

BOONE, IOWA

APRIL 26-28, 2023



Conducted by:

Iowa Downtown Resource Center



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PURPOSE

The Boone County Chamber of Commerce and community leaders worked with the Iowa Downtown Resource Center, Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA), to conduct a Downtown Assessment to raise awareness, educate, make recommendations, and encourage the local community. In conducting this and other “self-discovery” processes, Boone has begun to empower itself by stepping out of its comfort zone. It is a good sign that the community appears ready to make plans and turn them into actions to address the challenges and opportunities in the downtown.

This assessment and its recommendations should serve as a call to action and provide the community with current information to formulate strategies necessary to address the very serious issue of saving and improving the downtown for future generations.

This report cannot and does not provide ALL the answers. Ultimately, Boone’s citizens must decide what is relevant and realistic, prioritize options, and acquire necessary resources as they address Downtown’s future.

**“Never doubt that a small group of committed
dependable citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”
-Margaret Mead**

OVERVIEW

This Downtown Assessment report and recommendations for Boone are based on the Team's downtown development experience – totaling nearly 100 years. Their beliefs are grounded by the philosophy that for Downtown to re-establish itself as the social and commercial center of the community – the physical heart and soul of the city – Downtown must become more valuable physically, economically, socially, and politically.

The health of Downtown has a direct impact upon the entire community's economic well-being. They are inter-related. Downtown revitalization IS economic development. Downtown is a prime location for incubating small business, it is an affordable location for independent businesses and is historically one of the community's major employers. The commercial center provides a compact environment with multiple stories for commerce, government, and living spaces, thus reducing sprawl and the cost associated with extending city services and infrastructure. The pedestrian friendly environment is convenient and accessible, serving as the center (community space) for not only commercial trade but also a hub for cultural, social, and civic engagement. A building's condition, the business' viability, and maximization of the building's square footage for income generation, affect not only the property's value, but also the value of the neighboring properties and real estate in the entire community. Investments in Downtown allow it to "pay its fair share" in taxes resulting in lessening the tax burdens of its citizens and city government.



Most of our memories are directly associated with a PLACE. We "go back" to places we feel good about. We "go back" to places where we have had positive experiences. We "go back" to places where we have had fun. We "go back" to places we think are important. We are also attracted to places where we think we will have a positive experience. We must strive to keep Downtown a "go to" kind of destination, not an avoidable area we pass by on our way to destinations located on the outskirts of town.

The following report summarizes the observations and recommendations resulting from an Iowa Downtown Resource Center Assessment conducted in Boone, Iowa.

The Team's familiarization process with Boone began with a review of materials supplied to us prior to the visit, a pre-visit online survey consisting of 365 completed surveys, a driving tour of the city and a walking tour of the downtown district.

The intensive three-day visit also included interviews with approximately 120 community leaders, individuals and groups representing the public and private sectors. Based upon these activities and the Assessment Team's extensive working knowledge in downtown economic development, this report summarizes their findings and recommendations for downtown Boone.

ASSESSMENT TEAM

The Iowa Economic Development Authority's Assessment Team included six downtown development professionals:

JIM ENGLE, Director, Iowa Downtown Resource Center, Iowa Economic Development Authority, Des Moines, Iowa. Jim has been with IEDA since January 2014. As director of the Iowa Downtown Resource Center, he



oversees all downtown development programs of the authority. His current responsibilities include managing a million-dollar annual budget, overseeing the planning and delivery of technical assistance services, and developing training opportunities for all Iowa communities. Jim's areas of expertise are in organizational development, promotion, business development and working with smaller communities with populations ranging from 400 to 80,000. Prior to joining the IEDA, Jim served as Coordinator of the Wisconsin Main Street Program for 23 years.

He also served as the Main Street Executive Director in Oskaloosa, Iowa. He holds a degree in Business Management from Central College in Pella, Iowa. Over the years, Jim has consulted for Main Street programs in Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Washington, Tennessee, and Michigan. He has also presented at many national downtown conferences.

JEFF GEERTS, EcoDistricts AP, NCI CS & CM Special Projects Manager, Iowa Economic Development Authority, Des Moines, Iowa. Working for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources for 15 years and the Iowa Economic



Development Authority for the last 14 years, Jeff has more than 25 years of grant writing, grant management, and program development experience with an emphasis on environmentally sustainable development. Jeff's expertise is matching up a community's vision with the resources to make the vision a reality. Jeff is actively involved with several nonprofit organizations and currently is a board member of Des Moines Heritage Trust. For 20+ years Jeff programmed an award-winning international comparative policy course in best practices for community leaders and graduate public administration students at Drake University. Along with being an EcoDistricts Accredited Professional and certified in the National Charrette

Institute's Charrette System and Charrette Management, Jeff has a Bachelor of Science degree in management science and statistics from St. Ambrose University and master's degree in public administration from Drake University.

SARAH LEMBKE, AIA, is the Downtown Building Rehabilitation Specialist for Main Street Iowa and the Iowa Downtown Resource Center. In this role, she provides design services to Main Street Iowa



communities, including facade renderings, designs for public spaces, and floor plans for upper story housing. Sarah enjoys working with building owners to determine how to balance the long-term physical preservation of their properties with the current demands of their businesses, residential tenants, and other users. She holds a Bachelor of Architecture from Iowa State University and a Master of Science in Heritage Conservation and Preservation from the University of Minnesota. Prior to joining the Iowa Downtown Resource Center team, Sarah worked in private practice as a historic architect in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

TIM REINDERS is a downtown revitalization consultant with over 30 years' experience. He has been a local director in Clinton, Iowa as well as working as a Design Specialist at Main Street Iowa. In his



role at Main Street Iowa, he provided design services and training to communities across the state. He has also worked in a number of states across the country and has conducted training and presentations at numerous conferences and seminars. He has been involved in local, state and national community development organizations. Tim studied architecture and community and regional planning at Iowa State University.

DENNIS REYNOLDS delivers award winning master planning, urban design, site design and public art with his unique combination of innovative design; presentation and listening skills; quick hand drawings; and pro-active facilitation of the design process. Prior to creating his own consulting practice, Reynolds Urban Design, he provided senior level design services and leadership at HOK (Kansas City), Sasaki (Boston) and NBBJ (Columbus). He founded and led the innovative HOK S+V+E “Design Studio,” facilitating cutting edge multi-disciplined design



concepts. His major projects include Ho Chi Minh City’s Thu Thiem Peninsula Master Plan, Nanjing Olympic Sports Park (that hosted the 2005 China Games and the 2008 Summer Olympics), The Great American Ballpark for the Cincinnati Reds and the Dubai Autodrome Formula One Racing Community. As Director of Design for a major Midwest real estate development company from 2005 to 2011, Dennis was responsible for groundbreaking projects including the “New Urbanist” Village of Ponderosa and “Shimmer” lakeside terrace. Recent projects include urban design, site design and public art for the emerging downtown Des Moines Bridge District, the North Kansas City Vision Plan, East Village’s City Square, Bondurant’s Swings and Fireflies, Overland Park Medical Center’s “Heritage” public art trail and Edina Grandview Urban Design Concepts. Dennis has a Bachelor of Arts from Wheaton College with concentrations in Fine Arts, Economics and Group Dynamics and a Master of Landscape Architecture from Kansas State University.

TRAVIS TOLIVER, IOM Currently, in his ninth year serving as Executive Director for the Waverly Chamber of Commerce and the Waverly Main Street Program, Travis continues to use his acquired skills to help better the Waverly business community and the Cedar Valley of Northeast Iowa. He serves on the board of directors for



the Mid-American Chamber Executives (2024 Chair), Iowa Association of Chambers of Commerce, Waverly Area Development Fund, Waverly Chamber Music Series, Waverly Economic Development Commission, Wartburg College's National Leadership Advisory Board and Waverly's Sister City organization which helps to foster and maintain relations between Waverly, Iowa and Eisenach, Germany. In 2020, Travis graduated from the Institute for Organizational Management, a four-year professional development program of the US

Chamber of Commerce Foundation. Travis is highly sought after as a consultant, facilitator, and public speaker throughout the Midwest in the areas of leadership, customer service, relationship building, board governance/orientations and strategic planning. He is also an accomplished voiceover artist, emcee, narrator, and opera/musical theater performer.

INTRODUCTION

Boone (population 12,400) is the county seat of Boone County. This central Iowa city on U.S. Route 30 lies just west of Ames, Iowa and north of the Des Moines metro area. Boone has a rich coal mining and railroad history.



It is served by the mainline of the Union Pacific Railroad and it does not take visitors long to recognize the importance of the railroad to Boone. Pufferbilly Days, one of Iowa's largest festivals, attracts over 30,000 attendees and pays tribute to the railroad and trains. The Boone & Scenic Valley Railroad allows visitors to view Boone and the river valley via train, possibly even a dinner train or similar excursion, and the James H. Andrew Railroad Museum is another interesting attraction. The community also boasts plentiful recreation opportunities such as the beautiful Ledges State Park, an excellent city park system (including J.B.

McHose Park), a well-attended Farm Progress Show and the IMCA Super Nationals held at Boone Speedway. Boone is also "home office" for Fareway Grocery Stores.

Downtown Boone, as you would expect from the community's history, is full of interesting, historic buildings with great architecture. Downtown Boone has several multi-story buildings often not seen in communities its size. Many of the buildings need rehabilitation, some minor and some total rehabs. The entry to the downtown via Story Street is spectacular with its historic homes and mature trees. Residents yearn for the downtown district that they remember...a district with abundant retail stores. Ironically, the district does indeed have a nice core of businesses. Some go unnoticed by the local populace. The community has made a concerted effort to bring people downtown with a green space, entertainment venue, weekly events and Farmers Markets. These events are popular with Boone residents.



Members of the Downtown Assessment Team believe the identification of strengths and challenges should be taken constructively and utilized by local leaders to do many good things in the downtown. We hope the following observations and recommendations will help identify priorities and provide the motivation to shift from planning – to action.



Prior to the assessment visit, the Iowa Downtown Resource Center administered an online survey to residents of Boone to get their ideas and opinions about the downtown area. A total of 365 people participated in the survey. A complete summary of survey responses for the pre-assessment surveys completed online is available as an attachment.

PRE-ASSESSMENT VISIT SURVEY trends show... (number of responses in parenthesis)

What is downtown Boone's greatest strength?

- Location: (133)
- Downtown buildings (69)
 - However, the need for work on buildings was communicated.
- Downtown businesses (54)
- Promotional events (52)
- Appearance/Cleanliness (38)



What is downtown Boone's greatest weakness?

- Lack of downtown businesses (189)
- Not enough to do (85)
- Appearance/Cleanliness (37)
- Other (34)
 - Parking was most popular response.
- Downtown buildings (30)



If you were given \$100,000 to invest in the downtown, how would you use the funds?

- Update/maintain/restore/paint/re-roof historic buildings (120)
- Start a new business/Fill storefront/Incentives/Less junk stores/More variety (87)
 - Restaurant mentioned specifically on 21 of the surveys.
- Something for kids/teens/families (37)
 - Popular responses include rec center, splash pad, children's museum and bowling.
- General dress up and cleanup of downtown (14)
- More parking/Parking signage (11)
- Plant trees/Plantings/Benches (10)
- Turn large, empty lot into meeting place/playground/community garden (9)
- Enhance greenspace/Add fountain/Close part of Story for pedestrians (6)
- More events/entertainment/Expand Farmers Market (6)



What type of new business do you think is most needed in downtown Boone?

- Restaurant (129)
 - Most popular...Upscale/nicer, breakfast, café, burgers
- Clothing/Boutique (36)
- Arcade/family fun/splash pad/bowling alley/skating rink (34)
- Shoes (25)



- Coffee (13)
- Anything but antiques (11)
- Stores that cater to kids/teens (10)
- Rec center/Gym/Indoor pool (8)
- A venue/Community center (7)
- General store/Variety (6)

What type of new activity would make you want to spend time in the downtown?

- Concerts/Live music (48)
- More shops/Shopping (33)
- Bowling alley (22)
- Something for kids and teens (19)
- Rec center/Fitness center/pool (17)
- Family fun activities (16)
- Restaurants (16)
- Food trucks/Food court (14)
- Bigger farmers market/Here later in the day (14)
- Arcade (11)
- More events on greenspace (7)
- Evening arts events/Art Walk/Sip n' Paint/Make and Take Art (7)



Which public amenities do you think are most needed downtown?

- Places for kids (181)
- Parking (104)
- Public art (98)
- Street seating (70)
- Street trees (43)
- Better sidewalks (42)
- Other (40)
 - Public restrooms was a frequent response



What is your age?

- Under 15 (0%)
- 15-25 (4.08%)
- 26-35 (19.84%)
- 36-45 (22.83%)
- 46-55 (20.38%)
- 56-65 (14.95%)
- 65+ (15.49%)
- Unidentified (2.45%)

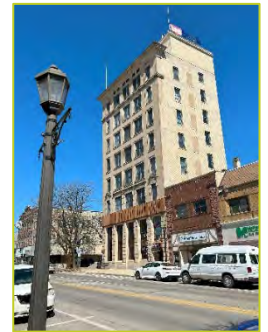
COMMUNITY STRENGTHS/ASSETS (Assessment Team's List)

- Boone & Scenic Valley Train/Railroad heritage/Rail explorers
- Natural Setting: Ledges State Park; River
- Park (fantastic) and trails
- School Edge Program with 200+ partners
- Boone Speedway
- Library
- Farm Progress Show (200,000 people in three days!)
- Hospital
- Pufferbilly Days (one of Iowa's largest festivals)
- Recreation: Top notch Little League, Two golf courses, Seven Oaks Recreation, Summer camps
- New elementary school/School system choices
- Big employers like Fareway and Union Pacific



DOWNTOWN BOONE STRENGTHS/ASSETS (Assessment Team's List)

- Story Street entrance to downtown: Beautiful homes/Mature trees
- Green space/Nights on Green
- Farmers Market
- Downtown architecture, some extraordinary
- Core of unique shops
 - 3 clothing stores
 - Theater
 - Several restaurants
 - Bookstore
 - 3 gifts/art stores
 - Rock shop
 - Antique store
 - Curiosity shop
 - Quilting
 - Brew pub
 - Bars
 - Amazing baker
- City incentive programs for building rehab and new businesses includes BDIF for building rehabilitation, Jump Start Boone, Housing Incentive, Build Boone Start Up Grant.
- Beautiful flower baskets
- Historic light fixtures/Downtown seating
- Train mural
- Shops on Story: Organized effort to provide peer assistance with social media; promote businesses and host events



DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP AND CHANGING MINDSETS

Boone leaders are ready to make a difference in the downtown area. Participation during the Downtown Assessment visit indicates that people are interested and ready to help. The reasons for an interest in downtown development/revitalization spawn from trends and sometimes problems that have slowly occurred over many years. A spiral in building conditions, downtown traffic, and the local business mix does not happen overnight. Addressing those weaknesses doesn't either. But downtown Boone's strengths....fantastic building stock, a core of good businesses and a growing initiative to bring people downtown with events positions the community for downtown success. Not all communities have those strengths to build upon but yearn for the same positive outcomes.



This does require a shift in local mindsets. Downtown revitalization is a simple concept but not as simple to pull off. If downtown is a priority, resources (time and money) must be committed. And, just as important...leaders must actively work communitywide to communicate the importance of a vibrant downtown and to reach a shared vision for the downtown. Like in any community, not everyone is on the same page. There are even those that believe downtown is "past its prime," and that the effort to improve it is not worth the time and money. This team doesn't believe that. But, if there is an expectation that the only definition of success will involve bringing downtown back to what it was 60 years ago (the glory days), success may not happen. Business trends are so different now, that we cannot measure success that way. Downtown can boom again, just know that it will be different.

Our fact-finding steps for this visit (survey, tours, interviews) consistently revealed the same things that should serve as priorities for Boone to make positive things happen in the downtown. The recommendations you see in this report primarily address these challenges through short and long-term projects.



For example, this report points out the wonderful Story Street entrance to town...but when visitors travel by car and reach downtown, they are greeted with many eyesores; eyesores that were once beautiful buildings. This is certainly a priority, but a bigger picture effort to change the local culture regarding the downtown, develop leadership and commit to a vision is important too. Although work in this area is perhaps not as easy to quantify or even explain, it still needs to happen even if the efforts to do so oftentimes occur behind the scenes.

People are the key. The interest is certainly here! Keep developing leaders who can recruit other volunteers, lead meetings, brainstorm ideas, join committees and get community input that helps you reach consensus on what you want downtown Boone to be in 10 years, 20 years and beyond.

Develop a 15-20 person advisory board to represent Boone comprised of influential citizens and people that provide different perspectives. Work together to develop a concise explanation of what success will look like in the downtown....a shared vision that you can work towards. Promote that vision widely and work with groups in Boone to see how they can contribute to that vision. Perhaps this is based on 3-5 strategies that you can point to and benchmark small, medium and large successes every year. Establish a Boone leadership program to develop new leaders for the future. We know there is talent in Boone. Take advantage of this to focus on downtown issues!

ASSESSMENT TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The Assessment team's recommendations are grouped into five themes with suggested time frames for specific projects. It is important to take one step at a time and understand that the longer-term recommendations are not of much consequence until the shorter-term recommendations are addressed.



The Assessment Team hopes Boone will assess each recommendation and develop a plan to implement what is RIGHT for the downtown. As the process gains momentum, community leadership will need to determine additional strategies and develop approaches that are more sophisticated.

Our hope was/is to work with leaders to identify the strengths, challenges, and opportunities in a constructive way to help the community improve the vitality of the downtown over time. We appreciate the openness and honesty of residents, and we appreciate that community leaders allowed the Assessment Team to be honest in its findings.

THEME 1 COMMUNITY COMMUNICATION

OVERVIEW

Boone has many entities/organizations doing positive things in the community, such as the City, County, Chamber of Commerce, Convention & Visitors Bureau, Shops on Story, schools, employers, recreation facilities, churches, etc. Couple this with individual businesses doing their own promotions.

The impact of all this work is great, but the Assessment Team heard many times:

- “We don’t know about that.”
- “We don’t know where events are.”
- “Organizations and businesses don’t communicate.”
- “Residents don’t know when businesses are open.”
- “What does the Chamber do?”
- “If I am not on Facebook, I don’t know what is going on.”
- “Traditional media doesn’t focus enough on local things, Boone or downtown.”
- “Why can’t downtown tap into the local tourist market?”

Promoting downtown, getting positive messages out and volunteer recruitment is so much easier if there is a concerted effort to share information community-wide.



It is so easy for a group to just do its own thing, but Boone has so many partnership opportunities. It was mentioned that familiarity with projects and events from group to group is very limited. It is worth the time and effort to develop a campaign to get the word out and link groups together so that cross promotion of activities and gained knowledge can occur. This kind of community wide promotion and improved awareness requires varying methods to achieve; old and new.

OBSERVATION #1 WHOSE JOB IS IT?

Everyone has a role. Identifying all the partners and stakeholders first is crucial. A starting point would be for the Chamber of Commerce to convene a meeting with representatives from all of these key entities.

ACTION STEPS

- Define a meeting mission. Talk about the communication voids/opportunities that exist and identify a smaller group/action team (made up of talented individuals with this kind of experience) that can be tasked with implementing strategies to get the word out and groom partnerships. Include staff from the local media. Discuss types of ideas to reach different people in the community varying in levels of sophistication from old school posters to new school social media strategies. Kick off the meeting by talking about each group’s mission and the calendar of activities they are planning for the year. How can events be packaged and presented to event attendees? For example, will Little League teams (from out of town) be in town for a tournament during the time that Nights on the Green are being held? Is there a way those Little League families will know about their opportunities in advance with a calendar of events, business directory, event description, etc.? The matchmaking possibilities are endless.



- Consider holding this kind of meeting twice a year. And, let the action team go to work.

OBSERVATION #2 REACHING VISITORS

Boone has so many attractions that bring visitors to town....Ledges State Park, railroad enthusiasts, people (200,000) at the Farm Progress Show, attendees of Cyclone games staying in the hotels, etc. It was stated that downtown Boone does not make the itinerary of many of those out of towners. Work to change that. How do you reach them?

ACTION STEPS

- Develop the message. Why should these visitors come downtown? The museum? Restaurants? Great shops?
- Use existing quality materials or develop new ones that can be distributed widely in hotels and other tourist locations.
- Develop a quality online Downtown Business Guide that includes a map.



OBSERVATION #3 EVENT PROMOTION

Boone's emphasis on programming the Green Space, the Farmers Market and making the downtown a place to come for entertainment is impressive. More is better. In fact, the pre-visit survey indicated that residents want even more opportunities like this. But we did hear that finding out about events is not as easy as it could be. Even promotional series such as the Nights on the Green can be easy to overlook. There is an excellent opportunity to promote every one of those nights as a unit but also as individual events with different kinds of music, food, etc.

ACTION STEPS

- Create a spiffy calendar of events that can be accessed online via social media, available in print (11" x 17" posters, grocery bag stuffers, refrigerator magnets), and promoted through email blasts, on screen ads at the movie theater and in news stories. It is always good to have a community calendar of events for residents and visitors, but it is also more digestible to have a shorter version with just key events that are happening in the downtown area.



- Design an attractive event sign or signs that can be placed at key locations indicating..."Event Tonight," "Farmers Market Tonight," "Downtown Music Tonight," in the green.
- Restaurant table tents
- Enlist the help of the Red Coats to introduce the fresh 2024 Downtown Calendar of Events. The Red Coats can speak at the service organizations gatherings and hand out flyers at events.

- Increase business presence by matching a single business up with a promotional date (either Nights on the Green or the Farmers Market). Feature that business with giveaways, announcements, etc. at the event.

OBSERVATION #4 COMMUNITY AWARENESS/NEWS

It was stated that Boone needs another way to keep residents up to date regarding community news, events and business happenings. People in our focus groups had a genuine desire to know more and stay informed.

ACTION STEP

- Consider the development of an E-Newsletter or even a “Boone Life” magazine that keeps residents in the know about all of the business offerings that Boone has, entertainment options, key dates, good news stories, highlight the most recent building rehabilitation, cool downtown efforts taken by Boone citizens, and volunteer opportunities. Cedar Falls and Decorah have great examples of small, but effective magazines like this.



THEME 2 DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS

OVERVIEW

Downtown Boone has a number of interesting, historic buildings. As with many communities, some of the original character has been altered or removed. Even so, there are a large number of buildings that have retained their historic storefront systems including display windows, entranceways and building ornamentation. As is common in many communities, some buildings suffer from deferred maintenance and a general lack of reinvestment.



In Boone, most of the downtown buildings appear to be constructed in the late 19th or early 20th Centuries and are two or three stories in height. This creates a compact and walkable district. Over time, some of this continuity in fabric has been lost by demolition either to accommodate parking or from other unforeseen calamities like fires. Even with all the changes that have occurred, downtown Boone has some good “bones” to work with to create a vibrant, attractive traditional commercial district.

OBSERVATION #1 ARCHITECTURAL AWARENESS

Before the public can value and cherish the local architectural fabric, they must first understand and appreciate it. A well-known quote from the Senegalese forestry scientist, Baba Dioum sums up this idea quite well:

“In the end, we will conserve (save) only what we love; we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.”

Teaching people to understand historic architecture can help build support for saving and rehabilitating downtown. An awareness of local architectural character helps build this support. A building’s architectural character is expressed by a number of building elements – window patterns and designs, as well as architectural details including cornices, window hoods, signs and transoms. Even the building materials themselves can have a local significance – especially if locally manufactured.

ACTION STEPS

- Develop strategies to increase appreciation of Boone’s historic architecture. A number of different strategies can be created, both short term and long term and targeted to various audiences of all ages. Many strategies are very inexpensive. Some are more costly.
 - Host an architectural detail scavenger hunt. This can be a series of individual building details published on a regular basis – in the paper, on the Chamber website and/or Facebook page. Each correct answer goes into a drawing for a prize – like “downtown dollars” or “Chamber bucks.” This could also be done as a collection of images. The Iowa State Fair does this type of contest annually and can serve as a model.
 - Post QR codes in the windows of buildings throughout downtown. When scanned, the QR code directs the user to a history of the individual building. This information will also be valuable for potential National Register nominations as well. In place of QR codes, a small poster with similar information can be posted at each building.



- Install interpretive signs at various locations in the district. Each sign should focus on a particular topic relating to the history of Downtown Boone. This could include the impact of the railroad on downtown's development, any major catastrophes that occurred downtown - like major fires- and lost significant structures. These signs can also reinforce tourism initiatives and attractions like the Lincoln Highway and the Boone and Scenic Valley Railroad. These signs also help reinforce the walkability and pedestrian feel of downtown.
- Hold downtown walking tours. These tours can be stand-alone events but are often more successful when held during another existing event that is drawing people downtown. Consider adding a walking tour as an add on during the Farmers' Market or Friday evening concerts.



- Consider designating downtown Boone as a historic district. There are many interesting early 20th century storefronts throughout downtown that still retain a lot of their historic integrity. These elements include terrazzo entry floors, copper and aluminum storefront systems and some interesting transom windows. These elements, along with the railroad development history, provide a compelling case for a historic district. National Register designation provides property owners with additional financial incentive opportunities. It also provides an additional tourism marketing opportunity for downtown and the community.

OBSERVATION #2 SIMPLE VISUAL ENHANCEMENTS

Downtown revitalization is a multi-tiered undertaking. Revitalization strives to improve the business climate by reducing vacancies and increasing sales. It also works to improve the real estate climate by improving properties to help increase rents, increase occupancy and use, and raise property values. The net result is to make local businesses more successful, improve property owner cash flow and net worth, and to increase local sales and property taxes.

Building improvement projects do not necessarily need to be expensive to have a major impact on the feeling and character of a downtown. Something as simple as an appropriately applied paint scheme can make a huge difference. A good sign can also make a visual impact. Removing extraneous elements from the façade can also help. In general, the objective should be to enhance and maintain the original design and character of the building. Improvements that maintain and enhance the original character of any building will usually have better long-term sustainability than a project that is more trendy and less appropriate.

There are a number of opportunities in downtown Boone to improve the exterior visual appearance of the facades at low cost. These projects can be implemented quickly and inexpensively.

ACTION STEPS

- Use your local incentive fund to facilitate some less complex projects in the next couple of years. Target specific items like signs – new and removal of old; paint; and transom window restoration. Consider increasing the match for these projects to 1:1.
- Develop a sign grant program. Integrate graphic artists into the program to help provide design ideas to businesses. Work with local sign fabricators to help facilitate the construction and installation of new signs. Work with City code officials to ensure that all signs are appropriate and meet local codes.

- Do not forget to include simple interior improvements as well. This could be removal of drop ceilings to expose an original metal ceiling, refinishing wood or terrazzo floors or lighting for display windows.
- Try to get five or six small projects done in the next year or so. These projects are critical to building momentum and excitement about downtown. Celebrate them when they are finished with ribbon cuttings and other promotional activities.



Window graphics related to a business with covered storefront windows help enliven the street level. Painting filled upper story windows (dark charcoal gray or flat black) helps create the illusion of glass in the openings. Both techniques help restore the traditional façade rhythm of the building.

OBSERVATION #3 MAJOR REHABILITATION

As Boone's downtown revitalization process continues to grow and gain momentum, it will become more and more feasible to implement larger and more complex projects. Bigger projects require more complicated financing to make them feasible. Also, to attract major investments, developers require some assurance that their investment is not risky and that additional investments, by other developers and local organizations, will likely happen.



This vacant building needs a major façade facelift. The main floor space provides an excellent opportunity for new retail. The upper floor could be apartments.

ACTION STEPS

- Identify key buildings in need of major rehabilitation. Contact the property owners of each building to gauge their ability to undertake a major project. Work with new owners of downtown buildings to determine their capacity for undertaking a significant project. Integrate local City officials (fire marshal, building officials, elected officials, etc.) in this process to help identify issues and roadblocks that may be encountered during the rehab process. Provide willing owners with assistance applying for financial incentives, especially the Community Catalyst grant. Help identify barriers they may encounter in the rehab process and work to eliminate as many barriers as possible.
- Target at least one or two total building rehabs each year including exterior, interior and upper floors. Look at getting two more storefront spaces “lease ready” each year.

OBSERVATION #4 DOWNTOWN HOUSING

A residential component is very important to a vibrant downtown district. Too often, downtown housing has been associated with low end, inferior housing filled with undesirable tenants associated with crime, drugs and other societal problems. Today's vibrant downtown districts typically include housing of all types – owner occupied, rentals – short and long term, low/moderate income, market rate, high end and even housing for senior citizens. The housing offered downtown can and should reflect the general housing market of the entire community.

Downtown housing can have many benefits for property owners and businesses. Downtown residents provide 24-hour activity in the district, that alone can provide additional safety and security by providing more “eyes on the street”. Residential units can also provide additional revenue and cash flow critical to property owners. This cash flow is vital to help maintain and improve historic downtown structures.

Currently downtown Boone does offer some downtown housing including two major residential properties. However, the amount of residential opportunities in the district appears to be quite low overall when compared with the high amount of vacant or underused upper floor spaces located throughout the district.

ACTION STEPS

- Build more local capacity and interest to help implement more downtown housing in Boone. This includes educating property owners as well as local officials and city leaders. There are numerous examples across the state of Iowa where communities have successfully incorporated housing as a major component of their downtown revitalization strategy. Boone should be no different.
 - Learn how other communities have implemented new housing in their downtowns. Get a van load (or two) of community leaders to visit other communities like Jefferson, Woodbine, Manning, Marshalltown and State Center. Discuss how similar projects could be brought to Boone.
 - Attend workshops offered by Main Street Iowa and IEDA/IFA regarding downtown housing. Annual training opportunities like the Iowa Downtown Conference and regional Downtown forums typically will have a housing component.
 - Invite representatives from IEDA/IFA to Boone to show how other communities have developed their housing programs and discuss financial incentives for developing similar projects in Boone.
- Look at developing a pilot project for more upscale, downtown residential living in downtown Boone. Make this a part of the next application for a community catalyst grant application. Use the project to help enlighten local property owners about the benefits of downtown upper floor residents.
- Target four to six new units downtown each year. This correlates to one or two larger projects or three or four smaller projects. For instance, the former antique mall cited above could have four market rate units – one front and one back on each side of the building, or two gracious high-end units.

Upper floor housing in these buildings provides a number of benefits for the owners as well as for the entire downtown area. There are many similar structures in the district waiting for redevelopment in Boone.



OBSERVATION #5 FINANCING

The financial feasibility of the rehab of a historic downtown property often comes up short. It is typical that a rehab project in downtown will require a number of financial incentives and funding sources, some local, some state and some federal. Understanding these varied and numerous programs can be a daunting task for a typical small town property owner. Each program will have its own eligibility requirements, application windows and project deadlines. Demystifying these programs and providing local property owners with technical assistance and support can help improve the use of appropriate financial incentives and facilitate property development in the downtown district.

ACTION STEPS

- Continually evaluate your existing financial incentives, grants, loans, and tax incentives to make certain they are meeting your stated goals for downtown. Revise grant criteria to target the incentive to reach goals. For some smaller projects consider providing a 1:1 match with a small total budget, perhaps \$5,000. Also consider rounds of applications for very specific uses – like signs, transom window restoration, upper floor window treatments, paint, etc.
- Work with your local financial institutions to determine what role(s) they could play in the revitalization efforts. A low-interest loan program can help spark rehab projects and provide an additional tool for the local efforts.
- Research and access state and federal funding sources that can help fund local revitalization efforts. Three programs that Boone should consider include:
 - **Community Catalyst grants.** Boone received one of these grants for the former newspaper office. Apply for another. These grants provide up to \$100,000 for total building rehabilitation. Housing is an encouraged component of each grant. The grant must be matched 1:1 with local cash.
 - **Downtown Revitalization (DTR) grants.** This program provides up to \$500,000 for multiple façade improvements in a downtown area. A local match is required, but not specified. Typically, a 1:1 match is expected with the local match coming equally from the City and property owners. A local property owner can receive \$4 worth of façade work for each dollar they invest. Target a small area for this and consider applying for multiple rounds of funding. *See attachment in Resources.*
 - **CDBG Downtown Housing.** This program provides funds to develop upper floor residential units in downtown. Multiple units are expected, and they can be in a number of different buildings. *See attachment in Resources.*

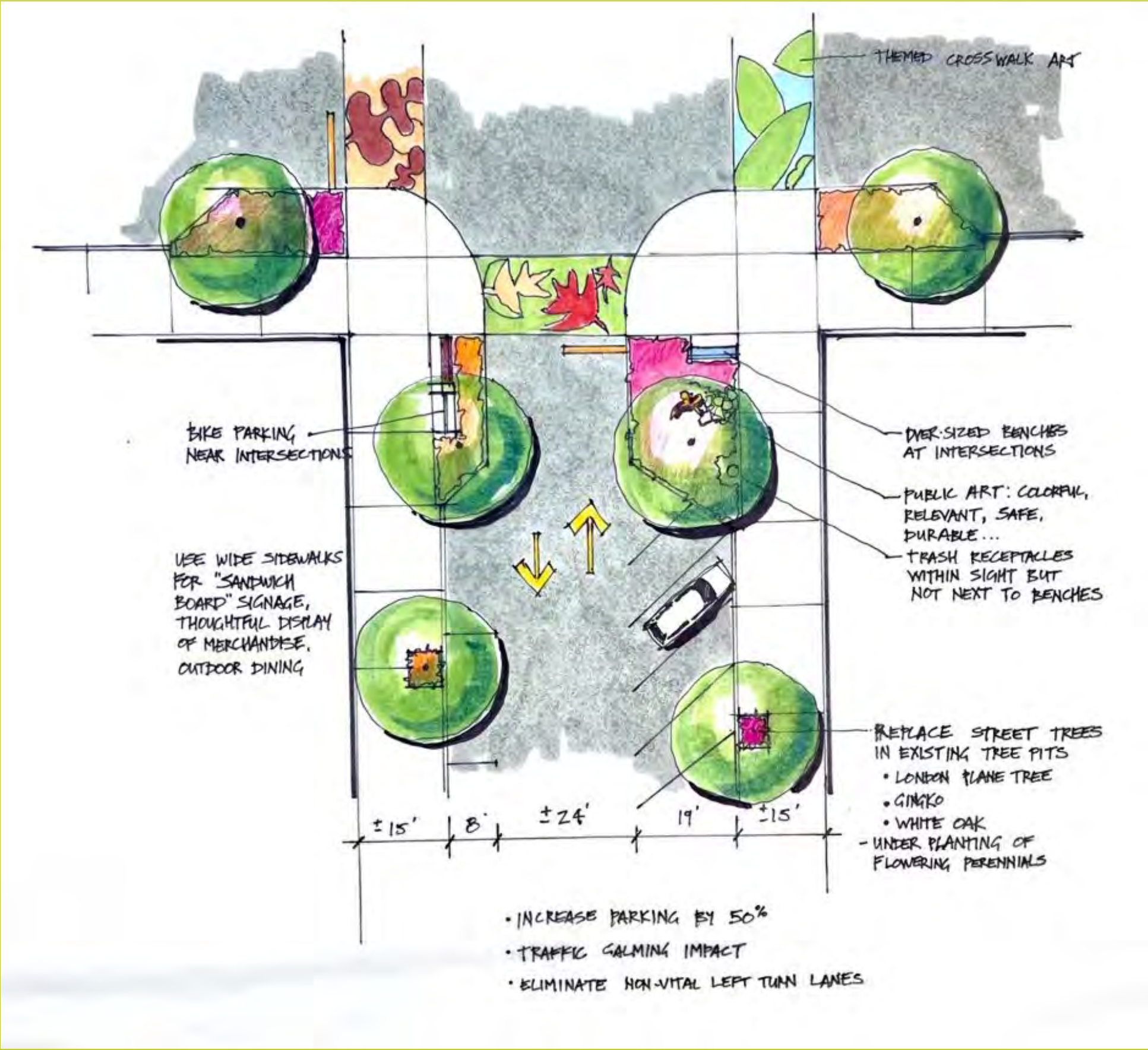
OBSERVATION #6 PARKING

One of the most contentious issues in almost every downtown is parking. Downtown Boone is no different. Parking was regularly mentioned as a problem, especially for customers and residents. As more and more downtown residential units are developed, parking will only become a bigger and bigger issue. Parking management is an ongoing issue that may include different strategies and approaches as the conditions in downtown change over time.

ACTION STEPS

- Develop a parking policy specifically for downtown residents. This permit could be a sticker or hang tag like those used for dorm residents at colleges. The permit would allow overnight parking on street in designated areas. This should allow downtown residents to park closer to their individual units and make downtown living more attractive.
- Restripe/paint the existing parallel parking on Story Street. Eliminate the perpendicular lines that define the front and rear of the designated parking stalls. By not having designated stalls, as defined by the current boxes, the amount of parking will actually increase. Where there is high demand, people will tend to squeeze in one or two additional spaces along the street.
- Undertake a comprehensive parking survey. This should include a general inventory of all available downtown parking – on street, off street, public and private. It should also include usage data – which stalls are used on a regular basis and for how long. This data will help develop and guide parking management strategies that address actual usage.
- Convert one side of Story Street to diagonal parking. The current travel width of the street provides enough space for parallel parking on one side of Story and diagonal parking on the opposite side. To accommodate this, the turning lanes will need to be eliminated to free up additional street width. It appears that the current traffic volume on Story Street does not require turning lanes. The reduction in the overall travel lane width will also function as a traffic calming device and reduce traffic speeds in this area, making it more pedestrian friendly. See illustration on the following page.

This rendering illustrates diagonal parking on one side of Story Street and retaining parallel parking on the other side. The turning lanes are also eliminated.



OBSERVATION #7 BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Decisions made today will affect downtown for years to come, especially decisions regarding major construction projects. These construction projects include buildings and major infrastructure projects. It is critical to have a road map or plan in place to guide and help direct investments to ensure that they build toward the preferred vision for the future of downtown.

VISIONS/PLANS

Currently, it does not appear that there is a strong vision or plan to guide investment in downtown Boone. The current comprehensive plan for the City was published in December 2006. Downtown was not a specific topic of that plan. There have been some efforts at creating ideas to help direct investment and improve the visual character of downtown including efforts in the late 1990's especially focused on improving the former Fareway structure and the adjacent parking deck. These ideas never gained much traction and went largely unused.

Design standards and guidelines help ensure that investments, both public and private, are expected to have consistent, reliable standards. Standards also provide a framework for review of projects and applications for funding.

ACTION STEPS

- Update the comprehensive plan. Include a section that specifically addresses downtown. Include policies relating to downtown housing, redevelopment/infill and parking. Identify how the policies and regulations affecting downtown should be different than for other areas of the community. This may lead to special zoning designations, or an overlay district.
- Re-apply for Main Street Iowa designation. The Main Street program can provide the structure, expertise and emphasis needed for Boone to have significant revitalization success. While not mandatory for success, in Boone's situation the program will address a number of issues currently facing the community regarding downtown.
- Develop and adopt design standards for downtown. Not all Boone projects (even funded by local incentives) have been appropriate. A simple strategy is to simply adopt the Main Street Iowa design standards. Use them as a basis to evaluate local grant applications for appropriateness.

OBSERVATION #8 INFILL LOTS/OPPORTUNITIES

Appropriate new construction to fill vacant or underused lots is a desirable revitalization strategy. The new development projects should exhibit traditional downtown characteristics and not replicate new suburban style development. It is important that new construction have a compatible size/mass to the historic buildings. This means that new development should be multi-floor and should sit immediately next to the sidewalk. Unfortunately, new projects are often single story and sit back from the sidewalk with parking in front. Parking should be accommodated at the rear and/or side of the building. By siting the building along the sidewalk, with storefront windows and entrances along the sidewalk, you can create a more walkable district.

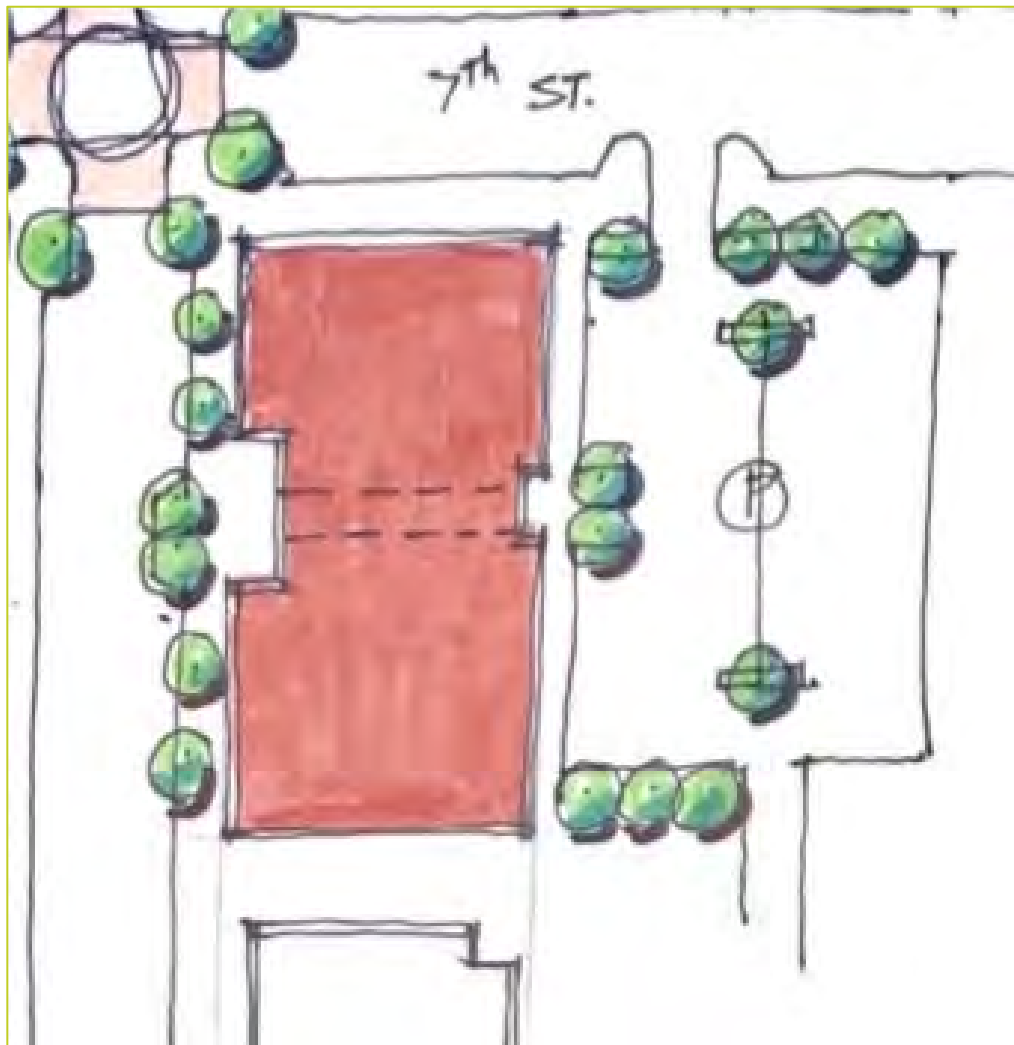
Boone currently has a large vacant lot facing Story Street. This is the site of the former Fareway and parking structure. There is currently a proposal to relocate an existing downtown business to this site. This site was also proposed for a new community recreation center to replace the closed YMCA complex. Ultimately, whatever is built on this site will change the character of downtown Boone for many years to come.

ACTION STEPS

- Determine if the existing plans for the former Fareway site is really the highest and best use for that area and really is in the best interests of the City and downtown. Compare the opportunities afforded by each site and the impact various development options would have on the overall downtown area. Evaluate if another available site could be a better fit for the current project and allow a more intensive use of the Fareway site.
- Evaluate and compare the benefits and limitations for each development site in downtown. This evaluation should include assessing the character of the site itself, the immediate context and how development on each individual site can affect the character of the entire downtown. Below is a quick comparison of each of the three primary sites that currently provide the greatest opportunities for new development in downtown Boone.
 - **Fareway Site vs Video Warehouse Site:** These sites are both about the same size, and while only a block apart, they have different contexts. The Fareway site is much more visually and physically connected to the traditional downtown immediately to the north. There is also much more existing parking surrounding the Fareway site. This makes the Fareway site more amenable to a use with occasional, extremely high traffic use – like a Rec Center or other public gathering facility. Because it acts as the gateway to the traditional commercial area to the north, density and siting is very important to any new construction on this site, it should be placed adjacent to the sidewalk on Story Street and have a multi- floor massing to complement the buildings to the north. The Video Warehouse site is at the north end of the small node of suburban style development near the intersection of Story Street and Mamie Eisenhower. Therefore, a typical box store like Dollar General is more appropriate at that location.
 - **Fareway Site vs Existing Dollar General Site:** If Dollar General vacates its current site just east of City Hall for a new site downtown, it will create a redevelopment opportunity for that area. This location could be used for the new Community Rec Center. This site has some advantages for this use. It would put the center in close proximity to City Hall. This could provide an opportunity to incorporate additional City offices in the Rec Center. It also creates a small “Civic Complex.” The Fareway Site has much more visibility and provides the opportunity for the building to have a major visual impact along that primary corridor that the existing Dollar General site does not. The Fareway site is also adjacent to the existing historical society museum. A new rec/community center could also be connected to the museum potentially benefiting both entities. The existing Dollar General is located near the Hy Vee grocery store which is also a downtown retailer. The Dollar General building and the vacant Genesis

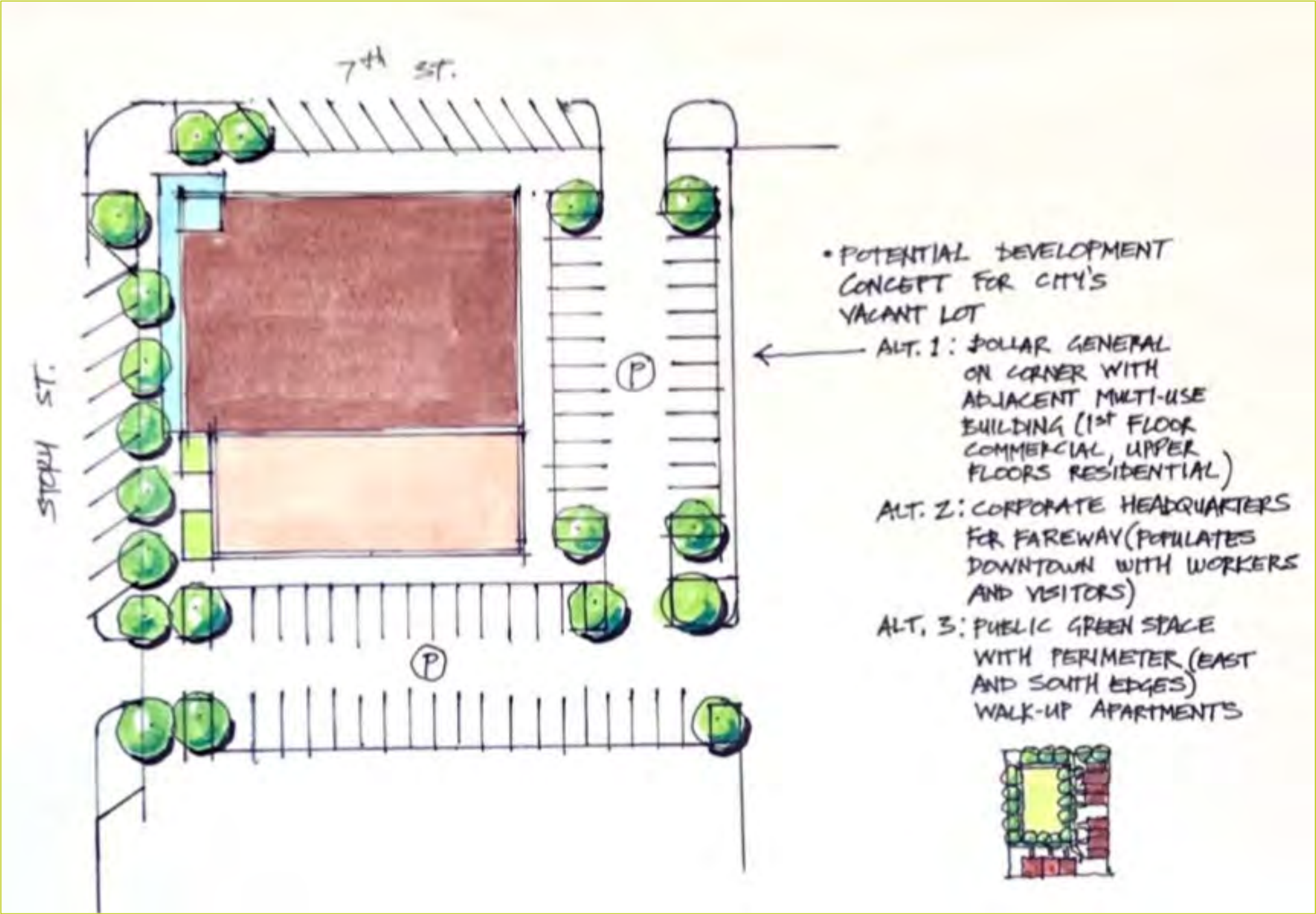
building immediately to the west also have some opportunity to function as a temporary rec facility that can house some activities until a new center is financed and finalized.

- **Video Warehouse Site vs Existing Dollar General Site:** Both sites currently have suburban style development – buildings set back with parking in front. The Video Warehouse site has much more visibility for traffic dependent retail. The current Dollar General site does benefit from being close to Hy Vee. It is also near the only railroad underpass which generates additional traffic past the location when trains are stopped and block the crossing on Story Street.
- Develop a set of required development standards for the former Fareway site. These standards should outline basic expectations for any new development on the site. This should include required materials (masonry), siting and massing of new buildings and any requirements for open/public space on the site. Any new building should have a multi-story massing, at least on the north end of the site. It should also abut the sidewalk, or at least incorporate a public space of some kind. Any on-site parking should be behind the buildings if any are proposed. These standards/requirements should become part of any development agreement between the City and any developer. These standards should be adopted and used for any new construction in downtown, including the existing planned project



The following illustrations show different mass and site placement for the former Fareway location. The vertical massing is also important to connect the new development to the historic fabric of the rest of the district.

- If possible, gain control of the Video Warehouse and Dollar General/Genesis sites. By having control (ownership), it is much easier to implement development standards for the sites and to further guide and control use. Without control, the open market is in charge and the results may not be as positive or desirable.



- TEST FEASIBILITY OF UPPER STORY RESIDENTIAL OVER DOLLAR GENERAL - ADDITIONAL REVENUE STREAM



- DOLLAR GENERAL
 - NEEDS TO INVEST IN DOWNTOWN'S CHARACTER WITH BRICK, STREETSCAPE, PEDESTRIAN CANOPY, REAR PARKING WITH BUILDING HOLDING URBAN EDGE

- USE ENTIRE SITE INCLUDING POTENTIAL FOR INTEGRATED RESIDENTIAL (HORIZONTAL MIXED-USE)

HISTORY CENTER



DOWNTOWN GATEWAY PARK

- NEGOTIATE DOLLAR GENERAL TO ALTERNATIVE DOWNTOWN SITE
- DEVELOP SITE AS THE DOWNTOWN PARK FINANCED BY THE DEVELOPMENT OF SEVEN WALK-UP TOWNHOMES (FACING THE PARK WITH FRONT PORCHES) (UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR NEW DOWNTOWN HOUSING)
- MIXED-USE PARK FOR ALL AGES:
 - WATER FEATURE/FOUNTAIN/SPLASH PAD
 - "KIDS WILL PLAY ON ANYTHING" WHILE MOM SHOPS
 - FLEXIBLE LAWN ACTIVITIES
 - FORMAL GARDEN NEAR HISTORY CENTER WITH INTERPRETIVE HISTORY SIGNAGE
 - RE-PURPOSED SHIPPING CONTAINER SHELTER AND RESTROOM

OVERVIEW

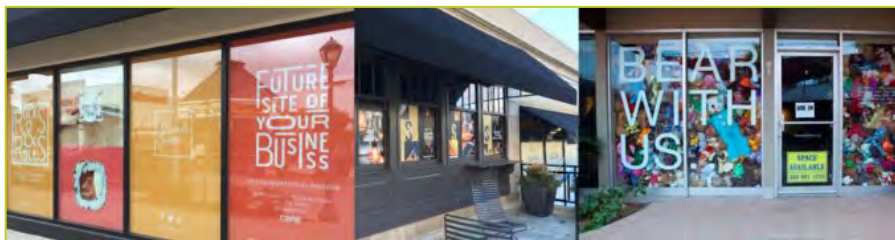
Vacant storefronts in downtown areas can have negative impacts on the local community and economy. It can lead to a decrease in foot traffic and a decline in the overall attractiveness of the area. Vacant storefronts can also create safety concerns, reduce property values, and discourage new businesses from opening. Empty storefronts can create a sense of neglect and abandonment, which can discourage future investment and further perpetuate the problem. On the other hand, having a bustling and vibrant downtown with a variety of businesses can attract visitors, boost the local economy, and contribute to a sense of community pride.

OBSERVATION 1 APPEARANCE OF VACANCIES

Downtown Boone does have its share of vacant properties. The ultimate goal is to fill these spaces with tenants/owners that contribute to downtown Boone's business mix, generate traffic and help existing businesses, but in the short-term improving the looks of these vacant storefronts is crucial.

ACTION STEPS

- Clean the windows. Having clean windows in an empty storefront is important because it can attract potential tenants or buyers who may be passing by. Clean windows can also help to create a positive impression of the space and its upkeep, which can lead to increased interest and a faster sale or lease. Additionally, clean windows can enhance the overall appearance of the building and the surrounding area, which can contribute to a more attractive and welcoming downtown and create curb appeal while allowing people to pass by and envision the opportunities that lie inside.
- Create business opportunity signs for windows.



- Partner with Boone High School, DMACC, or ISU Interior Design students to create merchandise window displays (example image). This helps the passerby see the potential in an empty space and helps give it some life while waiting for a new occupant.

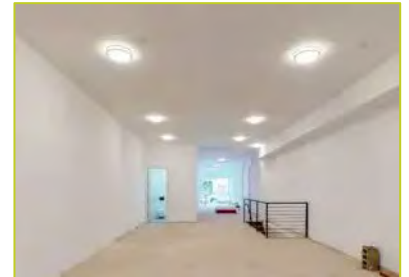


ISU Interior Design Students helping a local retailer with product window displays.

Prepping vacant buildings for use and doing the work to bring in needed businesses is essential to strengthen the vitality of the downtown. Some communities wait for it to happen. Others are proactive in making sure spaces are move in ready and having an actual plan to bring in the businesses that can impact their downtowns in the most favorable way.

ACTION STEPS

- Create an open storefront inventory. Keeping an ongoing list or spreadsheet of commercial spaces in your downtown helps to have information ready when a potential investor or new business arrives and starts asking about vacant storefronts. Information to include:
 - Address
 - Square footage
 - Purchase/Rental Cost
 - Utilities Cost
 - List of past businesses in the space
 - Brief description of the space
 - Owner contact information
- Whitebox commercial spaces. Start with a clean slate and remove any existing interior finishes. This includes ceilings, walls, flooring, and lighting. Once the space is stripped down, you can install basic utilities such as electrical, plumbing, and HVAC systems. Finally, you can add finishing touches such as neutral paint, flooring, and lighting fixtures to create a blank canvas for future tenants to customize. Consult with a professional contractor or architect for more detailed guidance.
- “Sell” the available spaces – website/social media, newspaper ads, etc. The last thing we want to do is become an unpaid real estate agent for your downtown but sometimes posting about open spaces on your website or social media platforms can prove to be helpful or could lead to a potential new owner or business to lease the space. Be sure to include the address, the size of the space and the owner or agent contact information.
- Host a business plan contest. Make finding a new business in your downtown fun by having a contest to see who has the best business plan for a particular space. Host the event in the space and have sponsors such as local banks who would put up a cash prize for the best out of 3 or 5 (depending on how many submissions you receive) to help open the next business in downtown Boone.
- Utilize a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) to assist start-up or expanding businesses with gap financing. RLFs can be locally generated through donations of banks, businesses, municipalities, counties, and local philanthropists. If not produced locally, many communities utilize loan funds through the USDA to help with gap financing or small business expansion projects. Keep the focus limited and the rates below current market value.
- Develop a strategic approach to recruiting businesses. The pre-assessment survey indicated that Boone residents would like to see a restaurant, clothing store, entertainment center, shoe store, coffee shop, etc. in the downtown. Seeking public opinion with a small, local sample is not a scientific approach but it is a good starting point. The good news is that downtown Boone has a core of



downtown businesses and an opportunity to fill a few buildings. Selling the downtown itself does not seem like a daunting task, but you still must show potential new businesses that they can make money here.

- Develop a business wish list based on community demand, area wide business voids and market data.
- Conduct local focus groups to talk about existing business voids (use well scripted questions) to better determine what stores they will shop in, when they will shop, how often, what exactly they are looking for, etc.
- Develop a plan for collecting new business leads. Do not make this quiet. Tell service clubs about your business wish list. Get the word out. Collect business cards from businesses in cities just out of your trade area that match your business wish profile. Inventory home-based businesses in Boone or businesses off the beaten path that may be looking for a new location with better foot traffic.
- Develop a chronological process for following up on leads....phone call, visit to store, call from current retailer, send information about downtown, show market data supporting need for that business type, work for a visit to Boone.
- Host a Grow with Google business workshop in Boone. IEDA has partnered with Google to provide a Grow with Google coach to assist with small business training across Iowa in 2023. The classes are free and open to any small business owner. In-person and virtual sessions are available as scheduling allows. For more information, click [here](#).

THEME 4 DRIVING DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC

OVERVIEW

It is important to create a culture that can only be found downtown and build traditions that visitors look forward to. The development of ideas that culminate into reasons that people come to the downtown should be an active segment of your economic development strategy. Boone has come a long way in recent years in this area. The Farmers Markets and Nights on the Green are great promotional series that bring people downtown on a consistent basis. They complement Pufferbilly Days, Boone's long-time festival. Yet, residents want more. From surveys and interviews, the assessment team heard this:



Downtown Boone, IA circa 1940s

- Boone residents, especially those living downtown and in nearby neighborhoods want more to do.
- Boone residents want more activities for children
- Current downtown events are good but do not necessarily drive business traffic
- Inconsistent and inadequate store hours are a challenge. People do not know when they can shop.
- There is a belief in Boone that there are just a handful of downtown businesses, which is not true. There are over twenty retail stores and restaurants in the downtown area. Could people have this wrong because they have not been downtown in a long time?

The development of events is perhaps the most volunteer dependent activity an organization(s) can do for a downtown, but extremely important. Executing events/activities that have the most impact and meet your goals (reasons for doing the event) is essential. There are three types of promotions, each with a specific purpose. 1) Special events or festivals (most of Boone's events fall into this category) that provide entertainment with wide impact increase the number of people who come downtown and expose residents and visitors to what downtown has to offer; 2) Retail /business promotions ring cash registers on the day of the event; and 3) Image activities accentuate the positive attributes of the downtown area.

OBSERVATION 1 BUSINESS EXPOSURE

The local reputation of downtown Boone as a place to shop or do business needs strengthening. This can be done with old school marketing and newer ways to get the word out. But the best way will be the development of activities to get Boone and area residents into the stores that first time.

ACTION STEPS

- Survey results show that residents want a bigger splash to be made around the Farmers Market. Vendor demand may be limited, but this could be an opportunity for downtown businesses to have a greater presence. Develop mini activities in the greenspace park on the evenings of the Farmers Markets (but only when businesses are open) that are sponsored by individual businesses, small clusters of complementary businesses or local organizations.

Examples provided on the following page.

- Trivia night (a focus on Boone trivia)
- Antiques Road Show type events (residents bring their treasures to the stage for an appraisal from an expert)
- Wine tasting
- Summer Reading Kickoff (with local celebrity readers)
- Movie Night (in the park) (sponsored by theater or library)
- Kid's train rides
- Pre-Pufferbilly Days event to promote the festival and give Farmers Market goers a taste of what is to come.



Test this approach out, perhaps four times a year...once a week in one specific month. Use every opportunity to make announcements about the sponsoring business(s). Can Farmers Market hours be changed to accommodate this type of event (when businesses are open)?

- Develop and execute promotional add-on events (also on Farmers Market nights) to get people in the businesses, for example scavenger hunts, store bingo or passport promotions, continuation of Sip & Stroll events, cash mobs (get a group of 50 supporters to commit to spending \$20 in one selected business in a 2-3 hour period, repeat with a different business the next week, etc.).
- Develop 1-3 additional retail events with an emphasis on group attendance, for example
 - Farm to Table dinner on Story Street (work with local growers and/or grocers)
 - Ladies Night Out event
 - Seasonal Open Houses
 - Shop Small Saturday or Holiday Hustle
 - Build a retail event around an unusual or forgotten holiday. Check out the National Calendar of Days at <https://nationaldaycalendar.com/> to find an excuse for a celebration on any of the 365 days of the year? For example, on the day this is written, it is National Volkswagen Day.
- The Assessment team heard repeatedly that the community needs more activities for kids/children. Put an emphasis on this by doing the kiddie train, face painting, balloon animals, and more creative ideas at most of your events. Give parents a reason to come downtown.



OBSERVATION 2 CROSS PROMOTION

Cross-promotion is simply partnering with another business that has similar or complimentary products or services. Explore opportunities to promote downtown Boone through cross-promotion.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Get the business community together from time to time to brainstorm opportunities to cross-promote. This exercise will develop relationships between business owners and can produce new opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy the shopping options that Boone has available.
- Develop and implement five new cross-promotion ideas on which downtown businesses can collaborate. Perhaps this is just a walkable collection of three or four businesses that sell similar complementary products. Here are a few other suggestions you may consider:
 - Display each other's brochures, posters or other marketing materials. Set up a display at your cash register or hang posters around your store that show your partner's complementary products. Your partner should do the same for you.
 - Start a referral program. Give a discount to customers who refer business to your partner from your store and vice versa.
 - Include marketing inserts in each other's invoices.
 - Make friends on social media. Cross promotion on social media is all about shared audiences and interests. Share ideas like tagging each other in posts or sharing the cost of an ad featuring both brands.
 - Consider giveaways or samples. Ask local businesses whose products or services seem related to yours and if they have anything they would like to give your customers access to (either for free or at a discount) in exchange for the increased exposure.
- Target a specific consumer group and focus on the shopper - not the product – to create a promotion. Here are just a few ideas to get your creative juices flowing:
 - Female audience: Consider a promotion with females as your target market because women account for 85% of all consumer purchases. Successful events targeting this demographic include "Ladies Nite Out," Style Shows, experiential DIY or product demonstrations
 - Wedding niche: Bridal shops can partner with tuxedo rental, bridal salon, hair styling, jewelry, clothing, shoes, accessories, florist, restaurants, bars & clubs, inns, hotels, motels, limousine service, travel, printing, party goods and nail salons.
 - Home repair: Hardware, furniture, interior design, house wares, paint, lawn & garden supplies, insurance and construction.



OBSERVATION 3 STORE HOURS

Surveys and interviews indicate that residents are not satisfied with store hours. They are too limited or in some cases just not communicated by store owners. Many businesses are only open at the end of the week...a little unusual for a community like Boone. There may not be a magic solution to this but deliberately working with business owners to make small changes is important.

ACTION STEPS

- Have quarterly business breakfasts to talk about a myriad of things, such as upcoming promotions AND store hours.
- Work with businesses to have their store hours posted no matter what the hours are.



OBSERVATION 4 PROMOTIONAL EFFICIENCY.....WHY ARE WE DOING THIS EVENT?

Boone is doing a nice job with events. Because events are so volunteer dependent and the community wants more, more, more....the evaluation of the intent of each promotion is critical. Do not do an event if it has outlived its usefulness or is not meeting one of your goals. **What could a possible goal of an event be?** *Not every event will have the same goal.*

- To attract people, perhaps just to expose them to the downtown?
- To bring children?
- To ring cash registers on the day of the event?
- To show residents a specific cluster of complementary businesses?
- To develop great photo ops?
- To develop a tradition for people to come downtown on a particular night?
- To promote restaurants?
- To attract small crowds (perhaps 100-150 people) with a series of very specific events?
- To feature window displays?
- To fill a calendar void?
- To cross promote two or more businesses?



ACTION ITEMS

- Bring together all entities that do community events. Go through the calendar and evaluate the success of each event (based on goals if you have them). Look for voids in the calendar and brainstorm ideas to fill those voids.
- Develop a simple protocol sheet for each of your events. Clearly define what the intent of the event is and how businesses can participate. This clarity eliminates false perceptions relating to the intent and success (usually relating to the immediate ringing of cash registers).
- Make decisions, sometimes hard ones about which events to keep, which ones to change or which ones to eliminate. And, talk about new ideas.

THEME 5: THE PEDESTRIAN AND DOWNTOWN EXPERIENCE

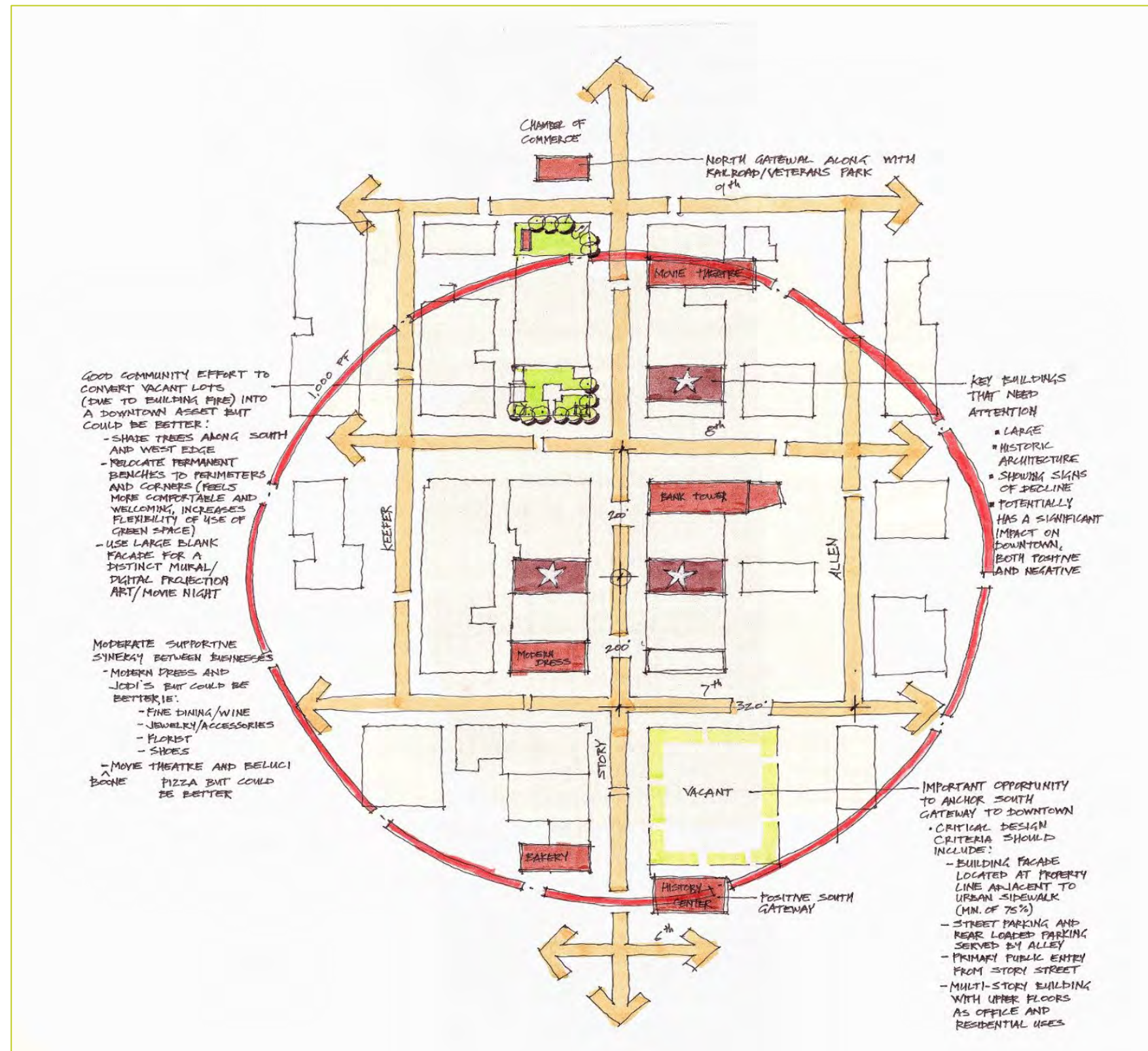
OVERVIEW

Downtown Boone boasts a rich foundation of historic architecture, wide sidewalks, and a walkable environment. Most of the downtown area is within a 1,000-foot walking distance from end-to-end, making downtown a comfortable walk for many. Boone's large quantity of relatively intact historic buildings with interesting architecture are a fantastic community asset. Recently, within those historic buildings, a new generation of entrepreneurs have added several downtown retail businesses. The community's destination attractions such as the Boone & Scenic Valley Railroad and Rail Explorers are located near downtown and create a tremendous opportunity to draw more visitors to downtown to experience its offerings of retail, entertainment, dining, and professional services.

As you consider the action steps below to improve the overall pedestrian and downtown experience in Boone, keep the following in mind.

- Thinking of memorable downtowns, you have visited, what made that visit memorable?
- What would inspire people to spend more time exploring what downtown Boone has to offer?
- Are the comfort amenities today's visitors are seeking, provided in downtown (food, drink, seating, Wi-Fi, experiences, bike racks, restrooms, etc.)?
- How can the action step help create a vibrant downtown?
- How can the action step support providing a range of reasons—10 or more reasons should be the goal—for people to visit downtown such as shopping, eating food, having a drink, listening to music, viewing art, playing games, meeting up with people, exercising, etc.?

The circle represents a 1,000-foot diameter.
Downtown Boone is quite walkable with short distances.



OBSERVATION #1 MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Downtown Boone contains many more businesses than residents and visitors realize based on the survey responses identifying a lack of businesses and need for more businesses. Unfortunately, the exterior appearance of many downtown buildings detracts from some high-quality indoor spaces that the Downtown Assessment Team experienced while in Boone. In some cases, the exterior condition of the buildings may be preventing residents and downtown visitors from exploring the wonderful businesses inside the buildings.

Well crafted, highly visible store signs that make it obvious as to what is inside the building is perhaps more valuable today, than ever, in this age of competition and opportunity created by online retail and service delivery. Not all signage in downtown Boone clearly tells potential customers what they will find inside, is lighted, or easy for pedestrians as well as motorists to read. Signs can be a welcome mat to downtown shopping and examples of public art.

ACTION ITEMS

- **Enhance Business Presence - Signs.** Establish a new sign grant program and share a list of good sign design and installation practices. Do a sign inventory of the downtown businesses. The Assessment Team recommends the use of blade signs—signs perpendicular to the road. Blade signs are easier for motorists and pedestrians to see and help shoppers coming out of stores see what additional adventures await them down the block. Looking down a block, not seeing what there is to see, and having to walk a couple of vacant stores to get there, may cause a potential customer to turn around and not explore further. But if the customer has blade signs signaling to them to come see what is there, they may not be deterred or may not notice the couple of vacant storefronts they have to pass to get there. Use signs that describe what is inside the building. See the [CoSign](#) projects in Iowa City and West Des Moines' Valley Junction for examples. View signs as an opportunity to integrate public art into downtown at the same time. Consider working with the school district and local artisans for possible sign design, fabrication and installation. Students gain valuable hands-on experience, and the cost of unique, one-of-a-kind signs can be greatly reduced. Window clings on display windows are a good way to let shoppers know what types of products they can find inside. Lighting signs makes them a silent salesperson to those visiting the downtown in the evening and help the area feel more vibrant and welcoming. "Open" banners and sidewalk sandwich boards are also effective business sign strategies in tandem with building mounted signs.





- **Business Presence – Windows:** Clean windows and clean out unattractive and out-of-date window displays. Partner with the high school’s interior design class and/or Iowa State University’s interior design program to improve window displays and add window displays in vacant storefront windows. These same student resources may be a great partnership for local businesses to improve interior store merchandising displays as well. Light window displays at night to add vibrancy to downtown and to help market the business after closing time.



- **Business Presence – Outdoor Displays:** Work with local retail display experts and high school and university design students to create attractive outdoor displays and outdoor dining options that provide a sense of vibrancy and attract visitors to downtown and encourage pedestrians to stroll more of the downtown district. If necessary, adopt or amend local ordinances that promote quality outdoor displays.

OBSERVATION #2 ENHANCE THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Downtowns should be viewed and treated as the front porch to a community. The front porch should be accessible, attractive, clean, comfortable, and an inviting place to gather.

Further compounding the negative impact of the building exteriors on downtown visits is the overall appearance of downtown. Downtown Assessment focus group attendees described downtown as gray, dull, bland, and unkept. Through the Downtown Assessment community survey, respondents identified the condition of the buildings and general overall appearance as weaknesses of the downtown. In the same survey, respondents identified places for kids, parking, and public art as the top three amenities needed most downtown.

There are several steps that Boone can take to enhance the visitor experience. Many of these steps are very low cost and can be completed quickly with community partners.

ACTION ITEMS

- **Cleanup and Maintenance.** Get a small group together from diverse perspectives and take a walk downtown to identify cleanup and maintenance needs. Quickly organize a downtown cleanup. Conduct quarterly, seasonal cleanups. Pull the weeds. Paint where needed—crosswalks, bike racks, benches, signs and light poles, etc. Pick up litter. Clean windows. Downtown cleanup events are a good way to engage students, clubs, teams, and community civic groups and establish and enhance partnerships with Downtown businesses. Partner with local media or law enforcement to feature “Caught in the Act” photos of people caught taking action to clean up downtown such as washing a storefront window, maintaining a planter, sweeping the sidewalk, or shoveling snow.



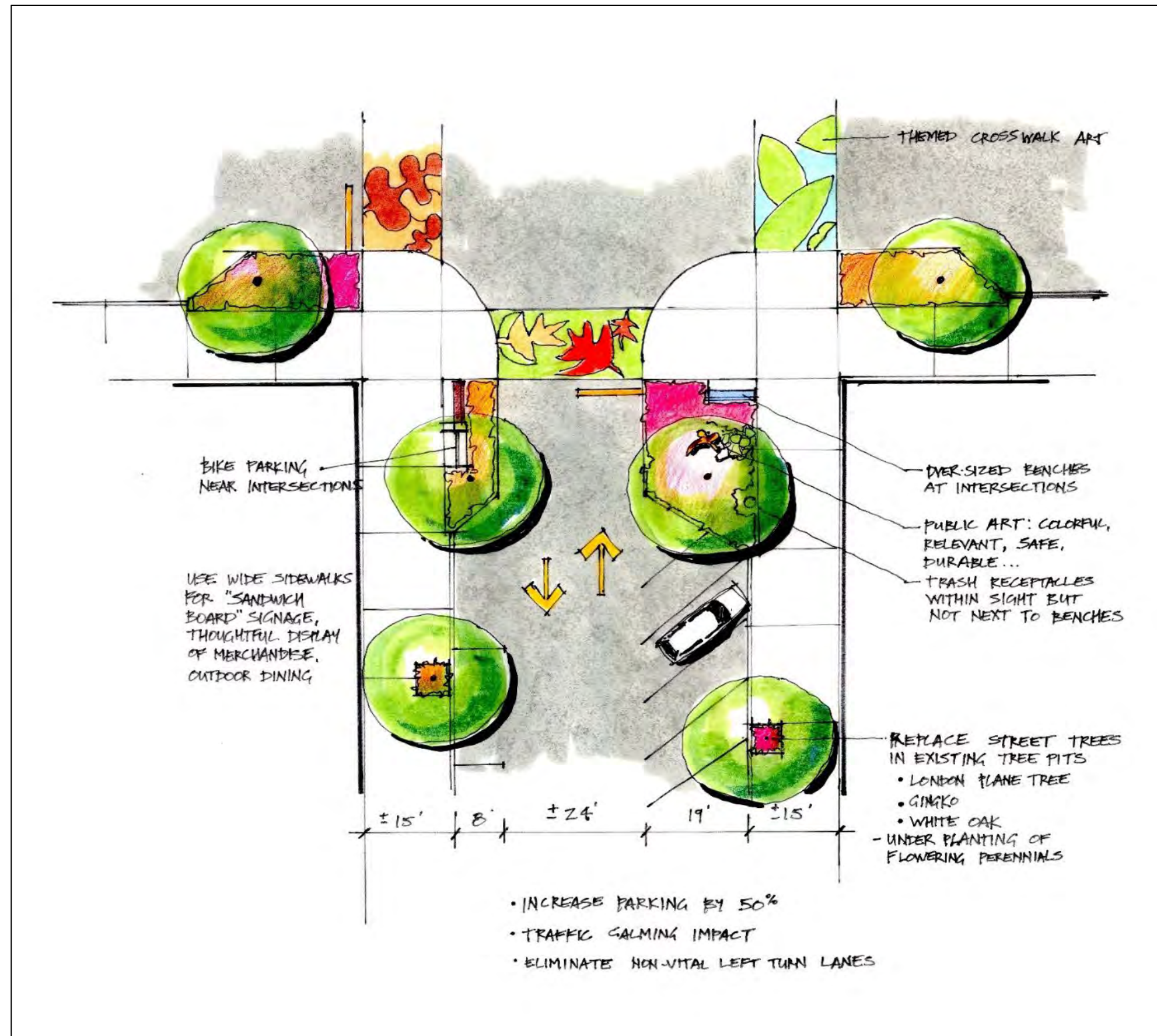
- **Update, Repair, and Remove Signs.** Take down out-of-date signs and signs of businesses no longer active. Repair broken, damaged, leaning signs. If the sign no longer applies, whether it is a sign for a business no longer operating or a business that has moved or if the parking requirements are no longer valid or enforced, remove the sign.



- **Trees.** Replace missing street trees in existing tree pits. Examples of appropriate tree species may include London planetree, ginkgo, and white oak. The city of Des Moines maintains a [recommended urban tree list](#).

- **Intersection Enhancements.** Add bike racks, over-sized benches, and public art at intersections. Place trash receptacles within site but not next to benches. Remove portions of the bump-out cement and replace with attractive plantings or utilize large, appropriately scaled planters with plantings changed seasonally year-round. There are also opportunities to add color to downtown in plantings around the base of existing intersection trees. Utilize crosswalks as an opportunity to improve pedestrian safety and attract downtown visitors by treating them as themed public art canvases.





Drawing suggesting intersection enhancements such as over-sized benches, public art, plantings, artfully painted crosswalks, and trash receptacles.

OBSERVATION #3 WAYFINDING AND PARKING

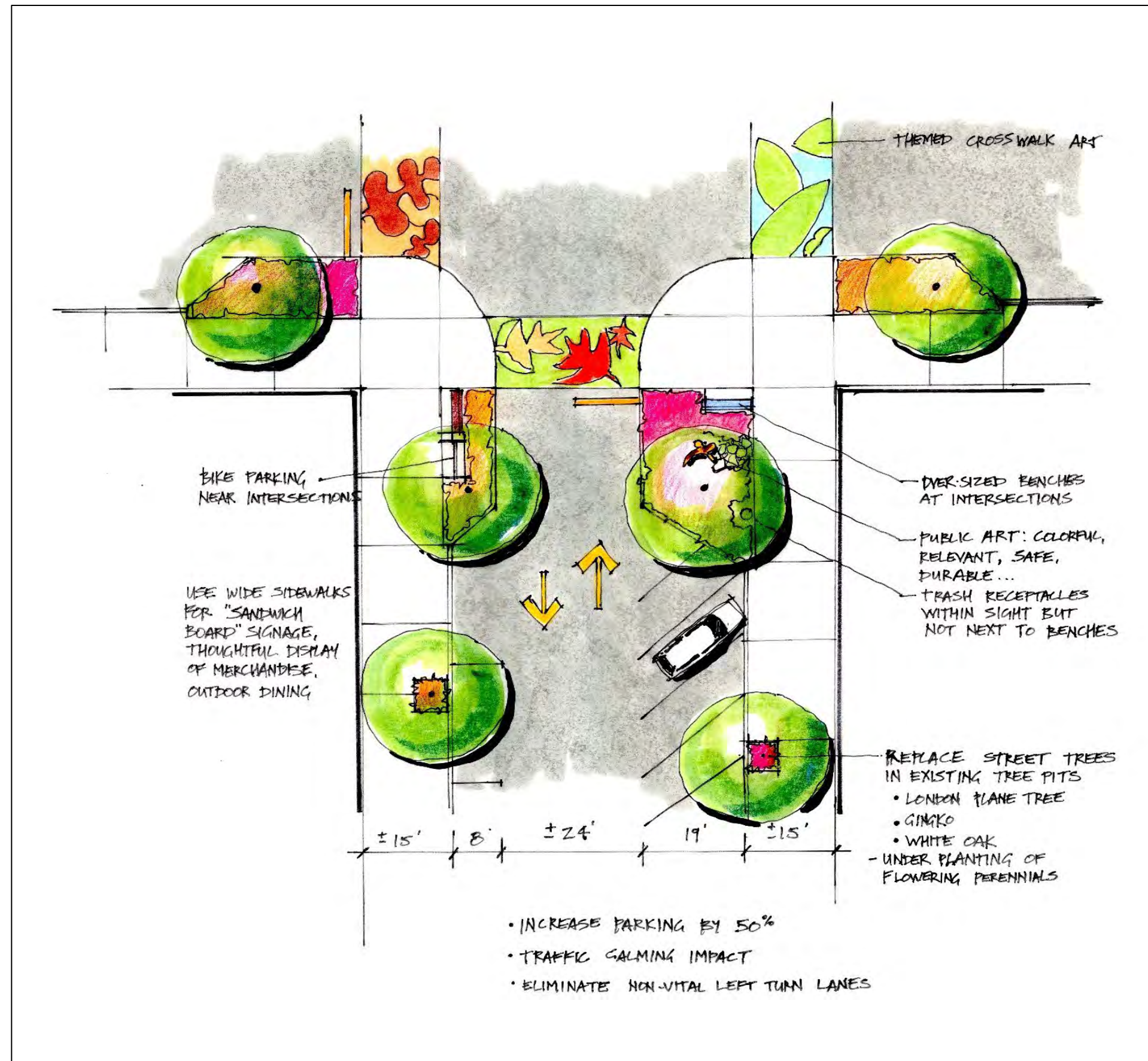
The team saw very few signs directing visitors to the downtown and the destination attractions. The signs the team did see were often small, non-descript signs in not the most impactful locations.

A comprehensive signage system could help celebrate Boone's community character, welcome visitors, highlight what downtown Boone has to offer, and increase visits to downtown.

ACTION ITEMS

- **Wayfinding.** Gather a small group of people, including people that do not regularly visit Boone, and drive into the community from a variety of directions to identify locations where directional signs to local attractions would be helpful. Work with the convention and visitor's bureau, chamber of commerce, school district, DMACC, tourist sites, and Boone County Economic Growth Corporation to develop attractive, strategically placed signs directing community visitors where you want them to go. Remember to include signs directing visitors to parking as well as public restrooms.
- **Parking Hours.** Remove two-hour parking limitation downtown. Educate building owners and business employees on where to park so as not to interfere with business patrons. Remove ban on overnight parking or set a schedule (ex. Second Monday of the month) for the nights that street cleaning will be taking place and no overnight parking is allowed.
- **Parking Availability.** Increase available parking on Story Street by converting at least the east side of Story Street to angled parking. The same approach may also be applied on some side streets as well. The installation of angled parking will help to slow traffic and will provide approximately 50 percent more parking spaces in the same space. Eliminating non-vital left turn lanes also will help provide more room for parking, slow traffic, and improve pedestrian safety.





Drawing showing concept of eliminating unnecessary left-turn lanes, adding angled-parking on east side of Story Street to increase overall parking spaces and calm traffic flow through downtown.

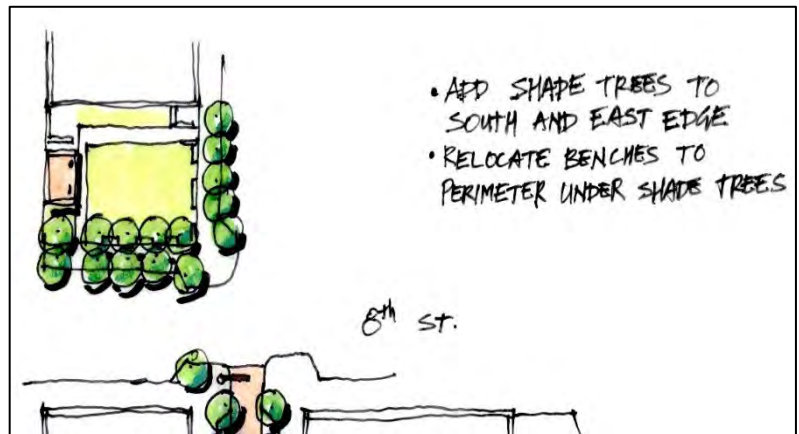
OBSERVATION #4 COMMUNITY GATHERING SPACES

A great park should have multiple activities available (both passive and active), be accessible, be attractive, feel safe and comfortable, and be a place where people want to meet and come together to socialize. In the Downtown Assessment community survey, respondents indicated a desire for more downtown events and a larger community gathering space for those events. Boone has tremendous opportunities to improve the functionality and size of existing downtown gathering spaces as well as opportunities to leverage the public right-of-way and streets to create unique gathering spaces.

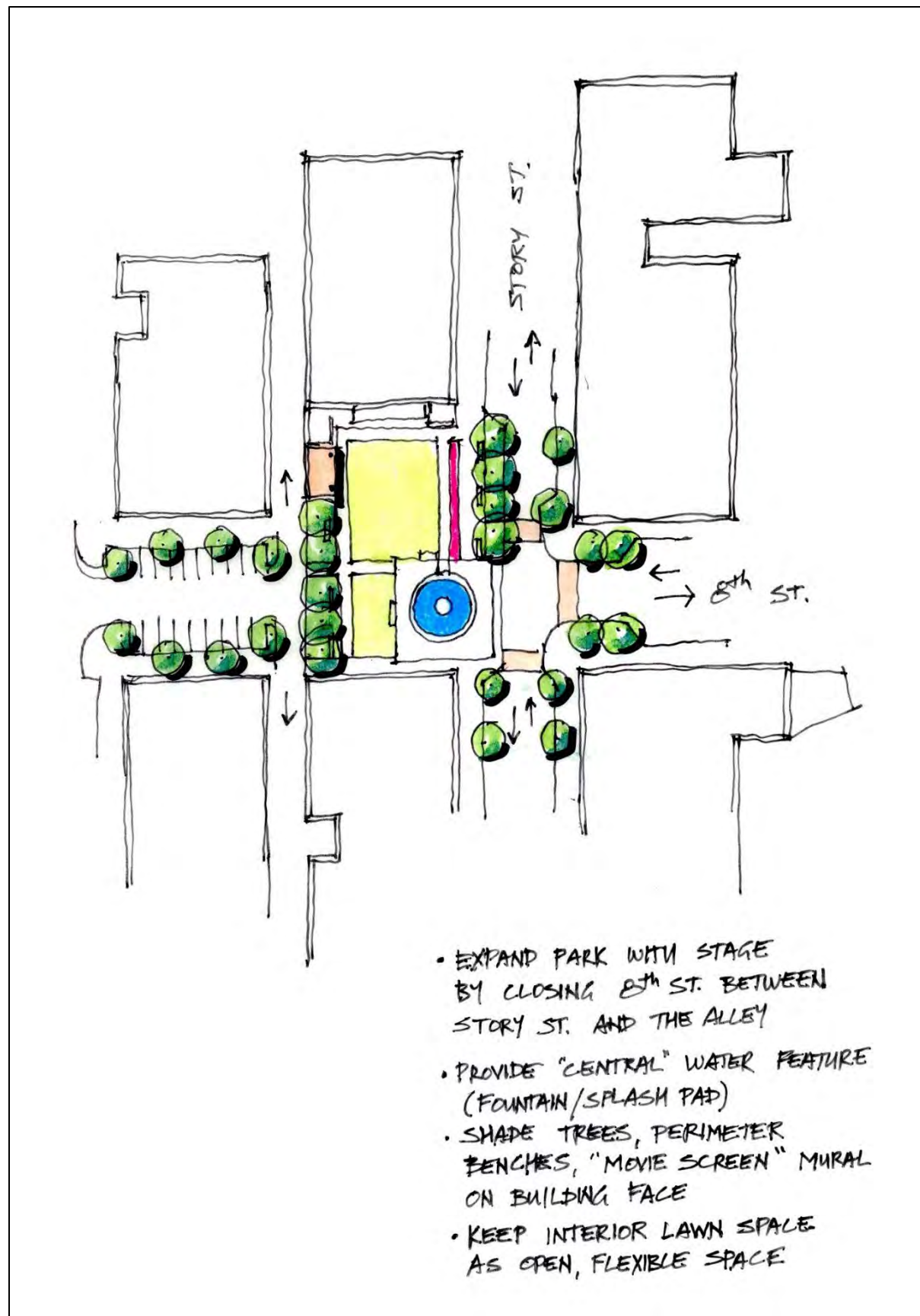
ACTION ITEMS

- **Improve Green Space Park Function and Layout.** The green space park at the corner of 8th Street and Story Street is too small for some community events.

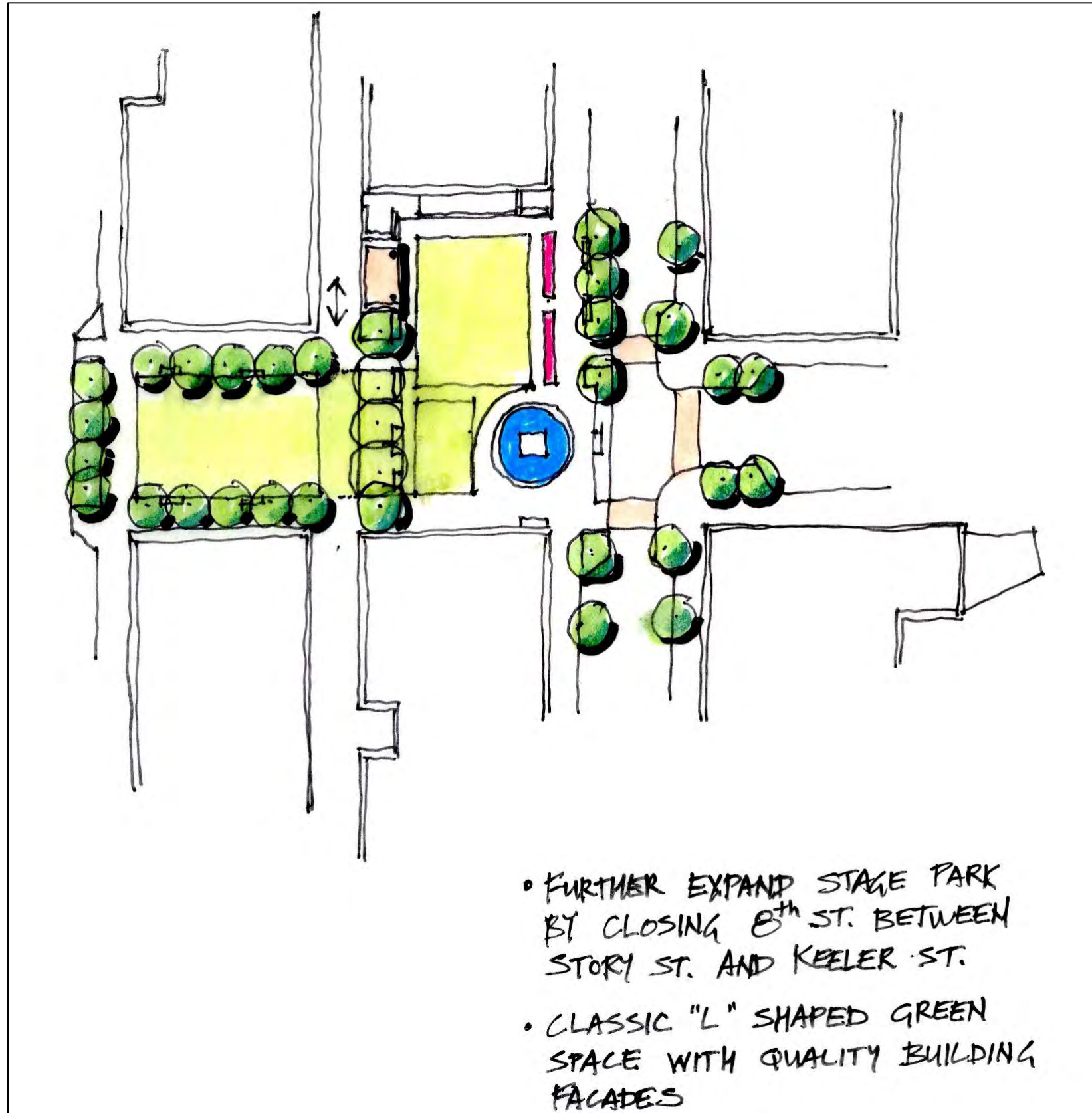
Immediate recommended green space park improvements include moving the four benches in the center of the park to the outside edges of the park resulting in greater flexibility for programming of the park space. Add trees at perimeter of park for shade. Place seating in the shade. To provide a larger, better functioning green space park, consider closing 8th Street between Story Street and the alley, or for a larger park space close 8th Street from Story Street to Keeler Street. Additional ideas to enhance this space include a fountain/splash pad feature near the corner of 8th and Story and a mural that depicts and doubles as a movie screen on the blank building wall on the north side of the green space park.



Drawing showing moving benches in center of Green Space Park to park edges under shade trees.

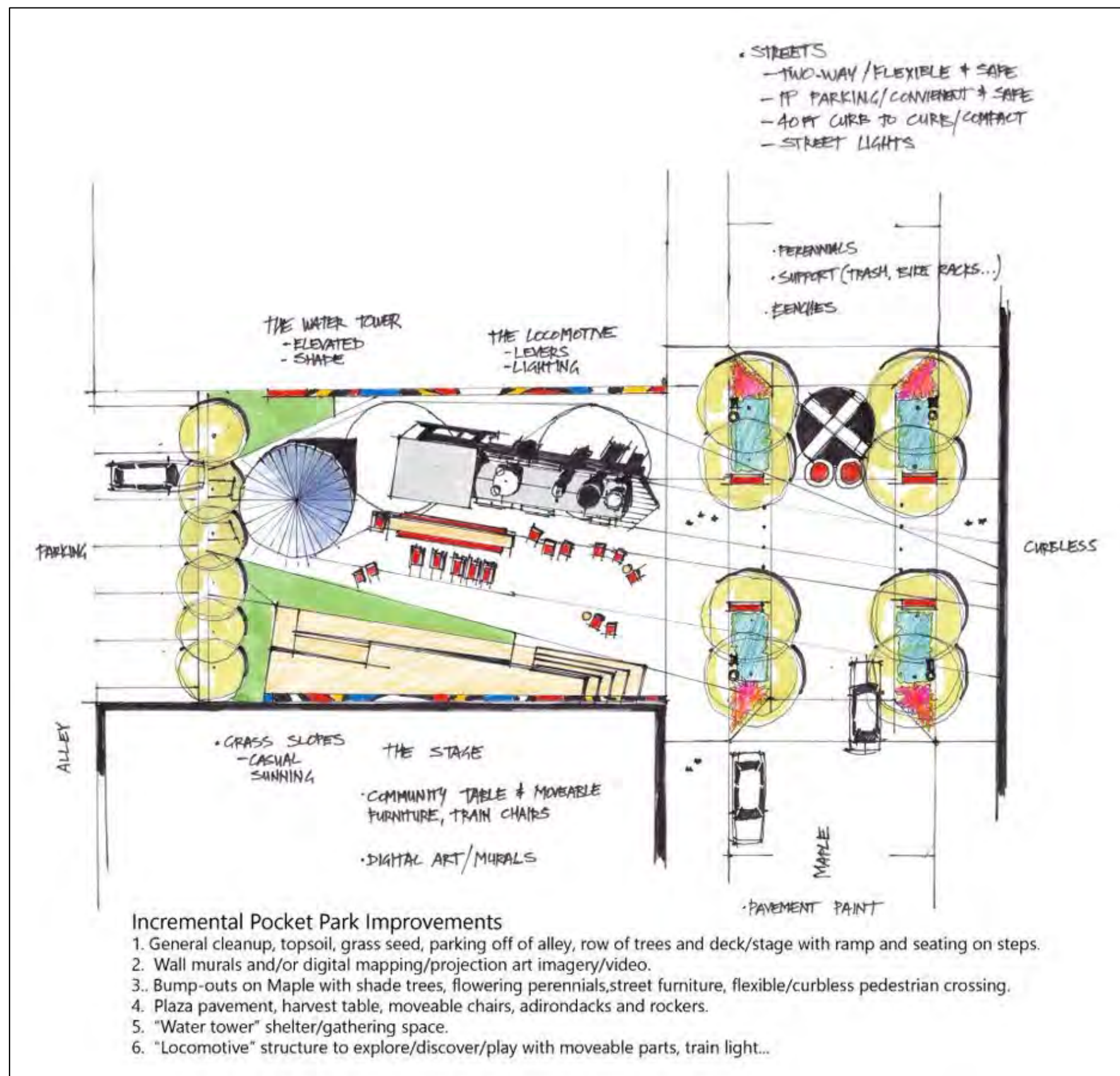


Larger park space and water feature possible by closing 8th St from Story St west to alley.



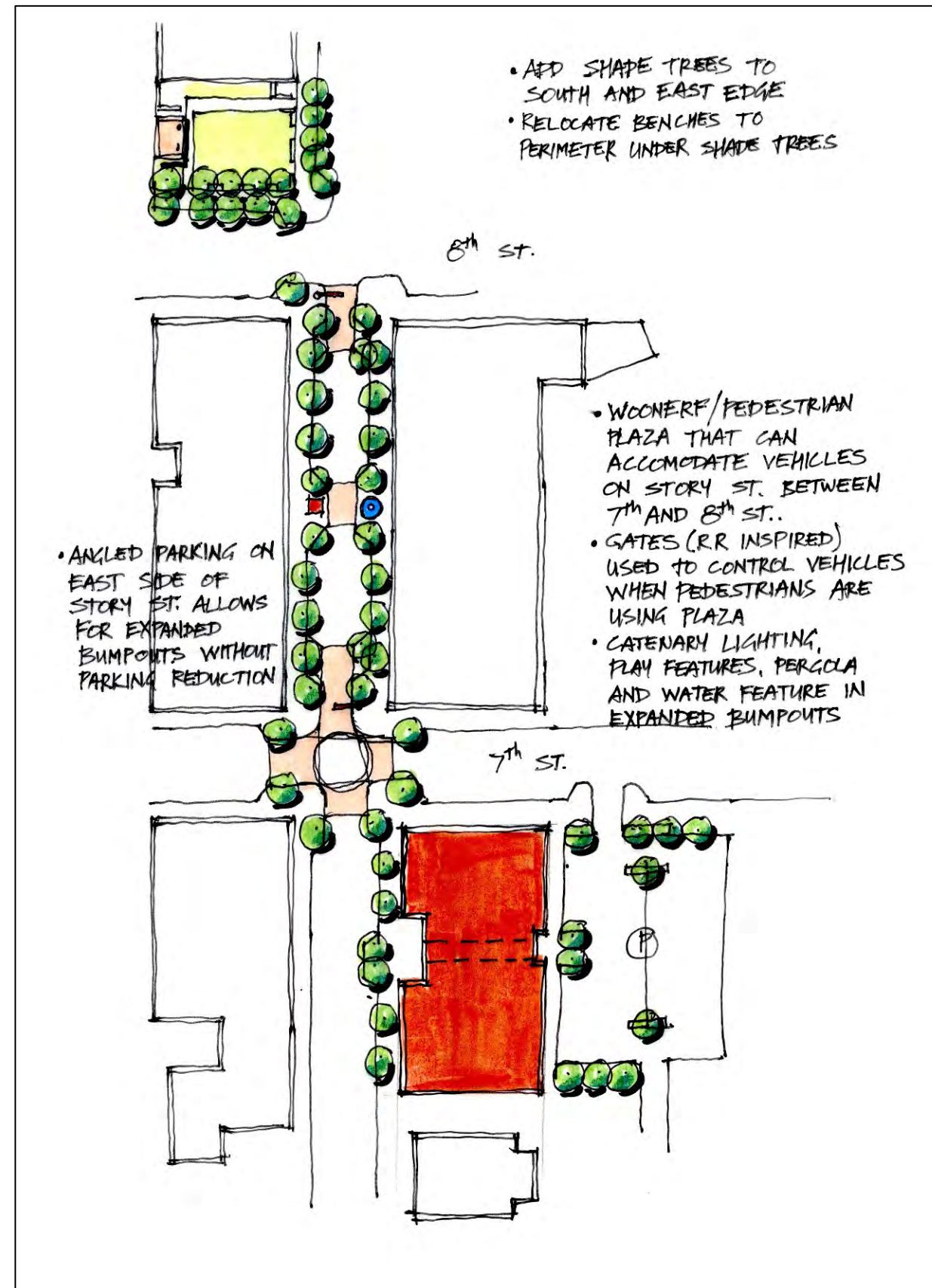
Consider closing 8th Street from Story Street west to Keeler Street to provide larger gathering space and corner water feature focal point and gathering spot.

- **Enhance Veterans Memorial Park.** The downtown park with the veteran’s memorial, nice large train mural, and caboose at the corner of ninth street and Story Street appears to be currently underutilized. This park space could be better activated to provide one of the places for kids that the community indicated an interest in during the community survey and community focus groups. How might this space be improved to become a “selfie” photo spot to promote Boone? What types of activities could be added to and programmed into this space to attract kids and families to downtown? This park location could also become an attractive location for outdoor dining whether it is carry-out meals from downtown restaurants such as Belluci’s Pizza, the Chinese restaurant further down Story Street, or food trucks parked along Story Street and 9th Street. Below is a concept for a railroad themed park that Downtown Assessment Team member Dennis Reynolds proposed during a downtown assessment in Creston, Iowa. A similar concept would be a great attraction to downtown Boone and would support the “selfie” photo occasion, need for kid activities, and outdoor dining opportunities discussed above.



Drawing depicts activating the Veterans Memorial Park through the addition of a railroad themed play structure, performance space, digital art, and flexible outdoor seating and tables.

- **Story Street Woonerf.** What is a woonerf? Woonerf is a Dutch word loosely translated to mean “living street.” Woonerfs are designed for a variety of street uses and accommodate pedestrians and vehicles equally while providing flexibility to easily become pedestrian only. Consider converting Story Street to a “living street” from at least 7th Street to 8th Street. Artistic traffic control gates that pay homage to Boone’s railroad prominence could be installed to close off Story Street during special events. See concept drawing below.



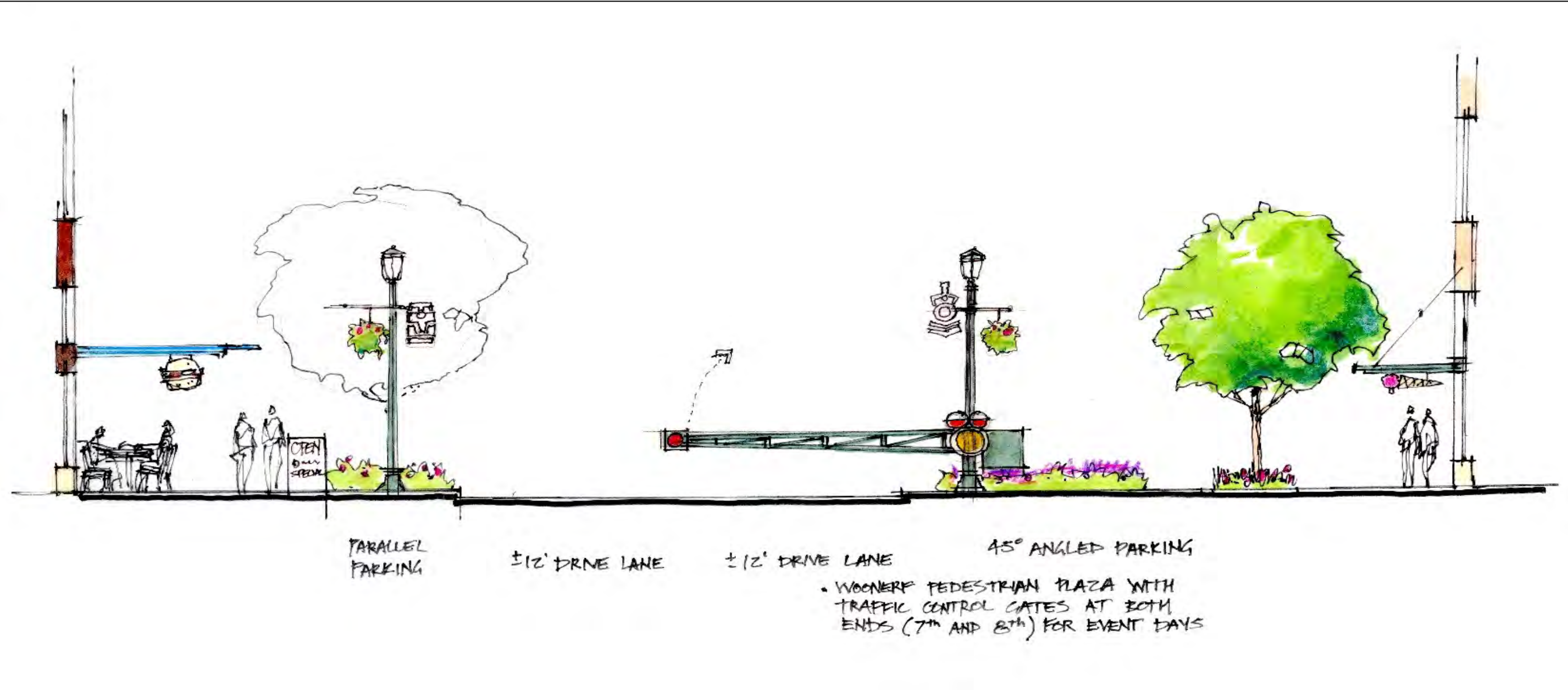
Woonerf approach to design of Story Street between 7th and 8th Streets.

A Linear Park

Market Street



*Market Street, a Shared Street/Festival Street
Des Moines Market District (City of Des Moines)*



Woonerf approach to design of Story Street between 7th and 8th Streets.

CONCLUSION

The art and science of revitalizing and transforming a downtown takes time, patience, and persistence. It takes partnerships and mentors. It takes champions that can communicate the vision, help prioritize, mobilize, and lead. Thankfully, there are many potential downtown champions in Boone. City staff and elected officials, businesses, financial institutions, industry, chamber of commerce, local and county economic development groups, school staff and students, and local service organizations; all could be potential champions for downtown revitalization. All will need to play a role to revitalize Boone's downtown to become the regional destination it could be. This Downtown Assessment Team appreciates Boone's hospitality and eagerness to get some new ideas and accept a constructive critique of the downtown. We hope this will be a "working document" to guide Boone as you move forward with your revitalization efforts. We encourage you to gather the community together soon to review the recommendations in this report and chart a course forward with the most popular ideas from this report, and form implementation teams.

To assist the city and citizens of Boone in keeping the momentum for downtown improvement going, the Iowa Economic Development Authority is offering the time and assistance of [Jeff Geerts](#) from the Assessment Team. Jeff is available to serve as a liaison from our agency to Boone to assist in developing and coordinating opportunities for quick implementation of placemaking projects. As your community comes together to identify opportunities to implement downtown improvement projects, Jeff is available to share his expertise, provide technical assistance and return to Boone to help plan and implement.

Review the Report – Review and share the Downtown Assessment report with all the groups above and more.

- Provide a verbal report to area groups.
- Send a press release to the local/regional newspapers.
- Have a pdf of the report available on the city website.
- Print off a couple of copies to share at the library.
- Bring all partners who participated in the assessment visit together to discuss the report and offer feedback.
- Share tiny bits of the report on your social media platforms.

Prioritize – Prioritize the actions the community should take. What quick projects could be done in the next month or before the end of the year to show progress throughout the community? Which projects align with work already on your list or included in the city's comprehensive plan? Who is the best group to tackle these projects?

Partnerships – Identify partnership opportunities and gaps where partners are needed. Which group is best suited to tackle the projects you have identified that have the highest priority and need to be addressed first? What support do they need – financial resources, labor, permission?

Roles – Identify the roles of the partners and the champions. WHO is going to do WHAT?

Get to work and celebrate your wins! Thank you, Boone!

PRIORITIES

The Assessment team encourages Boone to prioritize projects listed in this report, as well as other opportunities you feel are of importance.

Theme#	Immediate Priorities (0-6 months)
2	Identify key buildings for rehab: Work with owners on incentive programs
2	Evaluate financial incentives: Consider rounds for specific improvements like paint
2	Informational meeting for owners: Catalyst, Downtown Revitalization grants, etc.
2	Restripe/paint existing parallel parking on Story Street
2	Adopt downtown design standards
3	Clean storefront windows
3	Business opportunity signs in vacant windows
4	Business breakfasts to talk about issues; store hours
5	Enhance Business Presence – Sign grant program
5	Business Presence – Window: Display program and lighting
5	Business Presence – Outdoor Displays: Partnerships for display assistance
5	Cleanup events
5	Take down obsolete signs
5	Replace missing trees
5	Reassess downtown parking hours
Theme#	One Year Priorities (0-12 months)
Misc.	Advisory Committee for downtown vision development/key strategies
1	Stakeholder meeting to brainstorm communication improvements
1	Message development: Why should visitors come downtown
1	On-line business guide
1	Downtown calendar of events
1	“Event tonight sign,” table tents, Help from Redcoats to promote calendar of events
2	Sign grant program
2	Target 1-2 major rehabs in a year; Get two more spaces lease ready
2	Visit other communities that have successful downtown housing programs
2	Attend Iowa Downtown Conference, Housing Conference and other pertinent sessions
2	Develop parking policy for downtown residents; Permit program
2	Reapply for Main Street designation
2	Review plans for Fareway site
3	Downtown building inventory
3	“Sell” available spaces
4	1-3 new retail events with emphasis on group attendance
4	Add children’s component to all events
4	Promotional add-ons to get Farmers Market goers in businesses
4	Event audit with all organizations. Where are voids? Evaluate effectiveness of each
5	Intersection enhancements: bike racks, benches, art, etc.
5	Assess ease of finding downtown, school, etc; Implement wayfinding sign program

Theme#	Longer Term Projects (0-24 months)
1	Increase business presence with Farmers Market sponsorships
2	Architectural scavenger hunt
2	Work with banks on incentive program: Low interest loan for rehabs?
3	Partner with high schools and colleges for window display assistance/expertise
3	Business plan contest
4	Test run (4 weeks in a row) enhancement to Farmers Market with mini events
4	Target a customer group and run with one new event that reaches them
4	Develop protocol sheet for each event that clearly defines purpose
5	Parking availability: Consider some angle parking to increase number of spaces
5	Green Space Park layout improvements
5	Enhance Veteran's Memorial Park
5	Story Street Woonerf!
Theme#	Down the Road.....
Misc.	Boone Leadership Program
2	Downtown Historic Walking Tours
2	Pilot project for upscale living (upstairs); Catalyst application
2	Comprehensive parking study
2	Update comprehensive plan with downtown section
3	Develop chronological business recruitment strategy
4	Focus on cross-promotions among businesses: five new ideas

CONTACTS

Iowa Downtown Resource Center , IEDA, Des Moines, Iowa.....	515-348-6180
Keep Iowa Beautiful	515.323.6507
ISU Iowa Community Indicators Program retail analysis	515.294.2954
Certified Local Governments , State Historic Society of Iowa	515.281.6826
CDBG Downtown Revitalization Program	515.348.6208
CDBG Upper-Story Housing Program	515.348.6209

National and State Preservation Services and Programs:

National Trust for Historic Preservation	www.preservationnation.org
Main Street America (Main Street America Network Membership).....	https://www.mainstreet.org
National Park Service Preservation Briefs	https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm
State Historic Preservation Office	www.iowahistory.org

RESOURCES

The following attachments are available for download (12 months) [here](#).

- Boone Downtown Assessment Survey Summary
- Design Renderings/Drawings (original files -higher resolution available for download)
- Characteristics of a Successful Downtown

10 Great Resources for Downtown Boone

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| • Place Game | • Historic Building Rehab Checklist |
| • IEDA Downtown Design Guide | • Building Inventory Form |
| • Community Catalyst Program Fact Sheet | • Getting Your Business Ready to Sell |
| • Downtown Revitalization Fund | • Great Promotion Events |
| • Downtown Upper-Story Housing | • Example Event Evaluation |

The Iowa Downtown Resource Center (IDRC) has gathered a wide variety of community resource examples to help further your local revitalization initiatives. Click [here](#) to review examples ranging from promotional activities, fundraising, market analysis, downtown housing, public spaces, etc.