

AGENDA



DNN Advisory

Members:

Celeste McDonald • Daniel Drent • Eddie Tadlock • Hal Froot • Hassen Saker • Janna Maris • Jim Talen • Kathy Steindler • Kelli Jo Peltier • Latesha Lipscomb • Lauren Westerman • Mark Tangen • Martha Chieply • Paul Skentzos • Ted Droski • Teresa Haggerty

December 01, 2022

11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

29 Pearl St. NW

1. Introductions (10 mins)
2. Tomorrow's Holiday Party – Who's doing what (20 mins)
3. 5 minute updates from each subcommittee: safety, communications (10 mins)
4. Celebrate the service of members, a year of growth and new direction!

*Our next meeting will be held **in-person** on January 5, 2023, at 11:30 AM.*

Enclosures for review and preparation:

- GR Forward Goal 2.2
- Link: [DNN Subcommittee Google Drive](#)

The DNN exists to foster a community of downtown neighbors that are connected, informed and empowered to improve downtown living.



DOWNTOWN
GRAND RAPIDS INC.



GOAL 2

**CREATE A TRUE
DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD
THAT IS HOME TO A DIVERSE
POPULATION**

2.2 SUPPORT INITIATIVES THAT IMPROVE DOWNTOWN LIVING FOR EXISTING RESIDENTS & ATTRACT NEW DOWNTOWN RESIDENTS

Downtown Grand Rapids's most valuable asset is its people. As the Downtown population grows steadily and residents are turning districts and areas into neighborhoods, local leadership is tasked with ensuring that civic infrastructure, programs, and services are improving in step with this evolution. The following strategies should be considered to continue cultivating growth and encourage Downtown residents to put down roots.

FOSTER CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY TIES DOWNTOWN

The numbers of people who participated in the GR Forward process in various ways speak for themselves: Grand Rapidians are eager for opportunities to be a part of the future of Downtown Grand Rapids. Community members who participated in the process also spoke for themselves: at the public open house, public forums, and other engagement events, the planning team regularly heard individuals voice the need for continued community engagement and input beyond the horizon of the planning process itself. City leaders are encouraged to create regular and structural opportunities for the community to be a part of shaping the future of Downtown and the Grand River.



>>Support efforts to establish a Downtown residents council

Many Grand Rapids neighborhoods have formalized civic groups to establish formal representation within city-level dialogues and leadership structure among neighborhood residents. Efforts recently begun to assemble a Downtown residents council should be supported in order to create more opportunities for community building and social interaction among Downtown residents, many of whom are living in disconnected pockets of the Downtown area; and establish a venue for community dialogue about change Downtown. Among the roles the council may decide to take on, it may consider ways of welcoming new residents, creating a communications infrastructure to facilitate information sharing specific to Downtown among residents, and ensuring that the views of Downtown residents are being represented in major decisions by Downtown leadership.

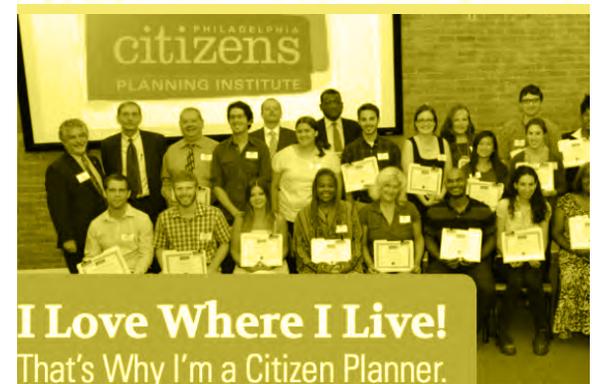
“Having lived in Heritage Hill for 27 years and loving the “neighborhood.” I would love to see the same “community” environment shared with Downtown residents.”

- Public forum participant

>>Educate residents about ways to be engaged in discussions around change Downtown

Outside of a comprehensive planning process, how will Downtown residents be able to continue taking part in guiding change Downtown?

- > Once established, the regular meetings of a Downtown residents council would act as appropriate venues for the City and Downtown leadership to engage the community in opportunities for input in decisions and priorities when appropriate.
- > Though some long-time residents may be familiar with channels of civic engagement, Downtown’s growing base of new residents will need some orientation. Grand Rapidians care deeply about the future of their City and form online discussion boards around development, transportation and green space among other topics. The opportunity is to spread this knowledge further and empower others across the City to better understand, and engage in, local planning and design issues. One example of this kind of initiative is Philadelphia’s Citizen’s Planning Institute [CPI], the education and outreach arm of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission. CPI offers courses and events designed to inform civic-minded community members about planning principles and municipal procedures around development and City decision making, including how to engage in opportunities for public input. Other cities pursue this idea outside of City government relying instead



PRECEDENT: CITIZEN'S PLANNING INSTITUTE

<http://citizensplanninginstitute.org/>

on local non-profits and development agencies. The City, DGRI and their partners should consider tapping into local expertise to develop a program focused on citizenship education. More informed and engaged citizens would benefit Downtown and communities across the City as well. As with the Citizen's Planning Institute, accommodations must be made to ensure the broadest participation possible across incomes and neighborhoods. CPI tracks participation in their programs in order to identify and address gaps in their services.

- > DGRI should continue to build local resident capacity through the membership of their Alliances and identify individuals that have an interest in serving on local boards and commissions.
- > The City's Connect & Engage webpage should be expanded to include an interactive calendar featuring all public meetings as well as current information about and timelines for ongoing and upcoming efforts, all sortable by neighborhood. Generally, an interactive map of neighborhoods and boundaries of resident councils; as well as centralized resources and information about how to get involved presented in a clear and accessible way would help foster continued engagement with community members.

>>Attract a diverse population to the Downtown neighborhood

While Downtown Grand Rapids is relatively racially diverse among neighborhoods in Grand Rapids, protecting and building upon that diversity is a critical and interrelated driver for all of the racial equity ambitions included in GR Forward. To achieve that ambition, GR Forward proposes to:

- > Provide a diversity of housing types and options, at different price points, to appeal to a wide range of people and families;
- > Protect affordable housing stock, and create tools to expand that supply. Modify incentive programs to assist in achieving GR Forward's target for affordable housing;

- > Modify the zoning code to reduce the development costs for new housing to keep prices more attainable; and
- > Identify effective approaches and tools to lower barriers to home ownership in Downtown.

UNLOCK THE POTENTIAL OF MUNICIPAL DATA AND ONLINE TOOLS

Many cities have discovered the great benefits of utilizing internet and mobile applications for data sharing and streamlining the experience of city services. In addition to improving transparency and engagement, cities have seen that a holistic approach to leveraging data and technology can improve efficiency of city services. Towards this end, the City of Grand Rapids is encouraged to pursue the following:

- > Continue working towards a comprehensive Open Data policy. Beyond providing an online venue for things like reporting potholes and paying bills, the more progressive examples of e-government have embraced Open Data policies in order to allow residents and business owners to participate in tracking trends in government performance improvement practices, crime patterns, street accident rates, City expenditures, parking utilization rates, and a wealth of additional raw datasets. Sharing data also allows IT developers to build apps or their own online tools, creating the opportunity for crowdsourcing and data interpretation



in useful and creative ways. Grand Rapids has made some progress towards this end, offering some data sets through various City web pages and offering links to data hosted on external websites, but the Louisville Metro Government's Office of Performance Improvement website offers an excellent model of making an extensive range of data and information accessible. Taking Open Data a step further, the Department of Technology and Change Management should pursue resources to continue to work to centralize municipal data collected across departments, make accessible a more comprehensive range of raw data, and host

online tools designed to allow users to view and interpret data.

- > Expand and centralize online interactive tools. The City already has a number of useful tools available through various web pages and, as the municipal office dedicated to providing “provide proven and effective enterprise technologies that enhance communication and information management to improve productivity, business processes, and support citizen’s engagement,” the City’s Department of Technology and Change Management is poised to continue efforts to bring these resources together. For instance, the City’s Inspection Services Portal provides convenient access to permit applications and code violation reporting, the Office of Special Events website has online applications for events and equipment rentals, and DGRI’s website features an interactive parking map. Hosting all of these tools in one place in a streamlined interface with Spanish translation would make them easier to find and use, as well as make it more apparent what’s missing. One example: In addition to the online tools previously suggested for citizenship education and engagement, an interactive map on the City’s website featuring real-time, place-specific information, such as roadway closures or utility work, would likely reduce City staff time spent fielding questions. The first step would be to take an inventory of what is already available and work with various departments and

management entities to create a centralized online portal, whether the Department of Technology and Change Management’s website or a stand-alone site, managed by a single entity working across departments.

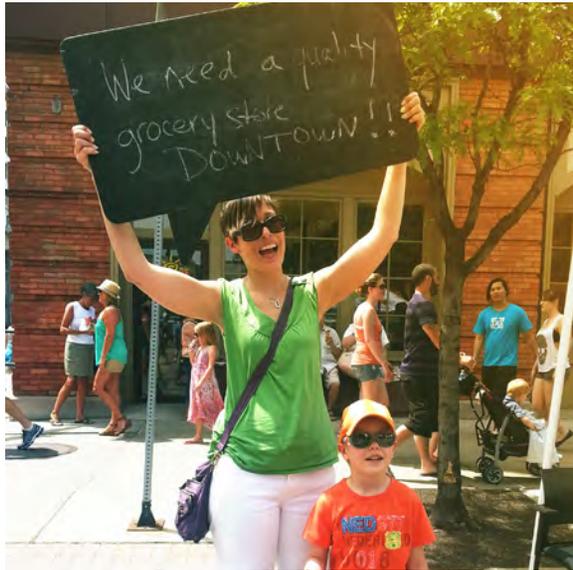
EXPAND YOUTH PROGRAMMING

The involvement of GRPS in GR Forward reflects the commitment to provide services and programming for area youth and families. There are currently events scattered throughout the year in Downtown some of which are attractive to youth and families. These include Movies in the Park and skating at Rosa Parks Circle in the winter. Discussions with local institutions, residents and parents indicate the need for more youth oriented programming Downtown. Redevelopment of the River promises to bring more outdoor recreational opportunities that will appeal to youth. In addition, Downtown programming should specifically consider youth and families in the planning for new events much as last year’s youth camping in Downtown which exposed youth [and the adults] to Downtown in new ways. Urban scavenger hunts & geo-caching, youth-oriented movies and music as well as youth-oriented recreational opportunities like skateboarding and sports programs can help to boost Downtown’s role as a draw for youth and families. As a precedent example, Philadelphia has two nationally recognized programs hosted through and outside of schools that offer opportunities for teens with a range of interests: Students Run Philly Style - a running club for high school students [perfect



for new River trails] and; CRED Philly magazine - a youth arts magazine showcasing the work of area youth.

More broadly, the opportunity is to connect youth to potential employment and the improvement of Downtown. The Mayor’s 100 Campaign that seeks to link 100 local businesses with area youth for internships and skills training, is an excellent and progressive model in this regard. GR Forward should support and promote this program and help to identify ways in which area youth can help work to implement GR Forward recommendations. This could include putting their creative minds to good use through the design of storefronts and other elements that bring a youthful eye to Downtown.



INCREASE ACCESS TO FRESH PRODUCE DOWNTOWN

Healthy eating is one of the most important elements of maintaining a healthy lifestyle but a complicated one with significant barriers, especially for low-income households. Time, money, and habit are all factors that determine food choices. Improving access to healthy, fresh food is one important step toward improving eating habits and resident health outcomes in communities across the country.

One of the most common requests during the public engagement process is the desire for a Downtown grocery store. For those that live or work Downtown, there are no options for a full range of healthy foods. The Downtown Market



fulfills an important niche, but broader options are necessary particularly as the Downtown population grows. It will take time for there to be sufficient demand to draw a grocery store but that is a goal worth pursuing at sites with high visibility, like the corner of Fulton and Market, would provide an attractive location for this use. In the meantime, it is worthwhile to actively promote existing food resources including the YMCA Veggie Van and the Mercy Health farmers market [to name a few] and pursue opportunities to expand and/or create new ones. Similarly, local institutions, the Downtown Residents Council and DGRI could evaluate the potential to tap into and expand

local Community Supported Agriculture [CSA] options for Downtown residents. CSA's often accept food stamps and provide locally grown, healthy food to members [residents and/or institutions]. These measures would provide additional amenities Downtown until there is demand for a full grocery and help to provide those with limited transportation choices healthy food options.

“ Build affordable grocery stores Downtown accessible to low income folks with quality food. ”

- Online collaborative map comment

EXPLORE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES TO ATTRACT NEW DOWNTOWN RESIDENTS

Grand Rapids is home to a significant number of employees and some of the region’s largest corporations. Currently, the majority of Downtown employees commute from outside of Downtown. Many will continue to choose to do so but others may be interested in owning or renting a home Downtown, close to where they work, with the right incentive. Employee Assisted Housing programs offer ranges of financial incentives to make the case for living near the office. Partnerships with major corporations could result in an incentive package for employees to choose housing options in or near Downtown. The Live Downtown Detroit program is just one example that utilizes a combination of forgivable loans, renter’s assistance, and funds for home improvements to incentivize downtown living for employees of partner corporations. The result is less demand for transportation [and parking], often a cost borne by the employers, an incentive to retain local talent long-term, and an improved Downtown that better reflects the values of local employers.

EXPAND MARKETING EFFORTS TO PROMOTE DOWNTOWN LIVING

DGRI’s website, along with others, are valuable in providing a virtual entry into the downtown lifestyle, highlighting local destinations, events, and urban amenities. Additional efforts to make the Downtown living experience come alive could include the production of short video clips or “webisodes,” each highlighting particular themes. Bringing a first-person perspective through short resident testimonial video clips—from both long-time residents and newcomers—could be worthwhile in representing the diversity of neighborhoods and presenting a range of perspectives on why it’s great to live Downtown. Some downtown living marketing strategies, such as Minneapolis’s Explore Downtown Living campaign, have created tours specifically for those who may be considering relocating Downtown—a chance to learn about what Downtown has to offer, get some orientation on the lay of the land, meet other potential newcomers, and take a peek inside various housing options to get a sense of what’s on the market.



PRECEDENT: LIVE DOWNTOWN DETROIT

<http://www.detroitlivedowntown.org/>

PROMOTE ZERO WASTE INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES THROUGHOUT DOWNTOWN

Reducing waste is a benefit for everyone. A growing movement is looking into ways to eliminate trash through careful planning and investments. A successful zero waste community can recover up to 90% of what is typically thrown away. DGRI and their partners should plan to transition Downtown toward zero waste and consider incentivizing zero waste infrastructure, planning and implementation in all Downtown buildings, both residential and commercial. To help raise awareness about waste, plan for a number of zero waste events Downtown that incorporate information about how to reduce waste including recycling and composting.