

2016 BURLINGTON DOWNTOWN PLANNING



The City of Burlington (City) and Racine County Economic Development Corporation (RCEDC) assembled a group of community stakeholders for a pair of strategic planning sessions in the spring of 2016. The group included elected officials, City staff, Chamber staff and board members and local residents, business and property owners. The assembled group spent the first meeting recapping the results of a recent business owner survey and city-wide retail market analysis and a second session participating in a series of facilitated activities as part of a planning session to discuss goals and priorities for revitalization of downtown Burlington. The goal of this session was to update the 2008 downtown plan which has become dated with changes in the local market climate. Specifically, the group participated in a brainstorming session to identify opportunities, challenges and goals related to these topics which should be addressed in future strategic plans, and understand where actions would be most supported and potentially effective in continuing the positive momentum which has been established in recent years.



PROCESS & BACKGROUND

The 2016 strategic planning process was designed to build on previous efforts, including the 2016 RCEDC retail market analysis and 2008 Downtown Plan. As part of previous planning sessions, Burlington had defined its goals surrounding downtown redevelopment as including the following:

- Increase/promote the availability of parking.
- Capitalize on area and local tourism.
- Attract/retain more small retail and restaurants and destination locations to Downtown.
- Continue to build upon historic charm and natural attributes through incentives for continued redevelopment and additional improvements.



Summary of Previous Planning & Activities

In 2000, the City created a comprehensive downtown plan, which included the following goals.

- Establish downtown Burlington as a mixed-use activity center for the community and the region, including retail, office, service, civic, residential and recreation land uses.
- Identify opportunities for infill development to strengthen the downtown's land use mix and business opportunities
- Improve access to the downtown including improvements in traffic circulation, pedestrian/bicycle circulation, parking and community wayfinding.



- Strengthen the historic downtown core as a pedestrian-oriented retail district.
- Improve the connections between the downtown, surrounding neighborhoods and community destinations.
- Preserve the historic character of the downtown while accommodating new urban infill development.
- Establish a new theme and identity for downtown Burlington through historic preservation and public space development.
- Build partnerships between the public and private sectors to implement master plan recommendations.

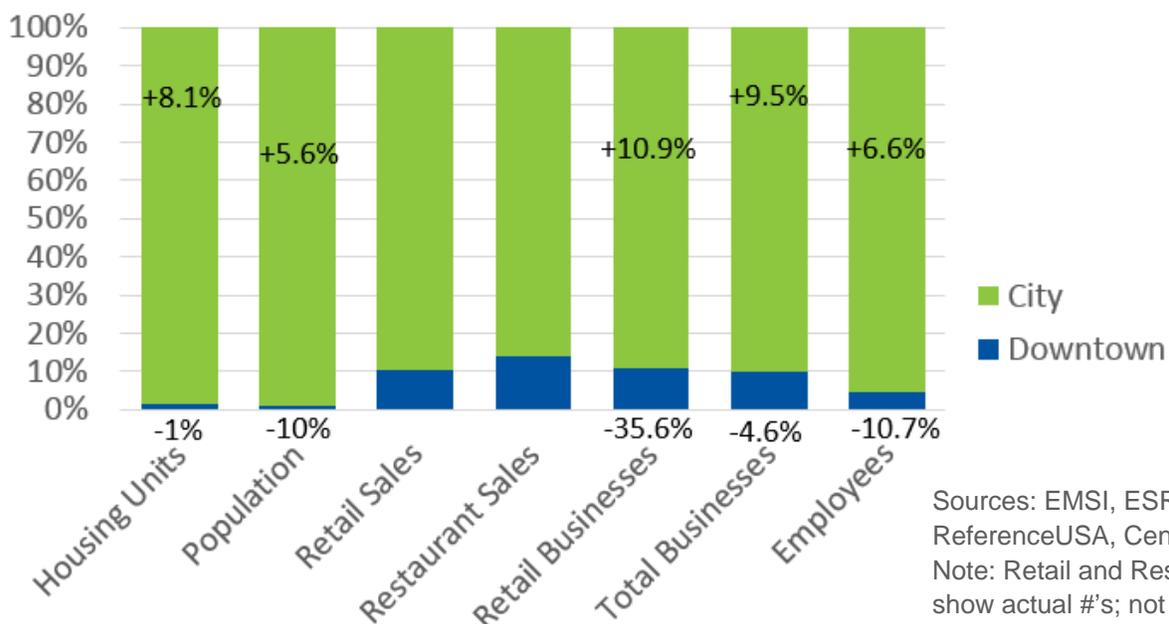
Specific recommendations emerging from this plan, many of which have been implemented, included:

- A system of wayfinding signs.
- Updates to zoning code to promote downtown development.
- Improved parking connections and efficiency.
- Enhanced streetscape along key streets, alleys and riverfront.

Market Analysis Summary

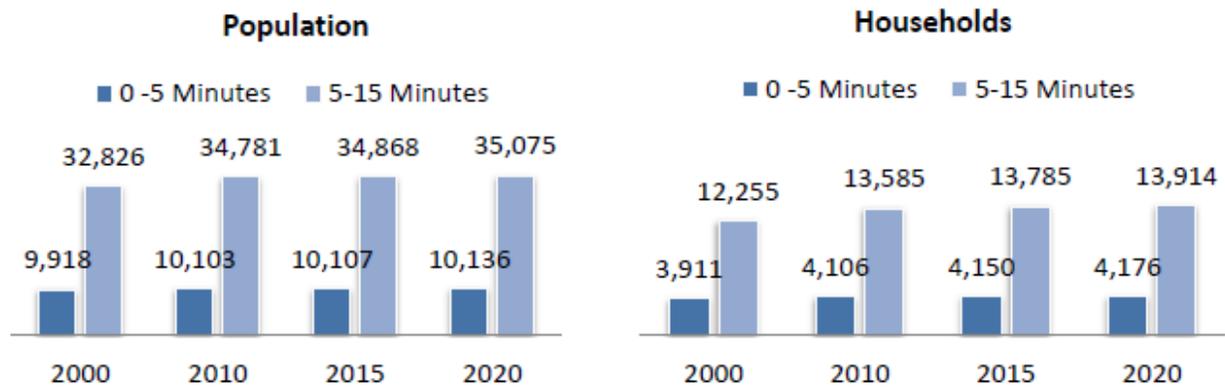
Although the City has made significant strides in promoting economic growth and development in the past decade, the downtown area has fallen behind the rest of the City in many regards. Because downtown represents not only the first impression and overall image of the community but the largest segment of existing infrastructure and investment, enhancing the economic vitality of this area has the potential to reap significant benefits for the city. The chart below shows the market share of downtown as compared to the City on each of a number of economic measures over the past 13 years. While downtown represents an average of 11% of activity in many sectors, this market share has been shrinking over time. The percentages indicated in each of the green and blue bars illustrate the percentage change in that indicator since 2003. In all instances, while Burlington has experienced positive growth, downtown has declined.

Downtown Market Share & Percent Change since 2003



Additionally, downtown has a substantially lower share of housing units and population than would be expected in a balanced economy, potentially limiting the pool of evening and weekend customers available to support a wide variety of downtown businesses.

Existing and new businesses and development to the City will need to cater to existing markets and/or attract additional customers from other areas to be sustainable. Primary businesses will typically rely on population living within 15 minutes of Burlington. This population includes just over 35,000 residents with a median household income of \$61,938, as shown in the charts below.



Median Household Income

	0- 5 minutes	5 - 15 minutes
2015 Median Household Income	\$54,292	\$61,938
2020 Median Household Income	\$63,193	\$75,325
2015-2020 Annual Rate	3.08%	3.99%

Other information learned about this group through the market study included the fact that the bulk of households within this market are included in one of three main segments, including young families, middle-aged professionals with older children, and middle-income empty nester households.

Based on the spending habits of these resident groups, potential recruitment or expansion targets might include: specialty food, building materials, specialty restaurants, office supplies, stationary and gifts, books and music, clothing and shoes, general merchandisers and electronics/appliance stores.

The survey of local businesses (chamber members and downtown businesses) identified a demand for the following additional business offerings and community enhancements:

Businesses desired:

- Restaurants (72%)
- Recreation (69%)
- Large format retail (58%)



Community enhancements/priorities:

- Public safety
- Good paying local jobs
- Pedestrian friendliness AND traffic flow

The survey also identified strengths and weaknesses of downtown in present day. These included:

Downtown Strengths, Weaknesses and Opportunities

Strengths:	Weaknesses:	Opportunities:
Welcoming	Not many retail shops	Restaurants and cafés (local, organic and family-friendly)
Quaint	Limited family restaurants	Furniture resale shops
Small Town Atmosphere	Old/new business owners don't see eye-to-eye	Antique stores
Planters and holiday decorations	Too many empty storefronts	Retail for younger audience
Police, fire and rescue services	Limited business participation in events	Women's clothing/accessories
	Existing events lack energy	New events (Art Walk)
	Many buildings in disrepair	

In order to address these weaknesses, improvements were desired in paver repair, traffic control/pedestrian safety, property maintenance enforcement and parking regulation enforcement. It was also recognized that some type of organization would be necessary in order to effectively carry out these initiatives – a business association or other entity able to coordinate downtown events, marketing and promotions.



BUSINESS RECRUITMENT & REDEVELOPMENT DISCUSSION

During the first planning session, participants were asked to respond to the results of the 2016 RCEDC retail market analysis and business survey. The following table indicates the priority industries, sites and focus areas that participants felt would be important to pursue in order to maximize local market capture and development potential.

Industries to Recruit Downtown	Sites to Revitalize Downtown	Other Important Items & Downtown Strategic Plan Topics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combine service with retail • Specialty items that aren't online • Women's Clothing (Mke Corridor), boutique downtown • Retail/Service that are experience driven • Indoor public market • Paint your own canvas and wine store • Cultural Experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entry ways into town. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Empty lot across from Brickyard. • Gas Station behind BJs • Restaurants in other areas (i.e. toward Aurora) specifically grow retail footprint <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 2.5 acre (sw corner on hwy 83) • Building across from old Standard Press (parking need) • Old Murphy Feed Mill • Coaches • Old M&I Building • Standard Press Building • 256 E. Chestnut St. (old Chocolate Expressions) • 135, 137 & 139 W. Chestnut St. (old WVA bldg.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern about online competition • Succession planning • Opportunity to increase marketing of existing businesses • Curb appeal • Evaluate competition (Lake Geneva) • Which communities would be akin to Burlington and considered successful • Evaluate maintenance/upkeep of buildings owned locally vs. out of town. • Resources to pay for building maintenance (i.e. window replacement) • Liquor licenses • Promote destination/experience elements and retail that is integrated • Destination marketing • Events that attract people and attract businesses downtown • Consider cross sell opportunities • Downtown Business Association



STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION RESULTS

Using the previously provided information as a frame of reference, the group participated in three interactive activities designed to identify, prioritize and address opportunities and challenges facing Burlington in the next 20 years which will influence the character of growth and development. These activities included: brainstorming strengths and challenges facing downtown, prioritizing items that have the greatest potential to impact the growth and vitality of downtown, and developing a 20-year vision for the community. The outcomes from these activities are profiled in this section.



20-year Vision

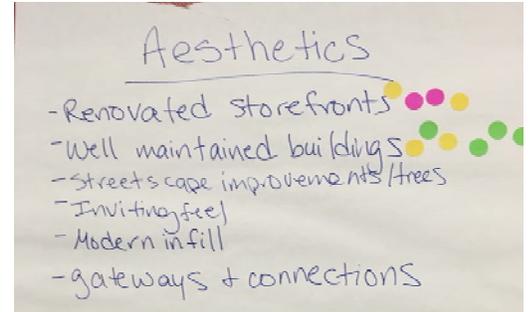
Each participant was asked to identify three vision statements for downtown Burlington. Participants were instructed to be specific, and to reference things which could be objectively evaluated as successfully completed in 20 years (i.e. ‘redevelop xyz building’ vs. ‘be a great place to live and work’). These vision statements were grouped into categories and summarized into several broader objectives. Individuals were then asked to select two of these objectives which they felt should be tackled first. The list below indicates those objectives which received the most votes as priority items.

- Promote/support building façade and interior maintenance activities (10)
- Attract retail, food, entertainment and destination business offerings (10)
- Create a destination/gathering spot in downtown (8)
- Expand events, encourage business organization and joint marketing (8)
- Reduce storefront vacancy (6)
- Increase parking (2)
- Attract more youth and seniors downtown (2)
- Provide more housing options/grow population (2)
- Create special events series downtown (2)
- Increase tourism (2)
- Expand recreational opportunities (2)
- Improve sidewalks (2)
- Integrate and connect bike paths to downtown (1)
- Improve pedestrian safety (1)
- Increase pedestrian traffic (1)
- Encourage longer business hours (1)



Other items identified as 20-year vision elements but not considered an immediate priority included:

- Promote infill development
- Promote shopping local
- Increase community pride/awareness
- Encourage existing business growth and promote sale of necessary items locally
- Improve gateways and connections
- Make streetscape improvements, add greenery & trees
- Create an inviting feel for downtown



Based on these votes, participants were divided into groups and asked to identify a broad goal, one or more targeted objectives and associated benchmark measurements and some 1, 3 and 5-year action items that they felt would be effective in making traction in their targeted area. The results are highlighted below.

Goal 1: Support business growth and expansion

Objective 1: Create incentives to support investment downtown (*links to Economic Vitality, pgs. 12 & 13*)

Measurement: Investment leveraged, number of buildings improved

Steps:

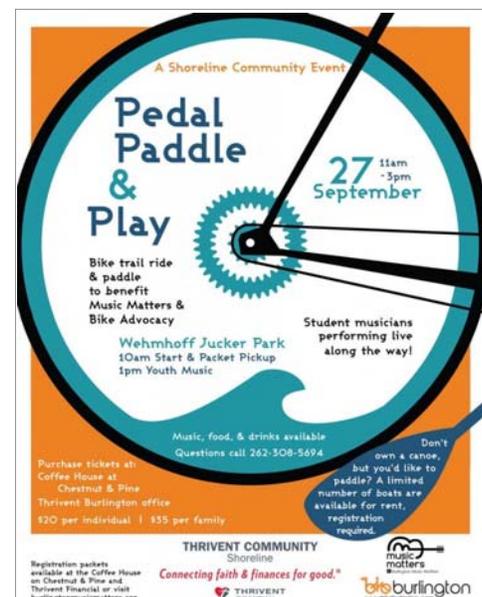
- Assess existing funds and needs of existing business and property owners.
- Establish necessary support infrastructure (i.e. Business Improvement District (BID), Tax Increment Financing District (TIF), financial assistance programs)
- Assist property owners and businesses to develop plans/finance projects, meet with individual property owners to introduce new programs.
- Revisit historic preservation ordinance/zoning to accommodate necessary improvements.

Objective 2: Increase recurring events that bring customers downtown (*links to Promotion, pgs. 12 & 13*)

Measurement: Number of events by type, participation, number of partners involved

Steps:

- Identify existing successful events which can be combined or expanded into a series (5ks, music, markets)
- Identify business tie-ins to increase marketing and cross-promotion.
- Develop a platform for business marketing and promotion to maximize reach



Goal 2: Improve the downtown experience

Objective 1: Create a sense of downtown as a destination *(links to Promotion, pgs. 12 & 13)*

Measurement: Attendance, marketing reach (i.e. articles published, content downloads, Twitter followers, Facebook fans), room tax collections

Steps:

- Create a master calendar of all community events
- Identify all potential local and regional marketing and promotions partners (i.e. fox river partners)
- Identify underutilized assets and ways to connect assets. Fill in any gaps (i.e. river recreation)
- Identify gaps in current event calendar and work to develop events which target a variety of audiences (i.e. family, recreation, arts, etc) and which cover all four seasons.
- Work to double attendance at signature events and from targeted audiences.

Goal 3: Improve the appearance of downtown

Objective 1: Enhance the welcoming appearance of downtown and facilitate property improvements *(links to Design, pgs. 11 & 13)*

Measurement: Properties improved, survey responses

Steps:

- Create a maintenance checklist for public spaces. What needs to be replaced and when? Create a budget for these improvements.
- Assess current maintenance codes/ordinances and revise where needed.
- Establish a beautification committee – master gardeners, etc.
- Purchase a street sweeper or other capital improvements necessary to improve public/community spaces. Assess funding sources such as: BID, donations and City funds.

Goal 4: Promote improved connections and complementary uses to sustain/increase business and customer traffic downtown.

Objective 1: Maintain a blend of housing and integrate additional building and key site uses through smart growth principles *(links to Design and Economic Vitality, pgs. 11-13)*

Measurement: Vacancy and rental rates

Steps:

- Complete housing market analysis for downtown.
- Develop programs to support renovation/development of product to address demand challenges.
- Encourage conversion/renovation of vacant or underutilized upper floors into units attractive to local market and/or office space.
- Continue to monitor and adjust policies to promote market stability.



Targeted Recommendations

In addition to the 20-year vision exercise, participants were divided into three groups and asked to more specifically address issues related to business climate, business recruitment, redevelopment planning and circulation and safety. The following elements were identified as priority items by the various groups.

Opportunities and Challenges: There are real and perceived opportunities and challenges associated with a downtown business location. Participants identified the following elements as items which should be recognized as part of any implementation planning.

Strengths of a Downtown Business Location:

- Unique features
- Pedestrian friendly
- Variety of business types/offerings
- Historic properties
- Downtown is affordable, safe and clean with adequate parking

Challenges of a Downtown Business Location:

- No central message/marketing
- Limited collaboration among businesses
- Limited population in trade area
- Limited population density downtown
- Wayfinding is lacking, especially pedestrian
- The perception that there is nothing downtown – mostly by the locals

A second group focused on identifying uses for existing vacant or potential redevelopment sites in downtown. Specifically, the group prioritized sites which could be critical for creating walkable areas, and/or uses which should be a top priority based on their ability to help create a destination cluster or meet a local need. Priorities from this group included:

- The Coach's building represents a priority redevelopment project. Ideal uses might include an indoor market, ethnic food store or mini-grocery space.
- High end clothing resale is also a needed use downtown which could fit in multiple currently available spaces.

A final group was asked to identify existing destinations and connections within downtown. These included major destinations that are attractions and should be well-signed and accommodated in future planning, priority sites which detract from the downtown experience, and corridors/locations which either provide a positive or negative downtown experience. The following results were identified by this group:

Major Destinations/Attractions:

- Canoe/Kayak launches
- Adrian's Frozen Custard
- Veterans Terrace
- Fred's Burgers
- Spinning Top/Yo-Yo and Logic Puzzle Museum
- Chocolate Museum



Major Destinations/Attractions Continued:

- Plaza Movie Theater
- Coffee House at Chestnut & Pine
- Farmers Market
- Public Library
- Riverwalk

Additional destinations adjacent to downtown/potential to connect:

- Chocolate Fest
- Beaumont Field
- Historic Museum
- Haylofter's Theater
- Catholic Central High School
- Aurora Hospital
- Karcher Middle School
- Pool
- White River and Seven Waters Bike Trails

Priority Renovation/Redevelopment Sites:

- Coach's Sports Bar
- City-owned lot at SWC E. Chestnut and N. Dodge
- Former M&I Bank Building and Pine Crest Retail Center on S. Pine
- Other secondary sites:
 - Old Standard Press – 700 N. Pine
 - 516/18 N. Pine
 - 413/17 S. Pine
 - 200/8/32 S. Pine
 - 256 State – former gas station

Most appealing areas in downtown:

- Adrian's Frozen Custard
- Fred's Burgers
- Coffee House at Chestnut & Pine
- E. Chestnut Street Loop
- Farmers Market
- Public Library
- Dog Park – outside downtown

Places which are not comfortable/appealing in downtown:

- Intersection of Bridge Street & Milwaukee Avenue
- W. Chestnut Street Municipal Parking lot – poor lighting
- E. Chestnut Street near 117-21 E. Chestnut Street– dirty, noisy
- E. Chestnut Street & N. Pine Street – dangerous for cars, bikes and pedestrians
- The Loop – crossing E. Chestnut Street in front of Chique and Unique
- Riverwalk Bridge Street underpass – poor lighting
- W. Chestnut Street and Milwaukee Avenue intersection – dangerous for cars, bikes and pedestrians
- Walk through between American Family Insurance building and Headquarters Salon building connecting The Loop to the Washington St. parking lots



Next Steps

Using the wide variety of relevant and viable strategies identified by the group, combined with information from the survey and market analysis, the next step is to develop an implementation plan. This plan should help prioritize activities, provide a timeline for various initiatives, and also identify local partners who will be responsible for leadership within each category. The following section proposes some recommended steps and processes which will help Burlington maintain momentum and engagement as they move forward with downtown revitalization activities. Recommendations are divided into categories based on the Main Street Four Point Approach, which will help to group activities together based on common interest and skills needed to successfully implement them. The final pages of this document include an implementation table which can be used to inform and track progress.

Organization

Developing a plan for leadership and communication among the various stakeholders with an interest in downtown revitalization will be a key aspect of future success.

- Participate in first impressions program or schedule field trips to other comparable cities. Monroe and Marshfield come to mind as representative options. Other cities which have effectively engaged their waterfront would also be relevant stops – Menomonee, Port Washington and Whitewater all fall into these categories.
- Host quarterly downtown forums introducing topics of interest to business/property owners and discussing downtown initiatives and status updates (i.e. available sites, new businesses, events, etc). The responsibility for hosting could rotate among entities to minimize burden and maximize topics covered. Potential topics might include ‘coffee with a cop’, department head breakfasts, ‘fire safety and ADA for historic buildings’, social media for small businesses, HR & Accounting updates, storefront displays “how to”, update events calendar and store promotions, etc.
 - o Connect Communities (if Burlington joined) hosts regular lunchtime webinars on a variety of relevant topics which could also be viewed in a group format.
- Create a formal organization, or a full or part-time City and/or Chamber staff position, dedicated to coordinating marketing, events, beautification and business assistance.
 - o Apply to Connect Communities program to provide support and resources to support downtown organization/revitalization. *(See description in last section of Example Projects / Initiatives)*
 - o Vet creation of a Business Improvement District (BID), and/or merchant association to increase collaboration among downtown property owners/businesses.

Design

- Review and update design guidelines packet for downtown. Create new materials which highlight desired uses and are user-friendly and easy to interpret.
- Update the existing wayfinding signage system plan including identification of potential public and private funding sources. Update/enhance plan to include pedestrian signage plan incorporating downtown areas as well as trails/riverwalk.



Design Continued

- Create funding plan considering multiple sources and timeline for downtown projects. Projects to consider include purchase of street sweeper, repair/replacement of brick pavers, planting/weeding and maintenance of flowers/landscaping.

Economic Vitality

- Survey property owners to determine type/size of projects necessary to address deferred maintenance or upgrades to commercial/residential spaces in downtown.
- Identify and implement appropriate financing mechanisms (i.e. TIF, BID, housing financial assistance, Revolving Loan Fund (RLF), etc.)
 - o Create marketing materials to summarize local and regional/state resources (i.e. City's Façade Grant and loan programs, Racine County Matching Grant, Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE), Historic Tax Credits). Promote to property owners through individual meetings. Consider targeting specific groupings of properties and/or a limited time 'double dollars' program to encourage numerous projects during a single time period to maximize impact.
- Create marketing materials for the top three downtown target properties to recruit new businesses/ownership. Develop materials profiling desired uses, available resources and market opportunities.
 - o Update general community profile, add to City and partner websites and provide to brokers to incorporate into existing listings in the City.
- Conduct outreach meetings with developers and brokers to provide relevant materials, communicate desired recruitment targets and priorities, and identify/address outstanding concerns and educate them on market opportunities and available assistance.

Promotion

- Engage existing civic organizations (e.g. Chamber, Rotary, Kiwanis, Bike Club, etc) to help market and enhance downtown. Hosting quarterly meeting of representatives from service groups together with City to identify opportunities, challenges, upcoming events, etc.
 - o An initial project of this group should be the creation of a shared event calendar. This would provide a central location for organizations (including businesses) to post events. Organizations should post links to this calendar on their website and strive to cross-promote area events using social media.
 - o Future activities might include coordinated downtown/community cleanup days, potentially in coordination with Earth Day or watershed groups.
 - o Civic organizations should be encouraged to utilize downtown for community events. Explore potential to create a downtown events planning guide highlighting necessary permits, processes and potential business tie-ins.
- Create a landing page for downtown revitalization efforts which can serve as a central point for projects, progress and activities. The central events calendar can live here, highlights of available property, design guidelines, user-friendly guide to opening a business in downtown Burlington. This page should be linked to all partner sites (City, Chamber, RCEDC, real estate professionals, etc).



Implementation Table

			Year One	Years 2-3	Years 5-10	
	Action Item	Lead Organization	Partners			
Organization	Participate in UW-EX First Impressions program and/or schedule field trips to comparable cities to establish vision and best practices for downtown Burlington.	Chamber, City Administrator	Downtown Business Owners			
	Host quarterly downtown forums featuring topics of interest.	Rotating	Chamber, City, RCEDC, Gateway Tech, SBDC, WWBIC, County, etc.			
	Consider applying for Connect Communities	Chamber, City Admin., DT Bus. Owners	RCEDC			
	Create a formal organization, or part/full time staff position dedicated to coordinating revitalization activities.	Chamber, City Administrator	DT Bus. Owners, RCEDC			
	Vet creation of Business Improvement District or Merchant Association	DT Bus. Owners	Chamber, City Admin., RCEDC			
Design	Review design guideline materials and website to provide user-friendly tools for property owners.	City Administrator	Chamber, DT Business & Property Owners			
	Update wayfinding signage system plan, create pedestrian wayfinding plan and create funding strategy.	Chamber	City Administrator			
	Develop programs to support conversion/renovation of existing downtown housing units.	City Admin., RCEDC	DT Property Owners			
	Create capital improvement plan for downtown projects. Identify timing and funding sources.	City Dir. DPW	Chamber, City Administrator			
	Develop programs to support renovation/development of new housing product to address demand challenges.	City Admin., RCEDC	DT Property Owners			
Economic Vitality	Survey property owners to identify improvement needs and challenges.	City Admnstr., RCEDC	Chamber			
	Create marketing materials to promote local, state and federal incentives to facilitate new businesses and/or property improvements. Create landing page on city website with links from partner sites featuring business recruitment tools.	City Dir. Admin. Svcs., RCEDC	Chamber			
	Update existing community profile, provide to real estate community	City Dir. Admin. Svcs., RCEDC	Chamber			
	Develop marketing materials for recruitment targets and for top three redevelopment sites.	City Dir. Admin. Svcs., RCEDC	Chamber			
	Develop property improvement program to facilitate and support continued reinvestment in downtown properties	City Admnstr., RCEDC	Chamber			
	Meet with brokers/developers/real estate professionals to communicate goals and resources.	City Admnstr., RCEDC	Chamber			
Promotion	Engage civic organizations to help market and enhance downtown. Host quarterly meetings to discuss/plan events. (Could be done on the same schedule as Organization's quarterly meetings).	Chamber	City Administrator, Civic Organizations			
	Create shared event calendar and centralized hosting site.	Chamber	City Administrator, Civic Organizations			
	Create landing page on city website for downtown revitalization efforts to track projects & progress.	City Dir. Admin. Svcs.	Chamber, Civic Organizations			
	Explore coordinated downtown/community cleanup days or other community-wide events to better connect residents with downtown.	Chamber, Civic Organizations	City Administrator			

Example Projects / Initiatives

Based on the priorities and objectives identified during the brainstorming session, the following example projects and initiatives from other communities may provide relevant examples for Burlington to follow as it looks to refine and develop local initiatives which will help achieve the community's vision. Although these initiatives would need to be refined to meet local needs, they represent real-world examples of successful initiatives implemented elsewhere to address common community development challenges.

- Edgerton façade improvement program double days
 - o In order to spur revitalization of downtown, Edgerton's CDA initiated a two-prong approach. They expanded their existing matching grant to offer 60% match instead of a 30% match and expanded the pool of funds available. This increase was only available for programs applying within a three month window. Applicants then had one year to complete the work. However, in addition to sending information about the expanded program to property owners, they also had the building inspector conduct an exterior inspection of all properties, based on the existing nuisance ordinance. A report of all identified issues was included with the expanded loan offering, not as an enforcement notice, but just as an observation. As a result, 44 individual projects were undertaken during a one-year period, and all but four serious inspection issues were remediated.
 - Link: <http://www.cityofedgerton.com/#!/downtown-incentive-programs/c1r1a>
- Berlin bank loan program & civic group quarterly meetings
 - o Berlin created a joint effort community group dedicated to revitalizing downtown. Comprised of local civic/community organizations and banks, the group has established itself under the name Building Up Berlin. They maintain a shared calendar of events, discuss economic and community trends, and have established a number of needed community programs including civic needs (housing), and revitalization supports including small business assistance and a low-interest revolving loan program sponsored by all five local banks.
 - Link: <http://www.cityofberlin.net/BuildingUpBerlin.pdf>
- First Bank Financial Centre loan program
 - o First Bank Financial Centre has established a coordinated low interest loan program to promote downtown revitalization in each of its communities. The local bank contributes funds based on a community-identified revitalization area. The loan applications and maintenance are administered by the bank, and recipients receive low-interest financing for property improvements within the downtown area.
 - Link: <http://www.oconomowoc-wi.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/37>
- Marshfield popup shops and indoor market program
 - o Marshfield (and Viroqua, among others) have used popup shops to help improve vitality and promote entrepreneurship within their downtown areas. By reaching agreements with landlords, the downtown organizations in these communities are able to offer several downtown storefronts to local entrepreneurs at no cost for a defined period of time (i.e. Thanksgiving to Christmas holiday shopping, summer tourist season, etc). Not only do entrepreneurs get to test out the local market, but the downtown areas benefit from additional shopping destinations and limited-time-only retail draws which attract additional customers downtown during key shopping windows. In both communities, popup entrepreneurs have turned into permanent businesses.



- Link: <http://www.hubcitytimes.com/2015/10/13/main-street-marshfield-pop-up-shop/>
- Trail connections/wayfinding
 - The images below provide examples of wayfinding which is intended for pedestrian traffic, whether downtown (at left) or on trails. This signage can help encourage existing customers and pedestrians to explore additional attractions while already in downtown Burlington. Waterford has also created a comprehensive wayfinding plan, available at the following link.
 - Waterford Link: <http://waterfordwi.org/documentcenter/view/1573>



- Connect Communities Program
 - The attached brochure provides a description of the services received and benefits of participating in this WEDC program. More information is available at the following link:
 - Link: <http://inwisconsin.com/community/assistance/connect-communities-program/>
- First Impressions Program
 - Volunteers from two somewhat similar communities in terms of size, location, and county seat, etc., agree to do unannounced visits and then report on their findings. Participants become “secret shoppers” for the day to discover what they can about a similar community or neighborhood. Participants follow procedures and document their visit using a participant guide or an online version of the guide to upload photos and comments. The guide, which ensures that evaluations and reports are thorough and uniform, requires minimal training. More information is available at the following link:
 - Link: <http://cced.ces.uwex.edu/2012/08/04/first-impressions-program-2/>





MAKING CONNECTIONS

Downtowns and urban commercial districts play an important role in their communities and in Wisconsin's overall economy, functioning not only as prominent employment and business centers, but oftentimes standing as the historic foundation of the municipalities they serve. They are the center of local government, providing a meeting place for the community. These places where people congregate to do business, attend events, or simply enjoy contact with their neighbors add vitality to an area that improves the quality of life for residents and visitors.

Successful commercial districts don't just happen. They need to be planned and nurtured. Their prosperity requires interest and action from many stakeholders who share a vision for the community. Where do you start? Who needs to be involved? What resources will be required to succeed?

These questions and more form the basis of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation's (WEDC's) Connect Communities Program.



201 West Washington Avenue
PO Box 7970
Madison, WI 53707-7970
(608) 210-6840
inwisconsin.com

CONNECT COMMUNITIES

RESOURCES FOR YOUR DOWNTOWNS AND URBAN COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS



SHARED GOALS

Connect Communities offers technical assistance and networking opportunities to local leaders interested in revitalizing their downtown or urban commercial districts. It also provides access to additional financial and technical assistance programs.

Because no two districts are identical, Connect Communities, like all WEDC programs, is adaptable to downtowns and urban commercial districts of all sizes. Connect Communities complements WEDC's very successful Main Street Program. In fact, successful Connect Communities may choose to apply for Wisconsin Main Street status.

Connect Communities helps local planners leverage the unique assets of their downtowns and urban districts. While the characteristics of each community may differ, Connect Communities participants share an interest in creating economic vibrancy within their districts. The goal is to reduce sprawl while spurring business and residential growth.

AVAILABLE SERVICES

Communities selected to participate in the Connect Communities Program will have immediate access to resources that will help them get started with a commercial revitalization effort. You will also benefit from interaction with WEDC's experienced staff and the leaders in the Connect Communities network. Connect Communities services include:

- A ListServ/Network Group to get new ideas from staff and other participating Connect Communities
- Participation in one Main Street Executive Director Workshop each year with a focus on a downtown revitalization topic. Past topics have included business recruitment, volunteer development and branding
- An on-site visit from one of WEDC's community development staff to assist in identifying needs and offering assistance
- An on-line open house to get your questions answered by experts
- Training for your downtown director or board president
- Roundtable discussion groups on pertinent topics held once every year
- Possible opportunities to link college/university student projects to your downtown/urban commercial district needs
- Access to WEDC's downtown development library
- Access to resources and training materials that have been developed for Wisconsin Main Street communities
- Invitation to the annual Main Street Awards Program, plus eligibility to nominate a project for a Connect Communities award
- Webinars/Regional Training

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

- Must have an organization that focuses on downtown/urban commercial district issues
- Signed agreement with WEDC
- Reporting (twice a year)
- Must have access to computer with required software
- Must commit to majority of training opportunities
- Annual fee: \$200

APPLICATION AND SELECTION

- Up to 20 communities selected each year
- Renewal application every two years
- Scoring based on:
 - Strength of committee/organization
 - Need for assistance
 - Clearly defined downtown/urban commercial district
 - Local resources available
 - Potential
- If your community is interested in learning more, please contact us at (608) 210-6840.
- To apply to be one of our Connect Communities visit www.inwisconsin.com/connectcommunities

Special Thank You to Racine County Economic Development Corporation for coordinating all parties which participated in the creation of this plan.

