

Downtown Resident Steering Committee
Downtown Neighbor Network Recommendation
9/5/2019

1. Background:

The GR Forward Downtown and River Activation Plan identified the goal to create a downtown neighborhood that is home to a diverse population. To that end, DGRI looks to support initiatives that improve downtown living for existing residents and attract new downtown residents in order to foster civic engagement and strengthen community ties downtown. GR Forward specifically identifies the opportunity to establish a downtown resident council. In early 2018, an ad-hoc Downtown Resident Steering Committee was formed to explore the creation of a stand alone organization that would represent downtown neighbors.

The Downtown Resident Steering Committee was constituted to represent various viewpoints and perspectives on the unique challenges and opportunities of living in or near downtown Grand Rapids. Although DGRI convened the group, it was made explicit that there was not a predetermined outcome and that the group had the authority to determine if there was need or desire for a downtown neighborhood group and what form that group might take. The group began with an extensive “data dive” to better understand who was living in downtown, what groups currently (or potentially) exist in and near downtown, what concerns residents have, how is downtown changing, and what type of organization might be the best fit to represent the unique voice of downtown living.

2. Process:

- a) Recruitment of Steve Faber, Byrum and Fisk to facilitate the independent process for the Downtown Resident Steering Committee, supported by DGRI Stakeholder Engagement Specialist Annamarie Buller
- b) Research and Data:
 - i. Resident survey
 - ii. Housing analysis
 - iii. Scan of organizations and associations
 - iv. Focus group discussion with existing neighborhoods (November 2017, April 2018)
- c) Scenario Planning: No growth, slow growth, high growth
- d) Structure Pros/Cons: Nonprofit vs Joint Venture
- e) Heartside residents reorganizing the Heartside Neighborhood Association (HNA) propose expansion.
- f) Downtown Resident Steering Committee Recommendations Engagement

3. Mission/Vision/Guiding Principles:

Mission:

The DNN exists to foster a community of downtown neighbors that are connected, informed and empowered to improve downtown living.

Vision:

The DNN envisions a neighborhood that is vibrant and culturally diverse, active, safe and full of opportunity and experiences unique to downtown living.

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Guiding Principles:

Accessible & Inclusive – We desire to be a network that is open to all neighbors

Empowering – We desire to be a network that supports downtown neighbors and provides an avenue to advance collective interests

Collaborative – We desire to be a network that brings people and groups together across boundaries

Equitable – We desire to be a network that is intentional about listening to our neighbors and elevating the voices of those who have been historically marginalized

Unique – We desire to be a network that embraces the peculiarities of living downtown and convey that perspective with the broader community

Key Programs:

Improved communications and greater awareness

- **Communication** - share information relevant to living downtown
 - Identify neighbors who want to join the Downtown Neighborhood Network
 - Outreach to building owners and property managers
 - Implement a communication tool that allows for information to be pushed out
 - Implement a communication tool that allows for information to be pulled in/ feedback
 - Find opportunities to tell the stories of downtown neighbors
 - Develop a brand and marketing materials for DNN

Increased participation in events, surveys and committees

- **Events** – organize events that bring downtown neighbors together
 - 4-6 events a year
 - Event opportunities for education and welcoming new neighbors
 - Feature Downtown and near neighborhood assets
 - Recruitment events to grow the DNN

Increased opportunities to inform policy and projects impacting

- **Advocacy** – provide opportunity for downtown neighbors to speak into and influence decisions that impact their quality of life
 - Conduct an annual survey of downtown neighbors to identify trends and issues
 - Develop tools to help neighbors organize and navigate systems
 - Provide a space for issues\ opportunities to “bubble up” that need action

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DNN Structure:

- An affinity group/ network for people who identify as downtown neighbors but may already be in a neighborhood
- Downtown Resident Network name change to Downtown Neighbor Network
- The DNN has blurred boundaries to be more inclusive- including Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods in its boundaries
- Work collaboratively with DGRI and near neighborhoods

Governance Structure: the Downtown Neighbor Network Advisory

The proposal is that the DNN Advisory will live within DGRI for at least two years. The DNN Advisory is most aligned to help the DGRI's Goal 2 Alliance achieve their outcomes, however, there is a desire for the DNN to exist outside the hierarchy of being under any specific committee. This will give the DNN Advisory a level of autonomy and recognize that the voice of downtown neighbors is valuable to all DGRI committees. The DNN Advisory may establish ad hoc committees to direct their work as need.

DGRI Alliance Representation:

The DNN Advisory will present to each Goal Alliance annually (winter each year)

- The DNN's Advisory Committee members will:
 - Live in or in a near neighborhood that is Downtown adjacent
 - Live in a multi-unit building
 - Be a mix of renters/owners
 - Embody values of the DNN
 - Represent full diversity
- The DNN Advisory Committee Recruitment process:
 - September 2018-Outreach to property owners to solicit residents to apply
 - November 1- DNN Event to announce structure and recruit board members
 - October 2018-Online application/ paper application for engagement events
 - November 21-Deadline for applications due by Thanksgiving
- The DNN Advisory Committee will be determined by:
 - Staff of DGRI
 - Members of the Downtown Resident Steering Committee
 - Representatives from the DGRI Goal Alliances

Partnerships:

- DGRI to provide staffing and direction
- Neighborhood Associations – interaction with near neighborhoods
- City of Grand Rapids

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Timeline:

Year One Milestones- October 2018- October 2019

Fall 2018

- Final engagement with near neighborhoods, City Commissioners, Committee and Chair recruitment, DGRI Board Approval
- Data enhancement
 - Outreach target downtown properties, condo leadership and property management each month

Winter 2019

- Selection of DNN Advisory
- DNN Announcement and Recruitment Event
- January 2019-First convening of the DNN Advisory
- January / February 2019-Focus on Board Governance for DNN
- January/ February 2019-Update and overview, planning with the 5 DGRI Alliances
- Bring communication tools online
 - First monthly newsletter with announcement of first meeting
- Downtown/ Near Downtown Resident Survey updated and deployed

Spring 2019

- Identify project opportunities shaped by the survey and issues identified throughout the year, look to budgeting and planning for 2020
- Events
 - Decision to continue to convene DRN Events Committee or reorganize
 - Building previews, education events, speakers etc.
 - Set remaining events for the year
 - Mix, Mingle and Share 2019 date tentatively set-April 10, 2019

Year Two Milestones- October 2019- October 2020

Fall 2019

- Evaluate year 1 progress
- Data enhancement
 - Outreach target downtown properties, condo leadership and property management each month
- November 2019 Event/Recruitment next wave of committee members

Winter 2020

- December 2019-Selection of new DNN Advisory members
- January 2020-First convening of the new DNN Advisory/ Strategic Planning
- January/ February 2020-Update and overview, planning with the 5 DGRI Alliances
- February/ March 2020- Downtown/ Near Downtown Survey updated and deployed
- Events 4-6 per year
- Issue advocacy, project implementation

Spring 2020

- Mix, Mingle and Share with your Downtown Neighbors
- Begin evaluation and make recommendation for the future of the DNN Advisory in 2021