



Economic Development Strategy for Downtown Des Plaines

Approved via Resolution R-52-25 March 3, 2025

/// Acknowledgements



This downtown economic development strategy was developed in partnership with City of Des Plaines staff, members of City council, and with the Des Plaines public. It is a guiding document to help the City propel the downtown business and residential district into a vibrant, energized area through thoughtful use of City investment and short- and long-term strategies.

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Overview

/// Introduction to Study Area & Strategy

Downtown Des Plaines is the historic center of the northwest suburb of Chicago. Characterized by architecture that blends old and new, ample transportation access, and unique commercial, residential, and entertainment options, the downtown area is rich with opportunities for additional investment.

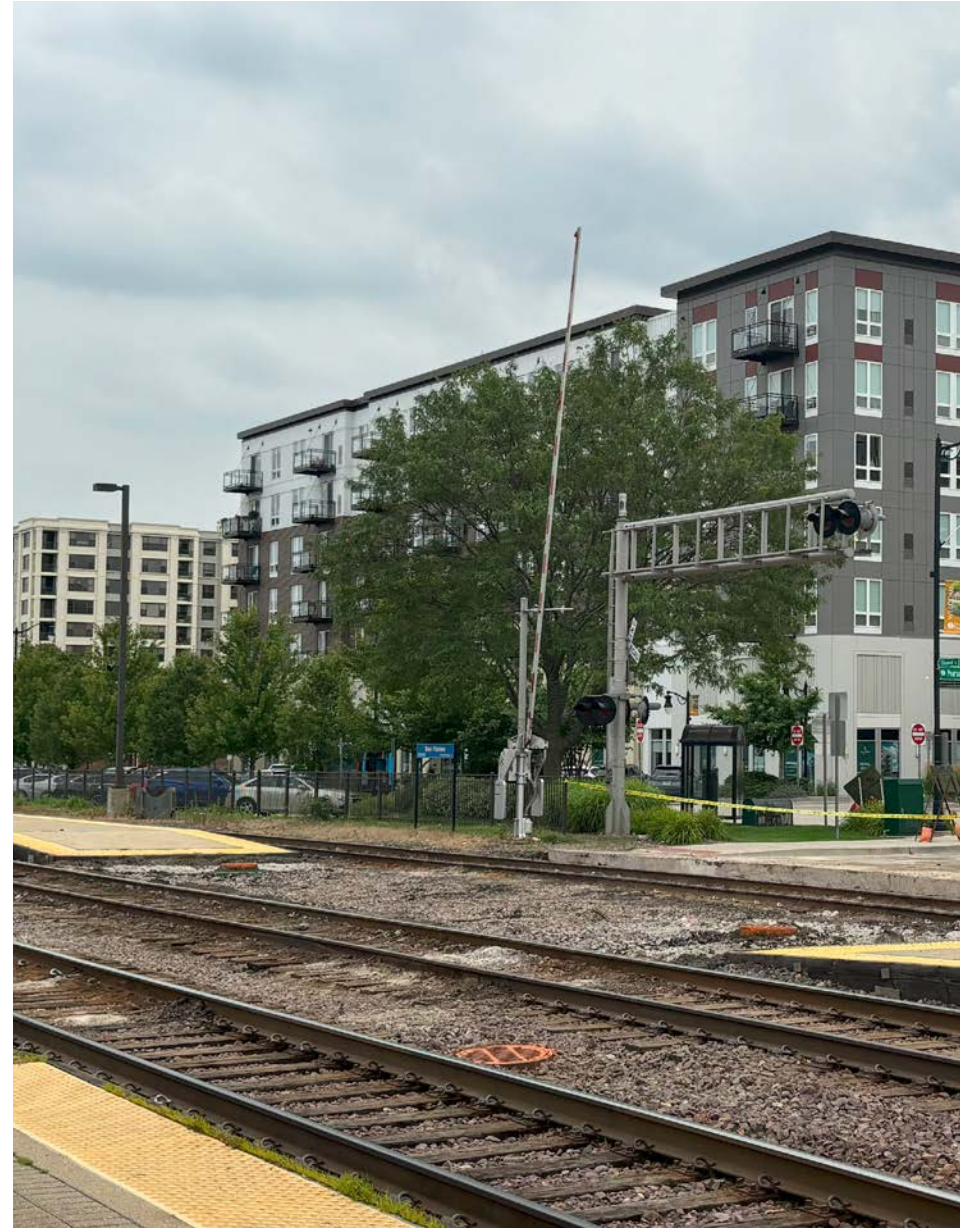
The area has changed significantly in the last four years with nearly 400 new residential multifamily units coming online, the introduction of the Pace Pulse bus which connects the city to O'Hare International Airport and east to Evanston, and several new projects that are under development. However, with these strengths have also come challenges, including limited dining and entertainment options, underutilized and vacant storefronts, and wayfinding and connectivity challenges.

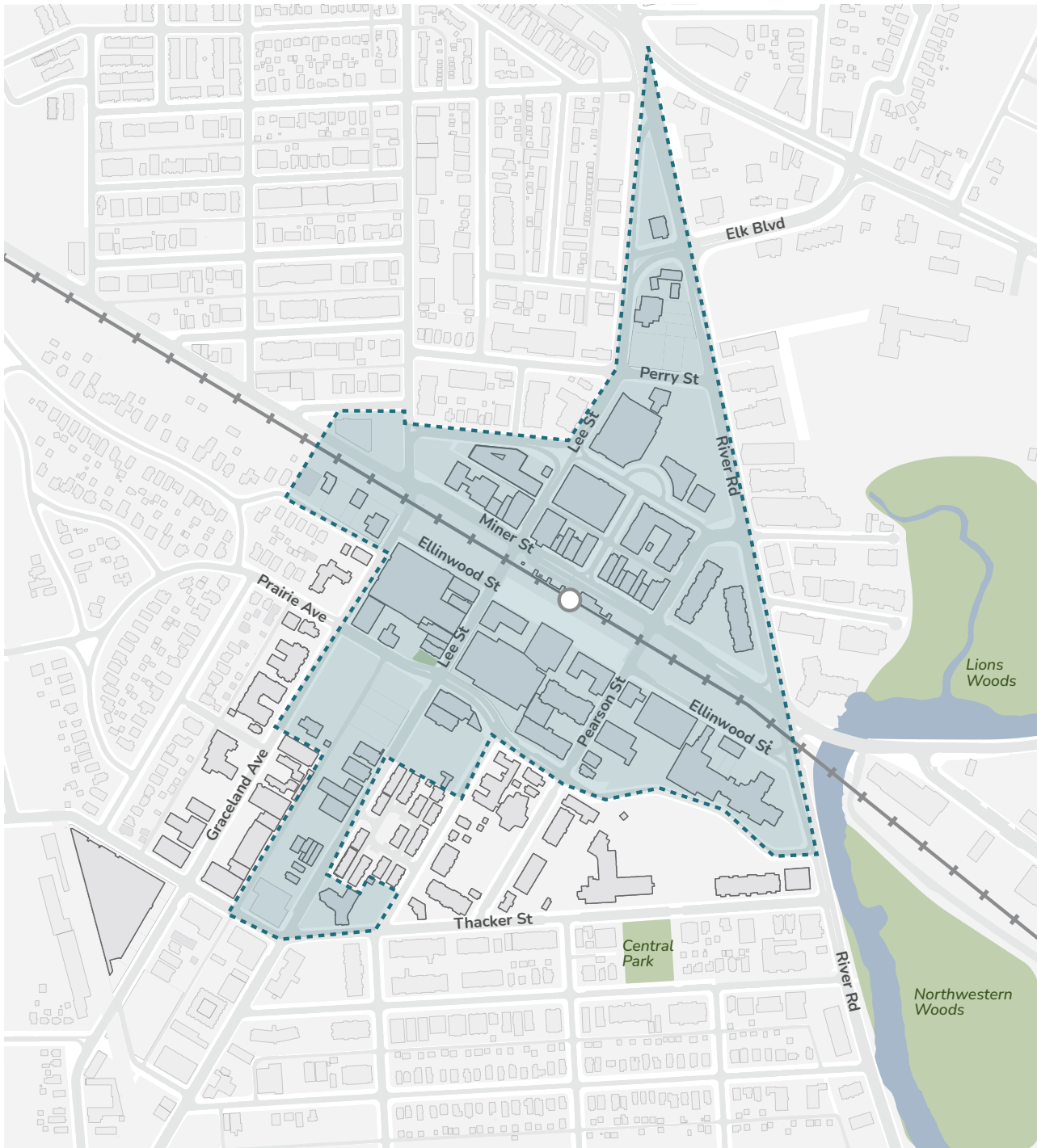
This Downtown Economic Development Strategy is intended to capitalize on the area's existing assets while providing tangible goals and recommendations to propel the area to a distinctive and vibrant business, residential and entertainment district.

The strategy is built upon existing plans relating to Downtown Des Plaines, including the city's 2019 Comprehensive Plan and 2022 Strategic Plan. Goals and recommendations in this strategy are informed by existing land use and market conditions, stakeholder and public input, and guidance from City elected and appointed officials and staff.

The Strategy focuses on the Downtown Des Plaines Study Area (the "Study Area"), which is roughly bounded by River Road to the east, Graceland Avenue to the west, Thacker Street to the south, and Rand Road to the north. The Study Area approximately aligns with the Des Plaines C-5 Commercial zoning district.

The Study Area is the site of historic downtown commercial businesses, the Des Plaines Theater, and the Des Plaines Metra station. Municipal services and community resources, including the Des Plaines City Hall and Public Library, are also located Downtown.

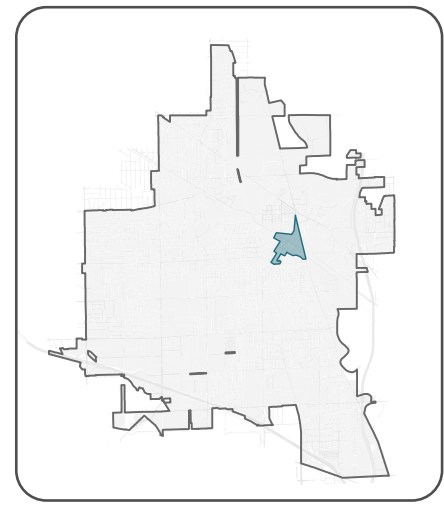


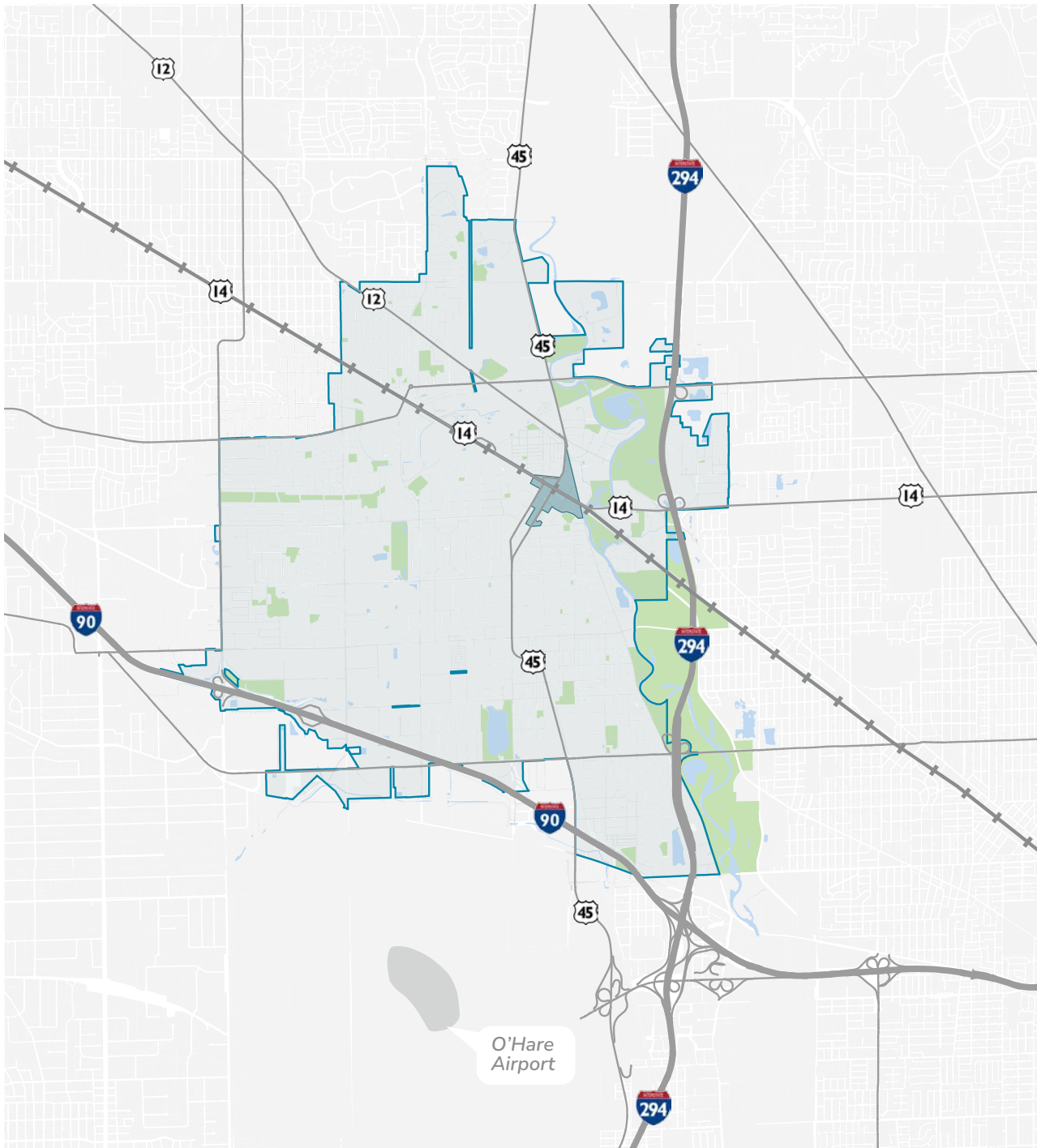


Downtown Des Plaines Location Map






-  Study Area
-  Des Plaines River
-  Existing Green Space
-  Metra UP-NW Station

Location within Des Plaines





Des Plaines Regional Access Map

-  Des Plaines Boundary
-  Study Area
-  Waterways
-  Green Space
-  Metra UP-NW



Existing Conditions

/// Land Use & Zoning

Downtown Des Plaines is largely built out. Yet, storefront and building vacancies are key challenges to fill (see *Market Study*, page 20). The area is dominated by retail and multifamily uses, including recent mixed-use and residential development of over 400 units from 2017-2024.

Land Use

- Miner Street is the key corridor through Downtown Des Plaines, characterized by access to Metra and Pace stops, a cluster of historic retail establishments, architecturally significant cultural uses, and municipal services. Metropolitan Square, a 2007 mixed-use development with an anchor grocery store tenant, is tucked just north of the Miner Street retail cluster.
- The City's inventory of municipal-owned property includes a concentration of parcels in the downtown core, downtown surface parking lots, and parking garages.
- Public parking, including surface lots, garages, and on-street parking is prevalent throughout Downtown, on both sides of Miner St. and Ellinwood St.
- Multifamily is the dominant residential typology, with most multifamily development occurring south of Ellinwood Street and east of Metropolitan Way.

Zoning

- The majority of the Study Area is zoned C-5 (Central Business District).
- The purpose of this district is to encourage higher density commercial and mixed-uses to support a vibrant downtown.

Open Space

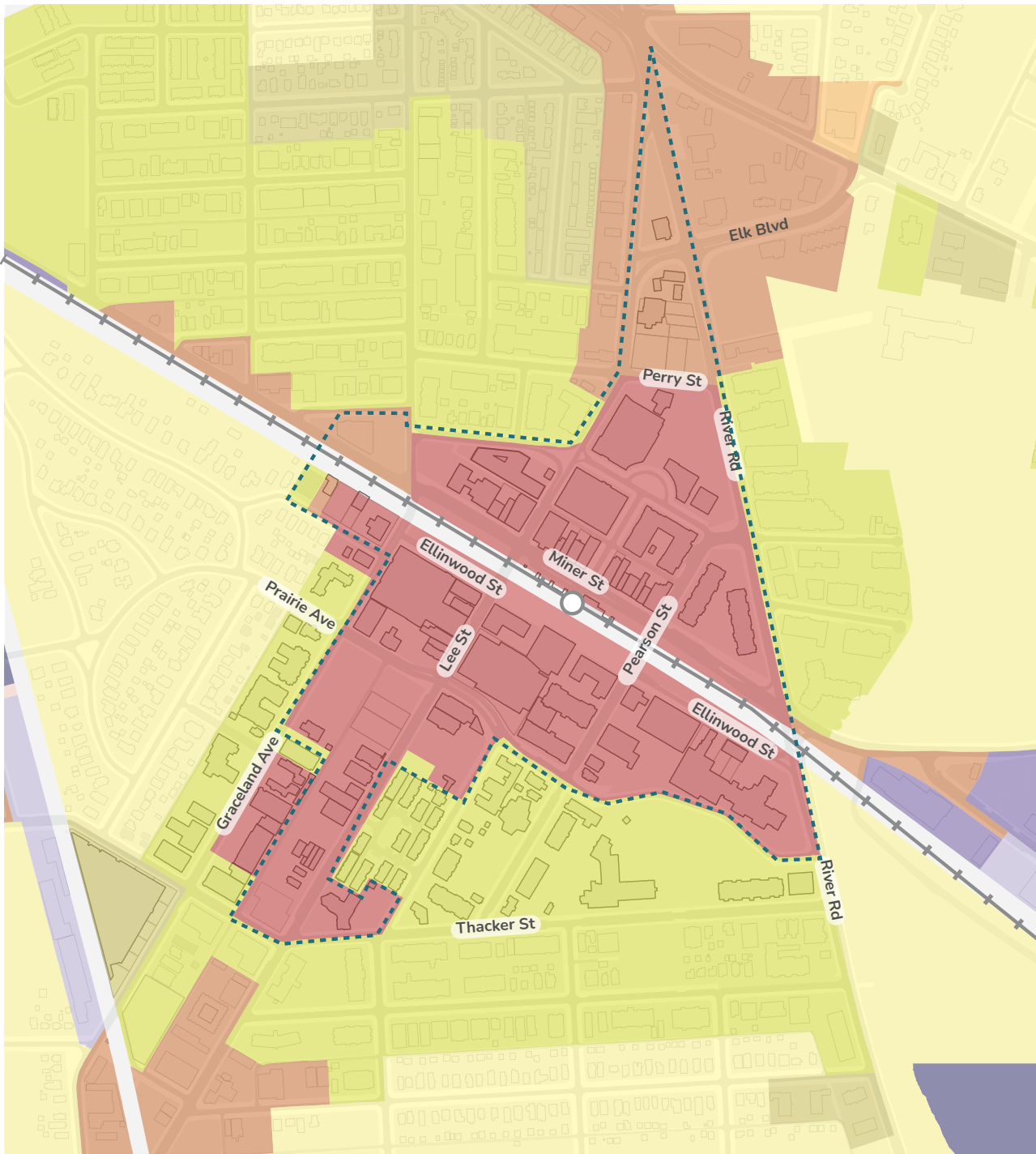
- The Des Plaines River and popular Des Plaines River Trail are located just east of the Study Area, past River Road, but limited signage and difficult street crossings create a barrier between downtown and these nearby amenities.
- There is limited space for public events in the Downtown.



Downtown Des Plaines Land Use

- Single Family Residential
- Multifamily Residential
- Institutional/Civic
- Office
- Retail
- Special Use
- Multi-Use
- Industrial
- Vacant Land
- Parking
- Transportation





Downtown Des Plaines Zoning

- R-1 Single Family Residential
- R-3 Townhouse Residential
- R-4 Central Core Residential
- C-1 Neighborhood Shopping
- C-3 General Commercial
- C-5 Central Business District
- M-1 Limited Manufacturing
- M-2 General Manufacturing
- Study Area
- Metra UP-NW Station

/// Transportation & Connectivity

The Downtown Study area is well-served by multiple transportation modalities, including the Des Plaines Metra Station, Pace buses (including the Pace Pulse line), convenient access to large regional thoroughfares like I-90 and I-294, and a ten-minute drive to O'Hare Airport.

Transit

- The downtown core is situated around the Des Plaines Metra station, served by the Union Pacific Northwest line.
- The area is served by five Pace routes, including the Pace Pulse toward Chicago O'Hare International Airport and east along Dempster St.

Parking

- Downtown parking facilities are important assets with key parking facilities throughout the downtown core including surface parking lots, reserved spaces for commuters, and three public parking structures adjacent to City Hall, Metropolitan Square, and the Des Plaines Public Library.
- Public parking— surface lots and garages— is prevalent on both sides of Miner and Ellinwood, but can be difficult to navigate and determine parking rules for the general public and downtown employees.
- Members of the public remark that signage and rules for public parking is unclear, resulting in a deterrent to going downtown.

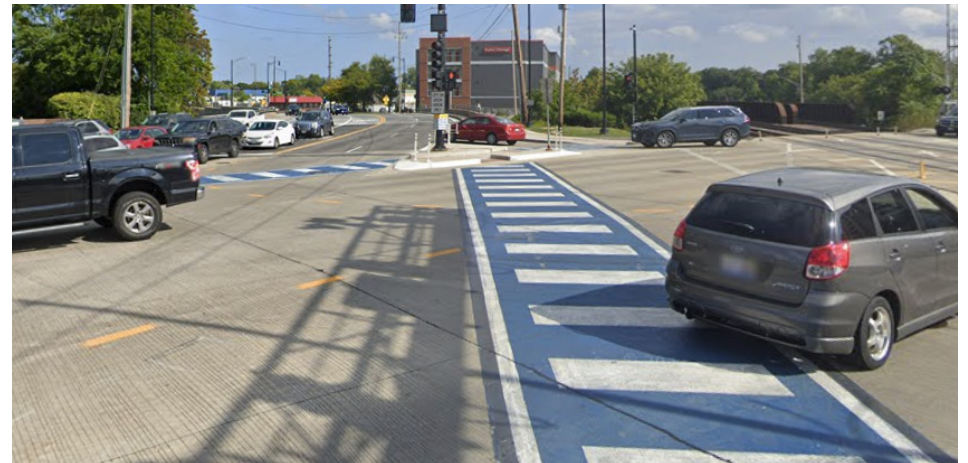
Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

- The railroad crossings through the center of Downtown act as a barrier, and the crossing from Ellinwood and Lee to Miner and Lee is an expansive 300 feet from building frontage to building frontage.
- Pedestrian and cyclist crossings can feel uncomfortable or dangerous, particularly across popular thoroughfares like River Road, where individuals cross to access the Des Plaines River Trail. Improved pedestrian crossings can make this connection more comfortable.

Wayfinding

- Cycling and walking downtown are currently challenging, particularly along Graceland, Lee, and Pearson, pedestrian and bicycle lane crossings are not visually differentiated from through lanes.

- Highly visible gateways into downtown from the east and west do not currently create a sense of place or arrival to the area.



Crossing River Road at Miner Street, 2023



Crossing railroad at Lee Street, 2022



Downtown Des Plaines Transportation + Parking

Parking Ownership

- Private
- Union Pacific Railroad
- City of Des Plaines

Transit

UP-NW Metra Rail

Pulse

208

230

234

226

} Pace Service

/// Identity & Character

Downtown Des Plaines is characterized by a mix of architectural styles, both historic and modern. Existing signage and streetscaping around the Study Area is inconsistent, resulting in a need for improved accessibility and reinforcing the character and potential of the Downtown.

Architectural Character

- The character of the Miner Street buildings on the north side of the street is interrupted by the form and accessibility challenges of Metropolitan Square.
- South of Ellinwood, newer mixed-use and commercial construction has been introduced bringing residents downtown.
- Updated architectural design guidelines could better guide new development to enhance the character and identity of Downtown.

Streetscape and Signage

- Wayfinding and signage throughout downtown is not currently unified through a consistent program. Visitors may find it difficult to locate popular amenities like the Library, Theater, City Hall, and connections to the Des Plaines River Trail.
- Metropolitan Square's current gateway, multi-tenant signage, and wayfinding is currently difficult to navigate but holds potential for improvements to public spaces to hold events and provide common open space.
- Businesses in the downtown currently suffer from a lack of cohesive branding and aesthetics. There are few structures with blade/wall signs or façade designs updated within the last 10 years.

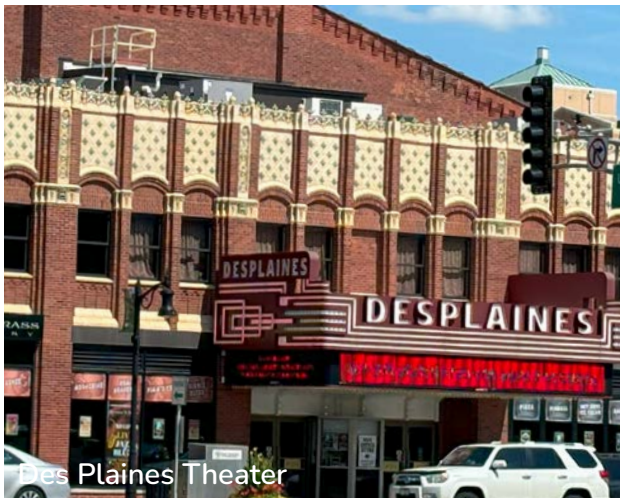


The marble bank building (left) was constructed in 1927, while the modern Welkin Apartments (right) were constructed in 2022.

Downtown Des Plaines is home to several exemplary structures from different periods and architectural styles.

Iconic Downtown Buildings

- **Des Plaines Theater**
Historic vaudeville theater opened in 1925 and renovated and reopened in 2021
Spanish Baroque architecture
- **Sugar Bowl**
Opened in 1921; has retained its iconic exposed neon sign
- **Leela Arts Building**
Former Masonic temple; constructed in 1920s
- **The Choo-Choo Restaurant**
Historic 1950s diner featuring meal service via a model train set
- **Former Des Plaines State Bank (678 Lee St)**
Built in 1927; home to numerous banks in the last 100 years, planned dine-in restaurant location





Unique Constraints

/// Unique Constraints

While Downtown Des Plaines has a number of assets upon which the City can build, there are some unique constraints that pose challenges to development. The three major constraints facing Downtown Des Plaines are: physical barriers, road jurisdictions, and flood prone areas.

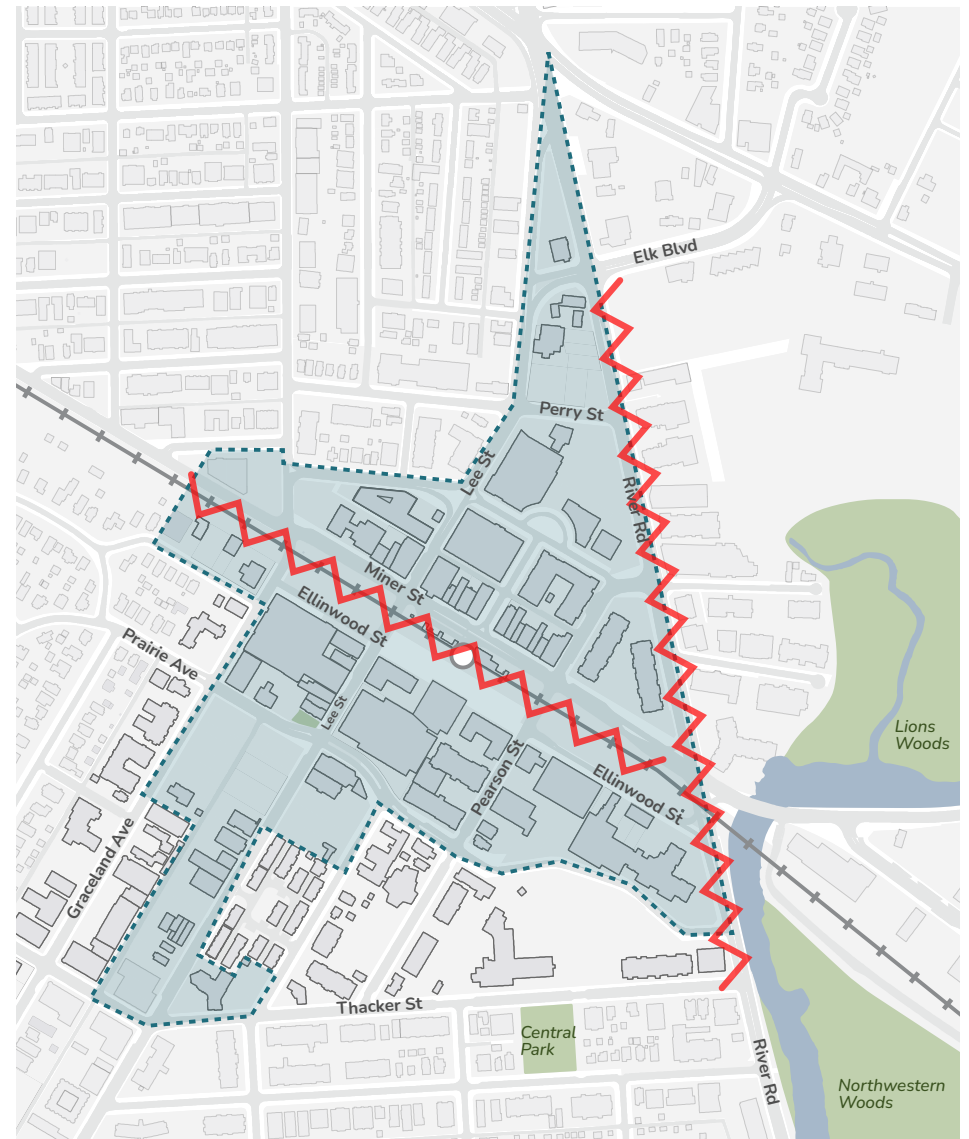
Physical Barriers

Downtown Des Plaines developed along key transportation routes – the Des Plaines River, roadways and railroad station. While this was a boon to development of the downtown, these same advantages create physical barriers – both real and perceived. In particular, the railroad tracks flanked by Miner Street and Ellinwood Street creates a significant barrier to the pedestrian environment, making the distance to travel from building front to building front 300 feet.

In addition, trains are more frequent at rush hours when there is more traffic, and traffic lights are regulated for safety for the rail. All this means that crossing Miner and Ellinwood can seem like a long distance and discourage people from going to multiple stores, restaurants and destinations that are located on both sides of the track.

Similarly, River Road is a principal arterial and a wide distance to cross to get from the Downtown over to the residential buildings on the East Side of River Road and/or over to the Des Plaines River Trail. Furthermore, the grade change means that the River is not seen from Downtown and is difficult to access. This limits Downtown as a destination for bikers and pedestrians. While the City has installed blue striping crosswalks across River Road, the distance and geometry discourage pedestrian and bike crossing.

The vast crossing widths at Miner Street and River Road as well as the grade change near the Des Plaines River create physical barriers to development in Downtown Des Plaines.



Road Jurisdictions

A second constraint is the jurisdiction of the roadway network. The City is constrained by IDOT requirements on roads (portions of S. River Road, U.S. Rt. 12 (NB Lee St. and SB Graceland/Jefferson) under IDOT jurisdiction. This limits the ability for the City to make changes to these roads. IDOT has moved toward the concept of complete streets ensuring that the right-of-way is safe for all users and more pedestrian-friendly.

Action Plan recommendations to enhance Downtown Des Plaines through urban design (page 47) can be designed to meet these constraints, e.g. landscape improvements to improve the pedestrian crossings across Lee Street.

- S. River Rd – City of Des Plaines jurisdiction (Elk Blvd to Devon Ave), Minor Arterial; IDOT jurisdiction north of Elk Blvd), Other Principal Arterial
- U.S. Rt. 12 (NB Lee St) – IDOT jurisdiction, Minor Arterial southeast of Golf Rd, Other Principal Arterial northwest of Golf Rd
- U.S. Rt. 45 (SB Graceland St & SB Jefferson) – IDOT jurisdiction, Other Principal Arterial
- U.S. Rt. 14 (Miner St) – IDOT jurisdiction, Minor Arterial
- UP Metra Railroad ROW – Union Pacific jurisdiction
- Ellinwood – City of Des Plaines jurisdiction, Local Road
- Prairie – City of Des Plaines jurisdiction, Local Road
- Pearson – City of Des Plaines jurisdiction, Major Collector
- Metropolitan Way – City of Des Plaines jurisdiction, Local Road
- Market – City of Des Plaines jurisdiction, Local Road
- Perry – City of Des Plaines jurisdiction, Local Road
- Elks Blvd – IDOT jurisdiction (south of Rand Rd), Other Principal Arterial (Lee St to Des Plaines River Rd), unclassified (Des Plaines River Rd to Rand Rd)

These roadways are illustrated on the map on page 18.

Flood Prone Areas

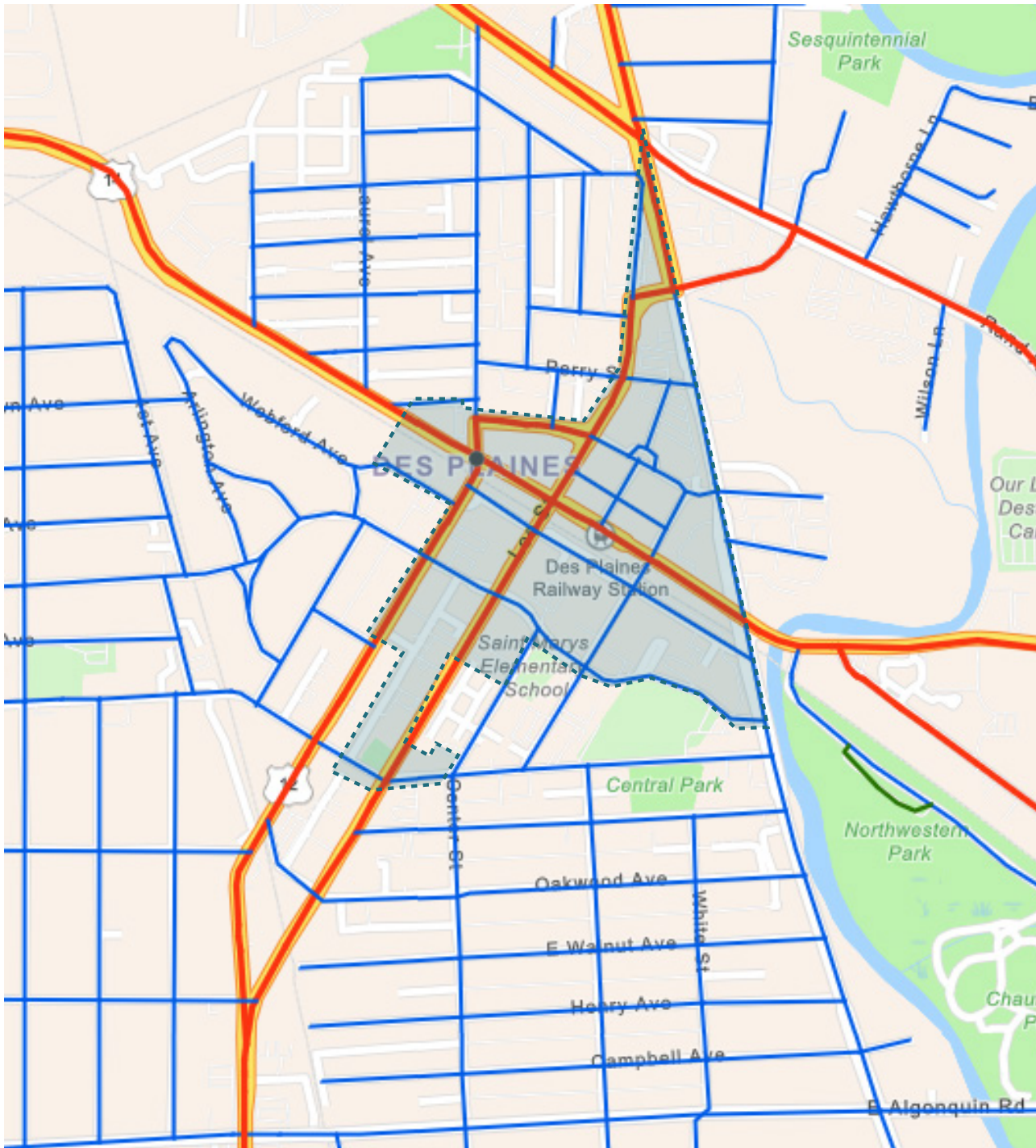
Des Plaines is located in the Des Plaines River Watershed which has a history of flooding into developed areas.

- Floodplain is land that is subject to inundation by the 100-year frequency flood as identified by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), or the 500-year risk of flood. Areas within the 100-year floodplain are regulated and must seek permits
- Floodway: that part of the floodplain immediately adjacent to and including the river or creek as identified on the FEMA Map. The floodway must be preserved in order to convey and store flood flows.

The east side of River Road throughout the Study Area is primarily located in 100-year floodplain, as well as portions of the west side of River Road. Any new development will require permits and would need to be elevated over the floodplain. Opportunities to reclaim floodplain for open space, such as the City-owned parcel at the northwest corner of Perry St. and River Rd., are identified in the urban design recommendations on page 47.

There is only a small portion of floodway between River Rd. and Lee St. where the two streets intersect which is a part of Wellers Creek. West of Lee St. the creek is underground. East of River Rd. the creek flows southward toward the Des Plaines River behind the residential buildings.

Flood prone areas are noted on the map on page 19.








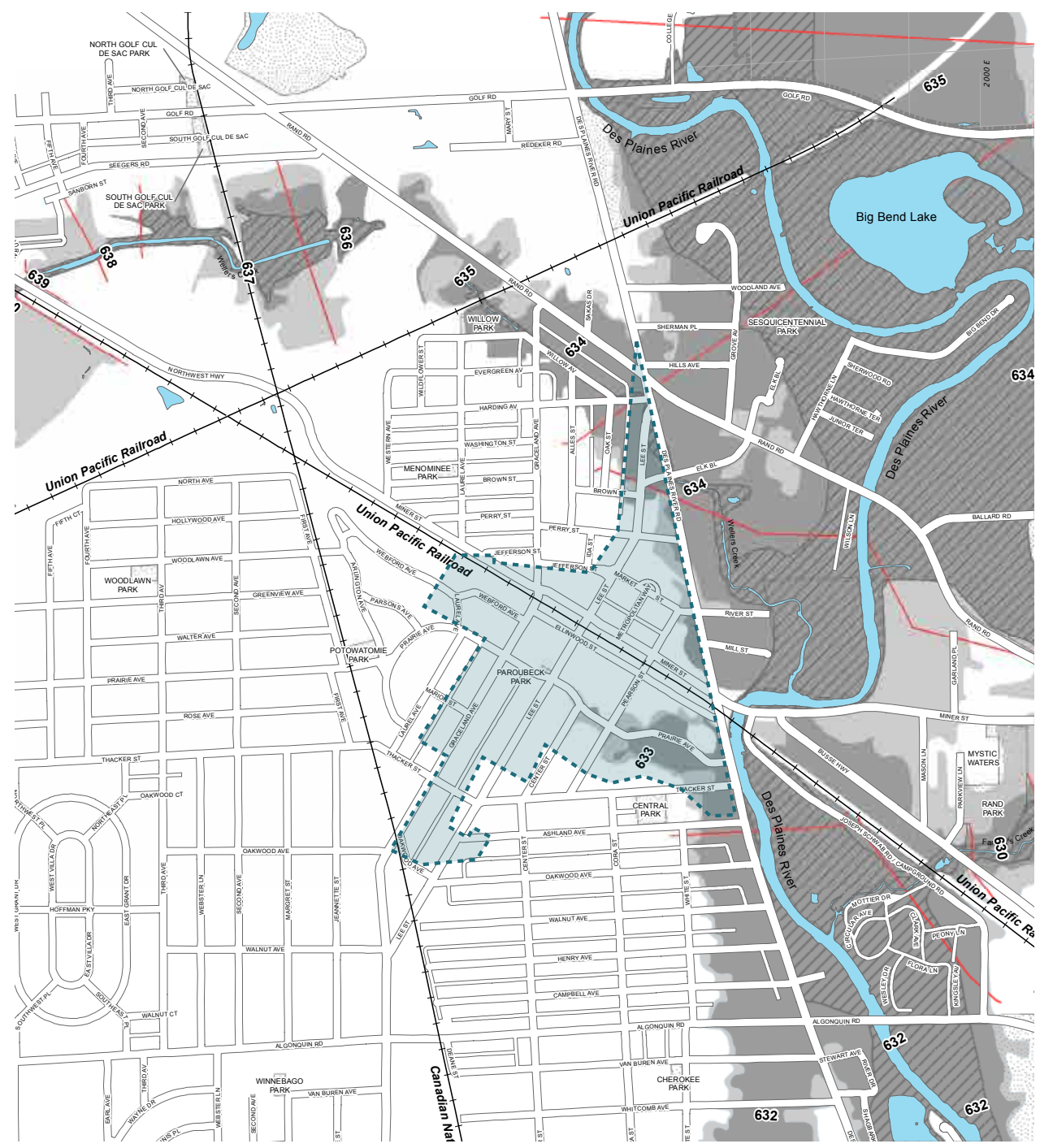
Downtown Des Plaines Road Jurisdiction

-  Study Area
-  City of Des Plaines
-  State

Source: Illinois Department of Transportation

Downtown Des Plaines Flood Prone Areas Map

-  Study Area
-  Waterway
-  Floodway
-  Special Flood Hazard Areas Inundated by 100-Year Flood
-  Special Flood Hazard Areas Inundated by 500-Year Flood



Source: FEMA



Market Study

/// Summary of Findings

Demographics

Recent population and household growth in the Downtown Study Area is primarily driven by smaller-sized households and an increase in residents aged 25 to 44, with a focus on young professionals rather than families. This demographic shift is contributing to the area's overall growth, shaping both the demand for housing and the need for services and amenities catering to this age group. The downtown area's evolving demographic profile signals a growing interest in urban living, with a population base trending more youthful.

Employment

The employment landscape in Downtown Des Plaines supports the residential market, with a stable employment base contributing to housing demand. As the population of young professionals continues to grow, the need for local employment opportunities remains important. The area benefits from its proximity to key transportation corridors and nearby employment hubs, enabling residents to live near their place of employment, which increases the appeal of downtown living.

Residential Market

The rental apartment market in the Downtown Study Area remains strong, with steady demand expected, particularly from young professionals and singles. Even as rental rates have risen, demand continues to grow, driven by the area's appeal and its proximity to employment opportunities and Chicago. Vacancy rates are at 15-year lows, reflecting the strong absorption of new units. Planned and proposed residential projects will further increase the population, supporting downtown commercial activity and contributing to the vitality of the retail market.

Retail Market

The retail market in Downtown Des Plaines faces several challenges, notably strong competition from other commercial corridors within the city and nearby downtowns. Despite improvements seen since the City's 2018 Downtown Market Assessment and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, Downtown Des Plaines still struggles with high vacancy rates, elevated rents, and limited business diversity, which impact its ability to attract and retain tenants. As the area develops, there is a clear need for transformative development projects, dynamic programming, and a strong branding strategy to support long-term retail growth.

- **Class A Retail:** Class A retail space in Downtown Des Plaines is limited to developments like Metropolitan Square and The Welkin. Despite the premium nature of these spaces, vacancies remain high, indicating that further strategies are needed to improve tenant attraction and optimize occupancy rates.
- **Class B Retail:** Class B retail spaces are performing better, with the lowest vacancy rate and more affordable rents, making them attractive to a broader range of retailers. This has allowed Class B spaces to maintain a stable retail environment despite the broader challenges facing the retail market.
- **Class C Retail:** Many older properties in downtown feature Class C retail space which is in need of significant upgrades to attract new tenants. However, the high renovation costs make these upgrades challenging, especially when landlords receive income from residential units above the retail spaces which diminishes urgency to find commercial tenants to meet financing and/or property tax obligations.

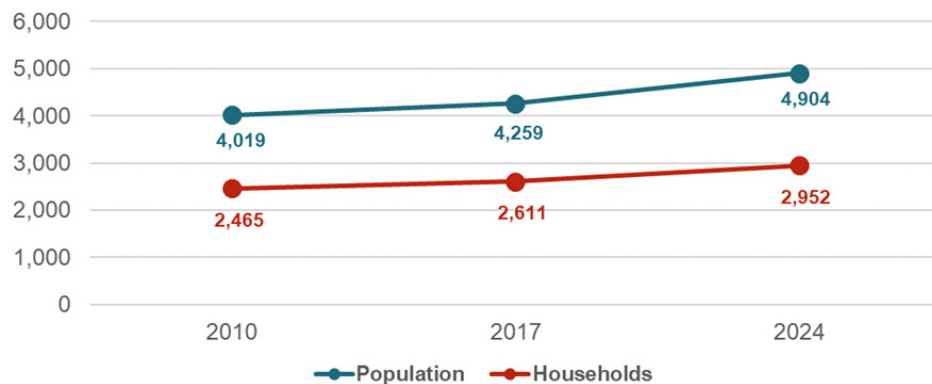
Area Demographics

The population and number of households in Downtown Des Plaines have experienced notable growth in recent years, reflecting the area’s increasing appeal and development. Additionally, the median household income in the Downtown Study Area has shown a positive shift, reflecting the area’s economic growth and increased cost of living.

Population & Household Trends

- According to data from Esri Business Analyst, the downtown population has seen significant increases, with a 22% rise since 2010 and a more recent 15% increase since 2017. This growth indicates a steady influx of residents, likely driven by favorable socioeconomic factors.
- The number of households in the downtown area has increased by 20% since 2010 and 13% since 2017, further highlighting the area’s growing residential demand. These trends suggest that Downtown Des Plaines is becoming an increasingly attractive place for people to live, with more families and individuals establishing roots in the downtown area.

Downtown Study Area Population and Household Growth Over Time



Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2010, 2017 & 2024 Estimates

Income Trends

- Currently, the median household income stands at \$74,510, marking an increase of \$16,707 since 2017. This increase aligns closely with inflation trends over the same period, suggesting that the area’s income growth is in step with broader economic conditions.

Downtown Study Area Median Income Growth Over Time



Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2017 & 2024 Estimates

Downtown Des Plaines is characterized by two prominent age cohorts: residents aged 25 to 44 (Millennials and Gen Z) and those aged 65+ (Baby Boomers). These groups dominate the demographic makeup of the area, and when compared to the broader city, Downtown exhibits some distinct age patterns.

Age Trends

- Downtown has a higher percentage of residents aged 25 to 44, reflecting a significant presence of young professionals and families. Additionally, there is also a higher percentage of residents aged 65+, indicating a notable senior population. However, downtown has fewer children and fewer young adults compared to the rest of the city. These trends suggest that Downtown Des Plaines is becoming a hub for both young professionals and seniors.
- The rapid pace of multiple large-scale developments in the area could lead to significant shifts in these demographics, so it's important to continue monitoring these changes closely.

**Esri Tapestry Market Segmentation* is a geodemographic system that identifies 68 distinctive markets in the US based on socioeconomic and demographic characteristics to provide an accurate, comprehensive profile of US consumers.

*Esri Tapestry Market Segmentation Data

- The two most prolific Tapestry Segmentation profiles in Downtown Des Plaines include “Old and Newcomers” and “Pleasantville.”

“Old and Newcomers”

Median Age: 39.4

Median Household Income: \$45,000*

- Mix of established long-term residents and young renters starting out
- Mostly renters who are just beginning their careers or renters that are retired
- Predominantly single households with mix of married couples (no children)
- Budget conscious, focused more on convenience than consumerism

**National average; Downtown Des Plaines median income is \$74,510*

“Pleasantville”

Median Age: 42.6

Median Household Income: \$93,000

- Households of older married-couple families with children over 18 (empty-nesters)
- More likely to own their home and spend money on home maintenance and improvement projects
- Still in the labor force, typically a dual-income household
- Not cost-conscious, willing to spend more on brands and experience they value

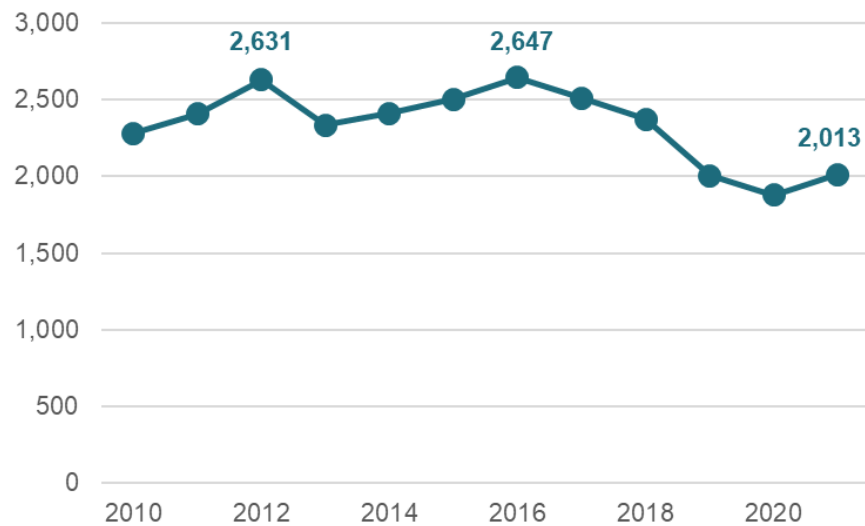
/// Employment

The job market in the Downtown Study Area of Des Plaines has experienced fluctuations since 2010, with significant disruptions noted during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Despite these challenges, the area's workforce has remained resilient.

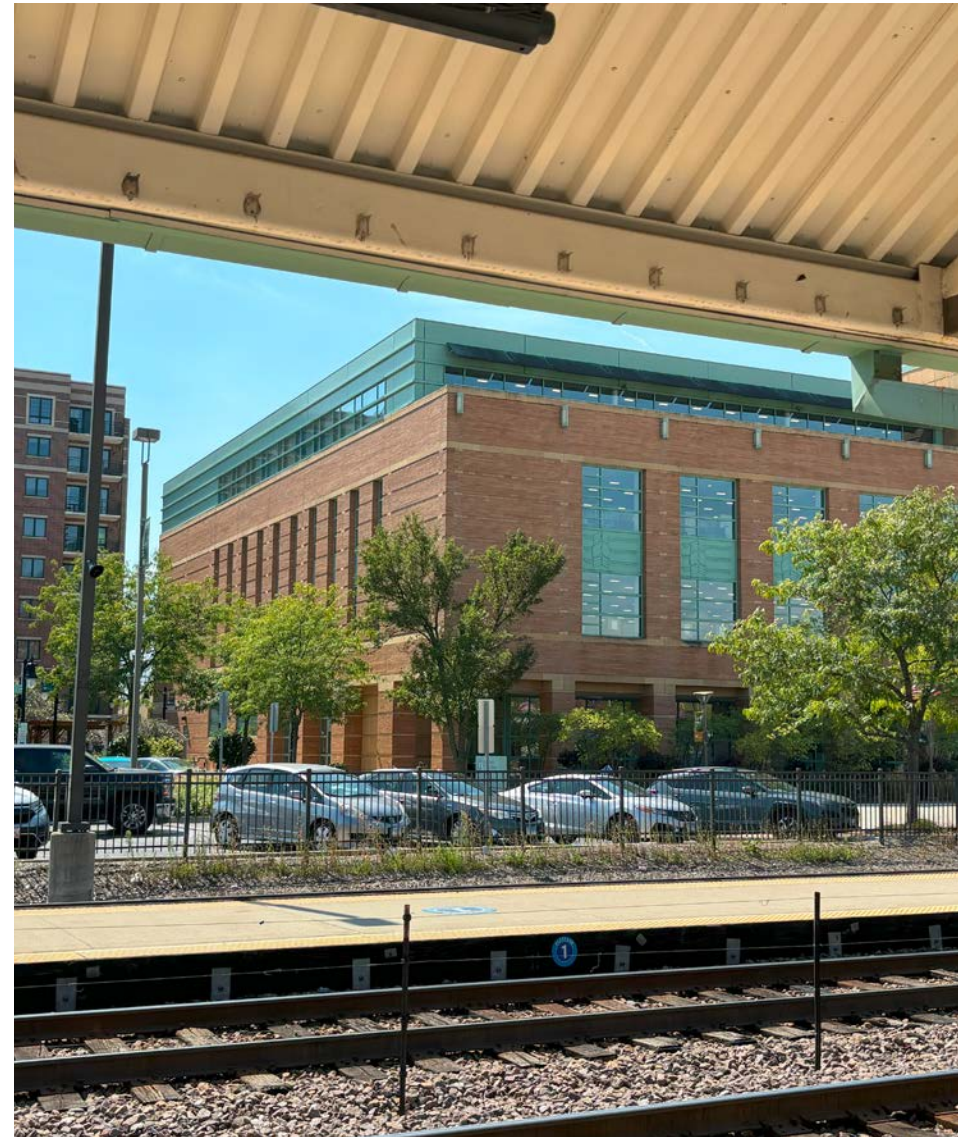
Jobs in Downtown Study Area

- In 2021, the leading industries in Downtown Des Plaines were healthcare, management, public administration, food services, and professional/technical services, indicating a diverse economic base that supports various sectors.
- Half of the employees working downtown commute less than 10 miles, with many coming from nearby locations such as Chicago, Des Plaines, or surrounding communities along Northwest Highway. This proximity to home suggests that downtown Des Plaines serves as an important employment hub for residents, reducing long commute times and supporting a local economy.

Jobs in Study Area, 2010 to 2021



Source: US Census Bureau Center for Economic Studies



/// Residential Market

Existing Housing Profile

Esri indicates that the housing landscape in Des Plaines, particularly in the Downtown Study Area, has seen notable growth in recent years.

- Des Plaines added 915 new units between 2017 and 2024, with 40% of those units located within the Downtown Study Area. Despite the addition of over 350 housing units downtown since 2017, occupancy rates have remained strong at 90%, signaling a positive absorption of the new units and continued demand for downtown living.
- The number of owner-occupied units in the Downtown Study Area has decreased, suggesting a trend from owner-occupied to increased quantities of renter-occupied units. This shift may reflect changes in the housing market and demographics, with more individuals choosing rental properties Downtown as the area evolves.

Existing Housing Profile, 2017 & 2024

	Downtown Study Area			Des Plaines		
	2017	2024	Change	2017	2024	Change
Owner-Occupied	1,837	1,817	-20	17,868	18,255	387
Percent	63%	55%	-1%	73%	72%	2%
Renter-Occupied	775	1,152	377	5,293	5,387	94
Percent	27%	35%	49%	22%	21%	2%
Vacant	306	322	16	1,326	1,495	169
Percent	10%	10%	5%	5%	6%	13%
Total Housing Units	2,917	3,291	374	24,486	25,405	915

Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2017 and 2024 Estimates

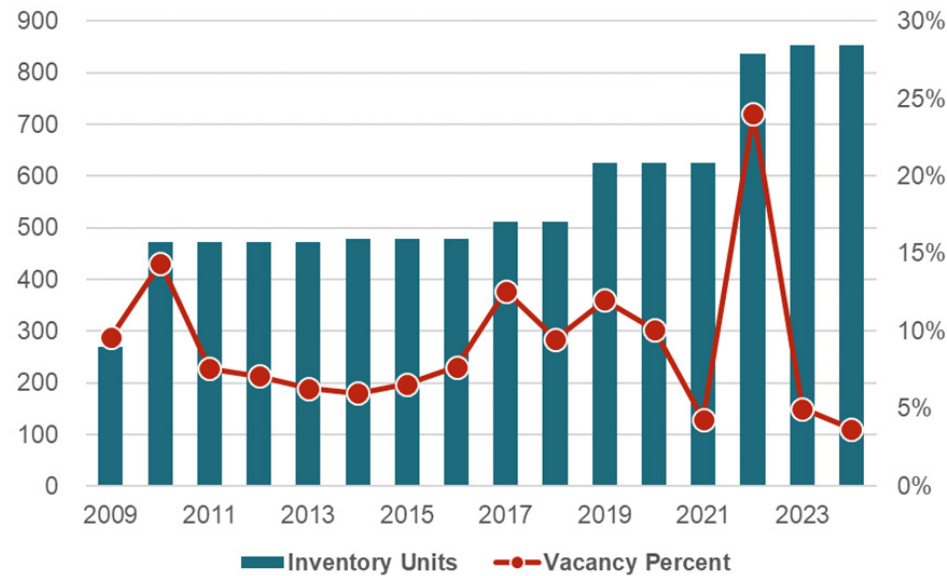


Rental Apartment Trends

The rental apartment market in the Downtown Study Area has shown consistent growth since 2010, indicating a demand for rental housing in the area.

- With 584 new rental units added between 2009 and 2024, this expansion highlights the area’s increasing appeal to renters and a market responding to urbanization and development trends. Despite a brief spike in vacancy rates in 2022 due to a surge of new units coming online at once, the vacancy rate has stabilized at 3.7% Downtown, while the citywide rate is 4.3%.
- A low vacancy rate is a key market indicator, signaling high demand and limited availability, which typically supports rental price stability or growth. The 2022 vacancy spike was temporary and likely reflective of the time needed to lease new units, reinforcing the idea that Downtown remains a competitive and sought-after location for renters.

Downtown Study Area Rental Market, 2009 to 2024

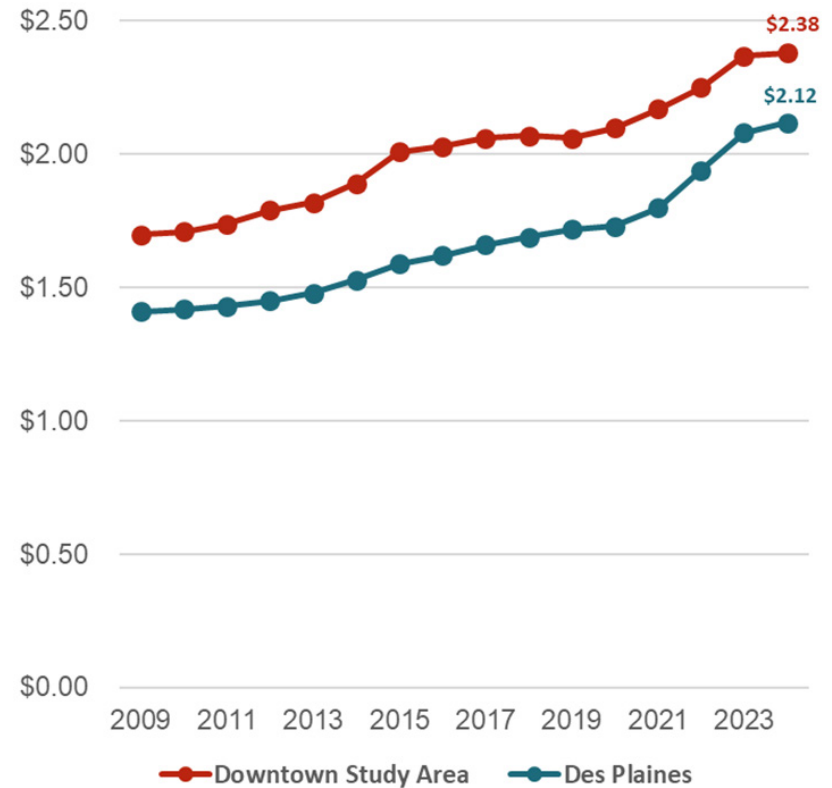


Source: CoStar, October 2024

The rental apartment market in the Study Area has seen a significant increase in asking rents over the past decade, reflecting growing demand and the area’s continued development.

- According to CoStar, asking rents per square foot have steadily risen from \$1.70/SF in 2010 to \$2.38/SF in 2024, marking a increase in rental rates. This trend highlights the increasing demand for living in downtown Des Plaines, likely driven by the convenience of being near a central business district.
- Asking rents Citywide were at an estimated \$2.12/SF in 2024, an increase from \$1.41/SF in 2010 but still lower than asking rents per square foot in the Downtown Study Area.

Downtown Study Area Rental Market, 2009 to 2024



Source: CoStar, October 2024

Since 2017, the Study Area has seen substantial growth with the addition of four new apartment buildings, contributing a total of 374 new units to the area's housing stock.

New Development

- These developments include two larger projects, Ellison and Welkin, as well as two smaller to mid-sized projects, Midtown Crossing and 1300 Jefferson St. According to CoStar, the current vacancy rate for these new developments is a low 5%, indicating strong demand for modern rental units.
- The average asking rent per square foot for these new developments is \$2.90, reflecting the premium nature of these properties in a rapidly developing downtown area.

Building	Units	Rent Type	Address	Year Built
Midtown Crossing	33	Affordable	751 Graceland Ave	2017
The Ellison	113	Market Rate	1555 Ellinwood Ave	2019
The Welkin	212	Market Rate	1425 Ellinwood Ave	2022
1300 Jefferson	16	Market Rate	1300 Jefferson St	2023

New Residential Development



1. Midtown Crossing



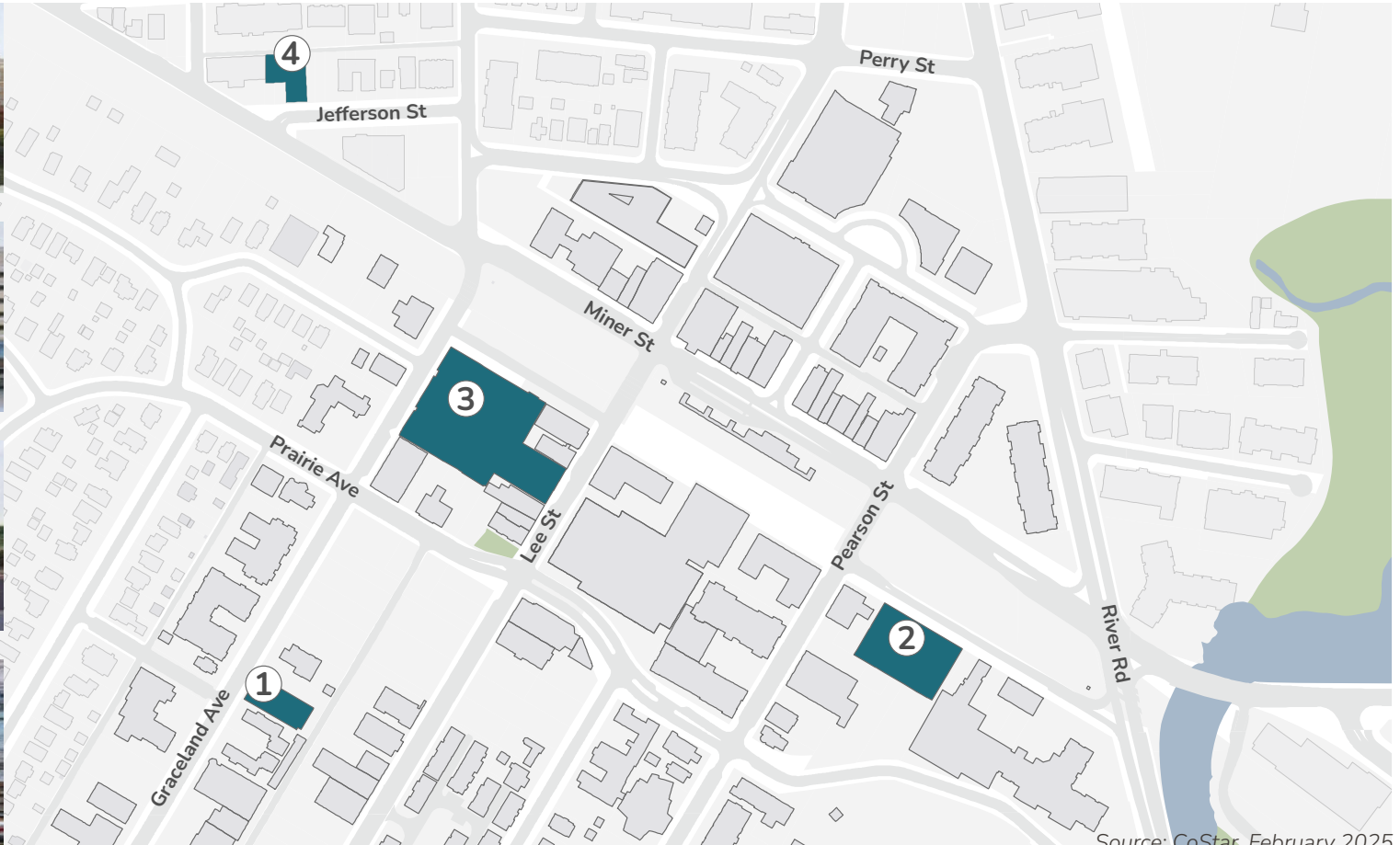
2. The Ellison



3. Welkin Apartments



4. 1300 Jefferson St



Source: CoStar, February 2025

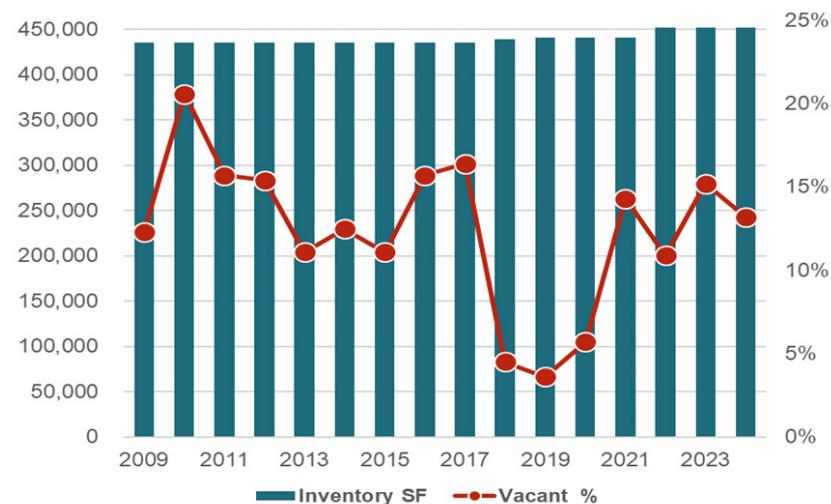
/// Retail Market

The existing commercial retail inventory and business mix in Downtown Des Plaines, which includes ground-floor spaces for traditional retail stores, personal and professional services, as well as dining establishments, is a key indicator of the area's economic activity and vitality.

Inventory

- There are nearly 3.7 million square feet of commercial retail space in Des Plaines; 440,000 square feet are located within the Downtown Study Area. The downtown retail market is diverse, with approximately 20% of the space classified as Class A retail, including notable properties like Metropolitan Square and ground-floor retail at The Welkin. Additionally, 30% of the retail inventory is Class B space, with an average construction year of 1974, reflecting a mix of older but functional properties.
- The remaining 50% is Class C retail space, with an average year built of 1939, indicating that much of the space is older and may require renovation or updates, especially where deferred capital expenditures are present. This variety in retail classifications illustrates the blend of modern and vintage retail properties that define the Downtown's commercial offerings.

Downtown Study Area Indicators, 2009 to 2024

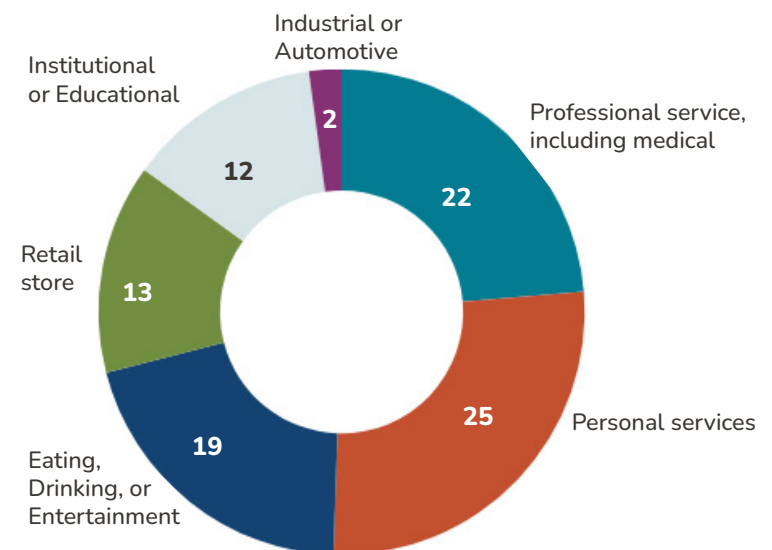


Source: CoStar, October 2024

Business Mix

- Out of Downtown's 120 ground-floor retail storefronts, 93 are occupied and 27 are vacant as of February 2025.
- The downtown business corridor is largely dominated by personal and professional service tenants, reflecting the area's focus on services that cater to residents and businesses. Many of these storefronts, however, do not have high levels of public interaction, as they are occupied by professional services, institutional or educational spaces, and industrial or auto-related businesses.
- This business mix indicates that while downtown Des Plaines is home to a variety of retail options, the area's commercial activity may be more service-oriented and less focused on traditional retail with direct consumer engagement.

Downtown Business Mix, 2024



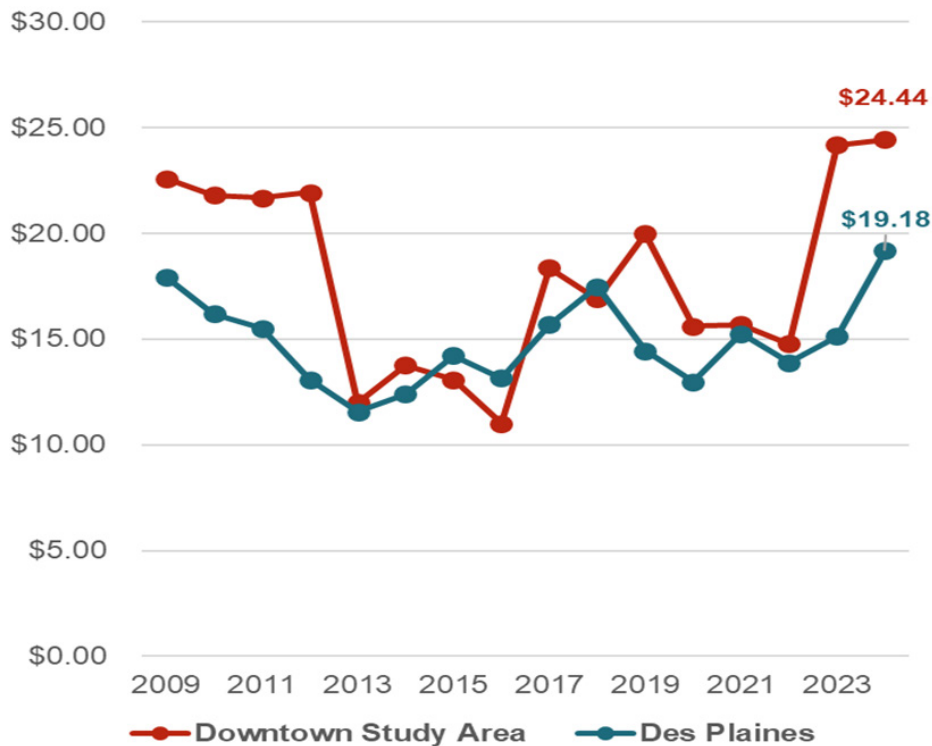
Source: City of Des Plaines

Rent Trends

- Over recent years, NNN rents in the Downtown Study Area have experienced significant increases, reflecting the growing demand for commercial spaces and the area's development.
- NNN rents citywide are generally lower than those downtown, which suggests that potential tenants may be priced out of the more premium locations in the heart of Des Plaines and may instead look to other areas of the city for more affordable options.

Triple Net Rent (NNN Rent) is a common lease structure where tenants pay rent plus additional costs such as property taxes, insurance, utilities, and maintenance.

NNN Rent in the Study Area and City, 2009 to 2024



Source: CoStar, October 2024

Vacancy Trends

- The vacancy rate for retail space in the Downtown Study Area has experienced significant fluctuations over the years, ranging from a high of 20% in 2010 to a low of 4% in 2019.
- Currently, the combined vacancy rate across all retail classes is at a relatively high 13.4%, indicating some challenges in leasing commercial retail spaces. Of the total 13.4% vacancy, 9% is in older Class C space and less than 5% is in Class A or B spaces, highlighting their higher desirability. It is typical for Class C spaces to have a higher vacancy rate than Class A or B, as it is often reflective of older buildings that may require updates or renovations to attract tenants.
- Available retail space is mainly concentrated in Metropolitan Square and older Class C buildings, highlighting the need for potential redevelopment or revitalization efforts in specific parts of Downtown.

Metropolitan Square

Metropolitan Square is a significant commercial property in Downtown Des Plaines, offering 89,257 square feet of retail space.

- 20% of this space remains vacant, reflecting a fluctuating vacancy rate over time. While the vacancy rate is lower than it was in 2010 and 2017, it remains above 20%, indicating ongoing challenges in fully leasing the property.
- The complex features 25 total storefronts, with 16 occupied at the time of the study, underscoring the potential for improvement in occupancy rates. Its performance will play a significant role in maintaining a vibrant and healthy downtown, making it an essential focus for future development and leasing strategies.



/// Competition

Downtown Des Plaines is in competition with multiple commercial retail corridors-- both inside and outside the city-- for resources, investment, and customers.

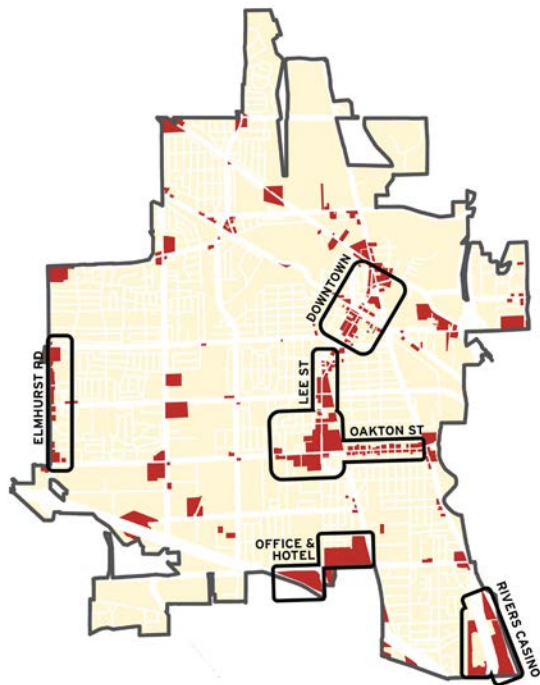
Internal Des Plaines Competition

- Each corridor caters to different types of business and customers, and while it is beneficial to have diversity in retail options, it can make it harder for the downtown to stand out or receive adequate support.

Nearby Competitive Corridors

- Compared to Downtown Mount Prospect, and Downtown Park Ridge, Downtown Des Plaines has the highest vacancy rate at 13.4% and the highest NNN asking rents at \$24.44.

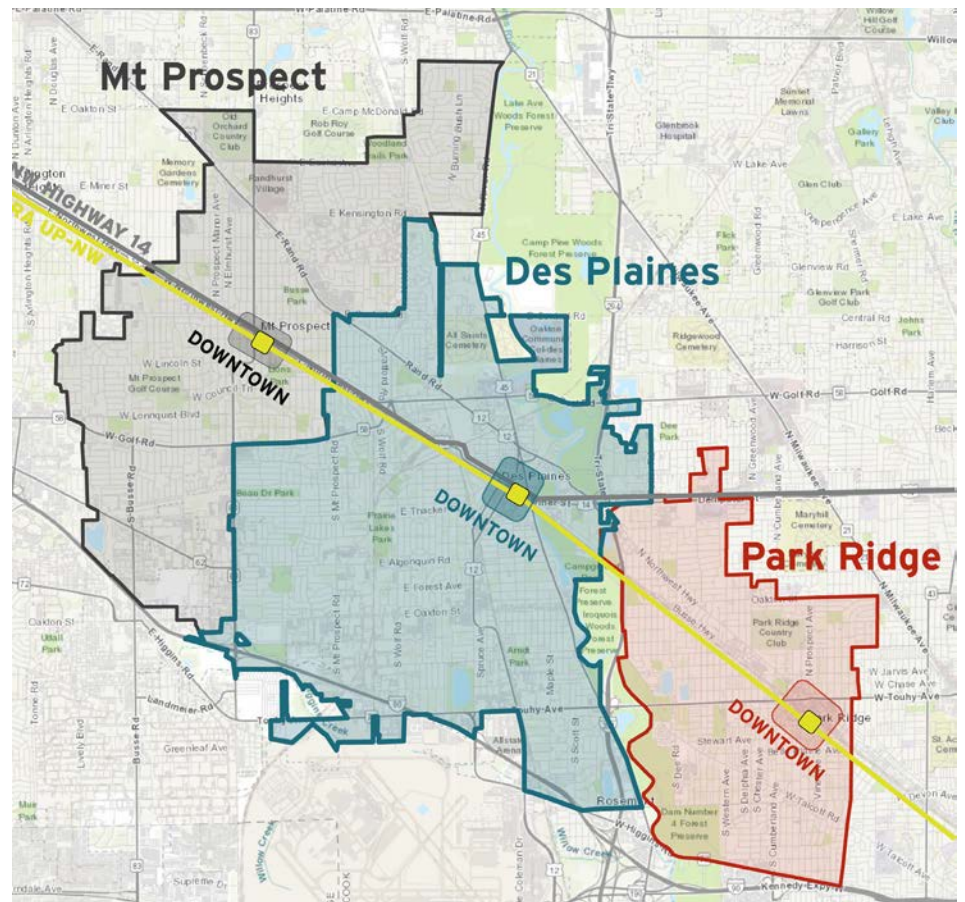
Des Plaines Commercial Corridors



Source: CMAP Land Use Data, 2018

Downtown Retail Market Indicators, 2024

Municipality	Retail SF	Vacancy Rate	Avg Asking Rent (NNN)
Des Plaines	439,465	13.4%	\$24.44/SF
Mount Prospect	300,778	3.5%	\$20.19/SF
Park Ridge	864,256	5.7%	\$24.02/SF



Source: CoStar, October 2024

/// Methodological Notes

The data and analysis for this report draw from several sources, including Esri Business Analyst and CoStar, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Downtown Des Plaines market. These sources offer insights into demographic trends, residential and commercial market conditions, and economic factors influencing the area.

Esri Business Analyst: Used for demographic and residential analysis.

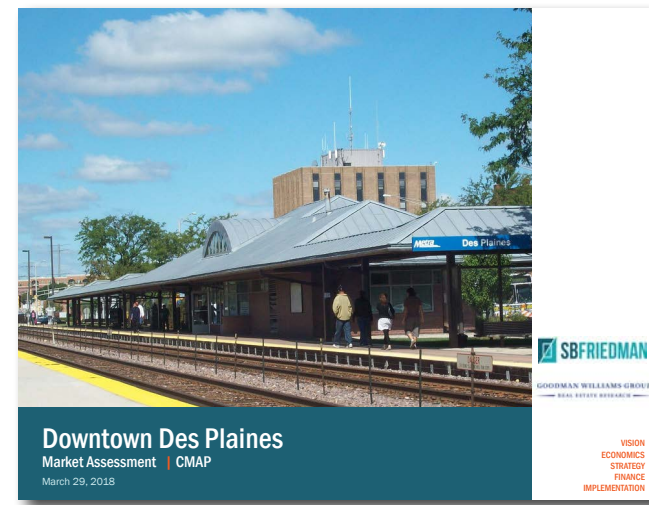
- Esri provides estimates based on data from the US Census Bureau, US Postal Service, Experian, and other sources to generate current year estimates.
- Since some of Esri's estimates rely on proprietary models, they may slightly vary from actual conditions, especially in fast-changing areas like Downtown Des Plaines.

CoStar: Used for residential and commercial market analysis.

- CoStar is a leading commercial real estate database providing information on key market indicators, which is essential for understanding trends in both the residential and commercial sectors.

Downtown Des Plaines Market Assessment, 2018:

- The 2018 Study serves as a benchmark for comparison in the 2024 Downtown Market Analysis, helping to track the area's progress over time.
- The 2018 Study Area is defined by the boundaries of Thacker St to the south, Graceland Ave to the west, River Rd to the east, and Harding Ave to the north (as shown in the map on page 5).





Engagement

Engagement Overview

Insights from key stakeholder interviews, public workshops, and an online survey helped inform the downtown development strategy and the criteria for City investment.

Stakeholder Interviews • September - December, 2024

The consultant team interviewed 20 stakeholders from the Des Plaines community and the surrounding area. The group included business and property owners, developers, local non-profit staff, City staff, and community advocates.

Public Workshop #1 • November 20, 2024

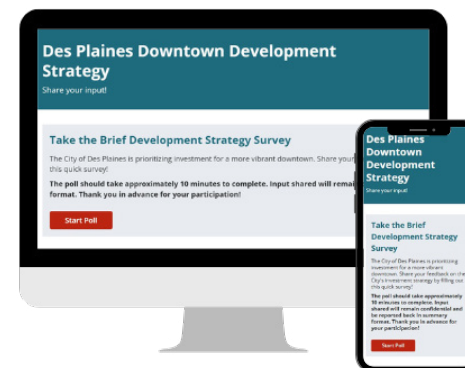
The first public workshop focused on introducing community members and members of City council to the project, existing conditions, market conditions and the proposed criteria for City investment in downtown projects and programs. Participants were also invited to share their feedback and questions with the consultant team during the public meeting recess.

Online Survey • November 20 - February 20, 2025

The online survey gathered feedback from the community on the direction of development in Downtown Des Plaines. The survey requested input on the proposed investment criteria and other measures of successful investment. The survey received 130 responses over three months.

Public Workshop #2 • February 10, 2025

The second public workshop gave an overview of the development criteria, as well as items from the Action Plan, and the five opportunity sites. Site scenarios were discussed and development criteria was applied to those scenarios. Members of the public were invited to share feedback on the trajectory of the plan and on the application of the criteria.



The Downtown Des Plaines Development Strategy Poll was open from November 2024 to February 2025, and garnered **130 responses** from community members.

/// Stakeholder Engagement

The Consultant Team interviewed a group of 20 Downtown Des Plaines stakeholders identified by City of Des Plaines staff. The stakeholders were asked about their relationship to Downtown Des Plaines and their experiences working with the City. The interviews yielded the following insights:

- **Working With the City + Incentives**

Stakeholders largely held that working with the City of Des Plaines is an easy, straightforward experience but that the incentive programs are not always clear or defined. Business owners note that the permitting process could be streamlined and that incentives could be helpful to improve downtown buildings that are in a state of disrepair.

- **Desired Downtown Uses**

Stakeholders called for more restaurants and more experiential uses in Downtown Des Plaines. Many mentioned the need for gathering spaces, green spaces, and improved connections to the natural areas around the Des Plaines River Trail.

- **Connectivity**

Interviewees said that Downtown Des Plaines is relatively accessible by a number of means, including Metra and vehicle access via I-90 and I-294. They also say that the Downtown is well-served by existing parking structures and on-street parking, although signage and wayfinding needs to be improved. There were comments about crossing the railroad and River Road feeling unsafe, and remarks that sidewalks and bike facilities could be enhanced.

- **Barriers to Development**

Stakeholders remarked upon some of the challenges surrounding development in Downtown Des Plaines. They said that a cohesive vision is needed, with more foot traffic and households to support new development. The desire for more events and programming Downtown was also expressed by some stakeholders.

“The City staff is responsive, which makes it easier to execute plans”

-Developer

“We need more restaurants; more experiences to support the Des Plaines Theater”

-Business owner

“Downtown is cut off from the natural resources to the east”

-Non-profit employee

“We need a vision to build into”

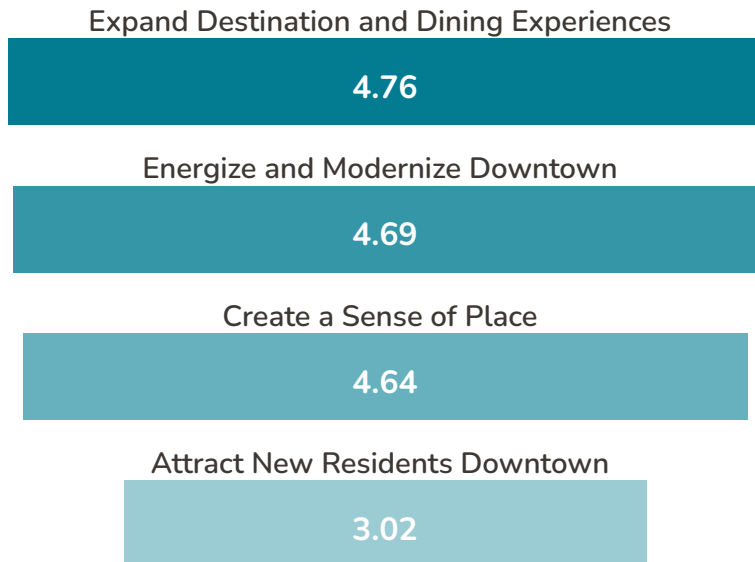
-Developer

/// Survey Findings

The online survey received 130 contributions during its open period from November 20th, 2024 through February 20, 2025. Of respondents, 94% were residents of Des Plaines, while 6% were members of other communities who work, go to school in, or visit Des Plaines. The majority of residents who participated have lived in the city for 11 years or more.

When asked to rank the importance of the drafted Investment Criteria (see Investment Criteria on page 38), respondents ranked **“Expand Destination and Dining Experiences”** as the most important goal, followed by **“Energize and Modernize Downtown”** and **“Create a Sense of Place.”** The goal with the lowest overall rank was **“Attract New Residents Downtown,”** which received an average score of 3, indicating that it was neither important nor unimportant to respondents.

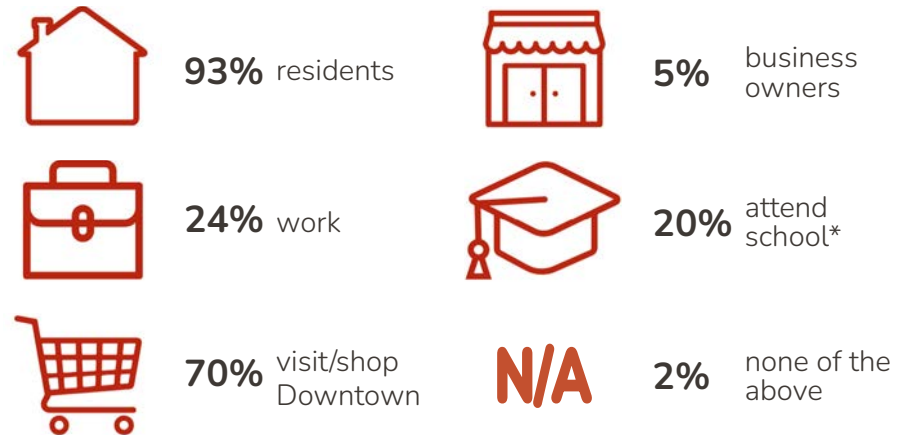
Survey Participants’ Ranking of Investment Criteria Goals



Respondents were asked to rank each goal on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being “Very Important,” 4 being “Somewhat Important,” 3 being “Neither Important Nor Unimportant,” 2 being “Somewhat Unimportant,” and 1 being “Not at All Important.” Average scores are shown above.

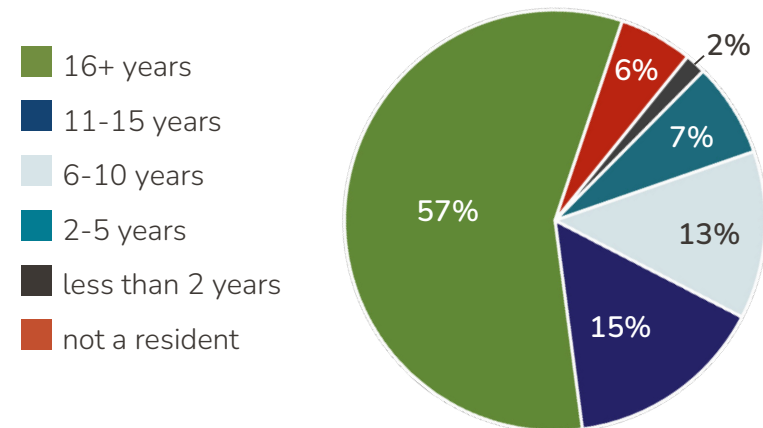
Participant Profile

Describe your relationship to Des Plaines:



*Includes respondents who attend school in District 62 or 63, or who have a household member who attend school in District 62 or 63

How long have you lived in Des Plaines?



The survey also solicited comments on the four Investment Criteria goals, and asked respondents for feedback on whether there are priorities for Downtown Des Plaines.

The common themes of responses to both of those questions were:

- **Demand for More Restaurants and Entertainment**

Comments emphasized the need for more diverse dining options and options with hours of operation extending into the evening, entertainment venues, and retail.

- **Impact of Residential Development**

Some respondents expressed concern over additional condos and apartment buildings being constructed downtown, especially in relation to those projects changing the architectural character of Des Plaines.

- **Small Business Support and Vacancy Revitalization**

Suggestions from respondents included supporting small businesses through affordable “incubator” spaces, subsidized rents, and repurposing existing buildings. Respondents also referenced vacant storefronts downtown and express the need for additional incentives or policies to support filling those storefronts.

- **Transportation and Parking**

Respondents to the survey note that confusion around parking and availability of parking are challenges in Downtown Des Plaines. Comments about transportation issues also focused on the quality and connectivity of sidewalks and other pedestrian paths.

- **Green Spaces and Sustainability**

Respondents stressed the need for green spaces, parks, and sustainable areas that foster community gatherings and events.

- **All-Ages Focus**

Multiple comments brought up the need for more spaces for teens, older kids, and families.

Representative Quotes from Open-Ended Survey Responses

- *“People gravitate towards food, so we need decent restaurants and good and easy to attend businesses with parking.”*
- *“As a life long Des Plaines resident who is now raising my own family here, I cannot stress enough how desperately we need restaurants and retail in the downtown area. I support the existing businesses now, but there simply aren’t enough options for dining or shopping. I would much rather spend my money locally, in my own town, versus Park Ridge, Arlington Heights, or online retailers.”*
- *“We need better mobility in the downtown area. It is not walkable and it’s uninviting. Too much traffic, cars, and busy streets make it unfriendly and unsafe for pedestrians.”*
- *“More of the original downtown buildings need to be preserved and utilized as well as adding a large green space. The surrounding towns all properly combined old and new, preserving the history while moving forward while also providing a central downtown area for events.”*
- *“As a mom of a teen, I often hear from parents that Des Plaines (and many of our neighboring towns) don’t have much to offer for our teen kids to do to get out and foster a bit of independence.”*
- *“A large green space park area for events. Also stop letting developments not add green space. They shouldn’t be able to just donate to the park district so the park district can put up more facilities instead of green space where it was removed.”*



Action Plan

/// Action Plan & Criteria Overview

The Downtown Des Plaines Economic Development Strategy Action Plan distills recommendations for the future of Downtown Des Plaines.

Investment Criteria

The Investment Criteria were created for the purpose of guiding the City of Des Plaines in strategically investing in the Downtown to produce catalytic, vibrant development. They were informed by multiple sources, including:

- 📄 *2019 Des Plaines Comprehensive Plan*;
- 📄 *2022 Strategic Plan*; and
- ★ *Downtown Redevelopment Goals*, drafted based on meetings and conversations with community stakeholders, input from the public, and discussions with the City of Des Plaines staff and leadership.

Each Criteria goal is broken into distinct actions pulled from the above sources. Sources for the actions will be denoted using the above symbology.

See these Criteria applied to recommended redevelopment strategies in the *Opportunity Sites* chapter (page 53) and as a fillable Spreadsheet for scoring new development projects in the *Appendix* (page 77).

Downtown Experience

The Action Plan also details several additional recommended Downtown Experience initiatives that will help propel Downtown Des Plaines toward vibrancy and prosperity. These initiatives are not development-specific and thus cannot be applied neatly to new proposed developments. However, they are recommendations that will promote additional economic and pedestrian activity in the downtown area.

Return on Investment

The actions within this Action Plan represent a broader application of traditional ROI, including both financial and intangible benefits to Downtown. The City's investments aligned with the criteria bridge gaps between market's willingness to accept risk while also accelerating progress toward reactivating and revitalizing Downtown Des Plaines.



1. Expand Destination & Dining Experiences

The desire for a larger variety of dining options was a consistent theme in stakeholder engagement and in previous planning efforts.

1.1 Create a new restaurant cluster along Miner Street.

There is demand for additional restaurants and dining options in the Downtown Study Area, especially those that are co-located or supportive of the Des Plaines Theater and the convenience of Downtown to the area's transportation system. Capitalizing on the existing foot traffic and tourism to the theater by offering additional nearby drinking and dining options will help Des Plaines become more competitive with nearby downtowns such as Arlington Heights and Park Ridge, which each boast far more restaurants.

Des Plaines can commit to this vision by prioritizing this area of Downtown for its incentive programs (see *Incentives* chapter, page 50).



1.2 Engage existing restaurants to better accommodate evening visitors, and actively recruit new restaurants to locate downtown.

Adding a larger supply of restaurants to Downtown will make it a more attractive place for people inside and outside the city to spend time. Currently, many of the Downtown Des Plaines restaurants operate at irregular hours that do not extend late into the night. Through coordinated activities with restaurant operators, a more consistent set of operating hours and marketing of the Downtown can yield mutual benefits for all.

1.3 Encourage the Theatre, downtown restaurants and businesses to develop and market creative packages and incentives to attract visitors and patrons.

The City should consider convening business owners in the Downtown area to work collaboratively on programming, marketing and events to attract more customers and foot traffic to the area.

This action item could work in tandem with the recommended Downtown Business Group in the *Enhance Downtown Experience* section, page 45.

Through 2024, the Des Plaines Theater operates two different eating and drinking establishments on-site, including a bar and a pizza restaurant, with a “speakeasy” room on the second floor. However, these businesses have typically been operational only on evenings when there are scheduled events.

1.4 Activate Downtown Des Plaines through arts and culture initiatives.

The rejuvenation of the Des Plaines Theater and the City's recent acquisition of the Leela Arts building, coupled with the city's active arts and culture communities, set the stage for Downtown Des Plaines to be a destination for arts and cultural programming. Bolstering these efforts contributes to cultural tourism and drives additional patronage to Downtown businesses.

Strengthening partnerships with the Des Plaines Theater, Des Plaines Public Library, local organizations including the Des Plaines Arts Council and The Des Plaines Art Guild, schools and youth arts organizations, and local artists can help add vibrancy and vitality to the area, and can contribute to meaningful community connections.

1.5 Continue to provide incentives targeted at specific commercial sectors to complement the vision of Downtown Des Plaines as a retail and entertainment district.

Continuing to provide the city's existing Business Assistance Grant incentives to developers and business owners is a key way to maintain existing businesses and to foster an inviting environment for retail and entertainment uses. Additional incentive programs can only further these efforts (see *Recommended Incentives* section on page 52 for recommended incentive structure).

Separately from this strategy, the City is currently coordinating with the owner of the former Olivetti's site regarding a potential redevelopment of the property. See more about this project in *Recent and Ongoing Development*, page 54.



/// 2. Energize & Modernize Downtown

New development in Downtown Des Plaines should propel the area toward a more vibrant, lively future.

★ 2.1 Activate street life with businesses on the ground floor.

The existing zoning in the Study Area, C-5 Commercial, disallows dwelling units below the second floor of any building, which is already powerful in ensuring that the streets and sidewalks are active. This can be further bolstered by encouraging ground floor businesses along key streets that attract additional foot traffic, such as retail and restaurant establishments. A vibrant street life with active sidewalks improves the economic vitality of an area, and brings business owners new customers.

▼ 2.2 Seek out a shared-space facility to help emerging entrepreneurs bring their business concepts to the local economy.

Entrepreneurs are critical drivers of economic development and vitality in many communities, including Des Plaines. Given the current absence of market demand for office space, the City can incentivize fresh ideas and investment from entrepreneurs by considering a shared work space downtown. Such a facility would be funded by memberships and could serve as a valuable launch point for small, “incubator” businesses that may not otherwise have the funds for their own space.



The Welkin provides over 11,500 square feet of Class A retail space on its ground floor. The site's proximity to the Metra station and the downtown core makes this space a prime opportunity to promote vibrant street life. A new hot pot restaurant opening in this space in 2025 was supported through a City Business Assistance Grant and will be a key anchor in drawing more people out of their homes and cars to visit Downtown Des Plaines.

★ **2.3 Support local businesses to grow and attract new customers downtown.**

The City of Des Plaines should recommit resources and incentives to help support the continued growth and maintenance of existing local businesses downtown. While attracting additional businesses downtown is an important component of energizing the area, it should not come at the expense of beloved local businesses that have become institutions in the City. The retention of local businesses and preservation of the historic charm of Downtown Des Plaines were repeated themes of community engagement. Employing many of the actions in this Action Plan will positively impact the growth of existing businesses in the area.

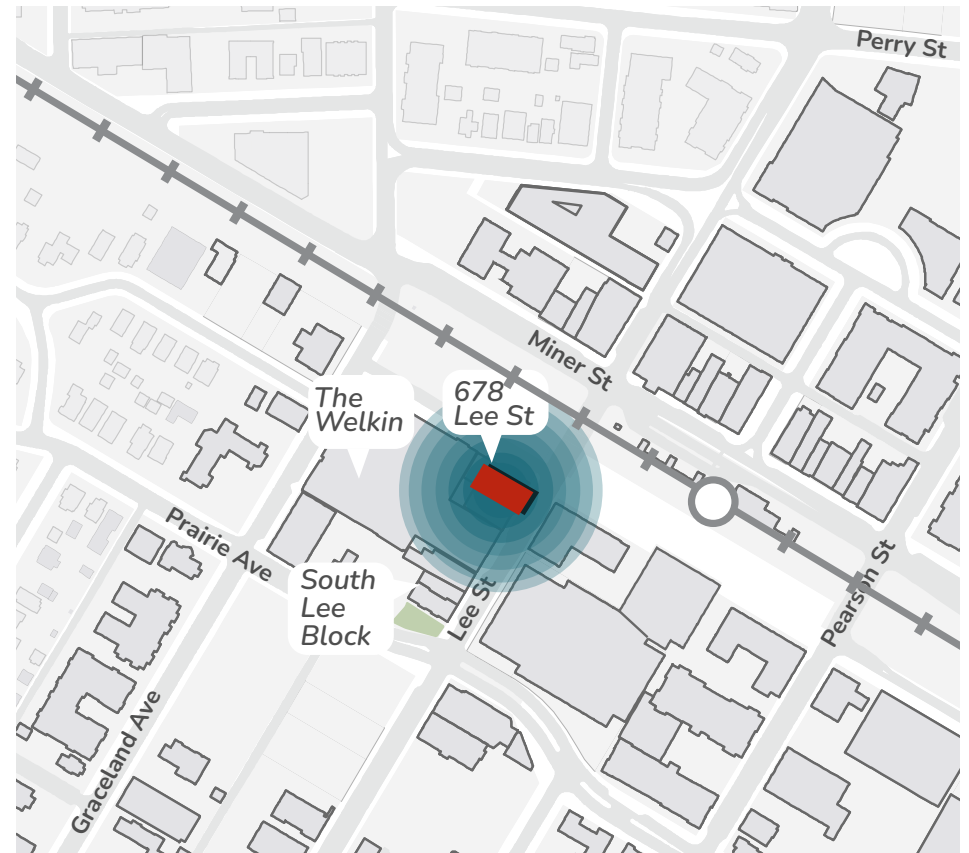
★ **2.4 Create economic value by strengthening the real estate property tax base to solidify overall downtown property values.**

A strong and stable tax base is key in any city's future economic development. Des Plaines has been strengthening its property tax base and improving its downtown property values by supporting and incentivizing the sale or lease of vacant retail and other properties downtown by private investors or developers.

★ **2.5 Catalyze development by spurring or supporting adjacent city-owned or key redevelopment projects.**

The City has already invested heavily in projects in the Downtown area (see *Recent and Ongoing Development*, page 54). Capitalizing on this investment is key in creating an exciting cluster of economic activity. Focusing efforts on key vacancies or opportunity areas adjacent to these City-owned or redeveloped sites can create a multiplier effect, catalyzing investment in those areas.

The map at the right illustrates an example of this effect. A potential destination restaurant use at 678 Lee Street will draw additional activity to the corner of Lee and Ellinwood and will be catalytic for successful new development on the southern portion of that block of Lee.



A new, multi-story restaurant on the corner of Lee and Ellinwood Streets will not only support existing entertainment and retail uses downtown, but it will also likely spur additional development and investment in its immediate vicinity. The City can prepare for renewed interest in the segment of the block south of the site by employing development strategies in the short and long term (see **Site 4** in the *Opportunity Sites* chapter, page 71).

/// 3. Create a Sense of Place

Future development in Downtown Des Plaines can reinforce the area's overall sense of place and identity as a vibrant multi-use business and residential district.

3.1 Enhance Metropolitan Square to create a gathering place for families and friends to eat, drink, shop and play.

Metropolitan Square is a sizeable opportunity for the City of Des Plaines to create some much-desired gathering spaces and areas for outdoor events and dining. The City can improve upon the experience for visitors to Metropolitan Square and can create those additional "people places" in the area by instituting a new, modified streetscaping plan.

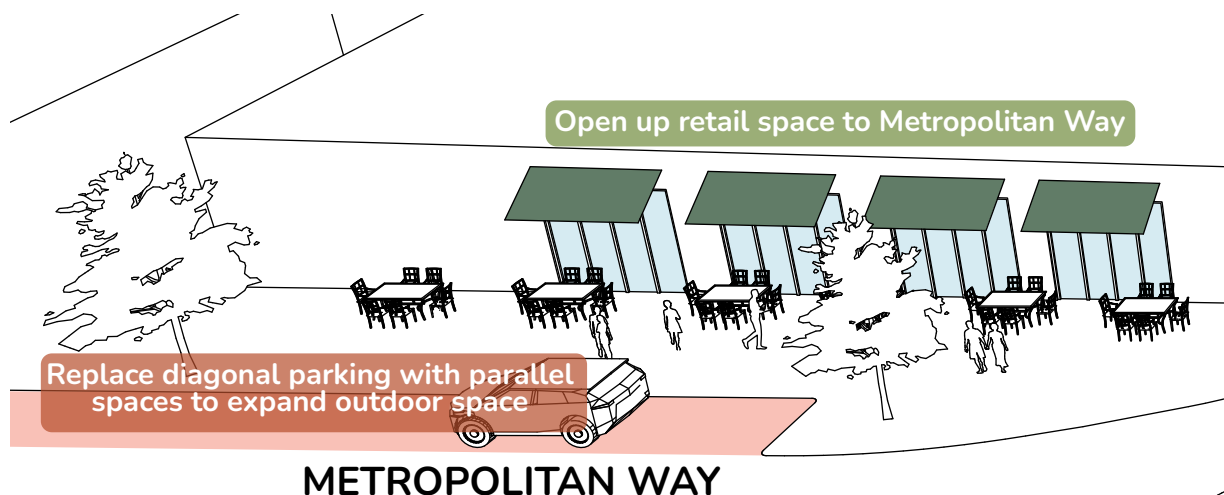
The streetscape plan for Metropolitan Square should connect to other popular spaces and places in the Downtown, including the Miner Street corridor, the Metra station, and Library Plaza. New parking configurations for outdoor dining, public spaces, landscaping, and pedestrian connections to the Elks Lodge can entice more visitors to explore the area and increase activity and connectivity among key nodes throughout Downtown Des Plaines.

3.2 Explore options for outdoor experiences and public gathering places (dining and other).

While the City should strive to add and retain more dining options in the Downtown area, there should be a concurrent effort to encourage business owners to offer outdoor dining if their locations allow for it. A key opportunity for outdoor dining and other public gathering space is the intersection of Miner and Metropolitan Way. If the adjacent vacant former restaurant on the northeast corner of this intersection is filled with a new business, this area can be a lively and inviting vista at the main pedestrian entrance to Metropolitan Square.

★ 3.3 Enhance downtown character by re-using iconic buildings or replacing vacant or underutilized buildings not contributing to downtown character.

Downtown Des Plaines is home to numerous iconic and architecturally historic buildings (see *Identity & Character* section, page 13). Re-use and preservation of these buildings with new uses should continue to be prioritized where economically viable, building on investments in the Des Plaines Theater, 678 Lee Street and the Leela Building.



◀ The vacant former restaurant space at the entrance to Metropolitan Square is an ideal space to introduce new placemaking and outdoor dining initiatives as it is highly visible along Miner Street and acts as a welcoming gateway to other Metropolitan Square businesses.

/// 4. Provide Additional Housing

The success of Downtown Des Plaines depends on a vibrant mix of busienses and residents. The City should continue to support residential growth in the Downtown, bringing people and energy to the area.

🏠 4.1 Pursue the development of new multifamily and mixed-use buildings.

In recent years, Des Plaines has added several new multifamily apartment buildings to its downtown. Continued Downtown residential demand, especially rental demand, is expected. Downtown's walkability and convenience to several employment centers makes it attractive to new residents, and this will only grow with renewed investment in the area. Additional housing typologies, such as townhomes, should be explored, particularly in the periphery of the Study Area.

🏠 4.2 Continue to attract higher density and mixed-use development, including those with first floor retail and dining.

The City should continue to support mixed-use multifamily buildings with commercial ground floors, particularly along Ellinwood and Miner Streets. Multi-family buildings at the further edges of the Downtown may not be able to support ground floor commercial development and can instead be home to amenity spaces for the building residents which will still help activate the street edge.

🏠 4.3 Pursue high-quality housing for residents in all stages of life.

Downtown is an attractive place to live for residents and newcomers of all ages and stages. While the area is currently home to primarily smaller households and individuals of young professional age — 25 to 44 — the City should encourage mixes of unit sizes and layouts to provide options for growing families, multi-generational households, and independent living.

▶ The Ellison apartments along Ellinwood near the southeast gateway to the Downtown Study Area provide 113 dwelling units to new residents who value close proximity to O'Hare, Rosemont, and other employment centers.



/// 5. Enhance Downtown Experience

Downtown Experience recommendations promote ease of access, lively streetscapes, and economic growth in the downtown area.

5.1 Devise and promote a regular cadence of events in the Downtown area.

Responses to the public survey and interviews with key stakeholders revealed a desire for more to do Downtown outside of shopping and dining. A schedule of recurring events such as food trucks, live outdoor performances, and outdoor children's movies can be coupled with more focused weekend and week-long promotional events.

An event series to celebrate the renewed effort to revitalize Downtown Des Plaines may also work to generate buzz and excitement from the community. With several development projects in the pipeline downtown, residents may be curious about the changes taking place. Capitalizing on this curiosity by creating programming to celebrate the implementation of this and other City plans can generate activity downtown and pride in place.

5.2 Create a coordinated branding, marketing, and physical wayfinding scheme to be adopted by all of Downtown Des Plaines.

Powerful branding for the Downtown Des Plaines area can help boost awareness of the City's unique features and assets, and can be used to help market the Downtown to potential developers or business owners looking for new space. It is recommended that the brand adopted by Downtown be incorporated into:

- All Downtown signage and wayfinding
- Streetscape features such as street furniture and bicycle racks
- Social media and website presence
- Events materials
- Marketing materials for business development and outreach

Strategy in Action: Making it Fun in Lemont's Downtown

Downtown Lemont, IL, underwent a rebranding and communications strategy that included a website redesign, a new logo, a downtown mascot (pictured below), and the creation of a unique brand identity that celebrated Lemont's history and culture. The strategy was the kickoff for a renewed focus on a full Downtown events calendar, including themed scavenger hunts and holiday gatherings, which often celebrated local businesses in the area. The [Lemont Downtown website](#) features an easy-to-navigate tool for finding new businesses to support and new things to do in Downtown Lemont.



5.3 Create a Business Association to work hand in hand with the City to solely market downtown enhancements and redevelopment strategies.

Creating a Business Association or other business owners and operators group can help facilitate some of the strategies in this action plan and foster a stronger business community in the downtown area. The downtown Business Association's function would convene to:

- Coordinate programming and logistics for recurring events, promotions, and holiday gatherings;
- Collaborate on business promotional programs including advertising, posting of promotional materials at approved public locations;
- Provide input regarding city-wide marketing materials, decorations, pennants, banners, etc. at City-owned properties;
- Share important knowledge and best practices among Downtown businesses and prospective business owners interested in moving to Downtown Des Plaines.

This Business Association may operate independently or as a subgroup of the existing Chamber of Commerce and can coordinate promotions and participation with area philanthropic and community organizations.

It is recommended that funding for this downtown Business Association come from the City's general funds, generated through the use of a Special Service Area (SSA) or Business Improvement District (BID), or via a membership fee paid by participating businesses to support promotions, campaigns, events, and education.

5.4 Consider joining Main Street America as a member in order to stay updated and knowledgeable on downtown experience enhancement strategies.

Many of the suggested actions in this strategy are in alignment with the mission of Main Street America (MSA), an organization that helps strengthen and reenergize downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts. By becoming a member of MSA, the City of Des Plaines can take advantage of resources, knowledge sharing, events, conferences, and networking within the downtown revitalization field. Joining a professional organization like MSA can assist the City in continuing its positive momentum and in learning about new practices and strategies to reinvigorate Downtown Des Plaines.

Strategy in Action: Mount Prospect Downtown Merchants Association

Founded in 2003, the Mount Prospect Downtown Merchants Association is a coalition of business owners who work together to bring awareness and new business to downtown Mount Prospect. The Merchants Association also promotes high-quality products and services downtown and encourages best practices in business and ethics. The group, currently over 60 businesses strong, hosts annual flagship programs, such as Downtown Trick or Treat and a Progressive Dinners series, as well as unique events that are family-focused and pedestrian friendly.



Image Source: Mount Prospect Downtown Merchants Association

5.5 Improve parking and wayfinding signage to highlight location, direction, and availability of parking spaces.

A repeated concern from public engagement both on the online survey and in public workshops was that the current parking situation Downtown needs to be improved through better signage, wayfinding and the consolidation, simplification, and posting of parking regulations. Participants stated that it is difficult to understand the availability and regulations of each lot, garage, and even on-street parking. Des Plaines currently offers parking in surface lots, parking decks, and on-street spaces - a scarce resource in many downtowns.

To remedy this, the City should invest in improving the overall wayfinding for Downtown parking and focus on signage and tools that will make finding available parking easy for visitors and residents. Electronic signs reporting the current parking stall availability in lots and garages and a uniform, recognizable, and easy-to-understand form for location signage can all alleviate parking stress and improve the experience of driving to, and staying in, Downtown Des Plaines.

Strategy in Action: Kansas City's Zona Rosa Parking Signage

The Zona Rosa district in Kansas City, MO, is home to shopping, dining, entertainment, apartment living, and plenty of parking. To make sense of parking locations and availability while also fitting in with Zona Rosa's existing wayfinding aesthetic, tailored electronic parking signs were installed throughout the area. These signs direct visitors to parking and report the number of stalls currently available.



Source: SignalTech

5.6 Conduct a new parking management study.

As of 2025, the most recent parking study of Downtown Des Plaines is from 2007. At the time of the 2007 study, there were 7,321 parking stalls in the downtown study area. The study suggested that the inventory of parking could support increased density of development in the future. Much has changed in Downtown Des Plaines since 2007, including numerous high-density multifamily residential developments as well as new retail and entertainment developments.

The City should engage in another parking utilization and management study, particularly in the downtown area, in order to gain an updated outlook on current parking inventory, demand, and needs. This study can be conducted in tandem with the new wayfinding and signage program to ensure that each effort supports the other.

5.7 Update the existing Business District Design Guidelines and implement them for all future development.

The City's existing Business District Design Guidelines were published in 2005. They lay out desired aesthetics for signage, streetscape features, building design, and placemaking elements like street furniture. Many of the recommendations within the 2005 Guidelines are still pertinent to Downtown Des Plaines, but it is recommended that they be reviewed and updated where necessary. Particular attention should be paid to desired building materiality for downtown developments.

Within the Guidelines, specific corridor plans are dictated, including designs for key sites along the corridor and overall suggestions for façade treatments and streetscape elements. It is recommended that Miner Street and Ellinwood Street get a similar treatment in a future update of these guidelines.

5.8 Utilize the City-owned parcel at the north end of Downtown as a public green space and stormwater management feature.

A green area in the City-owned parcel at 520 S River Road can provide a desired green space in the Downtown area. This site's proximity to the flood plain means that a green feature here can also work to manage stormwater and alleviate flooding. A stormwater basin near this site was suggested as part of the 2019 Des Plaines Comprehensive Plan. A right-of-way vacation of part of Perry Street west of River Road abutting the City's parking lot would increase the utility of this space and allow for a safer, better integrated pedestrian connection from this new open space area to the adjacent Elks Lodge site and Metropolitan Square..

5.8 Develop a network of green and gathering spaces throughout Downtown.

An additional concern from the public engagement for this effort was the lack of centralized gathering space or green space in Downtown Des Plaines. Currently, events are held at the Des Plaines Library Plaza and Metropolitan Square, but each has limited space and amenities.

While the location of Downtown Des Plaines is advantageous in many ways, it is in part hindered by some features of its land use, for instance, the Metra tracks and multiple rows of parking bisecting the area. For that reason, a network of green spaces and gathering nodes throughout the Downtown may be a more achievable vision. The reimagined green area in the northern City-owned parcel (referenced in action 5.6) can serve as the northern gateway to this network.

Moving south from that area, investments in Metropolitan Square can foster a welcoming and pleasant pedestrian environment and central open space at the center of the development. This will include the implementation of prior City plans to improve branding; update signage; and improve the functionality of the centralized gathering space within Metropolitan Square with an expanded, no-step flexible space for larger events and street fairs. Improvements to this area may also include new features such as sun shades, festive lighting, and/or water features such as a fountain or children's splash pad.

Strategic use of shared streets and landscaping in this area will promote opportunities for special events and gatherings as well as day-to-day outdoor dining.

Extended sidewalks and small reductions in surface parking south of the Metra tracks will help make the connection from Metropolitan Square to Library Plaza, the third node for gathering and a strong existing asset for Downtown Des Plaines.

Thorough greening of Ellinwood and proper signage and pedestrian crossing improvements, an eastern pathway can better connect Downtown with the Des Plaines River Trail.

Gateways to Downtown should also receive additional landscaping treatments to help signify arrival to the space. These gateways, and other urban design recommendations, are included on the following page.

Enhancing Downtown Des Plaines Through Strategic Urban Design

The addition of outdoor plazas, creative lighting, and other streetscape elements can help add to the area's unique sense of place and contribute to a more pleasant pedestrian environment. Locations where these features may be appropriate are included on the map that follows.





Incentives

Existing Programs

The City of Des Plaines offers assistance to businesses that need help improving, expanding, or locating to Des Plaines. The **Business Assistance Grant (BAG)** program distributes reimbursement grants in which the City pays back upon its completion between 12% and 50% of the total eligible cost of the business's project. The BAG program was designed to support business retention, expansion, and to attract new businesses to locate in Des Plaines.

To be eligible for a Business Assistance Grant, the applicant must be an existing or a future business with an affirmation that the owner will seek out and receive all necessary licenses and certifications. All grants are reimbursed after satisfaction of program requirements (occupancy, clearance of liens, and proof of payment to contractors).

The grants are offered at three different levels:

Sprout

Sprout grants support projects with eligible costs up to \$20,000. The grant provides a 50%/50% match of private investment with an award up to \$10,000.

Boost

Boost grants support projects with eligible costs from \$20,000 to \$140,000. The grant provides a 25%/75% match of private investment with an award up to \$40,000.

Growth

Growth grants support projects with eligible costs from \$140,000 to \$1,000,000. The grant provides a 12.5%/87.5% match of private investment with an award up to \$150,000.

The City of Des Plaines prides itself on being a business-friendly community that is willing to provide tailored attention to new businesses to foster a thriving economic ecosystem. The City's [website](#) hosts resources on the development process, available assistance programs, and business registration.

The City also has been investing in large development projects through assistance toward land acquisition and support for development expenses based on the public benefits the project is bringing to the City.

Development Assistance Incentive

The City provides significant incentives for large-scale redevelopment projects in the downtown area. This effort aims to drive substantial economic growth and enhance the overall quality of life in the City's core. Redevelopment projects must align with the City's vision and downtown plans. The subsidies, which can be in the form of grants, revenue sharing, and/or loans, may cover a substantial portion of redevelopment costs. Typically, these public/private partnerships are structured so that the City's investment is equal to the City's portion of local and state sales and property tax increases generated by the project within 5-10 years, ideally. Historically, the City's investments in large-scale projects have ranged from 10%-20% of total project costs.



Source: City of Des Plaines

/// Incentive Recommendations

In addition to the existing business grants offered by the City, there are other incentives that may help draw new vitality and development to the Downtown.

Establish a new “Catalyst” incentive program for redevelopment projects with costs exceeding \$1 million but less than large new construction projects exceeding \$5 million.

As the City intensifies its efforts to boost economic growth downtown by supporting business expansion through building improvement projects, there is a need to aid mid-sized redevelopment projects that exceed the parameters of the current Business Assistance Grant tiers. These major building renovation projects, with eligible costs surpassing \$1,000,000, yet not on the scale of typical large redevelopment projects, will require additional support from the City. This incentive program should be marketed alongside the existing incentives in order to draw more private development interest in the Downtown.

Market a Restaurant Incentive program for Downtown Des Plaines.

The City of Des Plaines should craft and market a Restaurant Incentive program to support existing local restaurants expanding or improving facilities, attract new restaurants to relocate into downtown Des Plaines, and to encourage developers to include restaurants in new developments. The Restaurant Incentive program can be based on and similar to existing incentive programs, but should be specifically marketed and highlighted as a restaurant attraction program. This program should expand the list of eligible expenditures to include additional systems and equipment unique to restaurants, which otherwise act as a barrier to entry for entrepreneurs looking to establish new restaurants within tenant spaces which were not previously used as restaurant space.





Opportunity Sites

/// Recent & Ongoing Development

The Downtown Study Area has seen a number of recent residential and commercial developments, and is currently undergoing several more development projects. These each have different levels of City involvement.

Recent Projects



The Des Plaines Theater

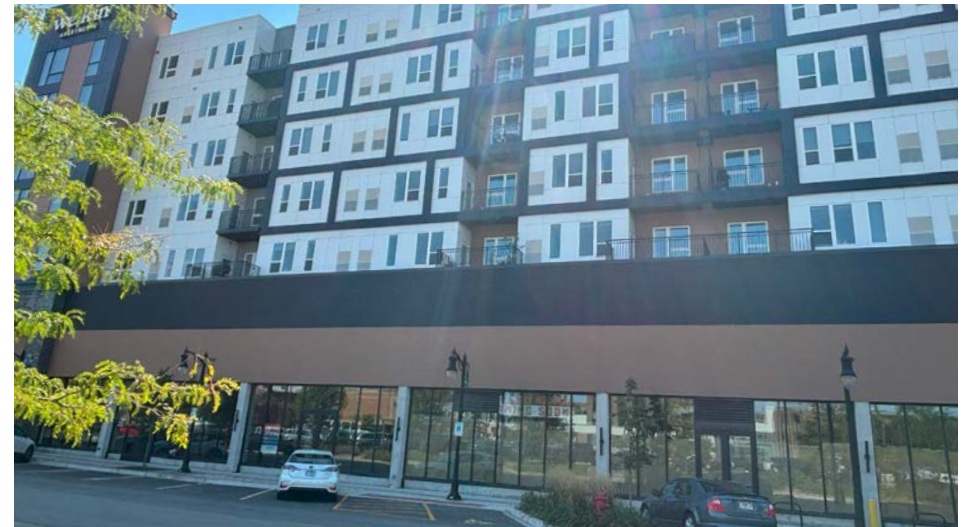
In 2018, the City of Des Plaines acquired and restored the historic **Des Plaines Theater**, a 100-year-old former vaudeville theater built in an art deco style. The City purchased the theater for \$1.2 million, and invested over \$6 million to renovate and revitalize it. The theater reopened in 2021 and currently houses a pizza restaurant and a speakeasy in addition to the theater space. The theater hosts live concerts and comedy performances by artists from around the country.

City's Role: Acquisition and restoration

Total Development Cost: \$7.8 million (\$1.2 million acquisition + \$6.6 million in restoration)

Total City Investment: 100%

Current Status: Open and operating



The Welkin Apartments & Galaxy Hot Pot

The **Welkin Apartments** were constructed in 2022, adding 212 new units to the area along with a large Class A retail space below. A Korean hot pot restaurant, Galaxy Hot Pot & Sushi, opened on the ground floor in 2025, bringing an experiential dining concept to Downtown Des Plaines. The restaurant developer received a Business Assistance Grant in the amount of \$100,000 from the City.

City's Role: Awarding Business Assistance Grant

Total Restaurant Development Cost: \$600,000

Total City Investment: 16.7% (\$100,000)

Current Status: Apartments operating and leased out; Restaurant opened in February 2025

The Ellison Apartments

The **Ellison Apartments** were constructed in 2016 and added 113 new market-rate units at the southeast corner of Downtown. The multifamily building houses studio, one-, and two-bedroom apartments. The Ellison's large ground floor space is currently utilized as a tenant amenity space.

City's Role: Zoning approval

Total Development Cost: \$19.8 million (in 2016)

Total City Investment: None (0%)

Current Status: Open and leased out



Ongoing Projects



678 Lee Street (Former Des Plaines Bank)

The City has entered into a partnership with a local restaurateur to renovate the historic bank building at **678 Lee Street** into a restaurant with three levels. The City purchased the building and its parking lot from a private owner for \$1.89 million in 2024 and entered into an agreement to provide some assistance for internal renovation and restoration in 2025.

City's Role: Acquisition, restoration, and ownership

Total Development Cost: Approximately \$18.4 million (in 2026)

Total City Investment: \$13.9 million (acquisition and renovation); \$4-5 million in private improvements

Current Status: Purchase approved



The Mylo Apartments

The **Mylo** apartment complex is a multifamily development planned for the former Journal & Topics site at the corner of Graceland Avenue and Webford Avenue. At six stories, it will bring 129 new units to Downtown. The building will also include a ground-floor retail space.

City's Role: Expansion of the C-5 zoning district to allow for the project and assistance with land assemblage

Total Development Cost: \$45.3 million (in 2025)

Total City Investment: None (0%)

Current Status: Approved; pre-construction



Source: Hanna Architects

Advent Apartments

The City recently received a development proposal for **Advent Apartments**, a seven-story mixed-use building which would bring 278 residential units, 382 parking spaces, and 8,500 square feet of commercial space to the vacant parcel at 750 Lee Street. The site proposal includes a setback of 10 feet from the corner of Lee and Graceland to allow for pedestrian-level landscaping.

City's Role: Potential assistance with assemblage

Total Development Cost: \$55 million (in 2025)

Total City Investment: None (0%)

Current Status: Pending approval



1575 Ellinwood Street (Former Olivetti's Restaurant)

The City is in conversation with the owner of the former Olivetti's restaurant at 1575 Ellinwood, who plans to demolish and rebuild the building to a ground-floor restaurant with apartments above. The building will bring a new dining option as well as up to three new rental apartments.

City's Role: Providing redevelopment loan

Total Development Cost: \$3.6 million (in 2025)

Total City Investment: \$1.2 million (33%) plus low-interest loan financing

Current Status: Pending development

Downtown Des Plaines Recent & Ongoing Projects

Recent Projects

- 1 Des Plaines Theater
- 2 Welkin Apartments
- 3 Ellison Apartments

Ongoing/Future Projects

- A Mylo Apartments
- B 678 Lee St
- C Advent Apartments
- D 1575 Ellinwood St



/// City's Return on Investment

With scarce resources and multiple priorities, the City of Des Plaines will be maximizing and appropriately distributing its investment across many project and initiatives. To determine the cost-benefit analysis after projects are implemented, several criteria are described below.

Des Plaines has proactively embarked on the redevelopment of its downtown, fully aware of the inherent risks. The City has taken the lead by providing project subsidies to drive development, especially during the early stages. A significant focus has been placed on complex sites or buildings that face barriers to development. Notable examples include preserving iconic building such as The Leela, the Des Plaines Theater, and the 678 Lee (former bank) building.

As development proceeds, the City will evaluate its investment to determine to what level projects are delivering the results anticipated. Return on investment measures the results from the upfront investment the City makes to support a project. Both quantitative and qualitative metrics will be used to assess the level of success.

Quantitative metrics for evaluation of individual projects include increases in:

- Total investment in new or renovated building
- Local sales tax produced annually for the property
- Local food and beverage sales tax produced annually
- Real estate property tax paid annually
- Real estate property value triennial reassessment of the property
- Number of new jobs created
- Number of new housing units created (for housing projects)
- New or relocated restaurant or business offerings

Qualitative metrics for evaluation of individual projects include:

- Increased customer and visitor activities in businesses on site
- Building developed with quality materials
- Improvement of public realm around new/removed building



/// Overview of Opportunity Sites

The City of Des Plaines has identified five opportunity sites in the Study Area both to demonstrate the application of the investment criteria and identify feasible development scenarios for specific properties. These sites have the potential to be catalytic forces for future development that will foster vibrancy and activity Downtown.

For each of the five opportunity sites, a vision and development parameters have been identified. Each opportunity site description includes key site characteristics and considerations, as well as relevant takeaways from market findings. The Investment Criteria outlined in the Action Plan chapter have been applied to each scenario, with a score for each goal on a scale of one to five.

The development parameters are intended to provide general guidance for the identified sites based on market realities, site context, and input from the City and public.

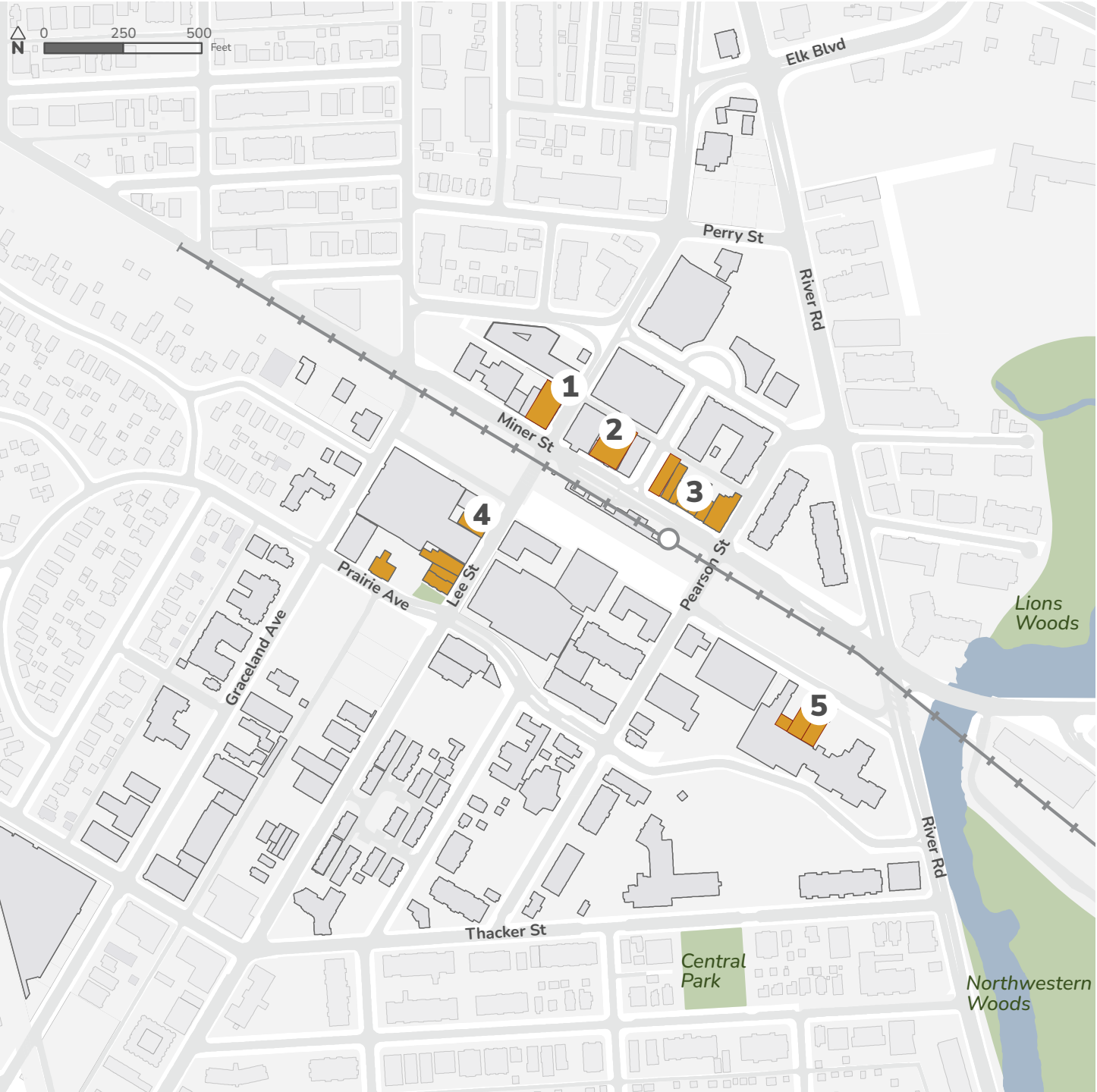
The five opportunity sites are:

1. Leela Arts Building (1452-1460 Miner Street)
2. 1484-1490 Miner Street
3. 1500 Block of Miner Street
4. 680 Block of Lee Street
5. 1577-1585 Ellinwood Street

These sites are noted on the map on the following page. A brief guide for navigating the Opportunity Site spreads can be found on page 61.



Downtown Des Plaines Opportunity Sites



How to Use this Section

A vision for the site is laid out first. It describes the goal of the site, including its potential future benefits to Downtown and the surrounding community.

The Market Findings section includes key details from the market study that are pertinent to each unique site.

An illustrative rendering or graphic depicts a scenario for each site.

Site 5 1577-1585 Ellinwood St

Vision for the Site

1577-1585 Ellinwood is a **modern** multifamily development, offering market rate units to **attract new downtown residents**. 1585 Ellinwood will offer residents easy access to Downtown Des Plaines businesses and services as well as to Metra, Pace, and River Road and Miner Street. The ground floor at this new development will generate revenue for the City through retail uses or can be used as an attractive amenity space for residents.

Site Characteristics

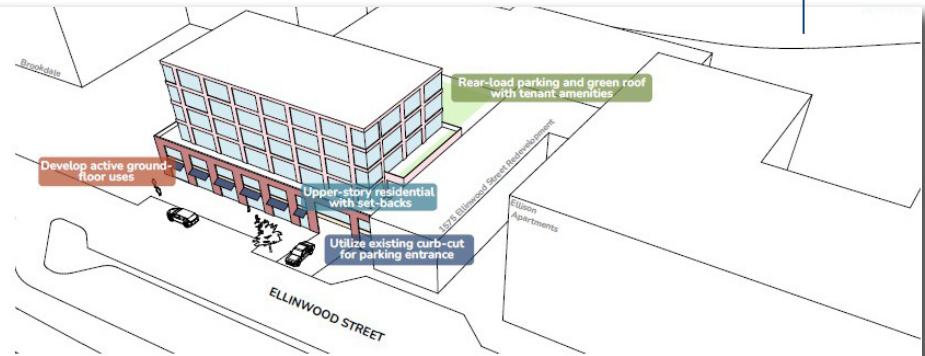
1585 Ellinwood Street is currently occupied by an outdated, two-story office building with four service tenants. Located in the southeast portion of the Study Area between the Ellison Apartments and the Brookdale assisted living facility, this site has ample access to River Road and Miner Street, and is just two blocks from the entrance to the Metra station. While it is well served by different transportation methods, this site is unlikely to see heavy foot traffic due to its location at the edge of downtown.

This site is also directly adjacent to the former Oliveti's restaurant, which may be renovated to a mixed use building with a ground floor restaurant space and residential above.

As part of recommended redevelopment, it is suggested that a new development encompass not only the parcel at 1585 Ellinwood, but also the adjacent parcel (1577 Ellinwood) between the current office building and the former Oliveti's building. This parcel is currently occupied by a one-story commercial building.

Market Findings

- **Potential Redevelopment:** The site presents an opportunity for redevelopment, either as a standalone project or as part of a larger assemblage of sites for a bigger development. The larger the development, the more attractive it will be to developers and the more financially feasible the project becomes. This could create a stronger impact on the surrounding area and enhance the site's overall appeal.
- **Retail Considerations:** Given its location further down Miner Street from the downtown core, retail here should be limited and thoughtfully considered. Rather than a large retail focus, the space could serve as an amenity for the building or include more service-based uses that complement, rather than compete with, the retail activity in the downtown core. This approach would help maintain the vibrancy of the downtown while ensuring the new development remains an attractive option for tenants.



Site Scenarios

Scenario 1: Developer Redevelops Property. With the goal of replacing the under-utilized office and commercial buildings, the City reviews development proposals and considers potential subsidy in order to facilitate redevelopment at the site.

Scenario 2: City Acquires and Redevelops Property. The City seeks to acquire the properties at 1577-1585 Ellinwood Street in order to facilitate redevelopment. The City then issues an RFP to developers to acquire and redevelop the property.

Criteria Applied: Scenario 1

Expand Destination & Dining Experiences	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Energize & Modernize Downtown	● ● ● ● ○
Create a Sense of Place	● ● ● ○ ○
Provide Additional Housing	● ● ● ● ●
Share of City Investment Needed	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Total Development Cost	● ● ● ● ●

Criteria Applied: Scenario 2

Expand Destination & Dining Experiences	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Energize & Modernize Downtown	● ● ● ● ○
Create a Sense of Place	● ● ● ○ ○
Provide Additional Housing	● ● ● ● ●
Share of City Investment Needed	● ● ● ● ○
Total Development Cost	● ● ● ● ●

The Site Characteristics section paints a picture of each site's unique features, geographic location, transportation and access points, and current uses.

An image of the current conditions is included for each site.

One or two site scenarios are described. These descriptions include use, City involvement, process for completion, and suggested bulk or density, where applicable.

Criteria is applied for each site scenario described. Metrics for these criteria are described on the following page.

/// Criteria Scoring

Downtown-wide metrics can be used to evaluate the broader impact on downtown from the collective of new redevelopment projects implemented. Quantitative and qualitative metrics for each goal include:

Expand Dining & Destination Experiences

- New restaurants, coffee shops, etc. opened or is expanded in new/renovated locations
- Added or expanded arts and cultural entities and activities
- Created Restaurant Business Assistance Grant with new participants
- Increased number of downtown events

Energize and Modernize Downtown

- Support provided to local business to attract new customers
- New ground floor businesses
- New development utilizing city-owned land
- Increased overall property tax base and property values

Create a Sense of Place

- New outdoor dining experiences and public gathering spaces
- Enhanced Metropolitan Square creating gathering spaces
- Re-used iconic buildings
- Replaced under-utilized buildings

Provide Additional Housing

- New housing developments and units

In order to weigh the above returns on City investment, it's important to also roughly quantify how much the City will need to invest for each development scenario, and how much each scenario will cost.

Share of City Investment

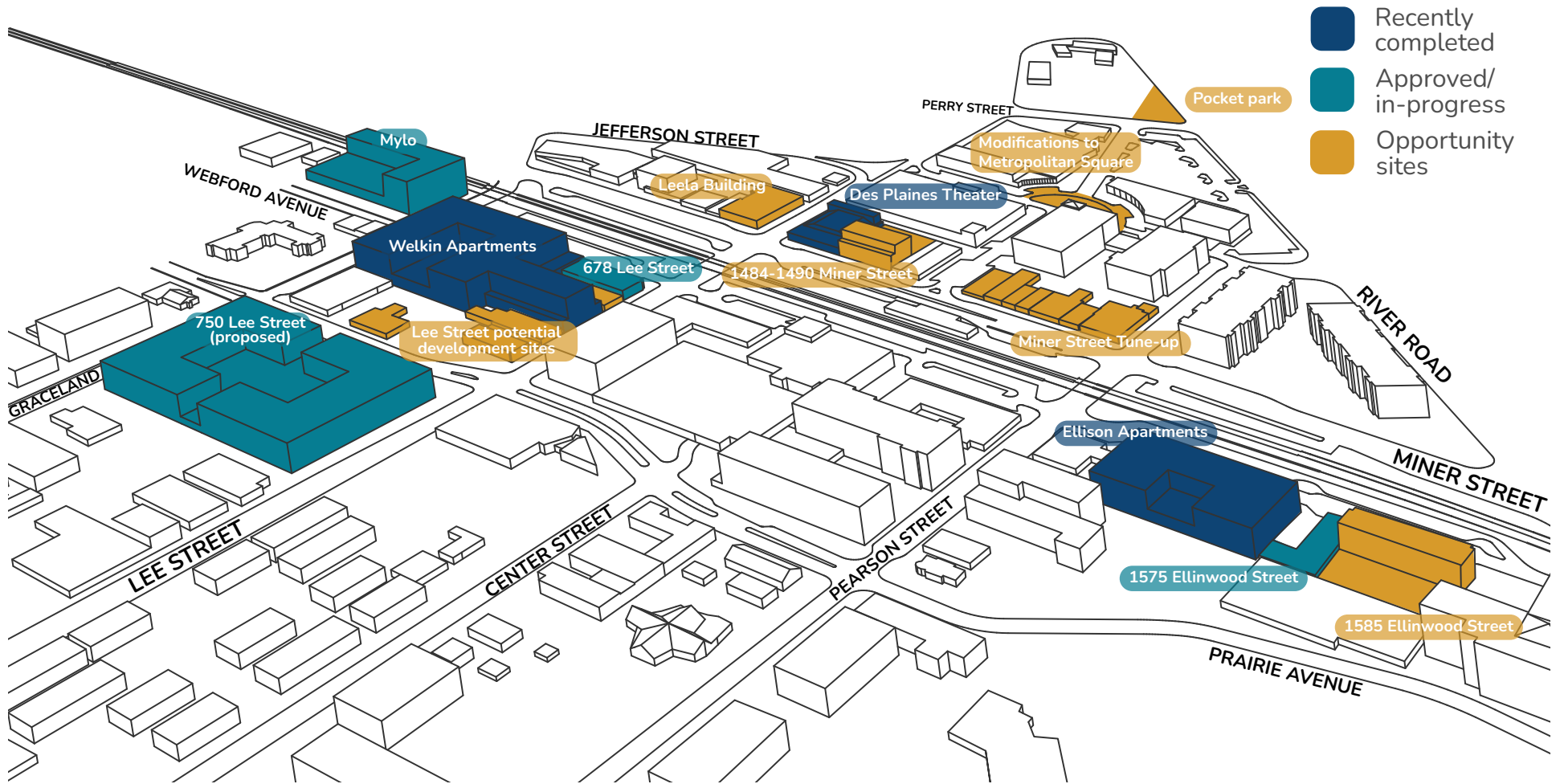
- A higher score denotes a larger portion of development cost coming from City investment, rather than private investment

Total Development Cost

- A higher score denotes a larger overall project cost



Downtown Des Plaines Downtown Sites



- Recently completed
- Approved/in-progress
- Opportunity sites

/// Site 1 Leela Arts Building (1452-1460 Miner St)

Vision for the Site

The Leela Arts Building (the former Des Plaines Masonic Temple) has the potential to be a **restored gem** within Downtown Des Plaines. The rehabilitated structure would be fully operational on all floors and house **retail, cafe, and cultural** uses. Leela's programming would **complement the Des Plaines Theater** and **drive economic growth** by generating retail and food and beverage tax. Its façade could be **eye-catching** with **restored reliefs, ground floor activities** and a **mural or other artistic treatment** on the Lee Street-facing side.

Site Characteristics

The Leela Arts Building is a City-owned property on the corner of Lee Street and Miner in the heart of Downtown Des Plaines. Once home to Leela Arts Center, and previously home to the Masonic Temple, this structure is in need of substantial investment. Its outdated internal layout makes it challenging for many uses, but can be adapted for cultural or arts

uses on the upper floors. As of February 2025, a highly-rated bakery is among four remaining tenants on the ground floor of the building.

The Leela Arts Building is adjacent to several small restaurant and retail uses and is on the same block as the City's Police Department and City Hall. Its location at a busy intersection downtown makes it a prime opportunity to bring an exciting use to the area. The success of the existing bakery on the ground floor suggests the same or a similar use can flourish in that space in the future.

If the building is cost prohibitive or structurally infeasible to rehabilitate, redevelopment of the site could combine the property with the neighboring property to the west for a mixed-use project.

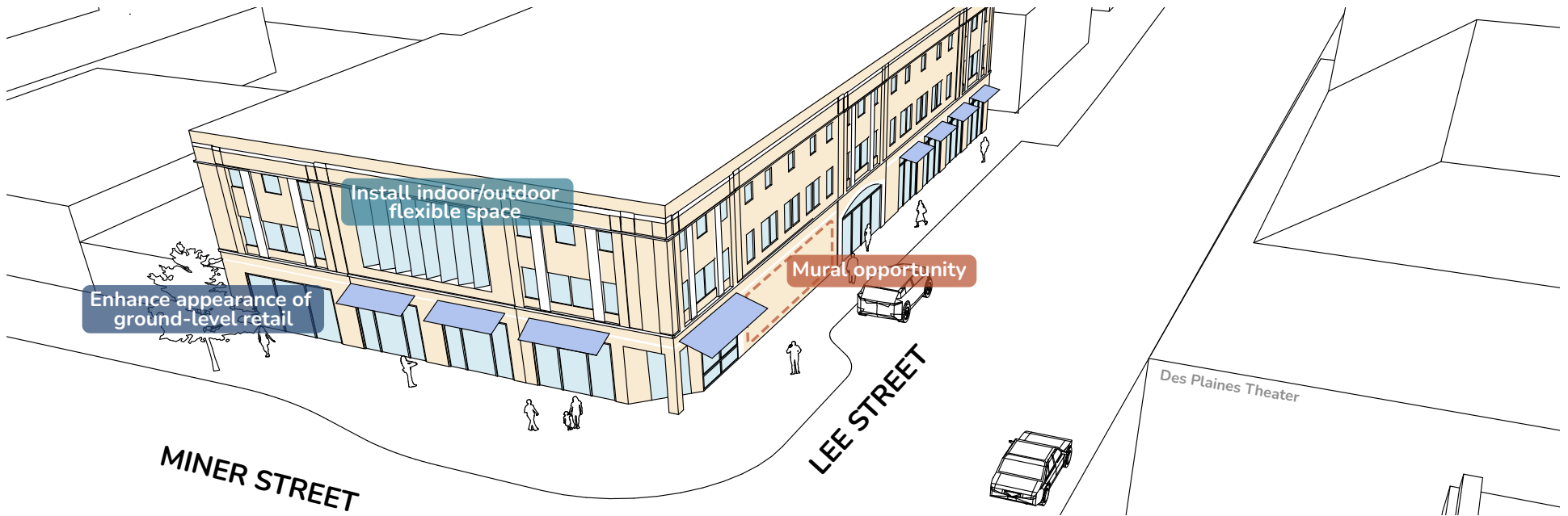


Market Findings

- **Prime Retail Location:** Positioned at a key downtown intersection, the Leela Arts Building offers a highly visible and accessible location for retail. This central spot benefits from heavy foot traffic, proximity to municipal services, and neighboring businesses, making it ideal for retail uses.
- **Ground Floor Potential:** The building's ground floor is an excellent opportunity for active retail uses, such as a coffee shop, café, or other eating and drinking establishments. These types of businesses can capitalize on the flow of people from nearby amenities, driving customer engagement and economic activity.
- **Cultural Destination:** The upper floors of the building can be adapted for cultural uses, such as a museum, gallery, or performance space. These spaces can draw visitors to the area, contributing to both daytime and evening activity. The existing community interest in cultural programming could make this an attractive opportunity for public/private partnerships.
- **Rent and Affordability:** Renovations to the Leela Arts Building may push up rent costs for ground-floor tenants. To ensure that rents remain affordable for small businesses, particularly local retailers, the City or developer may need to consider solutions to offset these costs, assistance with relocation, or a Business Assistance Grant for investment elsewhere either Downtown or elsewhere in the community. Tenant improvements will likely need to be covered by the developer or through public funding to keep the space viable for small businesses that are essential to Downtown's vibrancy and unique sense of place.
- **Demolition/New Development:** If the building were demolished and replaced with a new development, it would be a prime site for a mixed-use building with residential above retail. While this would bring Class A retail space, these spaces would come with top-of-market rents, making it more challenging to attract small businesses. In this case, a high-credit tenant, retail chain, or national tenant would likely be required to fill the ground-floor space, which may be more difficult to secure.



◀ The blank east-facing façade of the Leela Building is a prime opportunity to install a mural or other creative wall treatment to attract more interest to the space.



Site Scenarios

Scenario 1: Renovated Building with Private Ownership and Management. The Leela Arts Building is restored to operational and maintenance standards, and renovated to house an upper floor event space, entertainment use, or virtual sports use. Cultural or museum uses may be housed in Leela as part of a program of otherwise revenue-generating uses.

The City will evaluate the level of participation needed for renovation costs with the goal of a viable building at a reasonable deficit, as well

as anticipated monthly operating expenses and targeted rent in order to confirm this scenario is viable. Then, the City will market to a private buyer and determine the extent of a subsidy needed to facilitate a property sale based on purchaser proposals and the community benefits accrued for the project.

Scenario 2: Assemblage with Adjacent Property for Mixed-Use Development. The Leela Arts Building is assembled with the adjacent property on Miner Street (1430-1440 Miner St) and is demolished. A new, mixed-use development of 4-6 stories is constructed in its place, offering additional housing, parking, and Class A retail space.

Criteria Applied: Scenario 1

Expand Destination & Dining Experiences	● ● ● ● ●
Energize & Modernize Downtown	● ● ● ● ○
Create a Sense of Place	● ● ● ● ○
Provide Additional Housing	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Share of City Investment Needed	● ● ● ● ●
Total Development Cost	● ● ● ● ●

Criteria Applied: Scenario 2

Expand Destination & Dining Experiences	● ● ● ○ ○
Energize & Modernize Downtown	● ● ● ● ○
Create a Sense of Place	● ● ○ ○ ○
Provide Additional Housing	● ● ● ● ●
Share of City Investment Needed	● ● ● ○ ○
Total Development Cost	● ● ● ● ●

/// Site 2 1484-1490 Miner St

Vision for the Site

1484-1490 Miner Street is assembled into a site fit for a **vibrant, modern mixed-use property** that offers more residential units, parking, and ample **Class A retail** space, which Downtown currently lacks. The mixed-use property offers several stories of residential units, **attracting new residents** to the Study Area. With a **modern**, six-story structure, the property brings **height articulation** and **architectural interest** to historic Miner Street.

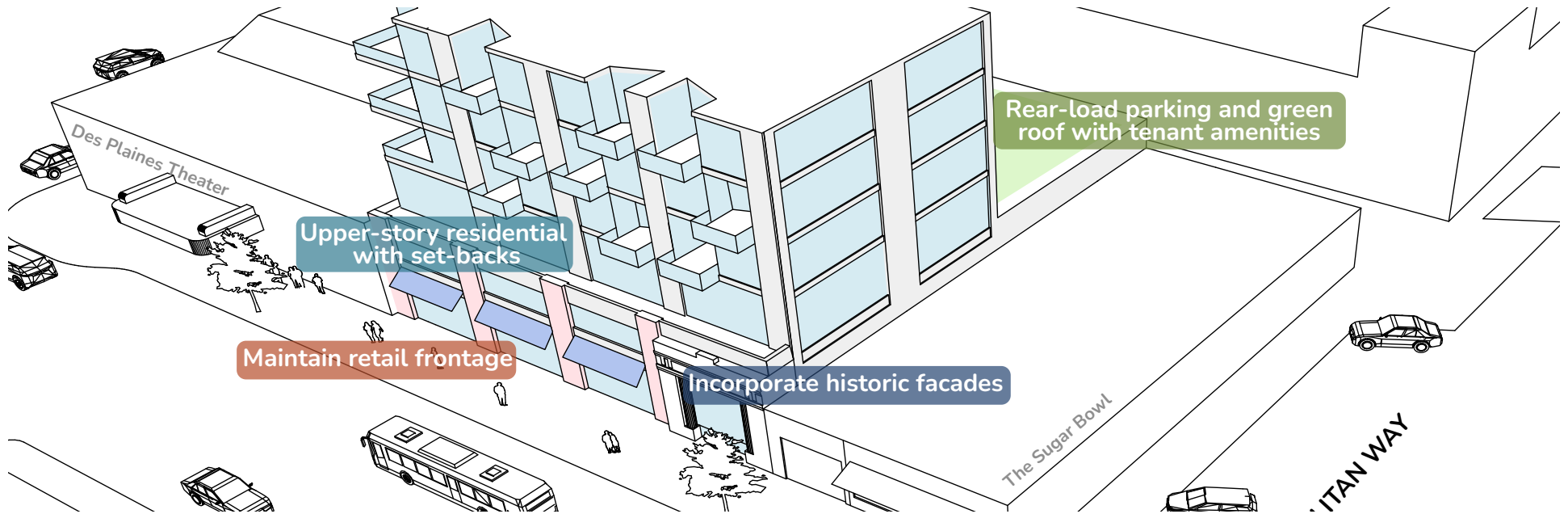
Site Characteristics

1484-1490 Miner Street is a collection of four properties, of which the City owns three. Two of the properties are vacant, a former bank building and a tudor-style retail building. The site is directly between the historic Des Plaines Theater and iconic Miner Street Tap and Sugar Bowl diner, focal points of Downtown Des Plaines. The site is also proximate to the Shop & Save grocery store in Metropolitan Square, making it attractive to potential residents. The properties have unique façades but have not been well-maintained in recent years, especially on the vacant tudor style and historic bank buildings. The site is easily accessible by Metra and is served by on-street parking and the public parking decks just north of the Miner Street corridor.

Market Findings

- **Mixed-Use Development Opportunity:** There is strong demand for residential units in downtown Des Plaines, particularly from young professionals, singles, empty-nesters, and small households. To ensure financial feasibility for developers, these would likely be luxury rental units, with a building height of up to six stories.
- **Class A Retail Demand:** There is a clear need for updated Class A retail space in this area. However, single-story Class A retail space faces limited demand, especially in a downtown focused on increasing density. Ground-floor retail in a mixed-use building is a more feasible option, as it aligns better with the area's development goals and is more likely to attract tenants.
- **Diverse Business Mix:** Ground-floor Class A retail would attract a diverse mix of tenants, including personal and professional services, as well as retail stores. This mix would contribute to downtown's vibrancy, supporting both residential and commercial growth and creating a pedestrian-friendly environment.





Site Scenarios

Scenario 1: Assemblage Developed into Six-story Mixed-Use Building. The site could be scraped to allow for construction of a six-story mixed-use building with ground floor commercial space and upper story residential. Commercial parking would be located on the ground floor in the rear of the building, with additional residential parking in the Metropolitan Square garage.

The City would need to acquire the one remaining non-City-owned property and demolish all four existing buildings in one phase. Existing tenants may be relocated permanently or temporarily during construction.

Criteria Applied: Scenario 1

Expand Destination & Dining Experiences	● ● ● ● ○
Energize & Modernize Downtown	● ● ● ● ○
Create a Sense of Place	● ● ● ○ ○
Provide Additional Housing	● ● ● ● ●
Share of City Investment Needed	● ● ○ ○ ○
Total Development Cost	● ● ● ● ●

The City would then issue an RFP to identify a developer for the project.

Scenario 2: Assemblage and Phased Development Into Two Single-Story Class A Retail Buildings. The site could be scraped in two phases, 1488-90 Miner and then 1484-86 Miner, to allow for construction of two single-story Class A retail structures. Outdoor rooftop space could be added provided an elevator was provided for accessibility. New planters could be added to the south face of the Metropolitan Square parking garage to beautify the service area visible over the roofline of new one-story buildings. This scenario is not ideal based on projected costs and lengthy timeline for any return on investment.

Criteria Applied: Scenario 2

Expand Destination & Dining Experiences	● ● ● ○ ○
Energize & Modernize Downtown	● ● ○ ○ ○
Create a Sense of Place	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Provide Additional Housing	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Share of City Investment Needed	● ● ● ● ○
Total Development Cost	● ● ● ● ●

/// Site 3 1500 Block of Miner St

Vision for the Site

The 1500 block of Miner Street is *beautified* and *celebrates the unique history and character of Des Plaines*. Façade improvements, standardization of awning and pedestrian level signage designs, and street furniture work in tandem with *improved gateway signage* for Metropolitan Square to *welcome visitors* to Downtown Des Plaines and the businesses therein. The sidewalks outside the historic businesses are *active* and flow into an *improved, vibrant streetscape* treatment along Metropolitan Way into Metropolitan Square. Metropolitan Way is periodically closed to cars and *activated* with events.

Site Characteristics

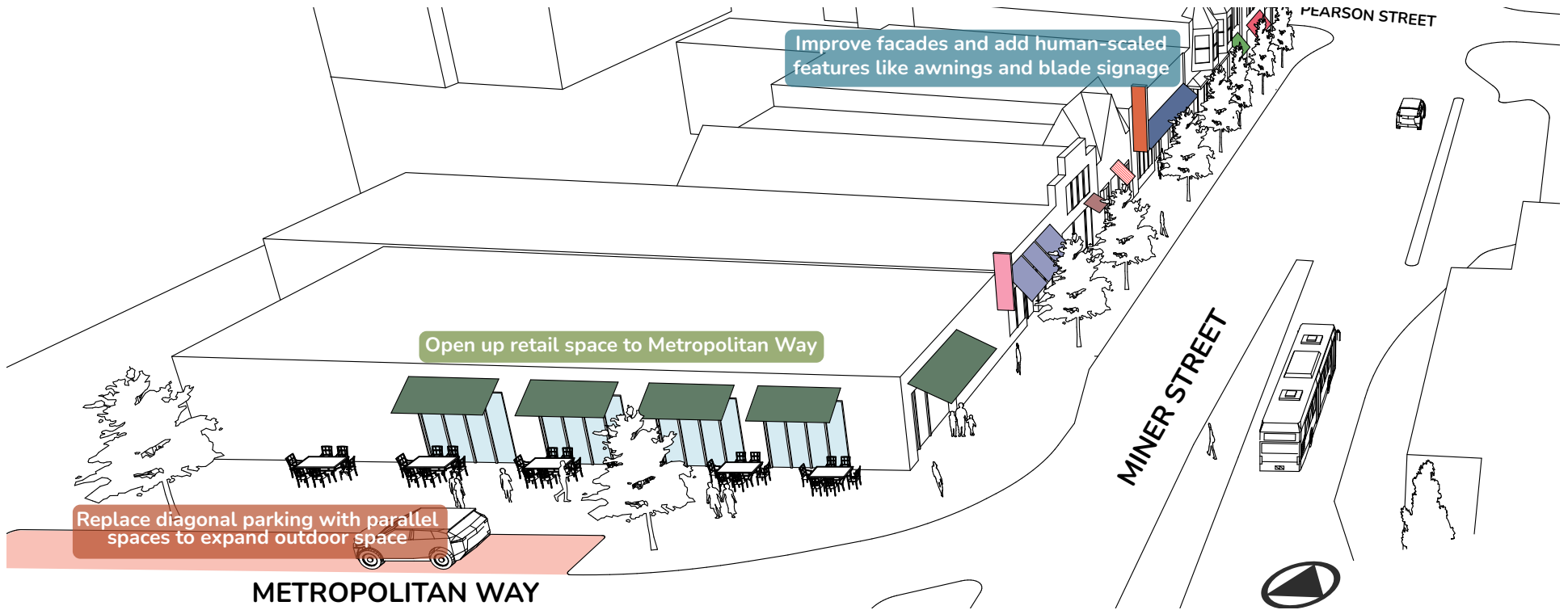
The block of parcels at 1500 Miner Street is currently occupied by historic Miner Street businesses, including R.C. Wahl Jewelers and Square Deal Shoes, businesses which have served the Des Plaines community well for decades. The façades of businesses along this block are generally well-maintained but could be improved to give Downtown Des Plaines a cleaner and more attractive look without sacrificing charm.

This site is directly across from the Des Plaines Metra stop, making it one of the first scenes a visitor or resident sees when stepping off the train. This block is also adjacent to the most visible entrance to Metropolitan Square, which currently offers very little sense of place and is in need of signage repair and a potential rebrand.

Market Findings

- **Importance of Class B Retail:** Class B retail space plays a critical role in supporting small, local, and legacy businesses that contribute to the unique identity of downtown. This type of space is vital for ensuring that these businesses can remain in the area, as they often offer affordable rent compared to Class A spaces.
- **High Demand for Class B Space:** The continued low vacancy rate in Class B retail space confirms that there is significant demand for this category of retail. As a result, improving these buildings with facade improvements, storefront window/door systems, modern wall/blade signage, accessibility improvements, etc. while maintaining affordable retail spaces will help ensure the long-term success and sustainability of local businesses which together help to establish a unique sense of place for Downtown Des Plaines.





Site Scenarios

Scenario: Businesses Facing Miner. Existing retail spaces are preserved for local businesses. Both the façades of these properties, which contribute to the character of the downtown, and interiors are improved to enhance the viability for retailers to be successful. The City will determine if existing incentive programs will meet the needs of these buildings, and their anticipated improvement costs, and consider creating additional incentives if needed. The City will market available financial incentives and/or hold an open house targeting owners to provide information about façade renovation and building improvements. Staff proactively works with business owners to streamline access to these incentives.

Scenario: Corner of Miner and Metropolitan Way. Signage at the Metropolitan Square entrance is replaced and modernized. Diagonal on-street parking on Metropolitan Way is converted to parallel parking to allow for outdoor dining on widened sidewalks. Metropolitan Way is periodically closed to cars for events. The vacant former restaurant at the corner is re-tenanted with a new restaurant and windows and doors are installed on the west-facing façade.

Criteria Applied

Expand Destination & Dining Experiences	● ● ● ● ○
Energize & Modernize Downtown	● ● ● ● ○
Create a Sense of Place	● ● ● ● ●
Provide Additional Housing	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Share of City Investment Needed	● ● ● ● ○
Total Development Cost	● ● ○ ○ ○

/// Site 4 680-682/694-720 Lee St

Vision for the Site

680-682/694-720 Lee Street represents a **key retail corridor** within Downtown Des Plaines. This southern block of Lee is a **gentle transition** from the largely residential and low-impact uses in the southern portion of Downtown toward the bustling heart of Downtown along Miner Street.

This block is **attractive, well-kept,** and **supports the forthcoming restaurant development** in the historic bank building at 678 Lee Street. The streetscape of this corridor is **inviting** and contributes to a **pleasant and distinctive sense of place** in the southern subarea of Downtown. Service uses are focused in the properties south of the parking garage, while active retail and dining is focused in the northern properties. **New public art** adorns the parking garage façade.

Site Characteristics

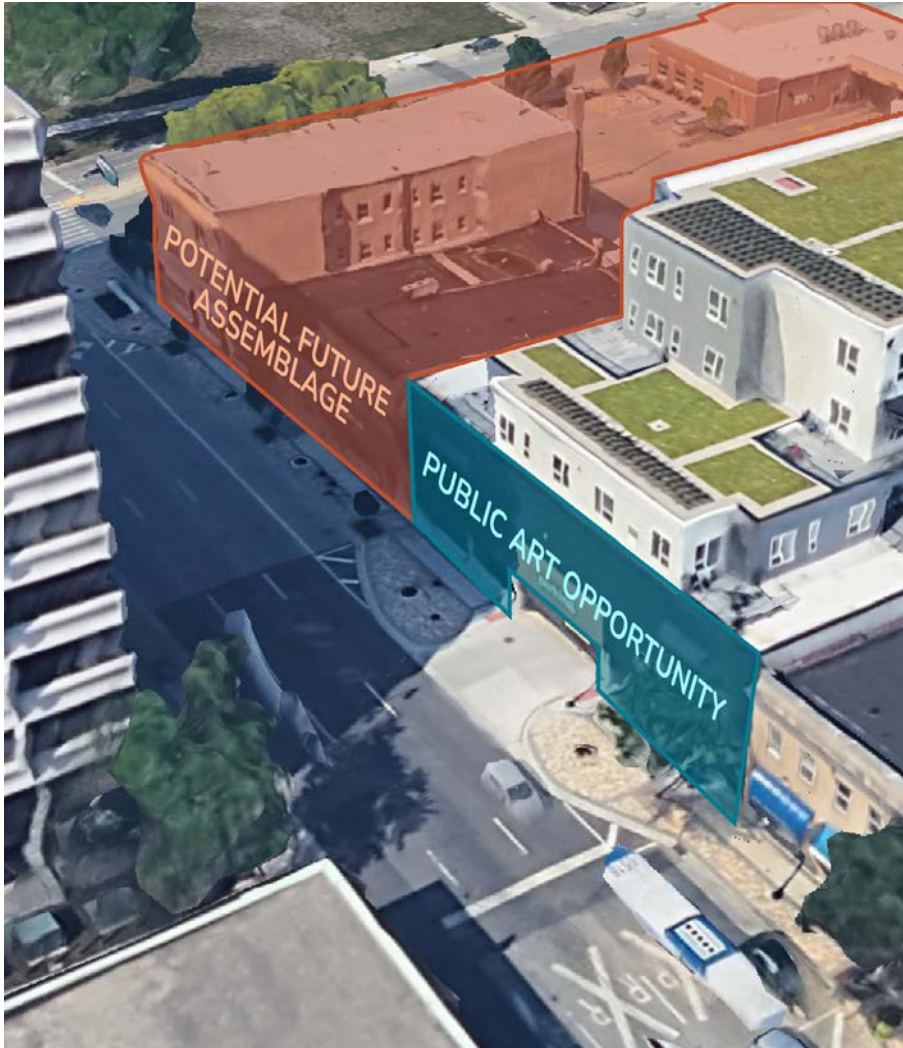
This site is situated on the southern portion of Lee Street, just south of 678 Lee, the historic marble bank building recently purchased by the City in partnership with a local restaurateur. Currently, the block is home to a post office, a portion of the Welkin Apartments' parking deck, a restaurant, vacant retail space, and a mixed-use building with upper-level apartments and services below. The façades of this block are largely disjointed, and those of the vacant retail space and restaurant are out of date and in need of maintenance. The entrance to the Welkin parking deck is large, disruptive, and does not clearly communicate that some of the parking can be utilized by the public, as well.

A key element of this opportunity site is that Lee Street is a northbound one-way thoroughfare through downtown. Any new development should note this traffic consideration, and any placemaking and wayfinding projects should clearly and visibly display this to northbound vehicles. Since traffic is frequently queued at the railroad crossing, street-level signage and large window displays are encouraged to market to captive potential customers.

Market Findings

- **Short-Term Opportunity:** Aesthetic improvements to the buildings can help retain and attract service-based businesses, particularly office users. Being slightly off the downtown core, this location is ideal for businesses that rely on accessibility and visibility without the higher costs of being in the immediate downtown area. These improvements could enhance the appeal of the site for these types of tenants.
- **Long-Term Development Potential:** Looking ahead, it makes sense to build off the success of nearby mixed-use developments with luxury residential units. As these projects thrive, they will increase demand for surrounding services, creating a stronger market for commercial spaces in the area. Planned improvements to the corner bank building, along with the assumed success of the new restaurant, will likely raise the profile of this corner and attract additional businesses and reinvestment.





Site Scenarios

Short Term Scenario: Aesthetic Improvements. Retail spaces along this block are preserved. Improvements are made to both the façades of the exiting buildings, which contribute to the character of the downtown, and any interior improvements to enhance the viability for retailers to be successful. The City will determine if existing incentive programs will meet the needs of these buildings, and their anticipated improvement costs, and consider creating additional incentives if needed. Ground-floor retail and active uses are focused on properties north of the parking garage with service uses focused on the sites south of the parking garage.

New public art adorns portions or all of the Welkin parking garage entrance, which bisects the block. An owner-approved mural is painted on its façade and creative metal art replaces the existing iron bars on the east-facing windows at the base of the garage.

Long Term Scenario: Property Assemblage and Redevelopment. Properties south of the parking deck entrance and along Prairie Street are assembled to market to developers for mixed-use development.

Criteria Applied

Expand Destination & Dining Experiences	● ● ● ○ ○
Energize & Modernize Downtown	● ● ● ● ○
Create a Sense of Place	● ● ● ○ ○
Provide Additional Housing	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Share of City Investment Needed	● ● ● ○ ○
Total Development Cost	● ● ○ ○ ○

Reimagining Public Art for Large Façades

The Welkin parking garage entrance presents a large barrier between two sides of the block, but it also presents a large opportunity to employ innovative public art. Dynamic light projections, metal or ironwork, or custom perforated cladding can be applied to the garage façade.

ART on THE MART | Chicago, IL



Quackenbush Garage Mural | Albany, NY



/// Site 5 1577-1585 Ellinwood St

Vision for the Site

1577-1585 Ellinwood is a *modern* multifamily development, offering market rate units to *attract new downtown residents*. 1585 Ellinwood will offer residents easy access to Downtown Des Plaines businesses and services as well as to Metra, Pace, and River Road and Miner Street. The ground floor at this new development will generate revenue for the City through retail uses or can be used as an attractive amenity space for residents.

Site Characteristics

1585 Ellinwood Street is currently occupied by an outdated, two-story office building with four service tenants. Located in the southeast portion of the Study Area between the Ellison Apartments and the Brookdale assisted living facility, this site has ample access to River Road and Miner Street, and is just two blocks from the entrance to the Metra station. While it is well served by different transportation methods, this site is unlikely to see heavy foot traffic due to its location at the edge of downtown.

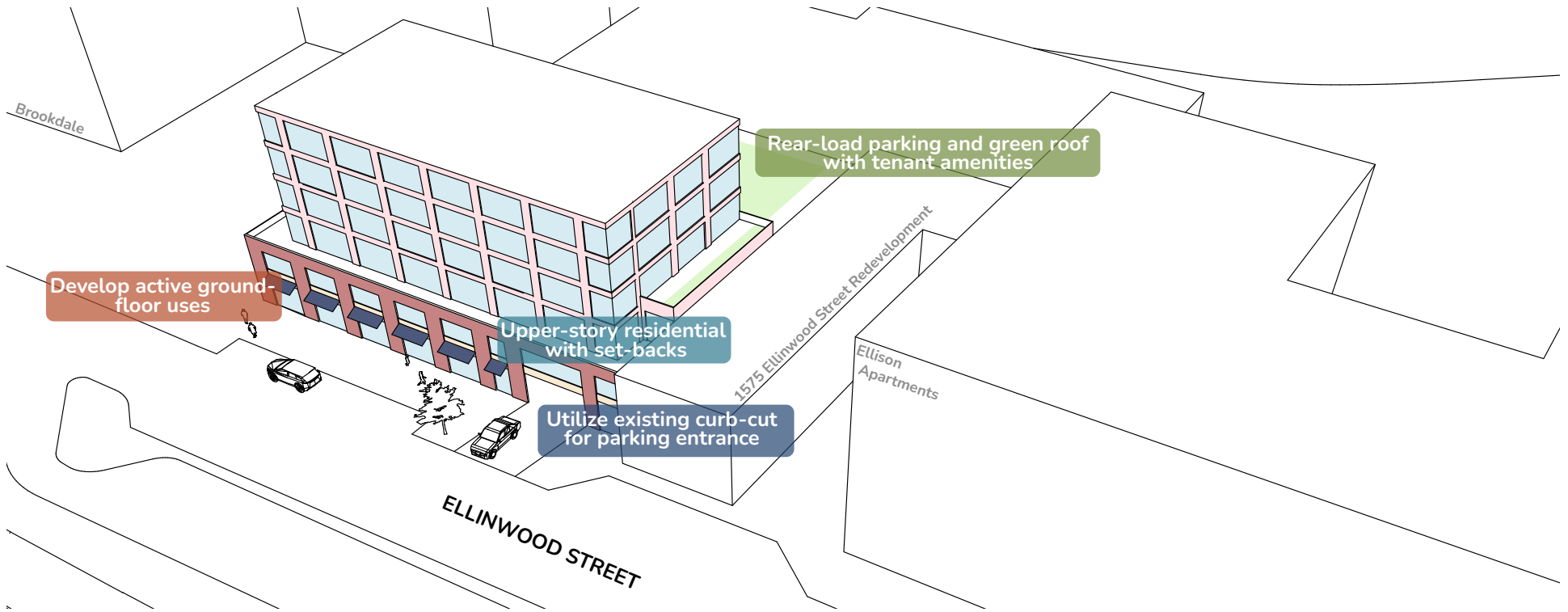
This site is also directly adjacent to the former Oliveti's restaurant, which may be renovated to a mixed use building with a ground floor restaurant space and residential above.

As part of recommended redevelopment, it is suggested that a new development encompass not only the parcel at 1585 Ellinwood, but also the adjacent parcel (1577 Ellinwood) between the current office building and the former Oliveti's building. This parcel is currently occupied by a one-story commercial building.

Market Findings

- **Potential Redevelopment:** The site presents an opportunity for redevelopment, either as a standalone project or as part of a larger assemblage of sites for a bigger development. The larger the development, the more attractive it will be to developers and the more financially feasible the project becomes. This could create a stronger impact on the surrounding area and enhance the site's overall appeal.
- **Retail Considerations:** Given its location further down Miner Street from the downtown core, retail here should be limited and thoughtfully considered. Rather than a large retail focus, the space could serve as an amenity for the building or include more service-based uses that complement, rather than compete with, the retail activity in the downtown core. This approach would help maintain the vibrancy of the downtown while ensuring the new development remains an attractive option for tenants.





Site Scenarios

Scenario 1: Developer Redevelops Property. With the goal of replacing the under-utilized office and commercial buildings, the City reviews development proposals and considers potential subsidy in order to facilitate redevelopment at the site.

Scenario 2: City Acquires and Redevelops Property. The City seeks to acquire the properties at 1577-1585 Ellinwood Street in order to facilitate redevelopment. The City then issues an RFP to developers to acquire and redevelop the property.

Criteria Applied: Scenario 1

Expand Destination & Dining Experiences	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Energize & Modernize Downtown	● ● ● ○ ○
Create a Sense of Place	● ● ○ ○ ○
Provide Additional Housing	● ● ● ● ●
Share of City Investment Needed	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Total Development Cost	● ● ● ● ●

Criteria Applied: Scenario 2

Expand Destination & Dining Experiences	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Energize & Modernize Downtown	● ● ● ○ ○
Create a Sense of Place	● ● ○ ○ ○
Provide Additional Housing	● ● ● ● ●
Share of City Investment Needed	● ● ● ● ○
Total Development Cost	● ● ● ● ●



Implementation & Closing

/// Implementation & Closing

Implementation

As the City of Des Plaines considers next steps for Downtown development, it may consider adopting a phased approach over the next 15 years. Suggestions for projects for implementation in the near- (1-3 years), mid- (3-5 years), and long-terms (5-15 years) are described below. In addition to these steps, the City should continue to evaluate new opportunities that arise, using this strategy as a guide.

Near-Term (1-3 years)

- Parking utilization and management study
- Wayfinding and branding signage program, with special attention paid to parking management
- Creation of a downtown Business Association
- Implementation of restaurant development at 678 Lee Street
- Implementation of mixed-use restaurant and residential development at 1575 Ellinwood
- Continuation of other private projects in progress
- Prioritization of subsequent major public investments

Mid-Term (3-5 years)

- Initiate highest priority projects, potentially drawn from Opportunity Sites in this strategy
- Implement Metropolitan Square improvements
- Create Perry Street pocket park on City-owned property

Long-Term (5-15 years)

- Initiate second and third tier priority projects
- Consider updates to criteria and new site assessments

Closing

The City of Des Plaines is already a great place to live, work, and play. The City has great potential and community support for thoughtful public investment to revitalize Downtown, and to provide more opportunities for entertainment and dining in the area.

There are opportunities for ongoing programming of investment over at least the next 10-15 years in accordance with this plan.

Limitations of Study

- Research for this project has been completed based on best available data at the time of the project. Market conditions may subsequently change affecting the results. The sources of information are referenced in materials produced by the Consultant Team.
- The study did not determine full legal and regulatory requirements of projects and programs under consideration by the City of Des Plaines.
- The Consultant research, reports and presentations are intended for the sole use of the City of Des Plaines and shall not be relied upon by any other party or purposes. No aspect of the work may be used for a property listing, appraisal, prospectus, loan, agreement or document intended for use in obtaining funds from investors.
- The research and recommendations conducted by the Consultant Team are presented as a professional planning consultant engagement and are not intended to represent the role of a certified municipal advisor under the U.S. Securities and Exchange Act.
- The research conducted by the Consultant is intended for public information.



Appendix

Criteria Spreadsheet

These worksheets are provided for application of the re:DDP criteria to future development proposals and to help the City and community differentiate and prioritize future public investment decisions throughout Downtown Des Plaines. Metrics to guide the scoring of development proposals are included for qualitative goals below.

Metrics for each goal include:

Expand Dining & Destination Experiences

- New restaurants, coffee shops, etc. opened or is expanded in new/renovated locations
- Added or expanded arts and cultural entities and activities
- Created Restaurant Business Assistance Grant with new participants
- Increased number of downtown events

Energize and Modernize Downtown

- Support provided to local business to attract new customers
- New ground floor businesses
- New development utilizing city-owned land
- Increased overall property tax base and property values

Create a Sense of Place

- New outdoor dining experiences and public gathering spaces
- Enhanced Metropolitan Square creating gathering spaces
- Re-used iconic buildings
- Replaced under-utilized buildings

Provide Additional Housing

- New housing developments and units

/// Criteria Spreadsheet

Project Assessment Matrix: Qualitative		Assesment: NA - Low - Med - High
Goal	Action	
Expand Destination & Dining Experiences	Create a new restaurant cluster on Miner Street next to Des Plaines Theater	
	Engage existing restaurants to better accommodate evening visitors, and actively recruit new restaurants to locate downtown.	
	Encourage the Theatre, downtown restaurants and businesses to develop and market creative packages and incentives to attract visitors and patrons.	
	Activate downtown Des Plaines through arts and culture initiatives.	
	Continue to provide incentives targeted at specific commercial sectors to complement the vision of Downtown Des Plaines as a retail and entertainment district.	
Energize and Modernize Downtown	Seek out a shared-space facility to help emerging entrepreneurs bring their business concepts to the local economy.	
	Support local businesses to grow and attract new customers downtown.	
	Activate streetlife with businesses on the ground floor.	
	Catalyze development by spurring or supporting adjacent city owned or key redevelopment projects.	
	Create economic value by strengthening property tax base to solidify overall downtown property values	
Create a Sense of Place	Explore the feasibility of enhancing Metropolitan Square to create a gathering place for families and friends to eat, drink, shop and play.	
	Explore options for outdoor experiences and public gathering places (dining and other).	
	Enhance downtown character by re-using iconic building or replacing vacant or underutilized building not contributing to downtown character.	
Provide Additional Housing	Continue to attract higher density and mixed-use development, including those with first floor retail and dining.	
	Pursue the development of new multifamily buildings, particularly townhomes and apartments.	
	Pursue high-quality housing for residents in all stages of life.	

/// Criteria Spreadsheet

Project Assessment Matrix: Quantitative		Assesment: NA - Low - Med - High
Goal	Action	
*City's Return on Investment	Structure the repayment timeframe of the state/local sales tax, the food and beverage tax, incremental property tax increase to be less than 15 years, or less than 10 where possible.	
	City Grant	\$
	Repayment Timeline	
	Structure the ratio of City subsidy to total project cost to be consistent with the Business Assistance Grant tiers (for projects less than \$1 million) and most impactful for the City's investment (for projects over \$1 million).	
	Total Project Costs	\$
	City Grant	\$
	Ratio of City Investment (%)	
	Structure the City's subsidy for the project to be proportionate within the City's overall investment program budget.	
	City Grant	\$
	Total Annual Funding	\$

**The City's Return on Investment is a combination of quantitative, financial returns as well as the qualitative benefits to Downtown that may not be financially quantifiable, as detailed on the previous pages of this worksheet.*