*Celebrate the Rivers: Des Moines' Most Important Geographic Asset*

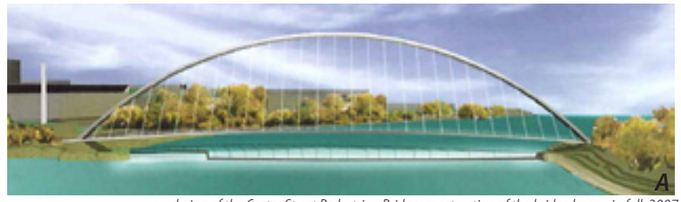
Des Moines will never have mountains, an ocean, nor year-round balmy weather. Our greatest geographic feature is our Rivers; these assets should be celebrated.

The Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers play significant roles in downtown. The Raccoon River forms a southern downtown boundary. The Des Moines River bisects downtown north-south and offers explanation for the roughly 12.5-degree rotation of the downtown street grid. The confluence of the Rivers on the southeast side of Principal Park marks the original Des Moines settlement.

The Des Moines River begins in southwestern Minnesota, flowing through farmland in northwestern Iowa before passing through Saylorville Reservoir and heading south through downtown Des Moines, collecting the water from the Raccoon River, flowing to Lake Red Rock, and finally draining into the Mississippi River at the southeast tip of Iowa. The branches of the Raccoon River originate in northwestern Iowa, passing through agricultural land and joining before flowing through Des Moines' western suburbs, past Water Works and Gray's Lake Parks and into the Des Moines River.

Rediscovering the Rivers, the 2002 riverfront masterplan states, "the rivers [have] taken on a less prominent role in the city, providing merely a backdrop for the development and revitalization that is occurring in downtown Des Moines." The riverfront masterplan challenges, "to take advantage of this incredible natural resource -- to reconnect with the rivers, bring them to the forefront once again." Downtown is rising to the challenge. The riverfront masterplan and the ensuing Principal Riverwalk, a series of ambitious first phase riverfront projects, is in the process of centering downtown Des Moines on the Des Moines River. The Long Look Gardens, Brenton Skating Plaza, and Union Pacific pedestrian bridge were completed in 2006. The Hansen Triangle was completed in 2007. The Center Street Pedestrian Bridge and Riverwalk promenades are under construction. A buzz about riverfront development has begun: the first housing units at the Water Street condominiums are occupied and planning for new riverfront redevelopment is underway.

The recommendations in the following several pages reinforce the 2002 riverfront master plan, incorporating Principle Riverwalk planned conditions and reiterating a number of aspects of the masterplan for future phases of riverfront development.



*rendering of the Center Street Pedestrian Bridge; construction of the bridge began in fall, 2007*



*Brenton Ice Skating Plaza*



*Hansen Triangle with its sculptural Quantum Leaf fountain at fall, 2007 ribbon cutting ceremony (photo courtesy of Brian Clark and Associates)*



*looking east along Union Pacific Pedestrian Bridge*



*plan of phase I Principal Riverwalk projects (courtesy of Wallace Roberts & Todd)*

*A. Center Street Pedestrian Bridge, B. Brenton Skating Plaza, C. City Hall and Long Look Gardens, D. Simon Estes Amphitheater, E. promenade (along length of Riverwalk), F. Union Pacific Pedestrian Bridge, G. Water Street Condominiums, H. Court Avenue pavilion, I. World Food Prize and gardens, J. YMCA, K. Hansen Triangle*

## Crossing the Rivers: a Key to an Active Riverfront

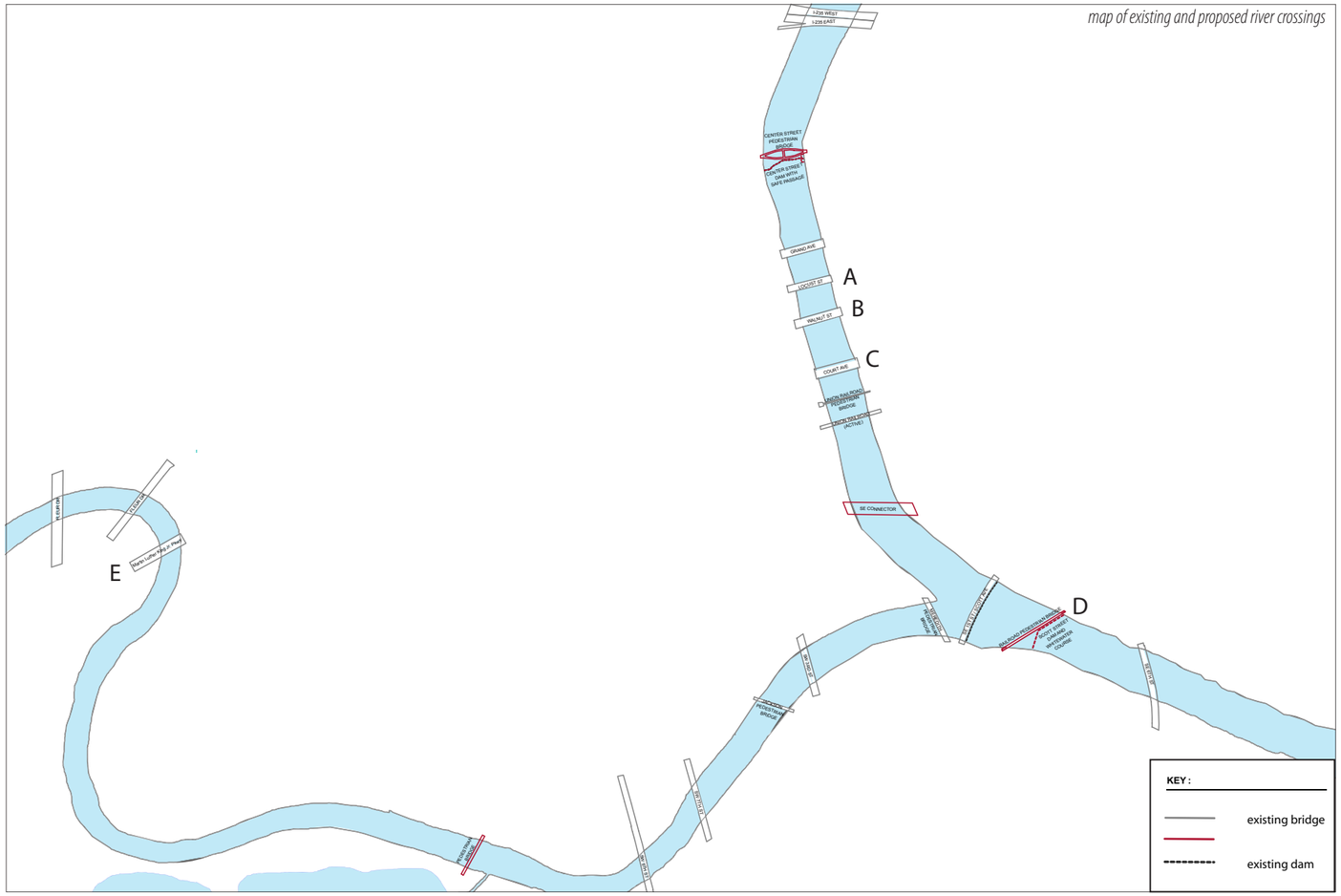
River crossings have a strong bearing on development and movement patterns in downtown. There are two kinds of river crossings creating these impacts: bridges *in* downtown and bridges *into* downtown.

Grand, Locust, Walnut, Court are the streets with existing bridges that cross the Des Moines River *in* downtown. These crossings have been in place for some 100 years. A future ML King Jr. bridge will soon span the Des Moines River, adding a significant new movement pattern in downtown and cueing new development areas. In addition, the newly-converted Union Pacific Railroad bridge and future Center Street bridge carry pedestrians across the Des Moines River; the future ML King Jr. bridge will provide bike and pedestrian accommodations. These new and future bridges nearly double the capacity for pedestrian movement across the Des Moines River in downtown. As the new Adventure Recreation Park is developed, the vacated railway bridge south of confluence of Rivers should be converted to pedestrian use in order to support this area.

In addition to a network of bridges crossing the Raccoon River *into* downtown from the south, the new ML King Jr. bridge accesses the southern part of downtown from the southwest, providing an entirely new access point for downtown and accommodates pedestrians and cyclists. This plan supports a proposal for new pedestrian bridge linking downtown to Gray's Lake Park that would be created in conjunction with development at Gray's Landing.

The quantity of river crossings seems to be serving downtown fairly well. In addition to the pedestrian bridges, the focus should now turn to improving the quality of the river crossings. Of the historic bridge crossings in downtown Des Moines, only the Court Avenue bridge retains its intricate historical detailing. Continued preservation efforts should be aimed at maintaining this important historical structure. The other three historic crossings in downtown met unfortunate fates and no longer bear the historical markings they once had. Work should be commenced to restore dignity to these three river crossings. New bridge crossings should adhere to high quality, expression striving to create the level of quality the Court Avenue bridge engendered generations ago.

*map of existing and proposed river crossings*



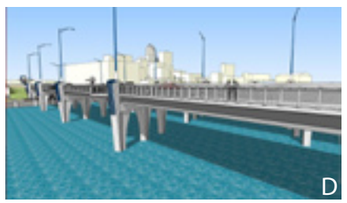








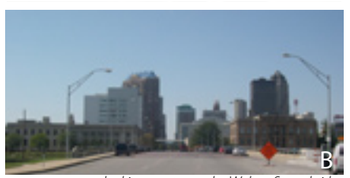








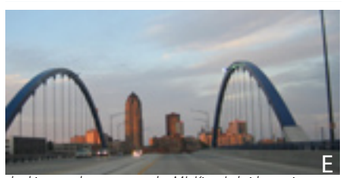
*looking east across the Locust Street bridge in 1910, looking east near the Walnut Street Bridge in 1940,*




*looking west near the Walnut Street bridge, looking west across the Walnut Street bridge,*




*historic detailing on the Court Avenue bridge, looking west across the broad width of the Court Ave. bridge,*




*looking northeast across the ML King Jr. bridge as it crosses the Raccoon River, rendering of the future ML King Jr. bridge looking northwest as it crosses the Des Moines River*

Touching the Water: Recreation and Safety

Occasionally, a boater will venture from Birdland Marina south of the Botanical Center and under the I-235 overpass on the Des Moines River towards downtown. However, the dangerous Center Street Dam prevents further excursion. Less than a mile down river from the Center Street Dam lies the Scott Street Dam. Very few river enthusiasts will risk the perils associated with these dams to explore downtown from this short section of the Des Moines River.

For both basic public safety issues and recreational benefits, the downtown dams on the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers should be 'safed' so that perennial river accidents do not lead to deaths and the downtown Rivers could realize their regional recreational potential. Early studies for the Adventure Recreation Park have studied the feasibility of modifying the dams to make the downtown Rivers much safer and their routes navigable. While the proposition is expensive, it is possible.

Modifying the dams opens the possibility for a simple but powerful idea for downtown: touching the water. It allows the possibility of navigating in over twenty miles along the Des Moines River from Saylorville Lake to Lake Red Rock, passing under the downtown bridges, offering views of the downtown skyline and the State Capitol, past Principal Park, through urban and rural areas. This proposition allows for the possibility of listening to summer concerts from the River, of mooring boats downtown, of dinner cruises on the River and creating the Adventure Recreation Park supported in this plan. Including the dam located along the Raccoon River between Gray's Lake and Water Works Parks in the 'safing' efforts creates an additional 20+ miles of navigable water trail on the Raccoon River from Adel and Redfield, through West Des Moines, past Raccoon Valley, Water Works, and Gray's Lake Parks to the Raccoon River's confluence with the Des Moines River.











*photo above: Center Street Dam in downtown Des Moines, photos left (from top): boats moored next to housing in Milwaukee, a crew team practicing in Austin, TX, Confluence Park -- a kayak and whitewater rafting area near downtown Denver (courtesy of Dr. McGarvey), boating on the Des Moines River between the Center St. Dam and I-235 overpass*















Celebrating our Rivers:  Riverfront Events

Downtown events have a role to play in bringing the Rivers back to prominence in downtown.  If done well and properly programmed, they draw visitors to downtown, encourage redevelopment along the Rivers and incent increased interest in further evolving the riverfront.  For example both La Plage in Paris and Waterfire in Providence, RI began after these cities had realized some investment in their urban riverfronts.  These high quality ephemeral events catapulted these cities and their rivers to international prominence and further enhanced their riverfront initiatives.

Events along the River.  The Paris Plage is an example of an event along the river.  Each summer, the Paris turns a section of its Siene Riverfront into a beach complete with sand, parasols, deck chairs, palm trees, even swimming pools floating in the River.

Events on the River.  Waterfire, a event designed by artist Barnabe Evans, has been occurring on weekends from April through November on Providence's downtown rivers for over a decade. It draws thousands residents and visitors to the Providence riverfront each year.

These sensational events take imagination, ingenuity, risk, and investment.  As with these examples, downtown Des Moines is positioned to accomplish something spectacular along or even on our Rivers.  Des Moines has its own versions of events along the river -- summer concert series, the Arts Festival, and the Court Avenue district occasionally spills events onto the Court Avenue bridge.  However, no events have been staged on the Rivers.  Safety is presently a concern; should the dams be 'safed' as discussed previously, events on the rivers become much more plausible.  Even without 'safing', artistic on-the-water endeavors can be undertaken.

*photos of on-the-water examples (left column, from top):  fountain in the Detroit airport -- water arcs randomly "jump" across the fountain, boats on the Charles River in Boston waiting for the Fourth of July fireworks display, Waterfire -- a recurring weekend on summer evenings in Providence, RI, the Bellagio fountain awes visitors in Las Vegas, photos of along-the-water examples (right column, from top):  a summer concert at the Simon Estes Amphitheater in Des Moines, La Plage -- a summer festival along the River Siene in Paris, impromptu performance along the Hudson River promenade in New York City*

## Redevelopment Opportunities

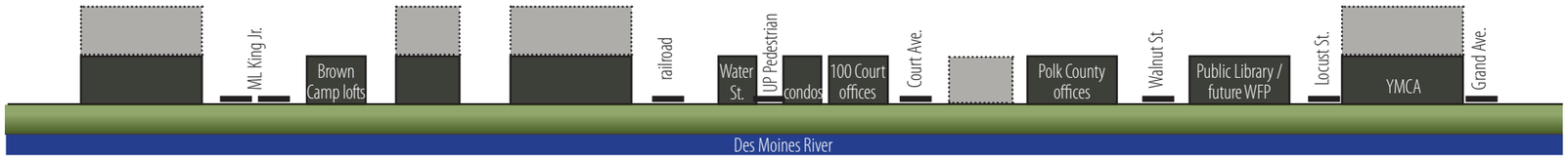
Investments in open space, public art, and new bridges at the Des Moines River change the dynamic of development along the River. There is an expectation with early proof that redevelopment will follow on the heels of these significant collaborative efforts. With over a million visitors in 2007, Gray's Lake shows that a larger-than-expected portion of our population responds to open space and water. Analysis of downtown planning public meeting input indicates a desire to live close to water. By way of example, the recently-constructed Water Street condominiums have been among the most successful downtown housing developments.

Historically, development at the River's edge produced an array of handsome civic buildings and some industrial uses. However, a handful of prime riverfront redevelopment opportunities -- from vacant lots to lingering industrial and warehouse uses to under utilized, aging properties -- are likely to alter this century-long development pattern, adding a new dimension to the riverfront.

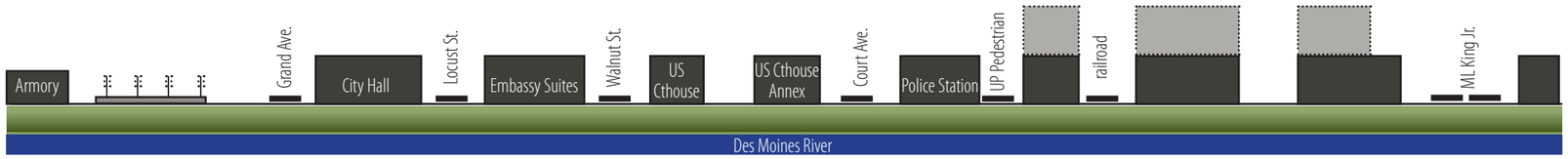
Redevelopment has the opportunity to contribute activity to the riverfront. As handsome as the Beaux Arts civic buildings are, they generally house workers for approximately 40 hours per week. New development should contain a mix of uses in order to contribute to a vibrant, active riverfront.

Though there may be new uses along the River, the continuity of public access along the entire downtown stretch of the riverfront should remain intact. This is a somewhat of a rarity at waterfronts across the country and should be maintained.

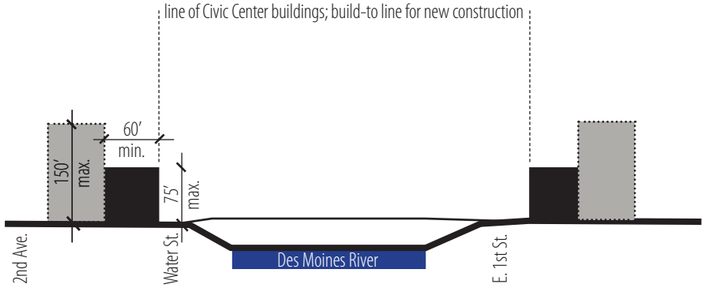
Early 20th Century planning of the Civic Center District on the riverfront should provide a guide to the form that new development takes. New riverfront projects have no obligation to mimic the historic Beaux Arts architecture, but should be respectful of its strong physical context. This sensitivity can take many forms -- materials, set-back, articulation, and height. Present zoning limits the height of new construction in the first block on either side of the river to a height of 75'. Exploration in the private development market suggests that redeveloping riverfront sites at this height is not feasible; in order to make redevelopment financially feasible, contain the desired mix of uses, and add density to the downtown, buildings need to be taller. The adjacent diagrams suggest a framework for respecting the historic form of the civic riverfront, the quality of the experience on and near the River, maintaining viewsheds to the Capitol, and allows for denser riverfront redevelopment.



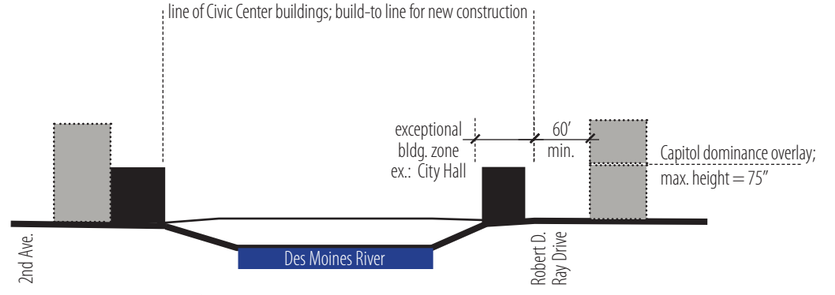

*longitudinal Des Moines River section/elevation **A** (looking at the west riverfront)*




*longitudinal Des Moines River section/elevation **B** (looking at the east riverfront)*

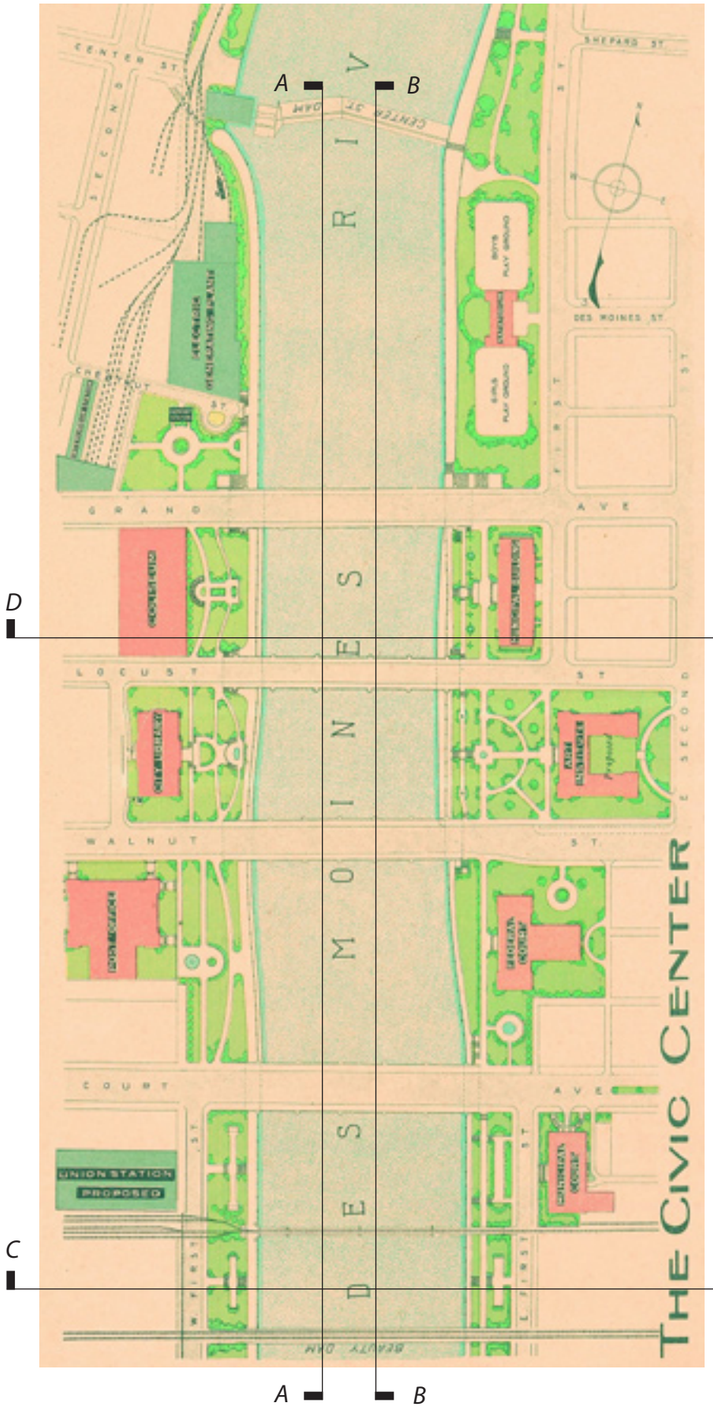



*Des Moines River cross section **C** (looking north near Union Pacific Railroad Pedestrian bridge )*




*Des Moines River cross section **D** (looking north near Locust Street )*

*the sections of the Des Moines River shown above propose a framework for respecting the strong context provided by the century-old riverfront Civic Center while suggesting a nuanced modification to existing riverfront regulations that would allow redevelopment to extend above the 75' height limit for a portions of redevelopment that are set back from the line of the historic civic architecture.*















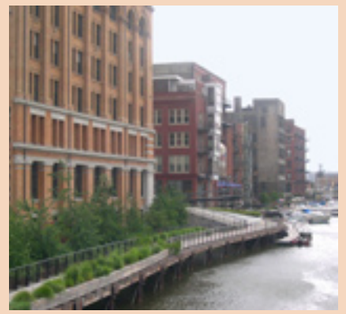

*photos (top and bottom): the uniformity of scale, material, and articulation formed by early 20th Century planning of the Civic Center, photos (center, clockwise from upper left): the Armory houses City offices, City Hall houses hosts official City government proceedings and offices, the U.S. Federal Courthouse, the former Public LIbrary is the in process of converting the the headquarters for the World Food Prize, the Des Moines Police Station*



*left: historic map of the Civic Center district on the riverfront, 1916 (attribution unknown); section keys identify proposed massing on previous page,*

## *Riverfront Development:* *A Hot Commodity in Other Places*

Ambitious proposals for riverfront redevelopment projects are springing up all over the country. Oceanview condominiums or even lakefront property in such places as Chicago have been prime real estate for a long time. The last decade has seen this infatuation with water transition to urban riverfronts. Just like Des Moines, many of the places where this investment is occurring have revitalized their rivers through environmental, recreation, and open space initiatives on and along the rivers. Redevelopment is taking many forms and housing a variety of uses. High end residential and moderately-priced housing packed with an array of lower level activities including retail and restaurants seem to be taking the lead in many of the developments across the country.









*photos (clockwise from upper left): rehabilitation and conversion of riverfront buildings in Milwaukee, proposal for riverfront development in Providence, RI (note that the proposal is rendered during the staging of the Waterfire event), the active Riverwalk in San Antonio, TX with its prevalence of restaurants and water taxis was one of the country's first riverfront redevelopment efforts, balconies overlooking the Mississippi River were added during this adaptive reuse of a warehouse building for riverfront housing in Minneapolis, MN*

Several places in downtown Des Moines have riverfront development opportunities and/or potential to leverage riverfront proximity in the creation of vibrant neighborhoods. The *District Planning and Design Guidelines* describe the riverfront neighborhoods more fully and include: Gray's Landing, Southwest Riverfront (MLK), Lower East Village, East Village and Northeast Riverfront, and Iowa Events Center.

*Putting Together a Green Downtown: Walkability + Trails and Bike Lanes + Parks + Rivers*

*Greening Downtown* includes proposals that pertain to aspects that have traditionally been under the purview of parks study -- biking, open space, rivers. However this section takes the position that these recreational components can and should have far-reaching effects. As many cities are finding, the blurring of traditional work "silos" -- parks, transportation, transit, engineering, public works, cultural affairs, and economic development - - can have an astoundingly positive impact on the quality of a place. *Greening Downtown* has aspects of all of these silos. Accomplishing these proposals for expanded bicycling amenities, a network of parks, and riverfront / waterway investment and development will require public-private collaboration across traditional boundaries.

Present efforts on the downtown riverfront are likely the first time in recent history that these intense collaborations have occurred. The process that is beginning to realize the first aspects of the Principal Riverwalk is five years in the making. Progress on such a major undertaking is slow, but steady: Trails connections have been made, the Brenton Skating Plaza is open and heavily used, Long Look gardens grace City Hall, the ribbon was recently cut at the Hansen Triangle, the Center Street Pedestrian Bridge is under construction, people reside in new housing developments along the River. The Principal Riverwalk is much like many of the proposals in the *Greening Downtown* section in that these new initiatives require sustained, collaborative attention to achieve. Like the Riverwalk, the impacts the Greening Downtown proposals should have broad effects on downtown's long-term future.

In addition to the open space implications that these proposals suggest, *Greening Downtown* supports sustainability tenets. Bicycle proposals augment the traditional recreational role of bicycling to encourage it as a viable transportation mode. Adding open space and trees to downtown has the potential to make environmental improvements to storm water management, air quality, and our urban microclimate. Celebrating the Rivers heightens the importance of improved water quality.

Looking back to the vision of the planning project, it is easy to see the correlation between the *Greening Downtown* proposals and the principles set forth for downtown: Healthy. Vibrant. Diverse. Accessible.




*the adjacent map identifies priorities for pedestrian improvements, trails, bike lanes, existing and proposed parks and open spaces, proposed river modifications (dams and bridges) and downtown's existing cultural amenities*

KEY:

**Existing Open Spaces:**

A Nollen Plaza

B Botanical Center

C John Muto Recreation Area

D Whitmer Park

E West Capitol Terraces

F Cohen Park

H Riverwalk
H1 Center Street Ped. Bridge
H2 Asian Gardens
H3 Brenton Ice Skating Plaza
H4 Long Look Gardens
H5 Union Railroad Ped. Bridge
H6 Court Avenue landing
H7 Hansen Triangle

I Pete Crivaro Park

J Principal Park

K Western Gateway Park

L Principal Plaza

M Gray's Lake Park

N Water Works Park

O John Pat Dorrian Trails
H Principal Riverwalk
O1 Kruidenier Trail
O2 Meredith Trail
O3 ML King Jr. Trail

**Proposed Open Spaces:**

1 Riverpoint Park

2 Walnut Street School playground

3 18th Street promenade

4 Methodist Hospital Green

5 Nollen Plaza (renovated)

6 Courthouse Square

7 Technology Plaza

8 Riverwalk extension

9 Adventure Recreation

10 Railroad Linear Park
10a recreation courts
10b playground
10c dog park
10d recreation courts
10e community gardens

11 Elm Street Squares

12 City Hall Plaza

13 Botanical Center grounds

14 State of Iowa People's Park

15 Water Works Park revamp

16 Depot Park

17 Pappajohn Sculpture Park

existing park / open space

proposed park / open space

existing cultural attraction

existing trail

proposed trail

existing bike lane

proposed bike lane

street with pedestrian focus