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Improving Downtown Iowa City's Alleys: A Clear Path

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A Clear Path

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Urban and Regional Planning Program
Field Problems 2005

Prepared for:
Brad Neumann
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Johnson County Council of Governments

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2000, public discussion about Iowa City's Downtown Alleys has grown. The public, the City Manager, City Staff, Iowa City's Solid Waste Committee, and the Iowa City Art Advisory Committee have all participated in shaping this process. Over the last several years, a consensus has been reached: improvement of the alleys must be a priority for the downtown. All agree Iowa City's alleys should serve as the best asset possible to businesses, downtown residents, and the community at large. So, the question becomes how to proceed.

This report builds on work first done by Iowa City's Solid Waste Committee. The attention now focused on the alleys presents an ideal opportunity to review alternative means of reshaping uses of alley space. The content of this report explores what, if any, options exist for reworking downtown waste disposal. Ideas about improving Iowa City's alleys start with improved waste removal services, should also include renovation and improvement schemes. However, any improvement effort which does not first address the basic problems of waste disposal in the alleys will fail to improve the condition of the alleyways. Therefore, this report joins the issues of waste disposal and beautification to create a single strategy for action in Iowa City's Alleys.

A number of approaches were utilized to outline an alley improvement strategy. Comparison was used to examine how other cities had coped with similar problems of alley waste disposal in intensively used areas. We reviewed literature on physical improvement and economic development to help inform the recommendations for design change. In both cases, examination centered on cities or areas within cities with characteristics most comparable to Iowa City. And formed the basis for our recommendations. We also referred to Iowa City's Zoning Ordinance, which defines the CB-10 District as pedestrian in character.

Public and expert opinion characterized another feature of our approach. Interviews were conducted with city staff members from departments judged likely to be affected by change in the alleys. The departments consulted included: 1) The Iowa City Fire Department, 2) The City Manager's Office, 3) Housing and Inspection Services, 4) Parking and Transit, 5) Planning and Community Development, 6) Parks and Recreation, 7) Public Works.

The Downtown Alleys lie in Iowa City's CB-10 zoning district, where commerce prevails as an important land use. Therefore, as a group strongly affected, the opinions and needs of downtown business owners were given much consideration. A specific set of interviews was conducted with downtown business owners, who were asked to provide their thoughts on the state of waste disposal in the alleys. They also gave feedback on the questions of
beautification, recycling and practical details concerning their current waste disposal services.

In a subsequent round of interviews, a Visual Preference Survey was conducted to further explore the public’s desire for enhancement of the alleys. The Visual Preference Survey provided an opportunity for the users of the downtown to comment on the nature of proposed change. Participants were asked to give positive or negative feedback to images and to cite what physical features were valued most. The visual preferences of the public help shaped the nature of recommended design changes.

Better organization of waste disposal in Iowa City’s Alleys continually emerged as the key starting point. We recommend a more coordinated and effectively regulated system for waste removal from the downtown. This report advocates formation of a Solid Waste District (SWD) in Downtown Iowa City. A solid waste district would reorganize disposal conditions to promote public health, welfare and safety. For downtown alleys, this means eliminating dumpsters. Misplacement of dumpsters repeatedly violate fire codes. Dumpsters add to congestion, limit motorist’s decision sight distance, and create unhygienic conditions. As a replacement, the solid waste district should require use 90 gallon trash containers serviced more frequently. Once the alleys are free of litter and dumpsters, beautification of alley space becomes possible.

To be most effective, a solid waste district should be designed as an amendment to the CB-10 zoning requirements. This zone should impose additional conditions on waste disposal within it. However, the precise nature of a solid waste district’s structure, administration, and function remains open to negotiation. For example, the City could take responsibility for waste removal from downtown alleys. Or the City could allow downtown businesses to coordinate their own waste removal services under the conditions of a solid waste district. Perhaps a privately-run solid waste district could be part of a larger Business Improvement District (BID). The City could help businesses or the Downtown Association collectively bargain for improved waste disposal services delivered at lower total cost. A solid waste district organized along any of these lines would be an appropriate response to current waste disposal problems downtown.

Beautification complements the effort to improve the sanitary conditions of Iowa City’s alleys. Downtown alleyway spaces represent an unrealized opportunity. Emptying the alleys of dumpsters will enable them to better function as an amenity for the entire downtown. Improving the physical appearance of alleys will help attract visitors to the downtown while augmenting the area for residents. A busier downtown will help the downtown retain its status as the leading center of local commerce. Downtowns which invest substantially in pedestrian infrastructure and improvements generate long term cash flows far in excess of those which do not (Leinberger, 2005, 69). A program of public capital
investment in pedestrian space may form part of an overall strategy to influence local retail market conditions (See Leinberger 2005, p. 68-78 for full review). So, a pedestrian-friendly downtown allows central urban locations to compete effectively with exurban commercial development centers.

Alley redesign must help increase pedestrian accessibility to alley space. At a minimum, a beautification effort must add features to the alleys that encourage pedestrian use. This might be as simple as adding lights and resurfacing the alleys to guide foot travel through alleys. Bike racks might prove a simple way to bring more people into alley space. A more ambitious approach would add barrier curbs to the alley which runs through the Ped Mall, allowing only for maintenance, waste removal and emergency vehicle access. Transforming the alleys into new, full pedestrian environments represents the most complete change feasible. Benches, coverings, and streetscaping would combine with the improvements already detailed to greatly enhance the quality of downtown alleyways. Inclusion of public art in the alleys will signal change to the community at large.

In sum, adopting improved waste disposal practices and design change will eliminate the obvious problems of alley space. Our recommendations come with the goal of finding the optimal use for alleyway space in the downtown. Addressing the waste disposal or beautifications only in part or separately does not solve the lasting problem of under use. The value of the alleys rests in their use. If alleys remain neglected, then they cannot function as an asset to improve quality of life and commerce in Iowa City’s Downtown Business District. A solid waste district and a program of physical revitalization will transform the alleys into the kind of creative public spaces that define downtown Iowa City.
The map below presents Iowa City’s Central Business District which consists of nine square blocks of retail shops, bars, restaurants, apartments, cafes, salons, art galleries, and other enterprises. Nine alleys run through the central business district. These eight alleys serve functional purposes; businesses, pedestrians, bicyclists, delivery vehicles, and personal automobiles all use them. This nine square block area forms the heart of Iowa City. The businesses in downtown, about 250 in all, provide valuable services and products to Iowa City residents and visitors. A vibrant, attractive downtown is a key element in keeping these businesses thriving, while business and commerce improves the quality of life for downtown residents and users. Better use of Iowa City’s Downtown Alleyways could aid these relationships.

MAP 1. DOWNTOWN IOWA CITY’S ALLEYWAYS

Map 1. Gives an overview of Iowa City’s CB-10 District. Burlington Street forms the core area’s Southern border, while Linn and Clinton Streets limit the area from the East and West respectively. Iowa Avenue brackets the core from the North.
Downtown alleys or alleys in high density areas have received much attention. Recently municipalities choose to focus on alley revitalization because many urban alleys are public property. Traditionally, alleys have served limited purposes. More recently, revitalization efforts have proliferated, expanding the potential uses of urban alley space. Changes have aimed at improving the sanitary condition, safety, usability and appearance of alleys. Improvement efforts typically take several forms, including local regulatory enforcement, formation of solid waste districts, and creation of business improvement districts to finance the physical upgrading of alleys. If successful, these efforts can maintain the quality of public services while enhancing the multiple but related uses of commerce, transport, and community-oriented design.

In the past, alleys have served informal purposes. From the era of horse-drawn carriages to that of automobiles, alleys have provided service entrances, a means for parcel delivery, and have also served as the waste removal point for urban systems. Historically, alleys also helped to differentiate front- and back-of-the-store activities (Wise, 2003). Today, businesses still value the contribution alleys play in facilitating behind-the-scenes activity. Besides appearances, the presence of alleys has, over time, helped to reduce potential health hazards of waste storage. Alleys separated people and structures from combustible materials such as firewood and coal in the past, and more recently, restaurant grease (Melosi, 1981). Alleys remain the logical location for infrastructure and provision of essential services. Overhead utility lines and underground sewer and water lines, for example, are frequently located in alleys.

However, with convenience come problems. In Iowa City, like many other towns, waste from dumpsters overflows into alleys and accumulates as litter. While this problem does not reach the level of direct waste dumping in the alleys, as was historically the case, potential health problems accompany such overflow and accumulation (Melosi, 1981).

"You just can't make people keep things clean."

-elderly woman seen voluntarily sweeping Iowa City alley by her downtown apartment

A large number of bars and restaurants in downtown Iowa City pose their own set of waste problems with littered bottle caps, cigarette butts, and bar admission
bracelets (Interviews 2, 9, 13, 16). In addition, homeless citizens looking for food scraps in the dumpsters pose a scavenging problem (Interview A, 2004; Interview 22, 2004). Any amount of trash in the alleys is a potential issue with vermin such as rats and insects. Also, blowing trash from the alleys generally ends up in the Pedestrian Mall, where it becomes the responsibility of the Iowa City Parks and Recreation workers to clean it up (Interview E, 2004). When residential tenants move out at the end of the year, alleys are often filled with discarded couches, televisions, desks, and other large items (Interviews 11, 15).

In addition, alley dumpsters contribute to congestion. They lend to a fear of the urban landscape, while requiring constant service. Garbage trucks add to congestion as well (DCA, 2002).

Alleys do fill other, more productive roles, however. Residents and visitors to urban downtowns use the alleys. In downtown Iowa City, alleys augment pedestrian access to business and residential locations. All too often pedestrians must compete with traffic—whether in the form of through traffic, waste hauling or delivery—when they attempt to use alley space. Auto traffic in the downtown alleys of Iowa City's Central Business District poses problems for businesses and waste removal efforts, and complicates the issue of emergency vehicle access. Auto traffic in alleys frequently becomes short-term parking, even in prohibited areas. This blocks alleys for other users, reducing the value of alleys to pedestrians and bicyclists who frequently use alleys as shortcuts (Interview B, 2004).

This congestion limits emergency vehicle access, especially fire emergency vehicles. For that reason, the Iowa City Fire Department considers it impossible to rely on the alleys for access (Interview C, 2004).

The problems alleys pose detract from downtown retail potential as well as posing potential health and safety issues (Atkins, 2000). Several groups recognize this, and in 2000, a Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) was formed by the City to consider options for downtown cleanup efforts. Initially the committee was to be citizen-advised; due to political reasons the committee was instead composed of City staff from several areas. The committee had representatives from landfill operations, management, and engineering; waste collection; sensitive areas administration; JCCOG solid waste planning; and housing and inspection services. The committee's task was to review the City's solid waste
management policies (Atkins, 2000). Over the next two years, the SWAC spoke with business owners and tenants downtown to determine the amount of interest in cleaning up the downtown alleyes (Neumann, 2001a), made recommendations to the City Manager (Neumann, 2001b), and drafted an ordinance regulating dumpsters in Iowa City’s downtown alleyes (Draft Ordinance, 2001). The ordinance was not implemented, and the SWAC essentially ceased to function.

In May 2004, City Council added downtown alley clean-up to their priority list for discussion. The City’s Public Art Advisory Committee has also recently considered funding for alley cleaning, paint, improved lighting, and also for introducing artwork to the alleyes (Iowa City Press Citizen, 2004). Since it appears interest in the alleyes is escalating with attention from City Council, citizens, and businesses, the time is ideal to propose a concrete set of recommendations for Iowa City’s alleyes.

This report is structured as follows. First, we describe how Iowa City has attempted to reshape waste collection downtown. We next consider what other communities have done to address their waste collection and alley problems. The third section presents a solid waste plan for the downtown business district. The final section provides a recommendation for physical improvement to the alleyes. Transformation of the alleyes into an asset to the entire community is only possible once basic waste disposal and sanitation problems have been satisfactorily resolved.

The goal of this effort is to ensure that Iowa City’s Downtown Business District benefits from a waste disposal system that sets the stage for beautification and development of higher uses for alleyway space. This report therefore evaluates the effect four possible alternatives: tighter regulatory enforcement, the creation of a dumpster permit system, the creation of a solid waste district, and the creation of a business improvement district.
METHODOLOGY

We investigated the following questions in this study:

- *Would stricter enforcement of current regulations solve any problems?*
- *Would a new permitting system for dumpsters hold any significant benefit?*
- *Could a solid waste district, where trash collection is coordinated by the city, improve the state of downtown alleys?*
- *Would a privately-initiated business improvement district be a viable alternative to municipal regulation of waste disposal?*

These questions resulted from variety of sources. Iowa City's existing regulation of alley waste disposal was the starting point for the entire process. Interviews were conducted with municipal staff about the current state of the alleys. A further set of interviews were conducted with downtown business owners in which interviewees were chosen through a double stratified random sample. A major concern of the study was speaking to people on all the alleys in the downtown. Therefore, interview candidates were selected partially by where they were located. The second concern was speaking with people associated with as many uses as possible. So, including a variety of businesses types became a selection criteria. We included retail businesses or services, bars and restaurants, and residential or other. A total of 21 entities were selected to survey. Sixteen of the 21 were both successfully contacted and agreed to be interviewed. Unfortunately, the majority of landlords we contacted were among those who did not respond and may be somewhat underrepresented in our study.

Selected business owners or tenants were asked for their opinions and ideas concerning the alleys. The themes of the survey were problem identification, appearance, usefulness to business, and suggestions for improvements.

Public preferences for physical changes were investigated using a Visual Preference Survey (VPS). The traditional VPS method presents an audience with images that give a full range of design options under consideration for a project (Nelessen, 1994, 83). The audience then evaluates each image, indicating the extent of their reaction (Nelessen, 1994, 83-84). The feedback from the visual preference survey provides a standardized means to gauge public opinion. Ideally, public preferences will help shape proposed design changes to public space.

We modified the traditional method to allow evaluations to be collected in individual interviews rather than a group setting. Images of design choices were drawn from many communities. This input was used to help formulate our recommendations for physical redevelopment.
CASE STUDIES

In order to form recommendations, it will be helpful to study what other communities are doing to combat issues with garbage, congestion, and general beautification. While many of the examples are from cities much larger than Iowa City, the studies look at neighborhoods or subsets rather than entire cities. The studies considered here are therefore comparable in scale to downtown Iowa City.

In 1971, Post Alley in Seattle was restored in conjunction with the surrounding 22-acre market area. Since then, it has become a major pedestrian corridor. Post Alley is a ten-block long corridor that runs parallel to the city's main waterfront. The alley links Pioneer Square and the Pike Place Market, two major historical attractions in the city. Improvements in the ten-block-long alley have included restoration or replacement of alley pavement as well as new sidewalks and new signage (Zelinka and Beattie, 2003). Seattle has attempted to realize the full potential of its alleys; the city's planning department touts public life, utility services, transportation, aesthetics, and effects on building height and block scale as integral functions of alleys (City of Seattle, 2005a).

“The design and redevelopment of Post Alley has been eclectic and piecemeal, growing organically over the last 25 years.”

“Lyle Bicknell, urban designer with Seattle's Department of Design, Construction, and Land Use

In 1998, Seattle's Pioneer Square Community Association (PSCA) implemented a dumpster-free alley pilot study. The Pioneer Square Neighborhood Plan called for a comprehensive program for removing dumpsters from alleys to "return the alleys to their intended utilitarian and pedestrian uses" (PSCA, 2003). The PSCA's plan was voluntarily implemented in the ten alleys included in the plan by a local janitorial firm called CleanScapes. In place of dumpsters, durable trash and recycling bags could be purchased from CleanScapes. Bag costs were dependent upon size, ranging from 15 to 33 gallons. Businesses set the full bags out as necessary and they were collected by CleanScapes, who made rounds seven times daily during the week and five times daily on the weekends.
In 2003, the PSCA, Seattle, and CleanScapes declared the program a success. Congestion and public health issues were improved and public safety and positive uses in the alley had increased. Removing the dumpsters was shown to work logistically as well as reducing crime and improving the quality of alley usage (PSCA, 2003).

Santa Cruz is another example of a community downtown that has rejuvenated its alleys. The Alley Walk Plan (see Appendix A) was part of a greater effort to rebuild the downtown after a major earthquake in 1989. A local architectural firm redesigned eight alleys in the downtown area. One of the major requirements of the plan included preserving the alley’s service uses as well as providing pedestrian pathways through the busiest parts of downtown (City of Santa Cruz, 2005). The plan therefore included sections to address infrastructure needs such as delivery access, refuse storage and collection, utilities, and maintenance as well as beautification, business entrances, and pedestrian corridors (Zelinka and Beattie, 2003). For example, the plan for one alley completely redesigned a parking lot to add bicycle parking and close off the alley to vehicles just past the parking lot. A key point in another alley was to provide community trash enclosures for several buildings to share. Beautification has included "extensive landscaping, new bike parking facilities, new lighting, paving, bollards, and artistic elements throughout the design" (City of Santa Cruz, 2005).

One option that other communities have implemented to combat the problems associated with the numerous dumpsters that contribute to congestion and trash accumulation in downtown alleys is a solid waste district (SWD). A SWD is a geographical area within which a group of customers join together to consolidate solid waste collection. Such a district was successfully implemented in Columbia, Missouri, in 2002 (DCA, 2002). The district was organized by the City of Columbia and the Downtown Columbia Association (DCA). Prior to establishment of the SWD, Colombia's downtown had many of the same problems downtown Iowa City now experiences (Gartner, 2004).

Concerns about scavenging, an increasing desire to recycle, and unequal billing charges were also an impetus to forming Columbia's SWD. The district was
viewed by many business owners as a way to have more leverage with their waste removal services rather than the City mandating collection. In addition, by removing many of the dumpsters in the downtown and jointly purchasing several compactors, (Columbia City Manager, 2003), it was determined that downtown businesses would save an annual total of about $6,100 (DCA, 2002). The DCA worked with the City to establish optimal locations for dumpsters, compactors, and recycling containers. They also worked cooperatively to determine the best collection and billing system (Gartner, 2004). Columbia’s campaign to clean up the alleys was accompanied by a streetscape beautification plan. Reducing the number of dumpsters has been a main goal; this reduces scavenging, improves the image of safety in the downtown, reduces offensive smells, increases recycling opportunities, and ensures everyone is paying equitably for refuse removal. Beautification efforts have included new lighting, new benches, new public waste receptacles, and hiring workers to keep public areas clean (Gartner, 2004).

“In essence, the BID is the quasi government for the downtown, the ‘keeper of the flame’ of the downtown strategy, and the provider of services the city government cannot provide.”

—Christopher Leinberger, from Urban Land, the official publication of the Urban Land Institute.

Another option for cleaning up congested alleys involves a business improvement district (BID). BIDs are an economic development tool in which a group of businesses voluntarily asks the City to levy additional property tax assessments within their specific district. The additional money, which is controlled by a BID Board of Directors rather than the City Council or Mayor, then goes to improving or promoting the business area.

Waste removal and recycling often fall within the realm of a BID’s responsibilities. Handling these tasks becomes a necessary step to improving the district overall (Bertrand, 2003). For example, in 2003, business owners in the town of Flushing, New York, created a BID to improve their downtown. Part of the plan included hiring additional workers who were used to sweep sidewalks, empty trash cans, wash street furniture, and clear snow (Bertrand, 2003).

BIDs are used from San Diego to Albany to band business owners together in an effort to draw people to certain districts, often downtowns (Resnick, 2001). In late 2004, over 1,000 BIDs existed in the United States, providing evidence “that it is now well-understood that establishing a BID is crucial to the successful revitalization of a downtown” (Leinberger, 2004, 73).

“Transform alleys from intimidating or barren truck delivery locations into what they really are—ready-made pedestrian-scaled environments—by giving them attractive streetscapes and uses such as cafés and shops.”

—Sean O’Malley in “Revitalizing Los Angeles” Urban Land
Cleaning up the alleys paves the way for streetscape redesign that brings people downtown to enjoy the new atmosphere. Planning a downtown alley redesign at human scale is one way to increase interest in alleys. Ongoing revitalization efforts in downtown Los Angeles include alley transformation (O’Malley, 2004). Some of the main elements of the revitalization efforts integrate lighting, benches, bus stops and landscaping into the streetscape. Another major effort in Los Angeles alleys and downtown LA in general is using human scale design principles to invigorate pedestrian activity. Allowing sidewalk cafés, encouraging mass transit, and relating buildings to the street are among the tactics being used to increase and encourage pedestrian activity in downtown Los Angeles’ alleys (O’Malley, 2004).

"It’s amazing what a small percentage of a project’s budget spend on art can do to raise the aesthetic quality of the project, which translates into character, ambiance, stable tenants, and higher rents.”
-Joe Nootbaar, principal of San Francisco real estate investment and development company JMA Ventures

Art is another way downtown alleyways can be made more appealing. Unique attractions in alleys can encourage people to visit downtowns and bringing consumer dollars. In San Francisco, for example, public art is mandated for some downtown buildings. Code requirements for new buildings or additions of more than 25,000 square feet in the central business district demand that at least one percent of construction costs be spend on a work of art that can be visible from public areas (Nyren, 2004). The theory is that this public art will entice people downtown, add character to buildings and the general ambiance, attract stable tenants, and in turn increase property values.

In 2003, Munich, Germany, completed CityQuartier Fünf Hütte, a project that integrated urban alleys into existing pedestrian space. The mixed-use redevelopment is located in the city’s historic banking district and features five courtyards interconnected by alley passages. The connectivity enhances the pedestrian shopping and dining areas. Lighting and artwork were an integral part of the redevelopment, as was the desire to meet
pedestrian needs in the urban center (Urban Land Institute, 2004).

Iowa City could learn from the successful sanitary improvements and beautification efforts of other communities. Beautification hinges upon meeting and maintaining basic standards of sanitary condition and hygiene. These improvements, in turn, hinge upon political will and adequate funding. Downtown Iowa City’s alleys could be transformed from dirty, congested, feared places into safe inviting open spaces with rich sounds, smells, and sights. Pedestrians are already attracted en masse to the downtown, including the retail shops, restaurants, and the Pedestrian Mall with its public art, the fountain, and the children’s play equipment. Extending that welcome into the alleys would encourage people to use the alleys and enhance downtown as a whole.
SOLID WASTE ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1: Enforce Current Regulations

Examining current municipal regulation of alley space is the starting point for our study. There are two major problems in downtown Iowa City’s alleys:

- the problem of illegal parking, and
- the problem of blowing trash.

Several regulations to address these are already in place in the City code. These regulations are discussed more thoroughly in Appendix B and include:

- parking is prohibited in designated fire lanes,
- dumpster size and location are specified,
- dumpsters must be locked at all times,
- permission is required to place dumpster in public right-of-way
- littering and nuisance laws apply to the area around dumpsters, and
- dumpsters within 50 feet of the street right-of-way must be screened from view.

Consistent enforcement regarding waste accumulation, parking, placement of dumpsters, and lid requirements is lacking. It is the responsibility of the Police Department to enforce the parking provision, as stated directly in the fire lane section of the fire code (City of Iowa City, 2004), and applies to both public and private properties. Waste accumulation in the alleys is an oft-cited problem, though businesses are technically only responsible for the waste in the dumpster, not around it. In addition, the responsibility to clean up the alleys is not taken by any department within the City. Dumpster placement is also a major problem, since 147 dumpsters exist in 9 square blocks (JCCOG, 2004). If strict adherence to the fire code was enforced, dumpsters would not be allowed to be stored “within 5 feet of combustible walls, openings, or combustible roof eave lines” (City of Iowa City, 2004). This would place dumpsters five feet out from the wall on both sides of the alley, squarely in the fire lanes to impede emergency access. Technically, then, dumpsters should not be allowed at all in alleys that are designated as fire lanes.

However, city staff agrees that these regulations are not enforced. Enforcing these regulations effectively would provide several benefits for the City and for alley users. First, revenue from increased citations could assist in partially funding additional staff to inspect alleys and cite violations. This would include parking tickets; increased parking citations could discourage illegal parking in the alleys, easing congestion.
Second, strictly enforcing the fire code for dumpsters would drastically reduce the number of dumpsters in the alleys. A dumpster survey done in summer 2004 showed approximately 63% of the 147 dumpsters to be in violation of at least one of the three requirements (JCCOG, 2004).

Third, citations for unlocked dumpsters could encourage businesses to consistently lock the dumpsters, preventing blowing trash, scavenging, and general messes from occurring. The 2004 dumpster survey showed fewer than ten percent of the dumpsters had locks (JCCOG, 2004). This may also improve perceptions of safety.

However, extra City staff would be needed to inspect alleys and cite violations, incurring costs. In addition, interviews showed that no department within the City wants the added responsibility of inspecting the alleys. To be successful, staff from the Fire Department, the Streets Department, Parking and Transit, and Housing and Inspection Services would be required to work together.

Additionally, neither business owners nor waste haulers accept responsibility for picking up trash around the dumpsters. Also, the desired level of cleanliness and strictness of enforcement is arguable. For instance, cigarette butts are litter, but it would be unlikely to cite a violation for each one thrown in downtown Iowa City’s alleys as well as extremely difficult to locate the source of the litter.

Stricter enforcement was recommended by the City Manager to the City Council in October 2003. There has been little to no change in the condition of the alleys since then.

To make enforcement effective, improvements could include:

- extra staff to inspect alleys and cite violations (one part-time position);
- coordination of city departments including solid waste planning, fire, parks and recreation, and housing and inspection services; and
- an organizational committee to address issues as they arise.
Alternative 2: Create a Permit System for Dumpsters

Creating a permit system in which the City annually renews permission for dumpsters to be placed in the public right-of-way is a second approach. This system, which would focus on cleaning up the trash around the dumpsters rather than limiting the number of dumpsters, would require dumpster users to obtain a permit and have the user's as well as the commercial waste hauler's contact information listed on the dumpster. In this scenario, the City could request the user to clean up around the dumpster if necessary. The City could then issue a citation or remove the dumpster if repeated requests go unaddressed.

A permit system was recommended by the Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) to the City Manager in March of 2001 as a way to clean up the downtown alleyways (Neumann, 2001b). An additional recommendation was to handle blowing litter as it is handled in other commercial areas: each business would be responsible for cleaning up the portion of the alley adjacent to their business. This method of assigning responsibility is already in effect for the front of downtown business owners' stores. The SWAC advised enforcement by Housing and Inspection Services, but enforcement would happen only as a response to complaints.

A permit system could provide an impetus for individual businesses to take responsibility for cleaning up the downtown alleyways, but it hinges upon increased inspection and enforcement. Revenue from permit sales could help fund an additional inspector specifically for the alleyways, though it is likely other funding would be necessary. The availability of contact information for offending parties' dumpsters may also provide a social incentive to keep the area around each dumpster clean.

Legal issues arise regarding who is responsible for cleaning areas adjacent to businesses that may not be responsible for the mess. On the street side, businesses pick up the trash in front of their stores because it affects the image of their business. Alleys do not demand the same level of scrutiny; businesses do not have as much at stake if their back door is surrounded by trash. Similarly, the issue of who is liable is unsolved and perhaps even muddled by requiring contact information for both the business owner and the waste hauler. Another problem with a permit system is that it does not address congestion issues. Clean dumpsters do not lessen congestion in an alley; if no limits are placed on the number of available permits, this system will not reduce congestion.

A third problem with a permit system is, again, the issue of enforcement. Even with additional staff, assigning the responsibility of permitting, inspecting, and enforcing the new system could be contentious. Dumpster permits and the ensuing inspections would likely be a low priority for Housing and Inspection Services, the most likely candidate for the additional tasks.

Enacting this recommendation would include one additional part-time position with Housing and inspection services to:
- issue permits, and
- provide additional inspection and enforcement.
Alternative 3: Establish a Business Improvement District

A business improvement district (BID) in downtown Iowa City could be established with assistance from the City. Businesses could ask the City to levy additional taxes on owners within a specific district to cover the cost of waste removal and recycling (Leinberger, 2004). The taxes, which would be controlled by a BID Board of Directors instead of City Council or the City Manager, would then go in part towards hiring a private waste hauler. Because the majority of downtown alleys are City right-of-way, a business improvement district would need to be coordinated with the City rather than solely by businesses.

Businesses often appreciate the flexibility of a BID because they have the ultimate decision-making power (Leinberger, 2004). Business owners set the rate cap to ensure that rates do not get out of hand. Additionally, the majority of businesses have to approve decisions, so it is often seen as a more democratic alternative to the City regulating services. Through a BID, workers can be hired to clean the downtown alleys and keep them clean (Resnick, 2001; Bertrand, 2003). In addition, collection could be better coordinated to reduce congestion in the alleys.

While this alternative could help organize waste collection in the downtown and reduce blowing trash, it would do little to alleviate congestion. In addition, a BID would have to pass a vote by City Council, making business participation and general consensus a political issue. However, a similar effort failed in Iowa City for a self-supported municipal improvement district (SSMID) in which a group of business owners also join to form a taxable district to support capital improvements. The effort failed in part because downtown business owners did not feel they would have enough control over the money they had contributed.

Enacting this recommendation would necessitate:

- business participation and general consensus,
- hiring a janitorial firm to maintain alleys,
- coordinating delivery vehicles, and
- coordinating collection;

and could include:

- increasing recycling
- beautification.
Alternative 4: Create a Solid Waste District

One option that other communities have used to combat congestion and trash issues in downtown alleys is a solid waste district (SWD). A SWD is a geographical area within which a group of customers join together to consolidate waste collection.

A solid waste district in downtown Iowa City would constitute nine square blocks and approximately 250 businesses. In this scenario, the City would consider these businesses, including residential rentals, as one consolidated service area for solid waste collection. This could occur by amending the Iowa City Zoning Code definition for a CB-10 district to include a requirement for all property to use city waste removal services (See Appendix C). The City would charge each business individually on an already-established utility billing system with water and sewer fees. The City could either collect the waste itself or contract the service out to a private waste hauler.

A SWD would provide daily collection in order to completely remove downtown waste dumpsters altogether. Bags or cans would be used in place of dumpsters and collected several times daily. Removing dumpsters could alleviate congestion, increase perceived safety levels, and provide businesses with financial incentives to produce less trash and recycle more. Additionally, more items than trash, recycling, or grease can be removed and successfully charged under this system instead of an individual or business throwing out an item that a private waste hauler will not accept, such as tires or appliances. Tags could be purchased for each of these items as well.

Bag collections could be scheduled several times daily at opportune times to reduce congestion and alleviate litter in the alleys. In this scenario, collection times would have to be determined by businesses' needs. Each business could set out as many bags as necessary as many times per day as necessary. For example, a 2:00 a.m. collection time would serve bar owners, whereas a 5:00 p.m. collection time would serve retail businesses. Communities that have successfully implemented dumpster-free alleys have scheduled between five and seven daily collections (PSCA, 2003), but Iowa City may determine more or less are necessary.

While multiple collection times would mean multiple trips for a hauler or haulers, it also means one truck per trip or per alley instead of six or seven trucks several times daily as is currently the case in downtown Iowa City's alleys. While overall trips may not be reduced drastically, efficiency would be greatly increased and congestion reduced. In addition, with bags instead of dumpsters, smaller trucks could be used to collect the waste.

The benefits of a SWD are numerous. First and foremost, waste dumpsters would be removed. The City would provide better incentives to businesses in the
form of lower fees. Instead of piecemeal contracts with individual downtown business owners, waste haulers would compete for the entire downtown or entire alleys, and due to larger economies of scale, the fees would likely be lower. Also, stronger penalties would keep the alleys in order; if alleys were not kept clean, fines could be implemented and enforced. In addition, a SWD is often viewed by business owners as a way to have more leverage in their collection services. Rather than private haulers charging various fees for waste collection, bulk purchasing power is used by the City to reduce prices and have more input into collection times and sites. In additions, smaller trucks could be used to collect waste since no equipment is needed to pick up large dumpsters; bags can be thrown into the collection truck by hand. This would ease congestion and enhance pedestrian accessibility.

Recycling services could be provided on a larger scale. Public recycling facilities could be placed strategically throughout the downtown alleys to provide businesses the opportunity to reduce their trash output. This could save businesses financially in that they lower the amount of garbage they must pay to dispose. In addition, grease receptacles could be placed to service several businesses rather than each bar or restaurant having separate dumpsters. These could be properly screened to limit the negative aesthetic effects.

Enacting this recommendation would necessitate:

- amending the CB-10 zoning requirements,
- political support at the City Council level,
- removing waste dumpsters,
- placing public recycling facilities,
- organizing collection times and routes, and
- possibly contracting with a private hauler to service the new district.

A SWD in the CB-10 district would provide:

- coordinated collection,
- congestion relief through removing dumpsters and coordinating delivery vehicles,
- increased recycling,
- general beautification, and
- design improvements.

We believe a City-run solid waste district is the best solution for Iowa City’s alley problems. A municipal SWD would be the most efficient, effective way to clean up the alleys, reduce congestion, and enhance pedestrian use.
FINANCING A SOLID WASTE DISTRICT

OVERVIEW

A SWD would eliminate dumpster collection in favor of a bag system. Bags would be serviced daily from 90 gallon waste containers. These containers would be stored inside businesses before scheduled pick-up times then returned inside.

But choice exists on the question of how to finance the changes brought about by a solid waste district. Of all options, user fees may be the most appropriate, because only users pay for services received. An extra surcharge will finance any recycling services eventually provided through the district. Fees paid to the SWD would parallel the current practice of paying for private removal. User charges would be payments made in return for regular and improved provision of waste disposal services (Fisher 2005, Chapter 11). The user fee or the user charge would cover all services provided through the solid waste district. Therefore, the precise nature and composition of fees imposed through the SWD requires examination.

WASTE REMOVAL FEE DESIGN

The structure of the user charge determines how participants SWD will be billed. Charges for public services and utilities take a number of standard formulations (Fisher 2005, Chapter 11):

PAYMENT OPTION ONE: A FLAT FEE

- All users pay an identical fee.
- Payment of the fee allows participation in the SWD.
- Payment provides access to all waste removal services offered in the district.

PAYMENT PROPOSAL TWO: A VOLUME MODIFIED FEE

- The volume modifier's structure may also vary (e.g., a flat fee for a certain threshold of waste versus a rising rate of payment for more waste.)
- Sometimes called the resource conservation approach, this price structure encourages businesses to consider the economic implications of producing more waste.
- All users pay an identical fee to participate in the SWD waste removal.
• Users then pay a variable amount tied to the volume of waste they produce.

PAYMENT PROPOSAL THREE: A VOLUME FEE

• For example, all businesses purchase bags to dispose of garbage in the SWD.

• All users pay entirely in proportion to the waste they produce (i.e., pay as you go.)

• The volume based price covers all services provided

Any fee type selected should be based on a notion of fairness (Fisher 2005, Chapter 1). Fair fees would have each participant paying the true costs they individually impose on the system for the services they receive. Payment by any one user should not affect payment by other users. While having all users pay a flat fee appeals to one conception of fairness, this option ignores the extra costs imposed by more waste.

Therefore, a volume based or volume fee would probably be the fairest pricing strategy. A volume modified fee arrangement would be preferable, because the fee more closely parallels the cost structure of waste removal in a solid waste district. Fixed costs in a solid waste district would arise from minimum collection costs and any capital costs necessary to start the SWD. These cost categories would be met through a basic service charge. Then all businesses would pay in proportion to the waste they produce.

So, a volume modified fee might resemble the following scheme. Payment of a base or entrance fee would cover the fixed costs of waste removal. The variable costs of disposal would be linked to more waste produced, and these costs would be covered by purchased trash bags. Businesses could purchase Solid Waste District bags to handle as much waste as they produce without pushing added cost onto other users. A flat fee system has no provision that provides an incentive to reduce waste output or to recycle either.

PRICING

In contrast to fee structure, the pricing decision presents more of a challenge. Cities typically use some type of financial impact assessment to determine the price of public services (See Fisher 2005, *Financial Impact Assessment* for full review of concept). Financial impact assessment takes the anticipated cost of service provision and divides it among the total benefit receiving population (Fisher 2005). This ratio establishes a per user cost total. The relationship between cost and use established by the assessment usually aids in predicting future prices as well (Fisher, 2005).
For this technique to work, the cost of service provision must be known. This report found that the cost of waste disposal in downtown Iowa City varies widely. The businesses questioned had multiple payment arrangements, although payment generally increased with frequency of service. The prices paid vary from $25 to hundreds of dollars per week. The fact that prices vary so widely illustrates the underlying need for a SWD. Negotiating prices on larger scales will enable more even pricing for equivalent levels of service. The increased value of each contract to a hauler will create competition based incentives to haulers to increase their efficiency of operations. Consolidating waste removal functions will hopefully present economies of scale, thereby lowering the overall cost of waste removal from the downtown.

Also, when considering price of service under a SWD, all benefits—both monetary and non-monetary—should be considered. Local businesses would benefit for a simpler, more predictable billing system. Businesses would know their cost of waste disposal in advance. A SWD would free downtown businesses and residents from unreasonable dumpster placement and rental charges. Removing dumpsters from the downtown entirely would help minimize the operational cost of waste disposal. This will minimize the likelihood that supplementary financing, such as a special assessment, would be necessary to repair deterioration to the alleys caused by clean-up of unsanitary conditions (Interview A, 2004).

The current cost of municipal waste disposal can give an idea of what the price of disposal might be under a SWD. The City of Iowa City currently negotiates with a private hauling for large scale waste removal. It currently costs the City of Iowa City $37.00 a month to have dumpsters and containers serviced by a private hauling firm (City of Iowa City, 2005d). The City of Iowa City offered this contract on a competitive basis and for a large number of receptacles. This result likely parallels what could be achieved with a SWD. However, cost minimization must be the primary fiscal objective for a solid waste district. The enthusiasm of the business community for a SWD will depend on how much cost savings can be achieved through collective action.

**REVIEW**

In summary, a city can dramatically simplify the dilemma of pricing by adopting a common sense approach. A flat participation fee tied to fixed costs of waste disposal should be advocated. The flat fee would be coupled with requirements mandating the purchase of garbage bags to reflect variable costs imposed through high volumes of waste production. This compromise option serves as the best way to price waste removal under a SWD.

Take Columbia, Missouri’s pricing system as a counter example. They created the following price categories: 1) Restaurant, 2) Retail, 3) Office, 4) Church, 5)
Industrial, 6) Bank, 7) Lodging, 8 Residential. The allotment of costs between the different price/use categories was based on each categories contribution to total waste production (DCA, 2003). Within each category, the City of Columbia also created a three step classification system. Depending on classification, users would pay more or less in proportion to the total waste generated. Table One (below) summarizes the Columbia’s pricing scheme.

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<th>PRICE CLASSIFICATION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Restaurant</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>$57.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lodging</td>
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Table 1. Solid Waste District Price Rates for Columbia Missouri

While likely effective for their circumstances, Columbia’s approach is complex. The approach encourages waste monitoring, which would increase total costs for a SWD. However, it generates competition among businesses to reduce overall waste production. But such an approach would fail in Iowa City. The CB-10 district encourages uniformly intense use of land within it (City of Iowa City, 2005b). A far simpler approach anticipates the likely fixed and variable costs of a SWD. Then it imposes a flexible fee that will generate revenue sufficient to meet the demands of those cost categories. Some incentives exist for businesses to reduce waste output, but allowances are made for businesses to continue produce current levels of waste with a minimum of added cost.

RECYCLING SURCHARGE

Conversations with downtown business owners, conducted for this report, revealed that most wanted access to recycling services. Presently, the City of Iowa City provides no place-specific recycling services to businesses in the CB-10 Zoning District. This oversight constitutes another problem with the current nature of waste disposal practices in the Downtown.

Right now, the City of Iowa City charges $3.10 per month to provide residential curbside recycling (City of Iowa City, 2005c). When asked, most downtown business owners demonstrated willingness pay for additional recycling options. This suggests that recycling would be a valued service to add to any SWD.

Adding recycling to the SWD would reduce total waste produced in the downtown. The CB-10 District includes 207 properties. Through recycling, large reductions in total waste generated could be realized. Recycling bags could be sold at lower prices or subsidized completely by refuse fees to discourage trash and encourage recycling. Alternatively, recycling collection facilities could be
strategically placed in downtown alleys to give businesses the opportunity to reduce their trash output and subsequently need fewer bags.
BEAUTIFICATION

Creation of a solid waste district will open the alleys to possibility of change. The dumpsters will be replaced by a container based collection system—similar to what is found in residential areas of Iowa City. Through elimination of the dumpsters, litter and illegal dumping will cease to diminish from the value of alley space. Removal of the dumpsters will also make more space available for better uses which contribute to the use value of Downtown Iowa City. We have identified a series of positive changes for the alleys. These changes have been formulated through interviews with City officials, waste producers, visitors, and users of the downtown. These interviews created a wealth of input and opinion about the alleys.

But change must proceed in accordance with the consensus vision already established through the public, comprehensive planning process. The CB-10 district is part of Iowa City’s Downtown Planning District. The comprehensive plan further characterizes this area as pedestrian friendly (Iowa City Comprehensive Plan 1997, 72). Iowa City’s Zoning Ordinance is more specific. It defines the intent of the CB-10 district as follows: “...a high density, compact, pedestrian oriented shopping, office, service, and entertainment area...” (City of Iowa City, 2005a). The CB-10 district contains, “...open space, plazas, or pedestrian way...” (City of Iowa City, 2005a). The ordinance restricts automobile oriented development in the zone as well (City of Iowa City, 2005a).

Public opinion, the comprehensive plan, and existing land use regulations endorse the pedestrian oriented character of the CB-10 district. A visual preference survey conducted for this report functions as our primary means of reading the public’s feelings on proposed improvements to the alleyways. It confirms that sentiment favors pedestrian development schemes for the Downtown. Our interviews showed most individuals favored images showing improved pedestrian space to the current unimproved alley space. This clear preference suggests that Iowa City’s CB-10 Alleys should be remade to resemble closely the improved open spaces that already characterize the CB-10 Zone. Elimination of the dumpsters and implementation of a SWD finally makes such change feasible.

Our Visual Preference Survey showed participants were clearly in favor of expanding the reach of pedestrian oriented amenities downtown. Not every alley has equal potential for revitalization. In some alleys, the demands of infrastructure and use prevent overhaul. The task now shifts to designating options to physically revitalize Iowa City’s Downtown Alleyway space. Specific goals should guide any recommendations for change; these follow below.
Goals

1. **Promote safe pedestrian accessibility, use and enjoyment of the alleys.**

Walkability offers a key competitive advantage over strip commercial development (Leinberger, 2005, 70). Thus, creation of walkable space supports the vitality of downtown locations. Long term positive benefits include increased demand for retail services and higher rents. For cities, this preserves or increases the real value of tax revenue into the future (Leinberger, 2005, 72). Over the long term, denser urban style pedestrian oriented development will yield higher returns (Leinberger, 2005, 71).

We designed the visual preference survey to isolate those physical features most appealing to users of the downtown. Individuals were asked to identify which features they most valued. Overall, respondents approved of design change similar to that already seen in the CB-10's plazas. Designers generally create a sense of pedestrian ownership of an environment through scaling design to human proportions (Nelessen, 1993, 153-59). Covering the alleys may bring a sense of familiar human space back to the alleys. Already one downtown alley, The Dubuque Walk, has covering. Covering for the alleys at large could proceed but it would have to accommodate height requirements for fire lanes and maintenance vehicles.

2. **Develop Iowa City's Downtown Business District alleys into an asset to local businesses and a destination attraction for the downtown.**

Downtowns must offer a diverse array of experiences to attract and engage a pedestrian culture (Leinberger, 2004; Costello and Landgren, 2005). Improvement of the alleys fits within an overall strategy of creating spaces individuals desire to travel through (Costello and Landgren, 2005, 76-77). Investment in design improves the local economy, while keeping Iowa City's Downtown competitive and an appealing destination choice (Weisbrod and Pollakowski, 1984).

In Eastern Iowa, few cities have devoted time and resources to alleyway beautification. Typical downtown improvement projects overlook the possibilities offered by alleyway space. Renovation of the alleys presents an opportunity to innovate; to create something unlike anything else in surrounding areas. Unique alley improvement aids in marketing the downtown while avoiding the pitfalls of copycat economic development. A more active downtown supports the use of the CB-10 district as a commercial center.
3. **Encourage the spread of art and creativity in the alleys.**

Cities of all types have realized the connection between art, culture and economic development (Fraser and Warren, 2005, 78). When used well, public art promotes positive change. Art demonstrates an area’s capacity to draw from the external world. Superior appearance and design highlight how people, materials and commerce converge into a set of uniquely local relationships that define a place. But there is also a firm fiscal logic operating. Creative assets can build a sense of identity for a place faster than almost any other type of capital improvement (Fraser and Warren, Szatan, et al.). Furthermore, the development of artistic industries and commerce holds the potential as a tangible industry in its own right (Fraser and Warren 2005, 82.).

Our Visual Preference Survey identified public art and landscaping as one of the most notable features of the downtown. The use of public art could figure as a central part of an intelligent effort to improve alley space. In development or redevelopment projects, the use of art in design renovation signals change (Nyren, 2005, 103). Art helps the process of image and place creation in the mind of the community (Nyren, 2005, 103). Art shapes the feel or atmosphere of a space (Nyren, 2005, 103). Even modest investment in art will translate to greatly enhanced visual appeal for a place (Nyren, 2005, 103).

**Design Recommendations**

**Step I. Growing the Pedestrian Mall**

- Resurfacing
- Improving lighting
- Installing bicycle racks

Revitalization of alleyway space should occur only on a limited basis. The alley which cuts through the Ped Mall represents the obvious starting point because of its proximity to existing pedestrian amenities. Over time, if judged positive, revitalization of alley space could be expanded to other alleys in the CB-10 district.

Initial changes should be kept minimal. Once dumpsters are removed, the identifiable brick surface of the Ped Mall should be extended to at least those alleys that directly connect to it. Depending on cost, the City might choose to resurface the entire alleyway surface area, or, alternately, a partial resurfacing with brick would have much the same effect. Pedestrians would be encouraged to travel through the alleys and along the path suggested by the resurfacing.
Expanding space identifiable with the Ped Mall draws on an already identifiable feature of downtown to help create a theme for alley revitalization. The picture to the left shows how thematic uniformity strengthens the impact of design changes to an area (Landgren and Costello, 2005, 76). If uniform changes occur, then they will be more noticeable and expand the area understood as usable.

Better lighting of the alleys would also enhance their appearance. If lights were placed outside the public right of way, then the approval of business owners would be needed. Presently, the alleys are not inviting to pedestrians after dark partly because they are not as well lit as surrounding areas. Better lit alleys would support the function of the downtown as a center of nightlife (Landgren and Costello, 2005, 76). A coherent and uniform system for lighting the alleys should be devised. Even these simple notions of design change, such as lighting, go a long way towards projecting a more desirable image of alley space. Standardizing light sources on the Ped Mall would unify the spaces (Landgren and Costello, 2005, 76-77).

Step II. Creating New Pedestrian Environments

- Name the alleys
- Assess closure of alleys
- Remove parking (in public right of way)
- Conceal utility infrastructure
- Murals
The picture above shows the next logical step to alley improvement involves concealing all remaining dumpsters and infrastructure. Success in improving the appearance of the alley results from minimizing those visual features that detract the most from perceptions that alley space equals other space downtown. Utility lines and poles clutter the alleys. Their presence helps spread the perception that alleys exist only for utility. Removal of all visible non-right of way infrastructure would be ideal, but the cost and disruption involved with the burial of power lines will likely prove prohibitive. As a result, this report recommends that a compromise between the need for infrastructure and the desire for improved alleys be struck: transformers and utility poles might be decorated or covered in such a manner as to diminish their visual impact. One such strategy might be to cover the transformers within a metal structure and then painting that structure a color which matches its vicinity.

A successful downtown maintains a balance of pedestrian and vehicle access (Landgren and Costello, 2005, 77). All alleys in the CB-10 district should be evaluated for their suitability to closure to automobile traffic. But the CB-10 alleys also serve as fire lanes (Interview C 2004). Therefore, all design improvements made to the alleys must be compatible with fire code. Use of special curbs or other traffic barriers could limit access only to maintenance and emergency vehicles. An analysis of the merits of traffic calming strategies versus closure should be conducted (Emmerson, 1998). This analysis should be conducted by
Johnson County Council of Government's (JCCOG) Transportation Planning Division.

Changes to the alleys should include a strategy for public participation to insure public approval of the outcome. One technique which has been used with success in other cities has been to name the alleys. Naming the alleys will promote awareness, whereas keeping them unnamed keeps alleys unnoticed. The idea of naming the alleys plays to concepts of ownership and civic involvement. If citizens become involved in alley improvement through the naming process, then they will get to know alley space better. Perhaps they will be more likely to care about changes taking place in the alleys. This could translate to a greater willingness to use alley space, once improved. Consequently, naming the alleys could become an important tactic for rethinking how alleys work in Iowa City.

Iowa City should also engage creative ways to build public engagement and consensus around the alleys as well. In the past, Downtown Iowa City has successfully hosted murals. Murals are one simple way to bring attention to the alleys. Contingent on approval from building owners, members of the community could participate in mural creation, or local artists could paint murals based on themes selected by the public. With the consent of property owners, murals could be painted on the sides of buildings. Murals will weather and are not permanent. Especially if changed regularly, murals could serve to promote public recognition and appreciation of alley space.

Step III. Transforming Space

- Coherent vision based on nature of CB-10 Zone
- Streetscaping: benches, tables, planters, etc.
- Make Public art a focus of improvement
- Encourage businesses to appeal to alley users
- Public Safety
- Cover alleys to create new pedestrian infrastructure
- Add an economic development component

The Visual Preference Survey found a broad range of design change in the alleys pleased most users. Because the options for change are so varied, a more complete overhaul of the alleys must be based on a coherent, specific vision. Direction for this vision may be found in the definition of the CB-10 zone. Because the zone promotes density and a mixture of uses within a pedestrian atmosphere, future change to the alleys must support this end. If alley space were redesigned with the results of public opinion in mind, it might resemble the picture below.
Because the Visual Preference Survey identified a broad range of acceptable change, this underscores the need for a coherent approach to revitalization efforts. Some respondents favored a larger role for public art in the downtown, while others wanted to see higher quality building facades. If recycling services are offered through the solid waste district, then recycling facilities might be decorated or creatively designed. Meetings spaces also meet with general approval from the public. Associated features, like benches and tables, also met with approval from users of the downtown.

Streetscaping and improvements are the best technique for pedestrian enhancement (Nelessen, 1993, 186-224). Behind streetscaping lies a simple idea: giving emphasis to those design elements that would be perceivable by a person moving through an environment (Nelessen, 1993, 186-224). Commonly, trees, hedges or inclusion of street lamps are used to interact with the pedestrians' attention (Nelessen, 1993, 186-224). Iowa City could explore placement of benches, planters, and public art (i.e., sculpture in the alleys). Such an approach would help incorporate neglected downtown alley spaces into pedestrian routes.

If pedestrian use of the alleys is increased, businesses along the alleys will realize their inherent value (Langren and Costello, 2005; Weisbrod and Pollakowski, 1984). Improvement will precipitate a change in perception about
the economic worth of downtown alleys. It makes sense to support this process through economic development initiatives. Given time, increased use of the alleys may lead business and property owners to view investment in façade improvement as desirable. The City should support private sector moves to invest in alleys space. For example, a special loan program to improve building exteriors in alleys would be appropriate. Creating site specific physical plans for alleys in advance could help guide this process. Alternately, Iowa City should commit economic development funds to promote development of new businesses, especially in the downtown, which will further improve the character and appearance of downtown alleys.

Finally, Iowa City’s alleys continue to suffer from the perception that they are unsafe. To a degree, this perception will only change over time and experience. However, the City of Iowa City could take a more proactive approach. Bringing police presence in the alleys to a level equal to the rest of the Ped Mall would help alleviate safety concerns.

Financing Beautification

So far, the design recommendations proposed have ignored the issues of cost associated with beautification. Several categories of cost are obviously involved. Initially, the City would need to finance any design improvements. However, operating costs also figure into total costs for beautification. For example, increased use of alley space might require a higher level of public safety presence or maintenance activity. Or it may be necessary to remove some or all street amenities placed in the alley during the winter to facilitate snow removal. Whatever the approach to beautification ultimately selected, the City must budget for the continuing costs of operating public amenities in alley space, if provided.

One approach to estimating costs comes from examining local spending on streetscaping and downtown revitalization efforts from within the region. At the lower end of spending, the City of Marion, Iowa, will spend $225,000 on downtown streetscaping during FY 2007-08 (City of Marion, 2005). In contrast the City of Burlington has recently completed a downtown revitalization effort with a budget of nearly $2 million (Iowa Department of Economic Development, 2005). But these figures apply to improvements programs entire downtown areas. The next page presents an itemized cost table. It should provide a more detailed accounting of the cost of pedestrian amenities for a one block alley. This table has been assembled to reflect a sense of the minimum costs involved with renovation of the alleys into pedestrian friendly space.
Table 2. Cost Estimate for Physical Improvements in Alley Revitalization Proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Category</th>
<th>Price Range</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Estimated Total Cost</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Variable</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Design Quality Street Lighting</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lamp Posts</td>
<td>$249-$2195</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bulb Coverings</td>
<td>$95-$554</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pedestrian Lights</td>
<td>$189-$338</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wall Lights</td>
<td>$135-$395</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fence Lights</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Design Quality Seating</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benches</td>
<td>$295-$995</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2500</td>
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<td>Tables</td>
<td>$850-$1295</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Surfacing</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brick</td>
<td>$0.09-0.37/sqft</td>
<td>Variable</td>
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<td><strong>Misc.</strong></td>
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<td>Public Trash Receptacles</td>
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<td>Bike Racks</td>
<td>$106-$535</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planters</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking Fountains</td>
<td>$818-$2937</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Cost in Improvement Materials** $9,701

Source:
http://www.fancystreetlight.com/lamps.htm  
http://www.oksolar.com/lighting/  
http://www.custompark.com/docs/cpl_complete_pricing_and_specs.pdf  
http://www.kaypark.com/lit_home.htm  

*Note: Cost estimates pertain to acquisition cost only*
OVERALL SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve waste collection in Downtown Iowa City through creation of a Solid Waste District; this will remove dumpsters to make way for beautification.

2. Finance the Solid Waste District through a volume modified fee arrangement.

3. Provide additional recycling options through the solid waste district, financed by a surcharge.

4. Support greater pedestrian utilization of the alleys through design changes and capital improvement to the alleys.

5. Make art and creativity the focus of any alternations to alley space.

This course of action provides an outline addressing all of the difficulties experienced in downtown Iowa City's alleys. The priorities represented in these recommendations reflect an effort to gather information from the community about Iowa City's Downtown alleys. Solving the waste problem and improving the appearance alleys remain linked, because both tasks aim to maximize the use value of alley space.
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Santa Cruz Alley Walk Plan
Appendix B: Iowa City Regulations

The set of regulations that most affects the alleys is Iowa City Fire Code, adopted from the 2003 International Fire Code. The premise of the fire code is sufficient access for City fire apparatus to enter downtown by way of alleys (Code 503.1.1). This can include requiring additional access if vehicle congestion exists (Code 503.1.2). While this is not possible in the alleys, parking can be regulated to meet fire lane requirements. Parking, therefore, is prohibited in any circumstances in a designated fire lane (Code 9-3-14). In many cases, the alleys in downtown Iowa City constitute fire lanes and parking is therefore prohibited.

Surfaces in the alleys are also regulated by fire code in that they must be “designed and maintained to support the imposed loads of fire apparatus and shall be surfaced so as to provide all-weather driving capabilities” (Code 503.2.3). Fire code also regulates combustible waste material. In order to reduce the possibility of a fire, waste accumulation is prohibited (Code 304.1). This waste can include “wastepaper...litter or combustible or flammable waste or rubbish of any type” (Code 304.1.1) and is prohibited in “any court, yard, vacant lot, [or] alley...” (Code 304.1.1). In addition, the placement of dumpsters (Code 304.3.3) and lid requirements (Code 304.3.2) are both part of the Iowa City Fire Code. If materials are susceptible to spontaneous ignition, daily disposal is mandated (Code 304.3.1).
Appendix C: Amendment to Zoning Code, Section 4-6E-8, CB-10 Zone

ORDINANCE NO.__________

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE ZONING CODE, SECTION 4-6E-8: CENTRAL BUSINESS ZONE (CB-10), TO INCLUDE SOLID WASTE COLLECTION AS A PUBLIC DUTY.

WHEREAS, the CB-10 zone encourages "open spaces, plazas and pedestrianways," and
WHEREAS, pedestrian access is often limited by congestion, and
WHEREAS, inefficient waste collection partially contributes to downtown alley congestion, and
WHEREAS, litter and filth in the downtown alleyways have continued to be an issue in the CB-10 district, and
WHEREAS, solid waste disposal is a public health issue, and
WHEREAS, consolidated (municipally-organized?) waste collection would support the CB-10 zone's intent to consolidate service facilities.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF IOWA CITY, IOWA:

SECTION 1. APPROVAL. CB-10 zone shall be amended to include solid waste collection as a function of the City rather than individual property owners. This can include using City equipment for collection or bidding out collection service to a private waste hauler or various haulers for different alleyways.

SECTION V. REPEALER. All ordinances and parts of ordinances in conflict with the provisions of this Ordinance are hereby repealed.

SECTION VI. SEVERABILITY. If any section, provision or part of the Ordinance shall be adjudged to be invalid or unconstitutional, such adjudication shall not affect the validity of the Ordinance as a whole or any section, provision or part thereof not adjudged invalid or unconstitutional.

SECTION VII. EFFECTIVE DATE. This Ordinance shall be in effect after its final passage, approval and publication, as provided by law.

Passed and approved this _____ day of __________, 20___.
Appendix D: Summary of Downtown Business Owner Surveys

Q.1: Have you changed private waste haulers in the last 12 months? (Y/N)
Q.2: If recycling services were offered downtown, would you use them? (Y/N)
Would you pay between $2-5; (Y/N) $5-10? (Y/N)
Q.3: Could you estimate your current monthly waste disposal cost? Do you know how you are billed?
Q.4: Are you satisfied with your waste removal services? (Y/N)
a) Price (Y/N)
b) Reliability (Y/N)
Q.5: Would you like to see the downtown change, and if so, how?

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<th>Survey</th>
<th>Q.1 changed hauler?</th>
<th>Q.2 use recycling?</th>
<th>$2-5</th>
<th>$5-10</th>
<th>Q.3 monthly waste $</th>
<th>billing method</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

* for predetermined number of collections per week
na=not answered   n=no    y=yes
REFERENCES

Atkins, Steve. 2000. Memo to Iowa City City Council. City of Iowa City. City Manager. 2 October.


City of Iowa City. 1997 Iowa City Comprehensive Plan.


City of Iowa City. 2005d. Request for proposal. City waste management.


http://www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us/ra/AlleyWalkPage.html

http://www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us/ra/MapleAlley.html

http://www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us/ra/FacadeImprovement.html

http://www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us/ra/FrazierLewis.html


Interview A. 2004. Confidential. Personal interview. 29 October.

Interview B. 2004. Confidential. Personal interview. 29 October.
Interview C. 2004. Confidential. Personal interview. 11 November.

Interview D. 2004. Confidential. Personal interview. 15 November

Interview E. 2004. Confidential. Personal interview. 29 November.


Neumann, Brad. 2001a. Memo to City Manager about attending Downtown Association meeting on 12 April. 24 April.

Neumann, Brad. 2001b. Memo to City Manager reporting Solid Waste Advisory Committee’s recommendations. 7 March.


Background

   Editorial about problems and possible solutions for Iowa City’s alleys.
   Great overview of our project.

   Discusses urban regime and ‘downtown business elite.’ May be helpful in discussing politics in downtown if necessary.

   Great in-depth discussion and analysis of all aspects of alleys.

Solid waste districts

   Columbia, MO’s downtown association’s newsletter. Issue deals specifically with the possibility of creating a solid waste district in downtown. Problems with current system and concrete examples (and possible costs) for downtown businesses of different types and sizes are provided. Excellent example.

   Property Lease Agreement for Trash Compactor Service. Placing compactors is part of the overall plan approved by Council in the January 1, 2003 ordinance regarding the Special Business District Solid Waste District. The plan included setting seven compactors as part of continuing efforts to remove dumpsters from downtown alleys to provide more efficient trash collection and enhance alley appearances.
Business improvement districts

   Discusses downtown BID funding cleanup. More about laborers picking up trash than collection.

   Reading from Peter’s Financing Local Government class. May prove helpful in developing pricing options for collection alternatives.

Case studies

   Includes information about Post Alley, the Santa Cruz Alleywalk Plan, and information about Fullerton’s alleys.

Post Alley; Seattle, WA
Pictures http://rdframe.buzznet.com/user/?id=474372

Santa Cruz
http://www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us/ra/AlleyWalkPage.html
http://www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us/ra/MapleAlley.html
http://www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us/ra/FacadeImprovement.html
http://www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us/ra/FrazierLewis.html

Pioneer Square; Seattle, WA
http://www.rubycollection.com/media_clippings/alleys.htm
http://www.downtownseattle.com/

General improvement and beautification

   American Planning Association.
   Some discussion of how alleys should function, especially in downtowns.

Some discussion of how alleys should function and look in downtowns.


Helpful in general design background.


Helpful in general design and planning background.