

# DOWNTOWN ASSESSMENT REPORT

## WAUKEE TRIANGLE DISTRICT

AUGUST 9-11, 2022



Conducted by:

Iowa Downtown Resource Center



**IOWA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**

1963 Bell Avenue, Suite 200 | Des Moines, Iowa 50315

PH: 515.348.6180 | [James.Engle@IowaEDA.com](mailto:James.Engle@IowaEDA.com)

[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 five downtown development professionals:

**JIM ENGLE**, Director, Iowa Downtown Resource Center, Iowa Economic Development Authority, Des Moines, Iowa. Jim has been with IEDA since January 2014. As director of the Iowa Downtown Resource Center, he oversees all downtown development programs of the authority. His current responsibilities



include managing a million-dollar annual budget, overseeing the planning and delivery of technical assistance services, and developing training opportunities for all Iowa communities. Jim's areas of expertise are in organizational development, promotion, business development and working with smaller communities with populations ranging from 400 to 80,000. Prior to joining the IEDA, Jim served as Coordinator of the Wisconsin Main Street Program for 23 years. He also served as the Main Street Executive Director in Oskaloosa, Iowa. He holds a degree in Business Management from Central College in Pella, Iowa. Over the years, Jim has consulted for Main Street programs in Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Washington, Tennessee, and Michigan. He has also presented at many national downtown conferences.

**MAIA FIALA JESSEN** is the Design Coordinator for the Iowa Downtown Resource Center's Main Street Iowa program. In this role, she provides technical assistance and conceptual design services to Main



Street Iowa communities and manages the Challenge Grant program for building rehabilitation projects. Prior to joining Main Street Iowa, Maia worked with the Oregon State Historic Preservation office, assisting Oregon communities with Main Street design, historic resource survey and inventory, and property listing in the National Register of Historic Places. She has a BFA in Interior Design from Iowa State University, an MS in Historic Preservation from the University of Oregon and is a certified Historic Real Estate Development Finance Professional (HREDFP) through the National Development Council.

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



15 years and the Iowa Economic Development Authority for the last 14 years, Jeff has more than 25 years of grant writing, grant management, and program development experience with an emphasis on environmentally sustainable development. Jeff's expertise is matching up a community's vision with the resources to make the vision a reality. Jeff is actively involved with several nonprofit organizations and currently is a board member of Des Moines Heritage Trust. For

20+ years Jeff programmed an award-winning international comparative policy course in best practices for community leaders and graduate public administration students at Drake University. Along with being an EcoDistricts Accredited Professional and certified in the National Charrette Institute's Charrette System and Charrette Management, Jeff has a Bachelor of Science degree in management science and statistics from St. Ambrose University and master's degree in public administration from Drake University.

**DENNIS REYNOLDS** delivers award winning master planning, urban design, site design and public art with his unique combination of innovative design; presentation and listening skills; quick hand drawings;



and pro-active facilitation of the design process. Prior to creating his own consulting practice, Reynolds Urban Design, he provided senior level design services and leadership at HOK (Kansas City), Sasaki (Boston) and NBBJ (Columbus). He founded and led the innovative HOK S+V+E "Design Studio," facilitating cutting edge multi-disciplined design concepts. His major projects include Ho Chi Minh City's Thu Thiem Peninsula Master Plan, Nanjing Olympic Sports Park (that hosted the 2005

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

**JIM THOMPSON** CMSM, HREDFP, serves as a Downtown Economic Development Specialist covering development for downtown districts for the Iowa Economic Development Authority. He served



at the local level in all aspects including program director, board member and volunteer. Jim received certification as a Historic Real Estate Development Finance Professional from the National Development Council. He earned his Certified Main Street Manager credentials through the National Main Street Center. He engages communities in market analysis including data analysis, business retention, recruitment, and implementation strategies. He has also led efforts in tax increment finance, urban revitalization, housing & real estate development, branding and one-on-one business technical assistance for Iowa's communities. Jim serves on the Iowa Rural Development Council Executive Board and leads the Empower Rural Iowa Leadership Taskforce. Jim is the grant administrator for the Community Catalyst Building Remediation grant program. He has over 25 years' experience in community development, retail management and served on a City Council for 10 years. Jim has also served as a consultant for the National Main Street Center, worked in several states and presented multiple times at the National Main Streets Conference.

## OVERVIEW

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

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

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

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

The Team's Waukee familiarization process began with a review of materials supplied prior to the visit, a pre-visit survey consisting of 537 completed online surveys, a driving tour of the city and a walking tour of the Downtown Triangle district. The intensive three-day visit also included interviews with approximately 75 community leaders, individuals and groups representing the public and private sectors and a community meeting. Based upon these activities and the Assessment Team's extensive working knowledge in downtown economic development, this report summarizes their findings and recommendations for the Triangle District of Waukee, Iowa.

## PURPOSE

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

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

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

**-Margaret Mead**

# INTRODUCTION

Waukeee, Iowa, a fast-growing Dallas County city is part of the Des Moines metropolitan area. While the city bustles with growing commercial and residential development, Waukeee's historic Triangle District is much different. Residents appreciate that it represents the roots and soul of the community. Change is slower in the Triangle District but that is what makes the district special. Despite the small footprint of the district the Triangle has remained viable largely because of several destination businesses that are very popular. The triangle street pattern with a park/gazebo in the middle is different than the typical Iowa town square. The district maintains a small town, agricultural feel as the tall grain elevators and retail space of Heartland Co-Op occupy one side of the triangle. The elevators can direct people to the downtown from miles away. Events like the weekly Farmers Market and winter festival bring nice crowds of people. The Triangle District is an active area from morning into the evening with both pedestrian and vehicular traffic. And a bike trail cuts across the downtown area. The district is also important to its area residential neighborhoods. Waukeee's Triangle District is widely known to Waukeee residents but perhaps a gem hidden from the rest of Des Moines.



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

Prior to the assessment visit, the Iowa Downtown Resource Center administered an online survey to residents of Waukeee to get their ideas and opinions about the downtown area. A total of 537 people participated in the survey. A complete summary of survey responses for the pre-assessment surveys completed online is available as an attachment.

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

### How FAMILIAR are you with Waukee's Downtown Triangle District?

Very familiar (346)  
Somewhat familiar (182)  
Not at all familiar (8)

### What is great about the Waukee Downtown Triangle District?

Small Town Feel/Atmosphere/Hometown feel/Small town in bigger town (128)  
Ice Cream Shop (91)  
Businesses in general/Locally owned/Small businesses/Variety (72)  
The Triangle/Green space/Unique/No other place like it/Gazebo (71)  
History/Preservation/Historic Buildings (49)  
Hardware store (45)  
It is close/Convenience/Easy access/Central (43)  
Farmers Market (40)  
Old Station Craft Meats Store (34)  
Endearing/Comforting/Quaint/Cute/Charm/Nostalgic (28)  
Local bars (28)  
Business owners/Loyal to Waukee/Friendly/Service (19)  
Nothing/Awful/Disappointing/Unknown (17)  
Walkable (14)  
Center of Waukee's original neighborhoods/Soul of Waukee (12)



### What one reason or business brings you to Waukee's Downtown Triangle District the most?

Ice cream store (191)  
Hardware store (138)  
Bars (43)  
Old Station Craft Meats Store (43)  
Farmers Market (35)

### What would make you spend more time in Waukee's Downtown Triangle District?

Restaurant/Deli/Outdoor seating/Patio (231)  
More stores/Greater variety/Family friendly/Shopping (216)  
More social events/Music/Family activities/Free activities/Weekly music/4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade (81)  
A place to gather/Meet friends//Benches and shade (20)  
Small park/More playground equipment/More green space (20)  
More parking (14)

### What type of new business would be most successful in Waukee's Downtown Triangle District?

Restaurant (274): Most popular...sandwiches, deli, breakfast, outdoor dining  
Coffee/Tea (56)  
Clothing/Boutique (50)  
Bakery (33)  
Gift store (20)  
Home décor (12)

**If you were given \$10,000 to spend to make Waukee's Downtown Triangle District better, how would you spend it?**

- Recruit businesses/Incentives (most popular: restaurant) (72)
- Keep it historic/façade work/Storefront improvement contest/Grants/Paint (54)
- Add great park/Green space/Playground equipment (36)
- Flowers/Landscaping in Triangle (33)
- Gazebo too small/Add plaza/amphitheater/Replace gazebo (33)
- More seating/Rock walls that double as seating (29)
- Interactive/Public art/Musical pieces by gazebo/Mural (26)
- Parking/Parking lot (22)
- New event/Fall Festival / Car show / Street dance / Art event/Bike festival / Fund raising event (21)
- Remodel Pin Oak Building/Reuse (15)
- Improve curbs/Sidewalks/Widen sidewalks/Walkability (12)
- Work on traffic patterns/Calming/Stop signs/Paint cross walks (12)
- Splash pad/Water feature/Water fountain (9)
- Bike repair station/Bike parking/Water station/Bike lane (9)
- Bring in food trucks (9)
- Spruce everything up/Clean it up (9)
- Marketing of Triangle/Businesses and events (9)



**Which public amenities do you think are most needed downtown?**

- Places for kids (240)
- Street seating (217)
- Green space (215)
- Public art (198)

**Age of survey taker**

- Under 15 (0 responses)
- 15-25 (7)
- 26-35 (117)
- 36-45 (180)
- 46-55 (90)
- 56-65 (60)
- 65+ (62)
- Unidentified (5)

# TRIANGLE DISTRICT STRENGTHS/ASSETS (Assessment Team's List)

Destination businesses: Ice Cream, Hardware, Meats, Bars

Compact district

Nice surrounding residential neighborhood

Interesting Triangle

Hometown feel

Close to bike trail

Excellent traffic count

Incentive programs for building improvements/Design Guidelines

Plans with good recommendations

Farmers Market

Winter Festival

Lively at night

Co-Op: Elevators help define the district



# ASSESSMENT TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS

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



The Assessment Team hopes Waukeet will assess each recommendation and develop a plan to implement what is RIGHT for the Triangle district. 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.

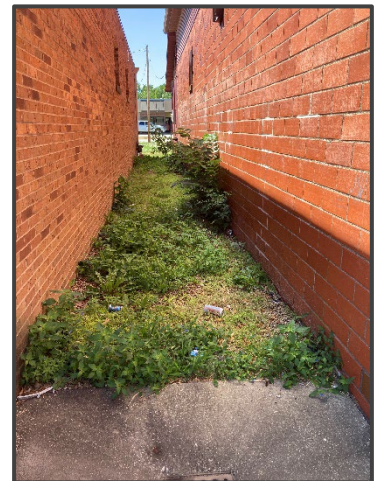
## THEME 1: CLEAN UP/MAINTENANCE

First impressions are important in a downtown commercial district and general cleanliness and maintenance play a big role in whether that impression is positive or negative. When a district appears clean, tidy and well maintained, it feels like an active place that people care about.



On the other hand, when there are weeds, overgrown plants or peeling paint, it can appear neglected and forgotten, particularly when other parts of town are new and under constant improvement.

While the Triangle District isn't the only commercial district serving fast-growing Waukeet, it is the HISTORIC HEART of the community and retaining that small-town feel is IMPORTANT to the local residents and business community. We often think of these small, historic commercial districts as the front porch of a community or neighborhood, and that front



porch should be clean, welcoming and inviting. That's true even in a larger community like Waukee. With anchor businesses that draw customers day and night, highly traveled vehicle routes, and the adjacent residential neighborhood, the Triangle District sees a lot of daily visitors and has the potential for more. Remember that the welcome mat is always out – whether you have cleaned up for those visitors or not.

The following clean up and maintenance items are 'low hanging fruit;' they are quick projects that are easy to accomplish and check off the list, visually demonstrate things are happening in the Triangle District, and can provide momentum for additional improvements. Even though they might seem like minor changes, don't overlook them. The small things add up!

### **Action Steps:**

- Start a district clean up initiative. We understand weeds on the sidewalk are the responsibility of the adjacent property owner, but they are not being addressed in some cases and reflect poorly on the district as a whole. Spaces between buildings also collect trash, leaves and other debris and are in need of attention. Is this something that could be led by an action committee focused on district improvements under the Business Association? We heard there were people ready and willing to volunteer – consider compiling a group of Triangle business owners, building owners and engaged neighbors to tackle weeds and other street/sidewalk cleanup on a regular basis.



- The empty planter baskets on the light posts were one of the first things that stood out as our team walked the district. What were they and why? They call attention in a negative way and appear as though something was forgotten or overlooked. The existing sidewalk planters are well maintained, and additional plantings on the light posts could complement these but would be better off removed if not being utilized. Either use them or lose them!

- Improve basic public amenities. The existing benches are looking tired and there were few garbage cans throughout the Triangle. Spruce up the existing benches with some new paint or consider partnering with the school to add new benches that match the recently completed picnic tables in Triangle Park. Add waste cans at regular intervals throughout the district for convenience and to keep trash off the streets and sidewalks.



- There are a few instances of signage for buildings, businesses or amenities that no longer exist in the Triangle District. Out of date signage contributes to a feeling of neglect and complacency in the district. Work with targeted property owners to remove as needed.
- Prior streetscape improvements were nicely done but are beginning to show their age with heavy street patching and pavers failing in some areas. As a longer-term initiative, keep larger scale streetscape improvements in mind and communicate with the city regarding planned and future projects and opportunities. These improvements will be important as the Triangle District evolves, both visually and from a pedestrian safety/usability perspective.

## THEME 2: WAYFINDING & SAFETY

Navigating to and through a historic commercial district is often second nature for those that live nearby, work there or visit frequently, and we were pleasantly surprised by the number of survey respondents that said they were familiar with the Triangle District. But there is also a large potential audience that is being missed. Current wayfinding and identifying signage for the district is nearly non-existent. Consider trying to find the Triangle District from a visitor's perspective or that of a new resident...are you assuming people know how to get to the district or will just stumble upon it, OR are you actively working to guide them there?

The Triangle District also has an incredible amenity and built-in potential audience with the nearby bike trail. The economic impact of bicycle trails and tourism on historic downtowns has been demonstrated across the state and country, and many communities are trying to achieve the nearby trail connections that Waukee and the Triangle District already have in place. However, the Triangle District is not taking

full advantage of this opportunity with a lack of signage identifying the district and its available amenities.

Strengthening the Triangle District will require more purposeful work on district identification to attract a broader visitor and customer base. The grain elevators act as a natural identifier for the district in general and are visible from miles away but cannot be relied on alone.

While getting to the Triangle District itself is one challenge, also consider how user friendly it is once you have arrived. Is it easy, and more importantly SAFE, to navigate throughout the district? Historic commercial districts are inherently designed to be walkable and pedestrian friendly, but for so long vehicular traffic and efficiency has been prioritized. Consider different users of the district and their varying needs; is it friendly for pedestrians, cyclists, and people of all ages and abilities?



The potential for a compact, pedestrian friendly district is part of the small-town feel people identified as a strength in the survey; one which respondents want to maintain. Those characteristics also differentiate the Triangle District from newer commercial developments taking place in other parts of Waukee. Capitalize on these strengths to improve the overall experience in the Triangle District. While wayfinding and safety improvements aren't overnight fixes, they will be important strategies towards district growth and success.



### **Action Steps:**

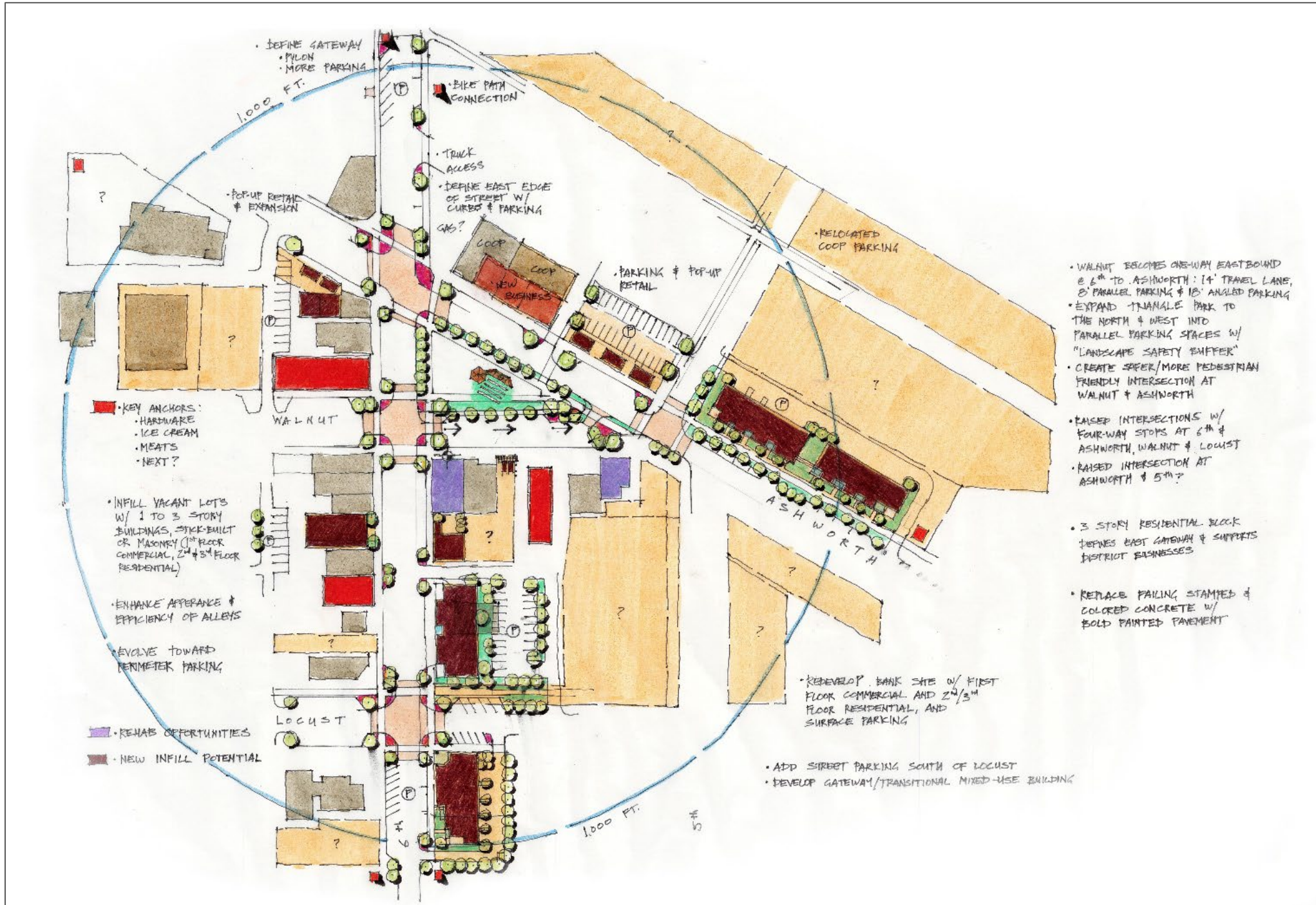
- Gather a group of Triangle District stakeholders to drive the district surroundings and entrances from that of a “visitor or newcomer” perspective. Look for existing signage that identifies the district and note their location, as well as the areas that are lacking signage. Be sure to include all major access points. This likely includes routes to the district from Hickman/Highway 6, Ashworth Drive and 6<sup>th</sup> Street/Ute Avenue from the south.

- Tell people where you are! Work with the city to create and install wayfinding signage identifying the Triangle District from primary travel routes. Coordinate with district/community branding for continuity and consistency and check signage requirements based on jurisdiction (DOT for State Highway 6 vs. local city routes).

- Install signage on the bike trail identifying the Downtown Triangle and its available amenities. You have a built-in traffic stream/potential customer base there; capture some stops by promoting the district and businesses/amenities that might be of interest to cyclists. The ice cream shop, bars, and hardware store (for any unexpected repair and tool needs) come to mind but be sure to add others as the district evolves. Including distance on the signage (2 blocks south, for example) can help if the Triangle District is not easily visible from the signage location. If possible, consider installing an advertisement for the Triangle District at the Raccoon River Valley trailhead for people who typically park there and head west, but might extend their return trip to the Triangle if they were aware of the available amenities.



- Create and install gateway signage to define boundaries and let people know when they have 'arrived' in the Triangle District. Even among locals who participated in the Assessment visit and interviews, the actual boundaries of the Triangle District were vague, and many had their own interpretations of where the district started and stopped. Define district edges and install gateway signage at each one. Potential locations were identified by the Assessment team and are noted in the plan on the following page. They include 6<sup>th</sup> Street & the Heart of the Warrior Trail to the north, Ashworth & 4<sup>th</sup> Street to the east, 6<sup>th</sup> Street between Locust and Cherry Streets to the south and Ashworth and 7<sup>th</sup> Street to the west.



• DEFINE GATEWAY  
 • PILON  
 • MORE PARKING  
 1000 FT.

• BIKE PATH CONNECTION

• TRUCK ACCESS

• DEFINE EAST EDGE OF STREET W/ CURBS & PARKING

GAS?

COOP  
 NEW BUSINESS

PARKING & POP-UP RETAIL

• RELOCATED COOP PARKING

• KEY ANCHORS:  
 • HARDWARE  
 • ICE CREAM  
 • MEATS  
 • NEXT?

• INFILL VACANT LOTS W/ 1 TO 3 STORY BUILDINGS, SICK-BUILT OR MASONRY (1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR COMMERCIAL, 2<sup>ND</sup> & 3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR RESIDENTIAL)

• ENHANCE APPEARANCE & EFFICIENCY OF ALLEYS

• EVOLVE TOWARD PERIMETER PARKING

• REHAB OPPORTUNITIES  
 • NEW INFILL POTENTIAL

• WALNUT ESCALATES ONE-WAY EASTBOUND 8' TO 14' TRAVEL LANE, 8' PARALLEL PARKING & 18' ANGLED PARKING  
 • EXPAND TRIANGULAR PARK TO THE NORTH & WEST INTO PARALLEL PARKING SPACES W/ "LANDSCAPE SAFETY BUFFER"  
 • CREATE SAFER/MORE PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLY INTERSECTION AT WALNUT & ASHWORTH

• RAISED INTERSECTIONS W/ FOUR-WAY STOPS AT 6<sup>TH</sup> & ASHWORTH, WALNUT & LOCUST  
 • RAISED INTERSECTION AT ASHWORTH & 5<sup>TH</sup>?

• 3 STORY RESIDENTIAL BLOCK DEFINES EAST GATEWAY & SUPPORTS DISTRICT BUSINESSES

• REPLACE FAILING STAMPEDED & COLORED CONCRETE W/ BOLD PAINTED PAVEMENT

• REDEVELOP BANK SITE W/ FIRST FLOOR COMMERCIAL AND 2<sup>ND</sup>/<sub>3</sub><sup>RD</sup> FLOOR RESIDENTIAL, AND SURFACE PARKING

• ADD STREET PARKING SOUTH OF LOCUST  
 • DEVELOP GATEWAY/TRANSITIONAL MIXED-USE BUILDING

WALNUT

LOCUST

ASHWORTH

1000 FT.  
 5<sup>TH</sup>

6<sup>TH</sup>

- Use a consistent design for all four gateways. A simple pylon structure that ties into the district's agricultural roots is shown here, with opportunities for logo signage, internal or external lighting and a map of the Triangle District businesses. At the north gateway/bicycle trail connection, consider integrating bike services such as water, air for tires, wireless connectivity/charging station and first aid supplies.



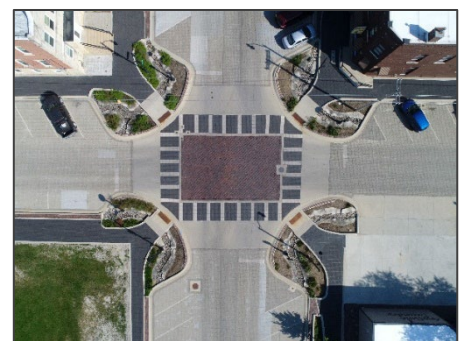
- Improving pedestrian safety throughout the district is essential for usability and comfort. Both 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Ashworth Drive see significant travel volumes, and while that traffic is good for district visibility, it has to be managed carefully and balanced with pedestrian needs. Walkability and traffic safety concerns were noted both onsite by the Assessment team and through the community survey and interview process.

- Install a 4 way stop at the intersection of 6<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Streets. This is a primary intersection for the district and was observed onsite as being particularly dangerous in addition to being mentioned multiple times during the community interviews. Traffic going east and west along Walnut Street is required to stop, but north and south bound traffic along 6<sup>th</sup> Street does not. This creates some confusion for users, particularly with the addition of the colored crosswalks that give pedestrians the impression that they have the right of way. Intersection improvements are especially important during events like the Farmer's Market that encourage pedestrian activity back and forth between Triangle Park and businesses on the west side of 6<sup>th</sup> Street. As an immediate fix, install a temporary/moveable stop sign in the middle of the intersection during the Farmer's Market and other events.

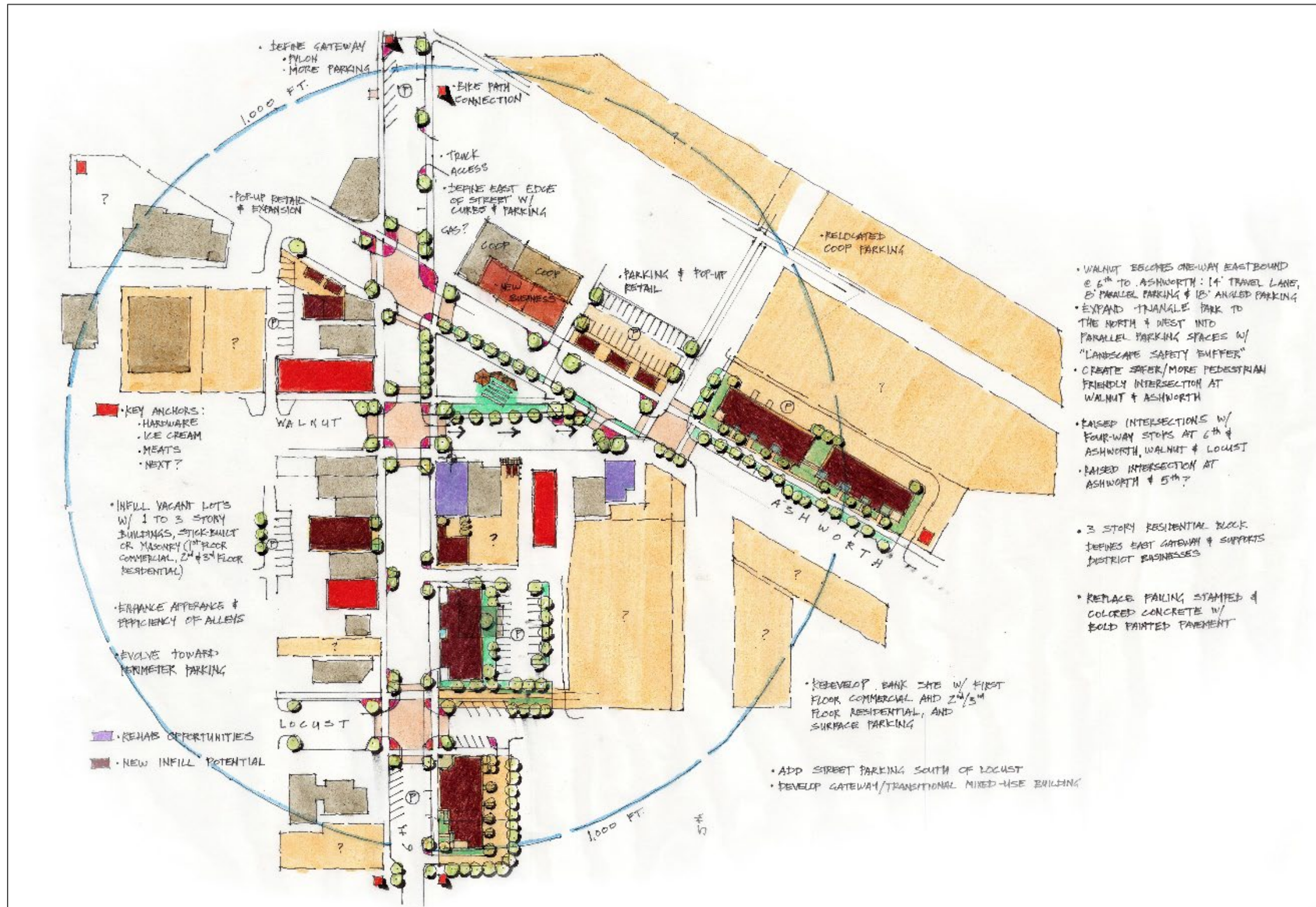
- Improve existing pedestrian crossings and add additional crossings. The intersection of Ashworth & Walnut at the east end of the Triangle Park was identified as a particularly difficult area to cross and needs additional markings. Short term, these improvements might include repainting striped crosswalks or replacing the failing colored and stamped concrete with bold painted pavement that is more visible and demands attention. Longer term, streetscape improvements should include traffic calming features that slow traffic and improve pedestrian safety such as raised intersections and bumpouts that reduce crossing distances.



- Consider changing to one-way traffic going east on Walnut Street between 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets. This not only slows traffic on the south side of the Triangle and reduces traffic flow issues at Ashworth and Walnut, but also allows Triangle Park to expand its footprint to the south.



See drawing below with suggested enhancements to the pedestrian experience and safety in the Triangle District.



- Consider adding green space to Triangle Park by creating a one-way street to help address safety concerns with vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

## THEME 3: BUSINESSES & BUILDINGS

The Triangle District is very unique, not just in design but also in use. There are three very dominate destination businesses, the hardware store, the ice cream store, and the meat store. This district should be very proud of this accomplishment but don't ever take it for granted. Make sure you do everything possible to grow these businesses. In fact, you need more just like them to make this district really work. The loss of just one business could greatly impact the entire district. The assessment team was also impressed by the nighttime business that the three bars offer the district. Many downtown districts would love to have just one of them in their districts. This opportunity enhances commercial activity day and night. Stay on top of any issues but above all, communication is key to working together for a better Triangle District.

Buildings in the district seem to only be improved if they are occupied. Almost every building needs some kind of work. Redevelopment of the Pin Oak building could be a catalyst for additional retail and restaurant growth in the district.

The drawing on the follow page shows one concept for the adaptive reuse of the Pin Oak building into multiple, flexible commercial uses and additional outdoor gathering space.

## Pin Oak Building - Adaptive Reuse



- BUMPOUT PLANTINGS
- WALNUT STREETSCAPE W/ CANOPY AND BENCHES

- ADD WINDOWS & ACCESS FROM 6<sup>th</sup> STREET
- SUNSHADE AWNINGS/CANOPIES
- CONTRASTING ROOF & TRIM

- TENANT FLEXIBILITY W/ MULTIPLE ENTRIES
- LARGE LOGO/SIGNAGE/ART

- OUTDOOR DINING PARTIALLY COVERED
- SOLID LOW WALL FOR SEPARATION FROM STREET
- STREET TREES WHERE SPACE IS AVAILABLE BEHIND PUBLIC SIDEWALK

- ALLEY
- SOUTH TRELLIS WALL FOR PRIVACY & ACOUSTICS
- PATIO TREE GROVE & UMBRELLAS FOR SHADE, ACOUSTICS..

Ideally you want businesses in the district to flow. Customer feet on the sidewalk should mean more business for everyone especially when businesses are working cooperatively together. This concept is not new. The best downtown districts depend on shoppers parking once and walking more. Make sure there is a way to identify open businesses with flags or other kinds of signage. We have to find ways to make sure visitors and new residents to Waukeee know about and can find the Triangle District.



Underutilized lots are both an opportunity and sometimes an eyesore. Make sure the city has appropriate ordinances to address inappropriate use and condition. When developed, these lots need to fit into a broader development plan. The size and use of buildings should play a significant role in every decision made. For example, when you have a transition area between the business district and residential make sure the new construction fills that need.

This rendering shows new construction on the vacant lot at the corner of Locust and 6<sup>th</sup> St. It blends commercial development on the first floor with upper-story development above into three-story townhouses to blend into the single family detached adjacent neighborhood. The illustration below shows one concept for how the vacant lot at 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Locust Street could be developed to appropriately transition from residential to commercial developments in a downtown neighborhood



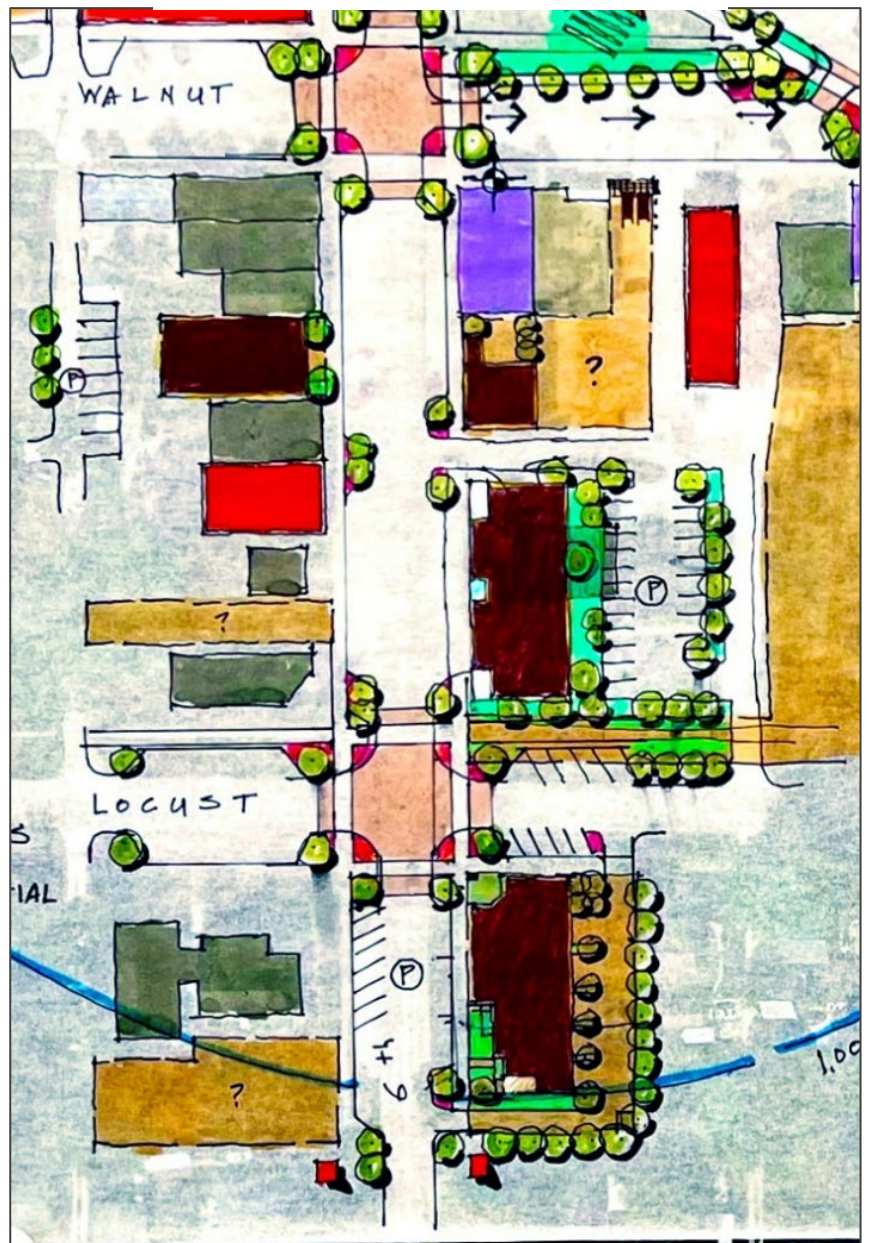
The city has some important incentives that need to work better for the Triangle District. Continue to work on awareness of any and all local funding sources. This funding needs to be dependable and consistent funding. Consider an annual appropriation at budget time. If it is not all spent in a fiscal year roll it over into the next year. Use this local funding as match for additional opportunities with state funding. The Triangle District is eligible to apply for State funding sources like Community Catalyst Building Remediation grants. Also, consider applying for Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) through IEDA, CDBG Downtown Revitalization and Upper Story grants. With pandemic related increases as well as supply chain issues it has become increasingly critical to bring additional dollars to these important projects.

This drawing demonstrates current uses of property within the Triangle District.

Ordinances to consider include Building Condition and Building Use. Minimum Maintenance and Nuisance Property ordinances are generally where most communities start.

When building conditions start showing up, it is usually part of a much larger problem. No first floor residential, appropriate zoning, and vacant building registries, are generally issues of building use and should be addressed with the adoption of appropriate ordinances.

Building use is becoming the biggest issue across Iowa downtowns. Property owner rights do not include using buildings inappropriately. This is one of the most critical needs right now for the Triangle District. Decide what you want, encourage partnerships, and get what you want.



## Action Steps:

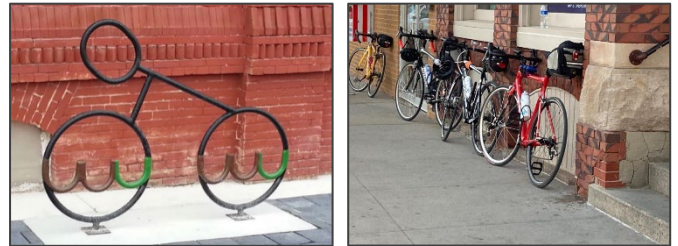
- Create a group of Triangle District representatives to address common issues. Utilize the function of the existing entity but broaden the effectiveness through expanded task forces. The new task forces should address appropriate business recruitment as well as a partnership between the neighborhood residents and bars. Communication is KEY.... never finger-pointing but instead initiating a solution-based agenda.
- Work with the design and marketing teams to create an “open for business” signage program.
- Work with the city on a comprehensive building and business inventory. This list should include the building owner’s contact information and a description of the building’s current use. The district is not that large – this should be relatively easy.
- Create an inventory of every lot not currently developed. This list should also include property owner’s contact information. Work with the city on an overlay district that addresses desired uses.
- City incentives are available. Work to make appropriate changes and then market them to all Triangle District property owners. This is a great way for the city to get a quality return on investment.
- State incentives CDBG Downtown Revitalization & Upper Story.
- Consider city ordinances that address the issues facing the Triangle District. Building Conditions and Building Use should be prioritized. Once in place, make sure they are enforced.

## THEME 4: PLACEMAKING

Placemaking is working together to turn spaces into places that promote connections between people and places and enhance community health and wellbeing. Placemaking can leverage and promote the assets of the Triangle District to create memorable experiences that will bring people back to the district and grow capacity within the community to enhance the quality of life within the district.

As you embark on greater placemaking efforts in the Triangle District, some key attributes of placemaking that need to be addressed include comfort, activities, bringing people together, and accessibility.

The Downtown Assessment Team identified several simple ways to improve comfort and convenience within the district including adding more seating, adding bike racks, providing more trash bins, removing weeds, incorporating more landscaping and plantings into the district, and providing better signage to indicate the location of various services and what services are available.



Providing more activities within the district will attract more visitors and customers. Adding activities creates opportunities to expose more people to the district and all it has to offer. With more activities and more people in the district comes opportunities to build social networks and support for the district and future enhancements. Activities in support of placemaking often can be small and quite simple such as having food and drink available, a simple lending library and a place to sit, music, art, swings, games (chess, bags, ping pong, etc.). Aim for offering 10+ activities in a place to make it a destination.

One idea that may draw more visitors and provide more variety in the district, while addressing the shortage of currently available retail spaces, may be the use of pop-up shops. Pop-up shops serve as incubator spaces for people wanting to try out a new business idea with a smaller upfront cost commitment. The pop-up shop tenants could be rotated seasonally to provide regular, renewed interest for district patrons to come to the district to see, “What’s new.”

The space between the church and the Ice Cream Shoppe is one possible place to try out pop-up shops (see drawing below)



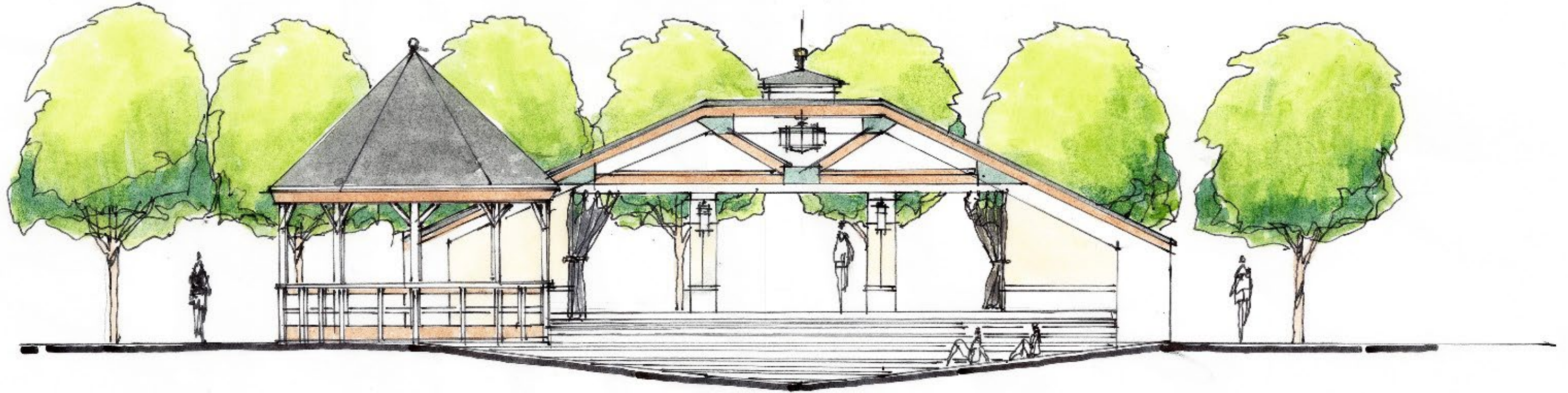
Throughout the assessment visit and in the pre-assessment survey the assessment team heard a desire for more green space. Adding more green space would go hand-in-hand with the recommendations above to improve comfort and add activities in the district while enhancing pedestrian safety and the functionality of the Triangle Park.

The assessment team believes Triangle Park could be enlarged and its functionality improved by removing parking on the north side of the park along Ashworth and by removing parking on the south side of the park and converting Walnut Street to one-way traffic heading east from 6<sup>th</sup> Street to Ashworth.

As an assessment team, we rarely, if ever, suggest one-way streets, but in this instance, we believe it could be an appropriate solution to expand the park and enhance its functionality.



The additional room created in the park by this reconfiguration provides the opportunity to create a new performance space, green space and additional seating (see images).



- EXISTING GAZEBO W/ VERTICALS & INTERIOR PAINTED WHITE

- COMMUNITY SHELTER/THEATRE
  - HEAVY BARN TIMBER
  - SEATING BOWL
  - INTEGRATED W/ GAZEBO

Adding art to the district will also improve its aesthetics, interest and vibrancy. Art can be integrated into downtowns in many ways from the design of benches, light poles and other streetscape amenities to painted crosswalks, murals and sculptures. One tremendous opportunity to add art that shares some of Waukeee's unique history while serving as a beacon to the district is a large mural applied to the south side of the grain elevators.



### **Action Steps:**

- See Action Steps above for Theme 1 Clean Up / Maintenance.
- Add amenities to increase comfort and convenience in the district such as seating, bike parking, trash and recycling receptacles, flowers and improved landscaping at the intersection areas such as next to the hardware store and Norm's. Partner with the school district and local artisans to design and build amenities to add uniqueness and community ownership to the improvements.

- Create an environment that supports more activity in the district that will draw more people and keep them longer. For example, partner with local businesses and/or the parks department to make available equipment in Triangle Park such as bags (corn hole), chess/checkers, books, ping pong, and Spikeball.
- Work with the Waukee Area Arts Council and local artists to identify opportunities to integrate public art into the Triangle District. Explore adding one or more large signature murals to the grain elevators.
- Partner with the building trades programs and marketing classes at the school district to develop pop-up shops along Walnut Street between the church and the Ice Cream Shoppe. See [Jewell, Iowa](#) and [Batavia, IL](#) examples.
- Bring businesses, neighboring residents and the city together to discuss options to enlarge Triangle Park, make changes to parking on north and south side of park and reconfigure Walnut Street to one-way traffic between 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Ashworth Dr.



## THEME 5: EVENTS & PROGRAMMING

Winter Fest is a locally beloved event that draws large crowds to the Triangle District and invokes Hallmark movie images. The Farmers Market brings a nice array of vendors to the district and creates an atmosphere where other businesses and organizations in the district participate to make for a fun evening.

During the visit, the assessment team heard lots of interest in having more events in the district. We heard the events should be family-focused and include a food component. We heard they should be fun and entertaining, and we heard that people want to be involved in supporting and sponsoring events.

Event planning can seem daunting, but it does not have to be. Sometimes we just need to commit to doing an event and put it on the calendar to give us the nudge (force us) to make an event happen. Events can be small. During the visit people told us how previously different local churches each took responsibility for hosting a weekly or monthly event. The same approach could be used today with a wide array of organizations.

### **Action Steps:**

- Develop a master “Events in the Triangle District” calendar. Include all the activities taking place, festivals, concerts, Farmers Market, fitness classes, music lessons, history walks, community dinners, etc. Perhaps its making use of the existing Waukee calendar or creating something similar to the Calendar of Events for Downtown Des Moines. The calendar of events should also be promoted in other ways than just social media and websites. Have event information posted in storefront windows. Utilize sandwich boards to promote events at main intersections like 6th Street and Walnut. Include event information in community mailings such as community newsletters and utility bill stuffers. Are there ways to promote the events through the school district or other local organizations? Can you use the Charter Bank sign?
- Bring neighborhood residents, Triangle business owners, the city and local organizations together to discuss what events they are planning or have interest in, create a calendar of the events and identify the lead entity for each event, possible partners and possible sponsors.

- To support the local interest in more food choices in the Triangle District, organize a series of food truck events and/or create pop-up opportunities for different food vendors to test out community support for various food business concepts.
- Partner with the school district and local arts organizations to bring events to the district. For example, bring school concerts, plays and small ensembles to the park. Or provide short little “teasers” in Triangle Park of upcoming concerts or plays. Display local student art in shop windows. Work with the library to create a story walk in shop windows.
- Establish events that promote your destination businesses—Ice Cream Shoppe, Old Station Craft Meats, and Waukee Hardware. For example, “Sundaes in the Park” or create an ice cream flavor contest, “Triangle Tailgate Barbecue Contest,” or do-it-yourself home repair classes.

## THEME 6: FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The key to future development is getting everyone on the same page. This is only accomplished through appropriate communication. While the assessment team was in the Triangle District, we witnessed so many opportunities. These will only be realized with everyone working together. There are too many issues to tackle these all at once, but the district is at a crossroads. Will the district get better or worse? No one has a crystal ball, but we do have the opportunity to leave a legacy of a much higher performing district. The elephant in the room is what happens with the coop business and property. They shared that the property is not utilized the same way it has been in the past. Now is a great time to start the conversation about what's next. We're talking long-term plans, not next week, but have the discussion. Waukee is a vibrant community on the rise, growing every day. The Triangle District has not kept up with this pace. There is way too much community pride demonstrated about this district to let it continue in decline. Buildings need to be fixed up. Buildings need to be occupied with appropriate businesses. Vacant lots and underutilized development areas need to be improved. It is past time to get everybody on the same page.

### **Action Steps:**

- Set up regular conversations with the coop. Be prepared to move forward.
- Work with the city on appropriate ordinances to ensure the buildings, lots, and businesses work.
- Start with the building and business inventories and then move to incentives to get what you want.
- Ensure everyone is represented at the table for discussion when appropriate. Some conversations need to be confidential at first but share when you can.

## THEME 7: ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY & STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION

The needs of a downtown commercial district are typically comprehensive...business development, marketing, events, maintenance, building rehabilitation, etc. Every successful downtown needs an organization that can be nimble, flexible and versatile to help meet those needs or a number of stakeholders that work together. Some communities (usually very small ones) lack organizational capacity to be comprehensive making it very difficult to generate ideas, raise money, recruit volunteers, complete improvements and ultimately avoid staleness.

A community with a local downtown organization or business association, a city staff with downtown priorities, service organizations, a Chamber of Commerce and many other partners can pull off a complementary effort to revitalize a downtown or maintain its success. Typically, the district serves as the downtown for the community. It is the hub or social center.

The Triangle District in Waukee is a little different. The Triangle is a very small downtown for the community that Waukee has grown to be. As the surveys indicated, residents (especially long-time ones) recognize the Triangle District as the historic town center that still has that small town feel. Years ago, the City, Chamber of Commerce, volunteer base and other stakeholders would have been working more exclusively in the downtown. Now, Waukee is booming. The responsibilities have grown exponentially. Perhaps the number of positions/people that work for/with the downtown has not grown.

This leaves the Triangle District with a successful Business Association that almost exclusively focuses on events. The City and Chamber are no less interested in the Triangle District but have additional responsibilities. It makes a comprehensive effort to improve the district a bit more challenging. It isn't always clear whose duty it is to actively look for business prospects, pull the weeds, talk to building owners about available grant programs, etc. Common responsibilities to make the Triangle better could slip through the cracks. On the bright side, there are potential new stakeholders that want to help. A concerted effort to build a more robust organization with partners could make a big difference.



**Action Steps:**

- Facilitate conversations involving all the Triangle District’s partners and stakeholders to define roles. Perhaps use the items in past planning efforts and/or this very report. Clearly define whose responsibility it is to maintain the sidewalks/alleys/public spaces. Develop new event ideas. Work with property owners on incentive programs. Get the word out about the Triangle. Keep a list of vacancies and work with potential new businesses, etc.



- The Business Association does nice work on the Farmers Market and other Triangle events. This Assessment Team would like to see this organization have an expanded role with a number of action teams that work on a more comprehensive set of projects that the Triangle District can benefit from. The team heard over and over that people are willing to volunteer but currently there isn’t a good framework to recruit and put volunteers to work. Small action teams can be in charge of new things like a Food Truck Night, a weed pulling effort, developing a way to communicate with residents, a block captain program to make businesses and property owners aware of coming events and financial programs that could help them, a mural committee, and streetscape improvements.
- The Triangle District certainly serves and is at the heart of a great residential neighborhood district. Those neighbors want to be involved. Open up the communication lines. Area residents enjoy the area and want to know what is going on in the district. But how do you do that? It is highly recommended that the neighbors start meeting with an end goal of forming a neighborhood association. That kind of structure will make it much easier for them to be involved and for the business association and city to communicate with them and vice versa.

Reserve a spot on the Business Association board for a liaison from the neighborhood community and the Triangle businesses. It is a fine line, but this assessment team does believe that efforts can be made to increase activity, build a better business mix, expose



businesses to more people but still maintain the small town feel that makes the district special. A short Triangle news sheet may also be a good communication tool.

- The Triangle District also has other potential partners that are eager to help and could make a difference in the district. The Assessment Team met with businesses from outside the Triangle District. Everyone appreciates the Triangle, and most are willing to help, for example how about Kinship Brewery sponsoring an event in the Triangle as part of the previously mentioned promotional series. Also, banks are eager to do something similar.

The Aspiring Professional Experience (APEX) program is amazing. Students are being linked up to businesses (and some in the Triangle) to gain professional experience. Keep up the good work and keep looking for matches in the Triangle.

But, also, the Waukee high schools can provide great learning experiences and helpful advice to businesses in other ways. It seems obvious that most Waukee residents know about the Triangle District, but the rest of Des Moines may not. Given the number of destination businesses in the Triangle, familiarizing Des Moines with this district could be very helpful and lucrative. No one has a huge marketing budget, but the high schools' Design & Communications Solutions class could be the perfect match to 1) help individual Triangle District businesses get the word out to the rest of Des Moines via social media; 2) promote events happening in the district; and 3) develop ideas to keep nearby residents informed with social media and old school ways like posters.

## CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Get to work and celebrate your wins!** Thank you, Waukee!

## PRIORITIES:

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

Theme#	Immediate Priorities (0-6 months)
1	Coordinate one time or series of district cleanup effort (weeds and trash).
1	Use or remove empty planter baskets.
1	Develop implementation plan for improvement of public amenities like benches and receptacles.
1	Take down obsolete business and public signage.
2	Stakeholder drive to identify signage issues and what a newcomer experiences.
3	Create an inventory of developable lots.
5	Inventory events organizations are planning and make a splash with a Triangle calendar!
Theme#	One Year Priorities (0-12 months)
2	Install bike trail signage identifying Triangle and amenities.
2	Create and install gateway signage to define Triangle District boundaries.
2	Install 4 way stop at the intersection of 6 <sup>th</sup> and Walnut Streets.
2	Improve existing pedestrian crossings and add additional crossings.
3	Develop comprehensive business and building inventory.

3	Explore state grants for building rehabs such as the Community Catalyst or CDBG programs and develop a project!
3	Remarket city incentive programs to all building owners.
5	Work with schools to bring events to the park.
6	Set up regular conversations with the Co-Op.
7	Facilitate meetings/conversations with organizations and stakeholders to define roles.
<b>Theme#</b>	<b>Longer Term Projects (0-24 months)</b>
1	Work with city to identify streetscape issues such as heavy road patching and plan for projects.
2	Wayfinding signage program.
3	Create an “open for business” signage program.
4	Develop plan for street amenities and implement seating, flowers, bike parking.
4	Create environment that promotes activity. Work with businesses and parks department to add equipment in park such as more interactive art, books, chess, etc.
5	Organize food truck events to support local interest in more food in the district.
5	Establish series of themed events that promote destination businesses.
6	Work with city to study/improve ordinances to ensure buildings are at maximum potential.
7	Develop a structure for the Business Association that includes action teams to ensure a more comprehensive approach to Triangle District improvements.
7	Work with area residents to develop neighborhood association that better allows them to have input and participate in planning and implementation of Triangle District projects.
<b>Theme#</b>	<b>Down the road.....</b>
2	Consider changing to one-way traffic going east on Walnut Street between 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> Streets to slow traffic and expand footprint of Triangle Park.
4	Work with arts council to incorporate public art in the park and district.
4	Add murals to top of the grain elevators. What an impact that would have!
4	Work with trades programs and marketing classes to add pop-up shops on Walnut Street.
4	Bring groups together to discuss options to enlarge Triangle Park to make it more useful.
7	Work with students in Design & Communications classes to help individual businesses in the Triangle District get the word out to the rest of Des Moines via social media, etc.; promote the district as a whole; and develop ideas to keep nearby residents informed via social media and old school marketing approaches such as posters.

## CONTACTS:

<a href="#">Iowa Downtown Resource Center</a> , IEDA, Des Moines, Iowa .....	515-348-6180
<a href="#">Keep Iowa Beautiful</a> .....	515.323.6507
<a href="#">ISU Iowa Community Indicators Program retail analysis</a> .....	515.294.2954
<a href="#">Certified Local Governments</a> , State Historic Society of Iowa .....	515.281.6826
<a href="#">CDBG Downtown Revitalization Program</a> .....	515.348.6208

### 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:

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

- Waukee Triangle District Survey Summary
- Design Renderings/Drawings

### 10 Great Examples for Triangle District

- What is Placemaking
- Characteristics of a Successful Downtown
- IEDA Downtown Design Guide
- Volunteer Recruitment Matrix Stakeholders
- Great Promotion Events
- Community Catalyst Program Fact Sheet
- Downtown Revitalization Fund
- Streetscape: Wayfinding Examples
- Rehab – A Checklist for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings
- Incentives for Business and Community Economic Development

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