

# **Muscatine: Insights and Rebranding Recommendations**

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The University of Iowa Marketing Institute

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This report summarizes the key finding, implications and recommendations that emerged from an analysis done by members of The Marketing Institute at The University of Iowa.

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Problem

Despite being the headquarters for well-known companies such as HNI Corporation, Kent Corporation, and numerous other companies (Bridgestone, Monsanto and Heinz to name a few), Muscatine does not appeal as a place to live for a significant portion of people employed by these companies. This has led to the phenomenon known as “import commuting.” This has become a major concern to Muscatine’s community and business leaders who have invested a great deal of resources to make the city a more attractive and self-contained community for its residents. It’s not unusual to meet workers who commute from Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, or even Dubuque (especially younger white collar workers).

Muscatine would like to understand why more of the working population does not choose to live there and start addressing those issues to reverse the trend. Furthermore, based on findings, they would like to develop a marketing plan that includes creating a brand identity.



### Project Description

The project is to create a new brand identity and marketing plan for the town of Muscatine, in order to reverse the current trend of import commuting. Recommendations will be based on market research done through the use of surveys and focus groups.

### Key Deliverables

1. Conduct a market research study using qualitative tools (focus groups and survey questionnaire) to find out why workers opt to commute rather than live in Muscatine; at the same time, find out how other similar size communities, either in Iowa or other areas of the USA, retain their commuters.

2. Analyze data and report key findings from the survey and focus groups; provide recommendations to reverse the trend.
3. Design/create a brand identity that is represented through a logo/slogan.
4. Provide a formal report and presentation that will include: executive summary, methodology, key findings, recommendations and implications.

## **II. OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY**

### **Field Research**

Our team analyzed demographic data, current branding strategies, and strengths and weaknesses of the city of Muscatine and the communities it competes with including Iowa City, Dubuque, Bettendorf, and Davenport. The main take-away we found in doing this research was that Muscatine's city programming, housing, and entertainment options are not aligned with the wants and needs of the young professional workforce age group they are trying to target.

### **Personal Interviews**

To gain direction and insight, we reached out to numerous business leaders throughout the community. These interviews consisted of phone conversations with leaders at some of the major corporations in Muscatine including HNI, Heinz, Bridgestone, Carver Pump, Muscatine Power and Water, Stanley Consultants, The Muscatine Arts Center, and Central State Bank. Topics asked about during the interviews included education, recreation, entertainment and housing options, and personal experiences in the city. The main goal of the interviews was to help us model our survey.

We also interviewed Rick Dickinson, the President and CEO of the Greater Dubuque Development Corporation. We believe that Dubuque offers a great model of various programs that would be very successful in attracting young professionals to Muscatine. Rick and his team began a campaign in 1997 based around restructuring their community, building a new brand image, and targeting young professionals, which has been very successful.

### **Survey**

In order to collect the opinions of young professional living and/or working in Muscatine, we created a survey that was emailed to the employees at most major corporations in the city. The survey was also posted on the Chamber of Commerce's website and in the city's newspaper. The survey was set up to collect opinions that could be sorted by whether or not participants lived in Muscatine, what age group they were a part of, and what pay grade they were in. This helped us single out the results of participants in the young professional age group that Muscatine would like to focus on marketing to. We received 438 replies. We used these results to design questions for our focus group.

### **Focus Group**

Our focus group held in Muscatine in December 2013, consisted of participants who currently work in Muscatine. We had asked those who answered our survey to provide their e-mail address if they were interested in joining us in a focus group. We were able

to use our survey results to pre-screen and select participants based on their level of education and age range. The 26 invited participants had some college education with 89% achieving a bachelor's degree or above. 65% of our group was in our target market age group of 21-35, with a few members in the age range of 41-56. The demographic provided us a mix of seasoned and young professionals. During our focus group we focused on perceived strengths and weaknesses of Muscatine.

### **III. KEY FINDINGS**

#### **Personal Interview Insights**

Our first personal interviews were conducted with Muscatine business leaders. From these interviews we were able to determine a lot of key insights that aided us in the development of our survey. We asked the business leaders a wide variety of questions regarding living and working in Muscatine. Based on these interviews, we discovered that a majority of the young professionals working in Muscatine do commute due to a lack of entertainment options for young adults in Muscatine. In addition, the positives of Muscatine were discussed such as the ample recreation services. However, the business leaders did mention that some of the weaknesses of Muscatine are in the areas of education and residential options.

We conducted a second personal interview with Rick Dickinson, the President and CEO of Greater Dubuque Development Corp. The interview provided us with great insights regarding programs Dubuque has developed to attract young professionals to the community. Rick first discussed Dubuque's Workforce Solutions project.

Workforce Solutions started in 1997 and provides a vehicle where prospective employees can easily identify opportunities in Dubuque. To aid this project, Dubuquejobs.com was created as a page for employers to post positions they were seeking to fill. The site has been very successful and generates about 80,000 viewers per month. Mr. Dickinson emphasized the importance of seeking out young professionals who are looking at jobs. Dubuquejobs.com aims to make it as easy as possible for young professionals to find great opportunities in Dubuque.

In addition, Mr. Dickinson described a "Concierge Service" that they offer to anyone who is moving to Dubuque. The concierge service offers tours of the community, and classes. The five classes introduce newcomers to other newcomers, provide a tour of the community, and introduce different restaurants, entertainment venues, and hospitality options. Dubuque understands how important it is for young professionals to develop a network, make friends, and feel connected in the community. Furthermore, Dubuque has moved residential opportunities and new businesses to the downtown area. This has allowed Dubuque to create a live-work environment that is very appealing to young professionals. The Dubuque Greater Development Corporation also travels to different Universities to promote businesses in Dubuque and recruit soon to be college graduates.

However, the most important insight we gained from Rick Dickinson and Dubuque was learning the greatest fallacy of community transformation is that a good slogan will solve all problems. Rick claimed, "Cutesiness of verbiage does not matter. Rebuilding a

community takes hard work, study, planning, implementation, collaboration, budgeting, and staying on schedule. There is nothing wrong with a cool logo but that is not going to create any real change”. Dubuque has been working on transforming its community for almost twenty years and they are just starting to reap the success of their efforts.

In order to be successful, Muscatine needs to work on some of its key weaknesses and build from the ground up. A great logo and slogan alone will not attract new young professionals to the community. Muscatine must also be perceived as a desirable place for young professionals to start their careers. The logo and slogan are merely visual representations of this brand promise and culture.

### **Survey Insights**

Due to privacy concerns, we distributed our Qualtrics survey through business leaders sending a link to their employees. Therefore, we were not able to determine how many people actually received our survey. However, we received 438 responses, 199 of which showed interest in participating in our focus groups. This high response provided great insights about people’s perceptions.

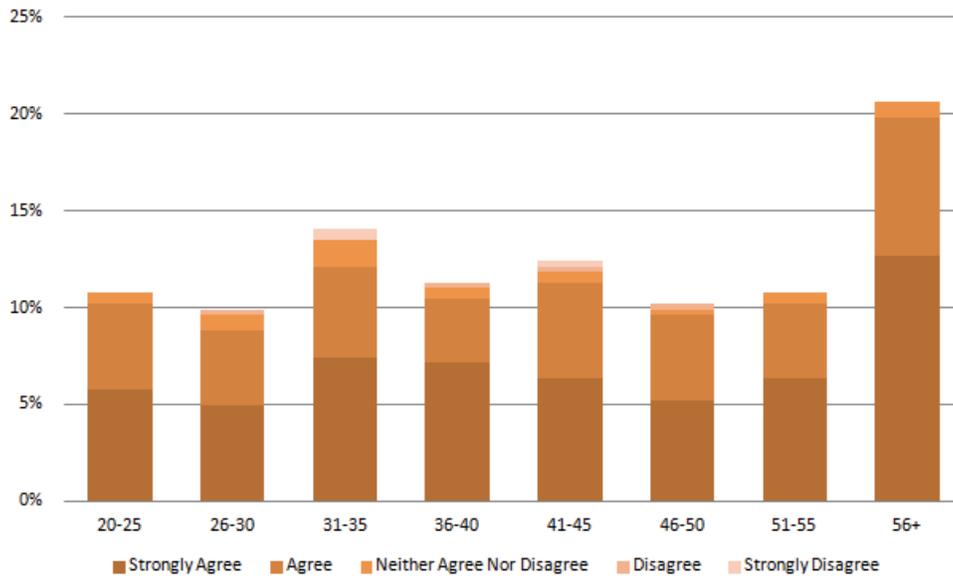
First, we found that 44% of participants that previously lived in Muscatine moved away due to proximity to their family and friends. Additionally, 72% of the respondents who currently live in Muscatine stated they have considered relocating in the near future. Along these lines, participants tended to rank employment opportunities as their top or second most important factor when considering a city to live in. On the other hand, commuters cited three primary factors to their decision to live somewhere other than Muscatine: “to be closer to family”, “there is more to do where [they] live”, and “Muscatine’s education system is lacking.”

Participants were asked to rank Muscatine’s perceived strengths and weaknesses. The top three resulting strengths were affordability, employment opportunities, and proximity to family and friends. The top three weaknesses participants listed were lack of retail, restaurants and recreation.

We conducted further analysis of information about participants’ current perceptions of Muscatine.

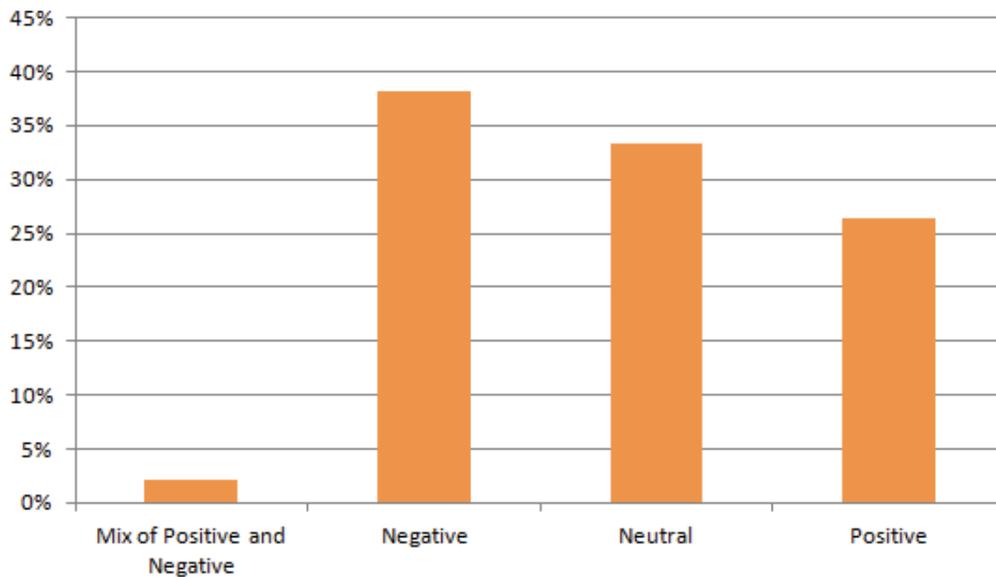
As shown in the bar graphs below, we asked participants if they thought Muscatine’s current branding, the Pearl of the Mississippi, was historical. The vast majority of participants agreed.

### "Is the Current Branding 'Historical'?"



We also asked participants an open-ended question regarding their perceptions of Muscatine. Responses varied greatly and ranged from “river” or “river town” to “stinky” to “great place to live.” In order to show these results objectively we labeled responses as positive, negative, neutral, or mixed. The majority of participants responded with negative or neutral perceptions of Muscatine.

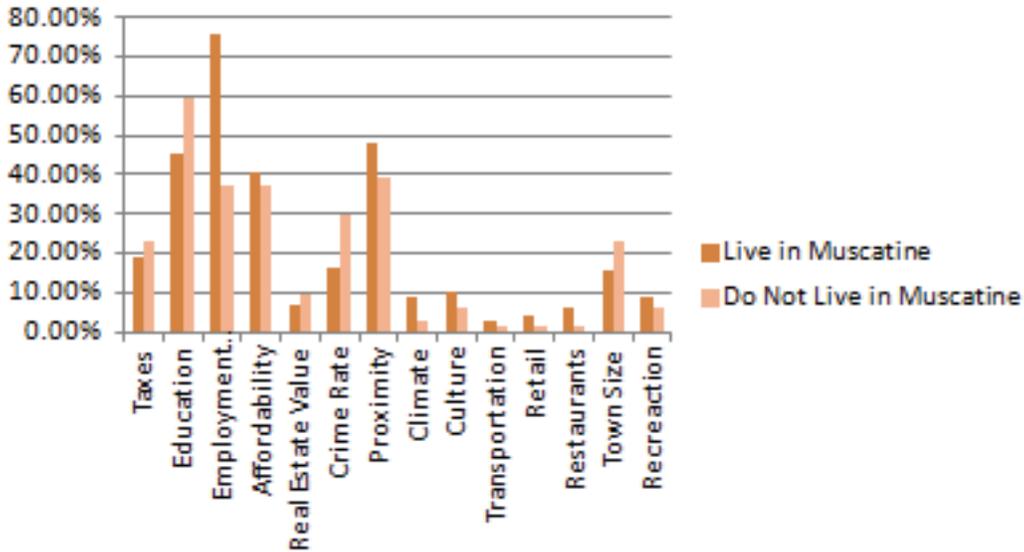
### What Comes to Mind When You Think of Muscatine?



We also asked survey participants to rank criteria in order of most importance to their decision of choosing a location to live. Employment, education and proximity to family

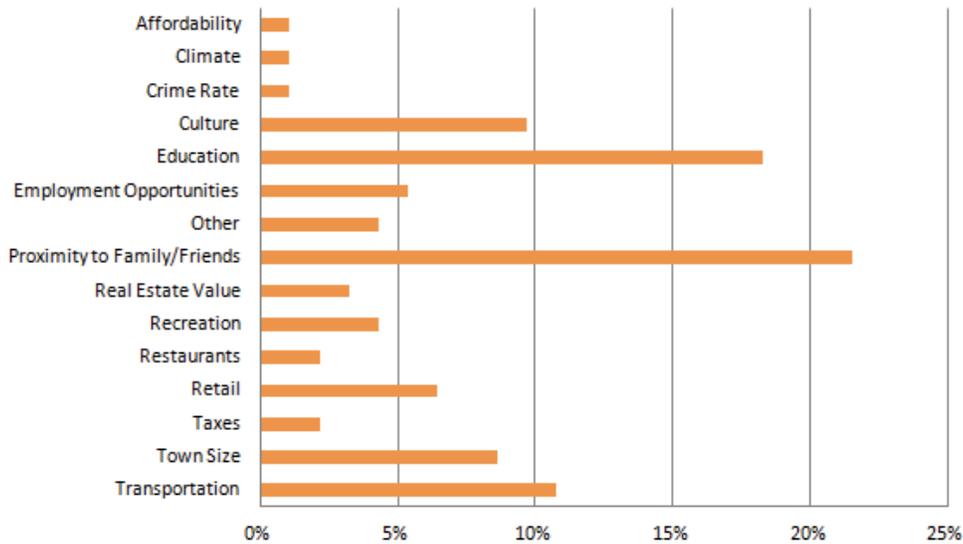
and friends were the top three factors participants cited as factors to their decision about what city to live in.

### Top 3 Factors in Living Location



Along those same lines, we asked participants who indicated they do not live in Muscatine to express why they chose to live elsewhere and commute to Muscatine. Participants commuting to Muscatine to work cited proximity to family and friends, education, transportation and culture as their primary reasons for choosing to live elsewhere.

### Why Not Live in Muscatine?



### **Focus Group Insights**

Our key findings addressed positives and negatives of Muscatine in the minds of people who live there. During our discussions, healthy living was a popular positive topic among participants. Verbatim from the participants include “There's an emphasis on healthy living.” “The YMCA provides low fees and there are other fitness centers, like Anytime Fitness too”. Participants also noted the abundant resources for outdoor fitness like trails, and the opening of Discovery Park. However, not everyone in the focus group was familiar with the new park. There was also a lack of recognition of the Blue Zones Project. We asked members in the focus group how they felt about the Blue Zone Initiative, and the majority of the participants needed the project to be explained.

Another key strength identified from the focus groups was the availability of employment in Muscatine. We were able to gather from the group, not only was there plenty of opportunities for work, but also companies that provide a great environment to work for. Quotes from participants included “I live here to be near work” and “Employers take good care of their employees” which support the positive perception those working in Muscatine have about their career opportunities.

Insights we discovered about areas of Muscatine that can be improved include options for late night transportation. We heard from participants there is no cab service, if they were hoping to be out late, and especially if they are choosing to drink. Currently Muscatine has a bus service which was not mentioned in the focus group, hinting at the issue of people being unaware of their options as well as their need of a taxi service.

Another weakness identified in our focus group included the lack of retail, restaurants, and hotel options. A quote from participant included, “We are missing big stores like Target”. The focus group remarked they travel to competitor cities like Iowa City and Dubuque to eat out and shop. They mentioned it would be beneficial if options were within walking distance, as well as their desire to have outdoor dining similar to nearby cities. Our key finding is those who work in Muscatine feel there is a trade off when deciding whether to live in Muscatine. Young professionals feel they will either need to commute on the weekends for leisure or commute during the week. Also during the discussions, people remarked they wish there were more options for their families and friends to stay when they visit. They wished there was a moderately upscale hotel in town (and not a motel). Currently, Muscatine has a bed and breakfast that does not appear to be well advertised as a viable option for this problem.

A final finding discovered in the focus group was the dismay for housing options among young professionals. They discussed the lack of housing options among those with similar financial backgrounds. Young professionals said they can not afford the nicer single family homes offered, but want something nicer than what they have lived in the past. A verbatim from the group included “I'm not in college anymore”. The group seemed to want an improvement from their college apartments until they are ready for the commitment of a home. An apartment complex mentioned as a current viable option for residents in that age range was Cottonwood.

## **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Short-Term Recommendations**

Our first short-term recommendation is to implement the Dubuque Model discussed earlier in the report. As seen from our interview with Rick Dickinson, it is of the utmost importance for Muscatine to create a community where young professionals feel connected and welcomed. We believe that by implementing a Concierge Service, young professionals will be able to see all of the great things the Muscatine community has to offer and start creating a professional and social network. In addition, a Muscatine Development group should begin recruiting at college campuses. This would allow students who will be entering the workforce the opportunity to see all of the great employment opportunities in Muscatine in a thriving community. Muscatine would also benefit from the creation of a jobs website. A website promoting all of the jobs in Muscatine would help attract new people to the area.

We also recommend that Muscatine promote and revive its downtown area. Survey results indicated Muscatine's top rated weaknesses were retail, restaurants, and recreation. In addition, from the focus group responses, we found that many young professionals working in Muscatine are looking for more entertainment options. If Muscatine could provide some financial incentives for businesses to move to the downtown area, we believe it will solve two main problems: 1) revitalization of the downtown to make it more appealing and attractive; and 2) keeping its residents in town to spend their money as opposed to surrounding cities.

Muscatine should also do more to advertise the recreation options available on the river and through the Blue Zones project. We believe that recreation opportunities could be one of Muscatine's greatest strengths; however, people need to be informed of the recreational options available. In general, it seems Muscatine can benefit from communicating to current and potential residents about the benefits of the town. As stated in the focus groups not everyone knew about the opening of the new trail or other recreational opportunities.

We think it is important to promote awareness by using social media and advertisements to promote what is great about Muscatine. Furthermore, we recommend that Muscatine create more housing options in the downtown area. This would create more housing for young professionals and would create a great work-life environment that college graduates enjoy.

Finally, Muscatine should work on improving its transportation options. Muscatine offers bus transportation, but as heard in the focus groups, many young professionals complain that there is no taxi service. We would recommend starting a taxi service. A taxi would allow people living in Muscatine and the surrounding area to stay out later and enjoy the downtown area.

### **Long-Term Recommendations**

Our first long-term recommendation is to improve the education system, especially in the high school level. As seen from our survey results, sixty percent of non-residents

included education in their top three factors in choosing a place of residence. In 2013 Muscatine's high school had an average score of 78.2 for math and 71.5 for reading, both which are below the state's average. Muscatine ranked worse than 83% of other Iowa schools in 2013. We recommend while Muscatine is focusing on improving their education they communicate their changes with community members. It is important for the public to be aware of the new change in leadership, the recent change in principal and superintendent.

We suggest working on housing options for young professionals. As seen by our focus group, the young professional employees feel they do not have options in Muscatine. We suggest opening more apartment complexes similar to Cottonwood, but closer to the downtown area. Cottonwood currently offers amenities young professionals seek such as the ability to have different lengths on their lease, as well as modern fixtures, appliances and ambiance in the apartments. We also suggest offering more two bedrooms apartment units as an option for young professionals to offset rent payments with a roommate. We believe a similar complex closer to downtown would be a very attractive and appealing to young professionals who have a tendency to prefer a more eclectic and urban lifestyle. Young professionals seek big city amenities, which include being able to walk to local shops, restaurants, and businesses.

Another option for housing includes offering subsidies for employees of Muscatine to live in town. Currently younger professionals may not have enough to afford the nicer options in Muscatine. By making nicer homes more affordable through a subsidy, current Muscatine workers may be more likely to stay in town.

Muscatine should also seek to improve their ways of communication with the younger demographic. As seen by our focus group, people sometimes have misconceptions or are not seeing the entire story. By developing a social media presence, a conversation can develop between Muscatine and their target market. Muscatine can use their "What's Up Muscatine" as a device to communicate with those living and commuting to Muscatine. We recommend using Twitter and Facebook, in addition to the website, to update people on changes as well as all the wonderful things in the city. For example, programs related to the Blue Zone and resources on how to get involved can be shared on a Facebook post. Or the hash tag #MuscatineBlueZone can be created in order to build excitement on the achievement. When using social media, remember to be engaging with your audience, as it can be another form of market research. Posts can be used to ask questions in order to find out what your audience wants in the city. For example post, "What kind of summer events would you like to see?" This will provide ideas on programming that would be attractive to a younger demographic.

Also Muscatine should focus on developing their downtown area. From the survey results we saw over five percent of responders choose not to live in Muscatine due to the lack of retail. Muscatine can help this issue in two ways. The first is to support the current establishments in downtown Muscatine. During our focus group a few restaurants were mentioned as great places to eat. It is important to give these restaurants support in order to bring positive attention to the downtown area. These restaurants include The Brew, 101 West, and Pearl City Chop House. Finding ways to partner and market current

options will change current perceptions of a lack of restaurants, as well as increase community support. Also, to attract new business and retail, Muscatine can offer subsidies as incentives for business owners to move to Muscatine.

### **Proposed Branding Strategy**

We think it is important to remember that a logo and slogan alone are not a brand; a brand is a culture and perception, and a logo and slogan are a visual representation of the brand's promise. We also want to emphasize that a branding campaign takes a considerable amount of time. When we spoke to Rick Dickinson from Dubuque, he told us the city began its rebranding process in 1997. It wasn't until recently, almost 20 years later, that Dubuque started marketing the rebranding materials. With this in mind, our proposed branding strategy runs parallel to our short-term and long-term recommendations.

We provided three rebranding directions, each with a different logo and slogan option. We also provided a final proposal recommendation.

#### *Proposal 1: Pearls of Opportunity*



Our first proposal is “Pearls of Opportunity.” This option references the history of the pearl button factory, but could also be interpreted similar to a “hidden gem” concept to someone who doesn't know the history behind the pearl. On the other hand, the mentioned opportunities could be interpreted as employment, community, health, or even education opportunities.

*Proposal 2: Great Opportunity. Close Community.*



Great Opportunity. Close Community.

# MUSCATINE

Our second proposal is “Great Opportunity. Close Community.” This option again emphasizes the many vast opportunities available to people living in Muscatine, but also aims to draw attention to the culture of Muscatine and its family-oriented programming and proposed young adult life culture. Overall, “Great Opportunity. Close Community.” aspires to generate perceptions of Muscatine as a “small big city.”

*Proposal 3: Opportunity Around Every Bend*



Our third proposal is “Opportunity Around Every Bend.” This option offers a subtle historical reference, but places the majority of its focus on the opportunities in Muscatine. It displays optimism and futuristic vision while being versatile and sustainable.

*Final Recommendation*



As previously mentioned, a brand is a culture and a promise - not logo or a slogan. The logo and slogan are visual representations of the brand promise. We feel the sunrise logo with the “Opportunity Around Every Bend” slogan represents a strong, sustainable brand promise of extensive opportunities through jobs, community involvement, environment, recreation and many other avenues and can be used alongside our short and long term recommendations. It demonstrates a forward-looking vision and the idea of “turning over a new leaf” to make positive changes to the Muscatine community such as the Blue Zones Project and our proposed short and long term recommendations.

The colors yellow, blue and green used in these logo proposals were chosen specifically for common psychology associated with them. Yellow indicates confidence and optimism while blue shows peace, integrity, trust and dependability. Additionally, green signifies harmony, balance, refreshment, health and growth. We feel these colors further represent the brand promise Muscatine should portray to its community.