

Arts-based Community Development Investment for downtown Ottumwa
Main Street Ottumwa one of 89 National Endowment for the Arts Our Town projects selected nationwide

[Ottumwa, IA] -- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Chairman Jane Chu announced 89 awards totaling \$6.89 million supporting projects across the nation through the NEA's Our Town program. Main Street Ottumwa, in partnership with the Ottumwa Area Arts Council and Iowa Economic Development Authority's Main Street Iowa program, is one of the recommended organizations for a grant of \$50,000 to enhance creative placemaking efforts in downtown Ottumwa. The NEA received 274 eligible applications for Our Town this year and will make grants ranging from \$25,000 to \$100,000.

"The arts reflect the vision, energy, and talent of America's artists and arts organizations," said NEA Chairman Jane Chu. "The National Endowment for the Arts is proud to support organizations such as Main Street Ottumwa and Main Street Iowa, to cultivate vitality in their communities through the arts."

Main Street Ottumwa will partner with The Better Block Foundation to facilitate a "train-the-trainer" workshop with the Main Street Iowa network, local arts organizations, public health officials, and planning professionals to integrate creative placemaking into their work. Training resources will be tested through a demonstration project in downtown Ottumwa and disseminated statewide. The main workshop, to be held in downtown Ottumwa in October, expects to draw over 100 Main Street, public health, community development, and arts professionals.

"The hands-on Main Street Ottumwa Better Block project will serve as a "living charrette" that engages our community on the street to help use visualize and experience potential impacts of strategies such as complete streets, public art, and pop-up shops by implementing improvements in a quicker, lighter, cheaper approach" says Fred Zesiger, Main Street Ottumwa Executive Director. "This supports Ottumwa's vision, while having statewide impact. The project's timing is perfect for Ottumwa to leverage the greatest placemaking impact from upcoming downtown investments."

The Better Block Ottumwa project will kick off on the evening of July 24th with a public forum to incorporate the Ottumwa community in the specific project development and provide interactive information about the Better Block process.

In addition to NEA funding, this initiative is supported by Main Street Ottumwa, City of Ottumwa, Ottumwa Regional Legacy Foundation, Main Street Iowa/Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA), University of Iowa Business Leadership Network, National Association of Realtors, South East Iowa Regional Board of Realtors, Community First Credit Union, and Peoples State Bank.

"Ottumwa is demonstrating statewide leadership in downtown development, innovative thinking and creative placemaking," commented Debi Durham, director of the Iowa Economic Development Authority. "The Main Street Iowa program is excited to join Ottumwa on this initiative that brings together many diverse partners to encourage new ways of thinking about economic development in our downtowns."

For a complete list of projects recommended for Our Town grant support, please visit the NEA web site at www.arts.gov. For more information on this project, please contact Fred Zesiger at director@mainstreetottumwa.com.