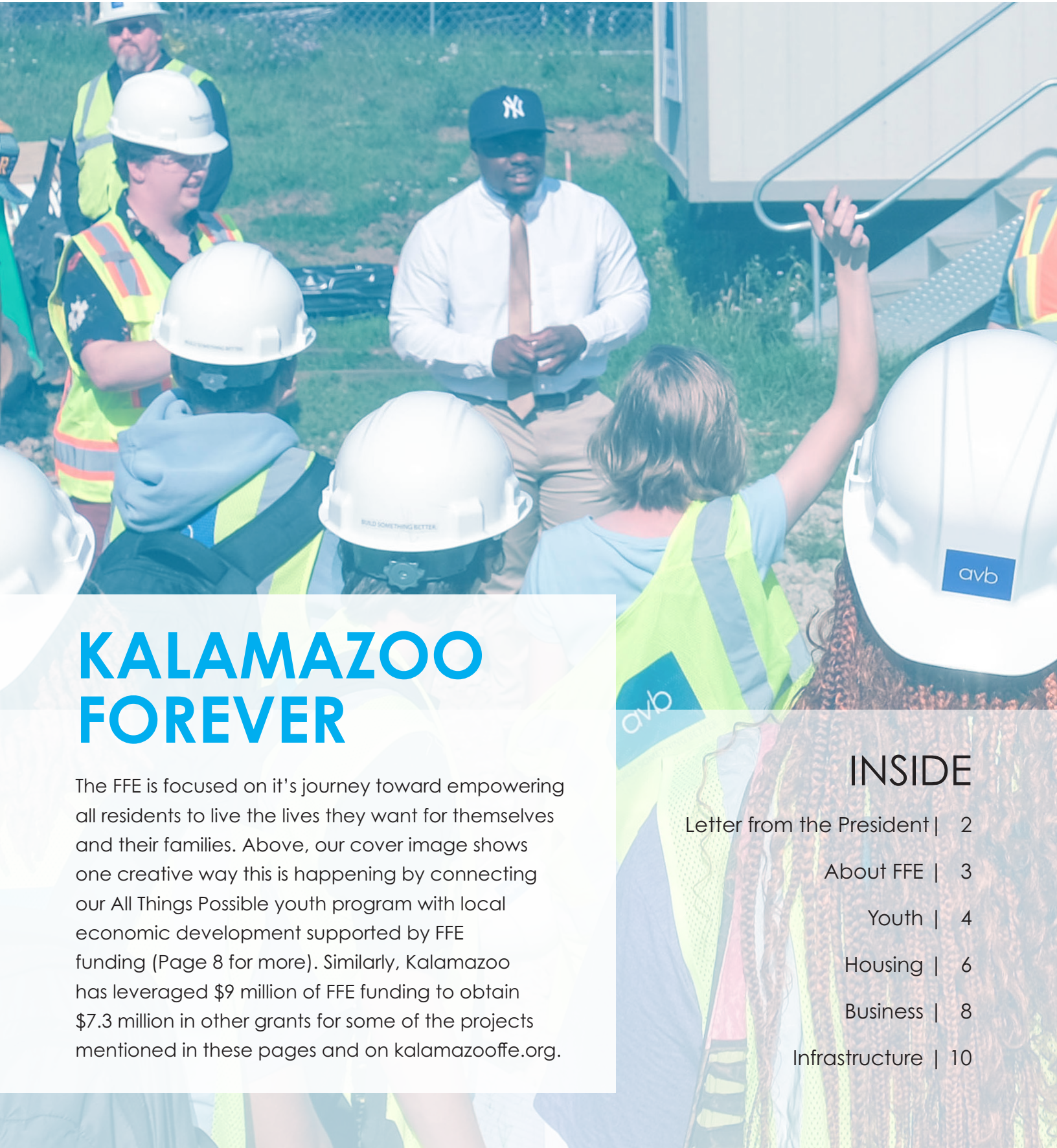




Kalamazoo
Foundation for
Excellence

Annual Newsletter | 2023



KALAMAZOO FOREVER

The FFE is focused on it's journey toward empowering all residents to live the lives they want for themselves and their families. Above, our cover image shows one creative way this is happening by connecting our All Things Possible youth program with local economic development supported by FFE funding (Page 8 for more). Similarly, Kalamazoo has leveraged \$9 million of FFE funding to obtain \$7.3 million in other grants for some of the projects mentioned in these pages and on kalamazoooffe.org.

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Dear Neighbors,

Together as a community, Kalamazoo is on a challenging journey to empower all residents to achieve the lives they want for themselves and their families. But Kalamazoo is unique for bringing together the voices of residents with visionary philanthropy in the form of the Imagine Kalamazoo strategic vision and the Foundation for Excellence. The FFE is a nonprofit dedicated to supporting municipal government, lowering property taxes to retain and attract people and businesses, and funding projects that move Kalamazoo past the effects of historical disinvestment and marginalization to a bright and shared future of prosperity.

We are proud to serve with an FFE Board that is currently 67% women and 47% people of color with a passion for helping Kalamazoo in previously unimaginable ways. For example, since 2017, when FFE was founded:

- All taxpayers have received a 38% City property tax reduction, averaging \$728 annually;
- More than 500 small businesses have been supported, over 90% women or minority-owned;
- More than 600 new affordable housing units have been built or rehabilitated;
- Zero homeowners have experienced tax foreclosure in Kalamazoo since 2019;
- More than 200,000 fare-free Metro bus trips have been provided to high school students;
- 12 miles of sidewalk have been repaired or built connecting 24 miles (9%) of the network;
- 7 City parks have been completely renovated, including the all-new Farmers Market;

This has been achieved with \$170 million of FFE investments in Kalamazoo, and we are committed to making \$300 million of further investments by 2030.

We hope that you will enjoy and share this newsletter and visit our website at kalamazooffe.org to see more stories and data than we could ever hope to fit in one newsletter.


Sandra Calderon-Huezo
FFE Board President


Steve Brown
Executive Director

Earning Trust and Proving Value

The Foundation for Excellence (FFE) is an independent nonprofit organization created in 2017 to help address longstanding challenges to the prosperity of Kalamazoo and make it a dynamic, fulfilling, and equitable community for all. The FFE provides more than \$20 million each year to stabilize the City's budget, lower the property tax rate, and invest in aspirational community programs. FFE directly supports the work of the City, which is often in collaboration with partners whose missions align with the Imagine Kalamazoo 2025 Strategic Vision. To ensure this work continues forever, an endowment is being established with a goal of raising \$500 million.

Community Members Lead

The FFE is governed by an independent Board of 15 voting Directors representing elected officials and community sectors like healthcare, education, and business. Each year, proposed projects are evaluated to ensure they align with Imagine Kalamazoo 2025 goals and are positioned for success. These projects are proposed to the FFE Board of Directors and City Commission in alternating public meetings for review, discussion, and approval.

Guiding Principles

Mission-Driven: FFE has a single focus on serving the people of the City of Kalamazoo.

Listening: The FFE board is guided by resident input through Imagine Kalamazoo 2025.

Transparency: All board meetings are conducted under the Open Meetings Act, welcome the public, and include an opportunity to comment.

Representation: The board intentionally reflects the community it serves. The Director application and selection process prioritizes diversity of abilities, perspectives, and sectors.

Join Us

FFE accepts applications for new board members each January. We encourage you to apply when the opportunity arises!

How does FFE Work?

Donations to the Foundation for Excellence are invested in an endowment to ensure it will last forever. Every year, the endowment earnings provide millions of dollars to fund projects and programs to realize our community's vision, stabilize the city budget, and reduce taxes. Annual grants are approved by the FFE Board of Directors before final approval by Kalamazoo's elected representatives, the City Commission.

Our Community

Impact begins and ends with Kalamazoo residents.

Vision & Master Plan

Our community vision guides our work and shapes the future.

Community Philanthropy

Visionary donations support the community's vision for Kalamazoo.

FFE Endowment

Funds are invested to ensure FFE will support Kalamazoo forever.

Annual Grant

The FFE Board of Directors and City Commission approve a grant to the City for aspirational projects, property tax reduction, and to stabilize the budget.

\$0.98 of every dollar FFE spends goes directly to achieve its mission



26% of funding supported youth development in 2023



7 parks have been renovated since 2018, including a new farmers market



200,000 free bus trips provided to high school students since 2019



More than 4,000 daily program slots for youth were filled in 2023 alone



An estimated \$1 million in childcare costs were saved during the summer of 2023



All 17 teens completed Counselors in Training program in 2023

Super Rec

With kids running around the playground and laughter filling the air, Super Rec offers an exciting and engaging space for Kalamazoo's youth. It's an FFE-funded program that offers free summer camp, with weekly field trips and activities designed to be engaging and enriching.

One day, lacrosse balls fly across the field, accompanied by shouts and excitement as kids learn the sport. On another day, kids mold clay to form self-portraits.

One participant, who has gone to Super Rec for three years, exclaims, "It has everything. We do projects, we get to go places, and they let us play at the park." When asked about the field trips, another camper eagerly remembers a trip to the museum



Learning the game of Lacrosse was just one of the experiences Super Rec campers enjoyed this summer.

and another recalls learning how to sew.

Super Rec has encouraged new interests and passions in Kalamazoo's next generation for the last six years thanks to FFE's support.

Youth Mobility Fund

"This is not just free transportation. It is much deeper than that," says a student of the Youth Mobility Fund. The Youth Mobility Fund is a collaboration between Metro, the City of Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo Public Schools, and the Kalamazoo Youth Development Network (KYDNet) to provide free bus passes to students. The program not only helps students find transportation in Kalamazoo but also helps them on their paths in life.

"We want you to be able to know you're supported,"

continues the student, "we want this to motivate you into getting your next job and... to getting started on your career and to supporting other students."

The Youth Mobility Fund hopes to remove the stress or worry about finding transportation and allow youth to explore new opportunities, like being able to get an after-school job or joining a sports team or club.

"We're just really motivating and helping them to do what they want to do."

MyCITY

"It really opened my eyes to a lot of new opportunities," says one participant about MyCity. It's a youth employment program that promotes career path exploration. The program offers



Developer Jamauri Bogan leads the All Things Possible camp on a tour of his Zone 32 project.



All Kzoo Parks summer camps include educational activities with a focus on social-emotional learning.

participants the opportunity to be involved in a variety of internships and gain new experiences and skills.

This participant is grateful for the various internships she has done and reflects, "I've learned a lot of my skills and a lot of personal training skills." Her favorite experience has been her internship with Tastes of Heaven, a local gourmet popcorn and candy shop.

"I really liked it," she says, "The people just love what they're doing." MyCity encourages its participants to broaden their horizons and explore different career paths. "Come in ready to try new things," she comments, "you're going to have to step out of your comfort zone."



HOUSING



600+ affordable housing units have been built or repaired since 2018



There have been zero tax foreclosures since 2018



\$750,000 of home value has been transferred to owners since 2019

Supporting affordable housing and homeownership for complete neighborhoods.



The interior of a typical Kalamazoo Attainable Homes Partnership home.

New Homes & New Homeowners

"It means that my kids have a forever home, they have a place they can call theirs," one new homeowner explained about what owning a home means to her. Thanks to the Kalamazoo Attainable Homes Partnership (KAHP) and funding from FFE, this Kalamazoo resident is now one of many new first-time homeowners in Kalamazoo.

FFE provides funding for the KAHP, which builds new infill housing throughout the city. Each house features high quality construction, is energy efficient, and blends in seamlessly with the surrounding neighborhood. The partnership also includes support from the Homebuilders Association of West Michigan and KNHS Homeownership Services.

KNHS works with future homebuyers, providing financial education and specialized loan products so when KAHP homes are ready, new low-to-moderate income homebuyers are ready too.

"The program helps you think," the homeowner reveals, "[It] helps you put your budget in front of you so that you can achieve your goals."

Being a homeowner "gives you peace of mind," she concludes. "It makes me very optimistic [for the future]."

Critical Home Repairs

Community Homeworks is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the Kalamazoo community. The organization promotes safe and sustainable housing in Kalamazoo by offering home repair support for income-qualified families. The organization's various services can include a furnace or water heater replacement, porch repairs, mold remediation, hazardous environmental cleanup, or electrical issues.

Recognizing the stress that unmet repair needs place on a family, FFE stepped in to provide Community Homeworks with more than \$100,000 to make critical code repairs. One resident received help when they had no hot water and a leaking pipe in their bathroom. "[It] was a blessing," they reflect, "I received the help that I needed to make my house livable again."

In addition to receiving assistance, the resident revealed, "The best thing about it all, was that everyone was so kind."



You can find blue signs like this one at FFE-funded housing projects throughout the city.

Zone 32: Business, Housing, and Youth (from cover)

"Smaller, newer entrepreneurs, who with a little bit of help, can do a lot," explains Jamauri Bogan. He is the founder of the company Bogan Developments, and is one of many recipients of the FFE-funded Technical Assistance (TA) grant. TA Grants help local businesses by providing funds to assist with marketing, accounting, technical needs, renovations, and expansions.

"It's crucial that this remains," continued Jamauri, "and remains a tool that your newer businesses can use to continue to grow and pay for services that facilitate growth."

The grant to Bogan Developments helped start construction of Zone 32, its first-ever housing complex and adjacent childcare center. The project addresses two critical community needs in Kalamazoo - affordable childcare and housing.

"[The grant] scaled me from doing single family rehabs of blighted homes," Jamauri reflects, "to now doing a development from the ground up."

During construction Zone 32, Jamauri also welcomed the City's All Things Possible Program to tour the site. During a series of visits, students learned about careers in construction and engineering, and asked questions about property development and building affordable housing. Project staff shared their professional journeys to become engineers or construction managers. On each tour, students took notes to answer questions at the end.



Stuffed Brain Studio owner Mike Klok looks over some of his finished work.

Developer Jamauri Bogan is joined by Mayor David Anderson, City Manager Jim Ritsema, and Business Consultant John Schmitt at the Zone 32 groundbreaking.



Stuffed Brain

For Mike Klok, owner of design and illustration company Stuffed Brain Studio, the TA Grant allowed him to protect his business name and secure its future. He was able to get a trademark and protect his business name from replication, which had been an ongoing issue.

"A lot of small businesses don't necessarily have the funds," he explained. "Through utilizing the TA grant, I was able to pay for some attorney fees to help start that process and secure my business name." Mike is now turning Stuffed Brain into its own brand with personal merchandise. "I feel a lot more confident," Mike reflects, "[The grant] makes a big, big difference for a very small business."



Downtown Ambassadors help visitors downtown and keep it clean and inviting.



48% of business investments made in core neighborhoods



500+ small businesses funded, 52% black-owned



Number of building permits are up 106% since 2017

Downtown Ambassadors

Since 2021, FFE has funded the Ambassador program, which helps keep Downtown Kalamazoo clean and inviting. Ambassadors check in with businesses, help visitors, and help with cleaning and maintenance.



829 safety interventions to make downtown safer and more inviting



398 hospitality visits to assist visitors and tourists



165,000 pounds of trash were collected



45 hours of power washing and removal of 322 graffiti



170 hours of snow removal & landscape care

INFRASTRUCTURE

Maple Street

Part of FFE funding focuses on improving and enhancing public spaces like parks and neighborhoods, or improving connectivity via safe streets and sidewalks. The most recent project in 2023 involved major renovations on Maple Street, like adding bike lanes, implementing speed humps, repaving the street, upgrading sidewalks, and redrawing road lines.

Even though it is a residential street, Maple Street experiences heavy traffic from drivers who use the road as a shortcut. These renovations help reduce speeding, improve safety, and create a more appropriate neighborhood street.

With its funds, FFE has replanted trees, renovated parks, implemented traffic-calming projects, and installed bike lanes. Projects like these make Kalamazoo more pleasant and welcoming. A 40-year resident on Maple Street shared, “[FFE] has been able to afford the City of Kalamazoo to do things that they just were not in a position to do for the longest time.”

“Through the Foundation for Excellence, things are changing... changing for the better.”

A city that is networked for safe walking, biking, riding, and driving.



With speed humps, bike lanes, and new sidewalks, FFE helped make Maple Street much safer and friendlier for residents.

Other residents agree. Another shared his experience that “the speed humps and bumps do slow people down,” and that the sidewalks help people get to and from nearby amenities. “I really like the crosswalks. People can walk to school or to the store safely.”

These traffic-calming projects improve the safety for motorists and cyclists, as well as for the neighborhood and all of its residents.

Sidewalks

Since 2019, FFE has invested \$1 million per year into restoring and expanding Kalamazoo’s sidewalk network. That investment continued in 2023, which saw major sections repaired, more gaps filled, and

entirely new sections added where they were badly needed.

Major sidewalk repairs were completed on Alamo Avenue, Cameron Street, Portage Street, and Mt Olivet Road. New sidewalk built on Springmont and Banard Avenues in the Oakwood Neighborhood helped to close network gaps and increase connectivity with the neighboring Oakland Drive/Winchell Neighborhood, plus the many amenities nearby like shopping centers at Oakland Dr, the Asylum Lake Preserve, and Woods Lake Park.

At Western Michigan University, new sidewalk was added on Fraternity Village Drive and California Avenue, addressing an urgent need to improve safety for students.



38% of 2023 funding supported infrastructure



20+ miles of streets gained traffic calming for safety since 2018



16+ miles of sidewalk have been repaired or built since 2017

Why Sidewalks?

Before FFE, there was no funding available to improve sidewalks in Kalamazoo. Yet, many people rely on them to get where they need to go. Since 2017, FFE has invested more than \$1 million per year to improve the sidewalk network.

In 2023 alone, new sidewalk helped connect:



11 grocery stores & commercial areas



8 schools & churches



9 parks or trails



3 hospitals or care facilities



Kalamazoo is stronger together

We invite everyone to be involved in Kalamazoo's success by participating in FFE's cycle of impact. Whether it's by voting in local elections, volunteering, looking out for neighbors, keeping public spaces safe and beautiful, or donating to FFE's endowment, we all have a role to play.



Consider a gift
in support of FFE
and a bold vision
for Kalamazoo.



LEARN

- Read about the FFE's impact in this newsletter
- Sign up for the City of Kalamazoo email list
- Follow @kalamazooocity on social media
- Attend an FFE board meeting
- Visit www.kalamazooffe.org



GIVE

- Make a gift of any size to support this work online or by mailing a check to the address above
- Volunteer your time for a cause that advances our community vision



LEAD

- Apply to serve on the FFE Board of Directors or nominate someone you know
- Make your voice heard in a community or neighborhood planning meeting