

CHAPTER 4: vision and guiding principles

Downtown Vision:

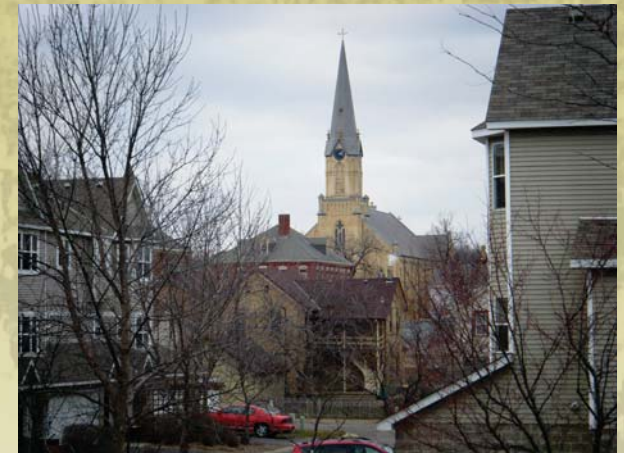
“Revitalize downtown Chaska as the hub of community destinations and gathering places, which reflect and celebrate our historic character, traditional small town atmosphere and values ”

As Chaska continues to grow and evolve as a community, downtown will continue to be the heart of the community and its enduring small town character. As “Minnesota’s Brick City”, downtown Chaska will be a thriving historic downtown that preserves and celebrates its unique heritage, physical historic assets, small town values, and strong sense of community. As a traditional downtown that brings together a diverse and healthy mix of activities and community destinations, downtown will be designed as a place that offers authentic small town character. The downtown plan envisions a multi-faceted and sustainable revitalization of downtown that enhances its unique historic small town character and recaptures its former vitality as the place to be in Chaska. The downtown vision encompasses five major elements: a vibrant main street district, community gathering places, thriving institutions and employers, desirable neighborhoods, and attractive street, sidewalk and trail connections.

Vibrant Main Street District

Chestnut Street/MN Hwy 41 is downtown’s “Main Street”. The main street district encompasses Chestnut Street and the cross-streets from Second St to Chaska Boulevard/County Rd 61. Downtown’s main street business district will be a vibrant hub of commercial and civic activities, including a unique mix of specialty retail and service businesses, restaurants, and offices in a traditional downtown environment that is friendly, aesthetically pleasing, and has an urban character unique to Chaska’s downtown heritage. The main street district will be a series of connected community destinations including the Second St & Chestnut St node, City Square node, Chaska Boulevard & Chestnut St node, as well as connecting to the Brickyard Clayhole district, Fireman’s Clayhole district, and Riverfront district.

In order to truly function as “Main Street” in the future, Chestnut St should be redesigned and reconstructed to better accommodate walkers, bicyclists and drivers visiting downtown businesses. Working with Mn DOT, the redesigned “Main Street” should provide parking on both sides of the street, wider sidewalks/pedestrian zones, and improved street crossing facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists.



View of a historic downtown Chaska landmark, Guardian Angels Church with newer townhouses in the foreground



Restoration of the Philip Henk historic building on Second Street East added a full window storefront at street level with offices above



- Legend:**
- Open Space Destination
 - Main Street Destination
 - Community Institution Destination
 - Catalyst Redevelopment Site
 - Downtown Gateway
 - Future Neighborhood Parks
 - Designated Historic Buildings

Vision:
Downtown
Destinations



Hoisington Koegler Group Inc.

ZHA Inc.

CHASKA DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

MAY, 2011

Figure 4-1. Vision of Downtown Destinations

“Main Street” will be complemented by attractive “Town Center” cross-streets, as well as the Brick City Paseo paralleling it to the east and west. “Town Center” streets will be improved as traditional downtown streets with wider sidewalks, streetscape amenities, corner plazas, and diagonal parking on both sides. Parking options for main street businesses will be proactively managed by the public and private sectors via a downtown parking management plan. Public parking, including on-street and off-street, will be a major component of downtown parking in order to retain the downtown’s traditional and historic character of side-by-side commercial storefronts located up to the sidewalk.

Community Gathering Places

As part of the original platting of downtown, City Square, which is literally the heart of downtown, was dedicated as a common park for the community in perpetuity. Throughout the community’s history, City Square has functioned as the most important community gathering place in downtown as well as the community. As the community’s civic heart, City Square was originally surrounded by civic buildings and stately homes. Many of these landmarks are gone. As sites and buildings surrounding City Square are revitalized in the future, they should be designed as landmarks “fronting” onto City Square.

In addition to City Square, downtown will be home to a variety of other community gathering places from Fireman’s Clayhole Lake & Park to Athletic Park and the downtown riverfront greenbelt, including community and neighborhood parks, playfields, plazas, sidewalks, trails, natural open spaces, and indoor facilities. As a downtown gateway and downtown’s only community park, Fireman’s Clayhole Lake & Park will be redesigned as a unique recreation destination for the community that integrates the site’s natural features with its heritage as a former brickyard and its potential for linking new retail or restaurants with enhanced recreational amenities. Historic Athletic Park will be improved as a historic town ball park as well as integrated with the surrounding components of the downtown greenbelt, including the river levee, the MN River National Wildlife Refuge, Winkel Park, and Riverbend Park. The enhanced downtown greenbelt and its trailhead/connections with the national wildlife refuge will create a unique and conveniently accessed natural area right next to downtown, for residents, workers, and visitors. The downtown parks and open spaces will be connected by a downtown trail system that provides convenient connections between downtown and recreation areas.

At the level of downtown districts and neighborhoods, downtown will be enhanced with two neighborhood parks (Downtown East and Downtown West neighborhoods) as well as urban plazas in the Chestnut St district. Building upon City Hall Plaza, the Chestnut St district should be enhanced with small plazas in conjunction with site redevelopment and street/alley reconstruction projects. For instance, redevelopment of the City Square West block should incorporate the Brick City Paseo concept and potentially a small outdoor plaza that would over look City Square. Street reconstruction projects, particularly “Town Center” streets could incorporate corner plazas.

Other important downtown gathering places include civic, faith-based, education and cultural institutions, such as the City Hall, library, County Gov’t. Center, schools, churches, and movie theater.



The Chaska History Center in the restored livery stable on Fourth Street West created a unique community gathering place in downtown



Historic City Square should remain the heart of downtown and the community as downtown is revitalized



Chaska Herald historic building on Second Street West is one of the oldest continuing businesses in downtown Chaska



Chaska City Hall on Fourth Street West, which was completed in 1989, complements the character of downtown's historic buildings



Historic Chaska brick houses dot the downtown neighborhoods

Thriving Institutions & Employers

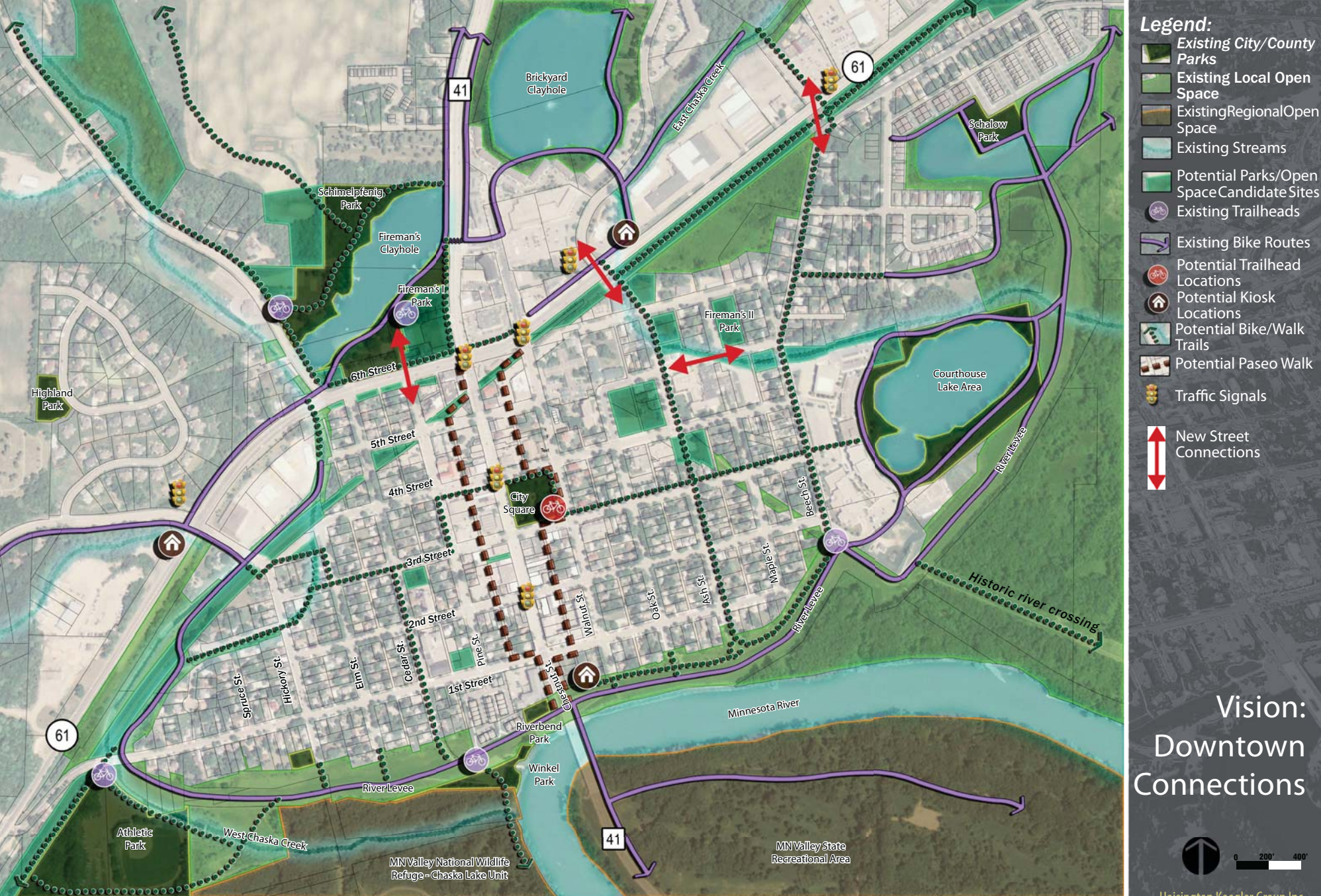
An important component of a vibrant downtown is having a significant concentration of anchor institutions within and adjacent to downtown that draw people downtown on a regular basis. Civic, cultural, social, educational and employment institutions also help support downtown businesses during the day. As the County seat, downtown Chaska has a long history as a center for civic institutions, including the Carver County Courthouse & Government Center, City Hall, Chaska Library, Chaska History Center, police, and license center. City Square was the historic focus of civic institutions with the City Hall, Carver County Courthouse, library, fire station, and history center all located around City Square in the past. Although most historic civic buildings are gone today, City Square and Fourth Street have the potential for being the center for civic institutions in the future. Other anchor institutions are the three downtown churches, affiliated schools, the Carver-Scott Educational Cooperative School, and the Auburn Manor senior living campus. Downtown revitalization should encourage and support the expansion of existing anchor institutions within downtown. Redevelopment of vacant/underutilized sites on the edge of downtown, such as along Chaska Boulevard/Cty Rd 61, offer valuable opportunities for accommodating the growth of businesses and employment in downtown.

Desirable Neighborhoods

Downtown Chaska is also home to traditional small town neighborhoods east and west of the Chestnut St main street district. While these two downtown neighborhoods retain their traditional small town character, they are enhanced in the future with amenities that increase their livability. These amenities include reconstructed streets, improved walk/bike crossings of highways, completion of a downtown trail network, addition of neighborhood parks, more neighborhood-oriented businesses in downtown, and funding assistance programs for downtown housing improvements. With the completion of the levee and creek diversion channels in the 1990s, which removed downtown properties from the floodplain, many downtown houses are ripe for reinvestment. As redevelopment and revitalization occurs, new housing options are encouraged in downtown, such as higher-density riverfront housing, housing above retail in mixed-use buildings, and townhouses.

Street, Sidewalk and Trail Connections

The downtown area in the future will have a well-connected network of streets, sidewalks and trails for residents, employees, and visitors. As part of the City's plan to reconstruct most of downtown's streets over the next ten years, street redesign will create a more attractive, safe and convenient downtown street network. Streetscapes and sidewalks will be redesigned to better balance the needs of walker, bicyclists and drivers. In line with the impressive network of trails in the rest of Chaska, a network of downtown trails will be completed that facilitates good connections between downtown and the rest of the community, as well as connections to the regional recreational trail network.



Vision: Downtown Connections



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Figure 4-2. Vision of Downtown Connections

Guiding Principles

Eight guiding principles establish the foundation of the downtown master plan. They are intended to support and provide clarity for achieving the plan's vision. They should also provide a means for guiding and evaluating improvements to the key elements of the plan, such as business development, jobs, streets, parks, trails, historic preservation, etc. As the community is pursuing downtown revitalization in the future, it should look to these guiding principles when evaluating efforts and proposals for reinvesting, redesigning and redeveloping in downtown.

1. Enhance the community's pride and historic sense of place in downtown

Downtown should serve as the community's priority location for major activities, celebrations, and creating a sense of community identity. Downtown's future character and improvements should physically reflect Chaska's unique historic character, traditional small town design and values. Downtown's rich heritage and remaining historic assets should be preserved, enhanced and celebrated as major assets of the revitalized downtown and its unique character. Enhancement of community pride and historic assets will benefit from interpreting and celebrating downtown's unique character and features through public art, wayfinding signage, and heritage preservation.

Known as "Minnesota's Brick City", downtown will be revitalized as the physical and visual embodiment of the community's unique heritage of brickmaking and community building. The prevalence of Chaska brick buildings remaining in downtown significantly contributes to a visually unique downtown environment. Chaska brick commercial buildings in downtown are not only of similar scale and form, they are also very similar in color. An important component of downtown's revitalization will be to enhance and expand the unique character of Chaska brick buildings in downtown. Existing Chaska brick buildings should be restored to highlight their Chaska brick character and new buildings should be designed to complement the scale, form and color of Chaska brick buildings. Existing and new buildings will be encouraged to design their storefronts with large window openings, individual street level entrances, and located up to the sidewalk. The focus will be on attracting more retail, restaurant, entertainment and service businesses to both renovated and new street level storefronts.

2. Reinvigorate the variety and vitality of downtown's main street destinations

Downtown's economy and vibrancy as a community destination needs to be revitalized by attracting more retail, restaurant and entertainment businesses to the main street district in existing storefront buildings as well as infill redevelopment projects, particularly along Chestnut Street/MN Hwy 41, Second Street, and Chaska Boulevard/Cty Rd 61. The main street district should be reconnected as a series of destinations, including the Riverfront District, historic Second St & Chestnut St node, City Square node, Chaska Boulevard node, Fireman's Clayhole district, and Brickyard Clayhole district.

Downtown parking should be provided and managed to meet the needs of existing businesses and institutions as well as support significant future economic development in downtown. Future parking options for downtown businesses will need to be proactively managed by the public and private sectors via a downtown parking management plan.

3. Create signature community gathering places

An expanded network of high quality community gathering places should be created in downtown to attract and accommodate a wide variety of uses by residents, workers, and visitors, including Fireman's Clayhole Lake/Park, Athletic Park, Winkel Park, Riverbend Park, , neighborhood parks, plazas, sidewalks, trails, Brick City Paseo, natural open spaces, and indoor facilities. The historic downtown core and downtown neighborhoods should have stronger connections to the natural assets of the downtown Chaska Greenbelt, including the Minnesota River, river levee trail, MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge, and MN Valley State Recreation Area.

4. Preserve and strengthen downtown as the hub for community institutions

Downtown should continue to serve as the primary hub for community institutions, both public and semi-public, including City and County government facilities, schools, churches, library, history center, arts and culture, social services, and senior living facilities. The City should develop collaborative relationships with these important community institutions to ensure their continuing success and support their future expansion needs.

5. Expand downtown's role as an employment center

Employment opportunities should be expanded in downtown through appropriate adaptation and expansion of existing buildings and redevelopment of underutilized sites. In particular, large underutilized sites along Chaska Blvd/Cty Rd 61 on the edge of downtown should be considered for redevelopment to land uses that increase the number of jobs downtown rather than new commercial uses that may compete with commercial in the downtown core district. Pursue employment growth through attracting new industries and with expansion of existing major employers.

6. Enhance downtown's neighborhoods and housing options

As the community's oldest neighborhoods, the Downtown East and Downtown West neighborhoods have the strongest small town character. Due to the age of the downtown neighborhoods and that some areas were in the river floodplain in the past, they are ripe for housing reinvestment and neighborhood enhancements. Revitalization of existing housing and addition of new housing options is encouraged to strengthen downtown as a complete neighborhood with desirable housing options and amenities. The City should initiate public improvements and assistance programs that target revitalization of downtown's neighborhoods to become great places to live.

7. Create inviting downtown streets, sidewalks and trails

Downtown's streets and sidewalks should be designed and reconstructed to create a desirable and balanced environment for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers, creating a Complete Streets network in downtown. Convenient street and trail connections should be created between downtown and surrounding areas. Working with MN DOT, the City should advocate for a route and design of a potential new MN Highway 41 river crossing that ultimately provides the greatest benefit for Chestnut St to function as downtown's "main street" and minimizes any negative impacts on downtown.

8. Strengthen downtown partnerships to achieve common goals

The City cannot achieve successful revitalization of downtown's districts and neighborhoods on its own. It is imperative that strong downtown partnerships are established that enable the City to identify common goals with other downtown stakeholders and leverage their resources. These partnerships will involve public and private entities.

