URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

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Part I: Introduction

When Mankato was first settled in 1852, development consisted of only a few small dwellings along the banks of the Minnesota River. By 1900, the city had boomed and its central business district stretched for 10 blocks. Today a diverse regional center, several decades of growth in population, commercial development, the number of highways and a corresponding reliance upon the automobile have pushed the city to the Hilltop area beyond the river bluffs.

Mankato's traditional river town character has not fared well from the last 50 years of growth. Contemporary development patterns, excessive use of signage, over-dependence upon the automobile and the construction of buildings that do not relate to their historical and architectural context have all contributed to its disappearance.

The design recommendations outlined in the Urban Design Guidelines will foster improvements to individual projects, strengthen the traditional character of Downtown, and shape the Hilltop area into a more cohesive marketplace and focus of community activity.

Study Area and Purpose

The study area, illustrated in Figure I-1, includes the Madison Avenue, or Hilltop commercial areas, downtown and the portion of Old Town between Mulberry Street and Madison Avenue.

This project's primary objective is to define those components that contribute to or detract from each area's identity, and to formulate a set of design principles that will improve the overall appearance of the commercial districts. These design principles, which are unique for each of the districts, address:

- Building appearance and placement
- Parking lot landscaping
- Setback and yard requirements
- Landscaping and signage
- Gateway enhancement

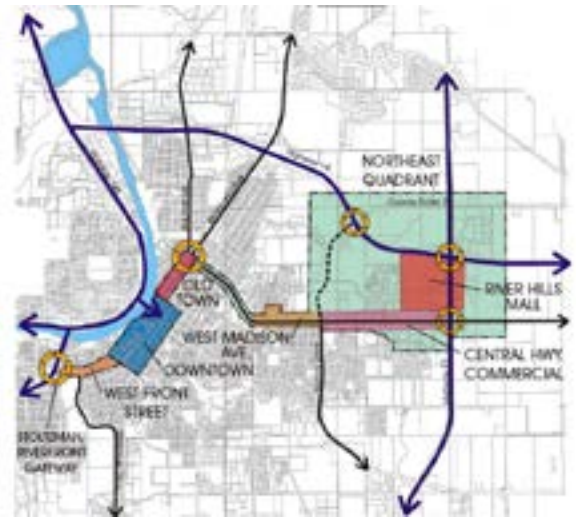


Figure I-1

Character Districts

Each of Mankato's commercial areas possesses a distinctive personality that is shaped by differing types of land uses, building placement, architecture, streetscape, open spaces, landforms and vegetation. In broad terms, these districts may be categorized as urban or highway commercial districts (see figure I-1).

Urban Districts and Development Patterns

An urban area's compact development pattern of tightly spaced buildings creates an inviting pedestrian environment. Urban commercial districts addressed in this study include:

- West Front Street
- Front Street
- The Downtown Core
- Old Town
- Riverfront Drive and Stoltzman Gateway

Highway Commercial Districts and Development Patterns

The design of the suburban environment centers around the automobile. Land uses are compartmentalized, requiring most trips to be made by car. Buildings are set back and isolated from the street in order to provide space for parking lots. Streets have been designed at a scale that is more comfortable for driving than walking, and signs are larger so they are legible at higher traveling speeds. What results is a cluttered environment with no semblance of a street wall. Highway commercial districts addressed in this study include:

- West Madison Avenue
- Central highway commercial district
- River Hills Mall district
- Highway 22 gateway
- Northeast quadrant

Project Approach

The city hosted an Issues Workshop and Visual Preference Survey in order to define a community vision and design objectives. These objectives, along with building type, sign, landscaping, and other development preferences, shaped the design principles, guidelines, and recommendations established in this document.

Past efforts to create a cohesive framework for Mankato's commercial areas were also reviewed. They include: the 1986 Land Use Plan, 1986 Comprehensive Plan Update, 1996 City of Mankato Zoning Ordinance, the 1990 Downtown Revitalization Strategy - Urban Design Plan & Guidelines, the 1997 Mankato Area Transportation and Planning Study (MATAPS), and several studies for Old Town, including the 1978 Old Town Concept Plan. This study reaffirms, expands, and integrates past study design objectives.

The following steps were undertaken for this project:

- An examination of existing designs for commercial land use districts;
- Zoning and subdivision ordinance review;
- Completion of site development and streetscape scenarios, based upon existing controls;
- A visioning workshop to establish a community vision for site and streetscape design;
- Preparation of preliminary design principles for site design, streetscape design, and gateway enhancements;
- Development of recommended changes to the zoning and subdivision ordinances that would support the design principles; and development of a design framework manual

Design Principles, Development Standards and Illustrative Prototypes

Design standards and guidelines preserve and enhance those elements most responsible for creating district character. Care should be taken, however, in maintaining flexibility for designers, allowing creative solutions for redevelopment, remodeling, and infill projects. Two types of regulations should be applied to the various character districts within the Mankato:

1. **Design guidelines-** Design guidelines are strongly recommended yet discretionary policies that guide more subjective considerations, such as district character, design details, or architectural style. They serve as design criteria for review by city staff, an architectural review board, the Planning Commission and City Council.
2. **Development standards-**Development standards address those aspects of site development and building design that are essential to maintain and reinforce the character of each district. They include permitted uses, building height, facade treatment, setbacks, and parking, sign, and landscaping specifications. These standards should be legally defensible and implemented through the city's development regulations.

The design guidelines and development standards should be defined with illustrative prototypes in order to provide the potential developer with a graphic illustration of the standards and intent of the guidelines.

How to Use this Design Framework Manual

This manual serves as a "kit of parts" for evaluating redevelopment proposals and as a guide for making decisions about public and private improvements within Mankato's commercial districts. It will ensure that each incremental site design, architectural and streetscape project contributes to a positive image for the city. Illustrations and photos are included within this document to communicate the intent and character of the principles and guidelines.

The manual is divided into sections:

- **Part II: Background.** This section outlines the findings from the visual preferency survey, issues workshop and background studies.
- **Part III: Traditional urban development patterns.** This section outlines general design principles for districts with traditional urban development patterns. Specific objectives and recommendations for development scenarios, signs, and gateway, landscape and streetscape treatments are included for each subdistrict.
- **Part IV: Highway commercial districts.** This section outlines general design principles for districts with conventional suburban development patterns. An alternative development model and specific objectives and recommendations for development scenarios, signs, and gateway, landscape and streetscape treatments are included for each subdistrict.
- **Part V: Implementation.** This section explains the various approaches to implementing design standards.

Public Sector

1. This document should be adopted as an addendum to the comprehensive plan.
2. The recommended changes to the zoning and subdivision ordinances, included in a separate document accompanying this design manual, should be codified and incorporated into the zoning district standards.
3. City departments should refer to the concept designs for the individual districts as a basis from which to develop

more detailed special area studies and implementation strategies.

4. City departments should refer to the objectives and recommendations in this manual to coordinate, design and budget for capital improvements.
5. The planning, engineering, and inspections departments should refer to the guidelines when reviewing individual development proposals. Each proposed development or renovation should reinforce the principles and comply with the guidelines.
6. The selection of specific streetscape elements such as street lamps, benches, paving, parking lot buffers, signs, and other streetscape furnishings should be based upon the prototypical designs provided in this manual.

Private Sector

1. As the first step to any project, developers should refer to this manual in order to understand Mankato's overall goals and determine how their property fits into the context of the district in which the project is proposed.
2. Developers should refer to the streetscape hierarchy plan in order to understand community expectations for site and streetscape treatments.
3. Developers should refer to the site planning and architectural guidelines to understand the minimum standards for quality expected by the city.
4. The guidelines for parking lot edge treatments and landscaping should serve as a reference during the site design phase of a project. Developers should discuss options for their particular site with city staff to determine if the parking lot edge treatments will be constructed as part of the site redevelopment or a larger public street improvement project.

Public vs. Private Streetscape Elements

Streetscape implementation will require a cooperative effort between the public and private sectors. However, the majority of the streetscape elements most likely will be constructed as part of a public street reconstruction project.

Elements that could be included in either a public improvement project, or as part of a large private redevelopment project, include: parking lot railings and other buffer treatments, street trees, sidewalk paving, benches, sculpture and other street furniture.

Part II: Background

Issues Workshop

As part of this study, approximately 50 local residents attended an issues workshop on April 23, 1998. Consultants elicited resident views on issues/objectives, strengths/opportunities, and weaknesses/threats associated with three primary study areas: downtown, Old Town and Madison Avenue. They also determined local preferences and expectations for potential redevelopment projects, streetscape amenities, and aesthetic improvements in the community.

Study Areas

Workshop participants divided into groups based upon the their particular area of interest: downtown, Old Town, or Madison Avenue. Each group was charged with listing and prioritizing the most important issues/objectives, strengths/opportunities, and weaknesses/threats associated with its selected area. The results are summarized and listed in order of priority.

Visual Preference Survey

A visual preference survey assists the community in determining which components of the built environment contribute to a city's overall image, and helps define the community's preferences for architecture, signs, building setbacks, landscaping, parking areas, and other design elements. For the visual preference survey, participants viewed 100 slides depicting a broad range of cityscapes in Mankato and elsewhere. The slides were grouped into two categories: highway commercial development and urban development. Generally located adjacent to major transportation corridors, highway commercial development is newer (post-1950s) and is characterized by lower densities, large parking areas, and commercial franchise signage. Urban development follows a more traditional and compact development pattern; although it may include new construction, it is frequently found in older areas of the city.

Workshop participants rated each slide on a scale of -3 for "least preferred" to +3 for "most preferred." As a result, participants were able to reach a consensus about Mankato's visual landscape, which is incorporated in the goals, objectives, design guidelines, and recommended standards formulated for the study. The two most preferred images and the two least preferred images for each category are shown on the following sections.

Issues and Objectives

Workshop participants identified the most pressing issues facing each district and suggested ways in which these concerns could be addressed through this study. The issues and objectives identified for each district are:

DOWNTOWN

- Capitalize on history through architecture, design and landscaping
- Eliminate one-way streets
- Upgrade Stoltzman/Riverfront gateway
- Landscape with annuals and perennials
- Add directional signs
- Make area pedestrian-friendly
- Increase variety of shops
- Increase the number of trail connections
- Eliminate graffiti problem
- Plan for Patterson district
- Capitalize on river
- Establish stricter sign standards
- Create downtown festivals
- Provide more establishments catering to adults
- Increase city-wide theme

OLD TOWN

- Establish renovation standards
- Increase parking
- Signs
  - » Increase beautification efforts
  - » Encourage use of Kasota stone and bronze
  - » Prevent vacancies

- Improve access points
- Bury power lines
- Screen view of dumpsters from residential uses
- Repave alleys
- Improve informational/directional signage

MADISON AVENUE

- Traffic
- Signs:
- Clean up and beautify entrance points
- Provide more greenery
- Vacant buildings - bad appearance
- Madison East
- Development design
- Economic vitality with gaps
- Revitalize Victory Drive, south of Madison Avenue
- Improve area with a continuous bike-walk path
- Encourage more infill to contain sprawl
- Haphazard building placement with no uniformity of building style/materials
- Change the color of River Hills Mall's largest sign
- Transportation corridor to Highway 14 bypass from Victory Drive would help area - along with service road for River Hills Mall
- Improve River Hills Mall's relationship to its surroundings and as well as its landscaping
- Area needs a unifying theme
- Maintain open space areas and natural vegetation corridor to the ravine areas. Cluster businesses to protect more open space
- Provide +200 feet of vegetative buffering around all ravines and wetlands
- Provide for adequate settling ponds that will intercept stormwater run-off before it enters ravines
- Intersperse multi-family housing throughout the Madison Avenue Area so that residents have the option to walk to work
- Maintain existing natural wetlands
- New development/rehabilitation needs to consider the needs of pedestrians and transit.
- Provide incentives to encourage existing businesses to renovate facades in a manner that fits into overall plan
- Emphasize Madison Avenue and Victory Drive as main roads - de-emphasize Adams and Thompson to save neighborhood
- River City Centre

Strengths and Opportunities

Workshop participants identified the strengths and opportunities associated with each district. Strengths and opportunities included concrete and tangible ideas for improvement, as well as more subjective impressions of each area. The results are as follows:

DOWNTOWN

- Historic buildings
- Potential of river
- Two speeds of access:
  - » Fast on Riverfront
  - » Slow on Front Street
- Civic Center/government center
- Showcase area
- Green space/public space
- Building controls
- Design theme - use of Mankato stone
- Walkability
- Pride/loyalty

- Downtown master plan
- Streetscape - positive influence
- Nearby fire/law enforcement
- Residential landscaping
- Business mix/services

OLD TOWN
- More green spaces, pocket parks, art
- Improve sense of safety for pedestrians
- Strong business/neighborhood connection
- Marketing opportunity
- Parking and beautification
- Preserve historical buildings
- Geographically extend look of Old Town
- Run trolley from downtown
- Minnesota River
- Outdoor shopping district
- Walking tour
- Nice signage
- Tie into bike trail
- Attract pedestrians into area
- Rock and Riverfront crossing improvements

MADISON AVENUE
- Opportunity to manage growth and support infill
- Current lack of identity presents opportunity to establish a theme/character
- Victory Drive/Highway 14 connection is important
- Adequate space for a bike trail and park resting area in Thompson Ravine
- Take a more proactive approach to environmental protection
- Residential development (e.g. Creekpoint)
- Adequate space to convert to a more pedestrian-friendly street
- Attracts people
- Good traffic-carrying capacity on Madison Avenue
- Victory Drive is a high-quality street
- Opportunity to connect lake/holding pond to new development
- Madison East area development presents opportunity
- Recent construction is attractive
- Convenient location for entire community
- Free parking
- Safe
- Variety of businesses
- Lots large enough to provide successful development opportunities
- Many access roads
- Open space for development
- Farmer's Market
- Six banks
- Hotels and motels
- Good mix of professional, retail, and education

Weaknesses and Threats

As a final step, participants identified the weaknesses and threats related to each district. Weaknesses and threats pinpoint possible trends which would negatively affect the district in the future.

DOWNTOWN
- Blighting influence of vacant and low-quality buildings

- Alleys:
  - » Condition
  - » Pedestrian/car conflict
  - » Safety
- Signage:
  - » Guidelines - ordinance
  - » Directional
- Lack of shopping choices
- Too many bars
- Pay versus free parking
- No river access - appearance of wall
- No pedestrian connection to Old Town
- Cherry Street entrance to Mall
- Need for Lincoln Park gateway
- Parking ramp (2nd Street) appearance
- Event-driven activity
- Accessibility/visibility of businesses

OLD TOWN

- Old Town - little clout and shortage of dollars
- Not enough parking
- Crossing Riverfront Drive
- Narrow sidewalks
- Not enough light
- Highway standards
- Deteriorating buildings
- Power lines
- Fast trains
- Gravel parking
- Second Street transition to residential
- City not maintaining alley lights

MADISON AVENUE

- Weak landscaping
- No distinctive entrance or unifying theme
- Inhospitable to pedestrians and cyclists
- Need Victory Drive connection
- Unattractive signage
- No public parks
- Threat of building abandonment
- Designed with a strip mall mentality
- Insufficient development standards and controls
- Need a master plan to ensure holistic design approach
- Parking areas dominate views
- Stop sprawl to the east
- Lacks character
- More entrances to River Hills Mall
- Area appears blighted
- Preponderance of national chains inhibits distinctive local character and harms businesses
- Difficult to cross Madison Avenue

Urban Development

General Appearance and Character

FAVORITE IMAGES

Score +80
+ outdoor dining
+ period lighting
+ landscaping



Score +73
+ canopy sign
+ sidewalk activity
+ pedestrian friendly

LEAST FAVORITE IMAGES



Score +27
- wide, three-lane street



Score +15
- minimal parking

Signs

FAVORITE IMAGES



Score +76
+ hanging sign
+ natural materials
+ appealing design



Score +42
+ shared signage
+ monument sign
+ mix of materials

LEAST FAVORITE IMAGES



Score -42
- wall sign too large
- front sign needs repair



Score -49
- franchise sign
- repetitive
- cheap materials

Streetscape

FAVORITE IMAGES



Score +101
+ inviting
+ landscaping
+ appealing signage



Score +84
+ composition of elements
+ fountain
+ brickwork

LEAST FAVORITE IMAGES



Score +29
- still a positive image
- minimal openings in street wall
- narrow boulevard



Score -40
- narrow sidewalk
- not pedestrian-friendly
- minimal landscaping

Parking Lot Treatments

FAVORITE IMAGES



Score +76

+ separation of parking from street

+ mix of materials



Score +84

+ brick and tree buffer

+ pedestrian-friendly

LEAST FAVORITE IMAGES



Score -18

- minimal separation

- no landscaping

- no buffer



Score -41

- uninviting

- no separation between street, sidewalk, and parking lot

Facade Treatments

FAVORITE IMAGES



Score +98

+ outdoor dining

+ relationship to street

+ inviting



Score +76

+ windows to street

+ window canopies

+ mix of materials

LEAST FAVORITE IMAGES



Score -36

- franchise architecture

- inappropriate colors for district



Score -60

- new facade does not complement historic character

Rear Entry Treatments

FAVORITE IMAGES



Score +57

+ windows and canopies complement historic quality

+ parking area

+new windows/doors

LEAST FAVORITE IMAGES



Score -80

- unattractive parking

- needs maintenance

- unattractive signage

Highway-Oriented Development

Streetscape

FAVORITE IMAGES



Score +86

+ boulevard plantings

+ mix of landscaping materials



Score +79

+ composition of elements

+ separation of parking

+ street furniture

LEAST FAVORITE IMAGES



Score -51

- street too wide

- minimal landscaping

- uninviting



Score -57

- competing signage

- confusing traffic signals

- no landscaping

Amenities

FAVORITE IMAGES



Score +68

+ water feature

+ mix of materials

+ nice composition



Score +67

+ fountain

+ courtyard feeling

+ street furniture

LEAST FAVORITE IMAGES



Score -5

- auto-oriented

- trendy



Score -56

- scale too large

- unattractive

Building Materials

FAVORITE IMAGES



Score +70

+ mix of materials
+ nice composition
+ appealing colors



Score +42

+ glass and stone combination
+ understated

LEAST FAVORITE IMAGES



Score -27

- franchise signage
- canopy too large
- bright colors



Score -40

- entire building is a sign
- bright colors

Landscaping

FAVORITE IMAGES



Score +84

+ nice composition
+ shade trees
+ mix of materials



Score +80

+ parking lot screening
+ street trees
+ mature vegetation

LEAST FAVORITE IMAGES



Score -4

- immature vegetation
- minimal materials



Score -19

- inadequate amount of vegetation in parking lot islands

Signs

FAVORITE IMAGES



Score +71

+ monument sign
+ shared signage
+ quality materials



Score +43

+ consistent signage
+ monument signs

LEAST FAVORITE IMAGES



Score -39

- incompatible colors
- confusing



Score -68

- competing signage
- franchise signs
- bulletin signs

Building and Parking Lot Placement

FAVORITE IMAGES



Score +44

+ minimal building setback

+ parking on side or in rear



Score +42

+ parking located in close proximity to building

+ small parking area

LEAST FAVORITE IMAGES



Score -12

- large parking areas

- distance too great between parking and building



Score -38

- immense parking area

- view of building obscured by automobiles

General Image and Character

FAVORITE IMAGES



Score +82

+ boulevard landscaping

+ street trees

+ buildings placed in close proximity to street



Score +57

+ clock tower

+ combined signage

+ quality building materials

LEAST FAVORITE IMAGES



Score -8

- no landscaping

- immense parking lot

- large building setback



Score -50

- competing signage

- no landscaping

Part III: Traditional Areas

Heart of the City: The Urban Development Pattern

Urban environments, such as downtown, Old Town and Front Street, are characterized by a compact building pattern that strongly delineates the street corridor and creates a comfortable pedestrian environment. Rich in local history and architecture, the Downtown Districts are the symbol and identifiable center of the city, and the setting for civic and cultural activities.

Unfortunately, the need to accommodate greater volumes of traffic and parking threatens to dilute these urban settings. Their special character will be maintained only if the existing buildings are preserved and their traditional building pattern reinforced through the sensitive placement and design of new buildings.

The Public Realm and Responsible Architecture

Many of the design principles presented in this chapter strive to form a positive image of the city through improvement of the public realm and streetscape. The public realm's design is shaped by parks and open space, street corridors, parking lots, sidewalks, signs, landscaping, streetscapes and the interrelationship between differing land uses. If public realm elements are well-designed, they create a positive image and a livable city.

Each new structure, whether a gas station, fast food restaurant, or museum, influences the character of the public realm and contributes to or detracts from the overall image of the city. New construction and redevelopment sites in the downtown area possess a number of identical design concerns, the solutions to which are basic elements in any design effort. However, they require the careful attention of a project designer and design review authority.

A building's physical characteristics, such as height, shape, width, and bulk, influence its ability to successfully integrate into its surroundings. Significant differences among any of these primary characteristics may disrupt the established scale and character of an area. Each new building and major addition should be reviewed in terms of its placement, shape, scale, materials, details, its relationship to its surroundings and contribution toward a positive image.

General Design Principles and Recommendations

Principle I: Maintain a compact and diverse critical mass of activity

Concentrate commercial, office, residential, civic, and cultural uses within walking distance in order to foster market synergy, vitality and pedestrian activity.

Principle II: Create a system of civic elements that provides a central vision, promotes continuity throughout Mankato and responds to individual districts

- Foster a positive image that enhances the unique characteristics of each district.
- Define streetscape and site planning treatments for gateways.
- Emphasize the use of Mankato stone in a variety of applications.
- Establish continuity while fostering variety and interest within each district.
- Expand the streetscape elements utilized for downtown.



Principle III: Integrate traffic movement with pedestrian safety and streetscape aesthetics

- Consider providing access to alternative forms of transportation, i.e., bicycles, buses, and in-line skates.
- Create pedestrian-friendly linkages between all areas within a five minute walk of commercial nodes to minimize vehicular trips and encourage walking.
- Treat transportation corridors as community links, not barriers.
- Respond to transportation engineering criteria for the various roadway classifications
- Buffer views to parking areas.





Principle IV: Respect the traditional urban development pattern

New buildings should follow the existing building pattern and be placed at the sidewalk or right-of-way line. As new infill development in the fringe areas of downtown progresses, the site planning guidelines listed below, and illustrated in figure III-1, should be followed in order to create a compact downtown.

- Place new buildings at the right-of-way line with a zero setback, or build-to line.
- On corner lots, buildings should be placed at the right-of-way line on both sides facing the street.
- Place parking lots in side and rear yards and prohibit parking between buildings and the sidewalk. If this is not feasible, a parking lot buffer such as a brick wall or decorative railing, should be placed at the right-of-way line to maintain the street wall.







PARKING LOT BUFFERS

The treatment of the setback area between parking lots and sidewalks is more important than setback depth. In an urban context, the street wall should be maintained across parking lot street frontages through the use of overstory trees, hedges and/or structural screens. A shallow setback that incorporates overstory trees and a low screen made of concrete, brick, and/or ornamental iron railings can effectively screen views while reinforcing the existing street wall. The buffer area should be a minimum of five feet wide to provide adequate space for trees, a railing or wall and snow storage.





Principle V: New or renovated buildings should complement adjacent buildings

ALIGNMENT

In order to maintain the street wall which defines the edges of street corridors and provides a comfortable pedestrian environment, the following guidelines, also illustrated in figure III-1, should be considered.

- New infill development should maintain the zero setback and the alignment of facades at the property line.

WIDTH

A consistent building width creates a rhythm that is an important element of the downtown'sarchitectural character. In order to maintain this consistency, the following guideline should be considered:

- New buildings should reflect the characteristic rhythm of facades along the street. New construction, including parking ramps that require two or more lots, should respect the street wall pattern by maintaining facade widths, and similar window openings and entrances.

HORIZONTAL RHYTHMS

The alignment of building roofs, cornices, and windows is generally continuous in older main streets and in portions of downtown Mankato. New development should respect this regularity, which is based on the following guidelines:

- New development should maintain a block's dominant alignment of building windows, cornices and roof lines. Character and scale should be compatible with surrounding structures through the use of materials, detailing and window placement. A clear visual division between street level and upper floors should also be maintained. The use of canopies and awnings are encouraged in order to accentuate the relationship between a building's ground floor and the street, and to protect pedestrians from the elements.

ENTRANCES

Main building entrances are often recessed to add interest and create more space for window display. The following guideline should apply to new construction:

- Building entrances should face and be clearly visible from the main street. They should be recessed in order to maintain a coherent pattern along the sidewalk and to define the entry point.



Principle VI. Architecture should stimulate interest at the street level

DISPLAY WINDOWS

Street-level building facades shape the pedestrian's streetscape experience. Ground-level businesses should stimulate passerby interest with well-lit displays of merchandise or by providing a view of internal activity. As a building's use changes, it is important to maintain its existing character, particularly at the street level. Retail stores typically possess large windows on the first floor for merchandise display, adding life and interest to the streetscape. The following guidelines encourage the preservation and creation of display windows for both newly renovated or newly constructed buildings (see figure III-2):



Figure III-2

- The original size and shape of existing display windows should be preserved. A minimum of 50 percent of a first floor facade abutting a main street should consist of windows or entries.

OUTDOOR SPACE

When appropriate, the extension of interior space into the public realm is not only lucrative for the business owner but interesting and visually stimulating for the pedestrian. If special consideration is given to their size, location, design and appearance, sidewalk cafes enhance an area's ambiance. A well-designed outdoor seating area will not block storefront entrances or inhibit access for the pedestrian or physically handicapped. Outdoor cafe furniture should be of an urban character and scaled to fit the space.

Principle VII: Mankato's traditional character should be reinforced through building color, texture and materials

The warm, buff tones of Mankato stone, which comes from the bedrock that shaped the river bluffs, is unique to the city and can be seen on buildings throughout downtown. A world-renowned building material, its use should be expanded in renovations of existing buildings and new construction.

Color is often the most recognizable element of a building and it can greatly enhance or detract from the visual harmony of street facades. In general, the number of colors should be limited in order to maintain simple color schemes.

The basic guidelines for building facade color are as follows:

- colors should be selected that will promote visual harmony and integrate buildings within their respective block.
- brick should be stained rather than painted if it is necessary to unify the brick color of patched or deteriorating areas.
- a building's original color scheme should be the first consideration during restoration.

MATERIALS

Infill buildings often do not fit into the architectural context of the area in which they are located. For instance, their scale and character may not be complementary with surrounding structures. Following is an example of how the zoning ordinance could address minimum standards for building materials:

All buildings erected in the CBD-C and CBD-F Districts shall be of masonry construction, an equivalent, or better. No building shall be constructed of sheet aluminum. No building shall be constructed with a wooden frame. Exterior surfaces of all buildings shall be faced with face brick, stone, architectural concrete or precast concrete, an equivalent or better. Mankato stone should be used within each building, at a minimum for cornice, lintels, sills, and other components that will highlight the facade. Within the central business district, the percentage of Mankato stone should increase to include the base course around the building and other areas, where possible.

Principle VIII: Signs should complement building appearance

Signs are an important architectural element for any business. However, since signs influence the overall character and appearance of the streetscape, they should complement a building's design.

Sign types inappropriate to the Urban Districts include pylon and free -standing signs, as well as roof signs. They detract from the appearance of the area, and are not typically needed in where buildings are placed closer to the street and thus more visible. Franchise logos and identification signs should be allowed only if they are scaled down in size and are integrated into the building facade and street character. Buildings and gas station canopies designed as signs should be prohibited.

OVERHANGING SIGNS

Overhanging signs received the highest preference rating in the Visual Preference Survey. Their prohibition in Mankato's current sign ordinance was also noted in the Issues Workshop. Overhanging signs, if appropriately designed, can add significant charm and character to a building facade and streetscape. Their use should be encouraged.

MULTIPLE TENANT BUILDINGS

Multi-tenant building signage is an important consideration. Each tenant is allowed one identification sign to be located within the designated sign area, as defined by the Ordinance. New multiple tenant buildings can successfully grant individuality to each tenant through the use of varied building materials and facade detailing. Signage may be varied in terms of lettering styles and lighting, while maintaining regularity in their size and location.

AWNING SIGNS

Awnings increase a business's visibility, particularly those located on the second floor of a building. Awning signage complements the building facade and can be easily removed as tastes evolve or new businesses move in. Awnings should be made of high-quality opaque material, and backlighting of awnings should be prohibited.

CLIMATE CONCERNS

- **Trees:** Trees placed around a building's perimeter provide shade and reduce precipitation and wind speeds at the pedestrian level.
- **Balconies:** Balconies not only create visual interest within the streetscape, but also provide for a safer street environment by encouraging more eyes on the street.
- **Winter warmth:** Mankato is a winter city where the warmth of sunlight in the middle of January can be absorbed on the sunny north side of many of the city streets. Streetscape treatments and building designs should take advantage of a sunny winter location by incorporating darker, warmth-absorbing materials and protected areas for pedestrian comfort.

In addition to sheltering pedestrians from the elements, awnings protect window displays from sun damage, and keep store interiors cooler on sunny summer days. Retractable awnings possess the ability to capture sun warmth and natural lighting.

As a general rule, awnings must conform to a standard of 7'-6" of clearance between awning frames and the sidewalk.

Principle IX: Historic buildings are unique and should be preserved

Mankato's older buildings are a unique and irreplaceable historical record of the city's evolution. Reasonable attempts should be undertaken to support their reuse while the preservation of historically significant buildings should be a priority. Following are the "Secretary of the Interior's Standards of Rehabilitation" which are generic and should be considered minimum guidelines upon which to base historic preservation efforts in Mankato (see figure III-3 below).

- Every reasonable effort should be made to provide a compatible use for a property which requires minimal alteration of the building, structure, or site and its environment, or to use a property for its originally intended purpose.
- The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.
- All buildings, structures, and sites shall be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create an earlier appearance shall be discouraged.
- Changes which may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history and development of a building, structure, or site and its environment. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right, and this significance shall be recognized and respected.
- Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship which characterize a building, structure, or site shall be treated with sensitivity.
- Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced, wherever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on

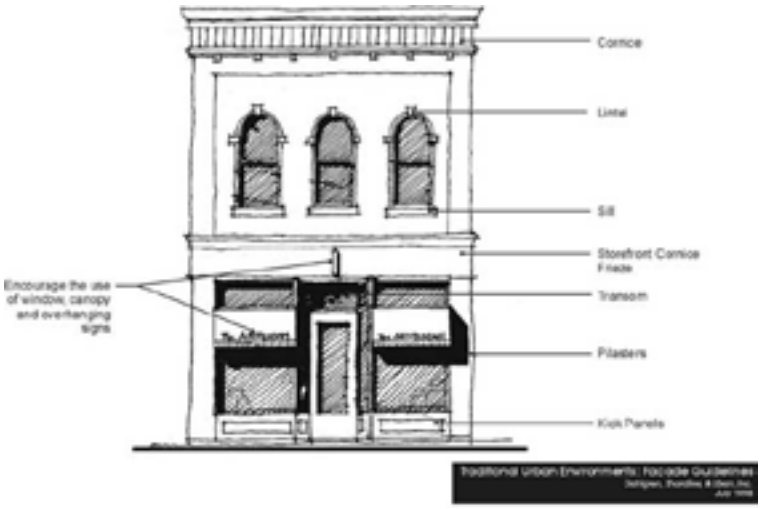


Figure III-3

accurate duplications of features, substantiated by historic, physical, or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings or structures.

- The surface cleaning of structures shall be undertaken with the gentlest means possible. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that will damage the historic building materials shall not be undertaken.
- Every reasonable effort shall be made to protect and preserve archaeological resources affected by, or adjacent to, any project.
- Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alternations and additions do not destroy significant historical, architectural or cultural material, and character of the property, neighborhood or environment.
- Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to structures shall be done in such a manner that if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structure would be unimpaired.

Principle X: Improve alleys, parking lots and rear building entries to create a safe, attractive and viable commercial and residential environment

ALLEY TREATMENTS

Alleys pose a unique problem as they often serve as the transitional area between commercial and residential uses and as the primary access for commercial parking lots, rear building entries, and service areas. In Old Town and other downtown districts, alley improvements have been undertaken in an inconsistent manner. Using Old Town as an example, the alleys could be improved by (see figure below):

- Developing a long-term strategy to bury overhead power lines.
- Providing an island at the end of each parking aisle that will define the parking areas, provide space to plant trees and buffer residential areas, and accommodate additional lighting that will provide a greater feeling of safety.



Figure III-4

- Defining the limits of the residential areas with well-delineated landscaped areas.
- Incorporating bollards, benches, signs, and other elements fabricated from Mankato stone that will blend with proposed streetscape elements and building treatments.

REAR BUILDING ENTRANCES

The rear entrance to a building may become the primary entrance when parking is located in the interior of a block as is typical for a traditional urban development pattern. Old Town possesses several fine examples of rear building entrances that have been improved with signs, canopies, landscaping and other complementary architectural detailing. Improvement to the rear building entrances, coupled with those made to alleys and parking lots, will create a welcoming and safe environment and should be encouraged.

LANDSCAPING PARKING LOT INTERIORS

Interior landscaping is essential to improve the appearance of large commercial parking lots. Landscaped islands provide visual relief from large expanses of asphalt and automobiles and, as shown in Figure III-4, shade trees add a vertical dimension to parking lots that is often needed to maintain a pedestrian scale.

If properly designed, parking lot islands can be landscaped cheaply and effectively. They should incorporate drought- and salt-tolerant trees that are indigenous to the area. The ground layer should consist of materials that will not be destroyed by the weight of snow piles, such as decorative mulch, or shrubs and perennials that may be sheared to the ground in late fall. Islands should be large enough and the soil uncompacted and treated to provide adequate habitat for trees and other plant materials.

RECOMMENDATION

The city should modify the zoning ordinance to clearly define what is acceptable as materials for buffering parking lots and landscaping the interior of parking lots. Following is an example of the proposed text:

Parking lots abutting primary or secondary streets in the urban districts shall possess a 6 foot setback and a landscape screen 2'-6" in height. Acceptable materials include:

- A hedge that is no less than 80 percent opaque in the winter months,
- A steel or ornamental iron picket railing with Kasota stone or brick piers,
- Kasota stone, steel, or concrete bollards spaced a maximum of 6 feet apart, and a ground cover of flowers, or low-growing evergreen or deciduous shrubs,
- Overstory or ornamental trees spaced a maximum of 25 feet apart, with a hedge, railing, or bollards in between,
- Any combination of the above that accomplishes the intent of the Ordinance,
- Parking lot interiors shall possess 150 square feet of landscape islands per 25 parking spaces. The islands shall include a minimum of one 2 1/2" caliper overstory tree at time of planting, and
- One tree per 25 feet of parking lot frontage shall be incorporated into the perimeter landscaping area.

VACANT BUILDINGS

Building occupancy is an indication of economic prosperity or decline. If store windows are full of merchandise and offices are bustling with people, then the urban commercial districts look prosperous. If building windows are vacant or, in the worst case, boarded up, visitors assume that and area is in a state of decline. Badly maintained vacant or abandoned buildings may also scare away potential tenants and reinvestment. Emphasis should be placed on making vacant and abandoned buildings appear "alive" and inhabited.

Design guidelines should consider the following requirements for vacant and/or abandoned buildings:

- Prohibit boarding up windows.
- Use first floor windows of vacant buildings as temporary display space for local arts groups, school arts programs, and/or community organizations.
- Offer meeting space for community organizations.
- Keep furniture, lights, blinds, and/or merchandise in the retail windows
- In the event of an adjacent building's demolition, treat common walls constructed of concrete block, poured concrete or other materials not intended for exposure to prevent their becoming an eyesore. The treatment may be temporary or permanent, depending on the adjacent parcel's potential for redevelopment.

Alternate treatments include:

- Masonry Paint: A temporary solution for concrete block walls in poor or patched condition.
- Murals: For a highly visible area that has smooth surfaces, consider painting a mural.
- Vines: Boston or Englemans ivy is a good cover for walls that will be exposed a minimum of three years.
- Stucco: An option for concrete block walls that are in poor condition and may be exposed for several years.

Old Town: Historical Commercial District

Old Town is a remnant of the original Central Business District. The CBD once stretched for ten blocks, until the construction of the Memorial Bridge interchange severed Old Town from Downtown. Some of the best preserved examples of turn-of- the-century buildings are located between 301 and 415 North Riverfront Drive. They give Old Town its character.

Background Studies

The commercial core of Old Town on Riverfront Drive between Plum Street and Madison Avenue has been the subject of several revitalization, traffic, and streetscape studies over the past 20 years. A summary of the recommendations from these studies, also illustrated in Figure III-5, follows:

OLD TOWN CONCEPT PLAN, 1978

CHNMB Assoc. and RCM Assoc, Inc. 1978.

This document establishes an urban design framework for the Old Town district. The key components are:

- Establishing Old Town as a Market Place.
- Enhancement of the architectural heritage and character of the Old Town core to preserve its friendly ambiance, while encouraging renovation and promoting redevelopment.
- Creation of a pedestrian system that utilizes alleys and rear access to shops, and focuses on two internal plazas at Plum and Elm streets. The creation of a pedestrian spine in the mid-block areas between Front and Second Streets stretching from Plum to Rock streets is the guiding element. Two plazas at the ends of the Old Town Alley serve as the major open space provisions for Old Town.
- Development of a riverfront recreational area with pedestrian linkages from the shops on Riverfront Drive along Rock and Elm streets.
- Redesigning Riverfront Drive to accommodate through-traffic while creating a safe parking and pedestrian environment. Front Street would be reduced to two lanes on the western half and a landscaped median would separate traffic from diagonal parking and a widened sidewalk.

OLD TOWN-WASHINGTON PARK REVITALIZATION PLAN, 1997

Planning studio project no. 4 | Prepared by: Students in Masters of Arts in Urban Planning, Mankato State University - Urban and Regional Studies Institute Mankato, Minnesota, December 11, 1997

The following synopsis of the revitalization plan provides an overview of the issues and recommendations found in the plan.

The current street configurations on Riverfront Drive, Fourth Street and Broad Street have exacerbated both safety and congestion problems associated with increased traffic volume.

Riverfront Drive

Eliminate on-street parking and create a permanent boulevard lane. Redirect traffic to the side-streets and alleyways, and accommodate customer parking with spaces that are within walking distance of most commercial businesses. Pedestrian crossings, via painted markings, brick paved markings, or signage, should be installed to create a pedestrian-friendly environment. Riverfront Drive's on-street parking should be eliminated to allow straightening of the street. Remove the pay-meters in the municipal lot on the 400 block of Riverfront Drive and open it up for free parking to accommodate the newly created parking demand.

Broad Street and Fourth Street

Convert one-way streets into two-way streets in order to decrease traffic and vehicle speeds in the residential neighborhoods. Install pedestrian crossings, via painted markings, brick paved markings, or signage to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment.

Riverfront Drive streetscaping

Establish a genuine neighborhood character that returns the streets to a pedestrian scale. Install paver brick or clearly delineate pedestrian crossings; plant vegetation wherever possible; install decorative street lamps; place benches and trash receptacles along the sidewalk where space permits; and place similar streetscaping elements on the boulevard median.

Historic buildings

Some of the best preserved examples of turn-of-the-century buildings are located in Old Town between 301 and 415 North Riverfront Drive. Examples of Queen Anne, Italianate, Arts and Crafts, and Art Deco styles of residential construction are well-represented in the neighborhood.

1. **Create Old Town historic district:** It is important for the city to encourage the preservation of Mankato's history. By establishing a municipal Old Town historical district, the city would provide the foundation for preserving the historical feeling of the business district and create a greater sense of identity for the area.
2. **Establish Historic design standards:** Historic design standards implementation, combined with a local review process for new development projects on Riverfront Drive would ensure the continuity of the historic feel of the commercial district. In addition, the formulation of a local historic preservation group representing residential and commercial interests could provide on-going advocacy for historic interests.
3. **Improve signage:** Improved signage at Memorial Bridge and at crucial gateway locations on Riverfront Drive would provide additional visibility for the district.

OLD TOWN REVITALIZATION PLAN, 1998

Prepared for the Mankato City Council By: Old Town Businesses, Inc., February 1998

Old Town Businesses, Inc. represents Old Town business and property owners. The organization prepared a proposal for the revitalization of the Old Town business district.

The organization adamantly rejects the concept that North Riverfront Drive in Old Town is merely a means for travel from one part of Mankato to another. Old Town is a distinct business district with a main arterial street passing through it. Riverfront Drive is important to the city's economic prosperity, while Old Town contributes to Mankato's sense of heritage and its present and future economic health.

Highlights of the proposal include:

- Parking is the lifeline that ties customers to Old Town's businesses. The proposal calls for parking along the (east side) northbound lanes of the 300, 400, 500, and 600 blocks of North Riverfront Drive.
- By widening the 300 block, parallel parking can be installed on the 300 block. This modification will make the width of the 300 block consistent with the rest of the Old Town blocks. Sidewalks can be narrowed by roughly three feet on the 300's west side and possibly up to two feet on the 300's east side if necessary.
- Left turn lanes should be removed at the intersections of Plum and Elm in order to provide a straight line of parking along the length of 300-600 blocks northbound, eliminating the "snake" through Old Town.
- Old Town Businesses, Inc. vehemently opposes the provision of center medians on Riverfront Drive. 5. The visual effects and streetscaping programs should be mobilized to enhance Old Town. Aesthetic improvements and landscaping programs should be undertaken with the installation of low level decorative lighting, banners, and widened corners incorporating planters and trees; planting trees anywhere that is convenient or possible; creating small parklike areas; and placing decorative Kasota stone signage at the north and south entrances into Old Town.
- Riverfront Drive should remain untouched on the 700 block to Madison Avenue. The businesses in that area, however, should be included in the streetscape plan.

Objectives

Participants in the issues workshop and visual preference survey identified the most pressing issues facing Old Town and suggested methods to address these challenges. Issues and objectives identified for the Old Town area reaffirm the objectives stated within the previous studies and are summarized below and illustrated in figures III-5 and III-6.

STREETSCAPE

- Prepare guidelines for streetscape, alleys, parking lots, and transitions to residential areas.
- Introduce elements that distinguish Old Town from other areas.
- Expand opportunities for building access from alleys and side streets.
- Reinforce historic character and promote area as a shopping district.
- Extend to Old Town the same lighting fixtures and other elements used in downtown.
- Create a stronger connection between Old Town and downtown.
- Utilize Mankato stone in streetscape and buildings.
- Bury power lines.
- Improve directional and informational signs.
- Screen dumpsters.
- Improve pedestrian safety.

BUILDINGS

- Outline design guidelines for new or renovated buildings and historic preservation.

Recommendations

1. Redevelopment guidelines: The general site design, architecture, signage, alley, parking lot treatments and other urban area design principles outlined previously in this chapter are particularly important for Old Town. These guidelines should be used as a reference when undertaking redevelopment projects.
2. Zoning and Site Design: Conventional commercial development, primarily north of Rock Street, dilutes the historical integrity and character of Old Town. Here signs clutter Old Town, while parking lots abutting the street destroy the street wall. The change from the traditional urban development pattern to a more suburban one coincides with the change from the CBD-F, Central Business District Fringe, zoning to the B-1, Community Business District.
3. The CBD-F Zone should be extended to include the area along Riverfront Drive to Madison Avenue, or the B-1 District regulations should be modified to incorporate special provisions for the Old Town District, requiring new development to comply with the guidelines established in this document.
4. New buildings should follow the existing building pattern and be placed at the sidewalk or right-of-way line. For new infill development in Old Town, the following site planning guidelines should be enforced to maintain a traditional compact development pattern.
5. Figure III-7 illustrates the application of these principles within the segment of Old Town between Rock Street and Madison Avenue.
6. Place new buildings at the right-of-way line with a zero setback, or build-to line.
7. On corner lots, buildings should be placed at the right-of-way line on both sides facing the street.
8. Place parking lots in side or rear yards and prohibit parking between the building and sidewalk. Any parking permitted in the front yard should be screened and the building line maintained with a brick wall or decorative railing placed at the right-of-way line.
9. Parking lot buffers: As mentioned previously, the relationship between parking lot and side walk is more important than setback depth. In an urban context, the street wall formed by buildings placed at the sidewalk should continue across the street frontage of parking lots through the use of overstory trees, hedges, and/or structural screens. A shallow setback with overstory trees and a low screen made of concrete, brick, and/or ornamental iron railings can effectively screen views while maintaining the street wall. The buffer area should be a minimum of five feet in width to provide adequate space for trees and a railing or wall, as well as a minimal area for snow storage. Figures III-8 and III-9 illustrate two options for buffering parking lots and defining their edges.
10. Side street parking: More on-street parking should be provided for the Old Town merchants and residents by incorporating on-street angled parking on the side streets (see figure III-7). Sidewalk throats, or bump-outs can be incorporated to provide space for boulevard trees, flowers, benches, signs, sculpture, kiosks, and street lamps. Bump-outs also define the parking lanes, shorten crosswalks and calm traffic by creating the illusion of a narrower street.
11. Streetscape: The combination of a wide busy street, lack of trees, and narrow walks along the Riverfront Drive corridor creates an inhospitable pedestrian environment. A buffer separating the sidewalk from the street provides a sense of safety and comfort for the pedestrian. As illustrated in Figures III-8 and III-9, parallel on-street parking creates such a buffer, as does the placement of pedestrian-scale street lamps, signs and trees between the street curb and sidewalk.
12. Streetscape elements: Foster continuity and connections to downtown: The Mankato street lamp, that was selected for downtown should be extended along Riverfront Drive and side streets to establish a minimum amount of continuity between the districts. Banners, railings, benches and other forms of artwork unique to Old Town should be incorporated as well.

Mankato stone

Streetscape bollards, benches, special paving highlights, sign and monument bases, sculpture, and edge treatments should consist of Mankato stone.

Paving treatments

Paving treatments should be simple and incorporate decorative pavers, as used Downtown, to define primary walkways, special seating areas and crosswalks.

Directional signs

A comprehensive civic sign system should be created for the entire city. Signs should be similar in character the Downtown signs that were created to reinforce the area's historic character and which utilize Mankato stone or precast concrete and brick as the primary base material.

Downtown Core: Showcase Business and Civic District

The downtown core of Mankato is the historical heart of the city and the focus of regional services and cultural activities. Nestled between the Minnesota River and its bluffs, downtown has evolved into a compact and walkable environment. The predominant use of Mankato stone on old and new buildings is unique to the city.

Background Studies

Downtown is in a constant state of change and has been the focus of significant redevelopment efforts over the last 15 years.

The comprehensive redevelopment strategy established in the *Downtown Revitalization Strategy and Implementation Program*, by ZHA, Inc. M. Paul Friedberg and Partners, Carl Walker Engineers, 1990, defines a framework of streetscapes and open spaces for downtown redevelopment, and underscores the need for a unified streetscape system, building design guidelines and gateway treatments. The plan also outlines a strategy to realize this vision over time. The elements most relevant to this design manual are outlined below. Many of these proposed improvements have been, or are about to be, implemented.

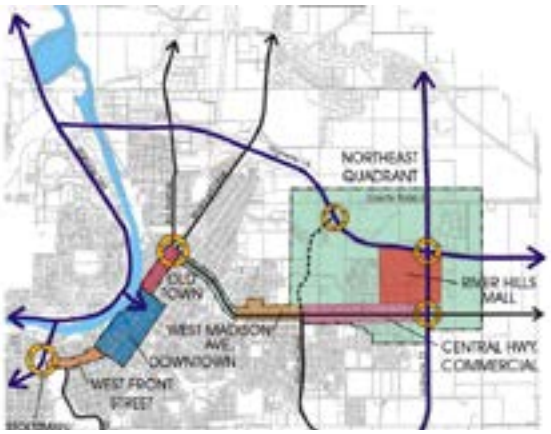
NORTH FRONT STREET

Objective:

- Establish the North Front Street area as the premier location for up-scale, retail, restaurant, and entertainment uses, as well as office and residential uses.

Actions:

- Streetscape Front Street between Hickory and the Holiday Inn, and Hickory Street between Second Street and Riverfront Drive.
- Streetscape treatments shall include street furniture, trees, lighting and new paving. Hickory and Front Streets will possess plaza environments in order to maximize the potential for market synergy among uses in this area.



MANKATO MALL AND ITS ENVIRONS

Objective:

- Change tenant mix and reintegrate Mankato Mall into the urban fabric in order to stabilize its operations.

Actions:

- Develop plazas around the Mankato Mall to create a high-quality environment and an intelligible pedestrian network which encourages people to explore retail opportunities beyond the mall. Specific public space projects include:
- The development of a public plaza on existing parking lots east of Mankato Mall.
- Redevelopment of the public space currently located at the southern entrance of the mall.
- The downtown plazas are intended to make the mall visible to downtown, link its activity with the rest of downtown, and complete an organized public space network connecting all major Downtown activities. The southern plaza will link the mall to South Front Street, the New HyVee and the Riverfront area. The eastern plaza will link the mall with Jackson Street, Second Street and North Front Street activities. These plazas, coupled with the Riverfront Park and the Civic Center plaza, will create a unified public space network surrounding the mall.

THE JACKSON STREET AREA

Objectives:

- Establish Jackson Street as an office spine which functionally connects office uses next to Old Main with those on Second Street.
- Develop a city/county government complex on Jackson Street between Second Street and Broad Street.
- Streetscape Jacksonville Street between Broad and Fourth Streets.

THE SECOND STREET AREA

Objective:

- Establish Second Street as a Gateway Street.

Actions:

- Streetscape Second Street in a manner that will communicate its importance as a pedestrian street and traffic corridor.
- Second Street is the primary entrance into the downtown core and its streetscape must clearly articulate this function

in order to orient the visitor and slow traffic. Visitors must feel that they are entering into a pedestrian-oriented space while through-traffic will be compelled to reroute to Riverfront Drive.

Issues workshop and visual preference survey

Issues Workshop and Visual Preference Survey participants identified the most pressing issues facing Downtown and suggested ways in which they should be addressed. Issues and objectives identified for the overall Downtown area reaffirm the objectives within ZHA's Downtown Revitalization Plan and are summarized below and illustrated in figure III-12:

- Capitalize on Downtown's historical context and architecture
- Upgrade Stoltzman/Riverfront Gateway
- Establish guidelines to ensure that redevelopment reinforces the unique architecture and streetscape
- Establish criteria for new development and signs

Recommendations

1. **Redevelopment guidelines:** Implementation of the excellent suggestions for streetscape and open space improvements outlined in the Downtown revitalization strategy and implementation program by ZHA, Inc. M. Paul Friedberg and Partners, Carl Walker Engineers, should continue.
2. **Site design and architecture:** Refer to the general site design, architecture, signage, alley, parking lot treatments, and other design principles outlined previously in this chapter. The dominant use of Mankato stone and brick establishes a character unique to downtown and should be reinforced through each new development. Consideration should be given to increasing the percentage of Mankato stone required for new buildings within the Downtown District.
3. **Streetscape:** Downtown's new streetscape design establishes a foundation of elements that should be expanded in order to create a cohesive treatment for Front Street, Old Town and the Madison Avenue Districts.
4. **Directional signs:** A comprehensive civic sign system should be created for the entire city. Signs should be similar in character the downtown signs that were created to reinforce the area's historic character and which utilize Mankato stone or precast concrete and brick as the primary base material.
5. **Civic center visibility:** The civic center serves as the destination for regional visitors who come to downtown Mankato for concerts, conventions, and other events. The building is visible from Highway 169 and the Memorial Bridge; however, it is not easily recognizable. To orient visitors to the civic Center and downtown, a special treatment of the upper portions of the building should be considered to create an identifiable landmark. The treatment could consist of special lighting, neon artwork, hanging fabric art or banners advertising special events, or tastefully designed letters that spell out "Civic Center."
6. **Electronic message boards:** The electronic message boards located on Riverfront Drive and Hickory Street, as well as on Madison Avenue and Sioux Road, should be enhanced with more extensive landscaping in order to draw more attention to the signs and to create a stronger visual presence. Additional signs should be located at the north and south gateway areas on Highway 169.
7. **Bridges and gateways:** The junction of Memorial Bridge with Second Street is the primary entrance to Downtown. Pedestrian-scale ornamental lighting and a decorative railing could be incorporated onto the existing bridge to create a gateway into downtown.
8. **Public art:** An ongoing program to incorporate permanent and temporary forms of public art should be considered throughout downtown. In addition, art elements can be used to enhance public structures such as the skyway and parking ramp.

West Front Street: Neighborhood Commercial

West Front Street, from Stoltzman Road to Liberty Street, is an area that is evolving from a residential to a commercial district. It has been rezoned from Central Business District Fringe, CBD-F, to Neighborhood Commercial, B-1, at Liberty Street. This change is evident south of Liberty Street where the building pattern changes from a compact urban street to one that is suburban.

The design objectives for this area are listed below and illustrated in figure III-14.

Objectives

- improve sense of safety through increased lighting and landscaping;
- create building renovation guidelines;
- improve appearance of parking areas;
- incorporate directional signage;
- support this area as a transitional district evolving from residential to a neighborhood commercial corridor.

Recommendations

1. **Land use:** Ensure a clear distinction between this area and other B-1, Community Business, districts. The small scale residential and neighborhood commercial character should be reinforced by encouraging adaptive reuse of the existing single family homes to small professional service businesses, such as dentist offices, and small limited hospitality uses such as restaurants, bed and breakfasts, and small shops. Higher density residential uses such as apartments and townhouses should also be encouraged.
2. **Architecture:** In order to avoid a mixture of setbacks and styles, a minimum size for a redevelopment area, such as 1/3 of a block, should be considered. New and renovated buildings should express the residential character of this area through the use of peaked or gabled roofs and three -story maximum heights. Larger buildings should express the predominate building modules and lot widths found within their respective blocks. Exterior building materials should consist of brick, precast concrete, and/or Mankato stone on all sides visible from public streets.
3. **Streetscape:** The streetscape treatment should reflect the residential quality of the district by creating a casual feeling on the street. Sidewalk bump-outs will provide space for boulevard trees, perennial beds, benches and street lamps. They also define the parking lanes, shorten crosswalks and calm traffic by creating the perception of a narrower street (see figure III-14). The Mankato street lamp, and other standard elements that have been selected for downtown should be extended along Front Street to establish a minimum amount of continuity between the districts. Paving treatments should be simple and incorporate decorative pavers, as used downtown, to define special seating areas and crosswalks. Mankato stone should be incorporated into the streetscape as bollards, benches, special paving highlights, sign and monument bases, sculpture and edge treatments.
4. **Signs:** Buildings are placed up to the street in this community commercial district. Building signs are visible from the street and therefore eliminate the need for pylon signs. Additional pylon signs should be prohibited within the B-1, community commercial, district, and existing ones phased out over a five- to 10-year period. Encourage the use of building and overhanging signs and permit monument signs only through the a conditional use permit. The requirements for a conditional use permit may include the use of brick and Mankato stone within the sign composition, a maximum height of 6 feet, and additional landscaping.
5. **Landscaping:** Parking areas placed within the front yard negatively influence the image of this area. Parcels are small and do not possess much additional space for landscaping. However, a landscaped buffer ranging in width between 5 and 6 feet and landscaped with trees, and ground covers or shrubs can effectively filter the view to parking areas. Landscaping materials must be able to withstand urban conditions, such as snow loads and car bumpers.
6. **General design principles:** Refer to the general recommendations and illustrations in the previous section of this chapter for design guidelines concerning alley, parking lot, and building treatments.

Front Street: "Main Street" Character

The segment of Front Street between Byron and Cherry streets is a clearly established commercial district, characterized by one- to three-story brick and stone buildings that form a "Main Street" character at the fringe of the downtown core. Front Street, terminating at the south plaza and entry to Mankato Mall, leads visitors into the downtown core. Pedestrian activity is more pronounced in this district than in the West Front Street District due to the mixture of bars and restaurants, as well as its proximity to downtown, the civic center, the university and residential areas.

Some parking lots abutting the street have been screened to maintain the street wall. Over the years, several of the building facades have been renovated with varying degrees of success. The mixture of facade treatments detracts from Front Street's building character and the overall "Main Street" quality.

The streetscape and building facade treatments should reinforce the unique "Main Street" quality of this district to distinguish it from other areas within the city.

Objectives

- Prepare redevelopment guidelines to improve appearance of parking areas and buildings.
- Incorporate directional signage, monuments, and lighting at key intersections.
- Increase lighting and other streetscape treatments to improve sense of safety.

Recommendations

1. **Redevelopment guidelines:** The general site design, architecture, signage, alley, parking lot treatments and other urban area design principles outlined previously in this chapter particularly apply to the Front Street District. These guidelines should serve as a reference when undertaking redevelopment projects.
2. **Streetscape:** The streetscape should provide a sense of safety and continuity throughout the Downtown core and other districts by incorporating pedestrian-scale street lamps, signs, and street treatments identical to those currently used Downtown. Sidewalk bump-outs, placed where possible, create space for boulevard trees, public art

work, kiosks, benches, lights, and other elements. Bump-outs also define the parking lanes, shorten crosswalks and calm traffic by creating the perception of a narrower street.

3. **Paving treatments:** Paving treatments should be simple and incorporate decorative pavers, as used Downtown, to define special seating areas and crosswalks.
4. **Mankato stone:** Streetscape bollards, benches, special paving highlights, sign and monument bases, sculpture and edge treatments should consist of Mankato stone.
5. **Directional signs:** A comprehensive civic sign system should be created for the entire city. Signs should be similar in character the downtown signs that were created to reinforce the area's historic character and which utilize Mankato stone or precast concrete and brick as the primary base material.
6. **Sense of safety:** Particular emphasis should be placed upon improving the sense of nighttime safety within the parking lots and along the streets within this district. This can be accomplished by adhering to the following principles:
   - » *Visibility:* Streets and parking lots will feel safer if they are visible to users who know they can be observed by others. Increasing the use of street and parking lot lighting, and maintaining visibility from the windows of nearby buildings will improve the sense of safety. Sidewalk and parking lot lighting should illuminate a person's face so that it is identifiable from 50 feet away. Decorative railings and overstory trees provide a canopy that creates a parking lot edge treatment that maintains the street edge while allowing clear visibility.
   - » *Ownership:* Well-maintained streets convey a sense of neighborhood ownership. Signs and maps can provide information about hours of operation, emergency numbers, and points of orientation for visitor, while conveying a sense of neighborhood integrity and an intolerance for undesirable or threatening behavior.
   - » *Activity and compatible land uses:* A compact land use pattern with a diverse mixture of uses will foster activity at all times of the day. This land use pattern will allow for more eyes on the street.
   - » *Readability:* Pedestrians need a clear path that offers freedom of movement and alternative route choices so that dangerous situations and areas, such as isolated and poorly lit areas, may be avoided.

Stoltzman Gateway District

As illustrated in figure III-15, the west gateway on Riverfront Drive from Highway 169 runs through an area in transition from recent conventional development into the older neighborhood commercial area of West Front Street. The high school athletic fields create a campus character for the southwest side of Riverfront Drive. The north side is characterized by a mixture of commercial structures, including a grocery store. The parking lots for the commercial buildings were built prior to contemporary landscaping standards and are devoid of trees or greenery.

Objective

- Improve the entry experience through landscaping, signage and redevelopment treatments.

Recommendations

Short Term (illustrated in figure III-16):

- Improve landscaping to define the entrance from Highway 169. Participate in the Minnesota Department of Transportation's Community Partnership Program to improve the landscaping at the intersection of Highway 169.
- Move the walkway along the east side of Riverfront Drive and incorporate a boulevard and street trees.
- Define the gateway by extending the landscape character of Riverfront Drive, north of Stoltzman Avenue, to the south.
- Incorporate Mankato stone bollards into the median along Riverfront Drive and Stoltzman Road to integrate the treatment with the streetscape and architectural materials found Downtown.
- Landscape the medians along Stoltzman Road.
- Buffer the parking lots with overstory trees and ornamental railing.
- Upgrade the entry monument in the triangular median at Front Street to include limestone walls, a stone directional sign and ornamental trees and flowers.

Long term (illustrated in figure III-17):

- Infill underutilized parking lots around the grocery store with buildings placed at the right-of-way line to reestablish the street edge and traditional building pattern.
- Define the gateway with an identifiable landmark building to serve as a focal point at the intersection at Stoltzman Road.
- Special Area Study: A special area plan involving every stakeholder should be undertaken to assess the market, traffic and parking implications, as well as improvement and implementation strategies to increase property values and forge public/private partnerships.

Part IV: Highway Areas

As opposed to the compact development pattern that defines Old Town, Front Street, and other urban areas of Downtown Mankato, Madison Avenue has evolved into a typical post-World War II suburban commercial strip, its design strongly influenced by accommodating the automobile. Nearly two miles in length, Madison Avenue and its environs above the bluff are characterized by widely-spaced buildings set back a great but inconsistent distance from the street, and the street wall co-opted to provide parking lots. What results is an automobile-dominated environment that appears cluttered and unorganized.

The scope of the Madison Avenue Commercial Districts Study Area (Figure IV-1) is quite large and includes the Community Commercial area on the west at the edge of the bluff, all of Madison Avenue, the Highway 22 corridor to the east, River Hills Mall, as well as the undeveloped intersection of Highway 14, the future extension of Victory Drive, and the "Northeast Quadrant," north of Highway 14.

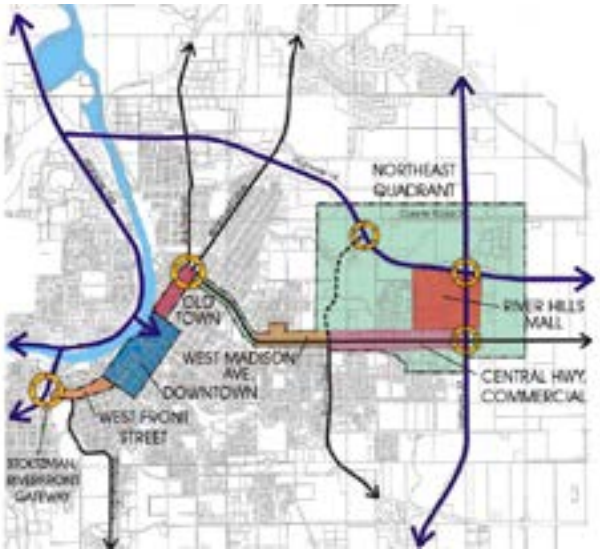


Figure IV-1

Madison Avenue - Background

Zoning

Most of the parcels abutting Madison Avenue between Riverfront Drive and Star Street are designated B-1, Community Business, by Mankato's 1997 zoning map. Madison East Mall is zoned B-3, Highway Business, as is most of the area east of Star Street to Highway 22 and around the River Hills Mall. The area just east of the River Hills Mall is designated OR, office residential, while the area north and south of the commercial districts are residentially zoned, mainly R-1, one-family dwellings, with pockets of R-2, Two-Family Dwellings, and R-3, Limited Multiple Dwellings.

Land use plan

The developed portions of the Madison Avenue Study Area have been designated commercial, and the undeveloped areas vacant or agricultural in Mankato's land use plan (figure IV-2 below). Housing and Office uses lie to the west of the River Hills Mall.

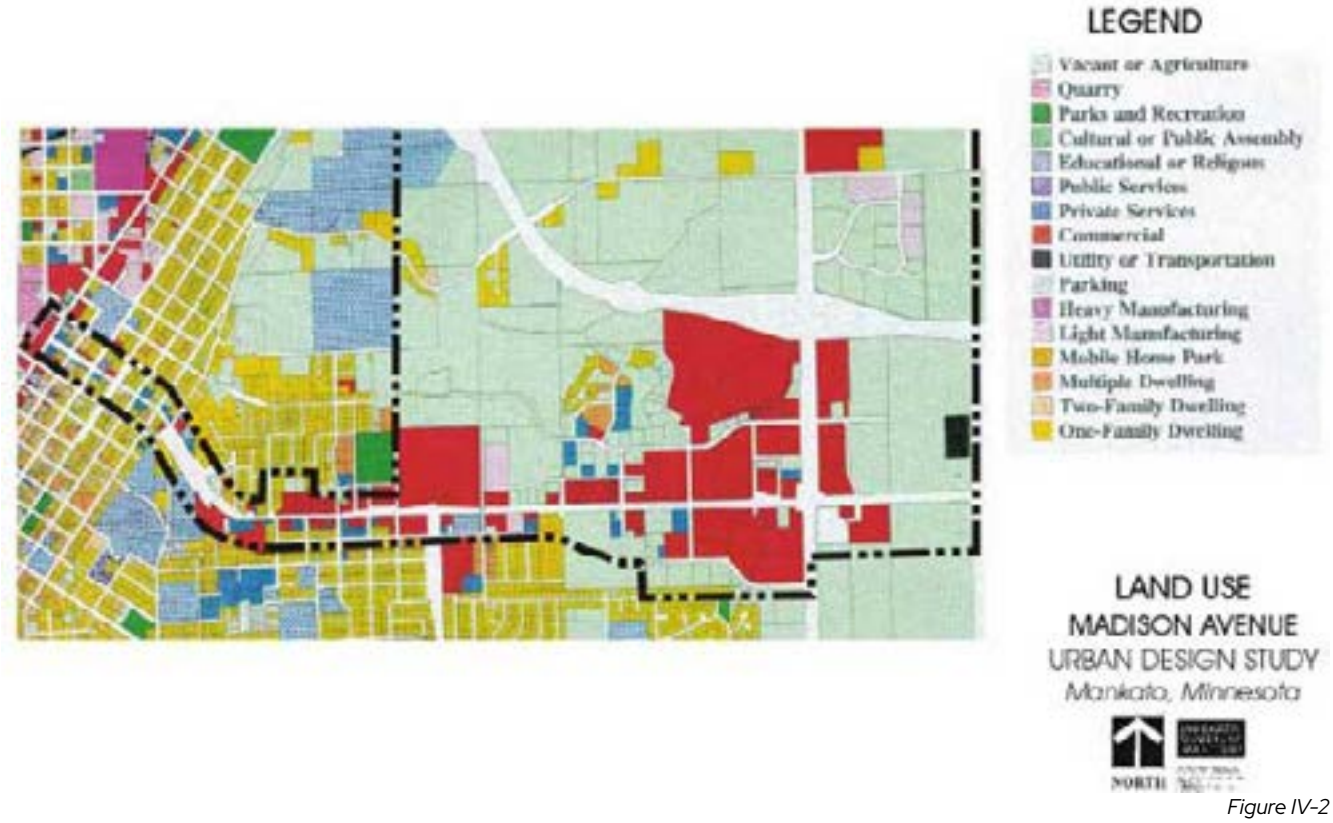


Figure IV-2

Transportation

Mankato/North Mankato Area Transportation and Planning Study

(MATAPS'96 Transportation Partners. Prepared by: SRF Consulting Group, Inc.)

Following is a summary of the recommendations from the MATAPS Study. The summary of analysis plan (figure IV-3) illustrates the street classification system proposed in this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

a. The MATAPS'96 Partners should, individually or as a group, pursue changes to the functional classification system over the next 6 to 12 months. Functional classification is directly related to the level of regional access and mobility a route provides, and affects many transportation decisions, such as maintenance policies, design, access management strategies, jurisdictional responsibility, and funding.

The proposed functional classification designations within the study area are as follows:

Principal arterials

- Highways 14 and 22
- Madison Avenue

Minor arterials

- Victory Drive
- Madison Avenue, east of Highway 22

Urban Collectors

- Raintree Avenue
- Adams Street
- Swiss Street
- Bassett Street

b. The city and county governments should incorporate the access planning guidelines developed as part of MATAPS'96 into their subdivision ordinances and administrative procedures. The partners should create strategies to protect important future transportation corridors through land use and zoning ordinances, access management, and the official mapping process (e.g., Victory Drive, TH 22, TH 14, and frontage road systems).

ACCESS MANAGEMENT

The MATAPS'96 Study suggests several access management alternatives for important corridors:

- Encourage shared driveways and internal circulation plans.
- Restrict vehicles from turning at minor access points in order to reduce conflicts.
- Develop proper setbacks to provide for future frontage roads.
- Encourage proper lot layout to minimize the number of access points.
- Encourage connections between developments.

Victory Drive Extension: Victory Drive, a four-lane divided minor arterial possessing a parkway character, is to be extended north of Madison Avenue to the junction of US Highway 14 and County Road 3. New highway interchange ramps will be constructed, as will a new frontage road to the River Hills Mall, and local street connections. At the time of this report's publication, the preferred alignment had not been determined.

Natural systems

THOMPSON RAVINE AND WOODLANDS

Thompson Ravine, located to the north of Madison Avenue, is a significant regional landform and includes the only substantial stand of woodlands in the Madison Avenue area. If the woodland fingers were used for open space corridors, trails, and parkways, they could provide a focus for the community park system and serve as a recreational resource with linkages to River Hills Mall, Victory Drive Parkway, the Northeast Quadrant and the residential areas and parks south of Madison Avenue. The city of Mankato 1997 proposed sidewalk and trail plan proposes trails through Thompson Ravine

STORMWATER

The majority of the Madison Avenue area's stormwater is collected and piped to the stormwater pond west of River Hills Mall. Given the large amount of impervious surface in this area, a single pond must handle a tremendous amount of stormwater and infrastructure. Stormwater is a resource that provides an opportunity to integrate natural systems with infrastructure and create amenities that will improve the landscape and livability of the commercial districts. Collecting stormwater into an integrated network of open space linkages and smaller ponding areas along Madison Avenue should be considered as a method to improve the street's appearance and alleviate pressure on the stormwater pond.

Madison Avenue - Defining a Community Vision

Issues Workshop

Issues Workshop and Visual Preference Survey participants identified the Madison Avenue area's most pressing issues and suggested methods to address them. The issues and objectives identified for the overall Madison Avenue area are summarized below and illustrated in figure IV-4. Specific issues and objectives for each special area are discussed in the following section.

Enhance the visual environment and foster a unique and memorable identity.

- Reduce visual clutter by minimizing the number, height, and size of signs.
- Reduce exterior lighting allowance for gas stations.
- Create a unified appearance.
- Enhance the gateways for each district with improved landscaping and site planning.
- New development should be constructed with high-quality building materials and relate contextually with its surroundings.
- Provide incentives to encourage exterior renovation of existing buildings.
- Improve the area with a continuous bike/walk system.
- The current lack of identity presents an opportunity to establish a theme/character.

Manage growth to support infill development and discourage sprawl.

- Develop identifiable centers of activity.
- Prevent haphazard building placement and encourage design consistency.
- Improve River Hills Mall's landscaping and connect it to the surrounding area.
- Concentrate multi-family housing in the Madison Avenue area to provide living space within walking distance of employment sites.
- Require new development/redevelopment to consider pedestrian and transit needs.

Preserve and integrate natural features into developed areas.

- Maintain open space areas and a natural vegetation corridor leading to the ravine areas--cluster development to protect more open space.
- Provide vegetative buffering around all ravines and wetlands.
- Provide for adequate settling ponds in order to intercept stormwater before it enters ravines.
- Set aside space for a bike trail and park area within Thompson Ravine.
- Maximize opportunity to connect lake/holding pond with new development.

Guiding Design Principles

The following design principles are based upon the collective vision of those residents who participated in the Issues Workshop and Visual Preference Survey. They guide the qualitative and functional aspects of the overall framework plan and pertain to all districts within the Madison Avenue area:

General design principles:

1. Define a framework of pedestrian-oriented linkages and open spaces
   - » Define a framework for redevelopment creating open space linkages and using streetscape elements.
   - » Provide parks and plazas for a variety of uses, including community gatherings.
   - » Create pedestrian-friendly linkages between all areas within a five minute walk of the commercial districts.
   - » Integrate infrastructure with open space improvements.
   - » Design stormwater and road rights-of-way as amenities and as part of the open space network.
   - » Provide open space linkages to natural wetland/ravine areas.
   - » Protect natural wetland/ravine areas.
2. Reduce visual clutter and enhance the appearance of street corridors through improved signage, site planning and landscape treatments.
   - » Emphasize the different roles and character of urban collectors, principle arterials, gateways, parkway corridors and special streets through a hierarchy of streetscape treatments.
   - » Define signage, landscaping and setback requirements for sites along urban collectors, principal arterials, gateway areas, and parkway corridors.
   - » Encourage shared driveways and internal circulation plans.
   - » Restrict turns at minor access points in order to reduce traffic conflicts.

» Encourage proper lot layout to minimize the number of access points.
» Encourage connections between developments.

3. Create a system of civic elements that provides a central vision and continuity throughout Mankato while still responding to individual districts.
   » Foster a positive and unique image for the Madison Avenue area.
   » Emphasize the use of Mankato stone in a variety of applications.
   » Expand the system of streetscape elements and signs currently used downtown to the Madison Avenue area.
4. Develop compact mixed-use centers of activity
   » Concentrate a mixture of uses within a defined area to foster market synergy, vitality, livability, and pedestrian activity.

Madison Avenue - Alternative Framework Plan

The alternative framework plan defines a vision for the redevelopment of the Madison Avenue area and illustrates ways in which the issues workshop goals and objectives may be applied to the existing setting. As such, this section presents the framework plan for the study area as well as specific site plan and streetscape design recommendations for each district. These recommendations are general guidelines for public and private redevelopment initiatives.

Compact mixed use centers

Upgraded landscaping, site planning and architectural controls will improve the appearance of individual developments and, over time, the image of the entire Madison Avenue commercial area. However, the current land-use plan encourages Madison Avenue and the surrounding district to function as a sprawling, automobile-dominated commercial area that lacks identifiable centers of activity.

An alternative to the conventional suburban model of development is the mixed-use center, where higher concentrations of uses are clustered together, enabling high-density residential, specialty retail, entertainment, and office uses to be integrated into a compact, pedestrian-scaled building pattern. Mixed-use centers that possess concentrated but diverse activities and uses, landmark architecture, and an inviting system of plazas, walks and open spaces will:

- Shape identifiable centers of activity and provide a focus for the community.
- Build a positive identity for the Madison Avenue "Marketplace."
- Utilize land and infrastructure more efficiently.
- Improve property values beyond conventional development.
- Improve the overall livability of the Madison Avenue area.

Mixed-Use Centers, designed with an integrated hierarchy of streets and pedestrian-scale open spaces, linkages, and trails, are proposed in those parts of the Madison Avenue Study Area that currently possess land-use patterns, redevelopment opportunities, and infrastructure elements that would support concentrations of infill development (see Figure IV-5, IV-6A, and IV-6B):

1. MADISON AVENUE AND VICTORY DRIVE

Once extended, Victory Drive will serve as the primary crossroad to Madison Avenue. Currently, residential neighborhoods and parks are within walking distance of the Madison East Mall. The Victory Drive extension will provide opportunities to develop underutilized and vacant land located within walking distance to the east and north of the mall into a concentration of offices, retail, and medium- to high-density residential.

2. RIVER HILLS MALL, SIOUX ROAD AND ADAMS STREET

A combination of convenient access, underutilized parcels, an emerging office and residential area, and an open space connection to the west provides an opportunity to create a vital mixed-use center of activity.

3. SIOUX ROAD: "MAIN STREET"

The buildings along Sioux Road and Adams Street are tightly spaced together, creating a comfortable pedestrian scale and thus the potential for a "Main Street" character to emerge along Sioux Road between Madison Avenue and the River Hills Mall. Such a scenario, which also could be applied along Adams and Raintree Streets, would require the creation of shared parking strategies and retail, entertainment and office infill in the underutilized peripheral portions of the mall's parking lot and along Sioux Road.

Medium- to high-density residential and office infill that is oriented along open space and trails extending between existing residential, Thompson Ravine Road and River Hills Mall would strengthen linkages to the west of the mall.

4. THOMPSON RAVINE ROAD AND HIGHWAY 14

The Victory Drive extension and new interchange at Highway 14 will create a major gateway to Mankato and provide an opportunity to shape this undeveloped area into a mixed-use compact model for development. Furthermore, Victory Drive's parkway character will set the tone for a high-quality gateway that can be reinforced with corresponding high-quality development (see figure 6A).

Streetscape hierarchy

Street design greatly influences the identity and open space framework of the Madison Avenue highway commercial areas. Streets serve as entries and gateways, provide linkages between the various districts, and establish the backbone of the development pattern.

The proposed hierarchy of streetscape treatments will emphasize each district and respond to the street classifications within the Hilltop and Madison Avenue districts. Using the functional street classification proposed in the MATAPS Plan, the street hierarchy includes principal arterials, gateway corridors, urban collectors, parkway corridors and special streets. A detailed discussion of each street can be found in the respective sections of this chapter.

The principle and supporting objectives for the streetscape hierarchy are to (see figures IV-5 and IV-6A):

PRINCIPLES:

- Create a system of civic elements that provides a central vision and continuity throughout Mankato.
- Develop a positive and unique image for the Madison Avenue area.
- Define streetscape and site planning treatments for gateways.
- Emphasize the use of Mankato stone in a variety of applications.
- Expand the system of streetscape elements and signs currently used downtown to the Madison Avenue area.

A brief description of the proposed street treatments follows.

A. Principal arterials and gateway corridors: Highway 22, Madison Avenue and Highway 14 at Thompson Ravine Road

Principal arterials act as gateway corridors into the city and are experienced primarily in the automobile. The character of these corridors varies from the open prairie landscape of Highway 22 to the developed Community Business segment of West Madison Avenue. Corridor treatments along the Gateway Corridors will:

Objectives:

- Inform visitors that they have arrived in Mankato. This may be accomplished through a system of unique, large -scale landscaping, civic monuments and sign treatments.
- Improve the image of the area through landscaping, site planning, signage, architectural guidelines and standards.

Treatments, illustrated in figure IV-7, may include:

- Extensive plantings of prairie wildflowers and grasses in the open highway corridors, to tree-lined boulevards in the proposed mixed-use center;
- Walkways and bike trail connections;
- Large Mankato stone entry monuments, bollards, retaining walls, and directional signs; and
- Roadway- and pedestrian-scale lighting in mixed-use centers.

B. Urban collectors: Raintree Avenue, Adams Street, Swiss Street and Bassett Street

Objectives:

- Create linkages between the mixed-use centers and residential districts, outlying commercial uses and parking areas.
- Provide continuity between the special streets and mixed-use centers through common streetscape elements, site planning and architecture.
- In selected areas, incorporate parking lot buffers, street trees, pedestrian- scale lighting, coordinated signage and street furniture.

Treatments, illustrated in figure IV-8, may include:

- Parallel parking bays defined with curb bump outs;
- Tree-lined boulevards;
- Walkways ranging in width between 6 and 8 feet;
- 13- to 15-foot pedestrian-scale lighting, spaced approximately 120 to 180 feet apart in the boulevards; and
- Mankato stone bollards, retaining walls, and directional signs.

C. Special streets: Sioux Road and Adams Street: Raintree Avenue to Highway 22

The alternative framework plan recommends that a retail, entertainment, and office mixed-use center be developed as infill along the currently underutilized periphery of the River Hills Mall parking lot, as well as for the vacant parcels along Sioux Road. Similar types of mixed-use centers may be developed along Adams and Raintree Streets. Sioux Road, Adams Street and Raintree Street will form the retail, business, and cultural heart of the proposed mixed-use centers and will receive the most intense streetscape treatment, including:

- Generous sidewalk space that can accommodate outdoor cafes, community festivals, public art, sidewalk sales and other Main Street activities.
- Streetscape elements such as sculpture, street trees, pedestrian-scale lighting, bus shelters, directional signs, colorful banners, benches and parallel parking.

D. Parkway: Victory Drive extension

As mentioned previously, Victory Drive will maintain its parkway character and extend as a four-lane, divided minor arterial north of Madison Avenue to the junction of US Highway 14 and County Road 3. To emphasize this street as an approach route, streetscape elements, such as pedestrian-scale lighting and decorative paving, will intensify as one approaches Madison Avenue.

Parkway components, illustrated in figure IV-9, include:

- Higher landscaping standards for development abutting the parkway;
- Pedestrian and bicycle linkages to surrounding development, transit facilities, and open spaces, including Thompson Ravine;
- Landscaped medians;
- Parallel parking bays, defined with curb bump- outs where possible;
- Tree-lined boulevards, 10 feet in width;
- Walkways ranging in width between 6 and 8 feet;
- Pedestrian-scale lighting, ranging between 13 and 15 feet in height, spaced approximately 120 to 180 feet apart in the boulevards; and
- Mankato stone entry monuments, bollards, retaining walls, and directional signs.

Madison Avenue - General Site Development Guidelines

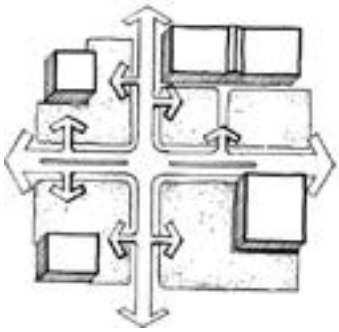
Private redevelopment strategies should work in concert with those of the city to improve the highway commercial areas within the Madison Avenue area. This chapter addresses private land-use regulations and redevelopment models that will improve the appearance and livability of the highway-oriented commercial and gateway districts. Suggested public streetscape and gateway improvements are outlined in the chapter following this one.

Visual Preference Survey

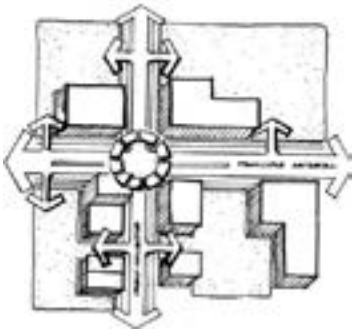
The design guidelines outlined in this chapter reinforce the community's design preferences defined by the Visual Preference Survey, a synopsis of which can be found in Chapter Two.

Development patterns

The relationship between buildings, parking lots and the street is the most important design element within the highway commercial areas. Madison Avenue's evolution into a typical suburban commercial strip has been influenced by increasingly accommodating the automobile. Widely spaced buildings that are separated from the street by parking lots characterize the Madison Avenue area. Such an environment, though convenient for the automobile, appears cluttered and inhospitable to pedestrians.



Existing development model: Parking lots define streetscape and identity



Proposed development model: Buildings define intersections,street corridors and identity

Figure IV-10

DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES:
For an illustrative example of the development guidelines' application, see Figure IV-11. Following are the proposed development guidelines:

A. Shape community identity with buildings not parking lots
Buildings placed up to the street, especially at intersections, within the highway commercial districts will better shape the street corridors and, ultimately, the identity of the community (see figures IV-10 and IV-11). Parking should be placed on the side or at the rear of building. If a building must be set back, no more than one row of parking should separate it from the street. National retailers will be challenged to meet this standard, however they have a responsibility to the greater community that buys their products. Most suburban commercial sprawl is a direct result of this unwillingness to adjust to a more traditional model of development.

Define community identity with streetscape and building placement.

B. Foster design continuity
The use of similar materials and architectural styles in both private developments and public streetscape treatments will provide design continuity throughout the Madison Avenue area. Public streetscape treatments should be supplemented by private landscaping.

C. Define corridor edges
- Street corridor edges should be well defined by:
- Locating buildings, or parts of buildings, close to the street;
- Locating buildings at the corner of sites abutting intersections;
- Buffering parking lot edges with a combination of trees, plantings, walls or railings; and
- If a building must be set back from the street, it should be separated by no more than one row of parking.

D. ARCHITECTURAL FOCAL FEATURES
Both new development and large redevelopment projects should enhance prominent corners of buildings with elements such as towers, arches, or roof forms that will serve as identifiable and memorable landmarks.

E. ROOF FORMS SHOULD ADD VISUAL INTEREST
Gabled, stepped and peaked roofs add variety and interest to buildings and should be incorporated in large developments.

F. PROHIBIT BORING, BLANK WALLS
Large expanses of blank walls create a very unfriendly pedestrian environment. Walls facing the street or walkways should be punctuated with display windows, doors, indentations, or other fenestration to add visual interest on the street. All sides of a building visible to the public should be treated consistently with quality materials and finishes.

G. ARCHITECTURE SHOULD STIMULATE INTEREST AT THE STREET LEVEL
Even in a suburban setting, the pedestrian experience helps define a streetscape. Since the pedestrian is keenly aware of the ground-level facades of those buildings adjacent to the sidewalk, street-level businesses should stimulate passerby interest through well-lit displays of merchandise or provide windows that reveal internal activity. As a building's use changes, it is important to maintain the existing character, particularly at the street level.

H. BUFFER PARKING LOTS
Parking lots abutting streets should be buffered with a combination of overstory or ornamental trees, shrubs, stone, brick, or concrete walls, and/or ornamental railings.

I. LANDSCAPE PARKING LOT INTERIORS
Interior parking lot landscaping significantly improves the appearance of large, commercial parking lots. Landscaped islands visually break up large expanses of asphalt and cars, while shade trees add a third dimension to maintain a pedestrian scale.

If properly designed, islands can be landscaped cheaply and effectively. They should incorporate drought- and salt-tolerant trees that are indigenous to the climate. The ground layer, such as decorative mulch, should be able to withstand the weight of snow piles, or consist of shrubs or perennials that can be sheared to the ground in the late fall. Islands also should be large enough, and the soil uncompacted and treated, to provide healthy habitat for trees and other plant materials.

J. MANKATO'S WORLD-FAMOUS STONE SHOULD BE INCORPORATED INTO BUILDING FACADES
New development should utilize high-quality materials such as brick, precast concrete and Mankato stone. At a minimum, Mankato stone should be used for window sills, wall caps, and other highlights. In addition, a common palette of brick colors and other materials should be created in order to establish a degree of conformity, but not uniformity, throughout the Madison Avenue area.

K. PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION
So that pedestrians will be able to move about safely and comfortably, public walkways should be provided to and through all developments, as well as between adjoining properties. Where possible, a consistent public and private streetscape treatment will reinforce the overall character.

L. ENCOURAGE OUTDOOR DINING AND SEATING FACILITIES
Outdoor dining and seating create a sense of vitality and activity more than any other amenity. Restaurant owners should be encouraged to include outdoor dining and seating facilities where possible.

Madison Avenue - Character Districts

Traveling east on Madison Avenue from Old Town, the Hilltop Commercial Area presents a significant contrast to the forested bluffs. A cluttered commercial strip, subdistricts within the area have evolved which reveal differing development patterns and the effects of zoning changes over time. The following section identifies the issues, objectives and recommendations for development and streetscape improvements for each of these subdistricts.

- West Madison Avenue
- Central Hwy Commercial
- River Hills Mall
- Hwy 22 Gateway
- Northeast quadrant

1. West Madison Avenue: Community Business District

The B-1 community commercial district in the west end of Madison Avenue, between Swiss Street and Victory Drive, is characterized by a mixture of small lot developments, differing architectural styles, and a proliferation of signs. The primary issues and objectives identified by the issues workshop participants for this district are:

ISSUES:
- Small lot development relates to the neighborhood scale and reflects the B-1 zoning parameters.
- Buildings situated close to street define corridor edges.
- Competing pylon signs create a cluttered image.
- A wide road and narrow sidewalks create an inhospitable pedestrian environment.
- Unscreened parking lots placed between the building and the street contribute to an automobile-dominated environment.

OBJECTIVES:
- Enhance the small-scale B-1, community commercial, character.
- Improve quality of landscaping, building materials, and site planning.
- Redevelop into a unified, vital "Marketplace" that possesses a distinctive character.
- Create guidelines for reducing the number and size of signs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
1. Signs: The primary influence on the B-1, community commercial, district's image is the overuse and competition between pylon signs. Their number undermine communication effectiveness and simply overwhelm the passerby with clutter. Since buildings are close to the street in this district, the visibility of building signs from the street negates any need for a pylon sign. As a result, additional pylon signs should be prohibited within the B-1, community commercial, district, and existing signs should be phased out over a five- to 10-year period, while the use of building and monument signs should be encouraged. Monument sign requirements may include a maximum height of six feet, additional landscaping, and the use of brick and Mankato stone within the sign composition.
2. Landscaping: The visibility of parking areas within the front yard negatively influences the image of the Madison Avenue Commercial Area. Although the parcels are small and do not possess much additional space for landscaping, a buffer ranging between 5 and 6 feet in depth and landscaped with a combination of trees, ground covers and/or shrubs would effectively filter the view to parking areas. Landscaping within such a buffer must be able to withstand snow loads, car bumpers, and other urban conditions.

3. **Size and shape of parcels:** The B-1 community business zoning requirements encourage commercial development on small, narrow lots, restricting the expansion of existing uses and requiring numerous access points that may impede traffic flow and streetscape opportunities. Consideration should be given to consolidating smaller parcels into larger ones that will be more attractive to multiple tenant buildings, permit higher density redevelopment, and accommodate shared access points and parking.
4. **Streetscape:** The western segment of Madison Avenue is wide, while its sidewalks are narrow, leaving little space for trees and other streetscape elements. A collaborative public/private strategy to improve the streetscape is recommended (see figure IV-12). Private improvements may consist of parking lot edge treatments and signs, while public improvements may consist of traffic signals, signs, street lighting, sidewalks, bus shelters, and street furniture. West Madison Avenue should be included in a comprehensive streetscape master plan for the entire Madison Avenue area.
5. **Special area study:** A detailed plan of the West Madison Avenue area should be prepared in order to determine the feasibility of implementing the public streetscape recommendations, private landscaping, signage improvements and redevelopment opportunities.

2. Central Highway Commercial District

The transition from B-1, community business, to B- 3, highway commercial, is evident along Madison Avenue by its change in development pattern. Moving east to Victory Drive, the parcels and buildings become larger, signs are spaced farther apart, and parking lots begin to dominate the landscape. The primary issues and objectives identified by issues workshop participants for the central highway commercial district are:

ISSUES:

- New development should be unified with architecture and upgraded materials.
- Provide incentives to encourage exterior building renovation.
- Provide a continuous system of bike/walk paths.
- Develop identifiable centers of activity.
- Provide for adequate settling ponds that will intercept stormwater before it enters ravines.
- Opportunity to connect lake/holding pond with new development.

OBJECTIVES:

- Improve the quality of landscaping, building materials, and site planning.
- Integrate Victory Drive extension.
- Redevelop into a unified, vital "Marketplace" that possesses a distinctive character.
- Create guidelines for signs, site planning, landscaping and buildings.
- Outline strategies for infill development and shared parking.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Madison Avenue East: community oriented mixed-use center:** The intersection of Victory Drive and Madison Avenue will serve as a primary crossroads after Victory Drive is extended to U.S. Highway 14. This extension also will provide infill opportunities to the west of the Madison East Mall where underutilized and vacant land could be developed into a mixed-use center consisting of offices, retail and medium- to high-density residential within walking distance to the Madison East Mall. Reinforce Victory Drive as a Parkway, once Victory Drive is extended, additional redevelopment will be possible at the intersection of Victory Drive and Madison Avenue. The quality of redevelopment in this area should fulfill four primary objectives:
    - » Reinforce Victory Drive as a parkway by increasing setbacks and strengthening landscaping standards for development abutting the parkway.
    - » Define this area as a mixed-use center of activity by increasing the intensity of development and variety of uses, including retail, office, entertainment and medium- to high-density residential.
    - » Provide pedestrian and bicycle linkages to surrounding development, transit facilities, Thompson Ravine and other open spaces.
    - » Adhere to the site planning and architectural guidelines recommended in this document to strengthen the corridor with landmark architecture and landscaping. Place buildings at the corner of parcels to shape the intersections of Victory Drive with Madison Avenue and Adams Street.
2. **Stormwater:** As previously mentioned, the majority of the Madison Avenue area's stormwater is collected and piped to the stormwater pond west of River Hills Mall. Given the large amount of impervious surface, this represents a tremendous amount of stormwater and infrastructure for one pond to manage. Stormwater is a resource that provides an opportunity to integrate natural systems with infrastructure and create amenities that will improve the landscape and livability of the commercial districts. Collecting stormwater into an integrated network of open

space linkages and smaller ponding areas along Madison Avenue should be considered as a method to improve the street's appearance and alleviate pressure on the stormwater pond.

3. **Streetscape:** This segment of Madison Avenue should be included in a comprehensive streetscape master plan for the entire Madison Avenue area. The recommended strategy consists of a collaboration between private parking lot edge treatments and sign improvements with public improvements to the stormwater ponding system, traffic signals, signs, street lighting, sidewalks, bus shelters and street furniture.
4. **Special area study:** A special area plan should be drafted for the Central Highway Commercial District. Such a plan would allow stakeholders to come together and formulate a common vision for the area and assess market opportunities, traffic and parking implications, increased property values, public and private partnerships, improvements and implementation strategies.

3. River Hills Mall District

The primary issues and objectives identified by the participants in the issues workshop for the River Hills Mall District are:

ISSUES:

- Parking defines the image: The negative impact of large parking lots upon Mankato's image is best exemplified by those of three large, contiguous retail stores situated between Sioux Road and Star Street. Madison Avenue, a gateway corridor, is perceived as an ocean of parking with very little landscaping to filter the view.
- Underutilized parcels and parking lots: Vacant buildings and marginal businesses are located southwest of the mall. The peripheral portions of the River Hills Mall parking lot, as well as some belonging to large box retailers, are underutilized and contribute to the desolate appearance of the area.
- Regional identity:
  - » New development needs unifying architecture and upgraded materials.
  - » Provide incentives to encourage facade renovation of existing businesses.
  - » Provide a continuous bike/walk path system.
  - » Develop identifiable centers of activity.
  - » Opportunity to connect lake/holding pond to new development.

OBJECTIVES:

- Improve the quality of landscaping, building materials, and site planning.
- Redevelop into a unified, vital "Marketplace" that possesses a distinctive character.
- Create sign guidelines.
- Outline strategies for infill development and shared parking.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Regional mixed-use center:** The River Hills Mall District's underutilized properties, excellent access, close proximity to the regional mall, as well as a mixture of offices and housing to the east create optimal conditions for developing a mixed-use center.
2. **Sioux Road: "Main Street"**: The buildings along Sioux Road and Adams Street are tightly spaced together, creating a comfortable pedestrian scale and thus the potential for a "Main Street" character to emerge along Sioux Road between Madison Avenue and the mall. Such a scenario, which also could be applied along Adams and Raintree Streets, would require the creation of shared parking strategies and retail, entertainment, and office infill in the underutilized peripheral portions of the mall's parking lot, and in vacant parcels along Sioux Road. Medium- to high-density residential and office infill that is oriented along open space and trails extending between existing residential, Thompson Ravine Road and River Hills Mall would strengthen linkages to the west of the mall.
3. **Sioux Road: special streetscape treatment:** To reinforce the "Main Street" character for Sioux Road, the streetscape treatment should incorporate street lamps, boulevard trees, bus shelters, street furniture, directional signage, and other elements to create a comfortable pedestrian environment from Madison Avenue to the front door of River Hills Mall. In addition, buildings should be placed up to the sidewalk edge to maintain a street wall.
4. **Reinforce a balance between the vehicular and pedestrian experience:** The planned completion of Adams Street creates more development opportunities for the area west of the mall. The quality of this redevelopment should fulfill four primary objectives:
5. **Special area study:** A special area plan should be drafted for the River Hills Mall District. Such a plan would allow stakeholders to come together and formulate a common vision for the area and assess market opportunities, traffic and parking implications, increased property values, public and private partnerships, improvements and implementation strategies.

4. Highway 22 Gateway

Highway 22 and Madison Avenue form the front door to Mankato from the east. Possessing an open highway landscape, the regional mall and other commercial developments shape its character.

OBJECTIVES:

- Inform visitors that they have arrived in Mankato through a system of unique, large-scale landscaping treatments, civic monuments, and sign treatments.
- Improve the image of the area through landscaping, site planning, signage, and architectural guidelines and standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Gateway treatment: Install walls and monuments built out of large, unfinished blocks of Mankato stone to define the gateway intersections on Highway 22.
- Participate in the Minnesota Department of Transportation's Gateway Partnership Program to improve the landscaping at the intersection of Highway 14 and Madison Avenue, as well as along Highway 22.
- Define gateway corridor site planning standards and require buildings to be placed at the corners of the intersections of Highway 22 with County Road 3, Adams Street and Madison Avenue.
- Require parking lots to be buffered from Highway 22 with landscaping that complements the highway corridor's proposed public landscaping.
- Adopt architectural standards that include the guidelines established in this document.

5. Northeast Quadrant-Thompson Ravine Road and Highway 14 gateway

As mentioned previously, vacant parcels, the Victory Drive extension, and new interchange at Highway 14 present an opportunity to shape a major gateway to Mankato. Victory Drive's parkway character should be reinforced with corresponding high-quality development.

OBJECTIVES:

- Inform visitors that they have arrived in Mankato through a system of unique, large-scale landscape, civic monument and sign treatments.
- Improve the image of the area through landscaping, site planning, signage and architectural guidelines and standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- As with the Highway 22 Gateway, install walls and monuments built out of large, unfinished blocks of Mankato stone to define the gateway intersections on Highway 14 as well as within Victory Drive's streetscape treatment.
- Participate in the Minnesota Department of Transportation's Gateway Partnership Program to improve the landscaping at the intersection of Highway 14 and County Road 3.
- Define gateway corridor site planning guidelines that require buildings to be placed at the corners of the intersections of Highway 14 with County Road 3 and along Victory Drive.
- Require parking lots to be buffered from Highway 14, Victory Drive, and County Road 3 with a combination of berming, Mankato stone walls, shrubs, evergreen and deciduous trees, prairie grasses and wildflowers, or building placement in order to complement the proposed public landscaping treatments.
- Adopt architectural standards that include the guidelines established in this document.
- Prohibit billboards.
- Special area study: A special area study of the Highway 14 and County Road 3 interchange should be undertaken to define in more detail the potential land uses, building massing, streetscape improvements, implementation strategies and cost.

Part V: Implementation

A. Introduction

This study analyzed virtually all of Mankato's commercial areas and recommends distinct strategies for guiding their future form and appearance. Because each of these areas is unique, different strategies are needed to accomplish the study's objectives.

Before describing the specific recommendations to implement the future vision contained in this report, understand that the current development pattern in Mankato evolved over many decades. Likewise, realization of this study's vision for Mankato will involve several years and will require a strong commitment from the landowner, the development community and the city of Mankato.

The city made a concerted effort to involve a broad cross-section of the community in all phases of this project. Business owners, residents, community leaders, and elected and appointed officials have all contributed greatly to this study. Successful implementation will require each of these sectors of the community to remain involved in the process. Zoning enforcement and design standards will not succeed without the cooperation and commitment of landowners, development interests and the rest of the community.

B. Implementation

1. Design standards built into zoning ordinance

If design objectives can be visualized and defined in quantifiable terms, then they can be expressed in the form of zoning ordinance standards. This method is the most effective and legally sound: definitive standards developed in response to reasonable goals and objectives can discourage legal challenges and better withstand them as well. The easiest approach for planning staff to administer, zoning ordinance design standards would render the formation and authorization of a separate design review committee unnecessary.

There are limitations to the results that can be achieved through zoning, however. Zoning regulations achieve a degree of continuity for an area and can prevent development that is truly incongruous and incompatible, but zoning will not guarantee beautiful or pleasant development.

2. Planned unit development zoning

Planned unit development (PUD) zoning may be applied anywhere the city chooses or in prescribed locations. A floating zoning district that overlays an existing zoning district, the PUD provides the city with an opportunity to customize a set of design standards in order to maximize a development's potential. The underlying zoning governs in all matters, unless the flexibility allowed under a PUD will result in a demonstrable improvement over what would result from the minimum requirements of the underlying zoning district.

Used in this way, the PUD acts as an enhancement of the underlying zoning, rather than as a replacement. The two sets of regulations need to be used in concert with each other.

3. Standards related to thresholds

This approach entails the creation of design review standards that have triggering mechanisms. For example, if a proposed building is above a certain height threshold, then vertical setback regulations would be required and the structure would be subject to architectural design review. Other triggering mechanisms might be land use, location, and size. The challenge is to establish architectural review criteria and to establish the necessary legal authority for the Design Review Committee. One approach is to establish the Review Committee as an advisory body to the Planning Commission and City Council, with final zoning authority resting with the City Council.

4. Standards related to special districts

This approach is really a refinement of the first method described above and would involve the establishment of separate standards that distinguish a particular district from the others. Whether implementation would involve the creation of new districts or overlay districts, they would need to be added to the official zoning map, and the underlying rationale for their creation explained in the comprehensive plan.

5. Incentive zoning "carrots" and "sticks"

Incentive zoning provides a bonus for developers who include extra amenities, or develop at a higher level of quality. This system works well in central business districts where land values are high and a developer would profit from an increased floor area ratio. Other incentives may include tax breaks, low interest loans, or public financing. Some communities require higher development standards whenever public financing is involved. The level of performance is included as part of the

financing agreement but not required by the city's zoning authority. Expectations on both sides should be reasonable and the increased development costs offset by the benefits associated with the public financing.

Exchanging floor area bonuses for greater amenities or higher quality development is less successful outside of the central business district. Typical commercial areas on the fringe of the central business building beyond two or three stories feasible. In addition, typical fringe commercial areas do not generate enough revenue to warrant parking structures. As a result, higher floor area ratios outside of the central business district probably will not entice developers to include more pedestrian amenities in their projects.

Furthermore, incentive zoning can result in an ad hoc distribution of landscaping or pedestrian amenities. One developer may be able to afford more amenities while another may not. A bonus system applied to every small parcel development, infill, and remodeling project is also an administrative headache. Consistent landscaping, site planning, and architectural standards created with the help of the business and development community is easier to administer and would result in more cohesive development pattern.

C. Recommended strategies

1. How to encourage and support cross-parking easements in infill projects

Throughout this document, there are numerous reminders about the limitations of zoning in accomplishing the objectives of this study. There are also references to the need to establish a cooperative working relationship with the private sector to achieve optimal results. The city, however, has control over a few important elements.

Rights-of-way and other public spaces represent one area in which city control can reap significant rewards. The city has already made a considerable investment in a distinctive downtown streetscape system and should strive to extend a modified version of this treatment throughout the community. Specific dimensions and design elements can be modified to suit different areas, but strong aesthetic ties and key elements unique to Mankato will create a strong unifying set of features throughout the city.

2. Establish two new zoning districts, the hilltop mixed-use district and the gateway district

The hilltop mixed-use and the gateway districts are intended for implementation of the recommendations contained in this manual. The hilltop mixed-use district will encourage and facilitate a high-quality mixed-use development pattern in Mankato's Hilltop area. Through development and redevelopment, a rich mixture of employment, services, institutions, entertainment, and housing will evolve in a compact development pattern.

The gateway district will establish a strong identity along Victory Drive and at Mankato's major entry points. This district will shape the character and image of these key areas through site planning, architectural standards, signage guidelines and landscaping requirements.

Ideally, the exact geographic boundaries of these two districts would be determined through a more focused study. If such a study were undertaken, the city could research each area's market and identify their optimum mixture of land uses. The market data should be shared with area property owners and interested developers and could serve as a guide for economic development.

3. Implement modifications to the sign ordinances

Many important areas within Mankato are dominated by visual clutter. Just as it took many years for this condition to evolve, it will take time to change it to a more appealing form. Recommended modifications to the sign ordinance have been submitted which, in general, strive to move away from pylon signs in favor of building signs and landscaped monument signs.

4. Support shared parking through shared parking agreements and cross-parking easements

Shared parking agreements and cross-parking easements most often are private agreements between private parties. Therefore, it is difficult for the city to compel a property owner to pursue these options. The city can, however, strongly support their use and clearly provide ordinances for their approval. The city should encourage property owners to secure shared parking agreements and allow them to construct less than the required amount of parking through the issuance of a conditional use permit (CUP). CUP approval would be contingent upon the existence of a private agreement, as well as an acceptable plan to provide sufficient parking that would meet the underlying code requirements in the event that the agreement is nullified in the future.

Appendix

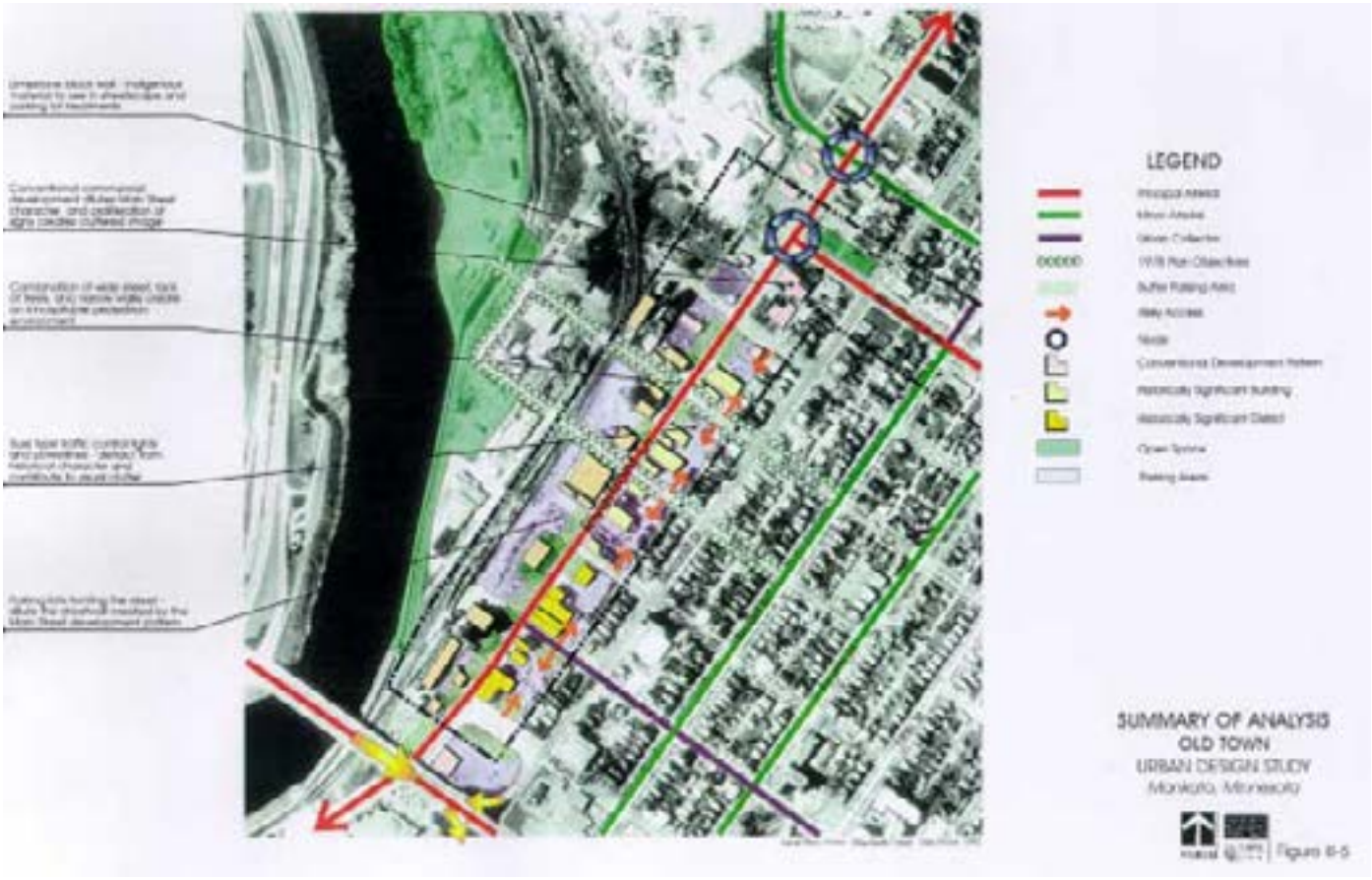


Figure III-5

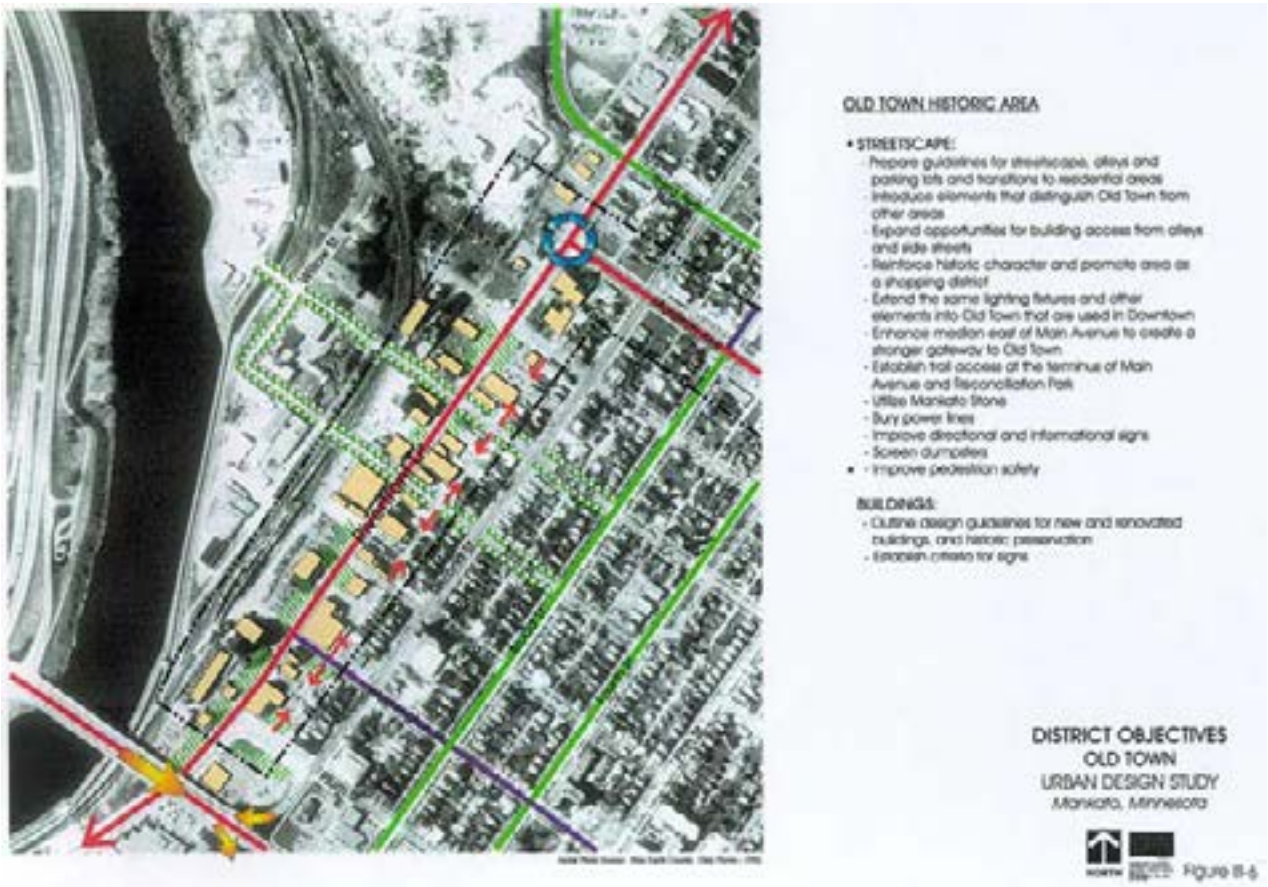


Figure III-6



Figure III-7

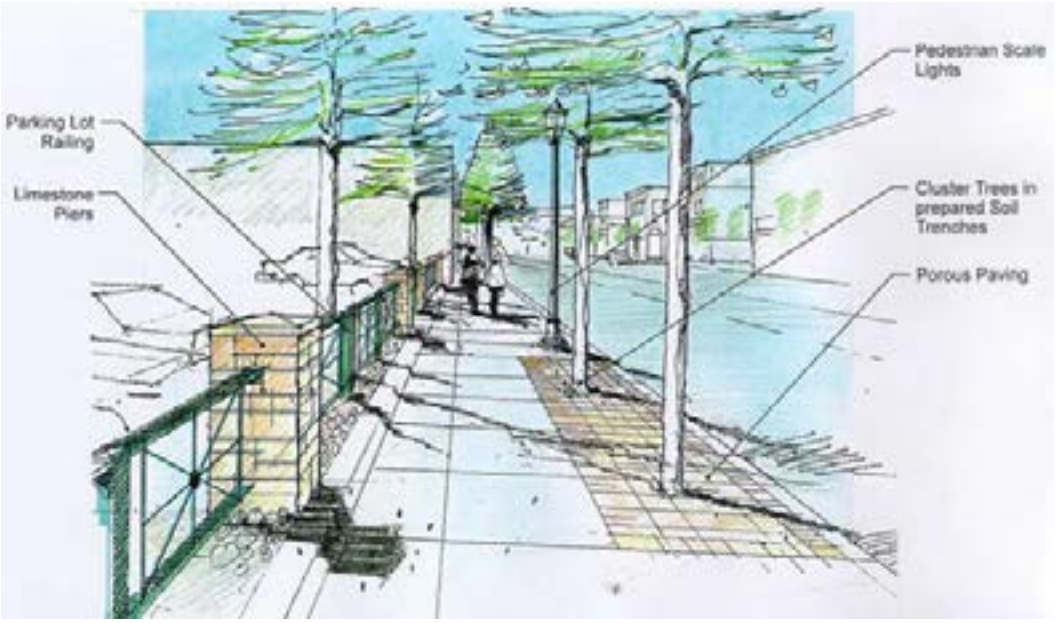


Figure III-8



Figure III-9



Figure III-12



Figure III-14

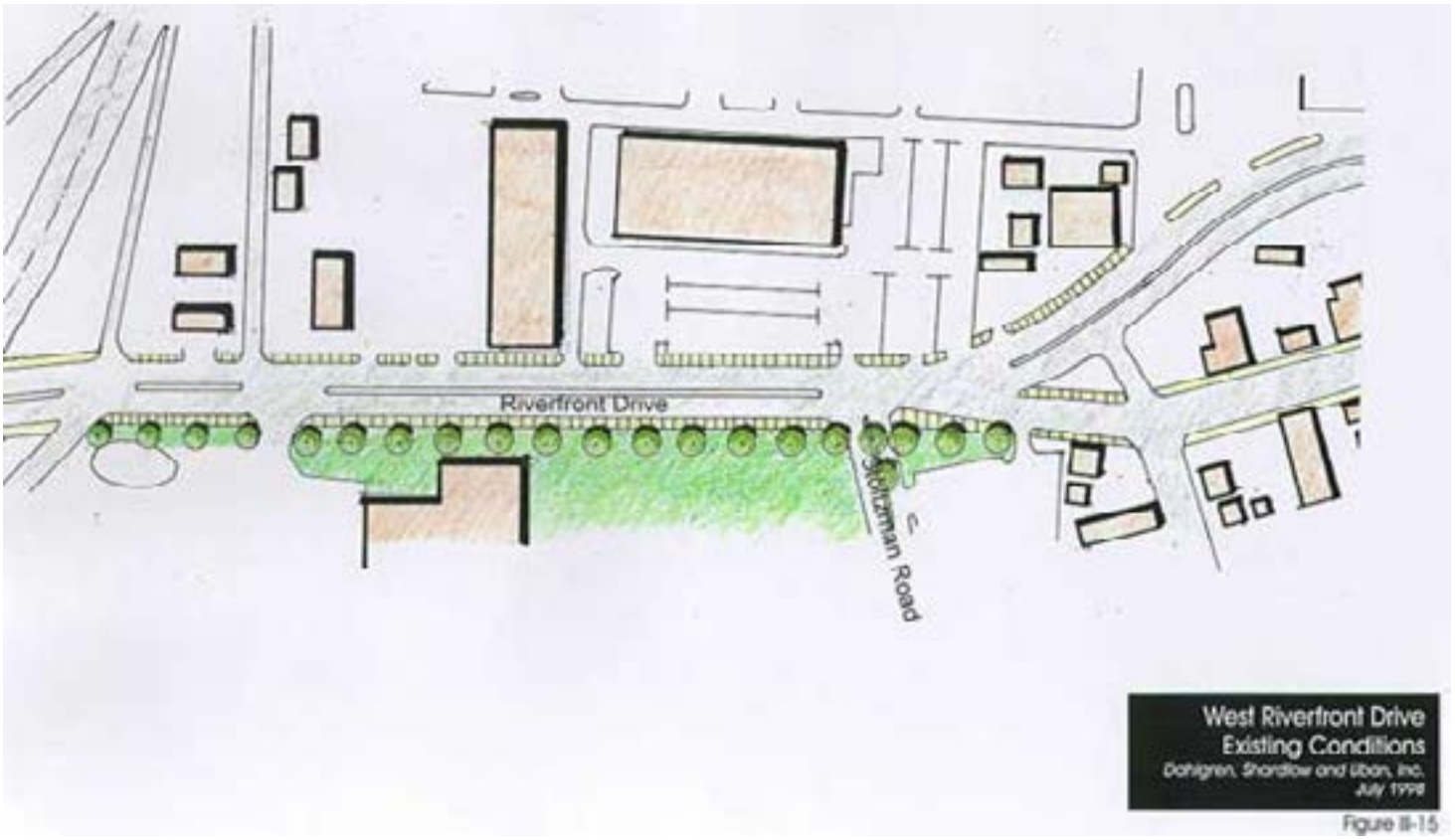


Figure III-15



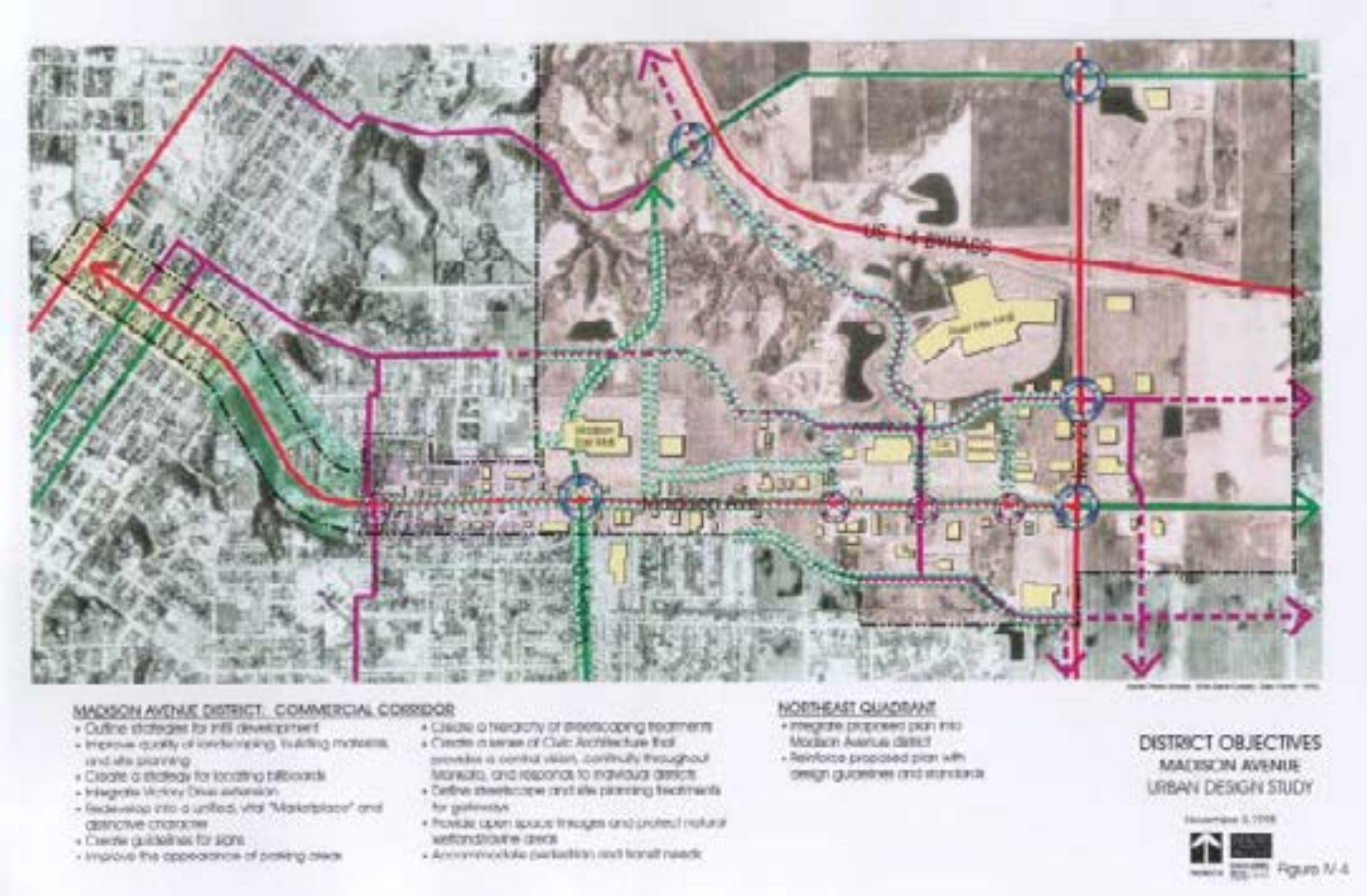
Figure III-16



Figure III-17



Figure IV-3



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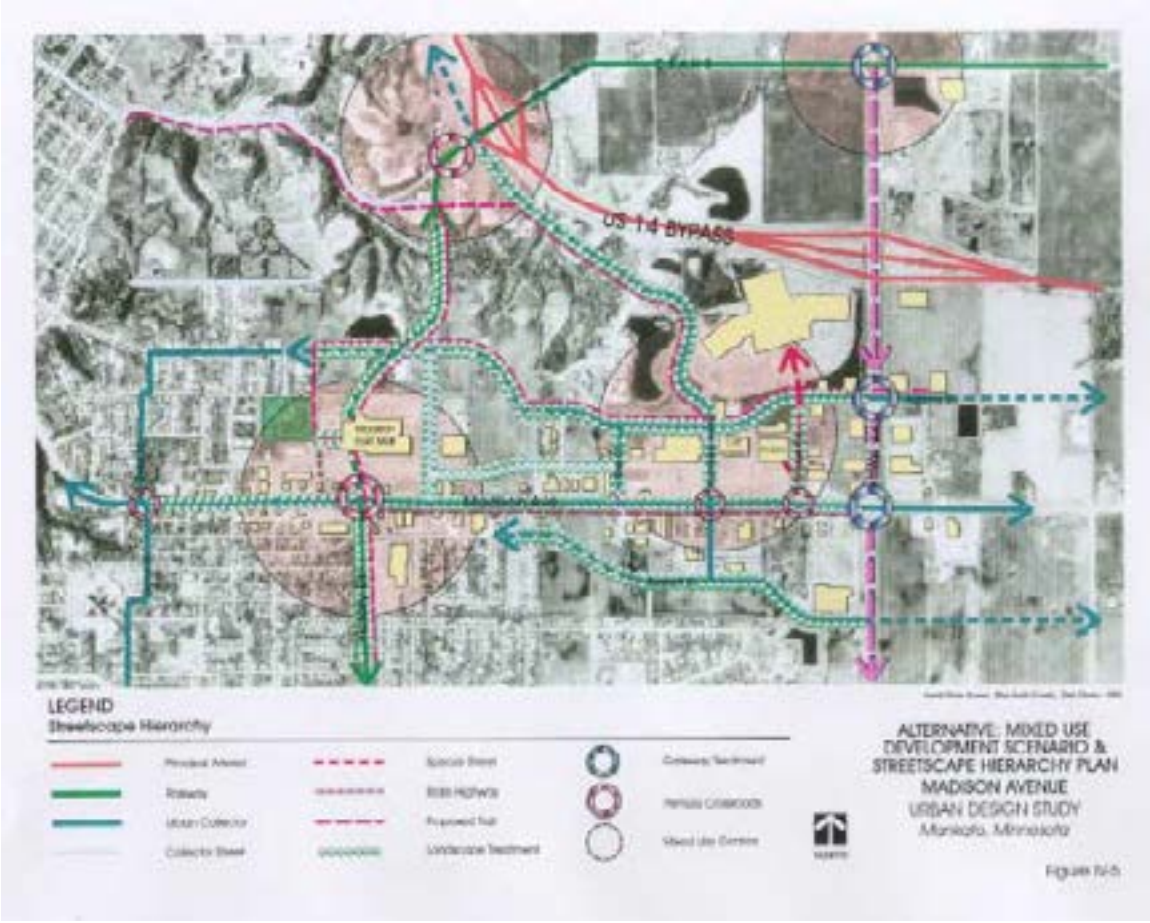

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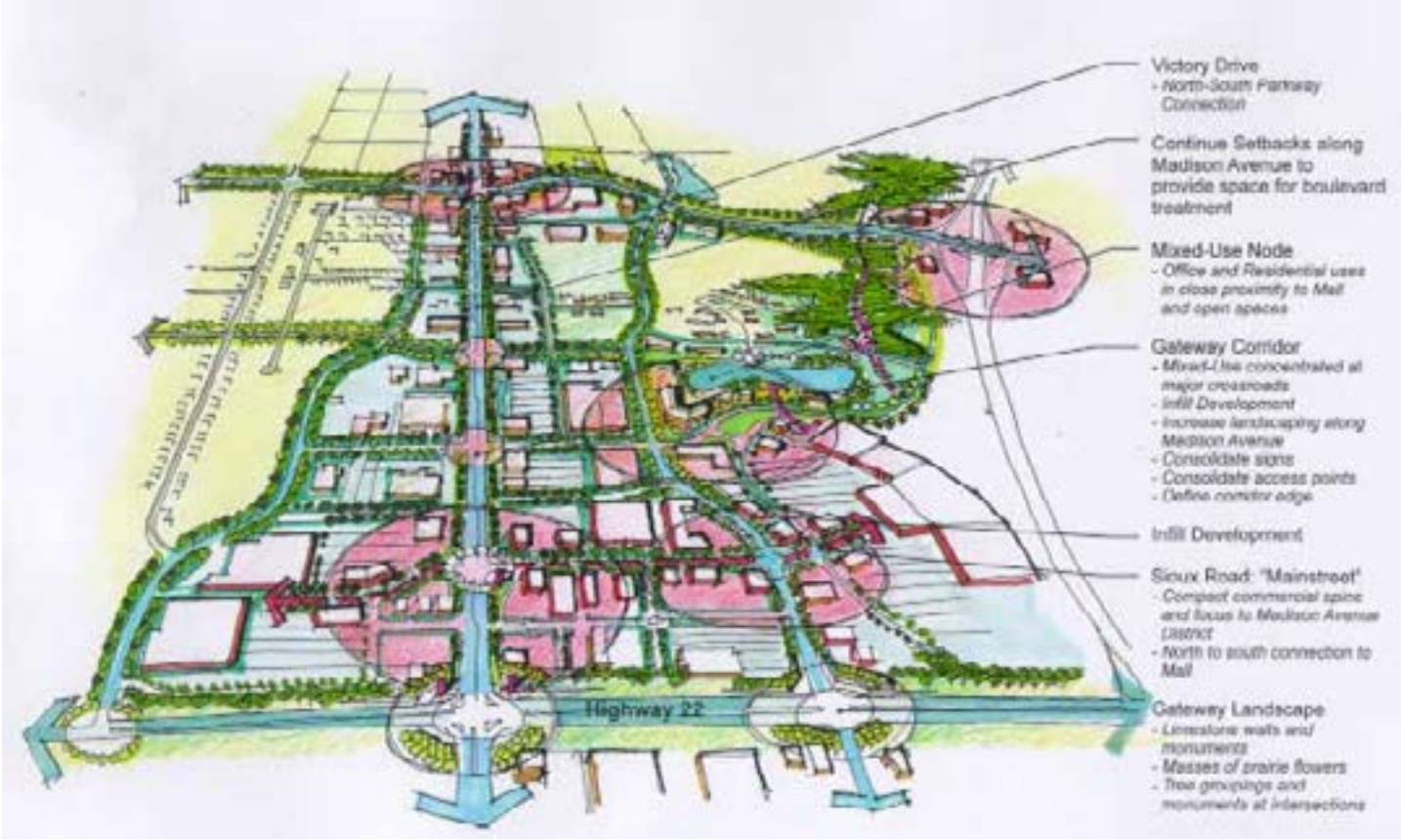

Figure IV-6a



Figure IV-6b

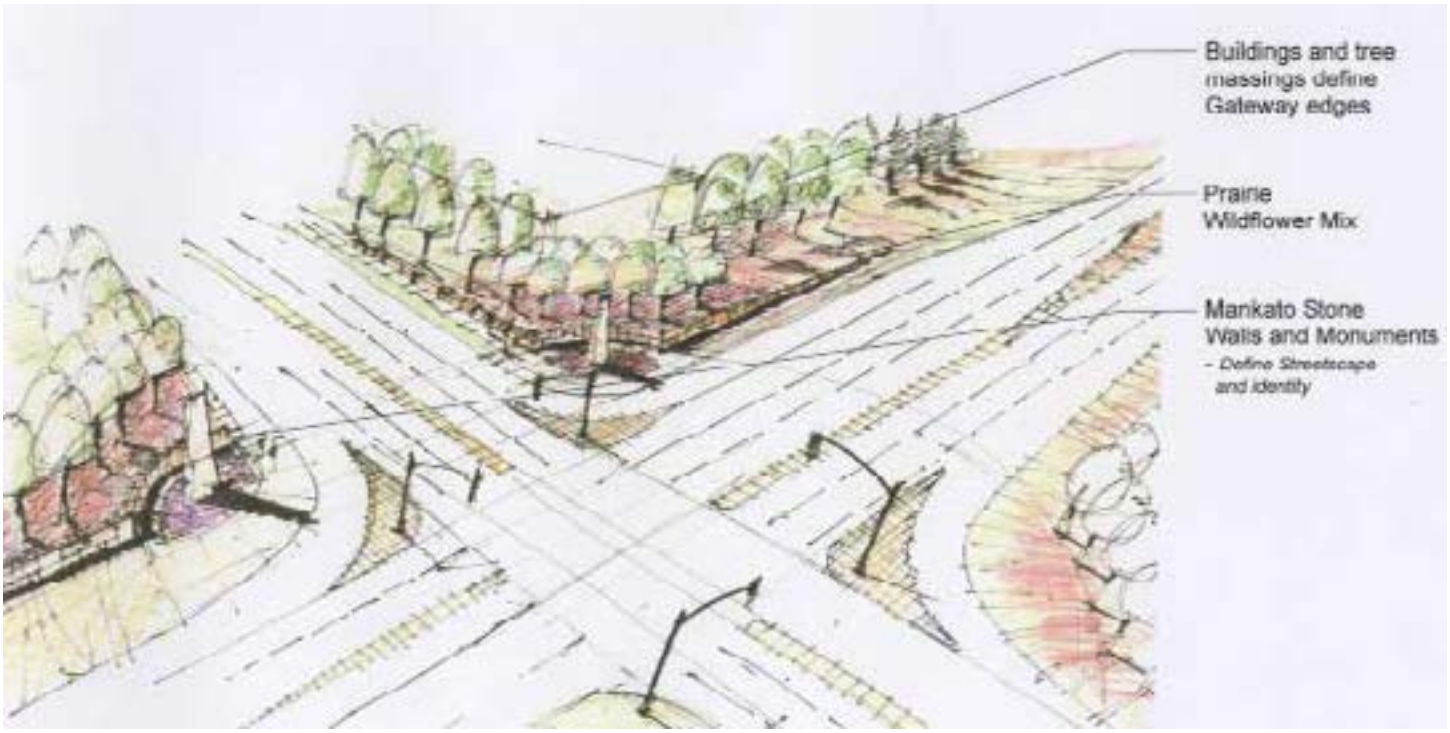

Figure IV-7



Figure IV-8v



Figure IV-9



Figure IV-12