



## Community Input

This plan for downtown Hutchinson is based largely on the input provided by the community—residents and business people—who chose to participate in a series of meetings that began in November of 2001 and spanned approximately a one-year time period. As a result, the initiatives that are defined in the plan directly resulted from a blending of the community’s ideas with the expertise of the project consulting team. It was essential for the people of Hutchinson to provide the foundation of this plan since they are both the beneficiaries of its results and they are the ones who will need to play a direct role in its implementation.

## Task Force Leadership

At the beginning of the planning process, a Steering Committee comprised of members of the Hutchinson Downtown Association was formed to provide input directly into the creation of the plan. Meeting on a monthly basis, the Steering Committee focused on the vision of the plan, defined project objectives, reviewed public input, and served as a sounding board for ideas and concepts offered by the consulting project team. The Committee’s role was seen as offering a way for the community’s concerns to be conveyed to the consulting project team as the plan evolved, and they also provided critical review of design direction at points during the planning process. Additionally, since the Steering Committee was comprised of members of the Hutchinson City Council and other local boards and commissions, they were able to seek input from their peers on a regular basis as ideas were developed and brought forward for public review and comment.

## Community Workshops

A series of community workshops formed the core of the public involvement process for the Downtown Revitalization Master Plan. The public process began on November 15, 2001 with a community wide kick-off meeting. The monthly Steering Committee meetings that were held were open to the public; meetings were held with the City Council to review strategic policy directives; meetings were held with the Economic Development Authority (EDA) to review project initiatives and funding sources; and three public open houses occurred, the last of which was held on October 10, 2002. These forums offered opportunities for literally hundreds of Hutchinson residents and businesspersons to become involved in the planning process.



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## Kick-Off Meeting

The initial public kick-off meeting, as much as anything, helped shape the downtown plan. It was attended by a broad base of community constituents—residents, business owners, land owners, business operators and particularly of note, a significant number of high school aged individuals. Participants were asked to provide individual and collective feedback on five different topics. The following is a brief summary of the topics and the input that was received:

### *Like About Downtown*

Participants were asked to list the top five things that they liked about downtown Hutchinson. Over half of the respondents stated that they liked downtown’s physical characteristics. Specifically, they referenced a fondness for the area’s historic buildings, Library Square, downtown area parks and the riverfront. Other items that were noteworthy—the variety of downtown businesses was frequently noted as was the positive appearance and “feel” of the downtown area.



*At a Kick-Off Meeting community constituents provided feedback on likes and dislikes about downtown. Positive aspects included Library Square, historic buildings, downtown parks and the positive “feel” of the downtown area, while traffic, deteriorating buildings and poor street lighting were seen as negative impacts.*

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### *Dislike About Downtown*

Probably to no one's surprise, traffic was listed as the most frequent dislike in downtown. Items related to traffic were identified by approximately one-third of the session participants. Other responses included feelings that the area was not inviting for non-vehicular movement (walk/bike/blade), opinions that the area has poor lighting, and a concern about vacant or deteriorating buildings.

### *Future Characteristics*

Participants were asked to discuss and list future characteristics desired in Downtown Hutchinson. Responses included: 1) Downtown should be more than just a retail center. It should have added opportunities for entertainment and the arts. 2) Housing should be a key element of the future downtown. Upscale condominiums, townhomes or apartments were suggested as an appropriate type of housing. 3) The future downtown needs to make better use of the river.

### *Barriers to Change*

Attendees were asked to list barriers that they foresee in achieving a revitalized downtown Hutchinson. Responses included a lack of money, general attitudes including a lack of commitment and support, bureaucratic issues including the need for multi-agency involvement, and a current lack of a plan and consensus.

### *How to Invest a Million Dollars*

As a means to further define the priorities of the community, each participant was given a hypothetical million dollars to spend on the downtown improvement of their choice. In a period of only about ten minutes, over \$130 million was spent on improvements in the downtown area. Over 60% of the funds were spent on two categories of projects. First and foremost, people spent money to add entertainment, arts or cultural activities to downtown Hutchinson. Second, the group spent money to address some form of activity or improvement focused on the Crow River.

The initial kick-off meeting provided a number of clear and consistent messages that reverberate throughout this plan. Hutchinson strongly supports its downtown. People have a fondness for the physical attributes of the area and seek to form a stronger link between downtown and the Crow River. Residents favor an increased presence of arts and cultural opportunities in the downtown area. Downtown should provide additional living opportunities.

### **Design Charrette**

For two days in February, 2002, the planning team conducted an on-site design charrette to help identify the key issues and provide some initial thoughts on future land use patterns and urban design changes for the downtown. This two day observation and information gathering session concluded with a public presentation, and provided feedback for revisions to the major plan elements and initial direction.

### **Community Open House**

On October 10, 2002, a final community open house was held in order to collect additional feedback on the results of the planning process, with a particular emphasis on those items that were identified as project initiatives. Participants were asked to comment on a series of initiatives (projects) including their overall impressions of the initiative and a relative ranking of its priority. This information was used to help define the set of recommended plan initiatives that can be found later in this document.



*Participants at the first public meeting were given a hypothetical million dollars to spend on the downtown improvement of their choice. Topping the list of improvements were entertainment, arts or cultural activities and improvements focused on the Crow River.*



*The community open house provided feedback on the results of the planning process.*