

Annandale DOWNTOWN PLAN

Adopted May 7, 2018



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Real People. Real Solutions.



part 1
BACKGROUND & PURPOSE



The City of Annandale recognizes the City's Downtown area as an important cultural, historic, and economic asset to the community. The City's Downtown is a thriving commercial center located at the intersection of State Highways 55 and 24. A key principle of the City is to ensure that the Downtown remains vibrant and successful while providing a healthy business environment. Therefore, the City of Annandale developed this plan to guide future public and private investment in Downtown Annandale.

MnDOT has a resurface and ADA improvement project planned for Trunk Highway (TH) 24 in 2020. Oak Avenue, which is the central street within the City's Downtown, is also TH 24. This project extends from Highway 55 to north of Poplar Avenue, which would include the section of Oak Avenue through the Downtown. The City has recognized a unique opportunity to develop a Downtown Plan and vision in order to coordinate community driven improvements with MnDOT's project. MnDOT's project includes a rebuild of the City's sidewalks along Oak Avenue with improvements related to accessibility requirements which will impact the existing streetscape. This project is the key catalyst to the City establishing this set of goals and policies for the Downtown.



Annandale is a community with a population of approximately 3,290 located 45 minutes northwest of the Twin Cities and 25 minutes south of St. Cloud. The city is known for its small town atmosphere, viable business environment, and abundance of lakes. Annandale has a notable thriving and intact Downtown. Annandale's Downtown is centered on TH 24 between Highway 55 and Birch Street. The strength of the Downtown's built environment comes from its existing building patterns which emphasize pedestrian accessibility, convenient businesses access to curbside parking, and close proximity to one another.

Annandale's Downtown is currently known for its central canopy district which includes most of the downtown buildings. The distinguishing feature of this district is the presence of a system of connected wooden canopies that provide cover to the primary sidewalk paths. The canopy system was installed in the late 1970s with inspiration from the community's pioneer beginnings and heritage.

At this time, Annandale is revisiting whether it wants to continue investment in the canopy system, particularly as it currently needs significant reinvestment to remain safe and attractive.

The general purpose and intent of this plan is to:

- **Guide future investment in downtown Annandale**
- **Promote a common vision based on shared community values and priorities**
- **Establish a framework for future decision making**
- **Promote the importance of the Downtown**
- **Create a comprehensive, coordinated effort for preservation and improvement**
- **Ensure proper public investment in necessary infrastructure**
- **Improve business environment through visual appearance, review of regulations, and provision of needed services**
- **Maintain areas of strength, improve areas of weakness**
- **Strengthen existing businesses and attract new businesses that fit**
- **Improve parking, visibility, and accessibility**
- **Coordinate public and private efforts to maximize efficiency**

Downtowns are Important

Historic downtowns, like Annandale's, are cultural and historic centers for their communities. Downtowns provide places of community gathering and economic opportunity. Downtowns have a compact and efficient development pattern that provides a greater amount of activity in a smaller area. This pattern reflects years of substantial investment in infrastructure and public services. Traditional downtowns are typically pedestrian friendly mixed use districts with retail, offices, governmental facilities, and other key community components.

Downtowns provide opportunities for a wide range of businesses. These are the places where start-up businesses are located next to established traffic generators that can assist in bringing success to both. Traditional downtowns commonly feature independent businesses owned and operated by key community members.

Downtowns provide a range of uses greater than any other place in a city. It serves as a place for gathering, employment, shopping, housing, dining, and entertainment. These multiple functions attract a greater number of visitors to the Downtown which highlights the importance of preserving this key asset.

Healthy downtowns have a distinct visual identity and sense of place.



Downtown Annandale, 1903

Planning Process

In order to develop this plan, the City sought input from a steering committee, elected official, and the general public.

The City’s Downtown Steering Committee consisting of business owners, Council members, and residents provided key input to the City regarding Downtown issues. This group was instrumental in evaluating and providing input for this plan. The Committee had several meetings, researched options, and made recommendations which are represented in this document.

Throughout this process, the City sought input from the public. The City held a community open house where residents and Downtown business owners were invited to give input on their impression of downtown today and their vision going forward. This input was very important and valuable to assist in the creation of the vision, goals, and policies found in this plan.



Downtown Vision

Downtown Annandale is a unique asset that reflects the character of the community. It reinforces the concept of the City as a small town with contemporary charm rooted in its cultural heritage. It is a traditional downtown that has a healthy business environment with a good mix of complementary uses. The primary goal is to preserve these positives while making necessary improvements.

The potential for improvements are present. The City wishes to capitalize on the MnDOT TH 24 project in order to improve the appearance of the Oak Avenue corridor. This project will provide an opportunity to re-evaluate components of the public realm including the width and design of the street and sidewalks. This will also present the City with the ability to ensure the architecture and design of the Downtown buildings and streetscape continue to be reflective of the City's character. The City will also ensure that the City will maintain active involvement in the improvement of access and parking for uses within the Downtown.

In summary, Annandale strives to have a Downtown that is premier, iconic, and a destination as well as a healthy environment for business activity.

The general action statement for the City regarding the Downtown is:

“The City of Annandale seeks to make improvements to the Downtown to more effectively reflect the vision and ensure the continuation, preservation, and improvement of this important feature of the City.”

Downtown Plan Vision Statement

“Downtown Annandale is a key community asset with an identifiable character reflective of the City’s cultural heritage with a successful business environment.”

Principal Goals

To elaborate on the vision and action statements, the following principal goals were developed. These are the primary goals from which the City's policies towards the Downtown District will be derived. These goals were developed from the input of the public and the Steering Committee. These principal goals are:

Downtown Theme

The Downtown is the focal point of the community. The City currently has an active, coordinated theme for the Downtown with the canopy system. This canopy system assists in creating a theme that highlights the Downtown as the focal point. Having a coordinated, unifying theme for the Downtown is valued, as it creates a coordinated theme and supports Downtown by creating a distinctive identity, unique sense of place, and community pride - while setting the stage for private investment. The current theme should either be continued or adapted to a modernized version works for Downtown business and property owners.

Land Use

Ensure land use and development policies are appropriate and assist in carrying out the City's vision. The City needs to evaluate the land use regulations for the Downtown to ensure the rules and processes are appropriate, match the coordinated theme, and help establish a business-friendly environment. Permitted uses should be compatible with the existing uses in the Downtown and uses that generate additional traffic and activity should be encouraged.

Streetscape & Access

Improve the appearance of the streetscape and improve access. The City desires to improve the appearance of the public realm and ensure that the sidewalk system is safe, attractive, and accessible for all visitors to the Downtown. Also, the City seeks to improve the appearance of key access points to the Downtown and increase the district's visibility.

Parking

Ensure adequate parking is available. The City seeks to ensure that adequate parking is available in the Downtown for today and into the future. The City also desires to have parking in appropriate places both for the convenience of visitors and the preservation of the character of the district.

Architecture & Design

Establish architectural guidelines for buildings. Establishing architectural guidelines will assist in preserving the character of the Downtown by guiding improvements to buildings and discouraging incompatible future construction. It will help ensure that the community character will continue into the future.



part 2
DOWNTOWN THEME



Downtown Annandale is the focal point of the City with a distinct character. The coordinated theme of the Downtown is one of its most unique features. The canopy system provides a shared theme throughout the Downtown. Many area downtowns have a variety of awnings, canopies, covered walkways, or open sidewalks. The unifying theme for the Downtown is valued and this concept is intended to be preserved. While the concept of a theme for the Downtown is intended to be kept, the theme may have a different format than the current canopy system.



Downtown Annandale, 1950's



Downtown Annandale, 1960's

Creating a Theme

The current unifying theme of the Downtown Core is important in creating the great sense of place found in Downtown Annandale. While it is true that the location on Highways 24 and 55 assists in creating a healthier district, the coordinated theme helps make Downtown stand apart. The historic character of many of the buildings, the diversity of uses, and the many independent business also lend a hand and should also be preserved. However, through this process a priority was identified of maintaining a theme and unique identity for the Downtown.

Annandale is a City with a proud cultural heritage. The current theme is reflective of the community's history. Any possible future theme should also be rooted in the City's history. Streetscape elements and building design will also need to be utilized in this effort. Theme elements should be consistent throughout the Downtown through design and materials.

Part of the current theme of the Downtown is the healthy business environment. To maintain and nurture this environment, it is important to maximize usable space, accessibility, and visibility. Creating usable spaces, increasing accessibility for all users, and helping businesses by allowing for adequate and proper signage are important.

History of Downtown Annandale

Annandale was founded in the 1880's. The earliest Downtown buildings had functioning wooden canopies or balconies over the front that were integral to providing access to many of the second levels of the buildings. These architectural features had support posts down into the covered sidewalk below.

Over time, the canopies were replaced largely by awnings. The awnings also served a functional purpose. Oak Avenue is a north-south street meaning the sun would shine into the store windows in either the morning or afternoon. The awnings provided needed shade.

This awning system generally persisted through the 1960's or so or until many of the businesses installed air conditioning units. Not all buildings had awnings and most of the awnings were functioning and raised or lowered at necessary times. In the 1950's and 1960's many of the businesses had projecting signs over the awnings to be identified by passing traffic.





Current Canopy System

In the late 1970's, the City established the current wooden canopy system. The canopies were erected as a public project and permitted to partially encroach into the right-of-way. This provided a covered walkway that was inspired by the appearance of the original downtown buildings and the City's pioneer heritage. The City felt it was important to honor the heritage of the community, and reintroduce the canopy system that set the downtown apart from other cities. The portion of the right-of-way covered by the canopy, in most cases, extends about 8 feet from the building face. The covered right-of-way is primarily the jurisdiction of the City while the uncovered sidewalk and street surface are under the jurisdiction of the State of Minnesota.

Canopy Issues

While the canopies on downtown buildings provide a unique and memorable atmosphere in Annandale, several concerns with the canopies have been raised. These issues include:

- Inconsistent canopy design and material use
- Narrow pedestrian access route in some locations under the canopies
- Obstacles blocking the pedestrian access route (not ADA compliant)
- Difficult to see business signs or duplicative signage (under canopy and above)
- Un-useable space between canopy posts and street
- Some canopy posts/stairways located in the MnDOT right-of-way
- Lack of proper maintenance and related safety concerns

The proposed MnDOT street project will result in improvements to the sidewalk system. These improvements require a minimum five foot wide, ADA compliant sidewalk with a slope of less than 2%. The target cross slope for the sidewalks is identified by MnDOT to be 1.5% from the back of curb to the back of walk. The existing sidewalk along Oak Avenue has cross slopes consistently greater than 2% and up to 6% through the Downtown Core.

Based on existing elevations of the businesses and the elevations of the street, to preserve the portion of the right-of-way under the canopies and including the canopy posts would result in two sidewalks at different levels in many locations. If the posts were not in the sidewalk, it would be far easier and less costly to construct a functioning unified sidewalk that would provide access to the businesses.

In certain locations, the building placement creates less space between the curb and the front of the building. This is especially true near the southwest corner of Chestnut Street and Oak Avenue. In some locations canopy posts have limited space to the curb and in others the distance between the building and the posts is narrow.



Street amenities inside or outside canopy posts creates obstacles.

Lack of ADA clearance.



Varying widths between building face and canopy posts, 8 feet to less than 4 foot.

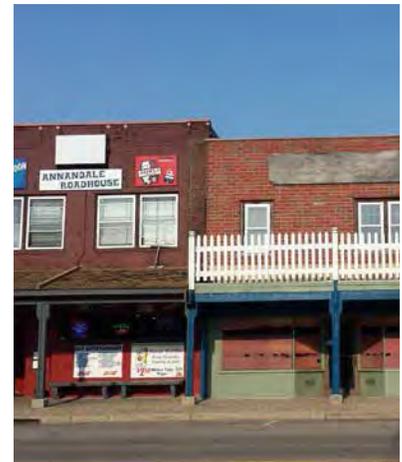
Maintenance is also an issue for the canopy system. The system is interconnected between buildings. This means that if one building owner neglects the canopy, it may harm an adjacent property owner's canopy. Many of the canopies are now about 40 years old, and in a few instances, are showing their age and in need of significant repairs. The sidewalk and street project will necessitate an evaluation of these structures.

Additionally, it is important to note that the canopies are constructed over public sidewalks. The standards (and liabilities) for such construction are higher today than what was in place in the late 1970's. To ensure proper safety measures are taken, such a structure today would likely require more detailed engineered building plans.

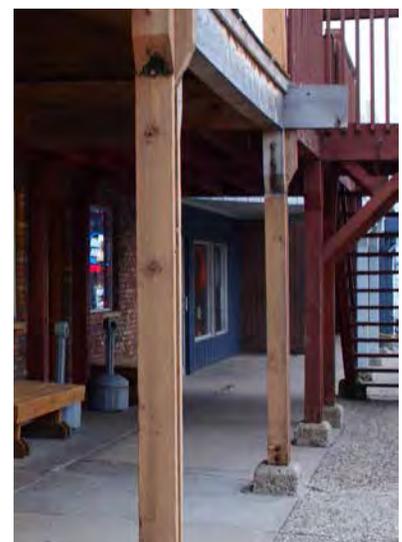
Concern has been expressed that taking down the canopies could result in damage to the buildings. Other cities that have removed canopy systems were contacted. Representatives from Davison, Michigan and Blue Earth, Minnesota both stated that there were only minor cosmetic repairs necessary. There are valid concerns, though, related to the appearance of the buildings behind the canopies should they be removed.



Canopy in need of repair



Unusable space outside canopy posts



Stairs in MnDOT right-of-way to be removed with this project

Options Evaluated

Due to the issues with the canopy system, evaluation of several options for a Downtown theme were evaluated as part of this process. The options evaluated were:



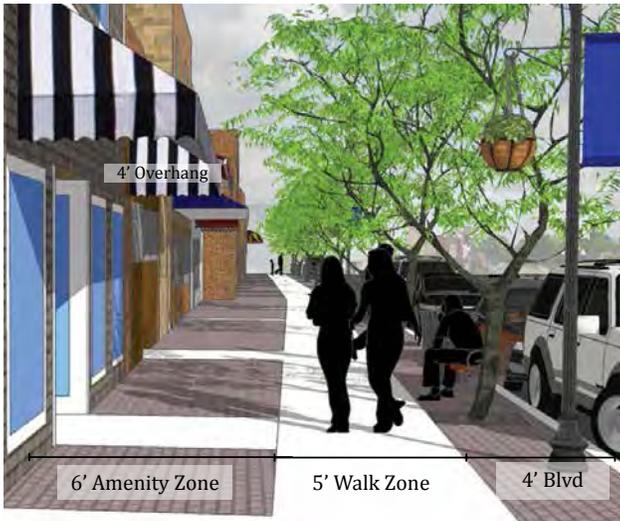
Update Existing Canopies

This option would attempt to preserve the existing canopy system, as much as feasible, and make updates when necessary. The issues with this concept were discussed above, to a degree. The biggest problems would be the potential for the dual sidewalk system and the fact that stabilizing or protecting the canopies through the construction process could be complex and expensive. This option would not necessarily impact the storefronts and would keep the current theme intact. Some of the existing canopies are in poor shape and may need to be reconstructed.



Construct a New Canopy System

A new canopy system could be constructed and engineered to modern standards. This could result in there being fewer posts but would also hinder redevelopment as the system would be uniform across all buildings. This option would likely be more costly than others as it would be labor intensive.



Replace Canopies with Awning System

This option would be a return to the system that replaced the original canopies in the mid-1900's, keeping with a historic theme. It would also allow for building owners to have their own design and independent structures. It would create a unique look, as it is rare for a City to have awnings on all buildings. This option would provide less coverage over the sidewalk, but would also be less expensive than canopies.



Use the New Streetscape to Create Theme, Have Open Sidewalk

This would result in no attachments to the building and would rely upon the streetscape improvements to create the theme for the Downtown. This would result in no encroachments into the right-of-way and allow for the greatest number of amenities.

At the public open house, these options were presented. The general sentiment of the public was that a better alternative to the current canopy system should be explored. Of the potential options presented, an awning system was the most popular amongst the general public and the steering committee.

Preferred Option: Replace Canopies with Awning System

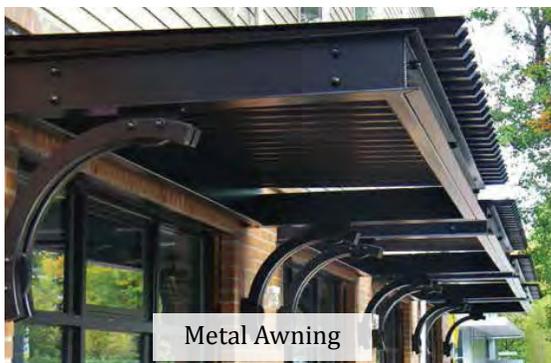
The preferred option explored for the Downtown theme is to replace the wooden canopy system with awnings. All canopies would be replaced with new awnings. To maintain a historical connection, traditional fabric awnings would be installed in place of canopy, but the city could consider alternative types in some cases.

- Maintains a theme with a historical connection
- Maintains a unique, coordinated theme for all buildings
- Allows for the sidewalk system to be unified
- Promotes greater accessibility (fewer obstructions in the right-of-way)
- Allows for greater utilization of the sidewalk for public and private amenities

As part of the preferred option, noting the modifications necessary in removing the canopy structures and the associated post, there will need to be specific, individual review of the buildings to assess current conditions and suitability of replacement awning. As the City participated in the design and installation of the canopy system, this may be a wise approach for transitioning into a new system.

Business signage should also be consistent with the general theme of the Downtown. Projecting signs and historic themed wall signs made of durable materials should be encouraged.

A façade improvement program may also be necessary to help fund modifications. Many area cities establish such funds and allow for financial assistance for business owners to install awnings and signage, as well as make building appearance improvements consistent with adopted guidelines.



Preferred Option: Replace Canopies with Awning System



Downtown Plan New Awning Concept

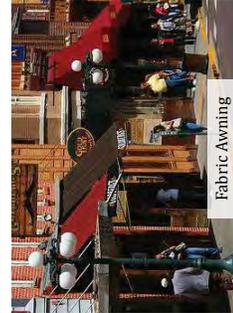
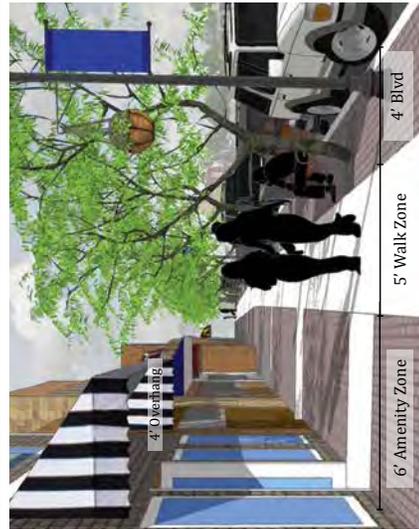


Pros

- ✓ Allows for complete sidewalk reconstruction with wider path
- ✓ Room for additional streetscape improvements
- ✓ Provides some shelter for pedestrians
- ✓ Less expensive and easier to maintain than canopies
- ✓ Easier for businesses to customize look

Cons

- ✗ Potentially less shelter than canopies
- ✗ Will need to determine design standards for awnings



Policies Related to Downtown Theme:

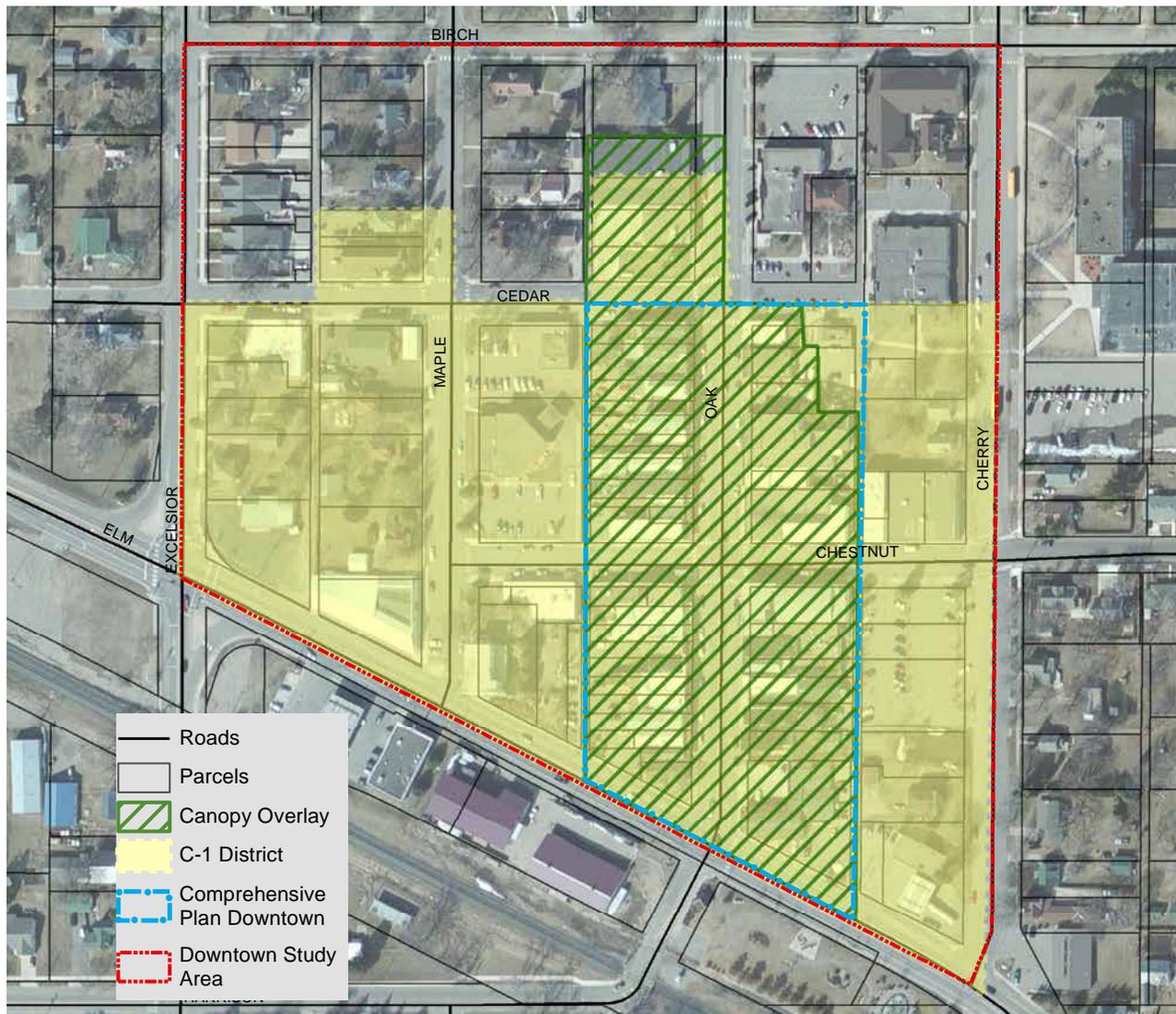
- **Maintain a theme with a historical connection**
- **Have a unique, coordinated theme for the front of the buildings and streetscape**
- **Maximize space for amenities by removing obstacles from the sidewalk**
- **Allow for greater pedestrian accessibility to the buildings**
- **Ensure any encroachments into public right-of-ways are safe**
- **Create more of an independent system for building owners through the awnings and signs**
- **Assist in making necessary building façade improvements**
- **Create a unifying streetscape with a uniform sidewalk design and similar amenities throughout the Downtown**



Land Use policies and regulations need to be evaluated to ensure that the City is promoting the desired improvements to the Downtown while also encouraging a successful business environment. The right kind of development can increase activity in and around the Downtown, which can assist in improving the economic situation.

Where is the Downtown?

Everybody knows generally where the Downtown is, but the City has different definitions of the “Downtown,” “Central Business District,” and the “Canopy District.” As part of the planning process, it is important to identify the area being referred to as the Downtown.



Downtown Existing Land Use



The Downtown Area in the Zoning Ordinance

In the Zoning Ordinance, there is the C-1, Central Business District. This District's stated purpose is "to encourage the continuation of a viable downtown area by allowing retail, service, office and entertainment facilities as well as public and semi-public uses. In addition, accessory residential uses shall be allowed above the commercial areas." The C-1 District states that there are no required setbacks, which allows for the more dense, traditional downtown development. However, for properties that are rezoned to C-1 after the year 2000, it is stated that the setbacks shall follow requirements of the C-2, Downtown Fringe District. This district is found mostly along Highway 55 and requires setbacks of 20 feet to right-of-way and rear lot lines, 50 feet to residential districts, and side yard setbacks of ½ of the building height.

The Zoning Ordinance also references a "Canopy District" which is defined as "Oak Avenue from Highway 55 north to Cedar Street, including the alleys, and including any other businesses/buildings in the C-1 District that have canopies." The purpose of the Canopy District is stated as:

1. To preserve the unique appearance of the downtown Annandale Canopy District, to promote business and encourage tourism.
2. To protect the investment that has been made in the present canopy system by the City and the downtown property owners.
3. To provide for a covered walkway system that makes downtown Annandale a pleasant and comfortable place to visit.

The following maintenance standards are found in the Zoning Ordinance:

1. Canopies must be stained and/or sealed by August 31 of each even numbered year. Such staining must be done to maintain a natural cedar look and must conform to existing tones, or such alternative colors approved by the City Council. Stain specifications call for use of Olympic 716 semi-transparent and Cedar Solid in a 50/50 ratio (oil base) or a product that is equal or better.
2. Approved alternative color choices shall be on file at City Hall. No canopy may have more than two colors.
3. To facilitate staining and major repair and/or reconstruction, the City may call for and award bids or quotes, with the costs billed back to the property owners on the basis of running feet and the type of canopy design.
4. All canopies must be sealed and maintained to prevent leaks.
5. Building permits must be obtained before canopies are replaced or reconstructed.

Regulations related to new construction are stated, as follows:

1. All new construction in the Canopy district must blend in with the existing "Turn of the Century Prairie Motif."
2. Canopies must be constructed of cedar.
3. Buildings shall be sided and faced and/or painted in such a way as to blend in with this motif. The use of ornamental brick, arches, rough textured siding and similar design characteristics should be encouraged.
4. All new buildings in the canopy district shall include canopies which conform to one of the existing canopy designs.

The required maintenance has proven to be difficult to enforce. Not every canopy has had the required annual maintenance done. Some canopies have not followed the requirements related to color. Violations of these standards are not easily rectified. This may be more easily accomplished through a property maintenance code rather than via zoning.

The regulations mention a “Turn of the Century Prairie Motif” which is not a clearly defined architectural style. This terminology could mean different concepts to different people. As part of this process, it would be appropriate to define key architectural standards.

Since the City’s Zoning Ordinance makes reference to the canopies and their maintenance directly, amendments will be necessary.

The Downtown Area in the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan identifies certain areas of the City as being “commercial.” No distinction is made between downtown or highway commercial on the land use map. Two blocks facing Oak Avenue from Highway 55 to Cedar Street are identified as a commercial land use. The businesses north of Cedar Street and the businesses not fronting on Oak Avenue are designated as a residential land use on the future land use map.

In the text of the Comprehensive Plan, the “Central Canopy District” is identified. The stated objective of this district is: “the traditional Canopy District in Annandale provides for a retail niche within the area while providing the economic feasibility necessary to sustain future commercial opportunities.” The following policies are itemized:

1. Encourage land use arrangements which improve the retail mix and maximize the land use/parking efficiencies.
2. Establish parking areas that function in an orderly manner, minimizing vehicular circulation and maximizing accessibility to major activity areas.
3. Establish a pedestrian circulation system within the Canopy District which connects major economic and recreational activity areas to residential neighborhoods.
4. Promote events and activities for social interaction, community pride, and identity.

The City should make amendments to the Comprehensive Plan to accurately depict the area intended to be the Downtown.

The Downtown Study Area

For the purposes of this plan, an area to be defined as the “Downtown” has been identified and is referenced as the “Downtown Study Area.” What is now referred to as the “Canopy District” is the centerpiece and focal point of this area, and in this plan is referred to as the “Downtown Commercial Core.” The full study area, however, the boundaries of the district are from Excelsior Avenue to Cherry Avenue and from Birch Street to Highway 55. This includes all blocks that have businesses and includes businesses and higher density residential uses that front on the east side of Excelsior Avenue, which is a County Road with higher levels of traffic. The boundaries of this District will allow for expansion of the Commercial uses and are logically the area which will contain the Downtown on-street parking.



Main Street, Late 19th Century

Linear downtowns can find greater strength by expanding in width. This allows for more commercial areas on the supporting streets that lead into the core. This also leads to more street space for parking. For example, the Comprehensive Plan defines the Downtown as just a majority of the Canopy District. This omits commercial areas that are already in place adjacent to the Canopy District. If all uses around this area were to become single family, this could create land use conflicts. Single family neighborhoods are not ideal places for commercial on-street parking and would likely be incompatible with surface parking lots. By increasing the width of the Downtown Area, transitional commercial and mixed residential areas could be established.

By tying the Downtown to another higher volume street (Excelsior Avenue), it creates the ability for more connections and access points drawing people into the Downtown. This would have three of the highest volume thoroughfares in the City bordering on or within the Downtown.

Pedestrian ways are key throughout the Downtown. Where possible all streets should have sidewalks to provide maximum access throughout the district. Currently, there are gaps in the sidewalk system within the Downtown area. Future streetscape elements should not be confined simply to Oak Avenue but rather used to define all of the Downtown.

Downtown Subdistricts

To better specify the policies towards land uses within the Downtown, three subdistricts are proposed: Commercial Core, Commercial Periphery, and Downtown Residential. The following pages describe these three subdistricts.

Commercial Core

The Commercial Core is the primary commercial district along Oak Avenue between Highway 55 and north to the Cedar Street intersection. This is the current area within the Canopy District. This area is the centerpiece of the Downtown and has the greatest intensity of uses and also the greatest amount of character. The intensity of uses is highlighted by the primarily enclosed street with building frontages along the street. The character is defined by not only the theme and intensity but also the entrepreneurial spirit of the small businesses, restaurants, and stores. The intent of this subdistrict is to preserve this intensity and character as much as possible.

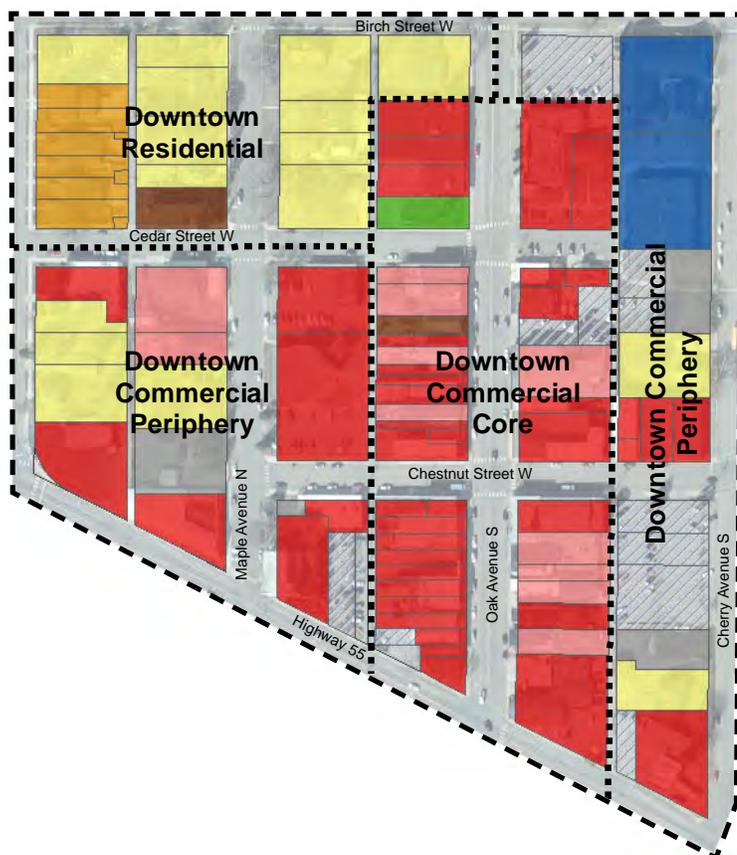
The zero lot line development pattern within this area should continue and the continuous retail frontage should be maintained. The pattern of smaller storefronts should continue and “big footprint” businesses with limited entry points discouraged to avoid breaks in the activity. New businesses that generate traffic and activity should be encouraged in this area. Parking areas should be focused on the outside of the blocks instead of on Oak Avenue.

The ground level of all buildings within the Core should have a commercial use. The upper levels of buildings may have residential uses but also offices and other commercial uses that are appropriate. Upper level residential

uses need to have parking provided in the rear as to not interfere with the customer parking on Oak Avenue or in the public lots. The maximum building height in the C-1 District is currently 50 feet. This would accommodate additional levels in buildings for these uses.

One of the primary purposes of the Commercial Core is to have a continuous range of complementary uses that provide a shared customer and activity base such as retail, office, and entertainment. Uses that are intermittent such as banquet halls or certain institutional uses would be more compatible with the Commercial Periphery. Auto-oriented uses that require driveways and drive through lanes would conflict with the purpose of the Commercial Core.

Uses that provide activity and bring people to the Downtown should be the primary focus in this area. The offices and services currently in the Downtown provide a necessary diversity. Expansion of the entertainment uses, restaurants, and retail should be a goal.



Commercial Periphery

The Commercial Periphery is the areas around the Downtown Core that is or may become predominately commercial in nature. This is the area where parking can be provided to support both the Periphery and Core businesses. The zero lot line development style found in the Core should still be permitted or even encouraged to preserve space and create a greater intensity of uses. However, businesses may provide their own parking lots provided the frontage of the lot is still primarily building with a delineation between the parking areas and the sidewalk.

Existing residential uses within the Periphery may remain. Houses that are developed into commercial uses should primarily be done through redevelopment to avoid house-businesses as much as possible. Such structures may have accessibility and access issues and become lower quality commercial spaces.

Ideally, the Periphery would maintain the ground level commercial land use pattern with residential uses on upper levels. This will assist in establishing a commercial character on the street level and help avoid avoidable gaps in activity. The ground level commercial uses could be less intense as those within the Core. Upper levels could be residential or commercial in nature. Upper level residential should be encouraged.

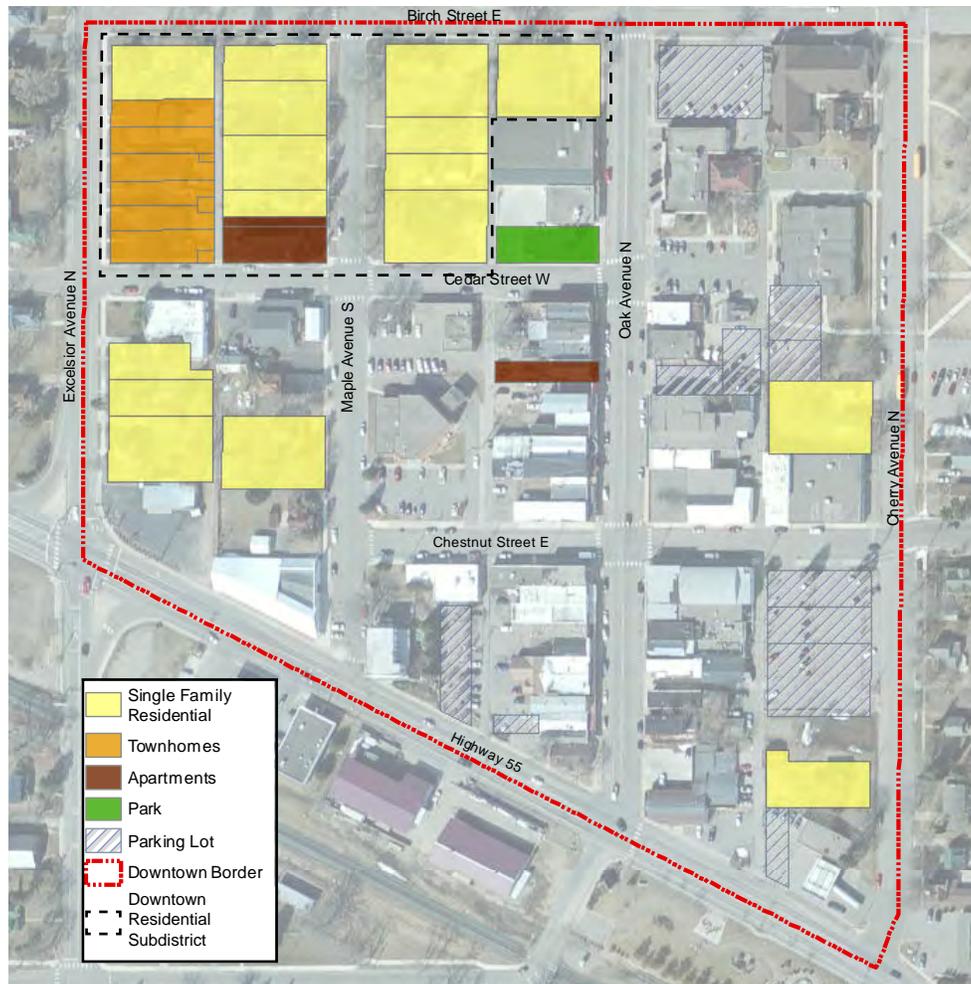
Uses in the periphery may be expanded to include more of the production-retail type uses like art studios, microbreweries, and antique stores. These uses may be more destination oriented and assist in generating traffic into the Downtown but do not necessarily need frontage on Oak Avenue. These uses would be a worthy addition to the zoning standards for this subdistrict.

The currently vacant Thayer Hotel is located the Periphery. This type of use is another ideal use for this area. This use can bring additional visitors to the Downtown but has the need for a separate dedicated surface parking lot, which is more appropriate in the Periphery than the Core.



Thayer Hotel Building, 2016

Downtown Residential



Existing residential units are scattered throughout all subdistricts.

The Downtown Residential Subdistrict is intended for areas where there is a distinct residential land use pattern within the Downtown. These areas may be single family or multi-family in nature however higher density uses are preferred and may be introduced where compatible. The density may be seen as complementary to the commercial uses, as it provides for more activity in close proximity to the businesses.

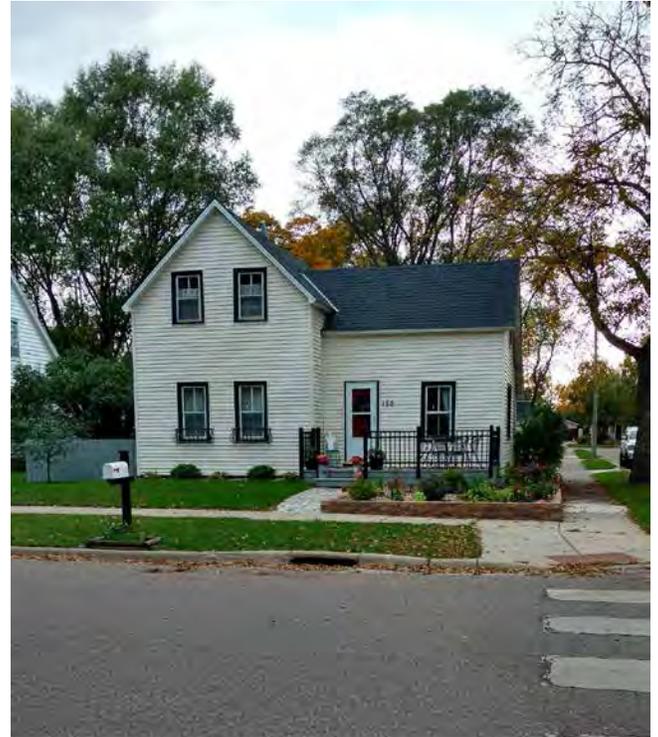
Residential units need to provide for parking as to not compete for parking with the commercial uses. The parking is preferred to be in the rear of the lots as to keep the buildings as the primary focus of the lots from the street. Single family units should have the garage to the rear and access off the alleys where feasible. With few exceptions, this is the current state of most dwelling units within this subdistrict. This will assist in preserving the historic and pedestrian friendly character of the area. Setbacks in this subdistrict should be consistent with development on adjacent lots. Conversion to higher density uses is encouraged.

Commercial uses should not intrude on these areas unless it were part of a larger redevelopment project.

Outside of the Downtown District, establishing newer higher density housing options may be ideal. Currently, the area outside of the Downtown is all zoned R-1 or R-2. The R-1 District only allows for single family uses while the R-2 allows single and two-family units. Allowing for greater density on the perimeter of the Downtown may assist in generating traffic to the area. The City may monitor property values and conditions in these areas to identify properties that may be ideal future redevelopment targets.



Existing residential home.



Existing residential home.

Evaluation of Ordinances and Policies

As noted above, the City has numerous policies and goals for the Downtown Area which sometimes conflict with one another. The City should revise land use plans to be coordinated and cohesive regarding the Downtown. Zoning Ordinances should be evaluated to ensure the proper uses are permitted and that zoning standards allow for the development desired. Economic development programs should be evaluated to ensure that the Downtown is an area of focus. With the potential for the changing of the theme for the Downtown, the standards related to the canopy system would need to be amended.

Improving the Business Environment

As the Downtown is identified as a key community asset and a community focal point, the City must take an active role in fostering a healthy and active business environment to help preserve this status.

In 2008, the University of Minnesota Extension Service created a Market Area Profile for the City. The information provided showed which retailers in the City had a greater rate of sales volume than State averages. It also depicted the type of customers that reside in the area. This information could be helpful in identifying some likely businesses to locate in the community. This information would likely need to be updated to be used but could assist in helping find businesses that may be interested in a location like Downtown Annandale.

In addition to an updated profile, the City may wish to consider a retail trade analysis study or more detailed market studies. These may provide the City with a greater amount of economic data to help with business expansion and recruitment, as well as assessing opportunities for the existing businesses. This information can be useful in identifying retail trends. The City may also engage in ongoing economic and market studies. More detailed studies can give you a snapshot of the current economic environment and alert you to issues and opportunities.

If the City is invested in ensuring there is a greater amount of activity in the Downtown and ensuring there are limited vacancies, the City may wish to assist in helping property owners get the word out on potential opportunities. While Cities frequently advertise available industrial park space, this is less common for downtowns. Vacant buildings can become issues as it breaks the continuous activity of a healthy primary commercial corridor. The City could establish a program that help businesses find space and work with the property owners to promote their buildings.

If vacant buildings become a greater issue, especially in the Commercial Core, the City may wish to consider a targeted vacant building registration program. These programs require property owners to register their buildings as vacant when not being used for longer periods of time. Cities commonly inspect buildings, as part of these programs, and may require certain code updates. This may be an option for a downtown by allowing the City to engage a property owner in a manner that may help alleviate any structural issues that may be partially responsible for its status. It would also give the City information on the property owner to help with connecting parties interested in properties.

Many cities use business retention and expansion programs for their industrial users. These methods could also be effective in a downtown. Such programs help establish good communication between the City and the business community. This may lead to information from business operators about space needs and issues where the City may be able to help facilitate solutions. It would also help create an environment of communication with property owners about building improvement programs.

If an atmosphere of communication and cooperation is fostered, putting people in contact with the resources needed is easier. When an opportunity arises, if there is adequate data, the City could assist in finding the right type of business.

Increasing Activity

Taking general steps to increase the overall activity in the Downtown can help make a better business environment.

With two-story buildings, the City may encourage the more intense use of underutilized upper floors. Many of the two-story buildings have apartments, some have storage. A few of the buildings use front stairways on the public sidewalk to access the upper levels, which may need to be relocated. The City can offer financial incentives or find programs to help convert these spaces into commercial uses like offices or improve residential units and help improve access to upper levels.

Adding more residential units in and near the Downtown can also help increase activity by adding a natural base of customers to the area. The City could evaluate the land use plan and find areas within the vicinity of the Downtown that may be appropriate to re-designate to a higher density. Likely targets would be areas with pockets of lower valued single family residences. These areas may be regulated in the Comprehensive Plan to a designation that allows for greater density.

In 2014, the City conducted a housing study that showed some limited demand for new residential units in the community. As time passes and projects in other parts of the City area completed, it may be advisable to update this study to monitor impacts to potential units in the Downtown.

When new development or redevelopment opportunities arise, the City should to encourage the development of buildings with more than one level. These buildings can accommodate more uses and help generate more activity to the Downtown by provision of additional commercial space or residential units.

Parking areas may be used for public gathering spaces and events. Currently, the City's farmers market makes use of the City Hall parking lot. Activities such as this should continue and possible other events for public parking areas identified. The City could help promote and organize events with interested community groups.

If certain buildings are constantly underutilized, there may be an underlying issue. Sometimes, the issue is not obvious and merits investigation. The City may be of assistance in this matter. Communication with property owners on their issues may present the City with specific properties that are in need of renovation or redevelopment and provide targets for economic development programs. Perhaps, certain property owners are lax in their maintenance or do not actively seek tenants and, as mentioned above, a vacant building program could be explored.

Another concept that helps increase activity is to ensure that key community facilities are located Downtown. Annandale currently has the Post Office, City Hall, and Library all located in the Downtown. The City should strive to keep these facilities in this area.

Policies Related to Land Use & Development:

- **Create a consistent definition of and policies towards the Downtown District**
- **Maintain continuous retail frontage in the Downtown Core**
Ensure street level commercial uses in the Downtown Core and as appropriate in Commercial Periphery
- **Promote vertical mixed use buildings and active second floors**
- **Use alley access and parking for residential uses where feasible to promote pedestrian friendly atmosphere and limit curb cuts**
- **Increase area of Downtown District to allow for greater integration of additional commercial uses and shared parking areas**
- **Increase density for residential units in the Downtown and vicinity**
- **Preserve existing single family uses when in appropriate locations**
- **Encourage redevelopment in line with requisite commercial design standards**
- **New development should complement and enhance the existing character of Downtown Annandale**
- **Encourage new businesses and activities that draw people to the Downtown**
- **Make the Downtown a focus in economic development programs**
- **Establish good communication with the business community and property owners to help find solutions to problems**
- **Ensure community facilities remain in the Downtown**



part 4
STREETSCAPE & ACCESS



The City seeks to present a vibrant and inviting streetscape for the Downtown. The current streetscape is focused on the canopy system. With the forthcoming street improvement project, there is an opportunity to evaluate the amenities within and design of the public realm.



Current Streetscape

Oak Avenue through the Downtown currently features the canopy system. The canopies create a covered walkway that provides a comfortable means for accessing businesses. As touched on in the Downtown Theme chapter, there are some issues with the canopy system that merit evaluation. In places, the canopy posts create a narrow sidewalk passage that lacks proper accessibility due to width. The canopy posts create, in some instances, an inner and outer sidewalk that are not wide enough to allow for many amenities. Also, there are issues with the slope of the sidewalk that cannot be corrected with the canopy posts in place.

Streetscape Improvements

An ideal streetscape would present a cohesive, welcoming environment with well-maintained storefronts and sidewalks in all seasons. The design should complement surrounding architecture and theme. A comprehensive strategy for improvement that incorporates the sidewalk, crosswalks, lights, trees, planting beds, trash receptacles, decorations, and benches helps to establish a balanced and attractive mix of amenities. With the forthcoming street project, the City has an opportunity to evaluate the streetscape and create a new design that matches the theme of the Downtown.

Oak Avenue - Street

The buildings on the west side of Oak Avenue have a varying degree of setback from the right-of-way. This makes the sidewalk narrower in certain places. In order to correct this condition, MnDOT suggested that the street surface could be shifted to the east within the Commercial Core. This appears to be an appropriate solution. The City will need to work with MnDOT to evaluate the transition back to the existing centerline north of the Core.

Oak Avenue has a wider street surface than is necessary for the street type. The surface is about 54 feet wide and within an 80 foot wide right-of-way. The width appears to be related to the former use of angle parking Downtown. The conversion of the parking to parallel makes some of this space no longer necessary. This space can be converted into sidewalk with the road project.



Oak Avenue - Sidewalk

With the sidewalk being widened and with the potential for the removal of the canopy posts, the sidewalk would be more open and with less slope for accessibility purposes. This would allow for there to be three zones in the sidewalk.

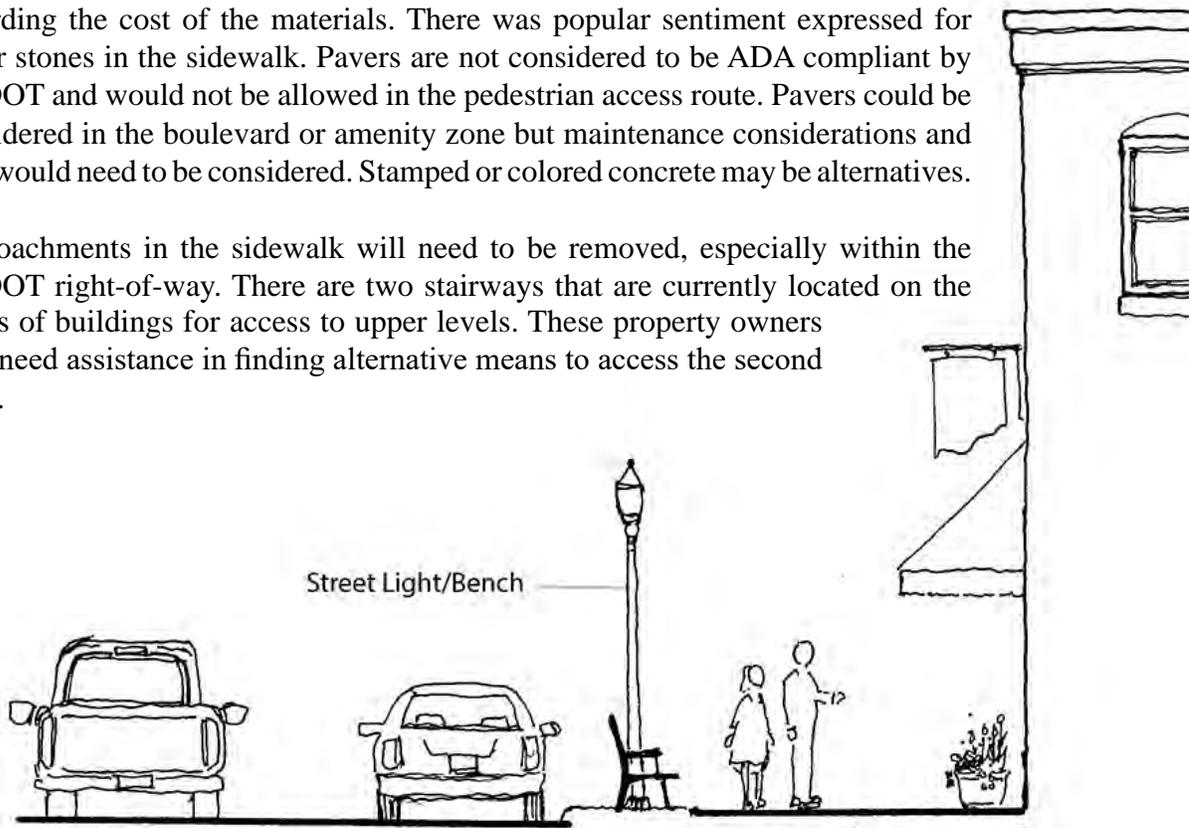
Nearest the Oak Avenue curb would be the boulevard. The boulevard would be MnDOT right-of-way but would allow for amenities such as trees, light fixtures, planters, and benches. This section would be about 4 feet wide. This section could be surfaced with a decorative material.

The center of the sidewalk is the pedestrian access route. This section would be about 5 feet in width and would need to maintain a maximum 2% slope. This section provides ADA accessibility. The surface would need to meet ADA requirements and would likely be surfaced with smooth concrete.

The six feet closest to the buildings is proposed to be the amenity zone. This area is intended for private amenities and improvements for the business owners. This area may also be surfaced with a decorative material. This area may be used for private benches, tables, chairs, merchandise, and other such features. It may also be necessary to create a transition up in elevation to building entrances in this zone. The City may wish to develop policies on what type of amenities would be permitted within this zone or which types would require permitting.

The decorative materials in the sidewalk will need to be identified in the final streetscape plan. It will need to be weighed against other streetscape priorities regarding the cost of the materials. There was popular sentiment expressed for paver stones in the sidewalk. Pavers are not considered to be ADA compliant by MnDOT and would not be allowed in the pedestrian access route. Pavers could be considered in the boulevard or amenity zone but maintenance considerations and cost would need to be considered. Stamped or colored concrete may be alternatives.

Encroachments in the sidewalk will need to be removed, especially within the MnDOT right-of-way. There are two stairways that are currently located on the fronts of buildings for access to upper levels. These property owners may need assistance in finding alternative means to access the second story.



Boulevard Amenities

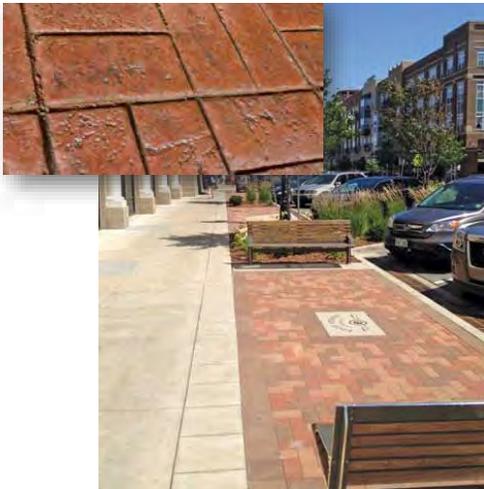
In conjunction with the MnDOT project, there will be the opportunity to place streetscape amenities in the boulevard. At the Open House, the City received input from the public on preferred elements. Decorative benches and trash receptacles were popular. The adding of vegetation was also popular via planting boxes, trees, and planter basket holding poles. The City should work with MnDOT to develop standards for what design of these amenities will be incorporated into the streetscape plan.

The City already has decorative pedestrian lighting on Oak Avenue. The public viewed this as important to keep. If the current light fixtures are inadequate and need replacement, similar historical themed lights would be preferred. If light poles cannot support plants or certain decorations, additional poles of a similar design would be a means to accommodate more plants.

Street Furniture Options



Decorative Paver Options



Boulevard Amenities - Continued

Trees are currently not found within the Oak Avenue Commercial Core, in part because the presence of canopies would conflict with them. The introduction of trees should be done carefully as to not interfere with business fronts or signage. Also, the appropriate type of tree would need to be identified to avoid constant branch management. This will require more evaluation with the final design of the street project.

Public art was also mentioned as a possibility by some attendees of the Open House. Inclusion of public art could be a positive for the City. However, policies regarding appropriate art and locations would need to be identified.

Bump outs near intersections were also a popular idea. This element may assist in shortening crosswalk distances and providing a place for public art or other amenities.

However, this would create a potential conflict with street snow removal. The City and MnDOT will need to consider this during the final street design process.

Greenery Options for Downtown



Downtown District & Area Amenities

The focus of the streetscape plan will be on Oak Avenue, as this is the area with the street project. However, modified designs of the streetscape plan should be made for all the streets within the Downtown. The sidewalk should be designed of similar materials along the other streets, as well. Also, the same lighting fixtures for Oak Avenue should be planned for all streets within the District. To connect the Downtown to Municipal Park on Pleasant Lake, a similar design of the streetscape and light fixtures should be continued north.

Within the Downtown, the City could also consider historic themed street signs to distinguish this area from the rest of the City. This will help create a unique atmosphere for this area. Wayfinding signage should also be used to help direct visitors to public parking and the Municipal Park.

While not all of Oak Avenue may be appropriate for tree plantings, in other areas of the Downtown trees may be used to soften the visual appearance of parking areas and walls. Parking areas should be separated from public pedestrian ways by walls or decorative fencing, as well.

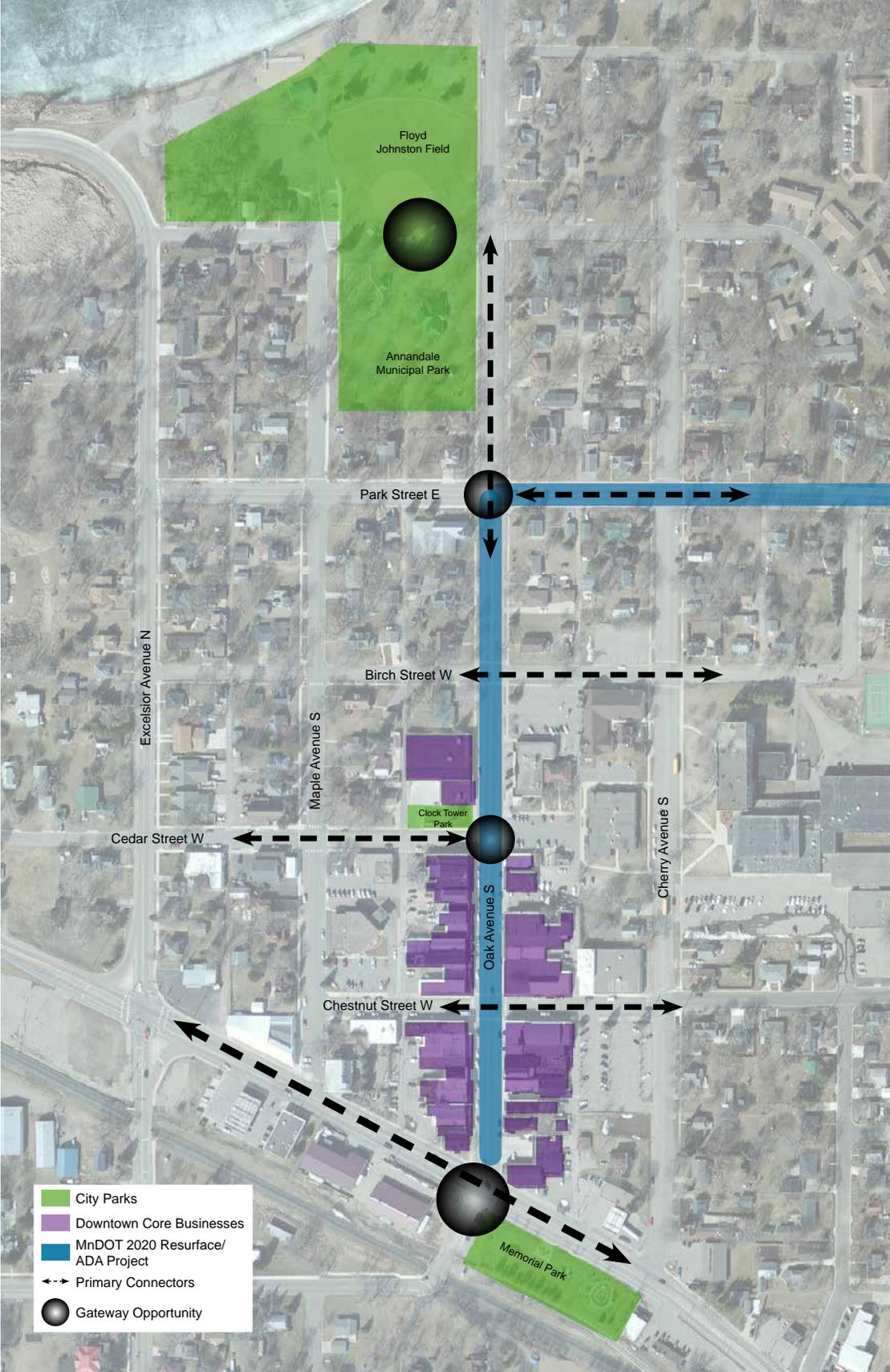
Gateways

Gateways are important welcoming elements that help identify the Downtown as a special place. Since Oak Avenue is a state highway, there is not an opportunity for an archway over the road. The City does have some opportunities for alternatives, though.

The principal gateway into Downtown is Highway 55 and Oak Avenue. Currently through building location and street orientation, there is limited visibility of the Downtown for westbound traffic on Highway 55. Therefore, this intersection is in primary need of a gateway element to draw attention to the Downtown. South of Highway 55 is Memorial Park, which may provide a location opportunity. There is already a community kiosk at this location which may be augmented for signage or other items, such as statues, to catch people's attention that they are in the Downtown.

A secondary gateway to the Downtown Core would be at Cedar Street and Oak Avenue. Clock Tower Park and the City Hall parking lot are in this area and may provide opportunities for an element location. There are also proposed gateway location for Park Avenue, which would follow the TH 24 route, and at Memorial Park, where the streetscape plan would lead.

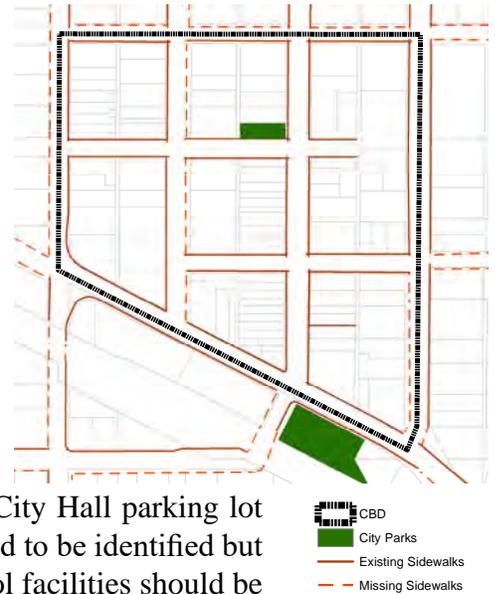
Downtown Core Gateways



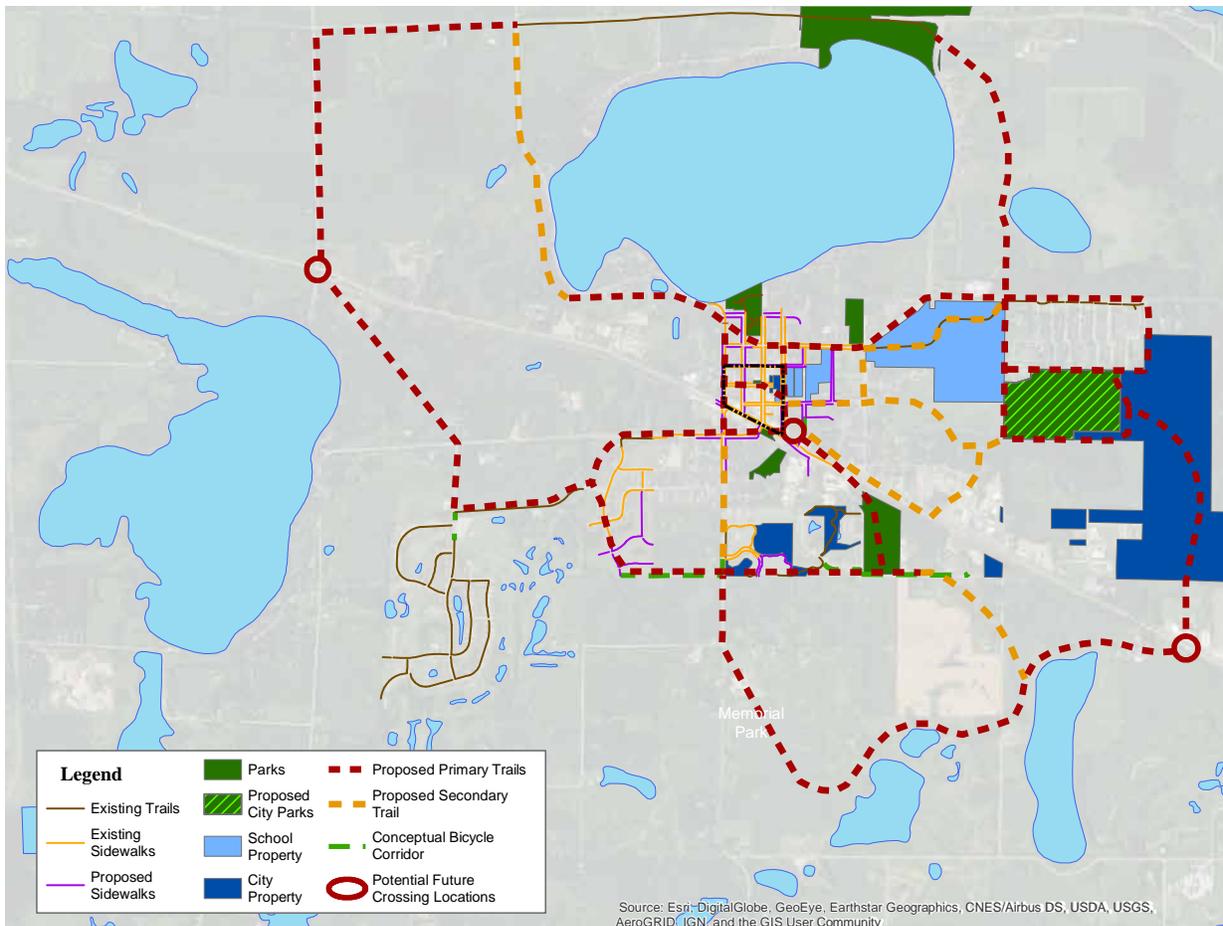
Trail & Sidewalk Plan

Oak Avenue is intended to have a focus on pedestrians and automobiles. Therefore, alternate routes for bicycle transportation would need to be identified. Primary connectors such as Highway 55, Chestnut Street, Cedar Street, and Birch Street may be capable for such a purpose with future designs.

The City's Trail Plan identifies Cherry Avenue and Excelsior Avenue as primary trail corridors. A potential trail crossing over Highway 55 is identified within the area of Memorial Park. In order to increase traffic and activity in the Downtown, the use of this area as a trail head between these two trail corridors and any other future planned routes would be ideal. Bicycle facilities would need to be designed for an east-west route through Downtown. Ideally this could utilize Clock Tower Park or the City Hall parking lot where bicycle racks could be easily located. The route would need to be identified but should not use Oak Avenue. Trail connections to parks and school facilities should be identified, as well.

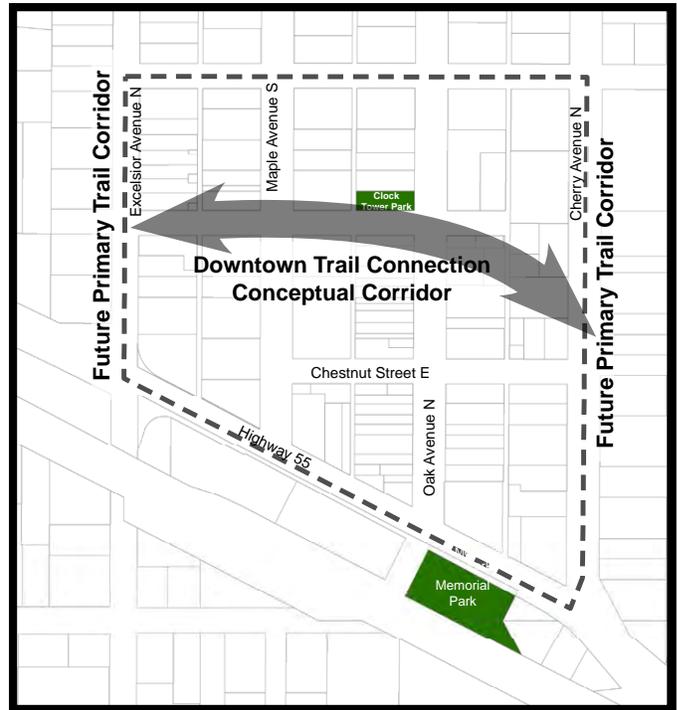


Existing and Proposed Trail Plan



Trail & Sidewalk Plan

There is a good sidewalk network within the Downtown currently. There are gaps, though, that should be filled. While it may be common to have sidewalks on only one side of the street in residential neighborhoods, it would be ideal to have sidewalks in all areas of the Downtown to maximize pedestrian access throughout the area. This will also allow for better access to parking.

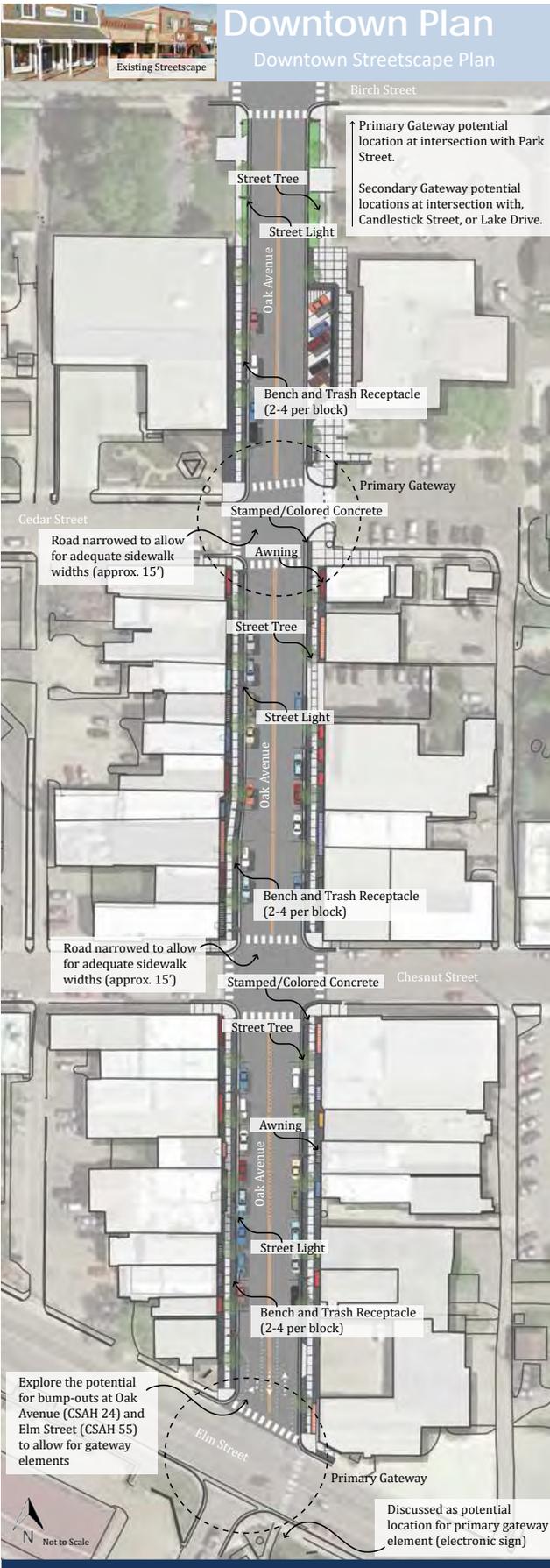


Increase Traffic

Currently there is a street light on Excelsior Avenue and Highway 55. A popular concept expressed by the public was to move this or add another streetlight to the Oak Avenue and Highway 55 location. MnDOT stated that this location would not be acceptable for a stoplight at current traffic volumes. This would likely require relocation of Wright County Road 5 to follow the same route as TH 24, which would require significant investment and effort. The City may choose to discuss this possibility with Wright County but resources and energy may be better allocated elsewhere in the near term. For example, attempting to use the gateway on Highway 55 and Oak Avenue and/or attempting to increase the visibility of Oak Avenue from Highway 55 may prove to be more achievable goals for increasing traffic in the short term.

Maintenance

With the extra amenities being placed within the streetscape and right-of-way, the City will need to develop a maintenance plan for these elements, in coordination with MnDOT, businesses, and property owners. For instance, an irrigation system may be ideal if the final streetscape plan includes many trees and plants.



Popular Streetscape Elements (voted on by attendees of May 23rd Open House)

Sidewalk Treatments



Greenery



Lighting



Banners



Furniture



Wayfinding & Signage



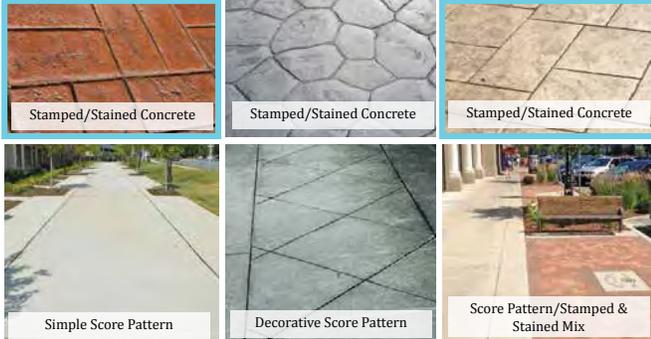


Downtown Plan Potential Streetscape Elements

Elements that received multiple votes from the public



Sidewalk Treatments



Planters



Benches & Trash Receptacles



Lighting



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Downtown Plan Potential Streetscape Elements

Elements that received multiple votes from the public



Street Trees



Sidewalk Seating and Shopping



Bike Rack



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Policies Related to Streetscape & Access:

- **Ensure adequate and equal space for improvements on both sides of Oak Avenue**
- **Narrow Oak Avenue to the width necessary for the roadway and allow any extra space to be incorporated into the sidewalk**
- **Extend streetscape improvements throughout the Downtown**
- **Extend streetscape improvements to Municipal Park**
- **Allow private amenity zone under awning areas**
- **Use decorative surfacing materials in boulevard and amenity zone**
- **Carefully introduce trees into the streetscape in proper locations**
- **Introduce vegetation and evaluate means for irrigation**
- **Maximize accessibility with sidewalk improvements**
- **Place public furniture in boulevard**
- **Improve sidewalk system throughout Downtown, fill in gaps**
- **Use Downtown as trailhead, design bicycle route through**
- **Establish primary gateways on Oak Avenue & Highway 55 and Oak Avenue & Cedar Street Improve visibility of**
- **Downtown from Highway 55**
- **Develop maintenance plan for amenities with community groups, businesses**



One of the primary concerns related to any downtown is parking. Too little parking may create a negative business environment. Too much parking wastes space and harms the density of activity. Keeping an eye on the parking supply and demand may help the City avoid costly over or under investment.



Street parking, 1940s

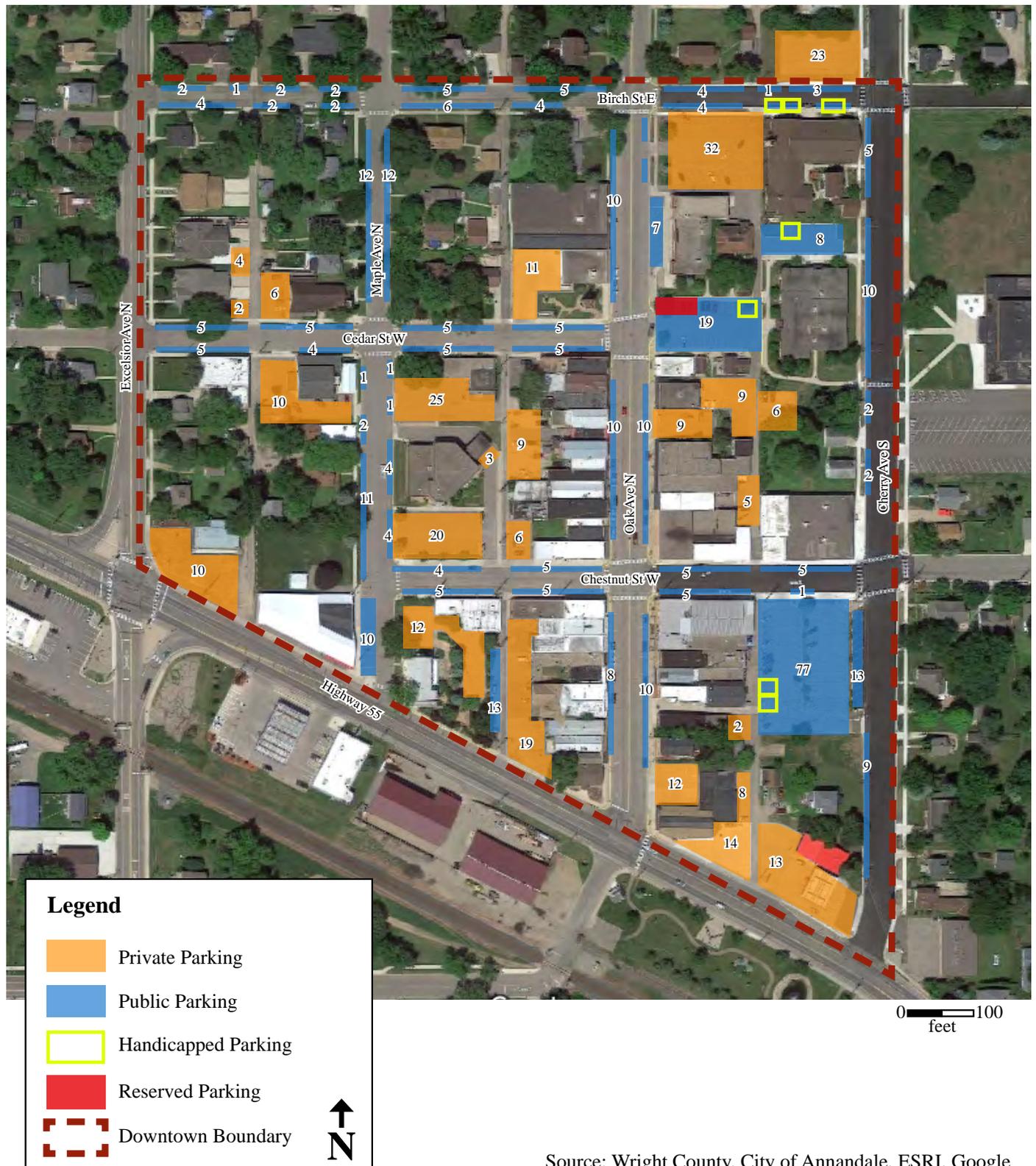


Street parking, 2010s

Parking Inventory

The City of Annandale has been very forward thinking about parking in the past. There are public parking areas found in key areas near the Downtown Core without creating many interruptions in the commercial frontage of the blocks. A parking inventory was prepared that shows the location of all public and private parking lots, as well as on-street parking within the Downtown. This shows that with private commercial lots, public lots, and street parking there are 643 parking stalls present. This number excludes the private parking lots for St. Ignatius Church.

Parking Inventory

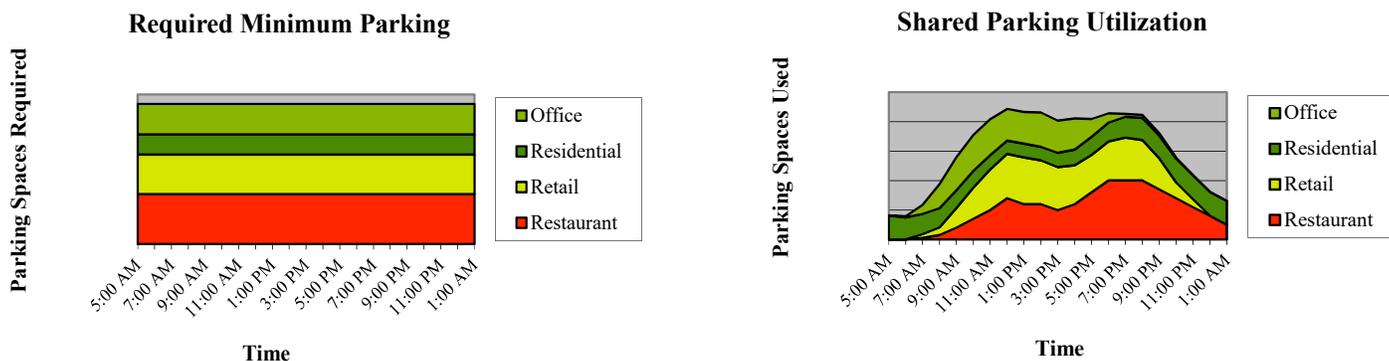


Downtown Parking Supply and Demand

The City’s Zoning Ordinance identifies how many parking spaces should be provided for each type of use. This type of calculation determines if a stand-alone commercial use has enough parking to avoid people parking in fire lanes and such. For a downtown district, there are a variety of uses that share parking and customers. Visitors often have multiple stops per trip, as well.

Using the required minimum parking approach, each use needs to provide its minimum parking independently. For example, a restaurant with a parking requirement of 15 stalls and a retail store with a requirement of 10 stalls would need to supply 25 stalls total. Using a shared parking approach, the office and restaurant would have different generalized parking demand times. Therefore, a portion of their parking could “overlap” and the two uses could reduce their provided parking to a total of about 20. Using the building sizes and mix of uses present, the required parking amount needed is reduced by about 20%.

Instead of using the City’s parking requirement table in the Zoning Ordinance for the needed parking minimums, transportation engineering studies were consulted. This was done to more split up general use categories and identify which specific uses have the potential for higher parking demands. For example, a professional office would generate a lower parking demand than a restaurant. If a restaurant were to replace an office, the City would need to be aware of the potential impacts to the parking supply. A graphic has been prepared depicting the general use of each parcel and its demand level. Using these calculations and an evaluation of the uses on each lot a general parking demand was found on a per lot basis and then aggregated into a total for each block.



Peak demand times were also evaluated on a more specific use by use basis. The peaks were generalized into day and night peak times. Factoring in the needed provision of residential parking, the maximum peaks were calculated in a block by block fashion. Noting that night and day peaks have some degree of overlap, each block was identified with its max peak (day or night plus residential). The ensuing analysis shows where parking areas are over or under their peak demand times.

For the residential parking calculations, two stalls were identified as being needed per unit. For single family and townhome uses, the two stalls were deemed supplied within the driveway and garage. The residential parking was calculated into the peak demand time for both day and night for the analysis. The idea here is to highlight a goal that residential parking be provided and not interfere with customer parking.

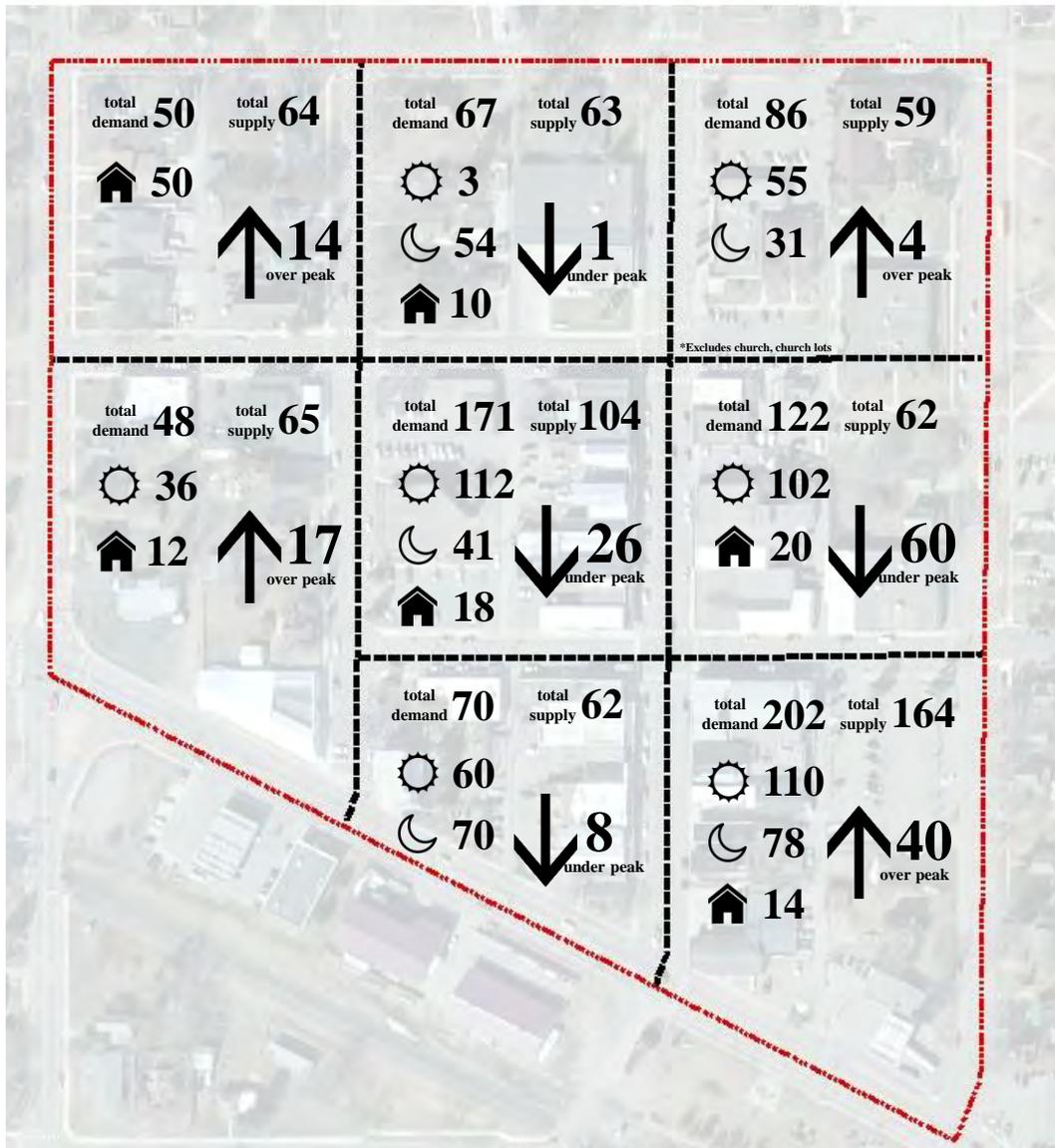
Taking into account each lot and its current use, the total parking requirement for the Downtown is 816 stalls. With the 20% reduction for shared parking, it shows an adjusted demand of 653 stalls. This analysis depicts that with the current mix and types of uses, the City has a good amount of parking.

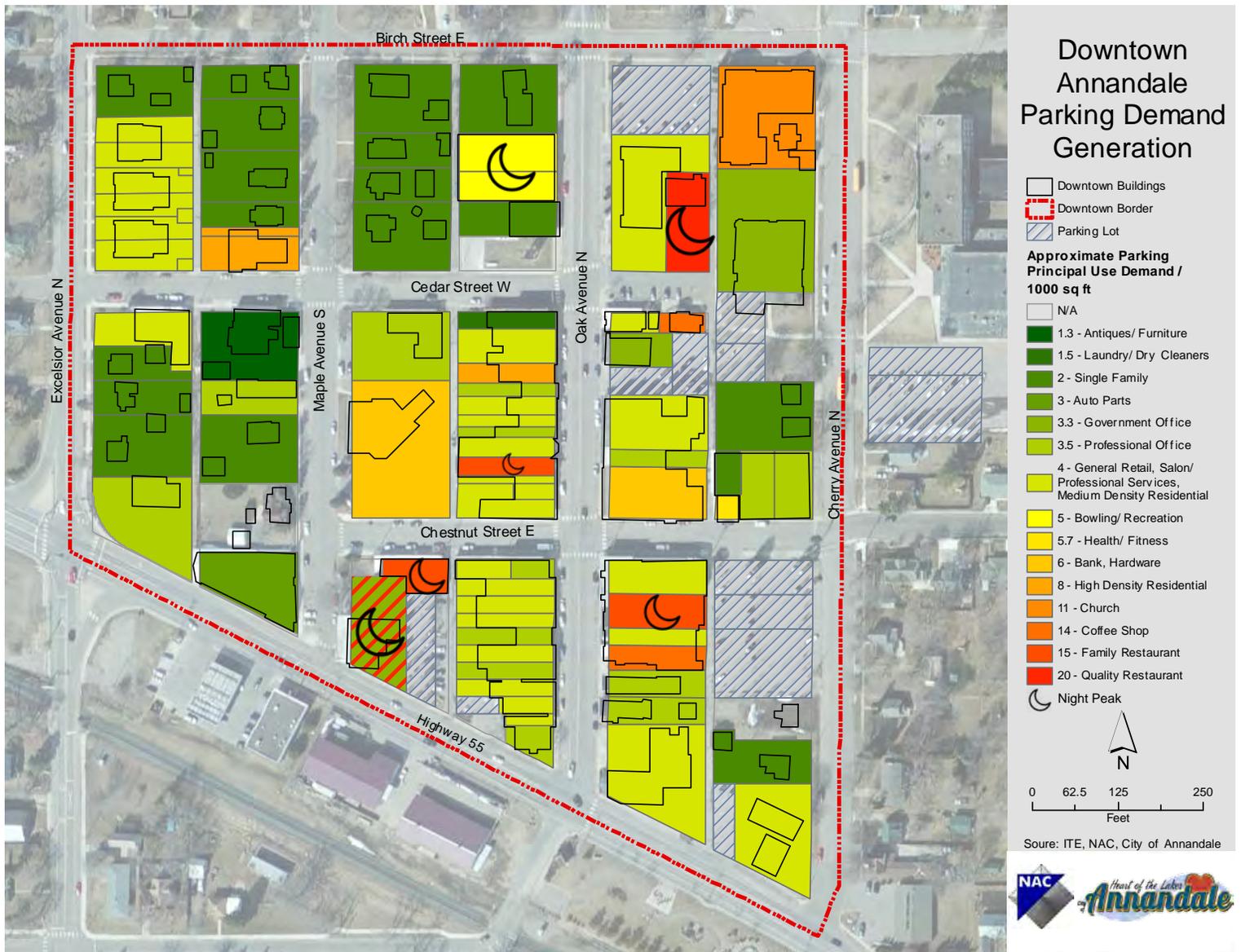
Noting the peak demand times with the potential for overlapping peaks while also reserving the requisite spots for residential uses, an additional analysis was done. This analysis shows that the central blocks fronting on Oak Avenue have a shortage of parking at the peak demand times. This shortage is largely absorbed by neighboring blocks. Using peak demand calculations, the parking demand aggregated at maximum peak times is 663 stalls, including residential. The amount of parking provided in the area is still generally adequate but could be augmented with some additional parking areas intended to increase the parking level to the aggregated peak level.

These analyses accounted for vacant buildings. These sites were calculated based on the last known use and factored into the numbers. Therefore, if a vacant building were to be occupied, in this manner, it would not create an issue. New buildings or new higher demand uses would be a catalyst for additional review.

816	Minimum Required Parking
663	Aggregated Peak Demand
653	Reduced Shared Parking
643	Parking Stalls Downtown

Parking Supply at Peak Demand Times





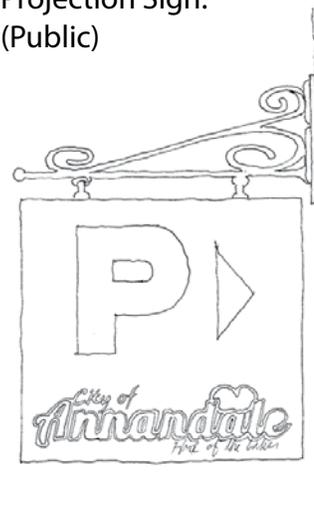
Public Parking Areas

The City has three primary public off-street parking areas. There is a small area located south of Chestnut Street between Maple and Oak Avenues that is accessed via the alley. Then there is the parking area around City Hall which is a popular lot. There is also the large municipal lot with about 77 stalls on Chestnut Street and Cherry Avenue. These parking areas are largely located in good areas where they do not interfere with the commercial frontage on Oak Avenue but are located in very close proximity. The large southeastern public parking area has a pedestrian access way that is located within a gap between two buildings to Oak Avenue. This provides a short-cut for pedestrians.

In the Open House there were comments received that there is a perceived parking shortage in the northeast part of Downtown. The analysis shows that there is available parking but the parking starts becoming remotely located if the City Hall lot is full. The primary off-street parking area would be two blocks to the south. To alleviate this, the City could discuss a shared parking arrangement with St. Ignatius Church.

Additional wayfinding signage should be provided to direct people to parking areas and also the pedestrian access ways to and from parking areas. Building owners could allow for additional signage on their structures for this purpose. Signs may also be located on poles within the right-of-way.

Projection Sign:
(Public)

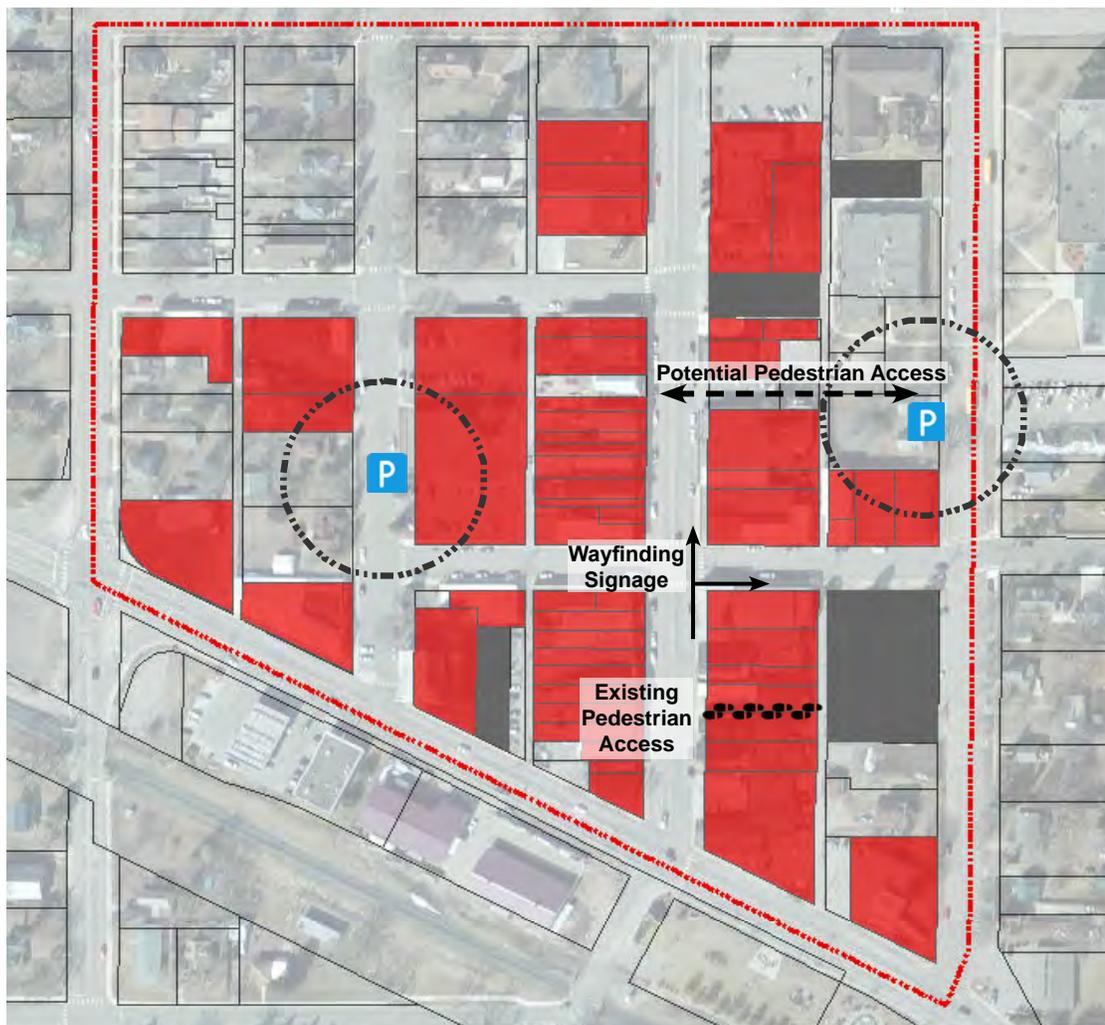


Future Parking Areas

While the City has an adequate amount of parking, at this time, it is important to think into the future. If higher intensity uses were to be established in the Downtown Core, there are limited opportunities available for providing more parking in appropriate areas. To this extent, it would be prudent for the City to consider future parking areas that could be reserved. When selecting these areas, potential for pedestrian short-cuts should be considered.

For example, parking is popular in the northeast section of Downtown. There are also gaps between a few of the buildings on Oak Avenue in this area, as well as a sidewalk leading back to City Hall. If a location for an additional parking lot on the rear of this block could be found there would be an opportunity for a lot with great access to the Commercial Core. If an opportunity arose, this property could be reserved for such a use.

Likewise, the central block on the west side of Oak Avenue has a larger parking demand. The rear of this block is occupied by the State Bank. The bank provides its own parking but there are no established public parking lots within this area. An ideal location for this area would be near the Chestnut Street and Maple Avenue intersection, using the existing sidewalk network for access. While these parking areas are not necessarily a high-level need today, the City should be aware that in the future these parking areas will likely be needed. If opportunities arise for acquiring or reserving these areas, it should be considered.



Parking Lot Design & Use

Parking lots, both public and private, should provide for a design that separates the parking surface from the adjacent pedestrian ways. A structural component, like a brick wall, would be ideal for this purpose. If existing lots are renovated, adding a component such as this, may be considered. Pedestrian access points should be considered and highlighted. Curb cuts into parking areas should be avoided in key commercial frontage areas. When possible, access could be derived from the alley or side streets.

Greenery could be introduced into parking lots to soften large surfaces of pavement. Islands of vegetation could be placed within large lots like the City's southeastern lot. New lots should be designed with this in mind.

Parking lots may also be designed to be used as event spaces. Pedestrian access points in key locations can help make this possible. More remote parking areas are less likely to be successful as event spaces. The City could allow for more centrally located lots to host events.

The prime commercial parking areas are along Oak Avenue and in front of City Hall. These areas should be reserved for business customers and Downtown visitors. Employees should be directed to other areas. If businesses need reserved parking in public lots, the City could assist in finding space in underutilized areas.

Parking Regulations

The City does not currently have separate zoning standards for parking within the Downtown. The City's Ordinance should be updated to reflect the distinct nature of the Downtown.

The minimum parking requirements could be waived for the Downtown, as the City is providing shared public parking. New development could provide some parking or provide to a parking fund.

Parking lot setbacks should not be required in the Downtown. Parking areas should have separation requirements to public sidewalks. Street fronting parking areas should be limited to the Commercial Periphery.

Policies Related to Parking:

- **The City should ensure there is adequate parking available to support the Downtown**
- **Parking areas should not occupy prime commercial space but be located in close proximity**
- **Parking should be located within a walkable distance from business areas**
- **Employee and residential parking should be provided as to not interfere with Commercial parking areas**
- **New parking areas should be reserved as land becomes available**
- **Parking areas should be directly connected to the Downtown Core, developed when needed, through pedestrian access ways**
- **Parking areas should be designed with separaters to pedestrian areas and include greenery**
- **Parking areas can be used to host events**
- **Parking demands and levels should be monitored**



part 6
ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN



Part of what makes Downtown Annandale unique is the historic and traditional downtown nature of many of the buildings. In order to preserve the unique character of the Downtown, the City should develop architectural design guidelines for new buildings and redevelopment. This will ensure that new construction and building enhancements are compatible with the overall area.

Downtown Architecture

The City of Annandale has a range of buildings in the Downtown. The buildings have been built in different eras and represent a variety of different architectural appearances. The buildings have been tied together through the canopy system. This system is being re-evaluated due to the street project. It is recommended that this system be replaced by a mandatory awning system. This system would represent a move towards a more independent system while still maintaining a cohesive theme. Building owners would be required to place an awning but would be able to have different colors and expressions.

The architecture of the buildings would also be more on display and would architectural improvements would be necessary. The canopy system resulted in many buildings being covered by the system and attachments to the system. Posts and support structures for the canopy system cover many of the buildings. If this system were removed, there may be cosmetic issues behind the canopy that would need to be corrected. The City should take the same lead in correcting these issues and improving the architecture behind as it did when creating the canopy system.

Essentially, with the removal of the canopy system, the City is setting the stage for reasserting the original architecture of the buildings Downtown, establishing a similar historic theme, correcting issues with building design, and ensuring new construction and development are consistent with the spirit of the Downtown.

Historic structures should be preserved and maintained whenever possible. New development, redevelopment, and modifications should also reflect the heritage and character of the district.



Architectural features, 1970s



Architectural features, 2010s

Awning System

The proposed awning system would keep a historic theme for the Downtown Core while allowing a step in the direction for individualism regarding building appearance and maintenance. Awnings are traditional downtown element that protect entryways and shade windows. The awnings should reflect the intended general historic character of the Downtown by being reflective of the mid-1900's system that replaced the original canopies.

Garish colors and signage on the awning face need to be avoided. Appropriate colors are demonstrated later in this document.

The awning system is intended to still replicate many of the features of the canopy system. Therefore, it is intended that the awnings extend to as much of the width of the building, as possible. Many of the modifications made to accommodate the canopies would still be covered by the awnings. However, this would be an opportunity to correct any underlying architectural issues.

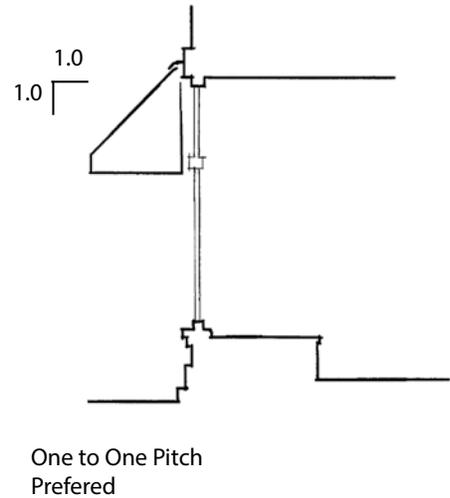
The awnings are intended to be a design feature and should be permanent awnings not retractable. To best replicate the positives of the canopy system, it is ideal for the awnings to protrude as far as feasible. The historic 1':1' triangle design keeps the historic appeal but also provides a depth that would be in scale with the intended sidewalk improvements. Awnings that extend about four feet from the building are recommended. Barrel or round awnings are not appropriate for the Commercial Core. There should not be upper floor awnings.

Signage may be provided on the valance but not on the large front slope. Awnings should be made of the proper cloth or similar synthetic materials designed to have the traditional appearance but not vinyl or other such materials. Alternate designs, such as modern or metal awnings, may be considered by the City on a case by case basis. Durable steel frames are preferred to limit maintenance needs. Awnings should be to the scale of the building and so large to conceal crucial building elements

Buildings that currently do not have awnings within the Commercial Core should not be required to have awnings. These buildings were exempted due to their unique architectural features and this should not change.

Within the Commercial Periphery, the awning system is still preferred. It is understood that the canopy system does not exist in these areas, but this would still be an opportunity to create a common theme throughout the district. Establishing awnings on street frontages is encouraged in these areas.

Awning Pitch:



Architectural Review

The City should take the lead in providing architectural review of the buildings. The City should encourage building improvements and facilitate discussions with architectural professionals. This can help educate building owners on property maintenance and encourage appropriate improvements. The City may also help provide necessary design assistance and incentives for action.

The unique nature of the Downtown includes the architectural variety of the buildings. To create an appropriate design, the City could assist property owners in evaluating individual buildings for unique architectural themes and highlight these themes. Without canopies, the original building will be more on display. This requires more attention to the state of the building. Improvements should be based on the unique style of the building or in some cases, the character of the area. For this step, the City should provide focus on the front facade and ensuring that the Commercial Core has a strong visual appeal.

Architectural Standards

Architectural standards are important to ensure that new construction and remodels are not out of character with the rest of the Downtown. The City has invested in establishing historic themes for the area, therefore this type of regulation is important.

The general theme for the Downtown is a traditional, historic small town commercial district. This includes the flat roof look, wide and tall storefronts, and upper levels where possible. This generally matches the existing buildings. The architectural standards depicted in this document should be codified as development standards within the Zoning Ordinance

Frontage

Another important character component of the existing Downtown is the continuous commercial frontage of the Commercial Core. Oak Avenue is primarily enclosed with few curb cuts or interruptions. This is integral to the character of the Downtown and should be preserved in this area.

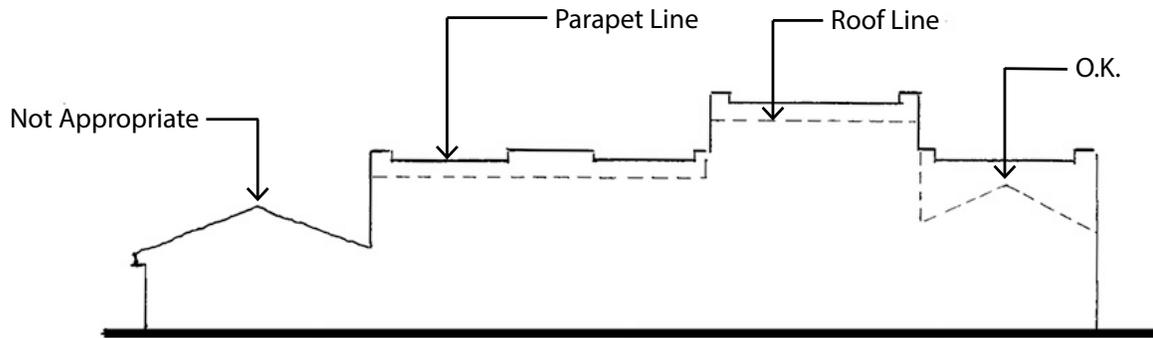
Within the Commercial Periphery, buildings should still be at least 50% of the width of the frontage. Non-frontage areas should be separated from pedestrian ways with walls that resemble adjacent buildings or other such features.

Commercial buildings should be built at a zero-front yard setback in all places in the Downtown. Exceptions may be made where buildings would have a courtyard with a wall or substantial architectural fence along the lot line. These situations are more appropriate for the Commercial Periphery.

In the Downtown Residential Subdistrict, the buildings should be setback in a manner that is reflective of the use and within the character of the vicinity. Residential uses may have reduced setbacks as compared to residential uses within other districts but shall respect the established development patterns within the area.

Building Height & Roofs

The Downtown currently has a variety of one and two-story buildings. Two-story buildings are recommended for any new construction or redevelopment, as this creates the most activity. Buildings greater than two stories in height may be considered, if not out of character with the area. Rooflines visible from the street should appear to be flat. A cornice may conceal a different roof type.



Building Materials & Colors

New and restored buildings should have exteriors consistent with buildings in the generally vicinity. This would generally include brick, wood siding, shakes, or stucco. The original materials of the structure are encouraged to be repaired rather than covered.

Colors of buildings and awnings are important to maintain the Downtown Theme. Warm, earth tone colors for buildings are preferred, as this is consistent with the building materials. Bright or primary colors are not appropriate for primary building colors but may be used as accents.

Awnings should also be these types of colors, as well as red and blue. Lighter colors or white may be acceptable as a stripe color. Bright colors are to be avoided as the principal awning color. Franchise based architecture may be permitted when consistent with these standards.

Acceptable Awning Colors



Building Placement & Front

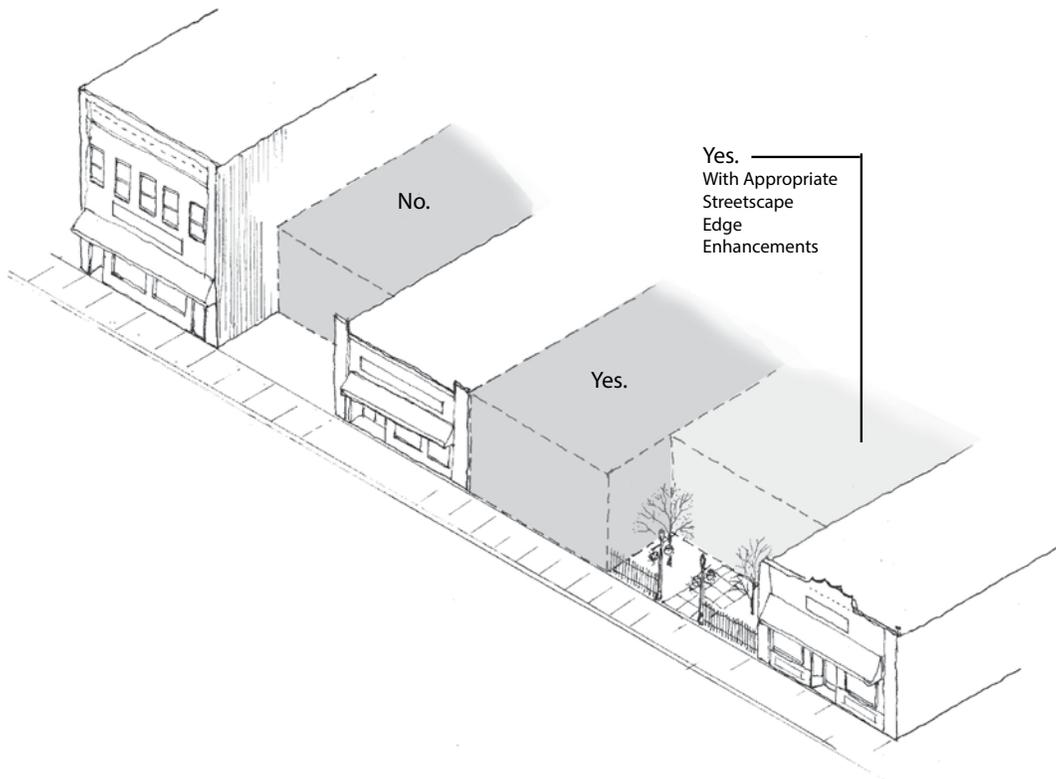
The storefront is an important architectural feature. Overly concealed building fronts give the appearance of the lack of activity. The bulkhead should not be more than 1/3rd of the distance between grade and the top of the display window. This creates the traditional architectural look of a historic downtown building. Transom windows are encouraged but it is understood that this feature would be obscured by the awnings. For taller bulkheads, planter boxes or other such softening touches are encouraged.

Large blank walls facing street fronts should be avoided. Front windows and glass doors should also occupy 60% or more of the front width of the building to maintain an open appearance.

Entrances should be recessed and predominately glass. Recessed entrances reduce conflicts between door and people movements within the pedestrian ways.

Upper levels should have about 15% windows, at minimum, but no more than 50%. Doors to balconies may be acceptable provided the balcony does not require ground level structural support. This may be reflective of the historic character of the Downtown.

Street Orientation:



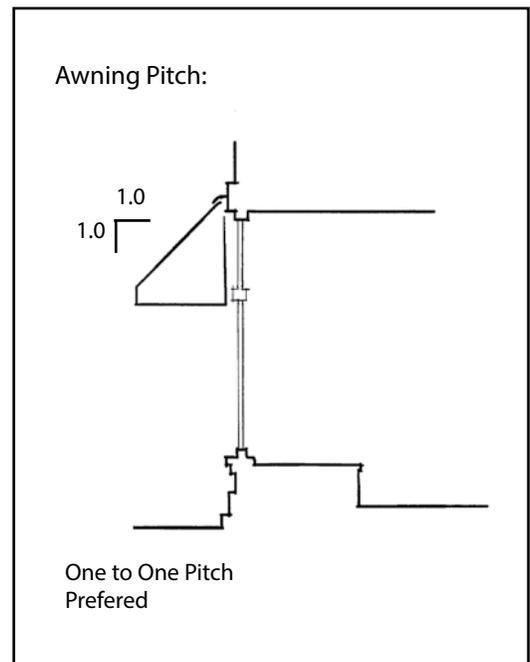
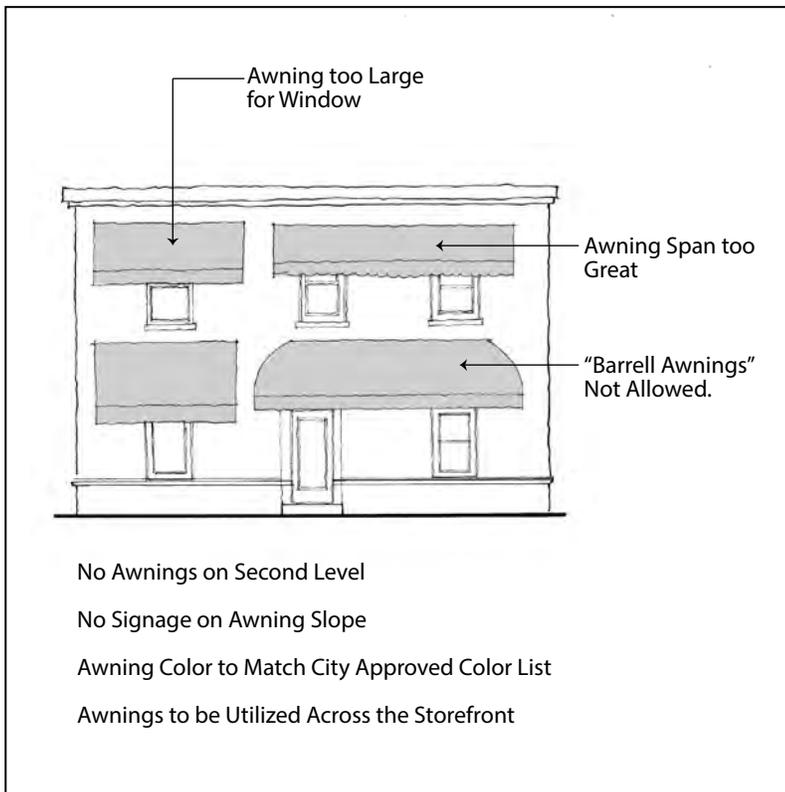
Building Placement & Front

Part of the purpose of this project is to increase accessibility in the sidewalk system. Therefore, it is important to ensure that awnings and projecting signs have adequate clearance. Eight feet is recommended. This may be reduced slightly if found necessary after the final streetscape design.

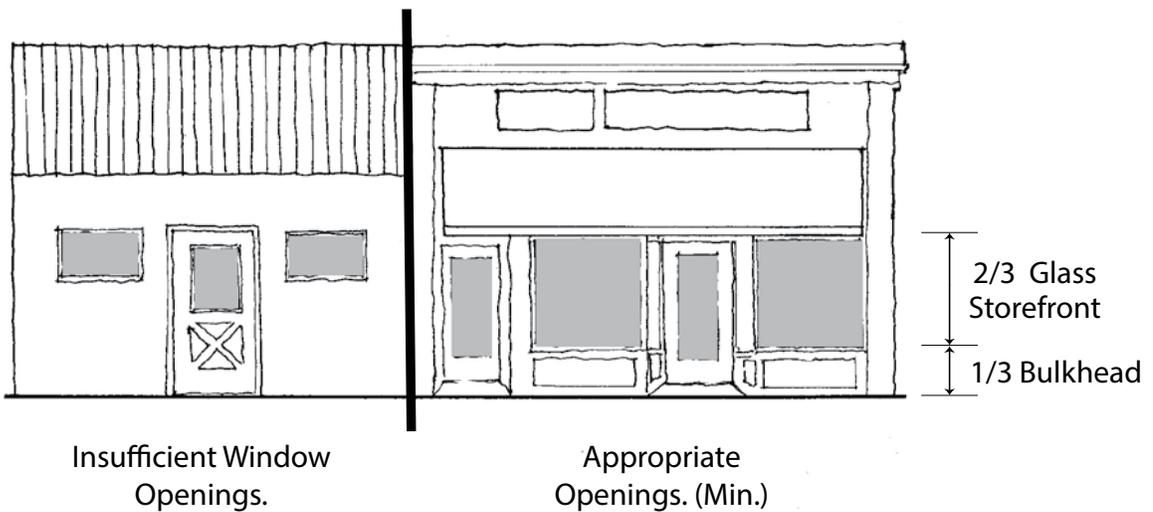
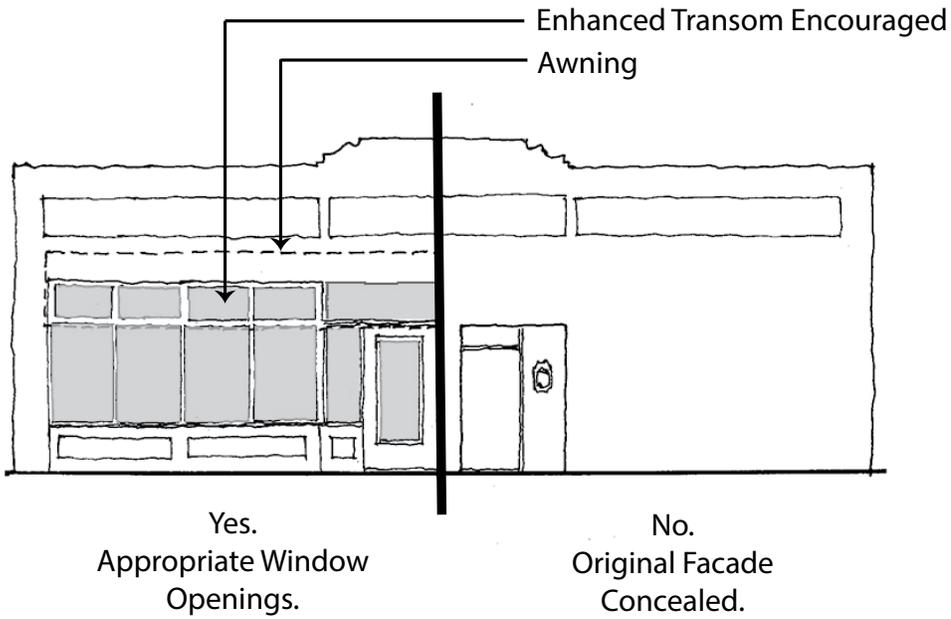
Architectural features such as window hoods, cornices, and other flourishes should be preserved on existing buildings and encouraged on new construction and remodels. Shutters may be used on upper floor windows provided the shutters are sized properly to give the impression of usability.

Planter boxes and other attached elements may be used to improve the appearance of the storefront.

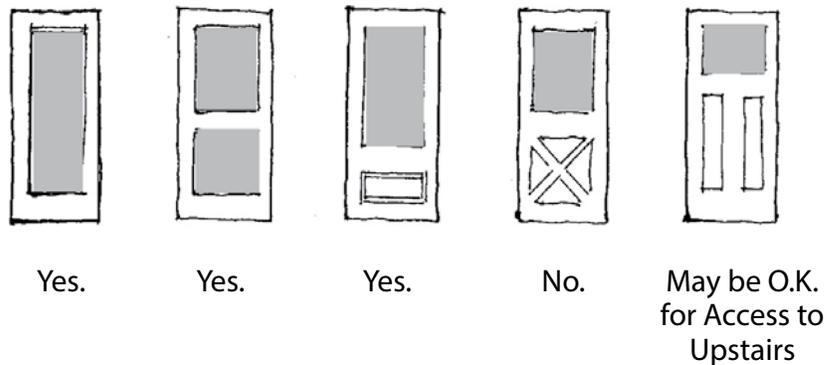
The proper architecture is important on all exposed sides of a building, but the primary focus is on the front. Rears of buildings facing public parking areas or residential uses should also be improved with similar building materials to the front. Trash areas should be screened with decorative walls and fencing.



Windows and Doors:



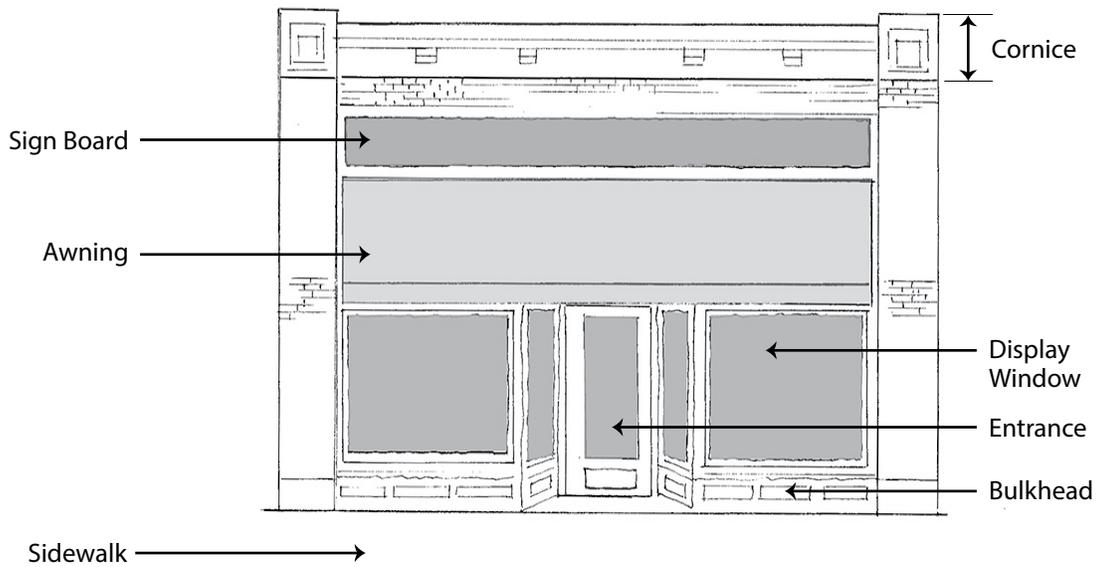
Door Elevations:



Typical Two-Story



Typical One-Story



Lighting

Downtown lights should be down-shielded to avoid excessive light pollution. Features should be externally lit rather than internally lit. Light fixtures should be designed to match the architecture of the building and complement street lights. Neon signs or lights should not be placed outside but are acceptable as window signs.

Signs

Signs should reflect character of the business, fit the building, but also reflect the downtown. Signs must be compatible in size, scale, quality, design, look, and blend in with architecture of the structure. Downtown signage should be oriented towards the slower traffic and pedestrians present in the area.

Projecting signs reflect the historic character of the City. Such signs should be two-sided and mounted near the building entrance area. These signs should be limited in size and scale and reflect the architecture of the building. Due to the awnings, these signs may be mounted higher than typical projecting signs in the upper level of the buildings.



Wall signs should be made of professional, durable materials such as wood and metal and mounted on the wall in an appropriate location, above the awning in a vertical position. Signs should not conceal important building elements. Oversized signs should be avoided. Wall signage should not exceed 15% of the building front. Vinyl and plastic may only be used when simulating traditional materials. Colors of signs should be compatible with the building and utilize more subdued and darker tones.

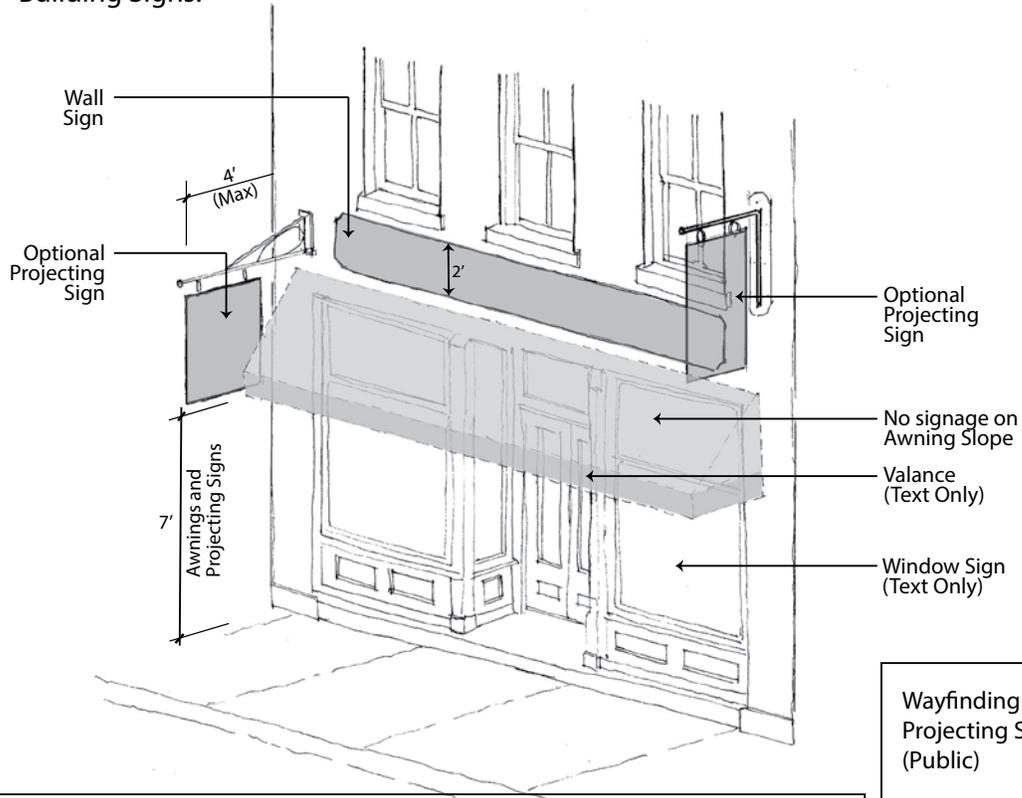
Window signs are encouraged but should not completely obscure the storefront windows. Establishing a standard for maximum window coverage would be appropriate. Exceptions may be made for vacant buildings having window coverings.

Sandwich board signs may be used but should not block sidewalk. The City should consider reasonable standards for these elements that allow their placement on Oak Avenue for businesses fronting on other streets. Other types of temporary signage should be discouraged in the Downtown.

Freestanding signs, internally lit box signs, reader boards, dynamic signs, flashing light signs, and homemade “do-it-yourself” signs are out of character with the Downtown and should be prohibited.

Public wayfinding signs may be placed on private structures, with the owner’s consents and would not count towards any signage limits.

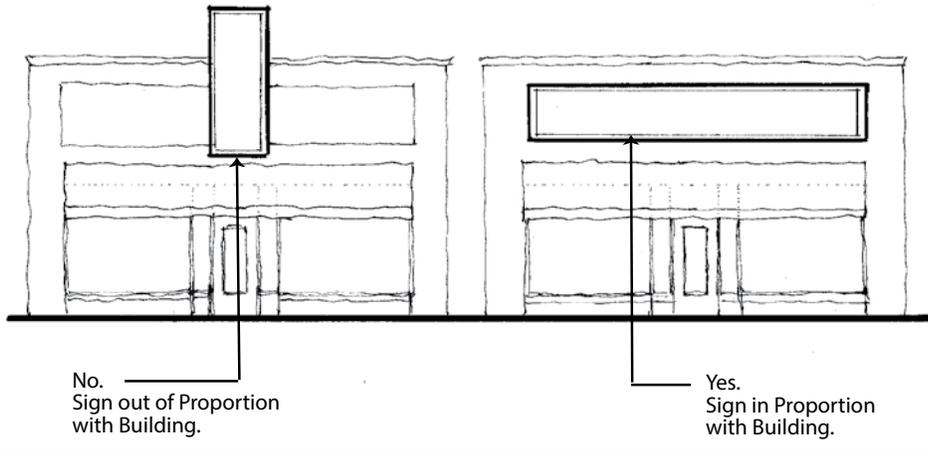
Building Signs:



Wayfinding Projecting Sign: (Public)



Proportion:



Appropriate Signage:



Redevelopment & Rehabilitation

The ideal goal would be to rehabilitate buildings when possible. The City may wish to establish façade improvement programs to help fund such projects. These projects should move buildings into the direction of being consistent with these general standards. Redevelopment should be done when rehabilitation projects are not possible. In these cases, the new structure should be compatible with other buildings and these standards.

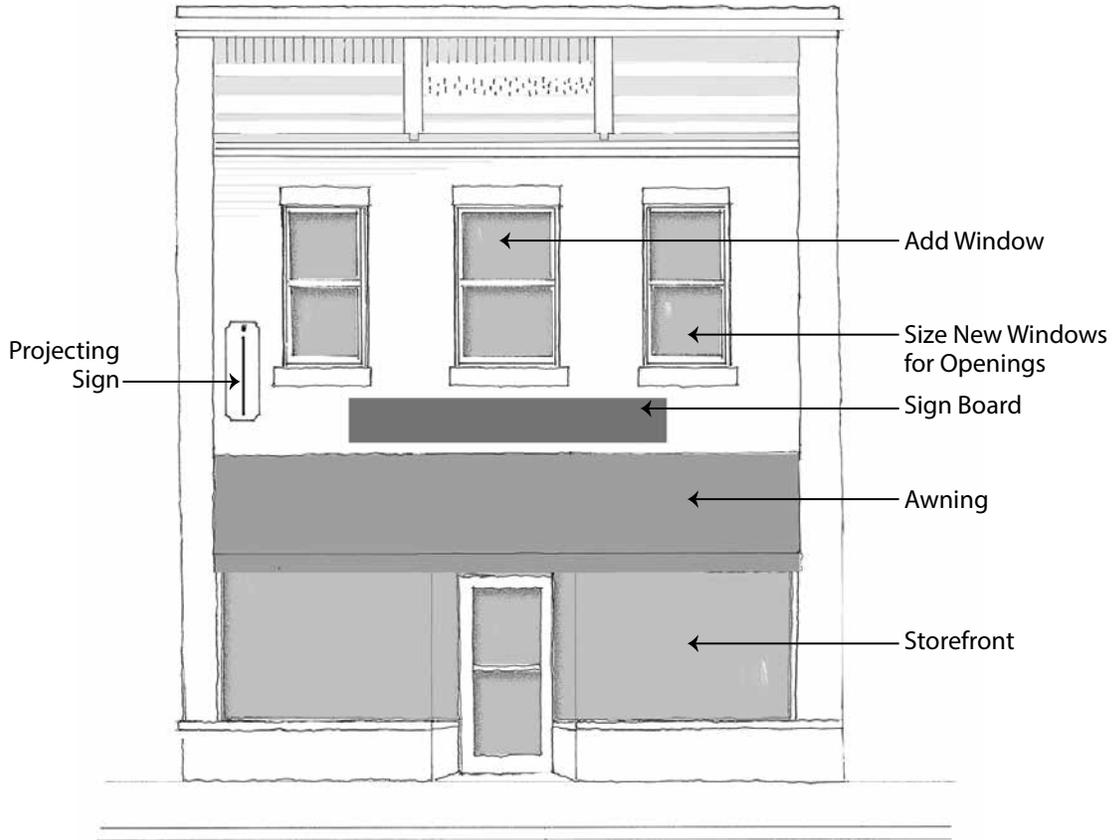
Design Requirements

The City should review and update ordinance language to require a higher standard of architecture reflective of these standards for the Downtown District. Standards should be simple and easy to follow to allow for Staff review and to avoid a lengthy public process. Review and approval of deviations from the strict standards may be done by the Planning Commission and City Council in manner similar to a variance. The design review should apply to new features, major remodels, and new construction.



Opportunities/Examples:

Stage Coach West Building:



All Things Good Building:

Dentist Building:



Potential Streetscape Renderings



Potential Streetscape Renderings



Potential Streetscape Renderings



Potential Streetscape Renderings



Policies Related to Architecture & Design:

- **Develop architectural standards that reflect the historic nature of the Downtown**
- **Establish standards for awnings that reflect traditional design and muted colors**
- **Create an architectural design and improvement program to assist in making necessary building improvements**
- **Establish a simple, City Staff led design review process that is quick and responsive. A process for reviewing deviations that includes public bodies should also be created**
- **Review existing zoning and building standards to ensure the design guidelines are reflected by ordinance**
- **The City should establish economic development programs to assist building owners in making recommended improvements**



part 7

IMPLEMENTATION

In order to implement this plan, the City needs to complete several specific tasks. These tasks are identified below by group.

Update Plans & Documents

This plan established several goals and policies that need to be included in the Land Use Plan and Zoning Ordinance. These documents should be updated to reflect this direction.

Comprehensive Plan

The City's Comprehensive Plan will need to be updated to include the larger Downtown Area. It currently depicts a limited commercial area fronting on Oak Avenue. The State Bank, Thayer Hotel, and other such sites are all guided as single family residential. The Commercial Core and Commercial Periphery should be guided as Commercial while the Downtown Residential should be designated as Multi-Family.

Park & Trail Plan

The current park and trail plan omits Clock Tower Park and any future trail connections through the Downtown. This should be included.

Zoning Ordinance

The City's Zoning Ordinance will require updating. The C-1 District will need revision to include all appropriate areas on the zoning map. The District will also require evaluation against the policies developed by this plan. The subdistricts will require a multi-district approach in the Downtown, as the Commercial Core and Commercial Periphery will have slightly different standards

The commercial performance standards in the Zoning Ordinance should separate standards for Downtown buildings from general commercial buildings. The design guidelines should be used for the Downtown.

A simple design review process should be developed and placed in the Code. This could include a more formal procedure to allow for deviations from set standards. The City's sign ordinance will need to be updated to include the design standards including allowances related to the wall and projecting sign standards.

Architectural & Theme Actions

The City will need to work with a team of professionals to establish the awning system and manage façade improvements. The City may elect to hire one awning company to work with building owners on establishing the initial system. It would also be ideal to use an architect to review the structures and make recommendations on building improvements. The City will need to take the lead on the removal of the canopies ahead of the street project.

The City will need to work with property owners with stairs in right-of-way to relocate access. The City should also work with building owners to establish accessible entrances during the sidewalk improvement project.

The City should prioritize economic development actions towards creating assistance for funding private improvements.



Finalize Streetscape Plan

A final streetscape plan for Oak Avenue should be in conjunction with the MnDOT project. Other portions of a streetscape plan are necessary, as well, but are not as much of a priority.

The City needs to evaluate the light fixtures to determine if the light levels emitted are adequate and establish if the poles can support planters, banners, and decorations. If a change is needed, this would have to be included in the final streetscape plan.

The final streetscape plan will need to be developed with input from community groups. This plan should select the final amenities for the Oak Avenue corridor. The final design materials of the sidewalk will need to be selected. The ability to place bumpouts and include decorative materials in sidewalks will need to be evaluated. This plan should also include more details for gateway features, wayfinding signage, and historic themed street signs.

A plan for maintaining streetscape elements needs to be developed with community groups. This needs to include an evaluation of an irrigation system, based on the final selected streetscape design.

A modified version of the streetscape plan will need to be developed for the portion of Oak Avenue to Municipal Park. Another modified version is needed for the other streets in the Downtown for future use. Also, a bicycle trail corridor should be designed to connect Excelsior Avenue and Cherry Avenue in the future.

The City will also need to evaluate utilities in the area and determine if any infrastructure improvements are necessary. Some actions may be ideal to accomplish during the construction project.



Actions Related to Parking

If parking problems are identified, the City may wish to invest in a more specific and detailed parking analysis.

The City will need to identify possible locations for future public parking and opportunities for pedestrian accesses. Wayfinding signage should be designed and placed directing people to public parking areas. If opportunities arise for acquisition, the City may take action in the future.

The City should consider developing a plan for the beautification of public parking areas including separation walls and planting islands.

Economic Development & Assistance

The City will need to evaluate its economic development programs to include the Downtown specific actions related to this plan. Some assistance may be done by coordinating efforts with community groups and Chamber of Commerce affiliated groups.

The City will need to evaluate options for vacant buildings. This may include a vacant building registration program. It may also include programs for assisting in advertising for business opportunities in vacant buildings.

The City should consider establishing a relationship with an architectural firm to help building owners make improvements to the façade of their structures. This would also include assistance in removing front stairways and improving the usability of upper floors.

To assist in finding out about specific needs in the Downtown business community, the City could establish an expansion and retention program to assist in communication.

As properties become available that may serve a need for parking and other possible goals such as redevelopment or provision of higher density residential, funds could be designated for acquisition.

The City should establish a façade improvement program. Funds could be set aside as loans or grants for property owners to make building improvements, place new signs, purchase awnings, or other such activities.

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) has grant programs available for streetscape improvements and rehabilitation projects. The City may wish to consider pursuing a comprehensive program grant for assistance in the rehabilitation of the Downtown. This may help get the façade improvement program started.

Priority Actions

Several of the above actions need to happen in the short term, ahead of any road project tasks. The priority tasks include designing the final streetscape and engaging architectural professionals for architectural and building needs. Concurrent with engaging the professionals would be the establishment of the economic development programs. While these steps are being initiated, the City should work on updating ordinances and plans. This process will need to be completed before the removal of the canopies, as the Canopy District is codified into the Zoning Ordinance.

Initial Projects

- Work with MnDOT to design final streetscape and road design. This should include establishment of gateways that may be impacted by the Oak Avenue project and any municipal infrastructure improvement needs
- Evaluate short term economic development programs and evaluate funding opportunities. At minimum, the City should establish a building façade improvement program and assistance for short term building improvements
- Establish a relationship with an architectural firm and awning contractor to evaluate the Downtown buildings to resolve potential initial issues. This includes the stairways in the right-of-way and canopy removal project
- Update the Zoning Ordinance, Park & Trail Plan, and Comprehensive Plan

Secondary Projects

- Design signs for parking wayfinding. Establish locations for parking wayfinding signage
- Finalize streetscape plans and gateways for areas not impacted by the Oak Avenue project
- Evaluate long term economic development programs and work with the Chamber of Commerce on providing requisite needs. This would include programs for business expansion and retention, redevelopment funding