

Downtown Elyria

An Action Plan for Vibrancy

March 31, 2023

Introduction

Downtown Elyria is the center of gravity of the city. At its core is Ely Park, a classic town square surrounded by historic buildings including Elyria City Hall and the Lorain County Courthouse. Additionally, the Black River meanders through the city featuring several parks. It embraces downtown on three sides to the west, north, and east.

Like many peer cities around Ohio and the rest of the country, Elyria's commercial core has suffered due to changing economic trends and disinvestment. Despite these challenges, the fabric of the downtown core remains strong. Elyria Community Partnership (ECP), City of Elyria and partnering community organizations are committed to bringing vitality back into downtown. This is an essential building block to a larger, on-going community revitalization strategy. Building rehabilitation, business support, enhancing parks and public spaces, and connecting downtown assets are each important components of a successful strategy.

ECP engaged consultants, LAND Studio and Thomas Starinsky Planning + Design to develop an action-oriented plan, in collaboration with local stakeholders,

to envision a series of projects, events, and initiatives that elevate, enhance, and connect a vibrant downtown. The planning process brought a diverse group of voices to the table. The ideas that emerged from the conversations seek to tell the story of Elyria – past and future – through a variety of experiences throughout Downtown.

The Action Plan for Vibrancy identifies opportunities to bring art, color, and people together including inspiring murals, exciting programming, and a dynamic street environment. It makes recommendations for priorities and implementation for each element. Finally, the plan provides information on costs and potential funding sources relevant to each project.

This Action Plan is meant to be used for continued stakeholder engagement activities, future fundraising efforts, and inspiring new projects.



LAND Studio is a nonprofit organization with a mission to create places and connect people through public art, collaborative planning, and dynamic programming. Their goal is to ensure the spaces they create are reflective of the communities they serve.

Thomas Starinsky Planning + Design works with three core values: Collaboration, Creativity and Innovation, and Evolution. Their goal is to engage in work that leads to tangible change that improves the quality of people's life with meaningful ideas that build community.



Goals for Downtown Elyria

INSPIRE a vibrant Downtown filled with people

- Activate Downtown with events
- Enhance public spaces with art and amenities
- Enhance connections to and through downtown
- Build momentum toward larger projects

CHANGE the Conversations about Downtown Elyria

- Foster cultural diversity and inclusion around Elyrian's heritage
- Acknowledge the past, evolving toward the future
- Engage the community and inspire the next chapter of Elyria

CREATE an action-oriented strategy

- Quick wins – public art, events, communications and marketing
- Leverage new investments
- Funding and Implementation Strategy

Community Engagement

The Steering Committee for the Action Plan is made up of twelve strategic stakeholders. This group met several times during the project to guide the Land Studio's work, discuss community goals and coordinate engagement of the entire Elyria community.

Mike Griffin, Chair
Mark Ballard
Dawn Calvert
Amber Doll
Stacey Francis
Daniel Martin
Steph Matus

Achilles Morales
Debby Krejsa
Joel Ratner
Andrea Repko
Monet Roberts
Frank Whitfield, Mayor of Elyria
James Ziemnik

It was important to meet with individual stakeholders to gain a deeper understanding of community needs and opportunities. The following organizational meetings were held including:

- Lorain County Metroparks – Jim Ziemnik, Director
- Forge 417 – Kevin Flanigan, Stephanie Mercado
- Lorain County Public Health – Kiara Williams, Health Education Specialist – Lorain County Active Transportation Plan
- City of Elyria – Mayor Frank Whitfield, Dawn Calvert, Director of Economic Development and Business Services
- Lorain County Historical Society, Kerri Broome, Executive Director
- City of Elyria Comprehensive Plan – MS Consultants. Met with the planning team and collaborated on the survey work to benefit both projects. Survey hosted at www.myelyria.com. As of 2.9.23 there have been 295 responses.

The Steering Committee organized and host six focus group meetings that were facilitated by Land Studio. All of the meetings were held successively on February 2, 2023. The following community focus areas were engaged.

- Elyria Sunrise Rotary
- Elyria Rotary
- Downtown Elyria Stakeholders
- Elyria High School Students
- Arts, Culture, and Historical Society Community
- African American Community

Approximately 60 community members attended in total





Community Engagement Insights

During the focus group sessions and within the online survey many strategy questions were asked to gain insight on key issues from the community. The following is a summary of

Today, when I think of Downtown Elyria, I think of...

Positive Emotions

Potential
Possibilities
Diamond in the rough
Opportunity
Thriving
Historic
Gathering
Blending old and new

Negative Emotions

Confusing
Neglected
Sketchy
Not friendly
No color
Dirty
Unwelcoming
Not enough for youth
Poor lighting

Positive – People & Places

Ely Square
The fountain
Gazebo
People-live and work
Churches
Foundry, Erie Island, Mystical Moon
Events
The Falls
Streetscape
Arts Council mural
Alleys

Negative – People & Places

Need gateways
Empty storefronts
Lack of small local businesses
Lack of bike racks
Vagrancy
Not enough parking
One hour parking is unwelcoming
Not enough seating/benches

If you had one wish for Downtown Elyria, what would it be?

Emotions

Family by day – more adult by evening
Be respected
Become a destination
Revitalization
Inspire the community
Jobs
Acknowledge and celebrate history
More color
Kid friendly

People & Places

Free WiFi
More restaurants
Places to hang out and sit
Upper floor living
Clean it up
Connection to the falls
More events
Incubator space
Safety
Shared office space – co-working
Bike connections
Gateways into Downtown

Wayfinding to parking
Flowers
Anchor community businesses – ex. Post office
Modern retail-ex. Ice cream
Accessible for mobility challenges
Amenities-garbage, bike racks
Public restrooms
Signature public art
Funding to seed projects
Enhance train underpasses
Increase and diversify marketing & communication
User friendly city processes



Community Engagement Insights

What did the young people have to say?

A space for young people managed by young people

Indoor space, outdoor space

Creative spaces; Rage rooms

Multiple things to do in one space – changes by week – health, paint, music, laser tag, cooking classes, garden, karate, dance

Young people can fix it up – sense of ownership

Spaces like the Y Center

Places to take pictures – pop up events

Outdoor music festival

Murals – diverse images, show how colorful we can be, needs to look forward and inspire

Young people program Pioneer Plaza several days a week

Bluetooth speaker – have your own dance party (Akron)

Cities mentioned during the conversations...

Oberlin

Welcoming

Murals

Fun restaurants

Tappan Square

Free art museum

Chalk walk

Feels alive – buildings shine

Medina

Root Candle

Crocker Park

Outside places to sit

Lakewood

Food Truck Park

Vermillion

Just go for the experience



Community Engagement Insights

When we are successful in what we set out to do, what is the one word to describe Downtown in five years?

Inviting
Safe
Well lit
People living Downtown
Picturesque
Like a post card
Pride
A great experience
Vibrancy
Unique
Revitalized
People all around
A destination
Rebranded
I can relax & be myself

I have an identity with my town
Thriving
Booming
Enticing
Miraculous
Jubilant
Connected
Happy
Believer
Renaissance
Included
"Ours" with all voices
Walkable
Welcomed

Sound of Downtown Elyria Playlist

Golden, Jill Scott
Celebration, Kool and the Gang
Rise Up, Andra Day
Happy, Pharrell Williams
Love All, Drake w/Jay-Z
God Did, DJ Khaled
I'm Still Standing, Elton John
Stronger, Kelly Clarkson
Don't Stop Believing, Journey
Everyday People, Sly and the Family Stone

Good Morning Gorgeous, Mary J. Blige
I Smile, Kirk Franklin
Summer, Calvin Harris
Vibin' Out, FKJ
With a Little Help From My Friends, The Beatles
What's Going On, Marvin Gaye
Beautiful Day, U2
Rhapsody in Blue, George Gershwin





Recommendations for a Vibrant Downtown Elyria

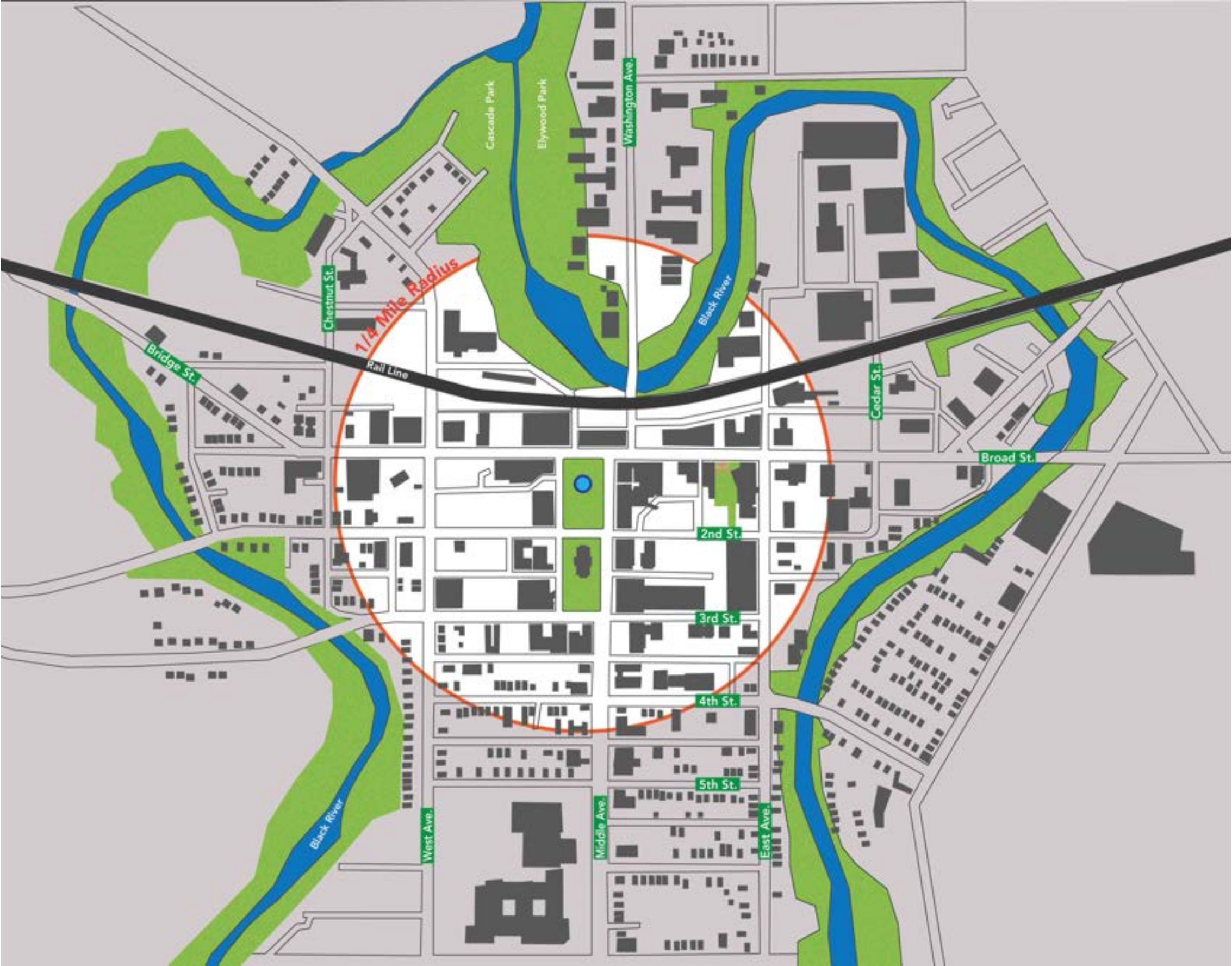
Get Back to Basics - Make a good impression

Make It Light, Bright, and Bold - Enhance downtown's sense of place

Connect Gathering Spaces and Social Places - Create a downtown personality

Policy and Incentive Opportunities - Support community investment

Downtown Elyria



Get Back to Basics - *Make a good impression*

Enhance Downtown's Sense of Place

- Grow the Current Clean Up Strategy
- Expand the Flower Planting Program
- Improve Sidewalk Amenities
- Develop a Street Pole Banner Program
- Enhance Entry Points

Develop a Marketing and Communication Strategy

- Promote and support all things Downtown Elyria
- Cultivate a relationship with the Chronicle

Sometimes, we forget to simply get back to basics. Communities work so hard on creating a big vision and recruiting new businesses, they lose sight of necessities like keeping downtown clean. Picking up litter, fixing broken benches or planting flowers seem so unimportant when thinking about revitalization. Yet, when a place is dirty or lacks color, it's the first thing we notice. Walking down a street that is clean with flowers and benches is an instant indication that property owners, businesses, and the city are investing in their community.

Elyria Community Partnership (ECP) and the City currently have programs to address cleaning and flower plantings, but focus group participants often commented that downtown felt neglected. This creates an opportunity to regroup and reflect on current work and rethink how these efforts are deployed. ECP can establish a working group to guide, manage, and coordinate this work.

A good place to start is to focus on the quarter mile radius centered on the fountain in Ely Square. This area encompasses most of the major downtown commercial buildings, East Falls Overlook Park, and all the entry points into Downtown. Focusing the efforts of the Vibrancy Plan in this area will garner a meaningful impact in year one. Additionally, the community can leverage the success of the initial projects to strategically implement subsequent projects. Collaboration and coordination will be key to effectively and efficiently implementing a new Back to Basics Strategy.

To keep downtown clean, ECP can expand their annual clean-up day to become monthly events that are focused on different areas of downtown each month - perhaps in coordination with the Third Thursday events. The City could support this work by coordinating large garbage pick-up and street cleaning with each event. Additionally, this work

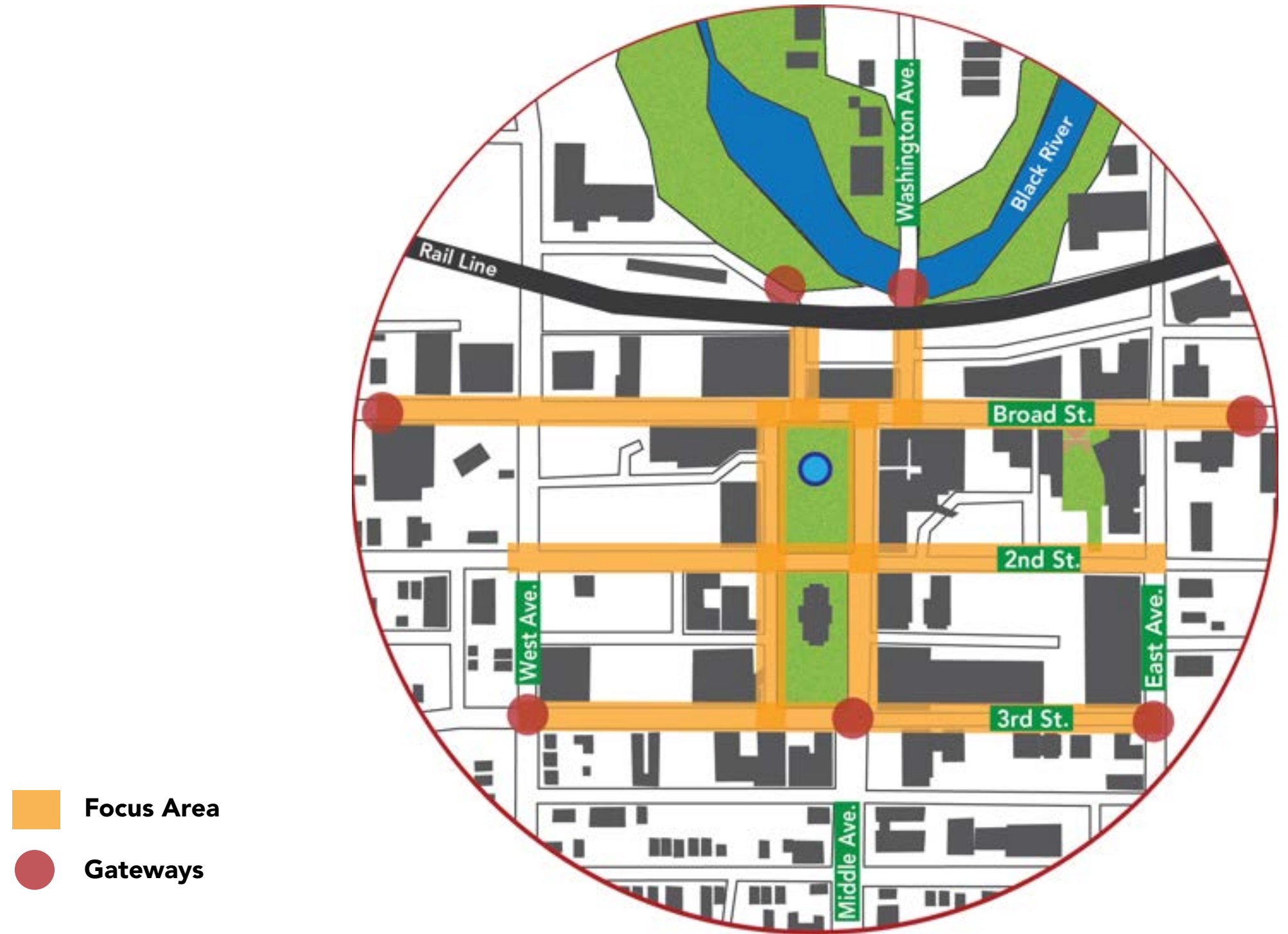
can incorporate a plan to monitor maintenance issues such as broken benches and street light outages.

There is also an opportunity to analyze and rethink the flower planting work that both ECP and the City undertake annually. Again, focused on the quarter mile radius and major entry points into downtown, hanging baskets can be deployed along major corridors such as Broad and around Ely Square. The large ground planters could be relocated to complement the hanging basket locations and to bring attention to important elements downtown such as intersection corners or mid-block crosswalks. With the new deployment strategy, ECP and the City can look for ways to increase funding to enhance the budgeted funds already committed to this work. Further, ECP can work with property owners to invest in their buildings and place flower planters at their entrances.

As the strategies around downtown clean up and flower plantings take hold, ECP and the City can then focus on upgrading and/or enhancing sidewalk amenities including benches, garbage receptacles, and bike racks. These types of amenities are essential in accommodating the needs of residents, employees, and visitors. Benches are helpful to people with mobility issues. Garbage receptacles help keep downtown clean. Bike racks will attract more riders to businesses.

Finally, as all this work materializes, it is important to tell everyone about this good work. A thoughtful and purposeful marketing and communications plan brings new attention downtown. There are great events and projects already happening downtown, yet many focus group participants were unaware of many activities. A marketing and communications plan with shed light on the work of ECP, which in turn can inspire building investment, new businesses, and funding.

Get Back to Basics - *Make a good impression*



Get Back to Basics - *Make a good impression*

Enhance Downtown's Sense of Place

Grow the Clean Up Strategy

Expand the Flower Planting Strategy

Improve Sidewalk Amenities



Get Back to Basics - *Make a good impression*

Enhance Downtown's Sense of Place

Develop a Street Pole Banner Program

Enhance Entry Points



Banner Idea



Make It Light, Bright, and Bold - *Enhance downtown's sense of place*

Create Meaningful Public Art Opportunities

Murals
Sculpture

Transform Gaps in the Streetscape

Railroad underpasses
Parking lot edges

Illuminate Downtown

Nothing does more to stir the soul than art and color. During the focus group sessions, many participants felt that downtown appears dirty and needs color. The recommendations in this section seek to engage residents and businesses to develop a series of bold creative interventions that will inspire community pride.

Currently, there are two public art projects in process. The Historical Looking Glass project is set to be installed this spring. The project is an interactive educational installation commissioned by ECP. It is designed to get people to see downtown Elyria through a historical lens. Five sculptural elements will be located in key areas around downtown. Additionally, there are several sculptures created by Mike Ensminger of Iron Image for the City. One of these sculptures – Butterflies at East Falls – has already been installed. There is an opportunity within the implementation of the Vibrancy Plan

to develop a strategy in placing these sculptures – and others – in a way that enhances the downtown experience.

Murals are an effective way to add color to the street presence. More importantly, when done purposefully, murals are extremely effective in building community and inspiring pride in a common purpose. During the planning process, several mural locations were identified. These locations will be prioritized in concert with strategies to enhance the downtown experience.

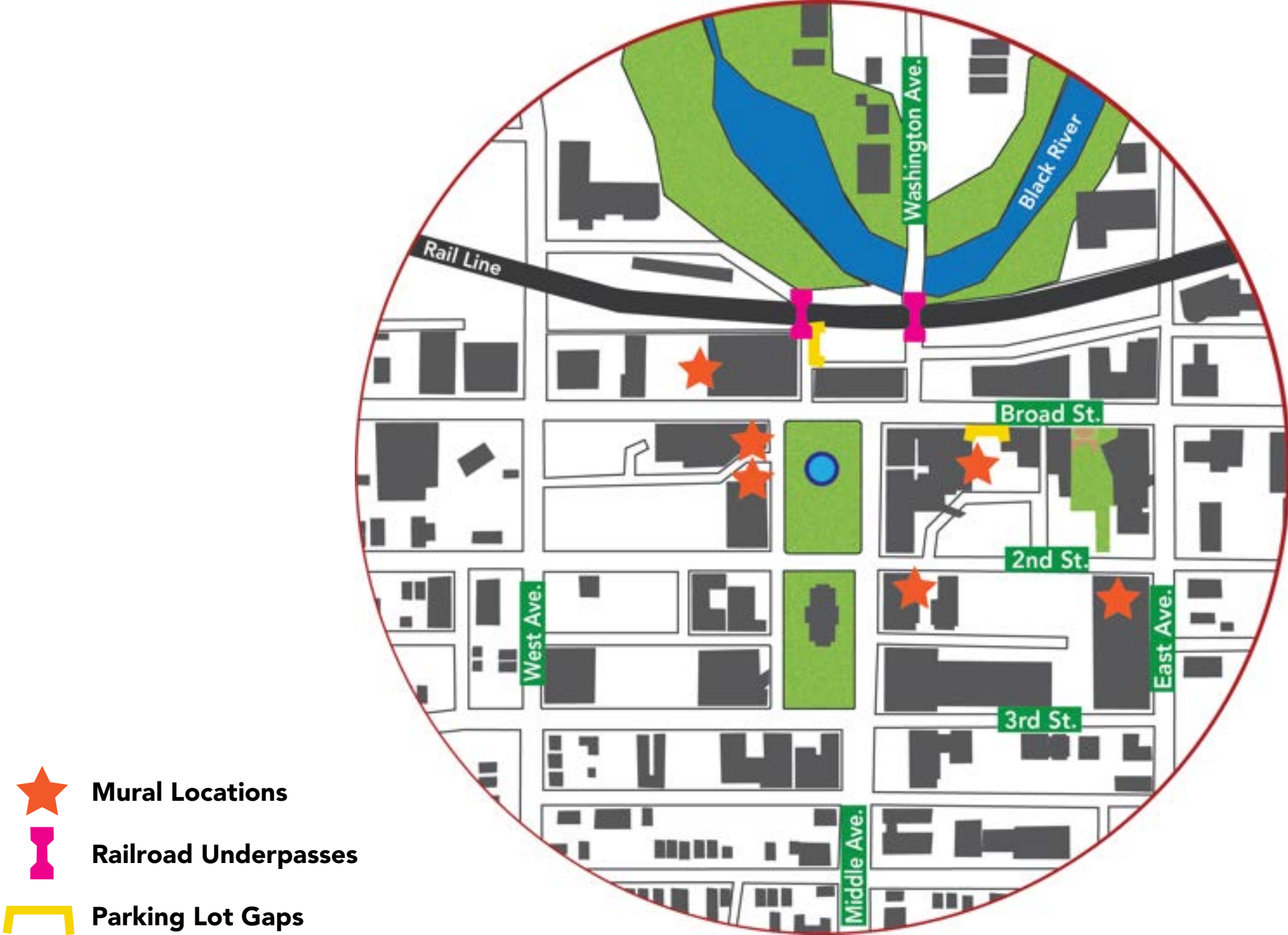
Creativity can also be employed to address mundane and unattractive parts of downtown. Unwelcoming environments that are dirty, dark, or just plain boring are deterrents to walking. Parking lots, while necessary, are long boring places to walk past and interrupt the pedestrian experience. Landscaping, creative fencing, and interesting signage can add interest and encourage people to continue walking.

Sometimes, the perception of safety is the deterrent even if one wants to continue walking. For example, the bridge underpass at Kerstetter Way is very unfriendly despite the handsome bridge steelwork. Lighting, cleaning, and adding color will go a long way to connect two of downtown's greatest assets – Ely Square and East Falls.

Lighting can also play a role in enhancing the visual presence of a place. Safety – real or perceived – is always a significant factor in the experience for residents, employees, and visitors. In addition to street lighting, architectural lighting of buildings and sconce lighting at the storefront level will improve the visual character of downtown and also subtly improve the perception of safety.

ECP can establish a working group to engage the community to advocate, guide and implement current and future projects that will enhance its sense of place.

Make It Light, Bright, and Bold - *Enhance downtown's sense of place*



Make It Light, Bright, and Bold - *Enhance downtown's sense of place*

Create Meaningful Public Art Opportunities

Murals

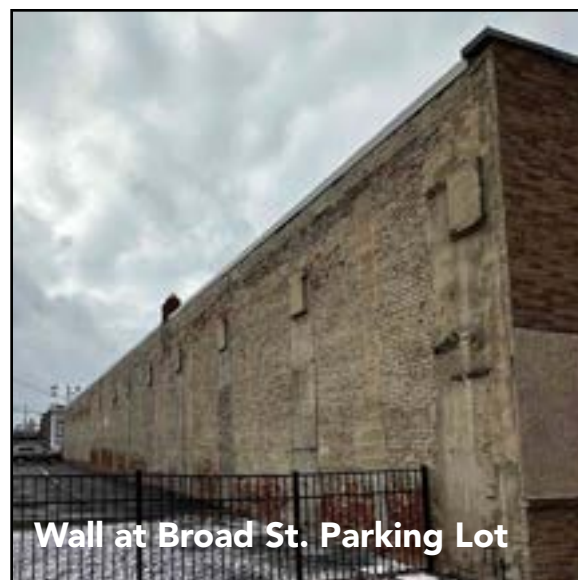
Sculpture



Sculpture by Mike Ensminger



Wall at The Foundry



Wall at Broad St. Parking Lot

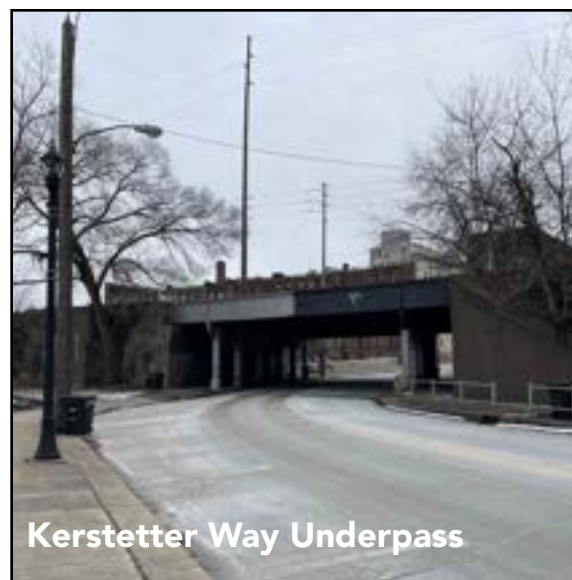
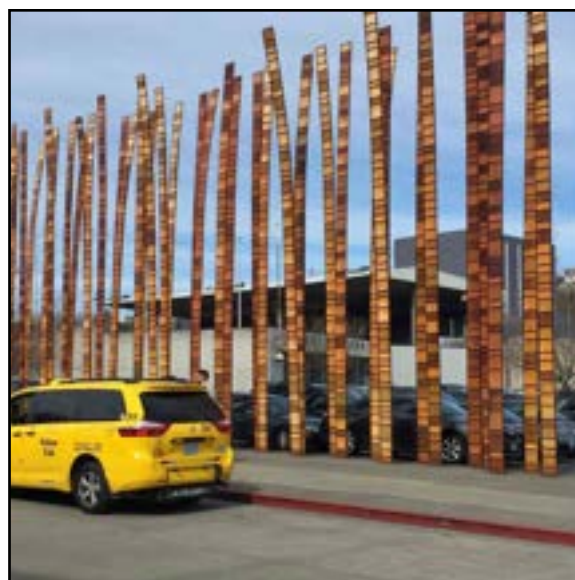
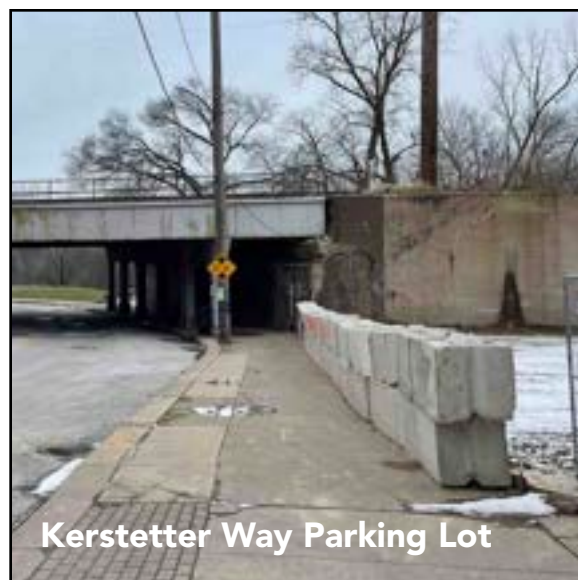


Make It Light, Bright, and Bold - *Enhance downtown's sense of place*

Transform Gaps in the Streetscape

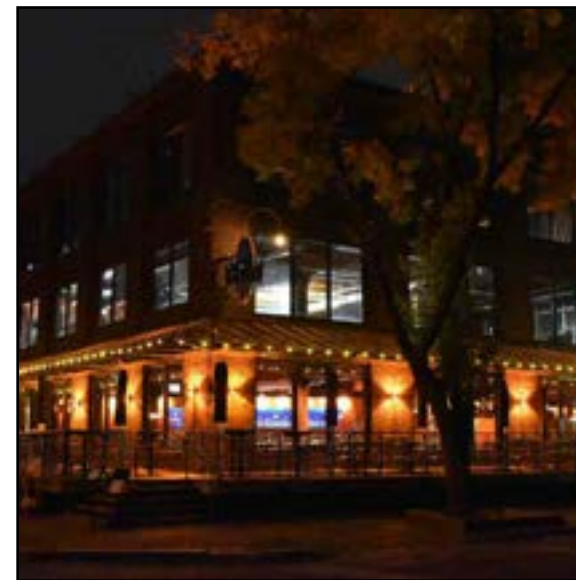
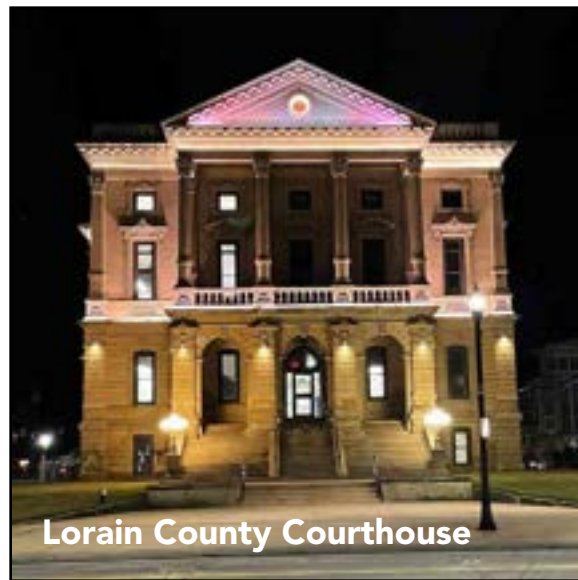
Railroad underpasses

Parking lot edges



Make It Light, Bright, and Bold - *Enhance downtown's sense of place*

Illuminate Downtown
Architecture
Safety



Connect Gathering Spaces & Social Places - *Create a downtown personality*

Establish a Clear Identity and Programming Strategy for Parks and Public Spaces

Ely Square
East Falls Overlook Park
Pioneer Plaza
Art Alley

Improve Safety in Pedestrian Infrastructure

Graphic crosswalks and curb extensions

Create Storefront Activations

Window graphics
Pop-up shops and events

Enhance and Grow Events and Programming

Elyria has many special places within its downtown – Ely Square, Pioneer Plaza, East Falls, and Art Alley. As the community sets out to implement actions around enhancing downtown’s sense of place, it will be important to understand how the community currently uses public spaces – where to they gather, what spaces work best for large events, what spaces are suited for more informal pop-up events, where do youth socialize, how are these spaces connected, what is the experience of navigating downtown.

Through some informal analysis, the community can establish a clear identity of the primary parks and public spaces. This can inform how to curate programming and events. It is important to ask questions such as where can civic events and larger city-wide gatherings be held; what places can host youth and arts programming with a more relaxed

atmosphere and flexible seating; and are there places that can be used for pop-up events. Answers to these questions can lead to a series of layered experiences. Building upon events currently held downtown such as Third Thursdays and the Apple Festival, ECP and the community can grow programming that fits the personality of the variety of spaces downtown.

Following an analysis of the downtown places, there will be an opportunity to evaluate the amenities necessary for each space. How are the spaces to be used during a typical day – does it need movable seating, places to gather, space for food trucks, need for electrical hook up, is a stage necessary will all need to be determined. Some of these elements will require further design and funding.

One way to develop an understanding

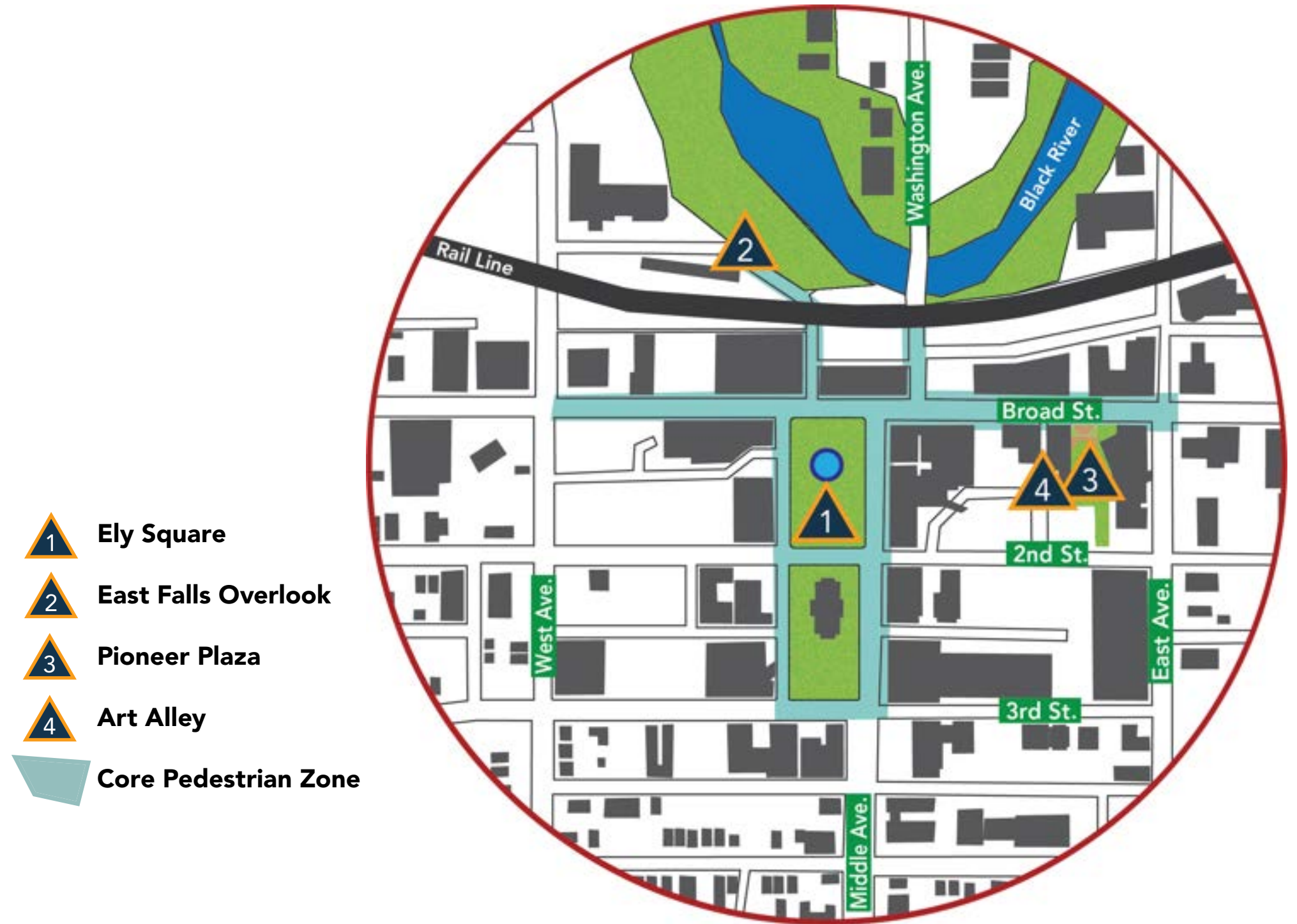
of space needs is to experiment. With some inexpensive movable stock furniture or community-built furniture, visitors can play a role in showing how a space can be used in different ways. The documentation of how the furniture is moved around and used during these experiments can inform the formal design and ultimate investment.

As ECP and the community curate the downtown experience, it will be increasingly important to connect the destinations throughout downtown from both an aesthetic and safety standpoint. Pedestrian infrastructure such as crosswalks and curb extensions need to be accentuated so that walkability is prioritized over auto traffic. For example, crosswalks can be raised and/or painted graphically to make them more visible to drivers. The graphics could further reinforce the brand identity of downtown.

Further, amenities like individual bike racks as well as larger bike parking areas near parks and plazas can encourage multiple ways of navigating downtown.

The special places in downtown are already community destinations. Paying attention to the details that support appealing events and dynamic spaces will create lasting memories.

Connect Gathering Spaces & Social Places - *Create a downtown personality*

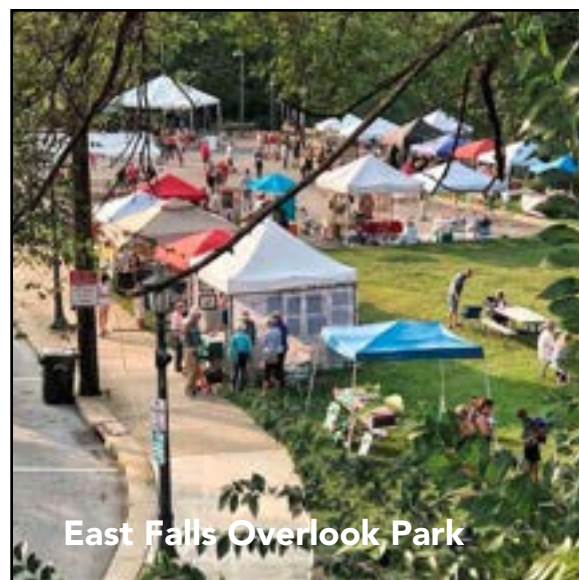


Connect Gathering Spaces & Social Places - *Create a downtown personality*

Establish a Clear Identity and Programming Strategy for Parks and Public Spaces
Ely Square, East Falls Overlook Park, Pioneer Plaza, Art Alley



Ely Square

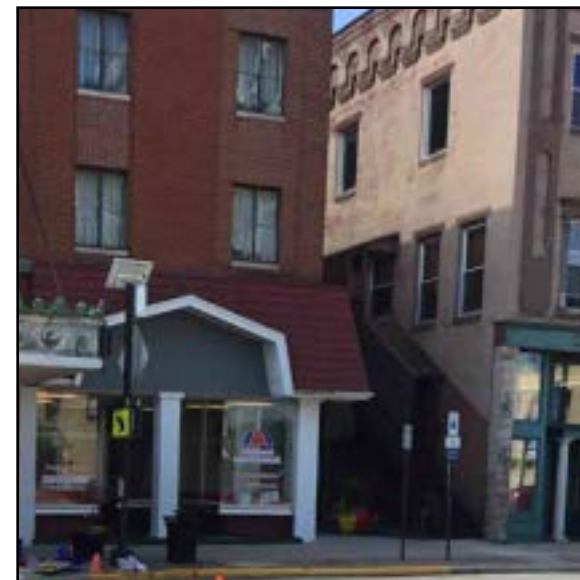


East Falls Overlook Park



Connect Gathering Spaces & Social Places - *Create a downtown personality*

Improve Safety in Pedestrian Infrastructure
Graphic crosswalks and curb extensions



Connect Gathering Spaces & Social Places - *Create a downtown personality*

Create Storefront Activations

Storefront window graphics

Pop-up stores and events



Policy & Incentive Opportunities - *Support downtown investments*

Policy

- Create an Outdoor Cafe Ordinance
- Update the City's Signage Code
- Prioritize Zoning Updates related to Breweries, Distilleries, and Manufacturing
- Streamline City Permitting Processes

Incentives

- Create or Enhance City Incentive Programs to Support Businesses and Building Renovation
- Create a Small Grant Program for Businesses, Residents, and Community Organizations

The City of Elyria government plays an important role in preserving the health, safety, and general welfare of its citizens. With that comes rules, standards, and regulations. One issue heard from focus group participants was that it is difficult to navigate city government. As with all things, there are two sides to every issue. Collaboration and communication are essential components to eliminating this conflict.

In addition to the work on the Downtown Elyria Action Plan for Vibrancy, the City is also undertaking a year-long update of the city's comprehensive plan. The work includes analyzing and updating plans around land use, zoning, and development. The two planning efforts were purposely coordinated to ensure that they complement each other. In fact, MS Consultants (the team that is developing the comprehensive plan) have prioritized developing zoning and regulations around outdoor cafes, distilleries, breweries, and light

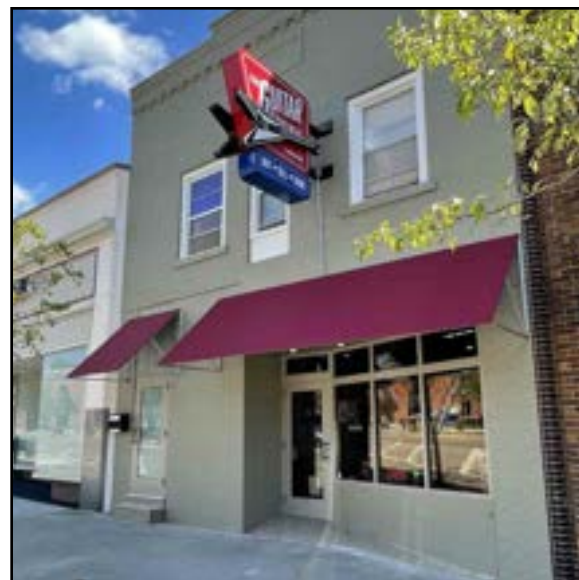
manufacturing that could grow business opportunities within downtown. Further, there have been initial discussions around updating the signage code. This will be essential in creating dynamic signage to enhance individual businesses and downtown as a whole.

ECP along with the City, County, and State, can also collaborate, coordinate, and promote existing incentive programs and explore new programs. As the place-based components of the Vibrancy Plan begin to take hold, incentive programs can be used strategically to support existing owners to invest in their business and attract new businesses. Additionally, through partnerships with the community and youth organizations, existing and new programs can be used to fund projects like murals or park enhancements.

Long term, collaboration around policy and incentives will be essential for sustained successful economic

development. ECP can play an important role in understanding both the community needs and city processes. With this, they can advocate for good communication and efficient implementation. In concert with user friendly city policy and regulation, downtown can develop a strong ecosystem that gives people confidence to invest in Elyria.

Policy & Incentive Opportunities - *Support downtown investments*





2023 Priority Projects

Enhance Downtown's Sense of Place

- Grow the current clean up strategy
- Expand the flower planting program
- Develop a street pole banner program
- Create committees around design and place enhancement

Create Meaningful Public Art Opportunities

- 3 Murals – local artists, partnering organizations
- Sculptures – looking glass, steel flowers, future opportunities
- Transform railroad underpass at Kerstetter Way

Establish a Clear Identity and Personality for Primary Parks and Public Spaces

- Experiment with Pioneer Plaza – movable furniture

Enhance and Grow Programming and Events

Develop a Marketing and Communication Strategy

Explore and Implement Policy and Incentive Opportunities



Funding Opportunities

National Endowment for the Arts

- Our Town Program
- Grants for Arts Program
- Challenge America

Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency

- Transportation Alternatives
- TLCI Implementation Grants

Ohio Arts Council

- ArtSTART
- ArtsNEXT

State of Ohio

- State Capital Budget Bill
- State Operating Funds
- Ohio Dept. Natural Resources NatureWorks Grant
- Ohio Dept. Natural Resources Clean Ohio Trails
- Ohio Dept. Natural Resources Recreation Trail Prg

City of Elyria

- Community Development Block Grant
- City Capital Budget

Lorain County Community Foundation

- Arts & Culture Strengthening Lorain County
- Education & Youth Development Community Grants
- IOBY - Lorain County Ohio Match Fund

Nord Family Foundation

The Cyrus Eaton Foundation

Sponsorships, Cash, In-Kind Opportunities

- Street projects
- Public art
- Programming and special events
- Safety and security
- Downtown WiFi

Project Cost Estimates

Focus Area	Project	Frequency or Quantity	Estimated Cost Per Item	Estimated Total Cost	Notes
Get Back to Basics					
	Banners (design, print, hardware, install)	68 poles	\$400	\$27,200	136 poles - alternate with flower baskets
	Hanging baskets (grow and install)	68 poles	\$100	\$6,800	City maintains
	Entry Signage (design, fabrication, install)	7 locations	\$10-25,000	\$70-175,000	
	Sidewalk Amenities	30 elements	\$35,000	\$35,000	15 benches, 15 bike racks
	Clean-up Program	12 events	\$500	\$6,000	Monthly clean up events
Make it Light, Bright and Bold					
	Mural #1	1 location	\$5,000	\$5,000	
	Mural #2	1 location	\$10,000	\$10,000	
	Mural #3	1 location	\$15,000	\$15,000	
	Railroad Underpass (paint only)	2 locations	\$25,000	\$50,000	Kerstetter Way and Washington Avenue
	Parking Lot Edges (landscape, fencing, sculpture)	2 locations	\$10-25,000	\$20-50,000	1 behind Forge 417, 2 at 365 Broad Avenue
	Illuminate Downtown - Architecture	2 buildings	\$10-25,000	\$20-50,000	
	Illuminate Downtown - Bridges Speciality Lighting	2 locations	\$15-30,000	\$30-60,000	
	Illuminate Downtown - Special Location	1 location	\$5-10,000	\$5-10,000	Kerstetter Way string lighting
Connect Gathering Places & Social Spaces					
Establish a Clear Identity and Personality for Parks and Public Spaces					
	Demonstration - moveable furniture	1 location	\$5-20,000	\$5-20,000	Work with partners and youth
	Pioneer Plaza Redesign (hard and soft costs)	1 location	\$450,000	\$450,000	Design informed by demonstration
	Storefront Window Graphics	10 locations	\$0-1,500	\$0-15,000	
	Pop-up Retail - Shipping Containers	2 units	\$15,000	\$30,000	
Enhance and Grow Events and Programming					
	Ely Square - beyond current programming	12 events	\$3,000	\$36,000	Work with partners
	Pioneer Plaza	16 events	\$2,000	\$18,000	Work with partners and youth
	East Falls Overlook Park	3 events	\$2,000	\$6,000	Work with partners
	Art Alley	2 events	\$3,000	\$6,000	Work with partners
Improve Safety in Pedestrian Infrastructure					
	Graphic Crosswalk	6 locations	\$500-1,000	\$3-6,000	