

Staff Report

**DOWNTOWN VISIONING WORKSHOP**

June 19, 2018

**BACKGROUND:**

The June 19<sup>th</sup> Downtown Visioning Workshop has been scheduled in accordance with the following Goal, Objective, and Task 1 established by the Ames City Council back in February 2018. The staff is providing the following material as background information for the workshop.

***Goal: TO STRENGTHEN DOWNTOWN & CAMPUSTOWN***

***Objective 1.*** To identify strategies to encourage investment in Downtown

***Task 1*** – Hold a workshop in the second quarter of 2018 with the Main Street Cultural District, downtown property owners, business owners, downtown residents, and other stakeholders to discuss their vision for the Downtown.

***Task 2*** – Following the workshop, review and give direction regarding the November 2017 staff report, which addresses possible locations for a public plaza, storm water management requirements, residential parking standards, and possible incentives to entice investment.

**LAND USE POLICY PLAN:**

The Land Use Policy Plan (LUPP), adopted in 1997, devoted Goal No. 8 to Downtown, stating, “**It is the goal of Ames to enhance the role of Downtown as a community focal point.**” In support of the goal, there are three objectives for Downtown related to:

1. Addressing intensity, expansion, and diversity of uses.
2. Improving the appearance.
3. Expanding transportation and parking choices.

The Land Use Policy Plan includes Downtown as part of the Urban Core Policy Options in Chapter 2. The LUPP describes Downtown as a broad area, extending from 6<sup>th</sup> Street to the railroad as the Traditional Downtown, and from the railroad to S 3<sup>rd</sup> Street as the Downtown Expansion area.

Key issues identified in in the LUPP for Downtown include:

- Parking
- Multi-Modal Transportation Center

- Uses
- Intensity
- Public Space

Attachments 1 and 2 contain excerpts from the Land Use Policy Plan regarding downtown. Attachment 3 is the LUPP Future Land Use Map of the Downtown.

### **CITY ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE 2000:**

The City Council has invested time, money, and resources over the years in the Downtown area in support of the vision described in the LUPP. Below are examples of initiatives that the City has undertaken since 2000.

- The City of Ames is nearing completion of the complete repaving of the streets downtown, including the installation of curb extensions and decorative pavement.
- The City of Ames completed the library renovation and expansion project in 2014.
- The City has promoted the installation of street furniture, art, and other fixed amenities in portions of the downtown.
- Created a Downtown façade assistance program to encourage the removal of non-historic façade elements consistent with the Downtown Design Guidelines. The City has funded this annually with \$50,000.
- The City adopted an urban revitalization plan in 2001 with eligibility criteria for partial property tax abatement. A key criterion is that an eligible project has to include façade renovations. A map of the urban revitalization area is found in the attachments.
- The City updated its sidewalk café ordinance to more readily allow installation of outdoor tables and chairs.
- The City updated its sign regulations to more readily allow sidewalk signs downtown.
- The City has provided annual funding to support several programs of the Main Street Cultural District, such as the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade, Snow Magic, and ArtWalk. The City has also supported one-time funding for such projects as the roof-edge lighting project.
- The City hired a consultant to initiate the nomination of downtown as a National Register Historic District. The nomination was completed by the Main Street Cultural District and recently approved in the Spring of 2018.

- The City has, upon request, closed portions of downtown streets and waived certain fees for downtown events. Examples of events include Farmers Market, Octagon Arts Festival, and Healthiest Ames Open Streets.
- The City conducted a study in 2009 on the feasibility of a downtown parking structure. The proposed structure was located along Clark Avenue north of the railroad tracks.
- The City completed a study in 2005 on a “catalyst” project for the parking lot site east of City Hall. The project consisted of central plaza with a small number of townhomes and retail spaces.

### **ZONING:**

Zoning for Downtown was established in 2000 with the current development standards. The Downtown Service Center (DSC) zoning district was created in 2006 when the Downtown/Campustown Service Center zoning district was split. At that time, the emphasis was on design standards for Campustown and the adjacent residential areas which were designated as University Impacted Areas rather than a review of Downtown standards.

The zoning standards reinforce the LUPP goals for intensification of uses and aesthetics with standards reinforcing 2-story building requirements, allowing mixed used above commercial, and no parking requirements for trade and office uses.

### **MAIN STREET CULTURAL DISTRICT:**

The Main Street Cultural District (MSCD) is an affiliate of the Ames Chamber of Commerce. In 2009, it received its Main Street Iowa (MSI) designation. This designation allows it to draw upon the resources of MSI for which, in return, MSCD must follow the four-fold transformational strategy endorsed by the national Main Street program (promotions, organization, economic vitality, design).

The City of Ames, as part of its annual budgeting process, reviews the request of MSCD for funding. If approved, the City and MSCD enter into a contract to provide certain services for reimbursement. For the upcoming fiscal year, the City has earmarked \$42,600 to MSCD.

### **DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT:**

An area of downtown (see Attachment 6) was recently designated as an Historic District and placed on the National Register of Historic Places. This designation, similar to the Old Town Historic District, makes owners eligible for federal and state tax credits for rehabilitations that conform to established guidelines. The district has not been designated a local historic district, as has the Old Town Historic District, which would include mandated design standards and review.

## **DOWNTOWN URBAN REVITALIZATION PLAN:**

In conjunction with the downtown façade assistance program, the City created an urban revitalization area to allow exemptions from any increase in taxable valuations that are created in conjunction with the façade improvements. To qualify for the abatement, a storefront must be improved and meet the design guidelines of the façade program. Additionally, the tax abatement only applies to commercial uses.

### Attachments:

1. LUPP Goals for a New Vision [Excerpts]
2. LUPP Urban Core Policy Options [Excerpts]
3. LUPP Future Land Use Map [Excerpt]
4. Zoning Map [Excerpt]
5. Main Street Cultural District Boundary
6. Downtown Historic District Boundary
7. Downtown Urban Revitalization Area

**Attachment 1:**

**GOALS FOR A NEW VISION [LUPP excerpts p. 25]**

**Goal No. 8.** It is the goal of Ames to enhance the role of Downtown as a community focal point.

Objectives. In expanding and strengthening the role of Downtown as a community focal point, Ames seeks the following objectives.

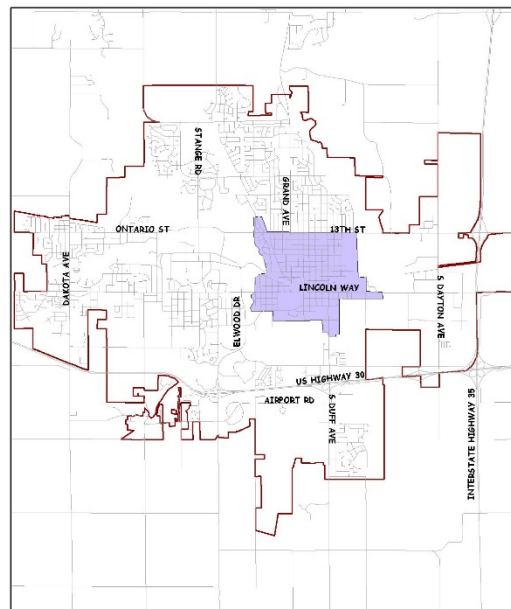
- 8.A. Ames seeks to maintain and enhance a strong central activity center through the intensification, expansion and diversification of uses including visitor attraction, entertainment, high density residential, offices and business support services.
- 8.B. Ames seeks to improve and integrate the appearance of Downtown through thematic design, preservation of historically and architecturally significant structures and reuse of structures involving economically marginal activities.
- 8.C. Ames seeks to expand parking in Downtown and to integrate automobile access with additional modes of transportation.

**Attachment 2:**

**URBAN CORE POLICY OPTIONS** [LUPP Excerpts pp. 41-45]

**Delineation.** Urban Core consists of the existing Downtown and the mostly single-family residential areas adjacent to Downtown. These areas approximate the boundaries of Ames, exclusive of the ISU-campus, as of 1930. These boundaries are loosely defined as 14th Street on the north, Municipal Cemetery on the east, 4th Street on the south and Squaw Creek on the west.

These areas are fully developed although some uses are transitional. Floor area/land ratios and densities are moderate, which has attracted limited intensification activities. Downtown and the residential areas adjacent are included in the Urban Core because of their historical relationship and the impact that their transition has on each other.



Urban Core Area

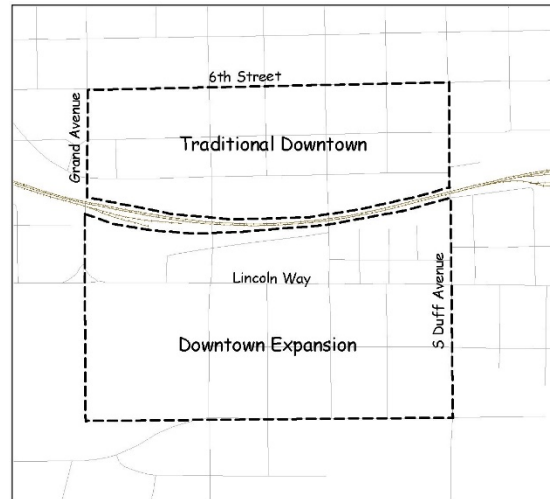
**Downtown.** The goal is to create a strong central place in Downtown. Downtown is characterized currently as two sub-districts separated by a major thoroughfare and railroad. Access and parking are limited. Uses are small to moderate in size. The economic base of Downtown is relatively strong although the absence of certain uses and public activity areas constrains its potential as a 24-hour location.

**Boundaries.** In defining the street boundaries of Downtown for planning purposes the following area is recommended: 6th Street on the north; Duff Avenue on the east; South 3rd Street on the south; and Grand Avenue on the west. The use of these boundaries creates a more cohesive district and provides greater access and circulation.

**Access.** Regional access is critical to the role of Downtown as a strong central place. South Duff Avenue is recommended as the regional access corridor to Downtown through its connection with Hwy. 30 and ultimately I-35.

Regional access should continue across Lincoln Way in providing direct access between Duff Avenue and the traditional Downtown. Additional direct access to Downtown should be established at the intersection of Duff Avenue and South 3rd Street.

The designation of South 3rd Street requires improvement in turning controls and connections with major streets.



Downtown Sub-Districts

Circulation. Inclusion of South 3rd Street with Downtown provides an opportunity to improve circulation involving the district. Its inclusion also improves north-south cross-town connections.

A realignment of South 3rd Street to connect with Grand Avenue is recommended. The realignment would involve cutting through the Lincoln Center (Target parking lot) adjacent to the Department of Transportation site. In connecting South 3rd Street with Grand Avenue, a more direct north-south route is created to the western boundary of Downtown. The route enables a free flow of traffic involving all sides of the district. The route also eliminates restrictions created by the presence of the railroad, which periodically interrupts traffic on Duff Avenue.

South 3<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Realignment with  
Grand Avenue



Parking. Parking is essential to improving the accessibility of Downtown and strengthening the district's viability. Parking improvements should consider the following locational and design criteria:

- Provide locations that are convenient to major activities;
- Cluster parking locations - leaving more income-generating building space; and,
  - Discourage the negative impact that the void spaces created by surface parking have on pedestrian movement, shopping patterns and appearance.

Multi-Modal Transportation Center. Downtown access and parking improvements should consider a multi-modal transportation center. A multi-modal transportation center meets two objectives:

- Strengthens Downtown by making it the central place through which commuters and users of the district would pass; and,
- Connects Downtown with the community through an integrated transportation system involving automobile, pedestrian, transit, taxi, commuter van and bicycle modes. Connection of the transportation center with activity locations is highly desirable.

Transit

Center.

and

services should link the center with ISU's campus and the Mary Greeley Medical Center. Pedestrian circulation should link the center with businesses, governmental services and public activity areas within Downtown.

Uses. Downtown's primary role has shifted from the traditional retail center to a major services center. Contributing to the current role are the large services employers including the Iowa Department of Transportation, City of Ames, financial institutions and others. Many of the remaining commercial uses have become smaller and more specialized. The largest concentrations of commercial uses involve historic Main Street, the emerging Depot area and the highway-oriented strip along Lincoln Way.



Depot reuse for commercial activities in  
Downtown Ames





In becoming a 24-hour center, Downtown is envisioned as the most mixed use area of Ames. An additional mixture of uses as well as strengthening of some existing ones is recommended. Future uses should also be selectively grouped so as to share attraction and support. Future uses should emphasize the following:

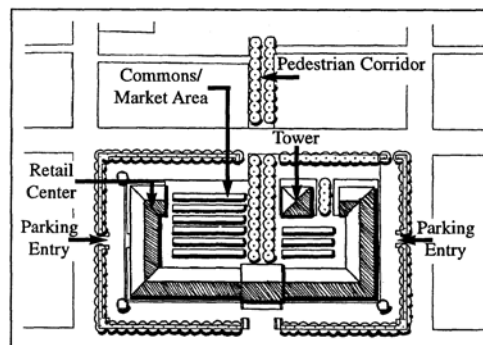
- Small/Medium Business Center involving private lease/multiple professional/trade services, financial services, business support services, (e.g. copying, office supplies, computer services) and small conferencing;
- Dining and Entertainment Center involving sit-down eating and drinking services (but not additional fast-food services because of their competition with sit-down facilities and their orientation toward vehicular traffic rather than pedestrian), performance halls and amusements;
- Cultural Center involving arts, crafts, museum, learning center, library and activity center (e.g. senior citizen);
- Residences involving multi-family and second-floor/over commercial establishments;
- Public spaces involving parks, outdoor event/festival and farmers/crafts market; and,
- Specialty Retail Center, involving personal items, specialty foods, bookstore etc.

Intensity. Downtown is also envisioned as the most intensely developed area of Ames. The following intensities are recommended:

- Commercial – 1.0 or greater floor area ratio (ratio of total building floor area to total lot area) and 100 percent lot coverage in the sub-district/traditional Downtown located north of the railroad; 0.5 or greater floor area ratio and 50 percent lot coverage in the remainder of Downtown; and,
- Multi-Family Residential – High-density residential with the maximum allowable number of dwelling units and 50 percent lot coverage in the district.

Public Space. In attracting more users in Downtown, additional public space supported by organized activities is recommended. Examples of public space are described in the following:

- Agora – a specialty retail center and outdoor commons/market area. The Agora is intended to draw patrons who are frequent purchasers of specialty items (e.g. fresh-baked breads, fresh produce, coffee/tea, home gardening supplies). Associated with these specialty stores may be a small cafe, fitness/nutrition center, etc.

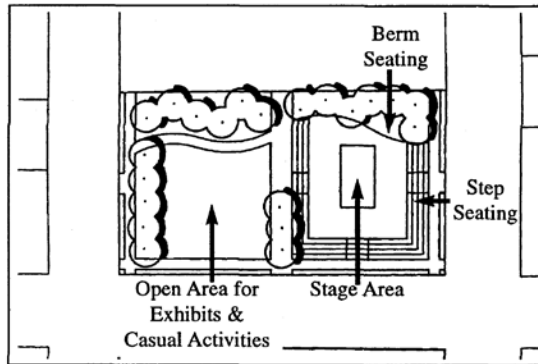


*Typical Agora*

The shape of the Agora typically encompasses an outdoor commons/market area that can be fitted with small stalls to house a farmers/crafts market. The commons/market area should permit only pedestrian traffic. Automobile access and parking should be located along the sides and rear of the Agora.

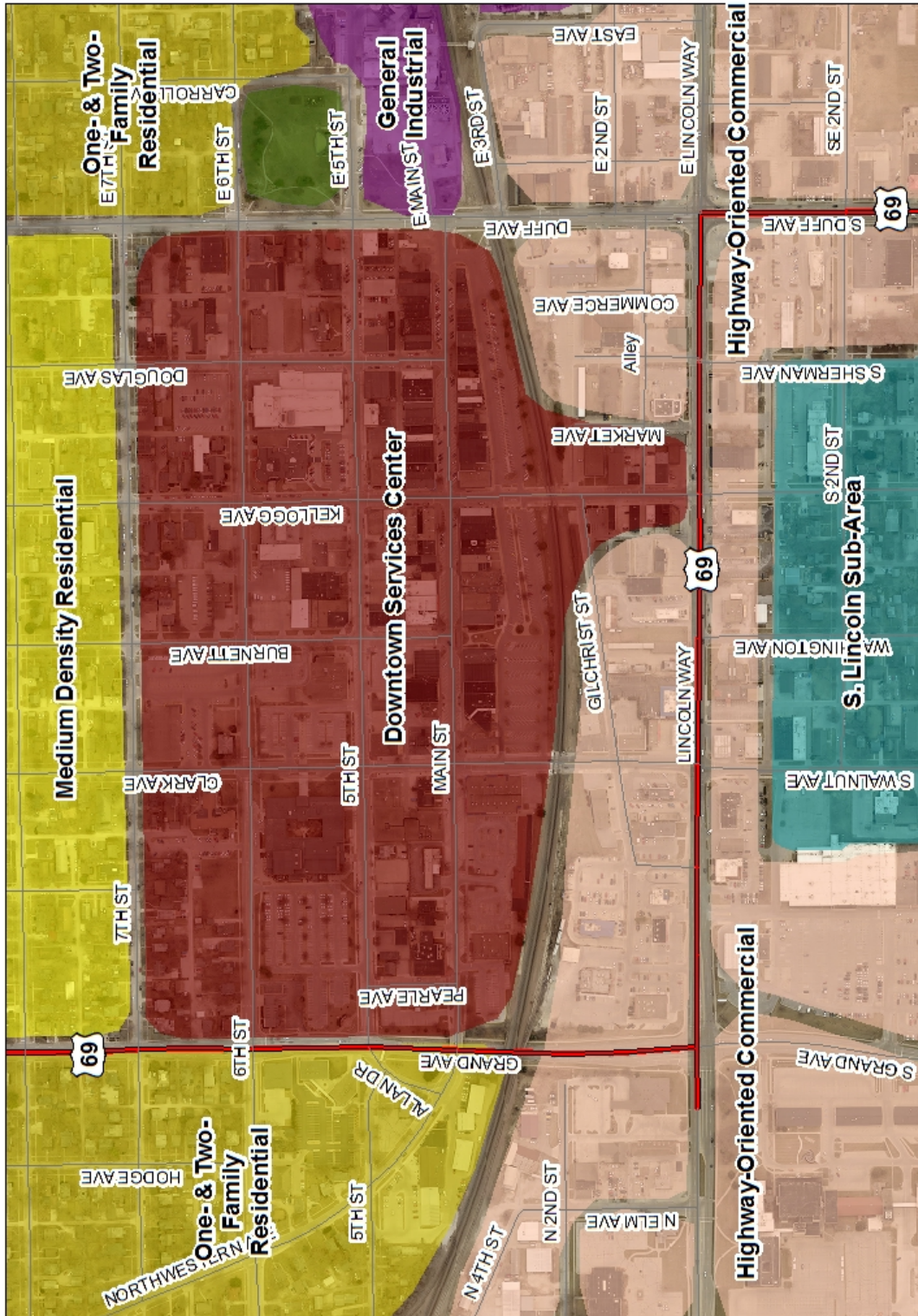
- Festival Plaza – an outdoor, multi-purpose public events area. The Festival Plaza is intended to provide a staging area for organized events and informal gatherings (e.g. lunchtime break/entertainment, Friday after work social mixer).

The Festival Plaza typically includes a grassy area for lounging/informal seating and paved sitting steps. A small stage area should be included for performances. The Plaza's design should also serve as an arts area that encourages passive use. The Plaza's location is typically convenient to large employment centers.

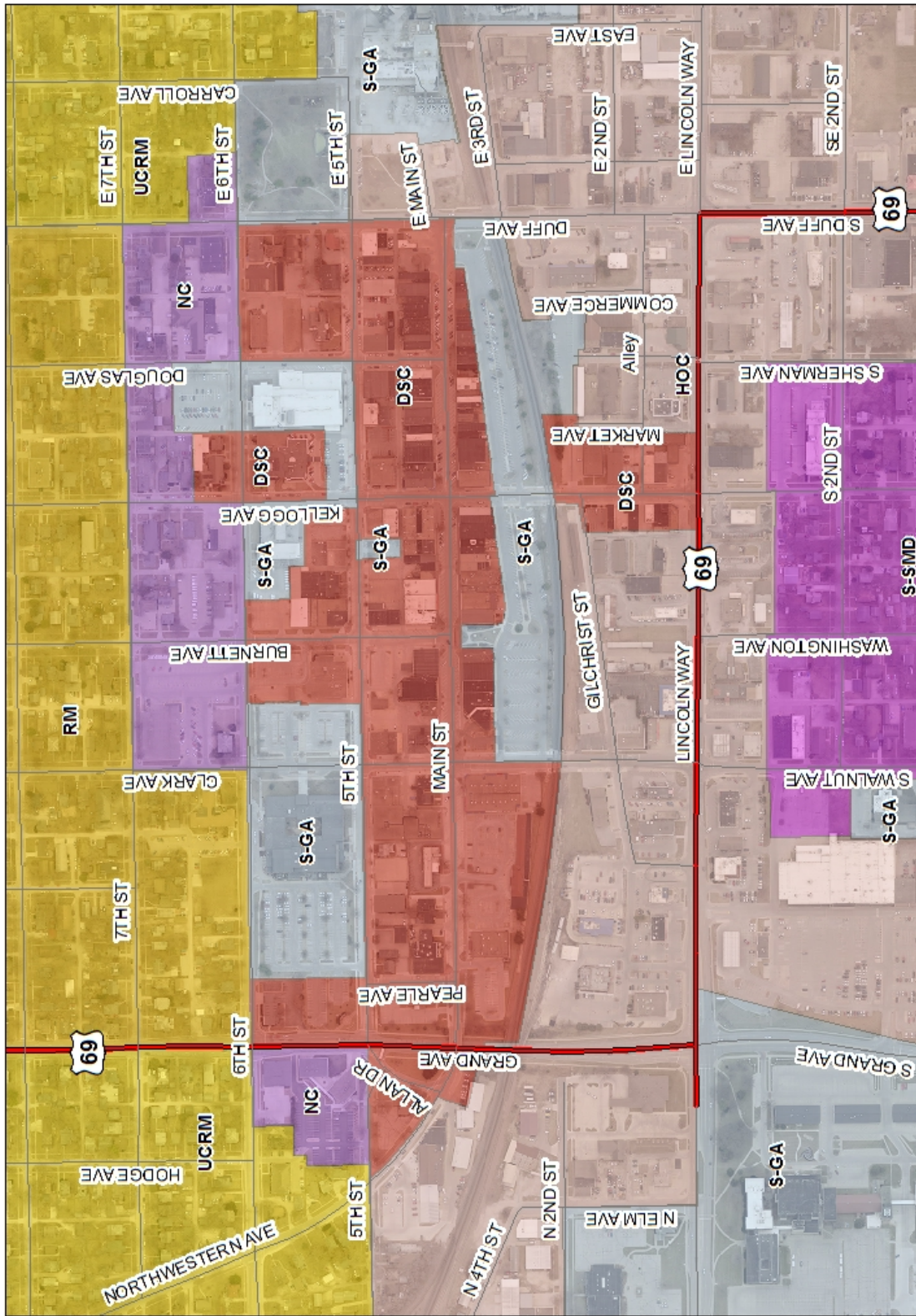


*Typical Festival Plaza*

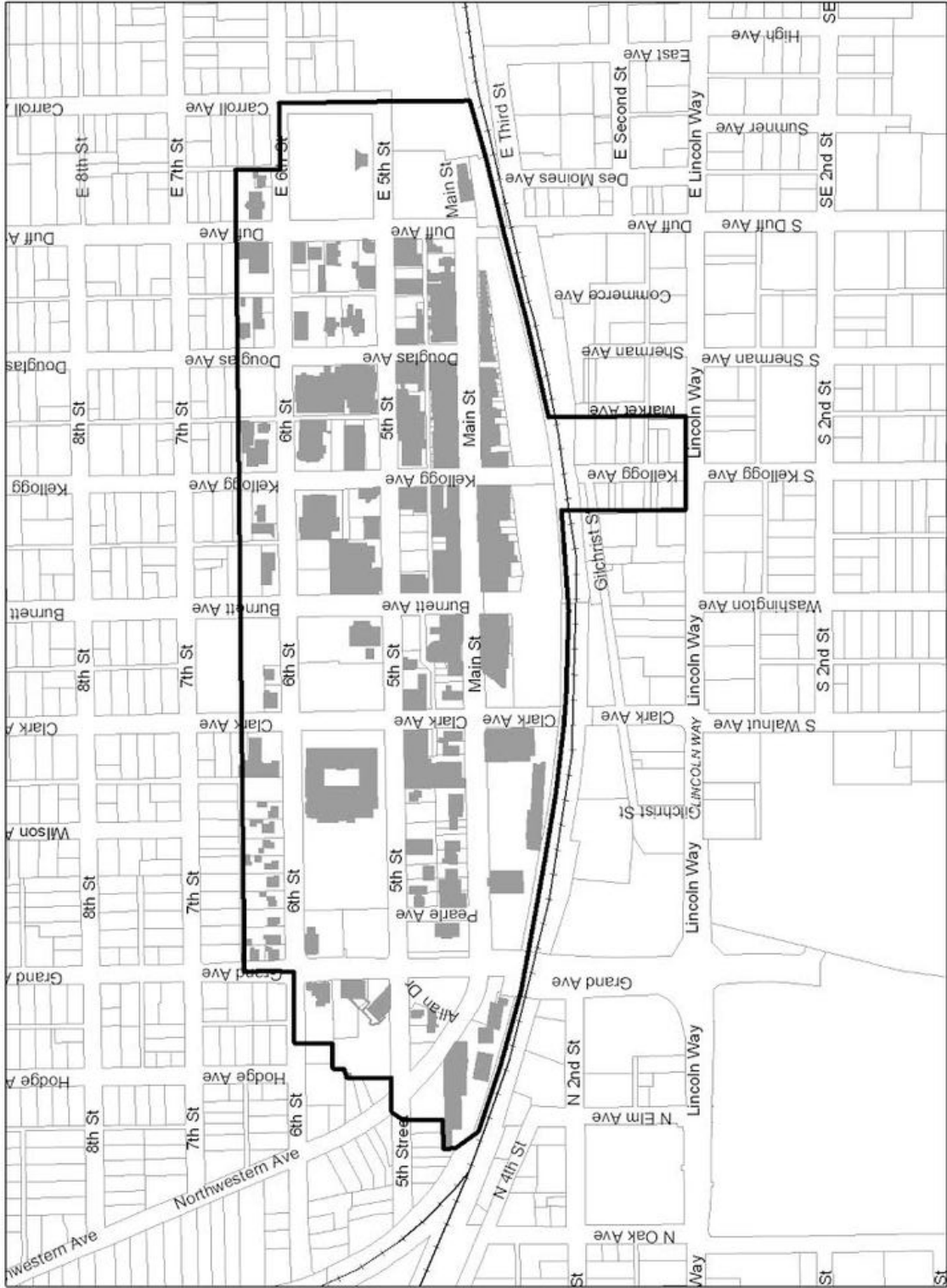
**Attachment 3: LUPP Future Land Use Map**



**Attachment 4: Downtown Zoning**



**Attachment 5: Main Street Cultural District Boundary**



Ames Main Street Cultural District

## Attachment 6: Downtown Historic District Boundary

United States Department of the Interior  
 National Park Service / National Register of Historic Places Registration Form  
 NPS Form 10900 OMB No. 10240018

Ames Main Street Historic District  
 Name of Property

Story, IA  
 County and State

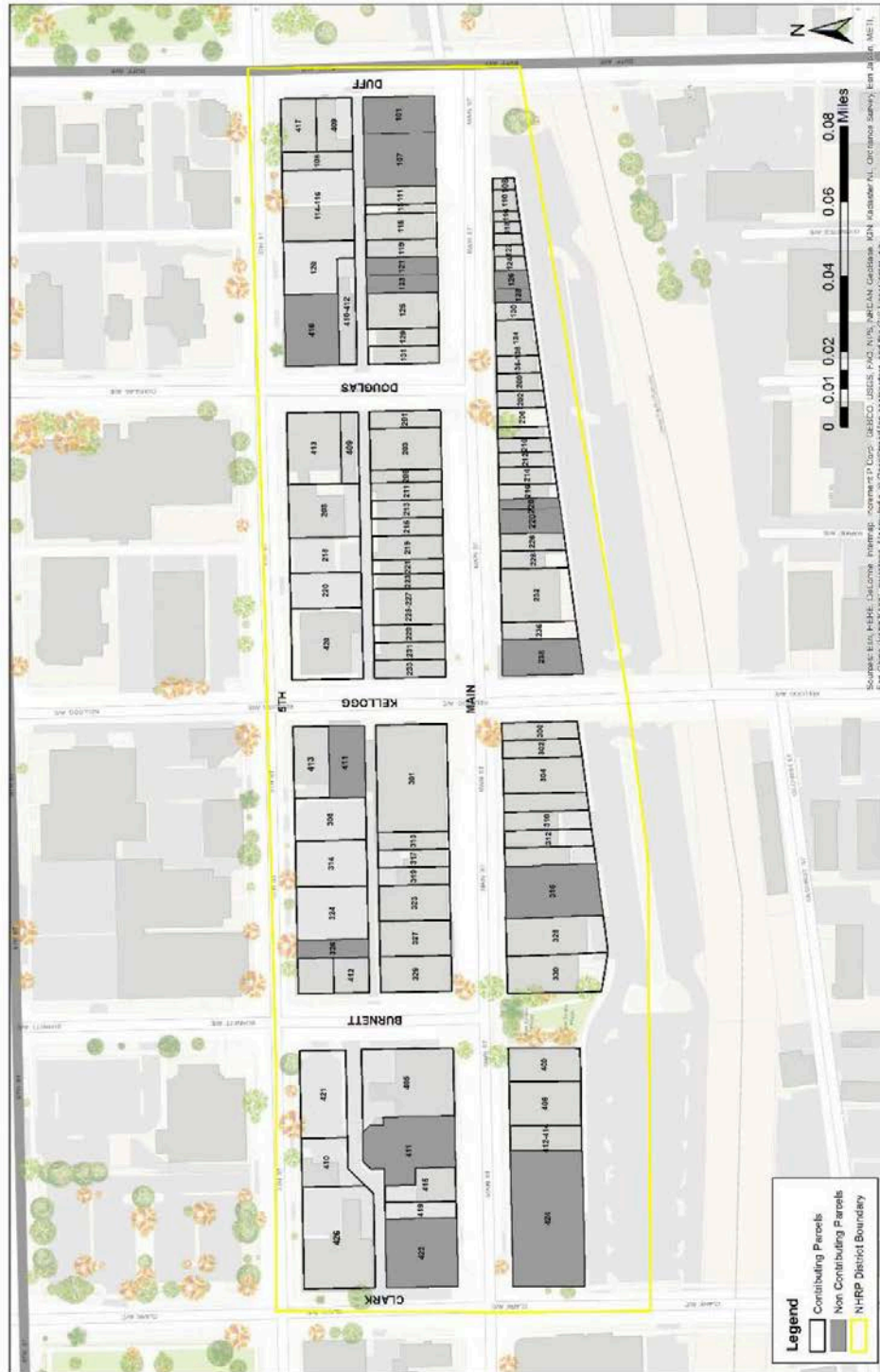
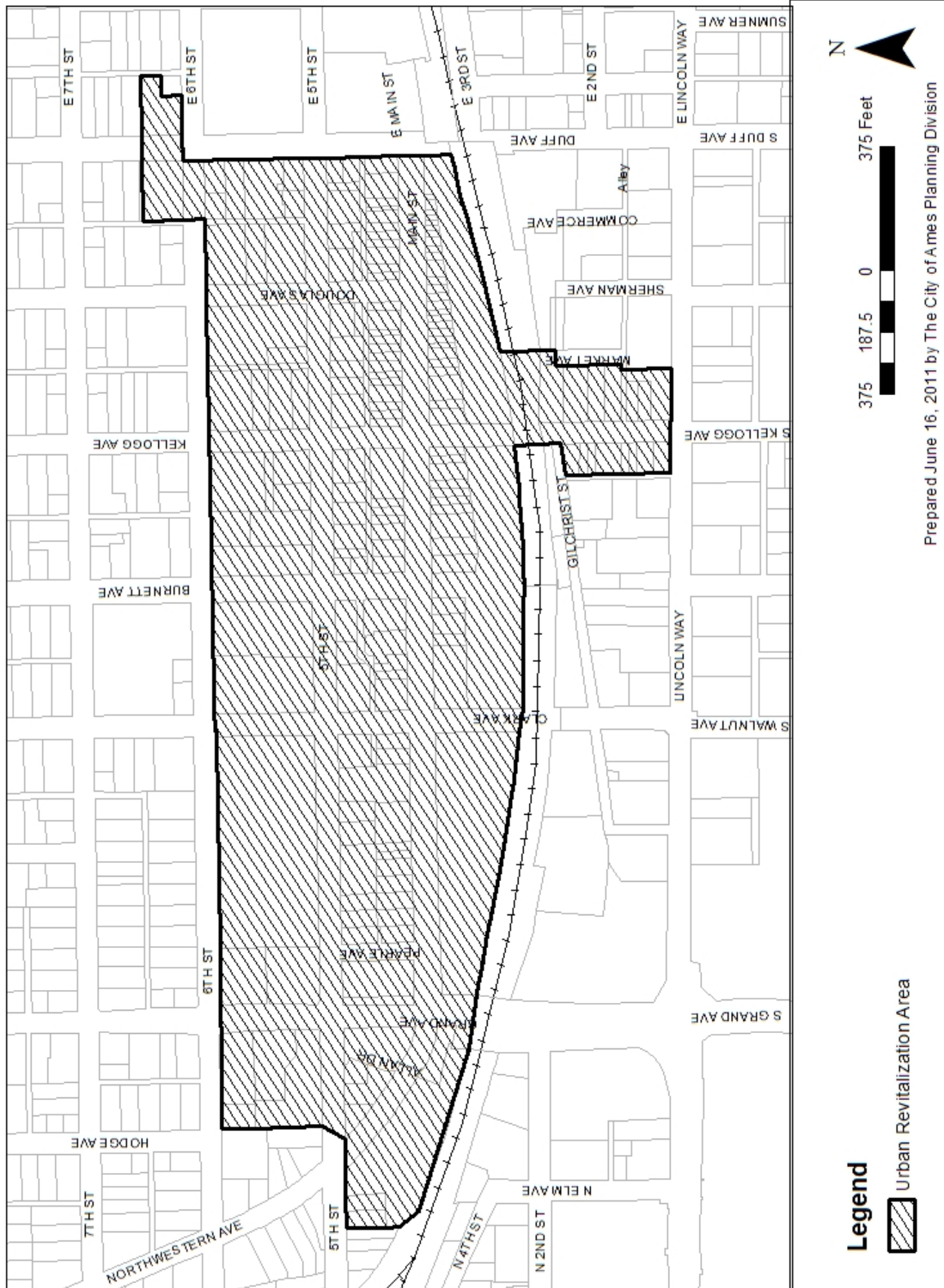


Figure 17 Simplified Aerial view with contributing resources marked.

**Attachment 7: Downtown Urban Revitalization Area**

**Downtown Urban Revitalization Area**



Prepared June 16, 2011 by The City of Ames Planning Division