

Historic West Des Moines Valley Junction Resident Association

Saturday November 6th, 2021

Why did you move to or stay in HWDM?

Themes:

- Affordability
- Small Town Feel in a Big City
- Character & Charm
- Walkability
- “Front Porch” Neighborhood
- Friendly People, Great Neighbors
- Tight-knit Community
- Neighbors Looking Out For Neighbors

Notes:

- Affordability was why we moved here, but we stayed for the people and small town feel
- Small and affordable homes with character and charm
- Opened business because of walkability, great people, great downtown
- Walkability, friendly people, yard for dog
- Wanted a slower pace town
- Like the local events
- Walk your dog or sit on front porch to meet people
- “Front porch neighborhood”
- Can get anywhere in town in 15 minutes
- Old neighborhood but new remodels happening every year
- Neighbors watch out for each other
- Small friendly neighborhood feel, know your neighbors
- Family legacy here – “Junction rats”
- Wonderful place to grow up, wonderful schools, “this place is home”
- Diversity accepted
- Relatively safe (“until last 5 years”)
- Quaint, Artsy , Diverse – “feels like grandma’s quilt”
- “Best kept secret in the Des Moines metro”
- “Valley Junction” in West Des Moines – small community within larger community
- 5th street was an affordable place you could take your kids, your mom, etc.

What has changed in HWDM for the better?

Themes:

- Capital Improvements: flood-gate, improved sidewalks, roads
- Money Well Invested: Winchester & Cat Cafe
- Park & Bike Improvements: Legion Park, new bike trail on 9th Street
- Valley Junction Resident Association: a voice for residents

Notes:

- Improved sidewalks to help walkability/accessibility
- Repaved streets and widened them a bit
- New development, following through on intentions
- Parks have improved
- Curb cuts for accessibility
- Neighborhood Association + Kevin – we have a local voice and someone listening to us
- Winchester & Cat Cafe – money well invested
- Flood-gate
- New apartment complex and distilleries/breweries south of railroad
- Vine has been repaved
- Capitol improvements to infrastructure
- Legion Park improvements
- New bike trail coming down 9th street

What has changed in HWDM for the worst?

Themes:

- Parking: no enforcement,
- New Development: does not fit the downtown, not what the residents want
- City Assistance: a lot of hoops to jump through for City assistance
- Preservation: preserve what we have instead of replacing with new buildings

Notes:

- 5th street not being developed for families or for locals
- New developments on 5th street do not match the character of the downtown
- Apartment buildings – 5th street is a shopping and dining district, no parking enforcement or tenant parking for tenants, construction constantly, doesn't match Valley Junction vibe
- Parking Issues – “we're locals, we know”
- Sewer system – aging sewers that can't even keep up with existing density, let alone new large developments
- City makes decisions for Valley Junction but doesn't listen to locals in the process
- Densest population, lowest per capita income – doesn't give us better services though, schools are filled, “why does all the low cost housing have to be in valley junction?”, gentrification happening, being taxed out of home
- All low income housing is in Valley Junction
- No historic preservation protecting what we have downtown
- Really need to focus on preserving our historic buildings – don't need to follow federal guidelines
- All buildings, whether “historical” or not, need to be maintained – We need to improve what we have instead of replacing it or adding new

- Why can't we have infill/ retrofitting in existing building?
- People and businesses ready to leave because of how the downtown is changing
- People stay but businesses and leadership keep turning over
- Not listening to residents and businesses throughout the planning process
- Entrance onto 4th and 5th needs improvement - incentivize property owners to improve their buildings
- Bike and Pedestrian Safety – need traffic calming
- Getting improvement funds from the City is a nightmare. So many hoops, need money to get money from the City – developers have the people, time, and deep pockets to get the money from the City
- Smaller developments are required to jump through hoops while big developers are not
- 5th street needs to be made the historic district that they've advertised for years
- Steering Committees – not a good representation of the residents that live here
- New apartment development was manipulated by the City – “We were sold one thing, but got another thing”
- Don't want to see just a sea of parking around the buildings – maybe enforcement is needed to help the parking situation?
- We can't compete with wealthy developers – being priced out

What do you see as the biggest challenge facing HWDM?

Notes:

- Duplexes/Landlord-Owned Properties/Rentals
 - Splitting a single-family house ruins homes
 - Re-converting duplexes to single family homes is so expensive
 - Not usually well maintained
 - Attracts more crime in the neighborhood
- Becoming less safe, more crime
- Losing historic downtown
 - Not maintaining what we have
 - Adding new buildings that don't fit
 - Types of businesses coming in are not for locals
- Sewer System – Needs updating, high cost to residents, smells

What is lacking in HWDM?

Themes:

- Green Space/Public Space Downtown
- Revitalization/Beautification
- Parking Enforcement
- Single-Family Home Ownership
- Improve Rental Inspection Program
- Representation of Residents

Notes:

- Green spaces – need water retention, flooding, public spaces for residents
- 5th street revitalization – need better landscaping and parking lot maintenance, broken concrete, trees removed, weeds, landscaping, etc.
- South side of railroad is overgrown and not nice to look at
- Reintroduction of tree canopy. On 3rd and 4th street
- Businesses that are considerate to a family neighborhood and locals
- Too many bars/restaurants – more family-oriented services and businesses
- “Feels like a downtown is being developed as a playground for rich people”
- Parking enforcement
- More focus on single-family home ownership
- Tenant to ownership pipeline to help encourage home and business ownership
- More assistance from the city for improvements, get rid of income requirements
- Improve rental inspection program, police enforcements, etc.
- More resident involvement in implementation
- Representation on the committee is not a true representation of the area
- Steering committee – conflicts of interest – power imbalance
- Residents vs Businesses
- Businesses come and go – residents live here

New Mayor Comments:

- Revitalizing, re-beautifying valley junction
- Meeting with banks for funding to help residents improve their homes
- Need to put more attention into the older things
- Coming up with design standards and guidelines for this district that will help maintain the character of VJ – committee guided
- No more apartment developments on 5th
- Just purchased site for green/retention
- Sliding scale assistance for residents
- Program for looking at dilapidated rentals – rehabbed by nonprofit, sold to low income
- Iowa finance authority program for first time home buyers – if you qualify for that program, City will double what they’ll give you
- \$231K rental rehab program – available for landlords