

Downtown West Orange Alliance

2026 Budget Narrative

Introduction

This year's proposed operating budget totals **\$320,298.00**, reflecting the cash revenue and expenditures of the Downtown West Orange Alliance. In addition, the Township provides \$28,000 in in-kind support, including office space and utilities, which is not reflected in the operating total.

The budget reflects a focused investment in planning, marketing, promotion, economic development, and organizational growth. Revenue is generated through a combination of Special Improvement District assessments, Township of West Orange contributions, grant funding, fundraising efforts, and prior year surplus.

Our programming includes Downtown Thursday events, the West Orange Street Fair, Holiday Open House, and Restaurant Week — each designed to drive visitation and strengthen economic activity within the downtown corridor.

This year, the Downtown West Orange Alliance successfully achieved national accreditation for the 26th consecutive year through the National Main Street Center. In 2024–2025, the accreditation process was strengthened to emphasize measurable impact, strong governance, financial accountability, and strategic implementation aligned with the nationally recognized Main Street Approach™.

The Downtown West Orange Alliance will continue to engage with business and property owners, residents, and community partners while advancing initiatives that promote the long-term stability and competitiveness of our downtown district.

Revenue

The assessment portion of this budget totals \$150,000, utilizing the established three-tier system as sanctioned by ordinance. The tiers are based on the type and location of commercial properties within the downtown corridor. This assessment represents a measured adjustment from prior years and reflects the increased cost of delivering downtown programming, corridor-wide beautification, economic development initiatives, and public events that support visitation and business growth.

There are currently 182 properties providing commercial space for more than 300 businesses, including restaurants, retail establishments, and personal and professional service companies.

Funding sources for the 2026 budget include Special Improvement District assessments, Township cash contributions and in-kind services, fundraising revenue, prior year surplus, interest income, and a \$72,189 Transformation Strategy grant secured to implement strategic initiatives aligned with the district's adopted Transformation Strategy, including targeted business recruitment, placemaking improvements, and enhanced marketing efforts.

Together, these revenue sources ensure the continued delivery of programming, beautification, marketing, and business-support services that strengthen the downtown business district.

The Alliance's 26th consecutive year of national accreditation through the National Main Street Center underscores the high level of accountability, reporting, and performance standards maintained in managing these public and assessment funds.

Assessment Revenue	\$ 150,000.00
Township Contribution Cash	\$ 67,809.00
Township Contribution In-Kind	\$ 28,000.00
Prior Year Surplus	\$ 5,000.00
Fall Fundraiser & Winter Event	\$ 5,000.00
Fundraising Efforts Events	\$ 20,000.00
Transformation Strategy Grant	\$ 72,189.00
Interest Income	\$ 300.00
TOTAL	\$ 348,298.00

Expenses

Administration & Office Operations

Expenses relating to Administration and Office Operations include the Township's in-kind support, which totals \$28,000 and has remained unchanged since the inception of the Special Improvement District. This in-kind contribution includes rent, utilities, telephone, postage, printing, and office supplies. The SID office is located within Township Hall and is provided as part of this support.

In addition to in-kind services, the Township provides a cash contribution of \$67,809 toward the overall operating budget.

Together, this support reflects the continued partnership between the Township and the Downtown West Orange Alliance in maintaining responsible administration and daily operations of the district.

Total Administration & Office Operations \$ 119,100.00.

The Administrative and Office Operations line item includes \$28,000 in in-kind expenses received from the Township. As previously noted, this support includes rent, utilities, telephone, postage, printing, and office supplies. Additional expenses within this category include personnel costs, payroll-related expenses, and general administrative operations necessary to support the day-to-day management of the Special Improvement District.

Technology & Systems Management

The Downtown Alliance continues to utilize Member 365 (M365), a comprehensive membership and database management platform that supports streamlined office operations and improved data management. This system enhances the organization's ability to manage and maintain accurate business and property owner records, track engagement, and support communication efforts across the district. The efficiencies gained through M365 strengthen internal administrative capacity and allow us to focus on strategic programming and economic development initiatives.

Personnel and Administrative expenses are as follows:

Executive Director	\$ 66,950.00
Executive Director Health Ins	\$ 5,000.00
Social Media Coord/Admin Assist	\$ 30,900.00
Payroll Fees	\$ 1,250.00
Employer Payroll Taxes	\$ 9,000.00
Office Supplies, Fees & Equipment	\$ 6,000.00
Sub-Total Admin Expense	\$ 119,100.00

Economic Revitalization (ER) \$4,000.00

The Economic Revitalization line item provides targeted funding to support the implementation of the district's adopted Transformation Strategy, **Thrive Local West Orange**, which positions Downtown West Orange as an incubator for small and emerging businesses.

This allocation supports entrepreneurial development initiatives, including business retention efforts, targeted recruitment, mentorship coordination, storefront activation, and coordinated business support initiatives designed to strengthen local businesses as anchors within the district.

The Economic Development team continues to take a proactive, relationship-driven approach to engaging property owners and prospective tenants, identifying retail-ready spaces, and supporting a balanced and sustainable business mix.

This funding allows the organization to respond strategically to vacancy trends, support data-driven recruitment efforts, and advance initiatives aimed at fostering business growth and long-term economic revitalization.

Professional Services & Insurance \$15,400.00

The Professional Services line item reflects expenses associated with regulatory compliance, financial oversight, and risk management. In accordance with the Special Improvement District ordinance, the organization conducted an independent financial audit this year. The cost of audit services has increased in recent years, and this year's expense reflects current market rates for independent auditing services. In addition to the audit, this category includes Directors & Officers' (D&O) Insurance, Worker's Compensation Insurance, and professional accounting services necessary to ensure responsible fiscal management and organizational compliance.

These expenditures support transparency, proper financial controls, and continued adherence to municipal and state requirements. Strong financial oversight is also a core component of maintaining national accreditation standards through the National Main Street Center.

D&O Insurance	\$ 1,850.00
Worker's Compensation	\$ 550.00
Accounting	\$ 13,000.00
Total Professional Services & Ins	\$ 15,400.00

Marketing & Promotions \$75,198.00

The Marketing & Promotions category supports the planning, production, and promotion of signature downtown events and initiatives that drive visitation, strengthen brand identity, and support local businesses.

The organization will continue to manage a variety of well-established and highly attended promotional events, including the West Orange Street Fair, Downtown Thursday events, and the annual Holiday Open House. These programs have grown in popularity and serve as key economic drivers for the downtown business district.

This category also supports collaborative fundraising and promotional efforts, including a fall fundraiser in partnership with the Thomas Edison Museum, as well as targeted seasonal and pop-up initiatives designed to increase foot traffic throughout the corridor.

In addition to event-based programming, funds support ongoing digital marketing and communications efforts, including social media outreach (Facebook and Instagram), email newsletters, the Downtown website, and the Downtown mobile app.

During last year, the Alliance was notified that the original mobile app provider would no longer support the platform. In response, the Alliance secured a new vendor and is currently rebuilding and enhancing the app to improve functionality and long-term sustainability. While the previous version included select Township information, the updated app will expand and formalize Township-related pages, creating a more comprehensive and user-friendly resource that serves both the downtown district and the broader West Orange community.

The Alliance's email newsletter maintains an average open rate of approximately 40%, significantly exceeding typical national benchmarks, reflecting strong community engagement and effective outreach.

Marketing Vendor/Visit WO Campaign	\$ 14,000.00
Mobile Application	\$ 5,000.00
Website Branding Design & M365	\$ 6,000.00
Street Fair	\$ 19,500.00
Downtown Thursdays	\$ 8,948.00
Holiday Open House	\$ 6,000.00
Social media – Promos & Newsletter	\$ 7,600.00
WO Chronicle, Tap & other print ads	\$ 1,000.00
Shop West Orange Card	00.00
Business Support & Restaurant Promo	\$ 2,650.00
Fall Fundraiser	\$ 3,000.00
Other Promotional Items	\$ 1,500.00
Total Marketing & Promotions	\$ 75,198.00

Grants & Strategic Initiatives

Transformation Strategy Grant – \$72,189

The Alliance secured a \$72,189 Transformation Strategy grant to implement initiatives aligned with the district’s adopted Transformation Strategy, *Thrive Local West Orange*. This funding supports targeted business recruitment, entrepreneurial development, storefront activation, placemaking enhancements, and marketing initiatives designed to strengthen the district as an incubator for small and emerging businesses.

State Tourism Grant Initiative – \$18,000

In partnership with the Township, the Alliance successfully secured an \$18,000 State of New Jersey Tourism Grant to support destination marketing initiatives. The Downtown West Orange Alliance prepared and submitted the grant application and will provide the required 25% matching funds in the amount of \$4,500. The Downtown Alliance is working with two professional vendors and the Promotions Committee to develop and implement this campaign.

The grant will fund a targeted digital marketing initiative promoting key West Orange tourism assets, including the Thomas Edison Museum, local open space and golf facilities, and wedding and lodging venues. This campaign is designed to increase visitation, elevate West Orange as a regional destination, and generate measurable economic impact for the broader community, including increased visitation for downtown restaurants, retail establishments, and service businesses.

Organization \$6,600.00

The Organization category supports the structural foundation and governance of the Downtown West Orange Alliance, ensuring effective coordination among board members, committees, volunteers, and community stakeholders. This line item provides for organizational development, sponsorship cultivation, partnership coordination, and the administrative support necessary to implement programs efficiently and collaboratively.

Maintaining strong working relationships with local organizations remains a priority. The Alliance continues to collaborate with partners such as the West Orange Chamber of Commerce, Friends of Edison, Friends of the West Orange Public Library, the Public Relations Commission, the West Orange Hispanic Foundation, The African Heritage Association, the Rotary Club of West Orange, and other community groups. Active participation in meetings and joint initiatives strengthens alignment and maximizes community impact.

In addition, the Alliance participates in ongoing professional development, training, and technical assistance opportunities offered through the National Main Street Center and Downtown New Jersey to ensure adherence to best practices in downtown management and economic development.

Community Events	\$	100.00
Dues & Subscriptions	\$	1,000.00
Main St. NJ -National Conference	\$	5,000.00
Trade Shows/Seminars	\$	500.00

Total Organization	\$ 6,600.00
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Visual Improvement \$100,000.00

The Visual Improvement category supports ongoing design, beautification, and placemaking initiatives that enhance the overall appearance and competitiveness of the downtown corridor. Over the years, significant progress has been made through the work of the Design Committee, including improvements to storefronts, signage, and awnings. The Alliance continues to collaborate with property owners and business stakeholders to elevate the visual identity of the district and strengthen curb appeal.

This line item provides funding for wayfinding signage, seasonal and holiday decorations, and the highly regarded façade grant reimbursement program, which incentivizes private investment in storefront improvements. The Alliance remains committed to maintaining a clean and welcoming environment. The addition of a part-time litter control staff member has proven effective, and enhanced maintenance and supplemental clean-up services will continue. Landscaping and planter beautification also remain a priority to ensure a cohesive and attractive streetscape.

These visual improvements directly support business retention and recruitment efforts by creating a vibrant, well-maintained environment that encourages occupancy, reduces vacancy, and strengthens overall investor confidence in the district.

Specific allocations within this category are as follows:

Hometown Heros/ Spring Banners	\$ 5,000.00
Design Improvements	\$ 5,000.00
Capital Expense & Signage	\$ 15,000.00
Façade Grant Program	\$ 20,000.00
Holiday Decorations	\$ 19,500.00
Landscaping/Streetscape	\$ 10,500.00
Litter Maintenance & Supplies	\$ 25,000.00
TOTAL Visual Improvement	\$100,000.00

In summary, the 2026 budget reflects a balanced and forward-looking approach to downtown management. Through thoughtful investment, strategic partnerships, and responsible fiscal oversight, the Downtown West Orange Alliance remains committed to strengthening the Main Street Corridor and enhancing its long-term economic revitalization. By combining local investment with external grant funding and maintaining rigorous financial standards, the Alliance is positioned to advance business growth, reduce vacancy, enhance the district's visual appeal, and promote West Orange as a vibrant destination.

The Board remains dedicated to evaluating every program and expenditure to ensure meaningful value for business and property owners while improving quality of life for the broader community we serve.

In conclusion, the total proposed 2026 operating budget is **\$320,298.00**. The Downtown West Orange Alliance respectfully requests approval of this budget and continued support for the strategic work being undertaken to strengthen the Main Street Corridor and the broader West Orange community. Thank you for your time, consideration, and ongoing partnership.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Megan Bell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.