

## ***INDIANA DOWNTOWN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

The Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda 2002 was defined by HyettPalma, Inc.. The Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda 2002 is based on:

- Discussions held with many members of both the private and public sectors of Valparaiso;
- Data collected by the City and by the Process Committee created to oversee the project;
- The results of a retail, office, and housing market analysis completed for Downtown by HyettPalma, Inc.; and
- The professional and technical expertise of HyettPalma, Inc..

The sections of this document titled Downtown Valparaiso Today and Downtown Valparaiso Tomorrow were written by Laura Gibbons of the IACT Foundation. The Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda 2002 was funded by a partnership of the City of Valparaiso, the City's Redevelopment Commission, Greater Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce, Porter County Community Foundation, Indiana Department of Commerce, and Valparaiso Community Festivals & Events.

A summary of the Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda 2002 appears below.

### ***DOWNTOWN VALPARAISO***

Valparaiso is fortunate to have a Downtown that is relatively healthy at this time. And, Downtown Valparaiso is fortunate in that there do not appear to be any Downtowns comparable to Valparaiso's located in the region.

The question could --and should --be asked then. ..what is making Downtown Valparaiso healthy and incomparable at this time? The answers are many.

- First, Downtown contains a large number of quality restaurants (with some offering evening entertainment), a significant amount of outdoor dining, and a considerable number of quality, specialty retail shops.
- Downtown contains a good number of activity generators, including City Hall, the post office located in City Hall, County Porter Courthouse and Administration Building, the public library (which, commendably, chose to expand in Downtown rather than relocate), the YMCA and Boys & Girls Club, Memorial Opera House, the Old Jail Museum, and nearby Chicago Street Theater.

- Downtown has an important collection of historic architecture with strong character, as has been recognized with Downtown's designation as a National Register Historic District. In addition, the City has recently created the Valparaiso Historic Preservation Commission, giving the City the opportunity to create local historic districts.

- Downtown is experiencing reinvestment, as evidenced by existing buildings that have been rehabbed and the quality infill construction at 57 Franklin.

- There is quality housing in and near Downtown. And, neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown are experiencing renovation and have active civic associations.

- Downtown enjoys the solid confidence of the local government and local lenders and the growing confidence of investors.

- Downtown can and is drawing on an affluent market in its primary retail trade area, where the average household income is approximately \$63,000.

- Valparaiso, is the seat of Porter County, making Downtown the government, finance, and professional office hub of the County.

- Downtown enjoys a positive image at this time as being historic, authentic, walkable, friendly, safe, and clean while offering good customer service. As a result, the community is proud of its Downtown.

- Community members appear to enjoy a positive self-image, describing Valparaiso as a healthy community that has good and assertive leaders, many active volunteers, a well-run City government and above average City services -- and that is the home of Orville Redenbacher and Valpo Velvet Ice Cream.

- Downtown is fortunate to be located in a City that enjoys a positive image within the region. During the course of this project, Valparaiso was repeatedly described as being progressive, professional, and advanced and having good schools and a good quality-of-life.

As pleased as community members are today with Downtown Valparaiso, they expressed remarkably strong agreement regarding how Downtown should be enhanced into the future. This included:

- Maintaining Downtown's historic identity, character, and uniqueness;

- Ensuring that Downtown is even more family-friendly and pedestrian-friendly than it is today;

- Enhancing Downtown so that it is Valparaiso's center of civic life and community life, and not simply a place of commerce;

- Increasing Downtown's mix of unique specialty retail shops, quality restaurants, and quality housing --while continuing to be Porter County's government, finance, and professional office hub;
- Stressing the importance of community cohesiveness and coordination of efforts as Downtown is further enhanced; and
- Making sure that Downtown becomes --and is viewed as -an adventure, an outing, and an experience that is vibrant both day and night.

In dealing with Downtown's enhancement, community members repeatedly stressed the importance of:

- Three words that are imperative --focus, fund, implement; and
- Ensuring that Downtown --and Valparaiso's other commercial areas --are viewed as elements of the whole, and are strengthened in a manner that allows them to complement rather than compete with each other .

The recommendations that follow were specifically tailored to leverage Downtown's current assets and address the community's desires and concerns.

It is understood that other commercial districts within Valparaiso are also in need of enhancement. However, it must be realized that Downtown is a unique area that deserves individualized treatment and attention, since it gives Valparaiso its identity. It must also be understood that each of Valparaiso's other commercial districts has its own specific set of needs and issues. Therefore, the City and the Chamber of Commerce should be commended for, and should continue in, their efforts to address those needs. However, in enhancing the City's Downtown and other commercial districts, these areas cannot be "lumped together" as some in the community would prefer. ..not if economic success for each area is the ultimate goal. Rather, a clear economic orientation must be defined for each and actions must be taken to make those economic orientations a reality. Only in this way will Valparaiso's commercial areas be able to complement each other and thrive.

The following recommendations are meant to address the needs and issues that are specific to Downtown Valparaiso.

### ***DOWNTOWN VALPARAISO SURVEY***

Two surveys were conducted as a part of this project to gauge the health of Downtown Valparaiso as perceived locally. These were a survey of owners and managers of businesses located in the project area and a telephone survey of residents living in Downtown's primary trade area. A summary of the survey

responses follows.

### **Use of Downtown**

Residents of Downtown's primary trade area reported coming to Downtown with great frequency -two-thirds (66%) said they come Downtown between 1 and 7 times a week.

### **Purpose of Trips**

When asked why they currently come to Downtown Valparaiso, the number one reason cited by residents surveyed (24%) was "shopping." The next response given with similar frequency was "eating in restaurants" (cited by 20% of residents). The next most frequently given response was "banking," cited by 10% of residents surveyed. Therefore, 54% of those surveyed said they now come to Downtown Valparaiso for one of these three reasons.

### **Shopping Area of Choice**

Those surveyed were asked where they do most of their family shopping at this time, other than grocery shopping. Over half (56%) of residents reported that they primarily shop either at Wal-Mart (cited by 29% of residents) or at Merrillville's Southlake Mall (cited by 27% of residents). When asked why they choose a particular shopping area, 68% of those surveyed cited one of two reasons. These were the variety/selection offered (39%) and the convenience of the shopping area (29%).

### **Downtown Characteristics**

Residents and business owners surveyed were asked to rate a list of 19 Downtown characteristics as being "good," "fair," or "poor" at this time.

Thirteen characteristics were rated "good" by a majority or a significant percent of residents and fourteen characteristics were rated "good" by a majority or a significant percent of business owners. Of these, thirteen were rated "good" by a majority or significant percent of both residents and business owners. These were:

- Feeling of safety (92% residents, 100% business owners);
- Cleanliness of area (89% residents, 77% business owners);
- Quality of restaurant (87% residents, 77% business owners);
- Helpfulness of salespeople (81% residents, 88% business owners);
- Knowledge of salespeople (81% residents, 70% business owners);
- Attractiveness of area (80% residents, 67% business owners);

- Quality of retail goods (76% residents, 79% business owners);
- Quality of service businesses (68% residents, 71% business owners);
- Attractiveness of buildings (68% residents, 55% business owners);
- Variety of restaurant (67% residents, 67% business owners);
- Prices at restaurants (59% residents, 66% business owners);
- Business hours (49% residents, 48% business owners); and
- Variety of service businesses (49% residents, 53% business owners).

The one characteristic rated "good" by a significant percent of business owners, but not by a significant percent of residents, was:

- Prices at service businesses (47% business owners, 37% residents).

### **Downtown Improvements**

Residents and business owners were asked to rate a list of possible Downtown improvements as being "very important," somewhat important," or "not important" at this time.

Five improvements were rated "very important" by a majority or a significant percent of residents and four received this same rating from a majority or a significant percent of business owners. The four improvements rated "very important" by a majority or significant percent of both residents and business owners are shown below:

- Recruit additional retail businesses (64% residents, 67% business owners);
- Improve convenience of parking (55% residents, 83% business owners);
- Improve availability of parking (53% residents, 79% business owners); and
- Increase variety of retail goods (50% residents, 46% business owners).

The one remaining improvement rated "very important" by a significant percent of residents, but not by a significant percent of business owners, was:

- Keep stores open later in the evenings (45% residents, 27% business owners).

## ***DOWNTOWN VALPARAISO TOMORROW***

A series of discussions, focus groups, and meetings were held to define the community's preferred vision of Downtown Valparaiso --as it would ideally exist in the year 2007. Those participating in the sessions said that, by the year 2007, Downtown Valparaiso would be known for having the following image.

*The vibrant heart of Valparaiso  
that reflects the  
"small, hometown flair and special feel"  
that only Downtown can deliver.*

*A Downtown that is  
safe, fun, friendly, pedestrian-oriented, and  
home to the best restaurants and specialty shops  
dedicated to service and quality.*

*A Downtown that has character -  
it is historic and classic and warm and inviting.*

*Downtown Valparaiso is  
"authentic, the real thing"  
where you can see a  
community that is working and living.*

*A Downtown that has "pizzazz"  
and is a destination  
--a place you can go with or without plans  
and you know you'll always find lots to do.  
A place of constant activity,  
where local attractions include the Courthouse Square,  
Memorial Opera House, Chicago Street Theater,  
the Old Jail Museum, and the Popcorn Festival.*

*A Downtown that has 'a proud heritage, a prominent future."  
Downtown is the "best in Northwest Indiana --  
You've gotta come see our town."*

### **Downtown Retail Market Opportunities**

Taking steps to further enhance Downtown Valparaiso, it is conservatively anticipated that Downtown may have the potential to support the development of between approximately 32,000 and 51,000 net square feet of additional retail space by the year 2007 --which could include expansions or sales increases by existing Downtown Valparaiso retail businesses and/or the construction of some limited amount of new retail space.

### **Downtown Office Market Opportunities**

It is estimated that approximately 50,000 to 75,000 square feet of additional office space could potentially be supported in Downtown Valparaiso between now and the year 2007. This represents an increase in demand based on both the expected continued enhancement of the area and an anticipated increase in area households during the same time period.

### **Downtown Housing Market Opportunities**

Every effort should be made, consistent with the implementation of the overall Downtown enhancement program, to introduce more quality, market-rate housing in the upper floors of Downtown's historic commercial buildings and in new low- to medium-density housing developed around the perimeters of Downtown Valparaiso --developed on vacant or underutilized parcels.

Downtown Valparaiso is fortunate to have a plethora of quality historic homes around and in proximity to Downtown. These valuable residential units should continue to be protected since not only are they significant community assets, but they also house a continuing vital customer base for Downtown's businesses.

## ***RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES***

The Valparaiso Downtown Action Agenda 2002 contains two sets of Recommended Strategies:

- A Development Framework which should be used to direct and manage Downtown's future character; and
- A Course of Action which should be implemented -by both the private and public sectors -to create the best possible future for Downtown Valparaiso.

Both are summarized below.

## ***DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK***

The following Development Framework should be used to ensure Downtown's future as an economically vibrant commercial center with great appeal to local residents and area-wide patrons.

### **Economic Orientation**

For greatest economic success, Downtown Valparaiso should be positioned in the marketplace as having the following economic orientation.

*Valparaiso's first neighborhood:*

*filled with unique shops,  
food for all tastes, and*

*a variety of entertainment --  
guaranteeing lots of fun;*

*with professional services  
to meet your every need,  
housing opportunities from  
lofts over the shop to "Victorian Ladies, "  
and an unequaled, small town, cozy ambience;*

a historic, authentic, and real Downtown,  
punctuated by a classic Courthouse Square,  
that is extremely friendly and family-oriented.

### **Retail**

In terms of its retail orientation, Downtown should be positioned as Valparaiso's historic specialty retail, dining, entertainment, and art center that offers a special collection of unique businesses around a classic Courthouse Square. To make Downtown even more pedestrian-friendly than it is today, retail businesses in Downtown should be clustered on Lincolnway and on side streets around the Courthouse Square.

### **Office**

In terms of its office orientation, Downtown should be positioned as Porter County's government, finance, and professional office hub offering a broad range of services that meet the needs of a dynamic, growing community and County.

### **Housing**

In terms of its housing orientation, Downtown should be positioned as a safe, comfortable, walkable environment that offers residents a hometown Downtown, a broad and expanding mix of uses, and a historic setting.

### **Adopt**

It is suggested that the City of Valparaiso adopt the Downtown Valparaiso Action Agenda 2002 as the Downtown element of the City's comprehensive plan, and that the agenda be used as the overall guide for the further enhancement of Downtown Valparaiso.

### **Course of Action**

The following Course of Action should be implemented, by both the private and public sectors, to attain the community's vision for Downtown Valparaiso and to capture the economic opportunities identified in the Downtown market analysis.

### **Business Recruitment**

Currently, the Valparaiso Economic Development Corporation (staffed by the Greater Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce) and City staff focus on recruiting and

retaining mid- to large-sized businesses. In addition, focus must be placed on recruiting small, independently owned businesses to Downtown, using the process described below.

### **1. Internal Recruitment**

Downtown is fortunate to now have many successful, well-managed businesses. Owners of these businesses should be contacted to review the findings of the market analysis and to determine their interest in opening additional businesses in Downtown Valparaiso. This type of business growth is known as internal business recruitment.

### **2. External Recruitment**

Working cooperatively and collaboratively with Downtown building owners and realtors, when building space is appropriately conditioned and available for occupancy by a new business, Downtown staff should aggressively seek appropriate retail business prospects from within the trade area and in larger and intermediate size communities --primarily in Indiana and Illinois.

Business prospects should be sought through field research, personal outreach, and personal contact between Downtown staff and business prospects. Businesses sought for Downtown should not be start-ups. Rather, the recruitment effort should be based on prospecting for well-established, well-managed, successful, independently owned businesses located throughout the trade area and beyond. To help condition the marketplace to understand retail business opportunities available in Downtown Valparaiso, the marketing initiative should be used to inform the market of Downtown enhancement actions and improvements, the depth and strength of Downtown's current offerings, and the range of goods and services being sought for Downtown Valparaiso.

## ***BUSINESS RETENTION***

Downtown is fortunate to have many healthy businesses at this time. The following recommended actions are intended to help those businesses become even more successful.

### **1. Business Hours**

Downtown's retail business owners should consider:

- Shifting to later business hours, rather than adding longer hours to the business day;
- Opening one late night per week, at least;
- Keeping full-time business hours, rather than just being open several days a week; and

- Ensuring that their business's hours are market-driven, meaning convenient for current and potential customers.

## **2. Display Windows**

To further the impact of display windows --and the "free" advertising they afford a business --display window lights should remain on until at least 11 :00 PM each day.

## **3. In-Window Signs**

Day to day, hand made signs placed in and on the windows of Downtown businesses should not be allowed. Such signs detract from the visual appeal of both the business itself and of Downtown.

## **4. Food Establishments**

To increase patronage of Downtown Valparaiso's restaurants, and to attract additional restaurateurs to Downtown, consideration should be given to:

- Restaurant owners marketing themselves as a group, to demonstrate the number, variety, and quality of Downtown's food establishments; and
- Holding a "Taste of Downtown" event on an annual basis, to feature Downtown and its food offerings.

## **5. Porter County Courthouse**

The City should request that the County consider opening the north door of the Courthouse for public use, as opposed to the south door.

## **6. Snow Removal**

To improve the consistency of snow removal --so that patrons have easy access to Downtown businesses at all times of the year --the following steps should be taken.

- The City should continue to discuss arrangements with INDOT that would allow the City to take over maintenance responsibilities for Lincolnway.
- The City should regularly enforce ordinances that require business owners to shovel walks within a certain amount of time after a snowfall.

## **7. Police Patrols**

The City currently operates foot patrols in Downtown and should be encouraged to continue to do so. In addition, if resources allow, consideration should be given to also operating bike patrols in Downtown.

## **8. Pathways Committee**

The City's Pathways Committee should be encouraged to ensure that Downtown is connected with all adjacent neighborhoods.

## **TRAFFIC**

While Downtown is pedestrian-friendly now, the following actions should be taken to ensure that there is as much priority given to people who are traveling in Downtown as to vehicles.

### **1. One-Way Streets**

A traffic engineer should be retained to examine the possibility of:

- Reversing the direction of traffic flow on Chicago and Jefferson, to satisfy safety concerns related to dropping off children at the library and YMCA; and
- Returning Franklin and Washington to two-way traffic, while retaining on-street parking.

### **2. Pedestrian Safety**

All factors affecting pedestrian safety throughout Downtown should be reviewed, including:

- Existing crosswalks;
- Additional crosswalks;
- Signalization; and
- Traffic speed limits and enforcement.

### **3. Lincolnway**

The City should continue to finalize arrangements with INDOT that will allow the City to assume responsibility for maintenance of --and control of --Lincolnway.

### **4. Red Lights**

The Valparaiso Police Department should consider conducting spot checks and issuing fines for motorists who advance into Downtown crosswalks while waiting at red lights.

### **5. Pedestrian Push Buttons**

Light poles along Lincolnway now have buttons that pedestrians can push to activate a light change. These buttons are now set to respond very quickly, and should remain so.

## **PARKING**

While it appears that Downtown has an adequate supply of public parking spaces at this time, the following actions should be taken to make these spaces as convenient as possible for Downtown customers.

### **1. Signs**

Currently, green and white signs are in place to direct motorists to public parking lots. The next step should now be taken to further encourage the use of these lots by the buying public. ..signs should be placed that identify each lot as a public parking lot.

### **2. Parking Turnover**

Downtown employees and business owners --who are all-day parkers, rather than short-term parkers --should park in off-street lots or on side streets within Downtown. They should not monopolize on-street spaces located on Lincolnway or around the Square since doing so hinders customer's and client's ability to park and spend money in Downtown. Employee prime parking space monopolization is literally one of the most pronounced forms of Downtown economic suicide. Therefore, it must be stopped, immediately.

The City of Valparaiso is very progressive in the tools and practices being used to address Downtown parking turnover. Consideration should be given to augmenting this system with the following.

- Fines for the second and third parking violation should be increased to more firmly discourage all-day parkers from monopolizing Downtown's most convenient on-street spaces.
- Consideration should be given to creating a "parking zone" in Downtown. Two-hour parking would be allowed once per day, between the hours of 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM, in the parking zone -- regardless of where motorists park. The parking zone should be drawn to include Lincolnway and the Courthouse Square.
- As part of the fine system, consideration should be given to allowing one "grace ticket" per month --or per week, if deemed feasible -to Downtown over-parkers. The purpose of this would be to not penalize shoppers or those seeking services who accidentally over-park.
- Aggressive enforcement of the two-hour limit should be continued in Downtown, and especially in the parking zone.

### **3. Additional On-Street Spaces**

Efforts should be made to create additional on-street parking in Downtown, wherever possible. This should include:

- Examining all streets in Downtown to determine if additional angled or parallel on-street spaces could be created; and
- Ensuring that, when the Police Department relocates from Downtown (due to space needs), on-street spaces on the south side of the Courthouse Square are made available for use by the public.

#### **4. Parking Decks**

In the future, the building of parking decks might be considered. This should only occur if:

- It can be quantified and documented by a parking professional that Downtown does indeed have a shortage of parking spaces; and
- The cost of creating a parking garage can be afforded.

#### **5. Screening**

Currently, there are many surface parking lots in Downtown. All of these lots - both private and public --should be screened with landscaping.

### ***PUBLIC SPACES***

Downtown's public spaces are well-maintained at this time and this fact is appreciated by the community. In addition, community members voiced a desire for streetscape elements to have an "integrated look," for any needed public improvements to be completed quickly, and for more landscaping in Downtown public spaces. The following recommendations are aimed at addressing these desires.

#### **1. Landscaping**

The City's Parks & Recreation Department now does an excellent job in landscaping the grounds of City Hall. This is recognized by the community and -- as a result --the community has expressed a great desire to see additional, quality landscaping placed in Downtown. This should be accomplished by:

- Intensifying on-street landscaping on Lincolnway and around the Courthouse Square;
- Using the maximum number of flowers in the above areas; and
- Considering removing pavers from tree wells in the above area and replacing them with flowers.

#### **2. Courthouse Grounds**

The City and the County should enter into a partnership that allows them to:

- Enhance and intensify landscaping of the Courthouse grounds;
- Maintain this landscaping in a quality manner for the long-term;
- Include a fountain and public art into the enhancement project; and
- Seek an endowment that allows the Courthouse grounds to be enhanced as a showcase for the entire County to enjoy.

### **3. Street Furnishings**

The City should develop standards for the style of trash receptacle, bench, and street light standard that should be used uniformly throughout Downtown - whether these street furnishings are being placed by the public or private sectors.

### **4. Lincolnway**

The City is currently in discussions with INDOT, regarding transferring responsibility for Lincolnway from the State to the City. In exchange, it is hoped that streetscape improvements will be made on Lincolnway which are:

- Designed by a professional landscape architect, using the recent Franklin Street improvements as a guide;.
- Pedestrian-friendly and in keeping with Downtown's historic architecture; and
- Easy for the City to maintain and repair.

### **5. Alleys**

Concern exists locally regarding the condition and cleanliness of Downtown alleys, which should be improved through the following.

- The City should consider using the green machine to also clean Downtown's alleys.
- Downtown business owners must work together --and with their haulers --to address alley cleanliness by defining a trash management plan.
- In the future, as funds allow, consideration should be given to the resurfacing of Downtown's alleys and consolidation of the maximum amount of the alleyway overhead wiring.

### **6. Entrances**

Actions should continue to be taken to enhance all major entrances leading to Downtown, as the City has done along Washington.

## ***BUILDINGS***

The time is at hand to encourage Downtown's property owners to enhance their structures --by making the following incentives available.

### **1. Design Guidelines**

The City has recently created the Valparaiso Historic Preservation Commission, having the ability to create local historic districts. The Commission should consider creating Downtown design guidelines --to be used on a voluntary basis. The guidelines should be offered as technical assistance for property owners who want to make appropriate exterior improvements, and, thereby, improve the value of their property.

### **2. Design Assistance**

To stimulate the immediate use of the design guidelines, a qualified architect, or architects, should be retained to offer interested building owners preliminary design assistance for the renovation of existing buildings.

### **3. Facade Challenge Grants**

Funds should be sought for the creation of a 50/50 matching grant program for the completion of facade improvement projects in Downtown Valparaiso. Grants of up to \$7,500 per building should be offered to those desiring to enhance the exterior of Downtown buildings, with projects undertaken consistent with Downtown's design guidelines. Specific improvements which should be funded through the matching grant program include:

- Enhancement of front facades;
- Installation of appropriate business signs; and
- Installation of appropriate awnings.

### **4. Business Signs**

Owners of businesses located around the Courthouse Square --and along Lincolnway --should consider erecting small projecting signs, since they are highly pedestrian-friendly and tend to increase the distance pedestrians are willing to walk.

### **5. Local Historic District**

In the future, consideration should be given to designating Downtown as a local historic district.

### **6. City Owned Buildings**

The City owns several small residential structures in Downtown. These were purchased with the intent of clearing them for parking. The City should either demolish these structures or sell them to the private sector.

### **7. "Old" Jail Building**

Consideration should be given to razing the structure and offering the site to the private sector for development --or the public sector if deemed needed. Most appropriate uses for this site include offices, housing, or a combination of both. If it is determined that private sector development interest is not sufficient at this time, then the site should be made available for public parking --as an interim use until the market can support construction of a new building on the site.

### **8. Streetwall**

Maintaining the pedestrian-friendly environment of a Downtown is vital to its economic success. Therefore, a long-term goal of the Valparaiso Downtown enhancement effort should be to:

- Encourage infill construction that re-creates Downtown's streetwall;
- Encourage such construction in Downtown's core --the area bounded by Jefferson, Napoleon, Indiana, and Morgan; and
- Use the structure at 57 Franklin as an example of quality, appropriate infill construction, and zero lot line development.

## ***MARKETING***

A comprehensive campaign must be created to market Downtown Valparaiso to the buying public and to establish a stronger position for Downtown in the marketplace. This campaign should be launched to specifically market businesses and attractions located in Downtown --and only Downtown. The campaign should position Downtown Valparaiso as a unique and distinct destination within the City, the County, and the region and should contain the following elements.

### **1. Key Marketing Messages**

The nearness of Chicago dictates that other business districts in the region must be equally sophisticated in crafting their marketing messages. Therefore, consideration should be given to retaining a marketing professional --on a short-term basis --to define key marketing messages that should be used to promote Downtown. And, those messages should be defined based on the vision, market analysis findings, and recommendations contained in the Action Agenda.

### **2. Story Placement**

Downtown Valparaiso is currently fortunate to have interesting shops, quality restaurants, and quality entertainment --all offered in an appealing, historic

ambience. A concerted effort should be made to get this message out into the marketplace. This should be done by getting stories placed about Downtown with all major print and electronic media located throughout the County, throughout the region, and in Chicago.

### **3. Downtown Brochure**

A high quality, professionally designed Downtown brochure must be created. The brochure should list all of Downtown's businesses and attractions, include a map of Downtown, and show the location of public parking. The brochure should be widely distributed at all locations where area residents and visitors tend to gather.

### **4. Cooperative Ads**

Downtown has a collection of retail businesses, restaurants, and entertainment venues that are significant enough to warrant a cooperative ad campaign. The campaign should promote Downtown as a whole, include Downtown's key marketing messages, and feature participating businesses.

### **5. Individual Business Marketing**

Currently, a number of Downtown businesses operate e-mail clubs, sponsor inbusiness promotions, run advertisements, and conduct other forms of individual marketing efforts. Such efforts should be encouraged and promoted.

### **6. Special Events**

Currently, Valparaiso Community Festivals and Events (VCFE) holds a number of special events in Downtown. Special events are an important component of an overall Downtown marketing campaign and Valparaiso is fortunate to have long running, well-established Downtown events. To capitalize on these events, Downtown businesses should make sure that --during the events --their window displays are eye-catching and their window display lights are on until late at night.

### **7. Farmers Market**

Downtown's current farmers market should be considerably "beefed up" to make it more of a Downtown anchor and activity generator. Starting in 2003, the market should be open one-day a week, for at least the entire Summer.

### **8. Entertainment**

To bring an informal, family-oriented level of entertainment to Downtown, consideration should be given to holding a Summer concert series on the lawn of the Courthouse. In addition, Valparaiso University students and faculty should be invited to provide musical entertainment, art shows, etc., in Downtown as a way of enticing additional University students, faculty, staff, and visitors to Downtown.

### **9. Web Site**

As part of the overall marketing campaign, it is very important to have information about Downtown on the Web. At this time, the Greater Valparaiso Chamber of

Commerce, Valparaiso Community Festivals and Events, and the City of Valparaiso maintain Web sites. Each of these entities should consider creating a separate page on their sites specifically about Downtown. If this is not possible, then a separate Downtown Web site should be created.

## ***PARTNERSHIP FOR SUCCESS***

A shared direction, a unified voice, and action are essential for Downtown success. And, charging a single entity with the responsibility of seeing that the Downtown Action Agenda is implemented is the only way to ensure that it will not become "another study that sits on a shelf." Downtown's future vitality is too important to the health of Valparaiso as a whole to allow that to occur. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that a Downtown Partnership (i.e., consortium of existing groups) be formed specifically to bring together all of the key entities, on a regular basis, to ensure implementation of the Downtown Action Agenda.

### **Composition**

The Downtown Partnership should have a "board of directors" that meets monthly and is comprised of:

- The Mayor of Valparaiso;
- A Valparaiso City Council Member;
- A top ranking representative of Porter County;
- The Chair of the Valparaiso Redevelopment Commission;
- The Chair of the Greater Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce;
- The Chair of Valparaiso Community Festivals and Events;
- The Chair of the Valparaiso Historic Preservation Commission;
- The CEO of a Downtown bank;
- A well-respected Downtown business owner;
- A well-respected Downtown property owner; and
- The president of the Central Neighborhood Association and the Banta Neighborhood Association.

### **Role**

The sole role of the Downtown Partnership must be to see that the Downtown Action Agenda is implemented in a timely and quality manner.

### **Unity and Leadership**

The Downtown Partnership must act as the force that unites, coalesces, and focuses all private and public sector entities --as well as all key individuals -on implementing the Downtown Action Agenda cooperatively. The Downtown Partnership must also demonstrate leadership, take action, and stimulate action by others.

### **Downtown Merchants Committee**

To keep Downtown's merchants involved --and to ensure they have a voice in the project --a Downtown Merchants Committee should be formed within VCFE as part of the Downtown Partnership.

### **Newsletter**

To keep the Downtown community informed about actions being taken and scheduled --and successes realized --the Downtown Partnership should publish a newsletter on a regular basis. This could be done as part of a broader newsletter published by VCFE.

### **Staff**

In a City the size of Valparaiso --and in a Downtown as dynamic as Valparaiso's - the assistance of a full-time Downtown director will eventually be necessary to implement the Downtown Action Agenda as aggressively as the community would want. In the interim, until this can be funded and accomplished, the Downtown Partnership should receive staff assistance from the City, the County, the Chamber, and VCFE.

### **Funding**

Implementation of the Downtown Action Agenda should be funded:

- Through a partnership of the entities that participated in funding its development; and
- By launching a City-wide United Way-type funding campaign.

In addition, as the Downtown Action Agenda is successfully implemented and Downtown is further strengthened, consideration should be given to creating a business improvement district in Downtown.