

***** May 2025 Update *****

On April 21, 2025 the Ann Arbor City Council approved dissolving the Design Review Board. This change takes effect May 11, 2025. City Planning Department staff will continue to comment on projects using design guidelines.



Ann Arbor Downtown Plan



May, 2009

City of Ann Arbor Downtown Plan

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City of Ann Arbor Downtown Plan

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PLANNING CONTEXT

The Downtown Plan recommends policy objectives and plan concepts which will guide public and private development decision-making in the downtown area. The Downtown Plan's primary focus is Ann Arbor's 66-block Downtown Development Authority district [SEE FIGURE 1], established as a tax increment finance district in 1982. This plan also makes recommendations for non-residentially zoned land adjacent to the DDA boundary and explores the downtown's role within the Central Area and the larger city. The plan addresses a broad range of issues concerning downtown's future – from land use priorities and parking management objectives to more detailed design guidelines for enhancing downtown's pedestrian orientation and identity as a place.

The plan was originally adopted as an element of the master plan in 1988 and updated in 1992 as part of the Central Area Plan. Building on the 1988 Downtown Plan's recommendations, a number of zoning amendments and programmatic changes were implemented by the City and the Downtown Development Authority throughout the 1990's [SEE FIGURE 2]. A renewed interest in downtown development in the early 2000's prompted a re-examination of the City's approach and resulted in this update to the plan. The planning initiatives that contribute to these revisions are summarized below.

Renewal of the Ann Arbor DDA Development Plan and Tax Increment Finance Plan (2003)

The DDA was established as a 30-year tax increment finance district in 1982. This plan lays out the DDA's goals, objectives and financing plan for the next 30 years to provide continuity in ongoing programs and long-term planning and financing of capital projects. The plan was approved by City Council in 2003.

Downtown Residential Task Force Report (2004)

In 2003, City Council commissioned a task force to identify barriers to the development of residential units in the downtown and how to address these barriers. The task force's recommendations were presented to City Council in June 2004.

Downtown Development Strategies Final Report (2006)

Responding to the Downtown Residential Task Force recommendations, City Council initiated the Downtown Development Strategies Project to modify downtown zoning. In May 2005, the City hired Calthorpe Associates to work with the community in developing a vision for the downtown, as well as recommendations to realize this vision. Calthorpe Associates presented its recommendations for zoning, urban design, housing, public spaces and mobility to City Council in December 2005. City Council accepted the consultant's final report, also entitled Recommended Vision and Policy Framework for Downtown Ann Arbor, and directed staff to identify a strategy for implementing the recommendations.

Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown (2006)

Drawing from the recommendations in the Downtown Development Strategies Final Report, City Council approved an Implementation Plan and identified five high priority objectives for staff to address:

- * Create special overlay zoning for the downtown that identifies areas of similar character.
- * Streamline the development proposal process.
- * Incorporate a set of essential design guidelines.
- * Pursue a comprehensive parking strategy.
- * Work with the Historic District Commission to clarify criteria for development.

City Council approved work plans and established advisory committees for each priority projects. Recommendations and implementation schedules from all five committees were approved by City Council in 2007.

Greenway Task Force Report (2007)

In 2005, City Council appointed the Allen Creek Greenway Task Force to develop recommendations for creating a new greenway to follow along the Ann Arbor Railroad right-of-way, connecting to the Huron River Greenway. The task force's report contains recommendations for the greenway and the future use of the three city-owned sites in the greenway: 415 W. Washington, 721 N. Main and the First/William parcel. The report was presented to City Council in March 2007.

Flood Mitigation Plan (2007)

In response to a recommendation in the city's Hazard Mitigation Plan, staff developed a plan for the mitigation of risks in floodplains throughout the city. The main goals of the plan are to minimize life endangerment and property damage or loss. The plan recommends that city codes be amended to limit new development in floodplains, including properties in the Allen Creek floodplain on the west edge of downtown. The plan was approved by City Council in March 2007.

Affordable Housing Needs Assessment (2007)

The Office of Community Development commissioned a countywide study of affordable housing needs in 2007. The study provides data on sub-areas of the county, including Ann Arbor's downtown area. The study also includes recommendations for additional affordable units in the downtown, by type, and potential tools for accomplishing these goals. The study was presented to City Council in September 2007.

Comprehensive Plan for Washtenaw County (2004)

This plan was developed around the vision of preserving the county's diverse landscapes, or "sense of place" and ensuring a sustainable future. Key recommendations include directing future development to infill sites in urban areas and increasing transit services throughout the region. The plan was adopted by the County Board Commissioners in September 2004.

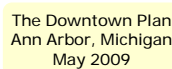


Figure 2

1988 Downtown Plan Implementation Highlights (Through 2007)

Zoning Amendments

Amendments to C2A and C2A/R districts to remove housing disincentive (1992)
Amendments to Premium section to add incentives for residential use (1994)
Amendments to C2A and C2A/R districts to add minimum height requirement (2002)
Amendments to remove side setback requirements from C2A and C2A/R districts (2006)
Rezoning of South University area from C1A and C1A/R to C2A (2006)

Other Codes

Designation of downtown historic districts (1992)
Percent of public projects for public art fund (2007)

Planning Initiatives

Downtown Events Facility Task Force (1989)
Community High Task Force (1990)
Library Block Plan (1991)
Municipal Garage Relocation Task Force (1992)
Main/Packard RFP – Ashley Mews development (1998)
Downtown Residential Task Force (2004)
Downtown Development Strategies Project (2006)
Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown (2007)
First/Washington RFP (2007)
Allen Creek Greenway Task Force (2007)
Monthly UM/City policy and projects meetings (2005 - present)

Transportation

Ashley/William Parking Structure Task Force (1990)
DDA management of parking system (1992)
Study of two-way traffic on First/Ashley (1997)
Establishment of getDowntown program and go!pass (1999)
Conversion of State/Liberty/Maynard to two-way traffic (2001)
Downtown shuttle service - “Link” (2005)
Parking availability study (2006)

Programs

Technical assistance for loft conversions
Expanded use of residential permit parking programs

Downtown Development Authority Initiatives

For a complete listing of DDA projects, see Appendix E of the DDA Development Plan and Tax Increment Finance Plan Renewal (2003)

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Historic Building Patterns

Downtown's identity as a place is significantly influenced by its architecture. Older commercial buildings play an especially important role in creating a positive downtown identity and in establishing the visual interest and comfortable sense of scale which help to give downtown streets a strong pedestrian orientation. As the traditional civic, economic and cultural heart of the community, downtown Ann Arbor is rich in historic resources. Six historic districts lie completely within the downtown boundaries. They are:

- * East Liberty Block Historic District (adopted in 1992)
- * East William Street Historic District (adopted in 1989)
- * Fourth Avenue/Ann Street Historic District (adopted in 1989)
- * Liberty Street Historic District (adopted in 1975)
- * Main Street Historic District (adopted in 1989)
- * State Street Historic District (adopted in 1992)

In addition, portions of three other historic districts, the Division Street Historic District, the Old Fourth Ward Historic District and the Old West Side Historic District, lie within the boundaries of downtown **[SEE FIGURE 3)].**

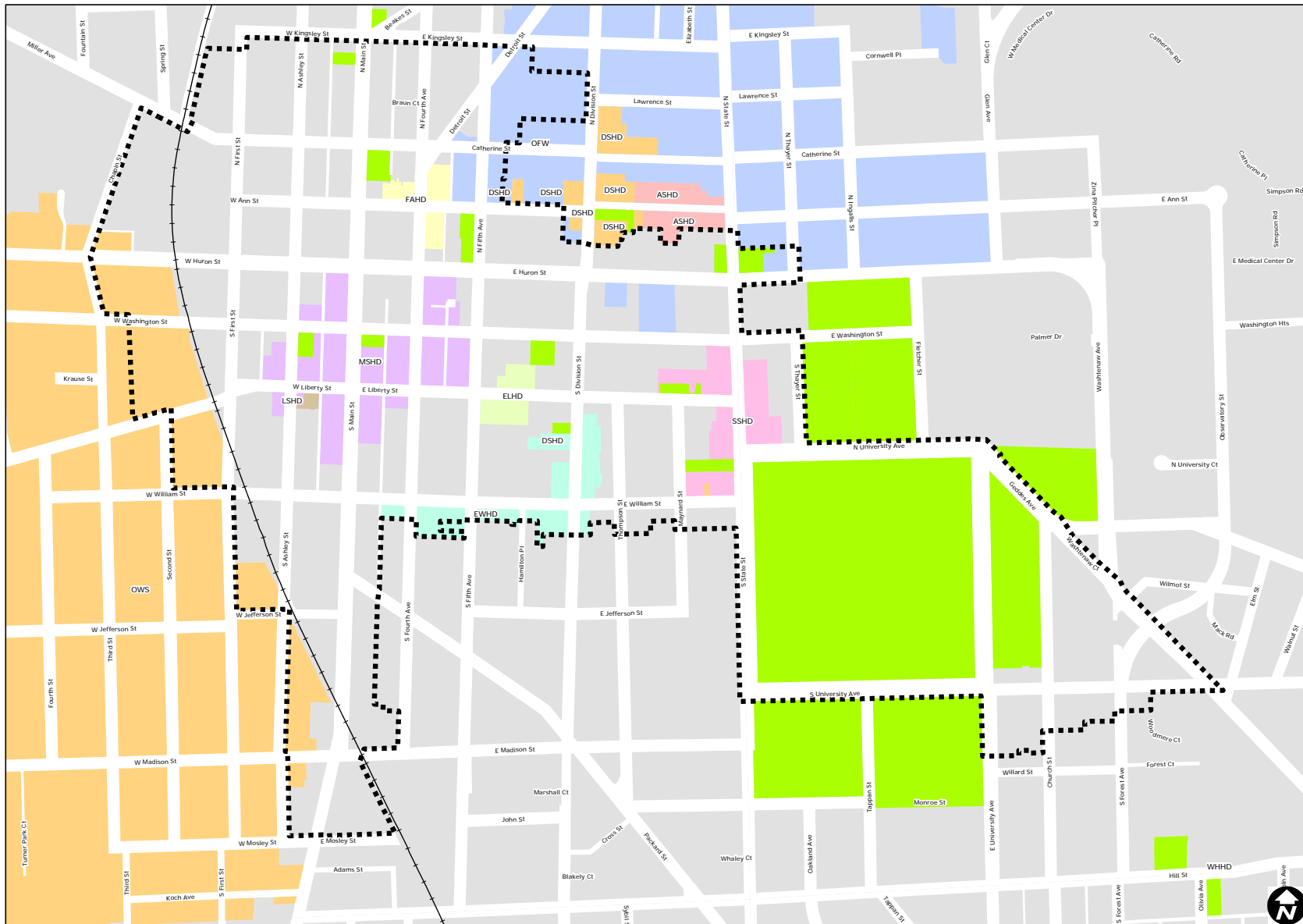
The first businesses in Ann Arbor were opened soon after John Allen and Elisha Walker Rumsey established the town site in 1824. The central business district developed along Main Street and around the county courthouse square at Main and Huron.

A post-Civil War building boom propelled a transformation of the downtown from a collection of insubstantial buildings to a stately array of "commercial palaces," a mode popular for retail business buildings since its introduction in New York in the 1840s. By 1878, when a railroad link with Toledo was finally established, Ann Arbor had become one of the most thriving business centers west of Detroit.

Beginning in the 1870s, a second business area developed on State Street adjacent to the expanding University of Michigan. In this area the majority of the commercial buildings are two-story and from the early twentieth century. As both the Main Street and State Street districts expanded a commercial corridor grew up along Liberty Street that functioned as a link between the two.

The styles of buildings in the downtown historic districts cover the range of popular architectural designs from the 1860's through the 1940s and include Italianate, Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival, Classical Revival, Beaux Arts and Art Deco.

Figure 3
Downtown
Historic
Districts and
National
Register Listings



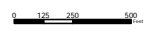
Map Legend

- Railroads
- - - DDA
- National Register Listings

Historic Districts

- Ann Street
- Division Street
- East Liberty
- Fourth / Ann
- Liberty Street
- Main Street
- Old Fourth Ward
- Old West Side
- State Street

The Downtown Plan
Ann Arbor, Michigan
May 2009



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EXISTING CONDITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Pedestrian/Open Space System

Downtown's pedestrian orientation is one of its most important assets, underlying its success as a focus of retail, entertainment, and business activity, as well as its potential to attract new residential development. The characteristics which establish this pedestrian orientation include:

- * The sense of scale established by older buildings and the traditional pattern of building to the front property line to create a continuous "wall" of development enclosing the street;
- * A continuity of storefronts and retail programming at the edge of the sidewalk;
- * The presence of open spaces and street trees which provide relief, and opportunities for relaxation, within the urban fabric;
- * A high degree of attention to the quality of the streetscape to provide a comfortable, attractive setting for people.
- * The Allen Creek valley, which provides an opportunity for linking public and private open spaces to connect to the UM Athletic Campus, West Park and the Huron River/North Main corridor.

Downtown has a number of streets, parks and plazas which share these characteristics and which form the backbone of its pedestrian/open space system **[SEE FIGURE 4]**. Detailed information about the downtown open space system may be found in the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan.

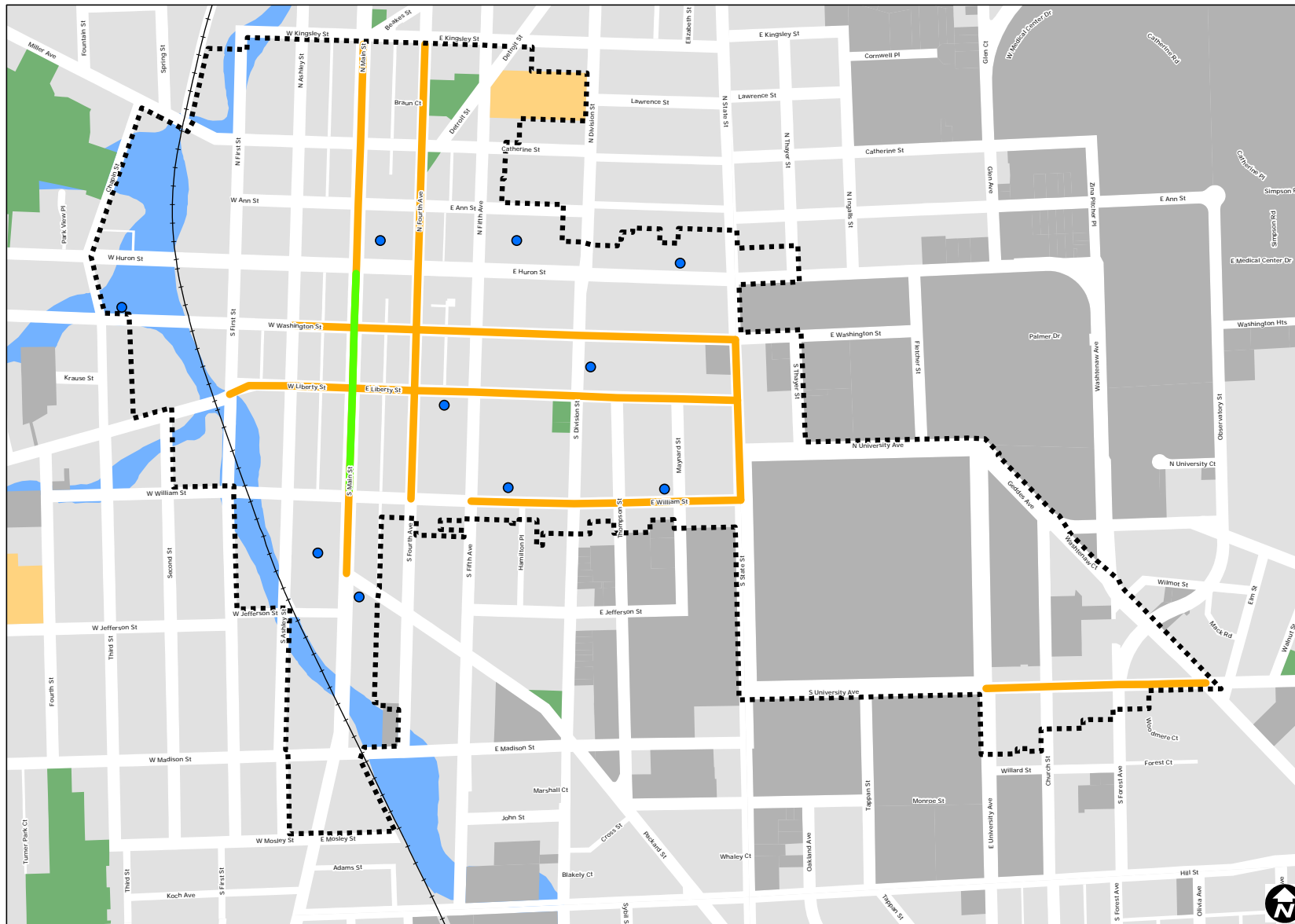


Figure 4
Existing
Pedestrian/
Open Space
Systems

Map Legend

- Railroads
- - - DDA
- Plazas
- Dean Promenade
- Streetscape Improvements
- Schools
- Parks
- University
- Floodway

The Downtown Plan
Ann Arbor, Michigan
May 2009

0 125 250 500 feet

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EXISTING CONDITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Land Use

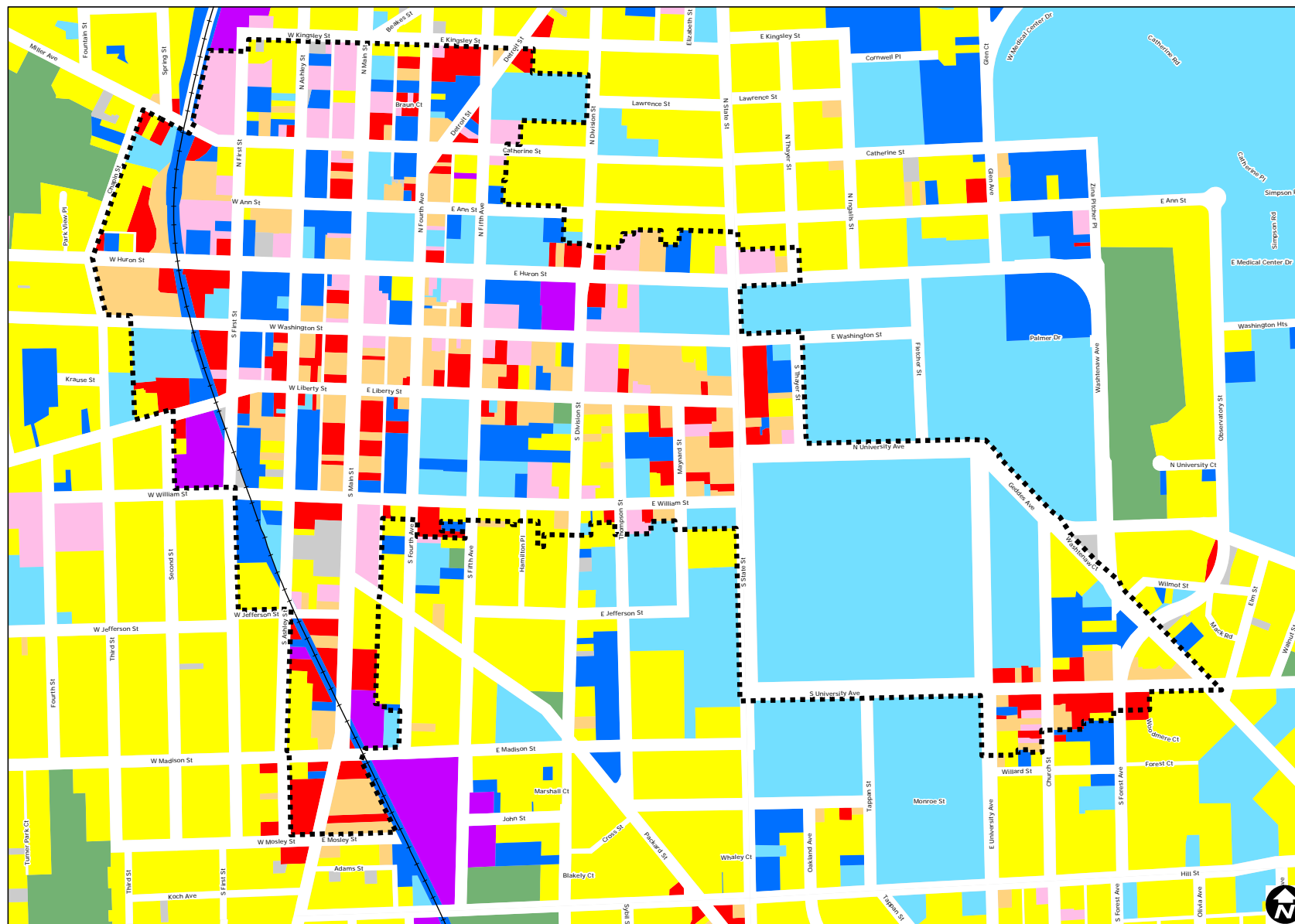
Downtown's pattern of mixed land uses includes four major retail districts, each with its own special character:

- * The traditional heart of downtown retail and commercial activity in the Main/Liberty area;
- * The State Street shopping district adjacent to the UM campus;
- * The Kerrytown/Farmers Market area, with its specialty retail orientation; and
- * The campus-oriented shopping district located on South University.

Other downtown areas which have a clearly identifiable land use orientation include the UM Central Campus; the Huron corridor, characterized by larger-scale structures and government, office, and institutional uses; and the civic focus made up of the Library and Federal Building on Fifth. Just as important as these non-residential land use concentrations, are the neighborhood areas which edge the boundaries of the DDA district.

In contrast to those downtown areas in which a clear physical and functional identity already exists, the western edge of the DDA district and the Fifth/Division corridor south of Huron can be identified as areas in transition, both in terms of land use and development character. These areas include significant amounts of vacant land (in the form of surface parking lots) and a mix of light industrial, auto-oriented commercial, office and residential uses **[SEE FIGURE 5]**.

Figure 5
Existing
Generalized
Land Use
2000



Map Legend

- +— Railroads
- ■ ■ ■ ■ DDA
- Land Use 2000**
- Residential
- Office
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Transportation
- Public Institutions
- Recreation
- Vacant
- Mixed Uses

The Downtown Plan
Ann Arbor, Michigan
May 2009



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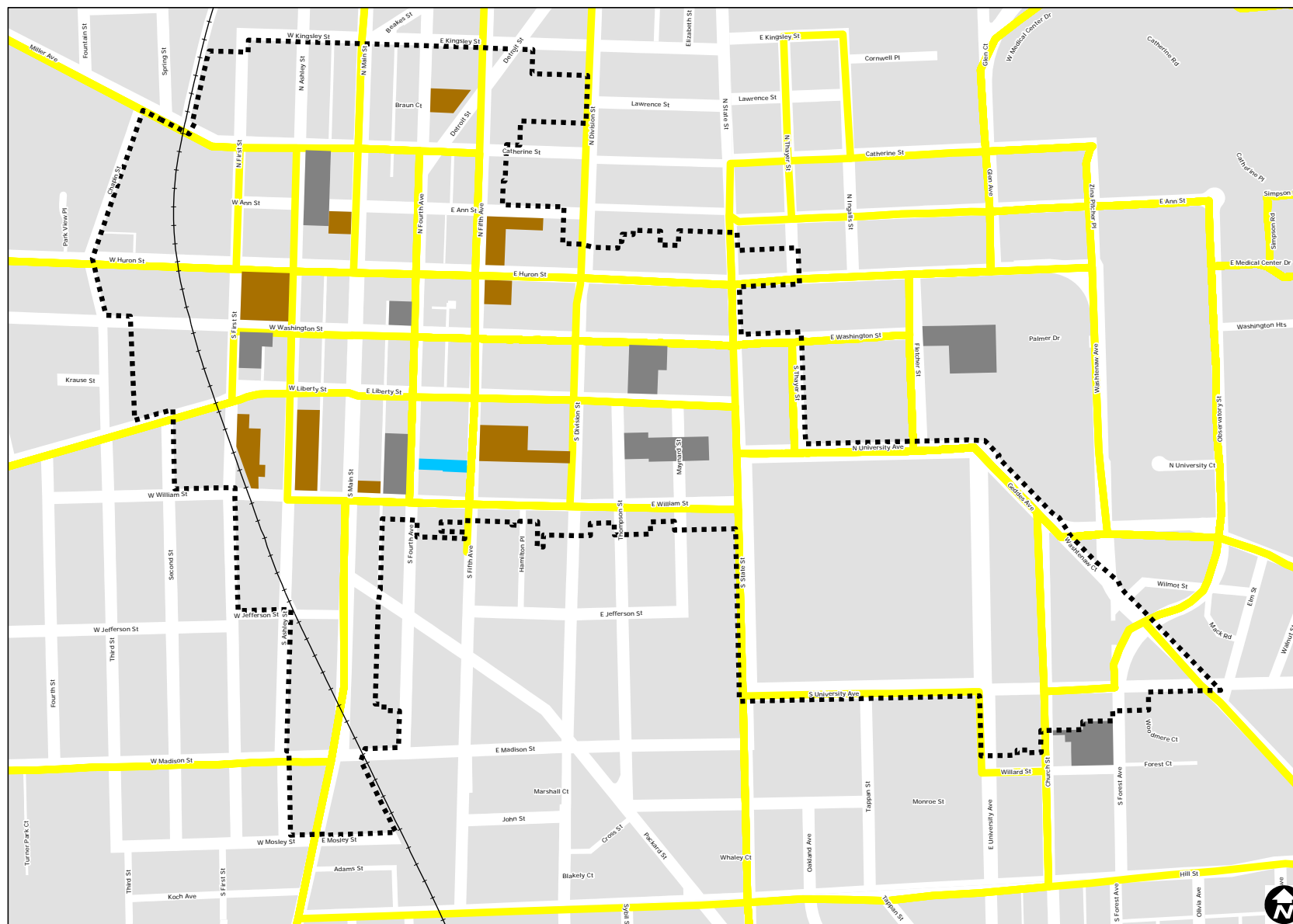
EXISTING CONDITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Transportation System

The transportation system provides infrastructure for transit, non-motorized travel and parking, and vehicular travel and parking. The historic downtown 'grid' street and sidewalk pattern and diverse mixture of land uses combine to provide access for pedestrians and cyclists; a critical mass of activity for transit; and a variety of routes for vehicle access. The Ann Arbor Railroad, located on the west edge of downtown, provides potential for commuter rail access from the north and south. Public parking structures allow users of the downtown to "park once" and walk or use transit to get to destinations **[SEE FIGURE 6]**.

Detailed information about existing transportation system conditions may be found in the Ann Arbor Transportation Plan (under revision in 2008), the Ann Arbor Non-motorized Plan (2006), the Washtenaw County Non-motorized Plan (2007), the Ann Arbor Downtown Parking Study (2007) and the Washtenaw County Transit Plan (2008).

Figure 6
Transportation
Plan



The Downtown Plan
Ann Arbor, Michigan
May 2009



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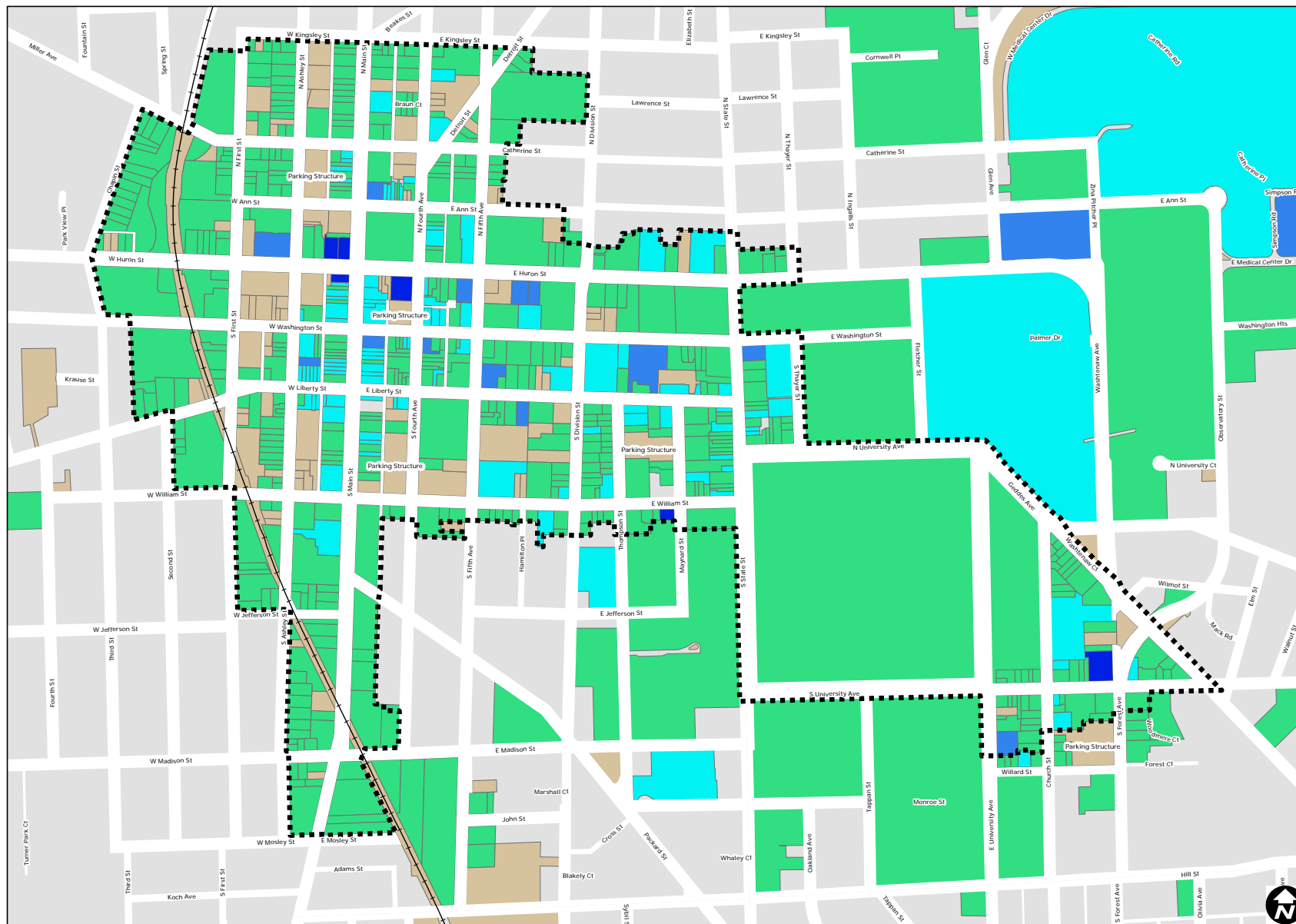
EXISTING CONDITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Existing Development Densities

By comparing existing development densities **[SEE FIGURE 7]** to the maximums permitted by existing zoning, it is possible to identify those areas where large disparities exist. In general, it can be anticipated that the larger the disparity, the greater the pressure for change and redevelopment will be.

In many instances, this potential for change is positive, providing opportunities and incentives for new development which can strengthen downtown's economy and add diversity to its land use base – as is the case along portions of downtown's west edge and on the strategically located “Library” Block. In other cases, however, where the scale, density, and character of existing development is valued by the community, this disparity opens the door to potentials for change which may be less desirable – for example, in the Kerrytown/Farmers Market area and on other neighborhood edges.

Figure 7
Existing
Private & Public
Development
Floor Area to
Lot Area Ratios
(FAR) 2008



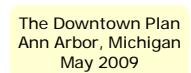
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EXISTING CONDITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Land Form and Building Scale

Downtown is located on a plateau defined by the Huron River Valley and its tributaries. This land form is most visible from the western edge of downtown where a significant change of elevation exists between Ashley and S. Main Streets and the Ann Arbor rail line located on the floor of the Allen Creek valley. Although few conscious efforts have yet been made to capitalize on this topographic feature, it presents an opportunity to create a positive identity for downtown and a clearer transition between the more intensively developed, commercially-oriented area to the east and the neighborhoods to the west **[SEE FIGURE 8]**.

The predominant scale of existing development in different downtown areas also helps to define an overall sense of urban form. In the neighborhoods which edge the DDA district, existing buildings are generally 2-3 stories in height and exhibit the smaller overall scale typical of single-family residential development. In contrast, development along downtown's Huron corridor is characterized by taller and more massive buildings interspersed with pockets of low-rise development and surface parking lots. Taller buildings are also located at the edges of the UM Central Campus (Tower Plaza and University Tower); and within the campus itself, larger institutional buildings and substantial open spaces create a distinctive scale and pattern of development.



EXISTING CONDITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Infrastructure Systems

Downtown buildings are currently served by public water, sanitary sewer and storm sewer systems, in addition to private energy and telecommunications systems. Maintaining and investing in this infrastructure is important to support the future growth and function of downtown. Utility improvements are programmed through the city's Capital Improvements Plan, which is updated annually based on customer level of service requirements and city asset management strategies.

Water: The downtown is well served by a gravity water distribution system. Some portions of the system require upsizing to support the fire flow and volume necessary for new building suppression and pump systems. Portions of system are older and may need replacement in the future. These system improvements will be identified by the Water Distribution Master Plan, currently in development.

Sanitary: The current system of sanitary sewer mains and trunklines has adequate capacity for existing uses. With added development, which increases the flow contributing to the system, available capacity will decrease. A hydraulic model is used to project the impact of new development on the system. Future capacity improvements and footing drain disconnects will be necessary to support increased density.

Storm: An underground system of storm sewers drains surface rainwater runoff from downtown streets, sidewalks, parking lots and roof tops. Most of the stormwater is collected in the Allen Creek drain on the west edge of downtown. The east portion of the South University area drains to Malletts Creek and a portion of the State Street area drains directly to the Huron River. The stormwater runoff from these developed areas contributes to flooding within the receiving systems. The floodplain boundaries and elevations associated with the stormwater systems can be found on FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps. The Flood Mitigation Plan provides recommendations for reducing risks to life and property in floodplain areas throughout the city.

Since most of the downtown was developed prior to current stormwater regulations, few buildings provide on-site containment and water quality facilities. As development and redevelopment of downtown properties occurs, new private storm water improvements are required to be added. The City is in the process of developing a stormwater model which will be used for future stormwater planning and management.

Street trees play an important role in the storm water system by reducing runoff from paved surfaces. In addition, they provide environmental benefits such as improving air quality and mitigating heat impacts and social and economic benefits by positively impacting shoppers' perceptions of an area and creating a sense of place.

Over the years the number of street trees in the downtown area has been declining due to several factors, including the emerald ash borer infestation, old age and poor growing conditions. An inventory of the street tree system will be conducted in 2009.

Energy and Telecommunications: The downtown is also serviced by gas, electric and telecommunications utilities, which are planned and installed by private utility companies.

GUIDING VALUES

The following values articulate the most fundamental elements of the downtown.

Neighborhood, Community and Regional Focus

Downtown will continue to accommodate and foster central business, government, shopping, cultural and entertainment functions within a reasonably compact, walkable area. Downtown's role as an activity center for surrounding neighborhoods, and as the social, cultural, and urban business center of the community and the region, will be strengthened.

Diversity of Use

Diversity of use is the key to unlocking downtown's potential as a focus of economic and social activity. A balanced mix of office, retail, housing, cultural, and entertainment uses will be promoted in order to draw people downtown in sufficient numbers to create a lively atmosphere and a profitable business setting. Emphasis will be placed on creating a critical mass of activity within a concentrated Core area.

Diversity of Users

Downtown will be accessible to everyone. Special efforts will be made to accommodate use and enjoyment by people of all ages and abilities.

Balance

New downtown development will be encouraged; but at the same time, existing assets and valued downtown characteristics will be conserved and strengthened. This balance between conservation and change will be fostered by emphasizing the use of incentives and guidelines.

Image and Identity

The preservation and rehabilitation of historic buildings will be encouraged to establish a positive image and marketable identity for downtown. Natural assets (including downtown's topography and its proximity to the Huron River), streetscape improvements, and open spaces will also be used to advantage in creating a clear development structure and a quality visual environment. Traditional land uses (including government functions and the Farmers Market) will be retained.

Pedestrian Orientation

Strong emphasis will be placed on downtown's quality as a place for people on foot by maintaining its sense of pedestrian scale; promoting an active street life; and providing a comfortable and convenient walking environment. Safety and security for downtown workers, residents, shoppers, and visitors will be maintained and enhanced.

Quality

A high level of quality will be encouraged in the design and maintenance of buildings, streetscapes, and public spaces.

Infrastructure Capacity

Future growth and development will be phased to ensure that infrastructure demands to water, sanitary, storm water, open space and motorized and non-motorized transportation systems do not outstrip available capacities. At the same time, maintaining and investing in these infrastructure systems is essential to downtown's ongoing stability and vitality.

Sustainability

The downtown should be developed and maintained such that it continues to provide for future generations a viable economy, a "green" and energy-efficient built environment and transportation network, and social and cultural opportunities.

LAND USE

Sustainable Systems

Goal: Plan and maintain public infrastructure systems to sustain existing and future downtown development.

Maintenance of existing public infrastructure systems will support private investment in downtown improvements by ensuring that the functional needs of building users are addressed both now and in the future.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Develop asset management policies and strategies for all downtown water, sanitary, storm and transportation systems.
- (2) Develop a plan for increasing downtown street tree plantings and optimizing planting success.
- (3) Look for opportunities to reduce the use of non-renewable energy sources, such as LED retrofits for streetlights and traffic signals, and to increase the use of renewable energy sources in public infrastructure systems
- (4) Implement the recommendations of the Flood Mitigation Plan for the Allen Creek floodplain to reduce the potential for damage of streets, utilities and buildings in the floodplain.
- (5) Evaluate the use of brownfield redevelopment, obsolete property or other financial incentives to encourage the clean-up and reuse of downtown sites.

LAND USE

Concentrated Diversity of Activity

Goal: Encourage dense land use and development patterns which draw people downtown and foster an active street life, contribute to its function as an urban residential neighborhood and support a sustainable transportation system.

A diverse and concentrated mix of land uses and activities is critical in drawing people downtown to create a lively atmosphere and a profitable business setting. If these uses are linked together by streets and open spaces which accommodate and encourage pedestrian movement, the activity generated by one use will provide support for others and downtown's street life will act as a magnet which draws more people.

An intensive pattern of development, and a concentration of pedestrian activity generators, is especially important within downtown's Core area to build the market needed to support a healthy retail sector. In turn, a strong retail component will serve as the "glue" that binds downtown together by creating the continuity of street level activity and interest which encourages people to move through the area on foot and by bike.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Encourage more land use diversity throughout downtown by revising the premium system to provide incentives for housing within developments.
- (2) Update zoning use regulations to incorporate new pedestrian-oriented uses, such as live-work units.
- (3) Develop standards to limit nuisance noise and lighting impacts from development.

LAND USE

Retail Environment

Goal: Promote downtown as the center of commerce in the community. Strengthen and expand a balanced mix of downtown's active uses, such as shops and services, restaurants, and entertainment attractions, by providing convenient transit and parking, a quality pedestrian environment, strategically located vehicular and bicycle parking, and a diverse land use context needed to support a successful retail environment.

Downtown's retail shops and services are the foundation of its success as a center of social activity. By making downtown's streets active, interesting places, these uses help to encourage the pedestrian flows needed to link downtown's diversity of land uses together. Restaurants and entertainment provide additional magnets for drawing people downtown, extending its cycle of activity into evening and weekend hours. It is proximity and ease of access to a broad choice of things to do, see, and buy that makes downtown a competitive location for offices, housing, hotels, and visitor attractions.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Explore opportunities to encourage active street-level uses, such as retail sales and services, and discourage the addition of non-active uses on key retail streets.
- (2) Attract a variety of new businesses to the downtown particularly those which are locally owned and serve a growing downtown residential population.
- (3) Continue public investments in streetscape improvements.
- (4) Encourage a balanced mix of downtown housing, visitor attractions, and office use to build market support for downtown retailing.
- (5) Undertake a market study of downtown retail potential to enhance the competitive advantages of downtown retailers; actively pursue study recommendations.
- (6) Increase capacity of existing businesses in the downtown to ensure that businesses can remain viable and take advantage of opportunities for future growth.

LAND USE

Housing

Goal: Encourage a diversity of new downtown housing opportunities and the expansion of the downtown resident population to strengthen downtown's role as an urban neighborhood. Continue to seek a range of age groups and income levels in the downtown.

Even a modest increase in housing and residents can enhance downtown's image as a safe, lively, people-oriented place, with the result that its appeal as a setting for a broad range of activities is increased. Downtown can be desirable for housing if (1) a distinctive "product" is provided for a variety of income levels and (2) downtown's amenity as a residential environment is enhanced.

The City can continue to improve downtown's appeal as a residential location by protecting the stability of its adjacent residential neighborhoods edges; supporting residential retail uses continuing to invest in streetscape improvements; upgrading cleanliness; and working to enhance perceived security. Public investments in the development of open space areas can also serve as a catalyst for, and complement to, private sector residential investments.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Revise existing zoning premiums, and provide premiums where not currently available, to create incentives for downtown residential use, including on-site affordable housing for lower income households.
- (2) Continue to invest in streetscape improvements and open spaces such as the Allen Creek greenway as part of the strategy for enhancing downtown's attractiveness as a residential investment location.
- (3) Remove disincentives to housing development and renovation in existing C2B and C2B/R zoning regulations.
- (4) Use DDA funds to support the development of downtown housing.
- (5) Continue to make housing a priority use of public land offered for private development.
- (6) Consider impacts on residential use in reviewing street occupancy permit applications and proposals for special outdoor events.
- (7) Encourage the development and/or expansion of downtown grocery stores and convenience services for downtown residents.

LAND USE

Office, Service and Cultural Uses

Goal: Promote a balanced mix of office, service, and cultural uses in the downtown area to complement retail and residential development and to create a diverse center of urban activity.

It is important that downtown maintain, and expand, its diversity of land uses, and office development is an important component of that mix. It contributes significantly to downtown's revenue base, as well as creating the employee population which supports retail, service, and entertainment uses and which establishes a market for downtown housing.

An important part of the strategy for tempering the impacts associated with new office development is to encourage commuters to choose alternatives to parking downtown all day to moderate the impacts of peak traffic and parking demands. In addition, guidelines and incentives must be established for encouraging new office projects which reinforce the intensive, compact pattern of development in downtown's Core; which complement the existing architectural context; and which add to downtown's pedestrian orientation.

The concentration of galleries, museums, studios, and performing arts facilities which has already begun to develop in the downtown area adds a special dimension to its image and appeal. This arts orientation distinguishes downtown from other shopping and business centers, enhancing its identity as a center of the community and the region. Additional cultural uses should be encouraged to locate downtown and these uses should be marketed in a coordinated manner as a special set of visitor attractions.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Introduce incentives to choose alternatives to parking downtown all day.
- (2) Encourage office developments to incorporate mixed uses through the use of premiums.
- (3) Encourage cultural and arts-oriented uses to locate downtown.
- (4) Market cultural uses as special set of visitor attractions.

LAND USE

Conference/Civic Center

Goal: Support the private development of a downtown conference/civic center within the Core area. Further investigate the costs and benefits of public funding participation in the construction and/or operation of such a downtown visitor attraction.

A downtown conference center could have a significant, positive impact on the downtown economy, especially its retail sector.

If a public commitment is to be considered, these will certainly have to be quantified under alternative participation scenarios and compared to the potential benefits which downtown might derive from a similarly-sized conference center located elsewhere in the community.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Amend the zoning ordinance to allow a conference/civic center within downtown's Core area as a special exception use subject to the condition that substantial evidence of economic feasibility is provided.
- (2) Evaluate the costs and benefits of any public financial participation in the development and/or operation of a downtown conference/civic center.
- (2) Encourage a facility design which can serve local as well as out-of-town meeting needs and which contributes to the quality of the pedestrian environment on adjacent streets.

LAND USE

Community Services

Goal: Maintain the downtown as a center for government, public and community service.

Government service and office uses help to make downtown a civic focus. They draw people downtown to fulfill a variety of service needs, as well as creating a significant office employee population. These government functions also help to create a market for other professional office and business service uses in the downtown area.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Make a commitment to keep City office and service functions (not including equipment and vehicle storage) downtown.
- (2) Establish a liaison with the County concerning their downtown expansion plans.

DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

Core Areas

Goal: Encourage downtown's highest density development and tallest buildings to locate within the Core areas [SEE FIGURE 9] to create the critical mass of activity and density needed to support a range of central retail, service, cultural, residential, and entertainment functions and transportation modes.

The Core Areas include downtown's largest retail areas - Main Street, State Street and South University; its highest concentration of office use; its principal civic functions (city, county, and federal government services; the central library); and major hotels. The Core Areas also include much of downtown's highest density development and its tallest buildings, creating a physical identity which reinforces its functional role as the center of downtown activity. It is a relatively compact area which, because of its mix of uses, concentration of activity generators, and density of development, serves as a focus of intensive pedestrian use.

Because the Core Areas are the traditional centers of downtown commercial development, they contain important retail concentrations and significant numbers of older and historic buildings which add to their special identity and visual appeal. These buildings and uses help to establish a strong pedestrian orientation in portions of the Core, defining its primary system of pedestrian connections. These qualities of identity, interest, scale, and amenity are valued assets which must be protected as new development occurs.

These positive characteristics can be maintained and strengthened while encouraging higher density development to concentrate in downtown's Core Areas. To achieve this balance, priorities for the protection of important historic structures must be established and compatibility with the existing development context must be encouraged in the design of new buildings. Guidelines will be needed to illustrate principles for designing these new buildings to (1) add to the pedestrian character of streets and sidewalks and (2) provide positive transitions in scale and height.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Replace the existing zoning designations that make up the Core areas (C1A, C1A/R, C2A, C2A/R and P) with a new Downtown Core zoning district.
- (2) Develop upper story setback requirements for properties in the Downtown Core that abut residentially zoned land.
- (3) Revise existing zoning premiums, and create premiums where not currently available, to establish incentives for achieving Core Areas objectives: residential development, affordable housing, "green" building, historic preservation, public parking, of development rights and public and private open space.
- (4) Incorporate recommended land use and urban design objectives, including the consideration of height limits, into overlay zoning districts for the review and approval of projects in the Core Areas.
- (5) Discourage "auto oriented commercial" land uses.
- (6) Encourage structured (rather than surface) parking that integrates bicycle, motorcycle and moped parking with vehicular parking. Below grade parking structures should be encouraged in major projects.

DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

Interface Area

Goal: Preserve and enhance incremental transitions in land use, density, building scale and height in the Interface areas located between downtown's neighborhood edges and Core Areas [SEE FIGURE 9].

Development within the DDA district, especially in the area which forms the Interface between the intensively developed Core and near-downtown neighborhoods, should reinforce the stability of these residential areas – but without unduly limiting the potential for downtown's overall growth and continued economic vitality. Ideally, development within this portion of the DDA district should blend smoothly into the neighborhoods at one edge and into the Core at the other.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Replace the existing zoning designations that make up the Interface areas (C2B, C2B/R, C3 and M1) with a new Downtown Interface zoning district.
- (2) Reduce maximum permitted FAR's of 600% and maintain height limits in the Interface zone, giving special consideration to adjoining residential neighborhoods.
- (3) Revise existing premiums, and provide premiums where not currently available, to create incentives for achieving Interface objectives: residential development, affordable housing, "green building" and transfer of development rights.
- (4) Incorporate recommended land use and urban design objectives as overlay zoning districts for the review and approval of projects in the Interface area.
- (5) Revise principal permitted land uses to encourage a shift in land use emphasis from "auto-oriented" and light industrial to mixed use buildings, incorporating residential and a mix of office, retail and business service functions.

FIGURE 10: Interface Transitions: Kerrytown/Farmers Market

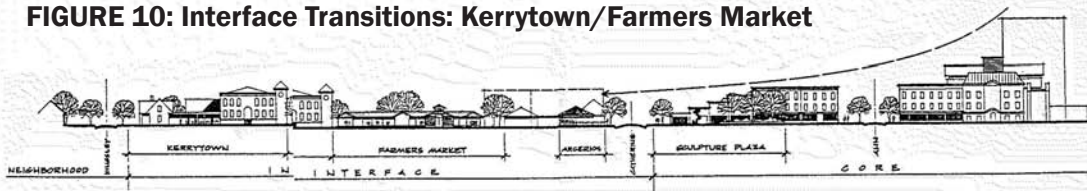


FIGURE 11: Interface Transitions: Allen Creek Valley

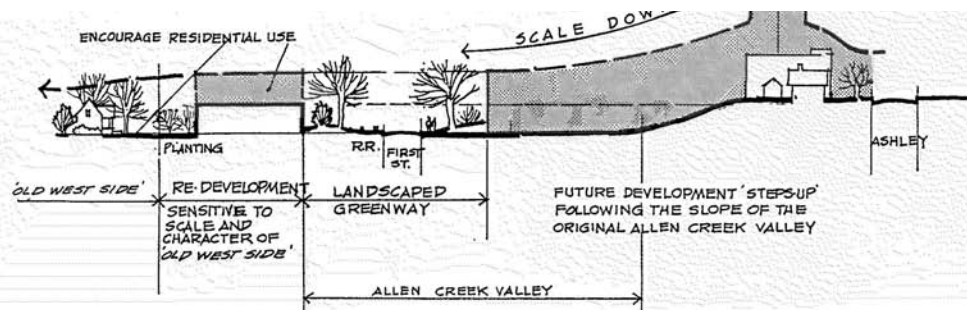
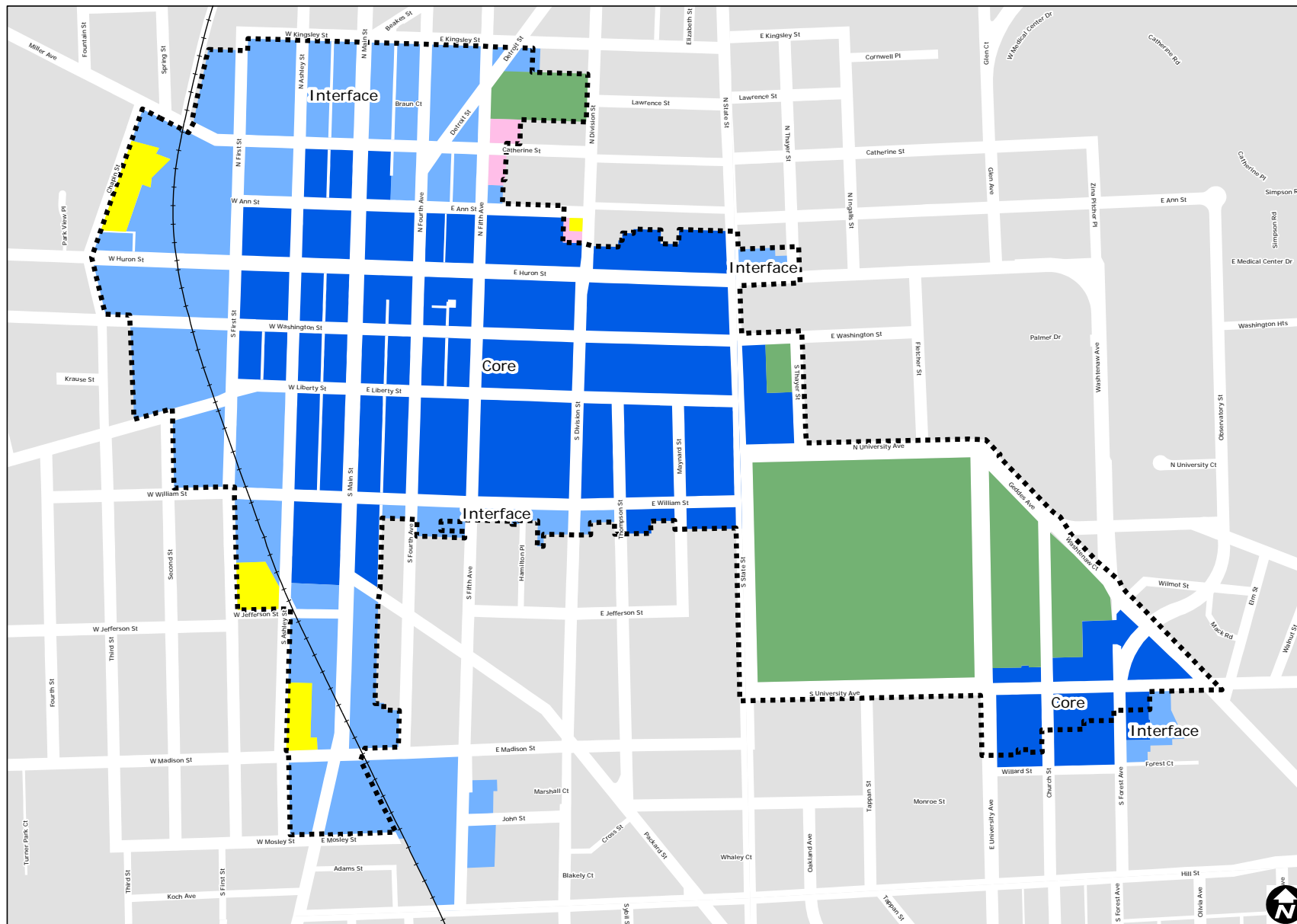


Figure 9
Downtown Planning Zones:
Future
Land Use



Map Legend

- Railroads
- DDA
- Land Use
- Office
- Education
- Residential
- Core
- Interface

The Downtown Plan
Ann Arbor, Michigan
May 2009



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DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

Adjoining Neighborhood Area

Goal: Protect the livability of residentially zoned neighborhoods adjacent to downtown.

The neighborhoods which edge downtown are an important factor in making it an attractive, vital center of community life. Near-downtown residents help to establish a market for retail, service, and entertainment functions, as well as extending the cycle of downtown activity into weekend and evening hours.

Definite land use boundaries, marking the outer limit of expansion for downtown-oriented commercial development, should be respected in order to reduce pressures for inappropriate encroachment into neighborhoods. In addition, efforts should be made to minimize through automobile traffic impacts on neighborhood streets and to reduce the parking pressures created by non-residents.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Respect residential zoning boundaries and discourage downtown commercial expansion past these limits.
- (2) Reduce parking pressures in neighborhood areas by expanding the use of resident parking permit programs and strictly limiting the addition of surface parking lots.
- (3) Minimize through automobile traffic impacts on neighborhood streets by adding traffic calming facilities such as corner bulb-outs, raised pedestrian crossings, speed humps, or other appropriate measures.

DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

Historic Preservation and Compatible Infill

Goal: Encourage new development to reinforce historic buildings' contribution to downtown's identity and pedestrian orientation.

Architecturally and historically significant buildings help to create a positive identity and special market appeal for downtown. They provide visual interest; establish a comfortable sense of scale; and maintain links to the past to give deeper meaning to the built environment. Special efforts should be made to encourage the preservation and renovation of these buildings and to promote compatibility in the design of new buildings located nearby.

Protection will continue to be afforded to buildings and districts within the DDA area which have already been designated as historic. This designation constitutes an "overlay" zone which requires Historic District Commission review and approval of applications for new construction and the alteration, repair, demolition or moving of structures.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Work with the Historic District Commission to clarify criteria for development.
- (2) Develop additional guidelines for compatible infill development in areas where buildings share valued design characteristics. Evaluate the feasibility of implementing these guidelines through modifications to the premium system and/or design review.
- (3) Evaluate the need for/desirability of compensating owners of designated properties through a Transfer of Development Rights program.
- (4) Evaluate the possibility of using premiums or a transfer of development rights program to preserve historic properties that are not protected by a local ordinance.
- (5) Retain the existing O Office district zoning for designated historic properties that abut residential zoning districts. Consider rezoning to O Office district those designated properties currently zoned commercial that abut residential zoning districts.

DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

Sensitivity to Context

Goal: Encourage articulation in the massing of larger new buildings to fit sensitively into the existing development context. Encourage design approaches which minimize the extent to which high-rise buildings create negative impacts in terms of scale, shading, and blocking views.

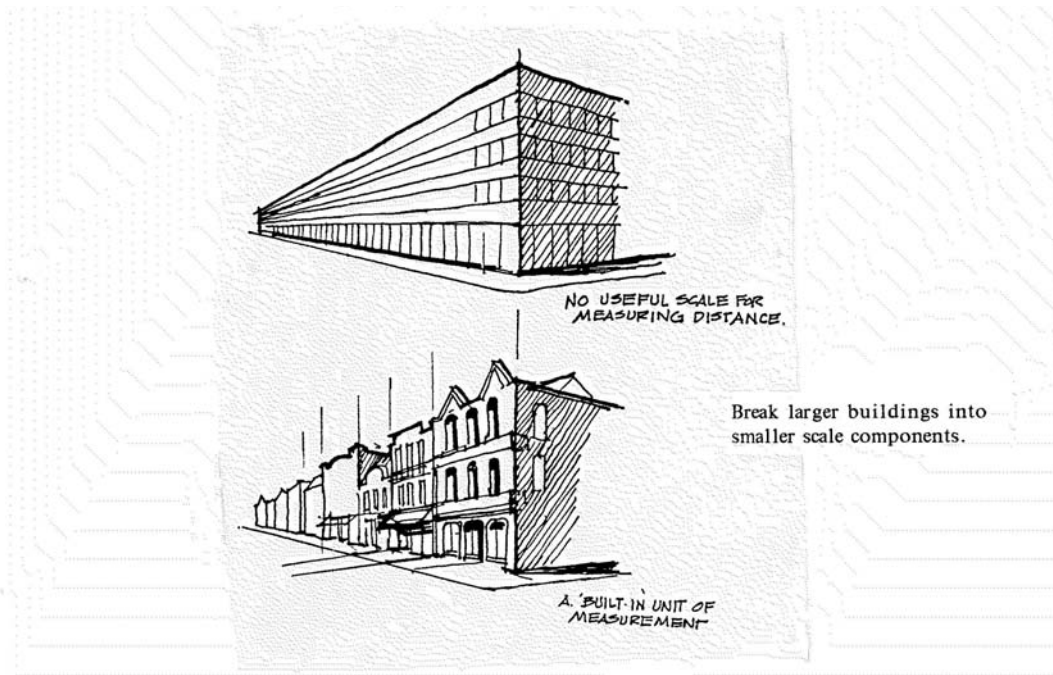
The most fundamental recommendations for the design of new downtown buildings are to (1) complement the scale and character of the existing development context; (2) reinforce the clarity of the overall urban form; and (3) add to the area's identity as a special place. This will require that harmony be encouraged in overall visual relationships, while still fostering design excellence and the diversity which adds richness and interest to the cityscape.

In the final analysis, the degree of success which is achieved in creating a coherent and satisfying set of visual relationships will depend on the sensitivity, skill, and creativity of individual developers and their design teams. These qualities cannot be legislated into existence; nor is it possible to define a strict set of requirements that can be universally applied to prevent "mistakes" from happening. But it is possible, and worthwhile, to define a number of important architectural design considerations and to provide related guidelines and incentives to which all new development projects are asked to respond.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Create special overlay zoning that identifies areas of similar character.
- (2) Incorporate a set of essential design guidelines for the review and approval of projects in downtown character districts. These guidelines should encourage the following elements:
 - * Variations in building height, roof lines, minor facade setbacks and architectural detailing to break larger new buildings into smaller scale components which fit more sensitively into the existing development context.
 - * Incremental transitions in building height to tie taller building elements into the surrounding development context.
 - * Techniques to minimize the impact of tall buildings in blocking views, shading sidewalks and public spaces.
- (3) Identify those downtown areas with the highest potential for growth and develop Area Urban Design Plans as advisory, site-specific development guidelines.

FIGURE 12: Sensitivity to Context: Building Mass



PEDESTRIAN AND OPEN SPACE SYSTEM

Streetscape Improvements

Goal: Improve and extend downtown's system of pedestrian connections through public and private streetscape improvements.

The program of streetscape improvements already being implemented by the Downtown Development Authority has helped to enhance the quality of the downtown pedestrian experience, as well as the area's overall visual character.

In setting future implementation priorities, greater emphasis might also be given to improvements on streets which link downtown to adjacent neighborhoods.

Within the Core area, greater emphasis might also be given to the development of improved pedestrian crossings on major arterial streets to overcome the physical and psychological barriers which these trafficways create between downtown's retail districts.

Downtown's appeal as a shopping and service center could also be significantly enhanced by providing attractive "short-cuts" through development blocks – in the form of open-air walkways, retail arcades, and atrium spaces – to increase the convenience of walking between parking structures and shopping frontages

The design character and level of maintenance in downtown's alleyways must also be considered as an integral part of any strategy for developing more attractive and convenient through-block connections.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Prepare a downtown streetscape improvement program that integrates with capital improvement projects.
- (2) Re-evaluate investment priorities considering the importance of improved pedestrian crosswalks; through-block connections linking parking to retail frontages; alley improvements; and links to neighborhoods.
- (3) Plan for long-term maintenance and repair of streetscape improvements; explore alternative funding sources.
- (4) Institute a process to work with property owners/developers to implement streetscape and building façade improvements.
- (5) Encourage the use of plantings and sidewalk furniture to improve the pedestrian experience on downtown sidewalks.

PEDESTRIAN AND OPEN SPACE SYSTEM

Development Guidelines

Goal: Encourage both rehabilitation and new development projects to enhance the pedestrian scale and orientation of streets which serve as downtown's primary pedestrian connections. Ensure that all other downtown streets also provide attractive and comfortable environments for people on foot.

While all of downtown's sidewalks should accommodate pedestrian activity, some will be particularly important in determining the quality of the pedestrian experience because of the volume of use they attract. Three primary factors influence pedestrian use levels, in large part by defining the extent to which a given street frontage provides an interesting and attractive setting for people on foot. This sense of pedestrian orientation is determined by:

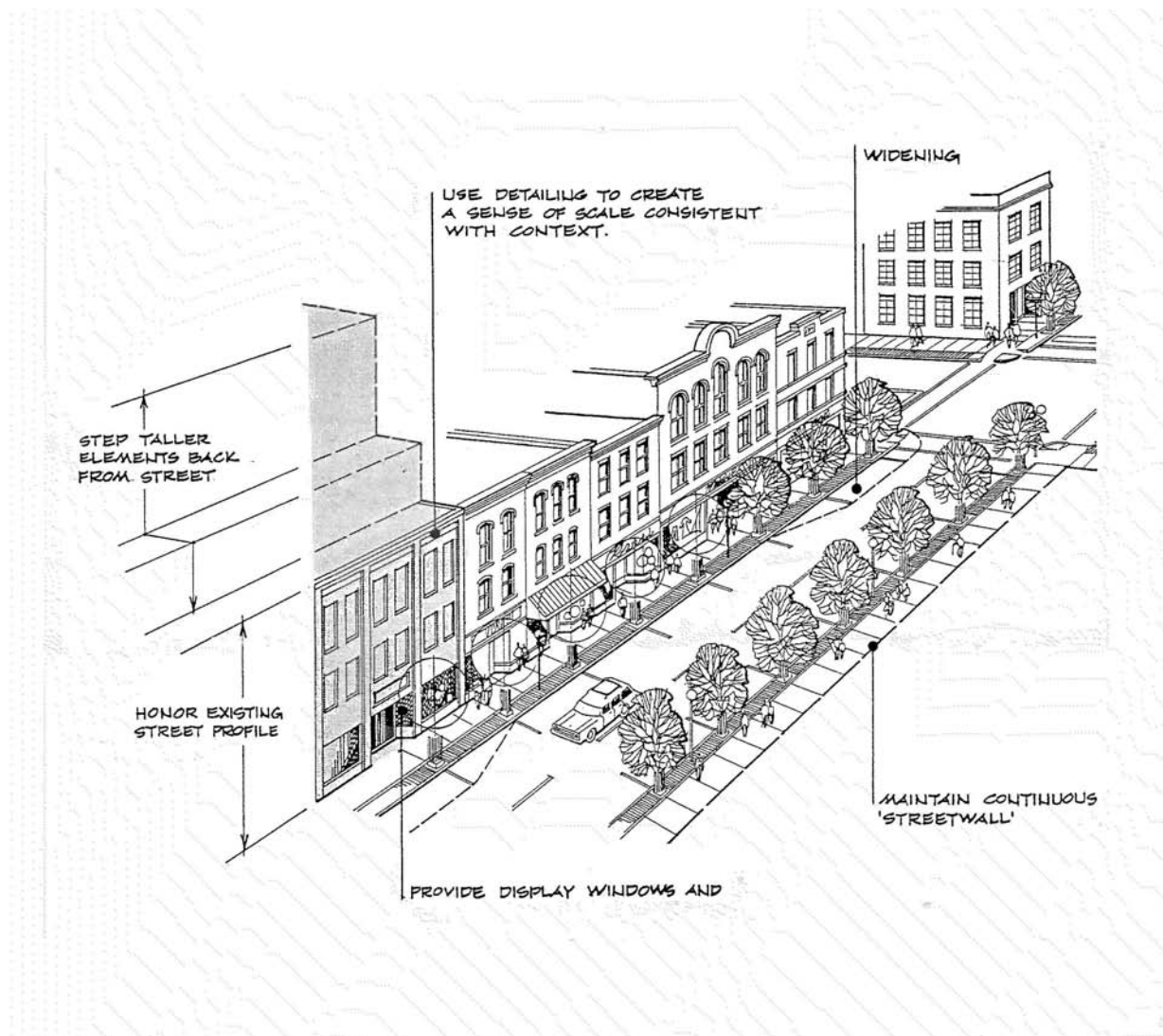
- * The street's functional role in the vehicular circulation system; including driveway access across sidewalks.
- * The scale and character of buildings which edge the sidewalk; and
- * The uses and activities which those buildings accommodate.

Downtown's streets can be categorized according to the role they play as pedestrian connections. Guidelines for future development along streets can contribute to the quality of downtown's pedestrian environment.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Adopt design guidelines for the street frontage of new development and rehabilitation projects based on the character of the adjoining streets.
- (2) Encourage new development to incorporate urban nature whenever possible, including window boxes, roof gardens and balconies, foundation and raised planters and parking lot buffers.

FIGURE 13: Characteristics of Pedestrian Orientation



PEDESTRIAN AND OPEN SPACE SYSTEM

Open Space Incentives and Guidelines

Goal: Encourage the development of parks, plazas, through-block arcades and atrium spaces, emphasizing small open spaces distributed throughout downtown.

While downtown's streets and sidewalks are the foundation of its open space system, other types of public spaces – including parks, plazas, arcades, and atriums – expand the variety of the pedestrian experience which downtown offers. These public spaces play an important role in structuring the “image of the city” by creating focal points – or landmarks – which punctuate the urban fabric and provide relief to the hard surfaces of the built environment. They also create opportunities for social interaction; if they are located and designed to attract use, they can add substantially to the vitality of downtown's street life. These spaces are most meaningful when they reinforce locations of special visual significance (such as downtown entry points and civic buildings) and functional importance (such as major “crossroads” of pedestrian movement).

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Re-evaluate existing zoning premiums to provide incentives for the private development of desired downtown open spaces.
- (2) Establish design guidelines for public open spaces.

PEDESTRIAN AND OPEN SPACE SYSTEM

Public Sector Open Space Development

Encourage the creation of new public spaces within the downtown and rehabilitation of existing spaces, including indoor public meeting and performing arts space.

The City must also consider downtown open space objectives in the course of making decisions on the future development of publicly owned parcels. Of particular importance are the opportunities for (1) using a portion of the strategically located “Library” parking lot as an open space and activity focus; (2) the preservation and improvement of the Community High open space area on Fifth Avenue; and (3) creating a greenway in the Allen Creek valley on downtown’s west edge (see the Allen Creek Greenway Goals and Action Strategies on Page 40). In addition, the Plan supports the development of improved open space areas at City Hall, as part of its possible future expansion.

The Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan identifies more specific, detailed information for downtown park plazas.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Encourage the creation of active, accessible and programmed public spaces within the downtown.
- (2) Encourage the rehabilitation of existing spaces, including indoor public meeting and performing arts space.
- (3) Encourage the preservation and improvement of the Community High open space area on Fifth.
- (4) Incorporate art into public spaces.

PEDESTRIAN AND OPEN SPACE SYSTEM

Allen Creek “Greenway”

Goal: Foster the development of a system of linked open spaces on the floor of the Allen Creek valley to create an amenity which encourages residential investment and provides an improved transition between the downtown Core and west side neighborhoods.

The presence of a number of vacant parcels and potential redevelopment sites within the Allen Creek valley creates the opportunity to plan for the future development of greenway along the west edge of downtown. In defining a workable implementation strategy, it is important to recognize that this valley open space system is not likely to take the form of a continuous, uniformly-dimensioned corridor. Instead, it will consist of a series of relatively small landscaped spaces and setbacks which are developed over time and are linked by non-motorized paths.

A combination of public sector investment and private sector cooperation will be required for implementation.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Dedicate portions of publicly owned sites within the Allen Creek valley for open space use as part of any development agreement.
- (2) Promote the development of an Allen Creek valley “greenway” as part of new development proposals in the valley.
- (3) Develop design guidelines for the Allen Creek greenway, including guidelines for safety and security.
- (4) Assess the interaction between the Allen Creek greenway and the residential development on its edges for appropriate design standards.

PEDESTRIAN AND OPEN SPACE SYSTEM

Entrance Corridors

Goal: Improve the visual quality of major downtown entrance corridors.

Downtown's entrance corridors parallel the major arterial streets which radiate from the Core. These streets pass through areas which vary in land use and development character; as a result, the degree to which they provide a positive entry experience varies. Outside the DDA district, the N. Main/Huron River corridor represents the greatest potential for improvement and a study of alternatives for its future development has been undertaken.

Within the DDA district, it is the character of development in the Interface area (located between the Core and neighborhoods which edge downtown) which determines the quality of the immediate downtown entry experience. Here a gradual progression in development scale and density is desirable -- not only to protect downtown's neighborhood edges, but also to create a heightened sense of arrival as the center of activity in the Core is approached.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Use the interface zone to encourage a gradual increase in scale and density between the downtown's neighborhood edges and the Core.

TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING

Vehicular Travel

Goal: Ensure that the traffic increases generated by future growth can be accommodated without jeopardizing the quality of the non-motorized environment, overtaxing the capacity of the existing street network, or channeling significantly increased auto traffic through neighborhoods.

Establishing an appropriate balance between competing objectives for pedestrian bicycle and vehicular use of downtown streets has traditionally been Ann Arbor's traffic management goal. The Plan endorses this policy and recommends that the existing street network be managed to maximize its capacity to meet the needs of future downtown development, without sacrificing the pedestrian orientation of important shopping streets or encouraging neighborhood through traffic.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Enforce lower traffic speed limits and maintain some on-street parking to protect the pedestrian orientation of major shopping streets.
- (2) Use operational changes, rather than street widening, to accommodate increased traffic demand on Shared and Vehicular Streets, consistent with objectives for pedestrian orientation and the protection of residential neighborhoods.
- (3) Locate and limit driveways across sidewalks to minimize conflicts between vehicles, pedestrians and bicycles.
- (4) Encourage shared vehicular access to parking and building service areas through public and private alleys and easements.

TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING

Non-motorized Travel

Goal: Establish a physical and cultural environment that supports and encourages safe, comfortable and convenient ways for pedestrians and bicyclists to travel throughout the downtown and into the surrounding city.

The design of the downtown non-motorized environment has a direct effect on the degree to which people enjoy the walking experience. If designed appropriately, the non-motorized environment serves not only the people who currently walk and bike but also entices those who don't. When considering appropriate design of a certain location, designers should consider not only existing non-motorized use, but how the design will influence and increase walking and bicycling in the future.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Establish bicycle and pedestrian ways in new construction and reconstruction projects on both sides of a street.
- (2) Apply the design guidelines from the Non-Motorized Transportation Plan Section 2.9 (Pedestrian Travel Downtown) for public improvements in Sidewalk Corridors.
- (3) Address the need for bicyclists and pedestrians to safely cross and travel on streets by implementing the recommendations from the Non-Motorized Transportation Plan Sections 2.3 (Travel Along Road Corridors) and 2.4 (Travel Across Road Corridors).
- (4) Provide bicycle parking on sidewalks and in parking lots and structures.
- (5) Provide appropriate parking options for small motorized vehicles, such as scooters, mopeds and motorcycles.

TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING

Transit

Goal: Improve transit service within the downtown connecting existing and regional transit facilities.

Commuter auto trips, and overall peak traffic volumes, will certainly increase as growth occurs in the downtown area; however, increased density and compact development patterns in the downtown provide the opportunity to shift this travel demand to alternative forms of commuting, such as walking, bicycling, car-pooling, transit use and commuter rail.

To successfully encourage such a shift away from low-occupancy vehicle commuting, policies for managing downtown's parking supply must be considered in concert with transit initiatives. In addition, the active co-operation of major downtown employers (including the County, City, and UM) will be needed to encourage a change in commuting patterns – for example, by subsidizing the cost of transit passes and by making car-pooling a prerequisite for the use of employer-paid parking spaces.

AATA efforts to develop park-and-ride lots outside of the downtown area, and commuter rail on the Ann Arbor Railroad (north/south) and Norfolk Southern (east/west) rights-of-way should be pursued. The success of such a program will depend on the existence of substantial cost and time savings to users as compared to driving and parking downtown all day.

Recommended Action Strategies

- 1) Reduce future increases in peak traffic and parking demand by adopting parking pricing and enforcement policies which enhance the competitiveness of transit, bicycle commuting and car-pool alternatives.
- (2) Support AATA efforts to provide satellite park-and-ride lots with downtown shuttle connections.
- (3) Encourage companies and the University of Michigan to reduce the number of employees arriving in downtown by automobile by offering go!passes and supporting a wide array of commuter choices.
- (4) Work with appropriate agencies to implement rail service along the Ann Arbor Railroad and Norfolk Southern rights-of-way.
- (5) Work with AATA to study connections between downtown and the potential future rail station.
- (6) Design and locate transit stations and major stops to ensure that they are surrounded by active uses and incorporate well-designed pedestrian amenities.

TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING

Parking Principles

Goal: The following eight principles should be applied to the development and management of the downtown public parking system. The principles are ordered by level of priority, beginning with a general principle/ policy statement, then proceeding through four demand-related principles, before addressing the recommended supply management approach. This intentionally reflects an emphasis on the high level of multi-modal assets within the Downtown community, and the value of capitalizing on these assets to reduce parking demand prior to taking supply-oriented actions.

First Principle

* Parking is one part of a multi-modal transportation approach to providing Downtown access and mobility.

Demand Principles

* Seek to accommodate all Downtown parking activity within the DDA parking system.

* Seek the most cost effective means for providing Downtown accessibility.

* Support modes of access that promote efficient land use patterns, environmental sensitivity, non-motorized mobility options, and the community's overall quality of life.

* The City administration will assume a leading role in defining preferred commuter transportation patterns within Downtown by encouraging alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle commuting among its elected officials and employees.

Supply Principles

* Maintain sufficient parking supply to allow purchase of monthly parking access instrument on demand, or following a waiting period of no more than 30 days.

* Maintain a formalized process for funding new parking.

* Maintain a formalized process for determining when new supply is needed.

Recommended Action Strategies

Refer to the Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown Recommended Parking Policies and Actions (June 2007).

TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING

Neighborhood Parking Pressures

Goal: Reduce parking pressures on neighborhood streets and discourage the encroachment of off-street parking into residential areas.

In considering modifications in the supply, location, and pricing of long-term parking it is important to anticipate potential impacts on near-downtown neighborhoods, as well. These areas already carry a heavy burden of non-resident, on- and off-street parking serving the downtown and campus areas.

Resident parking permit programs should be introduced in these areas, and their success monitored, to determine whether or not they can be effective in reducing parking pressures. In addition, current zoning language must be carefully evaluated, and modified if necessary, to prevent the spread of non-accessory/non-resident surface parking lots into residential areas.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Expand the use of residential permit parking programs in near-downtown neighborhoods.
- (2) Prohibit the spread of non-resident surface parking lots in neighborhood areas.

TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING

Structured and Underground Parking

Goal: Encourage the development of structured (rather than surface) parking to serve new downtown development, giving special emphasis to the construction of underground parking in all major projects.

Especially within the downtown Core, it is important to minimize the amount of land area which must be devoted to parking if development potential and intensity of pedestrian are to be maximized. Structured parking will be the preferable downtown parking format. However, large, above-grade parking structures that have no active uses at the street level have a significant negative impact on the visual character, sense of scale, and continuity of pedestrian activity on downtown streets.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Adopt strict controls on surface parking within the DDA district and adjacent neighborhoods.
- (2) Encourage the construction of underground parking by defraying the higher costs.
- (3) Take advantage of the change in elevation on west edge of Core to develop underground parking cost-effectively.

TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING

Improved Parking Facility Design

Goal: Promote the development of public parking as part of larger private projects rather than free-standing structures. Develop guidelines for better parking facility design, including the use of ground level retail frontages; landscaped setbacks; and through-block connections.

Even with priority given to the construction of underground parking, it is likely that additional above-grade parking structures will also be needed. However, if this above-grade parking is designed and constructed as a part of a larger development – rather than as a free-standing structure – it will be possible to integrate it more effectively into the downtown fabric by incorporating ground level and upper story spaces which are programmed for active (non-parking) use. The architectural design of such “mixed-use” projects – in terms of massing, exterior finish materials, and detailing – can also offer expanded opportunities for reducing the visual impact of structured parking.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Avoid the future development of monolithic, free-standing parking structures.
- (2) Adopt recommended parking design guidelines including street level retail.
- (3) Incorporate opportunities for bicycle and small motorized vehicle parking (see Non-Motorized Travel Action strategies).

MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE

Intergovernmental Coordination

Goal: Encourage improved cooperation between the City and the County, University of Michigan, public schools, and State and Federal agencies in exchanging information; formulating planning policies; and evaluating development initiatives.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Establish routine lines of communication and cooperative agreements concerning information exchange with the UM, County, and state and federal agencies.
- (2) Develop partnerships to plan for shared infrastructure needs and construction logistics.

Development Review

Goal: Streamline the development proposal process.

Developing in the downtown can be difficult and costly. Changes to the city's development review and permitting processes can assist in encouraging new investment.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Establish a specific timeframe for the review and permitting process for all downtown development projects.
- (2) Implement a workflow software program to track and manage the development review process.
- (3) Provide the opportunity for early review of a project by the Planning Commission.
- (4) Determine the appropriate level of engineering and construction detail needed for site plan submittals.
- (5) Coordinate streamlining efforts with outside agencies, including the Washtenaw County Office of the Drain Commissioner, the Department of Environmental Quality, etc.

MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE

Maintenance of Public Spaces

Goal: Improve the quality of maintenance on downtown streets bicycle lanes, bicycle parking, side-walks, alleys, and public spaces.

The issue of cleanliness is one which affects the image and pedestrian appeal of the downtown area. This is a problem area which presents the potential for significant improvements over the short-term.

It is entirely possible that the desired level of service, and the scope of improvement priorities, which are defined will require funding beyond available City sources. As a result, it is important that a mutual agreement be reached on the basic level of maintenance which should be provided by the public sector; once this has been established, merchants and property owners will have to decide whether, and how, they can pool their resources to provide any additional services which are desired.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Upgrade maintenance by developing guidelines for trash storage, cleaning streets on a regular basis, increasing enforcement of the snow removal ordinance and encouraging participation in adopt-a-tree or adopt-a-park programs.
- (2) Encourage improved private property maintenance by updating and enforcing ordinance standards and establishing recognition programs.

Maintenance of Private Property

Goal: Encourage pride of ownership and the achievement of a consistently high standard of exterior building and site maintenance.

The level of private property maintenance provided in the downtown area also influences its image and appeal. While most buildings and sites are well-maintained, others would benefit from concentrated improvement efforts. Property owners, merchants associations, and the Chamber could play an important role in inspiring a more consistent level of maintenance by helping to establish standards and by using peer pressure and promotional programs to urge compliance. The standards established by the downtown business community might also be used as a basis for reviewing and updating existing ordinance requirements for private property maintenance, with the City giving enforcement of those requirements a higher priority.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Work to resolve security and safety problems by expanding the community-oriented policing approach through bicycle and foot patrols, strengthening cooperative efforts between City and University police, and establishing a downtown Neighborhood Watch program.

ZONING PLAN

Downtown Zoning History

The current downtown zoning districts were established in 1963, as part of a citywide zoning update. At that time, two mixed-use downtown districts were created: C1A (Campus Business District) and C2A (Central Business District). In 1966, as a result of the recommendations of the Central City High Rise and Parking Study, the zoning ordinance was amended to create the C1A/R (Campus Business Residential District), C2A/R (Commercial Residential District) and C2B/R (Business Service/Residential District) and rezone properties throughout the downtown to these new categories to encourage new high density residential development in these areas. The 1966 amendments also introduced floor area premiums, which were developed to encourage the addition of design features such as public arcades and atriums. At the same time, the Off-Street Parking Ordinance was amended to exempt new construction in the downtown from off-street parking requirements.

The downtown planning area currently contains the following zoning districts:

- R4C Multiple-Family Dwelling District
- P Parking District
- Office Districts
- PL Public Land District
- C1A Campus Business District & C1A/R Campus Business Residential District
- C2A Central Business District & C2A/R Commercial Residential District
- C2B Business Service District & C2B/R Business Service/Residential District
- C3 Fringe Commercial District
- M1 Limited Industrial District
- PUD Planned Unit Development District

Proposed Zoning Changes

In 2006, City Council initiated the Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown (A2D2) project to implement recommendations from both the Downtown Residential Task Force report (2004) and the Downtown Development Strategies final report (2006). As part of this process, the Council-appointed Downtown Zoning Advisory Committee reviewed existing zoning regulations and conducted an analysis of all downtown development projects approved since 2000 and determined changes to the following downtown requirements were needed:

- Underlying zoning districts
- Permitted uses
- Maximum floor area in percentage of lot area (FAR)
- Floor area premiums
- Height
- Setback and lot coverage
- Off-street parking
- Parking lot design

The Council-appointed Design Guidelines Advisory Committee recommended the implementation of a context-based design review process for downtown development. This process would include three elements: 1) design standards for building form and placement, to be incorporated into downtown zoning requirements, 2) design guidelines for building appearance and site layout, and 3) a design review process to be incorporated into the site plan approval process for downtown development.

City Council approved the A2D2 recommendations in October 2007 and requested that the City Planning Commission initiate supporting amendments to the Downtown Plan and city codes to implement the recommendations.

Recommended Zoning Plan

Many of the future land use and development character recommendations of the Downtown Plan will be implemented through the zoning regulations of City Code. The recommended zoning plan outlined below identifies the elements that are most critical to implementation of the plan's goals. The recommended action strategies should be used to guide the development of specific ordinance language.

1) New downtown base districts. To implement the recommendations of the future land use plan (**see FIGURE 9**) and the Land Use and Development Character goals and action strategies, the zoning plan recommends the replacement of the C1A, C1A/R, C2A, C2A/R, C2B, C2B/R, C3, M1 and P districts in and directly adjacent to the Downtown Development Authority district with two new base zoning designations: the Downtown Core and the Downtown Interface zoning districts (**see FIGURE 14**).

Downtown Core District

Intent: The Downtown Core district should contain the downtown's greatest concentration of development and serve as a focus for intensive pedestrian use. This district is appropriate for a high-density mixture of residential and commercial development. The following objectives should guide the development of specific ordinance language:

Uses: A mixture of residential, civic, institutional, office, lodging and commercial, should be allowed by right as single uses or mixed within a building or site. Auto-oriented commercial uses, parking structures and some industrial uses could be allowed in certain situations with special exception use approval. Adult entertainment uses should no longer be allowed in the downtown, due to the increase in residential uses throughout the formerly non-residential core area.

Density: Floor area ratios in the range of 400-500% of the lot size should be allowed by right, with opportunities to increase the allowable floor area to 700-900% of the lot size with the use of premiums. In addition to the existing residential and pedestrian amenity premiums, the following premiums should be made available to properties in the Downtown Core district:

- Energy-efficient and environmentally-sensitive building
- Public or shared parking
- Housing affordable to lower income households
- Historic preservation for historic resources located outside of historic districts
- Transferred development rights, as allowed by law

Scale and Massing: Properties in the Downtown Core district should have a minimum height of two stories. Massing and height requirements for Downtown Core properties should be consistent with the proposed character overlay districts (see Section 2 below).

Downtown Interface District

Intent: The Downtown Interface district should act as an area of transition between the Core and surrounding residential neighborhoods. This district is appropriate for medium density residential and mixed-use development. The following objectives should guide the development of specific ordinance language:

Uses: A mixture of residential, civic, institutional, office, lodging, commercial, warehouse and some industrial uses should be allowed by right as single uses or mixed within a building or site. Auto-oriented commercial uses, parking structures and some industrial uses could be allowed in certain situations with special exception use approval.

Density: A floor area ratio of 200% of the lot size should be allowed by right, with opportunities to increase the allowable floor area to 400-500% of the lot size with the use of premiums. In addition to residential premiums, the following premiums should be available to properties in the Downtown Interface district:

- Energy-efficient and environmentally-sensitive building
- Housing affordable to lower income households

- Historic preservation for historic resources located outside of historic districts
- Transferred development rights, as allowed by law

Scale: Properties in the Downtown Interface district should have a minimum height of two stories and a maximum height of up to 6 stories. Placement standards should require a small amount of open space to be maintained and limit the building coverage to 70-80 percent of the lot. Additional building massing and setback requirements for Downtown Interface properties should be set by the character overlay districts.

2) New character overlay districts. To implement the Development Character goals and action strategies, the zoning plan recommends the creation of overlay districts that identify areas of similar character. These districts should provide building massing, articulation, setback, buffer and design requirements to supplement the base zoning districts. To the extent possible, graphic illustrations of these requirements should be incorporated in the ordinance. Potential overlay districts include (**see FIGURE 14**):

- South University
- State Street
- Liberty/Division
- East Huron
- Midtown
- Main Street
- Kerrytown
- First Street

3) New front setback requirements. To implement the Development Character goals and action strategies, the zoning plan recommends the creation of building frontage designations to identify the front setback requirement for new development based on the character of the adjoining street. These requirements should reflect at least three categories:

- Primary – buildings built up to the right-of-way, with allowance for entrance alcoves and programmed open space.
- Secondary – buildings placed near the right-of-way, with allowance for small setbacks, up to a defined maximum.
- Front Yard – buildings located a minimum distance from the right-of-way consistent with established setback patterns.

4) Other downtown zoning. The current zoning in the remainder of downtown is largely consistent with the Future Land Use map (Figure 9). Areas shown as residential on the map should remain zoned R4C; areas shown on the map as office should remain zoned O; and areas shown as education on the map should remain zoned PL. Similarly, no changes are proposed to existing planned unit development (PUD) districts in the downtown.

Several parcels of land currently owned by the Ann Arbor District Library and the University of Michigan are proposed to be rezoned to the PL Public Land district (**see FIGURE 14**).

5) Design guidelines and design review. To implement the Development Character goals and action strategies, the zoning plan recommends the creation of downtown design guidelines and amendments to city code to require design review and approval as part of the site plan approval process.

6) Changes to off-street parking requirements. To implement the Transportation and Parking goals and action strategies, the zoning plan recommends the following changes:

- The portion of above-grade parking structure used for required parking or public/shared parking should not be counted as part of the maximum floor area in percentage of lot area limitation.
- At-grade structured parking should be wrapped with occupiable space at street level.
- The parking requirements for premium floor area should be revised to be a single requirement for both residential and non-residential uses.

- A payment in-lieu of required parking should be allowed as an option to providing required parking spaces on site.
- Bicycle parking should be required for new downtown development.

7) Other text amendments: Additional changes to city codes may be necessary to implement the goals and action strategies in the Downtown Plan. The language of the action strategy and further public discussion will identify the specific changes needed.

Figure 14
Future
Base & Overlay
Zoning Plan

