



# CULTURE. CONNECTIONS. COMMUNITY.

**MAKING WHAT MATTERS IN  
MARSHALLTOWN *TOGETHER***



# THE TIME IS **NOW**

## MARSHALLTOWN'S CREATIVE COMMUNITY

**Cities that weave arts and culture into the fabric of daily life become a destination for visitors.** They drive economic prosperity. They become regional focal points. But most importantly, they bloom into a springboard of imagination and a creative home for their own residents.

**CONVERSATIONS SPARK. CONNECTIONS ARE MADE. COMMUNITY THRIVES.**

Research shows that community connectedness brings economic growth and well-being. Residents establish a connection and a commitment to where they live. It is an emotional function that drives behavior — the sense of belonging, the confidence that a person can make an impact and find support in their home community. These feelings fuse people to a place and to each other.

**WHEN PEOPLE FEEL CONNECTED, THEY ENGAGE TO MAKE A BETTER PLACE.**

What does community connectedness look like in action? It's volunteering, voting, a personal investment in problem-solving and collaborative work effort.

According to the Knight Foundation, the leading indicators of attachment/connectedness are social offerings, aesthetics, and openness. When Marshalltown embraces and expands its art and cultural identity, community growth and goal attainment will accelerate.

But how do we build and nurture community connectedness?

## **RAISING** THE BAR

The Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a standardized market research tool that measures respondents' satisfaction with one question: How likely they are to refer a product, service, or — in this case — a city to a friend. Marshalltown's overall score was relatively low at -12 percent, but it was 25 points higher with people of color, including Black and Latino residents and those from Burmese communities. Lack of civic connection and community pride stems from devastating storms impacting Marshalltown, as well as systemic issues compounded by cultural barriers.

**THIS MAKES THE WORK OF ARTISTS AND THE ROLE OF THE CREATIVE COMMUNITY EVEN MORE CRITICAL TO GROWING COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS.**



# MOVING FORWARD *TOGETHER*

## THIS DOCUMENT IS AN AMBITIOUS AND ASPIRATIONAL TEN-YEAR PLAN. IT BELONGS TO ALL OF US.

This process was shaped and improved by the diverse voices and distinctive perspectives of Marshalltown residents.

Existing civic plans recognize that “great things can happen when you dare to dream big.” Building a beautiful and welcoming Marshalltown directly addresses negative perceptions of education, crime, and lack of opportunity, as well as the challenge of young people leaving the community.

When an arts and culture master plan is adopted and integrated into a city’s comprehensive plan, amazing things happen. Art and culture can connect and renew Marshalltown, positioning us for collaboration and revitalization.

The creative community is who we are, how we work and play, and what we love. As you absorb the placemaking themes and ideas on the following pages, look forward with us. This future is hopeful and it’s attainable.

## THIS PLAN IS AN INVITATION TO IMAGINE, TO BUILD, AND TO CREATE COMMUNITY TOGETHER.

To ensure this plan reflects the richness of the Marshalltown community, consultants conducted 14 interviews, seven focus groups (including those involving artists, the Latino community, and the Burmese community), and an online survey (offered in 21 languages) completed by 655 people.

Throughout this plan, potential partners have been identified. These are organizations and institutions with natural connections to the cultural priorities outlined in the document. Where might you or your organization fit in? We have ideas. Let’s talk. Because making a vibrant and welcoming Marshalltown, alive with arts and authentic cultural opportunities, will take all of us.

All of us are the creative community. **TakepART with us.**



### PLANNING STEERING COMMITTEE

**John Hall** (Co-Chair)  
Marshalltown Area Chamber of  
Commerce and Alliance Board  
Member

**Deb Borton** (Co-Chair)  
Martha-Ellen Tye Foundation and  
Alliance Board Member

**Mike Tupper**, Marshalltown Police  
Chief and Alliance Board Member

**Kim Hanken**, Local artist  
and Marshalltown Public Art  
Committee Member

**Wendy Soltero**, Marshalltown  
YMCA-YWCA

**Gabe Isom**, Marshalltown  
City Council, 2nd Ward; Emerson

**Neil Dalal**, MARSHALLTOWN  
Company

**Michelle Spohnheimer**,  
City of Marshalltown

**Jesus Rios**, Emerson

**Plu Meh**, Child Abuse and  
Prevention Services

**Esmeralda Armas**, City of  
Marshalltown

**Julie Thede**, Marshalltown  
Community School District

**Aaron Buzbee**, Local Business  
Owner

*The planning committee also  
wishes to credit Group Creatives  
for their assistance in the  
development of this Master Plan.*

# PLACEMAKING THEMES

## HOW DOES A COMMUNITY FORM AND NURTURE AN AUTHENTIC PUBLIC IDENTITY? SOMETHING THAT HARNESSES LOCAL ASSETS AND ASPIRATIONS, WHILE PROMOTING COMMUNITY-LED CHANGE?

The placemaking themes in this plan can provide the blueprint; **it is up to all of us to build it.**

### POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

- Arts + Culture Alliance
- City of Marshalltown
- Connect Marshalltown
- Iowa State University Marshall County Extension
- Linn Creek District
- Local churches
- Local cultural organizations
- Marshall County
- Marshall County Conservation Board
- Marshalltown Area Chamber of Commerce
- Marshalltown Business Community
- Marshalltown Central Business District
- Marshalltown Community College
- Marshalltown Community School District
- UnityPoint Health - Marshalltown
- Marshalltown Fire Department
- Marshalltown Parks & Recreation
- Marshalltown Police Department
- Marshalltown Public Library
- Social service agencies
- Theravada Dhamma Society
- YMCA-YWCA
- **And YOU!**

## 1 REVITALIZE OVER RESTORE

**Aesthetics reflect identity, testifying to residents' imagination and dreams.** Marshalltown knows that thoughtful investment strengthens the community. Rather than removing and rebuilding, we can revitalize unused spaces, embrace color palettes that reflect the beautiful diversity of our community, and create plazas and public spaces that spark spontaneous connections.

## 2 BUILD BRIDGES

**We can foster meaningful connections by building both physical and metaphorical bridges.** These are avenues that direct residents and visitors to the unique cultural destination points within our community: events that uplift the contributions of both young people and elders, celebrations that invite us into one another's cultures, and grassroots cohorts of informal leaders empowered to create vibrant and welcoming spaces and neighborhoods.

## 3 ACTIVATE HOPE

**Artists and cultural influencers are thought leaders when it comes to expressing what hope looks and feels like within their communities.** People look to them for inspiration. Our city abounds with opportunities to celebrate growth and rebirth. We can leverage the insights of our creative community to attract visitors and tourists hungry for distinctive and authentic experiences.

## 4 ELEVATE YOUTH

**Young people are the future of our community.** When we open doors and give them the tools, resources, and support they need to thrive creatively, there are no boundaries to what they can achieve. That's the moment when passive participation becomes active engagement and produces the creative entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

## 5 HERITAGE OF INNOVATION

**From Marshalltown's earliest days as a community, arts and technology have always had a symbiotic relationship.** Art attracts innovators, and artists are known to activate innovation. We can incubate small businesses, especially within our immigrant communities. We can reinforce STEAM education within our schools. We can foster hands-on access to the spaces, equipment, and materials necessary to build new things. Opportunities to expand this creative footprint are limitless.



## PLACEMAKING THEME #1

# REVITALIZE OVER RESTORE

**Beauty matters.** Aesthetics reflect community, testifying to residents' highest aspirations and dreams. Out of devastation comes incredible opportunity for revitalization, reinvigoration, and reimagination of what was and what can be. The choices our community makes in the coming years and how and where we invest resources will be challenging, but prioritizing quality over quantity will express to the world that we care tremendously about the vibrancy of Marshalltown.

## CATALYSTS FOR SUCCESS

**Create a culturally vibrant and welcoming downtown.** With new capital investments into downtown restoration, Marshalltown has the opportunity to construct an area that respects historic architecture and reflects contemporary contributions from diverse stakeholders.



**INSPIRATION SPOTLIGHT:** *Chicago's **Little Village** offers a template for how to center cultural flair in a traditional Midwestern neighborhood. Marshalltown's **13th Street District** is a starting point for what it takes to create a local success story.*

**Spark spontaneous connections.** Main Street is a central location that can offer a neutral space for people of diverse cultures, backgrounds, ages, and interests to connect. The courthouse grounds and vacant lots are prime opportunities for a plaza. Populating a plaza with art activations, cultural events, and opportunities for joy and play is key to its success.

**Energize unused spaces.** Resist the impulse to tear down and rebuild; instead, consider reinvention for spaces that are part of the cultural fabric of the community. Unleash artists on spaces set to be demolished. Organize pop-up window galleries along Main Street. The possibilities are limited only by our imagination and willingness to act and invest boldly.



**INSPIRATION SPOTLIGHT:** *Transform an **old grain tower** into a rock climbing experience. Turn an **unused water tower** into iconic art. Make **boarded-up homes** into statement-making murals. Install **trails** in unexpected places.*

## WHAT HAPPENS IN A PLAZA?

*The physical setting of an accessible, pedestrian-focused plaza fosters stronger social connections. Cultural festivals and celebrations bring people in. Recurring programming — think food trucks, pop-up soccer, yoga sessions, farmer's markets, make-and-take art opportunities, performances, and other regular usages — keep people coming back.*

**Expand the color palette.** A growing number of Marshalltownians are connected with cultures that have a heritage of vibrant visuals as a distinctive piece of their community aesthetic. By intentionally considering the role of color, the city's palette can help achieve goals of inclusion. Input from local cultures will help residents feel represented and seen. **The Role of Color in a Sense of Place** provides an analysis of how the authentic use of color can deeply impact environments and community wellbeing.

**INSPIRATION SPOTLIGHT:** ***South Beach, Florida and San Antonio, Texas** intentionally welcome Latin American design motifs and bright colors in public spaces. This gives residents a proud sense of place and beckons visitors.*



**First impressions matter.** Incentivize creative interventions along the three main corridor entrances to the city. Local organizations, matching funds, and the buy-in of private homeowners and businesses can instigate fun and memorable installations.

**INSPIRATION SPOTLIGHT:** *See the impact bold projects have had on other communities: **Peak Experience, Aesthetics, Flint Neighborhood Parade.***



**POTENTIAL PARTNERS:** Marshalltown Business Community, Marshalltown Central Business District, Marshalltown Area Chamber of Commerce, Marshall County, City of Marshalltown, Arts + Culture Alliance, Marshalltown Community College, Marshalltown Community School District, UnityPoint Health - Marshalltown, and YOU!

## PLACEMAKING THEME #2

# BUILD BRIDGES

Some bridges are structural: bike paths, pedestrian circulation, accessible parking. Other bridges are metaphorical: arts initiatives that are participatory and that promote positive community connections. When we build bridges, we unleash enhanced physical and social mobility.

## CATALYSTS FOR SUCCESS

**Invest in new, unique, and authentic signature events.** Our community craves events and interactions that bring the town together. Traditions are grounding for a community: they are a source of common identity and they seed a sense of belonging.

- > **Utilize the beautiful campus at the Iowa Veterans Home** for an early July picnic to honor the many forms of independence that Marshalltownians observe.
- > **Host a monarch migration festival** that celebrates the 1,800-mile journey of the monarch butterfly from Iowa to Mexico.
- > **Sponsor an annual competition centered around engineering, architecture, or technology.** Invite youth and adults to build, make, adapt, or upcycle in order to reward creative skills.
- > **Host a water festival** led by the diverse cultures of the Burmese community. Recognize the Burmese New Year and underscore the importance of protecting the role of Marshalltown's waterways.



**INSPIRATION SPOTLIGHT:** *These events get it right: **Giant Picnic Blanket, Monarch Festival, Innovators, Soap Box Derby.** These actions work. See the **real-life impact.***

**Uplift informal leaders.** Build a grassroots cohort of informal leaders to identify and nurture welcoming spaces. Consider churches, barbershops, and cafes. These places create community vitality born from acquaintance. The Arts + Culture Alliance will spearhead a program for local leaders in response to the desire for cross-cultural connections and strategic support for individuals who wish to serve all citizens in the community.

**INSPIRATION SPOTLIGHT:** *Cohort members are selected to include diverse perspectives, like these examples: **Cohorts, Race Forward, Every Level Leadership, and Crossroads.***



**Cultivate welcoming spaces and nurture neighborhood-specific projects.** Welcoming spaces instigate cross-cultural connections and make it more likely that residents will participate in the community in other ways. Collective effort can produce casual spaces to build bridges. Physically, these can be adaptations or new creations; it is the social program that is most important in fostering cultural interaction.

**INSPIRATION SPOTLIGHT:** *Habitat Restore hired youth to **build adirondack chairs.** **Happy City Birds** created a colorful home for wildlife. **Ready Go Art** connects neighborhoods with mobile arts units.*



**POTENTIAL PARTNERS:** City of Marshalltown, Marshalltown Business Community, Marshall County Conservation Board, Marshalltown Parks & Recreation, Marshalltown Central Business District, Marshall County, Theravada Dhamma Society, YMCA-YWCA, Linn Creek District, Marshalltown Area Chamber of Commerce, Arts + Culture Alliance, Marshalltown Community School District, arts and culture organizations including the Marshalltown Public Library and local non-profit agencies, and **YOU!**

## PLACEMAKING THEME #3

# ACTIVATE HOPE

A shared sense of hope is critical in allowing imagination and possibility to flourish. It speaks to what could be. Without hope, individuals and their communities wither and stagnate. With hope – even in small doses – the borders of what is possible evaporate.

## CATALYSTS FOR SUCCESS

**Our city abounds with small opportunities to celebrate growth and rebirth.** Many of the goals our comprehensive plan outlines are long-term. Let's recognize the progress points along that path to help keep the momentum going. This could look like ribbon-cutting events to cheer on smaller milestones in long-term projects, tree plantings that include music and performance, or cultural celebrations centered around Marshalltown's murals.



**INSPIRATION SPOTLIGHT:** *Make it memorable. Consider Farmer Derek's invitation to the Bethel College to **perform inside his grain bin** and a performance by the St. Paul Marching Band to **celebrate a tree planting in a park.***

### **Leverage current residents as influencers.**

Fully utilize destination marketing to target those who already live in Marshalltown and amplify their power as trusted attractors to the region. This will expand residents' sense of community pride in Marshalltown's rich cultural assets and attract visitors.

**Market remarkable experiences by strategically planning, collecting data, and connecting artists to hospitality and tourism functions.** Marshalltown can build a tourism program that advances other civic goals.



**ARTIST-LED WELCOMING OF VISITORS CAN CREATE UNFORGETTABLE FIRST IMPRESSIONS. AN ARTS-FOCUSED MAP OR VISITOR'S GUIDE DESIGNED BY REGIONAL ARTISTS PROVIDES BOTH A WAYFINDING RESOURCE AND A CREATIVE MEANS TO HIGHLIGHT CULTURALLY RELEVANT AND HISTORIC PLACES, AND UNIQUE ATTRACTIONS SUCH AS MURALS AND INSTALLATIONS.**

**takepART!**  
MARSHALLTOWN

[takepARTmarshalltown.org](http://takepARTmarshalltown.org)

**POTENTIAL PARTNERS:** Marshalltown Area Chamber of Commerce, Marshalltown Business Community, Arts + Culture Alliance, Connect Marshalltown, City of Marshalltown, YMCA-YWCA, and YOU!

## PLACEMAKING THEME #4

# ELEVATE YOUTH

Bring young people into leadership circles, value their voices, and equip them with the tools and resources they need to fulfill their visions. That's where passive participation becomes active engagement and produces the creative entrepreneurs of tomorrow. Inviting the entire spectrum of age demographics into the process will strengthen the results.

## CATALYSTS FOR SUCCESS

**Open doors and eliminate barriers to art-related programs for residents of all ages.**

Art and culture opportunities must be accessible to youth, and accommodating to their unique schedules, transportation needs, and other obligations.



**INSPIRATION SPOTLIGHT:** *Des Moines' After School Arts Program* has musicians, artists, culinary experts, and teachers lead classes for children, creating more jobs for creatives and mentoring underserved youth.

**Connect the creativity of young thinkers to the business community.**

Harness the power of this motivated and ambitious group via paid apprenticeships, internships, and summer jobs. Pair teens with experienced makers, and they will produce amazing things. This integration can spur momentum for [youth development](#) and social impact.

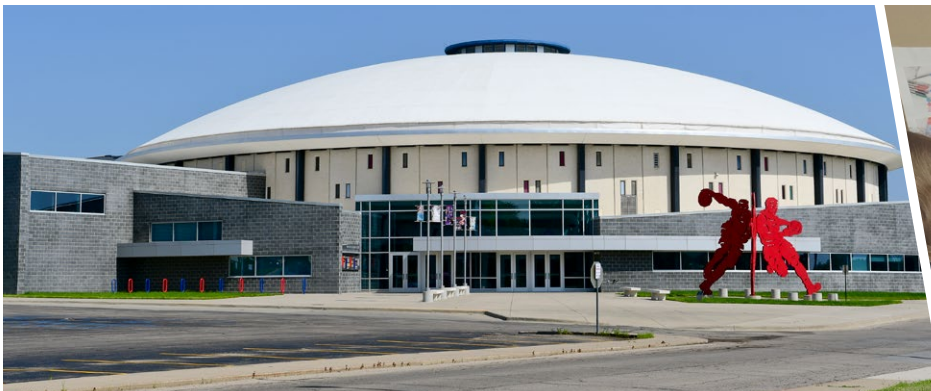
**INSPIRATION SPOTLIGHT:** *Artists for Humanity (AFH)* provides under-resourced teens the keys to self-sufficiency through paid employment in art and design.



**Offer trauma-informed art therapy opportunities to address underlying issues that may hinder an individual's creative potential and wellbeing.**

Healing from wounds related to past trauma, natural disaster, the COVID pandemic, and systemic issues is paramount in moving forward.

**INSPIRATION SPOTLIGHT:** *The Art + Life Long Learning and Arts and Youth Development & Education* fact sheets offer excellent statistics, case studies, and links to literature on how the arts make every phase of life better and more fulfilling.



**POTENTIAL PARTNERS:** Marshalltown Business Community, Marshalltown Community School District, Marshalltown Community College, Marshalltown Police Department, Marshalltown Fire Department, Marshalltown Area Chamber of Commerce, Iowa State University Marshall County Extension, Arts + Culture Alliance, area churches, local cultural organizations, local social service agencies, and **YOU!**



## PLACEMAKING THEME #5

# HERITAGE OF INNOVATION

The engineers and manufacturers that chose Marshalltown as a home for their companies established a local culture of innovation. Continuing to fuel this spirit will yield new approaches to public interaction with art, and symbiotically, infuse technological development with creative design principles.

## CATALYSTS FOR SUCCESS

Consider adopting a **STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) approach** to cultivate well-rounded, flexible-thinking future engineers and scientists. Marshalltown School District's connections with Iowa State University Marshall County Extension and Emerson continue to produce excellent STEM career opportunities for young people. Arts and technology together **have the power to democratize and broaden creative impact.**



**INSPIRATION SPOTLIGHT:** *Marshalltown can follow the lead of the **Iowa Governor's STEM Advisory Council**, which offers resources to students, teachers, and parents with the goal of maintaining Iowa's legacy as a leader in education and economic empowerment.*

**Make space for makers.** Develop a physical space (potentially the Orpheum Theater) where people can interact with projects and ideas, and have hands-on access to materials and equipment. Include space to showcase work.

**Fuel the growth of immigrant-owned businesses** through small business incubators and microloans. Immigrants own one in five small businesses in the United States, and an immigrant has double the likelihood of starting a new business compared with a native-born person. Their presence is especially impactful in small towns struggling to compete with larger municipalities.

**INSPIRATION SPOTLIGHT:** *Microloans are a tool in the creative economy that provide low- or no-interest loans to artists who are not well-served by traditional financial institutions. **Kiva, Springboard for the Arts**, and **Native Women Lead** are examples of successful arts microloan models.*



**POTENTIAL PARTNERS:** Marshalltown Business Community, Marshalltown Community School District, Marshalltown Community College, Marshalltown Area Chamber of Commerce, Iowa State University Marshall County Extension, Arts + Culture Alliance, area churches, local cultural organizations, local social service agencies, and **YOU!**

# ABUNDANT LIVING

## THE RETURN ON CULTURAL INVESTMENT IS WITHIN REACH

**When combined with a thrilling vision for the future, a mindset of abundance unlocks great potential.** This opportunity is an invitation to us all. Sustainable and diverse resources are needed to support the arts ecosystem in Marshalltown: K-12 arts education, new programming for existing or adaptive venues, and a healthy entrance of new roles and perspectives in the shared work support future growth.

- **Percent for Creative Placemaking** is a special type of initiative, often passed through a city ordinance, where a certain percentage of the budget for large public or private projects is allocated to fund creative projects in the community. It is an important tool to ensure a community develops with distinction and enhanced livability. Funding mechanisms must be in place in order to maintain pride-building activities for residents.
- **Arts-focused tax increment financing** is a proven tool for ensuring the arts are woven seamlessly into new development in Marshalltown.
- **Hotel/motel taxes** are a popular and widespread means of funding arts and cultural programming in municipalities across the country. Marshalltown could dedicate a portion of the transient guest tax to arts and culture, on the basis that the cultural attractions enhance visitors' experience, improve neighborhoods, and contribute to the local economy.

- **Investment in the arts scene** from Marshalltown's employers pays dividends in workforce recruitment and retention.
- **Artists and culture venues** can get creative in tapping new revenue streams by utilizing existing spaces and expertise to offer unique experiences to residents and visitors.
- **Investing in diverse creative minds** to not just participate but to lead local organizations is considered a **best practice** and a more effective way to gain the trust and engagement of all community members.
- **Programmatic collaborations**, including the following initiatives, continue to be key to extending the reach of cultural impact:
  - > **Visiting artist/artist-in-residency programs** supported by colleges and universities, government, and nonprofit organizations.
  - > **Artist relocation programs** that incentivize professional creatives to move to Marshalltown.
  - > **Nonprofit gallery space** that is inviting and accessible to residents who may not visit a traditional museum.
  - > **Unconventional galleries** in commercial spaces that offer a unique backdrop for rotating exhibits and artists with work to sell.

**MARSHALLTOWN NEEDS EXPANDED CIVIC SUPPORT TO ENSURE THE VIBRANCY OF THE REGION AS IT INVESTS SIGNIFICANT FUNDS IN REDEVELOPMENT TOWARD A BRIGHTER FUTURE. ACCESS TO FUNDING SOURCES BEYOND THE CITY — INCLUDING GOVERNMENTS, PRIVATE FOUNDATIONS, AND BUSINESSES — IS VITAL.**



# ADVANCING THE LOCAL ARTS AGENCY

In order to meaningfully integrate the arts into the daily life of any city, there must be a well-supported local organization managing and coordinating the effort. The **Arts + Culture Alliance** leads and nurtures the work of making Marshalltown an arts hub and destination. It is the guiding organization for leadership development, advocacy, and funding for the arts.

It sustains the health and vitality of artists locally, while ensuring the arts are accessible to all.

*What does this look like in action?* Much of this work is already happening. However, with increased buy-in and collaboration, this shared work will be even more impactful, effective, and beautiful!



**STRONG ARTS LEADERSHIP IS NECESSARY TO AMPLIFY THE UNIQUE ASSETS OF MARSHALLTOWN AND STRATEGICALLY CONNECT ARTS AND CULTURE TO OTHER CIVIC GOALS AND INITIATIVES.**

## VISION

Creativity is at the heart of a thriving and vibrant Marshalltown.

## MISSION

Lead the development of a creative community through arts and culture.

## VALUES

The **Arts + Culture Alliance** embraces the following organizational values:

### TEAMWORK

We prioritize relationships, partnerships and working together.

### INCLUSION

We value diversity in all forms and promote a culture of inclusion.

### IMPACT

We strive to make the greatest impact.

### INNOVATION

We constantly challenge the ideas of what's possible.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

We act with honesty, integrity and transparency.

## CORE FUNCTIONS



### CONNECT

We are the bridge builder for our community by collaborating and cultivating relationships.



### ADVOCATE

We promote the value and necessity of arts and culture.



### CELEBRATE

We engage and amplify the local arts and culture community.



# MAKING WHAT MATTERS IN MARSHALLTOWN *TOGETHER*

**Throughout this plan, potential partners have been identified.** These are organizations and institutions with natural connections to the cultural priorities outlined in the document.

**Where might you or your organization fit in?** We have ideas. Let's talk. Because making a vibrant and welcoming Marshalltown, alive with arts and authentic cultural opportunities, will take all of us.

***A COMMUNITY THAT DREAMS TOGETHER GROWS TOGETHER.***

***ALL OF US ARE THE CREATIVE COMMUNITY. TAKEPART WITH US.***

**THANK YOU TO THE SPONSORS OF THIS PLANNING EFFORT**

**MARSHALLTOWN**  
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