

Vision Statement and Request for Support

*Prepared by the Downtown Merchants Association
April 2004*

The following document represents a consensus of downtown Golden merchants regarding our vision for the future of downtown. It has been prepared to include the voices of we merchants and business owners that have invested our financial futures in the downtown area, in policy discussions about projects and programs to help keep the downtown area vital. It is our hope that you will carefully consider the contents of this document as you plan for and support the continued viability and success of downtown Golden.

Vision Statement & Strategic Positioning

The Downtown Merchants Association (DMA) believes that the many stakeholders in downtown Golden must work together to develop a strong, compelling image for our city that highlights those elements that make downtown Golden a unique and desirable destination for new and existing businesses, current and prospective residents, and those visiting the Rocky Mountain region, Colorado in particular. Reminiscent of the “Small Town, Big Fun” marketing slogan currently being used, the proposed image is that of an authentic, historic, outdoorsy mountain town, with a plentitude of unique eating, shopping and cultural attractions, as well as easy access to outdoor mountain activities. Once developed and refined, this image must be communicated effectively and delivered upon consistently at all levels, from marketing communications through tenant mix through architectural standards through streetscape components.

Tactics

The DMA suggests a number of specific tactical recommendations in support of this vision statement. They are organized into four main categories representing the physical and economic components of the downtown business area as follows: 1) streetscape, 2) buildings and facades, 3) tenant mix, and 4) business skills.

1. Streetscape. The downtown streetscape is comprised of the public right of way area and associated infrastructure improvements. On Washington Avenue, the area is generally considered to extend from building face to building face. There are a number of elements of the streetscape area of interest to businesses, including:

- Quality and consistency of sidewalk improvements
- Private building overhangs in the right of way
- Public directional signage
- Holiday decorations and seasonal banners

- Private signage in the right of way
- Use of the streetscape area for business purposes
- Use of streetscape area for events and street closures
- Alley improvements
- Maintenance levels

Streetscape Recommendations:

- The most critical streetscape issue facing merchants is the lack of visibility from the overgrown street trees. We encourage the City to revisit the landscape architecture of Washington Avenue and adjacent areas, with a potential outcome being removal of some trees. The ultimate goal is a redesigned streetscape that is shopper friendly, while increasing exposure of the businesses.
- The City should develop and install creative additional directional signs to encourage patronage of side street businesses and be consistent with the theme/image of downtown (e.g. Small Town Big Fun). These signs would not be individual listings of businesses, but simple, dynamic indicators that there are more businesses and attractions down these streets.
- Use of the sidewalk area must be more tightly controlled to prevent sign clutter and unattractive displays. The aforementioned signage is designed to help alleviate this problem, specifically as it relates to sandwich board-type signage.
- The City needs to formalize and enforce the agreements made in fall 2003 about street vendors, outdoor display of goods and outdoor seating areas. Specifically, there are to be no vendors on the bridge and vicinity. With regard to approved vendors, there must be a degree of control over the products offered, specific maintenance and clean-up guidelines, and approval from adjacent/nearby businesses.
- We support select events that close Washington Avenue, but believe that applicants must submit a standardized special event permit request form and charge a reasonable fee. The request form will outline information that must be provided, including demographics of participants and attendees, expected attendance, event promotion, expected economic impact and so on. As part of the permit process, the event organizers must present the proposed event and corresponding street closures to the Downtown Merchants Association and receive consensus approval.
- We propose development of “did you know?” signage that includes interesting facts about Golden (consistent with its overall theme/image) to be placed along Washington Avenue and adjacent side streets.
- The City needs to provide continued and more diligent enforcement of snow removal in the downtown area.
- GURA is encouraged to revisit its bench and bike rack donation program to provide needed public seating and promote a bike-friendly environment.

2. Buildings and Facades. The private buildings that abut the streetscape area also play an important part in the continued health and prosperity of downtown. These buildings vary significantly in age, condition, and style. The elements of concern to businesses include:

- Compatibility and consistency of building design
- Property owner maintenance and upkeep

Building and Façade Recommendations

- Design standards (vs. guidelines) for private development in the downtown area should be developed and implemented.
- The City, EDComm and GURA must continue current—and develop new—programs to encourage investment in existing buildings.
- Individual tenants should be educated about the possibilities for improvements and be enlisted to work with their building owners to encourage such investment, and to link these owners with GURA.
- GURA and the City should create incentives to encourage updates to existing buildings, including possible reconstruction of overhangs in a more business friendly and attractive manner, consistent with the proposed design standards.
- The City and GURA should proceed with plans for improving the appearance of and access through downtown alleyways. These underutilized areas can help us increase our critical mass and breadth of offerings. We believe that there are a number of opportunities for retail expansion in these areas, including artist studios and galleries.

3. Tenant Mix. The amount and type of commercial uses in the downtown area is a critical issue for merchant success, as well as a character and community design issue for the entire City. The amount of commercial space desired and the general types of tenants that should be encouraged to fill that space are crucial to the economic success of existing retailers.

Tenant Mix Recommendations:

- **The Downtown Merchants support the City and GURA in facilitating redevelopment of the Hested's building in a reasonable and expeditious fashion. The size and location of this key property make it a critical component to both improving tenant mix, as well as ensuring a positive perception of our viability and success as a downtown. This project should be addressed as the highest priority for downtown vitality and economic development.**
- We would like to see a retention program developed to encourage existing businesses to remain open for business and located in downtown Golden. This might include a resource center (actual or virtual) for business owners to get business, marketing and financial planning information; information on grant opportunities; and the like.
- The City is encouraged to revisit the results and recommendations of the Benson Report and use this information to create a three- to five-year action plan for downtown. This plan should consider the addition of an appropriate major/anchor tenant (local, regional or national) with destination appeal. Such a tenant can increase the credibility of downtown Golden as a vital, thriving business community, not to mention our customer

base. The plan should also consider the optimal mix of tenants to serve the needs and expectations of our two primary, yet often disparate customer groups: local residents and tourists.

- The City and GURA should work to increase the total amount of commercial space in the downtown core. As mentioned above, our alleyways are one way to do this; new development is another.
- The City and GURA are asked to consider development of incentives that encourage appropriate retail business to fill key vacancies in the downtown shopping district. We would like this primary four-block area to consist primarily of retail businesses, including boutiques, galleries and eating establishments.
- We support an increased representation of businesses that are synergistic with our cultural offerings, including artist studios and galleries, art/sewing supplies, and the like.
- We also support the attraction of businesses that are consistent with our overall image and synergistic with our natural offerings, including outdoor/sports-related retailers, family-friendly eating establishments, and quality tourist goods providers.

4. Business Skills. Many small business owners enter entrepreneurship because of a desire for independence and a wish to make it on their own. As a result of their small scale, many businesses have not had access to training and information that could increase business efficiency, profitability and overall success. Downtown merchants envision a business area where entrepreneurs have access to education and business resource materials that will increase the economic health of the entire area.

Business Skills Recommendations:

- The City and EDComm should continue to sponsor business skills training efforts that are convenient, economical and of value to Golden businesses. Suggested areas of training include the following:
 - 1) marketing and promotion
 - 2) customer service skills
 - 3) merchandising/display
 - 4) financial management
- We also ask that the City, EDComm and GURA consider funding incentive programs designed to increase business success. The Downtown Vision Committee is committed to taking the lead on development of such programs, making them both fun and educational for business owners. Some of the Vision Committee's ideas are as follows:
 - Training seminars.** Similar to the Merchant Training Seminar held in early March, we propose holding regular, perhaps semi-annual, and affordable educational programs of value to local businesses.
 - Window display contest.** Local businesses would be encouraged to enter a friendly competition to create the best window display, using concepts and tricks of the trade from noted retail sources (such as Rick Segel, the presenter at our Merchant Seminar held in early March). The business owners not only learn about display, but the winner receives a valuable, relative "prize," such as a small grant for a store improvement, like a new display window or lighting fixture.

- ❑ **Awards program.** An annual awards program could be developed where recognition is given for outstanding accomplishments, such as most improved store appearance, best marketing program and best customer service. This type of program could be sponsored by a specific organization or even the Transcript (think “Best of Westword”); a call for nominations could be publicized, encouraging involvement from both residents and other businesses.
- ❑ **Access to business planning information/experts.** Not unlike the SBA’s SCORE program, a small corps of local business experts/volunteers could be formed to support local small business success. The corps could be comprised of former and current business owners with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, who are willing to volunteer their time and expertise to others. Perhaps a small library of business and related resources and books could be available, as well as a web site with links to pertinent local business information. If this is not practical, interaction between small businesses and the SBA could be facilitated, perhaps through workshops held in Golden, as well as by an outreach program to educate business owners about the resources available.

Conclusion

The Downtown Merchants Association thanks you for your consideration of our thoughts, hopes and vision for downtown Golden. We also ask for the support of the dedicated individuals on our City Council, the GURA board and the Economic Development Commission. We hope you will support us in making this vision a reality as you do the important work with which you are charged. We look forward to an open dialogue with you about this document, which we see as a work-in-progress, something we will want to reference regularly and revise as appropriate. With your help, support and resources, we are optimistic about and look forward to the future of downtown Golden.