

Streetsense & Livingston County Development Corporation

INNOVATION

The Downtown 2.0 action plan combined an innovative mix of strategic and tactical interventions that included a diverse range of both policy and capital investments. These strategies were rooted in a common, market-informed understanding of shared challenges throughout the county. Unlike a typical downtown plan that serves to guide investment and policy for a single place, Downtown 2.0 directed change across nine downtowns in the county while maintaining a cohesive downtown brand and vision for the region. In doing so, the planning process also resulted in strong consensus-building at county-level and on-going collaboration and resource allocation between municipalities.

The audience included public officials, business owners and residents from each downtown. The plan was presented to the Board of Supervisors on January 28, 2018 and further ratified at a community event on February 6, 2018 that was attended by over 150 community members. At that meeting, each village voted on their priorities which informed the implementation strategies outlined in the plan.

Among many unique elements of the plan, Downtown 2.0 focused on the importance of “staging downtown for the customer”, i.e. ensuring that a customer’s “path to purchase” and arrival sequence was positive and seamless. This in turn informed the “First Impressions Program” which expanded the facade improvement grant program to include work that often does not fall under that category, including signage, public art and digital media.

OUTCOME

The plan has been instrumental in garnering consensus for action and in leveraging resources for downtown improvements, as is evident in the following key initiatives and programs that have been implemented with tangible impacts – and that will continue to have successes for years to come, including:

Plan Recommendation- Public Art on Main Street

Name of Program Implemented- First Impressions Program Inspirations Trail

Key Benefits/ Impacts- 100+ pieces of permanent and temporary art will be placed across the Main Street Corridors of the county’s nine villages between May 1 – May 24 2020.

Plan Recommendation- Promotion + Event Partnership

Name of Program Implemented- My Livingston Life

Key Benefits/ Impacts- Mylivingstonlife.com is a newly established dynamic website and biweekly newsletter that provides locals and visitors of Livingston County with an updated calendar of events. The digital engagement platforms are each visually appealing and include an easy-to-navigate guide of local businesses that could appeal to the interests of a wide range of consumers.

Plan Recommendation- Retail Attraction Program

Name of Program Implemented- Dream-O-Vate Competition

Key Benefits/ Impacts- nine new businesses opened as a result of the “Dream-O-Vate” business competition, a retail attraction program aimed at increasing retail occupancy in the county’s nine downtown districts.

38 applicants applied and winners were announced in May 2019. All new businesses benefited from press coverage and ribbon cuttings that helped raise awareness and drive sales.

EXECUTION

The study was completed on-time to be presented to the County’s Board of Supervisors in its first meeting of 2018 and completed within budget.

More importantly, the project was heavily driven by a community engagement process, which resulted in wide-spread support and

investment from county elected officials, property owners, and the local business community. Two years since its completion and adoption by the County, Downtown 2.0 continues to form the basis of and build momentum for the County's downtown economic development strategies and resource allocation.

REPRESENTATION

The effort included robust community engagement to ensure inclusivity and engagement from a broad set of stakeholders. From the market analysis phase through to final recommendations, more than 400 community members from across the county were engaged through open focus groups in each of the nine downtowns, one-on-one interviews, and walking tours with several mayors throughout the county. The plan concluded with a county-wide meeting that drew over 150 participants and incorporated small working groups and roundtable discussions. Additionally, an online survey was distributed in partnership with local anchor institution State University of New York Geneseo, which gathered input from the younger, tech-savvy college and millennial populations while individual community meetings facilitated by LOA were held in accessible downtown locations to ensure convenience for time-limited stakeholders and others with disabilities.

REPLICATION

Too frequently, the tendency in downtown planning has been for individual downtown communities to develop discrete plans that occur in a geographic vacuum. This frequently means that downtowns in a small geographic area can find themselves in competition for limited resources. This piecemeal approach often fails to recognize how the economic vitality of downtowns in any given region are in fact connected and, especially for visitors, seen as a collective whole. The alternative is collaboration – easier said than done – that finds shared challenges and advocates for a shared approach to common challenges. County governments are natural leaders in efforts to coordinate strategies for downtown revitalization in multiple town jurisdictions and should be encouraged to follow a collaborative downtown strategy as outlined here. Multi-downtown planning efforts like these can significantly lower the cost of planning for any individual municipality, help reduce duplication of effort and resources, and support policies and investment strategies that address common challenges.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

Developing a multi-downtown plan involves mayors, business owners, and residents from different jurisdictions who often come with a variety of sometimes competing concerns and objectives. The planning effort included an even-handed approach to ensuring that there was meaningful and even engagement from every downtown in the county. This included tours with each Downtown Mayor and focus groups in each town that engaged stakeholders on their own "turf". Sifting through the unique needs to find common threads was a challenge – but the analytical framework applied to this project helped the consultant to easily and quickly organize a plethora of information, glean findings and insights, and apply them to the challenges that emerged from the diagnostic effort. The outcome was a plan rooted in a set of shared challenges and a clear road map that now drives county-level economic development policies, investments and technical assistance strategies that enable disparate lawmakers from different municipalities to collectively pursue resources on behalf of all of the county's towns.