Intro
In the 2000’s, Downtown Oconomowoc was a thorough fare with the intersection of two state highways in the center of the City. The community had been waiting for a bypass since the 1950’s, and the opportunity for some traffic congestion relief was on the horizon. Since it was such a critical cross roads, investment in infrastructure, aesthetics, and pedestrian friendly elements could not occur. This resulted in the deterioration and stagnation of our central business district.
With the bypass complete which established an alternative travel route, public investment could occur. Unfortunately, the complete shut down of downtown could not have come at a more unfortunate time.... 2008, the start of the economic downturn.
The closure of roads and access had a tremendous effect on businesses, this coupled with the economy led to many business failures and downtown vacancy. And to make matters worse, Downtown Oconomowoc was shattered by the explosion of the First Baptist Church as result of the infrastructure construction. After all that disruption and turmoil, how do you pick up the pieces......
The critical steps taken for our community to progress that others can follow were:

1. Establish a plan or direction
2. Removal of barriers
3. Creating a destination
4. Establishing business resources
5. Foster partnerships

The City decided to engage the community and seek input. WI communities are required to update their Plan every 10 years, we saw this as an opportunity
Our community decided to incorporate a market analysis to determine what is achievable, but also felt it was important to get input from our residents and business owners.

In doing so we asked what are your top 3 likes & top 3 dislikes?

With this knowledge..... We were able to change or improve the dislikes, and enhance the positive elements.
Why can’t we be more like... our competition...

Delafield

Pewaukee

Cedarburg

Strawberry Festival
Downtown needed to change due to local growth & to continue to be competitive within the region

Reinvestment into the Heart of the Community, Key to overall Image & Vitality

Sets a direction for the community to follow and strive for success.

**Implementation is key....... Activity and progress is contagious!**

There are resources out there to assist communities too:

- UW Extension First Impressions Community Exchanges – Oconomowoc partnered with Cedarburg in 1994
- WI Downtown Action Council
- WI Rural Partners
When construction was all completed Downton looked nice and pedestrian friendliness was improved, however there were still barriers. The City took a look at its ordinances to determine... are there things that hindered progress and/or improvement?

**If the City is getting in the way of business/community improvements, that needs to change!**

There were several elements that were prohibited that could add interest and vitality to the street...

- Amended zoning ordinances to allow:
  - Outdoor seating
  - Outdoor decoration & display
  - Blade & sandwich board signage
  - Allow low intensity “industry” such as soap making
  - Efficient approvals of things we want/need such as restaurants
Commit to building a destination!

Momentum builds when based on the critical elements of the community....

Have limited resources to establish a brand?

There are resources available...

- Online logo/brand development through: **48hourlogo.com** a local restaurant used this service and it cost $250
  - Use local students they have many talents that can help us all.
Once there is buy-in & commitment, others become interested in helping as well.

The Heart of Lake Country now has gateway sculpture which was a donation from our local Rotary Club.
Is there a photographer or aspiring student that can help you? 
Image Marketing – pictured here are City staff members and their families
Images on social media – Facebook, Instagram & snapchat
Hyperlinks direct to website from social media
Now what?

Public Investment but No Businesses

?
Our next element was establishing business & building resources...

City Investment made believers in Downtown, now it was the private sectors turn

I created a program that leveraged the Community Investment Act requirements of the local bank to benefit our community....

Established a Loan Pool program to lend $25,000 loans at 1% to entrepreneurs interested in the community.

In our community, the Bank has invested $750,000 for business start-ups.

They have now expanded the program to 11 of their other branch communities as a result of our success.
The City capitalized a façade grant program initially through a Community Development Block Grant...

Due to its success the City began to budget dollars for continued building enhancement projects, which raise the taxable value of the property.

The sustainability of funding will be realized through our Downtown TIF district.
By seeing what building owners have done to enhance their investment, it results in a positive peer pressure for others to follow......
The Mann Block building is an architectural gem for Downtown Oconomowoc. The rehabilitation of this iconic structure is a result of a public/private partnership between the new building owner, the City and a grant from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. The project completion will occur in Spring of 2019, and provide the opportunity to welcome new tenants to the community.
This committee is about borrowing ideas, and the next couple are ones we had seen...

Take advantage of your key vistas with Swings like these, or

Is there an under utilized space that could welcome more activity?

Parks have picnic tables, but they are heavy and cannot accommodate different size groups...

Our Tourism Bureau spent $250 on plastic Adirondack chairs that were then secretly placed in a green space....

The result was a place to rest, and a quick game of duck-duck –goose!
Which a local business owner snapped a picture of and shared with the City!
Flexible and entertaining!
Given Oconomowoc’s connection to the arts, and desire to enhance the image of Downtown Oconomowoc, the City Tourism Commission began a collaborative mural program with building and business owners. It is their hope to continue to add additional murals in the future. They are also great photo opportunities that are shared in social media, which is free advertising! School students even volunteered to paint a mural of our High School mascot.
On an every day basis our downtown is now very welcoming, but it really shows when we partner with others to celebrate what it means to be the Heart of Lake Country.
Our community is now a destination, thanks to the efforts of many...

Each of our service clubs have a parade and other activities in our City Center

Our photo library is enhanced through a partnership with a professional photographer!
Partner with your local historical society, which also helps give them publicity. Another way to celebrate Oconomowoc. A thing to do that’s free. Tourism attraction and fun activity for families. You could do something like this in any community. This has led to a resident developed Geo-Cache historic tour.
Another great community partnership the photo doesn’t do it justice. Was so well received, the community asked the City to leave the lights up as long as possible! This adds a quaintness to our downtown. You’d be surprised what sparkly lights can do during a WI Winter.
Through partnerships with local organizations many events have expanded & flourished - quickly click through - this is what happened
Community coming together - Spring & Fall
Weekly to bring people downtown weekend mornings
American Legion concerts – every Wednesday

Friday Night – Sound Waves at City Beach – coordinated by local restaurant & supported by business sponsors
Festival of Arts was a two day activity.....
... Has expanded to an entire week of free family fun!
Promote historic events & significant facts about your community.....
In 2019, we will celebrate the 80th anniversary of the world premiere showing of the Wizard of Oz in Downtown Oconomowoc!
On Black Friday & Thanksgiving weekend, a local group has a German Christmas Market event in recognition of our heritage and Sister City relationship with Dietzenbach Germany.

This has shifted people away from big box retailers, and into our downtown shops and activities.
Thank you! And I hope our journey has created some inspiration and ideas others can use to enhance their communities.
If you like what you have seen, come for a visit & experience it for yourself!
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