

Cultural Development

Des Moines has a special history of creating cultural places in downtown. Beginning with early 20th Century planning followed by spectacular civic architecture in the early decades of the 1900's to the privately funded Civic Center and Nollen Plaza in the 1970's to a recent funds from the Vision Iowa program secured through an unprecedented community collaboration for a suite of new downtown cultural places. The list of these Vision Iowa projects is nearly complete -- Iowa Events Center, Pappajohn Higher Education Center, World Food Prize, and Riverwalk. They add delight, texture, and character to the community. And, while they set the bar for cultural development in downtown, work on downtown's culture is not over.

A city's culture is something that must continue to evolve. For those that do not value culture simply for the delight it contributes to a place, consider the importance of a city's culture as the economy shifts increasingly towards skilled, knowledge workers. Workers and, ultimately, businesses are increasingly choosing to locate in places that offer an engaging cultural environment. They seek places that offer enrichment through passive cultural activities -- going to a show, visiting a museum, listening to a concert, attending a film festival and places where people can actively engage with the cultural arts, such as purchasing art from galleries, learning new skills at culinary classes, or improving performance talents at rehearsal studios. In a location where competition for workers is fierce, cultural development is imperative to Des Moines' future.

Building our cultural identity should begin with that which makes Des Moines unique: trails and biking (think: RAGBRAI), our extensive network of public arts, agriculture and our wildly successful Farmer's Market, our two Rivers, and our unique history. Yes, 'keeping up with the Joneses is important' -- we need retail, restaurants, music, shows -- but we also have the opportunity to build authenticity and identity by bolstering our strengths.

The Cultural Development section covers cultural development strategies and significant site for future cultural development, cultural, entertainment, and historic districts, and civic places.

cultural places in downtown Des Moines (clockwise from upper left): the Des Moines Arts Festival in Gateway Park, trails along Gray's Lake, Oldenburg and van Bruggen sculpture in Meredith Corporation's lawn, Court Avenue Bridge and Des Moines River from the Union Railroad pedestrian bridge, East Locust Street in the East Village, downtown skyline from the Iowa Events Center, weekly seasonal Downtown Farmers Market on Court Avenue, eateries along 4th Street north of Court Avenue, the Science Center of Iowa, the Central Library and the proposed Pappajohn Sculpture Garden in Gateway Park (courtesy of Agrest + Gandelsonas Architects)

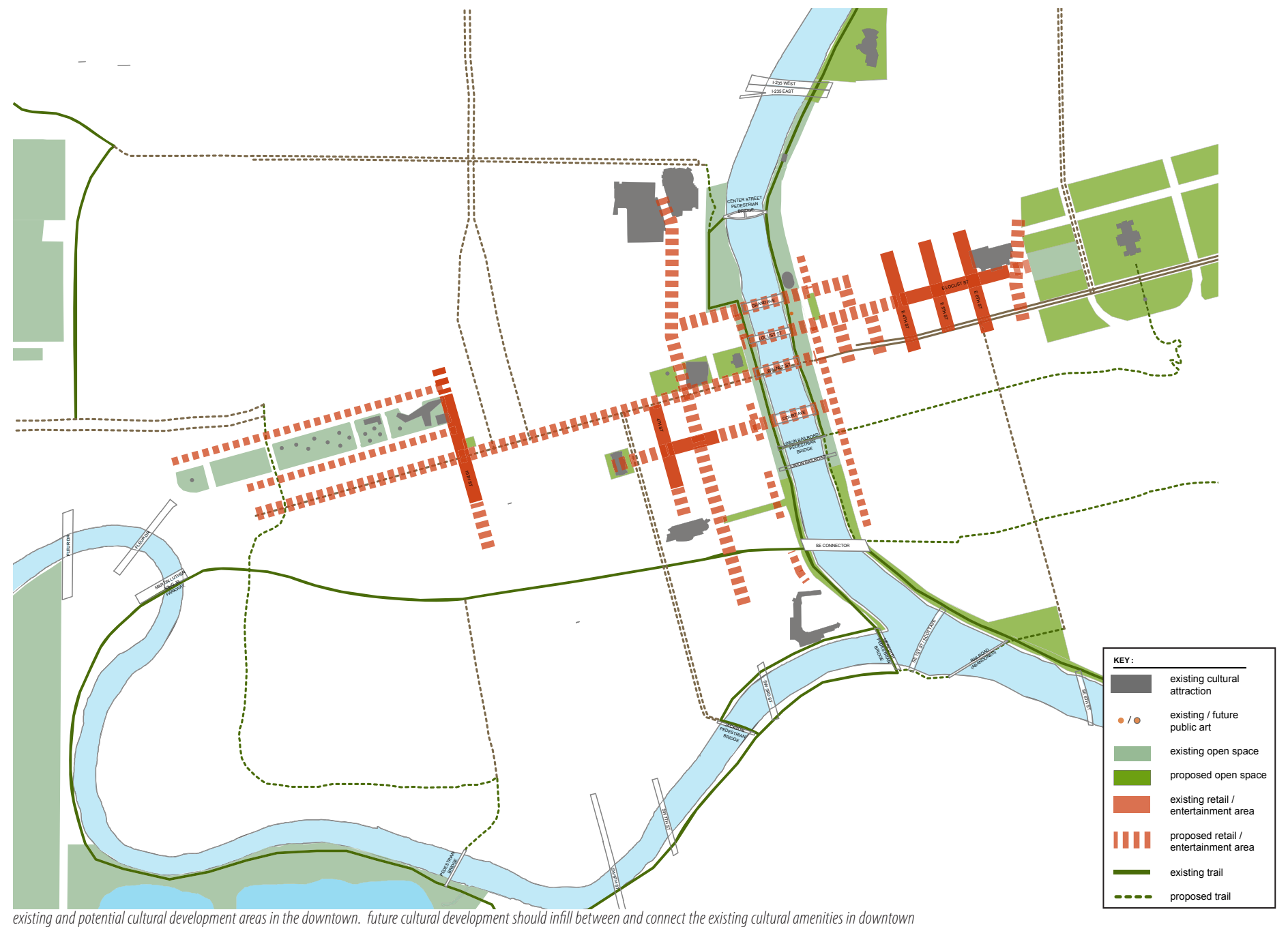
an Infill Strategy to Develop Downtown's Culture

Since 2000, over a half billion dollars have been invested in downtown Des Moines to enrich the cultural opportunities for the metropolitan's residents, bolster economic development opportunities, and enhance tourism opportunities. Venues such as the Iowa Events Center, the Science Center of Iowa and the Central Library joined with downtown's existing facilities -- the Civic Center, Principal Park, the State Historical Building, the Botanical Center, and the State Capitol -- in opening their doors to local residents and out-of-town visitors. The strategy recommended in this *Cultural Development* section is one of leveraging these existing facilities.

Downtown's cultural amenities are spread across the downtown. They animate the northern-, southern-, western-, and easternmost stretches and, while this currently presents some challenges, it ultimately provides long-term opportunities for downtown Des Moines. As development downtown progresses, these amenities will provide anchors and identity to the various areas that comprise downtown.

Presently, the challenge lies in connecting these places that presently feel far-flung. A walk after the I-Cubs game at Principal Park to meet friends on Court Avenue feels like a hike; one becomes painfully aware of the blisters developed after having dinner in the East Village then walking to catch a show at the Civic Center; returning books to the Central Library on a Saturday morning after fetching the freshest fare at the Downtown Farmer's Market can feel like a chore instead of fun.

Infill between these cultural amenities has the effect of drawing them closer together. One may serendipitously discover the treasures found in one of the East Village shops when walking between the Historical Building and an East Locust Street eatery. A hotel south of the Iowa Events Center may encourage a visitor to walk to a restaurant by Nollen Plaza. A few of these places exist in downtown currently: East Village with its streetscape and ground floor retail and restaurants, 10th Street with its combination of housing, restaurants, and the Library, 4th Street and Court Avenue with entertainment venues, housing, and restaurants. The adjoining map identifies these areas of connective fabric and shows areas that should strive for active infill development and pedestrian improvements.





Bright lights, smaller city: Minneapolis is far more navigable than New York or Los Angeles, and the price is right for art exhibits and theater shows.

By Steven Dahlman, MeetMinneapolis.com

Who put the art in heartland?

this recent headline appeared in USA Today, lauding the progress in Minneapolis' arts and culture scene. Many of Des Moines' Midwest counterpart cities have invested heavily in cultural amenities in recent years.

While infill development and bolstering existing amenities should be a main element of downtown's cultural development focus in the near-term, downtown must continue to identify and evolve its collection of significant cultural offerings. We have accomplished much on the cultural development front, but downtown must not rest on its laurels. Downtown should strengthen what's here and invest in future arts and cultural venues at small and large scales.

A local visual and performing arts center surfaced as a particular cultural amenity needed in downtown during the course of the planning work. With a vision of fostering local and regional artists through experimental and rehearsal performance spaces and studios, the program would be a good complement to larger venues downtown while supporting downtown's workforce and residents.

Not only are arts and culture important for the education and enrichment for local residents' and visitors', it has become a significant quotient in economic development. The quality of life -- often tied to a community's cache of arts and cultural amenities -- is an increasingly important factor in attracting businesses and workers. Lacking the geographic strengths of some cities (try as we might, we will never have mountains or an ocean), the pressure mounts to build on our unique strengths, cultural arts among them. Through the course of work on this project the following amenities were cited as desired cultural development opportunities in downtown Des Moines:

- movie theater,
- music venues,
- year-round indoor farmer's market,
- outdoor performance hall,
- children's museum,
- hotels, including convention hotel at IEC
- indoor water park,
- Iowa education center,
- center for citizen diplomacy,
- river environmental center,
- art center - downtown branch,
- performing arts school,
- culinary arts education center,
- adventure recreation center,
- local visual and performing arts center,
- small/mid-scale meeting & events space

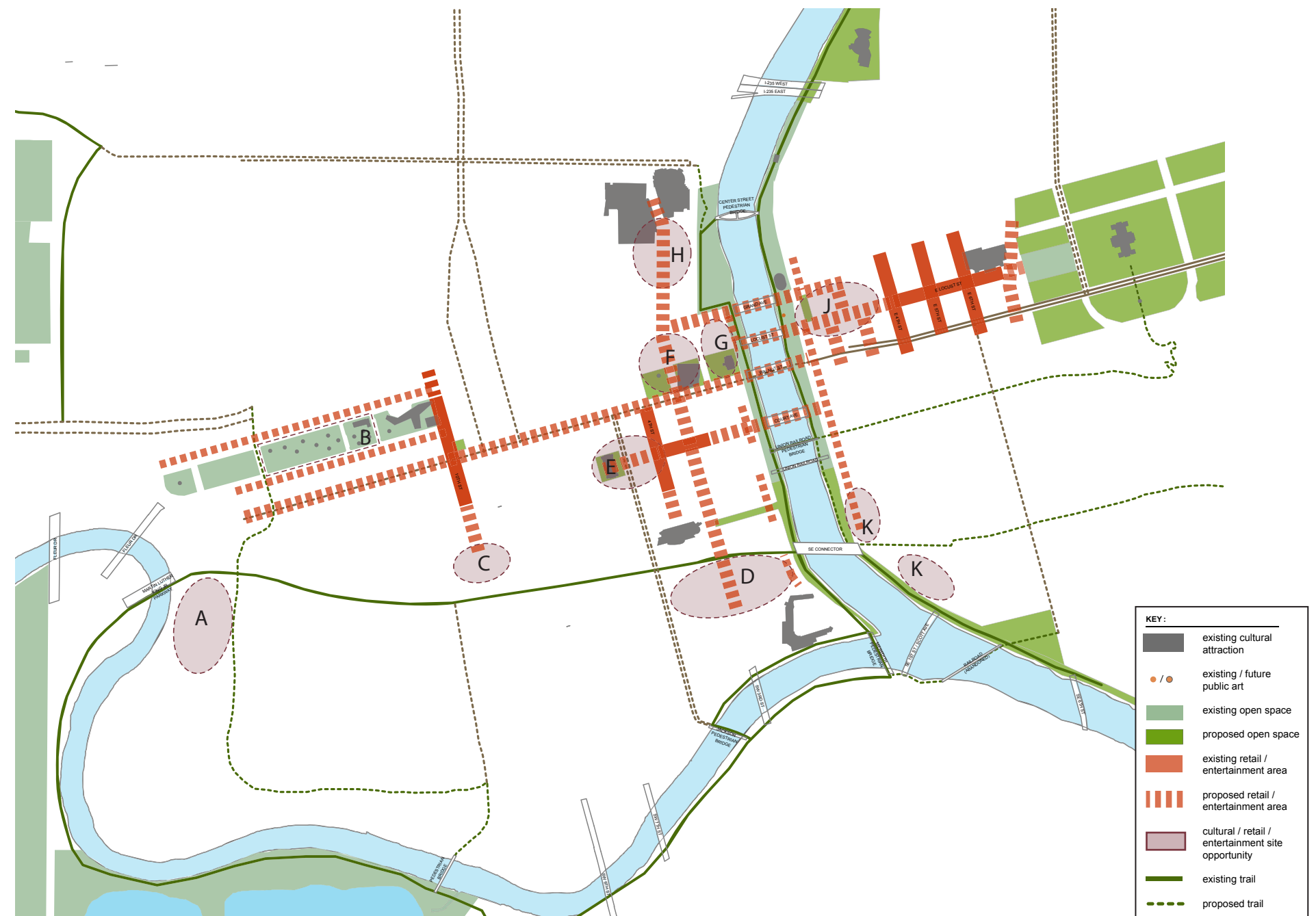


examples of cultural accomplishments in neighboring cities: the Guthrie Theater (a performing arts center) along the Mississippi River in Minneapolis, the Bloch Building addition to the Nelson Atkins Art Museum in Kansas City, MO, movie theaters in downtown San Francisco, CA, the Newseum in Washington, DC, a convention hotel in downtown Denver, CO, REI -- a recreational sporting goods retail store with a climbing wall near Minneapolis, Holland Center for Performing Arts in downtown Omaha, NE, Federal Courthouse and plaza in Minneapolis, an indoor market and mixed use commercial offices in the restored Ferry Building in San Francisco, CA, development adjacent to Camden Yards in Baltimore, MD

Significant Sites

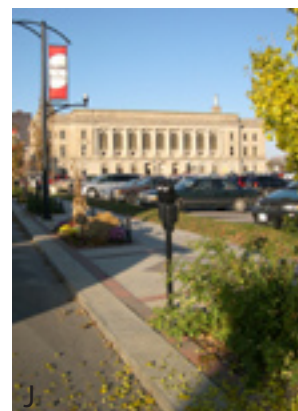
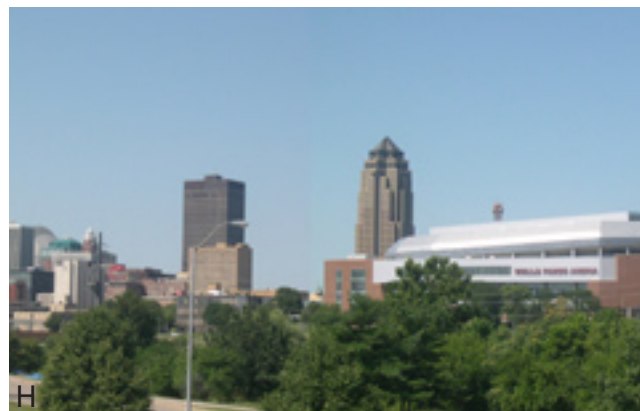
Recent and proposed investments in downtown Des Moines have highlighted significant sites that are presently vacant or under-utilized. With a few exceptions, all of these sites fall within the cultural development infill zones outlined in the previous section. Each site typically has a couple of key factors marking their significance. For example, one is on the River and along the thriving East Locust Street, another is along ML King Jr. Parkway and anchors the 10th Street corridor, another is adjacent to the Iowa Events Center and the terminus of the future Center Street Pedestrian Bridge. The combination of attributes typically makes each site highly visible, easily accessible, and keys to greater connectivity in downtown.

As future significant development projects are considered in Des Moines, especially those which hold cultural importance, these sites should be among the first considered. Signature mixed use projects, schools, cultural institutions, and civic places would help to anchor and add identity to downtown Des Moines if located in these prime locations. Much like the Polk County Courthouse and Court Avenue, the State Capitol and East Locust Street, the civic buildings along the Des Moines Riverfront create the clear and beautiful urban structure that very few other cities have achieved. These identified sites have the potential to strengthen our urban structure and realize the positive impacts of investments which have recently been made in downtown.



existing and potential cultural development areas in the downtown with significant sites identified. these significant sites would be conducive to major new cultural, commercial, residential, civic, or mixed use developments in downtown

- A. ML King Jr. Parkway added a completely new entry to downtown in 2005. Between the new bridge crossing the Raccoon River and downtown Des Moines lies a highly visible "gateway" site at the new southwestern entry to downtown,
- B. Gateway Park presently hosts new downtown cultural places -- the Central Library and Pappajohn Higher Education Center. The world-class Pappajohn Sculpture collection will be placed in the Park in the next couple of years. Future cultural venues could inhabit the Park and sites are available at the Park's perimeter,
- C. A parking lot along MLK Jr. Parkway lies at the southern end of the mixed use 10th Street corridor. The north end of 10th Street is visually terminated by the grand copper dome of the First United Methodist Church; the southern end merits a significant anchor.
- D. This parking lot serves I-Cubs fans attending baseball games at Principal Park. In addition, it sits adjacent to the River and ML King Parkway and, if considered with adjacent properties and historic buildings, could be an integral piece to a vibrant mixed use development that continues to serve parking needs.
- E. The Polk County Courthouse is a historic gem in downtown -- an icon in the skyline, an exclamation point of Court Avenue, and stunning interior spaces. As its future use as a courthouse is being studied in the course of the County courts expansion needs, other viable options for its continued public use and perhaps enhanced interior visits should be studied. It has the potential to be used as a mixed use facility and include an indoor market which extends the successful seasonal Downtown Farmer's Market on Court Avenue to a year-round amenity. Additionally, a large parcel southeast of the Courthouse serves as an interim parking lot and two historic buildings northeast of the Courthouse await a viable adaptive reuse scheme.
- F. With all three movement proposals supporting revitalization of Nollen Plaza, blocks surrounding this central downtown open space should be reviewed for reinvestment, program changes, and/or redevelopment.
- G. The YMCA occupies prime Des Moines Riverfront property. The institution is presently reviewing its redevelopment options.
- H. The new Iowa Events Center draws thousands of visitors to its facilities annually. Blocks to the south are important sites for connecting these visitors with downtown's other amenities. Additionally, some of these blocks have adjacency with the riverfront and offer outstanding skyline, Capitol, and River views from this privileged hilltop topography.
- J. The block east of City Hall serves as a parking lot for adjacent properties. With thriving development in the East Village and Riverwalk investment, this site becomes significant for linking the two important downtown places.
- K. With the first new bridge crossing the Des Moines River in downtown in nearly a century coinciding with renewed interest and investment in our riverfront comes some significant site development opportunities. The two sites north and south of the bridge crossing offer opportunities to serve as a gateway across the river, anchor the southern end of the downtown segment of the Des Moines River, and view the downtown skyline in conjunction with confluence of its Rivers. The northernmost of the two sites offers easy connections to the East Village and the emerging Lower East Village. The southernmost site has the potential to build synergies with a future adventure recreation facility further to the south.





A Rich Cultural History

The city's beginnings can be traced to a military post that was located at confluence of Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers in 1843. For more than a decade, the settlement town was called *Fort Des Moines*, but was shortened to *Des Moines* in 1857 when it became the capitol of the State. The city's founding is now commemorated by a replica chinked log cabin sited more than 1/4 mile away from the confluence of the Rivers along the edge of the baseball stadium parking lot at the Des Moines River. This history should be more visible, more accessible and the history of the city celebrated and presented in a dignified manner at the confluence of the Rivers.

Downtown's historic buildings and places are recognized in a couple of ways. Downtown has seven of the city's nineteen Local Landmarks. In addition to these locally-protected buildings, downtown has over forty listings on the National Register of Historic Places. The local landmarks are among these as are a

number of distinct warehouses, a couple of bridges, two historic districts, an archeological site, three churches, and several other architecturally and culturally significant buildings including the Polk County Courthouse, the State Capitol, and City Hall.

There are many more buildings that could be recognized for their cultural significance and/or architectural merit. The map below shows properties with buildings that are 25-, 50-, and 75-years old. Many of these buildings are worthy of recognition and, as evidenced by the resurgence of the East Village through restoration and infill, there are areas that could benefit from retaining and utilizing this historical fabric to create unique district character. Concentrations of these old and potentially historic buildings are located south of the east village, along Grand Avenue between E. 4th-E. 7th Streets, south of ML King Jr. Parkway extending west from the Des Moines River, and the west end of Walnut Street.

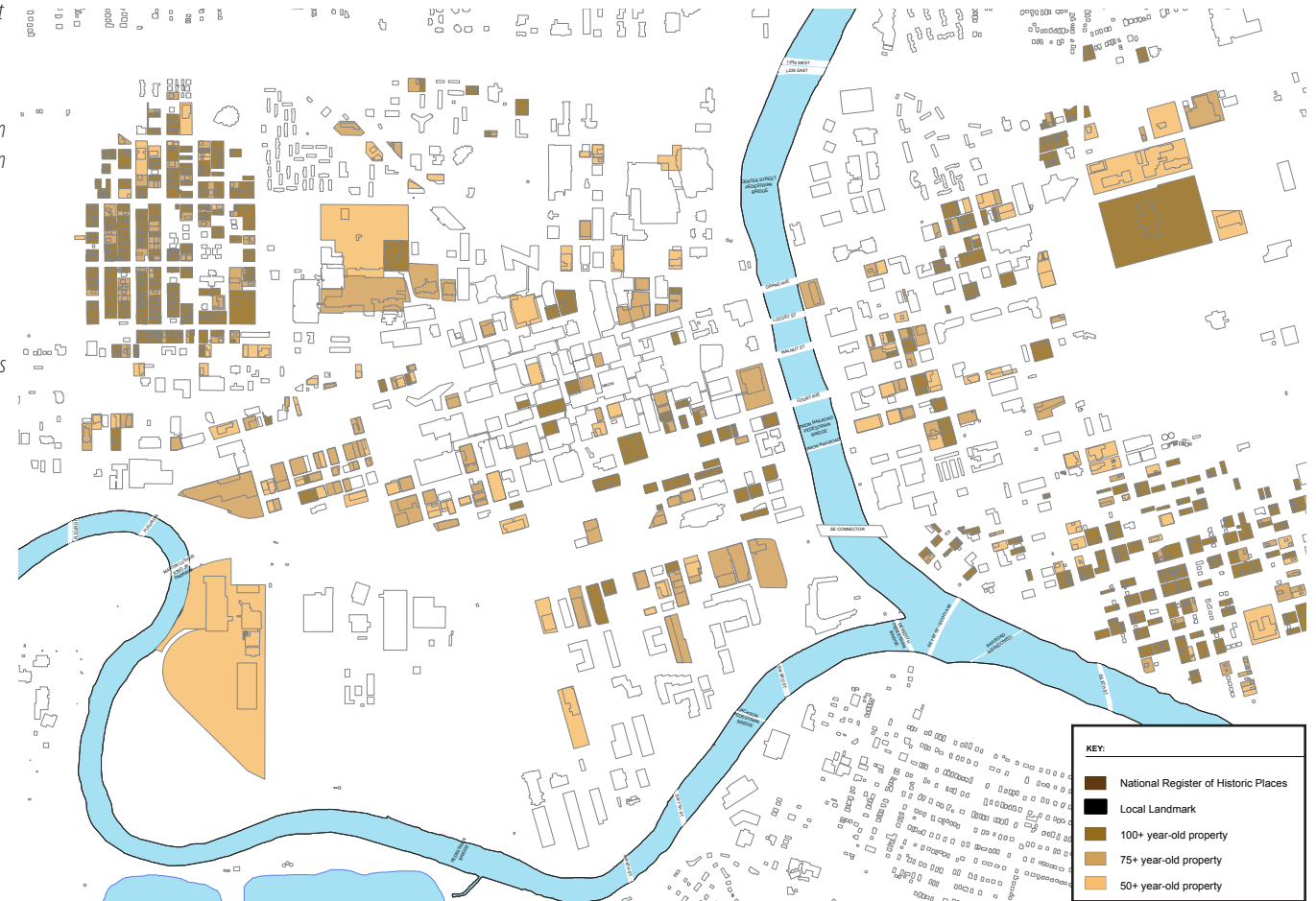


copy of a lithograph of Des Moines' earliest settlement pattern at the confluence of the Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers

map showing Inventory of Old and Historic Buildings in downtown

photograph of replica log cabin commemorating Des Moines' earliest settlers

map of Local Landmarks and National Register of Historic Places





Historic and Cultural Districts

Four districts in downtown Des Moines are recognized with official designation due to their cultural and/or historic significance. The East Village and Court Avenue Districts are recognized by the State of Iowa; the Civic Center District along the Des Moines River and the Sherman Hill Historic District are recognized by the National Register of Historic Places. According to the Iowa's Department of Cultural Affairs, "a Cultural District is a well-recognized, labeled, mixed use, compact area of a city in which a high concentration of cultural facilities serves as an anchor." Designation offers the benefits of potential tax credits, access to state financing programs, and recognition by allied funding partners.

The East Village Cultural and Entertainment District centers on a couple of blocks on either side of East Locust Street and its eclectic mix of retail in an array of historic and infill buildings from the Des Moines River to the State Capitol. In addition to areas presently within this district, the map below proposes adding a block to the south in order to include a cluster of historic buildings. The mixed use entertainment area on Court Avenue and 4th Street, as well as Principal Park headline the Court Avenue Cultural and Entertainment District. The Polk County Courthouse and an area south of ML King Jr. Parkway

with several warehouse buildings should be added to this district. The Civic Center Historic District follows both sides of the Des Moines River and recognizes the product of early 20th Century *City Beautiful* planning. City Hall, the Armory, the Public Library Building, Polk County Office Building (formerly U.S. Post Office), and Federal Courthouse were all designed in a Beaux Arts style with similar siting, massing and materials. With a number of buildings in this area potentially transitioning from civic uses to private uses, this District should also become State Cultural and Entertainment District with areas to the north added including: Botanical Center, Asian Gardens, Hansen Triangle, Center Street Pedestrian Bridge, Brenton Skating Plaza and south to the future Adventure Recreation area.

In addition to these cultural districts, an additional, emerging district should be considered: the Walnut Street Cultural and Entertainment District. The envisioned *Walnut Street Transformation* utilizes existing compact development and cultural places at downtown's core and imagines a mixed use corridor infilled with additional retail, restaurant and cultural places. The proposed new Cultural and Historic District would include Gateway Park, Nollen Plaza, and the Civic Center and would be accessed by proposed downtown transit.



3. DEVELOPMENT
Cultural Development

Civic Places

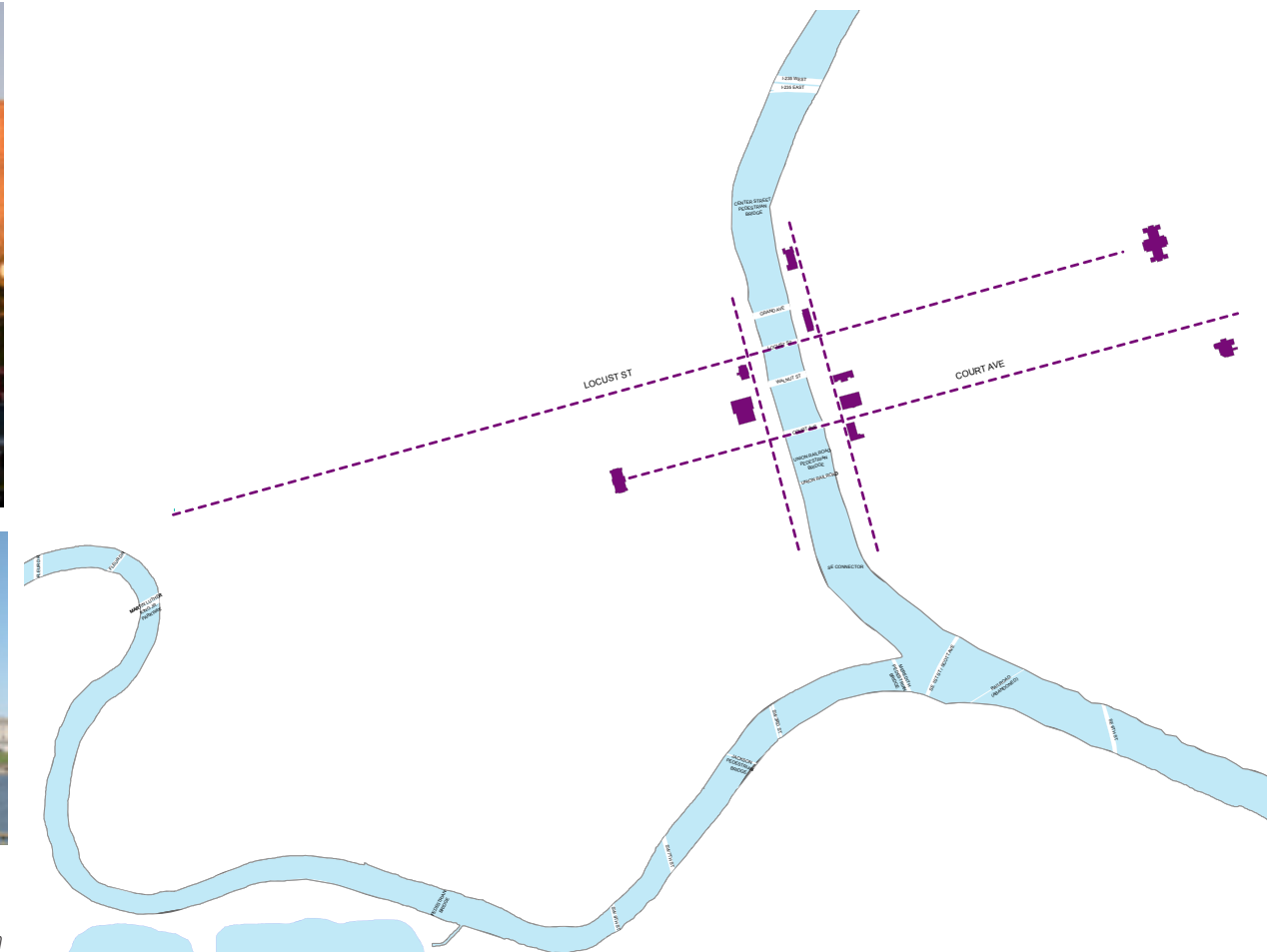
For most of the Des Moines' existence, our civic icons have worked to balance the east and west sides of downtown area, organize the city's structure and provide signature identity to the city. The State Capitol perched on a hill on the eastern edge of downtown and topped with its stunning gold dome terminates the 2-mile-long Locust Street vista and is visible from many vantages throughout downtown and beyond. The ornate limestone Polk County Courthouse with its dignified and imposing clocktower punctuates Court Avenue in the center of downtown. With their similar stone materials, ornamentation, height, and set-back from the Des Moines River, the unified collection of civic buildings that includes City Hall, the U.S. Courthouse, Police Station, former Public Library, and Polk County Offices, form the Civic Center, a product of early 20th Century *City Beautiful* planning. These places in downtown provide connections between east and west and offer unique identity to the city.

While it is somewhat rare that a compact area of a city hosts city-county-state-federal governments, it is especially unique that each of these entities is housed in a stunning architectural treasure and sets up an urban structure that forces the surrounding areas to take notice. Places such as City Hall, the Polk County Courthouse, and the State Capitol are among the most beautiful buildings in the city and add to the vibrancy of downtown, drawing large numbers of people to downtown for work and services each day.

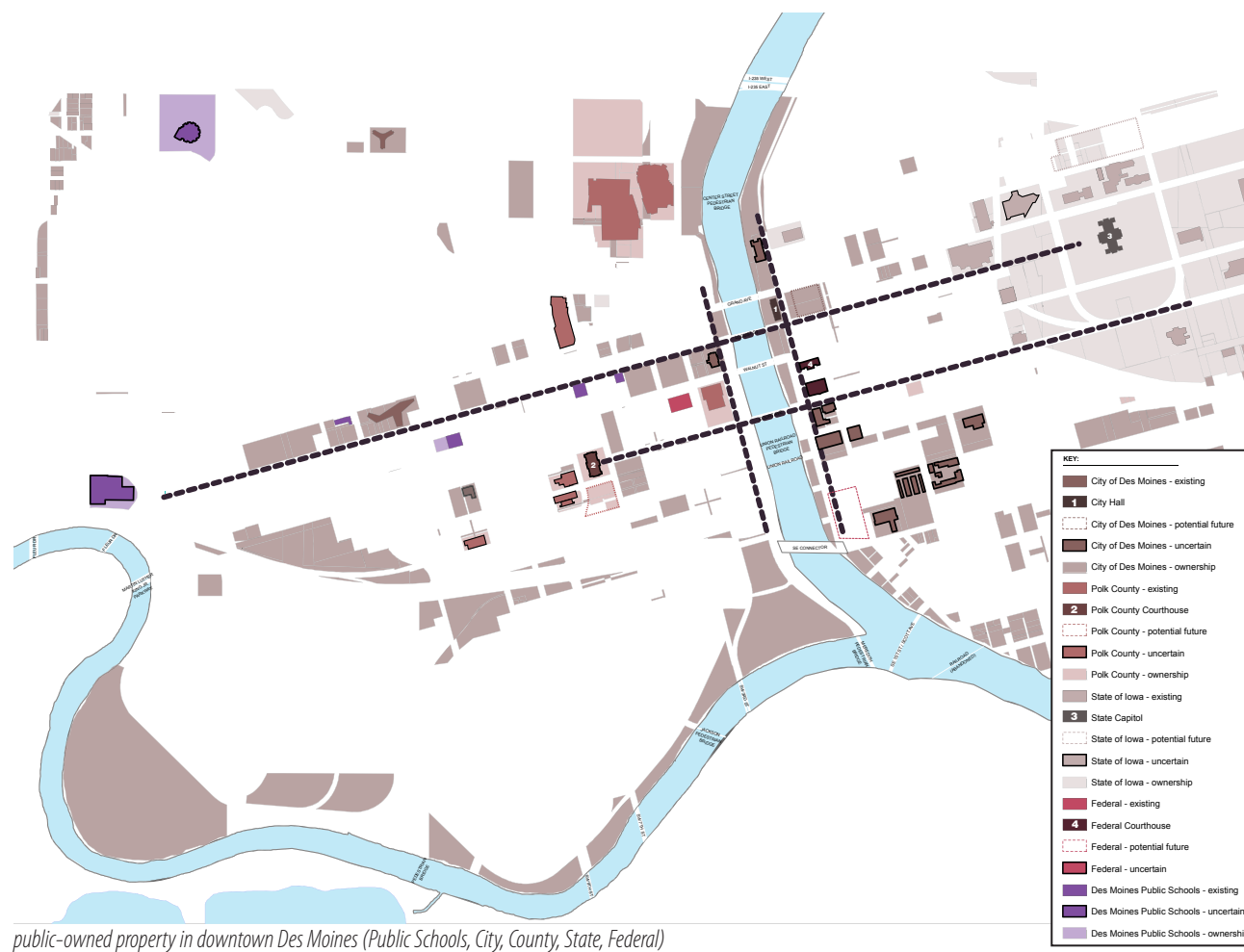
With the number of civic institutions located in downtown comes a large quantity of publicly-owned land. Some of this ownership pattern is necessary and highly desirable. However, a number of civic buildings and publicly-owned places in downtown are facing obsolescence for various reasons. The area cannot and should not remain static. Impending changes to some important civic places will be a challenge, but also offer outstanding opportunities for the community. As changes are discussed for a few of these important downtown civic places, their historic role in the city, their public spaces, and their significant architecture should continue to be respected and celebrated.



photos of downtown's signature civic places from top): State of Iowa Capitol at the east end of Locust Street with City Hall in the foreground, Polk County Courthouse at the west end of Court Avenue, the Civic Riverfront looking north from near the confluence of the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers



existing Civic Places in downtown Des Moines form urban structure and city identity



several public-owned properties in downtown have uncertain futures including (from top): the Armory and Federal Courthouse along the Des Moines River, City Public Works facilities, Polk County Courthouse, Polk County Convention Complex, Central Campus

In some cases, obsolescence is due to significantly higher value development encroaching. The highest and best use of some areas throughout downtown is in the process of changing and now areas that were unnumbered by such concerns now have the potential to realize much higher taxable values. Industrial, warehouse, service and maintenance facilities and, potentially, police and fire departments may need to be centrally-located, but not necessarily in the downtown area. For some of these facilities, location in an area with less traffic and less visibility would be preferred. Some industrial and warehouse uses on the southeast side of the Des Moines Riverfront, the City's Public Works facility south of the East Village, and the State's maintenance and filling station are examples of places that, due to recent investment nearby, should be relocated to other places in the city in order to encourage higher value development.

In other cases, buildings are now obsolete, not due to the quality of the buildings, but because the uses contained in the buildings have changed and grown beyond the space available in these buildings. For example, as grand and impressive as the architecture of the U.S. Courthouse and the Polk County Courthouse is, its designers could never have imagined the contemporary needs of our courts when they were constructed a hundred years ago. New buildings have been built or are contemplated to replace some of those places that have been outgrown, leaving the community with tough redevelopment questions. For some places, this potentially frees up valuable land for redevelopment (Polk County Convention Complex, Polk County Jail, Wallace Building). In other places, buildings are vacated for reuse, such as the former Public Library's reuse by the World Food Prize.

These are sensitive subjects in the community and it is an issue and faced by all levels of government present in the city. Ownership transition represents a challenge and an opportunity. In the case of any of the historic buildings, considerable care and funding will be required in order to preserve and maintain the architectural treasures for their current and/or future uses. Many of the places that are becoming obsolete are in areas that are emerging as valuable real estate. Careful and timely research and planning is needed to ensure that the community receives the best value from these transitions and that the rare beauty derived from the civic architecture and city form continues to contribute to the quality and vibrancy of downtown.

Tell Me About it! communicating downtown culture

There are many things going on in downtown -- events and activities big and small on the weekends, weekdays, spring, summer, fall, even in the winter. Every public meeting session for downtown planning recorded some version of input which said people recognized there are interesting events and activities in downtown and want to know more about them. However, people feel they are missing out on quality outings and missing out on experiencing downtown because they did not know about a particular event.

There are many outlets that communicate downtown's events ranging from printed to radio to digital media. Focused communications spread the word about wine tastings, concerts, live performances. People offering input at public meetings requested a single, surefire, comprehensive source for accessing downtown's events information. They want it to be something that can help with planning outings in advance (*I want to plan activities when Aunt Jan is in-town*) and spur-of-the-moment (*I just went to a show at the Civic Center and am not ready to call it an evening yet*). People communicated they are enthusiastic about the range, frequency, and type of events offered in downtown; they just want to be invited. As one participant noted, "Just tell me about it and I will be there!" While inviting the whole community may be an impossible task, greater coordination among medias is needed.

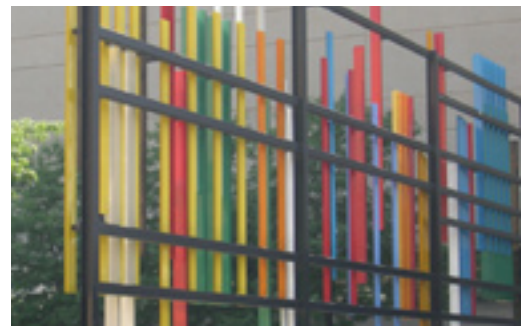


Building on a Legacy of Culture in Downtown Des Moines

Building on accomplishments in downtown Des Moines should inspire confidence to do more. And, not only should we have the confidence to do more, but also the commitment to do them in an excellent way. A long history shows we are committed to creating excellence in downtown -- our riverfront is studded with handsome architecture, a Civic Center that recently received a 25-year award from American Institute of Architects for its timeless value, a collection of public art throughout that downtown that is unprecedented not only among locales our size, but among cities in general, a new Central Library that is patronized for its collection *and* its architecture, a collection of civic architecture (City Hall, Polk County Courthouse, and State Capitol) that is second-to-none. Des Moines can boast a world-class legacy of great civic places. Future downtown places -- public and private -- should aspire to elevate this reputation.

Not only is this legacy about pride in our community, it is about connecting people with places. Take for example, Gray's Lake Park and the way that people have responded in attendance beyond the wildest of expectations. We didn't think we had a culture that would appreciate a public park on the edge of downtown until one was created which enriched the experience of going to a public space. Excellence inspires us.

As we look to create new places in downtown, committing to excellence is a time-held tradition in downtown Des Moines and should be continued. We currently enjoy the artifacts created by generations before us. Continued excellence something we can offer to younger generations ahead of us.



photos (clockwise from upper left): Central Library with "Les Vents", a kinetic sculpture, in Gateway Park, Civic Center with Nollen Plaza in the foreground, City Hall with Joel Shapiro's "untitled" along the Des Moines River, renown modernist architect, Mies van der Rohe's bank along Grand Avenue (now the Catholic Pastoral Center), the State Capitol with its restored gold dome and new West Capitol Terraces, sculpture garden at American Republic Insurance, proposal for Pappajohn Sculpture Garden in Gateway Park (courtesy of Agrest + Gandelsonas Architects) Union Pacific pedestrian bridge at the Riverwalk, pedestrian bridge at Gray's Lake Park, Meredith Corporation with its mural that rotates seasonally and the permanent installation of Claes Oldenburg's "Plautoir" at the western entrance to downtown, the East Village bike racks placed as a part of public art competition, the Polk County Courthouse with its grand clocktower