

# DEKALB: CITY CENTER

An update to the 2007 Downtown Revitalization Plan

*AS ADOPTED - JULY 8, 2013*



## ADOPTION ORDINANCE

ORDINANCE 13-45      Passed: July 8, 2013  
AMENDING THE MUNICIPAL CODE OF THE  
CITY OF DEKALB, ILLINOIS CHAPTER 30,  
"OFFICIAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN,"  
SECTION 30.01, "ADOPTION," BY  
INCLUDING AN APPROVED DEKALB CITY  
CENTER—AN UPDATE TO THE DOWNTOWN  
PLAN.

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL of the City of DeKalb, Illinois as follows:

**Section 1.** That the Municipal Code of the City of DeKalb, Illinois, Chapter 30, "Official Comprehensive Plan", Section 30.01 "Adoption", be amended by inserting a new Subsection n) as shown following:

*n) DeKalb City Center - An update to the Downtown Plan as recommended for approval by the Planning and Zoning Commission on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2013, and approved by the City Council on June 10<sup>th</sup>; a copy of Downtown DeKalb Update shall be kept and made available to the public in the City Clerk's office.*

**Section 2.** That the implementation of the Downtown DeKalb Revitalization Plan Update is done in a manner that is supportive of the objectives and recommendations of the "original" Downtown DeKalb Revitalization Plan of the Comprehensive Plan as approved by the City Council on February 26, 2007;

**Section 3.** That each section, paragraph, sentence, clause and provision of this ordinance is separable and if any provision is held unconstitutional or invalid for any reason, such decision shall not affect the remainder of this ordinance, nor any part thereof, other than that part affected by such decision.

**Section 4.** That except as to the amendments heretofore mentioned, all Sections of the Municipal Code of the City of DeKalb, Illinois shall remain in full force and effect.

**Section 5.** Upon its passage and approval according to law, this Ordinance shall be in full force and effect.

PASSED BY THE CITY COUNCIL of the City of DeKalb, Illinois at a regular meeting thereof held on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2013 and approved by me as Mayor on the same day. Received and filed June 28, 2013 by voice vote. Passed on second reading by roll call vote: 7-0-1. Aye: Jacobson, Finucane, Lash, Snow, Naylor, O' Leary, Rey. Absent: Baker.

ATTEST:

*Elizabeth E. Peerboom*  
ELIZABETH E. PEERBOOM, City Clerk



*John A. Rey*  
JOHN A. REY, Mayor

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*The DeKalb: City Center Plan has been prepared under the direction of City of DeKalb staff and a project steering committee, with additional input provided by past planning efforts, city center stakeholder groups, and land representatives. The following individuals, as members of the project steering committee, were instrumental in the preparation of this plan.*

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**Thank you to the following City Center advocates for hosting meetings in the development of this plan:**

Elwood House Museum and Park  
Eduardo's Restaurant  
O'Leary's Restaurant  
The Egyptian Theatre

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Planning Context</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Stakeholder Engagement</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Market Analysis</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Plan Recommendations</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Implementation</b>	<b>63</b>

Appendix



While this plan is intended to be entirely "user-friendly", some terms used in the document may be unfamiliar to readers. Recognizing this, this section provides definitions for several of the most uncommon terms found in the document.

### ATTACHED HOUSING

Residential dwelling units that are attached to one another on at least one side, possibly divided from one another by firewalls or other physical partitions. Common examples include townhouses, rowhouses, duplexes, (most) condominiums, and apartments.

### DETACHED HOUSING

Residential buildings in which each dwelling unit is surrounded by freestanding walls and is generally sited on a separate lot.

### TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF)

TIF is a method to use future gains in taxes to subsidize current improvements, which are projected to create the conditions for said gains. The completion of a public or private project often results in an increase in the value of surrounding real estate, which generates additional tax revenue that otherwise would not be expected to occur.

### SHARROW

A street marking installed on a lane of a paved road's surface indicating that bicyclists may use any portion of the full width of the lane.

### BUSINESS INCUBATOR

A facility and program designed to support the successful startup and development of startup firms during their early months or years, often providing affordable space, shared offices, resources and services, hands-on management training, marketing support, and access to some form of financing.

### FORM-BASED/TRANSECT ZONING

A transect is a zone which functions more like an inclusive environment, rather than simply regulating uses (as traditional zoning). Form-based codes are a response to the modern challenges of urban sprawl, deterioration of historic neighborhoods, and neglect of pedestrian safety in new development.

### HYBRID ZONING

An approach to zoning which involves the meshing of conventional zoning codes with graphic urban design standards that typically address setbacks, parking placement, building bulk, materials, and architectural features.

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# Section 1



In early 2013, the City of DeKalb assembled a team of consultants to prepare a framework for continued revitalization to downtown DeKalb. The city had multiple objectives for the plan and required a team that brought a range of experience and expertise to the project. As a part of its desired process, the city expressed the need for consultants to study and make findings regarding:

- Existing market conditions for commercial, office, and residential land uses within the downtown.
- Opportunities to improve the engagement of the Northern Illinois University Community in the downtown.
- Development strategies that would establish a planning basis for downtown development. The city asked the consultants to assess the area's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, and to plan for future growth in a way that would maximize use of existing assets and strengths and leverage previous public and private investment.
- Maximize downtown DeKalb's potential as a shopping, entertainment, and cultural destination.

### AN UPDATE TO THE 2007 DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PLAN

This Plan serves as an update to the City's 2007 Downtown Revitalization Plan, with a focus on initiatives, developments, and strategies to advance the revitalization effort in downtown for the next half-decade. The 2007 plan has been successful in changing visitors' and residents' image of and identity with DeKalb's downtown from one of indifference, decline, and lack of interest to one of promise, pride, and progress. The 2007 plan fostered the creation of Re:New DeKalb and planted the seed for substantial public and private investment in the downtown through infrastructure improvement, streetscape enhancement, blight removal, and redevelopment.

The 2007 plan's central goal was to restore downtown as the city's centerpiece. With this as a starting point, the planning process quickly revealed that to be successful in meeting this goal, "downtown" has to impress upon people something more than the 15 or 20 square blocks that represent the traditional "core". Hence, the idea of DeKalb City Center emerged to communicate the continued

importance of the traditional core of downtown, but also to take ownership of those areas immediately west of 1st Street and immediately east of 4th Street. In this spirit, this update is intended to move the downtown plan to a next step in the revitalization direction begun with the first implementation steps following the 2007 plan.



## A renewed vision:

*“DeKalb City Center will be a regional destination for culture, learning, dining and entertainment, joined with a world class university and surrounded by well connected, desirable neighborhoods.”*

### PLAN SUMMARY BY SECTION

The DeKalb City Center Plan is the result of a collaborative effort. The ideas, concepts, and strategies presented here reflect ideas suggested at a series of meetings with the Downtown Plan Update Steering Committee and highly-interactive and well-attended public meetings. Also, the report reflects ideas and recommendations from a consulting team that included urban designers, city planners, real estate specialists, and market analysts.

**Section 2** describes the current downtown context; it lays out the planning canvas through introducing the area’s existing texture, function, and position. The direction of downtown development since the 2007 plan has been somewhat slow but positive, although work remains to bolster these efforts. City Center’s inherent assets the plan seeks to build upon include a diversity of land uses, a strong pedestrian character, opportunities to increase density to support healthy and viable downtown businesses, and a proximity that allows for improving connections into the downtown from the Northern Illinois University campus, established residential neighborhoods, and local and regional bike and pedestrian systems.

**Section 3** of this plan summarizes the stakeholder participation process that was employed to generate consultant understanding of issues and opportunities and to formulate the plan’s vision and direction. The process involved working closely with a project steering committee throughout the process in a work session format, hosting an interactive project website, engaging traditional media, and utilizing a series of hands-on, results-oriented public meetings.

**Section 4** describes market conditions that have and will continue to influence the potential for redevelopment and new development in City Center. With an underlying current that acknowledges NIU’s capacity and function as an economic engine for City Center and DeKalb as a whole, Section 4 analyzes supply and demand issues for the residential, retail, and office markets downtown. Residential supply – especially for a high-value attached/rental product - is currently lacking in DeKalb and could be viable for City Center. The retail market analysis reflects a downtown retail market that is in relative balance and lacks significant demand for additional retail. That said, there exists some potential to add traffic generating uses. Finally, this section highlights that there is limited demand and supply within the downtown office market for DeKalb.

**Section 5** introduces the renewed vision for DeKalb City Center, and incorporates the consultant’s recommendations to guide future downtown development by supplementing the 2007 plan recommendations with both “physical” recommendations and “strategic” recommendations.

**Section 6** proposes an implementation framework for the plan. This section prioritizes and outlines steps to be taken to put the plan into action. Arguably the most critical early step in plan implementation must be the formalization of a management entity – in this case a Project Management Team blending the motivation, skill, and will of high-level civic, educational, and business leaders is recommended – to forge ahead with the other recommendations of this plan. The action plan presented in Section 6 is comprehensive and ambitious, but it is doable within a similar 5 to 7 year window it has taken to move the first components of the 2007 plan forward.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations and action plan presented via the DeKalb City Center Plan are targeted at one or more of the framework zones introduced below and illustrated in Map 6 on Page 51.

"The Core" - the historic heart of downtown DeKalb, comprised of the 12 blocks between 1st Street and 4th Street from Franklin to Oak Street.

"Eastern Gateway" - the East Lincoln Highway corridor from 4th Street to 7th Street.

"Communiversality Commons" - the area between the Kishwaukee River to 1st Street, from the UP Railroad tracks north to West Locust Street.

As revealed through the Downtown Revitalization Plan update process, the recommendations that follow are a combination of relatively low-hanging fruit and/or perceived catalysts that will build momentum towards the City Center vision of strengthening City Center as a regional destination for culture, learning, dining, and entertainment:

- Enhance the **West Lincoln Highway Corridor** from 1st Street to Castle Drive
- Utilize East Locust Street as an active pedestrian space for an expanded **weekend farmer's market**, community festivals, street fairs, and other community events
- Strategically acquire and develop properties for **"Library Square"**, a signature public event and "play" space
- Utilize a **uniform design and message for signage** on key vehicular and pedestrian corridors within City Center and citywide
- Engage local artists, including NIU's renowned School of Art, and the Nehring Center to plan for and implement the **animation of the public realm** with authentic and locally produced art pieces
- **Revise the city's Unified Development Ordinance** to better align with the downtown revitalization plan, adopted design guidelines, and evolved market expectations
- Carry forward the 2007 Downtown Plan's vision to **allow attached housing** in areas between the core and nearside residential neighborhoods, and include **small-lot detached housing** in edge areas, as well
- Provide **TIF support to the Egyptian Theatre** to support building upgrades and expansions, such as air conditioning, increased back-of-house space, and improved restroom and concession facilities
- Leverage TIF to study the **feasibility** of and potentially promote the **development** of additional City Center **traffic generators**, such as a hotel/conference center, children's museum, bowling alley, movie theater, or additional dining and entertainment options
- Target revitalization of the **"Eastern Gateway"**
- Partner with Northern Illinois University and HuskieLine to establish a free, dedicated **university to downtown shuttle loop**
- Expand the city's on-street bike **"sharrow" network** and establish a **bicycle wayfinding system** that links destinations west (NIU, Prairie Park) and east/north (Hopkins Park, Sycamore Road) to City Center.
- Design and construct **West Locust Street** as a direct connection from First Street to College Drive, potentially as a "bike boulevard."
- Undertake a comprehensive City Center **Parking Needs Analysis**, and develop structured/surface parking to meet quantified needs
- **Strengthen collaboration with NIU**, both at an administrative level and "on the ground" through increased outreach, physical, and program coordination to the benefit of both the campus and City Center
- Identify and recruit a City Center **"Project Management Team" (PMT)** that focuses specifically on moving forward the vision and recommendations of this and subsequent planning efforts impacting City Center
- Work with Northern Illinois University and/or the Center for Governmental Studies to recalibrate and broaden the reach of the 2011 Re:New Classroom Committee **survey** of the NIU community's use and knowledge of downtown DeKalb

Figure 1-1 | Action Plan

ACTION/PROJECT	RESPONSIBLE AGENCY	TIMING	COST
<b>FRAMEWORK ZONES</b>			
<b>THE CORE</b>			
Revise the Unified Development Ordinance	CDK	Short-Term	\$\$
Promote Residential Redevelopment	Private Developers, CDK, PMT	Ongoing	\$\$\$\$
Expand Public Open Space	CDK, PMT	Mid-Term	\$\$\$\$
Enhance City Center Entrance Nodes	CDK, PMT	Short-Term	\$\$ - \$\$\$
Improve and/or Establish Consistent Wayfinding System Citywide	CDK, CoC, PMT, CVB	Immediate	\$\$
Support Egyptian Theater Expansion	CDK, Foundations, PET	Immediate	\$\$\$\$
Support Additional Traffic Generators	CDK, Private Developers, PMT	Ongoing	\$\$\$\$
Establish City Center Shuttle Loop	CDK, NIU, DSATS, Veolia, PMT	Short-Term	\$\$\$
Program Locust Street as a Public Event Space	CDK, PMT, CoC, CVB	Immediate	\$
Analyze Parking Need and Develop Structured Parking	CDK, PMT	Short-Term	\$\$\$\$
<b>EAST GATEWAY</b>			
Improve and/or Establish Consistent Wayfinding System Citywide	CDK, CoC, PMT, CVB	Immediate	\$\$
Revise the Unified Development Ordinance	CDK	Short-Term	\$\$
Support Additional Traffic Generators	CDK, Private Developers, PMT	Ongoing	\$\$\$\$
Enhance City Center Entrance Nodes	CDK, PMT	Short-Term	\$\$ - \$\$\$
Expand Sharrow Network	CDK, DSATS, PMT	Immediate	\$
Analyze Parking Need and Develop Structured Parking	CDK, PMT	Mid-Term	\$\$\$\$
<b>COMMUNIVERSITY COMMONS</b>			
Lincoln Highway Streetscape	CDK, IDOT, NIU, PMT	Immediate	\$\$\$
Improve and/or Establish Consistent Wayfinding System Citywide	CDK, CoC, PMT, CVB	Immediate	\$\$
Revise the Unified Development Ordinance	CDK	Short-Term	\$\$
Enhance City Center Entrance Nodes	CDK, PMT	Short-Term	\$\$ - \$\$\$
Promote Residential Redevelopment	Private Developers, CDK, PMT	Ongoing	\$\$\$\$
Support Additional Traffic Generators	CDK, Private Developers, PMT	Ongoing	\$\$\$\$
Establish City Center Shuttle Loop	CDK, NIU, DSATS, Veolia, PMT	Short-Term	\$\$\$
Expand Sharrow Network	CDK, DSATS, PMT	Immediate	\$
Realign West Locust Street	CDK, PMT	Mid-Term	\$\$\$\$
<b>STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS</b>			
Refocus City Center Implementation Organization   Form PMT	CDK, NIU, CoC, RDK, BUS	Immediate	\$\$
Strengthen Collaboration with NIU	CDK, NIU, PMT	Ongoing	
Revisit and Periodically Update Student Surveys	NIU, CGS, CDK, PMT	Ongoing	\$
Establish Public Art Campaign	CDK, NIU	Immediate	\$
Explore Urban Business Incubator	CDK, NIU, KC, PMT, Private Developers	Mid-Term	\$\$\$\$
Plan Communiversality Commons	CDK, NIU, PMT	Short-Term	\$\$
Prepare Annual Report	PMT	Immediate	\$

**KEY:**

CDK = City of DeKalb

PMT = Project Management Team

NIU = Northern Illinois University

CoC = DeKalb Area Chamber of Commerce

RDK = Re:New DeKalb

CVB = DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau

PET = Preservation of the Egyptian Theater, Inc.

IDOT = Illinois Department of Transportation

DSATS = DeKalb Sycamore Area Transportation Study

KC = Kishwaukee College

- Work collaboratively with NIU and Kishwaukee College to explore the feasibility for the creation of clean **industrial/employment/innovation space** in City Center.
- Plan for the Future of “**Communiversality Commons**”

**DEFINITION OF UNCOMMON TERMS**

While this plan is intended to be entirely "user-friendly", some terms used in the document may be unfamiliar to readers. Recognizing this, this section provides definitions for several of the most uncommon terms found in the document.

**Attached Housing**

Residential dwelling units that are attached to one another on at least one side, possibly divided from one another by firewalls or other physical partitions. Common examples include townhouses, rowhouses, duplexes, (most) condominiums, and apartments.

**Detached Housing**

Residential buildings in which each dwelling unit is surrounded by freestanding walls and is generally sited on a separate lot.

**Tax Increment Financing (TIF)**

TIF is a method to use future gains in taxes to subsidize current improvements, which are projected to create the conditions for said gains. The completion of a public or private project often results in an increase in the value of surrounding real estate, which generates additional tax revenue that otherwise would not be expected to occur.

**Sharrow**

A street marking installed on a lane of a paved road's surface indicating that bicyclists may use any portion of the full width of the lane.

**Business Incubator**

A facility and program designed to support the successful startup and development of startup firms during their early months or years, often providing affordable space, shared offices, resources and services, hands-on management training, marketing support, and access to some form of financing.

**Form-Based/Transect Zoning**

Form-based codes focus on the regulation of urban space through carefully considered urban design rather than land use. Often, form-based codes employ a transect basis, which is a line or a cross-section through a defined space which charts the progression from most intensively urban to rural.

**Hybrid Zoning**

An approach to zoning which involves the meshing of conventional zoning codes with detailed and illustrative urban design standards that typically address setbacks, parking placement, building bulk, materials, and architectural features.



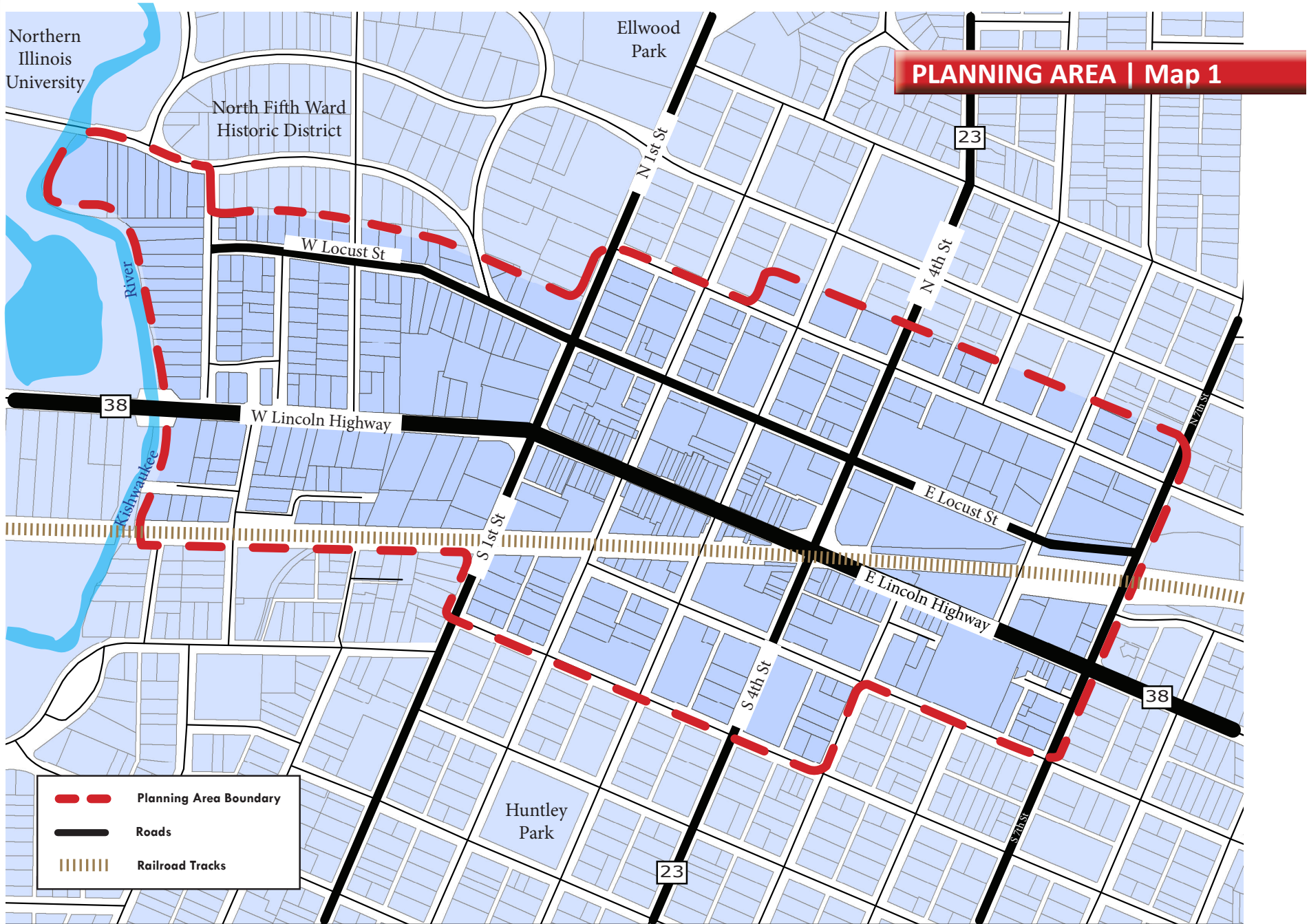
# Section 2

### DEKALB'S CITY CENTER: PLANNING AREA

DeKalb's City Center is poised to continue moving forward as a signature district and destination within a community of assets. Over the past half-decade, there have been major investments in the downtown that contribute strongly to an enhanced public realm and bolster DeKalb's economic vitality. These investments and other successes in City Center were largely realized through the Downtown Revitalization Plan, prepared with a great deal of stakeholder input and adopted in early 2007. While that plan has proven successful in laying a framework for continued downtown improvement, a refocusing of the plan's priorities in light of a changed economic and political climate is critical to sustain the momentum of the efforts since 2007 and leverage those investments to continue City Center's progress. The purpose of the 2013 plan, then, is to help ensure that DeKalb's City Center continues to revitalize and develop according to the community's collective vision. Taking cues from a highly participatory planning process, the update outlines projects and strategies that direct future private and public development so as to enhance and expand upon the many assets of DeKalb's City Center.

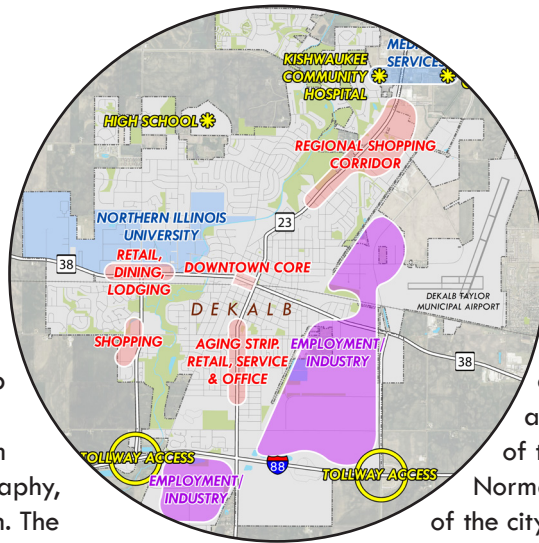
For the purposes of this plan update, DeKalb's City Center (Map 1, Next Page) is defined as a roughly 45-block area generally bound by the Kishwaukee River on the west, the UP Railroad (west of South 1st Street) and Franklin Street (east of South 1st Street) on the south, 7th Street on the east, and Oak Street (east of 1st Street) / Locust Street (west of 1st Street) to the north. Roughly 60 percent of this area lies east of 1st street and comprises the traditional downtown in nearly uniform, roughly 350' x 350' blocks on a grid running perpendicular to 1st Street. The remainder, west of 1st Street and bridging the gap between the western edge of the traditional downtown to the eastern edge of NIU (north of Lincoln Highway) is of decidedly different character; this area being comprised of a more classic "Garden City" development pattern and texture. Lincoln Highway (State Route 38) serves as the defining east-west artery through City Center, while 1st Street and 4th Street run north-south to dissect City Center into three distinct sub-areas within the district. The Union Pacific Railroad runs east-west just south of Lincoln Highway until slicing diagonally through the Lincoln/4th intersection, then running eastward north of Lincoln from there out.





### DEKALB'S CITY CENTER: LOCAL AND REGIONAL POSITION

Like many great cities throughout the country, DeKalb and its traditional City Center were founded and grown from the coincident forces of geography, technology, and transportation. The settlement of Huntley's Grove, as DeKalb was originally known, originated in the late-1830s near what is now the northwest corner of First Street and Lincoln Highway and served as a mid-point destination for teamsters hauling grain between Dixon's Ferry (present day Dixon) and Chicago. With the arrival of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad in 1853 and the establishment of a depot at Third Street, DeKalb's central location in the regional agricultural economy was solidified. Around the same time, innovators in DeKalb's industrial economy emerged. Working out of downtown shops, warehouses, and factories, these innovators began establishing patents, developing work processes, and erecting facilities for steel bending, barbed-wire fencing, seed production and more. By the 1880 census, DeKalb had grown from a sleepy village of several hundred to a city of nearly 1,600, with most of this population living near and celebrating all aspects of civic life within the city's center. The population would more than triple in the next twenty years, and a thriving city had taken root.



At the dawn of the 20th century, a new and prosperous era for DeKalb's city center was ushered in with continued economic and population growth and the chartering and opening of the Northern Illinois State Normal School at the western edge of the city. Over 110 years, Northern

Illinois University (as the "Normal School" was renamed in the late 1950s) has grown to become the third largest educational institution – by total enrollment – in Illinois with nearly 22,000 students. Similarly, the city's population has multiplied more than seven times over since 1900, to almost 43,862 residents as of the 2010 census. As the city has continued to grow outward from its historic center, the local and regional identity and function of DeKalb City Center has shifted rather dramatically. On a local level, the 700 acre-plus presence of NIU has historically served as a magnet for new commercial and higher-density residential growth well west of City Center as defined in this plan. Additionally, competition brought on by the availability of large tracts of developable land along State Highway 23 (Sycamore Road), the I-88 tollway, and Peace Road in the mid- to late-20th century has contributed to the gradual erosion of City Center's strength and importance as a retail, service, and employment center.

### DEKALB'S CITY CENTER: INITIAL COMMITTEE & CONSULTANT OBSERVATIONS AND IMPRESSIONS

#### Existing City Center Assets

While the city's economy and identity have re-centered in many ways outside of DeKalb's downtown, the area identified as City Center in Map 1 retains a significance and vitality as a civic and cultural core for the city and region and remains geographically central both within and outside of DeKalb's boundaries. DeKalb's City Center is in many ways a very successful district. It provides opportunities to enjoy the arts and entertainment and serves as a cultural, civic, and specialty retail and restaurant anchor and asset for surrounding neighborhoods and the city at large. DeKalb's City Center is an ideal locale for community initiatives and events, and a focus of Re:New DeKalb in recent years has been to find ways to bring the community together to celebrate downtown. Through Re:New's leadership and its strategic partnerships with the Chamber of Commerce, the city, NIU, and numerous private individuals and businesses, activities ranging from a weekly Thursday farmer's market in the summertime to the annual CornFest three-day music festival on Labor Day weekend to an annual HollyDays event during the Christmas season are vital in showcasing City Center as a place for community gathering and celebration.



Proximity is one of City Center's greatest assets, as it is geographically central to the community and within a very short distance of Northern Illinois University, Prairie Park, established and historic residential neighborhoods, the Elwood House Museum and Park, and Hopkins Park, among other community treasures. Enhancing the connectivity, awareness, image, and appeal of City Center to capitalize on this proximity will be key to growing and retaining an active, rich, and celebrated City Center.

In 2013, DeKalb's City Center retains much of what made it a great urban district in the first place relatively clearly: ready access from major regional transportation systems, a small but eclectic and unique blend of retailers and services within walking distance to one another, a walkable grid pattern of streets and compact blocks and a largely intact progression of attractive and interesting building façades, especially along Lincoln Highway and Locust Street from 1st through 4th Street. Additionally, institutional anchors such as the Egyptian Theatre, DeKalb Public Library, and DeKalb Municipal Building remain as vital spaces in the downtown and draw visitors from all walks of life to actively participate in city life and patronize the downtown's public and private spaces. With this in mind, a primary purpose of this plan update is to maintain, complement, and advance these inherent assets through targeted and strategic initiatives and investments.

#### Lack of Student Activity and Engagement Downtown

Although DeKalb's City Center is located within a mile of the heart of the NIU Campus, there is a general perception that there is limited student patronage of the downtown for business, pleasure, or just about any other purpose. This is largely confirmed by an admittedly limited 2011 survey which explored student use of the downtown and found – among other things – that 17% of those surveyed had never been downtown, and that between 42 and 49 percent of those surveyed “never” visit the downtown for bars (42%), shopping (46%), or entertainment (49%) – essentially three of the five main pillars of typical evening activity in a vibrant downtown (restaurants being a fourth – which 24% of those responding said they “never” visit downtown for – and housing being a fifth – which is addressed below).

#### Lack of Interconnectivity

To the casual visitor, City Center has a relatively weak sense of connectedness and cohesiveness, both from location to location within the core and from the “outside” to the “inside” of the district. Key destinations in City Center, for example the Frank Van Buer Plaza (home of the Thursday Farmer's Market), the DeKalb Public Library, the Egyptian Theatre, The Stagecoach Players Theatre, and DeKalb City Hall, are all physically separated from Lincoln Highway, which typically receives the most significant pedestrian and vehicular traffic and

certainly is the most visually identifiable corridor in the district. Thus, there is a perceived distance between “things to do” downtown which fosters single-use trips to the district and ultimately leaves City Center feeling somewhat hollow.

#### Lack of “Critical Mass”

Quite related to the connectivity issue is the general lack of critical mass in City Center. There are many viable destinations in the “core”, but City Center does not appear to be perceived as a destination in and of itself. While connectivity is a part of this challenge, the nature of current uses downtown is also an issue. Throughout the planning process, stakeholders cited the desire for more family-oriented spaces, places, and activities in the downtown, as well as the need for “high-quality” dining options, expanded specialty retail destinations, and – importantly – more consistent hours of operation from businesses. While current uses such as professional offices serve an important role and should be encouraged downtown, in DeKalb they tend to leave prime retail spaces unoccupied after 5:00 p.m. and thus don't effectively contribute to “around the clock” activity that keeps City Center feeling alive with activity.

#### Limited Usable Public Space

While there are several publicly owned sites in City Center, there is generally a shortage of vibrant public space downtown. While streetscape enhancements such as benches, outdoor seating areas, and small “parks” are dispersed throughout the downtown, the only truly inviting public square/gathering place is Van Buer Plaza, which is a public parking lot unless/until programmed for a special event (such as the weekly summertime farmer’s market). Existing dedicated public spaces include the DeKalb Square at the northeast corner of 4th and Lincoln, Memorial Park at the northeast corner of 1st and Lincoln, Moudy Park on the north side of Lincoln just east of the railroad tracks, and a mini-park on the south side of Lincoln Highway between 3rd and 4th. While these spaces have a certain charm as short-term oases if one happens to be downtown, they lack the dimension and flexibility to be considered destinations.

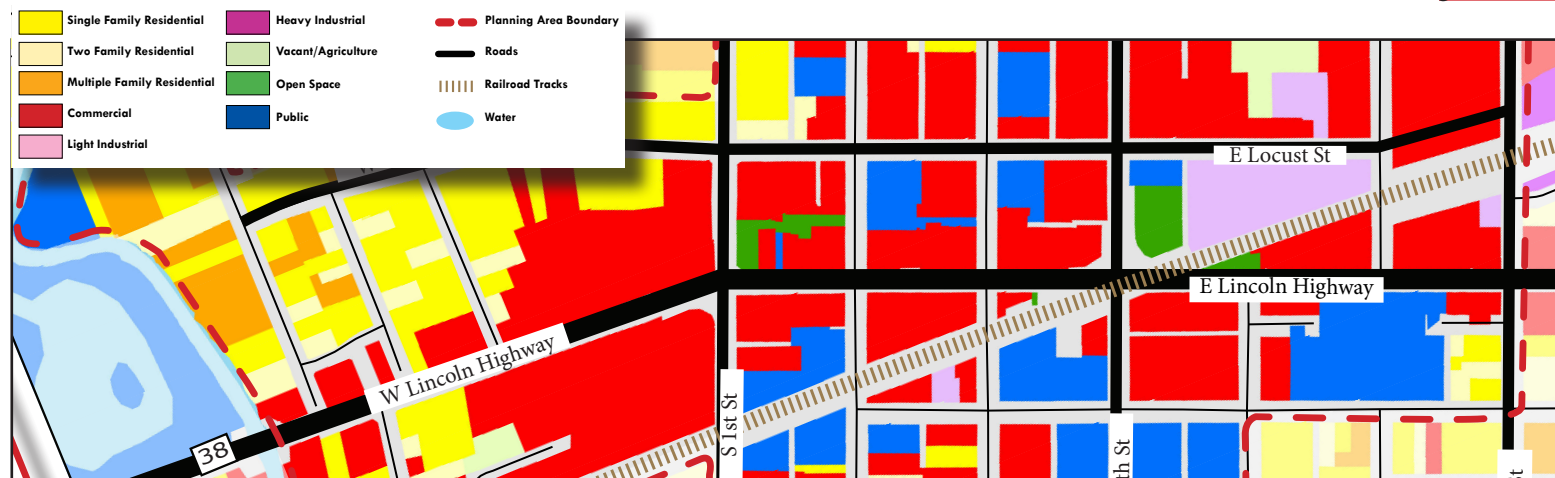
#### Perceptions of Additional Housing

Whereas the 2006 DeKalb Downtown Revitalization Plan advocated – perhaps even hinged on – the provision of additional attached housing in and near downtown, there were many indications throughout the update process that recent market-driven prospects to add rental housing anywhere in the city (including in or near the downtown) were and would continue to be met with rather substantial public angst and political hurdles. In essence, the city’s unofficial position appears to be that for every new rental property proposed for approval, an existing rental unit must come “off the market” somewhere else in the city for a net gain of zero rental units. The city’s position, while founded in a well-meaning desire to promote greater stability in the makeup of city households and provide greater balance in the dynamic of the city’s housing “tenure”, in the long run may hamstring positive redevelopment and revitalization of DeKalb’s City Center. While there are neighborhoods in virtually every direction around City Center, there is limited viable housing within downtown proper. In almost every case, housing is an essential contributor to the “critical mass” that strong downtowns exhibit, as residents drive demand for retail, restaurant, entertainment, and open space, create a more vibrant evening and weekend atmosphere, and serve as vested stewards of the streets and spaces within the downtown.

#### Pride and Sense of Community Ownership

While much has been done in recent years to improve community pride and ownership as related to City Center, there remains a sense that too few community members – including those who own property and/or operate a business downtown - identify with downtown DeKalb as the city’s hallmark district. The importance of all forces pulling in the same direction cannot be overstated for long-term, sustainable success in enhancing DeKalb’s City Center. In this sense, it will be critical for committed and organized leadership to emerge from the plan update with focused, attainable, and measurable objectives and priorities that continue to move DeKalb’s City Center forward as a dynamic and authentic place for locals and visitors alike.

Figure 2-1 | Existing Land Use



## PHYSICAL CONDITIONS AND URBAN FORM

### Existing Land Use and Zoning

As illustrated in the current land use map (above), DeKalb's City Center currently supports a range of uses, with commercial, public, and light industrial predominate from 7th to 1st street and a mix of single- and multiple-family residential uses as well as commercial uses located west of 1st Street. The City of DeKalb's Unified Development Ordinance and Zoning Map (page 15), regulate development within City Center, and identify nine different zoning districts that are currently applied within the planning area. Central Business District (CBD) is the prevalent zoning classification east of 1st Street, while the Lincoln Highway Corridor west of 1st Street is zoned for more suburban/auto-oriented commercial and the West Locust Street area is zoned for Low-Density Multi-Family development. A brief run-down of applicable zoning districts is provided here:

**Central Business District (CBD)** – applicable to most properties in the planning area between 1st and 4th and the south side of Lincoln Highway out to 7th, CBD zoning permits a wide range of “typical” pedestrian-oriented downtown retail, office, and entertainment uses as well as dwelling units above a ground floor commercial use. With respect to site design, CBD accommodates a block and building typology that enhances the visual interest and pedestrian experience by allowing for full coverage of a building lot and bringing buildings close together and close to the sidewalk.

**Light Commercial District (LC)** – applicable to relatively few properties at the northern (on either side of 2nd and 3rd fronting Oak) and western (at Anne and Pearl Streets) edges of the planning area, LC zoning permits a range of commercial uses more typically found along major auto-oriented streets and tailored towards automobile access. LC zoning is dramatically incompatible with CBD zoning with respect to site design, as it requires buildings to be set back at least 40 feet from the street, limits lot coverage to 70% of the site, and requires on-site parking.

**General Commercial District (GC)** – applicable to most of the West Lincoln Highway Frontage, GC zoning represents a striking departure from CBD zoning characteristics (such as those in place just across 1st Street) and is tailored to uses that thrive in highway strip-style commercial development environments. Examples of permitted uses in the GC district include farm equipment sales and service and automobile, truck, and RV sales and rental. Similarly, site design characteristics espoused by GC zoning are largely incompatible with the characteristics found in the CBD district.

**Neighborhood Commercial District (NC)** – applicable to just one property in the planning area (on North 1st Street), NC zoning is intended for commercial uses which serve the needs of their immediate neighborhoods, such as drug stores, markets and bakeries, medical and dental offices, and similar uses.



*Light Industrial District (LI)* – applicable to the northeast corner of the planning area, LI allows for a range of business uses including light manufacturing, commercial, auto sales and service, and more. While certainly consistent with the character of development on the properties today and in history, LI is arguably out of alignment with neighboring uses and the overall vision for DeKalb’s City Center.

*Heavy Industrial District (HI)* – applicable to only a few properties in the northeast portion of the planning area, HI is intended to accommodate intensive commercial and manufacturing uses in “selected locations” in the city. The HI found within the planning boundary is the westward extent of a large, mostly contiguous block of heavy industry from the airport west along the Union Pacific Railroad and is populated with cabinetry shops, lawn equipment service and sales, a city parking lot and similar uses.

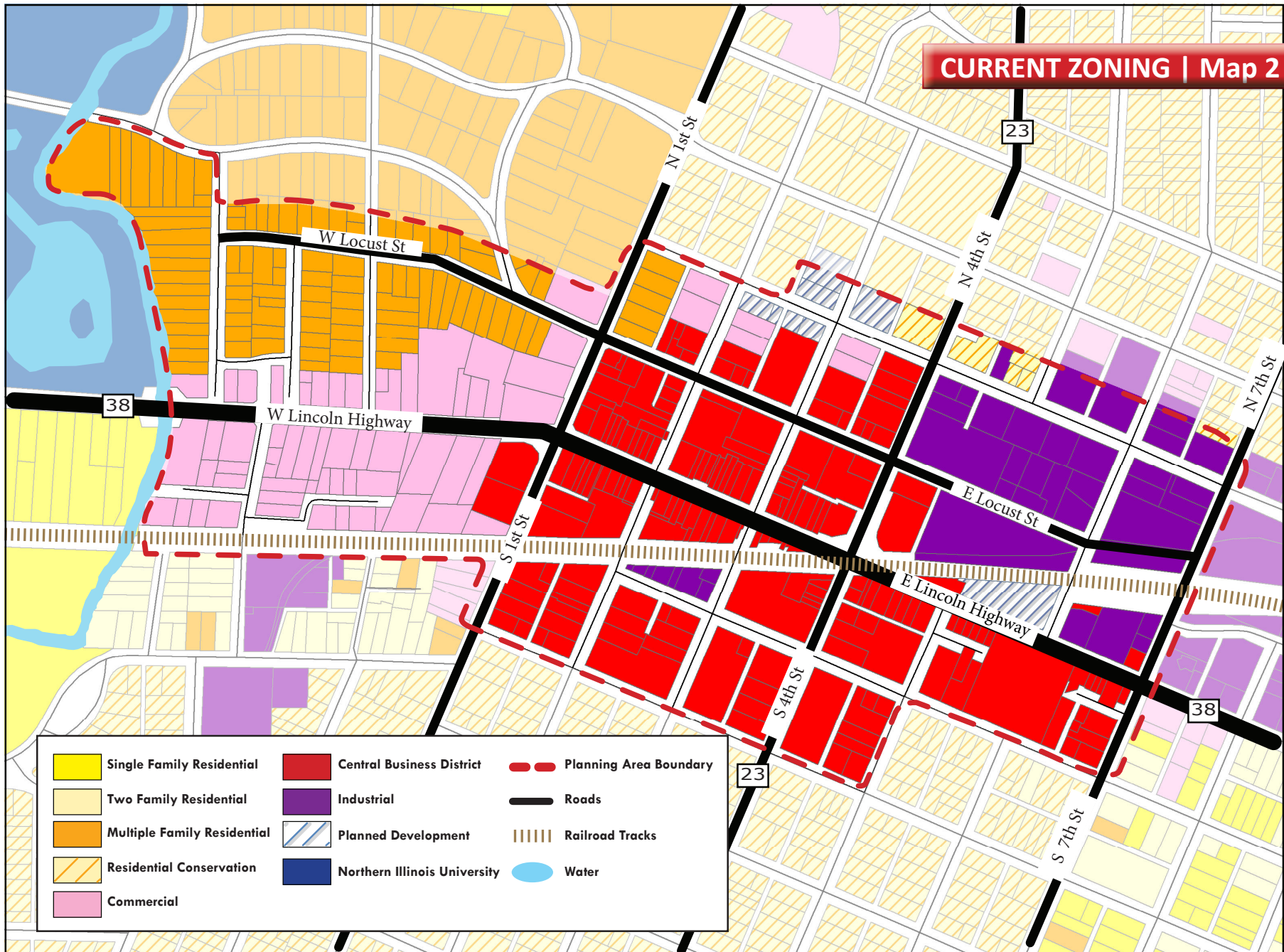
*Planned Development District (PD)* – applicable within the planning area at the existing/proposed library site and the McDonald’s currently undergoing redevelopment, PD affords greater flexibility in the development of sites than would the city’s conventional zoning districts.

*Low Density Small Scale Multiple Family Residential District (MFR-1)* – applicable within the planning area west of 1st Street and north of the West Lincoln Highway commercial corridor, MFR-1 is intended for residential development in up to 8-unit structures.

*Residential Conservation District (RC-1)* – applicable mostly in the southeastern corner of the planning area, RC-1 is intended to promote and preserve the city’s older residential neighborhoods (25 years or older) with a mix of single family detached as well as two-family and multiple-family dwellings.



## CURRENT ZONING | Map 2



Mobility, Parking, and Traffic (Map 3, next page)

DeKalb's City Center is accessible from the larger community and region via an integrated street network, most of which includes sidewalks. 1st Street and 4th Street (Illinois Route 23) provide north-south connection to most of the city's residential and commercial areas east of NIU, while Lincoln Highway (Illinois Route 38), provides east-west connection to NIU and west side housing and shopping as well as the employment centers on DeKalb's east and southeast sides. Lincoln Highway also provides connection to Annie Glidden Road and Peace Road, the two N-S routes with tollway interchanges at I-88. DeKalb's City Center is roughly 2.5 miles north of both tollway interchanges.

*Bike and Pedestrian Access*

While the core of City Center has become increasingly pedestrian friendly with recent streetscape improvements, bicycle and pedestrian connectivity from surrounding areas is challenged by particularly "hard" district edges formed by 1st Street to the west and the UP Railroad to the south and east of the core. Additionally, while there is a segment of the city's on-street bicycle circle route at 10th Street east of City Center and off-road bicycle facilities at the Kishwaukee River Trail less than ½ mile west of the downtown core, there is no dedicated bicycle connectivity of any sort linking City Center to these established systems.

*Transit*

Two transit providers operate in DeKalb, with somewhat limited downtown service. Via TransVAC's Green Line, transit service reaches 4 stops in City Center from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., Monday through Friday at between 10 and 15 minutes past every hour. Green Line service connects City Center with the city's major shopping areas, the western portion of the NIU Campus, and several public schools in the city. Green Line's major limitation is the infrequency of service (once an hour) and a length of travel time in many cases that is at a disadvantage to using an automobile or even bicycle for the trip. NIU also provides transit service through HuskieLine, which offers direct connection and a 5 minute ride from the NIU Student Center to 1st Street at ½ hour intervals (on the #2 bus) Monday through Thursday until 7 p.m. In addition to the #2, the #7 provides hourly trips from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., Monday through Sunday during the academic year.

*Parking*

Driving remains the predominant mode choice as a means to travel into downtown, and the city accommodates that mode choice with public parking dispersed throughout City Center. Within the planning area east of 1st Street, the City of DeKalb provides more than 650 free (but time-regulated) public parking spaces in 12 public parking lots. 530 of these spaces (81% of the total) are in the

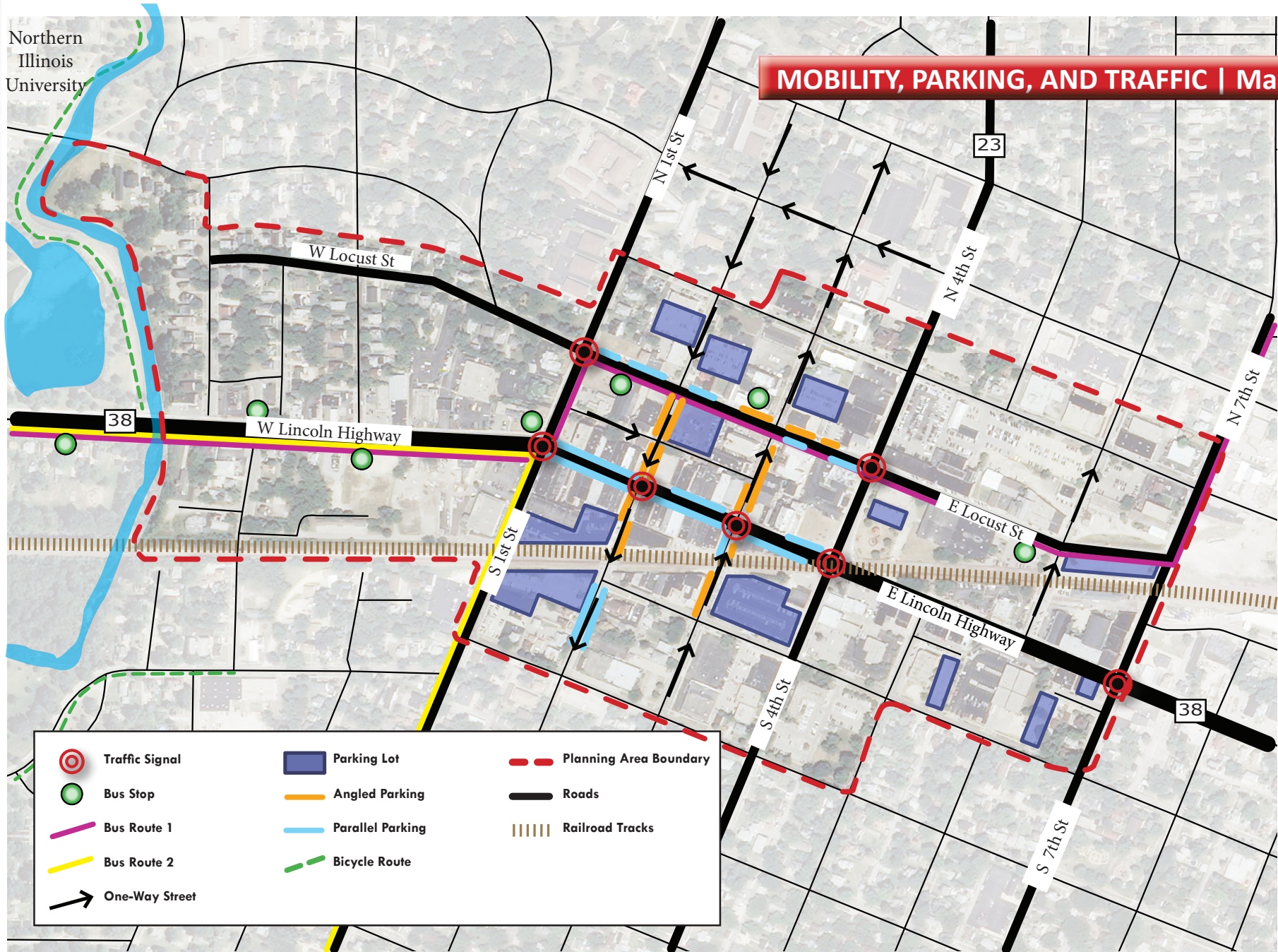
core area between 1st Street and 4th Street, with a roughly 60% - 40% split north and south of the railroad tracks. In addition, there are about 440 on-street parking spaces within City Center. While certainly there are occasions and locations for which immediate and/or "convenient" parking is more difficult to find, taken as a whole this compact district is reasonably well-served by public parking and parking occupancy rarely exceeds 85% within a 5 minute walk of almost any location.

*Vehicular Traffic and Circulation*

Average Daily Traffic (ADT) numbers on most City Center roadways continue to decline, most notably along East Lincoln Highway where traffic volume decreased 11% between 2006 and 2012. Equally notable is that Lincoln Highway west of 1st Street carries almost twice as much traffic on a daily basis as it does east of this intersection, indicating the function of City Center roadways as "through" routes rather than as "destination" corridors. City Center also features paired one-way streets at 2nd (southbound) and 3rd (northbound), as well as a one-way westbound Oak Street from 4th Street to 1st Street.



## MOBILITY, PARKING, AND TRAFFIC | Map 3



### Urban Design Characteristics

Over the last half-decade, the city of DeKalb has made substantial public investment in public infrastructure for the core of the downtown area. The 2007 plan proposed pedestrian-focused streetscape upgrades, and since then the city and Re:New DeKalb have collaborated to install new street lighting, benches, trash receptacles, brick sidewalk accents and crosswalk enhancements, bicycle parking, street trees and more in the “core” downtown area. In addition, the public parking lot formerly known as “Lot 4” was transformed into the landmark Frank Van Buer Plaza – serving not only as a “green” parking lot (utilizing pervious pavers) but also as a community gathering space for outdoor events such as the Farmer’s Market, outdoor musical performances, and community festivals such as CornFest. By all accounts, these investments have proven to substantially improve the image of DeKalb and its City Center.

### *Streetscape*

While streetscapes in the downtown core have been substantially improved since 2007, streetscape in the eastern (east of 4th Street) and western (west of 1st Street) edges of City Center is in fair to poor condition, with plain concrete sidewalks, limited or occasional landscape and signage, and (west of 1st) lacking distinctive pedestrian scaled lighting. Especially along Lincoln Highway, these areas are the gateway’s to City Center’s core, and should be

considered for strategic and compatible streetscape enhancement. Similarly, subtle spaces such as alleyways, building backs, and private parking areas currently function reasonably well, but suffer from poor lighting, disorder, and in some cases, neglect.

### *Design Character*

The block face within City Center is strongest along Lincoln Highway from 1st Street to the UP railroad crossing, with a variety of reasonably well-preserved and/or appropriately rehabilitated late-19th to early-20th century two-story commercial structures forming a continuous “street wall” along East Lincoln Highway. Besides this roughly four-block stretch, the rhythm and condition of development is somewhat irregular, largely lacks definition and ranges from blighted (West Lincoln from Pearl to the recently developed NB&T Bank) to relatively outdated and out of place (most of the north side of West Lincoln Highway, the north side of East Locust Street), to funky yet complementary (North 2nd and North 3rd Street). There are numerous opportunities for redevelopment and rehabilitation throughout City Center that could add not only to the design character of the area but also to the “critical mass” mentioned earlier in this plan.

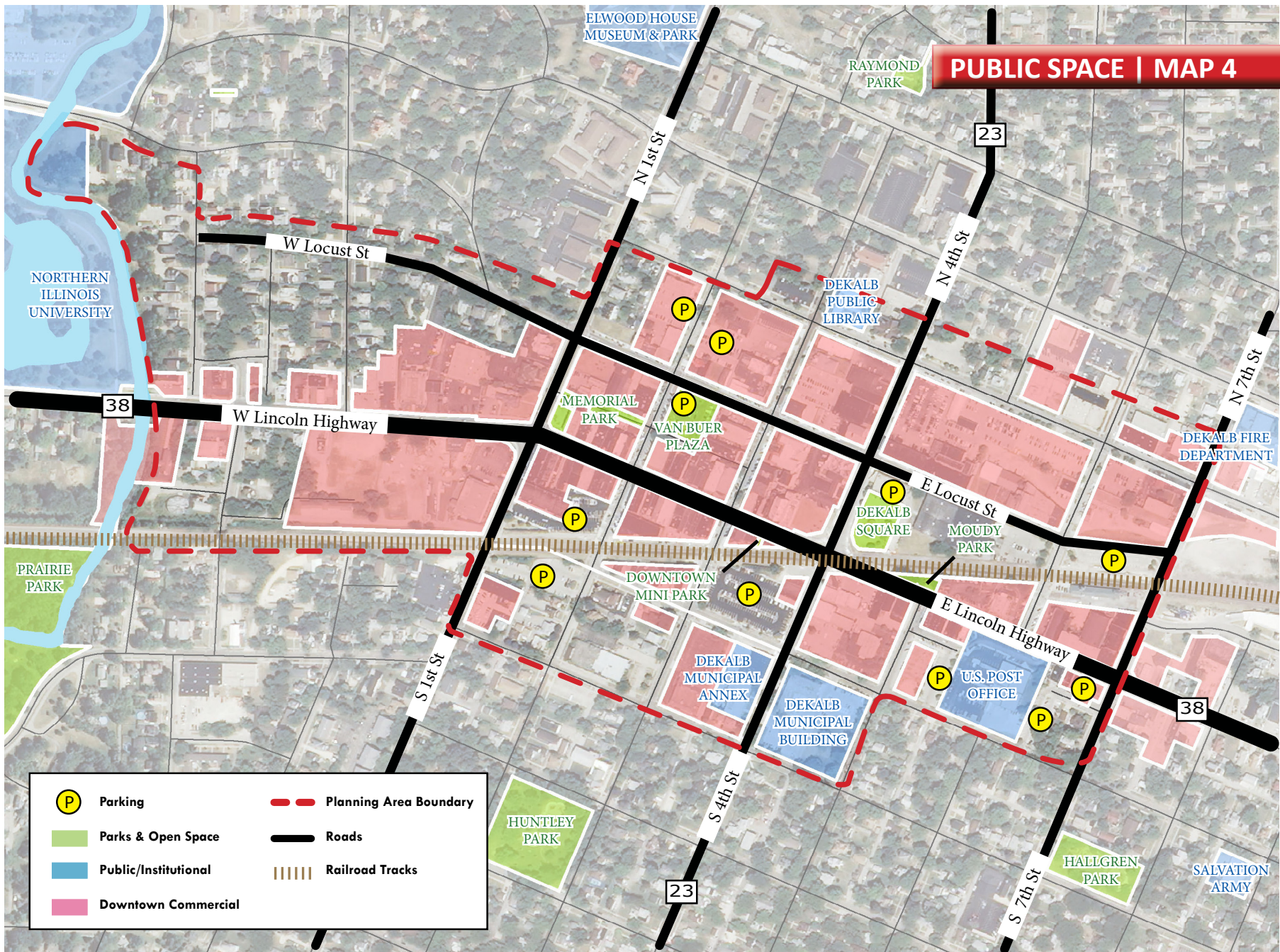
### *Public Space*

Public open space (Map 4, next page) is concentrated in the “core” of City Center in the

form of relatively small, passive open spaces and plazas. Memorial Park is a small public plaza at the northeast corner of 1st Street and East Lincoln Highway with limited seating areas, planting beds, and the “Soldiers and Sailors” Memorial Clock, first dedicated in 1921 and restored and relocated to the park in 1996. A small mid-block plaza just east of 322 East Lincoln Highway is a cozy, living-room sized oasis for strollers and bikers in City Center with a Lincoln Highway monument, a bench, and a bit of landscaping. DeKalb Square, located at the northeast corner of 4th Street and East Lincoln Highway, provides a gazebo and fountain as well as open lawn and planting areas. Tucked in the somewhat awkward corner north of the railroad tracks, the square is a nice – but triangular – space constrained by limited connectivity or sense of purpose. Kiddy-corner across the tracks from DeKalb Square lies Moudy Park, another triangular, small memorial park dedicated in the memory of a former DeKalb police officer. Cumulatively, these spaces total just over one-half acre, and individually none is much larger than 10,000 square feet. City Center’s signature public space, of course, is Frank Van Buer Plaza. At about  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre, Van Buer Plaza currently provides the best opportunity for community gatherings and events in a common space in City Center. However, there is virtually no opportunity for spontaneous interaction and enjoyment of Van Buer, because its primary purpose is as a public parking lot.



## PUBLIC SPACE | MAP 4





#### ACTIVITY & TRAFFIC GENERATORS (Map 5, next page)

In addition to its market and geographic position, DeKalb's City Center has several activity generators that draw employees, and visitors on a regular basis. Supporting these destinations and leveraging the visitation they supply by maximizing the "stay time" is a focus of this plan update. As Map 5 illustrates, a relative cluster of culturally-focused activity generators (A through E) exists in the core area from 1st through 4th. Assuring this cluster is linked - both through physical improvements and coordinated programming and promotion- should remain a priority in City Center.

#### SUMMARY OF RELEVANT PLANS, STUDIES, AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The City of DeKalb has a strong history of directing planning initiatives towards addressing challenges and building upon the strengths of City Center and its surrounding neighborhoods and corridors. This proactive approach provides a solid foundation for this plan update and provides additional context and support for the continued revitalization of DeKalb's City Center. The most relevant and recent initiatives are highlighted below.

##### Downtown Revitalization Plan (2007)

This plan worked from the fundamental goal of restoring the downtown as DeKalb's centerpiece, by improving the downtown image and providing a variety of destinations to serve the community

and attract visitors. The plan promoted substantial residential and mixed use redevelopment throughout downtown, as well as rehabilitation and re-habitation of historic structures along Lincoln Highway. The plan's greatest successes thus far have been in vastly improving the streetscape throughout the core area and in acquiring and demolishing blighted properties. A summary of the key accomplishments of the 2007 plan is presented below:

- Core area streetscape improvements
- Development of the Frank Van Buer Plaza
- Replacement of failing sewer and water infrastructure
- Redevelopment on West Lincoln Highway (NB&T)
- Landscaped parking lots
- Enhanced wayfinding
- Established guidelines for new construction
- Seating improvements at the Egyptian Theatre
- Aggressive blight removal program

Additionally, there are a number of initiatives introduced in the 2007 plan that stakeholders feel are still viable and worthy of pursuit:

- Expand parking
- Screen/buffer railroad tracks
- Promote residential development
- Foster redevelopment of vacant, underutilized sites

##### DeKalb 3D Comprehensive Plan (2005)

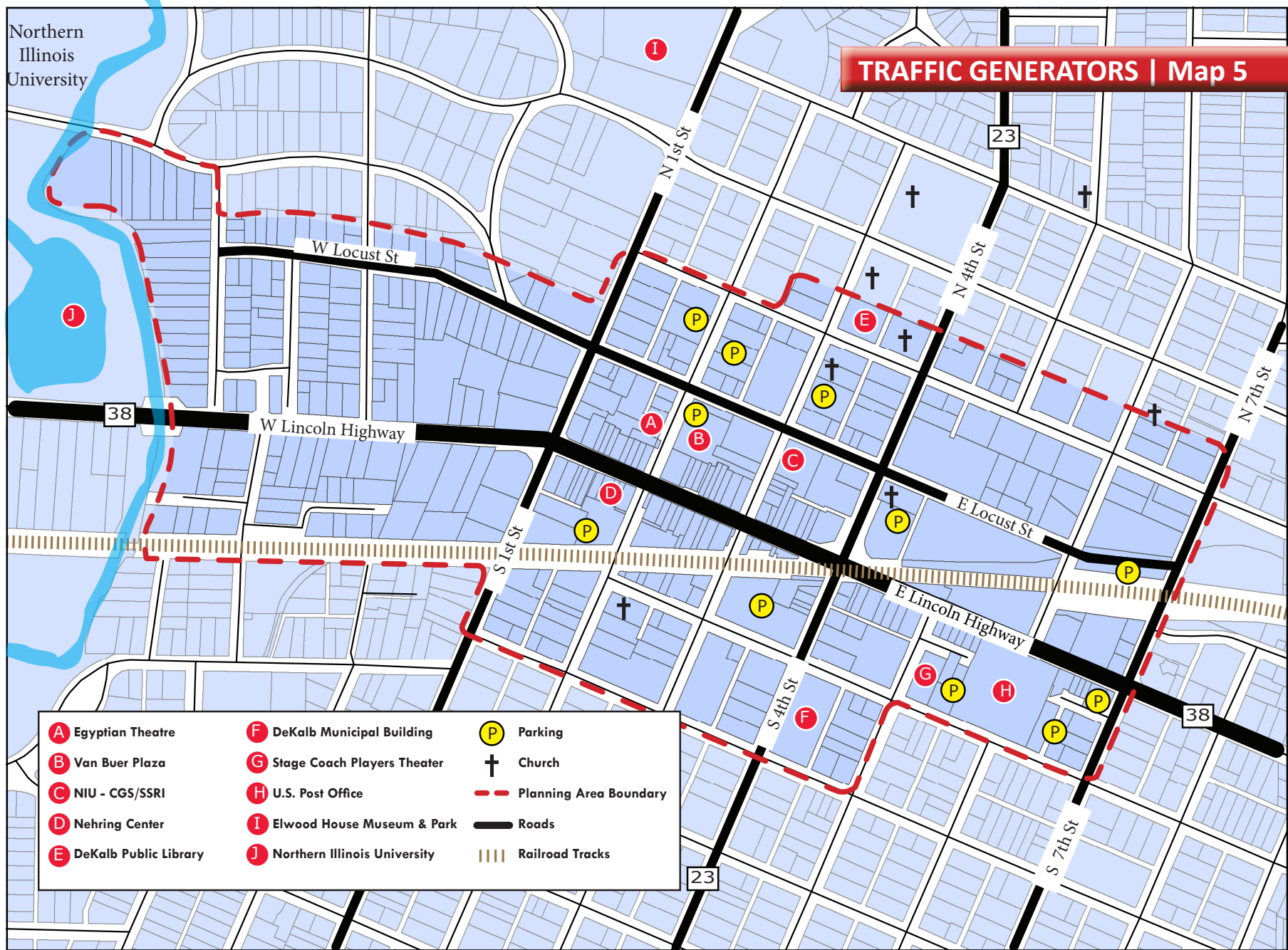
DeKalb's 2005 Comprehensive Plan sought to establish a desired development direction for the city and to guide policies for the city's growth. The appearance, role, and future of Downtown DeKalb were thoroughly discussed during formulation of this plan. Strategies focused on promoting revitalization through Main Street/DeKalb Inc. and consolidating multiple downtown revitalization plans and programs into an implementable approach to be adopted as an element of the ever-evolving comprehensive plan.

##### North 5th Ward Neighborhood Plan (2003)

The purpose of this plan was to build upon the strengths of this historic, well-situated neighborhood to ensure its long-term health and sustainability. The plan calls for preservation of the neighborhood's historic character, allowance of a mix of uses within the neighborhood, update and enforcement of parking and traffic regulations, and improved maintenance of properties. The importance of this neighborhood as a gateway to both Downtown DeKalb and NIU is clear throughout the plan.

##### Pearl Street Neighborhood Revitalization Plan (2008)

The plan for the future of this neighborhood was guided by both environmental concerns and ensuring that the neighborhood complemented the future redevelopment along Lincoln Highway as called for in the 2007 Downtown Revitalization Plan. The



preferred recommendation included redeveloping the entire site with high-density residential along the railroad tracks, low-density residential along Gurler Street, and mixed use along 1st Avenue. Additional recommendations included improved streetscaping and landscaping to provide an appropriate transition from the neighborhood to the coming improvements in downtown.

#### Elwood Historic Neighborhood Implementation Strategies (2011)

A series of public meetings resulted in the formulation of short-term implementation strategies to preserve and restore the integrity and historic character of the Elwood Historic Neighborhood. Along with initiatives to foster safety, sense of community, beautification, and property maintenance, strategies called for enhancing linkages between the neighborhood, Downtown DeKalb, and NIU. Specific recommendations include encouraging NIU faculty to reside in the neighborhood and continuing to revitalize downtown thereby making Elwood an attractive place to live and visit.

#### East Lincoln Highway Corridor Plan (2005)

This plan addressed a variety of community development factors along the East Lincoln Highway Corridor from Peace Road to 4th Street. It proposed a mix of uses along the western portion of the corridor along with denser development and improved streetscaping with the goal of establishing a transition

between neighborhoods to the east and the downtown. It also called for infill or redevelopment of lots with undesirable or conflicting land uses and restoration and celebration of historic structures along the corridor.

#### Central Redevelopment Project Area TIF Redevelopment Plan and Project (2008 Amendment)

In 2008, the city extended the boundaries, lengthened the term, and updated project costs associated with the Central Redevelopment Project Area TIF Redevelopment Plan and Project. The program provides limited financial incentives for private investment within the project area, which encompasses portions of the North 5th Ward and Elwood Neighborhood.

#### DeKalb-Sycamore Area Transportation Study Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2011)

The regional bicycle and pedestrian plan identified priority projects aimed at improving safety, connectivity, and wayfinding both within and between municipalities. Signage leading to downtown from outlying areas and increased bicycle parking around businesses were both short-term priority recommendations of the plan.

#### DeKalb Housing Information Project (2013)

This project was initiated by the NIU Center for Governmental Studies; it produced a profile of the city's housing stock and identified housing segments

that are likely over or under represented. The study found that the most dense and oldest housing stock in the city was generally located near downtown, as were higher concentrations of foreclosures. In addition, threats to quality of life and safety and frequency of exterior condition issues were higher in the vicinity of downtown.

#### City of DeKalb Design Review Process/Design Guidelines Checklist (2009)

Residential infill development projects within DeKalb's neighborhoods are required to undergo a review process before being approved to ensure that they enhance the neighborhood's character and do not disrupt the existing streetscape, architectural character, and development conditions within the neighborhood. The city's Design Review Committee conducts these reviews, which are intended to produce well-defined, consistent residential character within the city that fosters a sense of community among residents.

#### City of DeKalb Business Incentive Program (2012)

This program offers incentives to businesses that are creating jobs, building the city's economic base, maintaining their buildings, and enhancing economic diversity within the city. The program's intent is to build a local economy that is sustainable and able to meet the needs of city residents and visitors. The program also emphasizes the location of businesses, with several corridors in and around Downtown DeKalb prioritized.



# Section 3

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# *Downtown is*

Including stakeholders in the planning process was an essential part of creating a meaningful, achievable plan for DeKalb City Center. This group of committed public officials, businesses, property owners, and residents will ultimately be leaders in guiding the plan's implementation and celebrating its successes. Thus, from the beginning of the process, the plan process incorporated opportunities for stakeholders to provide thoughts, ideas, comments, and criticisms to the planning team in an effort to craft appropriate and attainable recommendations for this plan. More detail on the stakeholder engagement process can be found in Appendix A.

## Downtown Plan Update Steering Committee

The steering committee consisted of a focused group of interested citizens who have a distinguished stake in the future of Downtown DeKalb. The planning team worked with the steering committee to highlight key concepts and develop a focus for the plan's recommendations, strategies, and implementation schedule. The committee represented various interest groups and offered an array of different backgrounds, thoughts, and expertise on the issues facing Downtown DeKalb. The committee played a vital role in producing a consensus-based plan that will guide the future of downtown in the coming years.

## Key Person Interviews

During the planning process, the consulting team conducted one-on-one discussions with key community stakeholders who provided unique and valuable perspectives and knowledge with respect to DeKalb City Center. Leaders in higher education, transportation, recreation, and law enforcement, among other disciplines, provided important insights into the political and institutional structure of City Center and offered ideas about ways their organizations could become more involved in its success. Continuing to reach out to these individuals will assist in forging partnerships that will prove to be beneficial as the plan is implemented.

## Community Meetings

### Stakeholder Summit – February 12, 2013

The goal of the stakeholder summit was to generate input from the public about their vision for the downtown and the goals and priorities they believed would be most valuable. After a brief presentation, the group participated in a session where they described their current impressions of downtown, and what they envisioned it being ten years into the future. Each table also worked as a group to identify challenges, opportunities, and solutions to the issues facing downtown. The planning team compiled these results and used them to develop several key themes. Later in the evening, participants prioritized these ideas through a voting exercise.

The information gained at the summit provided additional guidance to the planning team about which challenges were most important to stakeholders and what opportunities they saw to overcome these challenges. These results were then taken along with those from other meetings and interviews to develop a draft set of recommendations to be presented at an open house in April.

## Public Plan Recommendations Open House – April 10, 2013

Using the information gathered in steering committee meetings, the stakeholder summit, and interviews, the planning team developed eleven draft recommendations that were presented to the public at an open house. The recommendations were displayed on posters with brief descriptions, images, and rationale for each. Participants were given ten dollars of "Monopoly" money which they could use to invest in the projects they viewed as most appealing, suitable, and actionable for Downtown DeKalb. Dialogue and idea sharing was encouraged throughout the event. The results of the open house were compiled to see which projects received the most investment from stakeholders and ultimately informed priority actions in the final plan recommendations.





# *everyone's business.*

## Project Website

The consulting team developed a website that allowed for stakeholders to view project information, exhibits, presentation, meeting results, and other project-related ideas. The website also provided opportunities for stakeholders to provide feedback and ask questions in real time. The project site was accessible through the Re:New DeKalb, City of DeKalb, and SAA Design Group, Inc. websites.

## Adoption Process (TO BE AMENDED w/ DATES & DETAILS FOLLOWING PLAN COMM)

The draft plan was made available for review by the public, who can provide comments on its content. In order to be implemented, the plan will need to be reviewed and approved by the steering committee, which will then pass it on to the Planning and Zoning Commission. The Commission will provide a recommendation to City Council, who will then vote on

whether or not to approve the plan. Once approved, the plan will become an amendment to the City of DeKalb's Comprehensive Plan.

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# Section 4

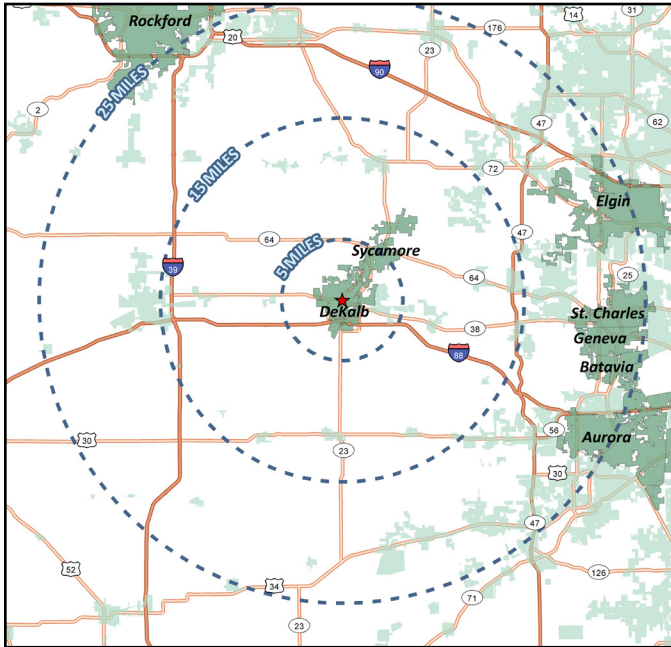


Figure 4-1 | Regional Market Context

Sycamore to the north and approximately 25 miles from St. Charles, Geneva, and other Chicago suburbs to the east. Figure 4-1 illustrates DeKalb's position relative to nearby towns.

## SITE ANALYSIS

### Site Assessment

The top priority project previously identified in the 2007 Downtown Plan, and subsequently implemented, was to enhance the streetscape within Downtown. As shown in Figure 4-2, the upgraded streetscape along Lincoln Highway, particularly between First and Fourth Streets, provides visual continuity and character by including steel benches, enhanced street lighting, brick sidewalks, seasonal banners and planters. These factors create a pedestrian-friendly environment for this portion of Downtown. Historic buildings, such as the Egyptian Theatre, also add to the appeal and marketability of the commercial district.

Conversely, east of Fourth Street, the character of the commercial district remains more automobile-oriented. That part of Downtown is characterized by fewer retail/commercial uses and more public and industrial uses, resulting in a fragmented street wall.

### Access and Visibility

Downtown DeKalb is easily accessible due to its location near major roadways. Interstate 88 is approximately two miles south of the area, and provides strong linkages between the Downtown and the far western suburbs of Chicago and beyond. Illinois Route 38 runs west from Chicago and goes directly through Downtown, providing both local visibility and regional access.

## INTRODUCTION

SB Friedman Development Advisors ("SB Friedman") was retained, as part of a consultant team led by SAA Design Group, by the City of DeKalb to update their 2007 Downtown Revitalization Plan. SB Friedman's role in the project was to assess downtown market conditions, identify and recommend redevelopment opportunities and strategies, and suggest priorities for the use of Tax Increment Financing ("TIF") funds to support downtown revitalization.

## REGIONAL CONTEXT

The City of DeKalb, located in central DeKalb County, is approximately 64 miles west of Chicago. Downtown DeKalb is less than five miles from

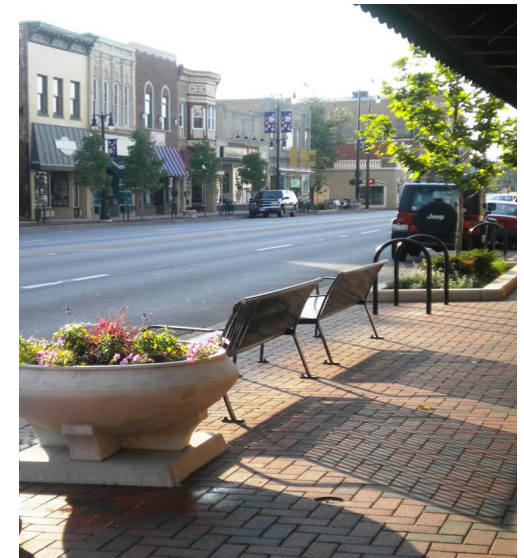


Figure 4-2 | Lincoln Highway Streetscape, 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> Streets

According to 2011 Illinois Department of Transportation traffic count data, Illinois Route 38 (Lincoln Highway) has an average daily traffic volume of approximately 9,000 vehicles in the Downtown area. First Street, a major downtown north/south cross street, has an average of 7,000 to 15,000 vehicles per day. The higher traffic counts along First Street may be due to its connectivity to Sycamore Road, which includes the big-box retail corridor to the north and access to the neighboring City of Sycamore. Current traffic counts downtown are unlikely to meet the typical standards of national retail chains, as most of them seek sites with traffic volumes in excess of 20,000 vehicles per day, as evidenced by traffic counts along Sycamore Road.

In addition, truck traffic originating from nearby industrial areas use Illinois Route 38 through Downtown as their east/west route. Truck traffic presents a challenge for both residential transportation and downtown marketability. On average, 700 to 900 trucks per day travel through the Study Area on Illinois Route 38. On Fourth Street (another key north/south roadway), there is an average daily truck volume of 300 to 500 trips.

There is no Amtrak passenger rail or Metra service to DeKalb. This may limit the appeal of Downtown for some potential residents. In addition, the rail line, which has six at-grade rail crossings downtown, greatly reduces continuity and marketability.

### Key Adjacent Uses

The following uses are located near DeKalb's Downtown and may impact development prospects in various ways:

**Residential:** A mix of single-family and multi-family residential homes border Downtown on the north, south, east and west; many of these homes are older and were constructed at small-town densities, which are relatively high compared to many contemporary subdivision-type developments of three to six dwelling units per acre. This nearby residential population helps support current downtown uses. Further residential development and redevelopment could lead to more successful neighborhood-serving retail, restaurant and entertainment uses.

**Industrial Buildings and Uses:** Industrial uses are situated along the railroad tracks and are primarily found east of the Downtown Study Area. Generally speaking, these sorts of uses do not provide substantial support for downtown commercial or residential development. However, given their location, they are likely not a substantial negative influence on downtown redevelopment.

**Rail Line:** The Union Pacific Railroad tracks run along the southern edge of Downtown with approximately 60 freight trains per day and six at-grade crossing

points. The at-grade crossings can make it difficult for walkers and drivers to get to and through the Study Area. In addition, while there is a quiet zone in place, the noise from the relatively high number of daily trains may have an adverse impact on the marketability of the Study Area for both residential and retail uses.

**Northern Illinois University ("NIU" or the "University"):** The core of the University campus begins just west of the Downtown Study Area boundary providing a pool of students that support downtown commercial uses. Furthermore, the University is a major source of employment in DeKalb and an economic engine for the entire City; NIU's Center for Governmental Studies is located in the Downtown Study Area.

### Market Analysis - Retail

In this section, we evaluate the competitive supply and demand for retail and recommended traffic-generating destination uses based on a review of comparable college towns. In the following section, we explore the potential for residential development based on an assessment of housing supply and demand, and interviews with stakeholders and the development community.

Figure 4-3 | Major Retail Nodes

## SUPPLY ANALYSIS

SB Friedman analyzed the retail market in Downtown as well as the broader market area to evaluate its local competitive position. In addition, we inventoried Downtown tenants to identify missing or under-represented retail categories.

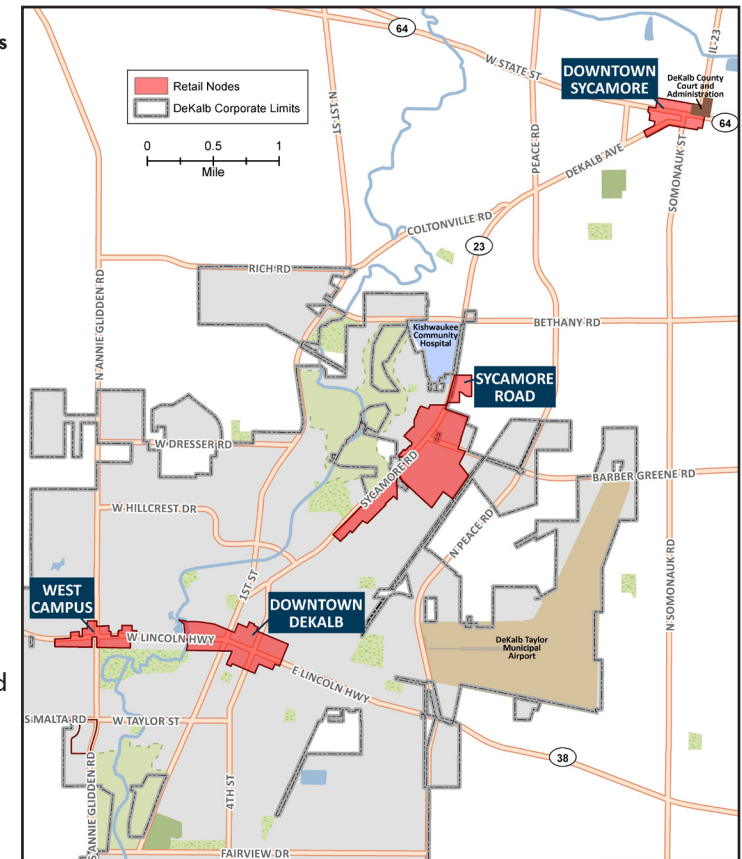
### Local Competitive Market

Retail development tends to occur in clusters. From a market perspective, the clustering of retail uses is often mutually beneficial for retailers and consumers, as consumers can shop at multiple stores conveniently in a single trip. While some stores are attractive enough to develop and succeed outside of the retail spatial pattern, frequently, an analysis of the pattern can provide insight into the function of major nodes and potential opportunities within a market area. As shown in Figure 4-3 on the following page, there are three major retail nodes within a five-mile radius of the Study Area:

1. Sycamore Road Corridor – Located along Sycamore Road between 13th Street and Oakland Drive, the corridor includes Northland Plaza Mall (over 300,000 square feet of retail space, featuring numerous national retailers such as JC Penny, Carson Prairie Scott and Sears), and multiple power centers, which are generally 250,000 to 600,000 square feet in size, featuring three or more category-dom-

inant anchor tenants, such as home improvement stores, discount department stores, warehouse clubs and office supply stores. Power centers typically have a trade area that ranges from a seven- to ten-minute drive time (about two-and-a-half to three miles.) Northland Plaza Mall may draw consumers from an even larger market area. These factors make the Sycamore Road Corridor the primary location for consumer staples and necessities in the DeKalb/Sycamore market. Other major tenants along the corridor include Super Wal-Mart, Target and Lowes.

2. NIU West Campus – Located around the intersection of Annie Glidden Road and Lincoln Highway, this cluster is less than one mile from the western edge of the Study Area. It consists largely of auto-oriented, stand-alone and strip center retail. Development is more community- and neighborhood-serving in scale, catering to the nearby student population as well as visitors. Starbucks, Chipotle and McDonald's are located in this cluster.
3. Downtown Sycamore – Located just north of DeKalb, Sycamore's Downtown offers neighborhood- and community-scale retail similar in type to those existing in DeKalb's Downtown. Just as in Downtown DeKalb, major tenants appear to be local or independent as opposed to national chains and/or franchises.



In the near term, the Sycamore Road Corridor will likely remain the location of choice for mid- to big-box retail in the DeKalb area. The proximity of the NIU West Campus retail node may be too close for certain national and chain retailers that are currently located there to consider an additional downtown location. In the absence of any additional development and based on the current local retail pattern, Downtown appears to be most attractive to smaller non-chain and local retailers in the near term.



Figure 4-4 | Spatial Distribution of Tenant Mix

### Downtown DeKalb Retail Tenant Mix

To assess the supply and distribution of existing downtown retail tenants, *SB Friedman* developed an updated inventory of first-floor, storefront retail and commercial tenancies within the Downtown. This inventory was developed by building on base data from *ReNew DeKalb*, which *SB Friedman* updated and refined through fieldwork.

The data revealed that the core of commercial activity exists along Lincoln Highway, consisting of primarily bars, restaurants and retail stores between First and Fourth Streets (Figure 4-4). Businesses providing professional or personal services are generally located along Second, Third and Fourth Streets on the north side of Downtown, whereas the auto-oriented

and industrial uses are predominantly located west of First Street and east of Fourth Street.

We summarized the retail storefront inventory data by store type as shown in Table 4-1 below. Key observations include:

- Storefront vacancy rate is at 12 percent. Based on our experience in other regional downtowns, this is not an extraordinarily high level of vacancy. In recent years, we have observed downtown vacancy rates ranging between 5 and 20 percent or more in Chicago suburbs and other older Illinois downtowns.
- There is no hotel in the Study Area.

Table 4-1 | Downtown Tenant Mix, Percentage of Total Storefronts

Source: *SB Friedman*

	Downtown DeKalb, IL
Retail Stores	27%
Professional/Financial Services	15%
Bars & Restaurants	18%
Vacant Storefront/Business	12%
Personal/Household Services	11%
Auto-Oriented Uses/Services	4%
Entertainment/Recreation	4%
Cultural/Institutional	2%
Food & Liquor Stores	2%
Office	1%
Public	4%
Hotel / Bed & Breakfast	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>



Table 4-2 | Downtown Traffic Generators

Tenant Type	Existing
Cultural and Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Churches</li> <li>• Nehring Center</li> </ul>
Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library</li> <li>• City Hall</li> <li>• Post Office</li> </ul>
Entertainment and Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Egyptian Theatre</li> <li>• Stagecoach Theatre</li> <li>• Van Buer Plaza</li> <li>• The House Café</li> <li>• Otto's</li> </ul>
Bars and Restaurants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent Restaurants</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NIU Center for Governmental Studies</li> <li>• Cosmetology School</li> </ul>
Meeting Space/Hotel/Leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various Local-Serving Meeting Spaces</li> </ul>

In order to identify retail and other uses with downtown potential, we further analyzed the inventory of downtown tenants with particular interest in those that would be likely to attract people to the area.

#### Existing Traffic Generators

One key element in many older, successful downtowns is the presence of important institutions and venues in strategic locations to act as traffic-generating “anchors” for the area. Traffic generators give people reasons to visit downtown and shop and dine, often catalyzing economic activity in commercial districts.

In addition to our downtown tenant inventory, discussions with community stakeholders helped identify existing traffic-generating uses, which contribute to Downtown’s appeal and regional competitiveness as a destination. These uses are summarized in Table 2 and described in more detail below.

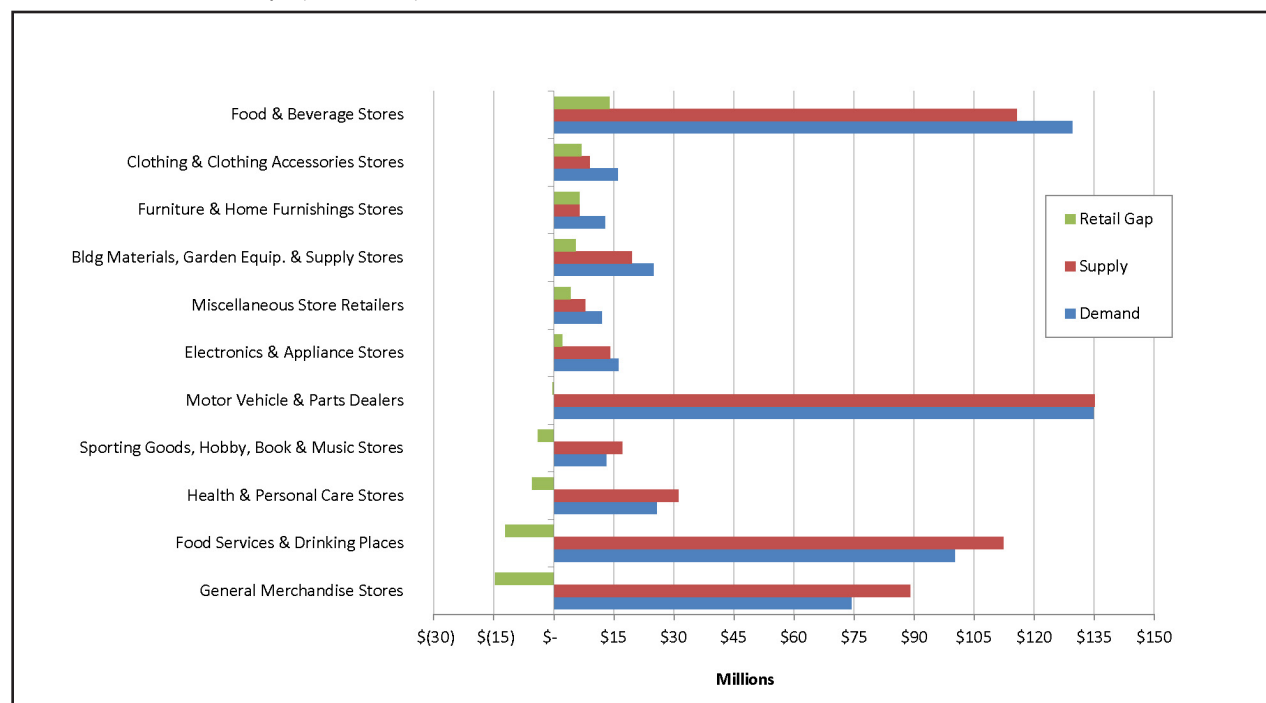
- **Cultural and Institutional.** Several large churches are located in the Downtown. Though churches may have consistent attendance, they tend to provide limited benefit for downtown retail businesses given that they tend to see high traffic only a few times per week.
- **Public.** City Hall and the DeKalb Public Library provide more consistent traffic, and thus offer greater benefit to downtown businesses from a traffic-generation perspective. The library in particular appears to be a strong traffic generator for downtown. It is currently located in a 19,000-square-foot building and is in the process of finalizing financing for an expansion of roughly 40,000 square feet. Currently, the library estimates that it serves approximately 1,000 visitors per day. This figure is expected to increase to 1,250 visits per day after the expansion is completed.
- **Entertainment and Recreation.** The Stagecoach Theatre is one of the major destination entertainment uses located in the Downtown. As one of the oldest operating community theatre troupes in Northern Illinois, the Stagecoach Theatre is a key community anchor, engaging local residents as the actors and actresses.
- The Egyptian Theatre, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is both a community and regional attraction used for local events as well as movies and concerts. From 2006 through 2012, over \$1.5 million was invested in restoration, maintenance and upgrades. Interviews confirmed the strong traffic-generation value of the Egyptian Theatre. People indicated that when there is an event at the Egyptian Theatre, other downtown businesses (especially restaurants and bars) see increased sales. However, the venue is minimally used during the summer months due to a lack of air conditioning.
- **Bars and Restaurants.** Downtown offers a range of independent and local chain restaurants. These tenants complement the cultural and entertainment users in the Downtown and contribute to the unique nature and destination appeal of Downtown DeKalb.

- **Education.** NIU leases space for its Center for Governmental Studies, creating a key educational traffic generator in Downtown. The Center helps to draw students from the main University campus into the Downtown commercial district.
- **Meeting Space/Hotel/Leisure.** Meeting space to serve smaller, local groups (up to roughly 150 people) is available at numerous Downtown locations, including churches, restaurants and several entertainment venues. However, current locations generally appear to lack some technology capabilities, such as contemporary audio and visual systems, which are common in most contemporary meeting and/or conference spaces.

Entertainment and cultural uses, and hotel/meeting space are typically key elements of successful downtown commercial districts. The tenant-mix analysis indicates that there are limited numbers of these uses and an absence of hotel and larger meeting space in Downtown DeKalb. Though there are existing traffic generators drawing consumers to the area, adding to or enhancing existing traffic-generating uses would likely increase the appeal of Downtown DeKalb as a destination.

**Figure 4-5 | DeKalb Retail Leakage Analysis – 10-Mile Radius**

Sources: ESRI Business Analyst (2010 data)



### DEMAND ANALYSIS

In order to further understand and quantify retail potential in Downtown, we conducted a “leakage analysis” using ESRI’s Business Analyst tool. This analysis can help to determine whether any retail spending is currently occurring outside of the DeKalb market area and what store types (if any) are undersupplied within the market. Using these data and our understanding of Downtown’s position within the local retail market, we sought to identify potential market opportunities that might fit in a downtown context.

### Demand – Leakage Approach

SB Friedman conducted a retail leakage analysis using a 10-mile market area around Downtown DeKalb. This analysis compares household retail spending by store type and the estimated supply of stores for various retail store types as shown in Figure 4-5 on the following page. A positive “retail gap” value represents leakage of retail spending outside of the market area. A negative value represents a surplus of retail sales, indicating a market that serves consumers from outside of the 10-mile market area. Positive value may indicate the poten-

tial to expand the retail base of a market area for a particular store type.

Overall, the retail market appears to largely be in balance. The leakage analysis indicates that the General Merchandise and Food Services & Drinking Places categories have the greatest surpluses in retail sales, approximately \$15 million and \$12 million respectively. These surpluses suggest that these retail categories are meeting local demand and drawing additional retail spending from outside of the 10 mile trade area. To illustrate, if a Naperville resident visits DeKalb to attend a show at the Egyptian Theatre and dines downtown after the show, that spending on dinner would be included in the \$12 million Food Services & Drinking Places surplus. This dynamic illustrates how traffic generators can benefit nearby dining and retail uses downtown. The leakage analysis also indicates that the Food & Beverage category has the greatest level of potential unmet demand, primarily driven by grocery stores, with approximately \$15 million in annual retail leakage. However, this gap is likely not large enough to support an additional store. (A typical supermarket ranges between 50,000 and 70,000 square feet, and newer stores can achieve

sales above \$500 per square foot resulting in annual store sales of around \$25 million). Lower levels of unmet demand are estimated for other store types, such as clothing and furniture. Our hypothesis is that the Chicago Premium Outlets in Aurora, just outside of the 10-mile market area, may be capturing sales in this category. Since downtown is not a suitable location for a competitive outlet mall, it does not appear that there is substantial unmet demand for apparel that could reasonably be captured in the Downtown.

Though the leakage analysis indicates some limited retail potential, ultimately, based on our retail tenant inventory, it did not appear that there were major categories that would likely be attracted to a downtown. Downtown DeKalb (and many downtowns, in general) has limited ability to capture certain types of stores, particularly big-box retailers and national chains. As a result, we used an alternate approach to identify potential retail opportunities. Building on our previous commercial tenant-mix inventory, *SB Friedman* utilized a comparables-based, presence-absence approach to identify potential retail store types that may be absent from or under-represented in Downtown DeKalb.

#### Demand – Presence-Absence Analysis for Aspirational Comparables

For the purposes of our analysis, we sought to identify “aspirational” downtowns to compare to DeKalb. Aspirational comparables were defined as Midwestern towns with universities and downtowns with good reputations. Based on guidance from the Steering Committee as well as *SB Friedman* experience working in college towns, we identified four potential “aspirational” comparable university towns: Iowa City, Iowa; Normal, Illinois; Bloomington, Indiana; and Mankato, Minnesota. Each of the four university towns has, in varying degrees, a larger local economy than DeKalb and a major public university better integrated into the fabric of their downtown district. Bloomington and Iowa City are home to flagship Universities while the University campuses in Mankato and Normal are more similar to Northern Illinois University. In addition, we researched retail sales activity to validate aspirational comparability. Based on our research and guidance from the Steering Committee, we concluded that these towns were good comparables for DeKalb to aspire to.

	Downtown DeKalb, IL	Downtown Iowa City, IA	Downtown Normal, IL	Downtown Bloomington, IN	Downtown Mankato, MN
Retail Stores	27%	27%	38%	32%	18%
Professional/Financial Services	15%	15%	6%	11%	18%
Bars & Restaurants	18%	29%	34%	22%	24%
Vacant Storefront/Business	12%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Personal/Household Services	11%	6%	6%	8%	20%
Auto-Oriented Uses/Services	4%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Entertainment/Recreation	4%	9%	4%	7%	4%
Cultural/Institutional	2%	3%	2%	5%	5%
Food & Liquor Stores	2%	3%	0%	5%	7%
Office	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%
Public	4%	4%	8%	3%	2%
Hotel / Bed & Breakfast	0%	1%	2%	5%	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 4-3 | Chamber of Commerce Downtown Tenant Lists**

Source: SB Friedman

We inventoried the retail uses in these aspirational downtowns using a combination of internet research and local Chamber of Commerce downtown tenant lists. SB Friedman did not perform fieldwork in this component of the analysis, although we have conducted previous studies in Normal and Iowa City that aided in our research.

As shown in Table 4-3 above, the comparable University towns' downtown commercial districts include a mix of uses, including cultural, leisure and entertainment uses as well as retail spaces. This mix plays an important role in enhancing the consumer experience and attracting people both locally and from farther away to a downtown. Comparing DeKalb's downtown tenant mix to those of the comparable University towns allowed us to identify uses that are currently absent from or under-represented in DeKalb. Based on this analysis,

it appears that the City may be able to attract the following additional tenants/users as the Downtown grows, including:

- **Bars and Restaurants.** Approximately 18 percent of Downtown DeKalb's storefront tenants are bars and restaurants. Though the ESRI leakage analysis indicates a retail surplus in Food Services & Drinking Places, Downtown DeKalb has a considerably lower percentage of bars and restaurants than the four aspirational university towns. Comparing our tenant inventory to those of the comparable downtowns indicates the types of bars and restaurants lacking in the Downtown that could potentially be successful there if DeKalb and its downtown grow to more closely resemble some of these aspirational comparable towns. If Downtown DeKalb grows

as a regional destination, potential opportunities may include: fast casual dining, ice cream parlors, vegetarian/vegan options, and bar and grills. Bars and restaurants benefit a downtown as they generally offer both day- and night-time service and often double as entertainment venues for consumers. Improved connectivity to NIU may help attract more of this tenant type.

- **Entertainment and Recreation.** Downtown DeKalb has four percent of its retail storefronts occupied by entertainment and recreational uses. This percentage is roughly equal to the percentages observed in Normal and Mankato. If the City of DeKalb were able to achieve Iowa City or Bloomington levels of entertainment uses, the percentages would increase.

**Table 4-4 | Missing/Under-Represented Traffic Generators**

Tenant Type	Existing	Missing
Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Library</li> <li>City Hall</li> <li>Post Office</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>County Courthouse</li> </ul>
Cultural and Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Churches</li> <li>Nehring Center</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Museum (Children's or other)</li> </ul>
Bars and Restaurants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent Restaurants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fresh Fast/Casual</li> <li>Vegetarian/Vegan</li> <li>Ice Cream Shop</li> </ul>
Entertainment and Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Egyptian Theatre</li> <li>Stagecoach Theatre</li> <li>Van Buer Plaza</li> <li>The House Café</li> <li>Otto's</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bowling Alley/Billiards</li> <li>Movie Theatre</li> <li>Yoga Studio</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NIU Center for Governmental Studies</li> <li>Cosmetology School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional Education- Oriented Uses</li> </ul>
Meeting Space/Hotel/Leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Various Local-Serving Meeting Spaces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Larger Meeting Space(s)</li> <li>Hotel</li> <li>B&amp;B</li> </ul>

Entertainment and recreation uses observed in comparable towns but missing from Downtown DeKalb include: bowling and billiards lounge, movie theatre, and fitness studio. There is one bowling alley in DeKalb, Mardi Gras Lanes, but it is located outside of the Downtown, approximately two miles north of the Study Area within the Sycamore Road retail cluster. In addition, this bowling alley does not have a billiards component. There is also a movie theatre in DeKalb, Market Square 10, located within the Sycamore Road cluster. However, stakeholder interviews suggest that the facility lacks modern amenities.

- Cultural/Institutional. Approximately less than two percent of storefronts in Downtown DeKalb are occupied by these uses. Three of the four comparable University towns have a higher percentage of storefronts occupied by these uses. Potential opportunities include: museums,

art galleries, private educational institutions or membership clubs. In addition to supporting the overall vitality of downtowns, cultural and institutional tenants can also serve as meaningful community activity centers.

- Hotels. All the comparable University towns have at least one full-service hotel, such as Marriott or Hyatt (complete with conference center). However, there is no hotel or other lodging facility in Downtown DeKalb. Hotels are important because they allow visitors to stay in a downtown, which makes them more likely to shop and or dine downtown. Hotels can also be developed with conference centers or local meeting spaces, which could increase the number of meetings/events held downtown, and further increase the overall number of people spending time and money in a downtown area. There are numerous regional events and confer-

ences that annually come to DeKalb that the Downtown commercial district could better capitalize on if a hotel were in operation. Of note is the annual Jehovah Witness convention held at NIU's convocation center. This convention occurs over seven contiguous weekends, and in 2012 attracted roughly 7,000 people per weekend to DeKalb

#### Conclusions and Potential Near-Term Priorities

In concluding our retail supply and presence-absence analysis, we identified specific traffic-generating uses missing or under-represented in the Study Area and made recommendations for potential near-term opportunities. Table 4-4 above highlights the missing traffic generators downtown which, if developed, may help increase Downtown DeKalb's marketability as a downtown destination.



- **Public.** Some of the comparable downtowns include county buildings, but this use is absent from DeKalb's Downtown, as it is not the county seat. There may be limited opportunity to add more public uses to Downtown.
- **Cultural and Institutional.** A children's museum is a popular downtown cultural use that exists in each of the four comparable University downtowns, but is absent in Downtown DeKalb. Museums are assets that play a significant role in attracting visitors year round to downtown commercial districts. Art, science and history museums are other popular types often found in downtown districts.
- **Bars and Restaurants.** Restaurant types present in comparable downtowns but absent or under-represented in Downtown DeKalb include: fresh food options (such as a Jason's Deli), vegetarian/vegan friendly options (such as the Pita Pit), and ice cream and frozen yogurt shops.
- **Entertainment and Recreation.** Uses present in comparable downtowns but absent in Downtown include: a moderate to upscale venue offering bowling and billiards, movie theatre, and fitness studio featuring yoga classes. As discussed above, both the existing bowling alley and movie theatre in DeKalb are located outside of

the Downtown Study Area and are not contemporary in terms of services or facilities.

- **Education.** One key difference between each of the aspirational University towns and DeKalb is the location of the downtowns relative to the university campuses. Whereas NIU's campus is west of the Downtown footprint, the comparable towns have universities integrated within their Downtown commercial districts boosting economic activity. If opportunities arise for additional education-oriented uses - including expansion of Kishwaukee College offerings in City Center - working to locate them downtown would be advantageous.
- **Meeting Space/Hotel.** A full-scale hotel and convention center, such as a Marriott or Hyatt, or bed & breakfast, are uses that are present in all of the aspirational University downtowns. Currently, this use does not exist in Downtown DeKalb. If Downtown is to grow as a regional dining, entertainment and cultural destination, a hotel could help support that growth.

## MARKET ANALYSIS - HOUSING

Increasing the residential population in and around a downtown can help support downtown businesses and overall downtown vitality. *SB Friedman* conducted research regarding the market potential for for-sale and rental housing appropriate for the Downtown DeKalb area.

### Background and Context

#### *For-Sale Housing*

Based on some preliminary interviews and demographic research, the near-term market for for-sale housing in the downtown area was evaluated in a limited fashion. Preliminary interviews with real estate brokers and local developers indicated very challenging near-term conditions for townhomes, condos and small lot single-family development.

The market for downtown for-sale housing products is generally empty nesters looking to downsize and reduce house maintenance obligations and/or young professional people looking to buy a first home. Conditions in Downtown DeKalb combined with the needs and challenges faced by these two population segments have led us to conclude that there will likely be limited potential for for-sale downtown housing products in the near term.

Specific challenges to for-sale housing development in and around the Downtown include:

1. **Broader Economic Environment:** The economic downturn experienced over the past several years has resulted in increased unemployment, foreclosures, loss of investments and other financial distress. Many baby boomers are unable to sell their current homes at a price that will allow them to move into a new downtown home. Many young professionals are more hesitant to buy a home after seeing properties decline in value substantially in recent years.
2. **Amenities and Regional Competition:** Currently, Downtown DeKalb offers some dining and entertainment amenities that appeal to home buyers. However, there are several attractive alternatives for downtown living within a 35-mile radius of DeKalb. Additional nearby cities with attractive downtowns include St. Charles and Naperville, within 25 and 35 miles of DeKalb, respectively. According to interviews, many higher-income households elect to reside in these other cities and commute to DeKalb. In order to compete effectively with some western suburbs of Chicago, the level of activity and amenities in Downtown DeKalb likely needs to increase.

The Downtown Plan should be flexible and allow for for-sale housing. However, due to the challenges

described above, development of these sorts of products in the near term appears unlikely. Therefore, attracting additional destination retail and traffic generators appears to be the most effective way, in the long term, to enhance Downtown's market position for these products.

#### *Rental Housing*

To analyze the market potential for rental apartments downtown, we evaluated the potential demand for additional rental housing as driven by two types of users:

1. **NIU Students (undergraduate and graduate):** This group generally seeks a relatively low-cost housing product with limited on-site amenities.
2. **Young Professionals and Empty Nesters:** These groups are generally more able and willing to pay higher rents and tend to desire higher-end finishes and amenities.

*Student Housing Considerations:* NIU is a substantial economic engine for DeKalb, and its student population greatly supports the rental housing market. However, stakeholder interviews revealed concerns about changing demographics and trends that may alter the dynamic of the local student housing market.

In particular, in recent years, perhaps partly driven

by challenges facing the broader economy, an increasing number of students have been commuting to school. As a result, the University has been challenged with declining enrollment. Furthermore, the University recently made a policy change regarding student residency requirements, mandating that second-year undergraduate students live on campus in university housing (unless they live at home). Currently, only freshmen are required to live in residence halls.

Based on these market dynamics and policy changes, additional low-cost student housing will likely not be needed in the near term, particularly as lower-quality housing would be contrary to the City's goal of improving the overall image of DeKalb. Instead, the Steering Committee, in addition to community stakeholders, expressed desire to retain and attract higher-income populations to the City.

#### Rental Housing Supply

*DeKalb Market:* SB Friedman gathered sample data on existing rental housing in the City. Using the MLS database of real estate listings in addition to discussion with leasing agents, we assessed the supply and condition of rental housing stock in order to determine whether housing options that could appeal to higher-income populations, such as young professionals and empty nesters, exist in the City as a whole and/or the Downtown.

	Median Price Per Square Foot	Rental Range		Example of Unit / Building Features	
		Low	High		
DeKalb (Sample of upper quartile units)	\$0.88	\$500	\$1,500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One has indoor pool</li> <li>One has fitness room</li> <li>One has playground</li> <li>One has dishwasher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wall AC units / One has Central AC</li> <li>Wood laminate flooring in some</li> <li>Patios in some</li> <li>Laundry room in clubhouse</li> </ul>
AMLI Naperville	\$1.35	\$1,000	\$1,600	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Crown molding</li> <li>Business center and conference room</li> <li>Gourmet kitchens</li> <li>Gas fireplaces</li> <li>Nine foot or vaulted ceilings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indoor basketball/volleyball court</li> <li>Individual garages</li> <li>Full-size in-unit washers &amp; dryers</li> </ul>
AMLI St. Charles	\$1.41	\$1,100	\$1,500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resort-style swimming pool and sun deck</li> <li>Sand volleyball court</li> <li>Executive business and conference center</li> <li>Community garden center</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attached/detached garages</li> <li>Dog park</li> <li>Full size in-unit washers &amp; dryers</li> <li>Gas fireplaces</li> <li>Nine foot or vaulted ceilings</li> <li>Walking path</li> </ul>

Table 4-5 | Rental Product Comparison

Based on our research, we found that most rental apartment complexes in DeKalb are over 40 years old, and are predominantly marketed to students. Monthly apartment rents generally range from \$500 per month for a studio unit to \$1,000 per month for three-bedroom units, while condos and townhomes can rent for between \$650 and \$1,500 per month. Most apartment complexes appear to offer minimal amenities such as shared laundry rooms, air conditioning and free storage space. There appear to be few rental housing options for households interested in higher-end rental living with more amenities.

**Competitive Market for Higher-End Rentals:** Interviews with community stakeholders, local developers, leasing agents and apartment managers confirmed that a high-quality rental housing product with high-end amenities is lacking in the marketplace. We were also informed that some two-income households elect to live in the far western suburbs of Chicago and commute to DeKalb, in order to live in areas where the housing product and community amenities meet their needs.

To better understand the competitive alternatives, we researched rental options in these potential alternative communities to determine what amenities are generally included in a higher-end rental product. AMLI apartment products in St. Charles and Naperville were identified as nearby, higher-end product for comparison purposes. These cities are within commuting distance to DeKalb, approximately 25 and 30 miles, respectively. We compared our sample of housing stock in DeKalb, considered to be within the upper quartile, to luxury rental housing stock in nearby St. Charles and Naperville. Our findings are shown in Table 4-5 above.

The comparison of rental products shows that apartments in DeKalb do not include luxury amenities, and there is currently not a higher-end rental product in DeKalb that can effectively compete with AMLI apartments. If rental housing product with similar amenities to the two AMLI properties were built in DeKalb, it could potentially attract the higher-income populations that currently have no viable rental housing option in the City.

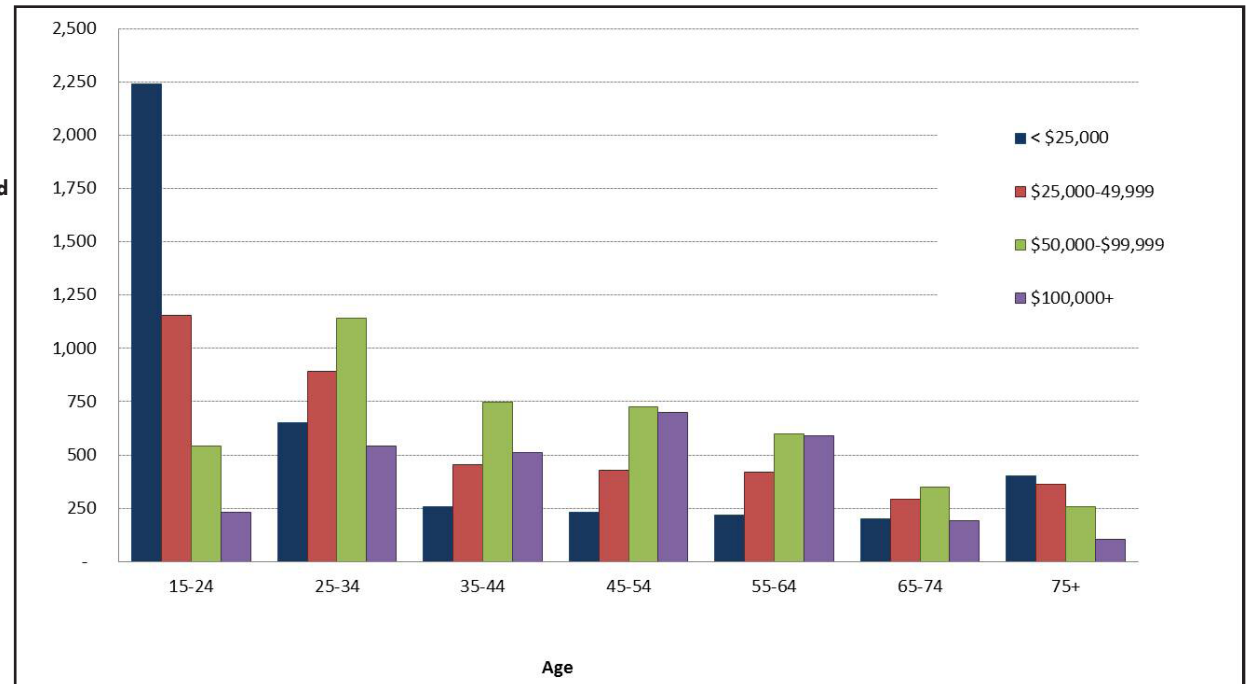
**Potential Downtown Sites for Rental Housing:** There are some larger sites downtown that may be suitable for a high-end apartment development, specifically:

- Shodeen Site on Lincoln Highway - Located just west of First Street on the south side of West Lincoln Highway, this site is vacant and development-ready. Discussions with the Steering Committee revealed that Shodeen Construction has received zoning approval for a condominium project, but the developer was unable to move forward with that project due to market conditions. The site is roughly seven acres in size and appears to be large enough to support a higher-quality apartment development.
- Others - There may be other sites that could be assembled or cleared for higher-end apartment development as well.

**Potential Competitive Projects:** It is our understanding that Shodeen has secured zoning for a multi-use development project at the southeast corner of Route 38 and Peace Road (the “Shodeen Peace Road

**Figure 4-6 | Households by Age and Income, DeKalb IL, 2012**

Source: ESRI Business Analyst, 2012 Forecasts



Site"). The total site is approximately 60 acres, half of which is dedicated for rental housing development the other half dedicated to commercial development. The residential component is intended to be a higher-end luxury rental complex with roughly 500 to 600 units. The development would likely be marketed towards higher-income households and some of the people electing to commute to DeKalb from the western suburbs. Should this project get built, it could be a material competitor with a downtown rental housing project.

## Rental Housing Demand

### Considerations and Demographic Trends

Young professionals are generally defined as people between the ages of 25 and 34 with a college degree. Nationwide, young professionals are increasingly electing to live in downtowns. These housing choices are often driven by a desire to live near

employment, entertainment and dining, and other characteristics of downtown areas.

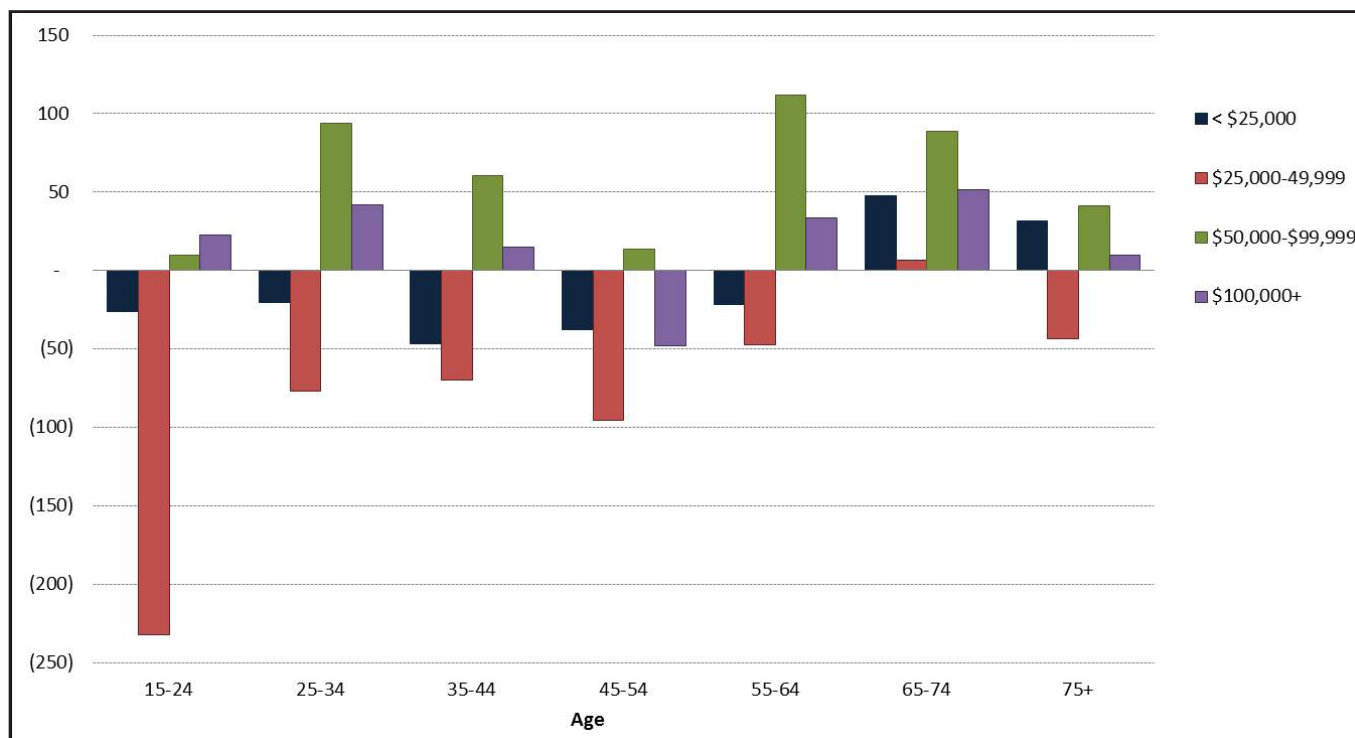
Empty nesters are generally defined as people between the ages of 55 and 64 with no children living in the home. Many in this cohort are interested in downsizing from their larger, family-oriented homes to lower-cost, higher-amenity housing that requires less maintenance. They, too, are attracted to the amenities often found in downtown areas.

To gain insight into the rental housing demand in DeKalb, *SB Friedman* analyzed demographic information for the City of DeKalb, including age and income, utilizing data from the U.S. Census's American Community Survey and ESRI population age and income projections.

- **Students:** Forty percent of DeKalb's population is comprised of people between the ages of 15 and 24 (largely students). This cohort

is relatively poor, most with annual household incomes of less than \$25,000 per year as shown in Figure 6. Fifty-three percent of all households in this income bracket are within this younger age range.

- **Young Professionals:** Fourteen percent of DeKalb's population is comprised of young professionals between the ages of 25 and 34. This demographic includes many middle- and higher-income households. Approximately 26 percent of households earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per year are young professionals. Almost 20 percent of households earning more than \$100,000 per year are in this cohort.
- **Empty Nesters:** Seven percent of DeKalb's population is comprised of empty nesters between the ages of 55 and 64. Similar to young professionals, many in this cohort earn



**Figure 7 | Change in Households by Age and Income, DeKalb IL, 2012 - 2017**

Source: ESRI Business Analyst, 2012 and 2017 Forecasts

middle and higher incomes. Almost 15 percent of households earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per year are empty nesters, and they comprise over 20 percent of households earning over \$100,000 per year.

These demographics suggest the following:

- **Students:** Most of this younger population cannot afford higher-end rental products.
- **Young Professionals:** Some of these households may be able to afford higher-end housing. The young professionals that currently work in the City but commute to DeKalb from neighboring suburbs could potentially be attracted to Downtown if comparable higher-end housing is developed.

- **Empty Nesters:** A relatively small portion of this group resides in DeKalb; however, some can afford higher-priced housing. As these households look to downsize, they may be motivated to relocate to Downtown for lower-maintenance, higher-amenity housing options.

Five-year projections suggest that total population growth will be relatively flat, a decline of less than one percent. Expectations through 2017 show an overall increase in the number of households earning between \$50,000 and \$99,000, predominantly the young professional households (25 to 34) and empty nesters (55 to 64) as seen in Figure 7 above.

As discussed, additional low-cost, student-oriented housing is a concern for stakeholders. Moreover, near-term demand appears low given the demographic and policy trends occurring at NIU. On the

other hand, high-end rental housing is lacking in the market, and evidence suggests that higher-income households, particularly young professionals and empty nesters, may have unmet housing demand; therefore, providing a rental product downtown that will appeal to this demographic may have a positive impact on the downtown.

### Conclusions

- **For-Sale Housing:** Near-term potential appears weak due to the challenging economic environment as well as regional housing competition offering attractive alternatives.
- **Rental Housing:**  
Supply:
  - o Higher-quality rental housing does not appear to exist in DeKalb. To effectively



compete with the western suburbs, better housing options are needed to encourage higher-income populations, such as young professionals and empty nesters, to locate to Downtown DeKalb.

- o Sites exist in Downtown that could potentially be suitable for higher-end rental housing development, however the Shodeen Peace Road Site on the east side of town is a potential competitor.

Demand:

- o Interviews with stakeholders and demographic data appear to suggest that some amount of higher quality rental housing is feasible.

Ultimately, our analysis indicates that Downtown DeKalb should allow for higher-priced/higher-quality rental housing, to help retain higher-income workers and support the growth of downtown businesses.

## MARKET ANALYSIS - EMPLOYMENT/OFFICE

The Steering Committee expressed an interest in further developing the employment base in Downtown DeKalb. Additional high-quality jobs in the area would likely help support existing downtown businesses as well as new downtown development.

Generally speaking, most downtowns have tended to prefer non-industrial employment, such as government jobs, white collar private-sector jobs, and sometimes call center jobs. New industrial jobs have tended to locate near major transportation routes such as I-88. For the purposes of this study, we have assumed that the desired types of employment in and around Downtown DeKalb are largely non-industrial in nature.

### Market-Driven Office Development

There may be some growth potential in office employment for traditional downtown-located businesses, such as insurance agencies, accounting firms and banks. However, large new corporate employers tend to locate closer to cities with major transportation, such as interstate highways (Naperville, Downers Grove and others) or commuter train lines (Downtown Chicago) in order to allow them to access a large labor pool. While a major employer could potentially elect to locate in Downtown DeKalb for

their own business reasons, the area is not a typical office location.

Any major office that would come to Downtown in the next five years would be of a “wild card” nature. The Downtown Plan should be able to accommodate such a use, but planning for that type of use should not drive the Plan objectives. Several of the potential apartment sites could also likely be developed for an office use should such a need arise.

### Institutionally-Driven Office Development

The goals of key institutions, such as NIU and Kishwaukee College (located in Malta, IL), could potentially support some office-type development in the downtown area. While we have not had any discussions with either entity, should one or both of them elect to create a small business incubator facility to help nurture start-up businesses, this type of development could be located downtown. Such a use would be supportive of the overall goals of energizing the downtown area.

## MARKET CONCLUSIONS

This section provides a summary of observations and opportunities in Downtown DeKalb, based on a compilation of our site analysis, retail analysis, comparables analysis, demographic factors, and community desires expressed through key stakeholders.

### Retail

- The primary retail core in Downtown exists along Lincoln Highway between First and Fourth Streets. Downtown's primary role in the retail pattern is to provide neighborhood-serving retail and a destination for services, culture, dining and entertainment.
- If better pedestrian linkages to the University are created, additional traffic-generating users locate in Downtown, and/or additional downtown housing is constructed, the Downtown area may be able to attract additional smaller retail tenants.
- Relative to comparable University downtowns, DeKalb is currently under-represented in several tenant types, including entertainment and recreation, bars and restaurants, cultural and institutional, and hotels and meeting space.

### Destination/Catalytic Uses

- Currently, there are several traffic-generating uses that draw people to Downtown, helping to establish the area as a destination location for both residents and visitors.
- Relative to comparable University downtowns, several traffic-generating uses that would help solidify Downtown's position as a cultural and entertainment destination are missing, particularly a children's museum, fitness studio, movie theatre, bowling/billiards lounge, and a hotel with conference center.
- Due to relatively flat population growth, adding traffic generators and/or expanding current ones are critical to improving Downtown's position as a regional destination.

### Residential

- Most rental product in the City is older (at least 40 years) and has limited amenities that cannot achieve higher rents.
- There may be potential for a higher-end rental product in the downtown area that will appeal to higher-income populations. Households earning \$50,000 or more could likely afford to pay more for rental housing and may be willing to do so in exchange for a higher-end product.

- Supporting the development of additional rental housing downtown would help support the expansion of retail uses.

### Employment/Office

- Downtown DeKalb lacks the characteristics typically needed for corporate office development, however should market or institutionally driven office development occur, it would be consistent with downtown growth and development.

## TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (“TIF”) DISTRICTS FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

This section of the report provides a summary-level analysis of the financial conditions of existing TIF districts in and around City Center, including their remaining terms and rough estimates of funds available to help catalyze downtown redevelopment.

There are presently two TIF districts in and around City Center: TIF 2 and the Central Area TIF.

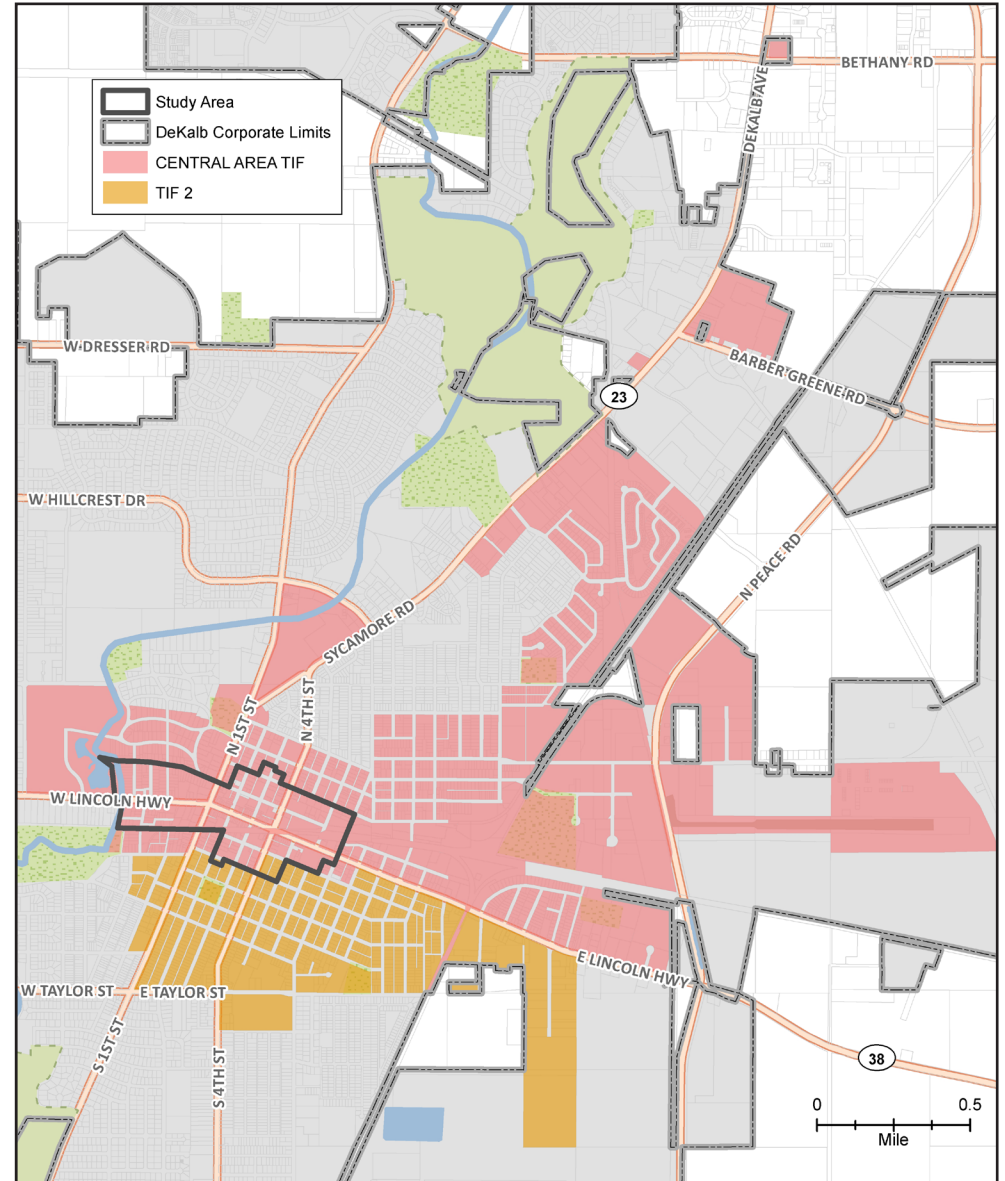
As illustrated in Figure 8, City Center is predominantly within the Central Area TIF.

### TIF District Key Facts and Assumptions

TIF district revenue projections were prepared by the City of DeKalb and provided to *SB Friedman* for review and analysis. In order to determine the available funds within the TIF districts, we conducted interviews with City staff to review the TIF financials and discuss planned expenditures. Based on these discussions, we determined the following:

**Figure 4-8 | TIF Boundaries and Downtown Study Area**

Sources: City of DeKalb



### TIF 2

- Expires on March 27, 2018 and has approximately \$13 million in TIF revenues projected by year 2018.
- Funds in TIF 2 predominantly have prior commitments to a variety of projects and expenditures including: reconfiguring City Hall, infrastructure improvements, and transfers out to other TIF districts.
- Projected present value of available funds to use towards downtown revitalization is between \$600,000 and \$700,000 (4.5 percent cost of funds).

### Central Area TIF

- Expires on December 31, 2020 and has approximately \$70 million in TIF revenues projected by the end of year 2020.
- Some of the fund expenditures are presently committed towards Downtown improvement projects, such as the Library Expansion. Other funding commitments include: debt service on bonds, transfers out to other TIFs, and street/alley improvements. Currently planned projects with more preliminary TIF funding commitments include airport improvements and Downtown Plan updates.
- Projected present value of available funds to use towards downtown revitalization is between \$5 million and \$6 million (4.5 percent cost of funds)

### **Total projected revenue available from both TIF funds is between \$6 million and \$7 million.**

The City's revenue projections are based on several key assumptions, including a conservative inflationary property tax growth of 1.5 percent annually, fund transfers in from adjacent TIFs, and no development within either district. In the event new taxable development occurs that does not require substantial TIF subsidy, there may be additional TIF revenues for projects in the future. In addition, funds can be ported between adjoining TIFs. If one district has excess funds and another needs them, money can be ported between the districts.

However, our analysis shows a limited level of monies available for Downtown's redevelopment. Accordingly, remaining TIF funds would be best used toward projects with the potential to spur other development or otherwise support downtown business development.

## PRIORITY INVESTMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Our approach to DeKalb's Downtown revitalization was to analyze development opportunities in the context of projects that often need the support of public resources, that have catalytic growth potential for Downtown DeKalb, and that are achievable within the next five years. Based on our assessment of Downtown's market opportunities, we recommend the following investment priorities for the remaining TIF funds:

### 1. Enhance Connectivity to NIU Campus

- DeKalb has a substantial student population. We recommend considering the downtown uses that are currently under-represented and encouraging those which appeal to the younger demographic. Furthermore, improving the connectivity between the NIU campus and the Downtown could help draw students to the Downtown DeKalb and increase spending on retail, restaurants and entertainment there.

### 2. Upgrade Current Traffic Generators

- We recommend upgrading the Egyptian Theatre to accommodate year-round use. The venue currently lacks air conditioning, which limits its use during the summer months. Adding this feature would allow the Egyptian Theatre to operate year-round, which would likely have

positive impacts on nearby dining and retail uses.

### 3. Partner with Both Profit and Non-Profit Entities to Develop Vacant Land and Support Projects with Catalytic Potential, Including:

- Downtown housing, including higher-priced rental products
- Missing traffic generators, such as:
  - o Museum
  - o Bowling and billiards lounge
  - o Hotel and conference center
  - o Fitness center/yoga studio

Development of housing and/or additional traffic generating uses would further support existing and future downtown businesses and overall vitality.





# Section 5

### CITY CENTER: DEKALB – UNPARALLELED ASSETS

This plan provides a vision for how DeKalb's City Center can advance as a vibrant and vital place in the next half-decade and beyond. It continues much of the direction first set out in the 2007 plan (and, in some cases, the 1998 plan before that), while incorporating additional recommendations regarding connectivity, physical form and character, and organizational and management structure. With a message that "downtown is everyone's business", the DeKalb City Center Plan seeks to leverage the assets and attributes that make City Center strong as anchors and guides for further improvement and development. Those assets and attributes are truly in the spirit of "smart growth" principles that many communities strive to achieve: maximizing the use of existing infrastructure, mixing residences, shopping, employment, cultural, and educational uses in proximity to one another, reducing the dependence on automobiles by moving towards walkable, bikeable, and transit-friendly environments, and ultimately fostering and sustaining a high quality of life.

Many of the factors at play within and surrounding DeKalb's City Center strongly contribute to its vibrant, highly livable character. In implementing this plan, these strengths will serve as the foundation for the next decade or more of development:

- There are a number of unique, timeless activity generators that bring people to the area on a regular basis, such as the DeKalb Public Library, the Egyptian Theatre, and Stagecoach Players Theater.
- Northern Illinois University is an especially unique contributor to City Center's potential and sustained vitality. The campus is immediately adjacent to our planning area, and is a regional - arguably even international - epicenter for education, innovation, culture, and the arts. There are a number of characteristics of NIU that a comprehensive downtown vision should seek to leverage, including:
  - ◇ During the academic year, NIU is a hub of activity for over 25,000 people every day, while in the summer months the campus draws thousands every week to athletic, academic, and arts-based summer camps, conventions, and other unique events geared to a range of ages and backgrounds.
  - ◇ NIU serves as a prime City Center tenant, with the Social Science Research Institute occupying the Monat Building at 3rd and Locust. Proactive engagement and encouragement of NIU as a vested owner and/or tenant should be an ongoing cornerstone of City Center redevelopment considerations.
  - ◇ NIU's nationally-acclaimed visual and performing arts department perfectly complements the vision of City Center and should be embraced and integrated into the fabric of City Center, wherever possible. Strategies could include expanding and promoting the "ArtWalk" event, launching a public arts campaign, or facilitating permanent studio space in downtown buildings.
- City Center – most especially the "core" between 1st Street and 4th Street – is a compact, walkable area in which people can do a number of things, such as shopping, dining, movies and theatrical productions, education, employment, and more without having to drive or move their car once they've arrived.
- Over 500 public parking spaces are available within the core, providing the area with significant opportunities to accommodate existing demand and consider the expansion of strategically located surface lots with structured parking behind buildings so as to not disrupt the texture and fabric of the downtown.
- An established network of gridded streets and sidewalks within the core foster the movement of pedestrians and autos and provide opportunities for improved connectivity to and from surrounding districts and neighborhoods.
- Improvements in streetscaping, infrastructure, and parking have raised the image of City Center and laid the groundwork for continued investment in buildings and spaces.

### CITY CENTER: DEKALB – A RENEWED VISION

Through collaboration with downtown businesses and the Downtown Plan Update Steering Committee, the vision for DeKalb's City Center is re-stated below, in certain respects an affirmation of the principles of the 2007 plan:

*“DeKalb City Center will be a regional destination for culture, learning, dining and entertainment, joined with a world class university and surrounded by well connected, desirable neighborhoods.”*

This plan's central objective is to supplement the 2007 plan with an actionable, focused development and strategic direction that ultimately helps the City to achieve its re-stated vision through continuous and incremental progress. Based upon this objective, in 10 years DeKalb's City Center will be characterized as:

- An economic engine for DeKalb and the region, with a unique and healthy blend of high-quality residences, shopping, employment, and institutional uses that ensure City Center remains competitive and active.
- Instantly identifiable by its mix of character-giving older buildings and new buildings that contribute to City Center's lasting legacy of high-quality architecture.
- A destination where families, students, alumni,

retirees, professionals, and empty nesters find appeal and opportunity to celebrate community together.

- An epicenter for a diverse range of arts, education, and entertainment options for residents and visitors to DeKalb and the broader region.
- A highly accessible, easy to navigate, and pedestrian-friendly “Place” where integrated, high-quality streetscapes and public spaces offer an interesting and inviting pedestrian experience.
- The central hub of an efficient, well-connected, multi-modal transportation system where pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and vehicles move safely and efficiently while co-existing throughout City Center.

In pursuit of this vision, the DeKalb City Center Plan is framed in several strategic objectives, as introduced below:

- Treat DeKalb City Center as a business that requires a structure for management, operations, and promotion to be successful.
- Leverage the demographic qualities of NIU to increase student use and activity in City Center by improving access and connectivity between City Center and the NIU campus.
- Animate City Center with improved visitor communications, continued aesthetic refinement, and

event programming.

- Direct TIF investment towards traffic generators with catalytic economic potential.
- Facilitate residential development and redevelopment in the underutilized lands adjoining the retail core of City Center and in adjoining neighborhoods.
- Broaden the engagement of the city and regional businesses and institutions in the strengthening of City Center.

## DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Relatively compact, City Center nonetheless has three distinct “zones”, which each will contribute in unique ways to achieving the objectives and vision introduced above. The recommendations and action plan presented via the DeKalb City Center Plan are targeted at one or more of the framework zones introduced below and illustrated in Map 6.

### “The Core”

The core refers to the historic heart of downtown DeKalb, comprised of the 12 blocks between 1st Street and 4th Street from Franklin to Oak Street. With its infrastructure more or less rehabilitated via the 2007 plan, the focus of the plan in the core will be to take the next step in revitalization by adding to the critical mass of activity and economy through targeted private and public redevelopment, preservation, and infill.

### “Eastern Gateway”

The East Lincoln Highway corridor from 4th Street to 7th Street, although not as tightly woven as the core, nonetheless retains a critical character and function for City Center. This three block long corridor will serve as an eastern gateway to the core and as a signature welcome to City Center through continued streetscape, signage, and pedestrian enhancements and targeted infill, preservation and redevelopment.

### “Communiversity Commons”

The “commons” is a critical transition zone between the Northern Illinois Campus and the core, and its current condition – most especially the roughly 1,000 feet along West Lincoln Highway from the Kishwaukee River eastward to about Castle Bank – is severely out of step with the vision and character of DeKalb City Center. A fundamental improvement in both the public realm – through improved streetscape and an enhanced and expanded pedestrian connection – and in the character, orientation, and scale of private redevelopment will present the transition area as a common ground that looks, feels, and functions as a vibrant, active town/gown district.

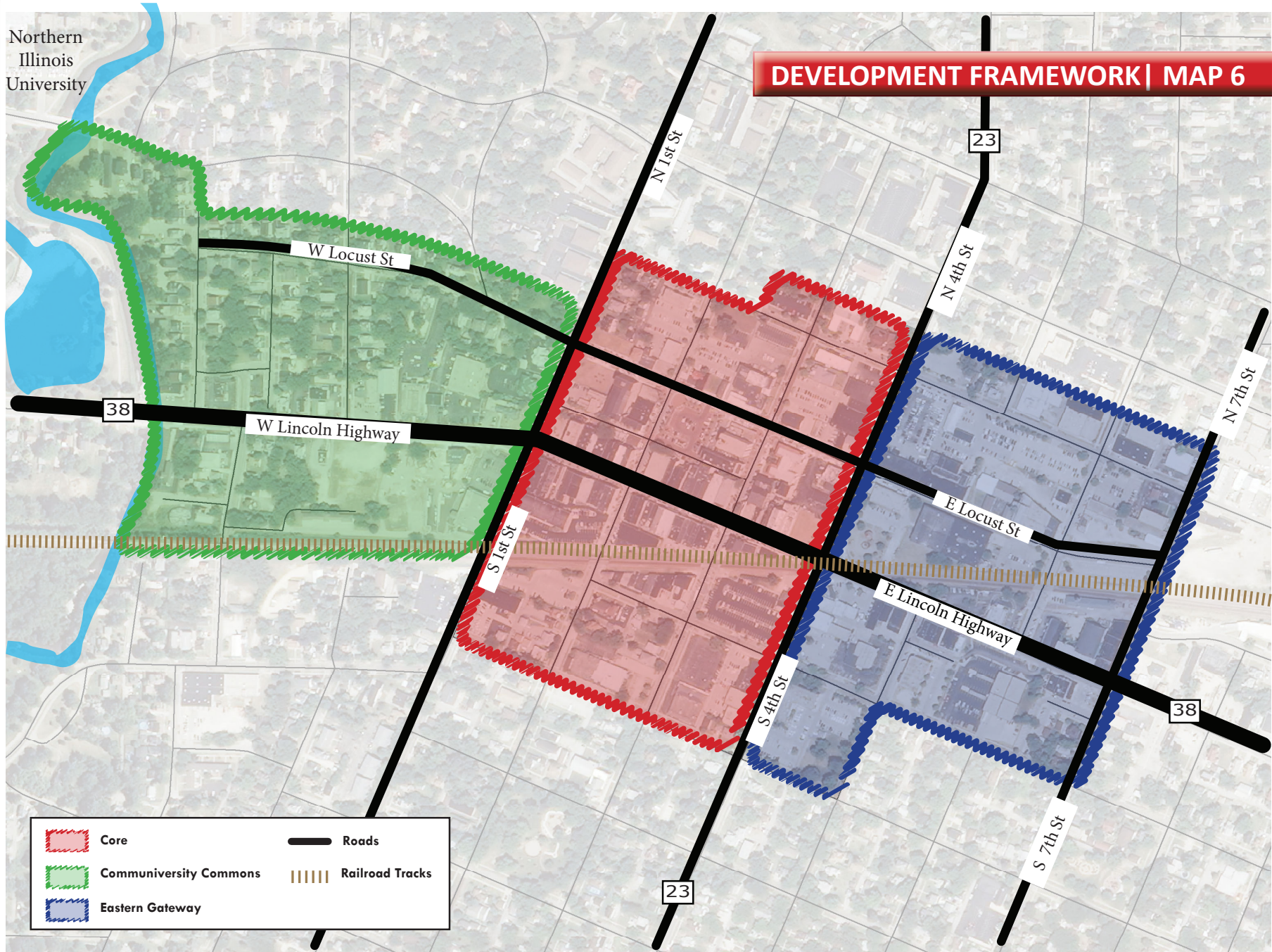
Currently, the three framework zones are woven together most strongly and directly by Lincoln Highway/Illinois Route 38, with physical break points at 1st Street and 4th Street. With this in mind, unifying the look, feel, and function of Lincoln Highway throughout City Center as a pedestrian friendly, multi-faceted and interesting shared corridor remains a critically important objective in furthering the viability of City Center.

That being said, strengthening the physical fiber that links the zones together by identifying and enhancing secondary and non-vehicular connections is an additional focus of the DeKalb City Center Plan. Most prominent of these secondary connections as proposed by this plan is Locust Street, which is envisioned as an entirely different - but equally important and enjoyable - corridor linking the heart of City Center with the Heart of NIU.

Overall, bolstering the sense of physical connectivity for automobiles, pedestrians, buses, and bicyclists throughout City Center is presented as a fundamental challenge and opportunity that the Plan seeks to address.

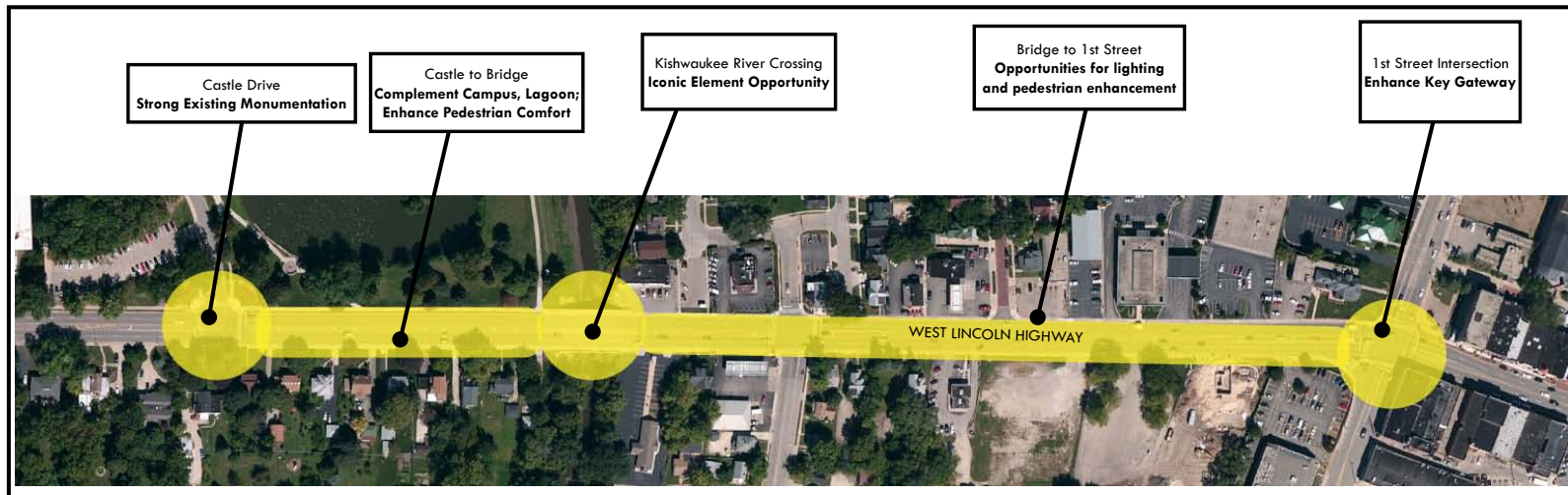


## DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK | MAP 6





**Figure 5-1 | Potential Streetscape Approach for West Lincoln Highway**



## PHYSICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The revitalization effort in DeKalb City Center has traction thanks to the intentional and immediate implementation of several of the 2007 plan's highest priorities: improving the aesthetic condition of the core through focused streetscape and parking lot enhancement and blight elimination. These public investments in improving the physical "fabric" of the downtown begin to shape the pattern and character of City Center as a unique and thriving place. It is critical that the momentum of these efforts is not stalled or even slowed, and the recommendations for physical improvements introduced below offer a number of targets that continue to shape City Center as a vital economic engine and meaningful destination. Map 7 on Page 59 provides a keyed illustrative master plan for these recommendations.

### Continue Aesthetic Refinement

While the investment in streetscapes and public spaces in City Center have been both substantial and effective, opportunities remain to further strengthen City Center's image.

*Lincoln Highway Streetscape (Figure 5-1 above; A1 on Map 7)*

**Recommendation:** Enhance the West Lincoln Highway Corridor from 1st Street to Castle Drive through streetscape improvements to strengthen the physical and visual connection between the core downtown and the Northern Illinois University campus.

**Why?:** Strengthening the physical connectivity between the downtown and NIU along the highly travelled West Lincoln Highway Corridor provides a stronger sense of entry and continuity to City Center, enhances pedestrian comfort and access and estab-

lishes a standard and framework for redevelopment along this critical gateway corridor.

*Enhance City Center Entrance Nodes (top right on p. 53; A2 on Map 7)*

**Recommendation:** Utilizing enhancements such as corner bulb-outs, gateway monumentation, and treated crosswalks strengthen the visual character and pedestrian comfort of the following intersections:

- East Lincoln Highway and 7th Street
- East Lincoln Highway and 4th Street
- East Lincoln Highway at Kishwaukee River Bridge
- 1st Street and Locust Street

**Why?:** These nodes are key City Center gateways, and should clearly convey a sense of arrival in a special "place" that is unified in its look and dynamic and rich in character.

*Program Locust Street as a Public Event Space (bottom right, this page; A3 on Map 7)*

**Recommendation:** Utilize East Locust Street as an active pedestrian space for an expanded weekend farmer's market, community festivals, street fairs, and other community events.

**Why:** For community events such as a farmer's market, movies in the park, artwalk, and more, giving an entire street to pedestrians and temporarily closing it to cars sends a welcoming and exciting message to downtown visitors, and drives visitation. East Locust can serve as an exciting and vibrant "backbone" connecting Frank Van Buer Plaza, the proposed Library Park, and a revitalized streetscape.

*Expand Public Open Space (Figure 5-2 on p. 54; A4 on Map 7)*

**Recommendation:** Strategically acquire and develop properties for "Library Square", a signature public event and "play" space.

**Why?:** Usable, dedicated green space in the heart of City Center will provide opportunities for relaxation and recreation for employees, residents, and visitors, and will provide dedicated public space for programmed and spontaneous city events. The Library Square concept establishes a perpetually usable public square to complement the recent investments in Van Buer Plaza and the proposed redevelopment and expansion of the DeKalb Public Library. Library Square adds to the critical mass of activity as a central element

bridging the Library, the Egyptian Theatre, and the heaviest concentration of dining and shopping opportunities in City Center. The expansion of Van Buer Plaza creates a visible presence of usable public space on East Lincoln Highway that directly links pedestrians to Locust Street, Library Square, and the Library.

*Improve and/or Establish a Consistent Wayfinding System Citywide*

**Recommendation:** Utilize a uniform design and message for signage on key vehicular and pedestrian corridors within City Center and citywide.

**Why?:** A consistent design theme assists destination-seekers by being readily identifiable markers to guide visitors from community entry points to City Center destinations. Currently there is a reasonably effective and consistent wayfinding system downtown; however, signage along State Route 23, Annie Glidden Road, and State Route 38 exhibit a different character in some cases.







**Figure 5-2 |** Library Square Park Concept, SAA Design Group

#### *Establish a Public Art Campaign*

**Recommendation:** Engage local artists, including NIU's renowned School of Art, and the Nehring Center to plan for and implement the animation the public realm with authentic and locally produced art pieces. These pieces could be permanent fixtures of parks, plazas, or parking lots, temporary and/or rotating outdoor pieces, or displayed in City Center storefronts, vacant upper story windows, or other highly visible spaces.

**Why?:** This recommendation leverages NIU's renowned arts programs and gives them a prominent place in City Center. A public arts campaign serves to add beauty and visual interest downtown, can serve as a unifying element and definition to the district, and increases the stake of the NIU community in the overall well-being of City Center.

#### Facilitate Residential Development and Redevelopment

The 2007 Plan sought to expand downtown's market through the promotion of substantial residential densification in and around downtown. Allowing the market to develop a healthy, stable mix of residential options in appropriate locations remains a target of this plan.

#### *Revise the Unified Development Ordinance*

**Recommendation:** Revise the city's Unified Development Ordinance to better align with the downtown revitalization plan, adopted design guidelines, and evolved market expectations.

**Why?:** Currently, prevailing zoning regulations limit the variety in housing options to vertical mixed-use development (i.e., living units over shops) throughout most of City Center, and fundamentally segregate – rather than mix – land uses. A “hybrid code” or transect-based smart code which could zero in on the

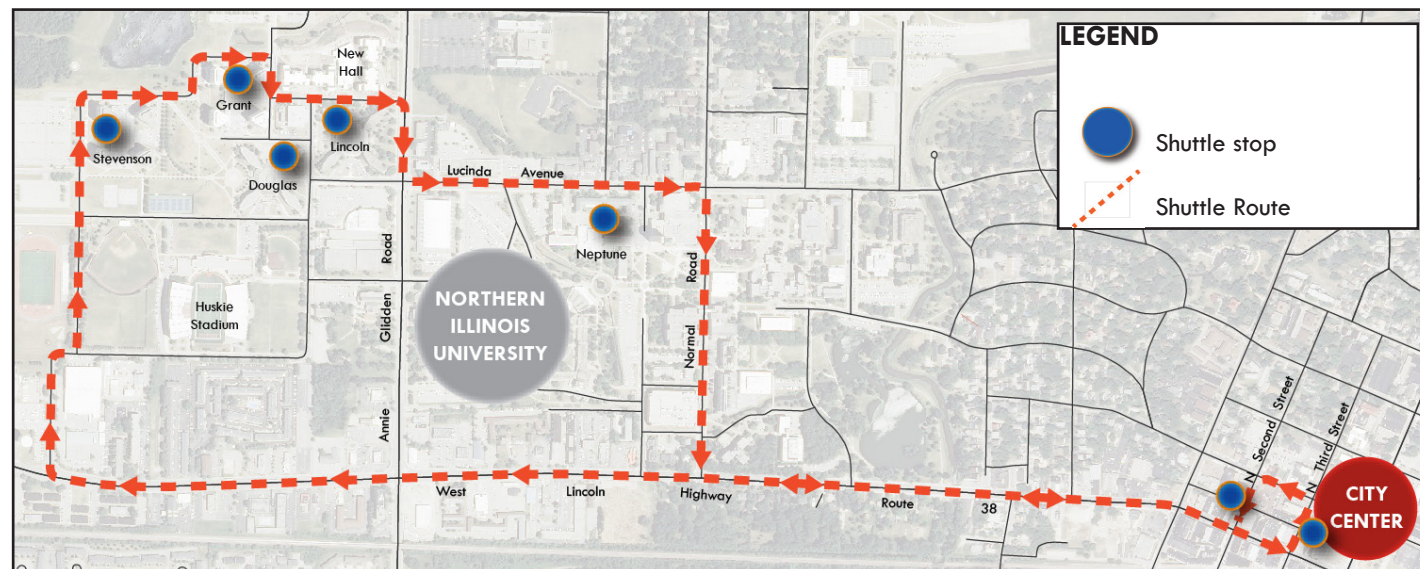
form and function characteristics proposed by this plan and the 2007 plan would likely be more effective than the current ordinance.

#### *Promote Residential Redevelopment in Transitional Areas (B1 on Map 7)*

**Recommendation:** Carry forward the 2007 Downtown Plan's vision to allow attached housing in areas between the core and nearside residential neighborhoods, and include small-lot detached housing in edge areas, as well.

**Why?:** A key ingredient for downtown success that is currently lacking in DeKalb City Center is an urban, mid- to high-quality residential component. Residents in and near downtown environments provide an immediate and invested stewardship and patronage to the businesses, institutions, and public spaces that locate there, and more and more people of all ages, interests, backgrounds, and stations in life are seeking a variety of housing options in active, pedestrian-rich environments.

**Figure 5-3 | Conceptual Shuttle Route (SAA)**



## Direct TIF Investment Towards Traffic Generators

The City's TIF authority should be leveraged to support the creation, enhancement, and/or expansion of uses with catalytic potential and broaden City Center's market draw and appeal.

*Support Egyptian Theatre Expansion (C1 on Map 7)*

**Recommendation:** Provide TIF support to the Egyptian Theatre to support building upgrades and expansions, such as air conditioning, increased back-of-house space, and improved restroom and concession facilities.

**Why?:** The Egyptian Theatre is a unique and vital destination to City Center, one that communities of DeKalb's size strive to create if they don't already have one. Improving the facility to allow for additional events throughout the year will serve to increase visitation to City Center.

### Support the Development of Currently Missing Traffic Generators

**Recommendation:** Leverage TIF to study the feasibility of and potentially promote the development of additional City Center traffic generators, such as a hotel/conference center, children's museum, bowling alley, movie theater, or additional dining and entertainment options.

**Why?:** Adding to the critical mass and destination qualities of the downtown is central to the plan's vision. TIF is often a successful tool in providing critical infrastructure and support to the development community in the creation of major "destination" uses.

### Improve Access and Connectivity

While City Center's internal connectivity for pedestrians and motor vehicles is relatively good, expanding

its connectivity to adjacent areas for all modes of travel is key to strengthening and sustaining its success.

*Establish City Center Shuttle Loop (Figure 5-3, above)*

**Recommendation:** Partner with Northern Illinois University and HuskieLine to establish a free, dedicated university to downtown shuttle loop, including a weekend “safe ride” service (for example, a 6 p.m. to 2:30 a.m. Friday and Saturday night service).

**Why?:** Current transit service between NIU and City Center is a somewhat impractical transportation option for many trips due to length of trip and frequency of service. A direct shuttle between residential halls and the heart of City Center provides a safe, convenient, and free transportation alternative to encourage student and faculty visitation in the core.



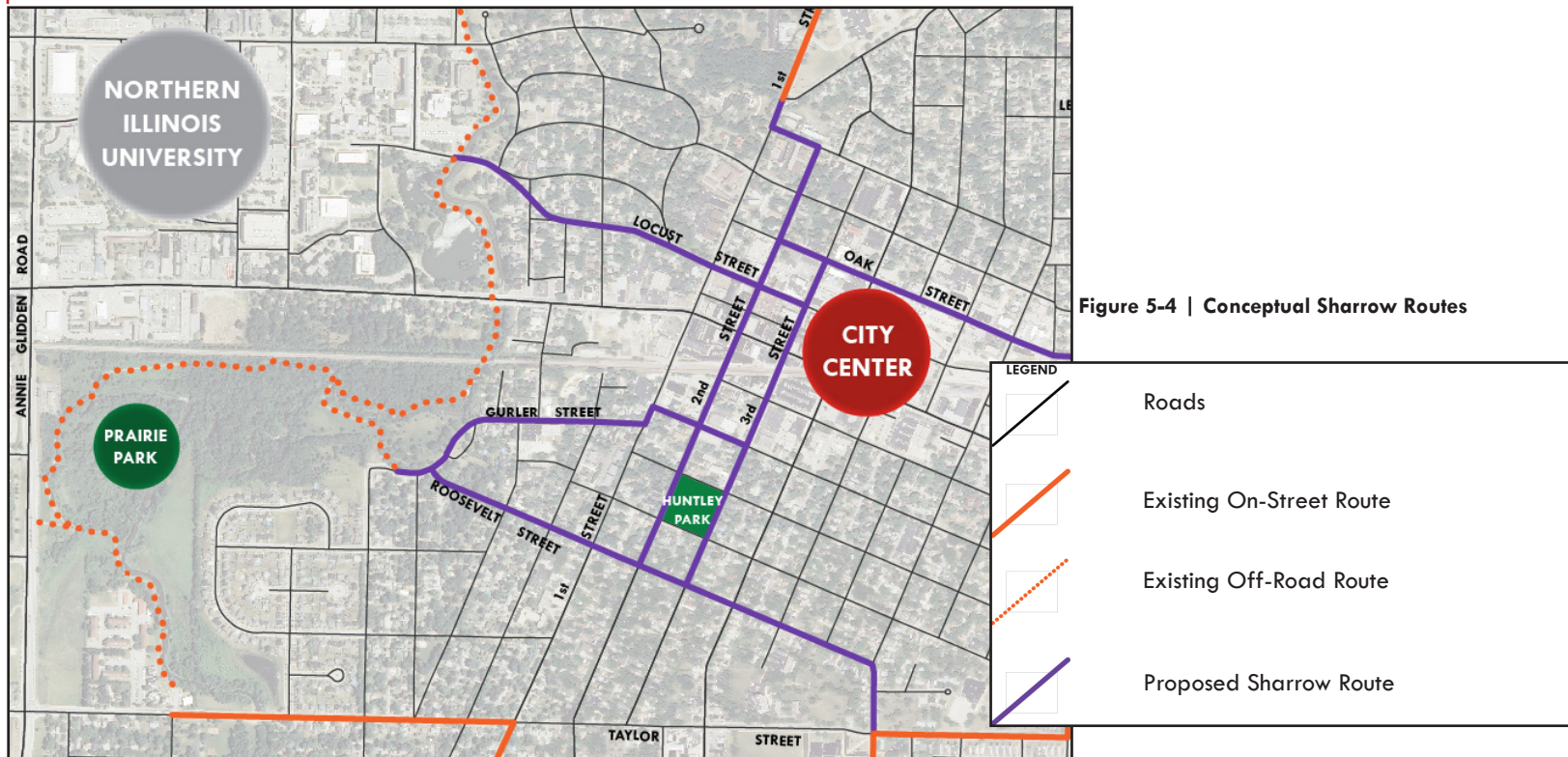


Figure 5-4 | Conceptual Sharrow Routes

*Expand Sharrow Network (Figure 5-4 above; D1 on Map 7)*

**Recommendation:** Expand the city’s on-street bike “sharrow” network and establish a bicycle wayfinding system that links destinations west (NIU, Prairie Park) and east/north (Hopkins Park, Sycamore Road) to City Center.

**Why?:** Studies have shown that expanding bicycle facilities can lead to as much as a 40 percent increase in economic activity in a community. DeKalb boasts an extensive bicycle network, with both on-street and off-street accommodations located within much of the city. City Center is currently “cut off” from this network, however.

*Realign West Locust Street (Figure 5-5, p. 57; D2 on Map 7)*

**Recommendation:** Design and construct West Locust Street as a direct connection from First Street to College Drive, potentially as a “bike boulevard.”

**Why?:** Improving the physical connection to city center from NIU and the Kishwaukee River Trail has the potential to introduce a largely absent demographic and market dynamic to city center businesses, cultural destinations, and special events.

*Analyze Parking Need and Develop Structured Parking (D3 on Map 7)*

**Recommendation:** Undertake a comprehensive City Center Parking Needs Analysis, and develop structured/surface parking to meet quantified needs

**Why?:** Matching parking supply and demand to existing and proposed vehicular traffic generators will ensure that the city has sufficient and effectively-located parking and will allow for efficient use of publicly owned land in the city center. Currently, the city owns and maintains 12 public surface lots in City Center. Several of these may be ideal candidates (notably Lot 2, Lot 9) for structured parking, and should be explored before considering new locations.



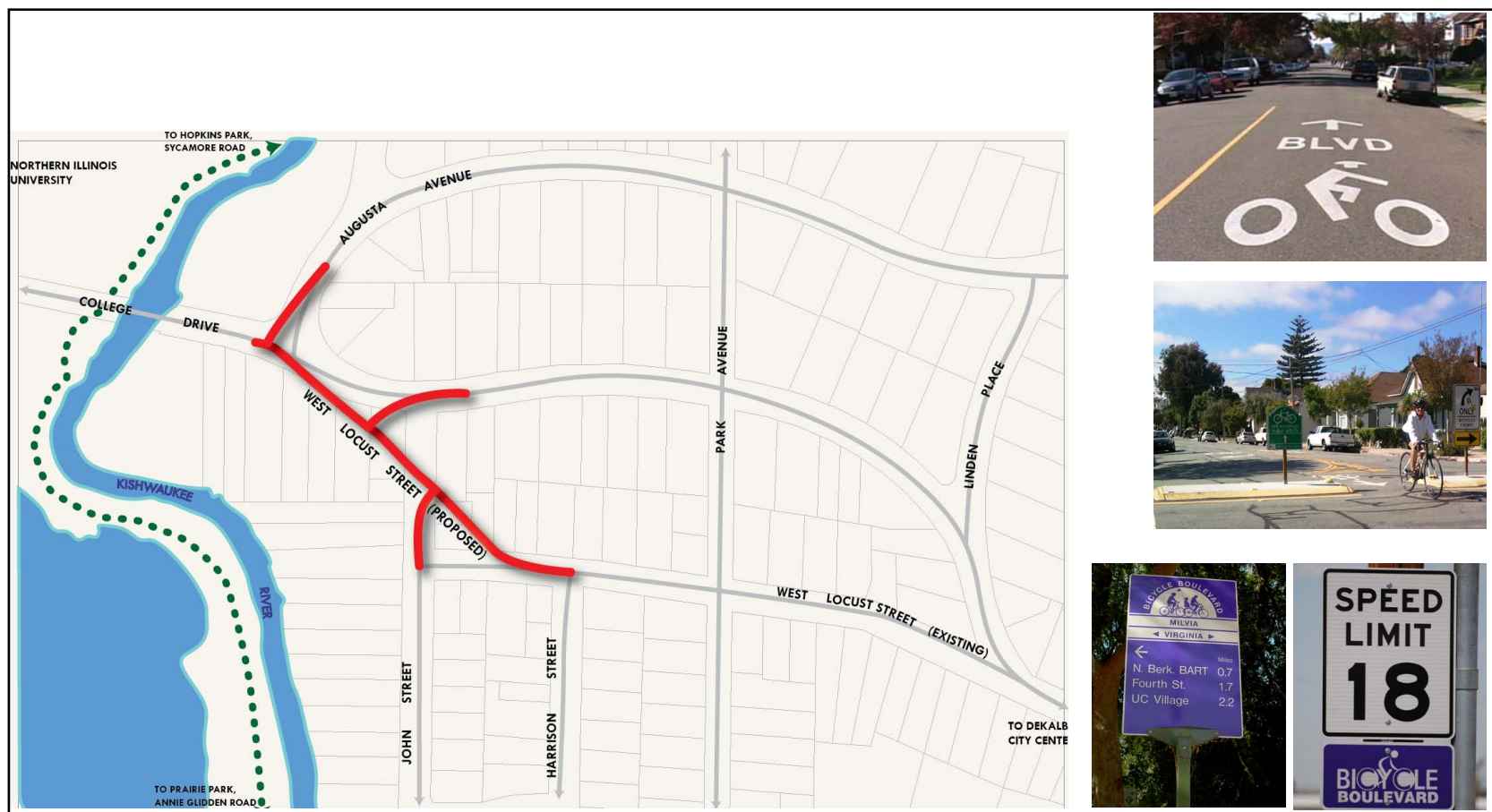


Figure 5-5 | Potential Realignment of West Locust Street

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the recommended physical improvements introduced in this and past plans, it is essential that the city promotes a strong framework of plan ownership within city government as well as through its strategic partnerships throughout the city and region. Following the mantra that “downtown is everyone’s business”, the strategic recommendations found here outline initiatives, partnerships, and activities that – although not necessarily brick and mortar projects in and of themselves – nonetheless strengthen City Center’s position as a regional economic engine.

Central to the strategic recommendations is a strengthened collaboration with NIU, both at an administrative level and “on the ground” through increased outreach, physical, and program coordination to the benefit of both the campus and City Center.

### Refocus City Center Implementation Organization

**Recommendation:** The city of DeKalb will act as a leader in the identification and recruitment of a City Center “Project Management Team” (PMT) that focuses specifically on moving forward the vision and recommendations of this and subsequent planning efforts impacting City Center.

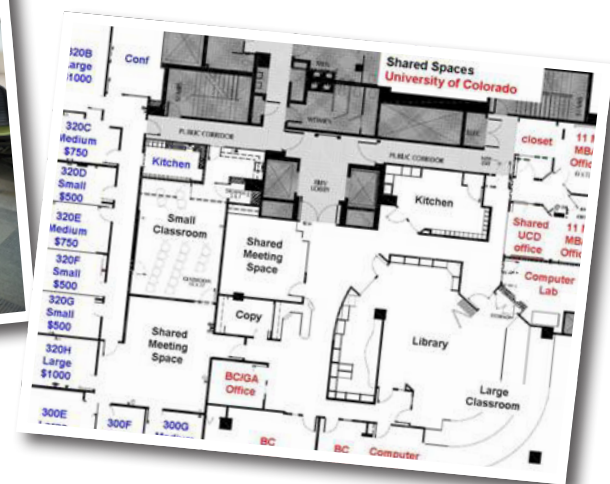
**Why?:** It is recommended that the Project Management Team consist solely of civic, corporate, and government leaders who can work as a team and have the individual resources, influence, and passion to implement the public and private activities and initiatives they prioritize in an annual work plan. City staff, consultants, and county and state agencies will provide technical support to the PMT on an as needed basis. The PMT will make recommendations to the Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Council, who will have ultimate authority for approving implementation projects. The Project Management Team will be responsible for:

- Establishing a leadership and operational structure. This is ideally a public/private partnership that can receive funding from local governments as well as area individuals, businesses, and foundations. Members might include elected officials, civic and corporate leaders, local government executives, executives of the university and community college, and area philanthropists.

- Developing a funding strategy, including selecting the best 501 (c)(3) entity to receive and distribute funds on behalf of the Organization. To this point, consideration should be given to:
  - o Determine the purpose and amount of seed money needed to continue the revitalization initiative.
  - o Determine the amount of additional seed money needed for such key steps as real estate commitments, facilities “use” planning, architectural and facilities master planning, economic impact studies, and fundraising feasibility study.
  - o Identify the best government, corporation, individual, and foundation sources of potential seed-money funding to jump-start this initiative.
  - o Carefully develop strategies for the best way to involve, cultivate, and solicit these potential donors, including government advocacy and relationship building on behalf of City Center at the local, state and federal levels.
  - o Implement those strategies. Securing the seed money in a well-thought-out, methodical manner with appropriate back-up materials will increase confidence in the City Center concept and make future fundraising easier.
- Hiring professional staff to run the day-to-day operation and management of the City Center



L to R: Water Technology Research and Business Incubator (Milwaukee, WI); Whitewater Innovation Center (Whitewater, WI); Bard Center for Entrepreneurship (Denver, CO) - all examples of university and community collaboration of business and technology incubators.



initiative. Fitting the right person to the right responsibilities will be critical. With this in mind, key skills and attributes for professional staff should focus on individuals who can:

- o Establish a strong informational campaign – including improving web and social media presence
- o Develop a City Center brand, marketing, and promotion plan and “infiltrate” ongoing activities at NIU (summer camps, athletic events, conventions) with positive City Center messaging and promotional materials
- o Develop, launch, and frequently update City Center events calendar
- o Conduct and administer a comprehensive and active City Center business recruitment and retention plan
- o Administer downtown programs, such as façade improvement programs and rent assistance, to support downtown tenancies
- o Identify and pursue funding opportunities for public, quasi-public, and private projects

#### Revisit and Periodically Update Student Use Surveys

**Recommendation:** Work with Northern Illinois University and/or the Center for Governmental Studies to recalibrate and broaden the reach of the 2011 Re:New Classroom Committee survey of the NIU community’s use and knowledge of downtown DeKalb.

**Why?:** The 2011 survey, while providing a glimpse of the lack of NIU students’ engagement in downtown, reached less than 1% of the campus population and was not cross-sectional in representation. Increasing the depth of understanding of the student market should be an ongoing priority for City Center.

Explore an “Innovation Quarter” (above images; S1 on Map 7)

**Recommendation:** Work collaboratively with NIU and Kishwaukee College to explore the feasibility for the creation of clean industrial/employment/innovation space as a business incubator in City Center.

**Why?:** An opportunity exists to leverage existing assets (such as existing vacant buildings and city-owned properties, active businesses, and infrastructure) in the northeastern quadrant of the planning area as a “pilot” for this concept, which would add substantial employment, activity, and intellectual capital to City Center.



Plan for the Future of “Communi-  
versity Commons”  
(character images above; S2 on Map 7)

**Recommendation:** Working together, the city and the university should engage in an honest discussion and collaborate to prepare a plan that addresses how to best re-imagine this common ground as a place that the whole of both the college community and the community at large can proudly call a part of their shared City Center.

**Why?:** The area defined in this plan as “Communi-  
versity Commons” is vastly important to the image  
and future of both Northern Illinois University and  
the core of downtown DeKalb. Its current condition is  
largely characterized by any combination of incon-  
sistency, underutilization, disinvestment, and blight.

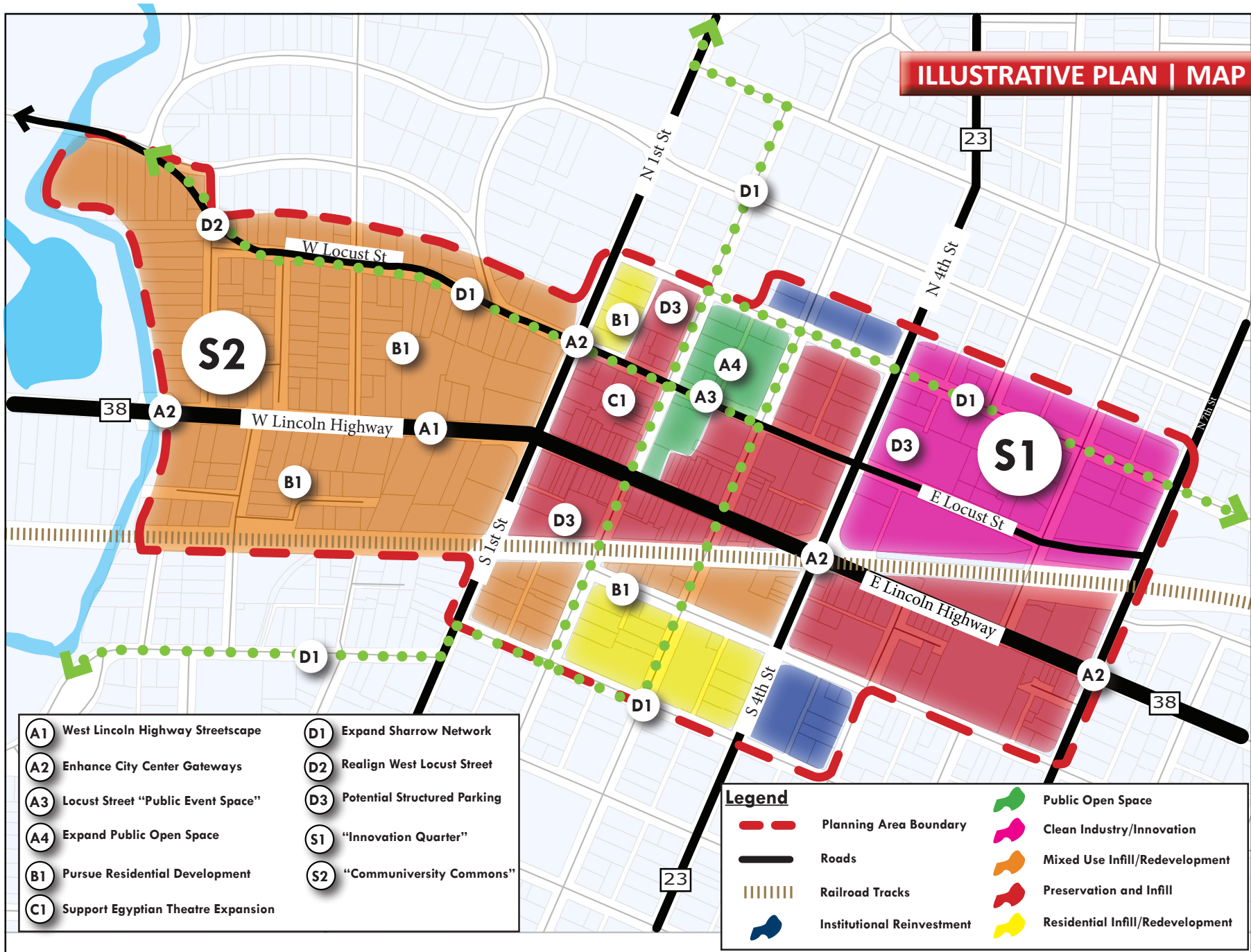
Working together, the city and the university should  
engage in an honest discussion and collaborate to  
prepare a plan that addresses how to best re-imag-  
ine this common ground as a place that the whole  
of both the college community and the community at  
large can proudly call a part of their shared City  
Center.

Prepare Annual Report

Monitoring and celebrating City Center progress and  
successes towards its vision will be critical in building  
awareness and buy-in for the continued revitalization  
effort. Like any successful business, DeKalb City Cen-  
ter should keep its patrons and “shareholders” (which  
is to say, the whole community) invested and involved  
in its activities through an annual report highlighting  
City Center goals, initiatives, and expectations for  
the future. This report is ideally much more than a  
marketing piece; it’s a continued information-sharing  
effort to retain and build community support for the  
City Center mission.



# ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN | MAP 7





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# Section 6

Downtown has been reinvigorated in the past half-decade, but much of that success would not have occurred without a commitment to community planning and subsequent public action. Collaborative community planning and action needs to continue to maintain and build upon recent successes. Downtown growth and its inherent efficiencies also benefit other areas of DeKalb by reducing the pressure for outward growth and the higher costs of local government services associated with low-density expansion. The implementation approach presented in this section provides a strategy for downtown revitalization for the next five years that leverages past successes and investments in City Center and enhances the existing and potential strengths of this dynamic district.

### ACTION PLAN

On the facing page, a recommended action plan is provided to guide implementation of the DeKalb City Center Plan. The action plan is broken down by the framework zones as defined on page 51, and identifies the key agency or agencies responsible for implementing the action. In addition, the action plan provides a proposed time frame for implementation as follows:

- Ongoing – a continuation or refocusing of an action already in place or in progress
- Immediate – an action to be undertaken as soon as the DeKalb City Center Plan is adopted.

- Short-Term – an action to be undertaken within 2 years of adoption of the DeKalb City Center Plan.
- Mid-Term – an action to be undertaken within 5 years of adoption of the DeKalb City Center Plan.

Finally, the Action Plan characterizes anticipated implementation costs for each action, as presented below:

- **\$:** Anticipated implementation costs of \$10,000 or less; presumably most significant costs are time and labor
- **\$\$:** Anticipated implementation costs of more than \$10,000 but less than \$50,000
- **\$\$\$:** Anticipated implementation costs of more than \$50,000 but less than \$200,000
- **\$\$\$\$:** Anticipated implementation costs of more than \$200,000

(Note: The recommendations of this Plan serve as a guide to future action and decision making and are not a commitment to funding. Funding for specific projects/actions will be allocated based on availability and consideration of priorities.)

### POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

There are a number of potential funding sources that could be explored for the implementation of plan recommendations. A listing of several possible sources, including (where applicable) application cycles, contact information, and other information is included as Appendix B.

### UPDATING THE DEKALB CITY CENTER PLAN

This plan is intended to be a living, workable document for the city of DeKalb and its implementation partners to use as a guide in making development, policy, and program decisions in the next half-decade (from 2013) or so. Upon the establishment of a Project Management Team, this plan will be used as a baseline of expectations and targets to meet the community's vision for City Center, and progress should be measured annually via a publicized report. Undertaking an update process is recommended in 5 to 7 years, as the city did with the 2007 plan, to reassess market conditions and document the progress made in implementing this plan.

ACTION/PROJECT	RESPONSIBLE AGENCY	TIMING	COST
<b>FRAMEWORK ZONES</b>			
<b>THE CORE</b>			
Revise the Unified Development Ordinance	CDK	Short-Term	\$\$
Promote Residential Redevelopment	Private Developers, CDK, PMT	Ongoing	\$\$\$\$
Expand Public Open Space	CDK, PMT	Mid-Term	\$\$\$\$
Enhance City Center Entrance Nodes	CDK, PMT	Short-Term	\$\$ - \$\$\$
Improve and/or Establish Consistent Wayfinding System Citywide	CDK, CoC, PMT, CVB	Immediate	\$\$
Support Egyptian Theater Expansion	CDK, Foundations, PET	Immediate	\$\$\$\$
Support Additional Traffic Generators	CDK, Private Developers, PMT	Ongoing	\$\$\$\$
Establish City Center Shuttle Loop	CDK, NIU, DSATS, Veolia, PMT	Short-Term	\$\$\$
Program Locust Street as a Public Event Space	CDK, PMT, CoC, CVB	Immediate	\$
Analyze Parking Need and Develop Structured Parking	CDK, PMT	Short-Term	\$\$\$\$
<b>EAST GATEWAY</b>			
Improve and/or Establish Consistent Wayfinding System Citywide	CDK, CoC, PMT, CVB	Immediate	\$\$
Revise the Unified Development Ordinance	CDK	Short-Term	\$\$
Support Additional Traffic Generators	CDK, Private Developers, PMT	Ongoing	\$\$\$\$
Enhance City Center Entrance Nodes	CDK, PMT	Short-Term	\$\$ - \$\$\$
Expand Sharrow Network	CDK, DSATS, PMT	Immediate	\$
Analyze Parking Need and Develop Structured Parking	CDK, PMT	Mid-Term	\$\$\$\$
<b>COMMUNIVERSITY COMMONS</b>			
Lincoln Highway Streetscape	CDK, IDOT, NIU, PMT	Immediate	\$\$\$
Improve and/or Establish Consistent Wayfinding System Citywide	CDK, CoC, PMT, CVB	Immediate	\$\$
Revise the Unified Development Ordinance	CDK	Short-Term	\$\$
Enhance City Center Entrance Nodes	CDK, PMT	Short-Term	\$\$ - \$\$\$
Promote Residential Redevelopment	Private Developers, CDK, PMT	Ongoing	\$\$\$\$
Support Additional Traffic Generators	CDK, Private Developers, PMT	Ongoing	\$\$\$\$
Establish City Center Shuttle Loop	CDK, NIU, DSATS, Veolia, PMT	Short-Term	\$\$\$
Expand Sharrow Network	CDK, DSATS, PMT	Immediate	\$
Realign West Locust Street	CDK, PMT	Mid-Term	\$\$\$\$
<b>STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS</b>			
Refocus City Center Implementation Organization   Form PMT	CDK, NIU, CoC, RDK, BUS	Immediate	\$\$
Strengthen Collaboration with NIU	CDK, NIU, PMT	Ongoing	
Revisit and Periodically Update Student Surveys	NIU, CGS, CDK, PMT	Ongoing	\$
Establish Public Art Campaign	CDK, NIU	Immediate	\$
Explore Urban Business Incubator	CDK, NIU, KC, PMT, Private Developers	Mid-Term	\$\$\$\$
Plan Communiversity Commons	CDK, NIU, PMT	Short-Term	\$\$
Prepare Annual Report	PMT	Immediate	\$

**KEY:**

CDK = City of DeKalb

PMT = Project Management Team

NIU = Northern Illinois University

CoC = DeKalb Area Chamber of Commerce

RDK = Re:New DeKalb

CVB = DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau

PET = Preservation of the Egyptian Theater, Inc.

IDOT = Illinois Department of Transportation

DSATS = DeKalb Sycamore Area Transportation Study

KC = Kishwaukee College

### INTEGRATION INTO OTHER CITY PLANS

This plan proposes both subtle and stark changes to transportation networks, land use patterns, city ordinances, city operations and funding, and more. It was developed through a highly-participatory, focused stakeholder process that reached downtown business owners, community and educational leaders, neighboring residents, and more. As such, when DeKalb or other agencies prepare or update other policy documents, such as neighborhood and corridor plans, transit plans, bicycle and pedestrian plans, and the comprehensive plan, the findings, vision, and recommendations of the DeKalb City Center Plan should be supported and integrated to the greatest extent possible.



## Memorandum

To: Downtown Revitalization Plan Update Steering Committee

From: SAA Design Group, Inc.

Re: Analysis of Results from DeKalb Downtown Summit

Date: 2/27/2013

### Overview

The goal of the DeKalb Downtown Summit was to discover where participants envision Downtown DeKalb in five to ten years and to begin to identify project priority areas that would help to achieve this vision. This memo addresses general trends identified by workshop participants and sets a direction for the continuing planning process in Downtown DeKalb.

### New Development

New Development refers to attracting new building construction, business start-ups, second-story development, and redevelopment of existing sites. Attracting new development is undoubtedly a key to success in downtown as it fills vacant lots and storefronts, builds the tax base, and brings people into the area. The challenges of attracting new or re-development identified by participants include currently vacant storefronts, attracting the right types of businesses and people, economic and financial constraints, the need for further investment by Northern Illinois University (NIU) and existing landlords, and proper definition of downtown's scope. Opportunities relating to these challenges include redeveloping specific sites, defining the downtown's market, providing financial incentives and developing a business incubator, engaging the NIU population, and reconsidering the definition of "downtown".

We need to ensure that we have an accurate and established definition of Downtown DeKalb's scope and market, otherwise attracting new development will be ineffective. In order to remove barriers, we should also identify the specific economic and financial constraints that inhibit new development. Because of the perceived lack of engagement by landlords and NIU, it will also be important to take steps to connect with these important groups and include them in this process.

### Business Mix

The type of businesses and land uses located downtown is also recognized as integral to its success. Providing a variety of destinations and experiences is essential in establishing a vibrant, healthy downtown. Challenges to business mix include the ability of downtown DeKalb to attract a diverse set of businesses due to the somewhat undefined market and the lack of connection with NIU's student population. Other challenges include parking issues and financial constraints for small businesses. The potential to leverage the community's unique assets in order to attract a wider variety of business types is seen as a major opportunity for the downtown, as is the possibility of capturing untapped market groups. Improvements made since 2006 are seen as increasing the ability of downtown to attract the type of business mix desired.

As in attracting new development, establishing Downtown DeKalb's market and engaging NIU and its students will be crucial in producing a diverse mix of businesses. The existence of financial and parking constraints and their effect on small businesses should be investigated further to develop a more detailed knowledge of these issues. The ability of other similar university towns to support a successful downtown could also be explored in order to identify similarities and useful strategies. It is evident that the improvements made since the 2006 Plan have had a positive effect on the perception of downtown DeKalb and on its ability to attract a diverse set of businesses. The momentum generated by these improvements should be built upon to ensure continued success.

### Public Spaces

The development, maintenance, and creative use of public spaces are essential to the success of downtown. Challenges in this category focus on unusable, or under-used, spaces as well as the lack of connectivity between spaces. Identified opportunities include making use of empty storefronts, vacant lots, and existing public spaces, consolidating redundant uses to open up more public spaces, and utilizing the river.

From these results, it is clear that participants desire functional public spaces and the ability to conveniently connect from one to another. Analyzing the functionality of existing public spaces and the barriers that prevent connectivity between spaces will enable priorities to be set. The results also illustrate the importance of filling or minimizing the appearance of vacancies. Additionally, the river is seen as a community asset and should be celebrated in a greater fashion. The opportunity arises to create usable public spaces along the river and to utilize these assets to attract businesses and people to the downtown.

## Aesthetics

Aesthetics refers to the look and feel of streets, sidewalks, public spaces, and existing buildings. Many of the challenges noted here involve deteriorating or unappealing sections of downtown or gateways into downtown. The ability to continue funding these types of improvements is also cited as a concern. Opportunities include expanding upon the streetscape improvements made to date, identifying the aesthetically-pleasing parts of downtown and replicating them, and improving the façade of downtown buildings.

Overall, participants believe that the improvements made in the past six years have contributed a great deal to the look and feel of Downtown DeKalb. The ability to fund the expansion of these improvements to adjacent streets and areas should be addressed. Priority areas for further streetscape improvements should be established, as should key downtown gateways and locations in need of more adequate wayfinding.

## Transportation

An efficient transportation system, both motorized and non-motorized, will enable people to get to and around downtown and will contribute immensely to its success. The major transportation challenges identified relate to the lack of connectivity between downtown and NIU, the frustrations of biking and walking downtown, and the railroad tracks. Related opportunities include connecting the existing system with new bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure – namely the future route under Lincoln Highway – along with expanding public transportation options, continuing to increase wayfinding, and improving general infrastructure (i.e. accessibility, one-way streets).

The most pressing issue regarding transportation seems to be the lack of connectivity between downtown and the NIU campus. Establishing this connection will have a positive effect on all other categories addressed in this memo. Alternative forms of transportation – bicycle, walking, public transit – are important aspects of the overall transportation network in the city and should be treated as such. While the railroad tracks are generally viewed as inhibiting transportation downtown, having infrastructure in place could provide a future benefit in the form of commuter rail service.

## Parking

The ability of residents and visitors to find parking can be a determinant in their decision to go downtown or elsewhere for their daily needs. The availability, cost, and location of parking each play a role in the decision-making process. Parking concerns center on the availability of parking during downtown events, the effects of parking restrictions and fines, and the lack of long-term employee or resident spaces. Opportunities include assigning residential, employee, and visitor spaces, reformulating the city's parking strategy, and connecting new bike and pedestrian routes to existing parking infrastructure.

Parking appears to be a concern for many downtown business-owners, specifically during large events. The impact of parking issues is likely amplified for this group due to its effect on the viability of their business. It is important to note that increasing the amount of parking is not the only solution to a shortage; the cost, location, and type of parking can also serve to improve the overall situation. Increasing the share of bicycling downtown will be dependent on the ability of riders to find adequate parking.

## Events/Programming

Attracting and hosting events downtown is a great way to bring people to the area for extended periods of time. The lack of an organizational structure for hosting events, lack of consistency in events from year to year, and lack of year-round events are all considered challenges, as is the absence of funding and infrastructure needed to support more events. Opportunities include attracting new events in coordination with NIU, identifying which types of events will be attractive to the downtown's market, moving existing events downtown, coordinating multiple events, and creating interest groups to organize and plan event schedules.

Generally, participants believe that hosting events is a practical way to bring both residents and visitors downtown and to encourage them to explore. Establishing a group responsible for marketing and organizing events in Downtown DeKalb will aid in this endeavor. Before doing so, it will be important to understand the market and the capacity of the downtown to host events, as well as the types of events that will be successful in Downtown DeKalb.

## Summary

As we move ahead in the planning process, it is important to acknowledge that each of these categories is interdependent and improvements in one area will ultimately lead to improvements in all areas. With this perspective in mind, we can use the results of the Downtown Summit to direct our future path to set priorities and develop strategies for implementation as we continue to renew Downtown DeKalb.

DeKalb Downtown Summit  
February 12, 2013  
One Word Visioning Exercise

Describe how you envision Downtown DeKalb...

Now

Potential
Opportunity
Vacancy
Traffic
Better
Streetscape
Pretty
Entertainment
Invested
Ownership
Entrepreneurship
Train
Functional
Funky
Resale

In 10 Years

"Wow"
An Experience
Appealing as a Getaway
Tourism Destination
Bustling
Vitality
Thriving
Interactive
Bicycle-Friendly
Access
Connected
Parking
Enjoyable
Perception
Green
Artistic
Public Art
Attractive Place to Live
Egyptian
Shared Market Identity
Hub
Passenger Rail
Useful Places
Unique
Interesting
Fun

Dining
Friendly
Community
Evolving
Too Small
Historic
Walkable
Diversity

Attractive
"Contemporary Culture, Countryside Charm"
Family-Friendly
Safe
Unity
Progressive
Expanded
Historic
Walkable
Multi-cultural

**DeKalb Downtown Summit**  
**February 12, 2013**  
**Priority Setting Workshop Results**

**Top Priorities**

**10+ Votes**

- Mooney, McCabe, Sawyer Imports, other key vacancies (14)
- Parking structure – possibly between Locust & Oak; on Grove Street (13)
- Kid/family friendly/oriented businesses (11)

**5-9 Votes**

- Connect downtown to NIU (9)
- Business Incubator (9)
- Ped/Bikeway to/from downtown (9)
- University/Downtown jointly plan 1<sup>st</sup> to river (7)
- Potential rail – Metra (7)
- Extend streetscape farther east and north (6)
- Activate 2<sup>nd</sup> floor uses (6)
- Cultural amenities - museum, gallery (6)
- Incentivize entrepreneurs (6)
- Bus Service – Elburn Train Station (6)
- Large public open space for public events (5)

**2-4 Votes**

- Develop green space from 1<sup>st</sup> to Pearl (4)
- More NIU-centered events (4)
- Downtown garden walk (4)
- Open amphitheatre (3)
- Empty storefronts (3)
- Cater to multi-cultural market (2)
- Hotel/Bed and Breakfast (2)
- Public art and murals (2)
- Parking during events (2)
- Additional bike parking (2)
- Art in vacant storefronts (2)

**1 Vote**

- More services (1)
- Old train depot (1)
- Property taxes (1)
- Sho-Deen eyesore (1)
- Existing vacant storefronts (1)
- Retaining students after graduation (1)
- Railroad tracks (1)
- Bike lanes (1)
- Right-hand free turn at 4<sup>th</sup> and Lincoln (1)
- More convenient bus service (1)
- Valet parking (1)
- Lack of consistency/schedule (1)
- Corn Fest (3)
- Music festivals (1)
- Film festival (1)
- Expand farmer's market (1)
- Art walks (1)
- Relocate events downtown (1)
- Create green space between Library and Van Buer plaza (1)

**Top Categories**

New Development - 43  
 Business Mix - 28  
 Public Spaces - 22  
 Aesthetics - 20  
 Transportation - 18  
 Parking - 18  
 Events/Programming - 16

DeKalb Downtown Revitalization Plan Update | 2-12-13 | DOWNTOWN SUMMIT

**Business Mix**

- the types of businesses and land uses located downtown

**What challenges and opportunities exist when we think about the mix of businesses?**

*Ideas to consider – what is our brand in the marketplace...what types of businesses are missing...what one type of business would you like to see...what segment of the population is not being attracted to downtown...what are the advantages/constraints of operating a business downtown...*

<u>Challenges</u>	<u>Opportunities</u>
Limited dining	Kid/family friendly/oriented businesses (11)
No national brands	Cultural amenities - museum, gallery (6)
No sense of “place”	Incentivize entrepreneurs (6)
Store hours not convenient	Cater to multi-cultural market (2)
Limited types of entertainment	Hotel/Bed and Breakfast (2)
NIU students get off at Annie Glidden	More services (1)
Limited options	Vintage
Unclear market	Upscale shops/eateries
Lack of private investment	Furniture store
Wayfinding	Evening restaurants
	Downtown website/social media
	Evening business hours

DeKalb Downtown Revitalization Plan Update | 2-12-13 | DOWNTOWN SUMMIT

## New Development

- attracting new building construction, business start-ups, or second story/redevelopment of existing sites

### What challenges and opportunities exist when we think about new or re- development?

Ideas to consider – what locations are most in need of new or re- development... what is DeKalb's market niche ...what sets DeKalb apart from other cities in the region...can the size of downtown be redefined...

<u>Challenges</u>	<u>Opportunities</u>
Property taxes (1)	Mooney, McCabe, Sawyer Imports, other key vacancies (14)
Sho-Deen eyesore (1)	Business Incubator (9)
Existing vacant storefronts (1)	University/Downtown jointly plan 1 <sup>st</sup> to river (7)
Retaining students after graduation (1)	Potential rail – Metra (7)
Space constraints	Old train depot (1)
Basic market potential (current economic climate)	Art in vacant storefronts (1)
High rents	Better use of riverfront
Empty DeKalb clinic	Mixed-use
Landlord apathy	Gateway at 4 <sup>th</sup>
Perception of city	Interstate signage to downtown

## Aesthetics

- the look and feel of streets, sidewalks, public spaces; the aesthetic character of existing buildings

### What challenges and opportunities exist when we think about aesthetics?

Ideas to consider – what parts of downtown would you/would you not take a visitor...how helpful is signage in helping to find your way around downtown...what building, street, or view epitomizes downtown...

<u>Challenges</u>	<u>Opportunities</u>
Railroad tracks (1)	Extend streetscape farther east and north (6)
Snow clearance	Activate 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor uses (6)
4 <sup>th</sup> to 10 <sup>th</sup> visual appearance	Develop green space from 1 <sup>st</sup> to Pearl (4)
Undefined downtown entrances	Public art and murals (2)
Building facades/storefronts in poor condition	Art in empty storefront (1)
Deteriorating housing stock	Better signage
Maintaining streetscape investment	Corner of 1 <sup>st</sup> and Lincoln
	Buffer/screen railroad



## Transportation

- the ways people get to downtown and how they move around once they are there

### What challenges and opportunities exist when we think about transportation?

Ideas to consider – what major barriers exist...what connections are missing...what deters you from going downtown...what are the main gateways to downtown...how are bicycles and pedestrians welcomed...do existing bus routes support the use of downtown...

#### Challenges

Handicap accessibility  
One-way streets  
Annie Glidden Is Main Street  
Getting N.I.U. kids downtown  
Trail connectivity  
Rail crossing for all modes  
Lack of side street parking  
Non-walkable corridors  
Huskie Bus has too few stops

#### Opportunities

Ped/Bikeway to/from downtown (9)  
Bus Service – Elburn Train Station (6)  
Bike lanes (1)  
Right-hand free turn at 4<sup>th</sup> and Lincoln (1)  
More convenient bus service (1)  
Eliminate parking to widen sidewalks & replace elsewhere

## Parking

- the location, type, availability, and cost of parking

### What challenges and opportunities exist when we think about parking?

Ideas to consider – what areas or uses demand the most parking...where is it hard to find a parking spot...how often does parking deter you or your customers from going downtown...

#### Challenges

Parking during events (2)  
On-street parking  
Too many restrictions (evenings & weekends)  
Employee parking  
Resident parking – no overnight parking

#### Opportunities

Parking structure – possibly between Locust & Oak; on Grove Street (13)  
Additional bike parking (2)  
Valet parking (1)  
Permit/fee-based system  
Parking structure with green roof  
Graduated fines

## Public Spaces

- parks, plazas, promenades, and other features that are open for public use

### What challenges and opportunities exist when we think about public spaces?

*Ideas to consider – what benefits do public spaces provide...what types of public spaces are most attractive to residents/visitors... is there too little public space downtown.... are existing public spaces downtown well-located and well-used...*

<u>Challenges</u>	<u>Opportunities</u>
Lack of usable spaces	Connect downtown to NIU (9)
No connectivity between spaces	Large public open space for public events (5)
Compressed boundaries	Downtown garden walk (4)
Underused spaces	Empty storefronts (3)
	Create green space between Library and Van Buer plaza (1)
	Vacant lots
	Kid-friendly public spaces
	Use plaza more
	Park district space downtown
	Move fountain across 4 <sup>th</sup> street and replace with parking

## Events/Programming

- the types of events and other activities that currently exist; how could more be added or existing events be made more successful

### What challenges and opportunities exist when we think about events/programs?

*Ideas to consider – what types of events would be successful...how can DeKalb attract more successful events...in what ways can DeKalb better take advantage of its location to host special events...*

<u>Challenges</u>	<u>Opportunities</u>
Lack of consistency/schedule (1)	More NIU-centered events (4)
Liquor control limits	Open amphitheatre (3)
Funding	Corn Fest (3)
Lack of organizational structure	Music festivals (1)
Winter programming	Film festival (1)
	Expand farmer's market (1)
	Art walks (1)
	Relocate events downtown (1)
	Tour group
	Cultural/performing arts center

## DeKalb Open House - 4/10/2013

### Investment Activity

	Total \$	Percentage	\$1	\$5
Public Event and Play Space	84	20%	49	7
Communiversy Commons	60	14%	40	4
Urban Business Incubator	48	11%	28	4
Parking	47	11%	27	4
NIU Shuttle	44	10%	34	2
Catalytic Projects	38	9%	18	4
Expand Streetscape	28	7%	18	2
W Locust Realignment	20	5%	10	2
PMT	19	4%	9	2
Bicycle Sharrow Network	19	4%	14	1
Revised UDO	18	4%	8	2
<b>Sum</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>34</b>

POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES				
GRANT NAME	AGENCY	DEADLINE	FUNDS AVAILABLE	AGENCY MATCH
Economic Development Program	IDOT	Ongoing	\$2 million	50% to 100%
Highway Safety Project Program	IDOT	Varies	Varies	Varies
Transportation Enhancement Program	IDOT	Varies	Varies	Up to 80%
Surface Transportation Program	FHWA	Varies	Varies	Up to 80%
Transportation Alternatives Program	FHWA	Varies	Varies	Varies
Transit Capital Investment Program	FTA	Varies	Varies	Up to 90%
Park and Recreation Facility Construction (PARC)	IDNR	November	Up to 10% of total released	Up to 75%
Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development (OSLAD)	IDNR	July	\$400,000 to \$750,000	Up to 50%
Illinois Bicycle Path Program	IDNR	March 1	\$200,000	Up to 50%
Recreational Trails Program	FHWA	March 1	\$200,000	Up to 80%
Tourism Marketing Partnership Program	IDCEO	Ongoing	\$100,000	Up to 50%
Tourism Private Sector Program	IDCEO	Ongoing	Varies	Up to 50%
Tourism Attraction Development Program	IDCEO	Ongoing	\$1,000,000	Up to 50%
Local Tourism and Convention Bureau Program	IDCEO	Ongoing	Varies	Varies
Business Development Public Infrastructure Program	IDCEO	Ongoing	\$500,000	Varies
Preservation Heritage Fund	Landmarks Illinois	Ongoing	\$500 to \$2,000	Up to 50%
Donnelley Preservation Fund	Landmarks Illinois	May 15; Nov 15	\$500 to \$2,000	Up to 50%
Certified Local Government Program	Illinois SHPO	Ongoing	10% of total released	Varies





