



City Administrator & Staff Update

2023.12.01

- **Chamber:** Please see the attached thank you letter for the City's Partnering for the Future pledge. Also attached is the press release regarding Chris Ales and Iowa Wesleyan Campus.
- **ED:** Please see the attached informational article regarding the Valley West Mall.
- **WWTP:** South Lift Station Variable Frequency Drives. We continue to have issues with spikes and drops coming from alliant. Attached are some quotes to provide fixes. That said. We have contacted Alliant (our rep) to review and meet with their staff to discuss solutions as we believe this is an Alliant issue to address and not city. If you recasll, there is some question from Alliant staff if this is related to the solar system in the area, but nothing definitive.
 - To Alliant: We have been having issues with our VFDs at our South Lift Station (wastewater) - spikes and drops in voltage. Mike (DPW Director) has been working with 3E and Bezzine Electric as well as Andy with Alliant (Line Foreman?). Bezzine has been working with a Wes (Field Engineer) at Alliant on the issue. They is some thought that it could be related to the hospital solar array, but nothing definitive yet. We need to find a solution to this issue and it doesn't appear that this should be a City issue or cost. Please see the attached from Bezzine. Option #1 doesn't appear to be an option as the spikes are not eliminated. However, Option #2 appears to eliminate the spikes/drops. Alliant may have some other ideas as well. Can we set up a time to meet or set up a call? Kay Sackville and Mike connected. There are doing some research before we meet.
- **SRO:** Sounds like I will be attending the 12/18 school board meeting with Shane to discuss the potential for an SRO officer. A cops grant could be submitted for in 2024. This is a three year grant that then requires a commitment for a fourth year. Funding is 75% school, 25% school. I'll see how the discussion goes...
- **Council:** We conducted new council member orientation this week.
- **Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) Program:** FYI. Thank you for your interest in the State of Iowa's federal allocation of Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) program funds. IEDA has successfully completed the federal strategy review process. The EECBG program will be a competitive grant program consisting of a Community Fund and an Innovation Fund. It is anticipated the EECBG program application will open early 2024 (January/February) in [IowaGrants.gov](https://iowagrants.gov) and will have a relatively short application

window. Therefore, potential applicants should be considering potential projects at this time. Please see below for a quick overview of the Community Fund and Innovation Fund. More details will be available when the application window opens in IowaGrants.gov. Thank you.

- Community Fund

Eligible applicants for the Community Fund are cities and counties that are not eligible to receive a formula EECBG direct allocation from the federal government.¹ The Community Fund has a total of \$1.2 million available for competitive grant awards to Iowa local governments for community-driven energy efficiency retrofit projects. Project awards may range from \$50,000-\$300,000.

Projects must be completed by June 30, 2026. Project examples, include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Building energy assessment or audits plus energy efficiency upgrades
- Energy efficiency upgrades at wastewater or water supply facilities
- Replacement of traffic signals and streetlights to improve energy efficiency

- Cost share is not required for Community Fund applications, but applicants providing cost share will receive a scoring preference during application review. Project costs incurred before the approval of a grant award are not eligible. Eligible project costs include:

- Energy assessments/audits
- Developing and installing energy efficiency improvements
- Contracting for project development and/or implementation
- Direct administration costs
- Contracting for federal regulations compliance assistance

- **Articles:** Couple informational articles attached on street transformations and civic design.

IT (Newberry)

- This week was budget week. It was spent getting updated quotes for next year. Some things have gone up but a majority stayed the same and I don't expect a price increase. This week was also spent going over updates and ensuring they were installed. I still need to find time after hours to apply updates to the cisco router. This week I deployed a proxy and now have my opmanager and bitwarden vault accessible from the internet. Currently I am cloning Nathans hard drive as he has a 120gb hard drive in his car that needed to be upgraded due to limited space. It has been replaced with a 1tb solid state drive. This week I also 3d printed some parts needed to mount a new switch at the fire department and I should have that installed next week. If you have any questions feel free to reach out.

Police/Fire (Logan)

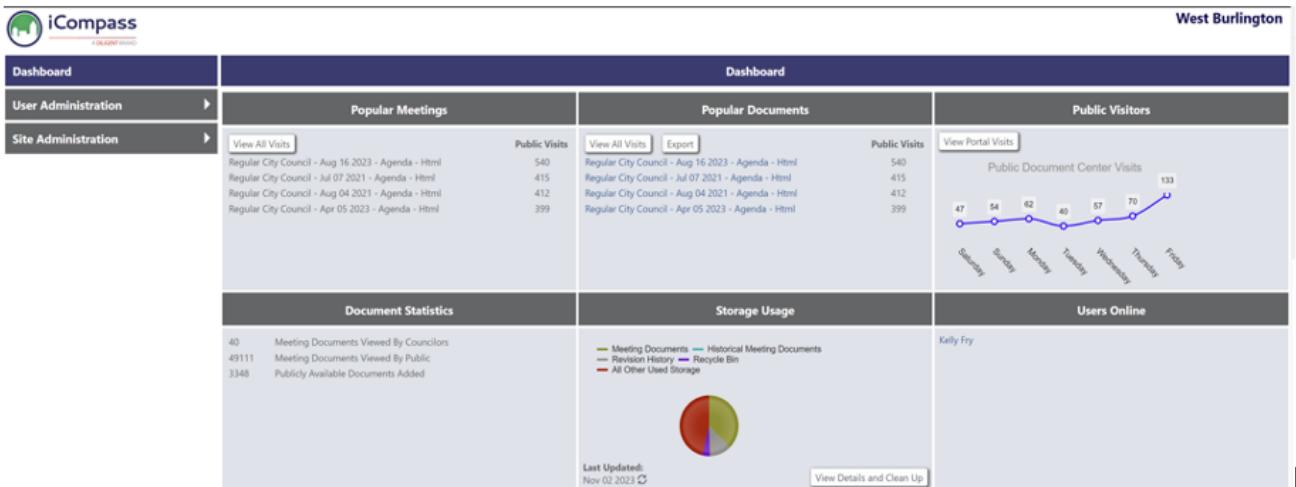
- Shopping with Fire Department tonight with Toys for Tots organization. They have the semi set up in the mall parking lot collecting donations today. I will post pictures of tonight's activities.

- Turned in a memo to hire a new Firefighter and Police Officer.
- Turned in a memo for Bunker Gear Purchase.
- Brice did his first deployment last night for the K-9. It was on a stolen car that he recovered from and incident at Casey's. The dog hit on the car for illegal narcotics so working on a search warrant for the vehicle.
- Letting Mark use the new squad car tell we can get the equipment installed.
- We have the Raffle Tickets in hand and have the permit from the state.

City Clerk (Fry)

- **PLANNING & ZONING** – The following appointments were made for 2024: Karen Dewey – Chairman, Joe Rector – Vice Chairman, Blake Ruther – P&Z's representative on the Board of Adjustment. Gary Deen (serving since 2012), Karen Dewey (serving since 1999), Larissa Conner (serving since 2019)
- **BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT** – We currently have a vacant seat on the Board and Lee Boughton's term will expire at the end of December. Lee has served on the Board since 2012.
- **BUDGET WORKSHOP** – There is a Virtual Budget Workshop on Tuesday, November 21st if anyone is interested in attending. It is from 9:30 – 1:00. I can register anyone that is interested.
- **ELECTED/APPOINTED OFFICIALS OPEN HOUSE** – Dec 20th from 4 – 6 p.m. before the last City Council meeting. Mark your calendar and spread the word. The invitation is attached. I have reached out to the photographer to have a group picture taken right before the meeting starts at 6.
- **COFFEE & CONVERSATION** – We have had some discussions about changing the time to encourage more people to attend. I wondered if we would like to consider a new time/event. Possibly – “Connect with the Council at 5”, We could open the Council Chambers at 5 on the first Wednesday of the month for people to come in before the regular meeting.
 - **Proposed 2024 Coffee & Conversation Dates: (Quarterly)**
 - Thursday, January 18 (Thursday after the second council meeting)
 - Thursday, April 18
 - Thursday, July 18
 - Thursday, October 17
- **WELLNESS PROGRAM** – We are wrapping up the 2023 Program. I believe Tara is planning on attending the Dec 20th meeting to give her report and ask Council to consider renewal for 2024.
- **MUNICIPAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY** – Katie and I are planning on going through the Municipal Leadership Academy and Ringo sounded interested as well.

- Website Statistics from iCompass (City Council Agenda Website):



Finance (Moore)

- I have been focusing my time on the upcoming budget – preparation, assisting departments and preparing to complete budget requests due from departments today. Created a new salary spreadsheet and met with Mike to go over his budget requests.

Public Works (Brissey)

- Water lab-
- Sewer lab
- Lift station rounds.
- Parks and Broadway trash and recycling
- Pool maintenance
- Locates.
- Service trucks and Squad cars
- Sign maintenance
- Hauling brush and leaves
- Leaf bag pick up.
- Mowing parks, city, properties, and medians.
- Backhoe and dump truck training for new higher
- Working on storm water plan.
- Working on budget in spare time ha.

- While doing the annual jetting through sewers we found five that we couldn't get in. We are having Four Seasons camera to see what is going on. We have Four Seacens working.
- Worked Thanksgiving Day on sump pump in basement of city hall to keep from back up and flooding basement.
- Worked Saturday 11-25-23 to prep equipment for snow.
- Worked Sunday plowing snow (likely out Friday night or early morning)



CITY CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2024

DESCRIPTION	TIME
REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING	6 PM
SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING	6 PM
BUDGET WORK SESSIONS (AS NEEDED)	6 PM
PLANNING & ZONING MEETING	6 PM
BUSINESS OF THE YEAR AWARD	TBD
CITY HALL CLOSED FOR A SCHEDULED HOLIDAY	
LEAGUE OF CITIES CONFERENCE - SIOUX CITY	All Day
4 TH OF JULY CELEBRATION	All Day
TRICK-OR-TREAT	5:30-7 PM

NOTE:

- SEPT. 18, 2024 - regular council meeting conflicts with League Conference. Meeting moved to Tues., Sept. 17th at 6 pm
- 2024 Calendar is tentative and may be adjusted as needed.

JANUARY		FEBRUARY		MARCH		APRIL		MAY		JUNE	
S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	T	F
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JULY		AUGUST		SEPTEMBER		OCTOBER		NOVEMBER		DECEMBER	
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							27	28	29	30	31



COMMUNITY

Community fosters social life through civic design

A new town in Alabama is a model for how community planning and institutions can connect people.

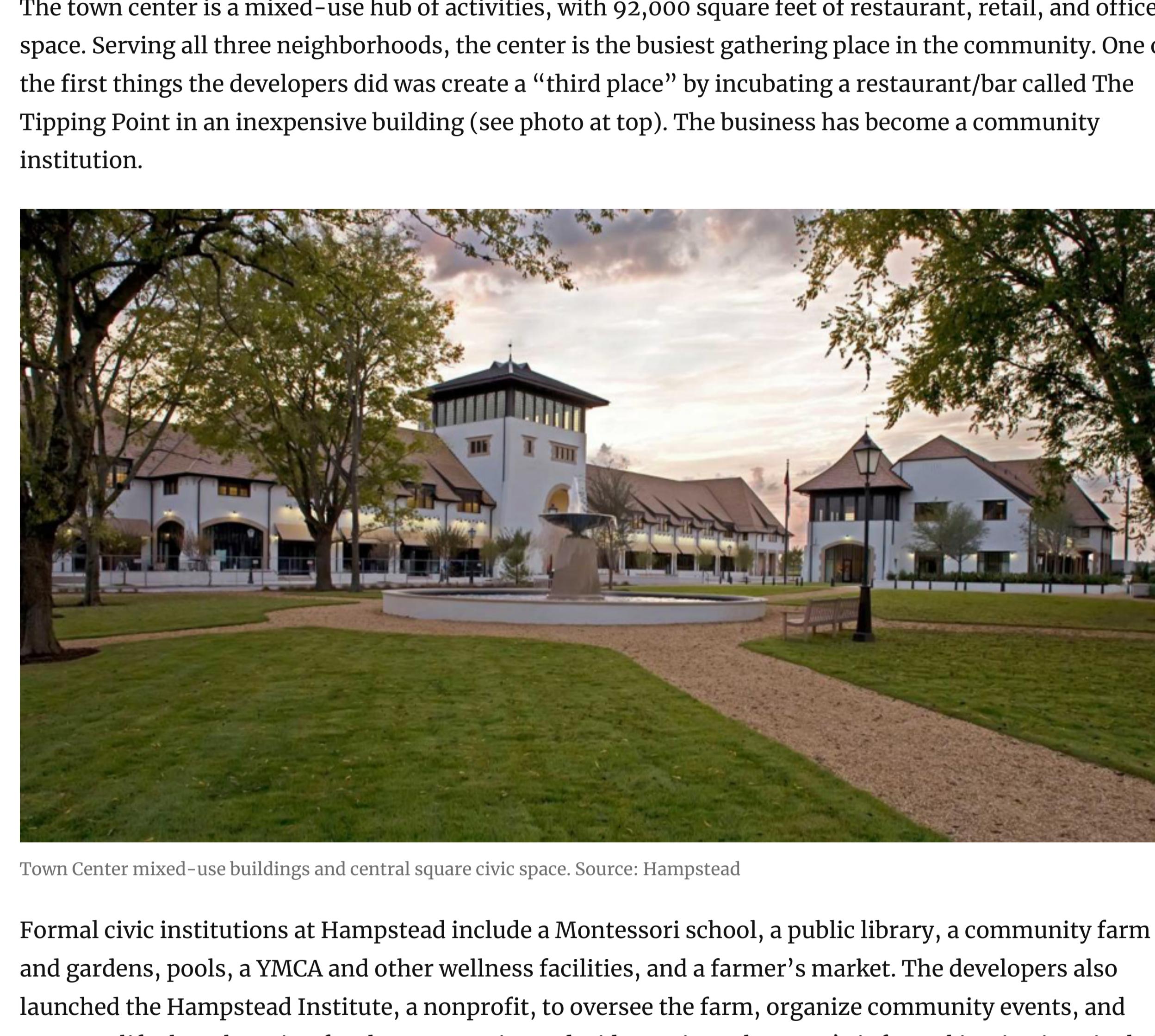
ROBERT STEUTEVILLE NOV. 27, 2023



Healthy communities need formal and informal civic sites and institutions that promote social interaction for humans to thrive, argues Seth Kaplan in his recently published book *Fragile Neighborhoods*. Physical design that includes town centers and gathering spaces helps meet that need. Institutions and norms that bring people together are also critical.

Hampstead in Montgomery, Alabama, a 416-acre new town established in 2008, offers a model for community design and software that promotes interaction and well-being. “There are people walking dogs all the time, kids on bikes, people taking walks, everyone speaks and waves. This place feels like a neighborhood ought to feel,” reports Hampstead resident Christi Holding.

The development team, co-founded by Anna Lowder and Harvi Sahota, explains the approach: “Civic space is vital. More than just landscaping, thoughtful civic space ranges from the agrarian urbanism component at the farm to sites for physical activity, fire pit parks for gathering, lakeside greens, and large open sites for annual traditions like food and drink festivals, fundraisers, and neighborhood parties.”

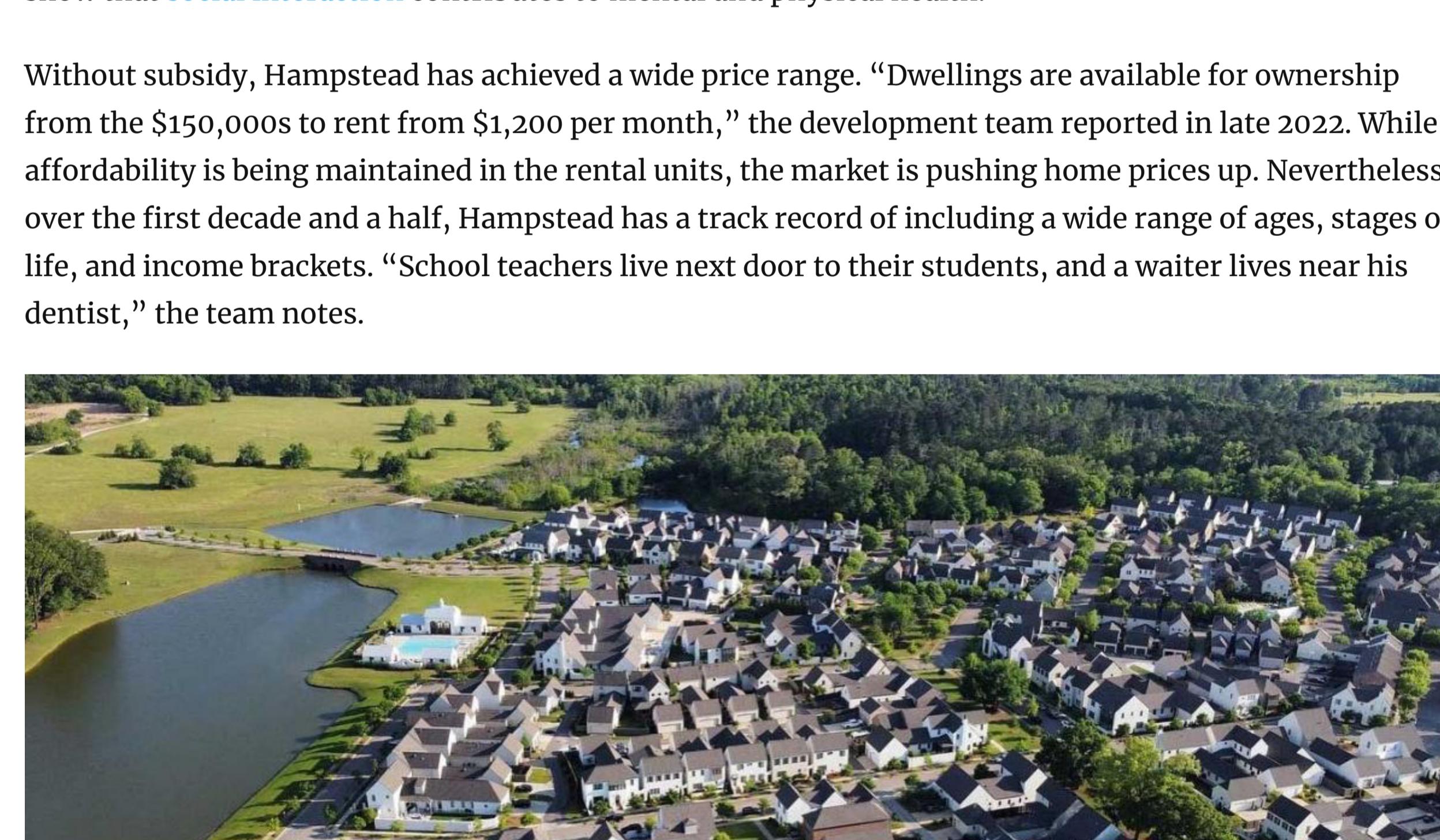


Aerial image showing project site plan and site boundaries within the regional context of largely sprawl development. Source: Hampstead development, with plan by DPZ.

Hampstead is nearly half-built, using a DPZ CoDESIGN plan that includes three walkable neighborhoods at the scale of a five-minute pedestrian shed—linked together as a small town. You can read more about the design [here](#). The scale and variety of activities of the town and neighborhoods foster community. Three hundred and fifteen houses and 85 rental apartments have been built to date in various types, including townhouses, live-work units, carriage houses, mews, courtyard units, and cottages. Many new urban architects contributed building designs.

Hampstead incorporates civic parks throughout. More than 30 percent of the site is set aside as natural preserves, parks, and a community farm. Parks include playgrounds, dog parks, pocket parks and greens, formal civic squares, community gardens, and sports fields. The developer’s determination to preserve existing trees enhanced the public places, especially early on.

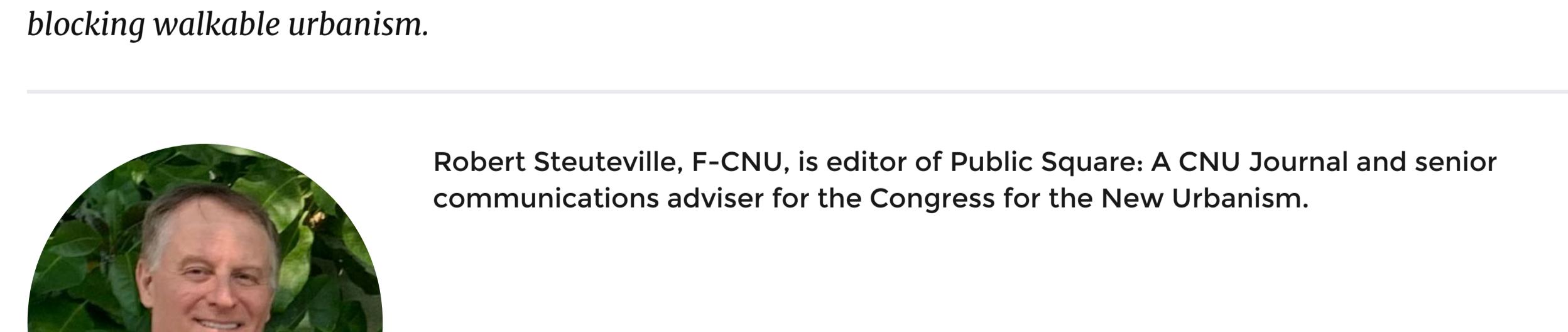
The town center is a mixed-use hub of activities, with 92,000 square feet of restaurant, retail, and office space. Serving all three neighborhoods, the center is the busiest gathering place in the community. One of the first things the developers did was create a “third place” by incubating a restaurant/bar called The Tipping Point in an inexpensive building (see photo at top). The business has become a community institution.



Town Center mixed-use buildings and central square civic space. Source: Hampstead

Formal civic institutions at Hampstead include a Montessori school, a public library, a community farm and gardens, pools, a YMCA and other wellness facilities, and a farmer’s market. The developers also launched the Hampstead Institute, a nonprofit, to oversee the farm, organize community events, and promote life-long learning for the community and wider region. The town’s informal institutions include an annual farm dinner, gatherings at town center restaurants, and other events.

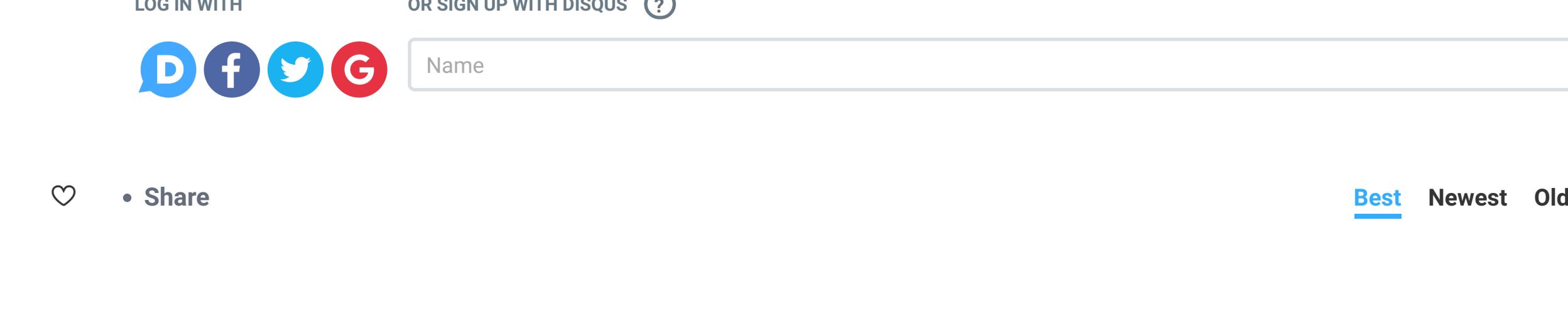
Many of the aspects of daily life are designed into Hampstead. “A resident can walk a child to school, work out at the gym, grab a coffee, work at the office, stop at the library or check mail at the post office, go to the dog park, drop kids at soccer or tennis practice, pick vegetables from the farm, and meet friends for dinner,” explains the development team. These activities often have a social component. A healthy neighborhood has overlapping institutions, so a resident could know people from the school or library and also regularly meet them picking up vegetables, going to the dog park, or at one of the town’s “third places.” That’s a feature of resilient neighborhoods, explains Kaplan.



Outdoor farm dinner, one of many annual traditions. Source: Hampstead

“Happiness is derived from social interaction, that sense of well-being through human connection, and health and wellness from the ability to walk and cycle,” the Hampstead team reports. Moreover, studies show that [social interaction](#) contributes to mental and physical health.

Without subsidy, Hampstead has achieved a wide price range. “Dwellings are available for ownership from the \$150,000s to rent from \$1,200 per month,” the development team reported in late 2022. While affordability is being maintained in the rental units, the market is pushing home prices up. Nevertheless, over the first decade and a half, Hampstead has a track record of including a wide range of ages, stages of life, and income brackets. “School teachers live next door to their students, and a waiter lives near his dentist,” the team notes.



Aerial view of Hampstead showing a mix of residential, commercial, and natural areas. Source: Hampstead

Hampstead’s design would not have been possible without a form-based code (FBC), and the community was a leader in its development. The town is the first traditional neighborhood development [built under Montgomery’s SmartCode](#), one of the first city SmartCodes in the US. The SmartCode is a Transect-based FBC created by DPZ to replicate new urban regulations across the US and the world.

The project has excellent street connectivity and internal walkability, but is surrounded by sprawl. Those fortunate to experience Hampstead daily benefit from a high quality of life. The transformation of Montgomery’s suburbs is a work in progress.

New Urbanism addresses these regional transportation issues, but they are difficult for individual developers to solve. On the other hand, fostering strong social connections within a project can be addressed with the design and programming of neighborhoods. In that regard, the difference in planning and urban design of a community like Hampstead stands out. In that regard, the difference in planning and urban design of a community like Hampstead stands out.

Editor’s note: This article addresses CNU’s [Strategic Plan](#) goal of working to change codes and regulations blocking walkable urbanism.

Robert Steuteville, F-CNU, is editor of Public Square: A CNU Journal and senior communications adviser for the Congress for the New Urbanism.

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November 20, 2023

City of West Burlington
Gregg Mandsager
122 Broadway St
West Burlington, IA 52655

Dear Gregg,

On behalf of the Greater Burlington Partnership, please accept my sincere gratitude for your \$ 30,000 investment in the **Partnership for The Future** campaign. Your support will enable us to aggressively pursue the shared goal of economic growth and community improvement. Together, we will pursue the priorities to Grow Workforce, Grow Business and Grow Population. Thank you for sharing this vision.

The terms of your investment, as we understand them, are indicated below. If the details are not accurate for any reason, please contact Mary Beth Sanchez at 319-208-0044 or by email to mbsanchez@greaterburlington.com with corrections at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Della D. Schmidt'.

Della D. Schmidt, IOM
President & CEO
Greater Burlington Partnership

Acknowledgment of *Partnership for Future* Investment Intention

Division:	Gold
Total Pledge:	\$ 30,000
Annual Payment:	\$ 6,000
First Payment	July 2024
Subsequent Payments	July 2025, July 2026, July 2027, July 2028



IWU Mt. Pleasant, LLC

For Immediate Release

IWU Mt. Pleasant, LLC (IWU) acquired six buildings on the former Iowa Wesleyan Campus in Mount Pleasant, Iowa on October 17, 2023, consisting of the former dormitories on the east and west sides of the campus, as well as the Science Building and Hershey Hall.

In response to numerous requests from local and regional community leaders, IWU plans to market the dormitories to serve anticipated housing needs for temporary construction workers in nearby Middletown. While in the very early stages, this use is expected to reduce the strain on area hotels needed for local businesses and residents alike, as well as attract construction workers to the community, replacing at least part of the economic benefit associated with former students at Iowa Wesleyan University.

Chris Ales, project manager and co-owner of IWU Mt. Pleasant, LLC further plans to convert the Science building and/or Hershey Hall to affordable housing. The initial phase of this project consists of approximately 30 apartments for seniors over the age 55 with incomes at or below 60% of the area median income and rents estimated at \$5-600 for one-bedroom and \$6-700 for two-bedroom apartments. Typical tenants will be retired on social security with a modest pension.

Ales has over 20 years of experience in adapting buildings such as these for use as housing throughout eastern Iowa, many of them award winning developments. Ales notes urban revitalization projects like these avoid blight otherwise associated with idled buildings and represent an efficient utilization of community resources. While preserving historic properties, they also provide needed affordable housing for seniors, which frees up entry level housing for the local workforce and utilizes existing public infrastructure which minimizes public costs.

PUBLIC SQUARE (/publicsquare)



Source: Street Plans Collaborative

TACTICAL URBANISM (/PUBLICSQUARE/CATEGORY/TACTICAL-URBANISM)

Street transformation is first for LA

A 1.3-mile suburban arterial was quickly modified to take space from automobile travel and give it to transit, biking, and walking.

ROBERT STEUTEVILLE (/node/538) NOV. 30, 2023



([http://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?
u=https%3A//www.cnu.org/node/10015&title=Street%20transformation%20is%20first%20for%20LA](http://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=https%3A//www.cnu.org/node/10015&title=Street%20transformation%20is%20first%20for%20LA))



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(mailto:Check%20out%20Street%20transformation%20is%20first%20for%20LA&body=https%3A//www.cnu.orgpublicsquare/2021-urbanism-comes-la)

Move Culver City transformed the streetscape on a 1.3-mile corridor using “quick build” techniques associated with Tactical Urbanism. The project created multi-modal space quickly and inexpensively to prioritize pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders. Bus ridership, cycling, and pedestrian activity rose

substantially on what was previously a car-centric suburban corridor.

Move Culver City was completed in November of 2021, at the height of the pandemic, when outdoor civic space was urgently needed. The project included a shared mobility lane and other bicycle, pedestrian, and transit-related improvements along Culver and Washington boulevards in downtown Culver City, a municipality in Los Angeles County.

Transforming a major artery often takes a decade or more, and such retrofits are rare. This project was completed less than a year after conception. “For New Urbanism to continue to be successful in the country, we have to find a way to accelerate the retrofit of streets designed for cars,” observes Street Plans Collaborative, which was hired by the city to design and implement the tactical mobility lane and worked closely with Sam Schwartz Engineering and T.Y. Lin International.

Culver City transformed its downtown over three decades from a low-density warehouse district to one of the most vibrant and walkable places in the LA region. The demographically diverse city is a movie production center, home to Sony Pictures Studios. A new Metro rail line runs through downtown, and urban building frontages were promoted. Only the corridor in question did not keep up with these changes until recently, the design team explains.



The community selected “Scenes of Ballona Creek” as its preferred theme for asphalt art. The murals depict various species of plants and animals that reflect the ecosystems around Culver City. Source: Street Plans Collaborative

Since installation, data has shown a growth in bus ridership of 52 percent, cycling activity has risen 32 percent, and walking has increased 18 percent on the corridor, according to the design team. Despite a 56 percent reduction in the space allocated for cars, vehicle speeds and volumes have not changed

significantly.

The Tactical approach allows adjustments to fine-tune the design and respond to issues discovered after implementation. More than 350 comments were received following construction, which resulted in redesigning a tricky intersection and optimizing traffic signals along the corridor to reduce delays.

The design team describes the new design as “humane, people-centered main street.” The project includes curb extensions, protected bike lanes, and physically separate bus lanes through the city's heart. On-street parking and one general-purpose travel lane were removed in both directions.

“Move Culver City is remarkable because it was the first to accomplish what has not yet been done in Los Angeles to date—a radical and aggressive reallocation of street space from cars to pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders,” notes Street Plans Collaborative.



Custom hardwood boarding platform. Source: Street Plans Collaborative

The project includes notable elements, including custom hardwood bus boarding platforms. These allow for boarding at grade and enable bicycles to cross the platforms.

“This attention to design included the conversion of more than 30,000 square feet of street space into curb and sidewalk space through the use of an asphalt art mural,” Street Plans notes. “The mural, called Scenes of Ballona Creek, stretches over 30 different sites and is one of the largest pavement murals in North America.”

Planning and design are underway to transform another section of the corridor.



Robert Steuteville, F-CNU, is editor of Public Square: A CNU Journal and senior communications adviser for the Congress for the New Urbanism.

(/publicsquare/author/robert-steuteville)

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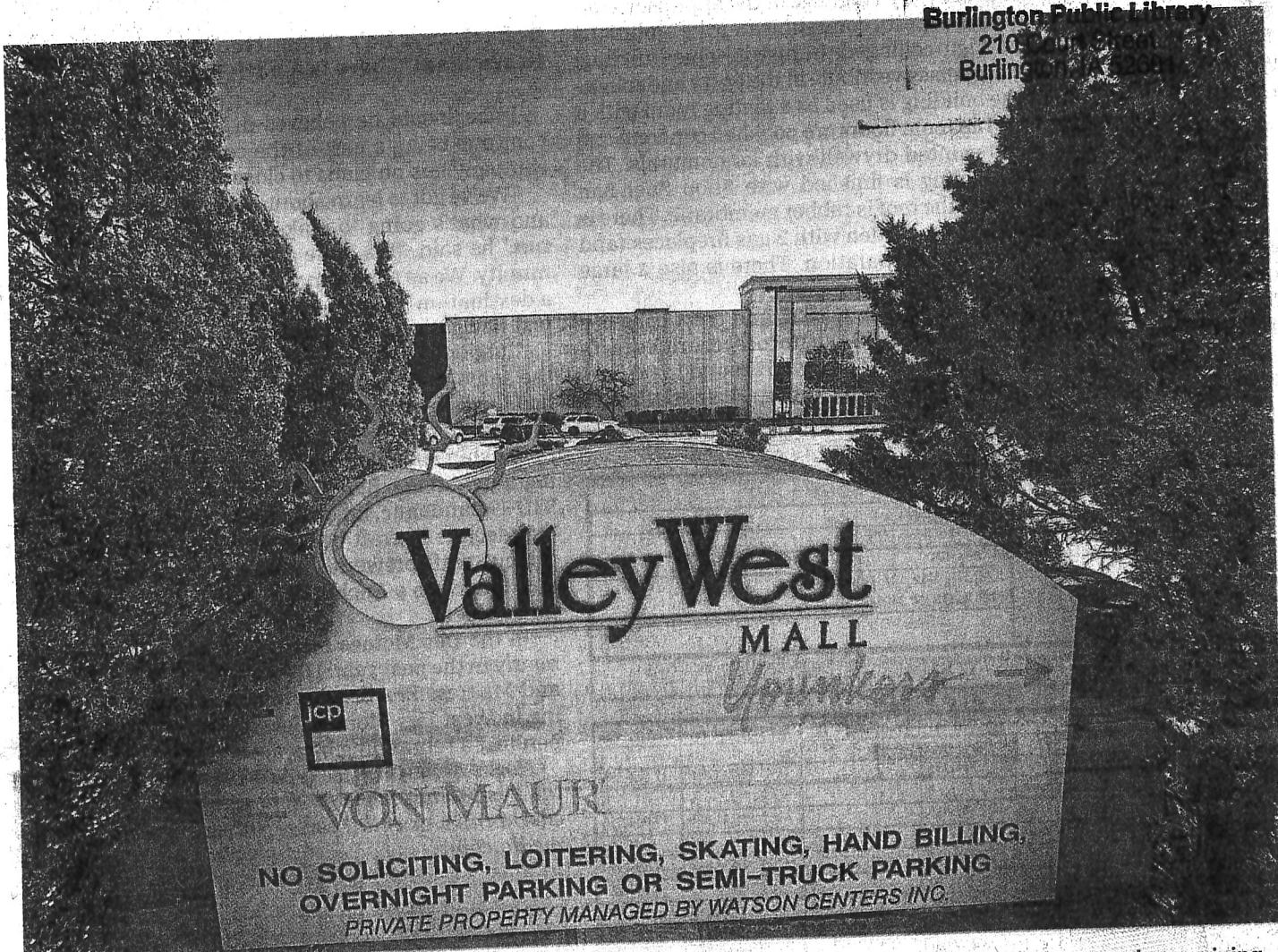
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The Des Moines Register

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What's in store for Valley West Mall?



Burlington Public Library

Traces of the names of the closed Von Maur and Younkers stores remain on a sign at Valley West Mall. Its sole remaining anchor tenant is JCPenney. PHOTOS BY ZACH BOYDEN-HOLMES/THE REGISTER

West Des Moines pushes redevelopment

Philip Joens

Des Moines Register
USA TODAY NETWORK

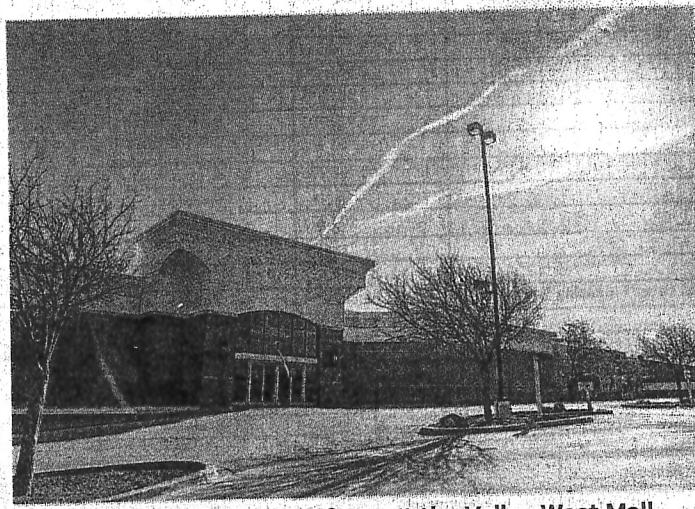
Second of two parts.

A year and a half after Valley West Mall went into foreclosure and more than a year after a judge approved its auction by the Polk County Sheriff's Office, the mall continues to operate, entering another holiday season with two of three anchor tenant spots vacant.

Concerned that the moribund mall could stifle an aging area that once was the Des Moines metro's prime commercial corridor, the city of West Des Moines is pushing for redevelopment of the 58-acre property overlooking Interstate 235 and University Avenue.

"We don't want to see that area die on the vine," said Ryan Moffatt, West Des Moines' economic development director.

See MALL, Page 6A



The former Von Maur storefront at the Valley West Mall sits vacant on Nov. 14.

Goodrich said.

Across the county, threats to poll workers, secretaries of state and election officials have become more common in recent years.

Chairman James Albert, a Republican who has served on the Iowa board for about 25 years, said that state employees should not have to endure threats and intimidation and that he wanted to invite both the state troopers who provide security at the Iowa Capitol complex and a representative of the Polk County Attorney's Office to the board's next meeting in January to discuss what could be done to deter the harassing behavior.

The board on Thursday also fined former state employee Dawn Cham-

See CAMPAIGN, Page 2A

Continued from Page 1A

But no buyer has materialized since U.S. Bank foreclosed on a \$42 million loan to the mall's then owner, Watson Centers of Minneapolis, in June 2022, and a Polk County judge the following October approved a plan for auctioning the mall. Instead of going forward with the auction, the court-appointed receiver, Los Angeles-based Krista Freitag, has allowed the mall to continue operating, and there are even a few small businesses listed on its website as "opening soon."

Moffatt said he met with Freitag, mall management and leasing agent Spinozo Real Estate Group on Nov. 8 to discuss the future of the site. In apparent acknowledgment that the mall's days are numbered, the Polk County Assessor's Office this year valued its buildings at just \$100.

Moffatt said the group agreed that there is more retail space at the mall than the market can bear. The group also agreed that the mall operators cannot keep operating like everything is OK, he said.

With West Bank building its new headquarters between the mall and the interstate, next to the also-new headquarters of health care plan administrator ClaimDOC, the city believes the site is ripe for reinvestment and is willing to provide tax-increment financing and other incentives should a buyer step forward, Moffatt said.

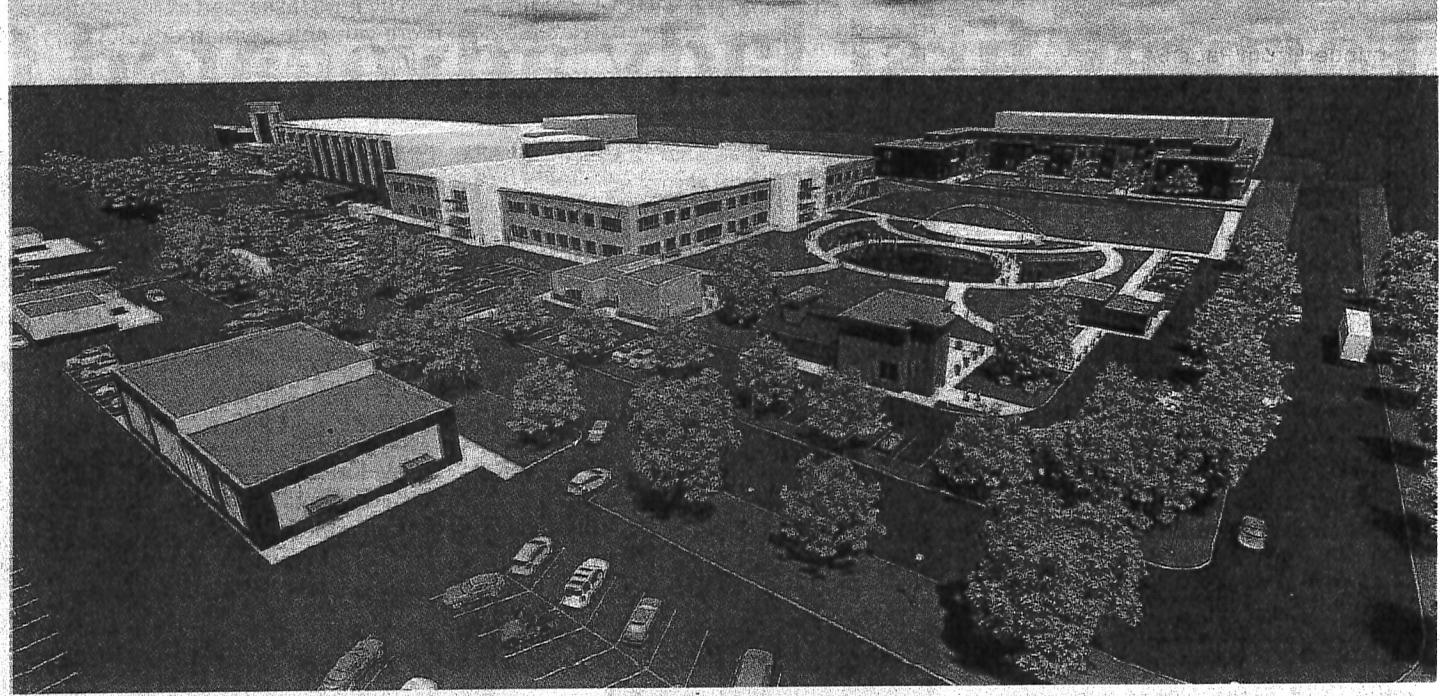
Valley West Mall in its current form hinders future growth on University Avenue, according to a report the city and neighboring Clive issued in late 2022. It called the mall a "liability, with fading occupancy and an aging tenant mix" in need of redevelopment.

"It's a good piece of real estate," Moffatt said, adding, "We're going to continue to work away and do what we can realistically to facilitate redevelopment there. If we did get a chance for redevelopment, I think we would get aggressive, as long as it met the city's visions and goals."

Freitag, the receiver, did not respond to requests for comment.

Valley West, once central Iowa's 'premier mall,' falls on hard times

Situated in a then-fast-growing part of the burgeoning suburban city, Valley



Valley West Mall released these renderings in 2019 of planned redevelopment of the site. SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

West opened in 1975. It quickly became what Clyde Evans, who retired as West Des Moines' economic development director in August, called the "premier mall" in the metro, supplanting the older Merle Hay and Southridge malls in Des Moines.

Built for \$26 million — more than \$140 million at today's prices — it had 855,000 square feet of shopping space and room for 90 shops in addition to its three anchor tenants.

It was among the busiest malls in the Midwest. In 2000, it had 40,000 visitors per day and employed 3,500 people.

"Anytime we had the boys basketball tournament, girls basketball tournament, the wrestling tournament, all these kids from outlying Iowa would come here to shop for prom dresses or shop or hang out," Evans said.

Then came construction of Jordan Creek Town Center, a \$200 million "lifestyle center" just 5 miles to the west, with entertainment, free-standing restaurants like P.F. Chang's and even hotels on outlying lots. A two-level Scheels sporting goods store occupies one of the mall's three anchor spaces instead of a traditional department store.

Watson Centers undertook an \$18 million renovation of Valley West in 2002 and 2003, aimed at preparing the mall to compete. It added skylights, glass railings, new flooring, a waterfall

and a glass elevator. But Evans said Watson Centers passed on other opportunities to keep up with Jordan Creek because it did not want to spend the money, calling the renovations "a half effort."

"Valley West Mall could have done a much better job than they did in terms of positioning themselves," he said. "They knew for a while that Jordan Creek was coming. They had some opportunities to do some things at that site, and they passed on it."

By the time Jordan Creek opened in 2004, the retail landscape also was under growing pressure from other forces, including changing shopper preferences and the rise of online retailing.

A major blow for Valley West came in 2018, when the Younkers department store chain liquidated, shutting down one of the mall's anchor stores. In 2019, the last year for which data is available, Valley West was 75% occupied, about 15% below the national average.

Then, in 2022, a second anchor, Von Maur, moved to occupy an empty Younkers site at Jordan Creek, which has maintained a 99% occupancy rate.

Valley West's sole remaining anchor amid a sea of largely empty parking lots is JCPenney, which has had struggles of its own, undergoing bankruptcy reorganization in 2020. Its stock was selling for about 20 cents a share when it went private after emerging from bankrupt-

cy, and its future remains unclear.

There are still a few mall staples at Valley West: Eddie Bauer and Victoria's Secret offer high-end fashion and lingerie. On the north end of the mall, Pro Image displays pricey Colorado Rockies, Chicago White Sox and Montreal Expos jerseys in its windows. Another high-end sports apparel store, Champs Sports, sits about 100 feet away.

And some local retailers are hanging in. Tom and David Stam launched the American branch of their family's Belgian-based Chocolaterie Stam from a kiosk at Valley West and eventually opened a full-fledged store there. They say they're committed to continue operating it, even while opening a new location at Jordan Creek.

In addition, since Spinozo became the leasing agent, 10 to 15 new stores have opened, though Moffatt said some may not be what he would term "high-quality" tenants.

Signs of the mall's struggles are readily apparent. Tarps cover entrances to the old Younkers space, and this fall the Kelly green carpet and elegant red marble floors of the Von Maur space, where a pianist once serenaded shoppers, housed a pop-up Spirit Halloween store. Another pop-up, a makeshift drive-in theater, occupies the Younkers store's otherwise vacant parking lot in

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Mall

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warmer weather.

Plans to redevelop Valley West Mall fail to move ahead

With the traditional mall clearly failing, Watson Centers in 2019 tried to rebrand it as Valley West Commons, seeking to reimagine it as a lifestyle center in the mode of Jordan Creek, with restaurants, entertainment and apartments. That plan went nowhere.

Two years later, Watson and the city announced plans to demolish the 200,000 square-foot Younkers space and construct a 240-unit apartment building, new retail spaces and an 18,000-square-foot restaurant. Under the proposal, the JCPenney building would have been demolished to create office and retail space with underground parking. A five-story hotel was slated for the north end of the property, and the plan also called for construction of an office building.

Watson Centers was ready to spend \$262 million on the project. But to leverage the necessary financing, the city sought \$30 million in Iowa tax incentives. It fell short in the competition with projects including Merle Hay Mall's proposal to turn its empty Younkers store into a hockey arena for the Des Moines Buccaneers.

"I don't think they had a bad conceptual plan," Aaron Hyde, a retail industry analyst at JLL Brokerage in Des Moines, told the Des Moines Business Record. "They just couldn't get it over the finish line."

The foreclosure followed.

During the Nov. 8 meeting, the city and the mall's leaders kicked around ideas, such as leaving portions of the mall to house retailers while new development occupies out lots, Moffatt said. But he said that without investors, "I think we can realistically acknowledge that the mall is going to continue to operate as is for the foreseeable future until we can get all the partners lined up to advance this to the next stage for development."

Retail industry analyst: 'It's one of the best pieces of land'

Valley West's site has the potential to become a "downtown-like focal point"

for the University Avenue corridor shared by Clive and West Des Moines, the study the cities released in late 2022 found.

The ClaimDOC and West Bank projects point to the potential.

"Our commercial Realtor thought we were insane," Bruce Hansen, ClaimDOC executive vice president, said in a news release about the company's \$3.9 million investment in converting a former Fitness World club into executive offices. "People want to work in spaces that are interesting and where they don't dread going into work each day. We wanted something different and something unique. This space fits the bill."

Next door, West Bank's 72,000-square-foot, four-story headquarters is rising where a vacant strip mall sat, advertising the bank's prominence to the thousands of drivers who pass by on I-235 daily. West Bank chose to redevelop a dilapidated site rather than build on undeveloped land, even though it cost more, CEO Dave Nelson said last year.

"We think when you can turn something blighted into something special, that's a strong example of community leadership," Nelson said.

Less than a mile to the east, the recently renovated Westowne Center occupies the northwest corner of the I-235 interchange with 22nd Avenue. And while the University Avenue corridor has some notable vacancies, including a recently closed Bed, Bath & Beyond store, other commercial properties boast a healthy roster of tenants, including the Water Tower Place Shopping Center, which is home to the metro's only Whole Foods store.

Hyde, the JLL analyst, noted the site's advantages, sitting in a prime spot off I-235, with easy access to nearby Interstate 35/80.

"I'd argue just from a pure real estate standpoint, it's one of the best pieces of land," Hyde told the Des Moines Register. "It's smack dab in the middle of the city."

For West Des Moines, having the property remain in limbo is costly. Property tax records show that in 2003 Valley West Mall paid \$3.1 million in property taxes, adjusted for inflation, on a valuation of about \$100 million. By 2022 the tax bill had fallen 83% to \$522,165 on a valuation of \$32.9 million. With the value for the next tax year set below \$20 million after the buildings were devalued, revenues will continue

their drastic decline.

The land, assessed at \$19.5 million, is more valuable being redeveloped, Hyde said.

"It's going to be an expensive" restoration, he said. "I think there's people out there who want to take a swing at it, but right now it's just sort of tied up with the receiver. The bank is going to have to figure out what to do."

Without redevelopment, 'there's an emptying or hollowing out that could occur'

Because property tax revenues at Valley West have fallen off so sharply, redeveloping the site is one of the city's top economic development priorities, Moffatt said. Several state tax incentives or abatements could be used to move the project along, he said.

At the local level, West Des Moines' primary financial incentive is tax increment financing, Moffatt said. In a TIF, the property tax revenues within a designated district are dedicated to supporting its redevelopment.

Or the city could use TIF funding to pay for infrastructure improvements. In 2014, when Microsoft agreed to build a data center in West Des Moines, the city supplemented \$20.3 million in state tax credits with \$87 million worth of infrastructure improvements by using tax increment financing to pay for fiber optic lines, roads and utility connections.

When Jordan Creek Town Center was built in an undeveloped section of West Des Moines in the early 2000s, the city similarly set up a TIF for infrastructure improvements to the area around the mall.

"If we don't do anything to help remedy the issue out there, there's an emptying or hollowing out that could occur in that area," Moffatt said of Valley West.

Any project would likely cost "multi-hundreds of millions of dollars," he said.

"It's probably a risky play for a developer, but there's a lot of developers around the country that specialize in doing this kind of thing," he said. "At some point we're hopeful the court-appointed receiver finds the right partner here."

What could be built at the Valley West Mall site?

Any new development would have components of previous plans: entertainment, retail, office space and hous-

ing, Moffatt said. Scenarios are on the table where portions of the mall are still active or where development starts with a cleared site, he said, but added that he favors a "more substantial redevelopment of that property."

Currently the Valley West site is oriented like a traditional mall campus, with buildings set far back from roads in oceans of parking lots. Previous redevelopment plans left that layout undisturbed. But the University Avenue study says Valley West should flip its orientation so that retail and entertainment businesses are on streets, and parking spaces and offices are on the interior.

That would make the site more inviting and pedestrian friendly and help create an "18 hour community" active outside of traditional business hours, the study said.

Housing would be a major component of any plan, according to Moffatt and the study. High-density multifamily buildings would likely comprise most of it, but some medium-density townhomes could be built, he said. Drainage is poor along University Avenue because stormwater management was not a required part of building plans in the 1970s, so a retention pond and park also could be built, according to the study.

Attractions like an indoor skydiving facility or Topgolf-like venue will be important, Moffatt and Hyde said.

"Some of the attraction stuff has already gone to Jordan Creek, or in the case of the concert venue, gone to Waukee," Moffatt said, referring to the Topgolf climate-controlled driving range slated for construction near Jordan Creek and Waukee's new Vibrant Music Hall. "But could there be something else? We think that longer-term redevelopment that does provide that mix of uses is going to be the best way for us to go."

Whatever comes next, Valley West should not try to replicate Jordan Creek, the University Avenue study said.

"The key to success is differentiation," the study said. "This project needs to be something different in order to give consumers a reason to come, which generates sales, which in turn gives merchants a reason to want to locate here."

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