

November 7, 2014



The Honorable Mayor T. M. Franklin Cownie and
Members of the Des Moines City Council
675 Harwood Drive
Des Moines, Iowa 50312

Dear Mayor Cownie and Council Members:

Over the past two decades Des Moines has been incredibly successful in establishing itself as a city able to boast of its thriving independent restaurant scene. This is a credit to local restaurateurs, entrepreneurs, chefs, culinary educators and the community itself.

The heart of our capital city is found in this unique set of entertainment, shopping, and cultural areas--from the Riverwalk and Western Gateway Park to East Village and Court Avenue District—Des Moines has a character all its own. My counterparts in other states have often asked how the city was able to so effectively both revitalize and reinvent its downtown. My answer is always the same – a consistent commitment from a private/public partnership to create a downtown where people want to not just work, but also live and recreate.

That is why the Iowa Restaurant Association must join the growing chorus of voices questioning the city's decision to shake up Court Avenue—the city's longest standing and most established entertainment district—with the addition of a large chain grocery store.

We count ourselves among those who believe a grocery store, and Hy-Vee in particular, can add much to the downtown's growth and future. But the designated location is curious. It seems oddly out of place when one considers that the familiar red lit sign of Hy-Vee will now be the first thing to greet visitors when they enter the area best known for a world class farmer's market, one-of-a-kind restaurants and bars, and the Science Center. Even more odd is the fact that this same area has steered clear of chain restaurants, but is now embracing a chain grocery store.

The Iowa Restaurant Association considers Hy-Vee a strong partner. We are excited that it will have a downtown location. But we are extremely concerned about the chosen location's impact on some of our longest standing independent restaurants and the impact on the ambiance of the area.

It is not too late for you to reconsider this plan—so please thoughtfully do so. There are vast open areas with large parking lots sitting empty along MLK Parkway—wouldn't it be best to find ways to build up those areas, rather than be detrimental to the independent restaurants in an already revitalized entertainment block?

Thank you for rethinking your current strategy. We are excited to see what options you might propose that benefit downtown residents and businesses.

Respectfully,

Jessica Dunker
President and CEO
Iowa Restaurant Association