

Downtown Rock Island Steering Committee Meeting Recap

Sept. 26, 2022, at Rock Island Public Library

In-person attendees: Arron Sutherland, Greg Stecker, Matt Pappas, Angela Campbell, Brandy VandeWalle, Jamie DeRudder, Pat Stolley and Ald. Dylan Parker

Virtual attendees: Katie Reilly, Charlotte Morrison and Jon Keim

I. Takeaways from IDA conference

- a. Jack and Chamber colleagues attended International Downtown Association (IDA) conference in Vancouver along with hundreds of other professionals in urban district management industry
- b. Validating to sit in on presentations by colleagues from across North America creatively addressing same issues being discussed in Rock Island at varying scales
 - i. Clean and safe initiatives
 1. “Places that are well maintained are treated differently and better”
 - a. -Cory Luster, VP, Public Space Maintenance, Downtown Baltimore
 2. Downtown Baltimore no longer does neighborhood cleanups because Clean Streets Ambassadors / Clean Team is doing well, and other stakeholders are following suit
 - a. Clean and blight removal zones
 - b. Operate with “see something, say something” mindset
 - c. Clean team is focused on providing hospitable presence, protecting their community and responding timely to situations
 - d. They communicate to stakeholders what they need from them and vice-versa
 3. Safety/security
 - a. 8 Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in U.S. have armed security
 - b. The Hollywood Partnership Board of Directors recently decided to move away from armed security
 - i. They were paying \$65/hour for academy-trained armed security officers, however, majority of calls they were responding to were public-nuisance calls, such as trespassing and basic disturbances, not responding to “person with a gun” or other crime in progress calls.
 - ii. Due to liability and lack of ROI, they decided to consolidate services and deploy more resources toward cleaning, homeless outreach and visitor services while ramping up partnership with police

4. Homeless outreach/community support teams
 - a. Trauma-informed de-escalation
 - b. Strategic partnerships are important, especially for smaller entities
 - i. We are actively working with Christian Care/Project NOW's Street Outreach Team to address issues as they arise
 - ii. Creating a downtown for everyone
 1. Memphis uses incremental approach to facilitate opportunities for minority business growth and development
 2. Important to have low-risk ways for women and people of color to test their business and be part of building their downtown
 - iii. Public space activation
 1. If you provide a really great experience outside, people will return
 2. Outdoor dining is all about ...
 - a. Streetscape beautification
 - b. Business recovery and attraction
 - c. Marketing for businesses
 - iv. Continued professional development
 1. IDA offers Emerging Leader Fellowship program and leadership in Place Management Certification

II. Special Service Area update

- a. Ald. Dylan Parker provided update on City's process of considering a new downtown Special Service Area (SSA)
 - i. As of Sept. 27, 75%+ of public comment submissions were in support of the proposal; Remaining 25% were split between opposition and neutral
 - ii. City staff intends to present basic MOU to Council ahead of Oct. 24 public hearing to confirm Council wants to work with the Chamber as the SSA managing partner

III. Downtown improvement projects

- a. Waiting to finalize scope of work with City staff
- b. Steering Committee members stressed need to envision what we want the future of downtown Rock Island to be and build backward
 - i. Engaging public spaces that make up a place people want to be and businesses want to invest
- c. Great River Plaza (downtown core)
 - i. Three businesses on or adjacent to the Plaza have closed since a survey was done in July 2021; similar to BIDs with armed security, not many pedestrian malls still exist, and Rock Island does not share qualities with those that are still successful
 - ii. City of RI staff is recommending a through street to allow for better access for emergency and maintenance vehicles, such as snowplows

- iii. Shared street to achieve vision for a mix of businesses, most notably restaurants and specialty retail
 - 1. We believe the Plaza needs a modern redesign to reactivate it as a destination for a diverse mix of businesses. Shared-street design should prioritize productive pedestrian and bicycle use and allow for slow vehicular traffic and potentially a parking zone for curbside/delivery/carryout. Additionally, the block could be closed to vehicular traffic Thursday-Saturday nights for outdoor dining and bar service and/or other special events, such as a weekly farmers market. This solution, we believe, would preserve the Plaza's attractive pedestrian-friendly traits, allow for better maintenance and also enhance accessibility and visibility for businesses and their customers. Streetscaping elements should include:
 - a. 25-30-foot-wide sidewalks
 - b. Dedicated outdoor dining spaces and structures
 - c. Planters and vegetation
 - d. Additional lighting
 - e. Banners/signage
 - f. Electrical hookups
 - g. Soft or no curbs so street and sidewalk are at same level
 - h. Street waste bins to match other furnishings
 - i. Attractive street barriers/closures for events
 - 2. Committee input
 - a. Block should have similar look and feel to surrounding blocks but include unique pedestrian-friendly features
 - b. Spread investment throughout downtown, including gateways, not just this single block

IV. Downtown branding

- a. Should "The District" in some way, shape or form be part of our ongoing branding for downtown? For example, The District of Downtown Rock Island
 - i. Some react positively to "The District" as a unique location identifier and see "Downtown Rock Island" as generic
 - ii. Others react negatively to "The District," think it's dead and feel it only refers to a two-block area in downtown, not the entire downtown we are looking to serve and promote
 - iii. The Downtown Rock Island Historic District encompasses the area between the river and 5th Avenue and 15th and 21st Streets
 - iv. Rock Island is a strong, bold name – Downtown Rock Island is hip, historic and walkable
 - v. Name of place management/placemaking entity to manage SSA also needs name – Rock Island Downtown Partnership / Downtown Rock Island Partnership
 - vi. To be continued...

V. Next meeting is Tuesday, Oct. 18, at TBD location