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This is a brief summary of the recommendations of an Iowa Downtown Resource Center Assessment Visit conducted in Durant. A complete report is also available from the City of Durant.

Durant needs to take downtown revitalization efforts to the next level. The city, businesses, organizations and volunteers need to get on the same page and become passionate about the importance of the downtown area. Durant includes a strong core of businesses, some of whom have been in business for many years. Nearly all community leaders and residents want to see more downtown business growth and physical improvements made to downtown buildings and public spaces. There is certainly pride in place demonstrated by the local participation while we were in town. It's great to see so many dedicated individuals working to make Durant a better place to live, work & play.

1. SIGNAGE

Gateway & Wayfinding Signage

Promotion of a district goes a long way towards assisting businesses. A cohesive wayfinding signage system and enhanced gateway signage could be important components in the visual identification and promotion of Downtown Durant.



- 1) Maintain the existing gateway signage on the east and west ends of 5th Street. Fix the missing letter on the western welcome sign as an immediate step.
- 2) Enhance the intersection of Yankee Avenue and 5th Street, where visitors from I-80 enter the community. Remove sign clutter and consider a gateway or monument sign that could provide the same information in a cleaner, more condensed manner.
- 3) Eliminate the 'Wilton Café' directional sign. While neighboring communities are often our partners in many ways, it is recommended to eliminate wayfinding signage that would lead travelers outside of the community.
- 4) Establish a Directional Sign Program and Implementation Plan through the use of a citizen action committee.

Business Signage

Well-designed signage not only increases business visibility, but enhances and enlivens the look and feel of downtown.

- 1) Before focusing on new signage, address outdated signs. Remove signs for defunct businesses and extraneous pole/supports.
- 2) Review sign ordinance to ensure it matches the types of signage desired for the downtown environment.
- 3) Explore options for a city incentivized signage program to encourage installation of high quality, well-designed signs. Small matching grants can be very effective, especially with guidelines attached to the incentive that encourage specific types of signage and require adherence to city sign code.
- 4) Identify business without current signage that might be prime candidates for an incentive program. Ensure incentive guidelines, requirements, and processes are clearly spelled out and consistent and then purposefully promote the signage program to downtown building and business owners to encourage participation.

2. PARTNERSHIP INCENTIVES & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

It's time for everyone to get on the same page for a shared vision for downtown Durant and work toward implementing this common goal. This goal should encompass all areas, but should focus especially on economic development. You must create an environment to succeed by helping businesses thrive within the downtown district.

- 1) Create a local business task force. This should be a joint effort between all development entities.
- 2) Explore downtown district funding examples, and find the ones that make the most sense for your district.
- 3) Create a task force to address business needs. This should be a joint implementation effort.
- 4) Create your own local incentives:
 - a. Create exclusive incentives for your downtown district.
 - b. Utilize Tax Increment Financing (TIF) as an appropriate tool to get what you want.
 - c. Consider other tools like abatement exclusively for downtown improvements.

3. DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENTS

Public Improvements

Improving and maintaining the public spaces in a community is of utmost importance for public safety, accessibility, and community aesthetics.

- 1) Add a permanent four-way stop along 5th Street to provide a safe pedestrian crossing.
- 2) Complete parking stall striping in the public right of ways.
- 3) Do a complete inventory of the sidewalks in the City Center area. On a map note trip hazards, missing ADA ramps, and gaps in the sidewalk connectivity.
- 4) Utilize TIF funding to undertake a Sidewalks Improvement Project using your inventory as a guide.



Gateway Improvements

Once basic public improvements have been tackled, Durant should go further to enhance the commercial corridor. Focus on primary and secondary intersections, as well as lighting in the City Center, to create a sense of connectedness.

- 1) Work with local landscapers to establish decorative plantings in the corner greenspace at intersections.
- 2) Determine if the existing streetlights can be replicated locally and install new street lighting in the City Center of the commercial corridor.



Beautification

A welcoming environment with clean sidewalks, benches, greenery and other amenities is more inviting to pedestrians and business customers and encourages them to linger longer.

- 1) Schedule regular street sweeping efforts, followed by sweeping of sidewalks and window washing of downtown businesses.
- 2) Street furniture and amenities like benches, planters, trash cans, and bike racks add color to the downtown and create a welcoming environment for residents and visitors. Either repair and spruce up existing items, or invest in new elements that can add more color and visual interest to the street.
- 3) Plan ahead to incorporate banners into the new street light posts. This adds color, dimension and visual interest to the corridor, and can help define the downtown core.

Downtown Buildings

One of the most common comments from survey data and onsite interviews was the "lived" appearance of many of the buildings in downtown Durant. Some buildings could benefit from relatively minor updates like fresh paint and new awnings or signage, while others need to address more substantial stabilization and deferred maintenance issues before doing larger scale façade improvements.



- 1) Work with downtown property and business owners to identify their most critical needs related to building improvements, and develop city incentives that address those needs and encourage private investment.
- 2) Complete a building inventory of the remaining historic commercial buildings in the downtown district to assess existing conditions and potential for storefront and façade improvements.
- 3) Consider a program that could provide architectural guidance and conceptual renderings to property owners wanting to take advantage of façade incentive programs.



Placemaking

Creative placemaking can help address the lack of definition and color in downtown Durant by activating vacant spaces, softening the harshness of a downtown, and bringing "comfort" back into the street design.

- 1) Consider forming a task force or committee to focus on placemaking and public art downtown.
- 2) Explore opportunities and potential locations to incorporate murals into downtown to add color and vibrancy. Murals should be visually interesting and have local significance.
- 3) Explore ways to activate the street frontage of setback and vacant lots to help create definition in the downtown core. Parking areas of setback buildings can be screened with planters or decorative panels, while vacant lots provide ample space for sculptures, interactive exhibits, etc. Utilize local artisans in these efforts.
- 4) Physical art isn't the only type of art that can bring color to a downtown space. Consider incorporating performance art (music, festivals, etc.) back into the downtown.

4. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE & PROCESSES

Organizational Structure

One of the biggest challenges for small town, downtown development is the lack of structure and focus that is needed to engage and mobilize volunteers to complete projects.

- 1) Initiate a meeting or series of meetings for the local community leaders and stakeholders. Get on the same page on wants and desires then expand to include the rest of the stakeholders. Develop a community development structure that makes sense. Identify missions, projects and taskforces that can lead these charges.
- 2) Consider additional support for businesses. Suggestions include a retail event such as Downtown Special of the Week, social get togethers for businesses to build camaraderie, joint activities, collaborative marketing, and workshops for businesses.
- 3) We believe the efficiency and effectiveness of the Chamber of Commerce can be dramatically enhanced with the hiring of a part-time director that can help mobilize volunteers and watch over projects.
- 4) Develop a public relations campaign to involve community members in the community development process.

City Approval Process and Ordinance Review

- 1) Start with a collaborative approach to the enforcement of the adopted property maintenance and nuisance codes within the Downtown.
- 2) Study and understand State of Iowa Code 657A 10A.
- 3) City Council should primarily be a policy setting body. Shift the approval of permits to City staff. Start first with sign permit approvals, then expand into other areas.

5. MARKETING – INTERNAL & EXTERNAL

A unified marketing effort needs to be created to "tell the story" of Durant in a positive way. Working together begins with strengthening the lines of communication between the City, the business community and the residents of Durant.

- 1) Celebrate local successes – BIG and small! Grand openings, business anniversaries, school events, or simply local youth gathering to brainstorm on how to make improvements to the park system.
- 2) Use social media outlets to share positive messages about the community and local businesses. Create one or two themed days and plan posts to educate businesses and local residents.
- 3) Create a weekly email database to share information with local businesses. Use Constant Contact or Mail Chimp to create a professional look and be consistent on when you send it out. Encourage businesses to share special sales and events with you so you can share it with the broader business community.
- 4) Create a community calendar so folks know what is happening. Have one organization (maybe the Chamber of Commerce) serve as a clearing house to keep it updated and encourage local groups/events to share their information.

6. GREEN SPACE IMPROVEMENTS

Durant has a number of nice parks, three of which are located within downtown or the surrounding blocks. While the existing green spaces are well-maintained, consider some infrastructure and programming improvements that meet the needs and wants of residents, and bring more regular activity to the parks as community gathering space.

- 1) Form a task force or committee that focuses on park improvements, from idea generation to fundraising. This helps take that role off the city's shoulders and engages kids, parents, and families – people that use these spaces most – in determining what sort of features and amenities are desired.
- 2) Add more amenities to the green space by the community center and library – tables and chairs, lounge chairs or hammocks, etc. Explore programming options for the bandshell in the same area, perhaps expanding on the existing movie nights to include more varying themes.
- 3) Consider programming for Pythian Sisters Park to bring more regular use to the space and generate more activity downtown (live music, food trucks, etc.).



CONTACTS/RESOURCES:

Iowa Downtown Resource Center, IEDA, Des Moines, Iowa	515 725 3058	https://www.iowaeconomicdevelopment.com/MainStreetIowa
State Historic Preservation Office		www.iowahistory.org
National Trust for Historic Preservation		www.preservationnation.org
National Main Street Center		http://www.mainstreet.org
National Park Service's Preservation Briefs		www.nps.gov/tsp/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm