Through commerce, culture, and community, develop downtown Des Moines as the world business center of choice.
AN ACTION PLAN FOR IOWA'S URBAN PLACE

Adopted by
Des Moines City Council
Roll Call #4779
December 18, 1995

On The Cover:

Looking west on Court Avenue toward the Polk County Courthouse.

The buildings of the Downtown Core including the Financial Center, Hub Tower, 801 Grand, Equitable Building and Ruan Center.

Employers Mutual construction project.

Civic Center Court, apartment complex.

Nollen Plaza with the Plaza Condominiums in the background.

A possible site for the Science Center of Iowa on the west bank of the Des Moines River.

The Younkers Warehouse located in the Court Avenue Historic Area.

Construction of the Riverfront Plaza and Amphitheater in front of the Embassy Suites Hotel on the east bank of the Des Moines River.
The time is 11:59 A.M. It's a sunny 72 degree day, the first Friday in June, year 2007. Today is the first day of shooting, shooting film that is. Once again, downtown Des Moines has been chosen as a site for a motion picture. Today is the day when downtown aerial shots for the picture will be filmed using numerous helicopters. Beginning at 12:00 noon several helicopters will descend on the metro center staggered at five minute intervals. Each will come from a different trajectory, several traveling from south to north, the others from west to east. Each will make several low passes during the filming.

At street level people are emerging from the buildings onto the streets for lunch, with the anticipation of free entertainment in the form of the aerial show about to begin overhead. Several employees emerge from one of the larger employers located on the west end of downtown. They gather for lunch in the large outdoor green space just across the street. Usually an outdoor concert by a local artist would be underway. Today, however, the show will be in the sky.

12:00 noon. The first pass of helicopters has begun coming from the south. A camera man in one of the helicopters begins filming as they pass over a multi-level street interchange, the main gateway into the downtown. As the pilot continues north and begins to pass over the Methodist Campus, the view to the west is that of the fully revitalized Sherman Hill Neighborhood and to the east, the modern finished look of the Hillside Neighborhood, two of five separate downtown neighborhoods. Meanwhile, at the top of the tallest building in Iowa, a special luncheon is just beginning promoting the plans for the “new” tallest building in Iowa, to be located in downtown. All the local players are there, as well as several overseas investors. At one of the tables a deal is in the works between a CEO from a West Des Moines company and the leaders of Downtown First, an action oriented group made up of government officials and private business people that focuses on downtown business. This particular West Des Moines company has been attempting to relocate in the downtown and wants office space in the new building, but the offer doesn’t seem to satisfy Downtown First. As the CEO begins to increase his offer, the attention is drawn to a helicopter whizzing by the window, close enough to make the china on the table rattle.

12:30 P.M. The helicopters have begun to make their west to east filming runs. One helicopter has the job of focusing on the main east-west connector, MLK Parkway. The flight path takes it above the newly constructed beltway, along which are light industrial centers to the south and the bustling Court Avenue District, which extends south to MLK Parkway. As the aircraft crosses the river, a YMCA sponsored rowing event is underway with intense competition providing lunch time entertainment for many river walkers. As the helicopter moves eastward encircling the capitol over a large crowd enjoying lunch on the grassy State Capitol hill, the pilot decides to turn and head west, skimming the low building tops in Downtown East. Along a street in Downtown East the crowd looks up as the aircraft buzzes overhead. The street has been blocked off to provide the space for a multi-ethnic marketplace. The noon hour overloads this mobile market with people who enjoy the tastes of ethnic food and goods. Each week, beginning in late spring and running throughout the summer, a different collector street in the downtown is blocked off to provide a place for this popular marketplace.

12:45 P.M. Two co-workers are taking the free downtown shuttle back to work after shopping at the ethnic marketplace located in downtown east this week. As they discuss their weekend plans they realize they are both taking their kids downtown to the first outdoor celebration of the season. This will be the first of several outdoor events held in the downtown throughout the late spring and summer.

1:00 P.M. As the helicopters fly south toward the airport and the buzz of their engines fades into the distance, another buzz and feeling of anticipation is coming. The work week is nearly complete and weekend plans are being made. The day of filming downtown Des Moines has just finished, but the rebirth of downtown Des Moines has just begun.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOWNTOWN PERSPECTIVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Introduction &amp; The Process ........................................... 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Physical Profile ......................................................... 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Downtown Potential .................................................... 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Related Plans &amp; Studies .............................................. 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Statistics .................................................................. 56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

destination DOWNTOWN ... An Action Plan for Iowa's Urban Place
Executive Summary

The destination DOWNTOWN steering committee has arrived at a consensus on the objectives and actions most critical to building our future downtown, and we present here what we consider some great ideas. The way we think about the downtown has evolved as we moved through this process, starting with an exploration of the shortcomings we currently face as well as the desires and visions we might pursue. The process of developing some shared ideas about our downtown has been as important as the plan printed on this paper. This interaction has given us the chance to use each other to try different ideas on for size, to develop a sense of their receptivity, to test the feasibility of alternative priorities, and to make them our own. We have concluded that the way to make the downtown we envision a reality is to focus our action on achieving the following three objectives:

- Make the Downtown a Cultural Center
- Retain and Expand Downtown Businesses
- Reinvent Downtown Neighborhoods

These three objectives are strongly interrelated. Retaining and expanding downtown business is an economic and employment gain essential to the health and viability of the entire Golden Circle (50 mile radius from Des Moines). Popular attractions and events, as well as residential options, increase the activity level, create a sense of community, provide a cosmopolitan character, and directly and indirectly influence decisions about business or corporate location. Downtown residential provides a base for the specialty shops, other small scale retail and entertainment, the opportunity to live close to work, and a sense of inhabitation and security. These characteristics can make the downtown the most popular place to work in the metropolitan area. Increasing the concentration of popular attractions and events can in turn build both commercial and residential markets by providing support services and meeting recreation needs. A vital downtown, interesting and unique, can dramatically affect market strength, reinforcing downtown Des Moines' competitive advantage with existing metropolitan area companies looking for an urban location and those companies wanting to get out of the overpopulated and high cost east and west coast locations.

In making these planning decisions we are inevitably also making design decisions that affect the way our downtown will look and the way we will experience and use it. This design aspect of community decision making has not been left to chance in this plan. Several of the concepts presented are tied to specific locations in the downtown. The concepts strengthen what is there today by building on the existing activities, buildings, or attractions. Important aspects of the unique character of downtown Des Moines have been strengthened by the recommended strategies. For example, Locust Street and Court Avenue, each terminated by beautiful and important civic buildings (the State Capitol and the Polk County Courthouse), one leading east from the river and one leading west from the river, have been reinforced by various plan strategies.

Planning is an ongoing process that must deliberate on and take notice of developments currently taking place. Projects that were underway when this process started have continued. There was no intent on stopping anything until this process was complete. The projects and ideas generated during this process were discussed in the context of what is currently planned or in the process of being implemented. Projects like the Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway, the Hillside Neighborhood, I-235 improvements, the Downtown Intermodal Facility, the 10th and Cherry Residential Rehabilitation, the Gateway District, the Riverfront Amphitheater, and economic development projects such as Employers Mutual, Meredith, and Equitable are supported and were addressed in this process. They became our starting point and blocks in the foundation of information that was used to look to the future in developing new proposals and projects. The plan strategies and action steps are based on a ten-year horizon and are listed at the center of this plan manual in Chapter 2 - Downtown Prospective.

The 'Now Initiatives'

In order to move into an implementation mode, the following projects have been singled out for an immediate and collective focus of energy based on their impact toward achieving the objectives and their potential for timely implementation within the larger context of all the plan strategies:
Executive Summary

Objective: MAKE THE DOWNTOWN A CULTURAL CENTER

Objective: RETAIN AND EXPAND DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES

Objective: REINVENT DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOODS

'Now Initiatives'

► Construct a new Science Center of Iowa on the downtown riverfront.

► Renew redevelopment efforts in the Court Avenue District to create an arts/small retail/entertainment and residential/mixed-use district.
  • Restore the Polk County Court House grounds, reconstruct the Victorian fountain, and light the facade.
  • Redevelop the drive-through bank site at 5th and Court for downtown residential/mixed-use.

► Build special bridge lighting, pedestrian improvements, and water surface lighting for the four main river bridges and the Center Street Dam to create a high impact centerpiece for riverfront development linking the east and west sides of the downtown.

'Now Initiatives'

► Generate revenue from a county-wide tax base to fund city based facilities widely used by the entire metropolitan area.

► Complete the planning for the "Gateway Landmark Area" and market as an Economic Development Opportunity Area.

► Undertake an implementation plan for the redevelopment of Downtown East between the State Capitol and the Des Moines River.

► Acquire "ready to build" development sites in the Downtown East, Court Avenue, and Gateway Development Opportunity Areas.

► Establish a mechanism to fund beautification projects, general maintenance, and increased service levels (including security) in the downtown.

► Build a second Park and Shuttle facility on the periphery of the downtown in conjunction with private sector parking demand reduction programs.