

Iowa City, University of Iowa want to partner on downtown study

by The Gazette Staff :: UPDATED: 12 May 2011 | 6:45 pm :: No Comments

Tweet

IOWA CITY – Iowa City may hire a consultant to study its downtown, with the goal of using the results to attract more retailers to the city's core.

The City Council is scheduled to vote Tuesday on a \$50,000 contract with Virginia-based Divaris Real Estate to assess the downtown market, with an emphasis on how the University of Iowa affects the area. The UI would pay for half of the cost.



Graffiti reading 'Dear Dad, please stop sending me your money. I'll just use it to buy booze.' is spray painted on a wall next to the Sauce liquor store on the Pedestrian May 2. (Brian Ray/ SourceMedia Group News)

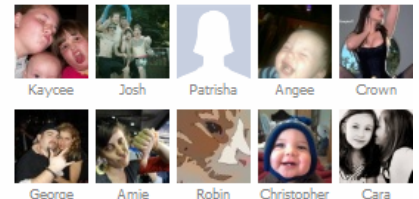
Follow us on Facebook



The Gazette on Facebook



11,588 people like The Gazette.



Facebook social plugin

Hoopla Local Music



Local music listings Search by venue, band or date.

Farmers Markets

The study is part of ongoing efforts to re-envision Iowa City's popular downtown.

"It will give us a tool to help sell downtown to the type of business that we haven't enjoyed there for some time," said Wendy Ford, the city's economic development coordinator.

A driving factor has been the year-old 21-only law, which bans underage people from bars after 10 p.m. The downtown had become largely known as a nighttime hot spot, but with a few large bars already having gone out of business, city and business leaders have a goal of attracting more retailers, office space and owner-occupied housing.

Some city and business leaders have recently expressed a desire to attract a few national retailers to downtown Iowa City, which currently is home mostly to locally owned shops.

The new study would analyze Iowa City's demographics out to a 30-mile radius and account for the impact of the 30,000 students who attend the UI and people who visit the area for things like UI sporting events and medical facilities.

The study will look at possibilities for more owner-occupied housing in addition to retail opportunities.

It also would identify other college towns with similar circumstances and retailers that have been successful in such settings.

John Millar of Divaris would lead the work. He gave a speech in Iowa City a few months ago about college town economics that has since been continually referenced by people involved in the future of downtown Iowa City.

Iowa City was part of a group that commissioned a downtown study in 2007, but that took a broader look at downtown. This would be more narrowly focused and tap into Millar's expertise of college towns, City Manager Tom Markus said.

"This is an acknowledgement that the university plays a major role in the future of our downtown," he said.

The study would be used to create a plan with a list of potential retailers for downtown Iowa City and determine how much and what kinds of retail the area could support.

That ties into the attempt underway to establish a self-supported municipal improvement district, or SSMID, in which downtown property owners would agree to pay an additional tax levy. The tax revenue would be used in part to pay for a downtown manager.

"This is kind of advanced work for what we hope will be created in terms of a SSMID with someone who leads the marketing effort, in part, as one of their roles," Markus said. Developers say downtown Iowa City is ripe for more retail and owner-occupied housing, according to Nancy Quellhorst, president and CEO of the Iowa City Area Chamber of Commerce. Having a better mix of uses would help downtown, she said.

"Anytime we can diversify our portfolio, it offers us protection from market swings and enhances downtown," she said.

Markus said if the council OKs it, the study could be finished this summer.

Farmers Markets

A schedule and map to find nearby farmers markets.

Cutest Pet Contest

How cute is your family pet? Submit a photo or just vote.

Get our content

... Email newsletters
... Facebook
... Mobile apps
... Mobile site
... RSS
... Text alerts
... Twitter

Follow the Kernels



Stay connected with news on the Cedar Rapids Kernels.

Traffic Camera Database

Who's been speeding and running red lights? Check the traffic camera database.

Mobile Apps

Stay connected wherever you are.
iPhone
Android
Blackberry

Find a job