

Downtown Cedar City: Reinventing a Place for Students

By Doyle Hyett and Dolores Palma for America Downtown®



Change can happen quickly when a community comes together to develop a hands-on, action-oriented downtown strategic plan. Just ask Cedar City students at Southern Utah University, who are helping to make their downtown a

trendier, all-purpose place to live, eat and socialize.

In 1996, Cedar City, Utah, joined NLC's *America Downtown®* technical assistance program, through which the *Cedar City Downtown Action Agenda 1996* was completed, in association with HyettPalma, Inc.

In 2010, after fourteen-years of actively and diligently implementing the 1996 *Downtown Action Agenda*, the City contracted with NLC to have its Downtown initiative updated.

The purpose of updating the City's *Downtown Action Agenda* was to:

- Review progress and identify gaps that have occurred as the *Downtown Action Agenda* was implemented over the last fourteen-years;
- Re-gauge local opinion about the downtown enhancement effort to date, as well as to revisit the community's concerns and aspirations for downtown's future;
- Refocus, as necessary, the actions that need to be taken over the next five-years to further enhance Downtown Cedar City;
- Recharge the downtown enhancement effort and those involved in that effort; and
- Recommend specific actions that should be taken over the next five-years to move Downtown Cedar City forward in attaining the community's defined vision for downtown and capturing the economic potentials facing Downtown.

Key Downtown Cedar City improvements made since completion of the *Cedar City Downtown Action Agenda 1996* include a plethora of significant economic and cultural initiatives.

- Renovation of the Old Post Office and consolidation/relocation of City offices to the historic building.
- Development of a parking structure near Main Street.
- Development of Heritage Theater and Festival Hall, major performing arts and public assembly spaces.
- Installation of downtown streetscape – trees, flower baskets, beautification.
- Renovation of many downtown building façades.
- Retention of a grocery store as a major downtown anchor.
- Spillover of downtown enhancement from downtown to adjacent commercial areas.
- City Council's understanding of the importance of downtown and the attitude and vision to keep activities in the downtown to feed retail businesses.
- Keeping and re-using downtown historic buildings – containing mixed-uses for vitality and foster clustering.
- Increases in sales tax revenue and jobs in downtown.
- The City keeping an open-mind and being "game" to try new things.
- The creation of a viable, working partnership between the City, the business and arts communities, and Southern Utah University.

The ***Cedar City Downtown Action Agenda 2011*** was completed in December 2010. And, since that very recent date, the community has used the ***Downtown Action Agenda*** to re-energize and re-focus its Downtown enhancement effort.

One of the more interesting developments which has occurred since the update process started is a growing understanding locally of serving the needs of Southern Utah University students, not only in the downtown strategy planning process, but providing those goods and services in downtown which most appeal to university students.

The growing university campus is now literally adjacent to Downtown Cedar City.

As noted in a recent newspaper article published by ***The Spectrum*** newspaper of St. George, Utah, "Southern Utah University students didn't shy away from what they want to see in downtown Cedar City, with answers ranging from trendy clothing stores to music venues to a gay bar."

"The gay bar would cover everything we want," said student Seth Connors, only half joking. "We'd have music, dancing, probably a restaurant, all in one."

"Well, yeah, a lot of people in Cedar City are students," said senior Kaitlin Sevy on what market the city is looking at while planning downtown changes. "We just need a social gathering place that can hold a lot of different types of events," Sevy added, noting a "cool, new venue just opened on the Boulevard in St. George, and Cedar should follow suit by showing movies, providing games and have live music, especially for the under-21 crowd".

"We want, just, stuff to do in general," laughed Holly Johnson, a freshman from Salt Lake City who said "she is thinking about leaving not because of her school, but because of where she has to live while attending".

"The purpose of the ***Downtown Action Agenda*** update," according to Cedar City's Economic Developer Brennan Wood, " was to develop an understanding of the current health of our downtown and review the action items of the original study. Cedar City's historic downtown plays a unique role not only for Cedar City but for Iron County in determining the success, vibrancy and economic health of the region. The ***Action Agenda*** plays a key function in determining the strategy we undertake for quality of life enhancements and increased business opportunities for our residents."

Mr. Wood also noted that "The update brought City officials, land owners, tenants, the Downtown Alliance and many other groups and organizations to the table to discuss short and long-term goals that would improve the downtown's feel, look and overall economy."

To learn how your community can participate in and benefit from ***The America Downtown® Program***, go to www.nlc.org/enterpriseprograms.org or contact Denise Belser at belser@nlc.org.

About the Authors

NLC's America Downtown Program is offered in partnership with HyettPalma, Inc. Formed in 1985, Doyle Hyett and Dolores Palma are the Chairman and President, respectively, of HyettPalma, Inc., the only firm specializing in the economic renaissance of business districts with over 45 years of combined experience in the fields of downtown enhancement and city planning.