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Indiana Downtown®

Valparaiso

Downtown Action Agenda Update 2017

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A technical assistance program offered by
The Indiana Association of Cities and Towns
& HyettPalma, Inc.

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April 3, 2017

The Honorable Jon Costas, Mayor
Valparaiso City Council Members
Valparaiso Redevelopment Commission
City of Valparaiso
Valparaiso, IN 46383

RE: ***Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda Update 2017***

HyettPalma, Inc., is pleased to present to you the ***Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda Update 2017***.

This document is the result of a process undertaken by HyettPalma, Inc., and the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns (IACT) to revisit, refocus, and recharge Valparaiso's Downtown enhancement effort by updating the ***Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda 2009***.

The original ***Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda 2002*** and the ***Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda 2009*** were completed by HyettPalma, Inc., as part of the *Indiana Downtown®* technical assistance program offered by the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns in conjunction with HyettPalma, Inc.

We thank you for the opportunity to work once again with the Valparaiso community and to be a part of your continuing efforts to further strengthen your Downtown. As always, we hope you will keep us informed of your success and know that HyettPalma and the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns stand ready to assist in any way as you proceed with Valparaiso's Downtown enhancement effort.

Sincerely,

Doyle G. Hyett

Dolores P. Palma

Acknowledgements

HyettPalma and IACT would like to thank the Downtown Improvement Committee, established to oversee this project, for identifying the critical issues to be addressed in this update. The Downtown Improvement Committee was comprised of the following members.

John Bowker, Valparaiso Redevelopment Commission
Rob Thorgren, Valparaiso Redevelopment Commission
Bob Thompson, County Planner, Porter County
Renee Blosky, Owner, Lifestyles
Eric Zosso, Owner, Provito/Downtown Co-working space
Lorelei Weimer, Director, Indiana Dunes Tourism
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Megan Marolf, Owner, Old World Market
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Introduction

INTRODUCTION

In 1992, the National League of Cities (NLC) -- America's largest membership organization representing the elected officials of this nation -- assumed a more aggressive role in the areas of Downtown enhancement and local economic development. That role entailed offering technical assistance to local elected officials concerned about the economic success of their Downtowns.

To fill this role, the National League of Cities approached HyettPalma, Inc. Together, NLC and HyettPalma designed an advanced new pilot program to offer on-site, technical assistance to a limited number of communities.

The Downtown pilot was presented under the banner of *ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE: THE REBIRTH OF AMERICA'S DOWNTOWNS*. It was structured to guide local governing bodies -- working in partnership with local business owners, property owners and concerned citizens -- in rethinking ways to rebuild our nation's Downtowns.

Availability of the Downtown pilot was limited to eleven cities over a period of two-years. In addition, the pilot required the local governing body in each participating community to be the agency that contracted with NLC for services. This was done to ensure the involvement of the governing body from the very start of the local Downtown enhancement effort.

Once the pilot was completed, NLC and HyettPalma evaluated its effectiveness and whether or not to continue offering Downtown technical assistance. Based on the evaluation, and specifically on the advice and needs expressed by the pilot's local officials, a new comprehensive technical assistance program was developed titled *AMERICA DOWNTOWN® -- NEW THINKING. NEW LIFE*.

After several years of tracking the *America Downtown®* program's success, the leadership of the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns (IACT) determined that a similar technical assistance program would be of benefit to communities in Indiana. Therefore, in 2000, IACT approached NLC and HyettPalma about developing such a program. With the backing of NLC, *Indiana Downtown®* was unveiled as an IACT program in the Summer of 2001.

Modeled after the *America Downtown®* program, *Indiana Downtown®* was launched as a pilot program that would run for a two-year period and assist ten

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communities. After that time, the pilot was designed to be evaluated by IACT and HyettPalma, with the assistance of local elected officials from the ten participating communities. Based on the response and recommendation of local elected officials from the pilot communities, **Indiana Downtown®** was made a permanent member service offered by IACT.

Indiana Downtown® brings together the local government insight of IACT and the Downtown expertise of HyettPalma, Inc. Together, they offer individualized assistance and a combination of strengths not available anywhere else. **Indiana Downtown®** was structured to provide the help local officials need to create a brighter future for their Downtowns.

Indiana Downtown® provides direct, hands-on help to city and town officials and community leaders who want to start, refocus, or energize their Downtown enhancement efforts. The program's strengths are built on the following convictions.

- The assistance provided is implementation-oriented – not another Downtown plan or study but an aggressive course of action that local officials and community leaders can start to implement immediately.
- The recommendations made for each Downtown are pragmatic – tailored to local resources so that they can be realistically implemented.
- The solutions offered are success-oriented – designed to improve each Downtown's economy so that the results are long-lasting.
- The on-site assistance is inclusive – providing a forum that brings public and private sector constituents together to identify Downtown issues, define a Downtown vision, and take needed actions in partnership.

IACT is committed to providing Indiana communities with the assistance they need to implement their enhancement efforts once their Downtown Action Agendas have been completed.

Project Overview

I. PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 2002, the City of Valparaiso joined IACT's *Indiana Downtown®* technical assistance program, through which the *Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda 2002* was completed by HyettPalma, Inc. In 2009, after seven-years of actively and diligently implementing the *Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda 2002*, the City of Valparaiso contracted with IACT to have its Downtown initiative updated, for the first time, by HyettPalma.

In late 2016 – after another seven years of active and successful Downtown enhancement efforts – the City of Valparaiso decided to once again update its Downtown strategy. To do so, the City once more contracted with IACT and HyettPalma.

The purpose of updating the *Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda Update 2009* was to:

- Review the Downtown progress that had been made over the last seven years;
- Determine the community's concerns and aspirations regarding Downtown's future;
- Recharge the Downtown enhancement effort and those involved in that effort; and
- Recommend specific actions that need to be taken over the next five-years to move Downtown Valparaiso forward in attaining the community's defined vision for Downtown and the economic potentials facing Downtown.

The *Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda Update 2017*, contained in these pages, presents the findings and recommendations that resulted from revisiting Downtown Valparaiso and the *Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda Update 2009*.

Downtown Accomplishments 2002-2009

II. DOWNTOWN ACCOMPLISHMENTS **2002-2009**

In 2009, as part of updating the *Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda 2002*, HyettPalma moderated a work session with the Downtown Improvement Committee during which participants were asked to cite:

- The greatest accomplishments they think had been made in Downtown over the last seven years; and
- The tangible and intangible factors they like most about Downtown Valparaiso at this time.

Below are the Downtown accomplishments that were most often cited by community members in 2009:

- Streetscape improvements made, which greatly increase Downtown's visual appeal;
- Streetscape improvements are of high quality and "were done right by the City;"
- Phase 1 of the City's wayfinding sign system was completed;
- Lighted street name signs were installed on Lincolnway;
- Pedestrian crosswalks were improved with signalization, push buttons, and "chirpers;"
- Downtown banners and flags were added and increased Downtown's vitality;
- Landscaping was increased, adding to Downtown's comfortability;
- On-the piped in music was added, which "sets a mood;"
- Creation of Central Park Plaza was begun – nice green space, more events held, affords community a place to gather;

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- City made parking lot improvements, demolished “haunted house” and created additional parking, created and began to install parking lot screening “template;”
- April to October daily bike patrols increased police presence and accessibility;
- Police Station was moved off Courthouse Square, yet kept in Downtown by reusing a vacant building in a highly visible location and purposely giving it a more progressive appearance;
- Design guidelines, assistance, and Challenge Façade Grants were created – to date generating approximately \$600,000 in high quality and award winning façade improvements with a 2:1 leverage ratio of private to public funds;
- Additional 3-way liquor licenses were obtained and additional quality, varied restaurants opened;
- Additional outdoor seating was created at food establishments, which increased Downtown’s vibrancy and feeling of vitality;
- The Downtown Dining Association was created, which undertakes marketing and events;
- Retailer participation in Downtown programs was increased;
- Additional businesses were opened and storefront vacancies were greatly decreased;
- V-Line affords people opportunity to come Downtown, connects Valparaiso University to Downtown, adds to feeling of safety;
- ChicaGo Dash is an economic development asset for Downtown, for the University, and for the City;
- Advances were made in connecting Downtown to the Pathways system;

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- Transit-Oriented Development area was identified, with the goal of linking it to Downtown;
- Eastgate entrance leading to Downtown was improved with a roundabout, serving as a symbol of a progressive city;
- University-oriented development was begun, which will provide a safe, convenient link to Downtown – and also hope for the future;
- City Administration commitment to Downtown was increased;
- A Special Events Director was hired;
- Valparaiso Community Festivals & Events (VCFE) brought about important changes by making events more contemporary, expanding events;
- VCFE commissioned and produced professionally designed Downtown brochure;
- VCFE in process of developing a new Web site;
- City Administration has improved communication with Downtown business owners, asking for their input regarding Downtown goals and desires;
- Valparaiso's progressive City Administration and knowledgeable, energetic staff have had a big impact on Downtown;
- Downtown has increased energy and vibrancy after 5PM;
- Downtown is active into the night, even on weekdays;
- Downtown has become a destination, rather than just a location;
- Downtown has an increased sense of charm and sense of history – “don't lose that!”
- Create greater links between Downtown and University students, parents, professors, and staff.

Downtown Accomplishments 2009-2017

III. DOWNTOWN ACCOMPLISHMENTS **2009-2017**

In 2017, a Downtown Improvement Committee was formed once again to identify the greatest improvements and successes that had been realized in Downtown since completion of the ***Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda Update 2009***.

The accomplishments most often cited include the following:

- Phase I and II of Central Park Plaza were completed – to include an amphitheater and the mixed-use Urschel Pavilion;
- Central Park Plaza allowed the number of Downtown special events to be increased from 5 to 11 per year, which brought a greater number of event attendees and types of events to Downtown;
- Central Park Plaza and the Urschel Pavilion/ice rink were funded through important private-public partnerships;
- In 2016, Central Park Plaza received a “Great Public Places” award from the American Planning Association;
- An increased number of unique restaurants and food establishments opened in Downtown, bringing more people to Downtown in the evenings and more University students to Downtown;
- Downtown’s streetscape was further improved by the City’s Parks Department with the addition of planters, flowers, and rain gardens – making Downtown more comfortable and walkable;
- Public art, in the form of sculptures, was added to Downtown;
- Public improvements were made on Washington Street – including improved streetscape, planters, lights strung above the street, and a kiosk listing businesses – adding a “new dimension” to Downtown’s appeal;
- Improvements were made on Napoleon Street, including the removal of asphalt and the addition of brick pavers;

- The Downtown Lighting Project was completed – from Morgan Boulevard to Roosevelt Road, and Joliet Road to Napoleon Street;
- The “Downtown U” project was completed, with improved sidewalks, improved parking, and pavement resurfacing;
- Traffic signalization was modernized in Downtown;
- The Challenge Façade Grant program was continued – to date generating approximately \$\$\$3,800,000 in high quality façade improvements with an approximately 3:1 leverage ratio of private to public funds;
- A Fire Suppression Grant Program was created, offering funds for the installation of sprinklers in older Downtown buildings;
- The City government has set a high standard of quality with public improvements made in Downtown and has successfully required the private sector to meet that same standard;
- A bike share program – ValpoVelocity – will begin in April of 2017, with 3 locations in Downtown;
- The “Dark Fiber Project” has been created, which is a municipal project providing infrastructure for the expansion of Internet service options available to Downtown businesses;
- The College of Court Reporting building was constructed in Downtown;
- A Downtown parking study was completed, Jefferson Street parking lots were improved, a Valet Parking service was created by Valparaiso University students, and parking was increased at the library;
- A “Creative District Plan” was completed, focusing on turning Indiana Avenue into an arts destination that would link Downtown to Valparaiso University;
- As Downtown has been made more “livable,” the demand for Downtown housing has increased;

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- Additional Downtown housing units were created – including both loft-style apartments in the upper floors of existing buildings and high quality apartments in new infill construction;
- The Thormahlen Building – once a burned-down structure – was replaced with a new, 3-story building that includes first floor office/retail and four apartments in each of the upper floors;
- The “Chicago Street Duplexes” (2 units) were constructed on Chicago Street;
- More people want to – and are excited about – living Downtown now, causing housing units to fill more quickly;
- Downtown’s residents now vary in age from university students to empty nesters;
- More investment has occurred in housing adjacent to Downtown – resulting in the improved quality of neighborhood housing;
- ChicaGo DASH bus service was increased and focus was placed on expanding parking for the DASH, enabling people to live in Valparaiso and work in Chicago;
- Ridership on the V-Line has increased exponentially, going from 40,000 riders during its first year of operation (2007) to 131,000 riders in 2016;
- Downtown’s Farmers Market was greatly improved and expanded and now draws customers on a regular basis, due to its niche of offering “local and handmade” items;
- A Market Master was hired for the Farmers Market, to increase its viability even further;
- Downtown is now viewed as a very important element of the community;

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- The number of middle school, high school, and university students coming to Downtown has increased;
- Downtown is now more connected to Valparaiso University;
- The University is now more able to present Downtown to parents as a student recruitment tool;
- In a recent survey conducted locally, 80% of respondents said Downtown is one of the most important – and one of the best – parts of Valparaiso;
- Downtown’s wider sidewalks, additional restaurants and outdoor cafes, and additional events have brought more people and greater vibrancy to Downtown;
- Downtown is viewed as being “more interesting” than it was in 2009;
- Due to its “good food,” Downtown has become a regional dining destination; and
- Downtown’s image has been improved and, as a result, Valparaiso’s overall image has improved as well.

Downtown Needs 2017

III. DOWNTOWN NEEDS 2017

Those participating in the *Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda Update 2017* were asked to identify the key needs that must be addressed to further enhance Downtown and strengthen its economy. The needs most often mentioned are shown below.

1. Housing

- Need more people living in and around Downtown
- Need basic services for residents

2. Retail

- Lack of retail – one of the biggest complaints of visitors
- Most retailers do not stay open late enough to take advantage of restaurant traffic
- Too many professional businesses in first floor spaces on Lincolnway

3. Parking

- Needs to feel more friendly
- Business owners and employees park on-street, taking most convenient parking from customers

4. Hotel

- Need a quality hotel in Downtown – “we have the clientele for it”

5. Civic/Conference Space

- Space for larger conferences needed
- University’s space is “maxed out”

6. Transit-Oriented Development Area/ANCO Building

- Need to clean up area
- Make it a special place
- Connect area with Downtown – “don’t make it an island”
- Develop in a quality manner

7. The Creative Plan

- How will its implementation be funded
- Need a space to show independent films
- Connect to Lincolnway and TOD area

8. Access

- Make Downtown more bicycle-friendly
- Make greater walk/bike connections to Valparaiso University and Ivy Tech
- Make greater connections to Pathways Trail system
- Don't lose sight of the importance of pedestrian comfort

9. Old Jail Building

- Put to greater use
- Make it a Downtown asset
- Speed up its development and getting it occupied

10. Marketing

- Need signage – where things are located, from 30 and 49 to Downtown
- Need staffing and funds to market Downtown more
- More promotion of retail needed

11. Entrances

- Clean-up east end of Lincolnway, from Downtown to University
- Continue 30 corridor beautification

Course of Action

IV. Course of Action

Great strides have been made in Downtown Valparaiso over the last fifteen years – since the **Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda 2002** was commissioned by the City of Valparaiso through the **Indiana Downtown®** program of the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns (IACT).

During those fifteen years, Downtown’s appearance has been improved, award-winning public spaces have been created, Downtown’s activity level and vitality have increased, greater housing demand has been experienced, Downtown’s economy has been strengthened, and Downtown’s overall image has been vastly upgraded – making Downtown one of the community’s favorite and most appreciated assets.

In 2009, when meetings were held to complete the first **Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda Update**, community members said they were pleased with the progress made in enhancing Downtown. However, they expressed a desire to “go from having a good Downtown to a great Downtown.”

In 2017, during completion of this second **Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda Update**, community members expressed excitement about their Downtown and all the improvements made. This time, though, community members said they wanted to go from “having a great Downtown to having a phenomenal Downtown.”

In working with Downtown Valparaiso over the last fifteen years, HyettPalma has been struck by and impressed with several of the values and attributes held by the community. These include:

- An unwillingness to be satisfied with “good enough,” which propels the community on to seek even greater levels of success for its Downtown;
- A City government that sets high standards of quality for itself, and requires the private sector to live up to those standards;
- The open and willing desire – on the part of Valparaiso’s business, government, institutional, and private sectors – to work together for the greater good of Downtown and the overall community; and

- The willingness to dream big – and then seek funding to make those dreams come true – rather than having their aspirations circumscribed by funds on hand.

HyettPalma is honored to have been a part of this team effort to enhance Downtown Valparaiso and offers the following strategic course of action designed to propel Downtown on to even greater levels of success over the next five years. The course of action was designed to incorporate the desires of the community, enable Downtown to take advantage of its realistic market opportunities, and leverage the Downtown successes already realized.

The recommended course of action is divided into the following four sections:

- The Grand Scheme;
- Downtown Fine Tuning;
- Activity Generators; and
- Tools.

~ The Grand Scheme ~

The following improvements should be made to improve the areas around and leading to Downtown, so that they are attractive and complement Downtown's further enhancement.

1. Uptown Lincolnway

A concerted effort should be made to redevelop the properties on both the north and south sides of Lincolnway, from the "original traffic circle" – at Sturdy Road – to Garfield Avenue.

This is a high priority project of Valparaiso, which has been identified in two formally adopted plans, including Valparaiso's ***Envision 2030 Comprehensive Plan*** and Valparaiso University's ***Campus Master Plan***. Design guidelines titled ***Eastgate Overlay Guidelines*** were also prepared for most of this area in 2005, but were never implemented. These design guidelines should be revisited in conjunction with this current effort to redevelop the area.

The purpose of the project should be to:

- Afford the development of necessary commercial enterprises and residential accommodations to serve the growing needs of Valparaiso University students, faculty, and administration in proximity to their campus;
- Enhance an extremely vital pedestrian and vehicular connector – Lincolnway – between Valparaiso University and Valparaiso’s historic Downtown;
- Foster the redevelopment of valuable, underutilized properties to increase density and, in turn, better utilize land and enhance the City’s tax base; and
- Enable the enhancement and beautification of the eastern entry to the University and Downtown Valparaiso.

The project should entail the preparation of a master plan to guide the future redevelopment of properties adjacent to Lincolnway – from Sturdy Road to Garfield Avenue. The plan should be prepared jointly by the City of Valparaiso and Valparaiso University.

When completed, the ***Uptown Lincolnway Master Plan*** should be used to guide the future acquisition of available properties along Lincolnway, cleanup of sites, and marketing of property to private developers to redevelop the area in accordance with the ***Uptown Lincolnway Master Plan***, and to serve the needs of Valparaiso University and the City of Valparaiso.

In association with the implementation of the master plan, the center of the roundabout at Lincolnway and Sturdy should be intensely landscaped and a significant piece of public art should be placed in the center of the roundabout to serve as a grand entrance to the University and Downtown.

The City of Valparaiso and Valparaiso University should use any and all appropriate legal tools to facilitate the implementation of the ***Uptown Lincolnway Master Plan***.

2. Lincolnway, from Garfield to Morgan

This portion of Lincolnway now acts as a transition area between Downtown and Uptown Lincolnway. The area is now comprised of single family homes currently in residential use, as well as single family structures that have been converted to commercial uses.

As Downtown is further enhanced – and as Uptown Lincolnway is further developed – market demand in this area will increase. At that time, it would be appropriate to:

- Redevelop this area with new, mixed-use structures; and/or
- Continue the commercial use of the area’s current structures by tenanting them with substantial retail and office businesses, thus lowering the rate of business turnover.

3. US 30 Corridor

The City of Valparaiso recently completed the ***US 30 Corridor Plan***, designed to guide the redevelopment of both public and private property along the commercial corridor. The project will also entail the enhancement/redevelopment of Washington Street from US 30 to Downtown Valparaiso, thereby greatly upgrading the appearance and development along Downtown’s southern entry.

The project is funded and implementation is underway.

~ Downtown Fine Tuning ~

Since 2002, tremendous strides have been made in turning Downtown into a destination that is highly attractive to consumers and investors. The following “fine tuning” actions are recommended to further build on this progress.

1. Retail Recruitment

According to the U.S. Travel Association, in 2015:

- The top leisure travel activities for U.S. domestic travelers were (1) visiting relatives; (2) shopping; (3) visiting friends; (4) fine dining; and (5) beaches; and
- The top leisure activities for overseas visitors were (1) shopping, (2) sightseeing; (3) fine dining; (4) national parks/monuments and (5) amusement/theme parks.

If attracting a larger number of tourists to Downtown is determined to be important, then an emphasis must be placed on aggressively recruiting quality, well-capitalized, and well-managed retail businesses – rather than being passive about the types of businesses that choose to open in Downtown.

If an aggressive and purposive retail recruitment effort is conducted it should include the following.

- **Walk-Ins**

All business prospects (or their agents), who express an interest in locating Downtown should be directed to the recruitment strategy's point-person. That person should be the Redevelopment Commission's Director – or their designee.

Naming a point-person, who all prospects should go to or be directed to, will allow clear channels of communication to be established and accurate information to be provided.

Through the point-person, prospects should be:

- Provided with information about Downtown locations for lease/sale;
- Accompanied on a Downtown walk-through;
- Introduced to other successful Downtown business owners; and
- Encouraged to contact the owners/agents of available Downtown property.

The point-person should follow-up with prospects to provide any additional information or assistance needed to help them make their decision regarding Downtown as a business location.

- **Outreach**

A concerted effort should be made to entice successful, well-established businesses to open a business in Downtown Valparaiso. This should be done by:

- Identifying existing, strong businesses that are compatible with the economic niche/brand being created in Downtown;
- Contacting and meeting with the owners of those businesses; and

- Taking the same steps recommended above for working with walk-in prospects – providing necessary information, walking Downtown, providing introductions to Downtown business owners, and following-up with prospects.

Appropriate, successful, well-established business owners should be sought from:

- Throughout Valparaiso;
- Throughout the greater Valparaiso trade area; and
- Other Indiana, Eastern Illinois, and Southern Michigan Downtowns.

Emphasis should also be placed on seeking business prospects from other communities with universities, such as South Bend, Ann Arbor, East Lansing, Grand Rapids, Lafayette, Terra Haute, Mt. Pleasant, Ypsilanti, etc.

Business prospects should be encouraged to establish a presence in Downtown Valparaiso by:

- Relocating to Downtown;
- Opening an additional business in Downtown – of the type they now operate in another community; and/or
- Opening an additional business Downtown – that is of a different type from their current business, but that also “fits” Downtown’s economic niche.
- **Pending Vacancies**

As part of the business recruitment strategy, the point-person must work closely with owners of Downtown commercial property. This is important in order to:

- Learn well in advance when leases will expire and spaces might become vacant; and
- Help willing property owners – especially on Lincolnway – lease their first floor spaces to businesses that will strengthen Downtown’s economic niche.

- **New Buyers**

There will be times when successful owners decide to close their Downtown businesses. It is very important for the point person to work closely with these owners – especially when their business is of a type that strengthens Downtown’s economic niche – to help them find an appropriate buyer. Doing so will allow Downtown to retain its strong businesses, and foot traffic, despite losing the current owners.

2. Signage

The City has installed several wayfinding (directional) signs since completion of the *Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda Update 2009*. Now it is time to:

- Freshen existing wayfinding signs through use of colors that are more visible and larger font size for motorist viewing;
- Make the signs more substantial and of higher quality – similar to those at Central Park Plaza;
- Increase the number of signs in and leading to Downtown; and
- Install signs to direct motorists to Downtown from 30, 49, Valparaiso University, Ivy Tech, and the Pathways Trail system.

3. Parking

Since the *Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda Update 2009* was completed, a Downtown parking study was completed, as recommended in the update, and the City has purchased additional Downtown parking lots. These actions should be applauded. Into the future, care should be taken to ensure that Downtown parking is convenient, friendly, and visible for Downtown customers.

And, as always, Downtown business owners and their employees should not park in on-street spaces.

4. Maintenance

The City government’s maintenance of Downtown is excellent and should be lauded, since it greatly adds to the feeling of comfort and safety experienced in Downtown. While this level of maintenance is continued, an eye should be kept on:

- Ensuring that all tree lights are in top working condition;

- Excellent landscaping is continued throughout Downtown; and
- Additional colorful landscaping is added to Downtown during the winter.

5. Pedestrians

Pedestrian comfort, pedestrian safety, and pedestrian-orientation in Downtown have all been increased through crosswalks, wider sidewalks, new walk signals, and count-down timers at crosswalks. Care should be taken to ensure that these assets are well maintained and continue to be a Downtown priority.

6. Alley Enhancement

To a large degree, the transformation of the alley adjacent to the new ice rink and pavilion has generated a call to explore the feasibility of upgrading the balance of alleyways throughout Downtown Valparaiso.

The purpose of the alleyway enhancement effort should be to not only cleanup the alleys, but to enable usage of alleys in association with the operations of adjacent businesses, such as outdoor seating for restaurants or simply the creation of passive outdoor sitting areas.

The following three obstacles must be overcome in order to enhance Downtown's alleyways.

- Trash Containment -- The plethora of scattered trash containers and dumpsters in several Downtown alleys makes for an unsightly and unsanitary environment. This is not conducive to future use of alleys. It is recommended that steps be taken to cluster and screen from public view trash containers and dumpsters, in a manner similar to the clustering and screening of trash next to the new Downtown pavilion. It might not be feasible in all cases, but when feasible, the clustered trash facilities should be setback from alleys – in parking lots, for example.
- Burying of Overhead Wiring -- Burying of Overhead Wiring -- Based on the cost of burying the wiring in the alley adjacent to the pavilion, it can be expected to cost a considerable amount to bury overhead wiring in the other Downtown alleys. While alleys could be enhanced to some degree without burying overhead wires, it is felt that the business community and public will not be pleased unless overhead wiring is removed, based on the high standards of quality displayed by all other public improvements and, especially, since the alley improvements adjacent to the Urschel Pavilion display what an enhanced alley can look like.

- Cost – Serious consideration should be given to the benefits of alleyway improvement resulting from the completion of a very expensive undertaking.

At this time, it appears that alley enhancement could potentially take place behind the buildings on the north side of Lincolnway, from Lafayette to Michigan.

7. Additional Amenities

To keep Downtown Valparaiso as contemporary and convenient as possible, consideration should be given to creating:

- Locations where electronic devices can be charged;
- Hot spots for Internet access;
- Locations where bicycles – that experience a malfunction while in Downtown – can be repaired (for an example of a Downtown repair station contact Big Rapids, Michigan); and
- On-street Downtown directories.

8. Public Art

Several pieces of public art have been placed in Downtown. And, it is expected that this will continue with the advent of the Creative District. As this occurs, care should be taken to ensure that all public art is of high quality.

9. Bikes

As was stated earlier, pedestrian-orientation, safety, and comfort should remain a priority in Downtown. Likewise, greater emphasis should be placed on making Downtown more accessible to and safer for bicycle riders. This should be done by:

- Creating bike lanes wherever possible;
- Installing “Share the Road” decals where streets are too narrow to accommodate bike lanes;
- Making it easier for bike riders to connect with the Pathways Trail system from Downtown through better signage that indicates where and how to make those connections; and

- Designating a bike route to Downtown from Valparaiso University and Ivy Tech.

10. Infill Construction

Infill construction – meaning the construction of new buildings on land that is vacant or where an existing building is no longer useable – has already begun to occur in Downtown Valparaiso. An example of such construction is the mixed-use, three-story structure that has replaced the fire damaged Thormahlen Building.

In appropriate situations and locations – and taking care not to demolish Downtown’s valuable and viable historic buildings – additional infill construction should be encouraged. In doing so:

- The City should continue to require zero lot line development – meaning structures that are built at the sidewalk line, rather than being set back;
- Mixed-use structures should be encouraged, that include commercial uses on first floors with housing and/or offices above;
- Construction of underground parking – to accommodate the needs of a structure’s users – should be encouraged; and
- Consideration should be given to allowing infill construction on current surface parking lots – as long as the forfeited parking spaces can be re-created within the building’s design.

11. Sewer Gas

City Hall is working on sewer separation in Downtown. This project should be completed as quickly as funding is available to do so.

~ Activity Generators ~

The following projects should be pursued in order to increase the number of people and the amount of activity within Downtown.

1. Housing

A concerted effort should continue to be made to encourage and support the development of more housing in the upper floors of buildings throughout Downtown Valparaiso. By all local accounts, and following discussions with

successful developers of upper story housing in Downtown, units are greatly sought by tenants, with many renting before construction/remodeling is completed.

The recent development and rapid rental and sales of new upper floor apartments and infill townhouses at the edges of Downtown confirms the fact that the Downtown and near Downtown housing market is strong and that past and current Downtown revitalization success is likely to be the main driver of this confirmed demand.

To stimulate the development of housing in larger or problem properties, consideration should be given to assisting with their assembly and acquisition – when needed and for quality projects only.

2. Transit-Oriented Development

The City of Valparaiso has designated a large area adjacent to the western boundary of Downtown – and extending southward to US 30 – to be redeveloped consistent with the design and development principles of transit-oriented development (TOD).

The project will entail the acquisition and redevelopment of property in the designated TOD area to provide housing and services for people who want to live in proximity to the City's ChicaGo DASH bus service, potential future passenger rail service, and within an easy walk or bike ride to the heart of Downtown Valparaiso.

The City's Redevelopment Commission will oversee implementation of the TOD plan.

It is understood that the Redevelopment Commission is currently considering the acquisition and redevelopment of properties including the former ANCO building and several surrounding parcels. This project is seen as the official start of the TOD plan's implementation. This should be commended and pursued aggressively.

In addition:

- The TOD area should be connected to the heart of Downtown via pedestrian, bike and vehicular connections;

- The area's existing water tower should be saved and turned into an art piece that acts as a symbol of – and beacon that draws people to – the TOD area;
- Downtowns boundaries should be expanded at this time to include the TOD area; and
- The TOD area should be given a name as quickly as possible, to identify it as a Downtown hub.

3. Creative District

The *Valparaiso Creative District Plan* was recently completed to guide the redevelopment and creation of an art focused district along Indiana Avenue in Downtown Valparaiso – to serve as the hub of arts and culture in Valparaiso and a connector to the TOD area and Valparaiso University.

This project will result in the introduction of more pronounced and highly sought after art and cultural enrichment offerings in Downtown Valparaiso.

Maximum public support is needed to ensure that this critically important plan is implemented at the earliest possible date. In doing so, care should be taken to connect the Creative District to Lincolnway, so that the flow of users between these two Downtown hubs is encouraged and facilitated.

4. Downtown Hubs

It should be recognized that three “hubs” are being created within Downtown. These are Lincolnway, the Creative District, and the TOD area. As Downtown and these hubs are further enhanced and developed, care should be taken to:

- Ensure that each hub has its own character and economic identity;
- Encourage the flow of customers and residents from one hub to another; and
- Not allow the hubs to cannibalize each other by having the same businesses or by stealing each other's businesses.

5. Civic/Conference Center

Creation of a Downtown civic/conference center in Valparaiso has been discussed for many years. Due to Downtown's increased economic strength, the time to seriously consider construction of such a facility is near. Construction of

a Downtown civic/conference center should be viewed as an excellent opportunity for City Hall, Valparaiso University, and the development community to partner on this project in a manner that is mutually beneficial for all involved partners and for the community.

6. Hotel

For years, Valparaiso University and City of Valparaiso officials, business leaders, visitors and local residents have questioned why Valparaiso does not have quality lodging facilities to accommodate the demands and needs of visitors and business travelers – located in or very close to Downtown Valparaiso.

Ten to fifteen years ago, one could logically question the feasibility of Downtown lodging, given the scarcity of shopping and dining options in Downtown Valparaiso at that time.

Today, however, due to not only the tremendous new food and retail offerings, but also the overall enhancement of Downtown's public spaces and buildings, the demand for Downtown housing, and the growing demand for quality lodging to meet the needs of Valparaiso University and Valparaiso's business community, it appears the time might be right to explore the feasibility of developing up-market lodging in or very near Downtown Valparaiso.

To do so, it is recommended that the City of Valparaiso, working in partnership with Valparaiso University, contact current hotel franchisees located within Valparaiso to explore their interest in operating a Downtown hotel.

7. Entertainment Venue

There is – and long has been – interest in creating an entertainment venue in Downtown that is flexible and allows for multiple uses. Such a facility should be established in the Creative District, if at all possible. If this cannot be achieved, then the venue should be located as close to the heart of Downtown as possible. In addition, the Downtown entertainment venue should be developed as a mutually-beneficial joint venture between City Hall, Valparaiso University, and the private sector.

8. Old Jail

The former jail building in Downtown is too valuable, too visible, and offers too much of an opportunity for generating additional activity in Downtown to remain vacant – even partially. Therefore, swift and rigorous action should be taken to see that the structure is rehabbed and occupied. The following steps should be taken to do so.

- The City Administration should work with and urge the building's current owners to aggressively seek users for the structure.
- The building should be marketed as appropriate for a variety of uses – commercial on the first floor, offices and market-rate apartments on upper floors.
- The feasibility of developing the structure as a Downtown hotel – either totally or in conjunction with apartments – should also be explored.
- If the building's current owners are unable or unwilling to quickly turn the structure into a Downtown activity-generator, the City should encourage and assist them in marketing the building to owners who will.

9. Potential Future Housing Sites

Several large structures that are totally or partially vacant now exist in the neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown. Among these are the old YMCA and St. Paul's School buildings. It should be determined if these structures are viable for re-use. If so, consideration should be given to turning them into apartments or condominiums. If it is determined that re-use of the structures is not feasible, consideration should be given to redeveloping these sites for multi-family housing.

~ Tools ~

The following tools should be created – and actions taken – to continue to stimulate investment in Downtown.

1. Incentives

Incentives should be offered that help Downtown priorities be realized, such as;

- Attracting additional, high quality retail shops to Downtown;
- Encouraging the redevelopment of obsolete buildings in and around Downtown; and
- Encouraging the creation of additional quality housing in and adjacent to Downtown.

To stimulate such investment:

- Incentives should be flexible in order to meet the needs of each quality developer or business involved on a case-by-case basis;
- While incentives should be flexible, the City's standards for eligible projects must be firm and clear – in terms of uses that will be incentivized, construction materials that are required, and standards of quality that must be met; and
- Consideration should be given to making the incentives available for a limited time only – in order to stimulate quality investment as quickly as possible.

2. Disincentives

Consideration should be given to waiving City fees that might act as disincentives to private sector investment in Downtown. This should include building permit fees and sewer tap-in fees. It is important to note that fees should only be waived for projects that meet City standards and are compatible with City plans and the community's vision for Downtown.

3. Joint Ventures

Whenever mutually beneficial, the City, Valparaiso University, and the private sector should consider undertaking projects together in order to share the risk and rewards of such ventures. For example, if the University desires to develop a multi-purpose entertainment venue in Downtown, consideration should be given to developing such a facility in a joint-venture with the City and private sector – with the intent being to develop such a facility that could be used jointly by the University to meet demand for such facilities off-campus and, potentially, offer the community the civic meeting and entertainment space desired by many local organizations and businesses.

The joint funding, development and operation of the Urschel Pavilion should be viewed as an excellent example of a successful public/private joint venture.

4. Property Acquisition & Disposition

As the need arises and as appropriate, the City should continue to acquire property to be transferred to private developers for rehabilitation or redevelopment in accordance with Downtown plans. For example, in order to start the implementation of the TOD plan, the Redevelopment Commission is considering the acquisition of the old ANCO building and adjacent property to be

transferred to private developers. This is also the process the City has employed to stimulate housing development Downtown. These should serve as excellent models for future acquisition and disposition efforts.

5. Marketing

Currently, Downtown and its businesses are being marketed very well by several groups – including Valparaiso Events, Valpo Downtown Dining, the Downtown Retail Association, Porter County Museum, and Indiana Dunes Tourism.

Those marketing efforts should be continued and augmented by:

- Increased use of social media outlets;
- Increased marketing of Downtown’s retail shops; and
- Listing ALL of Downtown’s impulse-oriented businesses in marketing materials produced – to highlight the depth and breadth of offerings in Downtown and reasons to patronize Downtown.

6. Funding

An excellent job has been done of funding the Valparaiso Downtown enhancement effort through public-private partnerships. This approach should be continued as the ***Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda Update 2017*** is implemented.

In addition, funds should be sought from two programs available through the State of Indiana. These are:

- The Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority’s “CreatING Places” – “a place-based crowdfunding grant program . . . employs a donation and reward-based method of crowdfunding called “crowdgranting”. In crowdgranting, citizens actively support projects and activities through web-based donations which, if the fundraising goal is reached within a set time, are matched by a sponsor”; and
- The Indiana Stellar Communities Designation Program – “a multi-agency partnership designed to recognize Indiana’s smaller communities that have identified comprehensive community and economic development projects and activities as well as next steps and key partnerships”.

7. Benchmarks

The following benchmarks should be tracked by the City of Valparaiso on an annual basis as a way of measuring Downtown success:

- Total taxable value of property in Downtown;
- Number of new jobs created;
- Dollar amount of new private investment;
- Public improvements and their costs;
- List of business openings;
- List of business closings;
- Total number of businesses in Downtown;
- Total number of housing units;
- Occupied retail space (sq. ft.);
- Vacant retail space (sq. ft.);
- Occupied office space (sq. ft.);
- Vacant office space (sq. ft.);
- Occupied residential space (sq. ft.); and
- Vacant residential space (sq. ft.).

Tracking these benchmarks will be of great help in efforts are made to attract investors, funders, and supporters for the Downtown effort.

8. Adopt

HyettPalma strongly urges the Valparaiso City Council to adopt the ***Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda Update 2017*** as the City's official guide for Downtown's continued enhancement.