DOWNTOWN ROCKFORD STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

PLANNING AREA: CENTRAL

DECEMBER 2015

PREPARED FOR:

THE CITY OF ROCKFORD ILLINOIS, USA

PREPARED BY:

FARR ASSOCIATES

Sam Schwartz Engineering D.P.C.

business districts, inc.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This Plan was created with the participation and cooperation of the following entities:

Mayor Morrissey
Rockford City Council
COR Planning & Community Development Department
COR Public Works Department
Friends of Ziock
River District Association (RDA)
Rockford Aquarium Board
Rockford Area Arts Council (RAAC)
Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB)
Rockford Area Economic Development Council (RAEDC)
Rockford Area Venues & Entertainment (RAVE)
Rockford Community Partners (RCP)
Rockford Etsy Team
Rockford Parks District (RPD)
Rockford Public Library (RPL)
Rock Riverfront Development Partnership (RRDP)
Rock River Water Reclamation District (RRWD)
Southwest Ideas for Tomorrow Today (SWIFTT)
The Element
The Get It Done Group
Transform Rockford
Winnebago County

Chestnut Street Bridge looking West - 1946
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HOW CAN A DOWNTOWN WITH YEARS OF PLANNING, CONTINUE THE MOMENTUM OF IMPLEMENTATION?

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PREVIOUS PLANNING

Rockford has no shortage of plans. The City has seen numerous plans over the last decade that generally agree on the following things: direct mixed-use development towards the downtown area; connect the existing pieces of water front parks and trails; add residential dwellings to downtown area; and enhance mobility in and around downtown through alternative modes of transportation such as bikes, trolley, and water taxis. Many of these recommendations are already coming to fruition and are evident in the investment projects that the City is currently undertaking, with many more in the pipeline. By mining these previous plans for key recommendations, we focus on implementation strategies for the recommendations, rather than just creating another shelf document that is years from realization.

MINE PREVIOUS PLANS

Numerous planning studies were conducted over the last 15 years with focus areas that included Downtown Rockford. We carefully searched each plan for its primary recommendations and mapped them to understand where and what the priorities are for the Downtown area. The planning studies reviewed were:

RIVER DISTRICT FRAMEWORK PLAN

ROCKFORD RIVER WALK VISION PLAN

RIVER DISTRICT FRAMEWORK PLAN UPDATE

DOWNTOWN PARKING STUDY

MUSEUM CAMPUS MASTER PLAN (Rockford Park District)

REDEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK PLAN

SOUTH MAIN CORRIDOR REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

PRAIRIE STREET BREWHOUSE PLAN (Non-City Council Approved Plan)

BUILD ON PREVIOUS PLANS

Relevant recommendations were pulled and brought into the current context of Downtown Rockford. These recommendations served as the foundation for our implementation strategies.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

+ Improve parking in Downtown
+ Improve streetscaping and lighting
+ Increase retail activity
+ Improve mobility throughout Downtown

MUSEUM CAMPUS

1. Expand existing museum facilities
2. Enhance Park along waterfront
3. Add boat facilities
4. Add a pedestrian bridge to cross the river

MADISON STREET (NORTH)

1. Connect park along waterfront
2. Expand harbor and Marina facilities
3. Add residential on east/west side of Madison
4. Pedestrian bridge to Museum Campus

MADISON STREET (SOUTH)

1. Emphasis on trolley line/station
2. Create new residential
3. Connect to future Whitewater Park

DAVIS PARK

1. Connect to Courthouse
2. Infill buildings around

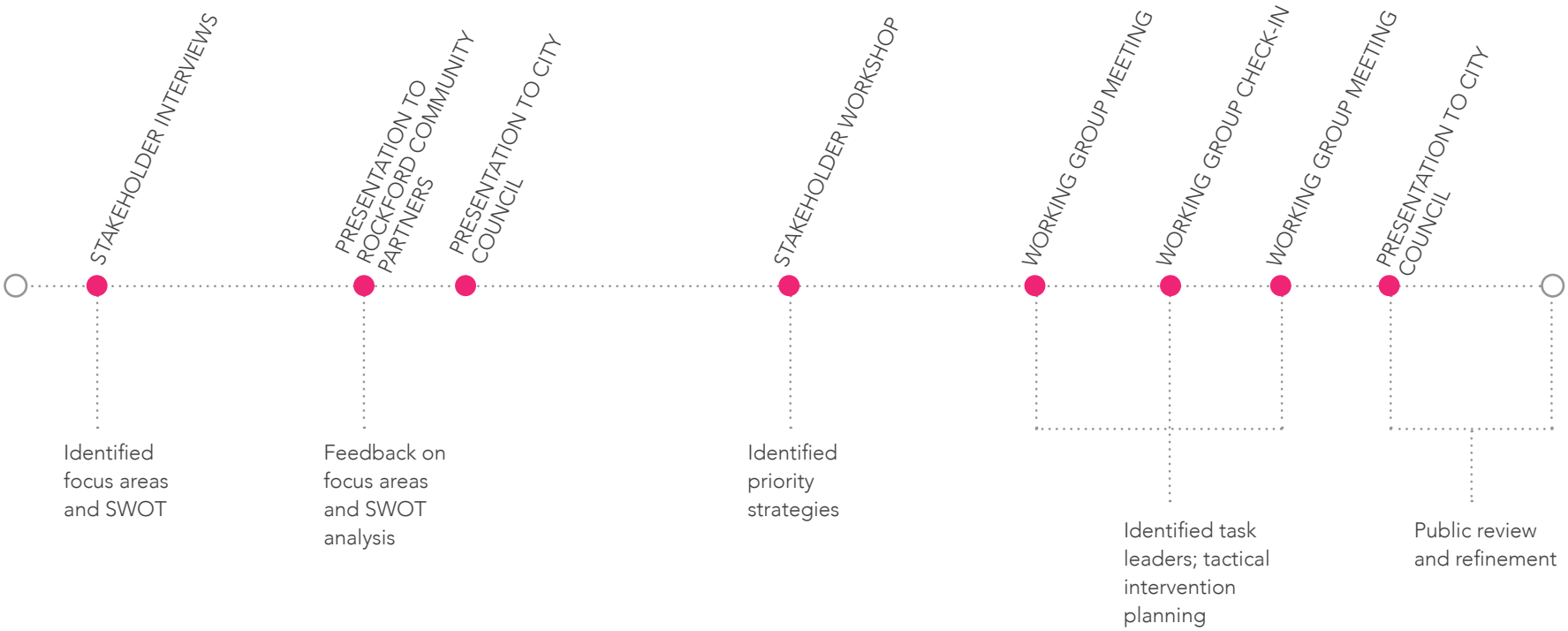
MAIN STREET

1. Add a Plaza/Parking Lot
2. Create an entertainment area
3. Add more mixed-use

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholders were engaged throughout the process of the Implementation Plan. The project kicked off with group and individual interviews with a multitude of stakeholders identified by the consultant team and the City of Rockford. The content developed throughout the process was presented back to stakeholders a number of times, and was refined to incorporate feedback received. Interim and final implementation strategies were then presented to City Council and Staff for approval. A public survey was also conducted which solicited input from the general public. The strategies and recommended partners and timelines are a direct result of engagement with entities in Rockford.

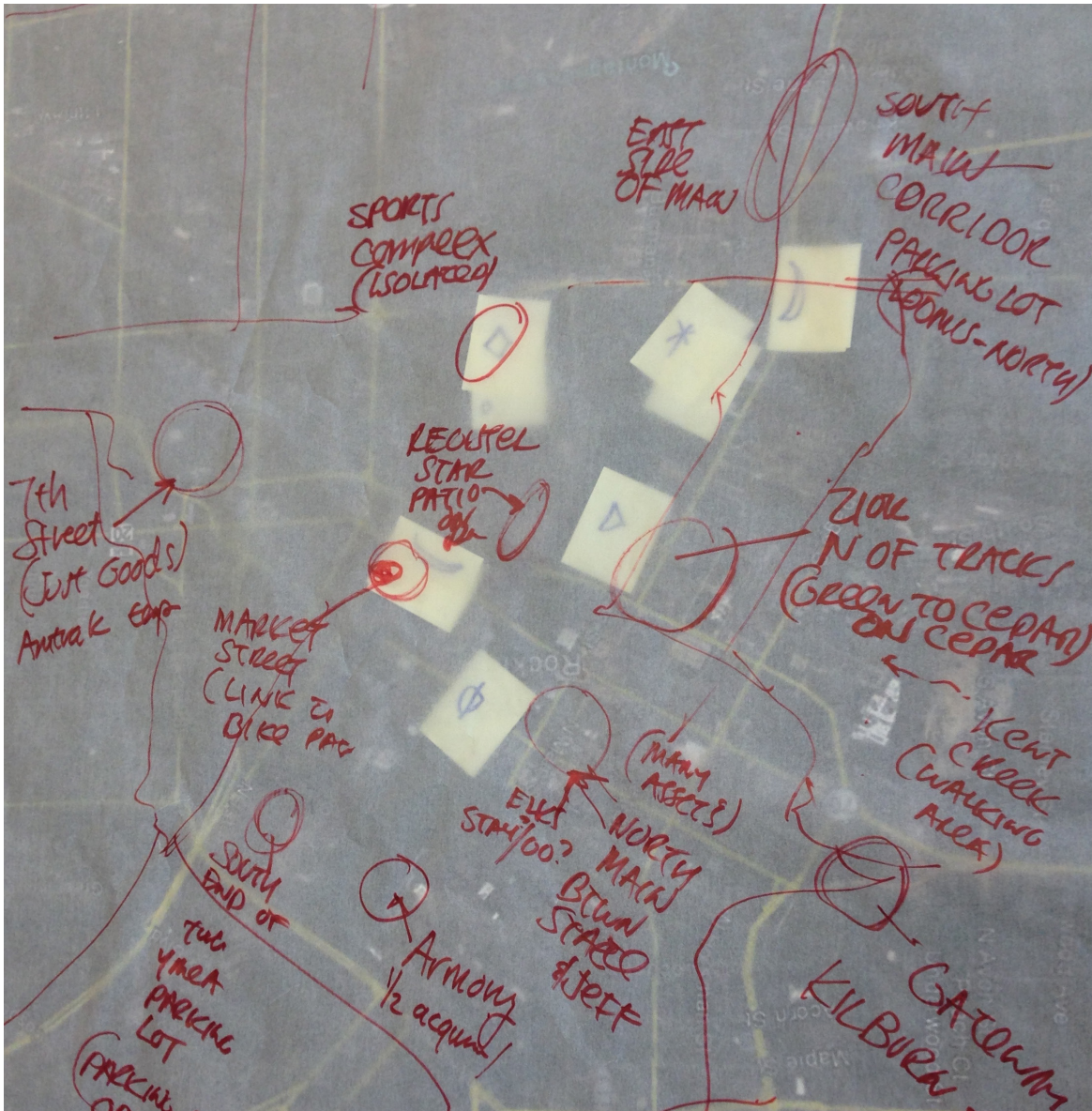
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE



STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Stakeholder interviews were conducted on November 21, 2014 in Downtown Rockford. Broken into four separate groups, participants identified catalytic sites throughout Rockford, as well as events and projects currently underway in downtown and nearby neighborhoods.

PARTICIPANTS IN STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS:
Rockford Area Venues & Entertainment (RAVE);
Rockford Area Economic Development Council (RAEDC);
Rockford Chamber of Commerce (RCC);
Rockford Community Partners (RCP - formerly known as EDEEN);
Rockford Etsy Team;
Rockford Public Library (RPL);
The Friends of Ziock;
Rock Riverfront Development Partnership (RRDP);
Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB);
Rockford Local Development Corporation (RLDC);
Rockford Parks District (RPD);
River District Association (RDA);
Southwest Ideas for Tomorrow Today (SWIFTT);
Transform Rockford;
The Element;
Winnebago County Economic Development (WinnCo);
City of Rockford Staff;
Alderman Getchus;
Alderman McNamara;
Alderman Hervey



ASSETS TO BUILD ON

Stakeholders identified a number of existing assets that should be leveraged for maximum gain. The main assets to build upon include:

+ Events bring a lot of people to Downtown.

+ Many organizations and citizens are already engaged with street and storefront activation.

+ Development is already underway that can be leveraged (Gorman Hotel, Downtown Sports Complex, Prairie Street Brewhouse, etc).

IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

Stakeholders also identified challenges that deter downtown development. These challenges became critical points to be addressed through the implementation strategies.

+ There are unused or underutilized storefronts and parcels along primary retail streets.

+ There are many groups doing great things in the downtown, but efforts need to be better coordinated.

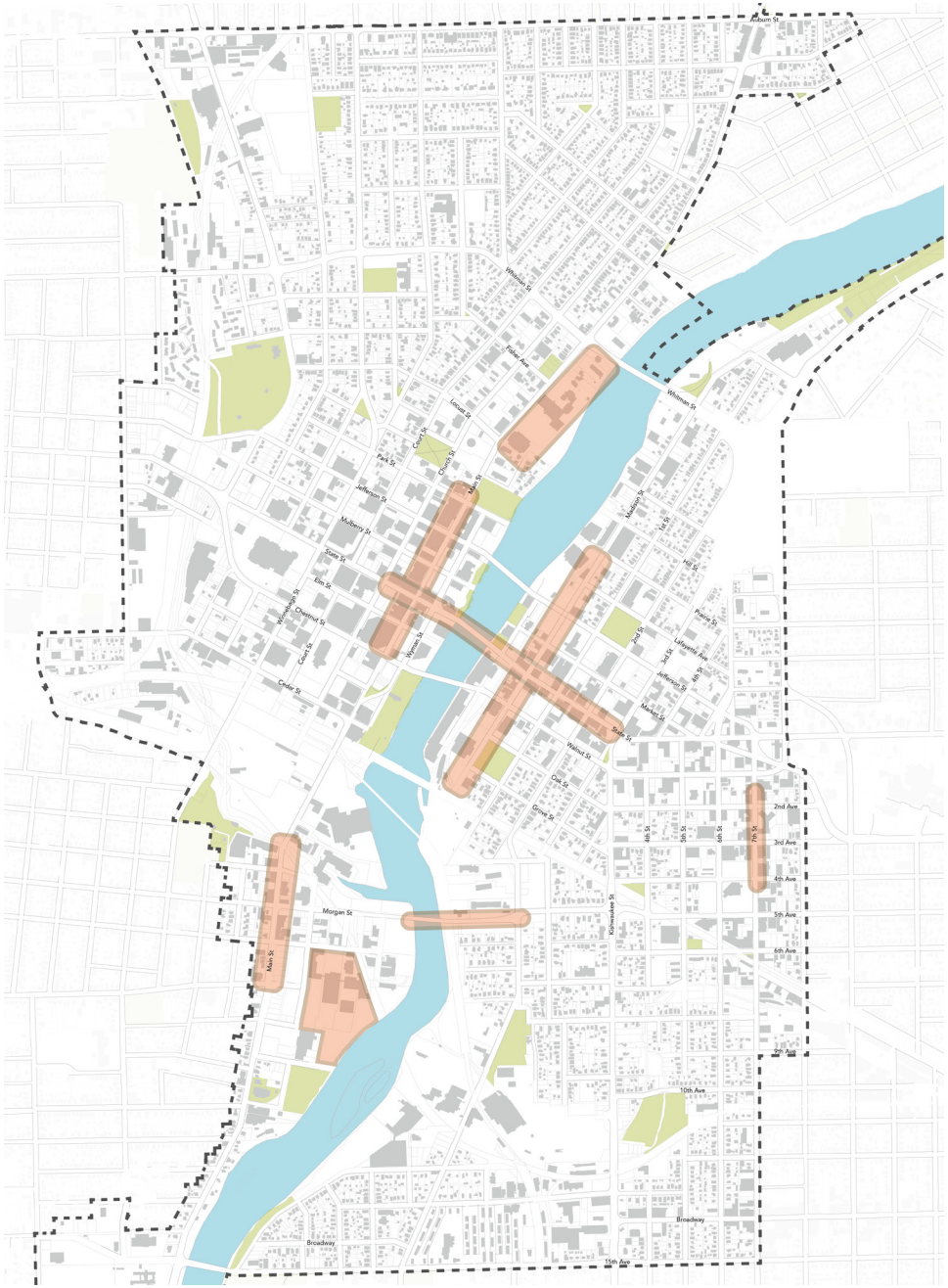
+ There is a lack of consistency in design standards throughout the downtown.

+ Downtown needs more people in it to maintain the day-to-day vibrancy.

+ Distribution and mis-perceptions about parking is still
+ an issue.

+ Streetscape conditions, including sidewalk maintenance and lighting deter walkability.

CATALYTIC AREAS IDENTIFIED BY STAKEHOLDERS

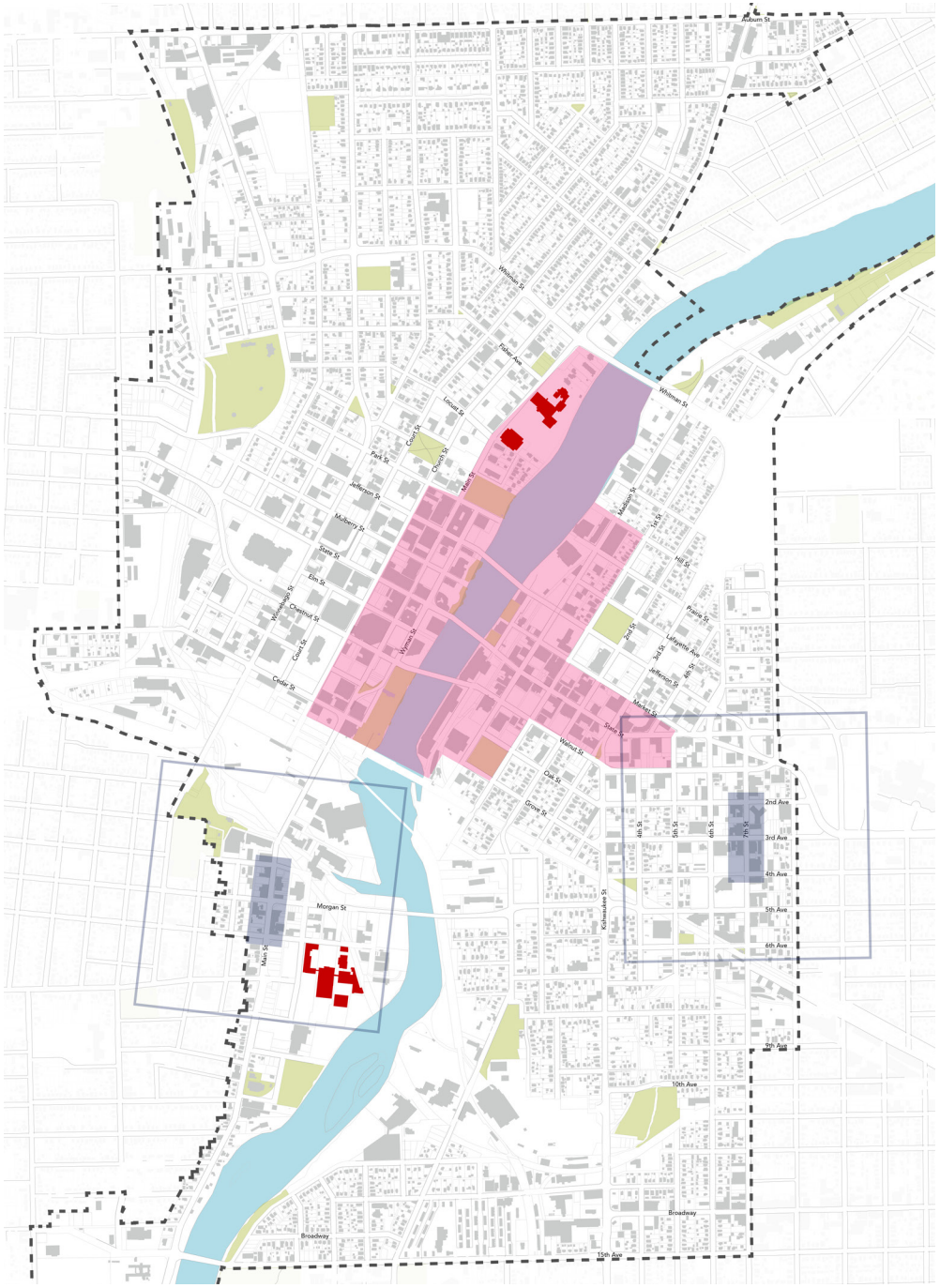


FOCUS AREAS

One of the first points of distinction between the Strategic Action Plan and previous planning efforts is the identification of a focus area within Downtown Rockford. While there is no official boundary for the Downtown, the River Edge Zone was first presented as the study area. This area is 4 square miles and within it has multiple areas with unique characteristics, challenges, and assets. In order to create any effective implementation strategies, we believe it is necessary to narrow the Action Plan to a digestible focus area so efforts are geographically concentrated, rather than spread too far.

FOCUS AREA

Based on Stakeholder Interviews and input from the City of Rockford, the narrowed focus area was selected within the River Edge Zone as the primary area of implementation for the Downtown Strategic Action Plan. Additionally, nearby neighborhood centers were also identified where strategies can be replicated, as well as larger redevelopment areas that merit additional planning processes of their own.



Downtown Focus Area

Large Redevelopment Area

Neighborhood Centers

"A" STREETS

A streets are the heart of the downtown focus area, along which retail and active uses are located. The "A" streets identified within the Downtown focus area are: State Street, Main Street, and Madison Street. These streets already contain a significant number of retail establishments, and have a number of destinations fronting them or within a block of them. Many of the strategies will be focused on the "A" street as the first point of implementation.

"B" STREETS

"B" streets are those that are located in close proximity to "A" streets, but may not be appropriate for a high concentration of retail uses, but perhaps more conducive to office and residential uses, that don't require high-traffic frontage. These streets still deserve a high level of care and amenities like sidewalks, good lighting, and shade should still be provided. There are several of these streets in the Downtown area. Many are already seeing development activity happening on them, while others are ripening to become highly coveted areas for downtown residential developments.

"A" Street

"B" Streets

"A" STREET:

A street that is designed with or otherwise characterized by features that promote the safety, comfort, and convenience of pedestrians. Such streets typically feature sidewalks at least five feet wide, narrow streets, buildings pulled up close to the street, pedestrian-scaled lighting, on-street parking, aligned building facades, building entrances on the street, and a modest turning radius.

As defined by The Lexicon of New Urbanism
Duany, Plater-Zyberk Co.

"A" STREET IN ANN ARBOR, MI

© weddingmapper.com

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The existing conditions analysis and mapping of strengths and challenges provided a backdrop for the implementation strategies. Downtown Rockford has great bones, with several high-investment projects underway, a number of historic buildings ripe for redevelopment, unique existing businesses, and extremely popular events that bring thousands of people to Downtown Rockford. Challenges include high-speed, one-way streets that make navigating through Downtown difficult and dangerous for pedestrians, large areas in key locations dedicated to surface parking, and a limited number of people living in the Downtown area.

Gorman Hotel

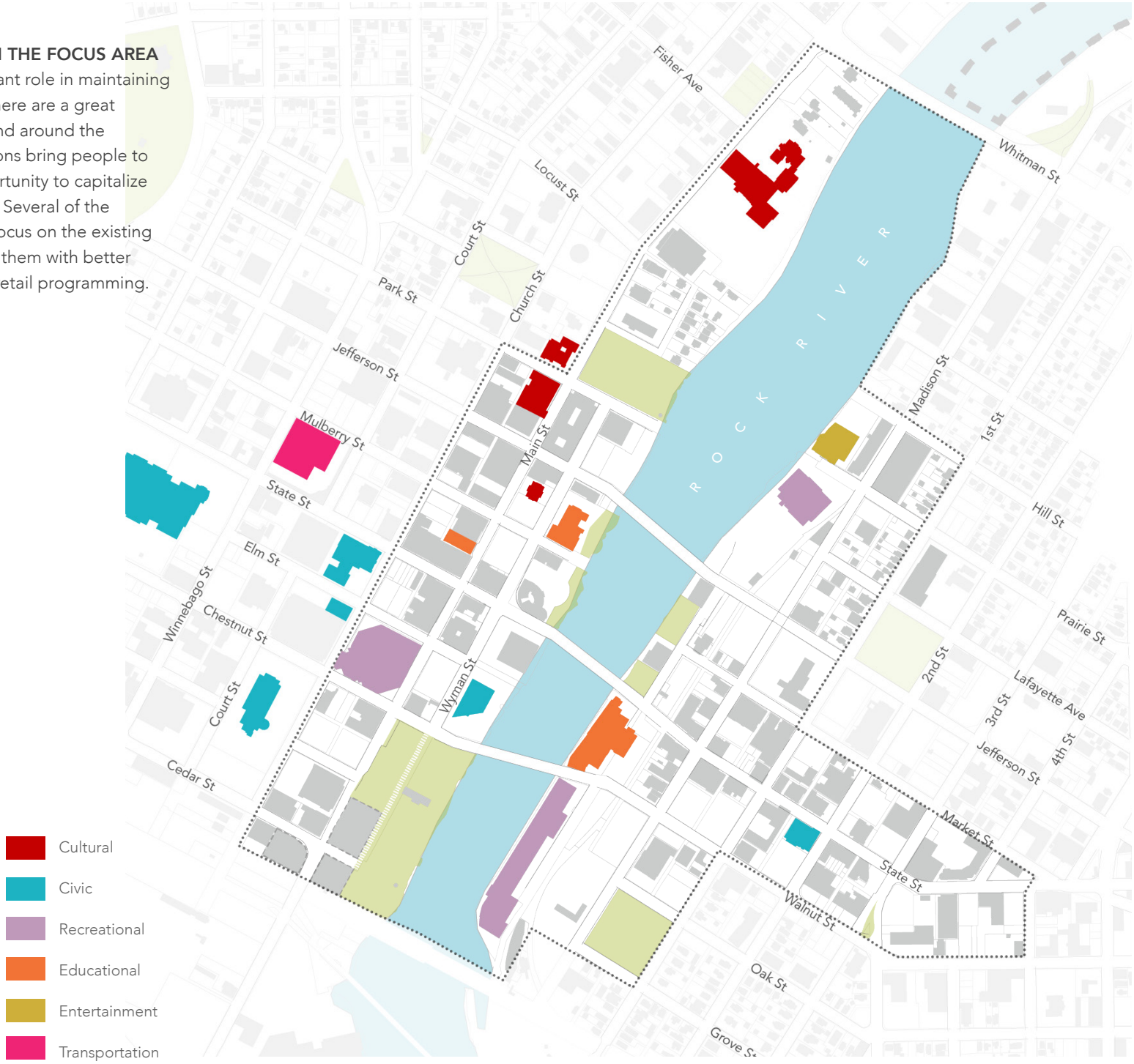
BMO Harris Centre

Rockford City Hall

Downtown Sports Complex

MAJOR DESTINATIONS IN THE FOCUS AREA

Destinations play an important role in maintaining street life in a downtown. There are a great number of destinations in and around the focus area. These destinations bring people to Downtown and are an opportunity to capitalize on the draw that they have. Several of the implementation strategies focus on the existing destinations and enhancing them with better connections and increased retail programming.



Stroll on State Event

© rrstarr

Davis Park

© Flickr - Steeleman204

Screw City Beer Fest Event

© Flickr - OlympicTavern

Rockford City Market

© Flickr - Jenn

EVENTS IN THE FOCUS AREA

Downtown Rockford hosts a large number of popular events throughout the year. These events are evidence that Downtown Rockford has the ability to draw thousands of people to its businesses, can be an vibrant place, and that the view people have regarding Downtown safety, lack of parking, and lack of businesses are perceptions, and not necessarily facts. Many of the implementation strategies use the existing events in the focus area as a testing ground for improvements.

- City Market
- Stroll on State
- Ice Hogs
- Screw City Beer Fest
- Dinner on the Dock/ Handmade Market/Meltfest

MOBILITY IN THE DOWNTOWN FOCUS AREA

There are several streets and paths in the Downtown focus area that provide a pleasant experience for multiple modes of travel including driving, walking, and biking. However, as a whole, Downtown suffers from a lack of high-quality, multi-modal connectivity. Several issues such as wide rights-of-ways, narrow sidewalks, and lack of bicycle lanes, make it particularly difficult, for pedestrians and cyclists to navigate through Downtown.

CAR CRASH HOT SPOTS

The car crash hot spots data is not particularly alarming. However, there are a couple of spots that could benefit from traffic calming strategies, particularly on State Street and 2nd, as well as hot spots on Jefferson Street.

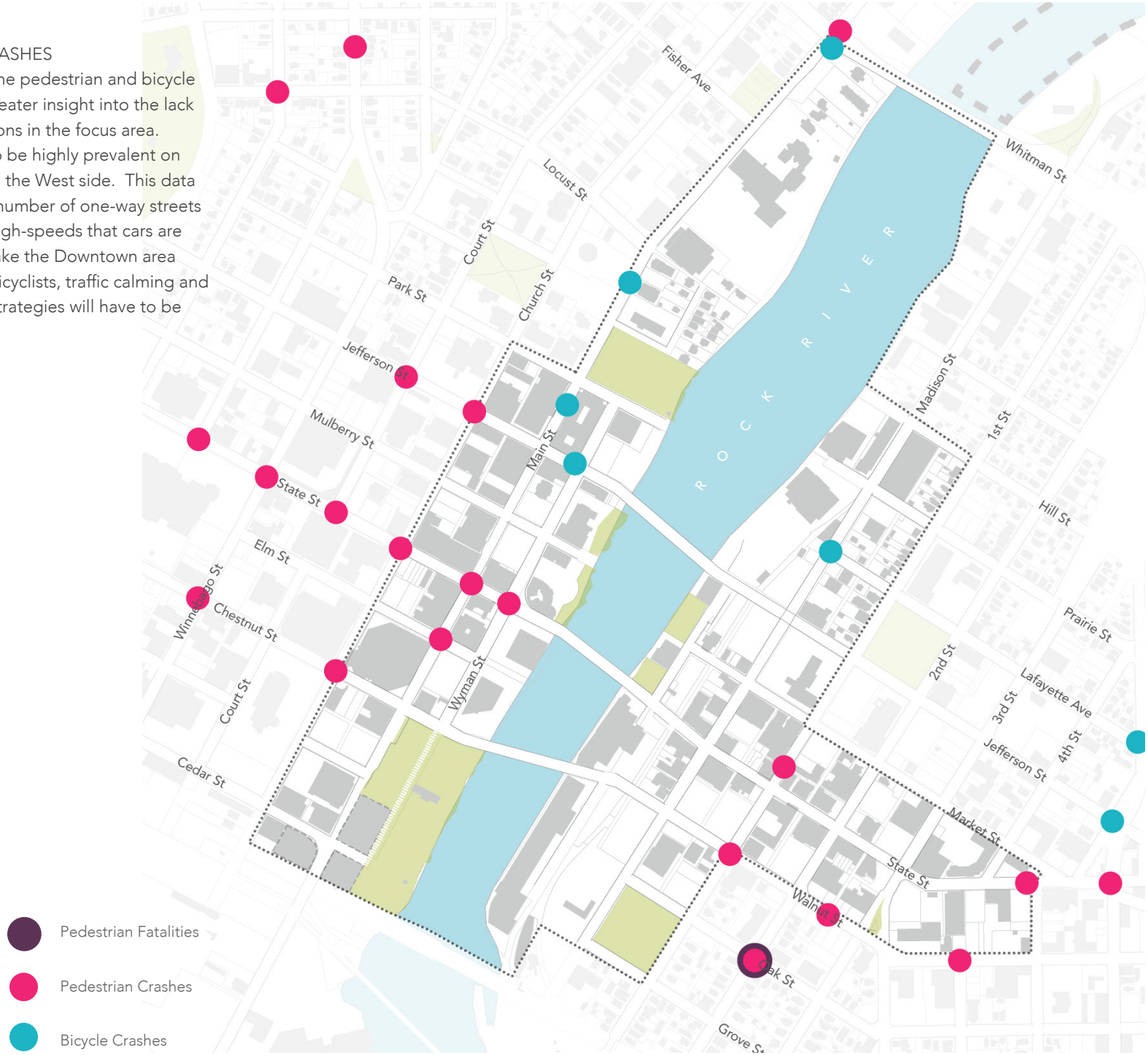
5+ Crashes/year

2-4 Crashes/year

>1 Crashes/year

PEDESTRIAN/BICYCLE CRASHES

Unlike the car crash data, the pedestrian and bicycle crash data does provide greater insight into the lack of alternative mobility options in the focus area. Pedestrian crashes seem to be highly prevalent on State Street, particularly on the West side. This data is not surprising given the number of one-way streets in the focus area and the high-speeds that cars are traveling at. In order to make the Downtown area safer for pedestrians and bicyclists, traffic calming and pedestrian enhancement strategies will have to be employed.



PARKING SURPLUS IN THE FOCUS AREA

Parking has been identified as a major concern among residents of Rockford, as well as the City of Rockford. The 2008 Walker Parking Study noted that unlike the perception that there is a lack of parking in the Downtown area, there is actually a surplus of approximately 1,885 spaces.

On the East side, there is a surplus of 480 parking spaces, whereas the West side has a much greater surplus with 1,405 spaces. This is likely due to the the fact that there are 3 structured parking decks, which are underutilized.

Given the parking surplus, 100,000 sf of vacancy can be easily infilled and accommodate the additional parking spaces needed, even with the parking displaced by the development.
Easily accommodate all vacancy

Surface Parking

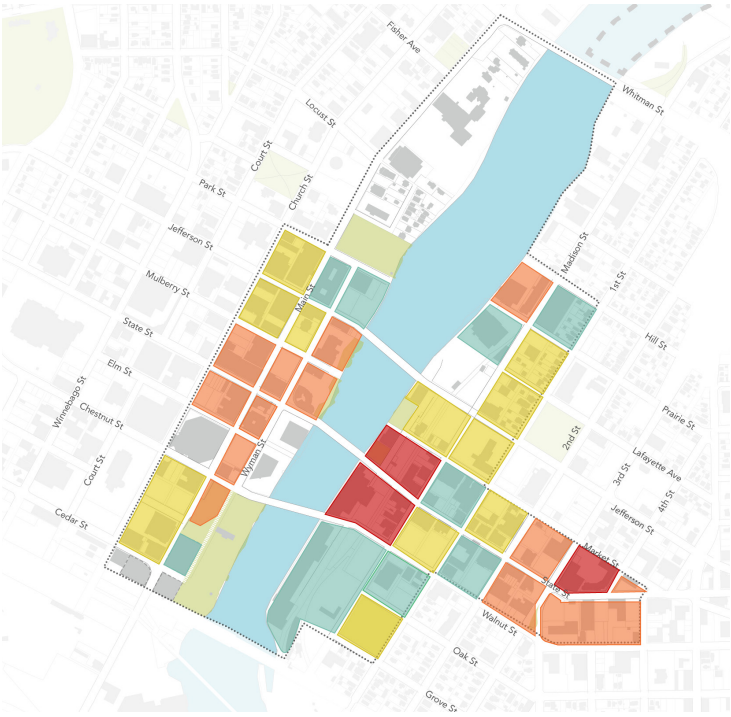
Structured Parking

ON-STREET PARKING AVAILABILITY

The Walker Parking study was conducted in 2008. We conducted parking utilization analyses to understand what the current state of parking in the focus area is. A small percentage of the on-street parking is utilized to its full capacity. Most on-street parking has over 50% availability. This doesn't even include the fact that on-street parking is not allowed on some streets. The current parking demand can be easily accommodated with the existing parking supply.

On-Street Parking Availability

- 100% - 75%
- 75%-50%
- 50%-25%
- 25%-0%



PARKING LOTS & GARAGES AVAILABILITY

The parking lots and garages seem to more utilized, though there is still a significant amount of availability. Part of the underutilization may also be due to the fact that some of the parking lots are dedicated for specialty uses that only see patrons on certain days of the week. This can be alleviated by increasing shared parking where uses that occur during different days of the week or different parts of the day can use the same parking facilities.

Parking Lots & Garage Availability

- 100% - 75%
- 75%-50%
- 50%-25%
- 25%-0%

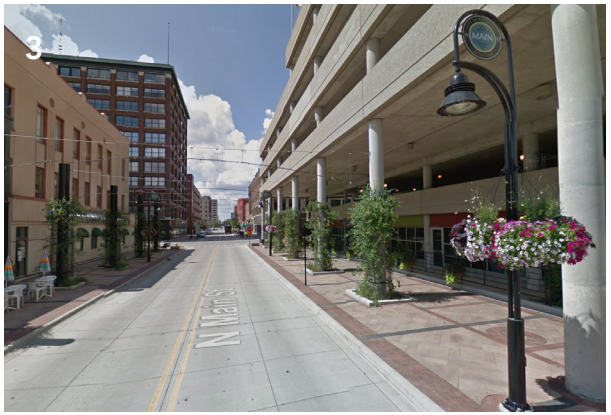
EXISTING STREETSCAPE INCONSISTENCIES

One of the challenges identified by stakeholders and the City of Rockford is the lack of urban standards and the inconsistencies in streetscape design. The issues are especially evident when one compares the East side of the River to the West side. However, even among the two sides, there are extreme inconsistencies in streetscaping.

The map illustrates the variety of different lighting and landscaping elements found throughout the focus area. While some elements such as in Image 3 on Main Street and Image 4B on State Street are pleasant, they are not used enough to create any sort of consistent branding or overall aesthetic of the Downtown. The lack of streetscaping, especially lighting, make it difficult for pedestrians to feel safe and know when they are entering areas of high activity.

1

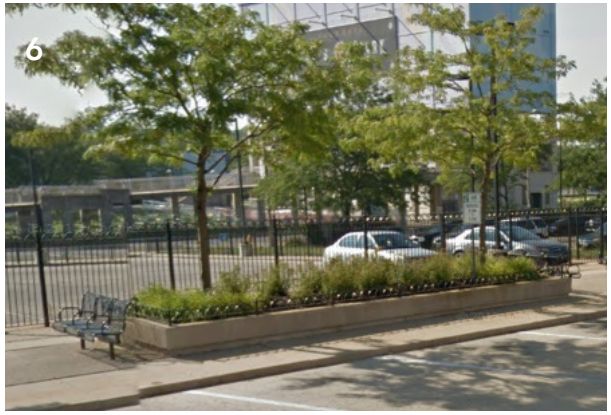
2


3
N Main St

4A

4B

5


6

7

CURRENT INVESTMENTS

A number of investment projects are currently underway in Downtown Rockford. The area is abuzz with activity and this Action Plan proposes to build on that momentum. Many of the current investments are a result of previous planning exercises and are a testament to the power of persistent organizing and partnerships. This Plan encourages high-investment projects that have been previously recommended to continue to be pursued, but that they be supplemented by the strategies proposed in this document.

CURRENT INVESTMENTS IN DOWNTOWN

Current investments in the Downtown area include a number of projects, including building redevelopment, area redevelopment, streetscaping, and mobility improvement projects. The map highlights many of these projects, as well as those that are planned for the near future. It is clear to see that even within a very concentrated geographic area, there is a great deal of activity. This Plan proposes to tie those efforts together so that current and future efforts complement one another and previous planning efforts.

CURRENT INVESTMENT PROJECTS

1 WEST STATE STREET STREETSCAPE

2 MAIN STREET GATEWAYS

3 GORMAN HOTEL PROJECT

4 SOUTH MAIN REDEVELOPMENT

5 DOWNTOWN SPORTS COMPLEX REDEVELOPMENT

6 OUTDOOR CITY MARKET

7 300/400 EAST STATE STREET REDEVELOPMENT

8 WELLNESS CENTER

9 PRAIRIE STREET BREWHOUSE

10 134 N. MAIN STREET BREDEVELOPMENT

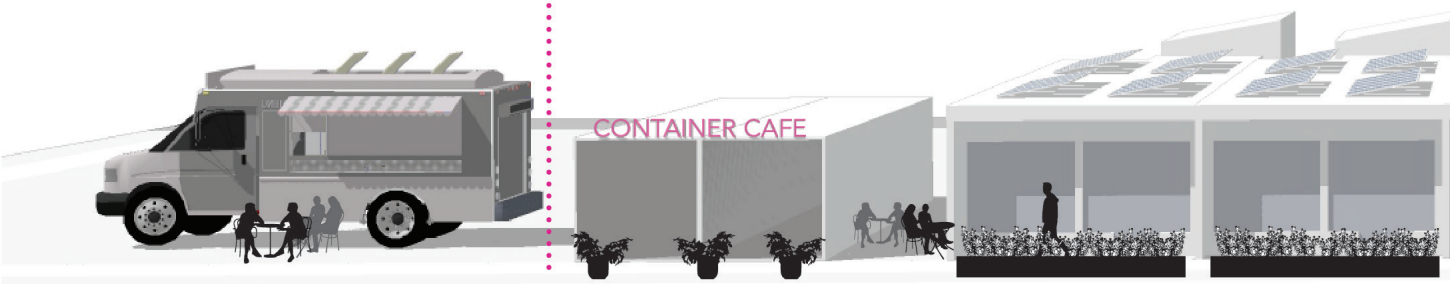
A TLC APPROACH

Long-term planning processes often result in recommendations that are costly, resource-intensive, and have a timeline of 15-20 years. A T[actical], L[ean], C[limax] approach, on the other hand proposes shorter-term implementation tactics that ultimately lead to high-investment climax conditions. This approach allows for testing through prototypes, and more immediate results that lead to incremental, but impactful development. The implementation strategies are subdivided into TLC strategies that take a larger goal and show how to bring it to fruition through short, mid, and long-term steps.

TIME short-term

TACTICAL
(small-scale interventions)

LEAN
(1-story storefront)



COST low

long-term

CLIMAX
(4-5 story mixed-use)

high

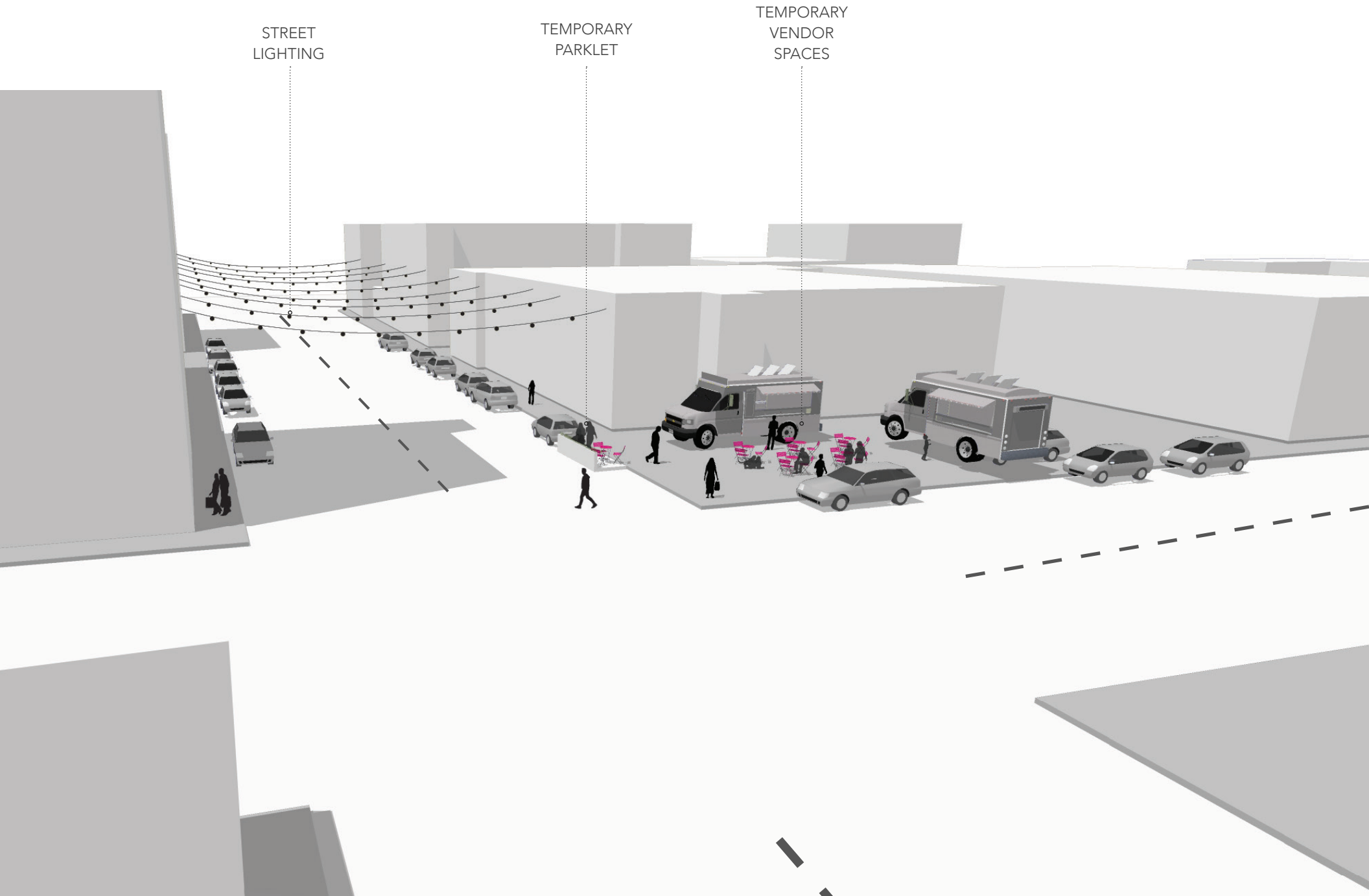
TACTICAL

WHAT IS A "TACTICAL" APPROACH?

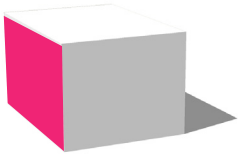
The "tactical" part of the TLC approach focuses on tactical interventions to accomplish a larger purpose. Tactical Urbanism, as it is often coined, asks the question "what can we do right away?". The implementation strategies outline low-risk, temporary solutions to help test the market for future, long-term, permanent improvements. These interventions are an opportunity to solicit public excitement or disapproval towards a certain idea. They are also a way to empower everyday citizens to take challenges into their own hands and come up with solutions that can be carried out quickly and with limited resources.

WHAT DO TACTICS LOOK LIKE?

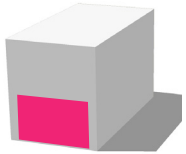
Tactics can be quite simple or elaborate, depending on availability of time and resources. Some interventions include: covering an unsightly blank wall with artwork, decorating vacant storefronts with lighting, or testing future public spaces with a temporary park set up for one day.


STREET
LIGHTING
TEMPORARY
PARKLET
TEMPORARY
VENDOR
SPACES

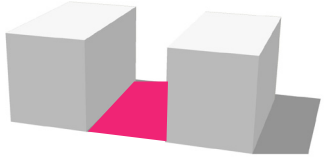
WHERE CAN TACTICS BE IMPLEMENTED?



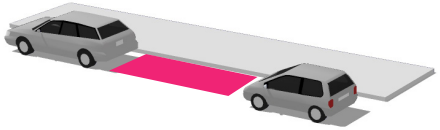
BLANK WALL



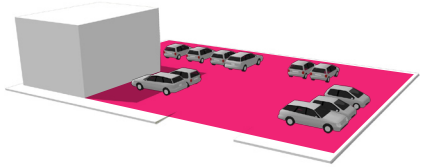
VACANT STOREFRONT



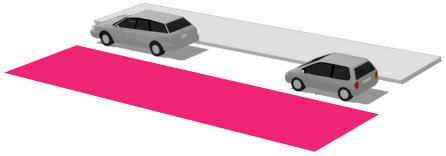
VACANT LOT



PARKING SPACE



PARKING LOT



STREET

Candy Chang - Before I Die Wall

© culturalweekly.com

© urbancincy.com

© pps.org

© surpriseindustries.com

© Flickr - Tony Webster

© Seattle Rainbow Crosswalks

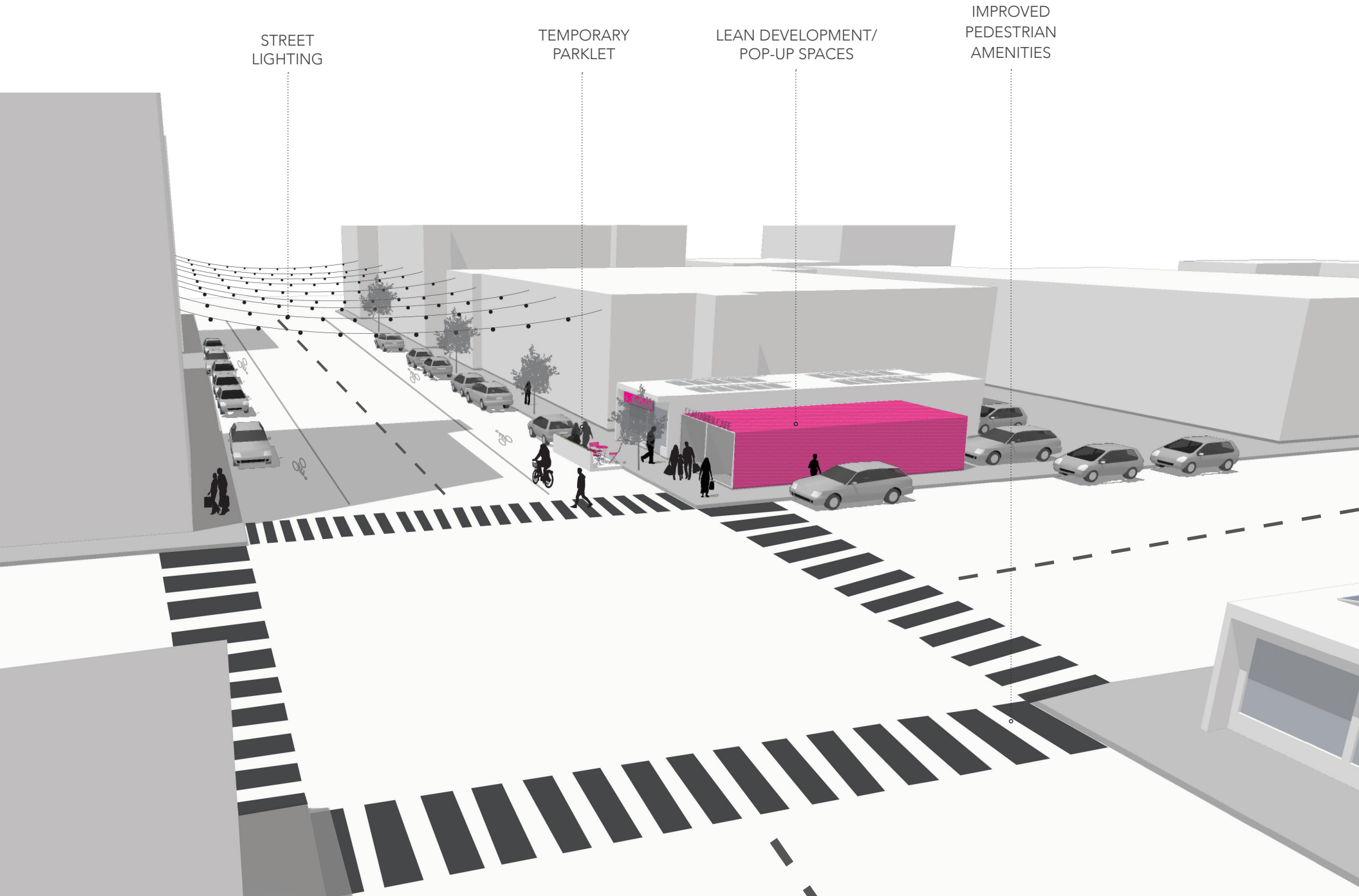
LEAN

WHAT IS A "LEAN" APPROACH?

Lean strategies are the middle-ground between Tactical Urbanism and Climax development, with an aim to work around the "red tape" that often hinders development and increases costs. Lean strategies are intended to be flexible and adaptable, with a higher level of permanency than tactical interventions. Lean strategies require more resources than tactical ones, however, are still less costly and resource-intensive than climax developments. An example of a lean strategy would be a 1-story retail building or a shallow, retail space made of shipping containers instead of the 4-5 story mixed-use development.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE REQUIRED IN A "LEAN" APPROACH?

While lean strategies are meant to work around the financial barriers of high-investment developments, they too need creative methods of execution as some strategies (such as shipping containers and temporary pop-up shops) will be a novel idea in many cities and the zoning and legal mechanisms to bring them to fruition will not be in place.


STREET LIGHTING
TEMPORARY PARKLET
LEAN DEVELOPMENT/ POP-UP SPACES
IMPROVED PEDESTRIAN AMENITIES

© herrerainc.com

© Flickr - Big Man

© remodelista.com

© Flickr - Robyn Lee

WHAT FORM DO LEAN STRATEGIES TAKE?

Lean strategies can take a multitude of forms, with the caveat that they can be implemented in a relatively short time-frame and are less costly than other strategies that would normally be used to accomplish the same goals. Lean strategies are often intended to be replaced by higher investment developments when the market allows for it and finance mechanisms are available. In the case of Downtown Rockford, lean strategies are proposed as a way to fill storefront and parcel vacancy and test mobility improvements such as bike lanes and road diets.

LEAN RETAIL

Lean retail ranges from testing businesses in vacant storefronts for a period of 3-6 months, to putting up temporary retail in shipping containers in a vacant lot, to building a simple, yet attractive, 1-story retail building. Other lean strategies that can also be used include:

+ Limiting depths of retail shops to 20′. If the goals is to complete a street wall with continuous storefronts, the depth of the store is not as important.

+ Creating micro-shops and shared business spaces. More and more retailers and restaurateurs are leaning towards smaller business footprints with shared spaces. This limits the amount of startup capital that a business might need and allows grouping of complementary businesses.

CLIMAX

Climax development is the end goal. In the case of Rockford and many other cities, it's what previous plans have called for from the get-go. Climax might look something like a four-story mixed-use building, a new apartment building, or even the permanent adjustment of street sections. This type of development takes a great amount of time, planning, and secure financing. Climax projects often require many partnerships, need greater assurances on return on investment, and more time and thorough planning when it comes to design and engineering.

EXPANDED OUTDOOR SEATING/PARKLET
CLIMAX MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT
IMPROVED PEDESTRIAN AMENITIES
PERMANENT STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

Downtown Champaign, IL
© Champaign History Blog

Florida CraftArt
501
jewelry
© tbo.com

Class of 1923 Ice Rink
University of Pennsylvania
Drexel University
30th Street Post Office
30th St. Station/Amtrak
Penn
UNIVERSITY CITY

INSTRUCTIONS
epark

WHAT IS THE CLIMAX CONDITION FOR DOWNTOWN ROCKFORD?

Downtown Rockford currently has many climax projects in the pipeline including: Davis Park redevelopment, redevelopment of the Amerock building into a hotel, Amtrak service and station, and the renovation of the Downtown Sports Complex. These projects have and will take years to come to fruition and are the result of complex partnerships and financing mechanisms. The completion of these highly catalytic projects will likely lead to further development. Additional climax development in Downtown Rockford will likely include the addition of mixed-use developments, multi-story residential developments, and well-connected waterfront park spaces and trails. Based on consensus from stakeholders, the following elements are the key to a successful Downtown Rockford:

+ Strong retail corridors with minimal to no vacancies
+ A strong brand and identity
+ Uses that create a 24-hour community (i.e. grocery store, dry cleaners, pharmacy, residences, etc.)
+ A business/office recruitment strategy that is consistent with the vision for a healthy and
+ vibrant Downtown
+ Multi-modal transportation options (i.e. walking, biking, transit)
+ Good lighting and streetscaping

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING THAT CONDITION IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

Climax projects generally require land ownerships, large amounts of money, community backing, and partnerships to come to full realization. There is also an opportunity cost with climax projects, where land and money is held out of for long-term, high investment projects, sometimes at the cost of smaller, but more immediate development opportunities. The City should continue to pursue climax opportunities in the background, however, should also be implementing lean and tactical opportunities simultaneously.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

The Implementation Strategies are organized into 4 sections: MOBILITY, LARGE REDEVELOPMENT, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, and URBAN DESIGN. A list of end goals are provided for each section and each goal has associated TLC recommended strategies. Partners, recommended timelines, and funding sources are also provided as they relate to each strategy. These strategies should be viewed as a menu of options that organizations and the City should consider and implement based on resources available.

The goal of the Implementation Strategies is to provide a clear roadmap for accomplishing the goals laid out by previous planning efforts, as well as, additional goals identified by stakeholders and the City of Rockford.

MOBILITY

1. Improve multi-modal mobility to and through Downtown.
2. Improve bike connections to and through Downtown.
3. Create more on-street parking in Downtown.
4. Improve parking strategy throughout Downtown to balance demand.

LARGE REDEVELOPMENT

1. Redevelop the Rockford Public Library as an anchor and learning institution of the future in Downtown Rockford.
2. Redevelop Davis Park to become a stronger anchor in Downtown Rockford.
3. Establish the Wellness Center as a “healthy living” anchor in Downtown Rockford.
4. Build an Aquarium in Downtown Rockford.
5. Continue to pursue large scale redevelopment projects.

STRATEGIES

URBAN DESIGN

1. Make Downtown Rockford a commercial, entertainment, and cultural center that residents take pride in and consumers visit often.

2. Develop more residential options in an around Downtown - include greater diversity of housing types.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

1. Adopt consistent streetscape standards for Downtown Rockford.

2. Maintain day-to-day vibrancy in Downtown Rockford.

3. Create a narrative and brand identity specifically for Downtown Rockford.

MOBILITY

1 Improve multi-modal mobility to and through Downtown.

2 Improve bike connections to and through Downtown.

3 Create more on-street parking in Downtown.

4 Improve parking strategy throughout Downtown to balance demand.

1 Improve multi-modal mobility to and through Downtown.

		STRATEGIES	COLLABORATIVE ACTION NETWORK	TIMELINE	FUNDING
TACTICAL	1	Test shared-use space on State Street Bridge for 3 months	COR	Summer 2015	Capital Improvement Program
	2	Test shared-use space on Jefferson Bridge for 3 months	COR	Summer 2016	Capital Improvement Program

LEAN	1	Negotiate with IDOT to study capacity requirements for bridge/corridors further. At a minimum, modify IDOT Chestnut Bridge MUP cross sections to reduce travel lanes to 11' and widen sidewalk	COR; IDOT; RMAP	2015	Capital Improvement Program; Rivers Edge Redevelopment Zone; Tax Increment Financing
	2	Conduct a traffic study to determine if Walnut and Jefferson can be reduced to (2) travel lanes each. ADT indicates that they can with appropriate signal intersection improvements	COR; IDOT	Initiate in 2015	Capital Improvements Program
	3	Conduct a study on the current use of CIP funding and other funding sources to evaluate how improvements can be financed.	COR	2015	
	4	Continue development of an event ingress/egress plan	COR; RMAP, RAVE, WinnCo	2016	Capital Improvements Program
	5	Refresh/add crosswalk striping and tighten curb radii on identified intersections	COR	2017	Capital Improvements Program; Federal or State Grant

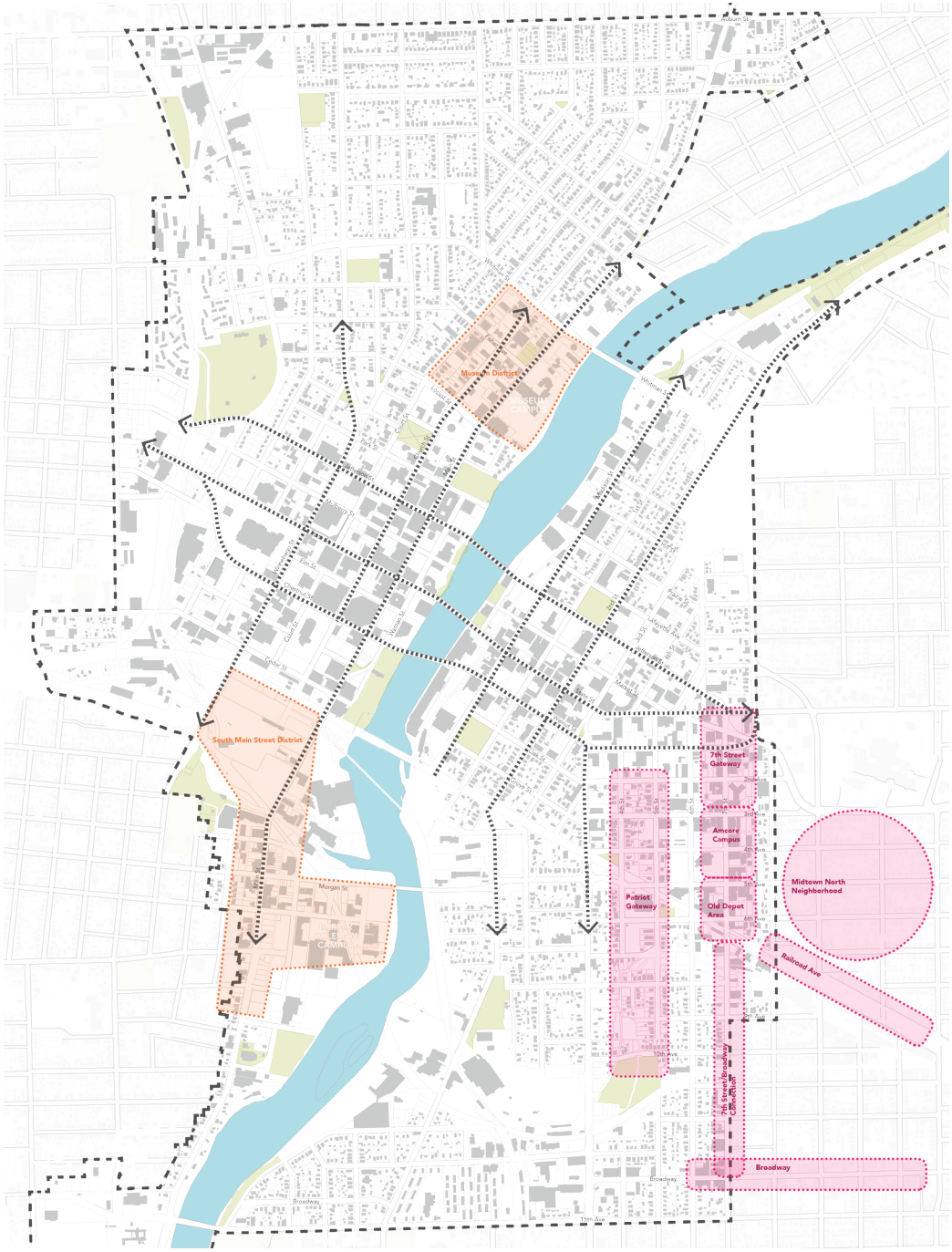
CLIMAX	1	Reduce travel lanes on State Street bridge to one in each direction	COR	2016	CIP
	2	Reduce travel lanes on Chestnut/Walnut and Jefferson, add separated bike facilities & on-street parking	COR; IDOT; RMAP	2020	City and Partner Organization Operating Budget/Capital Improvement Program

ESTABLISH A MULTI-MODALLY ACCESSIBLE STREET NETWORK

In order to make Downtown a highly accessible and visited place, it is imperative that connections to and through Downtown be strengthened. Currently, there are areas where connectivity is great, but then it quickly falls off with streets that are too wide and sidewalks that are in disrepair.

Downtown can be a much stronger neighborhood center if it leverages the assets of nearby neighborhoods and connects to anchors and destinations within those neighborhoods.

A number of streets have been identified that can serve as critical connectors. These streets should be improved with road diets, the addition of on-street bike facilities, and an enhanced public realm consisting of sidewalks, shade trees, and human-scaled lighting.

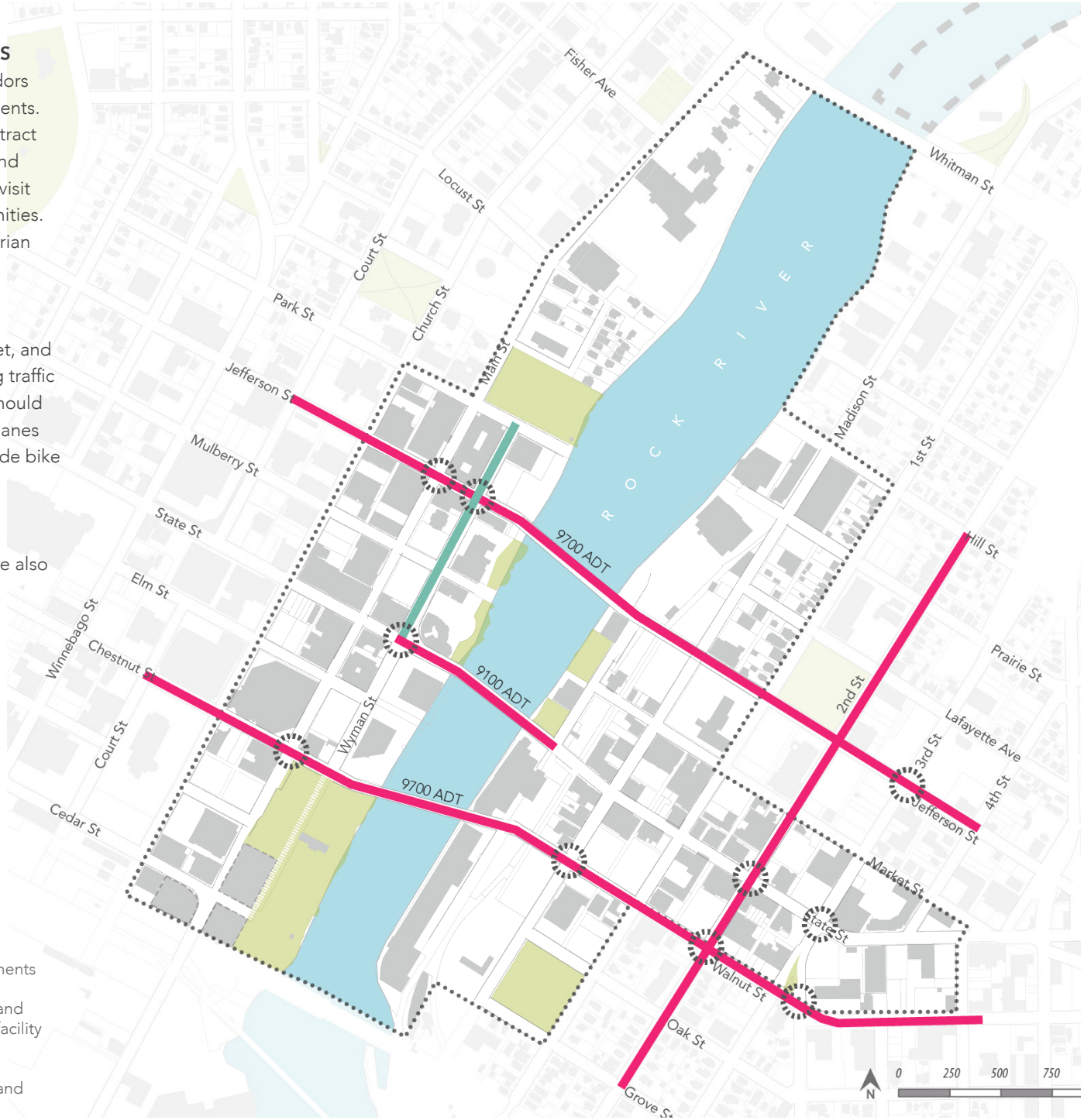


DOWNTOWN MOBILITY IMPROVEMENTS

The Downtown focus area has several corridors going through it that are need of improvements. These improvements will be necessary to attract urban development, as well as millennials and empty nesters that prefer to live, work, and visit vibrant, walkable, and bike-friendly communities. The improvements will also increase pedestrian traffic which will have a positive impact on businesses in the Downtown area.

The Jefferson Street, Chestnut/Walnut Street, and 2nd Street corridors are critical in facilitating traffic in and out of Downtown. These corridors should undergo road diets that reduce their travel lanes and reconfigure their rights-of-ways to include bike facilities and parking.

Key intersections that deserve pedestrian improvements and temporary wayfinding are also identified.



Pedestrian Improvements

Reduce travel lanes and add separated bike facility and/or parking

Reduce travel lanes and add parking

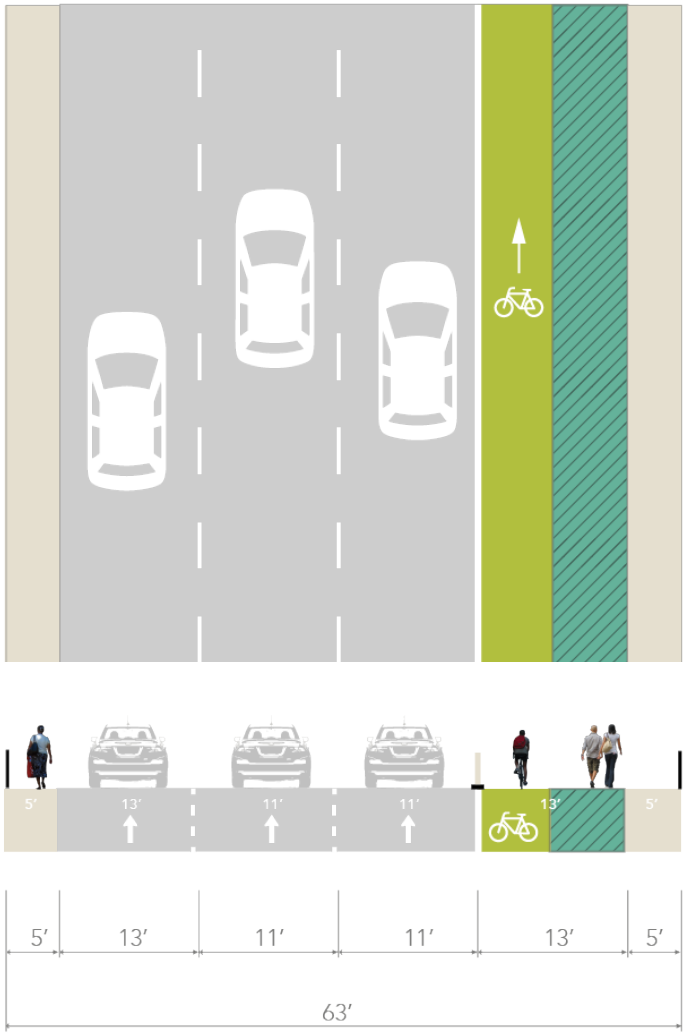
JEFFERSON BRIDGE TACTICAL INTERVENTION

Similar to the tactical intervention on the State Street Bridge, it is recommended that the Jefferson Street Bridge also be temporarily converted to test a shared-use space.

Testing out these bridge changes will help gauge the impact that the high-investment permanent changes will have on traffic and users. The intervention will also give residents and visitors the opportunity to try out changes before they occur permanently. The interventions may lead to additional lessons and insights that can then be incorporated into the climax design.

PROPOSED JEFFERSON STREET BRIDGE TACTICAL INTERVENTION

+ Convert a travel lane to a shared-use space
+ Install flexible bollards, rubber pads, planters, etc. to serve as barriers
+ Install signage that alerts user of the changes



State Street Bridge Tactical Intervention - Rockford, IL

JEFFERSON & CHESTNUT/WALNUT CLIMAX IMPROVEMENTS

The Annual Daily Traffic (ADT) on Jefferson and Chestnut/Walnut Streets is approx. 8500-9700 each. Given that the ADT is relatively small, the two streets can undergo a road diet, without having a detrimental effect on traffic, with proper signal improvements. This should be studied further prior to making permanent changes.

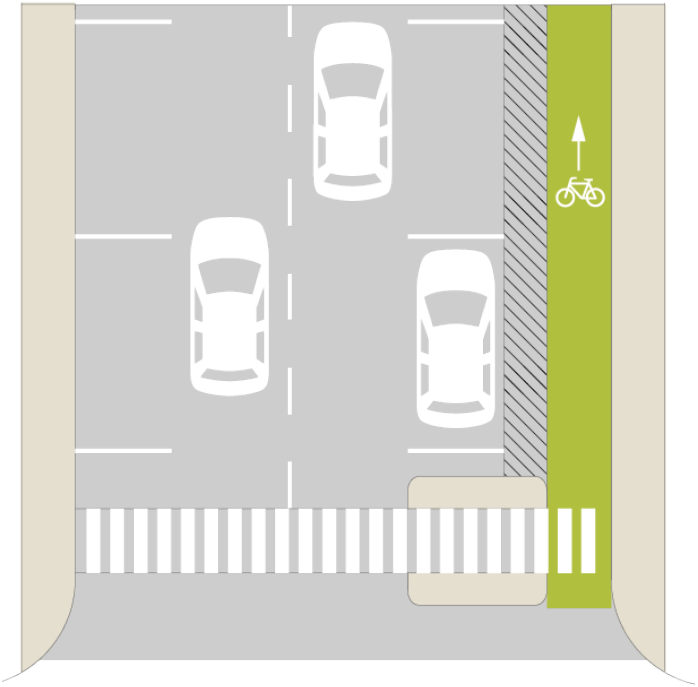
NEIL STREET/WALNUT STREET ONE-WAY PAIR
CHAMPAIGN, IL

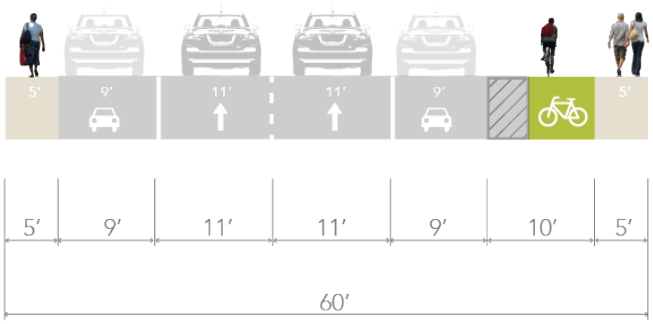
As a comparison, Neil Street/Walnut Street form a one-way pair through downtown Champaign and successfully carry 7500-9000 vehicles with two travel lanes each. The two streets also have on-street parking and a bike lane.

Walnut Street through Downtown Champaign

PROPOSED JEFFERSON CLIMAX IMPROVEMENT

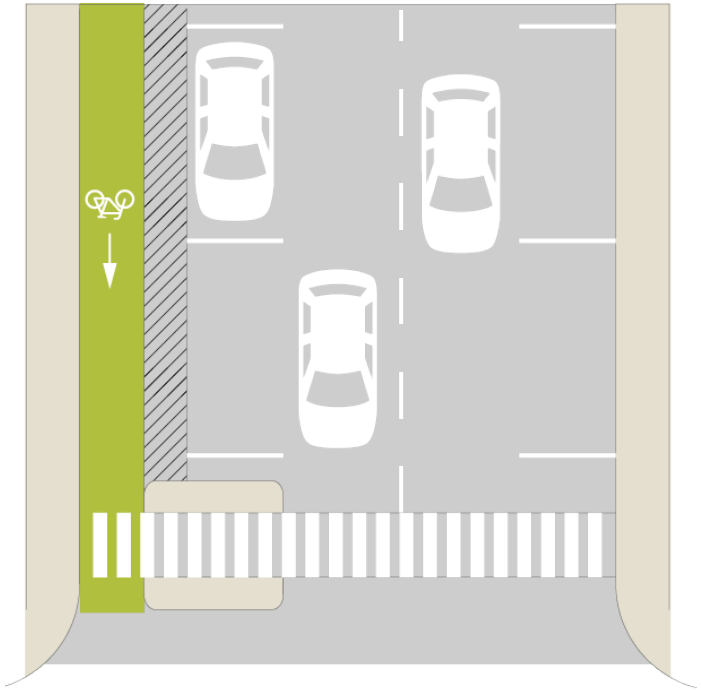
+ Keep one-way traffic
+ Reduce to 2 travel lanes
+ Add a protected bike lane
+ Add on-street parking
+ Add optional median island/curb extensions

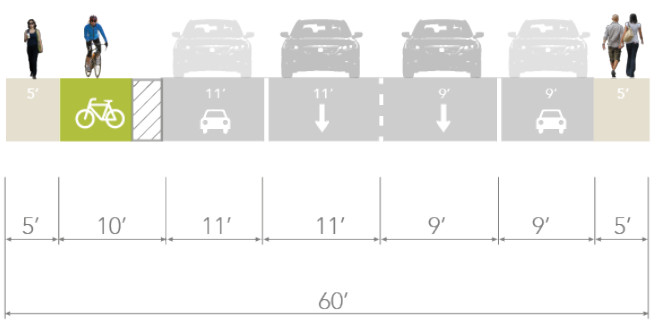




PROPOSED CHESTNUT/WALNUT CLIMAX IMPROVEMENTS

+ Keep one-way traffic
+ Reduce to 2 travel lanes
+ Add protected bike lane
+ Add on-street parking
+ Optional median island/curb extensions





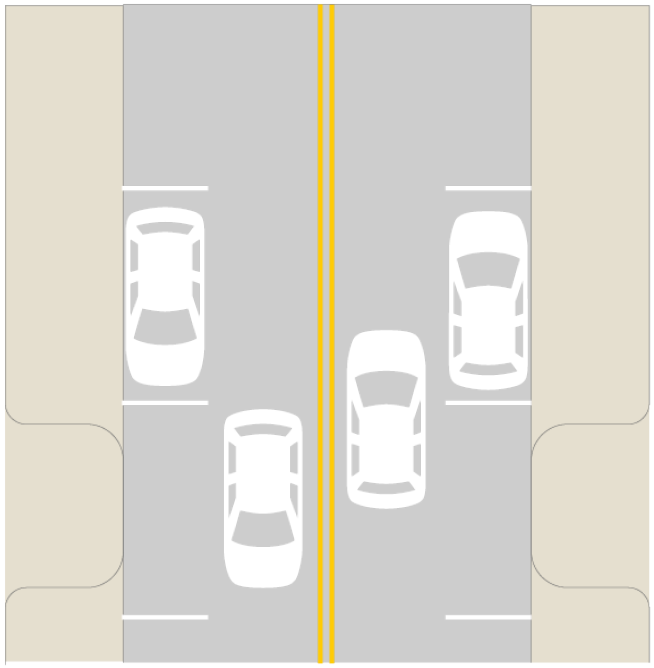
STATE STREET CLIMAX IMPROVEMENTS

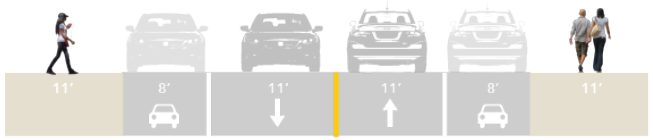
Given the low ADT on the State Street Bridge, a road diet is recommended. State Street should be reduced to two travel lanes (one in each direction), with parking on both sides. These improvements will create a safer connection between the East and West sides of the river.

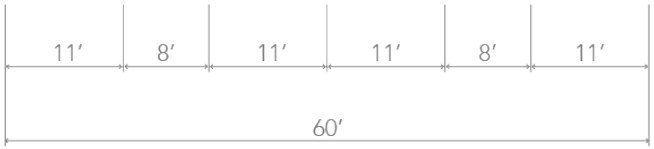
An example of this conversion can be seen in Fox River. The Main Street (IL 64) bridge over the Fox River provides an inviting connection between the east and west sides of downtown St. Charles, IL with wide sidewalks, curb extensions, on-street parking, river lookouts, gateway features and pedestrian-oriented lighting.

PROPOSED STATE STREET CLIMAX IMPROVEMENTS

+ Widen sidewalk
+ Add on-street parking
+ Add curb extension
+ 2-Lane travel







Fox River - St. Charles, IL
© Flickr - ittichai

2 Improve bike connections through and to Downtown.

		STRATEGIES	COLLABORATIVE ACTION NETWORK	TIMELINE	FUNDING
TACTICAL	1	Continue to hold reoccurring biking events (i..e Critical Mass) centered around Downtown	COR - WB; RDA; RMAP; RPD	Ongoing	Foundations; Private funding
LEAN	1	Develop a bike facilities master plan	COR; RMAP;WinnCo	Immediately	City and Partner Organization Operating Budget/Capital Improvement Program/ State & Funding Grants
	2	Commission a feasibility study on the riverfront bike/ped connection from (South) IL Railway Bridge to the (North) Museum Campus on both sides of the river	COR; RMAP	Initiate in 2015	City and Partner Organization Operating Budget/Capital Improvement Program
	3	Fill in on-street bike routes/signage connecting trails to Downtown (Mulberry, Lafayette, and Market are a priority)	COR; RMAP;WinnCo	2016	City and Partner Organization Operating Budget/Capital Improvement Program
	4	Implement a small-scale bike rental system	RACVB; COR; RPD	2017	City and Partner Organization Operating Budget/Capital Improvement Program/ State & Funding Grant
CLIMAX	1	Study the feasibility of Downtown bike share	COR; RMAP; WinnCo	2018	State & Federal Grants; Foundations
	2	Reduce travel lanes on Walnut & Jefferson and add separated bike lanes	COR; IDOT	2020	City and Partner Organization Operating Budget/Capital Improvement Program

PROPOSED BIKE PLAN

Downtown Rockford is already taking steps towards creating a more bike-friendly environment, with proposed bikeways that are in the pipeline to implementation and a plan to add bike racks throughout the Downtown area. This proposed bike plan takes those plans and proposes a more complete bike system for the Downtown area.

Bike infrastructure changes can occur at different levels, ranging from a low-investment signed bike route to a high-investment physically separated cycle track. In cases where resources are limited, Rockford should use tactical and lean strategies to test and implement bike improvements. These can include temporarily testing a bike lane such as the one on State Street bridge or painting a dedicated bike lane.

Existing Bikeways

Proposed Bikeways

Priority On-Street Route

IMPLEMENT A BIKE RENTAL SYSTEM

In addition to implementing infrastructure changes, programs will also help Rockford move towards becoming more bike-friendly and encourage ridership in the Downtown area. One approach to achieving this goal would be implementing a bike share program .

Bike share is a point-to-point transit system that provides a mobility option that is flexible, fun, and affordable. In larger cities, such as New York and Chicago, bike share has changed how people get around the city and expanded the amount of destinations they can get to in a short amount of time. Bike share is essentially a pedestrian accelerator that allows people to cover a larger walk shed in a shorter amount of time.

CHALLENGES OF BIKE-SHARE

The challenge that most cities have faced is building a bike share system and structure that is attractive to demographics of people that don't normally bike during the day. A successful bike share system requires building a membership that encompasses all demographics that are willing to use it to make short point to point trips. Achieving this goal requires a dense system of bike share stations as well as a membership/cost structure that does not create any barriers to entry.

LEAN BIKE-RENTAL SYSTEM

Bike share systems such as Divvy Bike and B-Cycle, now commonly found in large cities may be too costly of an endeavor for a smaller city like Rockford. A small-scale bike rental system run by a local organization would a good alternative and serve as a starting point for encouraging ridership. Coupling the rental program with existing programs like Critical Mass would also increase interest and provide a foundation for a more robust system in the future.

CLIMAX BIKE-SHARING SYSTEM

If and when Rockford is interested in installing a more formal bike-share system, a a bike share feasibility study should be completed prior to installation. The study would cost $25,000-$40,000 and would include bike share station siting, identification of the best structure of the system and potential vendors. If the study were completed in 2016, an initial bike share system could be installed in 2017.

It is strongly recommended that the system be as dense as possible, while covering as much area. The initial startup cost of the system will likely be in the range of $500,000 to $1,000,000 depending on the number of stations and the type of technology used. This startup cost can be covered either through a public/private collaboration or grants. It is recommended that the system and operating structure be designed to cover annual operating costs after year two. Sponsorship should be considered for a revenue stream, but it is unlikely that it will cover the initial capital expenses.

Divvy bike sharing facilities in Chicago

3 Create more on-street parking in Downtown.

		STRATEGIES	COLLABORATIVE ACTION NETWORK	TIMELINE	FUNDING
LEAN	1	Continue to pursue transfer of Wyman from State of Illinois	COR; IDOT; RMAP	2018	

CLIMAX	1	Modify cross section to include parallel parking on the northbound side of Wyman Street	COR; IDOT; RMAP	2020	City and Partner Organization Operating Budget; Capital Improvement Program
	2	Add on-street parking in identified locations on State, Jefferson, and Walnut Streets	COR	2018	City and Partner Organization Operating Budget; Capital Improvement Program

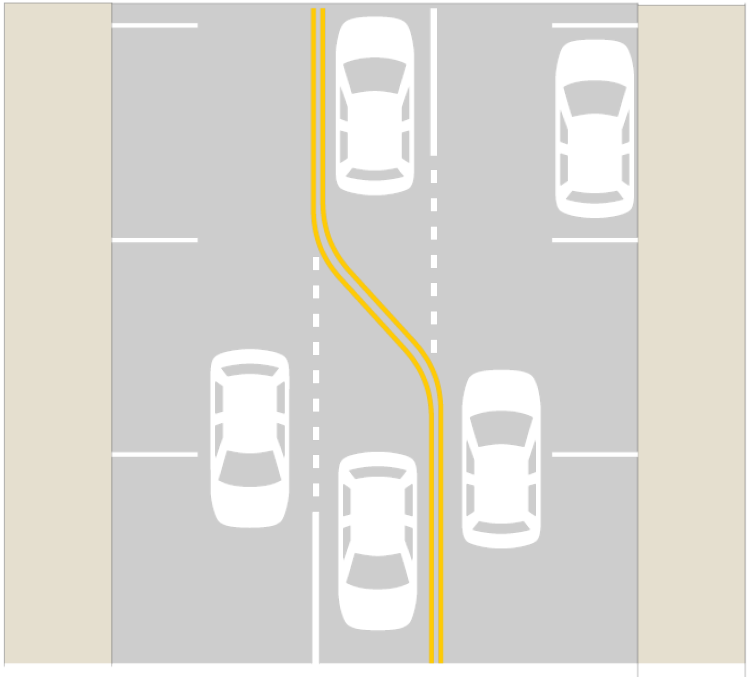
ADD ON-STREET PARKING IN STRATEGIC LOCATIONS

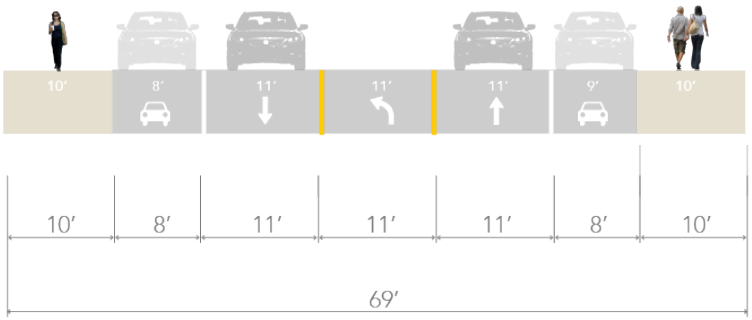
Many of the streets in Downtown Rockford have large rights-of-ways, for which road diets have been recommended. In lieu of travel lanes that are too many and too wide, parking lanes can be added to balance the demand for parking. This would also slow traffic down, making a better environment for pedestrians, and also make drivers take notice of the mix of uses they are driving by. On-street parking is also beneficial for retailers who want to provide consumers with convenient parking.

Addition of on-street parking is proposed on the following streets: Wyman, Jefferson, Chestnut, and State. Parking is only recommended for certain locations on those streets, which are highlighted in the maps.

PROPOSED WYMAN STREET IMPROVEMENTS

+ Reduce Travel Lanes
+ On-Street Parking (both sides)
+ Turn Lane at Intersections (needs to be studied)

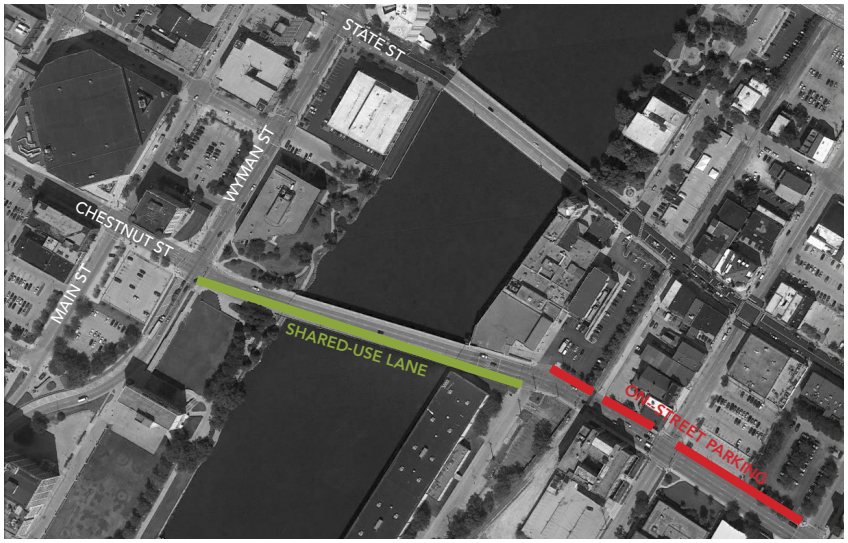




Test on-street parking on the east side of Wyman Street between Jefferson and State to demonstrate the benefits.

Add on-street parking to State Street locations shown in red.

Once the JD on Wyman Street is complete, reduce travel lanes and provide on-street parking where possible as shown in the Wyman Corridor plan.



Test shared use concept on Chestnut Bridge between Water and Wyman Street to demonstrate increased bike/ped capacity. Test on-street parking in select locations on Walnut in conjunction with the shared use test on the Chestnut Bridge.

4 Improve parking strategy throughout Downtown to balance demand.

		STRATEGIES	COLLABORATIVE ACTION NETWORK	TIMELINE	FUNDING
TACTICAL	1	Install temporary signage, and/or lights at garages until permanent wayfinding can be installed	COR; RACVB; RRDP	Ongoing	Tax Increment Financing; RIvers Edge Development Zone
LEAN	1	Encourage "park once" attitude by creating an appealing pool of public parking (wayfinding, lighting, well-maintained clean decks, and improved general mobility and from).	COR; RACVB	2016	
	2	Improve parking time limit enforcement	COR	Ongoing	
	3	Work with employers to provide employee parking in decks or lots	RDA; RRDP; COR	2016	Special Service Area; Business Improvement District
	4	Work with retailers to create incentives to shop	RDA	2015	
	5	Test parking meters by installing at key locations on "A" streets	COR	2018	City and Partner Organization Operating Budget; State & Federal Grants; Special Service Area; Business Improvement District
CLIMAX	1	Develop a Downtown Parking Authority	COR	2017	
	2	Install meters with mobile app/payment options	Designated Parking Authority; COR	2020	City and Partner Organization Operating Budget; State & Federal Grants; Special Service Area; Business Improvement District
	3	Install technology at parking garages to let people know of real-time parking availability	Designated Parking Authority; COR	2020	City and Partner Organization Operating Budget; State & Federal Grants; Special Service Area; Business Improvement District
	4	Adjust garage pricing structure to balance demand with market-rate on-street spaces.	Designated Parking Authority; COR	2020	Special Service Area; Business Improvement District

USE A PHASED APPROACH TO ADDRESSING PARKING

Solving the parking issues will require a phased approach with cooperation between the City, business owners, and the residents and visitors of Downtown. Given the surplus of parking the current parking supply can be better optimized to serve the needs and additional parking can be added as deemed necessary in the future.

INCLUDE BUSINESSES IN REDISTRIBUTING PARKING

Many businesses owners and employees park immediately outside of their shops, taking up parking spots that would normally be most convenient for consumers. Business owners can mitigate this by working out deals to provide employee parking in nearby lots or parking garages. This can also be added as part of the employee contract to ensure cooperation. Furthermore, businesses can move towards becoming a "bicycle-friendly business" and provide amenities to encourage employees to walk or bike to work.

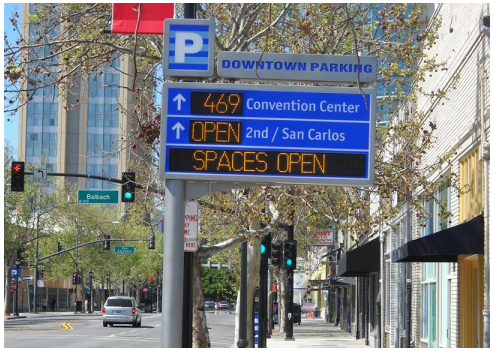
Additionally, business owners can create incentives that bring people into their shops. Parking validation can be offered, or discounts within the store can be offered during certain business hours to encourage more consumers to come in. Another tactic that can be used is to offer discounts to those consumers that walk, bike, or take public transportation to reach the business.

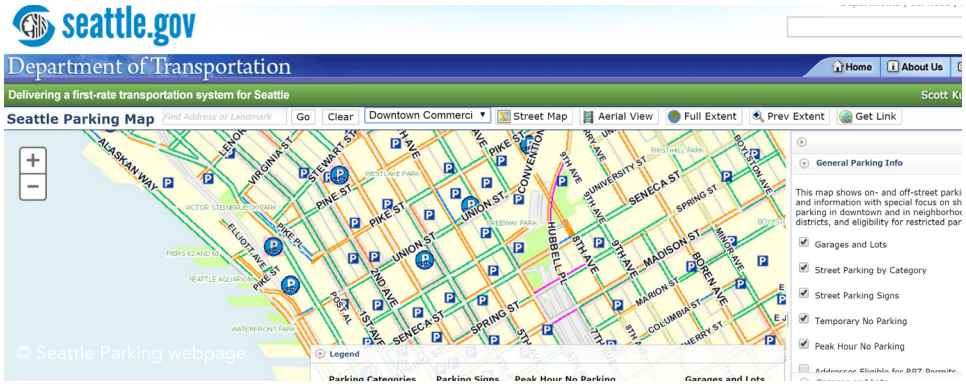
IMPROVE WAYFINDING AND CONDITIONS OF FACILITIES

Two of the concerns that people have expressed through the Consumer Perception Survey are a lack of safety and lack of parking. Both of these concerns can be alleviated by providing better wayfinding throughout the Downtown area directing people to parking locations, and by improving the physical conditions of parking facilities, especially with the addition of more lighting. If people are not able to easily find parking or get the perception that it is too dark and not well maintained, it will impact the safety they feel in using those facilities.

OPTIMIZING PARKING THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

New parking meters are already equipped with technology that allows for mobile payment options. However, technology can also be added to parking decks, allowing people to see the number of available parking spaces in real-time. This information will reduce the mis-perceptions people may have about lack of parking and allow people to see the abundance of parking that exists.





CLIMAX PARKING CONDITION

Even though there is a great parking surplus, most of the parking availability is on the West side. When the vacancy that currently exists is infilled, there is a possibility that there may be a need for additional parking decks, particularly on the East side. If residential units are added, it is assumed that many of them will self-park on-site, but there may be conditions where on-street parking and site conditions may leave a parking deficiency.

When taking into account the addition of on-street parking and changes in lifestyles focusing more on alternate modes of transportation, the need for additional parking decks may not be necessary in the future, therefore, the need for additional parking should be strongly studied before adding. Even if parking decks are added, they should be designed to accommodate wrapper retail, offices, or housing on the ground floor, so as not to break up the street wall with any blank or inactive building facades.

Potential Parking Deck locations