

## Staying The Course

The great author and inventor Charles Kettering once said “the world hates change, yet it is the only thing that has brought progress”. He was probably correct. Another famous comment claims “the definition of insanity is to keep doing the same things and expect a different outcome”. Whatever the famous motivational quote, change is something that many community betterment organizations claim to be about or seek. But, in no case is it easy or simple to accomplish.

This has certainly been the experience for the Pensacola Downtown Improvement Board (DIB). Over the last few years, it has undertaken the studies of how to improve the experience of downtown parking, how to make downtown retail uses more plentiful and successful, and how to attract more mixed-income housing. In each analytical analysis, the recommendations from the well-respected and highly experienced consultants have been to undertake a comprehensive multi-year implementation strategy to reach the desired conditions. All strategies involved doing many things differently in the downtown than we have done in the past. In short, each strategy recommended “changes” from the typical or norm in order to get to the desired condition.

The projected and anticipated outcomes from the proposed plans were deemed so desirable and foundational for future downtown prosperity that the DIB started shifting more and more of its human and financial resources towards implementation. Today, the DIB finds itself twenty months into a thirty-six month strategy to improve the experience of downtown parking for customers, clients, and visitors. Consequently, it has never been easier for patrons of downtown to find convenient places to park. Likewise, twenty-two months into a forty-eight month strategy for enhancing and increasing downtown retail offerings, it’s not hard to see the positive by-products of such efforts. Just slightly more than a year into the effort to attract more mixed-income housing into downtown, there are also some encouraging developments that are occurring. The responses and results from all of these actions have been encouraging to the DIB in its efforts to help Downtown Pensacola attracting more investment, more jobs, more residents, and more customers.

While much progress has been made; much more needs to still be done to reach the projected results and environment that just about all of us claim to desire. Towards that end, the DIB has again focused its resources for the coming fiscal year on critical implementation items from these various plans in an effort to move downtown even closer to the prized outcome. To continue its commitment to a sustainable and vibrant twenty-four hour downtown in this difficult economic climate, the DIB has had to make some hard choices with regards to programs and activities for the coming year. In order to stay committed to the big-picture outcomes the various focused strategies predict, several long-standing activities have been discontinued because of lack of funding and several desired new activities, not specifically prescribed in the development strategies, have been omitted from the program of work and the budget because of lack of human or financial resources. These were difficult decisions which were discussed and debated for several months by the DIB committees comprised of

downtown business and property owners and the board itself. In the end, the vast majority of those actively involved with the DIB concurred that the greatest gains for downtown can be made by continuing the new strategic and focused paths instead of continuing to commit manpower and/or funding to events and activities that were enjoyable but did not measurably move the downtown towards a better tomorrow.

As a result, the goals and priorities of the DIB for FY 2010 are as follows:

- 1.) Continue implementation of the Downtown Retail Strategy
- 2.) Increase visits to downtown by tourists
- 3.) Increase residential offerings and occupancy, and
- 4.) Increase community awareness about the value of downtown.

Change is hard for most people because it causes us to act or think outside of our comfort zones. Downtown Pensacola is a neat and comfortable place already. The DIB believes that it can be a vibrant and dynamic destination. But to get there, we have to be willing to do some things differently. The DIB is stepping up to the plate to do just that.