

# EXISTING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS

## Kishwaukee Street Corridor Revitalization Plan

March 2008



In association with:  
Gary W. Anderson and Associates &  
Valerie S. Kretchmer Associates, Inc.



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## Introduction

The Kishwaukee Street Corridor Revitalization Plan was initiated by the City of Rockford to establish a long-term vision for the future of this central artery through the City, linking Downtown Rockford on the north to the Chicago Rockford International Airport on the south. Along its approximately 4.3 mile length, Kishwaukee Street exhibits a varied character that includes both large scale and small scale industrial uses, retail and commercial service businesses, and multi-family and single family residential areas. Like many streets that traverse older neighborhoods in cities such as Rockford, increasing truck traffic and overall traffic volumes have placed a heavier burden on Kishwaukee Street than it was originally designed to accommodate. The age, scale and condition of structures along the corridor vary widely, and incompatibilities between land uses that have evolved over time are commonplace. In response to increasing traffic and aging infrastructure conditions, changing patterns of retail development that favor newer sites in outlying areas, and the evolving needs of the industrial sector, many properties along Kishwaukee Street are suffering from ongoing disinvestment. While many well maintained properties are present along the corridor, the overall perception of blighted conditions has stifled interest in reinvestment.

The Kishwaukee Street Corridor Revitalization Plan, upon completion, will provide a consensus-based strategy to undertake targeted public investment and foster public-private partnerships that will stabilize and enhance this important corridor. The planned reconstruction of Kishwaukee Street between Harrison and 15th Avenues, to be completed in 2009 by the Illinois Department of Transportation, will serve as a catalyst for positive change in the area. A major investment in enhancing the 10th Avenue Park and the Keith Creek will also be a key driver of positive change along the corridor between 6th Avenue and the freight railroad tracks, and the City is further investing in infrastructure improvements through the Kishwaukee Bridge replacement project and the overhead utility relocation project. Re-establishing the corridor as a vibrant and attractive focus of industrial and commercial activity will have a positive impact on the quality of life in neighboring residential areas, and foster renewed confidence in private sector investment.

## Process Overview

The Plan will be developed as the result of a community planning process, involving local stakeholders and the community at large in discussing creative solutions to stem further decline along Kishwaukee Street and foster a viable and sustainable pattern of development in the future. HNTB Corporation and Valerie Kretchmer Associates, Inc. have been selected to assist the City in this important effort. To date, extensive field surveys and a review of available existing data have been undertaken. In addition, a series of stakeholder interviews was conducted by the consulting team to garner preliminary insights into community concerns and ideas regarding the corridor.

HNTB has prepared this Existing Conditions Report to summarize existing physical conditions and preliminary community input. This report should be reviewed in conjunction with the market assessment report prepared by Valerie Kretchmer Associates (available under separate cover) to gain a complete understanding of current planning influences on the corridor.

Following review of these background materials, the consulting team will facilitate an “empowerment workshop” with City staff and key local stakeholders to establish a shared vision for the future of the Kishwaukee Street corridor. Selected representatives of Chicago-based community development corporations (CDCs) who have achieved success in revitalizing aging industrial corridors in Chicago will be invited to share their experiences and offer suggestions

and feedback regarding the Kishwaukee Street Corridor planning effort. Building upon this direction, more detailed physical planning and policy recommendations will be developed by the consulting team in the next step of the process, including redevelopment concepts for selected sites and structures along the corridor. The planning process will culminate in an implementation-oriented Plan that builds on existing City economic development efforts, seeking to identify opportunities for partnerships to foster a thriving industrial base, diverse retail and service offerings, and stable and attractive nearby residential areas.

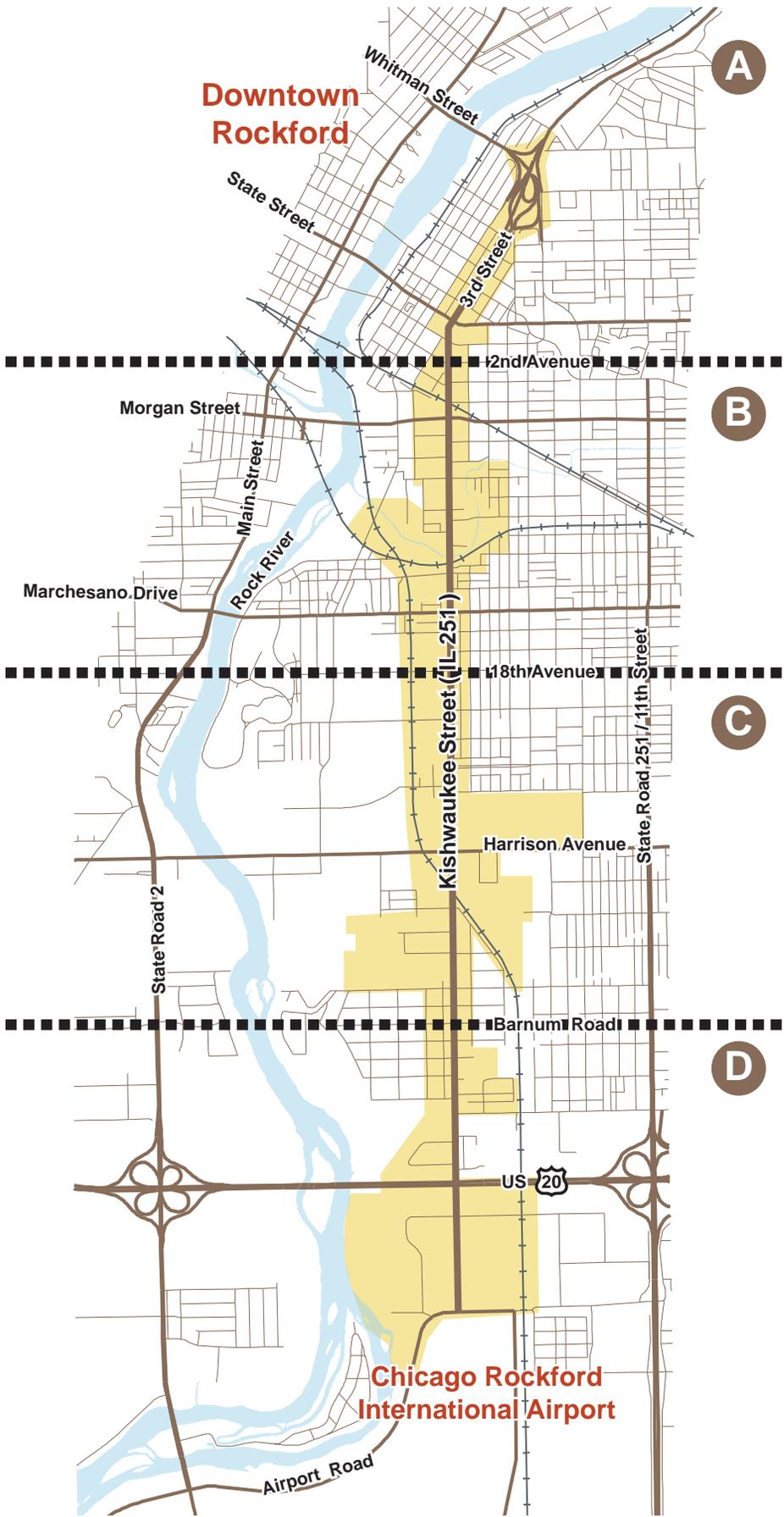
## Organization of the Report

This report provides key findings with regard to physical conditions along the corridor, and summarizes stakeholder input regarding issues and opportunities. Findings and input are summarized in three sections: Existing Land Use and Conditions, Access and Circulation, and Urban Character Districts. The report concludes with a section entitled Assets, Opportunities and Constraints, which highlights broad planning considerations, pending public investments or other catalysts for change, and a preliminary identification of “opportunity areas” for community review and consideration.

Throughout this report, the Kishwaukee Street corridor has been sub-divided into four sections for ease of reference.

- **Section A** extends from Downtown Rockford south to 2nd Avenue.
- **Section B** extends from 2nd Avenue to 18th Avenue.
- **Section C** extends from 18th Avenue to Barnum Road.
- **Section D** extends from Barnum Road to the Chicago Rockford International Airport.

These four sections are delineated on the “Vicinity Map” on the following page. The rationale for dividing the corridor into these four sections is discussed in the Existing Land Use and Conditions section to follow.



### Legend

-  Study Area Boundary
-  Match Line
- A** Section A: Northern boundary of study corridor to 2nd Avenue
- B** Section B: 2nd Avenue to 18th Avenue
- C** Section C: 18th Avenue to Barnum Road
- D** Section D: Barnum Road to Chicago Rockford International Airport

Vicinity Map  
Not to Scale



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## Existing Land Use and Conditions

This section of the report outlines the existing land and conditions for each of the four areas of the corridor. An overview of these areas is provided below, and is followed by maps of each corridor area that graphically depict existing land use and key conditions.

### Area A (Northern boundary of study corridor to 2nd Avenue)

The northern section of the study corridor is comprised of mixed-use, residential, and institutional land uses. The mixed-use buildings are a combination of older and new construction, and are frequently bordered by surface parking lots. A number of churches are adjacent to both residential and commercial uses. Residential usage is limited to 2nd Avenue between Olive and Lafayette Streets and the parcels in the triangle at the intersection of Oak and Kishwaukee Streets. Buildings in this section tend to be in better condition than throughout the remainder of the study corridor, and the landscaping is comparatively better maintained.

Kishwaukee Street operates as a two-way roadway, but changes to a northbound one-way traffic flow as Kishwaukee crosses Walnut Street and becomes 3rd Street. This change in traffic direction marks the approach into Rockford's Central Business District. Walnut Street operates as an eastbound one-way street, which turn into 1st Avenue as it crosses Kishwaukee Street.

### Relevant Community Input

- Residents in the area have expressed concerns that the pair of one-way streets that operate north of Walnut Street (2nd Street is southbound and 3rd Street is northbound) and the limited east- and southbound access provided by Walnut and Madison Streets negatively affect the residences, retail stores, and restaurants in this area. They believe that two-way streets are “better for business.”

### Area B (2nd Avenue to 18th Avenue)

This section of the corridor is comprised of predominately residential and commercial uses, with a limited number of industrial parcels. Haight Village, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Districts, is an established, stable residential area of well-maintained single-family homes stretching northwest from the intersection of Grove and Kishwaukee Streets. Residential uses continue south along Kishwaukee Street, occasionally interrupted by commercial or institutional uses, until 10th Avenue and Lewis Street. These residential uses are a mixture of single-family homes and former single-family homes that have been converted to multi-family units. The quality of the structures varies from well-maintained to abandoned and boarded up. On the block between 10th Avenue and Sand Street, the City has acquired and demolished several residences to enable the expansion of 10th Avenue Park and facilitate the implementation of the Keith Creek Greenway Plan. South of Lewis Street, residential uses are replaced by a scrap metal yard, which is partially blocked from view by a segmented concrete fence.

As Kishwaukee crosses the railroad tracks at Lorden Court, the corridor becomes a mixture of both abandoned and new commercial and industrial uses. A number of national commercial chain establishments, including McDonald's and Subway restaurants and Walgreen's Pharmacy, operate within two blocks of Broadway in each direction. Surrounding this newer construction, however, are a number of abandoned commercial structures and vacant lots. Generally these are small, single-story structures that are boarded up and located in overgrown and cracked asphalt surface parking lots. The east side of Kishwaukee between 16th and 18th Avenues has single- and multi-family residential structures that are in good condition, while the western side of the street is a mixture of residential and commercial uses and surface parking lots.

### Relevant Community Input

- One area business owner has bought a number of houses ranging from \$30,000 to \$70,000 in this section of the corridor. While some of these homes were occupied when he purchased them, he ended up razing them because they “weren't worth renting out.”
- The City's retail priorities are not along the Kishwaukee Corridor: 11th Street, Broadway, and the downtown area are higher priorities. The availability of vacant sites at these higher priority locations makes new retail construction along Kishwaukee Street challenging.

### Area C (18th Avenue to Barnum Road)

This section of the corridor transitions from industrial and residential uses at the northern end to a mixture of residential, commercial and industrial uses between Barnum and Barry Roads. This section of Kishwaukee Street is currently undergoing

reconstruction activity by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), which will expand the roadway. Construction plans require the acquisition of several feet of right-of-way on each side of the existing road, which will have a significant impact on the residential structures, some of which will need to have their front porches removed.

Existing industrial structures range from new construction that is well-maintained to turn-of-the-century factory buildings and warehouses that are not currently occupied. The center portion of this section, from 21st Avenue to South Avenue, has the highest concentration of industrial uses and includes a number of vacant parcels. Residential structures at the northern end of the section include both older, single-family housing stock and newer, multi-family buildings. A new senior citizen housing development was constructed on the east side of Kishwaukee between 20th and 21st Avenues, and is one of the highest density residential developments in the study corridor. This southern section of the corridor includes Orton Keyes, a Rockford Housing Authority-owned property. The area immediately surrounding this development is the largest concentration of maintained open space within the study corridor. The southern end of the corridor contains a low-density mixture of residential, commercial and industrial uses. As is typical throughout the corridor, the quality of structures varies from well-maintained to abandoned.

### Relevant Community Input

- The Kishwaukee-Harrison redevelopment area should be kept industrial, and, over time, buildings should be demolished and/or rehabbed for continued industrial use. The City should annex more land for a very large industrial park.

### Area D (Barnum Road to Chicago Rockford International Airport)

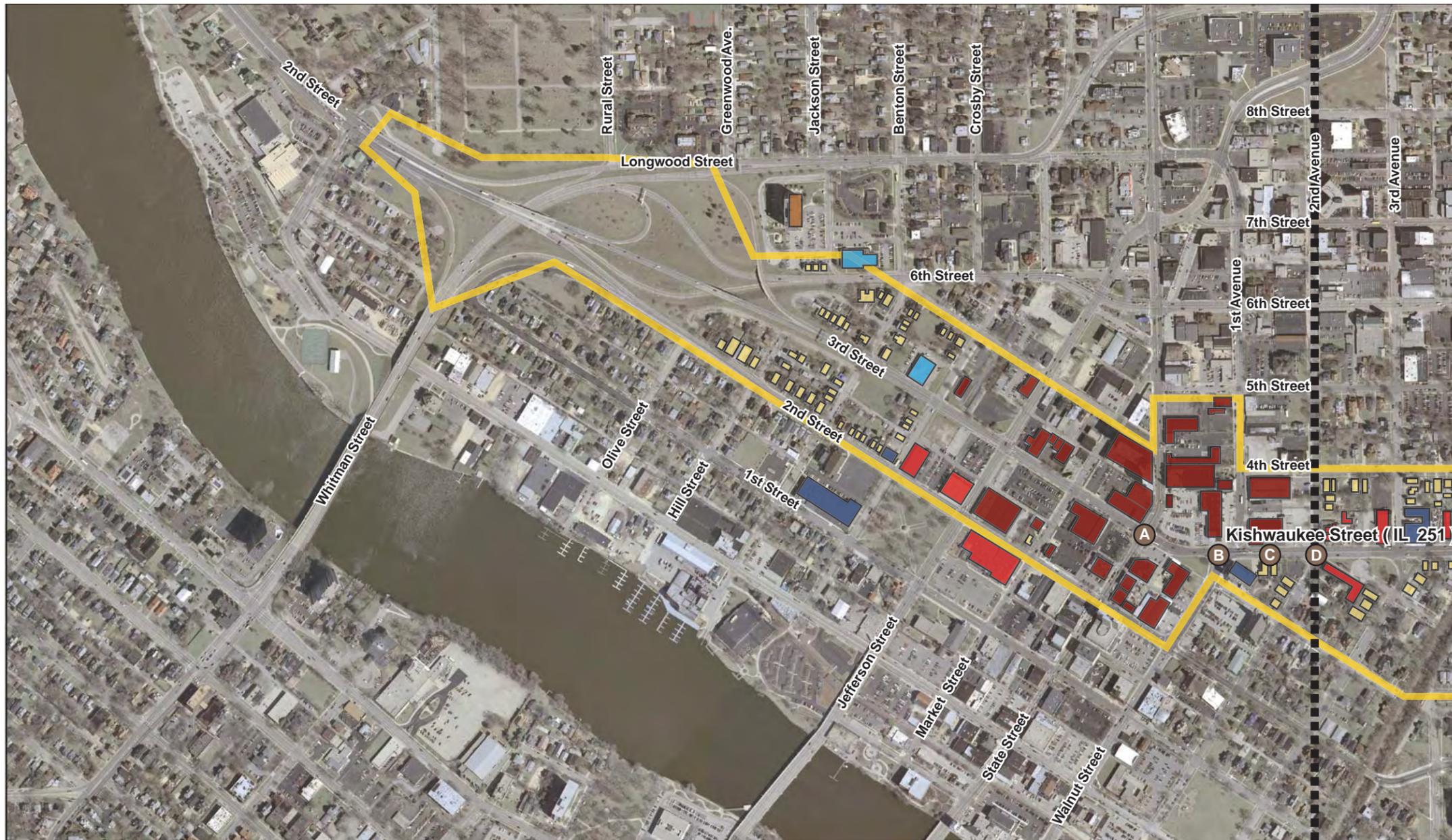
The northern edge of this corridor continues the mixed residential and commercial usage patterns of the southern end of Area C. South of Sandy Hollow Road, however, the corridor becomes exclusively industrial, with the exception of the Riverdahl School and one commercial operation. This section contains the largest concentration of new construction and is the best-maintained area of the corridor. The southern border of this section, and the entire study corridor, is the Chicago Rockford International Airport. The value accrued through proximity to this valuable transportation and economic development asset has encouraged the adjacent property owners to adhere to a comparatively higher standard of property maintenance. The advantages of this location have also attracted larger users that have developed campus-like facilities on larger parcels.

### Relevant Community Input

- The airport owns 3,000 acres of land, which provides ample opportunity to expand. The airport is also particularly interested in development along Routes 20 and 251: the oversized / overweight capacity of Route 251 and development opportunities along Route 20 present the prospect of leveraging aviation-related or other compatible land use patterns in the area.
- There are many industrial uses in this section of the corridor, but they are not compatible with adjacent residential uses. There is a need for “shovel-ready” sites and strong utility connections. There is a definite theme of metal-based firms in the corridor, although smaller logistics industries and modern manufacturing facilities may also be a good fit.

## Stakeholder Feedback

- Residential rental property has not held its value
- New residential construction costs more than it can be sold for on the market
- Existing senior housing facilities are adequate
- There is a need more quality housing
- The real estate market is decentralized: property owners are not aware when adjacent properties are for sale
- Environmental remediation of formerly industrial lands is required

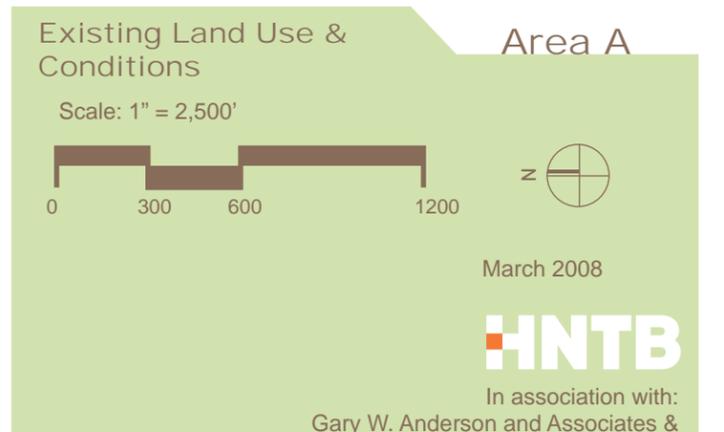
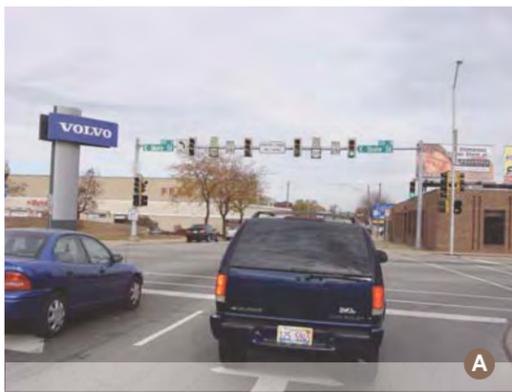


Legend

- Single Family
- Multi-Family
- Commercial
- Mixed Use
- Office
- Public / Institution
- Industrial
- Match Line
- Study Area Boundary

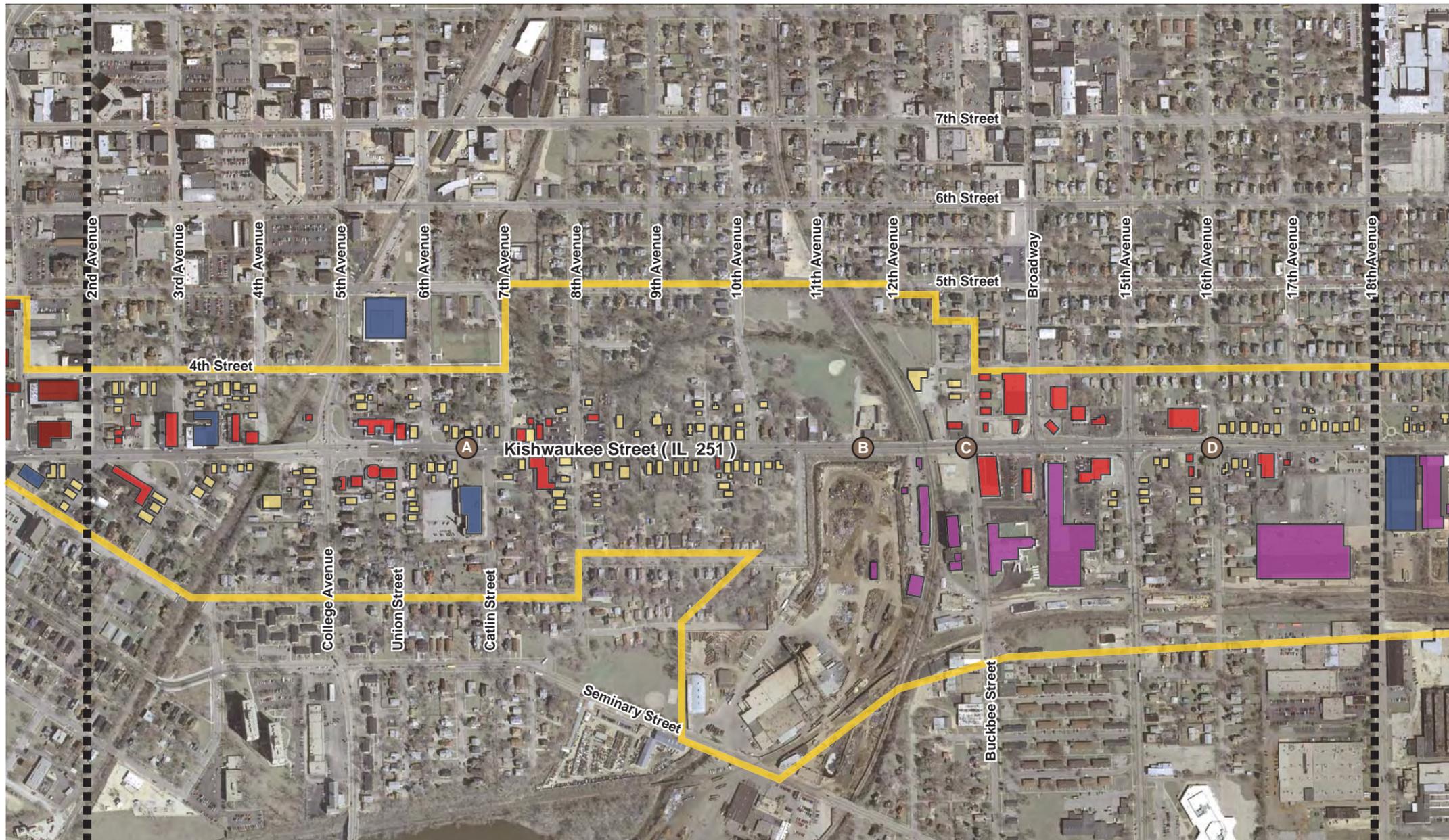
Picture Key:

- A** Intersection of Kishwaukee and East State Streets: One-way northbound traffic flow.
- B** Northwest corner of Kishwaukee and Walnut Streets: Older structures in good condition with a pocket park and well-maintained landscaping.
- C** Kishwaukee Street between Walnut and Oak Streets looking west: Adjacent institutional and residential uses.
- D** Northeast corner of Kishwaukee Street and 2nd Avenue: Representative commercial/mixed-use with surface parking and perimeter landscaping.



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Legend

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Picture Key:

- East side of Kishwaukee Street between 6th and 7th Avenues: Representative residential mix of single- and multi-family structures.
- A**
- West side of Kishwaukee Street between Lewis and Buckbee Streets: Concrete fencing surrounding scrap metal yard and bridge over Keith Creek.
- B**
- East side of Kishwaukee Street between Buckbee Street and Broadway: Abandoned commercial structure surrounded by deteriorated surface parking lot.
- C**
- East side of Kishwaukee Street at 16th Avenue: Newer commercial construction adjacent to older residential structures.
- D**



A



B



C

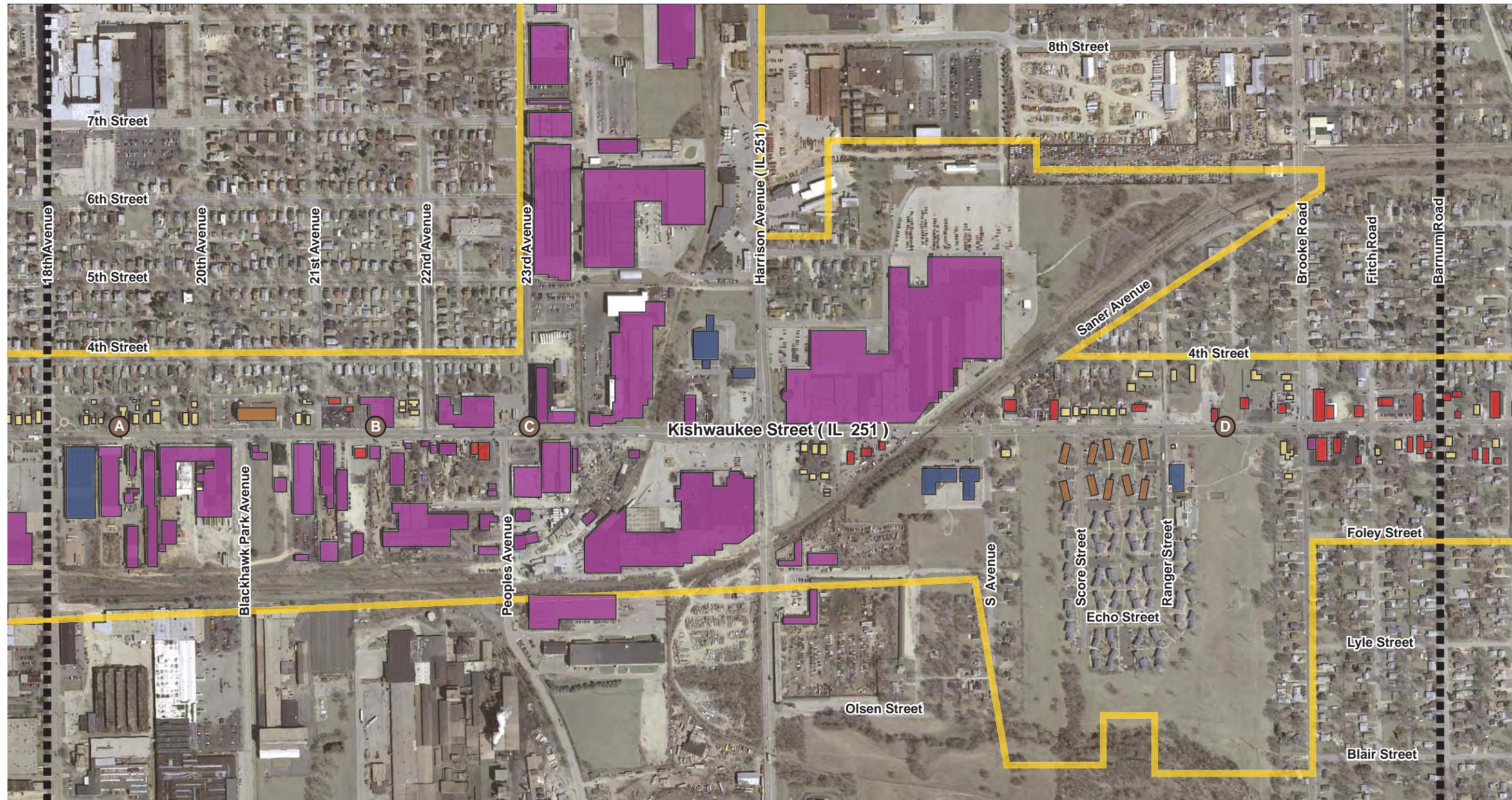


D



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Picture Key:

- A** East side of Kishwaukee Street between 18th and 20th Avenues: Representative residential uses.
- B** West side of Kishwaukee Street between 21st and 22nd Avenue: Typical commercial / industrial use.
- C** East side of Kishwaukee Street at the corner of 23rd Avenue: Abandoned former furniture manufacturer.
- D** East side of Kishwaukee Street between Ranger Street and Brooke Road: Representative auto sales commercial use.



A



B



C



D

Existing Land Use & Conditions

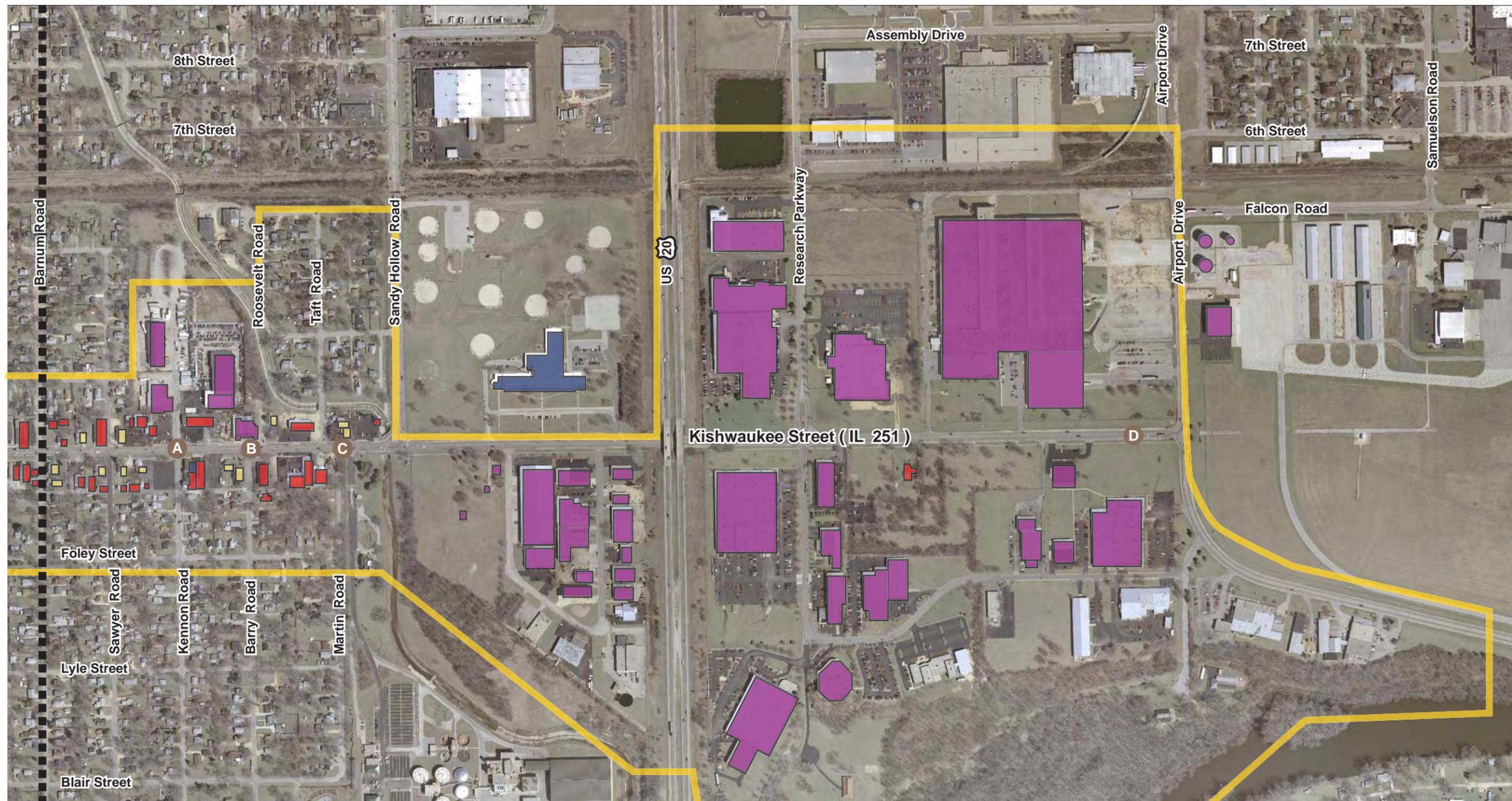
Scale: 1" = 2,500'

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Legend

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Picture Key:

- A** Northeast corner of Kishwaukee Street and Kennon Road: Representative auto sales commercial use.
- B** Southwest corner of Kishwaukee Street and Barry Road: Commercial use with no signage and unimproved parking area.
- C** Northwest corner of Kishwaukee Street and Martin Road: Residential use abutting commercial uses.
- D** West side of Kishwaukee Street between Airport Drive and Boeing Drive: Representative newer industrial/office use.



A



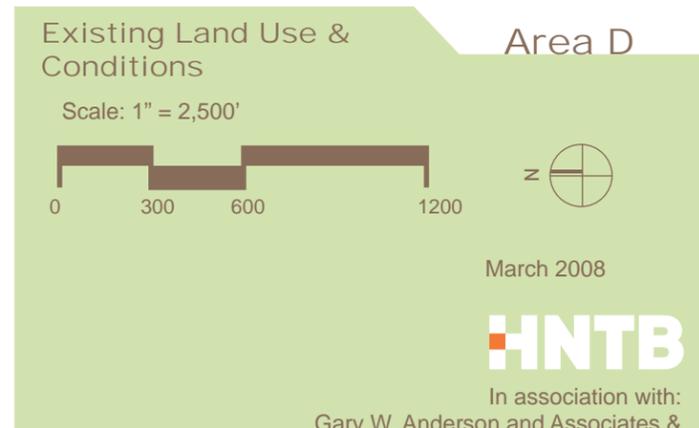
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