



## Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan

February 2006

### Grand Rapids, Minnesota

Grand Rapids Economic Development Authority  
Central Business District Association

Hoisington Koegler Group, Inc.



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# Contents

## Chapters

Introduction .....	1
Guiding Principles .....	6
Community Context.....	9
Framework Plan .....	13
Redevelopment Opportunity Sites .....	22
Public Realm .....	39
Parking .....	43
Implementation.....	50
Appendix A - Parking Study	



This Redevelopment Master Plan is designed to be a tool for establishing and sustaining the Downtown desired by Grand Rapids. The Plan:

- Describes the contents, character and qualities desired for Downtown.
- Presents a plan to guide private and public improvements to achieve this vision.
- Outlines the public actions and investments required for change.

*What, why and how* are the threads that run throughout the Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan.

In broad terms, “what” is the vision for the future of Downtown. The plan describes what Downtown Grand Rapids seeks to become. Within this broad vision lies series of smaller, specific “whats” - the steps to be taken to achieve this vision.

The long-term success of redevelopment requires more than a plan and action steps. “Why” explains the relevance of the steps to be taken. This understanding is essential. “Why” brings the commitment to make difficult decisions. The stakeholders understand why the decision is important to Downtown. “Why” creates the ability to adapt to changing conditions. Understanding the rationale may lead to other paths with the same outcome.

“How” provides the knowledge and the means needed to implement the Plan. Many critical elements of the Plan will not happen without action by the City. The City is not, however, solely responsible for the success of this Plan. The majority of the investment called for in the Plan comes from private development. Downtown must be a place that attracts and sustains businesses.

### Importance of Plans and Actions

Planning for Downtown Grand Rapids is not new. A series of planning initiatives undertaken over the past 16 years have looked to the future of Downtown. These plans have included

- CBD Development Plan (1989)
- CBD Redevelopment Plan, An Amendment to the City’s Comprehensive Plan (1996)
- Riverfront Framework Plan (2000)

These documents provide an important resource for understanding the evolution of objectives and initiatives for Downtown.

These prior efforts also demonstrate that the presence of a plan, by itself, is not sufficient. While each effort has led to incremental change, none of these plans has provided an enduring guide for the Downtown. The 2005 Downtown Redevelopment

Master Plan seeks to meet that need.

This Plan does not duplicate much of the background information generated by past plans. Instead, this document focuses on practical guidance for creating and maintaining a successful Downtown in Grand Rapids. The Plan is a meaningful tool for change and not “just another plan.” The Plan serves as a springboard for other investigations, such as market research, that will be needed to undertake specific projects.

The effective use of this Plan relies on a clear understanding of the importance of Downtown and the implementation of this Plan. Several factors help to describe the implications of this Plan.

### ***Downtown is important***

Some may view Downtown as just another commercial district in Grand Rapids. With this view, the success (or failure) of any single commercial district is not critical. The important factor is the overall availability of goods and services to the community. The goal of public action is to guide land use. Market forces will shape the type and quantity of businesses.



Figure 1  
Downtown Planning Area

Downtown is not, however, just another place of business. Downtown is uniquely important to the character and quality of life in Grand Rapids. Failure to promote a successful Downtown is not in the best interest of Grand Rapids. Grand Rapids competes with other places for visitors, businesses and residents. The quality and vitality of Downtown is a key to attracting people to Grand Rapids.

### ***Downtown is unique***

Stand in any other commercial district in Grand Rapids and look objectively at the place. While

these businesses provide important goods and services to the community, they do little to establish a sense of identity for Grand Rapids. The view along the southern parts of Pokegama Avenue is duplicated in many other cities across Minnesota. Only Downtown creates a place unique to Grand Rapids.

Downtown is the single most identifiable location in Grand Rapids. Downtown is the part of Grand Rapids most likely to be seen by visitors to Grand Rapids. Almost 17,000 vehicles pass through the in-

tersection of Highways 169 and 2 every day. Unique destinations such as the Itasca County Courthouse, Blandin and the Grand Rapids Area Library draw people to Downtown from a broader region. The impression created by Downtown influences overall views on Grand Rapids.

### ***Failure to act has consequences***

People are often reluctant to use the term “blight” in discussing redevelopment plans. We don’t want to create the stigma of labeling someone’s property as “blighted.” Blight exists in redevelopment settings regardless of our willingness to discuss it. The failure to discuss, identify, and remove blight only increases the challenges facing the Downtown.

In a physical setting, like the Downtown, blight is the equivalent of a cancer. It begins small and spreads. Blight makes downtown areas ill both physically and economically. These symptoms of blight are some of the greatest barriers to achieving the vision for the future of Downtown Grand Rapids.

Blight is not a thing, but a cycle of change. Over time, all buildings experience physical deterioration. In a healthy setting, property owners have the incentive and ability to reinvest in the building. Deterioration is stopped before it becomes a problem.

Blight produces tangible consequences. Property values (and the tax base for local governments) fall. Businesses close, reducing jobs and economic activity in Grand Rapids. The spread of blight makes future solutions more difficult and expensive.



### ***There are barriers to change***

Downtown competes with the “edge” to attract and retain businesses. Development in Downtown faces physical and economic barriers that are not present in sites on the growing edges of Grand Rapids. This Plan identifies and provides strategies for the removal of these barriers.

Commercial development on the edge occurs on vacant land with sites configured for new businesses. Only one vacant site exists in the entire Downtown area. Redevelopment sites typically consist of multiple parcels. Many of these parcels contain buildings. Assembling a site increases the complexity of redevelopment.

Redevelopment is more expensive. Buildings increase the cost of land. This cost may include compensation for the relocation of existing businesses. The costs of demolishing buildings and clearing the site are not presented on the edge.

Parking solutions are more complicated in Downtown. The need for an adequate supply of convenient and free parking is the same on the edge and in Downtown. With a greater supply of land, edge projects can simply build a larger parking lot. This approach will not work in Downtown. Site constraints force the use of structured parking (decks, ramps, or underground) with meet the needs of larger projects. Structured parking typically costs three to five times more than surface parking.

### ***Downtown is a dynamic environment***

Downtown is a dynamic environment, facing both challenges and opportunities. The Redevelopment Master Plan prepares the community to meet the challenges and capture the opportunities.

Downtown Grand Rapids builds for the future from a strong foundation. Downtown contains a collection of successful local businesses. Through maintenance and revitalization, these businesses set a positive standard for the character of Downtown. The business community is engaged in creating and maintaining a healthy downtown.

Redevelopment has brought new investment to Downtown. Some of this investment has come in the form of private development. Public investments have also been instrumental in the evolution of Downtown. Construction of a new library establishes a public presence on the Mississippi River. The library, combined with the Blandin Foundation and KAXE Radio, starts the process of linking Downtown with the riverfront. The City has enhanced the setting with streetscape improvements.

At the same time, challenges appear on the horizon. Reinvestment in properties does not occur throughout the Downtown, but in more of a checkerboard pattern. Disconnected parcels experience increased pressures of blight.

The retail core of Grand Rapids is shifting south. Large national retailers are coming to Grand Rapids to build on vacant land along the Highway 169 cor-

ridor. Downtown cannot claim to be the primary business district of Grand Rapids.

An environmental review process is underway for the construction of warehouse and processing facilities for the Blandin Paper Company. One of the five options under consideration places the expansion in Downtown. Regardless of the location, Blandin’s presence is an important element of the future for Downtown Grand Rapids.

### **Using the Plan**

This “master plan” articulates the community’s vision for the future of Downtown. This vision cannot be achieved overnight. This master plan presents a framework for guiding actions over the next 20 years. Some actions occur in the near term (1 to 5 years), while other steps may not be taken for years to come.

This master plan must not be viewed as a “blueprint” for what Downtown Grand Rapids will look like. The Plan does not attempt to prescribe specific loca-



tion, size and use of structures. Instead, the Plan uses text and illustrations to guide private and public investments in a manner that creates and maintains the Downtown desired by Grand Rapids. The Plan shows what Downtown might look like by applying the principles and taking the actions described in this Plan.



The Plan seeks a balance between consistent adherence to fundamental principles and flexibility to adapt to change. Every project involves an exploration of implications and fits with Downtown in the context of this plan. Used in this manner, the Plan guides actions to become valued parts of the fabric and traditions of Downtown.

A series of interrelated elements make up the Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan:

### ***Guiding Principles***

The Guiding Principles contain a collection of fundamental objectives for guiding redevelopment in Downtown. Taken together, these principles describe the vision for Downtown. The Guiding Principles provide a framework for evaluating decisions and projects.

### ***Community Context***

Downtown is not an island. It exists in the context of a broader community. Looking at Downtown in this broader context shows opportunities to enhance implementation of this plan.

### ***Framework Plan***

The Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan serves as a framework for public and private investment. This section summarizes the key land uses and redevelopment activities that work to achieve the vision for Downtown.

### ***Redevelopment Opportunity Sites***

Encouraging redevelopment can be complicated, time consuming and expensive. It is important that the Master Plan provide a focus for the efforts of the City. Five opportunity sites present the best combination of need and positive influence. This section presents detailed redevelopment strategies for each of these sites.

### ***Public Realm***

Downtown is made up of both private and public properties. Improvements in the public realm are needed to support and complement the private investments desired by this Plan. This section contains guidance on the design and character of public improvements in Downtown. Part of these improvements include the pending reconstruction of Highway 2.

### ***Parking***

An adequate supply of properly located and free parking is an essential ingredient of future success for Downtown. The Master Plan describes the current system and presents recommendations for meeting future parking needs.

### ***Implementation***

Implementation is a thread that runs through the Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan. Each section contains ideas and strategies for creating the Downtown desired by Grand Rapids. The Implementation section of the Plan provides general guidance on the use and execution of the Plan.

### ***Acknowledgments***

The creation of this Plan mirrors the public/private collaboration required for the future of Downtown. The process that produced this plan was a joint venture of the Grand Rapids Economic Development Authority (GREDA) and the Central Business District Association (CBDA). The Blandin Foundation, CBDA and GREDA provided financial support for this project.

The planning and urban design firm of Hoisington Koegler Group, Inc. was retained to facilitate the planning process and to prepare this plan. The other member of the consulting team, Meyer Mohaddes Associates, focused on parking and transportation issues.

The work of the consulting team was directed by the following individuals serving as the steering committee for this project:

Frank and Kay Allen  
Sandy Anderson  
Craig Bender  
Todd Driscoll  
Wade Fauth  
Wanda Haverkost  
Tom Jackson  
Ernie and Trina Jacobson  
Jim Kent  
Gary McNerney  
Bruce Ogle  
Tom Osborn  
Larry Schlauderaff  
Noah Wilcox  
Ed Zabinski

The Steering Committee brought a wide range of perspective and insight about Downtown and the community to the planning process. The Committee strived to create a useful and meaningful tool to guide future investments in Downtown.

Rob Mattei, Community Development Director for the City of Grand Rapids, managed the planning process for the City and its Economic Development Authority. He provided valuable guidance and assistance to the consulting team.



# Guiding Principles

The Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan is based on a set of Guiding Principles. These principles provide a consistent framework for guiding both public and private investments.

In many respects, these principles are the most important part of the plan. They provide an enduring statement of the objectives for development in Downtown. The Guiding principles provide a framework for evaluating proposals, projects, ideas and new directions. Decisions can be measured by their consistency with these principles.

The Plan presents a course of action. It is more than a depiction of the desired future state of Downtown. The Plan outlines strategies and actions to move Downtown towards its vision. The Guiding Principles state the fundamental values and objectives for Downtown Grand Rapids. Taken together, these Guiding Principles describe the vision for the future of Downtown.

## ***Downtown is an essential part of Grand Rapids.***

Development in Downtown reflects the identity, character and heritage. No other neighborhood or district plays such a prominent role in the community. Downtown is the crossroads. People traveling through Grand Rapids must come to Downtown.



*1st Avenue West - 1942*  
Source: Minnesota Historical Society

## ***Downtown is a unique place.***

Investments and activities emphasize that Downtown is a place unlike any other in Grand Rapids. As national retailers locate in Grand Rapids, other commercial areas develop a sense of “sameness”. You could be anywhere. Downtown is a place unique to Grand Rapids. It contains a collection of goods and services not available in other places.

## ***Downtown is a place of character and quality.***

The character of the buildings and public spaces creates an interesting and inviting atmosphere. It balances the need for convenience with an appeal that encourages a person to linger. The design and materials of new buildings should fit with and complement the character of Downtown. The maintenance and renovation of existing buildings should highlight the original style and character of these key pieces of Downtown. These actions must



*The character of public and private development make Downtown a place unlike any other in Grand Rapids.*

be taken with an understanding of the economic environment of Downtown. Additional investments in the quality of buildings and sites must be balanced with the ability to operate a successful business. The economic and physical quality of Downtown are intertwined.



### ***Downtown is a gathering place.***

Downtown is the place where Grand Rapids gathers. Making downtown the focal point of community events, such as Tall Timber Days, brings people to Downtown and enhances its identity. Sidewalk sales and other coordinated business events give people the chance to shop and to meet friends and neighborhoods. This plan seeks to provide more reasons to visit and more places to gather.

### ***Downtown is place for wheels and for feet.***

People should be able to travel to and through Downtown by car, by bicycle and by foot with equal ease.

Cars and trucks are part of Downtown. Regional highways bring thousands of vehicles to Downtown every day. Most people come to Downtown by car. The street system must provide safe and convenient access to and movement through Downtown.



*Vacant parcels and transportation (highway and rail) corridors impede the feeling that Downtown is a single and well connected district.*

Once in Downtown, an ample supply of parking located throughout the area allows people to stop and shop.

Despite the importance of vehicles, Downtown must be a walkable place. The visitor to Downtown should be drawn to wander and explore, not make one stop and leave. Sidewalks provide attractive and safe pathways. Storefronts meet the street and invite the shopper.

### ***Downtown is well connected.***

The idea of “connections” guides Downtown in many ways.

Businesses in Downtown are connected physically and economically. Physical connection does not mean Downtown should be a large strip mall. Rather, the physical connections mean the elimination of large gaps between parts of Downtown. The vacant land along 1st Avenue West illustrates this point. Without connections, Downtown cannot be a cohesive district.

Downtown needs the recognition of strong economic connections. The customer of one business is the source of potential support for others.

Connections require the ability to move within the Downtown. In Grand Rapids, this means safe opportunities to cross highways.

The connections extend beyond the boundaries of Downtown. Trails, sidewalks and bicycle lanes connect Downtown with the broader community.



*This mixed use building in Little Canada shows how housing and retail can facilitate redevelopment.*

### ***Downtown is an evolutionary place.***

The Downtown of today has taken years, decades and even centuries to become apparent. The future will present needs and opportunities that are not apparent today. The application of these principles allow Downtown to evolve consistently with the community’s vision.

### ***Downtown is a neighborhood.***

Housing is key to the future of Downtown. Housing brings people to Downtown. People add life and activity to the area beyond the typical “9 to 5”. It creates a new customer base for businesses. Housing provides the economic capacity to meet certain redevelopment needs.

### ***Make Downtown the best place for small businesses.***

Few “big box” developments stand alone. The big box is the anchor that attracts a collection of smaller businesses located on adjacent pads or strips of land.

These smaller businesses locate around the big box in hopes of capturing the customer base of the anchor businesses. Although big box retail competes with Downtown businesses, the pad development may be a greater threat. Pad businesses more directly represent lost opportunity for Downtown. The space requirements of large retailers cannot be met Downtown. On the other hand, many of the businesses located around big box sites would fit nicely into a Downtown setting.

***Downtown businesses set the standard for excellence.***

The products and service available from Downtown businesses shall be second to none. Much of this Plan focuses on creating a great physical setting for Downtown. The setting is only one part of the equation for success. The businesses that operate in this setting are the other key factor.

***Downtown is the civic center of Grand Rapids.***

Downtown is the civic core of Grand Rapids. City Hall, Itasca County Courthouse, United States Post Office, and Grand Rapids Area Library are all located in the Downtown. People must come to the Downtown to use these institutions. They do not exist anywhere else in Grand Rapids.

The effects of community facilities extend beyond the borders of Downtown. Grand Rapids High School, the Reif Center, IRA Civic Center, Elkington Middle School, and Itasca County Fairgrounds are located immediately north of Downtown. The




*Civic uses in and around the Downtown attract people to the area, creating an important source of customers.*

majority of residents pass through Downtown to reach these destinations. All of these civic uses create identity and opportunity for Downtown.

# Community Context

Downtown Grand Rapids is not an island. It exists in context of a broader community. The success of Downtown requires understanding and utilization of the elements in this community context. These elements can be used to support objectives for Downtown.

This section describes the elements of the surrounding community that have the greatest influence on achieving the vision for Downtown. These elements are shown graphically in Figure 2.

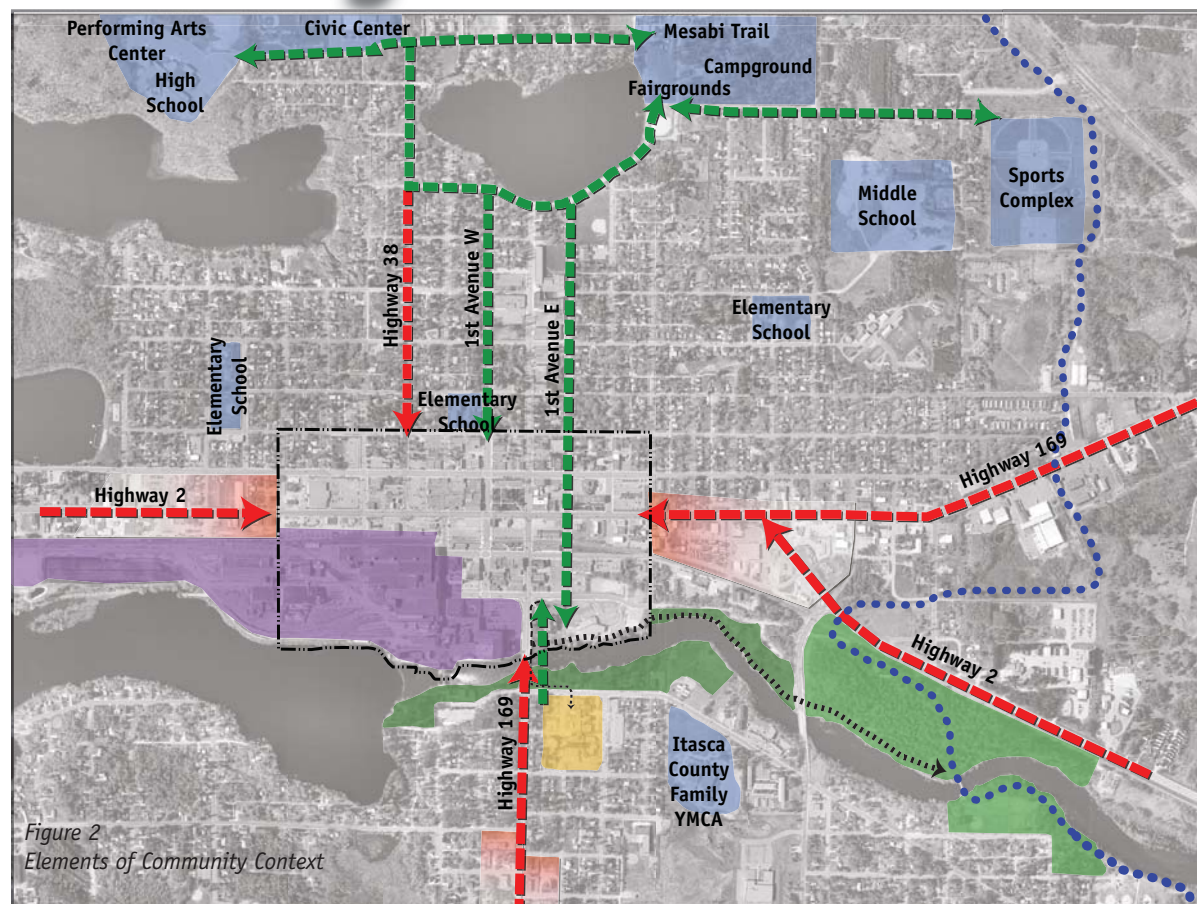
The dashed line  denotes the boundaries of the planning area for Downtown. The area within the planning area is examined in detail in the Framework Plan section of the Downtown Master Plan.



## Transportation Corridor

Downtown benefits from excellent accessibility. Downtown lies at the intersection of two regional highways - U.S. Highway 2 and U.S. Highway 169. State Highway 38 is the primary connection to Grand Rapids from the north. These highways form the key vehicular movements to and through the Downtown. The traffic in these transportation corridors represents a significant pool of potential customers.

The benefits to the Downtown from the exposure



Transportation Corridor  
Pedestrian/Bike Connections  
Riverfront Trail  
Community/Regional Trails



Community Facilities  
Riverfront  
Highway Retail  
Hospital Redevelopment



Blandin



and access provided by the regional highways offset the challenges posed by this traffic. Planning for the local transportation system should continue to emphasize the use of these corridors. Changes in the highways or local streets that create designated bypasses of Downtown should be avoided. Bypass roadways not only reduce this part of the Downtown customer base, they also create the risk that new commercial development follows the new roadway and traffic.

The pending reconstruction of Highway 2 in the Downtown will improve the quality of the roadway and create the opportunity in public spaces adjacent to the road. A more detailed discussion of this project can be found in the [Public Realm](#) chapter of the Plan.

### Wayfinding

The term “wayfinding” refers to a coordinated system of informational signage that directs people to key destinations in Grand Rapids. Creating a focus on Downtown would be a catalyst for establishing a wayfinding sign system. Placing these signs along the primary transportation corridors can help direct people to Downtown. Signage provides a cue to the traveler that Downtown lies ahead and to be aware. Signage also offers the potential of attracting the visitor to “big box” development on the edge of Grand Rapids. These visitors might not otherwise be aware of or seek out Downtown.



## Pedestrian/Bike Connections

Access to Downtown should not come solely from vehicles. Downtown should be a focal point of pedestrian and bicycle systems in Grand Rapids. Making Downtown readily accessible by foot and bicycle creates another opportunity for people to visit and shop. These connections can be made with a combination of sidewalks, trails and on-street bike lanes.

The Plan emphasizes three key pedestrian and bicycle connections to Downtown:

- 1st Avenue East
- 1st Avenue West
- Pokegama Avenue

Although opportunities to create and enhance connections will come in other places, these three streets hold the greatest potential for establishing clear and usable corridors.

1st Avenue East is a natural corridor. It connects the trail along Ice Lake with the Mississippi River. The recent physical improvements to the street



*The character of the rebuilt 1st Avenue East creates a strong connection extending north from Downtown.*



*The use of sidewalks and bike lanes promote the connection between Downtown and the broader community.*

distinguish 1st Avenue East from other streets. The improvements currently run from 6th Street to 11th Street. If allowed by future redevelopment, this street design should be continued to the south. At a minimum, this corridor should include a continuous system of sidewalks and bike lanes.

The Plan envisions the reconstruction of 1st Avenue West using a similar design to 1st Avenue East. These improvements will provide a pedestrian and bicycle corridor on the west side of Downtown. This street can create is an important access route to Downtown from the north; linking with the Civic Center and the facilities on the High School campus. The improvements should include sidewalks and designated on-street bike lanes.

Pokegama Avenue (U.S. Highway 169) provides access to Downtown from the south. The current Mississippi River bridge serves pedestrians and bicycles. The south side of the River bridge should be a key connection for sidewalk and trail systems in southern sections of Grand Rapids.



The Plan encourages a strong connection between Downtown and residential neighborhoods. These connections should be part of a broader community system of pedestrian and bicycle movement. This system should link key public uses (High School, Middle School, Fairgrounds) with Downtown.

## Riverfront

The Mississippi River is an essential element of Grand Rapids. Downtown provides a key point of connection between the community and the River. The majority of riverfront in Downtown has been developed (Blandin plant, Blandin Foundation, Library, and KAXE Radio). Improved trail connections provide the best opportunity for strengthening the relationship between Downtown and the River.



*Existing development along the riverfront limits options for improving connections with Downtown.*

## Riverfront Trail

Pedestrian and bicycle connections should also connect with the local and regional trail system. A key connection is with the Mississippi River. The development pattern along the riverfront has been set in the Downtown area. A strong pedestrian and bicycle link with the riverfront trail is an important strategy for enhancing the relationship between Downtown and the River.



*The Plan seeks to emphasize connections between Downtown and the riverfront trail system.*

## Community/Regional Trails

Trails are not only a means of access for Downtown, they are an increasingly important element of tourism. With bicycles and snowmobiles, trails offer year-round recreational opportunities. The Mesabi



*Trailhead for Mesabi State Trail*

State Trail begins just outside of Downtown. Trail users offer a pool of customers for Downtown businesses. Information and signage at the trailhead can encourage visitors into Downtown. This area also includes the County Fairground and community campgrounds. As a strong destination for visitors, this area should be incorporated into any wayfinding system. Signs and an informational kiosk can be used to inform and direct people to Downtown.

## Community Facilities

Community facilities provide access to a customer base not found in any other location. Many community facilities are located in and around Downtown. People using these facilities must travel to or through Downtown. The Plan seeks to build stronger connections between community facilities and Downtown.

Several strategies can be used to create these connections. Creating positive visual appeal along primary transportation corridors establishes the impression that these visitors should come and explore Downtown. Pedestrian and bicycle corridors link these community facilities with Downtown.



*Schools are examples of the community facilities that influence the future of Downtown.*

Information signage signals that Downtown is a destination and directs people to Downtown from these locations.

## Highway Retail

Retail development along highway corridors provides both threats and opportunities for Downtown. Highway retail is the primary source of retail competition for Downtown. Vacant land and large retailers may lure businesses from Downtown. The Plan responds to this competition by creating a unique business setting that offers its own attraction. Large retailers also draw people to Grand Rapids from a broader region. These visitors should be encouraged to stop Downtown as part of a trip to Grand Rapids.



## Hospital Redevelopment

Redevelopment of the Hospital site creates a new residential neighborhood adjacent to Downtown. Pedestrian and trail connections improve access and the ability to tap this customer base.



## Blandin

The current and future influence of Blandin facilities is a thread that runs throughout this Plan. Blandin employees and visitors to the plant bring people into Downtown Grand Rapids. The economic influence extends to support for existing businesses and the potential to create new ones. The proposed warehouse and processing facilities have implications for Downtown regardless of their location. These factors are discussed in greater detail in other parts of the Plan.



The Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan creates a framework for guiding development. The Plan describes the land uses and redevelopment activities proposed to achieve the vision for the future of Downtown. The Plan also recognizes the need to adapt to issues and opportunities that will occur in the future. This section explains the framework for land use and redevelopment activities in Downtown Grand Rapids.

## Land Use

Downtown contains a mixture of land uses. The Plan organizes the uses in a supportive and sustainable pattern. The map in Figure 3 contains the land use plan for Downtown. To achieve this land use pattern the City will amend its Comprehensive Plan. The type of development allowed in each land use category is described in the following section.

### **Commercial**

This land use category reflects that Downtown is a place of commerce. Commercial land use targets traditional retail, service and office uses. Buildings in these areas will consist of both one- and two-story structures.

### **Civic**

Downtown is the civic core of Grand Rapids. This land use consists of primarily governmental func-

tions. The Visitors Center is the only non-governmental use in this category. These community functions provide a unique means of attracting people into the Downtown.

### **Industrial**

Blandin is an important part of the future for Downtown. Employees and visitors to Blandin facilities give Downtown businesses unique access to a pool of customers. The plant creates opportunities for the development of supporting services. The Plan shows the existing land use pattern. The construction of a new warehouse in Downtown would expand the industrial land use. The implications of this project are discussed in the section on redevelopment opportunities for Blocks 17 and 18.

### **Mixed Use**

Part of Downtown is guided for a mix of retail, office and residential uses. This mixture of uses may be both vertical (different uses in separate buildings) and horizontal (different uses in a single building). The description of the concepts for the “redevelopment opportunity sites” in the next chapter offers more details on the nature of mixed use development in Downtown Grand Rapids.

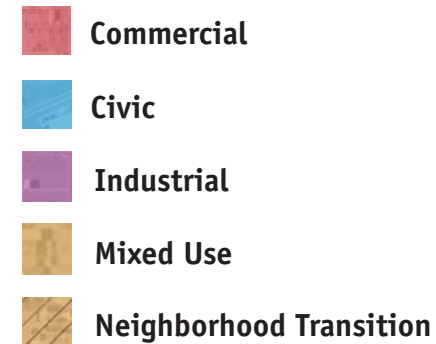
### **Neighborhood Transition**

This land use is a special type of mixed use. Its primary purpose is to establish an edge zone between Downtown and residential neighborhoods. This zone channels commercial activity into Downtown and prevents non-residential uses from creeping into neighborhoods. Several factors characterize the land use pattern in the Neighborhood Transition area:

- The area can contain a mixture of commercial and residential uses.
- The mixing of uses is expected to be horizontal in nature, with different uses occurring on the same block. This pattern is similar to the current mix of office, service and residential uses.
- Multiple story uses can be part of this area, but should be directed away from 6th Street North.
- The development north of the Central School square should be commercial, with a preference for retail uses ringing the entire square.



## Key to Land Use Plan

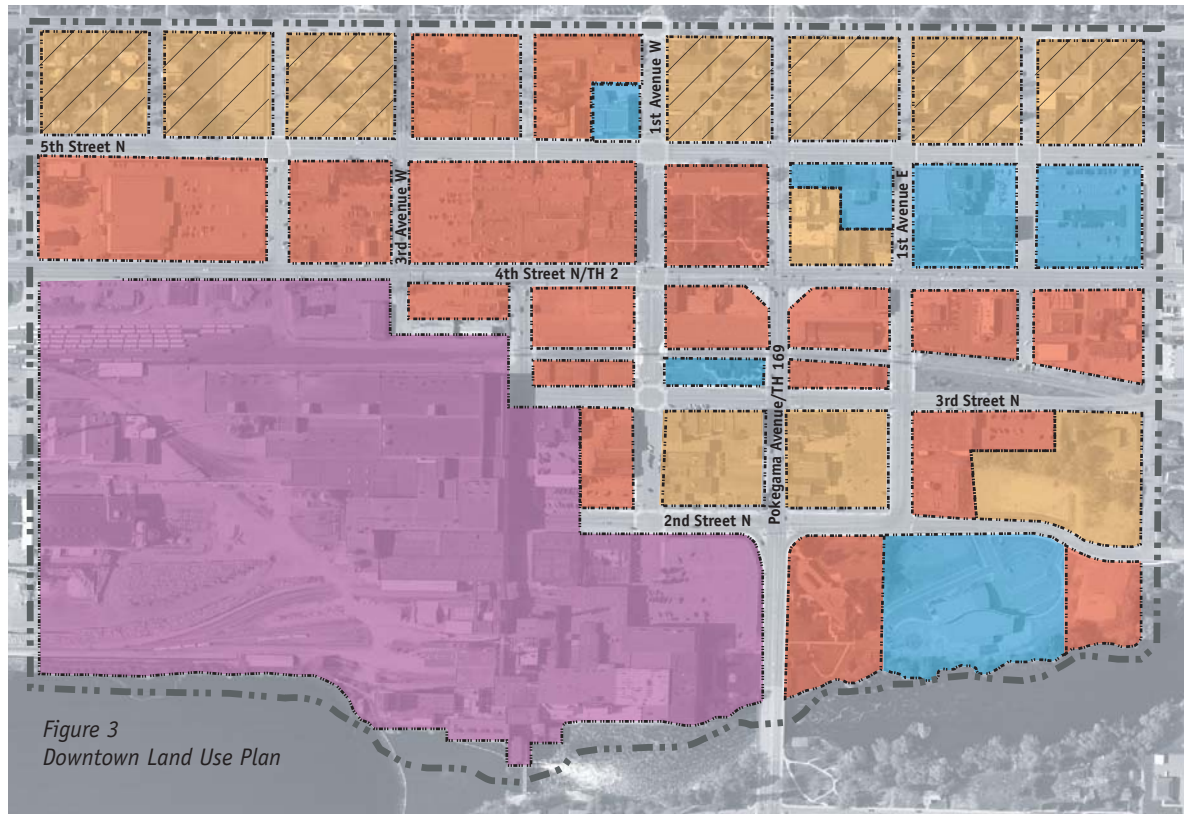


If implementation of the Plan could be accomplished solely by private investment, then no additional direction would be needed. It is unlikely, however, that all of the redevelopment desired for Downtown will occur without public action and assistance.

With limited public resources (particularly staff time and money) to facilitate redevelopment, it is important to apply these resources where they will have the greatest positive impact on Downtown. The Plan identifies five redevelopment opportunity sites. These sites represent a combination of need and opportunity. Redevelopment of these sites should be a primary focus for the implementation of the Plan. The sites are:

- Block 19
- Blocks 17/18
- Block 29
- Block 36
- Block 37

Although not a location for private redevelopment, the pending reconstruction of Highway 2 also con-



## Land Ownership

The pattern of land ownership is an important element of preparing for redevelopment. The map in Figure 4 shows the pattern of major property ownership based on 2004 parcel data.

The City of Grand Rapids is a key Downtown property owner. The majority of public property shown in Figure 4 is owned by the City. The City owns property in each redevelopment opportunity site except Blocks 17 and 18 (see discussion in next chapter). These parcels create flexibility assembling

sites and financing acquisition for redevelopment projects.

## Redevelopment Activities

The Framework Plan highlights the key public and private activities needed to realize the vision for Downtown. The key redevelopment activities are illustrated in Figure 5. The following section provides an explanation of each of the planned activities.



### Redevelopment Opportunity Sites

The Plan seeks to provide a framework to stimulate private investment throughout the Downtown area.



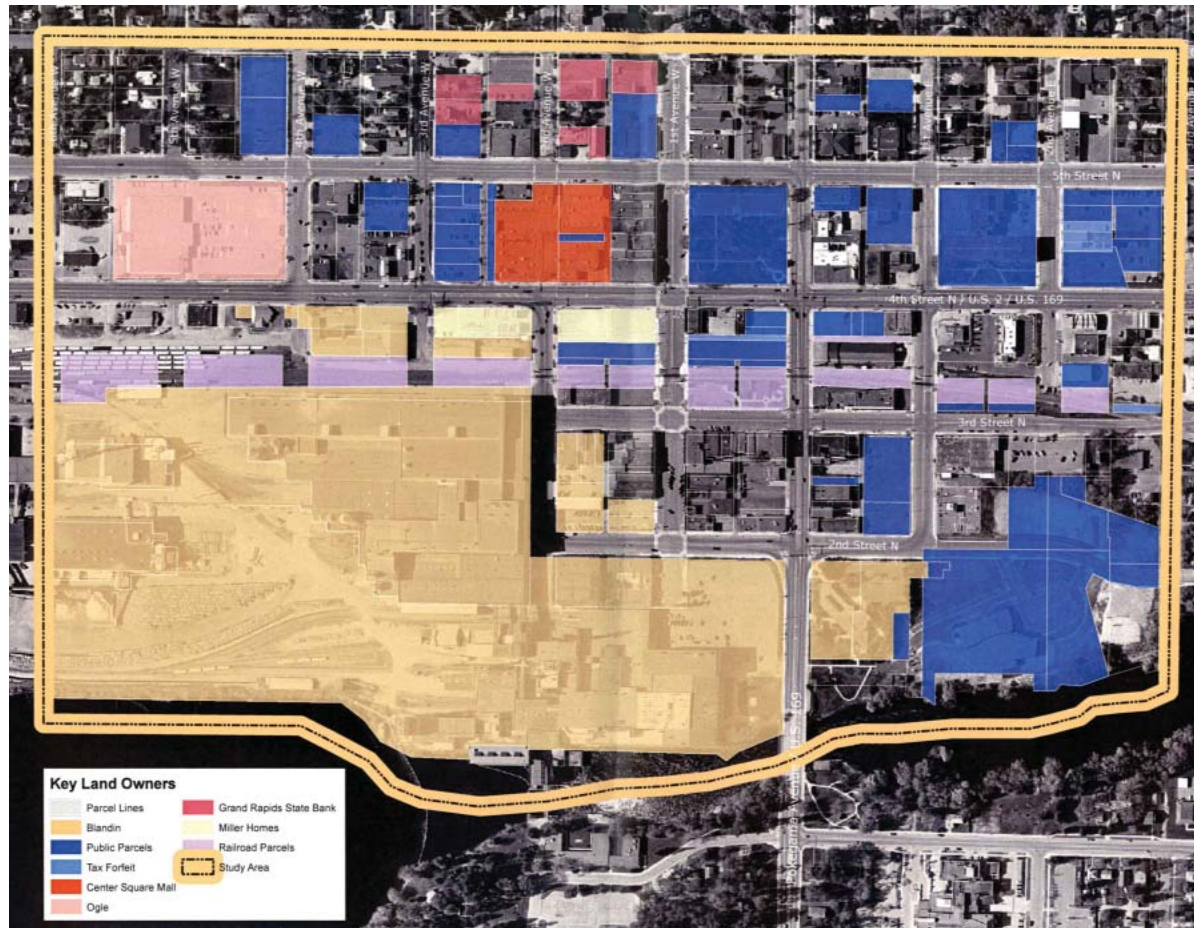


Figure 4  
Key Land Owners (2004)

stitutes a significant redevelopment opportunity for Downtown. The next chapter in the Plan describes the strategies for the redevelopment of each of these opportunity sites.



### Foundations

Change is not the sole focus of this Plan. A critical redevelopment strategy is the maintenance and

enhancement of key structures in Downtown. The buildings outlined in black in the Framework Plan represent building character and uses that are important assets. These buildings form the foundation for a successful Downtown.

**Central School** establishes a clear link with Grand Rapids' past. Central School is on the National

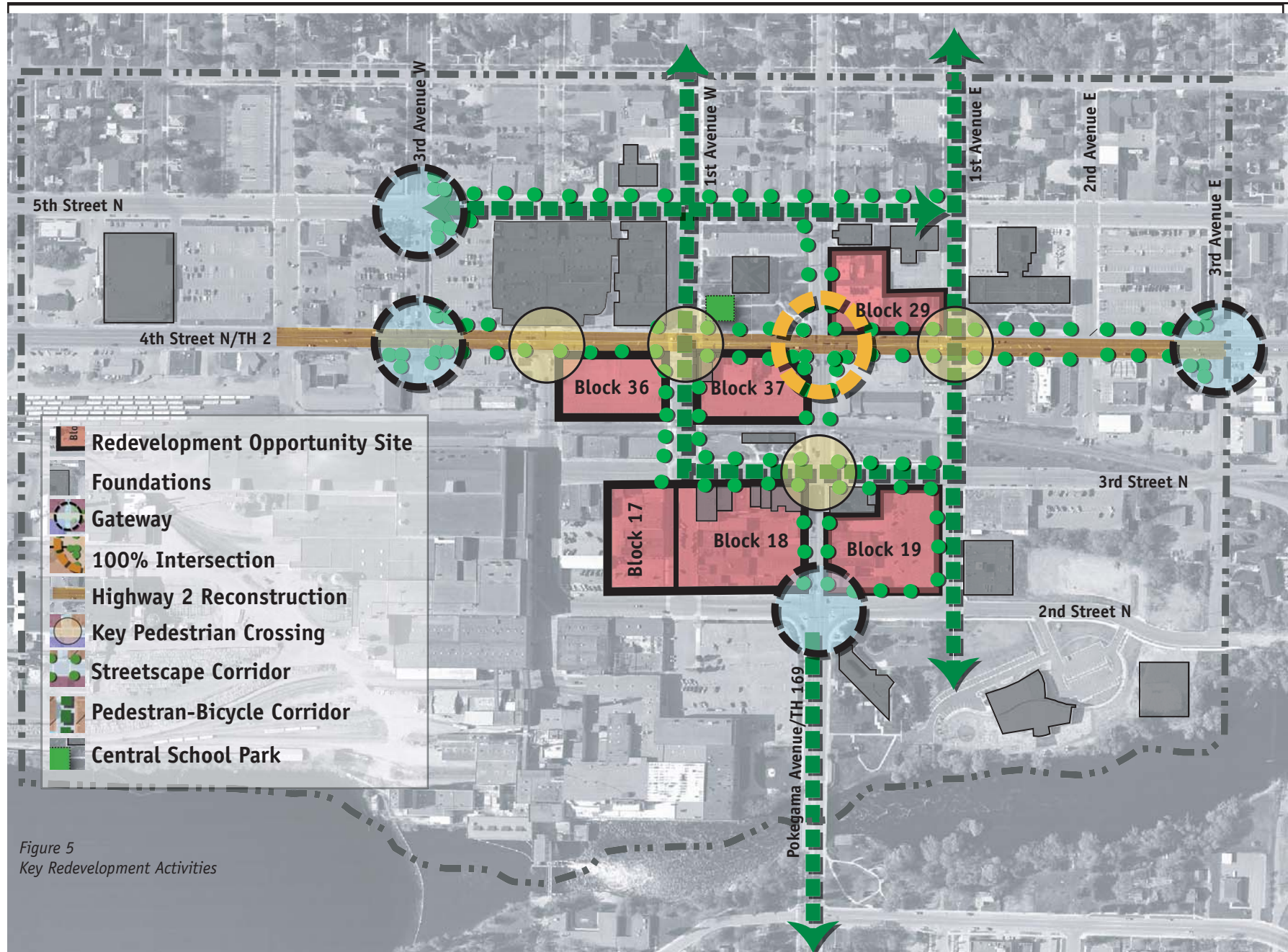


*The character of the building and the site make Central School a focal point of Downtown.*

Register of Historic Places. It is a “Richardsonian Romanesque” building designed in 1895 by F.W. Holister. The combination of location, renovated historic structure and site design make Central School one of the most identifiable aspects of Downtown.

The square around the Central School is the only significant green space in Downtown. The trees and landscaping add a vitality to Downtown that cannot be achieved with buildings. The site is a natural gathering place for Downtown.







*The buildings and uses along 1st Avenue West provide a model for future development.*

The retail block along **1st Avenue West** (between Highway 2 and 5th Street North) provides a model for future development in Downtown. Among the characteristics of this block are:

- Locally owned retail businesses
- Businesses that attract shoppers to Downtown
- Attractive and well-maintained storefronts and buildings.
- Adjacent on-street parking.

The Master Plan seeks to duplicate the form and type of uses as redevelopment occurs around the Central School Square.

**Central Square Mall** is a challenging piece of the Downtown puzzle. In the near term, the Mall is clearly part of the foundation for Downtown.



*Central Square Mall anchors the west end of Downtown.*

Among the assets of the Mall are:

- Contributions to a strong and diverse commercial base in Downtown.
- Physical connection to businesses on 1st Avenue West.
- Option for shopping in a climate controlled environment.
- Connection to parking supply in western sections of Downtown.

The challenge with the Mall is predicting its long-term use and viability. Recent trends have seen uses evolve into a mixture of retail, offices and services. Overall implementation of the Master Plan may impact the ability to sustain retail uses in the Mall as other Downtown redevelopment projects create new places for retail businesses. If successful, the Master Plan shifts the retail core of Downtown away from the Mall. Attention must be given to keeping the Mall as an anchor on the western end of the Downtown.

While neither sought nor desired by this Plan, it must be recognized that Mall may reach a point where it is no longer viable. This type of mall has been difficult to sustain in other locations. If the Mall reaches a point where a major renovation is required, the Master Plan suggests two potential options:

- The building would be redesigned to provide exterior facing storefronts. This change has been used on the conversion of other interior malls. This option creates retail space more

consistent with the remainder of Downtown. It also creates the potential for establishing a retail presence along 5th Street. Today, the Mall turns its back on this Street.

- A more radical change would be the removal of the Mall and the replacement with a mixed use project. Complete redevelopment of the Mall may require the additional density provided by a mix of retail and housing.

Downtown is the civic core of Grand Rapids. **Civic buildings and functions** form part of the foundation for the future of Downtown. Buildings highlighted in the Framework Plan are Post Office, City Hall, Fire Station, Itasca County Courthouse, Visitor's Center/Depot, and Library. Each of these buildings contain functions that can only be found in Downtown. Each unique destination helps to make Downtown distinct from other places in Grand Rapids.



*The Visitor Center is one of the civic foundations of Downtown.*



Offices of the **Blandin Foundation** and the **Glorvigen Building** show how new development can become part of Downtown's foundation. The building and site character of the Blandin Foundation begins to establish the south gateway to Downtown. The Glorvigen Building represents the scale and orientation sought from redevelopment. It fits with the plans for future development on Block 19.

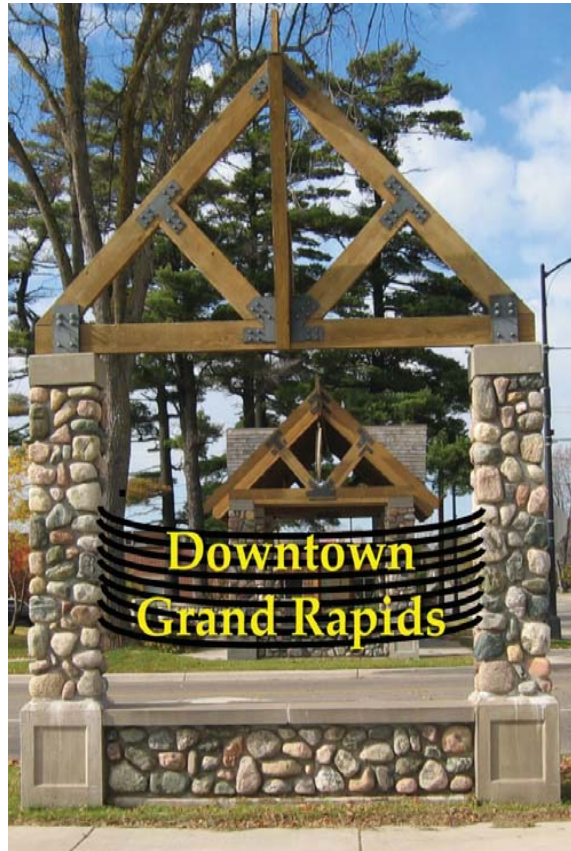
The other "foundations" identified in the Framework Plan are discussed as part of Redevelopment Opportunity Sites.

### Gateways

Public improvements play a role in the redevelopment of Downtown. The concept of gateways to Downtown was discussed in Community Context. The Framework Plan shows primary gateways at three locations: (1) Pokegama Avenue (Highway 169) and 2nd Street North, (2) 4th Street North (Highway 2) and 3rd Avenue West (Highway 38), and (3) 4th Street North (Highway 2) and 3rd Avenue East.

The gateways denote entrances to Downtown. Gateways can be combination of signs, monumentation and landscaping. These improvements mark entry points to Downtown. The Downtown streetscape also begins at these points. The character of private development should change from highway retail to the type of commercial and mixed use building desired in Downtown.

The photo on the this page shows a potential form



*This illustration of gateway monumentation blends the structures on 3rd Avenue West with the sign design on the River bridge.*

of gateway improvement. It combines the stone structures on 3rd Avenue West with the metal signage on the River bridge. The addition "Downtown Grand Rapids" completes this concept.

The west gateway (Highway 2 at 3rd Avenue West) presents an opportunity to follow the style set by the existing gateway improvements at 3rd Avenue and 5th Street. The large pine trees (and other na-



*Current conditions at West Gateway - Highway 2 at 3rd Avenue West.*

tive species) symbolize the forest and river identity of Grand Rapids. Additional tree plantings on the south side of the gateway intersection will help to screen storage facilities planned by Blandin. The gateway should also be the location where the character of the street changes. Streetscape starts at this location.



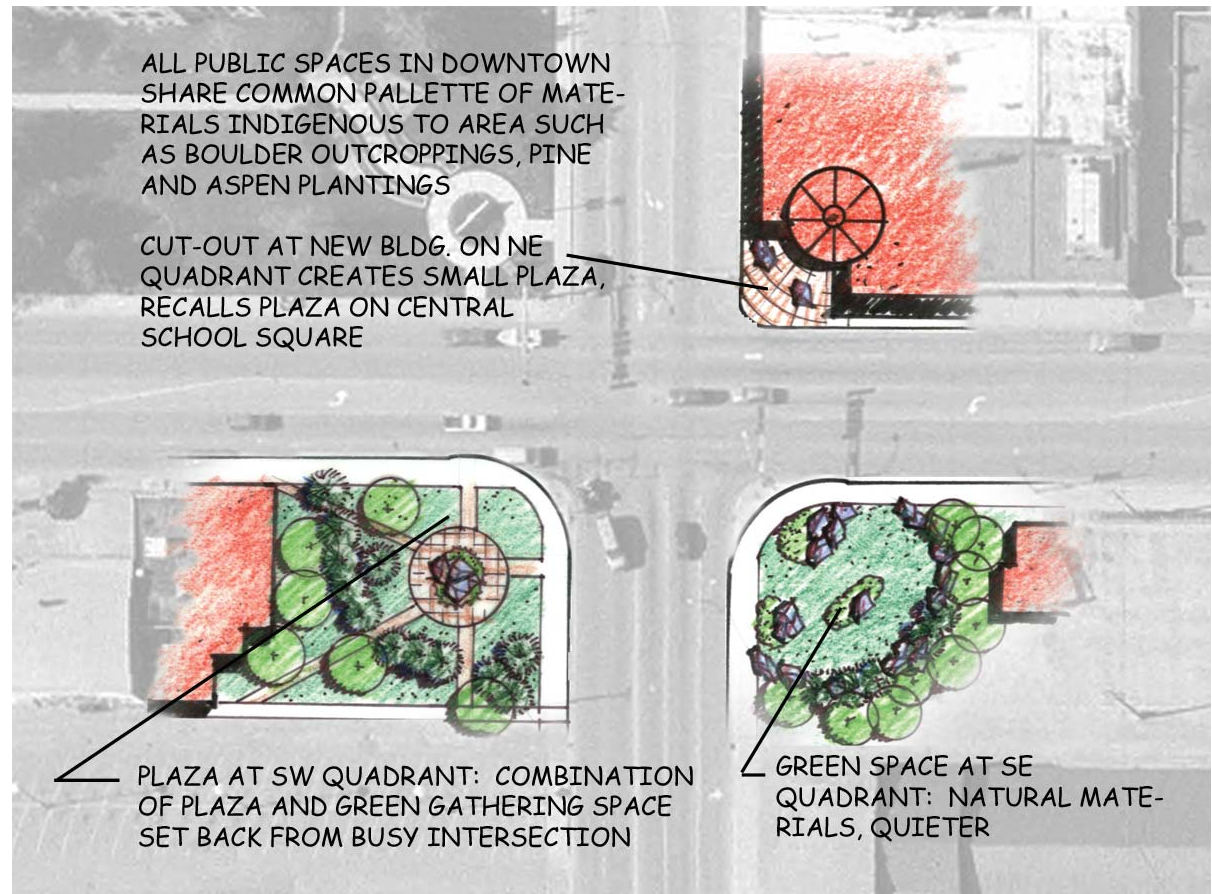


*Gateway improvements could be located on corner of Courthouse parking lot.*

The east gateway is located at Highway 2 and 3rd Avenue East. The open space on the southeast corner of the Courthouse parking lot provides the best opportunity for gateway improvements.

Gateway improvements have been made on the south side of the Mississippi River bridge entering Downtown. These improvements show how signage and landscaping can announce a place. Similar signs along Highway 2 would alert visitors that they have entered Downtown Grand Rapids.

The south gateway is a location where redevelopment projects should be used define the gateway to Downtown. The character and placement of buildings should signal that a person has entered an interesting and vital commercial district. A district that is different than any other place in Grand Rapids.



*Figure 6  
Illustration of Potential Improvements for 100% Intersection*



### **100% Intersection**

The intersection of Pokegama Avenue and Highway 2 is the 100% intersection in Grand Rapids. All traffic moving through Grand Rapids passes this point. It should be a location that sets the positive tone for Downtown.

Central School Square firmly establishes one corner of this intersection. The combination of building character and site development creates the impression of Downtown as an interesting and attractive place. This impression is not supported by the remainder of the intersection.

Figure 6 contains an illustration of public and private

improvements to define this crossroads of Grand Rapids. It shares needs and characteristics with Downtown gateways. Public improvements and building character should create sense of arrival and identity. Opportunities for establishment of the 100% intersection comes from redevelopment of Blocks 37 and 29 and the reconstruction of Highway 2.



### **Highway 2 Reconstruction**

Highways are a defining characteristic of Downtown Grand Rapids. Highway 2 and Highway 169 are regional transportation corridors. They bring thousands of vehicles to and through Downtown each day. This traffic represents opportunity for commerce. The Plan seeks to create a visually appealing place that encourages people to stop and a collection of businesses that brings people back.

The highways and the related traffic also pose challenges for redevelopment. The traffic produces



*Highways create both opportunities and challenges for Downtown.*

noise, odor and vibration. The factors may prevent some forms of development immediately adjacent to the highways. Traffic acts like a river. The Plan must provide the means for safely moving from one “bank” to the other.

A highway may not immediately seem to be a redevelopment activity. The pending reconstruction of Highway 2 is, however, an important redevelopment opportunity for Downtown. The chapter on Public Realm examines the implications of this project.



### **Key Pedestrian Crossings**

An objective of the Plan is to create a more walkable environment. Providing for the safe and convenient crossing of highways and major streets is a critical element of a walkable Downtown. The Framework Plan identifies the locations where pedestrian crossings must be established and maintained. The gateway locations and the 100% Intersection are also key crossing points.

The City has used the 1998 Downtown improvement project to start this process. The improvements have created better defined crossing areas and bump-outs that lessen the distance between curbs. Redevelopment projects and the Highway 2 reconstruction provide opportunities to make additional improvements at key locations.

The strategies for establishing pedestrian crossings are discussed in greater detail in the Public Realm chapter of the Plan.



*Safe and convenient pedestrian crossings are essential to making Downtown more walkable and connected.*



### **Streetscape Corridors**

Streetscape improvements are already part of the redevelopment toolkit in Grand Rapids. The City has used streetscape to enhance the parts of the public realm in Downtown. The Plan calls for the continuation of the improvement process throughout the Downtown area. Completion of these improvements clearly defines the area and identity of Downtown.



### **Pedestrian/Bike Connections**

The pedestrian and bicycle connections shown in the Framework Plan serve two purposes. These connections become primary links between Downtown, adjacent residential neighborhoods, and destinations north of Downtown. These connections should also be the primary focus for pedestrian movement within Downtown.

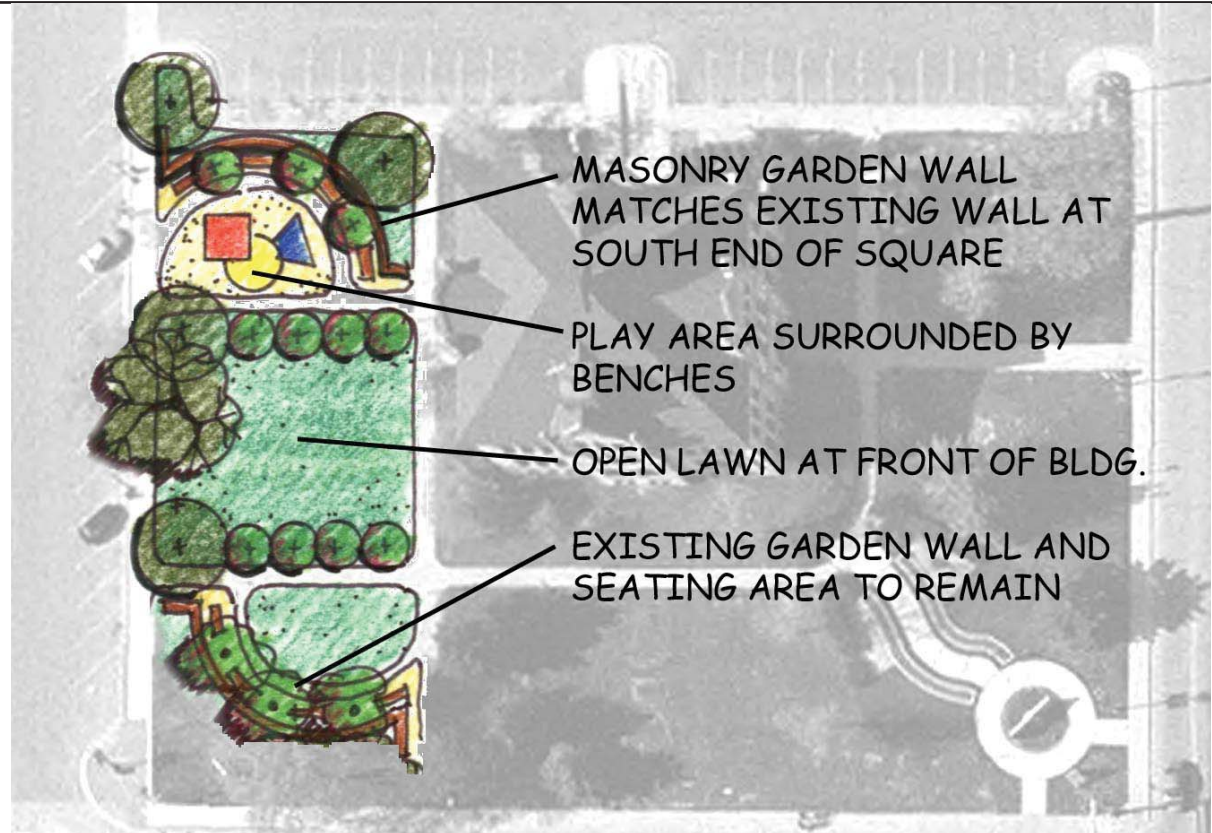




*Continued improvements are needed to complete 1st Avenue East as a pedestrian and bicycle corridor.*

### **Central School Park**

As the primary green and open space in Downtown, the Central School site becomes a natural gathering place for Downtown. The illustration in Figure 7 shows the enhancement of this gathering place through the addition of active play space. Broadening the range of activities in Downtown enhances its appeal as a family destination. This space should not be a simple Downtown playground, but have a unique character. The actual design of this space is beyond the scope of this Plan.



*Figure 7  
Concept Illustration for Park on Central School Site*

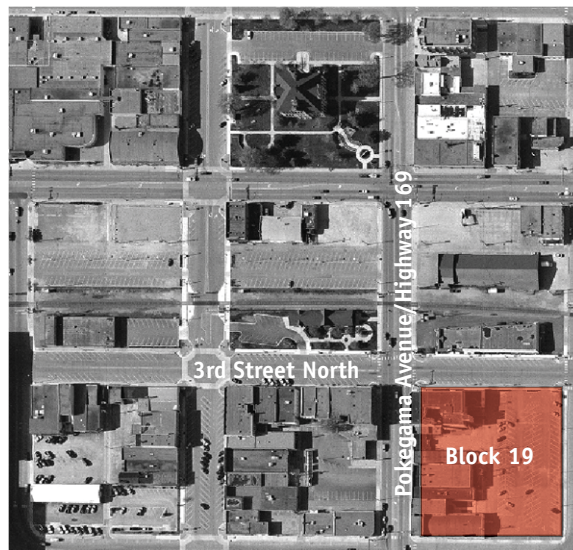
# Redevelopment Opportunity Sites

This section of the Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan contains a detailed discussion of redevelopment strategies for the five redevelopment opportunity sites identified in the Framework Plan. These sites become the initial focus for the City in working to achieve the vision for Downtown Grand Rapids.

Each of these sites is important to the future of Downtown. The order in which redevelopment of these sites occurs is not important. The City must be prepared to respond to opportunities. Redevelopment opportunities will likely require the City to work on multiple sites at the same time.

## Block 19

Block 19 is bound by Pokegama Avenue (U.S. Highway 169), 3rd Street North, 1st Avenue East and



2nd Street North. Several factors illustrate that Block 19 is a critical redevelopment opportunity site in Downtown Grand Rapids.

- **Key Gateway:** Block 19 forms the southern gateway to Downtown. These buildings create the initial impression of the Downtown arriving from the south.
- **Deteriorated Condition.** The current condition of the street face on Pokegama Avenue is not desirable. Storefronts are vacant. Some buildings experience deterioration. No people or activity are visible on the street.
- **Soil Conditions.** The east one-half of the site contains poor soils. The nature of these conditions will influence redevelopment. The current site design works around this limitation by using this portion of the site for surface parking. Development on this portion of the block will require correction of any deficiencies. Additional investigations will be needed to determine the nature of necessary site improve-



*The current condition of Block 19 along Pokegama Avenue creates a negative impression of Downtown.*





*Block 19 forms part of a key gateway to Downtown.*

ments.

- **Poor Design for Retail.** The current design of the Block makes it difficult to support retail activity. On-street parking is not possible on Pokegama. The lack of parking creates a barrier between the customer and the business. Although the eastern half of the block is devoted to parking, the back sides of buildings do not provide clear and consistent access for customers. The result is a dysfunctional business environment.
- **Comprehensive Solution Required.** Incremental change on the block will not work. The problems on this block require a comprehensive approach.

### ***Elements of Redevelopment***

The redevelopment of Block 19 should seek to accomplish the following:

- Provide a comprehensive solution for the block.
- Retain the historic Pokegama Hotel.
- Provide a viable site for new development.



*The view shows Block 19 from 1st Avenue East. The east half of Block 19 is a parking lot. The “backs” of these buildings do not cover an attractive face or clear points of access. Power lines should be buried as part of redevelopment.*

- Use building character, site design, and public realm improvements to enhance the gateway to Downtown.
- Provide adequate parking.
- Bury existing overhead power lines.
- Promote pedestrian and bicycle connections between Downtown and the River.

Block 19 provides an excellent illustration of the financial challenges facing Downtown redevelopment. Downtown competes with “edge” sites for new construction. Building on edge sites involves vacant land with few physical impediments. Contrast the edge site with the same project on Block 19. The following actions are required for redevelopment on Block 19:

- Multiple parcels must be assembled into a one or more larger development sites.
- The poor soil conditions must be corrected

or the design of new development adjusted to accommodate these constraints.

- Block 19 includes buildings. Buildings increase the cost of the property. The buildings must be demolished and removed. The acquisition cost typically reflects the cost of relocation for existing businesses.
- Automotive service use on the site indicates the potential for additional costs to correct any site contamination.
- Parking cannot be accommodated by acquiring more land and making a larger parking lot. At some point, the amount of new development requires structured parking. Structured parking spaces are typically 3 to 5 times more expensive than surface parking.

### ***Parking Strategies***

The eastern half of the Block is currently a surface parking lot. The lot provides parking for customers and employees of businesses in Block 19. Businesses adjacent to Block 19 also make use of these spaces.



*This vacant strip of land along 3rd Street North provides an opportunity for more parking.*

The provision of parking facilities is a key element of the successful redevelopment of Block 19. Parking constrains the amount of new development. The amount of development that can occur with surface-only parking is not financially feasible or physically desirable. Parking strategies for Block 19 include:

- Structured parking is needed to support greater development on Block 19. Public financial support will be needed to offset the additional costs of structured parking.
- Structured parking on Block 19 should be underground. This form of parking provides the dedicated and safe facilities needed to attract housing to this site. A portion of the underground facilities could be used for employee parking. The use of underground parking (in contrast with a parking ramp) creates the opportunity for portions of the site to be developed as green public places (see concept illustration).
- The site should include surface parking for business customers. This approach provides the recognized and accepted form of customer parking in Grand Rapids.
- All or a significant portion of the surface parking should be made part of the municipal parking system. (The Parking section of this Plan discusses strategies for creating and maintaining public parking in redevelopment projects.)
- The City owns a strip of land between 3rd Street North and the rail line. The parcel is too small

for development. Its location does not present a place for meaningful open space in Downtown. Adding parking spaces to this parcel creates greater flexibility in the redevelopment of Block 19.

### ***Pokegama Hotel***

The plan assumes retention of the Pokegama Hotel and the adjacent office building. The Hotel was built in 1892. It is identified as a “local resource” by the Itasca County Historical Society. This historic structure demonstrates many of the qualities sought for Downtown:

- Multiple stories
- Mixed use with residential uses over street level retail
- Positive relationship with the street.

Facade improvements will enhance the appearance of the Hotel. The redevelopment of the remainder of Block 19 should improve the viability of retail and housing uses in the Hotel. All of the site testing performed in the planning process assumed that the Hotel provides 9,000 square feet of retail and 10 dwelling units.

### ***Redevelopment Concepts***

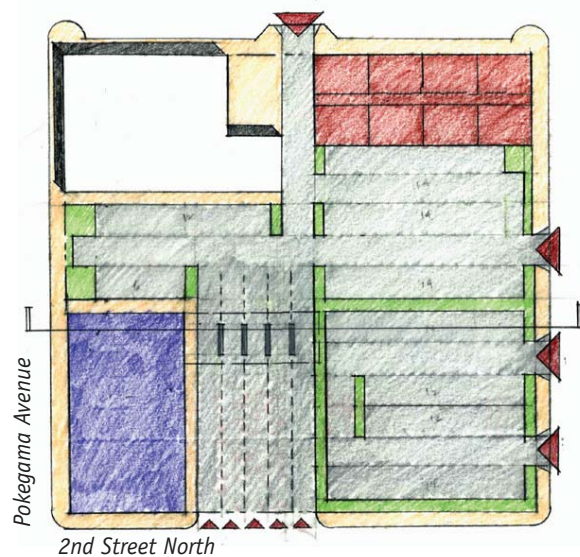
A series of alternatives for the redevelopment of Block 19 were explored during the planning process. These concepts not only illustrate alternative approaches for redevelopment, but also highlight the desired outcomes from any redevelopment project.



*Retention and revitalization of the Pokegama Hotel is part of the Plan for Block 19.*

### **Redevelopment with Surface Parking**

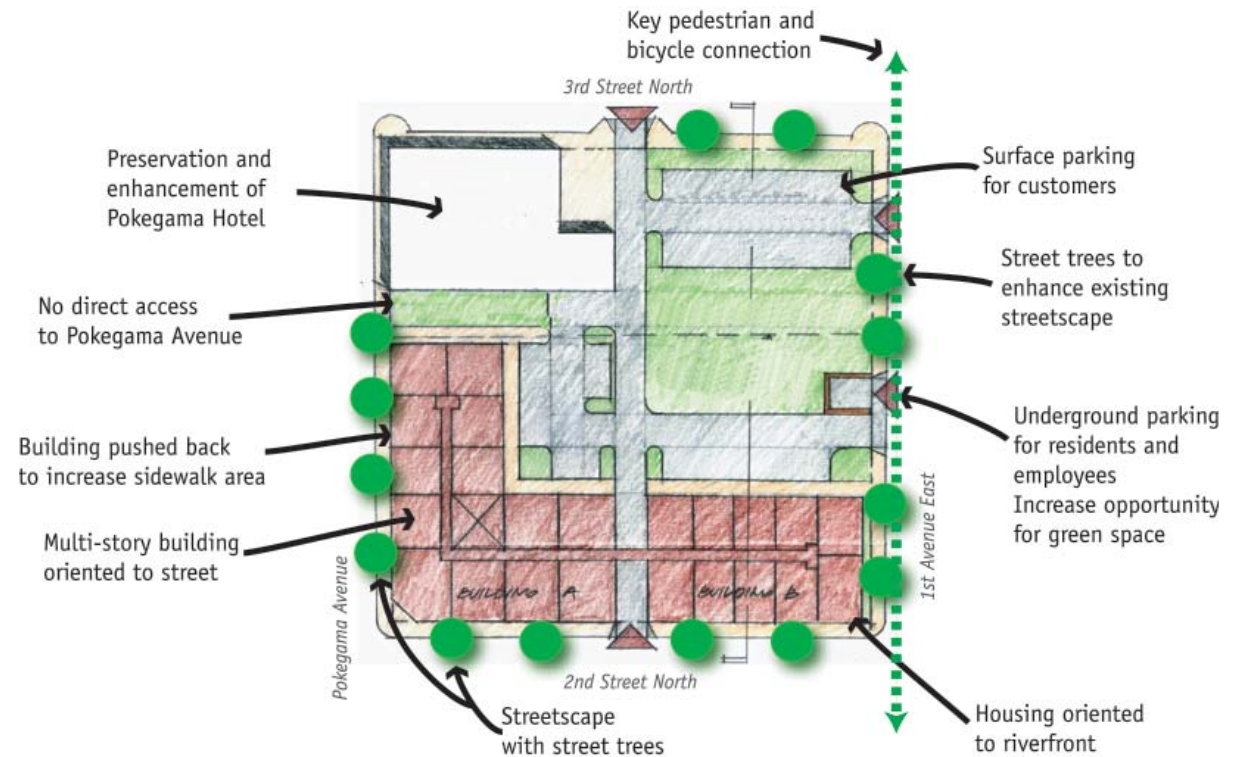
The testing of redevelopment options found that the Block can support approximately 18,400 square feet of commercial and eight housing units using all surface parking. The illustration in Figure 8 shows two new buildings on the block. A 10,000 square foot, single story bank building anchors the Pokegama/2nd Street corner. This conceptual site design shows five drive-through lanes. The second



**Figure 8**  
Concept for redevelopment of Block 19 using only surface parking.  
building is a two-story structure oriented to 3rd Street. The first floor contains 8,400 square feet of commercial space. Eight units of housing are assumed for the second floor.

This concept does not offer a realistic approach to redevelopment:

- It is unlikely that redevelopment is financially feasible. This limited amount of new development will not produce the public or private revenues needed to offset the costs of redevelopment.
- The concept underutilizes this key piece of property. Over one-half of the block is occupied by parking and drive areas.
- It will be difficult to attract and sustain the



**Figure 9**  
Illustration of redevelopment objectives for Block 19

proposed housing without dedicated parking. These limitations led to the exploration of alternatives using structured parking

### **Redevelopment With Structured Parking**

The illustration in Figure 9 shows a mixed use concept for redevelopment of Block 19. This concept is not a definitive site plan, but a depiction of the type, amount and character of development sought for this site. The City will work with private developers to determine the actual site plan for Block 19.

Redevelopment defines a key gateway to Down-

town. This gateway begins with the character of private development at the Pokegama/2nd Street corner and extends north along Pokegama. Public streetscape improvements should be used to complement and support private development. The objective is to define a different character than the commercial district to the south of Downtown on Pokegama Avenue. Improvement of Block 19 helps to distinguish Downtown as a vital, active and interesting place.

It will be difficult to sustain development oriented



to Pokegama. The traffic and lack of on-street parking create significant barriers to retail uses on this portion of Pokegama. The concept uses landscaping to create an attractive street face and show the presence of public parking behind the buildings. The commercial uses are oriented to 2nd Street and 3rd Street.

The multi-story buildings shown in this concept will require a mixture of uses. The first floor uses will be commercial. This location will likely result in a combination of retail and service businesses. These uses will not succeed above street level. Office and housing uses will be required to achieve the density shown in this concept.

Although there are no current examples of this housing style in Grand Rapids, this housing option is gaining popularity in other places. The riverfront provides an excellent amenity for new housing development. Creating a quality and successful mixed use development on Block 19 will demonstrate that this form of redevelopment is viable.

Redevelopment should help to create a strong pedestrian and bicycle corridor connection to the riverfront. The Downtown Framework uses 1st Avenue East as the primary pedestrian link between Downtown and the Mississippi River. This street provides the only practical route for this connection. Given the orientation of the site and the amount of on-site parking, a dedicated bike lane can take the place of on-street parking.

The current design of no direct vehicular access to

the block from Pokegama should be maintained. This design for Block 19 minimizes traffic conflicts. The traffic signals at both 2nd Street and 3rd Street provide good accessibility to and from Block 19.

If the Blandin warehouse expands on Block 17, 2nd Street will receive additional truck traffic. Steps should be taken to prevent truck traffic from using 2nd Street east of Pokegama and 1st Avenue East as shortcuts to eastbound Highway 2. A combination of physical improvements and regulations can provide impediments to the use of these streets by trucks. Any truck traffic on these streets would become a barrier to the development goals of the Downtown Plan.

A catalyst for the redevelopment of Block 19 may come from the relocation of the Wells Fargo Bank. The Bank has examined the possibility of consolidating its facilities as part of the redevelopment of this block. The main office and drive-through facilities are currently in separate buildings on Block 18.

Figure 10 illustrates a concept for Block 19 incorporating a bank. In this concept, the bank facility is a 24,000 sf, three-story building. The bank occupies a prominent location in the southwest corner of the site. Four drive-through lanes are shown in this concept. The concept shows an alternative approach to additional development on the site, with two mixed use buildings. Both buildings are shown as four-stories with three floors of housing over street level commercial. The building adjacent to 3rd Street contains 5,000 square feet of commer-

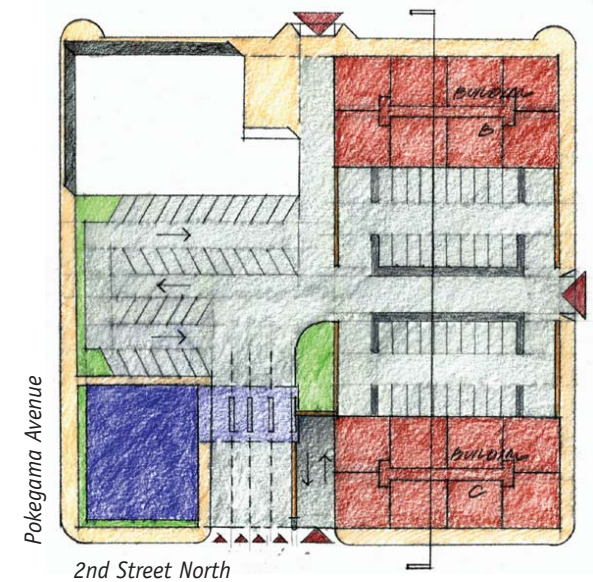


Figure 10  
Concept for redevelopment of Block 19 with bank

cial space and 24 residential units. This building complements the Pokegama Hotel and builds on the existing commercial orientation of 3rd Street. The building on 2nd Street contains 5,000 square feet of commercial and 24 residential units.

The primary difference in this concept comes from the drive-through banking facilities. These facilities influence the access and movement for the site. These requirements also reduce the amount of green/open space shown in this concept. The other redevelopment objectives described in this section apply regardless of the specific uses and building orientation.

### ***Implementing the Plan***

The City of Grand Rapids must play an active role and provide financial support to undertake redevelopment of Block 19. History clearly shows that the complexities of this site cause private investment to avoid Block 19. This section describes the actions and investments required for redevelopment.

#### **Find Private Developer(s)**

Redevelopment of Block 19 will be done as a collaborative effort with the City and private developers. Some larger development companies are capable of undertaking the entire redevelopment of Block 19. It is likely, however, that more than one developer will be needed. For example, Wells Fargo could build its facilities, but would not develop other parts of the site.

This type of redevelopment project typically requires City leadership to assemble the development group. In this position, the City can ensure that the developers have the ability to undertake the project.

The Implementation section contains additional information on attracting developers to Downtown redevelopment projects.

#### **Establish TIF District**

A tax increment financing (TIF) district will be established to provide funding for redevelopment. (A more detailed discussion of TIF can be found in the Implementation section.) TIF is used to offset the additional costs of redevelopment. These costs may include:

- Acquisition of land
- Demolition and clearance of buildings
- Remediation of site contamination
- Construction of structured parking
- Construction of streetscape and other public improvements

The EDA has taken the first step in this process with a study of building condition. State Law requires that more than 50% of the buildings in the TIF district meet criteria for “structurally substandard”. This study will provide the information needed to determine if a TIF district can be established.

Timing is an important factor in using tax increment financing. Ideally, the City would have the TIF district established early in the redevelopment process. This step removes the risk and uncertainty that TIF can be used for redevelopment. A proactive approach may not be possible. The establishment of a district starts a series of statutory time constraints on the use of TIF. The time required to undertake redevelopment could cause statutory authority to expire before a project takes place. Given these considerations, the approach for Block 19 takes middle course. The City/EDA will undertake the investigations needed to establish a district. The specific procedural steps will be taken in conjunction with an actual redevelopment project

The actual boundaries of the TIF district require careful consideration. State Law sets criteria for the type of property that can be included in a redevelopment TIF district. Subject to these criteria, the City

has discretion on drawing the boundaries.

District boundaries are important because they control where tax increment revenues can be spent. Not more than 25% of tax increments collected by the City may be spent outside of the boundaries of the TIF district. While the focus of this district will be the redevelopment of Block 19, other needs should also be considered.

Redevelopment of Block 18 would benefit from the use of any excess tax increment revenues from Block 19. Some concepts from Block 18 show public costs without any significant new development and the related revenues to support redevelopment activities.

#### **Prepare Finance Plan**

Financial planning needs to go hand-in-hand with physical planning for the redevelopment of Block 19. (These strategies also apply to other redevelopment opportunity sites.) The purpose of financial planning is to identify the elements of successful redevelopment on Block 19. The basic steps in financial planning for Block 19 include:

- Estimate the private costs of redevelopment, including land acquisition and site preparation.
- Estimate the costs of public improvements related to redevelopment.
- Estimate the type, amount and property value created by redevelopment.
- Estimate the public and private costs that are not likely to be supported by private investment (the “gap”).

- Project the ability of tax increment financing to close the gap.
- Evaluate other means of closing the gap.

There is rarely a single right answer for the composition of a redevelopment project that is financially feasible. This task will involve the exploration of a series of possible alternatives. The results will provide valuable guidance on the form and character of new development.

### Assemble Site

The parcels in Block 19 must be acquired and assembled into a common site for redevelopment. The City must play an active role in this process, but should not be expected to have direct responsibility for site assembly. Land acquisition should be undertaken by the developer as part of a comprehensive development agreement with the City.

Eminent domain (condemnation) is not the primary tool for land acquisition in this Plan. The City must, however, be prepared to use this power if needed to undertake redevelopment. Block 19 requires a comprehensive approach for redevelopment. The unwillingness of a single property owner to sell could stop development for the entire site. The commitment by the City to condemn property gives the developer assurance that the necessary site can be assembled. This commitment often produces the incentive to seek a negotiated sale.

### Secure Assistance From Blandin Foundation

The Blandin Foundation provides Grand Rapids with a tool for redevelopment not available to other

cities. Previous redevelopment planning by the City indicates that tax increment financing alone does not provide enough funding to cover all costs of developing Block 19. The City and the Foundation have begun to discuss alternatives to close this gap.

There are several reasons why the Blandin Foundation could be a participant in the redevelopment of Block 19. As an adjacent property owner, the Foundation has a stake in the future of Block 19. This site has broader community implications. The ability to redevelop Block 19 influences other investments and the overall success of the Downtown Master Plan. It is an excellent setting to explore new strategies for helping cities create and sustain healthy downtowns.

### Establish Parking Plan

In the process of creating the Master Plan, parking needs associated with redevelopment alternatives were analyzed. This work led to the parking strategies described earlier in this section. The actual parking plan for Block 19 will be established as part of the redevelopment process.

### Make Public Realm Improvements

The redevelopment of Block 19 involves both public and private investments. Improvements in the public realm to be made in conjunction with private redevelopment include:

- Extension of streetscape on to Pokegama Avenue and 2nd Street.
- Planting of street trees around entire block.
- Establishment of bike lane along 1st Avenue

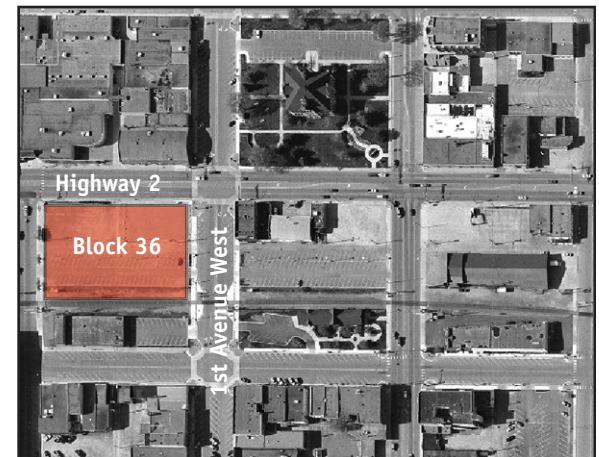
with connection to riverfront trail.

- Incorporation of public plaza/ green space into overall site design.

## Block 36

Block 36 is the location where a Ben Franklin store used to stand on the southwest corner of Highway 2 and 1st Avenue West. This block is a key redevelopment opportunity site. Several factors highlight the redevelopment opportunity for this site.

- **Fill in the gap.** Redevelopment of this site builds a more connected and continuous Downtown environment. The site is a natural bridge from the retail core north of Highway 2 with the commercial uses in Blocks 17 and 18.
- **The site is vacant.** No other redevelopment opportunity site is vacant. The lack of buildings enhances the financial feasibility of redevelopment. Land acquisition expense does not





include cost for buildings. Expenditures for demolition and clearance are avoided.

- **The site consists of a single parcel.** All other opportunity sites require the assembly of multiple parcels.

### **Elements of Redevelopment**

The redevelopment of Block 36 should seek to accomplish the following:

- Extend the retail identity and character of 1st Avenue West to the south of Highway 2.
- Enhance the character of the street along Highway 2.
- Use enhanced highway crossing and streetscape to encourage pedestrian movement.
- Provide adequate parking.



*Block 36 is the only vacant property among the Redevelopment Opportunity sites.*

### **Parking Strategies**

The southern section of this Block provides 30 spaces for all-day public parking and 30 spaces for permit parking. Observations and investigations made during the planning process show that these spaces are used even though the block is vacant.



*Existing parking lot in Block 36.*

(The parking study element of the Downtown Plan did not specifically study utilization of this lot.) As the only “all-day” spaces in the core of Downtown, this lot likely attracts employee parking.

This block illustrates the balancing act between parking and other development objectives. Block 36 is a key redevelopment site in Downtown. Yet, redevelopment of this property potentially displaces parking that supports other businesses. Parking strategies that allow for the redevelopment of this site while meeting the overall parking needs of Downtown include:

- Seek to include some long-term parking spaces in the site design for Block 36.



*Improving the pedestrian crossing at 2nd Avenue West provides better access to parking in western sections of Downtown.*

- Continue to allow on-street parking on 1st Avenue.
- Provide dedicated long-term parking spaces in the Central Square Mall lot and improve pedestrian connections to make the space usable.
- Obtain outside funding to increase parking capacity with structured parking.

### **Redevelopment Concept**

Figure 11 (on the next page) shows the redevelopment concept and objectives for Block 36. The redevelopment concept for Block 36 calls for new commercial use. The site testing analysis indicates that the Block can support 12,000 square feet of single-story development with surface parking. The site testing explored other development options for this location. The orientation of the Block to Highway 2 make this site less desirable for new housing than other Downtown locations.

Redevelopment of Block 36 extends the retail face of Downtown along 1st Avenue West. This site fills in a critical gap and builds better connections with Blocks 17 and 18.

Development on Block 36 should occur with additional setback from Highway 2. The City will not be able to gain more right-of-way from the reconstruction of Highway 2. All of the existing right-of-way will be needed to accommodate travel and turning lanes. The current space between curb and building leaves inadequate area for sidewalks and other streetscape improvements. Moving buildings further back from the street is the only option

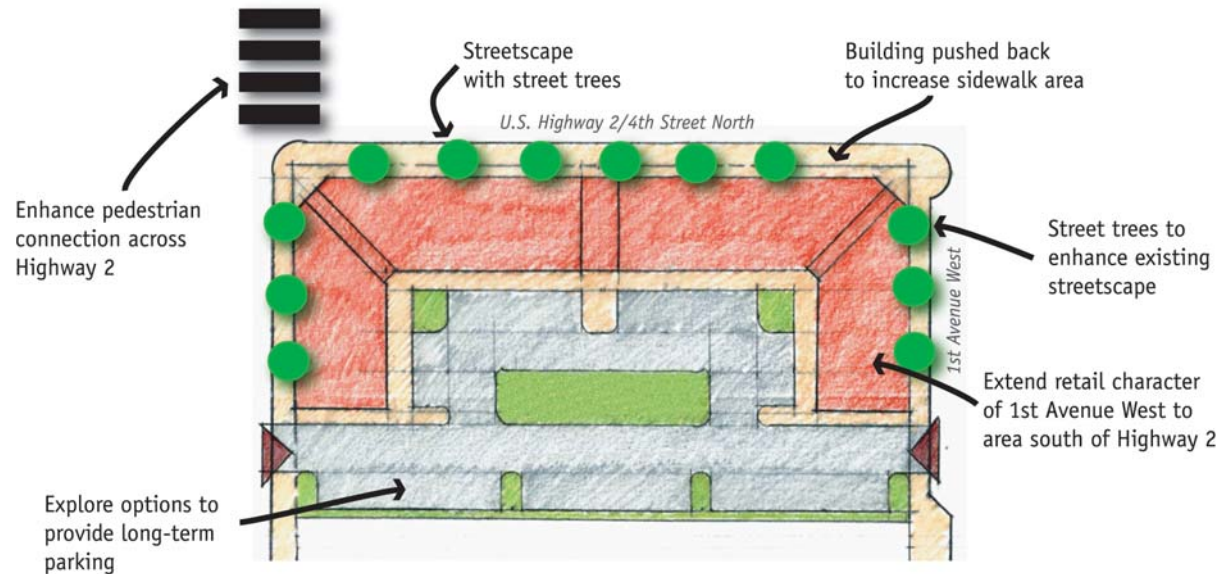


Figure 11  
Redevelopment concept for Block 36

for increased public space.

### Implementing the Plan

Redevelopment of Block 36 poses different challenges than the other opportunity sites. The property is ready for development. Smaller parcels do not need to be assembled. This vacant parcel does not require demolition or clearance of structures.

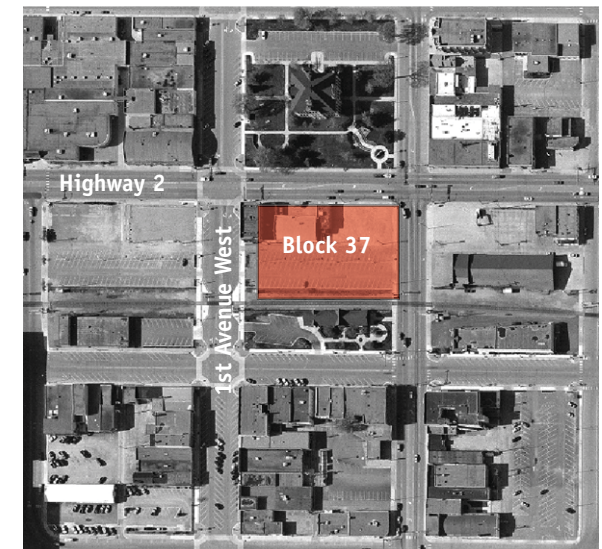
The Plan anticipates that private development will lead development on this site. In many respects, this parcel is similar to vacant land for commercial development in other parts of Grand Rapids. An important distinguishing factor is the set of public redevelopment objectives applied to this site. Achieving these objectives will require public participation in development of Block 36.

Unlike other opportunity sites, Block 36 cannot qualify as a stand-alone TIF district. Structures are a basic element of a redevelopment TIF district. Two development options are available:

- Block 36 could be included as part of another TIF district. The most likely candidate would be a district created for the adjacent Block 37. Additional investigations are needed to see if this approach meets statutory criteria.
- Tax abatement could be used to finance City participation in this site. Abatement would provide less funding capacity than TIF.

### Block 37

Block 37 is located directly south of Central Square. It is bound by Highway 2, Pokegama Avenue, 1st Avenue West and rail right-of-way. This block is a key location building extending retail development around the Central School square.



View of Block 37 from Pokegama Avenue.



## Elements of Redevelopment

The redevelopment of Block 36 should seek to accomplish the following:

- Extend the retail character from 1st Avenue West
- Retain the existing “Wings and Willows” building.
- Enhance the character of the street along Highway 2.
- Make improvements to define the 100% Intersection.

## Parking Strategies

Block 37 currently provides 87 parking spaces. Fifty-eight of the spaces are limited to a two hour duration. The remaining spaces are for permit parking. On-street parking is allowed on 1st Avenue. This parking capacity will be retained with the proposed redevelopment. Key elements of the parking strategies for Block 37 include:

- Provide a buffer between the building and the drive land for the parking lot.
- Strike a balance between making effective use

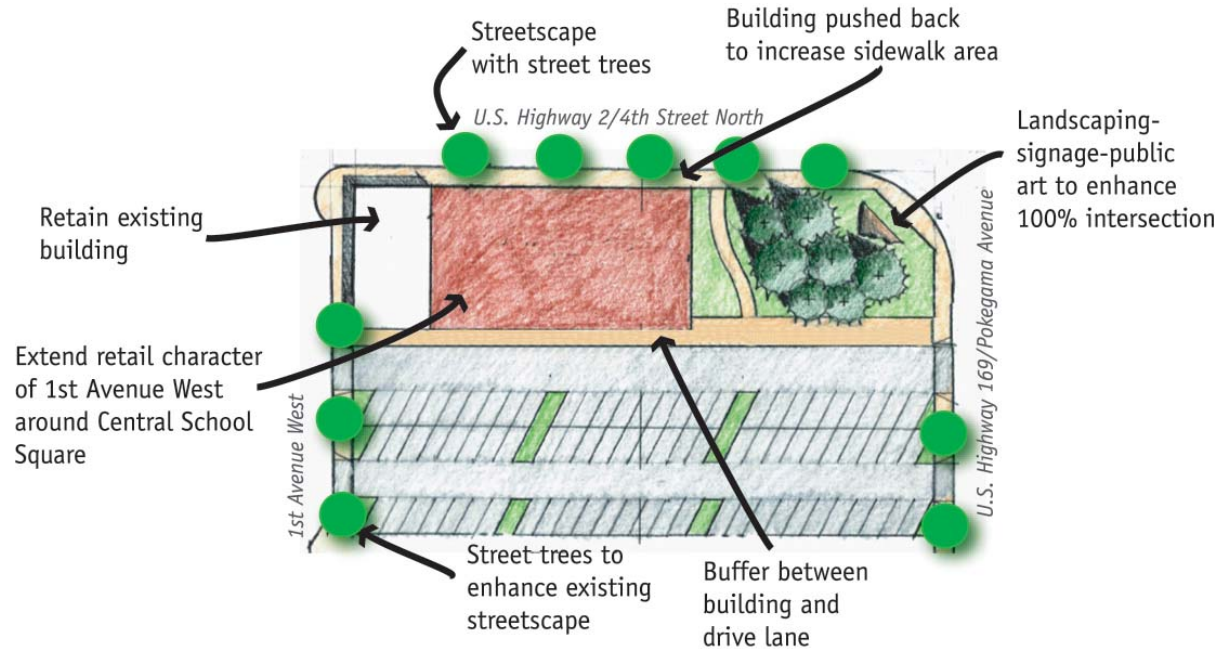


Figure 12  
Redevelopment Concept for Block 37

of parking capacity and creating an attractive site at this key location.

- Create functional and safe connections with

adjacent streets.

## Redevelopment Concept

The concept illustration (Figure 12) shows a two-story building, served by surface parking. This concept shows ground level retail with office on the second floor (19,600 sf of commercial space). Surface parking provides the 86 spaces required to serve the site. The concept retains and revitalizes the existing two-story building on the northwest corner of the site.

A single-story building on this block could extend east toward Pokegama Avenue. This option should



Existing building on Block 37 viewed from Highway 2.



leave space for improvements at the 100% intersection. The concept illustration shows a strong “green” presence at the core Downtown intersection of Pokegama and Highway 2. This corner could have a similar design to the gateway at 3rd Avenue West and 5th Street North.

Structured parking is needed to support additional development on this site. A mixed use concept for Block 37 was explored. The proximity to Highway 2 and the rail corridor make this site less suited for housing than other opportunity sites.

The concepts for Block 37 (and the other Opportunity Sites) show buildings with two “fronts” - strong orientation to both street and parking lot. This design is particularly important for Block 37. The back of this block is a key of Downtown for traffic from the south.

Block 37 is a possible site for relocation of the Visitor Center if this facility is displaced by expansion of



Rear building entrance in Hutchinson

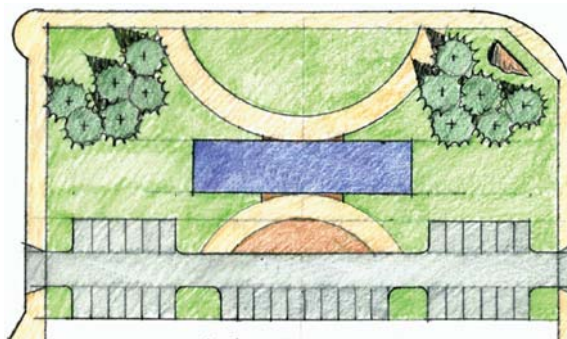


Figure 13  
Concept for Block 37 with relocation of Depot/Visitor Center.

Blandin (see Figure 13). This use of Block 37 would be difficult to undertake without outside funding.

### **Implementing the Plan**

Participation by the City will be needed to achieve the redevelopment objectives for Block 37. As a funding partner in redevelopment, the City gains greater influence over the character of public and private improvements at this critical location.

### **Find Private Developer**

The scale of redevelopment proposed for Block 37 can be undertaken by a single developer. Finding a developer partner for this project will be the key to implementation.

### **Establish TIF District**

A tax increment financing (TIF) district will be established to provide funding for redevelopment. At this location, the potential uses of TIF include:

- Acquisition of land.
- Demolition and clearance of buildings.
- Enhancement of surface parking areas.

- Construction of streetscape improvements.
- Make improvements to 100% intersection.

In preparation for creating a TIF district, the City/EDA should undertake a building condition study (similar to the study performed for Block 19). The study determines the presence of “structurally substandard” buildings and the ability to meet the statutory criteria for a redevelopment TIF district. Planning for a TIF district should also analyze the ability and merits of including Block 36 in the district.

### **Establish Parking Plan**

The process of creating the Master Plan analyzed parking needs associated with redevelopment alternatives. This work led to the parking strategies described earlier in this section. The actual parking plan for Block 37 will be established as part of the redevelopment process.

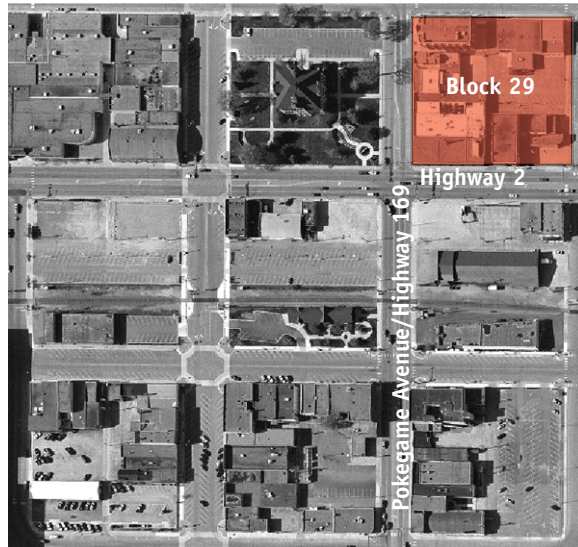
### **Make Public Realm Improvements**

As with other Redevelopment Opportunity Sites, the redevelopment of Block 37 involves both public and private investments. Improvements in the public realm to be made in conjunction with private redevelopment include:

- Extension of streetscape on to Highway 2/4th Street.
- Planting of street trees.
- Improvements of 100% Intersection.
- Incorporation of green space into overall site design.

## Block 29

Block 29 includes City Hall and the Fire Station. These civic uses would be retained. The remainder of the Block would be redeveloped with a mix of uses. Block 29 provides an important redevelopment site. The former Northprint building does not fit the desired character of Downtown. It occupies a critical location on the 100% intersection. Redevelopment of this site continues the process of establishing a strong and supportive setting around the Central School Square.



### Elements of Redevelopment

The redevelopment of Block 36 should seek to accomplish the following:

- Use mixed use project to locate retail uses on Pokegama Avenue.

- Integrate with City Hall and Fire Station.
- Enhance the character of the street along Highway 2.
- Use redevelopment to enhance the character of the 100% Intersection.

### Parking Strategies

Block 29 currently provides 19 parking spaces. The redevelopment of this site will create new parking spaces at a key location. The redevelopment concept shows underground parking to support planned housing and employment. Surface parking will support on-site commercial uses. These spaces will also be available for general use as part of the public system. The appropriate timing limits for these spaces can be considered when detailed site planning occurs as part of a redevelopment project.

### Redevelopment Concept

Figure 14 contains the concept for the redevelopment



*Existing private development on Block 29.*

ment of Block 29. A challenge to the redevelopment of this block will be finding the proper combination of uses and site layout. Retail uses should occur on the Pokegama Avenue side of the Block. The Plan seeks to ring the Central School with retail similar in use and character to the west side along 1st Avenue West.

The number and size of existing buildings suggests



*View of 100% intersection from the south. Block 29 is located in the upper right corner of the intersection.*



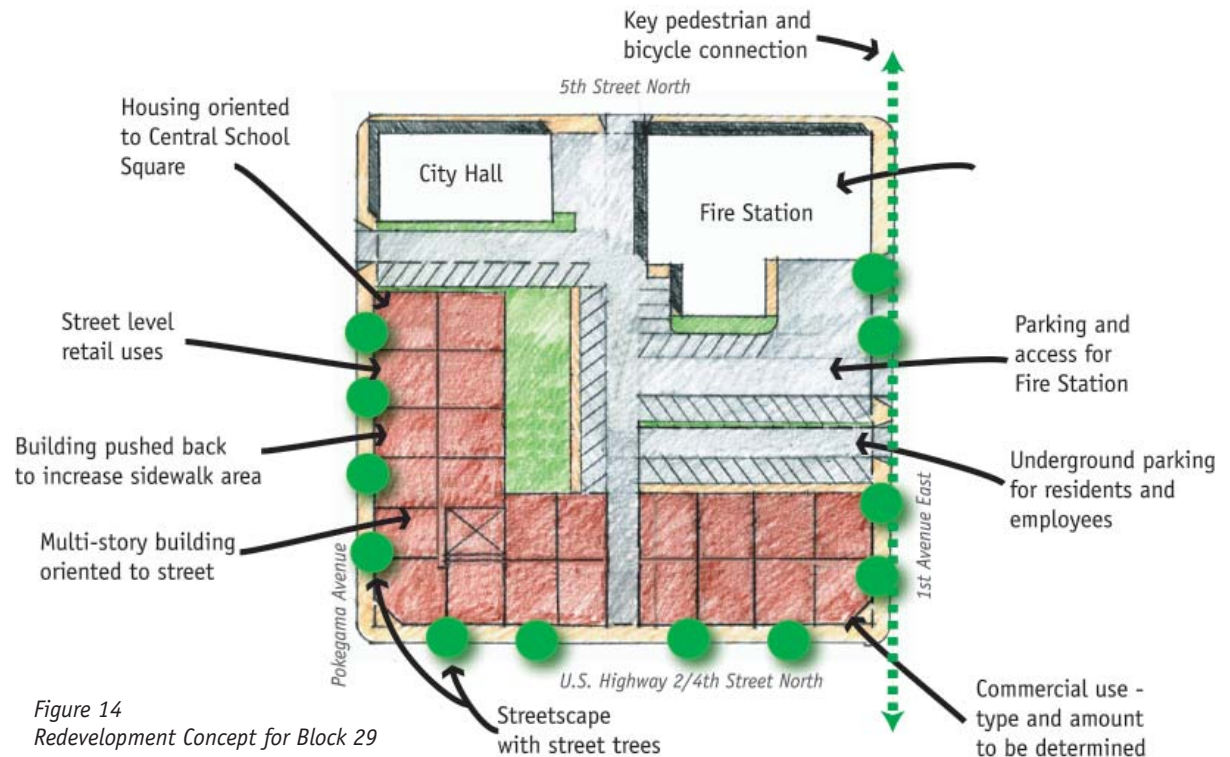


*City Hall and the Fire Station anchor Block 29.*

that single level development will not be financially feasible. Additional density at this location will require housing. Only the Pokegama Avenue side is well suited to housing. An orientation toward Central School Square and the proximity to the core of Downtown offers an attractive setting.

Redevelopment of this block should also use site and building design to enhance the character of the 100% intersection. The building located at the corner of Pokegama Avenue and Highway 2 works with Central School and public improvements to the south to define this intersection. Elements of improving the 100% Intersection include:

- Quality building materials and architecture consistent with design guidelines for Downtown.
- Storefronts that use windows, signage and facades to create a positive impression and to create interest.
- Streetscape and street trees work with buildings to create an attractive and inviting setting.
- Multi-story building that distinguishes Downtown from other commercial districts.



*Figure 14  
Redevelopment Concept for Block 29*

The concept shows new development along Highway 2. The aspect of the Plan will evolve through the process of undertaking a redevelopment project. The current condition of the Block shows the difficulty of sustaining commercial uses in this location. Creating a retail presence on this section of Highway 2 will continue to be a challenge.

Factors to consider when guiding development on the southern part of Block 29 include the following:

- The portion of the site facing Highway 2 is only suited to commercial uses. The site should be

designed with additional setbacks and attractive streetscape to offset the proximity to the highway.

- Retail uses could establish strong rear entrances. Green/plaza space and parking on the interior of the block provide an opportunity for a second storefront away from Highway 2. While still presenting a positive street face, the primary customer orientation shifts to the interior of the Block.
- Building orientation could focus on 1st Avenue East. This approach would build on retail, service and office connections with the County



Courthouse. This approach will be constrained by the operational needs of the Fire Station.

- Use of this site must accommodate current and future use of the Fire Station. Expansion of the Fire Station could provide a catalyst for redevelopment.

### ***Implementing the Plan***

Undertaking redevelopment on Block 29 poses many of the same challenges found in the other opportunity sites:

- Finding developers willing and capable of undertaking projects consistent with this Plan.
- Determining the need for financial assistance to make redevelopment feasible.
- Evaluating the ability to use tax increment financing or other tools.

It is helpful to consider the redevelopment of Block 29 in the context of the overall implementation of the Downtown Master Plan. While Block 29 is an important location for change, its need for redevelopment is not as great as other sites, such as Block 19.

In the short term, options for redevelopment of Block 29 will be market-driven. The City will respond to proposals offered by property owners and developers. City efforts will focus on the more immediate needs of the Highway 2 improvements, Blandin expansion and redevelopment of Block 19.

This approach may provide a long-term benefit for

Block 29. With similar development objectives, projects on Blocks 19 and 29 do not compete for developers, investment and users. Lessons learned from mixed use development on Block 19 can be applied to Block 29.

### **Block 17/18**

The future development of Blocks 17 and 18 will be controlled by the decision on expansion of the Blandin plant. One of the five options for the construction of a new warehouse involves Block 17. At the present time, the State is preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) to evaluate the implications of these options.

This part of the Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan should be revisited when decisions about the



Blandin expansion have been made. It is not possible to make realistic plans for the future of Blocks 17 and 18 while the details of plant expansion remain undecided.

The future of these blocks will be shaped by the decision on Blandin's expansion. Given this uncertainty, Block 17 and 18 have not been subject to the same site testing as the other redevelopment opportunity sites. The discussion that follows contains a broad framework for future development of Blocks 17 and 18. This portion of the Plan should be revisited when the details of the warehouse project are known.

This Plan focuses on the physical aspects of the Blandin facilities in Downtown Grand Rapids. It must also be acknowledged that the plant expansion has economic implications for Downtown. Currently, the employees and visitors to Blandin facilities provide an important part of the Downtown market. This market may decline with a decision to build new facilities outside of the existing plant "campus". The Plan does not address the economic impacts of the plant expansion.

### ***Elements of Redevelopment***

The redevelopment of Blocks 17/18 should seek to accomplish the following:

- Adapt development on these block to accommodate the results of Blandin's plant expansion.
- If possible, use this block as a critical connection between the riverfront and the retail core

of Downtown.

- Use redevelopment to enhance the south gateway of Downtown.
- Provide additional off-street parking.
- Avoid a development pattern that impairs any built use and creates more vacant land at this key location.

### **Parking Strategies**

Parking is an important factor in the future development of this site. No public off-street parking currently exists in either Block 17 or 18. All parking in the area comes from the combination of private lots and on-street parking. The expansion of Blandin may eliminate some existing on-street spaces. These factors focus the parking strategies on redevelopment projects. The creation of new off-street parking on Block 18 must be an outcome of redevelopment.

### **Redevelopment Concepts**

#### **No Blandin Expansion**

Without the Blandin expansion, the focus for Blocks 17 and 18 involve enhancement as opposed to redevelopment. The buildings in this area have generally positive character that has been enhanced by facade improvements. Streetscape and the Visitor's Center support the character of private development.

Blocks 17 and 18 will benefit from other aspects of the Downtown Plan. These blocks are disconnected from the core of Downtown. The combination of Highway 2, vacant parcels, parking lots, and rail corridor create significant physical barriers between

the retail core (1st Avenue East/Central School) and these blocks. This gap makes Blocks 17/18 act more like a separate commercial district than an integral part of Downtown. The Plan seeks to reduce these barriers and build strong connections. These blocks should also benefit from the redevelopment of Block 19 and the potential connections with new commercial and residential uses.

The relocation of Wells Fargo Bank provides an important opportunity for this area. The bank consists of two buildings on Block 18. The main bank facility (1st Avenue West/3rd Street) should be continued as a commercial use. The drive-in facilities along Pokegama present the need for



*The relocation of Wells Fargo Bank and the related drive up banking facilities provides an important opportunity for redevelopment*

redevelopment. Removal of this part of the bank provides much needed additional parking for Block 18. It also eliminates the need for direct access from Pokegama. As with the plans for Block 19, removal of direct access reduces traffic conflicts with Pokegama. This change will require better access to parking from 2nd Street.

Block 18 forms part of the southern gateway to Downtown. Redevelopment should be used to enhance the identity of this location as the gateway to Downtown. Similar to Block 19, the gateway is seen as a combination of building character and streetscape. Parking capacity on this block may limit the potential for a multi-story building at the "gateway corner". The planned scope of development on Block 18 does not call for provision of a parking structure.



*Redevelopment in Block 18 should include enhancement of the gateway at Pokegama and 2nd Street*

### Blandin on Block 17

Figure 15 shows one scenario for the Blandin expansion. In this scenario, the plant expands on to Block 17. The expansion also takes the Herald-Review offices.

The most obvious implication of this scenario is the removal of existing commercial buildings in Block 18 along 1st Avenue West. The construction of a warehouse on Block 17 also presents several challenges and opportunities for Block 18.

The warehouse changes the character of 1st Avenue. Today, the street presents a positive commercial character. Buildings on both sides of the street have invested in facade and signage improvements. After the expansion, the remaining businesses in Block 18 face the wall of a warehouse and not the front door of similar stores. The scale of the warehouse sets a strong industrial tone for this area. It is difficult to envision this portion of Block 18 maintaining the uses and building character desired for the Downtown.

Figure 15 shows a possible redevelopment concept for Block 18 following plant expansion. The orientation of buildings shifts to 3rd Street and Pokegama Avenue and away from the warehouse. Parking occupies the space between commercial development and Blandin facilities.

The impact on Block 18 could be lessened by the construction of offices along 1st Avenue West (south of 3rd Street). Corporate offices could be relocated from current facilities on the south side of the River.

The offices would provide a buffer between the warehouse and the commercial uses in Block 18. The offices would help 3rd Street retain the look of a viable business street.

A variation of this scenario would create an extended rail loading facility along the north side of 3rd Street (see Figure 16). This configuration has several implications for future development:

- The expansion displaces the Visitor's Center.
- The connection with the core of the Downtown business district is broken. Access on 1st Avenue West is eliminated or significantly limited.
- Development on Block 18 becomes an "island", surrounded by Blandin and Pokegama Avenue.

This plant configuration sets up a greater need for



Figure 15  
Blandin expansion on Block 17



redevelopment of Block 18. The setting would be altered in a manner that would be difficult to sustain existing commercial uses and structures. Options for Block 18 in this scenario would include:

- Housing related to Blandin.
- Retail, services or office uses needing proximity to Blandin.
- Commercial along Pokegama Avenue drawing support from redevelopment on Block 19.

Looking beyond the implications for Blocks 17 and 18, the construction of the warehouse will create business development opportunities for Downtown. Displaced businesses can become the catalysts for redevelopment on other opportunity sites in Downtown. These businesses have an existing presence in Downtown. Money from land acquisition and relocation provides another source of funding for redevelopment.

Blandin may provide a catalyst for new business development. Some retail and service businesses could benefit from a location adjacent to Blandin.

### ***Implementing the Plan***

Implementation will be tied to the nature of redevelopment. These details will evolve with the plans for development. Some financial factors to consider include:

- Without new development, tax increment financing does not work.



*Figure 16  
Blandin expansion along 3rd Street*

- Capturing the property value from plant expansion could provide a resource for redevelopment.
- City/Blandin collaborations may yield redevelopment projects.



# Public Realm

Making improvements in the “public realm” is an important City investment in the future of Downtown. The public realm represents that space from the edge of the curb to the front of the building. The Downtown Improvement Project and the resulting streetscape have started this process. Future opportunities will come from redevelopment projects and the reconstruction of Highway 2.



*The Downtown Plan builds on the existing streetscape improvements.*

## Role of Public Improvements

Public realm improvements serve several purposes:

- The improvements help to define the identity of Downtown. These improvements can only be found in Downtown.
- The improvements seek to enhance the experience of being in Downtown for a pedestrian. They make Downtown streets safer, more attractive and more comfortable.
- It is an opportunity to make Downtown a “greener” place. With exception of Central School Square and the riverfront, Downtown is a built environment. The appropriate use of street trees is the only means of adding some natural environment throughout Downtown.
- Public realm improvements demonstrate the City’s commitment to match private investment for the betterment of Downtown.

The Plan relies on several strategies for undertaking public improvements in support of private redevelopment objectives.

- Build and maintain attractive sidewalk systems that encourage people to move within the Downtown.
- Create safe and convenient pedestrian crossings

to minimize the impacts of traffic and make a cohesive Downtown.

- Use public realm improvements to define Downtown as a distinct place.
- Complete the streetscape system in Downtown.
- Add street trees to appropriate locations.
- Use Downtown as a setting for public art.

## Nature of the Public Realm

The best way of describing the “public realm” in Downtown is the area between the storefronts. These areas include sidewalks and streets. For this Plan, the primary focus is on the sidewalk area from curb to building. Improvements in this area work with the building to create a positive environment in Downtown.

The ability to make improvements is controlled by the available space. The illustrations in Figures 17 and 18 show how these improvements fit into different widths of public space. With limited space, decorative street lighting becomes the primary form of improvement. The light standard is placed between the sidewalk and the curb as a buffer between the pedestrian and traffic.

As the space grows, other improvements can be added. This expanded space is necessary to incor-

porate and sustain street trees.

The existing environment provides a narrow sidewalk area in many places. Traffic and parking needs prevent gaining additional right-of-way. Building lines do not move without redevelopment.

Each redevelopment project in Downtown creates the opportunity to expand the area for public realm improvements. Putting new buildings at a fifteen foot setback from the curb provides the space for the improvements envisioned by this Plan.

The series of illustrations in Figure 19 provide additional guidance on how alternative forms of public realm improvements can be fit into the available space. These illustrations will help the City work with developers to design redevelopment sites.

### Street Trees

The Plan advocates the planting of street trees at appropriate locations throughout Downtown. Trees should be added to the corridors shown in the Framework Plan. The type and placement of trees can be adjusted so as not to conflict with signage and recognition of businesses.

Trees add life, color and vitality to the street in a manner that cannot be equalled by man-made improvements. Trees provide shade and add comfort to the experience of pedestrians. Adding trees to existing streetscape further distinguishes the character and identity of Downtown from other commercial locations in Grand Rapids.

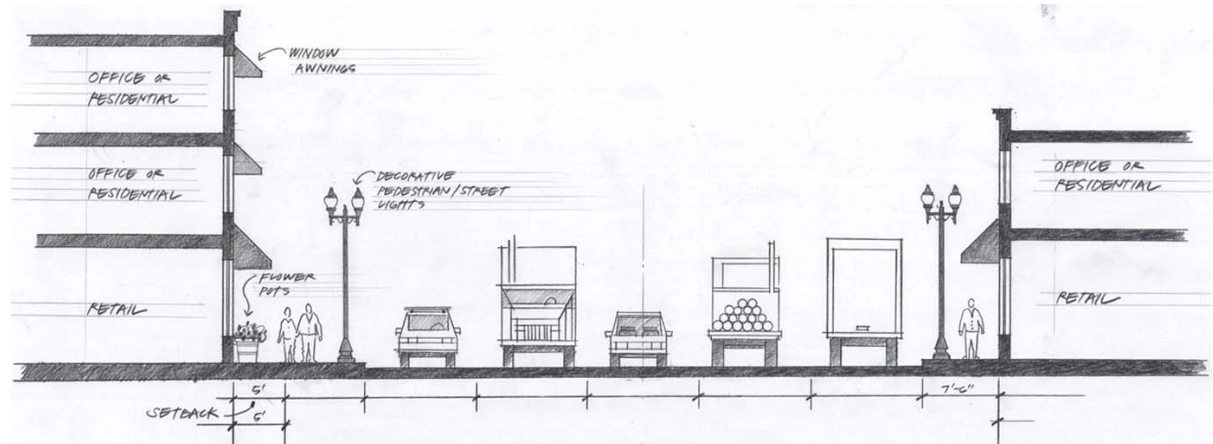


Figure 17  
Improvements in "Public Realm" with Standard Sidewalk

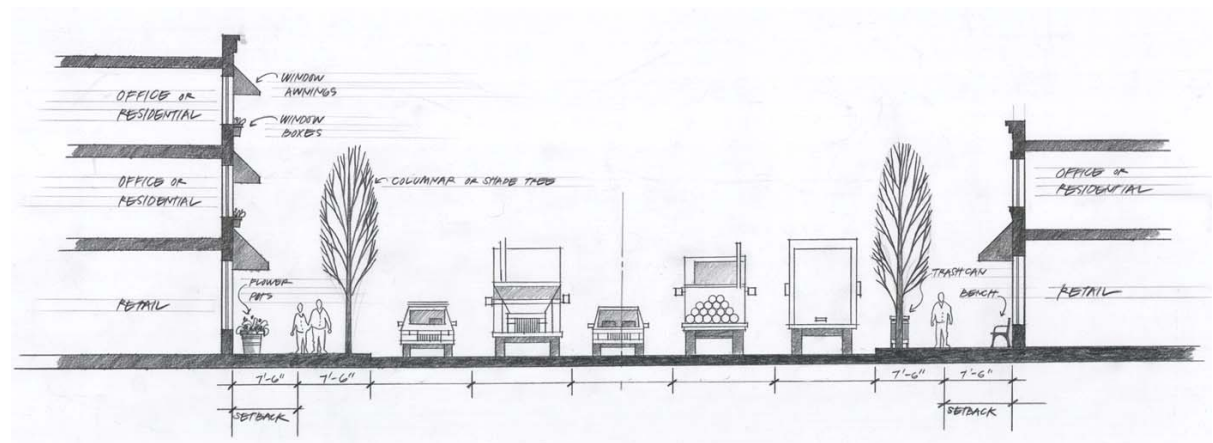


Figure 18  
Improvements in "Public Realm" with Expanded Sidewalk.





Downtown Little Falls shows how the use of trees enhances the street.

## Highway 2

Highway 2 offers a unique and important opportunity for improvements in the public realm. The State is planning for a much needed reconstruction of the highway through Downtown. By itself, the reconstruction project will accomplish positive outcomes:

- The current road surface is deteriorated. The run down condition of the road plays a factor in the impression of Downtown. A rebuilt road

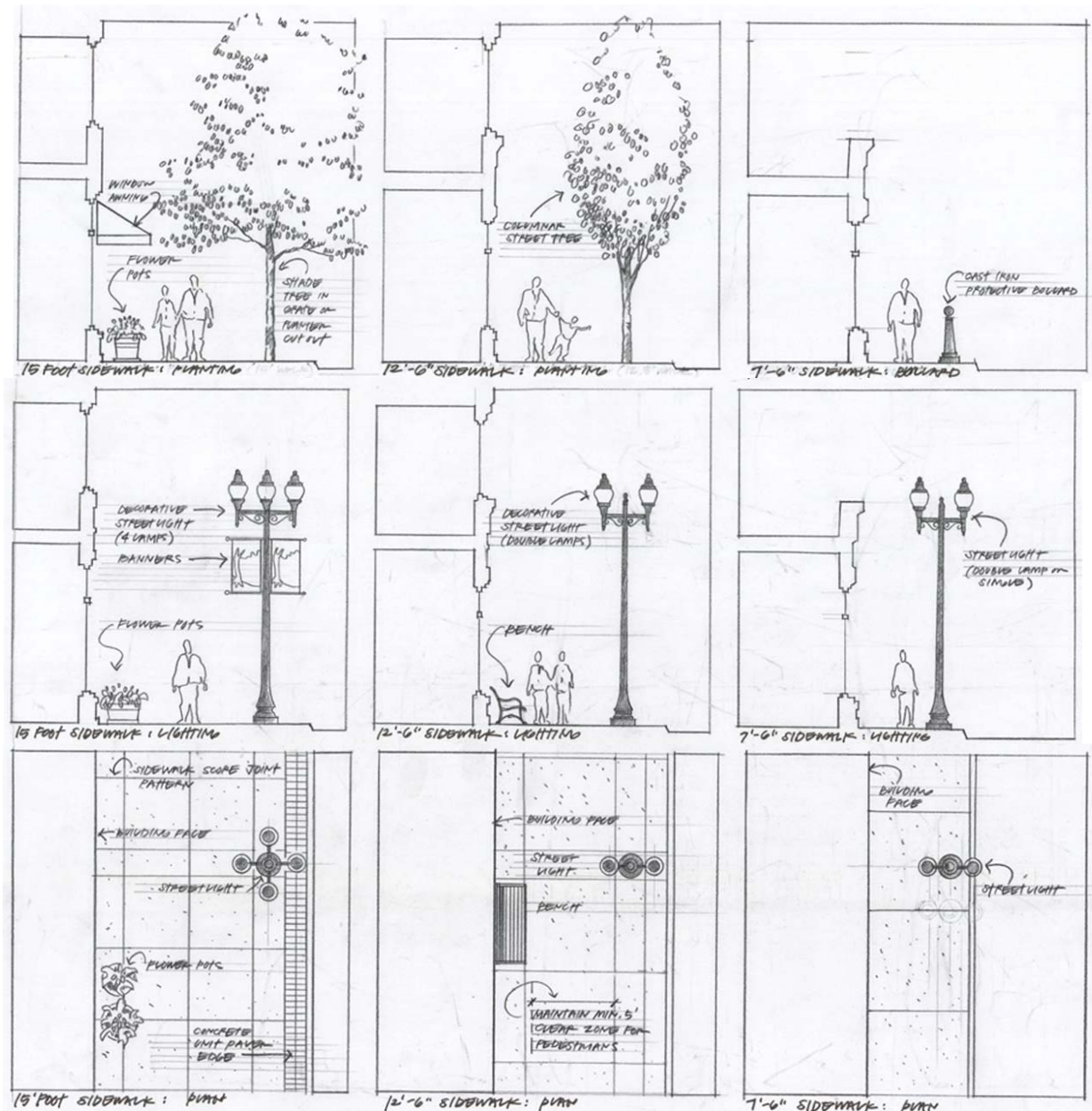


Figure 19  
Character and design of public realm improvements.

will not produce a positive impression, but will prevent the roadway from becoming a source of blight.

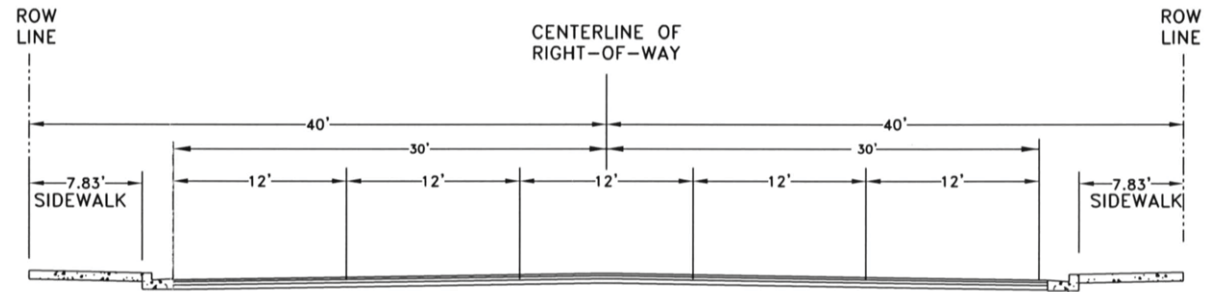
- The planning improvements will make vehicular traffic safer.

The downtown planning process provided a framework for exploring design alternatives with the State. Ideally, the City could have obtained road right-of-way to expand sidewalk area along the Highway. This objective proved unattainable. Highway 2 operates in a narrow corridor through Downtown Grand Rapids. All of the right-of-way is needed to provide sufficient drive and turn lanes.

Figure 20 depicts the planned road configuration. This illustration shows the limited space for addressing the needs of both vehicular and pedestrian movement in this corridor.



*The pending reconstruction of Highway 2 offers a series of opportunities to improve the Downtown environment.*



*Figure 20  
Profile of Highway 2 for Reconstruction.*

Despite the inability to expand sidewalks, the Highway 2 improvements can be a means for other enhancements to Downtown.

Enhanced crosswalks can more clearly identify areas for pedestrian crossing. The current painted designation of crosswalks is neither enduring nor attractive. The use of different construction materials (such as stamped concrete) creates an identifiable and appealing location for pedestrian movement across Highway 2. Key locations for the enhanced crosswalks include 1st Avenue West, Pokegama Avenue and 1st Avenue East.

Better traffic control devices will improve the function of the crosswalks. Crosswalks should include “countdown” indicators that show the time remaining before the light changes. These devices allow pedestrian to better gauge the ability to cross the street. Variable programming of traffic signals will provide opportunities for longer time to cross Highway 2. The existing signal controls operate under a single program designed to favor movement through Downtown on Highway 2. While the preference for

efficient through movement is needed during peak traffic periods, this need does not exist throughout the day. Greater flexibility in signal controls would allow additional crossing time when traffic volumes are lower. This change would also slow traffic moving through Downtown at certain times.



*Improved traffic controls will enhance safety for pedestrians and make Downtown a more walkable place.*



Parking is an essential ingredient of a successful Downtown. Parking must be convenient and available. The supply of spaces must be well distributed throughout Downtown. In Grand Rapids, parking must be free. The parking supply must meet the needs of the customer, the visitor, and the employee.

Parking cannot be treated as a separate and independent element of Downtown. Parking and land use are linked. Parking determines the capacity for land to develop. Surface parking lots influence the pattern and character of development. For these reasons, parking issues have been examined in each of the redevelopment opportunity sites. However, parking issues extend beyond the boundaries of individual sites.

This section of the Plan examines existing parking conditions in Downtown and recommends strategies for future system improvements and operations.

### Current Parking System

The parking system in Downtown Grand Rapids consists of three types of parking: on-street, public off-street and private off-street. An inventory of parking spaces was conducted as part of the planning process. The results of this inventory are summarized in Figure 21. This table distributes the total spaces by type, use limitations and location (north and south of Highway 2). The parking supply is shown graphically Figure 22. Several points of clarification must accompany this summary:

ized in Figure 21. This table distributes the total spaces by type, use limitations and location (north and south of Highway 2). The parking supply is shown graphically Figure 22. Several points of clarification must accompany this summary:

- The inventory includes a new 42-space lot at the Blandin Foundation.
- The total does not account for any lost spaces due to the redevelopment project on 3rd Street North.

	<u>North of 2</u>	<u>South of 2</u>	<u>Total</u>
On-street			
2 hour limit	238	290	528
All day	<u>8</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>28</u>
Subtotal On-street	246	310	556
Off-street - public			
2 hour limit	64	100	164
3 hour limit	0	116	116
4 hour limit	122	0	122
All day	256	0	256
Permit	<u>11</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>70</u>
Subtotal Off-street	453	275	728
Off-street - private	<u>293</u>	<u>359</u>	<u>652</u>
TOTAL	992	944	1,936

Figure 21  
Downtown Parking Supply - 2005

- Only a portion of the spaces in the Courthouse lot are clearly designated as reserved spaces. There are no posted restrictions on the remaining spaces.

The majority of off-street parking is provided and maintained by the City of Grand Rapids. Individual buildings/businesses are not directly responsible for providing parking needed to serve employees and customers. This approach allows the City to manage the supply, location and use of Downtown parking.

The majority of public parking is free. Less than 10% of off-street parking is reserved for permit usage.

There is limited enforcement of use limitations. The current system relies on an honor system to abide by posted time restrictions.

### Parking Study

A parking study was conducted at three on-street segments and three off street parking lots in Downtown Grand Rapids. The on-street segments consisted of

- 1st Avenue W between 2nd Street N and 3rd Street N.
- 1st Avenue W between 4th Street N and 5th



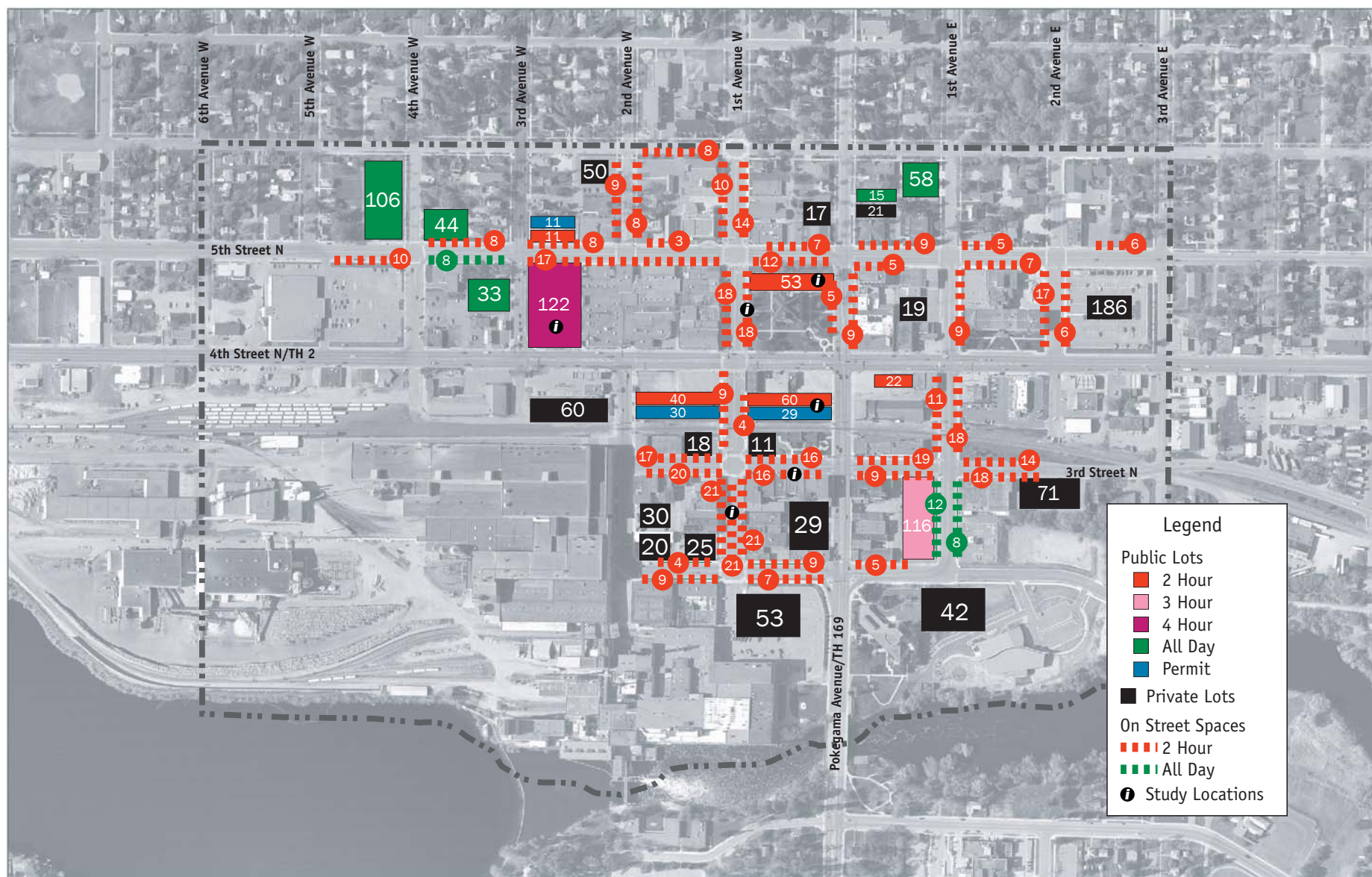


Figure 22  
Downtown Parking System (2005)

Street N.

- 3rd Street W between 1st Avenue W and Pokegama Avenue.

The off-street parking lots consisted of:

- Lot 1: Parking Lot north of 3rd Street N between 1st Avenue W and Pokegama Avenue
- Lot 2: Lot south of 5th Street N between 1st Avenue W and Pokegama Avenue
- Lot 3: Mall Lot east of 3rd Avenue W between 4th Street N and 5th Street N

These locations are noted **i** in the parking supply map on the previous page.

The parking study monitored the utilization and duration of parking in these locations. The complete results of the parking study can be found in Appendix A.

In summary, this study did not find indication of problems related to the supply or use restrictions of parking in these locations. These findings demonstrate that significant changes in the Downtown parking system are not needed. Instead, this plan focuses on enhancing the function of the system and outlines actions to be taken in conjunction with future redevelopment.

## Downtown Parking Plan

Meeting the parking needs of Downtown will be a balancing act. The pressure to provide the “right” parking supply must be balanced against the other objectives for Downtown. Inadequate parking is a barrier to sustaining businesses. Too much park-

ing makes Downtown unattractive as surface lots become the dominant physical feature. The construction and maintenance of parking facilities have financial implications for the City. There are a finite number of spaces that can be created on the street. Off-street parking is land that could also be used for building space. Never looking for a space means either a lack of customers or land that is underutilized (too many spaces). Too many challenges in finding a space becomes a disincentive to coming to Downtown.

The investigations and analysis conducted during the Downtown planning process led to the following plan for providing parking needed to support current and future development.

### Objectives

Planning for Downtown parking requires a clear set of objectives. These objectives help to explain the proper balance of outcomes for the parking system. The following objectives guide the management of the parking system in Downtown Grand Rapids:

- Downtown must provide an adequate supply of parking to meet the needs of customers, visitors, residents, and employees.
- The supply and type of parking spaces should be distributed across Downtown to meet the differing needs of each location.
- Public parking will be free to the user to promote use of Downtown businesses.
- The City of Grand Rapids will provide and maintain off-street parking in Downtown. This

approach allows the City to manage parking and development throughout Downtown, but just on a parcel-by-parcel basis.

- On-street parking should be used for short-term customer trips.

### Public Parking System

The current approach for a public parking system should be continued. The approach allows the City to manage parking needs across the entire Downtown, rather than on a parcel-by-parcel basis. A public parking system gives the City more control over creating a desirable development pattern that integrates buildings and parking.

Figure 23 summarizes the initiatives for enhancing the function of the parking system. The following section explains these initiatives in greater detail.

### Supply

The overall supply of public parking spaces in Downtown appears to be adequate for current needs. The utilization and duration analysis in the parking study supports this conclusion.

Although overall supply of public parking spaces is adequate, the distribution of the supply suggests some deficiencies. Some potential deficiencies on the distribution of the parking supply include:

- Only one off-street lot is available south of the railroad tracks (Block 19). No public off-street parking is available in Block 18.
- There is not clear strategy for employee parking south of the rail road tracks. The only



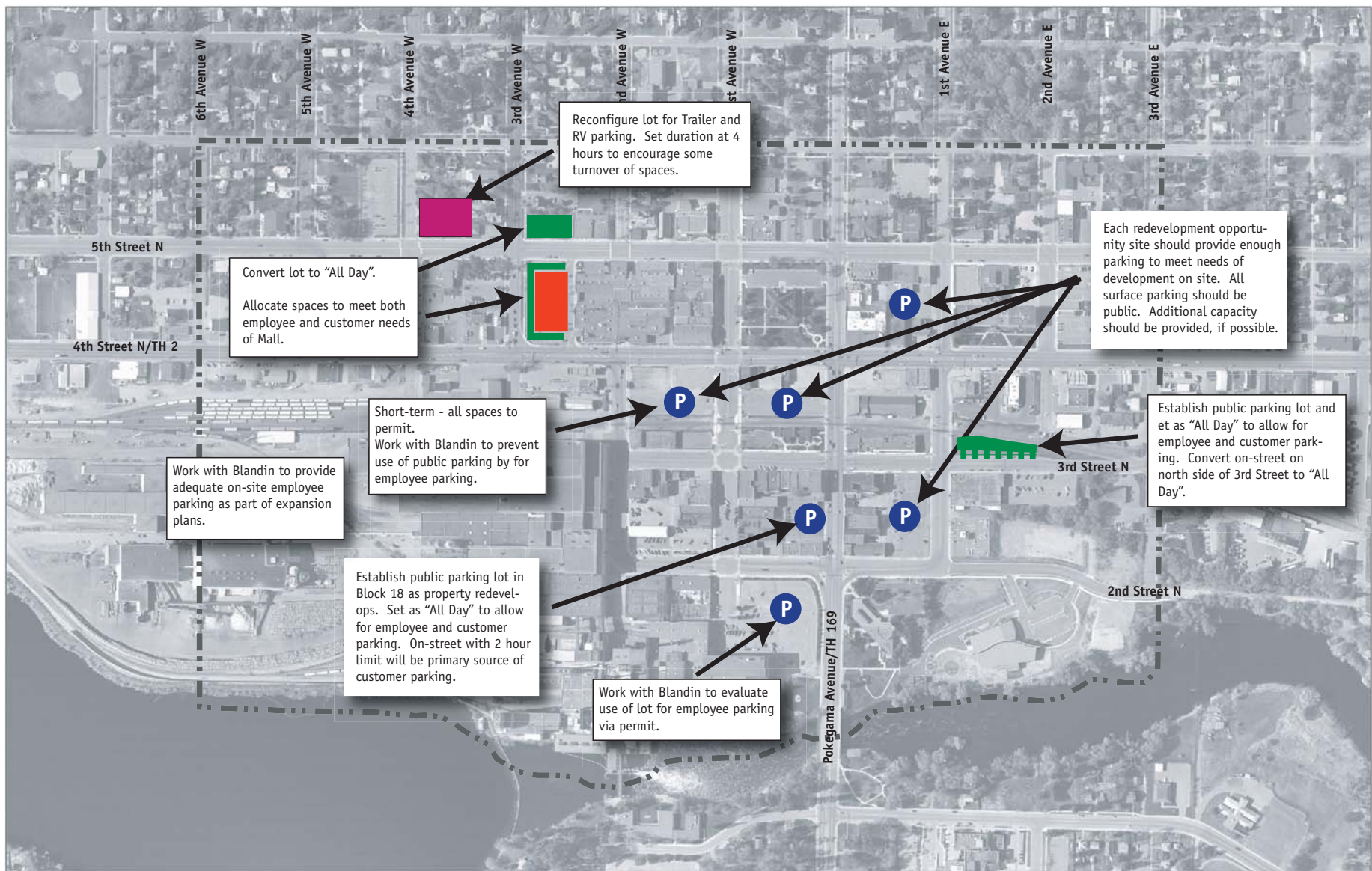


Figure 23  
Proposed Parking System Enhancements



allowed public option for employee parking is 20 on-street spaces located on 1st Avenue East (between 2nd and 3rd Streets) designated for all day parking. All remaining on-street spaces are restricted to 2-hour use.

- All spaces in the Central Square Mall lot are time limited (4 hour maximum). The Mall is no longer a purely retail operation. A mix of retail and service businesses requires parking for both customers and employees.
- Not all parking is reasonably accessible to the core of the Downtown. The two lots at 4th Avenue North and 5th Street North contain 150 spaces. This location provides little meaningful support for Downtown businesses. Most customers will not look for parking at this location. The separation is too great to be convenient for either customer or employee.

### ***Redevelopment and Parking***

The plan identifies a series of redevelopment opportunity sites. Each of these redevelopment sites is also a key to meeting parking needs of Downtown. The discussion of the redevelopment opportunity sites contains a section on parking strategies. In general, these redevelopment projects should seek to achieve the following:

- Each project should provide on-site parking sufficient to meet needs of customer, employee and resident users of the redevelopment.
- Redevelopment creates the ability to explore the construction of structured parking to expand the overall parking supply.

- Surface parking in redevelopment opportunity sites should be made part of the public parking system.
- City financial participation in these redevelopment projects creates the ability guide the design and use of these spaces.

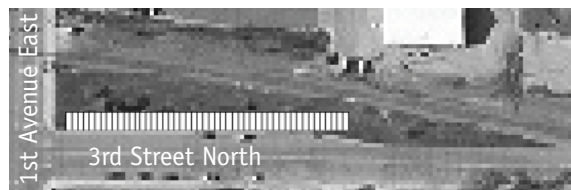
The potential expansion of the Blandin plant offers another opportunity to address parking needs in Downtown. Two specific initiatives stem from the Blandin expansion project:

- The City and Blandin should work closely to ensure that all parking needed to support plant operations (employee and visitor) can be provided on site.
- The expansion plans should be reviewed to determine the potential impacts on parking supply in Downtown.

### ***Other Expansion***

Outside of redevelopment projects, there are limited opportunities to expand the supply of parking in Downtown. All appropriate on-street spaces are currently used. No new streets are proposed.

Several opportunities exist to expand the parking supply:



*Add Parking Along 3rd Street North*

- The Blandin Foundation and the City plan to expand parking between the Foundation offices and the Library. Although these spaces are intended to support Foundation business, the spaces could be used for public purposes during non-business hours. The parameters of public use should be specified to aid the City in monitoring supply and need.
- The City and Blandin should explore use of the lot at Pokegama Avenue and 2nd Street North for permit parking. The goal would be to shift employee parking from on-street to this lot. The expansion of Blandin facilities could make this a very short-term change.
- Additional parking spaces should be provided using the vacant parcel on 3rd Street North to the east of 1st Avenue West. This parcel is underutilized in its current condition.

All other vacant land is better served by redevelopment rather than conversion to parking.

### ***Employment Parking***

The parking system needs to provide adequate parking for both customers and workers. In general, the Central Business District Association should promote the establishment and the use of a viable honor system for employee parking. A cooperative approach should prevent the need for the more difficult options for parking permits and use enforcement.

The City and Blandin should work to prevent use of public spaces for Blandin employee parking.



*Fence in Block 36 Parking Lot*

Blandin has the capacity to accommodate parking needs on-site.

In addition to the other strategies described in this section, several other steps should be taken to meet the needs of employment parking in Downtown.

- All of the parking in Block 36 should be converted to permit parking. Currently, the lot is split between permit and 2-hour parking. Given surrounding land uses, this lot does not provide essential customer parking. A permit approach helps to discourage use by Blandin employees. This portion of the employment parking supply is not permanent. These spaces will be displaced with the redevelopment of Block 36.
- The configuration of the parking spaces and property lines in Block 36 requires review. A fence through the southern edge of the lot removes 30 spaces from use. The alleyway

provides approximately ten unmarked spaces.

- All of the parking lot on the northeast corner of 5th Street North and 3rd Avenue West should be designated as permit parking. Currently, the lot is split between permit and 2-hour parking.
- Allowing permit parking in the Blandin lot at Pokegama and 2nd Street provides needed worker parking in this area of Downtown (see additional discussion in [Other Expansion](#)).
- If additional employee parking is needed, one strategy would be to designate edge spaces of the Central Square Mall lot as “all day” use. (All of the Mall spaces are currently limited to 4-hour use.) This approach allows the spaces to be used for either worker or customer parking. This change affects 50 spaces.

The hope of this plan is that providing an adequate supply of employment oriented spaces reduces the incentive for workers to time limited spaces. The parking system does not, however, prevent employees from moving between restricted spaces over the course of the work day.

### ***RV/Trailer Parking***

Part of the customer base for Downtown includes people driving recreational vehicles and towing trailers (campers and boats). The parking system must provide usable spaces for these oversized vehicles. The lack of proper space requires these users to occupy parking areas designed for conventional sized vehicles. This improper use may lead to supply and safety problems.



The City uses temporary signage to designate RV and trailer parking along both sides of 5th Street north of the Mall lot. It is desirable to expand RV-trailer parking in this location to use a coordinated sign system to direct visitors to designated locations.

The lot on the northeast corner of 5th Street and 4th Avenue West provides a good location for a dedicated off-street RV-trailer lot. It is close enough to the core of Downtown to be usable, but the conversion would not adversely effect parking for other customers and employees.

Establishing this RV-trailer lot will require some



reconfiguration. The current entrance and exit design will not support large vehicles. The lot does not allow turning area for entrance and exit on 4th Avenue. The exit to 5th Street is also a difficult



*Existing lot at 5th Street North and 4th Avenue West (north end)*

movement.

Signage plays a role in the success of meeting the parking needs of RV's and vehicles with trailers. The current sign system only supports vehicles entering Downtown from the south. Directional signs are located on Pokegama Avenue at Highway 2 and 5th Street North. A clear and consistent system of signs should be used to mark the location of off-street public parking lots designated for RV and trailer use. Directional signs should be posted at the gateway

intersections.

### ***Service District***

The operation and maintenance of the Downtown parking creates financial obligations for the City. The financial constraints facing the City may increase the difficulty in funding parking with general revenues.



*RV/trailer parking information sign at Highway 169/2 intersection*

A means of supplementing general revenues is with one or more special service districts. In simple terms, a special service district is a taxing district to finance services and improvements in commercial areas. More information about this tool appears in the Implementation section of the plan.







Without clear direction on implementation, the Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan risks remaining little more than a sheaf of papers. This section focuses on the keys to achieving the vision presented in this Framework.

## Keys to Implementation

The experience of Grand Rapids and of other cities shows that several factors are important ingredients for successful redevelopment:

**Patience:** The vision for this Plan cannot be implemented overnight. The time frame for implementing this Framework reflects its evolutionary nature; it looks forward over a period of years. Redevelopment often requires the patience to wait for the right things to happen, rather than making changes simply to be seen doing something.

**Commitment:** Commitment to the Plan and patience go hand-in-hand. This Plan does not simply seek to attract development to Downtown; it also seeks to move Downtown toward a vision for the future. There is a difference. Commitment to the Plan means the willingness to actively promote public and private investments that achieve the vision, and to deter developments that do not meet the objectives of the Plan. Not all of these decisions will be easy.

**Public-Private Partnerships:** Implementation of this Plan requires a continuation of the public-private partnerships that created the Plan. Both city government and businesses must actively work to achieve the vision for Downtown.

**Financial Reality:** A large portion of the implementation strategy discusses roles and responsibilities for the City. Implementing the Plan requires the careful investment of public funds, but the private side of the financial equation must not be overlooked. New development and existing businesses will pay for part of the improvements called for in the Plan. Implementing the Plan seeks to balance the investment in Plan initiatives with the creation of a financial environment that sustains businesses.

**Strategic Investments:** If financial support for the Plan was unlimited, the need for strategic decisions would be less important. With limited funds, though, every expenditure is crucial. It is not possible to undertake immediately all of the initiatives described in this Plan. Needs and opportunities not contemplated in the Plan may arise in the future. Every investment must be evaluated for its impact on achieving the vision for the future of Downtown Grand Rapids.

The Framework Plan provides a guide for private and public investments to revitalize Downtown in a manner consistent with this Plan. The following strategies will assist the City in implementing the Plan and realizing the vision for Downtown.

## Roles and Responsibilities

There is a temptation to give responsibility for implementation of the Downtown Master Plan to the City of Grand Rapids. Many of the powers and resources needed to undertake the actions described in this Plan are held by the City. The success of Downtown Grand Rapids cannot be made the sole responsibility of city government. Achieving the vision for Downtown requires on-going collaboration of both public and private stakeholders. This section describes the roles and responsibilities of key parties.

### ***Business and Property Owners***

While the City influences the physical setting, Downtown remains a place of *private* activity. Individual businesses determine the type of goods and services available in Downtown. Individual businesses make decisions about how they operate. Property owners decide how to maintain and improve their buildings. Each of these factors plays a role in the long-term success of Downtown.

### **CBDA**

The Central Business District Association (CBDA) was a partner in the preparation of this Plan. This involvement should continue into the implementation of the Plan.

Downtown is a collection of independent businesses. This independence adds to the character and quality of the Downtown environment. This same independence may also be a barrier to beneficial collective actions. The CBDA provides a means of organizing and engaging Downtown businesses. Roles for the CBDA include:

- Provide a forum for discussion, consensus and action on issues of importance to the Downtown.
- Advocate for City actions needed to undertake redevelopment projects and public improvements.
- Provide business-oriented input to public decision making.
- Collaborate with the City to attract businesses to Downtown.

The CBDA could serve as the “advisory board” for a special service district in Downtown. A special service district is a tool for financing improvements and enhanced services in Downtown (additional discussion follows). In this role, the CBDA would advise the City Council on how to use monies collected from the special service district. The district could provide an on-going source of funding for the CBDA.

### **GREDA**

The Grand Rapids Economic Development Authority (GREDA) authorized the process that created the Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan. The GREDA is in the best position to lead public efforts to implement the Plan.

The GREDA has been established to address the economic development and redevelopment needs of Grand Rapids. Many of the statutory powers required of implementation come to the GREDA through the housing and redevelopment powers of Minnesota Statutes, Section 469.001 through 469.047 (the “HRA Act”). The GREDA should use these powers to undertake the following actions:

- Acquire real property for the purpose of removing, preventing, or reducing blight, blighting factors, or the causes of blight;
- Clear any acquired areas;
- Install, construct or reconstruct streets, utilities, and site improvements essential to the preparation of sites for uses in accordance with the plan;
- Sell or lease land so acquired for uses in accordance with the plan;
- Prepare technical and financial plans and other arrangements for buildings, structures, and improvements and all other work in connection with the plan;
- Operate and maintain public parking facilities.

The Plan also anticipates that the GREDA will be the authority used to establish and administer tax increment financing districts in Downtown.

### **City Council**

The City Council must be committed to implementing this Plan. While the GREDA leads the implementation process, important redevelopment powers reside solely with the City Council. Among the powers that may be needed to undertake redevelopment powers in the Downtown are:

- Approve the establishment of TIF districts.
- Approve the establishment of special services districts and the levy of service charges on properties in the district.
- Levy of special assessments for public improvements.
- Issue of general obligation bonds to finance redevelopment and improvement projects.
- Condemn property for redevelopment.

Ensuring that the City Council is prepared to use these powers requires a close working relationship between the Council and GREDA. The City Council must be engaged in the redevelopment process and prepared to take action as needed.

Actions by the City Council can enhance the Downtown in other ways. Some examples include:

- Community events to make Downtown a focal point.
- Keep civic institutions concentrated in Downtown

- Avoid subsidizing projects that include businesses that should be located in Downtown.
- Provide staff capacity and resources needed to plan and undertake projects in Downtown.

### **Public Utilities Commission**

The Grand Rapids Public Utilities Commission operates the electric system. The Plan calls on the Utilities to bury power lines in Downtown in conjunction with redevelopment projects. GREDA will work with the Utilities Commission to coordinate the technical and financial planning required of these improvements.

### **IDC/Jobs 2020**

Itasca Development Corporation/Jobs 2020 (IDC/Jobs 2020) is the non-profit economic development organization serving the Itasca area, including the City of Grand Rapids. They have provided input into this Plan. IDC/Jobs 2020 focuses on helping local businesses succeed and is uniquely positioned to understand business needs. For those reasons IDC/Jobs 2020 should participate in implementation of this plan in the following ways:

- Facilitate expansion of existing businesses downtown;
- Attract new business to the downtown;
- Assist in securing project financing;
- Acquiring real property for development by other entities;
- Improving the business climate downtown;
- Promote availability of the Grand Rapids Business Improvement Loan Program;

- Collaborate on innovative ways to advance implementation of the Plan.

### **Blandin Foundation**

It is likely that the Blandin Foundation will be called on to be a financial partner in implementing the Plan. The Plan describes the need for this financial support. These projects provide opportunities to explore ways for the Blandin Foundation to facilitate community redevelopment in other places.

### **Using the HRA Act**

Many redevelopment powers come to the City through the HRA Act (Minnesota Statutes Sections 469.001 through 469.047). State Law authorizes the GREDA to use their powers. This section of the plan lays the foundation for accessing the necessary statutory authority.

### **Findings**

To exercise these powers, the HRA Act requires that the City Council make certain findings (by resolution) about the downtown area. The statutory findings focus on two development characteristics: (1) the presence of “substandard, slum, or blighted areas” or (2) a shortage of “decent, safe, and sanitary dwelling accommodations available to persons of low income and their families.” While housing needs form part of this plan, the physical condition of buildings and infrastructure are the primary catalyst for public actions.

The process of preparing this Plan involved the review and assessment of the existing condition of structures and infrastructure in the downtown

area. Through these efforts the City has laid the foundation for using the powers granted by the HRA Act.

The assessment of the downtown undertaken through the planning process identifies a variety of factors that show the need for redevelopment and the public actions offered in this Plan. Among the factors present in the downtown area are:

- Buildings and improvements that are physically or economically obsolete.
- Parcels with faulty arrangement and design and obsolete layout.
- Parcels with excessive land coverage.
- Parcels with deficient soil conditions.

The combination of these and other factors impair the ability of the private sector to correct these factors without the implementation of this plan. The failure to address this situation would not serve the best interests or general welfare of the community. Further, the results of the planning process should provide the basis for findings needed to support city actions under the HRA Act.

### **Redevelopment Plan**

It would be appropriate to designate the Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan as a “redevelopment plan” for the purposes of the HRA Act. In designating this redevelopment plan, the City Council will make the following findings:

1. Land in the project area would not be made available for redevelopment without the finan-



cial aid to be sought. This Plan identifies the financial barriers to redevelopment in Downtown Grand Rapids. The need for financial assistance from the City (and other public bodies) will be determined as part of each project. This finding will be verified throughout the implementation of the Plan.

2. This redevelopment plan will afford maximum opportunity for the redevelopment of the Downtown by private enterprise. A fundamental objective of this Plan is to maximize the opportunities for private investment in Downtown. Public actions and investments are taken to remove barriers and to provide catalysts for private development.
3. This redevelopment plan is consistent with the needs of Grand Rapids as a whole. To ensure this consistency, the City's Comprehensive Plan will be amended to support the Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan.

### ***Redevelopment Project Area***

The Downtown planning area, as shown in the Introduction section, is designated as the "project area" for undertaking redevelopment projects pursuant to this Plan. This area should also serve as the project area for the purposes of tax increment financing. This designation allows any excess tax increments to be spent in the Downtown, subject to the authorizations and limitations of each tax increment financing plan.

### **Downtown Investment Plan**

The Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan identifies a variety of public investments to facilitate and support redevelopment in Downtown. A "downtown investment plan" follows the concept of a capital improvements plan. It provides a comprehensive means of linking expenditures and funding. With limited financial resources, this approach enhances the ability of the City to make the most effective use of available funding. It also provides a means of identifying investments that are not initially linked to a source of funding. A proactive approach creates time to explore alternative funding strategies.

Potential public investments that should be considered in the preparation of a Downtown investment plan include:

- Facilitation of Redevelopment Opportunity sites
- Streetscape and pedestrian improvements connected with Highway 2 reconstruction.
- Completion of streetscape on streets not part of opportunity sites or adjacent to Highway 2.
- Gateway improvements
- Pedestrian and bicycle improvements in corridors in and leading to Downtown.
- Pedestrian improvements.
- Revitalization incentives.

Not every investment in this list will be made by the City of Grand Rapids using public funds. The objective is to identify public actions that will require funding and can compete successfully for available resources.

### **Land Use Controls**

The City manages land use with several different tools. The primary tools are the City's Comprehensive Plan and the adopted Zoning Ordinance. Existing land use controls should be reviewed and revised as necessary to ensure consistency with this Plan. This step allows development to occur that fits the Plan. These modifications will also prevent land uses that do not conform with the Downtown Master Plan.

#### ***Comprehensive Plan***

The Plan for the revitalization of Downtown should be made part of the Comprehensive Plan either by incorporation into the document or by reference. The City's Comprehensive Plan sets the framework for development within the entire community. Based upon the Comprehensive Plan, other land use controls such as the zoning ordinance are created. These zoning regulations, for example, must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and in that way the City ensures that development conforms to the community's goals. The currently adopted Comprehensive Plan does acknowledge redevelopment of Downtown and does recognize that a mix of land uses, including residential, would be acceptable.

#### ***Zoning***

The City's zoning ordinance is being updated. No large scale changes are anticipated to fit the Master Plan.

### ***Design Guidelines***

The City created design standards for Blocks 18, 19, 20 and 21 as part of the riverfront planning process. The application of these standards should be extended into the remainder of Downtown.

Design standards/guidelines are tools to improve the quality and character of buildings, although they may also impact the physical massing of individual structures. It is intended that the design guidelines provide assistance to developers and property owners to help in understanding what the City is looking for in Downtown. Design guidelines address many aspects of development, including structure size and appearance, building materials, signage, site configuration, lighting, and landscaping. These regulations can be implemented by adopting them by ordinance or can be a prerequisite to receiving public financing for redevelopment projects.

### ***Attracting Investment***

The Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan will be implemented by attracting private investment to Downtown. This investment will come from existing property owners and from new development partners for the City.

### ***Solicitation of Proposals***

The planning process has raised awareness about the potential for revitalization in Downtown Grand Rapids. For purposes of this Plan, redevelopment means demolition of existing structures and construction of a new building or buildings consistent with the Downtown framework. A potential de-

velopment partner may be apparent at the time of implementation. If not, the City may use a request for proposal (RFP) process to obtain a private development partner for a redevelopment project. The RFP allows the City to explain its objectives and to find the developer best suited to bring the segments of the design framework to fruition in this area. The steps in the RFP process include:

- Prepare and distribute RFP
- Select preferred development partner
- Negotiate preliminary development agreement.
- Approve final development agreement by GREDA.
- Planning review and approval process.

Specific steps for seeking development proposals are discussed later in this section.

### ***Revitalization***

Revitalization is an important outcome of this Plan. In the Plan, revitalization is used where existing structures will remain and will be upgraded. The City hopes to create an environment that encourages property owners to invest in the betterment of existing buildings and sites, perhaps through financial incentives. Tools to create that environment include:

- Grants for initial architectural and design work.
- Low interest loans to finance improvements.
- Use of public funds in matching grant program for qualifying improvements.

- Technical assistance for property owners wishing to explore revitalization projects.

The City and the EDA should take steps to establish a specific revitalization assistance program following adoption of this Plan. Without a commitment to this program, revitalization of existing structures may be set aside as resources are applied to other, larger redevelopment initiatives.

### ***Land Acquisition***

Opportunities may arise to acquire land not related to a current development proposal. It is advantageous to have the ability to purchase land at key locations when offered for sale by property owners. This approach offers several benefits:

- A “willing seller” purchase often reduces the long-term land expense and the public cost of redevelopment.
- The assembly of land enhances the potential for redevelopment. Land costs are certain and the delays to assemble a site are reduced.
- Control of land minimizes the need for condemnation.

The challenge of acquiring and banking land in advance of redevelopment is funding. The City will be looking into funding alternatives for land acquisition as well as specific redevelopment projects.

## Public Financial Assistance

Revitalization or redevelopment of Downtown will not occur without the financial assistance of the City of Grand Rapids. The need for public financial assistance comes from several factors:

- Redevelopment projects often prove not to be financially feasible without public assistance. This is because projected revenues available from the new development do not cover the costs of redevelopment. This “gap” between revenues and expenditures stems from a variety of causes. The main reason is that land costs are higher. The price of a redevelopment site includes land and structures. Further, redevelopment includes costs for demolition and clearance of existing structures. There are also expenses (direct or indirect) for the relocation of existing businesses. Often these additional costs cannot be passed on through higher lease rates or sale prices.
- The Plan seeks a higher level of design and building materials in Downtown. The framework anticipates that the City’s Downtown will create a showcase area for the community and therefore higher quality design and materials are anticipated. City financial participation in redevelopment provides a means of achieving this goal.
- Revitalization, rather than full-scale redevelopment, is also costly and limited by some of the same factors as the redevelopment process. The current economic environment of Downtown

may not generate enough additional income for the property owner to invest in enhanced building facades or signage. Public financing may be needed to support a portion of the cost of improvements.

### ***Tax Increment Financing***

Tax increment financing (TIF) is the primary development finance tool available to Minnesota cities (Minnesota Statutes, Sections 469.174 through 469.179). TIF is simple in concept, but complex in its application. Through tax increment financing, the property taxes created by new development (or redevelopment) are captured and used to finance activities needed to encourage the development. The challenge in using TIF lies with the complex and ever-changing statutory limitations. These complexities make it impractical to provide a thorough explanation of tax increment financing as part of this plan. Instead, this section highlights the use of TIF as it relates to the implementation of the plan.

#### **Uses**

Tax increment financing can be used to finance all of the important implementation actions facing the city: land acquisition, site preparation, parking, and public improvements.

In addition, TIF creates a means to borrow money needed to pay for redevelopment costs.

#### **Type of TIF Districts**

The implementation of the plan may require the creation of one or more new TIF districts. The following overview highlights some of the consid-

erations in creating a TIF district. This information is intended solely as a basic framework for finding applications within downtown. All specific uses will require a thorough analysis of all statutory factors.

The ability to meet the statutory criteria for establishing a district is a key to the use of TIF. Three types of TIF districts have application to the plan.

- **Redevelopment**: A redevelopment TIF district has two basic criteria: (1) parcels consisting of 70% of the area of the district are occupied by buildings, streets, utilities, or other improvements; to be occupied, not less than 15% of the parcel’s area must be covered by the improvements; and (2), more than 50% of the buildings, not including outbuildings, are structurally substandard to a degree requiring substantial renovation or clearance (as defined by statute). A redevelopment district may consist of non-contiguous areas, but each area and the entire area must meet these criteria;
- **Renewal and renovation**: A renewal and renovation district requires similar, but reduced criteria. The following three factors must exist: (1) the same 70% occupied test applies; (2) the minimum amount of structurally substandard buildings drops to 20%; (3) 30% of the other buildings require substantial renovation or clearance to remove existing conditions (such as inadequate street layout; incompatible uses or land use relationships; overcrowding of buildings on the land; excessive dwelling unit density; obsolete buildings not suitable for im-



provement or conversion; or other identified hazards to the health, safety, and general well being of the community);

- **Housing:** A housing TIF district is intended to contain a project, or a portion of a project, intended for occupancy, in part, by persons or families of low and moderate income. A district does not qualify as a housing district if the fair market value of the improvements, which are constructed in the district for commercial uses or for uses other than low and moderate income housing, consists of more than 20% of the total fair market value of the planned improvements in the development plan or agreement. Several variations of housing districts may also apply different rent and income restrictions and apply to owner-occupied and rental housing.

#### Limitations

The use of TIF as a financing tool also poses limitations:

- **Use of Tax Increments.** The use of tax increment revenues is controlled by both State Law and by local plan. State Law sets forth specific limitations based on the type of TIF district. These limitations generally tie back to the original criteria used for establishing the district. For example, at least 90% of the revenues derived from tax increments from a redevelopment district or renewal and renovation district must be used to finance the cost of correcting conditions that allowed for the designation of the district. The use of tax increments must

also be authorized by a tax increment financing plan adopted by the city;

- **Pooling.** The term pooling refers to the ability to spend money outside of the boundaries of the TIF district. For redevelopment districts, not more than 25% of revenues can be spent on activities outside of the TIF district. The limit is 20% for all other districts. Monies spent on administrative expense count against this limit. This limit reduces the ability of TIF to pay for area-wide improvements and to use excess revenues to support other development sites;
- **Timing Constraints.** Timing factors must be considered in creating a TIF district. Establishing a district too far in advance of actual development may limit future use. Within 3 years from the date of certification, the city must undertake activity within the district. The statutory criteria of activity includes issuance of bonds in aid of a project, acquisition of property or the construction of public improvements. Without qualifying activity, no tax increment can be collected from the district. Within 4 years from the date of certification, the city or property owners must take qualifying actions to improve parcels within the district. All parcels not meeting these statutory criteria must be removed (knocked down) from the district. Upon future improvement, any parcel so removed may be returned to the district. After 5 years from the date of certification, the use of tax increment is subject to new restrictions. Generally, tax increment can only be used to

satisfy existing debt and contractual obligations. The geographic area of the TIF district can be reduced, but not enlarged, after 5 years from the date of certification.

#### **Tax Abatement**

Tax abatement acts like a simpler and less powerful version of tax increment financing. With TIF, the city controls the entire property tax revenue from new development. Under the abatement statute (Minnesota Statutes, Sections 469.1812 through 469.1815), the city, county and school district have independent authority to grant an abatement. Acting alone, the city cannot use tax abatement to generate the same amount of revenue as TIF. Nonetheless, tax abatement provides a valuable tool for the downtown initiatives. Certain projects may be of sufficient importance to encourage county and/or school district abatement and achieve additional funding capacity.

#### Uses

Abatement in Minnesota works more like a rebate than an abatement. The city (and other units abating taxes) adds a tax levy equal to the amount of taxes to be abated. The revenue from the abatement levy can be returned to the property owner or retained and used to finance development activities. Tax abatement can be used to finance the key redevelopment actions in the downtown; such as land acquisition, site preparation and public improvements.

Tax abatement is perhaps best suited as an incentive for reinvestment in existing property. While TIF

deals with only the value from new development, abatement can apply to both new and existing value. This power provides the means to encourage building rehabilitation and storefront improvements. The City could agree to abate all or part of the municipal share of taxes to encourage reinvestment tied to the plan.

The statute grants the authority to issue general obligation bonds supported by the collection of abated taxes. The proceeds of the bonds may be used to pay for (1) public improvements that benefit the property, (2) land acquisition, (3) reimbursement to the property owner for improvements to the property, and (4) the costs of issuing the bonds.

#### Limitations

State law places several important limitations on the use of tax abatement:

- In any year, the total taxes abated by a political subdivision may not exceed the greater of 5% of the current levy or \$100,000;
- If one political subdivision declines to abate, then the abatement levy can be made for a maximum of 15 years. If the city, county and school district all abate, then the maximum period drops to 10 years;
- Taxes cannot be abated for property located within a tax increment financing district.

#### **Special Assessments**

Public improvements are often financed using the power to levy special assessments (Minnesota Statutes Chapter 429). A special assessment is a means

for benefiting properties to pay for all or part of the costs associated with improvements, and to spread the impact over a period of years. From a city perspective, this authority provides an important means of raising capital.

#### Uses

Special assessments can be used to finance all of the public improvements needed to implement the Plan. Eligible improvements include streets, sidewalks, street lighting, streetscape, and parking.

Special assessments provide a means to borrow money to finance public improvements. Chapter 429 conveys the power to issue general obligation improvement bonds to finance the design and construction of public improvements. Important factors in the use of improvement bonds include:

- A minimum of 20% of the cost of the improvement must be assessed against benefited properties;
- Beyond the 20% threshold, any other legally available source of municipal revenue may be used to pay debt service on improvement bonds;
- Improvements bonds are not subject to any statutory debt limit;
- Improvement bonds may be issued without voter approval.

#### Limitations

Careful consideration must be given to setting the amount of the assessment. From a legal perspective, the amount of an assessment cannot exceed the benefit to property as measured by increased market

value. There are also practical considerations. Benefiting property owners should pay for a fair share of improvement costs without creating an economic disincentive to operating a business in downtown. Within this limitation, several factors will shape the amount of the assessment.

- The amount of the assessment must be 20% or more of the improvement cost to allow the issuance of bonds;
- Local improvement policies and/or decisions made on previous projects often create parameters for assessments. Likewise, assessment decisions should be made with consideration of the potential implications for future similar projects;
- The assessment must strike a balance between equity and feasibility. Properties that benefit from improvements should pay a fair share of the costs. The assessment must be affordable for both the property owner and the city. Reducing the assessment to the property requires the city to allocate other revenues to the project.

#### **Special Service District**

A special service district is a tool for financing the construction and maintenance of public improvements within a defined area. Minnesota Statutes Sections 428A.01 through 428A.10 govern the creation and use of special service districts. This legislation is currently scheduled to expire in 2009. A special service district provides a means to levy taxes (service charges) and fund improvements to and services for a commercial area.

## Uses

A special service district has several applications for Downtown Grand Rapids.

- The district can provide an alternative to special assessments as a means of financing some of the public improvements in Downtown. The service district approach avoids the benefits test imposed by special assessments. The test for the service district is that the amount of service charges imposed must be reasonably related to the special services provided. The costs of shared parking or streetscape improvements, for example, may be better spread across a district than through assessments to individual properties.
- A special service district can provide for maintenance of public improvements. Some of the improvements described in the Plan require a level of maintenance above the typical public improvement. Items such as banners and planted materials must be maintained and replaced at a faster rate than that expected for streets or utilities. A higher standard of cleaning and snow removal may be expected in Downtown. Without a special service district, these costs are typically borne through the General Fund of the City.
- A special service district provides a means of providing and operating the Downtown parking system.

Use of special service districts should be considered during the negotiation of a development agreement.

If the City is going to use a special service district, the City should seek agreement to a petition and waiver of veto and other objections related to the use of a special service district. The development agreement must address both the establishment of the service district and the levy of a service charge.

## Limitations

The use of a special service district is subject to some important constraints:

- The process to create a district and to levy taxes must be initiated by petition of property owners and is subject to owner veto. The use of a special service district requires a collaboration of property owners and the city. There are two separate steps in the process: (1) adoption of an ordinance establishing the service district and (2) adoption of a resolution imposing the service charges. Neither step can be initiated by the City; the City must receive a petition to undertake the processes to create the special service district and to impose service charges. At a minimum, the petition must be signed by owners representing 25% of the area that would be included in the district and 25% of the tax capacity subject to the service charge.
- The actions of the City Council to adopt the ordinance and the resolution are subject to veto of the property owners. To veto the ordinance or the resolution, objections must be filed with the City Clerk within 45 days of initial City Council action to approve. The objections must

exceed 35% of area, tax capacity, or individual/business organizations in the proposed district. The specific veto requirements depend on the nature of the service charge.

- The service charge applies solely to non-residential property. State law limits the application of a service charge only to property that is classified for property taxation and used for commercial, industrial, or public utility purposes, or is vacant land zoned or designated on a land use plan for commercial or industrial use. Other types of property may be part of the service district, but may not be subject to the service charge. A housing improvement area could be employed for owned housing elements of a redevelopment project.



# Appendix A - Parking Study

## Parking Study Area

A parking study was conducted at three on-street segments and three off street parking lots in Downtown Grand Rapids, Minnesota. The on-street segments consisted of

- 1st Avenue W between 2nd Street N and 3rd Street N.
- 1st Avenue W between 4th Street N and 5th Street N.
- 3rd Street W between 1st Avenue W and Pokegama Avenue.

The off-street parking lots consisted of:

- Lot 1: Parking Lot north of 3rd Street N between 1st Avenue W and Pokegama Avenue
- Lot 2: Lot south of 5th Street N between 1st Avenue W and Pokegama Avenue
- Lot 3: Mall Lot east of 3rd Avenue W between 4th Street N and 5th Street N

## Occupancy and Utilization Rates

Parking space usage data was collected for all the on-street and off-street spaces within the study area. The data was collected from 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM with a 60-minute frequency on a Tuesday (March) and Saturday (September). This data was used in the analysis to identify areas of high parking de-

mand. Occupancy and utilization rates were also determined for various on-street segments and off-street lots.

Parking utilization and occupancy rates were determined from the analysis for various facilities in the study area. Figure 1 illustrates this parking utilization data. The data shown in the table is the maximum occupancy that occurred during any 60-minute interval of the entire study period. Note that this maximum occupancy occurs in different 60-minute time intervals during the entire study period for various locations/lots.

### Weekday Parking Characteristics On-Street Parking

The segment of 1st Avenue W between 2nd Street N and 3rd Street N reached 100% occupancy at noon with all of the 63 spaces being completely occupied. This could be attributed to the fact that many restaurant and bakery establishments exist on 1st Avenue W. However, it was also observed

that during this period empty on-street parking spaces were available on the adjacent 2nd Street N. Observed spillover parking from this segment on 1st Avenue W to 2nd Street N was minimal, and vehicles were seen waiting on 1st Avenue W for availability of parking spaces.

The segment of 1st Avenue W between 4th Street N and 5th Street N contained 36 spaces and had a maximum observed occupancy of 75% at 1:00 PM. 27 spaces out of the 36 spaces were occupied during this time period. The minimum occupancy observed during the study period was about 50% with 18 spaces being occupied at 9:00 AM.

Parking data on 3rd Street W between 1st Avenue W and Pokegama Avenue was collected between 11:00 AM and 2:00 PM. This portion of 3rd Street W has 32 spaces with a maximum occupancy of 65% at 1:00 PM and a minimum occupancy of 45% at 2:00 PM during the study period. In other words, maximum parking occupancy observed in

On-Street					Off-Street			
Street	Between	Total Spaces	Weekday	Weekend	Lot	Total Spaces	Weekday	Weekend
1st Avenue W	(2nd St N - 3rd St N)	63	63	37	Lot 1	89	33	34
1st Avenue W	(4th St N - 5th St N)	36	27	33	Lot 2	53	26	32
3rd Street N	(1st Ave W - Pokegama)	32	20	15	Lot 3	122	66	76

Figure 1  
Parking Utilization (Observed Maximum)

this segment during the study period was about 21 spaces and minimum parking occupancy observed was about 14 spaces.

Figure 2 shows the on-street parking occupancy for the three segments studied.

### Off-Street Parking

Off street lot 1 is located north of 3rd Street N between 1st Avenue W and Pokegama Avenue and contained about 89 parking spaces. It was observed that this lot had a maximum occupancy of 38% of the spaces around 10:00 AM indicating that about 33 spaces were occupied during this time period. The minimum observed occupancy in this lot was around 15% (or about 13 spaces) occurring at 2:00 PM during the study period.

Lot 2 was located south of 5th Street N between 1st Avenue W and Pokegama Avenue and contained about 53 spaces. The maximum observed occupancy of this lot was about 49% (or about 26 spaces) occurring at 10:00 AM. Minimum observed occupancy was 6 spaces (or 11%) which occurred at 5:00 PM during the study period.

Lot 3 was the mall lot located east of 3rd Avenue W between 4th Street N and 5th Street N. It had a total of 122 spaces with a maximum observed occupancy of 55% (or about 66 spaces) during 1:00 PM on the study day. The minimum occupancy observed was about 15% or about 18 spaces at 9:00 AM on the study day.

Figures 2 and 3 indicate the observed occupancy

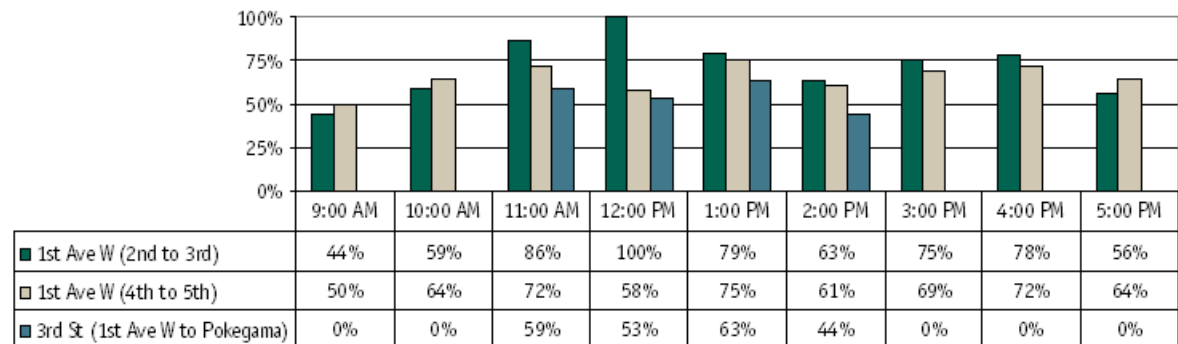


Figure 2  
Weekday Parking Occupancy - On Street

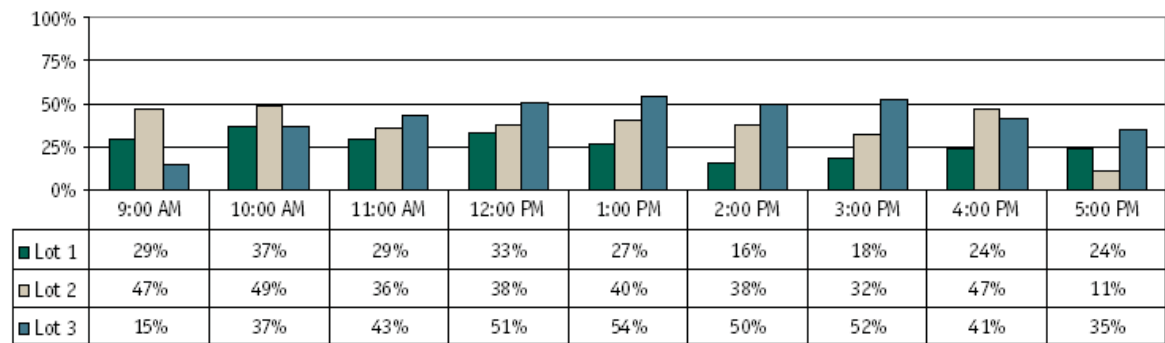


Figure 3  
Weekday Parking Occupancy - Off Street

data for the on-street and off-street parking facilities during the weekday (Tuesday) study period respectively.

### Weekend Parking Characteristics

A similar effort to derive weekend parking occupancy and duration was undertaken on a Saturday between the hours of 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM within Downtown Grand Rapids. Conducted with a 60

minute interval, the on-street and off-street parking spaces were observed to note the parking turnover characteristics.

### On-Street Parking

The segment of 1st Avenue W between 2nd Street N and 3rd Street N reached 59% occupancy at 1:00 PM with 37 of the 63 spaces being occupied. As noted during the weekday analysis, this highest

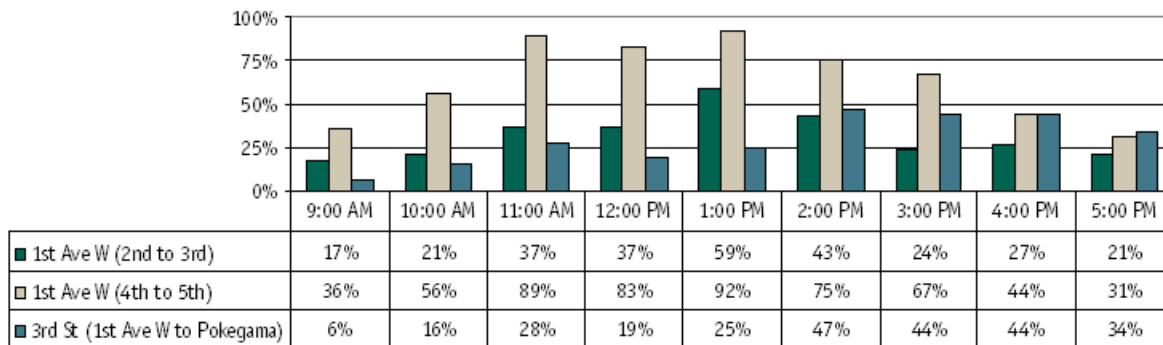


Figure 4  
Weekend Parking Occupancy - On Street

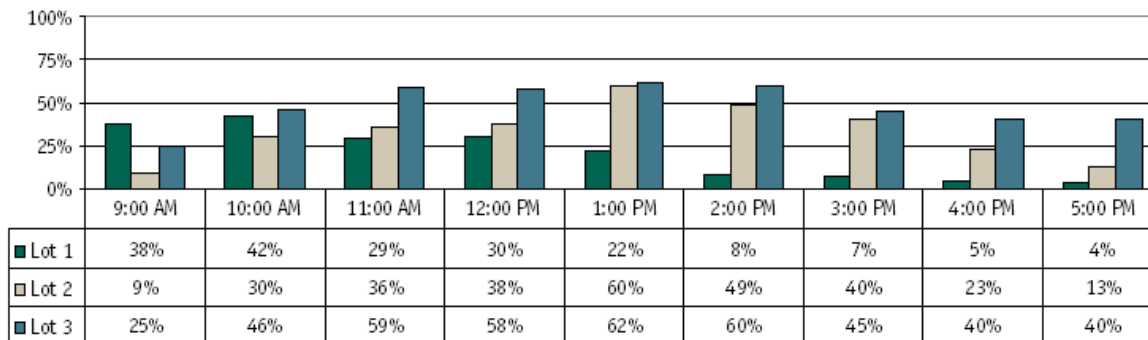


Figure 5  
Weekend Parking Occupancy - Off Street

occupancy percentage for this particular segment could be attributed to the fact that patrons are attracted to the restaurant and bakery establishments on 1st Avenue W for lunchtime dining.

The segment of 1st Avenue W between 4th Street N and 5th Street N had a maximum observed occupancy of about 92% at 1:00 PM. 33 spaces out of the 36 spaces were occupied during this time pe-

riod. It is important to note that the mid-day period from 11:00 AM until 1:00 PM had hourly occupancy above 80%. The minimum occupancy observed during the weekend study period was about 30% with 18 spaces being occupied at 5:00 PM. Many merchants close at 5:00 PM on the weekend thus being reflected in the lower number of parked vehicles along this segment of 1st Avenue.

The numbers of parked vehicles on 3rd Street W between 1st Avenue W and Pokegama Avenue was collected between 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM. This portion of 3rd Street W has 32 spaces with a maximum occupancy of 47% at 2:00 PM and a minimum occupancy of 6% at 9:00 AM during the study period. The maximum parking occupancy observed in this segment during the study period was about 15 spaces and minimum parking occupancy observed was 2 spaces. Many of the merchants along this segment do not open until 10:00 AM which accounts for the very low use at 9:00 AM. Figure 4 shows the percentage occupancy by hour for the on-street segments of parking studied.

#### Off-Street Parking

Off street parking lot 1 is located north of 3rd Street N between 1st Avenue W and Pokegama Avenue and contained about 89 parking spaces. It was observed that this lot had a maximum occupancy of 42% of the spaces around 10:00 AM indicating that about 37 spaces were occupied during this time period. The minimum observed occupancy in this lot was around 4% (or about 4 spaces) occurring at both 4:00 PM and 5:00 PM during the study period. It was observed that many parking in Lot 1 were patrons of the Silver Spoon restaurant, which accounts for the increased level of activity in the morning hours.

Lot 2 is located south of 5th Street N between 1st Avenue W and Pokegama Avenue and contained about 53 spaces. The maximum observed occupancy of this lot was about 60% (or about 32 spaces) oc-



curing at 1:00 PM. Minimum observed occupancy was 5 spaces (or 9%) which occurred at 9:00 AM during the study period. This lot primarily serves the Central School and the many boutiques housed within the restored building. The peak occupancy is reflective of the overall increase in activity in the Downtown area in the period around the noon hour. The morning low occupancy is attributable to the pre-opening of the shops in the Central School.

Lot 3 is the mall lot located east of 3rd Avenue W between 4th Street N and 5th Street N. It had a total of 122 spaces with a maximum observed occupancy of 62% (or about 76 spaces) during 1:00 PM on the weekend study day. The minimum occupancy observed was about 25% or about 31 spaces at 9:00 AM for the Saturday study parking. Figure 5 provides the hourly occupancy rates for the off-street parking lots studied.

Figures 4 and 5 indicate the observed occupancy data for the on-street and off-street parking facilities during the weekend (Saturday) study period respectively.

### **Duration of Parking Weekday**

Data collected within the study area was also used to estimate the duration of parking in various off street lots and on street segments.

Generally, it was observed that most of the on-street parking in the study segments was short term parking. A majority of the vehicles were parked for two hours or less along the various street segments as

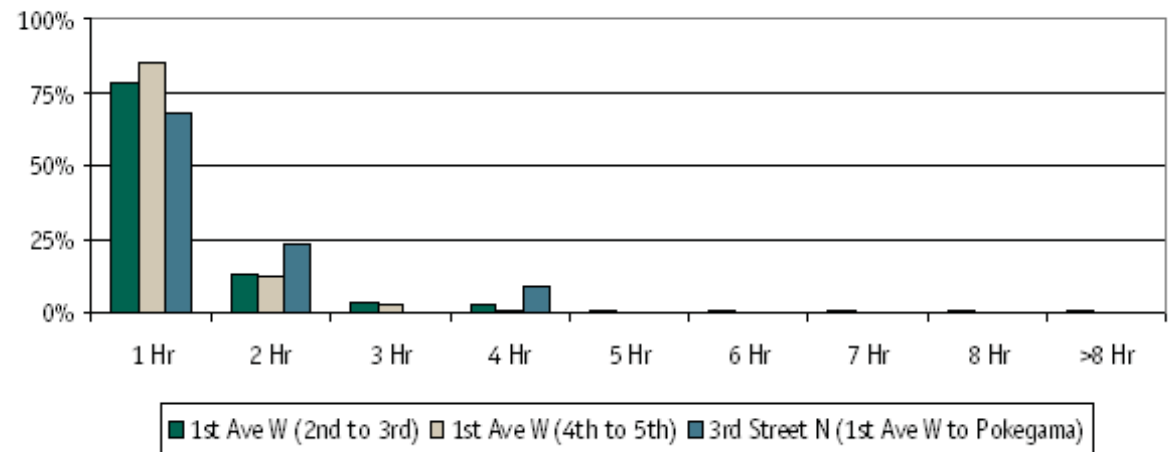


Figure 6  
Weekday Parking Duration - On Street

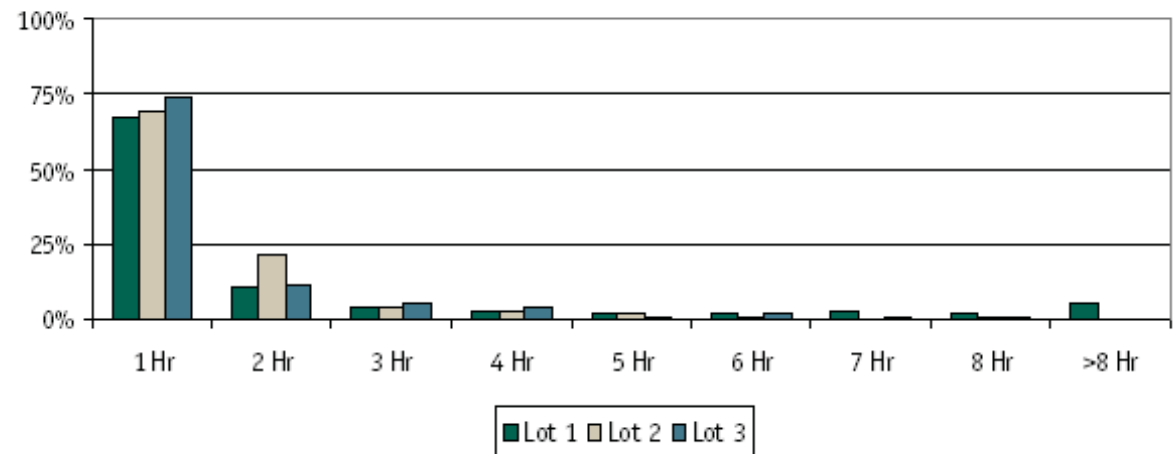


Figure 7  
Weekday Parking Duration - Off Street

indicated in Figure 6.

Data in Figure 6 indicates the duration of parking

for the various on street segments as a percentage of parked vehicles.

Off-Street parking in the study lots exhibited similar characteristics to on-street parking, but there existed a few locations with parking duration exceeding eight hours or more. This data is indicated in Figure 7 as a percentage of the parked vehicles.

In parking lot 1, about 67% of the parked vehicles were present for an hour or less and 11% of the parked vehicles were parked between 1-2 hours. Lot 1 had a few (about 10%) vehicles parked for more than 7 hours, which indicates some business owner/employee parking occurring in this lot.

Lot 2 exhibited similar characteristics with 69% parking for an hour or less and 21% vehicles parking between 1-2 hours.

Lot 3 had about 74% use of parking with a parking duration of one hour or less and 12% parking with duration of 1-2 hours.

### Weekend

It was observed that a majority of the on-street parking along the study segments was short term parking. The segments studied had a posted parking restriction of two hours. The analysis of the duration periods for two of the three segments of on-street parking revealed that between 96-99% of the parkers were complying with the two hour restriction

Data in Figure 8 indicates the duration of parking for various on-street segments as a percentage of parked vehicles.

Off-Street parking in the study lots exhibited simi-

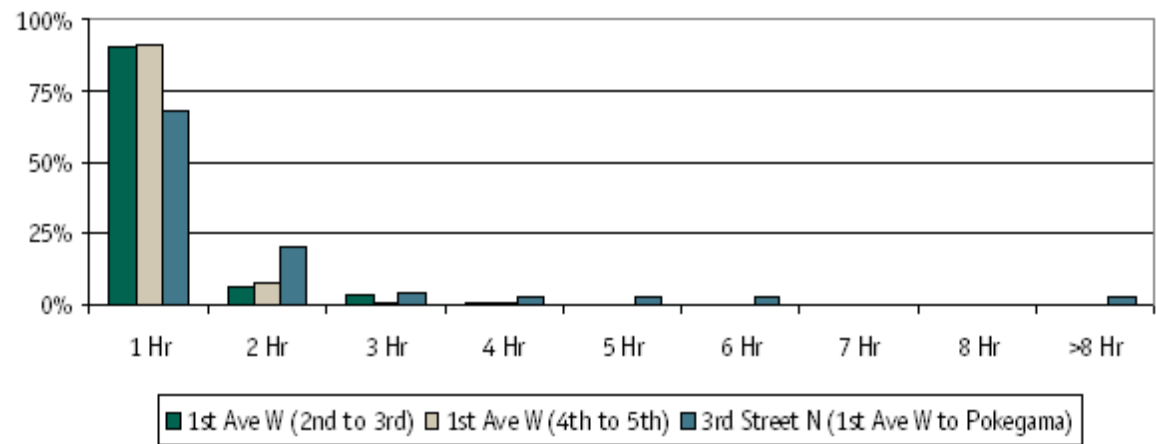


Figure 8  
Weekend Parking Duration - On Street

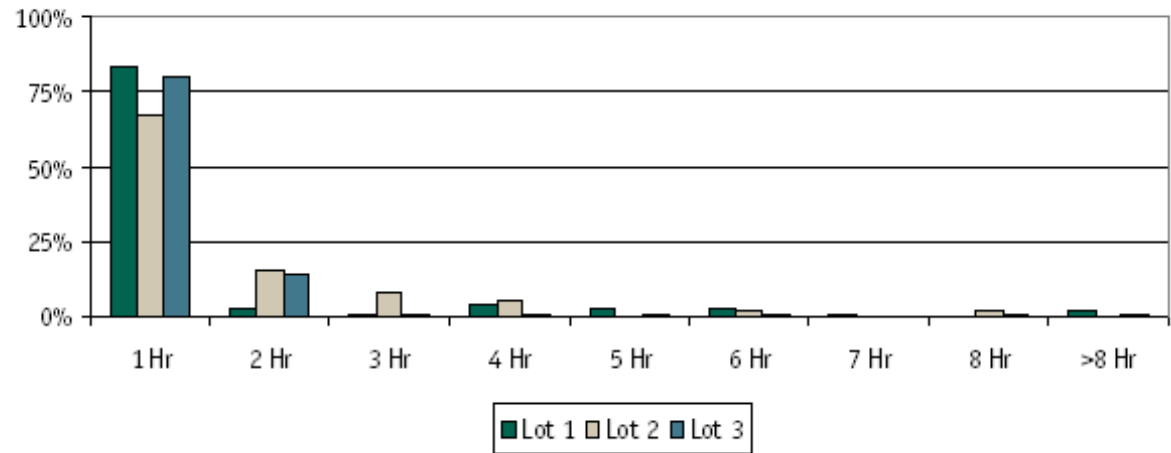


Figure 9  
Weekend Parking Duration - Off Street

lar characteristics to on-street parking, but there existed a few locations with parking duration exceeding eight hours or more. This data is indicated

in Figure 10 as a percentage of the parked vehicles. It should be noted that Lot 1 has a row of restricted permit parking only spaces, which generally account

for the longer duration parked vehicles.

Lot 2, which serves the Central School, has a restriction of 2 hours with a compliance of about 82%. The observation of several vehicles that were present in the lot during the weekday and weekend parking studies promotes a belief that the lot is being used by some employees of shops within the Central School.

Lot 3, the mall parking facility, has a parking restriction of four hours. The analysis of the parking duration data for Lot 3 shows that approximately 96% of the parked vehicles are in compliance with the 4 hour restriction.

### Recreational Vehicle / Trailer Towing Vehicle Parking

The City of Grand Rapids has provided on-street parking spaces for recreational vehicles or boat trailer parking while patrons visit Downtown Grand Rapids. The on-street spaces are located along 5th Street, just north of the mall parking lot. There are small wayfinding guide signs at the intersection of TH 169 and TH 2 directing drivers of RVs and boat towing vehicles (should also denote snowmobile trailers for winter parking conditions) in the general direction of the parking supply. The spaces are clearly marked as restricted for RV use, however, at no time during the parking surveys were RV or boat trailers present. The spaces remained unoccupied.

Alternatively, it appeared that tow rigs were parked

where drivers could find off-street locations where two end to end spaces could be utilized. The photograph below shows a truck/boat trailer rig in the mall parking lot during the 9:00 AM hour on Saturday.



Similarly, an example of a truck/boat trailer rig parking across multiple diagonal on-street spaces was observed on 1st Avenue between 4th Street W and 5th Street W. Fortunately, the driver only stopped momentarily for a quick errand Downtown. This was captured during the 9:00 AM hour of the weekend parking study.



The truck/trailer parking behaviors are quite random and unpredictable. Another example of a

truck/trailer combination violating parking restrictions i.e., parked across multiple reserved spaces in the Lot 1 off-street parking area.



While each of these observed examples clearly violated the intended parking usage, they were found only during the initial hour of the parking study in the weekend observations. Parking occupancy for the lots where each of these examples was observed was well below 50% and no real use conflict was present.

### User/Stakeholder Survey

MMA contacted the stakeholders and interested individuals in the list provided by the City of Grand Rapids. Of the sixteen individuals listed, telephone contact was made with fifteen, and of these, thirteen surveys were conducted and completed. Two individuals were left with voice messages and failed to return the calls. The 81% completed response to the survey was considered a valid sampling of Downtown interests. Many of the contacted individuals have been participating on the Steering Committee for this planning effort.



The parking questionnaire is provided later in this section.

Many responses were similar as most of the stakeholders worked or owned businesses in Downtown Grand Rapids. Because their work location was in Downtown, the majority of respondents stated that ‘work’ was the main purpose for visiting Downtown. The typical arrival time for those workers was between 7:00 AM and 9:00 AM., with ten respondents and three noting that the time of the work trip occurred at other times of the day. All but one respondent replied that they drive to access Downtown.

When queried about where they parked Downtown, nine respondents mentioned private off-street lots and two were parking in public off-street lots and one had a reserved public space (permit parking). The responses to the question regarding the duration of parking Downtown was quite expected, eight hours or more, with many being business owners. There was one response for one hour and one for four hours.

A question was asked about how convenient respondents felt the existing parking situation is in Downtown Grand Rapids. It was noted that several stated that this involves one’s perspective, whether as a business owner with onsite parking or as an employee or even as a visitor. Several mentioned that it can be difficult to find a ‘convenient’ parking space during the noon hour on 1st Avenue between 2nd Street and 3rd Street. It was explained that

convenient means no more than about a half-block walk distance from one’s desired destination. Of the twelve respondents that answered this question, five said that parking is ‘very convenient’, five stated that it is ‘somewhat convenient’, and two said that parking is ‘not very convenient’.

An optional, open-ended question asking for suggestions on how to improve parking in Downtown Grand Rapids was provided. The following suggestions have been summarized from the responses:

- Provide structured parking at the Central Square Mall parking lot, although there were concerns about blocking visibility and maneuvering difficulties for boats and trailers. (Note that boat trailer parking does occur early in the mornings.)
- Provide parking east of 3rd Avenue E. for employees to accommodate new development.
- More long-term employee parking (suggested by four respondents).
- More frequent and more strict enforcement (suggested by four respondents).
- More employee permit parking, try to get employees to not occupy spaces on-street Downtown so that patrons retain easy, convenient access to businesses.

During the telephone survey the participants were asked about employee parking and whether specific policies were in place directing parking practices. Most responded that employees were directed to park away from the business, in the public lots or

on-street outside the Central Business core. Several respondents noted that they provided annual parking permits for employees.

### **Form of Parking Survey**

1. What is your purpose for visiting Downtown Grand Rapids?  
 Shop    Restaurant    Work  
 Personal Business    Recreation  
 Multiple Purposes (explain) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_
2. What time did you arrive? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How did you get to Downtown?  
 Drive    Carpool    Walk/Bike
4. If you drove, where did you park?  
 On-street    Off-street lot (public)  
 Off-street lot (private)  
 Reserved space (public)
5. How long is your visit Downtown?  
 Less than 1 hour    1 to 2 hours  
 4 hours    8 hours or more
6. How convenient is parking Downtown Grand Rapids?  
 Very Convenient    Somewhat Convenient  
 Not Very Convenient
7. Please provide any suggestions for improving parking in Downtown Grand Rapids.