



Keokuk Better Block

WHAT:

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

WHO:

Jason Roberts, Founding Director, Better Block
Colin Amos, Project Manager, Better Block
Members of the Keokuk Community

WHEN:

April 18 and 19, 2018

WHERE:

810 Main Street, Keokuk

Keokuk

Keynote and Mini-Build Project

The evening started off with a keynote presentation by Jason Roberts to members of the Keokuk community. This was followed by a mini-build project.

The inspiration for the mini-build project came from the underutilization of Main Street by pedestrians.

For the mini-build project, we created a pop-up plaza with a mural. The plaza consisted of picnic tables, string lights, Wikiblock cafe sets, and a mural on the side of the building. Hamburgers and hot dogs were also brought for volunteers to enjoy. Despite difficulties with the weather, the pop-up public space and the conversations it started, helped to show the potential of the empty spaces on Main Street and how they can be activated permanently to become gathering spots for the community.



Mural, picnic tables, and string lights as part of the newly created plaza.



Community members helping build Wikiblock cafe sets.



Community members cooking hot dogs for the volunteers in the pop-up plaza.

Summary of Day Two

Meetings were held on Thursday with community members ranging from business and property owners to regional planners to identify the issues Keokuk is facing and brainstorm some possible interventions that could address these problems, using Better Block's process of rapid prototyping.

Much of the concern for Keokuk was a lack of investment and activity on Main Street. Many of the buildings on Main Street are in disrepair and being torn down, creating gaps in the building frontage down the street. These gaps lead to a drop in energy unless they are properly designed and activated. Main Street is also too wide to support regular and lively pedestrian activity. The car speeds and traffic make Main Street feel unsafe and uncomfortable to the pedestrian.



Streetscape

What - Main Street is too wide and cars are too fast to have a comfortable and safe street life

How - Options should be explored to regain control of Main Street from the state DOT, add bike lanes, extend sidewalk to make lanes smaller, extend bumpouts



Local Business

What - Supporting local businesses and filling vacant storefronts

How - Microgrant opportunities for local business owners to improve storefront, pop-up stores in vacant spaces, such as a super market



Pedestrian Amenities

What - How to make the streetscape more inviting for pedestrians

How - Install trees on Main Street, add benches, cafe seating, parklets, pocket parks in empty spaces, bike racks, interactive elements, art



Programming

What - How to continually activate the spaces in downtown Keokuk

How - Pop-up dog parks, outdoor concerts and festivals, programming associated with the river, such as kayaking and nature walks