

# GOAL 3:

## Further the Health and Well-Being of All Residents in the Region

One of Greater Des Moines's key competitive advantages is its high quality of life. The region is consistently recognized for its affordability, access to the outdoors, and family-friendly atmosphere. However, this way of life is being challenged by impediments to fair housing, the area's car-centered transportation system, and decreasing levels of physical activity. For residents to be able to truly enjoy the high quality of life for which Greater Des Moines is known, health and well-being, in all senses of those terms, need to be actively promoted throughout the region.

## Strategy 3A

### Ensure diverse housing choices – in terms of cost, style, and location – throughout the region

National experts repeatedly recognize the Greater Des Moines region for its high quality of life and moderate cost of living. Anticipated growth through the year 2050 poses challenges to the region's ability to maintain a relatively affordable cost of living. Additionally, anticipated growth will bring an increase in the diversity of residents in terms of racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds.

A portion of the area's perceived affordability is the low price of housing compared to other regions of the country.<sup>1</sup> Another portion of the region's affordability is typically identified as the low cost of transportation, partly due to short commute times and low levels of congestion. The desire to maintain affordability for all residents in the face of anticipated growth necessitates equal access to housing opportunities and consideration of housing location in relation to the job centers they serve.

It is important to note that, while the region is considered affordable to some, other residents rely on housing assistance programs even now. Housing affordability is not limited to just the cost of housing itself but also includes secondary costs, such as transportation costs and access to jobs, schools, and basic goods and services. The region should strive to ensure that diverse housing choices are available in locations near major employment and commercial centers.

Housing challenges can be broken into three components: impediments to fair housing, lack of workforce housing, and changing demographics.

#### Impediments to Fair Housing

According to *The Greater Des Moines Metro Area Regional Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice* (Regional Analysis of Impediments), prepared by Iowa State University as a component of The Tomorrow Plan, a majority of communities in Greater Des Moines have not taken action on any measures aimed at increasing the diversity of housing stock. For example, 70 percent of the communities had taken no action to promote affordable housing. The Regional Analysis of Impediments identifies the following eight impediments to fair housing in Greater Des Moines:

1. *Affordability*: Affordability is the biggest issue impeding housing choice in the region. This category can be further broken down into sub-areas that include: the high cost of housing compared to the incomes of many households, the lack of subsidized

housing in the region, the lack of affordable housing in close proximity to minimum to low wage job centers, the lack of affordable housing for seniors and people with disabilities, and the lack of units for large and extended family households.

2. *Language and cultural barriers*: The region is experiencing a slow change in demographic makeup, with a steadily increasing minority and immigrant population. Language poses a significant barrier for these groups, as there is a shortage of home buying professionals, mortgage brokers, and Realtors who are bilingual and bicultural. Compounding the issue is a lack of culturally sensitive and safe housing options for immigrant communities.
3. *Education (Fair housing rights)*: Approximately 40 percent of the Regional Analysis of Impediments survey respondents<sup>2</sup> indicated a lack of knowledge in regard to fair housing rights, laws, and processes. This lack of knowledge presents a key challenge, especially for low income population groups, immigrants, and people with limited English proficiency.
4. *Concentrations of subsidized housing*: Historically, public housing has been located in the City of Des Moines. The Section 8 voucher program provides rental assistance to low income families, the elderly, and the disabled based on guidelines developed by HUD. Section 8 voucher holders also are concentrated in the City of Des Moines and areas just outside the city limits. While Section 8 trends may be a reflection of availability of affordable housing in the region, the growth of suburbs in the recent decades — along with a shift of jobs to these areas — demands a fresh investigation of the housing policies and an increased regional approach to siting affordable housing.
5. *Landlord screening*: Increased screening by landlords using criminal background checks, credit scores, and eviction history is a common reason that people are excluded from housing options in the region. Screenings also have a negative impact on persons with intellectual and physical disabilities in terms of their ability to acquire housing and obtain credit.
6. *Support services*: Most rental assistance, public housing, and affordable home ownership programs require complementary support services to assist residents when unexpected challenges occur that may prevent them from making timely rent or mortgage payments. These programs also may target homeowners to ensure compliance with code regulations. Certain population groups such as seniors, low income households, refugees, individuals with criminal backgrounds, and individuals with intellectual, mental, or physical disabilities may require more specialized case management services. The primary cause cited for this gap is lack of resources.

7. **Zoning:** Certain land use and development policies and zoning provisions affect the range of housing choices available in certain jurisdictions. Some local jurisdictions limit the amount of land that can be developed into multi-family and multi-structure housing units, while other jurisdictions limit the number of non-family members living together. Large minimum lot sizes and restrictions on accessory dwelling units further impede choice and affordability.

8. **Homelessness:** Chronic homelessness and near homelessness remain causes for concern in Greater Des Moines. The lack of adequate support services to help these groups find and maintain suitable housing in a timely manner creates an additional barrier as these individuals and families seek housing. The homeless sheltering system in the region plays a key role in providing housing options but is more of a temporary solution to the problem.

### Workforce Housing

The second set of challenges stems from the workforce housing needs as economic growth continues in Greater Des Moines over the coming decades. The Iowa Finance Authority's 2012 Iowa Housing Study<sup>3</sup> reviews housing data for the eight county central Iowa region and makes projections to the year 2020. The study indicates that a majority of new households in central Iowa will be located in Polk and Dallas counties. The share of owner-occupied and rental units will remain similar to today. As a result, the current disconnect between lower priced rental unit demand and high priced rental unit supply will continue through 2020. This underscores the need for a comprehensive review of the region's strategy for supplying affordable housing units.

### Changing Demographics

The number of single-person households is expected to increase by 2050. It is anticipated that most of those households will be comprised of people under the age of 35 and over the age of 55. This shift in demographics necessitates the need to review housing availability to ensure the region can meet future housing demands. Most of the current housing stock is designed for the traditional family size and type. The Tomorrow Plan's quantitative survey respondents indicated a strong desire to be able to easily stay in their neighborhoods after they retire, which is often hard to do without a range of housing types. Additionally, results indicated that residents desire to live in a diverse community. Survey results and changing demographics indicate an opportunity to expand housing choice within a neighborhood. Doing so would ensure that residents can maintain their desired lifestyle in the same neighborhood as they age.

Currently, 28 percent of households nationwide are single person households; Greater Des Moines follows this trend. Projecting national trends forward, 40 percent of households in 2050 will be single person households. Assuming the Greater Des Moines region continues to follow suit, projections show a need for over 82,000 new single person units. It should be noted that total housing units reflects a 5 percent vacancy rate.

These three components — impediments to fair housing, lack of workforce housing, and changing demographics — underscore the magnitude of future regional housing needs and the need for a diverse regional housing stock. Addressing the need for more diverse housing at the regional level will ensure that housing is available for all residents. The goals of such an effort would be to:

## ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

A Regional Coalition for Housing – ARCH – defines an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) as “an extra living unit on your property, complete with kitchen, bathroom and sleeping facilities. Subject to local regulations, ADUs may be located inside, attached to, or detached from the primary home on your property. Another common term for ADU is ‘Mother in Law’ apartment.” ARCH<sup>4</sup> notes that the benefits of owning an ADU include:

- **Extra Housing:** ADUs can help meet a family need for extra housing or can enable a tenant to live nearby.
- **Companionship, Security, and Home Help:** ADUs allow caretakers to live nearby and provide companionship and an extra hand.
- **First Time Homebuyers:** ADUs can help first time homebuyers qualify for a larger home loan and earn extra income.
- **Income:** ADUs can help all types of homeowners earn extra cash for mortgage payments, home repairs, or any other expense.

## A GHOST IN THE SYSTEM

I left prison after 25 years of incarceration with a bus ticket, all my personal belongings (in a box), a \$10 bill, and a check for \$90. But I'm not upset with anyone because I'm guilty of what they accused me of.

When I entered the work release center, one of the first things they did was take the \$90 check, so there I stood on ground zero, quasi free, overwhelmed by circumstances, elated to be where I was.

Most newly released prisoners are met by their family and loved ones; I was met by a counselor I went to high school with who welcomed me back and promised to do all he could to help me succeed. That was invaluable information. This counselor actually set up a job interview, took me to it, and sat in on the interview with me.

I started work on a Friday. After the first day, I was asked if I wanted to work Saturday. Eager to impress my new employer, I committed before I knew buses ran on a late schedule on weekends. Therefore, I was confronted with my first real dilemma. Not wanting to start off on a bad foot with my employer, I borrowed \$40 and took a cab as far as it could get me to my job in Ankeny.

When I got off work that day, I went to assess the bus routes and discovered there was no bus that would get me to work on time. The bus would only take me to East 14th and Aurora in Des Moines, but I still had to get to Ankeny before 8:00 am. So I went on a crusade to secure a bike. God must have heard my prayers because an old friend just happened to have a bike he wasn't using until the weekend. For the next two months, I would catch a bus and ride a bike approximately 10 miles to work and back to the Fort Des Moines halfway house.

Due to the fact I had done so much time incarcerated, I became a "ghost" in the system, meaning I had no work history, no credit history, or social or civic history. There was basically no record I could reference. Therefore, I was compelled to stay in the halfway house three extra months because no one would rent to me.

Finally, a friend had a cousin who was looking for an older man who would be willing to rent a room and share the bathroom and kitchen with two other renters. It was ideal for my situation, but I was laid off in December due to seasonal work. I was supposed to receive workman's compensation, but I hadn't worked enough months to be eligible.

Once again I found myself in a situation I couldn't have prepared myself for while I was in prison. Yet I had to pay rent as well as other debts. Urban Dreams was instrumental in helping me connect with needed resources. I cannot emphasize enough how important it is for ex-offenders to be connected with information to emergency resources and how to obtain immediate assistance.

The number of ex-offenders is predicted to increase as the mandatory minimum sentences expire. We must prepare situations to facilitate their inevitable return, so they can find jobs with livable wages, affordable housing, and transportation assistance.

Dennis Henderson  
*Ex-offender Coordinator, Urban Dreams*

## WORKING THE NUMBERS

Between 2010 and 2020, central Iowa is projected to add 74,300 jobs, according to Iowa Workforce Development.<sup>5</sup> This job growth will result in approximately 41,500 net new workforce households over the decade, with three-quarters of those in Polk and Dallas counties.

The mix of housing in 2010 was 70 percent owner-occupied units and 30 percent renter-occupied units. Thus, keeping the same proportions, approximately 29,000 owner-occupied and 12,000 rental units will be needed between 2010 and 2020 to accommodate this new workforce housing demand. However, the majority of net new workforce households added are expected to be single- and two-person householders. Thus, the distribution of housing by price point needed to meet this demand is likely to be quite different from what exists in today's market.

## HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

2010 BASELINE HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS <sup>6</sup>						
	HOUSEHOLDS	HOUSING UNITS	POPULATION	AVG HH SIZE	HH SHARE OF TOTAL	POP SHARE OF TOTAL
1 person	52,094	54,699	52,094	1.00	28%	11%
2+	136,906	143,751	427,906	3.13	72%	89%
Total	189,000	198,450	480,000	2.54	100%	100%

2050 HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS				2010-2050 NEW GROWTH			
	HOUSEHOLDS	HOUSING UNITS	POPULATION	AVG HH SIZE	NEW HOUSEHOLDS	UNITS NEEDED	POP. GROWTH
1 person	130,434	136,956	130,434	1.00	78,340	87,257	78,340
2+	197,944	207,841	619,566	3.13	61,039	64,090	191,660
Total	328,378	344,797	750,000	2.28	139,379	146,348	270,000

CURRENTLY, 28 PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLDS NATIONWIDE ARE SINGLE-PERSON HOUSEHOLDS. GREATER DES MOINES FOLLOWS THIS TREND. PROJECTING NATIONAL TRENDS FORWARD, 40 PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLDS IN 2050 WILL BE SINGLE PERSON HOUSEHOLDS. ASSUMING THE GREATER DES MOINES REGION CONTINUES TO FOLLOW SUIT, PROJECTIONS SHOW A NEED FOR OVER 82,000 NEW SINGLE PERSON UNITS.

1. Address the geographic concentration of traditional affordable housing options.
  2. Promote and encourage the development of affordable housing near low-wage job centers and near public transit routes.
  3. Promote a diverse housing stock that provides housing choices for individuals of all races, cultures, ages, and economic backgrounds.
  4. Promote the development of neighborhoods and housing options that can serve different generations throughout their lifecycle.
  5. Increase the awareness and develop education regarding a variety of housing issues, including fair housing rights.
  6. Promote the development and redevelopment of diverse housing choices.
- Greater Des Moines should take several specific actions to achieve these goals:
- Continue a regional housing dialogue involving housing agencies, transportation organizations, developers, municipalities, and other stakeholders.
  - Create zoning ordinances that allow for a variety of housing types, such as accessory dwelling units, cottage housing developments, shared housing sites, and live-work units.
  - Create a regional affordable housing plan, including targets for various housing types throughout the region.
  - Prioritize the development review process for projects that include affordable units.
  - Create incentives and reduce barriers for developers to increase affordable housing for households with an income of less than 30 percent of the region's median income.
  - Prioritize the use of transportation funds to enhance transportation choice near affordable housing.

- Encourage unions and retirement fund managers to use pension funds to invest in affordable housing units.
- Balance the mix of income restricted and market rate rentals throughout the region, focusing immediately on the urban core.
- Increase residential densities by removing or reducing minimum lot size requirements.
- Engage and educate neighborhoods on the benefits of embedded affordable housing.
- Encourage a mix of land uses near transit corridors.
- Promote infill development and the rehabilitation of vacant structures.
  - Step up enforcement on vacant and abandoned buildings where codes are in violation.
  - Set up a community land trust (CLT) that maintains ownership of land portion of property.
  - Adopt rehabilitation building codes that make converting old structures and creating infill housing more feasible for developers.
  - Adopt financial incentives that make converting old structures more profitable for developers.
- Improve educational resources and programs related to housing.
  - Assist individuals with the purchase, rental, and maintenance of housing through employer-assisted housing programs, such as match down-payment assistance and the leveraging of housing development financing.
  - Provide education on the cost of living, and encourage residents to consider transportation costs when making housing choices.
  - Expand knowledge of fair housing rights complaint procedures in the region.
- Engage the state on preferred housing policies and programs, such as limiting tax abatements for new housing developments; continuing funding of the Vision Iowa program, Community Attraction and Tourism program, and Riverfront Enhancement program; and, incentivizing brownfield redevelopment.

**STRATEGY 3A  
POTENTIAL CHAMPIONS:**

Polk County Housing Trust Fund  
HUD  
Communities

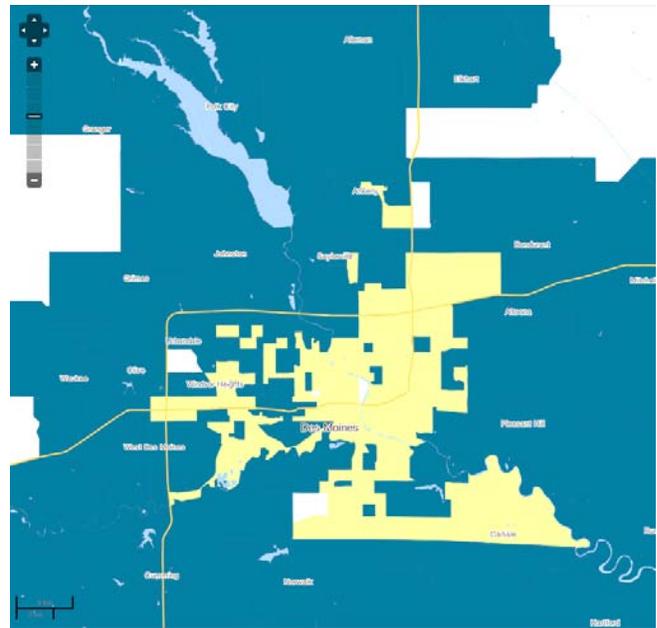
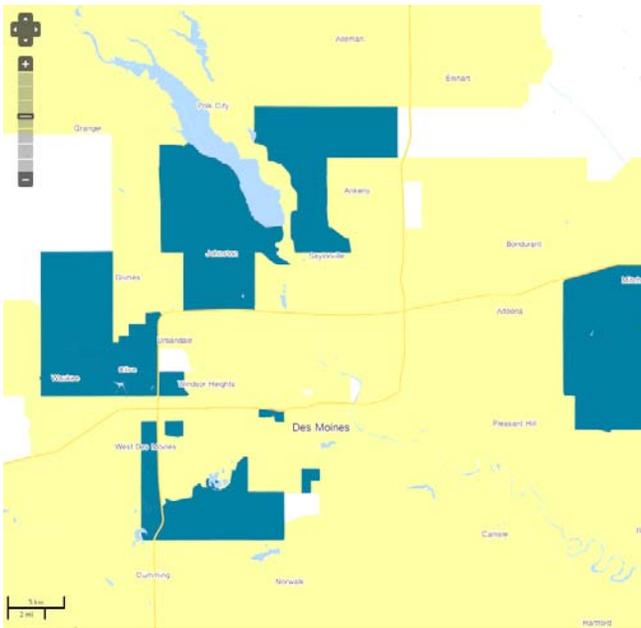
## THE HIDDEN COST OF HOUSING

When considering housing costs, people often think only of the rent or mortgage payments. In reality, though, that's only half of the picture. Consideration must also be given to the costs associated with where housing is located.

In 2008, the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) introduced its H+T Affordability Index<sup>7</sup> “that measures the true affordability of housing choice by factoring in both housing and transportation costs in a neighborhood.” The formula for determining affordability is:

$$\text{H+T Affordability Index} = \frac{\text{Housing Costs} + \text{Transportation Costs}}{\text{Income}}$$

Traditionally, households spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing fall into a “cost burdened” category. Using this criteria, 76 percent of US neighborhoods are “affordable.” Applying this classification to Greater Des Moines shows that most areas fall into the “affordable” classification, shown in yellow in the accompanying maps. This categorization doesn't take into account transportation costs as a result of housing location.



The H+T Affordability Index, in contrast, defines “affordable” as a household that spends less than 45 percent of its income on housing and transportation. Using this approach, the number of affordable neighborhoods in the country drops to 28 percent, and the number of cost burdened households in Greater Des Moines – shown in blue – increases dramatically.

The accompanying visualizations underscore the importance of taking a holistic view of affordability that includes housing location.

# THE MISSING Middle

## TOWNHOUSE



Townhouses, terrace houses, or row houses are attached units in groups larger than four. These are typically two to four story buildings set close to the street with separate entries for each unit. Well-designed townhomes provide access to garages from a rear lane or alley allowing for a continuous street frontage that is unbroken by driveways. This design allows for a higher number of on-street parking spaces. The shared walls of townhomes make them more energy efficient than similarly constructed detached units. Townhomes can be built as part of a homeowners association or as individual parcels under single ownership.

This type of townhouse consists of four stories with a two-story unit above another two-story unit. Stacked townhouses maintain the same feel as the traditional four story townhouse while doubling the density. The four story height allows for a well-defined street and creates a sense of enclosure that is essential to placemaking.

## STACKED TOWNHOUSE



## FOURPLEX



Fourplexes are semi-detached units that share a common wall. They resemble duplexes except that each side consists of two units stacked over each other for a total of four units.

## LIVE-WORK UNITS



Live-work units combine a person's living space with their work space, with the housing generally located above the first floor work space that faces the street. However, this flexible housing type can be arranged in a variety of fashions. It works well as a transition between single-use and mixed-use buildings.

Mixed-use apartments consist of apartments above commercial or office space. These buildings may have retail on the ground floor, offices on the second floor, and residential units on the remaining floors. Mixed-use apartments work well along commercial corridors where communities are trying to create a main street atmosphere.

In 2011, the National Association of Realtors conducted a study<sup>8</sup> that shows that the majority of Baby Boomers and Millennials desire to live in communities that are walkable and transit friendly. Communities that want to attract and retain these population groups need to provide a variety of housing that supports walking and transit.

One way to ensure these types of neighborhoods exist is to build “missing middle” housing types. These housing types include cottages, townhouse, duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, small apartment buildings, mansion apartments, live-work units, and apartments above shops. These building types have actual densities ranging from 16 to 35 dwelling units per acre, but their perceived density is much lower. The lower perceived density of these buildings make them generally acceptable to most people while allowing for the required density to make walking and transit viable.

## DUPLEX

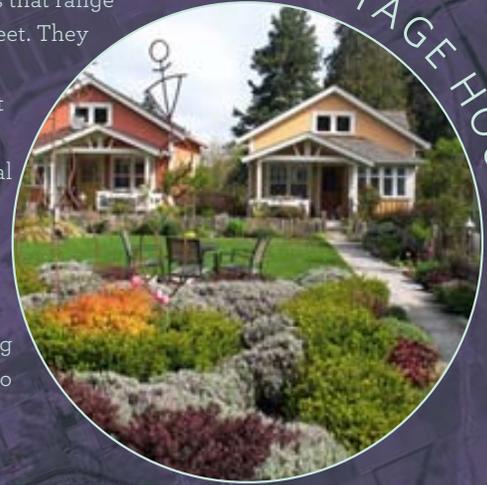


Duplexes are semi-detached units that share a common wall but are located on individual lots. In Greater Des Moines, these are commonly known as double houses; the region contains many fine examples of this housing type.

There are additional types of duplexes where units are stacked over each other. This type of duplex is most common in large single-family homes that have been converted to two units.

Cottage houses are detached units that range from around 400 to 1,200 square feet. They typically have a small footprint and can be arranged along a street or around a central courtyard. Cottages blend well into residential neighborhoods while increasing density due to the small lot sizes that accommodate this style. Cottage housing can provide an affordable option for singles, young families, and for retirees wishing to age in place.

## COTTAGE HOUSING



## SMALL APARTMENTS

Small apartments usually contain six to eight units on a small building footprint. The small building size makes them compatible in residential neighborhoods.



## TRIPLEX



Triplexes, or triple deckers, consist of three units stacked one above the other. Triple deckers are economical in that the cost of land and basement + roof construction is spread over three units.

## MIXED-USE APARTMENTS



Mansion apartments resemble large detached houses from the street but, in reality, consist of four to six apartments. The physical character of mansion apartments is compatible with detached single-family housing and adds options to a neighborhood.

## MANSSION APARTMENTS





Source: *Bicycling Magazine*

ACTIVITY <sup>9</sup>	CALORIES BURNED PER MINUTE
Drive alone in a vehicle	3.125
Walking to and riding the bus*	1.625 (6.000)
Bicycling (leisure)	8.500
Walking (leisure pace)	4.375
Walking (brisk 3.5 MPH)	5.375
Wheelchair use (manual)	4.000

## Strategy 3B

### Make walking, biking, and using public transportation a normal part of daily life

Looking to the year 2050, we know that Greater Des Moines will experience significant demographic changes. Nearly 140,000 Baby Boomers call the region home. The “graying” of the region will have implications for the transportation system, land use, and the placement of homes, businesses, and stores. Perhaps an even larger impact, though, could come from Generations X, Y, and Z — generally those under the age of 45 and who comprise nearly two-thirds of the region’s population. These generations have demonstrated different lifestyle choices and preferences than older generations. For instance, the share of new vehicles purchased by those aged 18 to 34 dropped 30 percent in the last five years. With these anticipated demographic shifts, creating a region where walking, biking, and using public transportation are as viable as driving will be imperative.

Greater Des Moines currently enjoys short commute times and little to no congestion, even during peak travel times. A report by Nelson/Nygaard<sup>10</sup> found that, in 2010, nearly three-fourths of the roads operated with free flowing traffic. Even without roadway capacity additions, projections for the year 2050 do not show any significant deterioration in commute times or increased congestion around Greater Des Moines. Given this abundance of roadway capacity, Greater Des Moines can still grow while shifting funding priorities to those modes that increase transportation choice.

The region can place new emphasis on walking, biking, and public transportation such that they become options as viable as driving. Pedestrians who can walk to different land uses, such as retail establishments, parks, and community facilities, in under 10 minutes are more likely to visit those places.<sup>11</sup> Placing daily goods and services, as well as recreational destinations, within walking distance of residences increases the incentives for residents to avoid using their cars.

Another strategy would be to further the use of bicycle infrastructure for commuting. Complete streets have been implemented around the globe and result in multimodal access to the places we live, work, learn, and play. They typically include shared lanes, bike lanes, or cycle tracks. Complete streets should be implemented throughout Greater Des Moines, as they are accessible and friendly to users of all modes, including drivers, bicyclists, and public transportation riders.

Furthering the use of public transportation has and will continue to be a challenge for Greater Des Moines, due in large part to

the lack of congestion and the short commute times, which provide little incentive to switch from private vehicles. Though bus service frequency has improved, it is often still quicker to travel by personal vehicle. Considering that future congestion is projected to be minimal, our region can at least redirect resources from private vehicle infrastructure to public transportation infrastructure in order to provide a positive incentive to switch modes.

Not only are walking, biking, and using public transportation key to increasing the mobility of Greater Des Moines residents, they are central to furthering residents’ health and well-being. Every walk or bike ride is a chance for exercise and social interaction, which create a healthy and welcoming community. Additionally, walking and biking require little space for each person engaged in those activities; the more people who walk and bike, the more space can be dedicated to other uses chosen by each community. People who use wheelchairs also benefit from increased pedestrian facilities when designed to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

Every trip starts and ends as a pedestrian trip. As a result, improvements to the pedestrian experience benefit everyone. Additionally, no forms of travel are healthier than walking and bicycling. Providing all residents with the option of walking and biking is at the heart of supporting the region’s health and well-being. To do so requires safe, comfortable environments with all users in mind. The following six fundamental pedestrian conditions should be provided, especially in mixed-use districts, around schools, and at connections to transit. It should be noted that these conditions benefit cyclists and users of other transportation modes as well.

- **Safety:** Pedestrians are well protected from road hazards such as vehicles.
- **Security:** Pedestrians are not susceptible to real or perceived robberies or other crimes.
- **Directness:** Pedestrian paths minimize distances traveled. People will always find the most direct route anyway, regardless of where a path leads.
- **Ease of Entry:** Walking is not onerous, so steep inclines and staircases are avoided.
- **Comfort:** Paths provide high quality space appropriate to the location and destinations.
- **Aesthetics:** Environments are pleasing to the eye and inspire a person to walk to the next corner.

Creating a region where walking, biking, and taking public transportation are as viable as driving will be an incremental process that includes numerous entities and action steps.

### **Educate residents and workers on the importance of a multimodal system**

- Provide training for engineers and planners.
- Adopt nationally-accepted standards on bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- Encourage the development of municipal-level bicycle and pedestrian plans.
- Work with DART to ensure that transit stops are more accessible to pedestrians.
- Implement a public education and marketing campaign to increase understanding and awareness related to a multimodal transportation system and to increase the knowledge of the relationship between the built environment and health and well-being.

### **Create a more walkable region**

- Connect, install, and repair sidewalks.
- Plant and maintain trees and landscaping.
- Build wide sidewalks in areas of high pedestrian activity.
- Improve street crossings near schools and commercial areas.
- Enforce right-of-way priority and motorist travel speeds in high pedestrian volume areas.
- Review pedestrian planning procedures, particularly concerning construction of sidewalks in new residential and commercial developments.
- Provide land use opportunities that allow people to be within walking distance of commercial and retail activity destinations.
- Improve pedestrian accessibility at and to transit facilities.
- Improve intersection traffic signalization and crossing times for all users, including persons with disabilities, children, and the elderly.

### **Expand the network of on-road bicycle friendly facilities in Greater Des Moines**

- Locate directional and informational signage along trails, as lane markings, and adjacent to roads.
- Reconfigure roads to allow all bicyclists to ride comfortably and safely, including the addition of shared lanes, bike lanes, or cycle tracks.
- Install more short- and long-term bicycle parking facilities.
- Provide clearly defined, safe, comfortable, and accessible bicycle commuter routes.
- Provide bicycle commuter amenities such as parking, showers, dressing rooms, and other end-of-trip facilities.
- Establish short- and long-term bicycle parking facilities near bus stops.
- Encourage the presence of paved shoulders on rural roadways.

### **Encourage compact, mixed-use development policies that create a more human-scale environment**

- Promote the use of shorter block lengths in new developments, resulting in a fine-grained street network that features more intersections.
- Minimize the use of cul-de-sacs in order to maximize connectivity.
- Foster higher density development.
- Implement traffic calming methods to create bicycle and pedestrian friendly corridors.
- Install street furniture to create a more inviting pedestrian environment.

#### **STRATEGY 3B POTENTIAL CHAMPIONS:**

Communities  
DART  
Downtown Community Alliance  
Des Moines Bike Collective  
Developers

“This strategy incorporates health into our daily lives through a supportive community infrastructure. **Health becomes part of the way we live** instead of a choice our brains struggle to make. The healthiest choice becomes the easiest choice. As a result, we become more active, eat better, and come together more often as a community. This seems like an easy choice to me!”

**Amy Jennings**

*Greater Des Moines Leadership Institute  
Executive Director*



## Strategy 3C

### **Make the healthy choice the natural choice**

A number of health initiatives are currently underway around the state and the region. Governor Terry Branstad wants Iowa to become the nation's healthiest state. He launched the Healthiest State Initiative in an effort to reach that goal. The Minnesota-based Blue Zones project has become a major player in that initiative. Blue Zones principles stem from founder Dan Buettner's research of communities across the globe with the greatest longevity. Healthy Polk 2020, which encompasses much of but not the entire region, works with ten community-driven approaches in a grassroots movement to promote health. At the same time, a contingent of local leadership wants to see the region known as the "Wellness Capital of the World."

This strategy aims to complement these many exceptional efforts with the fundamental recognition that we cannot speak of health without addressing all the goals of The Tomorrow Plan. We cannot be truly healthy, as individuals or as a public, unless we have healthy resources, economies, and options that enable residents to make the healthy choice instinctively. Healthy Polk 2020 notes that "existing societal norms require people to make an intentional decision (as opposed to the default decision) to make a healthy choice." Strategies to achieve these goals include:

- Tap grassroots issues to promote conversations about health between the public and decision makers. The public and decision makers often engage over issues of health without realizing the connections. They may discuss a proposed zoning change, a road widening, or a proposed economic development project without realizing how it affects health. The conversations rarely turn to which choices promote public health or elevate public health to the same level as other considerations. Working with representatives from health-focused initiatives, the region should develop a set of questions for the public and decision makers to consider in these conversations.
- Provide youth with more ways to be physically active in school. The importance of physical activity and getting young people outdoors has increasingly been documented. At the same time, school resources have been stretched thin, and an emphasis has been placed on fundamental academics, often at the expense of creativity and outdoor play. This strategy proposes a convening of educators, health professionals, private philanthropists, and designers to address the physical and programmatic aspects

of traditional recess and in-classroom activities to find better approaches to integrating physical activity into the school day — indoors and outdoors.

- Create more opportunities for everyone to walk or bike to their respective destinations. A recent study in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine<sup>13</sup> found that biking for transportation appears more helpful in losing weight and promoting health than working out at the gym. Besides fighting weight gain, walking and biking for transportation purposes boosts overall health, including a healthier level of most of the cardiovascular risk factors. These opportunities should be created through land use choices, density levels, and the maintenance and installation of infrastructure that allows walking and biking to be a safe and comfortable choice.
- Tap the Don't Smile Movement as a means of building awareness of healthy behaviors and of broadening engagement in the pursuit of a healthier region.

- Recruit champions to model healthy choices.
- Develop a promotional campaign to broaden the reach of the champions.
- Engage diverse populations to better understand their barriers to healthy behaviors and choices, to involve them in developing an action plan to overcome those barriers, and to implement that action plan in coordination with those populations.

### **STRATEGY 3C POTENTIAL CHAMPIONS:**

Local health departments

Iowa Department of Public Health

Healthiest State Initiative

## THE HEALTHIEST STATE INITIATIVE

The Healthiest State Initiative<sup>12</sup> is “a privately led public initiative intended to inspire Iowans and their communities throughout the state to improve their health and happiness.” To achieve this goal, individuals, families, businesses, faith-based organizations, not-for-profits, and the public sector have united in a community-focused effort to make Iowa the healthiest state in the country by 2016.

The initiative measures the state’s progress with the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, which tracks six areas that comprise well-being: life evaluation, emotional health, physical health, healthy behaviors, work environment, and basic access. While our 2012 ranking as the ninth healthiest state in the country is a step in the right direction, we can do better.



## HEALTHY POLK

Every ten years, people who live and work in Polk County have the opportunity to participate in the development of a community health plan, *Healthy Polk*, which guides the use of community resources to support improved health and quality of life for the subsequent decade. The latest plan, *Healthy Polk 2020*, focuses on community involvement. The process began with 54 community conversations during which 750 people voiced their opinions about what a healthy Polk County might look like. Additionally, 1,200 people completed an online survey, and nearly 400 were interviewed over the phone.

From those conversations, a list of more than 900 priorities emerged. The Healthy Polk 2020 Data Team narrowed that list down to 190 measurable priorities. The 274 individuals who registered for the Community Caucus winnowed that list down to 27. Finally, in early 2009, a traditional Iowa caucus took place, and participants developed the final list of 10 priorities:

- Devote additional resources to prevention and wellness.
- Provide youth with more ways to be physically active every day in school so they learn to become active adults.
- Increase the availability of accessible, affordable public transportation.
- Make sure that all people living in Polk County have health care insurance coverage.
- Expand health coverage and services for families who can't afford private insurance but don't qualify for public programs.
- Ensure equal access to health care for all.
- Encourage medical providers to focus on prevention, education, and wellness.
- Empower more people to take responsibility for maintaining their health.
- Advocate for affordable, quality, and safe housing.
- Ensure access to affordable, healthy food for everyone.



## DON'T SMILE AT ME

The simple act of smiling is an indicator of one's outlook on life and one's emotional health. However, we often overlook the importance of smiling. The Don't Smile Movement continues efforts associated with Healthy Polk 2020, and it measures the progress the county is making in terms of healthy behaviors.

The movement's goal is to count smiles across the county. Smile Spies hold signs that say things such as, "Don't smile at me," at events such as the Dam to Dam race, Pride Festival, PechaKucha, and Yoga in the Park. Other Smile Spies simultaneously tally if people are already smiling, if the sign provokes a smile, or if no smile is observed. By counting smiles, the Don't Smile Movement builds awareness of healthy behaviors and broadens engagement in the pursuit of a healthier Polk County.

## Strategy 3D

### Provide access to healthy food using a regional food system approach

Currently, the State of Iowa does not provide access to **healthy** food sources within its own borders; the state currently imports 90 percent of its food.<sup>14</sup> This matters because the regional food system spans numerous sectors — transportation, air quality, health, land use, infrastructure, etc.

A regional food system approach “would include the development of a food system that includes all of the actors, the technology, and the resources involved in the production-through-the-final-consumption (and waste management) of food.”<sup>15</sup> The goals of this approach are to:

- Enhance residents’ ability to obtain enough healthful food to lead an active, healthy life;
- Support diverse endeavors to produce and provide healthful food products within the region in an efficient and effective manner; and,
- Encourage the production of food that grows well in Greater Des Moines.

The key to reaching these goals in Greater Des Moines is to build upon and use already existing networks and collaborations, such as the one led by the Des Moines Area Religious Council (DMARC).

A regional food system approach would allow the region to become more self-reliant by producing more of its own food. Additionally, this approach could help increase the access of healthy food for regional residents, especially those facing economic challenges. An awareness of one’s connection to food — where it comes from, its nutrient value, and its production process — would benefit Greater Des Moines as a result of this strategy. Furthermore, this approach would help build a sense of community for residents and could help immigrant populations better assimilate into the community.

To move this strategy forward, the region must consider multiple aspects of food production, including scale of production. Is an individual producing just enough food for oneself in his own backyard, or is the production occurring on a much larger scale and aiming for profitability? The distribution of food must be considered as well. Will food from the region be farm to table food, or will the food be exported across the globe? This strategy aims to build upon the solid foundation laid by numerous groups around the region to address these questions.



“As a Midwesterner, I’ve always been proud of our farming heritage. To preserve our crucial role of feeding the world, we need to start by feeding our communities healthy, fresh food... We must take a stand now. We must stand by our values and say that it is unacceptable for anyone in our Iowa family to not have access to healthy, safe food. We must insist that the majority of our food is raised by farmers we know. We must encourage and support the people trying to bring forth the next generation of the American farmer. **We must be the example for the world.** There’s no better place to start than in Greater Des Moines.”

**Katie Ketelsen**

*Better Homes and Gardens Online Garden Editor + Maverly Lands  
Co-owner and Co-founder*

## RE-ENVISIONING LOCAL FOOD

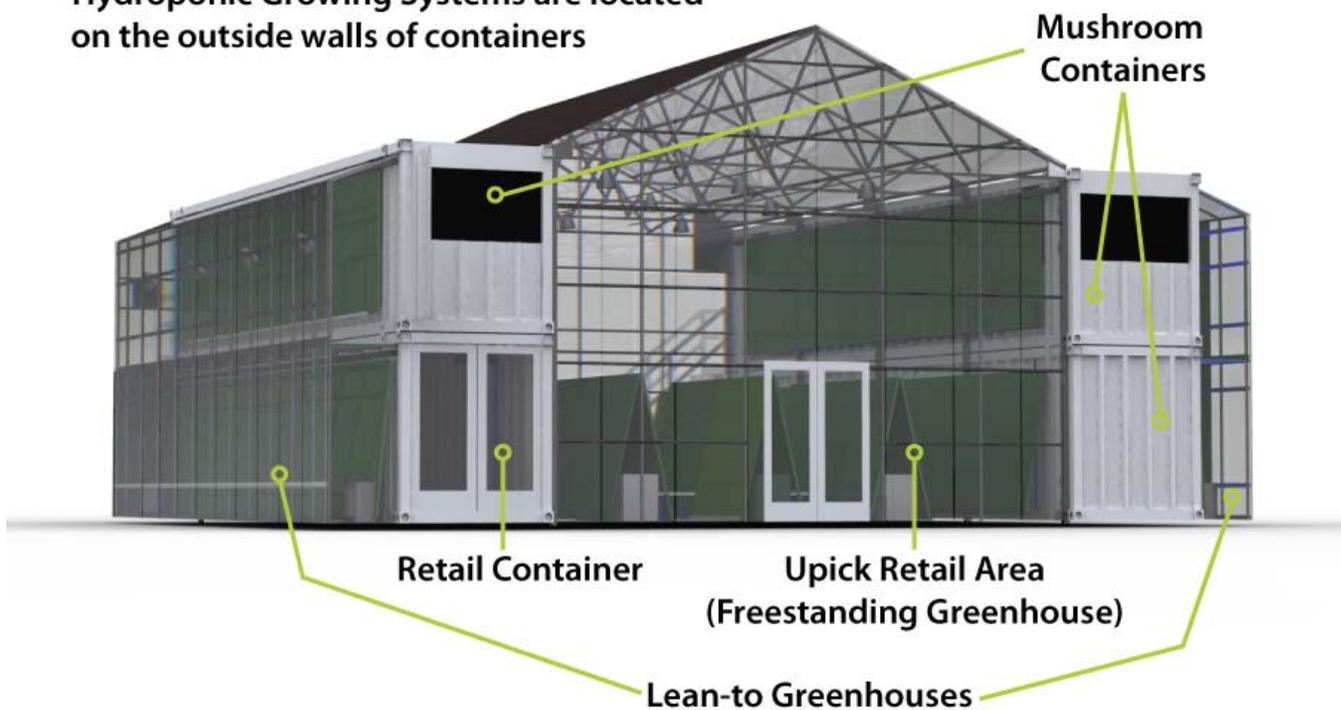
Traditional agricultural practices can pose challenges because of their low profit margins, their environmental degradation, and a disconnect between consumers and food. Raleigh, North Carolina's The Farmery,<sup>16</sup> though, presents a completely new approach to farming: one that looks for interdependence rather than the optimization of individual components.

The Farmery's "integrated retailing and growing system for locally grown food raises the value of the produce through a stimulating retail experience and reduces the costs of the produce by consolidating the entire food distribution system." The Farmery raises the value of its crops by putting the growing process on display, accommodating small hobby and backyard farmers for product diversity, offering fresher food, providing a unique "u-pick" experience, and using organic disease control and nutrients.

The Farmery is constructed of stacked shipping containers and greenhouses oriented to form a vertical farm and u-pick market in an urban neighborhood. The Farmery uses a proprietary growing system to grow edible plants on the sides of the shipping containers, while the interior space of the shipping container is used to cultivate gourmet mushrooms.

Is Greater Des Moines ready to re-envision local food?

**\*Hydroponic Growing Systems are located on the outside walls of containers**



- Work with local experts to understand what food system resources already exist in Greater Des Moines.
- Create a local food system council that markets the regional food system, raises awareness of it, and seeks to grow participation in existing community gardens.
- Create a regional food system clearinghouse that contains a database of where to access food (grocery stores, restaurants, pantries, farmers markets), and a database of food deserts as well as land and facilities that can be used for growing, warehousing, processing, and distributing food. Examples include vacant lots, licensed kitchens that are not used full time, empty warehouses, and companies that currently distribute food and may be interested in collaborating with local growers.
- Create a network of faith-based, school, and community gardens.
- Continue educational efforts related to the regional food system. A hands-on educational program should start in elementary schools. Through school gardens, this program could introduce children to a greater variety of foods and would enable them to understand the food system in a more meaningful way. Adult education programs should focus on growing fruits and vegetables, as well as implementing more sustainable farming practices for both row crops and fruits and vegetables.

- Create a food rescue program throughout Greater Des Moines that includes collections from gardens, restaurants, and events for food bank and pantries.
- Support the development of urban farms in Greater Des Moines as an anchor for the local food movement. Consider vertical growing as part of this step.
- Support the creation of food hubs or other means to aggregate and distribute products. This would support and enhance the competitiveness of locally and regionally grown products.
- Develop the capacity and facilities to support a four-season harvest (year-round growing).

**STRATEGY 3D**  
**POTENTIAL CHAMPIONS:**  
 Eat Greater Des Moines  
 Iowa Department of Public Health  
 Communities  
 Farmers

## EARTH HEROES

Is it possible to influence people’s mindset to the point that convenience comes before health in regards to their food? Absolutely, and the work has already started. Two community organizations are collaborating on their own strategic effort to explore, explain, and celebrate the world of plants with local youth.

The Levitt Boys and Girls Club serves 250 kindergarten through fifth grade children every day. Most youth involved in the program do not have many opportunities to experience truly healthy or nutritious food. Because of the club’s Earth Heroes program, offered each spring and summer at the Des Moines Botanical Center, many of these youth have that chance. They get to plant, grow, harvest, eat, and play with their food. They learn about seeds, soil, sun, and shovels. Participants have even been able to take home fresh produce to their parents and siblings, further promoting healthy foods and the reach of the Earth Heroes program.

One can easily see the program’s influence on youth who beg to take home another batch of potatoes or carrots. One can see it in those who draw pictures of sunflowers or tuck small onions, radishes, or peas in their pockets. Because of their participation in the Earth Heroes program, these youth hold a more realistic understanding of where food comes from and recognize that eating healthy can be both tasteful and fun.

# Strategy 3E ○○○●○

## Encourage and celebrate placemaking and community building opportunities

According to the Project for Public Spaces,<sup>17</sup> placemaking is “a multi-faceted approach to the planning, design, and management of public spaces. Put simply, it involves looking at, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work, and play in a particular space to discover their needs and aspirations. Then, a common vision for that place is created using this information. The vision can evolve quickly into an implementation strategy, beginning with small-scale, do-able improvements that can immediately bring benefits to public spaces and the people who use them. Placemaking capitalizes on a local community’s assets, inspiration, and potential, ultimately creating good public spaces that promote people’s health, happiness, and well-being.”

Not only does placemaking promote health, happiness, and well-being, it promotes economic growth. Over the course of the year, Greater Des Moines witnesses the energy and economic engine that accompanies farmers markets, amphitheaters, art fairs, and music festivals, to name a few. These elements provide evidence of — and create — a thriving region.

Bravo Greater Des Moines’ 2012 economic impact study<sup>18</sup> focuses on 53 arts, culture, and heritage organizations the organization supports financially. The study concluded that central Iowa arts, culture, and heritage organizations contribute \$114.4 million in annual economic output. It also found that these organizations employ over 2,100 Iowans each year and that they generate \$6.64 million in local, state, and regional taxes and charges.

While we begin to recognize the economic value of the arts and placemaking, government support continues to dwindle. The State of Iowa now ranks 40<sup>th</sup> of fifty states in spending for the arts at \$0.37 per capita. This places the state and, thus, Greater Des Moines, at a potential disadvantage when compared to neighboring states; Illinois ranks 29<sup>th</sup>, while Minnesota ranks first in the nation.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the challenges in funding these features, there is no doubt the region has achieved significant success. One cannot look exclusively at government support of the arts and placemaking. Private dollars play a critical role in Greater Des Moines’s art and culture scene, and significant gifts have been part of the region’s cultural vitality for some time. Private contributions of note include the Kruideniers’ catalytic gift for Gray’s Lake and the donation from the Pappajohns that created their namesake sculpture park in downtown Des Moines housing \$40 million worth of art.



Source: Drew Matthew Maifeld



Big Four Classic



I'll Make me a World in Iowa Festival



Living History Farms Race



IMT Marathon



World Food Festival



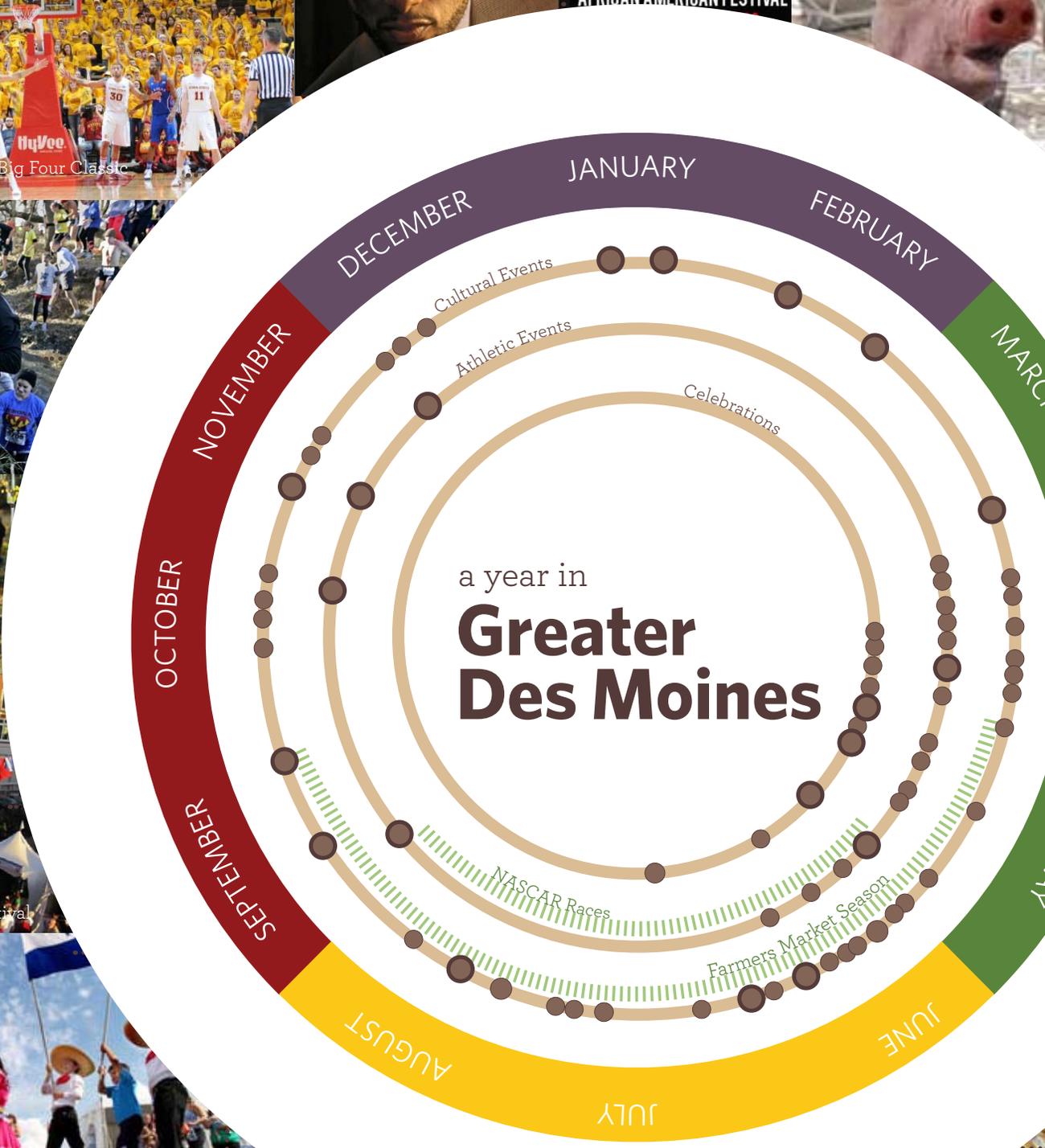
Latino Heritage Festival



Hy-Vee Triathlon



Iowa State Fair



a year in  
**Greater  
 Des Moines**



Blue Ribbon Bacon Festival



Catch Des Moines Release Party



Marketing and Media Panel

CH  
APRIL  
MA



Drake Relays



CelebrAsian Heritage Festival



Mothers Day Tea



Pridefest



Des Moines Art Festival



Juneteenth



Source: Bethany Wilcoxon

## PLACEMAKING BY PLANTING SCULPTURES

Open to visitors since September 2009, the John and Mary Pappajohn Sculpture Park features artwork by 21 of the world's most celebrated artists. The 4.4-acre park, located adjacent to a major crossroads of the urban grid, creates a pedestrian friendly entranceway to downtown Des Moines. This accessible setting, coupled with the skilled landscape design and high caliber of the art, makes it unlike any other sculpture park in the United States. The Pappajohns' contribution of 27 works for the park is the most significant donation of artwork ever made to the Des Moines Art Center.

To continue to set our region apart and ensure that it continues to be a place where people want to live, work, learn, and play, we must continue to value local gathering spaces and events that support arts, culture, and natural heritage, and that build a sense of community. The region should work to embrace the Power of 10 concept.<sup>20</sup> Greater Des Moines already has seventeen interesting communities. Now, we must work to provide great places within these communities that offer at least ten things to do or ten reasons to be there.

### A Juncture for Placemaking

An increasing number of examples demonstrate the placemaking value created by the intersection of people, art, and green space. Just consider the High Trestle Trail Bridge near the study area. It's a remarkable artistic treatment of the fifth largest pedestrian bridge in the nation.<sup>21</sup> The artistic achievement honoring the region's coal mining history brings more than 90,000 annual visitors to the Ankeny-Woodward corridor.<sup>22</sup>

Social gathering places, such as parks, libraries, and community centers, are ideal locales for displaying art and sponsoring lectures and programs on arts, culture, and green space. These places already attract a diverse range of residents, and many libraries and other gathering places around the region exhibit unique architectural qualities. We should leverage these gathering places to continue to grow the sense of community in Greater Des Moines.

Linear art exhibits connected by trail in Clive, the Urbandale Art Park that features interchangeable sculptures, and the Des Moines Social Club's proposed Art Walk are examples of efforts that support convergent placemaking in the region. For our region to continue to set itself apart and to draw top talent and businesses, we must nurture and grow these places where people can interact with art and green space. To get there, Greater Des Moines should:

- Enrich social gathering places, including parks, libraries, and community centers, through the convergence of placemaking, the arts, and conservation.
- Integrate art into streetscape and infrastructure projects.
- Identify "lighter, quicker, cheaper"<sup>23</sup> development strategies to jumpstart placemaking. Examples include temporary use of abandoned buildings for art exhibits or pop-up restaurants.
- Enhance community partnerships to provide support for placemaking and to get projects off the ground.
- Support communities in creating places that are accessible, engaging, comfortable, and sociable.

### Encourage via Education

Greater Des Moines organizations, schools, and libraries already provide educational programming related to the arts and environmental conservation. The Tomorrow Plan seeks

“Placemaking’ is both an overarching idea and a hands-on tool for improving a neighborhood, city, or region. It has the potential to be one of the most transformative ideas of this century.”

Metropolitan Planning Council of Chicago

to work with these groups to provide continued programming that embraces the convergence of these two areas and furthers placemaking and community building.

The GreenArts program offered by the Metro Arts Alliance seeks to increase knowledge of conservation and environmental science using art. Available to central Iowa students in kindergarten through twelfth grade, GreenArts uses a partnership among the Metro Arts Alliance, Polk County Conservation, and the Urban Environmental Partnership, which involves Metro Waste Authority and Des Moines Water Works. Over 400 students participate annually in programs ranging from “Mammals, Myths, and Masks” to “Water in Art.” These programs offer hands-on connections between culture and conservation and have long waiting lists, which speaks to the needs of tomorrow.

Groups like Art Noir, the Des Moines Social Club, and the Des Moines Music Coalition, along with the developing Adopt-A-Stream program, enhance the opportunities for young adults to embrace and engage in the arts and conservation as well. To further support them, Greater Des Moines should:

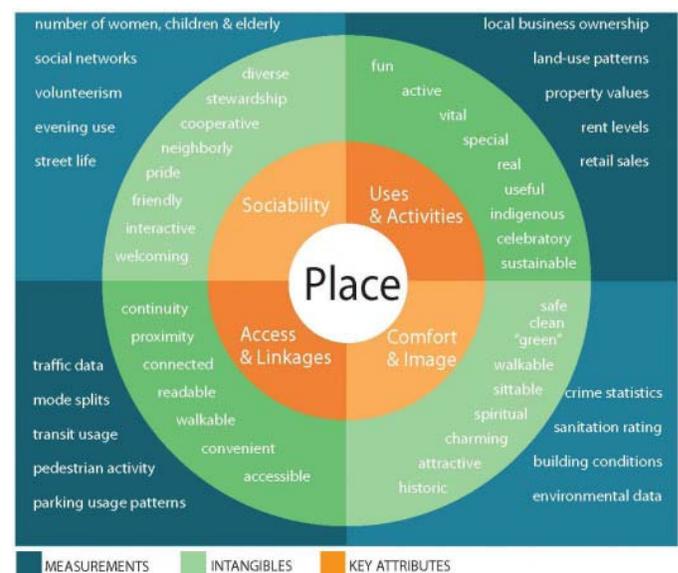
- Identify public-private partnerships between educational resources and industry to expand access to the arts.
- Work with businesses to provide opportunities for students and the public to view private art collections.
- Expand the number and diversity of artists involved in the arts and conservation programs.
- Gather more community partners to further the reach of existing arts and conservation programs.
- Introduce a year-round program that involves temporary art installations and programming at local parks. This could consist of monthly or bimonthly events that bring local, regional, and national artists into Greater Des Moines parks.
- Create a Strategic Wonder and Teaching (SWAT) team that dispatches to rare, short-lived wildlife phenomena in the region, such as seasonal eagle or trumpeter swan gatherings along

rivers. The SWAT team could be equipped with a teaching vehicle setup to display interpretive and educational material and could be staffed with trained representatives from county conservation groups, the DNR, local nature clubs, and other interested stakeholders.

- Leverage input from ArtPlace America, a collaboration of thirteen leading national and regional foundations dedicated to accelerate creative placemaking across the country. Through ArtPlace, creative placemakers are generating ideas and potential resources for arts expansion across the country. Bravo Greater Des Moines is currently working with ArtPlace to garner ideas for the region. Officials expect that these ideas will be available in 2013.

### Grow from the Roots

In addition to the high-level fundraising performed by Bravo Greater Des Moines, our region must provide grassroots support for arts, conservation, placemaking, and community building.



Source: *Project for Public Spaces*

## LIGHTER, QUICKER, CHEAPER

“Lighter, quicker, cheaper” (LQC)<sup>24</sup> describes a local strategy used to produce some of the world’s most successful public spaces. They are projects that are low risk and low cost, and take advantage of creative energy to produce new uses and to generate revenue in transitional places. LQC solutions can relate to basic amenities, public art, events, or light development such as adaptive reuse or temporary structures.



Consider the success of the Detroit SOUP program, a monthly dinner that funds micro-grants for creative projects in Detroit. SOUP<sup>25</sup> is a powerful tool to start conversations, practice democracy, and fund new projects, people, and ideas in a neighborhood, community, or city. Greater Des Moines should:

- Instigate a SOUP program in Greater Des Moines modeled after the Detroit SOUP program as a funding mechanism to support grassroots arts, conservation, placemaking, and community building efforts.
- Develop a mentorship program that pairs established arts organizations with burgeoning studios and artists.
- Expand the focus of the Greater Des Moines Public Art Foundation to be a truly regional group investing in a variety of arts endeavors.
- Explore traditional funding mechanisms, such as the Polk County Water and Land Legacy bond, as tools to further grassroots arts, conservation, placemaking, and community building efforts.
- Develop a local arts incubator.
- Support a framework for connecting and dispersing art, theater, and music districts across the region. The East Village, Art 316, Valley Junction, and the Crane Artist Lofts provide early examples of arts entrepreneurs that have collaborated or congregated. These vital hubs of cultural activity enrich the region and create built-in audiences for larger arts and placemaking events. The region needs more hubs that are accessible to all ethnic and demographic classes from across the region.

### Tactical Urbanism: Short Term Action, Long Term Change

Urban interventions such as guerrilla gardening, pavement to parks, and open streets are quick, often temporary, cheap projects that aim to make a small part of a region more lively or enjoyable. These types of projects have become more widespread in recent years and are collectively known as tactical urbanism — as in tactics used to improve the urban environment.

These tactics tend to be replicable across cities and, in certain instances, have become worldwide phenomena. The goal is not to simply do a cool project but to make something — even temporary — that will change how a place works and is perceived. Tactical urbanism features the following five characteristics:

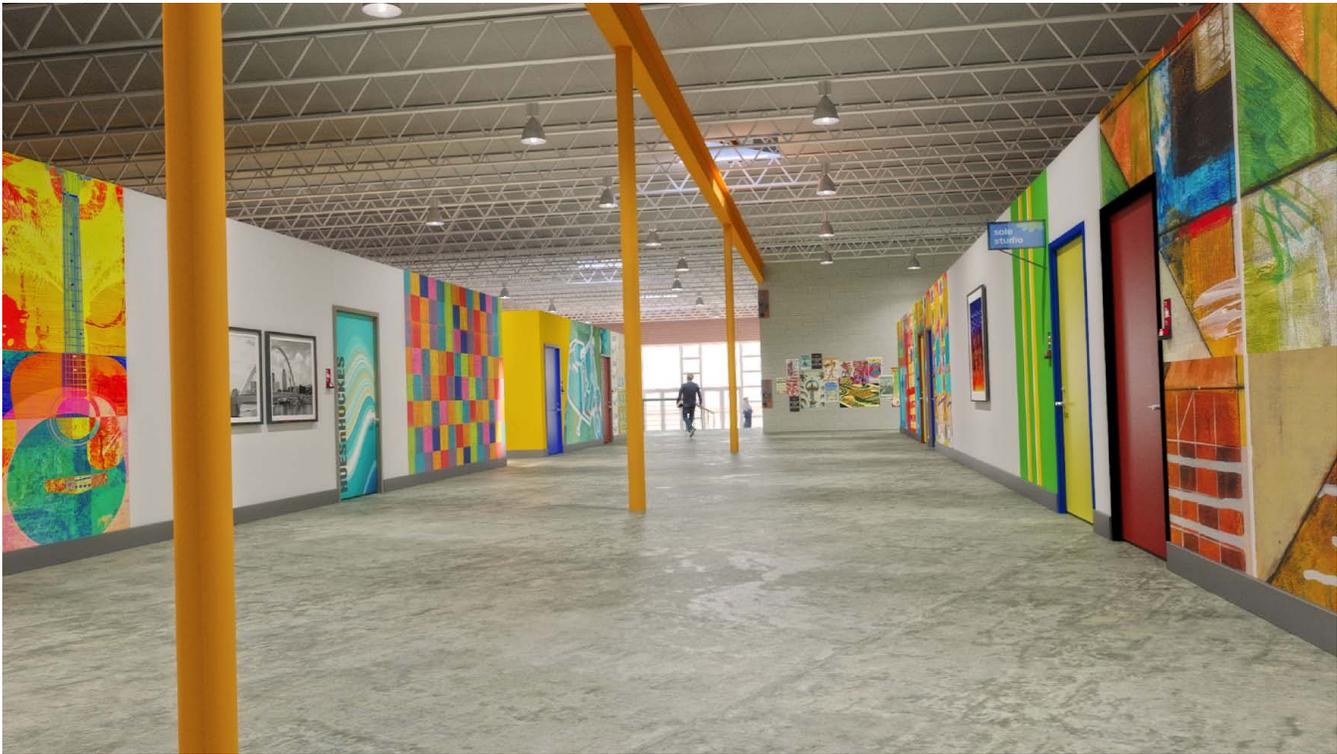
- A deliberate, phased approach to instigating change;
- The offering of local solutions for local planning challenges;

## DESMOINESARTS

The Des Moines Art Center, the Des Moines Arts Festival, and the Pappajohn Sculpture Park are significant attractions that have put Greater Des Moines on the arts map. The next challenge is to turn our attention to promoting local arts. With the local arts scene gaining momentum as downtown has redeveloped over the last decade, the region has a unique opportunity to convert an existing warehouse into a permanently affordable, non-profit space for the local arts. Programming could include non-residential workspace for artist studios, arts-related non-profit office space, galleries and exhibition space, classrooms, a theater, specialty arts spaces, and more. This space can serve as an incubator for local arts and could firmly establish Greater Des Moines as a leading region known for its support of all the arts.

DesMoinesArts has already taken a few taken steps to create this local arts incubator, having already engaged Bravo Greater Des Moines, the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines, arts groups including the Des Moines Social Club, and individual artists. Modeled after the Western Avenue Studios project<sup>26</sup> in Lowell, Massachusetts, the incubator will be one of the largest concentrations of artists working under one roof in the country.

The incubator project has proved demand exists, with nearly 400 local artists registering their support through a demand survey. DesMoinesArts has completed floor plans, renderings, and budgets, and is currently proceeding with a fundraising feasibility study. The project is designed to be financially self-sustaining, with positive annual cash flow that eliminates the need for continuous fundraising and gives the project the financial strength to last.



Source: DesMoinesArts

# OPEN STREETS, OPEN MINDS

Open streets events encompass a variety of activities. Following are just a few examples from around the country. Think about what open streets events could look like in Greater Des Moines.



Source: Flickr/bradleyjohnson



Source: Open Streets Minneapolis



Source: Chicago Loop Alliance



GREATER DES MOINES HAS IMPLEMENTED PARK(ING) DAY STRATEGIES IN THE PAST.  
 Source: RDG Planning and Design

- Short-term commitment and realistic expectations;
- Low risks, with possibly high rewards; and,
- The development of social capital among residents and the building of organizational capacity among public-private institutions, non-profits, and their constituents.

When residents engage directly in creating their immediate environments, even when temporary, it’s both empowering and energizing. Park(ing) Day — a day dedicated to temporarily converting parking spaces to park spaces — is one example of tactical urbanism that has already been explored in Greater Des Moines. A scan around the globe should inspire Greater Des Moines to engage in more tactical urbanism efforts.

Beyond the action steps outlined below, other examples of tactical urbanism include guerilla gardening, park mobiles, yarn bombing, guerilla wayfinding, edible bus stops, weed bombing, camps, ad busting, front yard or street libraries, alley art, pothole gardening, mobile farmers markets on buses, billboards as urban gardens, and projects such as those by Candy Chang.

- Build on previous park(ing) day efforts and expand the event to include all communities in the region.
- Deploy park(ing) day techniques at the parcel or parking lot scale to increase the supply of park space.

- Implement open streets and play streets events around the region. Open streets events temporarily provide safe spaces for walking, biking, skating, and social activities (think of a block party); promote local economic development; and, raise awareness about the detrimental effects of the automobile on urban living. Play streets create public playgrounds within spaces formerly used for the movement and storage of automobiles.
- Promote livable streets and neighborhood vitality through Build a Better Block programs, which encourage community builders and property owners to temporarily activate vacant storefronts and public space.
- Support pop-up retail spaces, restaurants, and cafes through public-private partnerships to promote the temporary use of vacant spaces and parking lanes.
- Reclaim underused asphalt as public space without large capital expenditures through a pavement to plazas initiative, a la Times Square. These interventions begin with the use of temporary, inexpensive materials to reassign excessive motor vehicle space for the use of pedestrians or bicyclists. In New York, injuries to motorists and their passengers declined by 63 percent after these plazas were installed, while pedestrian injuries decreased 35 percent and even as pedestrian volumes increased.<sup>27</sup>

“Arts and culture act as an economic driver for our regional economy in terms of visitors, locals, and those relocating here. More and more visitors are realizing Greater Des Moines has an artful vibe, and because of that, new visitor dollars are coming into our city. Central Iowans benefit from those visitor expenditures and from the arts and culture community in our city. Put simply, our vibrant arts and culture scene makes our city stronger.”<sup>28</sup>

Greg Edwards  
*Greater Des Moines Convention and Visitors  
 Bureau President and CEO*

- Position parklets throughout the region to increase the balance of public space. Parklets typically consist of a platform that sits flush with the sidewalk in place of two or three parking spaces. Parklets help reclaim underused asphalt as public spaces and can serve as laboratories for testing a more permanently designed public space.
- Follow the model of Depave to incrementally reduce stormwater pollution by surgically removing unnecessary pavement around the region. Depave promotes the removal of unnecessary pavement from urban areas to create community green spaces and mitigate stormwater runoff. Through community partnerships and volunteer engagement, Depave strives to overcome the social and environmental impacts of pavement with the use of action-oriented educational events, community stewardship, and advocacy to reconnect people with nature and inspire others. Depave is a nonprofit organization based in Portland, Oregon.
- Update ordinances to allow for food carts and trucks that provide low cost food, incubate small businesses, and activate underused sites.
- Temporarily employ a previously inactive, underused lot to bring a mix of art, food, and retail to a single location. This generates revenue for redevelopment, raises community awareness, builds community, and supports local entrepreneurs.
- Provide spaces for pop-up town halls at which people from many backgrounds can come together to discuss the future of the region. These town halls often benefit from happening simultaneously with conferences or festivals.
- Offer informal bike parking throughout the region.
- Repurpose neighborhood street intersections as community space. Such intersections encourage neighbors to interact with one another and generate a sense of ownership.
- Educate property owners about how to reclaim setbacks and activate the space between the structure and sidewalk to create a more engaging environment.
- Ensure that ordinances allow for mobile vendors, who offer needed commercial services, activate public spaces, and provide opportunities to earn income.

- Promote “micro-mixing” — the co-location of mutually supportive uses — to incubate new businesses and sustain existing entities.
- Nurture an environment that continues to allow artists to flourish.

### **Celebrate Community Character**

Arts, culture, and conservation tend to build the identity of the whole region rather than of individual neighborhoods and communities. Part of the region's strength, though, comes from the unique identity of each community. Each community's special events and traditions create a rich fabric for the region. As a result, Greater Des Moines should:

- Highlight community events, celebrations, and traditions in the community calendar outlined in Strategy 4C.
- Develop an annual regional event that highlights the unique traditions of each community while also recognizing the strength of the region as a region.

#### **STRATEGY 3E POTENTIAL CHAMPIONS:**

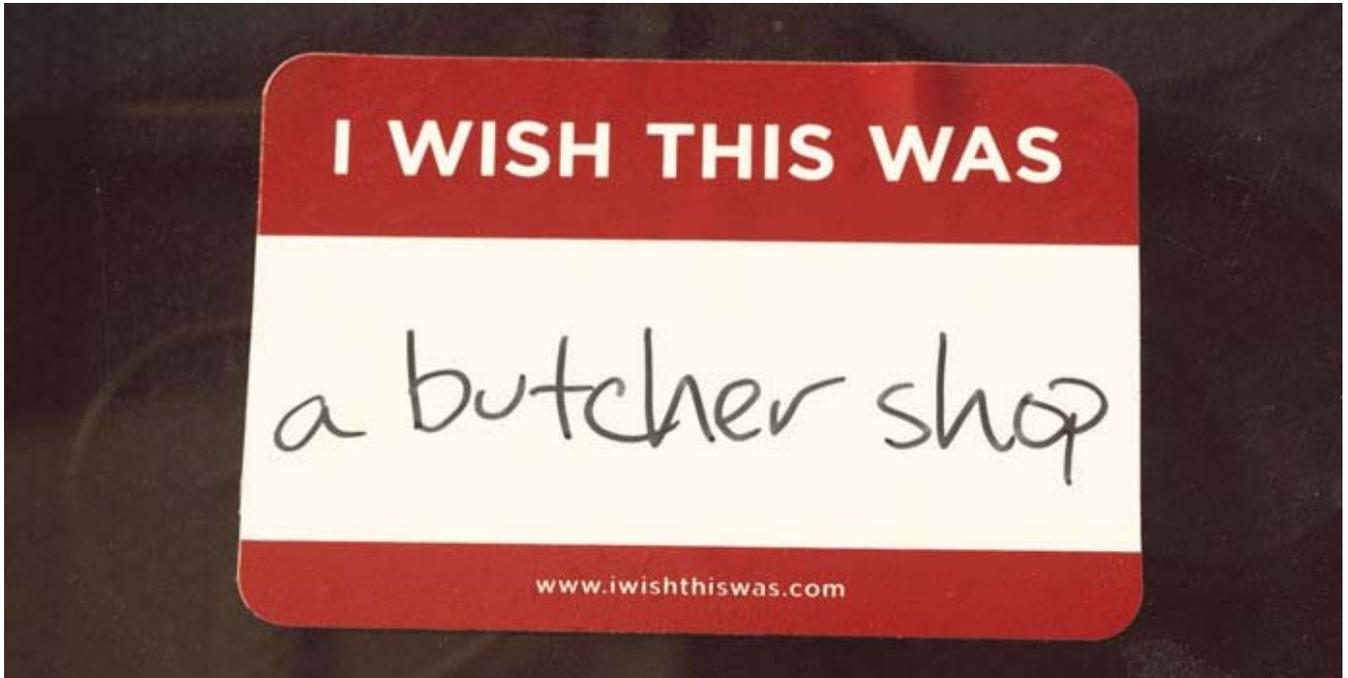
Des Moines Social Club  
 Bravo Greater Des Moines  
 DesMoinesArts  
 Des Moines Art Center  
 Metro Arts Alliance  
 Communities  
 Art Noir  
 Des Moines Music Coalition  
 Metro Waste Authority  
 Greater Des Moines Public Art Foundation

## **BUILD A BETTER BLOCK DALLAS: BEFORE + AFTER<sup>29</sup>**



## AS SWEET AS CANDY

Artist Candy Chang is passionate about public spaces and personal well-being. She unites public art, activism, and introspection. A leader in efforts to improve communities and individuals, her projects include the “Before I die...” installations and the “I wish this was...” onsite civic input effort. Additionally, her work supports the formation of ideas as a community, accessible city regulations, and the promotion of green sidewalks.<sup>30</sup>





# REPURPOSING in the

The City of West Des Moines repurposed the historic 1905 brick storefront that originally housed the Valley Junction Fire Department and City Hall as a community center. The space includes a community welcome center, a multi-purpose classroom, and a meeting room. The city retained historically significant design elements while introducing new technology and mechanical systems.



RIVERPOINT LOFTS

Originally designed in 1902, the Riverpoint Lofts building south of downtown Des Moines was the longtime home of Schmitt and Henry Manufacturing, one of the largest furniture manufacturers in the west. Today, the Riverpoint Lofts function as affordable one- and two-bedroom lofts that use original architectural elements and are located in a walkable neighborhood.



WEST DES MOINES COMMUNITY CENTER

# Region

A nearly \$30 million renovation transformed the century-old Des Moines Public Library Building into the Dr. Norman E. Borlaug World Food Prize Hall of Laureates. The renovation retained and repaired existing finishes to the greatest extent possible, and the building achieved Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum status in 2013.

Open to the public since the spring of 2012, the Hall serves as a world-class museum to recognize great achievements in agriculture and in fighting hunger; as a convocation center at which to hold events during the World Food Prize International Symposium; as a home for the expanding Global Youth Institute; as an educational facility; and, as a conference and meeting space.

## WORLD FOOD PRIZE HALL OF LAUREATES



## NORWALK CITY HALL



In June 2011, the City of Norwalk reopened its renovated city hall. The \$1.6 million renovation and expansion of the existing structure — the former fire station — saved the city millions of dollars in construction costs. Apparatus bays of the original building were converted to office space and city council chambers, and the site was completely reconfigured to provide a significant amount of green space and landscaped areas, providing a more aesthetically pleasing presence.

# Strategy 3F

## **Celebrate the unique heritage and character found throughout the region by promoting historic preservation**

Historic preservation protects our history and sense of place. Once those things are lost, they're lost forever. People are attracted to historic buildings, districts, and places for numerous reasons. One is that the scale is comfortable to humans. Another is that older buildings were designed with consideration to how they interact with their surroundings. Older built structures tend not to have the cookie-cutter designs or vast parking lots around them that much contemporary development does. Additionally, historic structures and districts keep a living record of where we, as a region, have been, and they teach future generations of the region's collective history.

Finally, historic buildings often have high environmental and economic value. The high quality materials often used in historic buildings means they tend to last longer than contemporary structures. These same buildings provide environmental benefits in that they already exist and, therefore, require no new materials or production for construction. They also tend to sit in the center of communities and in close proximity to other functions. In these ways, the most cost-effective and environmentally friendly way to develop is to take advantage of these existing structures rather than to push into greenfield farmland for development. Although not often recognized, rehabilitating existing structures often saves on construction costs, preserves desired open space, and demands less new infrastructure cost outlays than developing untouched farmland does.

As a result, the region should:

- Prioritize development and redevelopment in areas with existing infrastructure.
- Change the public's perception of preservation by conveying the broad scope of what is considered a historical or cultural resource and by communicating how these resources can be identified, protected, and appropriately used.
- Increase partnerships between preservationists and non-traditional partners to broaden the constituency for preservation and to maximize resources.
- Promote historic preservation through the creation of local historic districts and individual landmarks, and through partnerships with property owners, cities and counties, state agencies, and the public.

- Develop incentives for the preservation and repurposing of historic buildings. Repurposing historic buildings maintains an area's character while also reducing environmental degradation.
- Support local communities in incorporating Main Street's four-point approach, as appropriate. The four steps include organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring.<sup>31</sup>
- Offer historic preservation outreach and education, including a Preservation Academy to host lectures, workshops, and events promoting historic preservation around Greater Des Moines. Libraries could serve as partners in furthering this outreach and education through their existing resources.
- Create a regional network of signage and information on historic properties.
- Educate people on the value of the historic tax credits. Across the country, historic tax credit programs help offset the costs of the rehabilitation of buildings. The State Historic Preservation Tax Incentive Program ensures "character-defining features and spaces of buildings are retained and helps revitalize surrounding neighborhoods."<sup>32</sup> Greater Des Moines must work as a region to identify additional incentives for individuals who recycle or repurpose buildings.

**STRATEGY 3F  
POTENTIAL CHAMPIONS:**

Communities  
Iowa Economic Development Authority  
Department of Cultural Affairs



# Strategy 3G ○○●○

## Create Zest

**ZEST** n **1** keen relish; hearty enjoyment; gusto **2** an agreeable or piquant flavor imparted to something **3** anything added to impart flavor, enhance one’s appreciation, etc. **4** piquancy; interest; charm **5** liveliness or energy; animating spirit

Throughout this entire goal of furthering the health and well-being of all residents in the region and throughout the entire plan, there is a desire to build on robust relationships, to celebrate inimitable characteristics, and to shift long-held ideologies about the ways in which Greater Des Moines develops. Simply put, The Tomorrow Plan is about building on synergies of the region and creating zest in Greater Des Moines.

As demonstrated throughout the plan, Greater Des Moines has a solid foundation in place. The region must continue to push the proverbial envelope in order to not only compete in a global marketplace but also to be one of the, if not **the**, top places to live, work, learn, and play. To do so with zest, Greater Des Moines should:

- Identify grassroots advocates for housing, alternative transportation, health, local foods, parks, arts, placemaking, community building, and historic preservation.
- Create and foster Zest, a regional committee bringing together advocates and advisors on housing, alternative transportation, health, local foods, parks, arts, placemaking, community

building, and historic preservation. Zest will reflect and celebrate the diversity of the region.

- Identify regional efforts, such as public arts celebrations, regional relays, restaurant crawls via trails, etc., for Zest to spearhead. These efforts will become signature Zest events that celebrate the seventeen individual communities along with the region in its entirety.
- Create the Best of the Zest - an annual awards program recognizing achievements in creating community and furthering the vitality of Greater Des Moines.

**STRATEGY 3G  
POTENTIAL CHAMPIONS:**

Polk County Housing Trust Fund  
 Eat Greater Des Moines  
 Des Moines Social Club  
 Center on Sustainable Communities

