

**INTERNATIONAL DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION
ADVISORY PANEL REPORT
POTTAWATTAMIE COUNTY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
IOWA WEST FOUNDATION
COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA
NOVEMBER 5-7, 2006**

INTRODUCTION

Many Midwestern downtowns have seen dramatic improvement over the past ten years. Omaha, Des Moines, Lincoln, Cedar Rapids, Sioux Falls, and a host of smaller cities and towns in Iowa, Nebraska, the Dakotas and Minnesota have experienced significant and impressive successes in dining and entertainment, residential development, business development, cultural and arts amenities, and enhancements to infrastructure and appearance.

Council Bluffs has made some valiant and noticeable strides as well, building a new downtown library, restoring and reusing historic structures as museums, and redesigning an important downtown park. Some property owners have started or completed renovations of appealing historic commercial buildings. A handful of attractive residential rental units have been completed and rented on the upper floors of these historic buildings. A themed streetscape program with colorful sidewalk insets has improved the look and feel of downtown, and recent landscaping has also added to the feeling that good things can happen in downtown.

However, downtown Council Bluffs has not enjoyed the same kind of success as other downtowns. Pedestrian traffic in downtown is almost nonexistent at many times during both day and night. The size of the downtown workforce is small by comparison with other cities of similar size. Office, retail, dining and entertainment components are underperforming. Downtown lacks a sense of vibrancy, and the community seems uncertain about what direction downtown should be going and who should be responsible for determining that direction.

City government has invested in downtown. A strong mayor has shown real interest and support for downtown revitalization efforts. The Iowa West Foundation has been generous in supporting downtown projects.

Community leaders in Council Bluffs led by the Chamber of Commerce and the Iowa West Foundation invited the International Downtown Association (IDA) to conduct an Advisory Panel. The Panel's charge was to assess the various components of downtown Council Bluff and recommend ways in which downtown stakeholders could organize a successful downtown revitalization effort. Panelists visited Council Bluffs beginning Saturday, November 4, and departing on Tuesday, November 7. They toured downtown on foot and by van, met with large community groups and small focus groups, and reviewed numerous community studies and other documents.

Based on this wealth of information and experience, the Panel developed this report, setting forth their observations, findings, and recommendations. It is IDA's hope that this report will provide an action plan, a "road map" for Council Bluff leaders to adopt and implement. A timetable, agenda and list of participants are included in this report as appendices.

PURPOSE

- Assess existing plans and current conditions in downtown Council Bluffs;
- Discuss and compare best practices and successful strategies employed by other cities, particularly with regard to:
 - residential, dining, entertainment, arts & culture, retail and business development;
 - how other downtowns are organized (roles, funding, etc.);

- how to "sell" the downtown concept;
- advantages and disadvantages of collaborative strategies;
- opportunities for information sharing and technology applications;
- ways that programs, if initiated, can be sustained; and,
- short- and long-term strategies and investment priorities.

THE IDA ADVISORY PANEL

David Feehan, President of the International Downtown Association, served as Advisory Panel team leader. He was joined by:

David Anderson, President and CEO – Downtown Community Partnership, Fargo, ND

Dan Carmody, President – Fort Wayne Downtown Improvement District, Fort Wayne, IN

Ron Redmond, Executive Director – Church Street Marketplace District, Burlington VT

Panelists were specifically chosen because they have strong downtown management experience and either represent Midwestern cities (Fargo and Fort Wayne) or cities of similar size that have reached a high level of success (**Burlington**).

OBSERVATIONS

As mentioned earlier, IDA Panelists reviewed multiple plans, reports, and fact sheets. They walked the streets of downtown, took a van tour of peripheral areas of downtown as well as nearby neighborhoods, and met with more than 100 public officials, business owners, property owners, and community residents. The following observations represent what the Panelists heard, saw, and read.

Overall, Panelists found virtually universal consensus on one issue: No one is currently in charge of downtown. No person or entity has the authority and responsibility to manage, market, promote and plan for the community's central business district. No organization exists today that fills that role, and no business or community leader is the acknowledged champion for downtown.

A second issue around which there is little or no consensus is the boundaries of downtown. Various plans suggest that downtown is composed of a number of sub-districts, but participants in focus groups expressed uncertainty on the question of boundaries.

A third important observation by Panelists was that there is a virtual absence of signage and wayfinding systems guiding people to downtown Council Bluffs.

Panelists listed a number of additional observations, categorized as Assets, Attitudes and Actions, and Gaps.

Assets

Destinations

- Bayliss Park – the "town square" and subject of a major enhancement program, including a new fountain at the center of the park. This park serves as a gathering spot for downtown and is being programmed by the Parks Department with over 20 music events each year.

- Downtown Public Library – a new and significantly larger facility than the historic structure it replaced, the library draws both adults and children on a regular basis, with a reported 1,000 patrons per day. The library also provides community groups with a convenient place to meet.
- Squirrel Cage Jail Museum – One of only a few jails of this type still existing, this unusual museum complements other downtown attractions.
- Union Pacific Museum – Housed in the historic downtown library, this fine museum highlights the important role Council Bluffs played for decades as one of the country's primary railroad centers.
- YMCA – Offering a variety of programs and exercise facilities, the downtown YMCA is an asset many downtowns of this size lack.

Building Streetscapes

- “Good Bones” – A term often used by urban planners, meaning the built environment (buildings, streets, sidewalks and other physical features) is intact, well-proportioned, and potentially attractive.
- Great commercial “Main Street” building fronts – There are several blocks of intact buildings dating to the late 19th or early 20th century; many of these buildings have been partially or completely restored.
- New streetscape on Broadway – A significant investment has been made in downtown. The new streetscape includes decorative pavers and circular insets.
- Clean streets – Panelists all agreed that downtown streets and sidewalks were remarkably clean and litter-free. Graffiti seemed to be absent as well.

People and Organizations

- Public Sector – A strong commitment by the Mayor and other City government leaders to downtown is evident. Infrastructure improvements, programming the park, and participation in planning efforts signal that City leaders care about downtown.
- Non-Profit Sector – The Chamber of Commerce, Pottawattamie County Development Corporation, museum and library leaders, and the Arts Council are just a few of the nonprofits seeking to help revitalize downtown Council Bluffs. The Chamber and the PCDC have the potential to be important, even essential partners in downtown revitalization.
- Corporate Leaders – Banks, attorneys, and developers are all looking for and hoping for a downtown renaissance. Representatives of each took part in the IDA panel process.
- Awakening of interest in historic preservation – Like many Midwestern towns, Council Bluffs lost some historic and architecturally important structures over the past few decades; however, preservation seems to have taken hold, and buildings like the former public library, now the Union Pacific Museum, the Squirrel Cage Jail, and Bayliss Park Hall indicate a new commitment to preservation.
- Potential for engaged citizenry – Sponsors of the IDA Panel and panelists alike were pleased and surprised at the unexpectedly large turnout for the Panel's meetings.

Throughout the process, it was clear that interest in a downtown renaissance is strong and growing.

- Iowa West Foundation – Few cities of this size have an asset like the Iowa West Foundation. This charitable and community-focused institution has the resources and leadership to build capacity and provide seed capital for downtown revitalization efforts.

Location Advantages

- Proximity to Omaha – Located in a market area of 800,000 people, and directly across the river from a city that has already made substantial progress in downtown revitalization, Council Bluffs must take advantage of this huge asset.
- Casinos – While casinos are not located in downtown, and while they have created a critical mass many blocks away, they still generate thousands of visitors, at least some of which might want to visit downtown and spend both time and money there.
- Bluffs – Conventional wisdom says that downtowns located near water or hills have an advantage over those that are not. Downtown Council Bluffs does not have water, but it does have the dramatic bluffs overlooking downtown, and some wonderful neighborhoods ensconced there.
- History – Few cities in the Midwest have the rich and important history that Council Bluffs boasts. Much of this history revolves around the birth and heyday of the railroads; but with rail transportation taking on new importance, this history might become even more of an asset.

Attitudes and Actions

- Community Inferiority Complex – Panelists heard from many of those who participated in meetings and focus groups that Council Bluffs lacks confidence in itself and that residents find the downtown in particular something that engenders little pride.
- “Little Brother” syndrome – With Omaha just a bridge and a river away, it is easy to look at the skyscrapers and the Old Market and feel like there is no way to compete with the “Big Brother.”
- Public sector is frustrated and discouraged – Despite persistent efforts and good intentions, city staff and others feel frustrated and discouraged by the lack of private sector investment and community use of downtown.
- “Just Good Enough” attitude community-wide – One panel participant described this attitude as follows: “In our town, the glass is half-full; and that’s good enough.” In other words, instead of striving for excellence, Council Bluffs too often is willing to settle for mediocrity.
- No one is in charge of downtown – One of the most telling moments occurred in almost every focus group, when the question was asked, “Who is in charge of downtown?” No one seemed to know. In the end, the virtually universal opinion was that no one is currently in charge.

Gaps

Housing / Development

- Suburban infill style of construction – Some newer buildings in downtown (particularly the senior center near the Haymarket District) were built with setbacks and an architectural style that is more suburban than urban. Significant projects developed several years ago were reportedly donor-driven and not inclusive of public input. The library entrance on the side of the building is a good example.
- Overdependence on senior housing – Perhaps because funding sources are available, Council Bluffs, like some other downtowns in Iowa, has added more senior units to downtown than market rate, non-age specific units. One investor is exploring a mixed use development of 35 artist live-work units in a historic warehouse downtown. A 50-unit multi-family development of affordable for-sale townhouses and family apartments is planned nearby.

Parking / Way finding

- No cohesive, comprehensive parking management – The Panel was surprised to find parking in downtown quite difficult, even though there appeared to be a small office market and little retail. Parking meters are all one color, and it is impossible to distinguish from the driver's perspective whether a meter is short-term or long-term. All-day parking for a visitor is hard to find.
- Difficult to find downtown – Signage directing a visitor to downtown is almost nonexistent. There is one freeway sign on I-29, but none on the bridge coming from Omaha. By contrast, Des Moines is well-signed, both on the freeway and throughout downtown.

Market Deficiencies

- Retail – A few retail stores are evident on Broadway, but virtually none seem to be located in the heart of downtown. Given that there are several blocks of restored or restorable early 20th century commercial buildings, creating a small but exciting shopping district seems feasible.
- Dining – Restaurants are often the first businesses that kindle a reawakened downtown business district. Panelists did not observe more than a handful of restaurants. A new German restaurant is opening in the 100 Block of West Broadway.
- Entertainment – Beyond the museums and whatever programs the library produces, the entertainment component of downtown is very limited. Some events in Bayliss Park are held in the warmer months, and there are some drinking establishments elsewhere in the district; but otherwise downtown's offerings need improvement.
- Office – Panel participants described the downtown office market as small and weak. Too many offices, particularly legal offices, occupy first-floor space. There appears to be little if any competitive, Class A office space in downtown.
- Housing – Few options exist for someone who wishes to reside in downtown. A couple of enterprising developers have produced some small projects with rental units above the first floor, and these have been well-received; but choices are extremely limited, and a potential resident wishing to purchase a unit and live within walking distance of downtown must look at nearby neighborhoods.

Support

- Over dependence on Iowa West Foundation – Panelists heard several comments from focus group participants expressing concern that, while the Iowa West Foundation is a much-appreciated asset, it may have inadvertently created a dependency situation with respect to downtown revitalization.
- Presence of an indigenous arts community – Panelists noted the participation of the director of the local arts council, and the studies that suggested building a downtown revitalization strategy around the arts; but also observed that almost no local artists participated in the panel process. Is there a strong indigenous arts community from which to draw? If so, they need to be drawn into the discussion.

Strategy

- Funding projects without strategic purpose – Council Bluffs appears to have undertaken a number of projects – several of them donor-driven – that may be good in and of themselves but create little in the way of synergy, and do not seem to be part of an overall downtown strategy.
- “Silver Bullet” mentality – One of the most common mistakes many downtowns have made throughout past decades is to seize on one big project and believe that it will somehow magically ignite a rebirth of downtown. Experience has shown this is almost never true. Downtown management, marketing and maintenance are essential activities, without which no single project can truly succeed.
- Lack of compelling downtown vision – Though many plans have been commissioned, the Panel could find no evidence of a vision for downtown that inspired and convinced, and that came together with strong citizen support.

Other Observations

- Not enough pedestrian activity – Panelists observed very little pedestrian activity during the day and virtually none at night. Restaurants, entertainment venues, and especially downtown housing would begin to alleviate this.
- Little community buy-in for previous studies – While focus group participants sometimes seemed aware of various studies, there was apparently little sense of ownership.
- Need for empowerment and a process for capacity building – A striking element absent from Council Bluffs in the panelists’ observations was a process for empowerment and capacity-building. There are successful examples where this has been undertaken in other cities.
- Lack of proximity to freeway is a plus and a minus – freeways can serve as dividers or connectors (or both) but the fact that the I-29 freeway runs several blocks to the south of downtown is a factor downtown leaders should take into account – in terms of signage, gateways, marketing, and other ways.
- Good government incentives, such as tax rebates – for businesses looking to locate in downtown or develop and improve property, the City has assembled some attractive incentives.

- Hospital and newspaper leadership – Two major institutions – Mercy hospital and the daily newspaper – are led by passionate, interested CEOs.
- Lack of proximity to the river – As mentioned earlier in this report, proximity to the bluffs is an asset; lack of proximity to the river is a liability.
- Deteriorating infrastructure outside core – Beyond the area that benefited recently from a streetscape program, sidewalks, curbs and streets are deteriorating and need attention.
- Perception of safety – Even though crime in downtown is low, lack of pedestrian traffic and “lights on” at street level contribute to a feeling of uneasiness – particularly for those who are not familiar with downtown.
- Confusing street patterns – There seem to be more one-way streets than needed, and these combined with a lack of signage contributes to a confusing feeling.
- Little ethnic diversity – Many communities are finding that ethnic diversity brings new energy and opportunities for celebration. Council Bluffs could benefit from attracting people of different cultures and ethnic backgrounds.
- Layers of bureaucracy seem to create barriers to economic development. Approvals for projects were described as needing three and four steps in the approval process; and these steps were sequential rather than parallel.

Analysis

Focus

- Build capacity, not monuments. Creating an organization that not only manages downtown but attracts and encourages all kinds of people – developers, retailers, restaurateurs, event sponsors and planners, office tenants, artists, residents – to play an active role in downtown’s revitalization is essential. A capacity-building downtown organization will have impact well beyond the physical boundaries of downtown. Key players – the Iowa West Foundation, the Chamber of Commerce, the Arts Council, and other civic groups can find ways and develop strategies that muster untapped community energy and help channel that energy into worthwhile pursuits.

Traffic

- Downtown currently lacks pedestrian traffic. People tend to congregate where they see other people. The challenge for downtown Council Bluffs is to create pedestrian traffic of the right kind in downtown before many traffic generators (like great restaurants, coffee houses, and entertainment venues) are in place. This challenge can be addressed by quality programming of downtown spaces.

Quality programming

- The quickest way to create a lively place is to use existing spaces – parks, plazas, streets and sidewalks, empty buildings – to generate activity. Artists sometimes find public spaces – sidewalks, for instance – as wonderful canvases on which to work. Working in chalk, colorful images transform otherwise dull streetscapes into pieces of art that attract people, and media coverage. Empty buildings can be transformed with a little bit of work into instant art galleries. Farmers markets can become major traffic generators. Quality – in planning, organizing, and implementing – is the key to success. People come to expect exciting, interesting and rewarding ways to spend time and money in downtown.

Where is downtown, anyway?

- Bayliss Park was named by many as the heart of downtown; but others thought the 100 Block might be; still others said that downtown Omaha was really "downtown." There is no current consensus regarding the boundaries and center of downtown. One panelist even suggested Council Bluffs might use another term than downtown for its central business district, in order to avoid confusion with a much bigger downtown across the river.

Council Bluffs lacks a Downtown Champion

- Who is the keeper of the vision for downtown by developing a comprehensive and coherent set of strategies to achieve the vision. In most cities with successful downtowns, some person, persons or organization has been given or assumed responsibility for leading downtown revitalization efforts. Hugh McColl, former CEO of bank of America, is widely credited in Charlotte with spearheading the impressive rebirth of Uptown Charlotte. The Times Square BID in New York City is credited with creating the opportunity for Disney and others to invest in an area with lots of character but a long-standing reputation as seedy and unsavory.

Ready, willing, and able partners

- Neighborhood residents – especially those in the immediate vicinity of downtown – have a crucial stake in downtown's future. Their biggest financial investment is likely the home in which they live. Judging from the neighborhood residents that attended the Panel sessions, many are interested in downtown's future and would like to help.
- Businesses in downtown, and those that are not in downtown, also have a stake in downtown's future. Businesses can and should financially support a downtown organization. This is the case in virtually every successful downtown. Businesses (property owners and tenants) support downtown organizations through voluntary contributions or through BIDs (business improvement districts.) Businesses not in downtown can participate as well, because those that engage in business-to-business commerce as well as tourism and entertainment will benefit both directly and indirectly from a downtown where business and cultural opportunities are expanding.
- Community leaders appeared in unexpected numbers to listen and discuss downtown issues during the panel process. As downtown revitalization efforts pick up steam, these community leaders will be needed to rally support for programs and initiatives that are not necessarily on anyone's radar screen today.
- Citizens of Council Bluffs need to understand the importance of downtown to the entire community, and stand behind efforts to improve this important and vital neighborhood. A healthy downtown can help to create jobs throughout the community, because a healthy downtown is an essential element in recruiting and retaining talent. A talented and skilled workforce, in turn, is essential to recruiting and retaining the companies the Pottawattamie County Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, and City Government want to attract.

Recommendations (0-12 Months)

Council Bluffs private and public sector leaders should utilize the IDA Panel process to build an effective, entrepreneurial, independent and agile downtown organization.

At present, no one – no individual or organization – is in charge of downtown. Panelists asked several individuals the question "Who is in charge of the City of Council Bluffs?" Without hesitation, everyone

responded "Mayor Tom Hanafan, of course." For everyone -- including the Mayor himself -- it is abundantly clear that "the buck stops" on the mayor's desk. When it comes to downtown, many people and agencies have some degree of responsibility -- but no organization or individual has the "downtown buck stops here" sign on his or her desk.

Starting a downtown organization requires hard work and consensus building, but it is something many cities and towns have accomplished. IDA has published a very useful handbook called "ABCs for Creating BIDs." While this book specifically addresses the creation of special assessment districts, or business improvement districts, many of the organizational principles apply.

An effective downtown organization is:

- Adequately funded
- Private sector driven
- Competently directed
- Informed by visits to successful cities

The first step in organizing a corporation to manage, promote and lead downtown is to form an informal working group. It should not take more than 30 days to develop a list of 10-15 individuals who are acknowledged civic and business leaders and represent a cross section of downtown and community interests. This group should obtain a commitment for start-up funds, either from its members, from the Iowa West Foundation, or both.

Employing an outside consultant to assist the initial organizers can accelerate the process and avoid missteps. There are a number of capable consultants in the IDA network.

Determining the corporate status of the organization is an important early step. Most downtown organizations are chartered as nonprofit corporations by the state and as 501 (c) (3) [Charitable] or 501 (c) (6) [Civic or business association] under IRS regulations. If the downtown organization is going to engage in any lobbying efforts, or if this is even a remote future possibility, a c-6 designation is preferable. A c-3 designation is also more difficult to obtain, although it does make certain contributions tax-deductible, and expands opportunities to solicit and receive foundation and government grants. Actual incorporation expenses will be minimal, especially if an attorney will provide pro bono services.

Once the corporation is formed, an initial board of directors must be chosen. In terms of size, downtown boards vary widely. Some are as small as 5-7, while others approach 50 members and occasionally more. Initially a smaller board is advisable in most communities, simply because big boards can be unwieldy. Bylaws should allow for expansion over time if that is necessary. A good size for an initial board is more than 10 but less than 20, with preference given to an odd number (for breaking tie votes).

Once the organization is established and operating, the board should engage in a board retreat to establish a vision, mission, goals, and program priorities. These will be very helpful in securing funding -- potential funders will want to know what their dollars are expected to accomplish.

Along with the board retreat, board members should plan to visit some cities with downtowns that have already achieved a transformation, and downtowns that are well on their way to doing so. The Panel recommends visits to some or all of the following downtowns:

- Getting started: Duluth, Yakima
- Halfway there: Fargo, Quad Cities, Sioux Falls, Billings, Missoula

- Successful Downtowns: Burlington VT; Ann Arbor, Holland, Kalamazoo, MI

A budget should be based on the results of the retreat. Once again, an organizational consultant can be very helpful in attaching dollar amounts to proposed program activities. A realistic budget for the first full year, given the size of downtown, is \$400,000 to \$500,000. Approximately one-third of the budget will be spent on the CEO, support staff, and operating expenses. The other two-thirds will be spent on program activities, which may include additional personnel or contractors/consultants, materials, marketing, and so forth.

One way of approaching the funding of the organization in Council Bluffs may be to divide the proposed budget in thirds and ask the business community, the Iowa West Foundation, and the City to contribute one-third each. Each source should be prepared to make an initial commitment of at least three years, preferably five years. This secure base of funding will allow the organization to attract a chief executive with the requisite skills and experience.

Recruiting and hiring a CEO will be one of the most, if not the most, important decisions the board will make. For a city the size of Council Bluffs, and an expected budget of nearly \$500,000, an annual base salary of \$75,000 to \$100,000 is industry standard, according to IDA's CEO Survey. There are many advantages to hiring an experienced CEO from another city, and Council Bluffs should be open to doing so; advantages include the obvious ones of a short learning curve and a lack of local political baggage. However, if the right candidate is found locally, IDA can assist that person in acquiring the necessary learning and skills to effectively direct the new corporation.

Initially, the corporation can function with just a CEO and a skilled office manager or administrative assistant. As programs develop, the organization will probably want to hire people to manage and direct marketing and events, and/or business recruiting and retention.

One of the first actions the organization should take is to request that the City place a moratorium on demolition permits for any historically significant downtown buildings for two years (until downtown organization is up and running.)

As the new organization is being formed, its board members and new CEO should clarify the roles of City government, the Iowa West Foundation, the Chamber of Commerce, and other key players with respect to downtown. By convening these meetings and discussions, the new organization will position itself as the "community table" around which key players can gather for important policy decisions. Furthermore, these discussions will help to identify program priorities, funding possibilities, and unanticipated issues.

As the new organization finishes its initial organizational phase, it should convene a community conversation on downtown identity, character, brand, community DNA. This will provide an opportunity to keep the organization visible in the community and will allow residents and others not directly involved in the organizational process to stay engaged.

Recommendations (12-24 Months)

As the first year comes to a close, the board and staff of the downtown organization should develop a limited initial program focus. The Panel recommends that these program activities be outlined and presented to the board during the first twelve months, so that board approval is already in place as Year II commences. It is important to note that creating a new event with the quality, size, and visibility to be classified as a "signature" event is not a small undertaking. It may be possible to actually launch one of these events in Year II, such as an expanded farmers market; or it may mean, depending on the time of year, that an event will actually occur in Year III.

Programming downtown spaces (public and private) will require additional staff, funding, and expertise. These events can be outsourced, but the CEO's role should be to oversee, guide, and shape the event, ensuring that it adheres to the high standards that should mark every event produced by the new organization.

Creating a high quality, well-attended signature event such as a farmers market will also be a multi-year endeavor; these events tend to grow over a decade or more. An event like First Night, a non-alcoholic New Years Eve performing arts festival, could be developed and presented at the end of Year II. A summer arts festival, or other distinctive food and music event, will most likely take at least a year to properly organize, and will be presented in Year III.

Developing a business recruiting and retention program focused on appropriate street level uses will provide value to downtown property owners and will lend credibility to the new organization, demonstrating that it can produce longer-term benefits for downtown, for property owners, and for the community. Most recruiting programs are a mix of a well-developed plan (again, developed with the help of an outside expert) and aggressive opportunism on the part of the downtown organization staff. Holland, Michigan is one model for retail recruiting that has proven to be especially effective.

Another important task in Year II is to develop a brand identity for downtown based on community process and input. Right now, if downtown Council Bluffs has a "brand," it is mostly murky and negative. The Panel heard frequent comments during the process from participants who said that downtown was "dead" most of the time; that it was "scary" some of the time; and that, other than the library and an occasional museum trip, there was no reason to come downtown.

Developing a brand does not mean coming up with a colorful logo or snappy slogan. It means determining through interaction with the broader community and through a process with downtown leaders just what makes the downtown unique in this market, and what downtown can promise and deliver, now and in the future. It means creating through effective management, marketing and maintenance an impression that is both positive and memorable in the minds of potential customers. Ultimately, it means that people in the Council Bluffs-Omaha market will choose downtown as a destination, a place to work, or a place to live because they know what downtown is and they like what it can deliver.

Recommendations (24-36 Months)

By the beginning of the third year, the downtown organization will continue its focus on Year II ongoing programs – a signature event should have debuted in Year II or be ready for Debut in Year III; business recruiting should begin to show results; cooperation with the City, Chamber, Development Corporation, Arts Council, and other key players should be routine and institutionalized. A brand should be developed and a marketing campaign based on the brand should be underway.

As year III begins, the downtown organization should add the following components:

- Residential development – strengthening incentives and support. As the downtown becomes viewed more positively, demand for downtown housing is virtually certain to increase. In the Panel's experience, this demand occurs in small towns and major cities, in downtowns that are very polished and successful (like Burlington, VT), and in downtowns that need major work (like Detroit, MI). The role of the downtown organization will be to identify potential projects and potential developers, act as a matchmaker and hand-holder until the project becomes a reality, and then help market the project, along with other downtown residential opportunities.
- A comprehensive parking strategy and program based on user-friendly principles is another opportunity for the downtown organization to win the approval of downtown stakeholders and the broader community. Parking remains to this day one of the most disliked features in most downtowns. However, several communities – most notable, Kalamazoo, MI; Tempe, AZ; and Nashville, TN – have created

parking programs operated by the downtown organization and focused on extraordinary customer service.

Conclusion

Downtown investors – property owners and business owners – do what they do for a mix of reasons; but the overriding reason for owning property or operating a business is to make money. Why then, would tens of thousands of property and business owners in the US, Canada, the United Kingdom and around the globe spend the time and effort to organize downtown revitalization groups and vote in new taxes to fund business improvement districts?

The answer is simple: it works.

The evidence is overwhelming. Over the past decade-and-a-half, hard-headed, intelligent business leaders in thousands of downtowns have organized and supported effective, well-managed, entrepreneurial and energetic organizational vehicles to accomplish goals that they as individuals or companies could not accomplish alone. These new organizations, with strong support from the public sector and from civic organizations like chambers of commerce, development corporations, foundations, arts councils, convention and visitors bureaus, and resident groups, have proven successful.

If downtown is strong, everyone benefits. Strong, healthy, vibrant downtowns produce wealth, provide jobs, and increase tax revenues that support better basic services – public safety, education, health services, to name a few. Residential properties, especially in adjacent neighborhoods, gain value. The community has a public place of pride, and visitors from outside the community recognize this. People looking to locate to a new community often put quality of life – including a vibrant downtown – high on the list of criteria for choosing.

Council Bluffs has not ignored its downtown. However, it has not taken the essential step of creating an organizational vehicle to accomplish downtown revitalization. During the panel, the analogy of the downtown organization as a “vehicle” that could transport the downtown to better times was used frequently. Downtown revitalization almost never happens by accident – it is intentional, planned, and the result of thousands of hours by hundreds of concerned citizens who choose to invest significantly in the precious asset.

Now is the time to move forward and create the essential organizational vehicle. A downtown organization for Council Bluffs is a sine qua non. The panel urges the Mayor, City Council, Chamber of Commerce, Pottawattamie County Development Corporation, Arts Council, and most of all, downtown businesses to take ownership of downtown and move forward with alacrity and resolve. Council Bluffs deserves no less.

Appendix I

Timetable

October-December 2006

- Review and approve recommendations of the IDA Advisory Panel.
- Select a "working group" representing key stakeholders to undertake initial organizational steps.
- Determine an initial start-up budget.
- Select incorporators, corporate form; file incorporation papers.

January-March 2007

- Engage an organizational consultant.
- Select a group of cities; contact downtown organizations and schedule visits for second quarter 2007.
- Complete selection and election of first board of directors.
- Develop and approve job description and compensation package for CEO.
- Begin CEO recruiting process.
- Organize a board retreat to define vision, mission, boundaries of downtown, and strategic plan.
- Complete fundraising; secure three-five year commitments.

April-June 2007

- Interview and hire CEO.
- Secure office space, equipment.
- Hire administrative assistant.
- Request City moratorium on demolitions.
- Initiate discussions to clarify roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders.
- Develop program priorities based on vision/mission/strategic plan.
- Begin process of identifying and defining the downtown brand.

July-September 2007

- Expand outreach to all downtown property owners.
- Develop a database of downtown business owners
- Launch a communication vehicle – e-mail bulletin to stakeholders.
- Continue fundraising for priority programs.
- Complete city visits; host a "what did we learn" meeting to share with downtown stakeholders.

October-December 2007

- Plan program activities and budget for 2008.
- Identify one signature event that can be implemented in 2008.
- Plan and develop a business recruiting program.

January-December 2008

- Focus on organizing and implementing the signature downtown event and the business recruiting programs.
- Develop the "downtown brand" and communicate to the community.
- Identify and recruit developers who have the resources and skills to create quality downtown housing.
- Identify and inventory historically significant and contributing buildings in downtown; work with SHPO and City staff to control demolition process.
- Develop expanded budget and program for 2009.

January-December 2009

- Issue a "State of the Downtown" report.
- Develop second signature event.
- Outsource smaller events to other groups.
- Organize walking tours of downtown historic, arts and cultural attractions.
- Undertake an inventory of needed infrastructure improvements.
- Develop a downtown signage and wayfinding system.
- Organize a task force on creating customer-friendly downtown parking.

Appendix II

Council Bluffs Downtown Assessment

IDA Advisory Panel Agenda

November 5-7, 2006

(Note: the schedule and list of participants were modified slightly)

The advisory panel from the International Downtown Assn will:

- assess existing plans and current conditions in downtown Council Bluffs;
- discuss and compare best practices and successful strategies employed by other cities, particularly with regard to...
 - residential, dining, entertainment, arts & culture, retail and business development;
 - how other downtowns are organized (roles, funding, etc.);
 - how to "sell" the downtown concept;
 - advantages and disadvantages of collaborative strategies;
 - opportunities for information sharing and technology applications;
 - ways that programs, if initiated, can be sustained;
 - short- and long-term strategies and investment priorities.

Advisory Panel Members

- David Feehan – IDA President, *former ED of Des Moines downtown association*
- David Anderson – President Fargo Downtown Community Partnership, *formerly worked in Sioux City.*
- Ron Redmond – Executive Director, Church Street Marketplace District
- Dan Carmody – President, Fort Wayne Downtown Improvement District, *formerly worked in Rock Island*

Role of IDA Representative

- Assemble the expert team and manage the process
- Lead the panel in scheduled activities unless otherwise directed
- Produce written findings and recommendations within 45 days

Advisory Panel Team Members will...

- Review materials provided in advance
- Participate in all scheduled activities
- Participate in presentation of findings and recommendations.
- Provide written comments to IDA in support of final report.

Role of PCDC & IWF

- Arrange local lodging and transportation
- Provide background materials by October 15
- Arrange meeting rooms, tours, individual appointments, participation by stakeholders, A-V equipment and meals
- Consult with IDA regarding panelists

Background to be provided to Panelists

- Demographic profile
- Historical overview
- 2006 Visitors Guide
- Downtown Plan (July 2003)
- Downtown Revitalization Fund
- RFP to develop *downtown design guidelines (Project kick-off materials)*
- ArtsMarket *Cultural Master Plan* (executive summary)
- ArtSpace *Preliminary feasibility study of artist live-work spaces*
- Bayliss Park redevelopment plan (graphics only)
- IWF Public Art Master Plan (executive summary)
- Citywide entertainment / retail map (MAC, casinos, shops, etc.) & volume
 - *Visitation numbers for major area destinations*
 - *Historic neighborhood walking tour map*

Sunday, November 5th

2:00 p.m.	arrival and orientation lunch	BAYLISS PARK HALL
3:00 p.m.	orientation tour of downtown	on foot & by van
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Downtown historic district<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 100 Block and Haymarket- Bayliss Park / Nonpareil / Presbyterian Church / adjacent properties- Harvester warehouses<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>How to link to Haymarket?</i>▪ <i>What collateral opportunities exist?</i>- So. Main Sr. Housing- Main St infill opportunities- Vine Street- Federal Building / Shugart Apts / Old YMCA- Residential infill<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ North Bluff Street▪ Church of the Brethren▪ Katelman area- Historic neighborhoods: <i>how to preserve, enhance & organize?</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Lincoln-Fairview▪ Park-Glen▪ Bluff-Third▪ So. 8th Street- Gateways & conduits<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Broadway from the River to the Viaduct▪ Entertainment District (MAC, gaming, BassPro, cinema, retail)	
6:00 p.m.	dinner meeting with local team and key stakeholders (90 min.)	

Monday, November 6th

7:30 a.m.	breakfast meeting w/downtown & community leaders	Bayliss Park Hall 325-8388
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ IDA describes program, process, expected outcomes▪ Panelist presentations on successful models (similar-sized markets)▪ Audience invited to ask questions.	
9:00 a.m.	Interviews & Focus Groups begin	Library
	10 AM – Public Sector	
	11 AM – Public Sector	
	12 PM – Private Sector (light lunch)	
	1:30 PM – Private Sector	
	2:30 PM – Private Sector	
	3:30 PM – Neighborhood, Pastors & Nonprofits	
	4:30 PM – Neighborhood, Pastors & Nonprofits	
	5:30 PM – interview Mayor Tom Hanafan	Mayor's Office
6:30 p.m.	Dinner with local team to discuss impressions	Library
7:30 p.m.	Drafting Observations (panelists)	Hotel

Tuesday, November 7th

7:30 a.m.	Drafting Recommendations (panelists)	Hotel
11:00 a.m.	Present draft findings & recommendation to local team	Hotel
12:30 p.m.	Presentation to stakeholders and media	BAYLISS PARK HALL
1:45 p.m.	Adjourn	

November 6th FOCUS GROUPS
CB Public Library, Room 2-C

International Downtown Association

10:00 AM – Public Sector

Scott Sanders, *City Finance Director*

Don Gross, *City Community Development Director*

Greg Reeder, *City Public Works Director*

Matt Walsh, *City Councilman, banker*

Dolores Silkworth, *Landmarks Commission, landscape architect with RDG*

11:00 AM – Public Sector

Lynne Branigan, *City Council, businesswoman*

Gayle Malmquist, *City Development-Services Director*

Ron Hopp, *City Parks, Recreation & Property Director*

12:00 PM – Business / Private Sector

Tom Whitson, *retired banker, civic volunteer*

Bob Wilson, *Hot Shops, artist and entrepreneur*

Matt O'Reilly, *Aquila Natural Gas company, civic volunteer*

Matt Gronstal, *banker, civic volunteer*

Arlo Burke, *owner of Bayliss Park Hall*

Tom Johnson, *CFO Iowa Western Community College*

1:30 PM – Business / Private Sector

Kevin Culjat, *owner of two bar-eateries*

Jim Royer, *J Development (1892 Building, Bennett Building)*

Julie Staveak, *J Development*

Kim McKeown, *President & CEO, HGM (architects & engineers), civic volunteer*

Christian Christensen, *Bluestone Development*

2:30 PM – Business / Private Sector

Marie Knedler, *CEO Alegent-Mercy Hospital, former Chamber Chair, civic volunteer*

Tom Schmitt, *Publisher, The Daily Nonpareil*

Jane Bell, *VP External Relations, Ameristar Casino, Council Bluffs*

Jon Jerkovich, *President & CEO, Heartland Properties*

Dick Miller, *retired pharmacist*

3:30 PM – "Downtown Neighbors & Colleagues" (nonprofits, churches, residents)

Beth Lindquist, *Director, Union-Pacific Railroad Museum*

Tom Jensen, *Executive Director, The (senior) Center*

Pastor Dave Erickson, *First Christian Church*

Wayne Kobberdahl, *retired educator, active arts & civic volunteer*

Bishop Lewis Weigand, *Community of Christ (Reorganized LDS)*

Bob Putnam, *retired educator, Executive Director of Chanticleer Community Theater*

Joe Kueper, *Community Housing Investment Corp.*

4:30 PM – "Downtown Neighbors & Colleagues" (nonprofits, churches, residents)

Jill Struyk, *artist, homemaker, entrepreneur, civic volunteer*

Rick Killion, *deacon, Broadway United Methodist Church*

Linda Muilenburg, *administrator, Broadway United Methodist Church*

Kate McRae, *Director, YMCA / Council Bluffs affiliate*

Wayne Andersen, *resident, civic volunteer, preservationist*

Kori Nelson, *Executive Director, Historic General Dodge House*

Rev. Elizabeth Senden, *resident*

Laural Ronk, *Executive Director, Bluffs Arts Council*

BREAKFAST

Monday, November 6th

7:30am – 8:45am

Bayliss Hall

1	Jimelle Moreno	20	Lois Grove	39	Bob Moser
2	Pam Minor	21	Lil Jeppersen	40	Gary Schnack
3	Mike Abraham	22	Wayne Kobberdahl	41	Kate Schnack
4	Andrea McKinley	23	Donna Barry	42	Melvyn Houser
5	Diane Stein	24	Natalie Linstrom	43	Kori Nelson
6	Arlo Burk	25	Verne Welch	44	Norma Glassburner
7	Leslie Southard	26	Dick Miller	45	Vern Hundtofte
8	Beth Lindquist	27	Nancy Schulze	46	Terry Bailey
9	Matt Walsh	28	Marie Knedler	47	Tony Tauke
10	Kelly Sears	29	Paul Hamilton	48	Bonnie Brummer
11	Francis Clark	30	Eva Hamilton	49	Amy Recker
12	Shannon Meister	31	Michele Stephens	50	Gilbert Thomas
13	KC Hummel	32	Joe Kueper	51	Carla Tighe
14	Greg Reeder	33	Bert Savage	52	Mr. Tighe
15	Kate McRae	34	Paula Savage	53	Cindi Keithley
16	Don Gross	35	Jerry Vincent	54	Ed King
17	Phyliss Mosher	36	Mary Gumm	55	Debbie King
18	Karna Lowenstein	37	Amy Jocum		
19	Bill Grove	38	Bill Brayman		

(60+ attended)

LUNCH

Tuesday, November 7th

12:30pm – 1:45pm

Bayliss Hall

1	Ronald Cook	31	Lil Jepperson
2	Evelyn Cook	32	Wayne Kobberdahl
3	Elizabeth Ridgway	33	Lynne Branigan
4	Jimelle Moreno	34	Natalie Linstrom
5	Victor Moreno	35	Verne Welch
6	Jean Sorenson	36	Dick Miller
7	Pam Minor	37	Nancy Schulze
8	Pat Driscoll	38	Tom Crowley
9	Mary Ann Wager	39	Ron Hopp
10	Mike Abraham	40	Michele Stephens
11	Andrea McKinley	41	Joe Kueper
12	Roland Lynch	42	Sally Foss
13	Beth Lindquist	43	Jerry Vincent
14	Jim Royer	44	Amy Jocum
15	Julie Staveak	45	Mary Gumm
16	Jane Bell	46	Bob Brayman
17	Matt Walsh	47	Bob Moser
18	Christie Scott	48	Gary Schnack
19	Kelly Sears	49	Kate Schnack
20	Francis Clark	50	Melvyn Houser
21	Shannon Meister	51	Barb Morrison
22	KC Hummel	52	Kori Nelson
23	Greg Reeder	53	Terry Bailey
24	Deborah O'Donnell	54	Amy Recker
25	Dave Erickson	55	Gilbert Thomas
26	Kate McRae	56	Carla Tighe
27	Don Gross	57	Mr. Tighe
28	Phyliss Mosher	58	Cindi Keithley
29	Karna Lowenstein	59	Ed King
30	Ellen Fitzsimmons	60	Debbie King

(120 actually attended)

