



Iowa City Central District Plan

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

ADOPTED OCTOBER 21, 2008

Central District Plan

City of Iowa City, Iowa

2008

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Introduction

The Central District is one of ten planning districts in Iowa City. As elements of the Comprehensive Plan, district plans are intended to promote patterns of land use, urban design, infrastructure, and services that encourage and contribute to the livability of Iowa City and its neighborhoods. These plans are advisory documents for directing and managing change over time and serve to guide decision-making, public deliberation, and investment.

The Central District Plan establishes planning principles, goals and objectives that relate specifically to the history and existing conditions of the Central District. The plan addresses issues of housing and quality of life, transportation, commercial development, and parks, trails and open space.

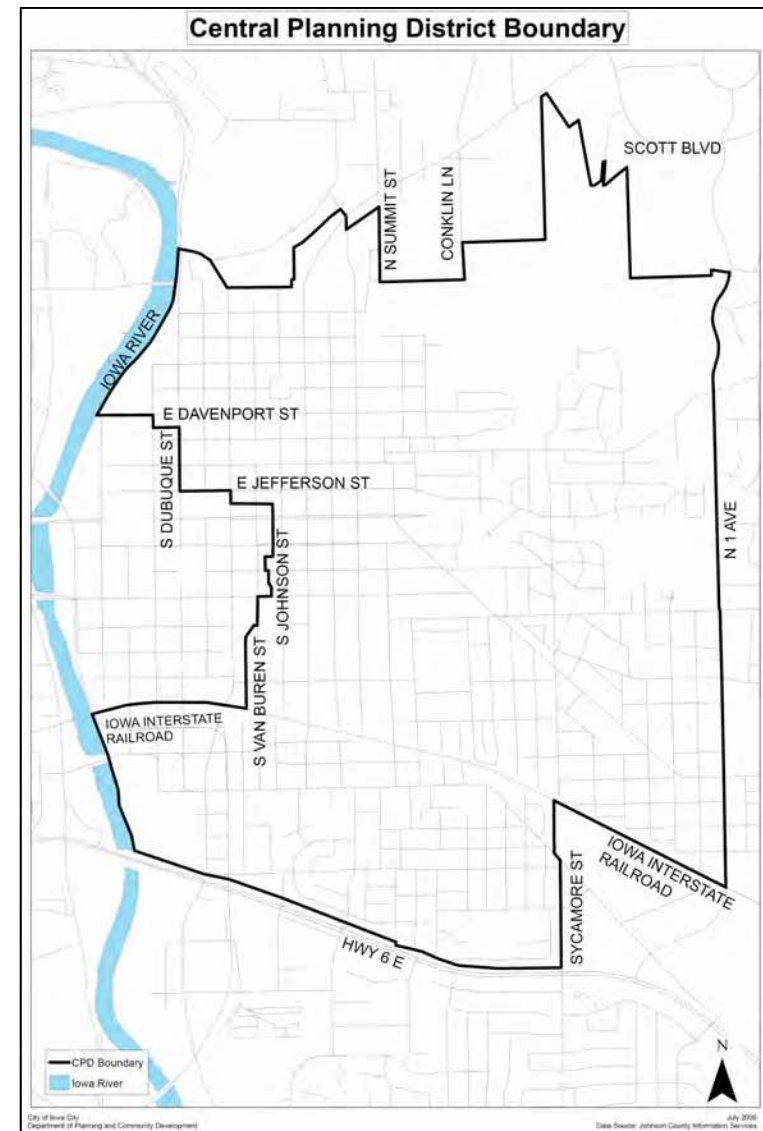
Public Participation

Public input is vital to any comprehensive planning effort. Residents, property owners, area businesses, community organizations, public service agencies, and other interested citizens helped formulate the goals and objectives for the Central District Plan through their participation in a series of community planning workshops and public forums.

To initiate the process a community workshop was held at City High School in October of 2006 to gather information on what makes the Central District attractive and livable as well as what is most challenging about living, working, or doing business here. Workshop participants discussed how to build on the assets of the area and brainstormed solutions to problems. To create a comfortable forum for discussion, workshop participants were divided into small groups. Each of these groups discussed topics ranging from housing and neighborhood livability to streets, transportation and parks. Those who were interested in discussing topics in more detail were encouraged to attend a series of smaller focus group discussions held at City Hall and the Public Library. The six focus group sessions were well-attended and discussion was lively. Topics included:

- Housing and Quality of Life
- Streets and Transportation
- Parks, Trails and Open Space
- Northside Marketplace (2 sessions)
- South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor

From these workshops and community forums, common themes emerged, and a final community-wide workshop in October 2007 drew together the vision, goals, and objectives for the Central District Plan.



The Central Planning District excludes Downtown, which forms its own planning district, but otherwise extends from the Iowa River east to First Avenue. The district's northern boundary follows the northern boundary of Hickory Hill Park and portions of N. Dodge Street. It is bounded on the south by Highway 6, but excludes the commercial and industrial areas near the Sycamore Mall.



Residents, property owners, area businesses, community organizations, public service agencies, and other interested citizens participated in a series of eight community planning workshops and public forums that took place over the course of twelve months.

Plan Implementation

The Central District Plan will be used as a general guide to future development or redevelopment within the district and for preserving valuable assets already present within established neighborhoods. It will take the efforts of City officials, area residents, businesses, and community organizations to achieve the goals and objectives in the plan. Planning staff, the Planning and Zoning Commission, the Board of Adjustment, and the City Council will use the plan as a guide when reviewing development and rezoning requests. It will serve as a tool for neighborhood groups, community organizations, and other interested parties to advocate for improvements and form partnerships to make elements of the plan a reality. The City will refer to the plan when setting funding priorities for public projects, improvements to existing infrastructure, and public services. Property owners, business owners, and developers who are thinking of investing in the Central District will find the plan useful as a framework for their plans. The plan will also serve as a benchmark over time and continued input from the public will ensure that the plan works equitably and reliably.

Iowa City Comprehensive Plan

Any effective planning effort must be grounded in reality—it must take into account the existing local conditions and any community-wide goals and policies that have already been agreed upon. The Iowa City Comprehensive Plan adopted in 1997 presents a vision for Iowa City, provides strategies for realizing that vision, and sets policies for the development and growth of the City. While each district plan addresses the unique characteristics of a specific area of the City, it must also meet the goals and policies adopted as a part of the larger Comprehensive Plan.

Following is a set of general principles from the Comprehensive Plan for maintaining and building healthy neighborhoods. Most of the neighborhoods within the Central District have been built according to these principles. New development or redevelopment should adhere to these principles as well.

Preserve Historic Resources and Reinvest in Older Neighborhoods - Adopting strategies to assure the stability and livability of Iowa City's older neighborhoods helps to preserve the culture, history, and identity of Iowa City. Investing in the neighborhoods that are closest to the University and other major employers in the city provides options for people to live close to work, school and shopping, promotes walking and bicycling, and reduces vehicle miles traveled. In addition, older neighborhoods contain many affordable housing options where City services and infrastructure are already in place.

Diversity of Housing Types - A mix of housing types within a neighborhood provides residential opportunities for a variety of people, including singles, couples, young families, large families, and

elderly persons. When diverse housing sizes and types are well-dispersed throughout the community, it becomes easier for people to live in the same neighborhood through a variety of life stages. A rich mix of housing within a neighborhood may include single-family homes on small lots, townhouses, duplexes, small apartment buildings, and zero-lot-line housing as well as large-lot, single-family residential development.

Affordable Housing – By allowing for a mix of housing types, moderately priced housing can be incorporated into a neighborhood, not segregated in one or two areas of the community. Small multi-family buildings can be incorporated on corner lots adjacent to arterial streets, and townhouses and duplex units can be mixed with single-family homes within a neighborhood. Apartments located above commercial businesses provide needed housing while increasing the revenue stream for commercial establishments.

Neighborhood Commercial Areas – Neighborhood commercial areas can provide a focal point and gathering place for a neighborhood. The businesses within a neighborhood commercial center should provide shopping opportunities within convenient walking distance for the residents in the immediate area. The design of the neighborhood commercial center should have a pedestrian orientation with the stores placed close to the street, but with sufficient open space to allow for outdoor cafes and patios or landscaping. Parking should be located to the rear and sides of stores with additional parking on the street. Incorporating apartments above shops and public open space may foster additional activity and vitality in a neighborhood commercial area.

Interconnected Street System - Grid street systems help to reduce congestion by dispersing traffic, since there are multiple routes to get from point A to point B. In addition, by providing more direct routes, interconnected streets can reduce the vehicle miles traveled each day within a neighborhood, provide more direct walking routes to neighborhood destinations, and reduce the cost of providing City services.

Streets as More than Pavement - Streets and the adjacent parkways and sidewalks can be enhanced and planned to encourage pedestrian activity. Street trees, benches, sidewalks, and attractive lighting along the street help create pleasant and safe public spaces for walking to neighborhood destinations and for socializing with neighbors. Streetscape amenities help give a sense of distinction, identity, and security within a neighborhood. Narrower street pavement widths slow traffic, reduce infrastructure costs, and allow for a more complete tree canopy over the street.

Reduced Front Yard Setbacks - Reduced setbacks allow homes to be placed closer to the street, which provides for more back yard space and room for garages and utilities if there is also an alley located behind the home. Reduced setbacks, combined with narrower street pavements, create a more intimate pedestrian-scaled public space along the street, which encourages walking and socializing.



The Comprehensive Plan encourages a mix of housing to provide opportunities for a variety of people at various stages of life to live within a neighborhood. Recent changes to design standards for multi-family housing and duplexes help to ensure that a mix of housing can fit into any neighborhood.



Many of the planning principles included in the Comprehensive Plan are characteristics exemplified in Iowa City's older neighborhoods. For example, the interconnected street system, sidewalks, narrow frontages, use of alleys, and diversity of housing type and affordability may all be found in the Longfellow District.

Narrower Lot Frontages - More compact development consumes less land and makes it possible to provide public improvements, such as streets, sewers and water lines more efficiently. This factor combined with building on smaller lots allows the construction of more moderately priced housing.

Use of Alleys - In neighborhoods with narrower lot frontages, providing an opportunity for parking off an alley is particularly advantageous. An alley or private rear lane allows utilities and the garage or parking area to be located behind the home, making it possible to achieve an appealing and pedestrian-friendly residential street even with the narrowest of home lots. Without the need for driveways and curb cuts along the street, there is more room for front yard landscaping, fewer interruptions to the sidewalk network, and more on-street parking available for visitors. In addition, when garages are accessed from alleys vehicular traffic and congestion on residential streets is reduced.

Pedestrian/Bikeway Connections - Important neighborhood destinations, such as parks, schools, bus stops, and neighborhood shopping centers should be accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists. A pleasant streetscape, continuous sidewalk system, and strategically located trails and bicycle routes make walking and biking easy and comfortable for neighborhood residents. Pedestrian and bike paths that intersect with key neighborhood destinations can be aligned along a grid street system, located along drainageways and constructed within major sanitary sewer easements.

Parks, Trails and Open Space - Ideally, neighborhood parks are small, three to seven acre open spaces that provide a focal point for informal gatherings and recreation within easy walking distance from homes in a neighborhood. Neighborhood parks are often located in the middle of a residential area, or situated adjacent to a school or a neighborhood shopping center. Neighborhood parks should be designed as an integral part of an interconnected system of open space. Ideally, trails or wide sidewalks should connect neighborhood parks with larger community and regional parks.

Preservation of sensitive areas, such as wetlands, woodlands, and stream corridors and their buffers, provides an opportunity to shape and enhance a neighborhood, while maintaining scenic and natural resources and wildlife habitat. Wherever possible, natural features, such as waterways, knolls and woodlands, should be incorporated as key amenities within parks and along trail systems.

History of Central Iowa City

The Central Planning District is the city's oldest and most diverse district. Much of the district, including the Northside, parts of Goosetown, College Hill, and College Green were included in the Original Town Plat of 1839.

The Original Town Plat included 100 square blocks measuring 320 feet by 320 feet. These blocks were divided into lots measuring 80 feet by 150 feet and most were served by alleys that ran east to west through the center. Space was set aside for public markets, such as North Market Square, and for parks, such as College Green. Though locations were also reserved for churches on Church Street, none were ever built on the street. Iowa Avenue was platted as a wide boulevard with the Capitol Square on the west and Governors Square on the east end. However, the State Capitol moved to Des Moines prior to the construction of the Governor's house.

The original 80-foot lot width was generous enough that many lots were later divided into two 40-foot wide lots. Many of the corner lots were divided so that houses were built to face east and west as well as north and south. This early increase housing density was a foreshadowing of the development that has occurred since the 1960's to house the growing student population attracted by the University.

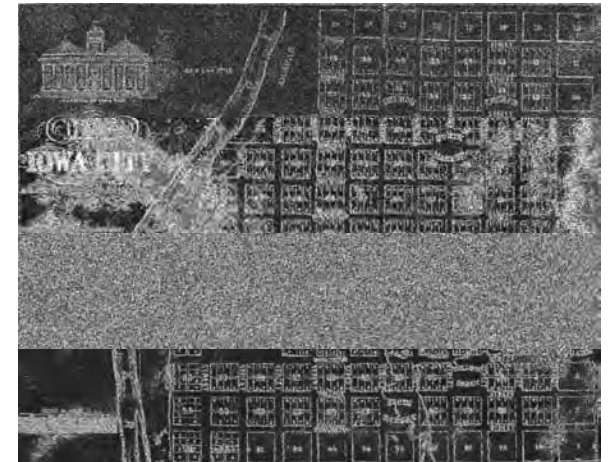
Early Growth

Early additions to the city included a number of small subdivisions located south of Court and east of Summit Street. Initial growth within the Original Town and its early additions was slow, as most building occurred Downtown near the Capitol building, and later the University. There was scattered residential development in parts of Northside and Goosetown from the 1840's through the 1850's. Stone and wood frame buildings, such as the native sandstone cottage at 614 North Johnson Street, exemplify the early settlers' use of local materials including stone, wood and brick produced from locally mined clay. Constructed around 1840, this is one of the oldest standing buildings in Iowa City.

The complete development of lots within the Original Town Plat took several decades, with building occurring in spurts that coincided with major historical events such as the railroad reaching the city in 1856 (population grew 102.9% between 1854 and 1860), the end of the Civil War (population grew 43.7% between 1863 and 1869), a wave of immigrants from Germany and Bohemia (population grew 17.2% in the late 1870's), and in the 1920's as University enrollment increased. This pattern of periodic development booms is reflected in the many styles of historic architecture evident throughout the Central Planning District, including Greek Revival, Italianate, Queen Anne, Mission, Tudor Revival, Bungalow, and American Foursquare.



Constructed in the 1850s, this sandstone cottage at 614 North Johnson Street is one of Iowa City's oldest buildings.



Much of the Central Planning District, including the Northside, parts of Goosetown, College Hill, and College Green were included in the Original Town Plat of 1839.



Neighborhoods in the Central Planning District span the entire history of Iowa City's residential development, from the historic neighborhoods surrounding the Downtown to the ranch-style housing of the Post-war 1950s and 1960s to the curvilinear streets and spacious lots of more contemporary neighborhoods built after the 1970's .

Growth After 1900

By 1900, Iowa City's residential neighborhoods fanned out from the University campus and downtown past the boundaries of the Original Town Plat. East Iowa City, located generally east of Seventh Avenue and south of Court Street, was platted in 1898 by W.F. Main who planned the area as a factory town. He built his jewelry factory adjacent to the railway located at the southern boundary of East Iowa City and his personal mansion on Friendship Street. The jewelry manufacturer went bankrupt, and the area, which was only sparsely developed when annexed into Iowa City around the time of World War I, eventually became the Creekside Neighborhood. The neighborhood is characterized by a variety of small houses on fairly large lots (generally 80 feet wide by 150 feet deep), creating an open spacious feeling when compared to other older Iowa City neighborhoods.

In 1908, the construction of the city's first streetcar line, the Rundell line, led to rapid residential development in much of the Longfellow Neighborhood, which at the time was on the far southeast side of Iowa City. The construction of Longfellow School in 1917 and expanding enrollment at the University spurred further development. The population of the old 5th Ward, which included the present Longfellow Neighborhood, doubled between 1920 and 1930. The pattern of development differed from other areas of the city in that blocks were much longer and lots sizes were smaller (generally 60 feet wide by 125 feet deep). Much of the housing constructed in this era was built for the middle and working classes and thus tended to be more modest than the housing built for the merchant and professional classes along Summit Street, College Hill, and parts of the Northside. Around this same time apartment buildings, such as the Summit Street Apartments (1914) and Woodlawn at 20 Evans Street (1926), were built to meet the demand for non-student luxury apartments.

Aesthetics of housing changed as well. The fanciful and asymmetric Victorian era designs gave way to simple, functional floor plans. Popular styles included Bungalow, Arts and Crafts, Four-square and Period Revival such as Colonial and Tudor. In addition, a large number of unique European cottage-style houses were built throughout the Longfellow and Kirkwood Place Additions (Yewell and Pickard Streets) by Howard Moffitt, a colorful local builder known for his use of salvaged building materials. Instead of carriage houses and barns, the new houses were built with garages to accommodate widespread automobile ownership. Early garages were generally small and accessed from an alley at the back of the lot.

Newer Developments

In addition to these historic areas, the Central District includes neighborhoods that were platted and developed after 1950, such as the Plum Grove, Highland, and Mark Twain Additions, located south of Kirkwood Avenue; and the Bel Air Additions, located south of Rochester Avenue. The most recently developed neighborhoods in the district include the Windsor Heights and Hickory Hill

Ridge subdivisions located adjacent to Hickory Hill Park, which were built after 1970. These late 20th century neighborhoods have a different development pattern than those established during the first 100 years of the city's history. Rather than a grid street pattern with alleys, these newer neighborhoods often have curvilinear streets with driveways entering directly onto the street. Lots are generally larger than those found in older neighborhoods. Single story ranch style houses were popular in these neighborhoods through the 1970's when two story houses again became a common house style.

City High

When it was built on the far eastern edge of the city in 1939, City High drew criticism from some residents for being too far from the student population. But within a few decades residential growth surrounded the school and began to spread to the east side of First Avenue beyond the Central Planning District. Just to the west of City High, property that had been the Johnson County Fairgrounds until the 1920s was subdivided into small residential lots. Part of the fairgrounds race track was used for the construction of Wilson Street and Morningside Drive.

University Influence

Prior to 1900, University enrollment was relatively small compared to the city's population, and students lived in boarding houses or rented rooms in family homes close to the campus. Rapid growth in University enrollment during the first decades of the 20th century spurred the development of student housing, and several fraternity and sorority houses were built along Dubuque Street and in the College Hill neighborhood. The University attempted to address the housing shortage by building Currier Hall (1912-13) for female students and the Quadrangle (1919-20) for male students. However, African American students were excluded from the dormitories until 1946, so private homes and rooming houses continued to be their only option. The house at 914 S. Dubuque Street still stands as a reminder of this era. In 1940, Elizabeth "Bettye" and Junious Tate purchased the home and began operating it as the "Tate Arms," a rooming house for African American students. Other African American families boarded black students, but the Tate Arms was the largest and most formal in its operations. Bettye Tate operated the rooming house until 1963 and continued to live in the home until 1978.

Over the first half of the 20th century the University built several additional dormitories with the last, Rienow Hall, being completed in 1968. Enrollment continued to grow during the 1970's. The private housing market responded to the demand resulting in the construction of apartment buildings and the conversion of houses to multi-unit buildings in neighborhoods where single-family housing had originally predominated.



Built in 1939, Iowa City High is located along the far eastern border of the district.



Demand for student rental housing has changed the density and character of many neighborhoods surrounding the Downtown.



Buildings that one served as neighborhood groceries have been readapted for other commercial uses.



The Anton Geiger House at 213 East Market Street is a significant historic structure from Iowa City's brewery era.

Commercial Development

Prior to 1950, most commercial development occurred downtown where residents from the entire city were able to purchase a wide variety of goods and services. Commercial development within the Central District included a number of small grocery stores situated within residential neighborhoods. Most of these "mom and pop" stores were located on corner lots and catered to nearby residents. As ownership of automobiles became more widespread, larger "supermarkets" became popular and located on the edges of the district along arterial streets. A few of the buildings that housed small grocers still remain and continue to function as commercial businesses. Examples include the Design Ranch on Dodge Street, the former Seaton's Meat Market and Watt's grocery store on Muscatine Avenue, which are now antique stores, and the Deluxe Bakery located on Summit Street.

South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor

From the early days of the city, factories, including a flour mill, linseed oil works, glass works, and foundry and machine shops, were located south of downtown along South Gilbert Street. The construction of the railroad yards and train depot near Ralston Creek in the 1870's reinforced the primarily industrial character of the area. As the city grew southward, the land between the Iowa River and Highland Court all the way to the new location of Highway 6 developed into a large industrial zone. As industries grew, they relocated to other parts of the city where larger lots were available, and the area evolved into a commercial corridor.

Northside Marketplace

The Northside Marketplace is one of Iowa City's most historic areas, reflecting early commercial practices and the influence of immigrant settlement. At the height of local brewing in America, from the 1850's through the 1870's, it was the center of the beer-brewing industry in Iowa City. There were at least four local breweries operating, and while only the Union Brewery Building at 127-131 N. Linn Street remains extant, several historic buildings associated with the brewing industry remain.

Common to the practice of the Northside commercial area, proprietors built homes near their businesses. The Conrad and Anna Graf House at 319 East Bloomington Street was erected by Conrad Graf half a block east and one block north of the Union Brewery. The Anton Geiger House at 213 East Market Street, which is currently owned by the Wesley Foundation, was the home of Anton Geiger, who was a partner with Simeon Hotz in the Union Brewery located to the immediate east. Joseph Hervert, saloon keeper, built his house at 204 North Gilbert in 1892 next to his saloon at 402 East Market Street (the Fox Head).

Zoning History

The City first enacted zoning in 1925. The early zoning for most of the district was for single-family residential development, with industrial development located in the Gilbert Street corridor and along the railroad.

In the early 1960's, the City drafted a new comprehensive plan with help from an out-of-town consulting firm, which advised the City to up-zone many of the close-in neighborhoods to encourage redevelopment with higher densities and modern buildings.

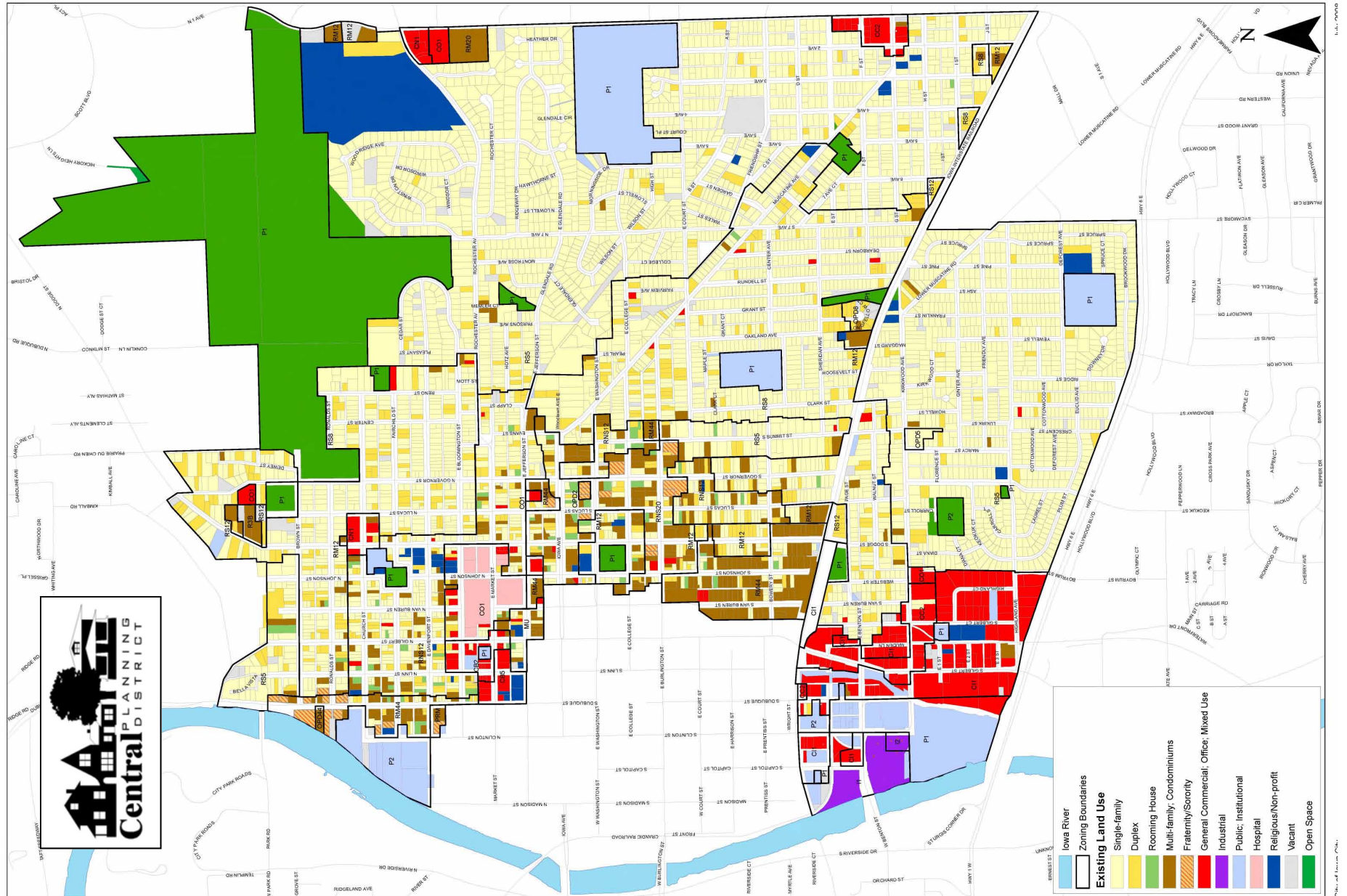
In response to the resulting up-zonings, rising University enrollment, and a University policy to build no new dormitories, widespread redevelopment of older neighborhoods began to take place in the 1970's in the form of the "mansard-plexes" (generally 12-unit apartment buildings that were nicknamed for the simplified mansard roofs). In addition, the higher densities allowed in the new zones permitted the large single-family homes typical of the area to be split into apartments and rooming houses. Given that the older neighborhoods were built with streets, yards, and parking to support single-family homes, the increasing densities put a strain on the neighborhood infrastructure. Back yards were turned into parking lots, on-street parking became more congested, and apartment buildings were constructed that were out of character with the neighborhood. Many residents objected to the unchecked transformation in neighborhood character and petitioned the City to down-zone areas to preserve the single-family residential character that remained. In response, the City Council down-zoned some of the City's older neighborhoods by adopting two new zoning designations, beginning with the RNC-20 zone adopted in 1983 and followed by the RNC-12 zone in 1992.* These new zones acknowledged the mix of uses that had already resulted from the rezonings of the 1960s while preserving the character of the older neighborhoods by preventing further densification. In addition, the Central District Multi-family Residential Design Standards, adopted in 2000, ensure that new multi-family structures built in the Central District are compatible with the surrounding neighborhood. The City has also been successful in protecting historic resources in the Central District through the adoption of historic district and conservation district overlay zones, and by bestowing historic landmark status on the area's most significant buildings and properties.



The designation of historic districts and guidelines has led to the preservation and rehabilitation of many buildings in the district. This was particularly true in the aftermath of the tornado in 2006.

* In 2005, the names of these zones were changed from Neighborhood Conservation Residential (RNC-12 and RNC-20) to Neighborhood Stabilization Residential (RNS-12 and RNS-20) to prevent confusion between these zones and the historic conservation overlay zones.

Central Planning District: Existing Land Use Map (2008)



Housing and Quality of Life

Existing Conditions

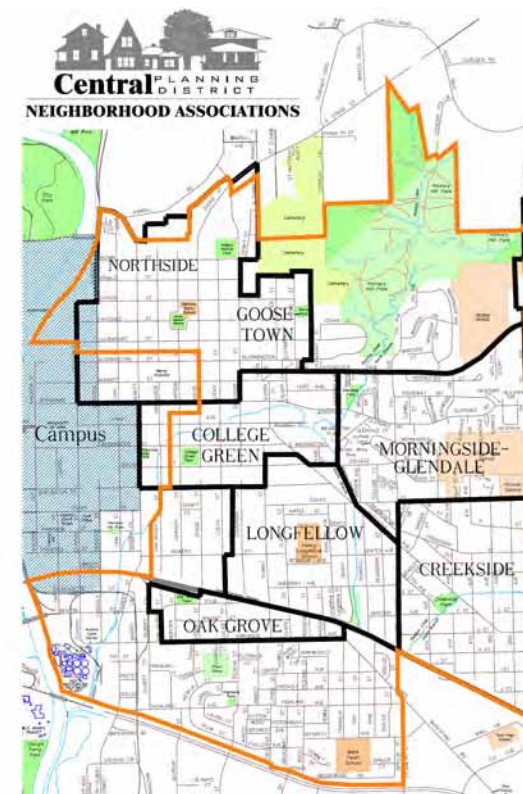
People value the neighborhoods within the Central District for the variety, charm, and affordability of the homes, the tree-lined streets, quality schools, and easy access to the University and employment centers. Neighborhoods within the district are fairly compact, with schools, commercial areas, and churches integrated into residential areas or within walking distance of the majority of homes. The grid-like street pattern of short connected blocks makes it easy for area residents to walk to school and work. Many parents feel comfortable allowing children to walk or bike to school. Horace Mann, Longfellow, Hoover, and Mark Twain elementary schools are all located within the district, with City High, Southeast Junior High, and Regina Schools situated along the edges of the Central District.

Much of the older housing stock still exists within the Central District. To preserve historic areas, the City has adopted a number of Historic and Conservation Districts and designated the most significant properties as historic landmarks. When property owners wish to make modifications to the exterior of buildings in these areas, they must adhere to guidelines that ensure that the historic character is not compromised.

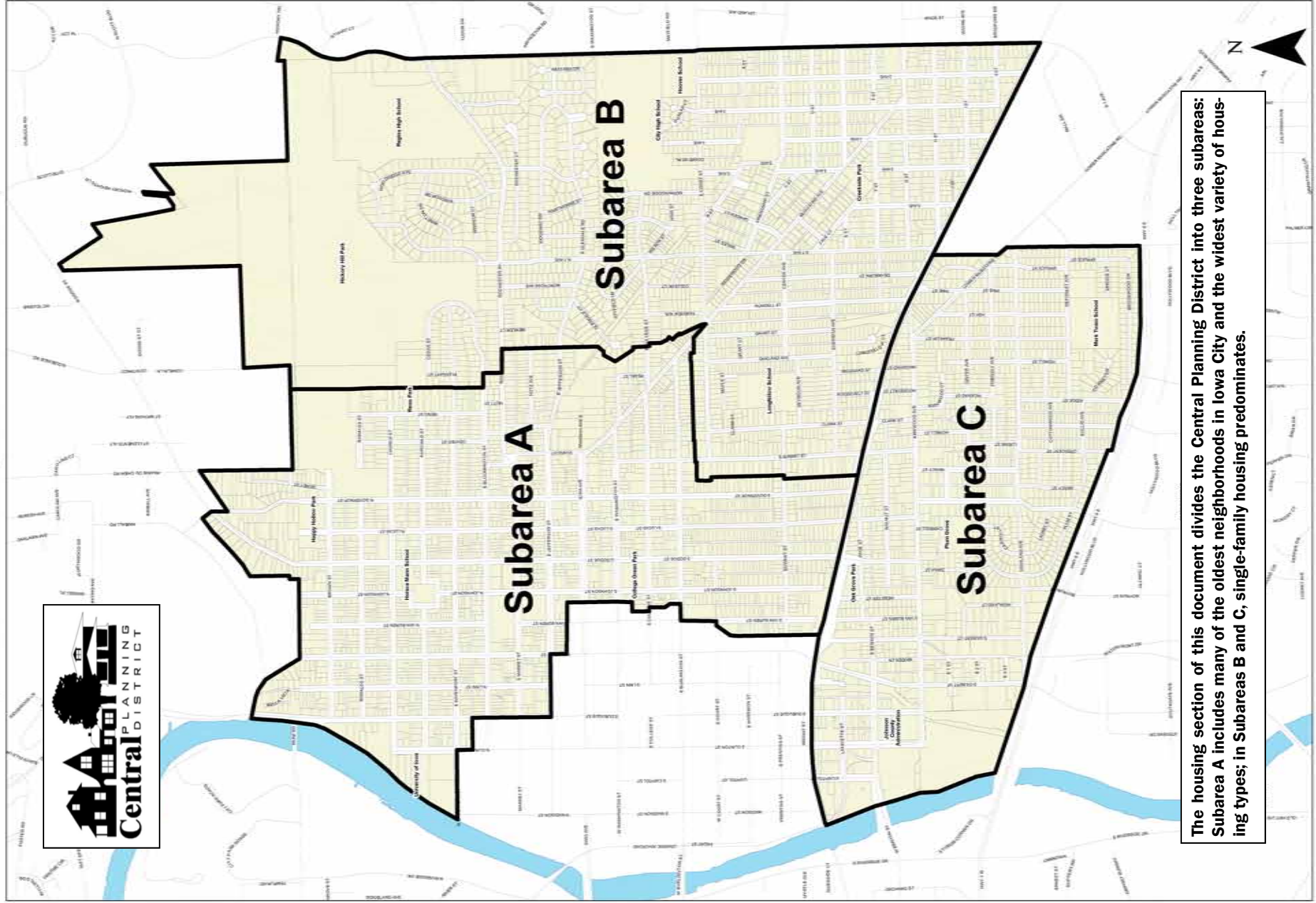
Neighborhood associations are active in the Central District, providing a social network and a means of advocating for neighborhood improvements and keeping people informed about matters that affect their neighborhoods. Neighborhood associations in the Central District include Northside, Goosetown, College Green, Longfellow, Glendale/Morningside, Creekside, and Oak Grove. These associations have been instrumental in gathering support and implementing neighborhood art projects and other improvements that give each neighborhood its distinct identity.

Neighborhoods within the Central District contain a wider variety of housing types than most other areas of the city. The Existing Land Use Map on page 10 illustrates this mix. While much of the original single-family housing stock remains, many homes have been converted into duplexes or apartments and now serve as rental properties rather than owner-occupied dwellings, particularly in areas close to the Downtown and the University where a large number of students live. The district is also home to a number of fraternities and sororities. The single-family homes in the district vary widely in size from large historic mansions and contemporary houses to smaller cottages and ranch-style homes. The significant number of smaller houses in the district provides affordable options for singles, the elderly, and young families.

The City's Zoning Map reflects this diversity through the various residential zoning districts. While most of the residential areas are zoned for single-family (RS-5, RS-8), there are a number of multi-family zones as well, including the RM-12, RM-20, RM-44, and PRM Zones. Note that the higher density multi-family zones (RM-44 and PRM) are located closest to the University and Downtown. As mentioned in the history section of the plan, the neighborhood stabilization zones (RNS-12 and RNS-20) were created to help balance the needs of neighborhoods that were once predominantly single-family but redeveloped over time to include duplex and multi-family buildings.



There are many active neighborhood associations within the Central District, the boundaries of which are illustrated on this map.



Planning for the Future

While many of the housing and quality of life issues identified by plan participants pertain district-wide, certain issues are more easily discussed based on location. For purposes of discussing housing and quality of life issues, the district is divided into three subareas that are illustrated on the map on page 12. The boundaries of these subareas do not represent a rigid line, but rather a means to characterize various areas of the district and to emphasize issues that are of particular importance or relevance to those locations. However, the goals and objectives at the end of this section apply to all areas of the Central District wherever they are relevant.

Subarea A encompasses the older neighborhoods that surround downtown Iowa City and the University campus. This area has the greatest diversity of housing types and the widest range of zoning designations, from medium density single-family to high density multi-family. This is the only area of the City where the stabilization zoning designations (RNS-12 and RNS-20) are used and includes the majority of the current historic and conservation overlay districts.

Subarea B includes the area east of Subarea A and extends to 1st Avenue, which is the boundary of the Central District. This area is predominately single-family homes with a number of duplexes scattered throughout. While many neighborhoods within Subarea B were built prior to WWII, a number were built more recently.

Subarea C is the area of the Central District between the Iowa Interstate Railway and Highway 6. It includes mostly single-family homes ranging from the stately Victorian-era homes along Kirkwood Avenue to smaller ranch-style homes built in the 1950's and 60's.

Subarea A

There is a steady demand for housing in the neighborhoods closest to Downtown and the University campus, and the market is quite complex. The University has approximately 6,000 on-campus housing units, while student enrollment is now over 30,000, making the private housing market the primary provider of student housing. Over the years, many single-family homes in neighborhoods closest to the university have been split into apartments and rooming houses or have been replaced with apartment buildings. The demand for student housing in Subarea A keeps apartment rents higher than in the rest of the Iowa City metropolitan area. Homeowners also compete for the charming historic homes that are conveniently located close to employment centers. While there are a considerable number of smaller, modest homes in Subarea A, the competition from student renters, who often live together and pool their resources, keeps these homes out of the financial reach of many singles or families looking for affordable homes to rent or own.

While this mix creates a vibrant and interesting living environment, it has been an ongoing challenge



In the Central Planning District, would-be homeowners compete with renters for housing, especially in the older historic neighborhoods close to the University and the Downtown.



Finding an appropriate balance between different housing types has been a challenge in the Central Planning District.



Public art projects, such as these street sign markers in the Goosetown neighborhood, help to create a sense of neighborhood identity and pride.

to maintain a balance between the different housing types and mix of residents within Subarea A. With absentee landlords and a large number of inexperienced young renters, problems with property maintenance, loud and disorderly conduct, yard upkeep, and snow removal are more prevalent. In an effort to identify and address ongoing nuisance issues in older neighborhoods, the City formed a Neighborhood Relations Task Force in 2001, which included representatives from neighborhood associations, landlord interest groups, tenant interest groups, the Association of Realtors, and various City departments, including Neighborhood Services, Housing Inspections, the City Attorney's Office, and the Police Department.

Based on the recommendations from this task force, the City adopted the Neighborhood Nuisance Ordinance in 2003. This ordinance defines neighborhood nuisances and establishes rules for preventing such nuisances. To make it easier for area residents to understand and use this ordinance, the City recently published a "Neighborhood Calming Guide" that describes how to best resolve neighborhood issues and report problem properties to the City.

An important goal of the Central District Plan is to continue to monitor and enforce the Neighborhood Nuisance Ordinance and to identify any additional quality of life issues that surface so that they can be addressed in a timely fashion through targeted code enforcement, mediation, education, or additional regulation. Neighborhood associations play a critical role in monitoring neighborhood conditions, advocating for services and neighborhood amenities, and disseminating information to area residents. Neighborhood Associations should continue their efforts to be inclusive and effective partners in maintaining quality of life in the Central District. The City should continue to support these organizations and encourage formation of new associations where needed. The City should also partner with the University to find ways to ensure that young University students have access to—and maintain—safe and healthy off-campus living environments. Many Central District workshop participants asked why the University wasn't taking a more active role in providing or partnering with private developers to provide better housing options for students.

A second important element of stabilizing older neighborhoods in the district is to provide incentives or programs to maintain, improve, and generally reinvest in the older housing stock and in neighborhood infrastructure, such as parks, streets, alleys, and other shared public spaces. Possible sources of funding and human resources include historic preservation programs, the City's housing rehabilitation program, neighborhood PIN (Program for Improving Neighborhoods) grants, the City's capital improvements program, and through collaborations with area schools and the University. The City should continue to partner with neighborhood associations to monitor and improve neighborhoods, to promote good neighbor relations, and foster neighborhood identity through events, festivals, public art, and shared spaces such as community gardens. In addition, the City and the University should continue to explore a variety of means to increase public awareness of the policies, programs, and funding opportunities available for neighborhood or property improvements.

While many of the older neighborhoods close to Downtown and the University contain a mixture of housing types, there are a few areas that are zoned exclusively for higher density multi-family. These areas include properties along Dubuque Street north of Downtown, along Iowa Avenue and Burlington Street, and a concentration of apartment buildings along Johnson and Van Buren Streets south of Burlington. Older single-family housing stock in these areas has been replaced over the years with apartment buildings that largely serve University students.

Adoption of the Planned High Density Multi-Family (PRM) Zone and multi-family infill standards in the mid- to late 1990's has helped to improve multi-family building and site design. However, large concentrations of higher density student housing with little on-site management, combined with a lack of pedestrian-scale lighting, recreational opportunities, and open space, have become problem in certain areas. Most frequently cited in the planning workshops was the concentration of apartments along South Johnson and South Van Buren Streets south of Burlington Street. This land was originally platted for single-family houses and thus the lots are small and narrow. Properties that once contained single-family homes with rear yards and small garages located off the alley were replaced in the 1970's and 1980's by apartment buildings with parking lots taking the place of back yard green space. A number of student residents from this area attended the Central District planning workshops and expressed concerns about pedestrian safety along South Johnson and South Van Buren, particularly during the late evening hours, as well as the lack of privacy and usable open space. Concerns were also expressed about the lack of on-site management in what have been characterized as "unmanaged dorms."

One goal of the plan is to foster partnerships between the City, the University, and area developers and landlords to develop strategies to improve living conditions in multi-family areas. One objective might be to encourage large-scale redevelopment in areas like S. Johnson and S. Van Buren to improve public safety and living conditions and create usable green space. Ideas include developing various incentives and new zoning designations to encourage redevelopment through a master planning process that would cluster higher density apartment buildings around usable green space with parking located in shared lots or structures, requirements for 24-hour on-site management of residential buildings, safe bicycle and pedestrian routes and facilities.

Another pocket of multi-family development in the northern part of the district along Dodge Street is zoned R3B, which is an obsolete zoning designation no longer used in the City Code. This area should be rezoned to a valid designation such as RM-20, which acknowledges the density of the existing multi-family development on the property.

The Northside Marketplace, a small concentration of mainstreet-style commercial buildings located along Market Street, Linn Street, and Bloomington Street, provide a lively mix of restaurants, retail shops, and a small neighborhood grocery store. These businesses are within walking distance of the



Zoning standards were put in place to ensure that multi-family buildings include features that define a safe and attractive streetscape, including front doors and windows. Top: This apartment building was constructed prior to adoption of the Central Planning District multi-family site development standards. Bottom: In contrast, this apartment building located on North Dodge Street was built according to the new standards.



College Green Park is one example of a park that provides a social and geographic focal point for the surrounding neighborhoods in the district.

Northside and Goosetown neighborhoods and to Downtown. Some redevelopment in this area is likely, however there is a strong desire to maintain the historic mainstreet character. If properties are redeveloped, apartments located above commercial storefronts would help to support businesses in the area, but the goal is to encourage smaller apartments with two or fewer bedrooms to prevent dorm-style apartments that many believe would be detrimental to the mix of businesses that currently serve a broader clientele. More detailed analysis of the Northside Marketplace is provided in the Commercial Development section of the plan.

Another quality of life issue in this subarea is the relative lack of parks and open space. College Green Park, North Market Square Park, and Reno Park provide gathering space for nearby residents, but offer limited space for recreation. City Park is nearby, but is not easily accessed due to a missing sidewalk segment and steep terrain along the east side of Dubuque Street. Filling in sidewalk gaps where feasible and enhancement and creative use of the parkways and medians along area streets would add to the livability of these neighborhoods. In addition, the City should explore opportunities to use public streets for festivals and gatherings and create incentives for commercial property owners to include plazas and outdoor seating areas, landscaping, and pedestrian amenities that will increase the vitality of commercial areas, such as the Northside Marketplace. See the Parks and Open Space section of the plan for a more detailed discussion of open space goals and objectives.

Subarea B

Traveling east across the Central District toward 1st Avenue, the density of development gradually decreases. Multi-family and stabilization zones give way to medium and low density single-family zoning (RS-8 and RS-5). Other than a few multi-family buildings located along 1st Avenue and near the Iowa Interstate Railway, the housing in this subarea consists mainly of single-family homes with a few duplexes scattered throughout. Distance from the University and lower occupancy standards (fewer persons allowed per dwelling unit) result in lower demand for housing for University undergraduates, and thus conflicts between long-term residents and student renters are infrequent.

The neighborhoods located west and south of City High School contain houses built in the late 19th century and early part of the 20th century, and include the Summit Street and Longfellow Historic Districts and the Clark Street and Dearborn Street Conservation Districts. The Longfellow, Creekside, and Morningside neighborhoods provide a rich variety of smaller affordable bungalows and cottages mixed in with larger Victorian, Craftsman and American Foursquare-style homes. The grid-like street pattern in this area is similar to the neighborhoods in Subarea A, with homes located on short blocks with rear alleys. Most streets have sidewalks, although there are gaps, particularly in the Creekside neighborhood. Families seeking livable neighborhoods in close proximity to quality schools keep demand for housing in these neighborhoods high. One of the goals of the Central District Plan is to encourage maintenance, rehabilitation, and continued reinvestment in this affordable housing stock

and to explore ways to ensure that this housing stock remains affordable to all income groups. In addition, filling in sidewalk gaps and improving alleys are of interest to residents in these neighborhoods. Ongoing support of neighborhood association activities, historic preservation, and partnerships with local schools will help keep these neighborhoods healthy.

The neighborhoods located north of City High School and south of Hickory Hill Park were developed later in the century from the 1950's to the 1990's. Ranch-style, split-level, and neo-colonial style homes predominate. Home lots are larger, blocks longer, and streets more curvilinear. In contrast to the older neighborhoods south of City High, these neighborhoods were not developed with rear alleys and a number of the local residential streets do not have sidewalks. Nevertheless, homes are within easy walking distance to City High, Hoover Elementary, Regina School, and Hickory Hill Park. Generous front yard landscaping combined with a beautiful canopy of overstory trees create a pleasant environment for walking and biking despite the gaps in the sidewalk network. Filling in sidewalk gaps over time would further enhance these neighborhoods and provide safe routes to area schools and parks.

With two high school campuses and two elementary schools in this subarea, and a junior high school located just outside the Central District along 1st Avenue, providing safe routes to school is a high priority. Residents, school and City officials should continue to monitor traffic and pedestrian safety and work to improve transit and alternative transportation options for students and teachers.

Improvements and access to parks is another issue of importance to residents of this area of the Central District. Many participants spoke fondly of Ralston Creek, how their children play there, walking on the ice in the winter time, watching ducklings in the spring, and hearing the sound of owls on summer nights. A goal of the plan is to find creative ways to provide access to the creek and capitalize on educational opportunities that it may provide. Ideas include simple measures such as installing educational signage at bridge crossings, to more ambitious undertakings like acquiring land or easements along the creek to provide trail connections between parks in the area. A small segment of trail has already been built along the creek and planted with native prairie in the Longfellow Neighborhood and the Court Hill Trail is currently under construction, which will provide a connection between Creekside Park and Court Hill Park. The City should also take advantage of any opportunities to acquire land for parks to help reduce the parkland deficit in this area. The property located at the intersection of Friendship Street and Fourth Avenue, currently owned by the Chadek family, is one that planning participants mentioned as a possibility for future park land if the Chadek family were to discontinue the current commercial use.

Residents in Subarea B have good access to commercial goods and services. The commercial areas at 1st and Muscatine, 1st and Rochester, and the nearby Sycamore Mall include grocery stores, drug-stores, banks, gas stations, movie theaters, and restaurants, along with host of other unique goods



Subarea B contains a mix of houses and neighborhoods that reflect old and new styles. Top: Cottage-style houses located on smaller lots along a traditional grid street (7th Avenue). Bottom: The neighborhood along Glendale Avenue (east of 7th Avenue) reflect a more contemporary style of housing located on curving roads and cul-de-sacs.



Aerial view of the walking trail located along Ralston Creek in the Longfellow Neighborhood. Participants in the planning workshop expressed a strong desire to find ways to create more physical and visual access to Ralston Creek as a way to maximize the sense of nature in a district that is short on public open space.

and services. Making these areas attractive and accessible for nearby residents will ensure that the commercial areas remain economically healthy over time and that adjacent residential properties maintain their value.

Subarea C

Housing from several different periods mesh to create a patchwork of housing styles in Subarea C. From a street lined with small ranch houses, one might turn the corner to find a row of homes built in the early 1900's. Traveling east along Kirkwood Avenue, grand Victorian-era houses stand alongside more modest early 20th-century styles. South of Kirkwood, eclectic stone cottages built by Howard Moffit add to the charm of the area. Small affordable starter homes predominate, particularly along the streets developed in the 1950's and later. Long-term maintenance and rehabilitation of housing is an important objective for what is one of the more affordable areas in the Central District.

The Oak Grove Neighborhood Association is the only active association in Subarea C. The City should support and encourage the formation of new neighborhood associations that would help create social networks and advocate for physical improvements that would foster a sense of neighborhood identity and pride for area residents. Community gathering places are important to the formation of informal and formal social networks. Only two small parks exist in Subarea C: Oak Grove Park and the tiny Highland Park. An active neighborhood association could partner with Mark Twain Elementary School for mutual benefit. Plum Grove, a State Historical Site, is a hidden gem that might be better utilized if it was more visible from surrounding streets. If properties along the west side of Carroll Street become available for sale, the City or the State Historical Society should consider acquiring them for a small park, which would create an open green entranceway for the Plum Grove site, and could also be used for neighborhood gatherings.

The Iowa Interstate Railway and U.S. Highway 6 are physical barriers that define Subarea C and result in limited street connections between the neighborhoods in this subarea the residential neighborhoods to the north and the commercial area along U.S. Highway 6 to the south. The bridges at Dodge Street and Summit Street extend over the rail line and create prime viewing areas for train lovers of all ages. Commercial areas to the east and the west form a different type of boundary to the residential neighborhoods in Subarea C. The Sycamore Mall, Proctor and Gamble, and Kirkwood Community College abut the eastern edge of Subarea C, and a mix of retail and intensive commercial uses along Gilbert Street, Gilbert Court, Highland Court, and Kirkwood Avenue make up the western third of Subarea C.

A majority of this westernmost area is zoned Intensive Commercial, which does not currently allow residential uses, although there are a number of "grandfathered" apartments located on the upper floors of commercial buildings scattered throughout the area. As mentioned in other parts of this

plan, there is potential for redevelopment in the Gilbert Street commercial corridor, especially if passenger rail is established in the future. Passenger rail could be the catalyst for high-density residential development and a different mix of retail businesses and services. In flood-prone areas along the Iowa River and Ralston Creek, any proposed residential development should be carefully considered and, if allowed, should be designed to be flood resistant. In addition, careful planning will be necessary to ensure that there is an attractive and functional interface between the redevelopment area and the residential neighborhoods to the east. For example, the “mixed use” designation along South Gilbert Court as illustrated on the plan map on p. 51 is intended to provide a transition from the higher intensity commercial uses that are likely to locate along Gilbert Street and along the rail lines if passenger rail or other catalysts for redevelopment occur in the future. If rezonings are requested to accommodate redevelopment, the City should consider appropriate conditions to ensure that the scale and intensity of new development does not threaten the integrity and character of the existing residential neighborhood to the east.

In residential areas near the Sycamore Mall, Kirkwood Community College, and next to commercial uses at the west end of Kirkwood Avenue, there is a concern about parking and traffic congestion, obtrusive commercial lighting, noise, and late-night activities that may reduce the livability of nearby residential areas. To preserve the integrity of the residential areas, commercial zoning should not be extended further east along Kirkwood Avenue. As commercial properties develop or redevelop, the City should enforce regulations regarding screening and landscaping of parking areas and outdoor storage areas, encourage businesses to redirect or change out obtrusive outdoor lighting, and work with Kirkwood Community College to implement transportation demand strategies for students and staff that result in workable solutions to parking and traffic congestion along Lower Muscatine Avenue.

Highland Avenue is ideally located to provide a link between the employment centers in the Sycamore Mall area and the Gilbert Street commercial corridor. Traffic calming may be necessary or desirable in the future to ensure that the street remains safe and comfortable for bicyclists, pedestrians, and nearby residents. U.S. Highway 6, Lower Muscatine Avenue, Kirkwood Avenue, and Keokuk Street are the arterials that are intended to carry through-traffic. Planning for any future improvements to these streets should give priority to improving facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians and maintaining adequate traffic flow to prevent cut-through traffic on local streets, but will also need to be accomplished in a manner that is sensitive to the residents that live along these arterial streets.



Subarea C contains smaller homes from many different eras, from 1950's ranch-style homes near Mark Twain Elementary School to eclectic stone cottages built in the early part of the 20th century.



Historic Preservation for the Central District

Section V. Neighborhood Strategies (page 73-98) of the Iowa City Historic Preservation Plan outlines the objectives for Iowa City Historic Areas and Neighborhoods. Many historic areas lie within the Central District. The objectives of the Historic Preservation Plan include:

- Retention of Historic District and Conservation District status of the already designated areas
- Reevaluating districts to determine if boundaries or integrity change
- Encouragement of local Historic District status of the Gilbert-Linn Street and Jefferson Street National Register Historic Districts
- Beginning the process of designating Goose-town as a local conservation district
- Completing surveys of several neighborhoods to determine the historic quality and district eligibility. These neighborhoods include:
Oak Grove – Kirkwood Avenue Corridor
Lucas Farms Neighborhood
Morningside – City High Neighborhood
Rochester Avenue Neighborhood

These objectives and goals help protect and maintain Iowa City's historic resources, which contribute to the quality of life of Central District neighborhoods.

Housing and Quality of Life - Goals and Objectives

The following goals and objectives for Housing and Quality of Life were formulated with the help of citizens who participated in the Central Planning District meetings and focus groups.

Goal 1: Promote the Central District as an attractive place to live by encouraging reinvestment in residential properties throughout the district and by supporting new housing opportunities.

- a. Improve public outreach to increase awareness of existing programs available through the City and other agencies to assist with the purchase and/or rehabilitation of older homes.
- b. Investigate incentives for property improvement and rehabilitation of the existing housing stock, both for homeowners and investment property owners.
- c. Encourage neighborhood associations and smaller ad hoc neighborhood groups to advocate for specific improvements, provide mediation for neighborhood disputes, and act as neighborhood watchdog organizations.
- d. Support the goals and objectives proposed in the Historic Preservation Plan (see sidebar).
- e. Support efforts of neighborhood associations, local schools, and other community organizations to create a sense of identity and neighborhood pride through art, festivals, shared community spaces, distinctive physical improvements, and development of neighborhood communication networks.
- f. Explore opportunities and plan actively for the creation of new transit-oriented residential areas between the Iowa River and Gilbert Street in concert with efforts to establish a commuter rail line and Amtrak station in this area.
- g. Support efforts to create affordable workforce housing within redevelopment areas.

Goal 2: Work to achieve a healthy balance of rental and owner-occupied housing in the district's older neighborhoods to promote long-term investment, affordable housing opportunities, and preservation of historic homes and neighborhoods.

- a. Work to bring over-occupied properties into compliance with current zoning requirements.
- b. Encourage the University and other area employers to establish programs and financing incentives to promote the purchase of homes in older neighborhoods to their employees.
- c. Work to improve conditions or encourage redevelopment in areas that have a concentration of apartments with few amenities and little usable open space.
- d. In higher density multi-family zones, ensure that adequate infrastructure and open space is provided to create a livable environment for residents.
- e. Explore ways to discourage inappropriate conversion of historic single-family homes into rooming houses and apartments.

- f. Explore ways to make more of the existing and future rental housing in the Central District available to families and other non-student populations in need of affordable housing, e.g. revisiting occupancy rules and housing code provisions to discourage or prevent unmanaged dorm-style apartments, supporting efforts by non-profit housing developers to rehabilitate older housing stock, partnerships between historic preservation organizations and affordable housing developers, etc.
- g. Examine existing zoning rules to ensure that they support housing goals and neighborhood stabilization efforts.

Goal 3: Remove obstacles to reinvestment in neighborhoods.

- a. Enforce regulations that prohibit permanent “for rent” signs on investment properties, which detract from the residential character of the neighborhood.
- b. Do more to educate the public about nuisance ordinances and encourage residents to report problem properties.
- c. Implement targeted code enforcement for areas that receive a higher level of complaints regarding zoning code violations, snow and weed removal, and trash control that affect neighborhood quality of life.
- d. Work actively with the University and other organizations to change the culture of alcohol use among the student population.
- e. Maintain and improve public alleys.
- f. Create incentives or policies that encourage or require landlords to preserve or create outdoor recreation/green space for renters.
- g. Investigate means of encouraging or requiring on-site property management for large multi-family developments.

Goal 4: Encourage development of businesses, institutions, and public entities that provide goods, services, and amenities that support healthy neighborhoods.

- a. Encourage a diverse range of businesses that provide essential services in the Downtown area—grocery, clothing, household items, etc.
- b. Encourage investment and reinvestment in existing commercial areas that provide goods and services for Central District neighborhoods.
- c. Provide for an attractive and functional transition between residential areas and adjacent commercial areas through management of traffic, landscape buffering and screening, outdoor lighting that provides for safety but avoids over-lighting and glare, effective management of outdoor service, work and storage areas, etc.



Targeted code enforcement in areas that receive more nuisance complaints could help to improve quality of life and encourage investment in neighborhoods.



Pedestrian scale lighting is one way to improve public safety in neighborhoods. Above: lighting in the North-side Marketplace has been widely praised for its effectiveness in illuminating pedestrian areas.

- d. Provide functional connections between commercial areas and surrounding neighborhoods to ensure good access for pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles.
- e. Take advantage of opportunities to create more parks and open space within the district.

Goal 5: Improve public safety throughout the district.

- a. Install pedestrian-scale lighting where needed to create safe travel corridors for pedestrians.
- b. Continue to fill in gaps in the existing sidewalk network.
- c. Provide for walkable/bikable routes to and through commercial areas
- d. Improve pedestrian crossings at major intersections.
- e. Ensure that any new development proposed for flood prone areas along the Iowa River and Ralston Creek is carefully considered and, if allowed, is designed to be flood resistant.

Goal 6: Work cooperatively with the University administration, staff, faculty, student groups, and other organizations to improve relations between University students and long-term residents of Central District neighborhoods.

- a. Market Central District neighborhoods to University staff and faculty to encourage home ownership and re-investment.
- b. Encourage the University to create incentives and funding opportunities for faculty and staff to own homes or rehabilitate homes close to campus.
- c. Work with the University to include rules for off-campus behavior in the student code of conduct.
- d. Facilitate partnerships between private developers of student housing and the University to provide effective on-site property management, amenities and recreational opportunities for students, and alternative transportation options.
- e. Work with the University, neighborhood groups, and landlords to educate student renters about their rights and responsibilities as they transition to living off-campus.
- f. Establish a "Community Council" of representatives from the City, the University, neighborhood associations, and student organizations as a vehicle for timely communication on important issues of community concern.
- g. Work with the University to educate students about the diversity of housing options available off-campus.
- h. Encourage young renters to get involved in the neighborhood and encourage neighborhood associations and groups to welcome and provide information to help young students be good neighbors.

Streets and Transportation

Existing Conditions

The majority of the Central District is designed with a grid-like, interconnected street network. The benefit of this type of street network is that there are multiple routes to any one location, which disperses traffic and provides for more direct routes to destinations. The ease of movement and lower traffic volumes in a grid street network make it efficient and comfortable for walking and bicycling. Having multiple routes available allows public services such as garbage pick-up, snow removal, and emergency services to be provided more efficiently and more cost-effectively.

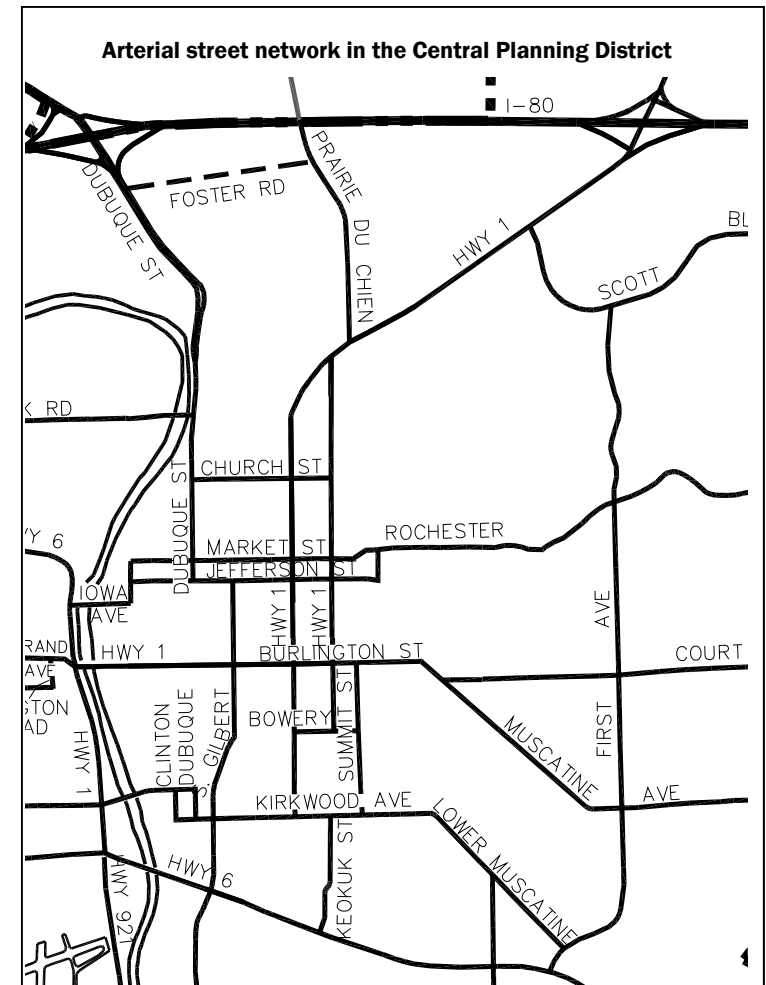
Arterial streets are the main traffic arteries of the city. Maintaining and improving traffic flow on arterial streets helps to keep local streets free of cut-through traffic. Arterial streets facilitate traffic flow through the strategic placement of traffic control (signals and stop signs), limiting on-street parking, and incorporating turn lanes where possible.

Due to historical development patterns and the proximity of the Downtown and University of Iowa, the Central District is well-served by arterial streets. Arterial streets circulate traffic between residences and employment and commercial areas. Highway 1 and Highway 6 carry regional traffic through the community.

With eight different transit routes running through the district, including the free Downtown Shuttle, the Central District is well-served by public transit. The bus system is designed with the Downtown and the main employment areas on the University of Iowa campus and University Hospitals serving as hubs.

Street Improvements

Continued reinvestment in the City's infrastructure in older neighborhoods is important to the livability and economic health of the community. Street improvements will occasionally be necessary to safely accommodate changing traffic patterns. One of the best ways to minimize the amount of cut-through traffic on local residential streets is to make it easier and safer for motorists to use the arterial street system. In developed neighborhoods, context sensitive design and implementation is an important consideration when implementing street improvement projects. Creative solutions that increase capacity and improve the roadway for all modes of transportation while minimizing impacts to neighboring properties should be the priority. In some instances, bus pull-outs and center turn lanes may be sufficient to keep traffic flowing, making it unnecessary to add travel lanes. However, in other instances, traffic volumes may have increased to the point where additional lanes are needed to prevent frustrated drivers





Participants in the planning workshop called for more facilities to safely accommodate bikes and pedestrians, especially along arterial streets.

from cutting through neighborhoods to avoid congested situations. Arterial street improvement projects that will be considered in the near future include the conversion of Lower Muscatine Avenue west of First Avenue from a four-lane street to a three-lane street to provide more room for turning traffic, to improve sidewalk connections to the Sycamore Mall area, and construction of a railroad overpass over First Avenue to improve traffic flow and pedestrian safety along this corridor. The reconstruction of the Gilbert Street and Highway 6 intersection to add additional turn lanes and improve capacity has been postponed indefinitely due to opposition from some property owners in the area. It is unlikely that the City Council will place this project back in the capital improvements budget without advocacy from area property owners.

Iowa City has adopted a "complete streets" policy. A complete street is a street that serves all potential road users: motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders. Balancing the needs of all users is not always easy. What is beneficial for one mode of transportation may not be ideal for another. For instance, bicycle commuters often view on-street parking as a potential danger, while for pedestrians, cars parked along the street help to slow traffic and create a buffer between moving vehicles and the sidewalk. To help balance these interests, particularly in older parts of town where roadway and right-of-way widths are already established, it may be helpful to identify specific streets and routes where bicyclists would be given priority. In addition, street improvement projects should include elements such as new sidewalks, street trees, landscaped medians, appropriate lighting, and carefully located utilities to enhance pedestrian access and safety.

Alleys

Many of the neighborhoods in the Central District were designed with service alleys. Streets designed with rear alleys have many advantages:

- Alleys allow utilities and garages to be located away from the street. The view along the street is one of homes rather than garages;
- Alleys improve traffic circulation and safety along neighborhood streets. Traffic is reduced and there are fewer conflict points, because cars back into the alley rather than into the street;
- Alleys minimize the need for driveways from the street, which allows for a safer, more continuous sidewalk system, preserves on-street parking, and leaves more space for front yard landscaping and street trees.

The alley infrastructure is aging and in need of maintenance in many parts of the Central District. The City should consider establishing a program to evaluate the condition of alleys and provide ap-

propriate maintenance, such as grading and spreading new gravel on unpaved alleys and repairing or resurfacing deteriorated pavement.

Traffic Calming Program

One way to reduce cut-through traffic on local residential streets is through the City's Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program. Traffic calming is the practice of managing speeds and/or volumes of traffic using one or more of the following approaches: targeted police enforcement; education; or physical changes to the roadway. Traffic calming is only used on local or collector streets, which must meet certain thresholds for speed and volume of traffic to qualify. With limited police resources, continuous speed enforcement on all streets is not possible, however, targeted enforcement during specific problem times (such as the end of the school day) can be an effective deterrent to speeders. Educating drivers is another means of calming traffic. Education methods include the "Share the Road" signs, "Check Your Speed" signs, and the radar-speed trailer that shows motorists how fast they are driving. When there is evidence of ongoing problems with speeding along a particular residential street, making physical changes to the roadway, such as installing traffic circles or speed humps, may be warranted. Examples include the speed humps installed on local residential streets around City High School and traffic circles on segments of College Street and Washington Street. Physical changes to the roadway must be requested by the neighborhood and have the support of property owners along the affected street.

Parking on Residential Streets

In most Central District neighborhoods, there is ample on-street parking available for residents and visitors. It can also double as a traffic calming device, because it helps to slow traffic along local streets. However, there are places in the district where demand for parking exceeds the supply—around the University of Iowa campus, Mercy Hospital, Kirkwood Community College, and City High School. College students, high school students and commuters that work Downtown, at the University, and Mercy Hospital compete with residents for on-street parking spaces. In addition, many of the single-family homes in the older parts of town were built before the widespread use of automobiles, when there was not a need for parking lots and large garages. Since there is more demand for on-street parking than space available in some neighborhoods, residents are sometimes unable to park in front of their house or even within the same block. This is typical in many cities that have residential neighborhoods near colleges, hospitals, and high schools.

Restricting where and when parking is allowed are tools that can be used to control parking congestion. If a majority of the neighborhood requests it, City transportation planning staff can evaluate various options for establishing parking restrictions. Some potential pitfalls to parking restrictions



Even gravel alleys can be maintained in a way that provided efficient and attractive access for neighborhoods.



Traffic calming measures, such as speed humps, have helped to control traffic speeds in problem areas, such as the neighborhoods surrounding City High.



Parking is allowed along most streets in the Central Planning District. In areas close to the Downtown and campus, residents and commuters sometimes compete for on-street parking.

include the fact that they apply to all parkers, including residents and their visitors; the need for enforcement; and the potential for the parking congestion to be shifted to neighboring streets.

One possible solution in the most congested areas would be to establish a residential on-street parking permit system, in which area residents would be sold a parking permit that would allow them to park on the street. Those parking without a permit would be ticketed. While an on-street parking permit system may benefit neighborhood residents by reducing the commuter vehicles parked on street, there can be some negative spill-over impacts to adjacent neighborhoods. To date, it has been difficult for area property owners and residents to agree on such a system for the following reasons:

- Having an on-street parking permit does not guarantee a resident a spot in front of their house, since on-street parking is first-come, first-serve;
- Enforcement will be an ongoing expense, and may not be covered by permit revenue;
- Commuter parking may simply shift to another neighborhood; and
- A system of issuing and enforcing visitor permits would need to be developed.

If residents and property owners in specific areas of the Central District agree that the benefits of a parking permit system outweigh the disadvantages, the City will investigate the feasibility and cost of establishing a parking permit system for the more congested areas.

Pedestrian Facilities

The pedestrian-friendly character of neighborhood streets is cited frequently by residents as a reason they enjoy living in the Central District. The gridded street pattern with rear alleys and short blocks lined with generally uninterrupted sidewalks make the Central District one of the most walkable areas of the city. However, there is still room for improvement. While fairly rare, some streets in the Central District were built without sidewalks. The City Council has recently established and funded a sidewalk infill program to address the gaps in the sidewalk system. Priority is given to major pedestrian routes along arterial and collector streets, and walking routes to major neighborhood destinations such as schools, parks, and commercial areas.

While it is relatively easy to walk safely and comfortably along residential streets, crossing arterial streets can be more difficult, especially on long blocks where there are no traffic signals or marked crosswalks. Marked crosswalks are typically painted at intersections with signals, at official school route crossings, and at high-volume pedestrian crossings. Appropriate warning signs for motorists, traffic signal timing, raised crosswalks, and wayfinding signage to direct pedestrians to safe crossing locations are all techniques that can be used to improve safety for pedestrians. The City should con-

tinue to explore opportunities to improve pedestrian routes and evaluate proposed crosswalks to ensure pedestrian safety.

Some participants in the Central Planning District workshops expressed concern about the lack of adequate pedestrian-scaled lighting along neighborhood streets. Street lights are located at each street intersection, which typically provides adequate lighting when blocks are short. However, on long blocks, or where trees, buildings, or other features block light from reaching the interior of the block, walking at night may be uncomfortable or unsafe. The City is exploring the possibility of adding pedestrian-scaled lighting along major pedestrian routes, in higher density multi-family areas, and in areas that have been identified as poorly lit. Care should be taken to ensure that light fixtures are downcast, shielded, and located to avoid spillover light and glare that would disturb the residential character of the neighborhood.

Bicycle Facilities

Improving facilities for bicyclists was a major topic of discussion at the Central District planning workshops and focus group meetings. This interest is understandable, since cycling is a popular means of transportation in Iowa City. A study conducted by the University of Iowa estimated 10 percent of commuters ride bicycles, at least on streets near the downtown campus.

Participants at the Central Planning District workshops listed characteristics that make streets uncomfortable or unsafe for bicyclists. Sand and debris along street edges, areas with congested on-street parking, and streets with high traffic volumes and speeds were mentioned as deterrents to cycling. Citizens also stressed the need for more bicycle parking, particularly sheltered bicycle parking at convenient locations. In general, participants emphasized the need to make cycling a means of transportation that is comfortable, safe, and convenient for a larger segment of the population, including programs and on-street accommodations targeted toward at less experienced cyclists, and cyclists who currently do not feel safe riding on area streets.

At present, Iowa City provides several types of on- and off-street accommodations for bicyclists and pedestrians. These include: multi-use paths/trails, wide sidewalks, wide travel lanes on new arterial streets, "share the road" signs, and bike parking at most major destinations. When streets are reconstructed, the Complete Streets Policy ensures that necessary bicycle and pedestrian accommodations are incorporated into the project. Since the street network in the Central District is largely established, a goal of this plan is to explore and implement new techniques, such as those described on the following pages, for encouraging and accommodating cycling on existing streets. Decisions on which technique to use in a particular location will have to be balanced with the need for safe and comfortable pedestrian facilities and for adequate on-street parking.



While most areas in the Central Planning District are well-designed for pedestrian travel, clearly marked pedestrian crossings at busy intersections and pedestrian scale lighting are two elements that could help to make walking safer and more appealing.



Providing an on-street environment that is safe for bicyclists was a high priority for participants in the planning process.



Multi-use paths or trails are separated from motor vehicle traffic. Cyclists of all abilities feel comfortable on multi-use paths.



Wayfinding signage is integral to establishing a bicycle friendly community.

Multi-use Path: A multi-use path (often called a trail or off-street path) is separated from motor vehicle traffic. These paths may exist within the street right-of-way or within an independent right-of-way or easement. Multi-use paths are typically open to bicyclists and pedestrians and accommodate two-way traffic. Multi-use paths are often appropriate in corridors not well-served by the street system, to create short-cuts, to link destination points, or as elements of a recreational trail plan. For example, the Iowa River Corridor Trail is a regional multi-use path that provides links to area destinations, as well as access to and views of the Iowa River.

Central District planning participants discussed the possibility of developing a trail network along Ralston Creek. Given the existing density of development and private property surrounding the creek, a new trail is unlikely in the near future. However, the City should consider acquiring easements that could one day be developed into a “Ralston Creek Trail.” The current development of the Court Hill Trail, for example, was set into motion by this approach.

Way-finding Signs: Distance and directional signs help casual and inexperienced cyclists choose streets suitable for their ability. Visiting bicyclists and new residents unfamiliar with the area use signs to navigate.

Way-finding signs would help bicyclists and pedestrians find convenient routes to and from destinations (i.e., schools, hospitals, parks, Downtown, etc.) throughout Iowa City and could improve the ability of cyclists to navigate our community. This could be especially useful in Iowa City where the change in student population means a high percentage of new residents every year. In 2006, way-finding signs were installed on the metropolitan trail system through a coordinated effort between Iowa City, Coralville, and North Liberty. Similar signs could be placed along designated on-street bikeways in Iowa City before and after turns, at major signalized intersections, and when bikeways intersect. Way-finding signs should include information on direction, distance and destination, and could also include directions to historic or cultural sites, schools, parks or emergency services. In addition to signs, more detailed information about routes and destinations could be posted on kiosks or similar structures strategically located in heavily trafficked areas of town.

Shared Lane Marking: Roadways are often too narrow to be safely shared side-by-side by cyclists and motorists. On these routes, cyclists wishing to stay out of the way of drivers often ride too close to parked cars and risk being struck by a suddenly opened car door. To avoid this, experienced cyclists position themselves closer to the center of narrow lanes.

A shared lane marking, also known as a “sharrow,” does not connote a separated bicycle lane, but instead directs the bicyclist to travel outside the car-door zone and encourages safe co-existence with vehicles. A recent study in San Francisco found that when passing vehicles were present, the markings caused an increase of three to four inches in the distance between cyclists and parked

cars and an increase of over two feet in the distance between cyclists and passing vehicles. Marking certain streets in the Central District with signs and sharrows would encourage bicycling and alert motorists of bicyclists on these streets.

Bike Lanes: A bike lane is a portion of the roadway exclusively designated for use by bicyclists. Bike lanes are most often used on urban arterial and major collector streets. Typically, the bike lane is separated from other travel lanes by a painted stripe and uses a combination of lane markings and signage to clarify its use.

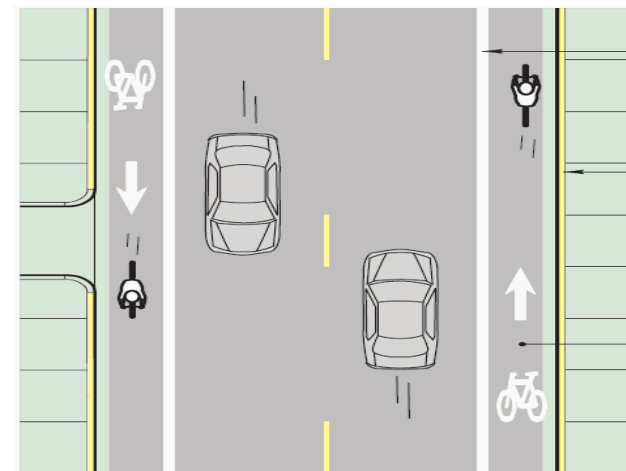
Bike lanes are a cost-effective way to delineate a segment of the roadway exclusively for bicycles. Bike lane markings decrease the likelihood that motorists swerve out of their lane to avoid cyclists on their right. Many streets in the Central District, particularly those with on-street parking, are not wide enough for bike lanes to be marked without widening the street. In these situations, sharrows may be a better alternative.

Market and Jefferson Streets from Governor Street to Madison Street are wide enough to accommodate bicycle lanes and, in fact, had bicycle lanes in the past. Staff finds these streets are logical locations for bike lanes or “sharrows” due to their ample width, one-way status, and connectivity to the north side of Downtown and University of Iowa campus. If bike lanes are implemented, the bike lane should be dashed or discontinued near intersections to allow bikes and vehicles to merge before turning.

Bikeways, Bike Routes, and Bike Boulevards: The terms "bikeway," "bike route," and "bike boulevard" have all been used to describe a street where bicycling is encouraged through a combination of signs, markings, and traffic calming techniques.

Bicycle boulevards are becoming a popular choice for cities that are serious about promoting bicycling as an alternative to the automobile. A bicycle boulevard is a shared roadway that has been enhanced in order to encourage bicycle traffic. The purpose of a bicycle boulevard is to improve bicycle safety and circulation by having or creating one or more of the following conditions:

- low traffic volumes;
- discouragement of non-local motor vehicle traffic;
- free-flow travel for bikes by assigning the right-of-way to the bicycle boulevard at intersections wherever possible;
- traffic control to help bicycles cross major arterial streets; and
- a distinctive look and/or ambiance such that cyclists become aware of the existence of the bike boulevard and motorists are alerted that the roadway is a priority route for bicyclists.

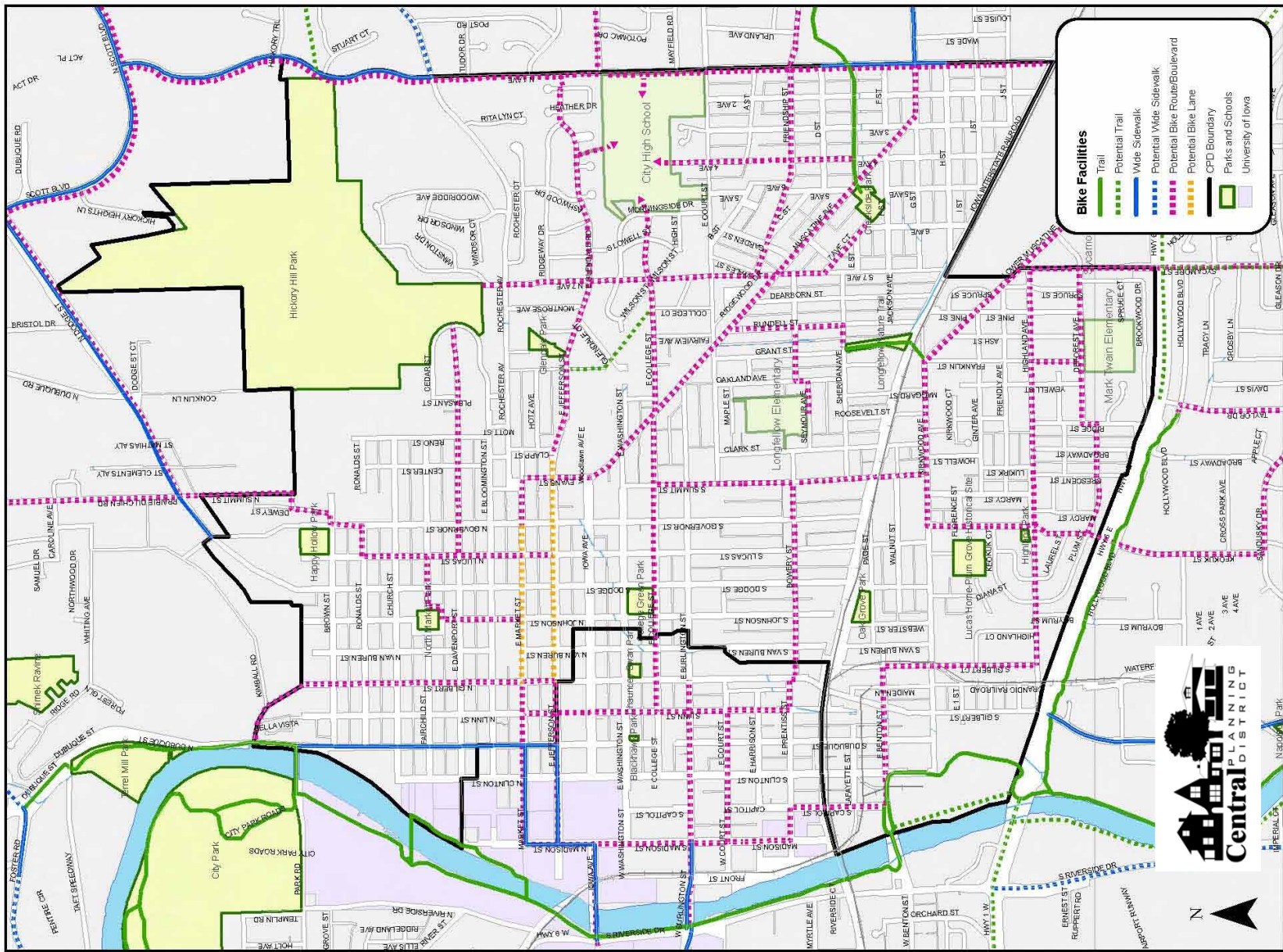


Bicycle lanes make bicycle travel safer along heavily trafficked streets. Bike lanes can also make less experienced cyclists feel more comfortable on the road as they travel through busy areas.



On bike boulevards, the road is marked to encourage bicycling, but bikes are not directed into separate lanes from motor vehicle traffic.

Existing and Potential Bike Facilities



These techniques temper the volume and speed of motor vehicles to create an environment where bicyclists of all experience levels can feel more comfortable. Implementation of traffic calming devices must be carefully evaluated to assess impacts to adjacent streets, which may experience increased traffic and on-street parking. Some cities have had success implementing traffic calming in a broader area rather than just on isolated streets, which ensures that through-traffic gets displaced to arterial streets designed to handle it and not simply shifted from one residential street to another. Such a strategy would have benefits for both bicyclists and pedestrians.

Bicycle Facilities Map: The map on page 30 illustrates existing bicycle facilities and streets that may be appropriate for signs, sharrows, and/or bikeways (bike routes, bike boulevards or bike lanes) based on their connectivity and traffic volume. Further analysis may reveal other streets or routes that might also be suitable for such bicycle accommodations.

Public Transit

Transit service in the Central District is among the most comprehensive in Iowa City. Public transit in the district is primarily provided by Iowa City Transit, which operates on a hub-and-spoke route system with its hub located in the Downtown area. Due to the setup of this system, many routes serving other areas of the city pass through the Central District, enhancing the availability of transit service within the district.

There are many University students living within the Central District. Services that cater to this group include the University of Iowa's CAMBUS system, which offers an additional transit service option to those in the northwest segment of the district. Additionally, Iowa City Transit has recognized that many University students were driving short distances to campus, occupying valuable downtown parking space, and adding to street congestion. To alleviate these issues, it now runs a free shuttle serving the areas of the Central District nearest the Downtown. Expansion of the free shuttle service could be explored as a means to further reduce demand for parking and congestion of streets.

Neighborhoods in close proximity to the Downtown and University, experience on-street parking shortages as commuters seek free parking. Potential solutions for the problem could include the use of commuter lots located outside the Central District in combination with shuttle service to and from the Downtown area. In addition, the City should explore opportunities to partner with area employers, including the University, to increase ridership and better meet the transit needs of employees and students.



With its system of interconnected streets and sidewalks, the Central Planning District has many of the necessary components to make bike and pedestrian travel safe for residents of all ages. Enhancements such as wayfinding signage, designated bikeways or lanes, and crosswalks encourage people to use the system and to feel more secure doing so.



Planning participants viewed education and information as key elements in an improved transit system. Improved signage and the availability of bus route schedules and maps at bus stops may encourage more ridership.



A local landmark, the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Passenger Station, could serve passengers again in the future if Amtrak service is extended to Iowa City.



The existing CRANDIC rail line is ideally located to serve commuters traveling from Cedar Rapids, North Liberty, and Coralville to Iowa City's Downtown and the University of Iowa, raising hopes and additional consideration for the reintroduction of passenger rail service to Iowa City.

All Iowa City transit buses are now equipped with lifts or low floors to allow access to a greater number of patrons. Johnson County SEATS and the University of Iowa's Bionic Bus provide service to those with disabilities. Other efforts to encourage greater accessibility and ridership should be explored through public outreach to schools, businesses, and area employers. Additional items that could be investigated include improved bus stop signage, posted schedules at each stop, and the possibility of locating additional shelters at stops with high usage.

Passenger Rail

Passenger rail is an exciting idea being considered for the Iowa City and Cedar Rapids corridor. According to the recently released *Cedar-Iowa River Rail Transit Project Feasibility Study*, the existing CRANDIC rail line is ideally located to serve commuters traveling from Cedar Rapids, North Liberty, and Coralville to Iowa City's Downtown and the University of Iowa. With the sharp increase in gas prices in recent years, alternative modes of transportation are becoming more attractive. In addition, comparison of the costs of adding an additional travel lane to I-380 between Cedar Rapids and Coralville (approximately \$400 million) to the cost of upgrading infrastructure to accommodate high-speed commuter rail between Cedar Rapids and Iowa City (approximately \$70 million) are promising as well.

In addition, the Iowa Department of Transportation is working with Amtrak to initiate a regional inter-city passenger rail link from Chicago through the Quad Cities to Iowa City and on to Des Moines, utilizing the Iowa Interstate Rail line. Annual ridership between Chicago and Iowa City is estimated to be about 187,000 passengers, based on two daily round-trips. If Amtrak service is extended to Iowa City, the 1898 landmark Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Passenger Station located at 115 Wright Street would be ideally located to once again serve travelers to Iowa City.

Since the CRANDIC rail line and the Iowa Interstate Rail line both extend through the South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor, this area has been identified as a prime location for "transit-oriented development," often abbreviated to "TOD." The following page contains a definition and brief explanation of the benefits of TOD and the idea is discussed further in the Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor section of the plan (see page 50).



The ultimate success of passenger rail or other mass transit depends on the design and density of development that surrounds it. Additional information on the components of transit oriented design is presented on page 50.

Transit Oriented Development

The term transit-oriented development (TOD) refers to high-density, mixed-use residential and commercial districts designed to facilitate transit use and maximize access to public transit systems. TOD's generally consist of a town center featuring a rail or bus station, surrounded by high-density, mixed-use development. High-density development is essential for generating the level of ridership needed to justify frequent service. Higher densities also help create an active street life to support commercial activity within convenient walking distance of homes and worksites. The goal of TOD is to create situations in which people do not require cars in order to live a quality life. TOD's typically extend out one-quarter to one-half mile—a distance that is walkable for most people.

The primary benefits of TOD's include:

- Reduced sprawl and protection of existing neighborhoods
- Reduced commute times and traffic congestion
- Improved environmental quality and open space preservation
- Reduce automobile dependency
- Reduced household spending on transportation, resulting in more affordable housing
- Healthier lifestyle with more walking and less stress
- Increased foot traffic and customers for area businesses
- Reduced public expense for roads and other infrastructure
- Enhanced ability to maintain economic competitiveness



While gravel alleys function well in many areas of the district, there are high-volume alleys, particularly in the higher density zones, that need improvements such as paving and storm sewer drainage.

Transportation Goals and Objectives

Goal 1. Street improvements - balance traffic circulation needs, preserve neighborhood character, and public safety issues

- a. Minimize the amount of cut-through traffic on local residential streets by making it easier and safer for motorists to use the arterial street system. Context sensitive design is important in developed neighborhoods. Creative solutions that increase capacity and improve the roadway for all modes of transportation while minimizing impacts to neighboring properties should be the priority.
- b. When planning for street improvements, give consideration to all modes of transportation, including walking, bicycling, and driving. Balance these needs with desirability of on-street parking and street trees.
- c. Evaluate options for funding improvements to public alleys, giving priority to alleys that serve higher density developments.
- d. In areas where redevelopment may spur the need for better vehicular access, encourage or require improvements to alleys rather than allowing new driveways in areas where loss of pedestrian facilities, on-street parking or mature street trees is a concern.

Goal 2. Identify on-street parking issues within various areas of the district and work with neighborhoods to provide solutions where needed.

- a. Compare the costs and benefits of free on-street parking versus paid parking in neighborhoods close to Downtown and other areas with high demand for on-street parking spaces.
- b. Explore feasibility of implementing an on-street parking permit system in neighborhoods that have a shortage of on-street parking or where on-street parking is a concern.
- c. Balance the need for on-street parking with the space needs for safe bike travel within the district.

Goal 3. Develop a plan to formalize safe bicycle and pedestrian connections between the major destinations in the district, including Downtown Iowa City, neighborhood commercial areas, the UI campus, parks, and elementary and secondary schools.

- a. Identify major pedestrian and bike routes within the district, i.e. routes between major destinations such as the Downtown area, University campus, schools, and neighborhood commercial areas.
- b. Continue to work with schools to evaluate and improve their programs for safe, accessible bike and pedestrian routes for children.

- c. Organize promotional, educational, and wayfinding programs to improve public awareness of safe and efficient ways to travel by foot or by bike to schools, employment centers, and parks.
- d. Continue to explore options such as high-visibility crosswalks to improve pedestrian crossings where major pedestrian routes intersect with arterial streets.
- e. Explore the viability of alternative routes for bikes or pedestrians along Ralston Creek, recognizing the difficulties posed by private ownership of the creek, access, and flooding.
- f. Investigate improvements or other modifications that could make use of existing streets or alleys as safe and efficient bike routes (e.g. bike boulevards, bike lanes, wayfinding programs, etc.)
- g. Educate bikers and motorists on how to share the road.
- h. Continue to fill in gaps in the sidewalk network on all public streets within the district.
- i. Insure that sidewalks in all areas of the district are maintained and kept clear of snow, debris, and overgrown vegetation during all times of year.
- j. Identify ways to make Burlington Street safer for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Goal 4. Continue to improve public transit to make it more user-friendly and to encourage increased ridership within the district.

- a. Make bus schedules more widely available and post schedules and maps at all stops.
- b. Make bus stops more visible, attractive, and protected from the elements.
- c. Explore ways to improve schedules, routes, and route connections.
- d. Explore new ways to increase ridership within the district through better public education and incentives.
- e. Investigate feasibility of park-and-ride commuter lots and shuttle service for people who work or go to school in Downtown Iowa City to help reduce congestion downtown and reduce the number of cars parked in the residential neighborhoods that surround the Downtown and the University campus.
- f. Continue to evaluate the need for off-peak transit service for those working second or third shifts.
- g. Investigate costs and benefits of expanding the free Downtown shuttle.



Educating bikers and motorists to safely share the road is an important component in making Iowa City a truly bike-friendly community.



Making bus stops more visible and attractive may be one way to make commuters aware of the bus system.



Goal 5. Explore opportunities to establish passenger rail service utilizing the CRANDIC rail line and Iowa Interstate Railroad.

- a. Investigate the feasibility of relocating the North Wastewater Treatment Plant and City Carton to provide land to support transit-oriented land uses near future passenger rail stations in the South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor.
- b. Conduct a public visioning process to determine the density, type, and location of development that would support passenger rail service in the South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor.
- c. Develop funding sources, development agreements, and implementation tools to make the vision a reality.

Parks, Open Space, and Public Ways

Existing Conditions

The most significant park in the Central Planning District is Hickory Hill Park, a 185-acre passive recreation park located in the northeast corner of the district. Founded in 1967, Hickory Hill Park is valued as a regional wilderness area within the city that offers soft-surface hiking/jogging trails. The district also contains several small neighborhood parks, some of which are the oldest public parks in Iowa City. These include College Green Park and North Market Square Park (both established in 1839), Happy Hollow Park and Reno Street Park located on the district's north side, Glendale Park and Creekside Park located to the east, and Oak Grove Park and Highland Park located in the south-east part of the district. Most of these parks consist of 2.5 acres of land or less, and while many provide picnic shelters and playground equipment for small children, they have limited space and facilities for active recreation, such as playing fields or courts, which are highly desired in the district. Despite their limited size, these smaller parks are valued by residents of the district as a community gathering space.

Four public elementary schools—Mann, Longfellow, Hoover and Twain—and one public high school, City High, are located within the district. While the Neighborhood Open Space Plan considers playgrounds, courts, and fields associated with public schools as usable recreation space for the district, these facilities receive only partial credit toward the open space need because they are not available for public use during the school day and are not controlled by the City. In addition, Oakland Cemetery, a public cemetery managed by the City's Parks and Recreation Department and located adjacent to Hickory Hill Park, and Plum Grove, a state historical site, contribute to open space within the district.

The Central District is served by two regional trails located at the perimeter of the district: the Iowa River Corridor (IRC) Trail and the Highway 6 Trail. The IRC Trail is part of a nine-mile trail system from Napoleon Park in south Iowa City to West Overlook Road in north Johnson County. The IRC Trail is a recreation route connecting many parks, including City Park and Waterworks Park, which also serves as a commuter route for people working on or near the University of Iowa campus. While the Highway 6 Trail is located just south of the Central District along Highway 6, it provides a means of access from the surrounding neighborhoods to the businesses along Highway 6 and another connection to the IRC Trail.

Because the Central District is almost completely developed, it is difficult to establish new trails. In order to do so, land must be donated to or purchased by the City, or existing property owners would need to grant public access easements across their private property. However, there are a few recent successes. A short neighborhood trail in the Longfellow District showcases native prairie plantings and provides a tunnel under the railroad tracks connecting neighborhoods that were previously cut off from one another. Area residents located north of the railroad tracks can now easily bike or



Above: Despite its small size, College Green park provides opportunities for active play, relaxation, and social gatherings. It also serves as a focal point for the neighborhood that surrounds it and is the site of many public events, including rallies, protests, parades and community celebrations.



The tunnel that connects the Longfellow Trail to Kirkwood Avenue provides a vital pedestrian and bike connection between two neighborhoods once cut off by the railroad.



In some areas of the district, private open space has been displaced by apartment buildings and parking lots. This creates greater demand on existing public parks and sometimes leads to conflicts when renters use rights-of-way for gathering or play space.

walk to the commercial areas near the Sycamore Mall. The Longfellow Trail also provides a new connection for bicyclists wanting to ride from these neighborhoods south to the Sycamore Greenway trail system located south of Highway 6. The Court Hill Trail is currently being built along Ralston Creek between Creekside Park and Court Hill Park. This trail will be part of a larger trail and sidewalk network connecting Creekside Park to Scott Park, and will include a connection to the sidewalk network around the Towncrest commercial area.

Open Space Needs

The Neighborhood Open Space Plan (adopted 1993) promotes parkland for active recreation and play space, relaxation and passive pleasure, and as a focal point for neighborhood activity and social interaction. The plan divides the Central Planning District into eight open space districts and has a goal of providing public park space within a walkable distance (one-quarter mile or less) of all residences. All but one of the open space districts in the Central Planning District are at a significant deficit in terms of the recommended public open space—the exception being the Hickory Hill District. While three of the open space districts—North Side, College Green, and City High—have less than half of the recommended open space, the Bowery and Near Southside Districts have no parks or open space within their boundaries. Large concentrations of multi-family housing in these areas, along with the expansion of parking lots to support larger numbers of residents, has exacerbated the situation by reducing the availability of private open space. While the construction of the University's new student recreation facility on the east campus will provide new opportunities for organized recreation and exercise, the lack of outdoor open space for more informal recreation or social gatherings will remain an issue in these areas of the district.

Addressing the parkland shortage will require a concerted effort by the City. As more high-density residential uses are developed south of Burlington Street—and especially if plans for a passenger rail system are pursued—there will likely be an even greater demand for open space in the areas surrounding the Downtown. Aside from the handful of undeveloped properties scattered throughout the Central District which could be acquired or redeveloped for park use (see map on page 40), the greatest opportunity to provide park space and trail connections on a large scale is if industrial and public property located west of Gilbert Street and south of Prentiss Street are relocated to make room for riverfront redevelopment, particularly if passenger rail service is re-established in the area. Many of the properties along the river were impacted by the 2008 flood. As the City and property owners in this area reevaluate land uses along the riverfront, there may be a singular opportunity to create highly desirable public park and trail space along the Iowa River.

Access and Awareness

Because there is very little undeveloped land in the Central District, there is no quick fix for creating new public park space. It is therefore critical that the City make the most of the limited park space it has by creating better public access to and greater awareness of existing parks in the district and improving the infrastructure and facilities that will help make these parks more usable. While there are plans to create a bike trail between Creekside and Scott Parks, there are no other trail connections between parks within the district and limited signage directing people to parks. Several parks are lacking in the amenities needed to make them fully usable—amenities such as drinking fountains and restrooms are absent in all but three parks in the district. Many residents are simply unaware of the public parks that do exist within the district. Participants in the planning process suggested a system of directional signage, including maps, to raise awareness of parks in the district. Additional wayfinding methods, such as streetscape enhancements and landscaping along rights-of-way that provide access to parks, would help direct people to smaller, less visible parks in the district, such as North Market Square and Creekside Park.

Alternative Spaces

Though there are a handful of undeveloped properties in the district that might be acquired to create new parks or to expand existing parks, it is unlikely that sufficient land will become available to bring the district in line with the goals of the Neighborhood Open Space Plan. Despite the significant shortage of public park space, a strong community tradition of gardening, a mature tree canopy, and close proximity to Ralston Creek and the Iowa River lend a distinct green character to the district. These green resources, which exist largely on private property or in public rights-of-way, help to soften an otherwise fully developed environment.

Given the anticipated growth in density in the areas of the district surrounding the Downtown, a focus on alternative or creative ways to expand and improve the sense of open or green space is important for preserving and enhancing the quality of life in this western portion of the district. Participants in the planning forums pointed to public rights-of-way (both streets and alleys) as substitutes for traditional open space or trails. Also, landscaping in the public right-of-way (parkways, boulevards, traffic triangles) provides an opportunity not only to mitigate or soften more densely developed areas, but would also provide a clearer separation between sidewalks and vehicle traffic. Landscaping can provide a visual edge to the street, which not only helps to guide motorists but also makes pedestrians feel safer and discourages pedestrians from crossing the street mid-block. There is significant potential to enhance and expand these alternative spaces through public-private partnerships, including relevant neighborhood associations and advocacy groups such as Project GREEN, and the Johnson County Master Gardeners.



Participants in the planning workshop called for a system of directional signage to help residents find local parks, especially Hickory Hill Park, the largest park in the district but one whose entrance is located at the end of a residential street.



Creative use of public streets and rights-of-way, such as creation of “festival streets” as shown in this illustration, would provide additional space for community gatherings and create a sense of neighborhood identity.



Open Space Goals and Objectives

The following goals and objectives for parks, trails, and public ways were developed from a series of public workshops, including a special focus session on the topic.

Goal 1. Investigate and pursue opportunities to acquire land for the development of new or expanded parks (see open space map on page 40).

- a. Pursue opportunities to create a public park and trails along the Iowa River as part of the City's response to the 2008 flood, or with any re-development of industrial and public property west of Gilbert Street.
- b. Work proactively to acquire the Chadek property as a public park space. The undeveloped property located along Friendship Street between Third and Fifth Avenue consists of five acres of undeveloped land. The parcel is ideal for a public parkland, as three sides of the property front onto streets or right-of-way, and there is sufficient space for active recreation use.
- c. Investigate the potential for creating or expanding parks or trails on undeveloped land throughout the district, including:
 - Undeveloped land adjacent to Happy Hollow Park. Additional space for Happy Hollow Park could provide opportunities for active recreation space (courts or fields).
 - Undeveloped lots near Creekside Park (.41 acres) and Glendale Park (.33 acres +).
 - Possible trail connection running from the intersection of College Street and College Court extending northwest to Glendale Court and across the creek to Parsons Avenue or through property east of Woodlawn that is currently owned by the Alberhasky family.
- d. Explore the possibility of a dog park or trail to serve the neighborhoods in the Central Planning District.
- e. Pursue opportunities to create parks, including small pocket parks and community gardens, where lots become available within the district. Consider lots adjacent to Plum Grove Historic Site on the west side of Carroll Street.



The Chadek property was identified as an ideal location for a future public park in an area of the district that lacks sufficient public park space.



A system of wayfinding signage and maps will help make residents more aware of those parks and trails that serve the district.



Some communities are now using wireless zones as park amenities.

- f. Investigate the feasibility of requiring a neighborhood open space fee when property within the district is rezoned for development at higher residential density. Fees would be used for acquisition of new parkland or improvements to existing parks within the area of rezoning.

Goal 2. Foster public awareness of and access to parks that serve the Central District.

- a. Create a system of bike- and pedestrian-connections to parks via trails or public rights-of-way that are bike and pedestrian friendly.
- b. Promote parks through public events such as history walks, tree walks, and movie nights or other social events in parks.
- c. Develop a user-friendly system of signage, maps, and other wayfinding techniques to guide people to parks and connecting trails.

Goal 3. Improve the amenities offered in existing parks or other open spaces.

- a. Wherever feasible, provide public restrooms and drinking water in public parks (especially at south Hickory Hill Park), including drinking water for dogs and fountains that allow hikers and bikers to refill water containers.
- b. Design and develop small parks that keep kids safe from vehicle traffic through the use of low fencing, landscape barriers and other appropriate methods.
- c. Investigate opportunities to provide recreational amenities on other public property (i.e. adaptive uses for parking lots during non-business hours), especially near higher density apartments.
- d. Investigate the possibility of making some parks "wireless" zones.
- e. Explore options for passive recreational uses on other public properties that are not designated parks, such as along the Iowa Avenue median or other street rights-of-way.
- g. Expand the sense of space for small parks by improving and enhancing the landscaping along streets leading into parks.
- h. Provide more and better opportunities for active recreation (i.e. basketball courts, skateboarding) within appropriate parks in the district, especially those close to multi-family and student housing.

Goal 4. Enhance and expand green spaces, both large and small, on public and private property.

- a. Identify public spaces that can be enhanced with landscaping, furniture, cultural or historical signage, or public art (i.e. street medians, rights-of-way, public parking facilities).
- b. Include and emphasize green (landscaping) components in all street improvement projects and minimize the use of paving and hard surfaces wherever possible (i.e. medians, traffic triangles, etc.), especially between sidewalks and streets.
- c. Create and promote a set of guidelines for private property owners who wish to landscape in the right-of-way (parkway).
- d. Explore creative uses of the Iowa Avenue median for some forms of passive recreation (such as seating space).
- e. Enhance the district's sense of green space through events such as garden walks and other public education campaigns that encourage private property owners to plant trees and undertake other landscaping projects.
- f. Consider designation of "festival streets"— streets that are designed similar to public squares (without a raised curb) but are open to traffic — to provide space for block parties, public gatherings, festivals, etc. These streets can be easily closed to allow festivals or other social gatherings or community events. Linn Street, between Market and Bloomington, might be an appropriate candidate for a festival street.
- g. Pursue opportunities for green rooftops as usable green space on public and privately owned buildings in the district, especially for projects that receive public funding or TIF designation.
- h. Investigate changes to the zoning code that would create opportunities for private, usable green space in multi-family developments.



Landscaping within the right-of-way is one way to make street-scapes and other heavily paved areas more attractive, which contributes to the district's sense of green space.

Participants in the planning workshops identified Ralston Creek as an important natural feature for the district and one that helps to create a sense of open natural space. Enhancing views and access to the creek wherever possible and educating residents about the creek and its role as a natural corridor will help to encourage a sense of stewardship for this important district asset.



Goal 5. Improve awareness of and access to the Iowa River and Ralston Creek.

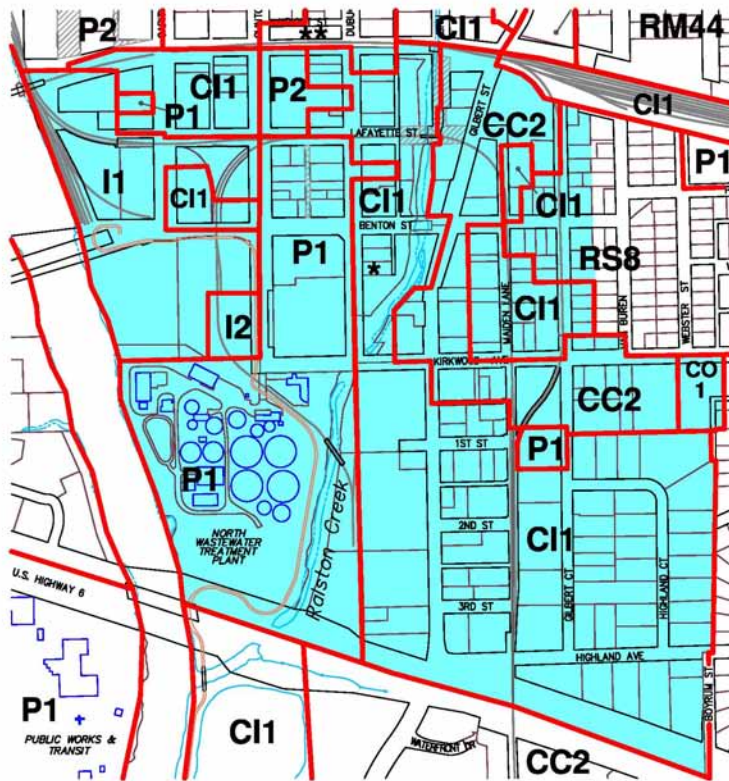
- a. Develop plans for improving visual and physical access to Ralston Creek and for restoration of the stream along both public and privately owned sections of the creek.
- b. Encourage community stewardship of the creek by educating property owners and residents about public and other funding opportunities for creek restoration and improvement along privately owned sections of the creek.
- c. Identify opportunities to acquire land or access rights to the creek, including a possible connection between Glendale Park and Hickory Hill Park.
- d. Foster the creation of new advocacy and volunteer groups (e.g. a "Friends of Ralston Creek") within neighborhoods to help maintain and improve the creek.
- e. Develop wayfinding methods for directing people to points of public access along Ralston Creek and the Iowa River.

Commercial Areas

There are a number of commercial areas that provide goods and services to the residents of the Central District. While largely located in the Southeast Planning District, the Sycamore Mall / First Avenue Commercial Area and the retail commercial node at First and Muscatine provide for most daily household needs. Groceries, gas and vehicle servicing, clothing, pharmaceuticals, restaurants, movie theaters, and medical and dental services are all readily available. District residents also enjoy good access to Downtown Iowa City and all its unique retail shops, government and professional services, restaurants and entertainment venues. Workshop participants cited proximity to employment centers — Downtown, University of Iowa, Kirkwood Community College, Mercy Hospital, and Proctor and Gamble — as a positive aspect of living in the Central District. There are two small neighborhood commercial nodes, one on Dodge Street near Horace Mann Elementary School and the other at the corner of 1st Avenue and Rochester Avenue. While limited in size, local residents appreciate the convenience of shopping close to home.

There are two significant commercial areas located within the boundaries of the Central District. These areas are examined in more detail in the following sections of the plan. The South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor contains a mix of intensive commercial uses, industrial uses, and a number of retail, office, and business service establishments. Many of these largely locally owned establishments have been in business for a long time, providing needed goods and services to city residents. The Northside Marketplace, with its charming mainstreet character, contains many local businesses and restaurants enjoyed by area residents. Good street and sidewalk connections make it possible for people to walk or bike to these areas. This area was originally included in the Downtown Planning District, but due to its neighborhood commercial character and its connection and direct effect on the surrounding neighborhoods, it is more appropriate to include it in the Central Planning District.





Current zoning map (2008) for the area defined as the South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor.

South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor

For the purpose of the Central District Plan, the South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor is defined as the area bounded by the Iowa River, Highway 6, Highland Court and the Iowa Interstate Railroad. A large portion of the area is zoned for industrial and intensive commercial uses, which often require outdoor storage space, and as well as public uses, which include the Johnson County Administrative Office, Iowa City's Waste Water Treatment Facility, and the Iowa City Animal Care Center.

Three arterial streets — Kirkwood Avenue, Benton Street and South Gilbert Street — converge in the area and serve as major travel corridors between downtown Iowa City and Highway 6. Business and property owners cite high visibility along Gilbert Street and Kirkwood Avenue along with lower rents (compared to Downtown) and opportunities for on-site parking as positive factors that influenced their decisions to locate in the area. A mix of retail, personal service, and office uses predominate along Kirkwood Avenue and South Gilbert Street, while the remainder of the area is characterized by a mix of industrial and intensive commercial uses, residential apartments, and public uses.

Traffic congestion, particularly at the Highway 6 and South Gilbert Street intersection, and driver confusion related to the one-way direction on Benton Street east of Kirkwood Avenue, are concerns for businesses and property owners. Due to opposition from some property owners, the City Council has placed improvements to the Highway 6 and Gilbert Street intersection on hold indefinitely and it is unlikely that the Council will place the project back in the capital improvements budget without advocacy from area property owners.

As noted in the history section at the beginning of this plan, the early development of much of the area was industrial. Properties south of Kirkwood Avenue, on Highland and Gilbert Courts, continue to provide a vital niche for automobile repair and other intensive commercial uses in close proximity to Downtown. City Carton, a recycling processing facility, and the City's Wastewater Treatment Facility occupy nearly all of the riverfront area. While the remainder of the district is gradually transitioning toward a mix of retail commercial, office, and apartments, an inconsistent development pattern and a lack of aesthetic cohesion were identified as obstacles to more significant reinvestment in the area. The consolidation of the Johnson County administration offices in a new facility between Clinton and Dubuque Streets, along with the potential for passenger rail service and the close proximity to

an expanding downtown and university campus, may provide a catalyst for major redevelopment in the area. Most recently, the flood of 2008 has prompted a reconsideration of development and land uses along the Iowa River.

South Gilbert Street

South Gilbert Street serves as an important entryway to Iowa City's Downtown, but one that lacks aesthetic appeal. The character and scale of commercial development along South Gilbert Street is auto-oriented, with parking lots located at the front of the lots and buildings set back from the street. Property owners and businesses alike expressed a desire for a more attractive and pedestrian-friendly streetscape as well as a welcoming commercial identity to attract nearby residents and shoppers. In general, the properties along Gilbert Street have been transitioning away from intensive commercial uses toward retail commercial uses, although quite a number are the type that require outdoor storage and display.

In the short term, screening parking lots with landscaping creating better connectivity between lots by providing cross-access for pedestrians and cars, and consolidating curb cuts would help to alleviate some of the traffic congestion and aesthetic issues along Gilbert Street.

In the long term, major commercial redevelopment along Gilbert Street is likely if the City and the State pursue development of passenger rail service between Cedar Rapids and Iowa City and Amtrak service between Chicago and Iowa City. Both the CRANDIC rail line and the Iowa Interstate Rail line extend through the South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor, making it an ideal location for high density transit-oriented development around the train depot and around transit stops. Adoption of an overlay zoning district tailored to this important commercial corridor could help to create a more uniform and attractive streetscape as redevelopment occurs, and will ensure that it redevelops with a pedestrian orientation to serve nearby residents and train passengers.

Future development scenarios for South Gilbert Street should take into account the potential for higher density residential neighborhoods located to take advantage of rail service and the type of commercial businesses that this concentration of new residents would support. A more in-depth study of appropriate land uses, open space, building and parking area designs, the residential density needed to support rail service, and strategies to improve connections to surrounding neighborhoods and commercial areas will be necessary.



Participants in the focus group session believe that the South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor lacks aesthetic appeal as well as an identity to attract customers and investment to the neighborhood.



Portions of Kirkwood Avenue have the elements of a more traditional mainstreet commercial area in terms of scale and pedestrian orientation.

Property north of Kirkwood Avenue on Gilbert Court and Maiden Lane are zoned RS-8 and CI-1. Mixed use zoning might provide a more appropriate transition between the commercial area and the neighborhood to the east.



Kirkwood Avenue

Slower moving traffic and the availability of on-street parking have attracted small-scale retail and personal service uses to Kirkwood Avenue, east of Gilbert Street. This area includes some of the elements of a more traditional mainstreet commercial zone in terms of scale and pedestrian orientation. There is a strong desire among the residential neighbors to prevent the commercial area from encroaching further to the east, and recent attempts to rezone residential property for commercial uses have failed. Maintaining the current boundary for the commercial uses along Kirkwood Avenue redevelop, there is also an opportunity for this area to become a neighborhood asset in much the way that the Northside Marketplace complements the residential neighborhood north of the Downtown.

North of Kirkwood Avenue, properties along Gilbert Court and Maiden Lane are currently zoned CI-1 and RS-8. While this area can appropriately serve both residential and commercial uses, the small size of the lots zoned for intensive commercial do not provide an ideal transition between the two uses. The CRANDIC rail line runs along Maiden Lane. Early discussions have identified Maiden Lane north of Kirkwood Avenue as a potential location for the terminus of passenger rail service between Iowa City and Cedar Rapids. A mixed-use zone west of Van Buren Street would provide an opportunity for small, low-intensity businesses as well as residential development, and provide a more appropriate transition between the commercial and residential zones.

Some commercial property owners along Kirkwood Avenue have expressed interest in developing residential units above storefronts to help support the commercial area and to provide a better transition between the commercial zone and the residential neighborhood to the east. Most indicated a desire to create residential uses that are different from what is offered in the Downtown and student markets. Mixed-use redevelopment reflecting the scale and character of the adjacent neighborhood, and streetscape improvements that link the commercial zone to the residential by emphasizing the history of the neighborhood, could help foster a stronger connection between business owners and residents.

Riverfront Area

Like many other communities across the nation, Iowa City is rethinking its relationship to urban rivers and streams and recognizing the benefits of public access and community open space along the waterfront. Participants in the Central Planning Process expressed a strong desire to reclaim the riverfront for public use and to provide an attractive resource to spur redevelopment in the South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor and the Near Southside Neighborhood.

Although the South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor has experienced a gradual transition away from industrial uses, there are two significant industrial uses that remain along the riverfront — the North Wastewater Treatment Plant and City Carton, a recycling processing facility. While these facilities provide an essential function in the community, they are a deterrent to retail and residential redevelopment and effectively cut off any public access to the Iowa River. Because a rail spur and convenient highway access for trucks are essential to City Carton's business, it is unlikely they will relocate unless an appropriate alternative location is found to serve their needs. The strategy for the North Wastewater Treatment Facility is to eventually relocate those functions to the South Wastewater Treatment Facility. This transition will be dependent on available funding.

The flooding of 2008, which affected properties north of Highway 6 and west of South Dubuque Street, has provided an impetus to reassess the risks to development within the floodplain and to minimize the impacts of future floods. Any future development or redevelopment, particularly residential development, in these areas must take the floodplain and its inherent risks into account. Properties at high flood risk could provide much needed open space. Development of trails and attractive park space along the river may encourage redevelopment and reinvestment in the area. In addition, if passenger rail is reintroduced into the community, usable open space along the river will be an important element in the transit-oriented development planned for this area. Any redevelopment proposed for the riverfront area should also relate to the Near Southside Neighborhood, which is located just north of the Iowa Interstate Railroad.

The redevelopment of areas west of Gilbert Street will likely depend on a substantial public-private effort to acquire and improve large tracts of property. Participants in the Central District Planning process were invited to generate ideas for how the riverfront area should redevelop if such an opportunity comes about. These ideas are incorporated into the goals and objectives at the end of this section.



The flood of 2008 impacted many properties in the South Gilbert Commercial Corridor. This photo shows an aerial view of the flooded Iowa River looking west from the intersection of S. Gilbert Street and Highway 6. The North Wastewater Treatment Plant is in the upper right corner.



Developing a rail or other public transit system does not in itself constitute a transit oriented development (TOD). The components of TOD have as much to do with the type and density of development around the rail or bus station as they do with the form of public transit itself. The components of TODs are:

- Walkable design with pedestrians as the focus.
- Train station as the central feature.
- A town center containing a mixture of uses in close proximity including office, residential, retail, and civic uses.
- High density (20-50 dwelling units per acre), high-quality development within a quarter to half mile surrounding the station.
- Efficient connections with other transit systems, such as buses, bike trails, etc.
- Streets with good connectivity and traffic calming features that slow vehicle speeds.
- Parking management to reduce the amount of land devoted to vehicle parking.

Passenger Rail Service

The area west of South Gilbert Street has become a focal point in discussions regarding long-term planning for the reintroduction of passenger rail service to the Iowa City/Cedar Rapids Corridor Area. The CRANDIC rail line is ideally located to provide service from this area to the University campus, downtown Iowa City, and the University and Veterans Hospitals, and would provide a connection to Coralville's River Landing development, North Liberty and along the I-380 corridor to Cedar Rapids. If funding is secured from the State Legislature, Amtrak could initiate passenger service from Chicago to Iowa City, utilizing the Iowa Interstate Rail Line.

Alternatives to automobile travel will become more attractive as gas prices escalate. With such convenient and cost-effective transportation links to local employment centers and to larger cities in the region, the Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor and the Near Southside will become an ideal location for higher density housing, which would in turn support retail and personal service businesses, entertainment venues, and restaurants along Gilbert Street and Kirkwood Avenue. Because development of a density and character to support mass transit is an essential component in planning for rail service, a proactive approach to development will be necessary for this area. Guidelines, regulations, and incentives should be adopted to support the long-term vision for this area. While in the short term, community commercial zoning may be appropriate along Gilbert Street, if passenger rail is introduced it will be necessary to create new zoning categories or a special overlay zone to ensure that the commercial area is integrated into a strategic vision for transit-oriented development. That vision should include a more pedestrian-oriented focus supported by a captive customer base in the new high-density residential areas to the west and from visitors arriving by rail. A shift away from auto-centric site design toward active, pedestrian-oriented street frontages will be key to making this vision a reality. Reclaiming open space along the Iowa River and providing bicycle and pedestrian links to area destinations will be important factors in making this an attractive place to live.

The plan map of the Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor on the following page illustrates the location of the existing rail lines and the proposed riverfront redevelopment area, commercial redevelopment area, and an urban mixed-use area. While all of these areas could include medium- to high- density residential uses, creating a new zoning category for "urban mixed use" that is intended primarily for high-density residential development along with businesses that provide goods and services essential for everyday living, will provide an environment where it is possible for residents to reduce or eliminate reliance on the automobile.



Traffic congestion at the intersection of South Gilbert Street and Highway 6 was a problem cited by many area business owners, however opposition from some property owners has placed improvements to the intersection on hold indefinitely.



Streetscape improvements could help to create a commercial identity for the area and provide safer and more pleasant pedestrian areas.

South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor Goals and Objectives

The following goals and objectives for the South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor were developed from a series of public workshops, including a special focus session with business and property owners from the area.

Goal 1: Improve traffic flow through the area.

- a. Improve the intersections at Highway 6 and Gilbert Street and Gilbert Street and Kirkwood Avenue to minimize congestion at peak travel times.
- b. Investigate adding turn lanes on Gilbert Street to allow easier access to businesses.
- c. Study the desirability/feasibility of direct east-west access between Benton and Gilbert Streets. Any improvements or changes should discourage cut-through traffic along the residential portion of Benton Street east of Maiden Lane (see map).
- d. Explore possibilities for better access to the Downtown from Benton Street via Clinton Street.
- e. Work to ensure safe bicycle and pedestrian access to the area.

Goal 2. Support the economic vitality of this commercial area.

- a. Preserve on-street parking along Kirkwood Avenue in order to slow traffic and support sales-oriented retail uses and personal service businesses.
- b. Consider economic incentives to encourage appropriate reinvestment and redevelopment.
- c. Maintain Gilbert Court, Highland Court and Highland Avenue east of the rail line and south of Kirkwood Avenue as an important niche for repair and other quasi-industrial uses close to the center of the city (see map).
- d. Provide guidelines to improve the appearance and function of the Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor, e.g. improve signage, lighting, sidewalks, and landscaping, consolidate curb cuts and provide cross-access connections, etc.
- e. Work to establish an identity for the commercial area as an important entryway to Iowa City.
- f. Investigate design guidelines to promote a consistent and attractive pattern of redevelopment along Kirkwood Avenue that complements the adjacent residential neighborhood.
- g. Encourage formation of a business association to foster stronger relationships between business owners.
- h. Undertake streetscape improvements for Kirkwood Avenue and Gilbert Street in order to improve the aesthetic appeal and identity of the commercial area.
- i. Improve the safety of the area through better pedestrian level lighting and crossings.

Goal 3. Introduce residential uses to the area to support commercial uses and to expand opportunities for living close to employment and transit.

- a. Encourage redevelopment of commercial properties to include mixed-use buildings with 2-3 stories of apartments above commercial storefronts.
- b. Establish policies and regulations that encourage mixed-use buildings with one- to two-bedroom apartments above commercial storefronts.
- c. Work to create a unique and diverse style of residential development in the area — focusing on a mix of housing, including affordable housing, for those who wish to live close to Downtown and major employment centers such as the University and the Johnson County Administrative offices.
- d. Explore new zoning designations for high-density residential in concert with transit-oriented development associated with introduction of passenger rail to the area.
- e. Provide a buffer between commercial zones and the residential neighborhood to the east by transitioning the current CI-1 area north of Kirkwood and east of Gilbert to a mixed-use zone, which would allow a mix of small retail and office uses and single family homes, duplexes, and low density multi-family housing. If rezonings are requested to accommodate redevelopment, the City should consider appropriate conditions to ensure that the scale and intensity of new development does not threaten the integrity and character of the existing residential neighborhood to the east.

Goal 4. Encourage riverfront redevelopment in a manner that supports the economic vitality and quality of life for the district as a whole.

- a. Take inherent flood risks into account when planning for redevelopment along the riverfront.
- b. Preserve riverfront property for public access and open space and provide improved bicycle and pedestrian trail connections through the area.
- c. Enhance views of the river by cleaning up the riverbank and planting appropriate natural landscaping.
- d. Encourage development that supports passenger rail or other public transit and that minimizes the need for additional vehicles and parking in the area.
- e. Given the proximity to the Downtown and potential for rail or other transit service, encourage higher-density residential development and transit-oriented commercial development.
- f. Identify and preserve historic properties in the area, such as the Tate House and Rock Island Railroad Depot.



Any long-term redevelopment scenario for the South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor should consider the potential for high-density urban development necessary to support rail service.

- g. Provide a mix of housing opportunities with an emphasis on providing diverse, accessible, and affordable housing for people who wish to live and work in the Downtown area.
- h. Encourage local start-ups and independent businesses.
- i. As much as possible, work to encourage a mix of uses to meet the basic needs of people living in the area with open space and play structures, trail and pedestrian connections, general retail such as grocery and drugstores, daycare, and civic uses.
- i. Work to promote sustainable development, including Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification and other green elements.

Goal 5. Encourage reinvestment and redevelopment where appropriate.

Short term

- a. Explore and implement initiatives to create aesthetic improvements to the commercial streetscape along Kirkwood Avenue, Benton Street, and Gilbert Street. Along Kirkwood Avenue, streetscape improvements should help establish a distinct character and identity connected with the historic neighborhood to the east.
- b. Organize a business association to advocate for improvements and reinvestment in the area.
- c. Establish an Urban Mixed-Use zoning designation to support redevelopment in areas bordering the Near Southside Neighborhood in order to support passenger rail service in the area.

Long term

- a. Work with industrial and quasi-industrial uses west of Gilbert Street to explore opportunities for relocation in order to free up the riverfront for redevelopment.
- b. Take advantage of the riverfront and existing rail facilities to create transit-oriented redevelopment in the area.
- c. Determine the appropriate mix of housing, commercial, open space and public amenities to support successful redevelopment efforts.
- d. Actively promote and expand bike trails, bus service, and rail service in this area to support higher density housing.
- e. Create incentives or regulations to ensure the development of affordable housing for people who work in the area.
- f. Explore opportunities to create much-needed public open space and trails within the Iowa River floodplain.



Participants in the planning workshop stressed the importance of public open space along the riverfront, including trail connections.

Northside Marketplace

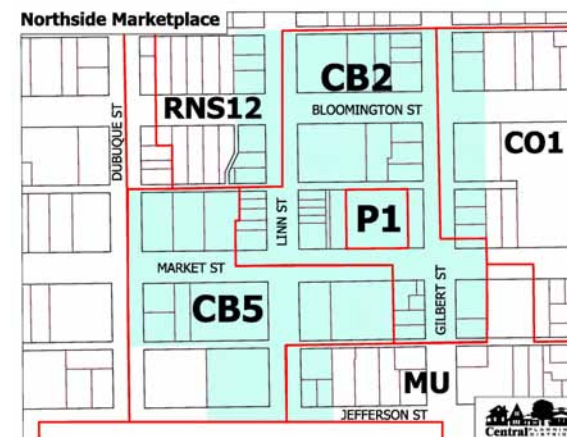
The Northside Marketplace is defined as the historic commercial neighborhood bounded by Bloomington and Jefferson Streets and North Gilbert and Dubuque Streets. Located just to the north of the Downtown, it is considered an important commercial area that serves the Central Planning District.

Despite its close proximity to the Downtown, the Northside Marketplace maintains a distinct identity and scale. Locally owned businesses that have become institutions in the community, such as John's Grocery, Pagliai's Pizza, and the Hamburg Inn, serve as commercial anchors for the neighborhood, which is defined by an eclectic mix of small-scale, locally owned specialty shops and restaurants. Many participants describe the area as "Old Iowa City" – an urban commercial district that is not dominated by the undergraduate student market.

A two-block section of University campus running from North Dubuque to Gilbert Street cuts off through-traffic on North Linn, creating the slower, pedestrian pace that helps define the area. However, this disconnection from the Downtown is also viewed as something of an obstacle to attracting more customers. Participants indicated that many people, even long-time residents of Iowa City, are simply not aware of Northside Marketplace.

While a number of recommendations from the Northside Marketplace Streetscape Master Plan (2000) have been implemented in order to improve the identity and safety of the area – including pedestrian-scale lighting, decorative paving, and streetscape amenities – participants agreed that more work is needed to direct people to the area from the Downtown and Dubuque Street. Participants also indicated that the Northside Marketplace Business Association, which has in recent years become somewhat dormant, should play a more active role in promoting the area, working with businesses to maintain and improve the district, and planning special events to attract new customers to the area.

Business owners cite the availability of on-street and surface parking in addition to affordable rents and pedestrian traffic as reasons for locating in the area. However, finding and maintaining the right balance of parking is critical as most of the surface parking in the area is privately owned and could be developed. While underground parking may be cost prohibitive to construct, there was some support for creating structured parking above the street level, similar to the ramps at Iowa Avenue and Court Street. However, creating structured parking in an area of small lots may be difficult without more significant redevelopment. Meanwhile, much of the metered parking is long-term (more than one hour), which allows non-shoppers to park during classes, work, or other events not related to the commercial center. Discouraging this sort of commuter parking through shorter time limits on meters will help to preserve parking for customers. Participants also expressed a particular interest in



Zoning map for the Northside Marketplace.



Its mainstreet character and eclectic mix of small, locally owned business are what residents find appealing in the Northside Marketplace.



New mixed-use development in the CB-5 zone at the corner of Linn and Market Streets. While most participants are supportive of the introduction of more residential units into the area, there are concerns about the scale and style of potential future redevelopment in the area.



The Foxhead is one of several buildings in the area that serve as reminder of the area's brewing history.

attracting bicycle commuters to the area through the use bike lanes or bikeways, as well as expanded or enhanced bicycle parking, such as covered bike parking.

While parking is an important asset for the commercial district, business owners and residents alike place a high value on pedestrian traffic. Along with wayfinding enhancements, participants called for safety improvements to the Gilbert and Linn and Linn and Market Street intersections. Most see these intersections as unsafe due to turning vehicle traffic that often does not yield to pedestrians. Additional bump-outs, decorative pavement, and modifications to the traffic signal timing were suggested as potential solutions to the problem.

Participants indicated that the historic character of the Northside Marketplace is one of its greatest assets. Development that is sensitive to the neighborhood's history and architectural significance should be encouraged. The Conrad and Anna Graf House at 319 Bloomington Street and the Anton Geiger House at 213 Market Street are both individually eligible for listing on the National Register for their association with significant events and the lives of significant persons, and are important examples of Italianate and simplified Italianate buildings in Iowa City. Other properties in the neighborhood, such as the Foxhead tavern, have likewise contributed to the overall history and character of the neighborhood. In addition to being the oldest bar in Iowa City. The Foxhead has been a popular gathering place for many famous writers who passed through the Iowa Writers' Workshop. The plan map on page 58 shows the location of significant historic buildings within the Northside Marketplace.

While many participants welcomed the new mixed-use residential development in the CB-5 zone at the corner of Linn and Market, there is concern that too much redevelopment or redevelopment at too large a scale or density could threaten the character of the neighborhood. Most participants want to encourage development of one and two-bedroom apartments that will be attractive to longer-term residents rather than the dorm-style apartments typical near Downtown.

Properties within the area are currently zoned Central Business Service (CB-2) and Central Business Support (CB-5). During the zoning code revision process in 2006, the CB-2 zone was to be phased out. However, due to some confusion and concern about the implications of the zoning changes proposed, the City Council decided to keep the CB-2 zone in the code. Council directed the Planning Department to re-examine the CB-2 zone as part of the Central District Planning process and make recommendations for changes that will ensure that future development in these areas is compatible with the existing mainstreet character. A goal of the plan is to adopt development standards in the CB-2 zone that are similar to the standards in the CB-5 and CB-10 Zone that require storefront windows, entrances at grade, buildings located close to the sidewalk, with parking located behind buildings. Development guidelines for residential densities and occupancy standards should also reflect the desired mix of apartments. Future changes to the CB-2 zone must take into account parking demand as well as the desire to preserve the character and scale of the commercial area.

Mercy Hospital is a large employer that borders the commercial district. Employees and visitors to the hospital support the economic vitality of the Northside Marketplace. However, there is concern about expansion of the hospital and associated medical offices and facilities and the potential displacement of retail commercial uses and erosion of the surrounding residential neighborhood. While hospital growth is not recommended west of Gilbert Street there may be opportunity for the hospital to grow south of Market Street and to the east as far as Dodge Street.

Northside Marketplace Goals and Objectives

The following goals and objectives for the Northside Marketplace were developed from a series of public workshops, including two special focus sessions with business and property owners from the area.

Goal 1. Preserve and promote the unique aspects of the Northside Marketplace.

- a. Establish policies and regulations that will preserve the existing scale and mainstreet commercial character of the Northside Marketplace.
- b. Protect historic buildings as an integral part of the Northside Marketplace.
- c. Adopt zoning rules that ensure that redevelopment occurs in a manner that promotes pedestrian-oriented street frontages.
- d. Explore and implement initiatives for storefront improvements and property maintenance.
- e. Explore and implement initiatives to clean up, maintain and improve service alleys and to enhance screening of the utility substation on Linn Street.

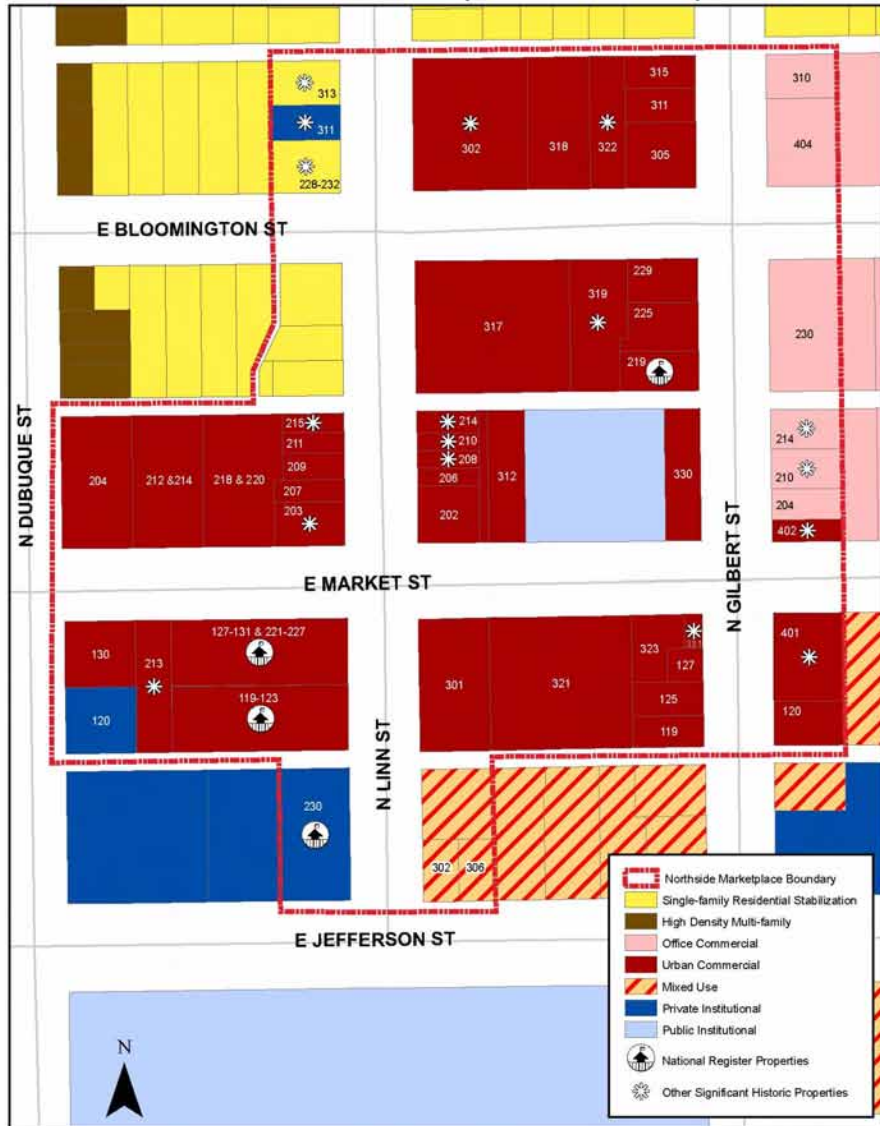
Goal 2. Encourage activities and physical improvements that create a sense of identity for the Northside Marketplace.

- a. Use signage or other way finding techniques to attract visitors and customers to the area, particularly from Downtown Iowa City and Dubuque Street.
- b. Improve the pedestrian passage from Iowa Avenue through University property to Linn Street with improved signage, public art, decorative pavement treatments, and/or similar elements.
- c. Extend and improve on the adopted streetscape plan for the area, including decorative pavement, benches, landscaping, pedestrian lighting, and pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
- d. Encourage seasonal festivals and activities that draw people to the area.



Wayfinding methods such as better signage, public art, or decorative paving in the Linn Street pedestrian passage (above) were all suggestions for providing a more visible connection between the Downtown and the Northside Marketplace.

Northside Marketplace Plan Map

**Goal 3. Support the economic vitality of the Northside Marketplace**

- Encourage area businesses and residents to participate in events, activities, and associations that foster a sense of identity and create a vibrant level of commercial activity.
- Support promotional activities of the local business association.
- Encourage partnerships between local businesses, institutions, and neighborhood associations.

Goal 4: Encourage development and redevelopment that will maintain the character and economic vitality of the Northside Marketplace

- Adopt zoning regulations to ensure that new development is consistent with the existing mainstreet commercial character of the area and compatible with surrounding residential neighborhoods, i.e. encourage 2- to 3-story buildings located close to the street, storefront windows, accessible and attractive building entrances and parking located behind or beneath buildings.
- Establish policies and regulations that encourage mixed-use buildings with 1- to 3-bedroom apartments above commercial storefronts in order to provide opportunities for a variety of tenants. Discourage 4 and 5-bedroom dorm-style apartments.
- Explore regulations as to limit the size, number, or hours of operation of businesses that sell alcohol in order to create an appropriate transition to the residential neighborhood and to preserve the variety of uses in the area.

Goal 5. Address the parking and traffic issues in the Northside Marketplace.

- Establish short term metered parking adjacent to businesses to reserve parking for business patrons and discourage commuter parking.
- As new development and redevelopment occurs explore options for shared parking to preserve land for active building uses.
- Explore feasibility of allowing parking on both sides of Market Street between Gilbert and Linn Streets.
- Explore feasibility of a structured parking area for the public lot on Market Street.

- e. Work with the Pagliai family or subsequent owner to explore future development scenarios for the private parking lot at the corner of Bloomington and Linn Street.

Goal 6. Support the use of alternative modes of transportation

- a. Install more bicycle parking, including covered bicycle parking.
- b. Explore options for bicycle lanes or designated routes to and through the area.
- c. Continue to promote improvements to the streetscape to create a comfortable and attractive environment for pedestrians.

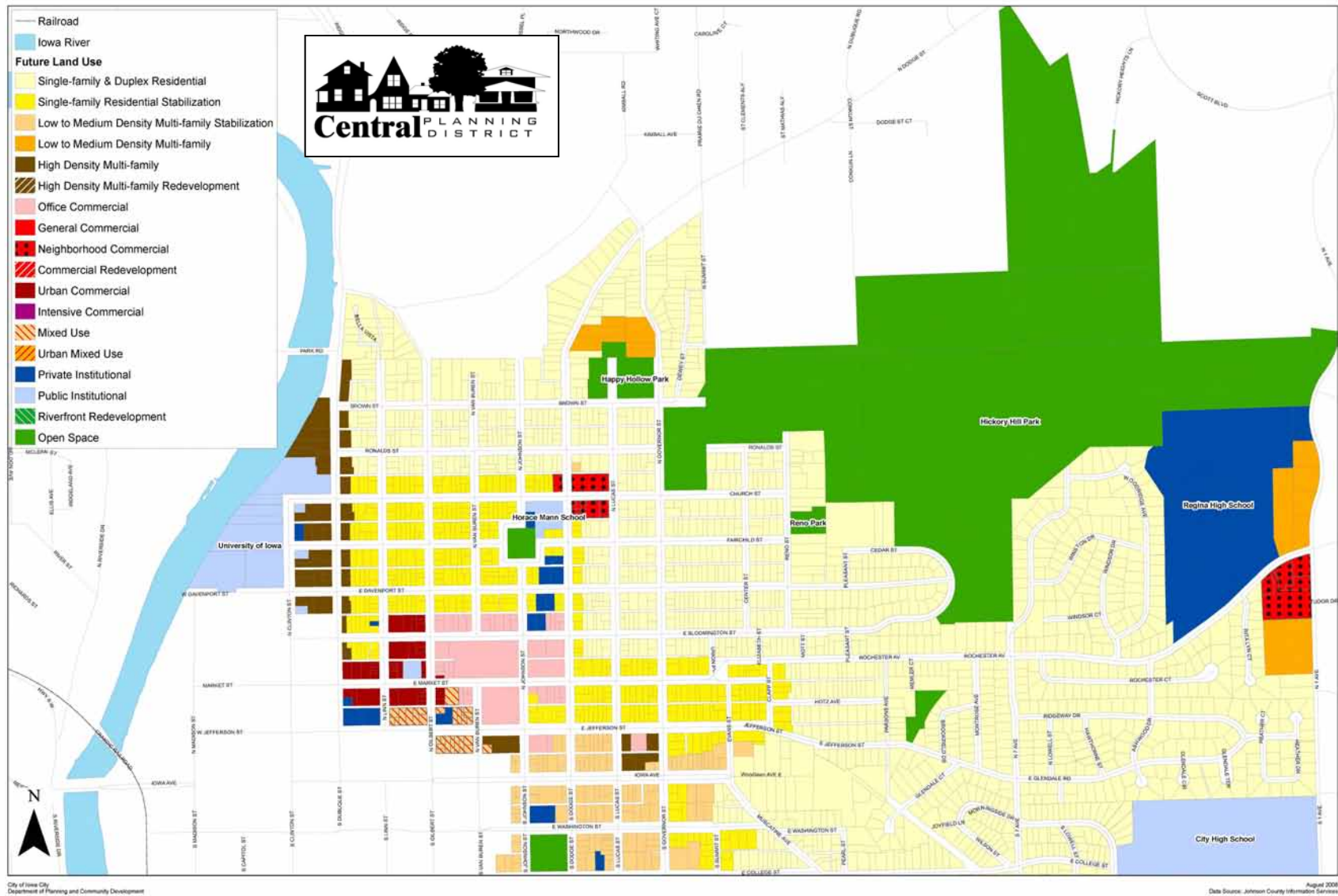
Goal 7. Improve public safety

- a. Study traffic circulation and signal timing at the intersection of Gilbert and Market Streets and implement changes that will improve pedestrian and vehicular safety.
- b. Study pedestrian activity at the intersection of Linn and Market Streets and implement changes that will improve safety for pedestrians.
- c. Explore and implement initiatives to prevent crime.
- d. Install additional pedestrian-scale lighting where needed.



Providing amenities such as covered bike racks for bicyclists is one way to support alternative modes of transportation and attract new visitors to the area.

Central District Plan Map (Map 1)



The Central District Plan Maps are intended to be used as a general guide to future land use and development in the Central District. The maps are color-coded to indicate the type of land use or type of development or redevelopment appropriate for specific areas of the District.



Central District Plan Map Designations

Single-Family/Duplex Residential

Intended primarily for single family and duplex residential development. Lower density zoning designations are suitable for areas with sensitive environmental features, topographical constraints, limited street access, or where compatibility with historical development patterns is important. Higher densities are more appropriate for areas with good access to all city services and facilities. For infill sites compatibility with surrounding neighborhood is important. Development Density: 2-13 dwelling units/acre

Single-Family Residential Stabilization

Intended for older areas of the city where single family homes originally predominated, but due to subsequent changes in zoning have experienced an increase in housing density and some conversion to multi-family and group living uses has occurred. The intent of this designation is to preserve the single-family residential character that remains by preventing further densification and conversion of single family residences to multi-family. Development Density: varies depending on mix of single family and conforming and nonconforming multi-family and group living uses

Low Density to Medium Density Multi-Family Stabilization

Intended for older areas of the city where single family homes originally predominated, but due to subsequent changes in zoning have experienced an increase in housing density and a significant conversion to multi-family and group living uses has occurred. The intent is to prevent further densification that may overtax existing land and infrastructure in older neighborhoods that were originally platted and designed for lower density residential uses. Development Density: varies depending on mix of single family and conforming and nonconforming multi-family and group living uses.

Low Density to Medium Density Multi-Family

Intended for low to medium density multi-family housing. Suitable for areas with good access to all city services and facilities. Higher density zoning designations may not be suitable for areas with topographical constraints or limited street access. For infill sites compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood is important. Development Density: 8-24 dwelling units/acre

High-Density Multi-Family Residential

Intended for high-density multi-family housing located in proximity to downtown, the University, or other employment centers. Suitable for areas with good access to all city services and facilities. Higher density zoning designations may not be suitable for areas with topographical constraints or limited street access. Development Density: 16-49 dwelling units/acre

High-Density Multi-Family Redevelopment

Designates an area of high density multi-family residential development where living conditions are less than ideal due to lack of adequate pedestrian amenities and crowded conditions with little usable open space for residents. Assessment of possible redevelopment scenarios will be necessary to encourage private redevelopment.

Office Commercial

Areas intended for office uses and compatible businesses. In some cases these areas may serve as a buffer between residential areas and more intensive commercial or industrial uses.

General Commercial

Areas intended to provide the opportunity for a large variety of commercial uses, particularly retail commercial uses, which serve a major segment of the community.

Neighborhood Commercial

Areas intended for retail and personal service uses that meet the day-to-day needs of the surrounding residential neighborhood. A grocery store or grocery store/drug store combination is preferred as the primary tenant in a Neighborhood Commercial (CN-1) zone although a variety of commercial uses are allowed. Specific site development standards will apply in these areas to ensure that commercial development is pedestrian-friendly and compatible with surrounding residential development.

Intensive Commercial

Areas intended for those sales and service functions and businesses whose operations are typically characterized by outdoor display and storage of merchandise, by repair businesses, quasi-industrial uses, and for sales of large equipment or motor vehicles, or by activities or operations conducted in buildings or structure not completely enclosed. Retail uses are restricted in order to provide opportunities for more land-intensive or quasi-industrial commercial operations and also to prevent conflicts between retail and industrial truck traffic. Special attention must be directed toward buffering the negative aspects of allowed uses from any adjacent lower intensity commercial areas or residential areas.

Urban Commercial

Central business service and support zones intended for compact, pedestrian-oriented shopping, office, service and entertainment uses. Residential apartments above commercial uses are encouraged to create an active street life and support commercial and service uses. Specific site development standards will apply in these areas to maintain or create pedestrian-oriented storefront commercial development, with parking areas located behind, under, or within buildings and the ground level floor area along street frontages reserved for active building uses. Residential density, building bulk and height should gradually decrease the further these areas are from the Central Business District in order to provide a transition to lower density residential areas that surround the downtown.

Mixed Use

Intended for low to medium density residential uses, including single family, duplexes, townhouses, and multi-family; and small-scale retail commercial uses, offices, personal services, and other uses that serve residents of and visitors to the area. Buildings can be mixed use or single use buildings. An area may be primarily commercial in nature or may be primarily residential depending on the market. Development is intended to be pedestrian-oriented with buildings oriented to the street with sidewalks, street trees and other pedestrian amenities. Residential buildings should be designed to ensure a comfortable and functional environment for urban living in close proximity to commercial uses. The mix of uses allowed requires special consideration of building and site design.

Urban Mixed Use

Intended for medium to high density residential uses in combination with retail, restaurants, personal service, office, and entertainment uses that serve residents of and visitors to the area. Buildings can be mixed use or single use buildings. Development is intended to be pedestrian-oriented with buildings oriented to the street with sidewalks, street trees and other pedestrian amenities. Residential buildings should be designed to ensure a comfortable and functional environment for urban living in close proximity to commercial uses, transit and other city services. The mix of uses allowed required special consideration of building and site design. A new zoning designation will need to be created to achieve the desired vision.

Commercial Redevelopment

Area where there is good possibility for commercial redevelopment to occur due to changing conditions in the area. This designation is used in the South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor to indicate where a transition away from intensive commercial uses may occur as the market responds to the demand for a different mix of retail goods and services. Potential catalysts for change in the area include: commencement of light rail or regional passenger rail service along the existing rail lines in the area; redevelopment along the Iowa River; and/or additional high density residential development in the Near Southside. Strategic planning initiatives will be necessary so that changes occur in a complementary and orderly fashion to support and ensure the success of public and private investment.

Riverfront Redevelopment

Area where there is a good possibility for redevelopment due to changing conditions in the area. This designation is used in the South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor to indicate where a transition away from industrial and public uses may make it possible to rethink use of the waterfront along the Iowa River, including planning for future flood events, and encouraging green space, passive or active recreational elements and other uses that will complement redevelopment efforts in the larger commercial corridor.

Private Institutional / Public Institutional

Areas intended for civic, cultural, or historical institutions; public schools; and places of assembly or worship. Iowa City does not have a zone that designates institutional uses as the primary, preferred land use. However, there are a number of zones where these uses are permitted or provisional uses. Development proposals are subject to the requirements of the underlying zoning designation. Land that is owned by a public entity is typically zoned Public (P).

Open Space

Indicates existing or potential open space that is important for the protection of sensitive natural features and/or to provide for recreational opportunities and/or to protect the aesthetic values of the community. An open space designation on private land may indicate that an area is largely unsuitable for development due to environmental or topographical constraints or may indicate that an opportunity to acquire needed open space is possible if current land uses are discontinued. While these areas are best reserved or acquired for open space, development may occur on privately held land if a proposal meets the underlying zoning requirements and the requirements of the Iowa City Sensitive Areas Ordinance.