

---

# DOWNTOWN SIDNEY MASTER PLAN

---

PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS  
PARKING  
DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

---

URBAN DEVELOPMENT SERVICES  
November 22, 2008

---



# acknowledgments

The Sidney Master Plan was developed by the people of City of Sidney, City of Sidney Staff, and lead consultant Urban Development Services. Special thanks to all the individuals who volunteered their time for interviews, workshops, and sessions.

## City of Sidney Council

- Wendall Gaston
- Dalan Hiatt
- Marvin Filsinger
- Larry Hiers
- Dave Weiderspon
- Bob Van Vleet

## Downtown Master Plan Steering Committee

- John Hehnke, Public Works, City of Sidney
- Hank Radtke, Street Superintendent
- Rod Fries, Electric Department Superintendent
- Gary Person, City Manager, City of Sidney
- Jim Pelster, Building & Zoning Administrator
- Megan McGown, Executive Director, Cheyenne County Chamber of Commerce

Special thanks to City Manager Gary Person whose organization and undivided attention made the Master Plan process work smoothly for the UDS/Bender Wells Clark Design team and to Cheyenne County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Megan McGown for leading a successful revitalization effort in Downtown Sidney

## Urban Development Services Team

### **Scott Day, Principal**

Urban Development Services  
354 Thorman Place  
San Antonio, TX 78209  
[www.urbandevelopmentservices.com](http://www.urbandevelopmentservices.com)

### **Larry Clark, Vice President**

Bender, Clark, Wells Design  
830 North Alamo Street  
San Antonio, Texas 78215  
[www.bwcdesign.com](http://www.bwcdesign.com)

# contents

- Executive Summary.....4
- Planning Process.....6
- History.....7
- Principals and Objectives.....10
- Master Plan Phases.....12
- Master Plan, Phase 1, Walkability and Beautification.....13
- Public Plaza .....15
- Signage and Wayfinding.....17
- Traffic .....20
- Parking .....20
- Infrastructure and Storm Water Needs.....22
- Urban Design Standards .....25
- Master Plan, Phase Two, Development in Downtown .....27
- Housing .....29
- Conclusions-Action Items.....31
- Incentives, Developer’s Tool Kit.....35
- Appendix A Illustrative Plan.....36
- Appendix B Details Sheet.....37
- Appendix C Plan for Plaza and Farmers Market .....38
- Appendix D Plan for Wayfinding .....39
- Appendix E Framework Plan .....40
- Appendix F Samples for Interpretive Signs .....41
- Appendix G Pavement Conditions .....42
- Appendix H Sidewalk Conditions .....43
- Appendix I Curb Conditions .....44
- Appendix J Drainage Conditions .....45

# executive summary

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Sidney has completed a citizen-driven master planning study for the Downtown. This planning effort is intended to build upon the pre-existing community vision and provide a broad foundation for public consensus on strategic actions to implement the vision. The City of Sidney is strategically located along Interstate 80 nestled in the rolling hills of the western panhandle of Nebraska. Sidney, like many communities, has seen a decline in its traditional downtown retail yet it maintains its strength as an office and financial center and a center for government. This Master Plan builds on Sidney's strengths and addresses emerging redevelopment opportunities to ensure a diverse future as an urban center serving the needs of the City's residents and its visitors.

The Master Planning process provided a community forum for discussing these issues and opportunities. The process was guided by a Steering Committee made up of City Staff and representatives from local businesses and community organizations. In addition to this committee, one-on-one stakeholder interviews and two public meetings provided the Sidney citizens a forum for public discourse. Based on these discussions and previous visioning efforts this document was developed.

In addition to this mission statement, seven planning principles for building a better Downtown were established to help direct the Master Planning process. Those principles are:

- Capitalize on strategic downtown parcels
- Connect downtown to the emerging business district on Old Post Road
- Leverage the assets (Historic Downtown History)
- Create a downtown that is beautiful and easy to walk through
- Establish a place for public assembly
- Create Design Standards to support and market the vision

With these principles guiding the process, a Master Plan emerged that emphasizes the importance of developing livable solutions to various issues affecting the City today. Livable solutions means that residents can live, work, shop, and socialize in a Downtown that is walkable and convenient. To achieve this, the Master Plan suggests new ways of thinking about infrastructure, transportation planning, affordable housing, and residential densities. In order to implement this new thinking without losing the quaint, historic nature of the Downtown, a series of key recommendations were developed. These "action items" are intended to be the first and continuing steps the City can take in order to achieve the citizen-based vision.

- Enhance the Downtown Address
- Focus on the Neighborhood Connections
- Establish the Property Framework
- Reestablish the Social Pattern of Coming to Downtown
- Market Downtown to the Development Community
- Defend Your Position
- Densify Downtown Residential

This Master Plan report is summarized beginning with the public process and citizen input. The report then walks through the primary planning principles, and breaks down the Master Plan into two phases. The two phases are discussed in detail and the report closes with conclusions and the next steps required for action and implementation. The City of Sidney is billed as “Small Town Values....Big Time Opportunities” and this has never been truer. The Master Plan builds on the strong citizen-based community vision and goes further to realize the full potential of the Downtown.

The Master Plan anticipates the on-going physical changes and potential market demands within the City. The outcome is a consensus on the importance of reinvestment into both the public realm and private property. This will require bold new initiatives to plan, incentivize, and finance many public enhancements and redevelopment activities. Partnerships between public agencies, private businesses, and the community will be necessary to ensure success. Downtown Sidney has tremendous potential as a regional center for urban living, fostered by its rich community built on the City’s unique history, culture, and economic resources. With a coordinated plan and the right tools for success, Downtown Sidney can ensure a bright tomorrow as a livable city in which young professionals, retirees, families, and tourists will come to live, work, play, and visit.

# the planning process



## THE MASTER PLANNING PROCESS

The design team reviewed previous visioning and planning efforts by the City, Chamber of Commerce and others. Key stakeholders, including representatives of city council and other members of the community, were interviewed and their input was incorporated into the study. In addition, two public meetings were held, at which input in various forms was accepted. Over the course of these meetings it is estimated that more than 45 Sidney residents attended. The second public meeting included the Chamber of Commerce's membership. Attendees were asked to rate the most important projects to undertake in the downtown. These themes were later ranked and organized into draft themes that formed the basis of the design principles and ultimately framed the master plan.



A final public meeting was held to gain comments regarding the drawings and to review this document. Over 25 people attended this meeting representing the steering committee, businesses, property owners, city officials and department heads.

# history



As the oldest settlement in all of western Nebraska, Sidney was considered the frontier territorial capital of Nebraska's High Plains region. At one time Cheyenne County's boundaries expanded over 7,210 square miles of the Nebraska Panhandle and Sidney was its county seat. Its territorial jurisdiction was double that size over the entire Panhandle.

It was laid out in 1867 by the Union Pacific Railroad and named for Sidney Dillon, then President of the Union Pacific. Frequent skirmishes between native Americans and railroad workers led to the establishment of a military outpost in 1869. A town site was established the summer of the same year. Sidney Barracks later became Fort Sidney, but not until Oct 8, 1884, did the City of Sidney officially incorporate as a municipality.

Sidney prospered in its first few years as a key freighting point, but grew rapidly when gold was discovered in the Black Hills in 1874. The Sidney-Deadwood Trail not only opened the shortest freight route to the gold fields from 1874-1881, it also linked Sidney with military posts and Indian agencies to the northwest.

The community served as the railhead for equipment and supplies moving northward. Shortage of sleeping accommodations led to the establishment of the world's first all night theater, a front street lined with 80 saloons, gaming halls, brothels and boarding houses and many colorful old west tales that gave Sidney the moniker as "Sinful Sidney - The Toughest Town in the Western Frontier." Traffic on the trail eventually phased out when the railroad arrived in Deadwood and Lead and the Fort closed in 1894.

With the outbreak of World War II, there was once again a military presence in the community with the construction and operation of the Sioux Ordinance Depot 10 miles northwest of

Sidney. The Depot saw important duty during the Korean War and Vietnam War. This resulted in great influx of people to Sidney and Cheyenne County. The Department of Defense terminated the Sioux Army Depot service 1967. This area today serves as private industrial parks for several regional businesses.



When the Lincoln Highway was designated in 1913, the automobile was still in its infancy. Those that had cars found road conditions were unsuitable for driving. City streets were often paved, but rural roads were primarily dirt tracks connecting farmlands. Without federal funding, and adequate financial backing, it was impossible to construct a road across America. It was, however, possible to identify existing roads and to label them as the Lincoln Highway. Sidney's previous history of being associated with military routes would again prove valuable as Illinois Avenue was deemed part

of the first transcontinental route. This designation would bring untold amounts of traffic through downtown each year till Interstate 80 was opened around Sidney on October 19, 1974.

Oil was discovered near Gurley in 1949 that setting off an oil exploration boom throughout the southern Panhandle. Sidney was designated to become the center of this with the establishment of the Nebraska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission headquarters. Cheyenne County still ranks as the No. 2 all-time oil producer in the history of the State of Nebraska and No.1 natural gas producer.

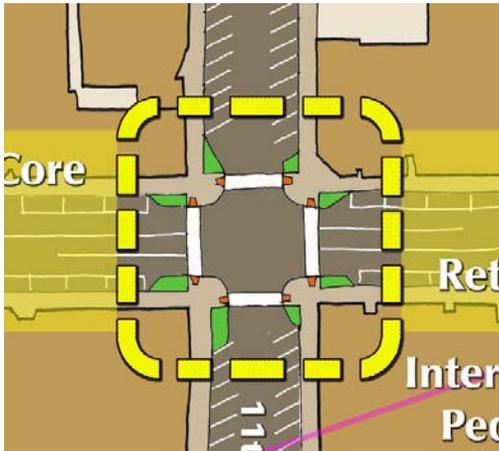
Sidney was largely dependent upon agricultural income since the first settlements. The Homestead Act and Kincaid Act increased the number of industrious farmers and ranchers to turn Sidney into an agriculture trade center. Even with the trend towards larger farms and fewer farmers, Cheyenne County remains the number one wheat producing county in Nebraska. Diversity and value added agri-businesses have helped sustain the agriculture economy.

The Washington Post's front page article cited Sidney as a community that has more jobs per capita than any other community in America. In 2005 national economist Jack Schultz wrote a book titled "Boom Town U.S.A. - the 7 1/2 keys to big success in small towns" listing Sidney as one of America's Top 100 rural communities for those under 50,000 population and one of only 4 Nebraska communities that met all of the community and economic standards for success. Schultz spoke at the 2008 Business & Industry luncheon in Sidney and cited the community as one of only five communities in America with more jobs than people who actually reside in the town.

Sidney's proud history has unveiled a story of triumph over reversals and setbacks, which would have destroyed the hopes and ambitions of lesser citizens. In Sidney's 140 year history it has met the challenges of change and remains vibrant, energetic and attractive. Sidney is truly one of rural America's success stories.



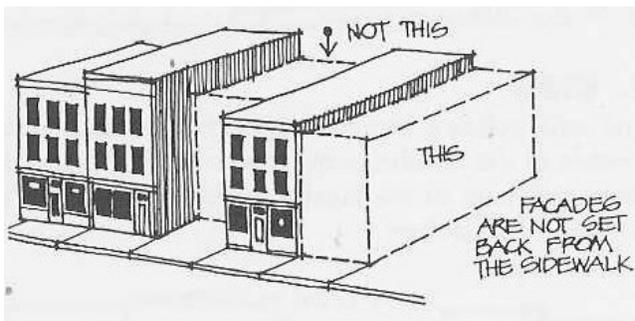




**Downtown Should be Walkable and Beautiful**  
 In order to enhance the overall community vision, a balance must be struck between pedestrian needs, general livability and the demands of the roadways. A common theme from the citizen input was to improve the beauty and walkability of the City. This should be achieved through an overall focus on stronger and healthier pedestrian environments and the implementation of more extensive street tree canopy.



**Downtown needs a place for public assembly**  
 Downtown is without adequate space for public assembly and needs a site that can host the farmers market. A community Sidney's size needs this space to be multi-use. The master plan identifies two different possible locations for this, the parking lots at Hickory and 10<sup>th</sup> and redesigning the parking lots on the east side of the courthouse



**Create Design Standards that Support and Markets the Vision**  
 In order to ensure the success of the citizen-based vision, the community should develop and implement design standards to ensure that new development augments and builds foot traffic for existing businesses. These standards are easy to implement and understand.

## the master plan — “two phases”

The first phase of the Master Plan involves items that can be controlled and modified by the City. This includes general beautification, pedestrian crossings and general walkability, new streetscapes and street tree plantings, required infrastructure, and a stormwater master plan. Phase I also includes a focus on updated Downtown signage and way-finding, urban design standards, marketing and development efforts, and strategic partnering with regional entities to achieve broader based efforts.

The second phase builds upon the implementation of Phase I and focuses on new development and housing to capitalize on downtown’s abundance of vacant second story space as a major asset. Phase II considers the need for more housing and suggests a focus on developing infill residential of various types in and around the core downtown. The beautification and livability efforts in Phase I will make this in-town residential more attractive and support the goal of bringing more residents to Downtown. Sound, market rate housing in various formats will help attract and retain the residents needed to continue to develop Sidney’s economic base.

# the master plan — phase one

## WALKABILITY & BEAUTIFICATION

### BEAUTIFICATION

The first phase of the Master Plan (Appendix A) entails basic beautification efforts in and around the Downtown Core. These efforts will greatly improve retail conditions, and moreover will create a more pleasant and unique identity for the Downtown which will begin to set it apart from other cities in the region.

### PEDESTRIAN CROSSING

The walking audit conducted early in the design process showed that many of the pedestrian crossings in Downtown are in disrepair or do not meet current American with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. Focusing on the core intersections including 10<sup>TH</sup> and Illinois and 10<sup>th</sup> and Jackson will help increase walkability and encourage more people to experience more of the Downtown. Various methods available to improve these crossings include: traffic calming, count-down pedestrian crossing lights, bricked crosswalks and way-finding.



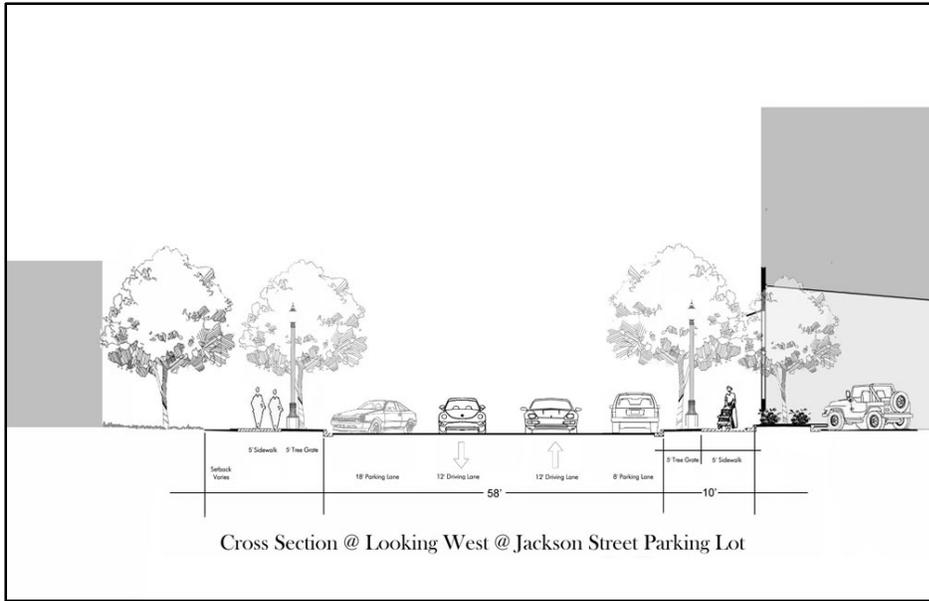
### WALKABILITY

In addition to adding beauty to Downtown, the City must become more walkable. Installing street trees and changing the section of some roadways by adding bulb-outs will slow drivers through the Downtown while continuing to efficiently accommodate vehicles. The following will further enhance Downtown:

- Add street trees
- Use consistent street furniture that reinforces downtown's architecture
- Upgrade streets and water drainage
- Improve sidewalks experiences
- Add Bike lanes
- Improve on-street parking
- Plant native, xeric, and flowering
- Improve or upgrade crosswalks
- Upgrade or repair crosswalk ramps
- Add canopy or shade structures over business entrances

Illinois Street and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue have wide sidewalks. Retain and expand these at intersections with bulb-out areas to extend further and thereby slow down traffic. The intersections would include new planted street trees with grates in Downtown and in tree lawns outside the immediate Downtown. Period lighting will highlight the historic qualities of Downtown Sidney. This could be combined with appropriate signage and banners. Retailers are encouraged to take advantage of the wide sidewalks by placing tables and chairs in front of their stores.

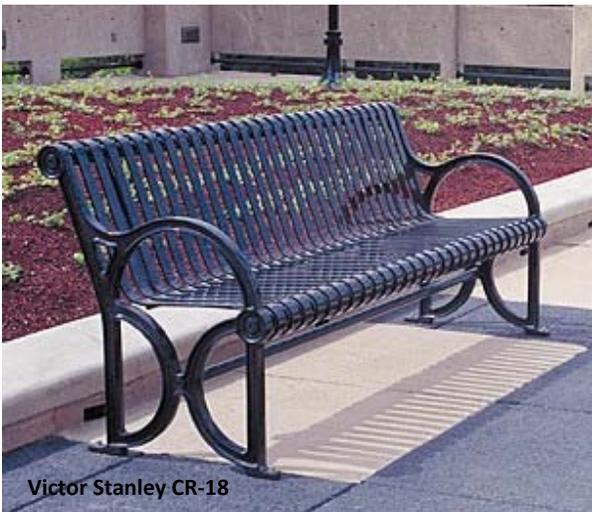




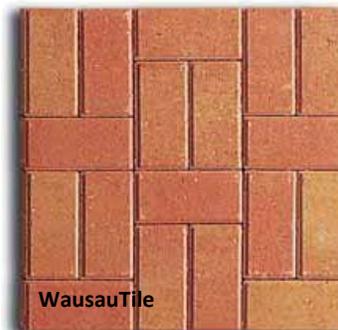
**STREETSCAPE GOAL**

The goal of getting people to walk further in downtown is achieved by providing them with a more enjoyable walkway via better shade, landscaping along parking lots, narrowing the street so that traffic slows and better illumination at night.

**DESIGN PALLETTE**



The suggested design palette (Appendix B) evokes Sidney's downtown architectural heritage with a blend of traditional materials with a hint of contemporary and classic styling. The materials are highly durable and should resist the rigors of downtown.



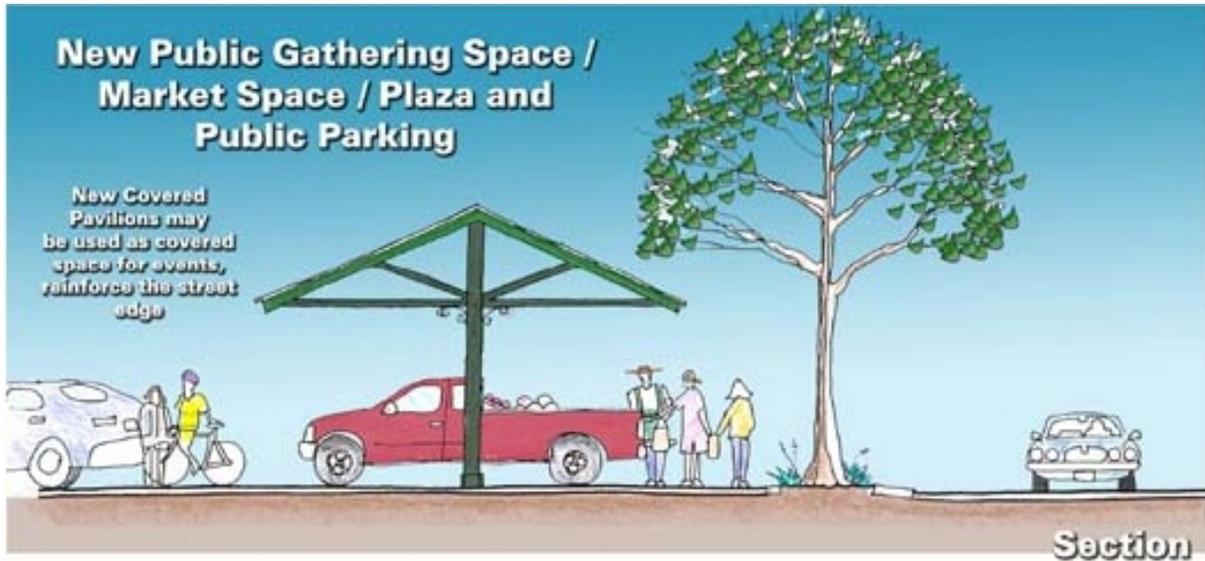
Union Metal, Colonial

## DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC PLAZA



One idea universally supported in the two community input sessions and in other community planning work is that Downtown Sidney needs a more formal space for gathering (Appendix C). This is important if downtown is to serve as the social living room for the community. Sidney needs a downtown social living room. When redesigned, these types of spaces are centers of community life where residents and visitors can engage socially. They should be inclusive social hubs, relevant for everyday activities and on special days. People who are playing, watching, resting, eating, listening, and learning activate these spaces, which should also be places of civic pride and beauty. The ideal location for such spaces is tangent to the downtown so that downtown can still be a place for retail even on days when there are activities in the plaza.

Building plazas and parks in downtowns requires careful placement. Placing these along primary shopping streets has often done just the reverse of what one would hope for. Permanently blocking or closing streets is also typically counterproductive. Almost all the communities that installed pedestrian malls have taken them out. The exception are university towns like Burlington, VT or Boulder, CO that have large numbers of students immediately adjacent to downtown, or in large metropolitan areas that have healthy densities of pedestrians achieved by strong mixed land use patterns such as Denver, CO.



The parking lots at Hickory Street and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue are one of the biggest assets in Downtown Sidney. Currently these spaces and their edges are not flexibly designed for other uses and therefore are underutilized. The courthouse has two parking lots in front of it but in their current design these are not ideal for public gathering. The courthouse plaza concept would also have to consider business hours for holding special events. Both of these locations present unique opportunities.

Temporarily blocking off the street with decorative gates or planters has worked in communities that need large spaces for public assembly or crowds. Santa Monica, CA Third Street Promenade uses such an approach as does Ybor City a neighborhood in Tampa, FL and the plaza in Santa Fe, NM. Instead of fully removing its pedestrian mall, Greeley, Co has also taken this approach. The plaza suggested above borrows on these concepts to provide downtown with a series of public spaces to use when needed and yet still provide parking on the typical business day.

The suggested design also includes interpretive signs at the top of 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Hickory to point out the original site of Fort Sidney and Boot Hill. Appendix F shows an example of such signage. The design also incorporates a planting strip along the railroad tracks to abate some of the noise as well as some evergreens along the west and east edges of the plaza to screen these views.



Consider gates that unfold to block off the street when needed



### SLOW DOWN THE TRAFFIC

Streetscape elements such as trees overarching the street and curb bulb outs will help to slow traffic and create a more walkable Downtown. The City also could request that the downtown posted speed limit of 25 MPH extended further out from the core downtown area. The eastern edge of this district should be 5<sup>th</sup> Street and the western edge, 15<sup>th</sup> Street. While this would increase the travel time through Downtown Sidney by approximately 30 seconds, walkability and pedestrian safety would significantly increase.

### SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING

An important component of this Master Plan is creating and installing consistent and well-designed signage and wayfinding (Appendix D). The first step is to create one cohesive identity or brand for the City and the Downtown. Once this is established, the signage palette should be applied in strategic places to serve the needs of the drivers, pedestrians, locals, and visitors. In addition to vehicular and pedestrian signs, wayfinding signs should be installed at the major entrances to the City.

The term "wayfinding" was first used in 1960 by architect Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City*, where he referred to maps, street numbers, directional signs and other elements as "way-finding" devices. This narrow description may explain the current misunderstanding that wayfinding is essentially the same as "signage." Travelers use wayfinding to navigate unfamiliar environments.

Signage is one component but *context* and *experiences* along the route are also important. Context and experience are derived from elements of the natural and built environment such as building placement, landscaping and width of roadway. These elements make an impression on the traveler and combine to make a trip memorable—or not. Locals and visitors alike should have an impression of an obvious connection between downtown and the emerging business district. The design elements of this connection should complement the image of historic Downtown, as well as facilitate travel from one place to another.

With regard to design and content, signs along these corridors need to be conspicuous or have a high degree of visibility from a great distance and the messages should be accurate and familiar.

Visitors who find themselves in new surroundings need to know where they actually are in the overall region. They should first be offered or informed of major destinations such as the courthouse, library, Legion Park, downtown, Cabelas etc. in order to formulate their action plans.

There are more than 1.5 million visitors to Cabelas each year and the vast majority is traveling to their corporate headquarters and store on Old Post Road. As you move north away from the interstate on 17J, the new “Welcome to Sidney” sign is positioned in a way that implies that Old Post Road is Sidney. Travelers are left with the impression that the new development along Old Post Road is downtown Sydney, because way-finding signs to downtown and other destinations are absent and because little of older Sidney is visible. This effect is heightened because the new development blocks any view of downtown and older neighborhoods.



Visitors to Sidney and Cabelas are more likely to access Sidney via 17J. Eleventh Street at Old Post Road functions as secondary entrance to downtown since there isn't any interstate access at this intersection. The sign at the top of 11<sup>th</sup> and Post Road seems to indicate that Sidney is downhill from this intersection and the view along this portion of Post Road reinforces this both night and day.





There are two solutions to this problem. One is to enhance the travel route to downtown along 17J, the Link Hwy, with landscaping that reinforces this as a route to downtown, creating a trail or path for the traveler. This can be in the form of trees along the road right of way and possibly plantings in the median. Second, good way-finding signs from the interstate to downtown will help reinforce this route with first time visitors.

The set of images shown on the next page shows wayfinding signs that use downtown as the major orientation point. These signs are located along all major decision points that visitors encounter as they make their way through the community. A secondary set of custom designed signs orients visitors to street names, destinations and parking lots as they enter the downtown.



Grand Haven, MI



Golden, CO

A secondary gateway to downtown occurs as you enter under the railroad viaduct on East Illinois. A billboard here says “Welcome to Sidney”. Improve this billboard so that it says welcome to Downtown Sidney and its design reinforces the more traditional look and feel of downtown.

## TRAFFIC

Consider adding a traffic signal at Illinois and 9<sup>th</sup>. This intersection handles a lot of traffic coming and going to the post office. If a signal can’t be installed then consider a flashing yellow light to reinforce the fact that cars should yield to pedestrians. This will allow pedestrians to more easily walk a circuit in downtown. Currently a pedestrian leaving the post office has to go to 10<sup>th</sup> in order to cross with a controlled intersection. The new light should obviously be synchronized with other lights along Illinois.

Illinois and 10<sup>th</sup> are the core historic “Main Streets” for Downtown Sidney and contain many of its unique shops and restaurants. Currently, the street system is all two-way which is ideal because it facilitates better movement within the downtown. Two-way streets are best for retail and should be retained in any future development or traffic planning scenarios. Both public workshops yielded absolutely no negative comments regarding traffic congestion or the pace of traffic in downtown.

## PARKING

The master plan process inventoried parking resources in the Downtown Sidney Master Plan study area using air photos and by driving and walking the area. Note that these figures are slightly smaller than those supplied by the city due to the use of a more constrained geographic

area. The inventory only considered the number of parking spaces and their locations. An occupancy and destination study is warranted at some point in the future before any major changes are made in the parking system. The counts are as follows:

On street parallel	113 spaces
On street diagonal	261 spaces
Private parking lots	163 spaces
<u>Public lots</u>	<u>138 spaces</u>
Total Spaces	675 spaces

On-street parking represents about 374 spaces or slightly more than half of the overall amount. This type of parking is most sought after by customers as people want to park and walk directly into their destination. Make every effort to retain on-street parking especially along Illinois and 10th. In addition to being the most sought after type of parking, it also establishes a barrier between pedestrians and faster-moving traffic, creating a safer environment for the pedestrian. Finally, a lack of parking along the street also leads to a perception that downtown doesn't have any parking. Communities that have reduced on street parking see a drop-off in the ability to lease downtown storefronts which has further negative consequences.

Downtown offers opportunities for expanded parking by converting parallel parking to angle parking. (See Appendix E) Typically angle parking is easier for the motorist to get in and out of and it psychologically narrows the street which acts as a traffic calming measure. This strategy is also of economic importance to the community as it keeps more taxable land available for development and allows an underused public resource (extra wide streets) to be used for parking. Several areas in downtown are becoming more suburban in feel, rather than urban, because businesses provide parking in lots rather than along the street through parallel or angled parking. Public parking lots and maximizing on-street parking allow the city to ultimately capture more tax base and they provides for a more densely developed downtown which is good for retailers. The following parking conversions would need further study but the initial analysis certainly merits further exploration. The current street cross section in downtown is about 60 feet which is large enough to accommodate two way traffic and angle parking. While Sidney appears to have abundant parking it might not be in the locations most sought after. The following recommendations will place more parking closer to key destinations.



These motorists are unsure of how to park in downtown

*Continue the program of striping downtown parking spaces.* This program has been effective at making sure that parking is used efficiently in downtown. There are still some undelineated parking spaces on the fringe of downtown that need to be striped.

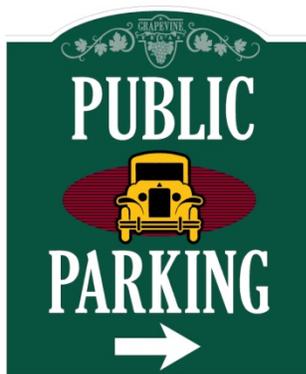
*South side of Jackson from 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> in front of the courthouse.* If these parking spaces were converted from parallel to angle it might allow the courthouse to remove the parking in front of the courthouse for other uses such as a community plaza or green space.

*North side of Jackson from 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>.* Although it appears that there's little demand for parking along this section of Jackson, conversion to angle parking could help meet demand when the community theater is having a show or when court is in session.

*North and South sides of Jackson from 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>.* This area is in front of Steffens Home Interiors, one of Sidney's major retailers. Having more parking here would undoubtedly be of a major assistance to this business and to the nearby courthouse

*West side of 9<sup>th</sup> north of Illinois.* This section of 9<sup>th</sup> is along the eastern edge of the closed gas station. Redeveloping this site would present the opportunity to place parking back on the street which is likely to be in demand close to the Post Office. The net impact is that the amount of parking by the post office would double. One of the major reasons that post offices leave downtowns is lack of parking.

*The eastern half of the north and south sides of Illinois between 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>.* This section currently is not striped for parking. No parking signs exist mid block. It appears as though there's more than enough capacity for west bound, right hand turns for the first half of the block to be allowed to park. Right now this is a curb cut with the auto dealer parking his cars up to the back of the sidewalk. The south side of this block only has one lane of traffic moving through leaving the curb lane unused. After the gas station a parking lane could be defined and established.



Grapevine, TX

### **Parking Directional Signs**

Sidney has about 160 public parking spaces in lots. These are appropriately located so that customers park in the lots and then walk past storefronts to get to their destinations. In other words, it's better for people to see storefronts first as they pass through downtown—not just parking lots. The challenge here is to educate and remind people where these lots are. Way finding signs posted along Illinois and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue to show the direction to the parking lots will help increase their use and free up curb parking for the convenience shoppers that need to quickly get in and out. These signs need to be designed as a part of the overall wayfinding system.

### **PARKING ENFORCEMENT**

Right now parking is unenforced downtown and there doesn't seem to be much of a problem. Before any major new lots are constructed in the future, however, parking enforcement should first be stepped up. It's likely that there are a lot of people parking on the street all day long. Enforcement will cause them to move into long term parking and free up on-street parking for customers.

### **INFRASTRUCTURE and STORM WATER NEEDS**

In December, 1995, the City of Sidney completed a flood reduction project that now contains the 100 year flood plain within a drainage channel. Prior to this project, most of the community lying between Grant Street and Lodgepole Road was designated as being within the 100 year flood plain. This area is now in the 500 year flood plain.

Despite these improvements downtown still suffers from localized flooding during storms due to a compilation of issues such as the number, size and frequency of storm drain inlets and grading. During tours with City officials and during public meetings, infrastructure issues were raised and concerns about the impact of future development were expressed. A more detailed analysis of the infrastructure conditions compiled by the City of Sidney can be found in (Appendices G-J, pages 44-47). The compilation mapping of quality ratings for sidewalks, curbs, pavement and flooding shows the worst concerns are at the intersection of 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Hickory (See figure, page 26). All of Hickory rates very poorly. The block east of 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the block south of this intersection on 13<sup>th</sup> show deficiencies. Other areas of concern are 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenues south of Illinois and Illinois between 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>.

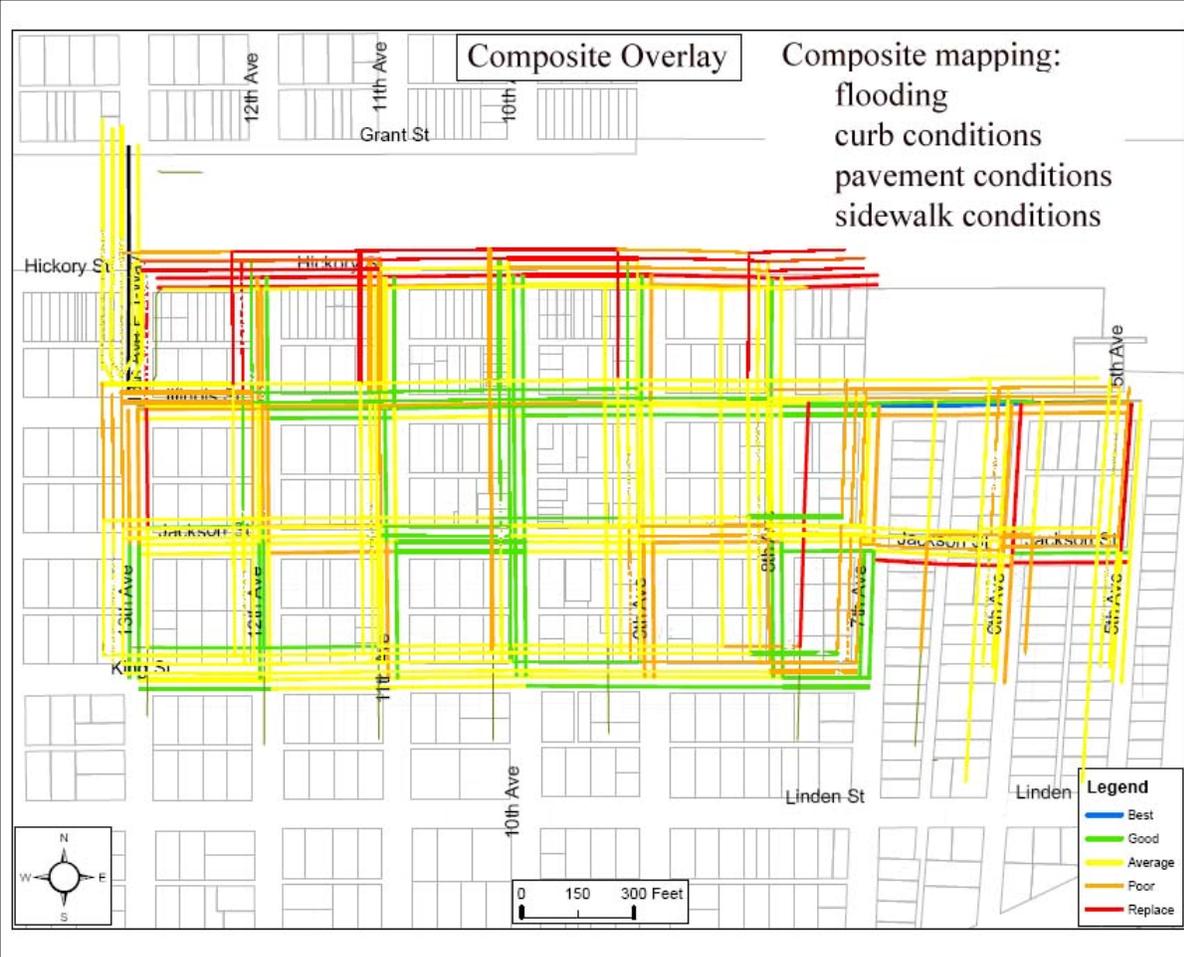


### **MASTER STORMWATER PLAN**

In order to make the Downtown more appealing to potential developers and to solve some existing infrastructure problems, such as localized flooding every couple of years, the design team suggests a storm water master plan. In this plan, storm water from streets and blocks would be re-directed away from areas prone to storm water build up (See Appendix J) and into a retention and “green” treatment pond possibly south of Downtown by Lodgepole Creek. The runoff water in the pond would receive primary treatment through settlement and plantings in the pond. Eventually, the water would return to Lodgepole Creek, but in a much cleaner state. When this is done there may be the opportunity to extend the bike trail into downtown via city streets. Lodgepole Creek is about 5-6 blocks from the southeast corner of the downtown study area.

### **STORMWATER COLLECTION AS COMMUNITY RESOURCE**

The creation of a landscaped storm water retention pond could build on the series of parks already being constructed along Lodgepole Creek, helping fill a community need for greenspace and providing amenities to attract potential residents. Many valuable park elements such as walking and jogging trails, exercise stations, benches, tot lots, swings, and other active-use elements can be incorporated into the Lodgepole watershed basin. In addition to improving the quality of life in the neighborhoods, property values may also increase.



# URBAN DESIGN STANDARDS

## URBAN DESIGN STANDARDS AND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN MODIFICATIONS

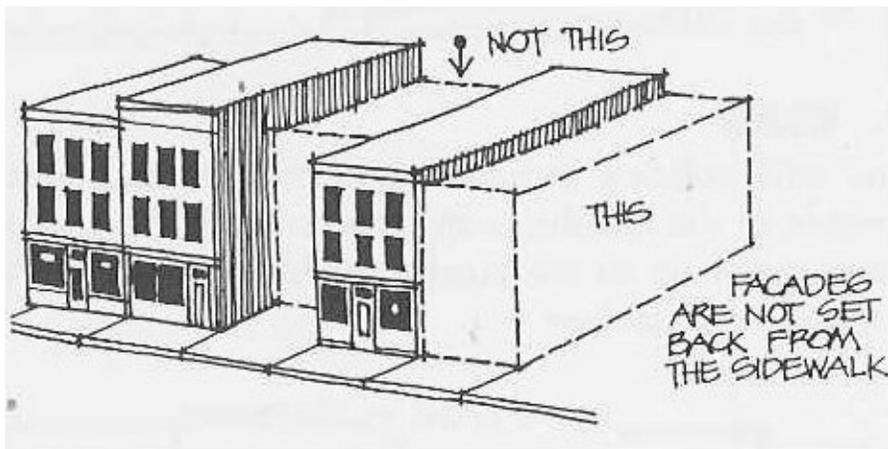
The current regulations and Comprehensive Master Plan are somewhat fairly suburban in nature and need to be adjusted to that they are more in line with the community vision expressed through the various stakeholder and public meetings. The current densities and intensities allowed, as well as the allowable floor area ratio, result in a development pattern that does not maximize the full efficiency of potential redevelopment blocks. The city needs to install a more formed based development standards as well as lot layouts and setbacks to achieve a building envelope that is more compatible with downtown's established pattern. These modifications will make the Downtown more livable and walkable, and will begin to match future development with the historic nature of Downtown and the desired vision of the citizens.



**The streetscape should offer contiguous, inviting first-floor development.**

Requiring this type of development is critical because contiguous store fronts lining the street produce more impulses for the pedestrian to keep walking and exploring. This is important because typical pedestrians will only walk about seventy feet in an unstimulating

environment before they lose interest and about 65% of all retail sales are impulse sales.



**Commercial storefronts should be built up the edge of the sidewalk (zero lot-setback) in order to provide an enticing retail environment.**

The great majority of buildings should be built up the edge of the sidewalk (zero lot-setback) in order to provide an enticing retail environment. Under no circumstances should

corner buildings be recessed from an intersection. It's important for these structures to act as "bookends" to frame the streetwall. Applying this to downtown Sidney means that as new development occurs (conversion of vacant lots, car lots, gas stations or redevelopment ) it should be built up to the street corner. Responses in both community presentations stressed that participants don't want to lose any more buildings and that new construction should reinforce downtown's historical sense of place. The zero lot-setback standard is important for

the primary shopping district which could be defined as Illinois from 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue and on 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue from Hickory to King. Public buildings such as courthouses, libraries, post offices and schools would be exempt from this standard. At the same time, community planning functions should place these aforementioned uses tangent to the central business district and not in the middle of a retail street.

## **ACTION ITEM**

The Zoning code should be amended to integrate a retail overlay zone in downtown that establishes a maximum setback of zero feet for new commercial construction, rehabilitation and restorations for lots facing Illinois between 7<sup>th</sup> Av. and 13<sup>th</sup> Av., on 10<sup>th</sup> between Hickory and King Streets and on Jackson between 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. The requirements in this zone should include:

### **Building orientation**

Buildings should be oriented to the primary shopping street and maintain a zero lot setback and the building should cover the entire front lot line. If possible, newly constructed buildings should have the same floor height on upper floors as adjoining buildings in case there's ever the need to link the storefronts.

### **Storefront windows**

Store windows should be made of clear glass to allow for visual access of the interior space. Smoked and mirror glass should be avoided at all costs on the first floor as these make the business appear closed. Ideally the first floor storefront should be about 80% glass from about 2 feet above grade to about 10 feet above grade to encourage the time-honored tradition of window shopping. Additionally this helps increase the feeling of security on the street. This allows the street to project a safer image after hours.

### **Storefront entrances**

Entrances or foyers should directly abut the sidewalk. Buildings may have recessed entrances but the facade should be a zero lot set back on the primary shopping street. Each storefront should have its own entrance that remains unlocked during business hours. Storefronts can be accessed from interior spaces but this is discouraged.

### **Drive-through businesses**

Drive-through businesses should be discouraged or prohibited in the primary shopping district. Driveways are not only dangerous but they lessen the incentives for the pedestrians to keep walking because the display window is no longer at the edge of the sidewalk. While this seems simple this key principal is often violated. Having a retail overlay in place in the form of building standards reduces the opportunity for this type of development.

# the master plan — phase two

## DEVELOPING DOWNTOWN

The current core of Downtown is fairly dense, which means that retail store fronts adjoin each other. This is ideal because it promotes a more walkable Downtown. The series of sketches below shows the current figure ground plane relationship, the amount of building coverage versus the amount of non developed land. Notice in the second figure that the core retail area tends to drop off when store fronts start to no longer be contiguous. (Also see Appendix E) The third image in this series shows where at least linear buildings or storefronts should be placed to “re-weave” downtown’s urban fabric. Ultimately this provides downtown with a better sense of place and a more favorable retail environment.

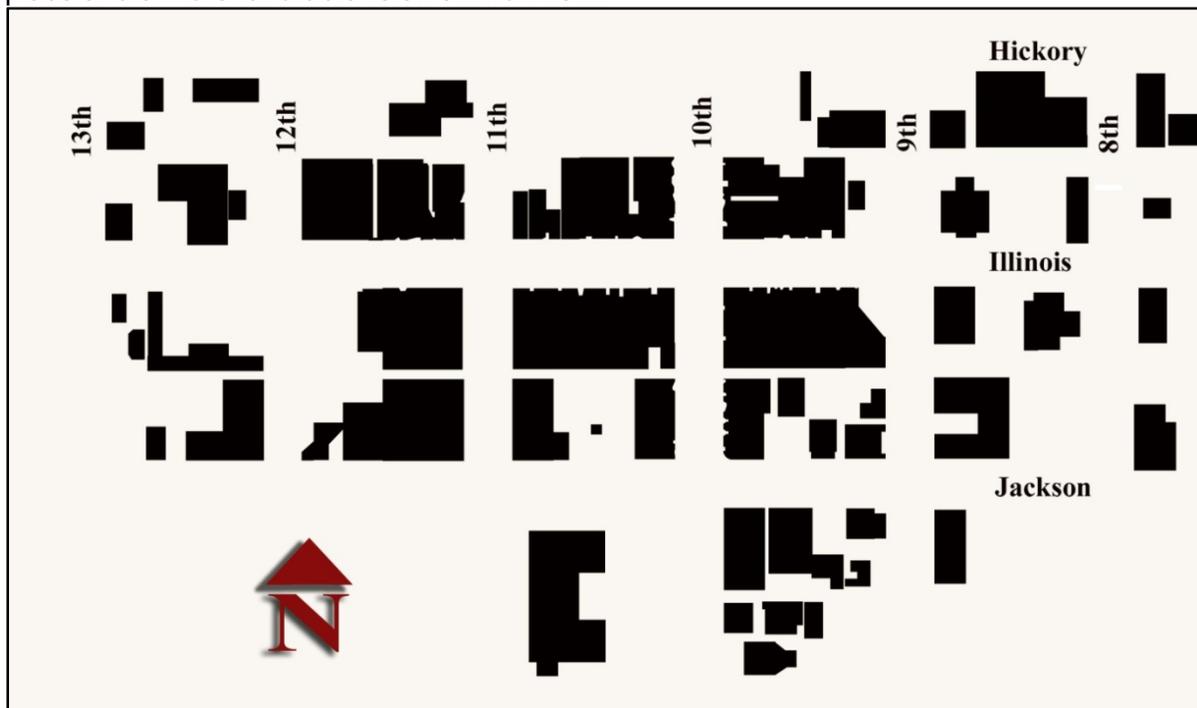
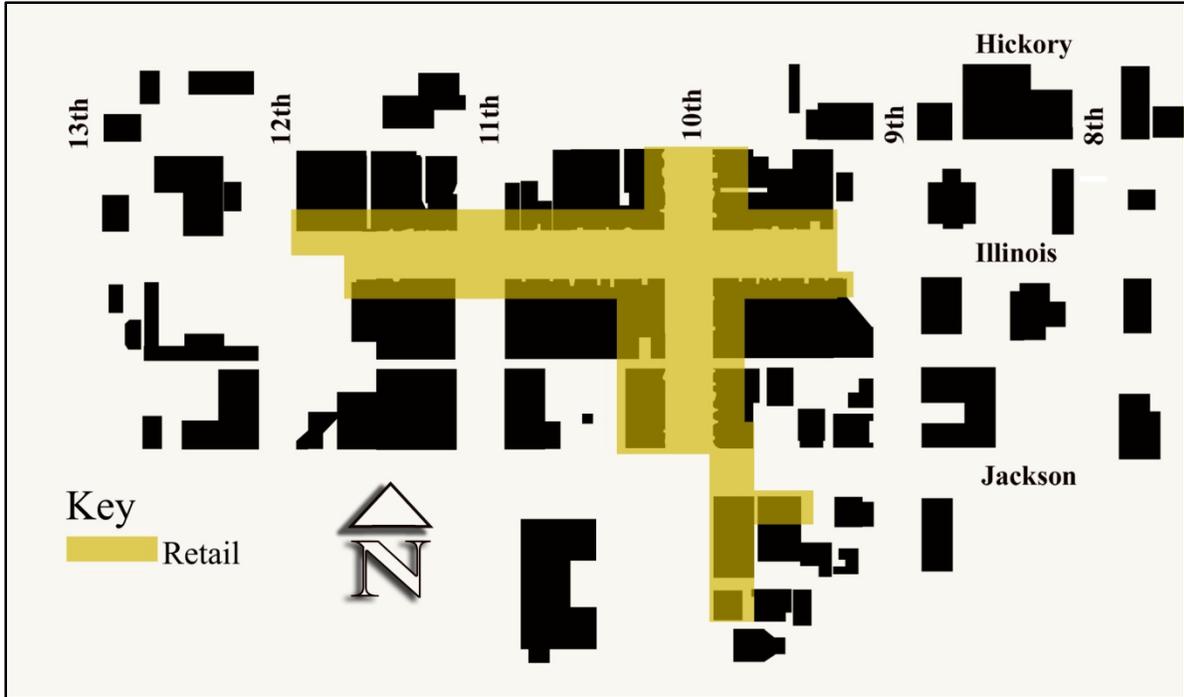
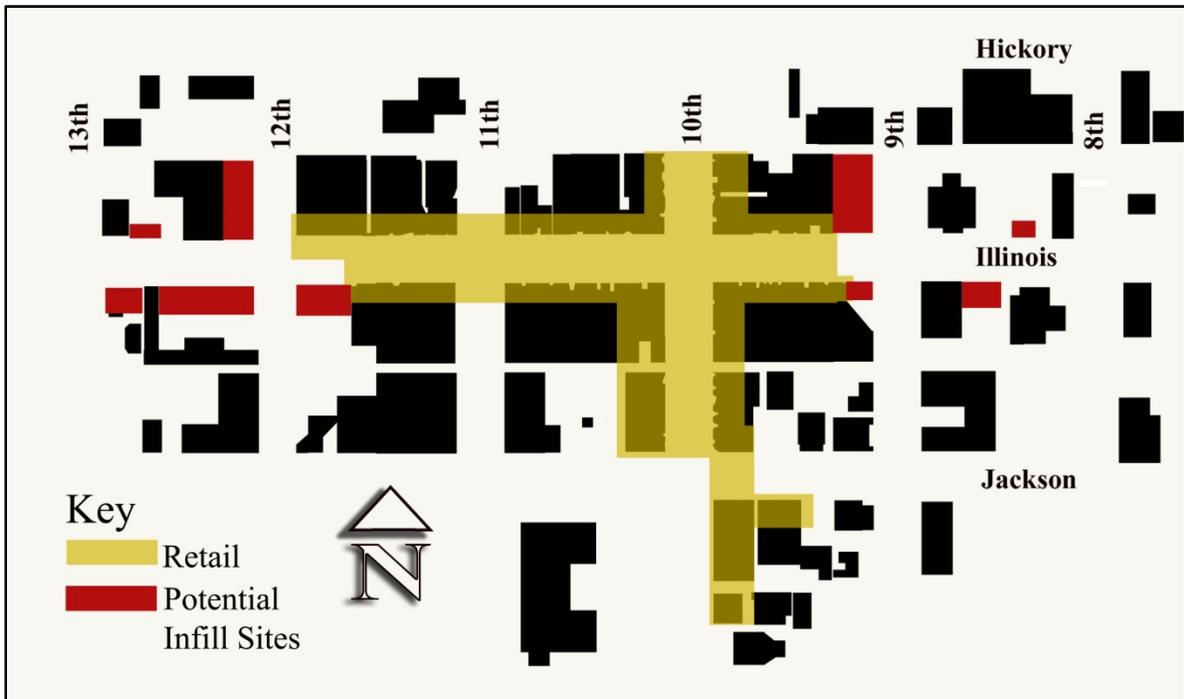


Figure Ground Plane Study



Core Retail Area and Figure Ground Plane

The sketch above maps the boundaries of the core retail district which is only about one-half of the study area. The sketch below shows sites that if properly developed would expand the core retail district by about 30%.



## DEVELOPMENT SITES

Participants in the public meetings offered very little regarding sites or ideas for new development opportunities yet Downtown Sidney should consider options for some of its anchors in case they need to expand. Two of the more likely anchors that will need more space at some time in the future are the post office and the library. The Chamber, City Economic Development board and others as appropriate should hold discussions with the library board and the postmaster to determine plans. This task force should stay in touch with these respective entities even if their plans are long range. Long range plans sometimes become short range plans given changes in economies, management, boards or funding resources.

## POTENTIAL REDEVELOPMENT SITES AND BUILDINGS

### *Elks Lodge*

The Eagles Lodge is a large facility that could bring more traffic to downtown as a public events center. This is a sound building that will have a much brighter future if the potential for flooding in downtown is eliminated.

### *Gas Station on 9<sup>th</sup> and Illinois*

The site of the abandoned gas station on the northwest corner of 9<sup>th</sup> and Illinois is important for new development. New development on this site will help link Cabelas' new downtown offices, the Chamber of Commerce, Western Drug and the post office to downtown. Right now this site does little to encourage pedestrians to walk by. There are two options: Find a use that builds on the gas station's history such as an ice cream store or coffee house that retains the gas station ambiance; or Create new high-quality, urban infill, built continuously along the Illinois Street edge of the sidewalk with good display windows to help pull more pedestrians into downtown. If the latter scenario comes to fruition then the gas station's exterior skin should be saved as this era of station no longer available. It could be rebuilt somewhere else in the Lincoln Road corridor.

*Strip Commercial sites west of the old bus station on Illinois to 13<sup>th</sup> Streets.* This last block and a half of downtown has several old gas stations and open air car lots that are prime for redevelopment. Development in this location will begin to reinforce a stronger sense of place for downtown and it will begin link downtown with the neighborhoods to the west. Existing uses should be grandfathered but as these sites changeover they should adopt the newer standards.

## HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES

Traditionally downtowns were the activity centers of the community and this is beginning to be true again across the country due to an urban renaissance. Downtowns are now beginning to offer a mix of uses including retail, entertainment, and office activities. Most of the undesirable elements of downtowns such as heavy manufacturing and substandard housing have been abated and now we're seeing downtowns become an ideal environment for mixed income, walkable, vibrant neighborhoods. Most importantly downtown residential can attract residents looking for a



sense of place that can be difficult to find in a suburban setting. Downtowns tend attract students, single professionals, and empty nesters.

A strong downtown housing market can create a built-in market for downtown employment, business, and entertainment; it improves local tax base by generating sale tax, property tax and income tax and it provides more housing choices for residents. Perhaps the single most important outcome of a downtown housing effort is that it reduces the need to expand city infrastructure. For minimal costs the city can get a much better return on their investment with having to greatly expand infrastructure because most of this is already in place.

Begin with a detailed assessment of housing needs by focusing on understanding the regional and local housing markets. Part of this assessment should be an inventory of downtown's second story spaces to identify which are the best candidates for some type of "loft living". This should be done in about two to three years from now or after the infrastructure and streetscaping has been upgraded. Understanding how these markets work is a critical step toward framing effective, achievable goals and strategies in downtown housing plan. Understanding the market will help the community develop a downtown housing plan that capitalizes on the unique demands of those residents who tend to find downtown living most attractive.

Developing this market will require that the downtown living experience be marketed in conjunction with financial incentives aimed at new downtown buyers and renters. Downtown housing must be deemed a priority if a community wants to succeed in bringing residents back downtown.



# conclusion

As downtowns continue their renaissance, it is time to take advantage of the energy and excitement in the community to focus on your downtown. Sidney is quickly becoming recognized as having a successful downtown revitalization effort in Western Nebraska. Getting this recognition to extend regionally will require the community to be more resourceful, a greater appreciation for the role that downtown can play in economic development retention and recruitment and a sustained, focused revitalization effort over the next decade. Great communities — and great downtowns for that matter — don't just happen. Great communities and downtowns take hard work, foresight, and commitment.

Commitment is vital to the success of Downtown Sidney. The opportunity to succeed is there, but only if there are coordinated efforts between all parties and continued dialogue with the public. Downtown Sidney has a tremendous potential as a regional center for urban living built on the City's up and coming arts, entertainment, and recreational offerings. The following are a series of action items and implementation strategies based on the Downtown Sidney Master Plan to guide the City towards achieving this community-driven process.

## Getting Ready (2009-2012, and beyond)

### ENHANCE THE DOWNTOWN ADDRESS

- Streetscape Enhancements
- Public Plaza
- Add Traffic Signal
- Reduce Traffic Speed
- Layout Parking More Efficiently
- Wayfinding and Signage
- Infrastructure Needs
- Retail Overlay District

### FOCUS ON THE NEIGHBORHOODS

- Street Tree Plantings to Along Downtown to Interstate Routes
- Street Tree Lawn Plantings on fringe of downtown
- Establish Stormwater Cleaning Ponds
- Continue Property Enhancement Grants

### ESTABLISH THE PROPERTY FRAMEWORK

- Establish non-profit for community development
- Purchasing of Critical Properties
- Assembly of Land

### CONTINUE TO ESTABLISH THE SOCIAL PATTERN – COMING TO DOWNTOWN

- Coordinate Downtown Events
- Expand Downtown Events
- Capitalize on the Assets, History and Architecture

### MARKET DOWNTOWN TO THE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

- Create a Developer's Toolkit

### DEFEND YOUR POSITION

- Continue to Advocate the Vision for Downtown

### DENSIFY DOWNTOWN RESIDENTIAL

- Begin model second story loft conversions

# INCENTIVES....DEVELOPERS TOOL KIT

## **DEVELOPER’S TOOLKIT**

Another tool used by many cities in marketing their downtowns is a “Developer’s Toolkit”. This toolkit contains information related to the vision of the City and highlights the key initiatives, demographic information, public investment programs, and specific contact people within the City to provide a transparent process for development. This would be a powerful document for people and businesses looking to invest in Sidney. With such a toolkit, the City could translate the vision of the Master Plan to focus those development efforts into something that the community can embrace. A Developer’s Toolkit could include:

## **MARKETING AND SHAPPING THE PUBLIC’S IMPRESSION**

Many toolkits begin with information piece about the Downtown and the elements that make it unique and special. A vision statement and key initiatives are usually included to describe the future direction of the City.

## **REGULATORY/ENTITLEMENTS**

Describing existing and desired entitlements can help build surety between the development community and the City. Also, regulatory changes can be advertised to potential developers that may be more attracted to denser, in-town development options.

## **UTILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

Many cities describe their existing capacity to promote public work projects that could help spur development. Also, describing a transparent process or expectation of developers when it comes to contribution to infrastructure will also create more surety between the developer and the City

## **STORMWATER**

The City can market their efforts to create stormwater master plans that would help entice developers to build.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANUP (BROWNFIELD SITES)**

By identifying brownfield sites and beginning the process to clean them, the City can market these opportunities to developers who won’t need to pay for the cost to remediate the sites.

## **LAND ASSEMBLY AND CATALYST SITES**

By listing specific sites or helping with land assembly, the City can make sites in the Downtown more appealing to potential developers. This can also help the City maintain control over critical development sites.

## **LAND COSTS AND AVAILABLE SITES**

Many municipalities advertise available sites within their downtown to help facilitate redevelopment. By listing the information available on the public tax roll, the City can help provide information for potential developers looking to invest in Downtown Sidney.

## **PARKING**

Many cities participate in attracting redevelopment by offering to improve parking around development sites. City can reserve a certain amount of spaces for public use, while providing the developer with the needed spaces for higher density projects.

## Historic Downtown Sidney Historic Improvement Incentive

This incentive program is a result of efforts of the Cheyenne County Chamber of Commerce and Sidney Historic Main Street committees working in partnership with the City of Sidney.

- \$100,000 has been appropriated from the City's LB840 Economic Development program for incentives for downtown historic business owners. Adopted by Sidney voters in 1997 from existing sales tax. City Council approved in July, 2005. Fund has no expiration date, until fully allocated. An additional \$50,000 annually was allocated by the voters from 2007-2017.
- Buildings eligible must be in the Historic Downtown District or other designated areas as defined by the Sidney City Council.
- The incentive program will allocate up to \$5,000 in matching funds per building structure for exterior work done on historic buildings that would enhance and restore the historic appearance of the building. As downtown buildings enhance the integrity of their historic significance, it will become a tourist attraction and help attract more business tenants.
- The program was retroactive to when the Main Street Program was adopted in 2004 so it would not penalize those business owners, who have already taken the initiative to do improvements.
- An application must be sought from the Chamber of Commerce (740 Illinois) or City of Sidney (1115 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue). The proposed project will then be reviewed by the Historic Downtown Preservation Board. If the board feels it meets the requirements of the program, the funding request will be reserved on a first come, first serve basis. Applicant has three months to start work.
- Any reimbursement (up to 50 percent with a maximum reimbursement of \$5,000), would come "after the fact" based on invoices. Projects may be less than the maximum.
- Reimbursement is 50 percent if contractors are from Cheyenne County and materials purchased are from Cheyenne County businesses. If an out of county business supplying materials or work is a Chamber of Commerce member it also qualifies at the 50 percent rate. All non-qualifying contractors and or purchased materials can be reimbursed at a 35 percent rate.
- Volunteer labor can count for up to \$1,000 of the project at a \$10 an hour rate. This can be volunteer groups such as the Jaycees, or managers / laborers employed by the business.
- This program can coincide with 3 other incentive programs for historic buildings.
  - 1) A 20 percent historic tax credit on federal taxes for historic restoration
  - 2) A 10 percent historic tax credit on state taxes for historic restoration

3) An 8 year moratorium on property tax increases as a result of improvements. Nebraska voters authorized this moratorium on Jan. 1, 2006. In years 9-12, the property would increase 25% each year up to its new valuation total.

## **Downtown Business Incentive Plan**

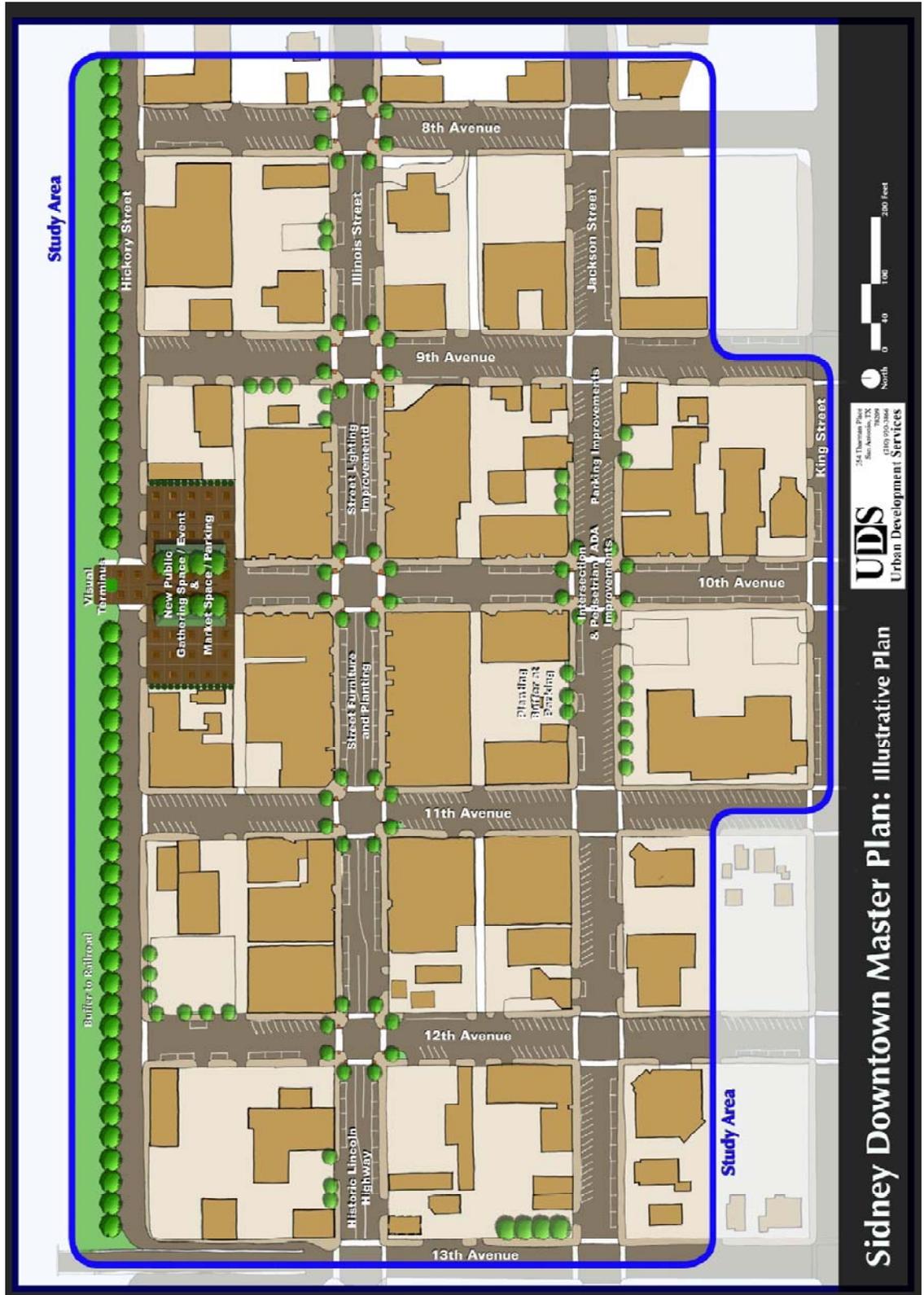
Purpose: To encourage retail development in the downtown area, thus making the community more attractive to major employers in the area in the recruitment of our expanding work force. It will also give the community a more vibrant look by having current vacant buildings occupied.

Funding would be allocated from that portion of the LB840 Sidney Economic Development Fund approved by Sidney voters for the period of time from 2007-2017, going into effect on Oct. 1, 2007. This funding amounts to \$50,000 annually for 10 years. This plan has been recommended by the Sidney Main Street Economic Vitality Committee.

### **Incentive Guidelines:**

Any vacant commercial building located in the designated downtown incentive district is eligible (roughly eight block area from 7th to 13th Avenue, Hickory to King). Applicant would need to fill out an application form, spelling out purpose of business and the proposed location. Application form is available at the Chamber of Commerce or City of Sidney. Applicant must submit a business plan. Rental assistance not to exceed \$500 monthly for six months would be provided out of the Economic Development Fund. Property owner would also promise not to exceed monthly rent of \$500 for the first six months, but would have an understanding with the proprietor how much the rent would then be following the initial six months. Any exceptions to this standard would have to be approved by the Main Street Economic Vitality Committee. Proprietor would sign a 2-year promissory note that the incentive funding would be repaid to the City of Sidney Economic Development Fund should they not meet the performance based standard of staying in business a minimum of two years, and keeping current on rental and utilities during that two year duration. At the end of the two years of keeping the business open and operating, the initial \$3,000 rental assistance would be forgiven. The new business must be "retail" in nature in that it provides products for sale that are subject to sales tax. Determinations will be made by the Main Street Economic Vitality Committee

# Appendix A



# Appendix B

**Cross Section @ Looking West @ Jackson Street: Parking Lot**

The plan view shows a parking lot layout with various stalls, including a 20' stall, a 10' stall, and a 15' stall. It also includes a 10' wide area for trees and a 10' wide area for a building. The cross-section shows a building facade with a large window, a sidewalk, and a parking lot with cars. The perspective view shows a building facade with a large window, a sidewalk, and a parking lot with cars and trees.

**Material and Furniture Samples:**

- Viewary Stanley CB-15
- Viewary Stanley BB-16
- Union Metal, Colonial
- WassauTile

## Sidney Downtown Master Plan: Detail Sheet



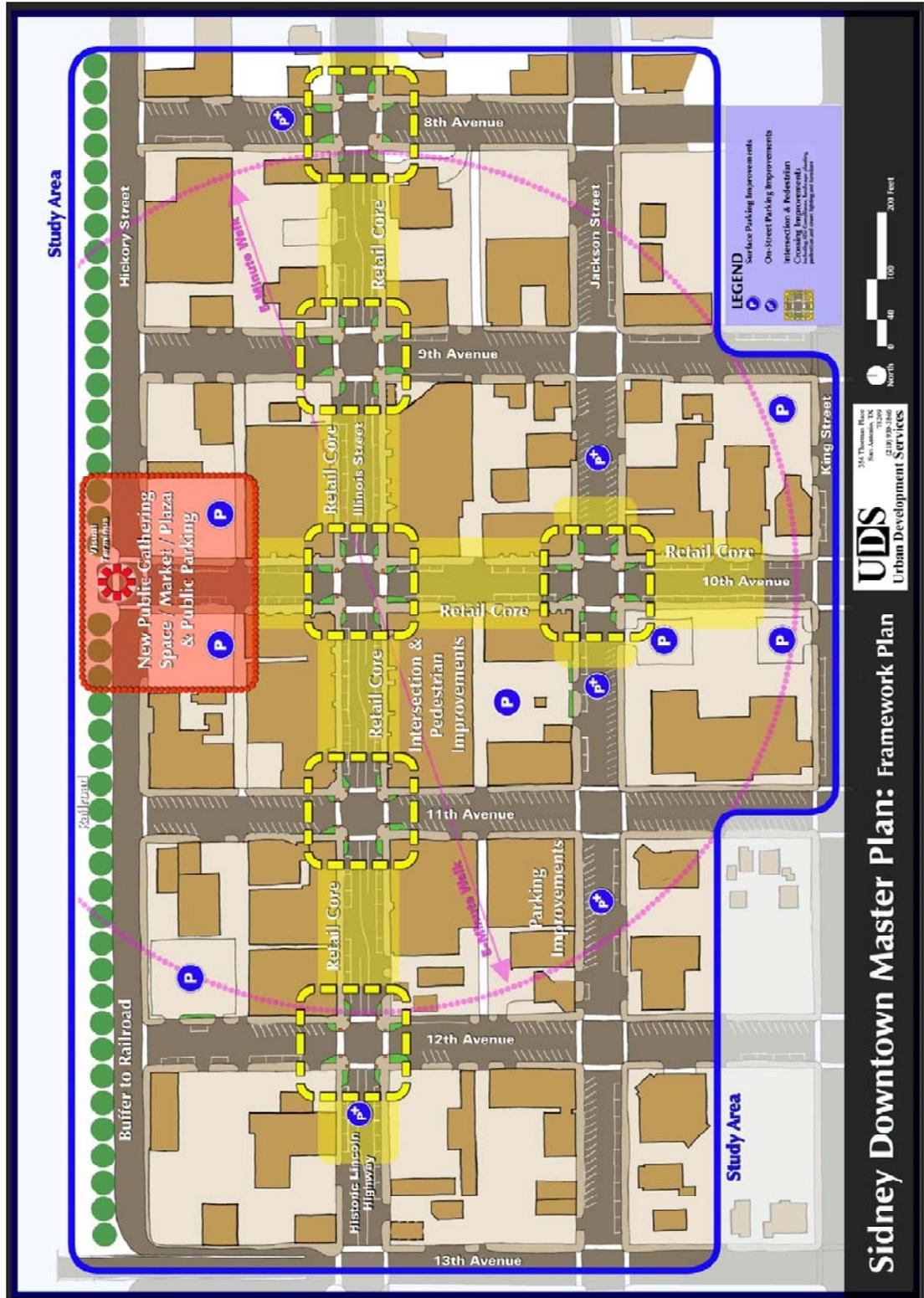
# Appendix C



# Appendix D



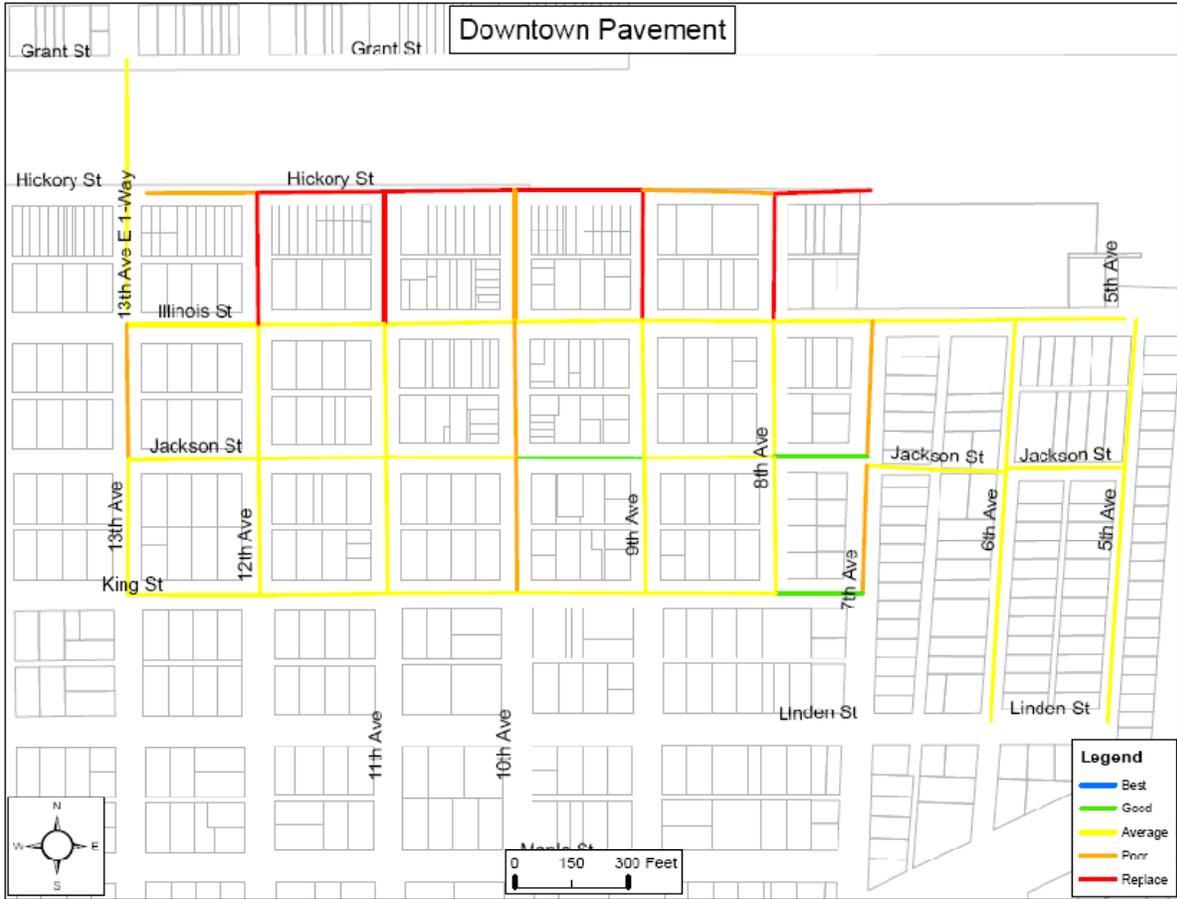
# Appendix E



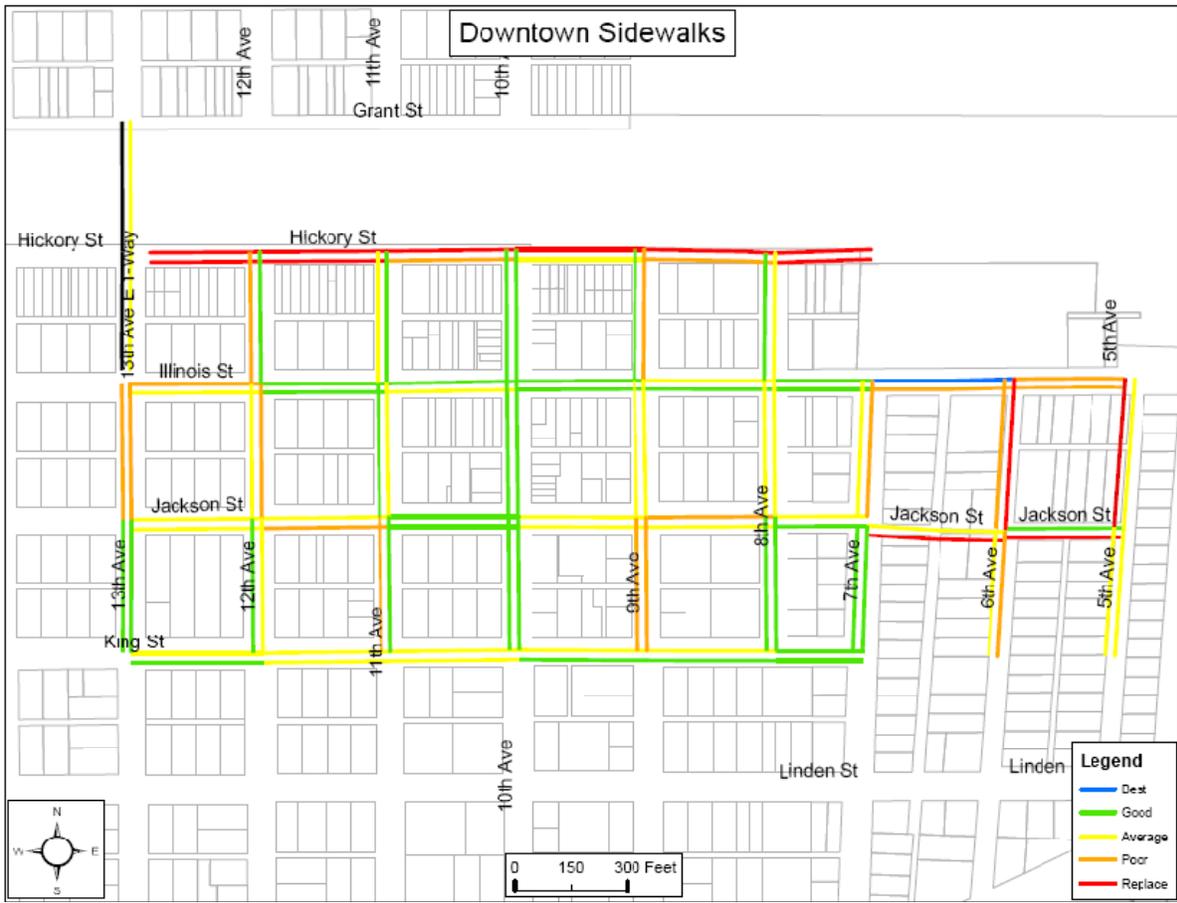
## Appendix F, Examples of interpretative signs



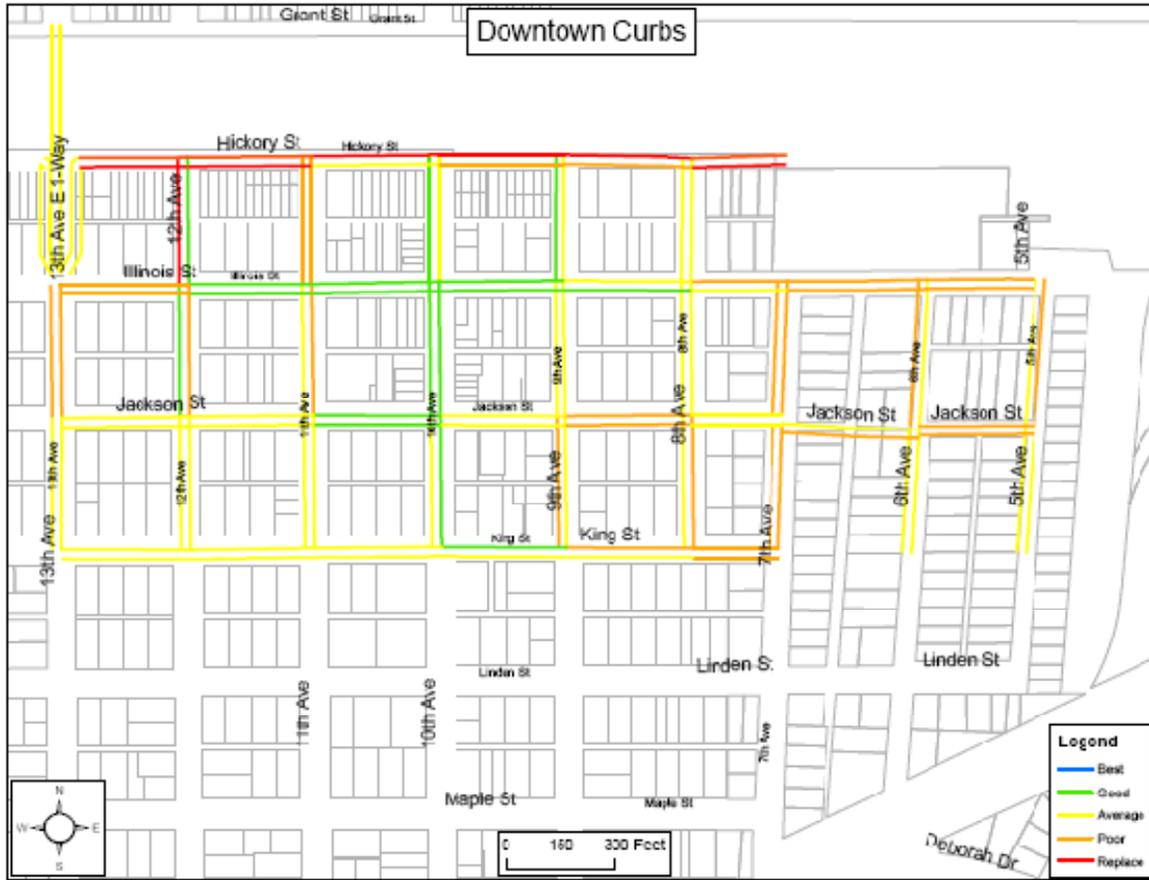
# Appendix G



# Appendix H



# Appendix I



# Appendix J

