

ITEM # 40c
DATE 10/14/08

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: EXPANSION OF THE DOWNTOWN FAÇADE GRANT PROGRAM

BACKGROUND:

On September 9, 2008, City Council directed staff to pursue expansion of the Façade Program in the downtown area. At that time the City Council reviewed a draft of proposed guidelines for an expanded program and directed staff to fine tune the standards and invite public input.

The current program applies to the downtown core. The existing program criteria include a set of Design Guidelines that are based on architectural elements appropriate to the commercial style that prevailed in downtown Ames during the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's. It is difficult for improvements to buildings with a different architectural style to meet these guidelines.

The proposed additional design guidelines are suited to these other types of buildings. Staff has also provided various options for an expanded program boundary. These documents are attached. These documents can also be found on the City's Internet web site (<http://www.cityofames.org>) by following the link to Options for Expanding Downtown Façade Grant Program on the home page of the Planning and Housing Department. An illustrated summary of the proposed design guidelines is also available there, as well as photographs of some of the existing buildings that would become eligible for grants under the various options for expansion.

The following changes have been made to the proposed design guidelines since September 9:

- Quality materials allows stucco to preserve a structure in some specific circumstances
- Façade modulation clarified to provide more than one option
- More specific criteria for roofs and awnings
- Building entrance language simplified

To encourage improvements that will have an impact, these guidelines define the minimum scope of improvements for a grant just as has been proposed as a revision of the current grant program. This allows the City to deny a grant if the improvements are not significant in terms of how the overall building is intended to look. This determination can be made on the basis of a plan for overall improvements to a building, even if some of those improvements would be part of a later project.

The program expansion would make grants available for improvements to buildings on sites within the downtown that are significant or prominent in terms of their location or use. Four options are presented to determine what is "significant or prominent:

Option A includes the sites that are visually important in the downtown because they either terminate a view or are prominent to entrances into the downtown area as described for streetscaping emphasis in the City's 1996 Downtown Plan. This option includes the intersections of Duff Avenue and Sixth Street, of Grand Avenue and Sixth Street and of Main Street, Northwestern Avenue and Allan Drive. The advantages of this option are that it focuses resources where improvements are most likely to make an impact and it would be the simplest to administer. A disadvantage is that it does not address sites that are prominent but are within the current program area and yet are not consistent architecturally with the current design guidelines.

Option B adds to Option A other very visible sites that are on the major streets on the periphery, Grand Avenue, Sixth Street and Duff Avenue. This option expands the opportunities to have significant visual impact without making administration any more complicated. Option B has the same disadvantage as Option A.

Option C adds the buildings along Kellogg Avenue and Clark Avenue, south from the Union Pacific Railroad. It generally does not include properties along Lincoln Way, nor Duff Avenue. This option recognizes that these corridors have the potential for urban characteristics similar to the Main Street core, a characteristic that can help visitors become oriented to the downtown area and how to get there. Kellogg in particular has all but one of its buildings placed at the street right of way line, has most of the buildings separated by shared party walls, and has windows and entrances comprising substantial portions of their facades. Kellogg Avenue can serve as a primary pedestrian linkage from the South Lincoln Neighborhood to the Main Street Cultural District, a potential that was also part of the sub-area plan for the South Lincoln Neighborhood.

A disadvantage of Option C is that the current Highway-Oriented Commercial Zoning is not consistent with the design guidelines in the following respects:

- The guidelines are based on building walls at the lot lines; the zoning requires setbacks.
- The guidelines are based on an urban form of a two- or three-story building filling the lot; the zoning has a maximum floor area ratio of 0.50, a maximum building coverage of 50% and a minimum landscaped area of 15% of the lot.
- The guidelines promote pedestrian-oriented scale and character supported with convenient community parking lots; the zoning requires parking spaces on-site, allows parking between the building and the street and allows drive-through service windows and outdoor storage.

Option D also allows the proposed additional guidelines to be applied to any building or façade within the downtown that has an architectural style that is not consistent with the current design guidelines, i.e., that it was never developed in the commercial style of the 1930's through 1950's. An advantage of this option is that it provides the maximum

flexibility for considering façade grants. It is more responsive than the current guidelines to the historic and architectural diversity that has resulted from the development over time of the current downtown. The added guidelines could also be applied to the south façade of the buildings on the south side of Main Street and to other blank facades in the area. Disadvantages include complicating the program which may lead to confusion and also that it may increase the number of grants and thus lead to requests to greater funding for the program.

On August 14, 2008, staff of the City and of the State Historical Society of Iowa sponsored a workshop "Preservation Opportunities in Ames Commercial Centers." These options for expansion of the program were presented in general terms. For the last ten days, the proposed revisions to the program have been on the City's Internet web site, with a link also from the Internet web site of the Main Street Cultural District. Notice of this was sent to attendees of the August workshop. On October 7, staff presented this information at the general membership meeting of the Main Street Cultural District.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. The City Council can approve the proposed additional Design Guidelines for the Downtown Façade Grant program and also approve Option D for the expanded program boundary, except without the areas south of the Union Pacific Railroad until the rezoning of that area is considered.
2. The City Council can approve the proposed additional Design Guidelines for the Downtown Façade Grant program and also approve any of the other Options for the expanded program boundary,
3. The City Council can approve the proposed additional Design Guidelines for the Downtown Façade Grant program and also approve any of the other Options for the expanded program boundary, with modifications
4. The City Council can deny the proposed additional Design Guidelines for the Downtown Façade Grant program and also deny any expansion of the program boundary.
5. The City Council can refer this issue back to staff for further information.

MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

It is difficult to know if the Downtown Façade Grant Program has been responsible for initiating improvement projects that would not have occurred without the grant program. However, it has had an impact on the projects that have occurred downtown and has advanced a more unified and consistent identity for an already attractive, strong and well-known downtown area. The program has not been used to its fullest potential. It is also likely that opportunities have been lost to have a greater impact on projects that did not fit the architectural style of the Design Guidelines or were outside of the program area. It makes sense at this time to try to get more benefit from a successful program

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council adopt Alternative No. 1, which is a recommendation that the City Council approve the proposed additional Design Guidelines for the Downtown Façade Grant program and also approve Option D for the expanded program boundary, except without the areas south of the Union Pacific Railroad until the rezoning of that area is considered.

Under this alternative, staff will work with property owners on pending projects to determine if they can be made to comply with the new guidelines and will also notify property owners of the expanded opportunity for any improvement projects that may be planned. Staff will also study rezoning of the area south of the Union Pacific Railroad, including consulting with property owners, and report back to City Council.

Downtown Grant Design Guidelines

For buildings on prominent sites beyond the Main Street core

Purpose. The following guidelines apply to buildings on select sites around the perimeter of the downtown, or on sites within the downtown that may not reflect the same location and development patterns of sites to which the City's Downtown Façade Grant Guidelines apply, but which nonetheless contribute to the downtown's visual character. These sites are significant in terms of their location as a view terminus, their location on major entrance points to the downtown, or their historic development with stand-alone buildings providing important community service.

The guidelines established for these buildings draw upon prominent or important design elements that typify the downtown. They nonetheless reflect the locational differences between these stand-alone sites and those that more rigidly align the downtown streetscape.

These guidelines are intended to apply to additions or alterations to existing buildings on these sites as part of the City's façade grant program. The purpose of the façade grant program for these prominent sites is to encourage improvement to the facades of these buildings that acknowledge or respect the original character of these buildings while also adding characteristics that reinforce the character and quality of the downtown. In this way, the downtown will have a more consistent image.

Design Standards.

1. Quality materials

- a Any face visible from public right-of-way must have clay brick as the material on more than 50% of its exterior facade area, not including windows and doors. Pre-cast concrete may be used only for lintels, sills and other accents.
- b Allowed materials on the rest of the exterior are cut stone and split face concrete block, except striated split face block, which is not allowed.
- c Stucco: The use of stucco or similar products (e.g., dri-vit) is not an allowed material, except in situations where:
 - i existing masonry has signs of advanced deterioration and the only feasible method of repair is to replace or cover the existing masonry; and
 - ii the layering of brick, stone or block over existing masonry would compromise the historic or architectural integrity of the building design; and
 - iii the removal and replacement of existing masonry would not be feasible without compromising the structural integrity of the building; and
 - iv stucco is used only in combination with brick accents on the same wall (e.g., pilasters, wainscoting, columns, etc.), and has the same color or tone as the brick accents.

2. Façade modulation

- a. Modulation in the façade shall be achieved through structural shifts in the building footprint that are reflected in the façade,

or through

- b. columns or buttresses that create a regular rhythm of supports,

or through

- c. Regularly spaced, visible structural elements, such as projecting pilasters, combined with regularly spaced window and door openings on all primary facades.
 - a No façade shall have a length exceeding forty (40) feet uninterrupted by a shift in the footprint, with the recessed/projecting portion measuring at least 10% of the façade width. Shifts in the footprint shall be reflected by a corresponding shift in the roof line or roof form.

3. Fenestration

- a Primary facades shall have windows comprising at least 30% of the width of the façade, and at least 20% of the area of the façade.
- b Secondary facades shall have the same fenestration as primary facades, or be detailed with projecting pilasters (6 inch projection minimum), combined with clay brick siding over the entire façade.
- c Windows shall have a vertical proportions that are no taller than three times the width of the window, and no shorter than the twice the width of the window, except as follows:
 - i Horizontal window openings may be filled with vertically oriented windows banked together (separated by wide mullions) into groupings of no more than 3. Multiple groupings are allowed if separated by a wall pillar that is at least as wide as one of the banked vertical windows.
 - ii Chicago style windows are appropriate, but may not be banked together with other window assemblies. They must be separated by a wall pillar that is at least as wide as the sidelight of the Chicago style window.
- d Colonial window motifs are not appropriate in the downtown. Preferably, windows should be divided by wider mullions rather than narrow muntin bars. If muntin bars are used, they shall be limited to upper-floor windows, and shall have the appearance of true-divided light windows.

4. Roof

- a Roofs must vary in height or form. No cornice, ridge or fascia shall exceed 40 feet in length without a minimum 5-foot elevation shift.
- b Roof pitch shall be 6:12 or steeper unless hidden by a parapet with a projecting cornice
- c Prohibited materials for roofs: corrugated sheet metal, fiberglass panel products

5. Building massing for new buildings

Structures shall be designed with vertical proportions and/or design elements such as colonnades extending two stories in height, projecting towers or steep-pitched roof forms that cascade and graduate down onto lower level roof forms.

6. Awnings

- a Awnings must be canvas fabric. No vinyl or other plasticized materials are permitted.
- b Backlit awnings are not permitted. If the canopy is lighted from underneath, it must be fitted with a black-out cloth to keep light from emitting through the canvas.
- c Awnings must include a loose valance, either scalloped, straight or box pleated. Rigid valances are not appropriate.

- d Awnings must be characterized by a traditional triangular frame (as viewed from the side) that tapers down to a narrow valance. Bowed awnings are not permitted except over arched window or door openings.
- e Awning signs are limited to individual letters or text placed on the canvas so that the canvas serves as the background to the sign. Lettering and text shall be no taller or wider than 70% of the width and height of the awning surface to which the sign is applied.

7. Building entrances

The primary pedestrian entry of the building shall

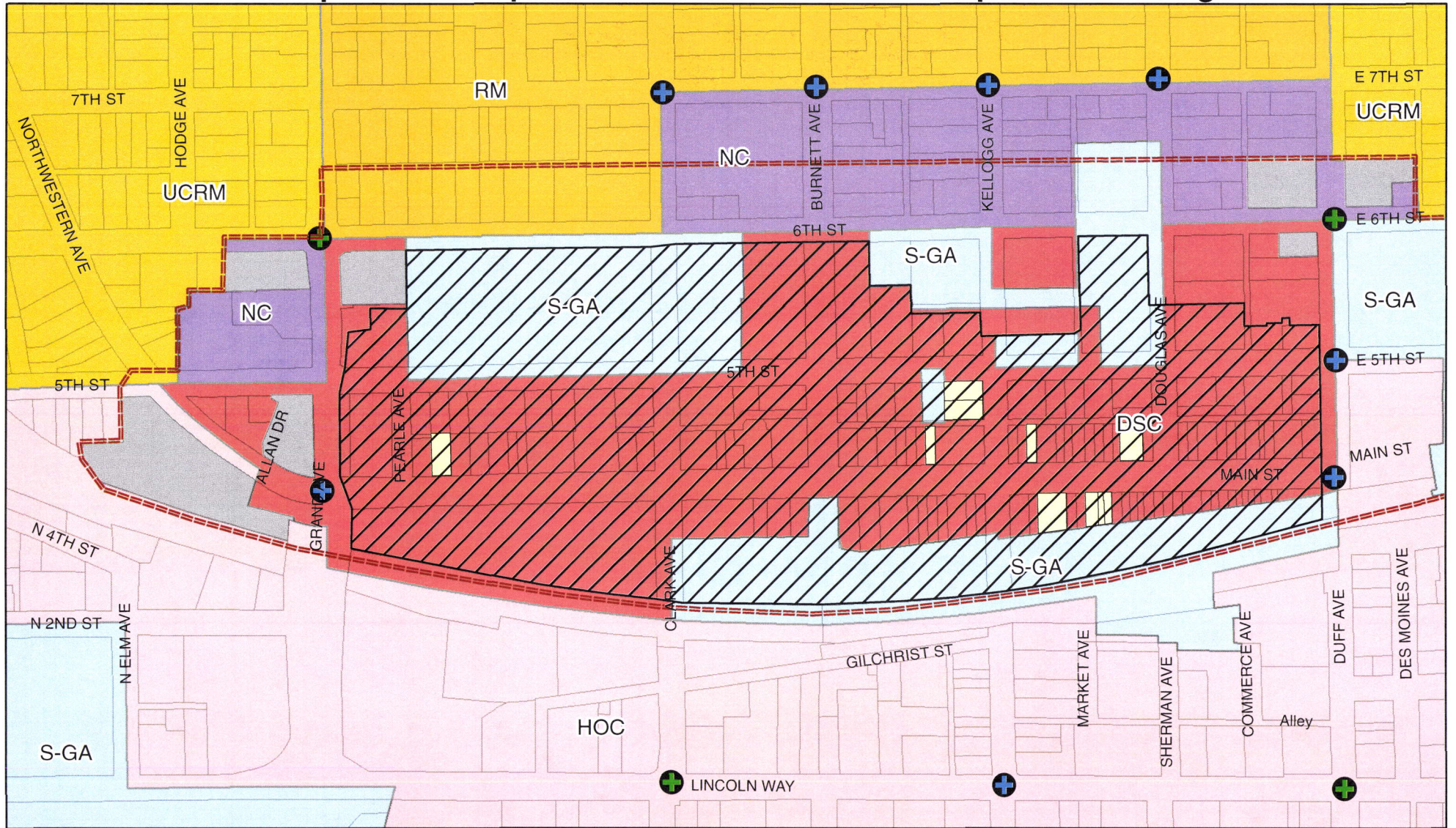
- a. be connected to the pedestrian sidewalks on the street with landscaped walkways separated from vehicle paving, and
- b. face the street or be no more than 90 degrees from facing a street, and
- c. be identified, defined and reinforced by
 - i. significant architectural elements of mass, such as building recesses or protrusions accompanied by changes in the roof, or
 - ii. sheltering elements such as arcades, canopies or porticos supported by columns and providing at least six feet of width and four feet of depth, or
 - iii. if the entrance faces the street, significant variations in the roof or parapet.

Minimum Qualifications for Grant.

Grants may be offered for improvements to select portions or features of a façade when it is not feasible to do an entire façade renovation. However, the improvements must contribute to a project that, when complete, will be generally consistent with all design standards. To determine this, an application for a façade grant must include an elevation plan for the building as it is intended to look when complete. The City may approve grants based upon a proposed improvement's contribution to the finished product, and may deny a grant for improvements that, while compliant in part, are not significant in terms of how the overall building is intended to ultimately look.

If a project is phased, grants shall be offered only to those improvements that are done in correct sequence of construction. For example, if the finished project requires installing or changing windows, these must be done before grant monies may be expended on siding materials, since siding is generally installed after windows are in place.

Options for Expansion - Downtown Facade Improvement Program



Expansion Option A

Commercial Buildings:
-at major gateways



Mainstreet Cultural District



Downtown_Facade_Improvement_Area



Access Location



Downtown Plan Gateway



Downtown_Facade_Grants



Residential Medium Density Zone "RM"



Urban Core Residential Medium Density Zone "UCRM"



Neighborhood Commercial Zone "NC"



Highway-Oriented Commercial Zone "HOC"

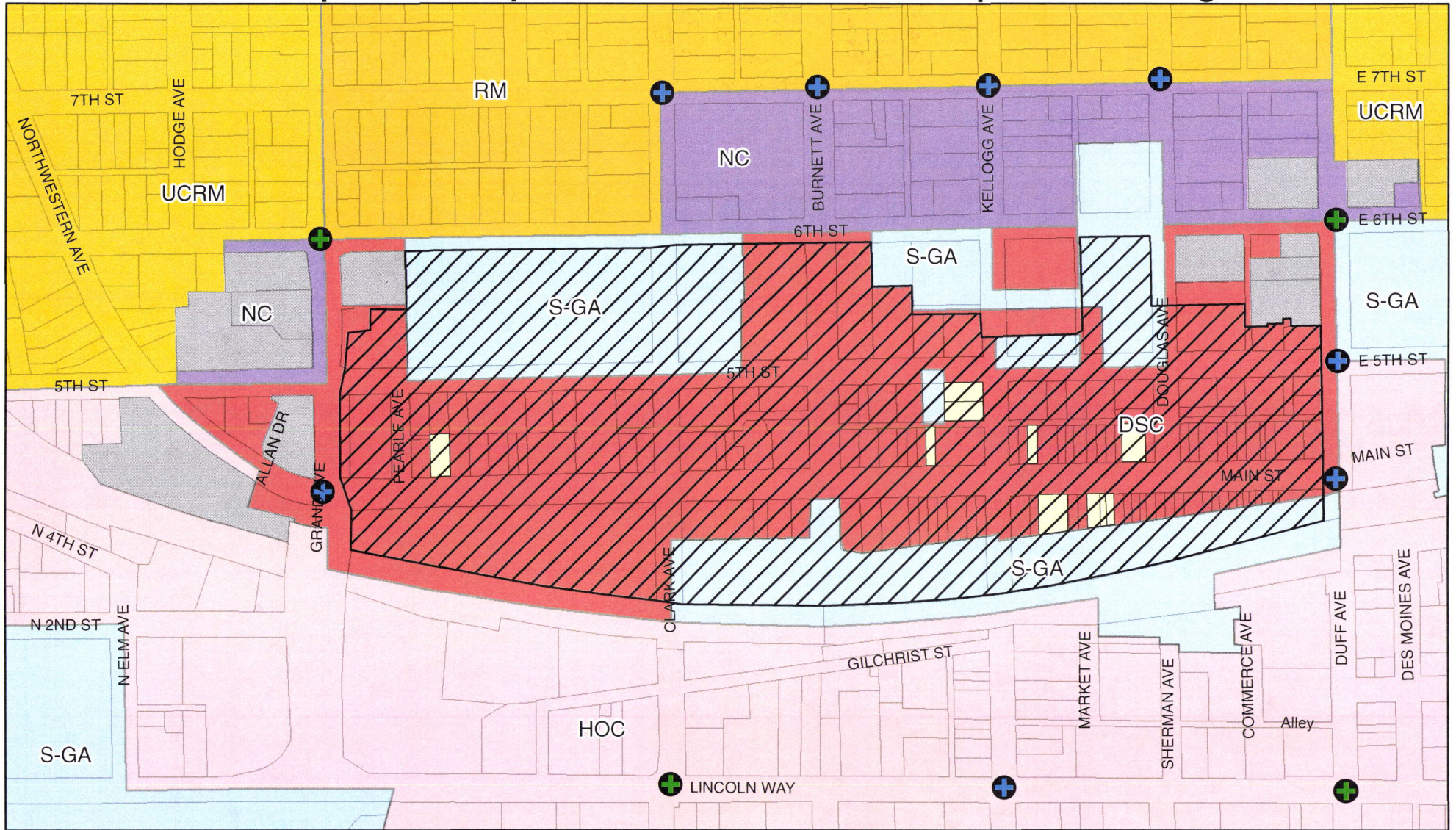


Downtown Service Center "DSC"



Government/Airport District "S-GA"

Options for Expansion - Downtown Facade Improvement Program



Expansion Option B

Commercial Buildings--
-at major gateways
-at other access points



Mainstreet Cultural District



Downtown_Facade_Improvement_Area



Access Location



Downtown Plan Gateway



Downtown_Facade_Grants



Residential Medium Density Zone "RM"



Urban Core Residential Medium Density Zone "UCRM"



Neighborhood Commercial Zone "NC"



Highway-Oriented Commercial Zone "HOC"

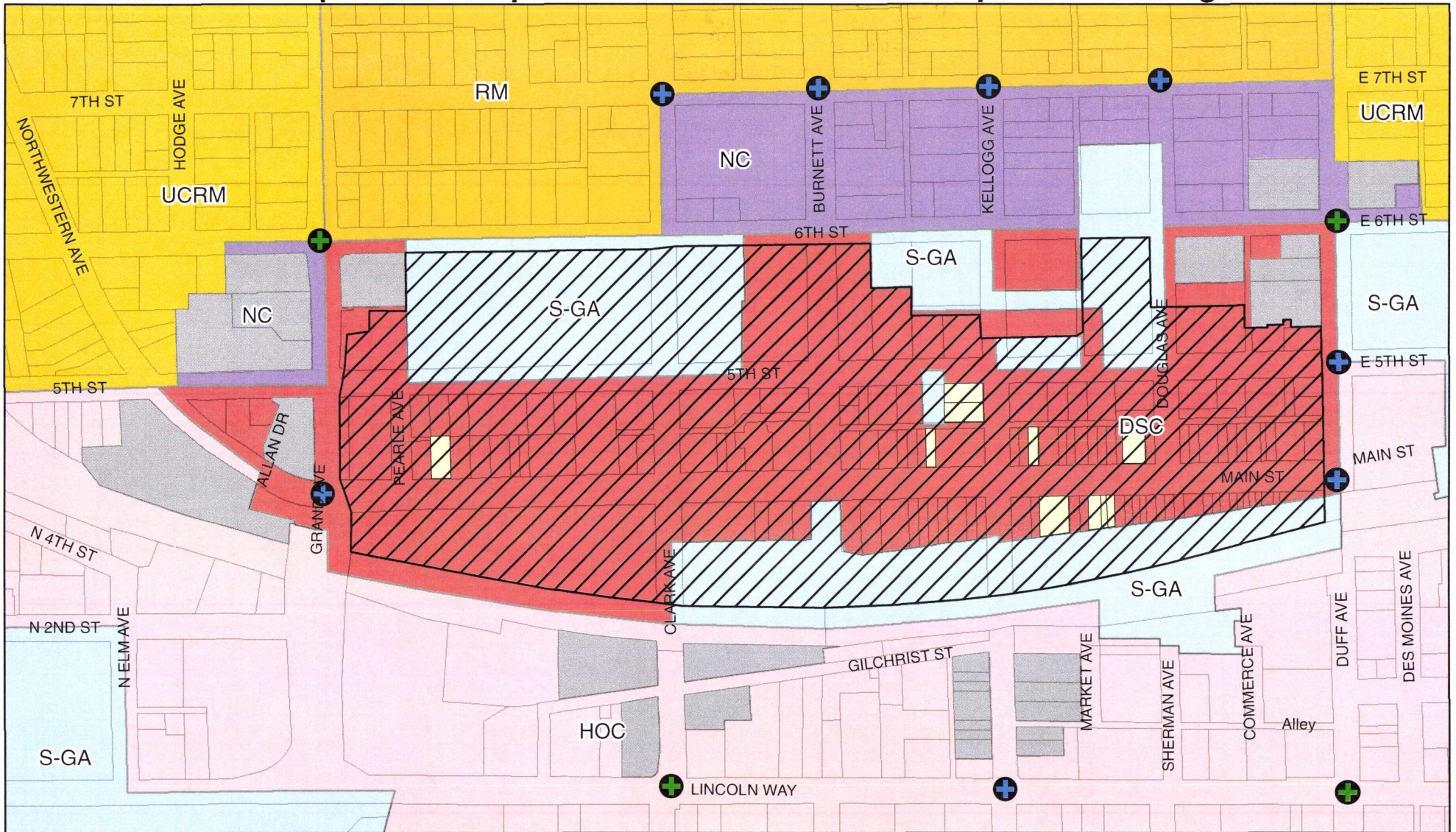


Downtown Service Center "DSC"



Government/Airport District "S-GA"

Options for Expansion - Downtown Facade Improvement Program



Expansion Option C

Commercial Buildings--
 -at major gateways
 -at other access points
 -along corridors
 from Lincoln Way



Mainstreet Cultural District



Downtown_Facade_Improvement_Area



Access Location



Downtown Plan Gateway



Downtown_Facade_Grants



Residential Medium Density Zone "RM"



Urban Core Residential Medium Density Zone "UCRM"



Neighborhood Commercial Zone "NC"



Highway-Oriented Commercial Zone "HOC"

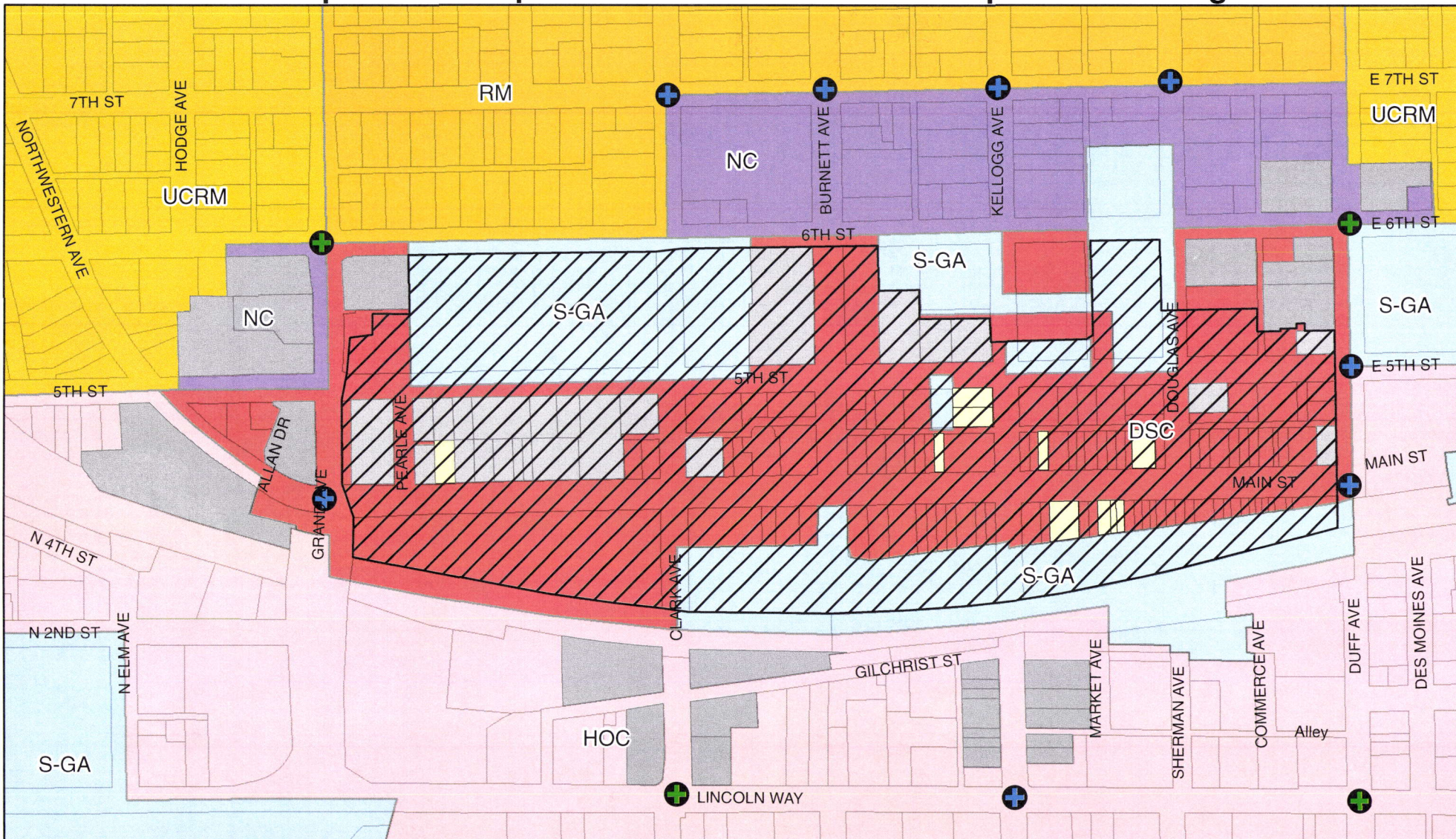


Downtown Service Center "DSC"




Government/Airport District "S-GA"

Options for Expansion - Downtown Facade Improvement Program



Expansion Option D

-  Commercial Buildings--
- at major gateways
- at other access points
- along corridors
- from Lincoln Way
- now eligible but
- not compatible



Mainstreet Cultural District



Downtown_Facade_Improvement_Area



Access Location



Downtown Plan Gateway



Downtown_Facade_Grants



Historic buildings-Contributing



Residential Medium Density Zone "RM"



Urban Core Residential Medium Density Zone "UCRM"



Neighborhood Commercial Zone "NC"



Highway-Oriented Commercial Zone "HOC"

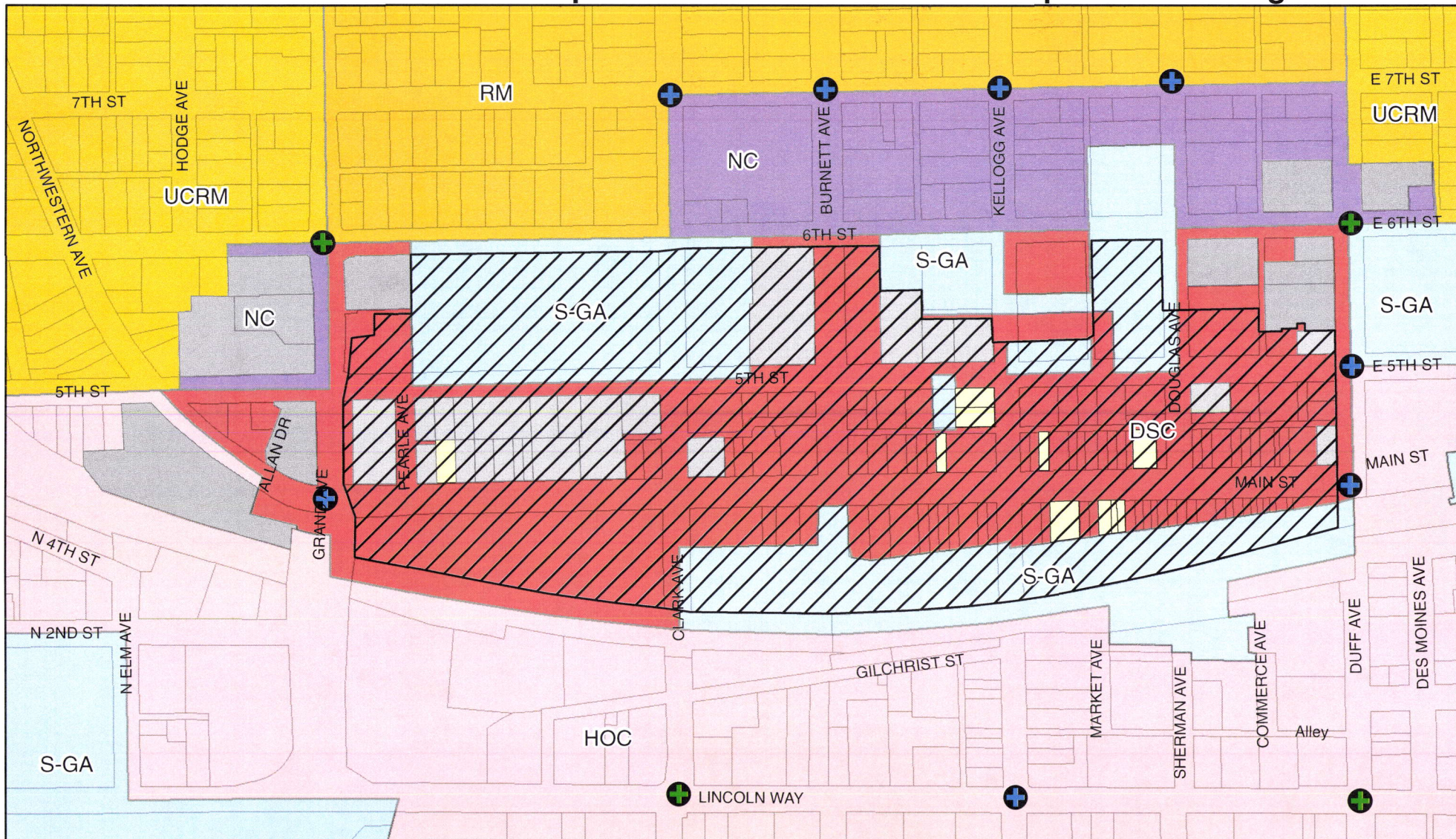


Downtown Service Center "DSC"




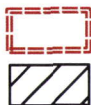
Government/Airport District "S-GA"

Recommended Expansion - Downtown Facade Improvement Program



Recommended Expansion

-  Commercial Buildings--
- at major gateways
- at other access points
- now eligible but not compatible



Mainstreet Cultural District



Downtown_Facade_Improvement_Area



Access Location



Downtown Plan Gateway



Downtown_Facade_Grants



Historic buildings-Contributing



Residential Medium Density Zone "RM"



Urban Core Residential Medium Density Zone "UCRM"



Neighborhood Commercial Zone "NC"



Highway-Oriented Commercial Zone "HOC"



Downtown Service Center "DSC"



Government/Airport District "S-GA"