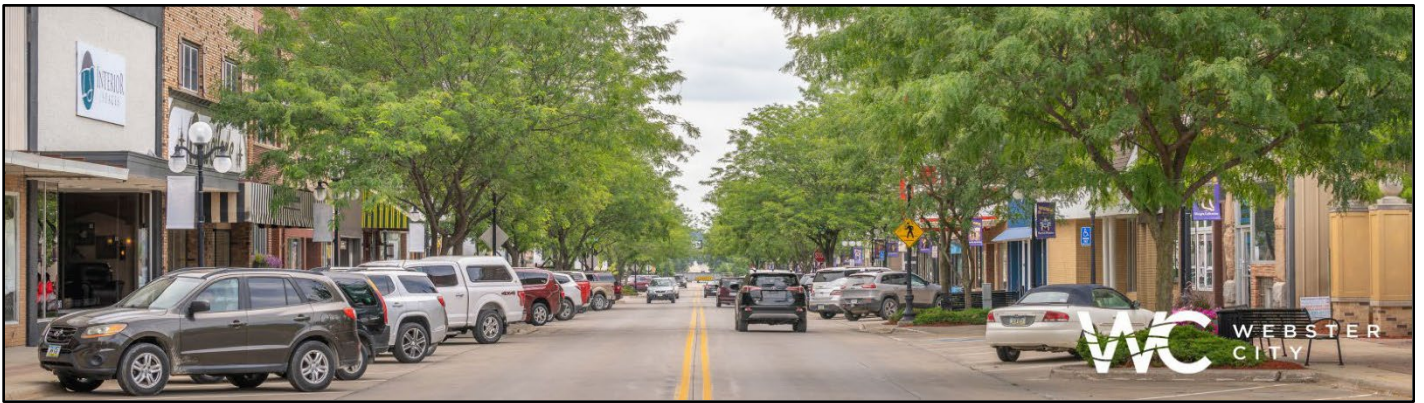


# Downtown Assessment Report

## Webster City, Iowa

February 7-9, 2023



Conducted by:

Iowa Downtown Resource Center



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[Iowa Economic Development Authority \(IowaEDA.com\)](http://IowaEDA.com)

[IowaEDA.com/downtown-resource-center/](http://IowaEDA.com/downtown-resource-center/)

## ASSESSMENT TEAM

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



**ROBIN BOSTROM**, Business Specialist, Iowa Downtown Resource Center, Iowa Economic Development Authority, Des Moines, Iowa. Prior to joining IEDA, Robin served as the local program director in West Union. She assists with market analysis training, provides technical assistance on business development efforts for Iowa's Main Street communities, as well as one-on-one business consulting and entrepreneur development. Robin also manages the Main Street Open 4 Business grant program that assists local entrepreneurs with business expansion projects. Robin's expertise stems from over 20 years as a small business owner in rural Northeast Iowa. She has also worked for numerous non-profit organizations, served as Executive Director for Fayette County Economic Development, and Director for the Turkey River Recreational Corridor. During this time, she served as project manager for several community development projects ranging from historic building rehabilitations to streetscape projects to trail development. She holds a BA from the University of Northern Iowa, is a graduate of the Heartland Economic Development Course and received a Development Finance Professional certification from the National Development Council.



**NICK SORENSEN**, Real Estate Development Specialist, Iowa Economic Development Authority, Des Moines, Iowa. In this role, he provides technical assistance to communities that focuses on real estate development issues in Iowa downtowns. Prior to joining the Iowa Downtown Resource Center team, Nick was a Peace Officer while having a construction business for 13 years and a Building Official, Zoning Official, Code Enforcement, and Special Projects Coordinator for 5 years. In his role with many hats, Nick was project manager for a Community Development Block Downtown Revitalization Grant that rehabilitated 13 facades, acquiring, and rehabilitating 9 storefront buildings on behalf of the city, applying for, and receiving Iowa Economic Development Authority Catalyst and Challenge Grants and assisted Region XII Council of Governments with the installation of the first two Homes for Iowa homes. Nick currently is a member of the Iowa Rural Development Council.



**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 Masters of Landscape Architecture from Kansas State University. He currently serves on both the Urban Design Review Board for the City of Des Moines and the Iowa Urban Land Institute Board, volunteers for multiple Dog Rescue groups and provides therapy dog visits with Mister Cotton.



**MARK WICKS** has served as Community Development Director in Charles City since 2013, overseeing both the Chamber of Commerce and local Main Street Iowa program. Prior to that he worked for 28 years as an award-winning journalist, photographer, and newspaper editor, including 18 as Managing Editor of the Charles City Press. He has been involved with the Charles City Main Street program since its inception in 1994, including serving as a volunteer, committee member, board member and board chair. He has also worked on a number of community visits and assessments for the State of Iowa through the Iowa Downtown Resource Center and is currently serving as Board President of the Iowa Association of Chambers of Commerce.

The following report summarizes the observations and recommendations resulting from an Iowa Downtown Resource Center Assessment conducted in Webster City, Iowa. In preparation of this report, the Assessment Team learned about Webster City's development history and plans for future development.

The Team's familiarization process began with a review of materials supplied prior to the visit, a pre-visit survey consisting of 80 completed surveys, a driving tour of the city and a walking tour of the Downtown commercial district. The intensive three-day visit also included interviews with approximately 100 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 Webster City.

This Downtown Assessment report and recommendations for Webster City are based on the Team's downtown development experience – totaling over 100 years. Their beliefs are grounded by the philosophy that in order 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. A strong downtown should be a pedestrian friendly environment that 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 to destinations on the outskirts of town.

**“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**

## PURPOSE

The City of Webster City 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, Webster City has begun to empower itself by stepping out of its comfort zone. It is a good sign that the community appears ready to take plans and turn them into actions to address Downtown’s challenges.

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, Webster City citizens must decide what is relevant and realistic, prioritize options, and acquire necessary resources as they address Downtown’s future.

## INTRODUCTION

Webster City, Iowa (population 7,825) is the county seat of Hamilton County located in central Iowa at the intersection of Highway 17 and Highway 20. The community has a rich agricultural heritage that supports the local economy with a strong manufacturing base that reaches across the United States. Outdoor recreation amenities provide many opportunities to enjoy time spent outdoors and draws visitors to the community year-round. While the community has experienced the loss of a major employer in the past 10 years, and the closure of a few small businesses (due to aging owners retiring), community members desire to reverse these trends.

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 Downtown. We hope the following observations and recommendations will help identify priorities and provide the motivation shift from planning to action on positive Downtown and community projects.

## OBSERVATIONS

The following statements summarize the thoughts of the Downtown Assessment Team as a result of the driving and walking tours, as well as interviews and meetings with Webster City residents:

- Business mix located downtown provides for most of the community needs.
- Strong manufacturing base/employment that brings 1,100+ into the community.
- Young people who grew up in the area are returning, taking over local businesses, or starting new ones.
- Several local businesses are destination businesses bringing customers into the community.
- Hwy 17 & Hwy 20 provide strong traffic numbers and exposure for the community.
- The community has outstanding public facilities including the public library and Fuller Hall, which were donated by local benefactors to the community.
- The community is surrounded by outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities.
- New housing developments have been created and building lots are available.
- A good way-finding signage system is in place.
- Local public arts and cultural programs are established and expanding.

## Some of the challenges that the team identified:

- Some hobby businesses are occupying prime commercial spaces but are rarely open to the public.
- Deferred building maintenance exists for several downtown buildings.
- Inappropriate renovations to buildings are affecting the structural integrity of several properties; some have collapsed due to this issue.
- There are no high-quality, move-in-ready retail spaces available.
- Labor Force shortages are making it difficult for local businesses to fill vacant positions.
- Communication between key stakeholders interested in community development efforts needs to be improved and shared on a more consistent basis.
- Affordable housing is an issue community wide and is contributing to the labor workforce issues of major employers.
- Changing volunteer base as past volunteers age and people move in and out of the community.

## THE SURVEY SAYS...

Prior to the assessment visit to Webster City, the Iowa Downtown Resource Center administered an online survey to residents of the community to get their ideas and opinions about the downtown area. Approximately 80 people participated in the survey. A complete summary of survey responses for the pre-assessment survey is available as an attachment.

## PRE-ASSESSMENT VISIT SURVEY trends show... (answers in order of popularity)

### WHAT IS DOWNTOWN'S GREATEST STRENGTH?

- Appearance/Cleanliness
- Location
- Promotional Events
- Downtown Buildings

### WHAT IS DOWNTOWN'S GREATEST WEAKNESS?

- Lack of Downtown Business/Better Mix
- Downtown Buildings/Empty Storefronts
- Not Enough to Do
- Appearance/Cleanliness
- No Local Support
- Inconsistent Business Hours



### IF YOU WERE GIVEN \$100,000 TO INVEST IN THE DOWNTOWN, WHAT WOULD YOU USE THE FUNDS FOR?

- Building Upgrades/Update Empty Storefronts/Facades
- Entice New Businesses to Come to Webster City/Incentives
- Light Sculpture/Public Art/Murals
- Fun Center/Place for Kids
- Café/Dinner Place/New Restaurant
- Better Access from Parking Lots to the Downtown
- New Signage
- Outdoor Spaces in Open Lots/Trees/More Seating/Pedestrian Facelift
- New Businesses/Craft Shop/Bakery/Bookstore/Night Club

**WHAT TYPE OF NEW BUSINESS IS MOST NEEDED IN DOWNTOWN WEBSTER CITY?**

- Restaurant
- Boutiques/Women's Apparel
- General Merchandise Retailer/Variety Store
- Hallmark/Gift Shop
- Family Fun Center/Bowling/Arcade
- Bakery
- Shoe Store
- Walmart/Target/Kmart
- Winery/Brewery
- Hobby Shop
- Games/Toys
- Household Goods



**WHAT TYPE OF NEW ACTIVITY WOULD MAKE YOU WANT TO SPEND TIME IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA?**

- Restaurant/Dining
  - Family-friendly and Higher-end Dining (similar to The Emphorium)
- More Shopping/More Businesses
- Live Music/Performances in the Green Spaces
- Fire Heaters and Umbrellas for Outdoor Dining Year-Round
- Kids Activities/Kids Game Room
- Festivals/Cultural Festival/Music Festival
- Crafts/Card Making
- Junk Fest Back Downtown
- Different Events/Community Activities
- Market Nights
- Weekly Farmers Market
- Public Pianos
- Family-Friendly Activities
- Stores Open Later One Night a Week
- Art Gallery/Art Space

**WHAT PUBLIC AMENITIES DO YOU THINK ARE MOST NEEDED DOWNTOWN?**

- Places for Kids
- Parking
- Public Art
- Street Seating
- Greenspace
- Better Lighting
- Trash Receptacles
- Bike Lanes
- Directional Signage



## ASSESSMENT TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Assessment team's recommendations have been grouped into five themes with suggested recommendations 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.

- Theme 1 – Building Maintenance
- Theme 2 – Downtown Enhancements
- Theme 3 – Communication & Collaboration
- Theme 4 – Public Outreach
- Theme 5 – Implementation

The Assessment Team hopes Webster City will assess each recommendation and develop a plan to implement what is right for Webster City. 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 allow the Assessment Team to be honest in its findings.

## THEME 1: BUILDING MAINTENANCE

The number one concern that the Assessment Team heard over and over again during our interviews related to the condition of several downtown buildings.

Vacant buildings and buildings that have not been well maintained can have a negative impact on your downtown. The message that it sends to visitors and residents is that downtown is not a priority and lacks community pride. Think of your community like you would your home. How do you want your community to look when company comes to visit? If you think of the community as Webster City's "house" the yard is your recreational assets, the front porch is the gateway into your community, the kitchen your water department, the garage is public works, residential areas are your bedrooms, and the living room is your downtown.



When you invite someone over to your home to entertain you typically invite them into your living room. Your living room is where people get the impression of who and what you are and what is important to you. Having the nicest hardwood floors can be overlooked if your furniture is uncomfortable, broken, dirty or even unsafe to sit on. Bare walls don't allow a person to identify with what you value. The more entertaining the setting the more you establish a lasting impression of positivity. You want the first impression that visitors have to downtown Webster City to be positive.



Webster City has invested time into educated decisions about their downtown. This is evident by the 2019 University of Iowa Strategic Plan, Chapter 3.5 of the 2021 Webster City Comprehensive Plan, the City investment into streetscape, and locally driven business/building incentive programs. The streetscape, public art and incentives should be celebrated, and everyone involved should be commended for this. It has laid the groundwork for a vibrant downtown. However, the work is not complete, and it never will be, nor should it be. A community should constantly be working to improve itself in all aspects. As everyone involved with the streetscape project should be celebrated, the maintenance of the sidewalks is lacking. Nothing says "stay out" or "don't come down here" than snow/ice covered sidewalks. This hurts the downtown experience by not being pedestrian friendly.

Some of Webster City's buildings are perceived as a liability when they should be viewed as opportunities. Opportunities for growth. Opportunities to fill a need. Opportunities to identify the community. You very well may identify a need that could fit in your downtown, but if no building could feasibly work for that particular business, no amount of recruiting will get them there.

The cost of a vacant building, as reflected on the following page, is more than just depreciated value. It spreads not only to other businesses, public utility, local option sales tax but more importantly, property tax valuation.



Potential lost revenue yearly

**\$221,840.00**

Place Economics, Donovan Rypkema/ March 2013

**Cost of a vacant building:**

- Local Government
  - Property tax \$100.00
  - Sales tax \$5,000.00
- Building Owner
  - Rents \$8,400.00
  - Property Value \$5,040.00
- Banks
  - Loans \$39,000.00
  - Fees & Interest \$2,200.00
  - Deposits \$17,000.00
- Professional Services
  - Insurance Premiums \$2,700.00
  - Legal & Accounting \$900.00
  - Property Management \$500.00
- Suppliers
  - M&R \$1,300.00
  - Printing/copying \$500.00
  - Supplies \$900.00
- Media
  - Marketing, advertising, PR \$6,200.00
- Workers
  - Business \$56,800.00
  - Owner's Comp & Profit \$31,500.00
  - Outside workers \$24,100.00
- Utility
  - Tele,Elec,Gas,Water,Internet,etc \$4,700.00
- State Government
  - Sales Tax \$15,000.00

With the majority of downtown building stock having been built over 100 years ago, deferred maintenance has become a problem. A lack of investment in the buildings has created these potential liabilities along with the loss in revenue.

In looking for a “return on investment” for a downtown let’s take a look at two projects in Audubon County, Iowa.

These two properties are by no means apples to apples. However, investing in what you have is as important as it is to recruit the next major employer.

**Return on Investment (ROI) Waspy's**

Taxable Value	\$9,469,810.00
Square Feet of land	1,130,818
Value per square foot	\$8.37

**Waspy's** is a truck stop chain that Audubon County recruited to town.

Not only is it a fuel station, but it also has an attached steakhouse, mechanic shop, truck wash and a 52 room hotel.

Is this important for the growth of Audubon? Absolutely. This created jobs, services, taxable value, entertainment, and lodging. At \$9,469,810 in taxable value and occupying 1,130,818 of land there is a return on investment of \$8.37 per square foot of taxable valuation.

**Return on Investment (ROI) 312 Broadway St**

Taxable Value	\$108,190.00
Square Feet of land	3,125
Value per square foot	\$34.62



**312 Broadway Street** In downtown Audubon is a rehabilitated historic building. On the first floor there is a bakery/coffee shop and in the upper story there are two apartments.

Is this building important to the growth of Audubon? Absolutely, and the building is already there. At \$108,190 in taxable value and occupying every square foot of the lot it sets on at 3,125 square feet; there is a return on investment of \$34.62 per square foot of taxable valuation.

A business on the first floor of a downtown building but vacant above creates multiple problems. The business is now burdened with the maintenance and cash flow of the entire building. This in turn drives the rent up and makes it difficult for that business to succeed in a small community. Having the upstairs vacant means that there are no eyes to spot the first drip of water that potentially could turn into thousands of gallons. The heat/cool loss from the first floor into the upper story makes utilities extremely expensive. When the upper story is finished out and occupied, it not only provides stable income for the building, but it also provides extra eyes for potential maintenance issues and a temperature regulated area easing the utilities on the first floor.

The renovation of the theater downtown is one the community is very proud of and is a definite draw to your community. Congratulations on this project!

The building next door to the theater presents lots of opportunity to leverage the beautiful theater building and continue to improve this central gathering space in the heart of downtown. The second story of this building is prime real estate for an upper story housing project and could provide 4 additional housing units, which are desperately needed.

The first-floor space could provide space for more family entertainment options that would complement the theater including an arcade, bowling alley, or axe throwing venue. More options for family entertainment were mentioned frequently as something most residents' desire. The center hallway could also serve as a pass-thru to the rear parking lot, providing a more convenient way for patrons to engage with these businesses during the evening hours.

See design rendering on the following page.



- LEVERAGE THE SUCCESS OF THE THEATRE WITH RENOVATION OF ADJACENT BUILDING
- CENTER HALL APTS. (4) WITH EFFICIENT NET-TO-GROSS (MIN. HALLWAYS)
  - ARCADE, MOVIE SNACKS/ICE CREAM
  - BOWLING ALLEY, AXE THROWING, FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT
- EXTEND CENTER HALL AS PASS-THRU TO LARGE PARKING SUPPLY BEHIND BUILDING (CURRENTLY DIFFICULT TO ACCESS)



- FEATURE STOREFRONTS AS MOST IMPORTANT DOWNTOWN EXPERIENCE. INTERIOR FOCUSED LIGHT ON ITEMS IN WINDOW (BRIGHTER THAN STREET LIGHTS). DISPLAY WINDOW IS YOUR SIGN THAT DRAWS CUSTOMERS IN.
- ADD BLADE SIGNS TO "LEAD" PEDESTRIANS AND ENLIVEN STREETScape

- USE CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS THAT WERE AVAILABLE WHEN THE BUILDING WAS ORIGINALLY BUILT OR ALTERNATIVE MATERIALS THAT ARE AUTHENTICALLY SIMILAR IN APPEARANCE
- TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TALL FLOOR TO CEILINGS WITH TALL WINDOWS (PER ORIGINAL CONSTRUCTION) TO LET LIGHT INTO SPACE AND CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEZZANINES/LOFTS

- DARK COLORED RAILING THAT MEETS 4" OPENING CODE
- CLEAR &/OR TRANSLUCENT WINDOWS FOR LOWER LEVEL
- OPEN TRANSOM WINDOWS TO ALLOW LIGHT DEEP INTO SPACE

The care you take to maintain the public spaces within your community is also important. Public spaces such as city parks, streets, and sidewalks set a standard of what the community expects and values. Your downtown is one part of the community that should tell a positive story about the people who call your community home.

The businesses that operate downtown also contribute to the image or brand of the community based on how they care for their buildings. Boarded up windows, peeling paint, garbage on the sidewalks, and vacant window displays send the wrong message. The public and private sector must work together to create a positive experience for shoppers and residents when they come downtown.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

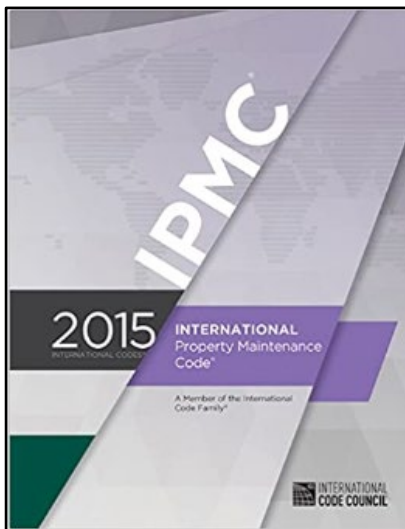
- Regulation of Webster City's Sec. 42-238 – Removal of snow, ice and accumulations needs to be enforced. There is a tremendous investment in the streetscape of downtown and it needs to be protected.
- Conduct a quality building inventory – occupied or not. When recruiting a business, you must identify the spaces available and determine if they are "move in" ready or not. If spaces are not ready to be occupied a business will find it difficult to locate downtown. Knowing the condition, and capabilities of a building is critical. This also opens the door to speaking with the property owner and gauging what their intentions are and what they are willing to do. It allows you a point of contact when there is interest in the building or if an emergency happens to occur.
- The quality and safety of these buildings is dictated on the city's building code and nuisance ordinances. A city can have these codes and ordinances but without enforcement – they do nothing. Establish a Building/Zoning/Code Official for Webster City. This position will help "set the bar" for minimum standards of all structures and properties in Webster City. Without standards, the bar does not exist. The Building/Zoning/Code Official would not be confined to only the downtown district but the entire city limits improving the entire community.
  - The Building/Zoning/Code Official would be responsible for examining residential, commercial, and industrial plans and drawings for conformance with applicable state and local codes by way of permits.
  - The Building Official would participate in development of policies, procedures, and codes (state and local) to assure quality control of current standards with inspections.
  - The Building/Zoning/Code Official would review applications for variances, conditional use permits, subdivisions, and zoning changes, make recommendations to the Commission, Administrator, and Council to assure compliance with city codes, coordinate assistance on planning and zoning issues with Engineers, Attorneys, and Building Department, determine legal use of zones before recommendation to Building Department, initiate all legal activities in zoning violations, refer to Attorney for assistance, and provide support to all development activities.
  - The Building/Zoning/Code Official would enforce all City nuisance codes and ordinances, actively patrol streets and respond to complaints and violations, research files to locate property owners, managers, and agents, develop department guidelines and procedures to effectively and efficiently accomplish the community's needs, provide all record keeping of notices and violations, be responsible for all legal activities concerning code enforcement, work with all city staff to coordinate their responsibilities involved in proper code violations, maintain budget record keeping and tax liens.



- The Building/Zoning/Code Official would work with the City Council to create a fee schedule for Building Permits, Variance Requests, Special Use Permits, Zoning Change Requests, Plats of Survey, Major/Minor Subdivisions, Preliminary Plats and Final Plats. These fees throughout the year should pay for the Building/Zoning/Code Department while establishing health and safety standards for Webster City.
- Enforce Webster City’s existing building codes. This is the “bar” you are aiming for. If adopted but not enforced, it is the same as having a tool on the shelf but never using it.
- For downtown standards, the most important code to enforce is the International Property Maintenance. This code addresses issues with slum and blight.

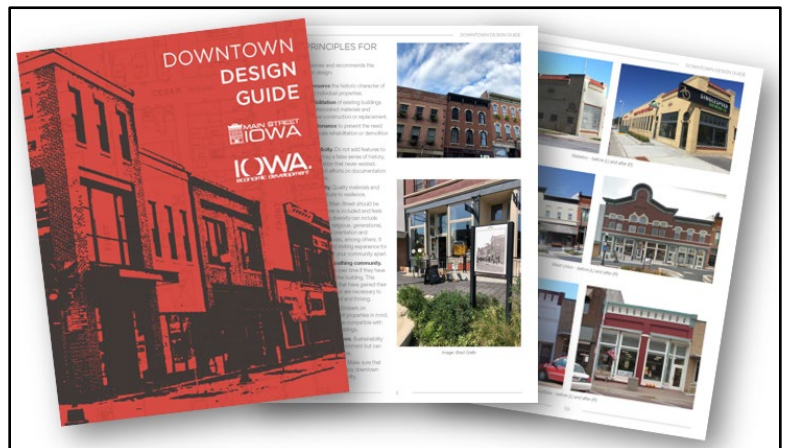
The City of Webster City has adopted by reference the following building codes:

- 2015 International Building Code
- 2015 International Residential Code
- 2015 International Fire Code
- 2015 International Mechanical Code
- 2015 Uniform Plumbing Code
- 2011 National Electric Code
- 2015 International Fuel Gas Code
- 2015 International Existing Building Code
- 2015 International Energy Conservation Code
- 2015 International Property Maintenance Code
- 2017 Sudas Design



- Review and update zoning codes to ensure current zoning encourages downtown development instead of preventing it along with ensuring the Nuisance Abatement Ordinances and Procedures are up to date. A downtown should never have storage as a permitted use unless it is secondary to the primary business, nor should dangerous materials be allowed to accumulate where open to the public. A building that is in poor condition brings down the value of the properties around it. Nuisance Abatement and Code Enforcement helps prevent this from happening but helps property owners achieve pride in their building. From a shoppers view on the sidewalk, you can see business signs across the street, but you are unable to see the signs for the businesses next to you. To increase the visibility of this signage, consider allowing projecting, hanging or blade signs.

- Discuss creating [Design Guidelines](#) for the downtown area. These guidelines advocate for the principles in rehabilitation, renovation, and new construction activities within the downtown area. These guidelines are offered to help the property owner and developer make sound investment decisions in the building improvements while enhancing the area’s historic character. Building plans should be reviewed with the city building inspector to ensure substantial compliance with these guidelines. The recommendations should be focused on historic renovations and discourage adding or elements that are not original in design to the building or infill historic openings. These guidelines can be adopted as an ordinance or as incentives for grant programs.





- Establish a Vacant Building Registry ordinance. A vacant downtown building can be characterized as one not open to the public. Typically, these buildings can be absentee owners or a foreclosure. They can also be a building used as storage. This allows the Building/Code Official to do regular inspections to identify problems within the interior of a building that cannot be seen from the outside. This will create a proactive approach to issues with a building instead of reactive. Additionally, it helps motivate the sale of the property. Fees and timeframes set for inspections can be set by the Planning and Zoning Commission along with the City Council.
- Apply for a Community Catalyst Building Remediation Grant. This grant is geared toward a project that could be the City's poster child for downtown revitalization. Continual contact with Iowa Economic Development Authority on appropriate projects is encouraged.



- Continue locally funded "grants" for things like facade repairs, roof repairs, essential utility upgrades and sign replacement. This helps the current owners with improvements and when spread around the downtown district, can make a large impact. The Webster City Chamber of Commerce has a Design Grant Program to encourage these projects for members, but it has a cap of \$800 and a maximum fund of \$2,400 per year. The average commercial grade front door with hardware installed is \$4,000. A complete storefront glass system is an average of \$30,000. Consider increasing amounts to make a larger impact.

- Establish Economic Development Agreements for developers and current owners of downtown buildings. These can help incentivize a developer or building owner to do extensive repairs and protect the city by including provisions that benefit the downtown. These can be created by utilizing Tax Increment Financing (TIF). The City would offer a sum of money to a developer by way of a forgivable loan over so many years. The agreement would set expectations from the city for the forgivable loan to be spent on; completion of second story apartments, new HVAC, upgraded electrical service, tuck pointing, roof repair, etc. This ensures the City's investment stays with the building and creates an incentive for the building owner to upgrade the "bones and veins" of the building. The City would pay itself back from the increment captured within the TIF District.
- Engage the second story of the buildings. People downtown means activity downtown. This also helps a building to cash flow. Doing a mid to higher end build out of a second or third story apartment adds rent to the property which helps the building owner show a return on their investment. Meanwhile, the people living in the apartments will tend to shop and dine within walking distance, helping those business owners.
- Create a development team. This team should consist of the Building Official, Mayor Council Member, City Attorney, a County Supervisor, Chamber Board Member, Economic Development Board Member, Structural Engineer, Architect, General Contractor. This team can help collaborate to create incentives, economic development agreements, downtown development strategies, targeted business recruitment.

- Establish a list of your local trades' talent. Skilled trades for historic buildings are a must. Invite the local high school building trades instructor along with Iowa Central Community College to be a part of your discussions as they have talent and labor that could assist in small to medium range projects. This will allow you to know who to contact when a business owner wants to make a repair but does not know who to ask.

## THEME 2: DOWNTOWN ENHANCEMENTS

Webster City has made significant investments to the physically built environment downtown through past improvements to the streetscape and public green spaces. The downtown lighting and sidewalk seating areas are attractive and have been well maintained. The wayfinding signage includes areas to share the story of Webster City with visitors through attractive kiosks placed throughout the district. Your city blocks are very long, averaging between 600-700 feet. The average city block is 300 feet so you must work extra hard to draw pedestrians down each block to experience everything you have to offer.

Key anchor businesses (identified in pink in the design rendering on page 16) can be starting points for customers visiting downtown. Having something every 20 feet – attractive window displays, plantings or public art – helps guide shoppers down the street. Attractive blade signage also draws customers to the next business. The City should revisit their ordinance to allow this type of signage, which significantly improves the customer's shopping experience.



The planting areas are a positive addition to your streetscape but could use a little attention. Removing the lower branches on some of the trees will open up the views of the storefronts and some of the evergreens could be replaced. Continue to address garbage and regular sidewalk maintenance (including snow removal) so that downtown looks attractive no matter what time of year it is.

Pete's Donuts is a great example of a local entrepreneur who creates community and would benefit from simple low-cost signage improvements. While most locals know where Pete's is, improved signage is for visitors and could help enliven the downtown experience. Although this business has a very small footprint downtown, they are bringing people to the area and often sells out of products early in the day. This building is also a great example of how saving your historic buildings, even the small ones, creates a place for small business to thrive and grow. See the design rendering on page 17.

It is also important to begin to develop a program to address business succession for downtown Webster City. Our team heard repeatedly about business owners wanting to retire or businesses that simply closed because there was not a buyer or a succession plan in place to transition the business to new ownership.

This has led to several vacant buildings downtown, with hints of more to come in the near future. It's time to be proactive rather than reactive to help ensure those landmark and important businesses remain in the community. Advance Iowa, located at the University of Northern Iowa is a great resource to assist businesses, especially family-owned businesses, to begin the discussions and planning for business transition.





- HOW CAN THE "CITY" HELP?
  - SUCCESSION PLAN
  - FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR SIMPLE, LOW COST SIGNAGE (PEOPLE KNOW WHERE PETE'S IS, THE SIGN IS FOR VISITORS AND TO ENLIVEN THE DOWNTOWN EXPERIENCE)
  - LIMB UP MATURE LOCUST TREES TO OPEN UP VIEWS OF STOREFRONTS
  - REPLACE LOW EVERGREENS IN DECLINE (TOO MUCH SHADE) WITH FLOWERING PERENNIALS

- TERRIFIC EXAMPLE OF LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR:
  - SAVING A BUILDING (EMPTY LOTS DO NOTHING FOR DOWNTOWN)
  - CREATING A VIABLE BUSINESS
  - PROVIDING A BUSINESS THAT BRINGS PEOPLE TO DOWNTOWN & CREATES "COMMUNITY"
  - GENERATING TAX REVENUES

The long city blocks also make it challenging to move from the rear parking areas to 2<sup>nd</sup> street. Look for areas where you can create pass-throughs that allow shoppers to access the 2<sup>nd</sup> Street businesses without going all the way around each block. Can they pass through a business or can gaps between buildings be turned into attractive walkways that are well lit and enhanced with seating or public art?

Webster City has ample parking available on both 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and the large public parking areas north of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. There is an opportunity to improve these areas and make them more attractive to shoppers. Sustainable environments that help define driveways are a great place to start. Adding plantings or trees in these areas make them safer, provide for stormwater management, provide areas for additional wayfinding signage as well as providing shade and color. Making sure these areas are well lit is also important from safety concerns, especially during the evening.

You have done a good job of bringing public art to the community. While there are some areas where public art is displayed downtown, there are opportunities to bring more to the area. Use public art to enhance the downtown experience for both vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Continue to build on the successful public art installations you currently have in place. Work to finish the mural that was started when you hosted RAGBRAI in 2022.

Deferred maintenance on downtown buildings has resulted in several buildings being torn down and lost forever. These historic buildings are part of your history and should be saved whenever possible. Vacant lots where buildings once stood do nothing for your downtown. They lower the city's tax revenue and create a void visually. You must be proactive to help bring purpose to the vacant lots that currently exist downtown. This is not just a city issue and has the greatest chance for success when it becomes a public/private partnership. One possible solution is to create mini structures on the vacant lots that provide temporary or short-term incubator space for micro businesses or new start-ups. These spaces allow small businesses to test the local market and establish a customer base before taking the leap into a full-size storefront. Jewell, Iowa and Marion, Iowa have had success with this concept, even utilizing grant funds to get started.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Complete the mural started downtown.
- Create a task force to review top projects and present a timeline to City Council.
- Consider adopting guiding principles to help aid future planning and implementation efforts.
- Review current sign ordinance to allow blade signage.
- Address business succession needs.
- Improve parking areas.
- Look for areas where you can create pass-throughs that allow shoppers to access the 2<sup>nd</sup> Street businesses.
- Repurpose vacant lots.

**COMMUNICATION**

Communication – or a lack thereof – was a recurring theme in discussions held with many of the focus groups. As a result, it was obviously causing some misunderstandings, miscommunication, confusion, frustration, hard feelings, as well as stalled out projects.

“We have a lot of good things here, but nobody knows,” said one respondent. “Community dialogue is absolutely terrible,” commented another. “Nobody really knows what is going on or what everyone else is doing.” A third reported, “people think things just happen, but they don’t,” adding “no one is sure who should be in the lead for which projects.”

Examples cited included miscommunication between City officials and staff, miscommunication between the City and County, a disconnect between the City and business community, a wide-spread sense that the downtown is only 2-3 blocks along Second Street, no business input on community events and no communication or collaboration between the communities of Hamilton County resulting in conflicting events.

Several business owners do not believe downtown is considered a priority by community leaders. With the recent building collapse downtown, people aren’t sure what older buildings are safe to go in and which may not be, hurting the businesses within. There are questions about whether building inspections and code enforcement are being done, is there any assistance for building owners needing to make repairs, and who is responsible for snow and ice-covered downtown sidewalks – a hazard that was mentioned numerous times.

Several other business owners noted they pay into the Self-Supported Municipal Improvement District (SSMID), which they said does a good job of making the 2-3 block stretch of Second Street look good, but businesses like theirs along the side streets downtown do not see the same benefits. That adds to the misperception that they are not part of the downtown.

On the customer-side, there were numerous mentions of businesses not being open when customers are available to shop. Many are closed after 5 p.m., on weekends or by noon on Saturdays. Frustration was voiced over the lack of diversity of shops and restaurants, as well as the inability to purchase needed items like shoes, office supplies and even underwear locally. Respondents didn’t think businesses are listening to the types of hours, goods and services they want and need today, and are stuck still doing things the way they have always done in the past.

Better communication is a two-way street. People must be willing to talk, but also to listen to one another. They need to keep the lines of communication open at both ends and seek out answers when there are questions. Everyone who visited with the Assessment Team has the same goal – to make their community of Webster City a great place to live and do business.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Stay updated on community news through the local newspaper, radio station and newsletters.
- Attend a City Council meeting to learn or talk about an issue.
- Consider having the Chamber host quarterly Community Coffee Gatherings to provide updates to the public on what is going on. City staff could attend to provide updates on current city projects.

- A regular newsletter or email blast updating what the City, Chamber and SMMID are working on could be completed by each entity and distributed through the Chamber.
- Work to increase awareness of what the downtown district encompasses and what role the SSMID plays through flyers, social media posts of SSMID members in action, media releases and discussions during public meetings.
- Distribute a community survey to see what goods and services residents wish they could purchase in town; what types of new businesses they would like to see to assist in business recruitment efforts.
- Work with the Downtown Resource Center or ISU Extension on an updated Economic Profile report to better understand sales surplus and leakage for Webster City.
- Consider a coordinated and consistent effort to extend shopping hours to better serve working residents. This might be one Saturday a month, one night during the week, or later hours on Saturdays.
- Businesses should look at their peak hours to see if they could open later and stay open later to better serve customers without adding additional hours to their current hours of operation.
- Coordinate ways for community events to better benefit businesses, whether by time of year, location, cross promoting or letting event traffic at the fairgrounds know about downtown shopping and dining opportunities.

## COLLABORATION

During our assessment interviews, the team learned that there are many groups, all doing good things in Webster City, but mainly working alone, rather than in tandem for the betterment of the community. This adds to the lack of communication within the community and can hamper each other's efforts. It can also result in wasted time and money in duplicating efforts and trying to fundraise against each other. Each of these groups bring something to the table in terms of knowledge, experience, resources, energy, and volunteers/workers. There is strength in unity by talking and working together whenever possible.

Enhanced collaboration can have outstanding benefits for the community. The bottom line for everyone is community betterment, so why not work together towards that? There are many potential partners – the City, County, School, LIFT-WC, Chamber – to name a few that could join forces to help overcome challenges and bring additional resources, both dollars and manpower, to the table to accomplish shared goals in a timelier manner. Enhanced collaboration is also very positive when applying for grants for local projects. Grant review committees love partnerships and collaboration! They give you the opportunity to score higher and make you even more competitive.

From a county-wide standpoint, having each of the communities in Hamilton County collaborate for the greater good would also make sense. Remarks were made in the focus groups that “towns in Hamilton County don't play well together” and that there were conflicting events because “it's every town for itself.” Imagine the drawing power if they all worked together to bring people to Hamilton County with so much more to offer than any one community? Instead of a two-hour visit, invite people to make a day or weekend of it seeing ALL that Hamilton County has to offer.

There are two great community resources with the local school district and community college that could be taken advantage of more. Students are your community's next generation, but you need to involve them in the community and show them all it has to offer them after graduation. Employers could work with the schools on career exploration and internship opportunities, which in turn can directly benefit local businesses. The Chamber, Library or historical groups could offer community and history tours so that students know about their hometown and the stories behind it. Utilize art students to add vitality downtown by painting vacant storefront windows or



helping with window displays. Students today are very tech-savvy and could assist those businesses that need assistance with social media marketing. The community college can assist with integrating Webster City's diverse population through ESL and community education classes. While there is no construction program at the Webster City campus, the community college does have one 20 miles away that could be tapped into to assist with the housing shortage. The high school also has two industrial education instructors.

Some communities greatly benefit from a Joint Entity Board or group that meets regularly and is comprised of representatives from the City, County, School District, Chamber, Economic Development, SSMID, Library, LIFT WC, hospital and any other groups you want to include. They often meet monthly, or at least quarterly, to share what they have going on, are planning to do, any issues or challenges they are facing, and to offer ideas or suggestions to possible solutions. First and foremost, it keeps everyone involved updated and the lines of communication open, but also can lead to useful suggestions, shared resources, and partnerships to address community issues. It takes the burden off just one entity if the issue impacts multiple entities who could work together on it. These meetings also are helpful in avoiding crossed wires, duplicating efforts or everyone trying to do public fundraising at the same time. One entity is usually responsible for organizing and running the meetings, usually the City or the Chamber. They are not open to the public, no minutes are required, and no official actions can be taken – informational only. It was said the City used to do something similar in Webster City but stopped. If the City does not wish to organize it, the Chamber or other third party could.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- There is strength in unity . . . explore partnerships to ease burdens and increase resources.
- Establish a regular Joint Entity Board meeting, using the Chamber or other third party to facilitate.
- Set up City, County, School and Chamber Board liaison positions to sit in on each other's meetings and provide brief updates on what their entity has going on, as well as to hear what others are doing.
- Work with the local newspaper to set up a weekly column that rotates between the different Joint Entity Board members to update the public.
- Work with the local radio station to do a Community Chat featuring a representative from different community groups or at least the mayor or Chamber director.
- Encourage different entities to submit Letters to the Editor thanking volunteers or supporters for projects they have accomplished or are working on. It provides awareness and different voices.
- Create a Hamilton County Calendar in addition to the Community Calendar on the Chamber website and have all the towns in Hamilton County list their events and use the calendar to avoid scheduling conflicts. It can also serve as a county-wide tourism tool.

**Working together works: Communicate, Collaborate, Celebrate – then rinse and repeat!**



Webster City has a lot to offer and be proud of; a stunning library, a terrific rec center, outstanding outdoor recreational facilities including Briggs Woods, small town charm and an attractive downtown streetscape. The community is also home of the Doodlebug Scooter and not just one, but two Nobel Prize winning authors, something no other US community can claim! There's also the Webster Theater, where none other than the legendary Dan Ackroyd once came and sold tickets at, then later used a line in a movie that his character was from Webster City, Iowa. On top of all that, the most identified community asset talked about in the focus groups was the friendly people of Webster City themselves, and how kind and willing they are to get involved.

Unfortunately, most Iowans are terrible at bragging and need to do a much better job of telling their stories. Webster City is no different. You need to let people know who you are, what you have to offer, and what you're doing to move forward. What's special here? Why choose Webster City? How you answer that question is where you need to start.

Everyone is a recruiter for Webster City, whether they realize it or not. From the Mayor and Chamber Director to council members and shop owners, to the convenience store clerk and restaurant staff. First impressions are lasting impressions. When the assessment team asked focus groups what they were most proud of in their community; there were several instances when the response was silence. This needs to change! You need to have your 20-second "Elevator Speech" ready when asked that question. First impressions are lasting impressions. You may not get a second chance to sell that person on your community. If you can't get excited about anything in your community, why should anyone else? There will always be challenges to work on but celebrate the good things and share those with others. Train your front-line workers how to be better community ambassadors when asked that fateful question of "What is there to do in Webster City?"

It makes it a lot easier to promote Webster City if you know Webster City. Just because you live or work in a place doesn't mean you know much about that place. We all tend to live in our little silos and don't necessarily see the big picture around us. Learn about your community, know its history and fascinating residents, know the assets and opportunities you currently have. Know who the players are and what they do. They are all important pieces to the Webster City puzzle. Utilize your Chamber, library, and museums to teach residents about their community, as well as the schools to teach new generations about their hometown . . . its past, present and future. Make sure they know what they have and the opportunities available. It's a great way to get everyone more involved and invested, not to mention making them better recruiters for your community.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Create a Quick Facts brochure about Webster City history and notable nuggets about the community.
- Make sure community promotional materials are at every restaurant, convenience store, and at Briggs Woods.
- Offer a hospitality workshop for your businesses.
- Visits by Chamber representatives to hotel, restaurant or convenience store staff with tips and promotional resources . . . let them know where to direct visitors.
- Column in the local newspaper or radio interviews about the importance of positive promotion of the community.

- Offer community tours for residents, employers, and perspective employees.
- Host community history talks at the library or museums; focus on a different subject each time.
- Integrate community history and community tours into the school curriculum – both for students and teachers, as many teachers aren't from Webster City originally. They can't teach what they don't know.
- Create a Historic Preservation Commission to preserve and promote awareness of the community's history and historically significant buildings.

## IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY BRAND

Webster City has a great location in central Iowa along Highway 20 with easy access to the interstate highway system and major metropolitan areas. This makes it a great place for local businesses including manufacturing and ag related businesses that rely on truck and rail transportation to transport their goods. It also provides an opportunity to pull travelers into the community from Highway 20. Several business owners mentioned the thousands of vehicles that pass by on a daily basis and the challenge of getting people off Highway 20 and into town beyond the gas stations or McDonald's. While a solid wayfinding sign program is in place along Superior Street once you exit the highway, there is nothing located on Highway 20 to encourage and entice drivers to check out all that the community has to offer. Something more is needed to attract their attention and interest.

Attractive billboard signage should be explored to encourage drivers to stop in Webster City and see all that the community has to offer. Who and what is Webster City? Why should people consider stopping here, dining here, playing here, or better yet, living here?



People don't know what they don't know, you have to tell them. Be loud and proud to be from Webster City!

Before you do that, though, the community's identity needs to be clarified. Residents were asked during our focus groups what the community's identity was, and most weren't sure. There were a lot of different ideas of what it involved, but no clear consensus. At the top of the Webstercity.com website it says "Opportunity Awaits . . ." but it is not very prominent. What does "Opportunity Awaits . . ." mean? If that is your slogan, it should be prominently displayed and at the forefront of everything you say and do. There should be a unified community identity promoted by everyone.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Establish a consensus on a community identity and brand, and make sure everyone knows what it is – and why it is.
- Clarify what "Opportunity Awaits" means and, if your slogan, use it prominently.
- Use that brand everywhere you can to make it recognizable as promoting Webster City.
- Add a quick glance description of why Webster City is special and worth visiting to the City and Chamber websites.
- Consider promotional signage right after getting off Highway 20 to attract visitors downtown – possibly a Visitors Kiosk or digital display board.
- Make sure your businesses are cross promoting one another and your community attractions.

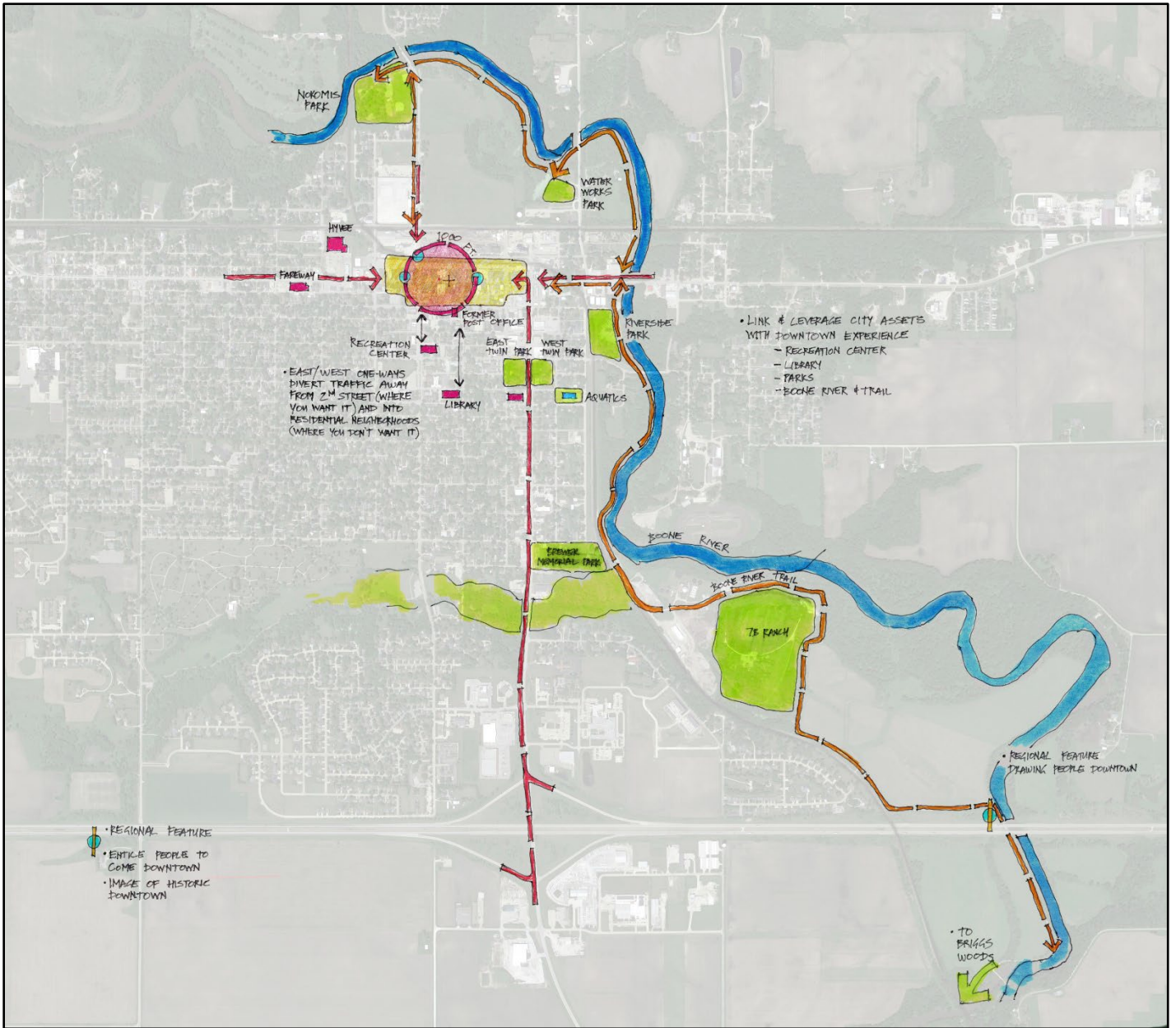
## REGIONAL PROMOTION

Once you are ready to promote the community, do so regionally and statewide. If you are just advertising locally you are preaching to the choir. You need to reach beyond, especially targeting travelers on Highway 20 before they get to the Webster City exit. Don't forget all of the communities along Highway 20 are an easy drive to your attractions and shopping. People like to get out and explore things outside of where they live. While you might fret over losing business to Fort Dodge, Boone, and Ames, you also have the opportunity to draw visitors from those locations who are looking for something different.

Utilize the Travel Iowa website and magazine by submitting stories, photos and keeping your information updated. There are other regional publications such as Inspire that offer advertising options. Have Webster City Community Guides available throughout the state at travel centers. Does the State Historical Society of Iowa have good information on your library and historic sites to help you promote them? Work with area tourism attractions and museums to promote Webster City in exchange for you helping to promote them. There are numerous outdoor recreational expos around the region like the Outdoor Adventure Expo in Minneapolis, Canoecopia in Madison, or the Eastern Iowa Sport Show in Cedar Falls. Attend and promote Briggs Woods State Park, your rivers and trails.

The trail system around Webster City is developing and provides a natural amenity that residents of all ages desire. This asset partnered with the Boone River provides another draw for the community – both for visitors and potential residents. It is important that you leverage these land and water trails with your other city assets such as the Recreation Center, public library and numerous city parks, and work to link them to the downtown.

How can you better direct trail and park users to the downtown? Look for key locations to add additional signage and gateways to connect trail users to the downtown and all it has to offer. Are there opportunities to add trailheads closer to the downtown so that trail users begin and end in or near the downtown district?



Social media campaigns and regional press releases are free and can be effective. Let area media outlets know about your special events ahead of time, and don't forget the small-town weekly newspapers in addition to the bigger community newspapers. There are a lot of smaller communities than Webster City along Highway 20 that might find what you have to offer appealing. Advertising in those newspapers is usually a lot less expensive as well. Do an occasional "Did You Know ..." social media campaign highlighting the unique treasures in Webster City.

Finally, make sure you keep all your attraction websites and Facebook pages active and updated. You never know who may be looking and interested in coming to visit. Show them what you have, keep it fresh and keep it current. There's nothing worse than getting someone to come, only for them to find out you are closed that day, or your posted hours of operation were wrong.

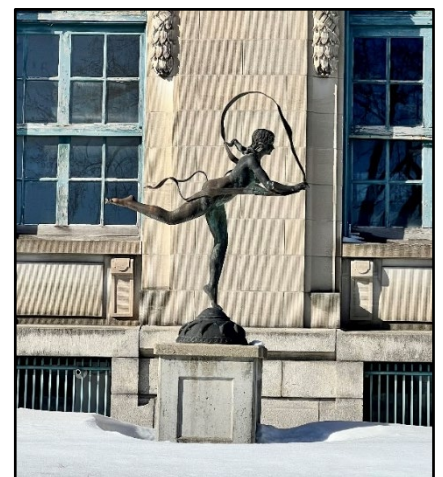
## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Consider promotional signage/billboards along Highway 20 before you get to the Webster City exit ... tease your one-of-a-kind library, Briggs Woods and trails, unique shops, dining opportunities, home of the Doodlebug, etc.
- Utilize Travel Iowa website and regional tourism magazines.
- Regional advertising and press releases to regional newspapers promoting community and events.
- Keep websites and Facebook pages updated and relevant.
- Create signage along the current trails to direct visitors to the downtown.
- Create QR code signage to place on trailheads or at Briggs Woods Park that directly connects to the Chamber website with downtown business hours and offerings.
- Create rack cards that list dining and shopping opportunities available in the community. Place them at local parks, the fairgrounds, museums, etc. Update them annually.

Researchers consistently find that peoples' experiences of place are heavily impacted by building facades, as noted in the recent article, From Vacant to Vibrant by Culture House found at this link, <https://medium.com/@culturehouse/from-vacant-to-vibrant-bac095189463>.

Commercial vacancies create inactive and monotonous facades which negatively impact people's moods. Activating storefronts can be used to reverse this effect and strengthen the downtown neighborhood.

Window displays, pop up shops, vacant building tours, art exhibits, and targeted signage are all examples of ways to activate vacant spaces to improve connectivity and sense of place. A good goal to work toward is to have something every 20 feet that visually engages pedestrians on the sidewalk. This could be an attractive window display or public art. Webster City already has an active public arts group that has done a great job bringing art installations to the community. This group is currently working to have Webster City participate in a larger, regional public art trail that is sure to bring more visitors to the community. Leverage your public art and look for opportunities to bring more of it downtown.



## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Create a policy to allow for organic street entertainment within parameters that both residents and guests can enjoy.
- Identify street performance and/or areas and clearly mark them to encourage use.
- Reach out to local artisans to create window displays that showcase the local art that is created in the Webster City area. This might include pottery, jewelry, painting and other media. The Northeast Iowa Studio Tour is a good example to research.
- Pair retailers with vacant storefront property owners to create window displays to showcase downtown offerings.
- Create a pop-up shop retail opportunity in vacant spaces for the holidays. Waterloo Iowa is an excellent example of a community that does this successfully.
- Work with commercial realtors to host a vacant building tour similar to Parade of Homes events done in other markets.
- Use survey data to design and install signage in vacant storefronts to target the business types that survey respondents identified as missing from the downtown. For example, “Imagine the Possibilities” with an image of great breakfast dining options. (The number 1 requested option in your community survey.)



Webster City has many plans that have been done over the past few years; the City's Comprehensive Plan, University of Iowa, and this Downtown Assessment to name just a few. Each of these plans identified areas of opportunity for improvements which will be necessary as the community continues to grow and evolve. The city and other community groups have made an effort to engage the community, listen to local partners, and bring in outside experts with fresh eyes to help identify the best way to move forward. However, sometimes too many reports and studies can stall the best intentions to get projects done. **NOW** is the time for Webster City to prioritize and move forward!

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- **Quarterly updates** – Host a quarterly update meeting for all active organizations (City, Rotary, Chamber, Webster City Schools, the Arts Council, etc.) to update each other on current projects. Look for opportunities to partner and support one another in those efforts. Keep the meeting short – no action taken – just a report-out of what each group is working on.
- **Celebrate your wins!!** Many times, we get so caught up in what needs to be done next that we forget to celebrate a completed project. Take time to share with the community and thank those involved.
- **Continue to tell the story.** Find ways to continue to tell the story about Webster City in new ways. When we have been directly involved in a project, we assume everyone else has the same knowledge we do. We need to continue to tell the story over and over. Consider sharing bits and pieces over social media networks, blog posts, presentations to local groups, and providing press releases to local news media.
- **Prioritize and get to work!** Webster City has invested time and resources to bring in professionals to advise the city on next steps to move the city forward. Many of the suggestions made by previous consultants are still relevant and align with the observations made by the Downtown Assessment team. Identify one or two items from each plan and create a timeline to implement those efforts. It's time to get to work!



## PRIORITIES

The Assessment team encourages Webster City to prioritize projects listed in this report, as well as other opportunities we feel are important.

Theme #	Immediate Priorities: (0-6 months)
1	Revisit prior plans and prioritize one or two projects that are most important.
1	Create a business and building inventory
1	Create an incentive program to help with building maintenance issues.
2	Host a Spring and Fall; clean-up downtown
2	Review city ordinances related to downtown signage, especially blade signage for businesses
3	Create a column in the local newspaper to positively promote/educate the community about all that Webster City has to offer.
3	Discuss partnerships with local groups and organizations to have events start and end in the downtown. (5K runs, bike rides, etc.)
3	Create a closed Facebook group for downtown merchants to share business-related information.
3	Create a community events calendar on the City/Webster City Chamber website.
3	Host a quarterly meeting to update community partners on projects currently underway
4	Identify trainings that can assist small business owners to be better prepared to reach new customers. Possible topics include social media marketing, online selling through Shop Iowa or other platforms, business succession, hospitality, etc.
4	Submit your local events to the Travel Iowa website.
Theme #	One Year Priorities (0-12 months)
1	Educate city leaders and building owners on proper building codes.
2	Create a task force to review top projects and present a timeline to City Council.
2	Consider adopting guiding principles to help aid future planning and implementation efforts.
3	Distribute a community survey to better understand gaps in the market.
3	Work to coordinate quarterly extended shopping hours to better serve customers.
3	Share accomplishments and completed community projects with the public through various media channels.
3	Create a page on the city website devoted to downtown development.
3	Create a Hamilton County calendar to help avoid scheduling conflicts so all the communities in the county can better support each other's events and activities.
4	Install additional signage to direct customers to free parking areas north of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street.
4	Consider hosting vacant property tours to showcase potential business opportunities.
4	Develop more consistent business hours including evening and weekend shopping hours.
Theme#	Longer term Projects: (0-24 months)
1	Review current policies and ordinances to identify those that stymie growth. Work to update ordinances to support positive business growth.
1	Continue efforts to adopt a unified building code.
1	Establish a vacant building ordinance.
2	Consider an annual public art contest to provide rotating art enhancements into the bump-out areas of the downtown.
4	Continue efforts to adopt a unified building code.
4	Review city ordinances related to downtown signage, especially blade signage for businesses.
Theme#	Down the Road...but plan now: (24 months +)
1	Research and adopt design guidelines to aid redevelopment efforts for historic buildings.
4	Create a Historic Preservation Commission for Webster City.

## CONCLUSION

We hope this will be a working document to guide Webster City 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.

One of the best ways to build on the citizen interest and excitement expressed during the Downtown Assessment is to identify “quick win” projects that show what is possible when the community comes together to revitalize downtown.

To assist the city and citizens of Webster City in keeping the momentum for downtown improvement going, the Iowa Economic Development Authority is offering . . .

Iowa Downtown Resource Center, IEDA, Des Moines, Iowa.....	515.348.6180
.....	<a href="https://iedamvc.spinstage.com/downtown-resource-center/">https://iedamvc.spinstage.com/downtown-resource-center/</a>
Keep Iowa Beautiful .....	515.323.6507
.....	<a href="https://www.keepiowabeautiful.com">https://www.keepiowabeautiful.com</a>
ISU Iowa Community Indicators Program Retail Analysis.....	<a href="http://www.icip.iastate.edu/retail">http://www.icip.iastate.edu/retail</a>
Certified Local Governments, State Historic Society of Iowa .....	515.281.6826
CDBG Downtown Revitalization Program.....	515.348.6208
.....	<a href="https://www.iowaeconomicdevelopment.com/DowntownFund">https://www.iowaeconomicdevelopment.com/DowntownFund</a>

### National and State Preservation Services and Programs:

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

## RESOURCES (electronic files are available [here](#))

- A Checklist for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings
- Business/Building Inventory Template
- Characteristics of a Successful Downtown
- Cost of an Empty Storefront
- Communication Strategies
- Creative Placemaking & the Arts Resource Guide
- Grow with Google Training
- Webster City ESRI Market Reports
- Webster City ESRI Market Snapshot
- Webster City Survey Summary
- Design Renderings
- Business Succession Handouts
- Window Displays
- Downtown Design Guidelines