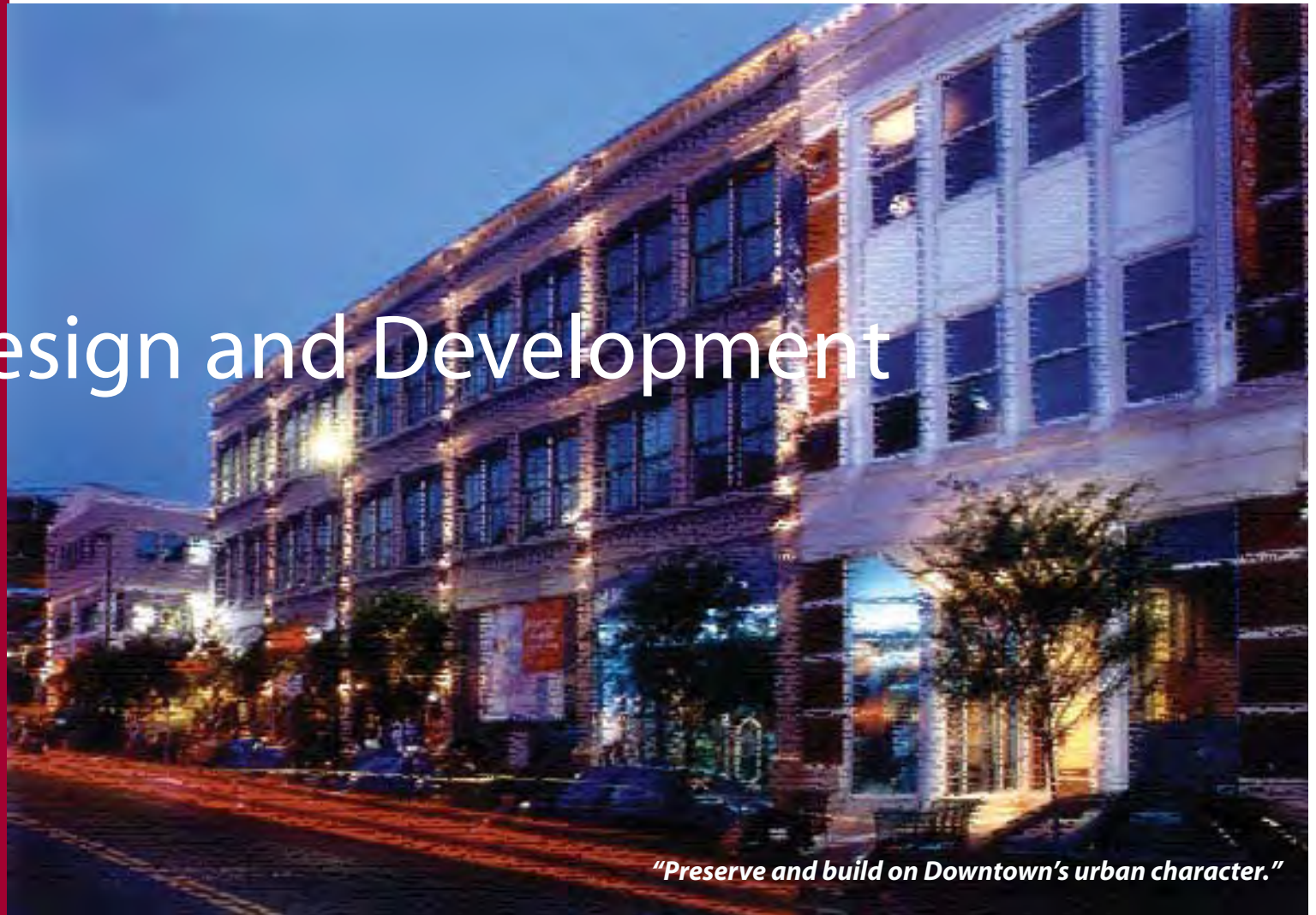


# Urban Design and Development



*"Preserve and build on Downtown's urban character."*

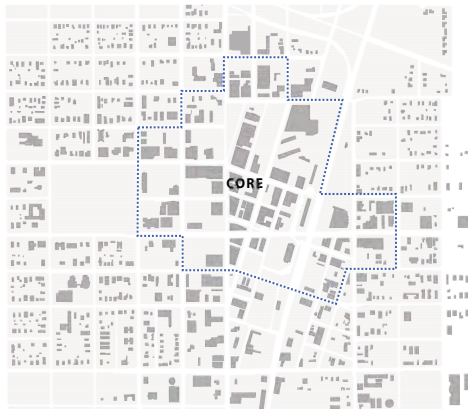
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## Summary

Downtown Champaign, like most other downtowns throughout the United States, has undergone drastic changes over the past 50 years. A sudden loss of retail and increased dependency on automobiles led downtown to rethink its approach to doing business by providing a suburban-like experience. As a result, a number of city blocks were razed to make way for additional parking, only to see businesses flee to suburban shopping malls and strip centers. Over 60 buildings were lost and only a handful replaced since 1960. The map to the right shows the progressive demolition of downtown buildings (*red*) and the infill projects (*yellow*) that have been created. Infill projects have fallen short of repairing the urban fabric downtown and some times has resembled suburban developments, and not the dense urban structures that once stood in their place. The goal of this plan is to “*preserve and build on downtown’s urban character*”. This means encouraging not only renovations of existing structures but the construction of new buildings that reflect urban design principles.



Downtown once boasted significant density and urban form. Much of this was lost with the demolition of over sixty structures between 1950 and today. See map to the right.



The central core of downtown is defined as the area seen above encompassing areas both east and west of the railroad.

Another key to urban design is creating a positive pedestrian experience. Creating a place that people desire to explore means creating interesting gathering spaces and amenities targeted specifically toward pedestrians. This plan lays the framework for creating attractive public spaces through the addition of urban parks and expansion of sidewalk space that is specifically designed to enhance the visitors’ experience.



This historic aerial shows the loss of downtown structures over the past 50 years. The red represents buildings lost to demolition and the yellow indicates locations of infill projects.



New public space such as the Plaza at One Main Street (above) has helped increase pedestrian activity within the downtown core.

## Challenges

Below are several challenges addressed by the plan in relation to Urban Design and Development.



One Main was completed in 2004 and represented the first new construction project in downtown in nearly 15 years

### The Cost of Development

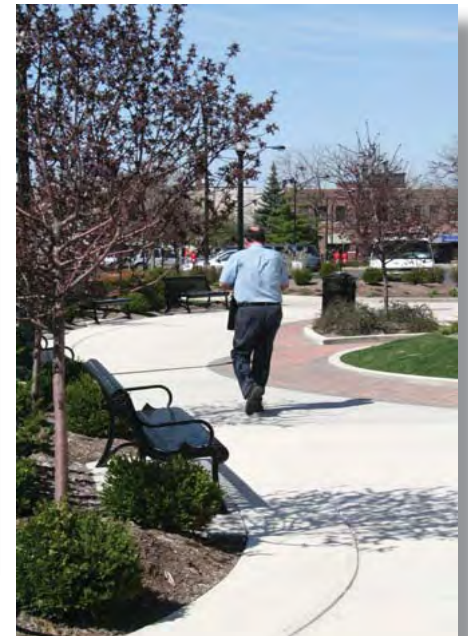
The cost of developing downtown can be higher than the cost of developing on a “greenfield” site at the City’s fringe. Issues such as property ownership, land assembly and unknown environmental conditions all contribute to time and money spent getting property ready for development downtown. Reliance on traditional market analysis to obtain financing can also discourage investment since absorption of new development is relatively untested.

### Lack of Public Gathering Space

As downtown continues to undergo redevelopment, balance between buildable land and public gathering space is needed. It is important to soften downtown with green space as well as ensure adequate civic space to accommodate community events. Downtown events currently utilize West Side Park, however the park does not suit certain events such as concerts, long term exhibits of public art or street festivals. Space will need to be set aside as development continues for the expansion of such activities.



Example of a band shell that can be used for public events.



Picture of “public gathering space” in front of One Main.



The new construction at 34 East Chester Street incorporates a brick design that closely matches the building to the east.



Providing deep building setbacks with parking in the front is more consistent with suburban patterns of development than urban patterns typically found in a downtown.

## Building Codes and Accessibility

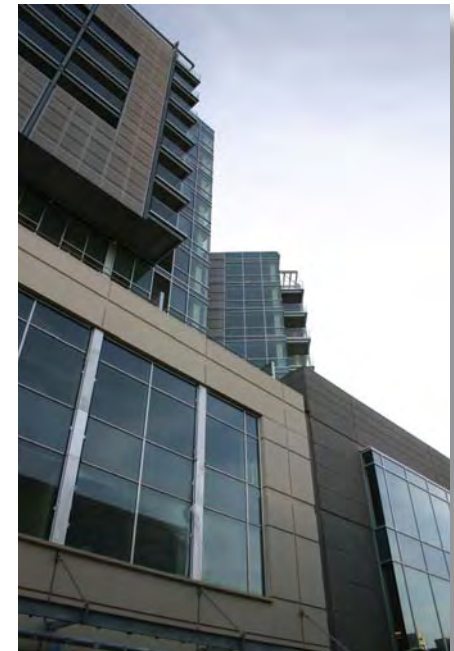
Renovation of existing buildings is often met with challenges not found in new construction. Retrofitting one-hundred-year-old buildings to meet today's standards is difficult and many times conflicts with the efforts to retain historic features. Downtown has, on many occasions, suffered devastating setbacks because these standards were not in place. As typical with common-wall buildings, fires serve as the primary threat to not only one building but the entire block. Therefore, understanding the value of these codes and working with trained professionals to overcome them in the most sensitive manner possible is necessary.



The existing Redevelopment Incentive Program has been assisting downtown properties upgrade since 1994.

## Design of New Construction

New construction should be designed to fit the character of downtown. This is true for both the design of the building as well as its placement on the site and its interaction with public space. The challenge with new construction is ensuring that building materials and features are consistent with the type of construction expected in an urban environment. Prefabricated structures that lack architectural features are not consistent with the character of downtown. Siting buildings back from the street and providing parking in front is more consistent with a suburban style of development than a pattern typically found in a downtown. New construction in downtown should fit not only on its own parcel but within the surrounding urban fabric of the block it sits on.



New structures such as this residential development in downtown Iowa City shows how modern architecture can fit in historic settings.

## Guiding Principles

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The following guiding principles shall guide decisions and policy related to urban design and development issues in the downtown.

### *Urban Design*

1. The site design of new development should be reflective of traditional downtown development patterns. For example, buildings should be pulled up to and face the street. The height and mass of new buildings should be consistent with the existing downtown fabric.
2. The architectural style of new construction can be either contemporary or have historic attributes. However, in all cases the materials, scale and window pattern should be consistent with the historic character of downtown. Whenever possible, existing historic buildings should be preserved.
3. The design of streets and sidewalks should be distinctively urban and should enhance the vibrancy of downtown by offering opportunities for outdoor recreation while also enhancing pedestrian safety.
4. Private and public gathering spaces in downtown should be created in various sizes both in public and private areas.
5. Signs should be in character with the scale and design of downtown

### *Development*

1. Continue to re-establish structures on existing surface parking lots and discourage the creation of new surface parking lots.
2. Renovation rather than demolition and replacement of existing buildings is preferred.
3. Infill development should help re-establish the blockface and rebuild the urban fabric.
4. Private / Public partnerships are encouraged to advance redevelopment opportunities.
5. Target financial incentives to structures and land uses, where appropriate, identified as top priorities in the Downtown Plan.

## Strategies

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The following strategies are action steps that would implement the urban design and development goals of the plan.

### *Urban Design*

- Create site design and style guidelines for new development that ensures buildings complement the existing urban character of downtown.
- Assess the current provisions of the Outdoor Café Program to ensure that they encourage outdoor seating and display of merchandise while still preserving public access and open space.
- Create a “way finding” signage system that directs motorists and pedestrians to key landmarks in downtown.
- Develop entryway beautification plans for key entry points into downtown.
- Study the feasibility of converting the surface parking lot at Neil and Washington Streets to a public plaza as a continuation of the One Main plaza. Explore opportunities for open space that captures a “family oriented” theme.

### *Development*

- Establish criteria to prioritize the redevelopment of existing publicly owned surface parking lots.
- Establish an ongoing dialogue with private downtown property owners about the potential for infill and redevelopment projects on their property.
- Create a Request for Proposal system to solicit development proposals for publicly-owned property to proactively promote redevelopment of surface parking lots which further the goals of this plan.
- Revise the Redevelopment Incentive Program (RIP) to place a greater emphasis on incentives for projects that achieve stated redevelopment goals and/or produce specific land uses identified in the Plan as desirable.
- Determine which existing structures best contribute to the historic character of downtown and designate those structures as local historic landmarks.
- Determine opportunities, whether large or small, for creating additional civic spaces in the public realm.
- Encourage the redevelopment of Park Street to enhance the connectivity between, West Side Park, the Virginia Theater and the Core of downtown and the North First Street area.
- Establish a dialogue with business owners to establish a comprehensive approach to waste management and collection



## Strategy 1 - Design Guidelines

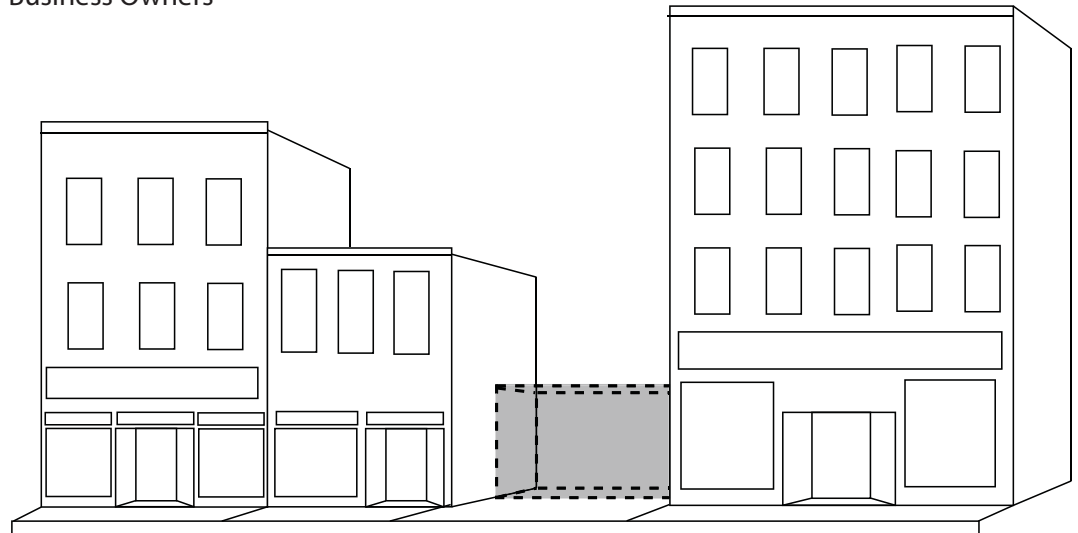
*Create site design and style guidelines for new development that ensures buildings complement the existing urban character of downtown.*

### Commentary

Design guidelines should be created to ensure that the exterior design of downtown structures is consistent with the desired character of the area. These guidelines should be administratively applied and designed to ensure that new construction is consistent with traditional downtown development patterns. The guidelines would focus on only exterior appearance, primarily materials, articulation and window patterns and the placement of the building on its parcel.

#### Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Building Safety Division
- Fire Department
- Private Developers & Architects
- Property Owners
- Business Owners



New construction (shown in grey) should match the style of the other structures on the blockface. In this example the building should be pulled up to the property line or sidewalk and should have a height more consistent with the other structures.

## Strategy 2 - Outdoor Cafe Program

*Assess the current provisions of the Outdoor Café Program to ensure that they encourage outdoor seating and display of merchandise while still preserving public access and open space.*

### Commentary

Recognized as the program that had the most significant impact on bringing life back to downtown streets, the Outdoor Cafe Program has livened up entertainment venues by allowing patrons to utilize the public right-of-way for seating and dining. Expansion of this program should include merchandise sales should be encouraged as downtown continues to grow. New developments should be encouraged to design their structures to facilitate this program to be utilized by their tenants.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Downtown Businesses
- Public Works Department



## Strategy 3- Pedestrian Signage Design

*Create a “way finding” signage system that directs motorists and pedestrians to key landmarks in downtown.*

### Commentary

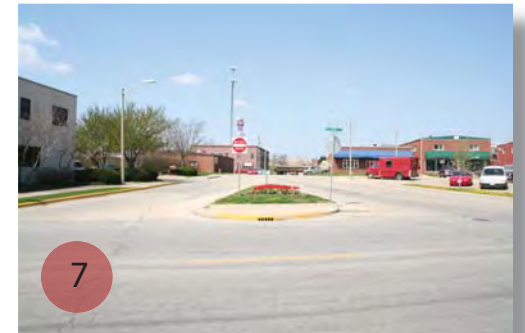
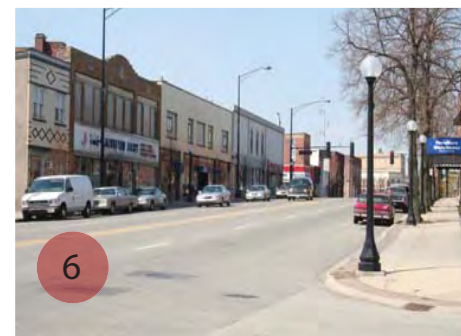
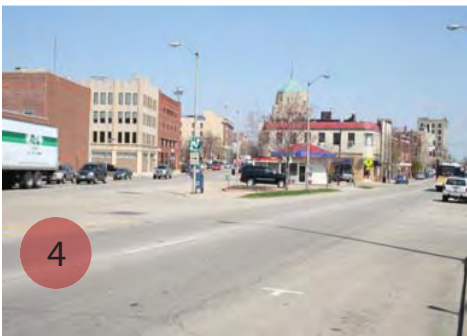
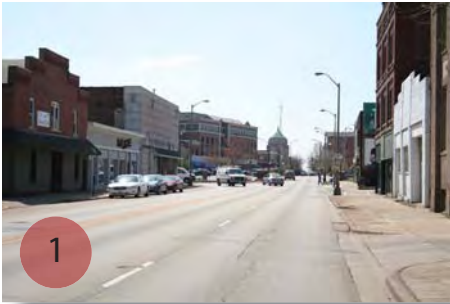
Pedestrian level signs in downtown can serve functional and aesthetic purposes. As downtown becomes more attractive to visitors, these signs serve the purpose of directing pedestrians to popular destinations. Users of downtown often have difficulty understanding how to move throughout downtown to find landmarks and businesses, therefore these signs should be simple and intuitive.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Convention and Visitors Bureau







## Strategy 4 - Entryway Beautification

*Develop entryway beautification plans for key entry points into downtown.*

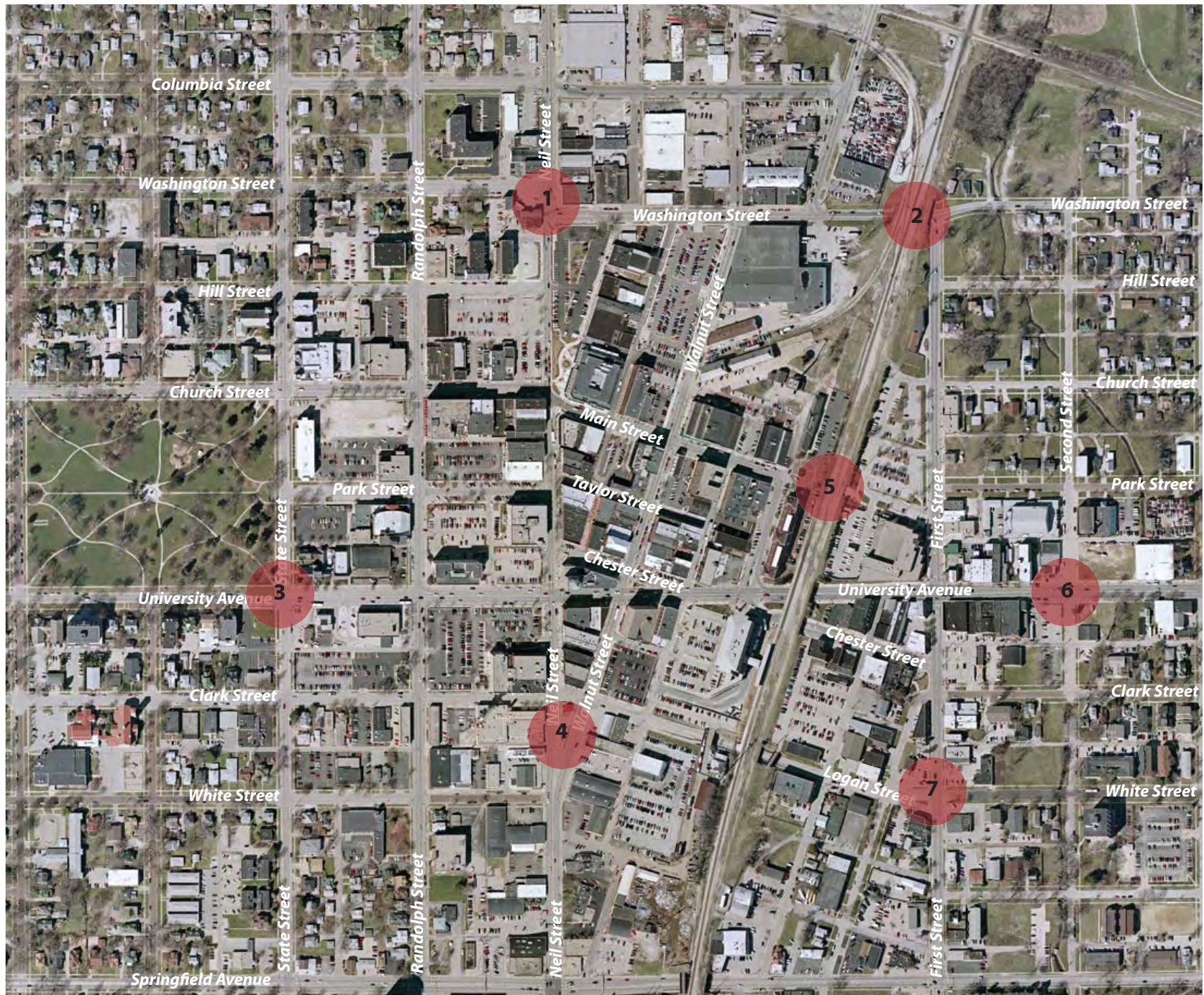
### Commentary

Beautifying the entryways to downtown is an important step to announce entry into downtown and create an inviting atmosphere for regular and less frequent visitors. These areas should include landscaping and signage to ensure that visitors are instantly oriented toward their destination. Key entry points have been identified below:

1. Neil Street and Columbia Street
2. Washington Street and First Street
3. University Avenue and State Street
4. Neil Street and Walnut Street division
5. Main Street Viaduct
6. University Avenue and Second Street
7. Logan Street and First Street

### Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Champaign Park District
- Canadian National Railroad



Identified locations of key entryways to the Downtown Area.

### Strategy 5 - Public Plaza

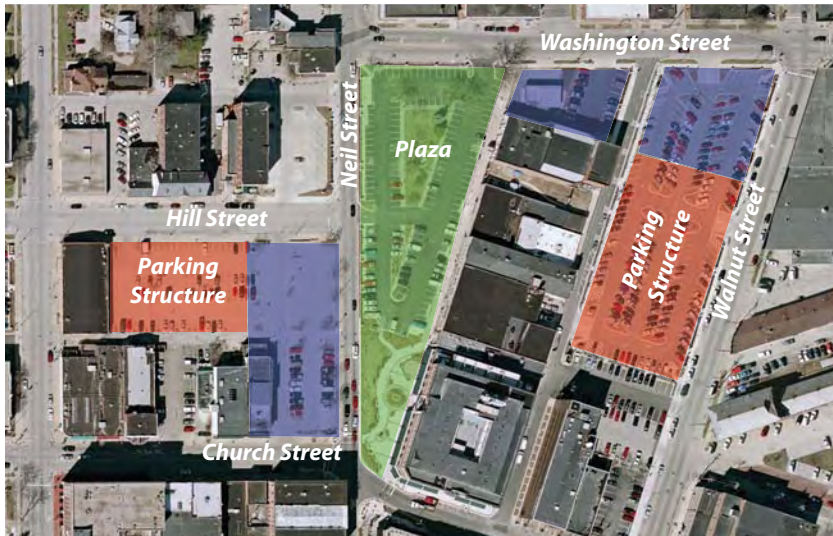
Study the feasibility of converting the surface parking lot at Neil and Washington Streets to a public plaza as a continuation of the One Main plaza. Explore opportunities for open space that captures a "family oriented" theme.

#### Commentary

A large scale project envisioned in this Plan is the construction of a large civic plaza in the heart of downtown. This space would be created to use throughout the year and serve as an entertainment center for the community. Festivals, concerts, ice skating, and other special events could take place in this plaza. The space can also serve as a central location for displaying public art. Many steps would need to take place to create this plaza including an analysis to determine the impact of relocated parking. Minimizing the impact on immediately adjacent businesses is important. Solutions may include maintaining at least one row of parking in the area or redesigning parking along Fremont Street. As downtown continues to grow, the establishment of a civic plaza such as this will become increasingly important.

#### Key Players:

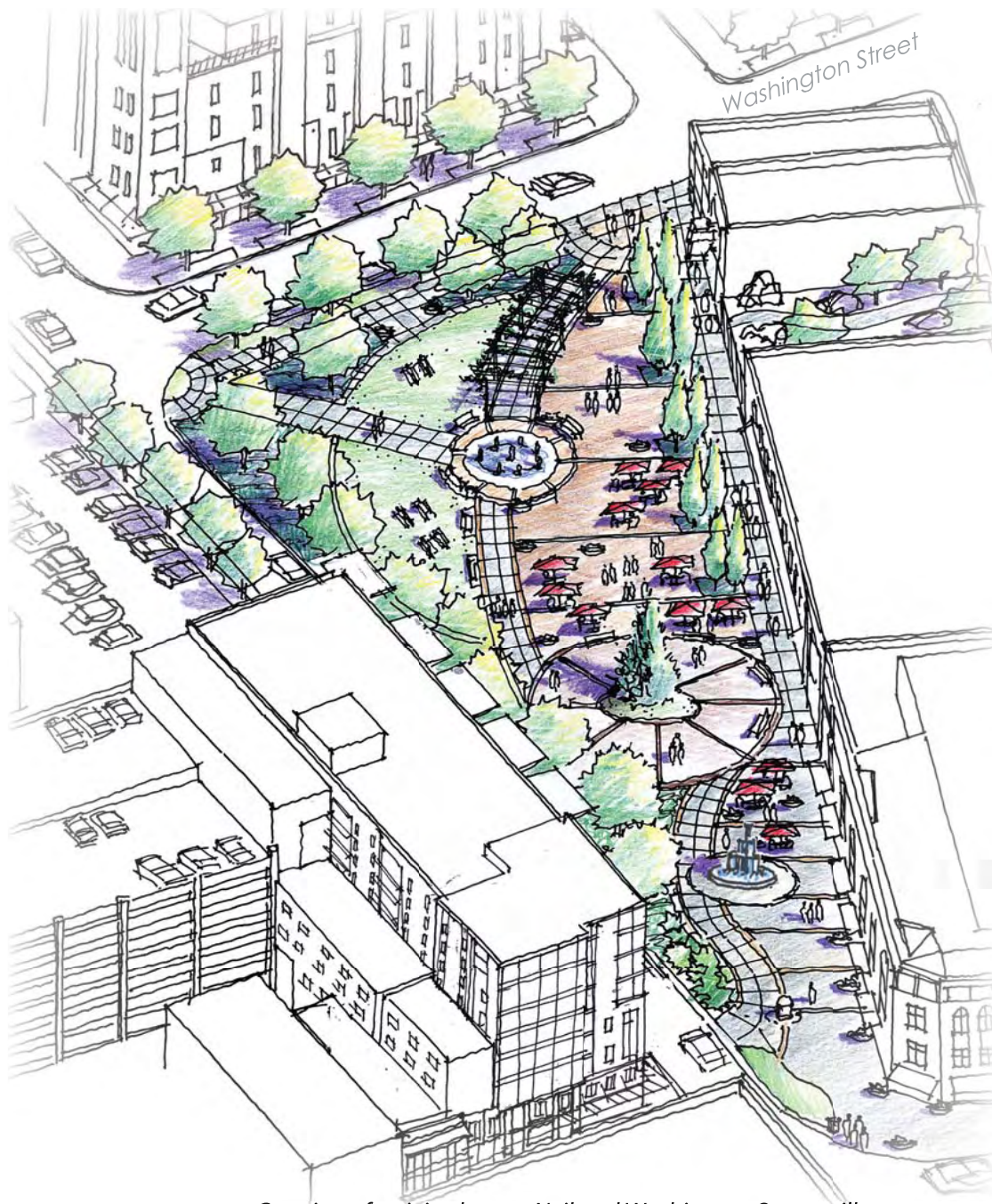
- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Orpheum Science Children's Museum
- Neil Street Businesses
- Private Donors



The Flat Iron Building, a landmark in downtown was demolished to create additional parking for Sears and Roebuck Co. in the mid 1970's. The effort was not enough to keep large department store anchors following the grand opening of Market Place Mall.



The current parking lot at Neil and Washington Street could serve as an ideal location for a large public plaza.



*Creation of a civic plaza at Neil and Washington Street will create a central gathering place for community festivals and events.*



Examples of civic plaza features/

## Strategy 6 - Infill Priority List

Establish criteria to prioritize the redevelopment of existing publicly owned surface parking lots.

### Commentary

To facilitate future development opportunities, the City will develop a priority listing of publicly-owned surface parking lots on which to promote their disposition and redevelopment. Promoting development of parking lots will increase the demand for parking in the core area. Therefore request for proposals to develop these lots must be timed to coincide with the development of structured parking.

- Neil and Church Street Lot
- Neil and Washington Streets (partial)
- Neil and Hill Streets

#### Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Property Owners
- Potential Investors
- Public Works Department



Main Street looking from Market Street circa 1905.



Main Street looking from Market Street in 2006.



*Main Street looking north from Market Street with a conceptual image of infill development of the City Parking lot at 41 - 47 East Main Street*

### Strategy 7 - Dialogue with Private Owners

*Establish an ongoing dialogue with private downtown property owners about the potential for infill and redevelopment projects on their property.*

#### Commentary

It would be impossible to carry out the goals of this Plan without the cooperation of private business and property owners. A large portion of the land available for development is in the control of private owners, and therefore it is crucial to creating partnerships with their owners to ensure that development continues.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- City Manager's Office
- Private Developers
- Property Owners



Nail Street and University Avenue looking northwest as demolition of the IOOF building proceeds.



Neil Street and University Avenue looking northwest today shows parking for Main Street Bank and Trust.



*This conceptual image represents an example of the potential to infill surface parking lots in Downtown. This example shows a redevelopment of a privately owned surface parking lot at the northwest corner of Neil Street and University Avenue (see the appendix for a complete map of potential infill locations)*





Public parking lots make up roughly one-third of all surface parking in downtown.

### Strategy 8 - Public Land Disposition Program

*Create a Request for Proposal system to solicit development proposals for publicly-owned property to proactively promote redevelopment of surface parking lots which further the goals of this plan.*

#### Commentary

To proactively pursue development of City owned property in a way that promotes the goals of this plan, a request for proposal process should be utilized to ensure selection of developments that best promote the vision for downtown.

#### Key Players:

- Planning Department
- City Manager's Office
- Private Developers
- Property Owners
- Business Owners



The City parking lot at the northeast corner of Neil and Main was sold for redevelopment in 2003



One Main Street opened in 2004 and represents the first new infill project in 15 years.

## Strategy 9 - Revised Redevelopment Incentive Program

*Revise the Redevelopment Incentive Program (RIP) to place a greater emphasis on incentives for projects that achieve stated redevelopment goals and/or produce specific land uses identified in the Plan as desirable.*

### Commentary

Since 1994, the Redevelopment Incentive Program has played a key role in the preservation and renovation of existing structures in downtown and the East University Avenue District. This program has leveraged nearly \$20,000,000 in private redevelopment. The program was created to bring structures up to City code and ensure the long term stabilization of the downtown building. Now that a majority of the structures in downtown have been stabilized it is appropriate to refocus these grants to accomplish the goals identified in this plan.

Potential large scale projects include:

- Bailey-Rugg Building (221 North Neil Street)
- Jos. Kuhn and Co. Building (33 Main Street)
- Russell Building/Rialto Theater (117 West Church Street)
- Orpheum Theater (346 North Neil Street)
- Graphic Press Building (205 North Market Street)
- Avenue Building (65 East University Avenue)
- Properties on Chester Street near Water Street

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Building Safety Division
- Fire Department
- Property Owners
- Business Owners



Since 1994 the Redevelopment Incentive Program has been responsible for over \$3 million in public investment.



## Strategy 10 - Preserve historic structures and promote their significance

*Determine which structures best contribute to the historic character of downtown and designate those structures as local historic landmarks.*

### Commentary

Designating properties as a local or national landmark helps to preserve the historical significance of downtown. Expanding educational programs targeted at historic structures downtown will help to broaden the knowledge and historical appreciation of Champaign. Programs should be created to convey the history of the community to the citizens of Champaign. Use of these existing buildings will serve as a tangible piece of that history.

### Current National Register Buildings as of 2006

- Inman Hotel (17 East University Avenue)
- Bailey-Rugg Building (219-225 North Neil Street)
- The Virginia Theater (203 West Park Street)
- Illinois Central Terminal (116 North Chestnut Street)
- Solon Building (201 North Market Street)
- Graphic Press Building (203-205 North Market Street)
- Burnham Athenaeum (306 West Church Street)
- Cattle Bank (102 East University Avenue)
- Illinois Traction Building (41 East University Avenue)
- Lincoln Building (44 East Main Street)
- Orpheum Theater (346 North Neil Street)
- Springer Federal Building (200 West Church Street)

### Current Local Landmarks as of 2006

- Sagamore Building (804 North Neil Street)
- Illinois Central Railroad District (312 North Walnut Street)
- Park "Art" Theater (126 West Church Street)
- Prayer for Rain Statue (West Side Park)
- The Parkview (305 West University Avenue)
- Rick Orr Florist Building (122 North Walnut Street)
- Atkinson Monument Building (106 South Neil Street)
- Price Paint Building (108 South Neil Street)

### Additional Buildings with Historical Significance

- Jos. Kuhn and Co Building (33 East Main Street)
- Lewis and Co Building (110 North Neil Street)
- Illinois Traction Building (41 East University Avenue)
- Trevett/Mattis Bank Building (112 West Church Street)
- National City Bank Building (30 East Main Street)

#### Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Historic Preservation Commission
- Property Owners
- Interested Community Members



The Virginia Theater stands as one of the most recognizable downtown landmarks.

### Strategy 11 - Public/Private Open Space

*Determine opportunities, whether large or small, for creating additional civic spaces in the public realm.*

#### Commentary

As downtown development continues to progress, it is important to remember that making the pedestrian feel welcome is key to downtown success. Development should be encouraged to contribute to creative amenities in the public realm. These can take the shape of street planters, benches, trees, shrubs or public art but each should be a direct benefit to the public.

#### Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Private Development Community
- Champaign Park District



Identified locations or existing and potential civic space is shown in green.

## Strategy 12 - Park Street Corridor

*Encourage the redevelopment of Park Street to enhance the connectivity between, West Side Park, the Virginia Theater and the Core of downtown and the North First Street area.*

### Commentary

Although West Side Park and the Virginia theater serve as vital community centers in Downtown their connection to the core must be strengthened. Currently both sit isolated from the core of downtown by surface parking lots and a lack of buildings that promote pedestrian traffic. Infill potential is very high along this corridor. However, because of high parking demands from neighboring offices and the theater, structured parking will need to be located in this area to make infill possible. Extending this corridor to eventually link an east-west between West Side Park and the historic Illinois Central Rail Station could provide enhanced pedestrian access throughout downtown.

#### Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Main Street Bank and Trust
- Champaign Park District
- Champaign Housing Authority
- Champaign County Mental Health Center
- Development Community



Aerial view of Park Street circa 1960



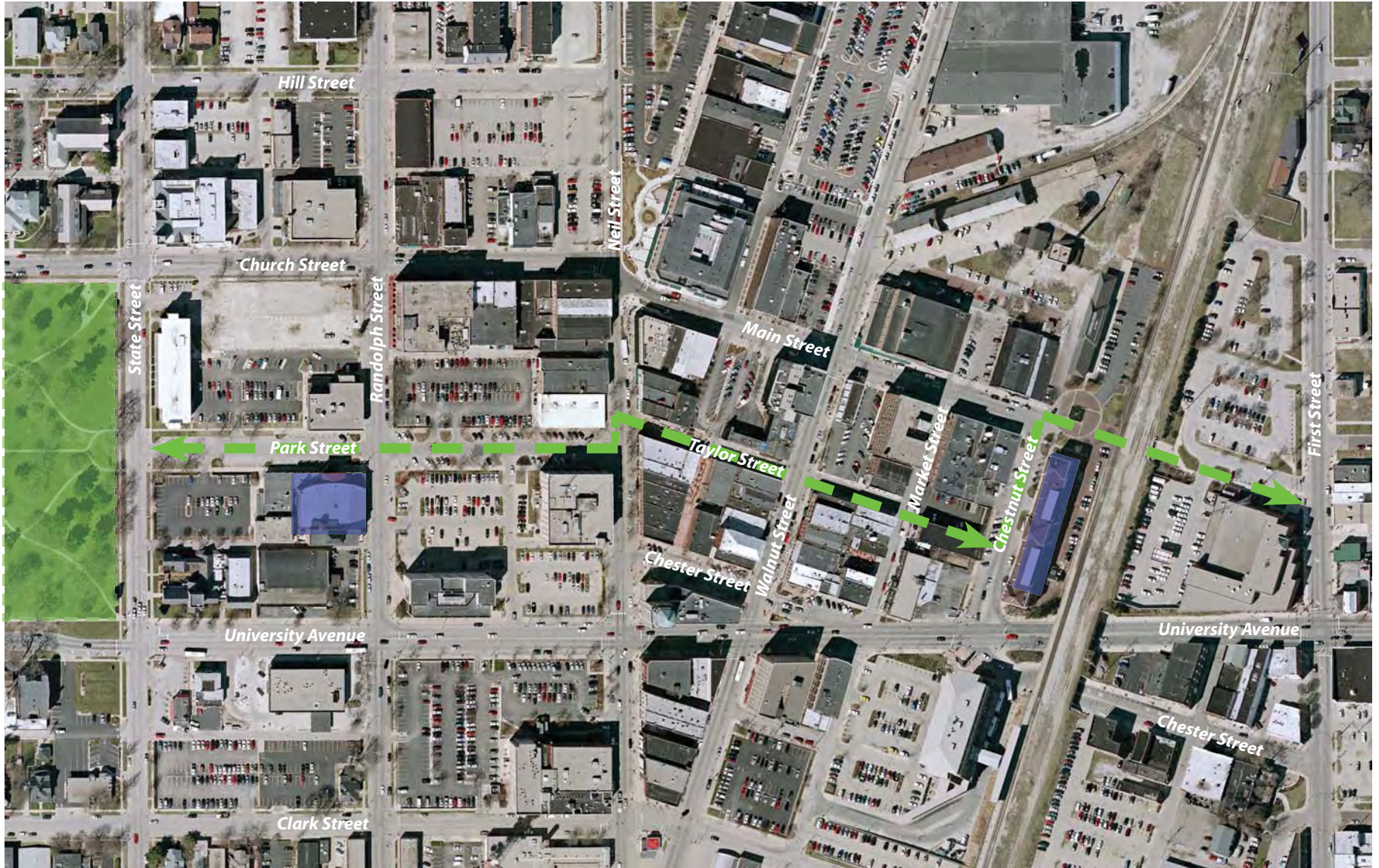
Park Street looking east from State Street (2006)



*Conceptual illustration of Park Street looking east. Creating a solid connection between downtown and West Side Park is important to the success of downtown.*

**Strategy 12 - Park Street Corridor (continued)**

*Encourage the redevelopment of Park Street to enhance the connectivity between the core area, West Side Park, and the Virginia Theater.*



*Utilizing lower capacity streets such as Park Street, Taylor Street and Chestnut Street, a pedestrian corridor can be created that links downtown east to west extending past many landmarks and venues.*

## Strategy 13 - Waste Management

Establish a dialogue with business owners to establish a comprehensive approach to waste management and collection

### Commentary

A difficult issue making its way to the forefront of development activity is the management and removal of waste. As downtown grows and more development and retail occurs, adequate space for waste collection is limited. A dialogue should be created with existing and future businesses to establish standards and identify locations that keep downtown clean while serving the needs of the individual businesses. New developments should also be built to accommodate all waste within their development as well as helping to create alternatives for neighboring businesses.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Downtown Business Owners
- Waste Hauling Companies
- Development Community



Because of the unique grid pattern of streets in the core area, public alleys large enough to accommodate trash collection are difficult to find.