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# THE FAYETTE COUNTY UNION NEWSPAPER

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## 'Green' Streetscape groundbreaking officially begins 'pioneering' project

*Eyes of the nation to be on West Union*

By Mike Van Sickle

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**BREAKING GROUND –**  
Among the dignitaries participating in the Green Pilot Streetscape groundbreaking ceremony on the courthouse square in West Union on Thursday were (l-r) West Union City Councilman Troy Schott, Councilwoman Karen Halva, Senator Bill Heckroth, Tim Waddell, division administrator with the IDED Community Development Division, West Union Mayor Merlin Dunt, David Yocca, senior partner of Conservation Design Forum, Representative Andrew Wenthe, and Councilman Marc Rue.

A large crowd gathering on the southwest corner of the courthouse square, the appearance of state and local dignitaries, and the sound of band music filling the streets of downtown West Union all helped provide the sense of an old-fashioned community celebration during Thursday's Green Pilot Streetscape groundbreaking ceremony.

The festive atmosphere was only fitting, as those in attendance shared pride in the community's past and present, while looking forward to an ingenious future.

In welcoming everyone in attendance to the ceremony, West Union Mayor Merlin Dunt quickly expressed his appreciation to all elected officials who worked to make the \$10.2 million Streetscape a reality. Special praise was given to U.S. Congressman Bruce Braley, Iowa Senators Bill Heckroth and Brian Schoenjahn, Representatives Andrew Wenthe and Roger Thomas, the Fayette County Supervisors, and West Union City Council.

The West Union mayor commended officials from Conservation Design Forum, Iowa Department of Economic Development, Main Street Iowa, and all technical advisors who have assisted with the design, grant writing, and other facets of the project.

"A special thank-you to Jeff Geerts (IDED special projects manager), the man with all the answers, who always knew where to look for money," Dunt added. "He never backed down at a challenge, even if it meant a heated City Council meeting."

In closing, Dunt added, "Today marks a special point in history for the city of West Union. As our forefathers did many years ago, we are now turning the page for this community and making a new mark. This new effort toward sustainability and conservation hopefully will set a new positive tone for West Union and bring prosperity that is needed for survival of small towns such as ours."

A new direction



**PORTION OF PROJECT –**  
Those attending the Green Pilot Streetscape groundbreaking ceremony in downtown West Union on

"Today is certainly a milestone, not only for the people of West Union and Fayette County, but for all Iowans and, in fact, much of the nation," David Yocca, senior partner of Conservation Design Forum, later agreed. "The reconstruction of a significant portion of the public realm of West Union as planned is one of, if not the most integrated, wholistic, forward-looking efforts that has been done on any street anywhere in this country."

He explained that the future West Union downtown district will represent an emerging example of green infrastructure, which will serve communities by creating safer, more comfortable, walkable and bikable streets; improve the health of local water, air, and soil;

Restore hydrology and the natural environment; provide long-term cost savings and value over convention infrastructure; support local businesses and job creation; and provide a more beautiful,

Thursday looked down upon authentic setting for outdoor use and enjoyment.

Vine Street, which will be under construction as part of the project next summer.

(Jerry Wadian photo)

"This is the direction the nation is moving toward, and West Union and the state of Iowa are leading the way," he noted. "West Union's Green Streets Project is pioneering in many ways, and it can be difficult to be a pioneer."

"It has certainly been a challenging two-and-a-half years for all involved in the project," he admitted. "A leading demonstration project by definition means there will be learning, adaptation to unforeseen issues, the need for open-mindedness, and getting way out of our normal comfort zone. There has been all of that, and there will be much more to come as the project that has been envisioned is now built, operated, and stewarded into the future."

Yocca informed those in attendance that he recently testified before a Congressional subcommittee of the House Transportation Committee about the value of green infrastructure to communities and small businesses. As part of the discussion, he shared West Union's efforts and described the aspects of the project.

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Conservation Design Forum

"The reception we get everywhere to this amazing initiative is always both positive and inquisitive," he commented. "'When can I see that? How did you get this put together? How is it working?'" These are the questions we hope to be able to shine some light on as the project becomes reality over the next 18 months.

"Be prepared for an onslaught of interested parties here in West Union, practitioners, regulators, public works and planning staff, elected officials, students and many others," he forewarned the city leaders, "because this is really a very unique, special, and extremely important project."

A community

'Deeply Connected'

Later, the master of ceremonies, Fayette County Economic Development director Robin Bostrom, helped unveil the community's new logo and tagline: "West Union: Deeply Connected."

While narrating a newly developed ad to help market West Union to new business and industry, as well as to benefit tourism, Bostrom said, "In West Union, we honor families and cherish our friends. We preserve our past, and we revel in the vision of our future. That future is happening now, as we are proud to be a Green Pilot Streetscape Program community."

"Inspired by our agricultural roots of using every resource available, we are tapping into cutting-edge technologies, building materials, and energy solutions to reconnect the community with its historic downtown. From our past, through to the present, and focused on the future, we are West Union, and we are deeply connected."

An international vision

Tim Waddell, division administrator with the IDED Community Development Division, praised the community for taking the green model a step further by creating a design that included the ability to retain 90 percent of precipitation on-site.

"This project is international in its scope, as an entire central business district creates a sustainable model for communities to emulate everywhere," Waddell emphasized. "West Union is now synonymous with Chicago, Seattle, and Boston in the history of our country's aspiration to become more green and sustainable...to show that this is ultimately an economic development project that will provide not just a renewable energy source for generations to come, but to provide lower costs to energy users and subsequently lower the cost of doing business, ensuring that these businesses remain viable for the next generation to come."

Waddell echoed Mayor Dunt's earlier sentiments in recognizing all public officials who supported the state's "Green Model Communities" legislation and the local endeavor. In addition, he praised the efforts of Jeff Geerts of IDED and Jim Patchett and the entire Conservation Design Forum staff, who designed the project.

"And, most importantly, I would like to recognize the many people of this community who helped make this project possible, who never gave up, who took the leap of faith," he concluded.

"I am going to single out some of them, including Robin Bostrom, Greg Ptacek, Mike Lauer, Tobin Britt, Dick Woodard, and Jon

Biederman. All of them were here at the beginning, and they are still here today. I thank you all for your perseverance and confidence, even in the darkest days of seeing this project to the final goal.

"And finally, a thank-you to the City of West Union, Mayor Dunt, and members of the City Council for taking on this project which, I believe, will change the way the world thinks of you and how you all think of yourselves."

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