

# CHAPTER 1

## BACKGROUND & PUBLIC INPUT

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### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The City of Verona has experienced a period of expansion and economic growth over the past decade, most visibly the addition of healthcare software giant Epic Systems on the western edge of the City. Due to this growth, downtown traffic volumes and congestion have been increasing toward levels last seen prior to the US 18/151 bypass construction, especially during peak hours. Much of the downtown building stock was built when US 18/151 ran through the heart of the City, and have a character more suited to a highway corridor than a downtown. For these reasons the City hired MSA Professional Services, Inc. to help evaluate the Main Street and Verona Avenue corridors and facilitate decisions regarding their future improvement.

### OUR VISION:

*Downtown Verona is the center of the community, a vibrant destination for residents and visitors. The downtown has grown with the City, adding more places to live, work, shop and eat, yet it has retained a small-town feel. Businesses are thriving. New parking lots and other improvements have eased congestion, and a series of sidewalk and streetscape improvements have made the entire area inviting, attractive, and recognizably “downtown”.*

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*“This planning document is intended to function as a guide to help City officials and economic development professionals attract and direct investment in Downtown Verona in ways that support the long term viability and sustainability of the downtown economy.*

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### PLAN OBJECTIVES

This plan serves to meet the following objectives:

1. Manage traffic congestion and delays
2. Provide adequate parking for all downtown uses
3. Improve comfort and safety for pedestrians and bikers
4. Facilitate private investment and redevelopment
5. Establish a consistent and unique character through streetscape improvements and design standards

# Chapter 1 Background & Public Input

## PLANNING PROCESS

There are many people interested and invested in the future of Downtown Verona; an inclusive, transparent public process was vital to the success of this plan. The City formed a *Steering Committee* representing diverse interests, including the Verona Area Chamber of Commerce, Verona Area School District, Common Council and Plan Commission, as well as several downtown business and property owners.

The Project Milestones graphic (at right) illustrates the year-long planning process. In total, MSA and the City facilitated fourteen meetings, conducted a dozen stakeholder interviews and implemented a community survey.

The business interviews, conducted early in the process, helped to identify the future plans, needs and desires of many downtown businesses. The visioning survey and public meeting provided input on a range of topics, including preferences for the function, physical design, and redevelopment of the downtown area.

All meetings were public and noticed as such. Additionally, draft materials and meeting schedule were posted on the City's website.

*Summaries of the meetings are provided in Section 1.3, and the summaries of the public outreach can be found in Section 1.4.*



## Project Milestones

City Staff "Kickoff" Meeting  
*December 11, 2012*

Steering Committee "Kickoff" Meeting #1  
*February 7, 2013*

Public Informational Meeting #1 -  
Project Introduction / Public Input  
*March 7, 2013*

City Staff Progress Report Meeting  
*April 4, 2013*

Stakeholder Interviews  
*March 21-April 13, 2013*

City Staff Progress Report Meeting  
*April 15, 2013*

Steering Committee Meeting #2 –  
Transportation Alternatives review  
*April 19, 2013*

Public Informational Meeting (2) -  
Transportation Alternatives  
*May 14, 2013*

Steering Committee Meeting #3 –  
Transportation Alternatives final review  
*May 23, 2013*

Plan Commission Progress Report Meeting  
*June 3, 2013*

Downtown Visioning Survey  
*July 10-24, 2013*

Public Visioning Meeting  
*July 20, 2013*

Steering Committee Meeting #4 –  
Land Use & Transportation Recommendations  
*September 16, 2013*

Public Informational Meeting (3) -  
Final Draft: Land Use & Transportation  
*October 21, 2013*

Steering Committee Meeting #5 –  
Draft Plan review  
*December 2, 2013*

Plan Commission Public Hearing and Recommendation  
*TBD - Jan/Feb 2014*

Common Council Adoption  
*TBD - Feb/March 2014*

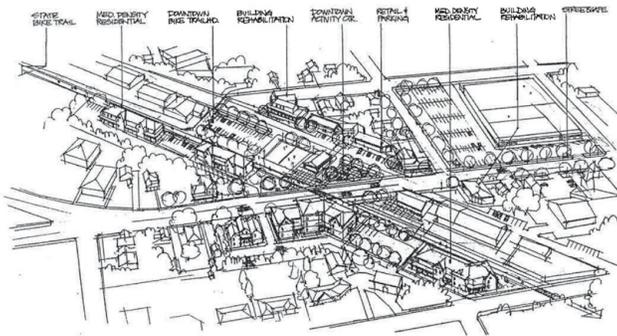


# Chapter 1 Background & Public Input

## 1.2 EXISTING PLAN SUMMARIES

There have been multiple planning processes over the past decade that address some aspects of this portion of Verona. The visions crafted and decisions made in those plans are acknowledged here and are incorporated as appropriate in this Plan.

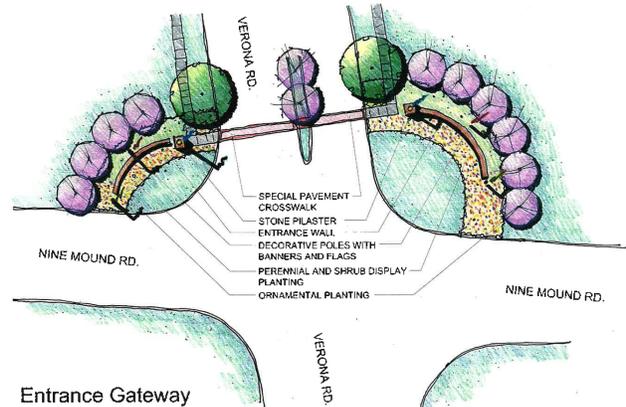
### 1997 DOWNTOWN DESIGN GUIDELINES & IMPROVEMENT PLAN



This 1997 plan was developed to provide guidelines for downtown development, redevelopment, and public improvements. Hand drawn sketches provided design ideas for several downtown parcels; however, many of those depicted have been improved since the plan was adopted, including, for example, the redevelopment of the former Brunzell lumberyard and creation of a trailhead for the Military Ridge State Trail (albeit with less parking than envisioned). One idea that has not been realized since this plan was developed was the potential to relocate Ellis manufacturing to allow for redevelopment of their site.

In addition to the development concepts, the plan provided streetscaping and wayfinding recommendations, as well as design guidelines. Some of the recommendations listed were to add gateway features, pedestrian-scaled lighting, street tree planting with tree grates, pavers, and other pedestrian amenities. The plan included a wayfinding concept plan that incorporated a mix of trailblazer, directional and directory signs. The design guidelines covered items such as building height, width, detailing, materials and colors, as well as parking and signage.

### 2005 DOWNTOWN VERONA STREETSCAPE MASTER PLAN



This plan, supported in part by Dane County's Better Urban Infill Development (BUILD) Program, focused on pedestrian, streetscaping and parking improvements within Verona's downtown. The Plan reviewed the circulation of the Main and Verona intersection and incorporated a parking study. The intersection and parking facilities were found to be adequate at that time. However, the consultant did suggest the City consider adding additional travel lanes in the future on Verona Avenue and Main Street to handle projected growth.

The recommendations of the plan included creation of a unique streetscape, improved pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, two municipal parking lots (at Hometown Junction Park and Memorial Baptist Church properties), and installation of downtown gateway features (a sample is pictured above). All the solutions illustrated in the plan were developed using existing right-of-way with no expansion of the Main and Verona intersection, nor adding any additional travel lanes on Main Street or Verona Avenue.

**2008 VERONA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

(Plan for Downtown Verona Appendix)

This City effort was incorporated in the City's Comprehensive Plan. It looked at the four blocks immediately adjacent to the Main and Verona intersection, as well as two additional blocks south of Park Lane. Prior to completing this plan, several new businesses had just moved in - both as new construction and conversion of existing buildings.

Since the City anticipated continued market pressure within the downtown, this Plan was created to promote and facilitate the redevelopment within the planning area. The plan included a property inventory, goals for redeveloping the planning area, land use recommendations, and an implementation plan. Implementation actions include expansion of the downtown tax incremental district (TID), creation of a business improvement district (BID), creation of a capital improvement budget for downtown projects, and exploration of a possible stormwater utility.

Expansion alternatives for the intersection of Main St. and Verona Ave. were briefly discussed, with recommendations to expand both roads to four lanes of traffic with bike lanes, restricted parking in outside lanes, and landscaped terraces.

The proposed land use plan showed the commercial uses on the west side of Main Street remaining and the residential uses converting to commercial along North Main Street and on the west side of Franklin Street. Within the redevelopment blocks, public parking was suggested as central "alleyway" spines accessed from Harriet Street in the northern blocks, and Park Lane in the southeast quadrant.



# Chapter 1 Background & Public Input

## 1.3 MEETING SUMMARIES

As described on page 2, this planning process included several meetings with a variety of groups, including City staff, the Steering Committee and Plan Commission. This section will summarize the input received during these meetings.

### CITY STAFF MEETINGS

There were three meetings held with City staff. All of these meetings were in the first half of the project.

**12/11/12** - The initial meeting allowed the City and MSA Professional Services to get up to speed on the project needs and discuss the formation of the potential steering committee.

**4/04/13** - This meeting discussed MSA's operational study of the downtown and the potential solutions for the Verona/Main intersection. From this meeting it was declared the "do nothing" alternative was not a viable option, but MSA would prepare an exhibit for this condition for comparison/baseline purposes.

**4/15/13** - This meeting discussed in more detail the existing conditions of the transportation network within the downtown and the potential solutions for the Verona/Main intersection. These conversations included discussions about how each solution would function in the projected year 2035 and how it would affect existing conditions (i.e. potential parking and building loss).

### PLAN COMMISSION MEETINGS

MSA attended and presented a summary of the project at two Plan Commission meetings.

**6/3/13** - A summary of the traffic and transportation findings and alternatives was followed by limited Plan Commission discussion but extensive public questions and comments.

**2/3/14 (official public hearing) / 3/3/14** - Final Plan Presentation and Public Hearing - The public hearing for this plan was hosted by the Plan Commission on February 3, 2014. Following a 10-minute presentation

by MSA to the commission and attendees, stakeholders were given the opportunity to make comments to the commission on any issue related to the draft plan. Most comments were in opposition to the proposed extension of Silent Street. Other comments and questions addressed proposed public parking lots and development concepts. Plan Commission discussed the plan but deferred action. At the March 3 meeting the commission heard additional comments, engaged in further discussion, and recommended adoption of the plan with the Silent Street extension removed from the plan.

### STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

MSA attended and facilitated discussions at five Steering Committee meetings.

**02/07/13** - The committee's first meeting featured a review of the scope and schedule and initial data collection efforts, plus a discussion of issues and opportunities.

**04/19/13** - This meeting focused on transportation analysis findings and alternatives. The three leading alternatives to manage long term traffic needs were presented and discussed - large signalized intersection, one-way pair, and a roundabout. No preferred solution was identified.

**05/23/13** - This meeting again reviewed the three main intersection improvement alternatives, and the public reactions to each. The committee declined to recommend a preferred alternative. Other transportation-related improvement ideas were also presented and discussed, including the connectivity improvements.

**09/16/13** - This meeting featured the first review of the land use and development alternatives and a final review of the core transportation and intersection improvement alternatives. The committee voted to recommend an expanded, signalized intersection at Main and Verona as the "final build out" option, if and when traffic growth requires four travel lanes east and north of that intersection.

**12/02/13** - At this final meeting the committee reviewed the full draft document, confirmed and edited the plan recommendations and implementation tasks, and voted to recommend the plan for adoption.

### **1.3 PUBLIC OUTREACH SUMMARIES**

Providing opportunities for feedback from residents, business owners, and other concerned citizens during the planning process helped the City and MSA understand community concerns and build consensus around the core elements of this Plan.

#### **PUBLIC INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS**

There were four public meetings during the planning process. Each of these meetings was publicized through public notices, Verona Press news articles, and letters to property owners in the downtown study area. Each meeting was specifically designed to engage stakeholders in constructive discussion.

**02/07/13** - The public kickoff meeting was hosted in the City Council room. Approximately 60 people attended. After a brief presentation, participants were asked to look at large maps of the downtown area and talk about the project with MSA and City staff. Everyone was encouraged to share their ideas and concerns regarding transportation and development issues by marking up the maps and filling out comment forms.

**05/14/13** - About 50 people attended the second public information meeting, hosted at the Verona Senior Center. This meeting featured a presentation of the transportation analysis and improvement alternatives, followed by a question and discussion period. Participants were asked to provide comments on each of the main improvement alternatives using a comment form

**7/29/13** - Approximately 45 people participated in visioning exercises at the Verona Senior Center. Following a presentation of the visioning survey results, attendees divided into four groups to discuss a series of physical design issues. Over the course of 90 minutes, participants tackled the same topics for each of the four “legs” of the corridor (north, south, east, west). At the conclusion of the meeting, the table facilitators presented summaries of the discussions and opinions for each area. See page 12 for a summary of the evening’s discussions.

**10/21/13** - The final public information meeting was attended by about 35 people at the Verona Senior Center. Following a 30-minute presentation that focused primarily on the land use and development recommendations, attendees received a worksheet and were asked to comment on each in a series of 14 topics.

## STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

MSA and City staff conducted twelve interviews with a variety of downtown stakeholders, including business owners, developers and the Verona Area School District. This summary features feedback from all of the interviewees, without specific attribution.

1. Who are your customers/members/users and where do they live?

- *City proper*
- *Surrounding area (Belleville, Waunakee, west side of Madison, Mt Horeb, Blanchardville, etc.)*
- *Employees: Verona / Clients: Nationwide*

2. Why are you located in downtown Verona? What are the advantages of operating at your current location?

- *Place to be 40 years ago*
- *Growing community*
- *Central location*
- *Proximity of retail and groceries*
- *Access to bike path*
- *Verona didn't have a store like theirs*
- *People are interested in buying local*
- *Good access to highway*
- *Convenient to trucking lines*
- *Need to be around other businesses (but not next to my major competition)*

3. Is there anything impeding the success of your business/organization that you think this plan could help to address?

- *Need more development along Verona Avenue*
- *Visibility of business*
- *Traffic speeds on Main*
- *Grass terrace a nuisance*
- *Relieve congestion*
- *Parking and access issues*
- *Circulation of both school sites*

4. Do you have any plans or aspirations for physical expansion in the next 5 years?

- *Would redevelop site(s) if numbers work*
- *Possible incremental expansion and reconfiguration of main building*

- *Not looking for condo buyers, but open to apartments*
- *Looking for commercial or mixed-use opportunities*
- *Expecting to need more space within 5 years*
- *Improve signage and freshen up the interior*

5. When is the peak time for traffic related to your business/organization?

- *Evenings, especially Friday nights*
- *Mid-morning, and between 3:30-6pm*
- *Not much traffic - 2/3 trucks per day*
- *Lunchtime in summer, Saturday all day*
- *3:30-7pm, begins when school releases*

6. Is parking a constraint for your organization? Can you approximate your parking need in total stalls, in terms of typical demand and peak demand?

- *Not really, but do rely on street parking*
- *Not an issue, but don't want to lose any*
- *Not a constraint*
- *Have off-street parking, but rely on on-street parking*
- *Park at church (make annual donation in exchange)*
- *Parking is an issue -primarily access issue*
- *High School parking an issue*

7. How far would your customers/users/members be willing to walk to reach your location?

- *A block a way is okay, but closer is better*

8. What concerns do you have related to any proposals we might put forward to reduce traffic congestion on Main St. and Verona Ave.? Is there anything you especially favor or oppose?

### Favor

- *Parking on backside of 100 block of Main Street*
- *School connections to Basswood and to Silent Street*
- *Improved alignment of Rita & Logan*
- *Roundabout idea*
- *One-way pair idea*

### Oppose

- *Losing on-street parking*
- *Losing access to Main or Verona*
- *If trying one-way, may not want to close streets west of Main Street*
- *Fitting in a roundabout at Main & Verona*
- *Extending Gilman Street to Lincoln Street through CECOR site*
- *Don't do one-way pair (will kill retail)*

- *Don't eliminate my building*
- *Closure of Railroad Street*
- *Improving Railroad through Ellis site would not be compatible with their business*

9. We will be looking for redevelopment opportunities – existing sites that have low value – and proposing infill development, likely including multi-story, mixed-use options. Do you have any ideas or concerns regarding infill development in the downtown area? How do you feel about buildings as high as 4-5 stories in downtown Verona?

#### Infill Development

- *Only concern is parking needs for infill*
- *Favor multi-story and mixed use development - if parking isn't an issue*
- *See the Lincoln Street and Verona Avenue as great mixed-use redevelopment opportunity*
- *Open to moving Ellis Manufacturing if City funds it*
- *Open to sale of Quonset hut site if an alternative location is found to store scrap metal*
- *If we want more retail, we need more residents first, especially downtown*
- *Baptist church and Cross Plains State Bank are potential redevelopment sites*
- *Don't want Section 8 housing*

#### Height

- *No concerns regarding height - as long as it looks good and works well*
- *Let the market decide - focus on design that activates the street*

10. What has your past experience been working with the City of Verona? In what ways have you been frustrated, or in what ways have staff and/or elected officials helped your organization?

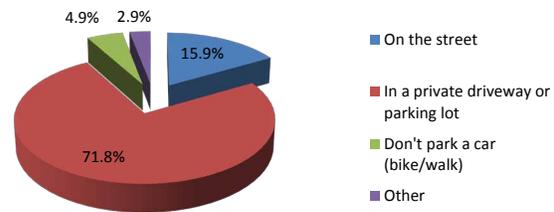
- *Generally good experience*
- *Great experience working with City*
- *Neutral*
- *No concerns - City is fair to them*
- *Great - Verona is easy to work with, but would like lower taxes*

11. What do you think the City could do, either within our outside the scope of this plan, to support your success?

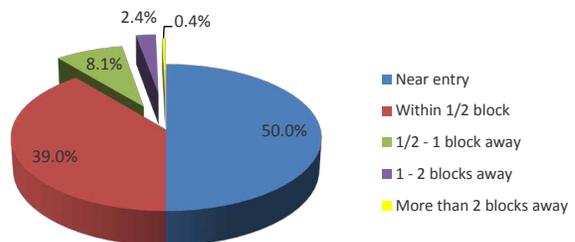
- *Incentives for development*
- *Spur development and investment on W. Verona, which is suffering as compared to E. Verona*
- *Property assemblage is hard - focus on this*
- *Do more to attract and retain young professionals*
- *Open to closing Park, Shuman or Church streets for purposes of expansion of Millers & Sons*
- *Sign grant monies*
- *Offer municipal parking*

# Chapter 1 Background & Public Input

## Describe downtown Verona today... (open-ended question - results categorized)



## Where do you typically park downtown?



## How far do you typically park from your destination?

### What attracts you to shop downtown?

1. **Convenient Location (91% agree)**
2. **Friendly Service (89%)**
3. **Independently Owned Stores (79%)**
4. **Quality of Products & Services (72%)**
5. **Convenient Parking (72%)**

### What are the disadvantages to shopping downtown? (check all that apply)

1. **Traffic Congestion (49% of respondents)**
2. **Poor Selection of Goods/Services (49%)**
3. **High Prices (31%)**
4. **Poor Appearance (26%)**
5. **Limited Hours (24%)**

## DOWNTOWN VISION SURVEY

The early public response to the transportation planning efforts revealed a desire to identify an inclusive vision for the downtown, to guide both the transportation and land use and development planning. A visioning process was added, starting with a public survey on a wide range of physical design and economic development topics.

The survey was available online for two weeks with the option of a paper copy available at the Verona Senior Center and City Hall. A letter was sent to all downtown property owners and a general invitation published on the City's website and in the Verona Press. Below is a summary of the responses gathered from more than 250 respondents.

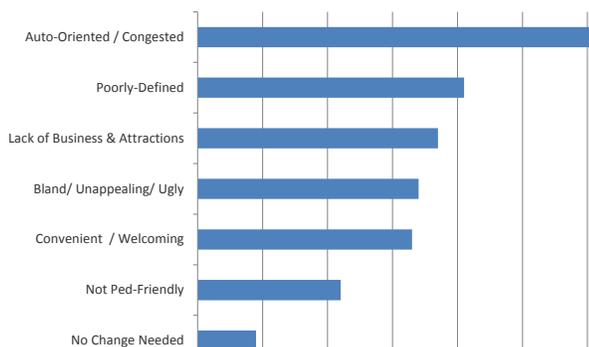
### Demographic Responses

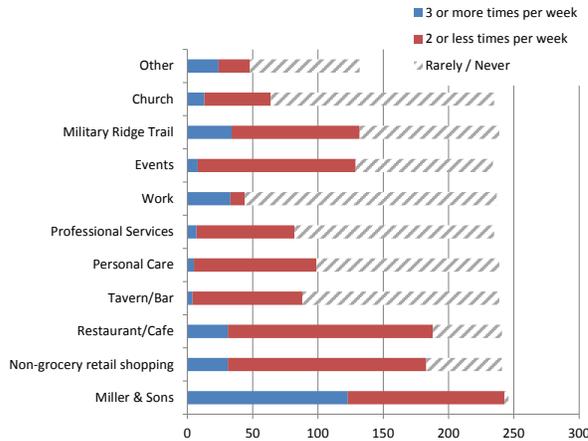
- 254 surveys completed
- 89% of respondents live in Verona (15% in downtown)
- 37% work in Verona (9% in downtown)
- 56% Female / 44% Male
- 45% under 45 / 55% were 45 or older
- Nearly 60% have children under the age of 18

### Vision Statement

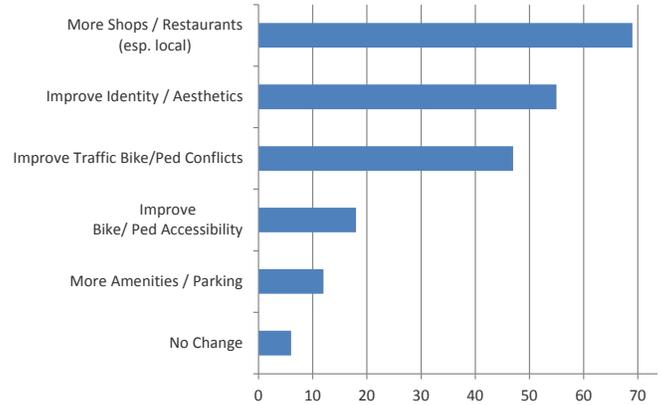
- 83% of respondents felt the following statement was appealing:

*"A meeting place and the center of community social life with a mix of coffee shops, brew pubs, cultural and recreational spaces."*





2. More public events downtown
3. Building façade improvements



How often do you come downtown for...

Top FIVE changes necessary to get more of your business?

- Greater Variety of Stores (69% of respondents)
- More Places to Eat (68%)
- Better Atmosphere (36%)
- Better Selection of Merchandise/Services (35%)
- Reduced Traffic Congestion (33%)

Small things to change in the next couple years?

**Transportation**

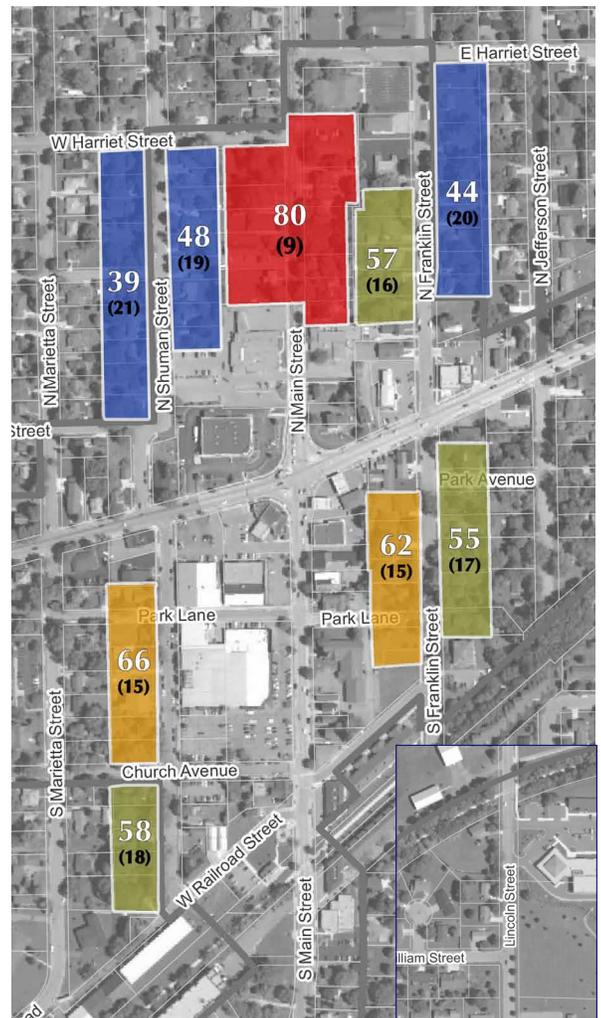
1. Remove parking on Main
2. Right turn lane on S. Main to Verona Ave.
3. Bike lanes on Main
4. Bike path connection from Silent St. to Main St.
5. Improve pedestrian-friendliness of crosswalks (repaint, other aids)
6. Restrict parking on Main based on travel patterns
7. Stop Sign at Main/Paoli

**Streetscaping**

1. More flowers in the summer
2. Paint blue poles to another color
3. Update light fixtures on Main St.
4. New banners on light poles

**Other**

1. More shops & restaurants



# Chapter 1 Background & Public Input

## DOWNTOWN VISION MEETING SUMMARY

A summary of key findings from the July 29 public visioning meeting:

### Land Use

- Groups were unanimous in their desire to protect local business, as well as a handful of specific older buildings
- Priority sites identified for redevelopment tend to be either in disrepair or aesthetically unappealing
- Multiple groups mentioned pedestrian access and safety as important issues to correct through redevelopment

### Streetscaping

- All groups agreed that developing a consistent aesthetic was especially important
- Trees and planters were universally liked
- Groups were split on sidewalk width (expand vs maintain) but were mostly in favor of paved terraces (rather than grass)
- Streetlights should be different as compared to the gateway areas - no blue poles downtown

### Bike and Pedestrian Accommodations

- No clear consensus regarding where or how to accommodate bikers moving north and south
- Improving crosswalks and bike trail visibility is a priority

### Parking

- Groups were split on:
  - Adequacy of existing parking facilities
  - Where additional parking would go
- Most groups supported time of day parking restrictions if and when more travel lanes are needed on Main St.

### Street Enclosure

- All groups preferred setbacks between 5 and 15 feet from the public Right-of-way
- The Park Bank setback is uniformly considered too small
- 2 – 3 stories agreed upon as ideal height limit, with the exception of some sites in the western gateway area

### Parks and Art

- Most groups expressed a desire for some kind of central park in downtown area, acknowledging that space for one is limited
- Art generally favored, especially as a means of reinforcing a consistent aesthetic for the downtown

### Issues Specific to South Main St.

- Downtown begins at Paoli St.
- Miller's and older buildings with character must be protected
- Redevelopment that aids Miller's is strongly supported, as is the redevelopment of the Mobil station, Quonset hut, and the east side of south Main St. in general
- Desire for a public gathering area, with the acknowledgment that space is limited

### Issues Specific to North Main St.

- Downtown begins at (or near) Harriet St.
- Preservation priorities include 302 N. Main St. and the homes north of Harriet St.
- General comfort with redevelopment on both sides of N. Main St., up to Harriet. Redevelopment on Franklin St. was generally deemed ok, but Shuman St. preferred to remain as single-family residential

### Issues Specific to East Verona Ave.

- Downtown begins at Lincoln St.
- No clear preservation priorities in this area
- Redevelopment supported for the houses between Culvers and Kwik Trip, the old motel, the Hughes flooring site, and the Natural Health Works building

### Issues specific to West Verona Ave.

- Downtown begins at Legion St.
- Redevelopment supported for St. Vincent, Bowling Alley, Chinmi Restaurant/Gas Station, and AmFam Building
- Buildings limited to 2 stories, with 3-4 fine further west