

## **Downtown Rock Island Steering Committee meeting recap**

May 18, 2021, QC Coffee and Pancake House, Downtown Rock Island

**In-person attendees:** Monta Ponsetto, Steve Ollenburg, Kyle Carter, Arron Sutherland, Bill Healy, Jose and Sarah Zepeda, Jamie DeRudder, Kyle Peters, Pat Stolley, Jennifer Verscha, Kevin Maynard, Mike Thoms, Miles Brainard

**Virtual committee member attendees:** John Timmer, Liz Tallman, Jon Keim and John Friederich

**Guests from City of RI:** Mike Bartels, Luke VanLandegen, Mike Kane, Nathan Parch

### **Agenda**

#### **I. Welcome, intros and 90-day goals update**

- a. Take ownership of Downtown Rock Island website and social media
  - i. The DARI Exec Committee voted May 13 to allow us the use of the website and social media through a usage agreement. DARI will continue ownership and administrative rights until our formal downtown organization is formed, then a formal transition could occur. We will be responsible for fees related to domain and maintenance costs that may incur during the user agreement period.
- b. Finalize Steering Committee Membership
  - i. We continue to add to the steering committee people who represent the various sectors downtown and are invested in downtown Rock Island. It has been a top priority since day 1 to foster a diverse and inclusive group of people to help found this organization. While we currently have some gaps, we are talking with other candidates to help balance out our team here in the coming weeks.
- c. Contact top 10 downtown property and/or business owners to introduce organizational goals
  - i. On track; continuing to make progress on connections

#### **II. Downtown TIF funds**

- a. Allocations: (Please see last two pages of report attached)
- b. Remaining \$1.5M
  - i. Potential uses
    1. Tree trimming and removal (about \$20,000)
      - a. Removal of ash trees along 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue between 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> streets to eliminate safety hazards; trees are showing signs of emerald ash borer infestation and causing issues for some property owners, including Jose and Sarah Zepeda; trimming of other downtown trees will be covered as well

- b. Trees will be replaced overtime with various tree species other than ash as part of larger streetscaping plan
  - i. Bill Healy asked if funding for DT tree maintenance could come from another funding source; Mike Bartels said it could, however, work would qualify for TIF funds
- 2. Streetscaping – Great River Plaza – City wants our feedback on nine new sketches as well as overall thoughts on future of plaza
  - a. RI City Engineer Mike Kane presented nine different sketches for turning plaza into a two-way street
  - b. There is not yet consensus among steering committee members on whether block should remain a pedestrian mall or be turned into a two-way street
  - c. There is, however, consensus among committee that Great River Plaza needs to be improved after 50 years, and we have an opportunity to make a visual change to the area that would generate positive buzz, draw more people and potentially new businesses to the area
    - i. Committee recognizes the need to remove planters, benches and other structures on plaza that may encourage loitering
    - ii. Consensus that changes should enhance safety/security, aesthetics and overall experience (lighting, cameras, signage, pop-up patio spaces, programming, etc.)
  - d. If turned into a street, committee prefers sketches that feature equity of sidewalk space on north and south sides of street that would allow for pop-up patio spaces next to businesses and possibly a few parking spaces next to Star Cres building (see attached sketches); there's also consensus that:
    - i. Patio fencing would need to be removable to make way for events and festivals; Jennifer Verscha said fencing against building better for wheelchair accessibility
    - ii. Sidewalks would need soft curbs to create pedestrian-friendly environment during events and festivals; Kyle Peters said stage he brings in is about 60 feet wide and 40 feet deep and could work with soft curbs
    - iii. Street would need removable road closures, such as bollards, that would make it easy to shut down at certain times, such as Thursday-Saturday evenings
    - iv. Additionally, the process to close the street down and obtain outdoor event permits/licenses should be efficient (software should match hardware)

- v. These amenities and features would help keep the area an entertainment district/hospitality zone while increasing passerby traffic for businesses and addressing loitering concerns on block
- e. Next steps: Jack has spoken with some business/property owners on plaza about its future and is creating a survey to gather input from all stakeholders before next steering committee meeting
- f. At end of next meeting on June 15, committee will provide City answer/recommendation to fundamental street vs. plaza question
  - i. Chosen design should bring greatest amount of people on most consistent basis
  - ii. Goal to hammer out more details on design of plaza by end of summer; construction would start in 2022, Kane said, and redesign would cost between \$800,000-\$1M
    - 1. Cost to add brighter lights (currently being tested on far east end of plaza) along 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue between 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> streets would cost about \$40,000
  - iii. Streetscaping design should set example for other areas throughout downtown
- 3. If plaza project is our homerun with downtown TIF funds, committee agrees we should identify other potential singles around DT to complement investment in plaza, such as activation of Arts Alley as well as area by Rozz-Tox

### **III. Downtown Rock Island organization**

- a. Governance (Steve Ollenburg and Nicole Watson-Lam have expressed interest to serve as chair and co-chair, respectively)
- b. Support services (Please see attached doc on SSA)
- c. Sustainable funding sources
  - i. We're contemplating a variety of sources to fund this organization, including the City, Chamber and a financial tool called a Special Service Area. There are more than 600 SSAs throughout Illinois, including some in the Quad Cities, and the way this works is property owners within a specific boundary would contribute dollars each year to help fund the organization's operating expenses, support services and capital improvement projects.
  - ii. We're also having encouraging conversations with Modern Woodmen about other creative ways to help fund this organization and the special services it would provide

### **IV. Look ahead**

- a. Next meeting: 4 p.m. Tuesday, June 15