

Wisconsin Downtown Action Council - Stakeholder's Survey

1. Within the last few years, what kinds of downtown revitalization support or assistance have been most helpful to you, regardless of the source, and why?

- Training, education and using models from other communities.
- Involvement with IDA (International Downtown Association) - through attending the annual conference and utilizing the web site.
- Gillett became a Wisconsin Main Street Community in 2002, and almost all of our success has come through the assistance of the Main Street staff and the support of other WI Main Street Communities.
- Revitalization support in the area of TIF and low interest loans have been most helpful to our downtown.
- Just knowing that the WI Main Street staff is available is invaluable to me.
- Seminars that are organized and hosted locally are very helpful and well received.
- Local business assistance is an important part of our outreach.
- Assistance from the WI Main Street Program.
- Assistance that we received from the UW-Extension (Bill Ryan, David Mench, and Chuck Law. We first learned about the services that the UW-EXT would provide by attending the Governor's Conference.
- Educational programs on BIDs. Particularly case studies on communities with successful BIDs to understand why they have been successful.
- Assistance from other Main Street program directors, BID directors, chambers in educating our community and its stakeholders on the benefits and opportunities BIDs provide.
- TIF districts - The continued access to this program has benefited efforts in our central city.
- Community Development Authorities - Again another tool to help customize programs to make opportunities happen.
- UW-extension - For technical services and educational programs.
- WDAC - for networking opportunities and case studies of what other communities have done.
- CDBG program for grants to improve public spaces, parks, infrastructure and streetscapes within the central business district.
- Rural Development - for grants and loans for infrastructure improvements to permit opportunities to be created.
- Property Taxes - For financial support of some streetscape improvements.
- Accommodations Taxes - For financial support of some of the amenities in our downtown such as flower baskets.
- Civic Clubs such as the Lions - Providing manpower and financial support for downtown refuse containers.
- WDNR Urban Forestry Grants - Again for monetary assistance in the improvement of our urban streetscape and management assistance in developing an urban forestry plan for the community.
- Although we would like to make use of the Main Street program, the stakeholders in this community have been hesitant to ante up the financial commitment necessary to even be in the running for selection as a Main Street Community.
- As a consultant who advises communities and developers on development issues, including downtown revitalization, I rely on economic analysis, demographic trends and fundamental drivers of economic activity.
- The support and information that we receive from the International Downtown Association (IDA).

Why has this support or assistance been helpful to you?

- I have met people at the conference and we have helped each other in our jobs. I met the editor of "Downtown Idea Exchange and Downtown Reporter" and this "connection" has been rewarding.
- I would say about 85% of all material that comes to me is a result of WI Main Street designation and through other community members of that group. This includes numerous seminars sponsored by Main Street or which I was exposed to through Main Street as well as specific assistance given by one of the four primary members of the WI Main Street staff.
- Our whole downtown is a TID and developers were enticed with this tool to rehab buildings. In addition a 1% under prime rate facade loan assists in many renovations for the downtown. All of the area banks contribute to the program and make it less of a risk.
- I can count on them being competent and available.
- Local assistance is easiest the easiest sell for attendance and speaks most directly to local issues. WI Main Street Program is especially helpful because of the expertise and statewide network that comes with it.
- Affordable. Came right to our location. Helped with community assessment.
- BID's, TIF's, and CDA's are essential in permitting each community the opportunity to customize financing packages for the particular opportunities that afford themselves, for grants for bricks and mortar projects. TIF Districts - because they help communities help themselves. They are applicable to almost every situation a community faces. They don't require new funding. Technical assistance is essential to assist this community in learning the mechanics on how funding mechanisms work; for providing a network of peers in other communities, for educating stakeholders on what is to be gained by trying something new and how to recognize and embrace opportunities.
- Knowing what's going on in downtown revitalization around the region is also important to me and WDAC has played a key role in that regard.

2. What do you believe WDAC is doing particularly well?

- An overall lack of visibility and not much happening with WDAC.
- I have attended the Governor's Conference and enjoyed networking with other professionals on a state level. That has been my only involvement. I know very little about WDAC.
- I'm sorry, but in the past few experiences I had with the group there was nothing that I felt the group was doing well for us.
- The organized trips to communities and the networking. You can read all you want about revitalization, but going to see it first hand and talk with others in the field and other business operators and practitioners really makes a difference. I went to the Lacrosse event and we hosted one as well.
- I liked the annual seminars. It was my chance to be with other Main Street people and learn.
- I can't say one way or the other. I am not sure what the mission of WDAC is? I miss the Governor's Conference as this was one activity that WDAC did very well.
- What you are doing right now by conducting this strategic planning and polling your membership.
- Providing case studies and tours of communities to learn what is working and what is not working. Providing a forum for networking. For providing programming on issues facing central cities.
- I value the networking and downtown site visits.
- I am not up-to-date on the work of WDAC. I don't know.

3. Of all the professional downtown revitalization support or assistance resources you are aware of, what are the two or three most valuable to you, and why?

- Wisconsin Main Street Center and the National Main Street Center.
- The IDA convention and its website
- Design assistance has been very helpful. If I had to pick a third, it was a consistent opportunity to network with other communities that might be struggling with the same problems as we are here in Gillett.
- I am most familiar with the four-point approach of the Main Street organization.
- WI Main Street Center, National Main Street Center and 1000 Friends of WI
- UW-Ext, WDAC
- Technical Assistance from UW Extension - local connections to statewide resources. The local extension agent is generally someone who is trusted by local stakeholders while outsiders may not be. Neighboring community professionals - because they have experienced putting projects together. Consultants provide the dreams and vision, but often lack the practical experience of making a project happen. A consultant can provide theories on how things should work. They often do not have the knowledge of how a funding package or financial package or project timetable may not work because limitations created by statute, or issues of property access from local stakeholders, or how to overcome opposition from interest groups. A professional from a neighboring community has experienced issues such as these. Their experience can give legitimacy to a project or program. They can share how the theory will actually work.
- WDAC, Main St. Program, UW Extension, TIF
- IDA and the contacts that I have made through their organization. The money.

Why are these the most valuable to you?

- Training, technical assistance and the personal assistance from the staff of each organization. The recent Downtown Conference in Wausau was excellent.
- I can go to the website and receive current information, the best practices and successes from other professionals, like entities.
- Design assistance specifically regarding our possible new Main Streetscape, and seminars and conferences that have focused on ideas we could use as a small community in creating a downtown mix of retail and service opportunities.
- The Main Street approach is a solid approach and I believe in it. But there are many strong organizations and the Main Street Program in WI should be careful not to exclude those other organizations.
- The networking at WMS and NMSC. 1000 Friends helped with local sign ordinances that have just been adopted.
- UW-Ext services are affordable, available and very comprehensive. WDAC - I valued the community tours, Governor's conference especially the opportunity to network with people from other communities.
- See previous response

4. Generally, what types of downtown revitalization support, resources or assistance, if any, are missing presently within Wisconsin?

- There is not a strong statewide network of downtown revitalization organizations and individuals.
- Wisconsin is missing a comprehensive, qualitative data about the impact that

downtowns make i.e. benchmarking. I understand WI Main Street Program has stats. I am not aware of other resources available to organizations like a BID.

- If our past association with WDAC and other like groups is an example, it would be the inability of those providing assistance to separate the problems of a larger most likely urban community from those of a smaller rural community. Also, I would say that the state government is uninterested in the problems of rural Wisconsin, most specifically northern rural Wisconsin, preferring to concentrate its efforts on larger, more visible locales in the southeastern and southwestern parts of the state. It is only after a company has shut down that we ever see state officials in our midst, and most often it isn't with much assistance.
- Issues dealing with building inspections and planning codes are missing. Education with regard to building access code is needed. It would be great to have a check sheet with all of the necessary information all in one source. There is a community in northern WI where you can walk 8 blocks without going outside! Our local fire department tells us we can replicate that. Why not?
- WMS needs additional staff and funding to do the work that is already on their plate. WI needs statewide technical assistance on downtown revitalization issues.
- The types of support that could be provided to communities who may never qualify as a Main Street community, BID, or TIF.
- I have missed the downtown site visits and discussions. I think we are missing a broader connection between economic development and downtown revitalization. Those seem to be two separate worlds, yet they depend on each other for their mutual success.
- I do not know because I am unaware of what is available. I realize that the responsibility of knowing what is available is on MY shoulders. A locally retained sales tax like the county 1/2% only for local.

5. Within the last few years, what types of support or assistance have you received from WDAC?

- 1 or 2 mailings, but I'm not sure what the content was.
- Just conference attendance
- None that I know of since our initial involvement in 2002, except for conferences we attended that did not meet many of our needs.
- Business tours
- Getting the New Market Tax Credit information out to the legislators.
- None
- Opportunity for community tours, conference and I also benefited from attending your strategic planning session in Madison.
- Networking opportunities Case studies of projects and success stories in other communities.
- Downtown site visits, networking.
- None, but I have not asked. All I have asked, which is none.

6. Which professional, trade or other organization(s) do you consider the most helpful for you presently concerning downtown revitalization, and why?

- Wisconsin Main Street Program and the National Main Street Center.
- Being involved with the local chamber of commerce and its committees (public policy committee); also local service clubs have provided networking and visibility for downtown. WEDA is state organization that I find helpful.
- Again, we are a member of the Wisconsin Main Street Communities and that is the most important group to which we belong. We also participate in numerous conferences and meetings that are sponsored by organizations such as WI Main

Street, but we don't belong to any others.

- WEDA and the Dept. of Commerce
- As a Main Street Community WMS is the most helpful organization for our community.
- UW-Extension / WDAC
- WEDA - Wisconsin Economic Development Association. Because this organization is reputable in the eyes of the state legislature and state agencies. The issues of its members get heard in the halls of the legislature. It has influence where influence is needed. It is a collection of seasoned development professionals who are involved with the central business district as well as larger community issues. Its a group of folks from the private sector (developers), the public sector, utilities, funding agencies, engineers, consultants, etc. Its a group of folks that have actual hands on experience in addressing the issues we all confront.
- Other than WDAC and Extension, IEDC (International Economic Development Council) has been the most helpful.
- IDA, because I can get a great amount of data and assistance. I also get connected with cities like Madison and with cities that have similar challenges. IDA is very membership focused. Other Chambers, other CVB's.

Why do you consider these professional, trade or other organization(s) to be the most helpful?

- The personal assistance from the staff of WMS and the NMSC is the most helpful.
- Our chamber of commerce and its public policy committee sees the importance of downtown with downtown progress reports. I am able to keep downtown on the forefront of service group professionals through my involvement with the service clubs.
- WEDA is all encompassing for research and development. It's an ED think tank; you can query information among 450 professionals (post and get it)!
- Because we don't qualify for any other assistance such as Main Street Program or BID.
- See previous response

7. What types of support or assistance needs do you see emerging now or that will likely emerge over the next few years concerning downtown revitalization?

- The Wisconsin Main Street Program gets hit with budget cuts every year and has less capacity to provide assistance to communities. The Alliance of WI Main Street Communities is currently under development and will pick up some of the slack from the declining resources at the state level.
- Making financial/funding mechanisms available for downtown redevelopment is what I see as an emerging need. Knowing all of the tools (TIF, grants, tax credits, and incentives) will be very critical.
- There needs to be assistance in writing grants that are actually prioritized for communities of our size and emphasize rural areas. There needs to be a greater understanding of the consumer who finds shopping in big box stores to be preferable to shopping in their local downtowns, especially in smaller downtowns. There needs to be a greater emphasis on tourism in out-of-the-way locations that aren't Wisconsin Dells or urban-based, such as agri-tourism or eco-tourism, both areas that would be great help to us in northern rural areas.
- As downtowns re-brand themselves I see a need for wireless communities. This would be a great topic for WDAC to tackle. Right now I am writing a RFP for broadband deployment, internet cafe, etc. This is the future and the now.
- We are preparing for a bypass that depending on funding should be started in 2009. This is a big issue of downtowns across the state. Fuel prices will affect the retail climate. We are launching a buy local campaign this season. With more dollars going to the gas tank will fewer dollars go towards local purchases? People are nervous and will they be more frugal?
- More help dealing with local community politics. Getting all parties who are concerned about economic development to work together. Although, I am an advocate for downtowns, sometimes our downtown organizations can appear to be at odds with development in other parts of the community. We need ways to help educate the community in the true value of revitalizing our downtowns.
- Representing communities at the state level in our attempts to educate the legislature that communities, and central business districts, have problems that need to be addressed. Acting as a clearing house for information desired by members in pursuit of our goals. By educating our members on emerging issues. By providing a network of professionals to offer advice, providing a shoulder to cry on when things don't work out, and be working as advocates for central business districts.
- Transportation, parking and affordable housing challenges. Also, the challenge of limited city budgets. Get cities to support healthy downtowns - figure out how to control fringe development.

8. What do you believe WDAC's job or primary role or roles should be?

- A primary role of WDAC is to establish a broad base of support for downtown revitalization across the state. Is it possible for WDAC to do this as an all volunteer organization? In many cases the dollars that have gone to WDAC will go to the new Alliance of WI Main Street Communities.
- Be a clearing house for useful information for downtown development. Be a link between Main Streets and BIDs. Be the communication vehicle to strengthen the value of a downtown professional i.e. career development. Could there be a certification program developed in the future? Could the organization lead an recognition/award program in the state? This would be more long term.
- If the group wishes to be the primary organization for all of Wisconsin downtowns, there needs to be a clearer understanding that what might work in Milwaukee or Wausau or Oshkosh won't necessarily be of any use to those of us who live and work in smaller towns across the state with populations of less than 3,000. There are as many differences between Wisconsin towns/cities of different sizes than there are

similarities. Gillett has more in common with a small town in Iowa or Minnesota than it does with Milwaukee or the Twin Cities. We are not a large city or a suburb. We don't share their outlook, interests or problems.

- Do what they do best. Networking and onsite tours. No matter how big or small the communities and downtowns are, keep doing it.
- The connection between WMS and WDAC is not clear. Ideally WDAC would go back to earlier days and be more of a partner with WMS. WDAC should partner with the newly formed Main Street Alliance
- Advocate for downtowns, clearinghouse resources and information, provider of networking opportunities to bring communities from all across the state together to learn from each other's experiences.
- An Advocate for central business districts An educational and technical resource for communities. A clearing house for information and funding opportunities.
- Networking, legislation and keeping members abreast of what's happening around the State in terms of downtown revitalization.
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- Building the image of downtowns as economic generators. Marketing Wisconsin's downtowns as a genre. Commissioning downtown research initiatives. Standing ready with reliable and current numbers Feeding stories about downtowns to the press. Working with bus tour companies to do various "themed" downtown tours. Specifically research how to get the downtown business person more engaged...more committed to the health of their business environment - the downtown. I do not think I am qualified to answer this question. To define downtowns value and protect it from fringe development.

9. Given what you consider to be WDAC's basic job or role, what performance criteria do you use to measure or judge WDAC's effectiveness?

- The visibility (or lack of visibility) of WDAC across the state.
- Gage by the frequency of usage of services. Number at conferences or website hits.
- Am I getting anything out of the material I receive or the conferences I attend or the meetings I schlep to that I can use here at home? If not, it isn't working for our community.
- Remember to ask attendees to complete an evaluation. What was most useful? What did they come away with? What one thing are you going to implement from what you learned? Ask for a strategy statement with how the practitioner will implement what was learned.
- I can't really answer this. I'd be inclined to start over and re-identify the purpose of WDAC.
- Whether or not the WDAC is able to increase membership.
- Good question. Probably, the interest in professionals in being associated with the organization. Attendance at WDAC sponsored events. In the recognition and image the organization has in the halls of the legislature or state agencies.
- The number of organized opportunities to learn, share information and network. Legislative success is well below this in importance.
- The number of organized opportunities to learn, share information and network. Legislative success is well below this in importance.
- I do not think I am qualified to answer this question.

10. In which performance area or areas do you believe WDAC can improve?

- Hire staff for WDAC. Focus on the consistency and regularity of the organization and

its' offerings, be it a regular newsletter, communication, whatever.

- Amount of touches per year. I know I would attend a conference and would consider hosting a conference.
- All those mentioned above. Overall, I have liked the people I have met through the WDAC, but haven't found any of the stuff presented at meetings or conferences to be very useful to me or my community. Now, it will require a major shift in perception to bring us back into the fold. Also, the mission of WDAC attempts to do too much! A mission must be simple; it must be remembered and easy to repeat!
- All organizations are responsible for better networking with other trade associations. Let's collaborate! Possibly at a WEDA conference there could be a downtown track and bring in the WI Incubator Association?!
- I have not been very active in WDAC, although appreciative of their work. Since Mayville is an "independent" Main Street organization, we are not routinely included in that network, although the staff is available to us.
- It is most important to create an image of WDAC and continue the work on the strategic plan.
- I think the WDAC simply needs to decide who they are, they services that they want to provide and then do it. Make sure that what you aim to do can be accomplished. Don't risk trying to do too much.
- Communication - When I lived near Green Bay, it was easier to participate in WDAC activities. It seemed that the WDAC shared information on events activities and issues more. I don't know if the organization has changed or if my location just outside the artic circle is responsible . . . but it seems that those of us up here in the North Country never hear of activities, never get news of WDAC's accomplishments, or are invited to an activity that always seems to be in the southeastern corner of the state. I recognize that locations are important to get a representative cross section of downtown activities and the proximity of members are important in the planning of activities. But, it seems that little is happening north of STH 29. If annual meetings are held that are not dependent upon location, it sure would be nice to have them in Wausau, Stevens Point or Eau Claire instead of Madison and Milwaukee. Since I have gotten off topic - back to communication. I don't think I have ever received a membership directory or minutes of business meetings of WDAC. Its not that I am interested in managing the organization, but it sure would be nice to know what the organization is doing. Maybe teaming up with the Wisconsin Rural Partnership to provide technical expertise to communities would be helpful. BID conferences, when they were held, were valuable. But it seems that we never got adequate notice of the meetings. or they were scheduled in busy times of the year. Or they were held in the far corners of the state.
- I do not think I am qualified to answer this question.
- Establishing the actual value of a downtown to the community.