DOWNTOWN INFOCUS

A BLUEPRINT FOR FARGO'S CORE

Summary

FARGO
DOWNTOWN INFOCUS PRESENTS
DOWNTOWN'S FUTURE 530
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DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY

Thank you to everyone who contributed to *Downtown InFocus* by participating in an interview or small group discussion or who shared a vision for the future at an open house or public meeting. Hundreds of local voices helped shape this plan; Downtown neighbors, employees, businesses, artists, community organizations, institutions, students, visitors, grassroots activists, City staff and leadership, and Downtown champions—your words and ideas populate the pages that follow.

Introduction

WELCOME TO DOWNTOWN FARGO!

> "I feel like we stand a chance to build a stronger community, and a stronger community that's outside of what most people think is typical of Fargo."
>
> *— Corey Cliett, Owner of NerdQ from Fargo Monthly*

Downtown InFocus is a comprehensive, action-oriented guidebook for the future of Fargo's historic Downtown. Downtown is the foundation of the region where "Fargo in the Timbers" was established in the 1800s on what is now the Mid-America Steel site. Like many cities across the country, both larger and smaller, Downtown has weathered booms and busts. Many Fargoans remember when, not long ago, Downtown suffered from disinvestment and empty storefronts. So much has changed since then. Thoughtful leadership and key investments have helped Downtown to turn a much-needed corner. Today, Downtown is a growing residential neighborhood, home to small and innovative businesses; it possesses a collection of locally-owned stores and restaurants that rivals that of cities with much larger populations. The positive energy in Downtown has resulted in significant press coverage and national attention.

While Downtown has momentum not seen since its heyday, some issues persist and new challenges have emerged. On the one hand, Downtown still suffers from too many surface parking lots that were once occupied by stores or housing. It can be hard to find basic services and goods (try buying Advil or a phone charger Downtown), and the infrastructure along and under many streets – the oldest in the City – is in need of major improvements.

On the other hand, with growth, we now face the challenge of ensuring that the Downtown experience is positive one for everyone. How do we ensure that visitors can easily find their way to their destinations? As Downtown grows in popularity, how do we support and retain existing retailers and keep from pricing out the very things that give Downtown its character in the first place?

Perhaps most importantly, other cities and Downtowns are competing – they are working hard to attract new jobs, new residents, visitors, and thus more vitality. From Sioux Falls to Grand Forks but also in cities across the country, downtowns are focusing on their "experience." The experience of a downtown helps to retain and attract talent and bring customers back time and time again. *Downtown InFocus* is an opportunity to figure out what's next for Downtown Fargo.

To develop this plan, all members of the community – those who live, work, learn, and play in Downtown – were welcomed as participants, each with a story or perspective to share. Through this process, residents and stakeholders created a vision for their Downtown and identified the key actions for change to help make that vision a reality. There was no shortage of ideas and opinions. Thank you to everyone who engaged with this planning process so closely and in doing so enriched the plan. Your words and ideas are present on every page.

> "For too long, people have let outsiders define us. The plan needs to let local voices decide on our identity." *— interview*

This project is the product of ongoing commitment by the City of Fargo to strategically invest in Downtown. But Downtown's future is not the City's full responsibility. Many agencies, organizations, business owners, and residents are hard at work to improve Downtown. This plan, therefore, is a guidebook for not just City action but the actions of all of the Fargoans who have already committed to creating a vibrant and distinctive Downtown that remains the economic, social, and cultural center of the region.

Map of the Focus Area

The *Downtown InFocus* focus area is comprised of 560 acres in the heart of Fargo. It includes all of the Business Improvements District (BID) and the Renaissance Zone and stretches from University Avenue to the Red River and roughly from Sanford Hospital to the southern edge of Island Park. This study area is larger than the traditional Downtown "core" to account for the fact that the connections between Downtown and the near neighborhoods are critically important to the future of Downtown. It is also important to note that while there is a dotted line around the study area on most of the maps, the plan recognizes that the study area boundaries are fuzzy meaning that we have not planned for Downtown in a vacuum. This plan does include data and strategies that extend outside of the Downtown study area based upon the feedback and guidance from residents and local leaders.

The Focus Area

Source: Interface Studio

- **RAIL**
- **OPEN SPACE**
- **DOWNTOWN FOCUS AREA**

Planning Process

THE *INFOCUS* PROCESS

Downtown InFocus launched in Fall 2016 with the goal to evaluate all manner of different factors impacting Downtown using existing City data, US Census, other third party data, as well as a detailed parcel by parcel evaluation of every property in Downtown. This research was evaluated and presented to community members throughout the planning process to help set clear expectations for how Downtown could (and should) change. The data analysis and research undertaken for Downtown through this process establishes a baseline from which we can set targets and measure performance towards achieving these objectives.

The planning team coupled data analysis with discussions with residents, business owners, city leaders, local institutions, and anyone else who had concerns or opinions about the direction Downtown was heading. The charge from the City and the expectations from those most connected to Downtown is that this work would be collaboratively developed and inclusive of all voices with a stake in Downtown's future.

To ensure widespread and active participation in developing this plan, the engagement process included multiple and unique opportunities to get involved including: Social meet and greets; over 50 one-on-one interviews; regular Working Committee meetings; a ***Downtown InFocus*** website; over 500 surveys, multiple City Commission Brown Bag Forums; 2 large "open houses" - one at the Union Storage Building and another at the Broadway Theater Garage during Frostival; a public event at the Fargo Theater and; 10 focus grpups to discuss ideas around: transportation, stormwater, local retail, homelessness, resident concerns, the arts and how to finance future improvements. These discussions helped the planning team connect with and learn from distinct populations in Fargo including residents, employees, business owners, students, non-profits, and those with special needs in the Downtown.

As the center of a growing region, Downtown Fargo is everyone's Downtown. The outreach approach reflects this fact, as does the enthusiasm of the community.

This could not have been possible without the active support and hard work of the City of Fargo who helped connect the planning team to the right mix of local voices necessary to help shape this plan. Coupled with the efforts of the Downtown Community Partnership, local retailers, non-profit organizations, and many others, this planning process provided the opportunity for those who care about Downtown to not just talk with the planning team, but also with each other.

Downtown InFocus time line

Community members weigh in and catch up at the first public open house held at the Historic Union building on NP Avenue; more than 280 people attended!

So, after all that data analysis and listening, a few key takeaways emerged:

Downtown needs to become more of a neighborhood...

In 2010, there were almost 3,900 residents living Downtown. With new development since that time, the number of residents continues to grow. But while Downtown is growing, there are limited retail options and services for residents and employees. It is easy to see why. A map of existing residents illustrates many 'gaps' Downtown where there are no residents. The lack of residential density requires that stores rely on visitors and employees to make up the difference.

In fact, if we tried to fully support the existing businesses based on local households alone (in other words, not counting visitors), Downtown would need another 4,500 households. In light of the desire for more stores and services and the need to better support existing businesses, Downtown needs to embrace and encourage growth. That growth must cater to a mix of family types, sizes, and incomes.

> "Retail cannot survive just on events, and we're an event driven Downtown. Retail cannot survive on student incomes... We need Downtown to become more of a neighborhood." *– interview*

...But remain a destination

Retail data indicates that Downtown functions like a 'resort town' where exiting businesses make the majority of their yearly income in a handful of months. Until there are a lot more residents Downtown, it is clear that for the foreseeable future Downtown will remain a destination. And a vibrant destination it is. There are over 61 bars and restaurants in Downtown, and Downtown currently is home to over half of the City's annual events including some of the largest ones like Street Fair. The future of Downtown needs to embrace its role as a destination and ensure that those visiting Fargo for either the first or tenth time enjoy their experience and support local businesses.

> "I'm so proud of our Downtown, especially on the weekends at night. The brand Fargo is immense - people everywhere know it." *– interview*

Downtown is vital to the regional economy

There are almost 18,000 jobs Downtown. While the largest number of jobs are in health care, Downtown is home to a large share of the region's talent-driven businesses including those in professional, scientific, and technology services. Talent is attracted by a combination of opportunities [are there jobs available?] and location [are there things for me to do?]. Along these lines, Downtown Fargo is competing with other downtowns across the country for the same talent. Downtown should be considered a product, and to compete with these other cities, the quality of the place matters. But regardless of whether a business is located Downtown or not, Downtown is essential in attracting talent to the region. Downtown Fargo is where local employers take candidates out to dinner and often where they stay. It is their introduction to Fargo, and in order to fill jobs both in Downtown and in the region—where there are an estimated 6,500 unfilled jobs at present and the number stands to balloon by an additional 30,000 as Baby Boomers retire—a successful and thriving Downtown plays a key role.

> "Downtown is a huge factor in attracting talent. People want a vibrant downtown whether you're a downtown person or not."
>
> *– interview*

Downtown is growing, but still lags the region

There is a pace to development in Downtown that frequently tells a story of rapid investment and change. Downtown is in fact seeing a lot of change. However, Downtown only accounts for 3% of total building permits issued in the City over the past five years. New development in South Fargo, in particular, still greatly outpaces Downtown. To support existing businesses and attract new ones, Downtown will need to capture a greater percentage of the City's growth and development.

> "We need to be smart and sustainable with our growth." *– interview*

Downtown is changing, which means transportation and parking must change

Downtown Fargo, like every other downtown across the country in cities both large and small, faces the challenge of managing parking. Growth and investment only places an increased spotlight on this challenge, as there is more competition for limited space Downtown. Based on an analysis of on- and off-street parking utilization, Downtown has sufficient parking to meet current demands; however available spaces are not always in the location most critical to supporting Downtown businesses. Spaces in the core of Downtown around Broadway are often full, and this will only get worse with continued growth Downtown. A few blocks away, however, there are ample opportunities for parking. Downtown needs to better use the spaces that are available while offering real choice for those looking to drive a little less.

> "We need more density downtown and fewer surface parking lots."
>
> *– interview*

Downtown has a unique ecology… and unique environmental challenges

Downtown sits in the glacial Lake Agassiz basin, which acts as a vast floodplain of the Red River. As a part of Lake Agassiz, the clay soils make for challenging soil conditions that impact building construction. Due to these soils and the fact that Downtown is extremely flat, the area faces two threats from flooding including the rising Red River as well as local rainfall. The Diversion Project is designed to mitigate the flooding of the Red River by diverting it around Fargo. However, local rainfall can quickly overwhelm Downtown's stormwater infrastructure and create localized flooding conditions that also cause property damage. To better protect businesses and reduce the cost of infrastructure Downtown, we need to look at alternative ways of managing water in Downtown's streets, public spaces and new development.

As the storms of 1992, 1993, and 2000 taught us,

> "We never thought of preparing for the rain… and rain and rain. If the Diversion gates are going to be closed, and we don't have a place to store the water, it'll back into the houses." *– interview*

Downtown is a center for services

Downtown has emerged as a center for services for those most in need. This is for a number of reasons: Downtown is already the center of the region and a center for jobs of all kinds; Downtown has the best transportation options for those who cannot afford a car; and as the largest City in the State, Downtown has more capacity to address some of the challenges faced by those experiencing homelessness. There is currently an infrastructure in place Downtown that represents the best chance of helping those in need find a job or a home. For these reasons, Downtown will remain a hub for various services that must be an active part of the planning for the future of Downtown.

> "There are some pretty phenomenal people in Downtown's service provider community. It's not just services, they treat us as equals – we get a human connection."
>
> *– interview*

Downtown needs more street life, and experiences that will draw people

Residents, business owners, employees and visitors have all expressed some level of concern about safety. For some, Downtown is perceived as unsafe. This of course impacts the bottom line of local businesses and the ability to attract new renters or homeowners. While the current efforts by local residents, the City, and the BID are extremely valuable in addressing some ongoing concerns, more street life is the best solution to perceptions about crime. More people or "eyes on the street" make a huge difference in how people perceive Downtown. One of the issues that impacts perceptions about a lack of public safety is inactive frontages. Today, only 9% of Downtown streets have an active frontage (an entrance or front door) and these are largely concentrated along, and very near to, Broadway. Conversely, 71% of streets are inactive meaning they are characterized by empty lots, parking, blank walls, or fencing and do not provide for an opportunity of "eyes on the street." These environments reinforce perceptions that the streets are unsafe and also explain why many people unfamiliar with Downtown are hesitant to park too far away from Broadway.

> "We have more people here at night; it feels a lot safer than it used to." *– interview*

But the broader point here is that Downtown thrives because it offers a unique experience, one that is hard to duplicate in other places. Today, visitors come for festivals and events, to go to dinner and snap a picture of the Fargo Theatre. To bring them back, we need to offer other experiences and opportunities to explore Downtown. New public spaces, both small and large, new programming and safe, active connections throughout Downtown are essential.

> "The theater marquee attracts people like moths to a flame." *– interview*

postcards from the FUTURE

VISION STATEMENTS

At the first public open house, participants had a chance to close their eyes, envision the Downtown they hope to see, and then write a postcard from the future, describing their vision...

A Collective Vision Statement

The community's words, hopes, and dreams provided the foundation for a shared vision statement that frames all that follows in the plan.

This statement echoes our priorities as a community and as a Downtown.

Where we've been, and where we're headed

Fargo's history is rooted in Downtown. It was established as the bustling center of a region. After decades of decline, Downtown Fargo has emerged as a unique destination thanks to deliberate and forward-thinking investment spearheaded by local leaders and a do-it-yourself culture embraced by community members. These actions recognized that Downtown is fundamentally different than the rest of the region. The infrastructure is older, the buildings are denser, the bones are good, there is more to see and do. Breathing additional life into Downtown will build upon these unique characteristics, ensuring that Downtown continues to serve as the center that drives the regional economy and hosts the region's social life.

Our shared vision for the future:

Downtown Fargo is a **family-friendly destination, full of variety** and **welcoming to all**. We **celebrate the diversity** of our Downtown residents and businesses, and we **cultivate creativity and the arts** as part of the day-to-day Downtown experience. New local jobs make Downtown a **magnet for innovators** and a **place where great ideas are demonstrated.**

Our streets are **walkable** and **vibrant, rich with color and texture** and **designed for a sustainable future**. New multi-use **trails connect Downtown to the Red River** and beyond.

As a creative center, Downtown offers **big-city amenities** and talent within a **small-town atmosphere.**

We welcome new buildings but also value preservation, resulting in a Downtown that is the **perfect mix of old and new…classic and modern, a must-see of the Midwest.**

At the second public open house, held during Frostival, community members reviewed a first draft of the vision statement and struck a pose with the words or themes that they liked best.

1

> "We need more density Downtown and fewer surface parking lots!"
>
> *– interview*

> "Retail cannot survive just on events. And we're an event driven Downtown. Retail cannot survive on student incomes... We need Downtown to become more of a neighborhood."
>
> *– interview*

Grow as a Neighborhood

by investing in housing to increase the population living Downtown and maintain Downtown's diversity.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- **More residential and income density** Downtown and in near neighborhoods will support a full-service Downtown with retail and restaurants, helping to offset the "resort town" risk of a destination Downtown.
- **More people living Downtown** will create added foot traffic, lessening vehicular traffic and improving perceptions of safety. Currently, of the nearly 18,000 employees Downtown, only 430 (or 2%) both live and work in Downtown. This means that while these employees may support local retail during lunch and perhaps after work, there are a significant number of people getting in a car and driving to and from work, which only adds to Downtown's parking challenges.
- **A diversity of housing types** offered at a range of price points will ensure that Downtown remains a diverse and open neighborhood. But Downtown is also home to many units for those who are sensitive to housing prices. There are currently about 375 income-restricted housing units Downtown plus another 60 units of transitional and supportive housing. With over 2,000 Fargoans on the waiting list (about a three-year wait) for affordable housing, the affordable units that exist Downtown are extremely important. As with many downtowns across the country, Downtown Fargo is starting to see a lot of development for those with higher incomes. What is missing are housing options for households sometimes referred to as the "missing middle," or those that cannot afford current market-rate rentals but whose incomes are not low enough to qualify for an affordable or income-restricted unit.

HOW WILL WE ACCOMPLISH OUR GOALS?

1.1 Encourage a mix of housing types for a range of price points

> Enable the construction of multi-family or townhouse developments for recent grads, young couples, and empty nesters as well as flats for seniors looking to age in place by re-zoning the edges of Downtown.

> Allow for smaller units in targeted areas.

> Target key sites for redevelopment.

1.2 Tweak the DMU

> Develop form-based requirements that guide the placement of buildings, parking, and other key design considerations for Downtown.

1.3 Fill the gaps to create "two cities, one Downtown"

> Redevelop the police station, health center and nearby available properties to help activate City Hall Plaza.

> Redevelop the Mid-America Steel site.

> Fill in the gaps along Main and create the infrastructure to support development.

1.4 Preserve existing single-family housing in near neighborhoods

> Expand capital sources to support single-family rehab and revitalization in neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown.

> Bring back the scattered-site TIF program to encourage rehabilitation of existing housing or new infill housing at affordable pricing.

> Explore employer-assisted housing options to encourage employees to live close to where they work.

> Build upon Downtown InFocus with subsequent Fargo InFocus neighborhood plans; focus on housing, especially for young-professionals, working professionals, and middle incomes.

1.5 Preserve housing affordability to keep Downtown within reach of low- and working-income households

> Provide City-owned land at below market rates but require the inclusion of affordable housing and/or affordable workspace within private development in return.

> Reserve select publicly-owned properties for the development of income-restricted housing for families below 60% of AMI.

1.6 Plan to preserve as well as grow

> Continue to track and assist in Downtown preservation efforts.

1.7 Address quality of life issues shared by Downtown residents

> Improve lighting Downtown.

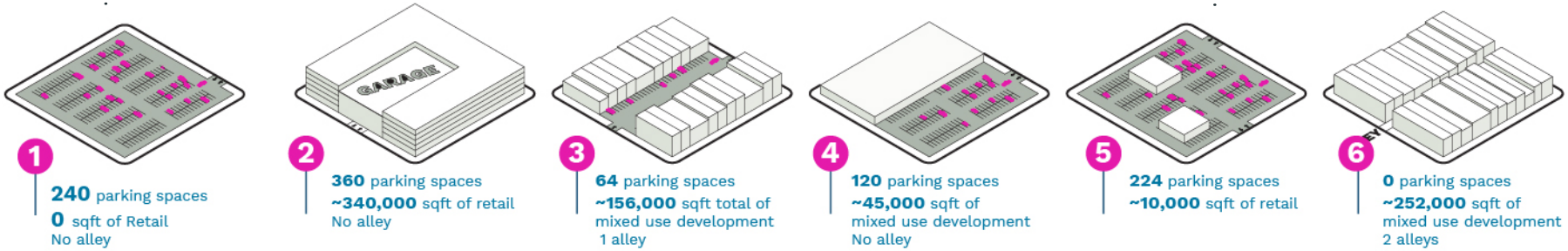
> Expand cleaning and greening to beautify Downtown.

> Support efforts of neighbors and businesses to clamp down on nuisance activity.

> Market Downtown as one of Fargo's safest and most diverse neighborhoods.

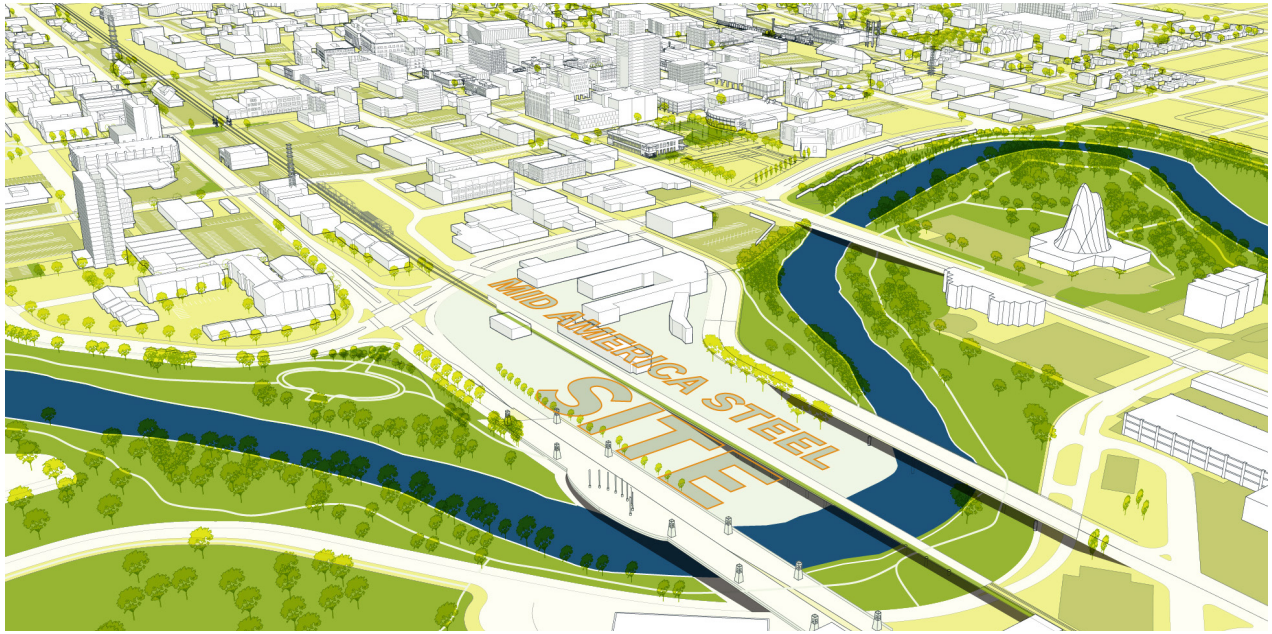
"There is a lot of subsidized housing and extremely affordable housing and very expensive housing Downtown but very little in the middle." *– interview*

Current development types allowed by-right in Fargo's DMU zoning requirements.

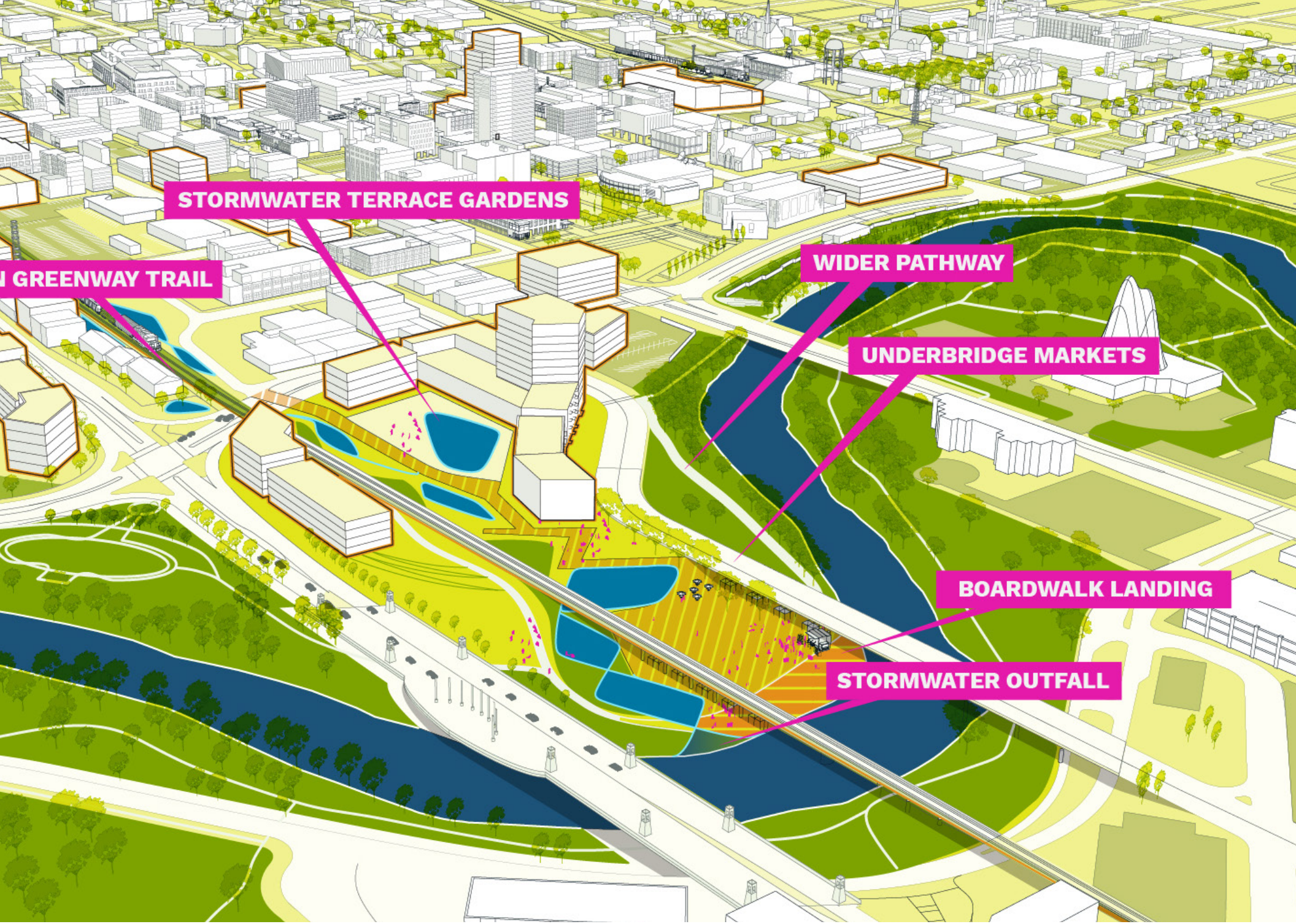


The permissive Downtown Mixed Use (DMU) zoning allows for development compatible with a dense, walkable downtown district, as well as development patterns more appropriate for auto-oriented suburban areas.

MAIN AVENUE POTENTIAL: Rendering showing Main Avenue road diet plus mixed use redevelopment to mirror existing shopping and dining destination south of Main at Broadway. The combination of new development, streetscape, and an improved plaza (not pictured) will create a true gateway to Downtown Fargo.



Existing conditions at the Mid-America Steel site, looking west from Moorhead



Conceptual Sketch of Mixed Use Redevelopment Potential and Riverfront Plaza at former Mid-America Steel Site

2

> "Downtown is the face of Fargo; it's the face of the largest, most progressive city of the state. It's the largest economic driver. It's the location of the two highways coming together. How do we get those people to come here as a destination?" *– interview*

Prosper as a Business Center

Increase the number and types of businesses and jobs Downtown (or accessible from Downtown).

Downtown is a core location for talent-driven businesses.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

> **Downtown has long been a center of economic activity.** Downtown represents approximately 1,200 businesses and 18,000 employees and is a critical location for talent-dependent businesses. For example, it is the home to 21% of the professional/technical firms in the metro area and represents 24% of the employees in the information/communications industry in Greater Fargo. Most of the available space Downtown, however, is under 6,000 square feet. In total, these spaces could support only between 250 to 450 additional workers.

> **Downtown lacks basic retail services** that would make it an even more attractive location and encourage more residents and Downtown employees to shop there. One of the challenges for Downtown is that, at present, it lacks the retail mix typically associated with a "neighborhood." Basics such as over the counter medicine, simple fruits and vegetables, and other day-to-day items are very difficult to find Downtown.

> Downtown has maintained its growth momentum, but the benefits of that momentum are not necessarily driving growth to existing businesses. Credit card sales data identified an increased number of sales and transactions, but **the activity for existing businesses remained flat**.

> With rising rents, **businesses that are sensitive to price have a difficult time finding or retaining the right space**.

HOW WILL WE ACCOMPLISH OUR GOALS?

2.1 Strengthen local retail

> Collect and track pedestrian counts.

> Conduct quarterly meet-ups of retailers.

> Work together to increase the potential customer pool and improve the Downtown customer experience by pursuing common operating hours, seasonal promotions and maintaining a strong voice within the BID to address safety and parking issues.

2.2 Concentrate new retail locations to maintain retail density and vibrancy

> Encourage new retail on blocks close to Broadway to expand the Downtown shopping and dining experience by linking activity on Broadway with activity on Main and in SOMA.

2.3 Encourage the creation of new commercial spaces for local businesses, start-ups, and artists

> Link incentives for new development to efforts supporting entrepreneurial activity like reduced ground floor rents and flexible lease arrangements.

> Create a tenant development program providing both recruitment and launch assistance for potential Downtown businesses.

> Encourage pop-up retail to test the Downtown market.

2.4 Encourage selective alley development

> Better utilize the older, deep but narrow buildings by strategically improving the experience along select alleyways.

2.5 Expand NDSU's presence Downtown

> Build upon NDSU's merchandising and entrepreneurship expertise to support a potential retail incubator program Downtown.

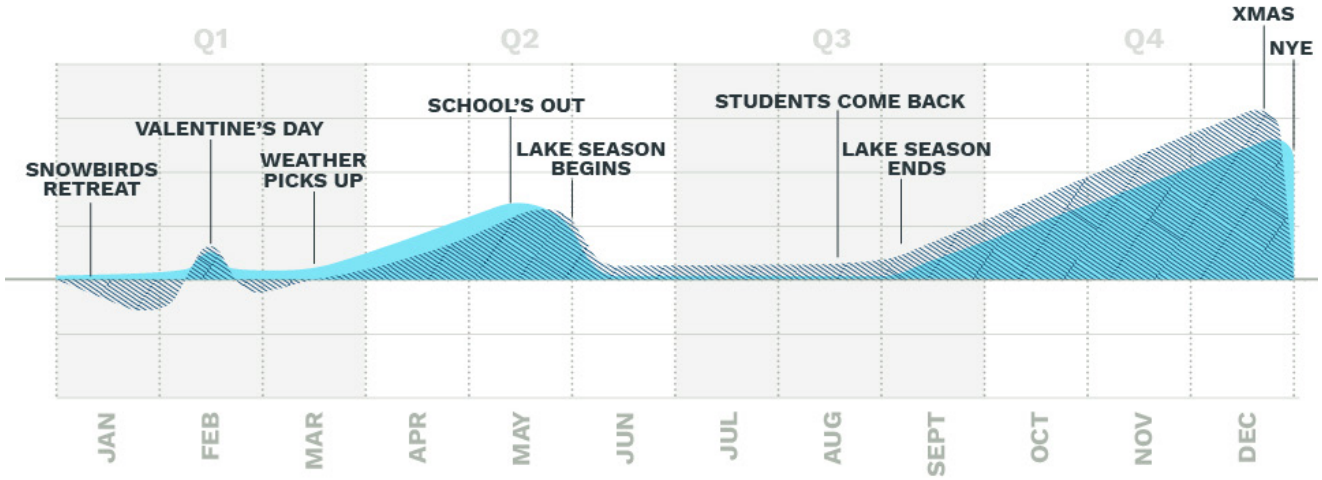
2.6 Improve the customer experience

> Focus on signage, lighting, and safety programs.

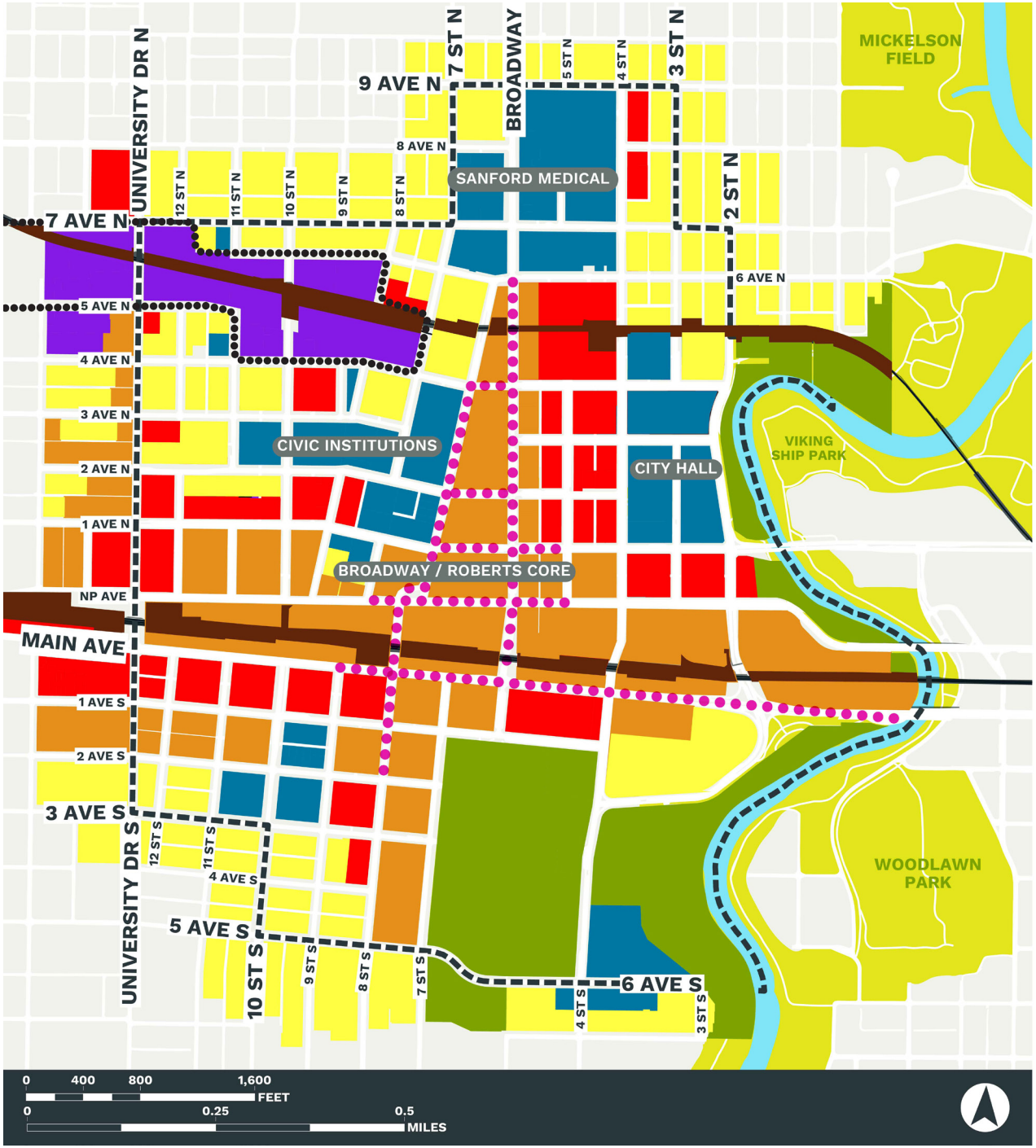
2.7 Plan for major events

> Work with CVB to maximize conventioneer activity in Downtown.

> "When people come to shop on a Sunday, it can be frustrating... Most places are closed, and there are few places to eat, nowhere to point people to."
>
> *– interview*



Due to vacation patterns and the academic calendar, Downtown functions as a "resort-town" in which businesses must do the bulk of their sales in a limited number of months.



Future Land Use

Source: Interface Studio

- RETAIL FOCUS
- INDUSTRIAL PRESERVATION
- RESIDENTIAL
- COMMERCIAL
- MIXED-USE
- INDUSTRIAL
- PARKS & RECREATION
- PUBLIC & INSTITUTIONAL
- UTILITY & OTHER
- RAIL
- OPEN SPACE
- DOWNTOWN FOCUS AREA

Future Land Use Map

3

> "Alumni are starting to claim this place. We used to have a major brain drain problem, but not Downtown Fargo is cool again." *– interview*

Thrive as a Destination

Create a unique downtown experience with an activated riverfront and vibrant sidewalks and public spaces that serve as the backdrop to the community's social life.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- **Downtowns across the country function differently than they did even a few decades ago.** There are more people living and excited to live in Downtown Fargo than in recent memory. At the same time, businesses across the region are competing for talent with cities across the country. A key factor in supporting both residential and job growth is the quality of the place. Downtown Fargo needs to provide a unique experience that cannot be found regionally or even in other cities.
- **Despite the unique collection of retailers, Downtown is often quiet on nights and weekends.** The most effective tool for changing perceptions is more activity. More people on the streets, more businesses, and more programming provide what is frequently referred to as "eyes on the street"–a key factor in improving safety in other successful downtowns.
- 14% of Downtown comprises open space; however, almost all of this space is located in Island Park. **As Downtown grows, additional parks and plazas will be needed to provide space that brings together residents and/or visitors.**
- **Current regulations obstruct investments that would improve streets and sidewalks, limiting economic development and sense of community fostered in these shared spaces.** The City needs to play a role in programming public space but motivated and creative residents and business owners should be encouraged to take initiatives into their own hands. These initiatives, sometimes as small as adding seating to an unused space, are valuable and necessary for a successful downtown but can run afoul of local regulations. We need standards and rules, but also flexibility to encourage greater activity on Downtown streets and sidewalks.

HOW WILL WE ACCOMPLISH OUR GOALS?

3.1 Deregulate

> Encourage outdoor dining, food trucks, and pop-up uses to activate Downtown streets and support local businesses.

> Advocate for changes at the State to change existing laws around liquor sales and outdoor dining.

> Push to change local liquor laws to support emerging business models like breweries and taprooms.

3.2 Mix It Up on Broadway

The transformation of Broadway about 15 years ago has stimulated a lot of activity Downtown. While that investment feels all too recent for those who raised the capital to make it happen, like any major investment, it needs some updating to respond to current opportunities.

> Reclaim select planted areas for active programming and use.

> Design additional sidewalk bump-outs (both temporary and permanent) to create more public space, usable in all seasons.

3.3 Encourage More Programming "Off-Broadway"

> Relieve pressure on Broadway by encouraging more events and programming in other designated areas.

3.4 Raise the profile of the arts and design

> Brand and promote a design district that highlights not just the arts but also the ongoing work of other design-related fields.

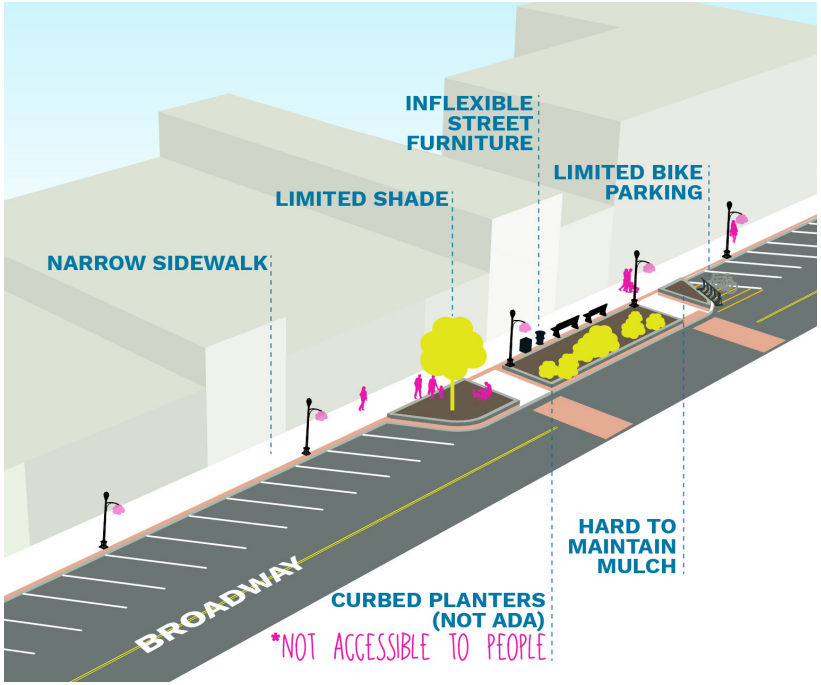
> Build upon annual arts events to create a Design Month in Downtown.

3.5 Invest in new public art

> Encourage new public art within new development and as public expressions of Fargo's identity.

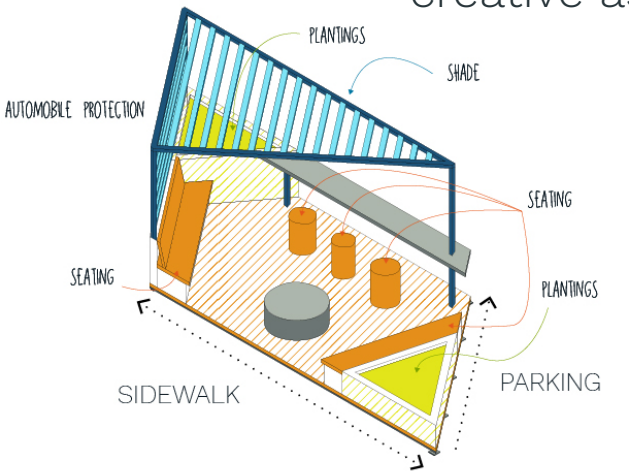
> Bring artists in on key public development projects.

In Holland, MI, the main retail street is similar in size to Broadway. The difference is in how the sidewalk bump-outs are used. In some cases, they are used as public space with winter warming huts, in others they serve as outdoor seating for restaurants.



Today's challenges in activating public realm along Broadway

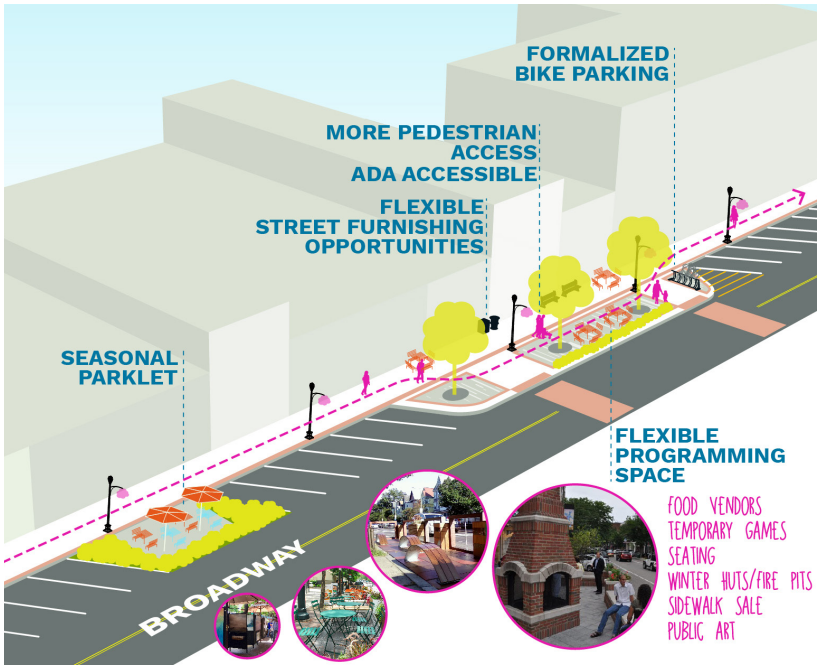
> "How do we create a brand? The arts are an enormous asset. Creative placemaking comes from creative assets." *– interview*



Parklet concept for Broadway

3.6 Pursue the Performing Arts Center

> Consider a final site for the Performing Arts Center including Mid-America Steel and the current Civic Center.



Design Concepts for Retrofitting Broadway Bump-Outs

Rendering of a Parklet in the Place of Parking on Broadway

4

> "We need to be more thoughtful about redevelopment. We don't want to price out the poor, the homeless. Fifteen years ago, they were the only people in Downtown." *– interview*

Be a Model for Inclusive Growth & Development

Protect Downtown's diversity and evolve as a model for equitable growth and development.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- **Downtown Fargoans expressed a commitment to inclusivity as Downtown revitalizes.** Fargo's Downtown community shares a vision for a Downtown that is welcoming to all—a place that not only remains diverse but celebrates its diversity.
- **Tensions are building between different factions of the community as Downtown redevelops.** But there is also recognition of a new tension emerging between newer neighbors and visitors drawn Downtown and the community of people living Downtown under different circumstances—either homeless or at risk of homelessness. While some interactions are polite, aggressive panhandling or drunken behavior can be intimidating, whether the target of an uncomfortable interaction be a shopper who is asked for money or a person experiencing homelessness who is taunted by binge-drinking students.
- **Downtown is host to a range of social services that belong Downtown, near transportation.** The Fargo Moorhead region has a very high quality network of shelters and associated service providers and advocates for individuals experiencing homelessness. The clustered location of services means that the local population of homeless people does traverse Downtown to meet their needs—and they will continue to do so.

HOW WILL WE ACCOMPLISH OUR GOALS?

4.1 De-stigmatize homelessness and cultivate a sense of community

> Expand Homelessness 101 trainings and build awareness of the Downtown service network.

4.2 Make space for the most vulnerable, 24 hours a day

> Develop a day center close to other services to provide a place for those experiencing homelessness to go when traditional shelters close.

4.3 Integrate necessities in select public spaces

> Design water fountains, water bottle filling stations, and restrooms into new park spaces.

4.4 Expand the service network to meet shifting social challenges

> Continue to focus on issues around behavioral health and chemical addiction treatment by supporting the work of the Mayors' Blue Ribbon Commission on Addiction (in Fargo, Moorhead, West Fargo, Horace, and Dilworth).

"Sometimes you just want a place to lay down, but you can't do that in the winter—you'll die." *– interview*

The prompt: describe the Downtown Fargo of tomorrow you hope for in one word of phrase.

4.5 Provide a range of housing options within Downtown, at a range of price points

> Help a Housing First approach take root in Downtown. Service providers and advocates combatting homelessness in Fargo have embraced the Housing First philosophy, a policy approach that prioritizes offering permanent, affordable housing as quickly as possible, and then offering necessary supportive services to help individuals and families remain in that housing.

4.6 Support pathways to work

> Connect those who are able to work with job training and transit options that bring available jobs within reach.

"We need to embody what it means to be a community of compassion. We won't tolerate exclusivity Downtown." *– interview*

5

> "I'm from Grand Forks – I lost 20 pounds from walking everywhere, the health benefits are huge for living in a more walkable community."
>
> *– interview*

Complete Our Streets

Make complete streets common place and encourage trips by foot, bicycle, and bus, as well as car.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- **In a dense, walkable Downtown like Fargo's, streets must serve many purposes and multiple modes.** Fargo's Downtown is growing, putting more demand on Fargo's streets than ever before. Housing in Downtown and the nearby neighborhoods is becoming more popular with students and young professionals who want to live in a walkable urban area. But, Fargo's businesses still rely on customers coming Downtown from throughout the region. It is important to consider the daily local and regional flows of people in and out of Fargo.
- **Changing the look, feel, and function of Downtown streets can shift behaviors and support alternative transportation choices and active lifestyles.** Fargo's Downtown is a small geographic area that is dense with destinations. For areas closer to Downtown, there is a big opportunity to shift mode choice toward more walking, biking, and use of bikeshare and transit to get to and around Downtown. With more activity Downtown comes the demand for more trips. If fewer trips are made by a car the result is less traffic and less space needed for parking. But, this requires better infrastructure supporting non-driving modes.

HOW WILL WE ACCOMPLISH OUR GOALS?

5.1 Establish a street hierarchy Downtown

> Follow a Downtown Fargo Playbook that outlines the role and design of each street in Downtown. The Playbook lays out a roadmap for the redesign of Downtown's streets, so that when the time comes to rebuild them, design and construction yields a coordinated network that can meet new transportation demands as time goes on. The *Downtown Playbook* is included as an appendix to this document.

5.2 Prioritize safety for the slowest speeds first

> Improve pedestrian safety throughout Downtown by enhancing key intersections.

> Retrofit streets to calm traffic; focus on near residential typology and side-streets not called out in Playbook. The idea is to slow traffic from Downtown to the adjacent residential neighborhoods.

5.3 Create a bicycle network Downtown

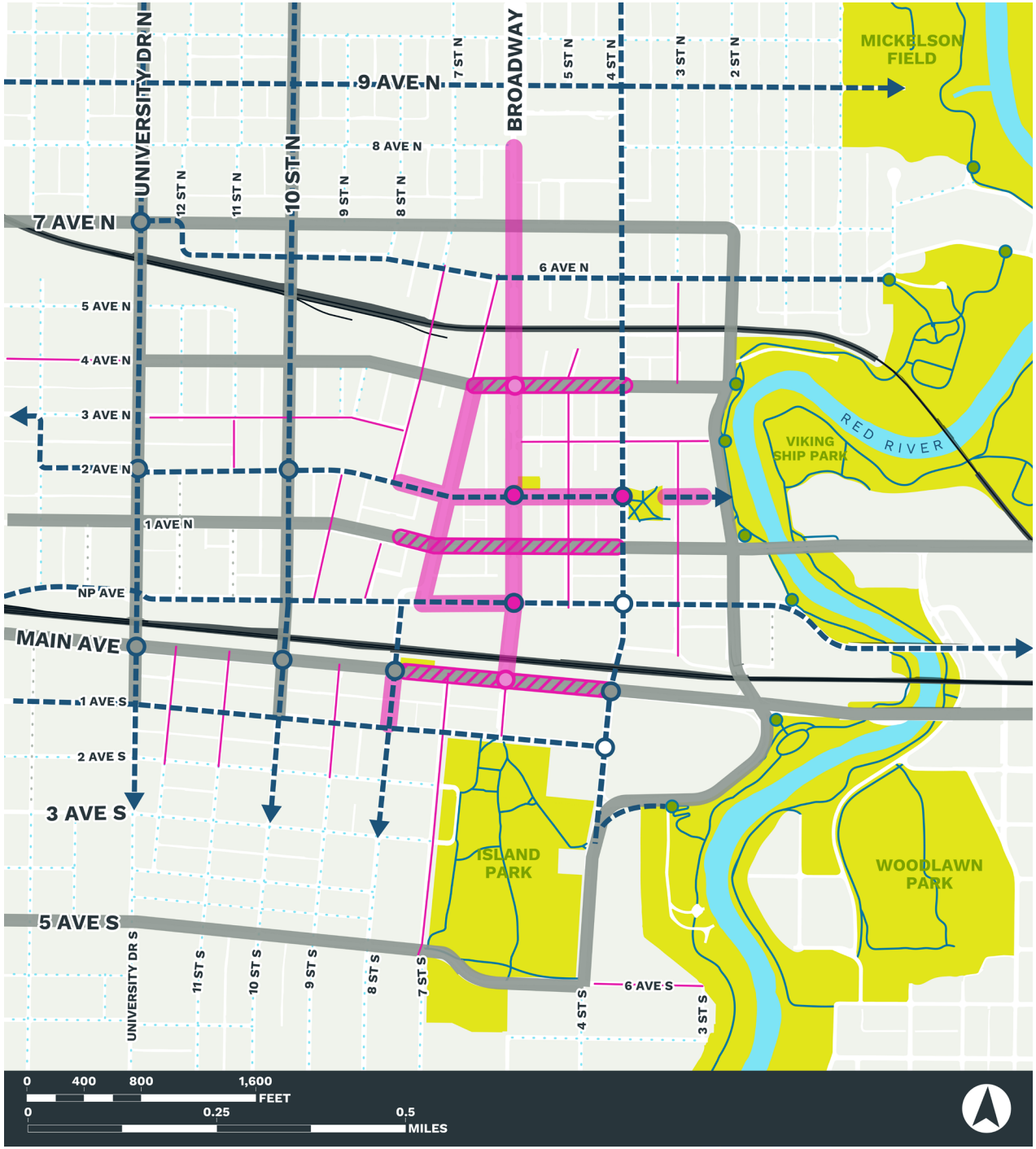
> Ensure safe, connected spaces for bicycles by upgrading bike infrastructure where appropriate.

5.4 Enhance local transit stops

> Increase the visibility and improve the quality of bus stops.

> Improve main pathways to the GTC and better integrate the station into the fabric of Downtown.

- EXISTING OFF-STREET TRAILS
- PEDESTRIAN ENHANCMENT FOCUS
- VEHICLE FLOW FOCUS
- BICYCLE CONNECTION
- INTERSECTION ENHANCEMENT
- LOCAL / FLEX STREETS
- NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER SLOW STREETS
- INTERSECTION ENHANCEMENT
- EXISTING TRAILHEADS



Proposed Street Network

5.5 Make it easy to get around without owning a car

> Leverage transit habits of students, and bolster ridership with intentional marketing and connections to necessary destinations. The City should support MATBUS in exploring: Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies like employee transit passes; marketing connections to daily services and destinations like groceries, pharmacies, etc. and; Tap-in, Tap-out type fee structure.

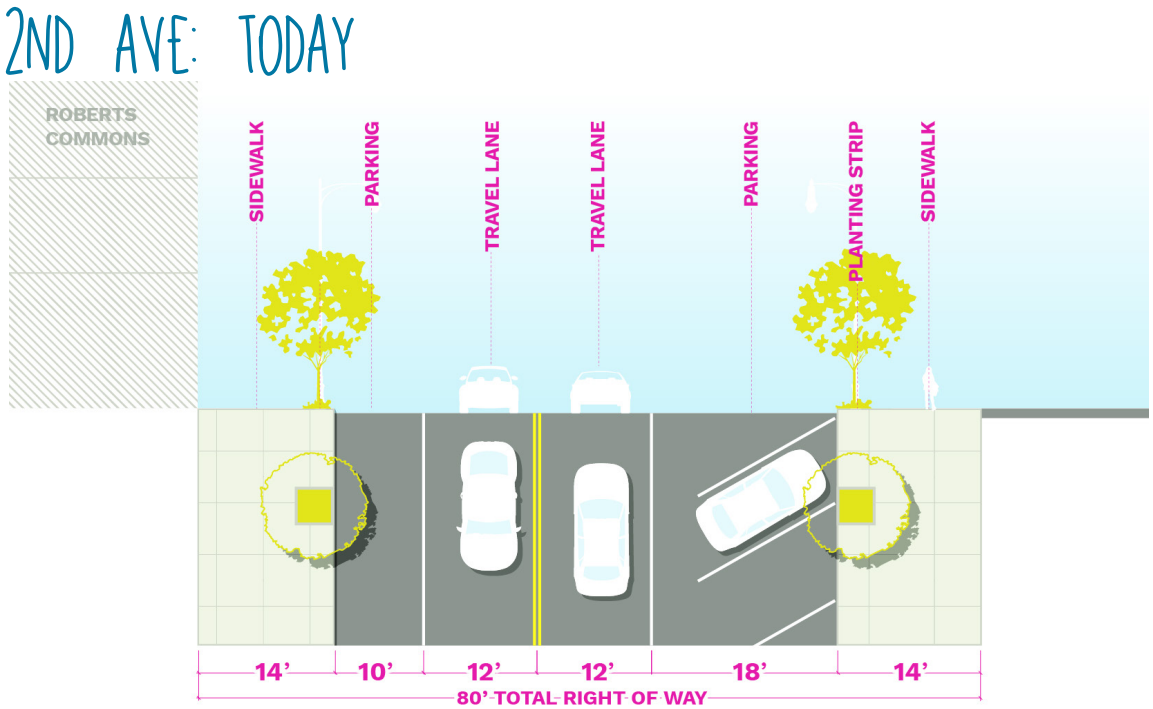
> Make walking, biking and taking transit more comfortable in the winter by prioritizing investment in bike lane snow clearing and sidewalk clearing (particularly around transit stops) and, creating warming shelters and weather-appropriate transit stops to support riders through the winter months.

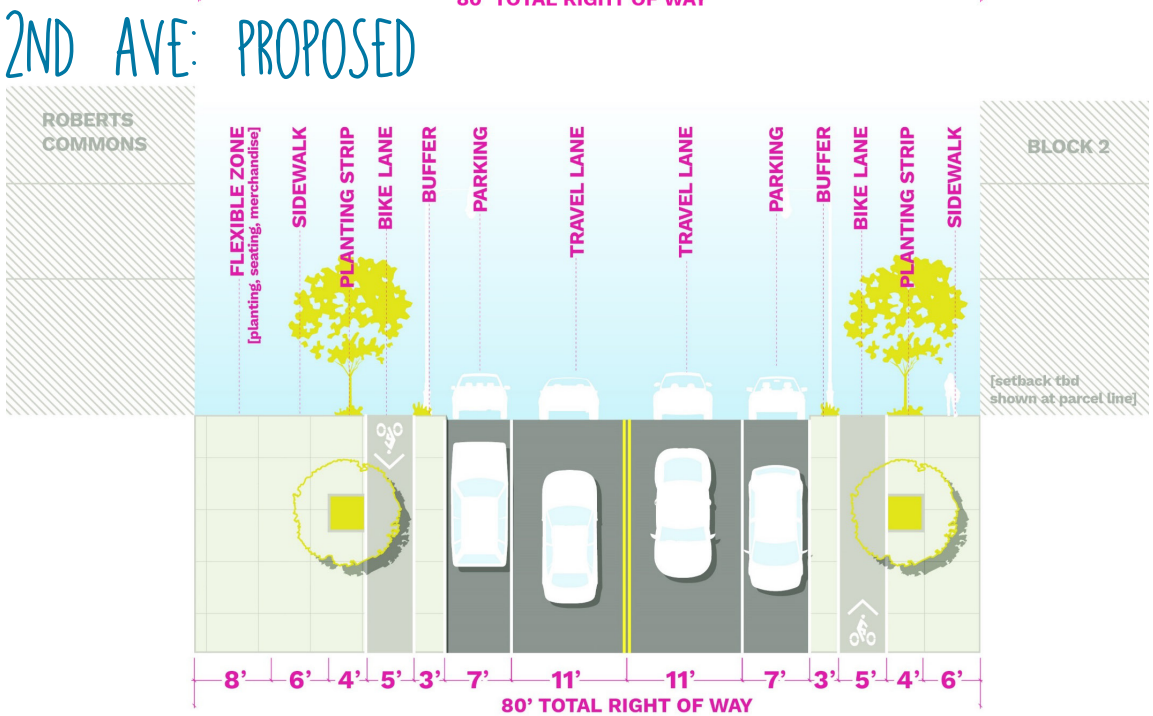
5.6 Build out the bike share system in and around Downtown

> Increase year over year programmatic and financial commitment to the bike share program to ensure its longevity.

> Grow the program to be most useful for Downtown and near-neighborhood residents and employees (who are not served by the current system).

Taking care of bike lanes in the winter, Montreal
Credit: Bartek Komorowski





2nd Avenue Street Sections

6

Park Smart

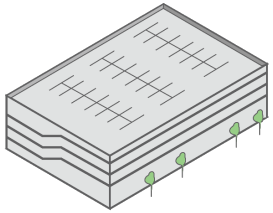
Manage parking resources to meet the needs of drivers, while also making room for new development and activity.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

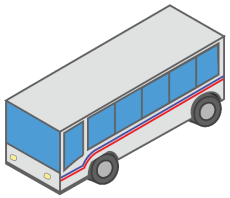
> **Parking is the first and last experience many have of Downtown. It needs to be well designed and well managed.** There is significant demand for parking spaces in the core of Downtown but many available spaces just a few blocks away. Demand for parking will only strengthen with upcoming new development. Fargo cannot build its way out of the problem. Parking is a means to an end: a thing we do to achieve something else.

> **In the short term, building new parking will alleviate pressure for parking in Downtown, but that will not solve the problem forever.** For years, the City has been able to manage its parking with traditional methods that include time limits, on-site enforcement, and adding supply where land is available. But there is more to the parking solution than simply adding capacity. While parking can support the vitality of a community, it can also have negative impacts on a user's experience. If time limits chase people away, businesses hurt. If employees or long-term visitors keep their vehicles parked in retail corridors for extended periods of time, incoming visitors have few spaces and get frustrated.

Parking is an issue that has direct financial implications for both private developers and the City alike. It's a matter of economics.



Cost per space $30,000



Cost per passenger $5,000

HOW WILL WE ACCOMPLISH OUR GOALS?

6.1 Create a tiered parking management approach

> Change parking rates, time restrictions, and assign penalties according to how close to the core you are. Downtown InFocus recommends a three-zone strategy to help guide parking policy and better manage the demand for parking spaces in Downtown.

> Align supply with demand by looking at parking utilization system wide. An effective way to reduce high parking demand is to increase pricing in high-demand facilities in combination with strategies that improve the quality of alternative modes.

6.2 Advocate for metered parking

> Continue to lobby the State to eliminate the ban on metered parking.

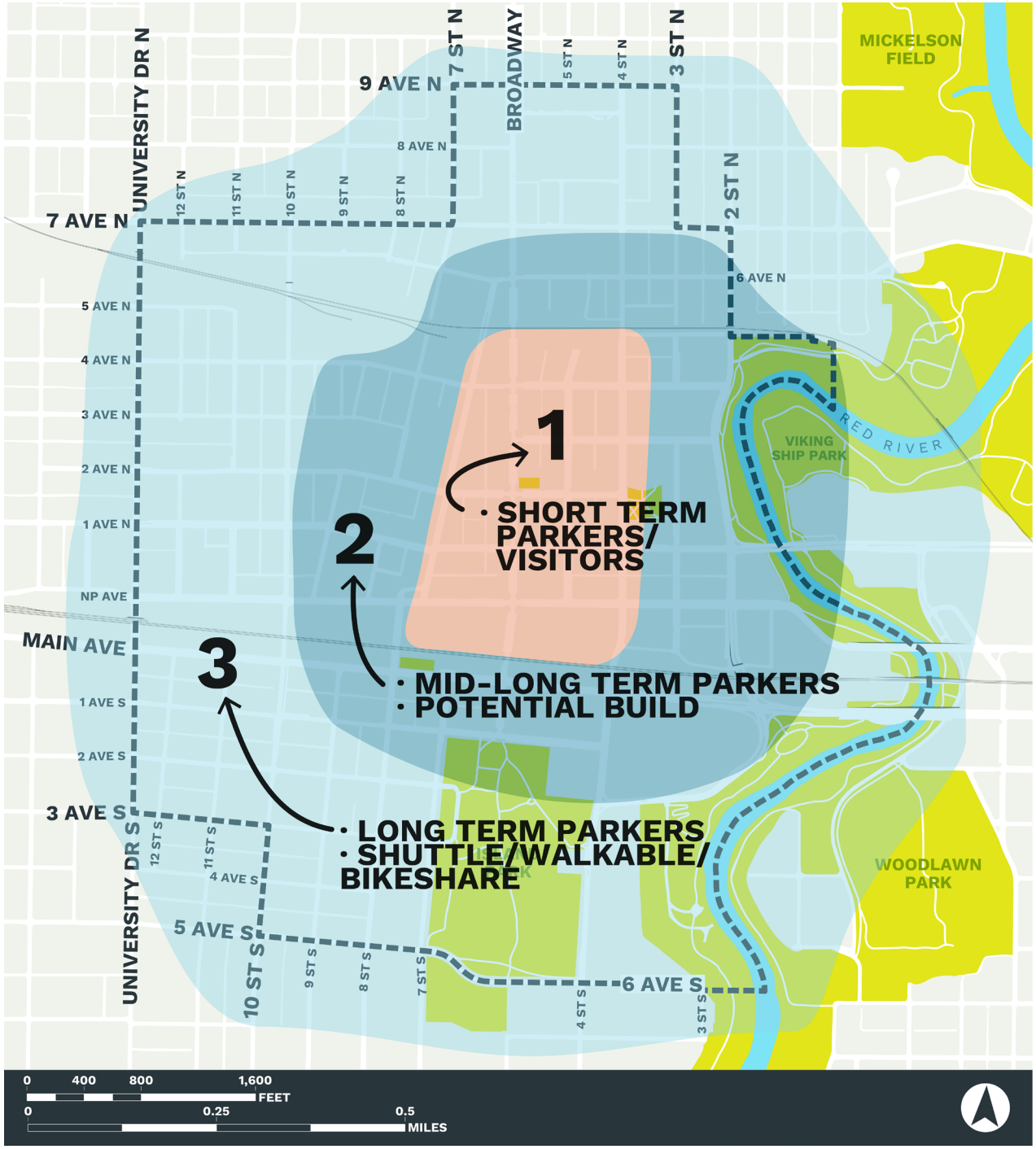
> Bring parking meters to Downtown, where collected revenue could be used for streetscape improvements, improved signage, or to improve parking lots.

6.3 Make it easy for visitors to park once, when spending the day in Downtown

> Adopt strategies to increase turnover for high-demand spaces. Create a park once strategy to allow people to complete tasks quickly, conveniently, and in a lively, safe environment, while encouraging walking and social interaction.

> Provide easy-to-find areas where visitors can park for the day without worry, or spot-hopping.

> Develop clearer wayfinding to help drivers find available parking to reduce the number of people circling for spots.



Parking Zones

6.4 Make desirable parking spaces available to customers, even at night

> Extend enforcement of on-street parking to 9:00 pm to ensure that turnover continues into the evening, allowing more people to come, park, dine, and enjoy Downtown.

> Change duration of evening parking intervals to accommodate dinner or movie outings.

6.5 Pursue a shared parking model

> Partner with local employers on shared parking opportunities so that parking resources better serve everyone. Identify viable locations for shared parking arrangements at private lots and garages to increase parking supply, maximize use, and avoid the public cost of new garages.

6.6 Work with willing local employers to incentivize alternative modes of commute

> Educate employers on the issues associated with paying for employee parking; encourage employers to offer transportation options outside of free parking. These include parking cash-out programs (providing cash instead of a dedicated parking space), discounted bike share, supporting carpooling, and offering discounted Uber or Lyft rides home at night if the employee did not commute to work in a single-occupancy vehicle.

> Consider a circulator that connects major Downtown job centers with off-site parking to free up spaces in the core.

6.7 Create an on-street parking permit for Downtown employees

> Mitigate long waiting lists at Downtown garages by offering employee permits for on-street parking in designated areas along some of the peripheral or underutilized streets for a lower monthly fee.

6.8 Consider implementing parking maximums

> Establish parking maximums in the core Downtown area to foster a more dense, walkable environment. Maintain parking minimums outside of the study area.

6.9 Beautify parking lots

> Prioritize landscaping, repaving, striping, and lighting so that parking lots contribute to Downtown's public realm and improved perceptions.

7 Play with Purpose

Develop a system of connected all-season green spaces designed for people (of a range of ages and interests) and purpose (as infrastructure that absorbs stormwater).

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

> **The FM Diversion project aims to protect the City from the rising Red River, but it does not reduce the threat of localized flooding of Downtown property caused by rain events.** In fact, the new flood walls will make localized floding from rain worse by trapping water Downtown.

> **We need to reduce the threat of localized flooding**. The lack of large scale detention basins that exist elsewhere in the City means that the roads themselves become the temporary storage for local rain events. During high intensity storms, catchment areas overflow into adjacent catchment areas, leading to more water moving at faster rates. This results in more property damage and higher risks to health and safety.

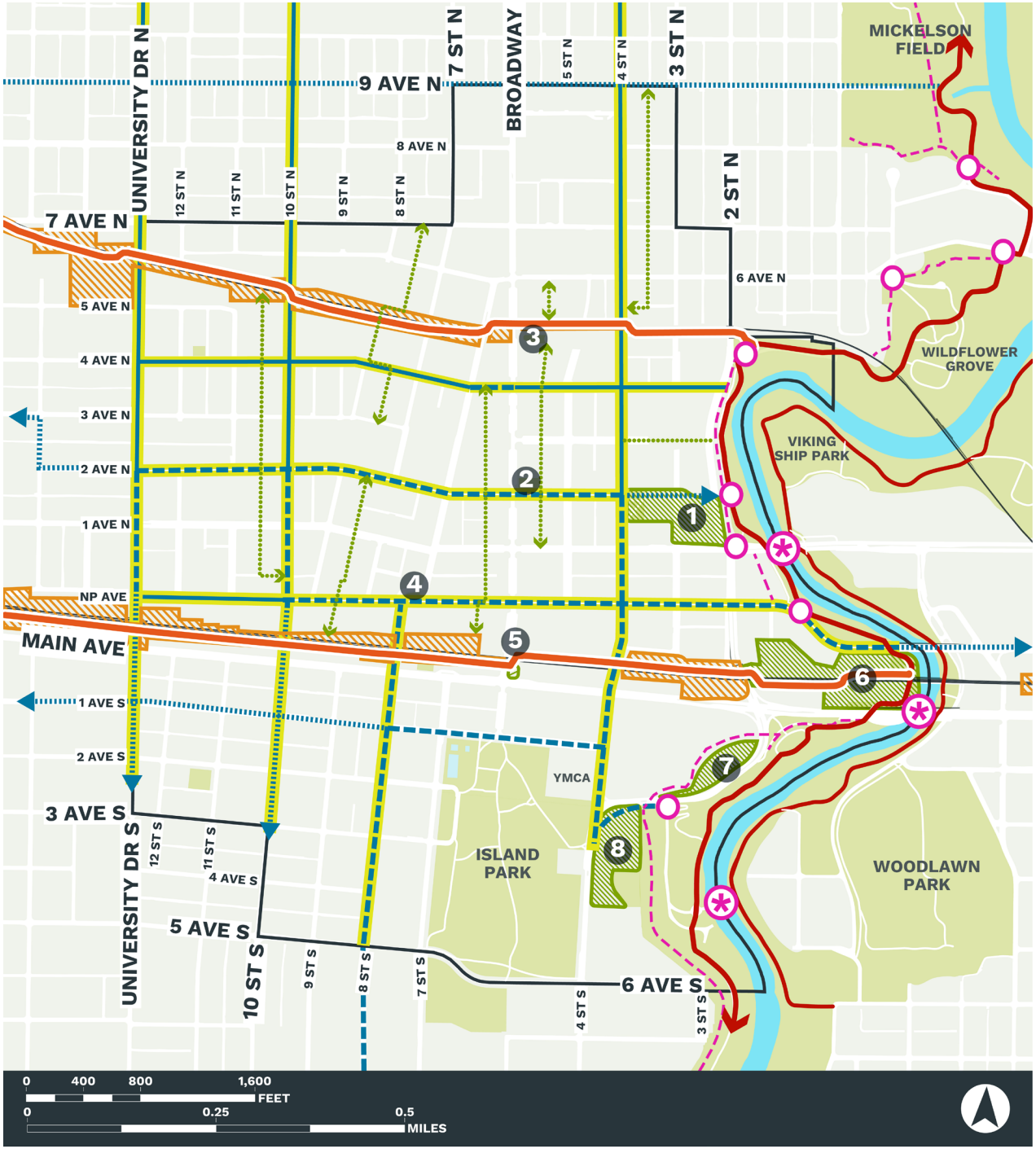
> **The water quality of the Red River is impacted by localized flooding.** Fargo's separated sewer system creates an opportunity to intercept that water and clean it before it enters the River. The amount of water that needs to be treated is usually about 0.6-1.5" of rain.

HOW WILL WE ACCOMPLISH OUR GOALS?

7.1 Cultivate a Downtown open space network

> Program open spaces to welcome families and visitors to Downtown while providing Downtown residents with a vibrant "front yard."

> Stitch together alleys, small parks, the Block 9 Plaza, City Hall Plaza, and the River. The creation of a robust open space network in Downtown starts with the recognition and improvement of existing assets like Block 9, City Hall Plaza, and Riverfront Park, but instead of being singular destination points, they become a system connected via new greenways, improved streetscapes, bikeways, and alleyways.



Potential Open Space Network

7.2 Program for families

> Focus on programming for families with children and for students under the age of 21.

> Program the City Hall Plaza to encourage regional visitors. The new City Hall Plaza should be one of the "Front Yard" experiences in Downtown.

> Develop more all-weather venues and events like Frostival.

7.3 Reconnect and activate the flood wall

> Design spaces on both sides of the flood wall to help people to get up, over, and back down the flood wall.

> Integrate public art and programming at nearby open spaces.

> Create a new, actively programmed City Hall Plaza and pursue a bridge aligned with 2nd Avenue. With City Hall under construction, a design for the plaza needs to be finalized to serve City Hall and provide a true amenity in this portion of Downtown.

1. CIVIC PLAZA
2. BLOCK 9 PLAZA
3. GREAT N. BIKES PARK
4. OLE TANGEN PARK
5. GATEWAY PLAZA
6. MID AMERICA STEEL PLAZA
7. DIVERSION PARK
8. ISLAND PARK/DIKE CONNECTOR

- URBAN GREENWAY
- GREENWAY INFRASTRUCTURE SITE
- OPEN SPACE IMPROVEMENTS
- ALLEYWAYS
- GREEN STREETS
- BIKE INFRASTRUCTURE
- MOORHEAD TRAIL ACCESS
- RIVERFRONT ACCESS
- FLOOD PROTECTION
- EXISTING OPEN SPACE
- EXISTING TRAIL

> Design a river park on the Mid-America Steel site. Participants in this process expressed a strong desire for a Riverfront Plaza that could host markets and other events on the Red River of the North.

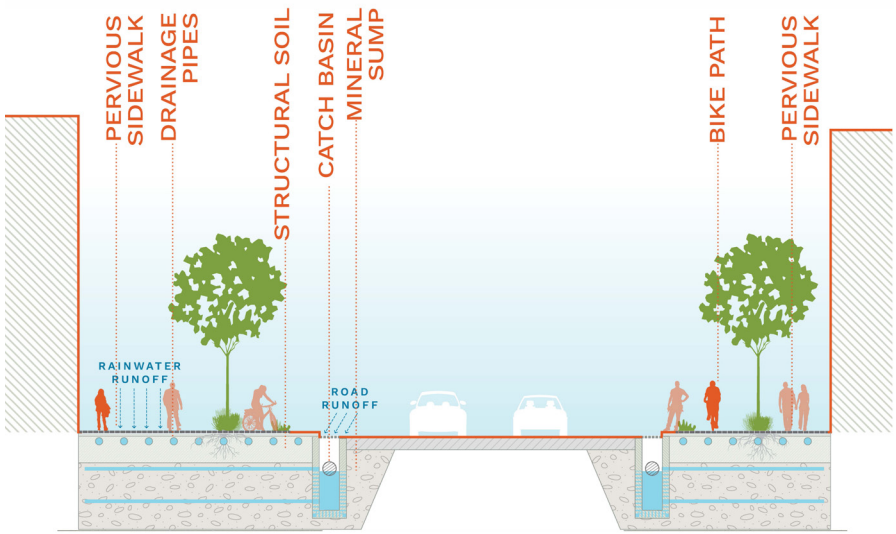
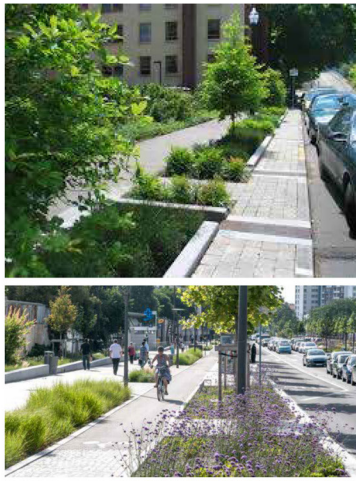
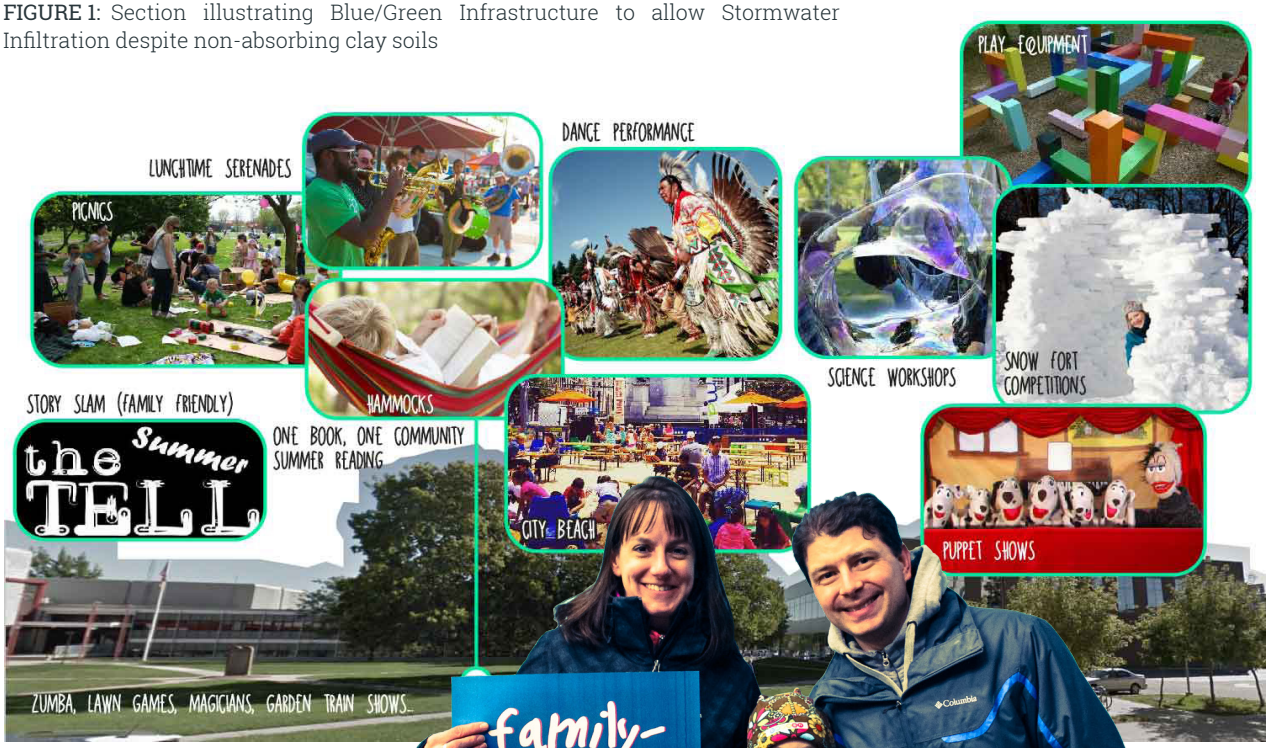


FIGURE 1: Section illustrating Blue/Green Infrastructure to allow Stormwater Infiltration despite non-absorbing clay soils



Blue/green infrastructure adds beauty above ground as well as functionality below ground.



Range of programming potential for Library/City Hall Plaza

7.4 Create urban greenways and an integrated, regional trail system

> Explore opportunities along rail right-of-ways to introduce protected trails that connect Downtown Fargo and Moorhead with the regional trail network.

> Fill gaps in a multi-use trail on both sides of the Red River, and connect to regional trails associated with the Diversion.

7.5 Encourage roof-top retention in new developments and parking garages

> Look at green roofs as a means of capturing water before it hits the street.

7.6 Integrate greening in the streets

> Retain rainwater on-street, and increase the green in Downtown. The creation of mineral sumps beneath the roads can add the additional capacity needed to handle water in Downtown. Mineral sumps are basins under the street that hold and treat stormwater. This water can be used to feed street trees thus creating one, integrated landscape along streets that both adds tree coverage and manages rainwater.

> Boost tree coverage Downtown to utilize captured rainwater, and enhance the Downtown experience. With the right selection of trees, each larger tree could transpire between 20,000-40,000 gallons of water per year, conveying water out of the sump system and cooling local conditions.

7.7 Adjust stormwater regulations

> Enable flexibility in addressing rainwater issues. Current flood ordinances address issues related to regional flooding rather than addressing issues related to localized flooding. Fargo needs to create a map that assesses local flood risk and review and enforce the flood proofing code to account for localized flooding.

Implementation Approach

CREATE A CLEAR MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

A Downtown Task Force

Central to the success of bringing the ideas in this plan to reality is a clear management structure that is charged with coordinating different initiatives, bringing key stakeholders together and fundraising. To help transition the planning conversations into a sustainable management structure, local partners should work toward creating a Downtown Task Force.

The Task Force would meet quarterly to coordinate and track the progress toward implementation around key initiatives. At this time, we recommend creating subcommittees around the following topics:

> **Parking** - to help address upcoming projects and implementation of this plan's parking strategy

> **Programming** – to coordinate and plan for year-round events that draw customers

> **Downtown services** – to further homelessness outreach and plan for a potential day center

> **Retail recruitment and support** – to further organize retailers, share data, and develop specific actions to help make Downtown an even better shopping and entertainment destination

> **Safety** – to coordinate the activities of the DCP, BID, FPD, and Downtown Neighborhood Association.

The "Capital Stack" for Implementation

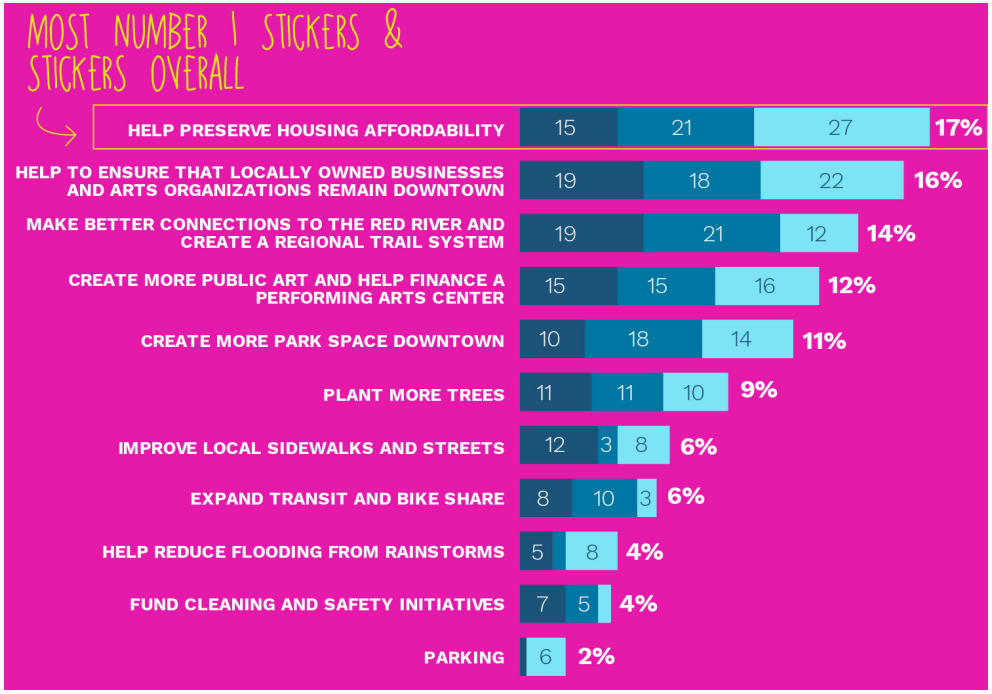
- **REVENUE - BACKED DEBT**
- **DEVELOPER CAPITAL**
- **REVOLVING FUNDS**
- **FED / STATE GRANTS**
- **DEDICATED / CIP FUND**
- **GENERAL FUND APPROPRIATIONS**

EXPAND THE TOOLBOX TO FINANCE IMPROVEMENT

Scale public benefits based on public investment in private development deals

During the course of this planning process, a number of key concerns and considerations were raised based on the impact and subsequent lessons from the transformation of Downtown over the prior decade.

Linkage should be created between providing public resources to a project and receiving a public good in return. Public resources could include direct cash investment, tax incentives, or land considerations. It will require defining an appropriate "public good" provided for a specific type of public investment – public art, green infrastructure, affordable ground floor work space, and affordable housing. However, the public good requirement needs to be calibrated to the level and type of public support. Public goods requirements that are far in excess of the relative value of the incentive may only serve to exacerbate development challenges.



Community priorities polled at second Open House

1st priority 2nd priority 3rd priority

> "Fargo does not save for maintenance... because of the Special Assessments. Our maintenance plan is to replace."
>
> – *interview*

Align financing mechanisms with development needs

To accelerate the development of this connected infrastructure, a district-wide financing approach that captures a portion of the value being created in Downtown makes the most sense. It provides the capital resources to accelerate the construction of the new infrastructure while at the same time spreading the cost across a wider geography than would be typical through a special assessment process.

Downtown InFocus proposes the utilization of the Urban Renewal authority granted by the State and the issuance of general obligation bonds. The bonds would be repaid by the creation of a restricted Downtown fund where a portion of the incremental revenue (fees, parking, taxes, rents) generated by additional Downtown development and gains in Downtown property values would be used to retire the bonds. This way **Downtown is paying for its own improvements through its incremental gains in value and tax generation.**

Ensure funding to manage the Downtown experience

Downtown Fargo is a destination for people throughout North Dakota and the upper Midwest. Its power is in offering an authentic, urban experience at a scale that is not overwhelming. This helps to drive job growth throughout the region as Downtown is used as a recruitment tool for talent.

To maintain this status and accommodate the wide variety of visitors and users of Downtown, a strong BID with clear responsibilities for managing and leading activity is essential. In other cities, BIDs have a substantially larger budget due the activities they undertake. In Fargo, it will be critical to talk with property owners around current assessment levels to determine the potential for raising assessments to correlate with greater benefits and ultimately more economic activity.

Look for new funding sources that engage the community in implementation

Explore the possibility of developing a Downtown-focused community challenge grant fund. If the Downtown Task Force can find a philanthropic partner or partners to capitalize the fund, a challenge grant program can encourage members of the public to get involved as active participants in plan implementation.

Prioritize projects for a phased implementation

Downtown InFocus identifies early action items across the major goal areas of this plan, but it is important to note that some of the plan's strategies will only be accomplished over a longer timeframe (up to 10 years). The implementation matrix included in the full plan includes necessary actions and potential funding sources for each recommendation. Agencies and organizations that should be responsible for leading implementation are also identified.

FARGO