

Operation Downtown

A Blue Ribbon Commission to
Address Homelessness, Mental
Health and Addiction Issues, and
Blight in Downtown Reno

Over 60 Community Leaders Involved

Problem Statement

- We have been Ignoring our Downtown for Too Long
 - Lacking in Downtown Advocates
 - Special Projects such as the Bowling Stadium, Retraco, & the Movie Theatre
 - But, No Comprehensive Plan to Deal with the Homeless Population
- Chronically Homelessness
 - Hospitalization, Incarceration, ambulance Services.
 - Mental Health Issues
 - Alcohol and Drug Addiction (Heroin a BIG Issue)
 - People Living on Streets Negatively Impacting Residents, Tourists, & Businesses
- Elderly Homelessness
 - Social Security Barely Covers Housing.
 - Large portion of downtown motel residents are elderly

Problem Statement, Cont'd

- Youth Homelessness
 - Adults Prey on Youth
 - Afraid to Use Supportive Services Including Food and Shelter
 - Literally No Housing for Homeless Youth
- Until a Homeless Person has a Roof Over Their Head, Nothing Will change – They are in Survival Mode
- Blight & Crime
 - Downtown and East and West of UNR = 1.25% of the Geographical Area of the City but 25% - 40% of the police calls for service
 - Boarded up and Vacant Property
 - Crumbling Sidewalks, Curb & Gutter
 - No Street Lighting or Street Trees
 - Right in our Core Downtown Area

Mental Health

- 1 in 5 adults in the United States has a mental illness
- Suicide Rate per 100,000 individuals
 - United States 12.9
 - Nevada 19.5
- Rate of Deaths by Drug Overdose
 - Nevada 4th highest in United States
- Adult Access to Mental Health/Substance Abuse Care
 - Nevada Rank 51st
- Youth Access to Mental Health/Substance Abuse Care
 - Nevada Rank 48th

Indigent Care

- Entire Human Services Budget, Washoe County - \$80,000,000
 - Child Welfare, Seniors, and Indigent Populations
- Overall Indigent Budget for Washoe County - \$25,000,000
 - 31% of total Human Services Budget
- Adult Services Division – Shifted from Cash Assistance and Indigent Medical Assistance to Specific Programs
 - Support Services, Treatment, Housing
 - Outcomes for the Continuum of Human Services
- Crossroad (JV between Sherriff's Office & Catholic Community Services)
 - Jail vs. Supportive Housing → \$130/day vs. \$27/day
 - Reduced costs for REMSA, Law Enforcement Response, etc.
 - Saves Community \$12M to \$15M Annually.
- Other Services – Support to VOA Shelter, Displaced Seniors, Senior Nutrition, Transitional Housing Programs, etc.

Impacts on Tourism

- Blight & Homelessness Affect Our Entire Tourism Industry
 - Casinos Warn their Patrons Not to Venture West of Sierra Street of East of Center Street
 - Only Remaining Businesses Open on the East Side of Virginia Street in the Core Area are Pawn Shops
 - Recent Stabbing of an RTC Security Guard at 4th St. Station
 - Results in a Not so Great Reputation
 - Missing out on Multi-Millions of Dollars in Economic Revenue and Tax Revenue
- Recent Comment on Trip Advisor, “Depressing Downtown”

*What's up with downtown Reno? It's so dismal, depressing whatever you want to call it. We see so many boarded up shops, young adults begging, drunk and homeless. We were here for only 2 nights and I'm very glad were leaving tomorrow. We have **no desire to visit Reno** again. 😞*

— They won't be back Period!!

OD - Vision for Downtown

Move towards downtown revitalization, economic development, tourism enhancement, affordable housing, and creation of a pedestrian friendly and walkable downtown that will become an integral part of the City of Reno

Priorities

- We Used a community Based Weighting System to develop Priorities
 - Provide Permanent Supportive Housing
 - Plan for Blight Reduction
 - Address Mental Health & Addiction Issues
 - Create a Walkable downtown.
 - Truckee River as a Welcome Mat

Solutions

- Supportive Housing for Chronically Homeless.
 - Denver Housing First Initiative (2006)
 - ER Visits Reduced 35%. Inpatient Visits Reduced 40%
 - Inpatient Night Visits Reduced 80%. Overall Patient Costs Reduced 66%
 - Detox Visits Reduced 82% or \$8,750 Per Person.
 - Incarceration Costs Reduced 76%
 - Average Savings = \$31,500 Per Person Over Two years or \$4,737,000 for the 150 person Study
 - As a Result, can provide Comprehensive Supportive Housing
 - Save \$4,745 Per Person. Monthly Income Increased from \$185 to \$431
 - Improved Quality of Life and Reduce Number of People Living on Streets

Solutions, Cont.d

- Provide Permanent Supportive Housing
- Special Assessment District
- Reinstitute Motel Interdiction Team
- City Fee for Boarded up or Vacant Property
 - (Pay for Calls for Service)
- **Ambassador/Navigator Programs**

Ambassador/Navigator Programs

- Typical Services
 - *Direct, Guide and Assist visitors*
 - *Escort employees and patrons*
 - *Serve as eyes and ears for local law enforcement*
 - *Document and report graffiti*
 - *Deter aggressive panhandling*
 - *Deter drinking in public*
- City of Reno, RTC, and RSCVA Have Interest
- Established in Numerous US Cities
- Could Serve all Major Area Resorts
- Could Provide Extra Service for Special Events

Examples

- Cleveland, Ohio
 - Clean and Safe ambassadors provide hospitality services. They're trained to help with information on hotels, restaurants, attractions, events, conventions, and parking locations and costs. They're also knowledgeable about local ordinances such as panhandling, loitering and solicitation and are in contact with Peace Officers if a situation requires action.
- Grand Rapids, Michigan
 - Provide directions, assistance, and information to downtown goers. They are also knowledgeable about local ordinances, prepared with radios, and have a positive influence on downtown safety by serving as the “eyes and ears” for the Grand Rapids Police Department.

Examples

- Raleigh, North Carolina
 - Serve as additional eyes and ears for Downtown by discouraging aggressive panhandlers and reporting problems to be addressed by the proper authorities. Feel free to approach any of the Downtown Ambassadors for information, recommendations, and directions.
- Sacramento, California
 - Old Town Sacramento is Once Again a Thriving Tourism Spot. Homeless Camps are Non Existent in Old Town Sac and in the tunnel that Connects Old Town Sac to the Golden 1 Center. Ambassadors in their Bright Yellow Shirts are Easy to Spot and Anxious to Help Tourists with Directions, Recommendations, and Escort Services.

Conclusion

- No More Studies.
- Develop a Business Plan
 - Provide Supportive Housing Program for Youth and Adult Populations
 - Reinstitute the Motel Interdiction Team
 - Implement Special Improvement District
 - **Fund Ambassador/Navigator Program by Year End/2017**
 - Ambassadors can work both downtown and at all major special events.
 - Business Improvement District to provide Oversight/Governing Body
- **We can fix our Downtown Issues and Reinvigorate our Tourism Sector, Reduce Costs, and Help Human Beings!!**