



Council
Communication
Office of the City Manager

Date

March 10, 2008

Agenda Item No. 67

Roll Call No. 08-

Communication No. 08-110

Submitted by: Richard A. Clark

AGENDA HEADING:

Resolution to receive and adopt the downtown plan titled “What’s Next, Downtown” and to refer to the appropriate entities for recommendation on suitable amendments to the City’s comprehensive plan, the Des Moines 2020 Community Character Plan, and other City plans and policies for implementation of this downtown plan.

SYNOPSIS:

Recommend receiving and adopting the downtown plan, “What’s Next Downtown” and referring the plan to the appropriate entities for implementation.

FISCAL IMPACT:

It is anticipated this plan will be used to guide and direct City funding for future projects.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Since late 2006, the City of Des Moines and Polk County, in conjunction with the Downtown Community Alliance, have been in the process of undertaking a study of the downtown to provide guidance on allocation of resources and to identify future projects and development opportunities;

The plan authors, Mario Gandelsonas of New York and Erin Olson-Douglas, AIA of Des Moines, focus on strategies to maintain and enhance the downtown as a vibrant area for employment, residents and visitors with recommendations grouped into two categories: movement and development.

The new priority projects emerging from the plan - Walnut St. Transformation, Skywalks and Sidewalks and Greening Downtown - are based on movement being crucial to providing connecting elements to link the significant activity areas. These initiatives are further described in the “Background” portion of this communication.

In addition to these new projects, the consultants strongly recommend continued focus on the major projects currently underway: the Riverwalk, SE Connector/MLK Parkway, Riverpoint West/Gray’s Landing, Gateway Park and provision of additional downtown housing.

Implementation of the priorities will require a multi-dimensional approach with concentration on updating zoning and guidelines, targeting market initiatives for housing and retail, and providing detailed planning for emerging areas. The next steps to this plan will include:

- Adoption of key guidelines into the comprehensive plan;
- Completion of the second volume of this plan which will detail specific areas in the downtown and provide recommendations for their development;
- Inclusion of projects into the City's Capital Improvement Projects and other budgeting cycles; and
- Work with private sector to leverage funding for existing and new priorities projects.

Background:

Priorities emerging from the plan focused on several key new initiatives in the downtown:

Walnut St. Transformation: Use Walnut Street, from the State Capitol complex to its 15th St. terminus, as the "spine" to connect places in downtown and create a lively urban environment. Physical projects such as transit (a shuttle evolving into a tramway and mass transit transfer point), enhanced skywalk/sidewalk connections, bike lanes, retail, identification of major north-south routes, as well as changes in private and public parking policies are key components of this initiative. Walnut Street was chosen as the "spine" based on the location of current major activity nodes and potential future major development sites.

'Skywalks and Sidewalks': Create new strategic connections through expansion of the current skywalk system, refreshing existing corridors and bridges, building visible and inviting vertical access points between the skywalk and sidewalk levels, and improving the street level experience through sidewalk widening, streetscapes, ground level development and other pedestrian elements.

'Greening Downtown': Enhance the current "greening" of downtown with creation of an integrated trail and urban bike lane system with a network of bicycle amenities, provide a unified system for showcasing the unique collection of downtown public art and a network of parks to serve the emerging residential areas as well as the downtown workforce and regional visitors.

To assist in gathering information, a number of public and stakeholder meetings have been held in the past year. The Downtown Steering Committee, led by Mayor Cownie, has provided guidance to the consultants in its review of this plan and has endorsed the presentation of the plan. This Committee is composed of representatives of the City of Des Moines, Polk County, the Downtown Community Alliance, downtown residents and businesses.

In addition, a number of public input sessions were held at the Des Moines Central Library; the most recent were at noon and early evening on September 18, 2007.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S):

Date: November 7, 2005

Roll Call Number: 05-2719

Action: Economic Development Grant to Des Moines Community Investment Corporation for commissioning a Comprehensive Study of the Downtown Area, not to exceed \$75,000. Moved by Kiernan to adopt. Motion Carried 7-0.

Date: May 8, 2006

Roll Call Number: 06-944

Action: One-year agreement with Erin Olson-Douglas, 3819 Lincoln Place Drive, Des Moines, for a study of downtown development, not to exceed \$94,000 with an option to extend for three months. Moved by Brooks to adopt. Motion Carried 7-0.

Date: December 4, 2006

Roll Call Number: 06-2417

Action: Professional Services Agreement with Mario Gandelsonas of Agrest & Gandelsonas Architects to provide additional creative input and analysis for the Downtown Plan. Moved by Hensley to adopt. Motion Carried 6-0.

Date: June 11, 2006

Roll Call Number: N/A

Action: At the June 11, 2007 Council workshop, project consultant Erin Olson-Douglas provided an interim update on the downtown plan progress and the public input that had been received. The Council indicated interest and support on the general direction that plan was taking. Since that time, she and Mario Gandelsonas, the other project consultant, have continued to work with the Steering Committee and other stakeholders on refining the goals and strategies to achieve those goals for the plan document.

Date: August 6, 2007

Roll Call Number: 07-1474

Action: Presentation and to receive and file a Draft Executive Summary of the Downtown Des Moines Planning Project (presentation by project consultants, Erin Olson-Douglas, AIA and Mario Gandelsonas, AIA). Moved by Kiernan to receive and file the “Draft Executive Summary – Downtown Des Moines Planning Project” and request input from the Plan & Zoning Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission and the Urban Design Review Board on or by October 1, 2007 and from the public sessions to be held at the Des Moines Central Library on September 18, 2007. Upon receipt of the input and comments, the consultants will then complete the plan report and its related documents for submission to the City Council for adoption and to the Polk County Board of Supervisors for its endorsement. Motion Carried 6-1.

BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION(S):

Date: October 2, 2007

Roll Call Number: N/A

Action: The Urban Design Review Board recommended approval of proposed plan document noting:

- Use the downtown plan to direct and prioritize public financial investments;
- Rezoning is critical to support implementation of the plan;
- Provide skywalk access to the west end of Walnut Street only when there is sufficient building and pedestrian density;
- An on-street climate-controlled pedestrian access, like an arcade, may be a viable alternative to 2nd story skywalks;
- Do more to ensure MLK is a positive pedestrian experience especially at the western edge that links to Fleur Dr. and Gray's Lake;
- Provide a green link from 15th Street to MLK to Meredith Trail;
- 2nd and 6th Avenues are important connectors to other areas in Des Moines that need to be acknowledged;
- E 4th, E 5th and E 6th Streets should maintain their distinctions;
- Lower East Village district has potential for more dense development;
- Integrate the findings of the East Village parking study into the plan;

Date: October 8, 2007

Roll Call Number: 07-1937

Action: Regarding Executive Summary component of the Downtown Plan from Plan & Zoning Commission. Moved by Hensley to receive and file. Motion Carried 7-0.

ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS:

Adoption of this plan is on the March 11, 2008 Polk County Board of Supervisors' agenda.

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