

From the Mayor...

April 7, 2017

At a recent strategic planning session, the city council discussed the need for more public space and outdoor seating in our busy downtown. During our Stellar project last year, the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA), one of our state Stellar partners, promoted the enhancement of Hoosier downtowns through the creation of new public spaces. The “Stellar First Friday on Market Street” last summer was partially funded by IHCDA as a means to stimulate new ideas and uses for public spaces.

Patronicity is a web hosted crowdfunding platform, featuring local projects that promote public space creation for community-wide use. Their website provides detailed project information and encourages public engagement by accepting donations to support a community's project. The Lt. Governor's office has partnered with Patronicity to promote the creation of new quality-of-place urban spaces in Indiana cities and towns, and IHCDA has pledged one million dollars of matching funds to support such projects.

The ‘Warsaw Alley Project’ is a downtown alleyway activation off of South Buffalo Street. It will be a seasonal project, running from May through October. Pedestrian access with public seating, greenery, a public art display, bicycle parking, and public WI-FI are key elements of the project. If our goal of \$50,000 of crowdfunding is reached, it will generate a matching grant of \$50,000 from IHCDA. Visit the Patronicity website (www.patronicity.com) to view “The Warsaw Alley” project and many other similar projects in Indiana and our region. With a fundraising deadline of May 5, any donations received would help us reach our goal to generate the matching grant.

During my State of the City address, I discussed the vibrancy of our downtown. Major employers in our downtown contribute to a significant demand for affiliated professional services, meeting space, meals, entertainment, and specialty retail. Positive collaboration with the Warsaw Community Development Corporation (WCDC) and our downtown tenants has resulted in near-full occupancy of our downtown retail spaces.

At the request of the WCDC, we are also finalizing guidelines to create outdoor seating opportunities for our local dining establishments. Sidewalk seating and road closures for regularly-scheduled and special events are prime examples of allowing the use of public space to enhance our downtown experience. Check out what Valparaiso has done in their downtown. Oak & Alley will fund and create their own separate outdoor seating area in the alley as a separate, complimentary project to the alleyway activation.

Quality of place and walkability are also enhanced by the expansion of public art. The Warsaw Public Arts Commission (WPAC) was formed almost two years ago to do just that. Through the success of the Walk-n-Wander sculpture exhibit last summer,

they have been able to establish the 'Artfully Warsaw' fund at the Kosciusko County Community Foundation. The establishment of a permanent downtown public arts trail is the focus of WPAC. We are very excited about their progress.

Improving bicycle and pedestrian access into and around downtown has been a recent priority of the Ride+Walk Warsaw+Winona Lake Advisory Committee. Two major residential development projects that include the Little Crow Lofts (42 apartments) and the North Buffalo Street urban housing (50 units in phase 1) are poised to expand our downtown residential landscape significantly over the next two to three years.

Connecting the last section of backbone trail through downtown between East and West Market Streets will create uninterrupted access along the trail from the Heritage Trail in Winona Lake to the Chinworth Bridge Trail on Old 30 West. This is the final link that will also give improved access to Zimmer Biomet, Central Park, and the North Buffalo Street Development.

Vibrancy in our downtown is the visible pulse of our community. Our alleyway project will add to that.