



Village of Morton Downtown Development Plan Business and Building Owners Workshop Summary

February 9th, 2011

On February 9th, 2011, a workshop for Downtown business and building owners was held at the Main Street Deli in order to obtain their unique perspectives about Downtown Morton and gauge consensus on issues and concerns. Over 30 attendees participated in the workshop which included an overview of the purpose of the study, the planning process, and an interactive exercise to obtain input and comments regarding Downtown Morton.

This report summarizes the results of the Business and Building Owners Workshop. The summary reflects the opinions and comments stated by individuals during the workshop and in response to the workshop questionnaire.

1. Identify five (5) issues or concerns confronting Downtown Morton.

Business and building owners in attendance discussed a variety of issues and concerns confronting Downtown Morton. In general, the primary areas of concern were: 1) business diversity; 2) parking; 3) the look and function of Downtown; 4) lack of green space, and 5) promotion of Downtown. The following is a summary of the key points that were raised for each of the primary areas of concern.

Business Diversity: Many comments from workshop participants were focused on a lack of business diversity, specifically a lack of retail businesses and a lack of restaurants that are open in the evening. Participants valued the office and service uses in Downtown but would like to attract additional retail and restaurant uses.

Look and Function of Downtown: Participants desired an improved aesthetic for Downtown, particularly building facades. Specifically mentioned as lacking included a unified “theme” or “style” for Downtown, the lack of a destination or “draw” and the lack of a civic gathering space for festivals and events. Improving pedestrian and bicycle facilities was cited as a need to bring people to Downtown and the need for improved pedestrian (driver) access to parking lots located behind buildings.

Parking: Participants noted several issues related to parking including a desire for additional parking; improved location of parking; and improved access to existing parking lots behind buildings.

Lack of Green Space: Those in attendance stated a desire for additional green space within Downtown. Suggestions included green space along the rights-of-way (e.g., streetscaping), park areas with benches and a large, civic gathering space.

Promotion of Downtown: In order to better promote Downtown to shoppers, tourists and new businesses, participants suggested increased marketing for Downtown, improved business support for special events, improved wayfinding signage and a “shop local” campaign.

2. List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.

Business and building owners in attendance were asked to list the three most important issues discussed thus far. The most frequent response was business diversity, specifically attracting new retail and restaurants to Downtown. A four-way tie for second most important included: creating a gathering place, appearance of buildings, creating green space and parking.

3. *Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken within Downtown Morton.*

When asked to identify specific projects or actions they would like to see undertaken in Downtown Morton, the most frequent responses were business attraction (particularly attracting restaurants and retail) and creating a destination or gathering place. Other projects mentioned were the creation of a façade improvement program, residential development, creation of a bicycle trail/network, wayfinding signage, a retail rent subsidy, pedestrian facilities, a strategic plan for vacant or underutilized buildings, a traffic study, a shop local campaign, additional parking, public restrooms, and extended business hours.

4. *What are the most important things that can be done to improve the business climate in Downtown Morton?*

Business and building owners in attendance stated a number of actions that could be undertaken to improve the business climate in Downtown Morton including improving pedestrian-friendliness, creating a town square or gathering space, creating a unified architectural theme, improving the atmosphere and appearance, improving business diversity and creating more parking.

5. *What do you perceive to be Downtown Morton's biggest competition?*

During the workshop, there was discussion on how to define competition. There was a sense that due to the current business mix in Downtown (e.g., office and service uses), there weren't any direct competitors for Downtown Morton. Participants did note that for daily shopping needs and evening activities, they generally travel outside of Downtown. For these uses, participants mentioned the commercial area north of Interstate 74 and areas outside of the Village including Downtown Washington, Peoria Heights, East Peoria, Peoria and Bloomington.

6. *What are the primary strengths and assets of Downtown Morton?*

A variety of assets, strengths, and advantages were provided by business and building owners. These included: the safe and walkable nature of Downtown, the frequent sports activities and events (which could provide a customer base), the people of Morton and the fact that so many businesses are locally-owned.