

SIDNEY

DOWNTOWN

MASTER PLAN



November 2020

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Steering Committee

Melissa Norgard
Kevin Howard
Kevin Kubo
Rebecca Arellano
Kelcey Cottrell
Marva Ellwanger

City Officials

Mayor Roger Gallaway
Joe Arterburn, City Council
Bob Olsen, City Council
Burke Radcliff, City Council
Brad Sherman, City Council
David Scott, City Manager

Consulting Team



RDG Planning & Design
www.RDGUSA.com

PLANNING PROCESS



INTRODUCTION

The planning process was designed to ensure a high-degree of efficiency and community involvement in under six months. The project kicked-off during the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in a process that relied on outdoor activities and remote engagement tactics. A Steering Committee, consisting of six community leaders and business owners, provided strategic direction throughout the schedule, while the broader community contributed ideas and feedback at key milestones. This chapter is organized into the following sections:

- The Process
- Inspiration Communities
- Engagement Results
- Goals and Priorities for Downtown

THE PROCESS

PHASE 1: INFORMATION GATHERING

The project team sought public input through listening sessions and an online survey. The listening sessions included owners of downtown buildings and businesses, city officials, and members of the city’s Visitors Committee. Key takeaways from these sessions include:

- Strengthening the connection between downtown and Interstate 80
- Attracting more retail shops like clothing, shoes, and sports equipment.
- Promoting more community activities and events
- Building a stronger identity (brand)
- Establishing a better place of public gathering
- Highlighting Sidney’s history
- Having buildings filled with active uses on the first floor and office/housing on upper levels
- Refreshing the image of downtown, both in the building facades and the streetscape

A community survey was launched in June and made available on the project website. Feedback from 273 respondents provided valuable insight into the vision of Sidney residents and is incorporated throughout the plan.

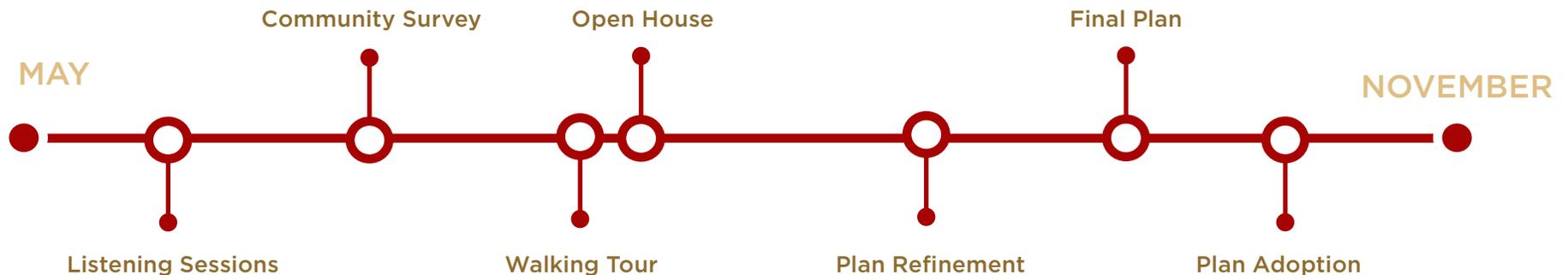
PHASE 2: CHARRETTE EVENT

The three-day charrette began with a tour led by the steering committee through the project area. A public open house at the Elks Building offered opportunities for people to visit with planners to discuss ideas and react to early concepts. On the final day, the consultant team shared results from the market analysis and early concepts as result of public input.

PHASE 3: PUBLICATION

In September 2020, the draft concepts, which reflect suggested changes from the survey and online survey, were presented to the steering committee. In late October the draft plan was presented at an open house and made available on the project website for additional public comment. The final plan was presented to the City Council on in November for final approval and adoption.

The plan is intended to guide future decisions and set priorities for action.



LISTENING SESSIONS (PHASE 1)

Listening sessions with stakeholder groups had participants share their "aspirational communities" that offer lessons for Sidney. Features from these locations offer opportunities for public spaces for events, outdoor dining, shopping experiences, and a host of programs and events.



Old Market | Omaha, NE



Public Square | Rapid City, SD



Yankton, SD



Ogallala, NE



Fort Collins, CO



Des Moines, IA



Haymarket | Lincoln, NE



Sterling, CO



Louisville, CO

SURVEY RESULTS

The online survey was completed by 273 people, and available from late June through the end of August. The survey included questions on the function of downtown and opportunities for improvement. Also, the survey included a visual listening exercise, asking respondents to rank their support for ideas of possible improvements. The following summarizes the survey results.

Downtown is an integral part of most residents weekly lives.

Nearly 75% of respondents go downtown at least once a week, with nearly half visiting two or more times per week. Downtown has a good business mix that serves the personal needs like haircuts and pharmacy, and leisure activities like eating and drinking, and entertainment.

More options for retail and clothing stores.

Many respondents rank shopping for clothing low on reasons for visiting downtown (see Figure 2) and also listed this retail open as a need for downtown. Type of retail ranged broadly to include specific options for mens or children’s clothing, boutique, and affordable clothing options.

More options for restaurants.

When asked for missing business types, restaurants was cited frequently. More specifically, respondents were interested in family friendly restaurants and breakfast options.

Attract more visitors to downtown. In both focus group meetings and the survey results, improving the connection between I-80 and downtown was cited as a necessary improvement.

Support for a new public market. The highest ranking idea, with a score of 74 out of 100, was a public market project, either indoor or outdoor.

Places for outdoor events like concerts, outdoor movies, or festivals ranked poorly. Despite the low ranking, several survey respondents expressed a desire to better use the parks and other outdoor public space in Sidney rather than create more space for these types of activities in downtown.

Restore and improve storefronts. Restoration and improvement of storefronts ranked in the middle for priorities in downtown, however a comprehensive and unified facade restoration program in downtown was the second highest ranking in the visual preference survey with a score of 68 out of 100.

Figure 1: Frequency for trips downtown

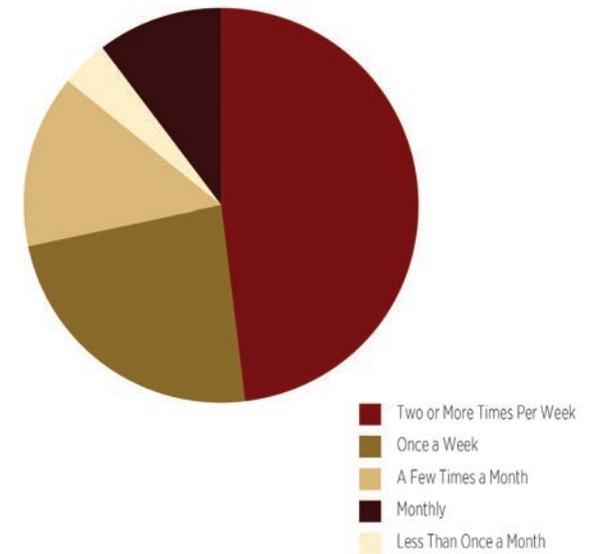
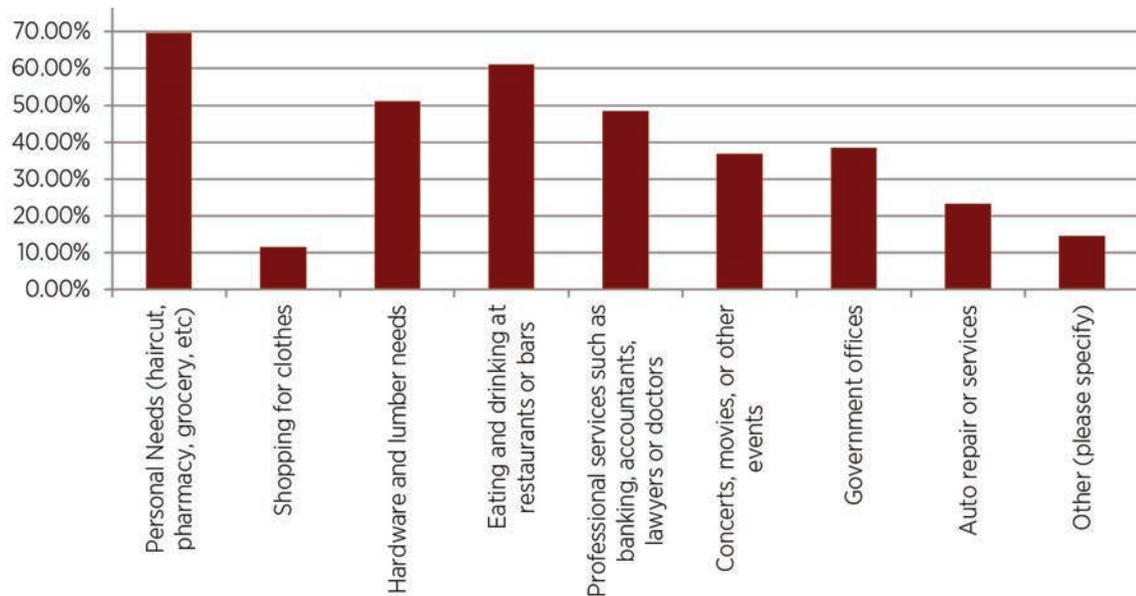


Figure 2: Reasons for visiting downtown



GOALS

The Steering Committee prepared a set of goals for the downtown plan that was formed from the survey results and discussion. Residents and business owners desire a vision for downtown that creates new opportunities to support existing businesses and attracts new enterprises through creating a more lively downtown.

Find ways to attract travelers into downtown. One way to promote downtown businesses is to improve the corridor from I-80 into downtown. Another option is to direct travel into downtown from 11th Avenue instead of 17J which is a more attractive corridor.

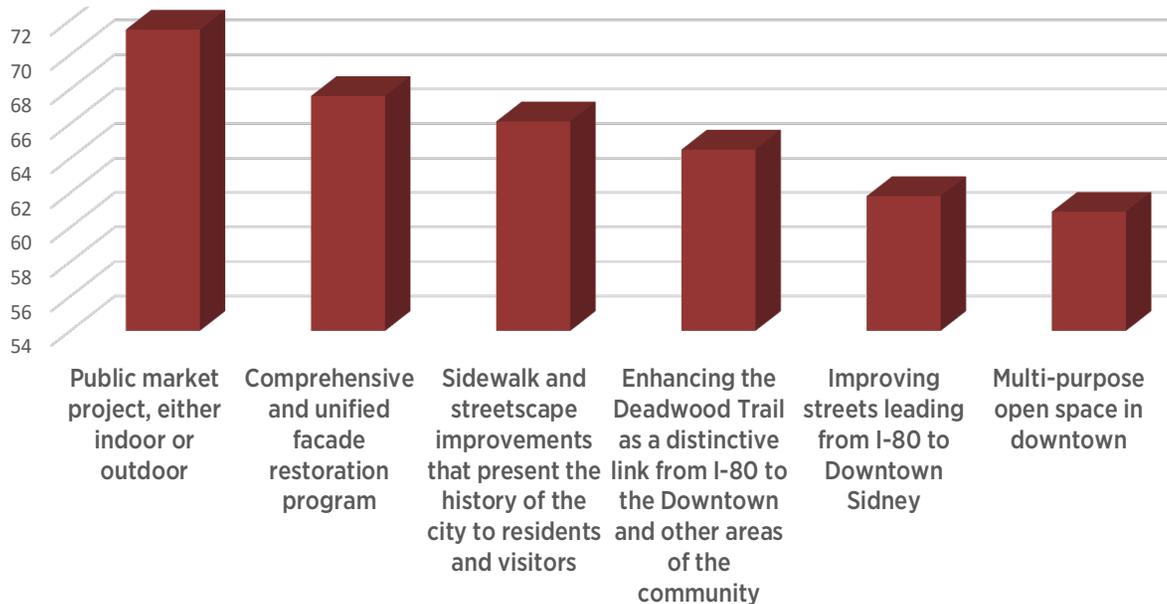
Support small business start ups to help fill gaps in the market. While Sidney has a good diversity of businesses, gaps still exist. Clothing options and restaurants were identified during public engagement as desired businesses. The market analysis supported the gap in clothing, as well as opportunities for new businesses in general merchandise, office supply, and specialty food stores.

Focus efforts on a facade restoration program. Sidney has a rich history which is reflective in the well-preserved building stock. While many have been restored, a number of buildings would benefit from a facade restoration program to remove slip covers, repair brick and stone, or rehab windows.

Increase street appeal through a cohesive streetscape plan. Several areas of downtown are well-maintained with flowers in planters or bump outs. Other areas have been ignored, allowing weeds to grow. Historic lighting is used in many areas, but is not uniform and may pose problems when the bulbs need replacement. A streetscape plan which identifies areas for improvements, materials to be used, and a maintenance plan for who will ensure the area is kept up would help increase the street appeal in downtown.

Create an outdoor space that supports local businesses and does not detract from other amenities in Sidney. Many residents want a space in downtown to gather that does not detract from the great park located just to the south. The space should be flexible and support the businesses located adjacent and in the vicinity. Hickory Square is the ideal location for just such an installation and if designed properly can serve as a catalyst for other projects on Hickory Street.

Figure 3: Support for Downtown Improvement Concepts



CHAPTER ONE

Downtown Today



INTRODUCTION

Downtown Sidney has many unique and historic features that create a sense of place and add value to the community. This plan will honor and preserve the heritage and character of the district, while expanding upon these traits to accommodate 21st century advancements. Just as the transition from carriage to automobile influenced downtown Sidney, so will trends in retail and changing housing preferences. Some will require new concepts, while others, such as more window display space, will require a return to older ideas. This chapter examines the conditions and opportunities for Sidney's downtown as it exists today.

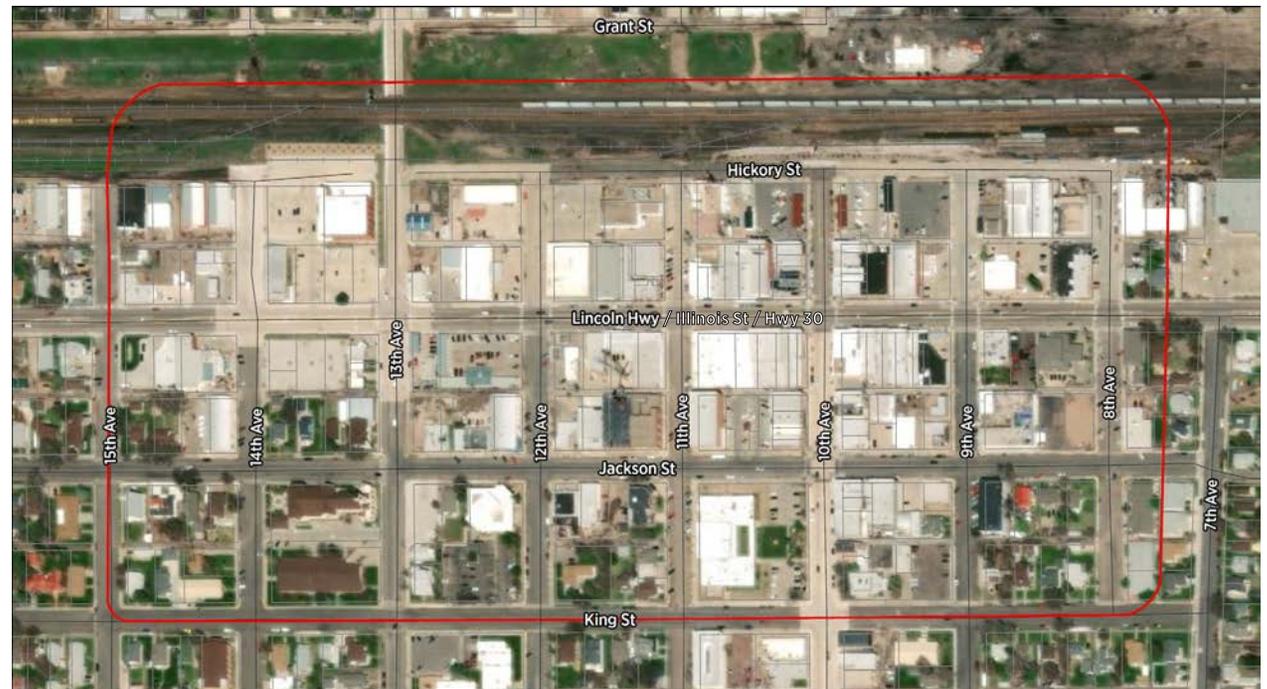
For the purposes of this plan, downtown is defined as the area bound by Hickory Street on the north, King Street on the south, 8th Avenue on the east and 15th Avenue on the west. This boundary is a starting point, as many upcoming recommendations focus on the heart of the commercial core, while consider downtown's relationship to Interstate 80.

The downtown environment consists of the physical buildings, transportation network, and activities. Downtown is poised to be the central location for gatherings, events, and other civic activities. By creating better connections to the highway and Interstate 80, downtown can strengthen its position in this regard.

This chapter reviews the following features:

- Building Use and Style
- Transportation
- Gateway
- Heart of Commerce
- Attractions and Programming

Figure 1.1: Study Area



BUILDING USE AND STYLE

Downtown Sidney has many historic structures, dating to early years of development. Most buildings are brick or stone and range from one to two stories in height. Some modern remodels and infill include the hardware store and several other office and retail buildings that have modern slip cover facades or stucco applied over the original brick.

Many buildings, like those pictured to the right at 10th Avenue and Highway 30, retain a high degree of integrity in their upper facades. Most buildings downtown have significantly altered storefronts resulting from new building tenants and changing fashion. Historic characteristics that have been altered in most buildings include the full height storefront windows with transoms above, retractable awnings, and blade signs. Some cornices have been altered, but many have been restored to almost their original appearance. Often, the removed detail is the projecting sign band with the date of the buildings construction or its name.

The building uses vary, but most of the downtown occupants are retail or office uses (see Figure 1.2). Retail is located primarily along Highway 30 and 10th Avenue. An auto related cluster formed around 12th Avenue and Highway 30 at the edge of the district. Office uses are scattered throughout the district. Housing is not shown in Figure 1.2, however many second stories in downtown have been converted to housing. Remaining vacant upper-story spaces struggle with converting to residential use because of the costs associated with meeting building code.

THEN



NOW



Figure 1.2: Existing Downtown Business Classifications



FIGURE 1.2: Existing Businesses by Type, 2020

BUSINESS TYPE	NUMBER
Civic/Government	2
Entertainment	2
Housing	0
Office	16
Personal Services	12
Restaurant/Bar	4
Retail	23
Vacant	12

Source: RDG Planning and Design

- Retail
- Entertainment
- Personal Service
- Auto-oriented
- Civic/Public
- Vacant
- Office
- Storage
- Restaurant

TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

The transportation environment affects all aspects of downtown life and activity. Downtown should be easy to access from all directions and offer a comfortable environment for walking, bicycling, and driving for a positive experience for all users. Figure 1.3 shows existing trails and connection priorities to support both bicycling and walking to downtown. Additionally, the three main vehicular entrances into downtown are highlighted.

Vehicular Conditions

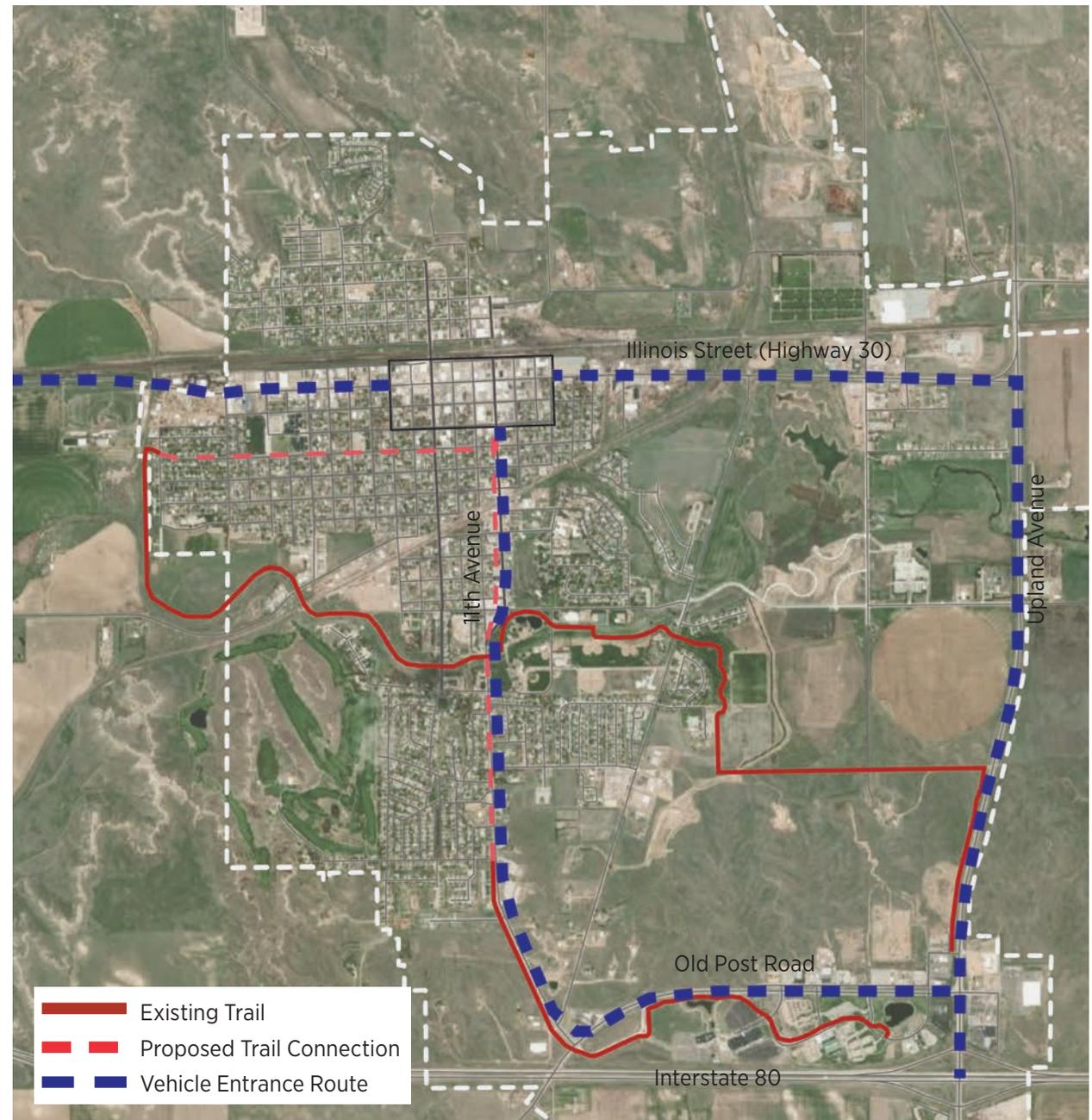
Overall, traffic flow in downtown is good. The grid system makes it easy to access the entire district and with on-street parking located in front of all businesses, users of downtown can easily find a place to park within a few blocks of their destination. Several public and private parking lots are also available for visitors to use.

Visitors traveling to downtown Sidney from I-80 are directed north on 17J to Highway 30. While this is the most direct route, participants desire for the corridor to be more attractive to give visitors a positive impression of the city.

A second route from I-80 that is not signed for travelers is Old Post Road to 11th Avenue. This route winds along the former Cabela's campus and along a tree-lined residential stretch with the park complex on the east side.

A third route is primarily used by visitors from communities to the northwest along Highway 30. This route has a similar feel as entering Highway 30 from the east, and the property fronting the highway is in better condition.

Figure 1.3: Active Transportation Conditions



Pedestrian Conditions

The pedestrian environment in downtown is well-maintained. Every block has sidewalks and crossings. Crossings along Highway 30 have bump outs which reduce the crossing distance for pedestrians, increasing their safety.

Access from the neighborhoods on foot immediately south of downtown is good, however the train tracks on the north side separate the neighborhood, cutting off access except at 13th Avenue which has a separated sidewalk from vehicle traffic under the bridge. Residential areas south of the diagonal tracks on the south side of downtown have several grade crossing options into downtown.

Bicycle Connections

The relatively wide and low trafficked streets of downtown make bicycling relatively easy on most streets except for Highway 30. Additionally, the Deadwood Trail and 11th Avenue trail provide separated bicycle and pedestrian access to the residential areas south of downtown. Young and inexperienced bicyclists may be deterred from biking the short distance to downtown on streets not separated or identified as bicycle lanes. Making the connection from the end of each of these trails to downtown is relatively easy and inexpensive.

GATEWAY

Sidney lacks a distinct gateway into the community. The location about 5 miles from I-80 allows traffic to pass without seeing the community, let alone downtown. An important component of this plan is to bring attention to downtown for travelers stopping out at the interchange on I-80. It will take more than signage or streetscape elements to connect downtown to I-80.

As discussed in the transportation section, there are three main entrances into downtown. These provide the first impression to visitors of downtown Sidney and should not be overlooked. Each of the three entrances paints a different picture of what to expect when arriving into downtown, some better than others. Emphasis should be placed on improving the corridor connection from 17J or directing traffic instead to 11th Avenue where little needs to be done to improve the gateway.

HEART OF COMMERCE

Downtown Sidney is the heart of commerce for the community. Despite the retail and restaurants at the I-80 interchange, many residents still visit downtown on a regular basis for their needs. Recently, local entrepreneurs have invested further in downtown by opening up businesses in vacant storefronts. This activity and support of downtown businesses has left few storefronts vacant. The opportunity exists to create a retail district and better promote activities of the businesses as a unit to draw in more shoppers.

ATTRACTIONS AND PROGRAMMING

Sidney hosts a number of events throughout the year drawing people to downtown. Each event is an opportunity to showcase the community and drive traffic to local businesses if properly coordinated. In addition, several museums serve as a destination.

Events/Programming

- Gold Rush Days
- Summer Concert Series
- Spring Expo
- Farmers Market
- Radio Station Cruise Night
- Christmas Parade of Lights

Attractions

- Fort Sidney Museum
- Fort Sidney Post Commander's Home
- Camp Lookout



OPPORTUNITIES

Sidney is a community of dedicated volunteers with a commitment to see improvement in Sidney. The numerous organizations and civic groups are a great foundation on which the success of this plan will depend. The downtown and character of Sidney conveys the care residents have for their community and serves as a reminder of the history and development of Sidney. Following are initial opportunities to leverage and challenges to address to move Sidney and the downtown forward.

OPPORTUNITIES TO LEVERAGE

- » **Excellent trail system.** The Deadwood Trail is one of the best trails in western Nebraska and should be highlighted to overnight visitors at the hotels. Opportunities exist to provide a bike share system and complete the last mile connection into downtown, allowing visitors a pleasant way to get to and from downtown for shopping and dining.
- » **Quality events.** Sidney has a series of events throughout the year that draw both residents and visitors into downtown. These events are an opportunity to drive more traffic to local businesses with proper coordination with the businesses to remain open and promotion of their offerings to event attendees.
- » **Rich history.** Sidney has a long and rich history dating back to the days of the Deadwood Trail before the railroad came through. This has led to a number of unique stories that can be used to inform streetscape improvements, be used as a tourist draw, or as a way to distinguish Sidney from other towns.
- » **Quality infrastructure.** A number of improvements have been made such as bump outs, trash receptacles, benches, and planters that should be maintained as part of any streetscape improvements.

CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

- » **Varying building conditions.** Many buildings show their age and need facade repairs or full rehabilitation. Special attention to storefront features, upper story windows, awnings, and signage could significantly improve the character of downtown. Guidelines on facade changes would help create a more cohesive feel to the district by standardizing the shape of awnings for example.
- » **Underutilized upper stories.** Some upper have been successfully converted to housing or other active uses, while many remain underutilized. The vacant upper stories offer an opportunity to add additional housing in downtown where code allows or to move less active uses like offices from first floor to second store space, opening up more retail space at sidewalk grade.
- » **Lack of permanent event space.** While Sidney has great park space and indoor event space, the downtown lacks any areas to gather or pause. Currently, 10th Avenue is at Hickory Street is opened and closed for each event, a time consuming process. A more permanent solution to gathering in downtown is needed to continue the events that draw people into downtown Sidney throughout the year.
- » **Disconnect between the I-80 interchange and downtown Sidney.** Not unlike many communities located on I-80, Sidney struggles with drawing traffic from the interchange to downtown. Many travelers passing through are unaware there is more to Sidney than what they see from the interstate.



CHAPTER TWO

MARKET ANALYSIS



INTRODUCTION

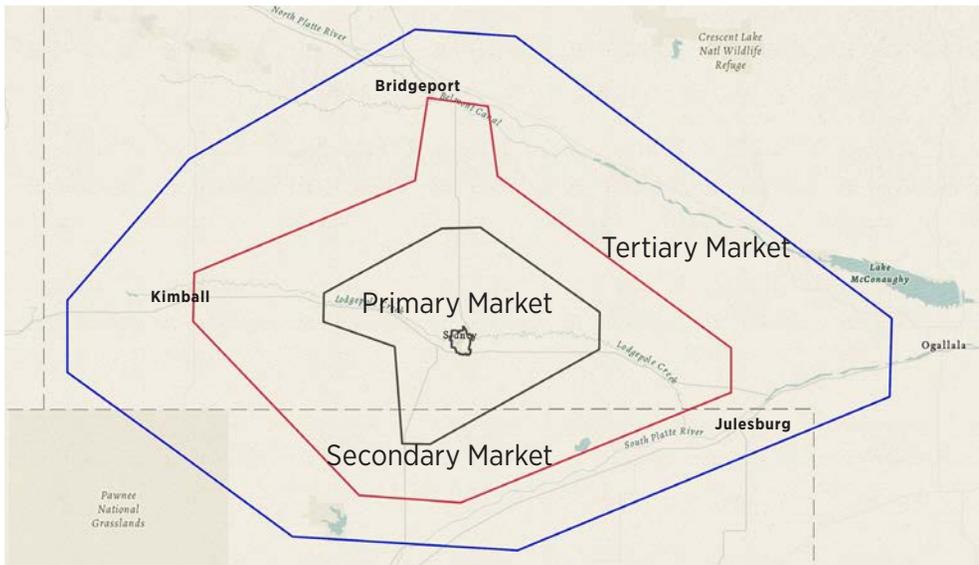
Several factors must be considered to understand the market landscape for downtown Sidney. The physical conditions identified in the previous chapter impact the look and experience, not necessarily the forces that create activity downtown. The market analysis is important because it reviews retail and housing demand and evaluates the needs and opportunities for development projects in and adjacent to downtown. Indicators from past and current trends in retail spending give insight into types of businesses Sidney can and should be supporting. Key concepts for downtown should build on these attributes and explore new avenues to set downtown apart from other areas in the city.

DEFINING THE ECONOMY

Sidney draws employment and customers from a larger economic region. Defining these regions is crucial to understand where strongholds in the local economy are and where gaps exist. The market areas for Sidney were developed considering regional economic centers and where people are most likely to shop given travel time, variety of shopping choices, and other attractions. These markets are broken into three areas—primary, secondary, and tertiary. Each are defined in the side bar and illustrated in Figure 2.1.

Generally, the primary market area is a 20 minute drive from Sidney where residents will first look for goods and services. If not readily available or within competitive price ranges, they will look to the secondary market. The tertiary market represents the region where Sidney is most likely to draw visitors for special events, tourism, and niche businesses. Demographics for each of the three market areas is located in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.1: Sidney Market Areas



DEFINITIONS

Primary Market

Residents of the primary market are within or adjacent to the city limits and will look to Sidney first for goods and services. If a product or service is available locally and is competitively priced, residents of this area will purchase from local businesses.

Secondary Market

This is where residents view Sidney as the most convenient population center for goods and services. The secondary market was derived by examining transportation routes, drive times, and distribution of population centers. This area extends about 30 miles to the north, east, and west, but only 20 miles to the south where Sterling is likely to capture the market.

Tertiary Market

The Tertiary Market extends the secondary market further north, east, and west to capture a drive time of about 60 minutes. This market represents the region from which Sidney may draw visitors for special events, tourism, and regional businesses like Cabela's retail outlet. This geographic area is difficult to define because certain features and amenities can attract visitors from hundreds of miles away, but these typically occur only a few times a year.

POPULATION

This sections reviews the historical population trends over the last few decades, trends by age group and their influence on downtown

POPULATION TRENDS

Sidney has experienced growth between 1990 and 2010. Between 2010 and 2018, Sidney experienced a decline, mostly caused by the loss of jobs at one major employer — Cabela’s. It is unlikely this decline in residents will continue as Sidney has seen new job growth in the last few years with more planned in the future. When measured against comparable communities between 2010 and 2018, Sidney’s decline in population was similar to Sterling, Colorado and Chadron, Nebraska. Communities like Scottsbluff, Holdrege, and Ogallala lost fewer residents during this time period.

POPULATION PROJECTION

Sidney expects to recover from the recent population loss. Many new small businesses have recently opened as well as 100 new jobs created with the potential for more at a UST Global.

Three growth rate scenarios were analyzed as illustrated in Figure 2.6. A 0.15% annual growth rate is just above the 2000 to 2018 rate and a 0.25% annual growth rate is equivalent to the 1990 to 2018 growth rate. An annual growth rate of 0.5% is included to show the potential growth that would result from an aggressive housing and employment development effort.

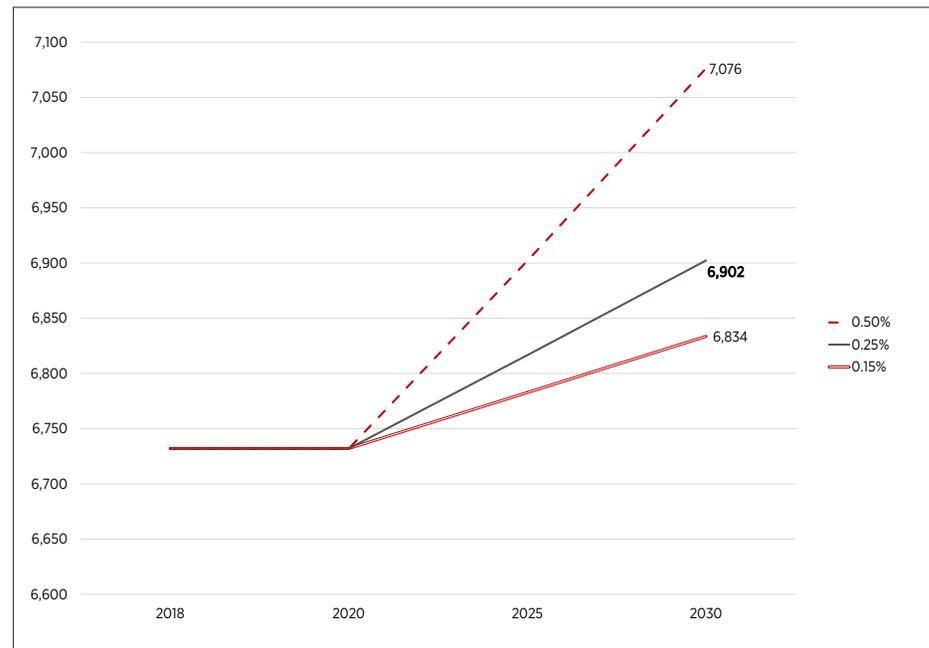
Based on this analysis, Sidney is projected to grow at an average annual growth rate of 0.15% which is just above the annual growth rate between 2000 and 2018. **This equates to an estimated population in 2030 of 6,834 residents.**

FIGURE 2.2: Market Area Characteristics, 2019

	PRIMARY MARKET	SECONDARY MARKET	TERTIARY MARKET
Population	9,214	14,547	24,625
Households	3,985	6,296	10,819
Median Disposable Income	\$50,488	\$46,622	\$43,523
Per Capita Income	\$34,773	\$33,031	\$31,523

Source: ESRI

Figure 2.6: Growth Rate Projections



TRENDS BY AGE

Figure 2.5 on the following page demonstrates the change in population between 2010 and 2018 by age cohort. There are three primary age groups—emerging, established or establishing, and seniors and empty nesters.

Emerging

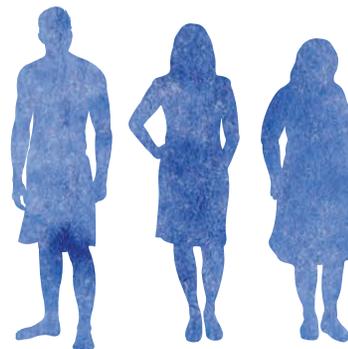
The emerging group (0 to 24 years old) is the most mobile of the cohorts—they relocate for college, work, or their family. If retained, this group will establish their own lives and families in Sidney. As a whole, between 2010 and 2018 this group declined partially due to 18 and 19 year olds leaving for college, but the greatest decline was within the 20 to 24 year old age cohort.



Established or Establishing

The established or establishing group (between 25 and 54 years of age) have secured jobs and housing or are in the process of establishing themselves. This represents the most broad cohort and can be broken into three sub groups:

- Ages 25 to 34: This group experienced the greatest growth of all age cohorts in Sidney. This could be a result of young professionals returning after college or the increase in small entrepreneurial businesses.
- Ages 35 to 44: This group saw the greatest out-migration next to the 20 to 24 year olds. This could be a result of higher level positions being eliminated at one of Sidney's largest employers and this age cohort moving to maintain the same level of employment elsewhere.
- Ages 45 to 54: The most established of this group, this age cohort remained largely unchanged but grew slightly.



Older Adult and Empty Nesters

These households often begin to shift their way of life as they approach retirement including down-sizing to smaller housing and finding their "new normal" without dependent children and a full-time career. This group grew overall, however the early retirees between 65 and 74 years of age lost population. The group above 75 years old grew slightly.



Age Group Influence on Downtown

The emerging cohort seeks activities, places to play and gather with friends, and amenities that are interactive and engaging (ex: water features, interactive art, shaded gathering spaces, and playgrounds). Young adults seek a vibrant, urban space with things to do throughout the day, but primarily in the evenings. They are the group most interested in living near downtown. Businesses that support this group are coffee shops, restaurants, bookstores, and other lounge spaces.

The established or establishing cohort has different interests based on their sub-group. Young families are seeking youth and family activities and entertainment. Downtown could serve as a family outing. Families with or without children seek an engaging shopping, restaurant, and entertainment district. They are interested in some nightlife, but to a lesser degree than young adults (18-24 years old). Established residents are also interested in nightlife, but prefer more upscale businesses than the emerging cohort. This group participates in both convenience and experiential shopping, but are more inclined to use downtown as a novelty (enjoyment/leisure) than a utility shopping destination (groceries, convenience goods, etc.).

Older adults and empty nesters interact in a similar manner to urban environments as young professionals. With greater stability and disposable income, these residents often engage more deeply with downtown as a place to down-size and focus their lives. This group may require more convenience items within walking distance to make their "new lifestyle" easy and enjoyable. This could be a prime area to maintain the 65- to 74-year-olds that are currently leaving Sidney. This group typically desires less maintenance and the ability to walk to basic daily needs - two major characteristics downtown buildings can provide.

FIGURE 2.5: Predicted 2018 Population Versus Actual 2018 Population

	AGE GROUP	2010	2018 PREDICTED	2018 ACTUAL	DIFFERENCE	% VARIANCE
Emerging	0-14	1,450	1,240	1,316	76	6.2%
	15-19	401	492	446	-46	-9.4%
	20-24	327	458	309	-149	-32.6%
	25-34	1,009	722	939	217	30.1%
Established/ Establishing	35-44	850	998	790	-208	-20.9%
	45-54	966	830	886	56	6.7%
	55-64	723	906	917	11	1.2%
Seniors/ Empty-Nester	65-74	451	615	515	-100	-16.3%
	75-84	378	311	375	64	20.6%
	85+	202	215	239	24	11.2%
	Total	6,757	6,787	6,732	-55	-0.8%

Source: Decennial Census; American Community Survey 2018

*Due to the smaller sample size, the 2018 estimates contain a higher margin of error

BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT LANDSCAPE

The employment character of Sidney impacts the way people interact with the business district. In addition to those who work and live in Sidney, this plan must also consider those who choose to live or work elsewhere but still interact with the local economy on a regular basis as their home or workplace.

INCOME

An individual's personal and household wages impact the amount of income available for necessities and monies spent in the community. Sidney has a median household income of \$58,784 which is the highest among peer cities shown in Figure 2.7.

Stable incomes in Sidney can be partially attributed to the strong workforce within the community and region. The 2018 American Community Survey estimated an unemployment rate for Sidney of only 2% while the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported an (pre-COVID-19) unemployment rate of 3.3% for February 2020.

An affordable, self-sustaining housing market, with adequate value to support market rate new construction, typically has a value-to-income ratio between 2.0 and 3.0. Ratios below 2.0 are significantly undervalued and make it difficult to support new construction costs.

Figure 2.7: Income & Housing Affordability

Sidney (Pop: 6,376)

Median Household Income	Median Contract Rent	Median House Value	Value / Income Ratio
\$58,784	\$559	\$113,900	1.94

Scottsbluff (Pop: 14,733)

Median Household Income	Median Contract Rent	Median House Value	Value / Income Ratio
\$42,488	\$545	\$107,500	2.53

Chadron (Pop: 5,488)

Median Household Income	Median Contract Rent	Median House Value	Value / Income Ratio
\$52,201	\$451	\$124,800	2.39

Holdrege (Pop: 5,405)

Median Household Income	Median Contract Rent	Median House Value	Value / Income Ratio
\$51,615	\$434	\$117,500	2.28

Sterling, CO (Pop: 13,630)

Median Household Income	Median Contract Rent	Median House Value	Value / Income Ratio
\$41,200	\$650	\$129,900	3.15

Source: American Community Survey 2018

COMMUTING TRENDS

Sidney is located at the crossroads of Interstate 80 and U.S. Highway 385. Highway 30, the former Lincoln Highway, runs east to west through the heart of downtown. The connectivity to regional and national transportation systems provides Sidney with strong access for jobs and tourism.

As Figure 2.8 illustrates, Sidney is a regional employment center drawing in over 1,600 employees to work in the community with an additional 1,815 residents employed within the city limits. Only 918 residents commute outside of Sidney for work.

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

The business and employment character of Sidney and the secondary/tertiary market areas provide insight into the workforce and economy. As Figures 2.9 and 2.10 illustrate, Sidney and the surrounding market areas primary source of employment is retail trade and services.

Sidney has a total of 544 employers creating 5,994 jobs. The greatest retail trade employer is eating and drinking establishments (561 employees) followed by general merchandise and food stores with 146 and 112 employees respectively. The primary service provider industry is educational institutions and libraries (622) followed by health services (574) and other services (458).

Figure 2.9: Number of Employees by Market Area (2019 ESRI Estimates)

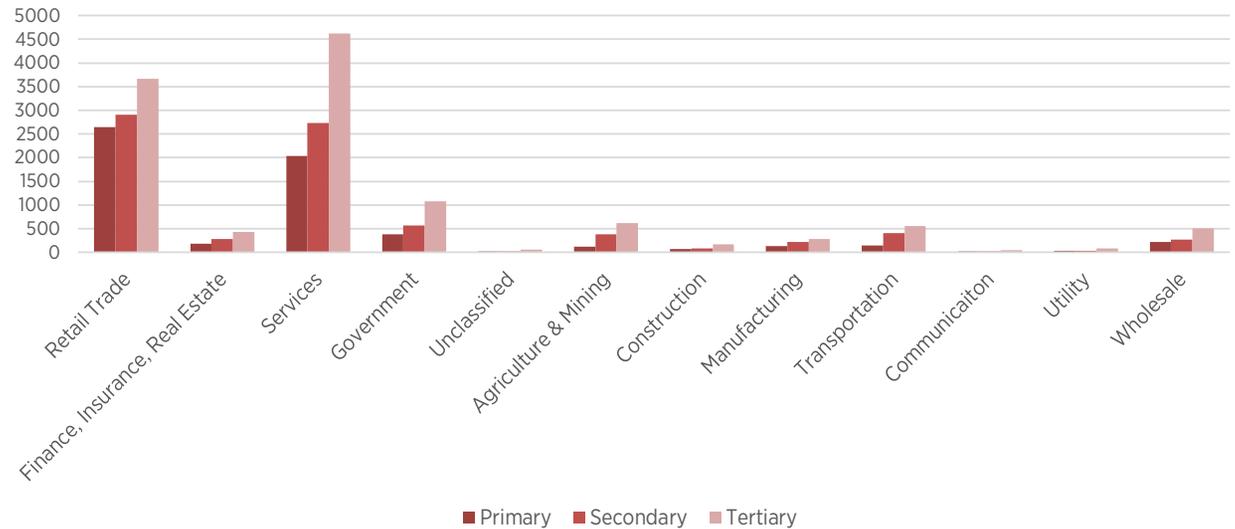


Figure 2.10: Number of Businesses by Market Area (2019 ESRI Estimates)

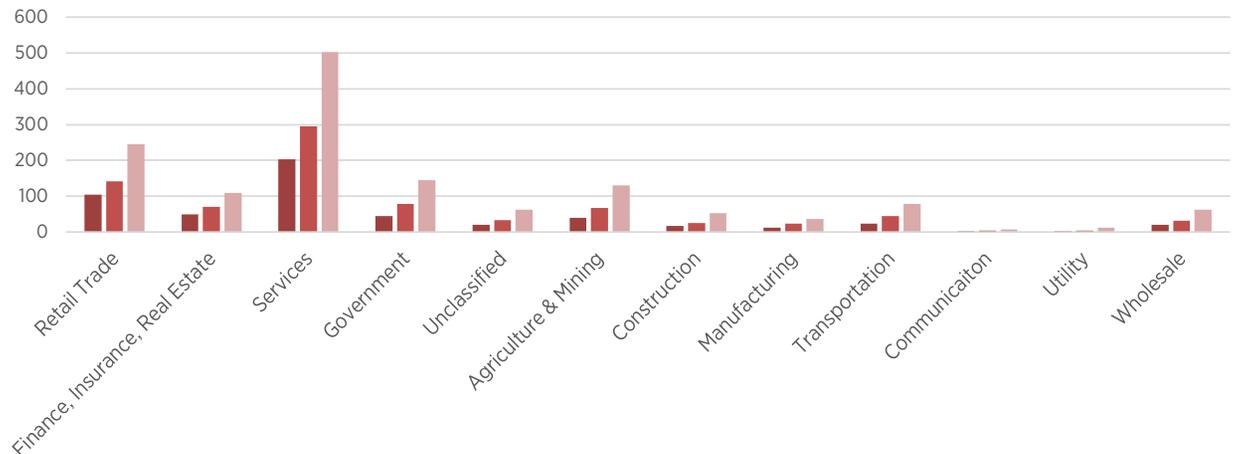
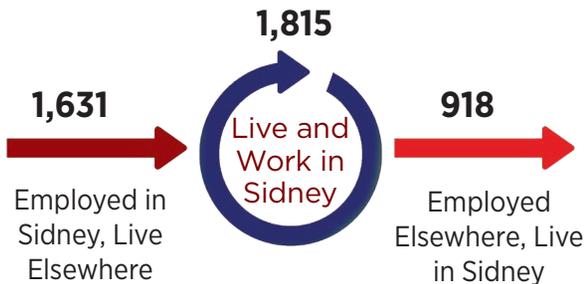


Figure 2.8: Inflow-Outflow for All Employment



Source: 2017 Census On the Map

RETAIL PERFORMANCE

This section explores the spending patterns in Sidney's Primary and Secondary Markets. The analysis compares actual spending to the amount predicted based on the population. The purpose of this analysis is to identify market sectors that attract spending into Sidney (surplus) and those sectors where spending is not being captured (gap sectors).

Figures suggest that the local population supports half of the retail base, while the other half is supported from outside of the city. This trend is common in communities like Sidney where they are a center of commerce in an otherwise rural setting of the State. Improving the appearance of the community helps ensure that this pattern continues and supports the case that reinvestment is even more important to avoid reversing trends.

Sidney's Primary Market doubled the total amount of spending that would be expected based on the size of the population. This demonstrates Sidney's retail and service economy does not currently meet the demand generated by its population. The following analysis delves into this retail analysis further.

- Total Adjusted Sales (Actual): \$331 million
- Total Adjusted Sales (Expected): \$166 million
 - › A total surplus of just under \$165 million was generated primarily due to strong performance in Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book & Music Stores, likely at the retail outlet of Cabela's. Another strong performance was seen in Gasoline Stations.
- Sporting Goods/Hobby Stores:

FIGURE 2.11: Retail Expenditure Analysis

	PRIMARY MARKET		
	2019 Expected Expenditures	2019 Actual Sales	Opportunity (Leakage/Surplus)
Total Retail Trade and Food & Drink	\$166,185,599	\$331,058,705	(\$164,873,106)
Total Retail Trade	\$151,522,912	\$310,562,800	(\$159,039,888)
Total Food & Drink	\$14,662,686	\$20,495,905	(\$5,833,219)

- › \$118 million in sales accounts for 36% of all adjusted sales in Sidney with a surplus of \$113 million in the Primary Market alone. Despite the recent relocation of the Cabela's corporate headquarters, the retail store continues to play a significant role in the region.
- Gasoline Stations:
 - › \$42 million in adjusted sales accounts for 13% of adjusted sales in Sidney and 17% when expanding the analysis to the Secondary Market. A surplus of \$25 million in the Primary Market and nearly \$42 million in the Secondary Market show the influence this sector has in the region resulting from Sidney's location on Interstate 80.
- General Merchandise Stores:
 - › \$42 million in adjusted sales accounts for another 13% of Sidney's retail market. The overall market surplus of almost \$22 million is due largely to department stores.
- Food and Beverage Stores:
 - › \$29 million in adjusted sales accounts for 9% of Sidney's retail market. A surplus of \$1.6 million in the Primary Market and \$3.2 million in the Secondary Market shows strong performance in the industry. The lack of sales in specialty food stores (spice shop, bakery, etc.) with \$1.3 million in expected expenditures shows a gap in this market in Sidney.

FIGURE 2.12: Retail Expenditure Analysis

Industry Group	PRIMARY MARKET			SECONDARY MARKET ONLY		
	2019 Expected Expenditures	2019 Actual Sales	Opportunity (Leakage/Surplus)	2019 Actual Sales	2019 Expected Expenditures	Opportunity (Leakage/Surplus)
Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers	\$33,266,110	\$28,299,680	\$4,966,430	\$50,362,849	\$30,452,342	\$19,910,507
Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores	\$3,783,191	\$5,140,021	-\$1,356,830	\$5,506,428	\$5,517,336	-\$10,908
Electronics & Appliance Stores	\$5,376,054	\$6,765,116	-\$1,389,062	\$7,811,244	\$7,508,928	\$302,316
Bldg Materials, Garden Equip. & Supply Stores	\$10,940,416	\$10,367,274	\$573,142	\$16,531,009	\$13,409,965	\$3,121,044
Food & Beverage Stores	\$27,487,070	\$29,100,479	-\$1,613,409	\$40,840,230	\$44,038,878	-\$3,198,648
Health & Personal Care Stores	\$9,609,892	\$9,431,181	\$178,711	\$14,572,488	\$14,401,081	\$171,407
Gasoline Stations	\$16,847,183	\$42,725,504	-\$25,878,321	\$25,280,602	\$67,188,487	-\$41,907,885
Clothing & Clothing Accessories Stores	\$5,190,112	\$5,054,566	\$135,546	\$7,462,782	\$5,398,532	\$2,064,250
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book & Music Stores	\$5,548,700	\$118,874,425	-\$113,325,725	\$8,085,902	\$126,616,206	-\$118,530,304
General Merchandise Stores	\$23,757,781	\$42,048,024	-\$18,290,243	\$34,878,087	\$50,395,358	-\$15,517,271
Miscellaneous Retailers (florist, office supply, used goods, other)	\$7,894,660	\$11,518,142	-\$3,623,482	\$11,804,030	\$12,633,861	-\$829,831
Nonstore Retailers	\$1,821,743	\$1,238,388	\$583,355	\$2,803,784	\$1,238,388	\$1,565,396
Food Services & Drinking Places	\$14,662,686	\$20,495,905	-\$5,833,219	\$21,234,624	\$22,088,964	-\$854,340

Source: RDG Planning & Design; ESRI

RETAIL SPENDING PATTERNS

The retail spending index provides a glimpse into the spending habits of residents in both the primary market and the total market areas compared to the national average (an index value of 100). In addition to the national comparison, the average per capita spending is illustrated by market sector. The retail spending index illustrates consumer habits by considering what goods and services are convenient, the willingness to spend money in certain market sectors, and other contributing factors.

Notable findings include:

- **Recreational Vehicles and Fees:** Spending well above the national average in both the Primary and Secondary Markets (132 and 134 respectively);
- **Pets:** Spending above the national average in both the primary and secondary markets (121 in both markets);
- **Lawn and Garden:** Spending above the national average in both the Primary and Secondary Markets (117 and 115 respectively);
- **Food:** Many respondents expressed interest in more restaurant variety in downtown Sidney. In concert with the previous section, this retail spending index provides insight into the purchases of food at home (grocery), food away from home (restaurants), and food and drink on trips (travel and tourism).
 - › Food at home: Spending near but below the national average in both the Primary and Secondary Markets (97 and 94 respectively)
 - › Food away from home: Spending below the national average in both the Primary and Secondary Markets (91 and 85 respectively)

FIGURE 2.13: Retail Spending Index

	PRIMARY MARKET			TOTAL MARKET		
	Spending Potential Index	Average Amount Spent	Total	Spending Potential Index	Average Amount Spent	Total
Apparel and Services	87	\$1,853.45	\$7,386,005			
Men's	91	\$378.88	\$1,509,833	86	\$356.48	\$2,244,374
Women's	82	\$592.12	\$2,359,588	76	\$545.28	\$3,433,094
Children's	93	\$299.22	\$1,192,390	88	\$283.32	\$1,783,799
Footwear	87	\$420.21	\$1,674,541	82	\$395.17	\$2,488,016
Watches & Jewelry	83	\$115.28	\$459,376	77	\$106.77	\$672,236
Apparel Products and Services (1)	72	\$47.75	\$190,277	65	\$43.12	\$271,507
Entertainment & Recreation	101	\$3,288.25	\$13,103,668			
Fees and Admissions	77	\$552.46	\$2,201,541	69	\$493.77	\$3,108,770
Pets	121	\$803.51	\$3,201,990	121	\$799.17	\$5,031,545
Toys/Games/Crafts/Hobbies (4)	100	\$117.80	\$469,436	95	\$111.84	\$704,118
Recreational Vehicles and Fees (5)	132	\$210.33	\$838,154	134	\$214.08	\$1,347,843
Sports/Recreation/Exercise Equipment (6)	95	\$197.79	\$788,177	90	\$186.49	\$1,174,110
Photo Equipment and Supplies (7)	94	\$49.13	\$195,786	88	\$45.78	\$288,222
Reading (8)	99	\$105.15	\$419,035	94	\$100.08	\$630,084
Catered Affairs (9)	80	\$21.20	\$84,469	71	\$18.95	\$119,320
Food						
Food at Home	97	\$5,036.49	\$20,070,406	94	\$4,838.29	\$30,461,887
Food Away from Home	91	\$3,329.22	\$13,266,954	85	\$3,133.38	\$19,727,743
Travel						
Airline Fares	77	\$422.61	\$1,684,102	70	\$381.75	\$2,403,478
Lodging on Trips	92	\$573.35	\$2,284,811	87	\$539.97	\$3,399,645
Auto/Truck Rental on Trips	98	\$25.69	\$102,366	91	\$23.83	\$150,020
Food and Drink on Trips	90	\$486.34	\$1,938,060	84	\$453.67	\$2,856,334

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; RDG Planning & Design; ESRI

HOUSING

A successful downtown is well rounded, provides amenities for people to visit and enjoy (the tourist), employment and opportunities to earn a living (the employee), and options for living (the resident).



A district must incorporate and balance these groups to realize its full potential. By incorporating residential units into the district, the downtown can become more of a neighborhood. When achieved, the following benefits accrue:

- Increased security (eyes on the street)
- Additional vitality and life throughout the day
- More consumers embedded in the district
- Additional stable revenue streams for business owners

HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

While many upper story units have been converted to housing in recent years and there are residential neighborhoods adjacent, there is potential to add a few more units on the upper floors of downtown buildings and at the periphery of the district. The following analysis provides a foundation of market and housing characteristics to guide residential housing production. It is important to note the analysis uses U.S. Census Bureau and American Community Survey data for the entire city, not just downtown Sidney.

- Approximately 65% of all units in Sidney are owner-occupied. This suggests that downtown housing could be a mix of owner-occupied units such as townhomes or condominiums in addition to apartments for rent.
- The estimated vacancy rate is around 8% which is on the upper end of a healthy vacancy rate. More housing units are needed to allow

current residents to move up, move laterally, or downsize within Sidney's housing market. Additionally, there is demand from local employers to expand their workforce, creating a need for more housing to accommodate new residents.

- The estimated median home value is \$81,400 and median income is \$64,348 creating a value-to-income ratio of 1.26, indicating an undervalued housing market.

FIGURE 2.14: Occupancy and Tenure

TYPICAL	2000	% OF OCCUPIED UNITS	2010	% OF OCCUPIED UNITS	CHANGE 2000-2010	2018	% OF OCCUPIED UNITS	CHANGE 2000-2018
Total Units	2,621		3,184		563	3,377		756
Occupied Units	2,621		2,893		272	3,100		479
Owner-Occupied	1,832	69.9%	1,307	57.0%	-525	1,997	64.4%	165
Renter-Occupied	789	30.1%	986	43.0%	197	1,103	35.6%	314
Total Vacant	269		291		22	277		8
Vacancy Rate	10.3%		9.1%			8.2%		

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; 2018 American Community Survey

HOUSING DEMAND

The housing demand summary (Figure 2.15) shows future housing needs based on the projected future population growth of 0.15%, annual replacement need of one per year, an average household size of 2.14 people and a stable vacancy rate of 7%. Figure 2.16 illustrate the how that demand should be divided both by type of unit and price.

- Approximately 60 new units or six units annually will be needed through 2030.
 - The unit mix shown in Figure 2.12 assumes a mix of owner-renter of 65%-35% to meet both existing and future needs for quality rental units.
 - Most new construction will cost more than \$130,000, causing demand for lower-cost units to be met by existing housing.
 - To reinforce the central role of the downtown district, a share of new development should be promoted in and around the downtown district.
- › If the downtown and adjacent area captured just 10-20% of the market potential, it would result in six to twelve units for the area in the next ten years.

FIGURE 2.15: Housing Demand Summary, Sidney

	2020	2025	2030	Total
Population at End of Period	6,732	6,783	6,834	
Household Population at End of Period	6,630	6,680	6,731	
Average People Per Household	2.14	2.14	2.14	
Household Demand at End of Period	3,098	3,122	3,145	
Projected Vacancy Rate	7.0%	7.0%	7.0%	
Unit Needs at End of Period	3,332	3,357	3,382	
Replacement Need (total lost units)		6	5	11
Cumulative Need During Period		30	30	60
Average Annual Construction		6	6	6

FIGURE 2.16: Housing Development Program

Owner Occupied	2019-2025	2026-2030	Total
Affordable Low: Under \$125,000	5	5	9
Affordable Moderate: \$125-200,000	5	5	11
Moderate Market: \$200-250,000	4	4	8
Market: \$250-350,000	3	3	6
High Market: Over \$350,000	2	2	4
	19	19	38
Total Renter Occupied			
Low: Less than \$500	3	3	6
Affordable: \$500-1,000	3	3	6
Market: Over \$1,000-1,500	3	3	6
High Market: Over \$1,500	2	2	4
	11	11	22
Total Need	30	30	60

MARKET CONCLUSIONS

Downtowns are unique commercial districts with characteristics different from modern commercial areas. The allure of downtown over new commercial developments is the walkable, compact environment. Sidney's historic downtown has these characteristics today and is positioned to lead the way for future growth.

From a market perspective, Sidney's strongest asset are the specialty businesses that draw visitors from varying distances. This regional traffic has potential to bring additional spending in the rest of downtown if weaknesses, like lack of retail and business variety, are addressed.



CHAPTER THREE

PLAN STRATEGIES



TACTICAL STRATEGIES

A complete downtown plan includes both tactical and development components. Tactical strategies are relatively low-cost actions that promote existing businesses and help attract customers through such means as image development, organization, marketing, events, and other programs. A tactical program for Downtown Sidney will most effectively be implemented through a Business Association that works in partnership with city government and other community organizations. Key recommendations in this section include:

- Create a business association
- Establish a maintenance plan
- Highlight History
- Improve Wayfinding

CREATE A BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

The fundamental mission of a downtown business association is to attract customers, activity, businesses, and investment to the district. A vital downtown has tremendous benefit to the economic strength and quality of the entire community. A business association should have formal leadership that will establish a specific agenda for action. From an organizational point of view, the association should include:

- » **A membership program that involves and represents the range of businesses and stakeholders in the district.** Committed members support the organization, develop ideas and priorities, and provide a means for collaboration and communication.
- » **Leadership that builds partnerships and provides a point of contact with city government and other agencies and organizations.** In addition to officers and a governing board, many downtown associations require full or part-time professional staff to carry out programs.

The scope of a business association will be determined by its members and leadership, with a priority program drawn from the following initiatives.

Branding and Marketing

- » **Establish a Downtown Sidney brand.** In general, "brand" is a series of expectations that an audience has of a product. These audiences are both internal and external. Internal audiences comprise citizens of the city, including people who live, work, and run businesses in Downtown. External audiences including people visiting the area, from travelers passing by on Interstate 80 to destination-driven visitors in town for business, social, or recreational purposes. A positive brand gives both audiences reasons to use the district. Many communities have used their unique stories as a way to brand themselves and promote their downtown as a destination. Sidney's colorful history dates back to the days of the Sidney-Deadwood Trail. A brand can both spotlight and update its unique history to

appeal to a variety of demographic groups. It may revive historic names and references or incorporate a more modern identity based on community assets and the natural environment. Features like graphics, banners, wayfinding, and even the design of downtown public spaces should express and reinforce the brand. The graphics for the downtown brand can be adapted from the citywide brand to maintain cohesion, but provide a unique downtown identity.

- » **Develop and Implement a Marketing Campaign.** A marketing campaign helps build brand awareness and attract visitors to the district. An initial campaign could focus on attracting out-of-town travelers and visitors to Downtown Sidney in-conjunction with tactical steps that take advantage of and enhance the downtown experience. The campaign could be part of a larger citywide marketing campaign.

USING HISTORY FOR MARKETING

Ogallala has leaned into its history as a wild west town on the Nebraska frontier. The city's website reads like an old bulletin with a unique font and design elements. The wild west theme is embraced in the re-creation of Front Street, which has a character of an old frontier town. Even the Mansion on the Hill Museum uses the font on their signage. But Ogallala has also updated its offerings with enhancements like Rendezvous Square and the new Driftwood Event Venue.



» **Develop and Distribute a Downtown Brochure.**

While a quality website can provide an important gateway for visitors, written collateral is still very valuable – especially to older adults and people who simply like the feel and usability of print versus on-line materials. Distribution may be focused at hotels and eating places at the I-80 interchange and at major commercial destinations like Cabela's.

» **Promoting Cross-Marketing.** Establishing a program by which retail and hospitality businesses understand each other's establishments and make referrals can have great benefits in a cooperative district. This would include sharing resources to attract customers into downtown who may shop at several businesses in one trip.

» **Increase Participation in the Nebraska Passport Program.** This program draws nearly 900 travelers to cities across Nebraska each year and could be tapped into to try to draw participants into Sidney. In 2020, only one business in Sidney was featured on the passport and it was not a downtown business.

Business Attraction

The Business Association would be instrumental in supporting business attraction and filling gaps in the market identified earlier in the market analysis. Some actions for supporting retail and service development include:

- » **Promote high standards of customer service.** This will help strengthen the district's identification with local consumers.
- » **Aggressively market and recruit retailers to downtown, matching needs with available space.** In addition, provide strategic management and possibly financial assistance through an economic development program.

» **Work to secure more locations for outdoor dining.** This includes physically identifying areas and providing regulatory support.

A Strong Digital Presence

While the City of Sidney's website has an informative section on the historic downtown, Downtown Sidney lacks a distinct, market-oriented digital presence. In addition, many Main Street businesses are small, locally owned enterprises that may need additional assistance to establish a more robust presence on the web or social media.

- » **Design a Downtown Sidney Website.** A website for Downtown Sidney can promote all businesses, increase interest in visiting the district, tell stories, and publicize upcoming events and attractions.
- » **Establish a Local Digital Business Assistance Program.** A program could be created to provide assistance to local business owners through young professionals or even high school students. Many businesses need a few hours of help in updating a website or getting their business listed properly on Google Maps.

Grant Applications

Grant applications provide critical supplemental funding for projects and may be directed to public, private, and philanthropic funders. Some grant applications are initiated by city government, while others may be prepared by business associations or development corporations. A formal district organization gains credibility for the application and administration of grants.

Business Standards

Some business districts follow shopping center standards by establishing extended hours on certain nights to attract more customers. Uniform hours provide greater predictability for customers.

Event Planning and Coordination

Events like the car show or festival tree lighting attract people from surrounding communities to stay for several hours or the entire day. Events held in downtown showcase downtown's businesses, stimulate immediate spending and create return customers. Also, marketing events such as joint sales can drive more traffic to the area. But events held downtown can also deter customers when they can't conveniently get to their destinations. Some businesses are unaware of planned events, which creates conflict.

In addition to planning events, a business association can improve communication and coordination, minimizing interference with normal operation. The City will have a point of contact to coordinate events and a system to relay details to business owners. Business owners can then adjust their hours and work with the City or event organizers to promote their extended hours for the special event.

ESTABLISH A MAINTENANCE PLAN

Maintenance of the public environment is important to the ability of a downtown district to project a quality image. Public space features include curb extensions (bump-outs), plantings and other landscaped areas, street furniture, litter clearance, public parking areas, and sidewalks. Leaving maintenance, such as snow removal, to individual businesses can lead to uneven performance. Clear identification of responsibility between the city and the district becomes very important. Many districts in Nebraska and outside use Business Improvement Districts (BID's), funding such costs as maintenance and promotion through special assessments.

HIGHLIGHT HISTORY

Downtown Sidney has a wealth of unusual and even surprising secrets and legends of events and features that, if known, could enrich the experience of the district. The community has demonstrated this with its program of historic plaques on significant buildings in the downtown historic district. This represented a major research effort on the part of citizens and makes being in the district especially interesting. Another story that emerged during the planning process was the former tunnel network. Research could be done to uncover the network of these tunnels and highlighted above ground in some manner as a walking tour for both visitors and residents alike. Once identified, the actual tunnels could be marked on the surface with a course of pavers or ceramic tiles.

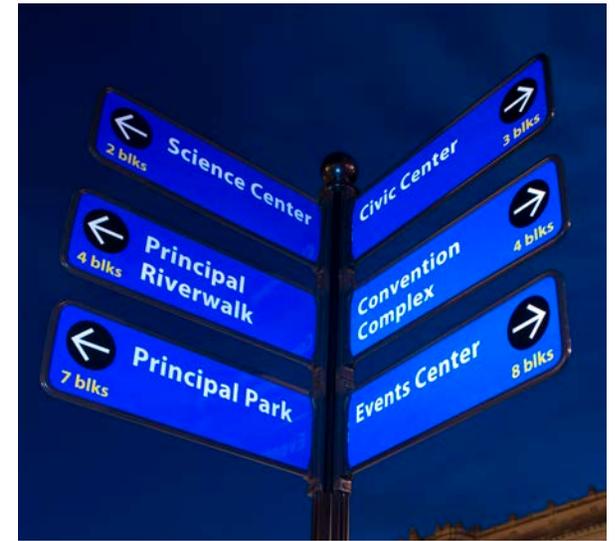
IMPROVE WAYFINDING

Visitors to Sidney may not be aware of features in and around Downtown. A community wayfinding system would direct people to the district clearly and pleasantly, and major features in downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods. Wayfinding operates at two scales: 1) community, directing visitors from major entry points like the interchange to Downtown and back; and 2) district, providing directions at a pedestrian scale to downtown destinations.

- » **Community.** A number of signs and billboards direct traffic to downtown Sidney via the 17J bypass and US 30. This route misses many of Sidney's most appealing features and bypasses area businesses. It also involves some misdirection and to the user it feels like it sends them away from, rather than into the city. A more attractive route using Old Post Road to 11th and 10th Avenues should be designated after discussions with Public Works and local

law enforcement to ensure there would be no capacity issues with increased traffic. This slower-speed, more comfortable route passes retailers, including Cabela's, shows off the city's beautiful central park system, and provides an especially appealing entrance into the central district. A study may be necessary to determine traffic capacity and necessary upgrades resulting from a redirection of traffic. Signs should be placed to ensure traffic is warned in advance of key destinations and is sized to be easily recognized.

- » **District.** This signage is more fine-grained than community scale and provides direction to specific points of interest. Signage is at the pedestrian scale, and may include blade signs on ornamental supports. Examples of destinations include the library, county courthouse, art center, commercial core, or other features proposed by this plan.



Above (from top): District wayfinding in Des Moines; outdoor dining in Wauwatosa, WI

Left: Students posing in front of their art tiles in the brick pillar in Shenandoah, IA

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Development strategies largely focus on opportunities presented by Downtown Sidney's physical environment, both built and natural, public and private. This section identifies possibilities that increase economic strength, capitalize on the unique character of the district, use land and buildings more effectively, and create a rewarding experience for those who live, work, and patronize Sidney's downtown.

Key recommendations in this section include:

- District Identification
- Opportunity Sites
- Public Realm
- Facade Restoration
- Storefront Activation
- Housing Availability
- Hickory Street Corridor
- Trail Connections to Downtown
- Maintaining and enhancing existing buildings and businesses, and increasing their use. This includes facade and building rehabilitation and adaptive reuse programs.
- Strategic public improvements that support private investment and increase the ability of the district to maximize positive social interaction.
- Increasing the character of the area as a pleasant walking environment.

DISTRICTS

The Downtown development concept identifies four development subdistricts, each with a specific role and a set of supportive policies and actions:

- *The Downtown Core*, Downtown's traditional business and retail blocks.
- *An Innovation District*, providing a supportive environment for new business enterprises and renewed economic vitality.
- *Lincoln Highway Business Park*, upgrading the US 30 corridor as a quality business environment.
- *Hickory Corridor* a multiple-use civic corridor and activity center.

Downtown Core Blocks

These blocks and blockfaces are the main commercial and historical core of Downtown, dominated by retail, service, and hospitality uses. They are closely aligned with the boundaries of the National Register district. Policies and programs in these blocks should focus on:

Major program initiatives for the Downtown Core include:

- Redesigning and updating the Facade Restoration Program to increase use and effectiveness.
- A storefront activation initiative to encourage retail and other active uses at street level.
- Housing availability, encouraging upper level housing development in applicable mixed use buildings.

These programs are described in more detail on pages 46-47.

Innovation District

Private sector entrepreneurship helped place Sidney on the national map, and the community can help re-create this energy in a contemporary setting. An innovation district requires availability of inexpensive, flexible space with significant character to attract start-up and innovative businesses – appealing to people with big ideas

The purpose of urban planning is finding a way to minimize our distress while maximizing our interactions"

-Geoffrey West



Downtown Core. Historic building block along 10th Avenue in the Downtown Core



Innovation District. The Barker Laundry Building, a component of a possible Sidney Innovation District



Innovation District concept plan at 12th Avenue and Jackson



Do Space in Omaha. This public facility provides technical assistance, digital support, conference facilities, and other features to support budding entrepreneurs



The Mill. This project in Bloomington, Indiana converted a deteriorated former mill into flexible space for new businesses



Lincoln Highway Business Park

and sometimes limited capital. In the opportunity analysis, the area around 12th Avenue and Jackson Street would be attractive. Two large buildings, the Barker Cleaners and US Apron, are both vacant and provide the right mix of space, flexibility, and ambiance. The adjacent Sidney Fine Arts Center and Security First Bank can help support the emergence of this district.

Components of the Innovation District initiative include:

- Acquisition and adaptive reuse of the Barker Cleaners and US Apron buildings. This could be accomplished by creating a nonprofit development corporation to carry out this effort, using community based investments and state and federal economic development programs. An LB 840 local option sales tax could also be used as a funding source. Debt service and operations would be supported by operating revenues.
- Completing an intersection improvement and branding at 12th Avenue and Jackson, with bump-outs, lighting, and streetscape elements

to unify the two enterprise buildings on opposing corners.

- A business support program, developed with the assistance of Western Nebraska Community College.
- Paving the alley and developing a parking lot and outdoor public space adjacent to the Sidney Art Center.

Lincoln Highway Business Park

Two major transportation corridors, the Union Pacific mainline and Highway 30 pass through Downtown Sidney and have attracted light industrial and corridor commercial uses to the area between 11th and 15th Streets between Highway 30 and the railroad tracks. The former Cabela's retail store, now successfully reused as a multi-tenant office building, is the landmark development here, with adjacent blocks including viable businesses, open land, and some deteriorating structures. This area presents an opportunity as a higher quality business park, both providing a more attractive and functional place to do business and a better west entrance to Downtown Sidney. Elements of a business park initiative include:

- Infill light industrial development on underused or distressed sites with upgraded parking.
- Improving Hickory Street to provide better service access to business without using Highway 30.
- A green buffer where possible along Illinois Street to provide a more attractive corridor and entrance into downtown, with the cooperation of adjacent property owners.
- Potential redevelopment of unused parts of the large parking lots built by Cabela's to support the retail store.
- With possible future improvement or reconstruction of the 13th Avenue underpass,

consideration for a Hickory Street bridge with sidewalk to link Hickory to the east and west.

Hickory Corridor

The Hickory Square proposal for a public open space at the head of 10th Avenue has been a focus of both considerable effort and frustration among Downtown advocates. However, community appreciation of the importance and potential for this area is well-placed. The corridor along the south side of Hickory from 8th to 12th Avenues has great potential if viewed as a larger development area, with a central focus at 10th Avenue. This concept, presented in more detail on page 48, also incorporates the public parking lots on either side of 10th Avenue, the obsolete municipal power plant, available land, and the alley between Illinois and Hickory.

OPPORTUNITY SITES

Figure 3.1 diagrams these four subdistricts as well as several other features in the public and private environments, which include the following.

Civic Buildings

Public buildings, including the courthouse, city hall, and the public library are important anchors for downtown, and their presence supports other initiatives. Similarly, St. Patrick's and other district churches also are centers that help sustain the strong surrounding residential areas and a secure downtown environment.

Opportunity Buildings

These buildings are currently vacant or underused, but can have significant impact on building a stronger city center. One of these, the Fort Sidney

Motel, is now under development. Others present substantial reuse opportunities, while still others are severely deteriorated and present significant redevelopment opportunities. City policy should promote reuse or redevelopment through such tools as tax increment financing, tax credits, and other incentive and gap financing programs.

Residential Blocks

Surrounding viable residential neighborhoods are an important asset to Downtown for a number of reasons. They provide a customer base within walking distance, but more importantly, they make downtown feel populated, safe, and secure. Public policy should maintain the quality of these central neighborhoods by working with commercial properties to create green buffers at commercial/residential edges; maintaining the quality of apartment buildings through code enforcement; and addressing the scattered distressed properties in and around downtown through acquisition and redevelopment.

THE PUBLIC REALM

While Downtown lacks a major public square, it is just under a mile from Sidney's central park and recreation network. Improved connectivity between the core and the park along 10th Avenue would figuratively make these parks part of the downtown environment. But places for public activity in downtown are also important, and the Hickory Square concept was an effort to meet this need. Possibilities for small public spaces include a re-imagined Hickory Corridor, a gateway space at 13th and Illinois, the Courthouse Square, and segments of the alley system.

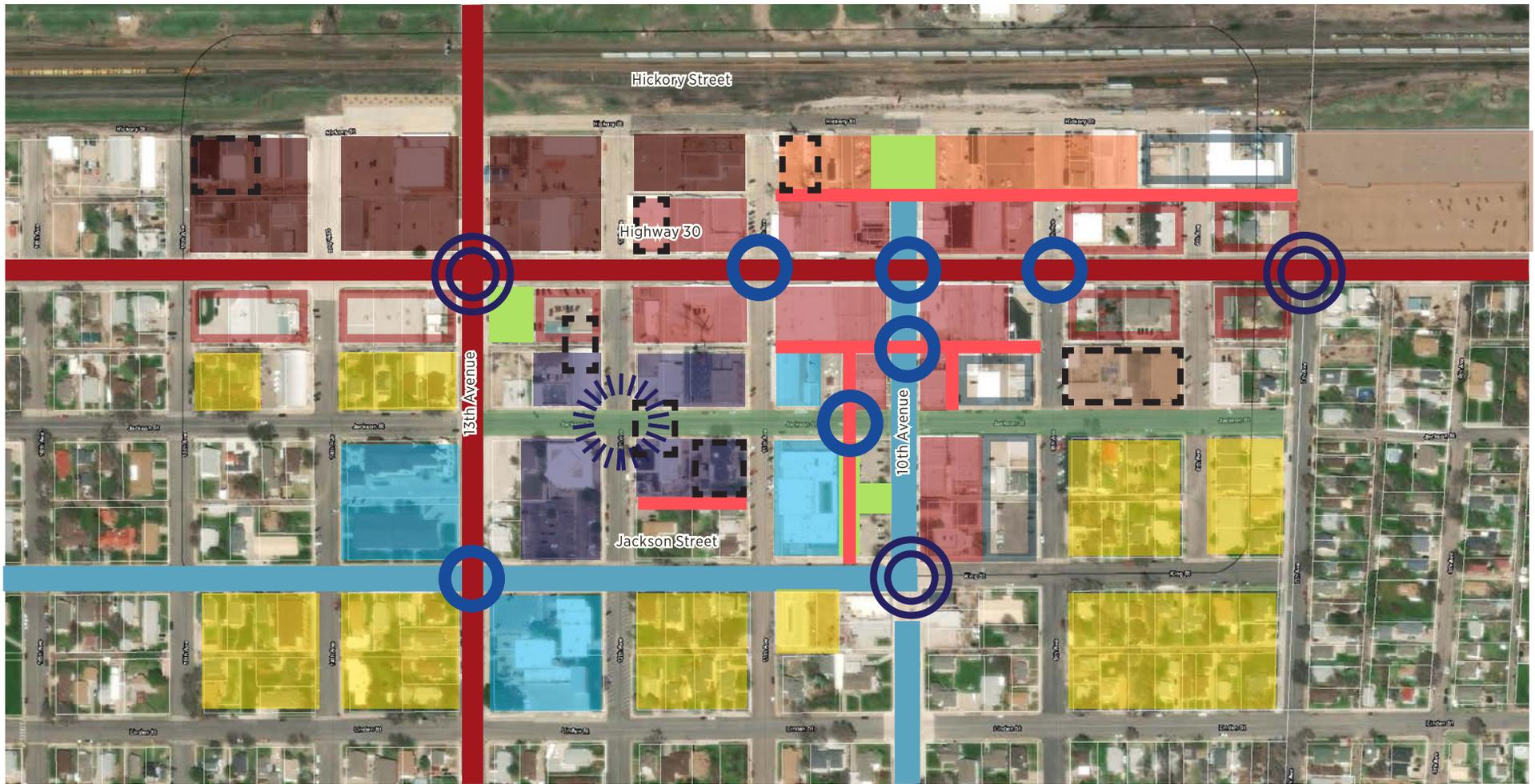


Opportunity Buildings. From top: the Osborn Building, part of which is occupied by the Sun-Telegraph; the Fort Sidney Motel, now under redevelopment



Residential Neighborhoods. Quality, sound surrounding residential areas benefit from a strong downtown

Figure 3.1: Opportunity Diagram





Lincoln Highway Business Park. The former Cabela's retail store can anchor a mixed use business park along the Highway 30 and railroad corridors on the west edge of the study area



Hickory Corridor. The area between 8th and 12th Avenues has substantial possibility if viewed as a development corridor rather than a single public open space



Civic and Religious Buildings. These landmark centers for public and spiritual life create a stable environment for businesses and neighborhoods

Joint Use Alleys

Alleys present a special opportunity in downtown. In addition to their primary service function, some are also used by pedestrians as cut-throughs or access to parking. Some businesses also have rear alley entrances. From a public space perspective, some of the core alleys also have an intimate spatial quality as they pass through more contained spaces out to downtown's wide streets. More communities are realizing the value of alleys as supplements to sidewalks, places for art, and even outdoor activity like food service. Inexpensive enhancements like lighting, paving, and art can make alleys especially distinctive. Alleys with special character and heavy use are identified in Figure 3.1 and establish a secondary pedestrian system that connects to and through the courthouse square.

Green Streets

Downtown Sidney's streets are very wide – a standard 55 foot curb-to-curb width in an 80-foot right-of-way. These dimensions are appropriate on 10th Avenue and Illinois Street. But on lower-volume streets, they create a very "hard" landscape that encourages excessive speed, heat island effects, and significant storm runoff. On certain streets, a calmer and more attractive street environment would be produced by moving the curb inward to the edge of the existing parking lane, and converting the current parking lane into a landscaping strip. Part of this strip could also function as a rain garden or bioswale to manage stormwater, reducing flooding in the street. This modification continues to provide space for standard parallel parking lanes on both sides and two standard travel lanes. Jackson and King Streets, with lower-scale development and lot frontages, are good candidates for green street treatment. Potential funding sources include the Nebraska Environmental Trust or the South Platte

NRD for innovative urban stormwater management projects. Street sections are illustrated later in this chapter.

Bicycle Links to Trail

The Sidney-Deadwood Trail is a special resource that effectively links the traveler services area at the I-80 interchange to a variety of major community features. However, it does not directly serve Downtown. The primary connection opportunities are 10th Avenue at the parks and Linden Street at the fairgrounds trail terminus. The width of these streets make bicycle accommodation relatively easy and inexpensive. More detail on street sections is provided later in this section.

Enhanced Pedestrian Crossings

Key pedestrian crossing points include Highway 30 at 9th, 10th, and 11th Avenues. The 10th Avenue intersection is signalized, while the others are marked by "continental" crosswalks. Other key locations are related to a possible alley network or a Linden Street bicycle link. Enhancements include high-visibility crosswalks, warning signage, and pedestrian initiated flashing beacons like rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFB).

District Entry Points

These points represent key transitions from the city at large into the core district. Key locations include Highway 30 at 7th and 13th Avenues and 10th Avenue and Linden Street. These can be marked by signage, lighting, and other thematic features. The south 10th Avenue entrance is an attractive gateway, while the Highway 30 points are more troublesome. Two opportunities for improvement exist, one from the east, using a portion of the former Cabela's parking lot and from the west, using a currently vacant site on the southeast corner of the intersection as an entry park.



"Alley Loop" Pedestrian System. This concept uses strategic alleys, sidewalk segments, and the walkway and courthouse lawn to form a secondary pedestrian network that connects three of the four downtown development subdistricts.

Joint Use Alleys. These alleys serve parking areas and rear entrances, and receive a significant amount of pedestrian traffic already. They can be enhanced into a secondary pedestrian system that opens up the often unused rear areas of buildings.



Green Street and Bicycle Links. The character of Jackson Street (top) would change significantly with a parkway strip replacing the current parking lane. This would have major micro-climate, stormwater management, aesthetic, and traffic-calming benefits, while retaining enough width for standard travel lanes and parking on both sides. Linden Street (below) can provide a direct link to the fairgrounds trailhead of the Sidney-Deadwood Trail.

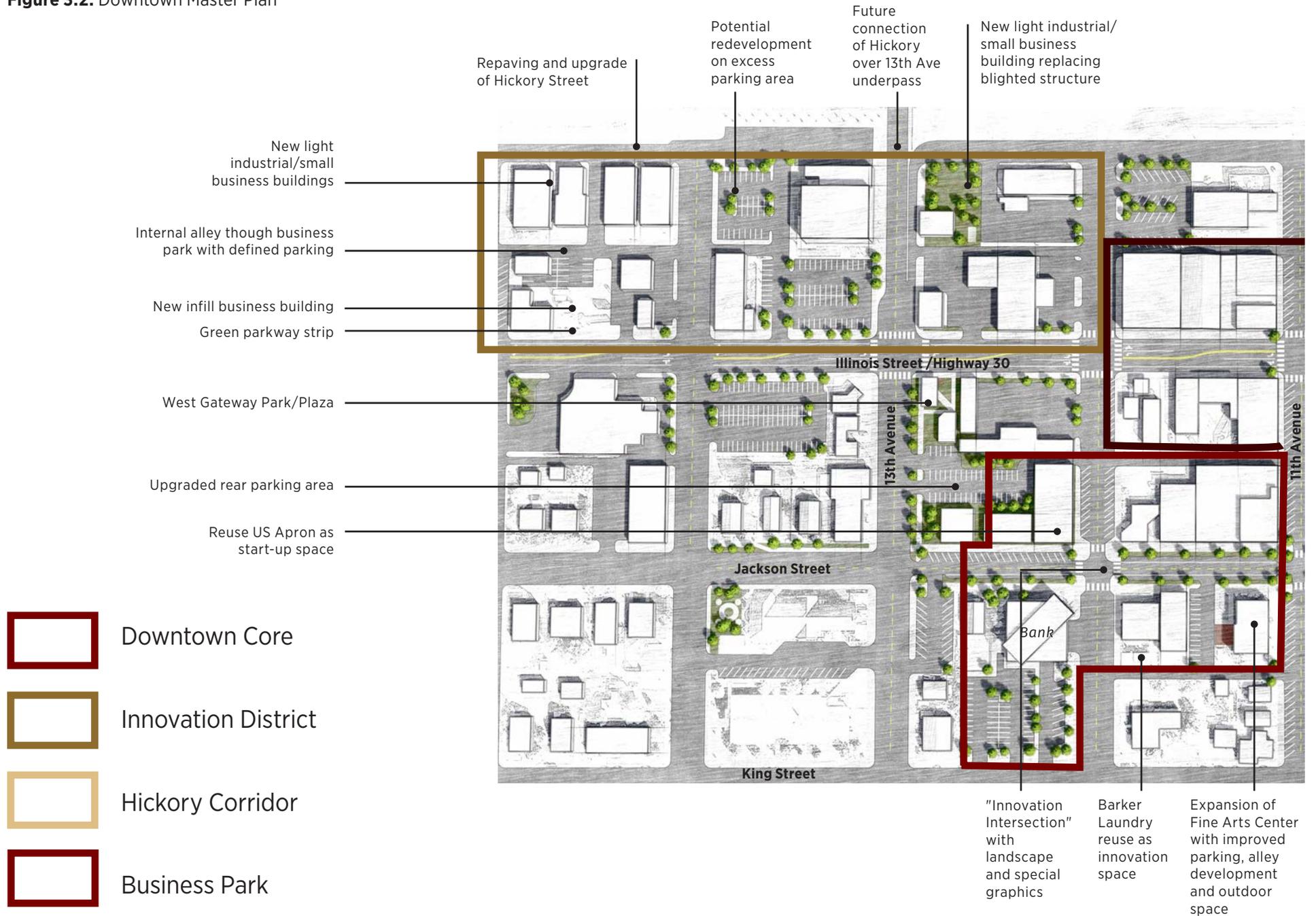




Pedestrian Crossing and Entry Point. Pedestrian crossing at 11th and Illinois is a high demand crossing but lacks protection for pedestrians. Curb extensions, a more visible and wide crosswalk, pedestrian warning signs, and potentially an rectangular rapid flashing beacon (RRFB) would increase pedestrian. Southeast corner of 13th Avenue and Highway 30 (below) could be a location for an entry feature or small public space.



Figure 3.2: Downtown Master Plan





FACADE RESTORATION PROGRAM

The City currently operates a historic facade enhancement program providing up to \$5,000 in matching funds per building within the boundary of the historic district (Figure 3.3). While the program provides some assistance for property owners to upgrade their buildings, costs for upgrading (beyond stabilizing) the building require additional financial assistance. Often costs for upgrading buildings is difficult to pass on to tenants, which deters owners from making large-scale investments. Major rehabilitation projects require a larger match to make them economically viable. An update that reflects the real cost of rehabilitation is necessary to achieve the program's goals.

One scenario would require a 25% match for all projects up to a maximum program grant of \$20,000. Providing a more substantial incentive may attract more project activity. Without added funding, fewer projects would be completed, but those projects would have a greater impact on the character and look of the district. Another approach would be to fund larger projects on a repayable basis either with annual debt service or deferred payment.

Changes to the program should leverage sources such as property owner funds, city funds, LB840, tax increment financing, and Downtown Revitalization Phase 2 funds. A program similar to Crete (see call out to the right) could be implemented using a Downtown Revitalization grant to complete a comprehensive approach to facade restoration.

Partners

- Chamber of Commerce
- City of Sidney
- Downtown building and business owners

Figure 3.3: Facade Enhancement Program Boundary



CRETE'S FACADE PROGRAM

Since 2016, the City of Crete has assisted in restoring 29 facades in their downtown through funding provided by Phase II CDBG matched with \$102,333 from the city's LB840 Economic Development Program.

The City began contacting property owners in 2017 to participate in the program which provides grant funds

equaling a percentage of each individual project's total cost. Each property owner provided a 20% match.

Priority projects include removal of the metal awnings and non-historic materials, installation of new awnings and upper story window replacement, restoring the original transom windows, and brick repair.

STOREFRONT ACTIVATION

Most of the buildings on Main Street are in good physical condition and despite alterations of the storefront, maintain a large area for storefront display. While downtown has a concentration of retail storefronts along 10th Avenue and Illinois Street, offices and some low-traffic uses occupy street level space, with vacant upper levels. Ideally, first floor uses should be active, with housing and offices on upper floors. While understanding there are good reasons for first floor office occupancy (including code issues, retail demand, and lack of elevators), policies should encourage active first floors. These policies may include code revisions, preference for rehabilitation projects that include active uses at street level, and business assistance for start-up retail enterprises.

Historic commercial buildings are intrinsic to the character of Downtown Sidney. Adaptive reuse of existing buildings and new construction both have their place, but retaining the historic integrity of the building stock is important. City regulatory policy should not create obstacles to adaptive reuse. In addition, typical market rents may make reuse unfeasible without gap financing. The City and other public and non-profit development entities should be prepared to form partnerships with building owners and developers, using available financing techniques such as tax credits, TIF, CDBG and HOME funds, and other sources. Second floor redevelopment should be a special priority, providing building owners with a potential return on the entire building.

Partners

- Chamber of Commerce
- City of Sidney
- Downtown building and business owners

HOUSING AVAILABILITY

Sidney currently has a shortage of housing both in type and price point. The lack of housing makes it difficult for workers to find housing in the community, and the regional shortage of housing makes it difficult for businesses to grow. Sidney has the opportunity to support both housing demand and downtown's growth and development through more housing in and around the core. Some opportunities exist for second floor residential in older downtown buildings, however, demand can also be met through new construction. As illustrated prior, a number opportunities exist for mixed use infill projects along Hickory Street that would support the proposed changes.

Partners

- Housing Developers
- City of Sidney
- Major Employers (in need of employee housing)

Figure 3.4: Successful Upper Story Housing



TAX CREDITS TO SUPPORT BUILDING REUSE

The Weber Brother's Building in Chadron, NE was constructed in 1888 and is a contributing building in the Chadron Commercial Historic District listed in the National Register in 2007. The project included rebuilding the sandstone units, the storefront, and pressed metal parapet and cresting along the roof line to rehab the building to its original state. No interior work has been completed to date.

- Location: 225 Main Street, Chadron, NE
- Project Management: Local Residents
- Federal Tax Credit: \$15,000
- State Historic Tax Credit: \$15,000
- Valuation Incentive Program: Yes
- Started: 2016
- Completed: 2018

HICKORY STREET CORRIDOR

A public open space for Downtown at Hickory Street and 10th Avenue was proposed in the last downtown plan, and conceptual designs were completed for a Hickory Square project. Despite not moving forward, the concept of a downtown gathering space at the Hickory Square location remains valid. The concepts included in this plan differ from previous proposals by:

- Considering the public space as an element of a more comprehensive development corridor; and
- Taking a realistic, tactical approach to the design of the public space as a modified, convertible street that remains open when needed, while still providing user amenities.

The full redevelopment program between 8th and 11th Avenues (Figure 3.5) includes the following elements:

- Hickory Square Gathering Space and Parking
- Power Plant Redevelopment
- Alley Walk
- Public Market
- Mixed Use Redevelopment

Gathering Space

The Hickory Square project could be the first phase of the corridor redevelopment. It would demonstrate public and charitable commitment creating potential to catalyze private investment in the area. The project includes:

- 10th Avenue between the mid-block alley and Hickory Street is redesigned as a convertible street, open to local traffic when needed and closed at other times to create an auto-free public space. The street channel would be narrowed to 22 feet, with a central circle

equal to the existing 55-foot wide street. It may be possible to retain existing pavement with an overlay and brick texture mat. The balance of the existing street would be turf and landscaping. The curb could be eliminated to create a continuous space when the street is closed for large events.

- Parking is reconfigured in the two adjacent city lots to 90 degree, maximizing parking and improving circulation. The small building east of 10th Avenue would be demolished, allowing expansion of the parking lot.
- Existing parking is maintained under the west canopy, but removed from the east canopy in place of landscaping and seating.
- Shade trees, seating areas, lighting, and streetscape elements are added.
- A built-in mechanism to close the street at the alley and Hickory Street is added.

The concept becomes extremely flexible, capable of accommodating events in closed configuration, routine public street life, food trucks, and local traffic when needed. Large events can be accommodated using the large parking area to the east, which should be equipped with lighting and power service to accommodate a temporary stage. If a need for a more permanent emerges in the future, this parking lot could be reconfigured to provide both green space for seating and a stage, while retaining parking area to serve area needs and the public market.



Figure 3.5 Hickory Corridor Development Concept

The alley is widened from 16 to 20 feet and a sidewalk and pedestrian crossings are added on the north side to encourage travel among the various buildings along Hickory Street.

The parking lot is reconfigured to 90 degree stalls, adding capacity for vehicles and improving the flow. Parking remains under the existing canopy on the west but the east becomes a sheltered greenspace. The existing building on the east side of the east parking lot would be removed to accommodate additional parking and a new public market structure. The east lot can be reconfigured and equipped to support larger performances with a movable stage.

The new bike shop outdoor space could be tied into the Hickory Street redevelopment with a small cycle track and pedestrian crossing from the sidewalk adjacent to the public market.

Maintain buildings as current occupants continue operations.



Pending decommissioning of the power plant, this site could be an adaptive reuse project highlighting the buildings historic character. Some outdoor equipment could be retained and painted as design elements. Remaining area would provide outdoor seating and patio space.

10th Avenue remains open to traffic, but is narrowed using existing paving. The curb could be eliminated to create a continuous space. The street can be closed during major events to provide more gathering space.

A new public market is constructed with outdoor market canopies on both sides of the building.

Potential redevelopment of existing building on south half of the block as a full half block building.

Power Plant Redevelopment

The municipal power plant, used only for emergencies, anchors the west end of the Hickory Corridor. A study should evaluate the need for its continued operation. If it is found to be obsolete, the building should be retained and re-purposed as a catalytic project. Possible brownfield designation may provide a funding source for site remediation. Power plants have been redeveloped for a number of purposes, including micro-breweries and brew pubs, recreation centers, and housing. Some of the outdoor equipment may be retained and painted in different colors as industrial sculptures. The area east of the building can be used for outdoor dining or public open space use. Another one-story auxiliary building on the site could be re-purposed as a public restroom, pop-up vendor, or storage.

Partners

- City of Sidney
- Chamber of Commerce
- Developer
- Historic Preservation Board

Public Market

The current District 12 probation building would be demolished, providing for additional parking and event space. In the concept shown in Figure 3.4, a new public market would front on 9th Avenue. An indoor market could have canopied outdoor space on either side. A public market ranked as the top installation for the visual listening exercise in the online survey which gives a good indication of public support. Options for a market include a roofed outdoor space, similar to Ogalalla's Rendezvous Square, a fully enclosed building, or a combination of both with the ability to open large sections of the wall on market days. A temporary shelter, similar to Ogalalla's market, could be used to test the concept while financing and design documents are finalized for a permanent structure.



Power Plant to Brewery (Winston Salem, NC)



Power Plant to Event Center (Columbia, SC)



Power Plant Housing, Fremont, NE



Power Plant to Climbing Wall (St. Louis, MO)



Figure 3.6: Potential Mixed Use Housing Opportunity in the Hickory Corridor

Pedestrian Connections

The market would anchor the east side of the Hickory Corridor, with the redeveloped power plant on the west. An upgraded alley would connect the two with the Hickory Square gathering space, with an adjacent sidewalk for pedestrians.

Partners

- City of Sidney
- Chamber of Commerce
- District 12 Probation Offices
- Business owners



Downtown building to year-round market (Ottumwa, IA)



Parking lot with shelter for market/events (Ogallala, NE)



Indoor/outdoor farmers market building (Billingham, WA)

TRAIL CONNECTIONS TO DOWNTOWN

The Sidney-Deadwood Trail is an incredible and quite possibly under-appreciated development asset with potential to link the interchange district and its complex of over 1,000 hotel rooms with downtown Sidney.

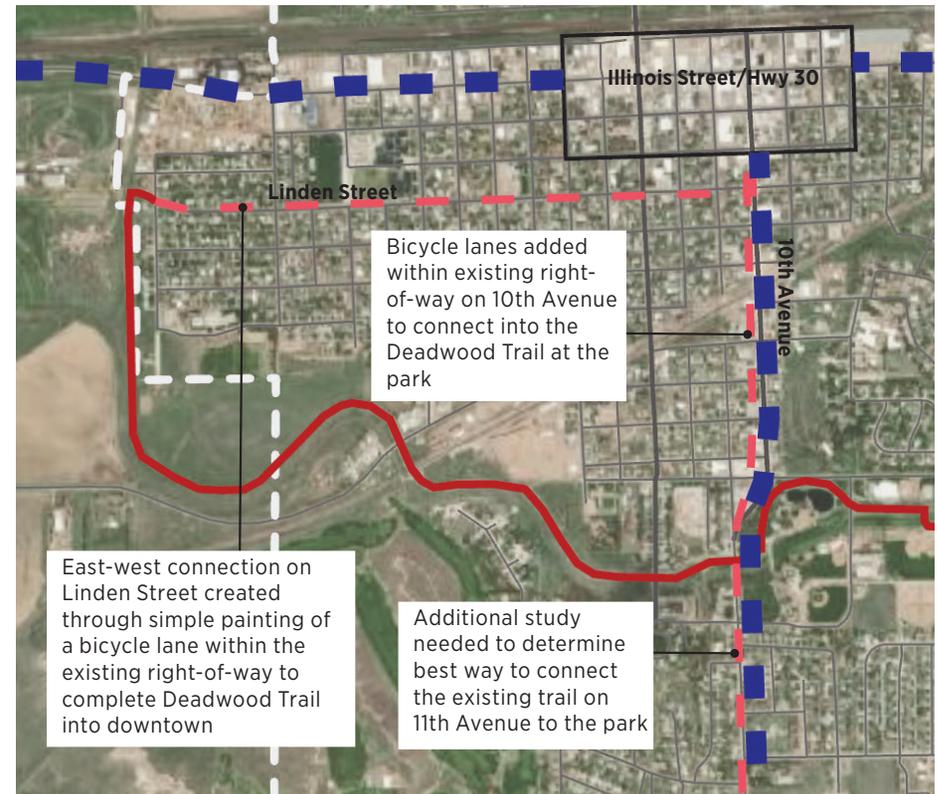
The Sidney-Deadwood trail begins at a trailhead at Jennifer Lane and 17J in the interchange hotel district and ends at Linden Street near the fairgrounds. This trail includes landscapes from high country hills to manicured city park along its 5.9 mile length and is one of the state's finest urban trail experiences. It provides an excellent opportunity to bring both residents and visitors from the interchange into the center of the city. Travelers staying in the city's hotels and looking for physical activity will find a bicycle ride to Downtown for dinner and shopping to be a rewarding experience. The only problem is that the trail reaches the center of town, but not Downtown. The missing ingredients include trail connections to the district, bicycles, and an accessible, visible trailhead.

An east-west connection from the Linden Street trailhead and a north-south connection from the trail's intersection with 10th Avenue at Legion Park would successfully link the trail to the district (Figure 3.7). Linden Street can accommodate either a two-way protected cycle track or one-way protected bike lanes to 10th Avenue (Figure 3.8). The street has sufficient width to maintain two-sided parking and two vehicular travel lanes. Bike lanes on 10th Avenue from Linden Street north to the Hickory Corridor can be installed by eliminating the two-way center turn lane (Figure 3.9).

In addition to the trail connections, other projects that can support a highly attractive feature for travelers and residents alike include:

- » **A more visible and enhanced trailhead.** The current site is difficult to find and lacks amenities. This could be done in a variety of ways including better lighting, gateway signage, or interpretive artwork to draw attention to the trail.
- » **A Bike-Share installation.** Bike-share stations could be set up at both ends of the trail and at an intermediate point such as the Cheyenne County Recreation Center. E-bikes (pedal-assist) have proven to be incredibly popular and would help to tame the hills on the return trip to the hotel from downtown. An analogous bike-share installation has been placed by Heartland B-Cycle at Valentine, largely used by visitors to shuttle to the Niobrara River high bridge.

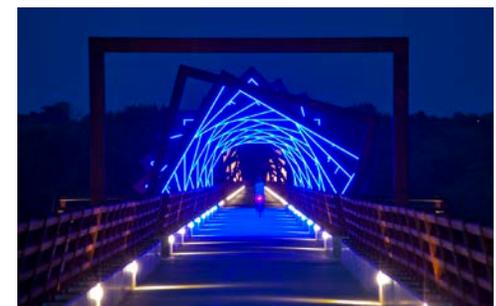
Figure 3.7: Proposed Trail Connections



- » **A potential iconic feature.** Some trails include a feature that actually attracts visitors by itself. An example is the High Trestle Bridge in Central Iowa, using striking blue LED lighting to recall the portals of the coal mines that dotted the area.

Partners

- City of Sidney
- Social clubs
- Downtown business owners
- Hotels
- Local health agencies

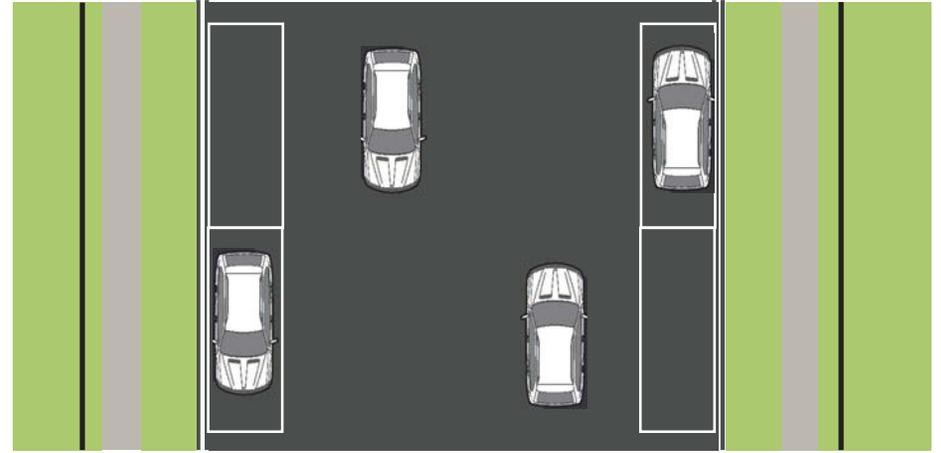


High Trestle Trail Bridge (near Madrid, IA)

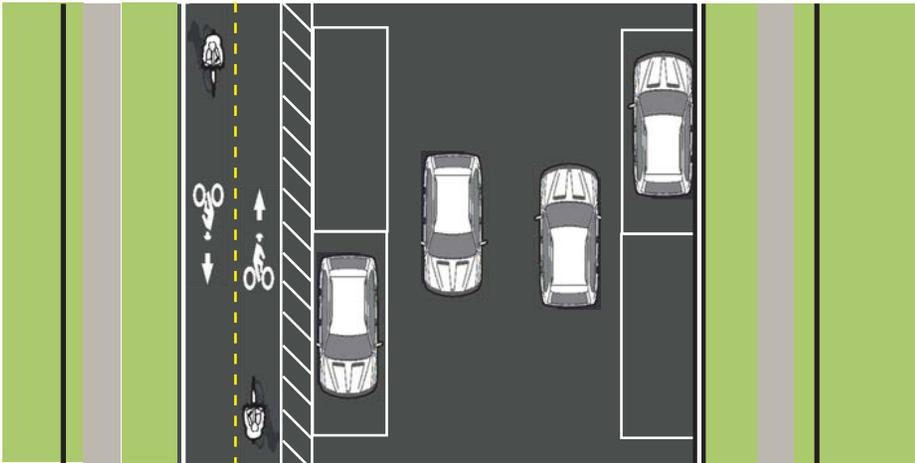
Figure 3.8: Linden Street Options



Existing Linden Street Section



Cycle Track Option



Protected Bike Lanes Option

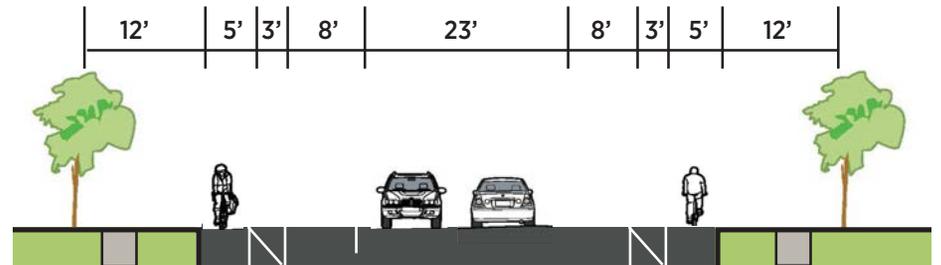
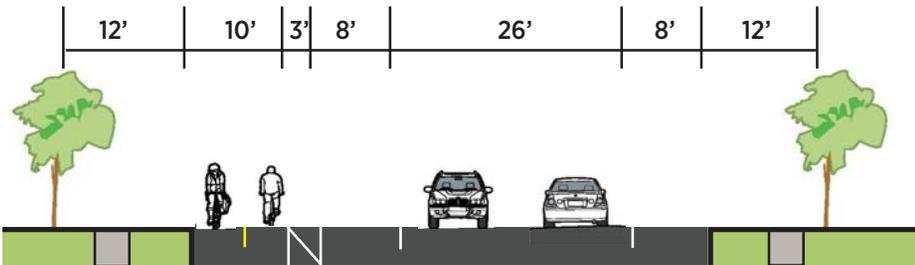
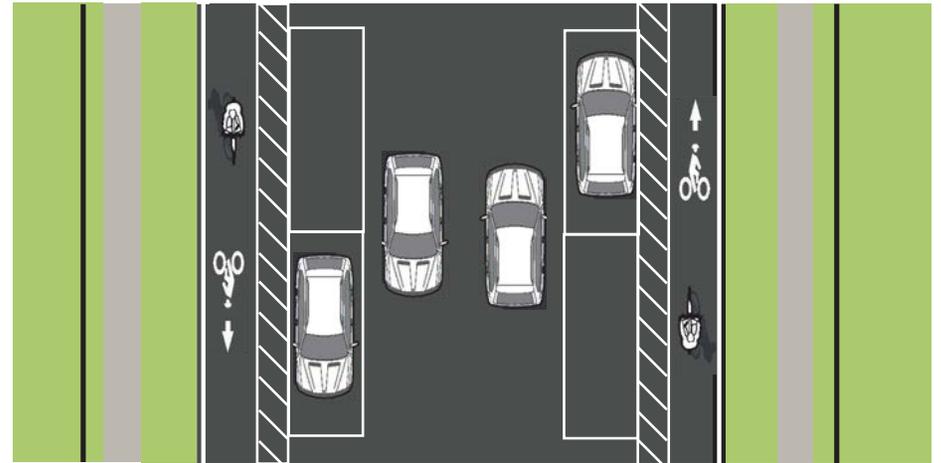
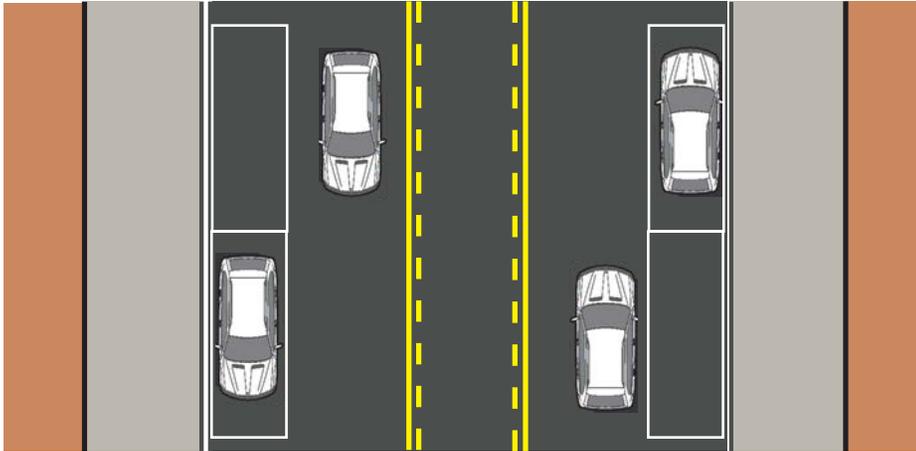


Figure 3.9: 10th Avenue Modification, Linden Street North

Existing Section



Proposed Section

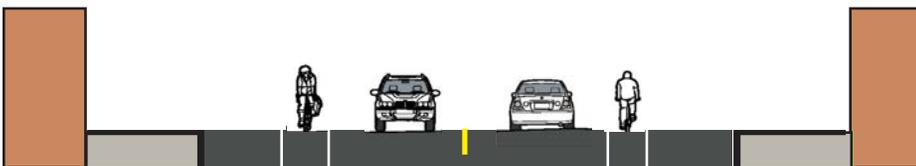
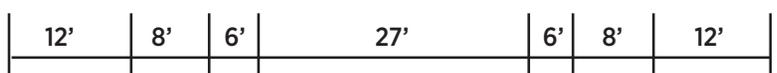
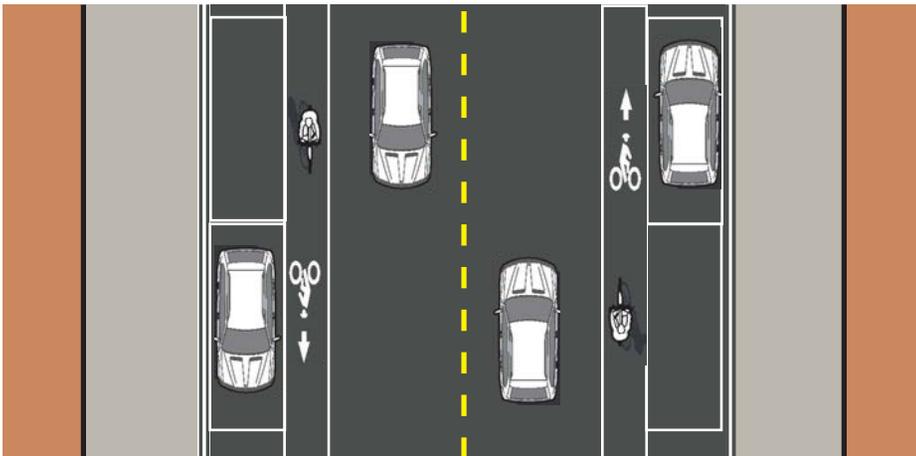
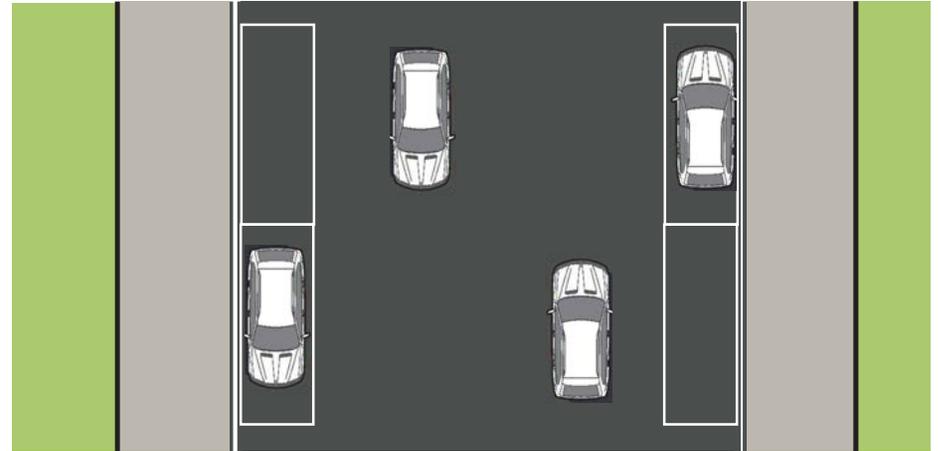
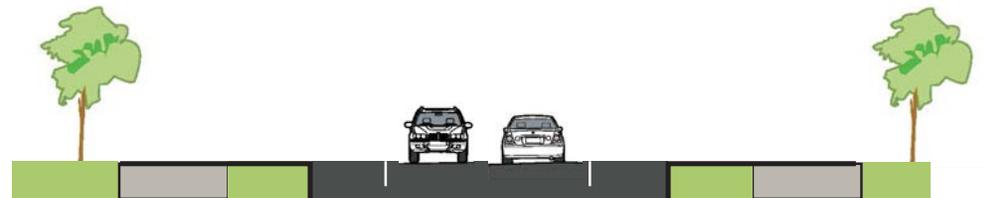
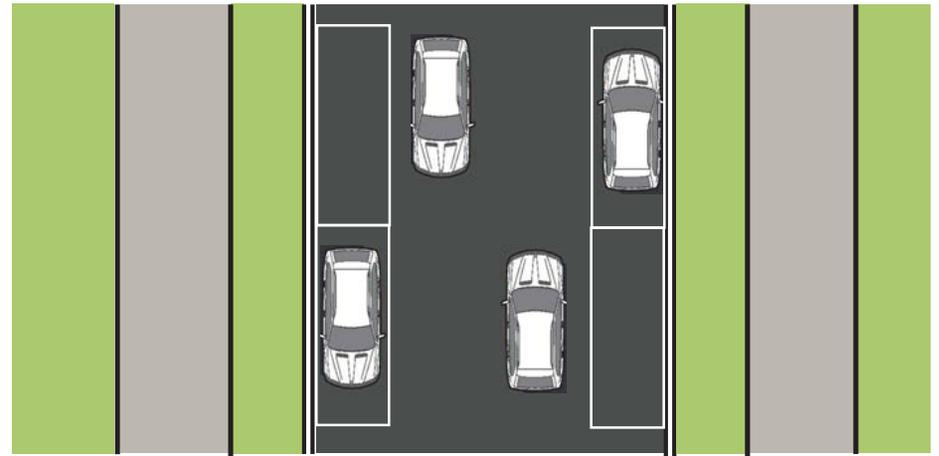


Figure 3.10: Jackson Street "Green Street" Conversion

Existing Section



Proposed Section

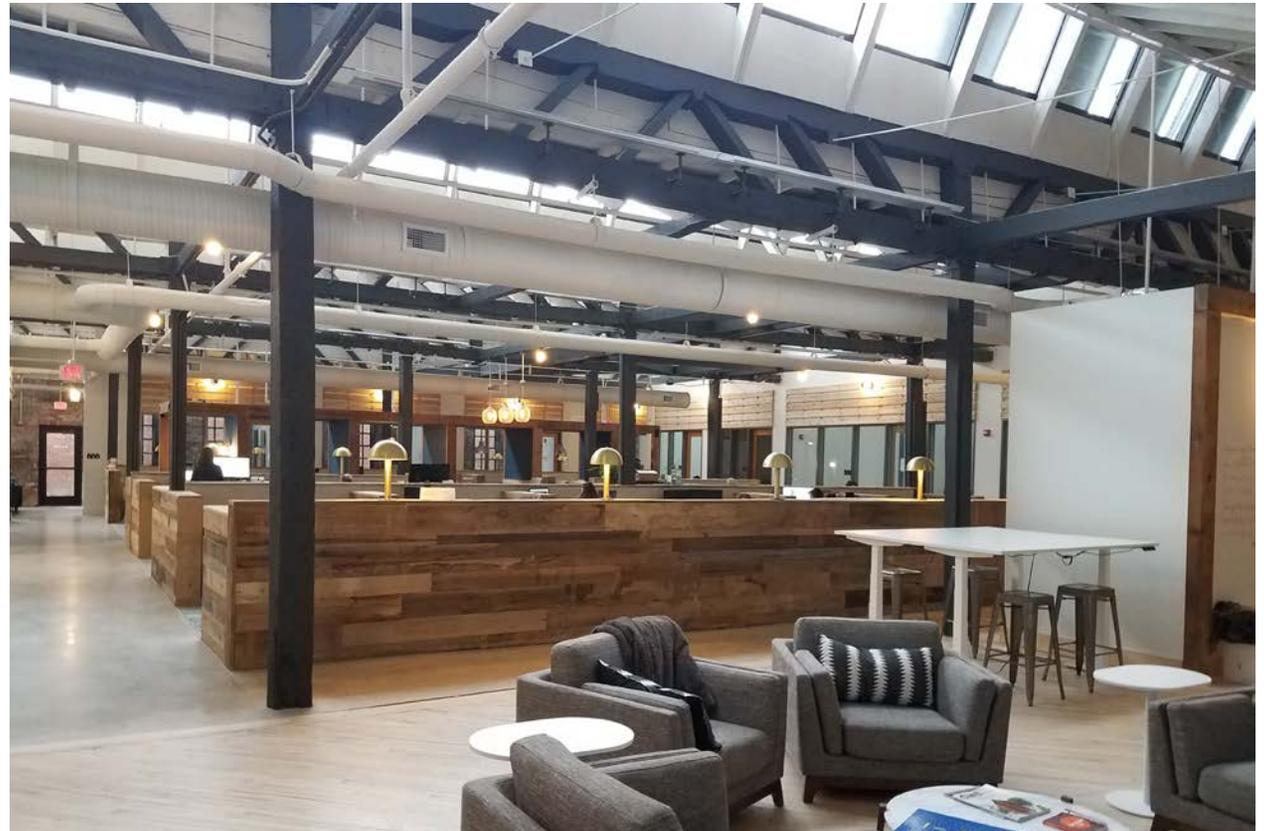




CONCLUSION

The recommendations of this plan seek to strengthen the downtown district, its business community, and the role it plays in the community as a whole. These projects focus on physical improvements, policy recommendations, and opportunities to improve the organizational capacity of the district. Each of these recommendations should be evaluated to engage the right partners, to secure the proper resources, and be prioritized in a sequence designed to build momentum for further implementation.

Following the adoption of this plan, the City will become eligible to apply for Phase 2 implementation grant funds from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. These funds can be used for a brick and mortar project. The grant should be used in concert with other funds including local funds which builds ownership in the projects and provides the capital needed to complete a high-quality project. The first project should serve as a catalyst that will set the stage for additional projects, therefore the quality is of utmost importance. The remaining projects should be evaluated annually to consider available funding mechanisms and that move existing momentum into additional action.



CHAPTER FOUR

IMPLEMENTATION



INTRODUCTION

Changing conditions over time necessitate flexibility when implementing the concepts in this plan. Some projects may advance as opportunities or demands emerge, while others may appear less important over time. Downtown's success, and the plan's success, relies on partnerships making physical improvements and policy change.



This chapter is organized into three sections, including:

- Partnerships
- Implementation Schedule
- Funding Mechanisms

Some projects may advance as opportunities or demands emerge, while others may appear less important over time.

PARTNERSHIPS

Implementing a downtown plan requires partnerships between many groups. Often the process begins with the city initiating the effort to author a plan like this one. Successful projects require collaboration and funding, of course. Ultimately the collective goal of the City, including Economic Development, the Chamber, and Tourism is to attract more customers as well as to attract and retain businesses to downtown.

CITY OF SIDNEY

All city departments have a role in implementing segments of the plan. Principle responsibilities include:

- Updating the City Incentives Program, including facade enhancement grant, sign incentive program.
- Budgeting funds in the Capital Improvement Program.
- Coordinating projects that are within the public realm, including corridor enhancements, street improvements, and public spaces.
- Managing infrastructure improvements to the public realm, like streets, sidewalks, and lighting.
- Reviewing development proposals and negotiating optimal projects.
- Revising policies when good applications do not necessarily match current policy.
- Investigating financial incentive programs as they emerge.

- Retaining and recruiting businesses to downtown.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Cheyenne County Chamber of Commerce's mission is to support business growth within the county. They provide retail economic assistance and business development programs in conjunction with the City of Sidney. Also, they operate the Keep Cheyenne County Beautiful program, focused on clean up and beautification. The assistance from the Chamber of Commerce will be instrumental in carrying out many of the recommendations in this plan.

Principle Responsibilities:

- Retaining and recruiting businesses to downtown.
- Assisting businesses with applications for the City Incentives Program, including facade enhancement grant, sign incentive program.

DOWNTOWN BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

The purpose of forming a Downtown Business Association is to enhance communication between businesses and to partnering groups, like the City, Chamber, Tourism, Historic Preservation, Main Street, and other allied partners. Alternatively, this could be a committee within the Chamber of Commerce.

Principle Responsibilities:

- Becoming a proxy between the city and downtown business community.

- Communicating among businesses to discuss event coordination and other operations.
- Initiating projects/activities for the betterment of downtown.

SIDNEY/CHEYENNE COUNTY TOURISM

The Sidney/Cheyenne County Tourism focuses on improving communication on the attractions and events that are happening in the community.

Principle Responsibilities:

- Authoring and distributing brochures and digital media to visitors.
- Advocating for community enhancements that improve the visitor's experience to Sidney.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD

The Historic Preservation Board works in cooperation with property owners and city officials to ensure that the character and integrity of historically significant sites and structures are preserved for all present and future citizens of our community.

Principle Responsibilities:

- Updating and administering the facade restoration program.
- Reviewing applications when appropriate.

NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

The not-for-profit and philanthropic communities are key groups to tap into for support in implementing phases of this plan. Their mission statements are inherently interested and supportive of strengthening the community. While the exact organizational capacity of each group would certainly complement certain aspects of the plan, appeals for funding are best made by organized groups, like the city, chamber, Main Street, and Downtown Business Association.

DECISION MAKING CRITERIA

The plan is built of many individual projects, recommendations, and actions that over time will create an economically strong city center that offers customers, residents, and visitors a diverse and attractive environment. However, not everything will be done at once, and revitalization is a process that moves forward in increments.

Public investment in the early phase of the project should create a "chain reaction" resulting in a strong and desirable private market response leading to self-sustaining investment and energy. Thus, the ability of initial projects to generate positive momentum is important.

Gaining support through quick and implementable actions is an important component of this plan. Concepts like Hickory Square can begin within the first year. Narrowing the street could be a longer term project, but reconfiguring the parking lots and adding landscaping are achievable. This could become a catalyst to kick start other aspects of this plan, representing a public investment that could be matched by private reinvestment.

The City and coordinating agencies should maintain a five-year plan to guide actions and investment toward the implementation of certain priority areas of the downtown plan.

The action plan should be evaluated annually with the following questions considered with regard to specific priorities and actions:

- Does the project respond to specific or high-profile community issues or needs?
- Does the project generate maximum private market response?
- What is the project's potential to transform the image of the area and community?
- Does the project attract both local residents and visitors, increasing business traffic and creating new reasons for people to be downtown?
- Does the project support the growth of existing businesses?
- Does the project capitalize on established but unmet market needs?
- Can the project be realistically implemented within a reasonable time frame with potentially available resources?
- Does the project generate substantial community support or consensus?
- Does the project incorporate and leverage outside funding sources, such as state grants or charitable contributions?

FIGURE 4.1: Implementation Schedule (public investments)

	ON-GOING	<3 YEARS	3-5 YEARS	BEYOND 5 YEARS	PARTNERSHIPS	FUNDING MECHANISMS
Policies/Programs						
Promote Businesses	●				CHAMBER, BUSINESS ASSOCIATION, STUDENTS, CITY	GENERAL FUNDS
Coordinate Events with Businesses	●				CITY, BUSINESS ASSOCIATION, CHAMBER	NA
Retain and Attract businesses		●			CHAMBER, CITY, BUSINESS ASSOCIATION	GENERAL FUNDS, SBA LOANS, PRIVATE
Development Brand and Marketing Campaign		●			CHAMBER, CITY, HPB, BUSINESS ASSOCIATION	GENERAL FUNDS
Downtown Enhancements						
Facade Restoration Program		●			HPB, CITY, LOCAL BUILDING OWNERS	CITY FUNDS, PROPERTY OWNER FUNDS, LB840, TIF, DTR PHASE 2 FUNDS
Sign Program / Activate Storefront		●			CHAMBER, CITY, DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS AND BUSINESS OWNERS	RENTAL ASSISTANCE FUND
Public Gathering Space		●			CITY, BUSINESS ASSOCIATION, CIVIC GROUPS	DTR PHASE 2 FUNDS, AARP GRANT
Redevelop/Reuse Power Plant				●	CITY, CHAMBER, DEVELOPER, HPB	CLG GRANT, BROWNFIELD FUNDS,
Reconfigure Parking Lot		●			CITY	GENERAL FUNDS
Public Market Design/Construction				●	CITY, CHAMBER, PROBATION OFFICE, BUSINESS ASSOCIATION	TIF, CITY FUNDS
Connect Trails to Downtown			●		CITY, SOCIAL CLUBS, BUSINESS ASSOCIATION, HOTESL, HEALTH AGENCIES	CABELA'S FUND, AARP GRANT, CITY FUNDS
Downtown Housing Projects		●			CITY, HOUSING DEVELOPERS, MAJOR EMPLOYERS	PRIVATE, CITY FUNDS

FUNDING MECHANISMS

The following section identifies different tools and techniques for funding improvements in downtown. Some have already been used, others may not be appropriate at this time, but should be kept in mind for future projects. Many of these funding mechanisms are administered by governments, philanthropic organizations, or not-for-profit organizations.

LOCAL TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

Historic Facade Enhancement Program

The City operates a small facade enhancement grant program using funding from LB840 program. Up to \$5,000 are allocated in matching funds per structure in the historic downtown district for exterior work only. The changes must comply with the design guidelines and are approved by the Sidney Historic Preservation Board. Funds are reimbursed at the completion of the project. Up to \$1,000 in volunteer labor can be counted towards the applicants match.

The City should evaluate the program and consider operational changes such as increasing the total amount of financial support the program can offer to an individual project. The refined program should seek to leverage a combination of funding sources including property owner funds, city funds, LB840, tax increment financing, and Downtown Revitalization Phase 2 funds.

Signage Grant Program

The signage grant program offers a 50% match up to \$1,000 for new, qualifying signage for businesses located within the historic district. Applications, like the facade enhancement program, are approved through the Historic Preservation Board.

City General Revenues

General revenues, appropriated through the City's annual budget process, can finance services, improvements, facilities, and development projects. These appropriations are separate from general revenues devoted to debt service on bonds. Common uses of general revenues in downtown development programs include funding staff and organizational expenses, or projects that can be divided into smaller phases.

Downtown Bond Issues

General obligation bond issues are appropriate to finance major public projects or improvements, and are secured by general city revenues. These revenues typically include property taxes or, potentially, local option sales taxes. General obligation bonds require majority voter approval.

Downtown Business Association

Establishing a Downtown Business Association provides a structure of communication between businesses and with its allied partners. While membership can be free, the board could collect voluntary fees for district marketing.

In the event that the district gains momentum and experiences significant transformation, the association could mature into a Business Improvement District (BID). A BID is most often set up to create an additional funding source for downtown improvements, such as clean-up, watering, and advertising campaign. Grand Island is a demonstration of a BID operating in Nebraska.

GRAND ISLAND BID

Property owners in Grand Island's Railside Business Improvement District (BID) contribute funding to the maintenance, development, and promotion of their commercial district. It is dedicated to improving and reinforcing existing assets within the district developing a stronger sense of place. The BID focuses on:

- Business development
- Cultural development
- Cleanliness
- Community safety
- Connections and communications

One of the key projects completed by the BID was a series of railside totems that assist pedestrians with navigating the area. Funding came from an AARP Community Challenge grant in addition to a Pinnacle Bank donation. Other projects include a railside plaza, bike racks, funding assistance for upper level housing, branding, and lighting.

Visit: <http://arriverailside.com>

Sidney Economic Development Program - LB 840

The city's existing economic development program was established to aid qualifying non-retail, non-service businesses in start-ups or expansion and other job creation projects including infrastructure, site development, land purchase and other related expenditures. Sidney should continue to use LB 840 program funding to assist small businesses as well as the facade enhancement program.

Private and Foundation Philanthropy

The plan provides a variety of opportunities for individual or foundation contributions. Private philanthropy, with appropriate recognition and commemoration, is a critical part of the downtown implementation program, and is especially appropriate for public space projects.

Downtown Rental Assistance Program

The Retail Rental Incentive program provides up to \$500 per month for 6 months in rental assistance to new businesses opening in the Historic Downtown District. The loan is forgiven after 2 years of business operation at the location. This program should be continued to assist start us in downtown.

Revenue Bonds

Revenue bonds are debt instruments that are repaid all or in part from revenues generated by the project or by other associated revenue sources. Revenue bonds typically are not secured by the credit of the community.

Revolving Loan Program

A downtown revolving loan program could provide low-interest loan funds granted by the City to cover any portion of costs to convert downtown buildings into more marketable assets. Those eligible to receive funds could include for-profit and not-for-profit organizations.

Tax Increment Financing

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) permits the use of a portion of local property and sales taxes to assist funding the redevelopment of certain designated areas within a community. Projects pay their entire established tax obligation with the increment between the pre- and post-valuations used to pay off qualifying debt. Downtown should remain as one of the 9 TIF districts in Sidney.

Taxes produced by the added value of the property caused by redevelopment or improvements may be used to pay certain costs incurred with a redevelopment project. Such costs may include, but are not limited to:

- Professional services such as studies, surveys, plans, fiscal management, and legal counsel
- Land acquisition and demolition of structures (site preparation)
- Building necessary new infrastructure in the project area such as streets, parking, and decorative lighting
- Building improvements or modifications exclusive of interior finishes
- Relocation of resident and business occupants located in the project area

STATE AND FEDERAL SOURCES

Certified Local Government (CLG) Grants

The Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) manages the Certified Local Government program which is a partnership that promotes local preservation through preservation ordinances, survey and nomination, and outreach and education. Communities, like Sidney, that become a CLG are open to technical assistance and training from SHPO and National Park Service in addition to matching grant funds. Projects that qualify for CLG grant funding include:

- Hiring consultants for archaeological, architectural, and historical surveys
- Preservation planning
- Preparing a National Register or local landmark nomination
- Programs for public education
- Walking/driving tours and other audio/video productions
- Staff and commission training
- Workshops, lectures, and conferences

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT - PHASE 2 DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION FUNDS

The Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) is administered by the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (NDED). NDED offers a Phase 2 grant worth \$350,000 to assist cities with costs for improving downtown. Eligible projects include streets, sewer, and water systems, historic restoration, removal of architectural barriers, and/or loans to businesses for facade improvements, signage, and/or to meet community codes.

Small Business Administration

The Small Business Administration (SBA) has financial assistance program that provide access to debt and equity primarily from banks or other private sources. SBA evaluates loan applications on two levels. The first is for eligibility, which varies by industry and SBA program; the second on credit merits of the application.

SBA programs and services support small business owners, connecting businesses to loans, government contracting opportunities, disaster assistance, and training programs to help your business succeed. Additional information: www.sba.gov

Transportation Alternatives (TA)

The Transportation Alternatives (TA) program provides 80% federal financing for such projects as trail facilities, infrastructure-related projects that improve safety for non-drivers, conversion of abandoned railroad corridors for non-motorized users, and safe routes to school. The program is administered by the Nebraska Department of Transportation.

AARP Community Challenge Grant

Each April AARP solicits proposals for their Community Challenge grant which provides small grants to fund "quick-action" projects to help communities become more livable for people of all ages. These funds could be used to fund a small, quick project that will build momentum for this district such as making the connection from downtown to the trail. For more information visit: <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/>



The Nebraska Main Street program dates to 1994 with the establishment of the Nebraska Main Street Network, Inc., a not-for-profit to serve as the state coordinator for the nationally accredited Main Street program. Main Street is a national model designed to educate communities on downtown revitalization using historic preservation as the base. Local communities leverage their own private investment and capitalize on their unique traditional commercial business districts to grow and succeed. Nebraska has five official member cities and 16 network communities.

Recently, Main Street has refocused their program pillars from the four point approach (organization, design, economic vitality, promotion) to include a greater focus on market analysis. This approach emphasizes that to create lasting change in a downtown core, communities need to think beyond individual projects and focus on the economic viability of the district. The transformation strategy focuses on two key aspects:

- Market-Driven Strategy (often easier because it focuses on what the market will support)
- Vision-Driven Strategy (harder to implement because it's based on what the community wants to see happen)

Member communities are asked to focus on just one to two transformational strategies at a time to be most effective. Within five years

its easy to determine if the strategy is working or if a new approach is needed. Main Street communities succeed because they:

- Cultivate robust entrepreneurial ecosystems while building a sustainable economic base
- Develop strong leadership and build organizational capacity to manage the downtown for the long-term
- Design quality people-centered places by improving on what is already there
- Build social capital and community engagement
- Are committed to and are active participants in the Main Street program and in getting things done

Visit: nebraskamainstreet.org

USDA Rural Development Programs

Rural Development division has many programs for businesses, energy conservation, renewable energy, housing, community facilities, and rural water.

Business Assistance Programs

- » **Business & Industry Guarantee Loans (B&I).** Lenders and financial institutions can apply for a guarantee from Rural Development in order to make sizable loans to businesses (up to \$25 million).
- » **Rural Economic Development Loans and Grants (REDLG).** These loans and grants are distributed to utility cooperatives who then can loan to businesses and/or community projects.
- » **The Rural Energy for America Program Grant.** The program provides grants and loan guarantees to small businesses for renewable energy projects and energy efficiency improvements.

Community Facilities

The program provides affordable funding to develop essential community facilities. Loans and grants to public bodies such as counties, cities, community centers, day cares, senior centers, homeless shelters, fire halls, ambulances, fire trucks, emergency equipment, and more.

National Trust and Main Street Program and Loan Fund

For Main Street communities, tax incentives may be available for restoration projects from the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office. The National Trust Loan Fund (NTLF) has more than 35 years of experience supporting preservation-based community development projects across the country. As a certified Community Development Financial institution, it has a mission of providing financial and technical resources to organizations that use historic preservation to support the revitalization of under-served and distressed communities. NTLF specializes in pre-development services, acquisition, mini permanent, bridge, and rehabilitation loans for residential, commercial, and public-use projects. Eligible borrowers include not-for-profit organizations, revitalization organizations or real estate developers working in certified Main Street communities, local, state or regional governments, and for-profit developers of older and/or historic buildings.

Value Incentive Program (VIP)

The Value Incentive Program (VIP) is a property tax preference for historic building renovations. The VIP program temporarily holds the taxable assessment at the pre-renovation value for a period of four years. To be eligible for VIP, the project must renovate a taxable historic structure to the specifications established by the Secretary of the Interior and must follow all program regulations. Additional information: www.nebraskahistory.org/histpres/vip/

Historic Tax Credit (Federal)

The Historic Tax Credit program offers a 20% investment tax credit for certified rehabilitation of National Register or National Register-eligible buildings. While Sidney does not have enough integrity in the downtown to qualify as a historic district, some older buildings may qualify on their own upon further research into its history. To qualify for the tax credit the following is required:

- The building is used for income-producing purposes
- Rehabilitation work follows the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for rehabilitation
- The project receives approval from the National Park Service. Property owners, developers, and architects must apply for the tax credit through the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and are encouraged to work with SHPO staff to ensure rehabilitation measures are appropriate. The SHPO then passes its recommendations on to the National Park Service for approval.

Historic Tax Credit (State)

The Historic Tax Credit program offers a 25% investment tax credit for certified rehabilitation of National Register or National Register-eligible buildings subject to operating procedures and the availability of tax credits.