



## Greater Downtown Dayton Plan Update

**Downtown Dayton Partnership: Kristen Wicker**

**Category: Special Events & Observances, nonprofit, No. 5b**

### Research

In 2012, the Downtown Dayton Partnership (DDP) wanted to provide a community update on progress made as part of the Greater Downtown Dayton Plan, a long-term strategic blueprint for the future of Dayton's urban core. The Plan also is an economic development strategy for the Dayton region, as research showed urban redevelopment increasingly is linked to a region's overall economic health and quality of life. The DDP launched the Plan in May 2010 as part of its annual meeting and felt it was important to give a comprehensive update two years into the implementation cycle as part of its 2012 annual meeting.

The DDP also felt it was important to present that update in a fun and unusual way — and in a manner that would convey the excitement and momentum that had been taking place in downtown Dayton since the Plan's launch. Recognizing that an update on a strategic economic development plan isn't exactly the sexiest topic, the DDP felt it was critical to focus its research on how to give that update some pizzazz.

DDP staff began research efforts by reading about, and in some cases watching video coverage of, similar updates by a variety of local and regional economic development organizations, such as the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce and Dayton Development Coalition. In addition, the DDP looked at similar work done by other downtown organizations, using a comprehensive database of websites and contacts provided by the International Downtown Association.

Of the dozens of strategic plan updates DDP staff reviewed, all were the type of presentation the DDP wanted to avoid: corporate, conservative and, to be honest, just plain dull. Therefore, the DDP pulled together a team of marketing and communications professionals from its partners, including the City of Dayton, Five Rivers MetroParks and Citywide

Development Corporation, along with some representatives of downtown marketing firms, to evaluate this research and brainstorm some possible options for a Greater Downtown Dayton Plan update that would be more lively.

The group determined a public event would be the best way to update the community on the Plan for several reasons: First, the Plan was launched in 2010 with a successful, well-received public event attended by more than 150 people. The group felt that success showed the community would support another event. Second, the group believed an event would generate excitement and strengthen community buy-in for the Plan and its recommendations. Third, an event would be better suited to the type of energetic Plan update the DDP had in mind. Finally, hosting an event would allow for tie-in to another event at RiverScape MetroPark, downtown Dayton's riverfront park, called First Friday @ 5. This free after-work concert was one of the Plan's recommendations that had been implemented since its launch.

At the time of research, Dayton had become one of the most recent cities to host Pecha Kucha Night. These events, hosted at hundreds of cities worldwide, are based on a fast-paced, entertaining presentation style developed in Tokyo. ("Pecha kucha" means "chit chat" in Japanese.) Presenters are allowed 20 Power Point slides that automatically advance after 20 seconds. DDP staff felt this might be an appropriate style to use in the Plan update and attended a Pecha Kucha Night in Dayton as part of the research process. The staff reported back to the larger group and determined this would, indeed, be a good presentation style to emulate for the Plan update.

## Planning

Once research resulted in the development of the overall idea — a public event using Pecha Kucha-style presentations — planning for the event began in earnest.

The DDP had two primary target audiences for the event. The first was the DDP's constituents, which consist of property and business owners in the Downtown Dayton Special Improvement District, as well as the constituents of partner organizations and other downtown stakeholders. Second, the DDP wanted to communicate with and attract the general public to meet the event goals of increasing community awareness about the importance of the Plan and more.

Selecting a date and time was easy: Holding the Plan update event toward the end of the business day on Friday, June 1, allowed it to coincide with the 2012 season kick off of the First Friday @ 5 concert series, which started at 5 p.m. at RiverScape MetroPark. In addition, while planning was underway, the silent portion of a fundraising campaign to raise money for a signature project in the Greater Downtown Dayton Plan — River Run, the removal of a dangerous low dam and construction of an in-river paddling attraction, the next phase of development at RiverScape MetroPark — was wrapping up. It was decided an announcement about the conclusion of that portion of the River Run fundraising campaign and a thank-you to the community and corporate donors would be included in the Plan update event.

This made selecting a location for the event easy: the Engineers Club of Dayton. Its location across the street from RiverScape would make it convenient for people to walk to the First Friday @ 5 concert afterward. The facility had the necessary amenities, including a 400-seat auditorium and available parking. In addition, several items representing Dayton history are displayed in the club, which seemed fitting for an event about a Plan that calls on building on Dayton's past to strengthen its future. Finally, the Engineers Club building has a great deal of architectural and historical interest, and the general public rarely gets a look inside, which the DDP felt would give the event extra interest.

With such basics as the date, time and location planned, the DDP developed these objectives for the Plan update event:

- increase the community's awareness about the Greater Downtown Dayton Plan and its projects
- improve the community's perception of downtown Dayton

- host an event attended by at least 300 people, double the number attending the 2010 Plan launch event
- receive media coverage of the event by the daily newspaper and at least two local TV stations
- create at least one video of the event that could be distributed to those unable to attend the event

The DDP next developed a budget for the event. The annual DDP budget allocated \$4,000 for an annual meeting, most of which usually is spent on facility rental and food. Yet the Plan update was not going to be a typical DDP annual meeting, since it would be open to the public and therefore much larger, and since plans called for it to be a more significant event than a typical annual meeting. For example, the DDP wanted to have some displays printed showing maps of the Greater Downtown Dayton Plan area and renderings of projects underway and in the planning phases — items that would not be part of a typical annual meeting expenditure.

The DDP was able to pull funds from its marketing and promotions and special events budgets to increase the annual meeting budget to \$6,000. While some line items came in higher than anticipated, the event overall still came in under budget at \$5,526.13. Part of this was because of cost savings from partnerships. For example, the DDP was able to use some displays printed by Chaminade-Julienne Catholic High School and work with FilmDayton to find a student videographer whose fee was much lower than a professional.

## Execution

The Greater Downtown Dayton Plan is organized in broad areas, including housing, economic development, placemaking, arts and entertainment, and outdoor recreation/active lifestyles. It was determined the presentations also would be organized in these areas. In keeping with planning an event that was not your parents' annual meeting, the DDP did not want all the usual suspects and typical spokespeople giving presentations. Rather, the goal was to find volunteers who lived and emulated their topics.

A brainstorming meeting to create a list of possible presenters was held, and then DDP staff members began asking the first-choice presenters if they'd be willing to volunteer their time. Fortunately, all of the first choices agreed to participate. However, the DDP did not want to completely leave out the community leaders who so often present at annual meetings. Therefore, it was decided these folks would be asked to briefly introduce the topic areas and the speakers. The final lineup was:

- **Introduction** by Dr. Michael Ervin, brainchild of the Greater Downtown Dayton Plan, chair of the Plan's implementation team and of the Downtown Dayton Partnership, downtown resident, and avid user of downtown's amenities and regular at businesses.
- **Economic Development:** Introduction by Dayton City Manager and downtown resident Tim Riordan; presentation by downtown resident Buddy LaChance of Premier Health Partners, which recently had made a major downtown investment by purchasing an office tower for its corporate headquarters, and Chris Wire, owner of a small marketing firm with national clients, Real Art Design Group.
- **Placemaking:** Introduction again by Dr. Ervin; presentation by Teresa Gasper, longtime developer and renovator of housing in one of greater downtown Dayton's most prominent historical neighborhoods.
- **Housing:** Introduction by the Home Builders Association of Dayton's President Walt Hibner, who had been an active member of a team promoting downtown Dayton living; presentation by downtown condo resident Shanon Potts and Colleen Ryan, owner of a home in another of greater downtown Dayton's most prominent historical neighborhoods.

- **Cycling & Active Lifestyles:** Introduction of Dayton City Commissioner Nan Whaley, key advocate and chair of the City's Bike-Walk Committee; presentation by Ned Pennock of CH2MHILL, which recently had donated \$10,000 toward the installation of 100 new bike racks downtown and himself an avid cyclist who bikes to work.
- **Arts & Entertainment:** Introduction by Montgomery County Commissioner Debbie Lieberman, a member of the County's Arts and Cultural District team; presentations by avid users of downtown's amenities, regulars at downtown events and businesses, and downtown residents Maha Kashani and Duante Beddingfield.

A DDP staff person was assigned to meet with each team and develop an outline for each of the presentations. The DDP had a list of items that needed to be covered but wanted each presenter to be able to infuse his or her personality into the presentations as well. While the DDP developed and created the bulk of the Pecha Kucha-style Power Points, including writing the presenters' scripts, many of the presenters did add their own flair. For example, Ned Pennock contributed some images and told stories about commuting to work downtown. Shanon Potts and Colleen Ryan also contributed photos of their downtown properties and talked about why they love living downtown.

Still, developing the presentations was one of the biggest challenges with the event. DDP staff quickly learned that fitting all the necessary information into 20 slides was more difficult than they thought. This meant it took nearly three times longer to actually finish the presentations than had been anticipated. This challenge was addressed by allowing two DDP staff members to come in and work all day during the Memorial Day holiday and make up the time later in June after the event. Also, because the presentations were so closely timed, it was decided to hold a dress rehearsal with all the presenters two days before the event to run through the presentations and scripts. Doing so ended up being a huge plus, as all the presenters felt more comfortable and some tweaks were able to be made to presentations.

Organizing the River Run announcement also was an important part of the process. Fundraising for the campaign began with a \$1 million challenge grant from the James M. Cox Foundation, part of Cox Media Group (CMG) Ohio. DDP staff worked with CMG Ohio staff to ensure its president, Julia Wallace, would be on hand to make the announcement that the silent portion of the campaign had ended and raised \$3.8 million. DDP staff also contacted representatives from all the community and corporate donors who had contributed to ensure they would be available to attend the event and receive an official thank-you certificate and be publicly thanked for their contributions.

To ensure the event would reflect the increased energy, excitement and momentum happening in downtown Dayton since the Plan's launch, DDP staff began brainstorming ways to set up the event that would achieve that goal. Taking a page from popular Dayton Dragons baseball games, where music is used to energize the crowd and enliven the games, the DDP contracted with a DJ to play songs as each presenter walked up to the stage. Presenters were given the opportunity to select their own songs, and the DDP selected some others that fit each of the Plan's areas.

Other activities designed to enliven the Plan update were the addition of a photo booth, with such props as lifejackets and paddles to highlight the River Run announcement. The photo booth was later moved to RiverScape, where people could use it at the First Friday @ 5 concert. Borrowing an idea from a CEOs for Cities conference attended by the DDP president, an artist was hired to create visual representations at the event of the material being presented. This turned out to be a popular addition, as many attendees reported they enjoyed watching art being created as they watched. Finally, balloon towers were used throughout the event area to create a fun, party-like atmosphere.

To publicize and promote the Plan, the DDP began by developing some strategic messaging that would convey the number of projects underway as part of the Plan. A simple headline — What's up with the Plan? — was selected, along with a design featuring photos and renderings of Plan-related projects arranged in a way to communicate progress and activity. This messaging and design were used in a postcard, and 3,000 copies were printed and distributed to downtown

businesses, as well as mailed to key downtown leaders and stakeholders. An e-blast also was developed and sent to business and community leaders, along with community partners, and the DDP asked them to send the information to their employees and networks.

In addition, the DDP planned a Facebook promotion targeted to its more than 3,000 followers, many of whom live, work and play downtown. For the three weeks leading up to the event, posts were planned that depicted various topics/projects that would be featured at the Plan update event through a mix of photos and trivia questions. The first person that provided an accurate answer to each post was entered in a drawing to win a prize (\$50 gift certificate to popular downtown restaurant Olive). A media alert was sent to all Dayton-area media in advance of the event as well, and DDP called key reporters and editors to personally invite them to attend and pitch coverage of the event.

All the communications asked for an RSVP to the DDP office. More than 10 days prior to the event, the number of RSVPs already had exceeded the available seating in the auditorium. To address this challenge, DDP staff began planning for an overflow area at the Engineers Club, with a live feed running from the auditorium to a nearby conference room. With such a large crowd expected, DDP staff carefully mapped out where everything for the event would be placed at the Engineers Club, down to the placement of welcome signs and the various displays.

## Results

The Plan update was completed within budget and on a very aggressive schedule. The DDP met and exceeded its objectives and was extremely pleased with the outcome of the event. More than 450 people attended the event, a standing-room-only crowd that included a diverse group from the community. The *Dayton Daily News*, two local TV stations, a local web magazine and public radio station covered the event and ran or aired feature-length stories about the Plan and/or the River Run funding announcement. Stories also appeared in local media about two news items announced during the Plan update event: the launch of a mobile app for downtown and a planned renovation project at the Dayton Art Institute. In addition, we were able to secure a videographer to record all segments of the event, producing multiple videos that later were posted on YouTube and linked to from the DDP Facebook page.

Perhaps the only down side to the entire event was the weather was quite chilly on June 1 so people did not spend as much time as hoped at the First Friday @ 5 concert after the Plan update — although no amount of research or planning could have prevented that.

A great deal of DDP staff time went into all these efforts and the event cost significantly more than a typical DDP annual meeting, but the return on that investment has been very positive and most certainly worth the expenditure. While many of the event goals cannot be quantified, the type of frequent and positive feedback the DDP continues to receive regarding downtown since the event was held indicates those goals about improving perceptions and increasing community awareness were met. Those comments are heard during visits with business and community leaders, and since the Plan update was held, more positive news stories about downtown have appeared in local media than typically would be the case. In addition, news coverage about river development projects, including River Run, being used as an economic development tool appeared in the *Dayton Daily News* and on the local NBC affiliate shortly after the Plan update event. Today, as implementation of the Greater Downtown Dayton Plan continues, DDP staff still hears positive comments about the Plan and the event.