

2021 ICDD Questionnaire for City Council Elections / November 2, 2021



Introduction

The following questions are intended to further explore your understanding of the downtown environment and your willingness to support initiatives important to the downtown while on Council. These documents are available to you for your review and should be cited in your responses where appropriate:

[ICDD Advocacy Statement](#)

[ICDD Strategic Plan Update 2019](#)

[Downtown Recovery Brief](#)

Please share your knowledge and position on the following questions to help inform the community.

Questions:

- 1. Please share your general thoughts about your experiences downtown, if/how the downtown functions as a community hub, and what you see as important for the area.**

Growing up in Fairfield, Iowa City was the “big city” to me. There was a mall and a movie theatre with more than one screen! More than that though, there was so much energy and creativity that emanated from downtown and campus. You could just feel it when you visited. I still have that sense of wonder about this place. To this day, Downtown still has cool places and businesses, and that *energy* is as palpable as ever. I believe it comes from residents that are passionate about our city and being involved. We see it in musical performances, a demonstration on the Ped Mall reacting to current events or a political debate, and in new entrepreneurial ventures that pop up so often downtown. I was an undergrad and lived in the downtown area for all 4 years of that time. I have worked and lived other places, but Iowa City, particularly downtown has always been “home”. We lived in North Liberty for 9 years when I worked in Cedar Rapids, because we wanted to be closer to Iowa City. I’m so blessed to now be living within walking distance to downtown.

“Hub” is absolutely the right word to describe downtown. Whatever neighborhood or part of town you live in and identify with, downtown is common to us all. It’s the tie

that binds all of Iowa City together, socially, economically and in concert with the University.

2. **As one of seven Councilmembers, you will be tasked with representing every neighborhood in Iowa City. How do you plan to balance the needs of the broader city and your personal priorities, while also considering that Downtown is not only one of the fastest-growing residential neighborhoods in the City, but the job center of the region and the largest contributor of the [general tax base](#).**

Assuring proper attention on all critical areas of the city is obviously a constant challenge. I am not running because of a particular pet issue that I prioritize or area of town that I represent. That fact, along with my past experience in organizations and multiple areas of the community, will help me with striking the right balance. There are several areas that I believe need more attention at the city council level (public safety, addressing increasing gun violence, assuring basic city services are maintained, economic development and growth) that will impact all of Iowa City, including downtown. I hope to bring a voice for these issues to the council.

3. **What role do you think downtown plays in the community--economically, socially, and financially as Iowa City strives to recover from the coronavirus pandemic in a manner that makes us better than before? How does this fit in with your ideas for commercial areas and neighborhoods throughout the community?**

Downtown is a critical part of our recovery. Socially, it is a common gathering space to meet and build relationships with our diverse population, particularly as we haven't had as much opportunity to do so due to the pandemic. There are certainly other areas of the city that have tremendous opportunity to be developed commercially. There is no reason that should distract from the work to support downtown. In fact, as mentioned in later questions, that work is very much consistent and mutually beneficial.

4. **There are several upcoming council considerations and other recent developments that are important to Downtown stakeholders and the larger community. The timing of some of them is uncertain. Help us understand your position on each of these actions and the approach you would take in considering them for approval/disapproval.**

- a. **Support for new development at [21 S. Linn Street \(US Bank parking lot\)](#).** A proposal was submitted by CA Ventures to develop a 13-story mixed use building on this vacant lot. In order for the development to fit on the lot without tearing down other buildings, the developer requested a reduction in parking requirements which was [denied at the Board of Adjustment](#).

ICDD Position: ICDD supported proposal. ICDD advocates for an update of the comprehensive plan to remove an outdated "desired heights map" that was cited as the reason to reject the project.

Your Position: I was excited about the project on the US Bank parking lot and am disappointed that it was denied. It's one of several projects in Iowa City where I believe we missed a great opportunity. In this case, to further enrich downtown

and increase housing units. I'm concerned that the result will be a solution that will be sub-optimal.

As you correctly state in your Advocacy Statement, the heights map was simply guidelines based on projected market demand/conditions, not the zoning code. We have taken a document that was meant to be helpful additional information and used it as a tool to restrict projects that are beneficial. I would be in favor of updating and/or eliminating these discrepancies as appropriate to assure they are not used in this way.

- b. **Support Historic Preservation through "Opt In" Program.** The Historic Preservation Commission and ICDD both agree that support for incentivizing historic preservation downtown would be a powerful and collaborative tool to reach multiple community-wide goals, including building preservation, sustainability, reduction of tax burden on key properties, and cultural opportunities. (See ICDD [Advocacy Statement 2.7](#))

ICDD Position: ICDD supports "opt in" program versus a local ordinance mandate and advocates for staff time to be devoted to developing the program.

Your Position: I am just learning about this program but am intrigued by it and am very open to how the city can support downtown businesses and property owners in it. Protecting our heritage in responsible ways and balancing it with our growth is very important to me. That is much more achievable when we have a collaborative effort with the city and property/business owners.

- c. **As a Self Supported Municipal Improvement District, the ICDD has a partially sustainable revenue stream from a voluntary assessment on downtown property owners. The ICDD believes SSMIDs can benefit other areas of the community and support improved collaboration city-wide.** As a City Council member, a South District SSMID may be brought to City Council for approval. While this is not a political vote, rather an obligation of Council to approve the SSMID if the requirements of [Iowa Chapter 386](#) governing SSMIDs are met. What are your general opinions related to additional SSMIDs in Iowa City.

ICDD Position: The ICDD supports and has been collaborating with South District partners to set up this improvement district. We advocate for the South District SSMID and a collaborative relationship between the two.

Your Position: I'm very pleased to read the ICDD supports and is collaborating with the South District in these efforts and does not see this competition to be resisted. I'm a believer in the "rising tide lifts all boats" analogy in this case. I am very supportive of SSMIDs in general and other associations that promote common purpose. I have been part of several professional associations and sat in groups of business with shared interest (non-profits in Cedar Rapids for instance) and that kind of collaboration is great for the community. I'll be cheering both groups on and my ear will be open to ways that the city can support those partnerships.

- d. **This year, City staff [removed a line item from the Capitol Improvement Plan \(CIP\)](#) that was voted on by previous Council members without alerting them or stakeholders like the ICDD to its removal.** The project, a change of the one-way street to two-way of Market Street that would benefit safety in the Northside Marketplace, was first discussed in the [2013 Downtown Streetscape](#). At that time, the two-way conversion was lauded as beneficial to the community and was estimated at \$500k. Since then, costs have changed and staff came to the conclusion that Jefferson and Market Street corridors are lined with 1970s vintage traffic signals that have been deferred replacement among other issues and so removed the project from the CIP for other critical priorities.

The CIP is something that stakeholders rely on once they are voted on by Council and changes to it are important to communicate. The ICDD is a strong supporter of the Market Street two-way conversion that downtown stakeholders have been waiting on for what will now be almost a decade.

ICDD Position: We advocate for Council to vote the Market Street two-way conversion back on the CIP when it comes up for Council vote and for City Council to advocate for its immediate prioritization to keep confidence in the City's processes.

Your Position: I worked in downtown Cedar Rapids as they transitioned their one-way streets to two-way. I saw first hand how it improved walkability and biking, made the area more friendly to walk-in's to businesses. It allowed for other changes in parking and traffic signals/flow that made the whole area feel more welcoming and neighborhood-like.

I am in favor of the conversion here in Iowa City as well.

You raise a larger issue in this as well, which is an all-too-common theme in Iowa City, in which city staff and council are not on the same page. We have to improve the consistency of guidance on which community residents, business and other organizations rely. People make financial and other decisions, both large and small, based on these decisions. The frustration from inconsistency is what drives the growing perception that Iowa City is less friendly to investment.

5. **One of the biggest challenges facing the City and downtown today is dwindling service levels in spite of rising service needs with an increased residential and visitor base. Downtown has a growing number of people experiencing homelessness with severe mental illness on most corners and no agency to specifically support the challenges of harassment of downtown patrons and lack of basic code enforcement. The ICPD has not re-assigned a downtown liaison - a proven solution - to address working with this population and to support education on basic code enforcement (parking on the pedestrian mall, riding bikes on sidewalks, etc.) As a Council member, does prioritizing an officer or another type of staff with code enforcement authority to this role align with your philosophy on supporting community safety? What else should the City be doing to increase service levels and basic code enforcement?**

I'm concerned to hear that ICDD is seeing a decrease in the level of service and I want to understand the specifics better. I have made "Back to Basics" one of the themes of my

campaign. I'm so proud to be a part of a progressive and forward-thinking community that focuses on big issues like social justice and climate change. As we tackle those issues, we absolutely must assure that basic city services are maintained and executed at a high level. I'm worried that we're taking our eye off the ball in that respect. I have worked for my hometown's Parks Department and Wastewater treatment plant. My father was a firefighter and later Fire Chief. It has given me an appreciation for these functions that many take for granted.

You also raise the public safety aspect of this and that is another priority of mine for city council. We have seen an increase in gun violence in Iowa City, including in and near downtown. My role on City Council is to assure this becomes a community-wide topic of conversation, so that there is a sense of urgency in discussing potential solutions. The ICDD should be one of many groups that participate in that problem solving process.

- 6. The ICDD supports a complex urban environment through tailored programs, clean and safe initiatives, events and "placemaking." The City often financially supports our programs that fill a specific need upon request (examples include power washing, placemaking pilot funds, partnerships on retail studies, among others).**

We believe that with increased visitation to and tax generation off of downtown properties, it will be more and more important to put additional resources towards improving cleanliness (bio matter, littered alley ways, etc.) to support stronger first impressions. As a council candidate, would you support providing additional resources towards downtown cleanliness and/or placemaking?

From above, it sounds like we first need to look at whether the previous baseline services are being maintained. I'd like to learn more about the specifics you have in mind and what that means for city staff and budget before providing any additional thoughts. As with any proposal, however, I'm open to discussion and listening to the needs and potential benefits.

- 7. Downtown Iowa City is the economic center of the City and a front door to the University of Iowa. In the current economic recovery climate, for many Downtown businesses, the margins are increasingly strained by limited labor, limited supply of space driving up property valuations and taxes, paying living wages, and competition. The retail industry in particular is facing difficult challenges and flat or decreasing revenues in recent years. How should the City best support local retailers?**

As an HR Professional for 20 years in the Iowa City and Cedar Rapids area, I understand well the challenges that business face, particularly in labor and wages. I have managed payroll, compensation and benefits programs and recruited people to this area. I have led a non-profit called Professional & Technical Diversity Network (PTDN) that put on events to welcome a diverse workforce to the area and created successful Corridor Welcome Receptions now organized by the respective Chambers.

At the city level, the first priority is to assure a safe and welcoming community through the basic services previously mentioned. Business, retail or otherwise, cannot thrive without that foundation. Next would be to partner with organizations like ICDD or the Business Partnership on additional solutions.

8. Are there City advocacy priorities at the State level that the ICDD can or should support? If so, what are they?

I don't have any legislative policy priorities specific to ICDD, but I am very focused on building positive relationships with other government entities. It's no secret that the political makeup of Iowa City and the current State Government are very different. This has created a toxic relationship that has been to the detriment of Iowa City. We've seen legislation that has impacted several of our priorities and eroded local control.

In my roles in business, issue advocacy and state service (National Guard, State Human Rights Board, etc.) I've been able to develop positive relationships with legislators in both major parties and folks in career positions at state agencies. That was only possible because I was respectful and kept conversations issue focused. I pledge to bring this approach to the Iowa City Council.

I'm not naïve. Iowa City will continue to have disagreements with state government. This will not magically go away, nor will we magically get all the policies we want. But to the extent that we can collaborate in some way, I will do everything I can to influence it positively. Even a person that I disagree with 95% of the time, leaves a 5% opportunity to get something done that might benefit Iowa City. I will forfeit that 5% opportunity if I hurl vulgar insults and name-calling on social media or elsewhere based on the other 95%. That is a disservice to Iowa City, and I will not do so as City Councilor.

Are there any other comments would you like to provide or suggestions for the ICDD?

Thank you for your responses!