

Review of Example Cities' Downtown Plans

Staff of Olympia's Community Planning and Development Department (CPD) reviewed downtown plans of 14 other cities. The purpose of the review was to identify best practices, or lessons learned, from these cities' experiences. All cities' plans were completed within the past twelve years, providing a picture of short- and medium-term implementation of the plans.

Plans selected were award-winners and/or recommended as high-quality plans by state agency reviewers, professional planning organizations, or peers in the planning profession. They are not necessarily a representative sample of all cities' downtown planning efforts. Five of the plans are from cities in other states, six are Washington cities that are larger and typically have more resources than Olympia, two are similar in size to Olympia, and one is a smaller city. Results of the review are summarized on the following pages.

All plans and implementation strategies were reviewed in detail on the city's websites. Based on that review, three Washington cities' plans (Kent, Bellingham, and Yakima) were selected for interviews with city staff members to get more detailed information on costs, timelines, public participation, and other aspects of the planning process.

Lessons Learned/Best Practices

- Need a clearly-articulated purpose that drives a focused scope and direction (Bothell; Kent; Burien; Yakima)
- Invest in an accurate picture of current conditions and market opportunities (Yakima; Bremerton; Kent; Missoula, MT)
- "District" approach can be helpful for pedestrian-oriented activity areas (Bellingham; Racine, WI; Missoula, MT)
 - Can promote a consistent design or "feel" – creates a "destination"
 - Don't be too prescriptive in defining districts' function– may stifle market response
- City only has direct control in public realm – streetscapes, land use, development and design standards, public placemaking, parking (All examples)
- "Catalyst projects" in public realm alone may not be enough to achieve goals (Burien; Bremerton; Milwaukie, OR)
- Private and non-profit partners are instrumental to success (Walla Walla; Yakima; Bothell; Ventura, CA; Grand Junction, CO)
- Explore all potential tools for implementation (Kent, Bothell, Everett, Bellingham, Walla Walla)
 - Be explicit about city and partner responsibilities, timelines and costs
 - Targeted marketing can be very effective

Downtown Plan Examples – Out of State

Racine WI (2005)

http://www.cityofracine.org/Adopted_City_Plans.aspx

Purpose: Update 1999 DT Plan for large downtown area

Lead: Consultant team

Fundamental Concept: Urban Design focus on districts for core area, greatly increased residential, neighborhood retail and riverfront access

Primary Elements:

Public Realm Framework (addresses city properties and rights of way)

Land Use Framework

Implementation Strategies (27 projects: 18 “catalyst”, 11 “priority”)

Notes: Coordinated with separate parks plan and major street corridor plans. Downtown Development Group was part of Oversight Committee.

Ventura CA (2007)

<http://www.cityofventura.net/cd/planning/citydesign>

Purpose: Update successful 1993 DT plan for large area (514 acres)

Lead: Consultant team

Fundamental Concept: “Art City” and a housing renaissance through “catalytic projects” in “focus areas” (i.e., districts)

Primary Elements:

Goals/Policies (with direct actions tied to each one)

Updated Development Code (FBC)

Streetscape Plan

Parking Management Plan (motto: “Park Once”)

Notes: Sidebars with “Consistency References” to highlight how coordinates with city comp plan and other functional plans, and with state laws. Downtown Redevelopment Agency participation in developing plan.

Milwaukie OR (2013)

<http://www.milwaukieoregon.gov/planning/fresh-look-milwaukie-downtown-road-map>

<http://www.milwaukieoregon.gov/communitydevelopment/south-downtown-concept-plan>

Purpose: “vision check” to update DT Land Use Framework Plan in 1997 for small downtown (approx. 24 square blocks); integrate with South DT plan for future light rail station area in 2011

Lead: PSU grad student consultant team

Fundamental Concept: Urban design concepts to address area divided from river by major thoroughfare and anticipating light rail stop soon

Primary Elements:

Goals/Policies

Small number of essential elements

Major Partners: None listed

Notes: Small effort; a few public workshops; primarily conceptual

Grand Junction CO (2009)

<http://gjcity.org/LongRangePlanning.aspx>

Purpose: Integrate Strategic DT Master Plan completed by DT Development Authority in 2008 with previous City-developed subarea plans for large DT area

Lead: Apparently in-house staff; no consultant team listed

Fundamental concept: comprehensive plan approach for large area of 3 districts

Primary Elements:

Goals/Policies (high-level)

Implementation Strategies for:

- Land use/zoning
- Design/development standards
- Traffic
- Entryways/signage
- Economic development
- Parks
- City-owned properties

Notes: Comprehensive plan-level policies; not strategic in nature. DT Development Authority had completed a previous plan in 2008 and participated in integrating that plan into City's Greater Downtown Plan.

Missoula, MT (2009)

<http://www.missouladowntown.com/about/downtown-master-plan/>

Purpose: Maintain an already vital downtown, especially in face of recession

Lead: Consultant team

Fundamental concept: Link housing, employment and cultural districts to the "retail hot spot"

Primary Elements:

- Retail
- Open Space (including large, existing riverfront park)
- Housing
- Employment
- Cultural/Visitor
- Circulation (Transportation)

Notes: Still have Macy's store downtown despite mall to south; 57 businesses and organizations contributed financially to DT Plan. DT Business Improvement District, DT Parking Commission, DT Redevelopment Agency, Economic Development Council, DT Association all listed as co-developers of the plan.

Downtown Plan Examples – Larger Cities in WA

(* = Conducted phone interview with staff)

Bothell (2010)

<http://www.ci.bothell.wa.us/cityservices/planninganddevelopment/DowntownRevitalizationPlan.ashx?p=1448>

Purpose: Re-position town center to create a downtown around a major crossroads that is being re-aligned by WSDOT; update downtown element of mid-1990's comp plan for large area (529 acres)

Lead: Consultant team

Fundamental Concept: Create and market a downtown brand ("Bothell Landing") that captures pent-up demand from captive audience for "convenience living" created by campuses; emphasize major investment in capital projects

Primary Elements:

- Vision (districts)

- Strategic Actions (capital projects and development standards)

- Branding and Promotion

- Private Sector Coordination

Notes: 4-year planning process; city priority for implementation, including primary emphasis of CFP, separate web page to promote brand and recruit private investment. WSDOT, UW-Bothell, community college partners in development of the plan as major property owners who planned to build new facilities.

*** Bellingham (2014)**

<http://www.cob.org/services/planning/urban-villages/downtown-district.aspx>

Purpose: Update successful 2002 City Center Master Plan for 249-acre downtown

Lead: in-house staff

Fundamental Concept: Comprehensive plan for downtown; goals and policies for each element

Primary Elements:

- Development, Design and Sustainability

- Land Use

- Activities/Tourism

- Parks, Open Space and Placemaking (including "opportunity areas")

- Transportation/Streetscape

Parking
Implementation Strategy (separate document incl. dev regs, design stds,
capital projects)

Notes: includes section highlighting “decade of accomplishments” of 2002 plan;
branded the planning process “my downtown”; heavy on public process through
many tools; maps illustrate different, overlapping districts from past plans; 4-year
process; additional plans for Port Waterfront (planned action) and for Old Town
(both adjacent to Downtown)

***Kent (2013)**

<http://kentwa.gov/content.aspx?id=23718>

Purpose: Updates successful 2002 DT Plan/Planned Action and 2005 DT Strategic
Action Plan for large area (552 acres)

Lead: Consultant team

Fundamental Concept: Start with 8 principles (very high-level – more like “themes”)
vetted through public process; update to a “Vision 2030” for 5 districts;
comprehensive plan approach; adopt updated planned action ordinance (144 acres)
and SEPA infill exemption (408 acres) to promote investment

Primary Elements:

- Existing Conditions (incl. trends and projections; very well done)
- Vision 2030 (districts)
- Goals/Policies/Actions (47 actions – 4 timing phases over 20 years w/
general cost estimates; feed them into CFP and budget)
- Land Use
- Urban Design
- Housing
- Transportation
- Parks
- Environmental Sustainability
- Public Safety
- Utilities
- Economic Development

Notes: 2-year process branded as “venture downtown Kent”; in addition to updated
planned action, adopted infill exemptions to SEPA review – both have similar
thresholds

Everett (2006)

<http://www.everettwa.org/default.aspx?ID=871>

Purpose: Revitalize downtown with housing and regional attractions

Lead: consultant team

Fundamental Concept:

- Regional attractions
- Livable neighborhoods
- Enhanced mixed-use retail and business activity

Primary Elements:

Land Use
Open Space
Transportation
Streetscape
Public Safety
Implementation Action Plan

Notes: Planned Action SEIS completed in 2009

Shoreline (2011)

<http://www.cityofshoreline.com/government/departments/planning-community-development/planning-projects-archive/town-center-subarea-plan-and-development-code>

Purpose: Create a town center along 17-block area of Aurora Avenue

Lead: Apparently in-house; no consultant team listed

Fundamental Concept: Promote desired redevelopment through adopted vision; use variety of public tools to implement

Primary Elements:

Vision (Environment-Economy-Social Equity)
Goals/Policies
Example Illustrations: Streetscapes, Gateways, Redevelopment of Key Sites
Recommended Actions (e.g. FBC, up-front environmental review, design standards, reduced parking standards)

Notes: Also adopted CRA

***Yakima (2013)**

<http://www.yakimawa.gov/services/downtown/>

Purpose: Downtown Master Plan to re-activate retail in long-dormant downtown

Lead: Consultant team

Fundamental Concept: Use game-changer public project (Plaza) and detailed Retail Plan focused on core corridor segment, plus address adjacent corridor segments

Primary Elements: (scope set at beginning of project)

- Retail Plan (Including detailed recruitment strategies and a task force to implement)

- Urban Design

- Public Space and Amenities

- Parking and Transportation

- Development Standards

Notes: Also featured a technical advisory committee. Retail strategy very strong; urban design element takes focus off main corridor. Partners continue to implement under leadership of city economic development coordinator. Large Steering Committee incl. Council ED Committee members and numerous stakeholders groups, e.g. property owners, restaurant/wineries, trolley group, downtown hotels, arts groups, entertainment/theater/festivals

Example Downtown Plans – Comparable-Sized Cities in WA

Bremerton (2007)

<http://www.ci.bremerton.wa.us/display.php?id=972>

Purpose: Activate fairly small waterfront downtown through major projects to take advantage of large amount of pass-through ferry traffic (i.e., make more of a destination)

Lead: in-house staff

Fundamental Concept: Strong analysis of existing conditions and market; address issues through public actions to improve urban design and streetscape; partner with other public entities where possible on catalyst projects

Primary Elements:

- Existing Conditions report
- Urban design strategies and principles
- Streetscape and parking
- Development Standards

Notes: 1-year process; pretty high-level plan; also CRA

Burien (2000 & 2002)

<https://www.burienwa.gov/index.aspx?NID=71>

Purpose: Phase I Concept Framework for an expanded/revitalized town center; Phase II Public/Educational/Cultural focus

Lead: Consultant Team for each phase

Fundamental Concept: public partnership for catalyst project (city hall/library/parking garage mixed use building); increase housing to support revitalized retail

Primary Elements:

- Goals/policies
- Urban design concepts (incl. a town square plaza)

Notes: Catalyst project completed; town square and housing not materialized; small retail fairly strong

Example Downtown Plans – Smaller Cities in WA

Walla Walla (2004)

http://www.wwjcd.org/index.asp?Type=B_LIST&SEC={CAEF7949-14CE-47B5-9544-DE75A571E621}#5E49BF1B-E5E6-4B41-9E08-7867120E3008

Purpose: Re-activate downtown; take advantage of growing wine-tourism and historic buildings

Lead: Consultant team

Fundamental Concept: Comprehensive plan for fairly small downtown

Primary Elements:

Goals/policies (addresses all comprehensive plan elements)

Strategic actions (5 phases of actions over 20 years)

Notes: very broad and comprehensive; very clear implementation matrix for actions. Recommended consideration of CRA. DT Walla Walla Foundation; Housing Authority assisted in development of the plan.