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## CHAPTER 8. DOWNTOWN STRATEGY

### SERVICE MISSION

Through commerce, culture, and community, develop downtown as the world business center of choice.

There is one Downtown strategy goal:

1. Reinforce downtown as a vibrant and vital center of commerce, culture, and community.

### RESULTS

Downtown Des Moines has received much attention in the last few years for the city's revitalization efforts. These efforts include the Des Moines Gateway project, I-235 construction, Iowa Events Center, Science Center, the Des Moines Higher Education Center, and the Public Library of Des Moines – Central project. These projects represent an unprecedented investment of public and private funding for new facilities in the downtown area. The expectation is that the planned projects will improve the entire area and provide greater cultural, educational, and recreational opportunities in Des Moines. Figures 8-1, 8-2, and 8-3 show a few of the new projects.

**Figure 8-1. New Allied Insurance Headquarters (under construction)**



**Figure 8-2. Gateway East**



**Figure 8-3. Future Plans for Court Avenue District**



Respondents were asked about their satisfaction with the level of effort Des Moines is putting forth in downtown revitalization efforts. For the most part, they were satisfied to very satisfied with these efforts. As Table 8-1 shows, people felt that the downtown was visually attractive (68%) and pleasant to walk through (61%), with residential opportunities (57%), entertainment opportunities (57%), and visitor attractions (57%), that the city was doing a good job integrating old and new architectural styles (57%), that there was an adequate supply of public parking (51%), and that there were areas to look around and sit (50%).

Respondents were less enthusiastic about other Downtown efforts. For example, only a minority of respondents felt that Des

Moines was doing a satisfactory job in developing open green space (39%), providing financial support to businesses (38%), assisting small businesses (34%), providing safe pedestrian and bicycle routes (32%), using existing structures for startup businesses (31%), or providing bike racks in safe locations (23%).

Note the bolded entries in Table 8-1 under the “Don’t know” column. Responses show a significant level of unfamiliarity with revitalization efforts, business financial support, assistance to downtown small businesses, safe pedestrian and bicycle routes downtown, the use of structures for start-up (entrepreneurial) business, and the location of bicycle racks in safe locations.

This information suggests a need to explore the topics more deeply and, if necessary, provide more information about these services to the public.

Respondents were asked for their input about some of the better-known strategies, or projects, Des Moines is implementing in its revitalization efforts. Some of these were mentioned previously, including Court Avenue, Gateway East, Gateway West, Gray’s Lake, and the Iowa Events Center.

**Table 8-1. Percent Satisfaction with Downtown Revitalization Efforts**

	Satisfied or Very Satisfied	Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied	Don't Know
Visually attractive	68	24	7
Pleasant to walk through	61	29	10
Entertainment opportunities	57	33	10
Integrate older and newer designs in Downtown	57	26	17
Residential opportunities	51	23	26
Visitor attractions	57	32	11
Supply of public parking	58	32	10
Areas to look around and sit	50	36	14
Preservation of significant structures <sup>1</sup>	48	37	15
Variety of businesses	46	39	15
Integration of automobiles with alternative transportation <sup>2</sup>	42	37	21
Development of areas of open, green space	56	31	13
Business financial support	38	16	<b>46</b>
Assistance for Downtown small businesses	34	22	<b>44</b>
Safe pedestrian and bicycle routes in Downtown	32	33	<b>35</b>
Use of structures for startup businesses	31	21	<b>48</b>
Bike racks to lock up bicycles in safe locations	23	27	<b>50</b>

<sup>1</sup> Refers to buildings of historic or architectural significance.

<sup>2</sup> For example, adding bicycle lanes or widening streets/sidewalks.

Table 8-2 displays the results of these questions. Respondents were most satisfied with Gray’s Lake (91%); over half of the respondents (55%) noted that the public was involved in planning the Gray’s Lake project.

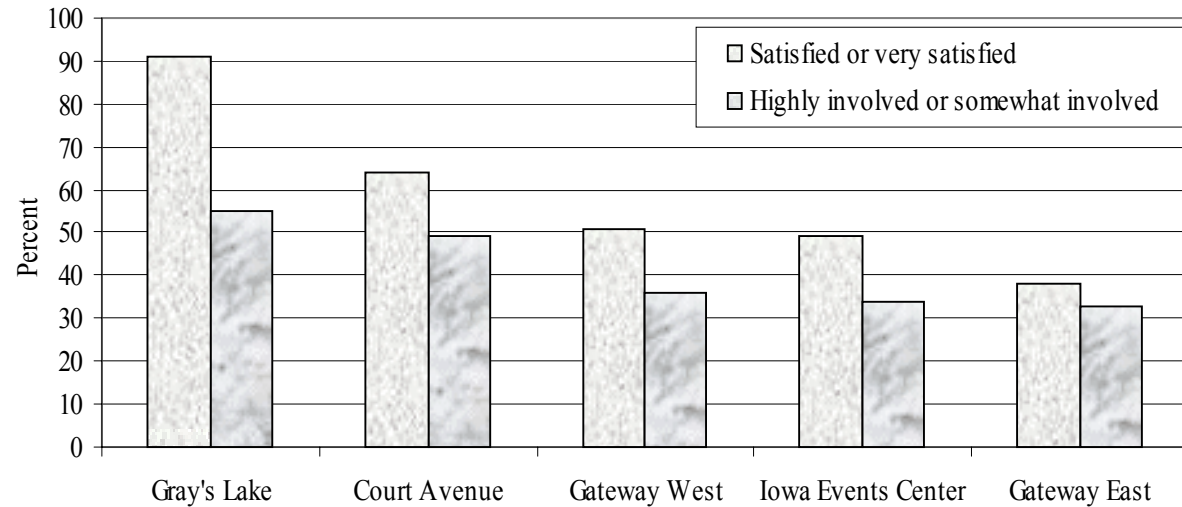
Similar results occurred for the remaining projects. For example, 64 percent were satisfied with the Court Avenue project and about half (49%) thought that the public was involved with the planning. From

these results, it appears that the more people are involved in a city or regional project, the more satisfied they are with the results (Figure 8-4). The latter has been well documented in the planning and sociology literature—when citizens are involved with a project and local government works with the public and takes their input seriously, they are more satisfied with the results, which represent a part of themselves as well as community investment.

**Table 8-2. Percent Satisfaction with Strategies for Downtown Development and Level of Public Involvement with Planning Process**

	Satisfaction with Strategies			Public Involvement in the Planning Process		
	Satisfied or Very Satisfied	Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied	Don’t Know	Highly or Somewhat Involved	Not Involved	Don’t Know
Court Avenue	64	26	10	49	22	29
Gateway West	51	22	27	36	27	37
Gateway East	38	25	37	33	26	41
Gray’s Lake	91	4	5	55	17	28
Iowa Events Center	49	31	19	34	37	29

**Figure 8-4. Relationship Between Satisfaction with and Public Involvement in Des Moines Strategies**



**COMMENTS**

A total of 138 comments associated with the strategy for Downtown were received. The majority of them pertained to the Des Moines revitalization efforts (74 comments). Of those, most frequently mentioned were satisfaction with Gray's Lake and requests that the city develop the east side (Table 8-3).

Of note, all of the comments received about the Events Center were negative and most of the comments received about Court Avenue also were negative. In both cases, most respondents felt that too much money was being put into the projects.

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**Table 8-3. Downtown Strategy Comment Categories**

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	Number	Examples
Beautification	27	Trees; landscaping; generally beautify; clean up streets, debris
Development	15	More businesses; more development; preserve/restore old building/revitalize
Downtown Strategies	74	Court Avenue: more entertainment, disapproval of project; Gateway East: develop/revitalize, building places to be proud of, develop attractions, buildings, building shopping center, stores; Gray's Lake: enjoys/satisfied with, more areas like Gray's Lake; Iowa Events Center: too expensive, bad idea
Entertainment/Attractions	7	More attractions; diverse entertainment; teen entertainment; not enough entertainment options; more open space
Transportation and Housing	8	Parking too expensive; remove cars from Downtown; add affordable housing; more variety in housing
Other	3	Finish projects; no more money to Downtown

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