

DOWNTOWN HERMISTON STAKEHOLDERS REPORT

City of Hermiston & Hermiston Downtown District



Where Life is Sweet



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1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to capture honest feedback from legitimate stakeholders in downtown Hermiston about what the challenges are for the area, and what those stakeholders would like to see changed. Therefore, the stakeholders interviewed only included people who are either:

1. Downtown Business Owners (or managers)
2. Downtown Property Owners

This report was developed by Emma Porricolo; a recent graduate completing a year a service in Hermiston through the University of Oregon's Resource Assistance for Rural Environments program. Honest feedback was possible due to a promise of relative anonymity, except for listing out names of those interviewed, as well as Ms. Porricolo's status as someone new to the community, and someone who would be leaving the community after a one-year deployment.

Interviews were done in person, and ranged from a half hour to almost two hours. Topics covered in the interviews included downtown events, the Hermiston Urban Renewal District, and areas of improvement for downtown. Five major issues were identified through the interviews, which included:

1. Beautification
2. A perceived lack of parking
3. A need for more retail and restaurants
4. Interior and exterior building upkeep and upgrades
5. More events and activities.

2. Introductory Information

2.1 Introduction

Emma Porricolo, a RARE Americorps participant, was brought to Hermiston as the Main Street Program Coordinator. When bringing in a Main Street Program Coordinator, the goal was to assist the downtown organization, the Hermiston Downtown District, through building organizational capacity and realistic/actionable goals. The first step to enacting changes within the organization was first to identify the issues downtown Hermiston experiences. It was decided the best way to identify these issues was through stakeholder interviews with downtown organizations, property owners, business managers, and owners. The benefit of having a newcomer to town was to be able to have open and honest conversations with the stakeholders about the issues downtown, without being compromised by politics or existing relationships.

Stakeholders were questioned on various topics related to downtown Hermiston including events, businesses, the Urban Renewal District, and areas of improvement for downtown. The interviews ranged from a half hour to almost 2 hours. Interviewees included 12 business owners, 5 business managers, 10 business. Several of the stakeholders did not fit into those categories; they include one organization leader, one realtor and one current property owner/ former business owner, and one former business/ property owner. Stakeholders interviewed ranged from brand new business managers to owners of a business that has been in their family for generations. The organizations and businesses of stakeholders ranged from retail, insurance, banking, hair salons, restaurants, and a church.

2.2 Background

Emma Porricolo, the author of the report and the interviewer, is the current Main Street Program Coordinator for Hermiston. Through the Americorps Resources Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) program Emma is in Hermiston for eleven months working on downtown revitalization through a partnership with the City of Hermiston, the Hermiston Downtown District (HDD), Greater Hermiston Chamber of Commerce, and Umatilla County. The mission of the RARE program is to “increase the capacity of rural communities to improve their economic, social, and environmental conditions, through the assistance of trained graduate-level participants.” The positions are focused on building capacity to have a lasting impact on the community and organizations they work for. For her year of service, Porricolo is working on developing the Hermiston Downtown District organization and creating a stable foundation that will allow the organization to continue to grow beyond the reliance on a single individual. The stakeholder interviews, this report, and the HDD Focus Workshops are the initial steps in identifying what issues the HDD should focus its efforts toward to develop long-term change.

2.3 Methodology

Downtown stakeholders eligible for interviews included organizations, property owners, businesses owners or managers located downtown. For the purpose of the interviews the

downtown area was defined by the boundaries of the Hermiston Urban Renewal District, see the map in Appendix A for reference. Interview requests were through phone calls, emails, and in-person requests. All interviews were conducted in person ranging in duration from 30 minutes to 2 hours. Interviews were done from October through December 2016.

2.4 Placing business downtown

There was a range of reasons stakeholders had placed their businesses downtown. Many of the stakeholders mentioned the businesses had already been downtown for many years when they became a part of the businesses; they had not had the option of where to place the business. Three business owners have moved downtown from Highway 395. One attributed the move to the improved parking and accessibility from the street are much better downtown, another stakeholder similarly had moved because there was more parking downtown. The third stakeholder was forced out by their competition on Highway 395 and saw downtown as an affordable option to move to.

"Many businesses said their customers typically come downtown to visit their business. Typically, they didn't have many walk-ins off the street."

One business that has several competitors around town had numerous customers switch to their business because of the better convenience of parking and accessibility of compared to Highway 395. Other stakeholders had other reasons they decided to place their businesses' downtown including "exposure and affordability," "most economical place," "felt it was important to be a member of a business district," "believes local business belong downtown," and "targeted the Main Street feel since it is fitting to their business." Interestingly when downtown businesses were asked about the customer base, and exposure downtown businesses get from being in a dense business district, they did not experience a huge benefit or addition of customers from walk-ins. Many businesses said their customers typically come downtown to visit their business. Typically, they didn't have many walk-ins off the street.

2.5 Expanding, Reducing, Relocating Downtown

Several businesses have relocated, expanded their business or added additional business ventures within the downtown within the last few years. When stakeholders were asked if they had plans of expanding, reducing, or relocating their businesses most responses were none of the above or expanding. None of the stakeholders indicated an intention to reduce their business, or re-locate out of downtown. For expansions, some stakeholders had plans for expanding infrastructure and others were expanding their business by increasing personnel. Six stakeholders had plans of expanding infrastructure, and four had plans to get additional employees.

"None of the stakeholders indicated an intention to reduce their business, or re-locate out of downtown."

Within the past several years some businesses have been relocating their businesses from downtown locations to a nearby location also downtown. When asked why they moved

stakeholders had varying reasons to move, typically related to the landlords, opportunity to buy, or more space. Three stakeholders stated they had moved to a new building for a larger place, one doing so because they were offered the opportunity to buy the building. One stakeholder moved locations because there was an opportunity to buy a large historical building downtown at a great price and felt it's "important to promote and keep things downtown," even with their business rapidly expanding.



3. Downtown Events

Most business owners interviewed expressed positivity toward downtown events, acknowledging that they bring people downtown; often from out of town, or those who typically do not visit this part of town. However, the majority did not think the current events had a large impact, positive or negative, on their businesses. There is the benefit of exposure for businesses

"However, the majority did not think the current events had a large impact, positive or negative, on their businesses."

when having downtown events, but it is hard to quantify the amount of benefit. Parking downtown was an issue often brought up with all of the events. Additionally, it's important to note that many of the stakeholders whose businesses were not affected or present for the events did not have many opinions of them because had not attended many or all of the events. Moving forward, there should

be more discussions by the Downtown District regarding how to better integrate businesses into these various events and how they can best utilize the increase of people downtown.

3.1 Eastern Oregon Arts Festival

Background –

Description – The Eastern Oregon Arts Festival is an event that promotes art in downtown Hermiston with stage entertainment, an art show, arts in action exhibit, and food vendors.

Date - 2nd Saturday in May

Years running – 2 years

Attendance – about 1,000 people

Street Closure – 2nd St between E Main St and E Gladys

Responses- The Eastern Oregon Arts Festival attracts a good niche to downtown. All of the ratings were positive, several stakeholders had not experienced the event. One stakeholder expressed, "attracts more people downtown, a lot of people from out of town." Other stakeholders felt we need more arts in Hermiston and the event should be "more spread out and include more participants." One of the few complaints was one stakeholder mentioned the stage blocks off their part of the street, which they felt may discourage visitors to visit their store.

3.2 Cinco de Mayo Celebration

Background –

Description – The Cinco de Mayo celebration is a Hispanic-themed community event that is two days packed with a parade, carnival, dance, vendors, and entertainment.

Date – First Saturday and Sunday of May

Years running – Has been downtown for 3 years

Attendance – Estimated 5,000 – 7,000 people total, continues to grow every year

Street Closure – 2nd St from E Main St to E Gladys, parade route – Hermiston Community Center to 2nd St over to 3rd St and back to Community Center.

*Note – The event has grown rapidly in the last few years, so much so that it has outgrown the downtown area. The City of Hermiston Parks and Recreation has decided to move the festivities to Butte Park.

Responses - The Cinco de Mayo celebration was very popular and brought traffic downtown on a Sunday, & didn't impact the majority of the businesses. It did not affect most businesses since it was held on a Sunday. One stakeholder had mentioned the noise of the event had inconvenienced their Sunday operations but was able to easily make time changes. Most people believed it was a good way to appreciate and show the importance of the Latino community in Hermiston. Only one business said they had used the flux of people downtown to their advantage and offered deals on the day of the celebration.

"Only one business said they had used the flux of people downtown to their advantage."

3.3 "Takin it to the Streets" 3 v. 3 Basketball Tournament –

Background –

Description – Takin it to the Street is a three on three basketball tournament that takes place downtown. There are brackets 2nd grade through high school and adult brackets as well.

Date – 3rd Weekend of July

Years Running -

Attendance –

Street Closures – Main Street from Hwy 395 to 4th St,

Responses - There were mixed reviews of "Takin it to the Streets." Most business owners were aware that the event attracts large crowds downtown. But just about every business said they close for the day of the tournament, aside from the restaurants. Some businesses mentioned that they have tried in the past to benefit from the event, trying to sell water and such but haven't had any luck. Many store owners expressed how when they have stayed open in past years people visit the stores to use the restroom or hide out in the shade. There are several businesses that are not kid-friendly. The event is a tough dilemma for downtown because most of the stores close aside from the restaurants, but everyone thinks is a good way to get these people downtown but have yet to find a solution to have the masses of people downtown benefit their business.

"Most of the stores close aside from the restaurants."

3.4 Funfest

Background –

Description – Funfest is a great family event that has something for everyone. The event shuts down Main Street to host food booths, exhibits, activities, games, vendors, classic car show and a stage with live music from local entertainers.

Date – 2nd Saturday in July

Years Running- 12 years

Attendance – estimated 2,000 – 4,000 people

Street Closures – E Main St from 4th St to Highway 395

Responses - Funfest had lots of positive responses from the stakeholders. One stakeholder described the events as, “lots of people, close to Main Street businesses, and family oriented.” Funfest seems to be one of the most popular downtown events. A few stakeholders had requests for some rearrangement of attractions throughout Main Street to better accommodate all downtown businesses

3.5 Treats on Main

Background Information –

Description – On Halloween a section of Main Street is shut down. Families come trick or treating at the stores along Main Street. The street is flooded with kids and families walking around, business buy over a thousand pieces of candy to hand out and have often run out before the event is over. Afterward there is a Halloween Carnival at the Hermiston Conference Center.

Date – Halloween, October 31st

Years Running- 5/6 years

Attendance – estimated 2,000 – 4,000 people

Street Closures – E Main St from Highway 395 to 4th St

Responses- Stakeholders had almost entirely positive responses towards the Treats on Main event. Although businesses close early for the event and experience little business during the event brings many people downtown and provides great exposure. Some stakeholders stated there have been experiences where people have noticed their stores during the event and later returned to stop in.

3.6 Festival of Lights and Winter Festival

Background Information –

Description – The Festival of Lights and Winter Festival is a celebration of the holidays in downtown Hermiston. The event has been evolving over the past two years. Both years the

event included a large Tree Lighting Ceremony. The first year, the Festival of Lights, was a huge display of moving lights coordinated to holiday songs that would run several times a week for the weeks leading up to the holidays. The Winter Festival this past year was a bit more comprehensive with events planned in the festival space throughout the month of December including Kids Night and several concerts. Unfortunately, most of this year's events were canceled or relocated due to weather.

Date – First Thursday after Thanksgiving

Years Running- 2 years

Attendance – estimated 500-700 people at Tree Lighting Ceremony

Street Closures – E Main St from Highway 395 to 4th St

Responses – The Hermiston Winter Festival is still a fairly new event that is continuing to grow. Stakeholders had critiques of the event such as lack of cleanliness of the tree and a nicer tree but acknowledged it is in the early stage and has lots of potential. For the stakeholders directly in the festival area, they said their business somewhat declined during the festival the first year of the event. The Winter Festival was the highest rated event for using resources to improve. It's also important to note that most of the interviews were conducted before the Winter Festival so most stakeholder responses do not include the second year of the event which saw significant improvements. The Tree Lighting and Ladies Night was a huge success this past year, Main Street businesses had positive reviews of the night.

3.7 First Thursday Passport Events

Background –

Description – First Thursday Passport Event is a special night once a month where shops and restaurants on Main Street stay open late until about 7:30 pm offering special deals and refreshments. The passport requires shoppers visit four participating retailers then submit their passport at the host business for a chance to win a prize from the host.

Date – 1st Thursday of every month

Years Running- 2 years in May 2017

Attendance – Estimated average about 75 people

Street Closures – None

Responses – The First Thursday Passport event has been successful in attracting new people downtown. One stakeholder's response to the event was, "strong in the beginning, is starting to level out regarding impact, often the same people." Another stakeholder mentioned they "have started to see the same crowd, the event has

"There is competition with Bellingers Farms with a similar event on the same night, which attracts a similar crowd."

plateaued a bit.” There is competition with Bellingers Farms with a similar event on the same night, which attracts a similar crowd. It’s also possible it may be more beneficial to do a different night to decrease competition. Numerous stakeholders pointed out there are many opportunities to expand and improve First Thursday with more advanced and increased advertising.

3.8 Hermiston’s Own Saturday Market

Background –

Description – Hermiston’s Own Saturday Market is a farmers market with additional products and entertainment.

Date – Saturdays from May 1st to September 30th

Years Running- 2 years at McKenzie Park

Attendance – Average about 20 vendors a week

Street Closures – None

Responses - The Saturday Market has been located downtown in the parking lot of the Hermiston Conference Center, and the parking lot across from City Hall. Now the market is located at Mackenzie Park, a few blocks away from downtown. Very few people said their

“Many stakeholders mentioned the popularity of Friday nights for a farmers market.”

business was ever impacted, positively or negatively from the market at its current location. Previously when the market was located downtown at the Hermiston Conference Center, or in the parking lot across from City Hall, there seemed to be more of

an attraction to visit. Many stakeholders mentioned the popularity of Friday nights for a farmers market, as seen in Pendleton. What several people pointed out was the potential the market has, since Hermiston is surrounded by agriculture it has the resources for a great farmer’s market within close reach.

4. Urban Renewal District

For background information about Hermiston's Urban Renewal District and the work of the Urban Renewal Agency visit <http://www.hermiston.or.us/ura>.

When stakeholders were asked if they were familiar with the projects identified in Hermiston's Urban Renewal District (HURD) by the Hermiston Urban Renewal Agency (HURA) most people had vague familiarity, they knew little bits and had heard some things through word of mouth but didn't understand the full scope of the revitalization efforts. At this stage, the two primary projects with the HURD plan are the Festival Street and the Façade Grant.

4.1 Façade grant

Some stakeholders had no idea about the program, some had issues, and a few had an interest in applying. The issues commonly expressed about the façade grant was that numerous businesses didn't have the funds available to cover the entire cost of the projects upfront, then later receive the grant funds through a reimbursement. Numerous stakeholders expressed the desire for the grant have a higher funding percentage than the current 50% of the entire project costs. Another common issue with façade grant was the issue of not owning their property and renting from the property owner. Some stakeholders have made improvements without using the façade grant that would have been eligible. Additionally, one stakeholder expressed that the façade grant needs more restrictions to ensure a purposeful vision for the end goal.

Stakeholders had a mixture of responses about storefront changes. Some businesses had made recent upgrades, others felt they needed to but lack the funds, and others depending on the nature of their business felt their facades' do not impact their customer base. When asked what types of improvements were desired responses included more signage, awnings, lighting, landscaping, modernizing look, and improving indoor visibility with window changes were the improvements stakeholders described. One stakeholder did express the desire to make façade improvements to fit in with the décor of Main Street. Further, many business owners deal with the complexity of renting their buildings from landlords having to coordinate with them for building improvements. Although, others had good relationships with their landlords but had concerns that they would not receive the full benefits of investing in improvements if they did not own the building.

4.2 Festival Street

There was mixed review of the Festival Street, but the majority were positive responses to the Festival Street. Many stakeholders felt the Festival Street is a great addition to the downtown and will attract larger crowds to the area. Several stakeholders felt that the Festival Street is not the

"Numerous stakeholders felt beautification of downtown is an important aspect of downtown revitalization."

appropriate use of funding at this stage of the Urban Renewal District Plan. One stakeholder stated, "there are other priorities the Urban Renewal Agency should have ahead of the Festival Street such as signage, bump outs at intersections, outdoor seating areas, and lighting. I don't believe a festival street will solve the small business problems Main Street faces." Other stakeholders further

from the Festival Street expressed concerns that the impacts of the events on the Festival Street may not reach their business to benefit them. Aside from the current HURA projects, numerous stakeholders felt beautification of downtown is an important aspect of downtown revitalization. In some interviews, stakeholders expressed frustration that the City of Hermiston has been focusing efforts and funding on attracting large “big box” stores and neglecting the downtown area with improvements they feel are necessary, such as beautification.

4.2.1 Desired Size and Frequency of Festival Street Events

Stakeholders were asked if they thought it would be better to hold a few large events over the year, or many smaller events on a regular basis at the Festival Street space. Responses included suggestions to host both large and small events in the Festival Street space. There are benefits and concerns with both types. Overall there were positive responses to the potential of holding events in the space. Hosting larger events would be a way to attract people from outside Hermiston to visit downtown, but there were concerns of events “landlocking” stores potentially interfering with business. Additionally, some people feel there isn’t a large enough crowd in town to be attracted to multiple large events. For smaller events, many believed that consistently having smaller events could attract a new crowd downtown and potentially create an environment where people have “a habit of going downtown and plan ahead for the events.” A concern with more frequent smaller events is the wearing out the novelty of the Festival Street and that it “may take a while for people to catch on.”

“Many believed that consistently having smaller events could attract a new crowd downtown and potentially create an environment where people have “a habit of going downtown and plan ahead for the events.”

Some stakeholders felt additional events could be brought to Hermiston and utilize the Festival Street. Others believed the current roster of events in Hermiston covers a variety of interests and that the Festival Street space can be utilized to improve and develop the events to a new level. Throughout the discussions of having small and large events, the need for planning ahead to ensure quality events was a stressed, regardless of the size. Most people felt good, well-planned events will attract crowds, even if it takes some time to get the desired crowds.

4.2.2 Suggested Events for the Festival Street

There was a variety of suggestions for different events that could use the Festival Street. Many events included food and drink festivals, the potential to utilize the resources within the vicinity of Hermiston. Specific examples include a beer festival, wine tasting, food trucks, beer and beef festival, agricultural festival, and relocating Hermiston’s Own Saturday Market. Other suggestions stressed the “need for cultural events of all people and promoting community engagement” within the space ranging from music such as local bands, family events, car shows, a street theater, and expanding events such as the Eastern Oregon Art Walk. Additionally, there were suggestions to bring back some classic Hermiston events to space including Oktoberfest.

Several people expressed the potential for the Festival Street to attract crowds downtown during Umatilla County Fair since the fairgrounds are moving further out of town. It is important for downtown Hermiston to take advantage of the large crowds that come to Hermiston for the event.



5. Barriers to Downtown's Success

When asked about the barriers that have stood in the way of downtown's success stakeholders had a variety of answers. Consistent themes across most responses include absentee landlords, parking, current downtown business matrix, a lacking aesthetic, decline of Main Street America, lack of consistency of posted hours, and typical small business hardships. All of these issues impact downtown's success; however, some issues are easier mitigated than others, while some may be nearly impossible to address.

5.1 Code Enforcement

Some stakeholders expressed frustration with the lack of code enforcement. The model the city follows is complaint-based, rather than proactively citing violators. Some people had critiques toward types of occupants of downtown properties, such as churches, and the "look" of buildings downtown.

Many people expressed the desire for a cohesive look downtown, and suggestions for going about it included creating design ordinances. After discussing the potential with city staff it has become clear that it would likely be extremely difficult to pass such an ordinance considering a landscape ordinance with minor requirements was unable to get passed. An alternative option could be to have the Hermiston Downtown District group create a suggested design guideline, which would not be enforced but a suggestion for property or store owners that would like to fit into a cohesive look.

5.2 The Decline of Main Street America

The decline of Main Street America, and the rise of big box stores, is an issue that is larger than downtown Hermiston. This is a common issue that has led to the creation of Main Street organizations across the country, working to shift the culture and save historic Main Streets. In Hermiston, this is especially pertinent since the city grew during times of reliance on vehicular travel and has sprawled from Main Street to Highway 395 as the dominant business corridor. Therefore, Hermiston has a much smaller "downtown" than might be expected for a city of its size.

With the shift and desire for most businesses to be on Highway 395 rents have declined on Main Street in the past. Potentially this may have led to the atypical makeup of businesses on Main Street today. Although there is a presence of retail, office spaces and churches also occupy much of the center of Main Street. Many believe churches are an important part of the community in Hermiston but may be better suited for a location outside the core of Main Street.

5.3 Absentee and uninvolved landlords

A common barrier stakeholders expressed was absentee and uninvolved landlords. Twelve business owners who were renting their space were interviewed. Many mentioned that numerous landlords, even if they are local, are not very invested in their buildings, and do the bare minimum maintenance for their building. Renters are not inclined to make renovations since they will likely not see a return on the investment personally. Further, there was frustration that the landlords often continue increase the rents although they make little improvements to the buildings.

5.4 Parking

Stakeholders predominately felt that parking is an issue on Main Street. It is perceived that there is currently not enough parking on Main Street. A common complaint was that customers do not go into a business if they cannot find parking right in front. Additionally, several stakeholders had complaints that employees were parking on the street directly in front of, or near, their storefront; taking that opportunity away from a customer, and hindering the potential for business.

5.5 Lacking Aesthetic

A cleaner downtown was also something stakeholders stressed. Many of the buildings downtown need upgrades and should be kept looking clean. The absence of a cohesive look downtown lacks a theme and sense of place that adds a dimension to downtown.

5.6 Downtown Business Matrix

One of the determinants of the thriving downtown is vacancy rates. Downtown Hermiston has a low vacancy rate, yet it does not feel like a thriving downtown. The makeup of the types of businesses and services downtown may be part of the explanation. Having a dynamic mix of business types and services in downtown is preferred, but in Hermiston the ratios of stores to services and organizations may be off from the ideal ratio. Another way to look at this issue is that there could be better communication and collaboration between downtown businesses and organizations to benefit one another better.

5.7 Typical Small Business Hardships

Typical small businesses hardships are a common issue in downtown areas. There are difficulties with starting a new small business, typically it takes some time to be profitable. Having small businesses as the primary type of business downtown does create a lot of turnover.

5.8 Consistency to Posted Hours and Closing Times

In the interviews, several stakeholders expressed the belief that the lack of consistency of posted hours is an issue for downtown. They feel customers are discouraged when they come to the store and it is closed although the posted hours claim they are open. Closing times are also a potential barrier for downtown. Many shops close around 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm, they are not open very long after people are off work on weekdays and are only open on Saturdays on the weekend. Some stakeholders believe if shops had extended hours there's potential for more customers to come after work.

"Many shops close around 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm."

5.9 Lack of Anything "Unique"

When stakeholders were asked, "what makes downtown unique," the overwhelmingly popular answer was "I can't think of anything unique." A few characteristics one stakeholder pointed out was "small town feel, warm, and friendly." Another stakeholder said Hermiston Drug is something special and unique to downtown Hermiston. Some people had more optimistic answers for downtown

"I can't think of anything"

moving forward describing it as a “place with lots of potential,” “working place that doesn’t have many vacancies, but needs a niche,” or “right off Highway 395, has lots of through traffic, could be better utilized to attract people toward downtown.” Utilizing placemaking techniques around downtown, such as art, signage, and more, could be a way to mitigate this issue.

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6. Visions for Downtown

There was a wide variety of responses to the question, what is your vision for downtown Hermiston? Some responses focused on the design and aesthetic of downtown, others on the business side, several expressed the vision of downtown as a “destination where people want to come and stay while shopping and dining.” For a downtown’s cohesive look, people described their visions as “cute downtown feel,” “traditional look, homey, small town feel,” “keep the older charm,” “western look like Roemarks,” “clean”, “newer, modern updated facades,” and “beautified with more landscaping and benches.” Others had visions of a friendly, nice, attractive space with more people and different businesses. Additionally, a space that “attracts more of a community, but also a place to escape.” One stakeholder described their vision as “eclectic businesses with studios for artists.” A few stakeholders had a vision of closing down Main Street for the first two blocks and only allowing pedestrians and cyclists, creating a meeting space that could be “the heart of Hermiston.”

When talking to stakeholders that had lived in Hermiston for most or all of their lives, they remember a time when downtown was the center of town and a bustling place. In to the late 80’s downtown was the destination to shop in town. Safeway, the hardware store, three clothing stores, shoe store, and more were located downtown. It was a much smaller town back then, but it was the hub of Hermiston and people would walk from one shop to another. Since then Walmart has come to town, and Hermiston has grown outward to have a strong business corridor down Highway 395. People who are newer to Hermiston say they think within recent years downtown has been busier in comparison to the last decade. Although some stakeholders mentioned, they had not visited downtown much until they began working downtown. One stakeholder described the evolution of Main Street as such, “until the 70’s, early to mid-80’s downtown was vibrant, Walmart came in the 90’s, through time property owners wanted to retire and didn’t take much care of the buildings.” It’s important to look back and see what once made downtown Hermiston a vibrant town center to guide the current revitalization efforts.

6.1 Attracting People and Businesses Downtown

When asking various ways to attract more people downtown, more retail was one of the most popular answers. Several stakeholders pointed out the need for an anchor retail store downtown like Roemarks once was. Others suggested more restaurants was also a similar suggestion or a landmark restaurant; many people suggested there’s a need for a diversity of restaurants in Hermiston and specialty food shops. Other suggestions included “appealing, reasonable rent,” “have good strong small businesses, “take incentives to get businesses that create a culture,” “embrace Hispanic culture” and “small locally owned businesses with unique services and products.” One stakeholder had the vision to “make a destination with restaurants, attract specialty shops and restaurants to attract people downtown.” Another common suggestion was changing consumer thoughts to appreciate and utilize the exceptional customer service and benefits of supporting small local businesses. One stakeholder stated, “the city needs to support the right businesses because they often have high turnover, but Hermiston needs those younger businesses.”

Others discussed their suggestion to capitalize on the close location to Washington and tax-free benefits Oregon offers.

6.2 Recommendations for Additional Amenities

6.2.1 Attractions:

- Museum
- Family activities
 - Arcade
 - Space for classes
 - Indoor playground
 - Trampoline Park
- Music
- Outdoor Venue
- Art Center
- Architectural Salvage
- Live Theatre
- Indoor shooting range

6.2.2 Businesses:

- Diversity of Restaurants
- Gourmet Cooking shop
- Outdoor bistro seating
- Wine Bar
- Brewery/ BrewPub
- Technology store
- Martini bar
- Fabric Store
- Sporting Goods Store
- Men's clothing
- Seasonal merchandise store
- Shoe store
- Farming and Hunting store

7. Summary

Based off of all the information gathered from the interviews these were the main topics of where improvements can be made. These were the topics most often addressed by the largest groups of stakeholders, they are common themes of downtown improvements and issues to address. Some of the topics are easier issues mitigate than others.

7.1 Beautification

Beautification of downtown can have many aspects. There were many responses in interviews that Main Street has been clean recently, but the beautification goes beyond that. Improved lighting, fancier lighting fixtures, banners, flower baskets, more landscaping, and benches are all additions that could beautify downtown. Additionally, throughout the interviews, a common need addressed was for a cohesive look downtown. When asked the question, “what makes downtown Hermiston unique,” overwhelming the response was, “I can’t think of anything,” yet some were optimistic; emphasizing the potential for downtown Hermiston. The purpose of placemaking projects would both address the issues of lack of uniqueness, and could help cultivate a “theme” of sorts downtown. Potential placemaking projects could also be seen as beautification. Examples of placemaking include art, signage, etc. A cohesive look should be representative of the culture of Hermiston.

7.2 More Retail and Restaurants

Although there is currently some retail downtown, the small physical nature of Hermiston’s downtown limits a sense of “critical mass.” Additionally, buildings which used to be retail have slowly transitioned to other uses over the years. Overwhelming people say more retail is needed downtown, typically bringing back the businesses that once made Main Street a booming hub of town. Similarly many stakeholders expressed a need for more restaurants downtown and saw a demand for more diversity of restaurants in Hermiston. Many think downtown can be revitalized with more restaurants and retail, to make downtown more of a destination when you can stop in several stores and have a meal.

7.3 Interior and Exterior Building Upkeep and Renovations

Many complained that properties have been passed down for generations or people live out of town. Some landlords are local, but there are similar issues with both. They are happy making money from rentals, but many renters complain that they feel the need to upkeep the building or make large improvements beyond the bare minimum. There are several opportunities that could mitigate this issue Façade Grant through the city, yet the difficulty many renters face is improvements require approval from the landlord. Also, several businesses have mentioned they don’t have the money to make the desired improvements even with grant opportunities.

7.4 Parking

Parking was an issue brought up in every interview. Some people felt there was a lack of spaces available on Main Street and had a notion that some customers would neglect to go into the business if they could not find a parking spot in the three or so spots directly in front of the store they had come to visit. Another issue with parking was having employees take the premium spots that should be available for customers. Further, some stakeholders expressed the belief that as we work on revitalizing downtown and attracting more people, we must accommodate parking for those changes.

7.5 More Activities and Events

Many stakeholders expressed concerns about the lack of “things to do” downtown. Activity attractions downtown could be in the form of more events or businesses. Numerous stakeholders discussed how there is a large population of families in town and a lack of activities for them in town. Additionally, most stakeholders thought positively of bringing new events to Hermiston, with potential for events that cater to various interests throughout town.

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8. Appendix

8.1 List of Interviewees

1) Jacob Neighbors

Simmons Insurance Agency

Business and Property Owner

Simmons Insurance Agency has been located in Hermiston since 1982.

2) Lucas Wagner

Banner Bank

Commercial Bank Manager

Banner Bank has had a branch in Hermiston for 128 years and has about 50 local employees

3) Steve Arrasmith

Holiday Inn

Local Owner and Operator of Hermiston Location

Brand new location in Hermiston, opened December 2016.

4) Daniel Czayka

Alexander Daniel Jewelry

Business Owner

Has been working downtown since 2004, opened his own business 2 years ago.

5) Toni

East Main Barbershop

Business owner for 2 years

Downtown employee for 5 years

6) Monica Todd

Nookies/ Hermiston Brewing

Business Manager

Has been manager for 2 years.

7) Denise Simmons

Sunrise Hair Salon

Business Owner and Property Owner

Has owned business for 16 years.

8) Sarah Lovell

Cozy Corner Tavern

Business Owners

Cozy Tavern existed since 1948. Owner since 2014.

9) Kurt and Susie & Bendixsen

Bendixsen Law P.C

Business and Property Owners

Downtown Stakeholders for 29 years.

10) Mary Corp

KC Art + Collectibles

Business and Property Owner

Has been business and property owner for almost 10 years.

11) Debra DeWitt

Mailing Made Easy ...@Mail Office Plus

Business Owner

Relocated business to downtown Hermiston 3 years ago.

12) Michael & Judy Gormley

Neighborhood Books and Gifts

Business Owner

Bought their business 5 years ago.

13) Lucio

Boost Mobile, Ochoa's Jewelers, and Adamari's Boutique

Business and Property Owner

Started business 5 years ago, purchased property 1 year ago.

14) Cynthia Traner

C& R Mercantile Co.

Business and Property Owner

Property owner since 2010, business owner since 2013.

15) Tami Rebman

American West Properties

Relator

Lifelong Hermiston resident, has been working in Hermiston for 20 years.

16) Melisa Ann Weber

Home Town Mortgage Group

Business and Property Owner

Downtown Stakeholder since 2013

17) Shelia Cozad

Property Owner and Former Downtown Business Owner

Downtown Property Owner about 30 years

18) Natalie

Ruty's

Business Owner

Business owner 9 years.

19) Charles Austin

P4 & More Computers

Business Manager

Has been the manager since the business has been located downtown, 2001

20) Isabella

Taqueria

Business Owner

Opened business downtown 5 years ago

21) LuAann Davison

State Farm Insurance Agent

Business and Property Owner

Downtown stakeholder for 1 year.

22) Bob and Janet Mullay

Hermiston Drug & Gift

Business Owner business owner

Hermiston drug has been in existence since 1927, been in their family for 45 to 50 years.

23) Angela Pursel

KOHU & The Q and Dance Unlimited

Business Owner and Local Radio Station

Business owner for almost 20 years.

24) Brandi Howard

Andee's Boutique

Business Owner

Has owned business for 20 years

25) John Tacker

American Family Insurance

Business Owner and Property Owner

Located downtown since 1999.

26) Laurie Hartung

Scrubs Life

Business Owner

for two and half years

27) Linda Mesteth

Walker's Furniture

Business Manager

Walker's Furniture opened a location in downtown Hermiston 4.5 years ago.

28) Doreen Quick

Washington Federal

Business Manager and Property Owner

Washington Federal has had a downtown location for 3 years.

29) Dax Bryant

Victory Baptist Church

Organization Leader and Property Owner

Victory Baptist Church have been at their current location downtown for about 5 years.

30) Roe and Marilyn Gardner

Roemarks

Former Business and Property Owner

Were downtown stakeholders for 39 years.

31) Dana Bonney

Hales Restaurant & Lounge

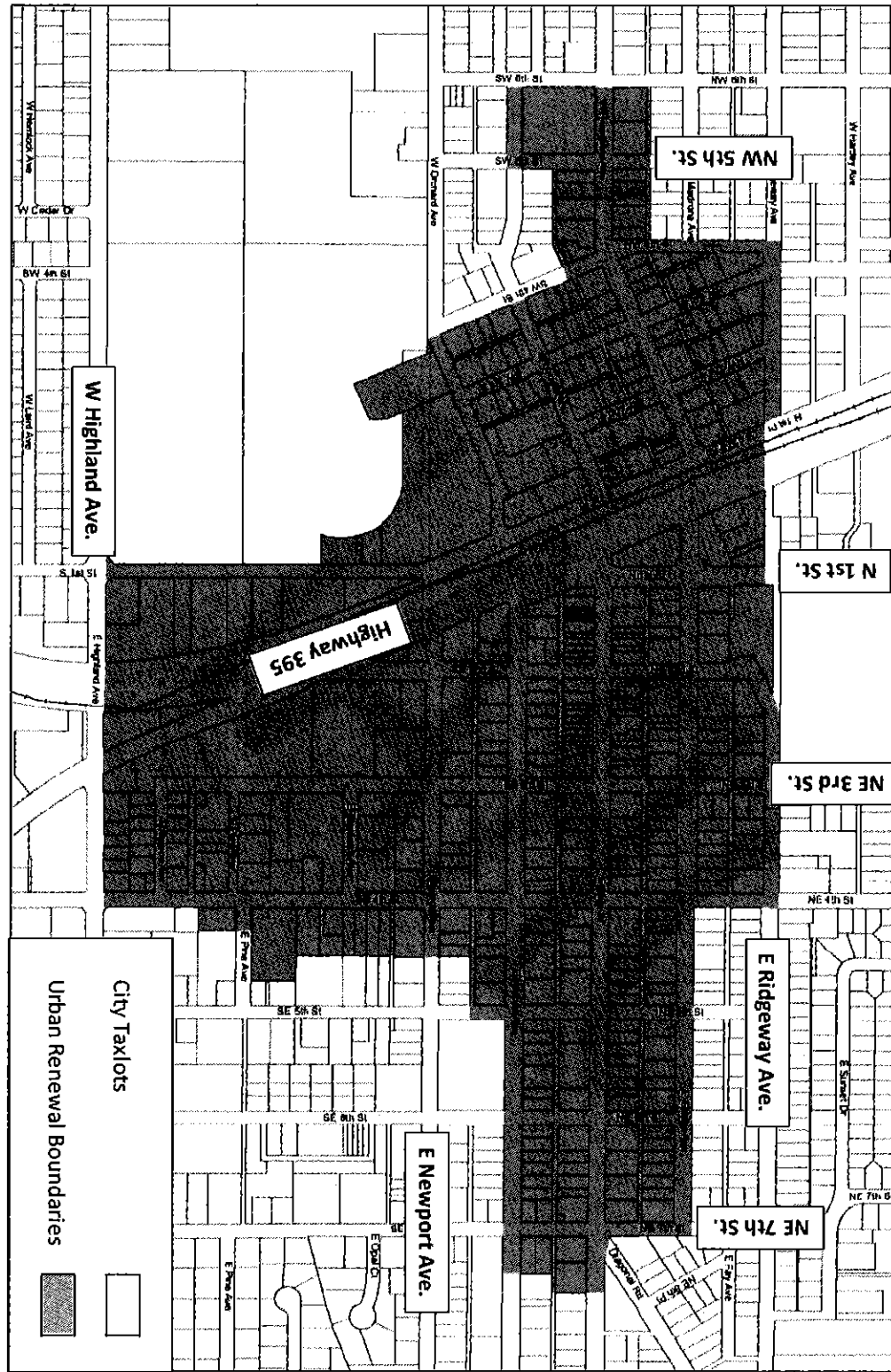
Business and Property Owner

Has been a downtown stakeholder for 35 years

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8.2 Map of Hermiston Urban Renewal District

Source: Hermiston GIS, Johnson Reid LLC



8.3 Downtown District Priorities Survey Questions

1. Tell me about your business
2. How are you a stakeholder downtown (business owner, property owner, both)? For how long have you been a downtown stakeholder?
3. Why did you decide to place your business downtown?
4. What are your operating days and hours?
5. Approximately how many people a day do you think your operation brings to downtown?
6. Do you have any plans of expanding, reducing, or relocating your business? If you have already relocated within the downtown, please explain why.
7. Please rate how the following "Downtown Events" impact your business financially from 1 to 5 (1 – Very Negative, 5 – Very Positive).
 - Eastern Oregon Arts Festival (Art Walk)
 - Cinco de Mayo Celebration
 - "Takin' it to the Streets" 3 on 3 Basketball Tournament
 - Fun Fest
 - "Treats on Main" Halloween Event
 - Holiday Lights Festival
 - "First Thursday" Passport events
 - Hermiston's Own Saturday Market
8. Please rate how you feel the following "Downtown Events" impact the downtown area as a whole from 1 to 5 (1 – Very Negative, 5 – Very Positive).
 - Eastern Oregon Arts Festival (Art Walk)
 - Cinco de Mayo Celebration
 - "Takin' it to the Streets" 3 on 3 Basketball Tournament
 - Fun Fest
 - "Treats on Main" Halloween Event
 - Holiday Lights Festival
 - "First Thursday" Passport events
 - Hermiston's Own Saturday Market
9. Understanding that everyone is working with limited time and resources, and therefore time and resources spent on current offerings may be better spent elsewhere, what do you think the community should focus more time/resources toward, and are there any that should be reduced or eliminated? Please rate 1 to 5 (1 - Less time/resources, 5 - More time/resources).
 - Eastern Oregon Arts Festival (Art Walk)
 - Cinco de Mayo Celebration
 - "Takin' it to the Streets" 3 on 3 Basketball Tournament