



**BETTER BLOCK**

# Fort Dodge Better Block

## **WHAT:**

In April, members of Better Block visited Fort Dodge to explore the issues in downtown, and help the community brainstorm rapid and unique solutions.

## **WHO:**

Jason Roberts, Founding Director, Better Block

Patrick Blaydes, Senior Project Manager, Better Block

Members of the Fort Dodge Community

## **WHEN:**

April 11 and 12, 2018

## **WHERE:**

Heartland Communications, Lot at 1007 Central Avenue, Growth Alliance

# Fort Dodge

## Keynote and Mini-Build Project

The evening started off with a keynote presentation by Jason Roberts with an introduction from Fort Dodge Mayor Matt Bemrich to members of the Fort Dodge community. This was followed by a mini-build project.

For the mini-build project, Better Block and Fort Dodge Main street tackled the issues of vacancy in Downtown and a lack things to do in the community. In 30 minutes, Better Block and Main street Fort Dodge and members of the community took, what was a vacant lot between two buildings and turned it into a Pop-Up Patio, complete with live music, food, drinks, and art work.



Jason Roberts presenting to Fort Dodge community members.



Before



After



Community members hanging lights.



Mayor Bemrich and Better Block staff building the bar.



View from the second floor of the pop-up.

# Fort Dodge

## Summary of Day Two Meetings

Three meetings were held on Thursday with community members ranging from high schoolers to long-time stakeholders in downtown. The purpose of the meetings was to explore the issues in Fort Dodge, and then, using Better Block's process of rapid prototyping and quickly moving mountains, discuss potential ideas in the community and a framework to accomplish them.

Much of the discussion revolved around the issue of a lack of places to go in downtown and a lack of things to do. This was shared across all different age groups. There was an additional discussion about the Better Block mini-build process in Fort Dodge from the previous day, and how that process brought a number of people together and created a sense of accomplishment quickly as opposed to a longer, drawn-out planning process.

The ideas below were cultivated from the discussions and address the issue of a lack of place and lack of activity and vibrancy in downtown. They are all centered around the similar energy and enthusiasm of the Pop-Up Patio and what can be accomplished quickly. Some of the projects can be tackled early on and build from the momentum of the Pop-Up Patio. Others should be grouped together and done in conjunction with the larger projects in a Better Block-style event.

### Quick Projects

#### Murals

A lack of color and art in downtown was a common thread in much of the conversations. A mural program in downtown can address this.

Use the African American church as a prototype. Create a call for artists, hold social mixers with art and community members, give a quick timeline for completion. Use the prototype as a framework for future projects.

#### Roof-Top Events

Pop-up Roof Top parties at either tall buildings or second story concerts as unique showcase of Fort Dodge and as gathering events.

Find supportive property owners, schedule events, brand them, and create unique Instagram backdrops.

#### Live-Music Venue

Younger adults mentioned a lack of cool venues for local music.

Find property owners willing to open their doors, piggyback on existing organizations for insurance, empower high school and college students to take ownership of the place and prevent it from becoming too officious.

### Better Block Event Projects

#### Mini-Museum Tour

Build on local history to pop-up mini-museums in downtown.

Empower volunteer historians for each museum, pair them with supportive property owners, build temporary space out, cluster them along a block, and create marketing material for a walking tour.

#### Pop-Up Mini Golf Course

Pop-up a mini-golf course in several parallel parking spaces along a street.

Locate the course on the same street as the museums, source astro turf, work with golf community for clubs,

#### Window Graphics

Create vinyl graphics in windows without pop-ups.

Sponsor a design competition among local designers to design and install them.

#### Create Unique Building Lighting

Activate downtown with unique lights along buildings.

Create a theme, work with volunteer landscape architects or artists on design, brand and celebrate a Building Lighting Ceremony.