



DOWNTOWN MASON CITY

MASON CITY, IOWA

IN VIEW

Mason City, a Main Street Iowa Community, is exploring and pursuing exciting opportunities for the future of the community's traditional downtown business district.

Main Street Mason City spearheaded the downtown market analysis process to promote an in-depth understanding of local and regional market conditions and trends impacting the downtown district's current economic performance and opportunities for the future. Information and direction gained throughout the market analysis process will provide a sound basis for local decision-making processes and strategies aimed at enhancing the Mason City downtown business district.

This report highlights just a small sample of the knowledge and direction synthesized from data collected during the market analysis process. Similarly, the implementation strategy is only a starting point for a more comprehensive slate of projects that is likely to emerge as local leaders and stakeholders work together and continue to study the market.

As Main Street Mason City moves forward, we will continue to involve partners, community leaders, business persons and residents in efforts to analyze and interpret the information collected through this study, in order to develop a complete understanding of the findings and results – and the implications for downtown. The ensuing process will “dig deep” into the results and their meanings and incorporate local knowledge into the analysis and interpretation of the study's findings. This process will aid in the development and implementation of strategies that are both market-driven and intrinsic to our community's goals and aspirations for downtown Mason City.

Now and in the future, Main Street Mason City and the entire community will be able to use these results for the betterment of Mason City. It will serve as a useful and flexible tool for business recruitment and retention, as well as remain a “living and breathing” document. It will be able to change along with the times and trends of the community, and remain very useful in aiding Main Street Mason City's enhancement of the downtown area.

DOWNTOWN MASON CITY

2014 MARKET STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY




Main Street Mason City

9 North Federal Ave.

Mason City, Iowa 50401

Telephone: (641) 494-0003

 director@mainstreetmasoncity.org

 www.mainstreetmasoncity.org



Located in the heart of North Central Iowa, Mason City boasts a unique architectural heritage and vibrant culture rich in history. The downtown district consists of 25 traditional city blocks, plus the Southbridge Mall, and includes a variety of historic places, commercial and residential buildings and public parks.

The downtown has recently seen some significant improvements. In 2011, the Historic Park Inn Hotel opened after an \$18 million restoration. The building was remodeled and restored to its original 1910 floor plan, and includes a bar, restaurant, 27 hotel rooms and a banquet room. In 2012, the downtown district began its Federal Avenue Streetscape Project, which highlights the city's prairie school architecture and has helped rejuvenate the area. In 2013, the facades of 11 buildings were renovated with the assistance of a \$500,000 grant from the State of Iowa. The neighborhood has also seen the addition of many new commercial and retail businesses, helping the district to become the primary focus of government, business and culture in the city.

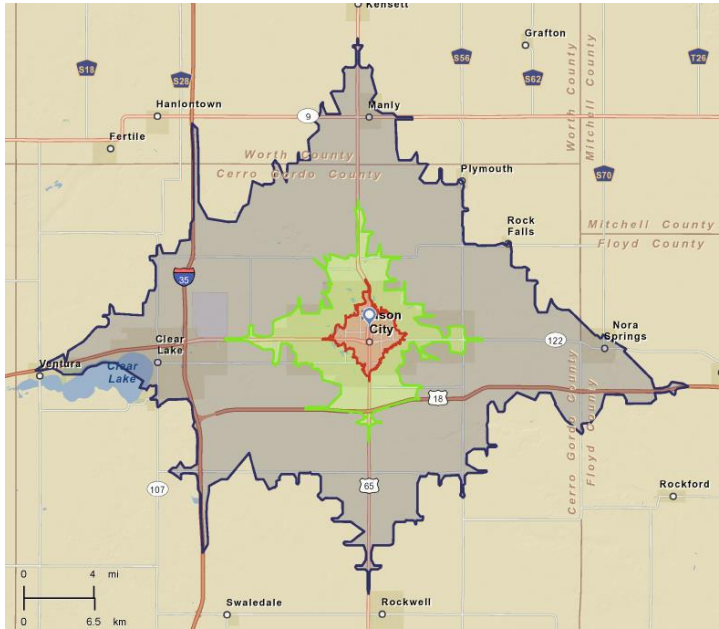
Mason City's downtown district is comprised of many different types of businesses, spanning retail, eating & dining establishments, financial and insurance institutions and entertainment options. On the retail side, the district offers clothing, books, art, home decor, spas/salons, and much more. Eating and dining establishments include upscale steak and seafood restaurants, pizzerias, bakeries, a 1940s Valentine Diner and a micro-brewery. Also included in the neighborhood is a grocery store, many different financial institutions, the Chamber of Commerce and other local non-profit organizations.

The downtown district also includes many residential properties and it serves as the city's governmental hub and location for City Hall and the County Courthouse. Downtown is the primary location for most of the historic buildings in Mason City, including the Historic Park Inn, the Parker Opera House, the Brick and Tile Building, the First National Bank building (now known as the City Center), and many other iconic buildings.

Central Park plays host to frequent outdoor activities, including a Friday night concert series in the summer, a holiday open-house event for local businesses, and various other town celebrations. The neighborhood is very walkable and attracts many tourists throughout the year to tour the district and view the historic architecture and Sculptures on Parade, which features 26 sculptures and new additions each year.

DOWNTOWN MASON CITY DRIVE TIME MARKET

FAST FACTS



Population	5 MIN	10 MIN	20 MIN
2000 Census	17,517	28,397	42,431
2013 Estimate	16,236	27,012	40,299
2018 Projection	16,071	26,741	39,897
Change: 2013 – 2018	-1.0%	-1.0%	-1.0%
Households	5 MIN	10 MIN	20 MIN
2000 Census	7,636	12,145	17,797
2013 Estimate	7,327	12,077	17,706
2018 Projection	7,292	12,037	17,646
Change: 2013 – 2018	-0.5%	-0.3%	-0.3%
Median HH Income	5 MIN	10 MIN	20 MIN
2013 Estimate	\$36,168	\$40,543	\$43,584
2018 Projection	\$41,295	\$49,256	\$52,314
Change: 2013 – 2018	+14.2%	+21.5%	+20.0%

Source: Esri





DOWNTOWN MARKETING

Survey findings on the media preferences of consumers in the Mason City area can provide direction for effective business and downtown marketing, promotion and cooperative advertising strategies. The information can also provide direction for communicating news and proposals for changes and improvements in the downtown area.

Social media, followed by newspaper and Internet websites, was cited as the most influential media source by consumer survey participants. The ranking of media preferences demonstrates the growing influence of the Internet and social media applications as a news resource, for researching products and services, and for communicating with clients.

The Internet can be a particularly valuable resource for businesses because it provides the potential to expand their trade areas well beyond local or regional geographies. Businesses with collectible, specialty, and custom merchandise lines, in particular, can use the Internet to market to the entire United States or even globally.

Marketing and cooperative advertising efforts should consider how the Internet and various E-commerce, online directories and social media applications might be used most effectively to communicate with consumers and further downtown promotional goals. The growing popularity of Facebook, for example, as an effective source to communicate with clients is evident in consumer online survey results that show 57% of respondents rely on social media as their primary source for news and information.

Q: Of the following, which two (2) media and information sources do you most rely on for Mason City area news and information?

Consumers Responses	Percentage
Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	24.0%
Newspaper	21.6%
Internet Website(s)	18.6%
Television	17.0%
Radio	10.9%

Source: 2014 Downtown Mason City Consumer Surveys. Top five responses shown.



HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES

Consumer survey results lend support for prospects to develop new housing of various styles in the downtown area.

Q: Would you consider living in Downtown Mason City?

Responses	
Yes	13.0%
Maybe	29.9%
I live downtown	2.7%

Source: 2014 Downtown Mason City Consumer Online Survey.

Those indicating they would consider living in the downtown expressed interest in a variety of housing styles, and in both owner- and renter-occupied units.

Q: What kind of housing in Downtown Mason City would you look for or consider?

Responses	
Apartment	18.2%
Loft	49.4%
Condo	46.8%
Townhouse	33.8%
Senior housing	16.9%

Source: 2014 Downtown Mason City Consumer Online Survey. Multiple responses allowed.

Some of the best prospects for new downtown housing might include units that are quite different from typical cookie-cutter housing styles and options— including styles that might take advantage of the unordinary dimensions, layouts and materials found in the upper levels of downtown commercial buildings to create distinguishable and even “funky” living and/or live & work spaces; and for higher-density condo, townhouse and mixed-use development at potential (and appropriate) redevelopment sites in the district and surrounding area.

Interest in loft style units, defined by open, flexible space and un-partitioned floor area, could offer exciting opportunities for developers of upper story residential space, especially since loft units are generally found to have the lowest construction cost of any rehab residential style.



DOWNTOWN PRIORITIES

Consumer and business survey respondents place a high value on possible efforts to create incentives for new and expanding businesses in the downtown area. Though the ranking of other items varies among the survey groups, the results also showed relatively strong support for efforts to stage additional festivals and events in the downtown area; to improve downtown streets, sidewalks, lighting, furnishing, green spaces, trails, etc.; and to restore and preserve the downtown’s historic character.

Question

Would you place a high, moderate or low priority on possible downtown Mason City enhancement efforts to:

Consumers (C) and Businesses (B) Rating as a “High Priority”

Enhancement Efforts	(C)	(B)
Create incentives for new and expanding businesses in the downtown area	69% (1)	66% (1)
Stage additional festivals and special events in the downtown area	61% (2)	56% (3)
Restore and preserve downtown Mason City’s historic character	52% (3)	52% (4)
Improve downtown streets, sidewalks, lighting, furnishings, green spaces, trails, etc.	51% (4)	59% (2)
Improve and/or create more housing in the downtown area	32% (5)	36% (5)

Source: 2014 Downtown Mason City Consumer and Business Surveys.

Input regarding priorities for the downtown district generally aligns with suggestions offered by consumer and business survey respondents when asked, “What is the first thing you would do to improve downtown Mason City?” Business improvement/development initiatives, dominated by business recruitment, ranked first, followed closely by parking and traffic-related subjects.

Consumers and businesses surveyed overwhelmingly identified features associated with the downtown’s streetscape, scenery architecture and character as things they love most or would never change, showing a great affection for the historic fabric of downtown and the need to maintain and enhance these assets.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Retail Targets

Market research findings provide general direction for various retail business types and merchandise lines that could be prime candidates and appropriate for expansion and recruitment in the Downtown Mason City District. The implementation of economic development strategies is part of a comprehensive, long-term enhancement program that emphasizes business retention efforts and a series of initiatives that will make downtown Mason City an even more attractive place to do business and invest.

Business types and merchandise lines that might be considered primary targets and candidates for expansion and recruitment, based on the existing business mix, trends in the marketplace, consumer and business surveys input and analysis of Esri retail data include:

- ▶ **Food Services and Drinking Places**
 - Full-Service Restaurants
 - Limited-Service Eating Places
 - Drinking Places (Alcoholic Beverages)
- ▶ **Miscellaneous Store Retailers**
 - Florists
 - Office Supplies, Stationery and Gifts
 - Used Merchandise Stores
 - Other Miscellaneous Store Retailers
- ▶ **Food and Beverage Stores**
 - Specialty Food Stores
 - Beer, Wine and Liquor Stores
- ▶ **Sporting Goods, Hobby, Books and Music Stores**
 - Sporting Goods/Hobby/Musical Instruments
 - Book, Periodical and Music Stores

Office and Service Uses

Office and service uses in the downtown Mason City area already play an important role in the district’s economy and sense of vitality and, predictably, will continue to do so in the future. These uses should continue to be encouraged to locate within the district. Where they are appropriate and applicable, Main Street and community development partners should work to locate these uses in buildings and spaces that are conducive to maintaining a strong sense of retail vibrancy throughout the Main Street district.

For more information contact:



Main Street Mason City
 9 North Federal Ave.
 Mason City, Iowa 50401
 Telephone: (641) 494-0003
 director@mainstreetmasoncity.org
 www.mainstreetmasoncity.org