

Introduction

On May 21, 2018, the City of Oskaloosa entered into an agreement with McClure Engineering Company for consultation services for the Oskaloosa Placemaking project. The team held a series of public visioning sessions, onsite meetings, performed outreach, and completed stakeholder interviews. A steering committee was formed to assess key themes received from the public, develop goals, and form action recommendations. The results and final recommendations were presented to the steering committee on February 22, 2019 and to the City Council during a study session on March 4, 2019. On April 15, 2019, the City Council passed a resolution accepting the Oskaloosa Creative Placemaking Action Plan.

Project Overview

The Action Plan is available for public viewing at <https://oskaloosaplacemaking.com/>. The plan contains six (6) key themes and a total of twelve (12) goals within those themes. A subcommittee has been formed to pursue each goal within the plan. Subcommittees work at their own discretion and their efforts are reported back to the steering committee. The steering committee meets monthly at City Hall to review progress and offer guidance to the subcommittees. This report contains a summary of subcommittee progress or activities toward each theme and goal since the action plan was accepted.

Program Themes, Goals, and Progress

Theme 1: Socializing

Restaurant subcommittee

- The Pizza Den opened at 214 A Ave East.
- The owner of the former Mi Ranchito building at 112 1st Ave E is working through plans to remodel the space and open a pub/restaurant. An architect has been engaged.
- There was a prospect interested in the former Swim's building, but plans have subsided.

Art Center subcommittee

- The side and rear brick walls on the building were repaired and tuckpointed by the owner.
- A sign for the Art Center and mural were painted on the walls near the rear entrance.
- This subcommittee and the FACE subcommittee (Arts) contain primarily the same members and have merged.

Theme 2: Connectivity

Transfer of Jurisdiction subcommittee

- The Eastern Iowa Transportation Coalition met and discussed regional needs.
- The northwest bypass connector is in Iowa DOT's 5-year plan.
- The DOT can assist with planning the southeast connector and identified funding opportunities.
- McClure has been engaged and is working with the Iowa DOT on safety improvements to the state corridors in Oskaloosa prior to jurisdiction transfer. Several pedestrian crossing concepts have been prepared for consideration.

Shared Streets subcommittee

- 4 lane to 3 lane conversions with bike lanes are under consideration by the City Council for A Avenue and South Market Street.

Bike Trail / Lanes subcommittee

- Coordinating with the city and water department to pursue McQuiston Trust grant funding in 2020-2021 for a water fountain, bench, bike maintenance station, and restrooms on the recreation trail near the northeast wastewater treatment plant.

Bike Share subcommittee

- Checked with various bike share companies including VeoRide and Kolonishare regarding service to Oskaloosa. These services now focus only on larger communities or require a large initial investment and local management of the system.
- Will continue search for an affordable solution which does not require local staff.

Theme 3: Arts

Fine Arts and Cultural Events (FACE) subcommittee

- Prepared a communications plan with goal of making communications unified and accessible between organizations. Assessed marketing strategies.
- Organized and held recurring arts and culture roundtable discussions.
- Organized and created a shared poster to promote events.

Theme 4: William Penn University

Transportation subcommittee

- Met with WPU dean of students to gather information and discuss transportation options (personal vehicle, bus, bike or car-sharing programs, etc).
- Researched Avis Zip Car car-sharing program.
- Considered a student survey to better determine wants and needs.

Mentorship subcommittee

- Promoted internship/job-shadowing opportunities and benefits to students.
- Reviewed existing mentorship programs that pair students with host families and alumni. These programs are successful so no changes proposed.
- Women's leadership program held in October.

Theme 5: Housing

Development / Revolving Loan Fund subcommittee

- Explored senior housing development opportunities as recommended by 2017 Maxfield study. Contacted local providers to discuss expansion possibilities.
- Created county-wide housing unit, building, and site inventory.
- Researched the Homes for Iowa program and toured the construction facility in Newton.
- Held meetings with a developer interested in downtown upper story housing.
- Identified the Elks Lodge building as a priority redevelopment opportunity. Met with leadership and arranged tours with consultants and developers.
- Created a template request for proposals (RFP) document to be used for available buildings.
- Held discussions and seeking partners to create a housing revolving loan fund.

Theme 6: Beautification

Gateway subcommittee

- A new Oskaloosa promotional billboard was installed on Highway 163.
- Volunteers cleaned up the Oskaloosa gateway sign on Highway 92; city staff repaired the lights.

Downtown subcommittee

- Alley beautification remains a priority. Moved all dumpsters from The Alley to the north-south section so not in view from the square. Applied for and obtained Golden Goose club

- funding to install four decorative “bookend” panels to block the view of trash dumpsters from the street. Six additional bookends are planned for installation throughout the downtown.
- Added street planters at the entrance to The Alley. Repainted west end walkway at no cost to the city.
 - Prepared concepts and are working with city staff to pursue design and construction funding to construct permanent curb “bumpouts” and a pedestrian crosswalk to the square park.
 - Obtained cost estimates to install a roofed enclosure and heat system over The Alley.
 - Murals were painted and installed at the west end of The Alley. A second phase is planned.
 - Obtained cost estimates to install accent lighting on tree trunks in the square park.
 - Researching costs and options to install interactive kiosks in the center square.
 - Discussing a proposal with county supervisors to install a covered events stage and restrooms on the county-owned parking lot south of the courthouse.

Conclusions

1. Placemaking remains an active part of the community. The process allowed us to identify specific priorities and options to pursue those priorities.
2. Subcommittees are active and bring many more people to these priority tasks than what would otherwise be available with existing staff. More involvement means greater results. All are volunteering their time and expertise to these efforts.
3. The overall steering committee will continue to meet monthly at City Hall to hear reports, discuss issues, and seek direction or feedback among subcommittees. Anyone interested may join the effort or participate in a subcommittee.
4. McClure’s consulting staff have been available for assistance and responsive to questions after the plan was accepted. Their team is now a subsidiary of McClure known as Alchemy Community Transformations (<https://alchemycommunities.com/>).
5. Placemaking is a first component in a broader planning effort to update Oskaloosa’s 20-year old Comprehensive Plan.