3. DEVELOPMENT

Living Downtown

a. South of Sherman Hill

This area has the opportunity to form a transition between the Victorian Sherman Hill neighborhood, comprised mainly of single family homes with some multi-family apartment and condominiums buildings and the denser, commercial downtown area.

The South of Sherman Hill area between the established neighborhood and the emerging Gateway commercial district should house a combination of multi-family dwellings and commercial uses and serve as a connection between Sherman Hill and the Gateway district. Development of the north-south streets (19th-15th) as walkable, landscaped routes will be an important aspect to connecting this neighborhood and Sherman Hill with the downtown. Densities in this area should average approximately 40 units per acre. The lower range of these densities should be located near the established Sherman Hill neighborhood; higher densities should occur closer to Gateway Park. Consistent with the 1990’s Sherman Hill Plan, Woodland Avenue should serve as the mixed use commercial corridor for the South of Sherman Hill and Sherman Hill neighborhoods, with Ingersoll Avenue serving as a commercial corridor.

South of Sherman Hill precedents: housing in the Gateway district of Charlotte, NC, multi-family housing on a residential street in Madison, WI, housing near the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis

b. Gateway West

Housing in the Gateway West area has the potential to rival some of the country’s great urban residences. As Gateway Park matures and the renown Pappajohn sculpture collection is installed, this area has the potential to emulate housing examples such as residences across from the new Denver High Art museum, or the Nasher museum in Dallas or the Walker Museum sculpture park in Minneapolis. While the north side of Gateway Park will likely be developed by commercial interests, the south side has the opportunity to contribute to a mix of uses, including housing, which will help to bring 24-hour activity to the Park. These sites have the opportunity to capture views to Gateway Park and potentially views of the River landscape to the south. Housing on Walnut Street would benefit from the proximity to the proposed transformation described in the movement section.

Housing in this area should be dense in order to fully realize the views that are available and approach the tax base expectations from the “Western Gateway Goals and Guiding Principles.” Zoning presently limits heights to 75’, a regulation which the District Planning and Design Guidelines recommends adapting. Active ground level uses at Locust and Walnut Streets are desired in this area.

Gateway West precedents: housing overlooking Capitol Square in Madison, WI, housing near the Walker Sculpture Garden in Minneapolis, MN, high-end housing on the north side of downtown Chicago, a rooftop garden above a parking garage and next to high-rise housing in downtown Kansas City, MO, Opus_1 is a mixed use housing project presently in planning stages for Walnut and 15th Street in Des Moines (rendering by Jeffrey Morgan Architecture Studio)
c. Gray’s Landing

A number of participants in public input meetings believe that Gray’s Landing offers the potential for an entirely different kind of neighborhood than is presently available in Des Moines. This 100+ acre area is presently vacant and/or industrial uses and awaits a significant mixed use redevelopment effort.

While density in Gray’s Landing should remain high enough to create an urban neighborhood, (15+ units / acre), the area also represents an opportunity for introducing housing into downtown that includes a garage, larger units, small yards, roof gardens, and other landscape amenities. As proposed in the movement section, Gray’s Landing would be connected to downtown via the north-south transit line at 15th St. and commercial uses supporting the neighborhood would occur at SW 11th and Tuttle Streets.

In the southwest part of this area, higher density ‘towers’ are envisioned offering residents sweeping 360 degree views towards the Rivers, Water Works Park, Gray’s Lake, and downtown. This area was formerly known as Riverpoint West. Much of it is currently part of a private development proposal by Sherman & Assoc.
d. South of ML King

The area south of ML King offers the opportunity for a mixed use neighborhood with a combination of new construction and adaptive reuse of some high quality warehouse buildings. Additionally, through repair of the street grid, Tuttle Street offers the potential to connect to the Gray’s Landing neighborhood and eastward to the Des Moines River. The area has excellent transportation access and proximity to trails, open space, and cultural amenities. Through strategic parking agreements, one of the significant riverfront properties could be redeveloped.

Density in this area should respond to the scale of existing historic warehouse buildings, averaging a medium density of approximately 40 dwelling units / acre. The warehouses in this area offer important character and history to this district and to downtown, adaptive reuse strategies that support their preservation should be supported. In some cases, a combination of modification and additions that enhance their liveability should be allowed in conjunction with building restoration. Housing and redevelopment in this area should build on the identity provided by existing artists’ studios, perhaps adding to the stock of live/work opportunities.

ML King South precedents (from top left): housing above commercial space in a renovated warehouse with new construction adding an upper level, new housing above a restaurant in warehouse area of Minneapolis, housing in a renovated warehouse with new, spacious decks in Kansas City, MO, housing above restaurants and retail in Milwaukee, new decks on a renovated warehouse in Milwaukee, and a new commercial building in a mixed use/ former warehouse district in Kansas City.

e. Court Avenue

Court Avenue is presently experiencing a resurgence with a recent wave of mixed use development including music venues, bars, restaurants, a market, and housing in a combination of new construction and renovation of warehouses. The Downtown Farmer’s Market draws some 15,000 people to Court Avenue every Saturday morning through the summer and fall. The vibrant mix of uses co-exists in relative peace through a strategy of placing rental units on the active Court Avenue and owner-occupied units on the quieter north-south streets. Opportunities exist for additional conversion of upper level space to residential use in this area. Vacant sites, parking lots, and under-utilized parcels offer the opportunity for infill construction along Court Avenue and its side streets, including several riverfront properties. To continue bolstering this entertainment district, new development should be mixed use with active ground floor uses and upper floors that thrive on (or at least co-exist with) Court Avenue’s lively street life.

In addition to infill throughout the area, this district should work towards completing the Court Avenue street wall, respecting the heights established by the existing fabric and framing the Polk County Courthouse. This area should maintain the medium density (~40 units/acre) currently characterizing the district.

Court Avenue precedents (from top): a mix of renovation and new construction create mixed use housing in Charlotte, NC, the warehouse district in Minneapolis creates a strong street wall through a combination of renovation and infill, housing above a market with parking on the rear in Milwaukee, contemporary mixed housing in Kansas City’s historic market district.
3. DEVELOPMENT

Living Downtown

East Village and Lower East Village

With the bridge crossing the Des Moines River extending ML King Jr. Parkway to the east, East Village and the area immediately south hold tremendous development potential. While the East Village presently offers a vibrant mix of retail, restaurants, office, and housing, areas to the south largely undeveloped, industrial, warehouse, or otherwise under-utilized. While a few infill opportunities still exist along East Locust St., the most active part of the East Village, there are considerable development and adaptive reuse opportunities to the south in the Lower East Village. However, considerable infrastructure improvements are necessary in order to realize the potential for the Lower East Village neighborhood. Further study is needed to determine the feasibility of residential redevelopment at riverfront sites. The combination of East Village’s successes, increased transportation access, and downtown transit and parks proposed in the movement section should lead to unique housing that could include larger units and units that incorporate garages. Development in this area should be mixed use and include medium density housing at 30-40 units / acre. Heights should respect the Capitol Dominance overlay which affects much of this area.

East Village and Lower East Village precedents (from top): development stepping down to the waterfront and open space in San Francisco, a mixed use district near City Hall in Austin, TX, a warehouse reused as housing with new balconies and garages in Milwaukee, WI, housing fronting onto a new neighborhood park in St. Paul, MI.
h. Northeast Riverfront

This area has the potential to become a neighborhood that takes advantage of its proximity to the riverfront and nearby gardens. Once the Center Street dam is 'safer' as recommended by the Adventure Recreation project, this area could provide docking/mooring amenities to the neighborhood -- one of a very few locations where this is possible in the city. This neighborhood will have improved connections to western areas of downtown when construction of the Center Street pedestrian bridge is completed in 2009. In addition to its riverfront identity, this area's proximity to the Botanical Center and the Robert Ray Asian Gardens could offer the area a distinction as a 'garden district' in the downtown.

The area is currently a flexible warehouse district constructed during 1970's urban renewal. Buildings in this area are not architecturally significant and do not contribute to the heritage and culture of the downtown. New construction in this neighborhood should be low-medium density (15-20 units / acre) and could incorporate larger units and units that accommodate garages. The area should form on a new small scale street grid that connects to the important riverfront street, Robert D. Ray Drive, and E. 4th Street.

i. South of Events Center

This district should form around the opportunities presented by the Iowa Events Center (IEC), an arena and convention facility completed in 2005. While redevelopment in this area is conducive to commercial activities related to the entertainment and tourist activities at the IEC (hotels, restaurants, bars, retail), the activity of this area, its proximity to the River with elevated topography and outstanding views, and excellent access to I-235 also create potential for high amenity housing. The mix of uses would foster the vibrant range of activity sought for the downtown. Additionally, the downtown transit proposal in the movement section indicates that 2nd/3rd Streets would serve as a future north-south tram route and enhance connectivity in this area.

The area is presently a mix of interesting older architecture and under-utilized sites with surface parking lots and small scale commercial buildings. A combination of adaptive reuse and new construction is possible in this district. The smaller scale street and alley pattern in the district should be retained as it is conducive to attracting pedestrians and vibrant outdoor activity.

New construction should be high density to respond to the area’s adjacency to the traditional downtown core and to the River.

Northeast Riverfront precedents (from top): housing near the Mississippi River in Minneapolis, housing adjacent to community gardens along the SW Connector Park in Boston, lined landscaped pedestrian area near housing in the Gateway District of Charlotte, NC, boats moored at housing along the Menomonee River in Milwaukee, WI.

Iowa Events Center area precedents (from top): the Power and Light District under construction near the Sprint Center arena in Kansas City, outdoor dining on Nicollet Mall in Minneapolis, sidewalk outside of a swanky hotel with a bar and restaurant in San Francisco, the Bluebird restaurant in an adapted old building in Chicago.
The Oakridge neighborhood presently houses about 1,000 people, including approximately 600 school-age children. Built in the 1980's as low income transitional housing, most of the residents of the Oakridge neighborhood currently qualify for the highest levels of housing subsidies available. While still serving transitional housing needs in the community, more Oakridge residents are opting to make the neighborhood their home and live in its rental housing for a number of years.

Through a combination of reconfigured streets, new construction, re-investment, and expansion, the proposal for Oakridge neighborhood suggests a transition from a low income enclave to a mixed income neighborhood integrated into and connected with downtown. As envisioned, the Oakridge neighborhood would maintain its current low income resident base and strong social service programs that Oakridge residents and the broader community utilize, which includes day care, summer camps, after-school programs, and workforce training. The issues surrounding this neighborhood are socially and politically sensitive; collaborative efforts are necessary to re-consider this neighborhood to create desirable and attractive living conditions for many income levels, including Oakridge's present residents.

Oakridge precedents (from top): mixed income neighborhood in Washington D.C. built with Hope VI funding, contemporary modular housing by Peter Gluck, LEED-certified affordable housing at the University of Washington, High Point mixed income housing in Seattle, Chatham Square mixed income housing near Washington, D.C.