



**BOLTON
& MENK**

HIGHWAY 2 LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT STUDY

GRAND RAPIDS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Draft Report
Draft as of August 1, 2025



supported in part by



Blandin Foundation
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

**TOC AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS TO BE FINALIZED
UPON PLAN COMPLETION**





EXISTING CONDITIONS

PHASE ONE: COMMUNICATIONS

Website

A website, GREDAStudy.com, was created with general information about the project including timeline, goals, and how people can get involved.

The website was updated on a regular basis as new information became available. The website also included a link to the MnDOT Corridor Study to ensure people were aware and informed about both projects.

Social Media

The City posted three social media posts in November and December.

The purpose was to generate initial interest in the project, invite people to attend a walking tour, and encourage people to take the survey.

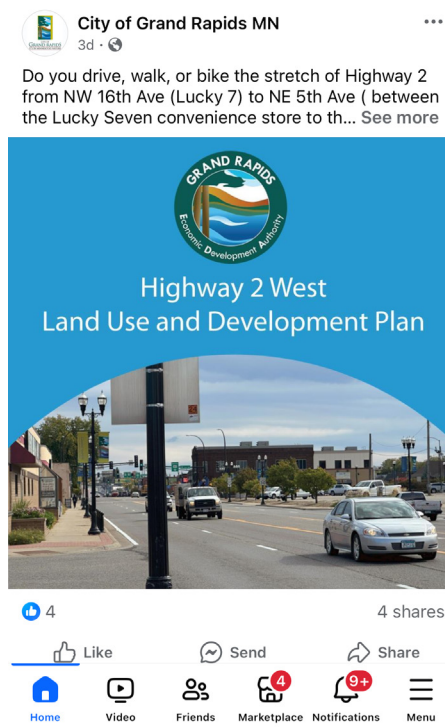
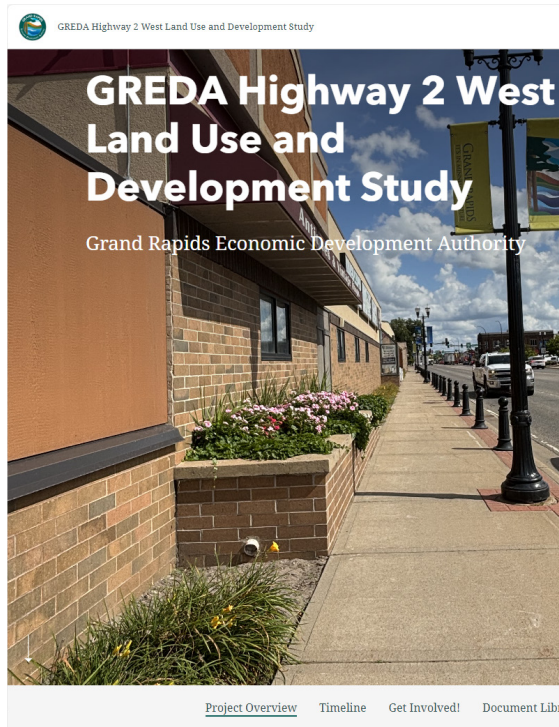
Emails

An initial newsletter was sent to over 250 project subscribers on November 8.

Subsequent emails were sent on November 18 and December 10, 2024.

The emails directed recipients to take the survey and visit the website for more information.

At the end of Phase 1 engagement, 525 people were signed up to receive the emails.



GREDA Hwy 2 West Land Use and Development

STUDY AREA



Want to get involved?

The project team will engage the community, identify issues and opportunities, develop concept plans, and prepare a small area plan that will guide future development and investment decisions. You can be involved in many ways:

- Monitor the website regularly for project updates
- Participate in a walking tour (November)
- Take a survey to help identify priorities, issues, and opportunities for improvement
- Participate in one of the business and property owner focus groups
- Attend a community meeting or event

Scroll down for details about current opportunities!

PHASE ONE

Survey

An online survey was made available for people to share their ideas and identify issues. Approximately 500 people completed the survey.

Highway 2 West Land Use and Development Study

The City of Grand Rapids Economic Development Authority (GREDA) is developing a small area plan for the area along the Highway 2 corridor. In partnership with the business community and property owners, GREDA has made significant public investment and aesthetic improvements to the blocks near the intersection of Highway 2 and Highway 169.

STUDY AREA



There is still work to be done to improve economic development, activate underused properties, improve walkability, and make it easier and safer to get through the city and west along Highway 2. This study, with input from the public, will address these needs. Please take this brief survey to assist GREDA in understanding the communities' issues and needs.

* 1. Tell us a little about yourself. Select all that apply.

- ☐ I live in Grand Rapids
- ☐ I own property in Grand Rapids
- ☐ I work in Grand Rapids
- ☐ I am a seasonal resident of Grand Rapids

Walking Tours

On November 21, the city held three bus/walking tours of the study area.

The tours were with the general public, business community and EDA members.

The purpose of the tours was to identify issues and opportunities and have community leaders see the corridor through fresh eyes.

Nearly 20 people participated in the tour and provided significant insight into the challenges and potential for the area.



Pop-Up

On November 21, the City had a pop-up event at the Grand Rapids Public Library where staff talked to a few people about the study.

See pages 34 and 35 for additional details of what we heard from the community about existing conditions and opportunities for improvement.

PHASE TWO

Survey Results

During the second phase of engagement, 568 survey responses collected over a month revealed public preferences for land use and aesthetics along the Highway 2 corridor. Overall, respondents favored more practical and pragmatic alternatives for downtown, including:

- A mix of land uses, including commercial uses and housing;
- The ability to walk, bike and drive to their destinations;
- District-wide placemaking improvements, such as planters and banners; and
- Buildings that are nicer than metal poll sheds with some aesthetic improvements, but not necessarily requiring wood, brick, or stone facing materials. Building design was the lowest priority for respondents across all segments.

The survey asked the same questions for each of the corridor’s three segments, to see if there were patterns in public perception across the areas.

Downtown Area

In the Downtown Area, retail and commercial uses were the highest priority for most respondents. The second-highest priority was adding housing options, closely followed by public realm and transportation improvements.

- Housing: Respondents favored housing in mixed-use buildings over single-use housing like apartments or senior housing.
- Commercial Uses: Respondents preferred a walkable mix of small businesses, offices, and public services over auto-oriented commercial uses.
- Transportation: Respondents preferred multi-modal street improvements over auto-oriented streets.

Highway 2 and 10th Avenue Node

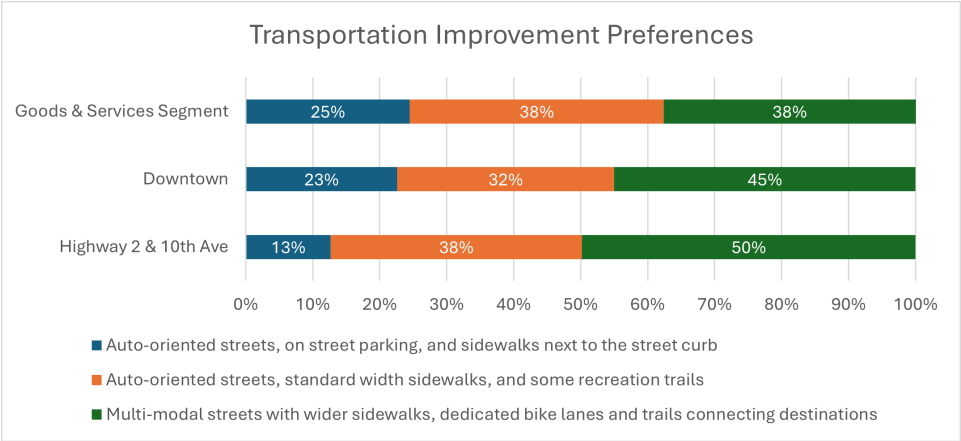
Respondents said their highest priorities in the 10th Avenue Node were adding retail and commercial uses, followed by adding housing options.

- Housing: Respondents favored a mix of housing types over a single housing type.
- Commercial Uses: Respondents preferred a mix of walkable mixed-use and auto-oriented commercial uses over exclusively auto-oriented commercial uses.
- Transportation: Respondents preferred multi-modal street improvements over auto-oriented streets.

Goods and Services Area

In the Goods and Services area, retail and commercial uses were by far the highest priority for respondents. Housing options, transportation improvements, and the public realm were prioritized similarly in this segment.

- Commercial Uses: Respondents preferred a mix of walkable and auto-oriented commercial uses, but were more open to auto-oriented commercial in this area than in the 10th Avenue Node.
- Transportation: Respondents preferred multi-modal streets or auto-oriented streets with some recreational trails.



PHASE THREE

The third phase of public engagement included an open house on June 24. The open house was an opportunity for residents and business owners to review and comment on redevelopment concepts for each of the three Character Areas along the corridor (described in detail in the Recommendations Section). A summary of prevailing themes and preferences from public comments is provided below.

Comments on the 10th Avenue Node

- **Strong desire for walkability, green space, and public realm improvements.**
 - Calming traffic, installing safer pedestrian crossings, and making streets more inviting.
 - Restoring Blandin Beach with amenities.
 - Adding terraces with large street trees.
 - Creating parks and recreational features like a splash pad
- **Mixed views on housing and development strategies**
 - Some favor mixed-use, medium-density housing and low-income options to address local needs.
 - Some oppose low-income housing due to concerns about cost and urban sprawl.
 - Some want to prioritize infill development and rehabilitation of existing housing before building in undeveloped areas.
- **Frustration with zoning requirements, and commercial design standards.**
 - Some are concerned zoning standards might overburden small businesses, suggesting more flexible, locally focused planning.
 - Pedestrian-friendly commercial design, especially for hotels and chain restaurants.
 - Some feel the plan risks displacing existing residents and businesses, while others see it as a smart step toward urban growth.



PHASE THREE

Comments on Downtown

- **Strong desire for walkability, green space, and public realm improvements.**
 - Respondents emphasized the importance of creating a more walkable, people-oriented Downtown.
 - Common desire for wider sidewalks, more greenery, and public art.
 - Reimagining NW 1st Ave as a walkable corridor from Central School to the south end.
 - Respondents want to address barriers like the government center, train tracks, and highway intersections that disrupt pedestrian connectivity.
 - Interest in beautification through lighting, landscaping, and sculpture walks.
- **Mixed Views on housing and development scale.**
 - Many supported medium- and high-density housing, especially mixed-use buildings with retail below and housing above, to address the housing crisis and revitalize downtown.
 - Others opposed additional apartments or low-income housing, citing concerns about taxpayer costs and urban sprawl.
 - Some called for for-sale options like condos and lofts to attract long-term residents.
- **Frustration with traffic, access, and coordination.** Traffic flow and access were recurring concerns:
 - Respondents have concerns about existing traffic flows and access.
 - The intersection of Hwy 169 and Hwy 2 was seen as a major pinch points needing redesign.
 - Several respondents noted that closed streets and poor traffic circulation—especially around the mall and government center—hurt both car and pedestrian movement.
 - Respondents would like to see more transparency in City-run redevelopment plans and the MnDOT corridor planning process, and want more opportunities for property owners to participate in decisions

Comments on the Goods & Services Segments

- **Strong support for landscaping, aesthetic improvements, and pedestrian-friendly design.**
 - Respondents appreciate prioritization of native landscaping, large canopy trees, and green space.
 - Public favors attractive, timeless design that integrates art and natural elements.
 - Respondents think rear parking and minimal setbacks will improve the pedestrian experience. There's a clear desire to make commercial areas feel more welcoming, walkable, and visually appealing.
- **Concerns about auto-oriented development.**
 - Respondents feel the area is already too car-centric, especially along Hwy 2.
 - Some agree that adding more drive-throughs or auto-focused infrastructure would worsen walkability and divide the city further.
 - Many suggest a need to prioritize biking, walking, and transit access over car convenience.
- **The public desires for diverse, local, and accessible commercial offerings.**
 - Many want to see more local and family-friendly dining options, not just breweries or fast food.
 - Respondents favor balanced commercial development that supports both residents and visitors.
 - There is some support for national chains (e.g., Chipotle, Chick-fil-A, Scheels) to fill gaps in retail and dining. Development of such businesses should be well designed and appropriately located on the site.

GROW GRAND RAPIDS 2040 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN — 2020

The City of Grand Rapids chose to guide its community by crafting a vision statement, a set of community values, and guiding principles. Anchoring the city's strategy for future growth and development in these statements provides a clear sense of the community it represents. The vision statement is included below:

“Grand Rapids provides opportunities for all through a blend of small town hospitality and character with big city amenities. The city provides residents and visitors with housing, employment, mobility, recreation, and economic options that provide access to a high quality of life for everyone. Grand Rapids neighborhoods and gathering spaces are safe, friendly, and diverse and integrate with the natural environment. Grand Rapids continues to serve as a regional hub, offering outstanding educational opportunities, excellent medical care, exceptional cultural, natural, and recreational amenities, and an unequaled community spirit to the region. The community embraces its natural surrounding and history while continuing to look ahead. Grand Rapids provides an opportunity for residents, stakeholders, businesses and the natural environment to grow into 2040.”

The City committed itself to actions that balance small-town living with a desire to be a regional center, economic opportunity, and sustainable development, based on the key themes from their values-setting process. In addition to the above vision statement, the city has the principles:

1. Direct growth and development to locations that serve and support the community's vision and values.
2. Align change with the existing community, neighborhoods, and natural resources fabric.
3. Promote local economic vitality.
4. Sustain Grand Rapids' neighborhoods.
5. Enhance healthy lifestyles, families, and community.
6. Sustain and enhance the city's status as a regional center and its role in the greater region.
7. Promote community participation and civic engagement to inform the public decision-making process.
8. Support access to arts and culture and explore opportunities to incorporate into municipal action.
9. Support and collaborate with community service providers and organizations to ensure that residents' needs are met.
10. The Comprehensive Plan is the foundation for City actions.

The City increased the area dedicated to commercial when it updated its comprehensive plan in 2020. Downtown Mixed-Use and Highway Commercial Districts were added to the land use plan to allow for greater growth in the study area. The plans were further refined in the 2023 Grand Rapids Downtown Plan Update.

The plan's themes emerged through the economic development discussions during this process, each focused on jobs and income, quality of life, and

economic resilience, respectively.

It aims to guide the City in identifying its transportation needs and priorities, making informed decisions, and aligning long-term plans with other jurisdictions such as Itasca County and The Minnesota Department of Transportation. A connected road network is important because it supports the city's quality of life, economic activities, and recreational activities. The transportation system must be safe for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, snowmobiles, ATVs, automobiles, trucks, trains, and buses.

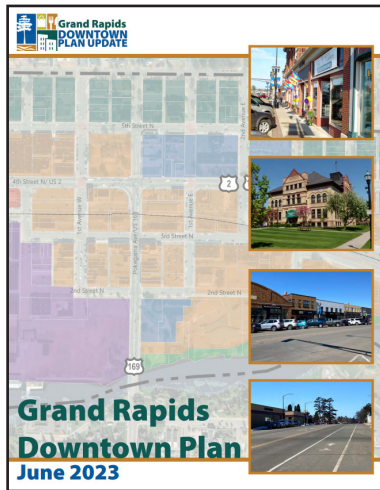
The Plan is available for review at the link: [GROW Grand Rapids 2040 Comprehensive Plan](#).



GRAND RAPIDS DOWNTOWN PLAN UPDATE – 2023

The Downtown Study Area, defined early in the planning process, spans from 4th Avenue W to 5th Avenue E and from 6th Street N to the Mississippi River. A vibrant, active downtown serves as the heart of a thriving community, playing a key role in shaping its identity and acting as a central destination. Downtown areas offer spaces to live, work, and play while reflecting the community's shared values and heritage. The City of Grand Rapids continues to invest in its downtown, seeking opportunities to enhance its spaces, places, and overall experiences. The Grand Rapids Downtown Plan Update outlines a future path that supports the community's priorities, strengths, and resources.

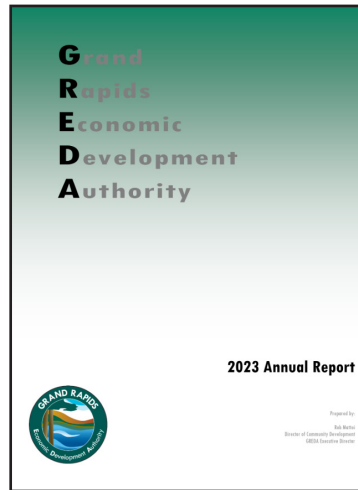
The Plan is available for review at the link: [Grand Rapids Downtown Plan Update](#).



GRAND RAPIDS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ANNUAL REPORT – 2023

The Grand Rapids Economic Development Authority's Annual Report documents the organization's activities to advance economic growth. The report outlines the available properties for development and leasable assets of the organization, including its 23 lots encompassing 54.78 acres. Further, the report details the significant business assistance opportunities for which this group is a conduit in the community. The work plan for the authority notes the key projects on which progress will be sought in the coming year.

The Report is available for review at the link: [Grand Rapids Economic Development Authority Annual Report 2023](#).



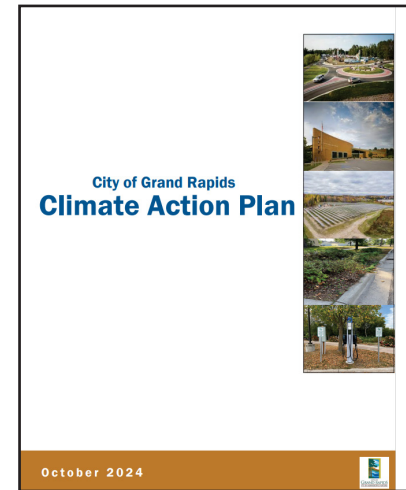
GRAND RAPIDS CLIMATE ACTION PLAN – 2024

The Grand Rapids Climate Action Plan, approved in October 2024, guides the city in achieving climate resiliency. The plan focuses on four goals that will have the greatest impact:

1. Rain Gardens, enhancing resiliency of urban lands.
2. Solar Power, providing clean power.
3. Transportation, reducing greenhouse gases.
4. Waste, finding new ways to recycle and reuse.

The plan includes implementable solutions and a process to review and revise the plan as new challenges arise.

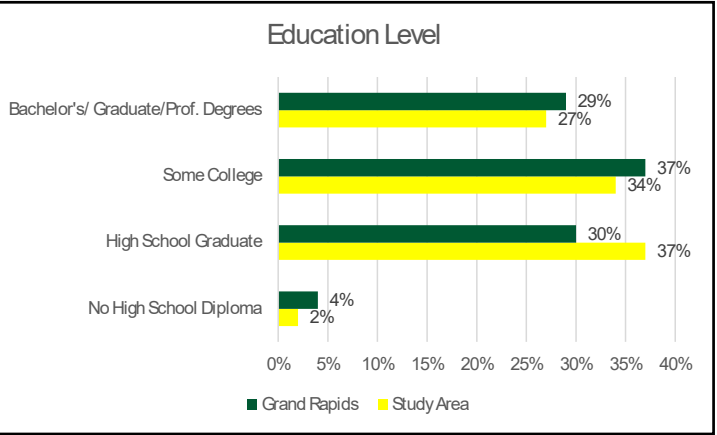
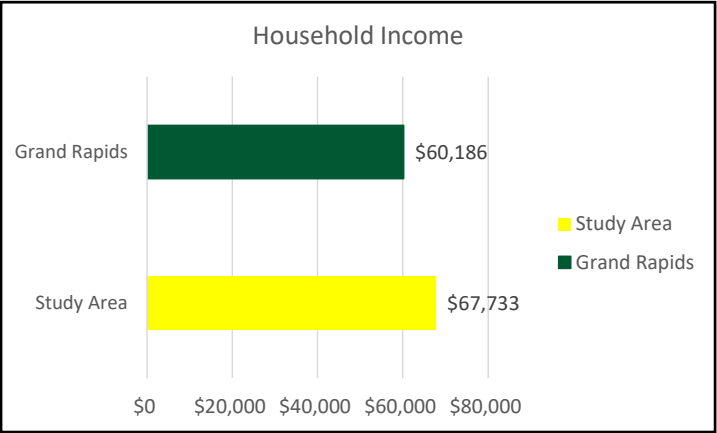
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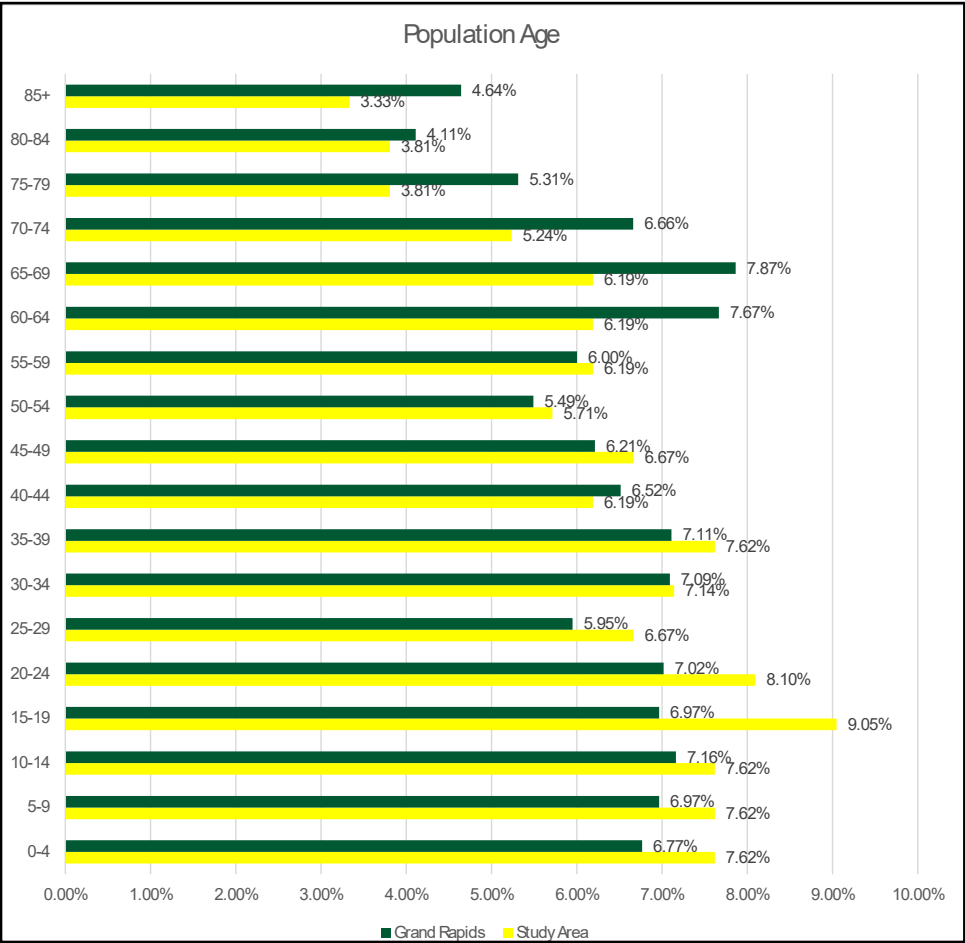
DEMOGRAPHICS

Stretching from NE 5th Avenue to NW 17th Avenue, the study area is home to 243 residents. The profile generated for this area provides key insights into the lives of residents here.

Of these households, the median household income is just over \$67,733, annually. The median home value of these is \$186,111. About 56% of these homes are owner-occupied and about 44% are rentals.



About 90% of the residents who live within this buffer are White. Black residents make up 1% of the area population, and American Indian residents make up about 2%.



COMMUNITY ASSETS



NATURAL RESOURCES

The study area is surrounded by natural resources including the Mississippi River, Forest Lake, and large swaths of forests which draw residents and tourists to the area.

INSTITUTIONS

The study area is home to a variety of government offices and nonprofit organizations such as Grand Rapids City Hall, the US Postal Service, Itasca County Government Center, Grand Rapids Public Library, and the Blandin Foundation offices.

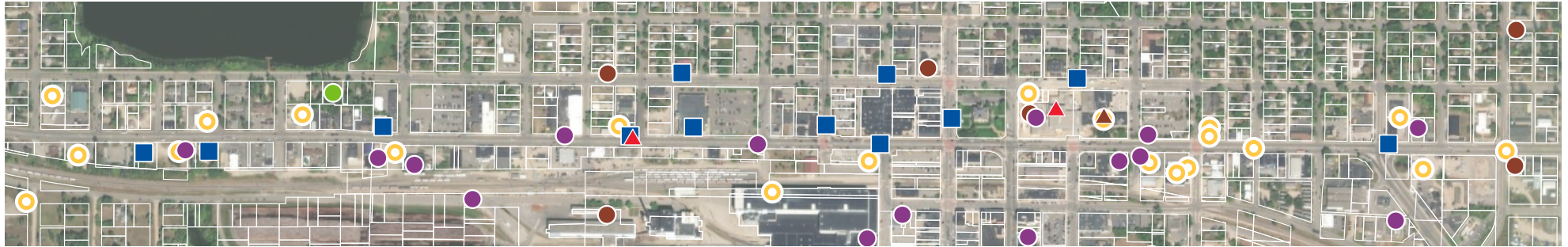
ARTS & CULTURE

Public art is visible throughout the study area with poems stamped into the sidewalks, murals and mosaics on the sides of buildings, and sculptures in parks or greenspaces. The Downtown area has art galleries, craft stores and art studios where people can make art. The City also hosts community events, celebrations, and parades.

HISTORY

Grand Rapids celebrates its history and recognizes its heroes at the History Museum, veterans memorial, and the American Legion.

MPCA WHAT'S IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD KNOWN HAZARDS MAP



This map from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) shows various sites in the study area which are enrolled in one or more investigative, cleanup, or monitoring programs. These sites include:

- Properties that were previously contaminated and those being investigated for contamination
- Facilities with air, water, and other environmental permits and registrations, and those that have applied
- Facilities the MPCA has penalized for environmental violations
- Projects under environmental review
- Emergency management activities
- Pollution prevention projects

- | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| ○ Multiple Programs | ● Solid Waste | ▲ Tanks |
| ■ Hazardous Waste | ▲ SSTS | ▲ Water Quality |
| ● Investigation & Cleanup | ● Stormwater | |

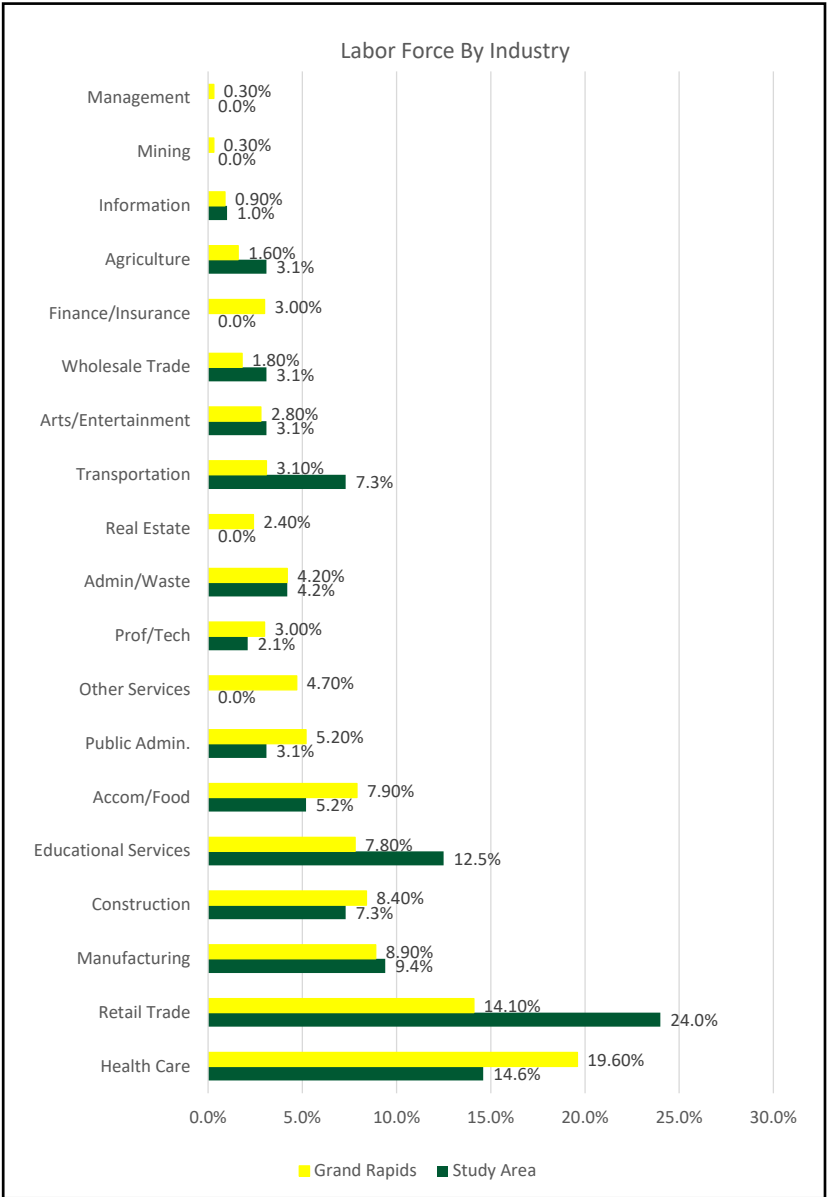
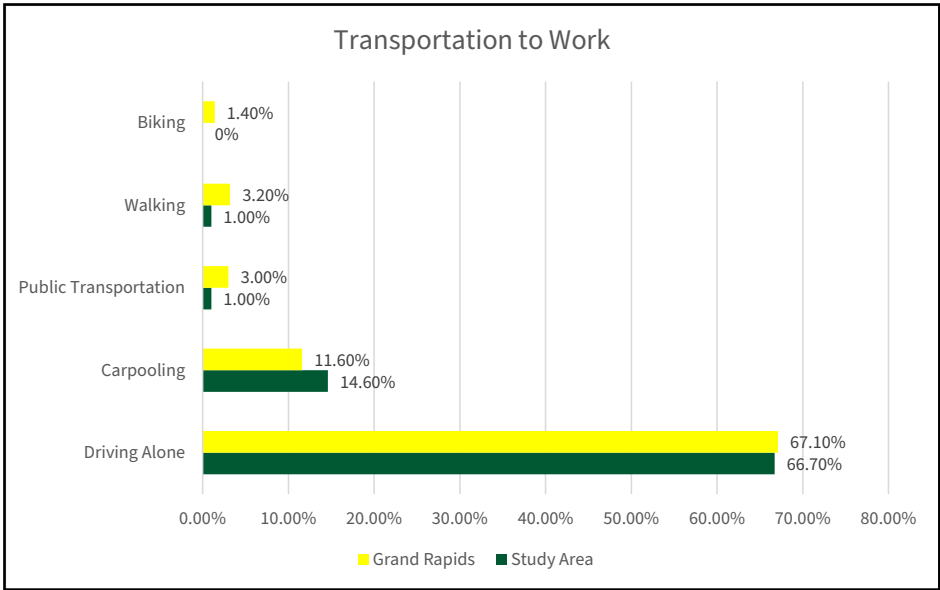
Map shows active sites enrolled in MPCA programs. For more details, visit [MPCA's interactive map](#).

EMPLOYMENT AND COMMUTING

In the one-mile buffer around the center point of the study area, health care is the largest labor force segment, followed by retail trade and manufacturing.

Of the approximately 2,900 jobs in the area, few employees live within 1 mi of the corridor. Rather, 2,551 (approximately 87 percent) commute into the area for work.

1,297 (approximately 81 percent) of area employees commute elsewhere for work, with nearly 71 percent of those trips less than 15 minutes away. About 80 percent of those trips are made by personal vehicle.



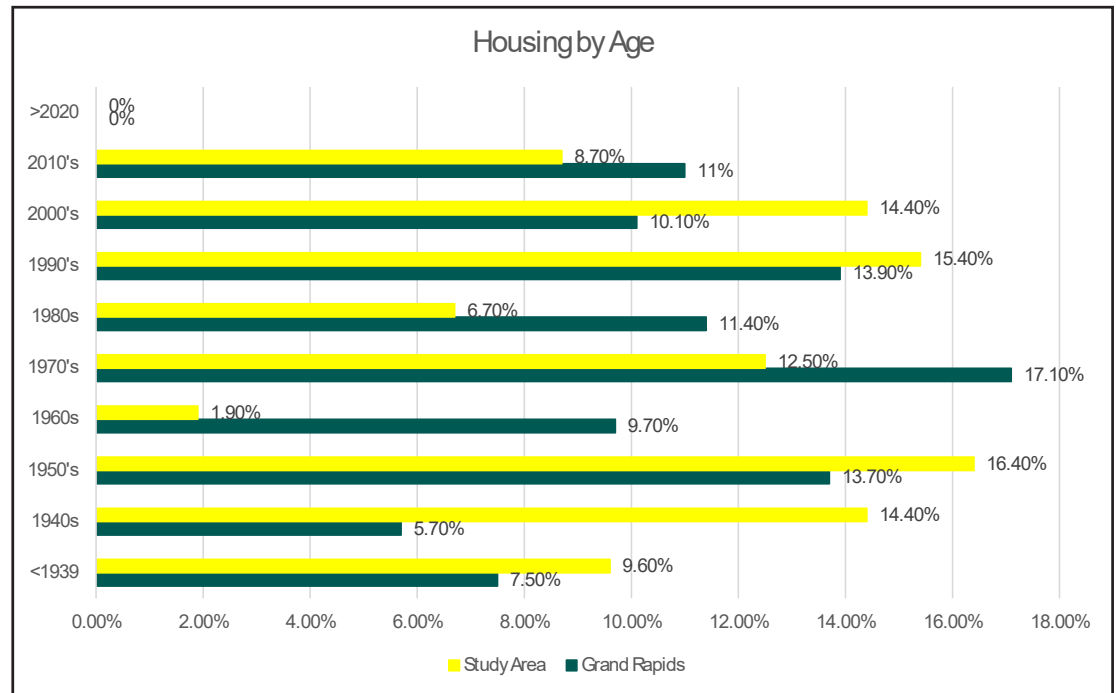
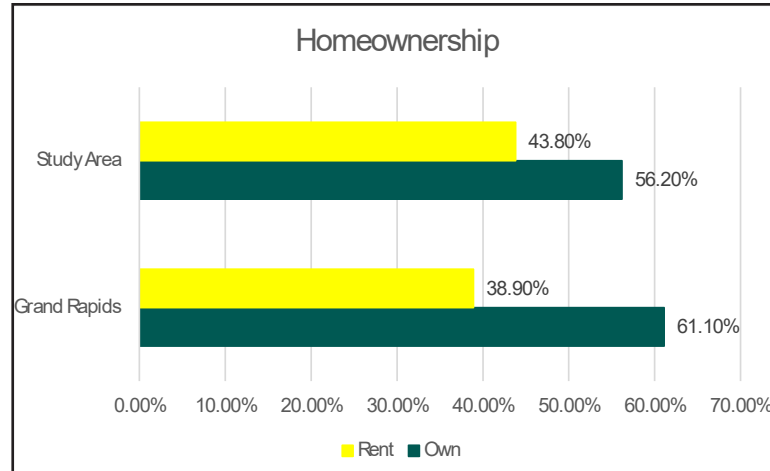
HOUSING

There are 52 households in the study area.

In the study area, 56 percent of residents own their home, compared to 61 percent in Grand Rapids.

Over 16 percent of households are cost-burdened, paying more than 30 percent of their income on their mortgage.

Over half of the homes in the study area are over 45 years old; further, nearly one-quarter of the homes in the study area are over 75 years old.



SPENDING HABITS

The annual median household income in the one mile buffer around the center of the study area approximately \$58,000, less than the County median of \$67,220.

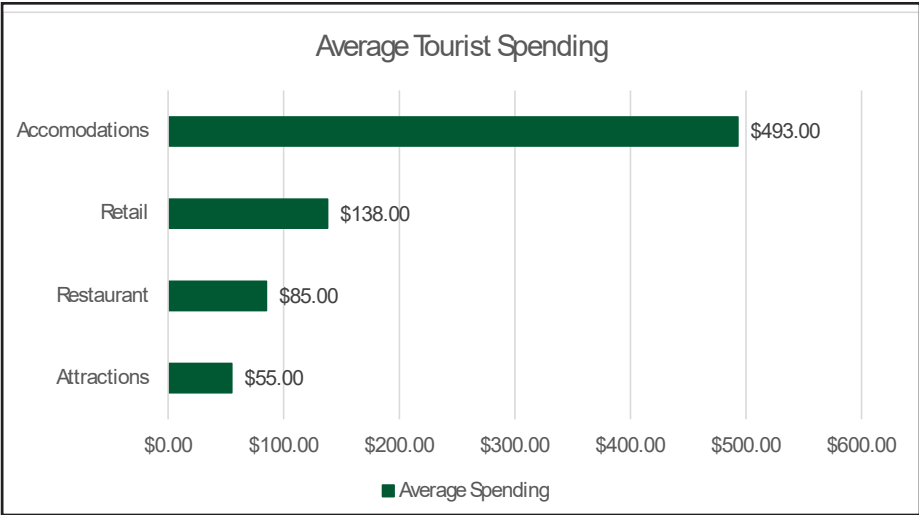
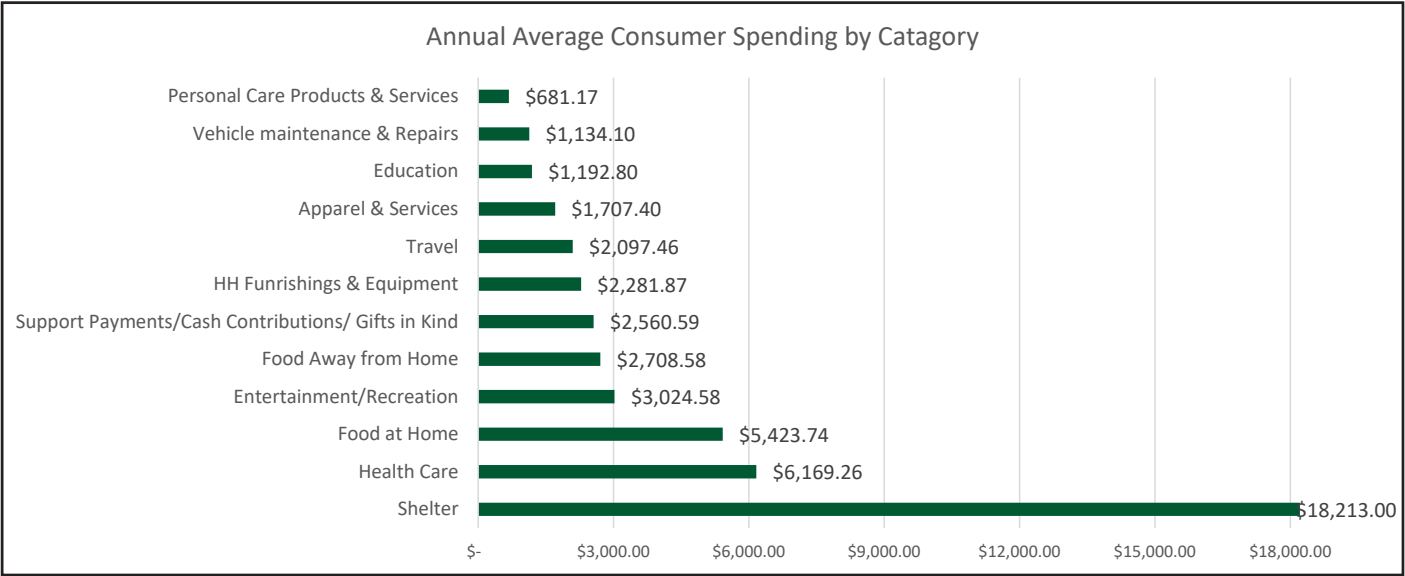
Due to the role of Highway 2 as a regional connector, both a project area and county lens was applied to consumer spending patterns and potential.

Within the study area after accounting for housing and health care expenses, meals at home, entertainment/recreation, and dining are the three largest categories of consumer spending (see chart to right).

County-wide industry demand estimates identifies small scale retailers, building materials and garden stores, and motor vehicle and parts dealers as the three strongest spending index categories (see Appendix A). Each are already prevalent uses along the corridor, and their estimated strong demand suggests an continued importance for a future role along highway 2.

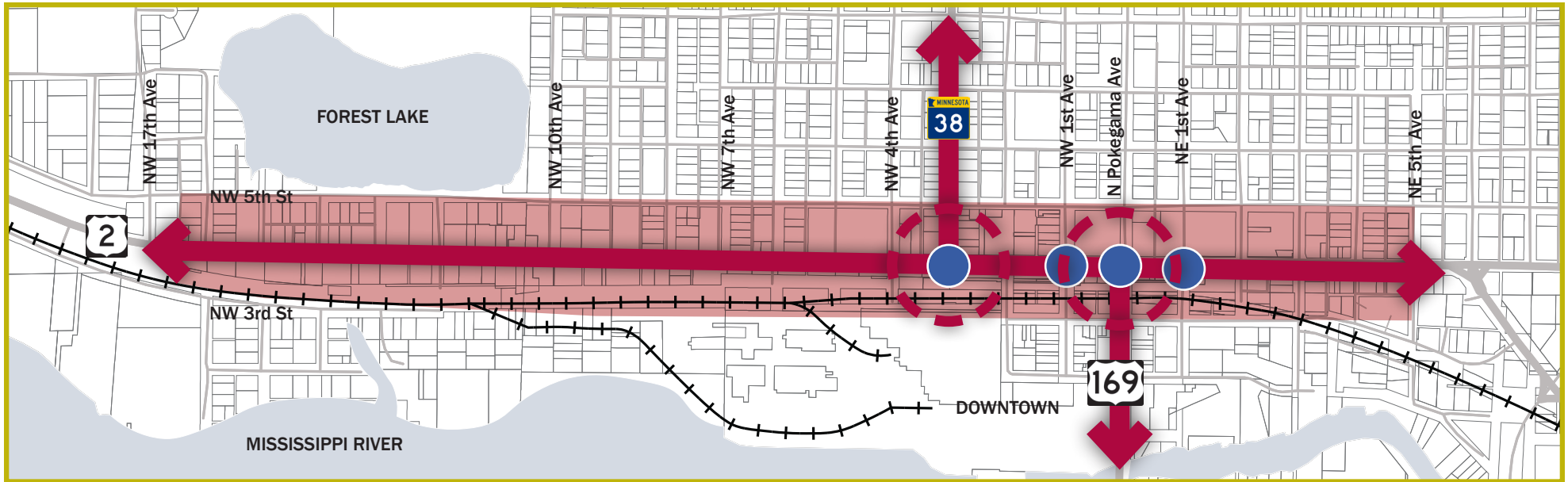
Tourism also plays a significant role in area economics. The average impact of tourism dollars is estimated to be around \$770 per person (2023). That breaks downtown to 64% (493) on lodging 18% (\$138) on retail, 8% (\$65) on restaurants, and 7% (\$55) on attractions.

Providing more destinations and places to stay within the study area could encourage more tourism, longer stays, and higher spending - particularly by those travelers who today area simply passing through Grand Rapids.



Tourist Data: Visit Grand Rapids Visitor Profile 2021-2023 prepared by Zartico

MAJOR CONNECTORS AND DIVIDERS



● Signalized Intersection

■ Study area

--- BNSF railroad alignment

Several US and state highways intersect within the study area and the BNSF active rail line provides freight services to the industrial corridor, which supports the local economy. However, the size and volume of traffic on these corridors creates barriers to passenger vehicles and pedestrians moving within the study area.

Crossing Highway 2 is challenging due to the width of the road, limited number of traffic signals, volume of traffic, and inconsistency of through-streets.

The study area has only four signalized intersections along Highway 2 at NW 3rd Avenue, NW 1st Avenue, Pokegama Avenue (Highway 169), and NE 1st Avenue.

Highway 2 is 70 feet wide with four travel lanes and a center turn lane, which is uncomfortable or difficult for many people to cross and discourages people from walking or biking, especially when combined with the limited number of

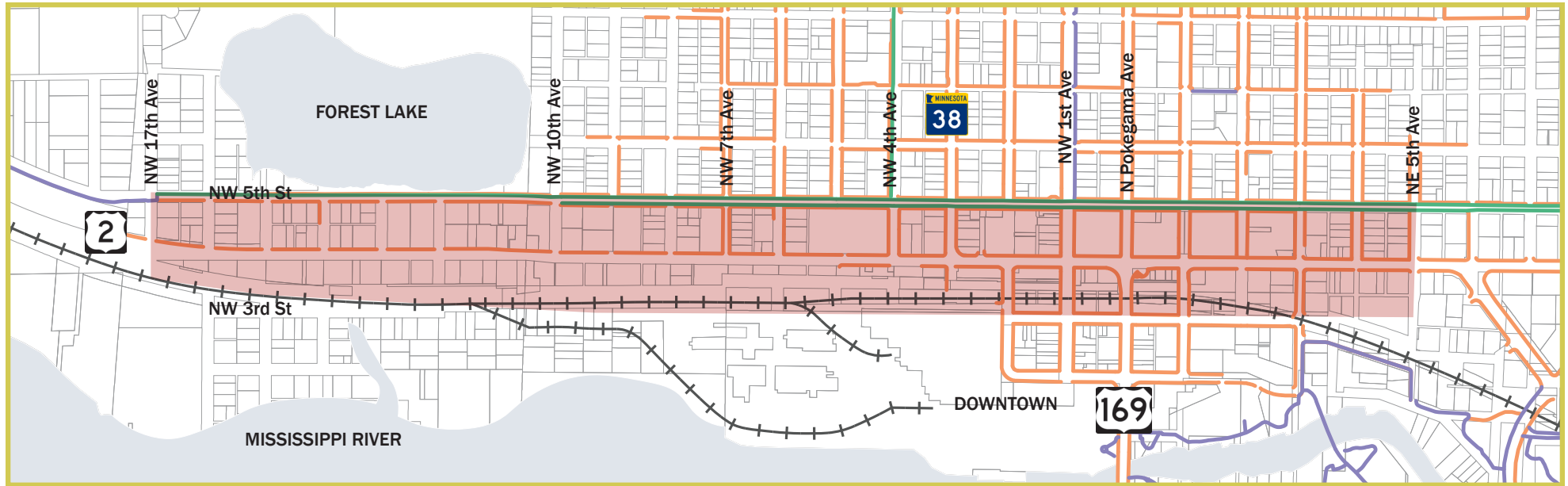
signalized crossing locations.

Average annual daily traffic (AADT) volumes for the project area ranges from 14,900 to 17,700 vehicles per day (2023). Of these vehicles, 6.8% are heavy commercial haulers. Continuing to accommodate these travelers will be necessary to balance with future land use and public realm improvements.

The rail line generally runs along the back of businesses south of Highway 2, but separates access to NW 3rd Street, which provides access to the Blandin Mill, residential areas along the Mississippi River, and the River itself.

There are on average four trains per day along the BNSF Railway through the study area. The typical speed of these trains is 25 mph.

A PARTIAL MULTIMODAL CORRIDOR



The study area has an incomplete sidewalk network. The sidewalks that exist are immediately adjacent to moving traffic. The resulting lack of comfortable and connected pedestrian spaces creates feelings of the corridor being unwelcoming to people walking.

Highway 2 has a continuous sidewalk on the north side of the road but no sidewalk on the south side outside of the Downtown area.

North/south streets in the study area west of 8th Avenue NW do not have sidewalks, which discourages people from walking in these areas. Streets in the study area east of NW 7th Avenue do have sidewalks.

The new on-street bike lanes on NW 5th Street provides an east/west route through the study area and routes along NW 4th Avenue and NW 1st Street provide north/south connectivity. However, limited bike-supportive amenities (such as bike parking) and challenges crossing the highways may discourage people from biking on a regular basis.

The traditional blocks and street grids do provide an opportunity for creating a more complete network and providing walking and biking enhancements.

Study area
 Sidewalk
 Bike trail
 Shared use trail

CRASH DATA

There have been four pedestrian/bicyclist crashes in the last ten years (2014-2023) and one bicyclist crash so far in 2024 (January-June crash data was available at the time data was pulled).

All five of these crashes were in the core Downtown area. Most were due to the driver failing to yield to the pedestrian.

Four of these crashes involved bicycles and one involved a pedestrian. Two resulted in a minor injury, three resulted in a possible injury.



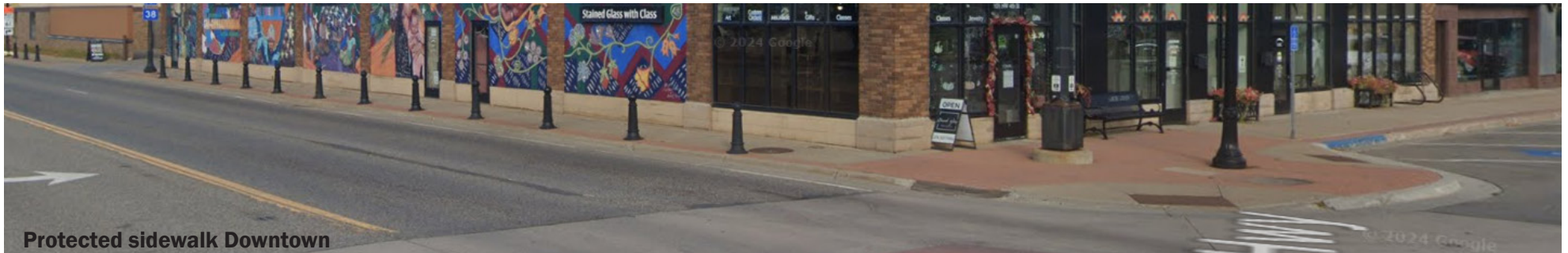
SIDEWALK CONDITIONS



Sidewalk west of Downtown



Missing sidewalk at cross street

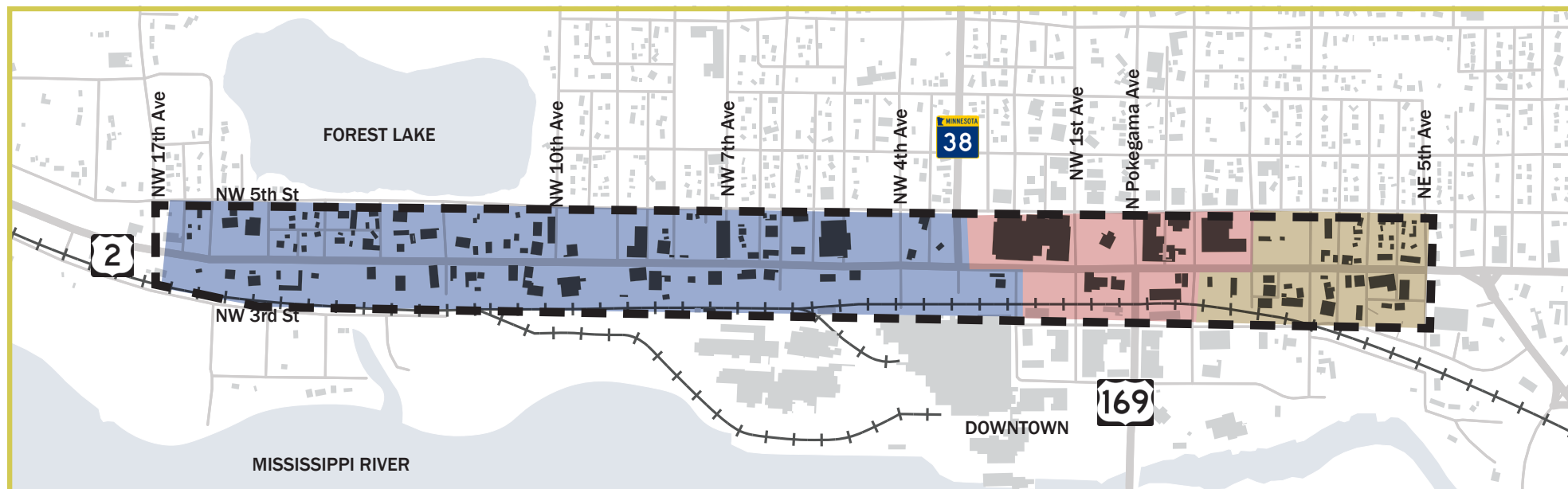


Protected sidewalk Downtown

As noted above, sidewalks along Highway 2 west of Downtown are only present on the north side. The 8-foot sidewalk is located next to the road with no boulevard or on-street parking to separate pedestrians from traffic, which creates a very uncomfortable and unsafe setting.

Pedestrian amenities are inconsistent within the study area. In the Downtown area there are streetscape elements such as seating, trash cans, trees, public art, and landscaping. However, west of NW 6th Avenue, there are no pedestrian amenities which reinforces the auto-oriented nature of the area and discourages walking or biking.

BUILT FORM & CHARACTER AREAS



The study areas can be broken into three distinct areas, based on current development pattern and land uses:

■ West Character Area ■ East Corridor Character Area
■ Downtown Character Area

West

The west half of the study area is dominated by the Blandin Paper Mill and a mix of 1-story industrial, highway commercial, and related uses. Buildings are either right off the road or have a parking lot in front. Many lots could be described as underdeveloped with a combination of surface parking, outdoor storage, or open grassy areas.

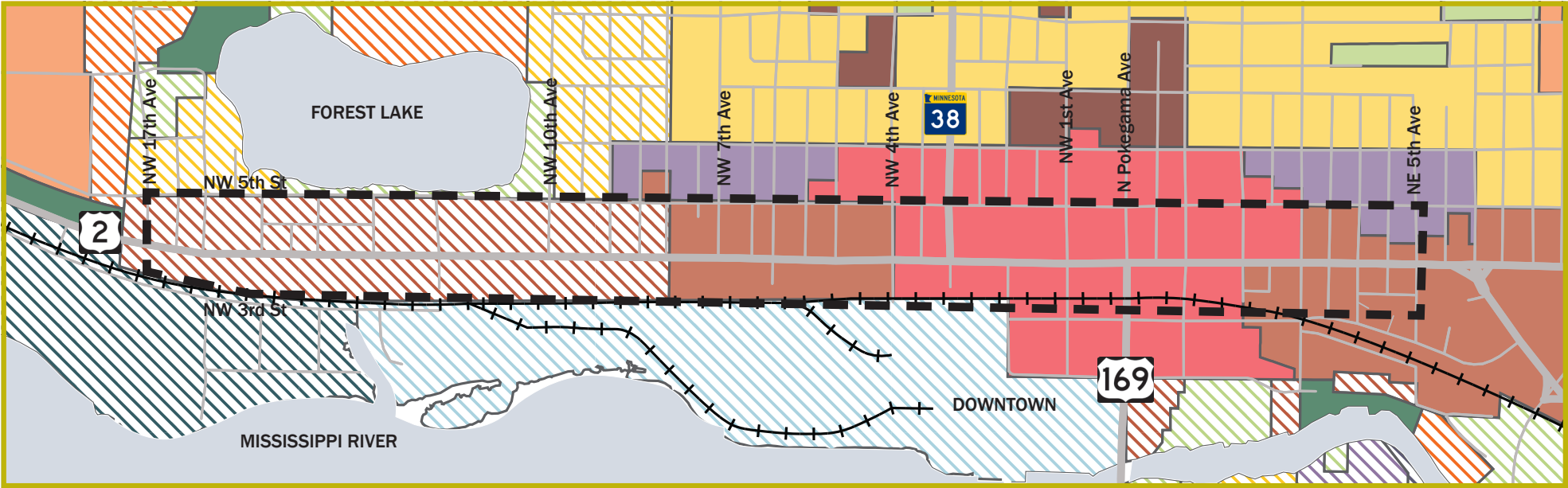
Downtown

The traditional downtown area with two- to four-story buildings has a mix of commercial, government and office uses. Many buildings are not set back from the road other than the sidewalk and on-street parking. Some lots have surface parking lots or paved spaces.

East

The east end of the study area has a mix of 1-story highway commercial and limited industrial uses. Buildings are right next to the road with side surface parking. Many lots could be described as underdeveloped with a combination of surface parking, or open grass/vacant.

CURRENT ZONING



Parcels within the study areas are zoned into one of the following districts: Central Business, General Business, Limited Business, General Industrial, and Public Use.

Accessory apartments are permitted in the General Business district and permitted with restriction in the Central Business district.

Business and Industrial districts permit (with or without restriction) a typical breadth of uses appropriate for each district. Permitted uses can be referenced in the [Zoning Code's Table of Permitted Uses](#).

- Public Use

Conservancy

Industrial Park

Central Business

Limited Business

General Business

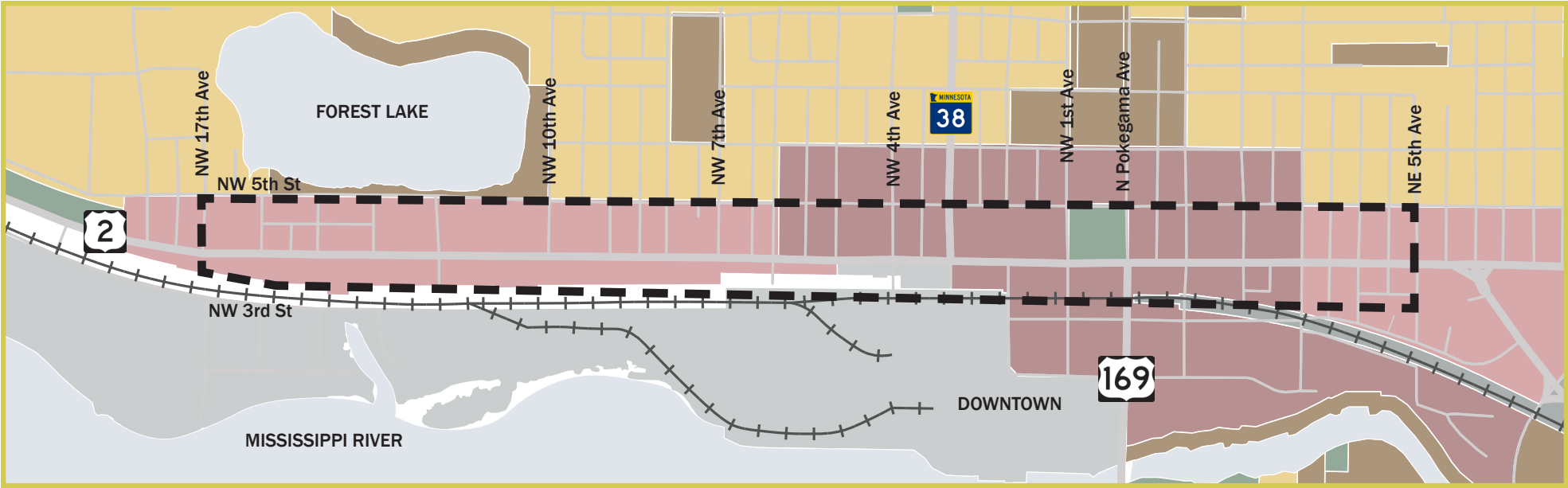
One-Family Residence

One and Two-Family Residence

Multi-Family Residence (High Density)

Denotes Shoreland zoning applied

FUTURE LAND USE GUIDANCE

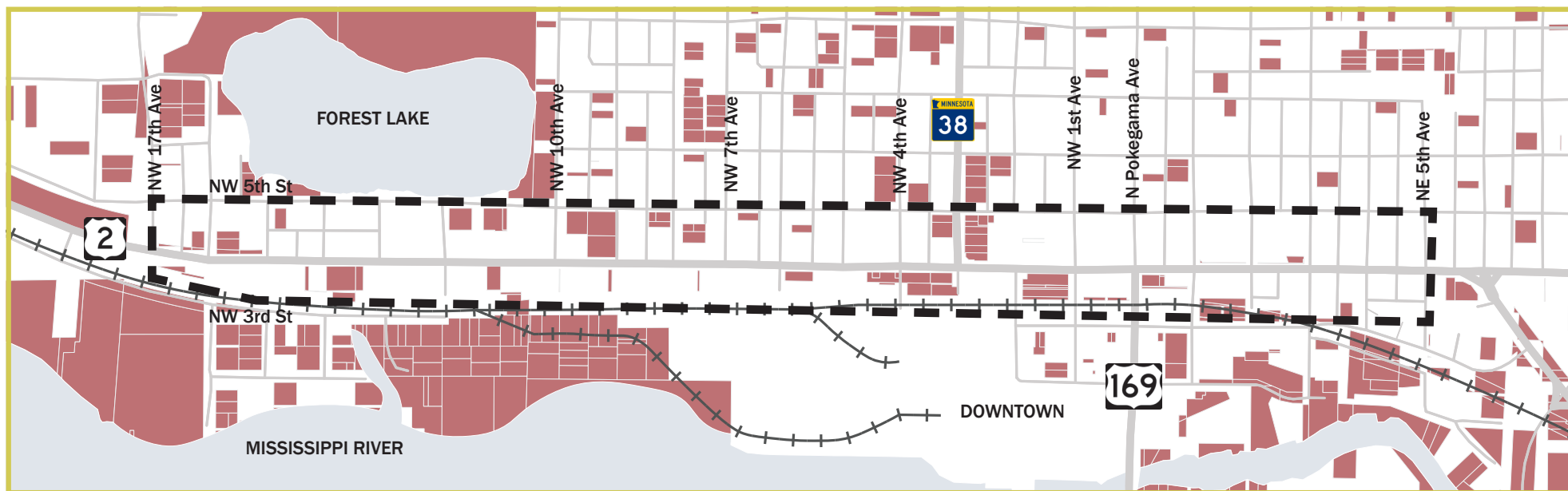


Future guidance for the Highway 2 corridor and the surrounding study area intends to support continued commercial and industrial uses. Specific use categories include Industrial-Traditional, Highway Commercial, and Downtown Mixed-Use. Old Central School and the surrounding park are guided as Park & Recreation.

These land use patterns would continue to support generally auto-oriented character uses on the west end of the study area, while transitioning to a typical downtown and mixed-use character around NW 6th Avenue.

- Rural Residential
- Suburban Residential
- Traditional Neighborhood
- Multifamily Residential
- Institutional/Civic
- Resource Management
- Parks & Recreation
- Transportation & Utilities
- Downtown Mixed-Use
- Highway Commercial
- Industrial-Traditional

VACANT PARCELS



An analysis of vacant parcels could help to identify areas that may be easier to redevelop because they do not require demolition of an existing building. Combining this data with property values and known contamination would assist in determining the potential cost to prepare the site for redevelopment.

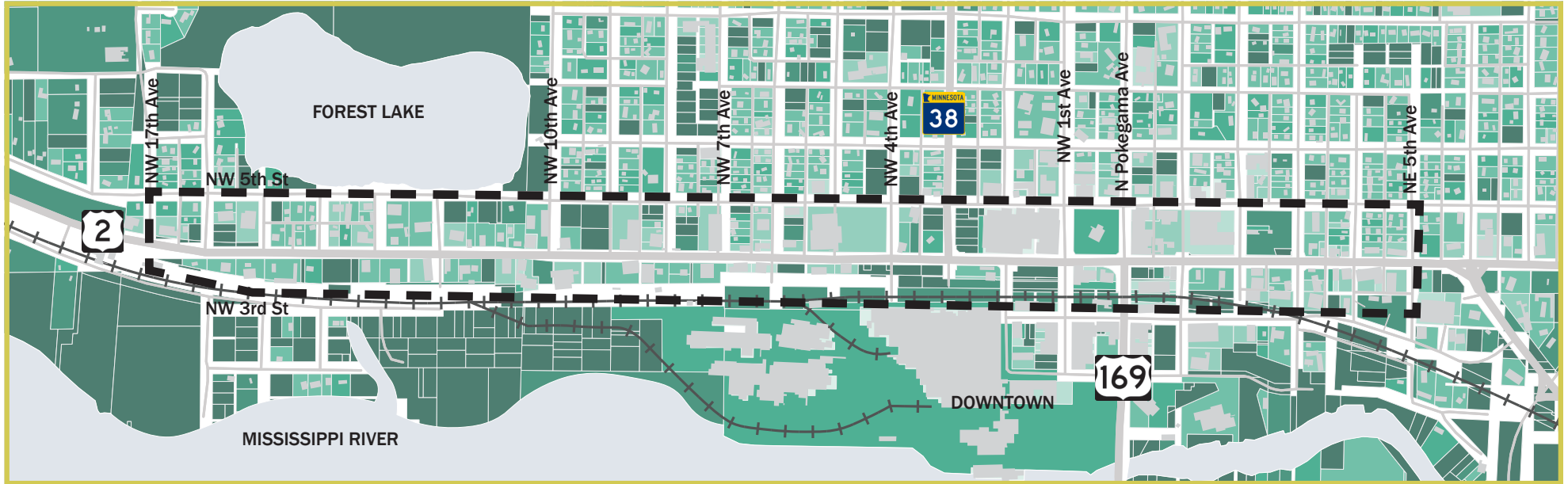
This map shows parcels that do not have improvements such as a building or parking lot that is in use.

Some of the vacant parcels are public open space or parks, such as the ones between Forest Lake and NW 10th Avenue, where Blandin Beach is located.

Other parcels may not have improvements but are being actively used, such as an area between NW 3rd Street and the Mississippi River that is used for storage of timber for Blandin's paper mill.

In addition to vacant parcels, there are empty or underutilized buildings, especially in the western part of the study area.

LOT COVERAGE

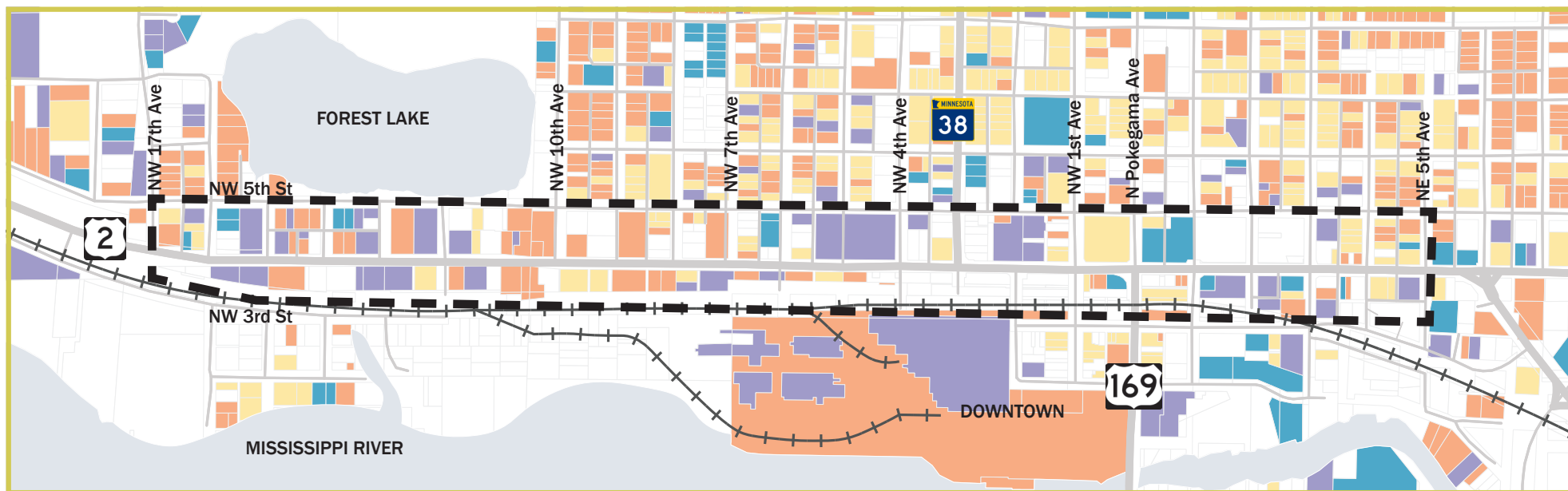


Lot coverage indicates the percentage of a parcel that is occupied by a building. Darker shading indicates areas that have a minimal number of buildings, while lighter shading indicates a higher level of development. This data does not reflect parking lots or other impervious surfaces such as patios or sidewalks. This map indicates:

- The land closest to the intersection of Highways 169 and 2 have the highest intensity of development.
- The area west of Highway 38 has the lowest intensity of uses.
- Parcels that are just parking lot and do not have a building on them show up as dark green oasis in otherwise high density areas.
- There is a lot of vacant and underutilized land south and west of the study area between Highway 2 and the Mississippi River that may be considered for redevelopment or different land uses.

- Vacant
- 5% or less covered
- 5 to 10% covered
- 10 to 25% covered
- 25 to 50% covered
- 50 to 75% covered
- 75 to 100 % covered

AGE OF BUILDINGS



The age of a building can indicate the condition of the building, the level of investment that may be needed to improve the building, or if it is adaptable to other uses. Older buildings may contain hazardous materials such as lead or asbestos that would need to be mitigated before demolition or rehabilitation.

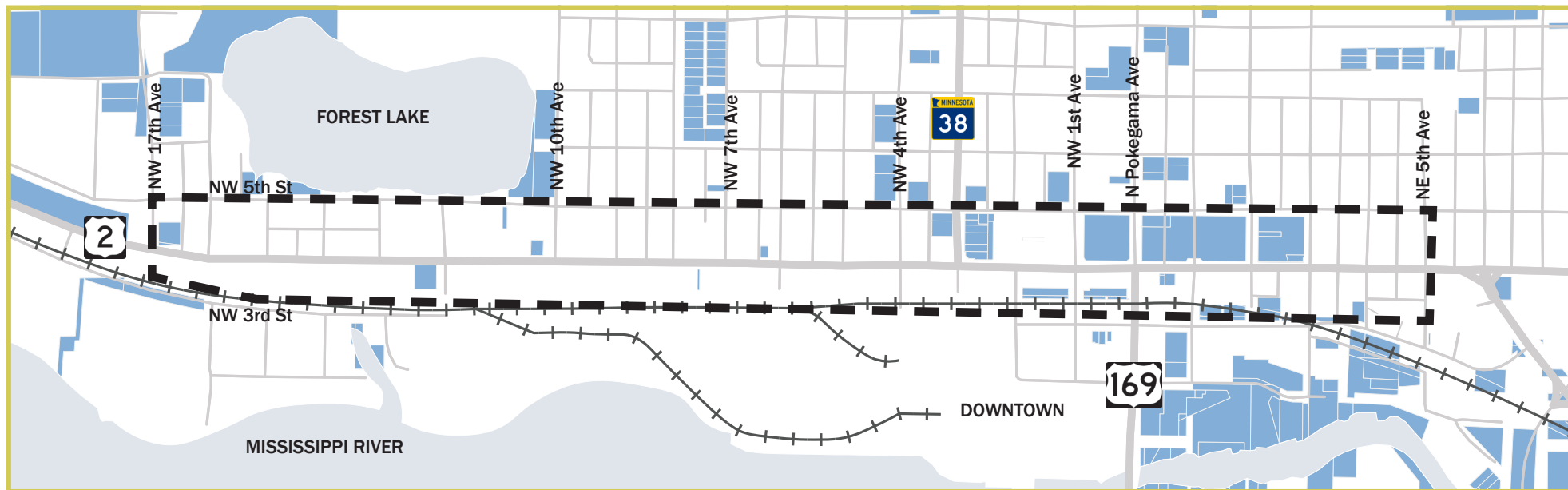
There is an area between NW 12th Avenue and NW 7th Avenue where all of the the buildings are 55 to 75 years old. This area also has a significant number of vacant parcels that are vacant or underutilized parking lots.

Between NW 17th Avenue and NW 12th Avenue, the buildings are a mix of mid to late century buildings for auto-oriented businesses that were built at a time when the roadway did not carry as much traffic and there was room for on-street parking and sidewalks.

The area east of Highway 169/N Pokegama Avenue between 5th Street and the Mississippi River has seen the most recent investment with buildings such as the Blandin Foundation, Itasca County Government Center, and the Grand Rapids Area Library.

- Vacant/no data
- Pre-War (1939 and earlier)
- Mid-Century (1940 to 1969)
- Late-Century (1970 to 1999)
- Millennium (2000 to 2024)

TAX-EXEMPT PROPERTIES

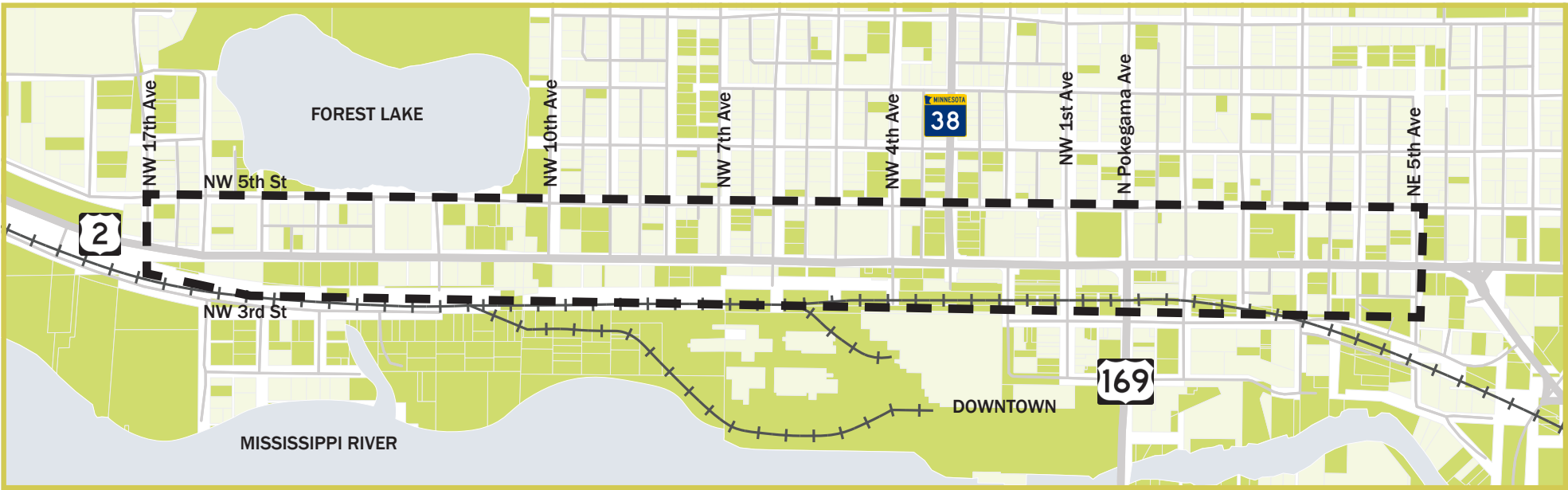


The map above identifies parcels that are tax-exempt, which means they have public or non-profit uses that do not pay property taxes. Uses may include city, county, or state government buildings; places of worship; non-profit organizations; or public housing. Analyzing this data can indicate if there are areas that are generating more or less in property taxes which then go to support public services.

There is a concentration of tax-exempt properties near the intersection of Highways 169 and 2 to the east, between NW 5th Street and the Mississippi River. However, these are larger employers that bring people and customers to the area that then support area businesses.

The tax-exempt parcels near Highway 38 and NW 5th Street show the public parking lots. While they provide a public use, they do not generate property taxes.

LAND AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL PARCEL VALUE



LAND AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL PARCEL VALUE

Analyzing the land value compared to the total value of a parcel can indicate areas that are underutilized. Parcels that are darker indicate that the land is more valuable than the building that sits on it. These are parcels that may be ideal for redevelopment.

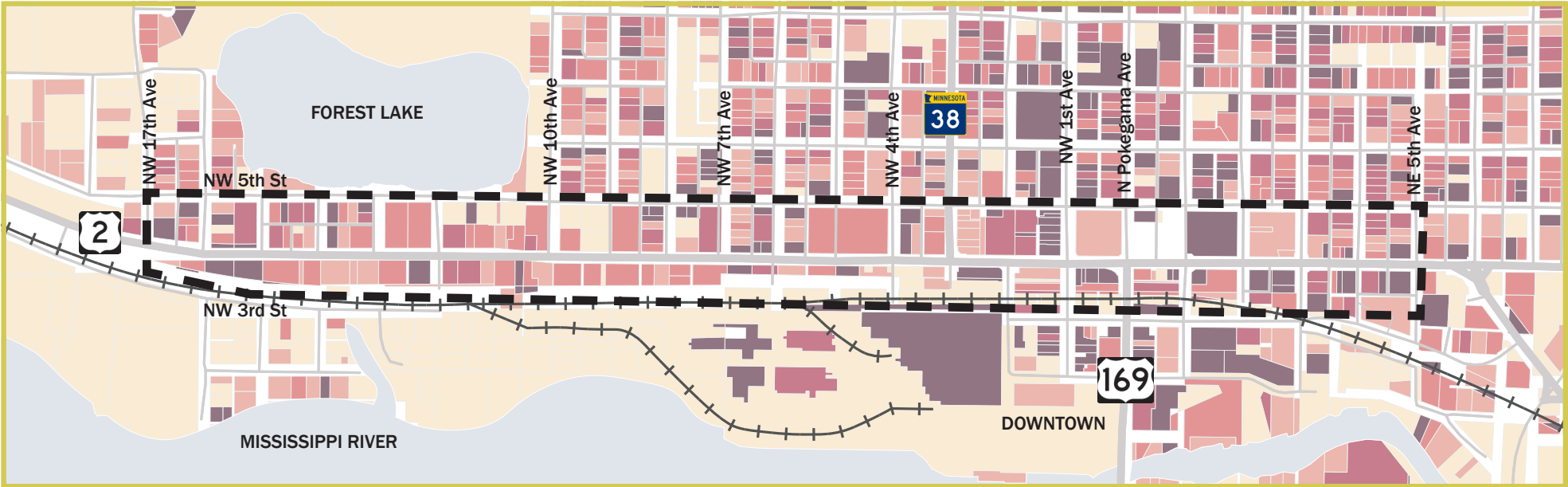
Vacant parcels, those with no building or those with a parking lot are shown in darker green.

Parcels with older commercial buildings, such as the area between NW NW 7th Avenue and NW 12th Avenue, are shown in green, indicating that the land is more valuable than the building.

Much of the area between the railroad tracks and the Mississippi River are dark green, which is outside of the study area. This could be due to the minimal amount of buildings or improvements on the site as well as the fact that water frontage is usually considered desirable and therefore higher value.

- Land is more than 50% of total parcel value
- Land is 50% or less of total parcel value

MARKET VALUE PER ACRE



Market value per acre was analyzed by dividing the estimated market value of each parcel by the size of the parcel, in acres. This map shows the resulting market value per acre with lighter areas indicating lower current value and darker areas having higher value per acre.

Lighter areas with lower value per acre generate less property tax, while darker shaded parcels generate more in property taxes per acre.

Areas with lower property value per area also indicate areas that would cost less to acquire or assemble parcels for redevelopment.

There are areas on the west end of the corridor where there are concentrations of parcels that are less than \$500,000 per acre that would be least costly to acquire and could generate the biggest increase in tax revenues through redevelopment.

- \$250k per acre or less
- \$250k to \$500k per acre
- \$500k to \$750k per acre
- \$750k to \$1M per acre
- \$1M or more per acre



WEST CHARACTER AREA

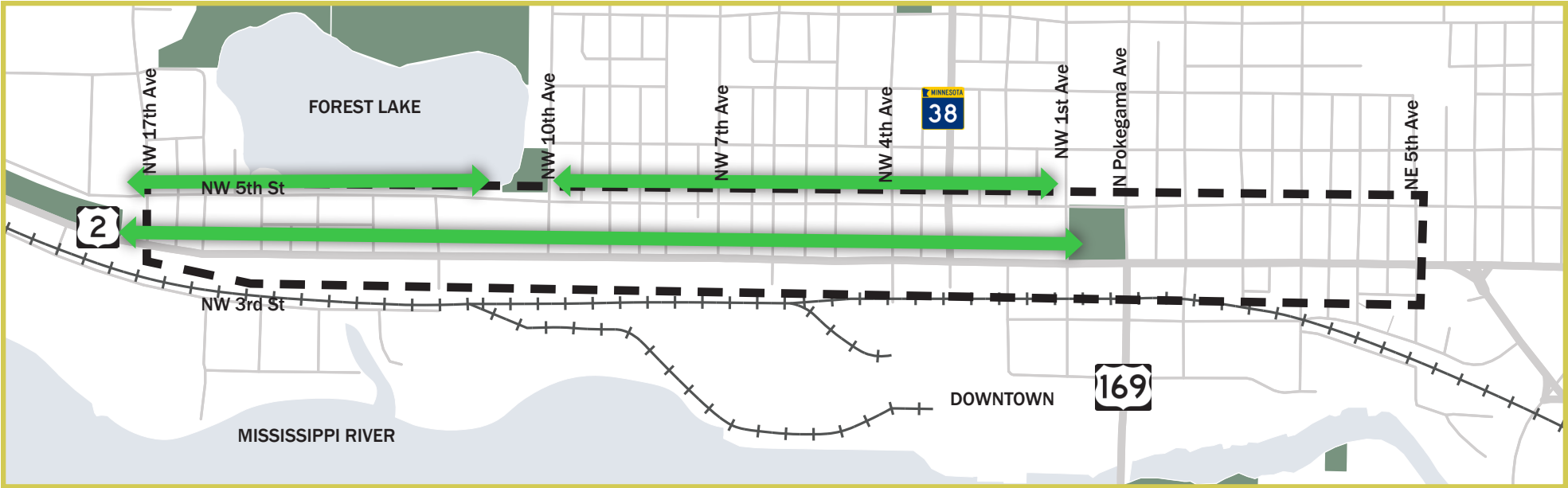


DOWNTOWN CHARACTER AREA



EAST CHARACTER AREA

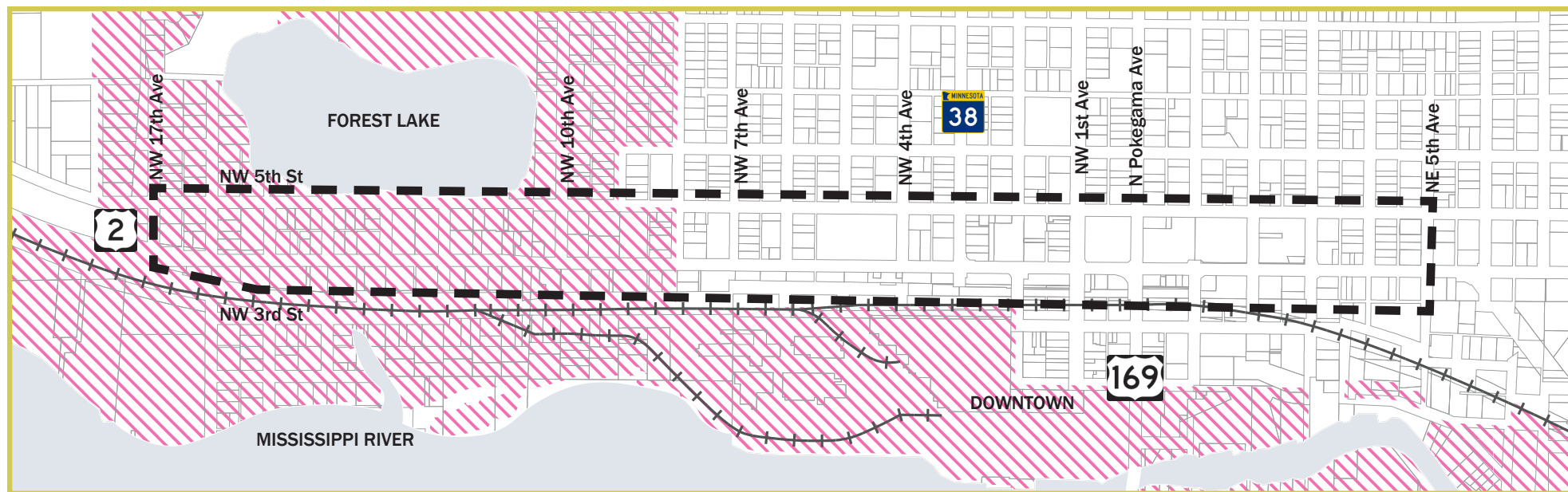




Modest parks and public open spaces surround the study area, including the veterans memorial, walking trails along the Mississippi River, Wayside Park, and the Blandin Foundations native plantings. The most significant open space is the grounds of the Old Central School block which functions as an ornamental community lawn.

Wayside Park, Blandin Beach, the Old Central School, and other small “pockets” of green space could be connected with a linear green corridor.

WATER ACCESS AND SHORELAND PROTECTION

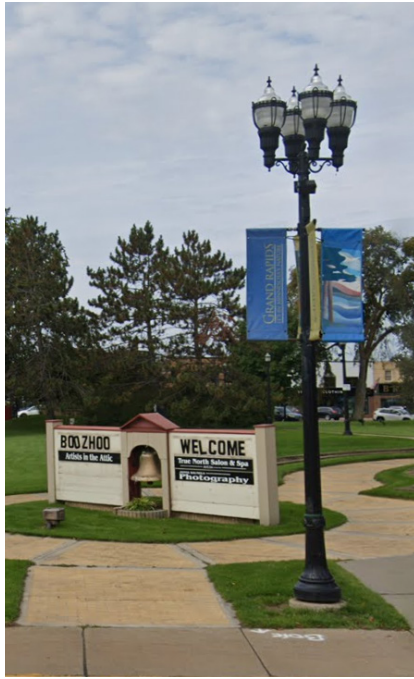


The western half of the study area and the area between the study area and Mississippi River are impacted by shoreland regulations which will impact how those areas can be developed.

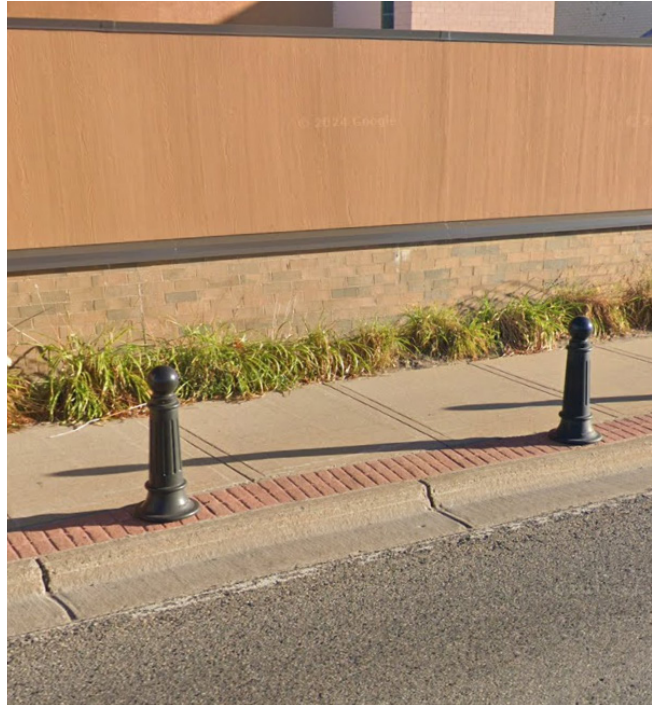
There are a limited number of public access point to Forest Lake, which limits the recreational use of the resources. There is one public access on Forest Lake.

- Lakes, Mississippi River
- Shoreland zones (zoning and statutory protections apply)

STREETSCAPE AMENITIES



Downtown Pedestrian Lighting



Downtown Bollards and Limited Vegetation

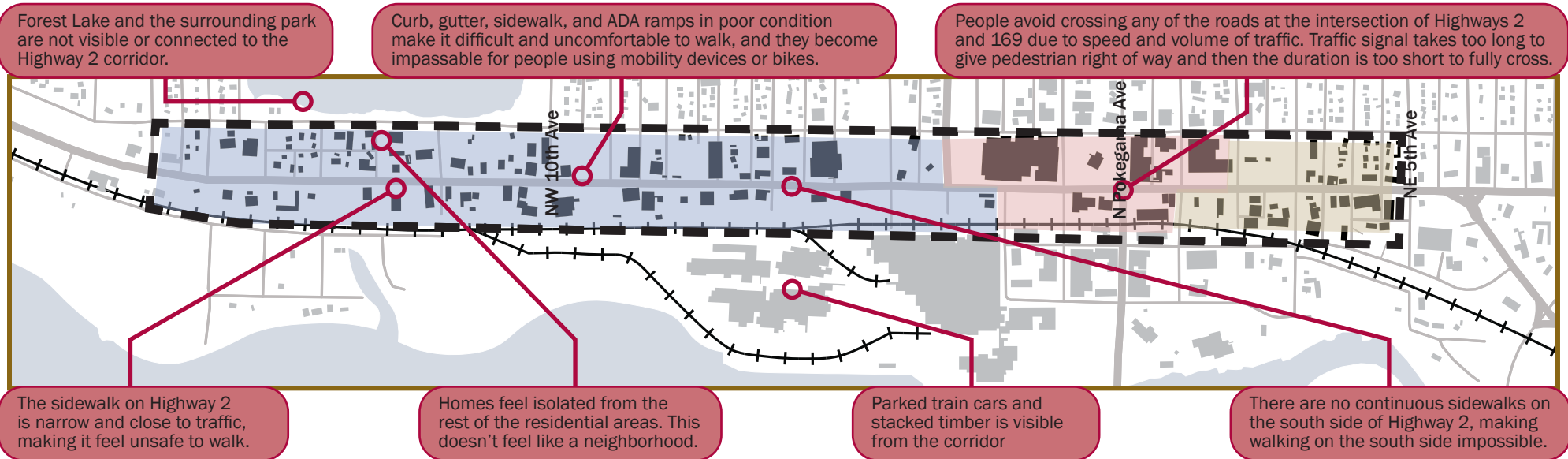


Standard Corridor Lighting in the Sidewalk

- As mentioned above, the Downtown area has some streetscape elements, especially on the Old Central School site. However, most of the study area does not have defined streetscape amenities such as trees or other shading elements.
- Streetscape in the Downtown segment of the study area consists of ornamental pedestrian-scale lighting, metal benches, and planters in front of private businesses. No boulevard trees and limited wayfinding exists in Downtown. Sidewalks are concrete with some decorative brick patterns and occasional stamped poems.
- The east and west ends of the study area do not have streetscape amenities other than auto-oriented 30' light poles which are located within the sidewalk. Where present, sidewalks are concrete. The absence of amenities and proximity of the sidewalk to vehicle traffic creates an uncomfortable pedestrian experience and discourages walking.

ISSUES

As part of the existing conditions review, residents, businesses, and property owners were invited to help identify critical issues within the study area. These items are shown here.



West

- A lot of vacant lots, parking lots, and unmaintained open spaces.
- Lack of landscaping, public art, or visual improvements but a lot of business signs clutter the view.
- Businesses that are open have little activity and exteriors could use freshening up or modernization to be more welcoming.
- No signalized or marked pedestrian crossings; people run across the street during break in traffic.
- Vehicles exceeded posted speed; sounds of trucks accelerating or braking and sirens make it loud and unpleasant to be in.
- Businesses are too far apart so it doesn't feel like a cohesive business district.

Downtown

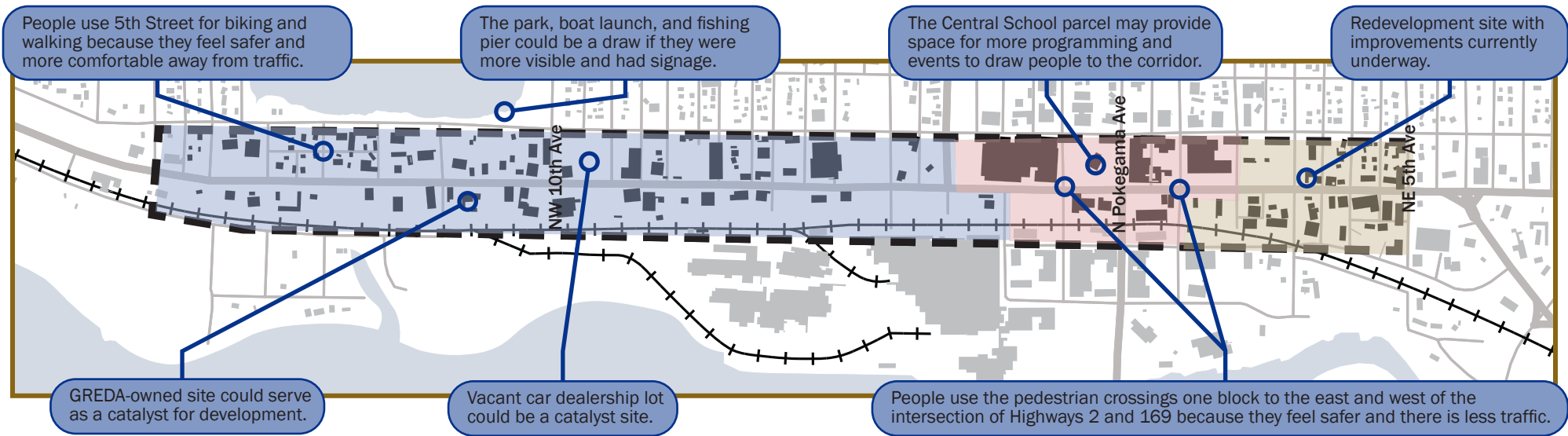
- Area is constrained by the Mississippi River, Highways 169 and 2, and railroad, making it difficult to navigate in a car, on a bike, or walking.
- Sidewalks are wider but still immediately adjacent to traffic so it feels unsafe and uncomfortable to walk along Highway 2.
- Limited amount of housing in the downtown area.
- Shopping mall recently lost larger tenant so some vacant space.

East

- Traffic signals take too long to give pedestrians the right of way and then they turn too soon before people can completely cross.
- Redevelopment and reinvestment is occurring slowly.
- Sidewalks are narrow and immediately adjacent to traffic, however there are more people walking in this area to local businesses and restaurants so it doesn't feel as unsafe or isolated.

OPPORTUNITIES

Residents, businesses, and property owners were additionally asked to call out potential opportunities to improve connectivity and public space, and to help identify sites for redevelopment. Their comments are shown here.



West

Vacant sites and parking lots could be an opportunity for starting infill development.

Corridor study provides opportunity to slow down traffic, widen and improve sidewalks, and add pedestrian crossings.

Downtown

Larger employers such as the County, City, Blandin Foundation, and Blandin Paper Mill have a large number of employees that could use more services, restaurants, and retail options within walking distance.

Several redevelopment sites underway including a co-op and new restaurants.

East

There are redevelopment projects currently underway in this area, which may catalyze developer interest in building on neighboring, vacant parcels.

Existing development in this area is relatively new compared to the western end of the corridor and many of the nearby establishments include service retail. Future developments/tenants here could benefit from existing customers in the area.



RECOMMENDATIONS

LOCALLY-BALANCED HIGHWAY CORRIDORS

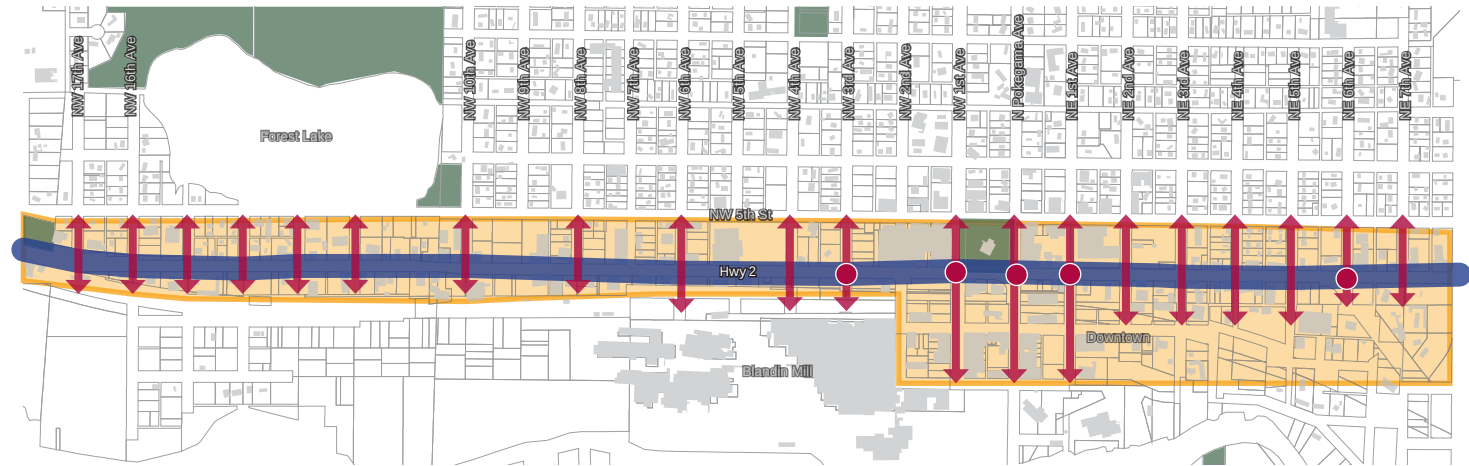
SERVING GRAND RAPIDS AND THE BROADER REGION

Highway 2 plays a significant role in Grand Rapids, offering regional connectivity and visibility through the heart of the city. And yet, the roadway is also a significant divider between the north and south sides of the Downtown area, as its design promotes drivers getting through the city as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The future roadway reconstruction project provides an opportunity to reconsider the long-term role of Highway 2 within Grand Rapids: should it continue to primarily support regional through-traffic that does not benefit the city, or can its design and functions be re-balanced to also support local needs?

Corridors like Highway 2 are typically characterized by a wide design with multiple travel lanes, high-speed traffic, buildings separated from the street by large parking lots, lack of trees and vegetation, and narrow sidewalks adjacent to the highway that don't invite people to walk to or between destinations.

A locally-balanced highway corridor can continue to support regional traffic needs, while benefiting the surrounding community by providing safe and comfortable local access, support for the existing business community, and space for a vibrant and connected public realm that welcomes people to Downtown Grand Rapids.



LOCAL ACCESS

Locally-balanced highways support both regional through traffic, and comfortable local accessibility.

The Highway's current five lanes of traffic promote high traffic speeds that makes local access and crossings, particular by walking or biking, very difficult and unsafe. There are no controlled intersections west of NW 3rd Ave.

Through a redesign, the corridor and adjacent streets can be designed to calm through-traffic within the Downtown area, enhance local access, and provide safer crossing locations.

BUSINESS GROWTH

Locally-balanced corridors are designed to move regional traffic, while inviting travelers to stop, shop, and spend time in the community.

Despite many businesses located along or surrounding the corridor, access is often difficult due to the roadway design and high-speed traffic.

A calmer corridor with safe, convenient crossings encourages residents and visitors to spend more time dining, shopping and recreating. This increase in activity can lead to more local spending at businesses, and incentivizes new economic development investments.

PUBLIC REALM

Locally-balanced corridors offer clear wayfinding for through-traffic, while providing a welcoming public realm.

About 75% of the existing Highway 2 right-of-way is used for vehicle traffic, with very limited space for streetscape, comfortable sidewalks, or features like art and wayfinding that uniquely distinguish the Downtown area.

Through a redesign, the corridor can be rebuilt with more space for trees, landscaping, pedestrian-scale lighting, buffered sidewalk, and local wayfinding.

LOCALLY-BALANCED HIGHWAY CORRIDORS

THE HIGHWAY “EDGE” AND PUBLIC REALM

A locally-balanced highway provides additional space to enhance the right-of-way (ROW) edges between Highway 2 and private development.

In Downtown today, the highway edge offers a 10' sidewalk along the north side, and 6'–8' on the south side. The sidewalk typically consists of lighting, with limited other features. Along the rest of the corridor, the highway edge typically includes a 6'–8' sidewalk with elevated light poles. West of Downtown, this sidewalk is only present on the north side.

A redesign of Highway 2 towards a locally-balanced design to repurpose portions of the 80' ROW to improve the edges and public realm. These improvements should enhance the comfort of those walking along the highway, economic activity, and overall aesthetics.

Edge design decisions along Highway 2 must consider current maintenance practices, emerging best practices such as low salt applications, and streetscape material lifespans, all while balancing the goal of elevating the sense of place and aesthetics of the corridor.

Existing Edge: Downtown



The Highway edge in Downtown today includes 8'–10' sidewalks, with pedestrian-scale lighting.

Existing Edge: Rest of Corridor



The Highway edge in the rest of the corridor today includes 6'–8' sidewalks, with 30' lighting located within the sidewalk.

Recommended: Downtown 5-lane segment (left) and 3-lane (right)



In the anticipated 5-lane segments in Downtown (between NW and NE 1st Avenues), a balanced edge maintains the colored sidewalk edge, and adds decorative bollards for safety. In the 3-lane segments the sidewalk is widened to 12', introducing space for signage, planters, and other amenities.



Recommended: Goods and Services (left) and 10th Ave Node (right)



In the Goods and Services segment, a balanced edge includes an 8' sidewalk on both sides of the corridor, using updated setbacks for trees (see page 56). Within the 10th Avenue Node, the sidewalk is widened to 12' on the north side of the Highway, with pedestrian-scale lighting and decorative bollards for safety.

DOWNTOWN

Downtown will continue to be the centerpiece of the greater Grand Rapids community. It is the economic and social engine of the region, providing a concentration of places to work and gather. Thanks to its unique character, existing resources, and redevelopment opportunities, Downtown will continue growing into a thriving mixed-use destination for working, living, accessing government, dining, and gathering.

Downtown will also continue to be the center of County and local government, as it is home to the Itasca County Government Center and Jail, Grand Rapids City Hall, and the Grand Rapids Area Library. These civic places provide permanent, anchor users within Downtown.

Building on prior planning efforts, the plan affirms opportunities for redevelopment, identifies improvements to how people move around Downtown in relation to Highway 2, and outlines enhancements for the public realm.

Downtown Grand Rapids will continue to be the heart of the community—the center of activity for gathering, working, and living.



DOWNTOWN

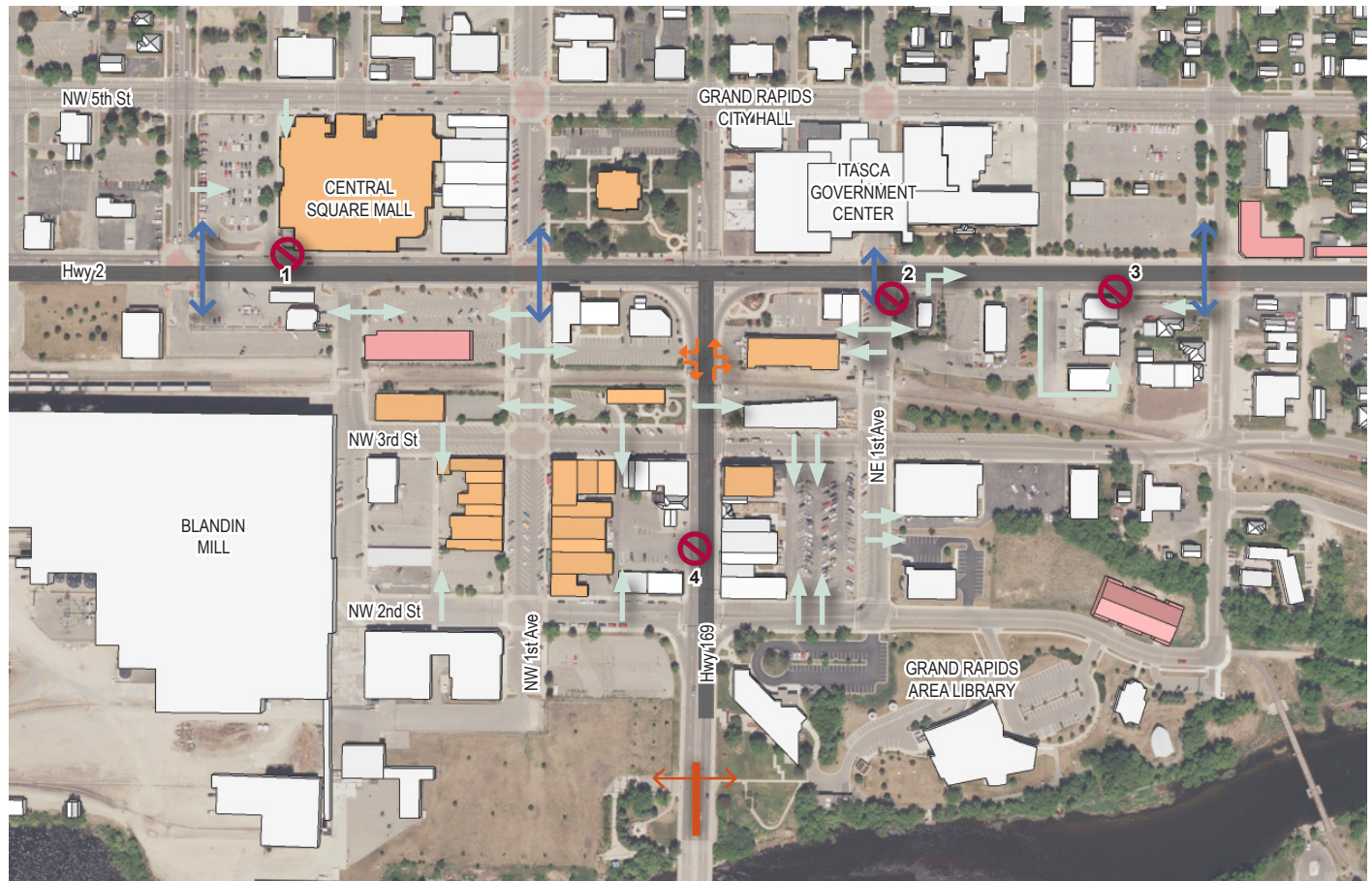
	TODAY					FUTURE			
Places to Work	●	●	●	○	Places to Work	●	●	●	●
Places to Play	●	●	○	○	Places to Play	●	●	●	○
Places to Live	●	○	○	○	Places to Live	●	●	●	○
People-Oriented	●	●	○	○	People-Oriented	●	●	●	○
Auto-Oriented	●	●	○	○	Auto-Oriented	●	●	○	○

DOWNTOWN

ACCESS AND CIRCULATION

Circulation around Downtown will remain oriented around Highways 2 and 169, each acting as perpendicular “spines” of the transportation network. As future improvements to Highway 2 are considered, there are opportunities to rethink the broader access and circulation in Downtown.

Where feasible, property access should shift off Highways 2 and 169 to adjacent local streets, while consolidating access points. This removes conflict areas (opportunities for crashes) for all travelers, and will provide more comfortable circulation for those walking and biking. While doing this, a design hierarchy should be applied to Downtown streets. This hierarchy should establish streets whose design is either balanced, or people-oriented.



KEY OUTCOMES

Property access is shifted from Highways 2 and 169 to side streets, and consolidated, whenever possible.

Structure and/or facade improvements (from 2023 DT Plan)

Proposed redevelopment site (from 2023 DT Plan)



Recommended Highway 2 pedestrian crossing location



Recommended Right-In Right-Out



Vehicle point of access



Recommended vehicle access closure

1. Central Square Mall mid-block entry
2. Edward Jones northern-most entry on NE 1st Avenue
3. Circle K access onto Highway 2
4. Wells Fargo parking access only Highway 169

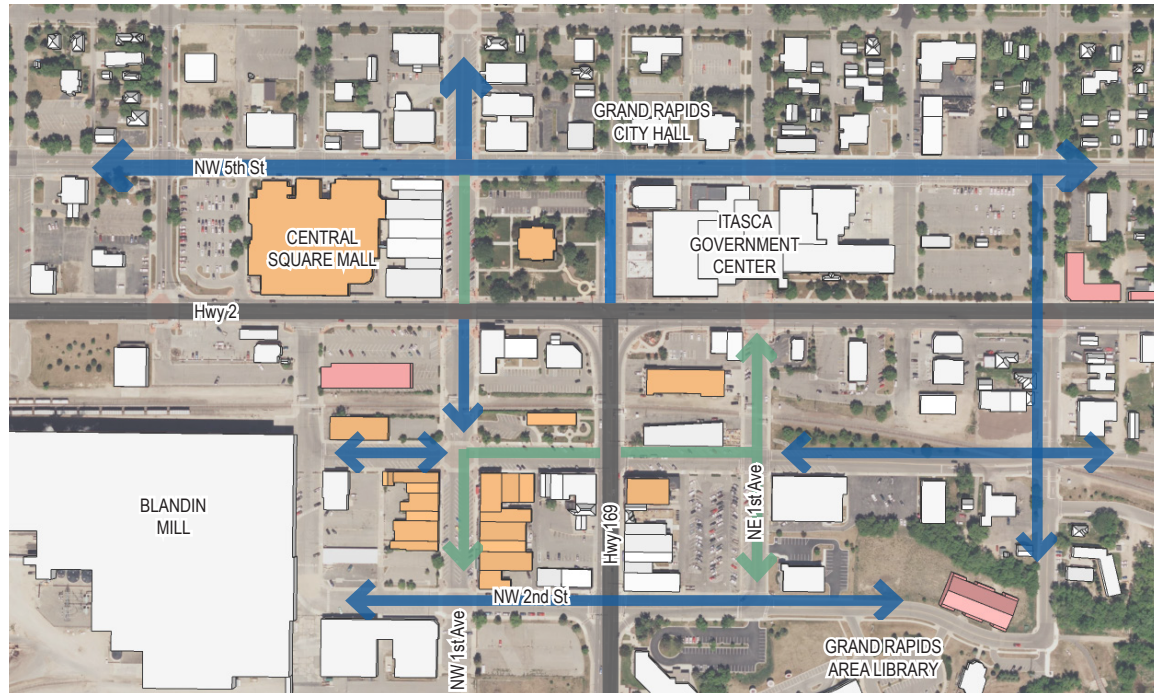
Center median, downtown gateway, and pedestrian crossing location

DOWNTOWN

STREET HIERARCHY

As future improvements to Highway 2 are considered, there are opportunities to rethink the broader access and circulation in Downtown.

Part of this rethinking is to apply a design hierarchy to Downtown streets. This hierarchy informs the role of streets, and their subsequent design. Within Downtown, streets should either be balanced in their use by vehicles and people, or people-oriented in that they tip the balance in favor of people.



- Structure and/or facade improvements (from 2023 DT Plan)
- Proposed redevelopment site (from 2023 DT Plan)
- Balanced street design
- People-oriented street design

KEY OUTCOMES

A clear street hierarchy informs street design and operation decisions.

Balanced Streets



Balanced streets are those that comfortably accommodate both vehicle and pedestrian travel. They are the primary streets of circulation Downtown.

People-Oriented Streets



People-oriented streets are designed to prioritize the comfortable use and movement of people. With wide and amenitized sidewalks, they encourage people to walk between destinations, offer space for outdoor dining, and can be shut down for events.

DOWNTOWN

DOWNTOWN STREETS

NE 1st Avenue and the southern block of NW 1st Avenue offer strong opportunities to rebalance the roadway design.

NE 1st Avenue is a direct connector between the Itasca County Government Center and Grand Rapids City Hall, to the Grand Rapids Area Library, Mississippi River, and riverfront trails. NW 1st Avenue is lined with active commercial uses, which could support the creation of a destination street for public gathering.

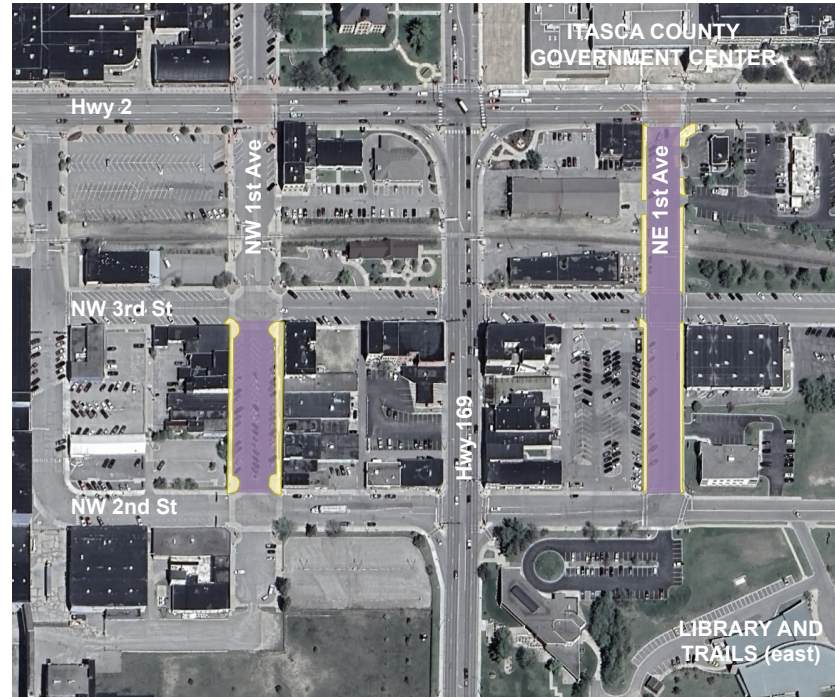
Redesigning each street would encourage more comfortable circulation within Downtown from Highway 2, while supporting area businesses.

KEY OUTCOMES

A redesigned NE 1st Avenue connects civic and recreational uses for walking and biking.

A redesigned NW 1st Avenue block creates space for events and gathering, and an enhanced public realm.

Existing



Space for vehicles (today) Space for people (today)

NE 1st Avenue Today



NW 1st Avenue Today



The design balance of each street today heavily favors vehicles, rather than space for people.

NE 1st Avenue Redesign



NE 1st Avenue is redesigned with wider sidewalks on the west side and shared use trails on the east to promote connectivity between civic and recreation uses.

NW 1st Avenue Redesign



NW 1st Avenue is redesigned with parallel parking and a center median, which offers space for events, trees, and other streetscape amenities. The median could be used for angled parking during non-event times.

DOWNTOWN

DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Downtown has several sites that would benefit from either redevelopment or building improvements. New development will support a horizontal and vertical mix of uses anchored primarily by high-density housing. These provide much-needed housing units, while generating more year-round activity in Downtown.

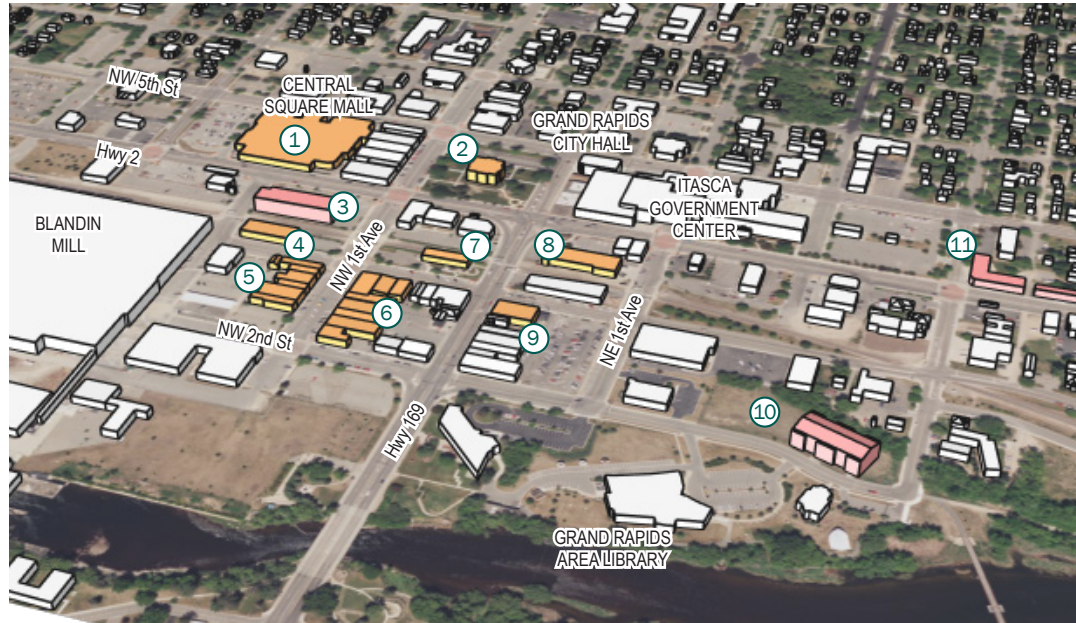
While redevelopment will be privately-driven, the City can play a role in Downtown redevelopment and building improvements. Helping to market sites, providing supportive public infrastructure, offering facade grant programs, and creating clear development expectations will encourage redevelopment in Downtown.

The 2023 Downtown Plan identified 10 Downtown development or improvement sites within the area of study for this plan. This plan identifies one additional site, the NE 1st Avenue parking lot.

KEY OUTCOMES

New mixed-use development within underutilized lots.

More places to live, work, gather, and recreate year-round.



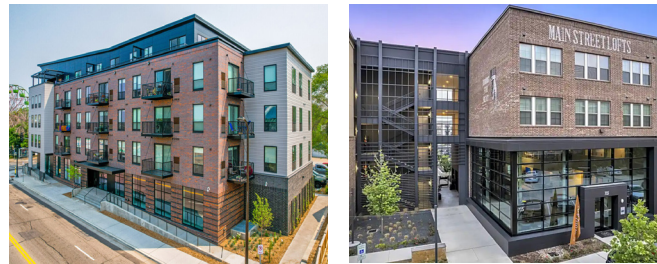
Structure and/or facade improvements
(from 2023 DT Plan)

Proposed redevelopment site
(from 2023 DT Plan)

Development Opportunity

Locations (2023 DT Plan
Opportunity Site Number)

1. Central Square Mall (1)
2. Central School (2)
3. Block 36 (5)
4. Herald Review Building (6)
5. Block 17 (10)
6. Western Half of Block 18 (11)
7. Depot (7)
8. Former Pluemer's Furniture Bldg (8)
9. Pokegama Hotel Bldg (*not in 2023 plan*)
10. New 63-unit apartment under construction (12)
11. 300 Block Hwy 2 (4)



Potential redevelopment examples within Downtown Grand Rapids.

Downtown Land Uses

Development in Downtown will include:

- Medium- and high-density multifamily housing
- Ground floor, active frontage shops and restaurants
- Entertainment venues and recreational spaces
- Professional services and offices
- Civic and institutional offices

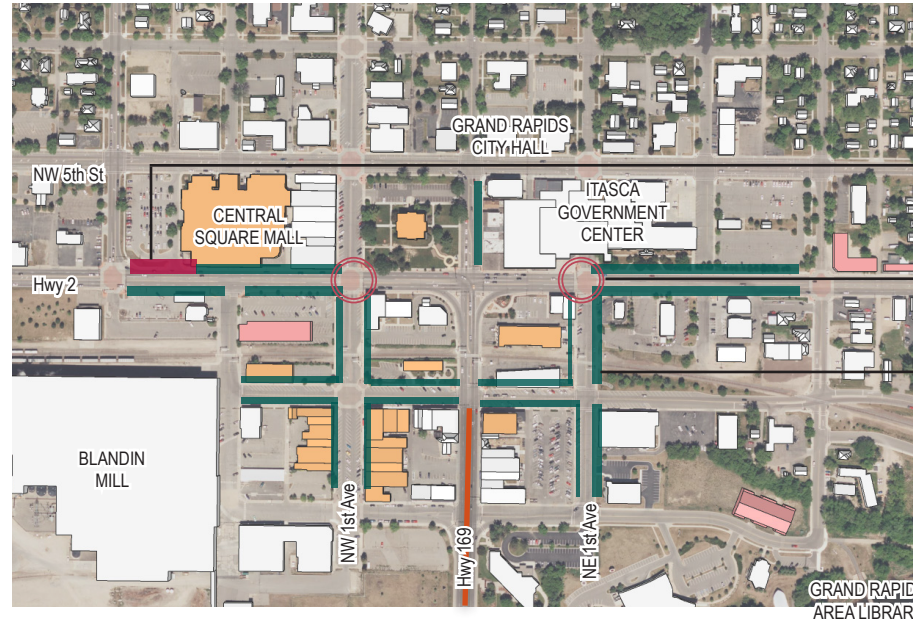
DOWNTOWN

PUBLIC REALM

The opportunity to reconsider the design of Highway 2 is a chance to rebalance the roadway right-of-way (ROW) to support both regional traffic and the local community.

Today, the majority of Highway 2's ROW is dedicated for vehicle traffic. A locally-balanced design would instead utilize more of the ROW for streetscape and aesthetic improvements that elevate the quality of place in Downtown.

Introducing elements like trees, landscaping, pedestrian-scale lighting, a buffered sidewalk, and local wayfinding would serve local residents, businesses, and visitors, as well as travelers passing through. If strategically aligned with other improvements, the city can maximize the local benefits of future design investments in Highway 2.



Structure and/or facade improvements (from 2023 DT Plan)

Proposed redevelopment site (from 2023 DT Plan)

Intersection improvements

Streetscape improvements

Gateway signage

Gateway signage or art feature welcoming people into Downtown. Should be part of access closure from Hwy 2 (see page X).

Intersection gateway or signage features, differentiating these intersections.

Streetscape improvements, with trees, seating, signage and similar features for a more comfortable and attractive sense of place.

KEY OUTCOMES

Enhanced streetscaping and sense of place within the Highway 2 ROW.

Strategically aligned public realm investments that encourage and leverage other Downtown improvements.



Intersection gateway feature. Downtown streets can act as public gathering spaces.



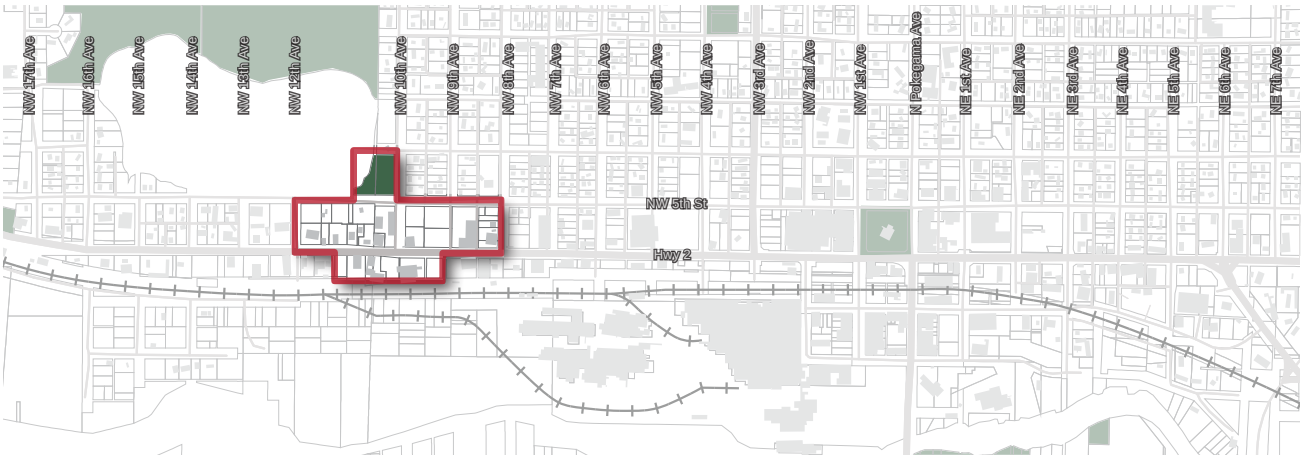
Streets should be comfortable and inviting.

10TH AVENUE NODE

The intersection of Highway 2 and NW 10th Avenue will be a new western gateway to the core of the city, and a locally-oriented activity center. This 10th Avenue Node will feature a mix of land uses and public spaces. It will be welcoming and accessible with ample sidewalks, trees and landscaping, benches, signage, lighting, and an appropriate level of parking.

Development of this area will complement Downtown by being reconfigured to support neighborhood-scale uses, safe and pleasant connections for those walking and biking, and a cohesively-designed public realm.

A key component of the Node will be leveraging Forest Lake and Blandin Beach Park, making each destination more accessible to residents and visitors. The lake and the park will be visibly and functionally connected to new development through cohesive site design and natural, comfortable streetscapes.



The 10th Avenue Node will be Grand Rapids’ new west-end gateway, offering attractive, peaceful destinations for dining, shopping, and gathering, while providing new housing options for residents.

10TH AVE NODE

	TODAY					FUTURE			
Places to Work					Places to Work				
Places to Play					Places to Play				
Places to Live					Places to Live				
People-Oriented					People-Oriented				
Auto-Oriented					Auto-Oriented				



10TH AVENUE NODE

DEVELOPMENT FOR NEIGHBORS AND VISITORS

Development of the 10th Avenue Node area will complement the existing Downtown through neighborhood-scale land uses, safe and pleasant connections, and a consistently designed public realm.

The north portions of each block should prioritize residential uses that would benefit from lake proximity and access to the calmer NW 5th Street. The south portions of each block should prioritize commercial uses, particularly those that would benefit from Highway visibility. Walkable and active commercial uses should be guided along NW 10th Avenue, and its intersection with NW 5th Street.

KEY OUTCOMES

A mix of housing options for area residents.

A center of neighborhood activity with desirable destinations for residents and visitors, including shopping, dining, and recreation.

An improved, small-scale retail environment for local entrepreneurs and businesses.



Development Plan

2–3 story apartments and 1–2 story town homes along the north portions of each block

Restaurants at the intersection corners for visibility and access.

A new hotel for attracting regional visitors

1–2 story commercial uses, fronting the highway

1–2 story commercial uses, leveraging an extended NW 10th Avenue (see pg XX)

Attracting a Hotel

The 10th Avenue Node could also be an attractive place for a new hotel. Such a site should leverage the regional connectivity of the city and block, while meeting a demand for more lodging in and around Downtown. As the 10th Avenue Node is developed as a destination, the prospects for a new hotel development will improve.

10th Avenue Node Land Uses

Development in the Node will include:

- Medium-density multifamily housing along NW 5th Street
- Hotel
- Ground floor, active-frontage shops and restaurants along NW 5th Street and NW 10th Avenue
- Restaurants, convenience retail, professional services, and offices fronting Highway 2

10TH AVENUE NODE

DEVELOPMENT FOR NEIGHBORS AND VISITORS



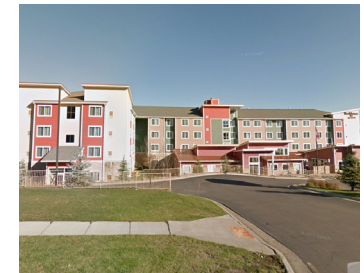
① Clustered commercial



② Medium-density apartments



③ Two-story town homes



④ Hotel and/or commercial

10TH AVENUE NODE

CATALYTIC REDEVELOPMENT SITES

Within the heart of the 10th Avenue Node are significant opportunities for catalytic redevelopment to anchor the node and set a precedent for new development projects.

The 2.25-acre former auto dealership is a full-block site between NW 10th and 9th Avenues. Redevelopment should leverage the proximity to the park and lake for new town homes or modest apartments, while capitalizing on Highway 2 visibility to attract a hotel or commercial development.

The 1.5-acre former Itasca County Farm Service site has the potential to spur a multi-phase commercial development along the southern edge of Highway 2. A new commercial use could leverage extending 10th Avenue to the north, while adding intersection improvements at the Highway 2 and 10th Avenue intersection.



Alternate 1: Hotel



Alternate 2: Commercial Frontage

Former Car Dealership Block

- 1-story commercial oriented to 10th Avenue, with 5'–10' setbacks
- 2-story apartments or town homes, with 10'–20' setbacks
- Centrally-located parking

A hotel and/or commercial uses front the Highway with 10'–15' setbacks and a facade oriented to the NE corner of the 10th Avenue / Highway 2 intersection



EDA-Owned Former Feed Service Center

- Future commercial development with access from an extended 10th Avenue
- 10'–15' setbacks from Highway 2
- 1–2 story commercial use fronting the highway
- Rear parking with access from an extended 10th Avenue
- Screening to buffer views of the rail line

KEY OUTCOMES

Catalytic development projects that anchor the Node and set a good precedent for future projects



10TH AVENUE NODE

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO BUSINESSES AND THE LAKEFRONT

Slight variations to the existing street network within the Node will stitch together the lakefront with development to the south, creating a seam between nature and the city. Sidewalks and streetscape will provide safe, convenient connections that encourage residents and visitors to spend time across various restaurants and shops.

The intersection of Highway 2 at NW 10th Avenue should be rebuilt as a “controlled” intersection with either a signal or a roundabout to improve circulation and provide a safe pedestrian crossing over the Highway. In doing so, NW 10th Avenue should be extended to the south, in what is EDA-owned land.

KEY OUTCOMES

A Slow Zone section of NW 5th Street from NW 9th Avenue to NW 12th Avenue is designed to encourage walking, biking, and access to the park and lake.

A controlled intersection at NW 10th Avenue and Highway 2 calms traffic and improves crossings, while an extended NW 10th Avenue provides access to new development.



Street Improvement Slow Zone Street



Improved Streets

A “slow street” design encourages walkability and access to Blandin Park and area businesses



NW 9th Avenue is a formalized street, creating better circulation

A controlled intersection with either a signal or roundabout, calming thru-traffic and creating safer crossings

An extended 10th Avenue supports new development with rear-loaded access

Highway 2 / NW 10th Avenue Intersection

Installing a traffic signal and extending NW 10th Avenue would allow for safer crossings and circulation within the Node, while calming regional thru-traffic. There are currently no controlled intersections west of NW 3rd Avenue.

Extending NW 10th Avenue through the intersection would create rear access for future redevelopment sites, thereby allowing for the consolidation of shallow parcels south of the Highway and creating larger development sites that do not rely on direct access from Highway 2.

10TH AVENUE NODE

PUBLIC REALM

The public realm in the 10th Avenue Node will be primarily pedestrian-focused — offering streetscapes and spaces that invite and encourage residents and visitors to move, play, rest, and belong. Along Highway 2, it will offer an attractive visual gateway for those traveling along the Highway, signaling the arrival into the center area of Grand Rapids.

Throughout the node, the public realm will be focused on physically and visually connecting people to destinations. Sidewalk and path improvements along NW 10th Avenue and NW 5th Street will capture the interest of passing travelers and provide connections for those walking and biking.

Blandin Beach Park will be a focal point of the node. The park will offer expanded walking and gathering spaces, such as a promenade along the Slow Zone. Improvements within the park will create more spaces for activity, including interacting with the water.

KEY OUTCOMES

Comfortable connections to and through the Node

A revitalized lakefront park with a multi-use promenade.



Public realm and/or crossing improvement

Public Realm Framework

Trees and signage, in coordination with new development, enhance the frontage of Highway 2

Strong visibility and safe crossings from the parking lot

A pedestrian-oriented park edge compliments the Slow Zone street with safe connections

Improve the lakefront with new amenities and dock space

New commercial uses offer street cafes and patio dining

Comfortable sidewalks, trees, and seating line each street



Inviting and safe walking streets.



Example of slow street design, which tips the street balance in favor of people.

10TH AVENUE NODE

PUBLIC REALM — BLANDIN BEACH PARK AND LAKEFRONT

Blandin Beach Park and Forest Lake will be a public focal point of the node. Creating strong park edges that attract pedestrians, while improving the programming within the park, will encourage residents and regional travelers to visit the park. While there, they may even be tempted to stop into a few restaurants or shops elsewhere within the Node.

The city has already begun envisioning how it might amenitize the park and lake as a destination. The concept graphics below show improvements such as a splash pad and seating area which, alongside other enhancements, could be leveraged to attract more park users and area development across NW 5th Street.



A Destination Public Space

Expanding the dock and extending it along the shore line offers a destination amenity and more places to interact with the water

A pedestrian-oriented space parallel to the Slow Zone street, such as a promenade, would encourage park access and connectivity

Additional park amenities and connections near the corner of NW 5th Street can encourage more types of activities year-round in the park



Conceptual park improvements (from Design Studio by CRS).



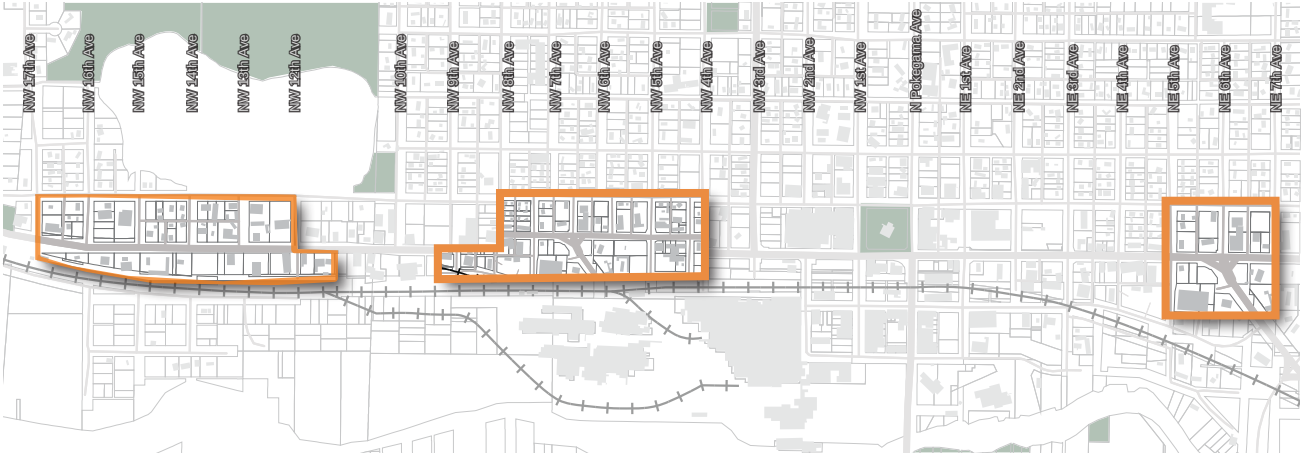
Enhanced dock and lake frontage.



Water-oriented activities.

GOODS AND SERVICES SEGMENTS

Outside Downtown and the 10th Avenue Node, Highway 2 will continue to function as a regionally-serving commercial corridor. These Goods and Services Segments will offer uses that play an important role in the local economy and benefit from the visibility of the thousands of daily travelers along the Highway.



The Goods & Services segments will be well-designed stretches of auto-oriented businesses that support residents and visitors going about day-to-day life.

GOODS AND SERVICES SEGMENTS

	TODAY					FUTURE			
Places to Work					Places to Work				
Places to Play					Places to Play				
Places to Live					Places to Live				
People-Oriented					People-Oriented				
Auto-Oriented					Auto-Oriented				

GOODS AND SERVICES SEGMENTS

DEVELOPMENT

Over time, existing aged and vacant industrial and manufacturing uses will likely transition to less intense auto-oriented commercial uses. Repair services, dealerships and storerooms, drive-through restaurants, car washes, professional services, and similar uses will be well-suited along the corridor. However, updated development site design standards and an improved public realm will make these areas more welcoming, attractive, and accessible.

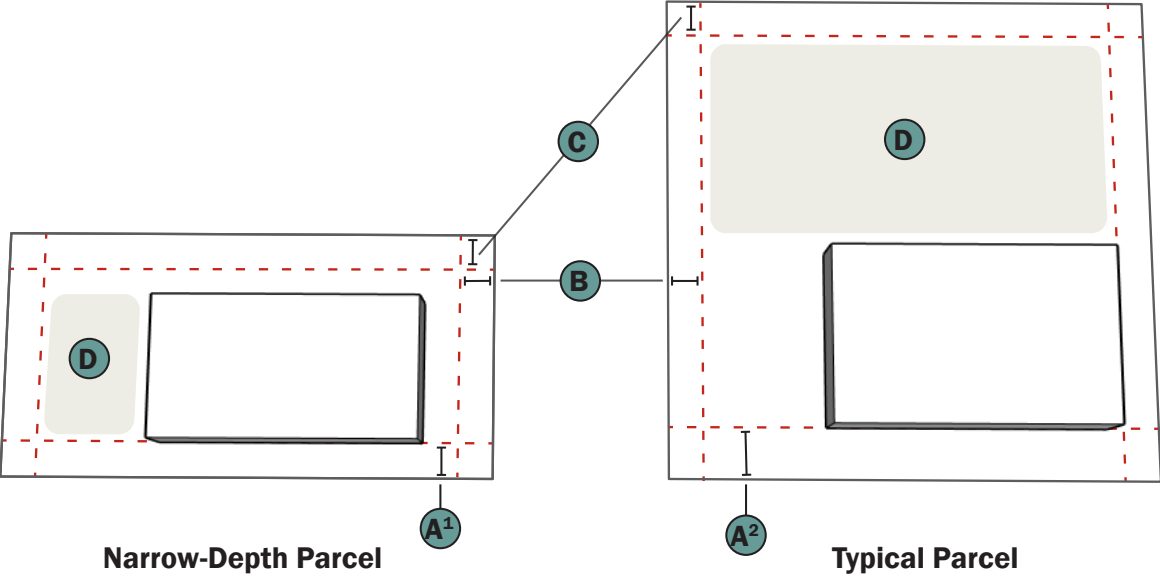


Land Use Types

- Regional-serving retail and dining such as drive-through restaurants
- Regional-serving office and commercial such as banks
- Home goods, grocery, and services
- Small- and medium-scale implement dealers and repair
- Automotive repair

DEVELOPMENT SITE GUIDANCE

Updated site design standards and public realm are necessary to ensure redevelopment within Goods and Services segments offers a more visually attractive and cohesive highway corridor. Reconsidering requirements for Setbacks, Orientation and Access, and Landscaping, is necessary to elevate the aesthetic of corridor, even as it maintains auto-oriented uses.



KEY OUTCOMES

Site design standards in the Goods and Services segment promote an attractive, connective commercial corridor.

Setbacks

For structures fronting Highway 2, the front setbacks should be 15' on typical lots. This distance provides visual and physical relief from the Highway. It also offers additional space for front landscaping and signage, without visually cluttering the Highway.

A¹	Front yard setback	10 feet
A²	Front yard setback	15 feet
B	Side yard setback	10 feet
C	Rear yard setback	10 feet
D	General parking area	-

Orientation and Access

Vehicle access should be required, whenever possible, to be located in the rear or sides of buildings. This may require the city to coordinate with prospective developers on shared driveways or alleys. Similarly, drive-thrus and loading bays should be located on the sides or rear of the building to maintain an attractive frontage along the Highway.

If doors are not located along the highway frontage, highway-fronting building facades should be designed with attractive materials and/or windows.

Landscaping

Updated site landscaping requirements promote resilient and native plants along the frontage and sides of new commercial buildings.

For properties south of Highway 2 along the rail lines, required screening visually blocks views of the rail line. Depending on materials, it may dampen sound, too.

DEVELOPMENT SITE GUIDANCE

In order to help denote a transition into the heart of Grand Rapids, the east and west areas of the goods and services segments could host gateway signage or art. These features should help indicate that a traveler is entering into the core of the city, and differentiate the area from the rest of Highway 2 across the region.



West-oriented gateway between 19th Ave NW and NW 15th Ave

East-oriented gateway between 6th Ave NE and NE 4th St

KEY OUTCOMES

Site design standards in the Goods and Services segment promote an attractive, connective commercial corridor.



Strong Gateway features are clearly visible, are generally vertical, and should reflect a local aesthetic in terms of form and materials. The above are some examples of gateway features, including the “Edge of the Wilderness” signage located at NW 5th St and NW 3rd Ave (top right).

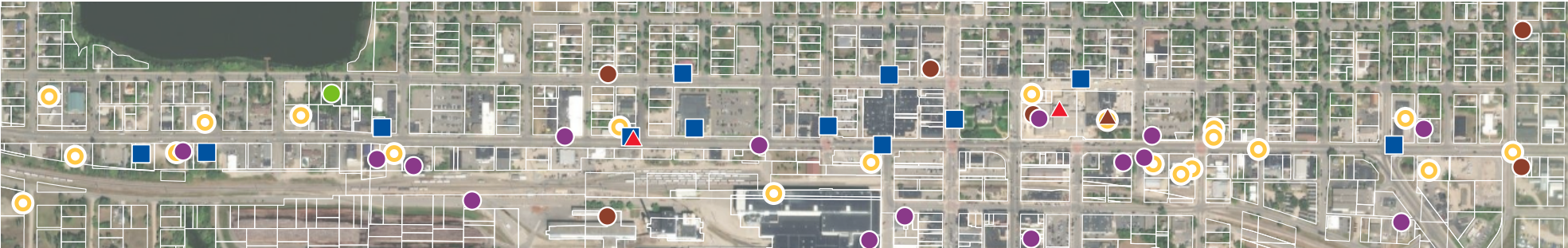
ENVIRONMENTAL SITE MITIGATION

Much of the existing properties within the Goods and Services segment have identified environmental contaminants. These must necessarily be addressed prior to redevelopment occurring, which has been a barrier to redevelopment in some cases. Much of the challenge has come from the financial costs associated with site cleanup. Ensuring clarity on the process, requirements, and available resources will be critical to support corridor redevelopment.

Generally, site mitigation is the responsibility of the property owner/developer

of a site. However, assessment or funding assistance may be provided by public entities, such as a city or county Economic Development Authority. Similarly, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), which tracks and monitors contamination, has funding support programs that could support investigation and cleanup efforts.

MPCA What's In My Neighborhood Known Hazards Map



KEY OUTCOMES

Develop clear and consistent educational information and site mitigation process requirements.

- Multiple Programs
- Hazardous Waste
- Investigation & Cleanup
- Solid Waste
- SSTS
- Stormwater
- Tanks
- Water Quality

Map shows active sites enrolled in MPCA programs. For more details, visit [MPCA's interactive map](#).



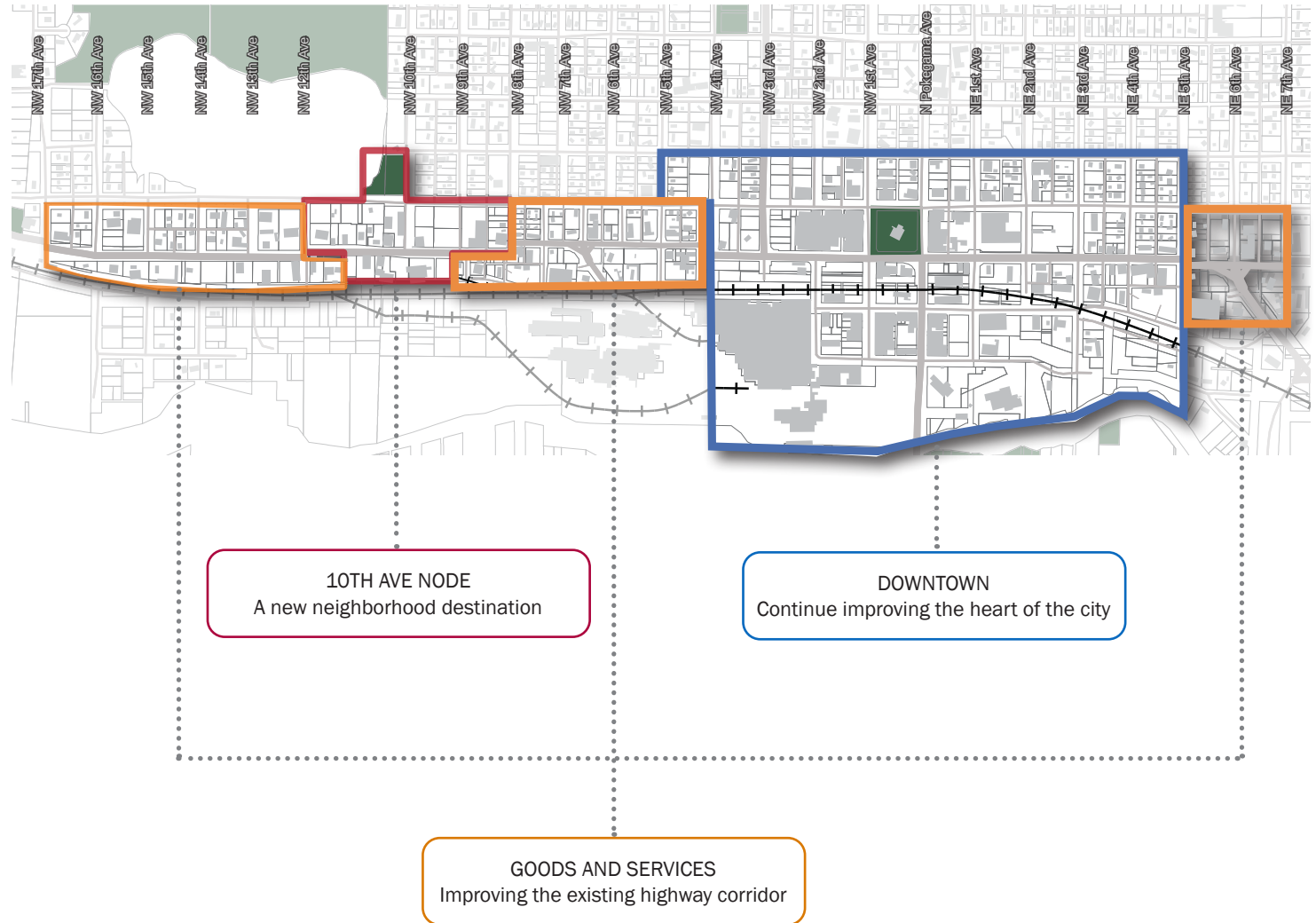
IMPLEMENTATION

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

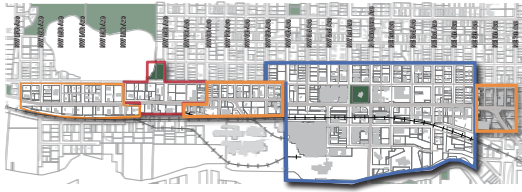
CLARITY AND PRIORITIZATION

To equip the City and its partners with the long-term guidance to realize the plan's vision, the following implementation plan outlines both action steps necessary for downtown broadly, and those specific to five opportunity area projects.

Implementation action steps are provided for the entire downtown, and are organized around Connectivity, Development, and Parks & Open Space.



DOWNTOWN IMPLEMENTATION



Implementation Action Naming Convention

Downtown **D. D. 1** Action #
 "Development"

Priority= 0-2 Years
 Near Term= 2-5 Years
 Med. Term= 5-10 Years
 Long-Term= 10+ Years
 Ongoing= Periodically / Opportunity-Driven

DEVELOPMENT (D)			CONNECTIVITY (C)			PUBLIC SPACE (PS)			HIGHWAY 2 COORDINATION (H)		
Action	Timing	Lead (L) / Support (S)	Action	Timing	Lead (L) / Support (S)	Action	Timing	Lead (L) / Support (S)	Action	Timing	Lead (L) / Support (S)
DD.1 Create a pedestrian overlay zone for blocks south of Highway 2, requiring buildings to have a positive relationship with the sidewalk and street in front of the building. This may include requirements for windows and doors, pedestrian amenities, and active ground floor uses.	Priority / Ongoing	Community Development (L) Engineering (S)	DC.1 Redesign NW 1st Avenue between NW 3rd and 2nd Streets to be a high quality, active street for pedestrians, social gathering, business activities, and vehicles.	Med. Term	Engineering (L) Community Development (S), Property Owners (S)	DPS.1 In coordination with access closure from Highway 2, establish a gateway feature along the south edge of the Central Square Mall parking lot.	Near Term	Community Development (L) Public Works (L) Central Square Mall (S)	DH.1 Continue to coordinate with MnDOT to select a preferred concept, and finalize design details for Highways 2 and 169 through downtown. These decisions should promote a locally-balanced corridor design.	Med. Term	Engineering (L), MnDOT (L) Community Development (S)
DD.2 Continue to follow implementation strategies outlined in the 2023 Downtown Plan for development sites, prioritizing infill development opportunities on vacant or publicly-owned land.	Ongoing	Community Development (L), Engineering, Parks (S), Public Works, Community Partner Organizations (S)	DC.1 Redesign NE 1st Avenue between Hwy 2 and NW 2nd Street to be a connector street for those walking and biking.	Med. Term	Engineering (L) Community Development (S), Property Owners (S)	DPS.2 As roadway improvement or reconstruction projects occurs, continue the inclusion of wayfinding, gateway, and public art features	Med. Term	Community Development (L) Public Works (L) Public Works (S)	DH.2 Finalize access restriction and management locations, along Highway 2 and Highway 169.	Ongoing	Engineering (L), MnDOT (L) Property Owners (S)
DD.3 Continue to support the establishment of the downtown alliance, and hiring of an executive director	Priority	Community Development (L)	DC.3 Work with property owners to consolidate vehicle access, prioritizing access from alleys and side streets.	Near Term	Community Development (L) Engineering (S)	CPS.3 As roadway improvement or reconstruction projects occurs, require the inclusion of trees, vegetation, and public seating along Pedestrian-Oriented streets.	Ongoing	Public Works (L) Parks (S)	DH.3 Finalize Highway 2 pedestrian crossing locations at NW 3rd and 1st, Avenues, and NE 1st and 3rd Avenues,	Priority	Engineering (L), MnDOT (L)
DD.4 Continue to support existing businesses by establishing or enhancing programs such as: - Façade improvement program - Business improvement grants - Business spotlight program	Near Term	GREDA (L) Community Development (S)	DC.4 Develop a downtown street design policy that designates a street hierarchy of Balanced and People-Oriented streets.	Priority	Engineering (L) Community Development (S),	DG3.4 Continue to promote businesses offering sidewalk seating, or retail activities, and ensure city policies support such activities.	Near Term	Community Development (L)	DH.3 As detailed design begins, develop highway edge condition and maintenance plans that promote welcoming downtown pedestrian activity, comfort, and ease of movement.	Near Term	Engineering (L), MnDOT (L) Community Development (S)
DD.5 Establish general City and EDA expectations around development partnerships and outcomes, to proactively set expectations for public participation in redevelopment.		GREDA (L), City Council (L) Community Development (S)									

10TH NODE IMPLEMENTATION



Implementation Action Naming Convention

10th Node **N. D. 1** Action #
 "Development"

Priority= 0-2 Years
 Near Term= 2-5 Years
 Med. Term= 5-10 Years
 Long-Term= 10+ Years
 Ongoing= Periodically / Opportunity-Driven

DEVELOPMENT (D)			CONNECTIVITY (C)			PUBLIC SPACE (PS)			HIGHWAY 2 COORDINATION (H)		
Action	Timing	Lead (L) / Support (S)	Action	Timing	Lead (L) / Support (S)	Action	Timing	Lead (L) / Support (S)	Action	Timing	Lead (L) / Support (S)
ND.1 Rezone residentially-guided properties, to align with the land use plan: - Allowance for multifamily housing up to 3 stories - Development oriented to NW 5th St or NW 10th Ave - Rear and/or side access - Shared parking and/or driveways when needed	Priority / Ongoing	Community Development (L)	NC.1 Commission conceptual design studies of 5th St N and 10th Ave NW, to develop concept design for "calm streets". Secure funding and schedule construction in coordination with the Highway 2 Project.	Near Term	Engineering (L) Community Development (S)	NPS.1 Continue to progress funding and design improvements to Blandin Park and Beach Area	Near Term	Parks (L) Community Development (S)	NH.1 Continue to coordinate with MnDOT to select a preferred concept, and finalize design details for Highways 2 through the 10th Ave Node. These decisions should promote a locally-balanced corridor design.	Priority	Engineering (L), MnDOT (L) Community Development (S)
ND.2 Rezone commercially-guided properties, to align with the land use plan: - Prohibit auto-oriented commercial uses and industrial uses - Enhanced landscape requirements - Rear and/or side access - Shared parking and/or driveways when needed	Priority / Ongoing	Community Development (L)	NC.1 Establish street design standards for new and reconstructed streets, within the 10th Node area.	Near Term	Engineering (L) Community Development (S)	NPS.2 Commission a feasibility study for improvements to the dock and riverfront, transitioning the area to a destination public space.	Med. Term	Parks (L) Engineering (L) Community Development (S)	NH.2 Continue to coordinate with MnDOT on intersection control options at Highway 2 and NW 10th Ave, while ensuring the extension of NW 10th Ave to the south. Once confirmed, prepare and solicit EDA-owned property for redevelopment.	Priority	Engineering (L), MnDOT (L) GREDA (L) Community Development (S)
ND.3 Continue conducting site evaluation of the EDA-owned property, to understand remediation needs, and pursue funding. Develop site remediation materials for property owners.	Priority / Ongoing	GREDA (L)	NC.3 Work with prospective developers to promote buildings with strong frontages or walk out housing units, that promote walkability.	Ongoing	Community Development (L) Engineering (S) Property Owners (S)	NPS.3 Promote commercial options in the 10th Ave Node that offer outdoor patios, and/or sidewalk seating and retail, and ensure city policies support such activities.	Ongoing	Community Development (L)	NH.3 Finalize Highway 2 median and access conditions from Highway 2, within the 10th Ave Node	Priority	Engineering (L), MnDOT (L) Community Development (S)
ND.4 Begin meeting with regional and national hotel networks, and market the area to interested hotel chains.	Near Term	GREDA (L) Community Development (S)	NC.4 During improvements to NW 5th St, extend existing bike facilities west through the 10th Ave Node. Ensure access to Blandin Park and Beach area.	Ongoing	Engineering (L) Community Development (S)				NH.3 As detailed design begins, develop highway edge condition and maintenance plans that promote pedestrian activity, comfort, and ease of movement.	Near Term	Engineering (L), MnDOT (L) Community Development (S)
ND.5 Establish City and EDA expectations around development partnerships and outcomes, to proactively set expectations for public participation in redevelopment.	Priority	GREDA (L), City Council (L) Community Development (S)									

GOODS AND SERVICES IMPLEMENTATION



Implementation Action Naming Convention

Goods and Services		G. D. 1		Action #
"Development"				

Priority= 0-2 Years
 Near Term= 2-5 Years
 Med. Term= 5-10 Years
 Long-Term= 10+ Years
 Ongoing= Periodically / Opportunity-Driven

DEVELOPMENT (D)			CONNECTIVITY (C)			PUBLIC SPACE (PS)			HIGHWAY 2 COORDINATION (H)		
Action	Timing	Lead (L) / Support (S)	Action	Timing	Lead (L) / Support (S)	Action	Timing	Lead (L) / Support (S)	Action	Timing	Lead (L) / Support (S)
GD.1 Establish a zoning overlay and rezone properties to update site design standards: - Reduced setbacks - Enhanced landscape standards - Rear and/or side access - Shared parking and driveways when possible	Priority / Ongoing	Community Development (L)	GC.1 As site improvement and/or redevelopment interest arises, evaluate opportunities to relocate front access to the side or rear of properties	Ongoing	Engineering (L) Property Owners (L) Community Development (S)	GPS.1 As site improvement and/or redevelopment interest arises, evaluate opportunities for promote connections to adjacent public spaces.	Ongoing	Community Development (L) Public Works (L)	GH.1 Continue to coordinate with MnDOT to select a preferred concept, and finalize design details for Highways 2 through the Goods and Services Segments. These decisions should promote a locally-balanced corridor design.	Priority	Engineering (L), MnDOT (L) Community Development (S)
GD.2 Continue to support existing businesses by establishing or enhancing programs such as: - Façade improvement program - Business improvement grants - Business spotlight program	Ongoing	GREDA (L)	GC.1 Develop best practice guidance, including draft model agreements, for establishing shared parking and access agreements between private property owners.	Near-Term	Community Development (L) Property Owners (S)	GPS.2 As site improvement and/or redevelopment interest arises, encourage enhanced landscaping along Highway 2 through zoning, to promote an elevated and welcoming aesthetic.	Ongoing	Community Development (L) Public Works (L) Public Works (S)	GH.2 Finalize access restriction and management locations, along Highway 2.	Priority	Engineering (L), MnDOT (L) Property Owners (S)
GD.3 Create site remediation educational materials that clearly outline major steps and requirements, and identify potential funding sources.	Priority	Community Development (L)							GH.3 In coordination with MnDOT identify locations for gateway features to be located around NW 19th and 15th Avenues to the west, and NE 6th and 4th Avenues to the east.	Priority	Engineering (L), MnDOT (S)
GD.4 Create clear, easily understandable development process materials, including a flow chart that outlines major steps and associated material needs, permitting, fees, and approval processes.	Priority	Community Development (L)									

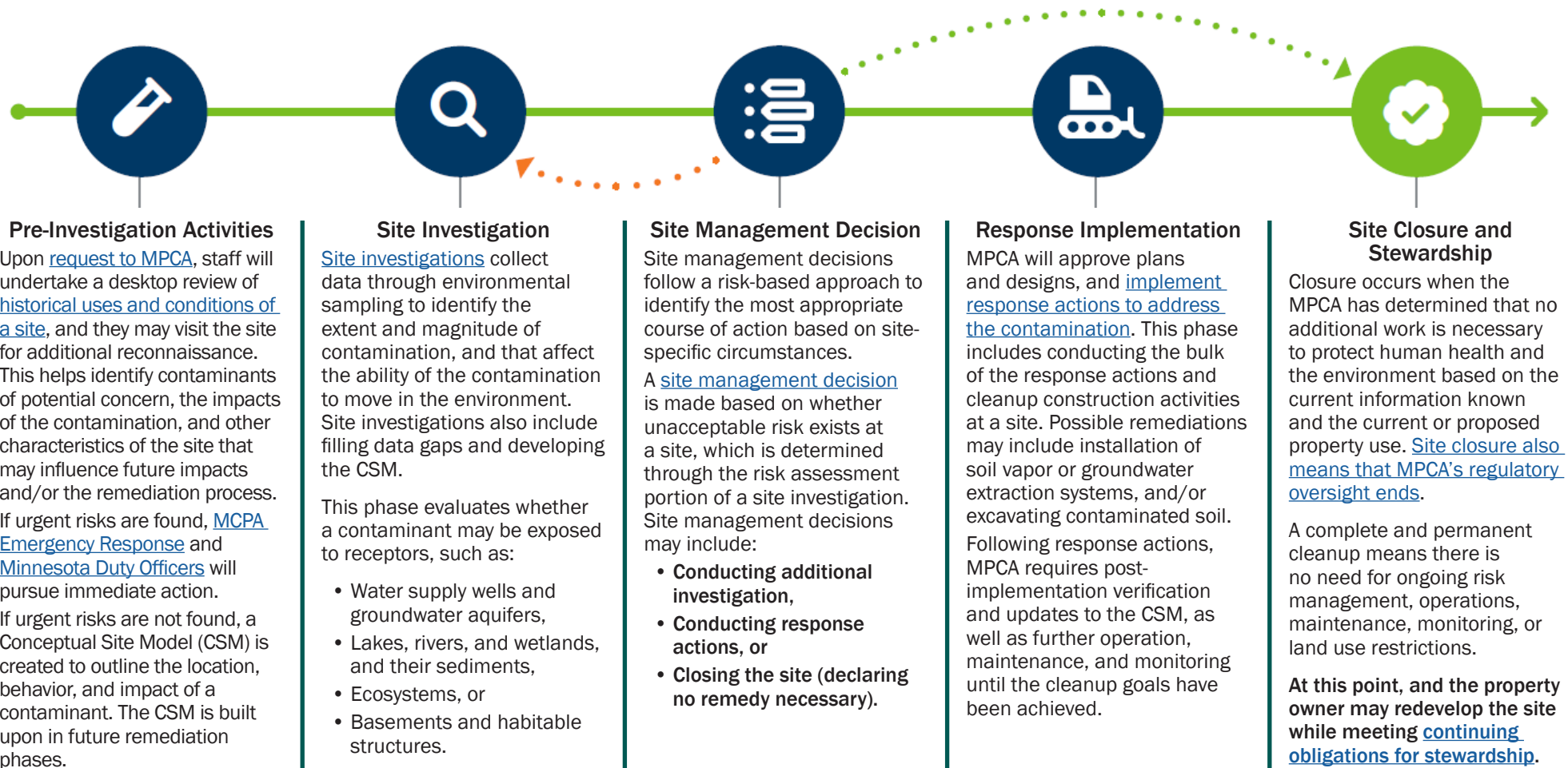
GOODS AND SERVICES IMPLEMENTATION

MPCA'S SITE REMEDIATION PROCESS

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) oversees the management and site remediation of pollutants, contaminants, and hazardous substances. MPCA's Remediation Division has a number of programs and initiatives to guide and support remediation, in order to support site redevelopment. While the exact process for each site may be slightly different depending on

identified contaminants and site classifications, the chart below outlines the general remediation process.

For more details, visit [MPCA's Remediation Division General Policy](#).





APPENDIX A - ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS