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Client Beloit 2020

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The redevelopment of Beloit's urban core adjoining the Rock River was first envisioned in 1988 in the form of a Vision Sketch Plan prepared by distinguished landscape architect and regional planner, Phil Lewis of the University of Wisconsin. The resulting plan, **Exhibit 1**, gave focus to the city's river front as a catalyst for the rebirth of Beloit. The Lewis Plan reasoned that through new public spaces, and the creative programming of those spaces, a new image of Beloit could be conveyed to residents and visitors alike. In addition, it was hoped that through

positive exposure to the river front, additional development and redevelopment would be attracted to Beloit's City Center. Between 1988 and 2000, Beloit 2000 in partnership with the City of Beloit, focused available resources and time on the redevelopment of existing and the construction of new public spaces, trails, public art, downtown streetscapes and the acquisition of lands along the river front. The goal of this effort was to increase visitation to Beloit and to restore the city's image.

1.1 Evolution of City Center's Redevelopment

In 2000, Beloit 2000 began to identify opportunities for expanding the reach of its successes along the river front into the adjoining neighborhoods, employment centers and Beloit College. Beloit 2000 became Beloit 2020 and expanded its focus beyond the edges of the river front public spaces and the downtown. With a new emphasis on further animation, connection

and renewal of the river front, Beloit 2020 looked to leverage past successes and investment. The future potential of that initiative was formalized in the 2005 RiverFront Master Plan Update, *A Vision for the City Center* adopted by Beloit 2020 and the City of Beloit. In that plan the vision for City Center was set as follows –

“Beloit City Center will be the confluence of the marketplace, ideas, culture, and the exceptional.”



Exhibit 1 — Professor Phil Lewis, University of Wisconsin Department of Landscape Architecture, 1988 sketch plan for Beloit RiverFront Revitalization

1.2 Life at the Center Plan

The lifeblood for any community is forged through the gravity of its economic development opportunities and the quality of employment opportunities those efforts generate. In Beloit, enhancing employment opportunity can best be attained by retaining the area's best and brightest minds and by encouraging creativity and entrepreneurship. Moreover, Beloit needs to attract talented and dynamic new populations and encourage those who left to return which is the motivation underlying this plan.

Life at the Center is a strategy document intended to enhance the features, amenities, and programming needed to grow the urban character of City Center. Past investments in planning and bricks-and-mortar projects have created a place – the RiverFront – that has the authenticity, animation and diversity that could appeal to young professionals, families and retirees. This project will leverage that investment to grow the appeal of City Center as a “place.” Key experiences of *Life at the Center* that make Beloit desirable include:



Professor John Elger of the California Institute for Smart Communities, at San Diego University embraces the *Life at the Center* approach. He concludes in his white paper *The Creative Community: Forging the Links between Art, Culture, Commerce and Community* that “metro areas of the 21st century will be stimulated by their attractiveness to young, talented people. The push to lure big corporations and build large factories was characteristic of the 20th century economy. The prize of the future will be the ability to attract the type of bright and creative people that generate new inventions, world-class products and the finance and marketing plans to support them.” He goes on to quote columnist, Neil Pierce who believes the future will see “the Creative Class seek out cultural variety,” and in Mr. Elgers words, “neighborhood art galleries, eclectic music venues and exciting night life. Many of them will tend to choose active, participatory recreation rather than passive forms. The premium placed on authenticity, real and historic neighborhoods and natural settings,

will continue to grow. In general, strong growth of high-tech infrastructure and industry has been characteristic of cities that embrace and promote all manner of artistic expression and cultural diversity.”

The opportunity for Beloit to attract employees described by Professor Elger lies in the community’s ability to leverage the assets of City Center. Promoting quality of life factors, such as a vibrant, diverse, and more livable city center that is attractive to existing and future “creative class” entrepreneurs, is a necessity for Beloit’s future.

The *Life at the Center* plan is intended to be a companion document of the 2005 Beloit 2020 Vision Plan for City Center. The plan was prepared under the direction of the Beloit 2020 Board of Directors and with input from the City Center Coordinating Council.

Concurrent with this effort, the City of Beloit has contracted for a rental housing market analysis for City Center which will inform the living component of this plan.

1.3 Plan Direction

The primary deliverable of this plan will be a set of **strategic initiatives** that are based upon research, analysis, and community engagement. These initiatives will form the foundation for program initiatives and catalytic projects that will:

- Strengthen the perceptions of City Center as a place and destination
- Coordinate plans and policies and leverage investment
- Enhance the competitiveness of City Center
- Strengthen the brand for City Center
- Address the management of City Center strategic initiatives



Harry C. Moore Pavilion, Beloit, WI

1.4 Plan Approach

This plan will focus on understanding people's preferences, perceptions and the experience of City Center in order to capitalize on the emerging trends for urban living, working, learning and visiting. Key to this plan's success will be building on past work and current planning initiatives, connecting urban lifestyle principles with City Center assets and opportunities, and engaging Beloit 2020's Vision, Beloit partners and City Center stakeholders to create a salient and marketable message for *Life at the Center*. The recently completed comprehensive city and downtown plans, the proposed City Center rental housing market study, and Beloit 2020's planning initiatives of the last five years will collectively serve as a framework for the *Life at the Center* initiative.

This plan will also strive to **connect principles** of urban living, sustainable development, economic gardening (growing local business), energy efficiency, healthy living, and social engagement with opportunities afforded by Beloit's City Center. In the past, living in urban centers has been about proximity to work. Going forward, life in urban centers will be about connections, efficiency, and access to opportunity – social, cultural, learning and recreation.

Partner and stakeholder engagement will be critical to identifying opportunities and addressing barriers that influence residents in the Greater Beloit Area when they make decisions about where they live, work, choose to spend money or visit for a special event.

This plan's work process was divided into four parts as identified in the following chapters:

Part 1: State of City Center (Chapter 2)

Part 2: Community Engagement (Chapter 3)

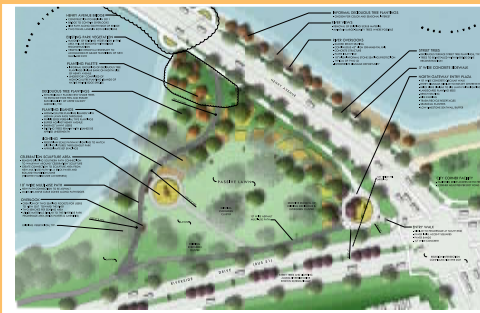
Part 3: Alignment of the City Center Vision and Community Perceptions (Chapter 4)

Part 4: Plan Implementation (Chapter 5)

Key tasks completed include the following:

- Reviewed current planning documents
- Interviewed public and private entities responsible for the planning, development, programming and maintenance of City Center
- Surveyed residents in the greater Beloit Area
- Interviewed focus groups
- Identified challenges and opportunities
- Formulated plan recommendations
- Prepared a plan implementation strategy

The recommendations of this plan have also been informed by the results of a rental market study conducted concurrently with the preparation of this plan.



Beloit Riverside Park - North Gateway Master Plan MP101

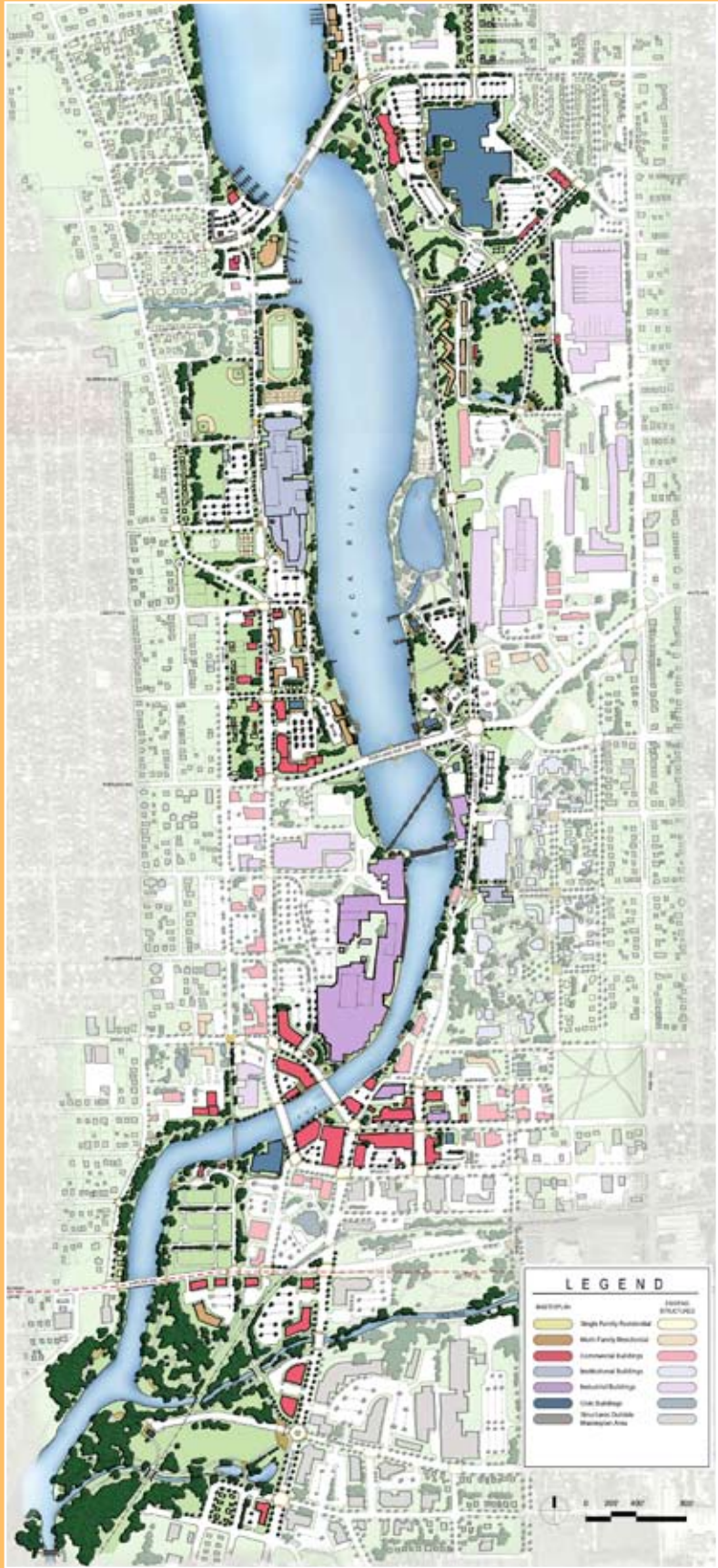


Exhibit 2 – 2005 Beloit Rock River Parkway Master Plan

City Center has been the focus of many public and private strategic and planning initiatives over the last 6 years. This part of the plan looks at the focus of those initiatives and the framework they have established for the future of City Center.

City Center, as shown on **Exhibit 2**, includes the Rock River Corridor, Beloit College, the downtown, employment centers, residential concentrations

and open space lands of the City of Beloit and the City of South Beloit. It encompasses an estimated 700 acres, and is home to 253 businesses, 5,652 employees and 1,008 residential units. The population within a 10 mile radius of City Center, and forming the primary market area for City Center, is estimated at 108,000 persons.

2.1 Current Plans Shaping the Future of City Center

The plans reviewed include those prepared by Beloit 2020, City of Beloit, City of South Beloit, Stateline Regional Planning Commission, Downtown Beloit Association, the Beloit Vision Partners, Beloit College and the corporate leaders located in City Center.

A review of these studies shows Beloit 2020's 2005 *Vision for City Center Plan* has had a dramatic influence on the city's current planning initiatives. A common theme emanating from these plans is the focus on enhancing the livability and sustainability of City Center while leveraging past investments as a catalyst for new business, redevelopment and increased visitation. Specific themes include:

- The revitalized RiverFront is the focus of many proposed initiatives. It is the optimum setting for showcasing Beloit through events, recreation, unique business settings and retail opportunities.
- Beloit College remains a key partner in achieving a livable city center.
- Beloit's geographic location, regional transportation infrastructure and prime agricultural lands reinforce the community's competitive advantage as a regional economic center.
- Beloit's City Center is an affordable place to live, it is walkable and it offers a wide variety of urban cultural experiences.

- Healthful sustainable living is a community-wide goal. The city is making a concerted effort to become an eco-municipality following *the Natural Step* process of sustainable stewardship of city resources.
- Great streets and public places set a positive tone for residents and visitors.
- City Center plans include an integrating transportation network; walking, biking, transit and convenient parking for residents and visitors.
- Continuing the public/private partnerships between the city, Beloit 2020 and Beloit College is essential for maintaining the momentum of the City Center vision.
- The economic base of Beloit is slowly changing from manufacturing to knowledge- and services-based industries.
- Strong City Center neighborhoods, commercial areas and employment centers are essential to attracting future residents.
- The City of South Beloit has lost momentum for improving its downtown and public spaces.
- City CIP plans call for continued incremental infrastructure improvements including road reconstruction, bridge and bike path connections to support the enhanced livability of City Center.

2.2 Funding Sources for City Center

Current public funding sources for City Center Redevelopment include the following programs.

- Capital Improvement Program – annual city appropriations for infrastructure improvements, grant matches, and consultant assistance
- Tax Increment District #5 (TID #5)– land acquisition, development support and infrastructure
- TID #5 Facade Improvement Program
- TID #5 Upper Floor Housing Grant Programs

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds – planning money
- Grants through the State of Wisconsin Departments of Transportation, Natural Resources and Commerce – infrastructure and employment

Of note is the close of TID #5 spending period in December of 2012 which is the only remaining TIF district in the downtown from which expenditures can be made.

2.3 Current Infrastructure Projects



Ironworks, Beloit, WI

The following infrastructure projects and redevelopment initiatives underway at the time of this report, shown in **Exhibit 3**, reflect the ongoing implementation of recommendations contained in the Beloit 2020 *Vision for City Center* plan and the plans of Beloit 2020 project partners.

- 1 Downtown Beloit Association promotion and study of upper floor housing and storefront façade improvement projects
- 2 Wagner Building redevelopment study
- 3 Ongoing renovation of the Eclipse Center (Beloit Mall) by the Hendricks Development Group
- 4 Turtle Creek Bike Trail construction from the River Bend site to the Turtle Creek bridge at Broad Street
- 5 DOT reconstruction of Riverside Drive and the preliminary design for the Henry Ave. bridge reconstruction
- 6 Riverside Park, North Entrance improvement plan
- 7 Iron Works redevelopment plan by the Hendricks Development Group
- 8 Beloit College Fine Arts Center construction
- 9 City Center rental housing market study

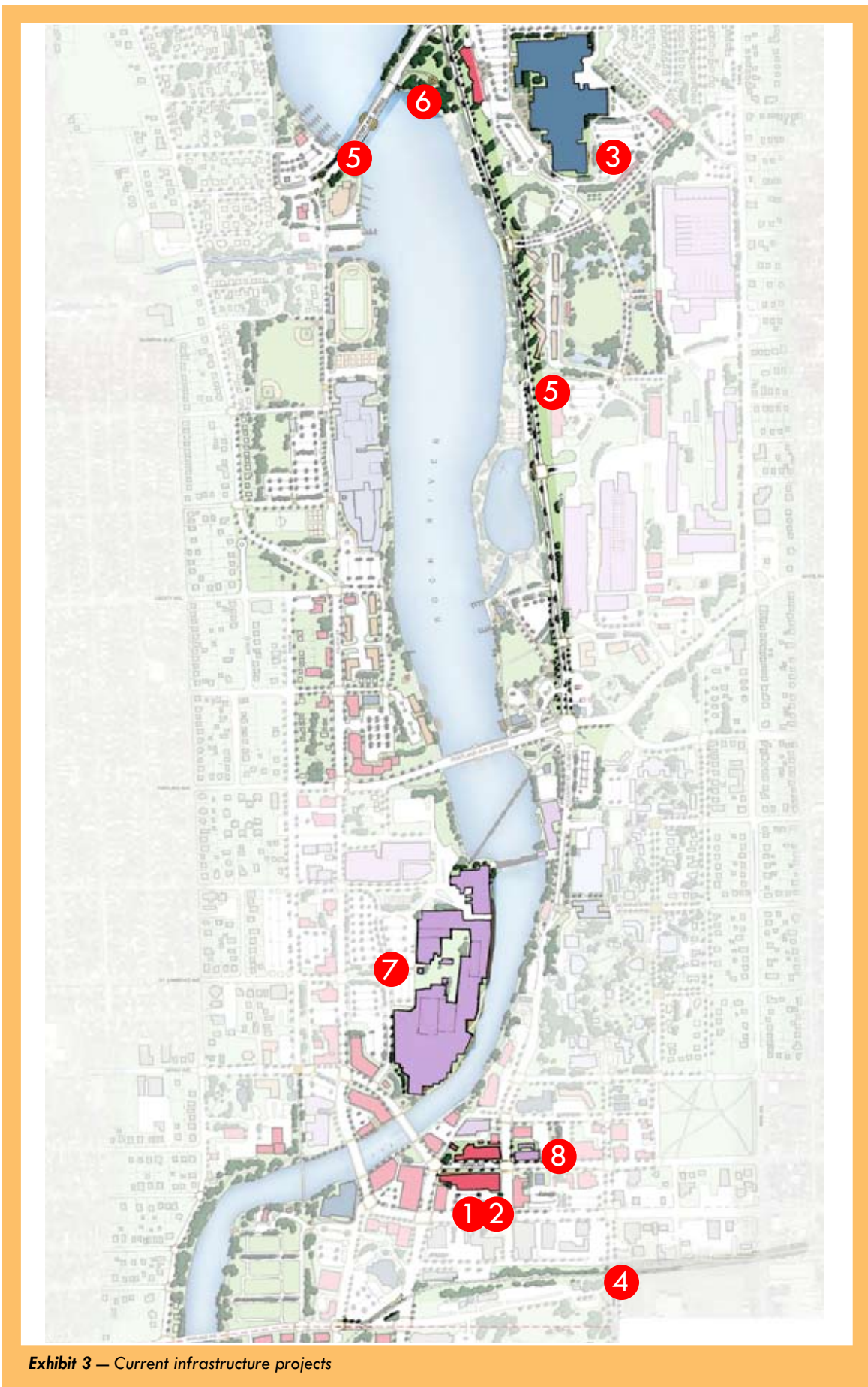
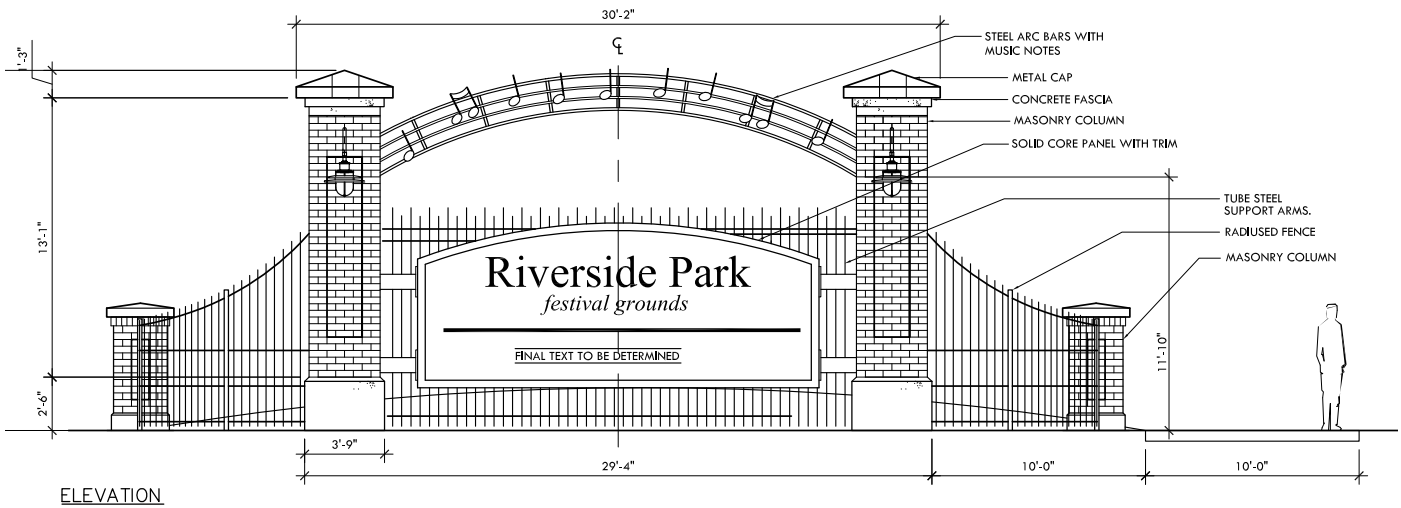
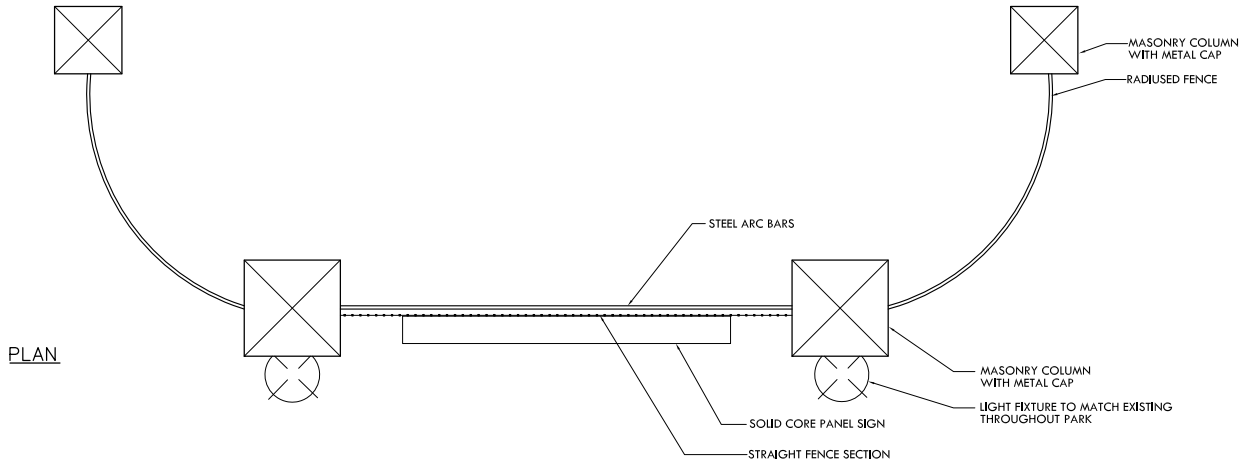


Exhibit 3 — Current infrastructure projects



SEE BELOW FOR IMAGES DEPICTING MATERIAL AND COLOR PALETTE



1 GATEWAY FEATURE – ELEVATION
L501

SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"



3 NORTH GATEWAY VIGNETTE
L501 VIEW FROM RIVERSIDE DRIVE, APPROX. 200' DISTANCE

SCALE NTS

Riverside Park - North Gateway Master Plan

The purpose of this part of the plan was twofold: First, to understand the community’s perception of the incremental redevelopment that has been occurring in City Center; and Second, to identify what the community would like to see accomplished in the future. To reach that understanding, the following community outreach activities were conducted:

- a. A survey of Beloit 2020 member employees to measure attitudes and perceptions of City Center;

- b. Focus group interviews to better understand responses generated by the broader community survey.

Concurrent with SAA’s work, the City of Beloit, using Baker Tilly International, conducted market research of the rental market within City Center. Questions regarding rental housing and housing preferences in general were included as part of the Beloit 2020 employee survey.

A summary of each community engagement activity follows.

3.1 Beloit 2020 Employee Survey

The goal of this survey was to identify key attitudes and behaviors of Greater Beloit Area residents toward City Center. For purposes of the survey, it was assumed that the employees of Beloit 2020 members would represent an acceptable cross section of residents in the Greater Beloit

Area. The Greater Beloit area is defined as that region of south-central Wisconsin and northern Illinois within a 10-mile radius of City Center. **Exhibit 4** illustrates the municipalities covered by the survey.

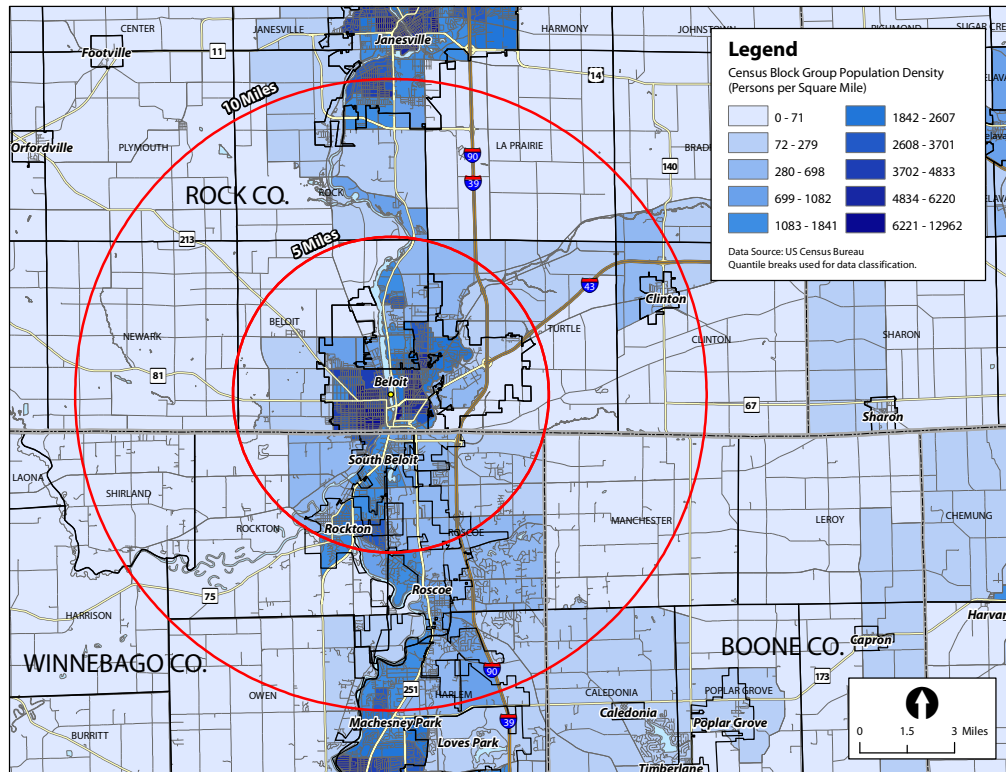


Exhibit 4 — Population density map of the Greater Beloit area

The survey was exclusively web-based and posted online over a three-week period in December, 2009 and January, 2010. The survey was distributed through the members of Beloit 2020 to their employees. It consisted of 58 questions, many of which had multiple parts. The survey questions asked about experiences, attitudes and behaviors about the following topics.

- How and why people use City Center, and how often
- What were the most important attributes of an urban lifestyle
- What facilities are lacking, adequate or abundant in City Center
- Where and how people get information about what City Center has to offer
- Level of interest in living in City Center and when
- Key considerations when deciding on a place to live
- Preferred housing types
- Experiences with transportation and parking
- Views of personal safety when in City Center

770 adults from the Greater Beloit Area started the survey and 640 respondents completed the entire survey. 640 respondents is a highly representative sample of the approximately 72,000-person population of adults ages 18-74 who live within a 10 mile radius of the City of Beloit. This large sample means that the errors associated with sampling are very small and the estimates are reliable.

The demographics of those responding are as follows:

- 56% male, 44% female
- 72% range in age from 35-61 years old
- Predominantly Caucasian race
- 80% had no children living with them
- 70% have incomes over \$50,000
- The statistical median total annual household income (gross) fell between \$75,000-\$99,999
- 93% have some college or advanced degrees
- More than 50% have lived in the Beloit area for more than 15 years, while 19% have never lived in the Beloit area

The full survey and a summary of responses are available from Beloit 2020 and are not included herein.

3.1.1 Survey Findings

How People are using City Center

Employment is the number-one reason why respondents are in City Center with over 70% of the respondents coming to City Center one or more times per week. 58% of respondents said they use the parks and purchase goods or services at least once a month. 2 out of 5 people said they visit the RiverFront for viewing and recreation at least once a month.

Pathway usage for walking and biking had the next highest frequency, averaging at least 4 times during the warm months.

Respondents say that, on average, they dine out, visit bars or enjoy nightlife at least 4 times a year, but fewer than once a month. Dining out was more frequent among respondents aged 49+, and nightlife was prevalent for the under-35 demographic.

The highest attended event in City Center is the “Farmers’ Market,” with over 70% identifying frequent to occasional use, followed by the “4th of July fireworks celebration” and “Riverfest.”

Of the other events or destinations asked about, all were reported as “rarely” attended. They include from most to least attended:

- Dancing at Harry’s Place
- Symphony Orchestra performances
- Theater, ballet and holiday concerts
- Turtle Island Playground
- Galleries and art exhibits
- Downtown street dance
- Beloit International Film Festival
- Downtown Art Walk
- Picnics and family events at Riverside Park
- Holidazzle
- Music at Harry’s Place
- Friday’s in the Park Lunch and Concert Series
- Ironworks Industrial Arts Gallery events
- Movie Night on the Big Lawn (a relatively new event)
- Events at the Fine Arts Incubator

Concerns about personal safety and a lack of awareness of events and amenities appear to have the greatest effect on usage.



Harry’s Place



Dancing at Harry’s Place



Turtle Island Playground



Movie Night on the Big Lawn

What is Important?

Overall respondents rated personal safety, employment opportunities, parks and open spaces, dining experiences and staple retail as very important to them in City Center.

Similarly, people who express interest in City Center as a place to live indicated that their most important priorities are the Farmers' Market, parks and open spaces, a variety of dining experiences, entertainment options and places for socializing and gathering.

Dining in City Center

Respondents desire more dining options and a greater variety of cuisine. They want more fine dining, casual family dining and ethnic dining. Bar and grill establishments are perceived as being abundant. When asked about what City Center could have less of, the most frequent response was "bars."

Getting Information about City Center

According to the data, word from family and friends is the top-rated vehicle for information about what is happening in City Center. The next most popular sources for City Center information were labeled as "occasional" sources and included the newspaper, internet, local TV, e-mail or newsletters. In the end, there was no clear resource for City Center information and this lack of a clear destination for information may account for a lack of awareness of what City Center has to offer.

Living in City Center

9% of all respondents say they will most-likely or are currently considering City Center as a place to live. 28% are unsure, which could be interpreted to mean there is a large segment of the population that is willing to still consider the possibility.

So who is most likely? Our data indicates it is a person who knows Beloit well, feels safe here, and is probably thinking seriously about retirement. Here are some other predictions:

- 3 out of 5 will be male
- They are currently between ages 45 and 61
- Majority are currently cohabitating or married
- They have lived in Beloit longer than 15 years and in their current home more than 6 years
- They have no children K-12 living with them now
- They are college graduates, many with advanced degrees
- 40% have household incomes \$50-100k, 29% earn \$100-150k
- They currently own 2 or 3 vehicles and live in single family homes
- 60% would move to City Center in several years, 30% would move in a few, 10% would move this year
- They prefer a detached single family home, but are moderately interested in upscale attached condos

The most important considerations for the group considering living in City Center are a quiet neighborhood, street appearance, landscaping, private yard space, pedestrian friendly and convenient access to services and indoor parking.

The Perception of Safety

1-in-3 respondents report that, to varying degrees, they are not satisfied with their sense of personal safety in City Center.

The survey shows that the longer someone has lived in Beloit the safer they feel.

It also shows that people who live in Beloit, zip code 53511, are more likely to feel safe here than most others outside that zip code.

Our hypothesis suggests that people unfamiliar with Beloit City Center are more likely to perceive it as an unsafe area, **not because of experience, but because of reputation.**

Because a sense of personal safety was the most often cited consideration for urban living in our survey, and is also a widespread concern in regards to City Center, this would be a key area on which to focus corrective efforts. In this case, it is controlling perception, not reality, which presents the greatest opportunity. In short, this appears to be a public relations issue.

3.1.2 Survey Conclusion

Overall, Beloiters feel that City Center has made great strides in recent years. The area is considered more attractive, offers more activities and feels safer. People say the progress appears to be continuing, but they caution that there is much more to be done. Ultimately, the people surveyed are optimistic about the direction of Beloit City Center and their response suggests opportunities for targeting improvements in:

- Personal safety
- Dining options
- Retail options
- Physical appearance
- Family friendliness
- Pedestrian accessibility and circulation
- Parking
- Programming
- Information dissemination



3.2 Focus Group Sessions

SAA conducted four focus group sessions using random volunteers identified by Beloit 2020 members from their employee pools. The purpose of the focus groups was to record experiences, perceptions and attitudes that were beyond the capability of the online survey. Interview questions included identification of desirable attributes of urban living, Beloit's urban feel, family use of City Center, perception of safety and resources for City Center information.

The sessions were held February 16, 17, 18, and 25, 2010 with each session lasting 1.5 hours. Thirty-three people participated in the 4 focus groups. The demographics represented by the participants included a variety of ages, genders, occupations, education levels, incomes, housing status, child status, and ethnicities.

Participants included city employees, elected officials, college educators, college students, young professionals, senior professionals, administrative and support staff, retail operators, a high school student, financial services, real estate agents/brokers, retirees, new residents, life-long residents, and former residents who have returned to the area.

One session held at Kerry ingredients, which included recently hired college students, provided a "newly relocated" perspective. Another session held at Beloit College focused on City Center residents and college students and provided a current, life-at-the-center perspective.

3.2.1 Group Process

An agenda and discussion outline were provided to each focus group participant.

Groups 1-3 were asked these seven questions:

1. What makes the heart of a city vibrant? (Probe: How important to you is it that Beloit's City Center is vibrant?)
2. Is the vision for a Beloit City Center renaissance being achieved? (Probe: What do you consider necessary for a renaissance in City Center?)
3. What factors enter your mind when deciding how to spend your free time?
4. What is it about City Center that is or is not family-friendly?
5. Describe your idea of being comfortably safe in an urban environment? (Probe: Are you discouraged about engaging in any types of activities or behaviors in City Center because of a concern about safety?)
6. Drawing on the positive experiences you have had in other urban centers, what changes do you recommend for Beloit City Center?
7. Where do people get information about City Center?

Group 4, City Center residents and students, were asked the following seven questions:

1. What makes the heart of a city vibrant? (Probe: How important to you is it that Beloit's City Center is vibrant?)
2. Is the vision for a Beloit City Center renaissance being achieved? (Probe: What do you consider necessary for a renaissance in City Center?)
3. What factors enter your mind when deciding how to spend your free time?
4. Describe your idea of being comfortably safe in an urban environment? (Probe: Are you discouraged about engaging in any types of activities or behaviors in City Center because of a concern about safety?)
5. If you told 5 friends that you live in Beloit's City Center, what impressions would they have?
6. Drawing on the positive experiences you have had in other urban centers, what changes do you recommend for Beloit City Center?
7. Where do people get information about City Center?

Sessions were tape-recorded and detailed notes taken. Notes on the participant responses to questions and a copy of the discussion agenda for each group are available from Beloit 2020 and not included herein.

3.2.2 Results

Vibrancy is what draws participants to visit other urban centers.

Good urban centers have lots of people on the street and offer things to do any day or night of the week. They are pedestrian friendly, offer unique shopping experiences, a diversity of dining experiences and a variety of living options. They offer a sense of place and history; provide a variety of transit – car, bike, and bus or subway options. The people there are diverse, they are welcoming and friendly and you feel safe. Public spaces provide for social gathering, they are organized and clean.

Beloit's renaissance is succeeding and numerous opportunities remain.

City Center's progress and substantial changes have been noticed.



The existing Farmers' Market is Beloit's symbol of this renaissance.

The Farmers' Market is popular, well attended and stocked with desirable products. It works because of its regular occurrence each Saturday morning, which brings thousands of people to City Center. Beloit's locally owned restaurants, coffee houses, and unique events like Dancing at Harry's Place, Turtle Island Playground and the Beloit International Film Festival are all seen as distinguishing and uniquely Beloit.

The Rock River is perceived as City Center's chief asset and more public spaces and river oriented businesses such as coffee shops, retail, or restaurants with direct connection or views of the river are desired. Continuing the RiverWalk system along the west bank of the river at the Iron Works is recognized as a future opportunity.

Beloit College's presence in City Center is also seen as a positive asset, adding event and cultural programming to City Center.

People living in the Beloit area have lots of choices on how to spend their free time.

Beloit is close to Madison, Rockford, Chicago, Milwaukee and destinations between. A desire for a full day of activity and weekend getaway opportunities was mentioned by some participants as important when making destination and entertainment choices.

People like coming to City Center.

Participants perceive City Center as affordable, clean, pedestrian friendly and a safe environment. However, City Center is lacking in unique shopping, entertainment and variety of food venues to warrant repeated or longer-term visits. For some, a decision of where to spend free time includes consideration of a group or family.

Will my family/friends enjoy time in City Center?

For others, cost, convenience and inclusiveness largely define how they will decide to use their free time.

Information about City Center.

People do not have a clear sense of where to find information about City Center events, programming and amenities. Similar to the community survey, word of mouth and recommendations on what to do carry a lot of weight. Internet searches and newspapers were

also used. Employees of Kerry Ingredients felt they had exceptional information on City Center events and entertainment due to the efforts of the staff publishing a weekly employee newsletter.

Am I safe in City Center?

People who have visited City Center in recent years are comfortable with their personal safety, but a negative reputation outside the community may be inhibiting the desire of those without a recent City Center experience to visit City Center.

Group participants note that the impressions from local press accounts of crime in City Center and their personal experience with feeling safe did not align with perceptions when there. Participants told of the "City Center-inexperienced" within the city and greater Beloit-area propagating negative impressions of personal safety. Realtors and employer recruitment staff were mentioned as directing potential residents to other communities. It was clear from City Center residents and many others that personal safety was not an issue for them.

Lighting levels and people on the street were often mentioned as determinates of the perception of safety. It was also clear that cleanliness of the place, and the presence of graffiti and vacant storefronts were indicators that stimulated more concern about personal safety.

Suggestions based upon experience with other urban centers for improving City Center.

Beale Street in Memphis, the San Antonio River Walk, Lake Geneva, Galena, and State Street in Madison were places often cited as desirable urban environments. These places were recognized for the breadth of public spaces, diversity of people, street life, place driven character, entertainment, shopping and food experiences offered. Many recognized that you could go to any of these places with out a plan in mind and there would always be something going on.

Suggested improvements

Participants in the focus groups provided a wealth of ideas concerning their thoughts for a revitalized City Center. The following is a summary of their ideas:

- Encourage greater diversity of unique, boutique-style shops.
- Support greater diversity of food - Mediterranean, Middle-Eastern, Asian and Sushi were most often cited. Recommend existing restaurants change and update their menus to encourage repeat visitation.
- Have longer and consistent business hours to change the “closed after 5:00 pm” impression of City Center.
- Recruit a movie theatre.
- Improve parking and travel convenience with a trolley.
- Improve traffic flows and light timing to encourage travel to City Center.
- Expand the RiverFront walk system and get more businesses to locate on the RiverWalk.
- Improve wayfinding so that people can find restaurants, shops and parking.
- Engage in a public relations campaign to change local and regional reputation of Beloit and show the positive renaissance Beloit is undergoing.
- Improve the dissemination of information about programming. Create or adopt one or multiple comprehensive and reliable resources that everyone can access for information about all attractions/events.
- Educate relocation specialists (employee recruiters, real estate agents) about the benefits of living in City Center, and dispel persisting myths about safety.
- Make City Center more family oriented. Consider kid oriented businesses, special programs to bring kids downtown, introduce youth sports, start a “Kids Spot” similar to Roscoe’s.
- Fill or otherwise utilize vacant store fronts which when left empty symbolize that more work is needed.
- Corridors leading to City Center need to evoke a favorable first impression. The interstate smell of cooking oil is not a good impression.
- Develop opportunities for experiential attractions - food, art, river and bike adventure.
- Refresh old events to attract new visitors.

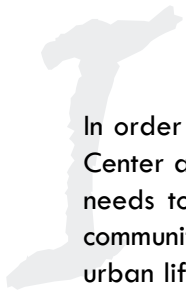
3.3 Rental Market Study

Concurrent with SAA's survey and focus group meetings, the City of Beloit commissioned Baker Tilley International to conduct a rental housing market study of City Center. Questions regarding rental interest, unit type and amenity preferences were included in the broader Greater Beloit Area. A full report from Baker Tilley International can be obtained from the City of Beloit, Economic Development Department.

Key findings of the Baker Tilley study are as follows:

- Demographic characteristics:
 - 86% of those surveyed owned their own homes compared to the Primary Market Area (PMA) which is 66.9%.
 - 99.6% were between ages 25 -54 compared to 61.3% in the PMA.
 - 61.3% had incomes of \$50,000 to \$150,000 compared to 47% in the PMA.
 - Household size of the survey sample was similar to the PMA as a whole.
- 33.5% were interested in multifamily type housing .
- 1.9% were specifically interested in rental apartments.
- 4.2% to 9.4% of the respondents expressed interest in condominiums, attached condominium homes, lofts or renovated commercial space.
- 62.5% of respondents preferred 3 bedroom or 2 bedroom with den type units.
- 43.8% of respondents were willing to pay more than \$700 per month and 16.7% more than \$800 per month for an apartment.
- Beloit is currently experiencing one of Wisconsin's highest unemployment rates.
- Overall rental vacancy rates are low, 4.5%, due to low rental rates in the area and concessions currently offered by landlords.
- Estimated achievable monthly market rents are \$695 for a one bedroom and \$800 for a two bedroom. These are 20%- 30% lower than in Madison, Wisconsin. The highest reported rents were found in City Center.
- The designs of the existing rental properties for the current rents are lower quality than that likely desired for City Center.
- Based upon current conditions, the development of rental units in Beloit will likely experience significant gaps in financial feasibility ranging from \$21,000 per one bedroom unit to \$41,000 per two-bedroom unit.
- Beloit City Center has many excellent sites for the development of rental and other housing types, many with river views, bike path connections, access to recreation spaces and easy access to arterial streets.

Baker Tilley concluded that the local economic and market conditions are not conducive to constructing multi-family housing in Beloit City Center. Key factors leading to this conclusion are demand for rental housing is low, the projected household growth in the greater Beloit area is slow and the employment market is soft. The biggest single factor however to overcome in the future are the low rental rates which significantly impact development costs leading to the potential for substandard building products which in the end do not fit with the goals for City Center.



In order for Beloit to realize the vision for City Center and see continued positive change there needs to be an alignment between the vision, community perceptions and aspirations and urban life style trends. This section of the *Life at*

the Center plan explores the alignment between current plans, community perceptions and the market trends impacting the Beloit region by identifying the challenges to be overcome and opportunities to pursue.

4.1 Interrelatedness of Plans and Perceptions

The 2005 vision plan for City Center set the agenda for the evolution of City Center over the last six years; and that agenda still remains relevant into the future. The companion City of Beloit, Downtown Beloit Association, Beloit College and the Vision Beloit Partner plans; plus the private development initiatives underway are intended to accomplish the overall vision for City Center. These plans are generally coordinated and express awareness of the interrelationships between land use patterns, circulation systems, public open space, livability and visitor attraction.

The objectives of the 2005 vision will continue to guide the development of City Center. Those objectives include:

- Community pride
- Continuous learning, innovation and creativity

- Strong economy and diversity of jobs
- Unique character
- Vibrant mix of activities
- Balanced transportation system
- Quality and accessible open spaces
- Range of housing options
- Compact and walkable
- Healthy and sustainable
- Clean and safe

The Greater Beloit Area survey has confirmed that the community has observed the renaissance occurring in City Center; and that the community is positive about the outcome. It is also clear from the survey and focus group conversations that the Beloit 2020 vision plan for City Center aligns with the aspirations of citizens. They like what is going on and welcome continued improvements.



“Beloit City Center will be the confluence of the marketplace, ideas, culture, and the exceptional”

Regarding the market trend for urban living, there is cause for optimism. Numerous urban lifestyle trends are creating opportunity for continued City Center success in coming years. Specific trends include:

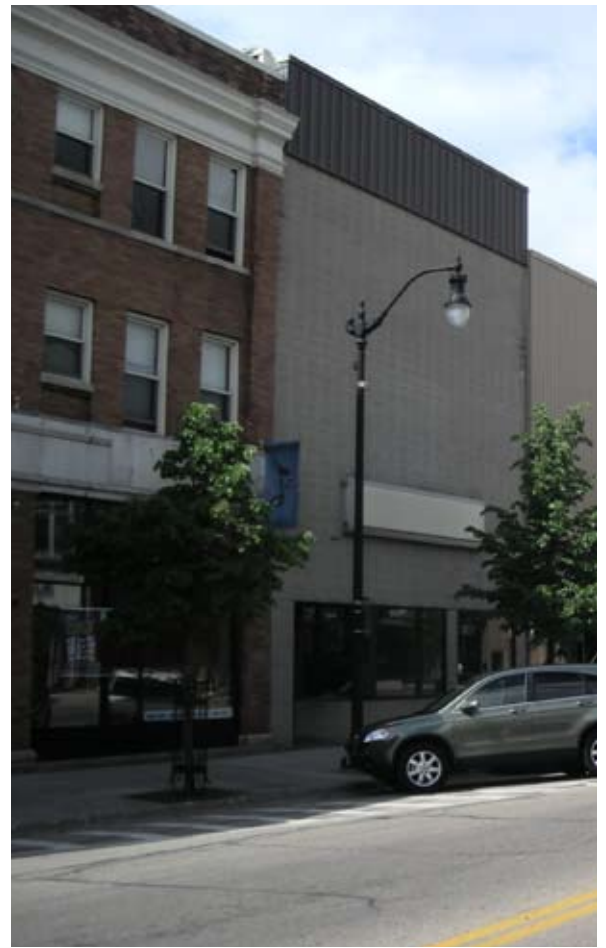
- Interest in supporting fresh, locally grown food and local businesses.
- Travel costs force people to consider close to home entertainment options.
- The new economy of 'information' and shifting job markets will necessitate the need for lifelong learning.
- The allure of urban living environments that offer the convenience of basic services, walkability and access to public places is growing among young professionals and retirees.
- An emerging 'creative class' (those workers devoted to ideas, technology and other creative content, now at 30% of the work force) is rapidly replacing workers in the labor and service classes. These young creatives have a tendency to seek a more urban life style in a walkable environment with a variety of transportation options, close to basic retail needs and recreation opportunities, public gathering spaces, and entertainment options.
- Young professionals can work anywhere they choose and are often choosing a location to live that has the amenities they desire, over a job.
- Retirees are relocating from the urban edges to urban centers that can provide them with a lower cost of living, a walkable environment, social interaction, learning opportunities, medical care and recreational and cultural experiences.
- Use of social networking communication tools – i.e. LinkedIn, FaceBook, Tweet and similar sites to access information and coordinate social activity has increased drastically.
- Biking in Wisconsin has grown to a \$1.4 billion dollar industry.

4.2 Challenges and Opportunities

The Greater Beloit Area survey findings, the focus group interview findings and discussions with City Center stakeholders confirm that some of City Center's past challenges still exist. In addition, new challenges have been identified as well as new opportunities discovered.

4.2.1 Challenges/Issues

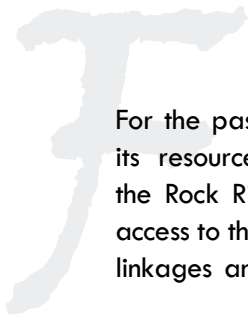
- The lack of a cohesive and identifiable brand for City Center
- The scale of City Center makes it physically difficult to connect the nine districts
- Finding private developers to initiate redevelopment projects in City Center
- A lack of understanding of the demand for various housing type options in City Center
- The negative perception of personal safety in Beloit held by those outside the city and by some city residents
- The lack of federal and state public funding resources to subsidize the higher cost of redevelopment in urban centers
- Vacant properties and storefronts that suggest a lack of vitality in City Center
- The need to attract more residents
- Getting people on the streets in the evenings
- Meeting resident and visitor expectations for unique retail shopping experiences
- A lack of major, high profile retail anchors to draw neighborhood residents, college students and visitors downtown
- Communicating with Greater Beloit area residents about events in City Center
- Mitigating the lingering negative reputation about Beloit in general and personal safety in City Center
- Making City Center more family friendly



4.2.2 Opportunities

- Build on survey results identifying market opportunities for more unique retail, entertainment and food businesses.
- Create more family friendly destinations, activities, entertainment and retail options.
- Encourage longer City Center visits by expanding on the popularity of the Saturday Farmers Market with other family or entertainment events.
- Partner with Beloit College to reinforce both the city's and the college's sustainability goals – college green streets, low maintenance landscaping along Riverside Drive, energy efficient building renovations and new construction.
- Build on the past success of the existing downtown home ownership and rental projects and build small-scale apartment rental projects.
- Work with property owners to strengthen City Center's river corridor identity with native landscape treatments along riverbanks and the steep slopes bordering Riverside Drive and Pleasant Street.
- Strengthen the perception of connection between the Beloit College campus and the Downtown with pedestrian links, wayfinding signage, lighting themes, and special 'gateways' to campus.
- Encourage and support the redevelopment of underutilized buildings and sites in City Center.
- Develop an information resource to include all things City Center – events, entertainment, dining, shops, services and housing.
- Work with the City and private property owners to explore options for continuing the West RiverWalk through the industrial properties on the west bank of the Rock River.
- Build on the presence of the new library, Beloit College and Memorial High School and the momentum of the Eclipse Center in attracting Cardinal Stritch University to establish City Center as a regional adult learning center.
- Provide weekend and special event trolley service to facilitate connections between the downtown and Riverside Park.
- Develop an art and international film movie house, building on the success of the Beloit International Film Festival and college interest in film.
- Strengthen the visual appearance of the city's public spaces along the entrance corridors leading to City Center.
- Promote City Center as the start of all biking and river adventure activity in the community and region.
- Introduce competitive youth sports into City Center to attract families and visitors.
- Reengage the leadership of the city of South Beloit in implementing the community's redevelopment and open space plans for the Rock River and Turtle Creek confluence area.
- Land bank available properties for future development.
- Provide Wi-Fi service.

In summary, the challenges and opportunities impacting the success of City Center cannot be addressed with public space improvements only. Beloit 2020 will need to achieve a higher level of engagement and plan support from its membership in order to achieve the goals of this plan.



For the past 20 years, Beloit 2020 has focused its resources on the physical improvement of the Rock River corridor including public spaces, access to the Rock River, enhancing transportation linkages and proposing aesthetic improvements.

Beloit 2020 has also provided support for both public and private redevelopment initiatives. Most importantly, Beloit 2020 has been the consistent voice of leadership for mobilizing public and private resources to advance City Center.

5.1 Recommended Strategies

Going forward, this plan recommends Beloit 2020 focus its attention on five key strategic initiatives – **Brand, Build, Visit, Communication and Connecting City Center** – which collectively are intended to make incremental progress on mitigating challenges and growing opportunities identified for City Center. Support for priority infrastructure and redevelopment projects will be ongoing and important; however new emphasis will be put on the planning and support needed to make the Live, Work, Learn and Visit experiences of *Life at the Center* a reality.

To engage Beloit 2020 in this shift of emphasis, it is the recommendation of this plan for Beloit 2020 to engage the expertise of its membership to serve on **strategy committees** that would be formed around each initiative. The purpose of these subcommittees is to develop a scope and an action plan for each initiative. A general description of each initiative is described below along with potential directions to be pursued.

5.1.1 Brand

The vision and reality of what has been achieved in City Center is a story that deserves to be told. With a brand, **and more importantly through the process of arriving at a brand**, City Center can organize, differentiate and focus its identity. Through branding the city can also begin closing the gap between reputation and experience.

Benefits of a brand can include:

- Greater strategic focus
- Unify approaches to marketing
- Establish key points of distinction in the marketplace
- Rally partners around a consistent message
- Capture the character and personality of a place

5.1.2 Build

Beloit 2020 has 20 years of successful experience in visioning, designing, seeking grants and applying political leverage to rebuild the public open space, amenities and infrastructure of City Center. Going forward, Beloit 2020 has a great base to build on. The new build projects will be primarily infill work and the redevelopment of underutilized property and buildings. The skills developed by Beloit 2020 are still applicable – vision, partnership building, grant chasing and political leverage. New skills could also be developed to advance redevelopment.

Those could include:

- Deal structuring
- Market analysis
- Catalytic project funding and leveraging investment

Near term priority ‘build’ projects that would benefit from Beloit 2020’s engagement include the following. **Exhibit 5** identifies the build projects

- 1 Wagner Building redevelopment to include storefronts and upper level housing
- 2 Adaptive re-use or redevelopment of the former Kerry Ingredients administrative offices and production facilities on Grand Avenue
- 3 Support for the continued redevelopment of the Iron Works site to accommodate more businesses and employment
- 4 A feasibility analysis for extending the west RiverWalk through the Iron Works site
- 5 Adaptive reuse of the Alliant Energy Power Plant site
- 6 Design studies for the enhancement of the pedestrian walks connecting Beloit College and the downtown
- 7 Implementation of the South Beloit “Confluence Park” Concept and bike path system as the missing link to connect Beloit’s bike paths with the northern Illinois regional system
- 8 Work with City Center partners to mitigate the perception of a threat to personal safety by dealing with the following– low level of night lighting, vacant store fronts, graffiti, and poorly maintained properties

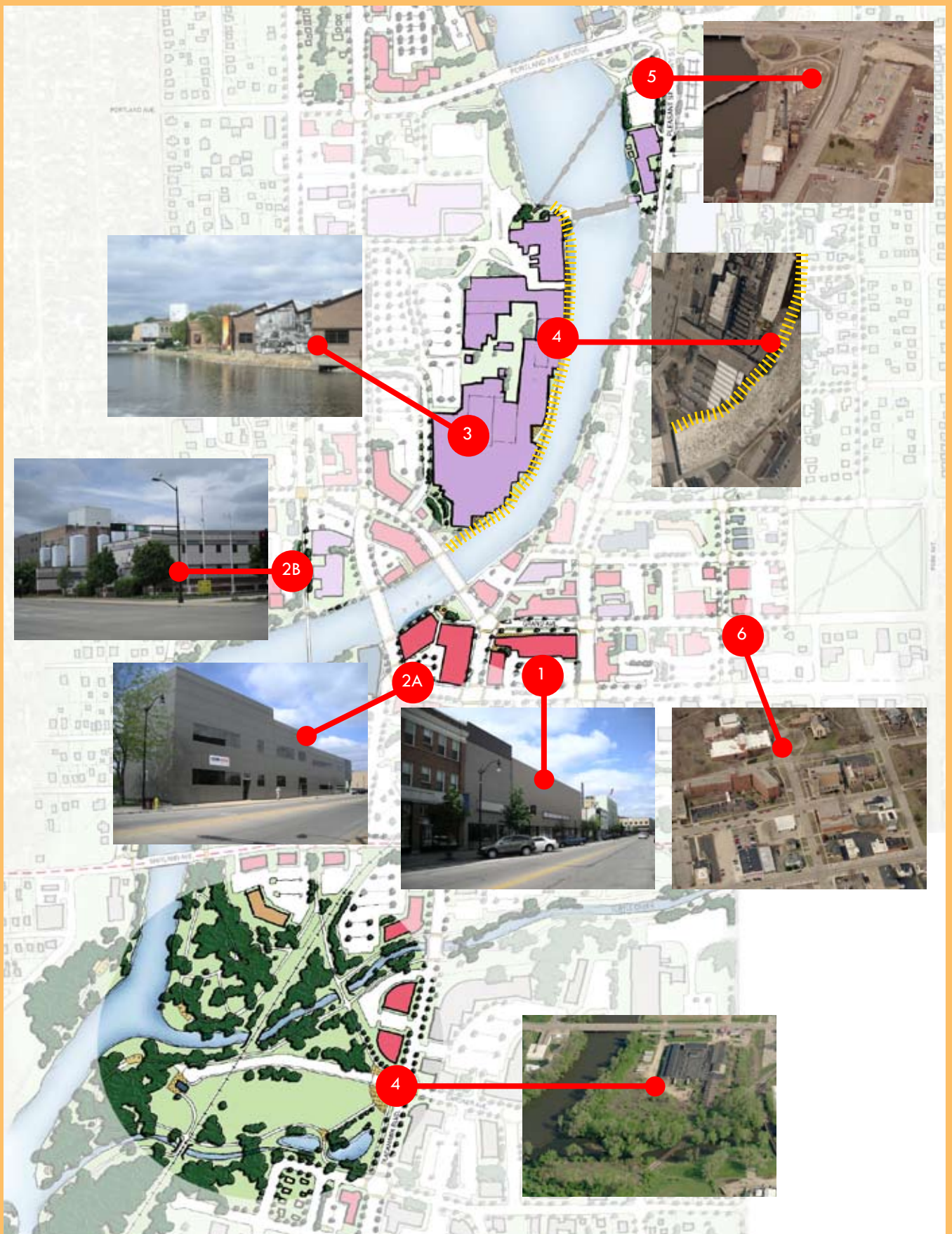


Exhibit 5 — Beloit build projects

5.1.3 Visit

Special event programming in City Center has been growing. The current events and programs are recognized for exceptional quality and diversity. Bringing visitors to Beloit has been key to changing perceptions of the community both externally and internally; and for building local pride. Continuing to offer such events is essential for distinguishing City Center. Examples of new avenues to consider for increasing visitation include:

- Review existing programs and continue to add new programs with the goal of extending visitor stays in City Center. For example, adding a family fair, a bike, run and paddle race, gospel music festival, theater in the park, music and art festivals, and movies in the park.

- Create weekend long adventures such as the murder mystery weekend in Bayfield, WI or the chocolate themed festival in Kohler, WI.
- Build on Beloit's extensive RiverFront bike system by adding tour loops into the countryside that start and end in City Center.
- Develop river adventures that make use of Beloit's Rock River and Turtle Creek.
- Revisit the Pageant Park concept



5.1.4 Communication

The Beloit 2020 employee survey and the focus group sessions revealed two important communication gaps impacting City Center visitation.

1. Finding out what events are going on in City Center

2. The lingering negative reputation of Beloit

Both of these issues are critical “first impressions” for the potential visitor and need to be addressed in a proactive manner using first class tools.

Information on City Center events is currently being handled with several websites, local papers, radio and television. Visit Beloit is experimenting with using some of the popular social media sites to inform and attract visitors. The employee survey indicated people use many different sources to learn about events, with word of mouth being the most popular and generating the most attendance. Published information was reported by focus group respondents as sometimes out-of-date or incomplete.

Resolution of the information gap lies in a comprehensive communication strategy that understands the demographic we are trying to attract to City Center and delivers the information they are seeking via the method they prefer. Strategy considerations should include:

- Understanding the demographics of those likely to be attracted to City Center
- Assessing the effectiveness of multiple agencies communicating information, multiple budgets and the effectiveness of the tools currently being used
- Consideration of assigning one responsible party for gathering and assembling all information
- Prioritizing tools for reaching the desired audiences

Countering the lingering negative reputation of Beloit requires a public relations approach that focuses on generating a positive first impression. The targeted audiences need to be residents of the Greater Beloit Area; and current and perspective employees. A first impression campaign should

focus on community celebrations, cultural activities, and other success affirming and quality-of-life amenities offered in City Center. The goal of the campaign is to convert those speaking negatively of Beloit and those curious from “nay-sayers” to believers by enjoying a positive experience.

5.1.5 Connecting City Center

City Center is located in two municipalities Beloit, Wisconsin and South Beloit, Illinois. These two components of the City Center need to become a well-connected place. The space is separated by the State Line and by Turtle Creek. The political and natural borders both need to be bridged with north-south connectors. These north-south connectors are; Park Ave, Prospect/Wheeler Ave, State St/Blackhawk Blvd, Rock River and Bluff St.

The commercial areas of South Beloit south along Park Ave to Gardner St and back on Blackhawk Boulevard form the southern gateway to City Center. This space is in need of a redevelopment plan. The Wheeler Ave Bridge is a potential bike and pedestrian bridge over Turtle Creek. The ability to have a real regional bike system connecting the Ice Age Trail to the Grand Illinois trail requires connection between Beloit and South Beloit. The confluence area of Turtle Creek and Rock River opens up a potentially great recreational area allowing for kayak and canoe connections on the Rock River and Turtle Creek. Long term, the banks of the Rock River in the City Center is a strategic link in the proposed Rock River Trail system. This proposed trail system begins in the Horicon Marsh to the north and terminates at the Mississippi River in Rock Island, Illinois.

This initiative focuses on engaging South Beloit to revisit its past plans, revise and update those plans and to provide specific assistance to get projects implemented.



- Encourage participation at City Center Coordinating Council meetings.
- Revisit past plans with community leaders and identify community priorities.
- Influence the revision of the Stateline Area Bike and Pedestrian System Plan to have City Center as the top priority.
- Research project funding sources and grant opportunities.
- Assist with securing grants.
- Work toward developing a visible project that has support on both sides of the Turtle Creek which connects significant assets and adds value to previous investments.

5.2 Partner Roles and Action Steps

5.2.1 Role of Beloit 2020 in Plan Implementation

The renaissance of City Center and Beloit’s Rock River corridor has occurred in great measure due to the leadership, tenacity and vision exhibited by Beloit 2020. Going forward, Beloit 2020 will retain that leadership role as well as accomplish the following:

- Craft the strategic direction of the Life at the Center initiative, **Exhibit 6**.
- Continually refresh the vision for City Center.
- Set the plan agenda and lobby for plan priorities.
- Continue to convene the City Center Coordinating Council at monthly meetings to identify new projects, coordinate project development, oversee design quality and strategies for new opportunities.
- Advocate for City Center priorities with stakeholders and political leaders in the community.
- Assist the city in pursuing grants.
- Provide seed money for catalytic projects.
- Engage the community in learning opportunities centered on community redevelopment themes and trends that Beloit could take advantage of.
- Provide periodic reports to the community on the leadership and investment made by Beloit 2020 in City Center.

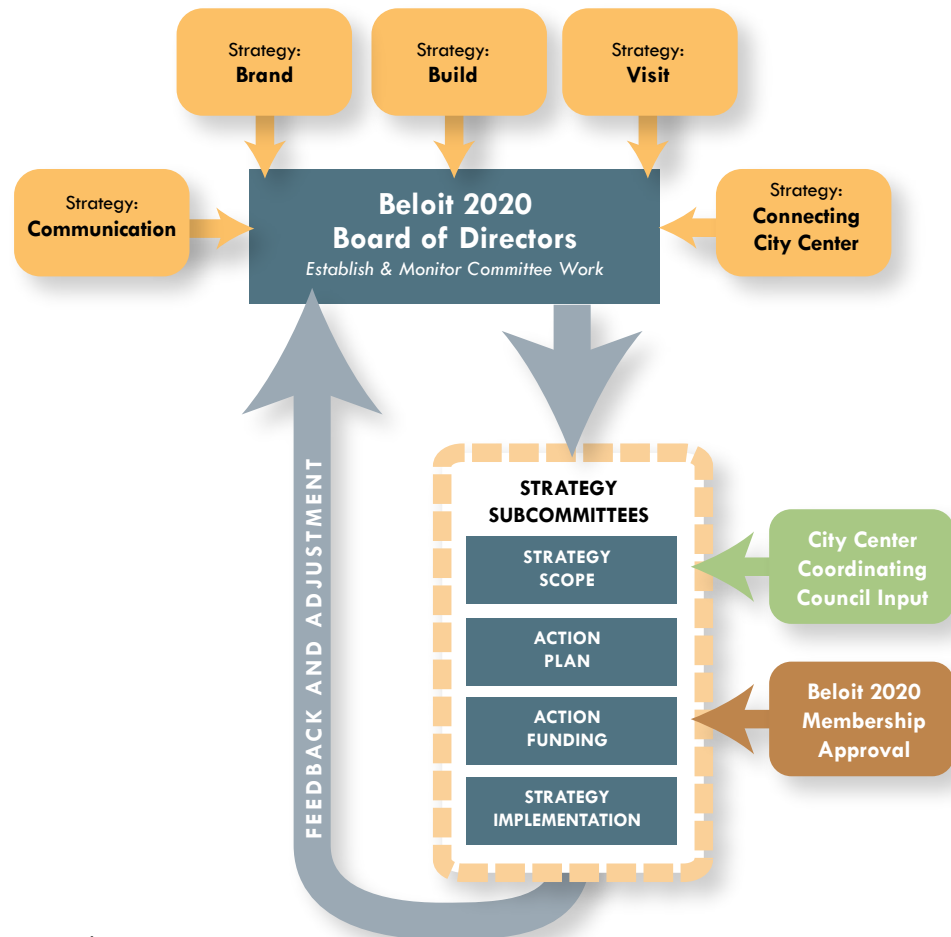


Exhibit 6 – Strategy Implementation Process

5.2.2 Role of Beloit 2020 Partners in Plan Implementation

The long term and continued success of Beloit's City Center and Rock River corridor plans has greatly benefited from the positive relationship Beloit 2020 has maintained with project partners. The roles of those partners in continuing to move the City Center vision forward relies on the unique strengths they can bring to implementing the vision.

- City Government – continue to prioritize City Center as a lead economic development project for staff, pursue project grants, provide technical expertise on infrastructure issues, engage city boards, commissions and the public in the review of proposed developments, work with Beloit 2020 in overseeing design quality
- Beloit College – continue to dissolve the physical and perceptual barriers between the college and City Center and to provide public access to cultural events that attract visitors
- Downtown Beloit Association – program events in the downtown that will draw visitors, lead efforts to attract retail businesses to City Center, maintain the aesthetic appeal of downtown
- Visit Beloit – program events in City Center, lead the effort to communicate with the community about City Center activities
- Greater Beloit Area Economic Development Corporation – promote and fund redevelopment in City Center
- School District of Beloit – provide a positive first impression of City Center for students, family members and visitors who visit the high school campus for events and programs; support students and community learning through its programs on campus and at the Eclipse Center.
- Hendricks Development Group – use its property resources to attract business that will support the vision for the downtown and RiverFront, provide public access to its river front edge as redevelopment occurs
- Friends of the RiverFront – plan and implement programs that attract visitors to the river front public spaces, maintain the aesthetic appeal of the river front park spaces

5.2.3 Action Timeline

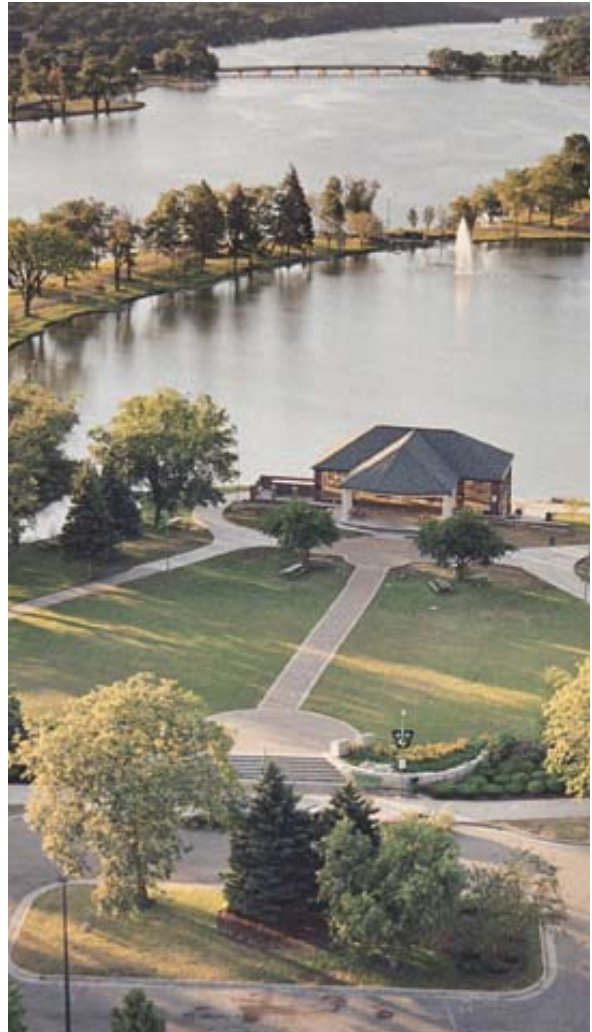
Following Beloit 2020 membership approval of this plan and recommended initiatives, a strategy committee will be formed for each of the identified initiatives. The goal of each committee will be to prepare a scope, goals and action plan for their initiative.

A preliminary schedule for committee activities is as follows:

- September 2010; membership for each committee is identified
- December 2010; each committee reports on initiative scope and goals
- March 2011; action plans for each initiative is presented
- June 2011; final approval and funding for each action plan element that is approved

5.2.4 Conclusion

The 2005 vision for City Center and its key objectives are being achieved, but as with all redevelopment, the work is a continuous cycle of advocating for change and leveraging opportunity. Beloit 2020 has been a catalyst for the renaissance of City Center and has emerged as the voice of leadership. By advocating for the heart of the community rather than abandoning it, and by animating its chief asset, the RiverFront, Beloit 2020 has elevated the image of the community and improved the ability of its member organization to attract quality employees to the Greater Beloit Area. This plan will be another incremental step in enhancing *Life at the Center*.





be in it.



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