



January 9, 2019

Fort Madison Riverfront Business District
Business Owners

The end of 2018 brought with it a lot of change and discussion about the direction of the Main Street Iowa program continuing in Fort Madison. The last few years has been a struggle to maintain the requirements placed on the organization by Main Street Iowa- budget requirements, travel and fees, board members, coordinators, etc. After a lengthy conversation between Main Street Iowa Director, Michael Wagler and our local board, a decision needed to be made to either remain with Main Street Iowa and identify opportunities to comply with their requirements or jump ship and revert back to Riverfront Business District (which is the holder of the not for profit status). Although not an easy decision, the decision was made by the Fort Madison Main Street Board of Directors to cut ties with Main Street Iowa and revert back to the Fort Madison Riverfront Business District.

We've had a lot of successes since we were brought back into the Main Street Iowa program, however our successes haven't been necessarily related directly to that partnership. Upon doing some research there are only a couple grant opportunities that are tied directly to Main Street Iowa- neither of which we've been awarded- we applied for but never received/initiated. The \$650,000.00 façade renovation program, which involved 13 downtown properties; the \$4.2 million upper story apartments and building rehabs of both the Cattermole and Lee Co Bank bldg.; the upcoming \$1.5 million sidewalk replacement program slated for Spring 2019- were all stand- alone partnerships involving Federal, State, Local and Private funding.

Another measure of success is the number of new businesses we've seen come into the District. Since 2009; 29 businesses have seen the value of a bricks and mortar business within the District as well as seven businesses completing a succession plan (two through existing employees and the remaining five through new faces to the business) to keep an existing business open and operational. Although we did lose a few stores to retirements, there is new energy and ideas to keep our downtown vibrant. Also, since 2009 the organization has started six new events, two of which were recognized by Main Street Iowa as innovative ideas and have been replicated by a number of other Main Street communities. Throughout the year we have nine large events along with a number of smaller events to help bring people downtown. That being said, there is always room to improve on those events and add to the list to keep things fresh.

Doing this move brings with it a need to "rebrand" ourselves as well as regroup and look at how we go about representing the District. We are looking for new board members to help direct this restructuring as we will virtually be starting from scratch for not only board members but also members on committees that will be identified. We would like to stay with the same committee structure: Organizational, Promotions, Business Recruitment and Downtown Design as there is merit to these committees and can see them being the catalyst to move this organization in the direction needed.

As we are in this transitional period, I ask all of you to please consider being a part of this restructuring. We are looking for motivated people willing to work together for the betterment of this new structure and do what's best for Fort Madison's downtown. We will need people to help identify new events to bring people to the District, look at our market outreach to make sure we're targeting the right crowd, working with the City on design, assistance writing grants, fundraising, etc. We have an opportunity to make this what we want, so now is the time to step up to the plate and make Fort Madison's downtown a place people will want to come and spend the day, relocate/expand a business, take up residency, invest.

We will be working with the Fort Madison Partners staff to help guide this transition along but they cannot do it the alone. **A meeting has been planned Thursday, January 17th 8:30-9:30 to talk with downtown merchants, contributors and potential board/committee members at the Connection Bank Community Room.** We want all the businesses- retail & service- to come together and discuss this new direction and provide ideas for the new structure. If we want the District to be successful we all need to do our part.

Thank you and I look forward to this new beginning.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie Knoch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephanie Knoch
Chair
Fort Madison
Riverfront Business District