

### Streetscape Improvements

To complement and build upon the South Main Street roadway reconstruction as well as the Revitalization Strategy Plan, the City has begun developing detailed streetscape design concepts for the Corridor. While the Revitalization Strategy planning process does not articulate a detailed streetscape plan for South Main, it suggests several key improvements and strategies to improve pedestrian safety, circulation and physical character. All streetscape ideas shown are preliminary ideas or designs developed to create a starting point for detailed streetscape designs. The preliminary concepts focus on three key areas that represent different roadway/streetscape conditions based on right-of-way width, adjacent land use condition and proposed roadway cross-section and function. These areas include:

- ❑ **Kent Street to Morgan Street**
- ❑ **Loomis Street to Montague Avenue**
- ❑ **Island Avenue to Illinois Avenue**

The following are suggested Revitalization Strategy Plan streetscape enhancements for the Corridor as a whole, as well as for each focus area.

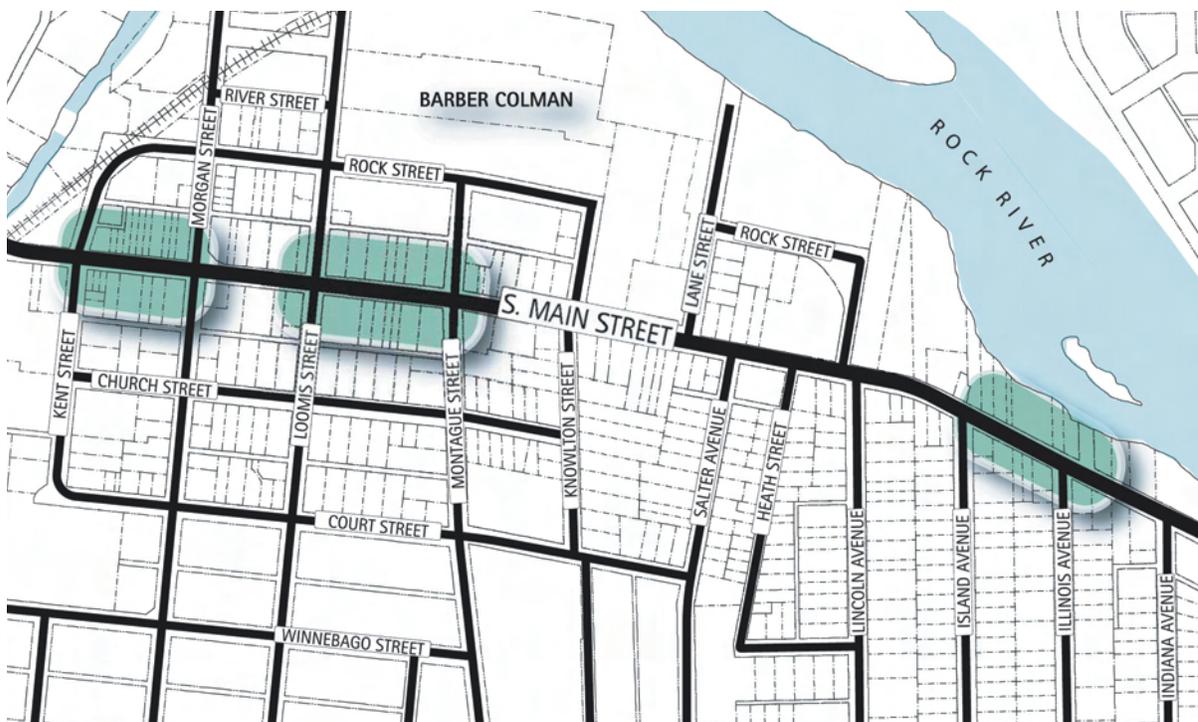
### **Overall Streetscape Recommendations**

- ❑ Develop a cohesive palette of streetscape elements, such as paving, lighting, benches, trash receptacles, bike racks and planters/urns to install in appropriate locations throughout the Corridor. Some potential elements have been shown in the Revitalization Strategy Plan concepts.
- ❑ Coordinate all streetscape elements with the Civic Design Advisory Group, the City’s committee for public design guidance.
- ❑ The City, in conjunction with area merchants and property owners, should investigate opportunities to integrate seasonal festivals, art programs or competitions into the South Main Streetscape. These programs offer a sense of community spirit and pride and can go a long way to “brand” the area.
- ❑ Improve wayfinding and directional signage, directing vehicles to public parking, key institutions and destinations.

# South Main Revitalization Strategy

## Section 6: Revitalization Vision

- ❑ Develop an overall branding program, including custom banners and wayfinding and signage elements. Conceptual branding concepts are shown in the following section of this report.
- ❑ Identify pocket park and new open space opportunities with designs linked to the streetscape theme and a signage/wayfinding package to support a more interconnected and cohesive district/Corridor.
- ❑ Improve intersection pedestrian crossings, including new thermoplastic striping, signage and potentially bollards at corners.
- ❑ Where possible, and in conjunction with a unified streetscape program, new development along South Main Street should seek to consolidate curb cuts in order to minimize pedestrian vehicular conflicts and create a more efficient traffic circulation system.



*Conceptual streetscape designs/ ideas are shown for Kent Street to Morgan Street, Loomis Street to Montague Avenue and Island Avenue to Illinois Avenue.*

### Kent Street to Morgan Street



*Where sidewalks exceed 10 feet in width street trees in grates should be provided.*



*Both pedestrian and roadway lighting should be integrated into the streetscape design.*

Within the existing commercial core of South Main Street, the right-of-way is only 72 feet with the majority of the buildings having no additional setback. With the roadway being widened slightly, the sidewalk space will become narrower and will vary from 6 to 11 feet, depending on location. The same narrow streetscape condition also applies to the block south of Morgan Street. The preliminary streetscape enhancements show strategies for creating a unified district despite the narrow sidewalk condition and include the following:

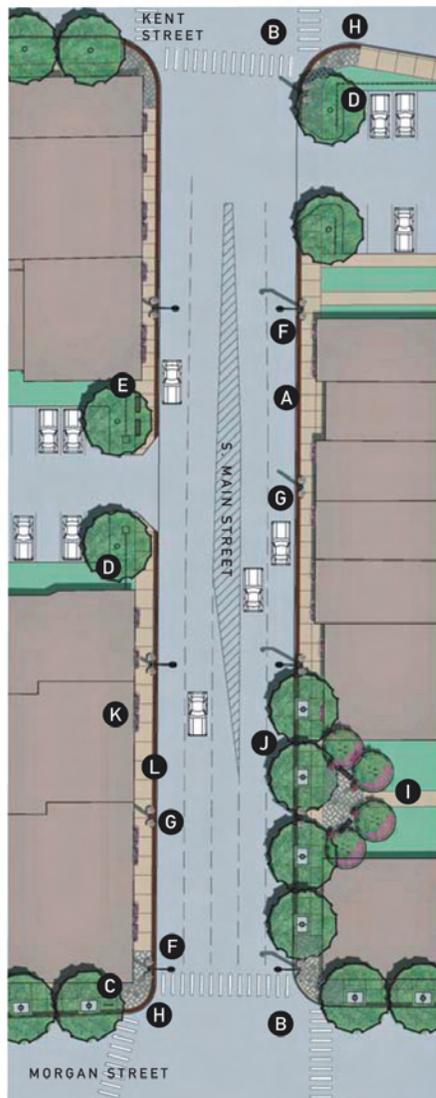
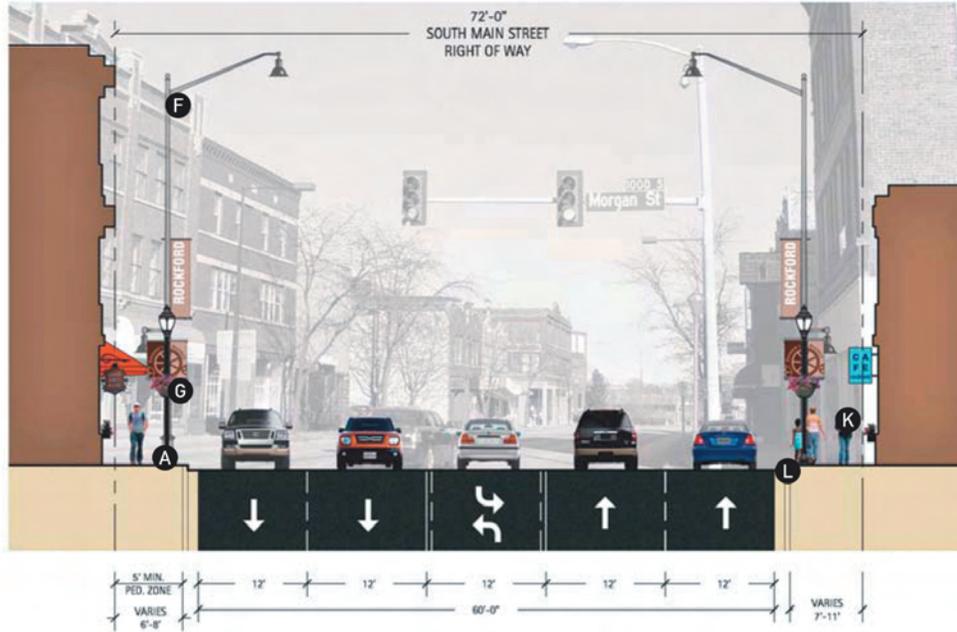
- ❑ Install street trees in tree grates where the sidewalk exceeds 10 feet in width. Appropriate “upright” tree species should be selected for these narrow conditions and a minimum of 5 feet of clear sidewalk space should be provided throughout the district.
- ❑ Consider utilizing hanging planters or baskets on light poles and/or buildings, as well as window boxes in storefronts to provide additional locations for annual flowers or seasonal color display.
- ❑ Integrate shorter pedestrian lights between the taller roadway lights to create a more pedestrian scaled environment.
- ❑ Provide a variety of paving materials for visual interest and contrast, such as brick or concrete paver banding along the curb and at key nodes and intersections.
- ❑ Consider screening existing parking lots with a combination of decorative ornamental metal fencing and landscaping.
- ❑ Combine the streetscape improvements with a façade and signage program to enhance the character of the entire district. Conceptual façade improvement ideas can be found in previous sections of this report.



*Decorative metal fencing and landscaping should be used to screen parking lots.*

# South Main Revitalization Strategy

## Section 6: Revitalization Vision



LEGEND	
<b>A</b>	Paver Banding
<b>B</b>	Striped Crosswalks
<b>C</b>	Bike Racks
<b>D</b>	Metal Fencing to Screen Parking
<b>E</b>	Benches
<b>F</b>	Roadway Lighting with Hanging Baskets
<b>G</b>	Pedestrian Lighting with Hanging Baskets
<b>H</b>	Decorative Paving at Corners
<b>I</b>	Pocket Park with Seating
<b>J</b>	Street Trees in Grates
<b>K</b>	Window Box Planters
<b>L</b>	Concrete Sidewalks



### Loomis to Montague



*Raised planters provide opportunities for landscaping, while also creating additional seating opportunities.*



*Using a variety of paving materials at key nodes and intersections provides visual interest in the streetscape.*

For this portion of South Main Street, the right-of-way is approximately 72 feet, but existing buildings do not immediately abut the right-of-way. On the west there are residential buildings stepped back and separated by a retaining wall. On the east, the lots are currently vacant. Therefore, the streetscape concept for this area demonstrates how a future scenario would ideally combine new building development with streetscape improvements. The same streetscape recommendations would also apply to new development that occurs north of Kent Creek, since a large portion of this is currently undeveloped or vacant property. The preliminary concepts suggest the following design standards and enhancements:

- ❑ Plans in these locations should require a minimum of 15-foot wide pedestrian zone for new development on the east to accommodate a range of streetscape elements, but at a minimum includes a unified street lighting, planting and paving approach. Where feasible, these pedestrian-oriented areas should consider small seating/conversation pockets, enhanced landscape planters, urns or outdoor furniture associated with adjacent retail/restaurant uses, as well as outdoor cafes.
- ❑ Provide a minimum 8-foot-wide clear sidewalk on the east and 5-foot-wide clear sidewalk on the west.
- ❑ Create a defined pedestrian zone on the east separated from the roadway utilizing a series of raised concrete curbed planters with a variety of landscaping and street trees.
- ❑ Install street trees in tree grates on the west side of the street. Space street trees consistently 25 to 30 feet apart throughout this area, where feasible.
- ❑ Integrate shorter pedestrian lights between the taller roadway lights to create a pedestrian scaled environment.
- ❑ Provide a variety of paving materials for visual interest and contrast, such as brick or concrete paver banding along the curb and at key nodes and intersections.
- ❑ Integrate moveable planters or urns as an additional unifying element.
- ❑ If feasible, create planted areas adjacent to buildings to incorporate additional permeable space, as well as a variety of shrubs and perennials.



### Island to Illinois

North of the 15th Avenue bridge, South Main Street is planned to be relocated, or shifted, to the east to mitigate flooding issues. This realignment will affect approximately 15 parcels of land, including displacement of a number of existing businesses and residents. Relocating the roadway, however, will provide an opportunity for increased public access to the Rock River. The planned cross-section for this portion of the roadway is also intended to have a landscaped median dividing the north and south travel lanes. The Revitalization Strategy Plan preliminary streetscape recommendations for this area include:

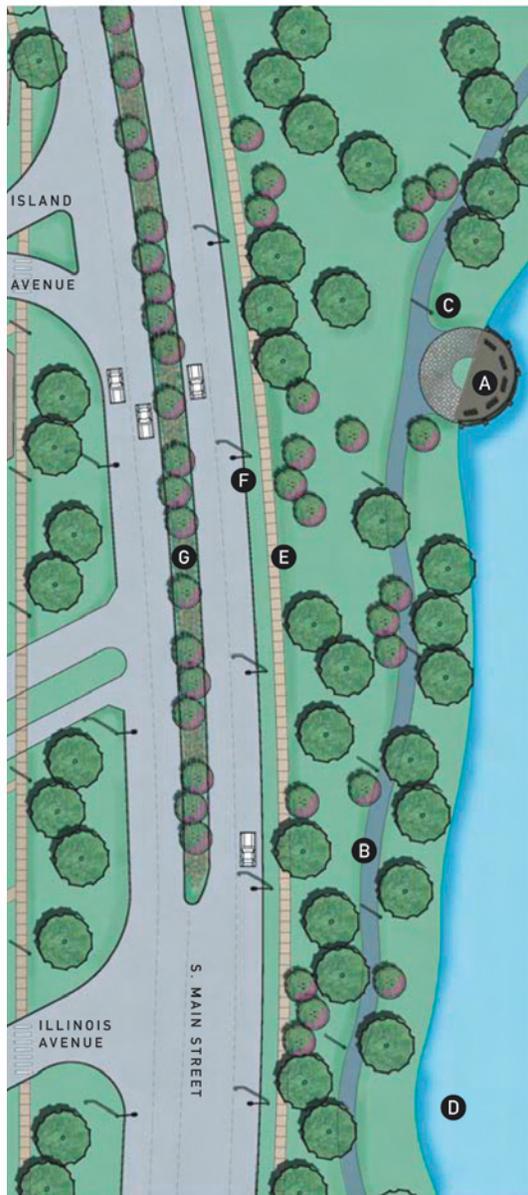
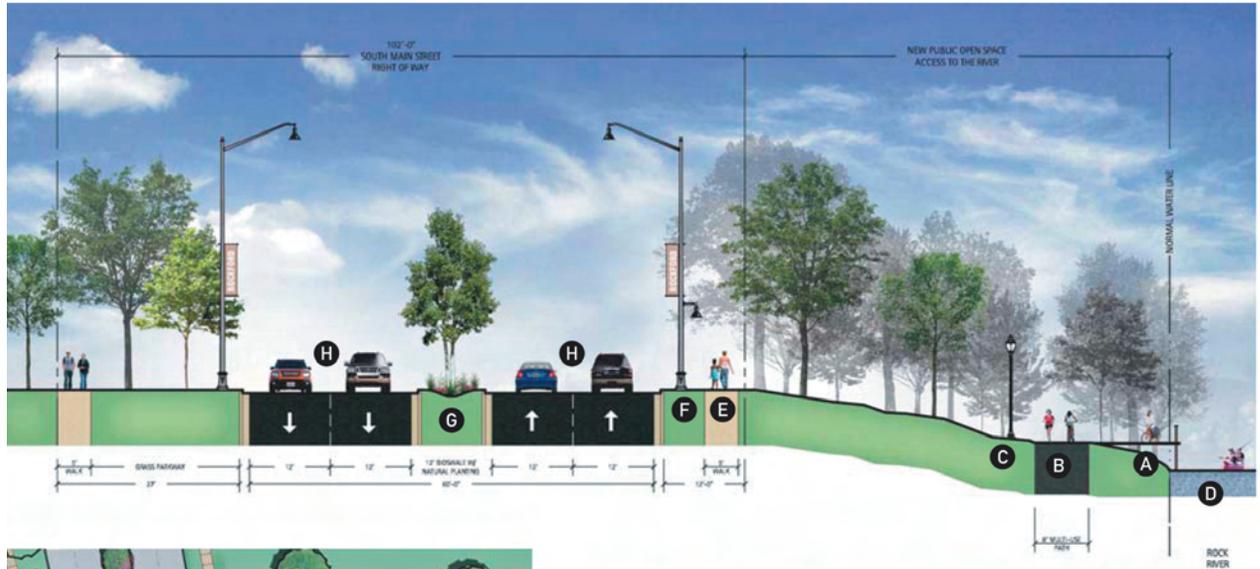
- ❑ Potential for the landscaped median to create a bioswale for the collection and filtration of storm water runoff using native plants. The median could also include groupings of appropriate tree species that thrive in wet conditions.
- ❑ Provide continuous 5-foot wide concrete sidewalks on both sides of the street to maximize connections to surrounding residential neighborhoods and commercial areas.
- ❑ Install new roadway lighting with decorative banners. If possible, provide an additional pedestrian level light fixture to light sidewalks.
- ❑ Integrate a natural park space adjacent to the riverfront, including multi-use bike/pedestrian linkages, a potential river overlook and seating pockets.
- ❑ Form groupings of shade and ornamental trees to create a more informal and “green” roadway edge, as well as filtered and “framed” views to the river.



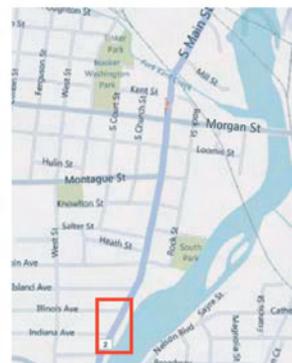
*The roadway realignment provides an opportunity to create additional green space along the Rock River.*

# South Main Revitalization Strategy

## Section 6: Revitalization Vision



LEGEND	
<b>A</b>	River Overlook
<b>B</b>	8'0" Multi-Use Path
<b>C</b>	Pedestrian Lighting
<b>D</b>	Rock River
<b>E</b>	5'0" Sidewalk
<b>F</b>	Roadway Lighting with Decorative Banners
<b>G</b>	Bioswale Median with Natural Planting



### Gateways | Signage | Branding

An attractive signage and branding program, which incorporates a recognizable graphic logo or image and facilitates travel for motorists and pedestrians, should be a part of a comprehensive streetscape project for South Main Street. A coordinated signage system may include the following components:

**Gateway Signs:** Such signs should announce arrival to key Corridor locations and play an important role in shaping first impressions in welcoming visitors. Gateway signs should be constructed of high quality materials such as stone, masonry or metal. Where space permits, landscaping and lighting should be incorporated into gateway features. Potential gateway locations include the intersection of South Main Street with the interchange exit ramps, Clifton Avenue in front of Klehm Arboretum, as well as the overpass structures at U.S. Highway 20 and the Union Pacific Railroad.

**Identity Signs/Banners:** Identity signage and banners can give South Main Street a festive, lively, distinct appearance. New roadway and pedestrian lights installed as part of the street reconstruction should be equipped with banners. Banners can incorporate a logo or “brand” that identifies the street or district.

**Directional Signs:** In addition to identity and gateway signs, directional signs that facilitate “wayfinding” will be important components of the system. Signage should be placed at key locations to guide visitors to destinations such as activity generators and attractions, schools, institutions and public parking lots.

**Parking Signs:** Identifies parking lot locations as well as parking regulations.

**Information Kiosks:** Kiosks can provide orientation and information about South Main Street, local businesses, bus service, special events and history of the area. Kiosks should be placed at key activity generators and open spaces.

During the Revitalization Strategy planning process, numerous gateway, branding/logo, signage and banner concepts were developed and presented at community workshops. Generally, participants responded positively to the idea of creating a new brand for the Corridor and district and agreed that this is a key strategy to revitalizing the area. The following describes preferred concepts for gateway signs, logos and banners that were developed as part of this process.

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### Gateway Signs

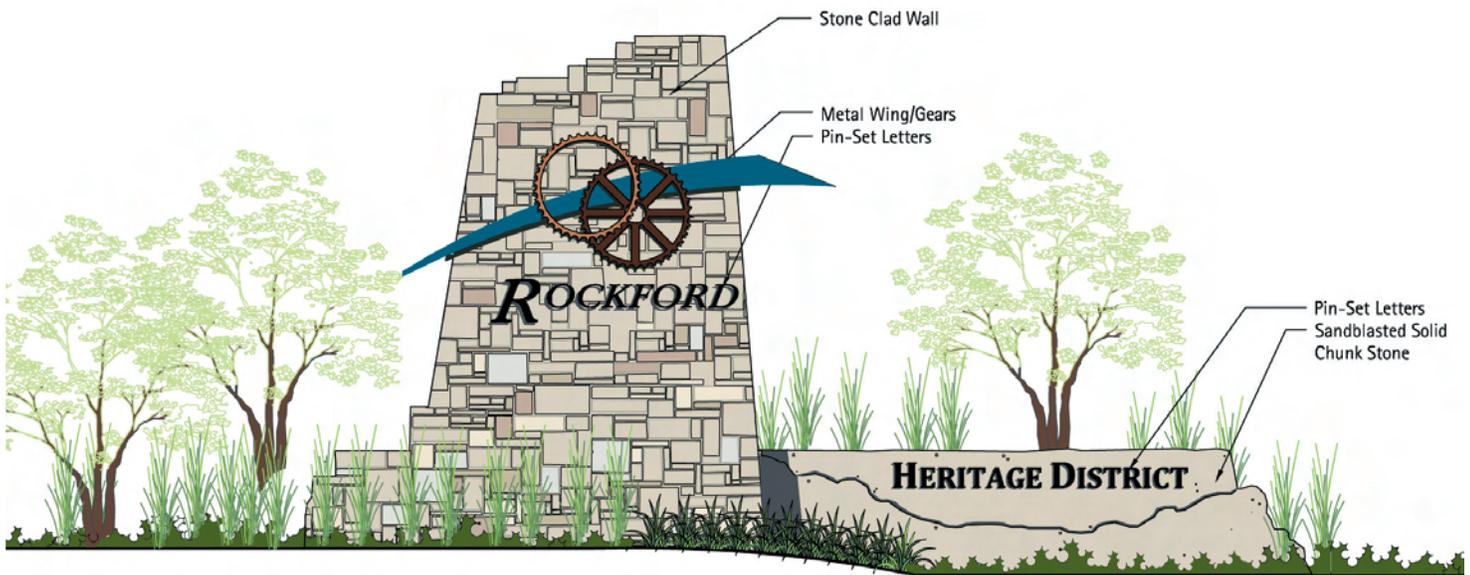
The preferred gateway concept incorporates elements inspired by Rockford's past and present industries, as well its natural setting along the Rock River. The "logo" symbolizes gears as a symbol of the area's industrial past, combined with an airplane wing as an important component of Rockford's current economy. The concept envisions a natural stacked stone in a random pattern forming the vertical structure for the "Rockford" name and logo. A larger piece of horizontal stone balances the sign and provides an opportunity to "brand" the district or area. This stone is meant to represent, or replicate, the local limestone outcropping escarpments found throughout the city and region. The stone materials also provide the flexibility to create low walls as part of the gateway, as well as a setting for complementary landscaping.

Potential locations for these gateways have been shown in the Revitalization Strategy Plan concepts.

Other gateway opportunities can be found at the existing structures of the U.S. Highway 20 overpass near the airport, as well as the Union Pacific Railroad bridge on the north end of the Corridor. The railroad bridge offers the opportunity to engage local artists to paint an image or phrase that represents the history, character and meaning of Southwest Rockford. The community could hold a contest for artists to design a vision for the bridge with the winner commissioned to implement the chosen design.



*The Union Pacific Railroad bridge provides an additional opportunity for both a neighborhood and Downtown gateway.*



*The preferred gateway concept melds elements inspired by Rockford's past and present industries and natural setting along the Rock River.*



*The triangle in front of Klehm Arboretum presents an opportunity to incorporate gateway signage combined with stone wall elements within a landscaped setting.*

A concept for the highway overpass envisions physical improvements to the structure and abutment walls by adding stone veneer to match the gateway concept. In addition, the railing depicts the “gear and wing” logo as a metal insert and decorative lighting is introduced as a design element. One side of the overpass would mark the arrival to the airport, while the south side would announce and welcome visitors to Rockford.



*The highway overpass on the south end of the Corridor offers an opportunity to welcome motorists to both the airport and to Rockford. The above view is looking south along South Main Street at U.S. Highway 20.*

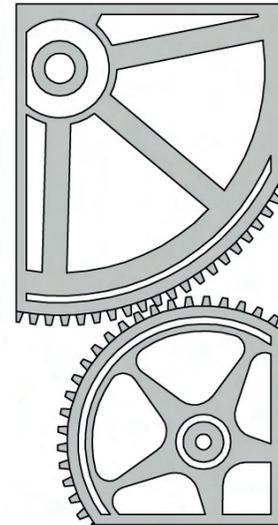
### Branding/Logos/Banners

Ideas and concepts for a district brand and logo were created to generate thought and discussion, as well as gauge residents' opinions about community identity. Most residents noted the lack of identity or identifiable image for the area south of Downtown oriented around the South Main Street Corridor. This area includes the historically industrial portion of the study area known as Founders Landing; the smaller scale commercial uses around Morgan Street; the Barber-Colman site; and the predominantly single-family neighborhoods south to Klehm Arboretum. Generally, residents viewed this area--from Klehm to Downtown--as a cohesive district.

The process used this geographic demarcation as a guide in developing concepts for "branding" the district and creating a recognizable name and image to which the area could become associated. The preferred district names at workshops included "Founder's District" and "Heritage District." From these district names, various logos and banners were developed representing the history, diversity and character of the area.

Potentially, one of the first implementation steps from this planning process is to integrate the "brand" and banner concepts into an overall wayfinding and signage program for the Corridor. Since a more detailed streetscape design process is currently underway, the banners may be the first element of that program implemented as new roadway lighting is installed.

**FOUNDER'S**



**DISTRICT**



*Conceptual logo ideas "branded" the area as the Founder's District or Heritage District.*



*Various conceptual designs for light pole banners and signage celebrate the area's diversity and industrial past and show variations for promoting the "Village Market." The final logo/brand and district name can be applied to an overall wayfinding and signage program for the Corridor and district.*

### Transportation and Infrastructure

The following describes transportation impacts of the South Main Street reconstruction project and other transportation and development projects that will affect the Corridor, as well as recommendations for improving the future transportation system. These projects provide an opportunity to promote other improvements to the transportation network that will benefit the neighborhoods. The street network within the Corridor, should be arranged to accommodate mobility for all transportation system users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit users of all ages and abilities. This Complete Streets approach is an initiative that the City of Rockford has promoted throughout the roadway planning and design process.

The impacts of the currently planned South Main Street improvements can be positive or negative. In some cases, the transportation recommendations presented in this section are intended to reinforce the positive aspects of the current roadway plans. In other cases, the recommendations are intended to mitigate potential issues that were identified during the planning process.



*The Morgan Street Bridge replacement project will provide much needed new infrastructure to the area. (Source: J. Katz, City of Rockford)*

### Transportation Impacts

#### REGIONAL

##### Roadway

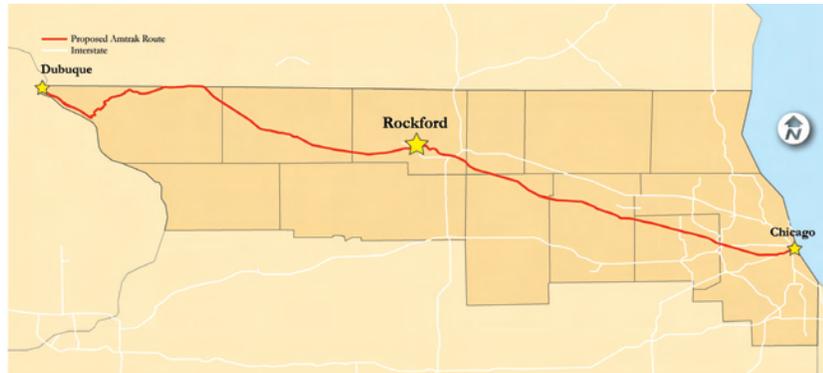
The South Main Street reconstruction will improve regional access and enhance the connection between Downtown Rockford, the Chicago Rockford International Airport and to the regional interstate system (I-39, I-90 and U.S. 20). As shown previously in **Figure 2.1: Regional Transportation Context**, South Main Street is one of several main thoroughfares into Downtown Rockford, but the surrounding community has yet to capitalize on the key physical linkages it provides.

Average daily traffic (ADT) on South Main Street (12,900) is less than the ADT on the other two main gateways into Downtown from the interstate system - East State Street (19,100) and IL-251 Kishwaukee Street (15,500). These numbers suggest that South Main Street is underutilized as a gateway into the City, despite being a quicker way into Downtown from the Interstate system.

The South Main Street reconstruction project and other proposed public infrastructure projects, such as the Morgan Street bridge replacement, are expected to encourage private investment in the Corridor. As additional investment occurs over time, there will be more traffic on South Main Street and the significance of this Corridor as a gateway will grow.

### Transit Connections

For nearly a decade, the Rockford region has been promoting the development of a commuter rail connection to the Chicago region. Today, these regional transit connection plans are close to being realized. A feasibility study to reinstate Amtrak service to Rockford (terminated in 1981) was conducted in 2006, concluding in a plan to once again provide this service. The Downtown | Riverfront Transition sub-area will include a future passenger station that will be part of new Amtrak rail service from downtown Chicago to Dubuque, Iowa. The proposed Amtrak route (below), shows the route of the future service.



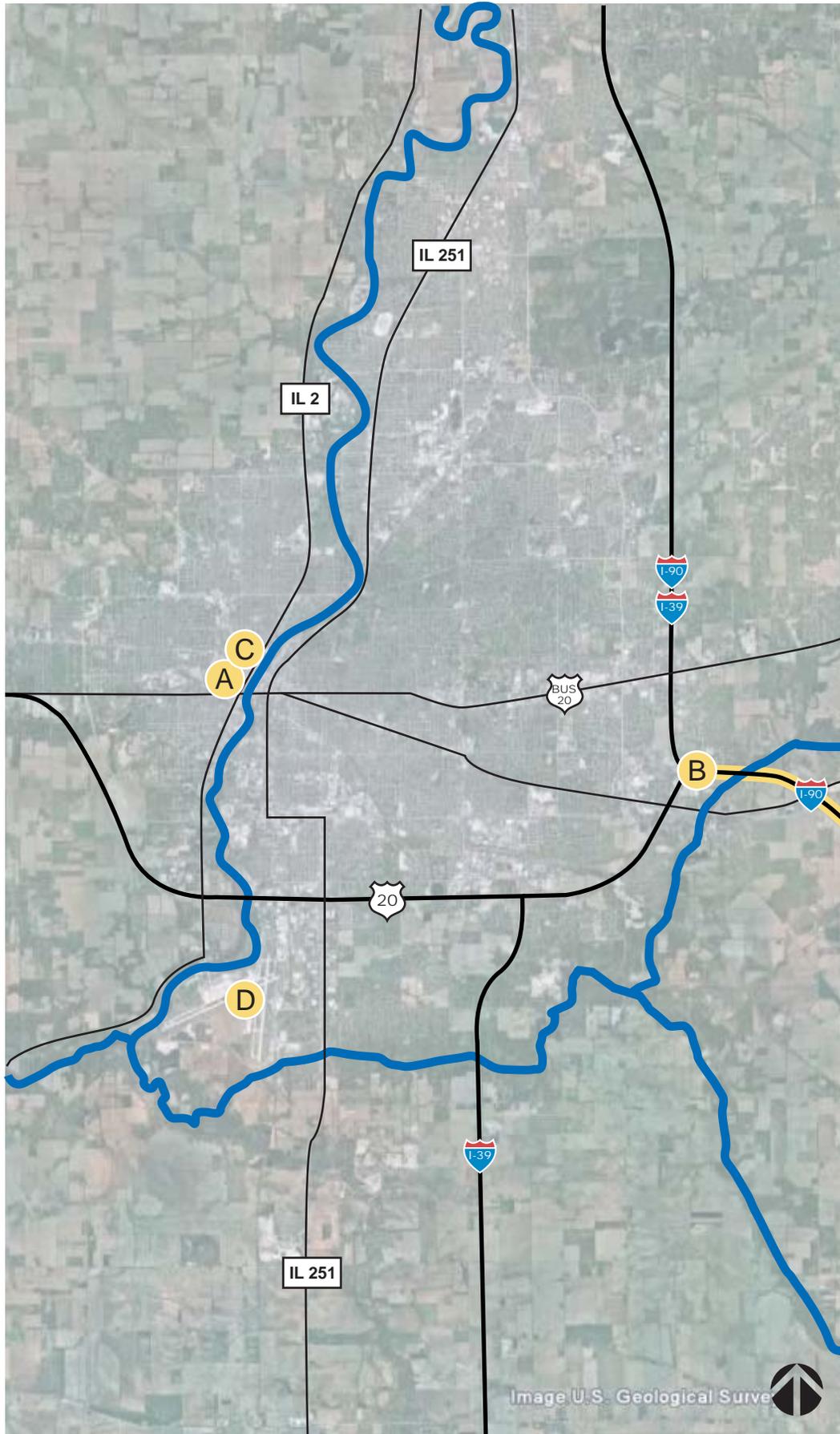
*Proposed Amtrak Route from Chicago to Dubuque, Iowa.*

The proposed Amtrak Station will be located at the former Downtown station site and will utilize the Canadian National (CN) Railroad right-of-way. The service will include a morning Dubuque to Chicago train and an evening Chicago to Dubuque train as shown in proposed schedule below. The current implementation schedule is for the new service to be in operation by the end of 2014 with construction of the station beginning in 2012 or 2013. The Chicago to Rockford portion of the service is forecast to have 35,100 annual passengers.

#### Chicago – West Elgin – Rockford – Freeport Galena – Dubuque Amtrak – CN

Westbound				Eastbound	
Daily				Daily	
6:15 PM		Dp	Chicago, IL-Union sta	Ar	10:10AM
R 7:28 PM		Dp	West Elgin, IL	Dp	D 8:38 AM
7:54 PM		Dp	Genoa, IL	Dp	8:12 AM
8:22 PM		Dp	Alpine Road	Dp	7:46 AM
8:32 PM		Dp	Rockford, IL	Dp	7:36 AM
9:11 PM		Dp	Freeport, IL	Dp	6:57 AM
10:30PM		Dp	Galena, IL	Dp	5:38 AM
11:25PM		Dp	Dubuque, IL	Dp	5:00 AM

R at West Elgin Eastbound - Stops only to receive passengers  
D at West Elgin Westbound,- Stops only to discharge passengers



**Legend**

- A Planned Amtrak Station
- B Western end of the Planned I-90 Jane Addams Tollway High-Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) or Toll (HOT) Lanes
- C RMTD Downtown Bus Depot
- D Chicago Rockford International Airport

FIGURE 6.7: REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT TRANSIT TERMINALS

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The region has also studied the potential for implementing commuter rail service between Rockford and Chicago. The Northern Illinois Commuter Transportation Initiative (NICTI) prepared a draft Environmental Assessment in 2009 of this potential commuter rail link. The commuter services would include a station on the Union Pacific Railroad tracks just north of the proposed Amtrak Station in the Downtown|Riverfront Transition area, as shown in the Revitalization Strategy Plan concept.

Currently, the Illinois Tollway is planning to expand the Jane Addams Memorial Tollway (I-90) from Rockford to the Kennedy Expressway. The tollway widening cross section will allow for a high occupancy lane between Rockford and the Chicago area. The details of the high occupancy lanes are still in the planning stage, but it could include express bus service between Rockford and Elgin and the proposed Metra Suburban Access Transit Route (STAR) line. The STAR line involves a proposed commuter rail connection from Joliet to Elgin to Chicago O'Hare International Airport. This Jane Addams Tollway widening effort is in the planning stages and engineering design has not yet begun. However, some preliminary construction will begin in 2012. By 2013 the construction should be fully underway and it will take through 2016 before it is completed.

The Jane Addams Tollway high occupancy lane project will likely delay, for the immediate future, the commuter rail service that was envisioned by NICTI. The Jane Addams Tollway widening will include a high occupancy lane that could allow for an express bus service between the Rockford and Chicago areas.

The Amtrak station site could be used as a park-and-ride facility to provide a regional transit connection to the Jane Addams Tollway express bus system. The Downtown|Riverfront Transition area could provide a significant transit connection along South Main Street and U.S. Highway 20 between Downtown, Amtrak Station, Chicago Rockford International Airport and Jane Addams Tollway transit connection.

## South Main Street

### BICYCLE

The Grand Illinois Trail and other trails planned as shown previously in **Figure 3.6 Planned Bicycle Improvements** indicate on-street and off-street bicycle facilities that are in the vicinity of South Main Street. Proposed off-street and on-street bicycle will provide important transportation connections between the Corridor sub-areas, Downtown and other neighborhoods. The City and RMAP have been working towards implementing sections of this bike path system in an incremental approach. It will be important to provide connections where crossings



*The roadway reconstruction plans to build upon recent bicycle linkages and facilities.*



*Pedestrian enhancements are a key component of the planned South Main Street improvements.*



*RMTD bus service provides important connections to jobs Downtown, Southrock Industrial Park and the airport.*

are planned in order to create a continuous regional bicycle network that links future residential and commercial development, employment centers and open space amenities.

### PEDESTRIAN

Pedestrian circulation and safety improvements are especially important to enhancing the quality of life in the Corridor. Access is expected to be improved as sidewalks are reconstructed or expanded along South Main Street. Access across South Main will also be improved with marked crosswalks at signalized intersections. Specific attention should be given to uncontrolled crosswalks at locations such as bus stops, parks and other pedestrian generators or destinations.

Vehicular speed is a major factor that affects pedestrian circulation and accessibility. At the southern end of the South Main Corridor, automobile speeds are highest, pedestrian crossings are farther apart and pedestrian traffic is more infrequent. On South Main Street near Downtown, pedestrian traffic is higher, crossings are more frequent and automobile speeds are slower.

The South Main Street reconstruction will include the installation of a barrier median that, while intended to reduce congestion and improve traffic flow, has the potential to divide some neighborhoods if care is not taken to facilitate adequate bicycle and pedestrian crossings. These crossings are especially important at churches, schools, parks, bus stops or commercial areas along the Corridor. In order to encourage walking, these crossings must be convenient, visible and closely spaced. It will be important to focus on creating a transportation network that provides for frequent access across South Main Street to preserve and enhance neighborhood connectivity and is sensitive to land use context.

The Rockford Health Council, as part of the 2011 Healthy Community Study, encourages pedestrian and non-motorized activity to promote active, healthy living. By promoting walkable environments, this incorporates physical activity into everyday transportation habits thereby seeking to improve physical health. Neighborhood improvements should encourage the promotion of walking, which is especially important along South Main Street with its commercial land use that can attract pedestrian foot traffic.

### Bus

The RMTD provides bus service in the Corridor including important connections to jobs Downtown, Southrock Industrial Park and the airport. The RMTD bus routes along South Main Street will continue to provide service after the South Main Street improvements are completed.

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Permanent bus stops are proposed to improve the transit level of service provided in the Corridor. Other current and proposed fixed-route bus stops along South Main Street are shown in Figure 3.7, Proposed Bus Stops. It will be important to improve access to bus stops through adequate pedestrian facilities and crossings.

### PARKING

On-street parking currently is in place along the north end South Main Street between Kent and Montague Streets. With the new roadway reconstruction, parallel parking will be removed to make way for the additional travel lanes and relocated to cross streets and off-street parking lots. Providing shared public parking opportunities within the Traditional Neighborhood Core will be vital to creating a vibrant, urban commercial district.



*Providing shared public parking opportunities is vital to creating vibrant commercial districts.*

### RIVER ACCESS

As envisioned in the Revitalization Strategy Plan, access to the Rock River will improve following the South Main Street reconstruction. Visual access and views will be created, which will highlight the presence of the Rock River, as well as open space along it. It will be important to preserve and enhance this river access to emphasize new park amenities, such as playgrounds, canoe launches, amphitheaters and/or the shared bike path system.

### Sub-areas

Traffic circulation impacts in the surrounding neighborhoods will be minimal due to the Corridor's established street grid that provides multiple routes to destinations. This street grid network should be continued as the Corridor develops in the future to encourage travel that does not require all trips within the area to make use of South Main Street. As South Main Street increases in importance as a regional connection, the local transportation grid should also increase in importance for neighborhood and local travel.

Neighborhoods along South Main Street will be impacted by roadway reconstruction project. Once the improvements are made to South Main, the community will have better access to Downtown, the airport and U.S. 20, as well as the potential for increased private investment or new development on properties facing South Main Street.



*The proposed Amtrak station and parking provides opportunities for regional connections.*

### **DOWNTOWN | RIVERFRONT TRANSITION AREA**

The Downtown | Riverfront Transition will link Downtown with other sub-areas. There are only two streets that connect the Downtown | Riverfront Transition area with Downtown Rockford. South Main Street is the primary street that crosses Kent Creek and the railroad tracks, so this segment will remain the main gateway to Downtown. The majority of Winnebago Street in the Downtown | Riverfront Transition area is grade-separated to cross Kent Creek and a section of the Illinois Railnet tracks and, as a result, is not a feasible option for secondary Downtown access.

The Amtrak station and facilities in the Downtown | Riverfront Transition sub-area will become a significant intermodal transportation center that will accommodate regional transit, as well as a potential transfer facility within the RMTD network. Inter-city bus also could benefit from the development of a regional transportation center in Rockford. Additional transit-related development and increased transportation options and linkages in the station area will encourage mixed-use growth Downtown, as well as in the surrounding target area.

### **TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD CORE**

The Traditional Neighborhood Core area will be affected by improvements to South Main Street, as well as improvements to the Morgan Street Bridge. These two major projects will considerably improve access to Downtown, as well as neighborhoods to the east of the Rock River. The City of Rockford Bike Plan includes a plan for bike lanes on Morgan Street, which would provide a non-motorized connection for the Traditional Neighborhood Core area with neighborhoods east of the Rock River.

### **URBAN TRANSITION**

The Urban Transition area will be affected mainly by the shift in South Main Street to the east, which will add frontage along the west side of the street, as well as access to the planned shared use path on the east side of South Main Street. A trail connection is expected to be made under the 15th Avenue Bridge, but an engineering solution for this location is still being considered. With potential new public open space along the Rock River within this area, an important strategy will be the location and number of east-west crossings and connections.

### **SEMI-RURAL TRANSITION**

The South Main Street reconstruction in the Semi-Rural Transition area is expected to improve access to property located east of South Main along the Rock River. Since much of this is located in the floodplain, it is

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expected to be averted and/or maintained as open space. This provides an opportunity to emphasize access to the Rock River, trail connections and outdoor recreation. A major gateway opportunity exists at the Clifton Avenue intersection with South Main Street and the entrance to Klehm Arboretum. With potential long term residential development south of Harrison/Springfield on the east, South Main Street will be a vital connection for these neighborhoods to other key Corridor destinations.

### AIRPORT|INTERCHANGE

The Airport|Interchange area is expected to benefit from an increase in developable land due to the reconfiguration of the U.S. Highway 20 interchange. A diamond interchange, a typical design for developing areas, seeks to reduce travel speeds of vehicles exiting U.S. Highway 20 to a speed more compatible with both existing and planned industrial and residential land uses, as well as the Faith Center Church. This reconfiguration of right-of-way provides space that would facilitate the creation of a gateway to Downtown Rockford, as well as Chicago Rockford International Airport. This reconfiguration also provides opportunities to develop a sizable commercial, industrial business hub with highway and airport access.



*The new diamond interchange provides opportunities to develop a sizable commercial and industrial hub with highway and airport access.*

### Recommendations

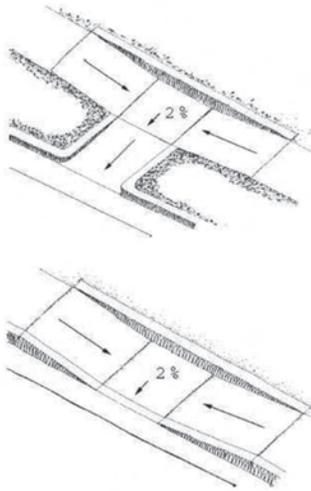
The following recommendations involve the incorporation of guidelines or best practices for development along the South Main Corridor. The Corridor is divided into sub-areas, and recommendations may vary from one sub-area to another.

#### ADOPT A ROCKFORD COMPLETE STREETS POLICY AND GUIDELINES

The City should adopt a Complete Streets policy that encourages the planning and design of streets that accommodate all users including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit users. In addition, the City should consider guidelines that specifically promote Complete Streets concepts and principles. This will help to promote walking, bicycling, and the use of transit as viable modes of transportation.

#### ENCOURAGE A GRID-STYLE STREET NETWORK IN THE CORRIDOR

The City of Rockford boasts a connected grid street network. Any new streets that are proposed within all sub-areas should continue to connect the grid that offers multiple routes to destinations. This would help prevent the creation of a circuitous, closed street network that increases overall travel distances, makes it less convenient for walking and bicycling, and increases dependence on South Main Street for all north-south travel. A connected grid will reduce overdependence on South Main Street for some north-south travel.



*Sidewalk design standards (source: IDOT Bureau of Design and Environment (BDE) Manual)*

### MAKE SIDEWALKS CONTINUOUS ACROSS DRIVEWAYS ALONG SOUTH MAIN STREET

Traffic entering and leaving driveways must yield to pedestrian traffic on sidewalks. To encourage this practice, sidewalks should extend across driveways and the sidewalk material should be consistent across the driveway. For instance, if the driveway is asphalt, the concrete sidewalk should extend across the asphalt to delineate the pedestrian way.

Additionally, the section of the sidewalk across the driveway should have a cross slope no greater than 2% to facilitate proper drainage and avoid creating a hazard for pedestrians using wheelchairs. This is consistent with the sidewalk design standards present in the IDOT Bureau of Design and Environment (BDE) Manual, as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act.

### PROVIDE A HIGHLY-VISIBLE, MARKED PEDESTRIAN CROSSING AT ALL BUS STOPS

Every bus stop will result in a pedestrian crossing. Many fixed-route bus stops have been proposed by RMTD at signalized intersections. However, the following bus stops are located at unsignalized intersections:

#### Standard Continental Zebra



*Typical pedestrian crosswalk markings.*

- Kent Street
- Salter Avenue
- Island Avenue
- Ogilby Road
- Pond Street
- Parkview Terrace
- Prairie Road
- Ann's Trailer Park Drive
- Seminole Avenue
- Onyx Parkway
- Aquamarine Drive
- Island Boulevard

Pedestrians are more likely to cross at a bus stop than they are to walk to a crossing at the nearest signalized intersection, so it is important that the roadway design take these bus stops into consideration and provide adequate crossing facilities. This includes a highly-visible, continental style marked crosswalk, as well as clear signage.



**Legend**

- PROPOSED NORTHBOUND STOP
- PROPOSED SOUTHBOUND STOP
- PLANNED BUS PULL-OUT LOCATION

FIGURE 6.8: PROPOSED BUS STOPS

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Five bus stops are located more than ¼ mile from signalized intersections (Ann’s Trailer Park Drive, Seminole Avenue, Onyx Parkway, Aquamarine Drive, and Island Boulevard) where pedestrians are unlikely to walk to the signal to cross. Furthermore, the posted speed following improvements will be 40 miles per hour. At these bus stops, rectangular rapid-flashing beacons (RRFB) are recommended to facilitate pedestrian crossings. The RRFB has a compliance rate of 95% and is activated only when a pedestrian presses the button to cross, which mitigates the concern over motorist delay and provides a gap in traffic to allow pedestrians to cross South Main Street.

### ENCOURAGE ON-STREET PARKING ON ALL NEW LOCAL STREETS

Adding on-street parking to a street provides a buffer to pedestrians, improves comfort while walking and slows travel speeds on local roadways where high-speed traffic is not desired. Providing on-street parking in developing areas provides motorists with flexibility to leave the car parked while making several trips, while not relying entirely on surface parking lots. Providing visitors and shoppers with multiple opportunities to park once and make several trips on foot supports economic development, encourages pedestrian activity and increases the number of pedestrians on the street, creating a more active commercial district.



*Example of a marked and signed pedestrian crossing.*

### **PROVIDE FLEXIBLE PARKING OPTIONS**

Parking is an asset that the City can and should use to support commercial development in areas where the cost of business owner-provided parking may discourage walking and, subsequently, economic development. Generally, parking must be conveniently located near businesses. Proper placement of shared public parking should support “park once” activity, which refers to the idea the customers only need to park once to run several errands or shop in multiple stores. The Revitalization Strategy Plan shows multiple locations for shared parking opportunities within both the Traditional Neighborhood Core and Downtown|Riverfront Transition Area to promote these areas as active, mixed-use districts.

### **DEVELOP THE AMTRAK STATION AREA AS A REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION CENTER**

A park and ride lot in the Amtrak station area would provide an intermodal connection to the express bus service that may be provided with the Jane Addams Tollway (I-90) widening. Providing a park and ride facility may help to build ridership for future commuter rail service, while also providing connections to RMTD and potential inter-city bus services. In addition, this provides multiple new connections to Southwest Rockford both citywide and regionally.

### **PROVIDE REGIONAL BICYCLE CONNECTIONS**

Planned regionally-significant bicycle facilities in the South Main Corridor include the following:

- ❑ Grand Illinois Trail
- ❑ Rock River Trail
- ❑ Morgan Street Bridge
- ❑ Marchesano Drive|15th Avenue Bridge
- ❑ Harrison Avenue

These facilities should be pursued in order to connect the regional bicycle network in conjunction with improvements to South Main Street. The proposed route of the Grand Illinois Trail is a trail of statewide significance and crosses South Main Street by way of Davis Park and Cedar Street. A trail crossing is recommended that would use the planned bicycle bridge across the Rock River to connect to Davis Park under the UP railroad bridge. This connection would continue west on Cedar Street.

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*Proposed regional bicycle connections to South Main Street.*

The Rock River Trail extends the full length of the Rock River in the South Main Corridor. Access to this trail includes providing South Main Street crossings at Morgan Street, Marchesano Drive|15th Avenue and Harrison Avenue. Due to engineering constraints and narrower right-of-way widths, the Rock River Trail is planned to cross under the 15th Avenue Bridge.

The remaining bicycle crossings occur at signalized intersections, and should be provided when these intersections and bridge are upgraded. Bike lanes are also recommended in the Rockford Bike Plan for each of these crossings. IDOT suggests bike lanes are possible for these roadways, but recommends sidepaths for urban roadways with the speeds and ADT of Morgan Street, Marchesano Drive|15th Avenue, and Harrison Avenue as shown below in the IDOT BDE.

### **PLAN FOR RIGHT-OF-WAY IMPROVEMENTS AT BUS STOPS**

It is recommended that the City set aside space for a paved bus stop with a sidewalk waiting area and room for a potential bench and shelter to accompany the bus stop sign. A typical bus stop pad is roughly 5 to 6 feet wide and can be anywhere from 8 to 12 feet long. An example of typical bus stop layouts for both near and far side stops, are shown on the next page.



*Typical bus stop layouts for far and near side configurations.*

### IMPLEMENT ACCESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN SUB-AREAS

The design of South Main Street incorporates access management techniques with the installation of a continuous barrier median at several locations. This has the effect of improving safety as well as reducing congestion by eliminating left-turns at unsignalized intersections that would cause conflict with oncoming traffic and create backups in traffic while waiting to turn. The installation of a continuous median renders unsignalized intersections as right-in/right-out only unless left-turn lanes are provided on South Main Street. Other access management strategies include:

- ❑ Limit multiple driveways or curb-cuts for single land uses.
- ❑ Maintain boulevard design along South Main Street and provide access on cross and side streets.
- ❑ Encourage offsets for driveways on opposite sides of local streets and collectors that minimize congestion.
- ❑ Allow and encourage shared driveways or curb-cuts to complement shared parking facilities. Currently, Rockford Zoning Ordinance 50-009 Shared Parking (A-F) allows for shared parking based on the approval by the Zoning Officer. However, adjacent developments with compatible uses may also benefit from the creation of shared driveways. The figure below from the Michigan Department of Transportation Access Management Guidebook shows shared driveways.

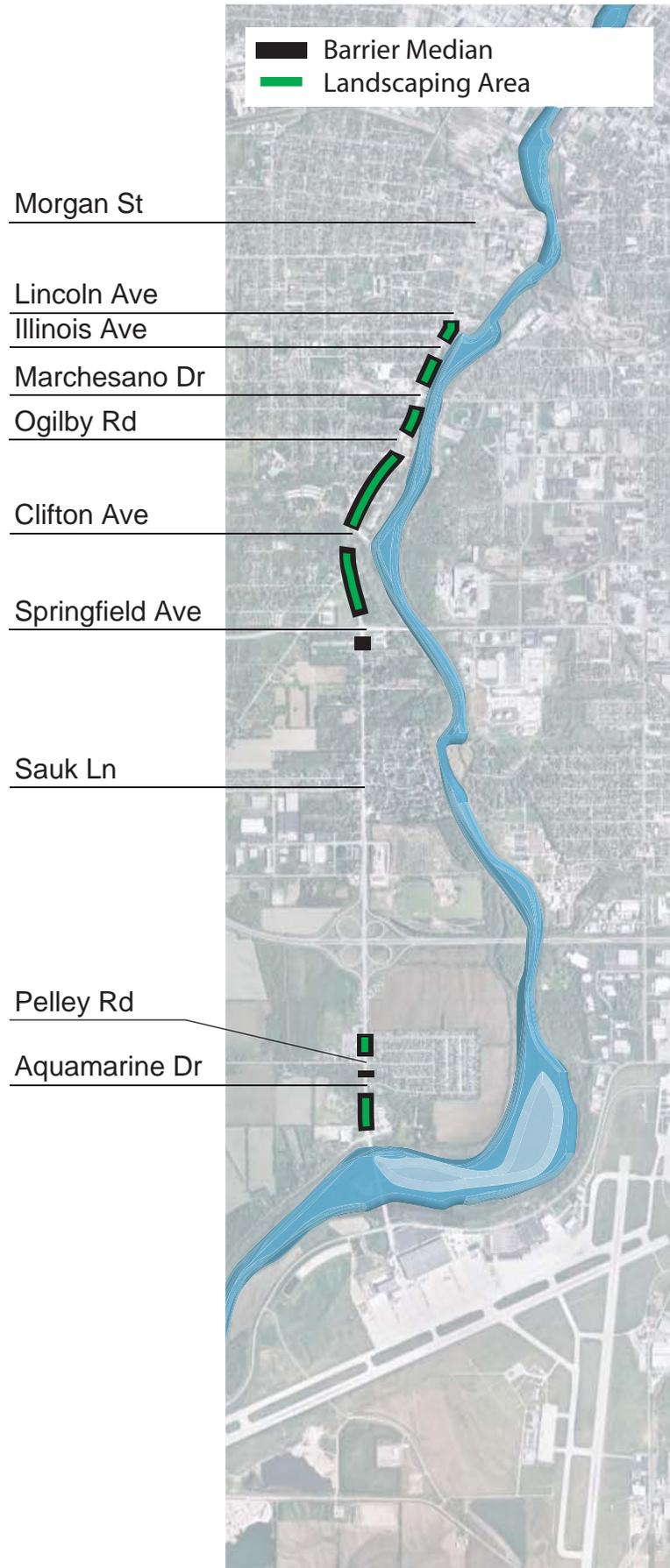
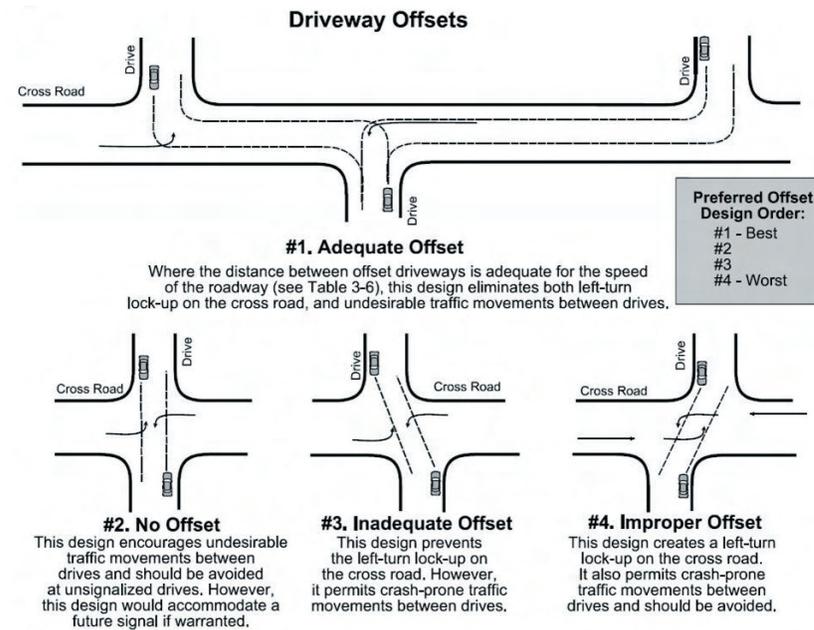


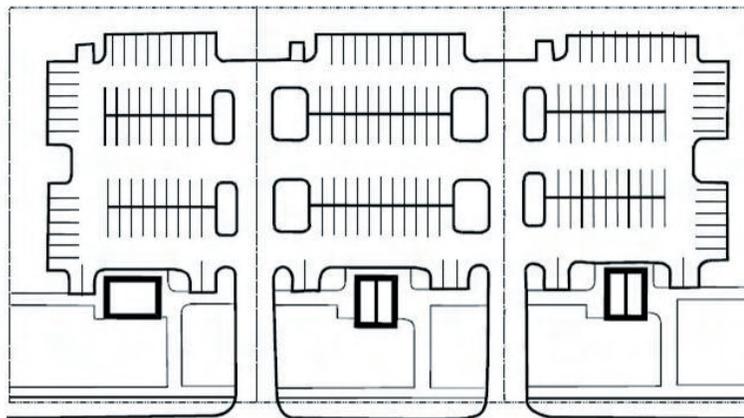
FIGURE 6.9: MEDIAN LOCATIONS

# South Main Revitalization Strategy

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*Example of Driveway Offsets.*



*Example of shared driveways or curb cuts to access parking lots.*

## Conclusion

The transportation network in the South Main Corridor will be shaped largely by the reconstruction of South Main Street. Recommendations presented in this section seek to enhance the positive aspects of these improvements and mitigate potential negative impacts of the roadway construction. The improvements to South Main Street, as well as capital improvements in the Corridor, send a clear message to the community about the commitment and renewed investment that City and IDOT have in the South Main Street and Southwest Rockford. It is because of this opportunity that focusing capital improvements in the sub-areas along South Main Street has the potential to promote and trigger economic development in the neighborhoods south of Downtown.

### Economic Development Strategies and Recommendations

Economic progress and revitalization within the South Main Street Corridor will require solving two problems: removing development barriers and creating new incentives for reinvestment and revitalization. Addressing these issues will help facilitate private sector involvement and investment along the Corridor.

Currently, there are several barriers to South Main Street's revitalization and redevelopment:

- ❑ **Lack of market confidence.** Entrepreneurs and developers are reluctant to make investments since demand for housing or retail has not been demonstrated and the perceived risks are too high. And while the costs of land and buildings in Southwest Rockford are low, there are few development pressures elsewhere in the city that would motivate a developer to build here.
- ❑ **Capital.** With the lack of confidence on part of the financial sector, developers and investors may not be able to access financing for construction projects and entrepreneurs cannot secure adequate startup capital.
- ❑ **Entrepreneurship.** While lack of startup capital presents one type of challenge, there also has not been evidence of demand by neighborhood-based entrepreneurs seeking to open new businesses. It is possible that such entrepreneurs exist but, since community development organizations are not well established in Southwest Rockford, entrepreneurs do not have access to small business development assistance.
- ❑ **Appearances.** South Main Street will see visual improvements with impending road and streetscape/landscaping enhancements, but it currently presents a distressed appearance. This is true of buildings throughout the Corridor, and especially in the Traditional Neighborhood Core.
- ❑ **East Side development.** Through a combination of available land, local perceptions, and development incentives, East State Street has been the favored area for retail and commercial expansion, which may serve as competition to fledging commercial activities along South Main Street.
- ❑ **Capacity.** Non-profit community groups on South Main have not yet achieved the organizational capacity to establish themselves as credible and competent leaders and facilitators in the revitalization process.

# South Main Revitalization Strategy

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Established TIFs cover much of the South Main Street Corridor, but other incentives for development are limited. City attention and project-specific incentives gravitate to potentially significant development sites such as the Amerock Building or the Barber-Colman site. Impending South Main Street road improvements and the Morgan Street Bridge replacement will bring new infrastructure investment and investment in adjacent sidewalks and streetscapes. But the road improvements themselves will present new challenges, particularly in the Downtown Riverfront/Transition and the Traditional Neighborhood Core sub-areas, where widening of intersections and the roadway, as well as the removal of on-street parking will impact street front business development.

*Federal and state level budget cuts may mean fewer incentives and resources for community development work. Rockford will have to think more creatively than before on securing scarce resources for revitalization activities.*

One additional factor that will likely impact revitalization along South Main Street over the next several years are impending Federal and state level budget cuts, which may mean fewer incentives and financial resources for community development work. This also means that mid-sized cities like Rockford will have to think more creatively than before on securing scarce resources for revitalization activities.

## Economic Development/Organizational Implementation Strategies

South Main Street traverses several development character sub-areas from an urban context in its northern sector adjacent to Downtown to a semi-rural setting near U.S. Highway 20. Therefore, each sub-area will benefit from planning and implementation strategies that are specific to the issues, conditions and context within each area. However, South Main Street as a whole will benefit by pursuing two basic planning approaches:

- 1. Reinvestment Priorities and Regulations.** Spurring revitalization and new development on South Main Street will require some shift and change in investment and planning priorities on behalf of the City and other agencies and organizations. In particular, the shift may involve removing obstacles to reinvestment, in terms of zoning and other land use regulations, and in creating an environment in which new investment can occur. For example, to set the stage for investment along South Main Street, the City could establish a fast-track, time-definite development approval process and a set of incentives that can catalyze building improvements and new development.

**2. Organizational capacity.** Organizational capacity in Rockford is fragmented among many different organizations. Three community-based groups work in Southwest Rockford, but none are currently staffed or have the resources to lead significant development initiatives. The two primary Downtown Rockford organizations are reluctant to dilute their efforts by expanding across Kent Creek as they work to focus their Downtown revitalization efforts and build organizational capacity to accomplish specific initiatives.

The most effective organization at the regional level, the Rockford Area Economic Development Council (RAEDC), has traditionally pursued industrial manufacturing targets, but is forward-looking in its priorities and recently added renewable energy, aerospace and high technology industries to its economic development and recruitment strategies. The RAEDC looks to attract large-scale businesses and is less focused on fine-grain, neighborhood economic development, nor does it generally pursue retail businesses. However, the RAEDC recently launched an entrepreneurship program with an emphasis on agricultural businesses, local food and food manufacturing and, in a trial capacity, retail start-ups.

### A Community Development Corporation

Neighborhood-based development capacity within the South Main Street Corridor and Southwest Rockford is currently somewhat limited as most groups lack adequate staff and financial resources. Overall, neighborhood organizational capacity requires strengthening in order to implement many of the business recruitment, housing development, and smaller-scale real estate development strategies and recommendations presented in this Plan. South Main Street needs more attention than City staff and elected officials alone can realistically provide. Therefore, it is recommended that a “South Main Partnership” be established as a public-private community development corporation.

Since community development efforts in Southwest Rockford have struggled to gain momentum, it is suggested the new Community Development Corporation (CDC) have the following organizational characteristics in order to ensure its long-term success:

- ❑ **Board of Directors.** Initially, it is recommended the new South Main Partnership establish a small board of directors (e.g., 6-8 people) with representation from the City and South Main Street merchants, developers and residents, as well as the local neighborhood alderman and a high-level representative from

# South Main Revitalization Strategy

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RAEDC. The RAEDC could greatly assist Southwest Rockford by expanding its interest to include the South Main Street retail zones. Other existing community development organizations, such as SWIFIT, RRDC, RAMBA and Pilgrim's Promise may also be included in the initial board.

- ❑ **Catalytic Projects.** The South Main Partnership should implement catalytic projects such as special events and façade improvements in the Traditional Neighborhood Core zone. It should have policy input on matters relating to South Main Street's other sub-areas; however, in order to have visible impact and build momentum, it should devote significant resources into catalytic projects themselves within the Traditional Neighborhood Core.

Agility and a focus on implementation will benefit from starting with small projects and expanding the organization's capacity to do things over time in both geographic terms and in board participation. Once the Partnership grows its own capacity as a facilitator and developer along South Main Street, it can later lead a broader range of community improvement initiatives, including:

- ❑ Community security
- ❑ Additional street and sidewalk cleaning
- ❑ Housing development
- ❑ Commercial building rehabilitation
- ❑ Business support and retention
- ❑ Entrepreneur development
- ❑ Business recruitment

Initially, the Partnership will require a full-time executive director and part-time administrative staff. Funding a new CDC in the current climate will require a blend of sources from both the public and private sectors. Initially, the City will likely have to play a critical role in financial support of the Partnership. Such funding should be offered with a match requirement to assure that the Partnership has a diversity of resources and that private-sector funding is incorporated from the outset. The initial funding base for the Partnership CDC should include the following:

- ❑ City support (e.g., CDBG)
- ❑ Property owner and merchants contributions
- ❑ Corporate philanthropy (esp. from Southwest Rockford industries)
- ❑ Neighborhood support

Business Improvement Districts and Special Service Area funding mechanisms (discussed later) should be tested for their financial and political viability. Low property values at the present time will, at least for now, limit the utility of the BID and SSA funding tools. In addition, if the Partnership is able to acquire or develop property in the future, the sale or operation of that development can serve as an additional revenue source for the Partnership.

### **MAIN STREET METHODOLOGY**

Since the Partnership should focus its first efforts on the Traditional Neighborhood Core of South Main Street, it should establish a commercial corridor revitalization initiative modeled on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's "Main Street Approach."

The start-up board of directors would lead the Partnership's Main Street initiative, with a volunteer committee providing activity support. The Main Street initiative, as applied in the National Trust's model, should leverage historic preservation as an economic development tool and implement incremental, catalytic projects in three broad areas of work:

- ❑ Design and physical improvements
- ❑ Promotion and marketing
- ❑ Economic restructuring, including business assistance and recruitment)

These work areas are linked by a common revitalization strategy as presented for the Traditional Neighborhood Core. The Core's catalytic projects should also support a strategy that builds on local ethnic diversity and entrepreneurship through new retail, light industrial and residential development.

Main Street programs often have committees representing the different areas of work (e.g., Design, Promotion, and Economic Restructuring, in the case of the South Main Partnership). At the outset, however, it is recommended that all projects are managed by the board of directors and volunteer committees can be established at a later date.

The lists below include the significant organizations who were brought to our attention during this planning process.

### SIGNIFICANT ROCKFORD ORGANIZATIONS

#### Organizations working in Southwest Rockford:

- ❑ SWIFTT (Southwest Ideas for Today and Tomorrow)
- ❑ RAMBA (Rockford Area Mexican Business Association)
- ❑ RRDC (Rock River Development Corporation)

#### Organizations working in downtown Rockford, with very limited overlap to Southwest Rockford:

- ❑ RDA (River District Association)
- ❑ RRDP (Rock River Development Partnership)

#### Organizations working citywide or regionally:

- ❑ RAEDC (Rockford Area Economic Development Council)
- ❑ RLDC (Rockford Local Development Corporation)

## Sub-Area Implementation Strategies

### DOWNTOWN RIVERFRONT/TRANSITION

Development of the Downtown Riverfront/Transition sub-area will, in part, relate to the establishment of future Amtrak service, park development and any changes to the site's industrial users. As noted in Revitalization Strategy Components section of this report, much of this sub-area's redevelopment will also depend on an improved housing market. Depending on frequency of service, the Amtrak service itself will not necessarily stimulate development of a transit-oriented village and therefore the implementation strategies are framed in the context of creating a mixed-use residential neighborhood – with train service.

In the case of housing development, private-sector capacity appears not to be the limiting factor. Several recent projects in the area demonstrate that competent local developers exist; these include the William Brown Loft Apartments, a small-scale mixed use building at West State and Wyman, and sixteen condos on South Main Street. Further, for historic properties (which may affect rehabilitation plans for the Amerock Building and/or portions of the Barber-Colman site), The Brown Lofts and several other Downtown adaptive use and building rehabilitation projects indicate developers' familiarity with historic preservation tax credits. The challenge is one of demand for housing product. While market-based increases for housing demand cannot be predicted in

the current housing climate, local initiatives and catalytic projects in Southwest Rockford can create a favorable context in which preference for housing in the neighborhood can grow.

As a general principle of neighborhood revitalization, residents come first and retail follows later. However, on South Main Street, existing housing must be stabilized and improved, and new neighborhood retail developed, before new residents will choose to move to Southwest Rockford and create additional housing demand. The Traditional Neighborhood Core sub-area (below) must first be made attractive to new residents; it can then set the stage for residential development in this Downtown Riverfront/Transition sub-area.

### **TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD CORE**

The traditional architecture of South Main's northern district functions as a neighborhood convenience center. To anyone passing through, the district presents a poorly maintained appearance with unattractive building changes and alterations. However, this district -- both physically and economically -- has potential to become the commercial heart of South Main Street and an incubator of small-scale retail and light industrial businesses.

### **Management and Funding**

As mentioned previously, a South Main Partnership organization should be established to facilitate revitalization initiatives along the Corridor. The following provides in-depth strategies and recommendations regarding how the Partnership and potential revitalization activities can be funded.

**Special Service Area.** Special Services Areas (SSA's) have been used in Illinois and throughout the country as an important financing tool for downtown and neighborhood commercial district improvements. A Special Service Area is a State authorized financing program that can be administered by the City or by a designated service provider agency, such as the South Main Partnership, to deliver a wide range of additional services and physical improvements in a defined geographic area such as a central business district or commercial corridor. An SSA is funded by a special tax assessment paid by the property owners in the designated SSA district and can finance a variety of district management activities including marketing and special events, trash and snow removal, and sidewalk/public space maintenance. Special Service Areas can also underwrite infrastructure and building improvements. The SSA itself is a funding mechanism but not in itself an organizational model. Memberships and fee-for-service programs the service provider agency

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may decide to implement separately to generate additional revenues may also supplement property tax assessments.

On South Main Street, property values are currently too low and businesses too marginal to provide sufficient resources for traditional SSA services. The South Main Partnership and the City should consider a two-part alternative to long-term funding: the South Main Partnership can begin the public process to establish a SSA mechanism in the Traditional Neighborhood Core sub-area, so the ordinance is in place as the district becomes more vibrant, new buildings are developed and property values rise. As the Barber-Colman site enters a predevelopment phase and seeks an anchor institutional user, the City can also negotiate a fee (e.g., in lieu of taxes) to partially fund the SSA for an initial five to ten-year period. This arrangement should have appeal to the Barber-Colman tenant by giving it some influence over its immediate environment.

**Residential Improvement District.** Residential improvement districts are less common than business improvement districts, but can be a similarly powerful tool. Illinois law allows for the creation of residential SSAs; they are most commonly used in new subdivision developments as a supplemental taxing tool to pay for repairs and maintenance and public improvements.

A residential SSA could have a powerful impact on Southwest Rockford, particularly if initially focused on the Traditional Neighborhood Core sub-area. An SSA could potentially pay for cleaning services, neighborhood bicycle and/or foot patrols (e.g., private security staff coordinated with the Police Department), flower planting and light landscaping, and street furniture such as benches and trash receptacles.

SSAs are usually established by ordinance at the request of a developer. (There are usually no residents yet who might oppose it.) The political hurdles to establishing an SSA in an existing neighborhood may be significant, especially in Southwest Rockford where home values and household incomes are low. As a practical approach, it may be most expedient to establish an SSA that applies to rental (e.g., “commercial” residential) properties only. With about half of all housing in Southwest Rockford renter-occupied, such an SSA ordinance may face less opposition. Landlords may be convinced of the value of an SSA as a way to bring additional stability to the neighborhood and as a way to improve residential property values.

Cleaning and patrol services funded by the proposed BID and/or SSA (and managed by the South Main Partnership) may be contracted to a local provider so the Partnership itself can still be operated with one staff person.



*Landscape projects could be funded by an SSA as a way to improve the area's appearance.*

**Business Improvement District (BID).** A BID is a State authorized financing program that municipalities can establish for improving infrastructure and attracting new commercial growth in a designated business improvement district. A BID is adopted by ordinance and is funded by small increments added to local sales or hotel taxes. Sales taxes can be used for several revitalization or redevelopment activities allowed under the BID statute; however, hotel taxes must be used for tourism and convention related activities. A BID remains in place for 23 years and revenues collected within it are placed in a Business District Tax Allocation Fund. A significant advantage of a BID is the flexibility and wider range of activities in which BID monies can be used as opposed to a TIF district or Special Service Area.

### Design Management and Clean and Safe

**Façade improvements.** Façade improvements to commercial storefronts (also discussed and illustrated previously) will be critical on South Main Street, particularly in this Corridor sub-area. Façade improvements stimulated by modest matching grants (e.g., \$10,000 to \$50,000) have been catalytic to revitalization in urban commercial districts across the country. Such programs are very effective at generating the necessary momentum at the start of a revitalization effort. In order to build that momentum, we recommend an aggressive rollout of the program, with a goal to initiate 10 new façade improvements within the Traditional Neighborhood Core within a year.



*Facade improvements are critical to improving South Main Street's image.*

South Main had a TIF-funded façade improvement program, which no longer operates. A new façade program is needed and should be managed by the proposed South Main Partnership. (As this plan for South Main was concluding, the City re-funded a façade program using \$60,000 of CDBG money.) Most façade incentive programs require a match from the business or property owner, but there is wide variation from place to place in the percentage of the required match. Some façade grant programs are able to stimulate multiple projects using a match of 50% or less. Given the condition of buildings and performance of retail businesses on South Main, we believe a larger subsidy of 75 to 80 percent will be required to stimulate façade improvements.

Beyond financial incentives, an effective façade improvement program also includes the following components:

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- ❑ **Design services.** The program should establish a services contract with a local architect, or with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, which provides design services to Illinois Main Street communities, to provide free conceptual designs to business and property owners.
- ❑ **Competitive selection.** Application deadlines give business and property owners a reason to act within a specific timeframe – and competitive evaluation of applications provides a motivation for business and property owners to build well-designed, high-quality projects.
- ❑ **Reimbursement-based.** Funding must be provided on a reimbursement basis to assure that the improvement is built as it was proposed. This requirement will inevitably inhibit some larger projects. However, if only a 20% to 25% match is required, the cash required for smaller projects should be achievable.

Additional funds for the South Main Street façade improvement program may come from the existing TIF, future CDBG grants, SSA/BID revenues or by a grant from a local bank or corporation.

**Activating vacant development sites.** Even before the proposed Village Market signature space is developed, it should be programmed and animated – not just with an annual event, but also regularly, even weekly during the outdoor weather months. Music, movies, food and flea markets can all be used as catalysts to attract people to the space. Out of this activation, people will become accustomed to thinking of the site as a place, and new enterprises can develop incrementally: what may begin as a food truck can later transition to a bricks-and-mortar restaurant in the new Village Market.



*The Village Market concept should be programmed to activate the vacant frontage along South Main Street.*

### CASE STUDY: "POP-UP PIAZZA" (BRISTOL, CT)

In Bristol, Connecticut, a developer (Renaissance Downtowns) is trying to create activity around a 17-acre site as a precursor to full development. They named the vacant site the "Pop-Up Piazza". Using Facebook and other social media, and a website used to solicit ideas from the public (BristolRising.com), the developer has created a calendar of regular events. The first business resulting from this activity – Bare Bones Café – just opened in August 2011. (CLUE Group is currently engaged in this project.)

**National Register Historic District.** Listing the Traditional Neighborhood Core in the National Register of Historic Places, the nation’s official list of buildings, sites and places worthy of preservation, would provide significant benefits and additional tools to advance the revitalization process. National Register designation allows owners of eligible downtown historic commercial properties to receive Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credits for substantial rehabilitation and adaptive use projects. Designation also allows the neighborhood to leverage its “branding” benefits for heritage-based marketing and economic development efforts that generate increased local tourism and sales dollars. The South Main Partnership and the City could explore the potential eligibility of this segment of the Corridor for listing in the National Register.



*Creating a clean, safe and attractive environment will be essential to successfully revitalizing South Main Street.*

**Clean and safe.** Clean, safe and attractive residential and commercial areas – the three characteristics that describe successful urban neighborhoods – will be essential to success here, given perceptions of Southwest Rockford. Volunteer efforts can have an initial impact: Cleanup days demonstrate that the community is involved, and may influence neighbors and teens to be more respectful of their surroundings. A Neighborhood Watch program (i.e., one with “deputized” volunteer patrols wearing a recognizable uniform) can have real and perceived impacts similar to organized cleanups. However, volunteer efforts face two significant challenges: they require organizational capacity to mobilize people and, while they can be great exercises in community-building, volunteer clean and safe crews are not a long-term solution. Interest is typically high at the outset but tends to wane over time.

### **Business Development and Capitalization**

**Capitalizing entrepreneurs and small businesses.** Several established non-profits in Rockford act as lending intermediaries (including RAEDC and RLDC), providing entrepreneurs with access to traditional financing sources such as SBA 504 loans. However, these funds can only be used for fixed-asset projects (e.g, land and buildings, machinery, etc.); they cannot be used for working capital or inventory.

Due to these limitations, and since small businesses and entrepreneurs are unlikely to qualify for traditional bank financing in the current economic climate, many communities have started to think more creatively about generating new sources of capital. These creative approaches can be described as “community-based financing.” Six variations of community-based financing include:

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1. **Small investor group.** A community investor group is a variation on the common practice of a small group of business people coming together to start or buy a business. For example, after identifying a clear need for a sit-down, high-quality dining establishment, 18 local business people in Effingham, Illinois, came together in 2006 to invest a total of \$50,000 in a local chef/entrepreneur. That investment, coupled with the chef's owner equity, enabled him to build and open Firefly Restaurant.

A variation on this practice was used to rescue an existing downtown business in Clare, Michigan. When a local bakery was about to close due to retiring owners, the local police department – the entire department, acting as private citizens – put up cash to buy the business. They renamed it “Cops & Doughnuts” and hired a professional manager to run the bakery. The story and the business name brought the community national news coverage. Small investor groups are the most agile and most easily organized of the community-based financing options.

2. **Cooperative.** A cooperative is a business that is established to serve the needs of a community of customers. Most early retail cooperatives were food co-ops, but there are now cooperative bicycle stores, bookstores and cafés. In a cooperative, each member owns an equal share of the business – and that ownership stake serves to finance the initial business. The business is governed by a board, but may hire professional management for day-to-day operation. As the business begins to earn a surplus, cooperatives are not-for-profit enterprises, it may reinvest the surplus to grow the business. Ultimately, cooperatives typically return their annual surplus to the members on a pro-rated formula. Conversely, if the cooperative loses money, it may need to assess its members to raise additional capital.



*A wide variety of businesses can be established as co-ops, such as cafes, groceries and even bookstores.*

3. **Community corporations.** Community-owned corporations are not “cooperatives” per se, but they are their for-profit “cousins.” Shares in the corporation can be purchased by anyone and, unlike a cooperative, any individual can own any amount of equity in the company. A prospectus, which is a required document for selling an equity share in the corporation, would specify the ownership rights of the shareholders – and the risks associated with the investment.
4. **Community investment fund.** An investment fund provides venture capital equity or loan debt to an entrepreneur. Unlike traditional venture capital, community-development investment funds are “social capitalists;” they are less interested in high rates of return and more interested in stimulating new businesses. These funds typically seek out great business ideas that have a

social-enterprise benefit but cannot gain access to capital, or sufficient capital, through traditional channels. Instead of owning and operating a business directly, the fund allows community members to invest in one or more businesses by investing in the fund. The investment fund generally seeks a modest return and the ability to revolve the capital into additional new businesses over time.

Several models of community investment funds exist nationally, including Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation, Boston Community Capital, and Pacific Community Ventures – to name a few. Rockford could establish its own fund, which would then solicit and evaluate business plans on a competitive basis. South Main Street entrepreneurs may be able to access capital through an existing fund, Chicago Community Ventures, a regional community investment fund that targets women-owned and minority-owned businesses, or businesses operating in low and moderate-income areas of metropolitan Chicago.

5. **Community loans.** Community loans – or loans made by individual community members – are the debt version of equity models such as the community-owned corporation. In 2008, the owners of Greenlight Bookstore in Brooklyn, NY, invested \$125,000 in a startup business in a retail category that continues to face significant risks. In addition to their own capital and an SBA loan of \$150,000, the owners borrowed money from community residents, which included 25 individuals loaning \$70,000. The business has become profitable and has begun to repay the loans.
6. **Barter.** Perhaps the cheapest way for an entrepreneur to raise money is through a form of “cash barter”. Similar to the community loan model, community members loan money to a new business. But, rather than being repaid in cash, they are repaid through a certificate for goods or services. Claire’s Restaurant in Hardwick, Vermont, used this tool: the loans function something like a pre-paid gift card and are repaid through free or discounted meals at the restaurant. The borrower (i.e., the business) may offer an incentive to the lender, such as a discount on purchases. In return, the business gets access to very inexpensive capital, since the cost of the goods or services provided will be less than the actual debt being repaid.

In many cases in Southwest Rockford, informal businesses create challenges for any kind of structured investment beyond family-based financing. The South Main Partnership should serve a role in connecting existing businesses and prospective entrepreneurs to technical assistance programs that can help them formalize their accounting and operations.

### CASE STUDY: FRUITVALE DISTRICT (OAKLAND, CA)

The Fruitvale neighborhood of Oakland, California, showed severe disinvestment in the mid-1990s. Home to a majority Latino and African American population, a local community development corporation (then called the Spanish Speaking Unity Council, later renamed the Unity Council) was working to stabilize residential areas by investing in housing rehabilitation and low and moderate income housing development. Around 1996, the Unity Council partnered with Local Initiatives Support Corporation and the National Trust Main Street Center to become an urban Main Street program and begin improvements to the commercial corridor. Since that time, Fruitvale has made a dramatic turnaround – by building on its diversity and ethnic identity.

**Façade improvements.** The first projects implemented in Fruitvale were storefront improvements, incentivized by matching grants. The hallmark of this program was its embrace of culturally-expressive façade changes and signs. The colorful façade improvements celebrated the personalities and diversity of the businesses within the buildings. In just a few years, the Main Street program had stimulated more than a dozen projects.

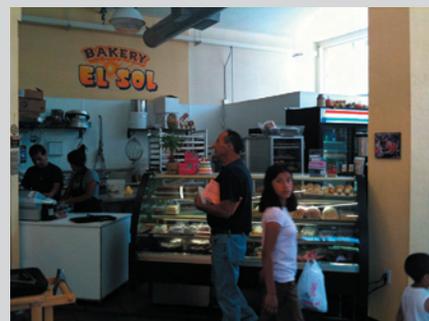


**Events.** Dia De Los Muertos. The Fruitvale Main Street program created a series of events to draw people to the commercial district, including Dia De Los Muertos (Day of the Dead), which now in its 16th year, has become one of the largest festivals in Oakland.



**Housing development.** The Unity Council developed a “Transit Village” in Fruitvale, adding 47 affordable-housing rental apartments.

**Public market.** As part of the Transit Village, Fruitvale built a 7,000 square foot enclosed Public Market, which provides vendor and incubator, spaces to 11 food and other start-up retail businesses. It also provides those businesses with ongoing technical and expansion assistance.



**Small-scale manufacturing.** The Unity Council partnered with Bay Area fashion designers to establish “Mio: Made In Oakland”, a 5,000 square foot social enterprise with a workforce development mission. “mio” manufactures sample garments for Bay Area designers and, in the process, provides job training to neighborhood minority women and pays them a living wage.

### URBAN TRANSITION SUB-AREA

#### Marchesano/South Main Target Area

The Carniceria El Centenario supermarket and shopping center at the northwest corner of Marchesano and South Main has remained occupied despite viable, with low or no vacancies. It functions as a neighborhood retail center that confirms the potential for niche market development at the proposed Village Market site, further north.

The Marchesano Shopping Center (south side of Marchesano at Clifton) presents several challenges for retail development, including the poor appearance of buildings and lack of landscaping, lack of visibility from South Main Street and lack of strong retail adjacencies. With landscaping and facade improvements, the shopping center can re-tenant as a neighborhood retail center. However, investment will need to come from the owner/developer, as limited South Main resources will initially be prioritized for the Traditional Neighborhood Core Target Area.

The owner/developer should consider several potential incentives for marketing the retail spaces:

- ❑ A “plain vanilla box” investment, where spaces are fit out and do not require a large investment by a prospective small-business tenant;
- ❑ Percentage-of-gross leases, to lessen the risk for a prospective neighborhood retailer;
- ❑ Joint venture investment by the shopping center owner and an entrepreneur; or
- ❑ Using community financing tools discussed in Section 8: Implementation.

#### INTERCHANGE TARGET AREA

As the market assessment portion of this report notes, much of Southwest Rockford’s household spending is currently captured within the city, but on the East Side. The General Merchandise leakage is about \$5.7 million; if recaptured within the neighborhood, could theoretically support an additional 20,000 to 25,000 square feet of retail space. Retail was considered as one of several potential uses in this sub-area, particularly on the southeast quadrant of the interchange.

## South Main Revitalization Strategy

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### Section 6: Revitalization Vision

Hotel development is envisioned as another potential future use within the Interchange Target Area. Hotels prefer clustered development and, for the present time, excess capacity remains in the hotel zone at East State and I-90. Future hotel development at South Main and Route 20 will be closely related to attracting additional passenger air service to the Chicago Rockford International Airport. The pro forma will likely need a combination of incentives:

- ❑ Room-night guarantees from current/future charter services;
- ❑ Enterprise Zone designation for the southeast quadrant of the Interchange Target Area;
- ❑ City purchase of the property to lease to the hotel owner;
- ❑ Bond to finance land development;
- ❑ Equity investment by the Airport;
- ❑ Equity investment by the City.

Hotel development on this site is a long-term prospect. Retail development will also require City participation and other incentives, but may be more easily achieved, depending on any future air service expansion. In either case, the City should evaluate the potential impact on East Side retailers and hotels before making a decision to participate in a deal.