

# Webster City, Iowa

## Final Report from SaveYour.Town

November 14 to November 20, 2019 I worked in Webster City, Iowa on a contracted Embedded Community Experience. My name is Deb Brown, and I'm the co-founder of SaveYour.Town. An embedded community experience (ECE) is when I come to town and meet as many people as I can, see what you have to offer, stay local and have conversations that move your community forward. This ECE is part of the Facebook Journalism Grant/Lenfest Institute grant given to the Daily Freeman Journal. SaveYour.Town and Legacy Learning Boone River Valley have partnered with the paper on this project.

At SaveYour.Town, we developed the Idea Friendly method for small towns to do big things. There are just 3 parts. You will *Gather Your Crowd* around your big idea, create a powerful network by *Building Connections* and then *Take Small Steps* to achieve the big idea.

In the course of the visit I spoke with government and city officials, entrepreneurs, business owners, students and citizens. I asked all of them "what do you want?" This report will focus on those answers and give stories and suggestions of ideas you can use in Webster City. The most often talked about categories were Community, Activities, Buildings, Food, Health, Housing, Jobs, Parks and Stores.

## COMMUNITY

### ATTITUDE

I want people to see WC for what it is, not what they want it to be  
get rid of passive pissers

### GOVERNMENT

less red tape  
stop relying on government for solutions  
lower property taxes

### POPULATION

increase population by 25% in the next 20 years  
more welcoming to immigrants  
more startups in all kinds of business  
more volunteers

### WORK TOGETHER

market our region  
more team effort  
work together to create more grant funding  
more collaboration between entities  
better ways to share what is going on in town  
more street parties  
more local shoppers  
more voluntary environmental decisions

### NO CARS

no car zone on 2nd street

The above table are the wants people told me about during my stay, related to community. Each section will share what residents want first. Address the attitude of negativity and look at the good things already here. It's too easy to focus on the bad instead of looking at the good and finding ways to fix the bad.

## Government

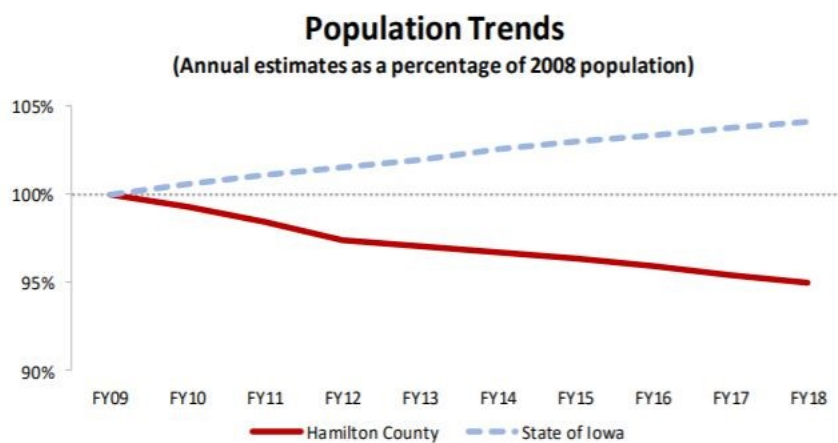
The city is often thought to be the open pockets of town, and it's not true. What if we relied on them less? This would lower the amount of red tape and create small groups of volunteers who are helping their town. Hamilton County Property Taxes are somewhere in the middle in ranking in the state. <http://bit.ly/39ZJQA7> It's a complaint I hear from many small towns. I think the city could do a bit more of talking about the property taxes, and where the money goes.

## Population

Most counties do want to increase the population! How can that be accomplished? One way is to be more welcoming to immigrants. Creating the space for startups and entrepreneurs to work and move here can bring in smart, young people and even some over 50's who are starting a second phase in life. Traditionally we ask our volunteers to serve on committees over a long period of time. We could ask for volunteers by project. I'm more likely to give you 3 hours on a Saturday than I am to sit on a committee.

The Iowa State University released a report, county by county, and ours shows a decrease in population.

- <http://bit.ly/39RmNXY>



Now, not all population decrease is necessarily bad. Ben Winchester, rural sociologist from University of Minnesota, states that:

**There are people choosing to move to your town for what you are today and what you will be — not what you were.**  
— Ben Winchester

## Work Together

People talked about developing a stronger sense of community pride and wanting more involvement in the community. Learning to work together, finding ways to learn about events and activities, marketing our region better, have more street parties like RVTV and Music in the Park all help strengthen the community.

According to Malcolm Gladwell, in [The Tipping Point: How Little Things Make a Difference](#), it only takes a few people to reach the tipping point for change. That is the power of the few. They must have the stickiness factor, what you want (change) must make sense to the people. Sharing the stories of places that have made change, and your stories of small steps shows the power of context.

It's the tiny grain of hope, those stories. You'll reach the positive tipping point in your community by taking small steps.

## What is the Idea Friendly Method?

The Idea Friendly method, developed by Becky McCray, is simple and easy to follow. You *Gather your Crowd* with a big idea. You turn your crowd into a powerful network by *Building Connections*. You and the crowd accomplish the big idea by *Taking Small Steps*.

## How can Webster City use the Idea Friendly Method?

**Start with *Gathering Your Crowd*.** Who is interested in your big idea? Bring them together, not at meetings! But over coffee, or a beer, or in someone's home. Start talking about this Big Idea you have. You start a public discussion about the kind of town you live in. You create the public focal point for the kind of discussion you want to have.

You've recently seen this happen with the controversy over East Twin Park. However, the aftermath has resulted in lots of people wanting to do things and work with formal organizations like Parks and Recreation for the city and Enhance Hamilton County Foundation. I look forward to seeing good things from this.

## Crowd Gathering with Lists

You can begin Gathering Your Crowd by creating lists at List.ly, that way others can join in and help you build the list. It's a great way to find out about things you don't know about!

- Create public lists of your historic assets, tourism ideas, restaurants, etc.
- Use social lists to connect local businesses <http://bit.ly/2sTw6WT>

## Crowd Gathering for Recreation and Activities

- Paint the Street, Arts R Alive Committee, Webster City, Iowa is a great example of letting your crowd in and help with promotion.



Read More: How to build more cooperation in your town

<http://bit.ly/35G2Tf6>

**Next begin *Building Connections*.** Who do you know in the city that would help with your big idea? What group of manufacturers would be willing to be involved? Who are the students that have input? What about your neighbors? You are building your network. When people talk to each other, community happens. In order to make your people even more capable, you connect them with resources and training.

Open networks (more connections) lead to more innovation.

- <http://bit.ly/2QEryMY>

The more diverse a person's social network, the more likely that person is to be innovative.

- <http://bit.ly/307WeJO>

### **Building Connections for Arts and Culture**

ARTesian Gallery and Studio has changed the way that their community looks at art and how they can use it. The photos are courtesy of Fred Schmidt, of FSB architects, engineers, and planners, Principal/Blog Author ARTesian Gallery

- <http://bit.ly/2FBMuhm>

### **Building Connections for Historic and Philanthropic**

Way more detail than you need for organizing a photo walk:

- <http://bit.ly/2uzAmey>

Webster City held an impromptu photo walk with international photojournalist Brendan Hoffman. Just by using Facebook and giving two days' notice, over 20 people came.

### **Building Connections for Recreation and Activities**

How could you bring many people with many interests together? The Bay of Quinte in Canada came up with the Active Community Expo:

- <http://bit.ly/381UVij>
- 

### **Now Take Small Steps.**

What are some meaningful, small steps everyone can take? Share on social media, make flyers, do research, compile the information, speak at Kiwanis and in front of other organizations. Be sure that all the ideas your crowd came up with are tried. There are no bad ideas. Will it be chaotic? You betcha. But in the chaos the magic happens. One idea doesn't reach out to everyone. Many ideas do.

When you start by taking small steps you make it possible for more people to be involved, you cut down the scale of the idea from huge and scary to small and doable. You also make it easier to fail (and learn) at a small scale rather than crash and burn with a huge effort all at once.

### **Small Steps for Business and Entrepreneurship**

Pop-ups during events. Webster City already does this at Ladies Night Out. JunqueFest has some vendors that are new to junquing and are just trying their idea out. Look for them, they are your future entrepreneurs! You could be like Hutchinson, Kansas. They hold a Third Thursday event that involves art, music and shopping. <https://www.facebook.com/ThirdThursdayHutch/>

### **Small Steps for Arts and Culture**

Pop-up Art Galleries.

- You'll have the chance to see Brendan Hoffman's *War in Ukraine* exhibit at the end of January. 620 2<sup>nd</sup> Street is the location and it begins January 20, 2020 and goes through January 26.

- Art on the Walls in Goffstown, New Hampshire – when a building is empty, they swoop in and put art up on the walls.
- Rose Ellis is an artist in Michigan who was given a small space in the front window area to display and sell her art. She said “This is the best business plan I never thought of. It turned my life around.” Not only does she display and sell there, she works there too!

<http://www.roseellis.com/>



### Small Steps for Historic and Philanthropic

Go Mobile. Could you create recordings about some of the historical sites here, post them on a website, and attach a QR code to it? Then put that code by the site and people can listen to the recording on their phone.

Medfield, MA has the Mobile History Project that started because an Eagle Scout needed a project. He worked with the local historical society to create it.

- <http://bit.ly/2T7e4ek>

### ACTIVITY

Adults wanted more of what we have.

#### More, more, more

more activities downtown  
 more arts  
 more entertainments  
 more events in town

#### Like What?

things for adults to do at night  
 family entertainment  
 bowling alley  
 skating rink  
 activities for teens  
 expand recreational  
 opportunities

Many people expressed they'd like to see more to do in town for kids and in the parks. Family friendly activities were wanted as well. I think there's more going on than people realize. Communication becomes a problem!

Begin with having activities around town. Music in the Park, Tractor Pulls, better use of the trails with activities like Color Runs, Trivia Night at local restaurants, food truck days, Art Show on the street, Disco Night at the Park, Kite Flying, and Chili Cook off are just a few ideas. Use the green spaces around town and have fun! Make sure your students know about it as well.

Communication matters. The city has a website that has a calendar on it. What if you just submitted your activity there? Then you and your crowd could share it on social media. That way everyone knows to go to the city page. [www.webstercity.com](http://www.webstercity.com)

The students were a lot more specific!

### **Students Know What They Want**

drive in movies  
arcade, food stand, music, like Fort Frenzy  
Outside things: mini golf, mini racetrack,  
laser tag  
concert venue  
escape rooms  
roller skating  
large entertainment like sky zone or indoor  
sports facility  
ice skating  
bowling alley  
atv riding in county

baseball field  
bigger pool  
go cart track  
gun range in town  
pool at high school  
pool more fun for older kids  
pool, better  
racquetball court  
rebuild racetrack  
trampoline park  
water park

I asked everyone what they wanted, and the students were very specific. I'm glad they were. There's a lot of people now interested in working on our parks. Knowing what the kids in town want is important. This can help give direction to what they could do.

The specific items like escape rooms, atv riding, trampoline park for example are harder to build. They do require money, and a lot of it. How could this become more Idea Friendly? What if you wanted a splash pad? Have you tried the idea out yet in a smaller way? Take a couple of sprinklers, hook them up at East Twin Park, and let kids come down on a hot day and enjoy. You can track how many come.

Ask the parents to come as well. They can visit with each other begin talking about to make this happen in real life. They are the crowd, the connections are those who can help them like the city can help them find the cost to do it, and the small steps could include doing this a few times in the summer. Just get started.

## **Parks**

### **Students**

better bathrooms at Briggs  
better park equipment  
digital interactive signs on trails and  
through town  
fix Kendall Young Park  
more things to do along the trail  
playgrounds, more  
twin parks updated  
upgrade fair grounds

### **Adults**

more parks and trails  
activities around both the trail and rivers  
access to the river  
road to back side of KY Park by White Fox  
improved town parks and Nokomis  
expand bike trails to connect with other regions  
continue parks to people  
more public gardens/parks

I'm particularly excited about the parks. The interest expressed at the City Council meeting, and the people donating to update and/or fix our parks, and the ongoing conversations are encouraging. Some of these things listed above can be handled by the city or county, like better bathrooms at Briggs.

Some of these things are already being worked on and haven't been released to the public yet. Soon!

Many could be done by groups and volunteers on a Saturday like clean up (improve) the parks. Maybe paint fences or add slates to wire fences.



Keep Iowa Beautiful has a grant with requests due February 14

- <http://bit.ly/2R5coiT>

Castle Rock, Washington takes their chain link fence beautification efforts seriously!

- <http://bit.ly/2QEwtxC>

More public gardens already have a starting point. The Community Gardens at ACE! Where else could flowers be planted? Look at what Henrietta, Texas did with their ditches. The orange flowers above are local flowers and beautiful!

What if we used that idea in empty lots until the lots are filled with something else? I think the Department of Natural Resources would work with us to get seeds for wildflowers.

The Parks to People: Boone Forks Region is turning into a reality. They've been working on this project for a number of years, and it's a brilliant move for all three counties to come together. Brian Lammers with County Conservation working with Webster and Boone Counties to create this project. Please be sure to contact him for more information and how you can help.

Here is their Master Plan:

<http://bit.ly/2QV5goY>

## Stores and Buildings

### Kinds of stores

Ben Franklin /variety kind of store

Big Box Store

store to buy toilet paper and paper towels/all-purpose items

copier shop

drive in

men's clothing store

new Dollar General Store

Bass Pro

self-care possibilities for a store

store to buy socks and underwear

shoe store

art museum

workspace

food coop

clothing store

comic bookstore

gas station

gluten free shops

Goodwill

grocery store Asian

ice cream shop

improv theater

mechanic, better

pet shop

plus size stores

shaved ice

sporting goods store

technology store

### Work to be done

more buildings filled

finish depot area

community conversations on rehabbing older buildings

more facade work downtown

no more derelict properties

Webster City has lost some businesses in the last ten years. A big chunk happened when The Factory left town. Yet even more has left in the past few years. First, businesses come and go all the time. It's like breathing: in.. and out... in and out. The secret is to begin creating the process of bringing new businesses to town or finding the entrepreneurs who are here now. This is not a fast project, but it is a lasting project.

Start in the schools. Get them involved in the community. Build benches, create art, plant gardens – there are many ways to do this. Also, internships at local businesses so they can learn if the kind of work they want to do is even a good idea. It can also connect them with mentors. Give them the opportunity to create their own small business, perhaps as a class. Where they will learn how to do business and run a successful business. You will be filling your pipeline with possible entrepreneurs. And this does a great job of connecting you to the town, so they want to come back after further education.

Some of the kind of stores listed probably won't come here, like a Bass Pro. But look at Bomgaar's – they have more things than you know. You can also bring your dog into the store with you! True Value also has a large selection of items as well.



Your town's future is being decided by the actions taken every day by all the people in your town based on what they believe about your town's future and their role in it. You've never been more important, or in a better position to make change possible for you, and for your town.

Carol Coletta, The Knight Foundation

### Why not start a Didcha Know Campaign?

Imagine going around to local businesses, finding something you didn't know they had, and posting photos of that online. If you didn't know they have it, others don't know either! You can start this project with just you! You can go take pictures and post them. You'll be leading the way to new cooperation, gathering your crowd and building connections with people even as you're taking small steps.

Why it works:

- you're helping people find out about things they didn't know they could buy or support in town. Trust me, lots of people have no idea what's available!
- This builds on your existing networks, and the networks of all your crowd members who participate.
- And it's so easy to do! Just simple online posts, photos and a few words.
- A bonus is that you'll build connections with local store owners and other partners. Community happens when people talk to each other, even when they're there to take photos to post online.

Examples:

- Becky did this for Shop Small Saturday in her town. And she found something surprising in every single store she visited.
- The Waynoka, Oklahoma, Chamber of Commerce has "Where is it in Waynoka Wednesdays." They post a few photos of a local business, featuring things people might not know they have. For the grocery store, they posted pictures of the gift wrap, the tools, markers and pens, auto supplies like oil... you get the idea!
- It doesn't have to be just your retail stores. Think about how your hospital could partner with you. Or your insurance agencies. This is an opportunity to have your businesses collaborate and really inform your community of what they might be missing.

### How can you fill the empty buildings downtown?

Fill the empty buildings and add more retail, which will allow for more local shopping. Make the town buildings look more attractive, even if they are empty. That includes removing old signs from buildings. It means adding color and vibrancy to your buildings. Can you help building owners make repairs? Continue to work on building connections with the city, what kind of grants do they know about? Visit other cities who have been successful, find out how they did it.



Your downtown is the one area of town people think of when they think of their hometown.

**Expecting a city to function without a downtown is like building a home with only bedrooms; yes, you can reside there, but you cannot LIVE there.**

**Jeff Siegler**

### Host an Empty Buildings Tour...Again

You've got empty buildings, and not just in the downtown area. You could host a **Tour of Empty Buildings**. It's simple to do. Get the owners and/or the realtors to agree to be onsite for the tour. Have a local person share during the tour what used to be there and maybe what could be there. Then you invite everyone you know. In fact, this is an event you could do county wide.

We did that in 2013. There were 12 buildings on the tour, and 10 were filled within 18 months. It's time to do it again!

Natchez, MS partnered with local artists and creative entrepreneurs to showcase some of their work in the empty buildings. It gives the viewer an opportunity to see just what might be possible.

- <http://bit.ly/2FCbN2G>

Need ideas for types of businesses that could be possible? This report shares stories and case studies.

- <http://bit.ly/2tNAaYt>

### Consider dividing the space up – Shared Spaces



#### Shared Spaces

The Idea Friendly way helps us achieve our big idea by taking small steps. Shared Spaces is one way to do that.

Washington, Iowa took a 15,000 square foot empty building and converted into a lot of small spaces from different businesses. The Christmas tree in this picture is a shared space. That's an idea of a tiny space. The clothing on the left is a larger space.

<https://www.thevillagewashingtonia.com/>

### Take the power to negotiate

Take negotiation authority into your own hands. Julie Worley took rent negotiation authority from building owners, and she filled buildings. She shared her story with SaveYour.Town.

"I worked for ten years as a rural economic developer in Rocky Ford, Colorado – population 3,200. I inventoried the many vacant buildings, and I called all the owners of the vacant buildings in town and

asked to [personally] tour their building. I wanted to know everything about the building and what kind of rent they were asking of a tenant.

Following the tour, and the declaration of what they wanted for rent, I would pointedly say to the building owner: *"I will get a renter for your building – but only if you will give me the authority to negotiate the rent."* You can imagine the looks I got! But I had one building owner – an out-of-town landlord who really didn't want to be in Rocky Ford, but who wanted his building rented – took me up on my offer. *"You go for it, Julie."* – he said to me. He had a building with four storefronts along Hwy. 50 and Main Street in Rocky Ford – it was a PRIME place for businesses.

I had my assignment and I was on a mission! And I got it done – but it did take almost a year to do it.

- 1st Storefront: Empty and the owner was asking \$450/rent: I worked with a young gal who had been raised in Rocky Ford and had always "dreamed" of opening a coffee shop on the corner of Hwy. 50 and Main Street. She needed to do several thousand dollars of plumbing to the building to accommodate the big coffee machine. I negotiated with her to pay rent at \$100 month – and credited the other \$350/rent she was to pay against the plumbing repair expenses until she had recovered those expenses, and she paid only \$100 month for almost 18 months. But what that did for an entrepreneur/new businessperson was allow her to get her business up and running – and the coffee shop has now sold and continues to operate on the corner of Main Street and Hwy. 50. She paid her own utilities.

-2nd Storefront: It was already occupied by a beauty shop who paid \$225/month: I visited with the beautician to determine if there was anything that needed to be done to her site to improve it – and she needed some repairs to her water pressure and to the façade of the building. I negotiated with her to reduce her rent to \$175 for a year – and the building owner was to fix the water problem and paint the front. She was a "happy camper" – her water pressure increased, and she got a new paint job on the front! The beautician is still "cutting and twisting hair" at this location. She, too, pays her own utilities.

- 3rd Storefront: Empty and the owner was asking \$300/rent: This storefront was the most difficult to fill. It was configured in a strange way; it really wasn't big enough for retail; and yet almost too small for a two-person office. But I worked and worked and finally got a radio station to locate in the building – the station was remotely operated, so there wasn't a "human" radio guy in there all the time. They paid \$150/rent, plus their utilities – and were pleased. They were in business about 18 months – the space is vacant now.

-4th Storefront: Empty and the owner was asking \$200/rent: This accomplishment – and the coffee shop – were the most fun of this project! There was a gal who wanted to open a thread shop, i.e. yarns, threads, knitting supplies – but she had NO money; no family support; no nothing – just the idea. The space was not more than 150 square feet – teeny-tiny. She went in and painted and made curtains and hung flowers and flags outside the door – and paid \$50/rent (because there was no meter in this space – her utilities were absorbed by the other three meters) – and when she finished, she had a thread shop that looked like something you would find in Aspen or Vail. She stocked an unusual brand of yarn, and her shop was the only place between Colorado Springs and the Kansas line that you could get it – people were coming from miles away to get the yarn – and she didn't even know she had done that until she was open. She just liked the brand of yarn to knit with for her own pieces. She was open for about a year – and then personal and family circumstances forced her to close. The space is occupied now by a local realtor.

So to make a long story short – because I could negotiate the rent and knew what the prospective business owners could pay and still be able to keep their doors open – I was able to fill the storefronts in a prominent building and the town was excited.

I had a couple of “takers” and I filled their buildings too. In the course of my ten years in Rocky Ford, I helped 17 “Mom and Pop” businesses open.”

## **Create Empty Building Codes that Work**

We heard about the concern over empty buildings. Several small towns use a Vacant Property Register to keep track of the empty buildings. It also gives notice to the owners that the community expects the buildings to be filled in a reasonable time frame. Much of this information also relates to residential areas as well.

- Vacant property register - <http://bit.ly/30c3GDx>
- Strong Towns shares 8 ways your town can add more housing without spending a dime. <http://bit.ly/2Ta5xr8>

## **You already have a code**

David Toyer, former economic development director, shared this note:

“One of the items I brought to the City when I was advising them in 2010-11 was called a “Vacant and Abandoned Property” ordinance - to avoid situations of building disinvestment that and the reliance upon traditional chronic nuisance ordinance that jurisdictions typically have in code. The goal (besides anticipating the challenges that could have come from a massive vacant Electrolux facility alongside a rail line, including fire protection, vandalism, etc.) was that the City needed a mechanism to engage property owners before buildings become vacant to insure there are certain protections in place for the community. It was also aimed at trying to encourage owners to more aggressively seek re-occupancy of vacant and under-invested in buildings to avoid their depreciation in assessed valuation.

This was also considered to be important to avoid situations where the vacancy wasn't thought about until after a bankruptcy, tax sale, etc. resulted in the property/building being owned by an out of area corporation or REIT within a portfolio of purchased properties that aren't filled. The ordinance requires that the owner(s) of the property meet with the city not later than 90 days before vacancy/abandonment, submit a “physical maintenance and security plan” for approval, and provide the City with a financial security upfront (to prevent against situations where the City has to step in and abate a nuisance, lien the property and hope it sells someday to get the taxpayers repaid).

I'm not sure since the Electrolux days that the City has used this tool, but it applies to the C2, C3, M1 and M2 districts (lots or buildings greater than 7,500 square feet), as well as any building greater than 7,500 square feet, which the DG building measures around 17,000 square feet. The section of code you should check out is in Chapter 10, Article VI (Sections 10-268 through 10-290. It may be something the community wants to revisit and look at going forward.”

**Your city codes could also be adjusted for adaptive reuse of empty buildings.** This article lays out the problem and solution.

- <http://bit.ly/2FCixhe>

Another article shares stories of other communities

- <http://bit.ly/2QC3SZI>

Here are a few examples of changed city codes:

- <http://bit.ly/2sTtyrN>

### Add Color Downtown

Why not a lighted bike path like they did in Poland? Using phosphor and recharged daily by the sun. Where could you do this? Trails? Parks? Downtown? The possibilities exist.

- <http://bit.ly/2T8clFy>

You could add plants and flowers to some of the downtown windows. What if you added more along the street? Some could be big pots by the curb, some could be actual window flowerpots. But don't make the city responsible for the flowers. Let people and groups and businesses sign up to responsible for one pot. Then encourage them to plant lots of colorful plants. Not just flowers either – what about some tomato plants? Or other garden items?



Saginaw, Texas is adding more public art around town. First, they painted a Texas flag on a grain elevator. They painted on storm sewers and manholes in the park. Then they added this mural to an empty building.



**“I prefer living in color.” – David Hockney**

## Try something different

Webster City has begun the process of using artists. It's much commented upon and makes our downtown look better. Art on the walls doesn't have to be only historical. This is an empty business in Hollis, Oklahoma. Doesn't it look like a barber shop? Nope, it's banners on the windows, even the barber pole.

### A Ninja Project

Washing windows and trimming the grass in an empty lot, helps make the town look a bit brighter. How could your church groups get involved in this kind of project?

- <http://bit.ly/2tNfWOU>



**I can't change history; I don't want to change history. I can only change the future. I'm working on that. Boris Becker**

### Talk to each other!

Find ways to get together and share what is happening in your town. Meet regularly, share marketing ideas and money for marketing. Be friendly and not competitive. Did you know if you have three similar stores in town, you become a destination? Work on once again becoming a destination.

### Is Retail Dead?

Some people believe that retail, at least the old way of retail, is on the way out. With the advent of Amazon and online shopping, they believe it's killing their business. The numbers for online shopping for our County are 9%. Not as bad as people think. I think retail is NOT dead, but it does need to be revamped. Start with the stores you have, and perhaps organize them into a Specialty Stores market. It can include both retail and restaurants.

**Start by making shopping at your store more of an experience.** Give customers a lounge area, just a few chairs and phone charging station will do. Perhaps serve tea or coffee. Hungry shoppers are grumpy shoppers, how about some light treats? Those are simple things each store can do!

One complaint I hear often is **that stores don't stay open late enough** for working people to shop. Limited business hours lead the list. I get it, you own a store and you want to spend time with your family too. What we know, though, is that 70% of shopping occurs after 6 pm, and the best money-making times for retail are on the weekends.

- <http://bit.ly/39QQ3yd>
- <http://bit.ly/361JlrW>
- <http://bit.ly/304Edvl>

### **Create events people want to come to.**

Try things out! Why not expand to include the entire county? What recreational resources do we have countywide? Include canoeing and kayaking and water sports. Disc golf is a big winner these days. Where are the running and walking trails? These recreational activities will bring people to the area year round.

Cheyenne McGriff from Wall, SD and her team created the Wall Crawl and Poker Run. No one had done it before. The Committee of Negativity weighed in with 'it will never work' and 'we've never done that before.' They ignored them and just did it! Here's their story:

- <http://bit.ly/2t16mrm/>

### **Marketing for stores**

**Let's talk marketing.** Marketing is a big part of encouraging your locals to support you. They need to find you, like the things you're doing and then support you. Your visitors and tourists also need to find you! Marketing will help make your downtown a destination and encourage more tourism.

First, **make sure your businesses are registered with Google.** <https://www.google.com/business/> Then talk to your SBDC folks, they do trainings on how to register your business and will come to your community. People use their cell phones to find your business, or a business like it. If you're registered with Google, you show up on the first page in the upper right-hand corner of the Google search engine. Free.

Next **let's look at how your windows look.** Are they inviting? Do you change them out at least once a month (twice would be better)? You have many vehicles that go through your downtown, are you appealing to them?

Even if you don't have a retail business, you can still change out the windows and promote other places in town. Invite a local non-profit to decorate! Maybe even create a schedule for all the nonprofits to decorate your windows.

- <http://bit.ly/2Nc5K9v>
- <http://bit.ly/30dmkeo>
- 

**Signage on your stores is important** too, it's some of your best marketing. For people walking around town, vinyl letters at eye level work. For people driving, blade signs that say what kind of business you have are good. Here's some great advice from Glen Muske:

- <http://bit.ly/35Erq48>

**Make video.** That's right take your smart phone and shoot video. Talk to us about your products. Show us your employees. Tell us a story. People are curious and want to see more of you. Make them short – under a minute works. I'd love to see a video about how the library is celebrating 100 years. Or perhaps instructional video on how to make the best omelet. Invite locals to come and shoot Facebook Live videos at your event, like Legacy Learning Boone River Valley did.

- <http://bit.ly/36GjQaz>

## HEALTH CARE

better health coverage  
childcare for all shifts  
mental health for all ages  
more doctors

### Childcare for all shifts

This is a tough one – the day cares are already full, and many are not for night shift or 2<sup>nd</sup> shift. What are some ideas that are out of box? Could the nursing homes think about helping? What about the hospital?

McKinley Bailey with Building Families is working on this challenge too. If individuals live in Hamilton, Humboldt or Wright counties, Building Families have startup money available to help start registered, in-home childcare businesses! They can contact McKinley Bailey at 516-602-6371 ext. 1 or mbailey@co.wright.ia.us for details.

Pierce County Nebraska has added the below 4 answers to their program. They have a 7200 population in entire county. Mr. Bailey has started the process; how could we help? Reach out to Pierce County and see how they got started!

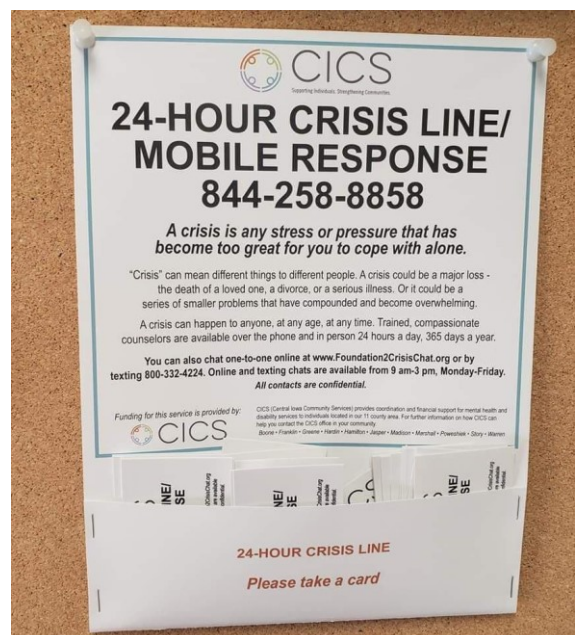
- 1.) Employers that have 2nd shift providing on-site day care for employees
- 2.) City/Economic development office offering mini grants to new in-home day-care providers as an incentive. \$2k grant to get daycare business started. More given quarterly to stay in business.
- 3.) Work with area churches to offer daycare program. Many churches have classrooms, kitchens and large fellowship halls utilized only on Sundays, Wednesday evenings or for funerals.
- 4.) Utilize investment or economic development group to purchase a home or building and offer low rent/lease to incubate a new daycare owner for 1-3 years in the space

### Mental Health Care

- <http://www.communitylinksforfamilies.org>

The Community Links for Families is a service provided by Building Families with funding from the Hamilton, Humboldt and Wright Recategorization Board. Individuals can always reach out to Building Families to help be connected to resources too. Their number is 515.602.6371 x1. The resources in this document cover many different categories of items families need like counseling, early childhood education, senior services, special needs, health and more.

We are fortunate in Hamilton County; mental health care is relatively available here. Berryhill Mental Health and YSS have the two school mental health contracts. They have services available. Van Diest Medical Center also has staff available for Mental Health. There is a Mental Health Learning Community Meeting that takes place every month in Webster City. CICS (Central Iowa Community Services) helps to coordinate that. Patti





Treibel-Leeds is the contact, at the Social Services office. CICS is a resource available in 11 Counties. Whether it's access to a 24-Hour crisis line, the Warm Line, transitional living centers, or other services, @CICS crisis services are available to individuals when any stress or pressure becomes too great for them to handle. They have a Facebook Page, and a website.

## More Doctors

Working with the local providers and hospital to see if they've begun some of the ideas below is a good starting point.

- subsidizing medical school for those willing to go into primary care and practice in rural areas could be beneficial.
- Targeted recruitment programs that reach out to students in rural areas as early as high school, should also be considered.
- The addition of rural residency programs, where doctors can be trained in rural hospitals or other rural care settings, should be a vital part of this effort.
- Add the opportunity for telehealth technologies to provide additional support and expand healthcare access for underserved rural communities, at least for diagnostic purposes.

## HOUSING

Our housing market is low. We need all types of housing. Webster City's household income distribution reflects a population that, on average, is slightly less well-off than that of Iowa as a whole. Just over one-third of the City's households, earn less than \$25,000 annually. But what can we do to create more affordable housing? What about a tiny house community? This house is made in York, NE by Champion home builders and is also movable.



### Why not start an investors club and buy one house or building?

Fix it up, and sell it a reasonable price? This is a great way for your affluent residents to help create a town people want to live in. PeerFinance addresses this idea with a lot of information to pursue.

- <https://peerfinance101.com/real-estate-investment-group/>

### Middle Housing

In smaller towns, middle housing is the key to affordable rentals. Duplexes, triplexes and quads are solutions we could add to our neighborhoods.

- <http://bit.ly/2FwDYjJ>

Read the Housing Assessment and Strategy done for the City of Webster City by RDG Planning and Design

- [https://webstercity.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/WebsterCity\\_HousingPlan2013-1.pdf](https://webstercity.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/WebsterCity_HousingPlan2013-1.pdf)

## FOOD

fast food

bakery

breakfast food restaurant

restaurants

farmers market longer hours

healthy food options

smoothie store

tropical snow



### Fast Food

This suggestion led the pack. Why aren't we trying food trucks? We could do Food Truck Friday on the first Friday of the month – invite food trucks from surrounding areas to come to town. Local restaurants worry about food trucks taking business, but they often see more business! People want to come out, but not everyone eats at the food truck. Lines, kids, not their kind of food ... this is a food truck park in Klamath Oregon.

### Bakery

There's a new bakery in town! I spoke to the owner and she's shooting for January 2020 to be open. What is a small step that could be taken to add more options? What if some of our fabulous cooks got together and offered cupcakes and pies one day a week here?

Did you know we have a donut shop coming? Where the old laundromat downtown was in the 700 block. Pete and Rebecca are working on it. Maybe we can get together like ninjas and go help them!

### Breakfast Food Restaurant

The key word in this section is variety. Right now, there's HyVee and Coney's. What other kind of breakfast options are there? How could this be spiced up? Iglesias de Dios has done breakfast burritos on Fridays. They will resume when all their paperwork is completed. They are also interested in using their commercial kitchen in other ways. What could be done with the commercial kitchen at ACE? Are there other options out there, and we just don't hear about it? There's a new bakery in town – will they be doing breakfast? Mornin Glory has quiche too.

### Brainstorm

With two commercial kitchens, at least, why not gather your crowd and see what kind of magic you could make? What does it take to start a Tropical Snow? Who knows all the food regulations? What kind of food is missing in our community? Our community is on fire right now with ideas. This is a great time to get together and talk about the possibilities.

## Ideas to Steal

Why not cover up the windows with some art? You could even paint the sides of buildings too!

- <http://bit.ly/2uzvuWO>

Other Resources:

- <http://bit.ly/3068WZd> for paint from Pittsburgh Paints.
- Keep American Beautiful has several grant opportunities: <https://www.kab.org/resources/community-grants>
- Feed a bee: <http://www.feedabee.com/>

## Makerspace and Coworking

Both options give startups room to grow. Coworking gives anyone a place to work in a location that provides fast Wi-Fi, tables and some amenities. Another benefit is the cross-pollination effect. Working in a place where you mix with others, get questions answered and have enlightening conversations helps your brain work better!

Maker spaces often generate businesses after someone has tried an idea out in a cultured, protected environment. It's an opportunity to try a skill you may not know, to work on projects you can't do at home and to get coaching from others. This is a picture from the Old Geezer Makerspace in Akron, Iowa. A group of retired farmers meet for coffee every day and they decided to bring their old woodworking tools into town. And created a Makerspace!



There are places in your town that would support a Maker Space.

- <http://bit.ly/2QErMUw>

You could start smaller with a Library of Things. This is founded on the idea we all need a place where we could go borrow things to get some work done. What if this was in one of the downtown buildings, or part of a shared space? Check out this link for more information.

- How to start a library of things <http://bit.ly/2tG7MYy>

## Online and Offline Training

Tony Guidroz, Director EDC, City of San Saba, Texas, population 2700, brought in SBDC for a night of meetings for new and existing businesses. First night: 22 attended. So, then the SBDC started coming every 2 weeks. They created **13 new businesses, 88 new jobs**. The SBDC is part of the Small Business Association and your tax dollars pay for their services.

- <https://americassbdc.org/>
- <http://bit.ly/2QBqsl3>

## Host a Newcomers Meeting.

You could do this quarterly and invite all new people in town to attend. Bennettsville, SC does it and they are finding that people are excited to attend. They have their realtors personally invite new homeowners to attend. Feed them, provide answers to questions like:

- What are the laws about garbage?
- Where can I get a job?
- What events and activities are there?
- What can my kids do in town?
- What if I have a bad landlord?

## Look at more ways you can encourage small scale manufacturing.

These are the artisan makers, the prototyping to small scale, it's the production at scale, the makerspaces and the shared commercial kitchens and workshops. You'd be looking for craft brewers, artisan businesses, contract manufacturing, commercial kitchens, farmers market organizers, and the 'connectors.

- <http://bit.ly/2FyE0ay>

## How about a Clean Up the Town Campaign that could go for one year?

Encourage your businesses, churches and organizations to get involved and do ninja projects. It's a good idea to share the stories of the work already done and the work ongoing of that with pictures and text on Facebook and Instagram. You could even paint the sides of the buildings and create places for selfie shots. This picture is from Nashville, but why not paint your own?



Join the Arbor Day Foundation for only \$10 and they will send you 10 free trees. I know the Park Board would appreciate that kind of donation.

- <http://bit.ly/37OTMub>

## Tourism Ideas

One person in Antwerp, Ohio suggested a new logo for town – “Where the fork are we?” – because they have a fork carved into a tree along the trail. Now that's a funny story, but it makes me realize we have some good recreational areas in town. Utilize the recreational opportunities available to tourists, and even county residents! Perhaps even include some agritourism. See what other communities are doing around agritourism:

- <http://bit.ly/307FOAM>

## Thank You

It was a pleasure to visit home. It was exciting to see so many groups already implementing the Idea Friendly method as well! I look forward to hearing about more of your successes!

I'm available to you by email if you have questions. [deb@saveyour.town](mailto:deb@saveyour.town)

I've also got a gift for you! Visit <https://saveyour.town/gift/> Then host Watch Parties with your friends and learn how to make Webster City more Idea Friendly. You'll also receive our newsletters each week that shares more information about small towns and the challenges they face and how to overcome them.

Again, Thank you.

Deb Brown  
Cofounder of SaveYour.Town

**SAVE  
YOUR**  
*.town*