



## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** November 15, 2018

**To:** Amy Miller, Assistant Director of Planning  
City of Lawrence

**From:** Nik Davis, Principal  
Sean Tapia, Associate  
Jackie Wells, Associate

**Re:** **Lawrence Downtown Master Plan  
Project Initiation Memo (D-1)**

SENT VIA EMAIL

This memorandum provides a summary of the meetings conducted on November 1, 2018 with City of Lawrence staff and the Downtown Master Plan Steering Committee as well as the initial thoughts and impressions gathered by the consultant team throughout the kickoff trip.

### **Project Staff Meeting**

On November 1, the Houseal Lavigne consultant team met with Amy Miller, Scott McCullough, and Diane Stoddard from the City. The purpose of this meeting was to review the scope of work, project schedule, next steps, project study area/limit of work, role of the steering committee, and opportunities for community outreach.

Discussion pertaining to the project study area clarified that the boundary detailed in the project contract is meant to act as the outer most limit of work and should provide context to recommendations made in the official Downtown area as established in the City's Comprehensive Plan.

### **Larger Staff Meeting**

After the consultant team met with project staff, it met with a larger group of City staff including representatives from the Municipal Services and Operations Department, Parks and Recreation Department, Communications and Creative Resources Department, and City Manager's Office. The purpose of this meeting was to introduce the consultant team to City staff, discuss the role of each department in the development of the Plan, review the scope of work and project study area, and facilitate a kickoff exercise.

HOUSEAL LAVIGNE  
ASSOCIATES, LLC

CHICAGO, IL  
188 West Randolph Street, Suite 200  
Chicago, Illinois 60601  
(312) 372-1008

www.hlplanning.com  
info@hlplanning.com

The kickoff exercise asked participants to identify issues or concerns they have about the Downtown, priority actions they would take to resolve those issues, and the strengths and assets of the area. The main issues identified include:

- Loss of retail
- Need to update infrastructure
- Lack of parking requirements for multifamily development
- Developer driven growth
- Lack of incentives for historic resources
- Growing homeless population
- Need for a gathering space
- General cleanliness and sense of security

The main actions identified by participants include:

- Create a positive space for economic development
- Maintain air quality and other livability indicators
- Increase opportunities for community interaction
- Eliminate panhandling
- Make the area more walkable
- Improve the streetscape
- Develop parking lots through a City driven RFP process

When asked to enumerate on the strengths and assets of the Downtown, participants mentioned:

- Acts as the heart of the City and a main gathering place for residents
- Developed in a human scale
- Has good landscaping and streetscaping
- Has many historic resources

### **Steering Committee Meeting**

After meeting with the larger staff group, the consultant team met with the project's Steering Committee. The 18-member Downtown Plan Steering Committee (DPSC) was appointed by the City Commission to advise, review, and provide feedback throughout the planning process. The DPSC consists of representatives from surrounding neighborhood associations, Explore Lawrence, Downtown Lawrence Inc, the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce, the Lawrence Cultural Arts Commission, the Historic Resources Commission, an architect, a developer, the Douglas County Planning Commission, the Affordable Housing Advisory Board, and downtown business and property owners. The purpose of this meeting was to introduce the steering committee to the consultant team, review their role in the planning process, review the scope of work and project study area, and facilitate the project kickoff exercise.

Like the kickoff exercise conducted at the larger staff meeting, the exercise asked Steering Committee members to identify issues or concerns they have about the Downtown, priority actions they would take to resolve those issues, and the strengths and assets of the area. The main issues identified by participants include:

- How do we balance preservation and progress?
- Need to reconnect to the river
- Economic viability
- Balance of property values and rental rates
- Maintain downtown character and historic fabric
- Promote better interaction between the downtown and university
- Availability, access, and perception of parking
- Appropriate location and height of new residential development
- Need to address inappropriate behaviors

The main actions identified by DPSC members include:

- Make a 100 percent commitment to renewable energy
- Revise parking cost structure
- Create a city owned storefronts incubator space for low income entrepreneurs
- Build a convention center
- Establish a business(es) that provide basic services
- Finish the Loop trail
- Make cut throughs on every block
- Hire downtown ambassadors for cleanliness and safety
- Redevelop the riverfront mall
- Replace parking meters
- Build bicycle lanes on Massachusetts Street
- Erect wayfinding signage
- Rezone the Downtown to a form-based code
- Increase police presence
- Provide free Wi-Fi throughout Downtown
- Establish a walkability program to encourage, direct, and promote pedestrian activity
- Provide incentives for locally owned businesses to remain Downtown

When asked to enumerate on the strengths and assets of the Downtown, DPSC members mentioned:

- Parks and landscape
- Historic integrity
- Independent destination
- Small town character, metropolitan amenities
- Human scale
- Unique, artistic, quirky
- Tradition
- Friendly and welcoming atmosphere
- Cultural opportunities
- Strength of local business ecosystem
- Family friendly
- Walkable
- Vibrant neighborhoods

### **Initial Project Thoughts**

In addition to meeting with project and City staff and the Steering Committee, the consultant team spent November 1 and 2 conducting initial reconnaissance of the Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. Initial thoughts regarding the Downtown and overall planning process include:

- Streetscape and pedestrian amenities are aging
- Saw-tooth style on-street parking along Massachusetts Street makes navigating the area safely difficult for bicyclists
- There is a disconnect between the Downtown and the river
- Historic buildings concentrated on Massachusetts Street south of 8<sup>th</sup> Street
- Several vacant and under-utilized properties along Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire streets