



Chapter 3

Downtown Survey

IT IS IMPORTANT IN A PLANNING PROCESS TO CONSIDER THE OPINIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE PEOPLE WHO KNOW THE COMMUNITY WELL - ITS RESIDENTS, BUSINESS OWNERS, PROPERTY OWNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS. A downtown survey for the Mason City downtown was carried out by The Mason City Downtown Association in the Fall of 2005. The survey asked questions about encouraging new investments and private partnerships, improving economic condition of the downtown and creating new opportunities for economic and physical development of the city.

In addition, a series of focus group and community meetings involving stakeholders was conducted by RDG as a component of the downtown planning process. This chapter summarizes the major findings from the downtown survey and the focus group meetings.

Downtown Survey Questions

A series of questions regarding new business developments, private investments and economic improvement in the downtown were asked in the 2005 survey. The survey questions included:

1. What can be done to encourage new business in downtown?
2. What type of public/private partnerships could be utilized to improve the economic and physical condition of the downtown?
3. How can the city encourage private investments in the downtown?
4. What other things could be done to encourage private investments in the downtown?
5. What private financial vehicles can be utilized to improve the downtown economic and physical conditions?

The respondents identified the following actions or policies to encourage new business in downtown:

- Financial Incentives, including Tax Increment Financing (TIF), Tax Abatement, Low Interest Loans, and Other Public and Private Incentives
- Marketing Strategies
- Affordable Rent
- More Restaurants / Entertainment

In response to what type of Public/Private Partnerships could be utilized to improve the economic and physical condition of the Downtown, the responses were;

- Partner with NIACC and utilize the Pappajohn Center and Small Business Department
- Chamber of Commerce, City and EDC
- Neighborhood Groups and Landlords
- Downtown Association (needs additional public support)
- Grant Matching Program with the City
- SSMID: Self Supporting Municipal Improvement District

The responses to how the city could encourage private investments in the Downtown included the following:

- Tax Incentives and Funding Assistance
- Relax Building and Remodeling Codes



- Increased Zoning Flexibility
- Marketing Strategy
- Increase Participation in Downtown Association
- Aesthetic improvements are needed
- Locate Investor Group

The list of responses to what private financial vehicles can be utilized to improve the Downtown economic and physical conditions were;

- Tax Increment Financing (TIF)
- Increase Volunteerism
- Loan Programs: Revolving Loan fund, Low Interest Loans, etc.

In October, 2006 RDG conducted five stakeholder Group meetings to solicit input from specific interest groups. A total of thirty-six people attended these meetings, which consisted of representatives from the following groups:

- Business Groups
- Business and property owners
- Real Estate/Bankers
- Cultural and Non-profit groups
- Government Officials

Key issues identified and discussed in these stakeholder group meetings included the following:

1. Land Use
2. Traffic Patterns
3. Marketing
4. Housing
5. Special Events
6. Generating Support
7. Bring People Downtown
8. Investment/Financing
9. Cultural District
10. Southbridge Mall
11. Parking
12. Wright on the Park
13. Economic Development
14. Rents
15. Central Park



Based upon public input and prior downtown area studies, the following priorities emerged as the primary focus of Mason City's downtown revitalization efforts:

Southbridge Mall

- Support continued vitality
- Create linkage to Willow Creek recreational trails
- Enhance pedestrian accessibility
- Improve linkages to other downtown attractions
- Improve vehicular approach from south
- Beautify mall property

Traffic Patterns

- Propose conversion of one-ways to two way
- Enhance linkages between downtown and adjacent districts

Housing

- Identify sites for infill new construction
- Identify priority adaptive reuse opportunities

Parking for Wright Hotel

- Identify solution for hotel parking on adjacent bank site
- Investigate on-street parking alternatives

Streetscape/Wayfinding

- Identify brand/logo for M.C.
- Identify gateway locations and preliminary signage design
- Identify conceptual improvements for Federal at Southbridge north entrance
- Identify preliminary design elements for unified downtown streetscape program, including alleys
- Identify priorities for downtown landscaping improvements

