

POLK CITY

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Conducted by

Iowa Downtown Resource Center



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

[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 13+ years, Jeff has more than 25 years of grant writing, grant management, and program development experience with an emphasis on environmentally sustainable development. Jeff's expertise is matching up a community's vision with the resources to make the vision a reality. Jeff is actively involved with several nonprofit organizations and currently is a board member of Des Moines Heritage Trust. For 20+ years Jeff has 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.

[MAIA FIALA JESSEN](#) is the Design Coordinator for the Iowa Downtown Resource Center's Main Street Iowa program. In this role, she provides technical assistance and conceptual design services to Main Street Iowa communities and manages the Challenge Grant program for building



rehabilitation projects. Prior to joining Main Street Iowa, Maia worked with the Oregon State Historic Preservation office, assisting Oregon communities with Main Street design, historic resource survey and inventory, and property listing in the National Register of Historic Places. She has a BFA in Interior Design from Iowa State University, an MS in Historic Preservation from the University of Oregon and is a certified Historic Real Estate Development Finance Professional (HREDFP) through the National Development Council.

[CAROL LILLY](#) is a Downtown Development Specialist with Iowa Downtown Resource Center's Main Street Iowa program. In this role, she provides technical assistance services to Main Street Iowa communities. Lilly is certified as a Historic Real Estate Development Finance Professional from the National Development Council. Prior to



joining Main Street Iowa, Lilly was the Executive Director of Community Main Street in Cedar Falls Iowa. She is a graduate of the University of Northern Iowa and has worked in the fields of property management, retail management, and marketing in Iowa, Nebraska, Arkansas, and Minnesota. Lilly has presented at state, regional and national workshops on topics related to economic development of downtown districts. She has always been an active volunteer, lending time and expertise to several worthy organizations including local Chambers of Commerce, various boards, foundations, tourism groups, church groups and school districts while living in communities across the Midwest.

[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 Masters of Landscape Architecture from Kansas State University. He has served on both the Urban Design Review Board for the City of Des Moines and the Iowa Urban Land Institute Board, volunteers for multiple Dog Rescue groups and provides therapy dog visits with Mister Cotton.

[Nick Sorensen](#) is a Downtown Real Estate Specialist with the Iowa Downtown Resource Center. In this role, he



provides technical assistance to communities that focuses on real estate development issues in Iowa downtowns. Prior to joining the Iowa Downtown Resource Center team, Nick was a Peace Officer for 13 years and a Building Official, Zoning Official, Code Enforcement, Special Projects coordinator for 5 years. In his role with many hats, Nick was project manager for a Community Development Block (Downtown Revitalization) Grant that rehabilitated 13 facades, acquiring and rehabilitating 9 storefront buildings on behalf of the city, applying for and receiving Iowa Economic Development Authority Catalyst and Challenge Grants and assisted Region XII Council of Governments with the installation of the first two Homes for Iowa homes. Nick currently is a member of the Iowa Rural Development Council.

The following report summarizes the observations and recommendations resulting from an Iowa Downtown Resource Center Assessment conducted in Polk City, Iowa. The Team’s familiarization process with Polk City began with a review of materials supplied prior to the visit, a pre-visit survey consisting of 229 completed online surveys, a driving tour of the city and a walking tour of the Downtown square. The intensive three-day visit also included interviews with approximately 35 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 Downtown Polk City.

OVERVIEW

This Downtown Assessment report and recommendations for Polk City are based on the Team’s downtown development experience – totaling nearly 80 years. 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 a hub for cultural, social, and civic engagement. 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 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 keep Downtown a “go to” kind of destination, not an avoidable area we pass by on our way to destinations located on the outskirts of town.

**“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**

PURPOSE

The City of Polk City worked with the Iowa Downtown Resource Center, Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA), to conduct a Downtown Assessment to raise awareness of the Downtown square and to identify opportunities to strengthen and enhance the Downtown square as Polk City's "front porch." Polk City has already proactively conducted extensive community visioning and planning and has many ongoing capital improvement projects that will build upon the community's strong foundation. Polk City seems well positioned to implement the recommendations in this report, or similar, in a timely, well thought out, and high-quality manner.



This assessment and its recommendations should serve as a call to action and provide the community with current information to formulate strategies necessary to strengthen and enhance the Downtown for future generations. This report cannot and does not provide ALL the answers. Ultimately, Polk City's citizens must decide what is relevant and realistic, prioritize options, and acquire necessary resources as they address Downtown's future.

INTRODUCTION

Polk City, Iowa, a fast-growing Polk County city is part of the Des Moines metropolitan area. While the city bustles with growing residential development, the community's original Downtown square helps maintain the community's small-town feel. Through the community interviews and survey process, it was quite apparent that the residents appreciate the Downtown Square as the community's heart and soul. Despite the small footprint of the square, the square has remained viable largely because of several destination businesses that are very popular. The town square is the last remaining typical Iowa town square in Polk County. The variety of services such as mix of restaurant types, dance studios, brewery, pub, children's art studio, exercise gym, insurance and financial services helps the square maintain a small-town feel. Events like the farmers market, winter festival, and Four Seasons Festival bring crowds of people to the square. The forthcoming Downtown trail connections to the Neal Smith and High Trestle recreation trails is likely to bring additional crowds to Polk City's Downtown square. The addition of these trail connections will provide new opportunities for many Iowans and visitors to Iowa to explore the quaint small town feel of the Downtown square as well as the numerous opportunities that Polk City provides for passively and actively communing with nature.



Members of the Downtown Assessment Team believe the identification of strengths and challenges should be taken constructively and utilized by local leaders to do many good things in the Downtown square. We hope the following observations and recommendations will help identify priorities and provide the motivation to shift from planning to action.

THE SURVEY SAYS...



Prior to the assessment visit, the Iowa Downtown Resource Center administered an online survey to residents of Polk City to get their ideas and opinions about the downtown area. 229 people participated in the survey. A complete summary of survey responses for the pre-assessment surveys completed online is available as an attachment.

PRE-ASSESSMENT VISIT SURVEY trends show... *(answers in order of popularity/responses)*

What is Downtown Polk City's Greatest Strength?

- Location (72) (31.4%)
- Appearance/Cleanliness (63) (27.5%)
- Other (36) (15.7%)
 - The Square, Small Town Feel
- Downtown Businesses (30) (13.1%)
- Promotional Events (24) (10.5%)

What is Downtown Polk City's Greatest Weakness?

- Lack of Downtown Businesses (92)(40.9%)
- Other (64) (28.4%)
 - Lack of Parking, Lack of Businesses, Need More Restaurants, A Little Rundown
- Not Enough to Do (48) (21.3%)
- Downtown Buildings (14) (6.2%)
- Appearance/Cleanliness (7) (3.1%)

What NEW ACTIVITY would make you spend more time Downtown?

- Weekly Events/Monthly Events/Festivals (62)
 - Examples: Live Music and Food Truck Night/Day (most stated by far), Food Festival, Restaurant Week, Local Talent, Sounds on The Square, Car Show, Festivals, 4th of July/Parade, Arts & Craft Fair
- Family Friendly/Better Play Area (49)
 - Park equipment (7), splash pad (7), pool (5), mini golf (3), Pickle Ball (3), Skating Rink (3), Yard Games (3), Movies in Park (2), Community Piano (1)
- More Restaurants (11)
- Shops (10)
- Farmers Market (larger/more) (8)
- Nicer (Upscale) Bar with Great Patio/Outdoor Dining (6)
- Spin Studio/Yoga/Pilates/Exercise (5)

If you were given \$100,000 to invest in Downtown, what would you use the funds for?

- Building Enhancements (26)
- More Businesses/Shopping (25)
- Restaurant (24)
- Landscaping/Lighting/Fountain/Park Square Improvements (24)
- Kids Activities/Playground Improvements (19)
- Parking (17)
- Pool/Splash Pad (14)
- Outdoor Recreation Space (pickle ball, fire pit, seating, and restrooms) (11)

What type of NEW BUSINESS is most needed Downtown?

- Restaurant (128)
 - Chinese (4), Sports Bar (4), Healthy (1), Wine Bar (3), Upscale (2), Diner/café (3), Steakhouse/BBQ (1), Mexican (6), Bakery (6), Meal Prep (1)
- Pharmacy (25)
- Boutique/Gift Shop (13)
- Shopping (12)
- Family Entertainment (pool, bowling, arcade, movie) (7)
- Dollar General or Similar (7)
- Hardware/General Repair (6)

Which public amenities do you think are most needed downtown?

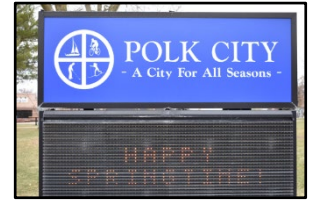
- Parking (117)
- Places for kids (67)
- Street seating (47)
- Other (40)
 - Restrooms, Pedestrian Improvements/Traffic Calming
- Public Art (36)
- Bike Lanes (33)
- Greenspace (30)

What is your age?

- Under 15 (0)
- 15-25 (3)
- 26-35 (35)
- 36-45 (76)
- 46-55 (42)
- 55-65 (38)
- 65+ (28)
- Prefer not to say (6)

POLK CITY STRENGTHS/ASSETS

- Recreational Assets
 - Natural areas
 - Parks
- Housing
- Small Town Feel
- Trail Network
- Proximity to Metro Services



DOWNTOWN SQUARE STRENGTHS/ASSETS

- Park/The Square/Playground
- Destination/Anchor Businesses
- Hub for Community Activities
- Free Public Wi-Fi



ASSESSMENT TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- Improve Walkability to Connect the Downtown
- Comprehensive Wayfinding and Environmental Graphics (Signs)
- Community Character, Appearance and Public Art
- Comprehensive Event and Activity Calendar
- Enhance Business Mix Using Data and Incentives

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 Polk City will assess each recommendation and develop a plan to implement what is RIGHT for the downtown. 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: WALKABILITY/CONNECTIONS

While the downtown isn't the only commercial district serving fast-growing Polk City, it is the historic heart of the community and retaining that small-town feel is important to the local resident and business community.

Although many individuals think of the square and its surrounding buildings as the downtown, the footprint of downtown encompasses more than the square. The yellow outline in the image to the right defines the set boundaries of the downtown area. Currently walkable connections throughout the downtown area are lacking.



According to [Walkscore.com](https://www.walkscore.com), using the address of Rising Sun Café on the square as the center point, Polk City has a Walkability score of 43, which means most errands require a car. Bikeability is also measured, and it is noteworthy that Polk City's Bikeable score ranks at 37, which indicates the community is somewhat bikeable. Improvements are planned with the trail connection project, which will likely improve the bikeable score. More should be done to improve pedestrian walkability.

Challenges identified by the community related to walkability in the downtown included:

- Lack of parking
- Lack of sidewalks/condition of sidewalks
- Crosswalk visibility
- Pedestrian safety to and from the square.
- Incomplete trail access for bikes

Visit almost any thriving downtown district and chances are it is a walkable neighborhood. Walkability is, by definition, "The extent to which the built environment is friendly to the presence of people living, shopping, visiting, enjoying or spending time in an area." In a walkable downtown, people can safely navigate from place to place. It is aesthetically pleasing, and guests are drawn to visit on foot. The goal is for visitors to "park once" and walk to multiple destinations during their stay.

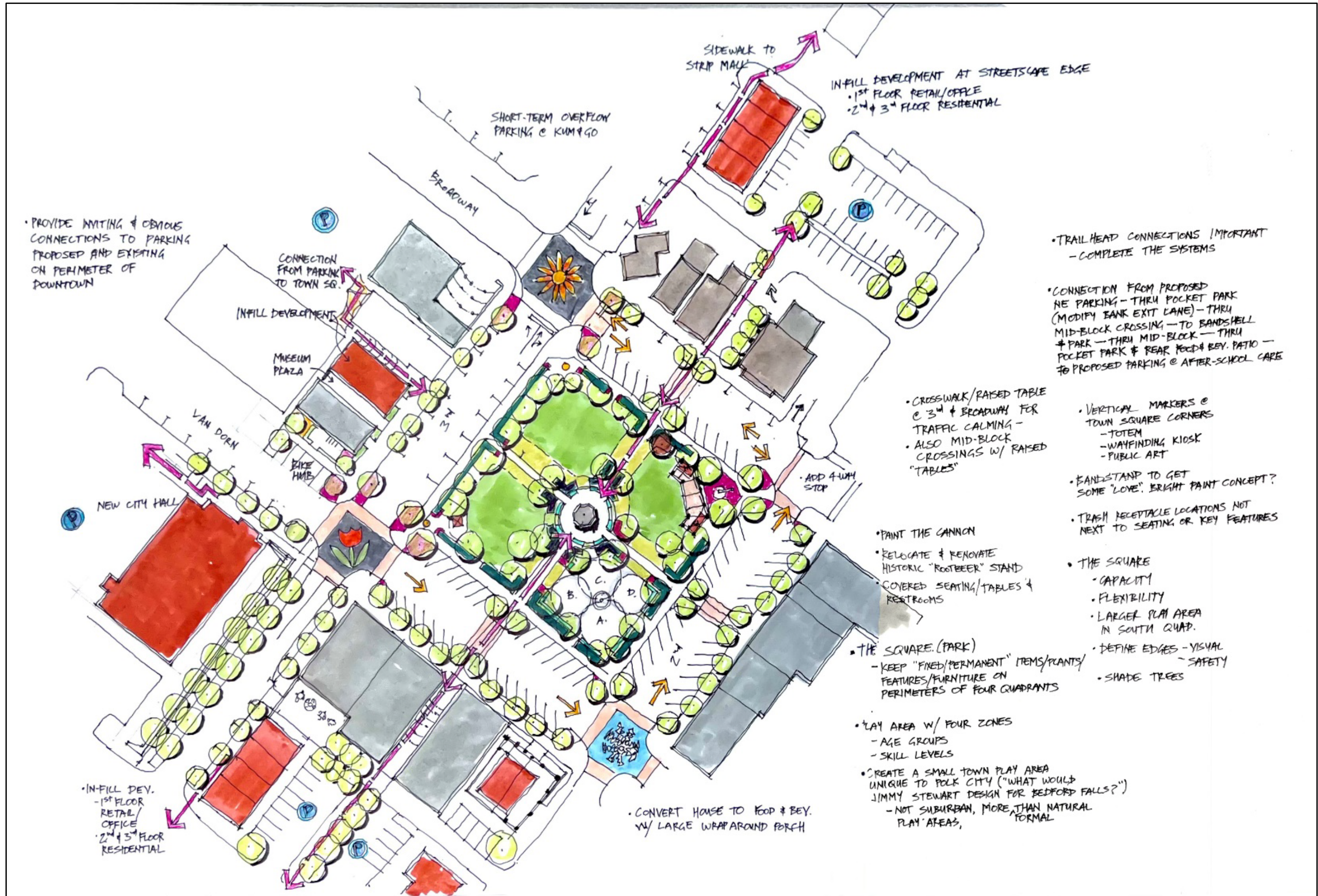
Architecture and Design magazine identifies the following characteristics of a walkable city:

- **Coherence** – clear and organized sidewalk, street, and land use system consistent with the scale and function of the urban context. (sidewalk and street should link points of interest and activity, provide clean lines of sight and include simple, instructive signage)
- **Continuity** – pattern of design and usage that unifies the pedestrian system (complimentary streetscaping along perpendicular and parallel streets)
- **Equilibrium** – a balance of transportation modes that accommodate and encourage pedestrian usage
- **Safety** – pedestrians are protected from automobiles and bicycles. (bump outs, crosswalks, bike lanes, etc.)
- **Comfort** – sidewalks should provide a variety of uses and activities characteristic to an urban environment (benches, bike racks, etc.)

- **Accessibility** – individuals are able to utilize the environment as fully as possible (wheelchair, stroller, audio at crosswalks)
- **Efficiency** – simple and cost effective in design and function (use budget wisely)
- **Attractiveness** – clean, efficient, well-maintained surroundings with adjacent storefronts and activities that provide sidewalk interest.

The drawing on the following page depicts suggestions for improved connections throughout the downtown area, and one can see how these ideas correlate to the characteristics of a walkable community. Notable suggestions as they relate to walkability include:

- a connection from the proposed NE parking lot through a modified bank exit lane to a raised mid-block crossing to access the park band shell
- continue through the park to another mid-block crossing, to/through the planned pocket park
- painted images to reflect the four seasons inside crosswalks around the square (calms traffic and improves safety)
- dedicated areas for additional bike parking
- new sidewalks to connect the square with the strip center to the north and to the planned youth center (referred to as the old church/funeral home) to the south
- infill development and a plaza area next to the museum with improved access to public parking along Broadway (across from Kum & Go)



• PROVIDE MYTING & OBVIOUS CONNECTIONS TO PARKING PROPOSED AND EXISTING ON PERIMETER OF DOWNTOWN

• INFILL DEV.
- 1ST FLOOR RETAIL/OFFICE
- 2ND & 3RD FLOOR RESIDENTIAL

CONNECTION FROM PARKING TO TOWN SQ.

SHORT-TERM OVERFLOW PARKING @ KUM&GO

SIDEWALK TO STRIP MALL

INFILL DEVELOPMENT AT STREETSCAPE EDGE
• 1ST FLOOR RETAIL/OFFICE
• 2ND & 3RD FLOOR RESIDENTIAL

• TRAIL HEAD CONNECTIONS IMPORTANT
- COMPLETE THE SYSTEMS

• CONNECTION FROM PROPOSED NE PARKING - THRU POCKET PARK (MODIFY BANK EXIT LANE) - THRU MID-BLOCK CROSSING - TO BANDSHELL & PARK - THRU MID-BLOCK - THRU POCKET PARK & REAR FOOD & BEV. PATIO - TO PROPOSED PARKING @ AFTER-SCHOOL CARE

• CROSSWALK/RAISED TABLE @ 3RD & BROADWAY FOR TRAFFIC CALMING - ALSO MID-BLOCK CROSSINGS W/ RAISED "TABLES"

• VERTICAL MARKERS @ TOWN SQUARE CORNERS
- TOTEM
- WAYFINDING KIOSK
- PUBLIC ART

• BANDESTAND TO GET SOME "LOVE", BRIGHT PAINT CONCEPT?
• TRASH RECEPTACLE LOCATIONS NOT NEXT TO SEATING OR KEY FEATURES

• PAINT THE CANNON
• RELOCATE & RENOVATE HISTORIC "ROOTBEER" STAND
• COVERED SEATING/TABLES & RESTROOMS

• THE SQUARE
- CAPACITY
- FLEXIBILITY
- LARGER PLAY AREA IN SOUTH QUAD.
- DEFINE EDGES - VISUAL - SAFETY
- SHADE TREES

• THE SQUARE (PARK)
- KEEP "FIXED/PERMANENT" ITEMS/PLANTS/FEATURES/FURNITURE ON PERIMETERS OF FOUR QUADRANTS

• LAY AREA W/ FOUR ZONES
- AGE GROUPS
- SKILL LEVELS

• CREATE A SMALL TOWN PLAY AREA UNIQUE TO POLK CITY ("WHAT WOULD JIMMY STEWART DESIGN FOR BEDFORD FALLS?")
- NOT SUBURBAN, MORE THAN NATURAL PLAY AREAS, FORMAL

• CONVERT HOUSE TO FOOD & BEV. W/ LARGE WRAPAROUND PORCH



*Example of a Raised Intersection (speed table)
West Union, IA*



*Example of a Mid-Block Crossing
West Union, Iowa*

- The city has plans to address the shortfall of spaces by creating two new public parking lots. Ideally, a downtown creates an environment where people are willing to park once and then walk throughout the district during their visit. When constructed, walkable connections will influence the public's willingness to utilize the new parking lots. Providing aesthetically pleasing connections to existing parking will also be important as the community grows and demand for parking increases. Consider walkability factors when designing the new parking lots.



Current Conditions

- Conduct a walking audit of sidewalks/lack of sidewalks throughout the downtown area to identify and list areas of opportunity. Use [AARP's Walk Audit Toolkit](#) as a guide. Prioritize the list and include the sidewalk improvement plan for desired outcomes in the CIP process.



Current Condition

Example

*Example
Manning, Iowa*

- Streetscape improvements around the square were done previously but lack continuity around the entire square and are beginning to show their age. As a longer-term initiative, keep larger scale streetscape improvements in mind as planned and future project opportunities arise. These improvements will be important as Polk City's downtown evolves, both visually and from a pedestrian safety/usability perspective.



Current Condition



Example with Landscaped Mid-Block Crosswalk

THEME 2: WAYFINDING/SIGNAGE

Overview:

Navigating to and through a historic commercial district is often second nature for those that live nearby, work there, or visit frequently. As shown in the survey and through the interviews conducted it is apparent residents frequent the downtown on a regular basis. However, there is a large amount of traffic flow, approximately 12,000 vehicles, driving through on 3rd Street every day and this is the daily average. Visually appealing wayfinding signage is a good hook to get this traffic to come in and explore the downtown. Once in the downtown, the exterior of the building needs to reflect what is on the interior, not only in building design but specifically business signage. Groundwork has been laid with existing wayfinding signage, Papa's Pizzeria mural, Fenders' and The Creamery business signs.



With the future completion of bike trails throughout the community and connecting to the Neal Smith and High Trestles Trail, there stands to be an even larger economic impact than just vehicular traffic. The economic impact of bicycle trails and tourism on historic downtowns has been demonstrated across the state and country. To prepare for this influx of passersby and to turn them into patrons, appropriate wayfinding and business signage will help you capitalize on this tourism benefit.



Good Signs:

- are easy to read
- are well designed
- are made from high quality materials
- exhibit good craftsmanship
- reflect the business's brand, personality and identity
- complement the building's design and the surrounding environment
- should fit the space on the building without taking away from the building
- should be kept simple
- mount into mortar joints if in masonry
- follow local ordinances (address ordinances if not business friendly)
- reflect current business hours on all buildings

Action Steps:

- Gather a group of downtown stakeholders to drive the district surroundings and entrances from a visitor or newcomer perspective. Look for current signage that identifies the district and note locations, as well as areas that are lacking. Be sure to include all major access points, not just vehicular but future trailways as well.
- Review your Polk City Town Square Design Standards related to signage to ensure they are not only business friendly but pedestrian and vehicular friendly as well.
- Install signage on the bike trails as they are completed identifying the Downtown and its available amenities. You will have a built-in traffic stream/potential customer base there; capture some stops by promoting the district and businesses/amenities that might be of interest to cyclists. The ice cream shop, bars, restaurants come to mind, but be sure to add others as the district evolves. Including distance on the signage (2 blocks south, for example) can help if the downtown is not easily visible from the signage location. If possible, consider installing an advertisement for the downtown at the Raccoon River Valley north and south trailheads for people who may not know what your downtown has to offer.
- Create and install gateway signage to define boundaries and let people know when they have 'arrived'. Even among locals who participated in the Assessment visit and interviews, the actual boundaries of the downtown were vague, and many had their own interpretations of where the district started and stopped.



Gateway Example

- Define district edges and install gateway signage at each one.
- Use a consistent design for all gateways. A simple structure that ties into the district's roots with opportunities for logo signage, internal or external lighting and a map of the downtown businesses.

4.1 Wayfinding

The wayfinding system should be introduced as part of the brand because it plays such an important role in the perception

PRIMARY GATEWAYS

These gateways are the primary intersection points and main entry ways to town. They need to be highly visible and introduce the brand.

BUILDING MARKERS

The markers can be either wall mounted or monument style and denote important landmarks in the downtown district.

TRAILBLAZERS

Trailblazers are the directing signs leading motorists to the main attractions in the area. These should have a maximum of three locations per sign and carry motorists from gateway to parking lot. Colors can be used to distinguish between different districts and can become smaller as the scale and speed of the roadway narrows.

STREET BANNERS

Banners are very popular and help to add color and movement to the lines of travel, acting as a speed calming device. They too can be color coded by district and can promote local events, as well as promoting the brand.

PARKING SIGNAGE

Identifying parking is important in creating a parking system in downtown. Visitors are more likely to walk a block or two to shop if the signage system leads them directly to a public parking lot and tell them how to proceed. The parking markers can be by themselves or as attachments to trailblazer signs.



Signage System Example
Burlington, Iowa

THEME 3: CHARACTER/APPEARANCE/ART

Overview:

Polk City's Downtown square is a fun, local and regional destination for dining, dessert, and festivals. Visitors are drawn to the square for its services; primarily for its variety of dining options, opportunity to play on the playground in the town square and partake of the community events. The square provides some public amenities for visitors such as a few outdoor seating options, the bandstand, drinking fountain, playground, and free public Wi-Fi.

During the Downtown Assessment community survey, respondents identified the appearance of some of the buildings and the public area in and around the square as a weakness. When asked in the survey what amenities are most needed downtown, the amenities identified most were children's play areas, street seating, public art, greenspace, and bike lanes ; all contribute to the look and feel of a place.

While the Downtown does contain destination businesses and a good foundation of public amenities, the Downtown square does present opportunities for enhancements. The Downtown area is somewhat bland, lacking color and sense of warmth and welcome. The amenities provided are in need of routine maintenance and repair and seem piecemealed together and lacking a strategic vision and plan.

Implementing a strong vision and plan for Downtown can improve the overall character and sense of place. Improving the beauty and functionality of the square, will mean more love for the square, which will lead to better maintenance and care and more funding opportunities to support the vision.

As the community of Polk City continues to develop a vibrant vision and plan for Downtown, there are a few key strategies to keep in mind. Think about the memorable places you have visited. What made them memorable? What strategies would inspire visitor interest all the way around the square? Is there something I see (signs, window displays, plantings, etc.) that entices me to keep walking around the square? Are there smells (restaurants, bakery/coffee shop), that make me want to investigate more of the square? Are there sounds (live or recorded music) that help create a sense of vibrancy on the square, which make me want to be part of the action? Are the comfort amenities that today's visitors are seeking provided (food, drink, seating, Wi-Fi, experiences, bike racks, restrooms, etc.)? Keep in mind what the Project for Public Spaces calls "The Power of 10+." The [Power of 10+](#) is the concept that thriving places provide a range of reasons for people to be there such as eating food, listening to music, viewing art, playing games, meeting up with people, exercising, etc.



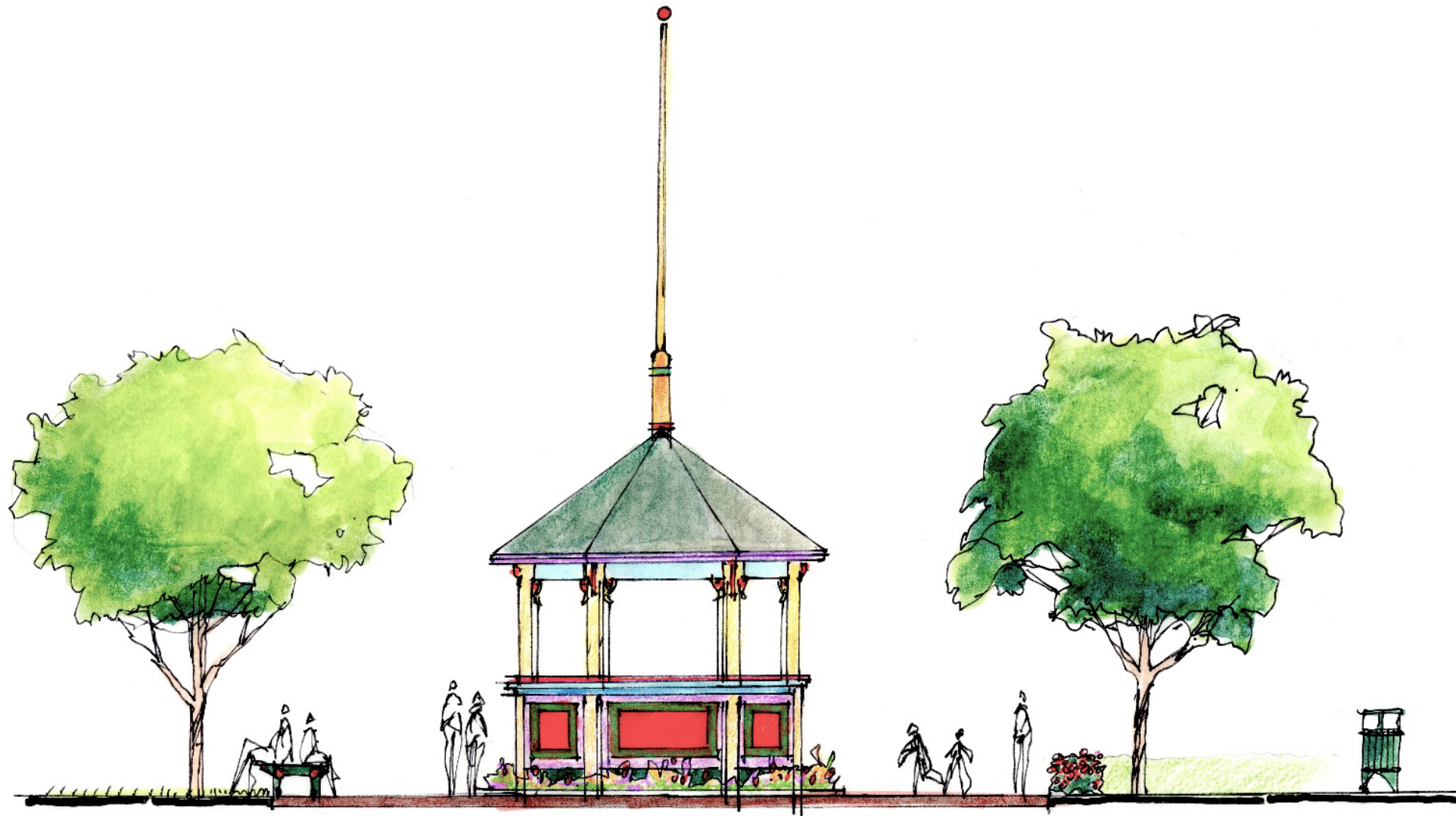
Action Steps:

- **Cleanup and maintenance.** Get a small group together (from diverse perspectives) and take a walk around the square. What do you see? Quickly organize a group for a spring cleanup. In support of the city’s brand— A City for All Seasons—conduct quarterly seasonal cleanups. Downtown cleanup events are a good way to engage students and community civic groups and establish and build upon partnerships with Downtown businesses. Clean up and celebrate.



- **Bandstand Improvements and Electrical Panel Beautification.** The bandstand is a prominent feature of Downtown’s Square Park. Steps should be taken to make the bandstand an even more prominent landmark. The Downtown Assessment team recommends painting the bandstand with a bright color scheme while painting the ground level lattice a dark color to visually elevate the bandshell while providing a backdrop for flowers. Until the city and the utility are able to bury the electrical services in the park (preferred option), take steps to either lessen the visual impact of the electrical services or improve the visual impact of the electrical services through an artistic treatment. One option may be to treat these services as canvases for art. Another option may be to create artistic “box covers” for temporary use that could then be utilized elsewhere in the community once these services are buried. See the image on the following page.

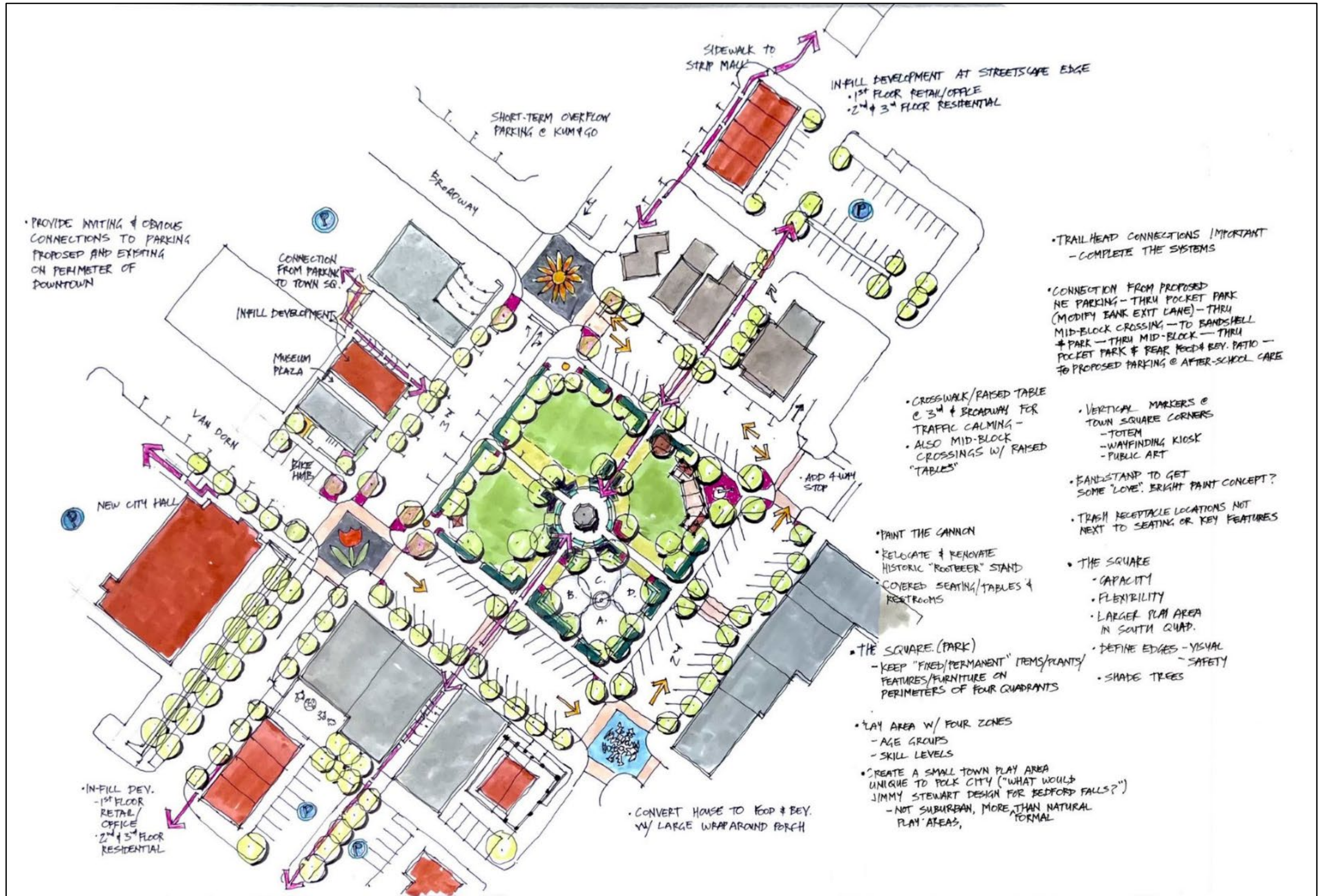




• 4' SEATING SURFACE

- ENHANCE DOUBLE-SIDED BENCHES FACING BOTH BANDSHELL & PARK ACTIVITY
- INTRODUCE SUCCESSION PLANTINGS OF BROAD SHADE TREES (OAK, HACKBERRY, GINKGO...) THAT MAKE PARK COMFORTABLE & ALLOW VIEWS ACROSS SQUARE. KEEP ALL PLANTINGS AT EDGES NEXT TO WALKWAYS & SEATING. KEEP LARGER OPEN LAWNS FOR FLEXIBILITY OF USE.
- CONSIDER A BRIGHT COLOR SCHEME FOR BANDSHELL BASED ON VICTORIAN DESIGN TO MAKE IT MORE OF A PROMINENT FEATURE
- PAINT GROUND LEVEL LATTICE A DARK COLOR TO VISUALLY ELEVATE THE BANDSHELL & PROVIDE A BACKDROP FOR FLOWERS
- COLORS INSPIRED BY THE FOUR SEASONS IN NATURE (SILVER & WHITE INTERIOR)
- GOOP EXISTING DOWNLIGHTING INSIDE
- FLOWERING ROSE HEDGES OR SHADE TOLERANT LOW PLANTINGS TO DEFINE CENTRAL SPACE & AXIAL WALKWAYS
- LOCATE TRASH RECEPTACLES!
 - NOT NEXT TO SEATING
 - WITHIN VIEW OF SEATING
 - PARK PERIMETER BUT NOT VISUALLY PROMINENT

- **Downtown Square Committee.** Establish a Downtown Square Committee to develop a long-term vision and plan for enhancing and maintaining the town square park and the adjacent areas on all sides of the square. The purpose of this committee is to prevent piecemeal approaches to park and downtown improvements, guide downtown maintenance, and to leverage future investments in the park and downtown for greatest impact and functionality. The committee should utilize the drawings and concepts resulting from the Downtown Assessment visit as a resource and starting point. One of the first priorities for the Downtown Square Committee should be to investigate converting the south and east sides of the square to one-way traffic (see Action Step below). The potential for wider sidewalks in front of the businesses (south and east side of the square) could have a dramatic effect on the vision and strategic plan for the square.
- **One-way traffic.** Investigate, and if appropriate, implement one-way traffic approach to the south and east sides of the square to provide approximately six (6) more feet of sidewalk width along the businesses on the south and east and improve pedestrian safety.



• PROVIDE WAYFINDING & OBVIOUS CONNECTIONS TO PARKING PROPOSED AND EXISTING ON PERIMETER OF DOWNTOWN

IN-FILL DEVELOPMENT AT STREETSCAPE EDGE
 • 1ST FLOOR RETAIL/OFFICE
 • 2ND & 3RD FLOOR RESIDENTIAL

• TRAIL HEAD CONNECTIONS IMPORTANT - COMPLETE THE SYSTEMS

• CONNECTION FROM PROPOSED NE PARKING - THRU POCKET PARK (MODIFY BANK EXIT LANE) - THRU MID-BLOCK CROSSING - TO BANDSHELL & PARK - THRU MID-BLOCK - THRU POCKET PARK & REAR FOOD & BEV. PATIO - TO PROPOSED PARKING @ AFTER-SCHOOL CARE

• CROSSWALK/RAISED TABLE @ 3RD & BROADWAY FOR TRAFFIC CALMING - ALSO MID-BLOCK CROSSINGS W/ RAISED "TABLES"

• VERTICAL MARKERS @ TOWN SQUARE CORNERS
 - TOTEM
 - WAYFINDING KIOSK
 - PUBLIC ART

• BANDESTAND TO GET SOME "LOVE", BRIGHT PAINT CONCEPT?
 • TRASH RECEPTACLE LOCATIONS NOT NEXT TO SEATING OR KEY FEATURES

• PAINT THE CANNON
 • RELOCATE & RENOVATE HISTORIC "ROOTBEER" STAND
 • COVERED SEATING/TABLES & RESTROOMS

• THE SQUARE
 - CAPACITY
 - FLEXIBILITY
 - LARGER PLAY AREA IN SOUTH QUAD.
 - DEFINE EDGES - VISUAL - SAFETY
 - SHADE TREES

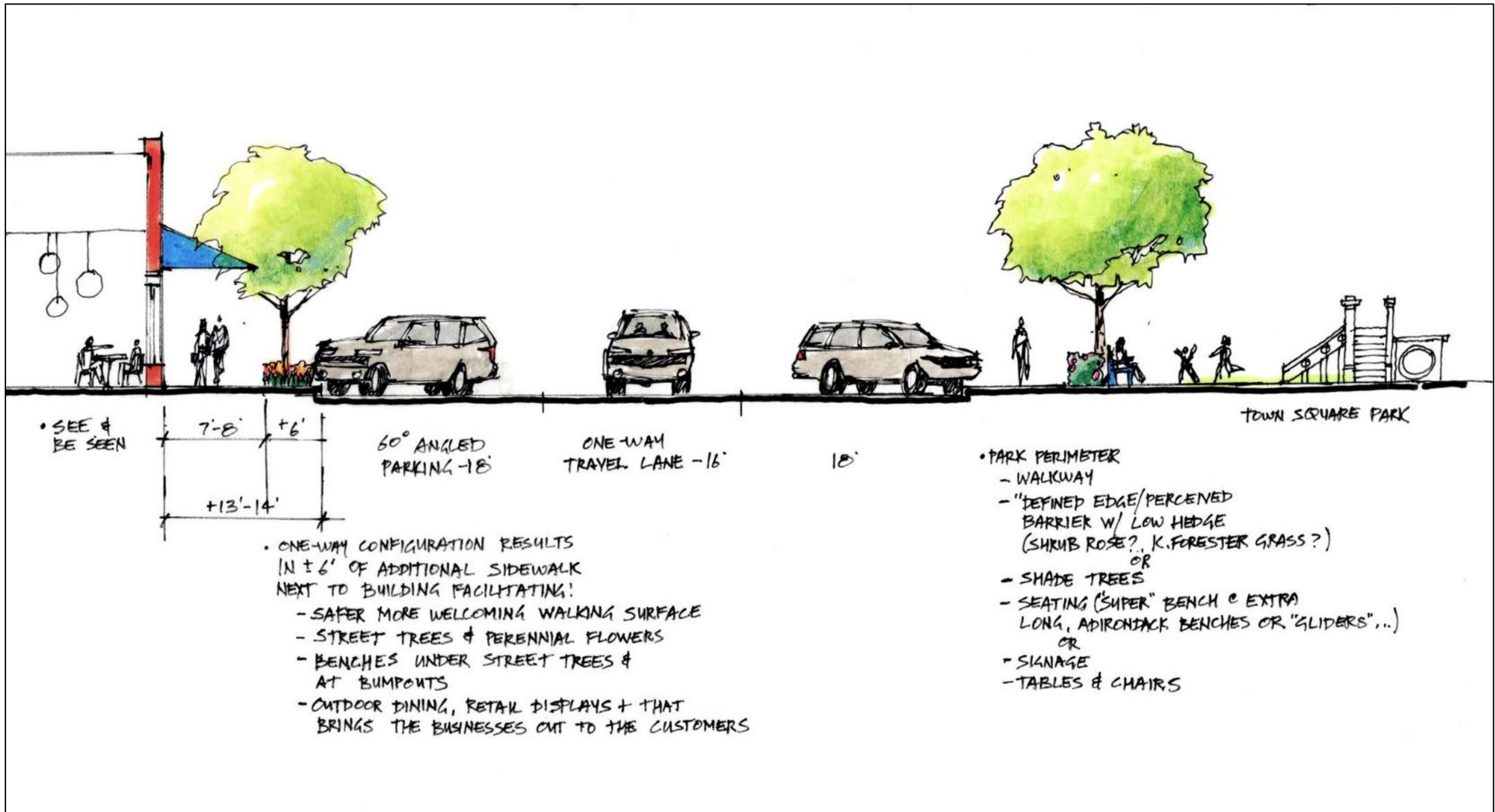
• THE SQUARE (PARK)
 - KEEP "FIXED/PERMANENT" ITEMS/PLANTS/FEATURES/FURNITURE ON PERIMETERS OF FOUR QUADRANTS

• LAY AREA W/ FOUR ZONES
 - AGE GROUPS
 - SKILL LEVELS

• CREATE A SMALL TOWN PLAY AREA UNIQUE TO POLK CITY ("WHAT WOULD JIMMY STEWART DESIGN FOR BEDFORD FALLS?")
 - NOT SUBURBAN, MORE THAN NATURAL PLAY AREAS, FORMAL

• IN-FILL DEV.
 - 1ST FLOOR RETAIL/OFFICE
 • 2ND & 3RD FLOOR RESIDENTIAL

• CONVERT HOUSE TO FOOD & BEV. W/ LARGE WRAPAROUND PORCH



- Add color, warmth, and vibrancy.** A quick way to add color to the downtown would be to add consistent, attractive planters of medium to large size strategically placed all the way around the square. Utilize seasonal plantings and decorations in the planters during all four seasons of the year. Given the current narrow nature of the sidewalks in front of the businesses on the south and east sides of the square, the best place to establish planters initially may be in all the bump-out areas at each of the intersections. A better, easier to maintain, more impactful approach would be to remove some of the bump-out pavement and replace it with perennial plantings and possibly seasonal annual plantings, public art, and seating. See pictures. Add flowering rose hedge or shade tolerant plantings to define the central space and axial walkways of the park while also creating natural buffers between traffic areas and children play areas. It's important to keep these edge plantings short enough to allow visibility into and out of the park for safety and to allow people to see the vibrant activity happening Downtown. All improvements made must be consistent with the vision and strategic plan developed under the leadership of the Downtown Square Committee (recommended above).



- Add amenities.** Based on the vision and implementation plan that the Downtown Square Park Committee develops in the Action Step above, strategically add high-quality, functional, and design-appropriate amenities to the Downtown area.



Bike rack designed and built by North Fayette Valley High School students for West Union, IA streetscape.

Amenities that the Downtown Assessment Team learned that are lacking based on community survey results, focus groups, and on-site research include outdoor seating, outdoor dining, public restrooms, and bicycle parking. Engaging local artists, students, and philanthropic groups in the design, construction, and installation of the amenities also helps grow community support and care for those amenities.



Metal street banner designed by North Fayette Valley High School art students and crafted by local metalsmith.

THEME 4: EVENTS/ACTIVITIES

Overview:

Known as a “City for All Seasons”, yet only three of the four seasons are celebrated with festivals? The Four Seasons Festival, Fall Festival and Light Up Polk City are locally beloved events that draw large crowds to the Square and downtown area. Consider adding a larger Spring event to round out the calendar. Expanding upon the Earth Day 5K event, now in its second year, is an option to consider.

During the assessment visit, the team learned there are a variety of events in the downtown such as Movies in the Park, Music in the Park, and a farmers market. A desire was expressed to enhance some of the existing activities.

- It was reported that the movie starts too late for many families with young children. Could there be pre-movie activities added such as live music, kids’ art class, face painting, or inflatables before the movie start time? Families with young children can take part in the fun prior to dusk and still make it home for a reasonable bedtime.
- A lack of vendors at the farmers market during the Thursday evening market was mentioned several times. Before making a concerted effort to grow the market, evaluate the current day and time it is being held. Are there nearby competing markets pulling vendors away? Is there another day and time where more vendors could attend?
- During the meeting with area youth, many ideas were generated. Lazer tag, bags tournament for teens/families, kids’ tractor pull, and a hangout place with a TV just reserved for teens to name a few. Could any of these ideas be incorporated into existing events? Consider adding one or two high school students to event planning committees to get their input and volunteer help.

Event planning for new events can seem daunting, but it does not have to be. Small scale ongoing events can benefit local businesses when they are strategically scheduled. Different community groups or businesses can take responsibility for hosting a weekly or monthly event downtown. For example, Fenders could host a weekly group bike ride that starts and ends in the downtown. After the ride, group members can gather for a beer. Host the ride on a night that is typically slow for Fenders and the other bars and restaurants. The same approach could be used with an array of businesses, organizations, and activities (group runs, walking groups, yoga, Zumba, etc.).



Action Steps:

- Consider creating a comprehensive web-based master community calendar (or enhance the Go Polk City calendar). Include all the activities taking place, festivals, concerts, farmers market, fitness classes, music lessons, history walks, community dinners, etc. Review the calendar. Is it balanced throughout the year? Are events and activities offered that match the interests of the demographic and sociographic profile of community members?

- The calendar of events should also be promoted in addition to just on social media and websites. Have event information posted in storefront windows. Utilize sandwich boards to promote events at main intersections like 3rd & Broadway. Include event information in community mailings such as community newsletters. Are there ways to promote the events through the school district or other local organizations? Would Polk City businesses with electronic signs be willing to promote events on the square a few days before an event occurs?
- Host a meeting with local businesses and community organizations interested in sponsoring/hosting smaller ongoing events such as the bike ride or the group run referenced earlier. Determine the best days/times for these types of ongoing events to occur and give it a try.
- Partner with the school district and local arts organizations to bring small events to the square. For example, bring school concerts, plays and small ensembles to the park. Or provide short little “teasers” in the square of upcoming concerts or plays. Display local student art in shop windows.
- Be strategic with each event. Establish events that promote and/or benefit your downtown businesses—Girls Night Out, Shop Hop, Dinner & An Outdoor Movie, etc.

THEME 5: BUSINESS MIX/BUSINESS INCENTIVES

Overview:

Polk City is in a unique position (GROWTH). Having almost doubled in size in ten years is quite impressive, although it can come with growing pains. Careful and thoughtful planning is KEY. With much of the community commuting to the metro area for employment, consideration should not be given to the businesses you WANT but to the businesses you are willing and able to SUPPORT.

Currently the downtown has no vacancies and very few lots available for development. Should vacancies arise, knowing your market is even more important. Downtowns are a place for walking and strolling. Continuous storefronts built to the sidewalk encourage people to walk from building to building, business to business. Downtown is a place to gather, do business and interact with other members of the community. It is a community's social and business hub...the heart of the town. Maintaining a positive image of commerce, community and a social center is paramount to your current and future growth.

Looking ahead to the future can sometimes make you forget about the present. Supporting your existing businesses and downtown shareholders is a large factor in your success. Recruiting the next new business can be exciting, fun, and exhausting. Helping your current businesses thrive will help set the example that Polk City values its businesses. To do this a community should have incentives that promote growth to businesses. These incentives should be based off what you, as a city want. These could be for simple signage, façade, building improvement or expansion of services mini-grants or they could be for large scale improvements to an existing structure wanting to add a rooftop patio or an infill multi-use project. These incentives can be used to leverage state and federal grant dollars. The city currently has an Economic Development Policy incentivizing large scale commercial/industrial development. Consider modifying this to encourage small scale growth that can holistically drive the downtown.

Incentives for existing businesses can help improve vibrancy. Note the outdoor seating, large windows for improved visibility.



Example of what can be done with facade incentive.



Current



Consider signage incentives to add more vibrancy and to clearly identify businesses.

Conduct an informal survey of building/business owners to determine what type of assistance is most needed and create specific parameters for eligible activities (façade improvements, signs/awnings, roofs, tuckpointing, etc). The program should emphasize good design and have guidelines attached. A scaled drawing or rendered photograph of the proposed changes and a written description of proposed work and materials should accompany any application. Require owner investment with a 1:1 match. If existing property owners are not willing to become part of this success, then downtown properties will need to change hands to more progressive ownership. Downtown development will only be successful when the appropriate players are at the table and there is broad-based community support. Adaptive reuse and full utilization of vacant or underperforming properties that adhere to appropriate design guidelines is essential.



- EXTEND SIDEWALK ON 2ND ST. TO AFTER-SCHOOL (CONVERTED CHURCH) W/ STREET TREES

- CONVERT EX. HOUSE TO BOUTIQUE RETAIL, "TEA HOUSE"...
- ELEVATED & PARTIALLY COVERED DECK OVERLOOKING PARK

- EXCITING FACADE & SIGNAGE TO MATCH THE FOOD
- BOLD LIGHTING & OVER SIZED 13' BENCHES PROVIDE "SIZZLE" & ACCOMMODATE WAITING FOR A TABLE

- POCKET PARK W/ THRU WALKWAY ON ONE SIDE & CATENARY LIGHTING, OVERHEAD MESH CANOPY, SEATING/TABLES, BAG TOSS, 4 SEASON NATURE SCENE MURAL, OUTDOOR TV,

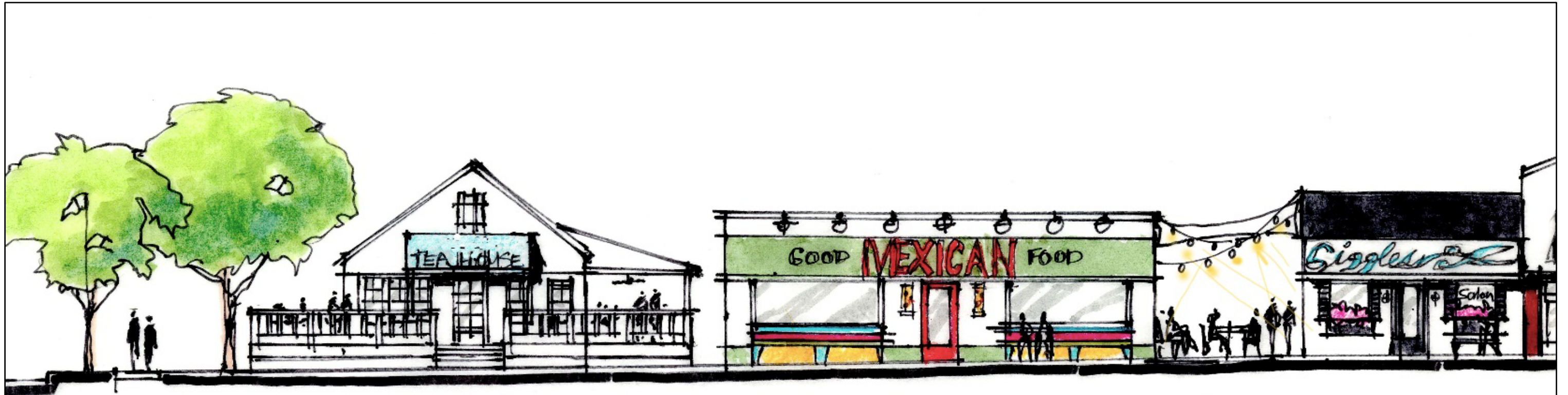
- FABRIC AWNING W/ SIGNAGE TO REDUCE MASS OF LARGE FALSE ROOF
- FLOWER BOXES

- HIGHLIGHT COLUMNS THAT IS LARGE TO DIMINISH VISUAL IMPACT OF LARGE BLANK UPPER FACADE
- BRIGHT DOORWAYS & "NEON" SIGN(S) IN WINDOW (AUDREY HEPBURN GRAPHIC ON DOOR?)

- ROOF DECK W/ MUSIC: VIEWS OF PARK, VISIBLE FROM 3RD STREET, SHADE STRUCTURE & UMBRELLA TABLES, CITY ASSISTANCE. REQUIRED
- LARGER, COLORFUL PIZZA ON SIGN. BRIGHTER/ BOLDER MURAL ON 3RD STREET
- WIDER SIDEWALK (DUE TO ONE-WAY STREET) ALLOWS OUTDOOR DINING, USEABLE SEATING, LARGER PLANTERS...
- FACADE PAINT HIGHLIGHTS SIGN, WINDOWS, "RICHNESS OF FOOD", VERTICAL PROPORTIONS



- 3RD STREET W/ CONTINUOUS SIDEWALKS, STREET TREES, PARALLEL PARKING AS A BUFFER BETWEEN MOVING TRAFFIC & PEDESTRIANS AS WELL AS TRAFFIC CALMING
- STREET TREES DEFINE "DOWNTOWN" W/ HIGH CANOPY



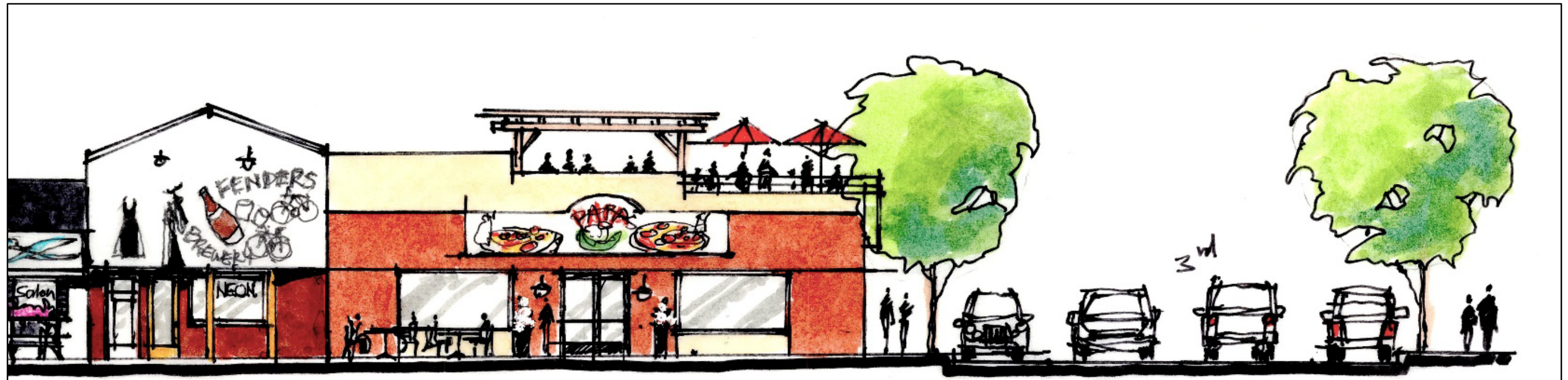
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- STREET TREES DEFINE "DOWNTOWN" W/ HIGH CANOPY

RETAIL DEMAND OUTLOOK | POLK CITY

10 MINUTE DRIVE TIME

Category	2021 Consumer Spending	2026 Forecasted Demand	Projected Growth
Apparel and Services	\$24,234,592	\$30,309,459	\$6,074,867
Computer	\$1,994,778	\$2,496,495	\$501,717
Entertainment & Recreation	\$36,830,693	\$46,062,817	\$9,232,124
Food at Home	\$59,378,587	\$74,238,113	\$14,859,526
Food Away from Home	\$43,617,276	\$54,565,199	\$10,947,923
Health	\$6,061,720	\$7,573,349	\$1,511,629
Home (mortgage & basics)	\$138,654,271	\$173,589,209	\$34,934,938
Household Furnishings & Equipment	\$16,523,300	\$20,664,416	\$4,141,116
Household Operations	\$22,707,125	\$28,412,806	\$5,707,681
Insurance	\$80,605,227	\$100,774,770	\$20,169,543
Transportation	\$70,770,516	\$88,526,868	\$17,756,352
Travel	\$24,211,724	\$30,294,353	\$6,082,538

Source: [Esri Retail Demand Outlook](#) | 6.23

Downtowns thrive when businesses generate foot traffic from not only within, but next door. A look at potential growth of Polk City in the next five years shows projected growth of close to \$11 million in food away from home, \$9 million in entertainment & recreation and \$6 million in apparel and services. All three of these are good examples of business with the potential for foot traffic and the probability of support.

Knowing the business types you potentially have the ability to support is key, but having incentives in place to get those businesses/developers to your community helps to close the deal.

Housing is foundational to everything we value as a community. When people live in safe, stable, and appropriate housing, the community wins. Investing in an affordable home means more than improving quality of life, it means ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. In fact, housing has been labeled the number one economic development issue in Iowa communities. The assessment team

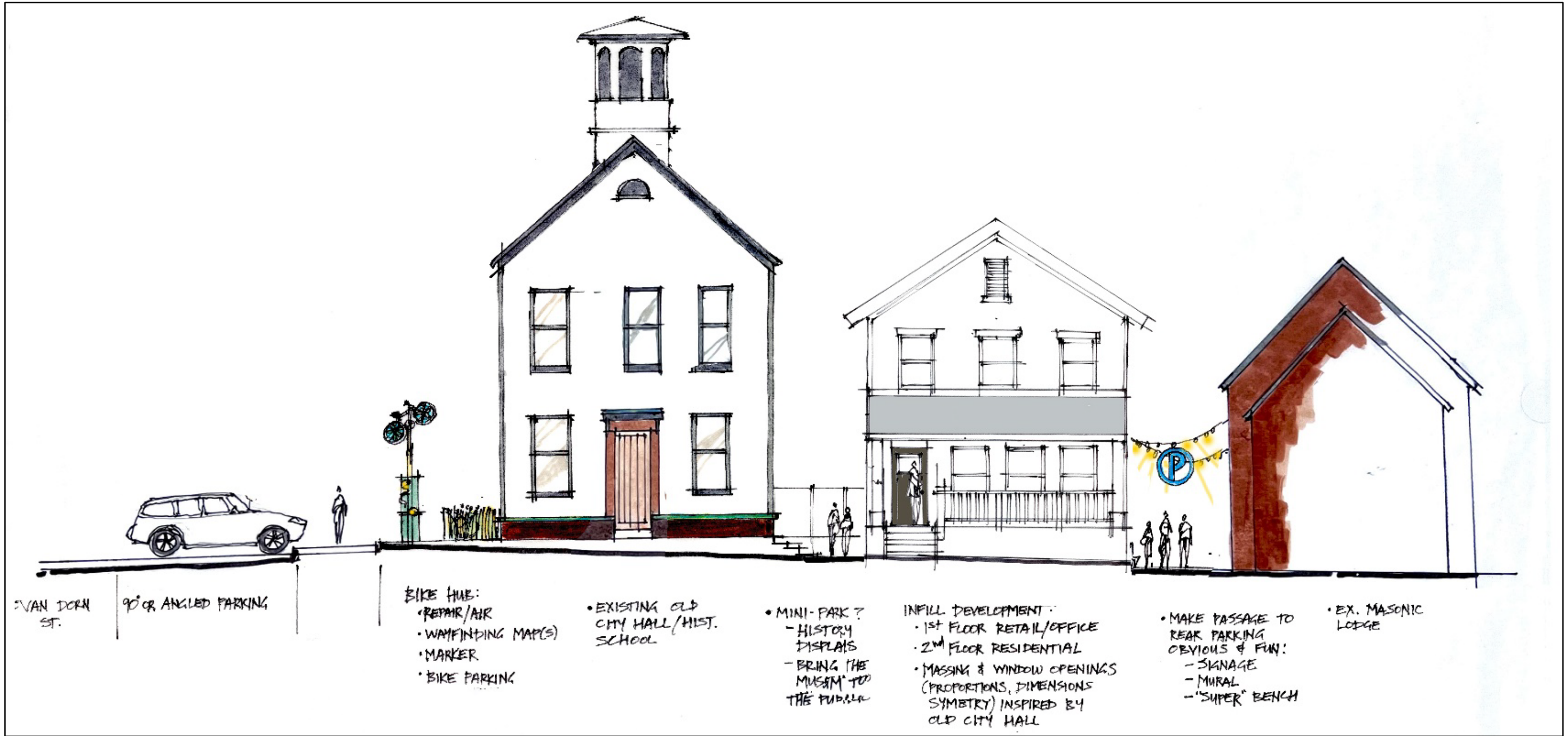
heard that although new single family home permits are being issued frequently, the community has very little in terms of rental units including affordable housing. For example, young teachers that move to town struggle to find an entry level place to live. Consider that nearly every THRIVING downtown has a STRONG residential neighborhood on the upper floors above downtown businesses. Downtown Upper Story Housing options bridge the following: Economic Development and Quality of Life.

Historically, downtown buildings had a business on the first floor and the building owners lived above their businesses. When working toward infill development on the frontage lots of 3rd Street, consider not only first floor commercial but also upper story housing. Upper story housing not only helps property owners cash flow their buildings, but with it comes a whole new market of people that eat in downtown's restaurants, use the services, shop in the stores, walk the sidewalks and bring activity downtown. The character and types of spaces built in your downtown can provide opportunities to create housing much different than those found in a typical unit located somewhere else.

Establish meaningful incentives for downtown real estate development and market those opportunities. Downtown residents spend more when they can walk to their retail destinations. Bakeries, coffee shops, restaurants and bars all benefit from walkable shoppers. The average downtown household spends over \$9,000 a year downtown. Occupied upper story units allow property owners to accept higher risk business tenants on the ground floor. It's always a good idea to require first floor tenants to have regular public hours. Downtown

residential demand dynamics are changes for the better. The newest numbers we've seen show downtown residents as 30% of households being single and 70% childless. Single female is the fastest growing segment of new households.

Although, there is a growing demand in empty nester and new households, 2/3 of all relocating workers prefer to rent vs. buy. The assessment team loves this as an alternative housing inventory selection. Single family detached home ownership is not for everyone. Having quality units of all kinds is important.



VAN DORN ST.

90° OR ANGLED PARKING

BIKE HUB:

- REPAIR/AIR
- WAYFINDING MAP(S)
- MARKER
- BIKE PARKING

• EXISTING OLD CITY HALL/HIST. SCHOOL

- MINI-PARK?
- HISTORY DISPLAYS
- BRING THE MUSEUM TO THE PUBLIC

INFILL DEVELOPMENT:

- 1ST FLOOR RETAIL/OFFICE
- 2ND FLOOR RESIDENTIAL
- MASSING & WINDOW OPENINGS (PROPORTIONS, DIMENSIONS SYMETRY) INSPIRED BY OLD CITY HALL

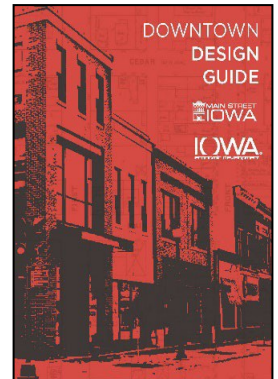
- MAKE PASSAGE TO REAR PARKING OBVIOUS & FUN!
- SIGNAGE
- MURAL
- "SUPER" BENCH

• EX. MASONIC LODGE



ACTION STEPS:

- Consider modifying your local Economic Development Policy to include small scale development “to get what you want” from the existing buildings. Façade mini grants are a great way to partner with property owners on improvements like signage, awnings, windows, lighting, HVAC, roofing, rooftop patio, etc. Consider forgiving building permits or water/sewer taps as a way to recruit development. This is also a great way to leverage state and federal grants.
- Review your Polk City Town Square Design Standards to ensure they are business/development friendly but establish a good look and feel. Back-lit signs and flag signs are good examples of what helps a business but is prohibited by your design standards. Encourage large commercial storefront glass systems to allow the feel of the building being open to the public. Download the Downtown Design Guide developed by the Iowa Downtown Resource Center available at [design recommendations](#). If you agree with portions or all of them, you could adopt them and include them in your local scoring for your Economic Development Policy. The incentives should help “raise the bar” for improving the aesthetic and functional appeal of downtown. Incentivize the kinds of projects you want.
- Explore the state and federal grants we shared in this report and in the attachment. This will allow improvements that might not have been possible without additional money invested.
- As properties are improved make sure to market the new opportunities for downtown development.
- With the amount of new housing subdivisions that have been created using Tax Increment Financing, a substantial amount of Low to Moderate Income set aside has been generated to help support affordable housing. This can be used to help incentivize new buildings with commercial first floors and additional upper story rental housing. Use this as a recruitment tool for infill lot development.
- Fill the Executive Director position at Go Polk City. This position is vital to lead your Community/Economic Development efforts.
- Leverage local incentives to maximize state and federal programs.
 - [CDBG Community Facilities & Services](#)
 - [Community Catalyst Building Remediation Program](#)
 - [Nuisance Property and Abandoned Building Remediation Loan Program](#)
 - [CDBG Housing Rehabilitation Fund](#)
 - [CDBG Upper Story Housing Conversion Program](#)
 - [Workforce Housing Tax Credits](#)
 - [Housing Tax Credit Program - Iowa Finance Authority](#)
 - [Brownfield/Grayfield Tax Credit Program](#)
 - [Historic Tax Credits](#)
 - [State Tax Credit](#)
 - [Federal Tax Credit](#)
 - [Property Tax Exemption](#)
 - <https://iowaculture.gov/history/preservation/tax-incentives/property-tax-exemption>
 - [ADA Federal Tax Credit](#)



- Recognize and celebrate your successes when a project is completed. Consider having a ribbon cutting. Present the owner with a framed “before and after” photo of the project. It can be amazing how soon we all forget how far we’ve come. Even a “certificate of accomplishment” suitable for framing can be a very positive public relations activity that can help change attitudes towards the condition of downtown and help create additional interest and investment in the local community.
- Require commercial first floor and residential upper story development of the 3rd Street frontage lots but have a city-based incentive. This adds needed rental units, places bodies downtown and cash flows the project.
- Take field trips. Visit communities that have had success with infill lot development with upper story housing projects. Good examples can be found in Charles City Marion, and Mason City. Talk to them about their challenges, the designs of the buildings, financing, etc.

CONCLUSION

The art and science of revitalizing and transforming a downtown takes time, patience, and persistence. It takes partnerships and mentors. It takes champions that can communicate the vision, help prioritize, mobilize, and lead. Thankfully, there are many potential champions for Polk City's Downtown Square.

City staff and elected officials, businesses, financial institutions, industry, chamber of commerce, local and county economic development groups, school staff and students, and local service organizations; all could be potential champions for downtown revitalization. All will need to play a role to revitalize Polk City's downtown square to become the regional destination it could be. This Downtown Assessment Team appreciates Polk City's hospitality and desire for new ideas and willingness to accept a constructive critique of downtown. We hope this will be a "working document" to guide Polk City as you move forward with your downtown enhancement efforts. We encourage you to gather the community together soon to review the recommendations in this report and chart a course forward with the most popular ideas from this report. Form implementation teams.

To assist the city and citizens of Polk City in keeping the momentum for downtown improvement going, the Iowa Economic Development Authority is offering the time and assistance of [Jeff Geerts](#) from the Assessment Team. Jeff is available to serve as a liaison from our agency to Polk City to assist in developing and coordinating opportunities for quick implementation of placemaking projects. As your community comes together to identify opportunities to implement downtown improvement projects, Jeff is available to share his expertise, provide technical assistance and return to Polk City to help plan and implement.

- **Review the Report** – Review and share the Downtown Assessment report with all the groups above and more.
 - Provide a verbal report to area groups.
 - Have a pdf of the report available on the city website.
 - Print off copies to share at the library.
 - Bring all partners who participated in the assessment visit together to discuss the report and offer feedback.
 - Share tiny bits of the report on your social media platforms.
- **Prioritize** – Prioritize the actions the community should take. What quick projects could be done in the next month or before the end of the year to show progress throughout the community? Which projects align with work already on your list or included in the city's comprehensive plan? Who is the best group to tackle these projects?
- **Partnerships** – Identify partnership opportunities and gaps where partners are needed. Which group is best suited to tackle the projects you have identified that have the highest priority and need to be addressed first? What support do they need – financial resources, labor, permission?
- **Roles** – Identify the roles of the partners and the champions. WHO is going to do WHAT?
- **Get to work and celebrate your wins!**

Thank you, Polk City!

PRIORITIES:

The Assessment team encourages Polk City to prioritize projects listed in this report, as well as other opportunities you feel are of importance.

Theme#	Immediate Priorities (0-6 months)
1	Walkability audit
2	Downtown stakeholders tour entrances to community and downtown to assess signage
3	Cleanup and maintenance
3	Bandstand improvements and electrical panel beautification
3	Downtown Square Committee
4	Use strategically placed sandwich signs to promote events on the square
4	Contact businesses with electronic signs in Polk City and ask if they would help promote upcoming events on them
4	Host a meeting for businesses and organizations interested in developing a series of on-going small-scale events
5	Take a field trip to communities who have finished multiuse properties
5	Fill the Executive Director roll for Go Polk City
Theme#	One Year Priorities (0-12 months)
1	Create a plan for walkable connections to/from new parking lots
1	Improve walkability to/from existing parking lots
2	Review and modify Polk City Town Square Design Standards to allow for lighted and blade signage
3	One-way traffic investigation and implementation if appropriate
3	Add color, warmth, and vibrancy to the downtown square
4	Use the Market Snapshot as a guide to evaluate the current calendar of events to make sure it is balanced and appeals to community
4	Implement a series of small-scale ongoing events
5	Review Polk City Town Square Design Standards to ensure you are getting the look you are wanting
5	Modify existing Economic Development Policy to include small scale projects, example: potential rooftop patio
5	Require infill projects to include upper story housing
Theme#	Longer Term Projects (0-24 months)
1	Begin implementation of walkable connection plan to/from the new parking lots
1	Create a master streetscape plan, include new, cohesive amenities (benches, bike racks, etc.) in the plan
2	Install wayfinding signage/murals from primary travel routes
2	Install wayfinding signage on the bike trails as they are finished
2	Install arrival signage to the Town Square
3	Add amenities to support vision and plan for downtown square
4	Strategically add events that “ring the register” of existing businesses
4	Enhance the GoPolkCity! Calendar of events by adding more events currently planned in the community. Identify a point person on staff to evaluate what should be included and who also maintains the calendar
5	Look into using Low to Moderate Income Set Aside from your residential Tax Increment Finance districts to incentivize affordable upper story housing in the downtown

Theme#	Down the road.....
1	Use a phased approach to implement the master streetscape plan
4	Create a new community wide calendar of events on an electronic platform
5	Leverage local incentives to access state and federal grants (ongoing)
5	Celebrate and recognize your successes with ribbon cuttings, certificates and ceremonies (ongoing)

CONTACTS:

[Iowa Downtown Resource Center](#), IEDA, Des Moines, Iowa 515-348-6180
[CDBG Downtown Revitalization Program](#).....515.348.6208

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:

The following attachments are available for download (12 months) [here](#).

- Polk City Downtown Square Survey Summary
- Design Renderings/Drawings
- Characteristics of a Successful Downtown
- IEDA Downtown Design Guide
- Great Promotion Events
- Community Catalyst Program Fact Sheet
- Streetscape: Wayfinding Examples
- Rehab – A Checklist for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings

The Iowa Downtown Resource Center (IDRC) has gathered a wide variety of community resource examples to help further your local revitalization initiatives. Click [here](#) to review examples ranging from promotional activities, fundraising, market analysis, downtown housing, public spaces, etc.