ENHANCING WICHITA'S QUALITY OF PLACE: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

By Emily Barnwell

Heather Schroeder, the new executive director of Downtown Wichita, will lead the Partnership's strategic priority of quality of place.

"I feel so fortunate to be in Wichita, serving in this role. I look forward to connecting with Wichitans and working together to build this world-class city from the inside out," said Schroeder.

Schroeder is overseeing the strategic initiatives focused on downtown Wichita's economic vitality, quality of life and cultural richness. This is a key pillar in the greater Wichita region's ongoing growth and economic success.

Proven Leader in Downtown Revitalization

Schroeder comes to the Partnership and Downtown Wichita with an impressive track record including nine years leading the economic development team of the Downtown Committee of Syracuse, Inc. She was instrumental in connecting developers and prospective business owners to the resources they needed to succeed.

In addition to maintaining a comprehensive database of all downtown properties, Schroeder oversaw the annual budget for streetscape improvements. She sought out creative ways to connect the eight different neighborhoods within downtown Syracuse through consistent street furnishings, lighting, holiday programming and a downtown flower program.

She envisions similar programs to enhance Wichita's thriving core.

"Downtown Wichita has some great opportunities to tie together areas of activity so the whole district feels vibrant, and I look forward to partnering on more "placemaking" projects," Schroeder explained.

Placemaking Overview

Alley Doors, 2020

Gallery Alley, 2021

Front Porch Project, 2022

jQuery(document).ready(function() { console.log('1'); jQuery(".image-260x150").find(".centered-column") .addClass("uk-width-1-2") .addClass("uk-width-1-4@s") .removeClass("uk-width-1-2@s"); });

Short-Term and Long-Term Goals

Schroeder, who started her role in mid-August, has already begun thoughtful work to ensure that downtown is clean, welcoming and well-maintained.

Her first priority is to establish an additional maintenance plan for downtown to enhance the work the City of Wichita already provides in the central business district. This also includes working with property owners to activate vacant storefronts and installing additional lighting and artwork to maintain the district's vibrant streetscape.

"Because this is such a well-used and highly visible part of the city, we need to put our best foot forward at all times. Locals and visitors alike deserve for the heart of the city to be beautiful," Schroeder said.

In the long term, Schroeder envisions a focus on evolving downtown to meet the needs of a changing population. This includes providing a walkable neighborhood for all individuals.

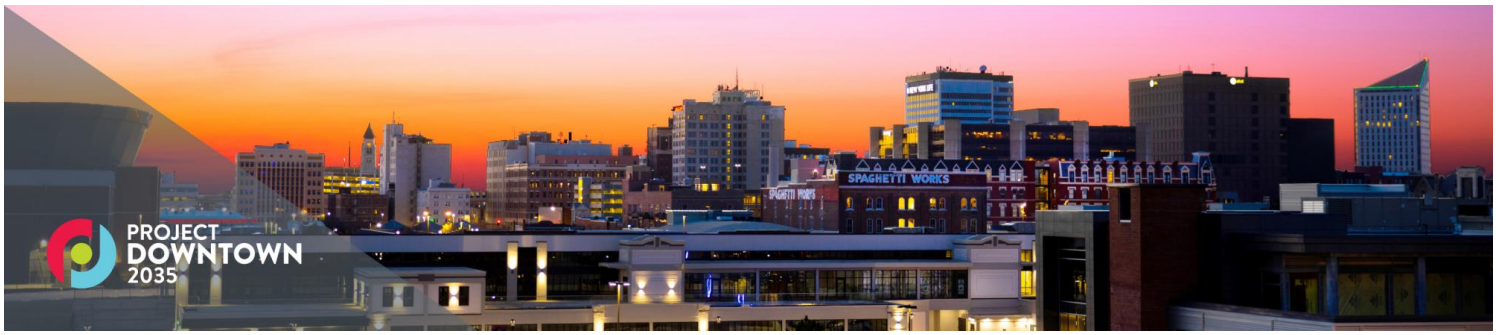
"We have to look carefully at the way we design our streets, to ensure people of all ages and abilities, on foot, on bikes, and in cars, all have options to get around comfortably and safely. That means providing more transportation options and filling in missing amenities like pharmacies and grocery stores that provide a complete day-to-day experience," she added.

Fresh Perspective

Schroeder has quickly fallen in love with Wichita and the individuals who call the region home.

"Wichita loves the arts! The first thing I noticed turning onto Douglas were the bronze statues – followed by murals, the Naftzger Park stage, Gallery Alley. Where there's art, there's energy!" she enthusiastically noted.

The midcentury pottery lover who also lives downtown promises to bring that same energy to her new role. She is excited about everything from storefront activation to outdoor maintenance but is most eager to get involved with the Project Downtown 2035 project.

Project Downtown 2035 is a 10-year visionary plan to drive continued catalytic investment in Wichita's core. It builds upon the success of Project Downtown which drove more than $1.7 billion in investment and created an estimated $760 million pipeline.

"This is an important next step in Wichita's growth chapter," she said. "We're looking forward to robust participation from the community on how they want to see Wichita evolve."