

COMMISSION ACTION FORM

DATE PREPARED: December 29, 2010

REQUEST: Land Use Policy Plan (LUPP) Future Land Use Map Amendment to change the land use designation of the subject properties from Highway-Oriented Commercial (HOC) to Downtown Services Center (See Figures 1 and 2: Current and Proposed Designations on Future Land Use Map)

**APPLICANT/
PROPERTY OWNER:
CONTACT:** Initiated by
City Council

LOCATION: All properties on 100 and 200 blocks of Kellogg Avenue
(From Union Pacific Railroad crossing to Lincoln Way)

ACREAGE: 3.25 Acres

**CURRENT
ZONING:** Highway-Oriented Commercial (HOC)
(See Figure 3: Current Zoning)

BACKGROUND:

On December 14, 2010, City Council directed the Planning and Zoning Commission to hold a public hearing on an amendment to the LUPP Future Land Use Map to change the land use designation of the properties along both sides of Kellogg Avenue between the Union Pacific Railroad and Lincoln Way from Highway-Oriented Commercial to Downtown Services Center. The purpose of this change, and a similar zoning map amendment, would be to encourage investments that promote the economic vitality of the Downtown and the Kellogg corridor, and strengthen visual connections between Lincoln Way and Main Street. The City Council is also considering expanding the boundaries of the Downtown Façade Improvement Program to expand south of the Union Pacific Railroad along the Kellogg corridor. This program provides grants and partial property tax abatement for improvements to front building facades whose design follows certain design guidelines.

The façade program and the land use are linked in this case because of differences in the land use policies and zoning development standards that apply to the areas north and south of the railroad. The zoning north of the railroad is Downtown Services Center (DSC), which allows building at the property lines, requires buildings to be at least two stories in height, and prohibits parking in front of the building. These standards are consistent with the character of the traditional Downtown, including storefronts at the sidewalk, buildings next to each other with no side setbacks, two stories with office or

residential uses above, and common parking areas. The historic design standards for the façade grants are based on these characteristics of the existing urban form.

In contrast, the zoning south of the railroad is Highway-Oriented Commercial (HOC), which requires buildings to be set away from the property lines, requires on-site parking, and allows that parking to be in front of the building. One-story buildings are usually built in this zone. In short, the current zoning prohibits the urban form required by the historic design standards for the façade grants. Therefore, if the Downtown Façade Improvement Program, with its historic design guidelines, is to be extended south of the Union Pacific Railroad, the Land Use Policy Plan Map and the zoning should first be changed to Downtown Services Center.

Therefore, the city staff examined whether the land use and zoning south of the railroad should be changed to be more consistent with the historic design standards for the Downtown Façade Improvement Program. The scope of the study included the entire area between Grand Avenue and Duff Avenue (See Figure 4: Study Area). City staff has:

- Collated and analyzed data about the buildings and properties on Main Street and in the study area.
- Examined possible future redevelopment in the study area under both the Highway-Oriented Commercial and Downtown Service Center zoning development standards.
- Heard feedback at a public meeting to which all property owners and business owners in the Downtown Service Center zoning district and the study area were invited.
- Heard feedback from the Main Street Cultural District General membership, Central Committee, Design Committee, and Business Improvement Committee.
- Contacted all property owners on Kellogg Avenue and spoke with eight of them.

(All of the detailed information and analysis on which this report is based are available at the City's website under [What's New](#) at the [Planning Division](#) page.)

The study area is within the larger area that the Land Use Policy Plan describes as the Urban Core, which includes four distinct and highly interrelated neighborhoods (See Figure 5: Neighborhoods in the Urban Core):

- **Ames Downtown.** Identified as the [Main Street Cultural District](#) in 2004, the Downtown was designated by State of Iowa Cultural Affairs Department as a Certified Cultural District and accepted into the Iowa Main Street Program as the Ames Main Street Cultural District.
- **Old Town Historic District.** The convenience of services that the Downtown offers and the street/sidewalk grid provide strong links to the Old Town Historic District (National and Local) to the north and the rest of the Old Town Neighborhood north to 13th Street.

- **Lincoln Way Commercial Corridor.** The railroad tracks make for a strong south boundary of the Downtown, due to three at-grade crossings and 60-90 trains per day. South of these tracks is the Lincoln Way Commercial Corridor, with primarily retail businesses providing direct vehicle access and convenient parking. It is on U.S. Highway 69, which is one of the City's major streets, carrying over 20,000 vehicles per day.
- **South Lincoln Neighborhood.** To the south of the study area is the South Lincoln Neighborhood, an area with a mix of uses including around 1,000 apartments and 60 detached residences housing over 2,000 people. The Ames Land Use Policy Plan designates most of the South Lincoln Neighborhood as part of the Downtown, with objectives to create a more cohesive district and provide greater access and circulation. The abutting Lincoln Way Commercial Corridor and the Ames Downtown north of it offer convenient services to South Lincoln Neighborhood residents.

Existing policies and previous planning reports have recognized the strong interrelationships between the Main Street Cultural District, the Lincoln Way commercial corridor, and the South Lincoln Neighborhood and the value of access and connections among them. Both the Land Use Policy Plan and the South Lincoln Sub-Area Plan recognize the challenge of making connections across Lincoln Way and the railroad and of the 800-foot distance between Lincoln Way and Main Street. Both plans call for streetscaping and intersection improvements to make the Lincoln Way crossing at the Clark and Kellogg intersections more prominent. However, a design study done a few years ago, when the traffic signals were replaced at the Kellogg intersection, revealed that currently there is not sufficient space on any of these corners to make any entryway features that will be visually prominent enough to compete with all of the existing signs, buildings and utilities.

It can be difficult to see and find the Downtown from Lincoln Way because the development of the Lincoln Way commercial corridor blocks views to the Downtown and because the physical character of development in the study area is so different from the traditional downtown. The exception is the Kellogg corridor, where the building placements are similar to a traditional Downtown – at the sidewalk without spaces between. To address these difficulties, both the Land Use Policy Plan and the Downtown Plan (1995) call for the study area to be an expansion area for the Downtown.

The history of development in the study area illustrates the reasons for its physical form. In early times, businesses that needed large properties and railroad access, such as lumber, coal, and grain, developed along the south side of the railroad. By the early 1900's, houses filled both sides of "Boone Road" to the south. The designation of Boone Road as the Lincoln Highway in 1913 provided the traffic and setting for a new type of commercial development that accommodated and served people with automobiles. Over time, this auto-oriented commercial development replaced the residences along Lincoln Way. At the same time, on Kellogg and in a portion of the area east of it, smaller lots were platted for more retail-oriented commercial uses, similar to the lots on Main Street (See Figure 6: Smaller lots on Kellogg and to the east). Therefore,

development on Kellogg was in the traditional Downtown style, as on Main Street. Along the Clark corridor, the wholesale uses, such as lumber, coal, gas and oil, remained for a longer period of time.

Thus, the study area now contains a wide variety of uses and lot sizes. As a whole the products and services offered on Kellogg are consistent with the Downtown and the Lincoln Way commercial corridor. But it appears that this corridor on its own does not provide a significant variety of retail goods and services.

Some uses in the Downtown are the same as in the study area, and some are different. For example, the study area contains fast-food restaurants, but all of the restaurants in the Downtown are sit-down. However, the differences in uses allowed by the different zoning designations are not significant. The significant differences in zoning standards north and south of the railroad pertain to the physical development in each zone, such as setbacks and parking standards.

In the Downtown, building placement, scale, and façade design invite people to walk, stay a while and shop. Such compact development provides a lot of activity – and a lot of business opportunity – in one place. Physical development south of the railroad is less compact, serving people in automobiles. One indicator of compactness is floor area ratio, which is the ratio of the total building floor area to the total site area. The maximum floor area ratio in the study area (Highway-Oriented Commercial zoning district) is 0.5. The majority of the properties in the study area have a floor area ratio consistent with this standard, except the Kellogg corridor. The compactness of development on Kellogg is non-conforming with respect to zoning and it indicates that the Kellogg corridor has a different character than rest of the study area (See Figure 7: Floor Area Ratios greater than 0.50).

The location of off-street parking is another element of the existing urban form. In the Downtown, parking for all properties is provided in large, centrally located parking lots. This allows the compact arrangement of larger buildings with many uses that creates a pedestrian environment for shopping and events. In the study area south of the railroad, parking is provided at each building and is owned and maintained by that building owner. This creates a dispersed pattern of smaller buildings with fewer uses with parking in front, beside, and/or behind each building.

Again, the exception is Kellogg, where there is little parking associated with each building. The parking that serves the Kellogg corridor includes on-street parallel parking, parking spaces behind some of the buildings and accessed by alleys, a private parking lot, and a public parking lot. The 143 total parking spaces are 35% fewer than what is now required for Highway-Oriented Commercial zoning.

Although the parking arrangement is similar to the Downtown, the urban form of the Kellogg corridor does not provide the same pedestrian environment found in the Downtown. Only two buildings are two-story, there are several gaps between storefronts where buildings have been removed, and the corridor is only one block long. The separation created by the railroad between this Kellogg corridor and Main Street is a

significant and permanent impediment to connecting a pedestrian-oriented environment along the Kellogg corridor to the pedestrian-friendly setting of the Downtown.

Property improvement and redevelopment have been frequent in the study area, but some properties are less suitable for redevelopment than others. One suitability indicator is whether or not a property can be redeveloped for its current use under current zoning standards. Existing conditions make this difficult for 40% of the properties in the study area, including floor area ratio exceeding the 0.5 maximum, lot width narrower than the 60-foot minimum, or lot sizes smaller than 10,000 square feet. When such properties cannot be combined with adjacent properties, redevelopment is difficult. Half of such properties are on Kellogg, comprising more than half of the total property area on Kellogg (See Figure 8: Lots with impediments to redevelopment under existing zoning). To preserve the potential revenue from their properties, some owners on Kellogg have purchased vacant properties to use for parking, which improves the parking problem, but also preserves gaps in the storefront streetscape, negatively affecting the retail pedestrian environment. This is particularly evident on the west side of Kellogg.

Investment in property improvement has been ongoing within the study area on a lot-by-lot basis. The 2006 renovation creating a new Starbucks coffee shop is one example. Two buildings on Clark were built in 1999 and 2001. Several buildings on Kellogg have been improved in the last few years. The street sidewalk and lighting on Kellogg were all replaced in 2009. Decorative paving and lighting included in that project have extended some of the visual elements from the Cultural District streetscape. In 2009, a major electric power interconnect line was installed overhead through the north part of the study area. This line, which follows the north side of Gilchrist, helps to provide reliable power for the entire community and is a critical element in the regional electrical network. In the next few years, plans call for the repaving of Gilchrist.

Redevelopment Scenarios. In order to analyze and illustrate future impacts of different policies and standards, two future development scenarios have been prepared:

- Maintain current land use and zoning on the Kellogg corridor. This future possible development of the Kellogg corridor is based on its current Highway-Oriented Commercial zoning. This scenario illustrates the corridor as a commercial area similar to Lincoln Way and South Duff Avenue. Under this scenario, the corridor would look significantly different than it does today and would not reflect the character of Downtown (See Figure 9).
- Change land use and zoning on the Kellogg corridor to Downtown Service Center. This future possible development of the Kellogg corridor is based on Downtown Services Center zoning. This scenario illustrates filling in the gaps between buildings and improving the facades making this Downtown entry corridor more consistent with Main Street (See Figure 10).

Animated models of these scenarios will be presented at the public hearing. It is important to note that City staff has prepared these scenarios only to study the implications of possible land use policies. No developer has made any proposal for this

area, nor has any developer been involved in preparing these scenarios. **It should be emphasized that the City of Ames is not proposing or initiating any redevelopment in the study area.**

Stakeholders Input

A public input meeting was held for this study on Monday, March 15, 2010, at 7:00 p.m. in City Hall. This meeting also covered the related topic of new standards to preserve existing historic facades Downtown. Invitations were sent to all of the property owners in the Cultural District and the study area, as well as to all of the businesses that do not own their buildings. Twenty people attended. Four people listed addresses in the Kellogg or Clark corridors, and the rest were associated with a business, property or organization in the Cultural District.

The above information and conclusions were presented, as well as two alternative future scenarios described above for the Kellogg corridor. Comments included:

- Public investment in the street and streetscape and private investment in five buildings have had a positive effect.
- Parking and setback requirements of Highway-Oriented Commercial zoning are a barrier to redevelopment in the Kellogg corridor.
- Change will continue to be incremental, because it is difficult to assemble a site suitable for a new building with the current standards.
- Some of the existing businesses, such as the adult business and the quick loan/pawnshops on Kellogg do not make a positive impression as an entryway into the Cultural District. However, it was also noted that the larger quick loan business had recently done a major facelift.

At this meeting there was general support for changing the zoning in the Kellogg corridor to Downtown Services Center. This past fall, staff spoke with seven of 11 property owners on Kellogg, plus one tenant. Five of these owners also owned the business. Reactions to the possible land use and zoning change were mixed. Of four owners of buildings that generally conform to the current zoning, one favors the current zoning and three either favor or do not see a problem to the change to Downtown Services Center. One other owner and one tenant also see no problems with the change. One owner favors the change so that the building can be rebuilt if destroyed. Another owner whose property may be for sale soon, favored whichever zoning is least restrictive.

Zoning non-conformities will be present on this block with either of the zoning options. Current non-conformities include lack of adequate parking, setbacks, landscaping, and floor area ratio and building coverage larger than permitted. One property appears to meet the current standards. If the zoning is changed to Downtown Services Center, only two buildings will conform to the requirement that all buildings have at least two stories and the minimum floor area ratio of one. However, many buildings in the Downtown Services Center north of the railroad do not meet these standards. Nonconforming buildings can be maintained, remodeled, enlarged, and rebuilt, unless they are destroyed resulting in loss of more than 70% of value. It is possible to amend the zoning

text to allow one-story buildings and buildings that do not meet minimum floor area ratio and building coverage requirements if built before the date the ordinance was enacted. This technique permits, for example, pre-existing duplexes in the City's Residential Low-Density zoning districts.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. The Planning and Zoning Commission can recommend that the City Council approve an amendment to the LUPP Future Land Use Map to change the land use designation of the properties along both sides of Kellogg Avenue between the Union Pacific Railroad and Lincoln Way from Highway-Oriented Commercial to Downtown Services Center.
2. The Planning and Zoning Commission can recommend that the City Council leave the LUPP Future Land Use Map unchanged, with the land use designation of the properties along both sides of Kellogg Avenue between the Union Pacific Railroad and Lincoln Way remaining Highway-Oriented Commercial.
3. The Planning and Zoning Commission can refer this request back to staff for more information prior to forwarding a recommendation to City Council.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

The properties along Kellogg Avenue are less suited for vehicle-oriented commercial development due to lack of exposure to Lincoln Way and lower traffic counts. This is likely why these properties have not already been purchased, consolidated, and redeveloped. The existing pattern of buildings is already similar to the Main Street streetscape, and Kellogg Avenue serves as a vehicle and pedestrian entrance to the Downtown area from the major arterial street in Ames. The Downtown Services Center zoning will help preserve these characteristics and, with the Downtown Façade Improvement Program, provide an incentive for redevelopment that improves Kellogg Avenue as a traditional retail block and as an entrance to the Downtown.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the Department of Planning and Housing that the Planning and Zoning Commission act in accordance with Alternative #1, which is to recommend that the City Council approve an amendment to the LUPP Future Land Use Map to change the land use designation of the properties along both sides of Kellogg Avenue between the Union Pacific Railroad and Lincoln Way from Highway-Oriented Commercial to Downtown Services Center.

This change will facilitate continued reinvestment and make commercial uses more viable in the Kellogg corridor. However, since many of the buildings have been improved recently and since parking is still a challenge, change will continue to be incremental and take more time.

Figure 1: Current designation on Future Land Use Map

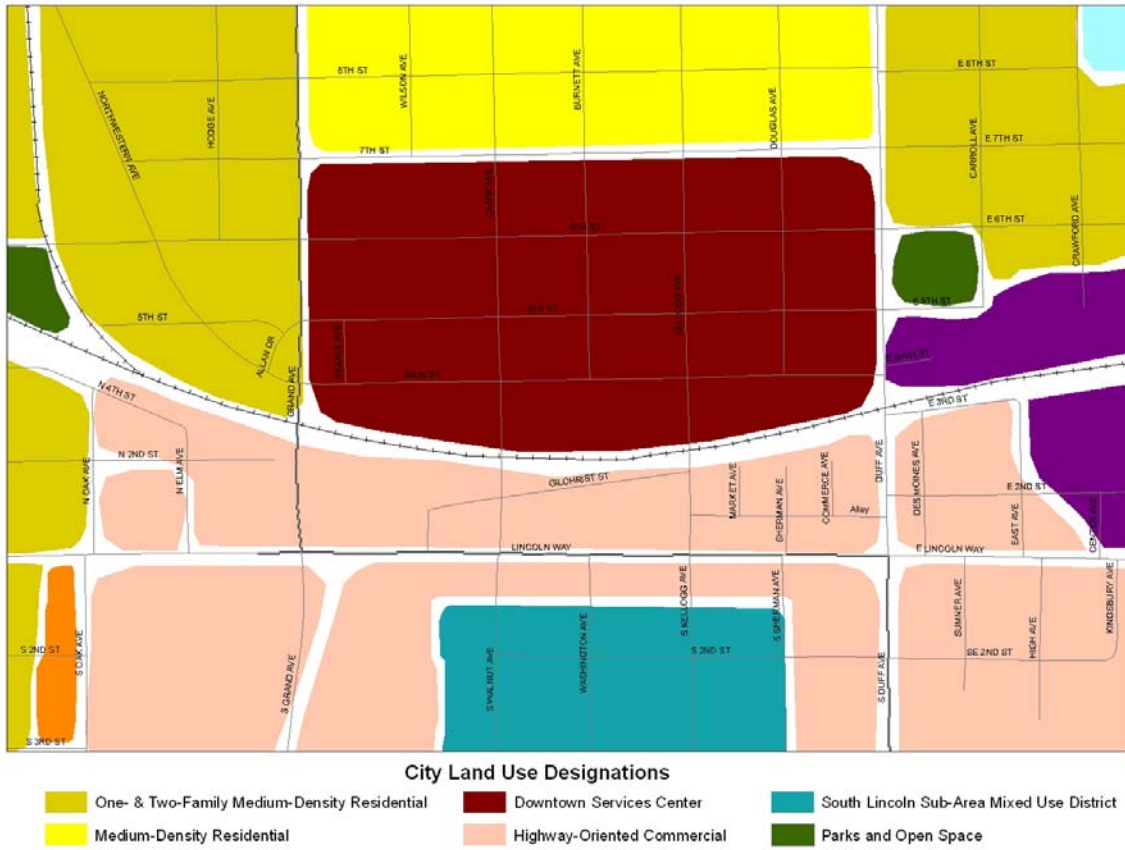


Figure 2: Proposed designation on Future Land Use Map

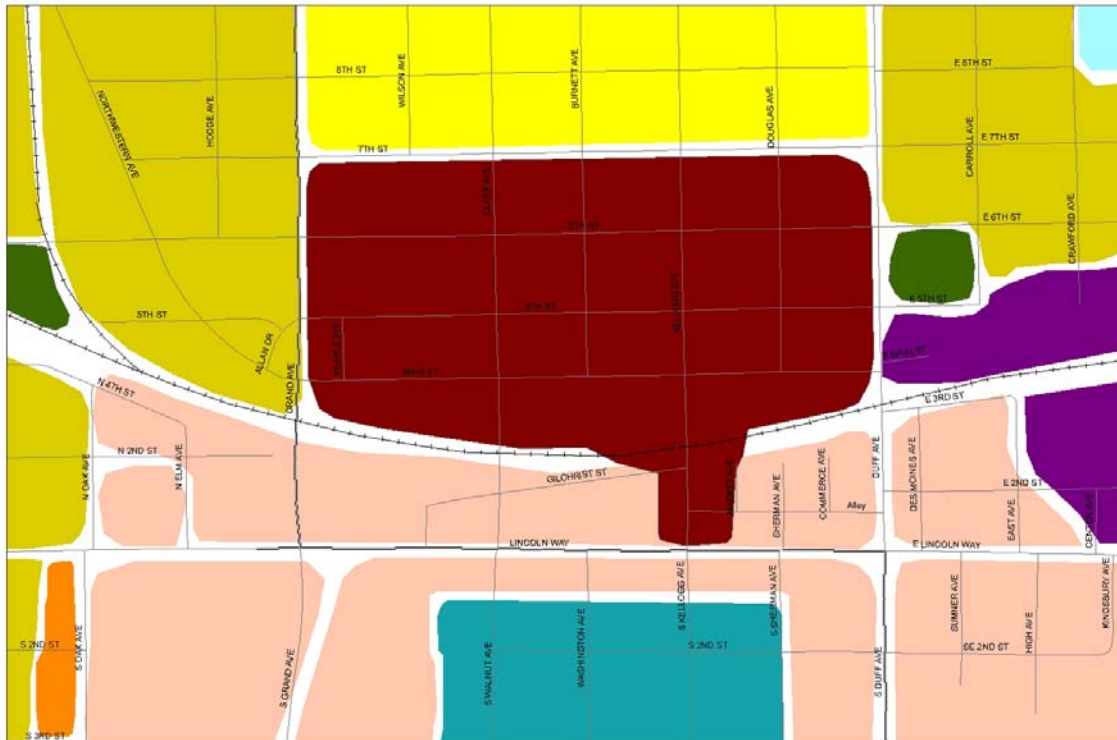


Figure 3: Current Zoning

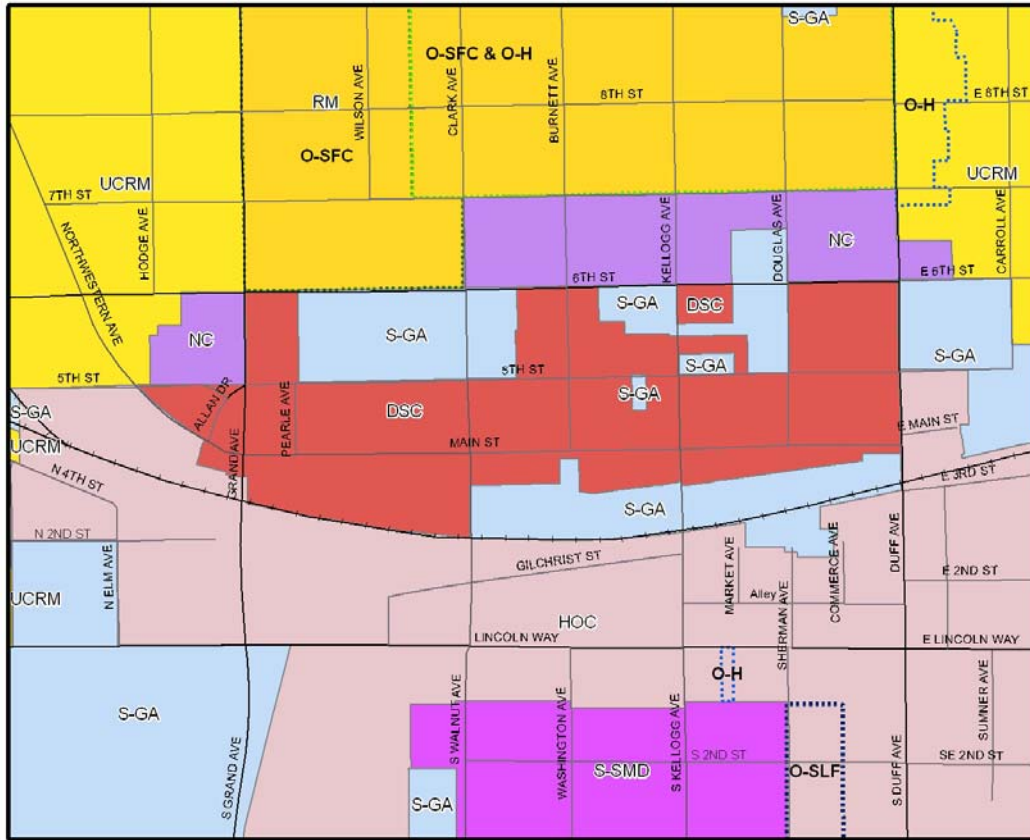


Figure 4: Study Area

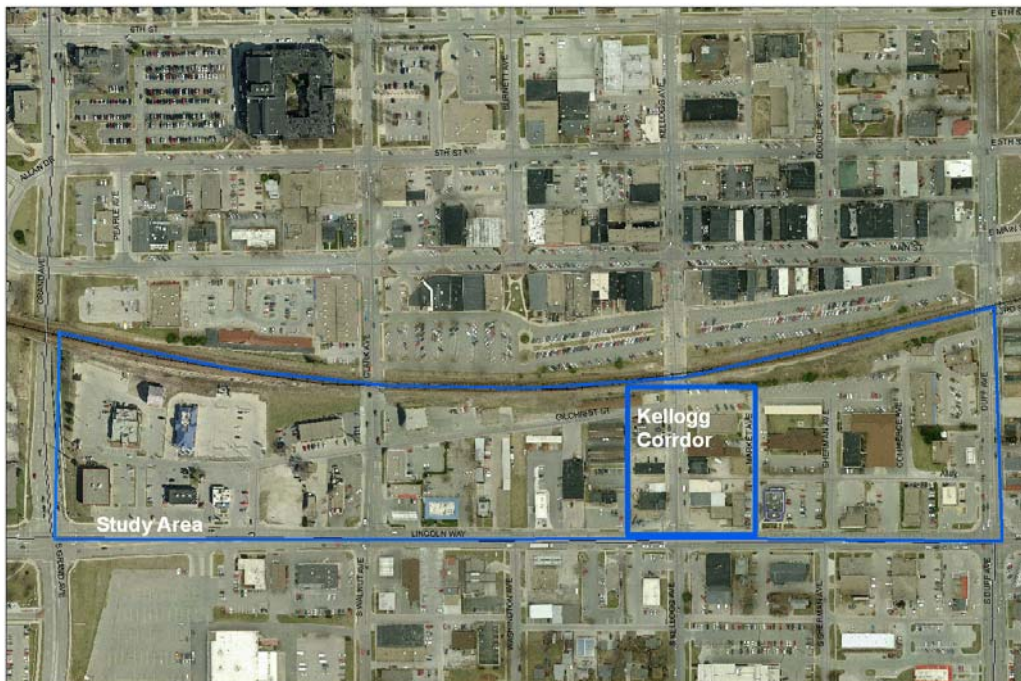


Figure 7: Floor Area Ratios greater than 0.50

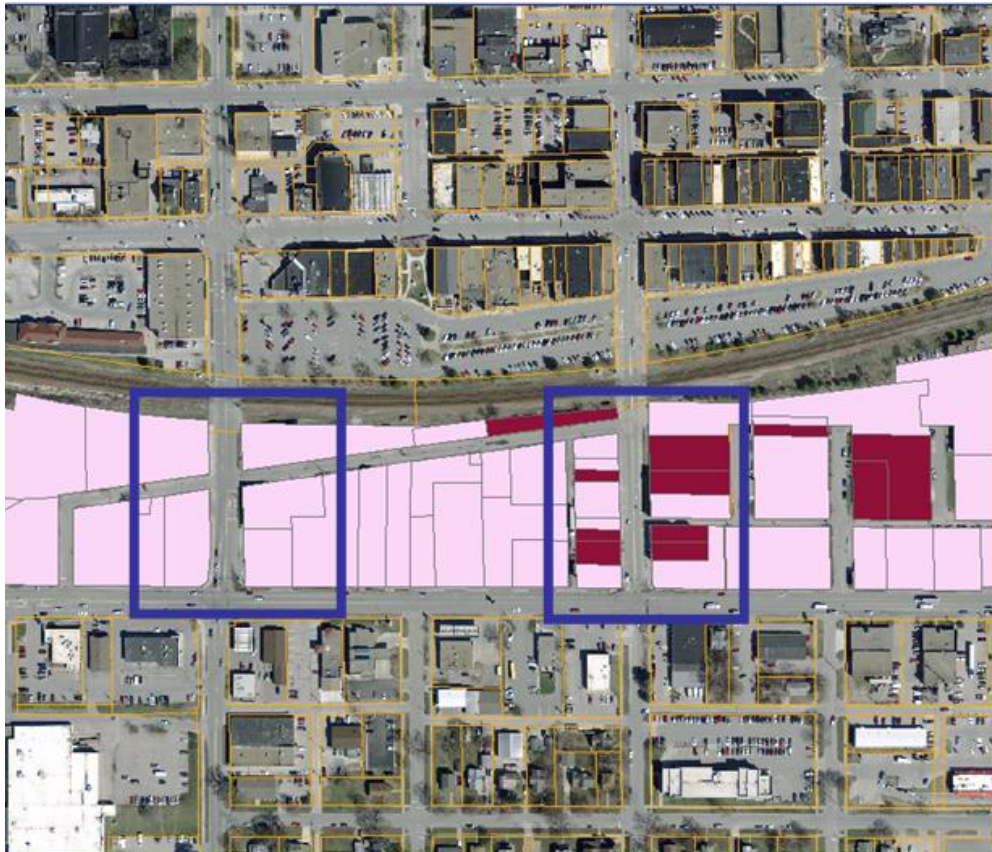


Figure 8: Lots with impediments to redevelopment under existing zoning

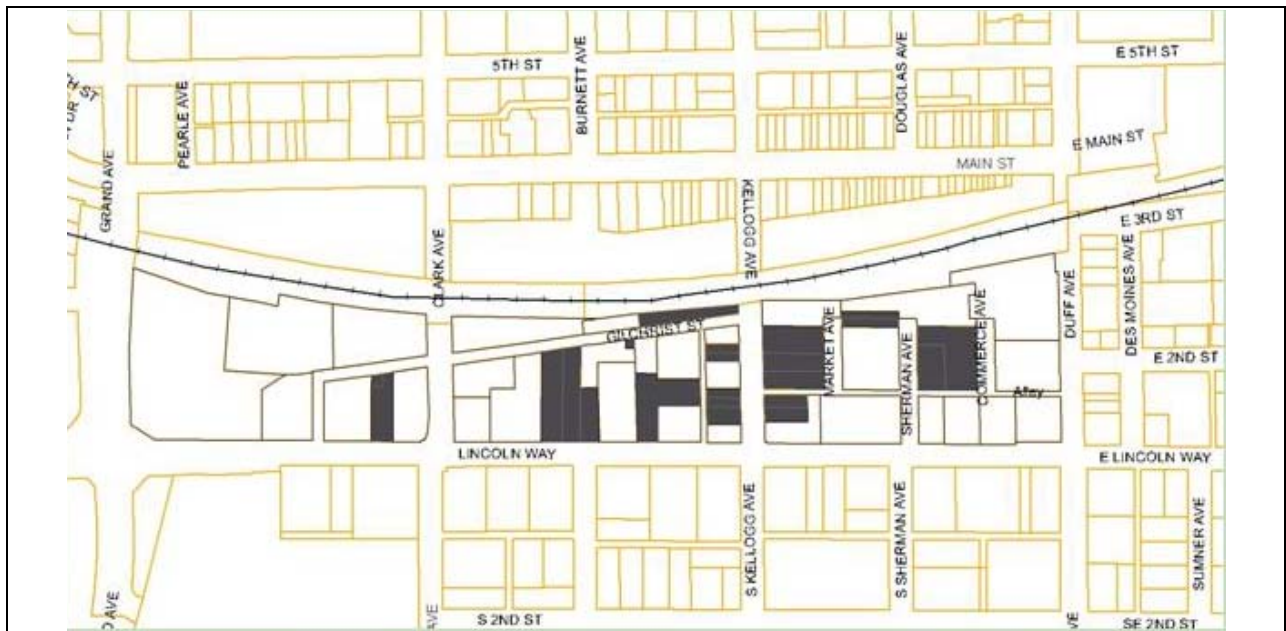


Figure 9: Redevelopment Scenario with Highway-Oriented Commercial Land Use

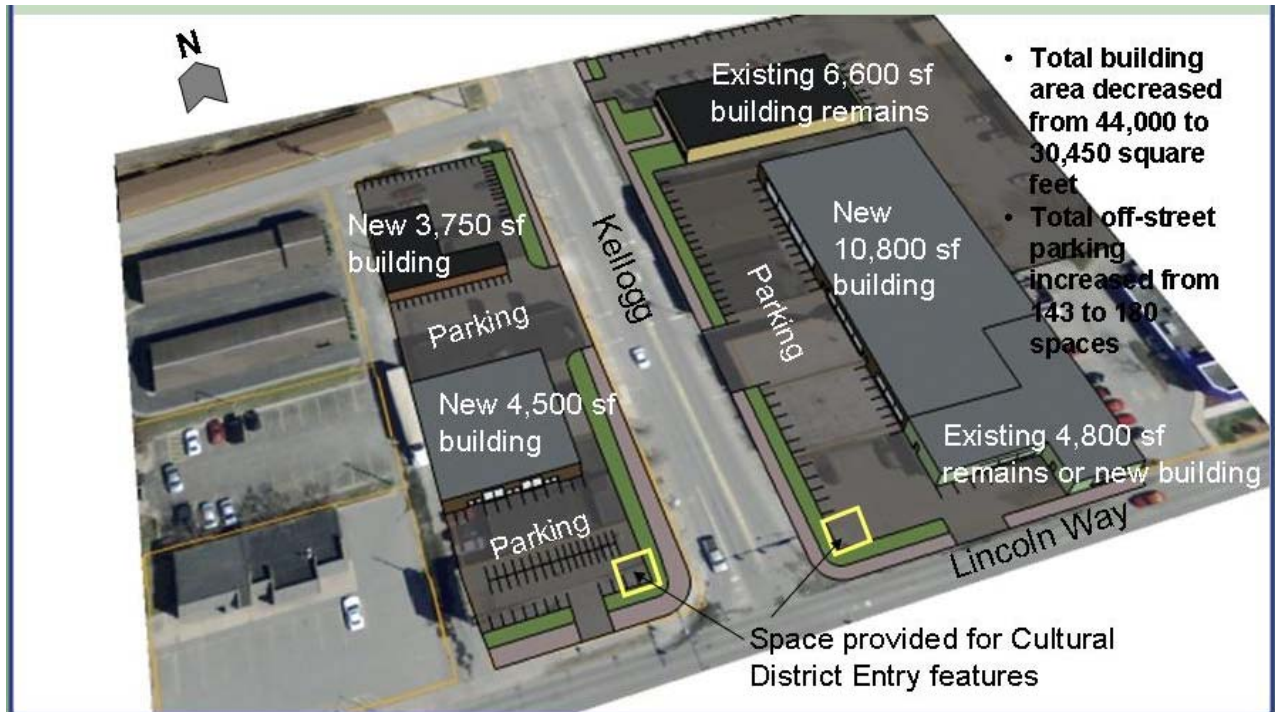


Figure 10: Redevelopment Scenario with Downtown Services Center Land Use

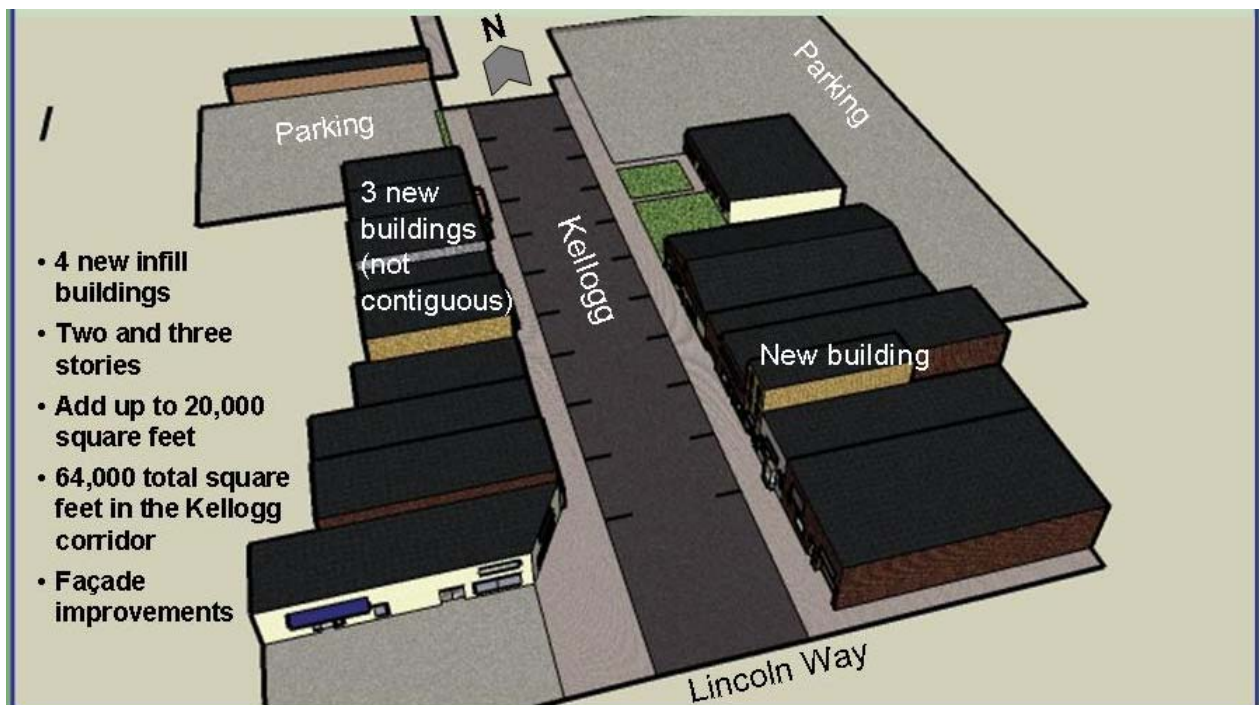


Figure 11: Advantages and disadvantages of changing zoning

Redevelopment under Current Commercial Land Use & Zoning

PROS

- Similar to surrounding development
- More visible parking
- Accommodates more customers arriving by car
- May yield higher revenues & rents per area
- More space for entry features at corners

CONS

- Less suitable for incremental change
- May require public investment different from Façade Improvement Program
- Different character than Main Street
- Less attractive to pedestrians
- May displace current businesses

Redevelopment under Downtown Zoning

PROS

- Similar character to Main Street area
- More suitable for incremental change
- More attractive to pedestrians
- May only require public investment in facades
- Does not displace current businesses

CONS

- Less convenient parking
- Lack of space for entry features at corners