

ADDRESSING PROBLEM PROPERTIES IN DOWNTOWN DISTRICTS



The appearance, use and safety of downtown districts impact community image, property values, future investments and ultimately, the long-term vitality of communities. A downtown cannot reach its full potential and thrive as a center for living, working and entertainment if nuisance buildings, improperly maintained lots and poor building uses are the focal point.

Solutions come with local action. Community leaders must identify challenges and develop ideas, programs and procedures to improve those problem properties.

WHAT TO DO FIRST

- Take an organized walk of your downtown district.
- Take notes and pictures. Ask yourself, what would a visitor to town think?
- Identify red flags and then work to develop ideas, programs and procedures to address issues.
- Publicly recognize property owners that take pride in their properties with news stories, pictures, awards, building of the month and other creative ideas.
- Communicate with the owners of downtown properties on a regular basis, keeping them up to date on what is happening in the district and possible programs to help them with property upkeep.
- Organize volunteer efforts to do painting, public art, window washing and displays, obsolete sign removal, murals and flower plantings that your downtown property owners could take advantage of.



INCENTIVES

- Develop local incentive programs to leverage state and federal grants. Low interest loan programs and grant programs can leverage funding for downtown buildings. Targeted grant programs for the removal of building slipcovers, uncovering windows and sign improvements have been successful statewide.
- Consider state and federal grant programs. For example, IEDA's Community Catalyst Building Remediation program has helped rehabilitate many underutilized and problem buildings.
- Create a local investor group to acquire, rehab and operate downtown properties.



IOWA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

1963 Bell Avenue, Suite 200
Des Moines, Iowa 50315 USA

International: +1.515.348.6200

Domestic: 1.800.245.4692

ENFORCEMENT

- Develop ordinances and policies to deal with properties. Ideas could include:
 - **Minimum maintenance ordinance** to preserve the structural integrity of your downtown buildings and to assure a clean, safe and attractive downtown.
 - **Vacant building ordinance** to address current or future vacant buildings that are dilapidated, unsafe or inadequately maintained.
 - Develop a **vacant building definition and registry process**. Example: Owners would have a deadline to fill out a form from the date the building becomes vacant. If the building is vacant after 6 months, an inspection will be made and a fee charged. Inappropriate uses such as storage will not be considered “occupancy.”
 - Utilize [Iowa Code, Chapter 657A](#) to address **Abandoned or Unsafe Buildings**.
 - Visit the [Downtown Resource Center website](#) for local city ordinance examples.
- Act - and be consistent! Enact the new ideas, programs and procedures to see change and success for your downtown. It may be difficult to follow through on new procedures due to personal relationships but consistency in enforcement is critical to the success of your downtown.

BEFORE



AFTER



Façade rehabilitation of the historic Iowa National Bank building in downtown Ottumwa received \$75,000 assistance from the Main Street Challenge Grant program administered by the Iowa Economic Development Authority.

LEARN MORE

IEDA's Downtown Resource Center (IDRC) can help connect communities with resources, visit iowaeda.com/downtown-resource-center or contact IDRC at downtown@iowaeda.com.

For more information on programs available at the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) contact
[+1.515.348.6200](tel:+15153486200) | downtown@iowaeda.com | iowaeda.com

FOLLOW US

 [iowaeconomicdevelopment](https://www.facebook.com/iowaeconomicdevelopment)

 [businessiowa](https://twitter.com/businessiowa)