

Iowa Parks Foundation, Inc.

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IPF's Goals for the Urban Recreation District (URD) Pilot Project:

Engage an energized and active economic development organization in common cause to increase local property values, increase general economic activity and jobs, and dramatically improve the quality of life for local **urban** residents and visitors;

1. Identify and methodically develop pragmatic, high-use and unique public recreation opportunities for local urban residents and visitors;
2. Draw substantial private and governmental investment for economic development and public recreation in the urban district;
3. Foster contact, cooperation and mutual civic improvement across socio-economic and other diverse local urban groups;
4. Establish, solidify and fund a human urban infrastructure for ongoing economic development in common cause with public recreation;
5. Record, organize and make available the lessons and tools developed during the pilot project for use by other urban areas in Iowa and elsewhere. The URD is modelled after the successful use of the "regional" concept in the Parks to People initiative, most developed too date in the Grant Wood Loop (Dubuque, Jones and Jackson Counties). See <http://www.iaparks.org/parks-to-people/> for regional planning and project documents attached at the bottom under the Grant Wood Loop designation; and
6. Develop new and innovative types of "parks", using existing public space (to avoid taking more of the urban tax base away), including but not limited to multiple staggered or alternating walking loops spaced throughout the district, pocket parks, open food and art market space, alleyway recreation, temporarily closed side streets during summer months for active play of all kinds, after hours use of school grounds, partial or full boulevard creation for "park like" feel, organic sculpture park, temporary climbing walls, "Tiny Y", space for art or music performance or space for outdoor coffee clutch relationships, Adirondack chairs and swinging porch chairs in clusters, unused space for fenced dog parks, multiple and clear physical connections to recreational assets outside the URD, shared restaurant/brewery/pocket park use space, etc. *See generally,* <http://betterblock.org/>;

IPF’s Ten Steps to Urban Recreation District (URD) Pilot Project Success:

	Responsible Parties	Task Description
1.	Econ. Dev. ED, Committee and Chairperson	<p>The Core URD Team: The URD identifies and secures economic development staff URD leader(s) (i.e., Econ. Dev. ED and/or her support staff) for at least 3 years, as well as a core community volunteer supporting committee and chairperson. Below are some common characteristics IPF has noted in prior similar efforts, but about the time IPF thinks there is some clear model of leader, a person comes along, breaks the mold, and is wildly successful: so take this for what it may be worth.</p> <p>Econ. Dev. ED: Enthusiastic, organized, patiently persistent, risk-taking, existing community ties, consummate “cat herder”, team builder and team member, prefers clear performance and progress measurements, competitive for the community, appreciates constant public marketing;</p> <p>Chairperson: Consensus builder, patient, wide and deep community ties and commitment, vision, gravity;</p> <p>Committee: Representatives from small and larger URD businesses, key employers, residential and development property owners, local elected officials, parks professionals, outdoor recreation non-profit advocate organizations, outdoor and recreational individual activists, private foundations, government grant-making bodies, individual donors and “gatherers”, civic and art institutions, schools, churches and broader economic development bodies. <i>It is important to remember that members of the committee will change over time (in the natural course of things) as projects may be completed or are permanently rejected, or as members’ personal and professional lives and demands change. There may even be a personality conflict or two over time.</i></p>
2.	Econ. Dev. ED and Chairperson	<p>Building Initial Public Support and Basic Research: Identify and then have conversations with a broad spectrum of business, political, public park, and neighborhood leaders and individual resident URD constituency representatives to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Confirm interest in the URD pilot project and confirm geographic boundaries of the URD; (b) Research existing local URD-related plans geographically (Metro Planning Office or DSM Partnership) and jurisdictionally (i.e., parks department); and

		(c) Identify any local ordinance and/or state statutory restrictions (i.e., cemetery ordinance or statute, for example or TIF district restrictions).
3.	Econ. Dev. ED, Committee and Chairperson	The Initial Cash Investment Test: Raise \$20k in cash and reasonably estimate volunteer and staff time at \$22@hour totaling \$20k to meet IPF \$20k cash match for plan development and consultant costs related to URD plan (including executed grant agreement with IPF)
4.	Econ. Dev. ED, Committee and Chairperson IPF Coach	<p>Outdoor Recreation Designer/Planner Consultant: Investigate and secure experienced and proven consultant to assist with URD planning process and plan according to contractually defined allocation of responsibilities, deliverables and project calendar (including executed consultant agreement between consultant and committee)</p> <p>Goals for hired outdoor recreation consultant in order of importance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Thorough and organized planning “process”. This is the public’s first impression for the entire project; (b) Create initial “human infrastructure” through planning process. That human infrastructure will execute the plan and any revisions to that plan, and that is what really matters in the end; (c) Prompt creative ideas and projects that truly and pragmatically fit the URD, while “pushing” the URD where that is constructive; (d) Help to expose the Econ. Dev. ED and supporting Committee to “plan execution” options; and (e) Produce an (initial) URD plan that adequately informs, guides and inspires the execution phase and all future plan revisions. <p>Lessons learned in what to investigate, consider and/or avoid in hiring outdoor recreation consultant services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) IPF’s anecdotal analysis of the role and importance of the consultant designer/planner are reflected in the following apportionment toward URD long-term success: 5% the current plan; 20% the planning process; and 75% the plan and revised plan execution team; (b) YOU—the customer—are the best “expert” in the room; trust your judgment about your own community, neighbors, and political and economic conditions when considering recreational options;

- (c) Require any potential designer/planner to provide their best examples of previous applicable or analogous plans;
- (d) Require any potential designer/planner to provide references from customers who have “executed” on whatever plan is provided over a period of years, not just months;
- (e) Require any potential designer/planner to provide references from customers where they can demonstrate the creation of a long-lasting human infrastructure for the execution phase;
- (f) Be careful of designers/planners who must travel quite a distance to provide services (or promise to provide services remotely) because good public recreation plans are innately “hands on” and site specific. That said, hiring a “non-local” consultant offers a clear advantage—new insights and no old obligations, as well as a greater likelihood that successes in other places are made available for your own plan;
- (g) Be leery of designers/planners who design and/or plan for the approval, awards and applause of other designers/planners colleagues or trade associations;
- (h) Be leery of designers/planners who re-use graphics, standard verbiage and lay-outs from previous plan after previous plan;
- (i) Some designers/planners believe that the “thicker” the plan, or the more color or “graphics” included in the plan, the better the plan in terms of the customer goals for execution. **Not true at all.** Too much color and too many graphics are an indication of too little creativity and substantive content;
- (j) One under-appreciated goal for a plan is to provide the customer with the underlying research, studies and verifiable anecdotes about particular proposed projects and any overall concept, such that the Econ. Dev. ED can then use that information to “sell” foundations, governmental units, grantors and private donors to get financial support to actually execute on the plan;
- (k) Beware the consultant firm with ONE star consultant qualified for your project but spread too thin. Will you end up with “new-bees” actually doing the work and showing up at the meetings?
- (l) Beware of one consulting firm wanting to immediately partner with one or more other consulting firms. It may mean that the first firm is not actually qualified for or staffed to complete your project properly;

		<p>(m) There is a serious difference between a simple (or even beautiful) “list of projects” and a “plan”; the latter centers itself on the “feel” or long-term community description and how public recreation fits neatly with that feel or description;</p> <p>(n) Beware the circumstances where the consulting body for the plan and plan process also employs or controls the economic development staff person leading the plan execution phase. Office and local politics, project favoritism, disincentive to think beyond the URD borders, and lack of transparent measurement of success may be unfortunate results;</p> <p>(o) Beware of any prospective consultant who is claiming to know too much (like a restaurant that serves both sushi and spaghetti), because in that instance the consultant is probably just self-educating on some areas in an elemental fashion and pretending to have deeper “expertise”. Asking for prior examples of work in each claimed area of expertise may lessen this problem;</p>
5.	<p>Econ. Dev. ED, Chairperson and Consultant</p> <p>IPF Coach</p>	<p>One Year Planning Process: Establish 1-year planning and plan completion calendar to:</p> <p>(a) Identify, gather, schedule and facilitate input from and conversation with individual and group constituencies to build the common plan;</p> <p>(b) Research, investigate and evaluate possible applicable similar URD-type projects and approaches nationally;</p> <p>(c) Agree upon project selection “values”, including (possibly) frequency of human outdoor exposure, human time together, human exercise or movement, human convenience, and aesthetics to broader array humans;</p> <p>(d) Project prioritizing approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects that are most likely to engender daily individual and “coffee clutch” active use, i.e. walking loops • Restaurant, coffee house or retail related use • Seasonal or holiday use • Individual sitting and/or observing use • Larger group event-based use • Small group periodic exercise or common activity use • Decorative, aesthetic or artistic use • Media and public support or awareness generation <p>(e) Produce an URD 3, 5 and 20 year written and digital plan; and</p>

		(f) Identifying 2-3 highly visible early project wins upfront
6.	Econ. Dev. ED, Consultant, Committee and Chairperson IPF Coach	Constituency Contacts: Establish and identify list of individual constituency in-person meetings and group or public meetings to develop plan and accumulate ideas, and then manage plan editing through volunteer supporting committee
7.	Econ. Dev. ED, Consultant, Committee and Chairperson IPF Coach	Ongoing Decision-Making: Build the permanent constituency of local URD support through agreement by all participants on an ongoing fundamental process and philosophy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Cooperation; (b) Consensus decision-making (not voting on or scoring projects); (c) Prioritizing and re-prioritizing projects based upon changing circumstances, funding, key advocate situation, practicality and flexibility; (d) Cross-constituency and cross-geographic “matching” approach; and (e) Ongoing communication and publicity
8.	Econ. Dev. ED and URD Co-Investigator	Travel and New Perspectives: Economic development individual URD staff leader(s) (and appropriate mission supporting travel companions) visit target model urban communities throughout the planning year for “on the ground” ideas and evaluation of successes and failures (i.e., Ann Arbor, Madison, Milwaukee, Chapel Hill, Charlottesville, Asheville, Charleston, canal district around Georgetown, walking areas around DC Mall and Botanical Center/two sculpture parks, The Hague, Oslo, and maybe Indianapolis or Columbus); and meet with IPF’s P2P regional economic development leaders in Iowa to garner suggestions and insights. This step accomplishes two goals, equally important: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Identifying and describing specific physical <i>project ideas</i> from a broad spectrum of individuals and communities, not just reliance on one or two “consultant” proposals; and (b) Identifying and describing the <i>URD “feel”</i> you are seeking to create. Every community has its own “feel”; what do you want for your community (i.e., artsy, true city main street, sophisticated, laid-back, vibrant economic activity, foody, live music community, craftsmen center, active urban, younger, older, mixed ages and demographics, family friendly, park-like beauty, large trees and shaded, colorful ornamental trees and shrubs, “you can get every service or good you need for everyday life here” feel, walking and biking culture, everyday necessity market-place, neighborhood bar feel, “walk to work” major employer feel, small-town within a big town, gritty

		warehouse district, flower-garden and planter feel, skateboards and scooter culture, evening stroll culture, etc.)?
9.	Econ. Dev. ED, Consultant, Committee and Chairperson IPF Coach	Complete and Publish the Plan: Complete and publish written and digital pilot URD plan
10.	Econ. Dev. ED, Chairperson and Committee IPF Coach	Base Match: Source and secure donated \$1 million “base match” (requiring 5:1 matching for projects) for initial three-year plan execution