

Downtown Coon Rapids group formed in pursuit of 'Main Street Iowa' designation

Pledges to demonstrate support and funding of Main Street Iowa Program sought

Fifteen volunteers meeting regularly to complete a Main Street Iowa (MSI) application recently formed the Downtown Coon Rapids Group. This group will be the official organization overseeing the development of the MSI application, which is a very competitive and time consuming process with a deadline of June 24, less than six weeks away.

If approved as a Main Street Iowa community, the Coon Rapids group hopes to accomplish what several other area communities (Guthrie Center, Manning, Woodbine, Jefferson) have been able to do with the MSI program — utilize the Main Street approach to reinvigorate their downtown area. The Main Street Iowa programs offers the leaders of its communities a proven common-sense, strategy-driven framework that helps guide downtown revitalization efforts. If selected as a MSI community, the Downtown Coon Rapids Group will receive guidance and technical assistance from the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) to promote downtown, recruit new businesses, strengthen existing businesses, host retail events, rehabilitate building facades and much more.

Pursuing a Main Street Iowa designation was the top choice of city leaders following exhaustive efforts over the past two years to determine local residents' and business owners' top priorities. The designation won't come easily, as only two communities are accepted

into the program every two years. The two 2019 winners will be announced in August.

Community Coordinator Katie Mason has been charged with providing guidance to the Downtown Coon Rapids Group as it gets underway.

New officials for the Downtown Coon Rapids Group were elected on April 16. Bryan Spangler is President while Joe Stitz is Vice President. Secretary and Treasurer are Mary Kennedy and Julie Winnett, respectively. Other members include Michele Acklin, Duane Esdohr, Dan Gudahl, Steve Houpp, Kristin Jackson, Katie Mason, Gayla McCool, Charlie Nixon, Allan Schroeder, Savannah Sease and Quinn Wurzer. Kennedy brings experience from having served on the Main Street Guthrie Center board before moving to Coon Rapids last year.

"We've attended application workshops and visited several other MSI communities in preparation for the application and program. Formalizing our group and electing an executive board was the next step in preparing for the MSI program," said Mason, who said the group is now digging in to complete the MSI application.

The application is broken up into four sections, with each assigned to a task force: support and funding, building fabric, potential and readiness. If any resident of the community feels they can lend their time with any of these tasks, please contact Mason at 712-999-4769.

SUPPORT AND FUNDING. This requires the group to create a budget, collect letters of support

and solicit three-year's worth of funding. The three-year's worth of funding proves to the IEDA that Coon Rapids is committed to this program and demonstrates community support which is a significant factor in being selected for this program.

"Because it is important to generate enough funds to cover our budget needs and equally important to show support, our goal is to have 100 three-year pledges for this program," Mason explained. "Those pledges can range from \$25 to \$10,000 -- every single one is important."

If you want to make a difference in keeping our local community thriving, please make a three-year pledge. At this time, DCRG is only asking for pledges until Coon Rapids is designated a MSI community. Upon acceptance into the program, they will annually invoice you for the amount you pledged. Donations may be tax deductible once a Main Street Coon Rapids non-profit is formed.

Pledge forms can be picked up at several businesses on Main Street, the public library, city clerk's office, CRMU and the community coordinator's office. An online pledge card is also available at www.coon-rapidsiowa.com.

BUILDING FABRIC. This section of the application requires a great deal of research on and mapping of the buildings within the downtown district. Details of all the buildings (commercial and residential) in the district must be collected and photos of the area taken. If you enjoy research or taking photos, this is the task force for you.



A tentative downtown district has been outlined by the DCRG. It stretches from Seventh Avenue to Fourth Avenue and from the railroad tracks north to Park Street with a portion of the residential homes removed. (See photo). Please note this is a tentative boundary and if you have any suggested changes, please let one of the group members know. The purpose of the boundary is to focus the efforts of the MSI program on the primary downtown area.

POTENTIAL. Economic vitality is one focal point of the MSI program. In preparation, the DCRG is collecting and detailing the economic, development and business trends in the downtown district. This includes information on the number of businesses by type, residential demographics, financial institutions, community events, incentives and city ordinances.

READINESS. To be selected as a MSI community, the DCRG is required to have a plan on how the Coon Rapids MSI program would operate. This includes creating

program goals, a nonprofit organization, a board of directors and organizational chart. In addition, they will have to hire a Main Street director.

PRESENTATION. Lastly, a group of community members will need to give a presentation to the IEDA on July 30 in Des Moines. The DCRG needs a diverse group of people (kids, seniors, residents, alumni, businesses, etc.) to attend that presentation in a demonstration of support. It will be a fun collaborative presentation.

"This group of volunteers has been making a lot of progress on the application but we still have a lot of work ahead of us in completing this application and defining the parameters for a Coon Rapids MS program. We are asking others in the community to help us with research and outreach as well as show their support through pledges."

For any questions about the MSI program, suggestions on the plan or to get involved, contact any of the DCRG members.

Coon Rapids group sees how Woodbine has benefited from Main Street Iowa program

Nine members of the Downtown Coon Rapids Group traveled to Woodbine last Friday to learn how the Harrison County community has seen astonishing outcomes through downtown revitalization.

Woodbine is a shining example of a small city (pop. 1459) which has brought new life to its downtown by offering residents new places to live, work and shop. The

Woodbine Main Street program has played a key role throughout, with the Municipal Utilities, Betterment Committee and the school all having instrumental roles.

Downtown Woodbine has seen significant investments in their Main Street property 'stock'. This has included adding a variety of housing to the area, including the development of 30 upper-story

units that has helped to create a 'downtown neighborhood'. Collaborative funding came from the city and private investors along with Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and Main Street Challenge grants through the Iowa Economic Development Authority.

In all, 63 building rehabs have been completed in the downtown,

including building renovations and facade rehabilitations. The Woodbine downtown area has seen a jump in activity, as evidenced by dramatic increases in new business startups, retail sales and assessed property valuations.

Excerpts in these stories were borrowed from stories published in "Cityscape" by the Iowa League of Cities, and the Council Bluffs Nonpareil.

TOWN HALL MEETING MONDAY, MAY 20

The Downtown Coon Rapids Group will host a Town Hall meeting to review plans for a Main Street Iowa program here. The event will be Monday, May 20 at 6:30 pm in the old Napa Store at 510 Main Street. "This is a great opportunity to better understand this program, hear how it will impact the downtown district and learn how the DCRG foresees it operating in Coon Rapids," said CR Community Coordinator Katie Mason.

How Woodbine recovered from its downtown fire

During their tour of Woodbine last Friday, the Coon Rapids group learned how the award-winning Woodbine Main Street group dealt with a devastating 2013 fire. The blaze destroyed all but the front facade of two historic buildings in the Woodbine downtown area. A similar fire scenario played out in Coon Rapids a year ago when fire destroyed all but the facade of the historic IOOF building. But unlike Woodbine's approach, the IOOF building facade here was torn down.

Largely due to the fact that Woodbine had been involved in the Main Street Iowa program for five years before their devastating fire, they were better prepared to deal with the disaster. Their effort began with the idea of saving the building's historic facades.

"We knew we had to save them because that was really a crucial part of getting grants," said Deb Sprecker, Executive Director of the Woodbine Main Street program. Sprecker said she didn't want to think about the hole that would have been left on the block without the effort to rebuild. "Worst-case scenario, both buildings would have been razed and we'd have a vacant lot in downtown," she said. "It would be like missing a front tooth."

The effort to rebuild began in a collaborated effort from the Main Street Woodbine and the Woodbine Betterment after the original building owners chose not to do it themselves. In an effort to save the facades, metal rods and cement braces were put in place and sat along Main Street for more than a year, cutting off sidewalk access in that area.

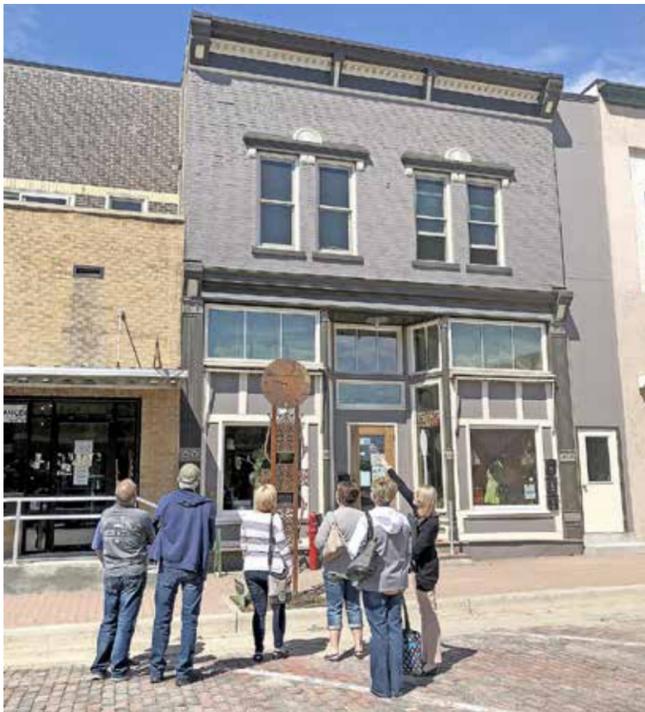
"Patience was definitely a key for

this whole project," Sprecker said.

Sprecker said the project — aided by a Main Street Iowa Challenge Grant, a federal Community Development Block Grant awarded by the Iowa Department of Economic Development Authority and tax-increment financing from the city — is all about moving the community forward.

Today the two historic facades saved after the 2013 fire is another impres-

sive result of what can happen with visionary leadership provided by Main Street Iowa. Once the construction behind the remaining facades was completed, a new downtown art studio, gift and coffee shop called Building Grounds and Heavy Metal Renaissance moved in. In addition, three new upper-story housing units help cash flow the small business downstairs.



Coon Rapids residents listen to Woodbine Main Street director Deb Sprecker explain how they saved the facades on these two downtown buildings



City Police unveil new police unit

Coon Rapids Police Officer Dustin Mason was spotted in the new 'cop truck' this week. The flashy decals on the new vehicle were installed locally by Sara South, dba South Sign Company. The city council approved the purchase of the Ford 2019 F150 from New Way Ford at their January budget workshop meeting. The funds came from the Police Department Equipment Reserve funds. The cost was \$15,135.68 plus the trade-in of the city's 2013 F150.

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