

Downtown Subarea Plan





Downtown Subarea Plan

Downtown is the historic heart of the St. Charles community. Its traditional Main Street, the Fox River, and civic uses give it a unique prominence and character. Recent investment in commercial, residential and office activities points towards a positive future as a revitalized vibrant center for the City and its residents. This Downtown Subarea Plan includes a series of recommendations aimed at preserving and enhancing this important part of the City of St. Charles and capitalizing on specific advantages that make it one of the Chicago region’s greatest places and a source of community pride.

Subarea Goals

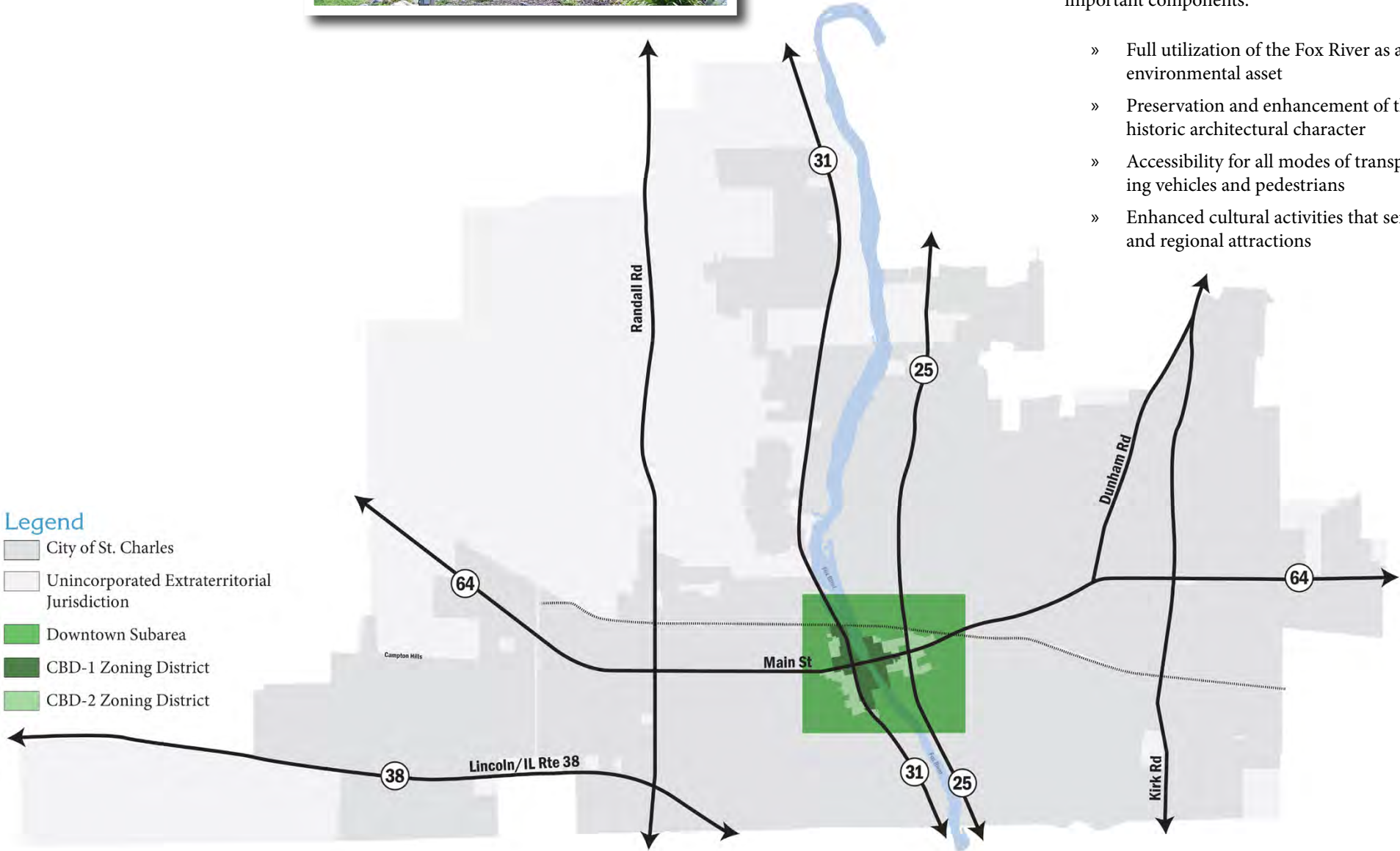
The vision for Downtown St. Charles includes the following important components:

- » Full utilization of the Fox River as a recreational and environmental asset
- » Preservation and enhancement of the Downtown’s historic architectural character
- » Accessibility for all modes of transportation, including vehicles and pedestrians
- » Enhanced cultural activities that serve as both local and regional attractions

Subarea Objectives

The following goals can help achieve the vision for Downtown:

- » Encourage development practices that minimize environmental impacts on the Fox River and consider its presence and benefits.
- » Provide continuous open space and bike/pedestrian access along the Fox River corridor as envisioned in the 2002 River Corridor Master Plan.
- » Provide a high level of physical and visual access to the Fox River from all portions of Downtown.
- » Recognize Downtown’s important architectural resources, and establish programs to preserve and enhance them.
- » Require new development to meet high standards of site and building design that are compatible with the historic character.
- » Enhance the public realm through streetscaping and gateways.
- » Move people using all modes of transportation safely and efficiently throughout Downtown.
- » Mitigate the impacts of truck traffic on Main Street.
- » Maintain and strengthen a comprehensive pedestrian network.
- » Better manage parking capacity and access throughout Downtown, especially as new development comes on-line.
- » Strategically coordinate civic and cultural events to attract residents and visitors to various portions of Downtown and different times of the year.
- » Enhance mobility between Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, communities, and other assets, such as other commercial centers, major bikeways and trails for all modes of travel.



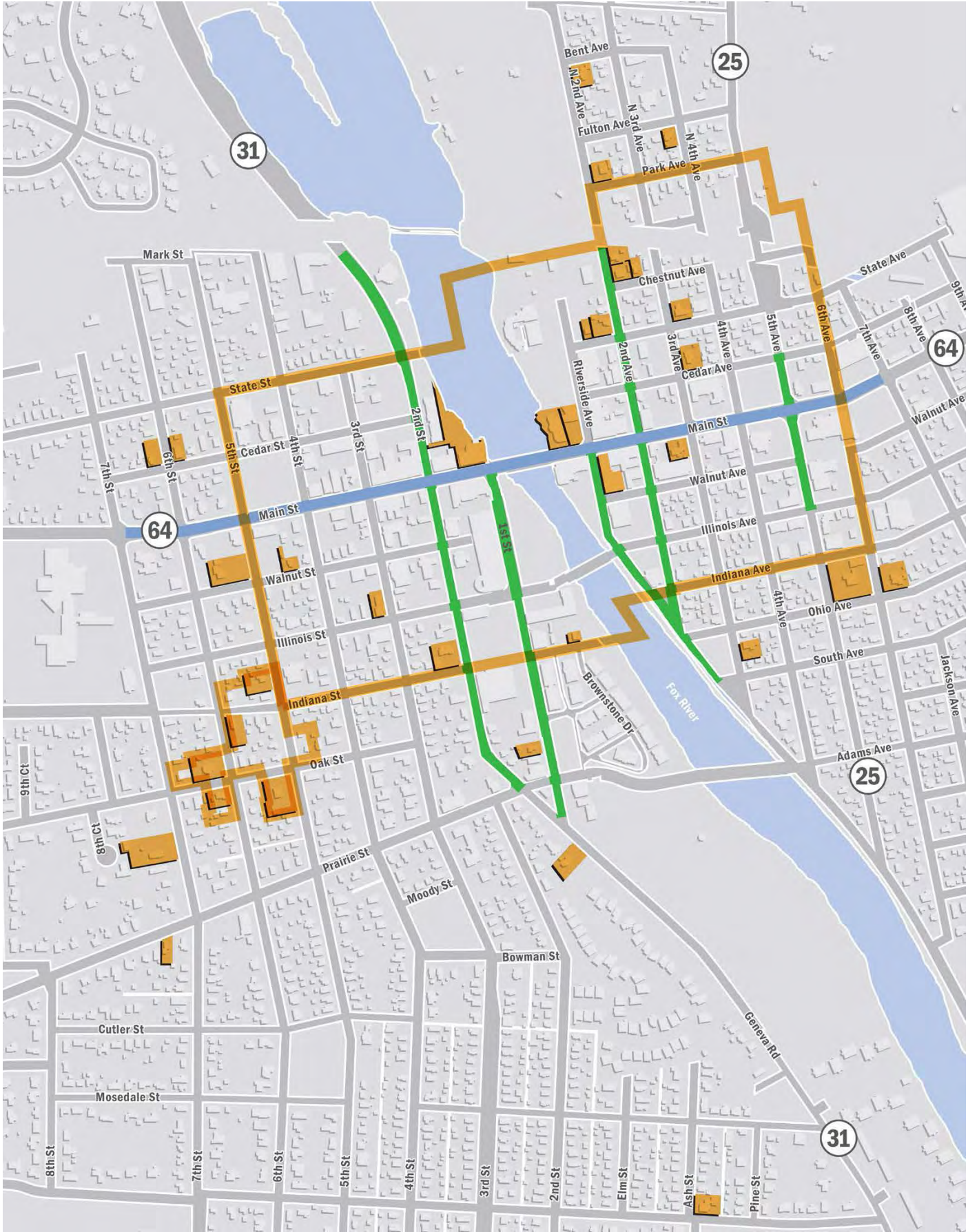
Downtown Framework Plan

Downtown St. Charles is, and should continue to be, a vibrant place with several systems working in concert with one another. This Framework Plan identifies several of the key principles that will assist City in guiding improvements and developments that ensures the area will evolve in a way that is consistent with the community’s vision.

Image & Character

Downtown is made up of several blocks of varying types of development forms and uses. Within these blocks, however, there is a clear hierarchy of “corridors” that provide the most character-defining experience. The value of traditional downtowns like St. Charles’ are most often derived from their intimate scale and focus on the pedestrian. In that regard, development in Downtown St. Charles can be managed by identifying and defining design principles for its various frontage types. The following frontage types are identified in this Framework Plan: Main Street (IL Route 64) frontage, Gateway Corridor frontage, Local frontage, and Fox River frontage.

This page and the following figure identifies and describes how development can be managed in the various frontage types in order to preserve the character of Downtown and ensure that it is functional and competitive for new investment.



- Main Street (IL Route 64) frontage** is the traditional heart of Downtown, and includes much of the City’s most significant architecture, including Hotel Baker, City Hall, the Arcada Theatre and several others.
- Gateway Corridor frontage** includes those streets that offer primary entry into the Downtown and, therefore, provide the first impression. These streets include 2nd Street/ Geneva Road (IL Route 31), 1st Street (south of Main Street), Riverside Avenue, 5th Avenue (north and south of Main Street) and 2nd Avenue (north and south of Main Street).
- Local frontage** includes the remaining streets that, while having a role in defining Downtown’s character, also satisfy more utilitarian functions in terms of access and secondary uses.
- Fox River frontage** includes properties that abut the Fox River. This is a unique and critical component to Downtown, and should be preserved as a public amenity.
- Historic District** & **Landmarks**. The City of St. Charles has adopted Historic Preservation Ordinances to foster awareness of the City’s rich history including its historic sites and buildings. The City’s Historic Preservation Commission is responsible for ensuring modifications and renovations, along with new development and construction, are consistent with the standards established for the historic district. The City’s history is important in maintaining its cultural fabric and identity. This value is recognized by the City’s residents and the City should ensure that this rich and unique history is not lost but rather complemented and enhanced with new downtown investment and development.

Chapter 8 Subarea Plans



Main Street Frontage

Building Massing & Placement

Buildings should have no front or side yard setbacks, built to the front and side lot lines to create a continuous streetwall, and be compatibly scaled with surrounding development.

Building Facade Orientation and Design

Facades should have strong orientation to the public sidewalk, with welcoming entrances. Attractive and safe rear entrances from rear parking areas or public walks should also be provided where appropriate.

Architectural Style and Design

Buildings should use traditional building materials and design elements, and generally align with surrounding buildings in terms of horizontal elements and vertical rhythm.

Vehicular Access & Parking

Parking should be located at the rear of the lot, and no curb cuts should be provided from the public street. Where parking exists along the front property line, a masonry wall should be constructed to hide parking and maintain the streetwall.

Bicycle Access & Pedestrian Mobility

All buildings should provide an attractive and discernable public entry from the sidewalk, and to the extent possible, bicycle parking should be provided at the rear or sides of buildings, near parking areas or other pedestrian accessible areas.

Land Use

Uses should be mixed, with multi-family and/or office above traditional downtown mixed use activities such retail, restaurant, and local services. While retail and entertainment are preferred for ground floor uses, service and office uses that have high visitation and create foot traffic downtown should be permitted.



Gateway Frontage

Building Massing & Placement

Buildings should be generally located on the front lot line, although small setbacks could accommodate gateway landscaping. To the extent possible, buildings should be built to the side lot lines to create a continuous streetwall.

Building Facade Orientation and Design

Facades should have strong orientation to the public sidewalk, or angled toward key gateway intersections, with welcoming entrances. Attractive and safe rear entrances from rear parking areas or public walks should also be provided where appropriate.

Architectural Style and Design

Buildings should use traditional building materials and design elements, and generally align with surrounding buildings in terms of horizontal elements and vertical rhythm. However, more flexibility and creativity should be encouraged within this general framework.

Vehicular Access & Parking

Parking should be located to the rear of the lot, and minimal curb cuts should be provided from the public street. Development should share curb cuts and provide access from side streets instead of gateway streets wherever possible.

Bicycle Access & Pedestrian Mobility

All buildings should provide an attractive and discernable public entry from the sidewalk, and to the extent possible, bicycle parking should be provided at the rear or sides of buildings, near parking areas or other pedestrian accessible areas.

Land Use

Uses should be mixed, comprised of traditional downtown mixed use activities such retail, restaurant, and local services, as well as secondary uses including offices and services with less customer visitation. Multi-story mixed use buildings should also be encouraged. Multi-family may also be appropriate on the fringe areas of Downtown.



Local Frontage

Building Massing & Placement

Setbacks may vary based on the use, but should not allow parking areas in the front of commercial buildings (i.e. strip commercial).

Building Façade Orientation and Design

Facades should be oriented towards the public sidewalk, and provide direct pedestrian linkages between the front entry and public sidewalk and/or parking areas.

Architectural Style and Design

Façade design and style may vary but should be generally compatible with the materials and architectural elements used in other portions of Downtown.

Vehicular Access & Parking

Curb cuts access can be provided from these streets. However, development should strive to minimize the number of curb cuts through effective on-site circulation and cross-access arrangements.

Bicycle Access & Pedestrian Mobility

All buildings should provide an attractive and discernable public entry from the sidewalk. Bicycle parking should be provided with other parking areas.

Land Use

Uses can include a broad range of activities appropriate in Downtown, including retail, service, office, multi-family and single-family residential, and low-impact auto-related services.



Fox River Frontage

Building Massing & Placement

Buildings should address both the Fox River and their frontage street. River frontage setbacks should be an adequate distance to accommodate public access to and along the river corridor.

Building Façade Orientation and Design

Facades should have strong orientation to both the Fox River and frontage street, with parking located on the internal portion of the lot.

Architectural Style and Design

Since buildings along the Fox River are visible from several locations in Downtown and accessible from all sides, they should utilize “360° architecture” with traditional building materials and design elements on all sides, and generally align with surrounding buildings in terms of horizontal elements and vertical rhythm.

Vehicular Access & Parking

Parking lots should be discouraged along the Fox River. Access to onsite parking and service areas should be discretely provided from the local public street and be well screened. Where parking must be located along the river, the site design and screening should be assessed on a case-by-case basis to ensure compatibility with Downtown character.

Bicycle Access & Pedestrian Mobility

All buildings should provide an attractive entry from the public sidewalk, and provide bicycle parking accessible from the riverfront. Development should also dedicate space for a continuous pedestrian or bike path along the Fox River.

Land Use

Uses should include traditional downtown uses such as retail and restaurants, recreational activities, as well as all types of residential development. To the extent possible, development should integrate outdoor plazas or parks that provide an attractive seasonal asset to their primary use.

Downtown Improvement Plan

Fox River. The Fox River was the focus of the City’s initial settlement and today remains a focal point of the community. The Fox River corridor provides a scenic setting, relief from the urban environment, and a number of other tangible and intangible benefits. The City should continue working with the Park District to realize the established vision and enhance public access to the river.

Downtown Retail Overlay District. The Downtown Overlay District is intended to preserve the economic vitality and pedestrian character of Downtown’s shopping core by limiting uses on the first floor that “typically generate relatively little pedestrian activity or are otherwise incompatible with a pedestrian oriented shopping area.” While this is an admirable objective, defining “typical” can result in missed opportunities. In addition, while all successful and vibrant downtowns have a large component of retail, they are also characterized by a varying mix of uses that generate activity at all periods of the day. Furthermore a detailed market analysis conducted as part of this process found that key retail categories are fairly saturated within the Downtown’s trade area. Given the number of vacancies Downtown, along with current market and economic conditions, the City should consider relaxing use restrictions in the District to fill storefronts on a temporary basis until demand for downtown retail space is stronger.

Gateways. While streetscaping in Downtown distinguishes this part of the City from other areas, the differences can be subtle to a casual observer and the edges of Downtown are not well demarcated. Given the importance of Downtown, the City should install gateway features at key entry points, that are integrated to the extent possible, with redevelopment of prominent parcels and highly visible locations. North-south gateways are currently less defined and would benefit most from enhancement. Gateway features consisting of signage, lighting, and landscaping should complement the existing streetscape and announce entry into Downtown St. Charles.

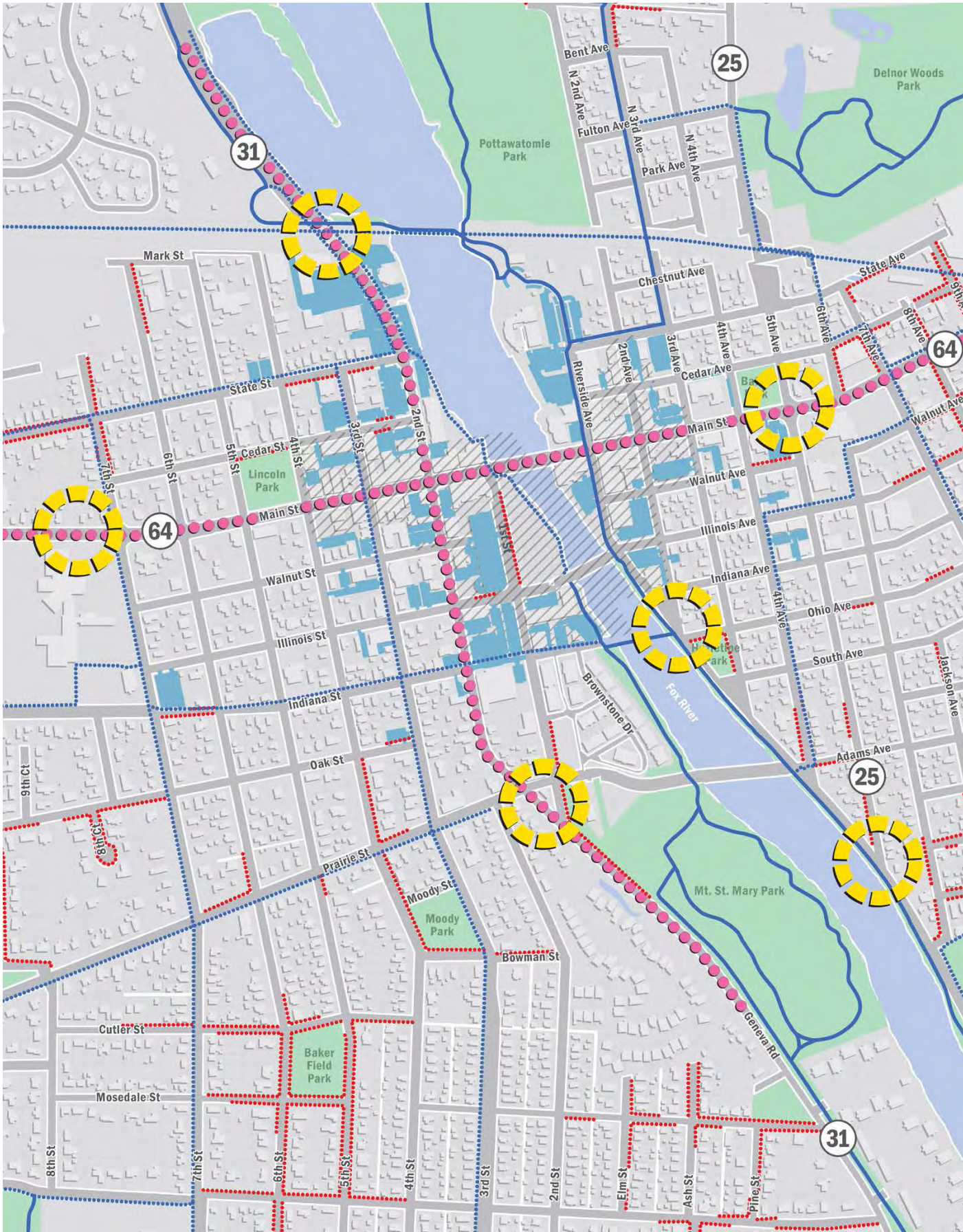
Wayfinding. Wayfinding should continue to be provided throughout Downtown, and additional opportunities for signage and new community destinations identified. Guidance should be provided to important downtown sites such as Pottawatomie Park, historic Main Street, and other local landmarks (public and private), and supporting functions such as public parking lots and structures or visitors information.

Pedestrian Friendly Streets. Downtown must be able to efficiently and safely move vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians. Given the combination of a pedestrian-oriented environment, the Fox River, Main Street/IL Route 64, and the function of Downtown St. Charles as a regional attraction, effectively balancing a number of transportation related functions can be challenging. Truck traffic on Main Street/IL 64 and 2nd Street/IL 31 impacts Downtown St. Charles by placing loud and slow moving vehicles on the corridors. This is further exacerbated by the grooved concrete roads that provide the traction necessary due to the sloping terrain, creating noise and vibrations that impact the pedestrian atmosphere. The City should continue to explore solutions to this issue, including working with IDOT on changing the road surfaces; identifying a local re-route that would remove truck traffic off a portion of these streets; or identifying bypass routes that would remove truck traffic entirely from the Downtown. The preferred alternative should balance net impact with costs and influences on other areas of the City and region.

Parking. Parking management is an important issue in Downtown St. Charles. Unlike a commercial corridor like Randall Road where surface parking predominates, providing convenient access to store entries, parking in a downtown is subtly provided for the “area” by both the City and local businesses. Parking is currently located strategically throughout Downtown, on the street, in public and private surface lots, and two parking structures that have recently been built to accommodate demand. The City should continue to provide parking strategically in all areas of Downtown, and carefully monitor demand to ensure that both current and future needs are met. The parking needs of each site should be taken into account as each site is being considered for development. Before new structures are built, the City should consider real-time signage and wayfinding that guides drivers to structures with open capacity to ensure all existing parking is utilized.

Sidewalk Gaps & Crosswalk Improvements The very nature of Downtown requires a comprehensive sidewalk network with safe crossings and signage. The presence of the Fox River makes Downtown a regional destination that is linked to other communities. Private development and public improvements in Downtown should work in concert to build a comprehensive pedestrian network that allows for constant movement within Downtown.

Existing & Future Trails. The City and Downtown are well served by a bicycle network that connects nearby parks and neighborhoods with a larger regional trail system. The trail system provides both opportunities for recreation and economic development. The City should continue to implement the trail system as planned, and where possible, promote connections to parks, neighborhoods, and local businesses.





Catalyst Sites

Catalyst sites are those parcels where redevelopment could have a catalytic impact on the surrounding area. In the identification of catalyst sites, certain criteria are considered. Catalyst sites are determined based on the sites exhibiting some or all of the following characteristics: Underutilized buildings or land; Vacant buildings or land; Structural soundness of buildings; Size of property; Ownership (e.g., unified private ownership or City-owned); Visibility and access; Current zoning and adjacent zoning; and Surrounding land uses. Although the sites identified provide alternatives if a property is proposed for future redevelopment, it is not necessarily an interest by the City to acquire or redevelop the site.

It should be recognized that some of the catalyst sites are existing public or private parking lots. The parking supply near each site should be assessed as each is considered for development. Downtown parking is further discussed on p. 74 and p. 89.

This subarea plan proposes the following for opportunity sites in the Downtown.

SITE A North 2nd Street is an important northern gateway for Downtown currently hosting several small retail and office uses. Existing uses fail to convey the desired character or atmosphere for this area of the City and Fox River frontage. Redevelopment should create an attractive gateway for Downtown with strong frontage on 2nd Street. Uses in this area may include retail, office, multi-family, or mixed use. In addition, the City should explore the possibility of adding a traffic signal at the intersection of State Street and IL Route 31 in order to provide a safe path for pedestrians to cross.

SITE B On the east side of Route 31 is a parcel isolated from other Downtown activity by heavy traffic. The City should take measures to better connect this site to the rest of Downtown, or consider this area as an opportunity to provide additional open space along the Fox River. Existing parking on the site could be accommodated elsewhere, such as Site A or Site C.

SITE C The existing City-owned parking lot on 2nd Street is an important resource for Downtown businesses. However, it also compromises the character of a key Downtown entry and represents a missed opportunity for more active development. Consideration should be given to transforming this entire block and potentially parcels west of 3rd Street into a mixed use development capable of catalyzing development on the north side of Main Street. Mixed use buildings with a parking structure could replace the surface lot and other development. Ground floor commercial uses could line 3rd Street with a centralized parking structure to maximize street activity.

SITE D This site represents a significant development opportunity in the Downtown, but would require parcel assembly, which could affect the site’s redevelopment potential. The Main Street frontage of this site should be redeveloped with structures built to the front lot line, with a character similar to the existing traditional fabric at the east end of the block. A prominent corner element at 4th Street would provide an attractive landmark when approaching Downtown from the west. The Walnut Street frontage, currently occupied by commercial uses in residential structures, could be redeveloped with uses that transition to the surrounding neighborhood, such as moderate multi-family housing or townhomes. A parking lot behind commercial uses fronting Main Street could also be explored as a viable option for the site.

SITE E This opportunity site represents an ideal Main Street infill scenario. Traditional buildings on the remainder of the block are occupied and well maintained, and the facing block on the north side of Main Street is fully intact. Infill development should complete the street wall and reflect the character of existing architecture. The 2nd Street frontage could also be redeveloped with an infill structure that creates a more complete street wall and complements potential redevelopment across the street.

SITE F This site is currently the parking area for the Szechwan Restaurant. Redevelopment potential of the site is limited since the restaurant uses the lot for building access and fenestration. However, the site could be redesigned as a public plaza that would serve as an extension of the 1st Street plaza to the east. A plaza at this location would provide a Main Street open space in the heart of Downtown that complements Lincoln Park to the west and Baker Park to the east. The plaza could be fully linked to the 1st Street plaza by removing or reconfiguring the drive-thru function of the existing Private Bank on 2nd Street just south of the opportunity site.

SITE G The parking lot on the northwest corner of 2nd Street and Walnut Street represents an opportunity to transform the character of the 2nd Street gateway corridor. This site should be redeveloped as a zero-setback commercial or mixed use structure with parking accessed from Walnut Street. Lost parking capacity can be mitigated by existing or future structured parking on nearby blocks.

SITE H The intersection of 2nd Street and Illinois Street is a prominent location in Downtown. While the southeast corner has an attractive building with a Francesca’s Restaurant, the other three quadrants are underutilized considering the setting. These properties should be redeveloped with mixed use, multi-family or green space that enhance the character of 2nd Street as a gateway corridor from the south.

SITE I Through recent redevelopment, 1st Street has emerged as an important character street in Downtown. An opportunity exists to extend this high quality character south, along a narrow portion of the public parking lot that fronts on 1st Street. Mixed use, which could include multi-family, could be built at this location if the displaced parking could be accommodated elsewhere.

SITE J The western portion of 1st Street development has been constructed and contributed positively to the energy and appearance of Downtown. This site represents the eastern half of the development which stalled during the economic downturn associated with the housing market collapse. It is recommended that the City continue to promote the approved plan as a viable option for this site, including the residential units that will bring more residents to the Downtown area.

SITE K The terminus of Indiana Street into the west bank of the Fox River is an important opportunity to redevelop a site so that it capitalizes on its riverfront location. The current site hosts the Beith House Museum. Redevelopment could accommodate this use while adding waterfront redevelopment such as a café or restaurant.

SITE L Immediately east of the Blue Goose Market is a small parking lot and green space that fronts on the west side of 1st Street. This area is a critical gap in the 1st Street environment. Development on this lot should reflect the design character of other recent development on the street, and add to the comfortable scale established by the surrounding context.

SITE M This area represents the southern gateway to Downtown, and existing uses and character around the intersection contrast with the community's vision for Downtown. Comprehensive redevelopment of this key intersection should transform the gateway into an attractive announcement of arrival into Downtown St. Charles. 1st Street and 2nd Street frontage could include mixed use or multi-family development, though viewsheds to important buildings and features, such as the historic Victorian house at 411 S. 2nd Street or Mount St. Mary Park, should be preserved. This opportunity may warrant further study to ensure that several urban systems are adequately planned for, such as open space linkages throughout Downtown and to the Fox River, bicycle pathways, traffic engineering, and signage and wayfinding.

SITE N This opportunity site benefits from a prime location, fronting on the Fox River and Main Street, and sitting directly across from City Hall. Redevelopment of this site should result in a building that extends the traditional scale and character of adjacent buildings on the block. Due to its high visibility from the west side of the Fox River, the new building should integrate an attractive riverfront facade, similar to the Hotel Baker. The rear portion of the site should include low-scale development along Riverside Avenue and/or open space along the Fox River.

SITE O Main Street in Downtown should strive to be a continuous streetwall of well-designed and pedestrian-scaled development. This parking lot at Main Street and 3rd Avenue is a significant opportunity to re-establish the traditional fabric of downtown. While Baker Park and Baker Memorial United Methodist Church are significant landmarks on relatively open lots and begin to set impressions and expectations for Main Street, their efforts are diminished by the presence of a surface parking lot at this key site. At a corner with prominent visibility from the large setback of the adjacent church, the building should be attractive on both the Main Street and 3rd Avenue facades.

SITE P The existing public parking lot could be used to relieve parking demand for other nearby blocks east of the Fox River. This opportunity site should be considered for a parking structure that would replace capacity lost by redevelopment of site N and other parking areas along Main Street. Due to the terrain of the site sloping down from the east towards the Fox River, the upper level of a multi-level structure would be approximately at-grade with 2nd Avenue, minimizing the impacts of such a structure on residential development to the east.

SITE Q This opportunity site represents the greatest potential for riverfront redevelopment on the east side of the Fox River. This site currently hosts a small office building and modest open space. However, it is the southern gateway to downtown along Riverside Avenue. Redevelopment of the site could vary based on the City's ability to address transportation and circulation. Redevelopment should also include a significant gateway feature at the southern end of the site, and gathering spaces for riverfront events, cafes, or other activities and uses.



Chapter 8 Subarea Plans

Downtown Redevelopment Concept



Potential Improvements

- 1 Existing City Hall
- 2 Main Street Bridge
- 3 Retrofit Harris Bank Building
- 4 Existing Arcada Theatre
- 5 Proposed Riverfront Park
- 6 Approved First Street Downtown Redevelopment: Building #1
- 7 Approved First Street Downtown Redevelopment: Building #2
- 8 Approved First Street Downtown Redevelopment: Building #3
- 9 Approved First Street Downtown Redevelopment Parking Deck with Rooftop Park
- 10 Approved First Street Downtown Redevelopment: Building #9
- 11 Existing First Street Development Parking Deck
- 12 Illinois Street Bridge
- 13 Existing River Rockhouse Building
- 14 Riverside Avenue Mixed use Redevelopment
- 15 Parking Garage on 2nd Street
- 16 Mixed use Redevelopment Fronting on Riverside Promenade
- 17 Gateway Mixed use Redevelopment Fronting on Riverside Avenue Promenade
- 18 Riverside Promenade on former Riverside Avenue

This figure represents an illustrative development concept for Downtown Catalyst Sites J, N, P, & Q. The concept is intended to illustrate one possible approach for redevelopment that satisfies the goals, objectives and guidelines as expressed in the St. Charles Comprehensive Plan. It is not intended to express action on behalf of the City to acquire and redevelop privately-held properties. The final format of redevelopment for these sites will depend upon local property ownership, unforeseen site constraints, and market forces at the time of redevelopment.