notes from the field

Urban design observations on Dubuque, Iowa

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a healthy city

This periodic e-newsletter provides an update on the Downtown Core Development Strategy. The strategy leverages the University of Dubuque's new College of Medicine and the Dubuque Museum of Art expansion that will stimulate mixed-use development and amenities downtown. This work situates growth to maximize economic impact, foster connectivity and enhance quality of life. These issues have explored the following topics, ideas and concepts as they have been developing:

Issue 1: Scale Matters
Issue 2: Mind the Gap
Issue 3: Downtown as Neighborhood
Issue 4: Art in the Public Realm
Issue 5: A Healthy City
Issue 6: Waterfront Linkages

A person's health is impacted by many factors. Genes, age, race, social and economic environment, nutrition and levels of exercise all impact well-being. One's physical condition is a complex intermingling of many things, including where one lives. However, buildings and spaces can be *designed* in ways that are conducive to improving the social determinants of health.

Enhancing connections between existing nodes in downtown Dubuque will encourage walking and cycling and improve air quality. Superlative pedestrian environments that are well maintained, shaded, clean and enlivened by a mix of uses will incentivize physical activity. In downtown Dubuque it is easier to drive between destinations than to walk. This can be said for many American cities.

The Port of Dubuque is a major economic driver for the region. Unfortunately, it is difficult to get to from the downtown core on foot. The existing Third Street sidewalk is narrow and uninviting and the highway is a barrier.

A great downtown...

encourages movement for people of all ages and abilities.

The emerging urban design strategy emphasizes four east-west corridors that enhance connectivity between existing destinations. A new pedestrian and bicycle bridge over the highway and rail line links the Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium with Hotel Julien, Main Street and the Cathedral of St. Raphael. The World War II-era steel bridge is "surplus property" for the State of Iowa. It can be dismantled, stored, cleaned, and (eventually) relocated from Adair County and reassembled in Dubuque at the bottom of Second Street.

mark your calendars | JUNE 16th 2026 | DUMA (Dubuque Museum of Art)

Please mark your calendars for (June 16, 2026 at 6pm at the DUMA) for another community-based conversation on the Downtown Core Development Strategy. If you missed the January 2026 Steeple Square event, this interactive presentation will give you an understanding of initiatives that will make downtown Dubuque more livable, equitable, resilient and beautiful!

Dubuque Forward Intentional. Community. Spark

architecture urban design GAMBLE ASSOCIATES

This effort is coordinated by Dubuque Forward and is led by architect and urban planner David Gamble. David is co-author of "Rebuilding the American City (Routledge, 2016) and "Rebuilding the American Town" (Routledge, 2024). He is Principal of Gamble Associates and a Lecturer in Urban Design at MIT. The Strategy builds on the Envision 2030 initiative and anticipates a city-led Master Plan in 2026.