

Iowa City Downtown District ADVOCACY STATEMENT

July 2023

The Iowa City Downtown District (ICDD) provides a voice for downtown businesses, nonprofits, cultural entities, and residents. The ICDD believes that when downtown thrives the whole community flourishes.

Introduction

The ICDD 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.** The ICDD works 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, the ICDD believes that when the downtown thrives, the whole community can flourish.

The ICDD strives to conduct our work using a lens for social justice. Advocacy is an important filter to social justice, along with providing access, agency, and solidarity, for long-term, thoughtful change. The following positions reflect our values and commitment to systemic change.

Process for Amending or Adding to the ICDD Advocacy Statement

While this document serves as the official advocacy of the ICDD, additional positions are sometimes requested or warranted. The ICDD legislative committee typically recommends to the board if and when to take a public position or develop a policy statement to guide our efforts. The following links are intended to provide guidance on where "bold" leadership can be applied in a meaningful and successful manner. Read more about ICDD's position process [here](#)

The following sections provide the ICDD's official advocacy statement.

1.0 Welcoming City Experience

Downtown is the heart of the Iowa City area. 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. The ICDD leads public realm initiatives that are crucial to the vitality, cleanliness, and friendliness of our downtown.

ICDD Positions:

The Downtown District is the economic and cultural engine of the Iowa City community. It is home to a wide variety of national and independent, locally-owned boutiques, cultural venues, hotels, 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.

The ICDD advocates for the following to enhance these efforts.

1.1 Welcoming Community

The ICDD supports inclusion and creating a community that prospers because everyone feels welcome. This means ensuring downtown is accessible to our residents as shoppers, workers, residents, and business owners. This includes support for the City of Iowa City's designation as a "Welcoming City" to visitors that reside or visit from around the globe and advocacy 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.

1.2 Support for Under-Represented Businesses

The ICDD supports the expansion of the City of Iowa City's financial assistance for current and emerging historically under-represented businesses and property owners. The ICDD encourages and can offer support for these targeted businesses, including recruitment to be on the Board of Directors of the ICDD.

1.3 Clean & Safe

In partnership with the City of Iowa City, the ICDD believes the downtown must be fundamentally clean and safe for all community members and visitors first in order for the area to thrive. The ICDD advocates for the following to ensure this baseline is met.

- Constant and increased maintenance of the Downtown space by City, Property Owners and Tenants through timely clean up of debris, graffiti, and unexpected damages.
- The City of Iowa City tending to their infrastructure of planter beds and tree canopies where applicable.
- Resources from the ICDD and the City of Iowa City that support a tandem cleaning effort in Downtown; optimizing both organizations' contributions without overlap.

Additionally the ICDD supports a continual exploration of optimized ICDD and City of Iowa City resources towards these cleaning initiatives.

1.3.1 The ICDD supports the Iowa City Police Department's placement of a daytime police officer as a liaison to downtown stakeholders as well as other public safety resources in the evening that proactively support downtown businesses and venues. The ICDD will continue to invest in these services where positive impact is the proven result. These officers assist with issues of shoplifting, counterfeit money, and a variety of safety issues businesses may face. The ICDD also believes the ICPD's community-based approach pays dividends for local-problem solving related to serving those underserved and experiencing mental illness, addiction, and/or homelessness.

1.3.2 We support continued discussion of community safety. This includes ways the ICPD and other agencies can team up to work towards a planned community based approach to safety.

1.3.3 The ICDD advocates for City support of additional study of downtown nightlife, calls for service, and other data to guide further ICDD public safety investments. Additional data and analysis from the ICPD will help identify the appropriate services, community stakeholders and resources that could divert, prevent or deter incidents in the later evening and prevent violence downtown.

1.3.4 The ICDD supports the ICPD's use of security cameras in the downtown area if:

- Cameras are not actively monitored;
- Cameras are identified so that the public is aware they are on;
- They are used to recall video for investigative purposes and officially subpoenaed requests only; and
- Video feeds are deleted every 6 months.

1.3.5 Downtown hosts thousands of people daily in the City center, as well as large public events, live music, children's activities and a playground, a public library, and a host of other attractions and sensitive uses. The ICDD believes private citizens with firearms in Downtown creates a cause for concern and an uneasiness amongst its visitors. The ICDD acknowledges the state of Iowa's open carry firearm regulations, but encourages private businesses to display no weapons trespassing signage at their entrances.

1.4 Support for Community Services

Downtowns are often the last refuge for individuals experiencing mental illness, substance abuse, and homelessness. The ICDD advocates for the following to enhance community services supporting individuals experiencing these conditions.

1.4.1 The ICDD supports 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. Further, the ICDD advocates for CIT training community-wide where those going through the training open up the opportunity for

others to attend as possible.

1.4.2 The ICDD supports the continuation and expansion of bystander intervention training for our alcohol licenses, University student groups and interested community members.

1.5 Support for the Arts Access Initiative

Our arts community is committed to building diversity in artistry and patronage. In 2019, The Englert Theatre and FilmScene launched The Arts Access Initiative, a holistic study of arts access in Johnson County. Now, arts advocacy groups like the Downtown Arts Alliance and the Cultural & Entertainment District are using this data to expand arts access in our community and encourage additional Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) to participate in arts programming. The more diverse content, the more people of color see others like themselves in downtown venues to support a more welcoming environment.

2.0 Shape the Urban Landscape

One of the constants about downtown is that it is ever changing. The ICDD is an organization that values our history and helps guide its next chapter. The ICDD recognizes that change is hard, yet necessary for growth—both in density and diversity of offerings downtown. The ICDD acknowledges that there are challenging discussions ahead regarding height, density, redevelopment, and historic preservation; and there is no consensus on these matters in the community or amongst ICDD membership.

The ICDD supports a planning strategy that places focus on a larger area, versus looking at individual properties, to **increase predictability**. Ideally, there are clear delineations of what decisions are policy driven and therefore, made by the city council, and which are administrative, and delegated to staff.

Designing the ideal downtown of the future takes into consideration an increasingly diverse population, climate change, creating experiential retail, changes in technology, and ensuring gathering spaces are malleable and programmed for various purposes and safe for all. The ICDD wants to play a role in facilitating and leading these discussions in a concerted and thoughtful manner by listening, conducting research, educating, communicating, and innovating. Hosting forums that inform best practices that shape a quality downtown built environment and access to it is a great way to provide opportunities for strategic learning.

ICDD Positions:

2.1. Urban Character:

The ICDD believes in a “smart growth” approach to sustainable downtown development and regional growth. This approach encourages compact and more 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 the ICDD hopes 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.
- “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.
- Support land use policies and regulations that encourage sustainability and foster and encourage downtown reinvestment.
- Participate and partner in projects that serve as models for desired future development (e.g. Tailwinds Project on the 100 Block of E College St).
- Well designed taller buildings that have a positive impact on the streetscape have a place in the downtown. It is recognized that most development over 3 stories is viewed as increased downtown density.
- A mix of housing types (apartments and condos, student and community, low-income to market rate) will keep a balance of income and young to older generations living downtown. When this mix is out of balance, incentives should be offered to housing developers and landlords to meet the objective.
- 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.
- Alleys are an opportunity to be used not only for solid waste, recycling, and deliveries. Our alleys can also become a destination, utilized as green alleyways with opportunities to view and participate in public art, and to become beloved walkways connecting other downtown destinations.

In addition, the City conducted a [Downtown and Pedestrian Mall Streetscape Update Plan](#) in 2014 to support the revitalization of and reinvestment in Downtown Iowa City. The ICDD advocates for continuing the implementation of standards outlined in the 2014 Streetscape Update Plan used to guide the renovation completion of Dubuque St. in 2024

2.2 Land Use Regulations

The 2019 [Downtown and Riverfront Crossing Master Plan](#) update (Downtown Comprehensive Plan or RFC Plan) provides land use guidance for the Downtown and Riverfront Crossings area. The ICDD supports the general guidance of the plan but acknowledges map heights in this plan are not necessarily a prescribed density. The following options could help de-politicize proposed projects considerably:

1. An administrative clarification added in the rear Appendix of the Downtown Comprehensive Plan on page 112 on a map entitled “Heights” that states the following: “This map was developed to provide market projections of possible heights of downtown development in 2009 and is not to be used as a regulatory guide for actual development or renovations projects, where the downtown zoning code prevails.” OR
2. Ensure that the zoning code and maps within the Comprehensive Plan are in alignment. For example, the zoning code does not permit one-story development downtown and this same map indicates properties where it is a “preferred height.”

The ICDD supports The City of Iowa City’s desire to explore a Form Based Code (FBC) through a comprehensive/zoning code approach to zoning land use for both Downtown proper and the Northside neighborhoods (www.formbasedcodes.org) to help streamline development and preserve character.

As it pertains to land use, zoning, and regulatory code compliance, the ICDD advocates for:

- A Form Based Code approach for the Northside neighborhood density.
- A zoning approach for the downtown core proximate to the pedestrian mall that allows the market to express demand for buildings at a variety of heights and uses while balancing the needs & wants of the community and preserving streetscape.
- Review parking regulations to downtown renovations and investments to support infill projects and additional housing opportunities for long-term community members.
- Exploration of downtown parking regulations in the special exception process, especially as it relates to the shallow nature of the local water table (detering underground parking) and the size of smaller property footprints that may not allow a development to accommodate the required parking on the site without demolishing adjacent properties.
- Review of the intent and outcomes of the “500-foot rule”. Explore a replacing Entertainment Management Plan (EMP) that maintains a competitive and fair business environment with areas outside of Downtown.
- Review of TIF Policy to ensure TIF or tax abatement incentives are effectively promoting development in line with downtown urban character while enhancing public benefits.

Last, the ICDD developed Design Guidelines in partnership with the City of Iowa City to support business openings downtown, quality sign standards, and storefront enhancements. High quality design standards are important to attract other high quality businesses. ICDD advocates the City of Iowa City stand behind these principles by encouraging business owners to achieve these signage [standards](#).

2.3 Support for Fair Commercial Leasing Standards

The ICDD supports landlord and tenant lease terms that provide a clear and positive business opportunity for both entities. As a rule of negotiation, each party should fully understand the lease terms and expect that all terms may possibly come to bear.

The ICDD supports negotiating lease terms that are mutually favorable. There are lease terms that are seen as “predatory” which include one or more of the following:

- Committing financial responsibility for major building improvements on the tenant, such as expensive equipment failures, external building repairs, roofing, or structural issues that are typically the financial role of the property owner.
- Allowing the landlord to involuntarily relocate tenants from one suite or building into another for their own objectives without mutual support, usually to attract or retain other tenants.
- No, or poor, subordination, non-disturbance, and atonement (SNDA) terms. Without it, a landlord may sell the property to a new owner that may then have the right to strike a lease agreement, evict the tenant, or negotiate a new agreement despite the terms of the old agreement.
- Permission for the property owner to exercise an early termination clause whereby the landlord may terminate a lease with only written notice by the landlord based upon redevelopment plans, the sale of the property, which nullifies the lease with no payment or relocation costs.

In these scenarios, tenants have significant cost exposure. If a landlord is seen to have these predatory terms in their lease, the ICDD will directly communicate with the landlord. Only after direct communication efforts, the District may take positions against landlords that are seen to lease in a “predatory manner and, as a last-resort action, disqualify the owner from District programs.

Because of their implications for a strong and vibrant downtown, the ICDD will offer lease clinics for both tenants and landlords to ensure both entities have the opportunity to better understand commercial leases, negotiating lease addendums and viewing current building inspections.

2.4. Housing for the Community

The ICDD supports the City’s goal of increasing the affordable housing stock, including in the downtown area. Affordable housing is defined as a household spending no more than 30% of their income on rent or mortgage and utilities. The ICDD similarly supports mixed-use development that incorporates residential units targeted towards long-term tenants as a particular need of downtown neighborhoods.

- To give higher consideration for developments that create affordable housing over those opting for a fee-in-lieu.
- Additionally, support housing in Downtown that meets the needs of the ‘missing middle’ above the published HUD housing income qualifications and below the market rate.

2.5 Remove Incentives for College-Oriented Housing Development

The current ratio of student to community housing downtown is out of balance and impacts the downtown market by strengthening the market demand for traditional student offerings (pizza, beer, and coffee). In order to offer a stronger merchandise mix targeted at the larger community, the ICDD advocates for incentives for community-based housing at mixed income ranges and a removal of incentives for student housing identified in the [Downtown and Riverfront Crossings Master Plan](#).

2.6 Access and Mobility

The ICDD supports study of the Iowa City area's mobility systems to assess and address the growing demand for safe, clean, green, reliable, accessible and affordable transportation options that serve businesses, residents and visitors alike. The ICDD advocates for:

A New Vision for Transit for the entire Iowa City region that:

- Expands on existing electric buses to support the economy, provide a cleaner alternative to automobiles and diesel engines, reduce road congestion, and to continue to provide a safe, reliable, and equitable mobility service.
- Create a consistent and timely public transit schedule.
- Expands busing on Sundays and exploring “on demand” transportation options
Support a pilot of system wide no fare transit.
- Fosters public transportation solutions through Transportation Network Companies (TNC) pilot opportunities.
- Support regional rail or bus rapid transit servicing Downtown Iowa City.
- Support University of Iowa’s exploration of a tram system moving people safely and efficiently across the Iowa River.

Street Design Downtown, that:

- Considers input from downtown stakeholders before modifications are made.
- Plans for future streamlined servicing to keep on street amenities maintained (e.g. electrical and lighting).
- Changes Market and Jefferson Streets from one-way to two-way to support accessibility to the Northside from Dubuque Street. This change is critical to the success of this retail neighborhood.
- Support for street design and parking changes to increase mobility and safety for both motorized and non-motorized traffic while ensuring there is sufficient parking for visiting shoppers.
- Carefully reviewing safest locations to support new bike lanes downtown that do not conflict with critical operations (deliveries, utilities, and visitor parking).

Addressing Parking Needs, such as:

- A study of flex parking that provides additional on-street metered parking on Burlington Street from Gilbert to Clinton Streets.

- Prioritizing parking in ramps for visitors and business employee permits above others (residents / students) by requesting this information when providing permits.
- Advocating the University of Iowa to encourage students to leave cars at home and instead of driving utilize free University and City bus/shuttles, E-bikes, Uber/Lyft, bicycles, and walking.
- Encouraging delivery trucks to temporarily park on-street to preserve parking for patrons as the best method to preserve parking spaces in front of stores.
- Encouraging delivery trucks to drop inventory prior to 11 am daily.
- Strengthen enforcement of illegal parking downtown.

Addressing Aging Parking Facilities by:

- Installing systems to help patrons know which garages have capacity.

Creating a bike friendly environment that:

- Expands bike trails and lanes to encourage safe biking options to and from downtown.
- When downtown, encourage bikers to share the slow-moving downtown street multi-modal lanes or get off bikes to walk to encourage comprehensive safety of all downtown traffic. This may entail removing bike lanes that currently are in conflict with loading zones, delivery drivers, and short-term parked cars.
- Increases bike parking downtown and across the area.

2.7 Sidewalk and Street Cafes and Open Dining Opportunities

Iowa City cafes create an unmatched vibrancy that benefit the business, the ICDD and the City. The ICDD commissioned a Sidewalk Cafe Case Study Report in March 2021 to analyze a variety of cities across the country and their approach to outdoor dining policy post COVID-19. The cities selected were other cold weather cities finding ways to embrace all four seasons, even when the temperatures drop. The case studies presented some alternative solutions to similar challenges of promoting and regulating outdoor dining and entertainment in downtown.

- The report recommends encouraging private investment in the outdoors as a way to support a 4-seasons environment. The ICDD continues to advocate for cafe opportunities for nightlife businesses. If the cafes are mismanaged, the City maintains its right to revoke the permit.

2.8 Historic Preservation:

In 2017, the City of Iowa City commissioned a Downtown Historic Survey to document the history of the buildings, the people, and the downtown area and to gain recommendations for its preservation. The ICDD supported one of the Survey's key accomplishments, which was the City of Iowa City's 2021 listing of Downtown Iowa City as a National Register of Historic Places. The survey has many other recommendations that are more complex and could require regulatory changes related to zoning.

The vitality of properties and their tenant businesses are crucial to the success of downtown, and achieving a common ground between what is appropriate for the contemporary retail environment and what contributes historically should be considered. The public process for establishing next steps for historic preservation downtown should include the ICDD and these stakeholders. Those who steward these properties currently have valuable information to share and exchange that will help support a robust conversation about preservation and how to best achieve it.

The goals of the ICDD will be to explore ways to achieve balance between incentives provided by the City and any possible requirements of owners with historic properties. The ICDD advocates for public financial support (such as tax relief) to ensure the costs of historic preservation and its importance to the entire community is shared.

2.8.1 Incentivize Historic Preservation - In April, 2021, the ICDD conducted a survey of property owners on historic preservation that demonstrated that downtown stewards would be very motivated by additional opt-in incentives as part of downtown preservation. Such incentives are also included in [The Iowa City Historic Preservation Commission current work plan](#).

2.8.2 New Guidelines and Supportive Process - Current Iowa City Historic Preservation Guidelines don't adequately address commercial buildings but utilize the Secretary of Interior's Guidelines as a default. The City should develop with the Historic Preservation Commission and Downtown District clear and easy to understand guidelines about what is or isn't allowed to a local landmark building in commercial areas.

For consideration:

- Allow discretion and flexibility of which historic era of the building should be preserved;
- Establish a framework that encourages preservation as an incentive for collaborative development processes, with the new College Street development as a leading example;
- Provide clear guidance for mitigation and signage and other educational opportunities that celebrate the history of the site or preserved building;
- Establish clear guidelines that prioritize City goals related to sustainability and preservation, especially where increased levels of natural light meet data-driven social, environmental, and economic sustainability goals.
- Tools to support accessibility and make historic buildings work better today, such as the allowance of smaller elevator shafts in local landmarked buildings with small footprints.

These guidelines should be directed at current and new landmark buildings also zoned commercial. In tandem, the City should provide adequate staff time or third-party consultant support to ensure they can reasonably be available to address applications.

2.8.3 Third Party Review - The City should hire a third-party consultant approved by the HPC and ICDD to approve the historic review of commercial landmark buildings, based on the

guidelines developed by the City and approved by HPC. This use of a consultant in this manner would be similar to the current process the City uses for Tax Increment Financing projects that undergo third-party review by the National Development Council. The process would support a more consistent, predictable, and expedited time frame that addresses one of the primary reasons stewards of historic buildings are not interested in officially listing properties. The consultant could also provide regular updates on projects approved by the HPC.

2.8.4 Opt-In Incentives - Similarly, consider the following financial incentivization for those that Opt-In to local listing:

- Provide professional support for state and federal tax credit applications (shared cost);
- Establish a revolving loan for approved tax credit projects whereby the City allocates funds early that get paid back by the owner when tax credits eventually are realized from the state; and
- Freeze property tax levels on newly listed historic properties to current levels for a period of time (e.g. 10 years or a phased tax increase to assessed market level during later years).

2.9 Strengthen a Diverse Economy

2.9.1 Support for Retail - Business retention and recruitment is important to the ICDD; striving to achieve a balanced mix of community-serving versus visitor / student-oriented retail. This requires City support and attention from other economic development organizations. The ICDD advocate for:

- Financial incentives to help attract and recruit retailers that meet the co-sponsored City-ICDD 2014 Retail Strategy and 2019 Retail Strategy Update for community-based soft retail goods.
- Financial, TIF assistance, parking reductions or other departures for building improvements that would support improving the accessibility of older properties and retaining independent retailers as a community benefit.
- City support for ICDD-led retail initiatives that enhance the built and regulatory environment.

2.9.2 Support for Local Arts Economy - Local art and culture venues support 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 one of many 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. The ICDD advocates for:

- Restoration of a meaningful financial commitment to the City's Public Arts Program.
- Fair pay for artisans and the development of paid art opportunities.

- City commitment to support the preservation of existing cultural venues and operations as needed.
- Supporting the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs 2022 Downtown Culture & Entertainment District in partnership through marketing and financial support.

2.9.3 Support for Historically Marginalized Businesses - The ICDD advocates for City and County public programs that provide financial incentives for underestimated businesses and cultural entities. The ICDD can do our part by inviting these businesses to review our vacant spaces and supporting connections with property owners.

Partnering with other area organizations and institutions to offer guidance, introductions, and support for historically marginalized businesses to ensure they have equal access to financial institutions, programs, and businesses services in our area.

2.10 Continue Building a Resilient Economy: The history of Downtown Iowa City has shown that business resilience has helped the area weather significant disruptive local and global economic variables, such as the 2020 Coronavirus Pandemic. In the future, the ICDD believes strengthening downtown as a destination will continue to fortify the economy. Creating a four-season downtown with ongoing bold and authentic programs and a business climate that meets customers wherever they are, virtually or physically, further our resiliency goals.

2.10.1 Excite through significant winter public arts installation - The ICDD advocates for City support and partnership with local hotels and University sponsors and partners on winter public art installations or activities that entice the public to get active and out in the winter season (e.g. Winter Night Lights, 2023).

2.10.2 Reimagine Our Streetscapes - Post-coronavirus pandemic, people have found more importance in being outdoors, walking and biking over cars, and are interested in more space in the public right of way. Therefore, we see the future construction of Dubuque Street as a model to reimagine the 2014 Downtown Streetscape Plan. Such an update would incorporate the following recommendations:

Establish a flexible design of Dubuque Street that allows easy transition of the street during special events and winter that enhances the entry into Downtown Iowa City. Specifically:

- Monument features that establish you are in Downtown Iowa City
- Bollards;
- Flexible parking and loading - consideration of reducing paved lines;
- Unique ambient lighting;
- Sustainable features;
- Infrastructure for outdoor heating;
- Extended cafe opportunities;

- Connection with an improved, resurfaced “arts” alley.

Streetscape projects could be advanced for a future State grant (Vision Iowa or Enhance Iowa) for upcoming State placemaking initiatives.

2.11 Create a Hub of Integrated Neighborhoods

Public input from the 2019 ICDD community survey suggests that the community places a high value on Downtown Iowa City and the operations of the ICDD and they would like to see more opportunities to connect Downtown with other neighborhoods of the City. As an organization, the ICDD advocates for the following as a means to support our larger vision of serving as a “hub” connecting all Iowa City neighborhoods and our surrounding cities together.

2.11.1 Connections through Public Art - The ICDD advocates for the City or other public art programs to invest in and carry themes that serve to connect downtown and other community neighborhoods or local communities together. The ICDD will similarly invest in public art programming that demonstrates our shared history, education and pride between downtown and the larger neighborhood system as one community.

2.11.2 Foster new and expanded SSMID opportunities and/or neighborhood partnerships - Based on feedback from stakeholders in the Riverfront Crossings district area south of Burlington St and north of the Iowa Interstate Railroad, there is an interest in being part of a SSMID, but there is a need for a champion or organization to gather around. For this reason, ICDD will continue to foster relationships with these stakeholders to explore if a SSMID is the proper tool to support this neighborhood as the ICDD looks toward renewal in 2026.

Because many stakeholders agree it is within the ICDD’s benefit to work collaboratively with emerging areas and new businesses that may impact the downtown market and City and ICDD service areas, the ICDD advocates to support new neighborhood organizations by being a guiding example of a successful SSMID. Areas such as the South District area can learn from the history of the ICDD that has been established for a decade.

ICDD will continue to support new neighborhood organizations who want to learn how the ICDD was founded and functions. ICDD leadership and staff will make a pointed effort to inform other interested neighborhoods of its own story, the path toward successful organization, the most impactful utilization of SSMID dollars, and the legal and other considerations to encourage a united voice that would serve as a sister organization and co-collaborator with the ICDD. Neighborhoods working together, instead of apart, will build a stronger, healthier Iowa City area community.

2.11.3 Create flexible incentives to support the top goals of Iowa City’s Self-Supporting Municipal Improvement Districts and other commercial nodes, including attaining a desired business mix that serves the surrounding neighborhood.

2.11.4 Incentivize Investment in the Individual Commercial Properties Community-Wide - The City should encourage the care and investment in all commercial areas of Iowa City so that all small business owners have similar investment opportunities. The ICDD advocates for government incentives to support continuous investment into the commercial areas of the City through programs such as matching facade and signage grants.

2.12 Support the [Better Together 2030 Vision and Implementation](#)

As the signature hub of a larger region, the health of Johnson County overall is critical to a symbiotic economic ecosystem. As such, the ICDD supports the five focus areas of the Better Together 2030 partnership and vision plan to become:

- Champions of the natural environment
- Providers of authentic, vibrant neighborhoods and districts
- A well-connected mobile region
- A thriving Inclusive economic ecosystem; and
- A re-imagined human and social services community.

The Downtown District supports:

- An overall regional plan that aligns with ICDD Strategic Initiatives supporting the vision for economic development, community development and cultural endeavors.
- Strengthening the downtown regional bus transit hub to include efficient incoming and outgoing employees and visitor mobility from a new Bus Rapid Transit system.
- The coordination of maintenance and construction projects with and between the City and UI to reduce the number of disruptions to downtown pedestrian and vehicular traffic.
- Support for collaborative downtown events with these partners to help familiarize, welcome, and promote local shopping, employment, participation in the arts and culture scene, and welcoming of new, long-term community members.
- Livable neighborhoods throughout Johnson County that have efficient public transit access to downtown.

3.0 Draw Visitors and Community to 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.

ICDD Positions:

3.1 Bring to Life Underutilized Spaces (Placemaking)

The ICDD supports activating underused areas of downtown to ensure their safety and to promote the relevance of our downtown as a dynamic place to engage with the community.

Specifically:

- Continued, predictable annual 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. If the funding was predictable and secure, the ICDD could plan for traveling national exhibits that are enjoyed in other cities. Without predictability of funding, this type of art will likely not visit Iowa City.
- Urban Acupuncture that targets private business frontages contributing to the public environment in Downtown through art interventions.
- Implementation of a simple and flexible City approval process for temporary public art projects that use or otherwise activate public spaces.

3.1.1 Activate the University of Iowa Pentacrest. - The ICDD advocates to University of Iowa leadership to invest in the Pentacrest yard as an opportunity to welcome and encourage activities in the largest green space available to downtown. Opportunities include wrapping and uplighting trees, uplighting and lining Pentacrest buildings with lights, allowing additional projection art, and programming all season activities throughout the Pentacrest with emphasis on the flat yard along Clinton Street.

3.2 Draw Feet in the Street (Events)

The ICDD advocates for events that draw people downtown, supports the downtown economy, and fosters art, music, and literary advancements. Recognizing that the Downtown landscape is a living and breathing ecosystem of businesses in need of customer traffic, utility access corridors, and pathways for people and deliveries, events require a thoughtful approach in order to keep business operations from being significantly disrupted. Collaboration with our local businesses and properties is an easy way to encourage diverse, integrated and successful events for the entire community.

We advocate event producers for:

- Minimal requests for street closures that have significant negative impacts on soft-good retailers.
- Prioritization of support for downtown businesses over outside vendors.
- Communication and accommodation of brick-and-mortar businesses when planning the event layout to minimize, where possible, the blocking of businesses by vendors or entertainment.
- Encourage current and future events in the public right of way to consult the [City of Iowa City Event Toolkit](#) when planning.
- Overnight dismantling of event infrastructure and cleaning of the event area.

3.3 Continuation of ICDD Place Management Opportunities

The ICDD is interested and has capacity to manage the Weather Dance Fountain Stage banner

system as it does the Street Pole Banner system so that all event producers have equitable access to the stage and a method to receive accurate measurements and opportunities for advanced marketing. Currently, different departments of the City provide the stage access, lighting opportunities, and access to the banners system yet the process to access these tools isn't yet streamlined or public facing. Streamlining this management through the ICDD team will allow increased and accessible use for more interested parties.

3.4 Foster a Vibrant Nighttime Atmosphere (Nighttime Initiative)

In 2017, the ICDD invested in a new Nighttime Mayor position to provide resource support and advocacy to nighttime businesses while engaging residents, visitors, students and employees seeking to interact with these businesses. The ICDD is working to activate public spaces downtown that are inviting people of all ages and helps enforce the perception of downtown nightlife as a community asset. The ICDD continually needs support from the City and UI to explore best practices from other cities, a review of local regulations, and ultimately the development of policies and programs that encourage an evenly robust downtown environment for all.

The following items are opportunities to support nightlife in a harmonious neighborhood.

- We support a change in State administration and regulations to allow local City control of liquor licenses, so that a simpler regulatory environment could be explored that would allow additional flexibility for restaurants to open past 12am while ensuring liquor license holders are accountable for their contributions to a clean, safe, and vibrant nightlife.
- Explore opportunities to mitigate potential nuisances related to noise, music management, and alcohol license abuses using an "Entertainment Management Plan" that could replace the rule that excludes a bar within 500-feet from another bar and that precludes restaurants from being open past 12am.
- Support a City Code ordinance for new residential infill and redevelopment property owners to perform sound level studies and noise abatement on their structure relative to the existing neighborhood sound.
- Continued support from harm reduction funding for urban acupuncture interventions such as lighting and restricting unauthorized public access to private properties in nightlife that speak to the perception of downtown and the safety of its inhabitants.
- Businesses sharing supportive social services and divergent care available in our community that are particularly sought out by nightlife employees and patrons such as 9-8-8, the Guidelink Center, RVAP and Mobile Crisis. ICDD will advocate for broad community safety initiatives that encompass a comprehensive approach to these challenging issues faced across downtown.