

An aerial, monochromatic yellow-tinted photograph of the Kansas City downtown grid. The image shows a dense network of streets and buildings, with a prominent diagonal street cutting through the grid. The perspective is from a high angle, looking down on the city.

# KANSAS CITY DOWNTOWN CORRIDOR STRATEGY

*PREPARED FOR:*  
THE CIVIC COUNCIL OF  
GREATER KANSAS CITY

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JUNE 2005





**NEED FOR A STRATEGY 2005**

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*Downtown Kansas City Skyline*

# 1

## need for a strategy

Kansas City has made tremendous strides over the last five years to transform the downtown and infuse it with new energy. No city in America has accomplished as much in such a short time. While the accomplishments are great, the imperative at this point is to sustain the momentum. Ongoing investment and a focus on the downtown Loop as a priority will develop the solid base that stakeholders are looking for - an authentic, sustainable, viable place where people want to be most of all, whether it is for jobs, living, or entertainment and culture. As a strong and vital core, a vibrant downtown strengthens the entire region, making Kansas City more competitive with other successful cities in attracting workers and visitors from the region and beyond.

Kansas City is fortunate in its location in the heart of America, a crossroads of rail, highway, and the river. The state line between Kansas and Missouri also shapes the city and its decisions. Heritage runs deep here, even though it is not always acknowledged. The topography of bluffs, hilltops, and the remnant of the Town of Kansas on the banks of the Missouri River are distinctive elements of the downtown. The city features majestic buildings like Union Station and other prominent architectural landmarks. The American Royal Rodeo and horse events, the 18th & Vine Jazz Museum and the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, the Steamship Arabia and the Liberty Memorial are all unique destinations in downtown Kansas City. The City Market and the many art galleries add a flavor to the neighborhoods and make them destinations in their own right, complementing the theaters in the downtown. New proposals for a performing arts center, an arena, and new entertainment venues in the Power & Light District will entice even more people downtown.

As a job center, downtown Kansas City continues to be an important player, with technology, financial, legal, medical, and government jobs, which will be further enhanced by the new headquarters for H&R Block in the Loop. Approximately 15,000 people live in the Downtown Corridor (31st Street to the River and the State Line to Bruce R. Watkins Drive). While this held steady from 1990, the patterns of investment are revealing. Population has been shrinking in some of the more traditional neighborhoods while dramatically increasing in the River Market, Quality Hill, and parts of the Crossroads. The investments that have occurred in the last 5 years are shown in Figure 1.





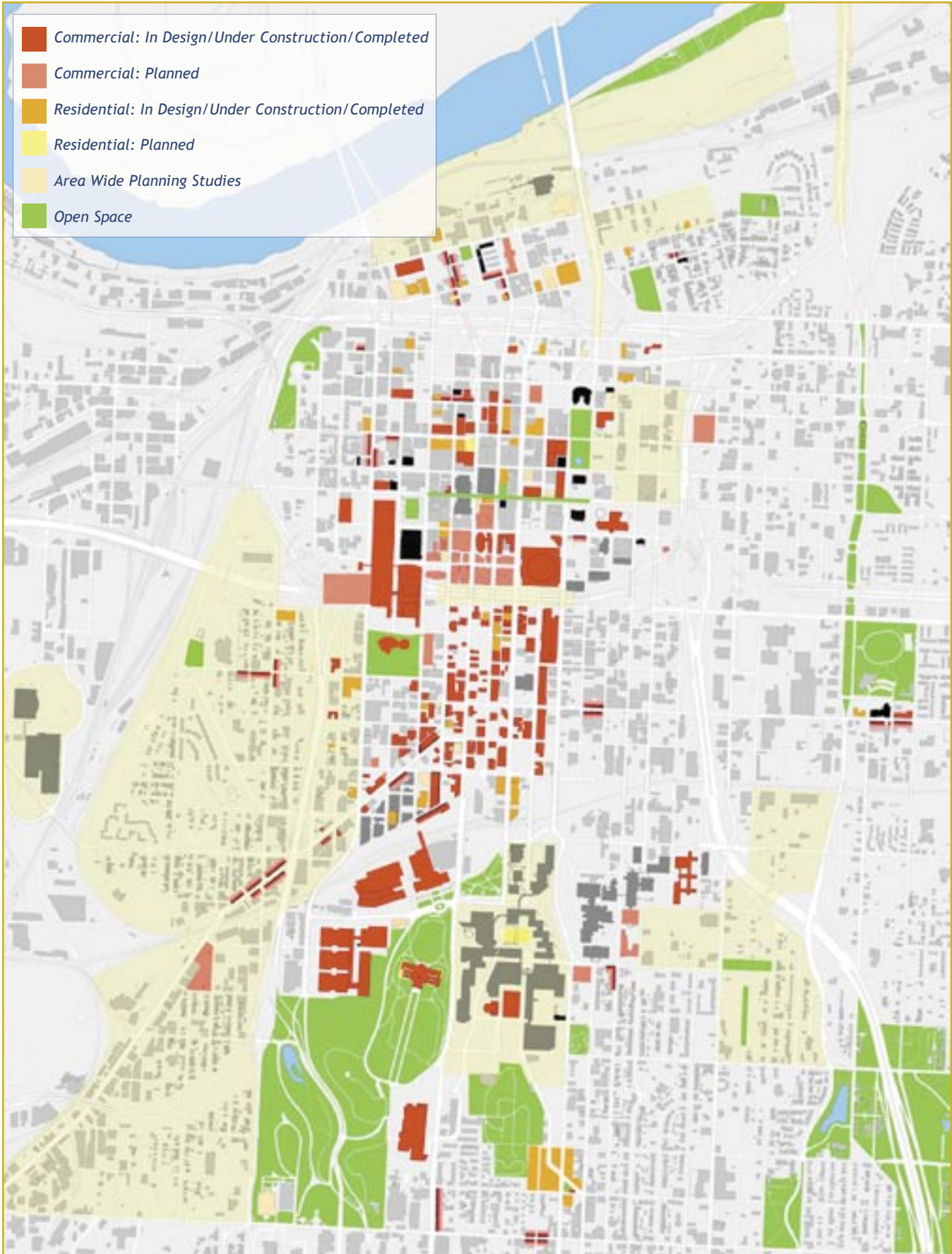


Figure 1. Completed and Planned Projects 2000 - 2005



## PROCESS

In late 2004, the Civic Council invited the Sasaki and ERA team back to Kansas City to update the Downtown Corridor Development Strategy completed in May 2001. The current need was to reflect on the successful implementation of the priorities of the initial plan, learn from the processes employed, reassess the next phase of priority projects, and take into account new issues facing the downtown. In addition, the capacity of the downtown stakeholder organizations has greatly increased with many new leaders, an advantage for looking forward over the next five to ten years and beyond.

The Civic Council Urban Core Revitalization Committee assembled a Steering Committee to oversee the work, with representatives of the City, the Civic Council, the Downtown Council, the Economic Development Corporation, the Kansas City, Missouri School District, and The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce. Building on the success of the 2001 process, the Sasaki/ERA team met with a broad cross section of stakeholders in one-on-one and group meetings to discuss these issues. Stakeholders included city agencies, cultural and non-profit organizations, the hospitals, large downtown employers, real estate interests, the architectural community, neighborhood leaders, transportation interests, and others. Initial meetings were held in January 2005, and alternatives and the draft plan were presented in March and May, respectively.

The Steering Committee, echoed by other stakeholders, raised questions that included how to complete successfully the work in the core area of the Loop, while recognizing the potential of other areas and the need to think forward to investments in them. Connectivity and the arrival sequence were expressed as a concern given the potential of many new destinations downtown and the dispersed nature of key attractions. The need to understand the elements of a successful neighborhood was raised, including concern about the depth of the current housing market. The need to reinvigorate downtown office space is an ongoing concern. The Steering Committee focused on developing a plan that embodied a clear strategy for moving forward, a new definition of priorities and the roles and responsibilities of key players. New priorities enhance and supplement continued implementation of the original Downtown Plan and its focus on the area inside the free-way loop.

## CENTERS OF ACTIVITY

Kansas City is unique in the size of its downtown corridor definition, which encompasses 4,000 acres. The development of the city over time and the size of the downtown corridor point to two areas that have the potential to become significant focal points, where a critical mass of jobs, housing, entertainment, culture, and hospitality are concentrated within a five to ten minute walk circle (Figure 2).

- The Loop, including the Theater, Convention and Entertainment District, Financial District, Library District, Quality Hill, the Government District, the top of the hill (16th and Central), and the north Crossroads.
- Washington Square, drawing in Crown Center, the Union Station area, Hospital Hill, Freight House District, and parts of the Crossroads.

To be successful the downtown needs these areas of intensity and diversity. The juxtaposition of activities in a close-knit district will draw people downtown for a wide variety of reasons, encourage them to stroll and stay longer, and importantly, convince them to come back again. In his recent article in ULI (March 2005), Christopher Leinberger calls this “walkable urbanity.” Each of these areas should feel urbane, connected, and pedestrian friendly. Although topography is always a factor in Kansas City, the character of the streets lined with active uses and building entries should compel people to choose walking over driving short distances.

Within the grid framework of the Loop, the emphasis should be on completing major projects that have begun, while at the same time investing in small entrepreneurial businesses that add unique interest and activity, including restaurants and shops. The adaptive reuse of appropriate office buildings and new residential construction will add a committed constituency that will make the Loop feel safer on a round-the-clock basis. Residents, visitors, and the downtown workforce should experience gracious shady streets that also will provide a connective fabric of public open spaces, punctuated by the few key open spaces within the core of the city.



Figure 2. Downtown Corridor Centers, Specialty Areas, and Neighborhoods



*The City Market in the River Market*

In order to become more than the sum of its parts, the area around Washington Park needs stronger connections and a more cohesive identity. Each of the disparate parts - Union Station, Hospital Hill, Crown Center, and Liberty Memorial - could become stronger as an urbane district, busy with medical students and employees, office workers, visitors, and residents. The new IRS center and the Federal Reserve will vastly increase the number of workers in the area, while expansion of UMKC and medical facilities on Hospital Hill will bring even more people into the area. Improvements to Liberty Memorial, Penn Valley Park, and Union Station will draw more visitors, and could be complemented by commuter rail centered around Union Station. The emphasis in this area is on transforming highway-like roads into city streets that have broad sidewalks, better wayfinding, and slower traffic to balance pedestrian and vehicular needs. Most importantly, buildings and their front doors need to engage the street, defining the public realm and generating the activity that creates walkable urbanity.

With two primary centers continuing to develop as cosmopolitan dynamic places, the downtown will offer a rich array of activities, drawing a broad cross-section of people into the region and downtown. Over time, movement between these two anchors will become essential, creating a demand for increased connectivity, via transit and great streets. Kansas City will be distinctive among its peers for the levels of activity and unique character found in each place, while benefiting from the spin-off activity that occurs between and around them.



*Dining in the Crossroads area*

## SPECIALTY AREAS

A number of specialty areas within the downtown corridor highlight Kansas City's unique heritage and complement the focal areas. These all fall within a five to twenty minute walk or a short drive from the primary mixed use centers.

- **River Market** - a thriving loft district along the shore of the Missouri River with special destinations such as the City Market, the Steamship Arabia, and the archaeological site of the Town of Kansas.
- **18th and Vine** - a destination for jazz music, dining, and heritage, joined with the Negro Leagues Baseball Hall of Fame.
- **American Royal** - horse shows, rodeos, and other animal events in a "dirt floor" venue located adjacent to Kemper Arena in the historic West Bottoms, which is home to the "World Series of Barbeque" and a growing arts community.
- **Crossroads** - a flourishing arts scene played out in the historic warehouse district with galleries, small businesses, live/work units, housing, and special events like "First Fridays."

These specialty areas are destinations for arts, dining, and entertainment that have a unique flavor. Each one offers the opportunity to uncover the heritage of the city, with interesting architecture, street activity, and special events, in a way that complements the core areas of the downtown.

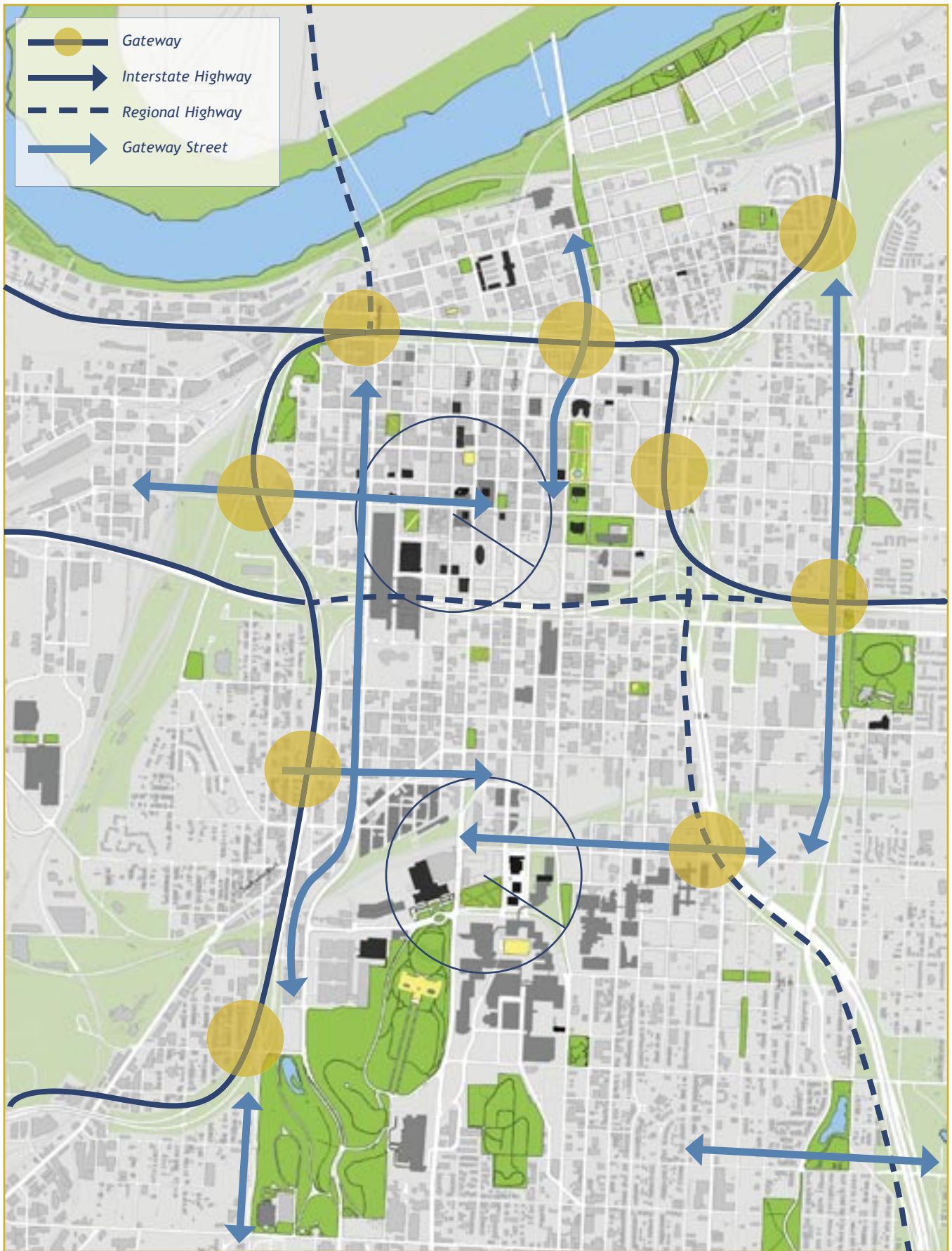


Figure 3. Downtown Corridor Sequence of Arrival



*The Skyline from the Heart of America Gateway*

## CIVIC FRAMEWORK

The civic framework establishes the structure within which urban life takes place, and it offers the single strongest opportunity to create a distinctive identity that cannot be matched in the outlying suburban districts. For visitors, the memorable elements of a city are found in the civic framework including:

- Gateways that form the first impression of the city.
- Streets that connect different places and tie together districts.
- Urban parks where people gather for relaxation, recreation, and entertainment.
- Transportation, which in urban areas is focused on public transit complemented by a network of streets.
- Public parking that is shared by different downtown events and users to maximum efficiency.
- Performing and visual arts.

### Downtown Arrival and Gateways

The sequence of arrival from the regional highways forms a lasting impression and can determine return visits. The goal is to get people off the highway and out of their cars as soon as possible by locating parking facilities in strategic sites just beyond the five to ten minute walk distance from the primary destinations.

Kansas City is ringed by highways, and the connections between these highways and the local street network are extremely permeable with many access points. Within a carefully thought out wayfinding system, however, only the

key gateways need to be identified and these should lead to primary streets that are easy to navigate and memorable in character (Figure 3).

The main traffic on the regional highways should be through-traffic, while local traffic traveling relatively short distances should be encouraged to use the excess capacity on all the city streets. Over time, some ramps to the highways should be removed to reduce cut-through traffic through neighborhoods and to improve the pedestrian character on the adjacent local streets, especially along the North Loop of I-70. In other cases, improvements are needed to clarify access points. Primary points of entry onto gateway streets include:

- Broadway from the river crossing on the north.
- Oak Street from the Heart of America Bridge.
- 12th Street on the west side of the Loop.
- 10th/11th Street on the east side of the Loop.
- Reconfigured entrance at 20th Street from I-35.
- Extension of 22nd Street as a pedestrian-friendly city street from Bruce R. Watkins Drive/US 71 to Grand and eventually to Main Street.
- Reconfigured ramps to direct traffic to Southwest Trafficway from I-35 southbound and to minimize traffic cutting through Penn Valley Park.

The gateways will not preclude additional improvements to local streets as recommended by others for the 21st Street connection to Pennway on the West Side.



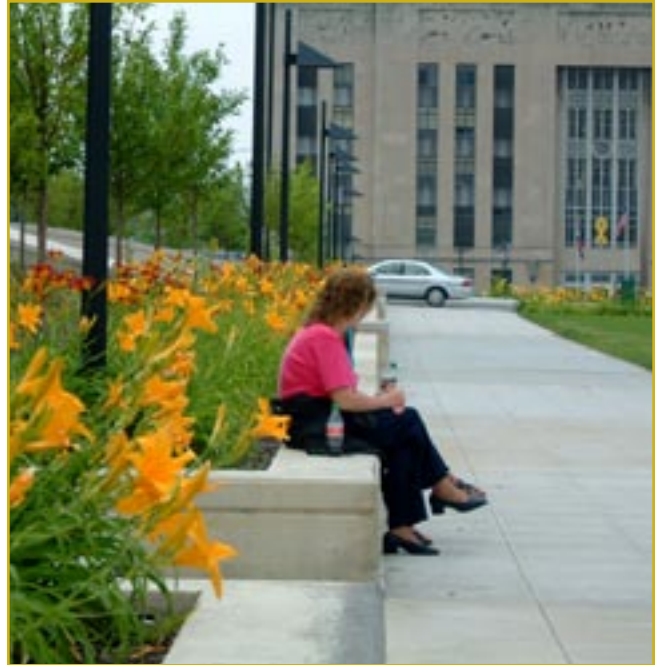
Figure 4. Downtown Corridor Open Space System

## Streetscape

Great streets are the hallmark of a city - Broadway in New York, Michigan Avenue in Chicago, Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. These streets cut across the city, connecting one district to another in grand tree-lined avenues, bustling with pedestrians on crowded sidewalks, while also carrying traffic from one place to another. These connectors are memorable and serve to orient the visitor within the overall grid of streets.

In Kansas City, a hierarchy of great streets will connect the many distinctive but unconnected places, creating corridors of walkable urbanity and serving to orient the driver (Figure 4). These designated streets are priorities for investment in streetscape that focuses on gracious street trees, distinctive lighting, and generous sidewalks.

Streetscapes designs should be used to define and develop both the "great streets" - which will add metropolitan character and connections throughout downtown - and to create even treatment of streetscape within the primary mixed use centers to foster a sense of a cohesive, walkable district. In particular, the hierarchy of these two concepts (great streets vs. districts) needs to be thoughtfully established. Transition from one palette of materials to the next should be carefully planned as the City moves toward implementation of the standards recommended as part of the recent streetscape study by the Chicago interdisciplinary design firm SOM. In the Loop, the primary focus for investment in streetscapes needs to be the Theater and Convention district, encompassing the general area between 9th Street and Truman Road, and from Broadway to Grand Boulevard.



*Davis Park*

On-street parking needs should be re-instituted on most streets downtown in order to increase the convenience and supply of parking downtown. This change will also increase the number of pedestrians on the street while slowing the speed of traffic. The implementation of a two-way street system throughout downtown will improve the balance of use between pedestrians and vehicles and make it easier for people to navigate downtown.

In the Washington Square area, the primary focus should be on taming the automobile and ensuring that pedestrians are able to comfortably stroll and easily cross the main arterials of Main Street, Grand Boulevard, Pershing, 22nd Street, Oak Street, and Gilham Road. The geometry of the intersections and street sections in particular needs to be changed to reduce the size of intersections, remove free right turns and the multiple small traffic islands, and to create narrower traffic lanes, on-street parking, and wider sidewalks.



*Parks with Programmed Uses in Addison, Texas*



*Plazas Activated with Outdoor Cafes in the Dallas Arts District*



## Urban Parks

Urban parks are the soul of the city, where people can relax, exercise, meet acquaintances, and enjoy art and culture. They establish a distinctive identity for the community, while creating value for the real estate surrounding them. Successful parks should create positive environments, whether they are being used quietly by a few people on a day-to-day basis or whether they are hosting hundreds for larger community gatherings and events.

Park programming should reflect the needs of the downtown, including those of the immediate constituency. To activate parks, programs often include children's play on structures or in water; festivals and performance space; lawns that allow for a wide range of activities including informal play, picnicking, and gatherings; public art; interpretive installations; plazas where people can see and be seen; and quieter seating areas. Park buildings attract people into the park, and provide services and "eyes on the park." These facilities might offer restaurants and outdoor cafes, information, restrooms, and, in some cases, equipment rental (bicycles, rollerblades, small boats, etc.).

The following are suggestions to activate the existing Kansas City parks:

- Barney Allis Plaza - redevelop park (with or without underground parking) to bring grades down to street level on all sides, including suggestions for an informal amphitheater built into the hill facing south toward the Municipal Auditorium. This park at the center of the city and the visitor district should welcome people to Kansas City, establish a memorable identity, facilitate movement across it in all directions, and complement convention center events and the theater district by providing large gathering spaces and allowing for outdoor performing arts.
- Davis Park - add residential uses on eastern edge to create "eyes on the park." Create on-street parallel parking around the park edge to encourage casual use of the park, increase parking supply around the government buildings, and promote short-cut strolls through the park, while creating a buffer from fast moving traffic.
- Penn Valley Park - because of the topography, the park is a series of distinctive and visually separated zones. Identify and enhance each zone with an activity generator and complementary programming that will attract families and other visitors to use the park. For instance, the area around the lake could benefit from a seasonal ice cream stand and place to rent paddleboats, miniature sail boats, and/or fishing equipment. The theater in the old castle would be enhanced by a destination restaurant nearby and a place to rent bicycles, rollerblades, and other sports equipment. The proposed skateboard park should be complemented by other activities that draw people out to the overlook at the Scout. The playground and the active recreation fields are already a popular destination. The roadways and ramps that currently divide the park should be reconfigured to create a more park-like experience that allows through-traffic on Broadway, but minimizes ramps that contribute to the speed of traffic and make pedestrian crossings almost impossible. The removal of ramps could create long-term opportunities for residential development in the northwest and southeast corners of the park with little loss of actual open space.
- Washington Park - like Davis Park, this open space would be enhanced by a complement of residential uses that faced directly on the park, increasing the day-to-day use while creating a constituency for the long-term care and maintenance of the park. With new infill development on the north edge, Washington Park can become the civic gathering ground for all the surrounding districts and attractions. To encourage use of the park, on-grade pedestrian crossings need to be easier by achieving a better balance between the function of the roads to deliver cars to surrounding businesses and residences and to facilitate those same workers and residents as pedestrians seeking use of the park.
- Pocket and neighborhood parks - With so many surface parking lots, underutilized land, and the even grid of streets, small pocket and neighborhood parks can create smaller focal points, establish identity, and enhance values in the adjacent properties and the neighborhood overall. Thimble Park on Quality Hill and the renovated Oppenstein Park at 12th and Walnut in the Loop are excellent examples that provide shady relief to the built environment and allow for small performances and events that bring together the adjacent community.

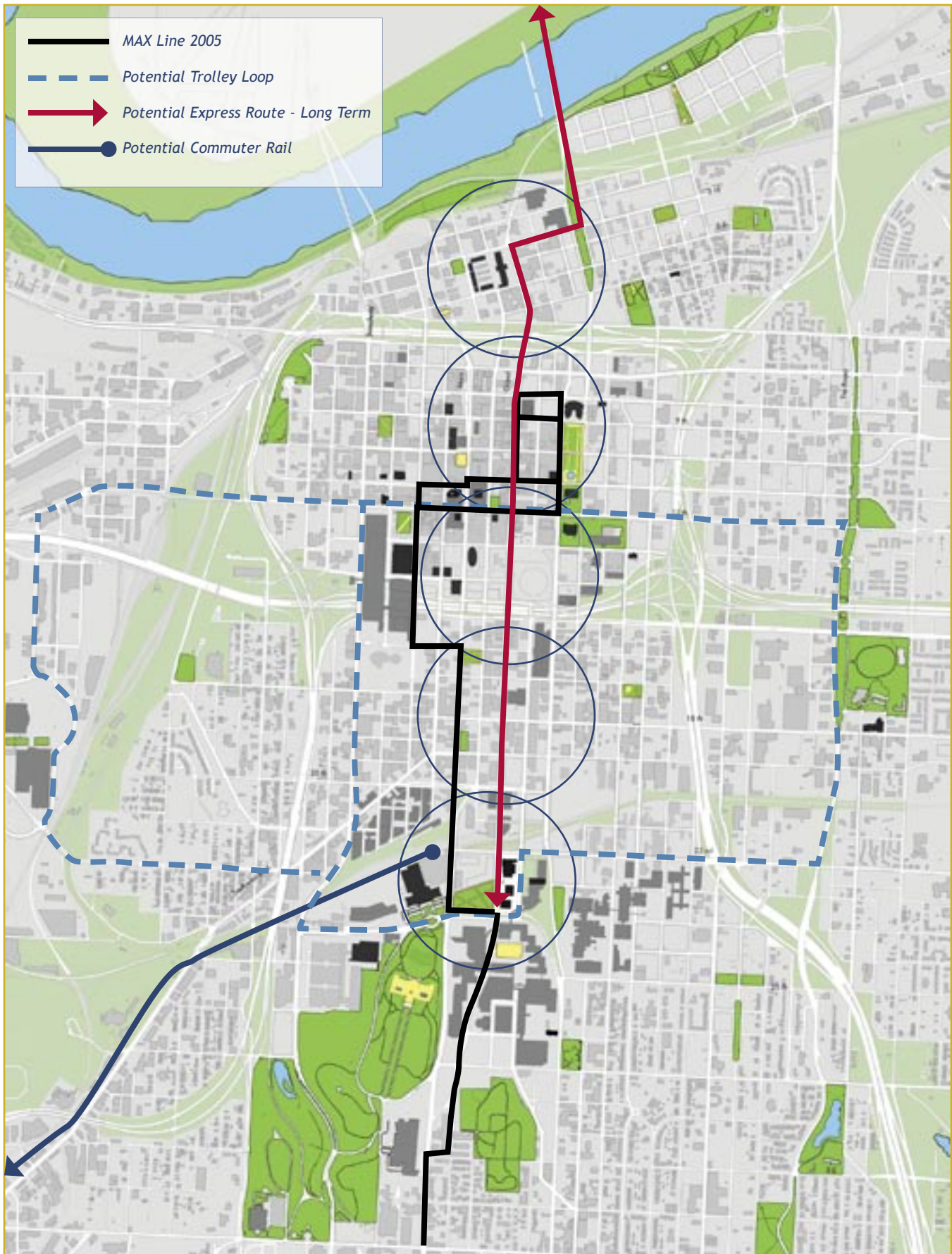


Figure 5. Existing and Potential Transit in the Downtown Corridor

## Transit

The Smart Moves plan advances a 12-year comprehensive plan for transit service to the Kansas City metropolitan area, including express service on bus rapid transit and commuter rail (Rapid Riders), local buses and trolleys that feed into the express service (Local Links), and express buses on the highways (Freeway Flyers). The plan was developed by MARC, the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority, and the region's transit providers with extensive public input.

As an important first step, the Metropolitan Area Express (MAX) begins service during the summer of 2005. This bus rapid transit (BRT) service will use new vehicles, the ability to override traffic signals, dedicated lanes in some segments, and digital information at the stops to keep riders informed. The six-mile route will connect the River Market to the Plaza with limited stops at key locations. Within the downtown, the route will connect the government district, the convention center, and Crown Center and points in between (Figure 5). The success of the MAX Line will be its ability to navigate quickly across the city with frequent buses, especially during rush hours.

Following the Smart Moves recommendation for Local Links, a trolley or shuttle system in the Downtown Corridor, will complement the MAX in the future. Once demand is established, with key attractions in place and with additional residential and office employment downtown, a rubber-wheeled trolley could provide the short-haul trips across downtown that are outside the five- to ten-minute walk to the MAX stations. Although the exact route of such a service will be based on future demand, a possible route would circle around the downtown and connect key destinations and neighborhoods following Broadway, 12th Street, the Paseo, and 18th Street. During major events, the route could extend to the American Royal in the West Bottoms.

The advantage of bus rapid transit is its flexibility. Once a successful route is established, the BRT can transform into a more permanent service with dedicated lanes for either the bus or light rail transit. This service and the associated stations create a pedestrian-friendly environment, where automobiles become secondary. Once ridership is established and activities and demand increase throughout the Loop, a straighter alignment of the transit line through downtown will facilitate express service. Grand Boulevard is the only street in the downtown that is wide enough to provide the dedicated lanes necessary for such express service. Careful design can ensure that these corridors become magnets for pedestrian activity as seen in the Denver 16th Street transit corridor.

Commuter rail works at the larger metropolitan scale of connecting downtown to the suburban neighborhoods of Johnson County and other outlying areas. This service, which requires coordination with the freight railroads and infrastructure improvements, will connect into Union Station. Express buses on the highways are an excellent short-term service for commuters, especially once the MAX is in place to distribute people to their jobs and other destinations, including venues for visitor attractions and visual and performing arts events.



*Light Rail Transit Station in Cleveland*

## BUILDING GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS

Downtown Kansas City already has a number of distinctive neighborhoods, each one quite different from the other. The range of choices around neighborhood characteristics and types of units (lofts, high rise and mid-rise apartments, rowhouses, bungalows, etc.) can broaden the market by appealing to different demographics and tastes. The more established neighborhoods include River Market, Quality Hill, the West Side, the West Crossroads, and Union Hill. As a mixed-use center, the Loop is becoming an important downtown neighborhood, as will Washington Square in the future. The neighborhoods on the eastern side of downtown have the greatest potential for new residential capacity, including infill of underutilized industrial land in Columbus Park, the development of the Berkley waterfront, new development in the East Loop, the ongoing adaptive reuse in the East Crossroads, infill in Hospital Hill, which may include some residential use, and the redevelopment of Beacon Hill and adjacent areas.

Great urban neighborhoods are not all alike, but they share some common character-defining elements.

- **Density and critical mass** - residential buildings only become a neighborhood when there are enough residents living in a relatively tightly knit district. As a collection of many residential buildings, these areas will form their own identity that is distinct from other areas. This more intense land use and the number of people become the basis for supporting amenities. Currently, the high-rise buildings on the bluff of the East Loop lack the critical mass to be a neighborhood, while Quality Hill, River Market, and other areas have become distinctive neighborhoods.
- **Building stock** - Neighborhoods often are defined by a consistent building material or type of building that adds to their identity. In Quality Hill, the row houses are distinctive; in the River Market, the warehouse buildings are the defining element; and the West Side is characterized largely by its single-family bungalows. In some areas, such as Union Hill, the building types may be quite eclectic but the overall massing and scale is the same.
- **Parks and pedestrian-friendly streets** - Every great neighborhood has shady streets that provide a soft relief to the buildings and a tremendous amenity for residents as they jog or stroll near their houses. Unlike other amenities, parks and pedestrian-friendly streets can be put in place at the outset to help define character and identity. Often neighborhoods coalesce around a single memorable open space. Examples from other cities include Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia or Gramercy Park in New York.

- **Diversity** - many people are drawn to urban neighborhoods because of the rich diversity that can be found. A range of incomes, ethnic and racial backgrounds, jobs, and cultural and personal interests enrich the mix and level of interaction, creating a quite different experience than suburban living.

As the number of housing units grows, the neighborhood is able to support amenities, which in turn reinforce identity and cohesive qualities. Even though they are highly desirable, schools, shops, and grocery stores can be justified only when a certain threshold of families and other residents is achieved. The cost of development and operations of these enterprises makes them a difficult proposition as the leading agent, in comparison with parks and streetscape.

Many suburban neighborhoods coalesce around a school, reflecting the concentration of families with school-aged children. In downtown, the West Side is an urban neighborhood that is centered around schools. For the most part, however, the primary demographic cohorts that are pioneering downtown living are the young adults (20 to 29 years old) and the empty nesters (45 to 70 years old). As the demand grows for education, private schools or charter schools are likely to rise up first, and could include innovative concepts such as global classrooms. High priority should be given to improving the existing public schools as a means of retaining families downtown. If the need exists, public magnet schools may be appropriate in the downtown where they are central to many members of the community. A number of magnet schools currently operate in the area around Union Hill and just south of the study area. A charter school downtown and several parochial schools in the area also serve the existing population.

The concentrated land use, the total number of people, and their disposable income become the basis for retail businesses that provide services for residents. A mix of residents, office workers, and tourists creates the strongest market for sustaining downtown retail. Within neighborhoods, small shops and cafes can become gathering points for a community. The Film Row area in the Crossroads or the corner of 6th and Campbell in Columbus Park provide examples.

## CATALYTIC PROJECTS

Within a downtown, large singular attractions and landmarks occur within a backdrop of residential and office buildings that make up the fabric of the city. This juxtaposition and contrast creates a sense of drama that is unlike other areas in the metropolitan area. By having a critical mass of destinations and attractions, downtowns become part of the itinerary for the visitor, and ideally can provide enough interesting activity to extend the visitors' stay and attract them back for repeat visits.

To complement the convention center, theaters, Union Station, and other museums, the primary focus of the last four years has been the siting and design of the new Sprint Arena downtown and the related entertainment district. The new KC Southern headquarters and the H&R Block headquarters within the Loop are important signals to the role of downtown as a premier office location. Several other catalytic projects are still to be realized, and important decisions must be made about their location, appropriateness, and/or timing. Many of these projects enhance the existing arts and culture environment downtown, which is an important generator of economic activity that draws residents and visitors from throughout the city and the metropolitan area.

## Performing Arts Center

The Performing Arts Center is close to realization and should be the highest priority in the course of the next year. Two sites are being considered, each with their own advantages and disadvantages (Figure 6). The dramatic architecture for the Performing Arts Center at the top of the hill at Central and 16th Street demonstrates that the buildings could become a cultural icon and landmark, although somewhat removed from the restaurants, theaters, and other activity on the downtown streets. This site would also require a substantial number of dedicated parking spaces because of its hilltop location. If sited on the Lyric Block, the Performing Arts Center would occupy one of the most prominent corners of downtown at Central and 11th Street, with the potential of reusing the historic theater while adding new concert halls and other facilities to the block. By sharing parking in this location, the Performing Arts Center will not require any new parking but instead can take advantage of the tremendous capacity in the nearby office parking facilities. At the same time, patrons are far more likely to park and have dinner before the show, extending their stay downtown.

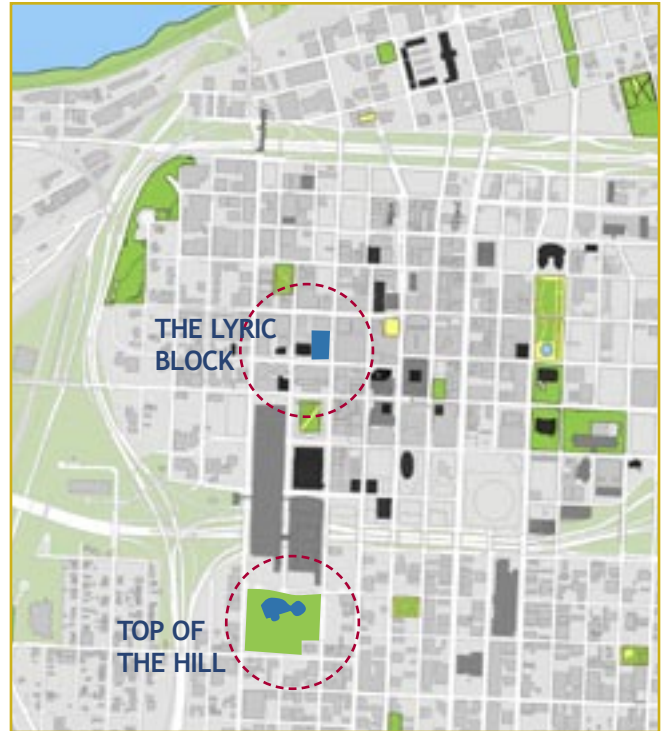


Figure 6. Two Locations Under Consideration for the Performing Arts Center



Baltimore



Cleveland



Denver

Figure 7. Several Suggested Locations for a Baseball Stadium

## Downtown Baseball

At the start of this study, the possibility of a downtown baseball stadium was an imminent decision. In this context, the downtown community identified a number of potential sites including prominent sites in the north Loop (A) and the north Crossroads (B+C). During the spring of 2005, the Royals decided to “live within their lease” at Kauffman Stadium for the remaining nine years, deferring any decision for a new stadium for four to five years. This timeframe creates a very different evaluation of criteria for the siting of a baseball stadium (Figure 7). Some key considerations include:

- Site capacity - the ability to fit a properly oriented and sized stadium within the site.
- Opportunity cost - the consideration of other uses that may develop there if the site is not held for the potential of a baseball stadium.
- Spin-off effects - the ability of the stadium due to its proximity and orientation to complement surrounding uses and generate supporting retail and entertainment.
- Urban design and scale - the effect of juxtaposing these extremely large structures within the fabric of the city, taking into consideration the placement of any blank sides and services.
- Shared parking potential - a key advantage of a downtown site is the ability to share office parking facilities that are not otherwise used in the evenings and on weekends.
- Access and circulation - consideration of the sequence of arrival for visitors coming from the regional highway system to the local streets to parking and then to sidewalks and impacts on circulation.
- Views of the city - with north or northeast orientation from the batter to the pitcher, the placement of the stadium can sometimes take advantage of spectacular views of the downtown skyline.

With the longer time frame, the north Loop and the north Crossroads sites have much too high of an opportunity cost, given the ability of the Sprint Arena, the Performing Arts Center, and other investments to spin off activity in these areas over the next five to ten years. While proximity to downtown is highly advantageous, the north Crossroads site seems in fact too close to other major

attractions, competing for parking rather than sharing it and creating a barrier between downtown and the ongoing investment in the Crossroads. With the potential relocation of the Performing Arts Center, the top of the hill site was considered as well. The topography on this site, however, does not lend itself to the bowl of the baseball stadium and the resulting wall on the downhill side would be daunting, although further feasibility analyses would be necessary to test this site. The ability to properly orient and accommodate a stadium in any of these three sites would be challenging. In order to fit the stadium, through-streets would need to be closed, notably Main Street in the north Crossroads scheme, Wyandotte Street in the north Loop scheme, and 16th Street at the top of the hill site.

In order to maintain options and allow for reconsideration at some future date, a fourth site (D) was identified for a baseball stadium should the issue arise again. The evaluation of this site must be considered within the context of a five to ten year timeframe or beyond. Located along the rail line at Oak Street and 19th Street, this site is currently used for surface parking for Hospital Hill, a use that would have to be replaced by taking advantage of shared parking to the extent possible. As an anchor in this corner of the downtown, the stadium could contribute to the ongoing activity in the Crossroads and the emerging Washington Square, complementing other nearby destinations such as Union Station and Liberty Memorial. The low-lying site is large enough to orient and accommodate the stadium without closing any through-streets. The bluffs overlooking this site from Hospital Hill will dramatically rise in value with views across the stadium toward the downtown skyline. A key advantage of this site is a very low opportunity cost in that the current surface parking acts as an adequate land banking strategy.

By being part of a larger urban framework, a downtown baseball stadium has a greater potential to spin off development around it than is typical in more isolated locations. As a catalyst for other uses and activities, a downtown baseball stadium can create a net economic gain for the region.



*Many Catalytic Projects Surround the Government District*



## Other Catalytic Projects

The Downtown Corridor strategy needs to take in to consideration a number of other catalyst projects that are in discussion at the current time. While many of these are fixed in their location, they may demand attention and/or resources or need to be recognized for their potential to transform dramatically the downtown.

- Old Federal Courthouse - The GSA is in the process of disposing of the old Federal Courthouse at 811 Grand, with a primary goal to develop an asset for the downtown through its reuse. The size of the building (approximately 280,000 sf), its unique layout with courtrooms, and the need for off-site parking requires a creative solution for its reuse. Given the focus on education and the ongoing desire to generate more activity on the streets, school-related use would be an ideal match. At some future time, this building could host a downtown continuing education center for the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC), Penn Valley Community College, or another institution or a separate college or school. Discussion is underway to reuse the building for a private school, a perfect location for such use. Office facilities would be another compatible use for this building.
- Margaret Kemp Community Center - A new social services center is proposed for a site just east of the Loop at 10th Street and Harrison Street. The coordinated delivery of social and community services will be improved in a new facility with a welcoming atmosphere that is proximate to nearby residential programs.
- Government Parking - The GSA is prohibited from providing parking for its government workers, many of whom are located in the Government District and adjacent East Loop. Since some of the government functions remaining downtown are in leased facilities, the lack of safe and convenient parking in the area will become a critical factor affecting the commitment to remain downtown. The lease for the FAA building on Davis Park will be up for renewal in the next several years. The acquisition of land to provide parking for the FAA and other tenants/users in the East Loop will be a first step in consolidating surface parking and freeing up land for redevelopment of other uses. In other parts of the district, the GSA owns a number of surface parking lots, opening up the possibility to partner with the municipal or private sector to allow structured parking on those sites as a means of adding parking capacity and spurring both public and private development.
- City Market Renovation - Improvements to the City Market would enhance an existing asset, which is a centerpiece of the River Market and a destination for other residents and visitors. Possibilities include the relocation of the Steamship Arabia within the Downtown Corridor, which will free up space in the market.
- Union Station Repositioning - Union Station is a landmark restoration and a beloved building in Kansas City. To sustain itself financially, the complex is looking at ways to use all the facilities within the station and on the site to the highest and best use. As a key anchor downtown, the Union Station needs to be a busy hub of activity with a wide variety of uses that can draw people back over and over for events and discovery.





## 2 market opportunities

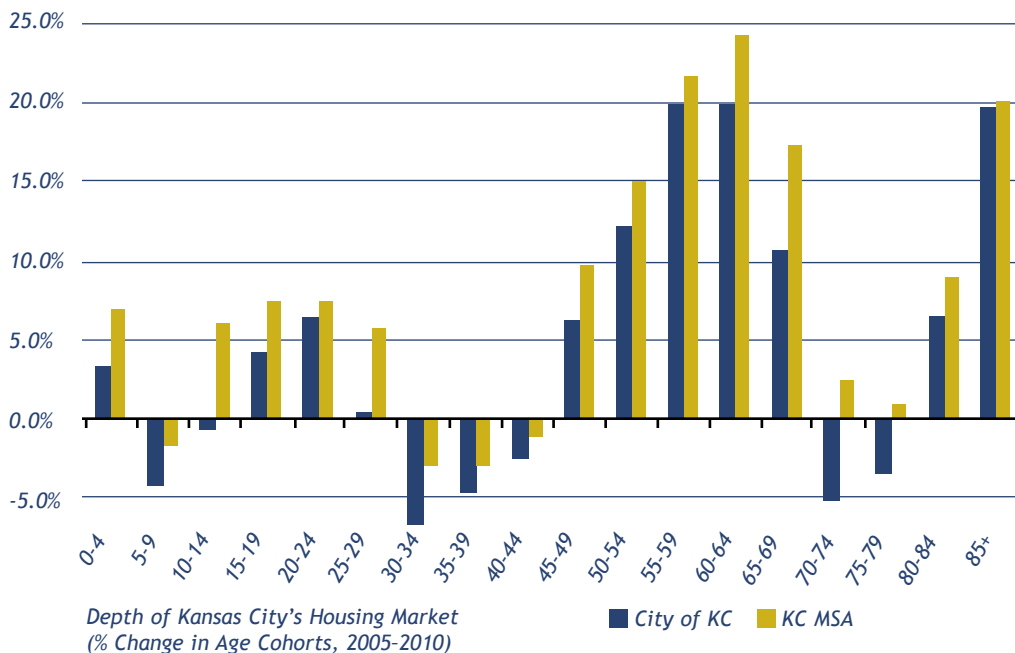
As a means of achieving the key goal of creating a vibrant and competitive downtown in Kansas City, the market analysis focused on examining those opportunities that appear to have the strongest near-term momentum, including those that build upon recent and ongoing downtown revitalization initiatives. Specifically, the Sasaki team was asked to define the depth and breadth of the downtown housing market, with the objective of understanding its sustainability over the next five years. Another key task in the market analysis focused on opportunities to diversify and expand downtown's employment base, with the primary goal of reducing current excess levels of vacant office space and reinforcing the 24-7 vibrancy of the Central Business District (CBD).

To support this analysis, detailed research was conducted on those factors driving demand for various types of real estate, such as housing, retail, and workforce. Market conditions in these property sectors were examined to understand such indices as absorption and leasing patterns, rental rates and sales prices, development trends and the like. Relevant demographic and real estate findings as they relate to market opportunities are noted in the text that follows.

### HOUSING

The Mayor's previously announced goal of 10,000 housing units as part of the River-Crown-Plaza initiative is well on its way to fruition. Significant momentum is underway in adding large numbers of new housing across the downtown. Previous efforts, such as new townhouse construction in Quality Hill, have established viable residential neighborhoods using a combination of private capital and public funding. More recently, a number of successful loft conversions in the Crossroads and the River Market areas as well as the ongoing conversion of obsolete office buildings (such as Wall Street Tower) are evidence of the increasing depth and size of downtown's housing market. Substantial conversion potential remains in specific locations such as the Crossroads, while the potential is thinner in other locations like the Garment and Library Districts due to the diminishing supply of adaptable buildings.

The City's population increased by more than 8,000 over the past five years, for a current population of almost 450,000 residents. While the majority of this growth has been in the Northland, greater downtown's population expanded by about 2,000 residents, with the completion



foot. In addition, since 2000, over 500 for-sale units have been delivered, with average prices in the range of \$200 to \$225 per square foot. According to downtown developers and real estate interests, these price points have reached the threshold of financial feasibility of new construction for both rental and for-sale product. This is a remarkable shift from the market findings in our 2001 report, which indicated at that time that price points were 20 percent to 40 percent below what is needed to support all-in development costs.

of more than 1,600 new housing units during this period. Demographic forecasts prepared by the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) suggest that the City will add about 15,000 new residents over the next five years to 464,000.

As illustrated in the accompanying chart, positive growth is expected among “twenty-somethings” with more sizable gains expected among “empty nesters” in the City (as well as the metropolitan area). These two demographic cohorts are likely to represent the strongest, near-term opportunity to continue to broaden the downtown housing market’s recent gains.

Opportunities to expand the draw of young professionals to the downtown will be linked in large measure to growth in downtown employment as well as the creation of a lively, exciting environment with such projects as KC Live! On the other hand, successfully attracting empty nesters will be more closely linked to quality-of-life issues such as improvements to the public realm with streetscape and public parks and plazas that are illustrative of the “walkable urbanity” initiatives contained in the plan.

The sustainability of downtown’s housing market is also illustrated in increasing rental rates as well as the emergence of for-sale product, which is characteristic of the evolution of downtown housing. Notably, rental rates have increased between 12 percent and 30 percent over the past five years to a range of \$1.06 to \$1.29 per square

Other evidence of a deepening housing market is the recent absorption patterns. Based on primary and secondary research, the average annual absorption in the downtown area is estimated to be in the range of 250 units per year.

Based on these findings, an analysis of demand potentials for market-rate housing over the next five years suggests the potential for a solid increase in downtown housing in the range of 1,300 units to as many as 2,500 new housing units. Key variables governing the range include the business and real estate cycle and an anticipated steady rise in interest rates. The anticipated successful absorption of current for-sale projects such as Metropolitan, The View and Wall Street Tower can be expected to enhance prospects for additional for-sale units during this period, thus strengthening the downtown as a viable housing market in the region. Units should continue to be a mix of one bedroom/den to attract young, single professionals as well as larger units offering quality finishes and amenities to attract empty nester households that may be relocating and/or downsizing from other locations. It is reasonable to expect a stronger empty nester segment demanding somewhat larger for-sale units with more luxurious finishes and amenities. Over the next few years, a market opportunity will likely exist for high-end condominiums, perhaps capable of achieving a significant premium over current pricing.

## COMMERCIAL

Corporate downsizing and a decline in employment during the recession of 2000-2001 hit the region's commercial office sector hard. Vacancy rates across the metropolitan area office inventory increased some submarkets to 25 percent, absorption was negative (or flat at best), and rental rates were stagnant. Since then, however, recent employment growth has stemmed these negative market indices. Almost two million square feet of office space has been absorbed across the metropolitan area since 2003.

Similar trends are also evident in the Downtown Kansas City office sector. The downtown office inventory (22 million square foot) comprises about 26 percent of the region's inventory. As a proportion of the metropolitan area, the downtown inventory has been declining; however, this is due, in large measure, to the conversion of a number of obsolete office buildings to residential use. As such, the office vacancy rate (16 percent) has declined and absorption is on the upswing in the River/Crown/Plaza Corridor—450,000 square feet of space was absorbed in the two year period of 2003 and 2004. Other significant projects to affect the overall health of the downtown office market include the relocation of H&R Block's headquarters facility near the Plaza to a location next to the KC Live! project in the Power & Light District, and the construction of the regional IRS facility near Union Station, with completion expected in 2007.

Woods & Poole, Inc., a demographic forecasting service, forecasts that the Kansas City metropolitan area will add more than 76,000 new jobs over the next five years, a key demand generator of commercial space. The majority of job growth is expected to be concentrated in Services, a sector that includes a range of professions such as business and professional services and health and medical care, and in retail trade.

To understand growth potentials in the downtown office market (as well as its supporting uses such as retail and lodging), a market-share analysis was prepared. In this model, downtown's share of regional employment, currently estimated at roughly 100,000 employees in the three ZIP codes comprising the greater downtown, represents only eight percent of the metropolitan area's job base. This is well below a number of other cities around the United States. As a rule, downtown employment in higher-density Northeastern cities comprises about 25 percent of market share (e.g., 27 percent in Washington, D.C.); in lower-den-

sity downtowns it is typically in the range of 10 percent to 15 percent (e.g., 12 percent in downtown Nashville).

Presuming Downtown Kansas City's share is held constant (at 8%) over the next five years suggests that (greater) downtown employment will expand by roughly 6,000 jobs. Note, however, that the IRS facility will generate 6,000 jobs (some of which are net new to the downtown as a result of relocation from other IRS facilities in the Midwest). Thus, these downtown employment forecasts are likely to be conservative. At a minimum, this suggests job-based demand for about one million square feet of office space over the next five years. Much of this demand can be satisfied by existing space. Ongoing economic development initiatives aimed at business retention and recruitment to the downtown could be expected to add to these estimates. New incentives need to be explored including measures to enable the use of a modified TIF for reinvestment in existing office space to attract new businesses. Given current vacancies of about 3.5 million square feet in the downtown office inventory suggests that near-term demand can be reasonably met in existing, viable vacant building stock.

Ancillary or supporting market opportunities, such as convenience and service retail and lodging, will be directly tied to increases in downtown's resident, visitor, and employee populations. Current market indicators among downtown's 3,700 hotel rooms are weak (e.g., annual occupancies have declined from 60 percent in 1999 to 52 percent in 2004). Turnaround in the downtown hotel market will also be tied, in part, to the expansion and enhanced marketing and management of the Convention Center.

With respect to other commercial uses, anticipated employment growth in the medical/health services sector suggest market potentials for about 250,000 to 300,000 square feet of research and development space tied to the Hospital Hill medical campus. In large part, opportunities to expand this sector will be tied to teaching and research funding grants in medical and biotechnology. Finally, there appear to be sufficient population densities and consumer spending to support about 50,000 square feet of grocery store use(s) within a two-mile trade area of the downtown. This reinforces the viability of the grocery store proposed as part of the KC Live! project.





3  
district  
concepts

The Downtown Corridor has distinct areas, yet there are standards for development that apply generally to the entire area. The principles for downtown development are outlined, followed by specific recommendations for geographic areas within the Corridor: The Loop, The Riverfront, Crossroads/Freight House/West Side, and Washington Square.

#### **DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS**

The six downtown development standards are intended to create a compact urbane downtown district with residences, shopping, cultural activities, and employment in close proximity. In particular, the guidelines encourage an active pedestrian environment, balanced transportation, distinctive architecture that respects the historic context, and ground floor retail on primary streets. These guidelines can form the basis of development review of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts, development Requests for Proposals (RFPs), site plan review, and other forms of development review and regulation. Many interests in the downtown have worked toward and contributed to the idea of design guidelines or principles and to their specific content, including the City's FOCUS plan, the 2001 Downtown Corridor Development Strategy, and the Kansas City Design Center, among others.



*Union Station, a Kansas City Landmark*

### **1. Buildings that engage the street shape the civic realm.**

- Buildings should be set close to the street and should define open space and streets with consistent heights along their facades.
- Building heights should be in proportion to right-of-way widths with recommended ratios of 1:1 or 1:1.5 right-of-way to building height.
- Where greater height is appropriate, the upper levels should be stepped back to provide consistent street walls along the street and in relation to the buildings on the opposite side.
- On residential streets, buildings may be set back on the site to allow for landscaped planting beds (typically 10 to 15 feet). For rowhouses, stoops provide rhythm and interest along the street.
- Multiple building entrances should open out to the public realm of the street.
- Buildings should be designed to accommodate ground floor retail. Where feasible, this use is encouraged, especially on prominent corners and where concentrated on both sides of the street.
- At the street level, buildings should be proportioned and offer details that relate to the pedestrian environment.

### **2. Historic and landmark buildings contribute to an authentic sense of place.**

- The preservation and adaptive reuse of significant historic buildings, whether residential, commercial or industrial architecture, is strongly encouraged.
- In many cases it is the collection of these buildings, with similar scale and function that creates a sense of a cohesive district.
- New development, which may be innovative in design, should relate to surrounding historic buildings with consideration given to building proportions, materials, and massing.





*Pedestrian friendly streets in the River Market*

### 3. Pedestrian-friendly streets balance use by vehicles and people.

- Streets should be two-way wherever possible to make it easier to navigate downtown and to calm traffic.
- On-street parking is recommended for at least one-side of most streets to increase the parking supply of convenient parking, to support retail use, to encourage people to park and walk on city streets to their destination, to buffer the pedestrian from moving traffic, and to calm traffic.
- Street trees are essential for pedestrian-friendly streets since they create a cooler microclimate in summer, buffer the pedestrian from moving traffic, and improve the image of the city.
- The palette of materials for lights, street furniture, and paving should become more consistent through the even application of the SOM guidelines for streetscape improvements. Standard lighting in particular provides the “connective tissue” between districts, minimizes awkward transitions, and is easier to maintain. Variations to this palette, especially as one moves out of the Loop, should be carefully considered to address these issues.
- Traffic circles or rotaries may be used in some quiet neighborhood settings as a means of calming traffic, but in other intersection locations they create a hostile environment for pedestrians.
- Truck routes should be carefully considered to encourage use of regional highways and to minimize cut-through traffic in neighborhoods.



*Oppenstein Park in the Loop*

#### **4. Successful urban parks are activated by the uses around them and a dedicated constituency.**

- Parks need to be graded to allow ground level views in from the adjacent streets. On city streets, these long views are enhanced by a canopy of shade trees along the curb line. In more informal parks, removing the underlying layers of shrubs may be necessary to allow long views across the park.
- Traffic calming measures should be taken on streets that pass through or are adjacent to parks to encourage casual foot traffic through the park. On-street parking along the park edge promotes park use and buffers park users from moving traffic.
- Residential uses around parks provide the highest degree of “eyes on the park” and a committed constituency that adds to park safety 24 hours a day and seven days a week.
- Park maintenance is essential to ensure a positive city image and active use of the park, addressing the health and trimming of trees, removal of underlying layers of vegetation, and the care of lawns and flowering beds.
- New pocket parks need to be sited strategically to add value to surrounding real estate, encourage quality development, and to provide a positive amenity to these uses.

- Public art can enrich the park experience, with collaboration between the design team and the artist, to create memorable places, contribute to the city identity, and carry on the Kansas City legacy of art and fountains. Public art can also integrate interpretive elements that further these objectives.
- Active programming of parks adds vitality, enriches the downtown culture, entices people downtown, and improves safety. This programming can include annual or seasonal events that are targeted appropriately to specific parks, large or small performing arts events, interpretive centers, and/or small commercial ventures (cafes, equipment rental, etc.).

#### **5. Parking facilities can be designed to contribute to an urbane downtown setting.**

- Parking requirements should be reduced to facilitate redevelopment within the urban core, especially by taking advantage of shared parking use and by counting on-street spaces to meet required parking amounts.
- Wrapping parking with other development and/or activating the ground floor of parking structures with retail uses is highly encouraged, especially if the parking structure is sited on a corner.



Library District Parking

## 6. Unique places allow for design innovation and diversity.

- Freestanding parking structures should be placed in the interior of the block or the rear of the block. Blank walls on corners and primary streets are discouraged.
- The scale of parking structures should be carefully considered to minimize impacts on the urban fabric with recommended sizes in the range of 300 to 500 cars.
- Visible parking structures should have a facade that relates to the scale, proportion, and character of the district. Garage facades should have a balance of solid wall and openings arranged to complement the surrounding structures. Large blank walls and continuous sloped strip openings are not appropriate. Ramps and sloping floors should not be expressed on the outside of the building, and, in particular, not on a façade with frontage on a primary street.
- Surface parking lots should be screened from streets and open spaces through the use of planted buffers around the edges. These buffers should be composed of continuous tree masses and other planting materials.
- Parking entrances and exits should be on side streets wherever possible.
- A fine-grained mix of uses promotes interaction and provides amenities that benefit residents, employees, and visitors.
- Diversity in the city is made possible by a range of housing types and a range of affordability levels.
- Innovative design builds on current design thinking but moves beyond popular trends to create buildings that are uniquely suited to their site, the context, and their program.
- The design of buildings should respond to unique aspects of the site, such as prominent locations at the termini of key streets and view corridors, corner locations, prominent locations on bluffs and overlooks, relationship to nearby historic or landmark buildings, or corner locations.
- The relationship of the building to the existing skyline should be considered in the overall massing.
- Special entryways, architectural details, articulation of the building mass, and careful use of materials are elements that create distinctive buildings and can shape the relationship of the building to its context.

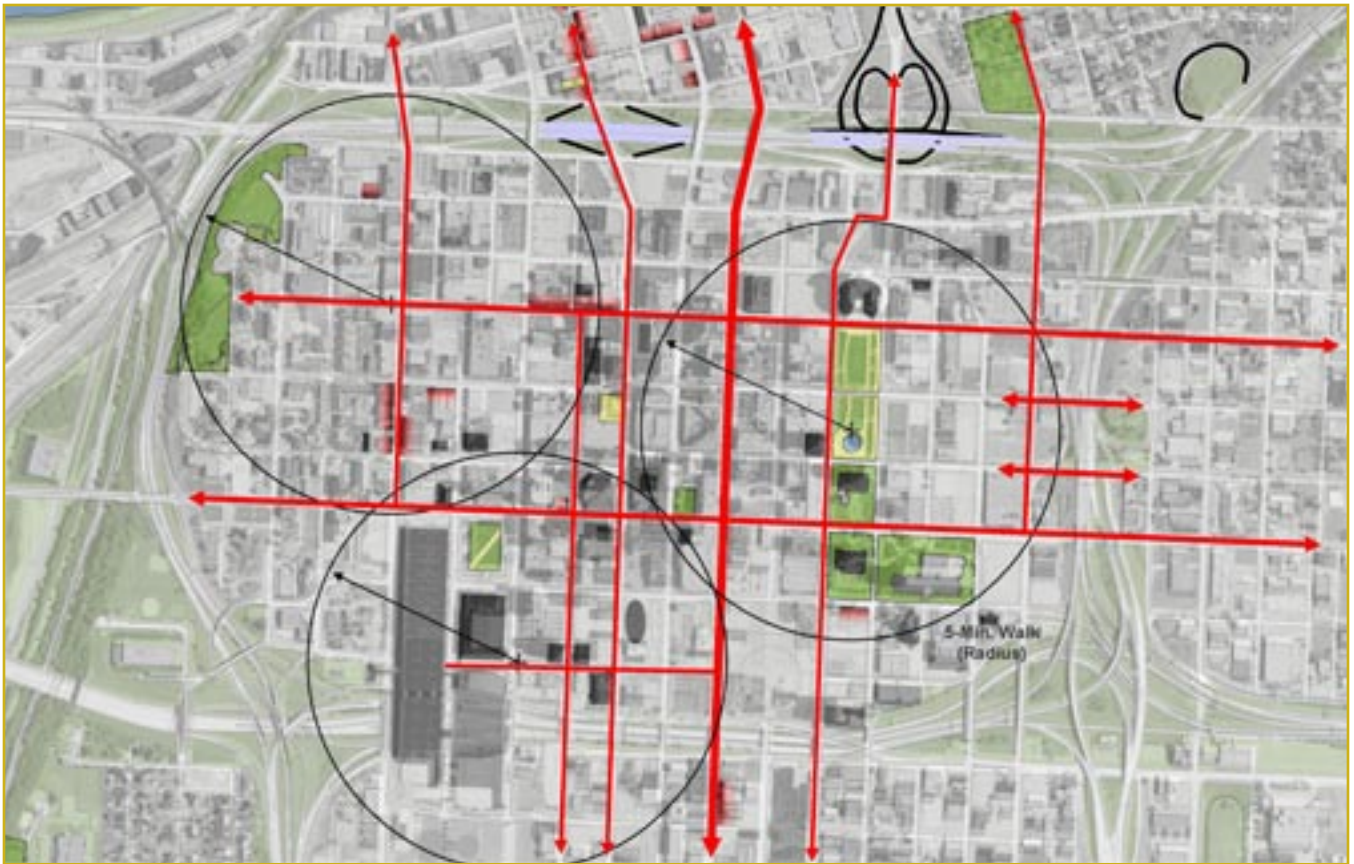


Figure 8. *The Loop: Existing Conditions*



Figure 9. *The Loop: Proposed Development Framework*

## THE LOOP

The Loop will become the heart of activity in the downtown corridor, with the finest grain of interaction between office, residential, performing arts, entertainment, and supporting retail (Figures 8 and 9). With clearly marked entry points and elegantly landscaped gateway streets, visitors will be welcomed into this exciting district. The sidewalks will be crowded with people making their way to events or strolling along to find dining or other goods in local shops. Tourists and conventioners will increasingly find enough attractions and interest to prolong their stay and concentrate their time in the downtown. Through programming and design, Barney Allis Plaza and Davis Park will draw people in for events or quiet time away from the bustle of the streets. Smaller pocket parks in key locations downtown will complement the larger more civic parks.

With important destinations such as the Sprint Arena, Performing Arts Center, Convention Center and theaters, downtown will be viewed as a desirable address for corporate headquarters, whose employees can take advantage of downtown amenities. With increasing members of residential households, downtown will also be seen as a neighborhood itself, with many different housing types in the vicinity to encourage the full range of employees to live close to work. This combination of a substantial residential population, downtown employees, and visitors will make downtown retail more feasible, leading to a greater choice in dining and personal goods available. Over time, the residential population will evolve into a wider more stable demographic that moves beyond twenty-year old and empty nester pioneers, and increasingly becomes seen as a lifestyle choice for families. Civic infrastructure, such as schools, will become more of a possibility as demand grows.

In terms of walkable urbanity within a five-minute radius, the Loop will have three primary centers of gravity, each with a zone of influence encompassing the many subdistricts within the Loop:

- The Power and Light District aligned along 14th Street and connecting the Sprint Arena and the Convention Center with a mix of new retail, office, and residential uses, with a zone of influence that encompasses the core area of hotels and a revitalized downtown office market in the financial district. The top of the hill at Central and 16th Street, which is within a five-minute walk of all this activity, could feature the Performing Arts Center or alternatively would be a tremendous site for residential uses overlooking the downtown skyline and the Crossroads.
- The Government District, centered around City Hall and Davis Park, embracing all of the East Loop and portions of Grand Boulevard, with a mix of uses that includes government, commercial office, and residential. With redevelopment, this area will be the most transformed with substantial new housing in the "East Village," the potential for a mid-rise office component, and infill and adaptive reuse on Grand Boulevard, including the potential for an educational facility.
- Quality Hill/Library District, centered on Broadway and 9th Street and encompassing residential and office uses, theaters, ground floor retail, and potentially the Performing Arts Center on the Lyric Theater block.



Figure 10. *The Riverfront: Existing Conditions*



Figure 11. *The Riverfront: Illustrative Plan*

## THE RIVERFRONT

Between the Loop and the Missouri River, three distinct neighborhoods will thrive with stronger connections between them: the River Market, Columbus Park, and Berkley Riverfront. Each of these neighborhoods has a distinct character and unique legacy that should be celebrated and enhanced with infill and new development and adaptive reuse. At the same time, improved connections will make it easier to support amenities such as retail and active parks. The improved connections will also include stronger links back to the Loop through the removal of excess highway ramps along the I-70 edge of the districts and two-way traffic on the bridges and tunnels that cross that highway. A new viaduct over the railroad between Berkley Riverfront and Columbus Park will give residents a direct connection on a pedestrian-friendly street to the riverfront park (Figure 10 and 11).

In the long-term, the removal of the Route 9 embankment will allow for an on-grade boulevard that acts as a seam, rather than a wall between the River Market and Columbus Park. Following the grade of the current ramps from the Heart of America Bridge and then climbing again across I-70, the new roadway will maintain the city street character of Oak Street in downtown Kansas City and Burlington Street in North Kansas City. In keeping with the Kansas City legacy, the new boulevard will create a gracious gateway to the downtown and provide a setting for retail and mid-rise development along its edge.

### The River Market

Building on its character of renovated lofts and walkable streets, the River Market will become a stronger neighborhood with ongoing loft construction and adaptive reuse, improvements to the City Market, a mix of office uses, and new development on the bluffs overlooking the river. As one of the downtown's specialty districts, the River Market blends its identity as a popular place to live and an attractive place to visit for dining, or going to the City Market, with access to the riverfront and its trail system. The redevelopment and improvements to the Second Street corridor from the Kansas City Southern site near the bluffs to the Cold Storage building will extend the fabric closer to the riverfront. With more people in the area, the city can finally engage the Missouri River with more demand for use of the existing pedestrian bridge and the new heritage trails, and increased interest in interpretive possibilities in the Town of Kansas site.

### Columbus Park

The strength of Columbus Park is its quiet setting and integrity as a community, especially in the area south of Fifth Street. The vacant and underutilized industrial lands north of Fifth Street provide tremendous opportunity to increase the resident population and create a critical mass to support more neighborhood retail and other civic amenities. As one of the lowest density downtown neighborhoods, the character of new development may range from wood frame one-and-two family homes on small lots to townhouses and small loft structures. With this character, Columbus Park is likely to continue to attract families who can benefit from a system of neighborhood parks. Both existing and new parks should be surrounded by residential uses on all sides, and will require ongoing maintenance to make them true neighborhood assets. With its wide corridor, new development along the proposed Heart of America Boulevard could be somewhat higher to match the scale of the nearby Cold Storage building. As the character of the district has changed over time, the role of the Northeast Industrial Trafficway needs to be reconsidered to limit truck traffic. Similarly, the removal of the I-70 ramp will help limit through-truck traffic in the neighborhood.

### Berkley Riverfront

For the development of the land south of the Berkley Riverfront Park, the Port Authority has selected Forest City, which is a nationally-renowned developer familiar with urban proto-types. Forest City and the Port Authority are beginning a process to look at the appropriate mix of uses and building type, the integration of open space and development, and the connections between the riverfront and the River Market on one side and Columbus Park on the other. Through street realignments and ramp reconfiguration, truck traffic needs to be addressed to avoid cut-through routes along Front Street, a pattern that also adversely affects the River Market neighborhood. The likely development in this area will be low to mid-rise housing with supporting retail uses, and the potential for higher-rise development, whether office or residential, along the I-29/I-35 corridor.



Figure 12. Crossroads/Freight House/West Side Existing Conditions



Figure 13. Crossroads/Freight House/West Side Proposed Development Framework



## CROSSROADS/FREIGHT HOUSE/WEST SIDE

The Crossroads has been extremely successful in attracting people downtown through its dynamic First Friday events and the many quality galleries throughout the district. The lower scale buildings in the Crossroads are well suited to gallery use as well as studios and live-work units. Many small businesses find these buildings the right size for start-up companies and other enterprises that can take advantage of spaces in the range of 15,000 to 20,000 square feet. The Freight House District, which occupies the higher loft buildings along the rail corridor, has become very popular for residential conversions and professional offices. Throughout the Crossroads and the Freight House Districts, restaurants, cafes, and small shops occupy the ground floor of the former industrial buildings. Increasingly, the energy of the Crossroads is moving east to take advantage of underutilized properties east of Grand Boulevard. This trend will help bridge the gap between the Crossroads and 18th and Vine on the Paseo, reinforcing a continuous cultural corridor along 18th Street, Southwest Boulevard, 21st Street, and then into the West Side on West Pennway Street. Like Columbus Park, the West Side is a residentially scaled, tightly knit community that has the advantage of close proximity to downtown with the sense of a protected enclave that reinforces its distinctive character.

In order to maintain the energy and success of the Crossroads, a primary focus must be given to shared parking facilities located strategically in the district. This strategy will allow for the infill of mixed-use retail/residential development and live/work units that will enhance the character of Crossroads and remove the gaps created by surface parking. A shared parking strategy also will benefit the local restaurants that are such an amenity in this area, and will also prevent the ongoing demolition of the existing building stock. Improvements to the I-35 ramps will make 20th Street a primary gateway into the district, with clear wayfinding and orientation that directs people to Main Street and Grand Boulevard. A few key corridors within the district should be targeted for streetscape improvements to establish links to adjacent districts as well as a more pedestrian-friendly environment within the district, calming traffic and enhancing adjacent uses. Recommended corridors are Baltimore, Main,



*Local Businesses in the Crossroads*

and Grand Boulevard, as well as the east-west cultural corridor described above. With redevelopment and infill, small pocket parks could replace surface parking to offer relief to the built environment and gathering places for the community. Given the character of the district, these open spaces could prominently feature public art and could include revolving installations to create a continually changing sculpture garden.

The West Side is a cohesive neighborhood supported by schools and neighborhood retail. Key recommendations for this area include:

- Preserve neighborhood character and scale
- Maintain an affordable housing stock
- Manage through traffic and improve key streets such as West Penn Way.



Figure 14. Washington Square Existing Conditions



Figure 15. Washington Square Development Framework



*Destinations in the Washington Square Area*

## WASHINGTON SQUARE

Washington Square will become a dynamic district that draws in the overlapping influences of Union Station, Crown Center, and Hospital Hill. Over time, new development and reconfiguration of the ground floor of existing buildings will activate Washington Park, creating an attractive gathering space for outdoor performances and quiet relaxation. In particular, the new infill development on the northern edge will provide a direct active ground floor with the potential for cafes and other retail to spill out into the park. Residential or other mixed use, with parking below the street level, will provide more direct “eyes on the park” while filling a void in the fabric of the city along the rail corridor.

An important goal is to engage the life and economic activity of Hospital Hill with its nearby neighbors and the rest of downtown. The institutional entities and property owners on Hospital Hill need to develop a more detailed master plan for this sub-district, incorporating all of the different master plans of the hospitals, the university and the city, (and others) and reconciling these with the larger goals of the downtown study. A joint development plan would insure shared parking, vibrant retail streets, a more diverse urbane setting, and other potential benefits gained from coming together to discuss future planning.

Reconfiguration of the street sections that penetrate this part of the downtown can widen sidewalks and narrow travel lanes, giving more space to the pedestrian and striking a better balance with vehicular speeds and use of the overall right-of-way. Visitors and other people in the area should be encouraged to park once, whether at Union Station, the Liberty Memorial, Crown Center, or Hospital Hill, and to traverse the area on foot using more pedestrian friendly streets. Washington Park could become interactively programmed with events and exhibitions in

Union Station to reinforce the connections between uses in the area.

While the grades between Hospital Hill and Crown Center are daunting, efforts should be made to minimize these differences and encourage pedestrian links between these two important centers of activity. A high priority is the appropriate design of 20th Street to function as a pedestrian-friendly city street, and not an arterial highway, facilitating connections up and down the hill. In order to draw Hospital Hill into the life of the City, vehicular use of Gillham Road needs to be brought into balance through geometric improvements that remove free right turn islands, remove duplicative roadways in front of Children’s Mercy Hospital and clarify the intersection of Oak, Gillham, and 22nd Street, and the installation of signals or stop signs that allow pedestrian crossings at 25th Street and 22nd Street.

Penn Valley Park will become the signature park for Kansas City with park-like drives, removal of highway ramps, and the strategic introduction of small park-scaled commercial enterprises that enhance the use of open space and add to the sense of safety, such as cafes, restaurants, small boat and equipment rental, and enhancement of the existing theater near the castle in the southeast corner. The new IRS and Federal Reserve complexes will add to the number of people that may use the park for jogging or other recreational use. The adaptive reuse of the BMA highrise for residential use and infill residential development south of 31st Street will also add “eyes on the park.” If feasible, the removal of highway ramps in the northwest corner and the southeast corner, could transfer use from a transportation focus to a residential focus, again providing a committed constituency that will be directly concerned with and actively using the park.



# 4

## implementation strategy

In order to move forward over the next several years and to keep a clear vision of long-term goals, the priority actions must be identified and arrayed over time. Priority actions include both capital projects and policy initiatives and take into account the balance between investment in the civic framework from the public and cultural non-profit sectors and investment from the private sector. With extensive input from stakeholders, these priorities are arranged to begin with activities underway and conclude with long-term goals, which are defined as eight to 12 years out. Policy initiatives range from the zoning and design review powers to the more strategic use of public economic incentives. A key aspect of the plan is the definition of roles and responsibilities of the diverse entities that must be involved to ensure successful implementation of the plan.

One fundamental objective of the Downtown Plan is to stabilize and enhance the downtown tax base, and to reinforce downtown's status as a net driver of Kansas City's fiscal health. Downtown's current momentum, however, is clearly linked to large catalytic projects and significant use of public incentives and investment. To achieve the goals for downtown as an economic engine presupposes a gradual decrease in the need for large-scale public investments and development incentives, and the ongoing return of a vibrant, entrepreneurial private investment climate downtown. This transition is a central theme in the implementation strategy outlined in this section.

Because public financial resources are expected to be more limited over the next several years, setting priorities will be important. The timing of the priority actions described below relates primarily to public investment. This discussion is not meant to imply control over the timing of privately funded initiatives. Rather, scarce public resources should be focused on those actions that have the greatest potential to lead to the outcome noted above.

### **EFFORTS UNDERWAY**

A number of important efforts are now underway, emphasizing several critical aspects of the implementation plan: building critical mass, strengthening the civic framework, market and private investment response, and preventing erosion of the economic base.



Figure 16. *Immediate Priorities: Years 0 to 3*

## Building Critical Mass

Without question, the most important priority is to continue to reinforce the vibrancy of the Loop subdistrict. This means completing the Sprint Arena and Convention Center expansion now underway, and enhancing the management systems and marketing to optimize their economic contribution.

## Civic Framework

The MAX bus rapid transit system now underway has the potential to reorient downtown to area residents and visitors, and to begin to enhance the connections between subdistricts and destinations.

## Market Response

Both public and government initiatives are underway that will shift existing activities within downtown and will attract new visitors to downtown. These include the IRS consolidation and expansion adjacent to Union Station, the HOK and H&R Block headquarters projects, the Power and Light district, the new Kansas City Star building, and the Federal Reserve.

## IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES: YEARS 0 TO 3

As these projects are completed, the appropriate priorities over the next three years are shown in Figure 16 and described below.

## Building Critical Mass

In the near term, a key priority is to resolve the location of the proposed Performing Arts Center and to complete its successful development. As noted elsewhere, each of the candidate sites would provide significant benefit to downtown, and would build effectively on efforts already underway.

## Preventing Erosion

A number of specific priorities relate to retaining and enhancing downtown's current economic base. In the East Loop, retaining and expanding the public and private employment base is key. This means consolidating and improving the social services delivery system at a single location, both to enhance the efficiency of these operations and to mitigate their impacts on other area employers and residents. Additionally, the plan recommends the acquisition of key parcels for parking or for additional government office space in the East Loop.

Two important downtown assets are currently studying repositioning options. Both the City Market and Union Station anticipate renovation or new investment to remain vital attractions. The City Market now houses the Steamship Arabia, which may potentially need a new location if displaced from its current location. The planning team strongly believes this historic visitor attraction should be retained somewhere in the downtown, potentially at Union Station or in the vicinity.

The U.S. General Services Administration is seeking reuse options for the former federal building at 811 Grand. This important downtown building represents a key opportunity. Appropriate uses might include a school or other institution.

An additional priority is designed to reinforce citywide support for downtown development. Downtown advocates should begin to coordinate their efforts with those of adjoining neighborhoods. Such an initiative would be designed to ensure that downtown development is not seen as a zero-sum game. In some cities, this perception has led to conflicts between neighborhood advocates and downtown interests.

## Civic Framework

The near term priority civic investments include streetscape improvements on the Broadway and 22nd Street corridor and in the core loop. Barney Allis Plaza could be redesigned within the next three years to provide much-improved open space value to the Loop, especially to the convention and visitor-related uses concentration around its perimeter.

## Private Investment Response

The actions now underway and identified above as near-term priorities will spark significant additional private investment. Among the key sites are the Kansas City Southern site in the River Market area, the Berkley Park neighborhood under the sponsorship of the Kansas City Port Authority, and the Beacon Hill project.

Additionally, the recruitment and retention program discussed below as a policy priority should result in stabilization and the beginning of an improved commercial real estate market downtown. Vacancy rates for existing office and retail space should begin to trend downward, and rents should begin to strengthen.



Figure 17. *Priorities: Years 4 to 7*



## **PRIORITIES: YEARS 4 TO 7**

In the mid-term of the plan, the major public investments—the catalytic projects—will have been completed and should be leveraging significant benefits. One potential project, however, may reappear on downtown’s radar screen.

A downtown ballpark has been discussed for several years, as plans for the Truman Sports Complex and as the Royals’ lease obligations and the County’s funding strategies have evolved. As part of the plan update, a number of potential options were examined. As noted elsewhere, several sites could support a ballpark downtown. There are important implications regarding the viability of land-banking a site for a ballpark that may never be built.

The Sasaki/ERA team generally endorses the value of a downtown ballpark for the purpose of stimulating downtown vitality. Because baseball already exists in the region, the prospective regional economic impact of the relocation to downtown is relatively low (although the implications for the franchise of a publicly funded stadium may be strongly positive). The experience of other cities suggests, however, that re-allocating an existing activity to a downtown location could make a meaningful difference in the pace and intensity of downtown development. While this is a major financial commitment, the community will no doubt weigh the costs and benefits of a ballpark as a downtown development strategy.

## **Civic Framework**

In the mid-term years, the major framework initiative is streetscape improvements: Grand Boulevard, Baltimore, and Main are the north-south priority streets; 5th and 18th Streets are priorities along east-west corridors.

Additionally, with the MAX/BRT route established, a logical next step in downtown’s connective framework would be the trolley circulator loop, which would connect the various subdistricts.

## **Private Investment Response**

The major private investment story in these middle years will be infill development at all scales occurring throughout downtown, and with more modest public financial incentives as a percentage of total project costs. Specific priority areas for the use of public incentives would be the Loop/Grand Boulevard, the north Crossroads, the East Loop, Washington Square, Hospital Hill, and the Beacon Hill neighborhood.



Figure 18. Long Term: Years 8 to 12



*Development Potential within the Context of Existing Buildings.*

### **THE LONG-TERM: YEARS 8 TO 12**

Civic priorities in the long run include the redesigned Bartle Hall entryway, which uses dramatic architecture to highlight the 14th Street entrance and the conversion of the Heart of America ramp entry to a downtown boulevard, designed to solidify and enhance the value of the adjacent neighborhoods. The “decking” of Truman Road at the south end of the Loop, under discussion for several years, may provide significant benefits relative to costs by this stage of downtown’s development. Finally, the designation of, and planning for, a rail transit corridor in the downtown would be an appropriate priority.

Beyond the broad-based infill, ongoing redevelopment, and enhanced performance of existing real estate, the private sector response could include a potential convention hotel (although many such deals have recently been driven by the public sector), the redevelopment of the Paseo area, and the sites adjacent to Penn Valley Park.

## POLICY PRIORITIES

In addition to the physical and capital improvement priorities identified above, a number of important policy initiatives form the core of the near-term implementation strategy. Several of these are already underway and can potentially better align the city’s regulatory structure with the downtown strategy. Chief among these is the city’s zoning code, which can become a key implementation tool, particularly if augmented with clear and enforceable design guidelines for both the public realm and for buildings.

Equally important is the need to continue to coordinate city actions to advance the plan. Numerous stakeholders have pointed out examples of past inconsistency or lack of coordination between city departments as they relate to downtown development. The current city administration appears committed to a stronger role for planning and stronger overall central coordination. This trend should continue. In particular, the Paseo Bridge redesign, and the planning and design of the ramp connections between the bridge and the Loop, are a critical area for near-term policy coordination.

The Downtown Council has evolved over the past few years into a much stronger organization, capable of moving well beyond its basic “clean and safe” mission (funded and executed through the Community Improvement District mechanism). It has followed the model of many advanced downtown-management organizations, with distinct entities operating under a unified staffing and management structure. Its work program for the coming year includes many of the priorities identified in this plan update: a stronger retention and recruitment program for office tenants and retailers; a potential new entity dedicated to special events and marketing; an enhanced research and data collection capability; and a potential role in a new (or newly revamped) parking authority.

As an indicator of its still-emerging status, however, the budget of the Downtown Council (including the CID) stands currently at about \$2.6 million. As a benchmark, following are the characteristics of some well-established downtown management organizations, including the assessment district and allied organizations:

ORGANIZATION	STAFF	BUDGET
Denver Partnership	18	\$8.8 million (2003-04)
Downtown DC BID	22	\$9 million (2003)
Central Houston	25	\$7.5 million

These are mature organizations, and some exist in very strong downtown markets. All have programs that resemble the ambitions of the Kansas City CID and Downtown Council. It is reasonable to expect that a similar level of funding and staff may be required for downtown Kansas City to reach its full potential.

Many similar cities, including those noted above, include within the capabilities of their downtown management organizations a specific entity that can serve as a real estate developer in the public interest. One example of such an entity is the Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation, better known as 3CDC.

3CDC is a private, non-profit corporation formed in 2003 and focused primarily on the implementation of strategic real estate development projects in three areas of the city’s downtown. It identifies strategic priorities in coordination with the city’s economic development division and the Port Authority (which controls the downtown waterfront), packages deals between these entities and private developers, and oversees project implementation.

Operating funds for 3CDC come from the private sector, both the business community and foundations and other philanthropic support. 3CDC works primarily with two funding vehicles to provide capital investment in projects: the \$50 million, tax-credit advantaged New Market Fund, and the Cincinnati Equity Fund, which has raised \$45.9 million from the private sector for downtown investment. These funds typically take a subordinate position or provide lower-cost equity and debt for gap financing.

The creation of such a vehicle in Kansas City, offering the ability to work entrepreneurially, but in the public interest, is an appropriate priority over the next few years. It is consistent with advancing the transition in downtown development from high-profile civic ventures and strongly incentivized public-private partnerships to a greater reliance on private investment.

Similarly, a Parking Authority can be a highly beneficial tool to advance the plan. The City of Kansas City has recently completed a parking study that examined possible

organizational approaches to develop and manage downtown parking. Such a program can be of great interest because of its operating revenue potential as well as its dramatic impact on downtown development patterns. The ultimate solution should meet two key tests. First, parking facilities should advance the objectives of the downtown development strategy in their location, design, and operations. Second, the highest priority for net revenues associated with downtown parking facilities is to reinvest them in downtown.

The Economic Development Corporation currently administers the existing system of development incentives, including tax-increment financing (TIF), through various special-purpose entities, such as the TIF Commission and the Port Authority. Missouri has a particularly powerful TIF statute, and it has been used widely to facilitate downtown development. Recent enhancements through the Missouri Downtown and Rural Economic Stimulus Act (MODESA) have further improved its utility in downtown.

Stakeholders have raised four key issues with Kansas City's use of TIF and related tools. First, they encompass the boundaries of specific project areas but do little to improve the "connective tissue," or the surrounding physical environment. Second, there is no mechanism for rewarding those projects that match established downtown priorities. Third, they are expensive and difficult to access for smaller projects, particularly the kind of infill development, rehabilitation, and adaptive use that downtown anticipates. Fourth, they provide an incentive that favors new construction over the re-tenanting and reuse of existing buildings.

The development economics of downtown projects clearly warrant incentives. Relatively high costs, relatively low rents, and the threat of a suburban or an interstate relocation make TIF a logical and compelling tool. And with a relatively high available increment, it is certainly reasonable to expect that developers will continue to seek TIF.

An appropriate near-term priority is a systematic review of development incentives in light of the issues identified above. The purpose would be to align the incentives and their administration with the objectives and priorities outlined in the plan.

Opportunities may exist to deploy TIF more creatively. For example, the District of Columbia BID adapted the city's TIF program to fund a highly targeted and selective

program of retail tenant improvements. The criteria for TIF funding under the program include a detailed scoring system that is rationally linked to the BID's retail recruitment strategy. Only those retailers considered most strategically valuable are eligible. One beneficial impact of this part of the program is that it reinforces the traditional "but for" test that is integral to TIF funding.

## **DOWNTOWN ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Three entities will play the lead roles in implementing this plan: the City of Kansas City, the Downtown Council, and the Economic Development Corporation. It is anticipated that the Civic Council will remain involved both through its ongoing support of the Downtown Council, through the future work of its Urban Core Revitalization Committee, and its support of strategic, metropolitan-wide initiatives. This section briefly covers the key responsibilities for the three lead entities, and includes a brief review of other entities that will need to be involved in implementation.

### **The City of Kansas City**

Effective implementation of this plan requires timely and on-going participation by the City, including the Mayor, City Manager and Council. It is critically important that the downtown plan, with revisions as required, become formally adopted and incorporated into the City's development policy framework, both to guide the allocation and marshaling of economic and staff resources, and to facilitate coordination between and within the City's departments.

The City, uniquely, possesses the police powers necessary to regulate development, the financing tools to support large-scale public investment, and the core responsibility to provide broad-based public services citywide. Within the Loop, the Downtown Council currently supplements these services through the Community Improvement District (CID).

The city will retain responsibility for ongoing planning, in conjunction with the Planning Commission and the Downtown Council, including the creation and administration of the design guidelines for streetscapes and development. The city will also manage streetscape design and construction. As a public review forum, the role of the Planning Commission in development review is vital in providing greater transparency to the development process downtown.

## The Downtown Council

Because of its unique focus on the downtown area, an enhanced Downtown Council will be responsible for its core facilitation and “clean and safe” functions as well as a number of now-emerging programs. These include the events and marketing function and research and data collection capabilities, as well as working with the EDC and other allies on the ongoing corporate and retail recruitment program. Because of its strong links to the business community, which would likely fund the proposed Downtown Development Corporation (DDC), the Downtown Council is also the logical candidate to serve as the DDC’s “host entity.”

## Economic Development Corporation

The EDC will continue to administer the primary development incentives and will serve the overall economic development mission for the city. The EDC has a lead role in recruitment and retention of businesses, and in partnership with the Downtown Council, to target these for downtown. Looking forward, the EDC will need to initiate the policy review of TIF and other incentive programs, and to adopt and incorporate this plan into its formal goals for development of downtown and its neighborhoods.

## Civic Council

The Civic Council, as the sponsor of this plan update, has an ongoing responsibility to represent the city’s business leadership and, as convener, to help provide the common ground between the key entities and the constellation of allied organizations. They will also play an important ongoing role in helping to develop an enhanced Downtown Council and the capitalization of the Development Corporation. As important allies in the downtown, the Civic Council should ensure through its partners that the Performing Arts Center moves forward in a timely manner. Members of the Civic Council can also assist in the recruitment of corporate headquarters to the downtown.

## Other Entities

In addition to these primary actors, a number of allied and related entities share responsibility for specific aspects of plan implementation.

The Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners and the Parks and Recreation Department play a key role in the creation and management of downtown parks and boulevards. The Convention and Visitors Association promotes the city and its downtown to the broader market, and as such will advance the “brand” of Kansas City, with which downtown marketing efforts should be linked.

A wide range of civic, neighborhood, and professional organizations will be critical, but their involvement will be periodic and issue-specific. These include, among others, the Arts Council of Metropolitan Kansas City, the Kansas City chapters of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), and American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), the Kansas City Design Center, Mid-America Regional Council (MARC), The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, and the many Foundations located in the Kansas City community.

## SUMMARY

The success of any plan is ultimately determined by how it is implemented. This Plan, the second plan which the Sasaki/ERA team has completed for Kansas City’s Downtown, is being issued at a time of great opportunity, with a rebirth and transformation of Downtown now clearly underway. Timely action is required to achieve the full potential of the major capital investments now in place and under construction, and to extend the benefits to adjacent neighborhoods, other parts of the City, and the larger metropolitan area. To achieve this potential requires both leadership and understanding - we urge the principal agencies to embrace the concepts incorporated in this plan and to formally incorporate them into their own plans and actions in the coming years.



Figure 19. *Proposed Development Framework*





This report was prepared for the Civic Council of Greater Kansas City, in cooperation and partnership with The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, the City of Kansas City, Missouri, and the Downtown Council, with significant input and participation by hundreds of stakeholders of Downtown Kansas City, Missouri.

*Special thanks for contributions to the three-dimensional model:  
Arnold Imaging, BNIM Architects, and 360 Architects*

