



*Partners working together to cultivate an attractive and thriving downtown*

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## **ECONOMIC VITALITY TEAM: SURVEYS AND INCENTIVES**

### **MEETING SUMMARY – THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8<sup>TH</sup>, 2016**

ATTENDEES: Michelle Petersen, Barb Bakshis, Tina Chitwood, Chip Bahr, Sue Uebele, Judith Schulz, Susan Lynch, Doug Harris

The meeting started with a discussion of the previously drafted survey. The team agreed that all questions must be relevant to this specific project, and that there must be a purpose for obtaining the requested information. The team also did not want the survey to duplicate the efforts from Tina and Carina's survey of Downtown occupants in 2015. (See 2015 Downtown Business Owners One-on-One Meetings Overview, attached)

The team reviewed the logistics of obtaining a comprehensive list of building owners, and Tina indicated the Megan Watkins was working on the list and would be distributing shortly.

As the team discussed specific questions to include in the survey, the goal of the team was reviewed:

“To determine the type/size of projects necessary to address deferred maintenance or upgrades to commercial/residential spaces in downtown, and to develop and implement new financing mechanisms to assist with funding, as well as to create marketing materials to summarize available funding resources”

The necessity of conducting a survey was then brought in to the discussion. The team discussed the two likely reasons that building owners are not investing in improvements:

1. They are not aware of the resources available.
2. They are no interested in making the investment in improvements.

The consensus of the team was to forego the survey, and to proceed with putting tools in the hands of building owners to help them navigate the resources available. They identified tools would be needed for financing, the HPC, and construction/vendors. A kick-off reception for building owners and tenants was discussed to introduce the “tool kit” was discussed.

Sue Uebele and Susan Lynch agreed to contact both high schools to gauge whether the Construction Academy could assist in projects. Chip Bahr was tasked with approaching the Community Fund for possible financing. Barb Bakshis and Tina Chitwood are pursuing financing vehicles. Michelle Petersen is compiling a list of contractors familiar with working on historic buildings.

There was also a discussion of how to involve the City for improvements from the sidewalk to the street. Possible changes to the hardscape were discussed, including the integration of trees and hanging

baskets. Doug Harris followed up the meeting with an electronic copy of “Tree Planting Solutions” as conducted in Toronto.

With the redirection of the team, joining forces with the Forums team for the next meeting seemed a logical step. As such, the October meeting will be rescheduled to October 20<sup>th</sup> at noon. The meeting will take place at Scherrer Construction, lunch will be provided.

## 2015 Downtown Business Owners One-On-One Meetings Overview

Downtown business owner one-on-one meetings were conducted by the City Administrator and RCEDC Community Development staff with the goal of understanding the challenges and opportunities of the downtown business community. Since the meetings began to occur in late May 2015, 100 letters were mailed to each of the downtown business owners and since the date of this report 34 businesses have participated in the meetings (representing 34% of all downtown businesses). The City Administrator and RCEDC staff will continue to schedule and meet with businesses through 2015. The information compiled from the meetings will be used to update the 2008 Downtown Strategic Plan, and after each meeting referrals to business resource providers (WDC, BLP, GTC, SBDC, etc.) are immediately sent to business owners. The final report is expected to be published by RCEDC by January 2016.

When asked about Downtown Burlington's strengths as a place to do business the common themes in responses involved "welcoming, quaint, small town atmosphere, historic look and character." Conversely, when asked about Downtown's weaknesses the responses included "not a lot of retail shopping opportunities, not a lot of family restaurants, old and new business owners don't see eye-to-eye, too many empty storefronts, not a lot of energy from business owners to participate in events and events are lacking energy, property maintenance issue with many buildings in disrepair. In follow up to these responses survey takers asked, "If you had a crystal ball what [offerings] would you like to see in Downtown?" The common themes in the responses included "more restaurants and cafés (with variety, local, organic and family-friendly offerings), furniture resale shops, antique stores, retail stores that attract the younger (20-30 year old crowd), women's clothing store with accessories such as scarves, new events such as an Art Walk.

Another component of the business owner meetings was to collect feedback regarding the satisfaction level of business owners pertaining to City services. Overall, the respondents reported that they felt the City was clean and they like the planters and holiday decorations. Items repeatedly reported as unsatisfactory were the deteriorating condition of the brick pavers, traffic control and pedestrian safety in the major intersections in downtown (mostly Milwaukee Ave. and W. Chestnut St. and N. Pine St. and E. Chestnut St.). Also unsatisfactory was the City's enforcement of property maintenance code and vacant buildings that are falling into disrepair, snow consistently being pushed up onto the sidewalks by City plow trucks and lack of parking enforcement regulations for on-street parking by the City.

Conversely, the City's Police, Fire and Rescue Department received consistently high ratings of satisfaction among business owners.

At the end of each business owner meeting survey takers asked the question, "What can the City provide to your business that isn't currently being offered?" The most frequent responses included: downtown business association and coordinating a marketing program (including graphic design) to promote downtown as a destination, to advertise the existing businesses and events occurring in downtown and to attract new businesses to open in downtown and new events to be developed (ex. Restaurant Week, Taste of Burlington, Car Show, Buy Local Campaign and Art Walk).



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**MEETING AGENDA – THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2016, 12:00PM**

**SCHERRER CONSTRUCTION, 601 BLACK HAWK DRIVE**

1. Introduction of team members
2. Overview of the progress of other teams
3. Discussion of joint effort for Downtown Building Owner Reception