

DOWNTOWN

Once the center for community and economic activity, Downtown Bloomington, like downtowns across the country, suffered the loss of retail and other business activities to shopping centers and commercial strips along Veterans Parkway. The vitality of a city's downtown is an important element in a community's overall economic health.

In 2008-2009, the City retained the services of Farr Associates to create a redevelopment strategy for Downtown. That report concluded that Bloomington's Downtown has immense potential that is yet to be realized. It also pointed out that revitalization of Downtown is threatened by failure of consensus on how to maintain, regulate, redevelop and generally manage this valuable and unique asset. The Downtown strategy report was officially adopted by the Council in 2014. While the City, in partnership with Downtown Bloomington Association and other key partners, is making inroads in Downtown redevelopment efforts, many recommended actions of that strategy are yet to be acted upon.

This section of the Economic Development chapter begins with

an examination of the goals and objectives of the aforementioned Downtown Strategy, to avoid duplication of effort.

While efforts are currently underway by the Downtown Bloomington Association (DBA) and the City towards implementation of the adopted Downtown Strategy, many action items are yet to be addressed. This plan emphasizes the function of the Downtown as the core attraction for employment, specialty retail, innovative mixed uses, and cultural and entertainment should be preserved and expanded.

In addition, the outreach process made it clear that there is no clear understanding in the community about the boundaries of Downtown. Goals and Objectives to address this short fall include unified marketing and branding for the Downtown district, creation of signage and wayfinding installations promoting the brand, and support for cultural, entertainment and commercial ventures.

The Downtown district is particularly important as the core of historic Bloomington. The goals and objectives emphasize the need to maintain its historic features and character through careful preservation and thoughtful redevelopment

where needed.

The support and expansion of attractions in the Downtown district is complemented by goals for furthering the public perception of Downtown as a safe and clean place while also instituting practices to ensure safety. Improving access and convenience is addressed through objectives for parking options, as well as car and bicycle sharing programs, and access to public transportation.

Downtown is a neighborhood as well as an economic center, and the plan guidance recognizes the interaction between these functions, and between the Downtown district and the adjacent neighborhoods. Developing and sustaining an active urban core that includes Downtown, Regeneration Area and the Preservation Area is vital to the longterm success of the community.



Figure 6-5. Downtown Bloomington Study Area and Warehouse District

D-1. Continue to build a healthy Downtown that offers a range of employment, retail, housing, cultural and entertainment opportunities for all.

D-1.1 Strengthen business recruitment and retention activities.

METRICS

- # of businesses in Downtown district ↑
- # of jobs in Downtown district ↑
- Commercial vacancy rate ↓
- # of start-up companies in Downtown district ↑
- # of resources available for Downtown business ↑
- Database of financial tools for business available for use
- Inventory of Downtown sites and buildings added to site certification database
- # of incentives provided to Downtown businesses ↑

D-1.1a Identify and seek development and business opportunities appropriate for Downtown. *City of Bloomington Economic Development staff, ongoing*

D-1.1b Actively promote Downtown sites and buildings for business locations. *DBA Economic Restructuring Committee, ongoing*

D-1.1c Identify the needs of current and future employees to make Downtown attractive to employers. *DBA, short*

D-1.1d Create and maintain a current database of financial tools and other resources for existing, new and start-up businesses in Downtown. *City of Bloomington Economic Development staff, short*

D-1.1e Create and maintain a current database inventory, coordinated with the City of Bloomington's proposed site certification program, of available sites and buildings in Downtown, as proposed in the Economic Development Strategy. *DBA Economic Restructuring Committee, short/ongoing*

D-1.1f Examine the feasibility of creating a small business incubator in Downtown. *City of Bloomington Economic Development staff, short-medium*

D-1.1g Prioritize mixed-use development/redevelopment projects for the Downtown area. *City of Bloomington, ongoing*

D-1.1h Continue to develop, promote and provide incentives for property owners or developers to reinvest in Downtown. *City of Bloomington Economic Development staff, ongoing*

D-1.1i Create an economic development staff position focused on Downtown business retention and recruitment. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

D-1.1j Leverage assets, such as the Constitution Trail, to encourage business retention and attraction. *City of Bloomington, ongoing*

PARTNER AGENCIES

DBA Economic Restructuring committee; EDC, MCRPC, U.S Cellular Coliseum, MCMH, Bloomington Public Library

D-1.2 Pursue catalyst projects that can serve as additional Downtown anchors.

D-1.2a Amend Coliseum management contract to involve its management in economic development projects compatible with Coliseum operations. *City of Bloomington, short*

D-1.2b Consider other Downtown needs during the expansion of community facilities currently located in Downtown, such as the BCPA/Creativity Center and the Bloomington Public Library. *City of Bloomington, short*

D-1.2c Encourage other community anchors, such as the YMCA, to expand in Downtown. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

D-1.2d Leverage Downtown assets, such as the Route 66 Visitors Center, to attract other catalyst projects. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

METRICS

- \$ public & private investment in Downtown ↑
- Downtown equalized assessed value ↑
- # of catalyst projects ↑

D-1.3 Reinvent the Warehouse District.

D-1.3a Investigate designation of a special use district, such as an Art or Innovation district, to bring a renewed focus to the warehouse district. *City of Bloomington, short*

D-1.3b Introduce and promote incentives for investment for property owners or developers in the Warehouse District. *City of Bloomington Economic Development staff, short-medium*

D-1.3c Coordinate with local businesses and Constitution Trail advocates regarding trailside businesses development to boost economic development in the area. *City of Bloomington Economic Development staff, short-medium*

D-1.3d Encourage and enable alternative business operations, such as pop-up businesses, in the Warehouse District. *City of Bloomington Economic Development staff, short-medium*

METRICS

- Equalized assessed value in Warehouse District ↑
- Number of businesses in Warehouse District ↑

PARTNER AGENCIES

EDC, DBA, Chamber of Commerce, local universities

D-1.4 Develop a wide variety of Downtown housing options.

METRICS

- # of housing units (ownership and rental units) ↑
- % vacancy rate ↓
- # of residential parking spaces ↑

D-1.4a Encourage the inclusion of residential units in mixed-use redevelopment. *City of Bloomington Economic Development staff, short*

D-1.4b Investigate creating an Employer Assisted Housing zone in and around Downtown. *City of Bloomington Economic Development staff, short-medium*

D-1.4c Explore employer-based incentives for home ownership. *City of Bloomington Economic Development staff, short-medium*

D-1.4d Encourage and support business development that serves Downtown residents, such as neighborhood scale grocery. *City of Bloomington Economic Development staff, ongoing*

D-1.4e Improve parking access/facilities for Downtown residents. *City of Bloomington Economic Development staff, short-medium*

PARTNER AGENCIES

DBA, Downtown Property Owners Association

D-2. Market and promote the unique brand and image of Downtown Bloomington.

D-2.1 Identify and designate gateways to Downtown.

METRICS

- Gateways identified
- Signage installed

D-2.1a Use City of Bloomington land or street r-o-w to create gateway features such as landscaping, artwork, pocket parks, etc. *City of Bloomington, short*

D-2.1b Install gateway signage. *City of Bloomington Economic Development staff, short-medium*

D-2.1c Create and sustain consistent Downtown streetscape design, including gateway areas. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

PARTNER AGENCIES

DBA, EDC, CVB, MCRPC, Town of Normal

METRICS

- \$ DBA funding ↑
- DBA programming and marketing activities ↑
- Adopted branding for Downtown
- Wayfinding signs installed

D-2.2 Expand the Downtown Bloomington Association’s marketing efforts.

D-2.2a City of Bloomington continue to support DBA. *City of Bloomington, ongoing*

D-2.2b Investigate regional and state funding sources. *DBA, ongoing*

D-2.2c Continue and expand the event programming activities. *DBA Promotions Committee, ongoing*

D-2.3 Improve wayfinding Downtown.

D-2.3a Install wayfinding signage for parking garages and attractions. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

D-2.3b Develop consistent branding and iconography for gateway and wayfinding signage. *DBA, ongoing*

D-2.3c Solicit cooperation from Downtown businesses in adopting and promoting consistent branded wayfinding. *City of Bloomington, short*

D-2.4 Develop and adopt a Downtown signage code appropriate to the area.

D-2.3a Review existing code for suitability to Downtown character. *City of Bloomington Economic Development staff, short*

D-2.3b Adapt code to encourage signs visible to pedestrians and bicyclists as well as auto traffic. *City of Bloomington, short*

D-2.3c Adapt code to discourage sign placements and sizes that detract from the Downtown character, while offering options to businesses. *City of Bloomington, short*

PARTNER AGENCIES

DBA, Convention and Visitors Bureau, Bloomington Public Library, Downtown property owners, contractors

METRICS

- Concentration of retail uses
- Adopt access management ordinance
- Concentration of office uses
- # of vendors at the Farmers Market ↑
- Participation in the Farmer's Market ↑
- Permanent site for Farmers Market in Downtown

D-2.5 Consolidate retail uses within in the Downtown core.

D-2.5a Ensure codes and regulations facilitate use of the area for retail locations. *City of Bloomington, short*

D-2.5b Modify street configuration and short-term street parking to promote access to retail locations. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

D-2.5c Encourage synergy in adjacent retail to promote multi-stop visits. *DBA, ongoing*

D-2.6 Encourage commercial and corporate uses along the U.S. 51 corridor surrounding the Downtown core.

D-2.6a Adopt access management policies on through routes in Downtown district. *City of Bloomington, short*

D-2.6b Coordinate parking deck access points and side street parking to support longer-term parking along corridor. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

D-2.7 Continue support and coordination efforts for the Farmers Market.

D-2.7a Provide assistance to the Farmers Market to resolve issues and continue to support the market's efforts in the future. *DBA, ongoing*

D-2.7b Make infrastructure changes or recommendations, including parking, streetscape, and signage. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

D-2.7c Investigate Downtown site/venue/street facilities for Farmers Market to allow for expanded market hours and seasons. *DBA Promotions Committee, short*

PARTNER AGENCIES

DBA, EDC

D-3. Protect Downtown’s historic character and encourage appropriate new development.

D-3.1 Protect the scale and character of historic Downtown and provide appropriate parameters for new development that complements its historic character.

METRICS

- Adopt and implement Downtown Historic District zoning overlay
- # of façade improvements to Downtown properties ↑
- # of adaptive reuse projects ↑
- \$ amount of public and private investment in historic properties ↑
- Equalized assessed value in Downtown district ↑

D-3.1a Implement the Downtown Bloomington Strategy recommendations for a zoning overlay ensuring that future developments are compatible with Downtown’s historic character. *City of Bloomington, short*

D-3.1b Target façade rehabilitations to concentrated areas of the Downtown. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

D-3.1c Develop incentives for façade rehabilitation in mixed-use redevelopment projects. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

D-3.1d Continue educating property owners regarding other funding sources or tax benefits of rehabilitation. *DBA, ongoing*

PARTNER AGENCIES

DBA, Historic Preservation Commission

D-4. A clean and safe Downtown.

D-4.1 Improve and promote Downtown as a clean and safe place.

METRICS

- Adoption of Downtown district-wide trash/snow removal programs
- Adoption of code revisions as needed to implement trash/snow program
- # of crimes in Downtown ↓
- Infrastructure rating ↑

D-4.1a Task Public Works department to develop a Downtown district trash removal and street cleaning program in cooperation with private service providers. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

D-4.1b Streamline and standardize snow removal for Downtown district, in cooperation with businesses and private service providers, through Code revisions as needed. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

D-4.1c Establish landscaping standards for parking to manage stormwater, provide shade and aesthetic benefits. *City of Bloomington, short*

D-4.1d Address infrastructure issues. *City of Bloomington, ongoing*

D-4.1e Work with the Bloomington Police Department to reduce crime and fear of crime in Downtown. *City of Bloomington, ongoing*

PARTNER AGENCIES

Bloomington Police Department, DBA

D-5. Continue to develop a multi-modal transportation network in Downtown.

D-5.1 Improve parking conditions and access and encourage shared public and private parking supplies.

D-5.1a Ensure that public parking is positioned for access to multiple destinations. *City of Bloomington, ongoing*

D-5.1b Evaluate parking ordinance standards and requirements. *City of Bloomington, short*

D-5.1c Investigate innovative parking solutions for effective parking management in Downtown. *City of Bloomington, ongoing*

D-5.1d Allow developments to pay in-lieu fees for public facilities instead of on-site private parking. *City of Bloomington, short*

D-5.1e Consider appropriately designed street parking in core retail area bounded by Center, East, Locust and Front Streets. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

D-5.1f Adopt parking code revisions consistent with appropriate standards for Downtown district. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

D-5.1g Require screening of parking facilities from street right-of-way using landscaping. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

D-5.1h Encourage interior parking within building footprints. *City of Bloomington, medium*

D-5.1i Coordinate shared private parking arrangements. *DBA, short-medium*

D-5.1j Coordinate and manage shared parking, such as valet or parking broker, to serve multiple restaurants, stores, and drinking establishments. *DBA, short-medium*

D-5.1k Consider the installation of parking meters in designated locations. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

METRICS

- Adoption of Downtown district-wide trash/snow removal programs
- Adoption of code revisions as needed to implement trash/snow program
- # of crimes in Downtown ↓
- Infrastructure rating ↑

PARTNER AGENCIES

DBA, Bloomington Public Works
Department

D-5.2 Enhance the walkability and bikability within and to Downtown and facilitate access to car-sharing and bicycle sharing services in the Downtown district.

METRICS

- Implementation of shared parking policy
- Installation of parking meters in designated locations
- Downtown location selection for car/bicycle sharing program
- # of bicycle access routes to Downtown district installed ↑
- # of bike/pedestrian wayfinding signs installed ↑
- Bicycle LOS ↑
- Sidewalk ratings (in PASER) ↑
- Aggregate sidewalk length in Downtown district ↑

D-5.2a Use wayfinding signage to identify walking and cycling routes and connections. *City of Bloomington, short/ongoing*

D-5.2b Continue to expand the bike connections to Downtown Bloomington. *City of Bloomington, ongoing*

D-5.2c Identify a Downtown location for transportation sharing services, including accessible office space and vehicle/bicycle parking. *DBA, short*

PARTNER AGENCIES

DBA, BikeBloNo, Friends of Constitution Trail, Connect Transit, City of Bloomington

D-5.3 Enhance the public transit access to Downtown.

METRICS

- Completed Downtown public transit transfer center
- Transit usage at Downtown transfer point ↑

D-5.3a Upgrade Front Street transfer location. *Connect Transit, short*

D-5.3b Include transit signage and transit stop information in wayfinding installations. *Connect Transit, short*

PARTNER AGENCIES

City of Bloomington, MCRPC

D-6. Reinforce the connections between Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods.

D-6.1 Encourage development on sites that will link Downtown with surrounding neighborhoods.

METRICS

- Development along the edge of the Downtown district ↑
- Equalized assessed value in regeneration and preservation areas ↑
- # owner-occupied housing units in the Regeneration and Preservation Areas ↑
- Vacancy rates in Regeneration and Preservation Areas ↓

D-6.1a Encourage development on opportunity sites on the outskirts of the area, especially as prioritized in the Downtown Master Plan. *DBA, ongoing*

D-6.1b Condemn properties that are not maintained. *City of Bloomington, ongoing*

PARTNER AGENCIES

DBA, Local employers

D-6.2 Form organizational alliances between the DBA and organizations active in surrounding neighborhoods.

METRICS

- # of joint DBA neighborhood meetings and programs ↑

D-6.2a Establish and/or maintain close contact with organizations in surrounding neighborhoods. *DBA, ongoing*

D-6.2b Work with surrounding neighborhood organizations to help improve the surrounding area. *DBA, ongoing*

D-6.2c Explore opportunities for joint programs, particularly those that assist property owners with rehabilitation and development, and document projects developed. *DBA, ongoing*

PARTNER AGENCIES

DBA, Neighborhood organizations

D-6.3 Pursue public-private development opportunities with major employers seeking employee housing near offices.

METRICS

- # of employers participating in employer-assisted housing program ↑
- Employer-assisted housing zone established in Downtown Regeneration and Preservation areas

D-6.3a Identify major employers in and near Downtown Bloomington that desire improved and expanded housing options for their employees. *City of Bloomington, ongoing*

D-6.3b Establish employer-assisted housing zones in established and regeneration neighborhoods surrounding Downtown. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

PARTNER AGENCIES

DBA, Local employers