THE REVIEW
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PlacePlans, a demonstration and technical assistance program developed in 2012 under the auspices of the statewide MIplace Partnership, with lead sponsorship from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. It focuses on assisting cities, selected through a competitive process, with the development of visionary yet realistic strategies to redevelop a key walkable, mixed-use area of their community. The League, along with faculty and students from Michigan State University School of Planning, Design and Construction and MSU Extension, worked with community leaders, residents, anchor institutions, and expert consultants to bring the best practices in placemaking and civic engagement to bear in a customized way for each of the 22 participating cities.

This article is the continuation of an ongoing series, PlacePlans: Where Are They Now?, which checks in on the progress in PlacePlans cities, with a particular eye on the lessons learned that can apply to communities everywhere.

**A New Vision For Downtown Cadillac**

The City of Cadillac embarked upon a bold new placemaking initiative when the city’s community development director sent a letter of interest to the Michigan Municipal League asking to participate in the 2013-2014 PlacePlans program. This one action eventually led to a partnership between the League and Michigan State University to design a brand new public plaza. The plaza would become the centerpiece of a set of five placemaking venues which would become the newly branded Cadillac Commons.
The city’s partnership with MSU and MML produced an effective public outreach campaign which provided many opportunities for community input from stakeholder interviews, public meetings, and a design charrette. State agencies including MDOT, MDEQ, and MDNR were also invited to these meetings.

On July 15, 2014, MSU staff made a presentation to approximately 100 members of the Cadillac community on placemaking design concepts which could be pursued to transform the center of downtown Cadillac. These concepts focused on an area that was comprised of a performing arts pavilion, City Park, and our largest downtown parking lot.

Community support was so overwhelming for this placemaking project that the city, under the leadership of Mayor Carla Filkins and City Manager Marcus Peccia, mobilized an implementation strategy. After soliciting proposals from design firms, the city selected Prein&Newhof to do the final design of the plaza project and perform construction management. The project included redesigning the city’s central parking lot, burying all public and private utilities, and adding a public plaza with amenities including a splash pad, fireplace, and synthetic ice skating rink. The project was initiated in the spring of 2016, with substantial completion by the end of the year.

Expanding The Scope
Innovation sometimes means adjusting on the fly, keeping what works and reworking what doesn’t. The original scope of the PlacePlan was limited to City Park and The Plaza. Based on feedback from participants in the early visioning sessions, it was titled “Heritage Plaza.” However, after shopping the Heritage Plaza concept to community supporters and potential funders, city leaders found that the name was not catching on, despite strong support for the overall concept. At the same time, they recognized opportunities to incorporate other potential projects in the adjacent area. With input from community stakeholders, they quickly pivoted to a rebrand with the more inclusive name “Cadillac Commons” and expanded the geographic scope to include The Market, Pavilion, and The Trailhead.

The plaza project was the third of five placemaking projects, the other two existing projects being the Pavilion and City Park. The city continues to aggressively pursue the remaining projects—The Market and The Trailhead. Plans for The Market, which call for housing two farmers market groups, were bid out in March, with construction expected to begin later this year. The city is currently applying for grants to construct White Pine Trailhead in 2018.

Cadillac’s receipt of a PlacePlans grant, and its subsequent pursuit of additional placemaking projects to complete Cadillac Commons, has resulted in a great deal of community pride and become the springboard from which many of our continuing downtown economic development activities are originating.

Lessons Learned
In looking back on the project, we found the following elements were key to its success:

• Initiate the design of the project with a quality group of development partners.
• Develop early community support. Special attention was paid to establishing times, locations, and amenities present when scheduling public meetings.
• Establish a formal plan for fundraising and solicitation of grants. Identification of local foundations or other community organizations that may assist in financing of the project is important.
• Establish a communication plan to keep the community and locally impacted businesses abreast of all new project developments and schedules. Consider establishing a website and using Facebook or other social media platforms.
• Schedule progress meetings to assist in keeping the project on schedule.
• Retain a firm which not only has a good reputation for design but also has experience as an on-site construction manager.
• Provide extra time in your construction schedule if your project involves utility work (either above or below ground) due to the potential for utility companies possibly being diverted to other critical work elements.

John Wallace is the City of Cadillac’s community development director. You may contact him at 231-775-0181 or jwallace@cadillac-mi.net.