

Chapter 3 – Land Use Strategies & Policies

Introduction

Land use strategies and objectives incorporate four prominent themes that arose repeatedly during the Downtown planning process: A Center; Sense of Place; Connectivity; and Density. Downtown land use policies will revolve around these main ideas. Specifically, focus on strengthening the center of Downtown and on key connections to and from the center of Downtown. Place an emphasis on Downtown's unique identity and places; and, increase the residential and employment density throughout the entire Downtown.

Downtown Land Use Policies and Strategies will be based upon creating:

1. A Distinct Center
2. Sense of Place
3. A Connected Downtown
4. Density and Intensity

1. A Distinct Downtown Center

The Downtown Center is the area recognizable as a “downtown”, with tall, closely set buildings and older, traditional buildings located along front property lines adjacent to sidewalks. It is an area where larger setbacks and excessive un-planned open space seem out of character. The Center also contains the highest number of historic and visually identifiable iconic buildings.

Historically, the downtown had a more compact center than it does today. Over the past 50 years changing land use patterns, declining industries, freeway construction, and gradual redevelopment of adjacent areas has allowed the downtown to expand but it has also lessened the density of the traditional downtown core.

Today's “downtown” is much larger in land area due to successful re-development efforts but this has also “watered-down” the traditional downtown core. A significant amount of stakeholder input has strongly recommended a renewed focus on the traditional Downtown core rippling outwards with strong connections to and from active adjacent districts.

In addition to the traditional center, utilizing the Milwaukee River and strong connecting north-south spine continue to be highly important. Relating redevelopment efforts to Wisconsin Avenue, whether that is projects directly on Wisconsin, or strong connections “TO” Wisconsin Avenue, are of high priorities. Improvements to the center of downtown have the ability to create an outward “ripple effect”, helping to make all the surrounding districts healthier

Vision: The heart of downtown. Urban, bustling, and busy, downtown Milwaukee contains a distinct and definable downtown core that contains a vibrant and walk-able hub of shops, restaurants, and pedestrian amenities in a real-life setting that together forms a center of gravity with a regional and statewide draw.

Intent:

- Create a walkable core in the center of Downtown with thru-traffic flowing around the core perimeter.
- Focus development efforts on the center of downtown in order to avoid a doughnut-hole pattern of development Downtown.
- Support and grow a retail hub in the center of Downtown that takes advantage of the various urban amenities and qualities not found in the suburbs.
- Support, preserve and re-use distinctive and iconic buildings located in the downtown center.
- Improve the pedestrian realm.

Policies and Strategies:

- Focus development efforts on the center of Downtown.
- Target the Downtown Center for priority streetscaping.
- Encourage and support the preservation of historic or iconic buildings with conversion of upper floors for residential or commercial uses and adopt parking policies that better utilize such sites.
- Utilize city resources and policies for retail projects located in the Downtown Center district as detailed in the BID 21 retail study.
- Support efforts to re-orient ground floor retail in the Shops of Grand Avenue onto Wisconsin Avenue.
- Ensure that retail uses on the edges of the downtown complement rather than dilute efforts to strengthen the commercial vibrancy and density in the center of the downtown.
- Within the Downtown Plan boundaries, limit ground floor retail requirements to the Downtown Center and specifically, those streets as detailed in the BID 21 retail study. Where retail is not present other means of high quality street level activation is required.
- Further concentrate retail by allowing ground floor space in non-commercial developments, such as parking decks, to activate the pedestrian zone by means other than retail uses.
- Support a renovated Bradley Center or ensure that a new multi-purpose arena with supporting retail and entertainment development remains Downtown.
- Recognize the need for and support an expanded convention center up to and along Kilbourn Avenue.

Form:

- Provide a high level of exterior activation and treatment to all visible building frontages.
- New developments in the Downtown Center should use quality, high level building materials. For example, where brick veneer or pre-cast may be an acceptable ground level façade cladding in some other location, a material such as granite or other high quality stone should be used.
- Concentrate on rebuilding the “street-wall”, especially on key pedestrian activity streets.
- Animate building walls with either activation or high quality wall design and articulation in order to make the pedestrian realm feel like the center.
- Maintain and in-fill the street-wall.
- Single-storey structures are discouraged in the Downtown Center.
- New or expanded surface parking lots are not permitted.
- Examine using design guidelines for the Downtown Center particularly Wisconsin Avenue.

2. A Sense of Place

Good form and design creates value. Poor form and design detracts from value. It is human nature to avoid places that are un-attractive. A Downtown that is attractive, recognizable, and memorable gives visitors reasons to come and linger downtown rather than one-stop shop. Make downtown an attractive place people want to visit.

A sense of place can be established at varying scale or sizes. At the largest scale Downtown has a regional or even national identity. At a more local context a sense of place is established with what is commonly known as “place-making” which is critical to the continued success of cities and urban neighborhoods. Three elements, identity, programming and enclosure can create a “place”.

While enhancing existing places in downtown is primarily important, one must not look past the opportunity to create new “places” throughout downtown. These additional places can help stitch together the fabric of downtown. A number of areas should be prime target of creating a new sense of place.

These include the Broadway Corridor, areas surrounding the Intermodal Station, the 4th Street Corridor at Wisconsin and near Zeidler Square, Wells Street from “Postman Square” to City Hall Square to Cathedral Square, the East Michigan Street Corridor. Throughout downtown various Iconic Building Clusters, at new plazas within private developments and at new riverfront opportunities

Identity can embody itself in a physical form, such as a relationship to a historic building, prominent civic sites, public art, or a unique building design. Programming comes from building and spatial design that supports active uses. Enclosure is the primary tool to create the form needed for place-making.

Downtown Milwaukee is truly an authentic place. The pattern of streets and unique intersections, convergences of spaces caused by the river flowing through it have created a quality and layout that is not contrived, but authentically Milwaukee. Add to that the numerous buildings that respond to the block patterns as well as the historic quality buildings and Milwaukee has a feel all its own. Understanding and building upon this unique context is vital to allowing the downtown to stand apart from many other non-descript or cookie-cutter places.

Vision: Downtown Milwaukee is the economic and cultural center of Wisconsin and one of the most enjoyable, attractive, and vibrant downtowns in the Midwest. It's orientation on place-making creates a downtown environment that draws new residents, visitors, creative employees, and businesses alike.

Intent:

- Downtown Milwaukee should have a distinct character and feel specific to our city.
- Downtown should be a sought-after destination for both local residents as well as out-of-town visitors.
- Downtown is the center, where not only a sense of place exist, but a "sense of occasion" is strongly reinforced.
- Improve the Downtown Lakefront.
- Maintain, complement, and enhance prominent vistas in the Downtown.
- Create and improve plazas, parks, open spaces, and other public sites downtown.
- Reduce the number and impact of blank walks and empty spaces downtown.
- Support entertainment uses that complement the Bradley Center and the convention center.
- Recognize the civic and economic significance of public art downtown.

Policies and Strategies:

- Downtown improvements and redevelopments should feel uniquely "Milwaukee" and not try to mimic current national trends.
- Build a sustained retail environment in the center of downtown that creates a regional and state-wide draw.
- Maintain the downtown's prominence as the main location for large public gatherings and events.
- Support new special events that raise the profile of downtown as the region's center of activity.
- Examine a reconfiguration of the lakefront-connected roadways in order to expand or improve civic, recreational, and development opportunities.
- Introduce the use of LED lighting and other visual and graphic improvements that will activate blank or unsightly building walls that would otherwise detract from the downtown environment.

- Establish a street hierarchy system.
- Integrate passive and interactive digital media into the public realm.
- Encourage new entertainment uses to complement the existing corridor of large venue sites by locating primarily along Old World Third and 4th Street south of Juneau.
- Promote the addition of playgrounds or other interactive play environments into public and private settings in order to support and attract families with children or grandparents residing or visiting downtown.
- Support the development of a public art plan.
- Promote and strategically locate public art with current and future attractions and developments.
- Continue to support outdoor dining, sidewalk café's and kiosks, and similar street level activity by creating and supporting policies that makes the creation, expansion, and growth of such activities less onerous and expensive.
- Increase the downtown tree canopy coverage in the pedestrian realm.
- Develop design guidelines for Downtown retail storefronts.
- Develop design guidelines for structured parking Downtown.

Form:

- For a distinctive and recognizable skyline, tops of buildings should be articulated and unique to the site when possible.
- Streets, plazas, and other open spaces should be enclosed by proportionately appropriate building scales.
- Where gaps in the street wall are necessary, design elements such as wall extensions, landscaping, and other techniques should be used to mitigate the loss of enclosure at the gap.
- Parking lots or existing parking lots awaiting future development should have well defined street edges. These edges should be created with a combination of hard elements such as walls and fences, as well as base planting and crowns of closely spaced trees.
- Building entrances should be located at corners, along the primary streets and be scaled appropriately to the character of the street. While single doors may meet building code, double doors may be a better fit to enhance the street.
- Glazing should be incorporated into a significant portion of the first floor. Flexibility for future entrances should be considered in full window walls.
- Glazing should be clear, non-tinted glazing on the first floor. (Upper floors are encouraged to have a non-tinted or lightly tinted glazing as well.)
- Where the highest active storefronts are not appropriate, buildings should still have engaging ground level floors. Wall articulation, detail, and human scaled elements are all important.
- Emphasize activation and vertical articulation on parking structures, which tend to have horizontal emphasis.
- Parking structures should have screened facades or façades with a developed design pattern. Despite the functional use of the building as a

parking structure the design of the exterior walls should have similar rhythms and openings as one would expect with an office, residence or other human occupied space.

- Public atriums, enclosed arcade and winter garden spaces are strongly encouraged to allow year round pedestrian comfort in downtown. These internalized spaces should be design to complement the street pedestrian experience and not to substitute for them.
- Acknowledge a street terminus with architecturally distinctive features or buildings.
- Articulate large floor plates to avoid large, bulky building massing.
- To avoid walled-off, insulated office complexes, in-house cafeteria facilities can be located on the ground floor and visible to the sidewalk.

3. A Connected Downtown

The majority of plan participants agreed that downtown Milwaukee contains a number of bright spots - “camp fires” or “pearls” - that make downtown an attractive and engaging place. The problem is that few of these points are connected to one another, lessening the economic and social impact in the downtown and making downtown more of a one-stop shop rather than a meaningful place.

While the center of Downtown contains many key components and attractions there are districts and destinations outside the Downtown core that complete the overall make-up and future successes for Downtown. Strengthening and enhancing the connections to these areas through infill of vacant and underutilized spaces and more comprehensive street improvements will serve these goals.

It is crucial to focus on “Key Sites” that are at “hinge” locations to allow important connections to be enforced and function appropriately. These sites could also be considered “pivotal” to the local areas. It is for that reason that we recommend key sites for redevelopment in order to strengthen those key connections.

Vision: Milwaukee recognizes that great urban environments are not centered on the car. Great urban environments are centered on the pedestrian and complemented with a range of transportation modes that connect people, places, attractions and neighborhoods to one another in order to create a dynamic and engaging city.

Intent:

- Strengthen linkages throughout downtown and to adjacent neighborhoods.
- Expand transit options downtown.
- Revisit the role of streets.
- Shorten the distance to Chicago.

Policies and Strategies:

- Improve connections to the Third Ward at Broadway and Water Streets.
- Complete the conversion of Wells and State Streets to two-way.
- Consider expanding Van Buren and Jackson to two-way south of Kilbourn.
- Reduce and mitigate the physical barriers between the lakefront, the downtown, and the Third Ward.
- Build on the success of the Marquette Interchange and pursue alternatives for the reconstructing of the on/off ramps at the north end of the Hoan Bridge in the area of the Lincoln Memorial Drive and Milwaukee's museum and festival grounds. Some of the most potentially valuable real estate in the state of Wisconsin exists in the Downtown-Lakefront-Third Ward triangle currently occupied by bridge and freeway ramps.
- Introduce streetcar and express bus transit to the downtown with connections to adjacent neighborhoods.
- Initial streetcar connections should stress a connection between the east town office area and the Intermodal Station as well as connections to the densest adjacent residential areas.
- Incorporates universal access and complete street elements.
- Consider removal of on-street parking in areas that are appropriate for wider sidewalks to serve dining and entertainment uses.
- Provide ADA spaces throughout the downtown. Location of spaces on block should contain multiple access points for vehicles.
- Establish the Intermodal Station as a regional transit hub with expanded commuter rail and high-speed train access into Chicago's Union Station.
- Promote the placement of electrical outlets in new parking structures for electric car re-charging.
- Expand bike facilities such as racks, storage spaces, and dedicated bike lanes.
- Integrate the Department of Public Works 2010 bike plan into downtown policy decisions.
- Wherever possible, support a mix of uses along the river and Riverwalk system. A mix of uses includes boat and river taxi parking zones, dining areas and platforms, and retail kiosks including food and beverage sales.
- Consider exploring a Downtown network of arcades and wintergardens as a ground level, retail friendly alternative to a skywalk system.
- Support on-street spaces and spaces in parking garages for zip cars.

Form:

- Maintain the Downtown street grid and public alley system. Alleys serve an important function by connecting multiple sites and minimize the number of curb cuts otherwise needed on a block.
- Where the street grid has been disrupted, efforts should be made to reconnect the grid. Where motor vehicle connections are not possible, pedestrian connections, at a minimum, should be made.

- Where possible use alleys as active, pedestrian friendly commercial space accented with lighting, arcade coverings, and storm water management best practices.
- Provide mid-block cross walks on long blocks (often as a result of “super-block” block combinations.
- A dedicated pedestrian sidewalk should lead to all building entrances. Driveways should not be used for this purpose.
- Use attractive lighting, signage, landscaping, and other appropriate means to fill in gaps between successful or active nodes or districts. Lighting can include up-lighting of buildings, trees, or public art.
- Use visible and uniform parking and bike route signage.
- Bus shelters should be positioned so riders do not impede pedestrians and storefront shoppers and vice versa.

4. Density and Intensity

Downtown Milwaukee should be a neighborhood in its own right, rather than simply the “Central Business District.” To achieve this goal, Downtown must add more residents and employees to its day and nighttime populations in order to transform into a cohesive and vibrant neighborhood. Furthermore, greater density acts as a catalyst for greater investment and services creating value for Downtown but for the entire city as a whole.

Vision: Downtown Milwaukee contains the highest levels of commercial and residential density of any Midwestern city outside of Chicago.

Intent:

- More people living and working downtown.
- Grow more mixed-use neighborhoods Downtown.
- Establish a larger university presence downtown.
- Support a larger corporate presence downtown.
- Reduce the number of surface parking lots downtown.

Policies and Strategies:

RESIDENTIAL

- Develop a variety of housing types downtown with varying levels of affordability that supports a mix of populations – e.g. singles, DINK’s, empty nesters, families with children, students, and vulnerable populations.
- Redirect future student housing downtown.
- Support policies that allow for the updating and conversion of older and/or historic properties to usable and functional residential space.
- Encourage and support the conversion of under-utilized Class B office space to upper level residential uses.

- Support new residential development in currently non-residential areas, notably Westown and the Haymarket and West of 6th Districts. This includes the Park East corridor, Mac Arthur Square, and south of the Central Library.
- Emphasize multi-family residential to be a primary land use for the Park East corridor west of the river.
- Demolition for the purposes of surface parking or smaller buildings is prohibited.
- Maintain the policy of not having a density cap.

OFFICE POLICIES

- Create physical environments that are attractive to specific industries and professions that have important connections to the corporations that are located in downtown that would benefit from being located downtown.
- Support policies that allow for the adaptive re-use of older or historic buildings.
- Take advantage of Milwaukee's proximity to Chicago, lakefront setting, existing downtown amenities and supporting commercial uses to attract and recruit a larger corporate presence. Support mixed-use commercial development throughout downtown.
- Increase the density of office space in the downtown with a mix of small, mid, and high-rise office buildings dispersed throughout the downtown utilizing new, in-fill, and existing building stocks.
- Encourage local institutional colleges and universities to locate future or expanded schools and dormitories downtown.
- Re-develop existing surface lots in the downtown.
- Establish parking policies that work to reduce the need for single-development parking structures.
- Demolition for the purposes of surface parking or smaller buildings is prohibited.

RETAIL AND ENTERTAINMENT POLICIES

- Concentrate destination retail area in relation with the retail plan of BID 21.
- Promote neighborhood supporting retail in existing and future neighborhoods of downtown.

Form:

- Require minimum FAR's Downtown.
- Avoid "buildings in a park" – siting buildings near the center of a block with large, landscaped areas between them and the street edge.
- Sites with larger setbacks, primarily mid-20th Century developments, should consider new street edge buildings that provides additional development opportunity but also builds-out the street wall.
- Avoid surface parking between the front face of a building and the public right-of-way.

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