

October 5, 2017

(Revised August 2018)

## **Iowa City Downtown District ADVOCACY**

**The ICDD provides a voice for downtown businesses, nonprofits, cultural entities, and residents.  
We believe that when the downtown thrives, the whole community flourishes.**

The Iowa City Downtown District provides vision, leadership and influence on a range of issues impacting downtown. Our work includes welcoming public spaces, drawing business interest and visitors downtown and shaping the downtown landscape through our influence.

**Advocacy is an important tool for this work.** We work closely with City and local leaders, community organizations and government agencies to ensure issues important to our members – and our urban core – are heard, understood, and acted upon.

The economic viability of the downtown is integral to our community's well-being. A vital downtown with growing property values helps build the City's tax base, which is used to support community parks and recreation, police and fire services, and health and human service agencies to name a few. A healthy downtown can also increase and protect property values in surrounding residential neighborhoods. A strong downtown supports the community in many ways. Therefore, we believe that when the downtown thrives, the whole community can flourish.

### **1.0 Welcoming Urban Experience**

We believe the downtown is the heart of our community. The Downtown District works to ensure that there is solid, sustainable infrastructure and functional, appealing space for living, learning, working, and playing within the geographical boundaries of the Downtown District. We are leading several public realm initiatives that are crucial to the vitality, cleanliness, and friendliness of our downtown.

#### **Key Initiatives:**

##### Welcoming

The Downtown District is the economic and cultural engine of the Iowa City community. It is home to a wide variety of independent, locally-owned boutiques, cultural venues, and some of the very best in dining and entertainment, and is a place where University and local business innovations merge. To sustain this engine, the ICDD partners with the City to support a welcoming environment for all residents and visitors. We advocate for the following to enhance these efforts.

- Continued support for a daytime police officer who can proactively support downtown entities and

visitors that plays dividends for local-problem solving related to serving those underserved and suffering in the community with mental illness, addiction, and/or homelessness.

● Continued support for the University of Iowa Better Bridges program downtown. This program includes City support from the Human Rights Coordinator and provides an educational setting for our businesses to encourage diversity in hiring, best business practices, and confidence to challenge disparaging comments to one-day eliminate racial bias within our community.

#### Clean:

ICDD members and staff are available in the downtown to observe and support the management of downtown spaces and places. As an organization, we would like to manage our own clean and safe team that includes an ambassador program and integrated janitorial and maintenance services with existing City funds currently used for downtown maintenance. We would like to explore contracting for these enhanced services through the ICDD.

#### Community Building:

The ICDD supports inclusion and creating a community that prospers because everyone feels welcome. The ICDD supports the City of Iowa City's designation as a "Welcoming City" to visitors that reside or visit from around the globe. We advocate for the creation of inclusive policies and practices such as making it easier for entrepreneurs to start a business or having wayfinding and public signage available in multiple languages.

#### Community Services:

Downtowns are often the last refuge for individuals suffering from mental illness, substance abuse, and homelessness. The ICDD supports the work of Johnson County to design a healthier environment to better serve these individuals. A variety of stakeholders have joined with local jurisdictions to design an Access Center. The goal is to provide citizens, families, hospital emergency departments, and law enforcement who are often the 'point of contact' for individuals in crisis, a quick and easy alternative to the local jail or the emergency department. The Access Center would provide immediate behavioral health intervention and treatment as well as comprehensive service coordination and transition planning, which is often lacking in local jails and Emergency Departments. The envisioned Access Center would consist of five "units;" a Sobering Unit, a Detoxification Unit, a Crisis Observation Unit (23-48 hours), a Crisis Stabilization Unit (up to 5 days), and a low-barrier homeless shelter. We believe this is a progressive, meaningful, and humane step forward to improving the quality of life of those in crisis as well as supporting positive interactions with all visitors downtown.

We also advocate for the continuing Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training for police, fire, and emergency staff to help support a less confrontational environment and to de-escalate events with offenders that may lead to violence or further crisis.

### Nighttime Atmosphere:

In 2017, the ICDD invested in a new Nighttime Mayor position to support nighttime businesses and to serve as a support for nighttime businesses and as a community concierge for residents, visitors, college students, and area employees. The ICDD is working to activate public spaces downtown that are inviting to people of all ages to change the image of downtown at night. However, we need support from the City and UI to explore best practices from other cities, a review of local regulations that prompt a 10:00pm spill out, and ultimately the development of a program that will encourage an evenly robust downtown environment for all visitors, students, residents, businesses and cultural entities. The following items are opportunities to support a healthy night time economy.

- ~~Provide one additional police officer that mimics the role of the daytime downtown ICPD liaison for the evening hours. A pro-active ICPD liaison would support downtown businesses and visitors at night and play dividends for safety, local problem solving, and communication on issues related to alcohol, safety, and help facilitate support with those in crisis or homeless.~~ (Completed)
- Support the ICDD's call for State legislative action to change the law that permits guns in public spaces such as parks, playgrounds, and high traffic public plazas such as the downtown pedestrian mall.
- Support opportunities for a better network of security cameras that can aid police investigations and deter crime.
- Address the unintended consequences related to a "spill out" crowd effect of under-21 individuals leaving bars at 10:00pm on the pedestrian mall.

## **2.0 Draw Visitors and Community to Support our Downtown**

The Downtown District aims to be a place where people of all backgrounds and ages are drawn; a community where people feel welcome in an environment of mutual respect, in which they collaborate and make connections with one another; and where a shared community identity can flourish at the same time that differences and variety are valued.

### **Key Initiatives**

#### Placemaking:

We support activating underused areas of the downtown to ensure their safety and to promote the relevance of our downtown as a dynamic place to engage with community. We advocate for support to continue and grow our placemaking efforts downtown. Specifically:

- Continued financial support from the City to activate the north end of the Pedestrian Mall known as Black Hawk Mini Park and other areas in need of activation.
- ~~review of methods to improve the management of the downtown street pole banners to ensure the system is fully used and highlights downtown events as well as other community messages.~~ (Completed)

### Events:

The ICDD advocates for events that draw people downtown, supports the downtown economy, and fosters art, music, and literary advancements. Collaboration with our local businesses and properties is an easy way to encourage diverse, integrated and successful events for the entire community. We advocate for:

- Minimal requests for street closures that have significant negative impacts on soft-good retailers.

### Public Art:

The arts are of critical importance to our downtown economy. Local art and culture venues supports the success of our authentic place and ICDD mission. ICDD initiatives deliberately serve to foster a local arts industry that appreciates a range of both locally driven, national, and international art.

As public art administrators, the ICDD is committed to working with downtown stakeholders and the City of Iowa City to facilitate the installation of work that is of artistic and civic worth, with a strong, but not exclusive, focus on involving local artists. We advocate for:

- Restoration of a meaningful financial commitment to the City's Public Arts Program
- Implementation of a simple and flexible City approval process for temporary public art projects that use or otherwise activate public spaces.
- Fair pay for artisans and the development of paid art opportunities.

## **3.0 Shape the Urban Landscape**

The ICDD takes a "smart growth" approach to sustainable downtown development and regional growth. This approach encourages compact and dense development in the City's commercial core, with a mix of building types and uses, diverse housing and transportation options, development within existing neighborhoods, and community engagement. The juxtaposition of old and new provides a rich analogy of our community that we hope to maintain and steward. The following statements guide our advocacy.

- Our urban character includes an integrated mix of contemporary structures and historic buildings that are both highly valued by our organization.
- Dense "infill" projects help financially support the downtown ecosystem by bringing additional customer base to businesses in older buildings that often struggle with higher maintenance costs.
- We support land use policies and regulations that foster and encourage downtown reinvestment.
- Thoughtful downtown development can grow the City's tax base, which in turn provides support for City services throughout the community. When the downtown thrives, the whole community flourishes.
- Well designed taller buildings have a place in the downtown landscape.

## **Key Initiatives:**

### Urban Character:

The City conducted a Downtown and Pedestrian Mall Streetscape Update Plan in 2014 ([www.icgov.org](http://www.icgov.org)) to support the revitalization of and reinvestment in Downtown Iowa City. The ICDD advocates for continuing the implementation of the 2014 Streetscape Update Plan.

The City of Iowa City is exploring a Form Based Code (FBC) approach to zoning land use for several neighborhoods ([www.formbasedcodes.org](http://www.formbasedcodes.org)) including the Northside Marketplace. The City has also identified a FBC approach to downtown in the future to help streamline development and preserve character. We advocate for:

- A Form Based Code approach for the Northside at similar neighborhood scale as CB-5 zoning, or a roughly five story building.
- A zoning approach for the downtown that allows for current heights and doesn't preclude the market from expressing demand for buildings at a variety of heights and uses.
- Review of impediments such as parking regulations to downtown renovations and investments to support infill projects and additional housing opportunities for long-term community members.
- Adoption of the co-sponsored City and ICDD Design Guidelines that support a positive street character and well designed storefronts.

### Support for Retail:

Business retention and recruitment is important to the ICDD. Downtown needs a more balanced mix of community-serving versus visitor / student-oriented retail. This requires City support and attention from other economic development organizations. We advocate for:

- Financial incentives to help attract and recruit retailers that meet the co-sponsored City-ICDD 2014 Retail Strategy for community-based soft retail goods.
- Financial or TIF assistance for building improvements that would support improving the accessibility of the space in older properties.

### Housing for the Community

We support the City's goal of increasing the affordable housing stock, including in the downtown area. We similarly support mixed-use development that incorporates residential units targeted towards long-term tenants as a particular need of downtown neighborhoods. Increasing the supply of residential units targeted at a variety of income levels will support the community's overall need for additional housing stock.

