

# Ten steps to creating great streets

Streetscapes create memorable places, unique identity and economic development.

**1 Visioning** is a documented process that defines “who we are” and “who we want to be.” This is an opportunity for everyone to provide input and generate ideas no matter how realistic, quirky, or pie-in-the-sky. Visioning creates participation and buy-in, allowing everyone to see how their idea fits with everyone else’s ideas. Tools include: brainstorming sessions, sketches and photo-renderings.

**2 Paving** is defined as treatment of the ground plane with different materials, textures, patterns and motifs. Different materials can influence a person’s perception of a space:

- Gravel: rural or park-like, informal, rough
- Brick: urban, traditional, decorative
- Concrete: urban, non-descript
- Colored/Patterned Concrete: urban, artistic
- Asphalt: urban, vehicular

Paving can be used to define space and guide movement. Consider space requirements for people to walk, linger, sit or dine. Combine materials with site amenities to create design palette/character of a place. New paving or well-maintained paving suggests a sense of pride and economic prosperity.

**3 Lighting** creates memorable places, day and night. Good lighting enhances security and increases opportunity to use spaces 24 hours a day. Different types of lighting include: flood, pedestrian, accent, street, landscape and architectural.

**4 Building Façades** represent the outside walls of streetscapes. There should be a complementary relationship between buildings and streets, such as the uniform relationship seen in historic downtowns. Possible improvements could include façade renovation, awnings, window decoration, identifiable entries and pedestrian-friendly signage.

**5 Way-finding** is not just signage anymore! Consider way-finding as a complete package of signs, markers, monuments and signals. Way-finding helps establish “where I am,” “where I’m going” and “what else is around.” Think about what it should look like and how the different elements should work together.

**6 Parking** needs must be balanced with the various needs of the people including safe pedestrian areas, places to meet or proportional use of space. While people prefer parking close to their destination, they will walk if the destination and pedestrian experiences are enjoyable. Coupled with lighting and site amenities, parking can be used to successfully transition between vehicular-only and pedestrian-only areas. Parking “zones” can be created on-street using paving.

The jury is still out on parking meters. Generally they are used to force turnover of parking space on a predictable schedule. They are usually needed when there is a perceived shortage of parking. Communities with ample visible parking opportunities can do without meters. Surface parking lots may eliminate the need for on-street spaces. Parallel, on-street parking creates a buffer between pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Angled, on-street parking creates a wider buffer but is less efficient.



*The streets of downtown Davenport.  
Photo courtesy of Shive-Hattery/Boyd-Fitzgerald.*

**7 Site Amenities** are what people usually think of when discussing streetscapes. There are many different furnishings and fixtures options:

- lights
- waste receptacles
- ash urns
- kiosks
- planters
- street signs
- benches
- tables

As with way-finding, you need to consider the complete package of site amenities when planning a streetscape. Size, form and materials should be complementary. Use of one or two defining characteristics (e.g. powder-coated metal, concrete, wrought iron, traditional, contemporary) will allow phased installation and replacement as needed.

**8 People** must drive your streetscape design. Site amenities, lighting, way-finding and paving will attract and encourage people to use your streetscape spaces. Creating places for people for all hours of the day is a sign of life, action and drives economic prosperity.

**9 Maintenance** personnel need to be involved early in the design and development process to ensure their input and buy-in. It is critical to ensure the maintenance budget covers both ongoing and future maintenance (replacement) needs. Consider the life-cycle costs of design decisions.

**10 Funding** is available for streetscape projects, especially when the projects are tied to other improvements (e.g. building renovation, sewer construction, road widening). Several funding options for cities include:

- Local option sales tax - an additional percentage of tax added on to purchases made within that city. A majority of the eligible electors in that city must approve the measure in a county wide election.
- Capital Improvement Program (CIP) - A CIP is a long-range plan, usually four to six years, which identifies capital projects and equipment purchases, provides a planning schedule and identifies options for financing the plan. The plan provides a link between a city's comprehensive and strategic plans and the city's annual budget.
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts - Tax increment financing (TIF) is a method of reallocating property tax revenues that are a result of an increase in taxable valuation above a "base valuation" figure within a tax increment area. Until the tax increment debt has been repaid, tax revenues produced must be spent by that jurisdiction for projects within that area.
- Self-Supported Municipal Improvement Districts (SSMID) - Businesses that own property in the district agree to pay additional property taxes and those funds are pooled strictly for the use of community improvements within the district.

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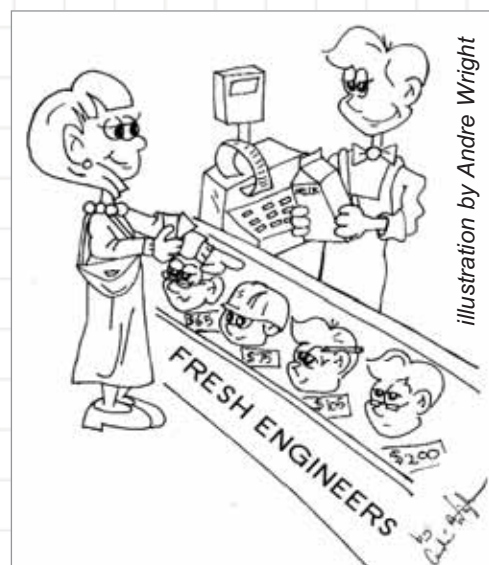
*This building façade and streetscape of downtown Fort Dodge shows the blending of the old architecture with the new development.*

## How should a city chose professional engineering services? Is picking an engineering consultant like picking apples?

Apples are apples; they are a commodity. All things being equal, you get them at the closest store, at the lowest price. When needing engineering services, this is not buying a commodity. Selecting the right engineer will make a difference for your community.

Here are several key things to look for in an engineering firm:

- They have focused expertise. Taste-test the apples. Do they have a good record of municipal engineering? Are they well referred by others?
- They want a relationship, not a project. Be wary of the firm chasing projects. Hire firms that are truly interested in your community and care about a long-term relationship with you.
- They will be an extension of your staff. Look for consultants who view themselves as extensions of your city team. Will they respond at a moments notice? Do they care as much about your success as you do?
- They go beyond design. Your engineering firm should be your trusted advisor and bring more than design to the table including funding information and specialty services like landscape architecture.
- They know their limits. A good consultant will tell you if a project is more than they can handle, is outside their expertise or is not something they are comfortable doing.



*illustration by Andre Wright*