Michigan City Mainstreet Association (MCMA)

Revitalizing Downtown Michigan City Through Volunteer-Driven Civic Leadership

What is the Michigan City Mainstreet Association?

For over 15 years, the Michigan City Mainstreet Association (MCMA) has served as an independent catalyst for the events, streetscape improvements, and public art projects that define the Uptown Arts District (UAD).

Because our work is so visible in the public eye, it is frequently misunderstood as a government-run program. We offer the following points to clarify our role and our history within the community:

Independent and Volunteer-Powered

MCMA is an independent 501(c)(4) non-profit organization. We are not a department or agency of the City. Every initiative we lead is powered by the dedication of unpaid volunteers—residents, artists, and small-business owners who contribute hundreds of hours annually to ensure our downtown remains vibrant and economically resilient.

Self-Sustaining and Community-Funded

A common misconception is that our work is supported by taxpayer dollars or municipal budgets. In reality, MCMA is a self-sustaining entity that operates almost entirely on:

- **Event Revenue:** Income generated from signature events like the Shelf Ice Brewfest is reinvested directly into downtown improvements.
- **Generous Donations:** We rely on the support of local individuals and businesses who share our vision for the district.
- **Independent Execution:** While we coordinate with the City on specific logistics, the vast majority of the planning, design, and funding for our projects is handled independently by our board and volunteers.

Our Focus for the Future

As we look ahead, our focus remains on ensuring the Uptown Arts District continues to grow as a premier destination for culture and commerce. Our ongoing efforts include:

- **District Marketing:** Actively marketing the Uptown Arts District to attract visitors and support our local merchant community.
- **High-Caliber Events:** Continuing to produce top-tier festivals and gatherings that bring energy and foot traffic to the heart of the city.
- **Downtown Improvements:** Updating pedestrian wayfinding signs and investigating creative design improvements for our downtown alleyways.
- **Art & Support Grants:** Facilitating new public artwork and working to launch a Blade Sign Grant Program to help local businesses enhance their visibility.
- **Community Connection:** Hosting regular "Community Socials" to foster open discussion regarding the continued improvement of the district.
- **Future Capacity:** Working toward an organizational model that eventually allows for professional staff to multiply the efforts of our volunteers and achieve even more for Michigan City.

MCMA is proud of the work we have accomplished over the last 15 years. We remain dedicated to the Uptown Arts District and look forward to continuing our role in shaping a successful downtown for everyone who lives, works, and visits here.

To see the full scope of our work, please refer to the detailed list below, which outlines the events, projects, and small-business support we have spearheaded since our inception.

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Our Impact

🎉 Signature Events & Community Programming

Years	Initiative	Impact & Results
2015 – 2020, 2022 →	**Shelf Ice Brewfest**	The region's premier winter craft-beer festival. As MCMA's primary fundraiser, it draws ~2,000 visitors each February, providing a significant economic boost to downtown businesses during the off-season.
2010 – 2019, 2021	**Taste of Michigan City**	A signature food and music festival held during Grand Prix weekend. MCMA created and managed this large-scale community gathering for over a decade.
~2010 →	**First Friday Art Walks**	Originally founded and managed by MCMA; now a self-sustaining district staple. MCMA continues to finance the First Friday Summer Series (est. 2019) to provide live street performances.
2014 – 2019	**Flame + Flair Halloween Festival**	A curated Halloween festival featuring fire performers and coordinated trick-or-treating to create a safe, vibrant downtown holiday experience.
~2012 – 2021	**Farmers Market**	MCMA successfully operated and marketed the Saturday market for nearly a decade before successfully transitioned administration to the City.
2018 – 2019	**Swale Music Fest**	A multi-stage festival highlighting original artists and regional diversity.
2022 – 2023	**St Patrick's Parade & Beer Garden**	Parade revived after longtime host stepped down; added beer-garden amenity to increase district dwell time.
2012	**Chili Cook-Off**	One-day winter crowd-builder for Uptown businesses.
2023 →	**Quarterly Community Socials**	Quarterly open forums designed to foster transparent communication and gather community-driven ideas for downtown improvements.

🎨 *Visual Identity & Public Art*

Years	Initiative	Purpose & Impact
2020 – 2021	**Naomi Anderson Sculpture**	MCMA secured the Indiana Humanities Preserving Women's Legacy Grant to help fund the Naomi Anderson Sculpture project which MCMA managed. Upon completion, the $140k monument was donated to the City in Oct 2021.
2019	**Pole Banner Art Program**	Coordinated the production and installation of 40+ artist-designed banners to provide year-round color and artistic identity to Franklin Street.
2021	**Hokkaido Mural & Celebration**	Managed a public art competition and mural installation, culminating in a community celebration that integrated live music and local vendors.

2017 – 2018	**Seasonal Planters Initiative**	Planters and flowers provided free to merchants, enhancing storefront appeal and pedestrian experience.

Small Business Support & Grantmaking

Years	Initiative	Purpose & Impact
2022 – 2023; paused	**Blade Sign Grant**	A pilot program (currently paused) designed to help businesses install high-quality perpendicular signage; ready to relaunch with funding.
2019 – 2024	**Party Grants**	Administered $1,000 micro-grants to support independent public events and creative gatherings within the UAD.
2014 →	**Trick-or-Treat Candy Fund**	Annual candy purchases for 30+ businesses to ensure the district remains the premier destination for family holiday events.
2010 – 2013	**Façade Improvement Grants**	Provided matching grants for storefront upgrades (awnings, signage, repairs) to revitalize the district's historic aesthetic.

Infrastructure & Advocacy

Years	Initiative	Purpose & Impact
2021 →	**"Walk MC" Wayfinding Signs**	Volunteers designed and placed a comprehensive pedestrian signage system (materials funded via RDC grant) to guide visitors through Uptown.
2017 – 2019	**Downtown Civic Plaza Steering Committee**	Provided design and programming expertise to ensure the current Plaza reflects the needs of the Uptown Arts District.
2015 – 2016	**Two-Way Conversion**	Successfully championed the conversion of downtown streets to a two-way system to improve traffic safety and merchant visibility.
2015 →	**Wayfinding Maps**	Developed and installed pedestrian maps to promote exploration of our downtown core (supported by a small RDC materials grant).