downtown as neighborhood

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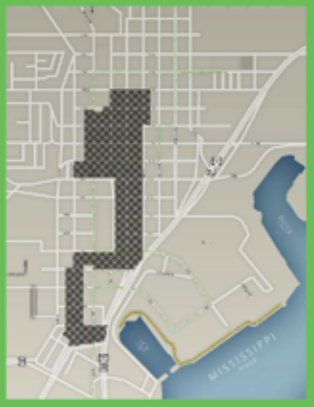
The most vibrant places in a city are areas where there are different things to do for all kinds of people at all times of the day. Generations ago, cities branded Central Business Districts (CBDs), downtown districts with a high concentration of commercial activity (but not much else). While CBDs demonstrated the advantages of density and proximity, they were not compelling destinations in which to visit or live. Mixing uses is generally good for urbanism.

Traditional zoning differentiates areas by land use - residential, recreational, institutional, etc. The thing is, uses change but building forms endure. What were once historic places of manufacturing can work well for many things today. Dubuque's Millwork District is a good example. It has offices, restaurants, shops and apartments inside the shells of former manufacturing. The separation of manufacturing from other areas is less critical than in the past because the nature industry itself is changing. Vibrant downtowns districts enable a variety of experiences.

Dubuque's downtown has numerous sub-districts. The underserved areas between them thwart connectivity and need attention.



Dubuque has a number of successfully branded districts. The Port of Dubuque, the Historic District or Clock Tower District are just a few of them. While these descriptions provide coherence and assist with wayfinding, they are also bounded and therefore exclude other areas which may lack a strong sense of place. **Efforts should be made to infill the areas between the existing districts and strengthen their identity.** Approximately 30% of Dubuque's downtown *doesn't have a brand* because either too much historic fabric has been lost, there is a prevalence of parking, or both. The areas that aren't branded thwart connectivity and undermine downtown's overall allure.

A great downtown is...

a place where uses come together to create vibrancy.

What happens to areas of downtown that lack a compelling identity but are bounded by others that do? Answer - they languish. These areas are well-positioned for an increase in residential development and the amenities that residents demand – interesting places to eat, compelling parks and open spaces, active ground floor uses and culture. As evidenced by the Envision 2030 effort, increasing the number of downtown residents is a primary goal. More people will bring more amenities.

Left: When asked to identify areas of the downtown core that were vibrant, consenses emerged around existing districts that have a strong identity. The areas in-between them need attention. Image overlay of 55 maps.

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