



Downtown 2040 Plan

City of Buffalo, Minnesota | January 2021

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Downtown 2040 Plan (*)

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(*) Subject to local, state and federal guidelines/mandates about meeting in public

Schedule

Downtown is Growing & Changing

A dozen plans, relocations and projects represent the dynamic change that is taking place in Buffalo's town center. These efforts create the energy and urgency to update the downtown plan so the city can proactively plan for the future. Each one of these projects will have a significant effect on the character, use and sustainability of downtown.

> Havenwood Senior Living and Alo Apartments, recently constructed, will add about 150 new residential units across multiple market segments.

> A new main fire station will provide needed updates for the department and, when, completed, will leave a site that could be an opportunity.

> Hwy 25 rebuild is proposed to include an alignment that will add more usable open space along the lakefront.

> The Wright County Government site will relocate its office and administrative population from downtown but will also provide the largest site for redevelopment on the lakefront.

> The community center has needs today and a "Friends of the Community Center" has plans for an expanded facility.

> The Post Office has been considering the need to relocate to a larger site to better handle large truck traffic.

> The city currently has a study going on for how to promote downtown more as an arts destination.

> Paving and streetscape improvements are needed in the central area as well as parking management and/or additional supply.

> The city HRA parcel on 1st Street S is a major redevelopment opportunity as is the city lot owned facing the lake next to Lakeview Antiques.

> The lakefront is seen as another opportunity to enhance the destination experience, add real estate value and improve direct connections to the lake.



* Wright County Government Center

< Images from top of middle column: Havenwood, Alo Apartments, Fire Station, Hwy 25 concept plan.



Exhibit 12

- Major redevelopment opportunities shown in yellow area
- Paving and streetscape improvements shown in red outline
- Parking supply improvements/opportunities shown in blue areas
- Potential lakefront views/connections shown with green arrows

1.4 Summary of Findings and Conditions

General

Downtown is experiencing a number of on-going and planned changes. One of the biggest changes is the relocation of the Wright County Government Center (A) and the loss of its daytime population. The move is expected to be complete by summer 2021. Overall, the study area contains about 100 acres of land valued at over \$98 million; almost 1/3 of the study area is in public/exempt status. Population growth was projected to increase by 0.9%/yr from 2016-2021, recent data suggest a growth rate of approximately 7% in 2019. A number of 'character areas' can be defined including the civic campus, core commercial and lakeside commercial.

Housing

Residential use is the fastest growing, and largest, land use category in downtown. New residential development added about 150 units in 2020. The 2018 Housing Plan documented highest demand for senior-dedicated housing and entry level units.

Streets and Parking

Parking supply based on recent counts appears to be adequate though there may be issues with management, peak demands and convenient locations. The central parking supply has been identified as an issue [C]. Key downtown streets are in need of paving and potential streetscape improvements [D].

Development Opportunities

Two major sites (Wright County Government and the city HRA parcel) provide almost 10 acres of redevelopment opportunity [A], [B]. Other opportunities include the Lakeview Mall site [E] and adjacent HRA parcel [E] that currently provides parking for downtown businesses.

Parks and Open Spaces

The lakefront is less connected and utilized in the downtown area; more connections and views to the lakefront [F] were identified as desirable in the community survey, open house, stakeholder comments and past plans. The Hwy 25 rebuild proposed alignment would provide more usable land on the lakefront and could support activities and redevelopment along 1st Street S.

Vision Statement

Our downtown is a connected, active and unique place; as it grows it will become a more active neighborhood and a charming destination that will support residents of all ages, businesses of all types and visitors in all seasons.





Core Commercial Area



Lakeside Commercial Area



Emerging Redevelopment Area



Civic Campus

Character Areas



North

3.1 Land Use Concept—The Big Idea

The “big idea” that provides the organizing focus for the plan is a consistent lakefront corridor that features a more connected and usable public amenity. This would provide a prominent lakefront public space and physically reinforce Buffalo as a lakefront downtown.



▲ Today most of the highest valued sites along the lakefront or with views of the lake are used for surface parking (shown in red).

3.2 Core Commercial Area

The land use concept is focused on maintaining and enhancing this environment through the use of phased street and streetscape updates, adding to the parking supply and promoting strategic infill opportunities. Key streets are due for resurfacing so this would be a good time to also update planters, furniture, signage, landscape and lighting.

An initial study to convert the former Buffalo Cinema has evolved into an effort to combine the interests of the Buffalo theater arts and supporters of a new community center. This effort could help define how public dollars can be used to deliver a more flexible use facility for a variety of community needs.

- A: Possible Buffalo Theater reuse
- B: Parking lot /supply improvement options
- C: Potential infill opportunities
- D: Street paving, crosswalks and streetscape



^ Shopfront on Central Avenue



3.3 Lakeside Commercial Area

This area has the most visibility and access to the lakefront in downtown and includes several development and redevelopment opportunities. The general land use idea is to take advantage of the visual and physical relationship to the lake with pedestrian & shopper friendly streets, addition of green space, public restrooms/welcome station and additional parking. Key sites are expected to be redeveloped over time.

Option A/B: Community Center or retail/residential
Option C: HRA+Lakeview Mall redevelopment area

Option C.1: Lakefront plaza/open space

Option C.2: Reconfigured surface parking

Option D: Former bank site



← *Parking street arrangement in downtown River Falls, WI*



Land Use Option A

Multi-family & mixed-use focus. This option could support a higher density and unit count of multi-family residential as well as retail/office/commercial uses. The Wright County study showed yields of 394 to 489 units of housing and up to 18,000 SF of commercial/retail.

Land Use Option B

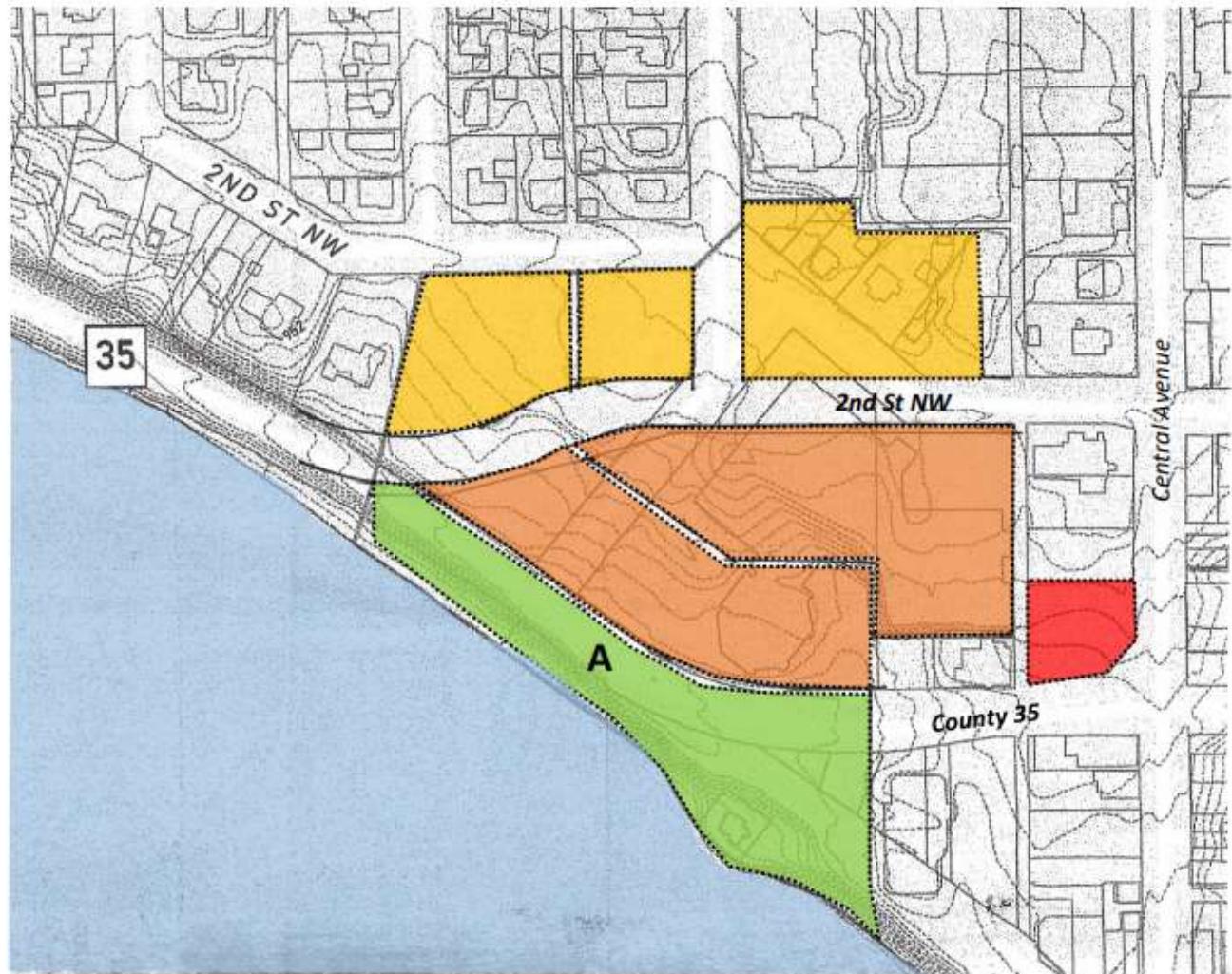
Residential with community center. Residential is the emphasis in this option but some of the land is focused on supporting a multi-use community center with views of the lake and ample parking.

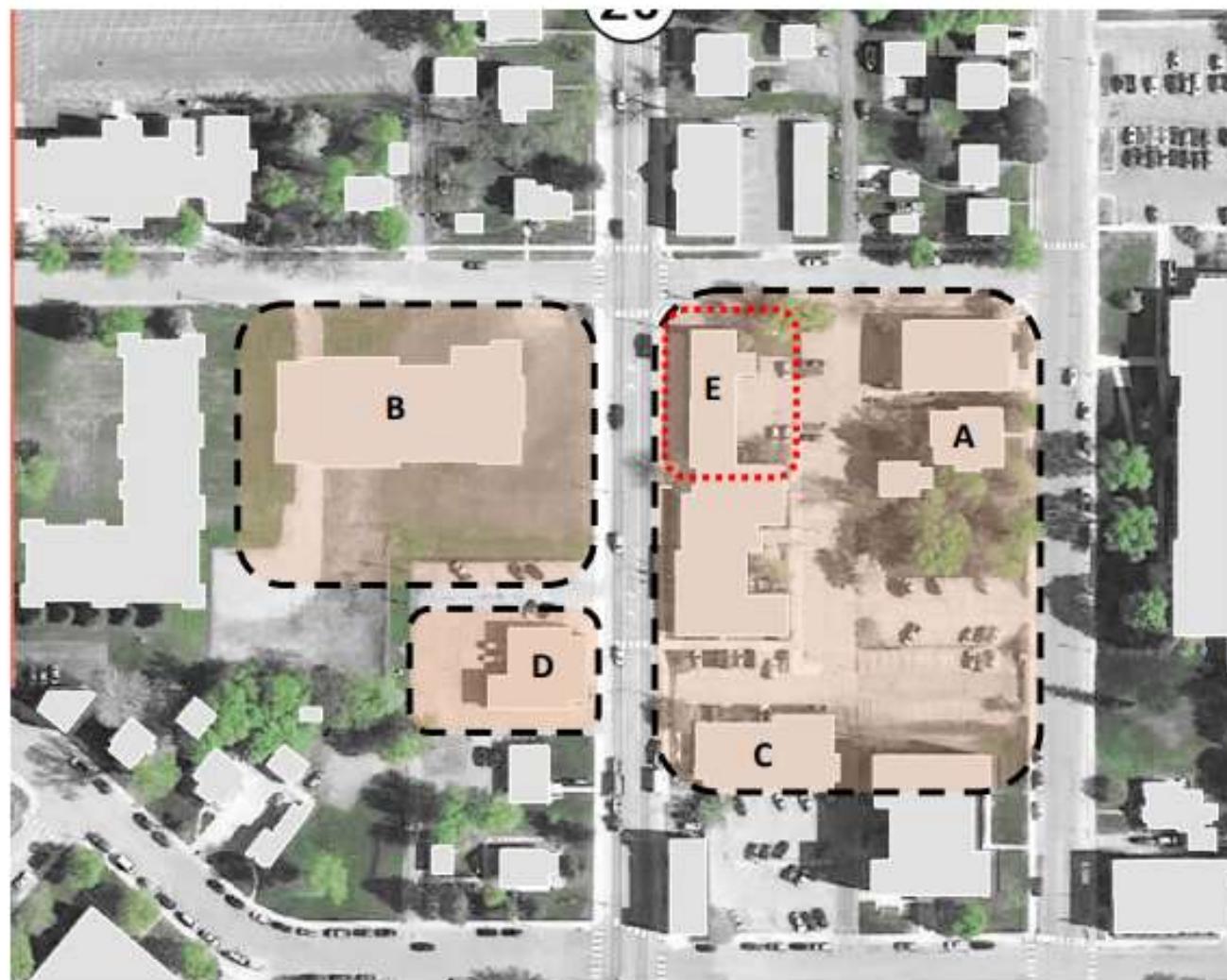
Land Use Option C

Neighborhood scale development. This option includes a variety of residential development with a focus on neighborhood scale development facing the existing neighborhood residential. Neighborhood scale development can include attached units such as cluster housing, townhouse and rowhouse buildings.

3.6 County Rd 35 Realignment Option

This is a compelling option proposed from the Stakeholder Group that shifts County 35 north from the lakefront and aligns with 2nd St NW and the Central Avenue intersection. This re-alignment creates the opportunity to have a significant new lakefront park [A], sort-of the western "bookend" to Sturges Park. A cost benefit analysis would need to be prepared to compare the implication of moving the road (including the signalized intersection) versus the value of additional developable land.





3.5 Civic Campus Area

This area has been home to fire, police and city hall for decades; the city has invested in the police department building, has acquired adjacent land for a possible additional parking [A] and is building the new fire station [B] on the west side of Central Avenue. This area also includes the community center, post office and chamber of commerce offices.

The land use concept is to maintain this area as a civic campus for the duration of the plan. If the community center were to move, this site would be available for redevelopment (probably as another community use or residential) [C]. There has been talk that the post office could move as well leaving a parcel for redevelopment [D]. One possibility is to relocate the post office into the Lakeside Commercial area on 1st St S.

The existing fire station site [E] can be considered for redevelopment in the future and as an interim parking in the mean time.



3.6 Community Center Options

Two options for locating a new community center are shown. No decision has been made about this but the Downtown Plan suggests at least two locations that could support various programs.

A—This option would utilize a portion of the Wright County government center site with the potential to support a larger activity program and possibly include some spaces that have views of the lake. The City would need to negotiate with the County for the needed land area (an area for parking is shown in the gray rectangle).

B—This option utilizes the HRA owned site on 1st St S and though this site is limited in depth and dimension it does contain enough area to support a modest program that could feature a community gathering space as well as a variety of smaller class rooms, meeting spaces and some off-street parking.

Note: Later in this year the Downtown Arts group and supporters of a new community center combined resources and are now considering how to combine the needs of each into a single, joint-use facility. In any case the sites considered here could support a version of this combined program on either site.

3.8 Building Guidelines

Building features as well as deferred maintenance and storefront appearances can be improved incrementally. Shopfront character, paint and regular maintenance can go a long way in signaling that visitors and residents are welcome.



Building improvements can highlight a historic building with proper color, materials, window types and storefront glazing. The Adara Home Health building is a good example of how owners and operators invested in their facilities with help from the city.



Brick is a very common material in downtown and should be considered for most commercial and multi-family buildings. Use on older buildings typically highlights the structure (expressed pilasters) and ornamental work at the parapet. Note the brick window arch and vertically proportioned window.



Avoid renovations and additions that conflict with the character and primary materials of historic buildings. Awnings and canopies should work with the authentic architecture of shopfronts, window proportion and detailing.



These hanging slab signs are appropriately scaled for the Division Street shopping environment and could be standard for the retail/commercial core.



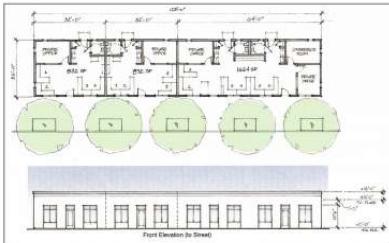
This vacant lot on 1st Ave S provides valuable opportunities for a liner building (see below), public restrooms, pop-up/seasonal uses, parking or improved as a green space in a downtown that has few such spaces.



The pedestrian sidewalk and crossing area need a more consistent physical treatment that is well designed, coordinated and works to improve the visual quality of the downtown environment.



Transparent shopfronts, visible entries, detailed cloth awnings and well proportioned sign board are all desirable examples for commercial/retail buildings. Image: Buffalo Chamber of Commerce



Shallow depth (26') "liner" building can easily fit into small lots or "line" a parking lot to provide incremental, affordable space.

Streetscape Details

Picking up on the black wrought iron of the Buffalo enclosure (at the former theater building) could be a theme to use for defining limited planting areas at street corners that would visually blend into the streetscape. This material could be used for benches, other street furnishings, outdoor dining boundaries and parking lot edges.



Signs & Wayfinding

Bolton & Menk have prepared wayfinding concepts that are ready to be implemented. Graphic: Bolton & Menk



4.1 Implementation

Implementation will be an on-going, month to month activity focused on guiding public and private investments to foster a residential and business supportive downtown. Building and maintaining a healthy and sustainable downtown requires a variety of tools, techniques and strategies. Key acquisitions, financial support, creative regulatory standards, redevelopment, best practices and regular maintenance are some of the key activities proposed to implement the 2040 Plan.

Generalized Phasing Diagram

Short Term: Red Outline (0-5 years) Public improvements in paving, parking, signage and streetscape in the short term will reinforce the destination qualities of downtown and support the private investment of businesses and services. This includes support for the Hwy 25 rebuild and investing in public improvements associated with the highway landscape and lakefront open space, trails and amenities. Downtown zoning could be revised and used as an incentive to support the first redevelopment on the Wright County site.

Mid Term : Blue Outline (6-10 years) Focus is on encouraging new investments such as a second phase of redevelopment for the Wright County site and the potential for one or more of the HRA sites to redevelop.

Long Term: Black Outline (11-20 years) Implementation will continue to anticipate additional new development on the Wright County site, a more complete realization of the consolidated lakefront and the possibility of operating a new community/arts center in downtown.





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Next Steps

- *2-3 week public review and comment period (City website, Facebook & Wright County Journal Press)*
- *Public zoom presentation of the plan the week of February 1*
- *Review and incorporate final comments*
- *Present to City Council for adoption in February*