



# Downtown Redevelopment Study 2019



## Acknowledgements

### **Community Development Authority**

- » Mike Gargaro, Chair
- » Joe Bucheger, Vice Chair
- » John Lyche
- » Ann Brandau
- » Ron Johnson
- » Jim Olson, Alderperson
- » Jim Binash, Alderperson

### **Common Council**

- » Joe Chilsen, Mayor
- » Jim Binash, First Aldermanic District, 2018-2019 Council President
- » Jim Olson, First Aldermanic District
- » Diane Wulf, Second Aldermanic District
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- » Ron Gjertsen, Third Aldermanic District

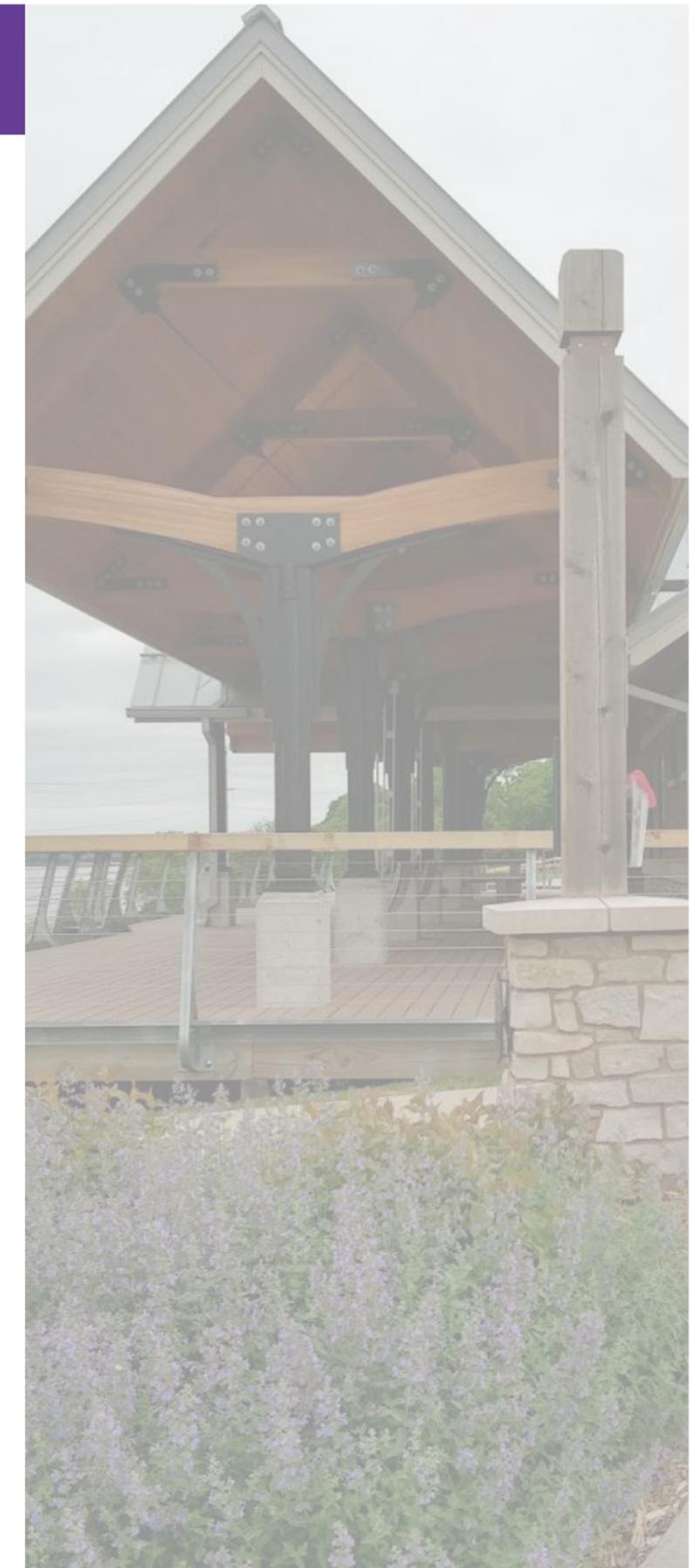
### **City Staff**

- » Katie Aspenson, Planning Manager
- » Eric Rindfleisch, City Administrator
- » Jarrod Holter, City Engineer/Director of Public Works
- » Kevin Schubert, Assistant City Engineer

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# Project Background



## Purpose

Downtown Onalaska is continuing to become a desirable destination locally and regionally. A major transformation of the downtown core and its connection to the City's riverfront and the state trail is occurring through public and private initiatives. The purpose of this downtown redevelopment study by the Onalaska Community Development Authority (CDA) is to build upon downtown's revitalization momentum by establishing a framework for the next phase of downtown property redevelopment projects and public improvements. The Downtown study area is shown in Figure 1.1, which includes the downtown core, riverfront, Hwy 35 corridor, and residential (west side of 3rd Avenue).

Historically, while the City has experienced significant growth and prosperity, the downtown area has lagged behind the rest of the City in terms of new investment and tax base increases. Similar to many cities, nearly all of the new retail development occurred at the City's edges, near the regional mall, and oriented to the major highways. While located adjacent to the riverfront, downtown is separated from the riverfront by the rail line and Hwy. 35 and its historic development turned its back toward the riverfront. In general, downtown lacked identity, connection to the river/open space, and was experiencing disinvestment. Onalaska functioned

more as a pass-through area than a destination. In 2008, the river's natural landscape was not even visible from Main Street.

Downtown's environment has been improved dramatically in recent years with the reconstruction and widening of the Great River Road, development of the Great River Landing, Dash-Park, new commercial buildings and businesses, and revitalization of existing commercial buildings and businesses on Main Street. The Great River Landing's upland area encompasses major regional trail connections and trailhead facility, main street plaza, river overlook, and parking, as well as future plans for river's edge development and a pedestrian bridge providing a vertical connection between downtown and the river's edge. Downtown's mix of businesses now includes desirable restaurants, a wine bar, bike shop, specialty clothing & gift shop, and salon/spa/massage. As a result of these improvements, downtown now has an identifiable center and much stronger connection to the riverfront. Main Street now offers a wide and long vista of the beautiful river valley and its bluffs.

Beginning in 1994 with the adoption of the City of Onalaska Comprehensive Plan, the City has made a commitment to encourage reinvestment and redevelopment of the downtown area and to take advantage of the aesthetic, recreational, and tourism



Great River Landing trailhead.

opportunities afforded by the riverfront. Centering Onalaska was a major non-profit organization composed of businesses and citizens who further stimulated interest in downtown and riverfront revitalization.

The City's 1999 Downtown Onalaska Redevelopment Plan was the foundation for most of these improvements. With the 2018 proposal by a developer for the redevelopment of the old City garage site, the redevelopment sites identified in this plan will be completed. To keep downtown's revitalization moving, there is a need for the city to provide guidance for future redevelopment opportunities.

The vision for downtown is to continue its revitalization as a destination for Onalaska residents, La Crosse area residents, and regional visitors. At the same time, downtown has the opportunity to evolve into a unique neighborhood within the City that offers a greater variety of housing options with convenient access to commercial businesses, services, and recreation amenities. Downtown's center is where Main Street intersects with the linked open spaces of Dash-Park and Great River Landing. To enhance and leverage these downtown assets, the focus is to create a cluster of destinations surrounding this area through future redevelopment.



Rendering of Main Street looking toward Great River Landing Trailhead

### 1999 Main Street Revitalization Illustration

- » Attract a greater variety of specialty retail, services, and tourist-oriented businesses
- » Storefront enhancements including signage, awnings, and large windows
- » Streetscape enhancements including streetlights, trees, planters, and sidewalk pavers



## Approach

The planning process consisted of three phases as follows:

- 1 **Phase 1 – Understand What Exists (July – September 2018)**
  - » Conduct Project Kickoff Meeting with CDA and City Staff
  - » Assemble Background Data
  - » Review Past Relevant Studies
  - » Understand Future Market Potential
  - » Understand Current Issues and Opportunities
  - » Meet with CDA and City Staff (Background and Market Summary, Stakeholder Questions)
  - » Meet with Key Property Owners/ Stakeholders
  - » Meet with CDA and City Staff (Review Comments from Stakeholder Meetings)
- 2 **Phase 2 – Explore the Possibilities (September – November 2018)**
  - » Develop Redevelopment Concept Alternatives
  - » Conduct a Design Workshop/ Review Meeting with CDA and City Staff (Evaluate the Alternatives)
  - » Refine the Concepts and Prepare for Second Round of Stakeholder Engagement
  - » Meet with Key Stakeholders
  - » Meet with CDA and City Staff (Review Comments from Stakeholder Meetings)
  - » Conduct Developer Roundtable
  - » Meet with CDA and City Staff (Review Comments from Developer Roundtable & Provide Overview of Community Meeting Approach)
  - » Conduct Additional Developer Review
- 3 **Phase 3 – Refine to a Preferred Redevelopment Plan & Seek Approvals (December 2018 – March 2019)**
  - » Conduct Public Meeting (January 8, 2019 at Irving Pertzsch Elementary School)
  - » Meet with CDA and City Staff (Review Feedback from Public Meeting, Discuss Implementation Priorities, Review Outline of Draft Report)
  - » Prepare Draft Redevelopment Plan Report
  - » Meet with CDA and City Staff to Review Draft Report
  - » Refine Draft Document Based on CDA & Staff Feedback
  - » Final Redevelopment Plan to CDA for Approvals



Figure 1.1 Study Area





## Prior Planning

### 1999 Downtown Onalaska Redevelopment Plan

The City's current downtown plan was completed in 1999 by City Staff, the City's Long Range Planning Committee, and Centering Onalaska working collaboratively with a planning consultant. The plan has a larger downtown core study area, extending east to 8th Avenue South and from Locust Street to Oak Forest, but its identified redevelopment sites were all focused near the intersection of Main Street and 2nd Ave South/Hwy 35. The key site redevelopment and public improvement projects recommended were:

- » Main Street Streetscape Improvements
- » Privately Owned Redevelopment Sites
  - Platz (Woolen Mill Site) and Skaff Properties west side of Hwy 35
  - Wiley and Wakeen/Harter Properties east side of Hwy 35 between Main St and Irvin Street
- » Publicly Owned Redevelopment Sites
  - Police Department Site on Main Street
  - City Garage and Shop Site on the riverfront (Court Street South)
- » Great River Trail Improvements and Routing
- » Sias Isles Marina Improvements
- » Wetland Conservancy Area Acquisition and Access Improvements

The implementation recommendations had a 5 to 10 year timeline, however, actual implementation has taken 20 years with the redevelopment of the last identified site (City garage site) anticipated to begin in 2019 or 2020.

### 2015 Great River Landing Plan

The Great River Landing Plan was completed in 2015. The project's goal was to develop a plan to revitalize the Onalaska waterfront by providing safe and accessible access to the waterfront with clear connectivity to the downtown and Main Street. The project involved the Mayor, Common

Council, Community Development Authority, Great River Landing Waterfront Committee, multiple City Departments, an urban design consultant, and numerous stakeholder groups.

The Great River Landing design concept envisions an extended Main Street to be directly connected to the waterfront. This connection will be achieved through a large pedestrian bridge and overlook that would span the railroad tracks to provide safe and accessible connection to the waterfront as a direct extension of Main Street. The uplands portion of the Great River Landing has been built, which includes a trailhead building with a visitor center, overlook, restroom facilities, parking (that could double as a farmers market), and Main Street Plaza for passive relaxation and enjoying views of the waterfront.

The planned lower waterfront portion of the project has been designed for both passive and active recreation. The proposed design concept includes a nature playground, picnic grove, log rolling boom, kayak launch along with other informal water's edge access, and a boardwalk system to connect the active area to the adjacent spillway.



1999 Riverfront Connection Concept Plan

- » Create vistas of the riverfront from downtown
- » Attractive and walkable connection between downtown and the riverfront
- » More trees and plantings along Irvin St



2015 Great River Landing Plan

- » Extend Main Street to be directly connected to the waterfront.
- » Connection will be achieved through a large pedestrian bridge and overlook spanning the railroad track

## 2016 Historical and Architectural Resources Survey

The purpose of this project was to provide a survey of the architectural and historical resources located within the City of Onalaska. This material may be useful in the development of a local preservation plan; to identify buildings, structures, sites and historic districts that meet the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places; and to increase public and private sector awareness of the community's historical and architectural heritage. This 2016 survey resulted in identification of a total of fifty-five properties that meet current survey standards. No historic districts were identified. Of the total seven properties that were considered for National Register eligibility, six are recommended as potentially eligible for the National Register. In the downtown study area, only two properties were identified to offer a sufficient degree of historical intrigue and/or architectural integrity to suggest potential for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The two properties are:

- » 201 Main Street, Onalaska State Bank (1912)
- » 414 4th Avenue South, Thomas & Mary Thompson House (ca. 1885)



### 2016 Historical and Architectural Resources Survey

- » Provided a survey of architectural and historical resources located in Onalaska
- » Onalaska State Bank (1912), 201 Main Street

The Onalaska State Bank building had previously been officially deemed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 2011 and it is also listed as a City of Onalaska Historic Landmark.

Other downtown properties that are part of this survey are:

- » 205 Main Street, Luedtke Walgreen Agency, Inc. (1964)
- » 330 Main Street, Independent Order of Odd Fellows Lodge (1882)/Onalaska Lodge No. 214, F. & A.M.
- » 401 Main Street, Dickinson Funeral Home (1974)
- » 410 Main Street, First Lutheran Church (1954) and First Lutheran Church Education Center (1963)

## 2016 City Comprehensive Plan

The City's current Comprehensive Plan was completed and adopted in 2016. The City's Long Range Planning Committee served as the steering committee for updating the comprehensive plan with monthly meetings and coordinating feedback from the Plan Commission, City committees, City Staff, and the general public. The Comprehensive Plan includes the following chapters: Issues & Opportunities, Housing, Transportation, Utilities & Community Facilities, Agricultural/Natural/Cultural Resources, Economic Development, Land Use, Intergovernmental Cooperation, and Implementation.

Key guidance for downtown from the 2016 City Comprehensive Plan includes the following:

- » The Future Land Use Map guides the entire downtown study area for the Downtown Mixed Use land use district.
- » One of the Land Use chapter's five goals is downtown-focused.
  - *Goal 2: Revitalize Downtown. Establish downtown Onalaska as a vibrant community and regional gathering place, destination, focal point, and source of city pride.*
  - *Objectives:*
    - *By identifying a core downtown area.*

- *By implementing the Great River Landing Plan.*
  - *By promoting infill and redevelopment downtown.*
  - *By ensuring the transportation system is adequately designed to serve the downtown.*
  - *By ensuring that new development is well designed, high quality (materials), pedestrian/bicycle oriented, and environmentally friendly.*
- » The Economic Development chapter identifies the properties along the Hwy 35 corridor in downtown as an Economic Development Site.
  - » The Implementation chapter identifies an implementation goal to update or create a new Downtown Redevelopment Plan.

## Railroad Quiet Zone Study

A Quiet Zone Study for the BNSF rail line that runs along the waterfront was completed in 2014. Due to some significant changes since 2014, including the large investment in the Great River Landing (which is immediately adjacent to the Irvin Street grade crossing) and the train/roadway traffic volumes, a Quiet Zone Field Diagnostic Meeting took place in 2018. The Irvin Street crossing is Quiet Zone eligible with the installation of some fencing. Future planning for Irvin Street and the lower portion of the Great River Landing project will need to be coordinated with Quiet Zone planning.





# Existing Conditions



## Zoning

A variety of zoning districts exist in the downtown (Figure 2.1). The following provides a summary of the existing zoning districts in the Downtown, organized by individual districts identified in the Redevelopment Planning Framework chapter.

### Downtown Core

- » Primarily Neighborhood Business (B1)
- » Three properties are zoned Community Business (B2)
- » Dash-Park and Great River Landing are zoned Public/Semi-Public (P1)
- » Entire district is also located within the Downtown-PUD overlay district

### Highway 35 Corridor

- » Primarily Neighborhood Business (B1)
- » Three properties are zoned Community Business (B2)
- » Entire district is also located within the Downtown-PUD overlay district

### Riverfront

- » Primarily Public/Semi-Public (P1)
- » Southernmost block is zoned Neighborhood Business (B1) with one property zoned Community Business (B2)
- » Entire district is also located within the Downtown-PUD overlay district

### Downtown Residential

- » Primarily zoned Single Family and Duplex Residential (R2)
- » One property zoned Multiple Family Residential (R4) at corner of Fern St
- » One property zoned Neighborhood Business (B1) at corner of King Street/Hwy 35 north of the downtown core.
- » Entire district is also located within the Downtown-Residential overlay district with exception of the one property at corner of King Street/Hwy 35 that is within the Downtown-PUD overlay district

Figure 2.1 Zoning Map





## Land Use

Current land uses in the downtown are generally a mix of commercial, residential and park uses (Figure 2.2). The following provides a summary of the current land uses in the Downtown, organized by individual districts identified in the Redevelopment Planning Framework chapter.

### Downtown Core

- » Concentration of commercial businesses (retail, personal service, restaurant, auto repair/towing) along Main Street and 2nd Avenue South/Hwy 35
- » One small two-story multi-unit residential building on Main Street
- » Two buildings have second floor residential apartments above commercial businesses
- » Single-family detached homes on 3rd and 4th Avenues South
- » Great River Landing recreational visitor/trailhead facility and parking lot
- » Dash-Park
- » Municipal parking lot
- » School District's administrative offices and parking lot
- » Electrical substation

### Highway 35 Corridor

- » Wide variety of commercial businesses (retail, personal service, restaurant, professional office, lodging, funeral home, gas station) along 2nd Avenue South/Hwy 35
- » Small number of single-family homes at south end of corridor
- » Five vacant properties

### Riverfront

- » City-owned land, City garage and shop buildings
- » Six single-family homes
- » One tri-plex

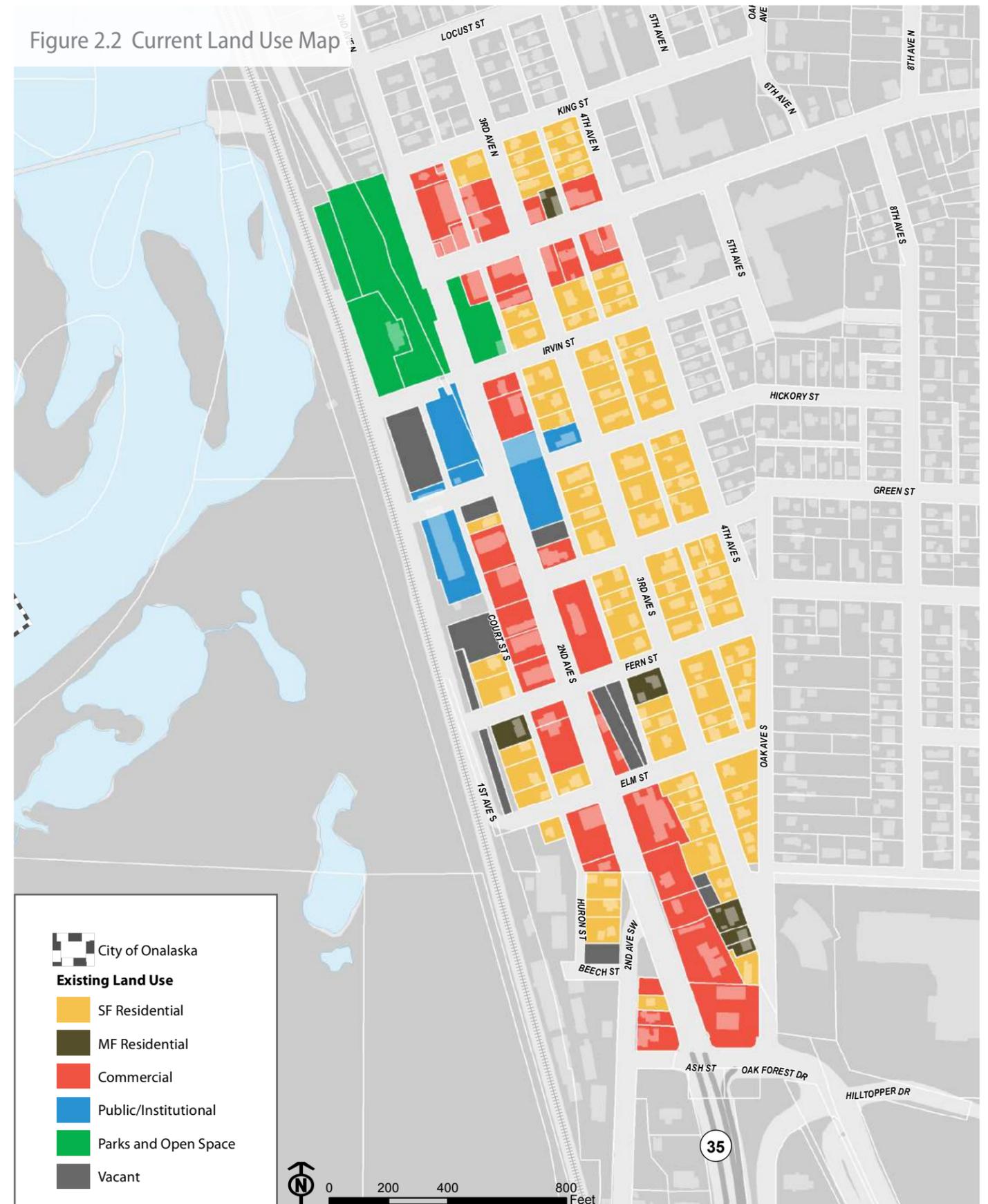
### Downtown Residential

- » Single-family homes along with two duplexes
- » Two small vacant lots on southernmost block but with no street or alley access



Downtown Core prior to recent public open space improvements.

Figure 2.2 Current Land Use Map





## Transportation

Downtown circulation benefits from its traditional street grid and access to major roadways (2nd Avenue South/Hwy 35 and Main Street). Hwy 35 and Main Street (Hwy 157) are both State roadways. Hwy 35/2nd Avenue South is designated as “The Great River Road”, which is Wisconsin’s only National Scenic Byway. This roadway was designated as a National Scenic Byway by the Federal Highway Administration and extends from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. In Wisconsin, this route parallels the Mississippi River for 250 miles along the state’s western border. These roads are known for their scenic qualities and are promoted as driving vacation destinations. Roadway functional classifications are as follows:

- » Principal Arterials – Hwy 35 (south of Main Street), Main Street
- » Minor Arterials - Hwy 35 (north of Main Street)
- » Collectors – 3rd Ave (south of Main Street), 4th Avenue North (north of Main Street)
- » Local Streets – all other streets

Almost all of the blocks east of Hwy 35 have an alley. In addition, Court Street functions as an alley west of Hwy 35 (Figure 2.3).



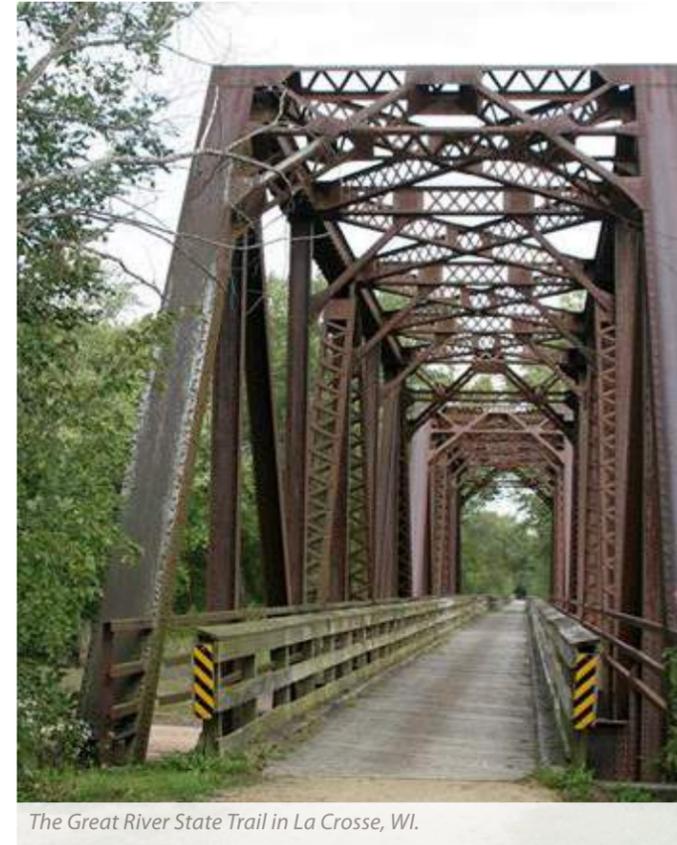
Court Street, west of Hwy 35, functions as an alley.

Downtown is well-served by sidewalks on many streets, including Main Street, Hwy 35, 3rd Avenue, and 4th Avenue South (see Figure 2.3). Many gaps exist along the east-west streets, including Irvin, King, Hickory, Green, Fern, and Elm, as well as Oak Avenue near the library and high school. Almost no sidewalks exist west of Hwy 35.



Existing sidewalks along Irvin Street.

The Great River State Trail travels through downtown with the Great River Landing serving as a major trailhead facility. The Great River State Trail is an approximately 24-mile rails-to-trails conversion that is a part of the Mississippi River Trail, which is a 3,000-mile designated bicycle route that travels from the headwaters of the Mississippi River in Itasca, MN all the way to the Delta of the Gulf of Mexico in Louisiana. In 2013, the WDNR estimated that 69,000 individuals utilized the Great River State Trail, with a high percentage utilizing the Onalaska portion of the trail. It was also estimated that the economic impact to the trail’s gateway communities - Trempealeau and Onalaska, was nearly \$1.8 million. On-street bike routes exist on Hwy 35, Main St, 3rd Ave (south of Main Street), and 4th Avenue North (north of Main Street).



The Great River State Trail in La Crosse, WI.

Pedestrian/bike crossings of Hwy 35 include two traffic signals - Main St and Ash St/Oak Forest. Additional street crossings are indicated with colored pavement markings at four intersections in between the two traffic signals. Striped pavement markings and pedestrian-friendly corner bump-outs exist at intersections along Main St.



Existing bike/ped crossing at Ash and Main Streets.

Transit is provided by La Crosse Municipal Transit Utility (MTU). Route 9 runs on Hwy 35 and Main Street with bus stops at 5th Avenue S/City Hall, Main Street/3rd Avenue, Hwy 35/Irvin Street, Hwy 35/Fern Street, and north of Hwy 35/Ash Street.



Burlington Northern Railroad along the shore of Onalaska, WI.

The Burlington Northern Railroad runs north/south along the shore of Lake Onalaska on the west side of downtown. This track is heavily utilized for freight traffic travelling between Chicago and the Twin Cities. Passenger rail service via Amtrak is available in La Crosse. In 2014 it was estimated that 60 trains travel through Onalaska daily. There is no public street access across the rail corridor in the downtown area. The only vehicular crossing is the driveway at the end of Irvin Street to the waterfront.



Figure 2.3 Transportation



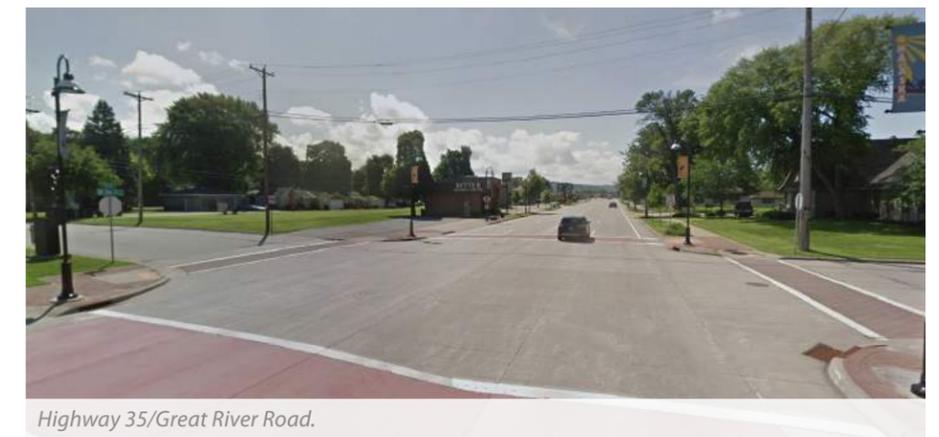
Great River Landing.



Dash-Park.



Main Street.



Highway 35/Great River Road.



## Parks, Trails, and Open Space

Downtown is located along the riverfront and its open space, most notably the Great River State Trail and Great River Landing. Dash-Park, a new signature central downtown park, was completed in 2018. Downtown's access to active parks includes Rowe Park, a large community park at the southern edge of downtown, and the playground at the elementary school. Downtown lacks a neighborhood park. In addition to the Great River State Trail, bicycling facilities exist on Hwy 35, Main St, 3rd Avenue South (south of Main St), and 4th Avenue North (north of Main St) (Figure 2.4).

A state snowmobile trail runs along Oak Ave south of downtown then crosses Hwy 35 and heads north to connect with the Great River State Trail. In fact, Lake Onalaska is connected to Lake Superior through a series of snowmobile trails. The Great River State Trail also accommodates cross country skiing and snowshoeing.



Existing public space at Dash-Park.



The Great River State Trail in Onalaska, WI.



Entry sign at Rowe Park.



Great River Landing trailhead.



State snowmobile trail.







## Redevelopment Scoring

In addition to examining previous planning efforts, it was necessary to evaluate property within the downtown for redevelopment potential. By finding the “low hanging fruit” it was possible to identify locations that make sense as starting points.

Part of the process for identifying priority sites (Figure 2.10) was an attribute-based evaluation of the properties within the study area. By assigning points based on characteristics of all of the parcels, the consultant team was able to get an initial view of where to focus redevelopment efforts. These characteristics included vacancy, age, land and building values, land use, size, ownership, location and visibility (Figures 2.6-2.9). This evaluation produced an initial framework to begin identifying redevelopment parcels.

Because the redevelopment scoring model could not take every variable into account, and because different redevelopment types have different needs, further analysis was conducted on a case-by-case basis, examining the physical characteristics, market realities, and other redevelopment demands of individual and combined sites.

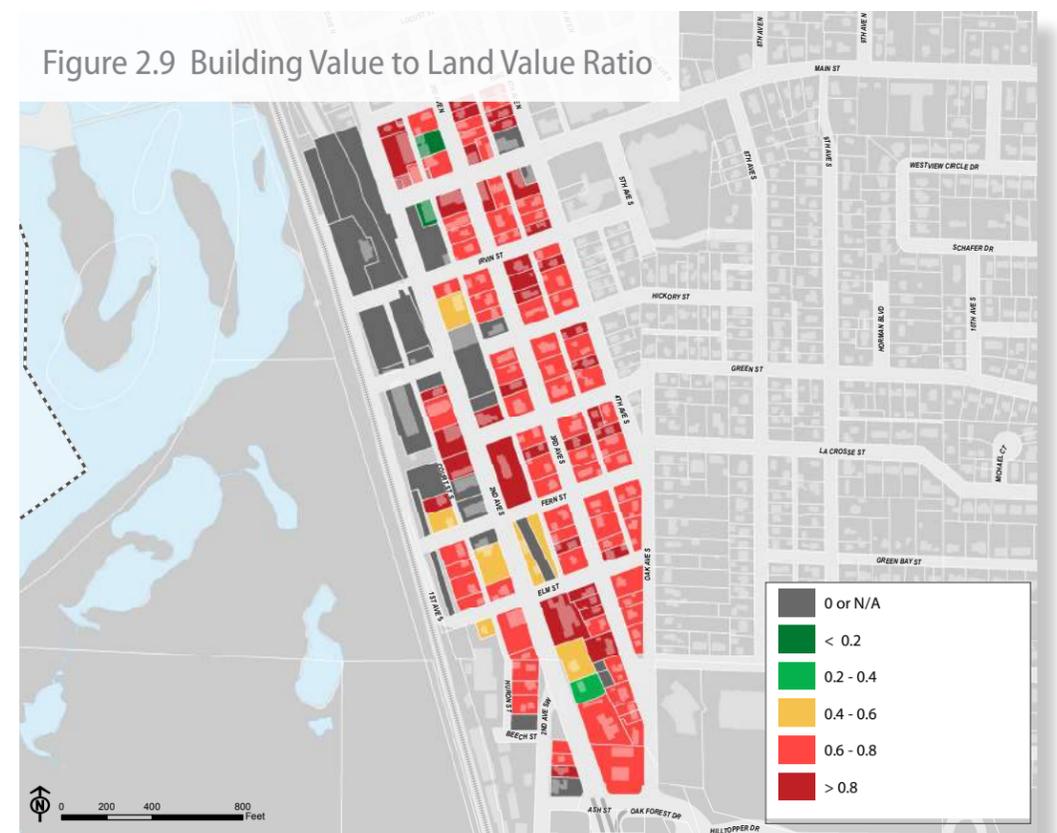
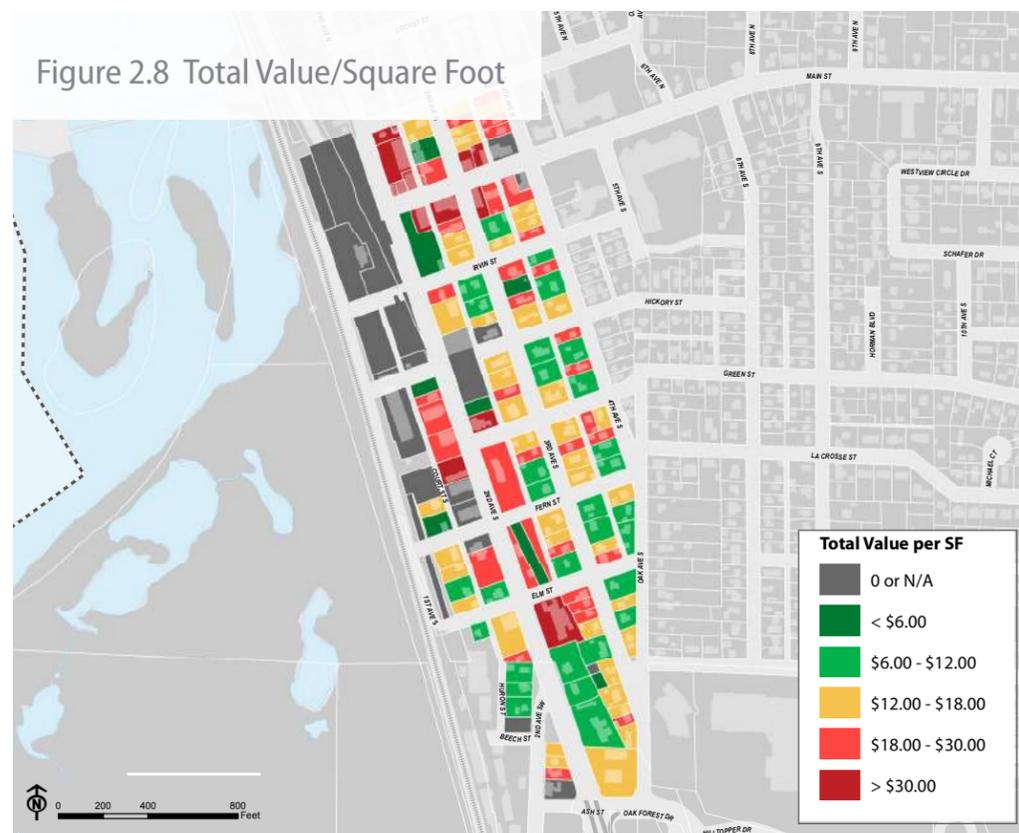
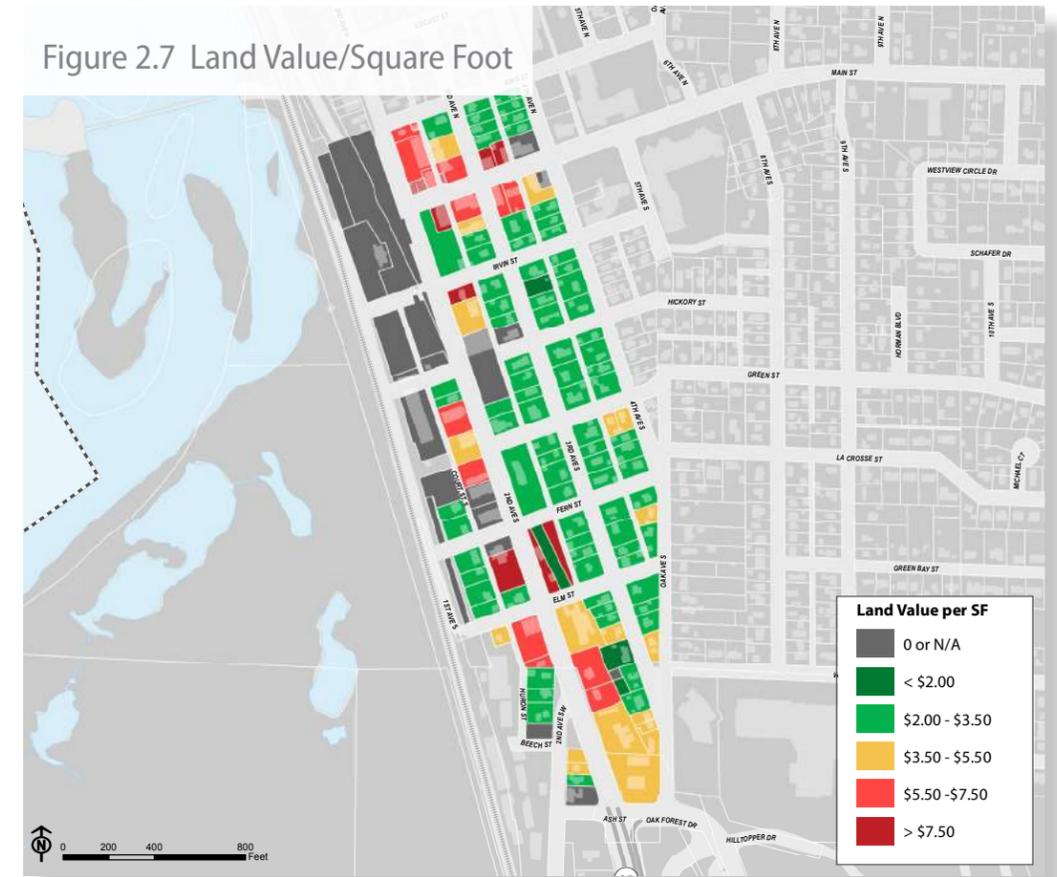
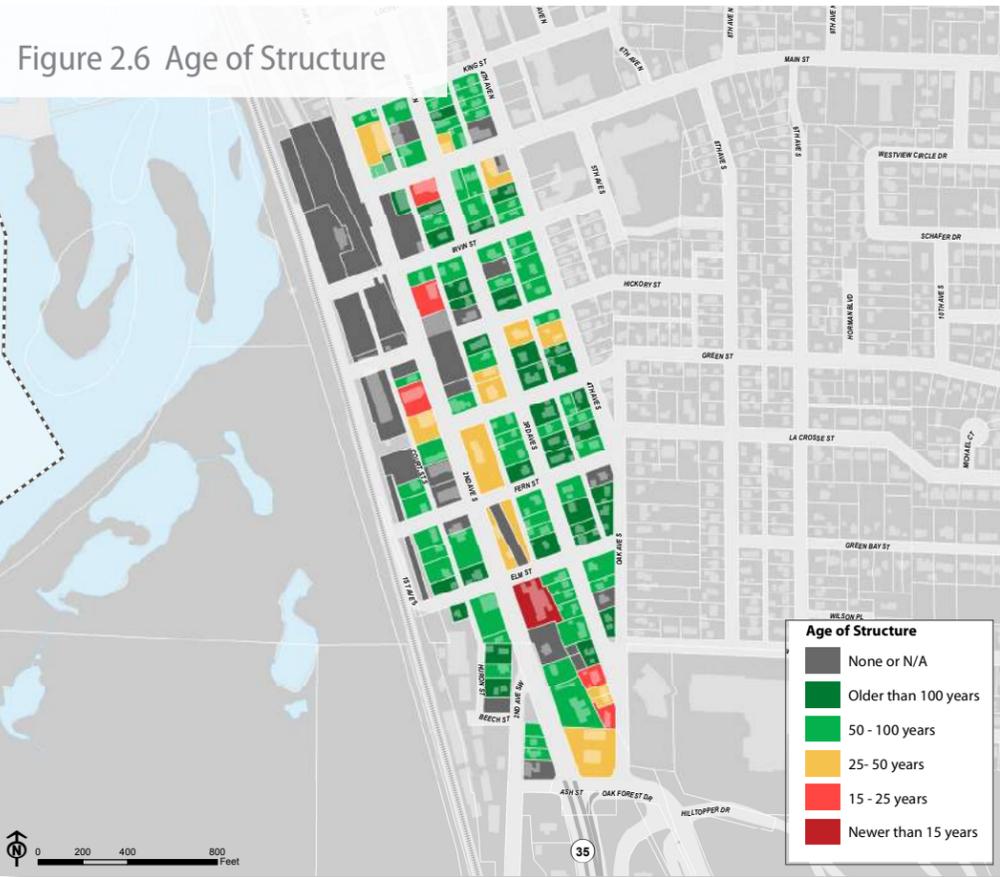
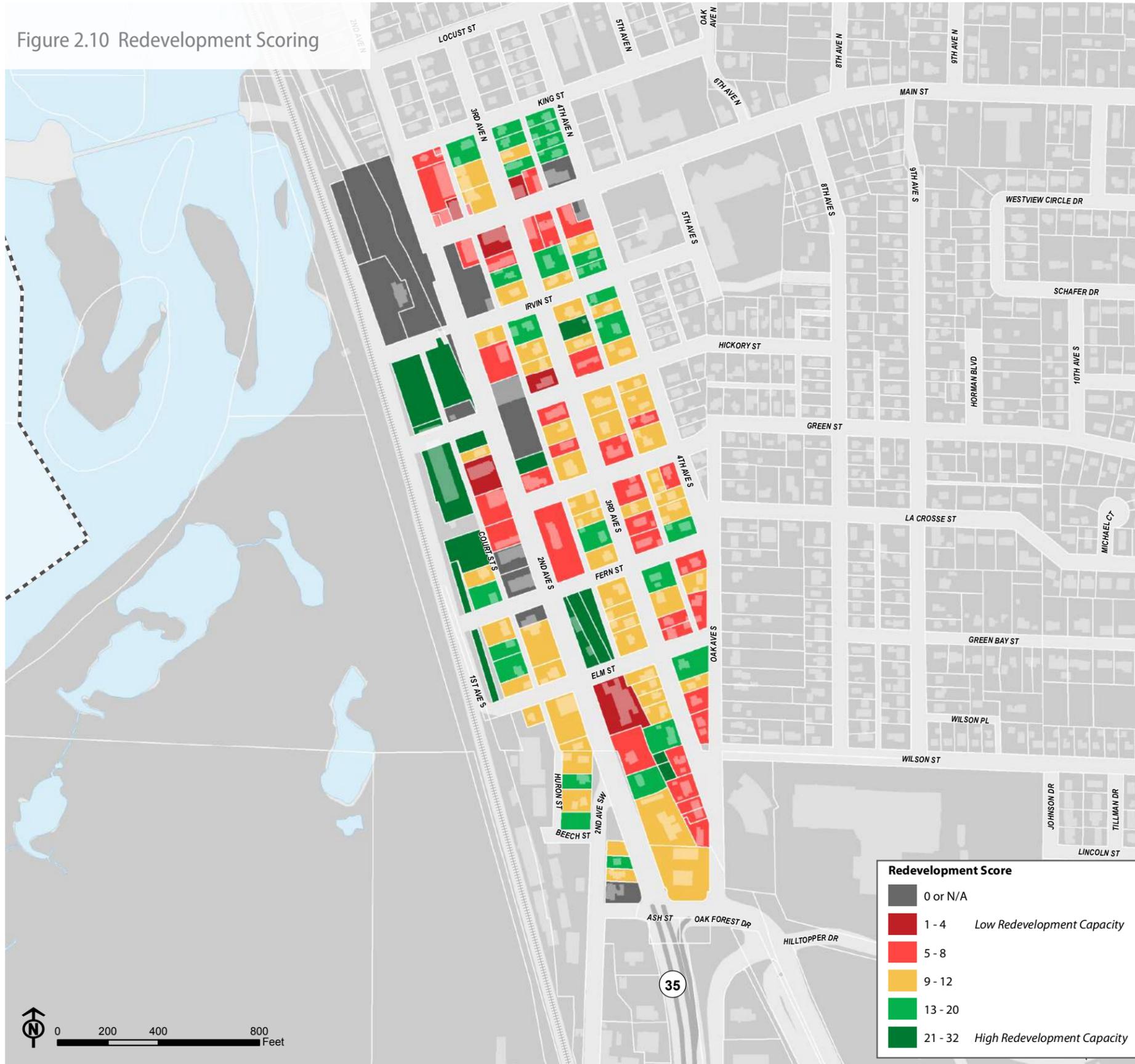


Figure 2.10 Redevelopment Scoring



## Redevelopment Scoring

This map shows the redevelopment potential as identified by scoring a number of variables for each parcel. This information should be considered as a baseline to start identifying potential redevelopment parcels, but should not be considered as definitive. The model cannot take everything into account and sites should be checked against ground conditions. (For example, some publicly owned parcels are missing information such as building improvement value.)

<b>Vacant:</b>	
No.....	0
Yes .....	20
<b>Age:</b>	
Over 100 yrs.....	1
50 - 100 yrs .....	5
25 - 50 yrs .....	3
15 - 25 yrs .....	1
Less than 15 yrs .....	0
<b>Land Value \$ / Square Foot:</b>	
< 2.....	4
2 - 3.5 .....	3
3.5 - 5.5 .....	2
5.5 - 7.5 .....	1
> 7.5 .....	0
<b>Total Value \$ /Square Foot:</b>	
< 6.....	4
6 - 12 .....	3
12 - 18 .....	2
18 - 30 .....	1
> 30.....	0
<b>Building Value to Land Value Ratio:</b>	
< 1.0.....	4
1.0 - 2.0 .....	3
2.0 - 3.0 .....	2
3.0 - 6.0 .....	1
> 6.0.....	0
<b>Building Value to Total Value Ratio:</b>	
< 0.2.....	4
0.2 - 0.4 .....	3
0.4 - 0.6 .....	2
0.6 - 0.8 .....	1
< 0.8.....	0
<b>Non-conforming Use:</b>	
Yes (SF or MF zoned commercial).....	3
No.....	0
<b>Parcel Size:</b>	
> 5 ac.....	4
2 - 5 ac.....	3
1 - 2 ac.....	1
< 1 ac.....	0
<b>City Ownership:</b>	
Owned by Onalaska .....	5
Not owned by Onalaska.....	0





## Market Summary

The strength of the downtown Onalaska market is derived from the City's social and economic demographics. The city benefits from positive perceptions of the community as a desired place to live, strong schools, and a good location relative to La Crosse.

Challenges facing the community will be the increase in older residents as a proportion of the overall population, the dwindling supply of developable land for subdivision, adaptability or right-sizing of the retail and commercial offerings along Hwy 35 to meet demand, and competition with surrounding communities.

As lifestyle and shopping preferences continue to change, downtown Onalaska should continue to position itself as a walkable, experience-driven destination with a desirable small town character. In this manner, the downtown can be important to the identity of the community and a marketable asset to new and existing residents.

Businesses along the Highway 35 corridor will maintain a focus on providing convenient, "on-the-way" retail and services that benefit from more traffic and can serve residents of Onalaska and Holmen that are commuting through the area.

Strong demand for housing remains, although supply is becoming constrained. There are fewer options within the City limits to create new neighborhoods, so it will be important to enable the development of new housing options in existing neighborhoods.

## Key Social and Economic Demographics

Within the La Crosse region, Onalaska has historically been a more affluent area than many other communities. Economic measures from household discretionary income to housing prices reflect this reality. It also means that the community has the means to support amenities such as restaurants and upscale retailers that may not work in other cities.

The community is also getting older. Based on population and housing age, many residents moved to Onalaska around the 1990s and early 2000s. Many of these residents are now in or entering the "empty nester" phase of their lives. They are reaching the highest earning potential of their careers as they near retirement and have more disposable income than ever before. In the next decade, many of these residents may be downsizing and looking for attractive, amenitized, but also lower maintenance housing options.

Households (Head of Household Age)	Onalaska	La Crosse	Holmen
Young Families (<45)	33.2%	49.0%	38.9%
Prime Earners (45-64)	37.7%	29.1%	42.2%
Retired (65+)	29.1%	21.1%	18.9%

The aging/empty nester population also has impacts on the schools where the enrollment numbers are not growing as much as in the past.

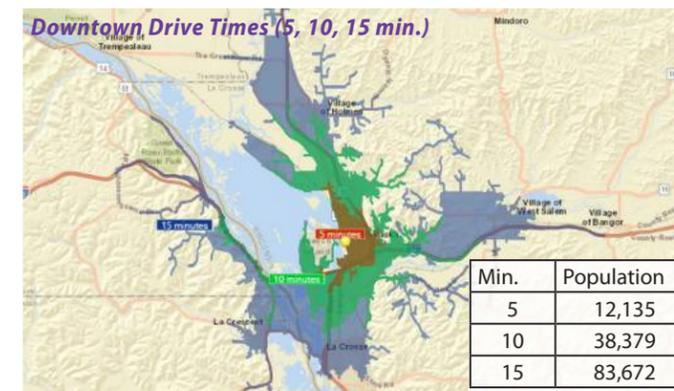
Based on higher housing prices relative to other communities and the lower supply of housing, Onalaska can be a more difficult place for young families to move into. The ability of Onalaska to attract the next generations of residents will be key to the long term success of the community.

## Commercial/Retail

From a retail and commercial perspective, the Hwy 35 corridor draws from other towns in the La Crosse region. However, in contrast to the State Road 16 Corridor, which is a larger regional draw, the smaller downtown commercial area is more likely to draw from a +/-15 minute drive (Figure 2.11). Downtown's power to draw customers also depends on its ability to offer something unique from surrounding commercial areas. These competing areas include Onalaska as well as Holmen, West Salem, Bangor, and La Crescent. It also includes the north side of La Crosse, but downtown La Crosse may represent the greatest competition.

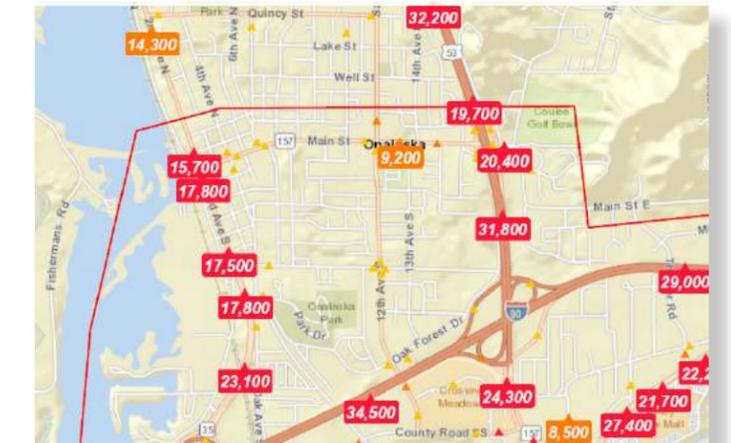
There are two distinct styles of retail within the downtown/ Highway 35 study area. The first is the experience-driven retail and restaurants along Main Street and near Dash-Park. This downtown core area functions as a place where someone might spend a few hours eating/drinking, shopping, biking, walking, and relaxing/rejuvenating. Because of the "destination" nature of this area, people are more comfortable parking once and walking to their destinations. Public and shared district parking facilities could work here. Downtown Onalaska is developing a strong brand based on creating a family friendly place that is focused on experiences more than the specific goods offered. Concerts, restaurants, biking and walking trails, spas, and access to the river are all examples of the experiences that people desire and can find in downtown Onalaska.

Figure 2.11 Commercial/Retail Market



The second type is the convenience focused retail along Highway 35. This retail benefits from the higher traffic counts from residents of Onalaska and Holmen commuting back and forth to the I-90 / Highway 16 areas or La Crosse (Figure 2.12). 57 percent of the working residents of Holmen are employed in La Crosse or Onalaska, and many of these workers are traveling along Highway 35 to get to and from work.

Figure 2.12 Traffic Counts



Highway 35 corridor uses are more focused on providing goods and services to people who are traveling to work or home. These include retail/food uses such as gas stations and takeout food, as well as services such as tax preparation, insurance offices, and auto shops. Because customers are in a hurry and unlikely to linger, convenient parking for each business is more important here than in the downtown core area.

## Employment

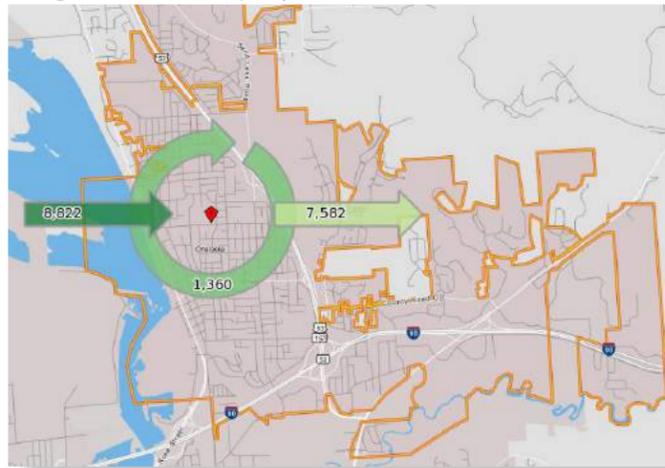
While many residents travel into La Crosse for work, Onalaska also has built and maintained a strong employment base. The city's jobs-to-population ratio is 0.64, which means there are more residents than jobs in the city. While the city has a strong employment base for a suburb, many residents are reliant on La Crosse as a job center.

City	Jobs/Population Ratio
Onalaska	0.64
Holmen	0.31
La Crosse	0.93

When examining commuting patterns, there is a large shift between the permanent and daytime populations (Figure 2.13).

- » 17,764 people employed in Onalaska
- » 8,822 people come into Onalaska to work
- » 1,360 residents live and work in Onalaska
- » 7,582 people commute out of Onalaska to work

Figure 2.13 Employment Patterns



Within the downtown study area (including the High School) there are approximately 1,300 jobs. Approximately 13% of these jobs are second jobs.

Among the primary jobs, 34% pay more than \$40,000/year. Employment is focused largely on education (16%), public administration (15%), business administration and support (15%), management (14%), and accommodation, food, and retail services (12%).

### Residential

There are many draws that create demand for housing within the community. A positive perception of the City, combined with strong schools and great access to La Crosse and beyond have made Onalaska a desired place to live. The City has seen drastic growth from the 1970s through the early 2000s. Residential growth has slowed as the city is reaching a fully built out status. There are not many opportunities for new neighborhoods, although some un-built lots remain in some active subdivisions.

### Neighborhood Characteristics

As a generalization, there are two main areas when it comes to housing in Onalaska. The downtown area and surrounding neighborhoods offer older, but also achievable entry level housing. These residents are largely new families and longtime residents.

The east side of the City has many more bluffs that offer views, but also restrict the ability to build affordable housing efficiently. Built more recently, these homes are more accessible to households with higher earnings, often further along in their careers.

### Single-Family Housing

The large scale development of single-family housing will become increasingly difficult as the City runs out of undeveloped land. Opportunities to improve the single-family housing stock will likely come in the form of infill lots and housing rehabilitation. As homes age, continued upkeep and rehabilitation will be important to keeping the housing stock competitive with other communities. The median year of a home built in Onalaska is 1983, compared with 1995 in Holmen.

Decade	Average Housing Units Per Year
1970s	~190 / year
1980s	~115 / year
1990s	~165 / year
2000s	~140 / year
2010-2016	~75 / year

### Multi-Family Housing

As the ability to add population through single-family housing is restricted, denser housing products such as apartments, condominiums, and townhomes will be the primary way for Onalaska to keep growing. Apartments appeal to many younger people as they begin careers and wait longer to start families. Similarly low maintenance housing appeals to many downsizing empty nesters. Most of the rental units that are in Onalaska are older stock and do not have the updated amenities that a more affluent clientele may expect.

The demographics of Onalaska suggest there could be untested demand for higher end for-sale and rental apartment products.

- » Median Household Income: \$61,299
- » Average Household Income: \$79,816
- » 4,693 (60%) of households make over \$50,000/year

Monthly Rent	Units	Affordable For Household Income of:
\$1-249	85	\$9,960
\$250-499	193	\$19,960
\$500-749	1,181	\$29,960
\$750-999	430	\$39,960
\$1000-1249	113	\$49,960
\$1250-1499	37	\$59,960
\$1500-1999	115	\$79,960
\$2000-2499	32	\$99,960
\$2500+	0	

### Senior Housing

A large, affluent, aging population will continue to increase the demand for senior housing. Senior housing includes everything from active adult housing, through assisted living, memory care, and nursing homes.

The community has many of the amenities desired by seniors, including trails and activities such as the concerts at Dash-Park.

## Key Takeaways: Residential

- » Economics and the School District help keep Onalaska as a premier, desired location.
- » The City is quickly approaching full build out and will not be able to develop new neighborhood subdivisions.
- » While demand remains high, residential land supply is becoming increasingly constrained, which may hinder growth moving forward.
- » If there are not opportunities for new families to move into Onalaska, the City will continue to lose them to other communities such as Holmen.
- » The downtown neighborhoods are more accessible for starter homes.
- » New civic improvements and possibilities of expanding employment options continue to draw people to the community.
- » An aging population has and will continue to drive growth in downsizing, active adult, and senior housing.

## Key Takeaways: Commercial

- » Market area economics (incomes, spending, etc) are good.
- » Benefit from “experience” based retail as a draw.
- » Build on existing brands and promote area as family friendly, outdoors, and culturally focused.
- » Market will rely on Onalaska & Holmen residents, with opportunities to draw from West Salem, Bangor, French Island.
- » Continue to capture “on the way” retail and convenient service for Onalaska and Holmen residents.

# Stakeholder & Community Input



## 2014 Community Survey

The Downtown Redevelopment Study was informed by input from the community-at-large and key downtown stakeholders. A summary of this input is provided here:

### 2014 Community Survey

In 2014, the City of Onalaska conducted a community survey to gather residents' opinions and feedback regarding the quality of life in the city, desired types of future development, and their satisfaction with the performance of city government and service delivery. Out of the 9,296 surveys distributed within the 54650 Zip Code, 1,059 surveys were fully completed and returned to the city, which represents an overall return rate of 11.4% and a 12.8% return rate from Onalaska residents.

Particularly relevant to downtown, one of the survey's questions invited residents to share their opinions related to the question "If you could change one thing in the City of Onalaska, what would it be?" A total of 579 residents responded to this question. The top concerns identified were the following:

- » Traffic improvements
- » Downtown redevelopment including desired business types and redevelopment of underutilized buildings through renovation or demolition
- » Recreational improvements including more sidewalks (fill the gaps), more bike lanes and other bike accommodations, and more parks/open spaces for enjoying the community's natural features
- » Waterfront development to better utilize the waterfront along Lake Onalaska/Black River

## 2018 Downtown Stakeholder Meetings

Two rounds of stakeholder input meetings were conducted in August and November 2018. Stakeholder input focused on land use/redevelopment, circulation/access, parking, and parks/open spaces.

### Land Use/Redevelopment

- » Continue to redevelop downtown and the highway corridor as a unique destination, such as food & drink places, artisan shops, brewery /distillery
- » Support the addition of local, small businesses downtown, including retail, restaurants, personal services, and offices
- » Promote the addition of housing in and surrounding downtown and along the waterfront including both condominiums/apartments (high density/mixed use) and townhomes/rowhouses (medium density)
- » Reinvestment in existing surrounding neighborhood homes
- » Some additional potential early phase redevelopment sites exist beyond current on-going projects
- » Promote assembly of undervalued properties to create larger and more viable redevelopment sites by both the city and interested developers

### Circulation/Access/Parking

- » Improve pedestrian and bicycling facilities throughout downtown, particularly along Hwy 35 and 3rd Avenue South
- » Address perceived and actual parking issues today and for future redevelopment with effective parking solutions, including increased parking facilities and more effective parking management approaches

### Parks/Trails/Open Spaces

- » Leverage downtown's natural amenities, outdoor recreation opportunities, and existing park amenities, including outfitter / canoe-kayak / bike shop businesses, public and private programming
- » Consider upgrading existing crushed gravel trail to a paved bike trail to increase accessibility and usage





## 2019 Community Public Meeting

The community public meeting was held on January 8, 2019, at Irving Pertzsch Elementary School. Approximately 50 people attended the meeting.

### Land Use/Redevelopment

- » Support for adding new housing options in downtown and along the riverfront
- » Additional food and drink businesses, including coffee shop, grocery store, etc.
- » Make the downtown core and riverfront area more walkable, including paths and routes from the surrounding neighborhoods
- » Preserve views to the riverfront
- » Support for some of the new downtown housing to be affordable, including senior housing, so that current downtown residents could afford to sell their houses and move into the new housing
- » Preserve a balance between low income and market rate housing in downtown

### Circulation/Access/Parking

- » Ensure good vehicle access to Hwy 35 from new residential developments
- » Additional parking in downtown, including shared parking opportunities
- » Need for crosswalks on Main Street and other key streets
- » Add sidewalk on west side of 3rd Avenue South near high school
- » Improve public transportation options
- » New housing development should provide adequate on-site parking
- » Balance approach to future parking needs

### Parks/Trails/Open Spaces

- » Don't change the plans for completing the Great River Landing
- » Support for streetscape improvements to both Irvin Street and the alleys connecting to Main Street
- » Community gateway/entry feature at south end of Hwy 35
- » Beautification that attracts visitors and businesses
- » Evaluate desire for paved vs. gravel trails



January 2019 community open house.



## Summary of Public Meeting Notification for January 8, 2019 Open House

### **Formal Meeting Announcements:**

- » Common Council on December 11th, 2018
- » CDA on December 12th, 2018

### **Social Media:**

- » Event information promoted through Onalaska's Park & Recreation, Police Department, and Fire Department Facebook pages

### **Press Release:**

- » Sent on 12/31/18 to all news media (television, newspaper, and radio) promoting the event
- » Sent on 1/4/19 on Irving Pertzsch Elementary School Email Mailing List

### **Individual invites to Onalaska Common Council, Committees, Boards, and Commissions:**

- » Common Council, Long Range Planning Committee, Great River Landing Committee, Park & Recreation Board, Plan Commission, Historic Preservation Commission, and Community Development Authority

### **Paper Flyers:**

- » Installed at various department offices in City Hall

### **Mailings:**

- » Letter to over 500 residents/business owners in "Downtown Onalaska" area on 12/14/18. Postcard reminder to same list on 12/27/18



## Downtown Districts

In order to help describe the desired future character of downtown redevelopment, the recommendations in this redevelopment framework are organized into four unique downtown districts (Figure 4.1). The following highlights each of these district's land uses, parking, site access, and building design characteristics that are essential to creating an attractive downtown environment.

### ***Downtown Core Mixed Use***

This district encompasses the core of downtown including the four blocks, both sides of Main Street, between 2nd and 4th Avenues, as well as the Great River Landing. Since the new Great River Landing and Dash-Park have now become the center of downtown, the blocks adjacent to these public open spaces are also included in the Downtown Core including the two blocks along the south side of Irvin Street and the School District administrative property. A mix of uses is desired in this district, including commercial, residential, civic, and park/open space.

### ***Riverfront Residential***

This district encompasses the riverfront land between the Great River Landing/Irvin Street and Elm Street, which is located on a terrace between the riverfront and Court Street South. Residential uses are desired in this district in order to enable people to live on the riverfront, expand available housing types in downtown, bring more residents to downtown that will attract and support downtown businesses, and concentrate commercial businesses in the downtown core and along Hwy 35.

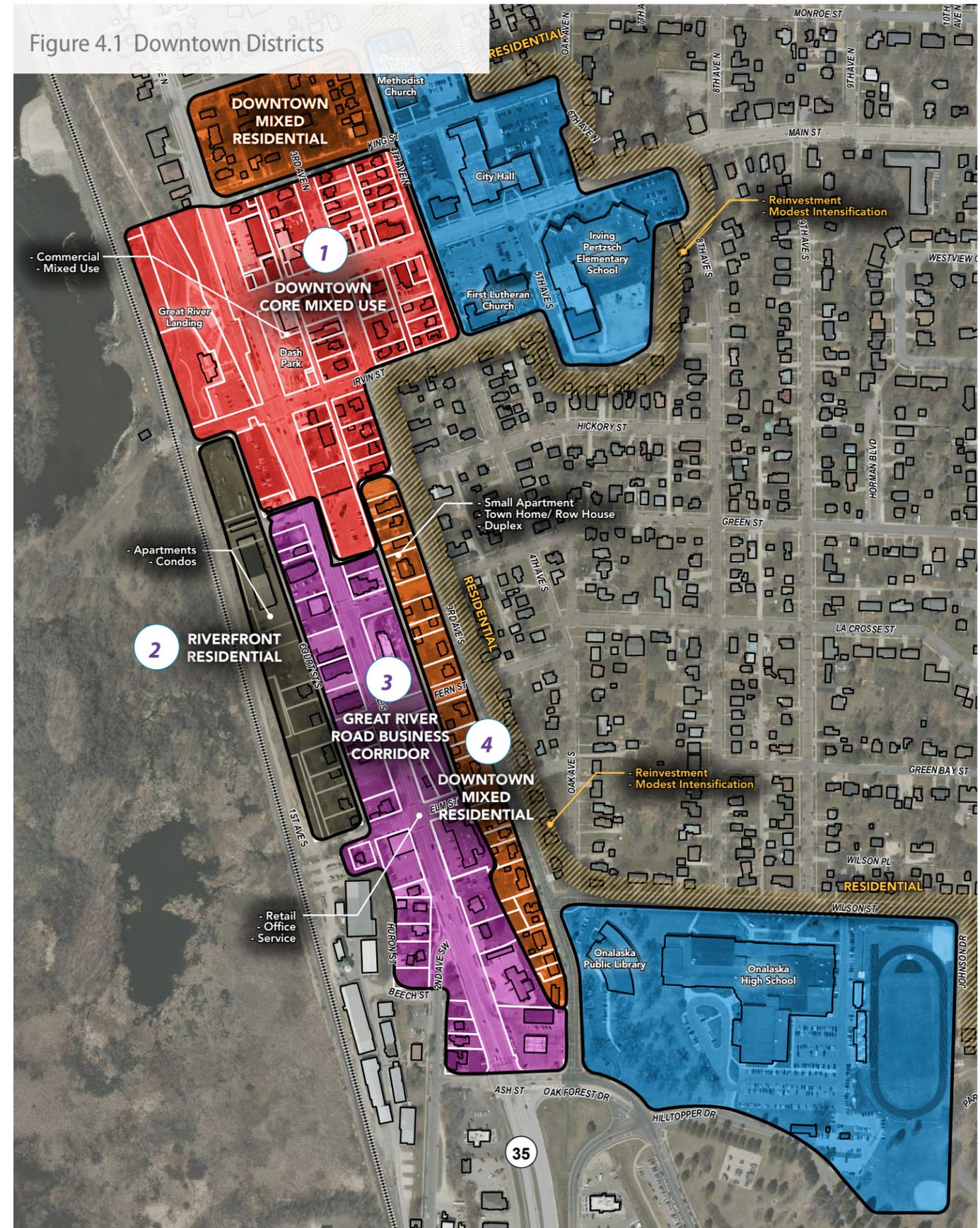
### ***Great River Road Business Corridor***

This district includes the Hwy 35/Great River Road corridor south of the downtown core from Hickory Street to Ash Street. This district is envisioned to continue filling in and redeveloping with a wide variety of commercial business serving both local and regional customers.

### ***Downtown Mixed Residential***

This district includes two residential areas immediately adjacent to the downtown core and/or the Hwy 35 corridor – the west side of 3rd Avenue which shares the alley with Hwy 35 businesses and the two blocks north of King Street which are located adjacent to the downtown core, Hwy 35, and the public/semi-public area to the east. A mix of residential types is desired in these two areas over time since they are conveniently located to commercial areas, could provide opportunities for expanding available housing types in downtown, and serve as transition areas between the commercial areas and smaller scale neighborhoods of detached houses.

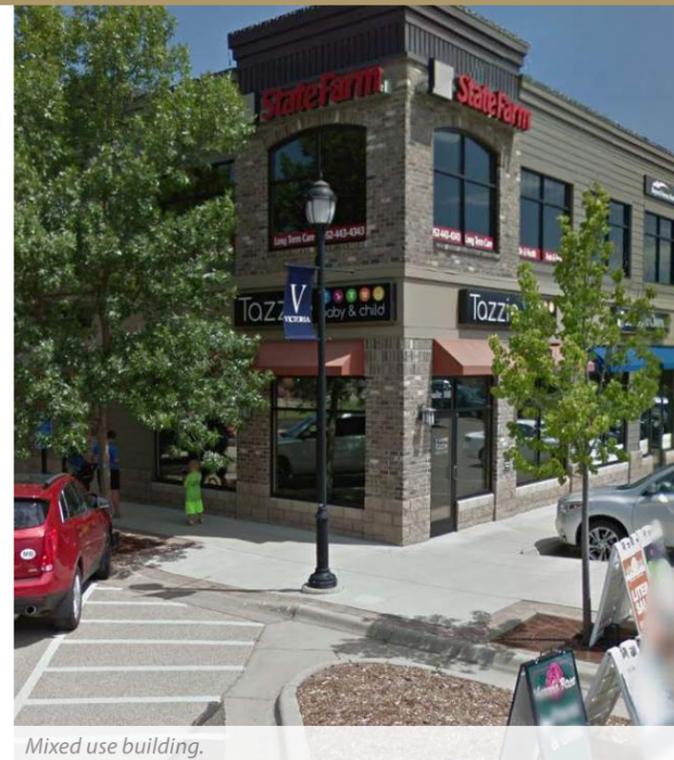
Figure 4.1 Downtown Districts



**1 Downtown Core Mixed Use Design Guidelines**



Mixed use building.



Mixed use building.



Mixed use building.

**Land Uses**

- » Primarily retail, personal services and restaurants at street level facing Main Street, Dash-Park and Hwy 35
- » Business services
- » Professional offices
- » Civic
- » Apartments/condos
- » Walk-up townhouses/rowhouses
- » Vertical mixed use buildings
- » Park/open space

**Parking**

- » On-street parking
- » Parking behind buildings
- » Parking under buildings using site grades
- » Municipal parking (surface or ramp)
- » Shared parking

**Site Access**

- » Alley as a shared vehicle access and pedestrian-friendly paseo
- » Eliminate driveways on Main Street to maximize on-street parking
- » Limit driveways on 3rd Avenue South to maximize on-street parking

**Building Design**

- » Multi-story buildings desirable
- » Zero building setback from the sidewalk
- » Portion of building can be setback from sidewalk to provide usable open space, e.g. outdoor dining/gathering spaces
- » Primary building entry faces street
- » Street and alley facades are dominated by transparent windows
- » Buildings wider than a typical lot have articulated street/alley facades



Mixed use building.



Mix of walk-up townhouses and apartments.

**Land Uses**

- » Apartments/condos
- » Walk-up townhouses/rowhouses
- » Limited retail, personal services, and restaurants

**Parking**

- » Parking under buildings using site grades
- » Limited surface parking
- » Surface parking away from riverfront, accessed from Court Street South

**Site Access**

- » Use Court St as a shared vehicle access and pedestrian-friendly paseo
- » Publicly accessible path or parkway/street along terrace
- » Place driveways on east-west streets whenever possible

**Building Design**

- » Multi-story buildings (3 or 4 stories) desirable
- » Building fronts face the river
- » Usable open space and pedestrian access between building and riverfront
- » Buildings wider than a typical lot have an articulated street facade



Private amenities for residents.



Proposed Great River Residences Project.



Multi-story buildings.



Retail/office mixed use.

**Land Uses**

- » Retail, personal services and restaurants
- » Business services
- » Professional offices

**Site Access**

- » Parking behind and between buildings
- » Shared parking

**Driveways**

- » Use alley as a shared vehicle access and pedestrian-friendly paseo (east side of Highway 35)
- » Place driveways on east-west streets whenever possible
- » Share driveways on Hwy 35 whenever possible

**Building Design**

- » Buildings placed at block corners
- » Minimal setback from the sidewalk
- » Larger setbacks allowed to provide usable open space, e.g. outdoor dining/gathering spaces
- » Primary building entry faces Hwy 35
- » Street facades are dominated by transparent windows

4 Downtown Mixed Residential Design Guidelines



Artist lofts/housing



Commercial use with structured parking behind and above.



Pedestrian friendly paseo.



Multi-story residential with underground parking.

**Land Uses**

- » Apartments/condos
- » Walk-up townhouses/rowhouses
- » Artist housing

**Parking**

- » Parking under buildings using site grades
- » On-street parking
- » Limited surface parking

**Site Access**

- » Use alley as a shared vehicle access and pedestrian-friendly paseo
- » Place driveways on east-west streets whenever possible
- » Limit driveways on 3rd Avenue South to maximize on-street parking

**Building Design**

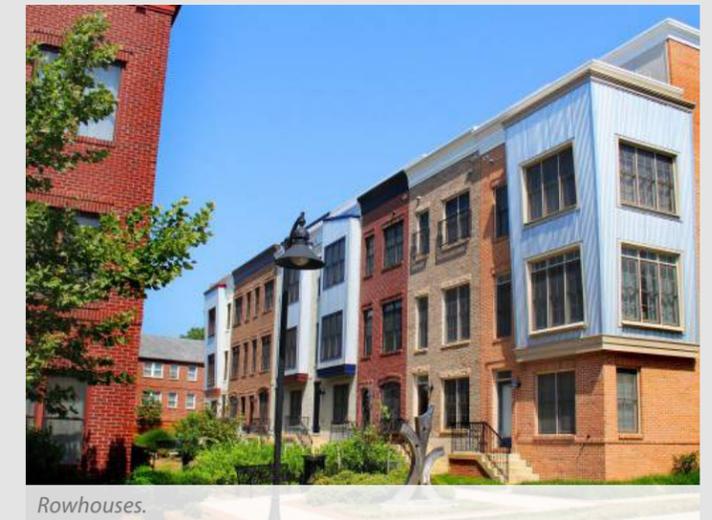
- » Multi-story buildings (3 or 4 stories) desirable
- » Small setbacks from sidewalk to provide transition/buffer between residential and public sidewalk
- » Primary building entries face street
- » Street and alley facades are dominated by transparent windows
- » Buildings wider than a typical lot have an articulated street facade



Townhomes.



Townhomes.



Rowhouses.

## Desired Redevelopment Concept

As part of the redevelopment planning process the consultant team explored redevelopment concepts for new commercial, residential and mixed use buildings in the downtown. These concepts also studied alternatives for parking to support the potential development including additional surface and/or structured parking integrated with the development. The following desired concepts are shown to illustrate potential size, scale and types of redevelopment for study purposes. Any future development will involve coordination between individual property owners, developers, reality of market conditions, and the City of Onalaska.



### Targeted Redevelopment Concept

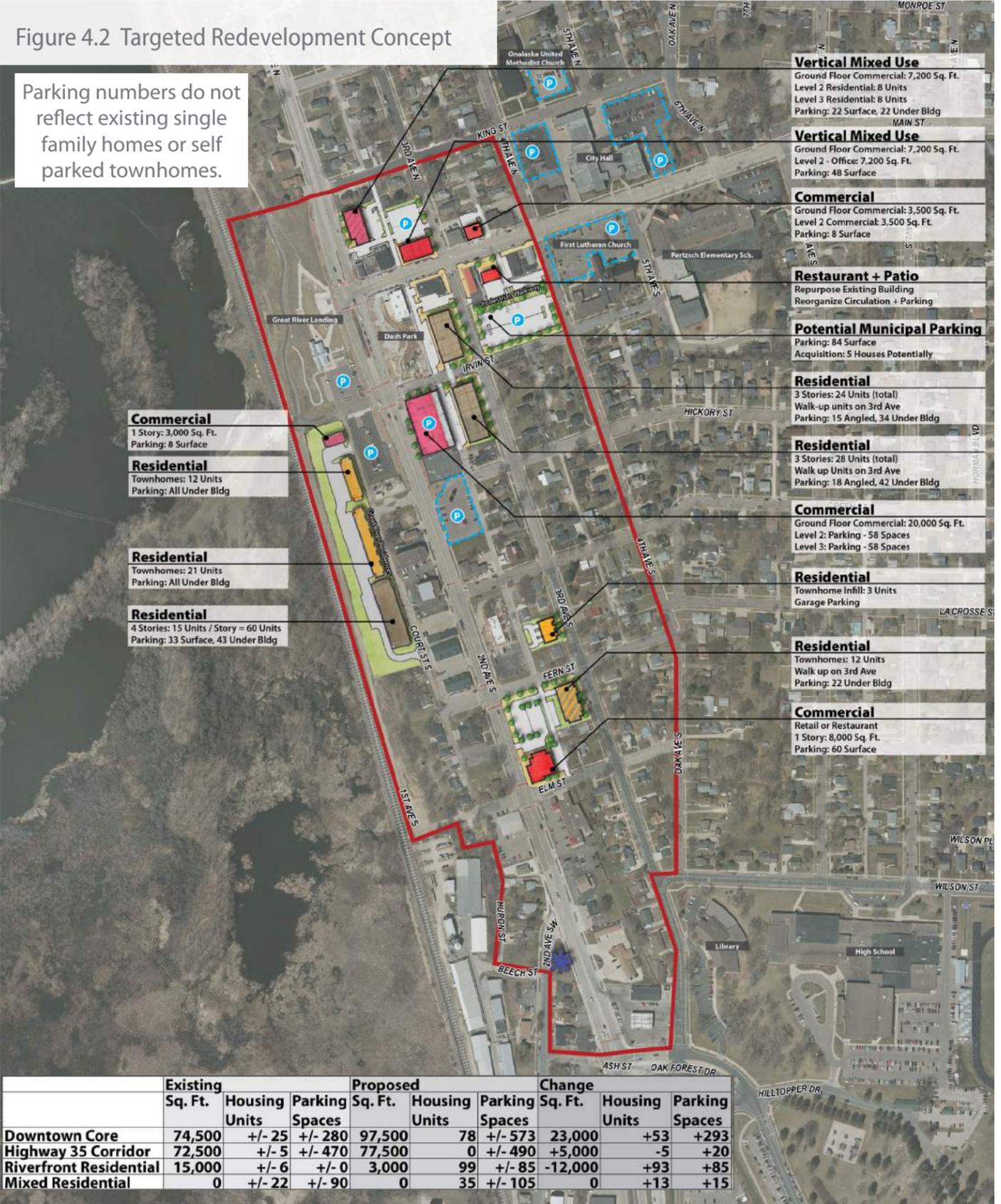
In this concept, the focus for redevelopment occurs in the Downtown Core Mixed Use District and in the Riverfront Residential District primarily with some additional targeted redevelopment/ infill on underutilized sites along 3rd Avenue South and Great River Road (Figures 4.2-4.3). The focus of redevelopment for the city should continue to center around and build upon the recent investments of the Great River Landing and Dash-Park.

- » Downtown Core Mixed Use focus for redevelopment/ reinvestment
- » Expand parking options (shared, surface, and integrated with development)
- » Riverfront housing
- » Infill redevelopment that requires limited site assembly

Figure 4.3 Section Drawing At Dash-Park



Figure 4.2 Targeted Redevelopment Concept



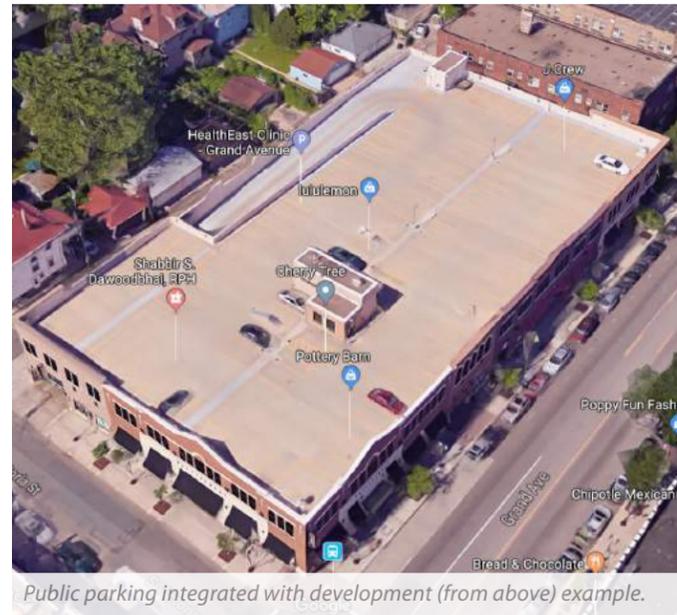
### Broader Redevelopment Concept

With the broader redevelopment concept, the focus for redevelopment still occurs in the Downtown Core Mixed Use District and Riverfront Residential District, but expands south along the Highway 35 and 3rd Avenue to explore options for commercial and residential redevelopment (Figures 4.4-4.5).

- » Continued Downtown Core Mixed use focus for redevelopment with mixed use and expanded ground-level commercial use along 3rd Ave.
- » Expand parking options (shared, surface, and structured)
- » Expanded riverfront housing south – adjust orientation, maintain grid.
- » Site assembly ( 1/4 block to 1/2 block sites) along the Great River Road Business Corridor and the Downtown Mixed Residential District



Public parking integrated with development (street view) example.



Public parking integrated with development (from above) example.



Downtown Mixed Residential example.

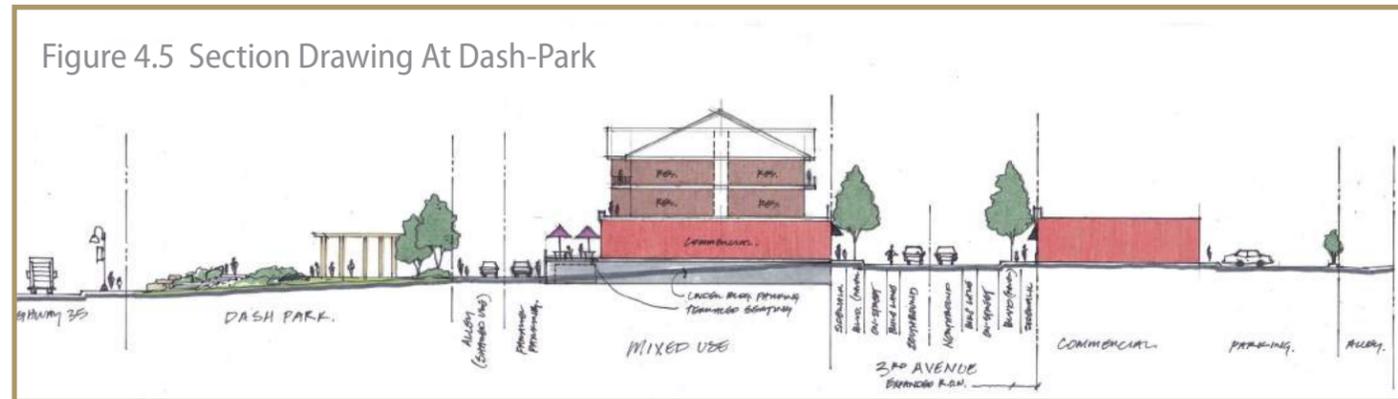
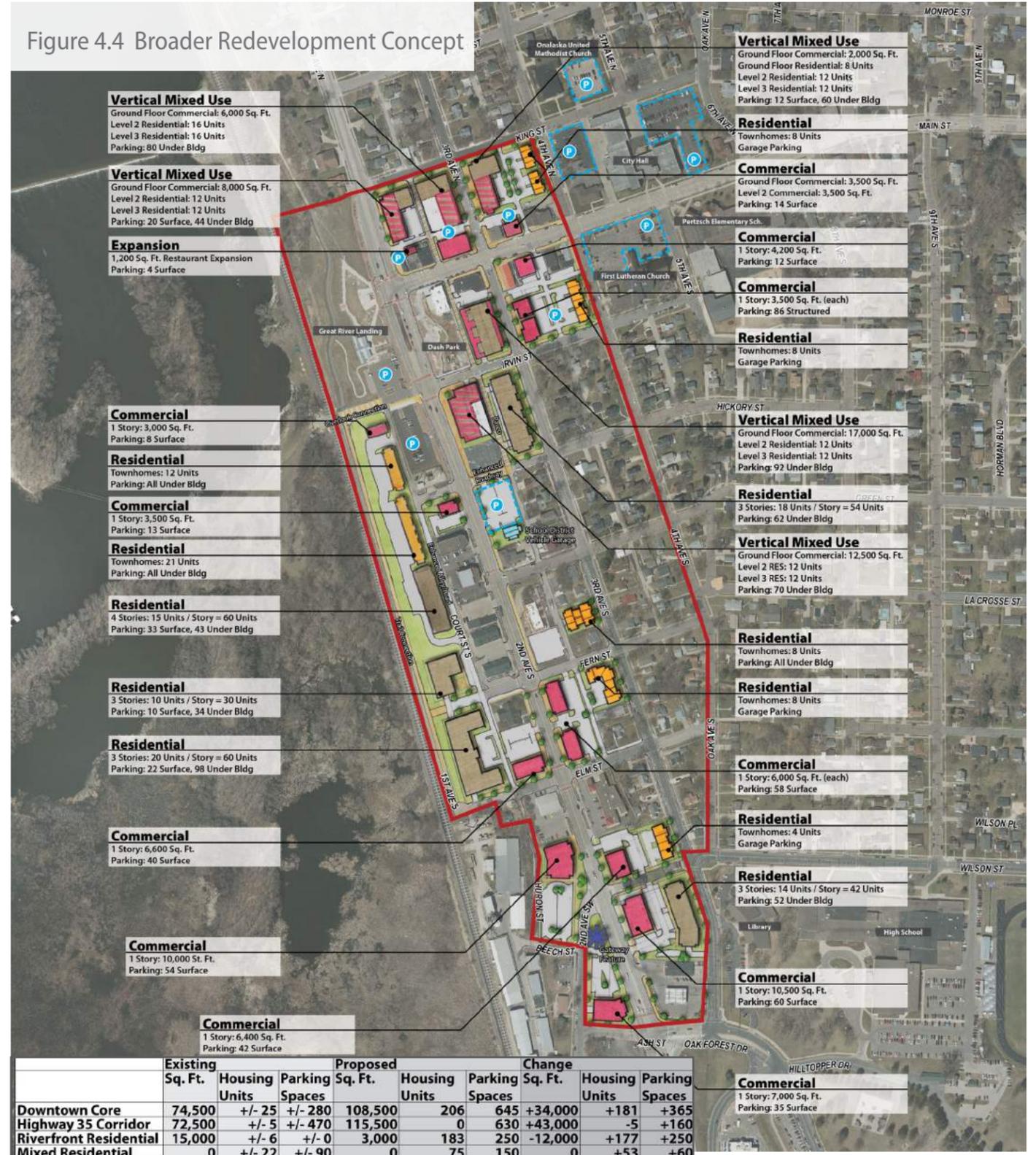


Figure 4.5 Section Drawing At Dash-Park

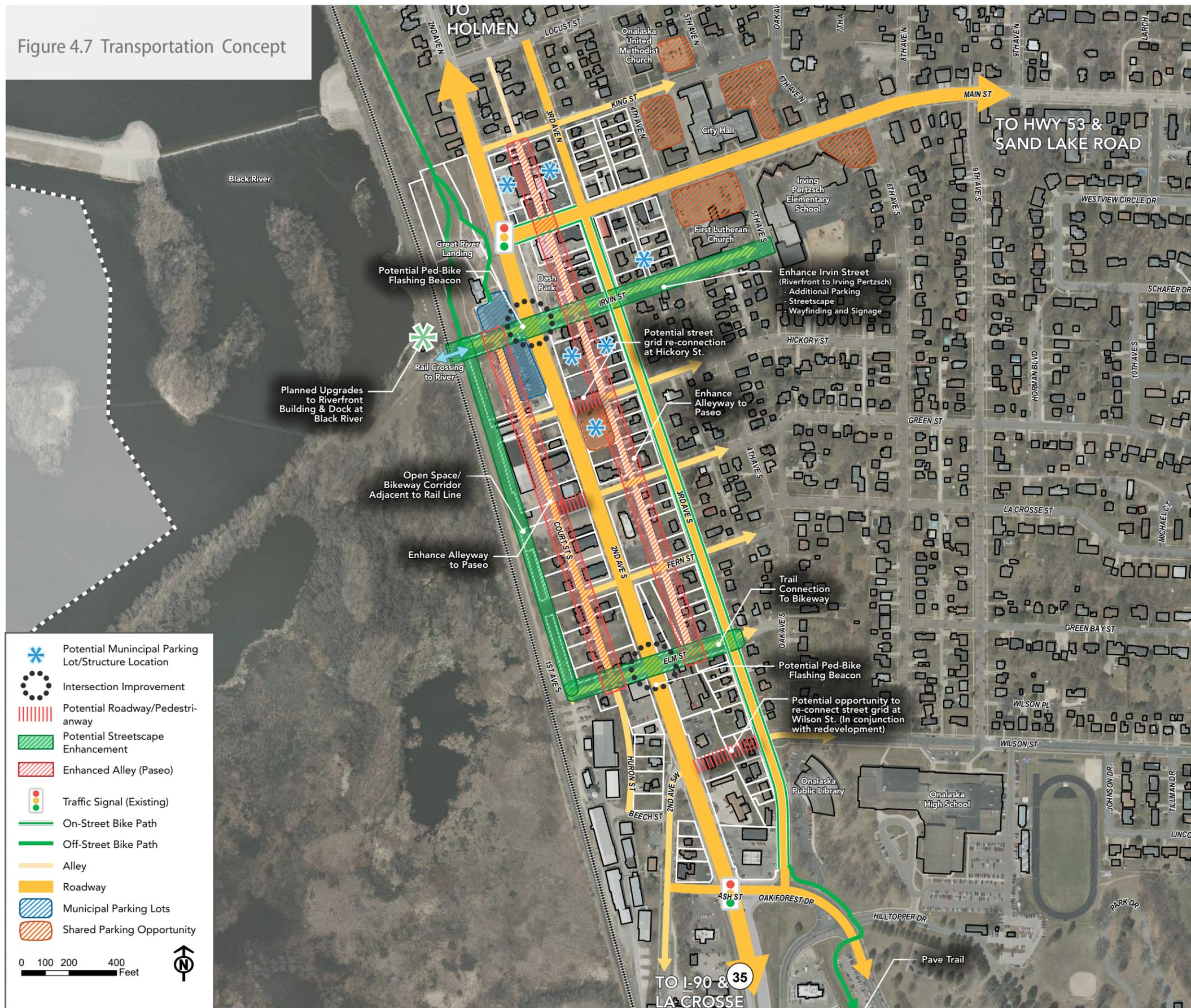
Figure 4.4 Broader Redevelopment Concept



Parking numbers do not reflect existing single family homes or self parked townhomes.



Figure 4.7 Transportation Concept



### Enhanced Alley "Paseo" Concept

- » A public path or place designed for leisurely walking or strolling
- » Provide alternative walking routes to streets for convenient connections to destinations and parking
- » Wide enough to comfortably accommodate pedestrians, bicycles, and vehicles if needed
- » Special pavement materials and pedestrian scale lighting used to create desirable walking paths
- » Opportunity for public space features, including trash receptacles, seating, bicycle racks, planters
- » Preferable for buildings or open spaces to be located adjacent to paseos
- » Parking adjacent to paseos should have some type of buffer

## Goals:

- » Expand downtown's walking/biking environment to include Irvin Street and Elm Street as key connections to a riverfront trail in the 1st Avenue South right-of-way along the rail line
- » Enhance alleys (east side of Hwy 35) and Court St as pedestrian-oriented paseos
- » Improve walking/biking crossings of Hwy 35
- » Implement the water's edge portion of the Great River Landing concept with connections to downtown via Irvin Street and a potential pedestrian bridge over the rail line
- » Continue to maintain and enhance the Great River State Trail as a high quality scenic and accessible trail for both regional and local users.
- » Continue to support the state snowmobile trail's route and access to downtown



## Parks, Trails, and Open Space

Completion of the upland portion of the Great River Landing has transformed the character of downtown from a place that historically developed with its back toward the river to a place that now affords a grand view of the river valley. The Great River Landing was the introduction of parks and open spaces into downtown. While the Great River Landing is both a regional open space and a local park, in the form of the Main Street Plaza, the subsequent development of Dash-Park brings a park literally into the heart of the downtown core. Prior to these parks, downtown residents did not have convenient access to a neighborhood park.

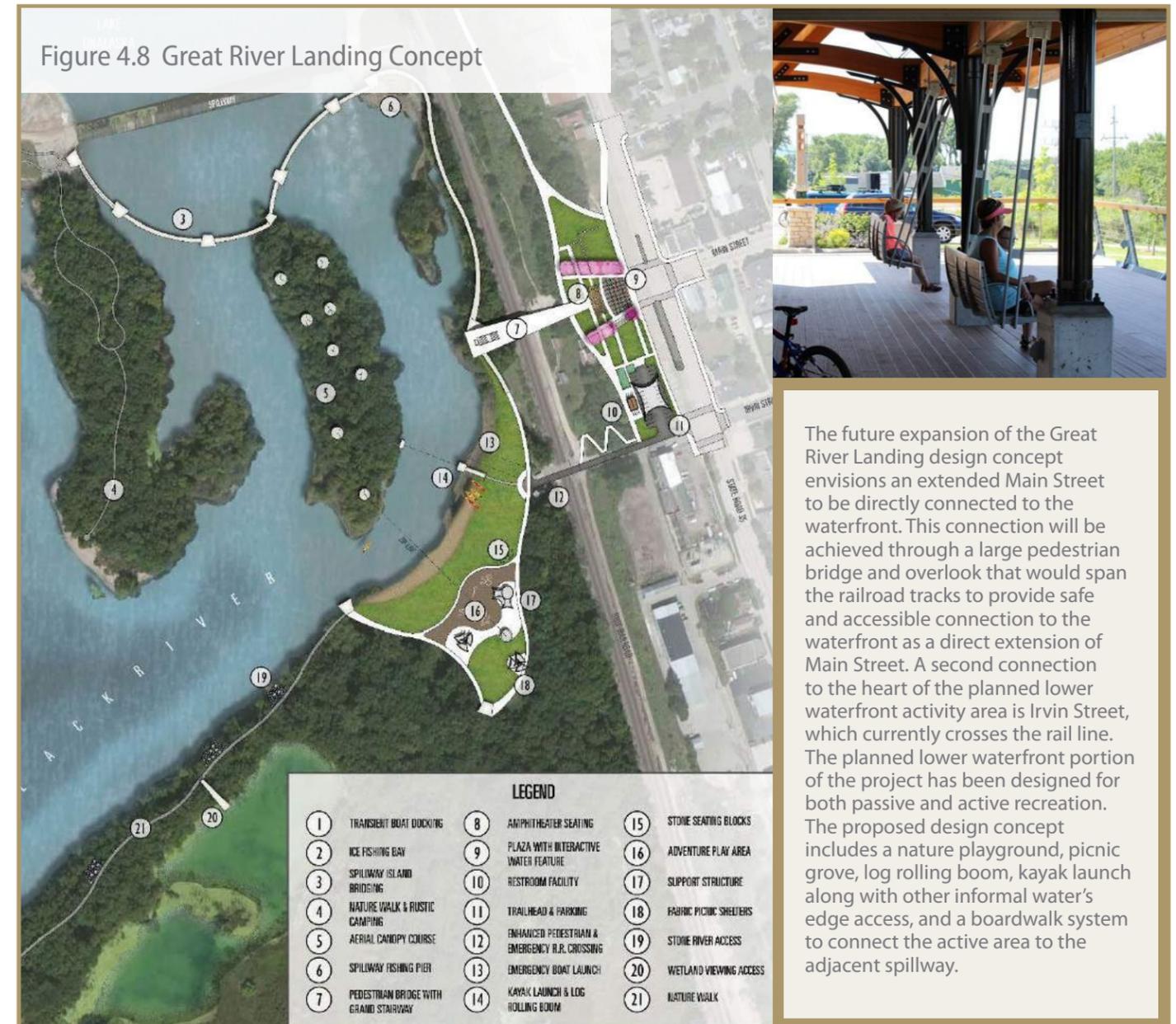
The future development of the water's edge portion of the Great River Landing will be another great asset for downtown. Irvin Street should be improved as a key trail connection between downtown and the waterfront (Figure 4.9).

## Trails

The current designated route of the Great River State Trail includes a segment of on-street bike lanes along Main Street for a block and then south on 3rd Avenue South. It is recommended that this route is kept because it brings regional bicyclists into downtown. In the past, the designated route on Court Street South bypassed downtown. Future pavement of a portion of the trail north of the Great River Landing should be considered to make it accessible to more users. Downtown is also a destination on the state snowmobile trail that connects to the Great River Landing, which also provides snowmobile parking.

To enhance the trails in downtown for both regional recreational users and downtown residents, it is recommended that a trail loop be created in downtown (see Figure 4.9). This loop would use Irvin Street and Elm Street to create a loop between downtown and the riverfront, including a trail down along the rail line.

Figure 4.8 Great River Landing Concept



The future expansion of the Great River Landing design concept envisions an extended Main Street to be directly connected to the waterfront. This connection will be achieved through a large pedestrian bridge and overlook that would span the railroad tracks to provide safe and accessible connection to the waterfront as a direct extension of Main Street. A second connection to the heart of the planned lower waterfront activity area is Irvin Street, which currently crosses the rail line. The planned lower waterfront portion of the project has been designed for both passive and active recreation. The proposed design concept includes a nature playground, picnic grove, log rolling boom, kayak launch along with other informal water's edge access, and a boardwalk system to connect the active area to the adjacent spillway.

This trail loop as well as the 3rd Avenue South on-street bike facility will also provide a trail connection between all of the parks and open spaces in downtown, including Great River Landing, Dash-Park, the playground at Irving Pertzsch Elementary School, the High School playfields, and Rowe Community Park.



Enhanced trail connection.

Figure 4.9 Parks, Trails, and Open Space Concept



Enhanced paddling connections along the Black River/Lake Onalaska.



Fishing the Black River/Lake Onalaska.



Enhanced bike trail connections.



# Implementation



## Keys to Implementation

Several factors will be crucial in successfully realizing the vision set forth by the City of Onalaska within the Downtown Redevelopment Study. These factors apply regardless of the actual form and timing of redevelopment:

### Patience

The vision for downtown cannot be implemented overnight. The time frame for implementation reflects its evolutionary nature; it looks forward over a period of years. The desired change often requires the patience to wait for the right things to happen, rather than making changes simply to be seen as doing something.

### Commitment

Commitment to the Downtown Redevelopment Study and patience go hand-in-hand. This study does more than simply seek to attract redevelopment in downtown; it provides a road map to move the area toward its vision. Commitment to the plan means the willingness to actively promote public and private investments that align with the objectives of the study. It also requires the willingness by decision makers to deter developments which do not meet the objectives of the plan. Not all of these decisions will be easy or will they occur exactly as analyzed in this study.

### Public & Private Partnerships

Removal of the physical and economic barriers to redevelopment in Onalaska will likely require some public financial assistance. The complexity of redevelopment envisioned for the area clearly demonstrates the need for public financial participation. Private investment will not be sufficient to pay for all costs associated with every redevelopment project. Strong public/private partnerships will make redevelopment projects more financially feasible, promote the desired types of development and build momentum in the area. The

needs established in this study do not make public financial assistance an entitlement however. On-going planning will define the nature of assistance and amount available for each step throughout the implementation process. This approach ensures that public monies are used to achieve desired public outcomes and not simply make development more affordable (or profitable) for the developer.

### Financial Reality

Implementing the Downtown Redevelopment Study requires careful investment of public funds, but the private side of the financial equation must not be overlooked. New development and existing businesses will pay for part of the improvements called for in the study. Implementing the Downtown Redevelopment Study seeks to balance the investment in public initiatives with the creation of a financial environment that sustains successful businesses.

### Strategic Investments

If financial support for the plan was unlimited, the need for strategic decisions would be less important. With limited funds, every expenditure is crucial. It is not possible to immediately undertake all of the initiatives described in this plan. Needs and opportunities not contemplated in the plan may arise in the future. Every investment must be evaluated for its impact on enhancing downtown.



Architect's Rendering of Proposed Great River Residences Project



## Roles & Responsibilities

There is a temptation to give sole responsibility for implementation of the Downtown Redevelopment Study to the City of Onalaska. While the City does possess many of the powers and resources needed to undertake the actions described in this redevelopment study, successful implementation will require actions by other stakeholders as well. Achieving the vision for downtown redevelopment and public improvements will require ongoing collaboration between public and private stakeholders. This section describes the roles and responsibilities of key parties.

### Business and Property Owners

While the City influences downtown's physical setting, downtown remains a place combining public and private activities. Individual businesses determine the types of goods and services available in downtown. Individual businesses make decisions about how they operate. Property owners decide how to maintain and improve their buildings. Individual property owners need to ensure that adequate convenient parking is provided for their customers and employees. Each of these factors plays a role in the long-term success of the corridor.

### City of Onalaska

The ultimate responsibility for implementing the recommendations of this redevelopment study rests with the City of Onalaska. The Common Council and Community Development Authority (CDA) will provide direction on staff resources, review of proposed development projects and approve public investments. Responsibility for managing redevelopment in downtown will be a priority for the Community Development Authority and the Planning / Zoning and Engineering Departments of the City.

### Planning / Zoning Department

The Planning / Zoning Department will share a lead role in managing implementation for the City.

The actions to be taken by the Planning / Zoning Department to implement the study include:

- » Application of land use controls and redevelopment guidelines to shepherd private development;
- » Review of development plans and proposals;
- » Coordination of planning for capital improvements needed to facilitate redevelopment; and
- » Creation of financial plans for public redevelopment investments and continued monitoring.

### Engineering Department

The Engineering Department also plays a major role in the design of public infrastructure improvements needed to support development and redevelopment in downtown, including utility and roadway improvements. The Engineering Department is also key player in planning for future roadway and transportation improvements, including ongoing conversations with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) on State Roads 35 and 157 (Main Street) safety and potential future intersection improvements in downtown.

### Community Development Authority (CDA)

Downtown is an important location for economic development in the City of Onalaska. The CDA will promote and monitor downtown redevelopment momentum. The CDA will need to determine their specific roles for a coordinated effort with the Common Council. Several potential CDA actions make them an important player in the successful implementation of the plan:

- » Provide a framework for coordinating efforts of the community. With limited resources, it is essential that the community work in unison to undertake redevelopment. The knowledge and experience gained from the planning process allows CDA members to efficiently and effectively take steps needed to implement core objectives of the study.

- » Work to ensure that economic development initiatives within Onalaska are a recognized priority for Common Council members.
- » Maintain an active role. Actively pursuing critical properties for redevelopment or educating business owners on improvement or reinvestment programs with low interest loans should be continued and expanded roles for the CDA.
- » Create an annual redevelopment "action plan" and report summary to help monitor progress toward implementation. This action plan would outline key steps to occur during the year, including descriptions of actions, responsible parties and funding resources. It forces the parties to not only consider what needs to be done in the coming year, but also why identified steps were not taken in the prior year.
- » Work with business owners and landlords to promote and help finance the maintenance and revitalization of businesses (both buildings and properties) in downtown.
- » Host annual developer roundtables or site tours showcasing the potential of Onalaska sites to perspective developers.
- » Provide guidance to the City to ensure that proposed development projects and public improvements are consistent with the study.
- » Promote development projects with sustainable design practices.
- » Continue to find the appropriate funding options for various redevelopment projects.
- » Collaborate with private brokers marketing Onalaska sites and leverage marketing efforts.

### Plan Commission

The Plan Commission has the lead responsibility for evaluating the application of land use controls needed to implement the Study. The Plan Commission advises the Common Council on issues involving the establishment of and compliance with the Comprehensive Land Use Plan and the zoning, subdivision, and sign ordinances. The Commission also reviews residential, commercial, and industrial development proposals and makes

recommendations to the Common Council according to the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan and requirements of the zoning, subdivision, and sign ordinances. The Plan Commission plays a key role in integrating the Downtown Redevelopment Study with the update of the Comprehensive Plan and Unified Development Code.

### Common Council

The Common Council sets the foundation for implementing this study consistent with the overall mission of the City. While other bodies (Plan Commission and CDA) play key roles in the implementation process, important redevelopment powers reside with the City Council. Among the powers that may be needed to undertake public initiatives in downtown are:

- » Allocate money in the annual budget to capital improvements in downtown.
- » Approve the establishment of tax increment financing (TIF) districts.
- » Levy of special assessments for public improvements.
- » Issuance of general obligation bonds to finance redevelopment and improvement projects.

### Community-at-Large

The community of Onalaska must stay involved as redevelopment continues over time. The community must work together with decision-makers and provide the necessary input for any new development, respecting existing land owners' desires and meeting the vision for the Downtown Redevelopment Study. Ultimately, the community must:

- » Provide a singular focus for the plan. The knowledge gained from the planning process will allow members of the community to efficiently and effectively comment on redevelopment proposals.
- » Continue public involvement. Continue to attend public meetings, or provide comments and suggestions to proposals as they come forward.



## Development Guidance and Controls

The initial focus of implementation will be on actions needed to establish the Downtown Redevelopment Study as the official guide for development and redevelopment in downtown. These actions involve the adoption of key policy documents and updated development controls.

### Approve the Downtown Redevelopment Study

The first implementation step is for the CDA and Common Council to approve the Downtown Redevelopment Study. These approvals set the stage for subsequent actions such as amending the comprehensive plan, zoning ordinances, and capital improvement program, as well as the identification of potential funding sources.

### Amend the Comprehensive Plan

The City will need to amend the Comprehensive Plan (Figure 5.1) to incorporate the new Downtown Redevelopment Study's recommendations, primarily the Land Use chapter. Land use guidance not only promotes the desired development outcomes, it also prevents development that is not consistent with the redevelopment study. These amendments will include the Future Land Use Map designations, Downtown (Land Use Goal 2) Objectives, and appropriate Land Use Policies/Recommendations consistent with the redevelopment study's direction and recommendations. Amending the Comprehensive Plan creates the foundation for all other implementation actions. Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan is a statutory requirement for zoning regulations, capital improvements and redevelopment projects.

It is recommended that the properties in the Riverfront Residential and Downtown Mixed Residential Districts be changed from the Downtown Mixed Use land use to the Mixed Density Residential land use on the Future Land Use Map.

### Amend Zoning Regulations

More direct control of future development and redevelopment comes from zoning regulations in the city's Unified Development Code (UDC). The existing zoning districts within the downtown study area will require modification to conform to the redevelopment study. Part of the necessary modification is enabling the type and form of development proposed in this study, for example, allowing vertical mixed use and residential use in downtown that currently zoned as commercial, as well as adjusting parking space requirements.

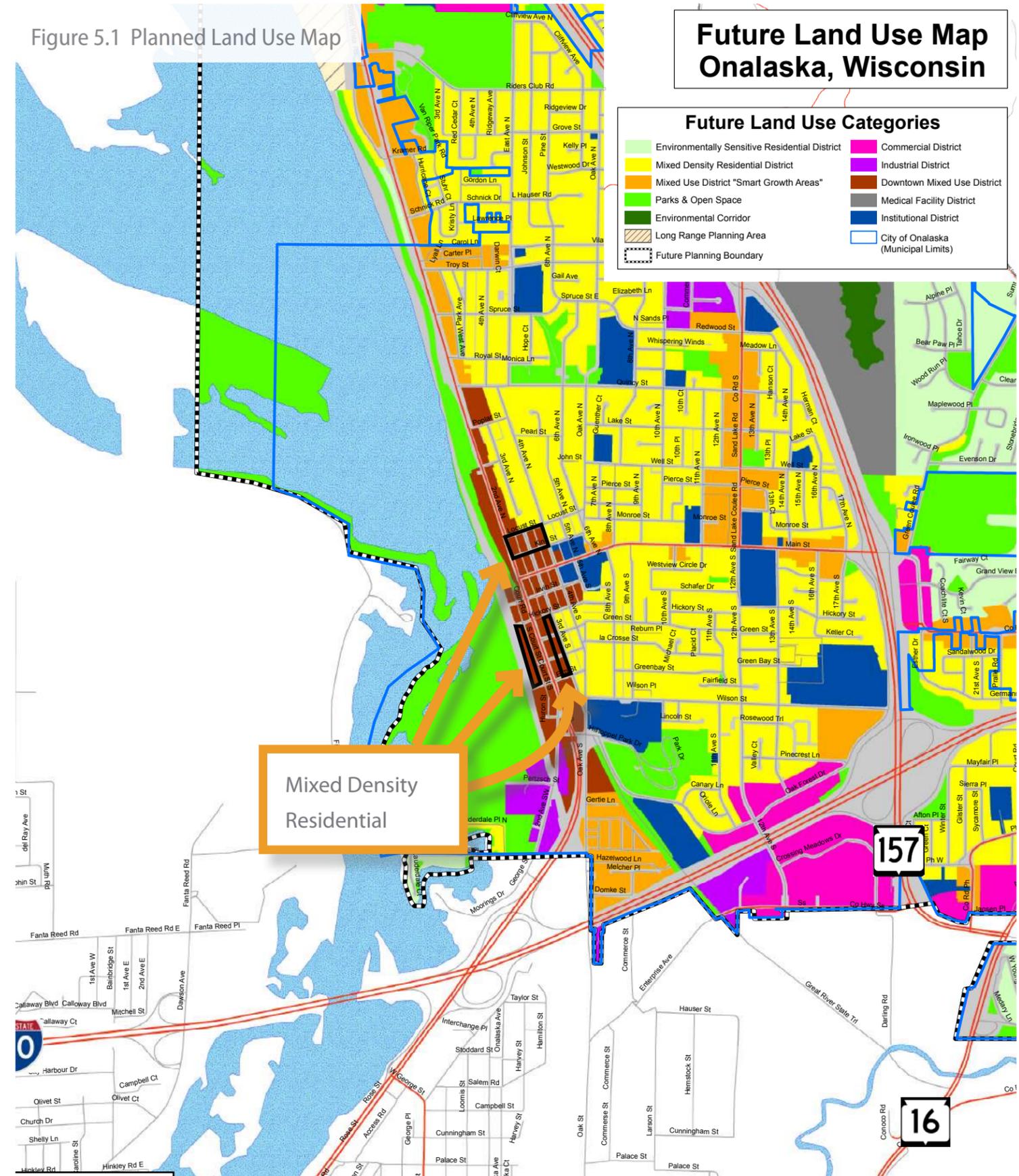
The following changes should be considered:

- » Rezone Riverfront Residential District properties from P1, B1 and B2 to R4
- » Rezone Downtown Mixed Residential District properties from R2 to R4
- » Consider rezoning entire Downtown Core District as B1 rather than its current mix of B1 and B2
- » Consider rezoning Great River Road Business Corridor District from B1 to B2

More detailed analysis and formal recommendation of any zoning changes will be handled by the City of Onalaska through the UDC Rewrite project which is scheduled for completion at the end of 2019.

The city's UDC also has two downtown design overlays districts in place: Downtown-PUD and Downtown-Residential. One option is to incorporate the Downtown Redevelopment Study's design guidelines into the overlay districts.

Figure 5.1 Planned Land Use Map





## Redevelopment Initiatives

Implementation of the Downtown Redevelopment Study is not a single action, but a series of sequenced steps. These steps will be taken over time and across multiple phases. Initial focus should be on several implementation initiatives that lay the foundation for change.

During the early years of redevelopment, there are several critical actions the City of Onalaska can take to reduce development constraints, allow for greater investment in public amenities and infrastructure and enhance the market viability of multiple locations. Suggested activities to enhance project success include:

### Focus on the momentum around downtown's new open space assets

Strategically target redevelopment sites and public improvements that will leverage downtown's desirable new open space assets. Focus on redevelopment that will continue to build market momentum and early projects act as positive demonstrations of great things to come in downtown. Start with achievable projects to build success and create a diversity of projects that are viable in the market place today so individual projects within the community don't directly compete with one another. Allowing this depth and range of early projects should be guided carefully with extensive examination as to which projects should or should not receive financial assistance. Key steps to advance this initiative include:

- » Explore opportunities to provide and manage parking conveniently and efficiently in downtown, including on-street, small lots behind buildings, public lot/ramp, shared parking lots.
- » Establish street design standards for downtown streets and enhanced alleys/paseos (Figure 5.2).
- » Reconstruct Irvin Street (between 2nd and 3rd Avenues South) and the enhanced alley/paseo between Main Street and Irvin Street.
- » City partnership and support for the proposed

- Great River Residences housing development
- » Continued progress on completing the Great River Landing waterfront project.
- » Pursue public acquisition of key properties or public-private partnerships to assemble adequate redevelopment sites, particularly in the Downtown Core.

### Build high quality development

Directing and building high quality commercial and residential development is critical to setting the table for future success. Early projects in the ground will provide the model for future development and establishing a high finish with proper selection of building materials will make great strides in elevating the image of Onalaska. Buildings should be respectful of adjacent properties and be designed with the appropriate scale. Both commercial and housing development should have a strong street presence and varied materials.

### Build a high quality public realm

Continued investment in creating a high quality and memorable public realm that will attract local residents, regional visitors, new businesses, and developers. Key steps to advance this initiative include:

- » Completion of the Great River Landing.
- » Consider paving some portions of the Great River State Trail to make it accessible and attractive to a broader group of users.
- » Improvements to downtown core streets.
- » Extend enhanced alleys/paseos and Court Street South
- » Work with WisDOT to improve walk/bike crossings of Hwy 35 and Main Street (Hwy 157), particularly at Hwy 35/Irvin Street.
- » Programming of public spaces, e.g. farmers market, art fairs in School District or Great River Landing parking lots.
- » Accommodate needs of snowmobiles to access downtown.

### Complete update of the zoning code

Collaborate with property and business owners on appropriate parking requirements and the desired application of mixed use development in downtown as part of the UDC Rewrite Project in 2019.

### Broader redevelopment opportunities

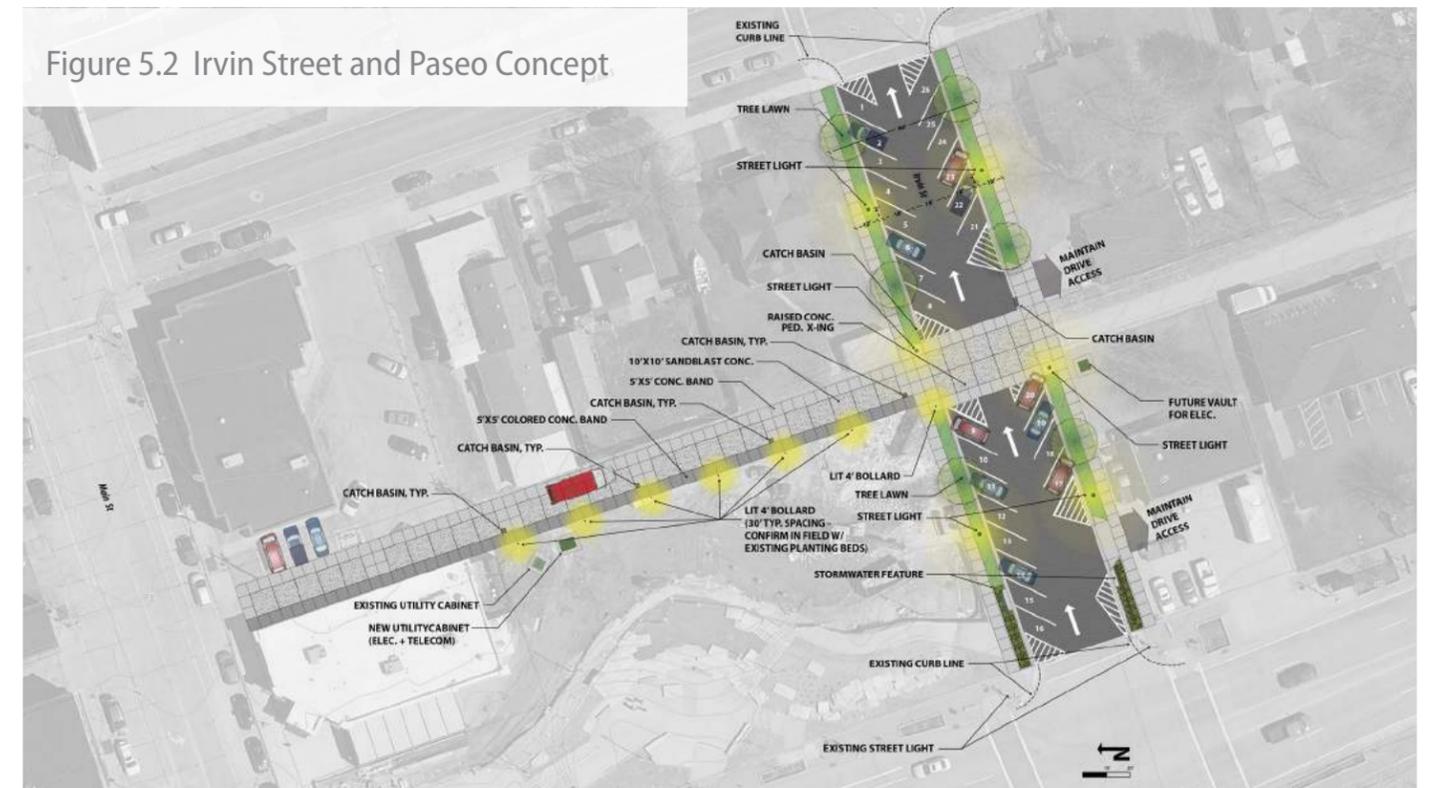
Keep an eye on opportunities for redevelopment beyond the downtown core. Key steps to advance this initiative include:

- » Work with utility company on future relocation of the electric substation.
- » Bury overhead power lines with infrastructure improvements and development projects.
- » Complete Quiet Zone improvements at Irvin Street.
- » Work with property owners of potential housing redevelopment sites, particularly adjacent to new riverfront housing and along west side of 3rd Ave.



Improved downtown public parking example.

Figure 5.2 Irvin Street and Paseo Concept

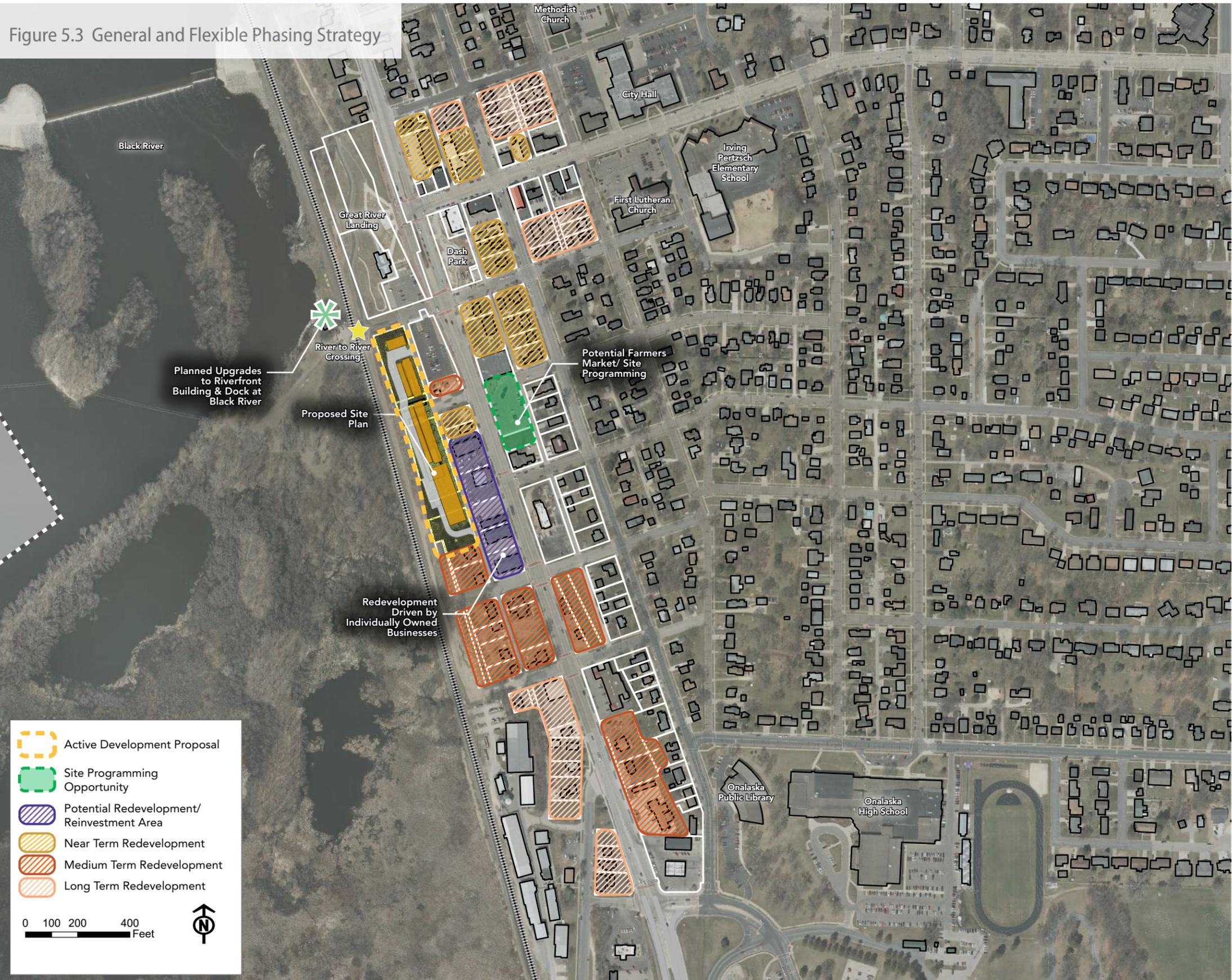


### Create a General and Flexible Phasing Strategy

Achieving the desired redevelopment goals of the Downtown study area will need to be approached in phases for a number of reasons including:

- » The large physical size of the study area
- » The large number of property owners
- » The need and complexity of assembling properties for redevelopment
- » The significant financial investments needed to facilitate redevelopment
- » Time needed for market absorption of new development

Figure 5.3 provides a general phasing strategy that starts with near term redevelopment in the Downtown Core, leveraging and complementing recent public and private investments including the Great River Landing, Dash-Park, and two new Main Street commercial buildings. Redevelopment of sites adjacent to these downtown amenities are identified as near term. In addition, near term redevelopment also includes the planned redevelopment of the City's public works site with the Great River Residences project and two vacant sites on the west side of Hwy 35. Medium term redevelopment areas include additional riverfront residential, relocation/expansion of the electric substation, and vacant/underutilized Hwy 35 properties. Long term redevelopment areas include the northeast and southwest corners of the study area.



## Municipal Tools for Public Investments

The vision for downtown will continue to require investment by the City of Onalaska. As larger scale redevelopment opportunities present themselves downtown, the City may also find public benefit through participation and investments in private redevelopment projects. This section highlights the primary municipal finance tools available to support public investments in downtown, both through public improvements and participation in private redevelopment projects. The primary finance tools available to cities are limited. This information is not intended to be an exhaustive guide, but rather a high level overview, a starting point, for further investigation. The use of these tools may be subject to requirements not discussed in this section. In addition, the statutes that govern these tools can be changed by the State Legislature.

### **Tax Incremental Finance**

Tax incremental finance (TIF) is one of the primary development finance tool available to Wisconsin cities. TIF is simple in concept, but complex in its application. Through TIF, the property taxes created by new development (or redevelopment) are captured and used to finance activities needed to encourage the development. The City approved a TID for the Great River Residences Redevelopment Project in February 2019. TIF can be used to finance many actions needed to facilitate redevelopment, including land acquisition, site preparation, parking, and public improvements. In addition, TIF creates a means to borrow money needed to pay for redevelopment costs. The City can issue general obligation bonds to finance certain qualified expenses. These bonds may be supported with tax increments and other legally available revenues.

The City has the authority to create a Tax Incremental District (TID) for a redevelopment site or area. The current value of all the taxable property within the defined TID boundaries is established prior to any redevelopment. New construction and investment increases the property's value which results in increased/incremental tax value.

### **Special Assessments**

Public improvements are often financed using the power to levy special assessments. The use of special assessments for the majority of public improvements is governed by state statutes. Essentially, special assessments are a means for benefiting properties to pay for all or part of the costs associated with improvements, and to spread the impact over a period of years. Special assessments can be used to finance public infrastructure improvements outlined in this study including streets, sidewalks and trails, streetscape, lighting and parking.

The method of spreading the assessments and the terms of the assessments are set by the City. Typically, the primary legal constraints on special assessments are:

- » The amount of the assessment cannot exceed the benefit the property receives from the improvement. The benefit is measured by the increase in property value.
- » The method assessment must be uniformly applied to the same type of property.

### **General Property Taxes**

General property taxes can be used to finance many of the services, improvements, facilities and development activities needed to implement elements of the Redevelopment Study. Taxes may be levied through the General Fund, to pay debt service on bonds, and as a levy for the CDA. The ability to use property taxes provides another resource for downtown.

### **Other City Funds**

While property taxes are the largest and most obvious source of City revenues, other funds may play a role in implementing the Redevelopment Study. The use of other City funds should be factored into capital improvements planning and earmarked for the Downtown/Highway 35 Corridor. Some potential funding sources include:

- » Utility revenues. Monies from municipal utilities

may be available to certain portions of Downtown or State Road 16 Corridor infrastructure improvement projects.

- » Park dedication fees. New development contributes money (or land) towards the creation of the local park system. Revenues from park dedication may be available to support park and trail improvements.
- » State aid for roads. The City receives money from the State for the construction and maintenance of roads. These roads must be part of the City's designated state aid street system.

### **Commercial Rehabilitation Loans and Grants**

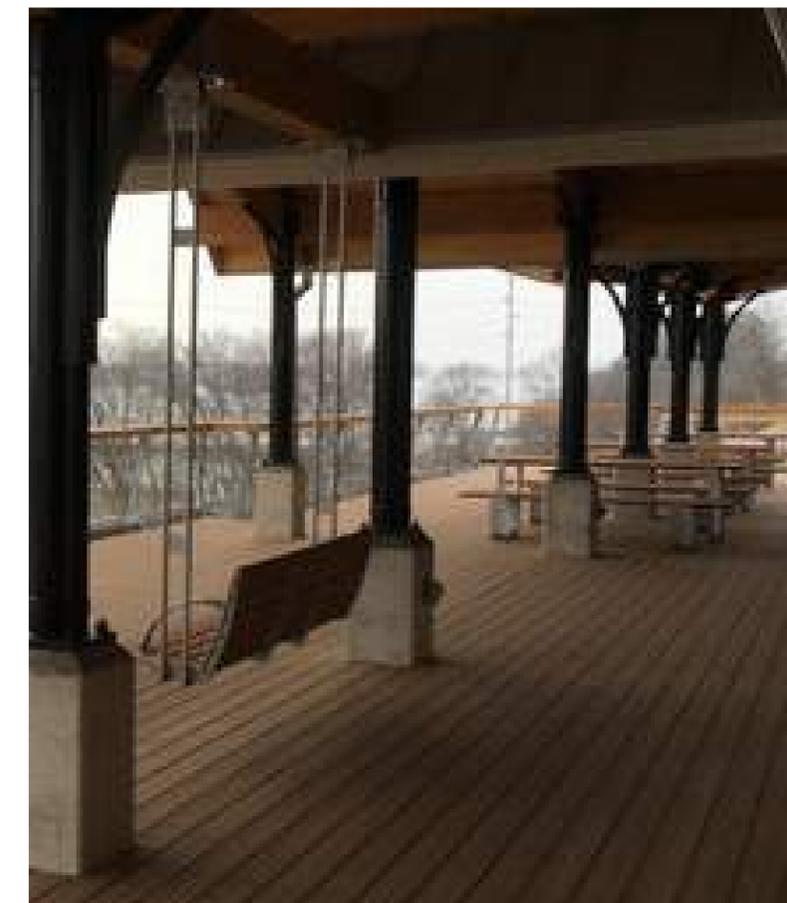
Typically, through HRAs and CDAs, cities have broad powers to facilitate the revitalization of existing buildings. State law also creates specific statutory authority for loans by cities. The City may establish a program to make loans to finance the rehabilitation of small and medium-sized commercial buildings. The program can be funded through the issuance of revenue bonds or obligations payable solely from all or a portion of the revenues derived from or other contributions to the program. Other revenues of the City (tax increment or tax abatement proceeds, for instance) could be used to assist the program.

### **Non-Municipal Revenue Sources**

The City should continue to be informed and pay attention to other revenue sources that exist or may become available from La Crosse County or the State of Wisconsin or other sources. Redevelopment projects often rely on a myriad and ever-changing source of revenues and programs to achieve City objectives.



Farmers market.



Great River Landing's river overlook.



## Regional Resources

### **Coulee Region Business Center**

The Coulee Region Business Center (CRBC) provides facilities, resources, mentoring and coaching to small businesses and entrepreneurs in the La Crosse area. The Center offers shared services and a network of professional assistance, giving entrepreneurs access to a wealth of business knowledge and support services. They can help to prepare a business plan, access funding, and market and grow a business.

### **Dairyland Power Cooperative**

Look to Dairyland's Business Development Assistance and Economic Development Loan Programs for site location assistance and an array of financing programs for new or expanding businesses.

### **La Crosse Area Convention and Visitor's Bureau**

This non-profit organization represents the convention and tourism industries of the La Crosse/ Onalaska Area business community, actively marketing the area to tourists and meeting planners both nationally and internationally.

### **La Crosse Area Development Corporation (LADCO)**

Founded in 1971, the La Crosse Area Development Corporation (LADCO) focuses on attracting businesses, retaining businesses, and they co-manage the Coulee Region Business Center. Services include: business attraction & retention assistance, site search/analysis, financial program coordination, assembly of private/public sector project teams, workforce development service, and regional transportation initiatives. LADCO also coordinates the Oktoberfest in the Capitol event and the La Crosse Area Inventors & Entrepreneurs Club.

### **La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC)**

The La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC) is the Metropolitan Planning Organization designated to perform transportation planning activities for the La Crosse and La Crescent Area. The main objectives of the LAPC are to develop and maintain a long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plan and a short-range Transportation Improvement Program, and other regionally significant projects.

### **La Crosse County Economic Development (LCED)**

The LCED provides information on County industrial parks, available sites, economic profile, and their other business assistance programs, including their revolving loan fund program.

### **Mississippi River Regional Plan Commission (MRRPC)**

Organized in 1964, MRRPC is a commission of nine counties along the Mississippi River in western Wisconsin. The organization is charged with planning for the physical, social and economic development of the region. The Commission provides administrative and technical assistance to several community, county or multi-county revolving loan funds.

### **7 Rivers Alliance**

The Alliance is a regional leadership group that boosts economic growth by fostering collaboration in western Wisconsin, southeast Minnesota, and northeast Iowa. The Alliance brings together public and private resources to forge entrepreneurial growth and serves as a clearinghouse of vital information to enhance quality of life in the region.

### **Small Business Development Center**

The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) located at the University Wisconsin – La Crosse, is one of ten university-based SBDCs in Wisconsin. The SBDC mission is to provide learning opportunities

and practical guidance to help individuals make informed business decisions. The La Crosse SBDC serves seven counties in the region and offers several types of services including seminars, customized in-house training, and individualized counseling.

### **UW-Extension La Crosse County**

The community and economic development agent can provide information and technical assistance on economic development in La Crosse County.

### **Xcel Energy**

Xcel offers a variety of programs and services for expanding companies or new industries wishing to relocate in their service area. They offer customized programs designed to help businesses and communities grow.



## State Programs

### **Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC)**

WEDC is a public-private corporation that replaced the State Department of Commerce in 2011 and leads the state's economic development efforts. WEDC provides a number of programs and services focused on business and community development including:

- » Community Development Investment Grant – Funds may be used for building renovation, historic preservation, demolition, new construction, infrastructure investment, and project/site development planning. Grants are limited to 25% of eligible project costs, with a maximum of up to \$250,000, and grant recipients must provide a 3:1 match investment in project costs.
- » Brownfield Site Assessment Grant – Funds may be used to identify and quantify the degree and extent of soil, vapor and groundwater contamination.
- » Brownfields Grant - Funds may be used for brownfield redevelopment or associated environmental remediation activities such as environmental investigation, remediation or monitoring of the site; removal of hazardous waste containers; soil removal, capping, barrier installation and vapor intrusion systems; and demolition activities that will facilitate redevelopment in a brownfield project.
- » Downtown Development Programs
  - *Wisconsin Main Street Program* – A free technical assistance program, rather than a direct funding program, provides training, façade renderings, small business consultations, and hiring of outside consultants to address topics such as business recruitment & retention, branding, historic preservation planning and event development.
  - *Connecting Communities Program* – Also a technical assistance program designed to provide training and networking for communities or organizations working on revitalization topics.

### **Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA)**

WHEDA works with developers to finance affordable rental housing and support economic development through its small business guarantee programs. Look to them for New Market Tax Credits, Small Business Financial Products, and Multifamily Financing and Tax Credits.

### **Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT)**

WisDOT allocates federal Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funds to transportation improvement projects that “expand travel choice, strengthen the local economy, improve the quality of life, and protect the environment.” The categories of eligible TAP projects include: trail facilities for non-motorized transport; constructing safe routes for non-drivers; converting abandoned railroad corridors for non-motorized transportation; constructing turnouts, overlooks and viewing areas; community improvement activities; any environmental mitigation activity; the Recreational Trails Program; the Safe Routes to Schools program; and projects in the right-of-way of former Interstate System routes or other divided highways. All TAP projects are funded 80% federally, with a 20% local match. The minimum project cost is \$50,000 for non-infrastructure and \$300,000 for infrastructure projects.



### **Federal Programs**

#### **Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC)**

The low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) program, created in 1986 and made permanent in 1993, is an indirect federal subsidy used to finance the construction and rehabilitation of low-income affordable rental housing. This program was created as an incentive for private developers and investors to provide more low-income housing. Without this incentive, affordable rental housing projects do not generate sufficient profit to warrant the investment.

The LIHTC gives investors a dollar-for-dollar reduction in their federal tax liability in exchange for providing financing to develop affordable rental housing. Investors’ equity contribution subsidizes low-income housing development, thus allowing some units to rent at below-market rates. In return, investors receive tax credits paid in annual allotments, generally over 10 years.

Financed projects must meet eligibility requirements for at least 30 years after project completion. In other words, owners must keep the units rent restricted and available to low-income tenants. At the end of the period, the properties remain under the control of the owner.

<https://www.novoco.com/resource-centers/affordable-housing-tax-credits/lihtc-basics/about-lihtc>

(Source: City of La Crosse, 2018)

### **Achieving the Vision**

In summary, the Downtown Redevelopment Study outlines an approach for positive, incremental redevelopment, reinvestment and intensification throughout the area. The plan outlines a series of achievable goals over the next ten years with potential redevelopment projects that have a reality in the marketplace today and provide a true foundation for transformation.

While the Redevelopment Study prescribes a detailed redevelopment approach for specific projects and likely steps, the plan is also flexible in its application to allow the City of Onalaska to adapt to an ever-changing marketplace. The Redevelopment Study should be utilized as a living document, continually referenced and checked against as development and redevelopment projects occur over time.



