

DOWNTOWN
MORRIS
MASTER PLAN



ENHANCE DOWNTOWN MORRIS

Downtown Morris Master Plan | Adopted August 3rd, 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DOWNTOWN MORRIS MASTER PLAN

Introduction

The downtown Master Plan represents the next step in a long history of City planning and continued strong interest in Downtown Morris. Efforts to enhance the downtown date back to the City's first Downtown Master Plan, adopted in 1995. While some recommendations from that plan have been addressed and some are still relevant today, the plan is very much in need of a modern update given changes to the economy and changes to how people use shop, work and recreate in the internet age.

Outreach + Vision

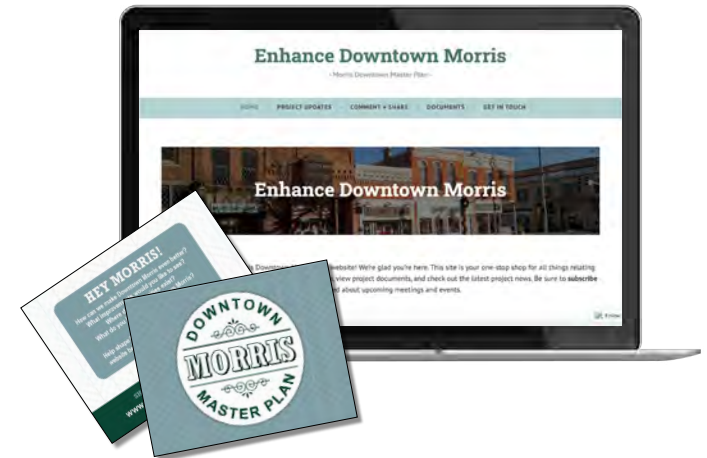
The City of Morris Downtown Master Plan is the result of a ten month-long effort by the City and its partners to both evaluate existing conditions and to consider future plans for Downtown Morris. The City of Morris is fortunate to have a strong, unique identity that fosters a community of involved, caring residents and stakeholders who have the collective goal of continuously maintaining and improving their City. Building on this connection, Morris' Downtown Master Plan involved thoughtful public outreach to make sure that the Plan was informed by the wants and needs of the community.

This Enhance Downtown Morris Plan is designed to build on the successes of the past and chart a path that will foster continued success for years to come. Our vision for the future of Downtown Morris can be summarized in one short, simple phrase:

If you like small towns, you will love Downtown Morris!

What makes us say that? Downtown Morris features:

- **Unique places to shop and dine** – few chains, more mom and pop shops;
- **Fun events for all** – from classic cars to fun runs, art shows and more;
- **Great walks** along the Illinois River and I&M Canal, through charming residential neighborhoods, and along a classic "Main Street" (locally known as Liberty Street);
- A continuing **hub of commerce** and the **center of local government**; and
- A **safe, friendly, and beautiful place** to visit or to call home.



DOWNTOWN MORRIS MASTER PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Market Assessment

This chapter examines Downtown Morris' market conditions, themes from stakeholder interviews conducted during the outreach phase, and findings from the online consumer survey. This chapter also provides an assessment of best practices from four similar downtowns in Illinois: Dixon, Jacksonville, Freeport, and Sterling. Understanding the strategies and actions that have helped similar historic downtowns expand their revitalization efforts can provide context and potential programming ideas for Downtown Morris. Finally, this chapter provides recommendations related to tourism and downtown morris, including leveraging existing assets like the regional The Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau (HCCVB) and Downtown Visitor Center, and creating new attractions like the 'Walk Morris!' walking tours.

Development Opportunities

This chapter examines land use and zoning issues + opportunities for Downtown Morris, including rezoning several areas north of the I&M canal, utilizing the B-2 Planned Development Zoning for a few opportunity sites, and creating a Business Transition zoning district for properties along Route 47. This chapter also identifies, analyzes, and provides recommendations for seven opportunity sites within the Downtown that offer long-term potential for either new construction or strategic reuse of existing buildings that could provide some additional diversity and added value to Downtown Morris.

Placemaking + Urban Design

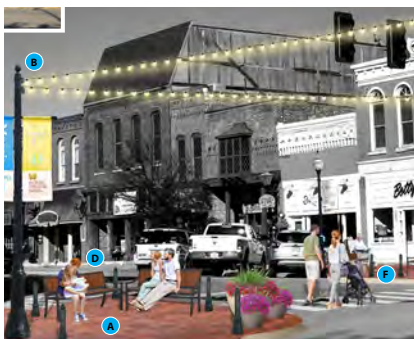
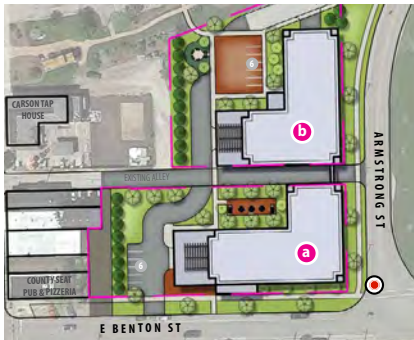
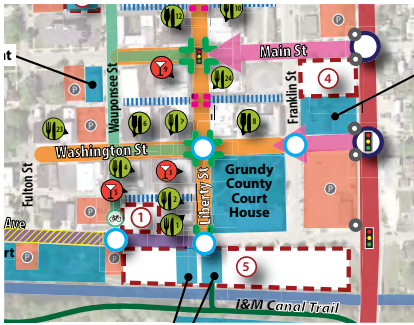
This chapter highlights ways in which the City, partner organizations, local businesses, and residents can incorporate new and enhance existing urban design elements throughout the downtown. High-quality urban design should encourage residents and visitors to stick around, enjoy the environment, dine at restaurants, and shop at stores. For Downtown Morris, urban design should reflect the character and identity of the downtown, enhance connectivity and safety, help create vibrant people places, and provide ample and accessible parking for customers and employees. In addition to providing detailed recommendations, this chapter also provides conceptual plans and renderings for some of the urban design elements highlighted in the plan.

Implementation Strategies

The Implementation Strategies chapter provides action items based on plan recommendations, suggested partners and potential resources, and priority rankings based on community feedback.

Appendix

The Appendix provides additional resources, including COVID-19 Resources; Streetscape Cost Scenarios; Survey Results; Stakeholder Interview Notes; Market Data; and Facade Improvements & Streetscape Recommendations.





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A big **THANKS** to all the Morris residents and business owners that took the time to complete the survey, chat with us during interviews and focus groups, and provided input throughout the planning process. Thanks also to the City of Morris for participation throughout the process, and especially for funding the effort. We are very grateful for the shared thoughts and ideas offered by the Morris Downtown Development Partnership (MDDP) and the Morris Retail Association (MRA). Thanks also to the Grundy County Chamber of Commerce and the Grundy Economic Development Corporation for their participation and suggestions.

City Council

Richard Kopczick, *Mayor*
Herb Wyeth
Jake Duvick
Julian Houston
Kurt Nolen
Derrick Wren
Alex Clubb
Duane Wolfe
Bill Martin

Planning Commission

John Wilkinson, *Chair*
R.H. Coleman
Dennis Hackett
Barry Narvick
Randy Werden
Jim Jennings
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Morris Downtown Development Partnership

J.R. Hock - *President*
Denise Pankey - *Vice President*
Erik Olson - *Treasurer*
Christina Van Yperen - *Secretary*
Steve Barr
Kristi Bennington
Ken Goodwin
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Theresa Lamb
Paula Mercer
Nancy Norton
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Market and Organizational Analysis



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CABINETS & DESIGN BY
Baker Street
INC.

107

107

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

Cabinetry
Planning and Design

107 W. Washington St.
(419) 412-6000
Monday - Friday 9:00 - 5:30
Evenings and Saturdays by Appointment

INKBA

Home Accessories
Cooking Classes
Adults & Kids

A PLAN TO ENHANCE DOWNTOWN MORRIS

How people will live, work, and shop in a community with Morris's history and character is not about dramatic and large-scale change; the City is well established both in regard to its land use and sense of community. Downtown Morris has strong regional attraction power with its vibrant mix of retail businesses, lively community events, and its accessibility to regional recreational amenities.

The challenge is to take a good downtown and make it better.

The Reason –

The downtown Master Plan represents the next step in a long history of City planning and recent interest in enhancing Downtown Morris. Modern efforts to enhance the downtown date back to the City's first Downtown Master Plan, adopted in 1995. The City has successfully addressed several of the recommendations outlined in that plan, including many parking and streetscape recommendations. Many of the other recommendations suggested in the 1995 Downtown Master Plan are relevant today based on the current wants and needs of the community. But the plan is very much in need of a modern update given changes to the economy and changes to how people use small downtowns related to shopping and work in the internet age. Just like when malls were built in the 1970's and created competition for small downtowns, online shopping has created a need to review and refine how those same downtowns are still relevant and essential to people's lives. This Plan is done in the context of understanding and meeting those opportunities and challenges.

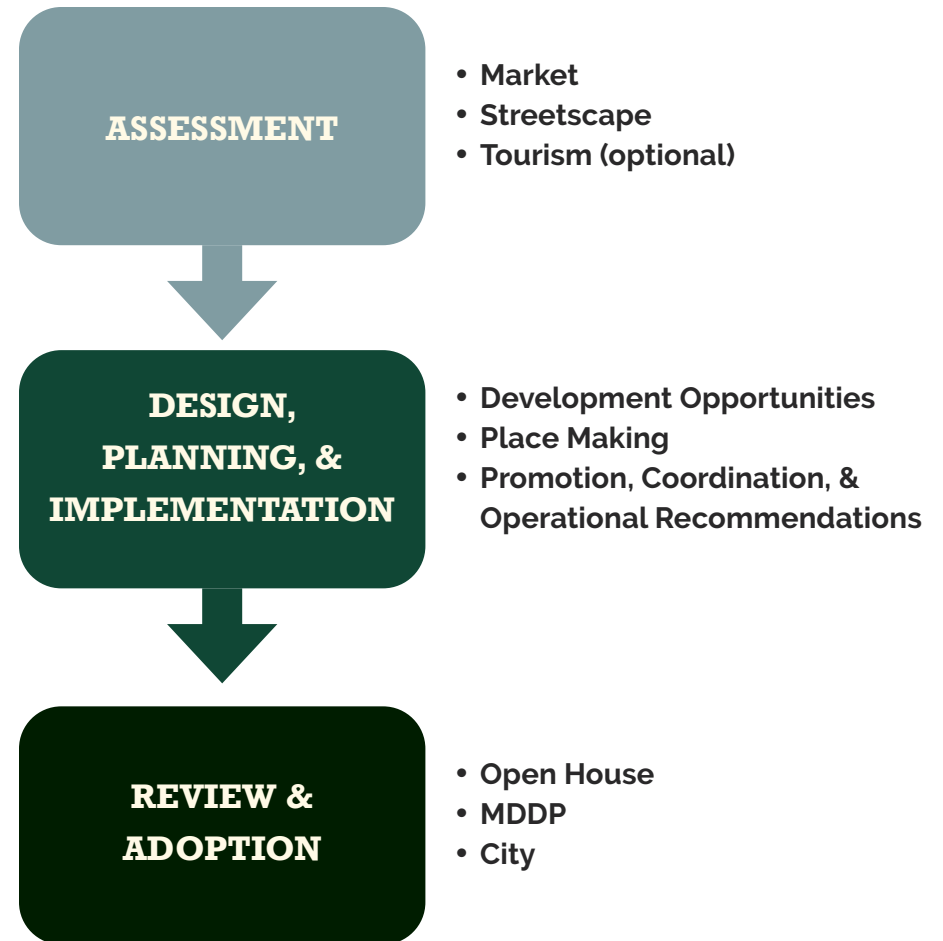


The Process –

The City of Morris Downtown Master Plan is the result of a ten month-long effort by the City and its partners to both evaluate existing conditions and to consider future plans for Downtown Morris. The downtown master planning process included an initial assessment phase focused on understanding where Downtown Morris is today, and what opportunities are on the horizon. During this phase, a great deal of energy was put toward understanding what residents, property owners, and business owners need and want for their community. The second phase of the project focused on development-specific design solutions, and feasible strategies to implement those solutions. And the final phase of the project included a review process for the downtown Master Plan, followed by the adoption of the plan by the City of Morris as a component of their Comprehensive Plan.

Central to the project was the City's partners, including the Morris Downtown Development Partnership, who reviewed technical aspects of the planning process and refined Plan recommendations to ensure they met the unique characteristics of Morris. Integral to the process was the input of the partner organizations, residents at public meetings, and City staff who shared insight, history, and context for the plan. Lastly, the City used a team of consultants with experience and expertise in land use, public engagement, market analysis, and urban design to assess the downtown and advance recommendations for its success.

FIGURE 1. THE PROCESS



ABOUT MORRIS

The City of Morris is situated in northeast Grundy County, approximately 55 miles southwest of Chicago's Loop. Considered part of the southwestern Chicago metropolitan area, Morris is intersected by I-80 running East/West and US Route 47 running North/South and lies just north of the Illinois River along the I&M Canal. Proximity to these major transportation routes offers residents and businesses within Morris excellent access to the Chicago metropolitan area, surrounding and nearby communities, and the Illinois River Valley region as a whole. Other major cities in the area include Ottawa to the west and Joliet to the east.

Morris was incorporated in 1842, the same year that it was chosen as the County seat for Grundy County given its location along the proposed I&M Canal. Once the canal was completed in 1948, it became the first commercial link between Lake Michigan and the Illinois River, which ultimately shaped the way both Chicago and the southwest region developed. Barge and freight traffic were instrumental in growing Morris' local economy, allowing the City to become one of the largest inland grain ports. Around the same time the canal was active in terms of freight transportation, public transportation was also ramping up in the region with the introduction of the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific railroad line, which opened in 1851. Given the speed and efficiency of passenger rail service, people could get to Chicago from the canal, and vice-versa, in record time. What used to take a full day to complete, now took just a few hours. However, passenger service on the Rock Island railroad later discontinued in 1987 due to improved accessibility throughout the region via the highway system, specifically Interstate 80 in the southwest region. A 2003 study examined the potential for an Illinois Valley Commuter Rail Line with a stop at the existing Morris Station in downtown, but no funding has been allocated for this service.

Morris' local character and strong identity are derived from its rich history and location. Morris' now benefits from several unique recreational assets associated with its location, including the I&M Canal Trail, the Illinois River, Gebhard Woods State Park, and William G Stratton State Park. Morris also has a unique, historic downtown – a cherished remnant of the City's history as a bustling inland port City. This downtown area has evolved since the days of freight and rail into a vibrant town center, Downtown Morris remains one of the regions premier downtowns, with many events and unique shops and restaurants that provide both a strong local and regional draw.



FIGURE 2. REGIONAL LOCATION



PAST PLANS

- **1995 Downtown Master Plan** // HyettPalma

The 1995 Morris: The Canal Town Downtown Master Plan by Hyett Palma “presents the findings of a market analysis conducted for the downtown of Morris, Illinois. The results of this analysis formed the foundation used to develop an economic enhancement strategy to further strengthen Downtown.” The market analysis was very thorough, and addressed opportunities for retail, office, and housing. It also included strategies to improve Downtown’s physical environment through facade and streetscape improvements.

- **2003 Comprehensive Plan** // North Central Illinois Council of Governments

- **2010 Comprehensive Plan Update** // Teska Associates, Inc.

- **2018 Comprehensive Plan Update** // Teska Associates, Inc.

“This [2018] Comprehensive Plan is an update to the 2003 Morris Comprehensive Plan. Morris first drafted a Comprehensive Plan in 1967, with an update in 1973. The 2003 update was the result of two plus years of meetings, discussion, and research by the Morris Planning Commission and the North Central Illinois Council of Governments. In the development of that plan a citizen survey was sent to a random sample of Morris residents in the summer of 2001. The survey was used to gather the citizens’ perspectives of the City of Morris. This survey was updated and repeated in 2009 as an on-line survey open to all within the community.

This 2010 update was the result of approximately one year of work by the Morris Planning Commission and the City’s planning consultant, Teska Associates, Inc. The planning commission studied and discussed at length the physical, economic, and social conditions of Morris in projecting what the future of the City should be. As a result, they developed a set of goals, objectives, distance cities, and policies for: general development, land use, housing and residential development, historic preservation, commercial development, public utilities, community facilities, open space and recreation, and ongoing planning.”

– 2018 Comprehensive Plan Update



Morris
SINCE 1974

OPEN
Morris Bakery

DONUTS • BROWNIES
CAKES • COOKIES
CUSTOM ORDERS

315

Morris Bakery

CUPCAKES • COFFEE CAKES
CINNAMON BREAD
POTATO ROLLS

CHAPTER 2.

OUTREACH + VISION

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The City of Morris is fortunate to have a strong and unique identity that fosters a community of involved, caring residents and stakeholders who have the collective goal of continuously maintaining and improving their City. Building on this connection, Morris' Downtown Master Plan involved thoughtful public outreach to make sure that the Plan was informed by the wants and needs of the community. Successfully meeting this goal meant generating project interest, building awareness, marketing outreach tools, and gathering people together to begin the conversation of what the Plan should address. It meant asking the right questions, meeting face-to-face to collect genuine feedback, providing regular and progressive updates over the course of the project, and generating content and documents that could be readily accessible for all, whether in-person (at meetings and workshops) or online (via the website).

Project Marketing:

□ PROJECT CARDS –

As part of the initial push by the City and its partners to inform the public about the project, the project team designed, printed, and distributed over 1,000 project cards to local businesses and individuals. Project cards help get the word out by acting as conversation starters throughout the engagement process. They also provide the downtown master plan website address so residents can learn more and be inspired to contribute.

□ WEBSITE –

The website was set up prior to any planning activities (www.EnhanceDowntownMorris.com). Its role in the process was invaluable – the project website served as a collaborative workspace for residents and stakeholders over the course of the project to learn about the Plan, stay up to date on news and upcoming meetings, and engage with the effort. The website integrated a “follow” feature, allowing users to receive project updates directly to their email. Throughout the project, the website had over 900 total views.

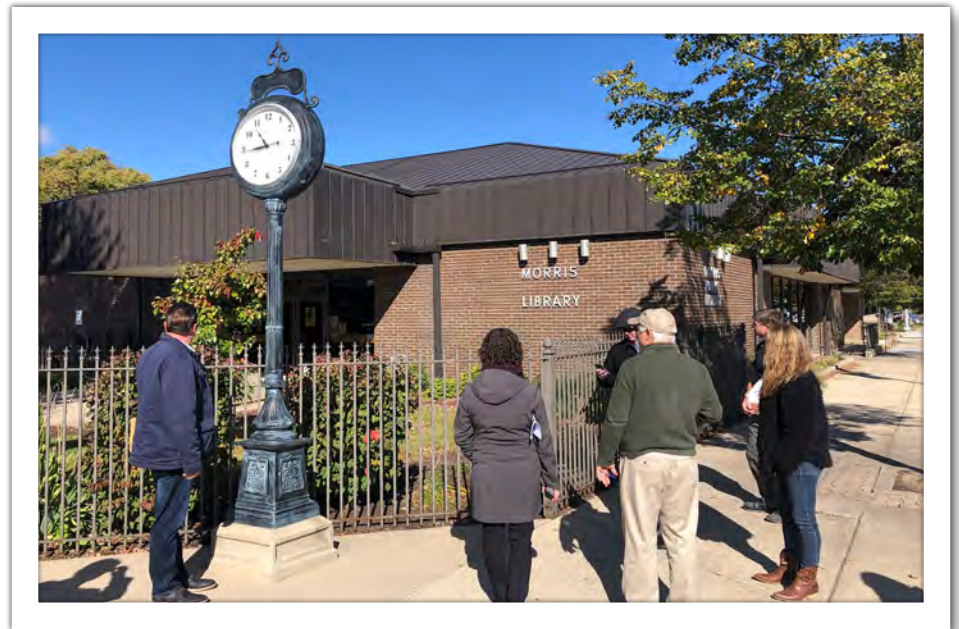
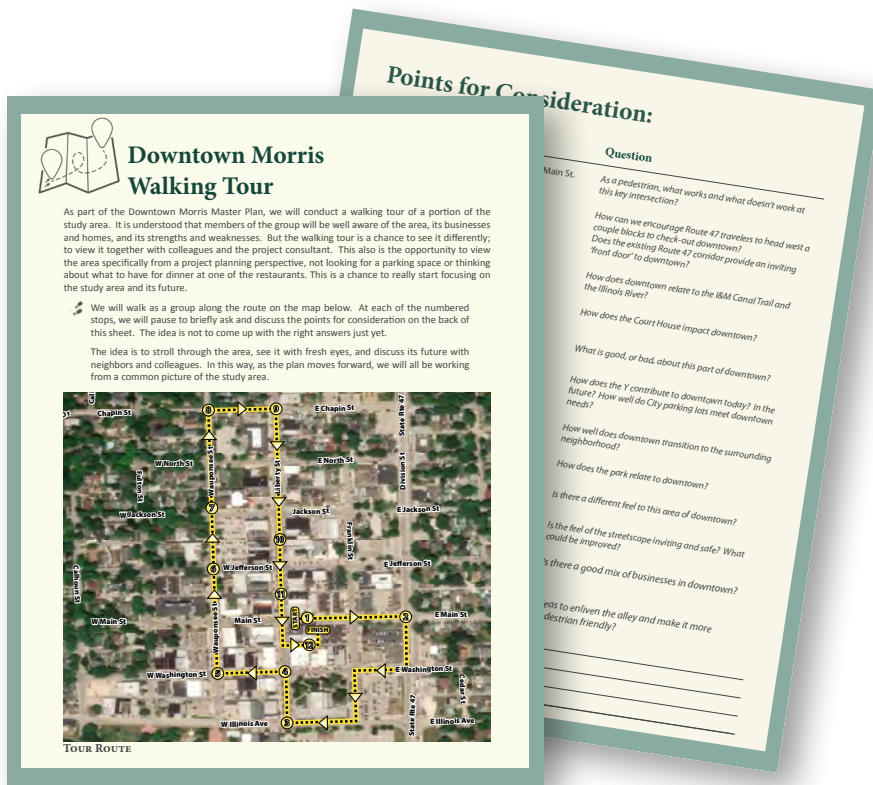
□ SOCIAL MEDIA –

Social media was instrumental for getting the word out during the community outreach phase. Several organizations and local groups used social media to promote the project website and the community survey, helping to get residents involved in the process.



Kick-Off Meeting + Walking Tour:

Morris Downtown Development Partnership (MDDP) members gathered with the Project team to discuss the top challenges, opportunities, and priorities facing Downtown Morris. These discussions help the Project team build a launching point to get the planning process started. Later, the Project team lead members of MDDP and City staff on a walking tour through downtown, stopping at different points along the way to discuss challenges, opportunities and general feedback. Notes collected from the walking tour were analyzed and helped inform this plan.



Stakeholder Interviews:

Interviews with individual stakeholders were conducted on-site in Morris on October 3, 2019, with additional follow-up phone interviews completed by early December 2019. A downtown business focus group, attended by twelve (12) downtown business owners or representatives, was conducted on November 13, 2019. The themes identified through this outreach are described Chapter 3: Downtown Morris Today.

Downtown Resident/Consumer Survey:

To better understand the community's retail and dining preferences, the Project Team conducted an online survey. The Survey was posted to the project website and was shared by several partners and groups on social media. The Survey, open from November 12th, 2019 to December 22nd, 2019, received over 1,000 responses over the six-week period. Survey results are summarized in Chapter 3: Downtown Morris Today.

DOWNTOWN VISION

Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, has been quoted as saying “*change is the only constant in life.*” With older buildings designed for specific times, aging infrastructure, an evolving economy, and a behavioral shift in shopping and work patterns, small downtowns like Morris must change and adapt or run the risk of becoming obsolete. Downtown Morris has done a commendable job of adapting to social, cultural and economic changes and continues to be an attractive, special place that draws both residents and visitors to shop, dine, be entertained, and conduct business. The City has also done a commendable job at updating streets and other infrastructure, providing appropriate parking, and creating a safe and clean environment for residents and visitors.

This Enhance Downtown Morris Plan is designed to build on the successes of the past and chart a path that will respond to change and foster continued success for years to come. Our vision for the future of Downtown Morris can be summarized in one short, simple phrase:

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What makes us say that? Downtown Morris features:

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- A safe, friendly and beautiful place to visit or to call home.





217

fancy goods
& fine events

Whimsy

217

CHAPTER 3.

MARKET ASSESSMENT

Whimsy
fancy goods & fine events

DOWNTOWN MARKET CONDITIONS

Market Assessment:

Fostering ongoing success means continuously building upon Downtown's strengths. Morris' downtown not only has multiple strengths—strong independent businesses, historic character, and destination events — but also engaged downtown leadership that actively wants to capitalize on these strengths.

Downtown Morris' success, like that of any traditional downtown, reflects how the area adapts to change. National market trends will continue to effect downtown business success. Technological change underlies these broader market trends. For example, ground level businesses must sell product through multiple sales channels, whether in-store or online, that engage and expand their customer communities. Purchasing through mobile phones continues to alter consumer behaviors and how individual businesses respond to consumer needs for instant gratification.

The trend encompassing all things 'local' has changed how communities perceive the importance of their downtowns. For Downtown Morris' future business growth, locally-owned businesses with good operating practices, regardless of use, can succeed. The altered consumer behaviors, noted above, also mean that Downtown's businesses can begin to focus on serving a larger trade area that both purchases from and makes visits to Downtown Morris.

Becoming a welcoming place is another aspect of change in downtown districts. Downtowns have always been the central place in any community. It's the place where commerce, people, and civic institutions interact. With changing demographics, including those in Morris' markets, downtowns now serve as the common connector for everyone in the community through events and inclusivity. Being a welcoming place is particularly important to younger consumers, including Millennials, and on a practical level, being welcoming attracts more dollars and more people.

The demographics for Morris's downtown markets are compared with those of the City of Morris in Table 1. A map of the destination, or 30-minute, drive time (Figure 3) follows the market demographics.



TABLE 1. MARKET DEMOGRAPHICS

| | .5-Mile Radius (Pedestrian) | 5-Minute Drive (Convenience) | 30-Minute Drive (‘Near Me’) | City of Morris |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|
| Total Population | 2,772 | 8,594 | 260,139 | 13,671 |
| Total Households | 1,186 | 3,615 | 90,870 | 5,529 |
| Household Size | 2.3 | 2.4 | 2.9 | 2.5 |
| Median Age | 37.5 | 39.5 | 36.7 | 39.4 |
| Projected Population Change by 2023 | -2.5% | 0.9% | 10.9% | 5.7% |
| Renter Occupied Housing Units | 49.4% | 43.1% | 25.1% | 42.7% |
| Total Employees | 1,383 | 4,352 | 95,196 | 6,249 |
| Average Household Income | \$69,051 | \$76,009 | \$85,343 | \$80,520 |
| Median Household Income | \$58,962 | \$63,384 | \$71,398 | \$67,294 |
| Per Capita Income | \$29,762 | \$32,176 | \$29,998 | \$32,793 |
| Estimated Spending: Dining | \$3,868,542 | \$12,557,136 | \$315,627,858 | \$20,107,867 |

Source: © 2017 Experian, Inc. All Rights Reserved, Alteryx, Inc.

Definitions for Downtown's markets are shown below.

- **5-Mile, or Pedestrian, Market:** This market includes nearby residents and employees who can easily walk to Downtown Morris.
- **5-Minute, or Convenience Drive, Market:** Located within a 5-minute drive or a 10-minute bike ride to Downtown Morris, these residents and employees can readily patronize Downtown's businesses.
- **30-Minute, or Destination, Market:** This destination market (shown in Figure 3) has increased in importance for all commercial districts with the advent of online and mobile enabled purchasing. For most consumers, 30-minutes represents the drive time for same or next day pick-up of an online purchase. ‘Near Me’ searches are also important for consumers in selecting restaurants and determining events, such as festivals or arts activities, to attend.

Downtown's more proximate markets (.5 mile and 5-minute drive time) have smaller populations with minimal projected population growth when compared with the 30-minute, or destination market. This 30-minute market is growing in population and younger, with higher incomes and larger households. This same market also includes the entire City of Morris. Though not shown above, the 30-minute market and the City are becoming more diverse. The Hispanic population is currently 17.7% in the 30-minute market and 11.3% in the City, and the total Hispanic populations projected to increase in both markets by 2023--11.1% (30-minute market) and 5.7% (City). Overall, this larger destination market is strong. It presents an opportunity to capture additional sales while positioning Downtown Morris as a place to spend time.

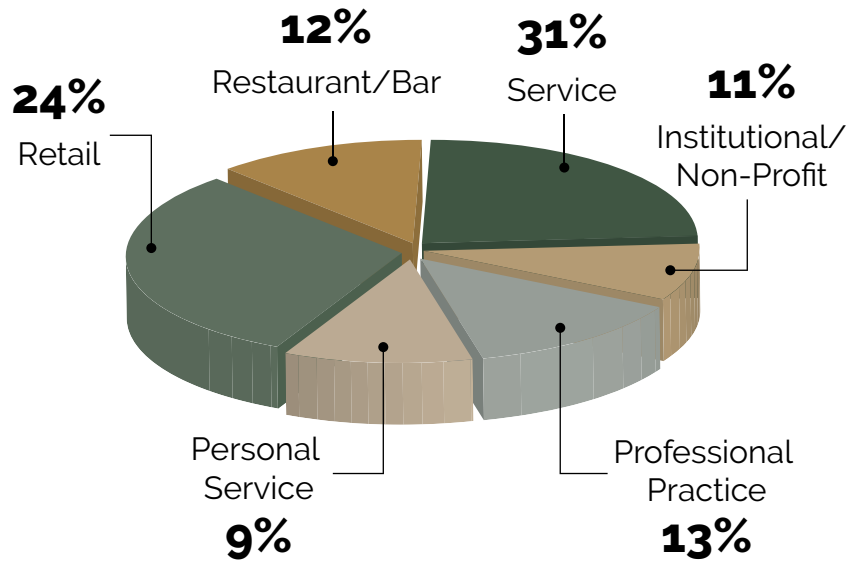
FIGURE 3. DESTINATION MARKET (30-MINUTE DRIVE-TIME)



Business Mix:

Downtown's overall mix of businesses, shown in Figure 4, is balanced. Nearly $\frac{1}{4}$ of the mix is comprised of professional practices and institutions, reflecting Morris' position as a county seat and regional center. These two (2) mix components, combined with the service businesses, and their employees are also an important downtown customer group. There are twice as many retailers as restaurants, and opportunities for the growth of both sectors are addressed in these Master Plan recommendations.

FIGURE 4. DOWNTOWN BUSINESS MIX



Source: MDDP Downtown Restaurants, Retailers & Storefront Businesses dated October 3, 2019; BDI.

Local Real Estate:

Real estate data for the Morris area, including downtown, is shown in Table 2. This data includes both commercial and residential market information.

TABLE 2. REAL ESTATE MARKET DATA

| Commercial Real Estate | Asking Rents PSF | Terms | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Available Lease Space | \$10-\$15 | Negotiable | - |
| Residential Real Estate | Asking Rents PSF/Month | Median Sales List Price | Median Price Sold |
| Housing Units for Rent | \$1.10-\$1.60 | - | - |
| Housing Units for Sale | - | \$229,900 | \$174,000 |

Sources: : Realtor.com; Trulia.com; Zillow.com; BDI.

Downtown Morris' commercial real estate market is bifurcated, given the substantial number of business owners who also own their buildings. The current estimated vacancy rate is about 8%, based upon data provided by MDDP. Recent commercial asking rents (non-owner occupied) in Downtown Morris range from \$10-15 per square foot (PSF), with varied expenses passed through to tenants. Morris' comparatively lower real estate tax rates, as shown in Table 3, ensure lower amounts for this lease pass-through to potential downtown tenants.

TABLE 3. PROPERTY TAX RATE COMPARISON

| Community | 2018 Property Tax Rate | Percent Above Morris |
|------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Morris | 8.0397 | n/a |
| Minooka | 8.7639 | 9.0% |
| Plainfield | 8.6686 | 7.8% |
| Shorewood | 9.0900 | 13.1% |
| Ottawa | 11.0520 | 37.5% |
| Yorkville | 10.5471 | 31.2% |

Sources: : County Tax Records; Teska Associates Inc.

Within the City's housing market, residential asking rents are typically in the \$1.10-1.60 PSF range, with some properties offered at rents above and below this range. Available residential rentals also include single-family homes of varied sizes. Properties available in and near downtown are available at these same price points. None of the residential rental listings were for new housing products.

Realtor.com describes Morris' 'for sale' residential market as a balanced market. The median list and median sales prices, as of February 2020, were \$229,900 and \$174,000, respectively.



STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Stakeholder interviews and focus groups provide insight into Downtown's opportunities and issues. This information adds context to the primary and secondary market data assessed in any downtown study. For downtowns, like Morris, which capture their customers from larger market geographies, understanding local assets and commercial successes is important to developing market growth strategies.

Key themes highlighted in the interview are provided on page 17.

❑ “HOMECOMERS”

Morris, like other communities, has young adults and young families returning to their hometowns for family reasons, quality of life, and cost of living. More children’s and outdoor activities would connect with younger residents—current or potential.

❑ MODERN RETAIL

Downtown’s businesses need to consider how doing business is changing. Many shoppers go elsewhere because the business mix lacks variety. Businesses are not changing fast enough to accommodate anyone with a mobile phone. E-commerce will be important to their future and to connecting with existing and potential consumers. New store formats, such shared spaces, should also be considered for vacancies.

❑ MODERN DINING

The City’s liquor ordinance needs revisions to attract different types of restaurants and to enable outdoor and rooftop dining. More sit-down restaurants are needed in Downtown Morris. Installation of commercial kitchens to accommodate new restaurants is very expensive, particularly when building renovations are required to address ventilation and other issues. Ideally, incentives would be offered to such businesses in the form of loans or grants to assist in making projects feasible. Funding for such programs could come from TIF or from a Special Service Area.

❑ INCENTIVIZE IMPROVEMENTS

To capitalize on the remaining years of the downtown Tax Increment Financing district, the City and Downtown’s private sector interests can jointly identify TIF eligible improvements to Downtown’s buildings and physical environment, and structure incentive programs to address those needs.

❑ IMPROVE PARKING MANAGEMENT

Parking management, specifically regulating and enforcing varied limits based upon parking use throughout downtown, can be improved. Also, handicapped parking spaces in certain areas are unsuitable for ramps or ramping.

❑ TOO MUCH OF “THE SAME”

Too much of Downtown’s business offering is ‘the same.’ Too many retailers carry similar merchandise, and there are too many similar bars offering food.

❑ LEVERAGE DOWNTOWN + RIVERFRONT

Greater focus is needed on downtown and the riverfront as important amenities instrumental in Morris’ quality of place. This is needed to attract younger professionals to live in Morris, more customers to Downtown Morris, and more investment throughout the community.

❑ FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

The vision for Downtown’s future needs to recognize ongoing change. Too much of what gets done in Morris is reactive, emphasizing how things have always been done, versus the willingness to adapt and be pro-active.

❑ MORRIS AS AN “EXPERIENCE”

Downtown’s strongest opportunity to capitalize on its heritage and character is the basis for its unique experience.

❑ ACTIVITY-BASED DOWNTOWN

Downtown needs to become more activity-based. This encompasses outdoor dining, gathering spaces, and physical activity of all types, recognizing the social aspect of why people visit downtown.

❑ TOURISM + RECREATION

Depending upon repairs to state facilities, trails, and open space along the Illinois River and I&M Canal, Downtown Morris can benefit from additional visitors and outdoor recreation amenities for area residents.

❑ BIKE FRIENDLY

Morris is a family-friendly community and a community that benefits from regional tourism along the I&M canal. However outdated bicycle regulations prohibit residents and visitors from riding their bikes into and through the downtown. Downtown Morris would benefit from updated regulations, clear routes, and improved bike amenities.

RESIDENT/CONSUMER SURVEY

The downtown Morris Resident/Consumer Survey was conducted from November 8, 2019 to December 23, 2019. This online survey consisted of 19 questions and received 1,060 responses. This response number was excellent and provided important primary research for the Master Plan process. This result was also the second highest number of total survey responses obtained in client communities with similar population.

The purpose of this online survey was twofold--to identify respondent preferences specific to Downtown Morris and to inform this Master Plan's market strategies. Respondents were not required to answer any individual survey question. This summary describes the key findings from the survey results. The complete survey results are provided in Appendix C of this Master Plan document.

The survey results identify what respondents think, not why they think the way they do. These results also identify respondent behaviors and attitudes about downtown and how they experience Downtown Morris. Overall, survey respondents were very direct in their observations about Downtown Morris and the kinds of actions needed to continuously improve the district.

The demographic characteristics of the downtown Morris survey respondent pool are:

- **73.4% of respondents were Morris residents**, representing an equivalent response rate of 19.2% of Morris households. Also, **51.7% of all respondents work in Morris**.
- **55.4% of respondents provided contact information**. This group represents an important pool of future downtown supporters or volunteers.
- In addition to the large number of respondents providing contact information, **46% of survey respondents added written comments** about Downtown Morris and how to sustain or improve the area.
- **44% of all respondents were aged 25-44**. This subgroup of respondents is particularly important for Morris' downtown businesses for two (2) reasons—they are in their highest spending and earning years, and they are forming and growing their households. In the survey Appendix, any differences between the full respondent pool and this subgroup are specifically identified by survey question.



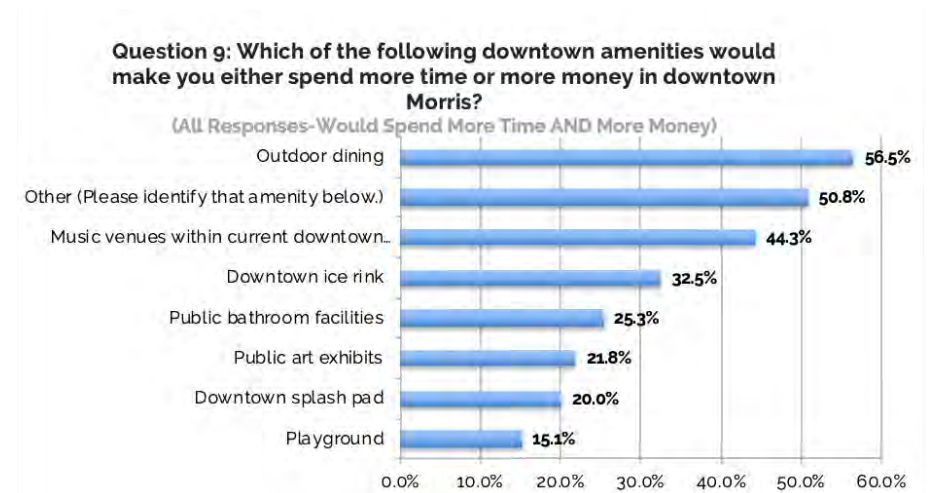
Survey findings with strategic implications for downtown growth include:

- **Morris residents are active patrons** of Morris' businesses, whether located downtown or elsewhere in the City.
- Dining, particularly at casual restaurants, was highly rated by respondents both in survey responses and in their written comments. Over 40% of respondents are dining out two (2) or more times weekly. **Outdoor dining was selected as the highest rated downtown amenity**, with respondents willing to spend more time and more money in Downtown Morris.
- Reflecting national trends, **online shopping is frequent among all respondents**, and 'buying online and picking up in store' (known as BOPIS) is increasing in frequency. Among the Morris survey respondents, 42.2% had made this type of purchase within the last month. Those purchases were primarily made at major retailers and restaurants, such as Kohl's or Jimmy John's, but six (6) local businesses (4 in Downtown Morris) were also identified. Capitalizing on this emerging consumer trend will enable greater customer loyalty and increase the opportunity for additional sales dollars when these customers physically visit these stores or restaurants.
- Certain **downtown special events** like Corn Fest, Cruise Nights and the French Hens Market are attended by high percentages of survey respondents; others are not. Ongoing evaluation of each event and Downtown's calendar of events should be conducted annually to ensure that event success is routinely assessed using relevant metrics, such as attendance and value to sponsors.

- Respondents were asked to rate specific downtown factors (Question 8) controlled by the public and private sectors. Specific to private sector interests, **respondents were the least satisfied with store operating hours and the quality and variety of goods available** in Downtown Morris. For the public sector, respondents were the least satisfied with Downtown's limited green space and greenery and with bike circulation.

Overall, the written comments from survey respondents were positive and optimistic about Downtown Morris and its future. They want a great downtown for residents and for visitors. Respondents also love Downtown's unique and historic character, noting that some Downtown's buildings need improvement. Common themes throughout the respondent comments expressed the desire for better restaurants and more interesting stores, with a strong preference for independently owned businesses.

FIGURE 5. CONSUMER SURVEY QUESTION 9



BEST PRACTICES ASSESSMENT

Understanding the strategies and actions that have helped similar historic downtowns expand their revitalization efforts can provide context and potential programming ideas for Downtown Morris. In Morris, an established downtown organizational framework already exists for implementing this Master Plan and for ensuring sustained focus on downtown success. Among other positives, Downtown's business and property owners and local partners, such as the Grundy County Chamber and Grundy EDC, actively support continued downtown success. This best practice research, as summarized below, emphasizes those strategies that can capitalize on Downtown Morris' multiple assets and the local capacity to expand revitalization efforts.

The communities considered as part of this assessment have historic character and market-supported opportunities. All four (4) communities examined are in Illinois. Most have similar populations or are slightly larger than Morris. Their downtowns function as regional commercial centers, and three (3) are also county seats. All of the communities are actively working to revitalize their downtown districts. These communities are **Dixon, Jacksonville, Freeport, and Sterling**.

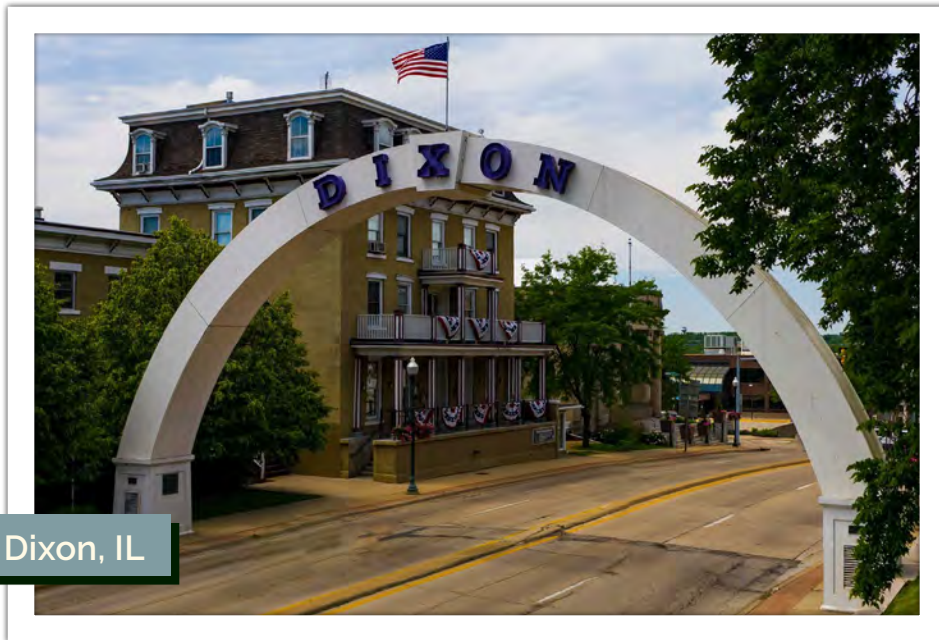
The best practices, applicable to Downtown Morris, identified in these downtowns, include:

- In each community, one downtown organization exists to advocate for Downtown's private sector interests (businesses and property owners). These organizations vary in type, structure and budget. In two communities (Dixon and Freeport), the downtown revitalization program is part of a larger organization with full-time staff dedicated to downtown. The other two communities have stand-alone non-profit entities with full-time staff. Both are established Main Street programs.
- These four downtown organizations recognize that an ongoing, strong partnership with the public sector is critical to addressing downtown issues. At the same time, the public sector recognizes that these organizations can accomplish work that they cannot.



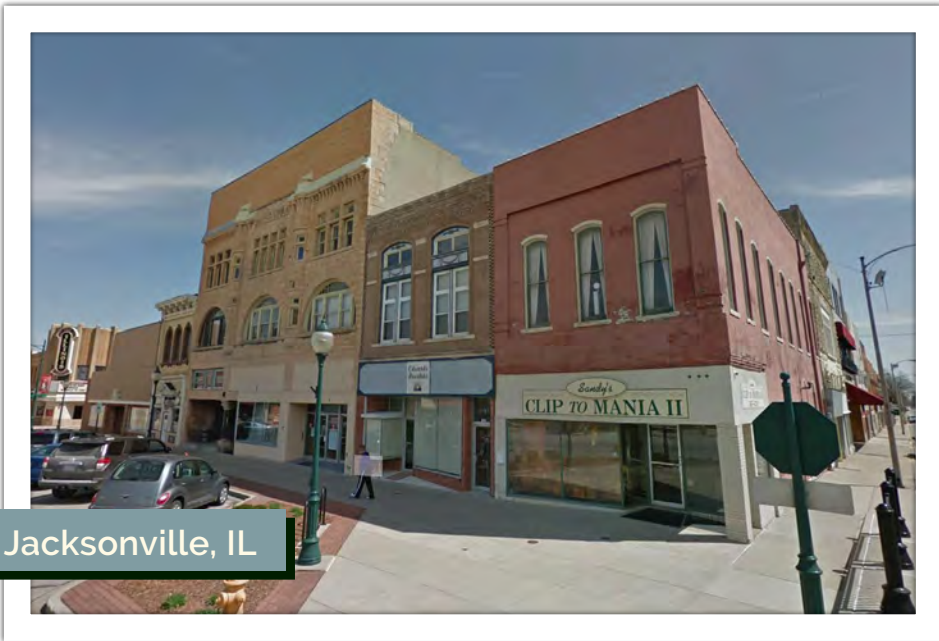
OTTAWA "PICK US" CAMPAIGN

Downtown Ottawa's "Pick Us" promotion (<https://pickusottawail.com/>) provides an integrated marketing approach for their Downtown's businesses, events, and other activities in the community. Specific to Ottawa's downtown, these ongoing promotional activities highlight Downtown's major attractions, including Tangled Roots Brewery, historic sites, and businesses. The range of hospitality options is easily navigated online, on mobile phones, and through available materials. While Ottawa's effort is organized by their visitor center and funded through hotel/motel tax, this type of unified approach to marketing and promotion can work for Downtown Morris. By providing relevant and user-oriented information, a singular message about Downtown Morris' many assets can be reinforced to residents, visitors, and potential investors.



Dixon, IL

Source: Discover Dixon Facebook

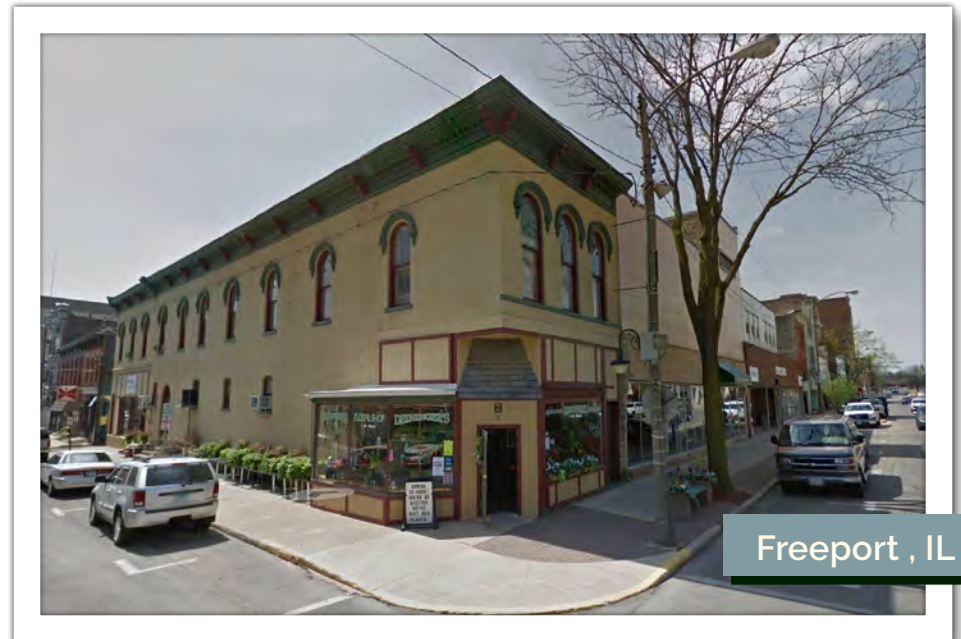


Jacksonville, IL

Source: Google Maps

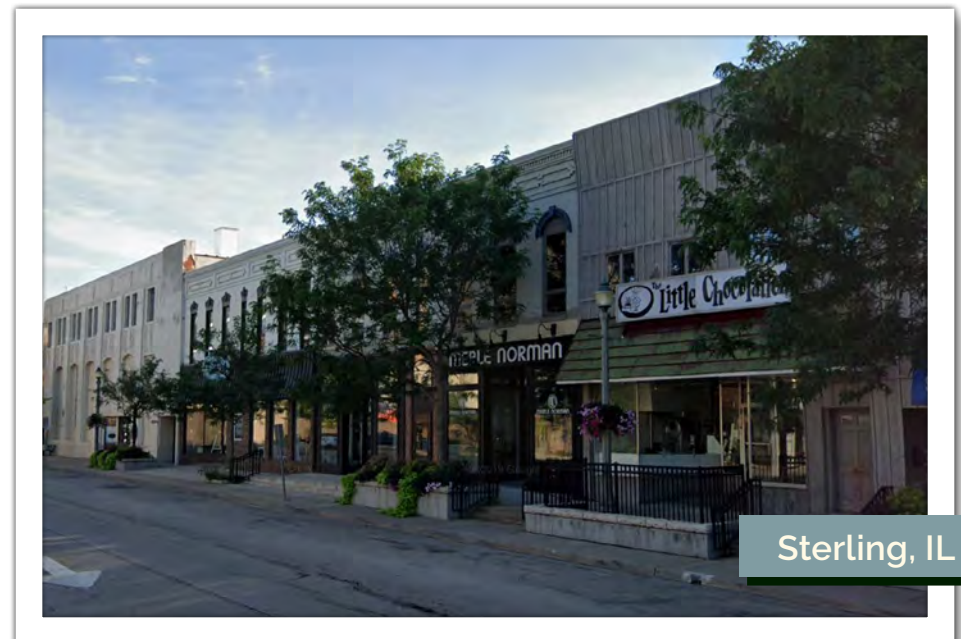
- Like Morris, each of these cities benefit from an engaged downtown business community committed to downtown success. One downtown organization is partially funded by Special Service Area (SSA) proceeds; two (2) others are exploring that sustainable funding option.
- In addition to partnerships with local government, partnerships with other local entities, including major downtown employers and regional institutions, ensure shared resources, access to funding and expertise, and collaborative marketing and events.
- These individual downtown organizations continue to build their operating capacity, credibility, and ability to expand the scope of their downtown work. Creativity is key to their success, including finding funding or resources for strategic programming.
- These organizations partner with their local or regional economic development groups to foster small business growth and solve business problems. Examples include:
- Partnering with the area's Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to provide one-on-one services to business owners and to identify suitable downtown tenants. For Downtown's like Morris, this partnership may also include business succession planning;
 - Incentives structured to attract and support new business types, such as restaurants, or to mitigate the cost of meeting local regulatory requirements, such as grease traps; and

- Business recruitment conducted as a partnership effort, including the property owner/representative, downtown organization, City staff, the local Chamber of Commerce, and the area EDC or CDC.
- These downtown organizations recognize that consumers visit their downtowns because of the district's local businesses and how their downtown environment makes consumers 'feel' during a visit. Making information about downtown readily available to residents and visitors (and investors) in multiple ways using all media is strategic to attraction and investment.
- The downtown organizations also foster a local experience centered on a range of local stories that resonate with different groups within the community. Examples include engaging high school students in certain downtown programs or promoting local cultures and immigrant-owned businesses. When residents strongly identify with their downtown, visitors will also enjoy the local experience. The goal is to make the downtown welcoming to their entire community and by extension, to all who visit.
- In these downtowns, focusing on sidewalk vitality cultivates their downtown experience. This trend is considered the logical next step, assuming other downtown physical improvements and real estate developments are ongoing.



Freeport , IL

Source: Google Maps



Sterling, IL

Source: Google Maps

TOURISM & DOWNTOWN MORRIS

As with many historic downtowns, local businesses need to generate sales from visitors and from residents to remain viable. Same day visitors from the region, primarily the destination market described above, will remain important to Downtown Morris. This factor reflects a broader national travel trend toward increased domestic travel. This growing trend encompasses five (5) factors—

- The perception of experiences and vacation memories as more valuable. These experiences vary, ranging from 'glamping' to weekend family road trips;
- Interest in destinations that embrace their unique local story and educate travelers in new ways. The increasing interest in places, like Little Rock, AK, associated with the Civil Rights movement is one example;
- Balancing tourism growth with a sensitivity to the local vision of what is important to their individual communities;
- Identifying ways to increase visitor spending versus focusing on increasing visitor numbers¹; and
- Like all sectors, the impact of technology looms large. For the tourism sector, this impact affects all aspects, from mobile phone usage to highly specialized travel agent booking apps².

According to OECD data, shown in Table 4, the total numbers of same day visits/excursions in the U. S. have varied slightly over the most recent three (3) year reporting period. Following this national data, Illinois Bureau of Tourism data in Table 5 shows the impact of domestic and international tourism statewide, including in Grundy County. The County ranks 29th among all Illinois counties. In the most recent county level reporting periods (2015 and 2016), tourism dollars, employment, and revenues increased in Grundy County.

¹ | Chris Davidson, "5 Essential Trends in Travel Marketing," D. K. Shifflet Blog Post on February 4, 2020.

² | "The Impacts of Technology on Travel," Travel Technology and Solutions Blog Post on March 20, 2020.



TABLE 4. NATIONAL TOURISM STATISTICS

| U. S. Domestic Tourism: All Trips | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Year | *2018 | 2017 | 2016 |
| Total Domestic Trips | 2,206,600,000 | 2,247,900,000 | 2,291,100,000 |
| Overnight Visitors (Tourists) | 1,566,686,000 | 1,618,488,000 | 1,658,950,200 |
| Same-Day Visitors (Excursionists) | 639,914,000 | 629,412,000 | 632,149,800 |

Sources: : OECDStat (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) obtained March 18, 2020; BDI.
*2018 data is the most recently available

TABLE 5. ILLINOIS TOURISM

| Economic Impact of Illinois Travel: Statewide and Grundy County** | | | | |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | 2015 Statewide | 2016 Statewide | 2015 Grundy County | 2016 Grundy County |
| Expenditures (In \$ Millions) | \$34,447.13 | \$35,173.99 | \$68.55 | \$71.91 |
| Payroll (In \$ Millions) | \$9,602.82 | 10, 243.48 | \$9.01 | \$9.87 |
| Employment (In Thousands) | 292.54 | 302.45 | 0.39 | 0.41 |
| State Tax Receipts (In \$ Millions) | \$1,695.18 | \$1,767.68 | \$4.82 | \$5.17 |
| Local Tax Receipts (In \$ Millions) | \$815.79 | \$871.08 | \$1.23 | \$1.35 |

Sources: : *Economic Impact of Travel on Illinois Counties 2016*, U. S. Travel Association, September 2017; BDI.
 **This is the most recent report available on the economic impact by county.

The Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau (HCCVB)

The Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau (HCCVB) promotes tourism throughout the 97-mile I&M Canal corridor, including Grundy County and Morris. This region includes Starved Rock and Mathiessen State Parks near Utica. The combined visitor numbers for both parks was 2.47 million in 2019, down from 3.5 million in 2018₃. With all State Parks closed for part of 2020, visitor numbers are expected to remain low this year but are expected to increase in coming years. With visitor numbers similar to some national parks, Starved Rock visitors are important to the regional economy, and balancing visitor numbers with stress to park facilities continues. Funding for both park’s operations and maintenance remains challenged, despite the 2019 decline in visitor numbers.

Visitor Center

Morris' visitor center is housed in the Grundy County Chamber offices, located at the north end of Morris' downtown. This visitor center serves as a local resource for Downtown Morris and for visitors to the Heritage Corridor. To enhance the visitor experience, additional signage at the visitor center and at key downtown locations would assist visitors to Morris and the region. Supplementing the visitor center efforts, the Morris Downtown Development Partnership (MDDP) and Morris Retail Association (MRA) work with the Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau (HCCVB) and local media to attract visitors. Identifying additional ways, including optimizing how visitors see Downtown Morris online, will enhance these attraction efforts and enable greater sales growth for downtown.



3 | Visitor numbers are estimated through car counts, assuming 5.5 persons per entering car. Visitor numbers cited are as publicized by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Walk Morris!

Walking is an activity that everyone can enjoy, and Downtown Morris is a great place to do that! MDDP already has an existing walking tour that takes you past many of the City's more historic structures. Additional routes are recommended with varying focus – all with the intent of highlighting unique and interesting places in and around Downtown Morris. Some routes could focus more on adjacent residential neighborhoods, some could focus on parks and open space areas, and others could build on the community's history.

Some research suggests that a walk of about two miles, or about 40 minutes for a typical pace, is an ideal length to help maintain fitness. Having at least one walk of that length is recommended. Another thought is to work with other nearby communities along the Illinois River/ I&M Canal Heritage Corridor to develop a series of walks in each community. Each town would emphasize unique "local" (and thus differentiating) activities based on local resources and culture. For example, Morris could do a Tuesday night event that attracts regional visitors, and then Wednesday night Ottawa would have their event. Through joint promotion, all communities could benefit by increased tourism visits and spin-off shopping and dining in local establishments.

FIGURE 6. WALKING TOUR: HISTORY



17 Lot's Block
809 W. Washington St.

This property was originally owned by the Irish canal boat captain, John McNeill, who opened a provision store here. In 1847 Hanson Hubbard and Lewis Lot turned it into a fancy dry goods store. Rip Kandelberg moved his business here in 1933.

18 Hanna & Leiby's
83 W. Washington St.

Edmund Hanna and Dr. David Leiby built this three-story brick store. Hanna ran the dry goods department and Dr. Leiby sold medicines. This brick building survived the fire of 1867 which burned the entire block to the west.

19 Frank Bros. Clothing Store
812 E. Washington St.

Built by Max Frank in 1882, this is a prime example of Italian commercial architecture. In 1905 it was purchased by the Hyatt Brothers and renamed as the Post Office.

20 Grady County Courthouse
811 E. Washington St.

This is the third courthouse, completed in 1913. The original courtroom on the second floor was restored in 2000. Memorials on the square include the "Indian Plaque" of Illini Chief Neoganta, the Civil War "Soldier's Monument" erected in 1899, two World War I cannons, and the Korean/Vietnam Veterans Memorial dedicated in 1991.

21 Canal Port Plaza / I&M Canal

End your tour at Canal Port Plaza and the historic I & M Canal.

Morris History

Morris began as a location on the proposed Illinois and Michigan Canal which would link the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. During its construction from 1836 to 1848, this was one of several towns that grew up along its banks—supplying contractors, housing workers, and enticing newcomers.

In 1841, after William Armstrong successfully petitioned the Illinois Legislature to create two new counties out of the vast county of La Salle, Grady County needed a county seat. There were two possible locations, but the Canal Commissioners could not reach an agreement. When Isaac Morris, of Quincy, cast his vote for the location favored by the local residents, they gratefully named the town after him.

Leander Newport was appointed surveyor, and directed to lay out the town into lots, blocks, streets, and alleys, with a public square. The original town was bound to the north by Washington Street, to the east by Cedar Street, to the west by Wauponsee Street, and to the south by the canal.

Mail to the new town was carried by stage coach before the canal opened. In 1839, the residents builtiskey Bridges over North Creek to induce the Frank and Walker Stage Line to change their route from Chicago to Galena and come through Morris. In 1845, it finally did, after the United States Postal Department mandated daily delivery for the new county seat.

With the opening of the I & M Canal in 1848, the town prospered. Wooden structures went up quickly for grain elevators, workshops, hotels, and stores. Then, in 1867, there was a fire on Washington Street. A fire district was implemented, enforcing more substantial building materials like brick and stone. A building boom followed and the wooden buildings were replaced. After the arrival of the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad in 1852, Morris grew to the north.

Factories mingled close to town, beginning with The Plow Factory built west of Liberty Street on Illinois Avenue. The Wolfed Tannery followed around 1858, Colhard Brewery in 1866, The Culbert Hardware in 1873, and Northwestern Noisies in 1909. The Morris Paper Mill was established in 1915.

The history of Morris is based on the development of transportation—from railroads to canal, from railroad to trucking to buildings used as an architectural record of its growth from the past.

Morris, Illinois Self-Guided Walking Tour of the Morris Downtown Commercial Historic District

Liberty Street 1858

Grady County Courthouse 2003

Illinois & Michigan Canal 1848

Heritage Corridor

ILLINOIS AND MICHIGAN CANAL

Morris Downtown
development partnership, inc.
1861 94-0245
www.downtownmorris.com

▲ Morris Self-Guided Walking Tour Pamphlet

FIGURE 7. WALKING TOUR: SHOPPING & DINING

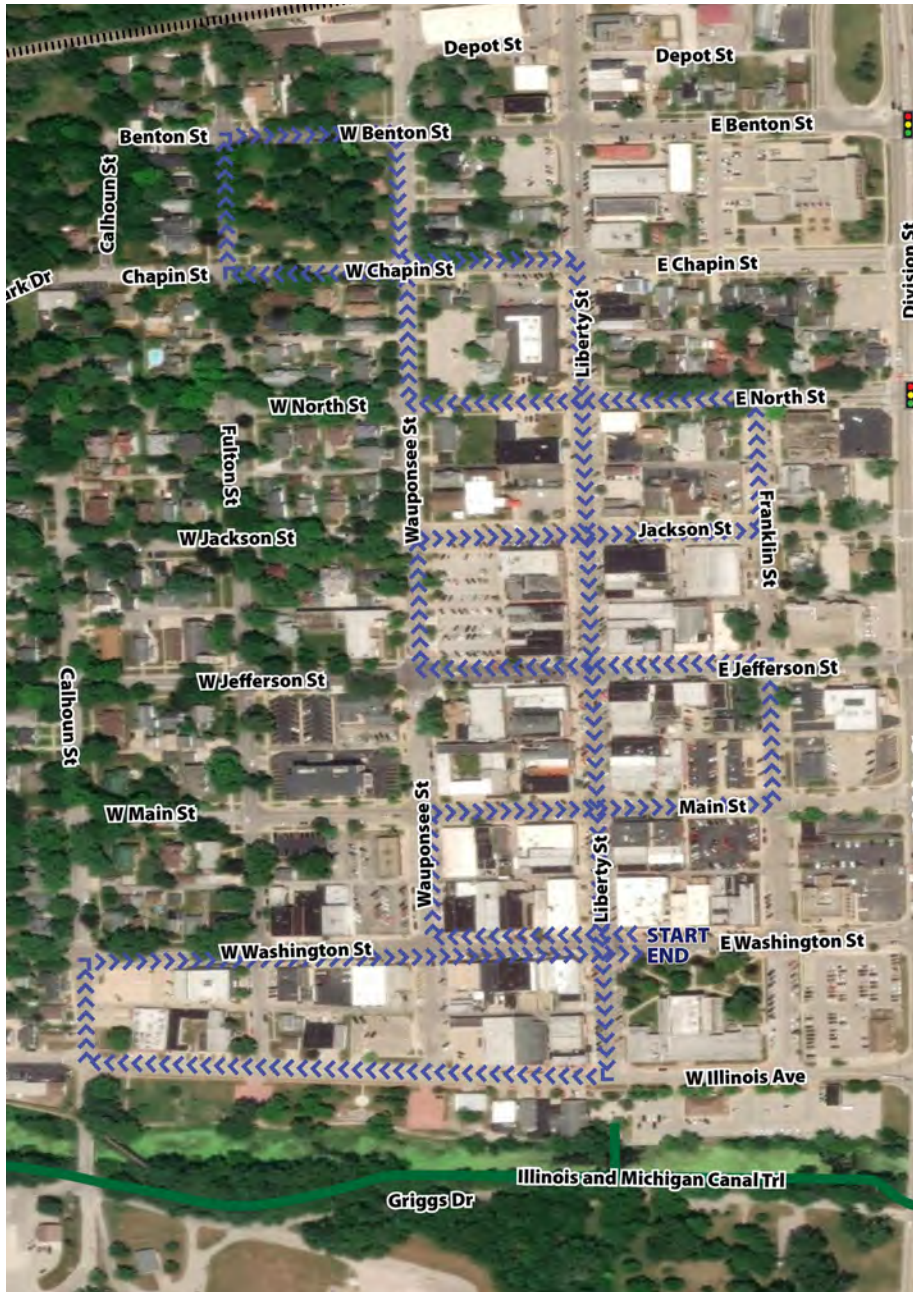
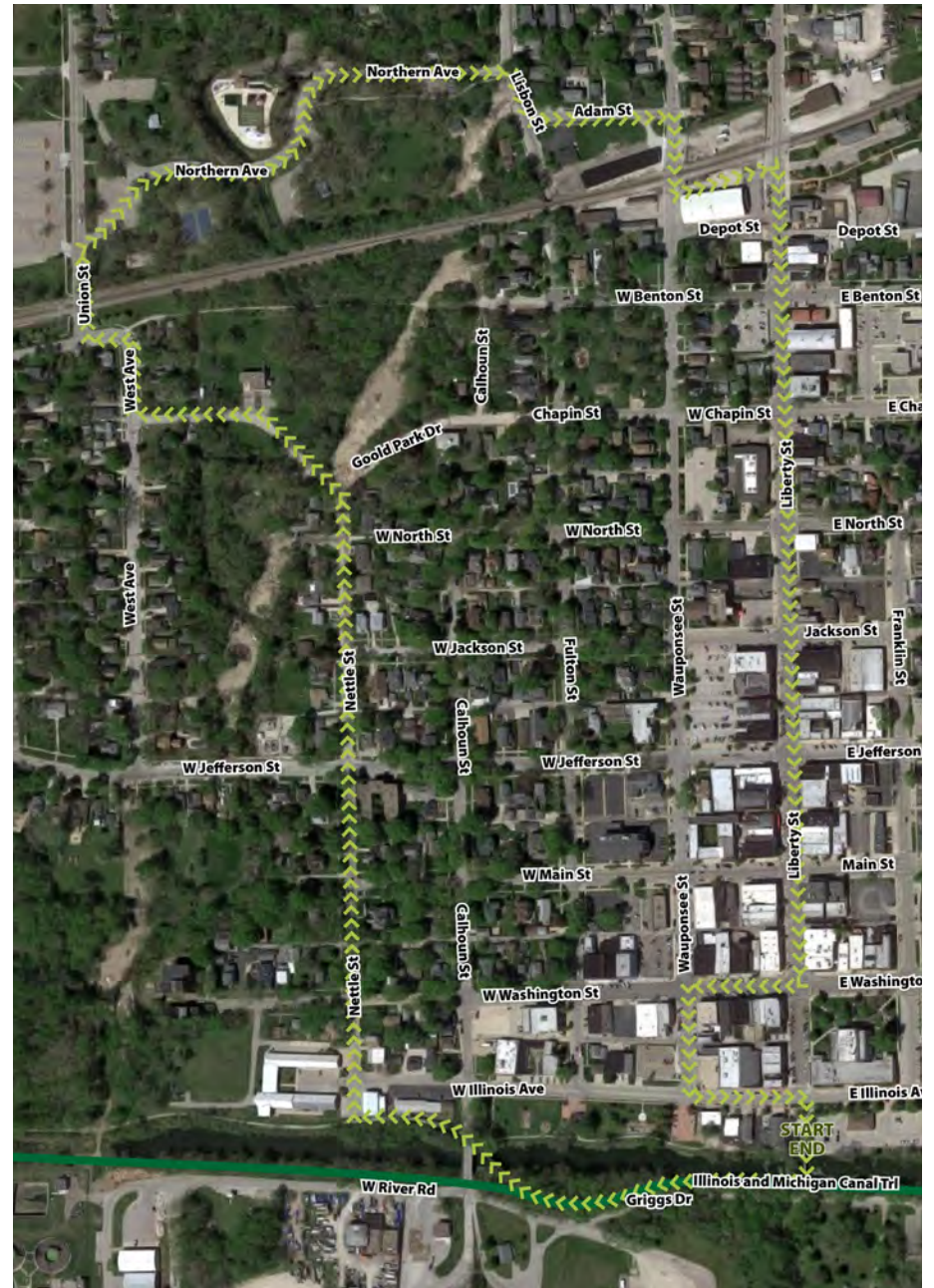


FIGURE 8. WALKING TOUR:





CHAPTER 4.

DEVELOPMENT

OPPORTUNITIES

LAND USE AND ZONING ISSUES

Change can be challenging in an established, built-out environment. But change is critical for downtown, allowing it to respond to changes in community wants and needs, market conditions, demographics, etc. While inevitable, it does not need to be random and unregulated. Considering land use in a plan allows the community to set context for that change, outline where it can fit into the community, and set out how it can best occur.

To borrow an often-used phrase, “Downtown Morris has great bones” – attractive older buildings that have a unique character and blend together well. As such, most redevelopment within Downtown Morris is anticipated to continue to occur within existing structures. While reuse of older buildings can create challenges to bring older structures up to code, the benefit of maintaining the character and identity of downtown are worth the effort.

Figure 9 shows the City’s existing zoning map for downtown and the surrounding area, clearly showing the primary downtown area in pink and zoned B-2 Central Shopping District. In reviewing this map with existing land use patterns and changing conditions, three areas for potential rezoning became clear. There is no immediate need to change the zoning of any of these properties, but should the property owner wish to consider a rezoning, the plan suggests the following:



- **Manufacturing zoning north of the I&M Canal** – When the Gebhard Brewery and Colman Hardware were active industries manufacturing zoning was appropriate in this area. However, now that Brewery is vacant and the Colman Hardware property has been converted to non-profit uses, there is not a need to allow manufacturing in this otherwise residential area. Figure 10 shows several different re-zoning suggestions for this area depending on the location and surrounding use, including:

- R-2 zoning for the flood plain area along Nettle Creek to be consistent with the remainder of the adjacent lots. R-2 is also appropriate for the block north of Illinois, west of Benton, and south of Washington based on existing uses in the area. Also based on the existing homes on the north side of Illinois between Calhoun Street and Nettle Street, R-2 is suggested for the southern portion of the block – which would match the zoning on the north side of the same block.
- B-2 Central Shopping District zoning is suggested for the area between Calhoun Street and Wauponsee Street, south of the alley north of Illinois and the I&M Canal. Some of these areas are City Park or parking lots.
- Business Transition zoning might be more appropriate for the Grundy County Historical Society property (former Coleman Hardware) at the end of Illinois Avenue.

- **B-2 Planned Development Zoning** – B-2 planned development zoning would be appropriate for several of the redevelopment sites downtown, particularly Sites 3 and 5 (see below) if they should ever redevelop for a more intense use incorporating apartments or other residential uses. Reuse of the former Gebhard Brewery property can likely best be accommodated through the planned development process. The appropriate underlying zoning in that case will depend on the proposed reuse of the facility.

- **Homes along Route 47** – As traffic has increased on Route 47, the noise and congestion associated with a location on a major State Highway suggest consideration of a different use. Creation of a new zoning district, Business Transition, is suggested for homes along Route 47. Such zoning would allow for continued residential use, but would also allow for conversion of these homes for limited commercial use. A good example of this is in Plainfield, where homes along Route 59 and Route 30 have been rezoned to Business Transition and reused – primarily for office activities.



Source: Google Maps

FIGURE 9. EXISTING ZONING MAP

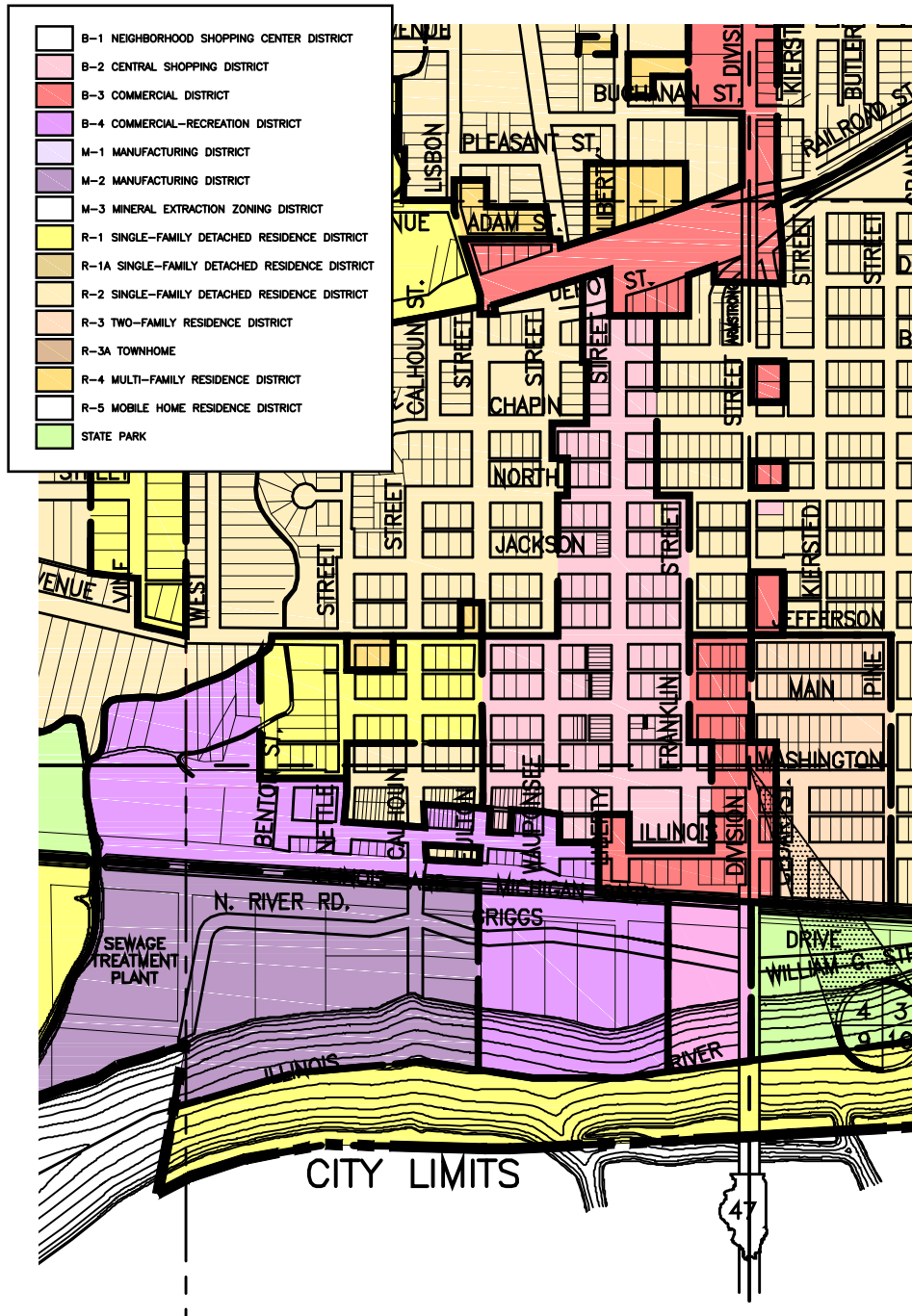
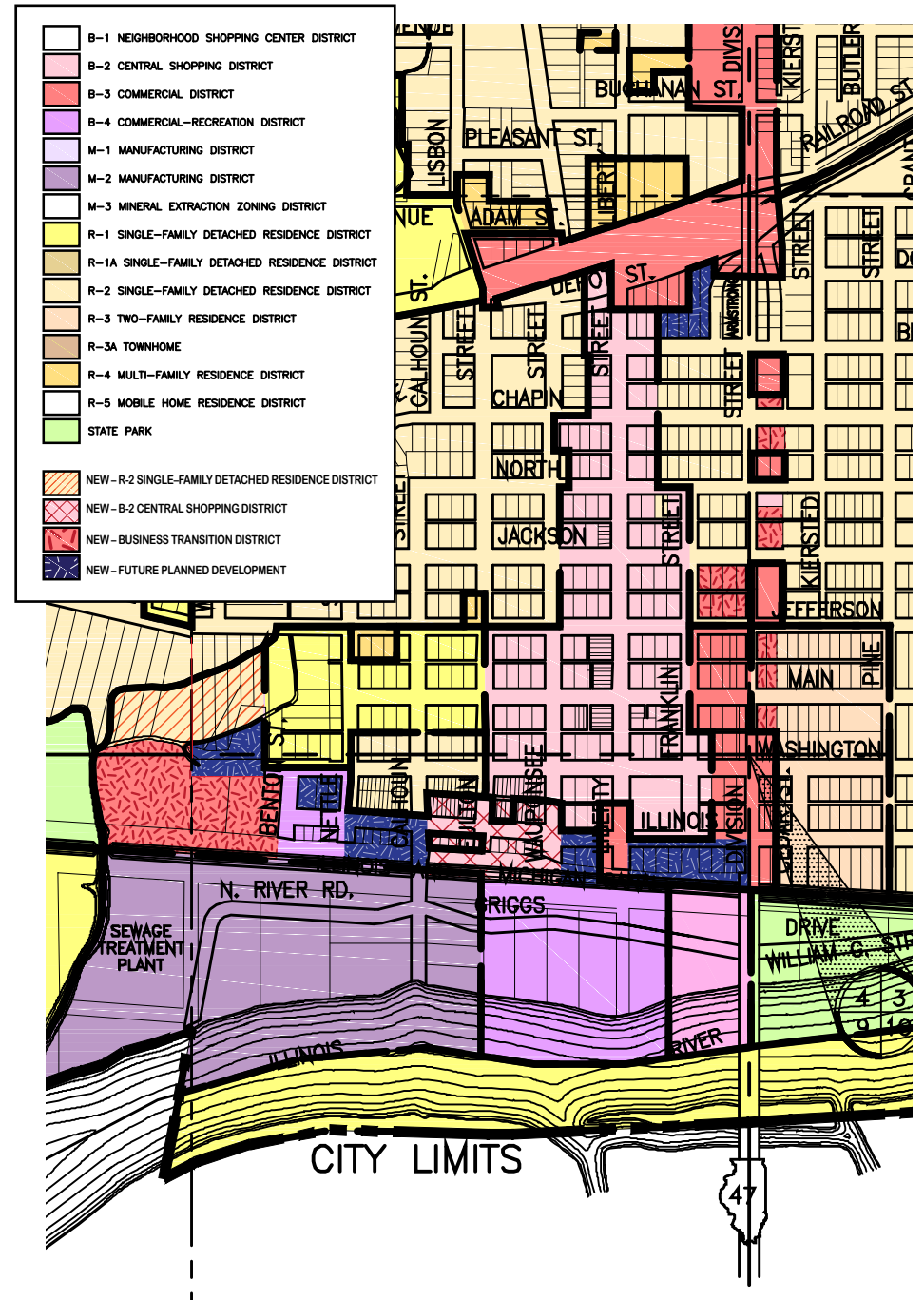


FIGURE 10. PROPOSED ZONING CHANGES

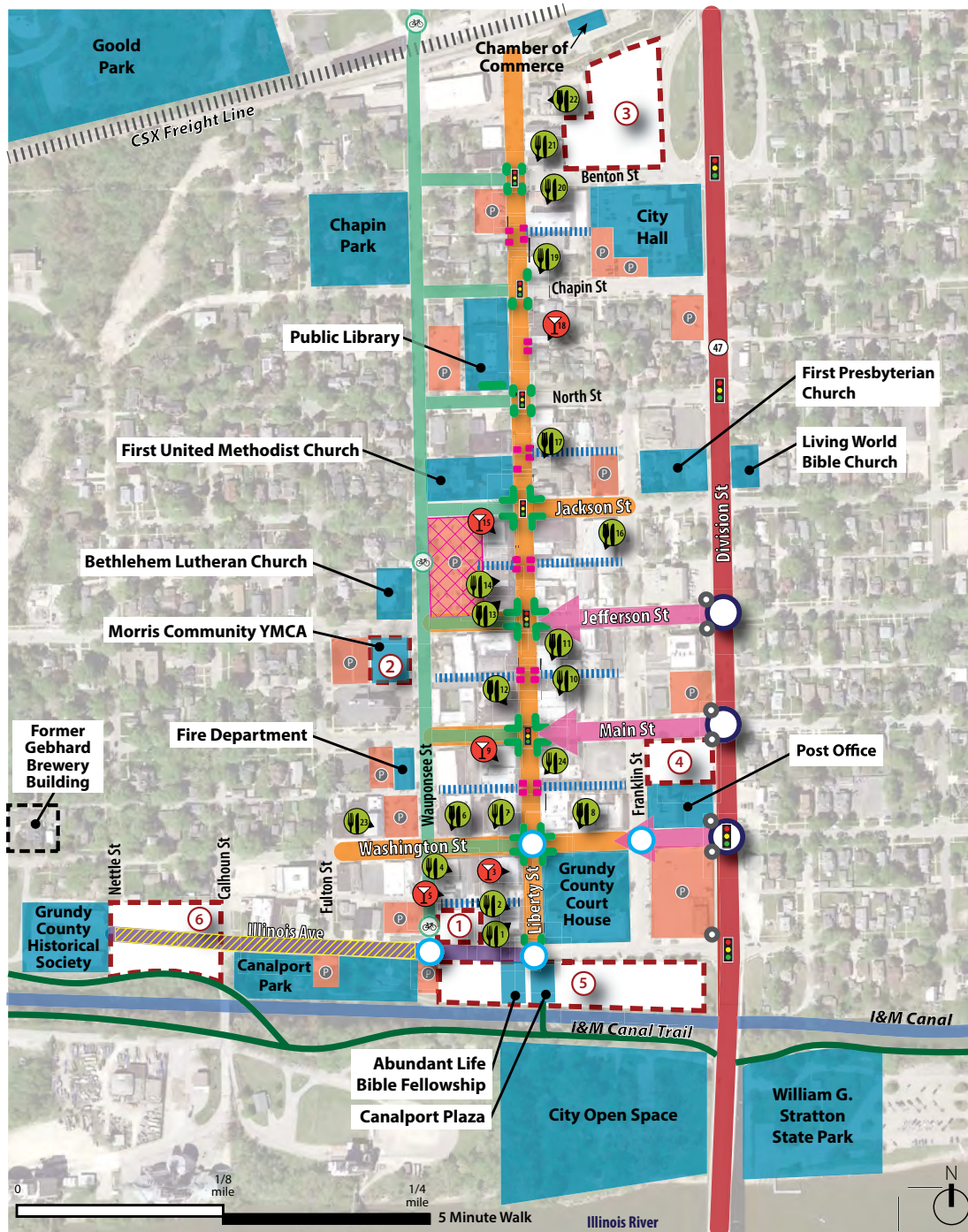


OPPORTUNITY SITES

While the plan clearly promotes a focus on continued reuse of existing building, several opportunity sites were identified where some new construction may be warranted in the future. All of these sites are currently serving the community in various ways, and there is no immediate need to seek redevelopment. However, these sites might offer long-term potential for new construction that could provide some diversity and added value to Downtown Morris. The City has no plans to push redevelopment of these sites. The suggestions below are provided as ideas for the future, should individual property owners wish to seek redevelopment. Sketches provided are conceptual in nature – designed to help visual opportunities only. Actual site redevelopment may, and probably will, vary significantly from these sketches. However, the sketches do provide a clear sense of what is possible on each site considering site context, appropriate land use, and parking needs. The size, number of units, and density of any residential projects is subject to change based on market conditions.



FIGURE 11. DOWNTOWN MORRIS ISSUES + OPPORTUNITIES MAP



Key:

- Walkable Shopping + Dining
- Historical Interpretation
- Auto Oriented
- Downtown Transition
- Community Destinations
- Public Parking Lots
- I&M Canal Trail
- Traffic Signal
- People Places
- Mid-Block Bumpout + Crossing at Alleys
- Downtown Gateways
- Downtown Entry Sign Piers
- Park + Festival Gateways
- Pedestrian Friendly Alleyway
- Illinois Ave Enhancements
- Events Parking lot
- Potential Redevelopment Opportunity Sites
- Proposed Bike Route + Amenities

Dining and Beverage:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Tully Monster Pub & Grill | 13. Ebbey George's Bar & Grill |
| 2. Corleone's Italian Restaurant | 14. Toby's Restaurant & Cantina |
| 3. Fraternal Order of Eagles | 15. Cade's Corner |
| 4. Sam's Pizza | 16. La Mex Fine Mexican Cuisine |
| 5. KJ McKeon's | 17. Liberty Street Cafe |
| 6. Clayton's Tap | 18. Bogies Sports Bar |
| 7. Sweet Tooth | 19. Morris Chop Shop |
| 8. Letty Mae's Tea Room | 20. Clayton's Rail |
| 9. South 20 | 21. The County Seat Pub & Pizzeria |
| 10. Montage Wine Bar & Spirits | 22. Carson Tap House |
| 11. Morris Bakery | 23. American Legion |
| 12. Al's Family Restaurant | 24. Weits Cafe |

OPPORTUNITY SITE #1

ILLINOIS CENTER BUILDING

Existing Conditions

The Illinois Center Building site is located at the northeast corner of Wauponsee Street and Illinois Avenue. The building is approximately 22,000 square feet with four potential commercial, office or retail spaces. The current configuration of the building includes a 10,000 square foot restaurant space that was a brew pub many years ago, but has been vacant for some time. The building requires some build out but remains in good condition. The site includes space for outdoor dining and some parking. The site is located across the street from Canal Port Plaza at the southern end of the downtown.

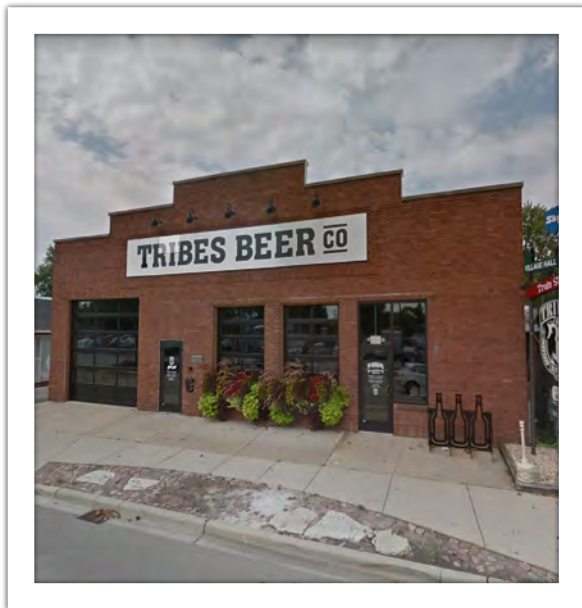
Key Factors

Key Factors of the Illinois Center Building are: 1) the exterior of the building is in good condition, 2) on-site parking is limited but significant public parking is nearby, 3) there is usable space on-site for outdoor seating and dining, and 4) the location of the site is well positioned near the I&M Canal and other public spaces such as the Canal Port Plaza and the Three French Hens Market.



Opportunities + Recommendations

Sale and reuse of the existing building for some type of mixed-use commercial is recommended. Given the location of the site near the I&M Canal, the on-site outdoor seating/dining space, the existing restaurant build-out within the main space of the building, a new specialty or destination restaurant or brew pub would be an ideal re-use of the building and site.



OPPORTUNITY SITE #2

YMCA BUILDING

Existing Conditions

This site is located at the southwest corner of Jefferson Street and Wauponcee Street. The site is approximately 14,375 square feet, with a 6,000 square foot single-story building with a substantial basement. The building is currently occupied by the Morris Community YMCA, which is planning to relocate to another location. It is neighbored by the Bethlehem Lutheran Church to the north, Fruland Funeral Home to the east, and First Midwest Bank and its parking lot to the north and west. The site was previously a bank, and also served as Morris's City Hall for many years.

Key Factors

Key Factors of the YMCA Site & Building are: 1) this building, both the interior and exterior, are in good condition, 2) on-site parking is limited but significant public parking is nearby, and 3) the site has long served as a destination in downtown and reuse will be important to the vitality of the western portion of downtown.

Opportunities + Recommendations

Sale and reuse of the existing building for some type of private use is recommended. This could potentially be a destination restaurant or a shared co-working office space. Given recent use for recreational programs, it could also be converted to a dance or other type of studio space.



OPPORTUNITY #3

BENTON/ARMSTRONG SITE

Existing Conditions

This site is located at the northwest corner of Benton Street and Armstrong Street, and is bisected by Depot Street which runs East-West through the site. Just west of Division Street (US 47), the site has good accessibility although it does not have ingress/egress onto Route 47 due to the overpass. The site consists of fourteen (14) parcels, most of which have an existing residential use and two of the larger parcels have existing commercial uses. In total, the site makes up about 1.4-acres in the northern portion of Downtown Morris. It is neighbored by the former Depot (now the Chamber of Commerce) building to the north, commercial uses to the west, and residential uses to the south.

Key Factors

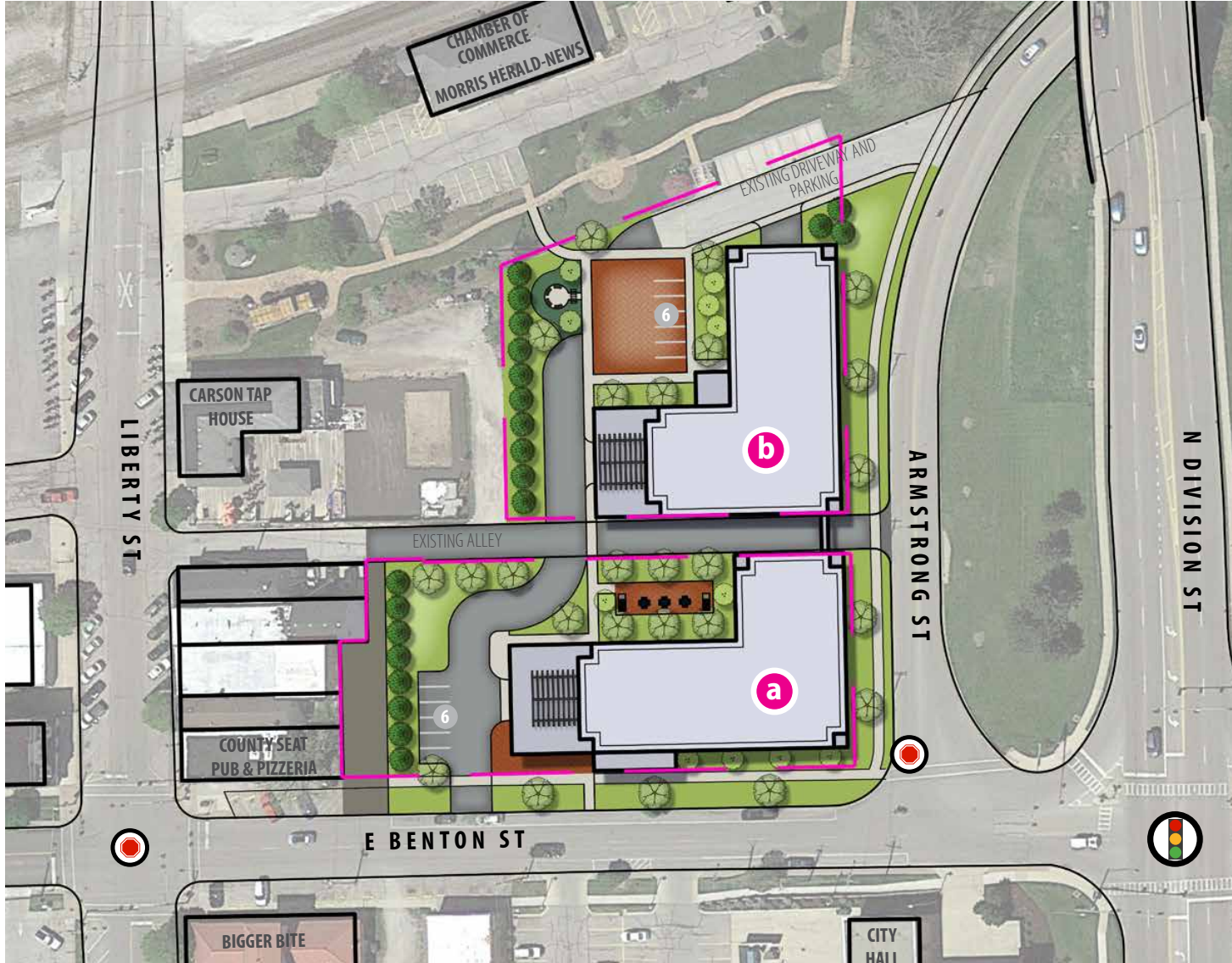
Key Factors of the Depot Street / Armstrong Street Site are: 1) this area presents perhaps the best potential in the downtown area for new multi-family scale residential development, 2) the site is located in the northern portion of the downtown which, if developed appropriately, could help attract other business and development to that area, 3) the site includes several existing residential uses which would need to be considered in any development plans. Consolidating 14 separate parcels into one common ownership will certainly be a challenge, but the project could be accomplished in phases, and 4) any development activity in this area must be sensitive to remaining adjacent residential uses to the south. The sites location, adjacent to the Route 47/railroad bridge embankment to the east, City Hall to the south and the railroad to the north, would allow a taller structure on this site than may be appropriate in other areas of downtown – perhaps up to 4 or 5 stories.

Opportunities + Recommendations

This site offers an excellent opportunity to add some additional residents to Downtown Morris. Given the site's relatively isolated location, a taller building in the 3 to 5 story range would be possible without negatively impacting surrounding uses. Adding population at the northern end of the downtown would also help to enhance the market for retail and restaurants in this area. The conceptual sketch below shows approximately 66 new housing units, which could produce from 100 to 150 new residents in Downtown Morris.



FIGURE 12. SCENARIO SKETCH: BENTON/ARMSTRONG SITE



- a 4-STORY MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL**
 33 Units (approx. 39 Units per Acre)
 Ave Unit Size: 950 SF
 41 Indoor Parking Spots (1.2 per Unit)
 Floor 1: Lobby, Structured Parking
 Floor 2: (11) Units, Shared Roof Amenity
 Floor 3-4: (11) Units per floor
 Site: Grill Area Amenity

- b 4-STORY MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL**
 33 Units (approx. 39 Units per Acre)
 Ave Unit Size: 950 SF
 41 Indoor Parking Spots (1.2 per Unit)
 Floor 1: Lobby, Structured Parking
 Floor 2: (11) Units, Shared Roof Amenity
 Floor 3-4: (11) Units per Floor
 Site: Arrival Court with Guest Parking,
 Garden Seating Area and Connection to
 Park

OPPORTUNITY SITE #4

GRUNDY BANK DRIVE-THRU SITE

Existing Conditions

This site is located at the southwest corner of Franklin Street and Main Street. The site is approximately one-half acre, which consists of parking spaces in the south half and a bank drive-thru in the north half of the lot. The lot is currently being used as employee parking and bank drive-thru for Grundy Bank, which is located one block west on Liberty Street. The property is neighbored by the United States Postal Service property and building to the south, a drive-in dry cleaners to the north, a private parking lot to the east, and Route 47 to the east.

Key Factors

Key Factors of the Grundy Bank Drive-Thru Site are: 1) highly visible location on Route 47, serving as a potential gateway into downtown; 2) the existing electronic message sign is often used to promote community events; 3) banking, like many industries, is changing rapidly with technology. If drive-thru's become less popular in the future, reuse of this site might offer some unique opportunities unavailable in other sites as this is the only identified site with good visibility from Route 47.

Opportunities + Recommendations

Since the site has traditionally been used for drive-thru purposes, it could be reused for some type of small restaurant or coffee shop focused on drive-thru business. It would also be a good location for some type of office use that desired both visibility and access to downtown shops/restaurants within walking distance. Apartments or condominiums may also be an alternative use for the site. Again, no change is anticipated on this site until the bank would determine that a drive-thru was no longer needed.



OPPORTUNITY SITE #5

I&M CANAL SITE

Existing Conditions

This site is located north of the I&M canal along Illinois Avenue and spans from Route 47 to the Canal Port Park. This potential redevelopment site includes several County-owned properties on the east side of the site, including the County Sheriff's building. Located in the middle of the site is the current Canal Port Plaza. West of the plaza are several commercial/office spaces. The site is located along the I&M canal and is accessible via the I&M Trail.

Key Factors

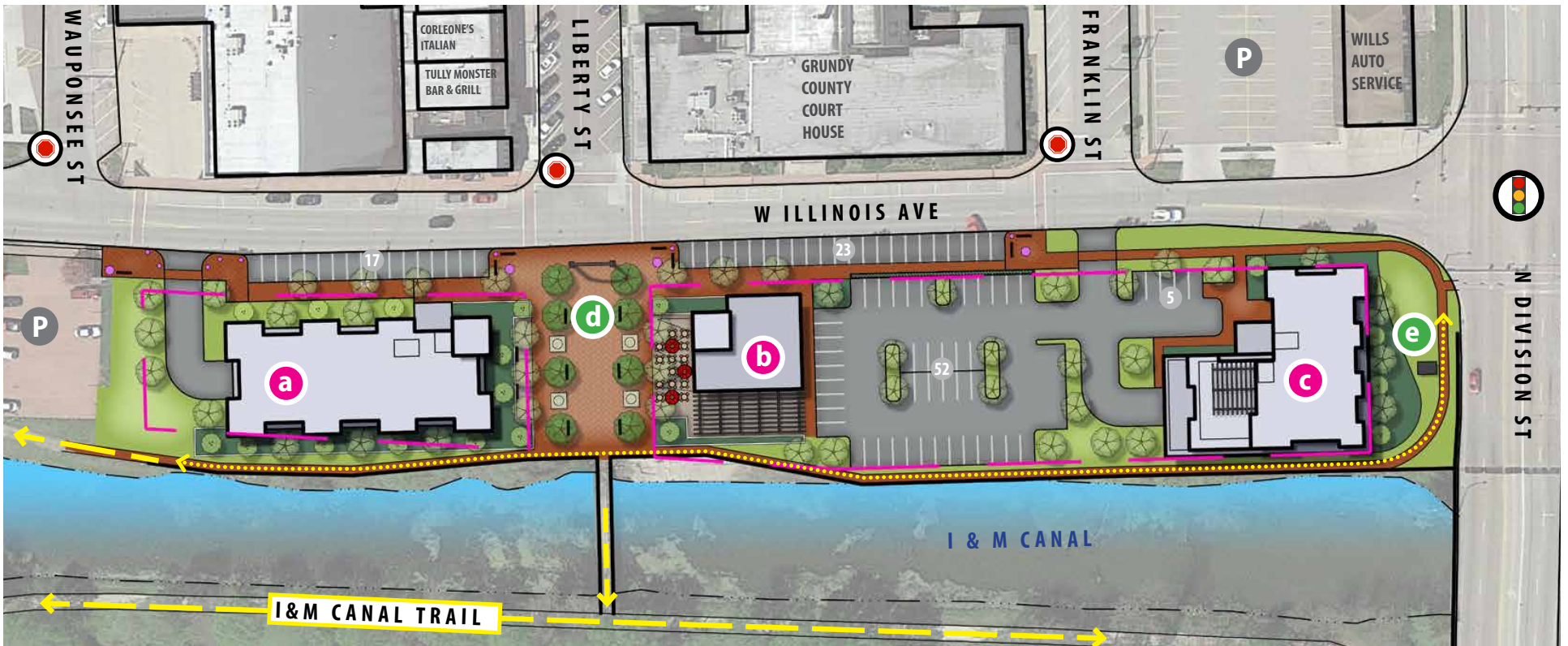
Key Factors of the Canal Port Place Site are: 1) It sits at the southern terminus of Liberty Street along the I&M canal, making it a gateway site for residents and visitors, 2) The location along the canal and access to regional transportation such as the I&M Canal and Route 47 makes it an ideal site for tourism, recreation, and destination restaurant/retail opportunities, and 3) the site sits along the canal at the southern-most end of downtown making it a good location for multi-story buildings that could take advantage of the view of the canal without significantly changing the character of the downtown, 4) Any redevelopment of this site would be dependent on identifying an appropriate relocation of key uses such as the sheriff's office, 5) Like Site 3, redevelopment of this Site 5 would likely occur in phases.

Opportunities + Recommendations

This location along the I&M Canal and Trail offers excellent opportunities for indoor and outdoor dining. It is also an excellent site to consider residential uses with a location that is immediately adjacent to the shopping and dining options available in Downtown Morris and the recreational opportunities offered by the Canal Trail and the adjacent Illinois River. The sketch below also proposes a trail connection on the north side of the canal to provide convenient pedestrian connections between uses.



FIGURE 13. SCENARIO SKETCH: CANAL PORT PLAZA SITE



teska March 2020



a 3-STORY MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL

18 Units (approx. 35 Units per Acre)
 Ave Unit Size: 950 SF
 26 Indoor Parking Spots (1.4 per Unit)
 Floor 1: Lobby, Structured Parking
 Floor 2 & 3: (9) Units per Floor

b RESTAURANT/COMMERCIAL

3890 SF
 Outdoor Dining Facing Canal Port Plaza
 Outdoor Dining/ Event Space Facing Canal
 Dedicated Parking Lot: 52 Spaces (Approx. 13 Cars per 1000 Sf Building)

c 4-STORY MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL

22 Units (approx. 45 Units per Acre)
 Ave Unit Size: 950 SF
 30 Indoor Parking Spots (1.3 per Unit)
 Floor 1: Lobby, Structured Parking
 Floor 2 & 3: (8) Units per Floor
 Floor 4: (6) Units, Shared Roof Deck Amenity

d CANAL PORT PLAZA

- Redesign To Create A Central Gathering Space
- Historical Markers Aligned With Alley Of Trees
- Gateway Arch Aligned With Liberty Street

e TRAIL CONNECTION

Connect Division St with I&M Canal Trail System; Trail Head Kiosk at Division

OPPORTUNITY SITE #6

WEST ILLINOIS AVENUE

Existing Conditions

The block of Illinois Avenue between Calhoun and Nettle Streets is an important connection between downtown and the City's Canalport Park and the Grundy County Historical Society. Unfortunately, there are currently no sidewalks or pedestrian amenities in this area. Driveways and paved areas bleed directly into the street. Land use in this block is mixed, with the largest single use being Midwest Auto Service. The block also contains several other small commercial structures as well as some residential uses on the north side of the block.

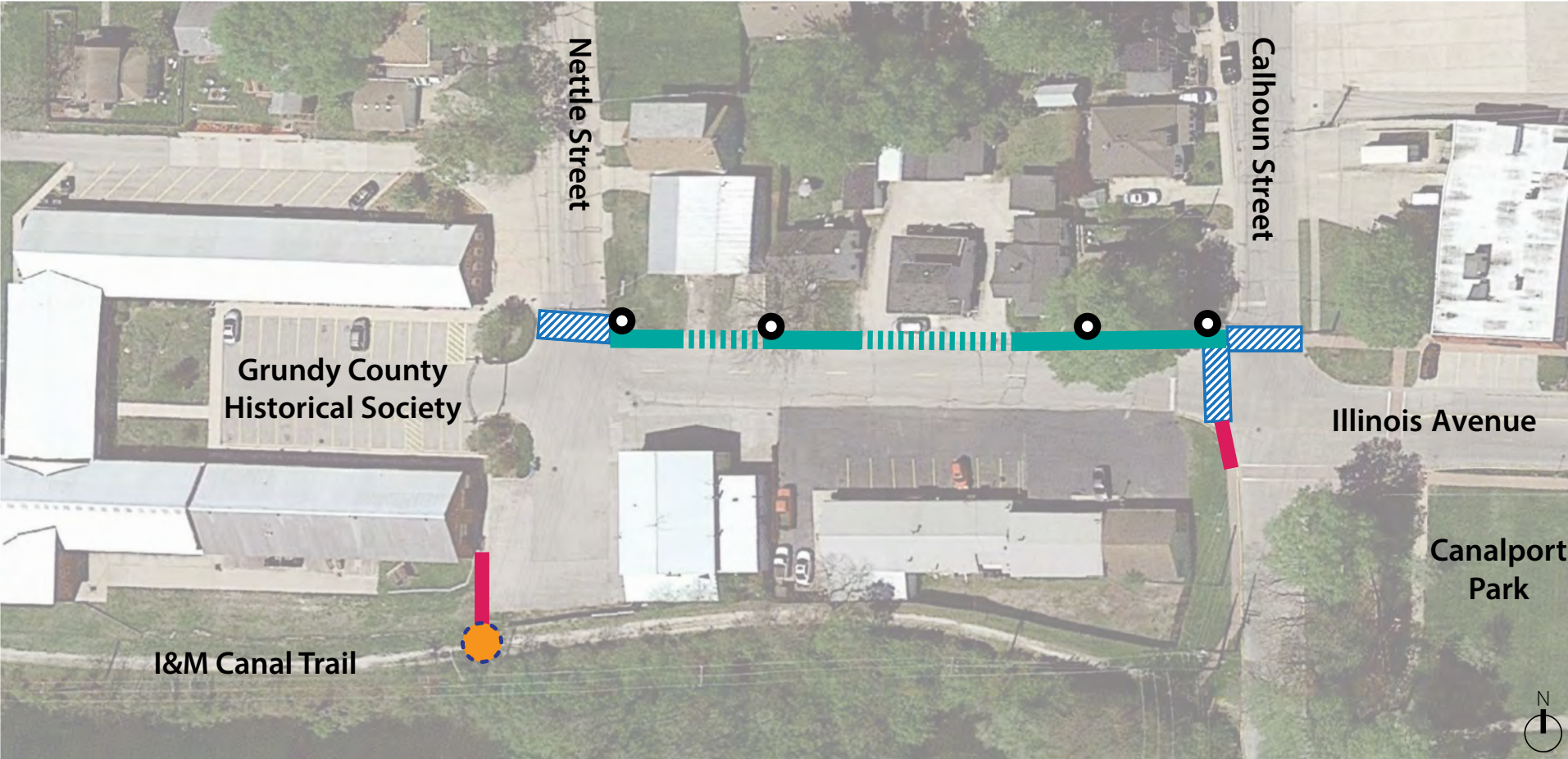
Opportunities + Recommendations

The primary recommendation for this block is to develop a pedestrian path to connect the Grundy County Historical Society with downtown. Given limited right-of-way and existing development patterns, a painted pedestrian path with plastic bollards to identify the edge is suggested on the north side of the street. In addition, lighting similar to elsewhere in downtown should be carried through this block to reinforce the visual connection.


Ultimately, this would be another block that would be an opportunity to add some additional residential units to Downtown Morris, either in the form of apartments or perhaps townhomes. If redevelopment were to occur, sidewalks and parkways would be desirable for an enhanced connection between these historical resources.




FIGURE 14. PEDESTRIAN ENHANCEMENTS: ILLINOIS AVENUE




 Painted Pedestrian Path with Plastic Bollard Edge

 Sidewalk Extension

 Pole Mounted Lighting Installed Atop Concrete Barriers
Final Lighting to be Coordinated with Engineering, Photometrics and Utility Access.

 Canal Trail Connection at Nettle Street

 Painted Pedestrian Crossing



Plastic Bollards

OPPORTUNITY SITE #7

GEBHARD BREWERY SITE

Existing Conditions

The Gebhard Brewery Site is located at the western terminus of Washington Street. The existing building has been vacant for many years, and while the structure has significant character, it presents significant economic challenges to reuse. Several past proposals have failed given the expense of repair and renovation to modern use. The property is located along the East Fork of Nettle Creek, and is adjacent to Gebhard Woods State Park to the west. A portion of the existing structure appears to be within the 100 year flood plain of the creek, making redevelopment of the existing structure more challenging. A small neighborhood of single-family homes like immediately to the east of the former brewery.



Key Factors

Key Factors of the Gebhard Brewery Building & Site are: 1) Age and poor conditions of the existing structure, 2) Location is physically separated from the commercial portion of downtown by an existing residential neighborhood, 3) The existing structure has a good story to tell, and could make for an interesting location for a destination use if the financial challenges of reuse could be overcome.

Opportunities + Recommendations

A brewpub or other destination business would be an interesting use of the existing structure. Medium to higher density residential use for this site would also be interesting given the location adjacent to the State Park and near downtown. Residential reuse could either be within the existing structure (perhaps as lofts) or new construction should rehabilitation prove to be unfeasible.





CHAPTER 5.

PLACEMAKING

+ URBAN DESIGN

DETAILS MATTER

High-quality urban design encourages residents and visitors to stick around, enjoy the environment, dine at restaurants, and shop at stores. It isn't just about making places attractive. People tend to associate urban design with community beautification – and while it does many things to fulfill that role, it serves a much greater purpose.

Effective urban design provides structure to the built environment by catering to all types of users – pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, residents, visitors, seniors, and children. It can improve safety in an area via bike lanes, sidewalk connectivity, count-down signals, crosswalks, and sidewalk bollards. It also helps guide users to and through-out a place using attractive, easy-to-read gateway, directional, and informational signage. Finally, it enhances the sense-of-place by incorporating seating, public art, shade trees, etc. that together provide a place to sit back, relax, and enjoy one's surroundings.

Enhancing these elements is often referred to as “placemaking”. Placemaking is a multi-faceted approach to the planning, design, and management of public spaces. Placemaking capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, with the intention of creating public spaces that promote people's health, happiness, and wellbeing. Elements of urban design and placemaking can work together to compliment the look, feel, and function of Downtown Morris.

The themes presented through out this chapter reflect the desires of Morris residents and stakeholders.



▲ Existing placemaking + urban design elements found through out Downtown Morris

CHARACTER

Future development and streetscape elements should promote consistent, cohesive application of urban design (lighting, street furniture, year-round landscaping, etc.) that celebrates the City's identity.

□ ARCHITECTURE:

Downtown Morris has a rich architectural history, with many buildings dating back to the late 1800's. As Morris continues to evolve, the City should encourage preservation and retention of architectural features that contribute to the downtown's historic charm. The City should continue to use the Facade Guidelines developed for the 1995 Hyatt-Palma Study (*Appendix*) to help guide facade improvements and future development within the downtown.

□ LANDSCAPING:

Landscaping treatments add a certain liveliness to a Downtown's aesthetic and can even enhance safety by providing a visual and physical buffer between pedestrians and parking/traffic. The City should continue to integrate and maintain landscape treatments that enhance the function, feel, and character of Downtown Morris. The City could consider consolidating planters (currently located within the sidewalk and in front of storefronts) and other plantings to future bump-outs and parklets; this will improve the ease with which people can move throughout the downtown and will minimize maintenance efforts (planters are currently maintained by both the City and individual retailers).

□ BUILDING PLAQUES:

Celebrate the history of significant structures via more building plaques at the street level that tell a story.

□ STREET FURNITURE + RECEPTACLES:

These elements are important for the function of downtown, but they are also an opportunity to enhance the downtown character and improve quality-of-life for all downtown users. The City should consider updating the street furniture, particularly the planters and trash receptacles. This could both increase usability/functionality and would help to modernize the downtown. The City should also continue to integrate additional outdoor seating options at key locations.

□ INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE:

Interpretive signage is both an educational tool and a way to promote and celebrate the City's rich history. Interpretive signage already exists in the Canal Port Plaza, and there are additional opportunities to integrate interpretive signage at key locations throughout downtown; consider along Illinois Avenue near the Grundy County Historical Society.

□ LIGHT POLE BANNERS:

Continue to celebrate and promote downtown identity via light pole banners. Banners may be location, event, holiday, or sponsor/business-specific and should be representative of the downtown's identity and character.

□ DECORATIVE PAVEMENT:

Further City/Downtown identity at key locations via concrete stampers or inlaid designs.



Architecture (Morris, IL)

Source: Teska Associates



Planter (????, IL)

Source: Teska Associates

Building Plaques (Morris, IL)



Source: Teska Associates

Interpretive Signage (Kankakee, IL)



Source: Teska Associates

CONNECTIVITY + SAFETY

Urban design elements should reflect and cater to the diversity of people that frequent the downtown: pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, residents, visitors, families, shoppers, children, seniors, etc. Connections through the community should be thoughtfully considered and improved to further enjoyment and usability of the downtown for all users. Connectivity and safety can be enhanced via lighting, pedestrian and bike amenities, crossings, bump-outs, signage, intersection treatments, crossing treatments, buffers, etc.

□ GATEWAY SIGNAGE + TREATMENTS:

An opportunity exists to add welcome signage and other gateway treatments, such as plantings and decorative traffic signals, along Route 47 to help attract and invite visitors into the downtown. Currently, the downtown has limited signage directing travelers on Route 47 to Downtown Morris. Integrating additional gateway treatments at key locations, such as the intersection of Washington St and Route 47, would help improve downtown visibility.

□ WAYFINDING SIGNAGE:

Navigation from place to place is an integral part of everyday life. People use their knowledge and previous experiences to find their way in the built environment. Wayfinding signage helps visitors find their way, get around, and understand the downtown. The City should expand its network of wayfinding signage to help orient and direct users to destinations and parking throughout the community, and particularly downtown. The following page highlights a sign hierarchy that could be considered:

- **Monument Signs** – These would be located at major community entry points, such as the Route 47/I-80 interchange (*see Figure 16 on pg. 52 for potential placement*).
- **Entry Sign Piers** – These would be located along Route 47 at key intersections including Benton, North, Jefferson, Main, and Washington Streets and Illinois Avenue. Locating a similar pier at the Route 6/Route 47 intersection points to direct visitors to Downtown Morris should also be considered (*see Figure 11 on pg. 32 for potential placement*).
- **Vehicular Wayfinding Signs** – These signs could direct motorists to points of interest throughout the community, including directing visitors to downtown. They would be located on Route 47 and Route 6. Placement would require close coordination with I.D.O.T. which controls these roadways.
- **Parking Entry Signs** – These signs would be located at the entrance to downtown municipal parking lots, and would indicate the parking restrictions associated with each lot.

FIGURE 15. CONCEPTUAL SIGNAGE/WAYFINDING

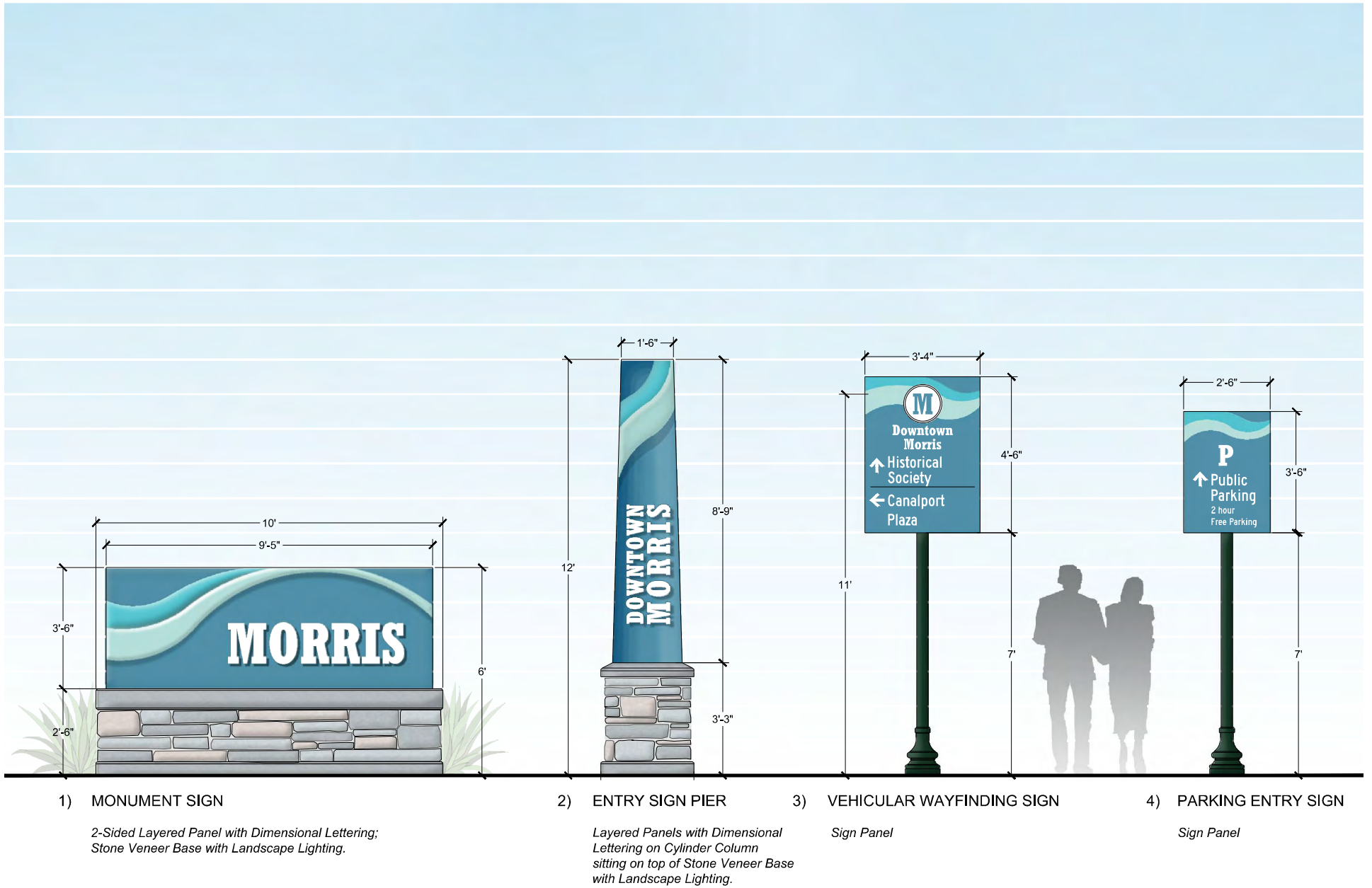



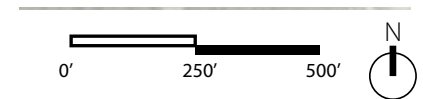
FIGURE 16. MONUMENT SIGN LOCATIONS



 Plantings

 Double Sided Monument Sign

*Final sign locations to be coordinated with site topography and permitted with Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT)



□ PEDESTRIAN ENHANCEMENTS:

Downtown Morris is built on a very walkable grid street system, with good sidewalks and crosswalks at some intersections. However, the following enhancements can both improve pedestrian safety and enhance the visual environment of downtown:

- **Bumpouts + Curb Extensions** – These pedestrian amenities help create a more pedestrian-friendly environment through improved safety, connectivity, and overall usability of the downtown. Add or enhance these elements at major downtown intersections and across certain connecting alleys (*see page 60 and 63 for an example of this type of treatment proposed for the intersection of Liberty and Washington Streets*).
- **Crosswalks + Alley Crossings** – From simple painted lines to thermoplastic patterns, crosswalks provide a visual clue for motorists to be on the look-out for pedestrians. Enhancing these crossings can also add both safety and aesthetic improvements to downtown (*example of a proposed alley treatment is provided on page 62*).
- **Bollards** – Integrate bollards at key locations around the downtown and nearby public spaces to further the safety of pedestrians and children.

Crosswalk (Evanston, IL)



Source: Teska Associates, Inc.

Bumpout (Plainfield, IL)



Source: Google Maps

□ BICYCLE ENHANCEMENTS:

With its many restaurants, public buildings like the library and post office, and shops, Downtown Morris is a natural place to want to ride a bicycle to and through. Plus, with a location directly off the I&M Canal Trail, downtown is a great stopping point for trail users looking for a place to grab some lunch or a cup of coffee on their route. In 2019, the Canal Corridor Association initiated the I&M Canal Bike Share System, with docking stations in Downtown Morris at the Canal Port Plaza as well as locations in LaSalle, Utica, Channahon and Lockport. However, bicycling is currently prohibited on Liberty Street given the angled parking and current configuration of intersections and lane width – making biking in and around downtown challenging. The following recommendations address this issue:

- **Designated Downtown Bike Route** – Wauponsee Street provides good north-south connectivity, including access across the CSX Railway to the north. Ideally, dedicated and marked bike lanes would be installed to mark the route. However, shared lanes could also be installed if space does not permit for dedicated lanes. This designation should include appropriate signage, including a wayfinding sign directing bikers to Wauponsee from the I&M Canal Trail at the Canalport Plaza. Additionally, east-west bike connections between Wauponsee and Liberty Street are recommended as shown on the Issues & Opportunities Map (*page 32*).
- **Bike Parking** – Bike parking is essential for a bike friendly downtown. Bike parking should be provided near key gathering spots like restaurants, coffee shops, the library, etc. Bike parking can also easily be integrated into the curb bump-out areas suggested previously. Bike parking should be in highly visible and accessible locations. People with nice bicycles like to be able to look out and see their bike while inside a restaurant or store. Bike parking should also be located in a way that does not inhibit safe pedestrian flow in and around the parking area.

Bike Lane (Evanston, IL)



Source: Teska Associates, Inc.

Bike Parking (Asheville, NC)



Source: Teska Associates, Inc.

PEOPLE PLACES

Creating comfortable and unique environments for visitors can make a place both enjoyable and memorable. Attention to detail helps define the character of spaces and includes integrating plazas, benches, creative seating, outdoor patios and other amenities at key locations. This includes design elements such as bollards and landscaping that enhance safety, further attractive sight-lines, and buffer users from traffic and noise.

□ LIGHTING :

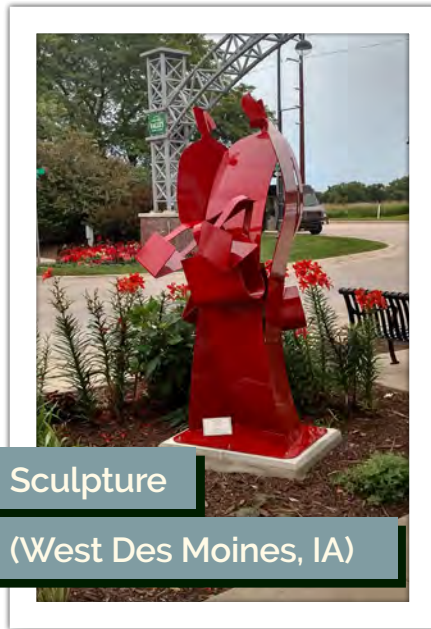
Downtown Morris already has attractive, pedestrian scale lighting along most streets, adding a classic hometown feel to the area. In addition to these attractive fixtures, additional lighting improvements are recommended to include:

- **Celebration Lighting** – Additional, celebration lighting should be considered at key locations that have significant pedestrian movement. Intersections like Liberty and Washington, or actively used alleys like the one between Grundy Bank and Weits Café are two examples. This lighting could be festoon-style lighting, with strings of lights providing a festive feel throughout the year.
- **Standard Lighting** – Expand the use of the City's standard downtown lighting on additional blocks, such as along Illinois Avenue between Calhoun and Nettle, and possibly along Route 47 in midblock locations to help identify the stretch between the Illinois River and the railroad as a unique area of the community.
- **Colored Lighting** - Explore opportunities to integrate colored lighting as building washes, or within public art, to add visual interest and excitement.



Festoon Lighting (Kankakee, IL)

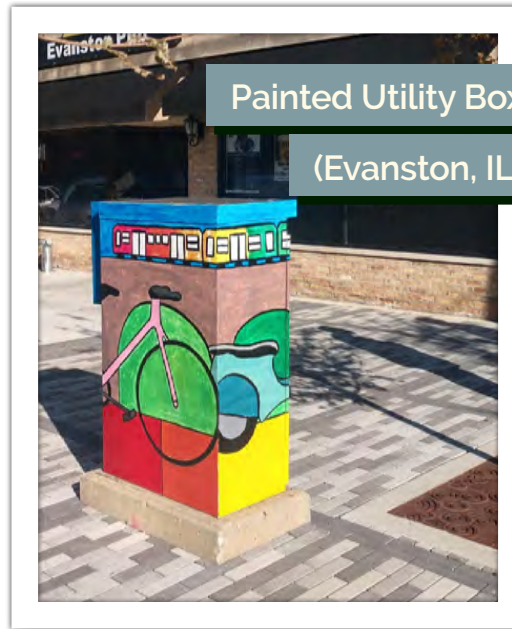
Source: Teska Associates, Inc.



Sculpture

(West Des Moines, IA)

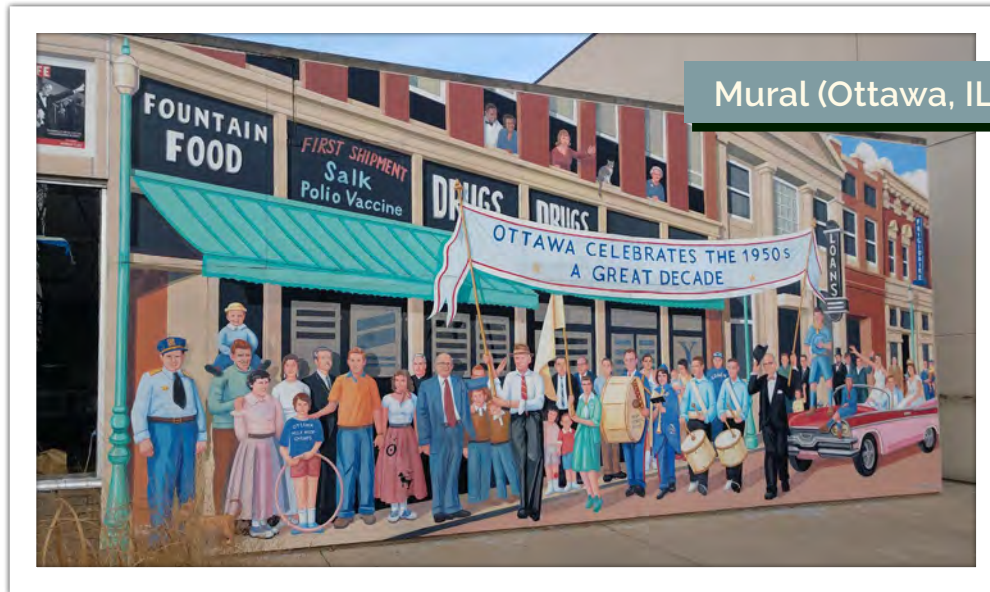
Source: Teska Associates



Painted Utility Box

(Evanston, IL)

Source: Teska Associates



Mural (Ottawa, IL)

Source: Teska Associates

□ PUBLIC ART:

Explore opportunities for public art installations. Public art is unique to place, contributing to community identity. Public art can even be interactive and kid-friendly to create a unique experience and help foster a pedestrian-friendly environment in the downtown. Two types of public art are recommended for Downtown Morris:

- **Permanent or semi-permanent art installations by artists.** This may include sculptures, murals, and other large art installations.
- **Temporary and/or Do-It-Yourself art displays.** These are usually fun, interactive projects that are created by the community for the community. This may include things like painted crosswalks and bumpouts, sidewalk chalk designs, and other DIY or inexpensive displays that contribute to the pedestrian experience in the downtown.

Potential locations for public art include:

- **Key downtown intersections** – noted as “People Places” on the Issues & Opportunities map (*page 32*).
- **Along Illinois Avenue** - building on some of the existing artwork celebrating the I&M Canal history.
- **On blank or mostly blank walls** – murals can create life and visual interest in an otherwise blank wall. Both Pontiac and Ottawa are nearby communities that have embraced the concept of downtown Murals with significant success, celebrating the uniqueness of each community and creating a reason for visitors to explore the downtown (*see page 53 for potential mural locations in Downtown Morris*).



▲ Two potential mural locations in Downtown Morris



Painted Bumpout (Chicago, IL)

Source: Google Maps

TACTICAL URBANSIM

Tactical Urbanism, also known as DIY urbanism, is a temporary activation of space by community members through quick, low-cost interventions to the built environment. Tactical urbanism is usually temporary, which encourages experimentation with how people interact with space. These projects are great to engage the community in improving their downtown, adding some quick public art, and testing design solutions in a low cost and fun way. An organization called **Better Block** has some great resources and ideas to create some tactical urbanism projects:

<https://www.betterblock.org/>

□ OUTDOOR DINING:

In the Midwest, where the warm seasons are limited, outdoor dining is especially prized as a way to enjoy community, friends, and neighbors. The nearby community of Plainfield is a great example of a downtown that has been transformed by the addition of outdoor dining opportunities. As identified in the community survey and other outreach efforts, outdoor dining is desired by many residents and visitors. While existing sidewalk widths provide some limitations, creative integration should be explored via parklets, sidewalk patios (where the right-of-way allows), roof-top dining, and temporary pop-up cafes at community events.

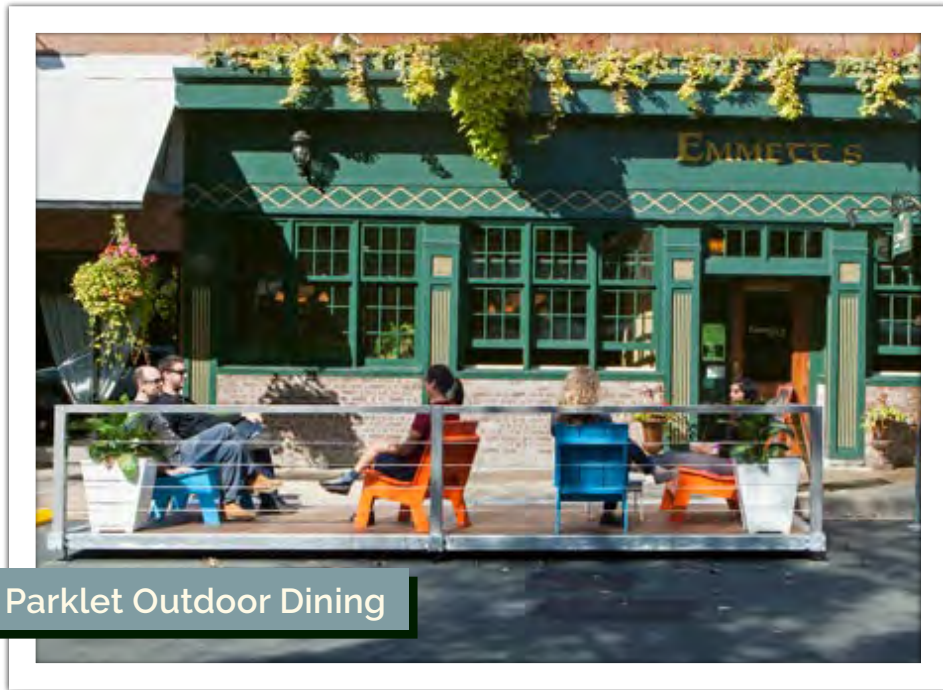


Temporary Parklet (Evanston, IL)

Source: Teska Associates

PARKLETS

Parklets are temporary (and sometimes permanent) platforms that convert parking spaces into curbside seating. Parklets can be used to provide outdoor dining opportunities in downtowns that have narrow sidewalks. Although temporary, they should be designed with pedestrian safety in mind. This includes vertical elements on the street-side to improve visibility and a flush transition from the platform to the sidewalk to improve safety and accessibility. To limit the number of parking spaces being used, policy standards should be determined, such as one platform per block face. For Downtown Morris, parklets should be the product of a partnership between the City, the MDDP, and the Morris Retailers Association.



Parklet Outdoor Dining

Source: DERO.com

□ PLAZAS & PUBLIC PLACES:

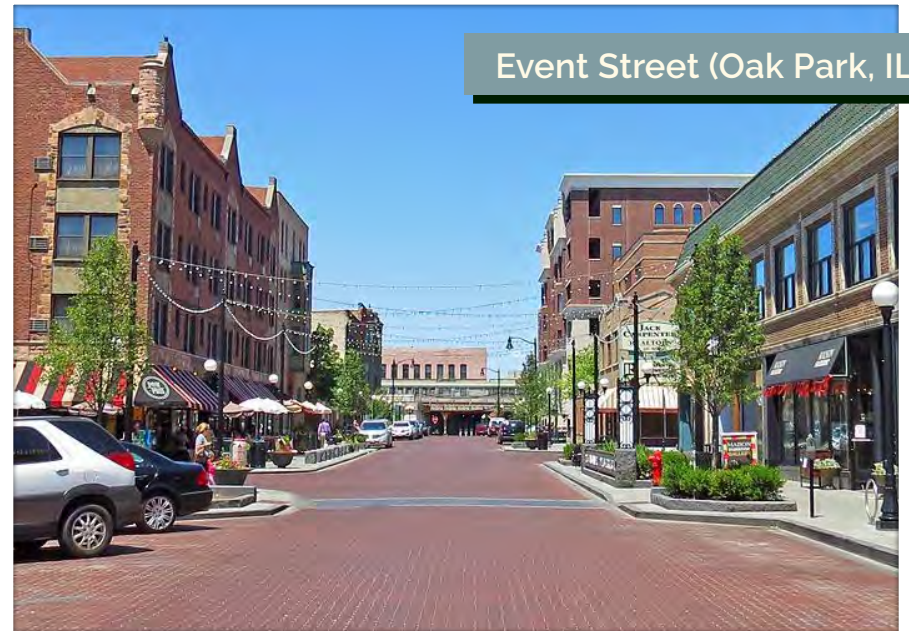
- **Event Parking Lot** – An opportunity exists to convert the city-owned parking lot on Wauponsee to a flex-space, one that is used for parking as it currently is on a daily basis, but an area that could be transformed into a space for special events. The City of DeKalb has a good example of this concept, where the parking lot at the corner of 2nd Street and Locust Street has been designed to also serve as the location for their weekly Farmers Market and other special summer events.
- **Event Street** – For many years, Morris has closed Liberty and other downtown streets and transformed them into public spaces to host events such as the Grundy County Cornfest and Cruise Nights. This approach has worked well and is recommended to continue.

Downtown streets and sidewalks are generally in good condition and should not need major repair or reconstruction for the foreseeable future. However, if reconstruction were needed in the future on key streets such as Liberty Street or Washington Street, the City might consider a Dutch concept called the *woonerf*, or 'living street'. In this concept, the street is shared as it is today, but with a focus more on the pedestrian and less on the car. In a typical *woonerf*, curbs are eliminated, and landscaping, planters and benches abound. Cars are still accommodating, and parking is allowed – until the space is needed for an event. Batavia has taken this approach along River Street in their downtown.



Event Parking Lot (DeKalb, IL)

Source: Google Maps



Event Street (Oak Park, IL)

Source: Chicago Car Keys (www.chicagocarkeys.com)

□ PARKS:

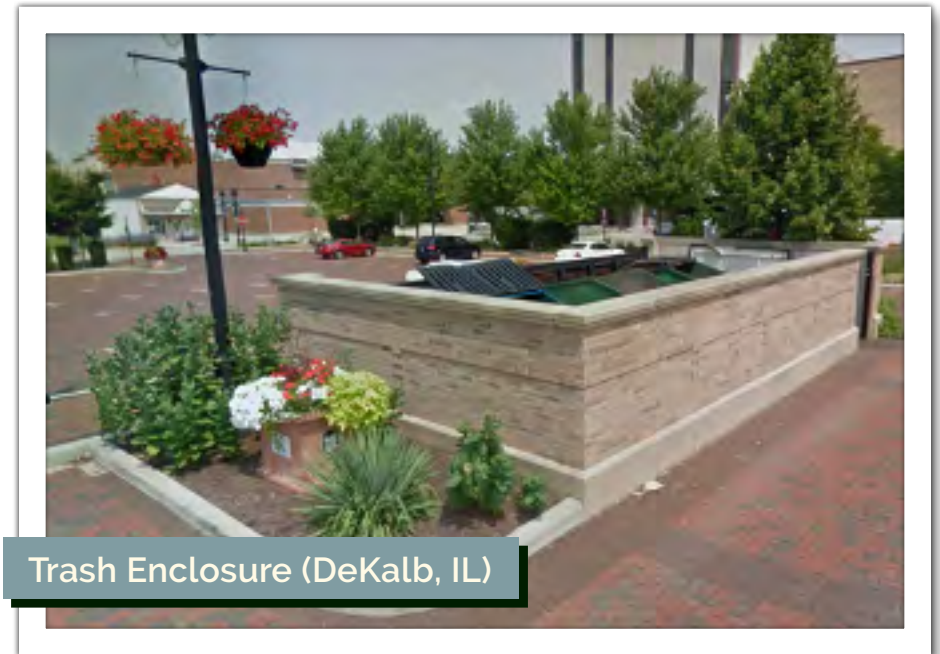
The City has two park spaces in downtown, with another two park areas immediately adjacent. Parks are great places for people to relax, enjoy nature, and take a break from shopping or working.



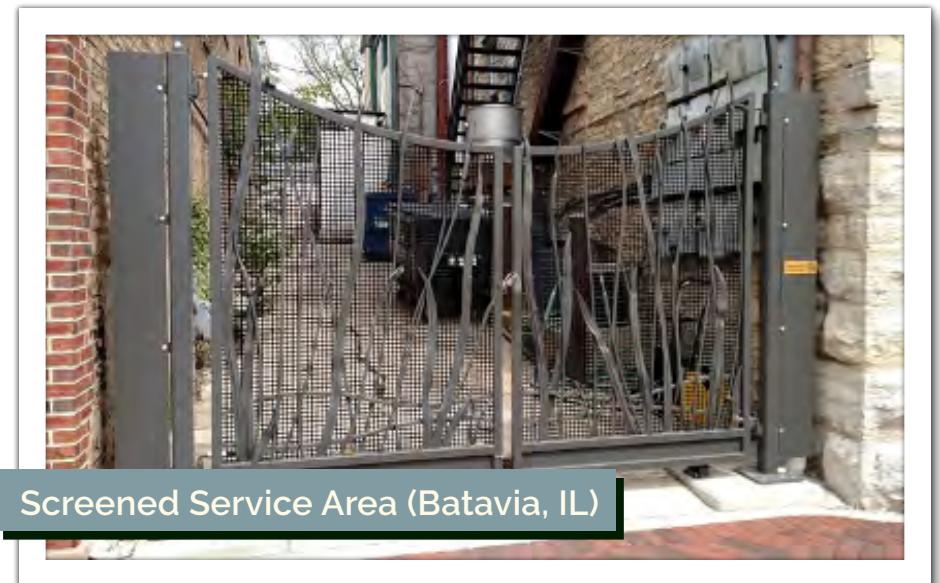
- **Chapin Park** - This classic town square (the park is surrounded by Chapin, Wauponsee, Benton and Fulton Streets at the north end of downtown includes a playground, gazebo, a restroom building, and many mature trees. During the Christmas season, the park is transformed with a lighting display that can be seen from the Route 47 bridge and draws visitors from near and far. An interesting comparison would be the Village Green Park in Plainfield, where in recent years the Park District has renovated the playground, added a spray park, added new restrooms and constructed a new shelter. Like Chapin Park, Village Green Park is one block off the main shopping street in Plainfield. In addition to serving nearby residents, it also attracts families who need a break from shopping, dining, or visiting the nearby library. A spray park is an amenity that was suggested by some residents in the community survey and would be an interesting addition to the downtown area either at Chapin Park or in Canalport Park. (add some pic's of the Village Green)
- **Canalport Park** - This park features a replica hull of a canal boat, picnic tables, and open space where the Three French Hens Market is held monthly during warm weather months.
- **Goold Park** - This park, located just north and west of downtown, is a classic example of a community park. It features a swimming pool, a rolling landscape with many beautiful mature trees, and a new bandstand/stage area. Several events are held each year in the park, including the annual Gebhard Woods Dulcimer Festival, movies in the park, and more.
- **Riverfront Park** - This City owned property lies immediately west of the Route 47 bridge along the Illinois River, and contains approximately 4.7 acres. The property is within the floodway of the River and does flood frequently. Current amenities include a parking lot, some beautiful trees, and a picnic area. The park has been used for the Cornfest carnival in recent years. In addition to an attractive open space on the River, this park would serve as a good overflow parking area for downtown events.

❑ TRASH ENCLOSURES:

The City of Morris Site Plan Review Ordinance requires new development to provide enclosures to screen trash cans and dumpsters. However, such screening is challenging downtown given smaller sites with limited space. A creative solution used by some communities is to work with several property owners along an alley to develop a common cart corral – either a fenced off area to store carts or, space permitting, a more substantial structure such as the enclosure pictured below in DeKalb, which was integrated with a public parking lot adjacent to an alley. There has been discussion of a new municipal parking lot at the southeast corner of Main Street and Wauponsee Street. If that were to occur, that might be a good location to consider such as shared trash enclosure. Some communities have even integrated public art into the trash enclosure screening as can be seen by the photo of a screened service area in downtown Batavia.



Source: Google Maps



Source: Teska Associates, Inc.

□ INTERSECTION ENHANCEMENTS

Downtown intersections provide opportunities for 'people places' - locations where people can meet, enjoy some seasonal landscaping, take a break while shopping, and perhaps park a bicycle. To promote safety, these intersections often have stripped pavement areas that provide for safe pedestrian and vehicular movement. It is suggested that the City consider using this space to focus more on the pedestrian. The sketches on the following pages show a concept for improvements at the Liberty Street and Washington Street intersection. A similar concept, perhaps scaled back a little, could be considered for other intersections along Liberty Street in Downtown Morris.

Bumpout, Decorative Pavers, + Plantings (Plainfield, IL)



Source: Google Maps

□ ELECTRICAL OUTLETS

In areas used for events like Canal Port Park and along Liberty Street, provide electrical outlets where possible to accommodate vendors. These outlets could have a central control to be turned on only during events. Some could also be left on for the benefit of visitors, who are often looking for a place to charge their smart phones or other devices.

□ PEDICABS

For large events, consider incorporating the use of some type of passenger vehicle, such as pedicabs/bicycle rickshaws, that could easily transport downtown visitors to and from parking areas, visitor centers, or public restrooms.

Pedicab



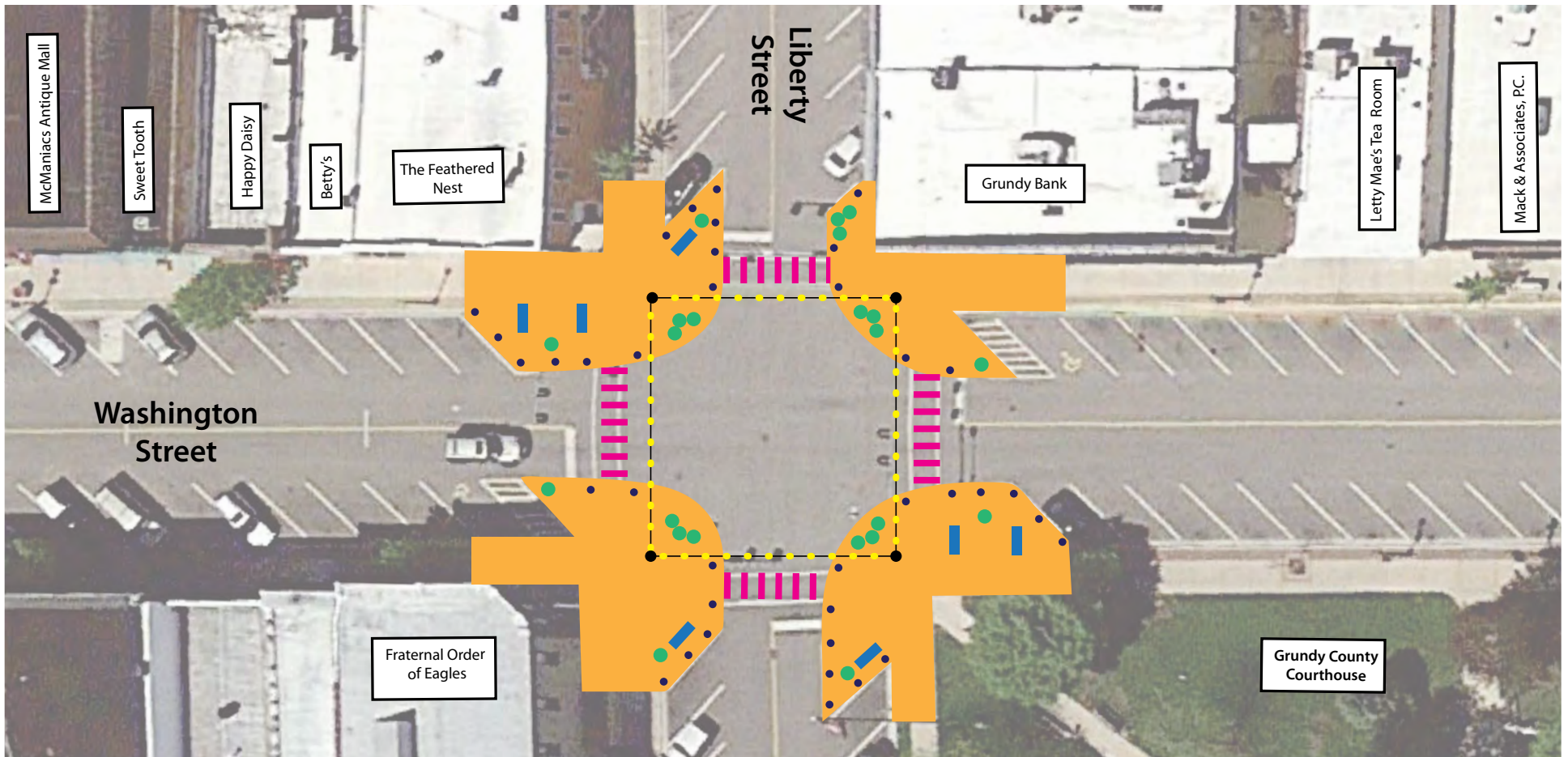
Source: Pixabay

Electrical Outlet (Ottawa, IL)



Source: Google Maps

FIGURE 17. PROPOSED INTERSECTION ENHANCEMENTS: LIBERTY STREET AND WASHINGTON STREET



- People Place Curb Extensions with Decorative Paving
Occupies Existing Painted Bumpout Areas
- Bollards
- Plantings
- Painted Striped Crosswalks
- Festoon Lighting
- Seating

*Final placement of bollards, seating, plantings and festoon lights dependent upon final grading plan.



FIGURE 18. INTERSECTION ENHANCEMENTS: LIBERTY STREET & WASHINGTON STREET



Existing

KEY

- A** People Place Curb Extensions with Decorative Paving Occupies Existing Painted Bumpout Areas
- B** Overhead Festoon Lighting
- C** Plantings
- D** Seating
- E** Painted Striped Crosswalks
- F** Bollards



Proposed

□ PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLY ALLEYS

While it is still used for traditional alley functions as access and trash pick-up, the alley just north of Grundy Bank is frequently used by pedestrians as a passage between downtown businesses and parking along Liberty Street and the popular Letty Mae's Tea Room which is accessed directly off the alley. While the City repaved this alley not long ago, additional pedestrian enhancements would help to create one of those special places that people will remember from their visit to Morris. The sketch on the following pages graphically shows what this might look like, including:

- Permanent mid-block bump outs, providing opportunities for outdoor dining and additional landscaping at the newly remodeled and re-imagined Weits Café
- Decorative lighting and gateway features that invite people to use the alley and improve safety
- Wall murals
- Screening of existing trash receptacles
- Extension of this alley concept to the west to Wauponsee Street, providing a connection to existing and future public parking areas.



Decorative Lighting (Denver, CO)

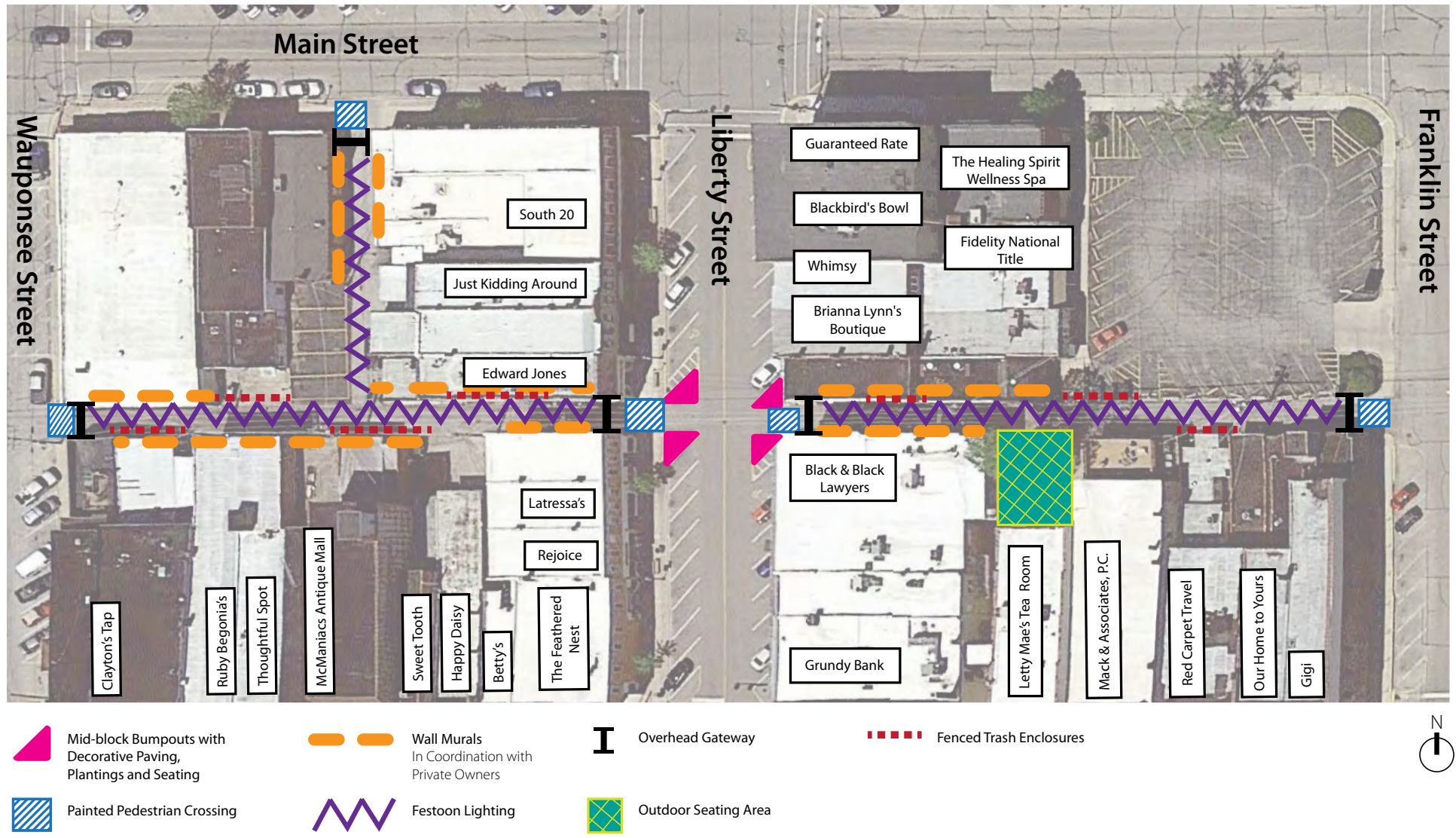
Source: Teska Associates, Inc.



Bumpout + Outdoor Dining (Evanston, IL)

Source: Teska Associates, Inc.

FIGURE 19. PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLY ALLEY PLAN



-  Mid-block Bumpouts with Decorative Paving, Plantings and Seating
-  Painted Pedestrian Crossing
-  Wall Murals In Coordination with Private Owners
-  Festoon Lighting
-  Overhead Gateway
-  Outdoor Seating Area
-  Fenced Trash Enclosures

FIGURE 20. PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLY ALLEY CONCEPT



Existing

KEY _____

- A** Wall Murals
In Coordination with Private Owners
- B** Overhead Gateway and Festoon Lighting
- C** Decorative Paving at Mid-Block Bumpouts
Occupies Existing Painted Bumpout Areas
- D** Painted Pedestrian Crossing
- E** Plantings and Seating



Proposed

PARKING

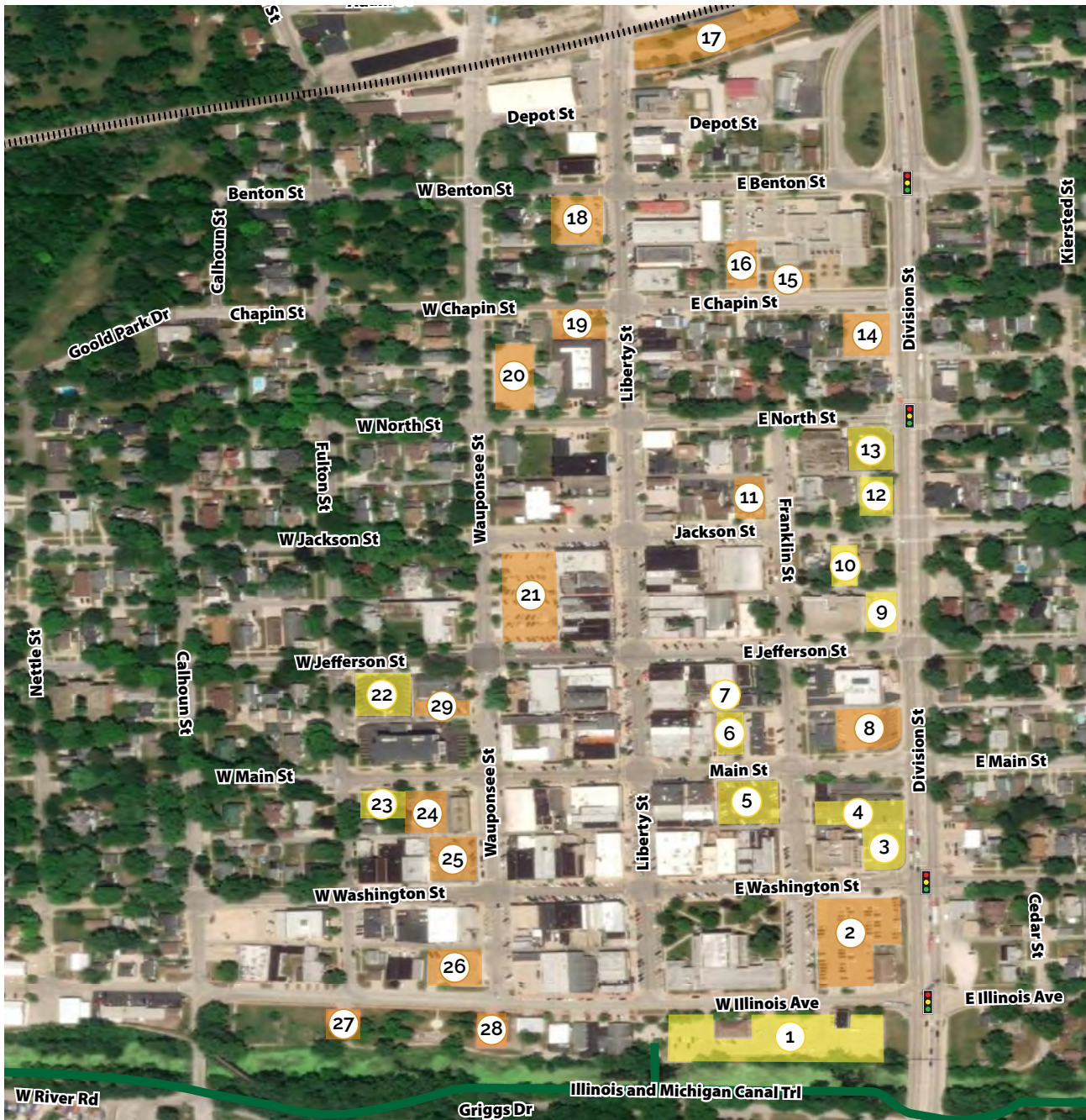
Providing ample and accessible parking for customers and employees is a priority for a successful downtown. Public parking in Downtown Morris is both provided on-street and off-street in city-owned lots in the form of free, time-restricted parking. Some businesses provide additional off-street parking to their customers and employees. Figure 21, below, identifies all public on-street, public off-street, and private off-street parking in Downtown and Table 6, below, quantifies the amount of parking in Downtown Morris by type and location.

TABLE 6. DOWNTOWN PARKING INVENTORY





| # | Public Off-Street Spots | Time Limit | # of Spaces | # | Private Off-Street Spots | Time Limit | # of Spaces | | Public On-Street Spots | Time Limit | # of Spaces |
|----|----------------------------|------------|-------------|----|-------------------------------|------------|-------------|--|------------------------|------------|-------------|
| 2 | Courthouse Lot | - | 100 | 1 | Canal County Lot | N/A | 88 | | Illinois Ave | 2 Hours | 22 |
| 8 | Main/Division | 8 Hours | 26 | 3 | Washington/Division South | N/A | 34 | | Washington Ave | 2 Hours | 88 |
| 11 | Jackson/Franklin | - | 8 | 4 | Washington/Division North | N/A | 36 | | Main St | 2 Hours | 55 |
| 14 | Chapin/Division | 8 Hours | 26 | 5 | Main/Franklin | N/A | 36 | | Jefferson St | 2 Hours | 73 |
| 15 | City Hall 2 | - | 8 | 6 | Jefferson/Franklin South | N/A | 20 | | Jackson St | 2 Hours | 70 |
| 16 | City Hall 1 | - | 20 | 7 | Jefferson/Franklin North | N/A | 10 | | North St | 2 Hours | 36 |
| 17 | Chamber Lot | - | 20 | 9 | Jefferson/Division South | N/A | 10 | | Chapin St | 2 Hours | 40 |
| 18 | Benton/Liberty | 8 Hours | 32 | 10 | Jefferson/Division North | N/A | 18 | | Benton St | 2 Hours | 54 |
| 20 | North/Wauponsee | - | 36 | 12 | Jackson/Division South | N/A | 20 | | Wauponsee St | 2 Hours | 44 |
| 21 | Wauponsee/Jackson | - | 66 | 13 | Jackson/Division North | N/A | 28 | | Liberty St | 2 Hours | 219 |
| 24 | Washington/Wauponsee North | 8 Hours | 25 | 19 | First United Methodist Church | N/A | 16 | | Franklin St | 2 Hours | 88 |
| 25 | Washington/Wauponsee South | 8 Hours | 36 | 22 | Jefferson/Fulton | N/A | 32 | | | | |
| 26 | Illinois/Wauponsee | - | 25 | 23 | Main/Fulton | N/A | 20 | | | | |
| 27 | Canal 2 | - | 14 | | | | | | | | |
| 28 | Canal 1 | - | 18 | | | | | | | | |
| 29 | YMCA | - | 10 | | | | | | | | |
| | | | 476 | | | | 362 | | | | 789 |
| | | | 29% | | | | 22% | | | | 49% |

Total Spaces: 1627

FIGURE 21. DOWNTOWN PARKING LOTS



Key:

-  Public Parking Lots
-  Private Parking Lots
-  Traffic Signal
-  I&M Canal Trail

While Downtown Morris has sufficient parking for the number and types of business, finding a convenient place to park downtown may feel difficult for many users given a variety of factors, including regulations, enforcement, location, and signage. Below is a list of parking challenges that users face in Downtown Morris:

❑ DOWNTOWN DISTRIBUTION

On-street customer parking is hard to find at times on certain blocks given the distribution of businesses in Downtown. It is impossible to provide a convenient parking space for everyone directly in front of their destination. However, typically there are other nearby parking options that drivers may not be aware of.

❑ LACK OF ENFORCEMENT

While the City has a two-hour time restriction on most on-street public parking in the downtown, it is rarely enforced which means some spots can remain occupied for several hours at a time, limiting turnover of the most desirable spaces.

❑ PARKING HIERARCHY

The desire for convenient parking for all users combined with the limited enforcement for parking time restrictions can result in a compromised parking hierarchy. One attempt to tackle the inefficiencies of parking in Downtown is establishing a hierarchy system (or structure). This would be priority based:

- 1. Resident** – Downtown residents should be provided reserved, off-street parking.
- 2. Customer** – Customer parking is a priority and should be accommodated within the most convenient spaces.
- 3. Employee** – Employees are often parked for longer periods of time and should be familiar with the area. They can walk longer distances and utilize less convenient parking.

❑ LOCATION + SIGNAGE

Over the years, the City has provided several parking lots throughout the downtown for customer and visitor parking. However, it may be difficult for users to identify these parking lots as public parking options and/or it may even be difficult for them to locate these lots given a lack of signage and wayfinding.

❑ COMMUNITY EVENTS

Downtown Morris hosts several large events throughout the year that can consume all downtown parking options. While there is typically ample parking for customers and employees on a daily basis, these events tend to highlight the aforementioned challenges and inflate the desire for additional parking.



Parking Recommendations:

□ WAYFINDING

Signage and wayfinding should be installed in and around the downtown and should direct customers to the appropriate lots, thereby creating a pool of easily accessible customer parking. The City or one of its partners could also provide a categorized, easy-to-read parking map to all local businesses for customers to take/use when visiting Downtown Morris. The City and its partners could also provide these materials on their websites and social media accounts.

□ LOT DESIGNATIONS

To the extent possible, each lot should be wholly or mostly designated for a particular user – whether its customers, employees, or residents to make usability of the system most clear. Signage at the entrance of the lot should display the type of parking accommodated within the lot.



□ OFF-STREET FACILITIES

All customer parking in surface lots should be 4+ hour in off-street facilities in order to force users into an off-street lot if they desire to park for a longer period. This maximizes turnover of the on-street spaces.

□ ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATIONS

Electric vehicle charging stations should be installed in key retail and destination locations in downtown to help meet customer/tourist expectations and infrastructure needs as electric vehicles become more common.

□ EVENT PARKING

Continue to monitor event parking in the downtown and continue to maintain communication between the City and event organizations. Continue to improve connectivity (wayfinding signage, lighting, etc.) between Liberty Street (through Canal Port plaza and over the bridge) and the City-owned lot south of the canal, which can be used for additional overflow parking for larger events.



Electric Vehicle Charging (Frankfort, IL)



CHAPTER 6.

IMPLEMENTATION

STRATEGIES

THE WHAT & HOW TO ENHANCE DOWNTOWN MORRIS

This plan outlines many initiatives to continue the transformation of Downtown Morris from good to great. Generating ideas is the easy part. This chapter focuses on the harder part of getting it done. The focus is on:

1. Marketing & Promotional Recommendations –

Morris has a great story, and we need to tell it to the world (or at least the region). We need to communicate successes, telling the story of unique local businesses and the people that drive them. That can be done thru traditional print marketing materials which still have value. However, most of the effort should be focused on social media and web-based information. Maintaining a strong event calendar is also an important component to the promotional effort.

2. Operational Recommendations –

These recommendations focus on how to manage implementation efforts to guide Downtown Morris. They also highlight the need for continued regional collaboration.

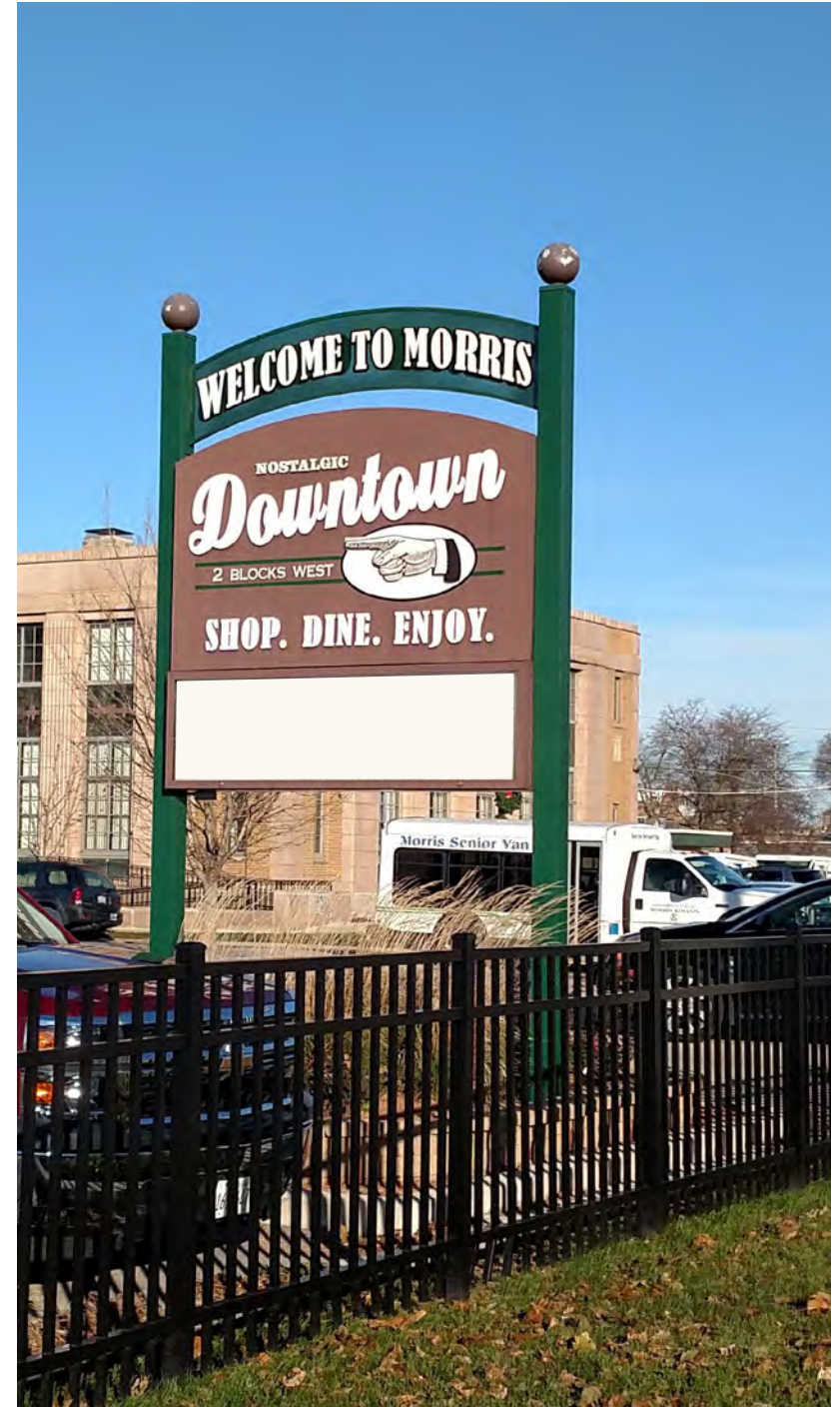
3. Funding Opportunities –

Without funding, great ideas can't turn into reality. This section describes some traditional and non-traditional sources of funding Morris can tap to implement the plan.

4. Priority Projects –

This section provides a summary of the key plan recommendations, responsible parties, and suggested priorities for implementation. Priorities include:

- a. 0 to 2 years
- b. 3 to 5 years
- c. 5 years and beyond



MARKETING & PROMOTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The current special events calendar in Downtown Morris includes multiple events held throughout the year that are well organized and well attended. Applying a strategic approach to future events and marketing will be critical to creating greater excitement about Downtown Morris. This approach will also cultivate Downtown's unique experience for residents and visitors.

□ TEMPORARY USES

Consider incorporating temporary uses as part of Downtown's overall marketing effort. Outdoor dining, pop-ups, and seasonal businesses occupying vacant storefronts are examples of activities that will attract consumers to see the 'new things' happening in Downtown Morris. These kinds of activities can become components of established special events.

□ WEB-BASED INFORMATION

Continuously improve the quality, availability, and accessibility of web-based information about Downtown Morris and its businesses on downtown and partner websites. In addition to search terms and mobile enabled, this information should include a consolidated event calendar, a complete downtown business list and map (also available for download), and a current parking map showing parking locations noting any time restrictions in each location. This information should be updated routinely;

□ MONITOR EVENTS

Review the downtown events calendar annually. Monitor each special event's results, using relevant event evaluation criteria to determine whether the event is duplicative, meets defined downtown objectives, and/or meets sponsor criteria. In addition, routinely update work plans for each downtown event;

□ ONLINE TRAINING

As appropriate, provide access to online and social media training for Downtown's ground level businesses;

□ REVIEW MARKETING MATERIALS

Also, review downtown-related electronic and social media and print marketing materials annually to ensure relevance, and make any necessary updates quarterly;

□ BALANCE PROMOTIONAL CALENDAR

In planning the annual marketing and promotional calendar, work to balance special events, major festivals, and business promotions at optimal times each year.

□ COMMUNICATE SUCCESS

Develop a strategic public relations strategy to communicate successes in Downtown Morris, including business and partnership successes and telling Downtown's story;

□ UTILIZE LOCAL RESOURCES

Seek out assistance from other area institutions, such as marketing internship opportunities with Joliet Junior College.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Downtown organizations foster economic growth in their commercial districts. As noted, Downtown Morris' key stakeholders are engaged in downtown issues and want downtown to continuously improve. The organizational capacity and local partnerships already exist. The MDDP currently functions as a part-time operation, and the MRA's volunteer driven work focuses on promotions to increase downtown merchant sales. The following recommendations are structured to establish a "downtown champion" focused on Downtown's economic success.

□ MERGE THE MDDP AND MRA

Combining the resources and expertise of both organizations will permit the establishment of a dedicated organization that advocates for downtown interests, promotes downtown, and develops programming to benefit downtown stakeholders.⁴ Having the MRA become a standing and working committee within the MDDP may be the easiest option, particularly to continue their successful business promotions.

□ HIRE A FULL-TIME DOWNTOWN DIRECTOR

With a single organization and sustainable funding, a downtown director can coordinate downtown work, advocate for Downtown's interests, and expand Downtown's partnerships.

□ ESTABLISH AN SSA

As part of the merger process, establish a SSA to fund downtown revitalization programming. Downtown businesses and property owners have expressed an interest in establishing a SSA to fund downtown work. Their interest in this funding mechanism and determining the right level of SSA funding should be evaluated.

□ DEVELOP FUNDING PLAN

In conjunction with the SSA process, develop a funding plan for the merged organization. This plan should address multiple funding sources, including sponsorships, a 'Friend of Downtown' group for residents, and collaborative grant applications.

□ IDENTIFY LOCAL EXPERTISE AND VOLUNTEERS

The Resident/Consumer Survey results provided a list of 589 contacts (287 of these contacts are aged 25-44.) These contacts are potential volunteers and likely possess useful knowledge to contribute to Downtown's future. Their interest in Downtown Morris presents another opportunity to engage more residents with their downtown.

□ COLLABORATE WITH REGIONAL PARTNERS

For the long-term, the downtown organization should collaborate with its economic partners, including the regional Small Business Development Center (SBDC), in fostering downtown business growth through entrepreneurship, expansion, retention, and recruitment.

Defining this "downtown champion" is also important to maintaining effective local, county, and regional partnerships. For the City, providing services to the entire community, in addition to downtown, is their mission. The Grundy County Chamber and the Grundy EDC have county-wide responsibilities for economic growth. The HCCVB is responsible for tourism growth in all or part of five (5) counties along a 97-mile corridor. For Downtown Morris' future, a designated downtown champion will enhance these partner relationships and will support ongoing customer and business attraction.

⁴ | Mergers to simply City economic development efforts have occurred in two (2) of the best practices communities. The goal with any merger is efficiency and increased focus in downtown work.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

As noted in the above Operational Recommendations, Downtown Morris' public and private sectors should consider establishing a SSA to fund the suggested downtown organization and its programming. Other funding options for the MDDP and/or the City to potentially access in support of specific revitalization programming are:

□ AARP LIVABLE COMMUNITIES COMMUNITY CHALLENGE

Through its Livable Communities initiative, AARP offers an annual challenge grant. Non-profits and local governments are eligible to apply. Applications for grant funding are due in April, and there are no set amounts for grant funding. Projects with the following criteria are acceptable for the application process: creating vibrant places; increasing connectivity, mobility, and transportation options; strengthening local housing and affordability; and engaging local citizens in these efforts. Project priorities include permanent physical improvements, temporary demonstrations to implement long-term change, and innovative programming or services. Recent projects include the installation of benches and planters, decorative lighting, parklets, public art, and accessibility improvements. The website link is provided below and includes important information about the grant application process and past successful projects.

<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/info-2020/2020-challenge.html>

□ AMERICAN EXPRESS FUTURE OF SHOPPING SMALL BUSINESS GRANT PROGRAM

Introduced in late 2019, this grant program is co-sponsored by American Express and the National Main Street Center. (Being an active Main Street member or local program is not required for application.) This \$10,000 grant is available to qualified small businesses as part of a competitive application process. Businesses must have fewer than 100 employees and operate out of a physical location. Eligibility and program information can be found at:

https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NMSC/390e0055-2395-4d3b-af60-81b53974430d/UploadedImages/Special_Projects/Future_of_Shopping_Small_Grant_Program_Terms_and_Conditions.pdf

□ LEVITT AMP GRANT/LEVITT FOUNDATION

The Levitt AMP grant provides matching funds for musical performance series in small to mid-sized communities. The Levitt Foundation considers several qualifiers in identifying finalists, including the quality of the venue and programming and outreach to all members of the applicant community. The Top 25 finalists in each grant making cycle are subject to online voting. Applicants with the largest number of votes receive funding. The grant making process typically starts in July, concluding in September. The following link provides information about the grant and grant making process. Past Illinois winners have included Galva, Jacksonville, and Springfield.

<https://grant.levittamp.org/levitt-amp-city-grant-awards/>

□ OPEN SPACE LAND ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT (OSLAD)

This program, administered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) offers a 50% match to acquire and construct park improvements. The program will fund up to a \$400,000 match for development projects, and has been used by the City of Morris for past park improvements.

Through interviews and the survey, residents and shoppers asked for consideration of additional recreational amenities in Downtown Morris – possibly a splash pad or an enhanced playground. Both of these facilities are frequently funded through the OSLAD program. The City could apply for an OSLAD development grant to fund such improvements, most likely in Chapin Park or potentially in Canalport Park.

<https://www2.illinois.gov/dnr/aeg/pages/openspacelandsacquisitiondevelopment-grant.aspx>

□ ILLINOIS TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM (ITEP)

As it relates to plan recommendations, the ITEP program can potentially assist with funding for:

- Pedestrian/Bicycle Facilities
- Streetscapes
- Historic Preservation & Rehabilitation of Historic Transportation Facilities

This program is administered by IDOT with funds primarily coming from Federal sources. However, the program is currently being revised based on additional funding provided through the State of Illinois Capital Bill. Earlier versions of the program required applicants to have completed Phase 1 Engineering prior to grant submittal. However, that requirement is being modified this year. The program also previously required a 20% local match, meaning 80% of the final engineering and construction costs were covered by the grant. The 20% local match is currently under review, with a tentative proposal to change that requirement to a sliding scale based on the size and characteristics of the community. With the potential for an 80% match, this program is highly competitive but also one of the best programs available to fund projects that can enhance the character and uniqueness of a community.

<http://www.idot.illinois.gov/transportation-system/local-transportation-partners/county-engineers-and-local-public-agencies/funding-opportunities/ITEP>

□ HISTORIC TAX CREDITS

For Downtown Morris' historic building rehabilitations, tax credits represent a potential financing tool that has been successfully used by regional developers. These credits are available for properties included in the National Register of Historic Places, either as individual listings or as contributing structures to a National Register district, or for properties deemed National Register eligible by Illinois' State Historic Preservation Office (Historic Preservation Division of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources). Properties must be listed on the National Register prior to project completion. Listing can be accomplished as part of the historic tax credit application process. The Historic Preservation Division of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources administers the federal and state historic tax credit programs in Illinois.

- **20% Federal Historic Tax Credit:** This Historic Tax Credit is used to rehabilitate a historic building, as defined above, to an income-producing use. This dollar-for-dollar federal income tax credit, equal to 20% of the qualified costs and expenses, is available to the property owner or tax-credit investors via syndication on the secondary market. For a qualified rehabilitation, project costs must exceed the building's 'adjusted basis.' This is defined as the purchase price minus the land cost and depreciation, and eligible costs are confirmed as part of the application process.

- **25% Illinois Historic Tax Credit:** Initiated in 2019, Illinois' Historic Tax Credit is available for rehabilitating a historic building for an income-producing use. This tax credit program is competitive. It provides a 25% dollar-for-dollar state income tax credit for qualified construction costs and expenses. This state tax credit must be used in tandem with the 20% Federal Historic Tax Credit. Qualified projects can apply for 25% of the qualifying rehabilitation expenditures, or QREs, up to a maximum of \$3 million. Eligible rehabilitation costs must exceed the building's 'adjusted basis.' Applications given priority for approval must also meet one of the following criteria: 1) qualified historic structures located in counties bordering states offering a historic rehabilitation tax credit; 2) qualified historic structures owned previously by federal, state or local governmental entities; 3) qualified historic structures located in census tracts with median family incomes at or below the state median family income; 4) qualified plan for rehabilitation includes certain development partners, such as a Community Development Entity (CDE) or not-for-profit organization; 5) qualified historic structures located in areas declared major disaster areas under the federal Stafford Act. Potential applicants should check the following web page for deadlines and information about mandatory meetings scheduled for potential applicants. Information about the federal historic tax credit is also available. Also, the current legislation provides for this credit's sunset on December 31, 2023.

https://www2.illinois.gov/dnrhistoric/Preserve/Pages/statecredit.aspx?fbclid=IwAR2aF5MPzJgGwMqlnd6jqrmkpwcvn7PXcTW_A060vmHjav_jxQe12UDhgoA

□ TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF)

TIF is a tool that the City of Morris has been using for years to promote redevelopment and partnership with the private sector. The City currently has two TIF Districts, one for a proposed Marina on the east side of town and a larger TIF that runs along Route 47 and Route 6, including much of downtown. This Morris TIF #1 has been very successful, providing millions of dollars in needed infrastructure projects while providing significant assistance to the school districts and other area taxing bodies. TIF #1 is currently producing almost \$5,000,000 a year in revenue, with half of that allocated back to the taxing bodies. The TIF District will expire at the end of 2021, leaving a very short window for additional projects in downtown or elsewhere. The TIF was used to fund this planning study.

Illinois Statutes outline what TIF funds can and cannot be used for. Downtown projects which can be funded through a TIF include:

- Road, utility, and streetscape enhancements
- Provision of public parking
- Facade and or interior renovation improvements
- Engineering and design services
- Marketing and promotion

It is recommended that the City work closely with the MDDP and MRA to quickly prioritize projects outlined in this Enhance Downtown Morris Plan that can be funded through remaining TIF Funds and quickly put the plan into action.

FIGURE 22. MORRIS TIF DISTRICTS



PRIORITY PROJECTS

A: 0 to 2 years **B:** 3 to 5 years **C:** 5 years and beyond

| Priority | Action Item | Partners | Notes | Page # Reference |
|------------|---|---|--|--------------------------------|
| C | Install informational kiosk at south end of downtown, and provide enhanced signage for visitors center in Chamber office | MDDP, MRA, Grundy Chamber, City of Morris | Liberty/Washington intersection would be ideal | Pg. 24 |
| A | Refine and promote <i>Walk Morris!</i> | MDDP, MRA, Grundy Chamber, City of Morris | Coordinate with other Heritage Corridor communities | Pg. 25 |
| A | Create Business Transition Zoning District | City of Morris, property owners | Conduct public meeting to discuss proposed zone, determine property owner interest | Pg. 29 |
| C | Rezone manufacturing area north of I&M Canal | City of Morris, property owners | | Pg. 29 |
| C | Provide opportunities to expand housing options | Developers, property owners, City of Morris | Focus on key opportunity sites | Pg. 29, pg. 32, pg. 36, pg. 42 |
| C | Enhance pedestrian connection on Illinois Avenue between Calhoun and Nettle Streets | City of Morris, property owners | Conceptual cost estimate of \$540,000 | Pg. 40-41 |
| B | Replace aging planters and trash receptacles | City of Morris, MDDP | Could be funded through a SSA, see Appendix for general cost estimates | Pg. 45 |
| B | Renew efforts to place historic plaques on downtown buildings | MDDP, property owners | | Pg. 45 |
| A | Refine and implement enhanced gateway and wayfinding signage | City of Morris, MDDP | See Appendix for general cost estimates | Pg. 47-48 |
| A-B | Install curb bump outs and enhanced crosswalks | City of Morris | See Appendix for general cost estimates | Pg. 50 |
| A | Designate bike route and bike lanes along Wauponsee Street with connections to Liberty Street. Install additional bike parking, and develop a bike friendly Morris guide. | City of Morris, MDDP | Conduct focus group with local bike riders to gain early input | Pg. 51 |
| A | Install celebration lighting at key locations | City of Morris | Key intersections and/or major links to Route 47 | Pg. 52 |
| A | Update City regulations regarding outdoor dining | City of Morris, MDDP, MRA | | Pg. 55 |

PRIORITY PROJECTS

A: 0 to 2 years **B:** 3 to 5 years **C:** 5 years and beyond

| Priority | Action Item | Partners | Notes | Page # Reference |
|----------|---|---|--|------------------|
| A | Work with restaurants to create outdoor dining opportunities, including rooftops, bump outs, and temporary parklets | Restaurants, MDDP, City of Morris | Install temporary parklets in mid block locations, consider more permanent bump outs at intersections | Pg. 55 |
| B | Create placemaking event to promote public art and placemaking experiments | MDDP, City of Morris | Perhaps a sidewalk chalk day, or temporary curb bump outs, or make an alley smile day | Pg. 53-54 |
| B | Screen trash enclosures in alleys used by pedestrians | Property owners, City of Morris, Garbage hauler | | Pg. 58 |
| A | Install alley improvements in blocks bound by Main, Franklin, Washington, Wauponsee | City of Morris, MDDP, Property Owners | Work with alley users (garbage, utilities, etc) to coordinate access needs while enhancing alley for pedestrian connections | Pg. 62-64 |
| B | Install consistent signs at all City-owned parking lots and develop parking guide to downtown Morris | City of Morris, MDDP | Parking guide should be in printed on a simple card that can be made available in shops and restaurants, and posted to key web sites (City, MDDP, MRA) | Pg. 67-68 |
| B | Better utilize Riverfront Park for special event Parking | City of Morris, MDDP | Minimal improvements needed, just some directional signage and a simple layout for event parking | Pg. 57 |
| C | Install a splash pad in Chapin Park | City of Morris | Plainfield's Village Green is a good example | Pg. 57 |
| A | Enhance web-based information on downtown | MDDP, MRA, City of Morris | This is an on-going need to keep information current and relevant | Pg. 71 |
| B | Consolidate Downtown Organizations | MDDP, MRA, Grundy Chamber, City of Morris | | Pg. 72 |
| A | Develop Branding and Marketing Strategy | MDDP, MRA, Grundy Chamber, City of Morris | Ottawa is a good example | Pg. 71 |
| B | Hire a Full-time Downtown Director | New combined organization | | Pg. 72 |
| C | Establish a Special Service Area (SSA) | City of Morris, downtown property owners | | Pg. 72 |



APPENDIX



APPENDIX (SEPARATE DOCUMENT)

Appendix A: COVID-19 Resources

Appendix B: Streetscape Cost Scenarios

Appendix C: Survey Results

Appendix D: Stakeholder Interview Notes

Appendix E: Market Data

Appendix F: Facade Improvements & Streetscape Recommendations