



## DOWNTOWN BROOKINGS

January 27, 2025

Economic Development Merge Committee  
Attn Co-Chairs Nick Wendell and Tom Fishback  
520 3rd Street | Brookings, SD 57006

Dear Economic Development Merge Committee,

Downtown Brookings plays a vital role in the economic, cultural, and social fabric of our community. While we are the newest organization within the economic partnership, the downtown neighborhood has long been, and continues to be, an essential driver of a strong, welcoming, and vibrant city for businesses, residents, and visitors alike. Our organization uniquely blends elements of economic and community development with tourism by combining new and existing business support with visitor and event marketing, all while weaving in placemaking and storytelling to create a distinct sense of place.

As the Brookings' economic development entities merger is examined, we want to emphasize the unique opportunities, challenges, and priorities that should be considered when reviewing how Downtown Brookings fits in. These insights capture both the strengths and the needs of Downtown, ensuring its voice and value remain a piece of the conversation. Below, we outline key considerations as we work together to build a stronger, more unified vision for our community.

We see the following opportunities for stability, growth, and increased value within a merged organization.

### Improved Services:

- Better data collection and assessment to inform priorities.
- Enhance customer experience and service delivery.
- Increase awareness of Downtown priorities and focus.
- Strengthening city-wide identity while maintaining Downtown's unique personality.

### Operational Improvements:

- Focus on Downtown initiatives rather than administrative operations.
- Achieve efficiencies through unified leadership and shared resources.
- Shared contracts and financial benefits (e.g., discounts, services).
- Implement more robust software and CRM systems.

### Stronger Collaboration:

- Improve communication among partners, both internal and external.
- Leverage broader expertise and cross-training opportunities.
- Foster professional development and employee support.
- "Get in the know" faster to assist people more effectively.

### Enhanced Funding:

- Diversified funding sources.
- Access to better funding opportunities through partnerships.

While there are many opportunities within a merged group, we'd be remiss not to mention our organization's concerns with a larger entity that is not focused specifically on the downtown area.

Identity Preservation:

- Risk of losing Downtown's unique voice in a larger organization.
- Possible inability to maintain Downtown's distinct personality in marketing efforts.

Operational Challenges:

- Potential for added bureaucracy, approvals, and oversight (red tape).
- Potential inability to maintain Downtown business-specific involvement and committee engagement.
- Risk of dilution in focus and priorities over time.

Perception Issues:

- Ensuring buy-in from those who may not understand Downtown's importance.
- Addressing concerns like "What about everybody else?"

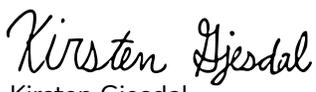
Autonomy Risks:

- Maintaining the ability to remain scrappy, agile, and autonomous in decision-making.

So with these opportunities and challenges in mind, we have devised a list of priorities for our organization to share what is most important to continuing successful work in Downtown Brookings.

- Preservation of Values: Commitment to remain an organization that is community-minded, dynamic, resourceful, committed, collaborative, and dedicated to upholding integrity.
- Downtown Focus: Ensure effort and a staff member are dedicated to needs unique to Downtown.
- Physical Location: Maintain a permanent presence in the Downtown neighborhood to remain relevant with our business partners, to be "in the know," and to remain a constant and approachable resource.
- Main Street America Model: Preserve and prioritize the MSA framework to guide Downtown efforts as a practical and adaptable system that has shown success in our community and hundreds of others nationwide. The framework impacts the Downtown Brookings neighborhood through four areas: Promotion, Organization, Economic Vitality, and Design.
- Identity Preservation: Uphold the approachable, welcoming, and historic identity of our brand and neighborhood.
- Autonomy: Maintain the ability to react quickly, think creatively, and pursue unconventional initiatives that bring energy and character to Downtown.
- Small Business Focus: Continued targeted assistance to small businesses.
- Understanding of Purpose: Training and awareness of the importance of a healthy downtown for all future staff and board members.

The Downtown Brookings neighborhood is a vibrant, dynamic space that embodies the spirit of our community, and the Downtown Brookings organization is proud to play a part in sharing that story. We look forward to further discussions on how a merged entity can propel and uplift the assets of the Brookings area, including the downtown district and our non-profit entity.

  
Kirsten Gjesdal

Executive Director of Downtown Brookings, on behalf of the Downtown Brookings Board of Directors:

Tom Fishback, President

Kerrie Vilhauer, Secretary

Nathaniel Condelli, Vice President

Renee Bauman, Past President

Laci Thompson, Treasurer

Samantha Beckman