As a downtown resident, I see that the movement ideas will transform how residents, workers, and visitors see downtown and traverse the city. Walnut Street Transformation, with its introduction of a downtown tram, will catapult this effort. Imagine beginning your day riding your bike or walking to the coffee shop. You pop out the laptop to check some e-mails, plan your day and slide into the morning bustle. The first meeting in the morning is across the city, so you hop on the tram and ten minutes later, you are striking a great deal with a new client. After landing your next big contract, you hop back on the tram and scoot across town for your lunch appointment. Success again, what a great day so far! A stop by your condo to pick up the presentation you forgot and a chance to give those thirsty tomatoes growing on the balcony a needed drink of water. Then it’s back several blocks to the office. By now it is getting toasty outside, so you pop up into the conditioned skywalks and slide back to the office with glimpses to the gorgeous summer day beyond. After some phone calls and e-mails, you are back out to give your presentation. A five minute tram ride listening to inspiring music on your i-tunes gets you set for a successful meeting. Another deal made! To wind down, you head out on the trails for Gray’s Lake where you walk in the park and hit the playground with your young family. The office team was ready to sneak out early today, so you meet them at happy hour, then it’s off to find friends at Principal Park to take in the I-Cubs. All this in a day’s work! —Ben Washburn, President of the Downtown Neighborhood Association.
2. MOVEMENT

This section of the plan provides the main components building synergy and connections between existing downtown amenities, capitalizing on what is already here, and proposing elements that have the potential to be catalytic.

Downtown has accomplished so much in the past several years -- a new arena and conference facility, a new Science Center, a new downtown park, enhanced grounds at the State Capitol, new restaurants, a new Central Library, a flayerwalk that is shaping up to be a gem, downtown trails, new and expanded commercial enterprises, a thriving retail district, and housing. This section of the planning work focuses on how to better use these elements.

It concentrates on enhancing movement to better utilize our downtown area and all that it offers.

The graphic on the preceding page analyzes the distance between downtown’s amenities, a key aspect to the potential for developing movement in downtown. Downtown Des Moines is relatively compact: 2 miles east to west and approximately 1.25 miles north to south. The map shows that downtown, when measured in 1/4-mile increments, is not immense and there is overlap in these radii. People will embark on this 5-10 minute walk if there are engaging distractions along the route and if there is a known destination that is worth the trip.

It is approximately two miles between Meredith Corporation / Gateway Park at the western edge of downtown and the terraces of the Iowa State Capitol on the east side of downtown.

The north-south dimension of downtown is roughly 1.25 miles as measured from the Iowa Events Center and Principal Park, the home of Iowa Cubs baseball.

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Using Chicago as a reference, we can compare these dimensions and see what might be possible in terms of moving people throughout downtown Des Moines.

In Chicago, the distance between ‘the Bean’ (artist Anish Kapoor’s Cloud Gate sculpture) in Millennium Park and the John Hancock Building at the northern end of the Michigan Avenue’s ‘magnificent mile’ is about two (2) miles.

Though it is a hefty walk, people traverse this distance on foot by the droves. The route provides destinations at each end as well as plenty to see and do along the way. The walk between the Hancock Building and the Bean includes part of Millennium Park, a bridge across the Chicago River, glimpses to Lake Michigan, the lushly landscaped Michigan Avenue, and retail shops along the magnificent mile. Buildings and landscape offer shade and shelter throughout the walk. Chicago’s urban circumstance provides interest all along the route.

The two-mile walk works in Chicago. What would encourage people to walk the two miles between the Capitol and the western end of Gateway Park in downtown Des Moines? Downtown has created worthy destinations throughout downtown. The focus now should turn to infill and creating interest and activity along the routes between the destinations in downtown Des Moines.

Chicago: a magnificent mile (or two)

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We have begun to think in these terms. We have created some interesting routes between downtown destinations — the edges of Gateway Park, East Locust Street, and the future promenade at the Principal Riverwalk encourage movement along their routes and connect downtown destinations. Additionally, they foster places in and of themselves.

To create stronger connections between places in downtown and movement throughout the downtown, continual attention is needed to create places that preference people and encourage greater engagement with our downtown environment. Getting people to engage with downtown requires movement between the elements in downtown — fluid, enjoyable movement between, for example, the Civic Center and East Village, between workplaces and Riverwalk, between the Iowa Events Center and Court Avenue. Greater engagement will lead to fuller use of the downtown and result in further evolution.

With recent downtown investments, the places that comprise downtown have extended the traditional downtown core. These new nodes — Gateway Park, the Iowa Events Center, the Science Center of Iowa, and the East Village — provide cues about where to focus the attention of the movement proposals. Further, the streets and routes between these nodes form corridors that are shown as preferred locations in the movement concepts.

As the comments were collected from the various public and steering committee meetings about what downtown was missing, it became clear that many people were asking for ways to facilitate movement to and around downtown. The need for better connections, that was identified in the plan’s goals, advanced to a concept that enhanced movement would facilitate these connections. Movement became a term that was used to discuss the various iterations of proposals for downtown. This section covers three movement proposals:

- Walnut Street Transformation
- Skywalks & Sidewalks
- Greening Downtown

Gateway Park, looking east along Locust Street, proposal for the active promenade at Principal Riverwalk, and shops along East Locust in the East Village are examples of places in downtown Des Moines that foster movement.