

DOWNTOWN ASSESSMENT REPORT



FAIRFIELD, IOWA

November 19-21, 2024

IOWA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY | Iowa Downtown Resource Center

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[iowa Economic Development Authority \(iowaeda.com\)](http://iowaeda.com)

The following report summarizes the observations and recommendations resulting from an Iowa Downtown Resource Center Assessment conducted in Fairfield, Iowa. In preparation of this report, the Assessment Team learned about Fairfield's downtown history, recent planning efforts, economic development and quality of life initiatives.

The Team's familiarization process began with a review of materials supplied prior to the visit, a driving tour of the city and a walking tour of the Downtown commercial district. The intensive three-day visit also included interviews with approximately 80 community leaders, individuals and groups representing the public and private sectors. Based upon these activities and the Assessment Team's extensive working knowledge in downtown economic development, this report summarizes their findings and recommendations for Fairfield.

PURPOSE

The Fairfield Chamber of Commerce worked with the Iowa Downtown Resource Center, Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA), to conduct a Downtown Assessment to raise awareness, educate, make recommendations, and encourage the local community.

This assessment and recommendations should serve as a call to action and provide the community with current information to formulate strategies necessary to address the very serious issue of saving or improving the downtown for future generations.

This report cannot and does not provide all the answers. Ultimately, Fairfield citizens must explore their options, decide what is relevant and realistic and acquire additional information and resources as they address Downtown's future.

**“Never doubt that a small group of
committed dependable citizens
can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”**

Margaret Mead

OVERVIEW

This Downtown Assessment report and recommendations for Fairfield are based on the Team’s downtown development experience. Their beliefs are grounded by the philosophy that for Downtown to re-establish itself as the social and commercial center of the community—the physical heart and soul of the city—Downtown must become more valuable physically, economically, socially and politically.

The health of Downtown has a direct impact upon the entire community’s economic well-being. They are inter-related. Downtown revitalization IS economic development. Downtown is a prime location for incubating small business, it is an affordable location for independent businesses and is historically one of the community’s major employers. The commercial center provides a compact environment with multiple stories for commerce, government and living spaces, thus reducing sprawl and the cost associated with extending city services and infrastructure. The pedestrian friendly environment is convenient and accessible, serving as the center (community space) for not only commercial trade but also cultural, social, and civic engagement. Historic downtown districts can serve as heritage tourism attractions. A building’s condition, the business’ viability, and maximization of the building’s square footage for income generation affect not only the property’s value, but also the value of the neighboring properties and real estate in the entire community. Investments in Downtown allow it to “pay its fair share” in taxes resulting in lessening the tax burdens of its citizens and city government.



Most of our memories are directly associated with a place. We “go back” to places we feel good about. We “go back” to places where we have had positive shopping experiences. We “go back” to places where we have had fun. We “go back” to places we think are important. We are also attracted to places where we think we will have a positive experience.

We must strive to make Downtown a “go to” kind of destination, not an avoidable area we pass through on our way to somewhere else.

The Iowa Economic Development Authority's Assessment Team included five downtown development professionals:

JIM ENGLE, Director, Iowa Downtown Resource Center, Iowa Economic Development Authority, Des Moines, Iowa. Jim has been with IEDA since January 2014. As director of the Iowa Downtown Resource



Center, he oversees all downtown development programs of the authority. His current responsibilities include managing a million-dollar annual budget, overseeing the planning and delivery of technical assistance services, and developing training opportunities for all Iowa communities. Jim's areas of expertise are in organizational development, promotion, business development and working with smaller communities with populations ranging from 400 to 80,000. Prior to joining the IEDA, Jim served as Coordinator of the Wisconsin Main Street Program for 23 years. He also served as the Main Street Executive Director in Oskaloosa, Iowa. He holds a degree in Business Management from Central College in Pella, Iowa. Over the years, Jim has consulted for Main Street programs in Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Washington, Tennessee, and Michigan. He has also presented at many national downtown conferences.

JEFF GEERTS, EcoDistricts AP, NCI CS & CM, Special Projects Manager, Iowa Economic Development Authority, Des Moines, Iowa. Working for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources for 15 years and the Iowa Economic Development Authority for the last 17+ years, Jeff has more than 30



years of grant writing, grant management, and program development experience with an emphasis on environmentally sustainable development. Jeff is actively involved with several nonprofit organizations and currently is a board member of Des Moines Heritage Trust. For 20+ years Jeff programmed an award-winning international comparative policy course in best practices for community leaders and graduate public administration students in the Drake University College of Business and Public Administration. Along with being an EcoDistricts Accredited Professional and certified in the National Charrette Institute's Charrette System and Charrette Management, Jeff has a Bachelor of Science degree in management science and statistics from St. Ambrose University and master's degree in public administration from Drake University.

KEEGAN HALL, Downtown Building Rehabilitation Specialist, Iowa Downtown Resource Center, Iowa Economic Development Authority, Des Moines, Iowa. Keegan works closely with



business owners and local Main Street directors to develop a vision for downtown properties. He has a passion for seeing the potential of historic buildings and guiding their rehabilitation, from concept to reality. His Main Street journey began in 2018 when he began work with the Montana Main Street program. He has also worked in real estate development with a focus on multifamily housing renovations in Rocky Mountain Region and performing preservation carpentry in Yellowstone.

DARLENE STRACHAN, C.M.S.M., is the former Assistant State Coordinator for Main Street Iowa with the Iowa Economic Development Authority, Des Moines, Iowa. She has been involved with selected Main Street communities and downtowns in Iowa since 1996. Darlene's formal introduction to Main



Street was in Greenfield, Iowa where she served as director for their start-up program, in addition to serving as director for Greenfield's Chamber and Economic Development Corporation. Coordinating economic development continued with Darlene's move to Corning, Iowa, a Great American Main Street Award winning community. In 1999 Darlene became a Certified Main Street Manager (C.M.S.M.) and joined the Main Street Iowa team in 2001. Her passion and training expertise areas are Main Street orientation, action plans and one-on-one time with executive directors, board presidents and board members. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Management from William Penn University in May of 2006. Prior to joining the Main Street program Darlene's career included 17 years' experience in various forms of media advertising, including outdoor/billboards, newspaper, and radio.

DENNIS REYNOLDS delivers award winning master planning, urban design, site design and public art with his unique combination of innovative design; presentation and listening skills; quick hand drawings; and pro-active facilitation of the design process. Prior to creating his own consulting practice, Reynolds Urban Design, he provided senior level design services and leadership at HOK (Kansas City), Sasaki (Boston) and NBBJ (Columbus). He founded and led the innovative HOK S+V+E "Design Studio,"



facilitating cutting edge multi-disciplined design concepts. His major projects include Ho Chi Minh City's Thu Thiem Peninsula Master Plan, Nanjing Olympic Sports Park (that hosted the 2005 China Games and the 2008 Summer Olympics), The Great American Ballpark for the Cincinnati Reds and the Dubai Autodrome Formula One Racing Community. As Director of Design for a major Midwest real estate development company from 2005 to 2011, Dennis was responsible for groundbreaking projects including the "New Urbanist" Village of Ponderosa and "Shimmer" lakeside terrace. Recent projects include urban design, site design and public art for the emerging downtown Des Moines Bridge District, the North Kansas City Vision Plan, East Village's City Square, Bondurant's Swings and Fireflies, Overland Park Medical Center's "Heritage" public art trail and Edina Grandview Urban Design Concepts. Dennis has a Bachelor of Arts from Wheaton College with concentrations in Fine Arts, Economics and Group Dynamics and a Master of Landscape Architecture from Kansas State University.

INTRODUCTION

Fairfield, Iowa, the county seat of Jefferson County has a population of approximately 9,400. The city blends a traditional agricultural community with a diverse and sophisticated center for arts and culture. Fairfield is the home of Maharishi International University with its active campus that further enriches the community's diversity and eclectic business mix. The city boasts 40+ restaurants with diverse food offerings. Fairfield is a unique city compared to more traditional communities in the state. Art and culture thrive in Fairfield. The Fairfield Arts & Convention Center is a first-class entertainment venue. The Carnegie Museum is also a gem housed in Iowa's first library building. And the arts are even featured when Fairfield celebrates. The First Friday Art Walks have been popular events for many years.



Fairfield's town square and side streets are blessed with amazing historic architecture with businesses on the lower storefronts and residential units upstairs. Ample opportunities exist to strengthen the business mix and add downtown residential living in upper story spaces. The park and gazebo in the square are beautiful locales for events or even a stroll. Downtown Fairfield is known for its impressive holiday lights and decorations. The courthouse stands proudly just off the town square. Fairfield residents get involved. More than 200 non-profit organizations do good work in the community. Perhaps local travel writers put it best....Fairfield...."expect the unexpected."



ASSETS/STRENGTHS

COMMUNITY

- Arts & Convention Center
- The Collective
- Maharishi International University
- Great arts network
- Highway 34 business corridor
- The Loop Trail
- Park system/Lake
- Hospital
- New daycare
- Maasdam Barns



DOWNTOWN

- Buildings/Architecture
- Courthouse
- Variety/Eclectic (restaurants especially)
- First Friday Art Walk
- Carnegie Museum
- Kiosks
- Streetscape/Plantings
- Kiwanis Kids Day
- Park/Gazebo
- Christmas decorations
- Upper story housing
- Downtown employees; Co-Lab spaces



RECOMMENDATIONS

The Assessment team's recommendations have been grouped into seven themes with suggested time frames for specific projects.

- Streets + Sidewalks
- Signs
- Business Presence
- Buildings
- Business Development/Vacancy
- Events
- Communication/Coordination

It is important to take one step at a time and understand that the longer-term recommendations are not of much consequence until the shorter-term recommendations are addressed.

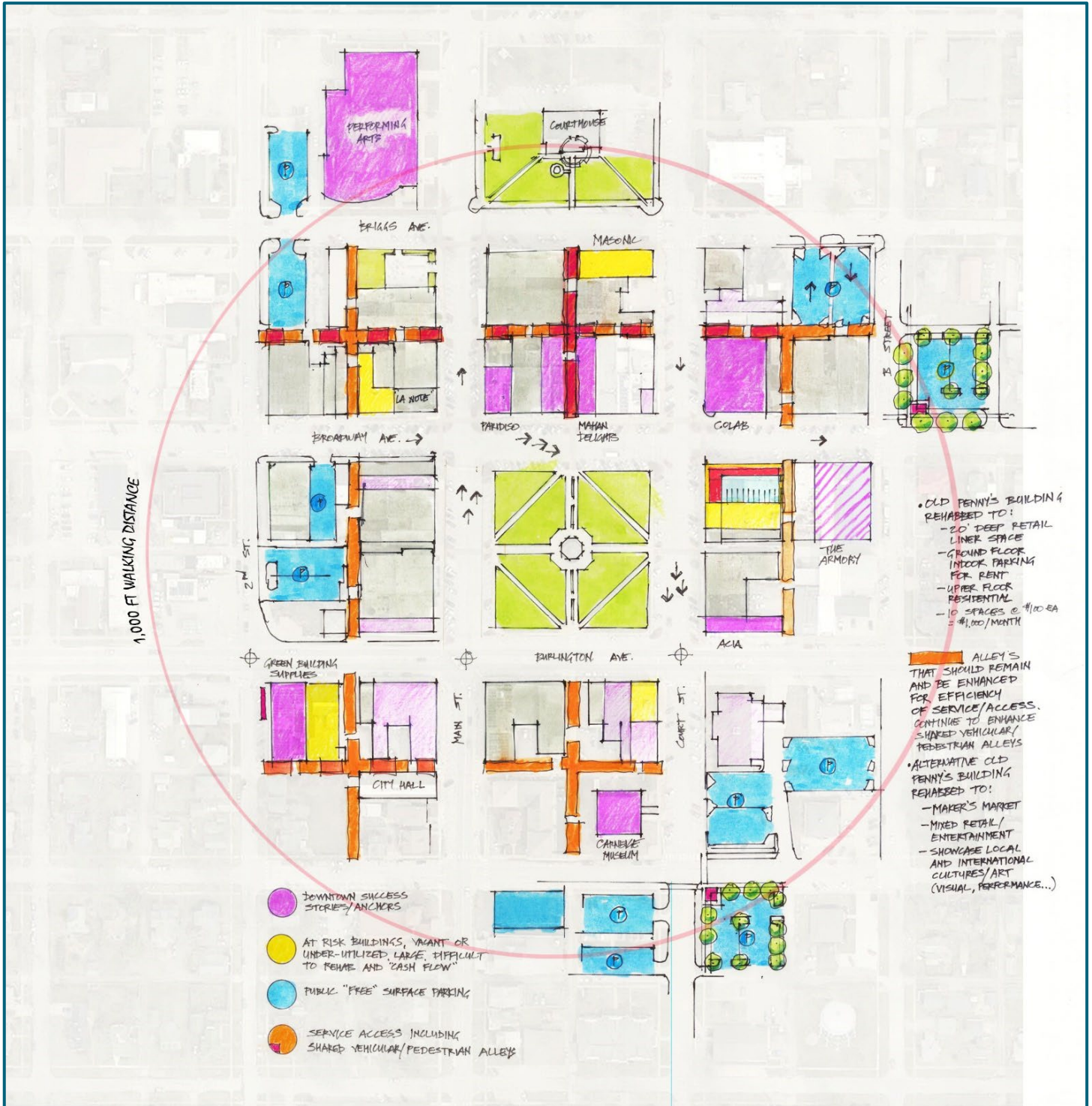
The Assessment Team hopes Fairfield will assess each recommendation and develop a plan to implement what is right for Fairfield. As the process gains momentum, community leadership will need to determine additional strategies and develop approaches that are more sophisticated.

Our hope was/is to work with leaders to identify the strengths, challenges, and opportunities in a constructive way to help the community improve the vitality of the downtown over time. We appreciate the openness and honesty of residents, and we appreciate that community leaders allowed the Assessment Team to be honest in its findings.



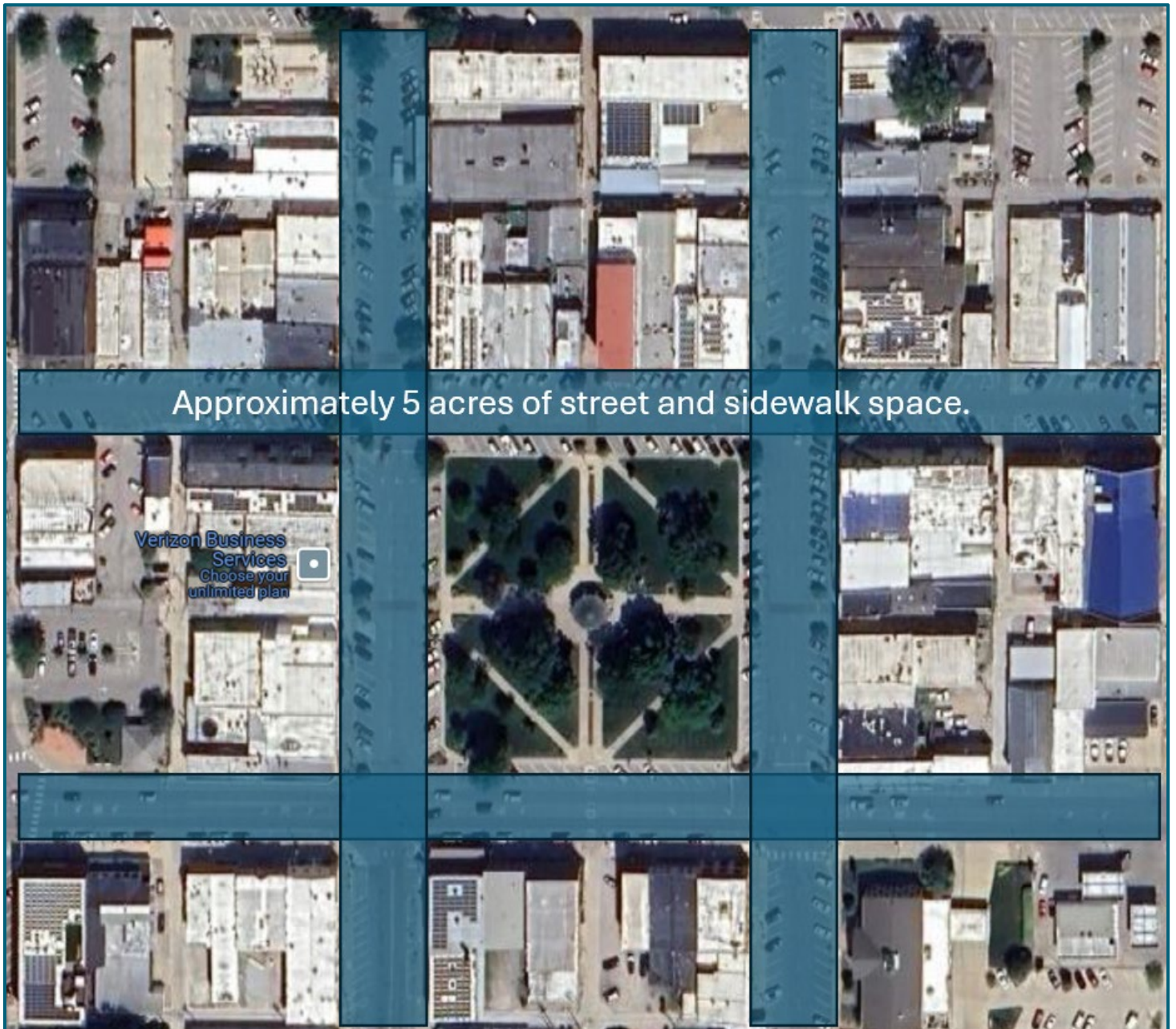
THEME 1: STREETS + SIDEWALKS

Downtown Fairfield is highlighted by Central Park, ample sidewalk space, historic architecture, a wonderful museum and great performing arts space, presence of the county courthouse, and an eclectic mix of restaurants. The compact design of downtown makes the area very walkable and the variety of businesses and public services accessible. From one side of downtown to the other is less than 1,000 feet – a very walkable distance that is much shorter than the distance from end-to-end of most shopping malls.



Theme 1 of this report is focused on enhancing Fairfield’s downtown street and sidewalk experience. Streets are an important conduit to bring residents and visitors by all modes of transportation to downtown in a safe, easy, and efficient manner. Sidewalks can safely and invitingly help downtown visitors to stroll, access shops, and experience all that a downtown has to offer.

Streets and sidewalks, sometimes referred to as the public right-of-way or streetscape, often make up 30 percent, or more, of an entire community’s land use. Approximately 5 acres or 24 percent of downtown Fairfield are streets and sidewalks. Add in Central Park and public parking lots, and approximately 33% or one third of downtown is public space.



Given the limited land available for local governments to generate property and sales tax revenue to support community services and enhance the local quality of life, it is incumbent upon local government leaders to think of themselves as investment portfolio managers. The city council, city leaders, and city

staff must consider when designing programs and developing policies, “Will this program or policy generate a return for the community? Is this the best use of our limited land resources?”

Historic Central Park, downtown’s wide streets and ample sidewalks are assets in the city of Fairfield’s portfolio. Those public downtown assets are currently underperforming. Sections of sidewalk are severely degraded and have become a safety hazard. Pedestrian access via the corners of Central Park and access across Burlington Avenue are a safety concern. Litter and weeds weaken Fairfield’s welcoming and inviting appearance. The downtown one-way streets make navigation confusing and inconvenient for drivers and present economic challenges for downtown businesses.

While the downtown street, sidewalk, and park assets are currently underperforming – with some investment in the enhancements recommended in this report – these assets could help support overall improvement in the social, environmental, and economic performance of downtown.

ACTION STEPS

Implement two-way traffic throughout downtown. The current one-way traffic pattern is not conducive to supporting businesses, is confusing, is inconvenient, unwelcoming, and creates safety hazards for drivers and pedestrians. There is plenty of street width to accommodate two-way traffic and that has been proven by the fact that the traffic pattern historically was two-way.

Presented on the following page is a suggested approach to improving downtown traffic flow and safety by re-establishing two-way traffic. Working closely with the Iowa DOT (Chris Poole, chris.poole@iowadot.us), it may be possible to pilot test two-way traffic by restriping the pavement, installing stop signs and changing the Burlington Ave traffic signals to flashing red or setting up temporary stop signs.

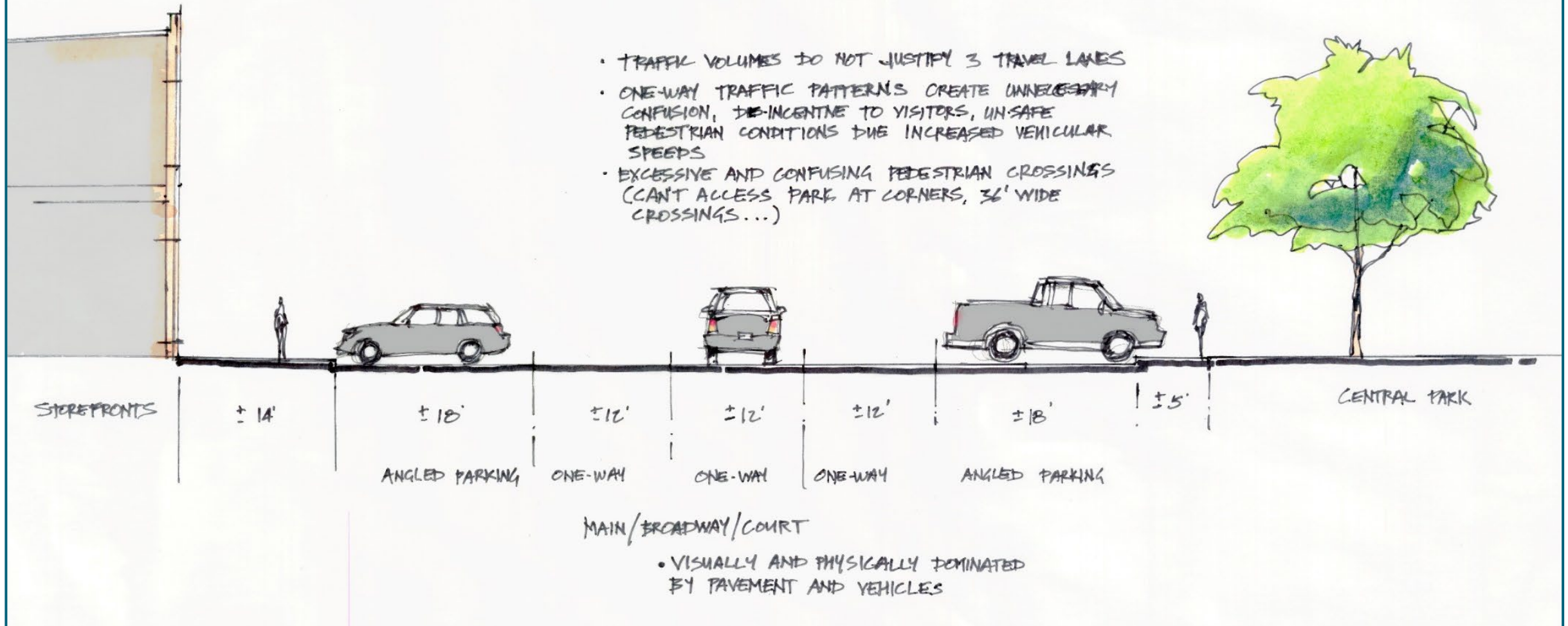


Current Traffic Pattern and Street Configuration Around Central Park

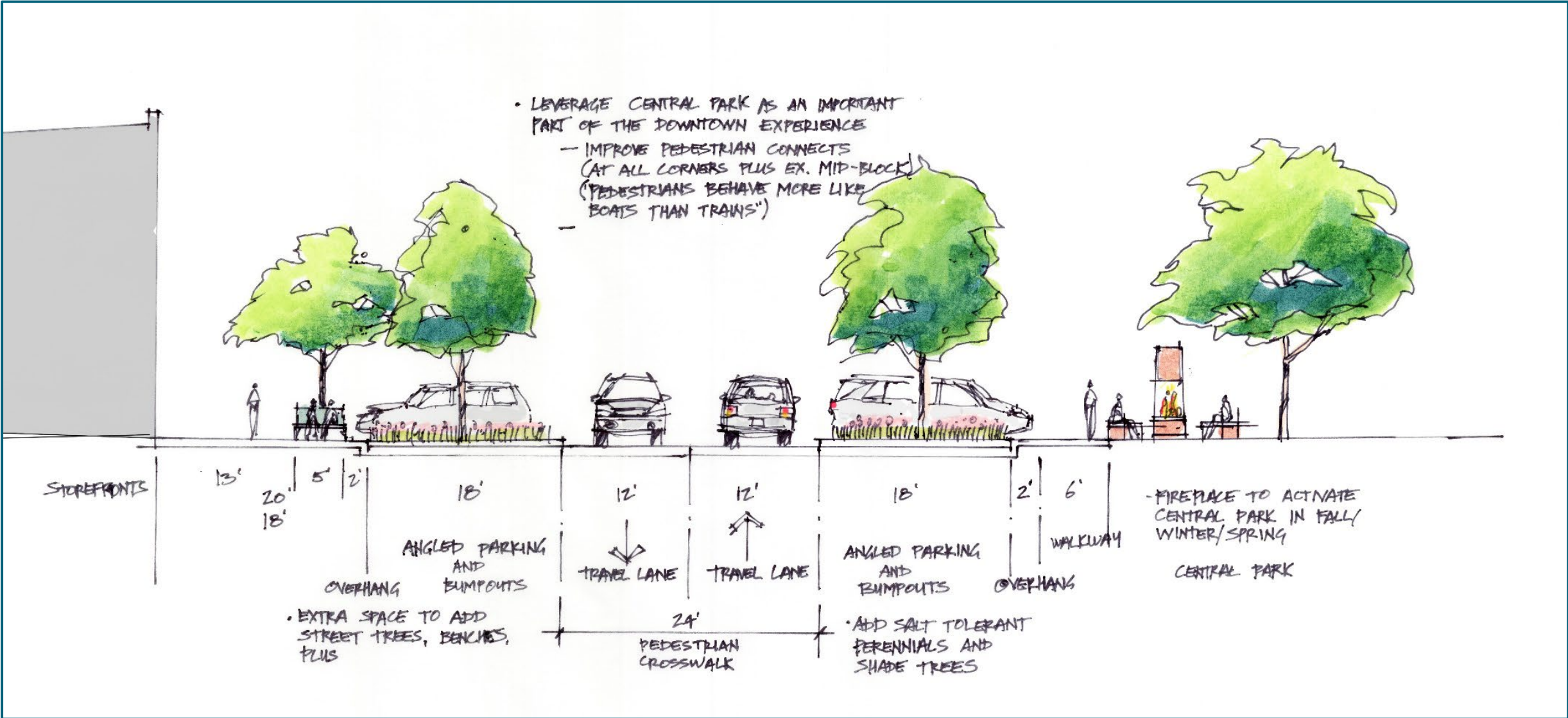
GOALS:

- DOWNTOWN SHOULD ALWAYS GIVE PEDESTRIANS PRIORITIES (SAFETY, COMFORT, WELCOMING, EASY TO FIND YOUR WAY...)
- "CAPTURE" DOWNTOWN USERS AND INCREASE DWELL TIME (ONCE YOU GET DOWNTOWN YOU DON'T WANT TO LEAVE)

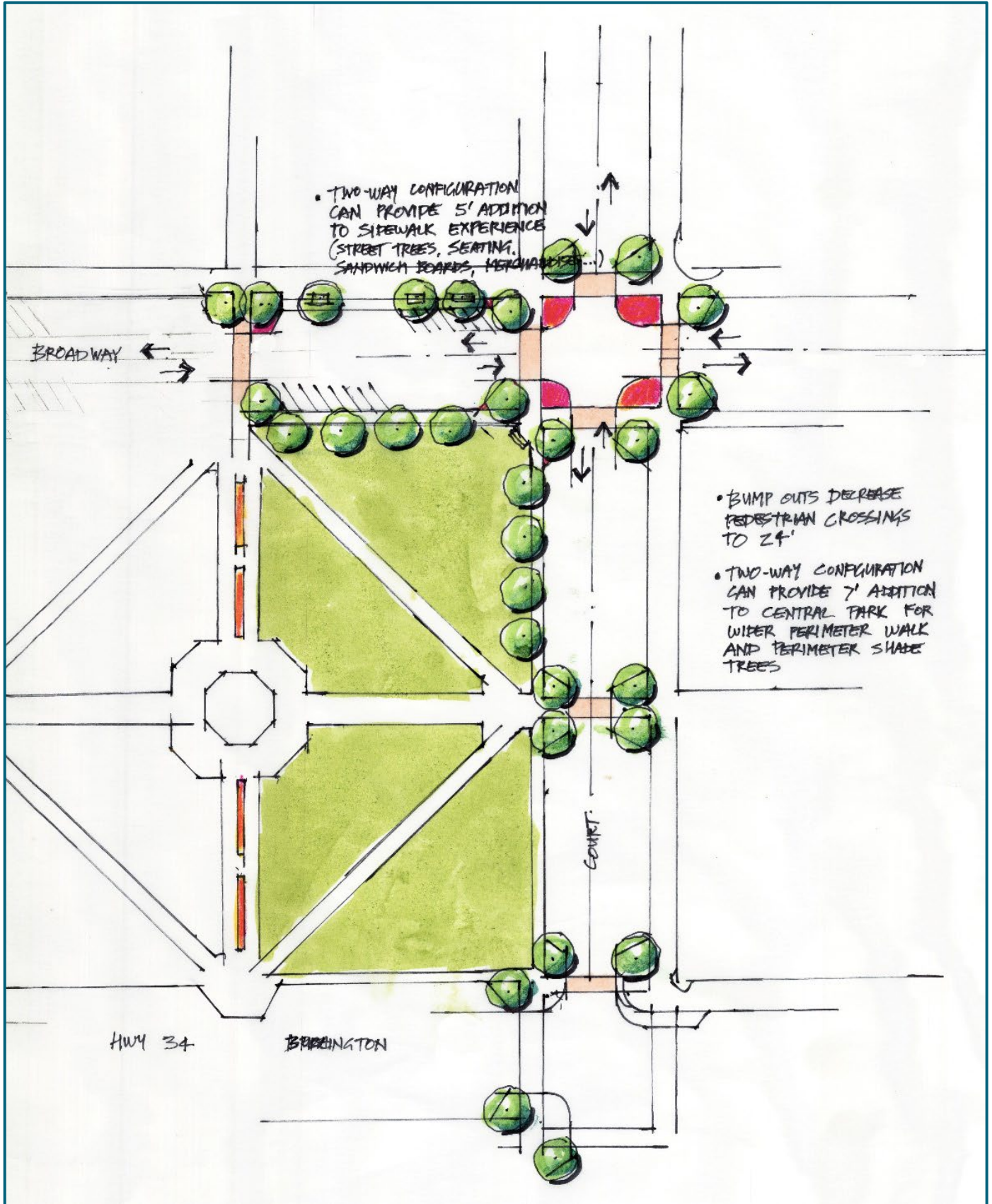
- TRAFFIC VOLUMES DO NOT JUSTIFY 3 TRAVEL LANES
- ONE-WAY TRAFFIC PATTERNS CREATE UNNECESSARY CONFUSION, ~~DE~~-INCENTIVE TO VISITORS, UNSAFE PEDESTRIAN CONDITIONS DUE INCREASED VEHICULAR SPEEDS
- EXCESSIVE AND CONFUSING PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS (CAN'T ACCESS PARK AT CORNERS, 36' WIDE CROSSINGS...)



Two-Way Traffic - Downtown Concept with Emphasis on People Not Cars



Two-Way Traffic Concept Showing Wider Sidewalks and Corner Bump-outs and Pedestrian Crossings



ACTION STEPS

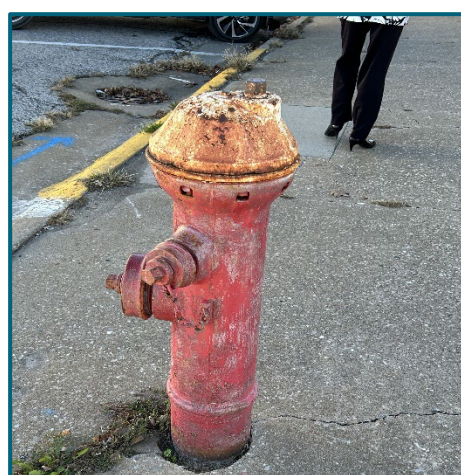
Repair Sidewalks – The current condition of many of the sidewalks in the downtown reflects poorly on the community and distracts visitors from seeing the good in downtown Fairfield. Poorly maintained sidewalks also are a pedestrian hazard and a potential liability for the city and downtown property owners. While current policy may make it the building owner’s responsibility to maintain the sidewalk in front of their building, that current policy is not working to produce the safe, comfortable, and welcoming downtown the community desires. Work with building owners, property owners, residents, local contractors and lenders to devise an incentive program to get the sidewalks repaired. There are many different approaches a community can take to support sidewalk improvements. One approach is a cost share between the city and property owners with the city contracting out for bulk discount pricing to repair multiple sidewalk sections at one time. Another approach has the city completing all work and assessing over multiple years part or all the cost to property owners.



Weed and Paint – Just like people tend to “spruce up” their homes when company is coming, downtowns need to be spruced up on a regular basis as company is coming to town every day. Start by weeding and painting. To clean up the weeds remind property owners of their responsibility, organize volunteer beautification groups / days, utilize city staff, and / or sponsor a downtown beautification contest that recognizes properties that maintain a pristine street appearance. In regular city correspondence remind people of the importance of a clean, well-kept community and the need for everyone to do their part.



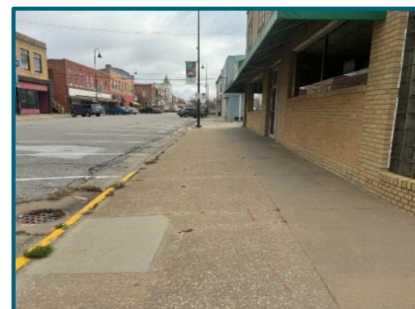
Painting is seemingly an endless job, but it is an important job that makes a big impact on community appearance, safety, and long-term maintenance. Restripe the pavement markings including crosswalks, curbs, parking spaces, and drive lanes. Paint fire hydrants, bike racks, benches, and other public infrastructure as well.



Organize regular (quarterly) downtown beautification days. Make them fun with some sort of celebration and incentive offered to volunteers.

Improve the Downtown Experience – The changing nature of retail business is driving a shift in shopping malls and downtowns away from a primary focus on retail shopping to a primary focus on offering experiences.

As Jaime Izurieta, author of *Main Street Mavericks* describes it, local governments, chambers of commerce, and Main Street organizations need to think of their downtowns as a stage and they are the script writers, set builders, and masters of ceremony supporting the local businesses (actors). What is being done to set the stage to encourage strolling or more time to be spent eating, drinking, shopping, and playing downtown? How can you support “spilling” the activity inside outside onto the sidewalks and streets of downtown? A quick, relatively easy and low cost first step in setting the stage is improving the streetscape. Here are some low-cost, high-impact improvements that should be implemented in downtown Fairfield.

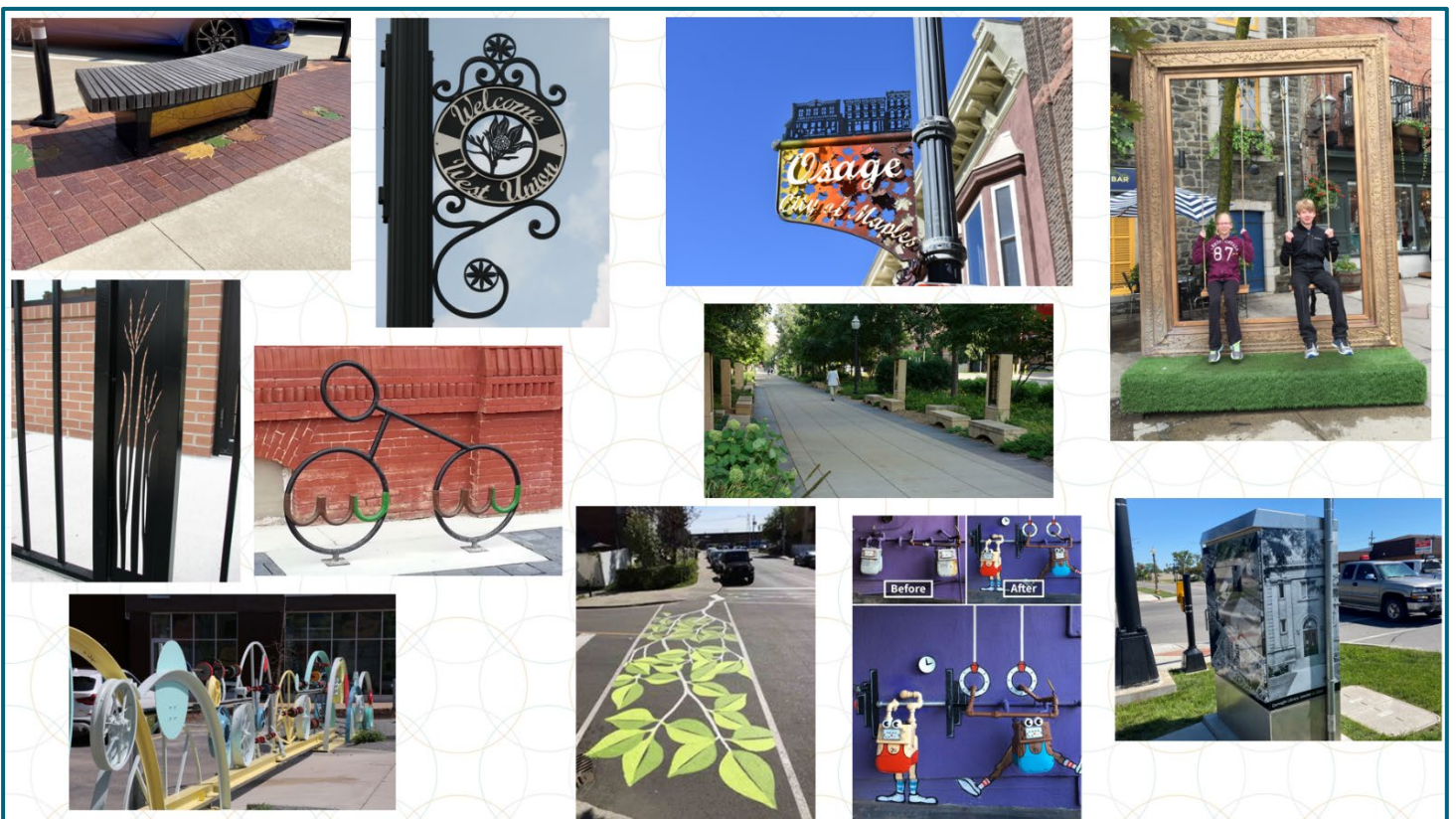


- Add outdoor dining
- Add seating
- Add pedestrian scaled streetlights, string lighting, and lighting from building storefronts
- Add colorful plantings
- Add corner pedestrian crossings to Central Park
- Add outdoor displays and merchandise
- Add music to the downtown environment (could be live music or streaming via speakers)

Remember, people eat, drink, shop, play, and live downtown. Create a downtown experience focused on people – not cars.



Add Art – The annual downtown art installation project adds a lot to the downtown experience and having a local organization charged with promoting the arts and arts accessibility like the Fairfield Art Association is fantastic. Engage the tremendous number of local artists to integrate art throughout the community year round, especially downtown. The extensive quantity of artists and the diversity of their art really distinguishes Fairfield from many other towns. Consider how art woven throughout the downtown could create a sense of discovery that encourages people to visit, stroll, and linger downtown. When considering ways to integrate art into downtown get creative. Art can come in many forms and can enhance everyday infrastructure that we otherwise may give little thought too. The image below shows artistic elements incorporated onto crosswalks, utility boxes and meters, seating, banners, pavements, walls, bike racks, railings, a history walk featuring scholars, etc. A seemingly low-cost, relatively easy to implement first project may be to display locally produced art throughout the vacant and underutilized downtown storefronts. A project like this would have multiple impacts—art gets added to downtown; local artisans get promoted; storefront windows get cleaned up; collaborations take place with downtown building owners; more visitors come to downtown and spend more time there; and the First Fridays Art Walk gets enhanced.



Manage Parking – Downtown Fairfield has enough parking spaces. Opportunities do exist to improve downtown parking and parking access by focusing on parking management. Identify the public parking lots with signs directing visitors to “Free Parking.” Improve the connections between the public parking lots and the town square through signage; clean, attractive, and well-lit walkways; and public art. Require and / or incentivize downtown building owners and business employees to park in the city lots. Identify options to improve parking behind buildings and explore possibilities for potential downtown residential parking within the back of building first floors.

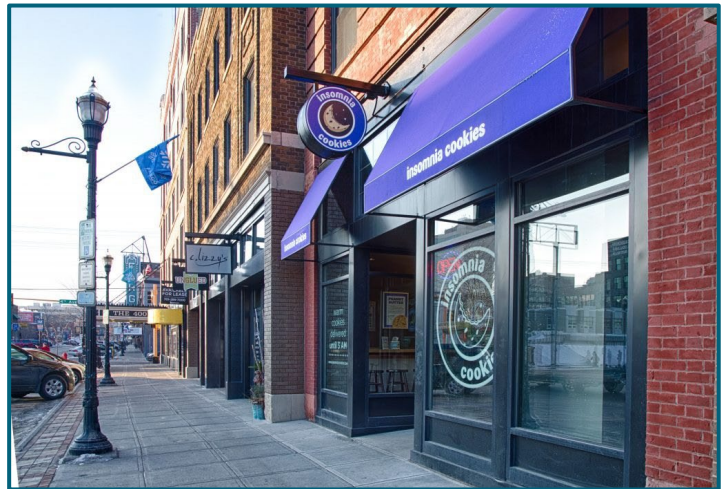
Plan Future of Alleys – Some nice art has been added to Fairfield’s downtown alleys. To maximize downtown alleys as an asset, develop a long-term plan for how alleys are going to be utilized and maintained. Business delivery access via alleys should be protected. The alleys should also help provide an attractive connection between downtown businesses and the public parking lots on the edge of downtown.

THEME 2: SIGNS

A lack of quality signage is a pervasive issue within the downtown area. This is evident both in business signage and in community wayfinding signage. Current signage is overwhelmed by poor quality signage, ineffective, missing and obsolete signage. Although some quality signage is indeed present, it is lost in the clutter. Improper signage is less effective at promoting businesses and attracting customers and lowers the overall appeal of the downtown commercial district. Fortunately, signage is a relatively low-cost, high-impact improvement that can help to transform the image of downtown Fairfield. A few incremental actions will help to change the signage status quo and redefine the “vibe” of the downtown district.

Signage also plays an important role in guiding residents and visitors downtown, and in connecting the downtown to adjacent amenities. Fairfield has already undergone a wayfinding planning process. Implementing wayfinding will contribute to enhancing downtown.

View down Broadway showing lacking, poor and obsolete signage (left) and example of street with good business signage (right) showing mix of signage types and purposes.



ACTION STEPS

Update and Enforce Sign Ordinance – Fairfield has an established sign ordinance which is currently inconsistently enforced. Updating the ordinance is an opportunity to reestablish what types of signage will enhance the collective feel of the downtown, and establish streamlined processes to ensure sign review, and prompt removal of obsolete signage. Quality signage ordinances encourage signs that are properly placed and proportioned to reflect downtown design vision, the building, while leaving room for

creativity and expression of business identity. Ordinances will need to be enforced to be effective. Supplement ordinances with design guidelines to better convey quality signage practices. Consider utilizing a signage review committee to review signage proposals. There may be opportunity to utilize City Maintenance staff to remove obsolete signage. (ideally for a fee)

Sign Cleanup Day - Kick off sign improvement efforts with a community cleanup day. Getting a group of skilled volunteers together to remove obsolete signage could be very impactful and get businesses interested in signage improvements.

Creative Sign Program - Fairfield has a “deep bench” of talent in the arts. There is opportunity to leverage this talent to support the design and fabrication of quality business signage throughout the downtown. Look at implementing a signage program similar to Valley Junction’s “Cosign” program to connect artists with businesses. Providing local funding for such a program will magnify the impact, however, partnerships and quality signage can be cultivated before funding is established.

Implement Wayfinding - Continue implementation of wayfinding plan, prioritizing downtown directional and gateway signage from IA-1 and HWY 34. Such signage will greatly improve the visitor experience downtown. A simple downtown gateway sign helps to say “welcome” and remind through-traffic that downtown is a destination. Don’t prioritize an expensive gateway with massive archway with fountains, etc. A simple pole-mounted sign can be perfectly effective at much less cost. Also prioritize wayfinding signage to identify public parking areas, including destination signage at the lot entrances. Prioritize well-maintained public lots with proximity to amenities so that visitors have a welcoming introduction to downtown. Parking lots adjacent to the Arts & Convention Center are a good starting point for signage.

Example of simple signage updates. Permanent signage above the storefront promotes business name and branding. A projecting blade sign provides visibility to pedestrians walking the sidewalk. Vinyl window graphics display important business information including operating hours.



Before



After

THEME 3: BUSINESS PRESENCE

Downtown Fairfield has an extensive array of businesses that could attract shoppers to stroll the downtown and linger. Unfortunately, the street presence of many of the businesses needs improvement. As discussed in the previous section, business signs are lacking, out-of-date, non-descriptive, or entirely missing. Several people during the local focus groups and in research discussions with people outside Fairfield mentioned that business hours are inconsistent, the business hours don't match what is posted on some business doors, and some Google business listings have out-of-date business hours.

In addition to business sign and business hours improvements, opportunities were identified to enhance the street presence of downtown businesses through improved storefront displays and downtown lighting.

ACTION STEPS

IMPROVE STORE HOURS INFORMATION – Make sure that the store hours posted on business doors and Google sites are accurate. This could be an educational effort of the local chamber to remind business owners to maintain correct business hours information. Maybe the chamber could help local businesses establish and update their Google business listing. Perhaps a local group could sponsor a standard front door business hour sign to be made available to all businesses to encourage updating and posting of store hours.

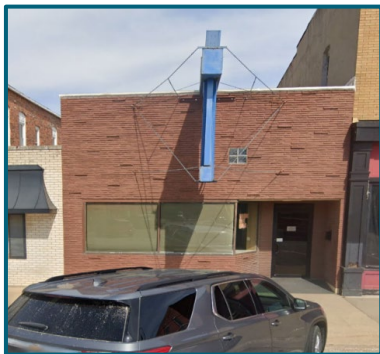


ENHANCE WINDOW DISPLAYS – Clean up and improve window displays throughout downtown. Great window displays tell us what you sell, entice people to shop, and can even facilitate after hours shopping by customers strolling by the windows outside of normal business hours. Identify local expertise in designing wonderful window displays such as existing store owners, local artisans, and interior designers. Pair them to help with existing store operators and owners of buildings with vacant storefronts. Utilize vacant storefronts to promote the products and services of downtown businesses. Change the window displays at least seasonally. Utilize vacant storefronts to display rotating exhibits from local museums. Imagine a First Friday Art Walk with art displayed in nearly every storefront throughout downtown. Now that's an Art Walk!



Lift the shades. Pull back the curtains. Keep windows clean. Don't use storefronts for storage. Don't over clutter windows with posters and flyers. Avoid the use of heavily tinted glass and please light up your window displays. Well-lit window displays showcase the products and services within, provide a sense of vibrancy to downtown, and provide great ambient lighting for evening strolls downtown.

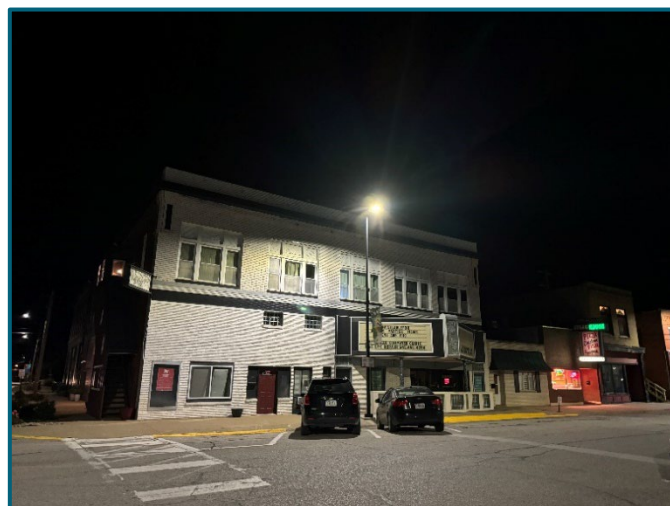
See the example below from Torino Pizza & Steak House showing what a difference window presence can make.



The picture on the far left causes potential customers to wonder whether the business is still in operation.

The picture on the right says, "Come on in. There's a lot going on here."

IMPROVE LIGHTING – Change out the taller, auto-focused downtown lighting, to shorter, more pedestrian-scaled lighting. Central Park has the more appropriate lighting from both a proper height perspective and historic authenticity. The lights along the sidewalks in downtown are too tall. They don't create a great atmosphere for strolling downtown and the light trespass into the second stories is very detrimental to upper-story housing residents. Install highly efficient LED lighting.



Choose lighting that helps set the stage for the downtown experience. Install light systems and poles that are multi-functional so they can support amenities such as changing color and intensity of light, electric vehicle charging, banners, hanging baskets, Wi-Fi, power for events, and downtown sound systems for music and promotions throughout the year.

THEME 4: BUILDINGS

Downtown Fairfield features a largely intact historic building stock around the central town square. Although several buildings have been significantly altered, there are no “missing teeth” around the square.

However, the downtown exhibits “symptoms of disinvestment” common in many towns of similar scale. Vacant or underutilized commercial spaces, altered window openings and storefronts, and deferred maintenance are present throughout the downtown core.

The most visually prominent issue is a lack of quality signage. Collectively these symptoms create a feeling of neglect and a sense that downtown Fairfield lacks a collective “pride of place” in relation to its downtown commercial district. Targeted investment will help to establish a cohesive business community that attracts increased customer sales for established businesses and is enticing for new businesses to relocate into.

Fortunately for Fairfield, collective small-scale improvements have the potential to greatly impact the look and feel of the downtown. We recommend starting with low-hanging fruit that is high-impact, low-cost.

Start by removing detracting features and working with building/business owners to update business signage. This will have an immediate impact on the visual appeal of the downtown area and correlate to increased business.



Historic Photo of Broadway and Main Streets showing historic signage and storefront configurations (top), and the same corner today (Bottom).

Note the mix of business signage, active storefronts and transom windows (and two-way street).

ACTION STEPS

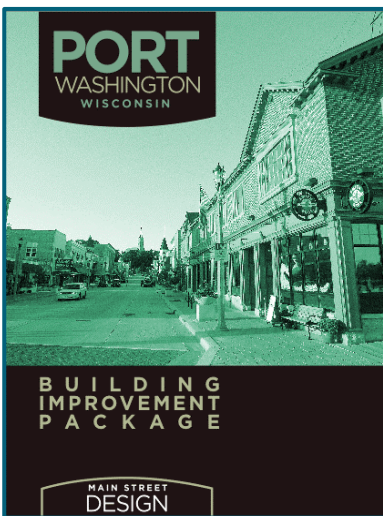
Update and Enforce Ordinances –Revisit all other ordinances and zoning parameters relating to downtown to ensure they accurately reflect the community vision for downtown and encourage the desired type of use and development in the downtown core. Permitted uses for ground floors, parking requirements, and location of residential units all impact how the downtown functions and what type of investment will be favorable. Generally, ground floor spaces facing the town square and along established commercial corridors should be utilized for businesses with active public hours. Consider encouraging residential use for upper floors, and potentially along select side streets and rear alleys.

Also consider a vacant building ordinance/registry and stricter policy towards derelict and poorly maintained properties. Ordinances must be enforced to be effective. The City will need to determine who will be responsible for review and enforcement of ordinances.

Adopt Design Guidelines – Establish design guidelines to encourage best practices for downtown building projects, general building upkeep, and business presence. Guidelines can be strictly enforced through a design review process. Establishing design review can be a contentious process, and is best introduced slowly as positive results are achieved to increase community buy-in. Start by developing design guidelines with community input and promoting as best-practice guidance. Next, tie established guidelines to new incentive programs. This will provide a “carrot” to the stick and ensure incentivized projects demonstrate best practices. Once the property and business owners begin to see the value and impact of good design practices, consider introducing a design review process for all projects within the downtown district. Main Street Iowa’s [Design Guidelines](#) are available as a starting point and reference.



Incentivize Building Improvements - Establish a local incentive program to support quality signage and building improvements. An incentive program can provide broader funding to a range of building improvements or provide component grants for targeted improvements such as business signage grants. Incentives are vital for addressing funding gaps, particularly for improvements that will positively impact the downtown. “Component” grants allow funds to be directed at and highest-priority issues, and then be redirected as needs change. Start by introducing component grants to encourage quality signage as this will have a major impact with lower investment.



Establishing a Tax Increment Finance District is one effective way to generate funding for an incentive program. As improvements begin to enhance the downtown, the corresponding increase in property taxes generates additional funding for continued enhancements, ideally creating a positive feedback loop.

The City and local non-profits should also be partnering with property owners to secure external funding for building improvements. Many funding programs require the local government to be a financial partner and/or the grant recipient. Having an established funding source to support property improvements will facilitate the leveraging of outside funds.

Private donations are another method of funding downtown improvements. A non-profit group can fundraise for downtown improvements to seed an improvement fund that can support general improvements such as street banners, sidewalk cleanups, etc. as well as seed a grant program for more targeted building improvements.

An incentive program will require a degree of administration and program management. It is vital to establish who will administer the program, and who will be involved in reviewing and awarding projects. Often the City (Community or Economic Development Department) administers local incentive programs. Alternatively, the program management can be delegated to a local non-profit focused on downtown improvements.

Promote Funding Other Resources – Many property and building owners are not aware of available resources for funding building improvements, business expansion, and general technical assistance programs to support small business. The City and local downtown improvement groups can help to identify and promote these resources. Additionally, IEDA staff are available to schedule local training on funding resources. Numerous resources include programs offered by IEDA, SBA, SBDC, and USDA-RD. The [Downtown Revitalization Grant \(CDBG\)](#) would be a great resource for downtown Fairfield.

Downtown Improvement Task Force – Establish a group to champion downtown improvements, in collaboration with City Government and local non-profits. This group should take on action-oriented tasks to make immediate improvements, while also facilitating larger building improvement projects through preliminary planning efforts, identifying funding resources, and promoting investment opportunities.

Establish a National Historic District – The historic commercial district is likely worthy of designation as a historic district. Designation would allow contributing buildings access to Historic Tax Credits which are an immensely valuable tool for financing larger property renovations. The designation process will involve researching buildings' histories and inventorying current conditions. This process and the information gathered can be a great tool for stoking excitement and engagement in downtown improvements. Historic Districts designation does not establish any regulatory requirements for properties. However, communities can elect to establish additional design guidelines and regulations on the local level, which can help to ensure quality design and appropriate alterations within the historic district. Contact the State Historic Preservation Office ([SHPO](#)) to begin the process.

Downtown Investment Group – Fairfield has a number of community members who are passionate about improving their community, and many residents who are in a strong financial position. There is an opportunity to form an investment group to allow “impact investors” to pool resources towards larger building improvement projects. Impact investment groups are an effective strategy for tackling larger projects that require a heavy lift and may not present the return on investment needed to attract a buyer/developer. Strategy can include acquiring, mothballing, and completing preliminary planning work

so that a property can be promoted and sold to a suitable developer, or can see a project through renovations and financial stabilization.

Establish a Building Inventory – A full understanding of the condition and occupancy of buildings in the downtown will help to identify opportunities and guide where efforts are focused. Start with inventorying each building in the downtown district including condition, occupancy of ground floor, occupancy of upper floors, and ownership. Use this as a tool for identifying opportunities for housing for new businesses.

Basic Building Information		Building Inventory	
Street Location	Street Location	Business Information	Business Information
Value <input type="checkbox"/> Available <input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/>	Value <input type="checkbox"/> Available <input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/>	Business Type	Business Type
Lot Parcel # _____	Lot Parcel # _____	Business Name	Business Name
Building # _____	Building # _____	Contact Name	Contact Name
Building Address	Building Address	Mailing Address	Mailing Address
City _____ State _____ Zip _____	City _____ State _____ Zip _____	City _____ State _____ Zip _____	City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Owner(s)	Owner(s)	Business Phone	Business Phone
Contact Name	Contact Name	Business Email	Business Email
Contact Address	Contact Address	Business Website	Business Website
City _____ State _____ Zip _____	City _____ State _____ Zip _____	Does the Business Use Established	Does the Business Use Established
Contact Phone	Contact Phone	If Renting, What is the Monthly Rent	If Renting, What is the Monthly Rent
Contact Email	Contact Email	Leave Building Dept _____	Leave Building Dept _____
Lead Date of Sale _____ Sale Amount _____	Lead Date of Sale _____ Sale Amount _____	Business Classification	Business Classification
Reservists: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone <input type="checkbox"/> Cell <input type="checkbox"/>	Reservists: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone <input type="checkbox"/> Cell <input type="checkbox"/>	Business Description	Business Description
Other _____	Other _____	Notes/Specialty	Notes/Specialty
Physical Characteristics	Physical Characteristics	Primary Products	Primary Products
Zoning Type _____	Zoning Type _____	Business Hours	Business Hours
# of Floors _____ # in Use _____	# of Floors _____ # in Use _____	Monday _____	Monday _____
# of Commercial Units _____ # in Use _____	# of Commercial Units _____ # in Use _____	Tuesday _____	Tuesday _____
# of Residential Units _____ # in Use _____	# of Residential Units _____ # in Use _____	Wednesday _____	Wednesday _____
Building Condition	Building Condition	Thursday _____	Thursday _____
Comments on Condition _____	Comments on Condition _____	Friday _____	Friday _____
Space Information	Space Information	Saturday _____	Saturday _____
Total Building Square Footage	Total Building Square Footage	Sunday _____	Sunday _____
Basement _____	Basement _____	Employer Information	Employer Information
1 st Floor _____	1 st Floor _____	# of Full Time _____ # of Part Time _____	# of Full Time _____ # of Part Time _____
2 nd Floor _____	2 nd Floor _____	# of Seasonal _____	# of Seasonal _____
3 rd Floor _____	3 rd Floor _____	Parking Information	Parking Information
# of Above _____	# of Above _____	On Street <input type="checkbox"/> Off Street <input type="checkbox"/>	On Street <input type="checkbox"/> Off Street <input type="checkbox"/>
Historic Information	Historic Information	Extra Information	Extra Information
Date of Construction _____	Date of Construction _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Current Pictures Location _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Current Pictures Location _____
Architectural Style _____	Architectural Style _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Historical Pictures Location _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Historical Pictures Location _____
Individual Register Listing: National <input type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/>	Individual Register Listing: National <input type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Maps Location _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Maps Location _____
District Listing: <input type="checkbox"/> (If Yes, Check All That Apply)	District Listing: <input type="checkbox"/> (If Yes, Check All That Apply)	Other Useful Information	Other Useful Information
Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Signature <input type="checkbox"/>	Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Signature <input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____
Property Availability For Sale <input type="checkbox"/>	Property Availability For Sale <input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____
Asking Price _____	Asking Price _____	Completed By _____ Date _____	Completed By _____ Date _____
Rent _____	Rent _____	Updated By _____ Date _____	Updated By _____ Date _____
Email _____	Email _____		
Realtor Phone _____	Realtor Phone _____		

Promote the Downtown as a Destination – Often businesses see their neighbors as competition. The reality is a cohesive business mix creates a shopping destination. The downtown will be more successful when businesses coordinate to compete against outside competition to grow the consumer base. Collective promotion and marketing of the downtown as a business destination will help to change perspectives, attract new customers, and new businesses. Establish open dialogue with local businesses to identify their needs, current market, and opportunities to target a larger customer base.

Priority Building Projects – The old JCPenney building was identified in community meetings as a priority development project. This property presents excellent renovation potential and could have catalytic impact on the downtown district. Renovation will not happen overnight. Action is already being taken to transition ownership. While this lengthy process is underway, action should be taken to complete preliminary planning and structural assessment to identify the highest, best use for the building. This information can be used to identify funding opportunities and create a general pro forma to market the property to a developer who can take on the project. Establishing a task force to oversee this process and allocating local funding to project development will help facilitate a success story. Action should also be taken as soon as possible to ensure the building is properly mothballed to avoid damage. Also work to identify other potential projects that have development potential and that could be at risk soon if action is not taken. It's best to get ahead of the eight ball when possible.



Small-scale Projects – Many buildings around the square could benefit from minor improvements to the façade, with the primary opportunity being quality business signage. Work with business owners to identify signage needs and implement improvements. The corner of N Main Street and Broadway Avenue has an established density of business activity and building stock requiring minor improvements, making it a good starting point from which to implement incremental improvements and enhance the connectivity between the square and Arts/Convention Center.

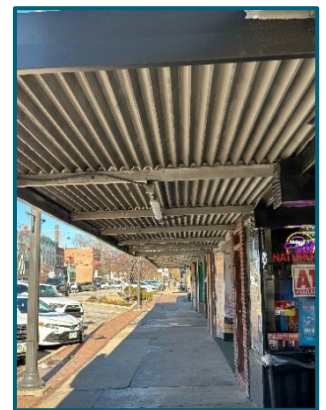
- Remove obsolete signage. This is a good task for a weekend work party.

Promote/Highlight recent success stories and major projects that are in progress including the “Armory” redevelopment and “Mohan Delights” rehabilitation. Such projects will have a positive impact downtown.

Promoting them and raising awareness will help to stir excitement and confidence in downtown improvements.



- Work with businesses to remove awnings and other features that are damaged or distracting. Assist with maintenance issues such as broken panel and tile, repainting, and repointing masonry. This will mitigate against more costly future repairs, demonstrate “pride of place” and enhance the visual appeal and sense of vitality in the downtown.
- Update business signage and activate storefronts with displays and text detailing business offerings. The transom windows on several properties have been converted to paneling. This creates a sign band opportunity which few are utilizing. This is an ideal place for business signage. Incorporate projecting signage for pedestrian visibility.
- Remove the post-supported and suspended metal awnings on the South (JCPenney and Priebe’s Buildings), East (Jes-Rite Building), and West (Bonnell Building and 107 W Broadway) sides of the square.
- Work with the owner of the former “Red Rock Tavern” to lease the building to a new business that would complement the current business mix. A tavern is a natural fit that would help fill a gap in nightlife businesses.
- Update the façade and business signage of the KMCD Radio building to revive its retro mid-century presence as seen in historic photos.



Mid-scale Projects - Several buildings are in need of more involved improvements but do not appear to require full renovation. Remember that improvements will be incremental and will build momentum with each success. Build from established successes to develop a vibrant node. Focus efforts on willing property and business owners.

- Clean up the Jes-Rite Building and work with the owner to establish terms for lease and/or sale of the building. Interior improvements may be needed to make the space leasable.
- The former Central Park Furnishings Building is well-suited for retail or a larger restaurant space. The location is good for an “anchor” tenant downtown. Work with the owner to establish terms for lease and/or sale of the building.
- Establish an incentive program starting with signage grants and expanding to larger facade improvements and building renovation.
- Identify upper floor housing and building renovation opportunities. Build relationships with property owners and assist with securing planning/development and funding support for projects.
- Several properties downtown would benefit from comprehensive facade improvements. This will help to elevate the character of the buildings and create more inviting commercial spaces. Encourage property owners to complete historically appropriate facade improvements; including new storefronts, transom windows, upper floor windows that fill the entire masonry opening, and remove cladding installed over brick.

Large-scale projects – there are multiple opportunities for larger-scale projects which may have catalytic impact on the downtown. These projects will require significant planning, financial leveraging, and partnerships to ensure long-term success. Initial efforts can identify opportunities and work to develop plans and funding to pave the way for renovation.

- Work to develop plans and identify funding for the JCPenney Building. The building is suited for a variety of uses and has catalytic potential.
- Work with the property owner on upper-floor renovation of the Green Building Supply Building. The large floor plate can accommodate a range of opportunities, and the project would build off an already successful business.
- There are several vacant lots and underutilized parking lots around the downtown perimeter that present opportunities for infill development. Evaluate which lots are best suited for development and identify suitable development types, i.e., multifamily, residential, hospitality, commercial, or mixed-use, and promote these opportunities. Consider offering city-owned lots through a Request for Qualifications (RFQ), paired with design parameters and commitment to support development via financial incentive, partnership on grants, reduced permitting fees, etc.

Small-scale



Mid-Scale

Concept renderings of façade improvements to the KMCD Radio building showing minor work to revive midcentury appearance (bottom left), and major work to remove slipcover and restore to earlier appearance (bottom right) with historic reference photos to guide design decisions.



Concept rendering of facade improvements to Central Park Furnishings building. The building and location are suitable for a larger retail tenant or dining establishment.



Large-scale

Concept rendering can help demonstrate possibilities for vacant and derelict properties. The JCPenney Building shown here presents opportunity for catalytic renovation.



THEME 5: BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT/VACANCY

This assessment team heard frequently that the downtown has a different vibe than a typical Iowa farm town. Can the “traditional vibe” work too? We think so. Downtown Fairfield represents a fairly large footprint for a community its size. The eclectic mix of businesses is particularly diverse in its number and range of eating establishments. Service and professional offices also line the streets. The district also has at least 12 first floor vacancies. Retail businesses are not as prevalent. We heard frequently that neighboring communities like Washington and Mt. Pleasant have far more retailers. This is unusual since downtown living and the presence of restaurants are two drivers of retail traffic. Fairfield has both of these as well as other entertainment options that can expose customers to retail strengths. It is surprising that retail has not taken off. Oftentimes, the business mix mimics the ethnicity, characteristics and personality of the community. This is seen by the eclectic restaurant scene, but not so much by interesting retail businesses. This being said, the community also yearns for more traditional retail businesses to serve the local market.



Vacant storefronts can have negative impacts on the community and economy. It can lead to a decrease in foot traffic and a decline in the overall attractiveness of the area. Vacant storefronts can also create safety concerns, reduce property values and discourage new businesses from opening. It creates a sense of neglect and abandonment.

Why would neighboring communities have a stronger retail presence? Do they have the ability to draw more retail customers? Not likely. Other things to consider:



- Can you look at retail spaces and see opportunity in downtown Fairfield? Perhaps, not. Very few of the vacancies are move-in ready. Forty years ago, the ground floor commercial spaces were the cash cows. Upper stories were more difficult to rent. This has flip-flopped. With housing shortages, it is easy to rent revitalized upper story space. Ground floor occupancy is more challenging. Some owners in Fairfield appear to be satisfied with a lack of ground floor tenant...especially those that can cash flow with apartments upstairs. This doesn't contribute to a strong downtown.

- Street patterns. One-way streets. We heard frequently by retailers that the street patterns do them no favors.
- The existing business mix is unusual. Does this deter retailers?
- Vacancy is a priority, but who is working on it?

ACTION STEPS

- Incentivizing improvements to make vacant buildings presentable to tenants and developing active business recruitment programs are always positive ways to address downtown vacancy and improving the business mix, but sometimes properties are held by owners with little intention to fill the spaces. Perhaps they use the storefronts for storage or personal use or object to making the properties presentable. This inaction doesn't help the vitality of the downtown and certainly doesn't



help existing businesses in the immediate area. Sometimes action needs to be taken. Consider adopting a Vacant Building Registry to encourage active use of first floor buildings. Owners have 30 days from the date the building becomes vacant to file a form. The cost to register is free for the initial filing and the first six-month period. If after the six-month period the building continues to be vacant, an inspection of the building will be made,

and a fee charged. Each subsequent one-year period of vacancy will trigger a re-inspection and fee. The owner is responsible for all exterior and interior improvements as well as lot maintenance. Failure to properly maintain the vacant building could result in increased renewal fees. "Vacancy" is defined locally and is typically based on hours that the building is open to the public, so a building used as storage is defined as being vacant.

- Create business ready spots. Currently, prospective business owners can't see the possibilities in Fairfield given the current buildings that are available. Very few vacancies are move-in ready. They need significant work or are buildings that do not project an image of quality (false fronts, downsized windows, masonry issues, paint, etc.)
- Work with owners of the vacant buildings. Start small and find a handful of property owners that are willing to accept assistance with the goal of filling their storefronts. Form a team of volunteers perhaps led by a volunteer contractor or handyman(woman) that can do small things to make the storefronts more presentable, for example washing windows, cleaning up visible junk, painting.
- Design and place fun, "Business Opportunity" signs in the windows. "I would make a great sports bar." This could be a terrific project for local artists.



- Without masking the vacancy, create displays in the windows to show life. This could be another potential project for local artists or schools. Promote local businesses, products, events, museums or art.

- Activate vacancies during the holidays with Pop Up Businesses. This could be a real draw and show the possibilities...boutiques, art, candles, food items, etc.

- Is there a downtown challenge more noticeable or frustrating to community residents than vacant storefronts or limited shopping opportunities? Perhaps not. Even if this is a much talked about downtown problem, many communities do not have an entity or a plan to improve. Who does downtown, small business recruitment? It is typically a role of a local economic development group, Chamber of Commerce or Main Street Program. Fairfield certainly has opportunities in this area. Downtown business recruitment is a competitive endeavor. Other communities are out there doing it. Rarely does a community have a high batting average when trying to lure businesses to their downtowns, but those that are organized and strategic can have success. Fairfield certainly does have a lot to sell. This plan includes a) Identifying business voids; b) Inventorying and promoting space; c) Generating leads; and d) and, Making the pitch.



The Team:

- Identify an organization and action group to serve as a local Small Business Development Team. This group can address both Business Retention and Business Recruitment activities. Fairfield intends to reapply for Main Street designation. If successful, this will open doors to receive assistance to better understand your market and recruit businesses.

The Businesses:

- You must show prospective businesses that they can make money in downtown Fairfield. Develop wish lists based on current business strengths and voids. Although not scientific, using focus groups to help identify business voids can provide a good start. Also, identify sales leakages and surpluses based on market data can show business opportunities in given retail categories. In this Assessment Team’s brief time in Fairfield, residents frequently mentioned the need for fine dining or steak house, sports bar, hardware and a youth-related business or entertainment center.



The Locations:

- Assess your vacancies. Develop lists with building information like past uses, contact information, realtor information, square footage, rent/sales figures, etc. Team up with realtors.
- Market the available buildings and rental spaces on the website...Hot Properties.
- Do an empty building tour for your Business Development Team and also to the public. Have fun with this! Provide a history of the building and discuss the possibilities. You never know who might become interested.



The Leads:

- Get to know the business types on your wish list. For example, steakhouses. How many are in a two-hour radius? Meet with them. Ask them questions. Find out what it takes. Contact the Restaurant Association. Do everything you can to know the business and perhaps generate a lead or two. There is nothing magic about lead generation....it does take tenacity and hard work.



- Develop a workshop for individuals interested in starting a new business.
- Don't keep the wish list a secret. Keep realtors, media reps, etc. in the know. They frequently come into contact with businesses that may be interested in opening a second store. Get the word out. Mention your recruitments plans and needs to service organizations. Word of mouth contacts like this can lead to match ups.

- Make visits to communities just outside your trade area. Pay attention to businesses that match your wish list. Collect business cards. Look at their websites.

Making the Pitch:

- Develop a chronological process for following up on leads, including initial generation of lead; phone call; visit to business by two team members, mailing of positive information or a Fairfield gift, and hopefully that business's visit to Fairfield.
- Consider other ways to make the business recruitment process easier with local lead generation or incentives.

- Work with building owners to develop an incentive for renting space, for example ½ off rent for the first six months or a lease or no rent for three months.
- Develop a business plan competition with a cash prize for the winner. Will local banks sponsor? These contests generate good leads from local residents that have always dreamed of having their own business.
- Inventory home businesses. Are there businesses operating in their homes that are ready to take a leap to a more visible location? Are there businesses in smaller locations (off the beaten path) that may be interested in more visibility?

Start small. Think differently.

- Consider pop-up stores in vacant storefronts. Also, Farmers Market vendors are sometimes interested in business expansion plans. Testing those out with Pop Up stores is a good idea.
- Promote shared space by more than one business in an empty building similar to the Co-Lab tenants. Perhaps this can be done with small retailers. An example is the Landing Marketplace in Decorah which is a mix of shared space and also areas for customers to gather. Perhaps this concept would make a good topic for Traction Thursdays. Businesses can complement each other but there are also very successful business combinations (separate businesses or owned by same entrepreneur) that have very little to do with each other. The advantage to their business model is strictly benefiting from a smaller space and shared amenities.



When discussing business potential in downtown Fairfield, residents frequently stated the need for a gathering place (perhaps a business) for youth. This concept was echoed in meetings with young people in Fairfield. This is a concept with merit.

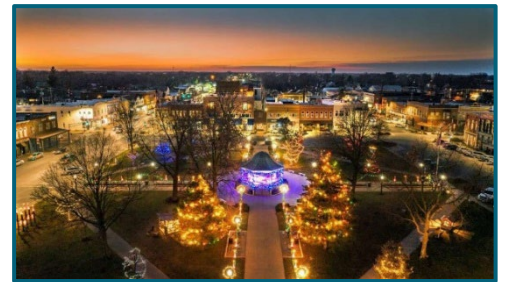


- Explore a business opportunity, (preferably more than a hangout space) to use a vacant building for a youth center with a business component such as pizza or games. This could be an opportunity for teenagers to actually put a business plan together and manage the endeavor through a partnership with the high school(s).

THEME 6: EVENTS



Fairfield offers a large variety of events for people to socialize, be recognized and entertained. Kiwanis Kid's Day is excellent for families to socialize and economically have fun. The Chamber of Commerce has multiple events to recognize teachers, manufacturers, and their members. Local and area people of all ages are entertained when they attend First Friday Art Walks. The Convention & Visitors Bureau organizes an annual Restaurant Week, an entertaining, social event that emphasizes Fairfield's unique global cuisine. These are just a few of the many activities that showcase Fairfield's eclectic vibes that range from the arts, creativity, music, dance, theater, food, and outdoor recreation to a diverse selection of cultural and festive events. While this represents a very full calendar, consider adding a few missing categories: shopping event, spring event, cross-marketing and a unique new event. Keep in mind, downtown is not just the buildings



around the square. Your downtown has additional layers surrounding your central park.

ACTION STEPS

- There is a need to get people into stores and spend money. Showcase the goods and services offered in Fairfield two or three times a year. This will benefit the businesses.
 - Offer experiences. Let a customer pour water on waterproof flooring to see the magic. Salons could insert tinsel into hair and/or do a nail showing what a dip, gel, shellac, etc. service looks on a nail. Give a mini-facial. Offer continual modeling of children's and women's clothing.
 - Offer DIY (Do It Yourself) activities. Build a birdhouse. Let customers create their own pretty latte. Make a charcuterie board.
 - Demonstrations. Show the different types and levels of tools, staple guns, etc. and let customers try the tools.
- Introduce a spring event. Have it on May Day or any day that best fits the local community calendar. Use this as an opportunity to bring awareness of products offered in stores and encouragement to shop.
 - Take the time to research and then promote an A-to-Z campaign. Here is a sample start up for this theme. Market using all forms of media: social, newspapers, radio
 - A...aprons at At Home
 - B...books at The Collectors Store
 - C...coffee at Café Paradiso
 - D...diamonds at Americus Diamond
 - E...Ethiopian cuisine at Addis Ethiopian Food
 - F...flooring at Green Building Supply
 - G...green plants at Fairfield Flower Shop

- Cross-Marketing is a fantastic way to encourage people to shop and eat in numerous businesses. Cross-marketing can be conducted between a couple of businesses (no limit to number of partnerships), a downtown-wide campaign with a specific time-frame or year-round. Could use (i.e., \$5) coupons, Chamber bucks, samples of products, % discount or suggestions of complimentary products.
 - If customer buys a lamp (Could have a minimum \$ purchase), give them “\$” to enjoy a meal at a Fairfield restaurant. Will need to supply lists.
 - If they eat at a local restaurant, they are given \$5 Chamber Bucks to use in a local business. Will need to supply lists.
 - When customer buys a new pair of jeans they are told to go to store “XYZ” for i.e., a free rose, hand lotion or free ice cream cone.



- The assessment team heard about a new and very unique event that could be happening in Fairfield. A Fermentation Festival!!! Not everyone sells fermented products, but they can still join in on this very out-of-the-ordinary event.
 - Offer small cups of wine, beer, yogurt or bread samples to customers
 - Conduct a passport program (one punch for stopping at a store, three punches if a purchase was made) to win prizes such as a loaf or basket of bread, a bread knife, bottle of wine, 6-pack of beer, etc.
- Take advantage of your artistic vibe.
 - Host events that encourage the community to share their talents. Painting/coloring individual squares, jigsaw puzzle pieces that show individual artwork or individual contributions that create a single themed piece of artwork. Organize a downtown Chalk the Walk such as the annual event held in Mount Vernon, Iowa.



- Continue to have a strong focus on planning and programming.
 - Some added events should be small (limited work for staff and businesses)
 - Make sure events have the potential to be powerful. If not then it is ok to wait until all the pieces (financial, location, date, enough volunteers, staff time, etc.) are in place.
 - Not all events need to have something for everyone. Sometimes it is good to focus on particular demographics.
 - Include music (everyone loved the element of music at events) that complement your cultural diversity.
 - Plan early so stores have time to prepare and market to current and potential customers
 - Advertising/marketing needs to include social media, local newspapers, radio. Contact area television when you are hosting a unique or extra special event.

THEME 7: COMMUNICATIONS/COORDINATION

Oh, how we wish everyone read every word in all our communications. Sadly, this doesn't happen even though we feel like we are reaching out in so many ways. There can never be enough or too much communication. The Assessment Team heard multiple times "I/We didn't know." The Chamber Chatter e-newsletter, Facebook postings, Traction Tuesdays and Business After Hours are excellent communication tools. Yet not every business has time to check Facebook daily. Many businesses are "mom and pop" or "one-person" which makes it next to impossible for such businesses to attend functions. Communication between businesses and to the public needs to be expanded. Streamlined coordination amongst staff, volunteers and the community are essential to continued success. While not easy, it is a crucial element in achieving your goals.



ACTION ITEMS

- Consider creating a private Facebook group – "Fairfield Forum." Hopefully, comments and questions will be of a positive nature. Some might provoke some interesting conversations which will easily show areas of concern that need to be addressed. While other comments may clarify assumptions and clear up rumors. Venting is normal and can be a good thing. If remarks are constructive, it will bring an awareness as to what people are thinking and needing. Everyone likes to have answers to their questions.
 - A platform for businesses, building owners and staff (Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitor's Bureau and Economic Development) only.
 - A place for updates
 - Promote an anniversary
 - Let each other know about special events
 - Sell store fixtures, shelving, display cases, etc.
 - Contact information
 - Who cleans your windows?
 - Who would you recommend we call to get a new sign?

- Ask questions. Streamlined coordination amongst staff, volunteers and the community are essential to continued success. While not easy, it is a crucial element in achieving your goals.
 - What is happening in that white three-story building?
 - I have to file a _____ report????
 - How many treats should I have ready for our Halloween event?
 - What time are you closing New Year's Eve?
- Travel writers shared with the Assessment Team their suggestion of having a "100 Things To Do/Buy In Fairfield, For Less Than \$10" Campaign.
 - Other twists:
 - o 52-week campaign offering a new idea every week
 - o Less than \$10 and maybe even FREE
 - A few ideas to get you started...

o Cup of coffee	o Get your daily	o Look at art
o Attend a movie	10,000 steps while	o Buy a reusable
o Park	window shopping	straw
o Buy a cold beer	o Enjoy a glass of	
o Attend First Friday	wine	
o Art Walk	o Eat ice cream	

- Business of the month program
 - Not only should you personally present a special certificate to the Business of the Month (maybe during a Traction Thursday or a Business After Hours), be sure to use all avenues of communication: Facebook, newspapers, radio, Chamber Chatter, etc.
 - Recognition could be for a special reason such as a benchmark anniversary, expansion of business or a business that reached a special honor within their industry.
 - Take a look at particular months and use that as a theme...
 - o October-Women's Small Business Month
 - o November-Entrepreneurship Month
 - o December-Best Holiday Decorated Window
 - o January-Newest Business in downtown Fairfield
 - Mix it up: Staff choice, People's choice, Student's choice, Themed



- Coordination involves so many moving parts and people: Fairfield staff, business and building owners, employees, and volunteers, just to name a few. Coordination of volunteers is crucial for success. During interviews, the team heard many people volunteer for specific tasks ranging from helping to create/design signage and to reviewing ordinances. You are encouraged to tap into these talents. In the Iowa Downtown Resource Center world, we have seen success and increased volunteerism using the following ideas.
 - Have very specific committees such as those used in Main Street Iowa communities: Business Improvement, Design, Organization and Promotions.

- Recruit volunteers for their individual talents.
- Recruit volunteers for very specific tasks.
- Some volunteers are only available at certain times. Use this to your advantage. Find out when volunteers want to volunteer and when they can volunteer...day of week, time of day, what season(s).
- Keep in mind that volunteers have special passions. By knowing your volunteers, you can connect them with activities they are passionate about.
- Keep in mind that people of different ages have unique talents that can be beneficial to your needs.

CONTACTS

Iowa Downtown Resource Center, IEDA,	515.348.6180
.....	https://www.iowaeda.com/downtown-resource-center/
Keep Iowa Beautiful	515.323.6507
.....	https://www.KeepIowaBeautiful.com
ISU Iowa Community Indicators Program Retail Analysis.....	http://www.icip.iastate.edu/retail
Certified Local Governments, State Historical Society of Iowa	515.281.6826
CDBG Downtown Revitalization Program.....	515.348.6208
.....	https://www.iowaeda.com/cdbg/downtown-revitalization-fund/

National and State Preservation Services and Programs:

National Trust for Historic Preservation	www.preservationnation.org
Main Street America (Main Street America Network Membership).....	https://www.mainstreet.org
National Park Service Preservation Briefs	https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm
State Historic Preservation Office	www.iowahistory.org

RESOURCES

Electronic files are available for download [here](#). (for 12 months)

- Fairfield Design Renderings
- [Sidewalk Resource Guide: Restoring Social Life in Our Communities](#)
- [The Placemaking Process](#)
- [Eleven Principles for Making Great Community Places](#)
- [A Street You Go To, Not Just Through: Principles for Fostering Streets as Places](#)
- [How To Do Creative Placemaking](#)
- Design Guidelines
- Retail Events
- Preservation Brief: Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts
- Place-Signage
- Upper Story Housing Benefits
- Characteristics of a Successful Downtown
- CDBG-Downtown Revitalization Grant Overview
- Community Catalyst Grant Fact Sheet
- Example: Vacant Building Registry and Ordinance

CLOSING

The Assessment Team also heard, “Fairfield has a vibrant volunteer energy.” Such an exciting statement that shows promise for an incredible future of volunteerism in Fairfield.

It was a pleasure for our team to work in Fairfield. The community has enthusiastic volunteers and leaders that will make a difference. We hope this visit and report can assist in building a solid plan for downtown projects and improvements. We encourage leaders, organizations and volunteers to work collaboratively. Focus on projects that you get excited about. We are here for continued support. Good luck!

PRIORITIES

The Assessment team encourages Fairfield to prioritize projects listed in this report and other opportunities we feel are of importance.

Theme #	Immediate Priorities: (0-6 months)
1	Organize weed and paint programs; Clean up days
3	Posted store hours and updates on Google sites
4	Adopt design guidelines to serve as best practices; Tie to future incentive programs
4	Adopt IEDA’s Downtown Design Guidelines and tie to local grant programs
2,4	Remove obsolete business signs
4	Raise awareness by promoting recent building rehab success stories
5	Establish or assign group to be Small Business Development Team
5	Inventory and assess vacant, downtown buildings
7	Create a Fairfield Forum Facebook group for businesses
7	Create recognition/awareness programs for local businesses
Theme #	One Year Priorities (0-12 months)
1	Parking management activities: Sign free parking; Improve lot connections
1	Long-term alley art plan
2, 4	Update and enforce ordinances including sign ordinance
3	Emphasis on window displays: Mentors; Displays in vacant windows
4	Establish local incentive program(s) to support quality building improvements
4	Downtown improvement task force
4	Establish a downtown building inventory
4	Interaction with owners.; See recommendations for small scale to large scale projects
5	Identify and create business ready storefronts: Minor improvements
5	Business Opportunity Signs for windows in vacant buildings
5	Displays in vacant windows
5	Holiday pop up businesses in vacant space
5	Develop business wish list based on market data and consumer opinions
5	Inventory home businesses and opportunities to fill downtown space
6	Develop promotional activities to get people in stores: Offer experiences

Theme#	Longer term Projects: (0-24 months)
1	Sidewalk repair
1	Develop plan to improve the sidewalk experience: outdoor dining, art, etc.
2	Develop creative program (Co-Sign) to improve downtown business signage
2	Implement wayfinding sign program
4	Investigate potential of downtown investment group
5	Adopt Vacant Building Registry
5	Market hot properties (available buildings) on website
5	Empty building tour
5	Open Your Own Business workshop
5	Get the word out about your business wish list; Visit communities to generate leads
5	Develop business recruitment process: Handling leads
5	Work with building owners on rent incentives
5	Business plan competition
5	Promote pop-up businesses in vacant storefronts
6	Develop a spring event. A to Z campaign
6	Brainstorm and execute business to business cross marketing ideas
6	Develop promotional series that focuses on local talent
7	Develop campaign: 100 Things to do or Buy in Fairfield (travel writers' idea)
Theme#	Down the Road....but plan now: (24 months +)
1	Two-way traffic
3	Improve downtown lighting
4	Establish a National Historic District
4	Explore/plan for a youth gathering space, possibly a business run by youth
6	Fermentation Festival

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“Everyone has the right to live in
a great place.

More importantly,
everyone has the right to
contribute to making the place
where they already live great.”

Fred Kent