

2006 Downtown Plan

City of Champaign, Illinois



The Champaign Downtown Plan

City of Champaign
Planning Department
May 2005

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About the cover:
This illustration shows potential infill opportunities at the 100 block of East Main Street. This illustration is explained further on page 30.

Framework



"A vision for the future of downtown."

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History of Downtown Champaign

REFLECTIONS ON THE DOWNTOWN OVER THE YEARS

an historical narrative by Former Champaign Mayor Dannel McCollum

With the final determination of route for the Chicago Branch of the Illinois Central Railroad in the latter half of 1851, the location of a station nearly two miles to the west of the Champaign County Court House was de facto determined. In mid-1853, shortly after the railroad purchased 80 acres from the Col. M.W. Busey estate, construction of the first buildings begun on the "depot grounds," and the area soon became known as the Depot. By the time of the arrival of the first train from



As a junction point to all directions, downtown Champaign once thrived as a midwestern hub for freight and services.

Chicago in regular service to what the railroad called Urbana Station, on July 24, 1854, a great deal of activity was in progress in the depot area. In addition to newcomers to the area, there was significant migration from Urbana. In the first two months of 1855, an effort was initiated to incorporate Urbana and surrounding area, including the Depot, into a single municipality. Due to opposition in the latter area, Urbana incorporated alone without the inclusion of the Depot. In March of that year, the Depot was granted its own post office under the name West Urbana. The separation of the new town from the old had become a determined fact. Commercial development in the depot area occurred on both sides of the tracks. In those early years, the Doane House, which served both as the railroad station and as a hotel on the east side of the tracks,



Ruins of Illinois Building Mar. 17-15.
The St. Patrick's Day fire of 1915 destroyed the entire five story Lewis and Company Department store at the southwest corner Park and Neil Street. Fires like this were common throughout the early history of downtown.



1858



1924



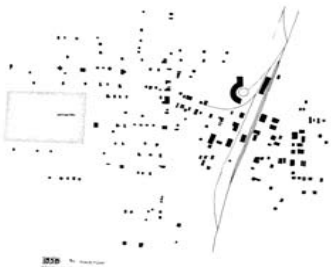
1951



1977



1996





The five points intersection of Neil, Hickory, Main and Church Streets has long been considered the center of Downtown. Although fires and demolition have changed the northern face of this intersection the southern faces remain intact.

west of the Illinois Central tracks. This was a consequence of the swale, better known as the north branch of the Boneyard, which runs along Second Street, rendering the area wet and difficult to develop. Almost from the outset, the commercial strength of Champaign-Urbana became concentrated in Downtown Champaign, a circumstance ultimately attributable to its proximity to the railroad. Its steady growth through the latter half of the 19th century,



Lewis and Company reopened in their rebuilt department store. Note the large picture windows which added street life throughout the entire downtown.

was the social center of the community. Also, the Cattle Bank, the only surviving building from that era, remains at the northeast corner of First Street and University Avenue. But, as the 1858 Bowman map of Urbana and West Urbana plainly illustrates, the thrust of the development soon was concentrated

though considerable, was smaller than many other area cities of similar size and importance owing to the fact that the presence of downtown Urbana also drew market shares, as subsequently did Campustown. Among the earliest public improvements were

sidewalks.

By the late 1860's, the original frame buildings hastily erected after the coming of the railroad were being replaced with more permanent structures of brick. One of the earliest of these buildings remains on the northwest corner of Taylor and Chestnut streets. The first of the really large brick structures was a three story, Italianate building where One Main stands today; it fell to the march of progress with the building of the Grant Department Store. It was followed shortly by two very similar buildings on the two corners to the west. Only the Metropolitan Building (223 North Neil Street) remains. (Its mate to the north was razed to create a surface parking lot.) Confidence in the future of the area and fire resistance were the determining factors. Beginning in the latter years of the 19th century, the downtown streets were paved with bricks, helping the area rise out of the mud. As the downtown expanded, it did surround a few surviving single family residences, some of which remained until the late 20th century. In the pre-automobile age, even as late as 1910 and a bit beyond, virtually all the social activities of mid-sized cities such as Champaign occurred in or immediately adjacent to the downtown areas: general retail, food markets, banking, offices, government, dining, lodges, churches, entertainment, etc. Respecting the latter, the opera houses of the late 19th century, gave way to the vaudeville movie houses, the grandest of which, the Virginia, survives today. On the immediate periphery were a number of fine apartment buildings dating from the turn of the century. The downtown built environment as it was established in the mid teens remained intact for the next thirty years, from the



The flatiron building served as a landmark in downtown from 1909 to the 1970's but was razed in a last ditch effort to keep major retail tenants from fleeing to the shopping centers and to make way for additional parking. Even with additional parking the stores left to the newly opened Country Fair Shopping Center and Market Place Mall.



For nearly 50 years, downtown Champaign was served by a nine-mile streetcar system that connected downtown to surrounding neighborhoods and even rural destinations. The interurban system was taken up after General Motors purchased the system because of competition with automobiles.

bus service began as people wanted to drive instead of ride. Vintage buildings began to come down as individual businesses attempted to accommodate the increased need for parking. A pioneer in this movement was Robeson's Department Store. The City installed parking meters to encourage turnover and prevent employees from monopolizing scarce places on city streets. But the proliferation of automobiles opened a new threat to the downtown. People



The December 27, 1987 fire destroyed the entire block between Neil, Main, and Fremont Streets. Failing to rebuild the block the developer eventually razed the buildings and sold the property to the City to construct parking. However, in 2004 the City sold this lot to One Main Development for a 30,000 square foot mixed use development

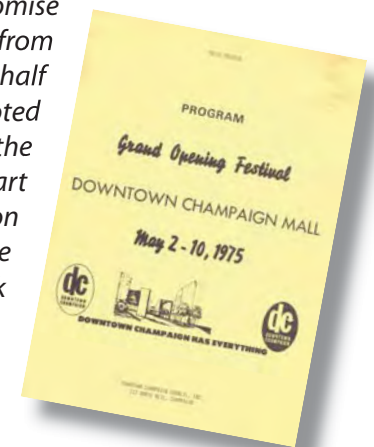
time of World War I, through the Great Depression and World War II. Pent-up consumer demand, unleashed following the defeat of Germany and Japan, was to have a major impact upon downtown. The automobile industry was quick to shift from war production and to dust off its 1942 models for the 1946 production year. The long decline in local

could drive further afield to do their shopping. Developers were quick to seize the opportunity and in 1959, Country Fair Shopping Center opened at the intersection of Springfield and Mattis Avenues. In the downtown, owners of many of the older buildings constructed sleek metal facade treatments to "modernize" their businesses and thus make them appear more fashionable to customers. But the knockout blow to downtown retail was the development of Marketplace, a shopping mall located just north of 1-74 on Neil Street extended. Delighted to have the retail expansion, yet at the same time desperate to appease and preserve the downtown interests, the City embarked upon a study of the aging area. The consultants recommended a plan which would have roofed over much of the central downtown area. The scale and costs of the proposal were staggering, far exceeding what could reasonably be built and sustained. The compromise was the pedestrian mall blocking off Neil Street from the corner of Main and Neil south a block and a half south to Chester Street. The idea, largely promoted by Downtown business interests, was to make the downtown more pedestrian friendly. Another part of the "improvements" was to take out the flatiron block in front of the Sears store and virtually the entire area to the rear of the store and in back of J.C. Penney's to create huge parking lots, all in an effort to keep the two large chain stores downtown.

It was all to no avail. Within two years, both Sears



Once dominated by large department stores, Downtown was the commercial heart of the region. Over time this dominance has shifted to auto-oriented regional shopping centers





Over a 30 year time period over 60 buildings were leveled to make way for surface parking.. This movement did substantial damage to the urban fabric of downtown Champaign

were built, this time south of Main Street. That failed to arrest the closing of the traditional downtown department stores-Lewis' and Robeson's - with Jos. Kuhn hanging on only by a sliver. For a decade and a half, from 1975 until 1990, what had once been a vibrant downtown became virtually an 8:00 am to 5:00 pm operation. Even the major movie theaters - The Rialto, The Orpheum and finally The Virginia began to shut down, victims of the multiplex operations located elsewhere.



Finance District just in time to take advantage of the first major redevelopment in the downtown-the Bankllinois (now Main Street Bank and Trust) project,

and J.C. Penney's had fled to Marketplace Mall. The pedestrian mall on Neil Street, the perceived trendy, miracle cure for downtown ills, made a downtown already difficult to navigate because of its contorted street patterns, next to impossible. Still larger parking lots

Fortunately, a number of anchors remained in the downtown. Prominent among them were: City government, the News-Gazette, Christie Clinic and major banks. Property values declined markedly. The City government reacted by creating a Tax Increment

followed by the expansion of Christie Clinic. By the mid 1980's, the then mayor had made it a major goal to reopen Neil Street. By then, most people realized what a mistake the pedestrian mall had been. The only question was who should pay for the removal, the downtown interests who had promoted the pedestrian mall in the first place, or the public at large. The matter was resolved when the City financed the reopening of the street, one way south. The City Council realized that the downtown would never come back as the major retail center of the region. Its future lay as a mixed use area as entrepreneurs took advantage of the diminished property values to establish specialty retail, dining and entertainment venues. As traffic increased, it was hoped residential redevelopment would occur in the often vacant upper stories of the older buildings. Using Tax Increment funds, the City embarked upon an ambitious cityscape plan to visually improve the appearance of the public areas. Furthermore, the City Council made provision for outdoor seating venues for restaurants and coffee houses using public sidewalks. A major blow to the downtown occurred when a fire destroyed much of the One Main block, everything east of the former Grants Department Store. After a valiant attempt to redevelop the fire area, the City acquired the block and razed the buildings to create a parking lot. It left the City in a position subsequently to support a major redevelopment project on the site. While it was outside of the TIF district, the future of the Virginia Theater was of growing concern to the City. After it ceased being a movie venue, a husband and wife team continued to keep the theater open with



Marking the first new construction in downtown in over 15 years, One Main features three restaurants, two retail businesses, a business incubator, major computer game designer firm, and 26 condominiums.

live performances. While the theater was in generally good condition for a 70-year-old structure, it had significant shortcomings with respect to current life safety codes. In protracted negotiations with the owner, the City created the Redevelopment Investment Program (RIP). The theory was that much of the costs of renovating older buildings involved life safety codes imposed by government, so the City should participate in the costs. Since TIF money could not be used for the Virginia, funds from other sources were made available. To qualify for RIP monies, either from TIF funds or other sources, a developer had to meet certain criteria, among which were considerations of historic preservation, appropriate facade treatments and permanent improvements to the building. One final incentive was offered under the provisions of which a Class A (bar) license would be made available for significant downtown building renovation projects. Not only were buildings renovated, but traffic in the evening hours increased significantly. The result has been most encouraging. The visual appearance of the downtown with tastefully restored buildings and beautified public areas has had a positive impact. Increased traffic from expanding entertainment venues-bars and restaurants-has moved the downtown from an eight hour to a 17 hour area. Currently, the City is offering incentives for the redevelopment of the upper stories into apartments as well as new construction. Considering the condition of the downtown in the mid-1980s, the transformation has been remarkable.

Dannel McCollum served as a three term Mayor of Champaign from 1987 to 1999. Now retired, Mayor McCollum assists the Champaign Historical Museum in preserving the history of Champaign County.



TIME LINE OF MAJOR DOWNTOWN EVENTS

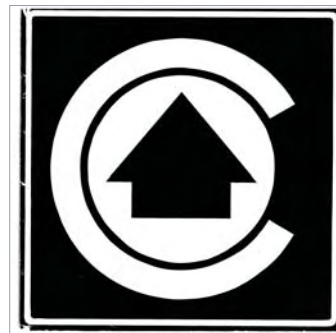
- 1860 - City of Champaign incorporated
- 1868 - University of Illinois is established
- 1887 - Electric streetcar service begins downtown
- 1921 - Virginia Theater opens
- 1936 - Last remaining streetcar is decommissioned
- 1937 - Christie Clinic opens downtown offices
- 1959 - Country Fair Shopping Center opens
- 1964 - Lincoln Square Mall opens in Downtown Urbana
- 1967 - Parkland College opens Downtown campus
- 1970 - Inman Hotel closes
- 1975 - Neil Street Pedestrian Mall opens
- 1976 - Market Place Mall Opens on North Neil Street
- 1977 - Sears and J.C. Penney's close downtown stores
- 1981 - Tax Increment Finance District is established
- 1986 - Neil Street pedestrian mall is removed
- 1987 - Fire destroys entire block at Neil and Main
- 1987 - Christie Clinic begins expansion
- 1990 - Robeson's Dept. Store closes after 116 years
- 1992 - Downtown Plan adopted by City Council
- 1995 - Streetscape phase I project begins
- 2001 - Final streetscape phase completed
- 2004 - One Main Street opens at Neil and Main Street
- 2004 - Parking Lot reconstruction project is completed

Past Planning Efforts

As downtown has evolved, so too has the planning process. Three significant planning efforts ranging from land use to urban design studies have been completed with the intentions of guiding a future vision for downtown. While some of these studies have been more influential on the development of downtown than others, they all have one common similarity. They all recognize the importance of downtown to Champaign and recognize it as the heart of the community. Downtown is perhaps the most dynamic area of the city. It is greatly affected by changes in the economy, local market, local interest and perception. The following plans have all contained ideas for downtown portrayed in written policy and graphic illustration. They all have contributed to the current physical state of downtown as well as the current philosophy on what makes downtown work.

Design Concept Study for Downtown Champaign 1969

This plan was prepared by a team of architects at the University of Illinois for the Champaign Development Corporation. The plan contained a set of sketches and drawings that illustrated specific design concepts for downtown's transformation. The plan also identified specific mapped strategies of transportation and land use. Most notably, the plan recommended closing Neil Street for a pedestrian mall that would include a rotunda, called Champaign Circle, in the middle of Neil Street at Taylor Street. The plan also called for significant amounts of surface parking to be provided for the mall concept.



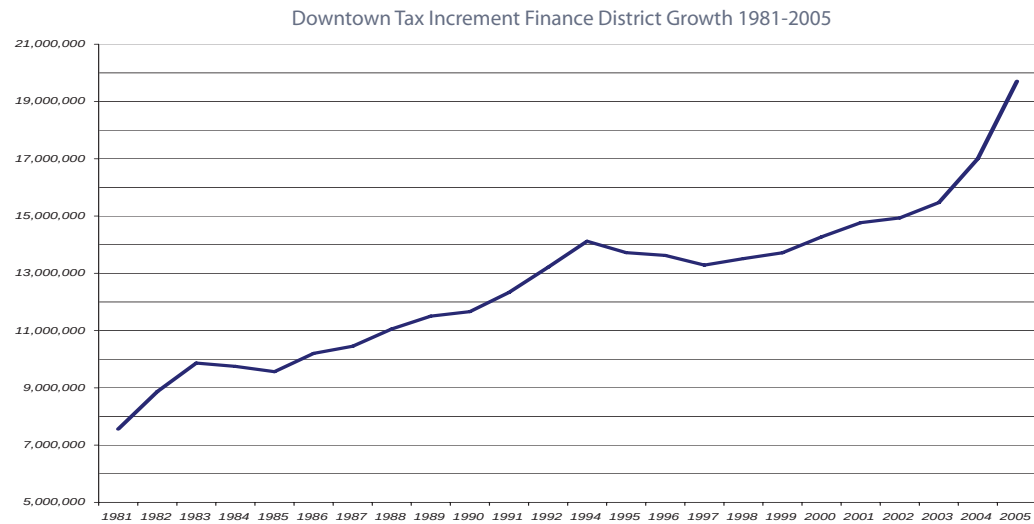
downtown champaign
DESIGN CONCEPT STUDY
CDC
CHAMPAIGN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
JULY, 1969



Tax Increment Financing District

1986

In 1986 the City Council adopted the first Tax Increment Financing (TIF) plan for a portion of downtown. TIF is a redevelopment financing tool that allows increases in property taxes above the base year to be collected and used for permanent improvements in the designated TIF area. The TIF plan adopted for downtown called for City participation in site assembly for new development, construction of public improvements and assistance for building rehabilitation. The TIF has been used primarily to fund improvements to public infrastructure and to incentivize the improvement of a blighted building stock. Set to expire in 2005, the City Council extended the life of the TIF to 2021. As of 2006 this district has leveraged over \$14 million in funds for the redevelopment of downtown.

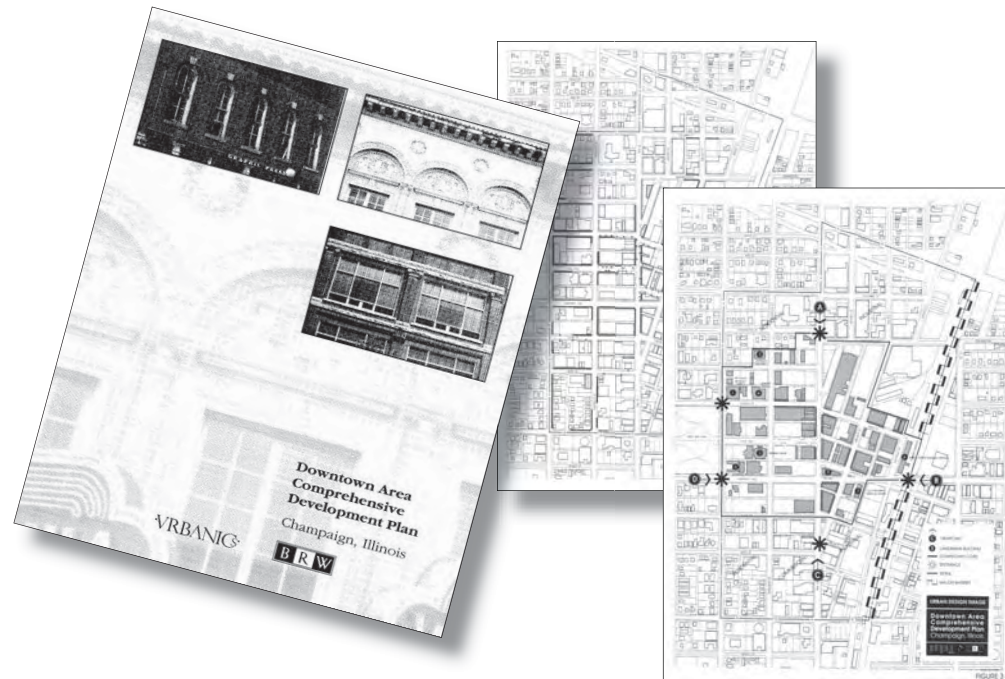


Equalized assessed valuations have risen steadily since the inception of the TIF district in 1981.

Downtown Area Comprehensive Development Plan

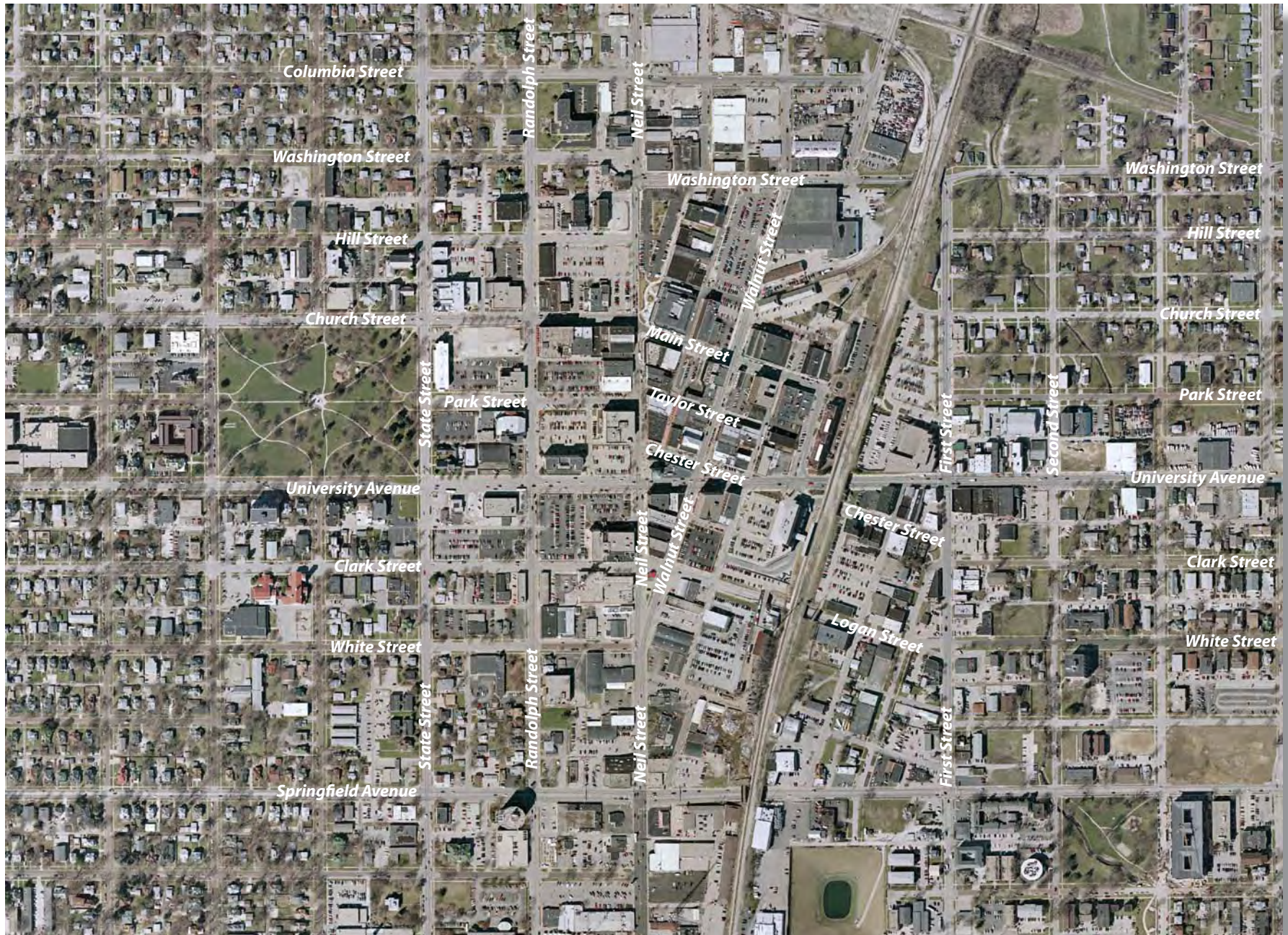
1992

The 1992 Downtown Comprehensive Development Plan established a process for increasing interest in new investment downtown. This Plan was broken into two primary categories: Capital Improvement Projects and Marketing and Organizational Tasks. This Plan has guided policy in downtown over the past 14 years with achievements including the development of the intermodal transportation center, over \$20 million in private investments linked to the Redevelopment Incentive Program (RIP), and a comprehensive streetscape improvement program. A market analysis performed by Urbanics Consultants, Ltd. concluded that there would be an increase in demand for residential units and office space in downtown over the next 15 years. This market analysis also concluded that there would be demand for a hotel/motel and conference facilities.



These three studies have served as the foundation for the 2006 Champaign Downtown Plan.

Downtown Champaign



Public Participation

- Steering Committee (14 meetings)
- Stakeholder Interviews
 - Social Service Organizations
 - Realtors
 - Redevelopment Incentive Program Participants
 - Building Owners
 - Property Owners
- Public Open Houses (3)
- Scenario Workshop (1)
- Plan Commission (2)
- City Council Study Sessions (2)



Issues and Forces

Early in the planning process, Steering Committee members undertook an exercise to document downtown's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The top responses to that exercise are displayed below.

Strengths

- Increase in Residential Units
- Pedestrian Scale Environment
- New Investment
- Entertainment Venues
- Existing Parking
- Existing Building Stock

Weaknesses

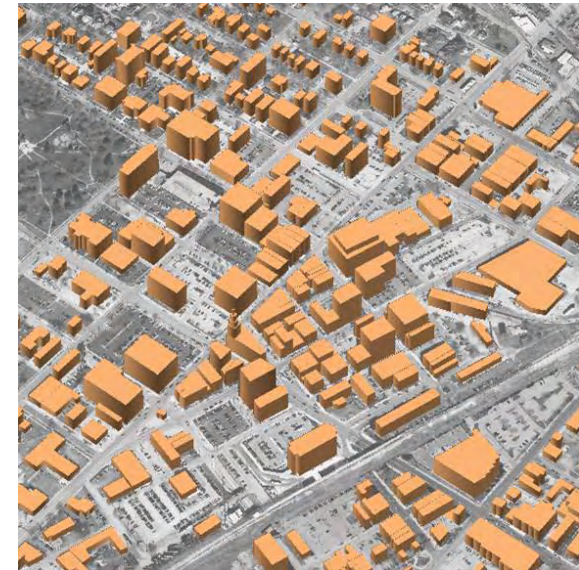
- Pedestrian Crossings
- Conflicting Land Uses
- Under-utilized Buildings
- Street Litter and Trash
- Lack of Parking Perception
- Vacant Upper Floors
- Lack of Visuals

Opportunities

- Vacant Buildings
- Connections to Surrounding Residential
- Redevelopment Opportunities
- Large Parking Lots
- Downtown Organizations

Threats

- Blighted Areas
- Deteriorating Buildings
- Reliance on Surface Parking
- Perceived Lack of Safety





Trends and Assumptions

During a series of stakeholder interviews and analysis, Planning staff and steering committee members explored a number of developing trends currently impacting the downtown, and assumptions about potential issues that could influence the progress of downtown.

Trends

- Property values continue to rise due to ongoing redevelopment.
- Residential markets in Champaign continue to be strong in the southwest area and generally on the fringe of the City.
- Surrounding communities use Champaign as an employment and shopping center.
- Champaign and Urbana are growing steadily.
- Downtown is becoming more competitive with Campustown and downtown Urbana
- The public transportation system in the area will not change drastically.
- Neighborhood commercial centers are growing increasingly competitive with downtown.
- North Prospect and Market Place mall maintaining their status as the regional shopping destinations in the community and region.
- Downtown is drawing more visitors from regional locations.
- Additional commercial centers will be constructed throughout Champaign, increasing competition with downtown.
- Current renovations are adding demand to the downtown parking system.

Assumptions

- Development pressure will increase as more land becomes available.
- National franchises already present in Champaign will begin to look at downtown for possible second locations.
- Entertainment venues will continue to thrive and expand as opportunities become available.
- Upper-floors of buildings will continue to be converted to residential units.
- Burnham Redevelopment will continue to bridge the gap between Downtown and Campustown, bringing more students into the downtown area.
- Rental rates on housing will continue to climb as renovation costs increase.
- Remaining downtown vacant spaces will be renovated.
- Surrounding neighborhoods will play a large role in housing supply for downtown.

Scenarios and Vision

On February 17, 2005, the City of Champaign hosted a public workshop that engaged people in a discussion on possible scenarios for downtown's future. Five different scenarios were presented as a general indication of how downtown could evolve over the next ten years. Two of the scenarios were intentionally melodramatic stories. One creates a utopian vision of downtown while the second represented the worst case scenario for downtown. The remaining three scenarios reflected more realistic descriptions of possible futures for downtown. The five scenarios are described as follows:



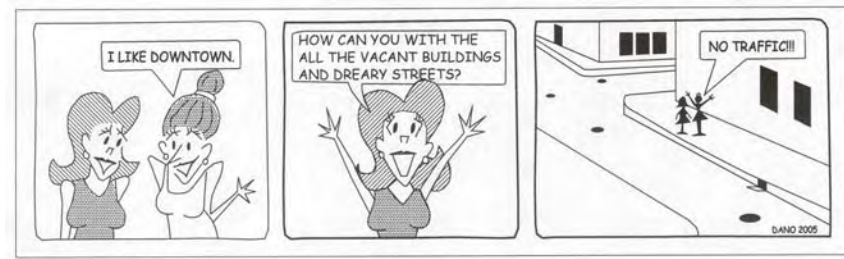
Somewhere Over the Rainbow (Utopian Downtown)

This story describes a utopian atmosphere for downtown with a perfect blend of restaurants, bars and family-oriented space that is safe and constantly in use by everyone. Downtown is a lovely neighborhood where people smile at one another and persons of all backgrounds are accepted. Downtown's perfect mixture of urban and small town life draws in guests from all over the state.



Concrete Ghost town (Worst Case Scenario)

The Concrete Ghost town story illustrates the extreme example of downtown being abandoned by government, businesses and others for the more active growth areas of the City. The result of this exodus is a harsh place where there is little regard for downtown's appearance or safety.



Downtown, Everything's Waiting for You

In this scenario, interest in investing in downtown is very strong, and there is a heightened interest from national chain businesses to locate here. Downtown becomes more of a regional destination and attractive to a variety of users. At first, the visitors to downtown include a mix of local residents with out-of-town visitors. But as downtown continues to evolve as a regional destination, it becomes less desirable for local residents. The increase of land value has also caused many local businesses, social service agencies and non-profit groups to relocate to other more affordable areas of the City. Public/private partnerships are strong and since downtown has become successful in attracting visitors, the City builds public parking and works with the business owners to fund programs to maintain and clean downtown.



Shop Around the Corner

In the *Shop Around the Corner* scenario, the restaurant and bar scene has dissipated somewhat and there is more of a mix of businesses that serve daily needs of residents, employees and visitors. There is still a high demand by people to live in downtown and there have been great strides made in tying downtown to adjacent neighborhoods. Downtown builds a niche for people wishing to walk, bike and take transit more than drive a car. Social service agencies and non-profit organizations enjoy healthy dialogues about keeping appropriate relationships among different groups of downtown users.



Central Perks

Residential development interest in downtown remains strong and the area is attractive to primarily empty-nesters and young professionals. The center of downtown shifts to Neil Street and Main Street and parking concerns continue. Housing prices rise and the residential neighborhoods to the west and northwest see increased demand allowing people to live closer to downtown. However, connections between downtown and areas to the east and northeast are not strengthened and there is still a lack of cohesive tie between downtown and North First Street. Although the market demand for downtown has grown, it comes at a price as less economically influential groups are able to participate in downtown's growth.



Ideal Scenario and Vision Statement

The Scenario Workshop participants held group discussions about the likelihood of these scenarios, how they as individuals might fit into them and how they might respond to the described changes in downtown. While the intent of the exercise was not to pick any one scenario as “preferred”, groups listed many aspects of each scenario that they liked and disliked. The following scenario best blends the comments of the group discussions and can be considered the “ideal” scenario for downtown.

It's 2015 in Downtown Champaign....

Downtown Champaign has continued to generate interest and investment since its rebirth in the late 1990's and early 2000's. People continue to want to live, work and visit downtown for many different reasons. Downtown activities are better diversified than they were in 2005 offering shopping, entertainment, cultural, artistic and educational opportunities for people of all different ages. This creates activity every day and night. Community gathering space gives downtown residents and visitors alike a place to congregate and enjoy the history and vibrancy that downtown has to offer. While it has become even more of a regional destination, downtown has not lost its appeal to local residents. Because downtown has kept an appropriate mix of national and local businesses that complement each other and attract people that want to shop and recreate at both. Downtown is inviting to walk; clean and safe. An active downtown association works closely with the City and others to keep it this way. While parking is available in general, not every destination in the core of the downtown has parking spaces next to them. However, because of downtown's continued successes, walking a few blocks is now considered enjoyable rather than a burden.

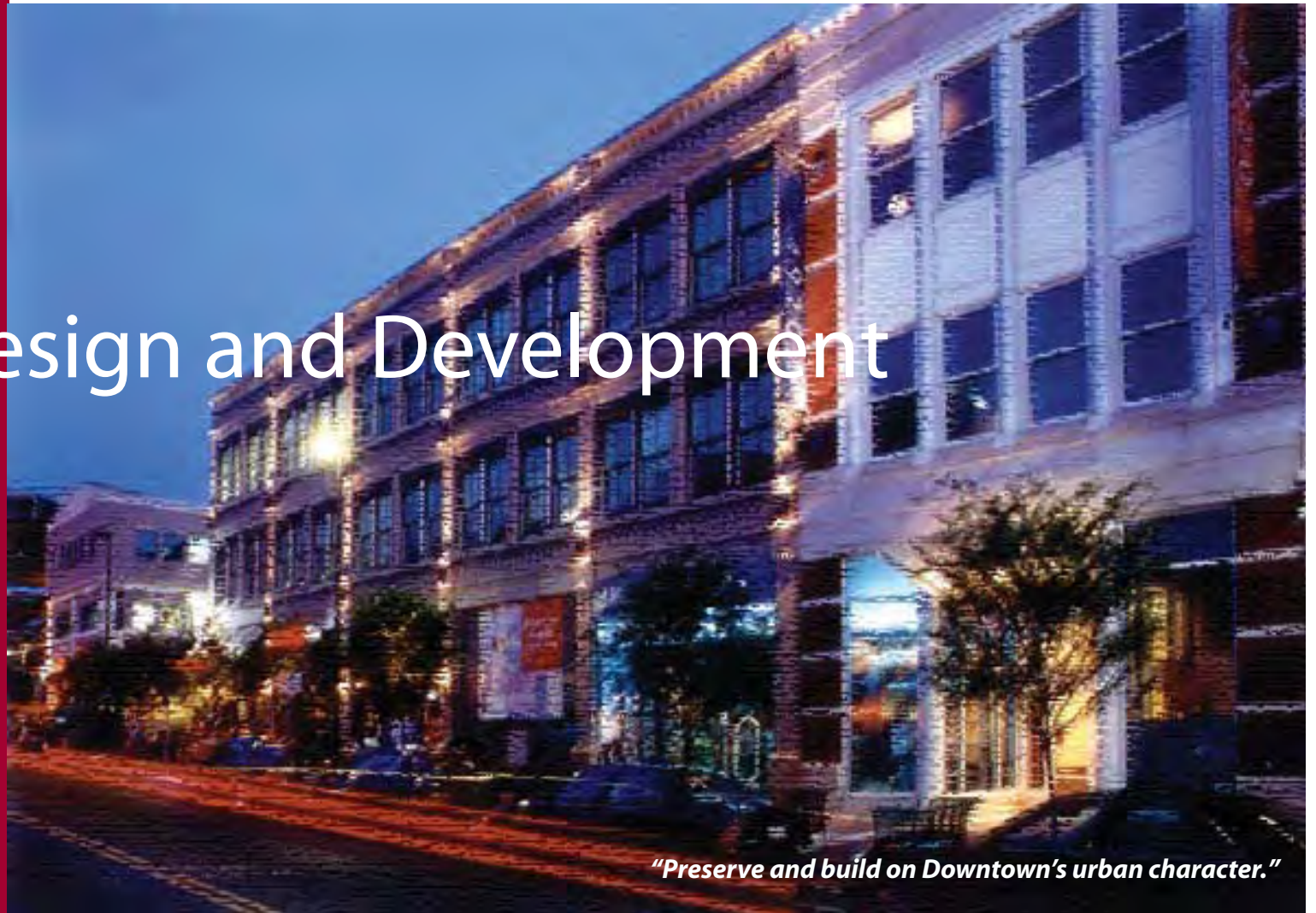
Most importantly, it has been learned that what makes downtown ultimately successful is not only investment in physical improvements such as new sidewalks, streets, buildings or holiday decorations, but rather an investment in people, culture and diversity. This contributes to the real reason people want to experience downtown. It is understood that while physical improvements are the easiest things to capture in photos illustrating the success of a downtown, it's the intangible energy created by people and relationships that truly attract people's interest and desire to be downtown. Today (2015), when you ask people why they enjoy downtown Champaign, it isn't because of one reason such as a new building or a new bar/restaurant. It is because of many intangible reasons centered on the life downtown creates.



“Downtown Champaign will be a vibrant, walkable downtown, built on its urban character, connected to surrounding neighborhoods, and easily accessible as a regional destination.”

Downtown Steering Committee Winter 2004

Urban Design and Development



"Preserve and build on Downtown's urban character."

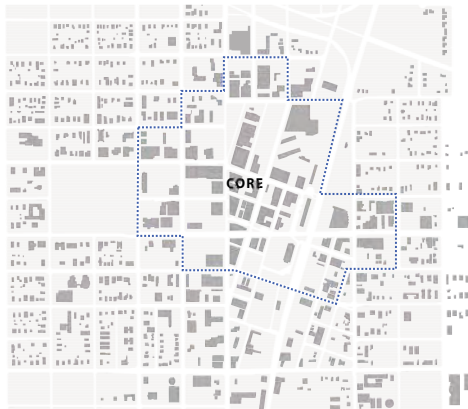
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Summary

Downtown Champaign, like most other downtowns throughout the United States, has undergone drastic changes over the past 50 years. A sudden loss of retail and increased dependency on automobiles led downtown to rethink its approach to doing business by providing a suburban-like experience. As a result, a number of city blocks were razed to make way for additional parking, only to see businesses flee to suburban shopping malls and strip centers. Over 60 buildings were lost and only a handful replaced since 1960. The map to the right shows the progressive demolition of downtown buildings (red) and the infill projects (yellow) that have been created. Infill projects have fallen short of repairing the urban fabric downtown and some times has resembled suburban developments, and not the dense urban structures that once stood in their place. The goal of this plan is to “*preserve and build on downtown’s urban character*”. This means encouraging not only renovations of existing structures but the construction of new buildings that reflect urban design principles.



Downtown once boasted significant density and urban form. Much of this was lost with the demolition of over sixty structures between 1950 and today. See map to the right.



The central core of downtown is defined as the area seen above encompassing areas both east and west of the railroad.



This historic aerial shows the loss of downtown structures over the past 50 years. The red represents buildings lost to demolition and the yellow indicates locations of infill projects.



New public space such as the Plaza at One Main Street (above) has helped increase pedestrian activity within the downtown core.

Challenges

Below are several challenges addressed by the plan in relation to Urban Design and Development.



One Main was completed in 2004 and represented the first new construction project in downtown in nearly 15 years

The Cost of Development

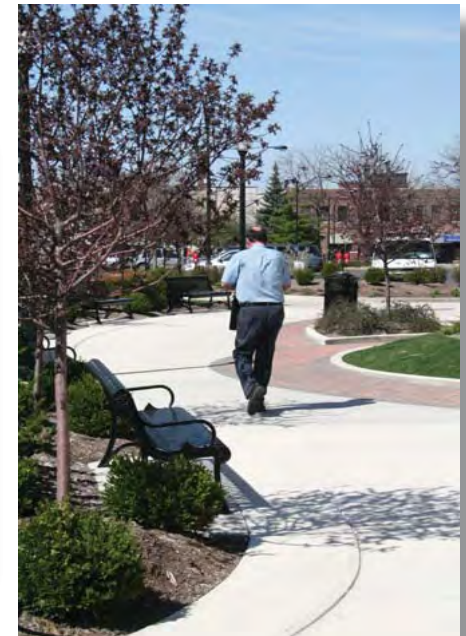
The cost of developing downtown can be higher than the cost of developing on a “greenfield” site at the City’s fringe. Issues such as property ownership, land assembly and unknown environmental conditions all contribute to time and money spent getting property ready for development downtown. Reliance on traditional market analysis to obtain financing can also discourage investment since absorption of new development is relatively untested.

Lack of Public Gathering Space

As downtown continues to undergo redevelopment, balance between buildable land and public gathering space is needed. It is important to soften downtown with green space as well as ensure adequate civic space to accommodate community events. Downtown events currently utilize West Side Park, however the park does not suit certain events such as concerts, long term exhibits of public art or street festivals. Space will need to be set aside as development continues for the expansion of such activities.



Example of a band shell that can be used for public events.



Picture of “public gathering space” in front of One Main.



The new construction at 34 East Chester Street incorporates a brick design that closely matches the building to the east.



Providing deep building setbacks with parking in the front is more consistent with suburban patterns of development than urban patterns typically found in a downtown.

Building Codes and Accessibility

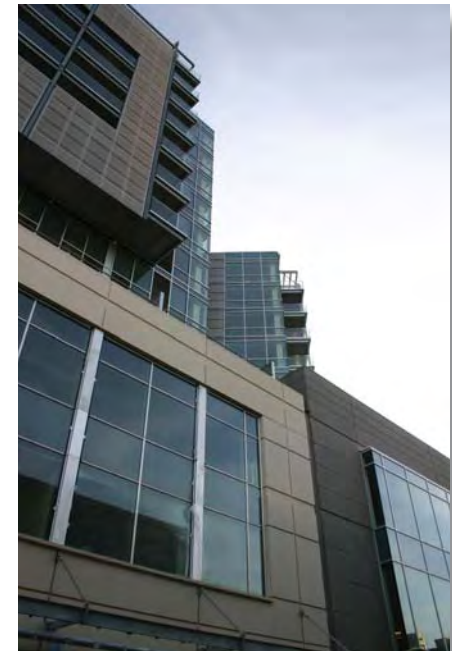
Renovation of existing buildings is often met with challenges not found in new construction. Retrofitting one-hundred-year-old buildings to meet today's standards is difficult and many times conflicts with the efforts to retain historic features. Downtown has, on many occasions, suffered devastating setbacks because these standards were not in place. As typical with common-wall buildings, fires serve as the primary threat to not only one building but the entire block. Therefore, understanding the value of these codes and working with trained professionals to overcome them in the most sensitive manner possible is necessary.



The existing Redevelopment Incentive Program has been assisting downtown properties upgrade since 1994.

Design of New Construction

New construction should be designed to fit the character of downtown. This is true for both the design of the building as well as its placement on the site and its interaction with public space. The challenge with new construction is ensuring that building materials and features are consistent with the type of construction expected in an urban environment. Prefabricated structures that lack architectural features are not consistent with the character of downtown. Siting buildings back from the street and providing parking in front is more consistent with a suburban style of development than a pattern typically found in a downtown. New construction in downtown should fit not only on its own parcel but within the surrounding urban fabric of the block it sits on.



New structures such as this residential development in downtown Iowa City shows how modern architecture can fit in historic settings.

Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles shall guide decisions and policy related to urban design and development issues in the downtown.

Urban Design

1. The site design of new development should be reflective of traditional downtown development patterns. For example, buildings should be pulled up to and face the street. The height and mass of new buildings should be consistent with the existing downtown fabric.
2. The architectural style of new construction can be either contemporary or have historic attributes. However, in all cases the materials, scale and window pattern should be consistent with the historic character of downtown. Whenever possible, existing historic buildings should be preserved.
3. The design of streets and sidewalks should be distinctively urban and should enhance the vibrancy of downtown by offering opportunities for outdoor recreation while also enhancing pedestrian safety.
4. Private and public gathering spaces in downtown should be created in various sizes both in public and private areas.
5. Signs should be in character with the scale and design of downtown

Development

1. Continue to re-establish structures on existing surface parking lots and discourage the creation of new surface parking lots.
2. Renovation rather than demolition and replacement of existing buildings is preferred.
3. Infill development should help re-establish the blockface and rebuild the urban fabric.
4. Private / Public partnerships are encouraged to advance redevelopment opportunities.
5. Target financial incentives to structures and land uses, where appropriate, identified as top priorities in the Downtown Plan.

Strategies

The following strategies are action steps that would implement the urban design and development goals of the plan.

Urban Design

- ☐ Create site design and style guidelines for new development that ensures buildings complement the existing urban character of downtown.
- ☐ Assess the current provisions of the Outdoor Café Program to ensure that they encourage outdoor seating and display of merchandise while still preserving public access and open space.
- ☐ Create a “way finding” signage system that directs motorists and pedestrians to key landmarks in downtown.
- ☐ Develop entryway beautification plans for key entry points into downtown.
- ☐ Study the feasibility of converting the surface parking lot at Neil and Washington Streets to a public plaza as a continuation of the One Main plaza. Explore opportunities for open space that captures a “family oriented” theme.

Development

- ☐ Establish criteria to prioritize the redevelopment of existing publicly owned surface parking lots.
- ☐ Establish an ongoing dialogue with private downtown property owners about the potential for infill and redevelopment projects on their property.
- ☐ Create a Request for Proposal system to solicit development proposals for publicly-owned property to proactively promote redevelopment of surface parking lots which further the goals of this plan.
- ☐ Revise the Redevelopment Incentive Program (RIP) to place a greater emphasis on incentives for projects that achieve stated redevelopment goals and/or produce specific land uses identified in the Plan as desirable.
- ☐ Determine which existing structures best contribute to the historic character of downtown and designate those structures as local historic landmarks.
- ☐ Determine opportunities, whether large or small, for creating additional civic spaces in the public realm.
- ☐ Encourage the redevelopment of Park Street to enhance the connectivity between, West Side Park, the Virginia Theater and the Core of downtown and the North First Street area.
- ☐ Establish a dialogue with business owners to establish a comprehensive approach to waste management and collection



Strategy 1 - Design Guidelines

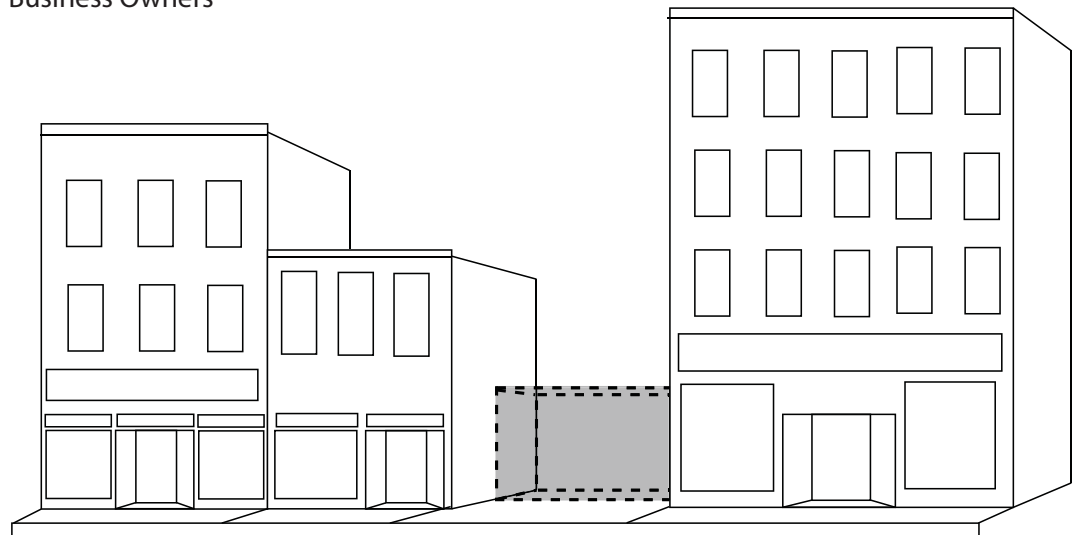
Create site design and style guidelines for new development that ensures buildings complement the existing urban character of downtown.

Commentary

Design guidelines should be created to ensure that the exterior design of downtown structures is consistent with the desired character of the area. These guidelines should be administratively applied and designed to ensure that new construction is consistent with traditional downtown development patterns. The guidelines would focus on only exterior appearance, primarily materials, articulation and window patterns and the placement of the building on its parcel.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Building Safety Division
- Fire Department
- Private Developers & Architects
- Property Owners
- Business Owners



New construction (shown in grey) should match the style of the other structures on the blockface. In this example the building should be pulled up to the property line or sidewalk and should have a height more consistent with the other structures.

Strategy 2 - Outdoor Cafe Program

Assess the current provisions of the Outdoor Café Program to ensure that they encourage outdoor seating and display of merchandise while still preserving public access and open space.

Commentary

Recognized as the program that had the most significant impact on bringing life back to downtown streets, the Outdoor Cafe Program has livened up entertainment venues by allowing patrons to utilize the public right-of-way for seating and dining. Expansion of this program should include merchandise sales should be encouraged as downtown continues to grow. New developments should be encouraged to design their structures to facilitate this program to be utilized by their tenants.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Downtown Businesses
- Public Works Department



Strategy 3- Pedestrian Signage Design

Create a “way finding” signage system that directs motorists and pedestrians to key landmarks in downtown.

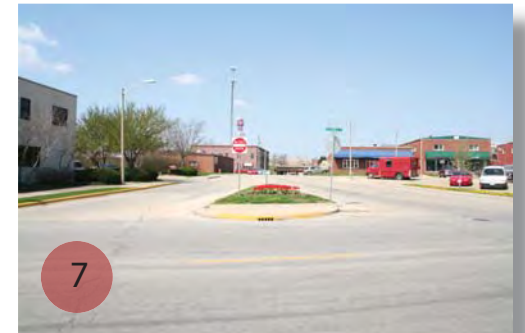
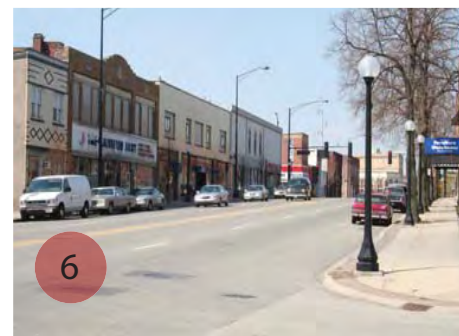
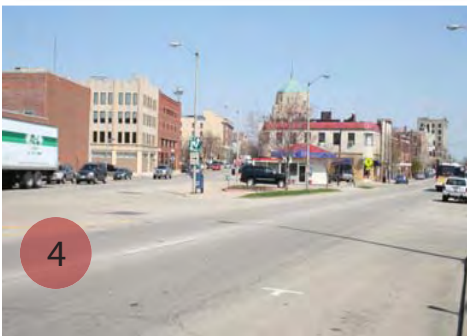
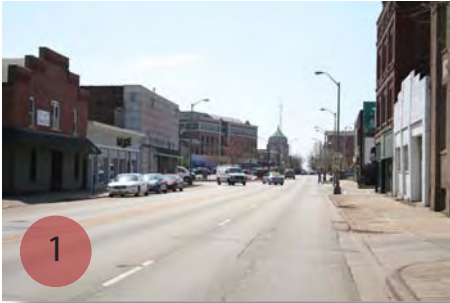
Commentary

Pedestrian level signs in downtown can serve functional and aesthetic purposes. As downtown becomes more attractive to visitors, these signs serve the purpose of directing pedestrians to popular destinations. Users of downtown often have difficulty understanding how to move throughout downtown to find landmarks and businesses, therefore these signs should be simple and intuitive.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Convention and Visitors Bureau





Strategy 4 - Entryway Beautification

Develop entryway beautification plans for key entry points into downtown.

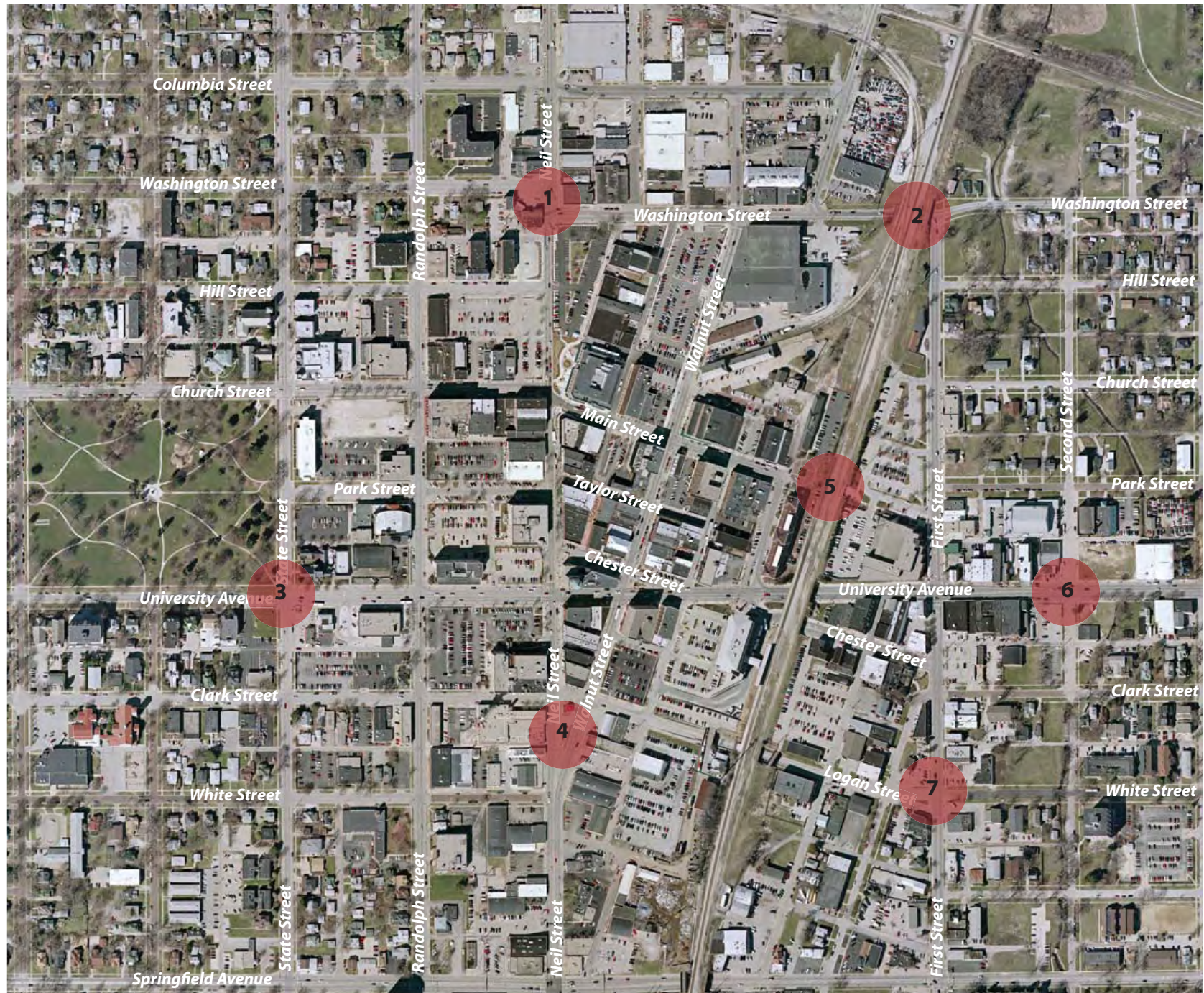
Commentary

Beautifying the entryways to downtown is an important step to announce entry into downtown and create an inviting atmosphere for regular and less frequent visitors. These areas should include landscaping and signage to ensure that visitors are instantly oriented toward their destination. Key entry points have been identified below:

1. Neil Street and Columbia Street
2. Washington Street and First Street
3. University Avenue and State Street
4. Neil Street and Walnut Street division
5. Main Street Viaduct
6. University Avenue and Second Street
7. Logan Street and First Street

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Champaign Park District
- Canadian National Railroad



Identified locations of key entryways to the Downtown Area.

Strategy 5 - Public Plaza

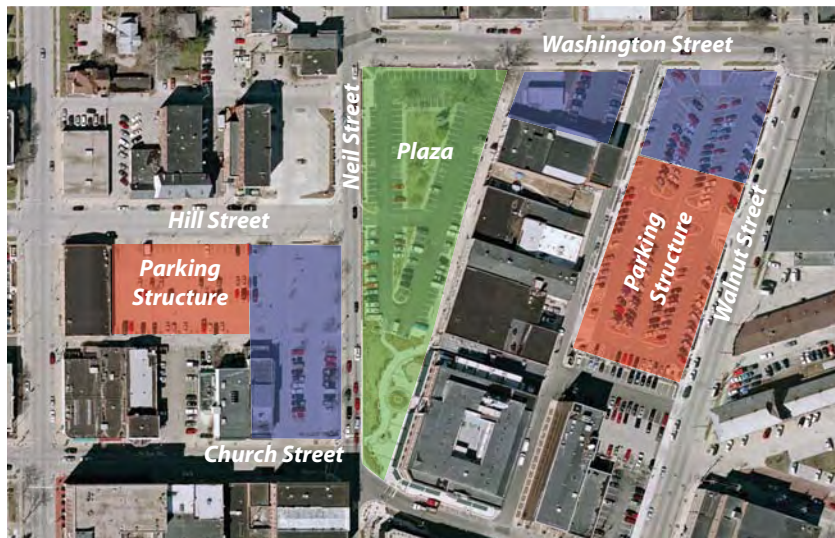
Study the feasibility of converting the surface parking lot at Neil and Washington Streets to a public plaza as a continuation of the One Main plaza. Explore opportunities for open space that captures a “family oriented” theme.

Commentary

A large scale project envisioned in this Plan is the construction of a large civic plaza in the heart of downtown. This space would be created to use throughout the year and serve as an entertainment center for the community. Festivals, concerts, ice skating, and other special events could take place in this plaza. The space can also serve as a central location for displaying public art. Many steps would need to take place to create this plaza including an analysis to determine the impact of relocated parking. Minimizing the impact on immediately adjacent businesses is important. Solutions may include maintaining at least one row of parking in the area or redesigning parking along Fremont Street. As downtown continues to grow, the establishment of a civic plaza such as this will become increasingly important.

Key Players:

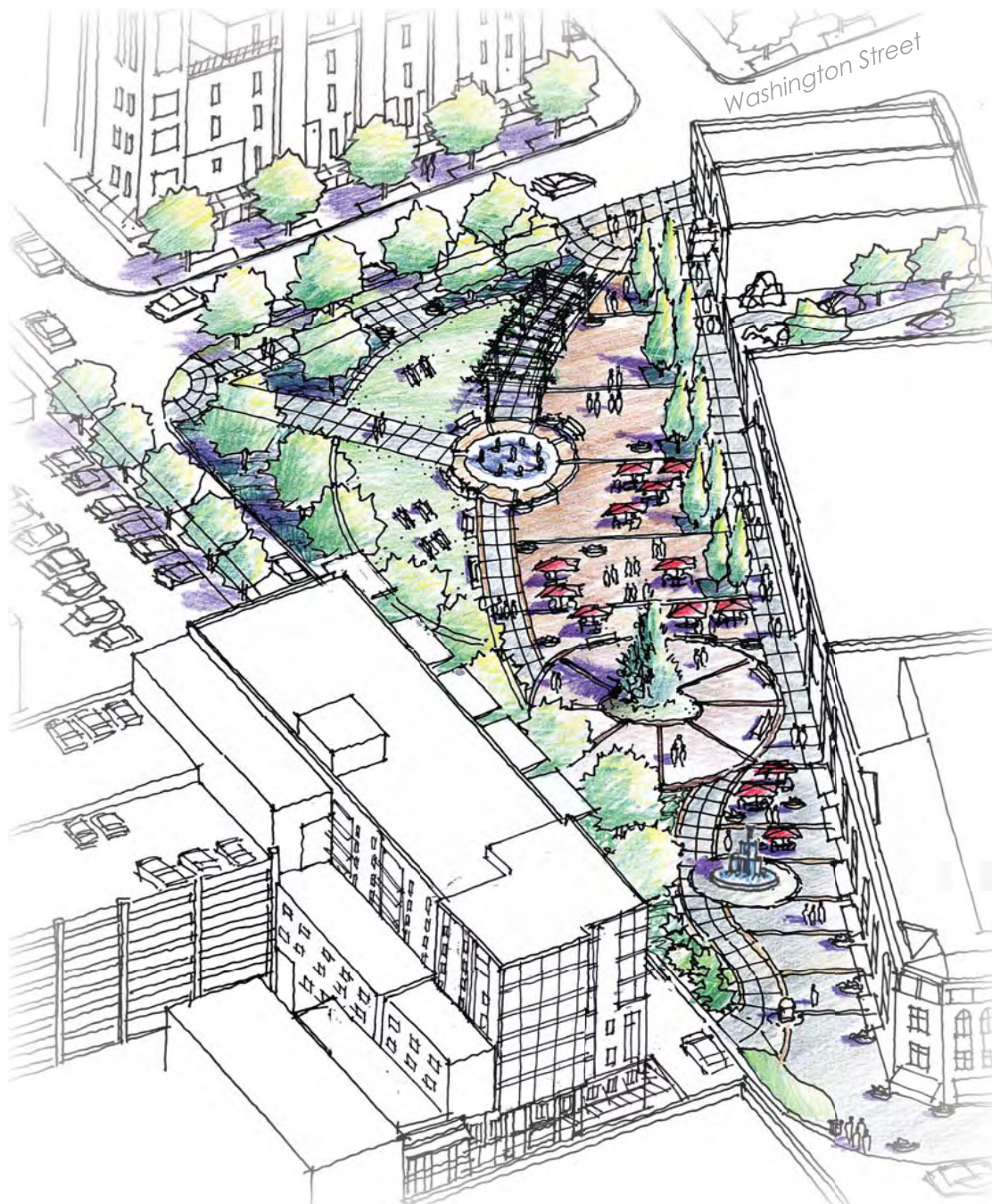
- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Orpheum Science Children’s Museum
- Neil Street Businesses
- Private Donors



The Flat Iron Building, a landmark in downtown was demolished to create additional parking for Sears and Roebuck Co. in the mid 1970's. The effort was not enough to keep large department store anchors following the grand opening of Market Place Mall.



The current parking lot at Neil and Washington Street could serve as an ideal location for a large public plaza.



Creation of a civic plaza at Neil and Washington Street will create a central gathering place for community festivals and events.



Examples of civic plaza features/

Strategy 6 - Infill Priority List

Establish criteria to prioritize the redevelopment of existing publicly owned surface parking lots.

Commentary

To facilitate future development opportunities, the City will develop a priority listing of publicly-owned surface parking lots on which to promote their disposition and redevelopment. Promoting development of parking lots will increase the demand for parking in the core area. Therefore request for proposals to develop these lots must be timed to coincide with the development of structured parking.

- Neil and Church Street Lot
- Neil and Washington Streets (partial)
- Neil and Hill Streets

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Property Owners
- Potential Investors
- Public Works Department



Main Street looking from Market Street circa 1905.



Main Street looking from Market Street in 2006.



Main Street looking north from Market Street with a conceptual image of infill development of the City Parking lot at 41 - 47 East Main Street

Strategy 7 - Dialogue with Private Owners

Establish an ongoing dialogue with private downtown property owners about the potential for infill and redevelopment projects on their property.

Commentary

It would be impossible to carry out the goals of this Plan without the cooperation of private business and property owners. A large portion of the land available for development is in the control of private owners, and therefore it is crucial to creating partnerships with their owners to ensure that development continues.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- City Manager's Office
- Private Developers
- Property Owners



Nail Street and University Avenue looking northwest as demolition of the IOOF building proceeds.



Neil Street and University Avenue looking northwest today shows parking for Main Street Bank and Trust.



This conceptual image represents an example of the potential to infill surface parking lots in Downtown. This example shows a redevelopment of a privately owned surface parking lot at the northwest corner of Neil Street and University Avenue (see the appendix for a complete map of potential infill locations)



Public parking lots make up roughly one-third of all surface parking in downtown.

Strategy 8 - Public Land Disposition Program

Create a Request for Proposal system to solicit development proposals for publicly-owned property to proactively promote redevelopment of surface parking lots which further the goals of this plan.

Commentary

To proactively pursue development of City owned property in a way that promotes the goals of this plan, a request for proposal process should be utilized to ensure selection of developments that best promote the vision for downtown.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- City Manager's Office
- Private Developers
- Property Owners
- Business Owners



The City parking lot at the northeast corner of Neil and Main was sold for redevelopment in 2003



One Main Street opened in 2004 and represents the first new infill project in 15 years.

Strategy 9 - Revised Redevelopment Incentive Program

Revise the Redevelopment Incentive Program (RIP) to place a greater emphasis on incentives for projects that achieve stated redevelopment goals and/or produce specific land uses identified in the Plan as desirable.

Commentary

Since 1994, the Redevelopment Incentive Program has played a key role in the preservation and renovation of existing structures in downtown and the East University Avenue District. This program has leveraged nearly \$20,000,000 in private redevelopment. The program was created to bring structures up to City code and ensure the long term stabilization of the downtown building. Now that a majority of the structures in downtown have been stabilized it is appropriate to refocus these grants to accomplish the goals identified in this plan. Potential large scale projects include:

- Bailey-Rugg Building (221 North Neil Street)
- Jos. Kuhn and Co. Building (33 Main Street)
- Russell Building/Rialto Theater (117 West Church Street)
- Orpheum Theater (346 North Neil Street)
- Graphic Press Building (205 North Market Street)
- Avenue Building (65 East University Avenue)
- Properties on Chester Street near Water Street

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Building Safety Division
- Fire Department
- Property Owners
- Business Owners



Since 1994 the Redevelopment Incentive Program has been responsible for over \$3 million in public investment.



Strategy 10 - Preserve historic structures and promote their significance

Determine which structures best contribute to the historic character of downtown and designate those structures as local historic landmarks.

Commentary

Designating properties as a local or national landmark helps to preserve the historical significance of downtown. Expanding educational programs targeted at historic structures downtown will help to broaden the knowledge and historical appreciation of Champaign. Programs should be created to convey the history of the community to the citizens of Champaign. Use of these existing buildings will serve as a tangible piece of that history.

Current National Register Buildings as of 2006

- Inman Hotel (17 East University Avenue)
- Bailey-Rugg Building (219-225 North Neil Street)
- The Virginia Theater (203 West Park Street)
- Illinois Central Terminal (116 North Chestnut Street)
- Solon Building (201 North Market Street)
- Graphic Press Building (203-205 North Market Street)
- Burnham Athenaeum (306 West Church Street)
- Cattle Bank (102 East University Avenue)
- Illinois Traction Building (41 East University Avenue)
- Lincoln Building (44 East Main Street)
- Orpheum Theater (346 North Neil Street)
- Springer Federal Building (200 West Church Street)

Current Local Landmarks as of 2006

- Sagamore Building (804 North Neil Street)
- Illinois Central Railroad District (312 North Walnut Street)
- Park "Art" Theater (126 West Church Street)
- Prayer for Rain Statue (West Side Park)
- The Parkview (305 West University Avenue)
- Rick Orr Florist Building (122 North Walnut Street)
- Atkinson Monument Building (106 South Neil Street)
- Price Paint Building (108 South Neil Street)

Additional Buildings with Historical Significance

- Jos. Kuhn and Co Building (33 East Main Street)
- Lewis and Co Building (110 North Neil Street)
- Illinois Traction Building (41 East University Avenue)
- Trevett/Mattis Bank Building (112 West Church Street)
- National City Bank Building (30 East Main Street)

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Historic Preservation Commission
- Property Owners
- Interested Community Members



The Virginia Theater stands as one of the most recognizable downtown landmarks.

Strategy 11 - Public/Private Open Space

Determine opportunities, whether large or small, for creating additional civic spaces in the public realm.

Commentary

As downtown development continues to progress, it is important to remember that making the pedestrian feel welcome is key to downtowns success. Development should be encouraged to contribute to creative amenities in the public realm. These can take the shape of street planters, benches, trees, shrubs or public art but each should be a direct benefit to the public.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Private Development Community
- Champaign Park District



Identified locations or existing and potential civic space is shown in green.

Strategy 12 - Park Street Corridor

Encourage the redevelopment of Park Street to enhance the connectivity between, West Side Park, the Virginia Theater and the Core of downtown and the North First Street area.

Commentary

Although West Side Park and the Virginia theater serve as vital community centers in Downtown their connection to the core must be strengthened. Currently both sit isolated from the core of downtown by surface parking lots and a lack of buildings that promote pedestrian traffic. Infill potential is very high along this corridor. However, because of high parking demands from neighboring offices and the theater, structured parking will need to be located in this area to make infill possible. Extending this corridor to eventually link an east-west between West Side Park and the historic Illinois Central Rail Station could provide enhanced pedestrian access throughout downtown.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Main Street Bank and Trust
- Champaign Park District
- Champaign Housing Authority
- Champaign County Mental Health Center
- Development Community



Aerial view of Park Street circa 1960



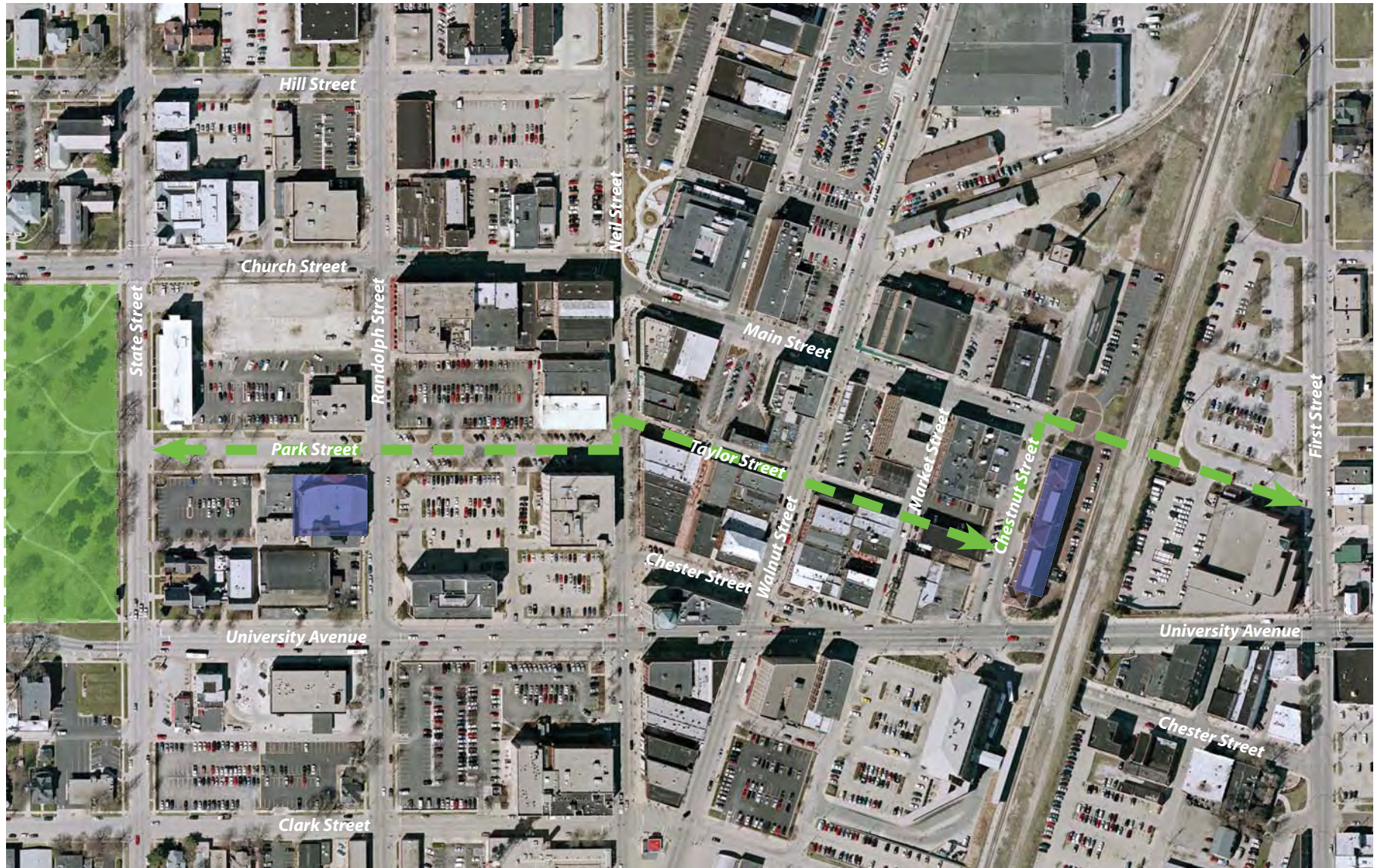
Park Street looking east from State Street (2006)



Conceptual illustration of Park Street looking east. Creating a solid connection between downtown and West Side Park is important to the success of downtown.

Strategy 12 - Park Street Corridor (continued)

Encourage the redevelopment of Park Street to enhance the connectivity between the core area, West Side Park, and the Virginia Theater.



Utilizing lower capacity streets such as Park Street, Taylor Street and Chestnut Street, a pedestrian corridor can be created that links downtown east to west extending past many landmarks and venues.

Strategy 13 - Waste Management

Establish a dialogue with business owners to establish a comprehensive approach to waste management and collection

Commentary

A difficult issue making its way to the forefront of development activity is the management and removal of waste. As downtown grows and more development and retail occurs, adequate space for waste collection is limited. A dialogue should be created with existing and future businesses to establish standards and identify locations that keep downtown clean while serving the needs of the individual businesses. New developments should also be built to accommodate all waste within their development as well as helping to create alternatives for neighboring businesses.

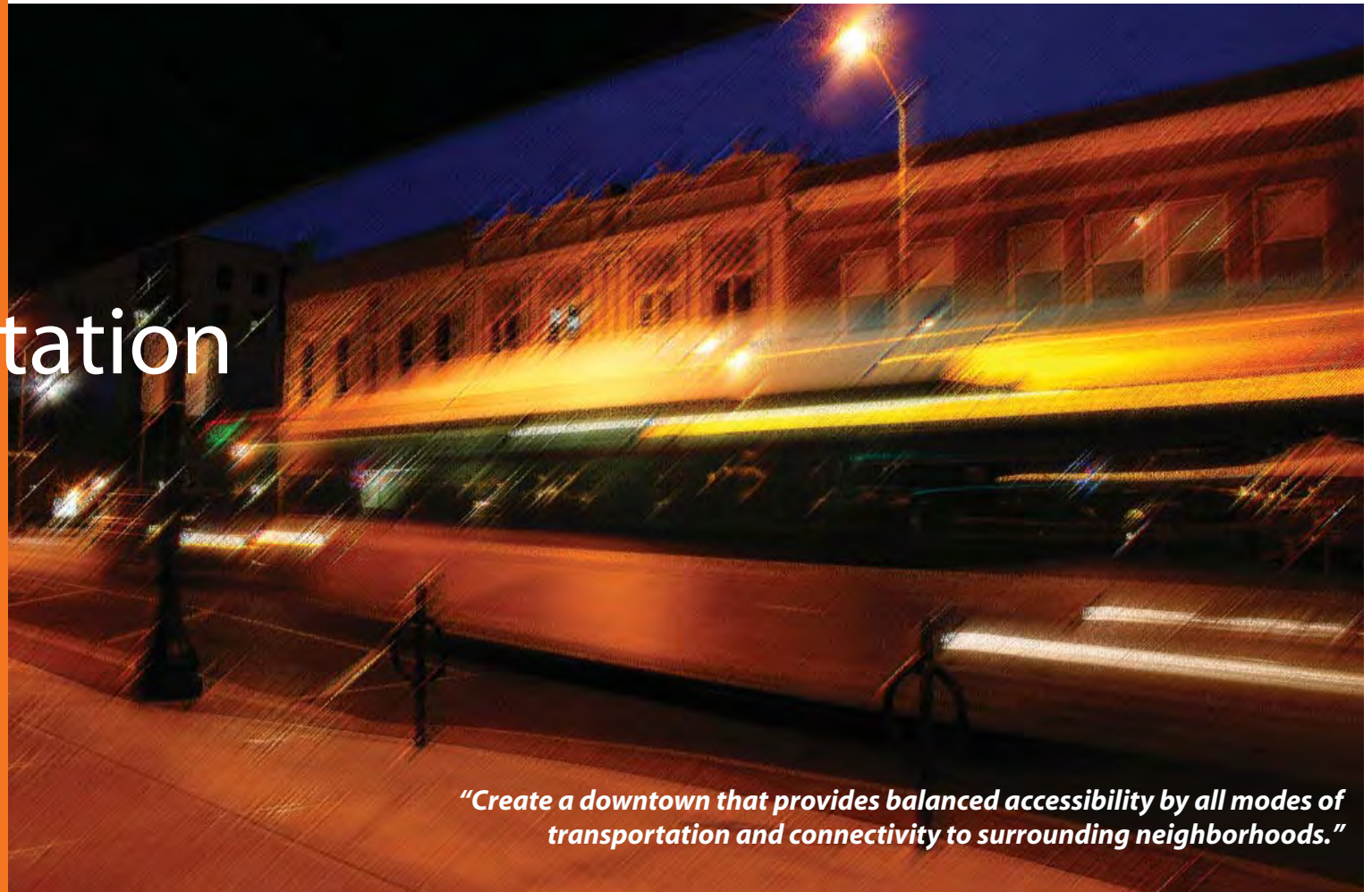
Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Downtown Business Owners
- Waste Hauling Companies
- Development Community



Because of the unique grid pattern of streets in the core area, public alleys large enough to accommodate trash collection are difficult to find.

Transportation



"Create a downtown that provides balanced accessibility by all modes of transportation and connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods."

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Summary

An efficient transportation system is essential for downtown. More so than any other area of the City, downtown must be served by a variety of modes including cars, transit, bicycles and walking. Downtown is a final travel destination for many, but it also serves as a link for transportation to other areas. The link includes two major arterial roadways: Neil Street and University Avenue, that carry significant traffic through the area and on to other destinations in the community. Also, the Illinois Terminal is a transfer location for almost all transit routes in the City. The area serves as a public transit hub for a regional system that has a total system ridership of nearly 11 million passengers per year. The Illinois Terminal serves as a final destination and transfer point for bus service, passenger rail and taxi service.

Having an accessible downtown is a part of the vision statement. However, what constitutes accessibility can be debated. For some, it means being able to drive to downtown quickly and find a convenient place to park. For others, it means having a downtown that is better served by transit and is safe and easy to walk. For others, walking or biking is their priority. In some cases, these goals can conflict with each other.

This section of the plan recognizes that there must be a strong balance in the transportation system. The needs and desire to continue to drive to downtown and find a parking space must continue to be recognized although the goals of having a downtown that favors the pedestrian and creates a safe and walkable environment will be highlighted. The plan also looks to further diversify the way people access downtown and make alternative travel options even more appealing.



Automobiles remain the preferred method by a majority of the population.



Downtown once utilized 9 miles of inter-urban line that transported citizens throughout the Champaign-Urbana community.



The Illinois Terminal, completed in 1998, serves as the center piece to the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District's city-wide bus service.

Challenges

Current challenges in the existing downtown transportation system were considered when formulating the guiding principles and strategies for this Plan. These challenges include:

Safety

There have been great strides made in recent years in creating a safer transportation system in downtown. However, there is still work to be done. There remains areas of downtown where the probability of vehicle/vehicle and vehicle/pedestrian conflicts remain high. In most of these instances, the current design of roadways promotes a high vehicle speed thus increasing the likelihood of accidents. The high speed design of roadways also puts the pedestrian at a disadvantage and creates an uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous experience for someone on foot or bicycle. Current examples include University Avenue between Neil Street and First Street, the split of Walnut Street and Neil Street to the South, and the intersection of Randolph Avenue and Park Avenue.

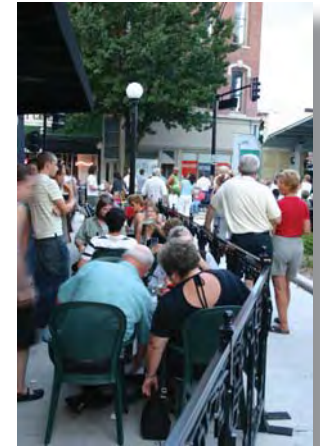
Walkability

Having a downtown that is easy and comfortable to walk through is essential. Many areas of downtown enjoy a very walkable environment such as the core of downtown at Neil Street and Main Street. This helps create an environment that attracts people which in turn leads to being a location where businesses like to locate. There are still many areas of downtown that are either difficult to walk or do not offer an interesting environment which would attract people to walk.



Encouraging Public Transit

The CU-MTD serves downtown Champaign from nearly all areas of the community. The system is reliable, safe, and economical. However, most employees in downtown still do not consider transit as an alternative to driving to work everyday. More trips to downtown by car creates a higher demand on roadways leading to downtown and also creates more demand for parking.



Street Capacity

As downtown grows the population of people using downtown will grow as well. The goals of infilling under-utilized property with dense new development has an impact on the capacity of the existing street system. Streets in downtown cannot easily be widened to create more capacity. While it is difficult to imagine traffic snarls in downtown similar to much larger cities, the likelihood of congestion will increase as downtown grows unless a diversified transportation system evolves with this growth. However, some congestion in downtown signifies success because people have a reason to come downtown.

Parking

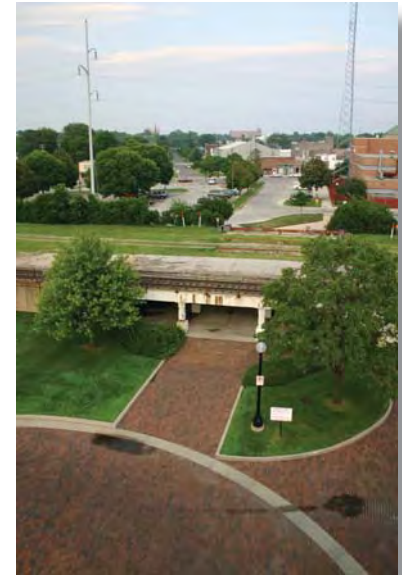
The issue of parking in downtown is complex and subject to varying opinions and perceptions. Perhaps what makes the issue so difficult is that in many respects the goals for a dense and vibrant downtown are generally incompatible with the goals of providing abundant parking in close proximity to destinations. Downtown developed prior to today's volume of automobiles. This allowed for a development pattern that was compact and dense with no need to provide for large spaces to store vehicles. In the 1960's and 1970's the threat of suburban shopping centers with abundant surface parking presented significant competition for downtown. In response, downtowns across the country looked to eliminate building stock and replace them with surface parking lots. Unfortunately, the result for many downtowns was a loss of the original vibrancy that first made people want to visit.

Today, there is still a dual interest to have a dense and vibrant downtown but to also provide convenient off-street and on-street parking. Whether there is enough parking and if it is in the optimal location will perhaps always be debated. The goal of this plan is to strike the best possible balance between these two goals.



Connections to Adjacent Neighborhoods

Successful downtowns often have a seamless transition to adjacent neighborhoods making it easy and enjoyable to travel between them. A significant challenge for downtown Champaign is the existing physical connection between the Core of downtown and the North First Street commercial area and surrounding neighborhood. Since the beginning of downtown, this connection has been challenged by the location of the elevated railroad tracks. Today there are essentially three points of connection; Washington Street, the Main Street viaduct, and University Avenue. To better link North First Street with the Core of downtown, the connections between the two need to be addressed.



Transportation Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles shall guide decisions and policy related to transportation issues in the downtown.

Overall Mobility

Pedestrian safety and walkability is the highest priority for the transportation system downtown.

Neil Street and University Avenue are major roadways that connect the community through downtown. The design of these streets must carefully balance the goals of creating a pedestrian friendly environment and carrying high volumes of traffic.

Downtown streets should be designed to reduce travel speeds to increase pedestrian safety while still allowing vehicles into downtown and to parking locations.

Access should encourage use of travel modes other than automobiles.

To become an effective regional attraction, downtown needs to be an easily accessible hub of the community. It should also be easy and efficient to enter and depart downtown.

Strong transit and pedestrian connections should be established and maintained between Downtown, the First Street Corridor, the Burnham Redevelopment and Campustown to strengthen each of these areas.

Connections to adjacent neighborhoods including the North First Street area and surrounding residential areas should be improved to better link with the core of downtown.

Parking

The expectations of parking supply and location should be different in downtown than in suburban areas. The placement of parking should be convenient to downtown uses but not in locations that make them a focal point. The supply of parking should be carefully managed in order to allow availability yet not encourage access to downtown solely by automobile.

The demand for new parking should be located in parking structures rather than surface parking lots, where appropriate.

The downtown public parking system (on-street and off-street) should be well signed, well illuminated, easy to locate and user-friendly.

A good balance of short term and long term public parking should be provided to accommodate different types of trips and visitors.

Transportation Strategies

The following strategies and action steps would implement the transportation and parking goals of the plan.

Overall Mobility

- ☐ Design intersection improvements to enhance pedestrian safety and prioritize installation based on the highest frequency or potential for pedestrian/vehicular conflicts.
- ☐ Install countdown signals at high volume intersections downtown.
- ☐ Develop strategies to promote greater use of transit by downtown employees
- ☐ Identify a bicycle route system into downtown and consider striping streets for bicycle lanes where appropriate.
- ☐ Determine strategies to promote more bicycle usage in downtown by providing appropriate facilities and by promoting bicycle events.
- ☐ Develop consistent entryway signs that direct motorists to parking facilities and other key landmarks.
- ☐ Redesign the Neil and Walnut Street “Y” intersection to reduce the width of pavement, to slow traffic speeds and create a more attractive entry to downtown
- ☐ Develop taxi cab stands in downtown and a system to ensure availability of taxis at high demand times.
- ☐ Monitor advancements in street light technology and upgrade lighting to create a safer pedestrian experience.
- ☐ Work with the CU-MTD to promote a transit route that specifically promotes a downtown to campus connection.

Parking

- ☐ Determine and prioritize where public parking structures will be needed based on the future assumptions of growth and development, and consider their construction as public/private ventures with large scale development projects.
- ☐ Complete a comprehensive parking study for downtown.

Strategy 1 - Intersection Safety Improvements

Design intersection improvements to enhance pedestrian safety and prioritize installation based on the highest frequency or potential for pedestrian/vehicular conflicts.

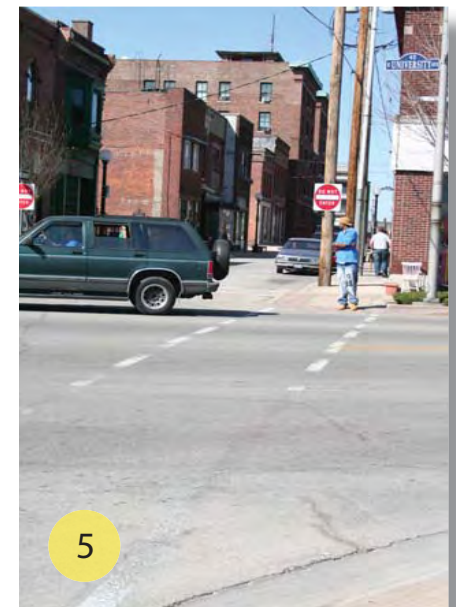
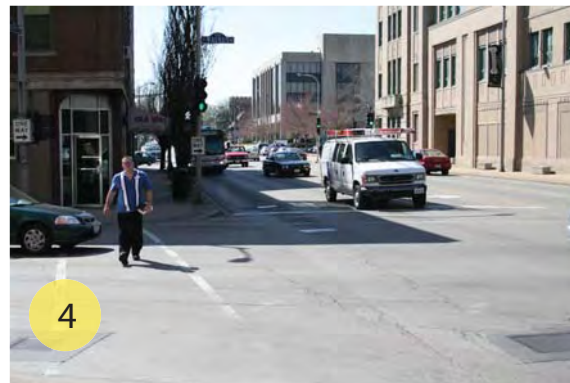
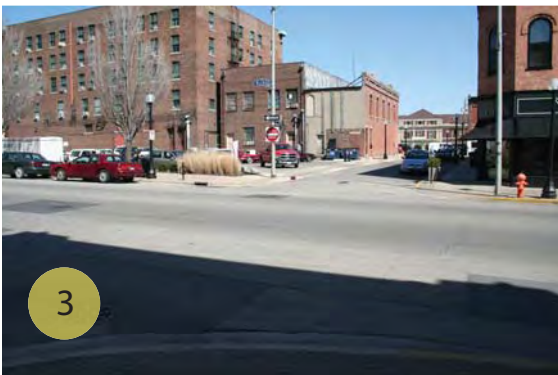
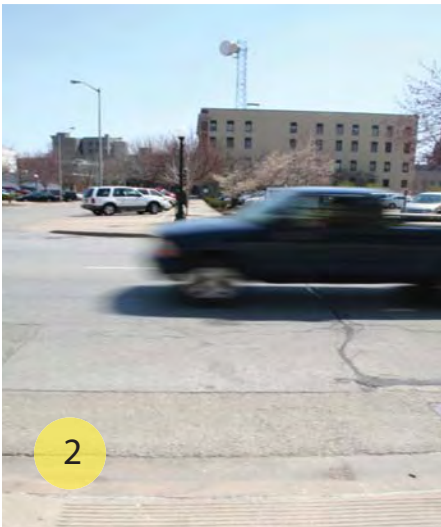
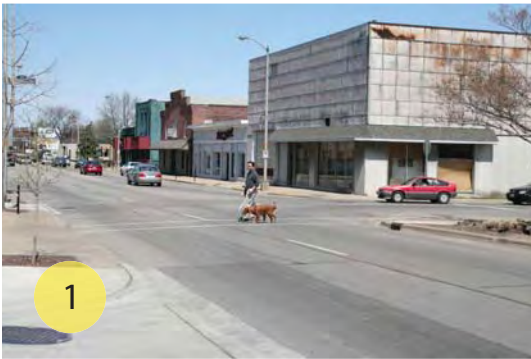
Commentary

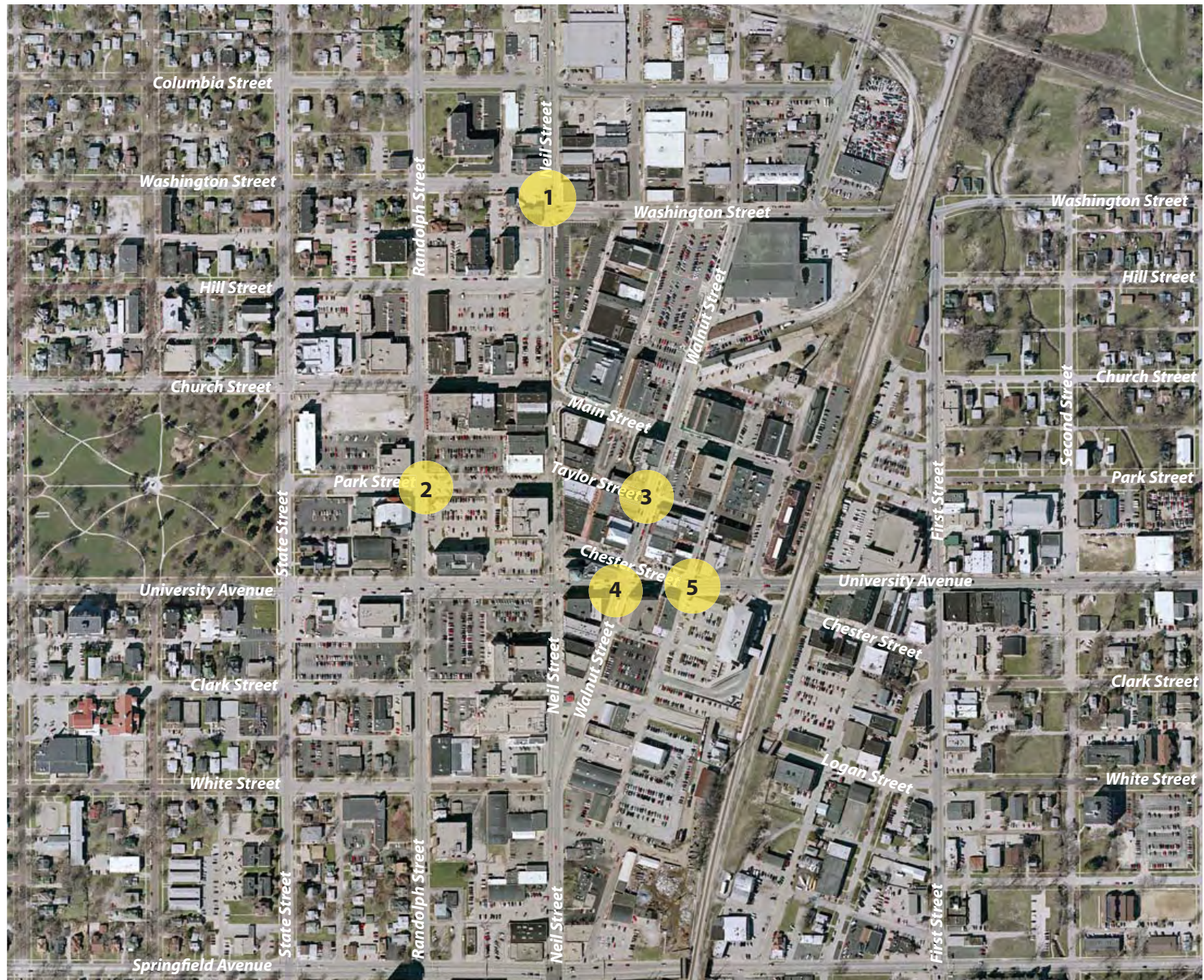
To achieve the goal of creating a more walkable downtown the design and function of downtown intersections should be studied to identify changes to prioritize pedestrian safety. Intersections should be designed to slow traffic and allow for the safe crossing of pedestrians. Possible measures include curb bump-outs, countdown signals, no turn on red policies, etc. Priority should be given to the following intersections:

- 1) Neil Street and Washington Street
- 2) Park Street and Randolph Street
- 3) Walnut Street and Taylor Street (mid-block crossing)
- 4) University Avenue and Walnut Street
- 5) University Avenue and Market Street (above left)

Key Players:

- Public Works Department
- Planning Department
- Property Owners





Identified locations of high volume intersections that frequently result in pedestrian/vehicular conflicts.



Strategy 2 - Countdown Crosswalks

Install countdown signals at high volume intersections downtown.

Commentary

Countdown signals give pedestrians a better understanding of when the light will change and how much time is left to cross the street, therefore increasing awareness and safety for pedestrians.

Key Players:

- Public Works Department
- Planning Department



Strategy 3 - Increase Use of Transit

Develop strategies to promote greater use of transit by downtown employees

Commentary

Greater use of public transit by downtown employees would decrease the demand for parking. It would also improve traffic circulation around downtown and make streets safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. There are perhaps many reasons why downtown employees do not consider transit for their commute to work. These reasons may include the convenience and relative low cost of parking. Another reason may be a basic lack of understanding of how the CU-MTD system works. The CU-MTD should consider direct routes to downtown from certain locations that are easy to understand and give assurance to passengers that their route goes to downtown directly. Other strategies should be considered such as employer subsidized transit passes and incentives to employees who choose not to drive to work.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District
- Downtown Businesses



Strategy 4 - Promoting Bicycle Use

Identify a bicycle route system into downtown and consider striping streets for bike lanes where appropriate

Commentary

As downtown continues to grow as a residential neighborhood, more of its residents will look to means other than vehicular travel to make short trips around downtown. An integrated bike lane system will facilitate keeping bicyclists from using busy sidewalks while protecting them from vehicular traffic. Consideration should also be given to integrating bike lanes with existing and planned bike trails as shown in the Champaign County Greenways and Trails Plan. Provisions should also be made, for providing proper storage for bicycles at downtown destinations as well as transfer points to other means of transit.

Key Players:

- Public Works Department
- Planning Department
- Champaign County Regional Plan Commission
- Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District

Strategy 5 - Bicycle Facilities and Events

Determine strategies to promote more bicycle usage in downtown by providing appropriate facilities and promoting bicycle events.

Commentary

In order to create a usable bicycle system, riders must feel comfortable leaving their bike once at their destination. There are currently a number of bike racks located throughout downtown, however with an increase in usage, additional opportunities for bicycle storage should be considered including the use of bicycle storage lockers. Specific events targeted towards bicyclists should be organized to originate in downtown and showcase local interest in bicycling both for recreation and commuting purposes

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Champaign County Regional Plan Commission
- Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District (Illinois Terminal)



Strategy 6 - Redesign the Neil Street/Walnut Street “Y” Intersection

Redesign the Neil and Walnut Street “Y” intersection to reduce the width of pavement, to slow traffic speeds and create a more attractive entry to downtown

Commentary

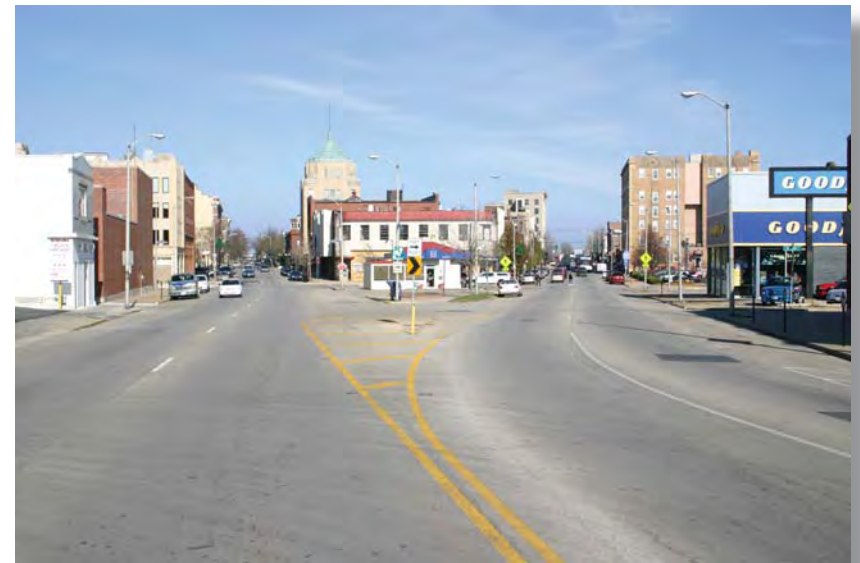
Serving as the primary entrance to downtown from the south, the “Y” intersection of Neil Street and Walnut Street meet not only begins the system of one way streets but also announces ones arrival into the downtown. Because this intersection is often viewed as a major entrance, measures should be taken to beautify this gateway. At the same time, such improvements will serve as a means of slowing vehicular speeds as drivers approach downtown and enhance pedestrian safety. This intersection would be softened from its current pavement width to a more green and inviting gateway. With the addition of raised curbs and expanded streetscape, drivers will be more likely to reduce speed and begin watching for pedestrians.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Property Owners



Existing configuration of Neil and Walnut Street division (2006)



Existing division of Neil and Walnut Street looking north (2006)



Softening and beautifying the division of Neil and Walnut Street will create a safer more attractive entry point to Downtown from the south.



Strategy 7 - Taxi Stands

Develop taxi cab stands in downtown and a system to ensure availability of taxis at high demand times.

Commentary

One way to encourage a better mix of transportation in downtown is to strengthen and promote the taxi cab system. Implementing a system of converting existing loading zones into late night taxi stands will encourage higher use of taxis which can create a safer environment for late night patrons. Utilizing existing loading zones after peak hours would provide enough adequate locations for taxi stands while not interrupting existing parking spaces. Locations should be found in the heart of downtown near the intersection of Main and Neil Street.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Police Department
- Downtown Businesses
- Taxi Companies



Strategy 8 - Illumination of Downtown Streets

Monitor advancements in street lighting technology and upgrade lighting to create a safer pedestrian experience.

Commentary

Proper placement of street lights and appropriate lighting levels can ensure a safe and more attractive downtown. Consider future enhancements to the downtown street lighting system when advancements in white LED technology becomes economically viable, possibly within five years. Illumination of buildings and architecture can also aid traditional street lighting methods while highlighting buildings and creating a more attractive downtown.

Key Players:

- Public Works Department
- Building Owners

Strategy 9 - Determine Future Parking Deck Locations

Determine the appropriate locations for public parking structures based on future assumptions of growth and development and prioritize their construction as public/private ventures in conjunction with large scale development projects.

Commentary

A fundamental philosophy of this Plan is to infill surface parking lots with new development projects where appropriate. This goal helps to achieve the vision of creating a dense and vibrant downtown. It also recognizes that providing off-street parking in downtown is important and that continued reliance on surface parking would make further growth and development of the downtown infeasible. Providing parking in structures rather than surface parking lots offers the only means to provide additional spaces without having to tear down more buildings to create additional surface lots. However, parking structures are expensive and they need to be strategically planned and financed. Partnerships between the public and private sectors should be used where possible. As a top priority, a parking deck should be considered in conjunction with a proposed development at the corner of Neil and Hill Street. This deck should accommodate parking for the new development as well as provide additional public parking. Possible locations for new parking structures should also be identified on the east and south sides of downtown as need is demonstrated. When planning for parking structures, the overall goals of encouraging alternative modes of transportation in downtown should be carefully considered.

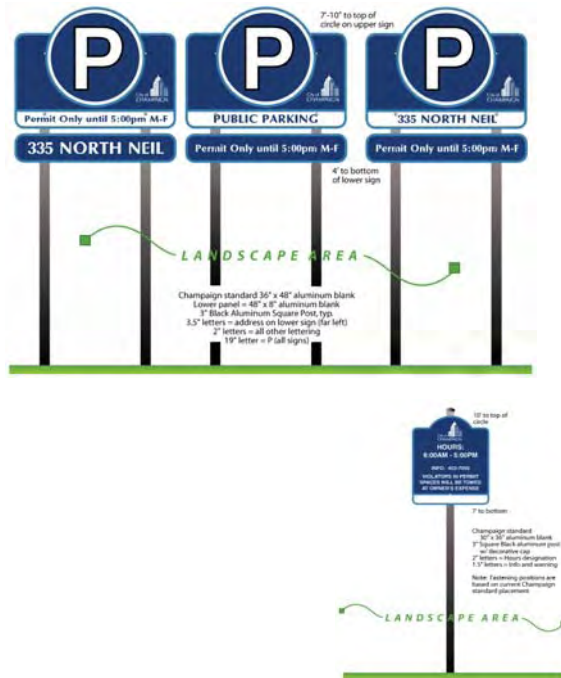
Key Players:

- Planning Department
- City Managers Office
- Public Works Department
- Downtown Developers
- Downtown Businesses

Locating parking decks in quadrants of downtown will help to ensure that all businesses benefit from adequate parking supply while preserving the core for higher density uses.



Examples of well designed urban parking structures (Evanston, IL top, Naperville, IL center, Moline, IL bottom)



University of Illinois students are more frequently attracted to downtown for entertainment and shopping venues.

Strategy 10 -Wayfinding Signs

Develop consistent entryway signs that direct motorists to parking facilities and other key landmarks.

Commentary

To attract a regional customer base, as well as to ease use by area residents, downtown signage must be well designed and feel intuitive to first time visitors. By adding attractive entryways to downtown's primary entrances, visitors will feel as though they have reached a destination. Directional signage at key locations to guide motorists to downtown, and way finding signage throughout downtown is important in guiding visitors to major attractions, landmarks and parking. Directing motorists to their final destination can also help reduce unnecessary traffic in downtown when visitors "circle" to find parking or their destination. This signage should carry a common theme and be used to guide all modes of travel in and around downtown.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Downtown Businesses

Strategy 11 - Dedicated Campus to Downtown Transit Route

Work with the CU-MTD to promote a transit route that specifically promotes a downtown to campus connection.

Commentary

The goal of strengthening the connection between downtown Champaign and Campustown has been identified in other efforts. Such a link will strengthen the continued success of downtown. Because of policies in the campus area discouraging vehicle use and ownership, this transit connection must remain strong to ensure the continued use by university students. An easy to understand, well promoted route can also attract riders that would normally only consider driving and have never considered the convenience of transit.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District
- Campustown Businesses

Strategy 12 - 2006 Parking Study

Complete a comprehensive parking study for downtown.

Commentary

Parking is critical to the success of downtown. Too little can cause people not to make visit downtown. Too much can compromise the density and vibrancy that make downtowns attractive. A well designed public parking system that strikes the right balance between too little and too much and between surface and structured parking, provides the greatest opportunity for success. Since downtown has become more popular, a closer look is needed to determine issues such as the number of spaces needed, their location, and how best to manage them.

Key Players:

- Public Works Department
- Planning Department



Public parking (blue) lots make up approximately one third of the available parking area in the downtown core. Private lots (red) make up the remaining space.

Market Demand and Land Use



"Establish a mix of uses that contribute to a vibrant downtown."

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Summary

Historically, downtown has served as a retail, cultural and office center as well as an entertainment destination. Today, entertainment establishments have given downtown an energetic and vibrant feel, while office uses continue to serve as anchors for economic stability. This chapter looks at the current balance of land uses and market demand issues that create challenges to furthering the advancement of downtown. Maintaining a healthy mixture of uses has been a key element to downtown's success and will play an even more vital role as the area continues to evolve.



Working with existing and potential businesses is a pivotal to the implementation of this section. Ensuring that, as more franchise businesses look to enter the market, that the existing businesses are encouraged to remain. These businesses will help keep the local flavor alive in downtown and maintain an appropriate blend of uses.

That being said, downtown is expected to continue as an entertainment destination. This niche should be strengthened by continued growth of arts and culture related uses and activities that enhance the already established retail businesses. Establishment of an arts district would help to bolster cultural opportunities as well as make use of the community's vast creative talents. Working with groups such as 40 North 88 West and the University of Illinois, will allow downtown to enhance its role as a cultural center in the region.

This includes understanding both how downtown is viewed from a traditional market analysis standpoint as well as understanding its potential based on trends and examples occurring in other communities. Attached as an appendix to this plan is a market position study completed by Business Development Incorporated in 2005. This study helps determine downtown position in the community in relation to other commercial centers.



Challenges

While the success on Downtown Champaign in recent years has been exciting, the downtown market is still considered by many to be challenging, unproven, and difficult to enter. The challenges described below reflect comments from focus groups conducted with key stakeholders:

Mix of Uses

Over the past five years, downtown has grown as an entertainment destination with the addition of over 20 restaurants and bars located within the core area. The development of these uses has helped to spur building renovation of existing buildings and solidified downtown as a destination capable of attracting visitors on a regional scale. However, the expansion of other retail uses has been slower to develop. Adding a base of retail uses with the existing entertainment uses will help to create a stronger downtown economy.



Local Business Retention

One of the qualities which gives Downtown Champaign its unique flavor is the collection of locally owned businesses. These businesses, many of which have been long-standing at their current location, offer an experience to the consumer that is unique anywhere else in the region. As downtown continues to grow and develop attracting national franchises will strengthen its position as a regional destination and serve to legitimize the downtown market. At the same time it is important to maintain a healthy mix of local and nationally based businesses to keep downtowns unique character.



Lack of Market Data

Many communities have created development corporations or associations that keep track of development and changing statistics in their downtown area. Downtown Champaign has only a volunteer membership organization with few resources or part-time staffing at best. As a result, it has struggled to collect the necessary data to properly market existing businesses and attract new companies to the area. The real estate market in downtown is often times not well understood with no central location for listings of other important data. Demographic and financial data is often times incomplete and out of date. Understanding ways to capture this data and disseminate it to the businesses will strengthen downtown's market share and entice new development to the area.



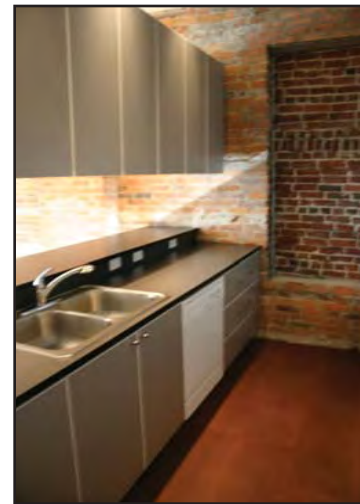


Need for Residential

For a downtown to continue its recent success, and develop a wider range of businesses and services, a residential base is necessary. Many of the upper floors of commercial buildings have been converted to 1 and 2 bedroom apartments. However, the net result of these projects has been approximately 50 new units. Ultimately, to draw a greater mix of businesses, higher density residential developments will be needed. There is an opportunity for infill projects in a number of areas around downtown. In addition making a stronger connection to the surrounding neighborhoods adds to this residential base. The neighborhoods coupled with new construction can add the necessary population to support a wider variety of retail uses.

Unknown/Unproven Market Conditions

One concern expressed during stakeholder interviews with local realtors was the lack of an established market downtown. Because downtown went nearly 15 years between large scale construction projects, many view downtown as a high risk investment for new development because projects are more complex and may not provide the same return on investment as fringe development. It was expressed that many are watching to see whether the One Main Development succeeds as an indicator of how infill development in downtown works. Properties are rarely listed for sale and unknown to prospective buyers which makes new entry into the market difficult. There is also an extremely wide range of rents for commercial space that adds to the notion that an unstable market exist.



Promotion of the Art

Champaign-Urbana has resources present in the community that promote arts and culture, including the University of Illinois, Parkland College, and the Champaign Arts Council. Because of this and the character, including pursuing a cultural theme for downtown is feasible with the right partnerships.

Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles shall guide decisions and policy related to market demand and land use issues in downtown.

Cultivating a greater variety of land uses is critical to the success of downtown. This includes attracting retail, entertainment, housing, office, and service uses.

Developments in downtown should provide a mix of uses including first floor retail and upper-story residential/office.

An emphasis should be placed on attracting more people to live and work in downtown including the attraction of corporate headquarters.

The presence of arts and culture is an important aspect to creating a downtown that is unique, vibrant and desirable.

Downtown is the cultural center of the community and is an ideal location for events and programs designed to celebrate Champaign's culture.

Downtown will succeed best with an appropriate mix of locally based and nationally based businesses. Nationally based businesses serve as good anchors for locally owned businesses because of their greater familiarity to the public and larger advertising budgets.

Strategies

The following strategies are action steps that would implement the market demand and land use goals of the Plan.

- ☐ Complete a market analysis for downtown to establish demographic data and identify strategies information and develop strategies to attract more retail, residential and corporate office uses to the downtown area, and better understand the role of downtown in the context of all of Champaign's business centers.
- ☐ Cluster new retail uses in a central downtown location to strengthen the market draw.
- ☐ Work to add higher densities for the number of new residential units in and near downtown within the next 10 years, and include a diverse range of housing types and prices.
- ☐ Develop a program to promote creation of artist live-work and/or gallery space in downtown. Focus on the Market Street and Chester Street areas to cultivate arts related uses.
- ☐ Determine a consistent funding source and amount for supporting downtown events.
- ☐ Support existing cultural facilities in downtown such as theaters and the Children's Museum, and create new facilities. Develop a concept for creating a "Theater District".
- ☐ Determine where mixed-use projects with first floor retail are highest priority for infill development projects. Promote a mix of uses for developments in the "Core" of downtown.
- ☐ Create a program that would discourage building vacancies in the downtown.
- ☐ Conduct regular retention visits to existing businesses to determine their needs.
- ☐ Recruit new businesses that have a broad appeal to residents and visitors.



Strategy 1 - Market Analysis

Complete a market analysis for downtown to establish demographic data and identify strategies information and develop strategies to attract more retail, residential and corporate office uses to the downtown area, and better understand the role of downtown in the context of all of Champaign's business centers.

Commentary

Understanding the existing business climate and its future potential, is essential to overcoming concerns and barriers that exist for new investors. To strengthen this understanding, a market analysis should be developed to give specific information about how downtown competes citywide, regionally and statewide. Gathering this information will be crucial to business attraction and retention.

A preliminary study has been completed and is attached as an appendix to this document. In 2005 the Planning Department commissioned Business Development Incorporated (BDI) to begin taking a look at how other commercial areas in Champaign effect downtown's position. The next phase of this study will expand on this analysis and provide a comprehensive market picture. IT will also identify strategies to promote business growth and development in downtown.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- City Manager's Economic Development Office

Strategy 2 - Cluster Retail

Cluster new retail uses in a central downtown location to strengthen the market draw.

Commentary

Retail has the greatest chance of success when it is clustered in one location. This allows stores to create synergy with each other and gives shoppers a one-stop destination offering multiple shopping experiences. With the recent development of “One Main” and a potential project at Neil and Church Street, this area is quickly becoming the center of downtown activity. Together, these developments provide the best opportunity to achieve a significant cluster of retail uses.

Key Players:

- Downtown Developers
- Downtown Businesses
- Planning Department

Strategy 3 - Diversity of Housing

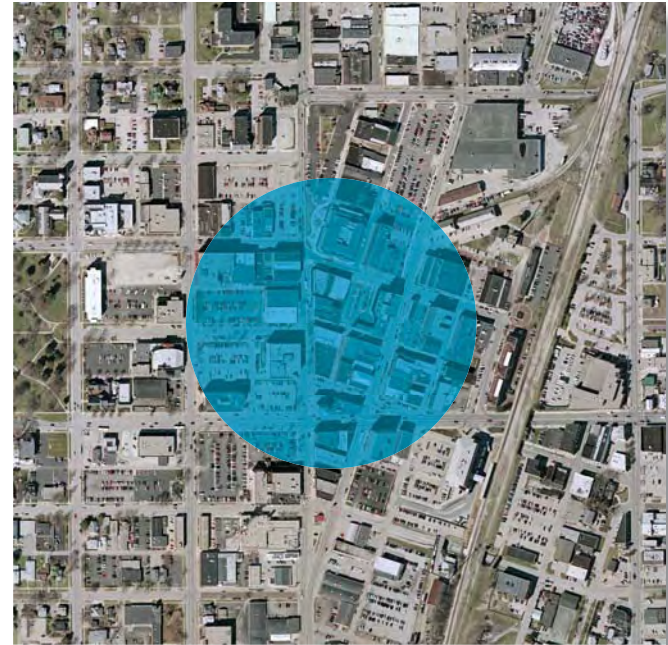
Work to add higher densities for the number of new residential units in and near downtown within the next 10 years, and include a diverse range of housing types and prices.

Commentary

The success of downtown is enhanced by having a greater number, and a diverse population of residents. Infill projects tend to be more complex and provide smaller returns than they do in the fringe locations. Renovation projects add units in smaller numbers and are often expensive to complete. To achieve greater success, strategies should be established to ensure that a variety of housing is available and affordable for a range of income levels, a variety of housing styles and options must be present. A variety of housing styles and prices in the surrounding neighborhoods also supports for the continued success of downtown

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Neighborhood Services Department
- Downtown Developers
- Downtown Businesses
- Downtown Property Owners
- Apartment Owners Association



Clustering retail in the core will strengthen the combine marketing power of the entire downtown.



Apartment and condominiums such as this encircle the downtown area which help provide housing options to the downtown area.



Strategy 4 - Incentivize Artist Live-Work Space

Develop a program to promote creation of artist live-work and/or gallery space in downtown. Focus on the Market Street and Chester Street areas to cultivate arts related uses.

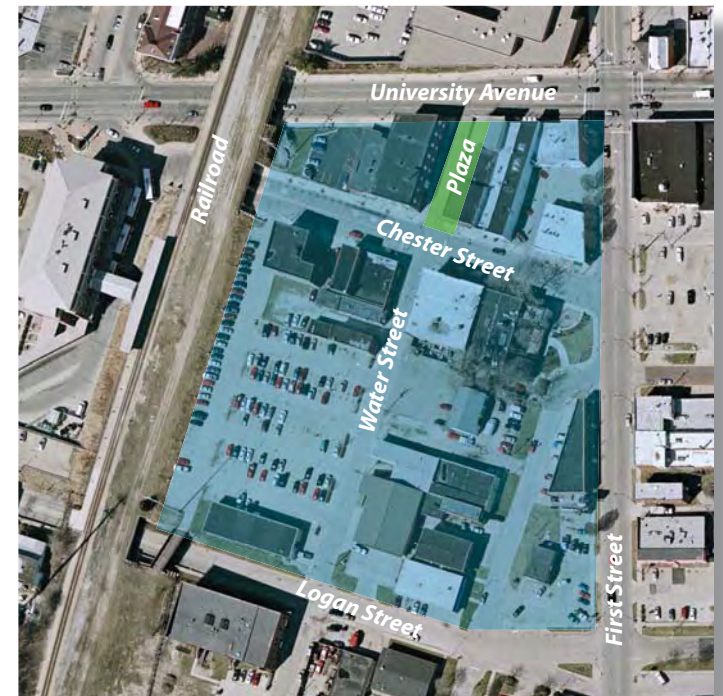
Commentary

Along with the University of Illinois and Parkland College, downtown serves as a central point for cultural activities in Champaign. Great potential exists to expand on this cluster by expanding opportunities for artists in the community to live, create and show their work in a central place. Two areas are identified in this plan (Market Street and Chester Street) where the presence of existing warehouse space and adequate access makes the development of residential units and gallery space for artists feasible. There already exist some art studios and merchants in the Chester and Water Street Corridors. Expanding this area could also assist in strengthening the connection between the Burnham Hospital Redevelopment and Campustown. The Market Street Corridor between University and Main Street also has the potential to develop into artist space because of its close proximity to the pedestrian center of downtown and its low vehicular presence. Both areas should be explored as potential artist live-work neighborhoods.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- 40 North 88 West
- City Manager's Office
- Public Works Department
- Downtown Developers
- Downtown Property Owners
- Convention and Visitors Bureau

Located adjacent to downtown core, this once industrial area along Chester and Water Streets would provide an ideal location for an artist live work district.



Strategy 5 - Support for Downtown Events

Determine a consistent funding source and amount for supporting downtown events.

Commentary

Downtown has become a popular venue for community events. Most events such as the Downtown Festival of the Arts and Taste of Champaign are run entirely by the Champaign Park District. However, with the increasing frequency and cost of these events, more assistance will be needed to maintain a high quality as well as this more aggressive schedule. Coordinating events and stable funding will be needed along with better partnerships between and benefitting parties.

Key Players:

- Champaign Downtown Association
- Champaign Park District
- Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Downtown Businesses
- City Manager's Office



Strategy 6 - Arts and Theater Facilities

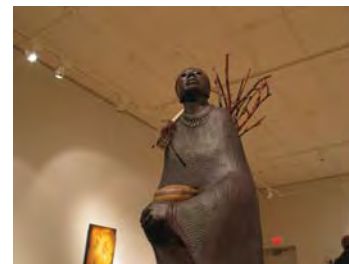
Support existing cultural facilities in downtown such as theaters and the Children's Museum, and create new facilities. Develop a concept for creating a "Theater District".

Commentary

The existing art and theater spaces in Champaign serve as primary attractions for visitors and citizens alike. The Orpheum Children's Science Museum and Springer Cultural Center creates a family-friendly environment. The Virginia Theater and Boardman's New Art Theater serve as downtown performance and movie spaces. Each of these facilities should be maintained and enhanced to create regional draws that complement each other to create an Arts and Entertainment District. Additionally, opportunities should be sought to restore the theater space in other historic downtown theater, such as the Orpheum and Rialto Theaters.

Key Players:

- Private Developers
- 40 North 88 West
- Convention and Visitors Bureau





Strategy 7 - Mixed Use Redevelopments

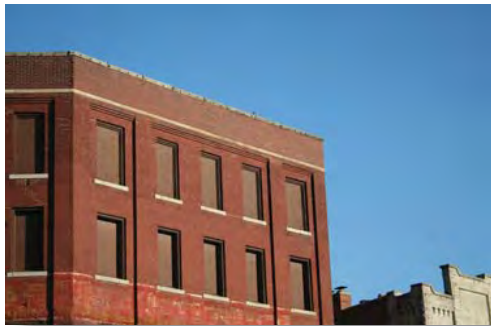
Determine where mixed-use projects with first floor retail are highest priority for infill development projects. Promote a mix of uses for developments in the “Core” of downtown.

Commentary

Mixed-use developments are preferred in downtown, although in some areas outside of the Core a single use development may be appropriate. The mix can be a combination of ground floor retail and upper floor office or residential. It is, however, important to include this ground floor retail, as it promotes pedestrian interaction and more attractive and active interesting street environment.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- City Managers Economic Development Office



Strategy 8 - Vacant Building Program

Create a program that would discourage building vacancies in the downtown.

Commentary

Vacant buildings in the heart of downtown damage the vibrancy and reputation of the area and present real threats to neighboring buildings and property values. There are serious risks created by the continued decay of vacant structures. This strategy calls for developing a program to both promote renovation of these buildings while establishing penalties for long-term vacancies. These buildings provide great opportunities for continued reinvestment without the need for new construction. A number of remaining vacant buildings face challenging renovations and incentives may be needed to overcome the higher cost of these projects and potentially lower returns.

Key Players:

- Property Owners
- Building Safety Division
- Fire Department
- Planning Department
- Neighborhood Services

Strategy 9 - Business Retention Services

Conduct regular retention visits to existing businesses to determine their needs

Commentary

Working with existing businesses to determine their needs and concerns will help to ensure these businesses are able to survive in a changing market place. Key to this strategy is creating a mechanism to respond to issues and needs identified in the retention visits.

Key Players:

- Business Owners
- Champaign Downtown Association
- Planning Department
- City Managers Economic Development Office
- Chamber of Commerce

Strategy 10 - New Business Recruitment

Recruit new businesses that have a broad appeal to residents and visitors.

Commentary

As downtown develops and more retail space becomes available, recruitment of new businesses will be necessary to achieve retail diversity. Although a majority of recruitment will likely be conducted by developers and property owners of downtown buildings, the City should assist in attracting and educating new businesses about the community and downtown planning efforts.

Key Players:

- Developers
- Property Owners
- Planning Department
- City Manager's Office
- Champaign Downtown Association
- Chamber of Commerce
- Economic Development Corporation



Organization



"Market Downtown to attract people from a regional area."

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Summary

This chapter of the plan focuses on strategies to organize promotion of downtown. The implementation of this Plan and the success of downtown can best be accomplished through a network of partners. This network can pool its resources and technical expertise to collectively achieve the vision of the Plan. Traditionally, the City has been viewed as the primary steward of downtown through its policy, incentives and investment in the public infrastructure. Volunteer groups such as the Downtown Champaign Council or the Champaign Downtown Association (CDA) have supplemented this effort. Other groups such as the Champaign Park District and the local Arts Council, 40 North 88 West, have also played key roles promoting downtown through beautification, cultural events, and entertainment opportunities. Perhaps the most critical partner in downtown is the private sector. Decisions by private property owners and business owners on whether or how to invest in their land/business have the biggest impact on whether downtown will continue to grow and be successful. This Plan proposes an organizational structure where the City helps facilitate a network of partners to maximize the impact of their expertise to achieve the vision of the plan.

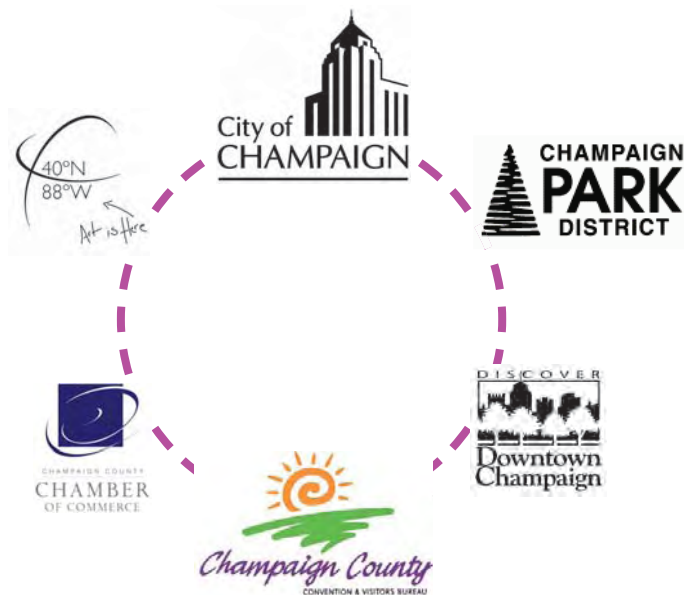
Downtown requires a higher level of public services than many other areas of the City. The area has some of the oldest infrastructure and highest levels of use. To continue to attract investment and people downtown, the streets, sidewalks and other public spaces should be clean, safe and attractive. The commitment of the City to provide this level of maintenance should be matched by the commitment of property owners to maintain their property as well. This chapter proposes strategies to improve the infrastructure and promote clean and safe public and private spaces.



Challenges

Coordination of events and activities

Over the past several years, there has been a high level of interest in festivals and activities downtown. For example, in 2005 the Downtown Festival of the Arts was expanded to include a streetfest which attracted thousands of people to downtown and West Side Park for music, food, arts and entertainment activities. Today, major events downtown include the Boneyard Arts Festival, Taste of Champaign, Artist Against Aids, Holiday Parade, Tree Lighting and Ebbertfest. The Champaign Park District has traditionally coordinated downtown events but as events become more popular the cost of running them and the need for coordination increases. Similarly, the CDA has traditionally coordinated other downtown activities through volunteer efforts but as activity increases, the need for volunteers and funding also rises.



Primary contact for downtown information

There is currently no single contact for information about downtown information. Inquires for data and information come from current business owners, potential investors and others desiring information about attractions, calendars of events, basic demographic data and investment opportunities. Although there are a number of resources that can be drawn upon, no single location is equipped to address all these kinds of requests.

Marketing Downtown

Downtown has seen many successes over the past several years with building renovations and new construction projects. However, downtown is still largely unmarketed as a major attraction for Champaign. There is also no common "branding" of downtown that is recognizable to residents and visitors. If downtown is to diversify its activities and attract different people at all time of the day and week, it should be branded and marketed.



Funding Infrastructure Improvements

The Tax Increment Finance District (TIF) has been the primary funding mechanism for downtown infrastructure improvements for the past twenty years. Although the TIF has recently been extended for an additional 12 years, funding for capital improvements will need to be prioritized with other improvements citywide.



Maintaining Infrastructure

Some public infrastructure in downtown represents the oldest infrastructure in the city. The infrastructure downtown also experiences some of the highest use citywide. Because a positive pedestrian experience promotes downtowns success streets, sidewalks, streetlights, and other appurtenances in downtown need to be not only functional but also attractive and distinctive. Further, streets and sidewalks need to be clean and safe. Keeping infrastructure maintained requires significant coordination and budgeting.

Keeping downtown as the center for community services

Downtown has traditionally been a center for community services, including city government, the federal post office, and various social service agencies. Centrally located and served well by public transportation, downtown offers convenience to residents seeking these services. As the role of downtown changes and as the needs for these agencies also change, it is important to try to keep these functions in the heart of the city.



Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles shall guide decisions and policies related to organizational issues in the downtown.

Organization

To achieve success in downtown, a network of partners should be established to advance the principles and goals of the plan.

Outside entities and organizations should play key roles in running events, providing beautification and supporting businesses

Data and information on the downtown should be readily available in order to help potential investors understand downtown's market potential.

Efforts to continue the revitalization of downtown should include aggressively seeking funding opportunities and technical assistance for projects and programs.

Downtown will benefit from the creation of an identity for downtown that is recognizable to residents and visitors.

Business recruitment and retention is important for the long term success in downtown.

Public Service

Downtown has a high level of activity and contains a significant amount of public space. Therefore adequate resources for the maintenance and upkeep of downtown are a high priority.

The public infrastructure in downtown requires maintenance at a higher level than other areas of the city.

Downtown public safety is a high priority

Strategies

The following strategies are action steps that would implement the organizational goals of the Plan.

Organization

- ☐ Establish a stable funding sources (e.g. a food and beverage tax increase or creation of a Special Service Area) to support downtown organizations as well as continued support of downtown cultural events.
- ☐ Coordinate with other entities on annual events and programs and identify funding needed to successfully run these events.
- ☐ Designate a City Staff position that would have primary responsibility for implementation of the strategies of the plan and fostering effective downtown networks.
- ☐ Establish a system to develop and maintain updated demographic information about downtown that can be easily shared with potential investors.
- ☐ Work with the Champaign Downtown Association to create marketing materials that can be distributed to visitors, potential investors, and other interested individuals.
- ☐ Identify a brand for downtown to use in marketing its activities.
- ☐ Establish a continuing dialogue between the City and existing downtown community service agencies to better understand their continuing role in downtown in the future.

Public Service

- ☐ Determine a priority list of needed streetscape upgrades that are not likely to be completed in conjunction with a development project, and identify an appropriate funding source.
- ☐ Program and budget for the systematic maintenance of downtown from routine cleaning to minor infrastructure improvements.
- ☐ Annually evaluate public safety data including crime and traffic accident reports to determine where increased efforts need to be made to ensure that downtown continues to be viewed as “safe” for all users of downtown.

Strategy 1 - Organizational Funding Sources

Establish a stable funding sources (e.g. a food and beverage tax increase or creation of a Special Service Area) to support downtown organizations as well as continued support of downtown cultural events.

Commentary

As downtown continues to revitalize, the expense to maintain the area and provide necessary improvements has increased. Implementation of the Downtown Plan will also create new cost for downtown. The Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District has long been the mechanism for funding public improvements and incentivizing further private investment in downtown. However, the TIF District will end in 2017. For this reason it is important to consider establishing another potential source of revenue that can help implement the strategies of the plan. Two possible sources include the Food and Beverage Tax and Special Service Areas.

Food and Beverage Tax generates revenue from a tax collected on food and beverage sales at restaurants citywide. In 2006 the approved tax rate was one-half cent per dollar of purchase. For a twenty dollar purchase the tax is ten cents. Unlike funds generated in TIF, Food and Beverage revenues collected are essentially unrestricted and can be used for a variety of programs and improvements. Currently, anticipated revenues are programmed through 2008 for capital improvements in the Campustown Area. An increase of the Food and Beverage Tax could help fund many of the strategies in this plan including capital improvements, funding for arts and cultural programs and funding for organizational goals such as a part time Downtown Administrator position. However, since Food and Beverage Tax is generated from restaurants and bars citywide, it is important to consider improvements needed in other areas that significantly contribute to the revenue (such as North Prospect, Campustown, etc.) and develop a program that equally distributes the benefits.

Guest Check

TABLE	GUESTS	SERVER	
4	2	AK	4160-48
1			Burger/Fries 5.99
1			Iced Tea 1.49
1			Chicken Sand. 5.99
			Fries
1			Pepsi 1.49
1			Appetizer 4.99
			SUBTOTAL 19.95
7 3/4%			SALES TAX 1.54
1%			FOOD & BEV. TAX .20
			TOTAL \$21.69

GUEST RECEIPT

TABLE	GUESTS	SERVER	
			4160-48

SA540 Receipt for Income Tax or Expense Account Record a edams

Special Service Areas (SSA) are used to provide a specified improvement to a defined area. Revenue is generated from a special annual tax that is applied to those property owners that benefit from the improvement. SSA's are typically used to fund infrastructure improvement projects. For example, property owners that are adjacent to an unimproved alley could agree to equally contribute to the paving of the alley when the improvement is not scheduled as part of the City's Capital Improvements Program. SSA's have also been used to generate funds for ongoing maintenance or safety programs. This could include the hiring of a crew to clean sidewalks, plant flowers, or provide extra security presence.

Any proposals to increase the Food and Beverage Tax or implement Special Service Areas should include an identification of what the money is to be generated for and how it would improve the downtown area and implement the goals of this plan. City Council approval would be needed to implement both of these actions.

Key Players:

- City Managers Office
- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Restaurant and Bar Owners
- Business Owners
- Property Owners
- Champaign Downtown Association



Strategy 2 - Event Coordination

Coordinate with other entities on annual events and programs and identify funding needed to successfully run these events.

Commentary

The popularity of downtown for events, festivals and cultural programs has been increasing in recent years. Events such as Ebertfest, Downtown Festival of the Arts, Boneyard Arts Festival, and the Christmas Parade have attracted thousands of people to downtown. As a result many people have experienced everything else that downtown has to offer. Currently, events are sponsored by different entities such as the Champaign Park District, the Champaign Downtown Association and 40 North 88 West. The City often assists with these events in different ways with either personnel services or financial contributions. As these events continue to grow in popularity, the cost to produce them rises too. The need to annually plan and budget for events becomes critical. Also, to keep these events popular, an annual program should be published and marketed.

Key Players:

- City Managers Office
- Planning Department
- Champaign Downtown Association

Strategy 3 - Downtown Coordinator

Designate a City Staff position that would have primary responsibility for implementation of the strategies of the plan and fostering effective downtown networks.

Commentary

Having a designated person responsible for coordinating downtown networks and implementing the strategies of the plan is important to downtowns continued success. This person would be the primary contact for business owners, residents, potential investors and others needing information about downtown. A Downtown Coordinator would take the initiative to monitor the implementation of the goals of the plan and take responsibility for facilitating the right network of partners to keep downtown moving forward. This position could be a responsibility of a staff position within the Planning Department.

Key Players:

- City Managers Office
- Planning Department

Strategy 4 - Information Repository

Establish a system to develop and maintain updated demographic information about downtown that can be easily shared with potential investors.

Commentary

Although downtown has been experiencing a revitalization, it is in many ways still an untested market for many potential investors. The availability of accurate, up to date data and information on downtown can make all the difference in a decision to open a new business or invest in an older building. Information that should regularly be updated and available included basic demographic information such as population, numbers of employees, and number of visitor to downtown. Information that is also typically requested includes average sale/rent prices of property, parking data, available site information and data and information on incentive programs and active downtown organizations.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Champaign Downtown Association

Strategy 5 - Downtown Marketing

Work with the Champaign Downtown Association to create marketing materials that can be distributed to visitors, potential investors, and other interested individuals.

Commentary

Downtown events, activities and general information should be marketed through a variety of mediums and coordinated among the different network partners. This marketing could be organized under a common theme or design. The Downtown Coordinator should work to promote and distribute marketing materials in a number of different ways depending on the information. This may include promoting downtown events regionally through the Champaign County Convention and Visitors Bureau, promoting the opportunities for investment downtown at the community, regional and statewide levels, and organizing creative ways to promote existing businesses and attractions.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- City Manager's Office
- Champaign Downtown Association





Strategy 6 - Branding

Identify a brand for downtown to use in marketing its activities.

Commentary

Consistent with the goals of marketing downtown, a common “brand” should be developed. The concept of branding promotes creating an identifiable image that people associate with downtown when they see it. It can be used on everything from entryway signs to promotional print materials and web sites. In any event, the brand should strive to capture the spirit of downtown Champaign and not simply be a stock logo. Consideration should be given to a design competition to create this image.

Key Players:

- City Managers Office
- Planning Department
- Champaign Downtown Association
- Champaign Park District
- Champaign County Convention and Visitors Bureau

Strategy 7 - Dialogue with Community Service Agencies

Establish a continuing dialogue between the City and existing downtown community service agencies to better understand their continuing role in downtown in the future.

Commentary

Downtown serves as an important hub for many community service agencies in Champaign. The accessibility of downtown from all parts of the community makes this a natural fit. As downtown changes this could have an impact on these agencies and the populations they serve. A dialogue where the city and agencies can better understand trends and needs can assist in planning and policy decisions.

Key Players:

- City Managers Office
- Planning Department
- Downtown Community Service Agencies



Strategy 8- Streetscape Maintenance

Determine a priority listing for needed streetscape upgrades that are not likely to be completed in conjunction with a development project. Consider Special Service Areas (SSA) for those projects that are considered high priority and offer a high benefit for private property owners.

Commentary

The TIF allows money to be used for streetscape improvements anywhere in the district. Typically, these improvements are coordinated with new development projects and offered as a financial incentive to the project while providing a public benefit. However, there are many areas of downtown that need improvements to older streetscape where no new construction projects are planned or anticipated. In these cases, a priority listing of projects along with identified funding sources would be beneficial to ensure that improvements are coordinated consistently with the goals of the plan.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Engineering Division

Strategy 9 - Keep Downtown Clean Program

Program and budget for the systematic maintenance of downtown from routine cleaning to minor infrastructure improvements.

Commentary

Basic maintenance and cleaning of streets, sidewalk and other public spaces is a very important part of keeping downtown beautiful and attractive for investors, shoppers and employees of downtown. Although many property owners take initiative to clean the public areas in front of their property, a coordinated effort to keep all of downtown clean and in good repair is important. This is typically achieved through a Special Service Area program where property owners and the city are able to pool their resources and create an economy of scale by executing a program the encompasses all of downtown.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Downtown Property Owners



Strategy 10 - Downtown Safety Program

Annually evaluate public safety data including crime and traffic accident reports to determine where increased efforts need to be made to ensure that downtown continues to be viewed as “safe” for all users of downtown.

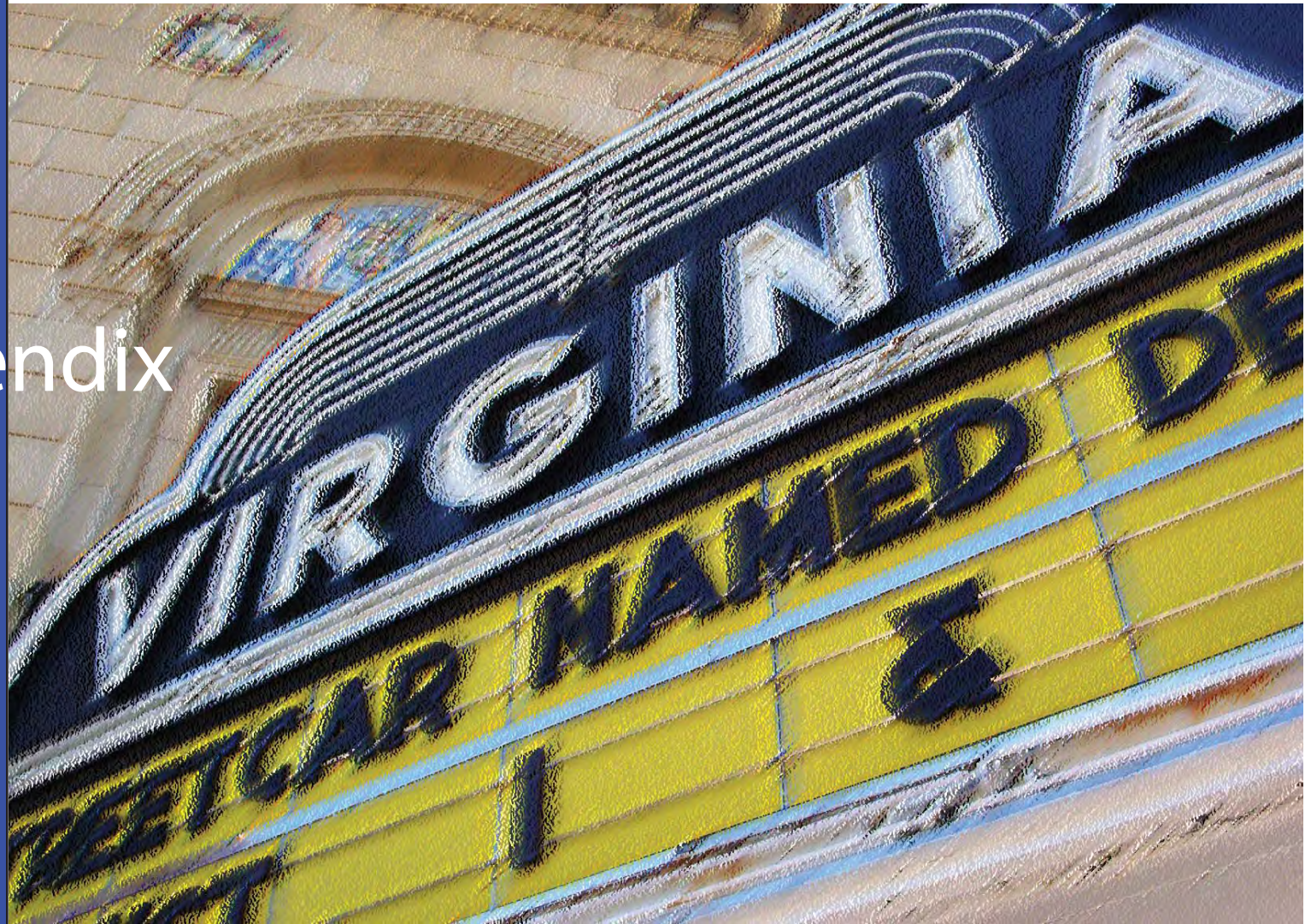
Commentary

To continue to attract people to downtown, it needs to be safe both in reality and perception. Regular monitoring of basic safety data such as traffic accidents and crimes can help the city and business owners understand what safety related areas need to be addressed. Through regular contact and discussion, appropriate actions can be implemented early on before a problem grows too large.

Key Players:

- Champaign Police Department
- Downtown Property Owners
- Downtown Business Owners
- Residents

Appendix



Downtown Existing Conditions Report
BDI Marketing Study Executive Summary
Downtown Parking Plan Executive Summary

TBD
TBD
TBD