

To: Amelia Buragas, Downtown Task Force Chair  
From: Tom Dabareiner AICP, Community Development Director  
Date: October 20, 2017  
Subject: Review of DTF Recommendations

A number of people have asked for my opinion regarding the draft proposals under consideration by the Downtown Task Force (DTF). Also, I have had a chance to review the draft final report from the DTF.

At an earlier meeting of the DTF, I presented three categories of improvements. I will use those categories to organize my review. It is worth stating that the vast majority of DTF recommendations can find clear support in the City's Comprehensive Plan—exactly how the Plan should be used—and my professional role therefore leans heavily towards support, coupled with 35 years of experience.

### **Catalyst Projects**

A catalyst project should be substantial enough to generate a respectable number of new users in the downtown. All three projects identified in the DTF draft Final Report as Catalyst Projects fit easily within the Catalyst Projects category and within the City of Bloomington Comprehensive Plan 2035.

The redevelopment of the *Market Street Parking Deck* as some kind of multi-use facility could become a significant catalyst. As a library / community center, it could generate more than 1,000 users per day. The City's financial participation in downtown redevelopment projects is likely expected *and* is also needed for the library—why not achieve both in a downtown library location? Importantly, the concept has specific support in the Comprehensive Plan. I also participated in the planning of a downtown many years ago which included adding a public library as an anchor, so am aware of and endorse the benefits of downtown libraries. Expansion of the library on its existing site does little, if anything, to boost the downtown and in some redevelopment scenarios could compete against the downtown. The distance and obstacles (e.g., crossing East Street, and walking passed a jail, parking deck, a parking lot and abandoned building, and bland government center) will deter pedestrians from visiting the library and the downtown.

A new office headquarters or apartment/condo unit complex in and adjacent to the downtown both fit the catalyst typology. With regard to new housing, eventual growth generating about 2,000 new residents (not all at once, which would have a negative market impact) was one example given. One could argue that any set of activities that daily contribute 2,000 potential downtown users should become a target for the DTF. This is not to say all 2,000 would visit businesses in the downtown on a daily basis, but instead would provide an adequate base from which to draw frequent visitors (in addition to others already visiting the downtown).

Both a new hotel / convention center at the Front and Center location and the proposal to establish multi-use development in and around the downtown are classic catalyst examples. It is important to acknowledge that a hotel / convention center needs regular use and consistently high occupancies to

contribute as a true catalyst. New residential, once occupied, provides a consistent base and should be encouraged. Both concepts are rooted in the Comprehensive Plan.

### **Placemaking**

Façade improvements, streetscapes, public art and special events fall into this broad category. Much work in the past has been focused here and is also proposed by the DTF. These are largely design-oriented and make a location an attractive and more interesting place to visit. While some may attract more people to the downtown, the numbers are lower and less consistent that brought about with a catalyst project.

Shade trees, natural plantings, self-watering planters, painted/brick/stamped crosswalks, art and decorative lighting are part of the DTF draft proposal. S-4 zoning designation for historical structures can add to the list of attractions in a downtown. Keeping the downtown clean and installing decorative lighting also join the list, as well as events like First Fridays and the farmers market. Creating “shared space” by making street ROWs available for pedestrian and bicycle usage also fits this category, although if done right it can become an attraction generating new visitors for the downtown.

Some have mentioned the catalyst potential of the BCPA and the Arena, but they are more akin to *special events* based on event infrequency. Thus, they belong in the Placemaking category in my view.

### **Supportive**

I would place sidewalks, parking and other infrastructure in the Supportive category. Well-managed systems are certainly essential to a successful downtown; however, they are necessary only because they serve the users of the downtown.

Ordinances to support first-floor retail may be unnecessary, as the marketplace would prefer this location too. However, when combined with true building design requirements or incentives, this may functionally move the topic into the Placemaking category.

Pc: Melissa Hon  
Steve Rasmussen