

Downtown Coolidge Today

II. DOWNTOWN COOLIDGE TODAY

Following is a description of Downtown Coolidge – as it stands today and as envisioned by the public.

Strengths

Downtown Coolidge currently has a variety of strengths that bode well for its future. These include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following.

A number of anchors are currently located in Downtown, which attract users and employees on a regular basis. These include:

- City offices, county offices, and federal offices;
- The post office and library;
- The Coolidge Chamber of Commerce and School District offices;
- San Carlos and Main Street Parks;
- The Central Arizona College office and the Adult Center;
- The Coolidge Historical Museum;
- Churches;
- A variety of businesses; and
- Restaurants.

Several tools have been created to spur investment in Downtown and encourage appropriate improvements. These are:

- The “Commercial Rehabilitation Program,” which offers forgivable, zero-interest, deferred loans that can be used for façade and sign improvements;
- Designation of Downtown as a local and state historic district;
- Design review performed by the City’s Historic Resource and Landmark Commission – referred to locally, and in this document, as the Historical Commission; and

- The budding “linkage” program, which the City has initiated to enable new developments to contribute financially to Downtown improvements.

A good deal of private and public sector improvement is underway or scheduled in Downtown. These projects include:

- Rehab and upgrading of privately owned buildings and vacant lots;
- Construction of new housing units;
- The opening of new businesses;
- Interest being shown by real estate developers; and
- The City’s planned improvements to City Hall, the library, and San Carlos Park.

Downtown’s current and anticipated markets are very strong and include:

- The trade area’s current long-time residents;
- Central Arizona College students;
- Visitors to the Casa Grande National Monument – which number approximately 100,000 per year;
- Users of the under-construction sports complex; and
- Residents of new housing developments under construction and in the planning stages – which are expected to bring tremendous growth and huge population increases to the City.

In addition, and very importantly, the Downtown enhancement effort has the enthusiastic support of the Mayor and the entire Coolidge City Council. This is evidenced by the fact that:

- At its 2006 retreat, City Council determined that having a revitalization strategy defined for Downtown was one of their top priorities;
- The Mayor and City Council passed a resolution to contract with the National League of Cities to participate in the **America Downtown** program, and thereby, complete this **Downtown Action Agenda**; and

- The City has recently retained a city planner to focus attention on Downtown and implementation of the ***Downtown Action Agenda***.

Finally, it is very fortunate that:

- The public and the business community appear optimistic about, interested in, and ready to invest in Downtown's future;
- The community appears to understand that Downtown can be an important image maker or breaker for Coolidge; and
- Those in both the public and private sectors have expressed a strong desire to "get on it and work together" for Downtown's enhancement.

Concerns

Those participating in the ***Downtown Action Agenda*** process were asked to voice their concerns for Downtown's future. In response, the following concerns were mentioned repeatedly:

- The physical condition of buildings and public improvements;
- Owners who have been "sitting" on long-vacant buildings;
- Public safety;
- Lack of reasons to come Downtown;
- The condition of the residential areas within Downtown;
- The cost-effectiveness of investing in Downtown buildings;
- The role of preservation in Downtown;
- How to attract businesses to Downtown; and
- The impact that new, commercial "competition" will have on Downtown.

Desires

Those participating in the ***Downtown Action Agenda*** process were also asked to voice their desires for Downtown's future. In response, the following desires were mentioned repeatedly:

- Creating attractions that draw people;
- Making Downtown a destination;
- Retaining Downtown's "hometown feeling," which is epitomized by its friendliness, relaxed atmosphere, and multi-generational businesses;
- Incorporating the community's heritage into Downtown's enhancement;
- Making Downtown clean and safe;
- Improving Downtown's appearance;
- Filling buildings with viable businesses;
- Improving Downtown's quality and variety of businesses;
- Adding more retail, food, art, and entertainment to Downtown's mix of uses;
- Creating a Downtown where local residents can and choose to shop;
- Attracting visitors from Casa Grande National Monument to Downtown – and vice versa; and
- Focusing on the Downtown enhancement effort to "get it together and get it done."

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Image

A series of meetings were held to engage community members in defining their preferred image of the future Downtown Coolidge. A synopsis of that image is shown below.

***Downtown Coolidge would be
A vibrant, enjoyable, and fun Downtown with
Extremely friendly people,
Cute shops, a diversity of cool and eclectic restaurants,
A strong arts presence, and
A huge amount of nightlife.***

***A unique and special place where
Generations of families have chosen to stay,
Have opened businesses, and
Continue to care about the community.***

***A dynamic regional destination where
People of all ages gather and that
Attracts area residents and visitors alike.***

***A beautiful, quaint, and charming Downtown that
Has made a connection with its history,
Retained its hometown feeling, yet
Welcomes new buildings and modern businesses.***

***A pedestrian-friendly Downtown that is
Clean and safe and where
People park, walk, shop, can eat in a variety of restaurants,
Be entertained, live, and even spend the night.***

***A family-oriented Downtown that makes visitors say,
“This is a place that takes pride in itself and its heritage,”
“I haven’t had this much fun since I was a kid,”
“What a distinctive and beautiful place,”
“I wish they’d do this in my hometown,”***

***“Let’s stay here for the whole weekend,”
“Let’s come back soon!”***

Guidelines

Given Downtown’s current strengths – as well as the community’s concerns, desires, and preferred future image for Downtown – HyettPalma strongly recommends that the ***Downtown Action Agenda*** be implemented using the following guidelines.

1. Set the Stage

In its early days, the Downtown enhancement effort must be focused on the basics – ensuring that Downtown is clean, safe, and visually appealing. Doing so will set the stage for successful business development and the recruitment of quality businesses and investors.

2. Set Standards of Quality

Along with setting the stage for business development, standards of quality must be established in and for Downtown. These standards of quality must address what is expected in Downtown regarding physical improvements made by the private and public sectors – e.g., building appearance, public improvements, landscaping, etc.

3. Create Examples of Quality

Once standards of quality are established, the institutions located in Downtown must set an example by adhering to those standards. Doing so will result in having examples of quality created by Downtown’s leadership – examples which will raise the barre and require others to meet that test.

Downtown institutions that should take the lead in creating examples of quality include:

- The City government;
- The Chamber of Commerce;
- The School Board;
- Banks; and

- The Historical Commission.

4. *Make Sure Downtown Remains Unique*

It is anticipated that the City of Coolidge will experience tremendous commercial growth over the next several years. For Downtown to successfully co-exist with this new commercial development, Downtown must remain unique and distinctive from the competition. This must be accomplished by:

- Preserving Downtown's remaining historic structures;
- Respecting, and being true to, Downtown's historic architecture – rather than remodeling façades to replicate structures not located in Downtown;
- Ensuring that newly constructed buildings complement the old in Downtown;
- Maintaining the pedestrian-orientation of Downtown's historic area;
- Creating the economic orientations recommended for the three Downtown districts discussed later in this document; and
- Marketing Downtown as a unique destination that provides an experience not found elsewhere.

5. *Get the Word Out*

All forms of available communication must be used to let the buying public and investment community know that:

- A market-driven course of action has been created to bring about Downtown's enhancement;
- Downtown's enhancement is a top priority of the Mayor and City Council;
- A large number of positive improvements are occurring in Downtown;

- More and more improvements are about to come on-line; and
- In short . . .

It's a new day in Downtown Coolidge!

6. Ratchet Up

The effort to get the word out that it is a new day in Downtown Coolidge should be aimed at increasing the public's interest in, support of, and commitment to Downtown's enhancement. Accomplishing this will ratchet up the confidence, interest, and involvement that quality investors have in Downtown.

7. Create Linkages

The City government is in the early stages of creating financial linkages that would make funds for Downtown improvements available from new developments within the City. This is an excellent initiative that should be expanded, with linkage contributions continuing past the construction phase of new developments.

8. Coordinated, Quality Improvements

Care must be taken to ensure that all improvements made in Downtown:

- Are coordinated;
- Are in-keeping with the **Downtown Action Agenda** recommendations;
- Move Downtown toward attaining the community's vision;
- Enable Downtown to capture the opportunities defined in the market analysis;
- Adhere to the standards of quality established for Downtown; and
- Are based on – and adhere to – advice obtained from experienced professionals, where applicable.

Doing so will ensure that all improvements made will “fit” and result in the kind of Downtown desired by the community. It must be recognized that the time appears to be right for creating such a Downtown. So much so that a once in a lifetime opportunity might be at hand – and such an opportunity cannot be lost due to disjointed or poorly conceived Downtown improvements.

9. Re-Build Pride

The Downtown enhancement effort must be used to rekindle and re-build the pride which local residents feel for their Downtown, their history, and the future of their community.

10. New Area Residents

The tens of thousands of new residents expected to locate in Coolidge comprise an entirely new, potential customer base for Downtown. These potential customers can be viewed as a clean slate – one without any pre-conceived notions about Downtown Coolidge. Therefore, Downtown must be improved and marketed to these new residents as an appealing destination and a unique experience.

11. Business & Residential Enhancement

Downtown Coolidge was developed in an unusual configuration. Typically, a Downtown is comprised of contiguous commercial development that has residential uses on its peripheries. In Coolidge, the reverse has occurred: a residential neighborhood lies in the center of Downtown, with commercial uses forming a ring around that neighborhood.

In a Downtown with a more typical configuration, the commercial area and its adjacent neighborhoods are usually improved in a phased manner. However, in Coolidge, Downtown’s commercial and residential uses are much more inter-related, due to its unusual configuration. Therefore, the Downtown enhancement effort in Coolidge cannot be phased. Instead, the enhancement of Downtown Coolidge must entail improving both the commercial area and residential area – simultaneously – rather in phases.