

# Downtown Stillwater Revitalization

## Revitalization Opportunities and Downtown's Unprecedented Future

The Downtown Revitalization Committee (DRC) was established in September 2012 as a means for downtown businesses and property owners to join together to identify opportunities to revitalize, (or redevelop) downtown in conjunction with the major capital improvements taking place in the next four years; creation of Brown's Creek Trail, Lowell Park/Phase II completion, Lift Bridge renovation, and eventual redevelopment of the Shoddy Mill.



In total, these improvements will forever alter downtown as we know it today. However, each of these improvements will not reach their full potential if they are not meshed together into one cohesive plan that clearly identifies all the possible opportunities beyond just the improvements themselves.

The DRC has spent the last 10 months identifying a wide range of additional opportunities that further enhance the aforementioned improvements as well as creating a dynamic commercial district that evokes the unique history of downtown as never before. When added to the major improvements, the DRC's opportunities act like mortar, cementing the continuity of the major improvements into a seamless flow of cyclists, pedestrians, shoppers, diners and residents - all enjoying the new vibe of a rejuvenated downtown that offers goods and services in demand 12 months of the year. And the opportunities the DRC has brought forth couldn't come at a better time.

As stated previously, downtown Stillwater is decaying both economically and physically. The great recession and ever-increasing property taxes have eroded the financial capabilities of property owners to maintain their properties, let alone the ability to reinvest in the properties to bring them into refurbished condition. This failing economic structure forces owners to lease their spaces to under-qualified tenants who often don't have the capital to withstand Stillwater's seasonal highs and lows. This all-to-present situation produces a "revolving door" reputation that downtown and the City cannot afford.



*"I want to cancel my membership this year because my business is not doing well. I almost closed this winter and now this month is slow too. I have no money to pay for membership. I hope you understand. I can barely pay rent this month. I'm so sorry for this."*  
- Downtown Chamber Member, June 12<sup>th</sup> email

To ensure downtown doesn't just survive as it has in recent years - but thrive - downtown businesses, property owners, City officials and MnDOT must take unprecedented collaborative action to leverage each opportunity to its fullest extent. To do anything less dramatically marginalizes the investment and benefit potential provided by these major improvements.

With the bulk of downtown opportunities identified, the next step is action. The time has arrived where we now must work together to start implementing the opportunities in a systematic process to bring about the best downtown – from vision to reality.



The work the DRC has done to date is now ready for implementation. Below summarizes all the current DRC opportunities and the specific actions needed to continue the revitalization of downtown.

### Economic Development Action Plan

The DRC has received proposals from two local economic development consultants with yet another highly recommended consultant, Buxton, who has preformed economic development, redevelopment, and marketing plans for more than 650 municipalities. Proposals received range from \$35,000 to \$65,000.

The full assessment of downtown’s current offerings, market trade area, consumer profile and resulting proposed business mix action plan is the most influential set of economic reports critical for all of us to make sound decisions for downtown long into the future.

The resulting action plan comes at the pivotal time in downtown history, when all these opportunities converge to make downtown an economic powerhouse or, if not undertaken, continues to have downtown remaining an economic revolving door, with well-intended businesses coming and going on a regular basis. The latter is not beneficial to downtown or the economics that the city relies on. The investment and stakes are too high to allow past methods to continue their lack luster results.



There is little doubt that strategically planning downtown guided by these economic action plans brings economic benefits, not just for downtown, but for all of Stillwater. As downtown is redeveloped into a 12-month commercial district, the City will enjoy a rebirth of economic activity throughout the city, which can only enhance the quality of life, viability and economic restructuring of other commercial districts, and provide a positive impact on commercial and residential values as well. It is for this reason, and rationale, that the DRC requests the economic plans be supported by the City.

### Transient Docking Grant Preparation

The DRC's River Front subcommittee has conducted research and meetings with DNR Transient Docking Grant representatives with the goal of submitting an application for the \$100,000 Minnesota competitive grant. The grant application deadline is August 1<sup>st</sup>. If the initial grant application is approved, a formal grant application will be in April 2014. The DNR grant representatives are very willing to provide extensive assistance to the City to complete the initial grant application.



### Bike Friendly Community Assessment

The need for a complete biking assessment for all of Stillwater is not only timely, it is imperative given the impending completion of the Brown's Creek Trail. It is essential that all biking interaction within Stillwater, and specifically downtown, be fully assessed to ensure biking interaction is safe for bikers, pedestrians, automobile traffic and downtown visitors enjoying the commercial district and Lowell Park.

The *Bike Friendly Community Assessment* is provided by the Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota and will be funded by community organizations. Nearly half of the \$5,000 assessment cost has already been collected. All the DRC seeks is the City's acceptance of the assessment's results and to have recommendations pertinent to downtown be given thorough consideration as it may relate to the current Lowell Park plans and other considerations for safe and enjoyable interaction for all who visit downtown.



### Snow Removal Quotes

It is important that we plan early for a new method of handling snow removal from downtown sidewalks. In an effort to devise a cost estimate and possible cost distribution calculation, it would be wise to get quotes for snow removal this summer so defined contribution zones can be developed with corresponding cost structure drafted for further review. Getting cost quotes now allows the City and downtown property owners to craft a workable arrangement well before the winter season begins.

### Building Facade and Tree Up-Lighting

There are approximately seven building owners who are very interested in up-lighting the building facades or trees within their property lines. The work and cost necessary are the responsibility of the building owners with no funding requested from the City. All the DRC and property owners ask is the ability to proceed with their planned ambiance improvements.



## Bluff Lighting

At the workshop there was discussion about a test pilot program to light the south and north bluff areas. MnDOT's Adam Josephson has provided the items for consideration requested by Mayor Harycki. The goal as stated by Mayor Harycki is to implement this project yet this summer. We now need to respond to the items from MnDOT and establish a resulting action plan.

*"The details will be important to fully understand what is being proposed. Keep me in the loop as this gets developed and hopefully we can work through the various issues."*

- Adam Josephson, P.E. MnDOT

## Review Lowell Park Phase II Improvements

It is recommended that Lowell Park Phase II improvements be given another look before improvements begin. This request is made due to the fact the improvements were designed prior to the realization of Brown's Creek Trail and Congressional approval of the St. Croix River Crossing. These two major new developments to downtown will dramatically alter the use and traffic patterns of Lowell Park.

It is recommended that the *Bike Friendly Community Assessment* be conducted this summer to ensure the park provides safe interaction among all the various modes of transportation converging in one location. One last review may also result in maximizing the park's potential use throughout 12 months of the year.

## Downtown Planning with MnDOT

Fall DRC workshops and conversations with MnDOT have identified significant opportunities along main street with the elimination of turn lanes that could result in wider sidewalks as proposed in the Ambiance subcommittee presentation. Extending the Lift Bridge plaza to Main Street and perhaps to Chestnut west of Main Street present exciting opportunities to create a wide thoroughfare that may increase the economic value of Second Street.

## Initial Planning of the Medallion Project

In the near future a steering committee will be formed to begin the process of rolling out the Medallion Project. We envision city staff participating on the committee.

## Historical Street Signs

The DRC's Ambiance subcommittee identified historical street signs as a significant component to celebrating Stillwater's history.

