

DOWNTOWN STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN STATE OF THE DOWNTOWN REPORT

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CITY OF KENOSHA, WISCONSIN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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PLANNING MISSION

In January of 2012, the Kenosha Area Business Alliance (KABA) and the City of Kenosha engaged The Lakota Group (planning and design), Goodman Williams Group (market and economic analysis) and T.Y. Lin International (transportation planning) to initiate a planning process to develop a strategic revitalization and implementation strategy for Kenosha's downtown. The last full Downtown Master Plan was prepared in 1991 and established the plan for reclaiming the lakefront, which was accomplished through the HarborPark development. While additional studies have been conducted in the years since, the timing is right to develop a new downtown plan that establishes the goals and priorities for the next 20 years.

The City's goal for this planning mission is to create a clear, documented and shared vision, or "game plan," for the Downtown that sets the stage for funding strategies, capital improvement programming, new development and retention/attraction of new and existing businesses. These goals will be shaped by evaluating the Downtown's land use, physical conditions, zoning, real estate market and infrastructure and transportation system helping to create a "sense of place" for Downtown Kenosha.

PLANNING PROCESS

The first phase of this planning process involved an overall assessment of the Downtown's existing land use mix, physical conditions, transportation network and access, infrastructure and real estate market. This phase also focused on extensive public participation through interviews, focus group sessions, an online community survey, discussions with City staff and agencies, as well as a Community Open House. The process, which began in January 2012, includes the following phases:

Phase 1: State of the Downtown

Phase 1 involved an inventory of existing Downtown conditions and included team fieldwork and assessments, a meeting with the project's Steering Committee, numerous Focus Group discussions and stakeholder interviews, a Community Open House and this State of the Downtown report. Community outreach and public awareness methods included a project website, a KABA run Facebook page, an online survey and email blasts announcing major events in the process.

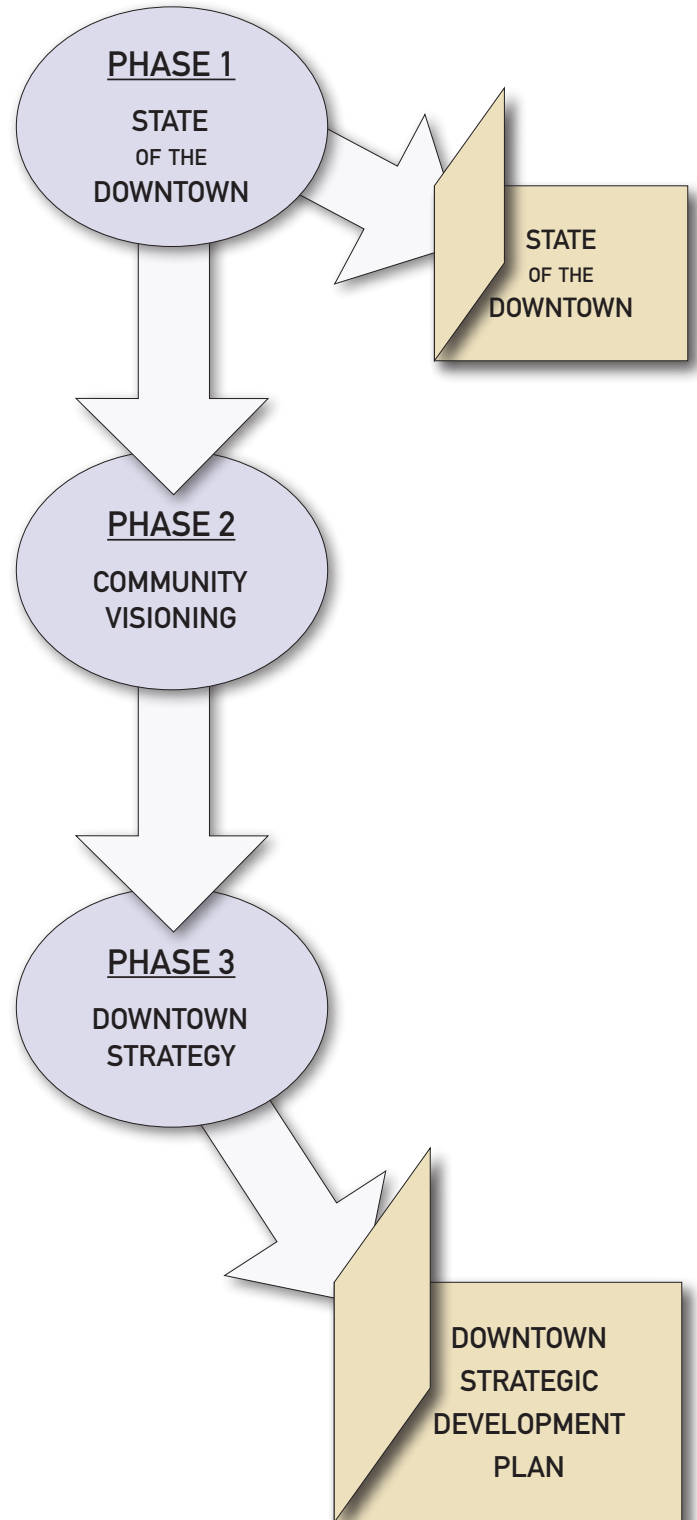
Phase 2: Community Visioning

Phase 2 will involve generating a range of development strategies for the Downtown, as well as concepts for enhancing the area's land use mix, physical conditions, transit, transportation, pedestrian and bike circulation, parking and streetscape. After review by the Steering Committee, a Community Visioning Workshop will be held to review the State of the Downtown findings, development strategies and design concepts.

Phase 3: Downtown Strategy

Phase 3 will involve crafting a more specific Strategic Development Plan direction for the Downtown, as well as a set of strategies for its implementation. This information will be reviewed with the

Steering Committee, and a third Community Workshop will be held to discuss final plan outcomes. Downtown revitalization strategies will outline optimal and achievable short-term and long-range development scenarios and clear, concise methods for evaluating future development funding opportunities and required development control improvements. Key implementation action strategies will address land use policy and zoning issues, as well as public and private actions that can be taken to advance City and Downtown objectives.



In addition to the public input, the following is a summary of the constraints and opportunities identified during the fieldwork and analysis portions of the planning process:

Weaknesses/Challenges/Issues

■ Physical Conditions

- The City lacks a sense of arrival, both in regards to signage and gateways and to established character.
- Some building facades need improvement. The architecture of individual storefronts is not coordinated across the building façade. Several buildings have long solid walls without windows.
- A clustering of several vacant buildings within the Downtown core impacts the appearance and activity.
- Some crosswalks could be better defined and visible to motorists and pedestrians.
- The width of several roadways is larger than appears necessary, creating the appearance of large uninterrupted paving areas.
- Some business signage is dated, aging or unattractive.
- Portions of the streetscape have few street trees.
- The 6th Street infrastructure is in need of repair or replacement

■ Transportation

- The distance from the I-94 to Downtown Kenosha makes drawing visitors from the interstate challenging.
- There are several potential routes into the Downtown without clear wayfinding to guide visitors on the best route.
- Sheridan Road by-passes the Downtown commercial area, causing many motorists to overlook the Downtown.
- Several roadways within the Downtown are in need of repair or resurfacing.
- The Metra commuter rail's service schedule makes using the train a less attractive option for some types of trips.

■ Parking

- There is a perception that parking is difficult to find in some locations at peak times. Other concerns have been raised that if vacant buildings were to become occupied, there would be a significant parking shortage.
- While the City has improved the parking lot at 57th Street and 7th Avenue with new landscape and lighting, many parking lots are unattractive and poorly screened from adjacent roadways and uses.
- Due to the size of the Downtown and the location of different key destinations, many visitors park multiple times within one visit to the Downtown as opposed to parking once and walking.



■ Commercial

- Within the Downtown area there is a significant amount of commercially zoned land, along with vacancies creates a lack of critical mass.
- The surrounding commercial corridors provide for many of the regional commercial desires.
- The Downtown lacks critical daytime and evening populations to support certain additional commercial uses.

■ Residential

- Inflated land values and rental price points make second floor rental challenging. However, there is solid demand for quality downtown rental apartments.
- There is a high percentage of seasonal residents within HarborPark which leads to a lack of year-around activity in the Downtown.

■ Other

- The Downtown has numerous parcels and a variety of owners, some of whom may have an inflated sense of land value or financial challenges affecting their property, which could inhibit future development or redevelopment.



Strengths/Opportunities/Ideas

■ Physical Conditions

- The City has effectively reclaimed its lakefront over the last 20 years creating a series of quality open spaces that provide access for the public to the waterfront.
- New development associated with HarborPark is well done and maintained, setting a positive standard for new development.
- The City has clusters of quality buildings with historic character and value that creates an authentic environment for a strong mixed-use Downtown.

■ Transportation

- Kenosha is uniquely positioned between Chicago and Milwaukee with easy travel times to both cities.
- Kenosha has a solid grid system of streets that supports a permeable city with Complete Streets opportunities.
- Metra provides commuter rail service between Chicago and Kenosha.
- The City has invested in their street car system to create a unique transit amenity.
- The City has budgeted funds for expanding and improving the street car system.
- The bus system links the Downtown with the surrounding neighborhoods.
- The City has funds budgeted for improving the bike facilities throughout the community.

■ Parking

- Current parking demands are being accommodated through a variety of parking lots, decks and on-street parking opportunities.
- The City made improvements to the public lot at the corner of 56th Street and 5th Avenue which creates a visual example for future improvements to follow.
- The City has plans to install additional bike parking as recommended in the parking *Downtown/Uptown Parking Study* to encourage a balance in transportation use.



■ Commercial

- A range of key businesses and restaurants continue to succeed in the Downtown and draw loyal patrons.
- There is a current retail leakage that indicates that the Downtown would support additional stores.
- The Harbor Market has had the benefit of being an incubator for new businesses within the Downtown.
- The daytime population of the Downtown is increasing, which will have the added benefit of supporting additional retail and restaurant uses.

■ Residential

- There appears to be a growing demand for Downtown apartments and residential units.

■ Other

- Proximity to Carthage College offers potential to create partnerships that will increase the vibrancy of the Downtown.
- The Kenosha Medical Center campus brings significant employees and visitors to the greater downtown area, which could be capitalized on to increase business in the Downtown.
- The City has in place or has the ability to establish several funding mechanisms that could be used to further various Downtown initiatives.
- A growing number of festivals energizes the Downtown throughout the summer.

PRELIMINARY IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

A sustained commitment and participation by several different stakeholder groups, including the City of Kenosha, the Kenosha Area Business Alliance, the Kenosha Lakeshore Business Improvement District, among others, will be required to bring the vision of a revitalized downtown Kenosha to fruition. Working together as partners, the community will need to consider the following as critical Strategic Plan implementation action steps and strategies:

- **Funding Sources**
- **Capacity Building**
- **Community-initiated development**

CATALYTIC SITES AND PROJECTS

The City, KABA and other entities will need to work together to initiate the redevelopment and adaptive use of the key opportunity sites and buildings in Downtown Kenosha. Each site or building may necessitate a slightly different approach to its redevelopment depending on site or building size, developer interest, ownership issues, and available financial resources and incentives. However, two basic approaches are suggested.

- **Vacant Opportunity Site**
- **Adaptive Use**
- **Catalytic Site Marketing**
- **Preliminary Catalytic Sites**

BRANDING AND MARKETING

Going forward, downtown Kenosha is envisioned to be a unique destination within the greater Chicago-Milwaukee metropolitan regions and on-going efforts to brand and market its retail, service, recreational and cultural offerings and attractions, as well as promote the area's revitalization potential to investors, developers, new businesses and future residents, will be critically important. Such activities will be critical to communicating the Downtown's characteristics as well as the goods and services it offers to shoppers, visitors and potential investors. Therefore, an over-arching branding/marketing strategy for downtown Kenosha can be used to develop marketing materials and advertising campaigns, organize targeted promotional/special events, conduct more effective public relations activities and coordinate with the planned Downtown signage and wayfinding system.

Given its mission, the Kenosha Lakeshore BID would be the most appropriate organization to develop and manage an effective branding and marketing program focused on enhancing downtown's overall image and increasing sales for

existing businesses and restaurants. Organizations that could play partnership roles in such program include the City, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, the City and the Chamber of Commerce. Implementation action steps in developing the program may include:

- **Branding Study**
- **Image Building Marketing**

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Establishing effective public/private partnerships and building local organizational capacity and leadership will be critical to long-term success in implementing the Strategic Plan. Partnerships between the City and entities such as KABA, the BID, the Chamber and other groups, will be especially vital in leveraging financial and human resources to accomplish more complex revitalization initiatives, such as facilitating new development, recruiting new businesses, and in managing ongoing marketing and promotion activities. Such partnerships can also maximize the leadership necessary from both the private and public sectors to help steward Strategic Plan implementation from its early stages to the long term. Key partnership and organizational development implementation steps that should be considered include:

- **Kenosha Lakeshore BID**
- **Kenosha Area Business Alliance**
- **Kenosha Area Chamber of Commerce.**
- **Kenosha Commission on the Arts**
- **Main Street Revitalization Program**

FUNDING

Funding from municipal, county, state and Federal sources as well as local foundations, corporate, and civic and business organizations will be needed to finance Strategic Plan elements. Public infrastructure, lakefront and streetscape improvements, and the creation of new incentive programs will be the most significant expenditures and thus should be prioritized according to the Strategic Plan strategies and recommendations. Key funding sources and incentive programs that should be explored further as critical Strategic Plan implementation tools include:

- **Tax Increment Financing (TIF)**
- **Business Improvement District (BID)**
- **Equity Fund/Community Supported Financing**
- **Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program**
- **New Market Tax Credits**