

Introduction

The Community Matters Program, University of Illinois Extension

Community Matters is an exemplar of the university's mission as a land grant institution and involves an inter-college collaboration between University of Illinois Extension, the Department of Urban and Regional Planning and the Department of Landscape Architecture in the College of Fine and Applied Arts. Community Matters **brings together faculty, staff, community members and student resources** to work with selected communities and neighborhoods throughout Illinois **to address local needs**.

This project utilizes **campus-wide academic excellence and engagement principles** at the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana Campus to **build the capacity of communities** to pursue balanced planning and development.

A critical element in this collaboration is the **opportunity for students to engage in hands-on experience** in communities while working with various University of Illinois faculty, University of Illinois Extension staff, and community leaders. This relationship provides a **unique opportunity for community leaders to gain access to faculty expertise** and student resources in areas which are identified as critical to their future development.

Best Practices Research from Across the Midwest

The recommendations in this document stem from research that was conducted across multiple Midwestern communities between May 2011 and March 2012. These communities were chosen because of their similarity to Monmouth in terms of demographic composition, industry composition and proximity to a college. Interviews were conducted with community leaders to discern how other communities have successfully revitalized their downtowns through public-private collaboration, community engagement and financial incentives from the local, state and federal levels. In November 2011, a business practices and attitudes survey was conducted in Monmouth to determine how business owners perceive the business climate in Monmouth and to determine how best to direct the City's resources toward promoting the downtown.



Map courtesy of Ohaganspencer.com

Zoning & Design Guidelines



Goals

- Preserve historic buildings
- Encourage downtown residential use
- Discourage vacant properties

Potential Strategies

- Create a Historic Preservation Commission
- Adopt “Standards for Rehabilitation” from the Secretary of the Interior or other design standards manual that guides exterior repairs/renovation
- Rezone downtown to encourage mixed or residential use
- Work with Monmouth College to encourage alumni/faculty/upperclass use of downtown residence
- Allocate enough downtown parking to support 2 or fewer parking spaces per residential unit
- Require owners to submit a Vacant Property Plan that outlines how building will be brought up to code within a specified time frame
- Require vacant properties to acquire surety bonds in an amount sufficient to cover demolition
- Establish a list of developers and contractors for RFPs to bring buildings up to code

Key Players

- City of Monmouth
- Building owners

Sustainability & Walkable Urbanism



Goals

- Create more green civic spaces in the downtown
- Improve accessibility and ease of movement for pedestrians and older people
- Encourage sustainable-alternatives in capital improvements and building systems

Potential Strategies

- Increase landscaping and planters along public rights-of-way
- Increase sales and attendance at the Farmers Market to promote a local food economy
- Install street furniture such as benches and tables
- Employ traffic calming devices such as speed tables, raised pedestrian cross-walks or bump-outs
- Widen sidewalks and plant buffer trees to delineate sidewalk and street
- Provide “human scale” lighting fixtures along pedestrian routes
- Install bicycle infrastructure, such as racks and dedicated bike lanes or “sharrows”
- Work with building owners to improve building efficiency using programs like Ameren’s Act on Energy
- For products and services that go out to bid, require consideration of sustainable alternatives
- Provide gap financing so that the more sustainable alternative product/service can be purchased

Key Players

- City of Monmouth
- Business owners
- Building owners
- Ameren

Financial Incentives



Goals

- Promote responsible growth and spending of TIF funds for the downtown
- Provide appropriate loans and grants for business owners and/or building owners
- Develop financial incentives that enhance the arts presence in the downtown

Potential Strategies

- Develop a TIF budget and short and long-term strategies for TIF spending
- Use TIF and Enterprise Zone overlap to generate stronger incentive packages
- Educate building owners about available grant and fund opportunities
- Develop forgivable loan or matching grant programs for non-building owners
- Provide artist-relocation grants to attract artists to live-work spaces
- Consider 'sweat equity' renovation programs that allow artists to buy buildings for a nominal fee conditional on a promise to renovate
- Establish a Special Service Area (SSA) or Business Improvement District (BID) to generate additional equity for capital improvements in the downtown

Key Players

- City of Monmouth
- Building owners
- Financial institutions
- Philanthropic foundations

Business Stewardship



Goals

- Provide technical assistance to businesses on topics like marketing and social media
- Improve relationships and communication with existing businesses
- Attract businesses to fill an arts & culture niche in the downtown

Potential Strategies

- Develop and employ a branding strategy that identifies downtown Monmouth as a cultural niche
- Provide businesses with assistance for developing pro formas and business plans
- Create a social media/e-commerce presence for the downtown and individual businesses
- Improve formal and informal networking opportunities for downtown businesses
- Market in regional and national art publications
- Update and maintain LOIS listings of available properties
- Conduct regularly scheduled retention visits with business owners
- Establish a micro-loan program for regional participation
- Promote work spaces for artists, galleries and entertainment
- Work with Monmouth College to establish a black box theater downtown

Key Players

- City of Monmouth
- Buchanan Center for the Arts
- Chamber of Commerce
- Existing businesses
- Monmouth College