

IOWA  
*life* | changing

## CLINTON, IOWA

Downtown Assessment Visit  
July 11 & 12, 2006

**Consultant Team:**

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IDRC

Resource Center

Iowa Downtown

## INTRODUCTION

*The following report summarizes the observations and recommendations that are a result of an Iowa Downtown Resource Center Assessment Visit conducted in Clinton, Iowa. In preparation of this report, the Team had to learn about Clinton's development history and plans for future development. The Assessment Team's familiarization process began with a review of materials about Clinton supplied prior to the visit, a driving tour of the city and a walking tour of the downtown commercial district. The intensive two-day visit also included interviews with approximately 81 community leaders, individuals and groups representing the public and private sectors. Based upon these activities and the Assessment Team's extensive working knowledge in downtown economic development, this report summarizes their findings and recommendations for Clinton.*

## PURPOSE

The Clinton Downtown Partnership contracted with the Iowa Downtown Resource Center, Iowa Department of Economic Development (IDED), to conduct a Downtown Assessment Visit which included the following services:

"Coordinate, implement, and participate in a two-day assessment visit to the downtown area of Clinton, Iowa on July 11 & 12, 2006. The assessment visit team will be comprised of two downtown development professionals. The assessment team will partake in a familiarization tour of the community, a downtown walking tour, interview local community leaders, assess the current state of downtown, and develop oral and written observations and recommendations."

*The Assessment Team included two downtown development professionals:*

**Thom Guzman**, Director, Iowa Downtown Resource Center, Iowa Department of Economic Development, (IDED), Des Moines, Iowa. Guzman has been with IDED since January 1988. As director of the Iowa Downtown Resource Center, Guzman oversees all downtown development programs of the department, including its premier program, Main Street Iowa. Guzman was the Main Street program director for downtown Grass Valley, California prior to joining IDED. He has been a real estate broker, retail sales manager, non-profit association manager, Main Street program director, and Main Street state coordinator prior to becoming the downtown resource center director. His current responsibilities include managing a million dollar annual budget, overseeing the planning and delivery of technical assistance services, training, and assessments for Iowa's 37 Main Street communities and for developing technical assistance and training opportunities for all Iowa communities. Guzman's areas of expertise are in organizational development, promotion, and working with smaller communities with populations ranging from 400 to 82,000. He is a graduate of Leadership Iowa, is past vice-chair of the Iowa Commission on Latino Affairs, and currently chairs the department's Diversity Committee. Guzman currently sits on three of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's committees: Community Development Financial Institution, Loan Committee and Diversity Council. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree from California State University Hayward. Over the years, Guzman has consulted for Main Street programs in Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maine, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington and Wisconsin. He has also presented at many national and international downtown conferences.

**Janet McCannon**, CMSM, Downtown Consultant, Burlington, IA. McCannon is the former director of Downtown Partners, Inc. She earned the designation Certified Main Street Manager (CMSM) through experience and certification institute with the National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Main Street Center in Washington D.C. McCannon is a graduate of the University of Illinois and has taken graduate studies from the University of Iowa. A wealth of information and passion for downtown redevelopment has resulted from varied professions/occupations/ vocations, such as: ten years as a social studies/history teacher in the Burlington Community School system; a small business (bridal shop) owner in downtown Burlington; fifteen years as a downtown department store buyer; ten years as director of Burlington's downtown redevelopment organizations; two terms on the Burlington City Council; tour guide trainer for the Burlington Convention and Tourism Bureau; local liaison for MetroPlains Development in the rehabilitation of a 20 year vacant hotel into 75 housing units and as a consultant for the Iowa Department of Economic Development. McCannon remains active in many community committees and boards.

## OVERVIEW

*This Downtown Assessment Visit report and recommendations for Clinton are based on the Team's downtown development experience, totaling over 37 years. Their beliefs are grounded by the philosophy that in order for downtown to re-establish itself as the social and commercial center of the community – the physical heart and soul of the city – downtown must become more valuable physically, economically, socially and politically.*

The dialog with the community begins with the community's need to understand why downtown is important.

- 1) Downtown serves as the symbol (*the visual testimony*) of the community's economic health. The commercial activity and vibrancy of downtown is a reflection of the health and investment within the entire community.
- 2) The viability of downtown is important to both public and private sectors. Government officials and taxpayers have a vested interest in the health and viability of downtown and the valuation of its commercial properties. Since the welfare of downtown is both a public and private concern, it is in everyone's best interest to form a partnership to address its vitality. Both sectors have resources and expertise to contribute to the revitalization process.
- 3) The local quality of life (*livability*) is reflected through the condition of downtown. Today, young workers will change their employment and careers multiple times, many of them basing those decisions solely upon where they prefer to live. Quality of life is a key factor in industrial, commercial and professional business and employee recruitment.
- 4) Downtown reflects local pride and the values of the community. Much can be learned about your community and its values by exploring its downtown.
- 5) Downtown is a functioning, living museum. It speaks volumes about how your community began developing, how it has evolved and what influences have been instrumental in its development. Your downtown is unique--with its own character and history (*sense of place*), that sets it apart from any other place.

The health of downtown has a direct impact upon the entire community's economic well being. They are inter-related. Downtown revitalization IS economic development. Downtown is a prime location for incubating small business, it is an affordable location for independent businesses, and is one of the community's major employers. The commercial center provides a compact environment with multiple stories for commerce, government and living spaces, thus reducing sprawl and the cost associated in extending city services and infrastructure. The pedestrian friendly environment is convenient and accessible, serving as the center (*community space*) for not only commercial trade but also cultural, social and civic engagement. Historic downtown districts can serve as heritage tourism attractions. A building's condition, the business' viability and maximization of the building's square footage for income generation affect not only the property's value, but also the value of the neighboring properties and real estate in the entire community. Investments in downtown allow it to "*pay its fair share*" in taxes resulting in lessening the tax burdens of its citizens and city government.

Clinton does not look or resemble what it was like 40 years ago. Downtown has also changed. Various factors have had dramatic effects upon the character of downtown and its businesses' viability. External forces have affected downtown's competitiveness--big box retail, internet sales, catalog sales, relocation of traditional downtown uses to other areas of town (post office, libraries, city hall, schools, etc.), transportation and commuter trends to name a few. Citizens are more mobile and technologically connected, increasing regional and even global competition, and directly affecting the level of activity and commerce in downtown. More women have entered the workforce. Women, the primary household purchasers, are making the majority of purchases on Saturday, Sunday and in the evening. Different generations of consumers have different spending habits and expectations. The commercial business world has dramatically changed.

Internal forces at work include the investments or lack of investments that have been made in downtown buildings. Inappropriate façade changes over the years have lessened the historic integrity of downtown properties and affected its overall appearance. Under-utilization of buildings also reduces income generation which has a direct effect upon the amount of capital available for reinvestment in the buildings and ultimately, the value of downtown. Covered, boarded up and scaled down display windows create barriers between the businesses and the customers. In some cases, signage is lacking, poorly designed or obsolete. These physical changes combined with other external forces have substantially challenged the dynamics and vitality of downtown. It is important to note that none of this occurred with malicious intent. Rather, building and business owners were seeking possible solutions to the ever-changing dynamics under which downtown existed, not realizing that many of these solutions only contributed to downtown's decline.

When downtown begins losing its physical and economic value, its social and political values are also affected. The more varied the functions of downtown, the more often people have reasons to come downtown at different times of the day, thus adding more value to downtown. Promotional venues that attract people to downtown for social, cultural, recreational and retail experiences increase citizens' appreciation of the downtown through positive associations and interactions. This association (*sense of place*) between the fond memories that promotions create and the built environment in which they occur, becomes a strong emotional connection. Participants will care about downtown and feel they have a stake in its future. Because of the pleasant experiences the participants are more apt to come back to make purchases at a later date.

Strategies need to continue to be developed to promote downtown and stimulate **appropriate** reinvestments in downtown properties and businesses. Downtown belongs to everyone and the revitalization process requires a strong commitment from all sectors (*stakeholders*) within the community. Educating these stakeholders and changing the community's attitudes takes time and persistence, but is a critical component in the revitalization process. As understanding grows, citizens will become more actively engaged in the implementation of strategies to improve downtown's economic and physical condition. The public and private sectors must form an alliance (*partnership*) to pool their resources to address the future of downtown and stimulate and direct positive change. Over the past ten years, Clinton has had a number of successes in its' downtown revitalization efforts. Through this assessment visit, Clinton has taken another step in addressing its commercial district's future. Now, additional actions are necessary to continue to improve the climate for reinvestments, improve the viability of existing businesses, increase customer traffic, and attract new business to fill the vacant and under-utilized properties, invest in building improvements and increase downtown's uses, thereby increasing its value. As you already know, change does not occur overnight. The successes will be incremental and every one should be celebrated. Failures will occur and lessons will be learned.

The intent of this document is to assist the Downtown Partnership and the community of Clinton in its continual journey to improve downtown physically, economically, socially and politically. This assessment occurred in a relatively short period of time and addresses the issues participants identified as important during the visit. Despite limited time, the Assessment Team interviewed approximately **81** individuals representing a cross section of stakeholders in the community. This assessment should serve as a continued call to action and provide the community with up to date information to formulate strategies necessary to address the very serious issue of saving downtown for future generations. This report cannot and does not provide all of the answers. Ultimately, the community must explore their options, decide what is relevant and realistic and acquire additional information and resources as its citizens address downtown's future.

**"Never doubt that a small group of committed dependable citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has."**

**-Margaret Mead-**

## "ONE WORD" DESCRIPTIONS OF CLINTON

*\*indicates descriptives voiced multiple times*

The Assessment Team asked interviewees for "one word" descriptions of Clinton. Collectively Clinton was described as:

- Improving\*
- Opportunity\*
- Changing\*
- River\*
- Blue collar\*
- Stinky\*
- Friendly
- Conservative
- Fragile
- Teetering
- Industrial
- Cooperative
- Slowing improving
- Swimming against current
- Progressing
- Recovering
- Low wages
- Home town
- Opinionated
- More aggressive
- Welfare
- Great potential
- Hard working
- Homey
- Depressed economy
- Leaving – kids & businesses
- Struggling
- Static
- Frustrating
- Loyal
- Divided
- Disjointed
- Puzzling – mixed messages
- Lazy
- Lack of vision
- Afraid to change
- Unknowing
- Poised for the future
- Environment
- Time is now
- Opportunistic
- Growing in spite of itself
- Educated
- Love it
- Mississippi
- Welcoming
- Eclectic
- Seeking
- Right direction
- Tentative
- Ambitious
- Moving forward
- Caring
- Historic
- Recreational
- Negative
- River city
- Progressive
- Busy
- Forward thinking
- Aggressive
- Developing
- Apathetic
- Ultra conservative
- Stagnant
- Focused on negative
- Unwilling to change
- Frightened
- Costs money
- Old
- Old fashioned
- Great place to live
- Family
- Amenities
- Good location

### Under 30 year olds

- Smelly
- River
- Cornfields
- Small
- Boring

## "ONE WORD" DESCRIPTIONS OF DOWNTOWN CLINTON

*\*indicates a descriptive voiced multiple times*

The Assessment Team asked interviewees for "one word" descriptions of Clinton's downtown commercial district. Collectively, the downtown was described as:

- Improving\*
- Old\*
- Changing (+)\*
- Potential\*
- Challenged\*
- Disconnected\*
- Vacant\*
- Transitional\*
- Struggling\*
- Historic\*
- Searching
- Avoidable
- Attractive
- Almost quaint
- Progressive
- Fun
- Renovating
- Active
- Non historic
- Ugly
- Not well maintained
- Not innovative
- Disappointing
- Boarded up windows
- Empty storefronts
- Slowly changing
- Same as community
- Creating a new image
- Lack of money
- Fighting public perception
- Nothing downtown
- Mis-matched
- Not cohesive
- Ill-defined
- Frustrating
- Orphan

- Tacky
- Taxes too high
- Help!
- Visual improvements
- Dead
- Dirty
- Wal-mart
- Quiet
- Big buildings
- Trying
- Progressing
- Mix – good & bad
- Threatened
- Not supported
- Local businesses
- Searching
- Looking for its soul
- Holes
- Doesn't know what it wants to be!
- Non progressive
- Non accepted
- Not the first thought
- Revitalize
- Slow
- Old fashioned
- Not unified
- Lacking
- Emerging
- Attitude
- Changed (-)
- Declined
- Clean
- Colorful
- Modernistic
- Unique
- Neat
- Social

**Under 30 year olds**

- Loud (*trucks*)
- Struggling
- Old
- Fun (*bars*)

**COMMUNITY ASSETS**

\*Indicates assets voiced multiple times

Interviewees were asked to identify Clinton's assets. Collectively, the following assets were mentioned:

- River\*
- Location\*
- Transportation modes\*
- People\*
- Parks\*
- Eagle Point Park\*
- Schools\*
- Quality of Life\*
- Industry\*
- Low crime rate/safe\*
- Cultural amenities & activities\*
- Riverfront\*
- Proximity to Chicago & QC
- Diverse industrial base
- Two colleges
- Volunteerism
- Historic
- Rail access
- Arboretum
- Shopping choices
- Quality labor
- Can do attitude
- Friendly
- Scenic
- Ericson Center activities
- Fortune 500 companies
- Education
- Active Y's
- Centrally located
- Inexpensive recreational opportunities
- Midwestern old home town values
- Diversity of community needs
- Huge work ethic
- Cheap labor
- Low fixed costs of operation
- Churches
- Leadership
- Hometown
- Adaptability
- Events
- Manufacturing
- Entrepreneurs
- Trails

**Under 30 year olds:**

- Smallness
- Riverfront developments
- People know each other
- Wealth of recreation & events
- 2 colleges

## DOWNTOWN'S ASSETS

\*Indicates assets voiced multiple times

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proximity to River*</li> <li>- New streetscape*</li> <li>- Historic buildings*</li> <li>- Old Buildings*</li> <li>- Sense of place*</li> <li>- Good parking*</li> <li>- Downtown apartments</li> <li>- Inexpensive</li> <li>- Banks</li> <li>- Low cost of building purchases</li> <li>- Riverfront</li> <li>- Rehabbed buildings</li> <li>- Variety of businesses</li> <li>- Buildings – but many tacky</li> <li>- Improvements</li> <li>- City buildings – city hall, library, etc.</li> <li>- Government services</li> <li>- Architecture</li> <li>- Still resembles a downtown</li> <li>- Wide street</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Started renovations</li> <li>- Sculptures</li> <li>- Collaborative business community</li> <li>- Low rents</li> <li>- Low property values</li> <li>- Proximity to other businesses</li> <li>- Cluster of service businesses</li> <li>- Downtown partnership</li> <li>- Friendly</li> <li>- Two bridges</li> <li>- Riverfront amenities</li> <li>- Few vacancies</li> <li>- SSMID</li> <li>- Familiar</li> <li>- Pedestrian friendly</li> <li>- Historic gathering spot</li> <li>- Home town downtown</li> <li>- Potential for market rate housing</li> <li>- Cozy</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Warm</li> <li>- Walkable</li> <li>- History</li> <li>- Historicity</li> <li>- Character</li> <li>- Assessable</li> <li>- Committed people</li> <li>- Art center</li> <li>- Historic museum</li> <li>- Convenient</li> <li>- Variety of restaurants</li> <li>- Personal shopping experiences</li> <li>- Public bus system</li> <li>- Location</li> <li>- Can do attitude</li> <li>- Safe</li> </ul> <p><b>Under 30 year olds:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- On the water</li> <li>- Buildings</li> <li>- Apartments</li> <li>- Close to everything</li> </ul> |
|---|---|--|

## "COMMUNITY'S CHALLENGES"

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Odor/smell*</li> <li>- Attitudes*</li> <li>- Loss of youth/keeping young people*</li> <li>- High paying jobs*</li> <li>- Old Post Office*</li> <li>- Finances – city &amp; private*</li> <li>- Funding*</li> <li>- Poor communication*</li> <li>- Need to prioritize*</li> <li>- Streets/roads*</li> <li>- Growth</li> <li>- Town that smells</li> <li>- Aesthetics</li> <li>- Infrastructure costs</li> <li>- Lots of needs – lack of finances</li> <li>- Low wages</li> <li>- Too many commercial areas</li> <li>- Recruiting industry &amp; jobs</li> <li>- Need for more retail</li> <li>- Out of town management</li> <li>- Getting new customers</li> <li>- Loss of population</li> <li>- Declining population</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aging population</li> <li>- Restaurants</li> <li>- First ward</li> <li>- No bus service (Hwy 30)</li> <li>- Aging/old population</li> <li>- Keeping community appearance</li> <li>- Appearance</li> <li>- Lots of projects on city's plate</li> <li>- Superstores</li> <li>- Lack of mid range housing</li> <li>- Junk in people's yards</li> <li>- Capital</li> <li>- Focus and plan</li> <li>- No deep pocket persons</li> <li>- Financing</li> <li>- Retaining jobs</li> <li>- Building a place to be proud of</li> <li>- Challenges are opportunities</li> <li>- Re-inventing our self once again</li> <li>- Leadership</li> <li>- Adaptive re-use/preservation</li> <li>- Preservation vs. new construction</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of partnering with diverse groups</li> <li>- Need for collaboration</li> <li>- Filling buildings</li> <li>- Too much talk &amp; attempts to please everyone</li> <li>- Lack of pride</li> <li>- Parking</li> <li>- Surviving</li> <li>- Building code</li> <li>- Loss of educated people</li> <li>- Industrial growth</li> <li>- Commanche Avenue approach</li> </ul> <p><b>Under 30 year olds:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not enough people to support specialty shops</li> <li>- Gap between income levels</li> <li>- Lack of culture and diversity</li> <li>- Economic struggles:</li> <li>- Clinton vs. Quad Cities</li> <li>- Downtown vs. Hwy 30 commercial</li> <li>- Lack of professional jobs</li> </ul> |
|--|--|---|

## "DOWNTOWN'S DESIRES"

- |                                     |  |   |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| - Full storefronts*                 | - Become a destination                     | - Maintenance of buildings                                |
| - Renovated/refurbished buildings*  | - Redo 2nd Street                          | - Get recognition   |
| - Fixed upper story windows         | - New look towards levy                    | - Thriving, not surviving                                 |
| - Specialty shops*                  | - Vibrant downtown                         | - Bustling downtown                                       |
| - Focused business mixes            | - Better uniform signage                   | - Well utilized buildings                                 |
| - More customers/shoppers*          | - Downtown is a hangout destination        | - Retain city services – library, city hall, police, etc. |
| - Filled buildings/storefronts*     | - Destination experiences                  | - Mid to upscale apartments                               |
| - More parking*                     | - Improved attitude of business owners     | - Quieter night life for residents                        |
| - More park & less parking lot      | - makeover                                 | - Better window displays                                  |
| - More activities*                  | - More restaurants – fine dining & outside |   |
| - Street furniture – places to sit* | - Coffee shops                             | <b>Under 30 year olds:</b>                                |
| - Sidewalk musicians                | - Expanded streetscape                     | - Restaurant on the river                                 |
| - Successful businesses             | - Clothing stores                          | - Cleaned up downtown                                     |
| - Prosperity                        | - Reinvestment into buildings              | - More businesses downtown instead of on the edge of town |
| - Lower property taxes              | - Downtown master plan                     | - More things for young people to do                      |
| - More unique businesses            | - More improvements                        |   |
| - Boutique shops unique to Clinton  |  |   |

## GREAT PLACES

\*Indicates assets voiced multiple times

Interviewees were asked to share what they liked BEST about being an Iowa Great Place:

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| - Opportunity*                 | - Chance for grant preference                      |
| - Exposure*                    | - Designation                                      |
| - Unique opportunity*          | - Too new to know yet                              |
| - Proactive community leaders* | - Advertising from Alcohol Beverage Control trucks |
| - Only one of three in state*  | - Lottery game                                     |
| - Money*                       | - Lifeline   |
| - Potential for good things    | - Makes marketing Clinton easier                   |
| - Assistance from the state    | - Pride  |
| - Outside notice               | - New attractions                                  |
| - Recognition                  | - Great effort to move ahead                       |
| - Getting on top of the list   | - Opened up resources                              |
| - Potential                    | - Better reputation                                |
| - We deserved it               | - Opportunity to develop                           |
| - Someone else believes in us  | - It can build tourism                             |
| - Job creation                 | - Create interest in coming to Clinton             |
| - Got foot in door             | - Brings community together more                   |
| - The honor                    |  |

## GREAT PLACES

*\*Indicates assets voiced multiple times*

Interviewees were asked to share what they liked LEAST about being an Iowa Great Place:

- Nothing\*
- Can we afford it?
- How it was promoted – advantages
- What's not to like?
- Ambitious
- How do we pull it off?
- Potential for money being poorly spent
- Can't think of negative
- No downside
- Where's the money?
- Juggling limited community resources
- Are we prepared to accept that opportunity?
- Sheer number of projects – where is funding coming from?
- Uncertainty in money required
- A feeling that things are being pushed on us by local Great Places leaders
- There has not been an opportunity for our input
- It was all done by a chosen few
- Lots of local fundraising will have to take place
- I don't see how it could be negative!

## "COMMUNITY QUOTES"

During the interview process, the following comments were shared:

"People don't want to change".

"People in Clinton don't want to see other people in Clinton make money".

"Clinton is the step-child of the Quad Cities".

"There's no central planning".

"We need to remove the old to build the new".

"If we take everything down for parking lots, where are we going to put the stores"?

"There are lots of interest groups in Clinton who all want their share".

Things that should work, don't".

"Clinton has let commercial development get out of control".

"Economics – downtown properties are being over assessed".

"Clinton has an over supply of commercial properties".

"Clinton has a horrible attitude about itself".

"The community is divided among itself".

"There is not enough partnering and collaboration on projects".

"We can go either way right now, depending on how we manage it".

"People need to understand that things can change".

"We are a blue collar community".

"Expressway development will continue to make downtown development harder".

"Clinton is still two towns or more".

"There is talent and wealth in the community".

"People perceive they can't find what they want downtown".

"If people buy into something, they make it happen".

"Perception of Clinton is "that town with the smell".

"Lots of the city is old and wearing out and should have been addressed when the city had money".

"People often have opinions that are not based on fact".

"People don't want to change".

"Lots of what is new is ugly".

"This is the most pumped we've been in many, many years".

"Clinton is a non-progressive, blue collar old town".

"Downtown is struggling to try and find an identity".

"Clinton is on the apex of opportunity".

"Downtown is lacking the spark to keep itself going, but I don't know how to fix it".

"We Celebrate if somebody fails".

"Inability to let go of the old and embrace the new".

"We need to remove the old to build new".

"Clinton has changed dramatically North to South".

"Tax assessments are a dis-incentive to rehabilitation".

"Chamber does not spend much on marketing/retail".

"Properties assessed higher than reasonable market value".

"People are very conservative in Clinton".

"People's standard of living is not getting better".

"People don't care about customer service".

"We are not good enough for many people in Clinton."

"We do not market Clinton well on the internet".

"My customer base is not from Clinton".

"Clintonians don't support downtown".

"We haven't ever been able to pull off the river & downtown connection".

"Downtown was the Place, they **wanted** to be there".

"Within 10 years, 40% of Clintonians will be of retirement age".

"Downtown is a part of so many things in the city".

"Do downtown building owners really have the interest of downtown at heart"?

"Pensions and social security provide a large percentage of incomes".

"People don't realize how their lack of property maintenance affects how the whole town looks".

## Under 30 year olds:

"Coming over the bridges, downtown looks like an abandoned town".

"I don't even know what I want".

"There's a big gap in income levels in this town".

"College grads don't come back here".

"Challenges are opportunities".

## Related to Great Places:

"Can we afford our cost of being an Iowa Great Place"?

"This building is making progress. Now, what's gonna happen around it"?

"There is a city versus county mentality"?

"We have to utilize the river a lot more"?

"We need a restaurant on the River"?

"Still a lot of business goes on with a handshake and a man's word".

"Downtown will be the community's service center/financial center".

"50% of our business comes from Illinois".

"Downtown has got to keep fighting for the downtown it deserves".

"Clinton is no different than any other town. The town is run by a select few".

"Generally, there is an 'input problem' in Clinton".

"Great Places...nobody's explained it to us".

## ASSESSMENT TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS

The Assessment Team bases the following opinions on our driving tour, walking tour, and discussions with local business owners and community representatives:

The people we interviewed frequently discussed the different states of conflict that exist in Clinton.

The conflicts come from all sides:

- Preservation advocates vs. non-advocates
- Jealous neighbor mentality
- Special interest groups
- Two or more "Clintons"
- County vs. city
- Change vs. no change
- Nay-sayers (*CAVE People - "Citizens Against Virtually Everything"*)
- Hear-say vs. facts (*communication?*)

*People seem to relish in seeing others fail. We could not detect a "unified" spirit, but rather one which exemplifies "it's my way/ my project or I'm not going to support it". This type of environment will make downtown development even more challenging and daunting.*

The Downtown Partnership is to be commended for working towards the completion of several good downtown initiatives which have been completed in spite of community's divisive attitudes:

- Howes, Van Allen, Jacobsen & Armstrong rehabs
- 5th Ave streetscape
- Wayfinding signs (*community wide*)
- Riverfront fountain & approach
- Incentive loan & grant programs
- SSMID
- Design guidelines

## The riverfront is one of downtown's biggest, most mentioned assets. But how do visitors find it?

Even newer residents of the community shared with us that it took them weeks or even months to discover the riverfront once they moved into town. Imagine the number of visitors who miss it altogether because they can not find it!

It is difficult to know when you have arrived Downtown because:

- Neighborhoods adjacent to downtown have deteriorated resulting in many Clintonians "avoiding downtown"
- entryways to downtown are not designated
- highway 30 currently has the appearance of a disaster zone
- many design elements that tie the entire downtown together are missing: uniform lighting, banners, benches, plantings, etc.

*Communities with flourishing downtowns exude almost a magical and visually exciting personality which is greater than the sum of the collective parts of rehabilitated buildings, exciting signage, lighting, street furniture, banners, pedestrian friendly streetscaping and people.*

Clinton has an over abundance of commercial space for a population of its size to support.

Evidence:

- Over 110,000 square feet vacant downtown (over two dozen buildings, including upper stories plus vacant lots!)
- Big box vacancies on Hwy 30
- Vacant buildings on Second St & Lyons

And now there are plans for more on Mills Creek (although limited) and Liberty Square. How does this make economic sense for the community? How can we as a community continue to develop more commercial space knowing that every vacant 25' storefront represents the following negative economic impact to the community:

## Cost of an Empty Store on Main Street



- ⌘ \$250,000 lost sales
- ⌘ \$16,250 lost employee payroll
- ⌘ \$15,000 lost rents
- ⌘ \$24,750 lost business profit
- ⌘ \$1,500 lost property taxes
- ⌘ \$5,100 lost bank deposits
- ⌘ \$51,000 lost r.e. loan demand
- ⌘ \$15,000 lost bus. loan demand
- ⌘ \$12,500 lost sales tax to gov.
- ⌘ \$18,900 lost household income generated elsewhere in community
- ⌘ \$5,500 lost utilities
- ⌘ \$3,500 lost advertising

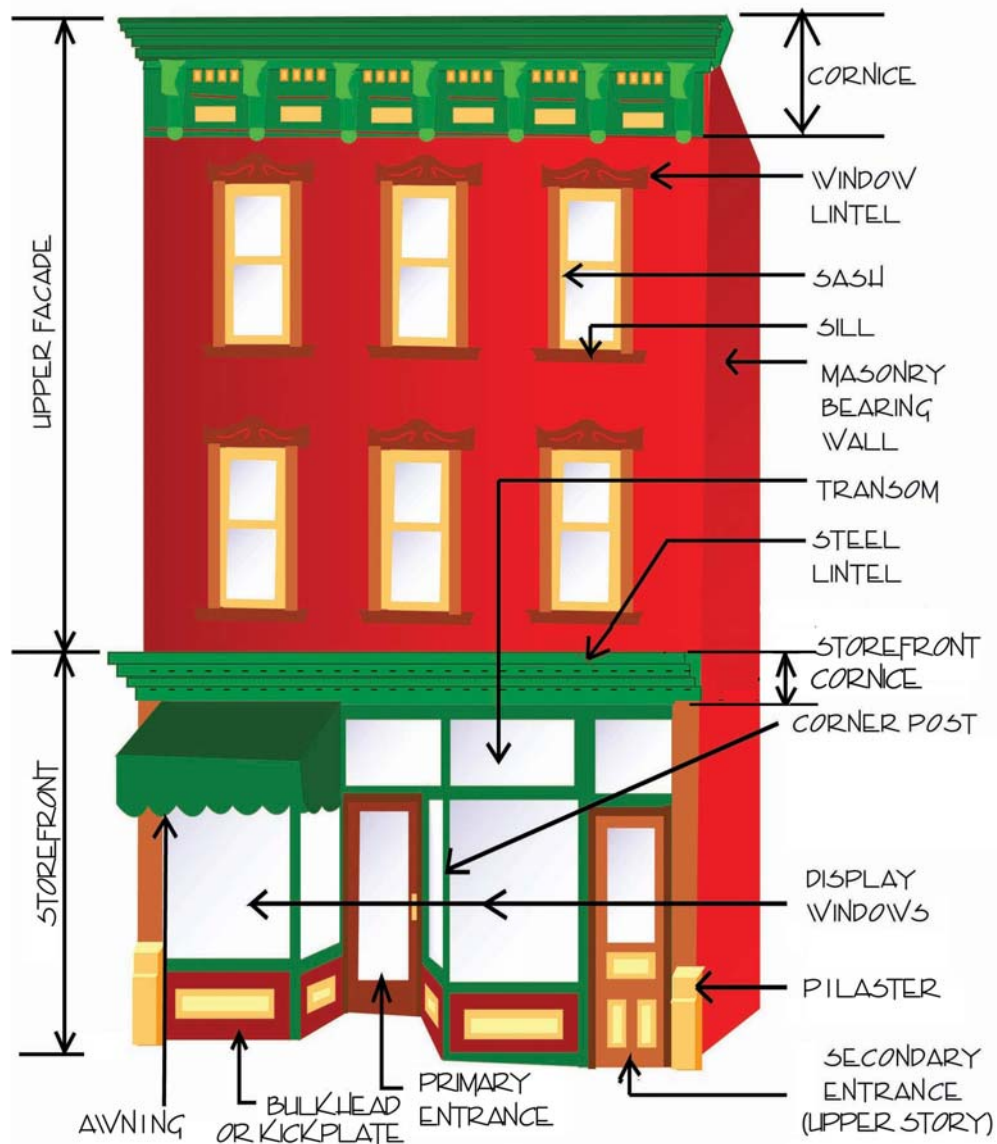
If downtown is to become economically healthy once again, it is important that “people generating” uses remain downtown: Library, Police Station, City Hall, Courthouses, Churches, Y’s, back office operations, post offices, etc. And, that architecturally significant buildings which add to downtown’s uniqueness, are retained and adaptively reused (recycled). (old post office, library, for example)

While much has been accomplished with large building rehabilitations, many of the smaller projects which positively change people’s perceptions about downtown are not being regularly addressed:

- Weeds in sidewalk cracks
- Dirty windows in vacant buildings
- Lack of window displays in vacant buildings
- Boarded up upper story windows
- Covered transom glass areas
- Obsolete signage

In order for us to better understand downtowns and the importance of the pedestrian environment, we need to take a look at a traditional downtown building to discover why and how they contribute to the pedestrian experience.

### A BUILDING’S ANATOMY



Every feature of the façade of a traditional downtown building enhances the streetface. From bulkheads and display windows which allow the pedestrian to step right up to the storefront, to upper story windows and cornices which create a repetitive pattern building after building, giving rhythm and symmetry to entire blocks.

**Downtown can not improve significantly without changing attitudes and perceptions.** This will not be easy given the environment of conflict which exists within Clinton. It will take continued, dedicated efforts, one person and project at a time, to incrementally change the community's attitudes.

**We heard over and over that building rehabilitations were not occurring because of exorbitant property tax increases once projects are completed.** Somehow, the city must get a handle on this in order to remove this obstacle to downtown rehabilitation. The long term result of this policy will be even more deteriorated downtown buildings unable to pay their fair share of the community's tax burden in future years.

## DOWNTOWN CHALLENGES

- What does downtown want to be when "*it grows up*"? How does Clinton move beyond the current paradigm of what downtown is (*avoidable*) and develop a new paradigm representing what downtown could be? Downtown has the raw materials (*great architecture, ample parking, riverfront setting, people generating uses*) to be a wonderful, visually exciting and economically thriving downtown. Is that what Clintonians want?
- Is historic preservation based downtown economic development the way to go or not? Clinton has done a fine job rehabilitating a number of large white elephant buildings. Yet the community continues to question the value of the uniqueness of downtown's architecture, specifically other historically significant landmarks like the old post office and library. These landmarks contribute to the aesthetic and social charm of downtown. Once removed, they will never be replaced with anything near the architectural value of these gems. They should also contribute to the economic health of downtown through continued use or new uses. They are not old buildings, they are **Signature** downtown buildings and should be protected and maintained appropriately for future generations, as your forefathers did for you when they built them over 100 years ago.
- How does investing in the entire downtown, not just in large white elephant building rehabilitations, including smaller projects which positively change people's perceptions about downtown become a priority? What needs to be done to incite market rate upper floor housing development so that 100% of downtown buildings are contributing to the economic, physical, social and political health of downtown?
- How does the Downtown Partnership develop incentives to strengthen the arts, culture, entertainment and recreation uses, thus strengthening downtown's designation as a cultural and entertainment district? And, if downtown intends to attract the employed and the visitor, how does downtown coordinate store hours for "niche businesses" that meet the needs of today's consumer and potential cultural and entertainment district user?
- How does Clinton convince the community that downtown is "OUR" collective challenge and not "THEIR" problem (*downtown building and business owners*)? How does Clinton make downtown development a priority for the rest of the community and engage hundreds of citizens in the process? How does Clinton channel some of the community's collective wealth into downtown programs to spur appropriate development?
- How does Clinton develop downtown in light of the over abundance of commercial space throughout the community? This reality is not going away. Clinton's population is not growing (*in fact has declined*), thereby cutting the commercial economic pie into smaller and smaller pieces. The realities of competition, socio-economic and demographic changes will continue to be a significant challenge for downtown.
- Downtown can no longer be ALL things to all people. How does Clinton update the market research from ten years ago to confirm/identify downtown's economic niches and implement a strategy to strengthen and grow those niches?

## ASSESSMENT TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The assessment team's recommendations are categorized into immediate (*now*), very short term (*within 6 months*), short term (*6 to 12 months*), and longer term (*beyond 12 months*). It is important to take one step at a time and understand that the longer term recommendations are not of much consequence until the shorter term recommendations are addressed. As the process gains momentum, community leadership will need to determine additional strategies and develop approaches that are more sophisticated.

### RECOMMENDATIONS—IMMEDIATE

Downtown has been declining for over 40 years. The community's commitment to the Downtown Partnership is commendable. For approximately six or seven years, it has led the effort to arrest this decline. Understand, it will take many years of determined, incremental, comprehensive actions, through this kind of initiative to stabilize downtown and once again increase its value to the community. There are no magic answers other than determined and committed community citizens working together for the benefit of their city center.

If not already a member, **join the National Main Street Center Network**. It is the country's largest downtown development affinity group. By joining the network, the Downtown Partnership will be able to receive:

- information about national downtown development training opportunities
- an excellent newsletter filled with case study success stories
- access to a countrywide list-serv allowing the Downtown Partnership to pose questions and receive input from communities throughout the country
- information via the National Main Street Center's information exchange which provides examples of downtown development tools and solutions for the asking

The annual cost to join the network is a bargain at \$195 a year. A membership application is enclosed with the attachments to the original copy of this report.

**Make sure all downtown building owners (*local and absentee*) and business owners are included in a regularly updated contact list.** Consider soliciting electronic mail addresses for cost effective communication. Our experience has shown that we need to communicate regularly with building owners in order to inform them about what is happening downtown and to educate them on appropriate rehabilitation. Oskaloosa, Iowa has had excellent building rehabilitation success by including absentee owners in regular mailings.

**Work with the local newspaper to have regular articles about the changes that are occurring downtown.** Provide before and after photos with captions. Remember to also include bullet point type commentary which provides "just the facts" information for readers who won't take the time to read entire articles.

**Make it a priority to keep "people generating" uses downtown.** Work with city leaders and the library board to keep the library and police department Downtown. This will require communication on the "importance of retaining people generating uses downtown". It will require outside the box thinking for solutions. Contact Burlington, Iowa to see how the police department rehabilitated an older downtown building for their new police station. Contact Cedar Falls to discover how they successfully built a new library downtown when virtually every other option was to relocate it out of their city center. Many times, communities contact the Iowa Downtown Resource Center for assistance after they have innocently relocated away from downtown the library, post office, city hall, police station, schools, etc. Remember, every time a use leaves downtown, it lessens the value of downtown to the community. As the heart & soul of Clinton, downtown's vitality affects the entire community physically, economically, socially, and mentally.

**Conduct Downtown Partnership sponsored twice a year downtown wide Clean Up Campaigns.** The campaigns should address elimination of weeds in sidewalk cracks, washing windows in vacant storefronts, removal of litter from vacant lots and sweeping vacant storefront entryways. Involve all members of the board, committees, scouting organizations, etc. Remember, *Downtown can not improve significantly without changing attitudes and perceptions.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS – VERY SHORT TERM (within six months)

Reinstate or create new downtown incentive programs to kick off in winter, 2007 (*maintain design review and approval for every project*):

- low interest revolving loan program for building rehabilitation projects
- façade grant program for all exposed sides of a building
- awning grant program
- new infill construction incentive program
- sign grants for removal from vacant buildings and for existing businesses

The Downtown Partnership's *Façade Design Resource Book* is an excellent reference tool. It should be marketed and adhered to as downtown's standards for any incentive program. Grant funds should be paid only after the work is completed and conforms to the approved design. Loan programs should also require design review and approval as part of the application process. **Signature** buildings need to adhere to the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Building Rehabilitation. Remember to use patience and persuasion as you work with building and business owners. They are entitled to do anything they desire to their buildings if they are using their own resources. However, if they intend to use any of the Downtown Partnership's downtown incentive programs, they should be expected to adhere to design review and approval. Add an additional section to your Façade Design Resource Book requiring new construction to use appropriate building materials (no steel/metal buildings) and have zero setbacks if they are utilizing any of Downtown Partnership's grant or loan programs so that they blend in with downtown's historic structures.

**Consider scheduling Downtown Partnership sponsored downtown "Fam Tours" once or twice a year for the general public to see downtown up close and personal.** Showcase upstairs downtown spaces – apartments and offices, rehabilitated buildings and buildings needing rehab. Invite community residents to experience the wonderful changes occurring in their downtown. Waterloo, Cedar Falls and Burlington have conducted such events, entitled "De Tour", "Upstairs, Downtown", etc. with very positive results.

**Establish a "vacant building" sub-committee of the Planning and Design Committee whose purpose is to incrementally improve the visual appearance of every vacant building.** This includes collecting used bed linens from the local motels/hospital and hanging them as curtains in freshly washed vacant upper story windows; establishing a window display program inviting and scheduling non-profit organizations to create window displays for freshly washed vacant storefront windows on a 45 to 60 day cycle; and, working with building owners to remove obsolete signs. This is a very hands-on sub committee which will see immediate results and support the Downtown Partnerships' efforts in changing attitudes and perceptions.

**Target an entire block of buildings downtown for impact.** Consider focusing all of your program's energies in getting this target block to use your incentive programs and showcase what can happen with concerted efforts towards building rehabilitation, business recruitment and upper floor development. This targeted block should also get the attention of the "vacant building" sub-committee.

**Work with city to address the issue of immediate reassessments of rehabilitated buildings and to encourage the use of the 3 year tax abatement program for substantial rehabilitation.** So long as building owners believe they are immediately penalized (with higher taxes) for building rehabilitation, the incentives developed for rehabilitation will not be well utilized.

## RECOMMENDATIONS – SHORT TERM

*(within 6 to 12 months)*

**Invite Dan Tindall, The Built Environment, Grinnell, Iowa, to Clinton to discuss market rate upper floor housing development.** Dan has great examples of successful projects from all across the state and can share strategies used to make market rate upper floor housing a reality. Dan's contact information is included in contacts and resources page at the end of this report.

**Take the time to learn about limited liability corporations and community initiated development strategies as funding mechanisms to address upper floor housing and start-up niche businesses.** Dan Tindall is an excellent source for this information. Contact Spencer, Iowa to learn about their downtown housing limited liability corporation which works to address upper floor housing and Burlington to hear about their riverfront restaurant limited liability corporation.

**Hold Recruitment Committee Brainstorming meetings in vacant storefronts to discuss and discover potential uses for each space.** Take into account the location of each storefront and its proximity to or within one of downtown's current economic niches (home décor & improvement, sports/recreation/personal health, auto related, professional & financial services, or cultural & entertainment). Brainstorming in each vacant storefront allows the committee freedom to dream while within the confines of the space. The uniqueness of each space becomes an integral component of the brainstorming. Develop a list of potential uses for each vacancy for business recruitment and expansion purposes. Share these ideas in newsletters, articles, and marketing materials. By strengthening your existing economic niches, existing businesses in that niche will benefit as well.

**Consider conducting a housing survey of downtown dwellers** to determine age range of residents, monthly cost of rentals and types of goods and services they desire downtown. Striving to meet the needs of downtown residents should be a priority of the Downtown Partnership, especially if we desire to have more residents, both income based and market rate.

**Work with the city to expand the way Clinton can use Tax Increment Financing dollars.** Contact Hampton, Iowa to see how they use TIF dollars for downtown façade grants. Remember to use design review and approval for any project using these funds. Downtown development is a public/private partnership. Working with the city to develop new financial tools for downtown is a win-win strategy.

**Work with Clinton's grade schools to foster an appreciation of the community's history and its rich commercial architecture with school age students.** Coordinate downtown walking tours, rubbings & coloring contests with classes that teach local history (*5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade?*). This is an excellent way to foster historic built environment appreciation, which over time, becomes sound historic preservation understanding and ethic.

**Develop action plans for every activity undertaken** which will identify all the steps necessary to complete each activity including responsible person, due date, approximate cost, measure of achievement and evaluation. Communities who embrace the action plan strategy (also called work plans or programs of work) typically accomplish twice as much during a similar time period as communities who only set goals without action plans. Sample action plans included with the attachments to the original copy of this report.

## RECOMMENDATIONS - LONGER TERM

*(beyond 12 months)*

**Take the time to review the HyettPalma study for relevance and decide if an updated downtown focused market study makes sense at this time.** Market studies are typically outdated within 5 years of completion. Many factors which were relevant in 1996/97 are no longer valid. Competition for the consumer dollar is greater today in the Clinton trade area as well. The objective should be to assist in determining the soundest economic uses for today's downtown. What other economic niches could excel downtown in addition to home décor & improvement, sports/recreation/personal health, auto related, professional & financial services, and cultural and entertainment niches that currently appear to have a foothold downtown? How can these niches be enhanced? The best way to make these decisions is by conducting a new comprehensive market study and conducting survey work to assess the needs and desires of downtown's current and potential users. Excellent consultants to consider include Clue Group,

Downtown Professionals Network, Marketek, Greenberg Development Services and HyettPalma. Their contact information is included in the contacts and resources page at the end of this report.

**Use the information learned from this study to explore appropriate business hours for the identified economic niches.** It is very probable to have business hours which will be different for each niche. Work with existing businesses that compliment and contribute to those niches to adjust their hours accordingly. Collective marketing of these hours will be critical to long term sustainability. McDonald's Corporation claims it takes their regular customers two years to realize they have made changes to their menus or hours. Downtowns, in general, give up after trying something new for just six weeks and go back to their old habits. Again, we need to remember the saying: *"If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got."*

**Once the market analysis is completed, work with your Convention & Visitors Bureau to use the market research to develop a new marketing plan which supports identified economic niches** (*i.e. cluster marketing, branding, cross-marketing*). Market these niches on the web as well as through traditional channels.

For the out of town visitor, downtown is much easier to find because of the excellent way-finding program which directs visitors towards downtown. However, once visitors have arrived, it is important for them to know that they *"have"* arrived. Entry signs to downtown and a visually exciting streetscape will tell your visitors that downtown is a special place. **Work with the city to continue to expand the streetscape throughout the SSMID district and to include entry signs indicating that indeed the visitor "has arrived", and street furniture for visitor comfort. Since the river front is a "hidden treasure", make certain way-finding is enhanced to direct visitors over the flood walls to discover the river for themselves.**

**Contact Corning and Charles City to learn about Project SOLD & CITY, respectively.** These are collaborative efforts between the downtown development organization and the school district to train high school students on the history, purpose and importance of their communities, specifically their city centers. These communities understand that every incoming class of 9th graders is the next generation of ambassadors at the fast food restaurants and convenience stores. The message they share with visitors is the first impressions visitors receive about your community. By changing their views, Corning and Charles City have been successful in turning negative thoughts and comments about their communities into proud statements about these students' home town.

**Consider installing information plaques on all historically significant buildings.** These plaques assist in informing visitors and educating residents on the history and value of these historic treasures to the community. Start with **Signature** buildings first, then incrementally include all historically significant buildings.

As your development initiatives increase, additional human and financial resources will need to be identified and utilized to meet the needs of your ever growing program. Staff will need to invest more time in coordinating the work of volunteers engaged in task forces and committees and less time implementing projects. The typical downtown organization, in communities of Clinton's size, has between 200 and 300 volunteers from within the community assisting with the work of the program. It is important to note, that volunteers still come one at a time. If everyone currently involved with the Downtown Partnership successfully recruited one new person a year, the number of people engaged in the program would double every year.

## SUMMARY

The Downtown Assessment Visit serves multiple purposes—raising awareness, educating, recommending, and encouraging the local community. In conducting this *“self discovery”* process, Clinton continues to empower itself by stepping out of its comfort zone. The desire to build on the work of the Downtown Partnership is a good sign that the community is now ready to take additional steps to address downtown’s challenges. The process will take creativity, hard work and an understanding that the revitalization process is incremental and requires grassroots commitment. The content of this report is intended to help Clinton leaders face downtown’s future in a positive way by focusing on the many possibilities and capitalizing on the community’s assets and resources.

Downtown can be one of Clinton’s greatest assets or perhaps, its biggest detriment. Its challenges will not go away. Its competition is not going away. However, downtown’s unique architecture, its authenticity and character, is slowly going away as historic buildings are razed or altered. It is important to preserve the authentic past in a culture that is moving towards uniformity and sameness. The following is a paraphrase from the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s website article *“Why Preserve?”* *“Some buildings are worth saving because they are good to look at. They are a “gift to the street” that enriches the surroundings. Some buildings are worth saving because there is “plenty of life left in them”. Some buildings are adapted for other innovative and/or multiple uses. And others are worth saving because they are a link to our past and help us understand “who we are.”* Those buildings are the **Signature** buildings that Clinton is fortunate to possess. Many of the properties in downtown are excellent examples of 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture. This quantity of quality downtown architecture should not be taken for granted. It simply does not exist in many Iowa communities any longer. Downtown was built with pride and purpose. Your forefathers intended their buildings to last for hundreds and hundreds of years. Their longevity depends upon the care and attention from future generations. Questions we should ask ourselves are, “Would the original designer, builder and/or owner recognize their property today? Would ‘they’ be pleased with the care and attention the property has received?”

Most of our memories are directly associated with a place. We *“go back”* to places we feel good about. We *“go back”* to places where we’ve had positive shopping experiences. We *“go back”* to places where we have had fun. We *“go back”* to places we think are important. We are also attracted to places where *“we think”* we will have a positive experience. We must strive to make downtown a *“go to”* kind of destination, not an *“avoidable area we pass through to get somewhere else”*.

Downtown should be protected, nurtured and marketed in order to retain existing businesses and customers and attract investors, new businesses, and new customers. The Team’s recommendations are based upon a comprehensive and incremental approach that addresses the social, political, physical and economic values of downtown though the implementation of activities that will increase these values—making people want to *“go back”* to downtown for all of those reasons.

Downtown is at a crossroads. Clinton is facing many challenges both in the community and in downtown. Downtown will continue to be affected and impacted by these challenges. These challenges did not occur overnight nor can they be addressed and reversed in a short period of time. A great deal of planning, patience and persistence will be required along with courage, vision, and conviction to take it one step at a time. If you have the commitment, you will find the human and financial resources to make it happen. It requires focusing on downtown’s assets and riches and capitalizing on your resources. Downtown has *“great bones”*. The challenge is to find a way to keep them and re-establish them as contributors to downtown’s economy. The citizens of Clinton can either choose to sit and watch as change continues to occur downtown and accept the consequences or take a proactive stance with the Downtown Partnership and guide their future in a more predictable and productive direction. You **CAN** affect the outcome and have whatever downtown you choose to have. It’s up to you! Decisions will have to be made. Remember, **every community eventually gets the downtown they deserve.**

In closing, thoughts become words – words become actions – actions become habits – habits become character – character is EVERYTHING! The character of downtown and Clinton deserves your utmost attention.

**“If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got.”**

*--Ben Boozer--*

## CONTACTS AND RESOURCES

### COMMUNITY CONTACT INFO:

Burlington	Val Giannettino, Downtown Partners, Inc.	319/752-0015
Cedar Falls	Cary Darrah, Community Main Street	319/277-0213
Charles City	Jim Thompson, Community Revitalization	641/228-2335
Corning	Stacie Hull, Main Street Corning	641/322-3243
Hampton	Deb Kalousek, Main Street Hampton	641/456-5668
Oskaloosa	Jon Sullivan, Main Street Oskaloosa	641/673-7629 ext. 13
Spencer	Bob Rose, Spencer Main Street Company	712/262-7246
Waterloo	Terry Poe Buschkamp, Main Street Waterloo	319/291-2038

### CONTACT INFO:

Dan Tindall, The Built Environment, Grinnell, IA 641/236-6686

#### Market Analysis Consultants:

Downtown Professionals Network, Jay Schlinsog, Batavia, IL	630/482-2930
Greenberg Development Services, Hilary Greenberg, Charlotte, NC	704/373-0757
Clue Group, Kennedy Smith, Alexandria, VA	703/519-1802
Marketek, Portland, OR	503/636-1659
HyettPalma, Alexandria, VA	703/683-5126

#### Iowa Downtown Center Resource Library and Consultant Information:

Iowa Downtown Resource Center 515/242-4733 or [www.mainstreetiowa.org](http://www.mainstreetiowa.org)

#### National Preservation Services and Programs:

National Trust for Historic Preservation [www.nthp.org](http://www.nthp.org)

National Main Street Center [www.mainst.org](http://www.mainst.org) (*National Main Street Network Membership*)

National Park Service [www.2.cr.nps.gov](http://www.2.cr.nps.gov)

### ENCLOSURES:

- Action Plans/Work Plans
- Benefits of a Healthy Downtown
- Community Initiated Development
- Downtown Resource Center Lending Library List and Reservation Form
- Establishing Economic Niches
- Examples of Incentive Grant & Loan Programs
- Market Analysis Uses Within Four Committees
- National Main Street Center Books Catalogue
- National Main Street Center Membership Information