



A Future Vision **Final**
A Revitalization Master Plan for Downtown Hutchinson **Report**

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Prepared for:

Hutchinson Downtown Association
and
The City of Hutchinson, Minnesota

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Introduction & Purpose

Need for a Downtown Plan

No single event or crisis prompted the preparation of this plan. Rather, the plan evolved from a series of events that attracted the community's attention and led to the conclusion that downtown might not be as healthy as it once was. Prior to the initiation of the Revitalization Plan, the State Theater closed. At about the same time, the United States Postal Service began investigating sites for a new post office south of town. A growing number of vacant storefronts greeted visitors along Main Street and key cross streets, and business and property owners expressed concern about the City's lack of investment and reinvestment in downtown Hutchinson.

In response to these concerns, the City initiated a two-step process. The first step addressed downtown's building rehabilitation needs. The Hutchinson Economic Development Authority (EDA) revised its downtown commercial loan program to better meet these needs and also created two new grant programs designed to improve the aesthetic appearance of downtown with minimal investment from the business and property owners. One of these programs, the Sign and Awning Grant Program, encourages the installation of new signs and awnings. The second of these programs, the Storefront Revitalization Grant Program, provides property owners with matching funds for exterior improvements that enhance the "curb appeal" of their property.

The second step taken by the City to address the community's concerns was the commissioning of the Downtown Hutchinson Revitalization Master Plan to identify and develop a long-range plan for downtown Hutchinson. The plan is intended to help ensure that downtown Hutchinson retains its small town charm, while providing a business and shopping environment that appeals to a diverse group of people. The Revitalization Master Plan is intended to help awaken the spirit and vibrancy that was once found in downtown Hutchinson.

Focus of the Plan

Even though there is no crisis, there is a recognized need to be progressive and to maintain downtown's place in the regional economy. Downtowns are changing, and the ability of Hutchinson's downtown to build on the opportunities present in its path will be critical to its success.

Accordingly, this plan does not rely on the "big fix." Rather, it looks to solutions that build upon what is already working in Hutchinson, and proposes that implementation of those solutions occur over a long period of time. Hutchinson has been growing and changing for more than a century; there is no reason it should not continue to evolve at a measured pace toward positive change.

Goals for Hutchinson's Downtown Plan

The community has expressed a broad interest in the revitalization of downtown Hutchinson. In expressing that interest, the public acknowledged a number of general project goals including:

- Define downtown boundaries
- Improve access and circulation
- Enhance open space and river views
- Expand downtown housing
- Expand downtown employment



An example of a storefront revitalization from a grant program offered through the EDA in Hutchinson, one of the steps already taken by the city to reinvest in downtown.

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- Emphasize a government core
 - Improve downtown entries
 - Identify future uses for the Hutchinson Hotel and State Theater

The Planning Process – Defining the Limits of the Plan

The assembly of the Hutchinson Downtown Revitalization Master Plan featured a true community planning process. It combined the local knowledge of the community with the experience and ideas of a consulting project team comprised of land use planners, traffic engineers, market analysts, landscape architects, and architects. Over the course of the 12-month process, both the project consultants and the community capitalized on numerous opportunities to exchange ideas, to challenge established conventions, and to create a plan that truly reflects the wishes of the community.

The beginning point of the planning process involved defining the downtown area’s boundaries for the purposes of conducting the revitalization study. Initially, the limits of the study area encompassed an area bounded by the Crow River on the north, Franklin Street on the west, Adams Street on the east and Fourth Avenue on the south. In order to help clarify the project boundaries, one of the first planning tasks was to conduct a two-part analysis of downtown issues and opportunities. First, local business leaders and area residents were interviewed in order to gain their insights into downtown. Second, the consulting team conducted an objective overview of the downtown area. This “outsider’s” overview of downtown Hutchinson provided an ability to raise issues that may not be apparent to local residents familiar with the area.

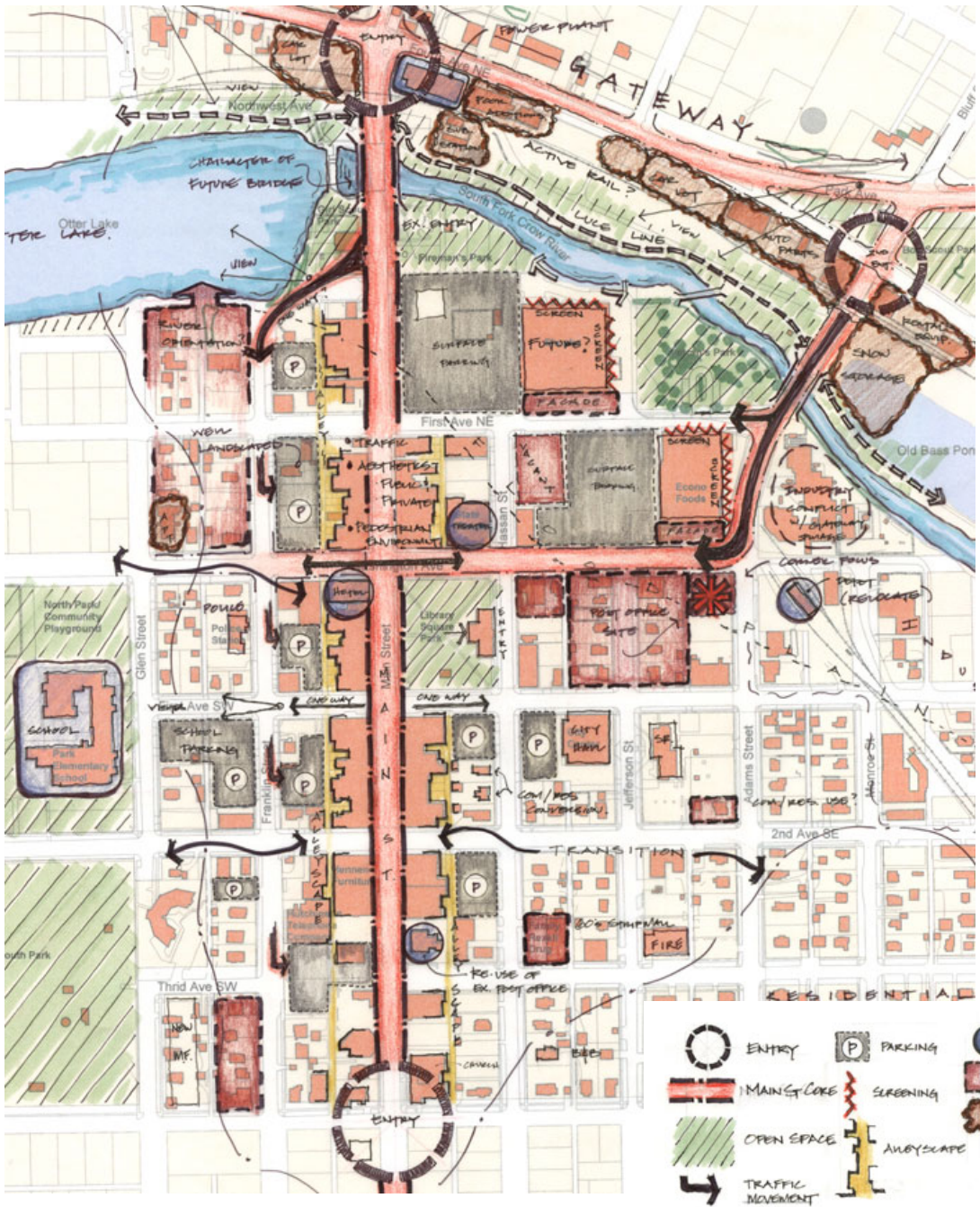
Key issues, opportunities and observations that were identified include:

- Downtown has three primary entrance points – Main Street at Highway 7, Adams Street at Highway 7 and Main Street at Fourth Avenue. Both northern entrances are partially framed by auto sales lots and outside storage of rental equipment. Fourth Avenue on the south is a clear demarcation between the residential neighborhood and the commercial area.
- Main Street has a strong retail base.
- Rear parking lots provide convenient parking, but in some cases lack logical connections.
- Downtown contains an interesting mix of historic structures and newer big box retail uses.
- Park Elementary School is an important part of downtown.
- In some ways, Hutchinson has turned its back on the Crow River. The Shopko and Econo Foods present on its south bank; commercial uses on the north bank of the river fail to engage the river.
- The transition between the downtown’s commercial area and the surrounding neighborhood needs to be carefully managed. Some examples of “commercial creep” are evident.
- Areas along the northern terminus of Franklin Street offer interesting vistas of Otter Lake.
- The power plant on the north end of downtown makes a strong architectural statement.
- Washington Avenue has potential to play a stronger role as a key downtown entry street.
- The eastern edge of Riverside Jaycee Park, along with Girl Scout and Boy Scout Park, Fireman’s Park, Veteran’s Memorial Park, and the Crow River Recreational

Area provide open space, a place to gather, and enhance the public's exposure to the Crow River.

- The industrial area east of Adams Street and generally north of Second Avenue SE contains a number of deteriorating and unattractive buildings.

As a result of these observations the study boundaries of the downtown were expanded. The original boundaries remained as the primary area of focus for detail elements like design guidelines, but an additional study area was established, which included the north side of the Crow River; generally south of Highway 7; the area west of Glen Street encompassing the Park Elementary School site; and portions of the industrial area east of Adams Street. Collectively, this total area became the focus of a comprehensive revitalization plan for the downtown area.



An "Opportunities and Observations" physical graphic illustrates the key physical issues of downtown from an outsider's point of view.