Every week I hear folks talking about downtown development. What’s the new project here or there? How many condos and apartments are they building? What’s that new sushi place? Book Store? With an astronomical amount of public and private investment, development is certainly happening. Imagine a workday amidst this development. You rarely use your car to make your way from your condo to your growing start-up business in the East Village. Off to work and you spot the tram on its way down the street — guess coffee will have to wait until you reach the office today. You and the ‘lil’ guy hop on, then off the tram as you drop him off at daycare. Your wife heads off for her day, sheltered from the biting cold by the skywalks as she makes her way to climb the corporate ladder at one of the big downtown financial services companies housed in a new gleaming office building overlooking Gateway Park. During the couple of blocks walking to your office, you think back to the weekend when you traversed the city with spring in the air, and how you noticed so many unique neighborhoods within this highly populated downtown area. The increased development now makes the city 24/7, not just nine to five. To some, selling the car and making a commitment to urban living is a priority. Consuming less land, avoiding urban sprawl, and helping the environment all play into this urban lifestyle of living. Tonight, you think, it might be a good night for catching up on some errands — as they say, retail follows rooftops — and it sure is nice to have these daily necessities close at hand. Maybe the wind will die down and you will suggest an outing to the Skating Plaza followed by some spicy fare at one of the new downtown restaurants. — Ben Washburn, President of the Downtown Neighborhood Association
DEVELOPMENT

Dating back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, planning in downtown Des Moines created a framework that fostered development while celebrating important places in the heart of the city. In the late 1800’s, the State Capitol was constructed on the hill east of the Des Moines River with Locust Street leading up to its front steps. The early 1900’s saw the construction of the Polk County Courthouse with the city’s merchants lining Court Avenue and framing the grand beaux arts building. By 1910, the Des Moines Civic Center Plan directed the construction of the City’s civic and government in a line along both banks of the Des Moines River. The foresight in city planning in the span of these 20 years produced a development framework that served downtown for a century.

Recent projects in downtown are creating similar impact. Investments such as the construction of ML King Jr. Parkway, Gateway Park, Principal Riverwalk, and a streetscape at East Locust signal a framework to direct development and provide a catalyst to attract development in the downtown. In the past five years, a number of major projects, including several new and expanded corporate headquarters, mixed use development, housing, and downtown retail have responded to these investments. At this time, it is clear that additional private and public development is desired to complement existing development, fill in missing elements, and densify vacant and under-utilized sites.

Proposals in the movement section are formed with analogous intentions to those recent projects: a catalytic impact for expanded downtown development. The following pages comprising the development section are more speculative that those in the movement section. They imagine the development potential for downtown that is both a response to recent investments as well as a reaction to the movement proposals including: downtown transit, skywalks, streetscapes, and open space.

This section discusses the three areas of development proposals: downtown as a business hub, living downtown, and cultural development.