



“Downtown Bloomington is one of the greatest assets in the Bloomington-Normal metropolitan area and has the potential to enhance its regional draw.”

*Downtown Bloomington Strategy Plan
Farr Associates, Inc.*

To: Mayor and City Council
From: Downtown Task Force Committee
Date: August 31, 2018

Over the last few decades metropolitan downtowns across the country have changed dramatically. Areas that were once negatively impacted by shopping malls and urban sprawl are being reinvented and reinvigorated. Downtown Bloomington is no different and has the potential to enhance the livability of our community and have a regional economic impact.

In line with the importance of a revitalized Downtown, the Downtown Task Force Committee was formed on May 8, 2017 to establish top priorities for Downtown Bloomington for the next 3 to 5 years. The nine member committee, comprised of various constituencies in the community, also was tasked with proposing an action plan to move those priorities to fruition.

Summary of Activities

The primary goal of the task force is to create an implementation strategy built on existing planning documents. In order to achieve this goal, the task force has reviewed the following:

- Bring It On Bloomington! City of Bloomington Comprehensive Plan (2015)
- Downtown Bloomington Strategy Plan (2013)
- Main Street Transportation Feasibility Study (2012)
- Downtown Streetscape Lighting Master Plan (2015)

The Task Force also has invited individuals with areas of expertise pertinent to the revitalization and development of Downtown to formally address the task force. The following are the presentations received by the task force to date:

- Steve Rasmussen, Assistant City Manager, “Downtown Update.”
- Tom Dabareiner, Director of Community Development, “Comprehensive Plan Overview / Results of 2016 Downtown Stakeholder Meeting.”
- Tom Dabareiner, Director of Community Development, “Downtown Zoning.”
- Greg Koos, Director Emeritus McLean County Museum of History, “Historic Preservation.”
- Lea Cline, Vice Chair, Historic Preservation Commission, “Historic Preservation.”
- Vasu Pinnamaraju, Executive Director, McLean County Regional Planning Commission, “Public Places.”
- Kenneth Bays, Assistant Chief of Police, “Downtown Safety Statistics.”

The task force also has encouraged public participation in this process. A public listening session was held on June 27 and resulted in a robust conversation about Downtown visioning and priorities. The task force also has encouraged members of the public to actively participate in its discussions and has solicited and received written public comment.

Initial Findings

The work of the Task Force continues to affirm that there is strong support throughout the community for continued revitalization of the Downtown area. Downtown is seen as a key component of a healthy city as well as an area with the potential for a high return on investment. There also is a great deal of pride for the many accomplishments that have already been achieved in the Downtown area. However, there is a strong belief that Downtown remains underutilized and that there exist a number of smaller, easy-to-achieve projects that can have a positive impact in the short-term. There also remains a desire to discuss the feasibility of a larger development project and its potential to act as a catalyst for further development and investment in the Downtown area.

The following have been identified as areas of opportunity:

Public Places

For many, the appeal of Downtown is the sense of community that it creates. There is a desire to continue to enhance this aspect of the Downtown area by enhancing and adding to our public places.

Items under review: Public plazas, improvement of existing public places, tactical urbanism to reclaim space in the public right-of-way, pedestrian mall.

Walkability

Downtown is a destination. Visitors should be encouraged to enjoy the many businesses and amenities in the area instead of a single destination. The task force has heard significant support for enhancing the walkability of Downtown.

Items under review: Pedestrian walkways, more shade, more ground level retail, more street facing windows, street art, wider sidewalks, enhanced crosswalks, public plazas.

Beautification / Public Art

One of Downtown's largest assets is its thriving art community and there is a strong desire to continue this tradition through expanded use of art in public spaces. There also is a desire to continue to improve the aesthetic appearance of Downtown Bloomington.

Items under review: More decorative lighting, tactical urbanism projects, brick crosswalks, brick streets, more and larger trees, continuity in Downtown plantings, more planters, increased historic preservation, sculpture garden/park.

Parking

Parking remains a point of contention in the Downtown area. There are ample spaces; however, there continues to be a feeling that parking is a limiting factor. Residents note a desire for safe and convenient parking. There also is a desire to change parking culture so that employees, residents, and longer-term visitors use covered parking decks to ensure availability of on street parking for short-term visitors.

Items under review: Parking meters, replace parallel parking with slant parking, incentivize parking garages, move county/city vehicles to garages to open up surface space, analyze future parking structure needs.

Moving Forward

The next meeting of the Downtown Task Force will be held on September 5 at 12 p.m. Tom Dabareiner will be making a presentation on potential catalyst projects. The task force will then discuss public infrastructure on September 26 at 4:30 p.m.

The ultimate goal is to provide the City Council with a final report within the next 60-90 days so that the City Council can take into account these recommendations in the upcoming budget process. The task force also looks forward to hearing council's thought on this initial report so that your comments can be incorporated into our final recommendations.

Sincerely,

Amelia Buragas
Chair, Downtown Bloomington Task Force