

Downtown Monroe Festival Lot

Presentation of Concepts and
Public Engagement Process

City Council
May 13, 2025



Background

The idea of a “Festival Lot” was first proposed by the Monroe Hispanic community in focus group discussions for the 2008 Downtown Plan to host community gatherings, festivals, and cultural events. Over time the concept of a “festival lot” evolved to refer to a flexible public space that could serve multiple functions throughout the year. Some of these functions included an outdoor gathering space, public parking, and public restrooms.



Background

The 2008 Downtown Master Plan includes mention of a potential "Festival Lot" to be developed somewhere in or near Downtown Monroe.

“A Festival Lot can promote multiple uses in a flexible public space. This type of feature can serve primarily as a fully functional surface but may be closed off for special events. Special paving and bollards often delineate the boundaries of Festival Lots. They frequently include landscaping at the edge to provide shade for the events and power supplies at key locations. At event times, Festival Lots are closed to traffic and transform into public gathering space for special events such as markets, concerts or other festivals.”

Union Bank Property – Existing Conditions

In December 2023, the City of Monroe completed the purchase of two adjacent properties, totaling approximately one half-acre, located at the northwest corner of W. Main and N. Blakeley Street in downtown Monroe for a future public space such as a Festival Lot.



Goals for the Property

Short- and long-term goals identified for the property include:

- Using the site as a magnet to bring people downtown to shop and dine
- Creating more activity downtown
- Providing parking for downtown visitors
- Providing a public restroom for downtown visitors
- Activating the former Union Bank building at 201 West Main to prevent the structure from deteriorating due to lack of use
- Demolishing the former chiropractor's office at 101 North Blakeley to remove the building as an attractive nuisance
- Create short-term improvements to maintain momentum to achieve long-term vision
- Avoid creating an expectation of use inconsistent with the community's long-term vision for the site

Festival Lot Concept Considerations

Since receiving clear direction from City Council at its March 11, 2025 meeting, staff and the City's design consultant have developed FOUR options that illustrate increasing levels of investment and development of the Festival Lot concept, as well as various potential configurations.

The following slides present:

- illustrative imagery meant to provide examples of other “festival lots” or public plazas;
- four Festival Lot concept options, including a preliminary development budget for each option.
- various features, amenities, and functionalities that could be included in a Festival Lot.

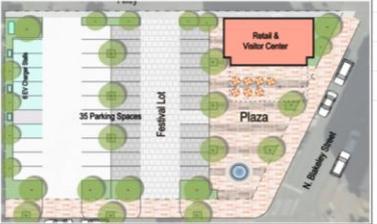
Festival Lot Potential Configurations and Uses



Festival Lot Character Examples



Festival Lot – Options Comparison

| | OPTION 1 | OPTION 2 | OPTION 3 | OPTION 4 |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| |  |  |  |  |
| Permanent Plaza & Event Space (SF) | 3000 | 4980 | 4000 | 11000 |
| New Retail & Visitor Center Area | | | 1525 | 2050 |
| Renovated Bank Building Area (SF) | 3400 (Existing) | 3400 (Existing) | | |
| Festival Lot w/ Special Parking Paving (SF) | | | 6300 | |
| Total Parking Stalls (w/EV) | 29 | 30 | 41 | 15 |
| Approximate Cost <small>(Very rough estimate, advanced design/specs/estimate needed)</small> | \$850K - \$1.0M | \$950K - \$1.1M | \$1.7M - \$1.9M | \$2.0M - \$2.3M |

Option 1 – Renovate Existing Union Bank Building



- Upgrades and modifications to existing building – use as visitor center, potential retail use & public restrooms.
- Demo Chiropractor building
- Keep current parking lot, take out existing drive-thru shelter, modify and restripe, use portion of parking for festival lot events.
- Create a small public plaza and add landscaping.
- 29 Public parking spaces plus 4 EV stalls parking off alley.

Option 2 – Event Plaza & Renovate Existing Union Bank



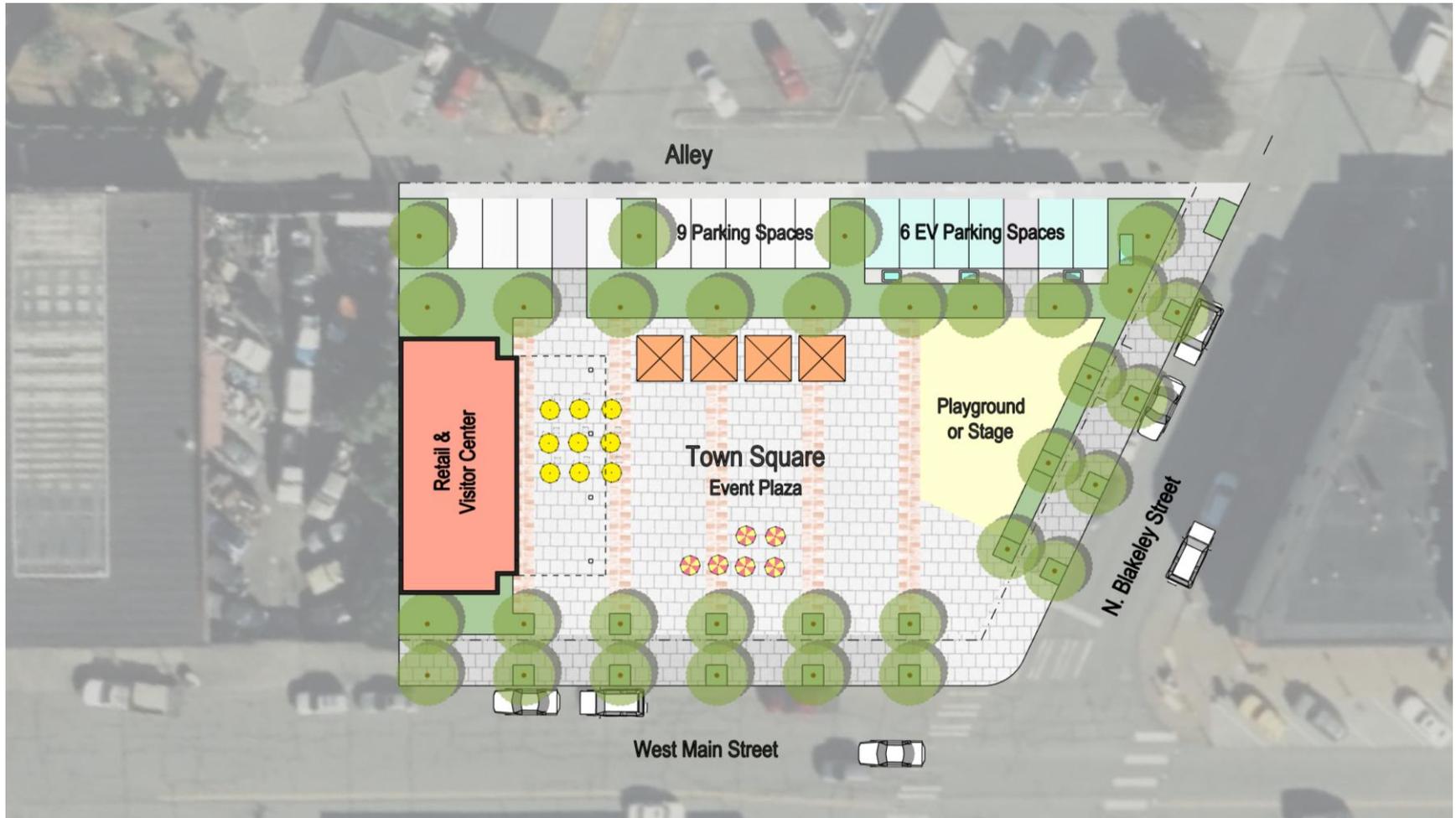
- Upgrades to existing building, demo chiropractor building (same as option 1).
- Permanent event plaza
- New parking lot with new pavement and efficient geometry.
- 24 Public parking spaces plus 6 EV stalls parking off alley.

Option 3 – Festival Lot & New Retail/Visitor Center



- New 1525 SF visitor center building with retail/restrooms at NW Corner. Demo all existing buildings.
- New permanent public plaza at corner. New sidewalks.
- Parking lot with enhanced paving that can turn into a festival lot
- New parking lot with new pavement and efficient geometry.
- 35 Public parking spaces plus 6 EV stalls.

Option 4 – Large Town Square & New Visitor Center



- New 3050 SF visitor center building with retail/restrooms at east end of property. Demo all existing buildings.
- New 11,000 SF permanent public town square/events plaza with new sidewalks.
- Potential playground or stage/bandstand feature
- Parking along alley only
- 9 Public parking spaces plus 6 EV stalls.



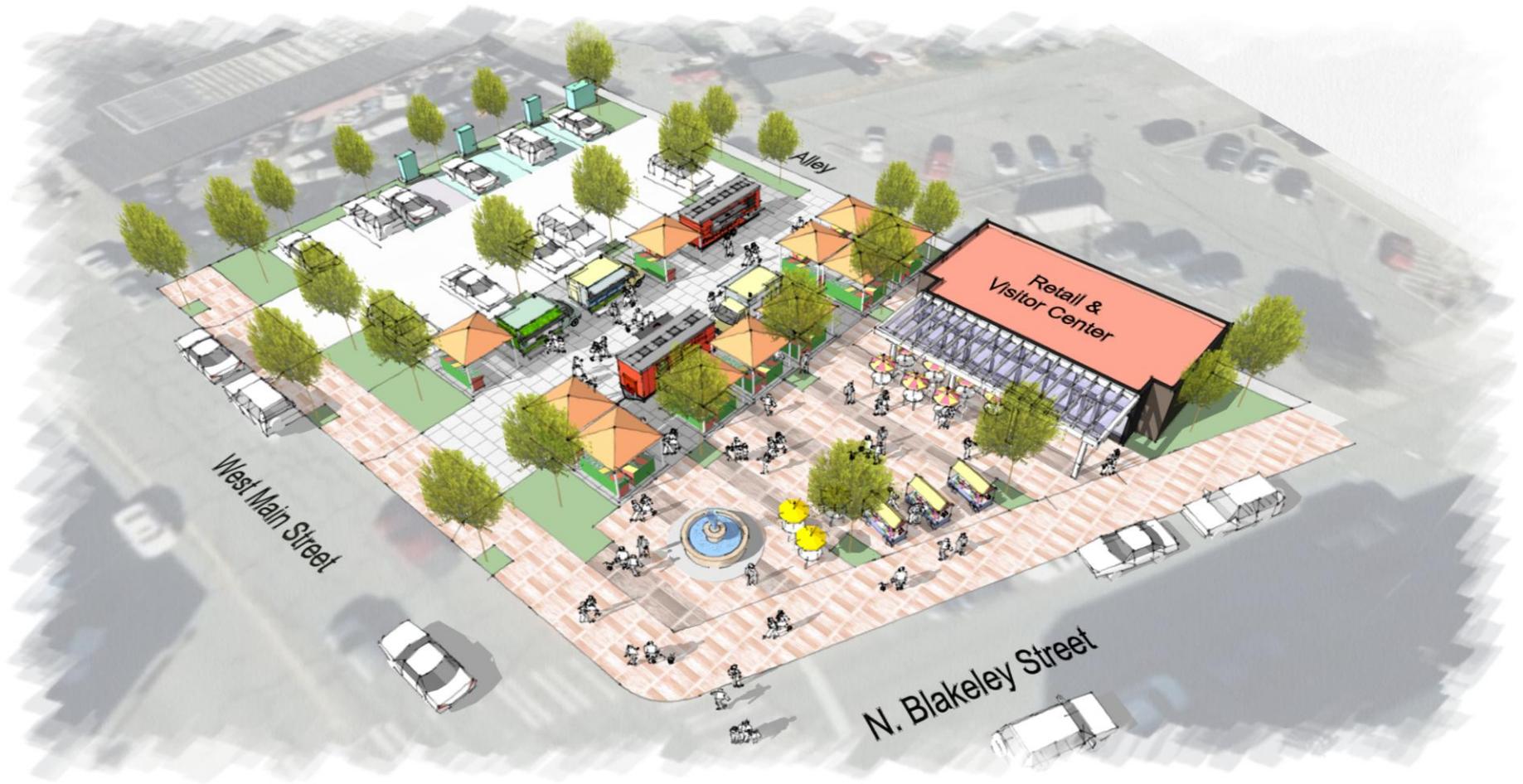
Existing Union Bank Property



Option 1 – Renovate Existing Union Bank Building



Option 2 – Event Plaza & Renovate Existing Union Bank



Option 3 – Festival Lot & New Visitor Center



Option 4 – Large Town Square & New Visitor Center



Urban Plaza Amenities-Features

Examples

Outdoor Stages



Fountains – Water Features



Kiosks



Movable Tables & Chairs



Outdoor Cafés

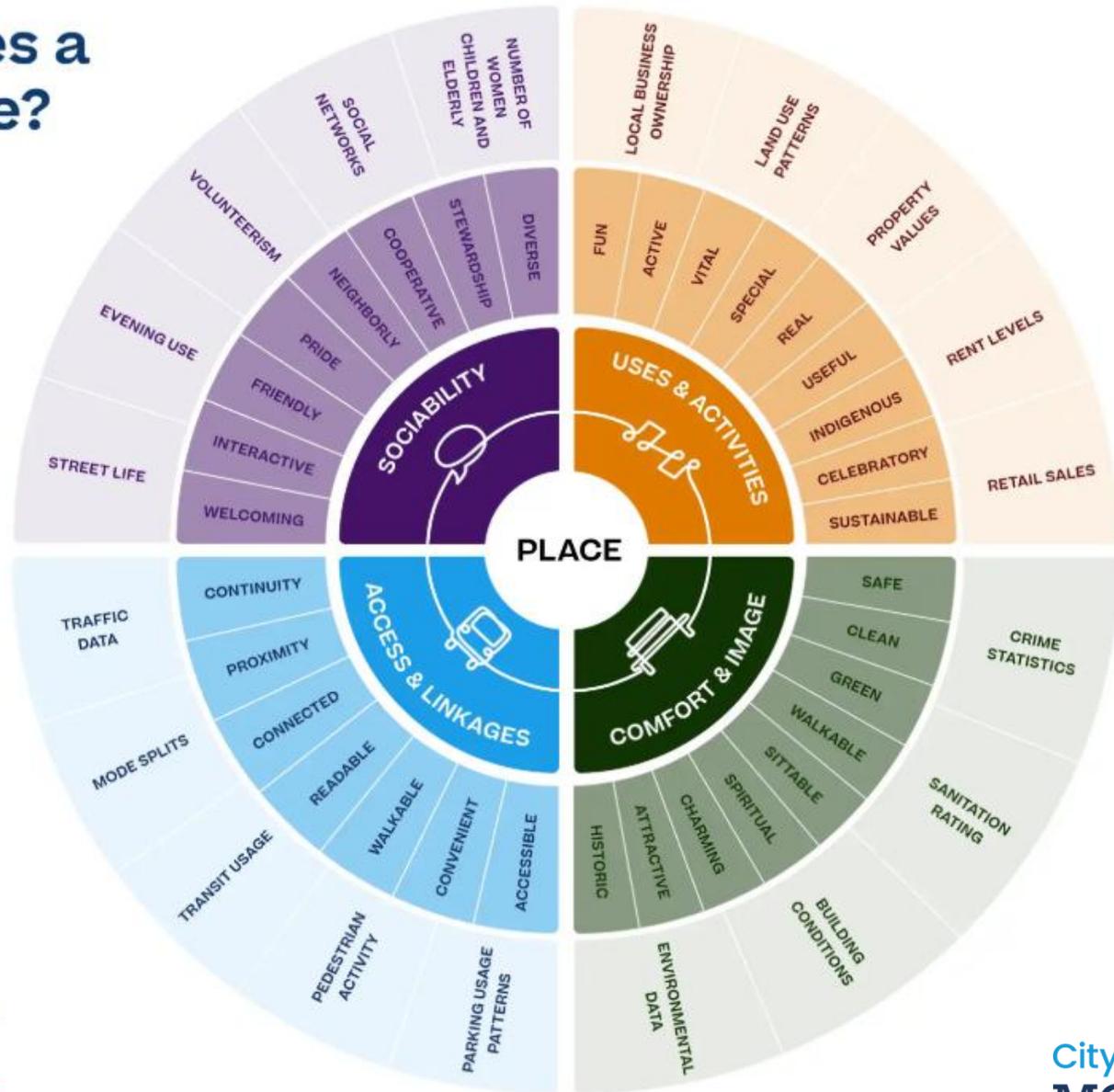


Public Plaza Considerations

A downtown public plaza is not the same as a neighborhood green space park. It requires a higher level of programming, activation, and maintenance, especially for year-round and all-weather use, which is important. Examples of programming/activation:

- Tai Chi Tuesdays
- Yoga group exercise
- Kids events
- Dog events
- Food Truck Fridays
- Movie nights in Summer
- Holiday Market
- Flower Market
- Holiday Tree Lighting
- Saturday evening dances
- And many more possibilities

What Makes a Great Place?



Project
for Public
Spaces

Proposed Public Engagement Process

- Presentation of preliminary concepts, including site plans, illustrations,
- Rough cost estimates,
- Development timeframes
- Array of potential amenities, features, and/or functionalities

Public input and/or preferences will be synthesized and used to present refinements to these concepts and/or development of a fourth concept – all for presentation to EDAB, Planning Commission, Park Board, and City Council.

City Council will be asked to review the resulting information and identify its preferred concept.

Proposed Public Engagement Process

The proposed Public Engagement Process is as follows:

- Two Open Houses held on site in the former Union Bank building on different days and at different times of day (e.g., Noon and 5:30pm).
- Info booth at Farmers Market, with feedback forms.
- Create dedicated webpage with Concepts, etc.
- Create online survey, open for one month.
- Publicize via Facebook, City website, "Monroe This Week," monthly Business Newsletter, direct mail to Downtown businesses, etc.

Upon conclusion of public engagement process, synthesize and analyze public input and ideas and make initial presentation to Parks Board.

Return to City Council with summary and analysis of public input and Parks Board comments for further direction.

Fiscal Impacts

There is \$75,000 in the 2025-2026 budget to consider near-term uses for the properties. The budget is allocated to short-term efforts to activate the property (\$10,000); develop the long-range vision (\$30,000); and site development improvements (\$35,000).

Next Steps

Phase One

We are currently concluding this phase which has consisted of:

- *Staff analysis of options, including assistance of consultant*
- *Presentation to EDAB for comments*
- *Presentation to Parks Board for comments*
- *Presentation to City Council for direction*
- *Presentation to Return to City Council P3 Committee*
- **Presentation to full City Council**

Next Steps

Phase Two

- With City Council direction, the consultant will finalize Festival Lot concept options with site plans and illustrations for use in the Public Engagement Process.
- Initiate Public Engagement Process, likely over the span of 4 to 6 weeks.

Important to conclude public process by early July to allow time for staff analysis and compilation of input, followed by presentations to Boards and Commissions, before returning to City Council for further deliberation in time to consider potential inclusion of related item(s) in the mid-biennium budget adjustments in the Fall.

Next Steps

Phase Three

- Staff will synthesize and analyze public input.
- Present findings from Public Engagement Process to EDAB, Planning Commission, and Park Board.
- Present findings from Public Engagement Process, as well as comments from Boards and Commissions, to City Council.
- If required, revise any Festival Lot concepts accordingly for presentation to City Council.
- City Council chooses preferred Festival Lot concept and directs staff to develop timeline for both design development process and physical development of Festival Lot, as well as corresponding estimated budget.
- City Council may wish to amend biennial budget to include funding for design development of preferred concept in 2026.

Questions Comments Direction