



## CONNECTIONS : CITY CENTER

South Beloit, Illinois and Beloit, Wisconsin



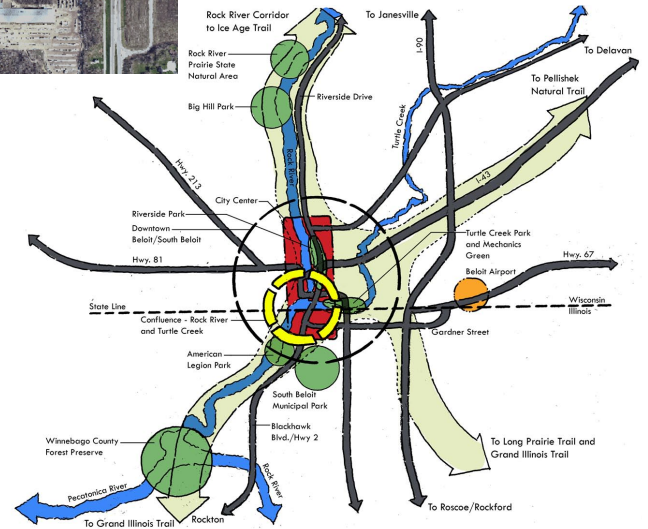
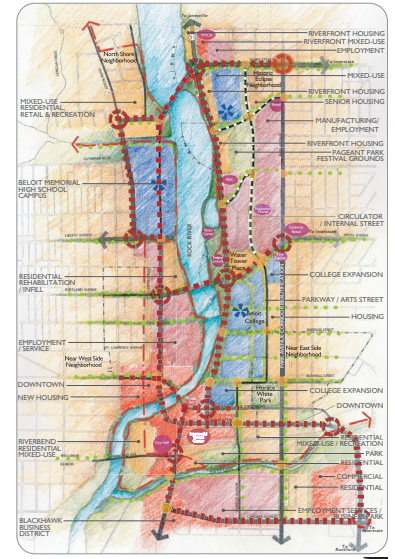


## CONNECTIONS: CITY CENTER | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Connections: City Center Plan (often referred to as “Connections” for short) provides a guide for the physical improvement and development of a critical, shared urban district with its origin near the confluence of the Rock River and Turtle Creek in South Beloit, Illinois (generally, the area within the yellow boundary in the image above). In undertaking this plan, the city of South Beloit, and its partner to the north, Beloit, Wisconsin confirmed that the confluence and the paths, nodes, edges, and districts within and around it are fundamental elements in communicating community identity for both communities (and to some degree for Wisconsin and Illinois). With this in mind, a multi-faceted approach to identifying potential public and private improvements was employed for this Plan.

The Connections document presents a revitalization strategy for the “Confluence Corridor” - the roughly 930 acre planning area detailed in this plan - with a focus on improving bike and pedestrian connections between the two communities and the region as a whole, identifying a preferred redevelopment pattern for key corridors in the planning area (Blackhawk Boulevard, Gardner Street, Highway 251/Dearborn Avenue, and Shirland Avenue), and enhancing community identity through streetscape treatment of shared community gateways, most notably Highway 251/Dearborn Avenue. The plan is based upon an opportunity analysis completed in the first half of 2011 which summarizes the project area’s existing assets, challenges, and opportunities.



The genesis of Connections can be found in the “Connecting City Center” initiative revealed in the 2009 “Life at the Center” plan led by Beloit 2020. Along with the Greater Beloit Economic Development Corporation (GBEDC) and both stateline cities, 2020 recognizes the key role South Beloit plays as a portal to both communities’ downtown and waterfront areas. In this spirit, parties mutually committed to continuing the momentum of “City Center” improvements into its southern reaches, as encompassed by this planning area. The result is a plan purposed to enhance connectivity, mobility, and pedestrian comfort, create interesting and accessible public spaces, re(build) upon a legacy of employment, improve the capacity and coherence of the planning area as a commercial destination, increase residential density, and illustrate community pride and identity.

## PROCESS

Connections involved a substantial amount of public involvement, and discussions continued even within the roughly six month period between completion of the opportunities analysis and kickoff of the redevelopment and bicycle master planning stages of the plan. The public engagement process for the plan generally included the following:

- Monthly updates to Beloit 2020's "Project Management Team"
- Several public workshops to identify assets, opportunities, challenges, and to respond to conceptual plan elements
- Periodic updates to the Greater Beloit Economic Development Committee's Business Development Committee
- Work sessions with the South Beloit Connections Steering Committee
- Public Open House events at the conclusion of each phase
- "Stakeholder Summit" meetings at the conclusion of each phase
- Plan adoption by common councils of both cities, GBEDC, and Beloit 2020

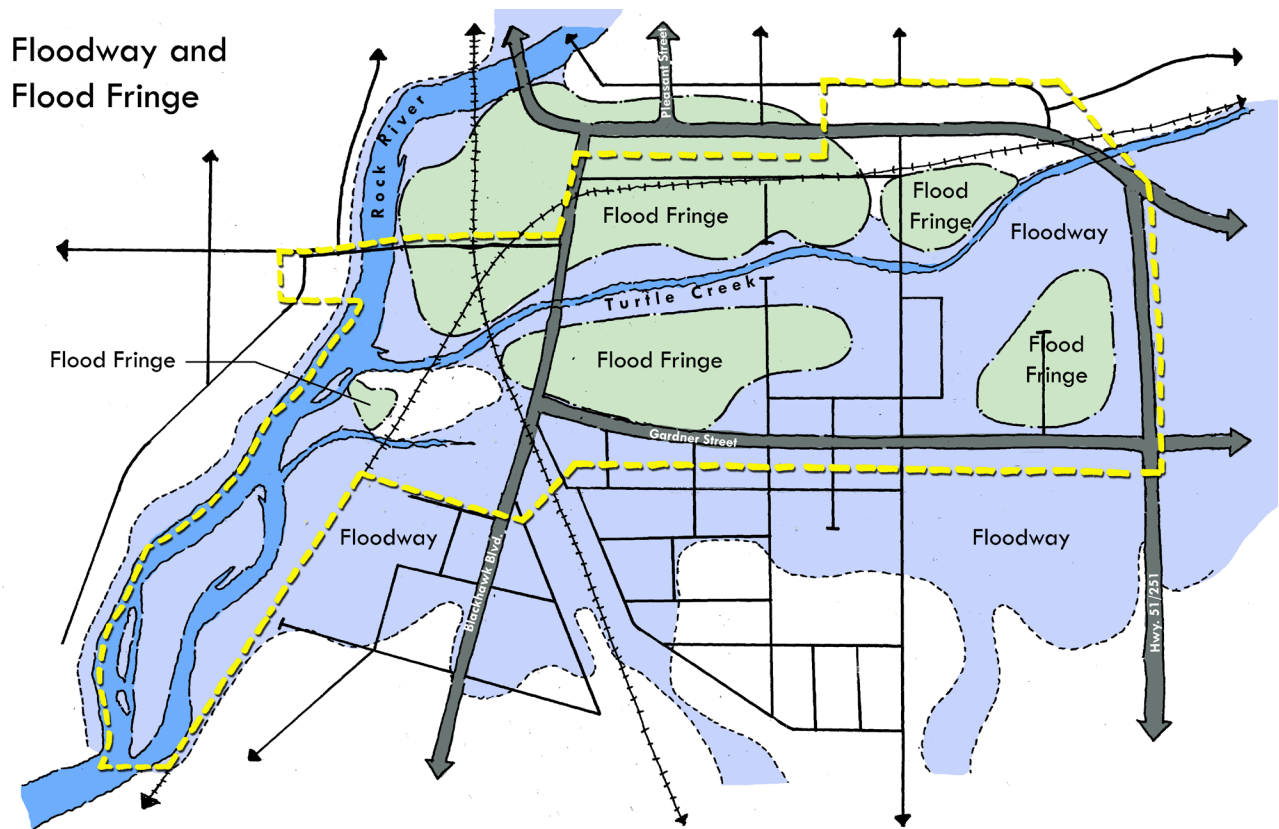


## KEY FINDINGS - ASSETS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CHALLENGES

Including waterways, the Connections planning area encompasses just under 1.5 square miles ( $\pm$  930 acres) in area, with about 2/3 of this area lying south of the state line in South Beloit. The most influential shaping characteristics identified in the area include:

- **Publicly Owned Lands** (Map on Page 12) - the most substantial land owner in the study area is the City of South Beloit. Over the course of time, the city has acquired a number of properties immediately adjacent to Turtle Creek, such that an almost contiguous block of land from the confluence of the creek with the Rock River to the Wheeler Avenue Bridge (about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of shoreline) is currently owned by the City of South Beloit. To a lesser degree but still vital, the City of Beloit is a key landholder north of the stateline, especially immediately east of the river and at strategically spaced park spaces along Turtle Creek.
- **Underutilized Lands** - The planning area is largely characterized by inefficient, obsolete, and incompatible land uses. As the area was developed rather haphazardly and before planning and development regulations were applicable, this has resulted in a disjointed and declining development landscape.
- **Depressed Aesthetics** - Aesthetically, the planning area is largely uninviting and uninspiring, and lacks a distinctive character and sense of identity. This is true of both private development and the public realm (streetscapes), and further contributes to the visual decline of the area.
- **FEMA Flood Hazard Areas** (map on next page) - Essentially the entire study area is identified on FEMA's Flood Hazard Maps. This is particularly true south of the state line, where over 90% of the properties in the planning area are so impacted. It can be assured that the prevalence of areas defined as floodway will require additional permitting and other resources for future development and redevelopment and, in many cases, may hinder future development and redevelopment altogether.





- **Major Transportation Corridors** - The transportation network within the study area includes major regional highways such as Blackhawk Boulevard/IL-2/IL-75 (State Street in Beloit), Dearborn Avenue/USH 51/IL-251 (Dearborn Street in Beloit), and Gardner Street/IL-75. Additionally, the Iowa, Chicago, and Eastern Railroad traverses the heart of the study area, providing freight rail access to the economies of Rockford, Chicago, Janesville, Madison, Milwaukee, and points in between (and beyond).
- **Missing Link** - Although major regional on- and off-road bicycling networks (over 20 miles each in Wisconsin and Illinois) are found immediately north and south of the planning area, there are no well-designated routes or paths connecting

the two regional networks. Thus, the Connections planning area represents a key “missing link” in this regional amenity.

- **Native American Heritage** - The Connections planning area has a unique cultural legacy that contributes to its value as a “place” in South Beloit and Beloit. Chief Black Hawk was sheltered by the Ho-Chunk during the Black Hawk War in 1832 at “Turtle Village,” which is believed to have been located on the east side of the river at or near its confluence with Turtle Creek. History shows that Turtle Village was a thriving Native American community, and that the confluence has served as a unique and vital destination for generations.

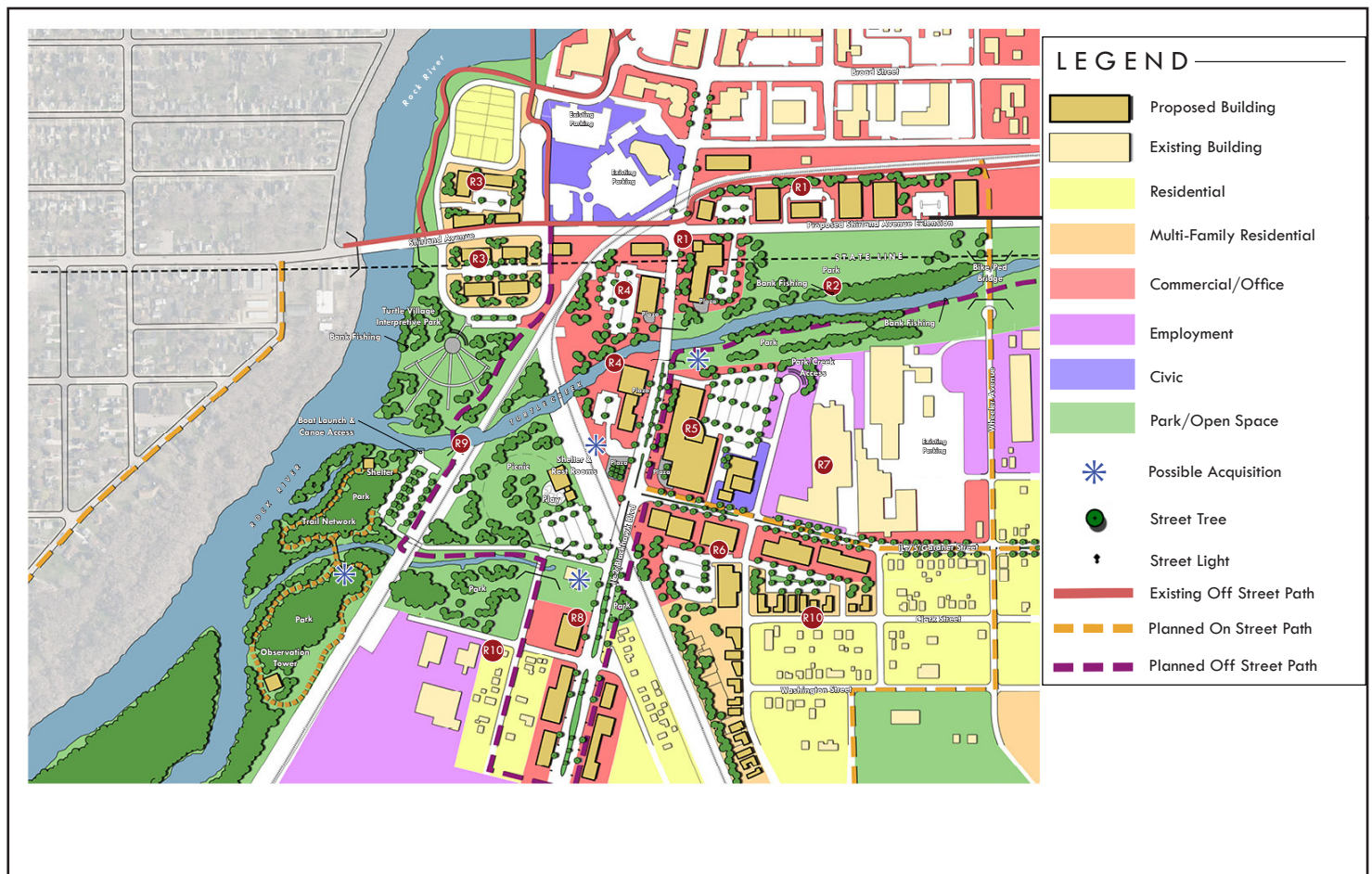
## RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Connections were developed with extensive stakeholder input and guidance, and focus on transforming the “Confluence Corridor” into a more vibrant, accessible, active, and inviting community destination. As envisioned by the public and the planning partners, the underlying framework for the recommendations is to reflect a strong commitment to preserving natural areas and open space and maximize access to and linkage of development areas. This framework served as the jumping off point for the development of specific streetscape, transportation, and land use recommendations, introduced in this section and discussed in detail on pages 18 through 29.

*Redevelopment Recommendations (Exhibit 4.1; Caption Below, page 23)*

- R1: Shirland Avenue Extended*
- R2: Stateline Restoration Prairie*
- R3: West End Residential*
- R4: North Blackhawk Boulevard Redevelopment-*
- R5: “Primecast” Redevelopment*
- R6: Gardner Street Revitalization and Infill*
- R7: Legacy Employers*
- R8: South Blackhawk Boulevard Redevelopment*
- R9: Confluence Park*
- R10: Neighborhood Preservation and Infill*

## REDEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS





*Streetscape and Transportation Recommendations  
(Caption Below, Exhibit 4.3 - page 27)*

The plan recommends three distinct streetscape zones for the Confluence Corridor, summarized below:

- *Town Center Streetscape* - most intensive, “urban” streetscape treatment; pedestrian friendly character; core planning area
- *Vehicular Transition Streetscape* - unifying streetscape treatment for gateways and segments that transition from highway speeds to neighborhood/commercial areas
- *Urban Highway Streetscape* - enhanced lighting, median treatments, and signage for main highways leading into Confluence Corridor (IL-251 and IL-75)

*T1: Enhance Major Intersections*

*T2: Expand Pedestrian Zone*

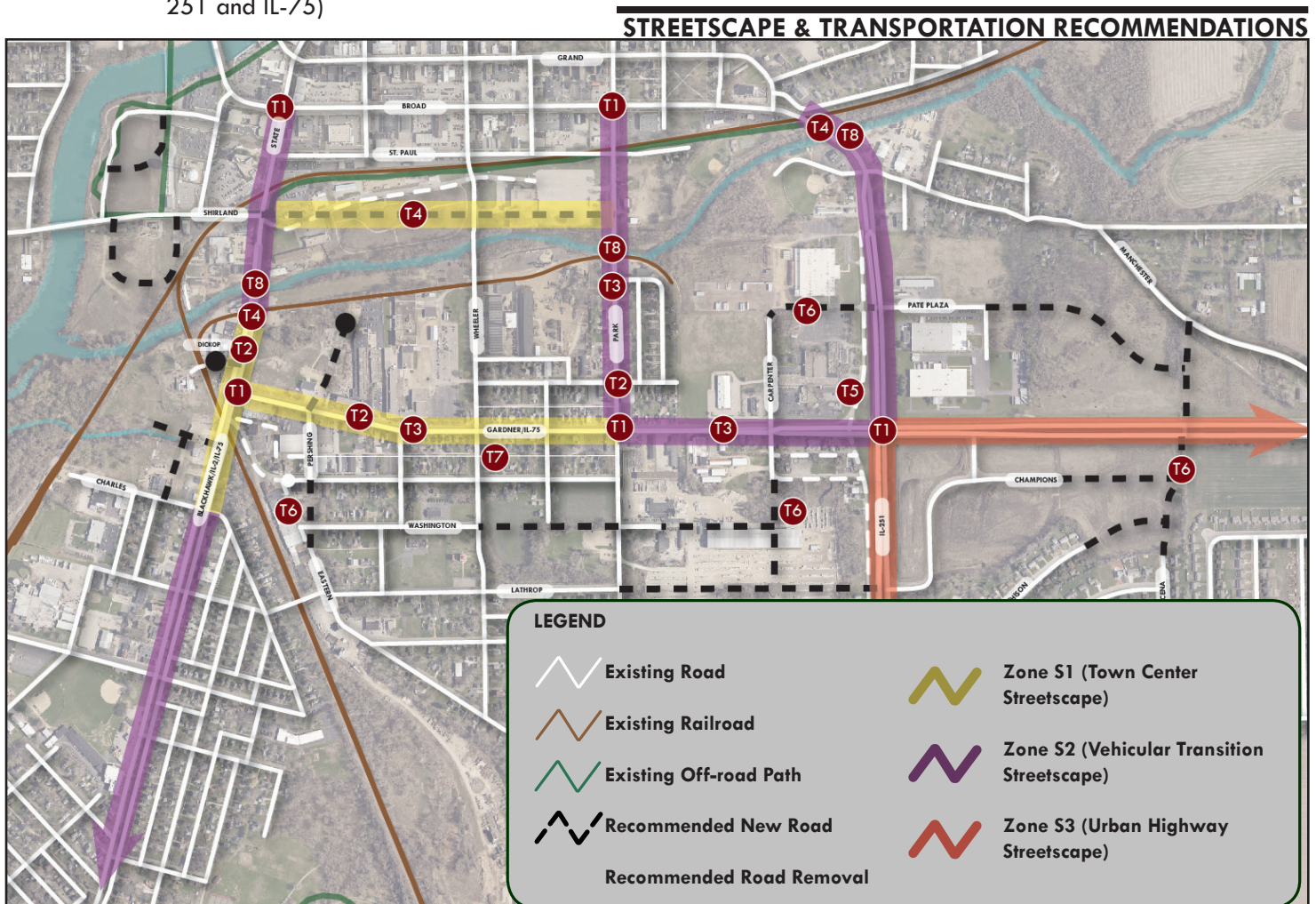
*T3: Road Diet*

*T4: Mid-Block Crossings*

*T5 & T6: Phase Out Frontage Roads/Strengthen Grid and Improve Circulation*

*T7: Alleys as Assets*

*T8: Bridge Zone*



## IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

This plan presents a comprehensive, long-term set of interrelated recommendations aimed at creating a pedestrian-friendly district that strengthens surrounding residential neighborhoods and complements downtown Beloit. These recommendations should serve as a guide for future decision making by both cities (Beloit and South Beloit) as they consider public improvements, land use decisions (both private and public), and

transportation within and around the immediate planning area. Generally, these recommendations will be implemented incrementally over the course of several years or even decades. With that being said, the table below (further discussion of these items is found beginning on page II:32) introduces a number of critical implementation steps that should be undertaken in the near term following plan adoption in order to set the stage for the successful redevelopment and revitalization as envisioned in this plan.

TIMING	IMPLEMENTATION ACTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	COST	NOTES
<i>Immediate/ Ongoing</i>	<i>Update Capital Improvements Plans</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of South Beloit</li> <li>• City of Beloit</li> </ul>	\$	Incorporate plan recommendations into local CIPs
<i>Immediate/ Ongoing</i>	<i>Continue Brownfield Remediation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of South Beloit</li> </ul>	\$\$\$	EPA lists three sites on Federal brownfields list
<i>Immediate/ Ongoing</i>	<i>Commit to Code Enforcement</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of South Beloit</li> </ul>	\$ - \$\$	Dedicate staff resources; identify target enforcement areas
<i>Early 2013</i>	<i>Develop Design Guidelines</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of South Beloit</li> <li>• City of Beloit</li> <li>• Consultant</li> </ul>	\$\$	Establish consistent standards for site design, building design, stormwater management, public space, and more
<i>Early 2013</i>	<i>Formalize Development Review Process</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of South Beloit</li> </ul>	\$	Current review process unclear, potentially ineffective
<i>Early 2013</i>	<i>Address/Analyze Floodplain Challenges</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of South Beloit</li> <li>• City of Beloit</li> <li>• Consultant</li> </ul>	\$\$\$	Consider regional stormwater management; South Beloit Comp Plan to include study
<i>Mid- to Late- 2013</i>	<i>Create Tax Increment Financing District</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of South Beloit</li> <li>• Consultant</li> <li>• GBEDC (as liaison)</li> </ul>	\$\$ - \$\$\$	Create a TIF district in accordance with Illinois Statutes (65 ILCS 110)
<i>Early 2014</i>	<i>Revise zoning ordinance &amp; map for consistency w/ Plan</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of South Beloit</li> <li>• City of Beloit</li> <li>• Consultant</li> </ul>	\$ - \$\$	Proposed development would not be allowed under existing zoning
<i>As possible</i>	<i>Strategic Property Acquisition</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of South Beloit</li> </ul>	\$\$\$	See Exhibit 4.4, page II:27; potential to leverage IDNR's OSLAD program for parkland acquisition

**KEY:** \$ = Minimal or low (\$10,000 or less); \$\$ = moderate cost (\$10,000 to \$50,000); \$\$\$ = high cost (\$50,000 or more)



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## Acknowledgments:

City of South Beloit Connections Plan Steering Committee

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John LaMendola	Commissioner of Public Properties
Tom Fitzgerald	City of South Beloit Resident
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Beloit 2020

Greater Beloit Economic Development Corporation

Stateline Area Transportation Study

City of Beloit Common Council

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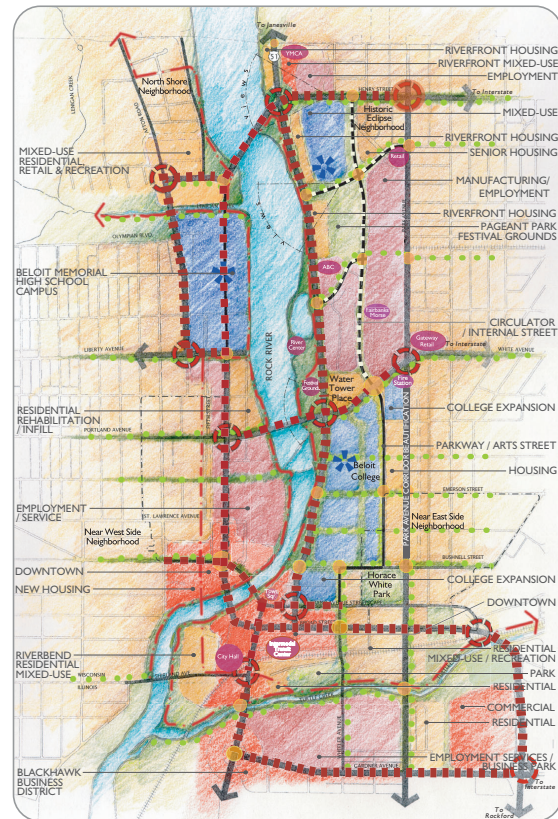


## CONNECTIONS: CITY CENTER | INTRODUCTION .....

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

The people of Beloit and South Beloit share a unique and distinctive market and natural resource in the Rock River and Turtle Creek corridors. While the Illinois-Wisconsin state line separates the two communities politically, their shared water corridors, transportation network and economies in many ways creates one community with a common interest. Through the leadership of Beloit 2020 and its predecessor Beloit 2000, the two communities have been engaged in rebuilding their respective city centers around their waterfronts for 20-plus years. In 2005 both city councils adopted the 2020 Vision for City Center Plan which established goals and principles for the 9 planning districts identified for both communities as “City Center”. In 2006 the Rock River Parkway Master Plan, developed by Beloit 2020, illustrated development opportunities for both communities along the Rock River and in the Turtle Creek confluence area. The recently adopted Life At The Center plan proposes five strategic initiatives aimed at increasing living, working, learning and visiting opportunities in City Center, which includes South Beloit’s City Center and the confluence area of Turtle Creek and the Rock River.

The specific initiative targeted on South Beloit and titled “Connecting City Center” recognizes the key role South Beloit plays as a portal to both communities’ downtown and waterfront areas. The confluence area of Turtle Creek and the Rock River is also the missing link for connecting Beloit’s bike system with the Illinois and Winnebago County bike systems south of South Beloit as well as the connection Illinois riders need to enter the Beloit, Rock County and State of Wisconsin bike trails north of Beloit. The study area’s eastern segment, although just a mile from the confluence area, is characteristically quite different and offers additional opportunities for redevelopment, improved property access and enhanced open space. Among other things, this area



includes larger blocks of land with redevelopment potential such as the former Cub Foods site, existing but arguably underutilized assets such as Turtle Creek Park, and recent examples of redevelopment such as the Walgreens store on Broad Street and Park Avenue in Beloit. Altogether, the study area has historically been only superficially studied and planned for. This study looks to change that by specifically reaching out to both public and private interests on both sides of the border and establishing a vision, goals, and measurable desired outcomes for the district.

In 2012, both cities partnered with Beloit 2020 and the Greater Beloit Economic Development Corporation (GBEDC) to prepare a focused redevelopment strategy for a roughly 925 acre ( $\pm 1.5$  square mile) planning area with its origin near the confluence of the Rock River and Turtle Creek and running eastward along both sides of the Illinois/Wisconsin State Line to Dearborn Avenue/Illinois State Highway 251. The partners

worked to identify recommended improvements in land use, transportation connectivity (for all modes) and community identity and streetscaping for the primary gateway corridors found within the planning area, especially Dearborn Avenue/IL-251, Gardner Street/IL-75, and Blackhawk Boulevard/IL-2/IL-75. Realizing that these corridors and the lands surrounding them are fundamental elements in communicating community identity for both Beloit and South Beloit (and to some degree for Wisconsin and Illinois), a multi-faceted approach to identifying potential public and private improvements was employed for the Plan.

The Connections Plan builds upon an opportunity analysis (Appendix A) completed in the first half of 2011 by the project partners which summarized the project area's existing assets, challenges, and opportunities. Through the course of completing the opportunity analysis, the project partners engaged local stakeholders in identifying a preferred, high level conceptual approach to redevelopment for the area. The results of the analysis and public involvement activities showed that this plan should stress preserving open space, improving bike and pedestrian connectivity, and enhancing the sense of place one encounters upon arrival into and passage through the planning area with visible and accessible public spaces, coordinated and improved streetscape treatments, enhanced urban design and a more cohesive land use fabric.

## PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES OF THE PLAN

From the outset of the planning process, the project partners identified three primary, interrelated purposes for undertaking a more detailed analysis than was completed during the opportunity analysis phase. These purposes were identified as:

1. Complete a South Beloit Bike Path Plan and identify a preferred alternative for the

2012 Cycle of the Illinois Transportation Enhancements Program (ITEP) offered by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT).

2. Prepare a Redevelopment Plan Concept for the "Heart of the Confluence" at and around the Blackhawk Boulevard/Gardner Street intersection.
3. Define a streetscape approach for the intersection and immediate approaches of the intersection of Gardner Street and Dearborn Avenue (IL-251).

With an understanding of project purpose, the project partners identified several principles to guide the development of the Confluence Corridor Plan. These principles are summarized below:

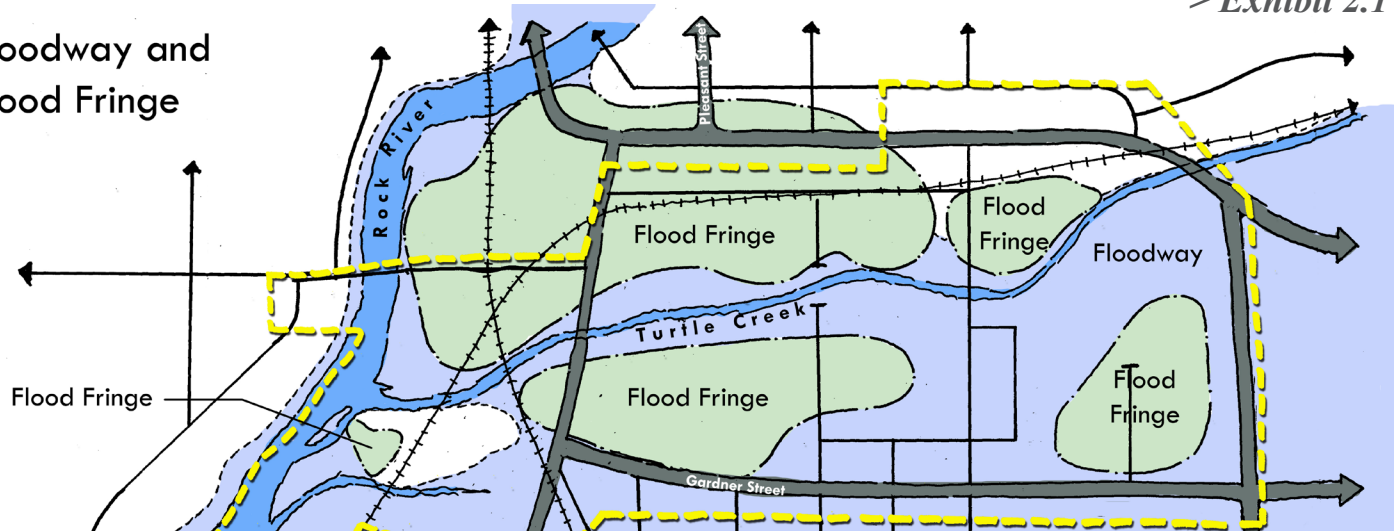
- Enhance connectivity and mobility
- Enhance pedestrian comfort
- Enclose street corridors
- Create interesting and accessible public spaces
- Re(build) upon a legacy of employment within the planning area
- Improve the capacity and coherence of the planning area as a commercial destination
- Increase residential density
- Illustrate community pride and identity
- Exemplify the area's position as a district of confluence: the confluence of nature and city, the confluence of two communities with a shared vision, two states with mutual prospects for prosperity, and the confluence of community living, working, learning, creating, and playing.



## SITE ANALYSIS

> Exhibit 2.1

### Floodway and Flood Fringe



The Connections planning area, with its focus spreading eastward from the confluence of the Rock River and Turtle Creek, has served as a center of inhabitation and activity for as long as humans have occupied the region. The planning area is concurrent with - or at least proximate to - some of the most historically significant sites in the stateline community, including the historic Native American settlement of "Turtle Village", the site of pioneer Joseph Thiebault's (the Beloit area's first white settler) cabin, the Bushnell-Wheeler House (an 1850 Italianate now housing the South Beloit Historical Society), and the Wheeler Avenue Bridge (a 140' span through truss bridge constructed in 1899). The planning area's legacy in the 20th Century can be recognized in the dynamic range of storefronts, residences, industries, public open spaces, and transportation networks that define it.

Although it is under 1.5 square miles in total area, the Connections planning area demonstrates an active "city center" character within - and just beyond - the project limits. Especially in the areas adjacent to Turtle Creek and its paralleling railroad tracks (both north and south of the creek), the planning area has a very labor-oriented identity, as a number of industrial sites and modest working class neighborhoods remain. That said, a shifting economy since the early- to mid-20th century has eroded the area's strong position as

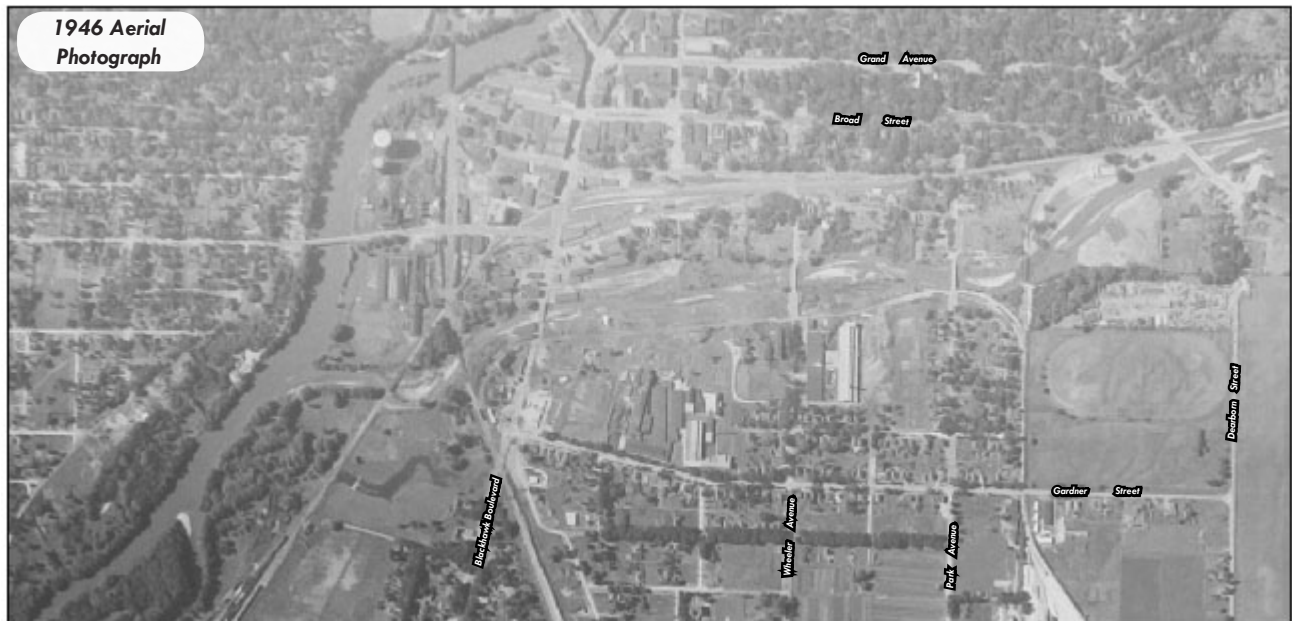
a center of employment, and though some industrial pockets or shells remain, they no longer provide the depth of employment opportunity one can imagine they once did.

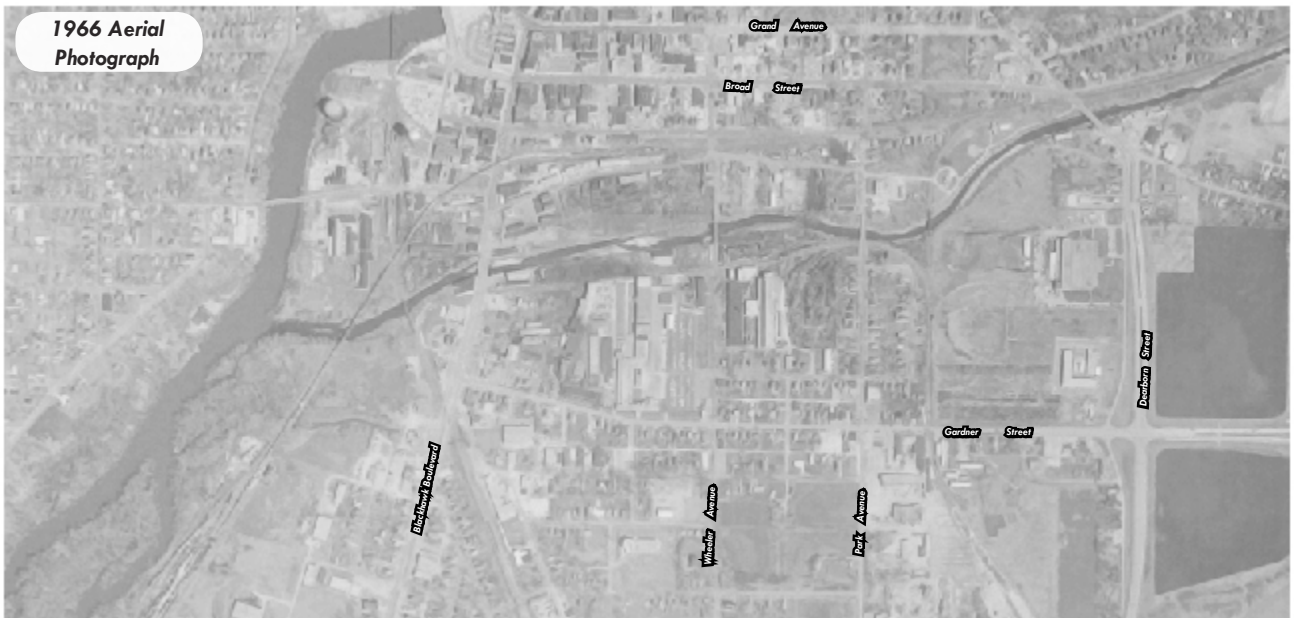
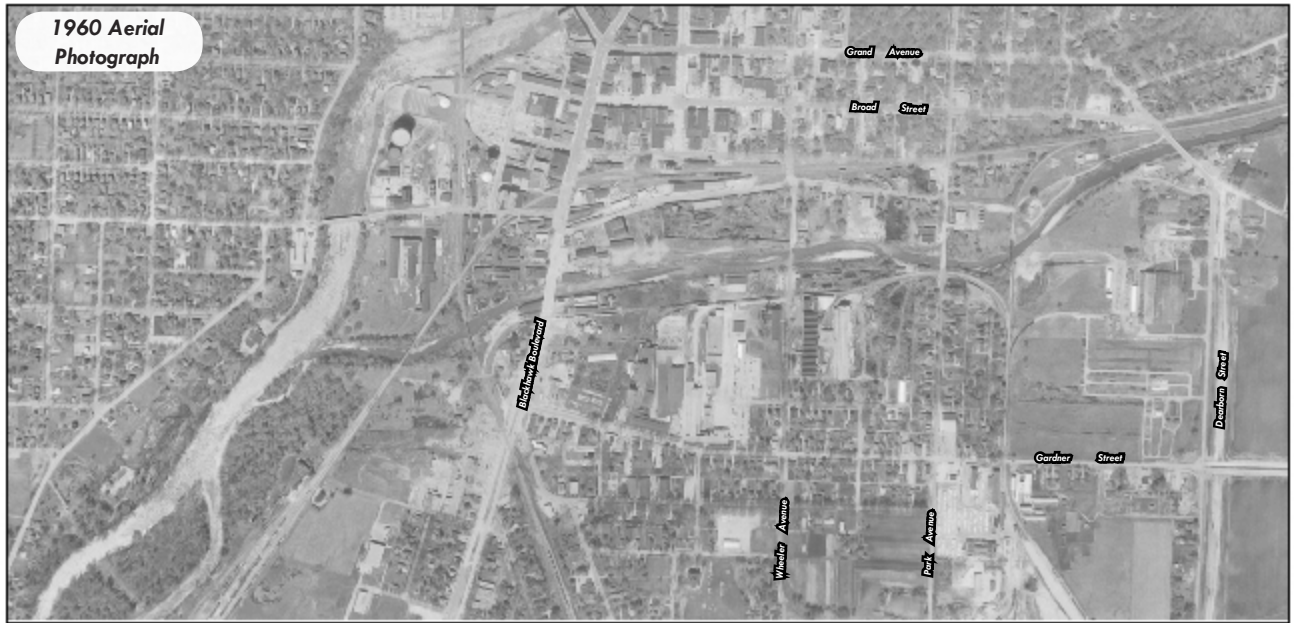
The most striking and constant characteristics of the Confluence Corridor planning area throughout its history are its surface water resources, namely the Rock River, Turtle Creek, and associated floodplains, wetlands, and tributaries. While these resources enrich the planning area with opportunities to experience nature, wildlife, recreation, industry and more, they have wielded substantial destructive power in the form of severe flooding events throughout the planning area's developed urban history. Arguably, the historical threat of flooding within the Connections planning area is the single most impactful shaping factor in its future. Flood hazard areas are illustrated in Exhibit 2.1, above, illustrating the reach of FEMA flood hazard areas into the Confluence Corridor (as an example, just over 80% of the South Beloit properties in the study area at least touch the Floodway).

Appendix A - I of this plan, the "Opportunities Analysis", provides substantial detail about existing conditions in the planning area. Those details provide critical subtext to the plan presented in these pages, and should be referenced to supplement the imagery presented in this section of the Confluence Corridor Plan.

## HISTORICAL IMAGES (present day road names superimposed for reference)

As the images depict, substantial land development and transportation expansion occurred in the 25-year period following the second World War, but the core infrastructure and layout of the area has been well established for decades.





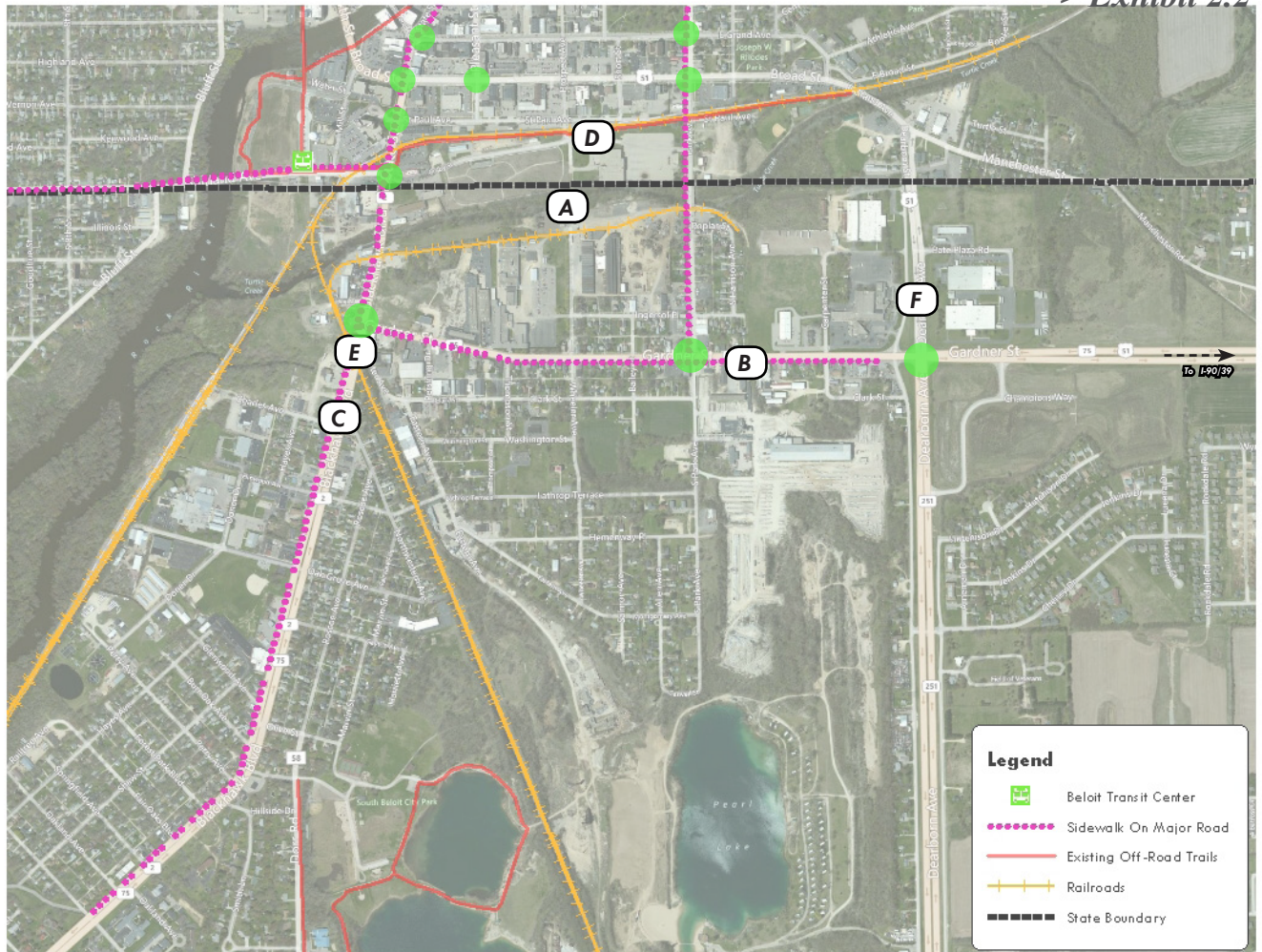






## EXISTING TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

> *Exhibit 2.2*



The Wheeler Avenue Bridge (below) crosses Turtle Creek just south of the state line and provides a potential bike/ped connection.



Gardner Street just east of the Park Avenue intersection (below) is representative of the auto-oriented roadways in the area.





The Confluence Corridor planning area is well-connected by roadways and freight rail, with several state highways (IL-75, IL-2, IL-251, WI-213, US-51) passing through the area and an interstate highway (I-90/39) directly accessible just over a mile east of the area. Although most roads within the planning area are fitted with sidewalks, the area is predominantly auto-oriented. That being said, a

recently completed (2011) extension of the City of Beloit's extensive trail network runs throughout the planning area's northern portion and terminates at Turtle Creek Park at the planning area's eastern edge. This route provides the opportunity for several critical connection points for planned bicycle and pedestrian improvements south of the state line.



**Blackhawk Boulevard (above) is a key gateway corridor lined with charming landscaped medians south of its intersection with the railroad.**

**A rather confounding segment of Blackhawk Boulevard (below) lies between the state line and South Beloit City Hall, with one creek crossing, two rail crossings and a "T" intersection with Gardner Street populating this roughly 1/4 mile segment.**



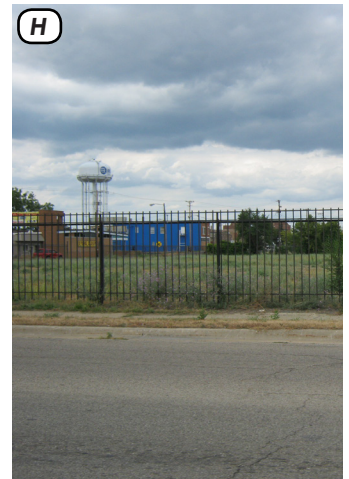
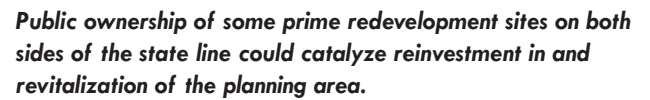
**The Turtle Creek Path (above) was completed by the City of Beloit in 2011 and will connect to proposed South Beloit systems at Wheeler Avenue and Dearborn Avenue.**

**At the eastern end of the planning area, IL-251 (below) and IL-75 are wide divided highways which provide little sense of distinction or arrival as one enters the planning area and prepares to enter City Center.**





### > *Exhibit 2.3*





The planning area exhibits a bit of a “hodgepodge” of uses that - if more comprehensively considered and coordinated - could work together as part of a vibrant, functional urban district. Land use in the eastern portion of the area is especially auto-oriented (service stations, road motels, large parking areas), and as one moves westward an arguably aging “spot-use” development pattern evolves in

which residences, industries, and commercial uses are interspersed throughout. Part I of this plan provides extensive detail about the range of existing land uses in the planning area.



*Illustrating the legacy of industry and employment in the planning area, fixtures like Behr Iron & Metal (above), Gardner Machine, Winnebago Foundry, and more have significant aesthetic and development impacts.*

*Highway- and auto-oriented properties and uses are one’s first impression upon entry into the eastern portion of the planning area from the south (IL-251) or east (I-90/39)*



*The terminal vista of Gardner Street (above) provides an image of the lack of land use cohesion present in the nature of development mixed throughout the planning area.*

*Arguably outmoded uses and properties (such as the former Cub Foods site on Park Avenue, below) are interspersed throughout the planning area, in some cases resulting in vacancy, deterioration, and blight.*



## Public Involvement Process .....

### OVERVIEW OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

The Connections Plan was developed in consultation with a dynamic group of stakeholders, including representatives from the South Beloit City Council, Greater Beloit Economic Development Corporation, Beloit 2020, Downtown Beloit Association and the Beloit City Council (collectively, the City Center Collaboration Council). The plan is effectively a continuation of the ongoing “City Center” initiative focused on maintaining and continually improving the viability and vitality of Beloit’s (and South Beloit’s) historic core. Embracing and embodying the spirit of “Connections” between the two stateline communities, these groups and the general public helped to identify and articulate the greater community’s vision for the enhancement and revitalization of this shared near-downtown district. The following were key components of the Connections planning process:

#### Public Project Kick-Off Meeting

On January 18, 2011, the SAA team conducted a public input session aimed at assessing the public’s perceived opportunities and desires for the Connections Corridor. The roughly 30 attendees

at this meeting were divided into groups of 8 to 10, with each planner asking his group a series of questions designed to gauge individuals’ and groups’ impressions, attitudes, and aspirations about the Connections Corridor. The questions and session results/summary are attached as Appendix B) to this report.

#### Community Design Workshop

On February 15, 2011, the SAA team conducted a highly interactive public workshop focusing on general physical and urban design concepts and ideas for the Connections Corridor. At this workshop, attendees again were separated into groups of 7-10 to participate in several activities. First, participants were asked to create a “pie chart” to signify how land use in the study area should be divided between various land use types, such as open space, residential, industrial, etc. The second activity provided participants with the opportunity to discuss the merits and shortcomings of two alternative development concepts: one which was decidedly open-space themed and another which focused more heavily on redevelopment. The final activity was an image preference survey, which involved

participants selecting preferred images from several dozen images in the general categories of “Development”, “Open Space”, and “Identity”. Materials and results for the community design workshop are included as appendices to this report.

#### Stakeholder Interviews

Between February and April 2011, SAA interviewed community stakeholders, business and property owners, and public officials to gain a better understanding of the development visions and constraints for the Connections Corridor.





Seventeen interviews in all were conducted, and although the results of these discussions will be held in confidence, the input received has been incorporated into the opportunity analysis and plan.

### **Development of Project Goals and Plan Principles**

The overarching objective of this project is to engage the citizens, policy makers, and business and property owners in South Beloit and Beloit in the critical and forward thinking planning process for the Connections Corridor. This study introduced important considerations in the study area such as current and future redevelopment opportunities that can improve tax base, potential bike and pedestrian connections, opportunities for open space preservation, and possible development and aesthetic enhancements of the district's primary roadway corridors. Using the project goals outlined below as a framework, these efforts can be assured to align with the vision for the Connections Corridor that materialized through this phase of the project.

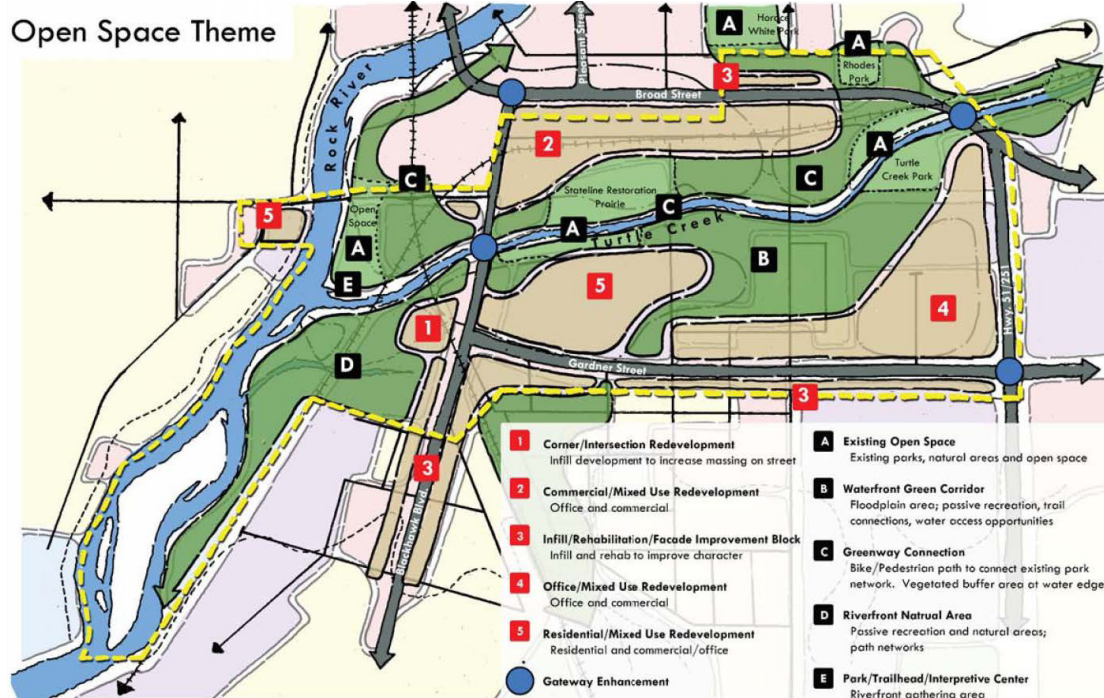
- **Project Goal #1:** Build a partnership between Beloit, South Beloit, and Beloit 2020.
- **Project Goal #2:** Engage citizens, public officials, and business and property owners in both Beloit and South Beloit in increasing their understanding of the opportunities and challenges for planned redevelopment, infrastructure investment, and open space enhancements in the study area.
- **Project Goal #3:** Identify generally preferred land use patterns for the study area.
- **Project Goal #4:** Identify areas of opportunity within the study area.



### **Alternatives Assessment Workshop**

On February 15, 2012, over twenty-five stateline officials and residents came together in the library at South Beloit High School to initiate the “action” phase of the Connections Plan. At this meeting, participants divided into two smaller groups to respond to conceptual land use patterns and characteristics (Exhibit 3.2, the preferred concept, is depicted on page 17) based upon the “Open Space Theme” that was selected as the preferred redevelopment approach in the 2011 Phase of Connections (depicted in Exhibit 3.1 on page 16). Additionally, the smaller groups were asked to discuss the pros and cons of several bicycle connection options and to develop consensus around a preferred option, and to identify characteristics of streetscape treatments that were preferred for the planning area's key corridors. In all, four themed “concepts” maps were presented to be discussed in small-group roundtable settings. The themes presented are discussed on page 16:

> Exhibit 3.1



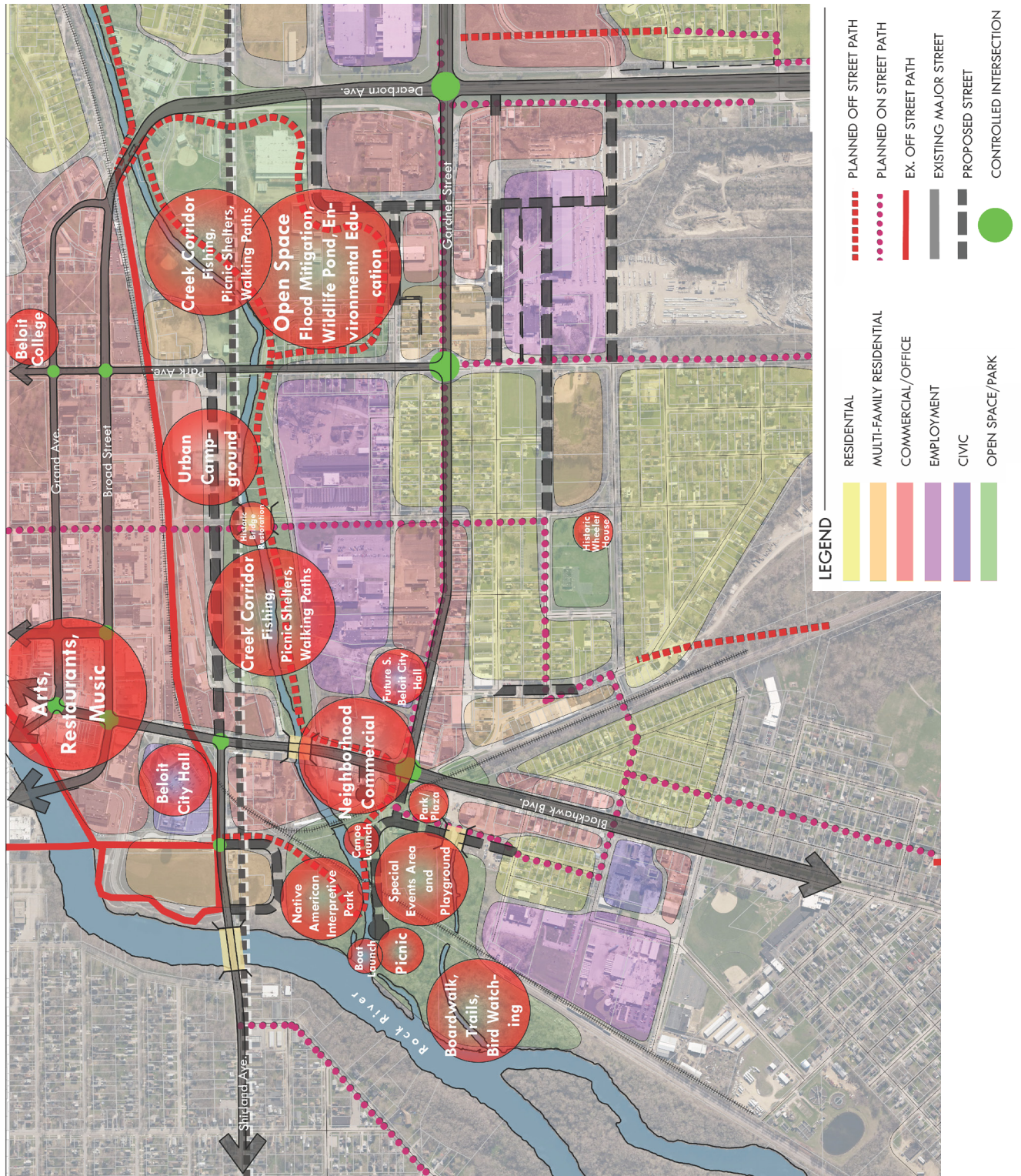
- Land Use Plan – a conceptual land use pattern was illustrated for the study area
- Movement space – concepts for new bicycle route connections, roadway connections, and roadway enhancements/treatments were designated at specific locations on the map, with corresponding character images presented in a companion sheet
- Public Space - concepts for public space were designated at specific locations on the map, with corresponding character images presented in a companion sheet
- Destinations – conceptual destinations (characteristic land uses such as neighborhood commercial areas, urban campgrounds, playgrounds, etc) were designated at specific locations on the map, with corresponding character images presented in a companion sheet.

The primary exercise at this meeting was an “image preference survey”, which involved participants being given “currency” in the form of small adhesive

dots, which they were then encouraged to spend on concepts they felt held the highest priority and were most appropriate and well-aligned to the planning principles. A summary of results is presented below:

- Providing bicycle linkage between the City of Beloit (and beyond) systems and South Beloit (and beyond) systems was a particular focus of the groups and identified as a very high priority
- There was strong support for the rehabilitation of Wheeler Bridge as a bike/ped route; however, participants expressed some concern for using an almost exclusively on-street route through the City of South Beloit
- There was considerable discussion about using Eastern Avenue to the “Trenwyth” property and entering City Park from the east for the bike link
- Boulevards imaged strongly as community gateways and highway corridors







- “Town Center” streetscapes favored well-defined edges using minimal building setbacks and ped zone separation from vehicular lanes via plantings, ped scale lighting
- Generally, a unified streetscaping approach with subtle signals of transition (low level monumentation or recognition of a “third place” that was shared (eg, “confluence area”) between communities were favored over more ornate/expressive treatments such as gateways, arches, etc.
- In general, the establishment of a formal public space at or near the Blackhawk/Gardner intersection (west side) with views and access to the creek/river was identified as a very high priority
- The image of a public plaza to the southeast of Blackhawk/Gardner was well received

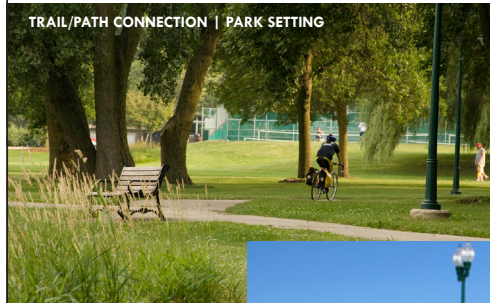
#### IDENTITY/AESTHETICS



URBAN HIGHWAY CORRIDOR



TRANSITION CORRIDOR



TRAIL/PATH CONNECTION | PARK SETTING



BRIDGE/COMMUNITY IDENTITY



*Charged with the task of selecting images that best represent desired improvements for the planning area, the public identified those to the right, below, and on the next page.*

#### DESTINATIONS



OPENSOURCE | WATERFRONT PARK



BRIDGE RESTORATION



CANOE/KAYAK LAUNCH



RIVER EDGE DEVELOPMENT | TRAIL CONNECTION



BOARDWALK | BIRD WATCHING AREA





PUBLIC PLAZA | COMMUNITY GATHERING

#### PUBLIC SPACE



PLAYGROUND AREA



CREEK CORRIDOR | WATER EDGE DEVELOPMENT | WILDLIFE CORRIDOR



EVENT AREA | PUBLIC PLAZA



WATER ACCESS | DEVELOPMENT



PICNIC AREA | SHELTER | CREEK CORRIDOR

- Water-centric spaces (canoe launch, riverwalks/boardwalks, wildlife viewing) rated very strongly
- Establishing a municipal campus around the existing fire station (north side of Gardner) was favored
- Generally, participants identified the area centered on the Blackhawk/Gardner intersection as the highest priority for redevelopment, the establishment of identity and well-defined public space

The input gained throughout the public process - culminating with the February 15 meeting - communicates the community's preference for a shared, active, and highly walkable/bikeable urban waterfront district. Key themes emerging from the public process point to a need to increase awareness and stewardship of - as well as access to - the planning area's fundamental natural assets: the Rock River, Turtle Creek, and associated floodplain areas. With this and the planning principles introduced on page 5 of this plan in mind, the plan recommendations that follow serve as a focus and guide for future development of this truly unique urban neighborhood.

## Plan Recommendations

The following text, figures and exhibits summarize recommended streetscape, transportation, bicycle connectivity, and land use changes for the Confluence Corridor planning area. These recommendations represent a comprehensive list of specific improvements that should be considered and implemented by the cities of Beloit and South Beloit over the next 25 years. Specific plan recommendations are divided into focused categories that include Streetscape (S), Transportation (T), and Redevelopment (R). Recommendations identified in these categories are numbered and keyed to their corresponding master plan.

### REDEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS ( R )

This plan envisions urban infill development and strategic redevelopment throughout the Connections planning area to support continued revitalization of downtown Beloit and adjacent neighborhoods. This unique setting offers an opportunity for a strong mix of land uses and development types that respect the environmental richness of the Turtle Creek and Rock River corridors while complementing the vibrance and importance of downtown Beloit and South Beloit's established residential neighborhoods. The redevelopment vision for the Connections planning area is illustrated in Exhibits 4.1 (page 23) & 4.2 (page 24).

**R1 >>> SHIRLAND AVENUE EXTENDED:** The recommended extension of Shirland Avenue along a straight east-west alignment creates improved redevelopment blocks and parcels for the area between the railroad corridor and Turtle Creek. This alignment creates sites with potential for commercial or recreational development on the south side of Shirland with opportunities for outdoor plazas, dining,

beergardens, etc. and unique views to the redesigned Stateline Restoration Prairie and Turtle Creek. Development on the north side of Shirland could include service and office uses, or a mix of uses including residential. Avoid parking areas directly in front of buildings on State Street, Shirland Avenue, and Blackhawk Boulevard, and orient parking areas away from Turtle Creek wherever possible.

**R2 >>> STATELINE RESTORATION PRAIRIE:** Reconfigure the public open space straddling the state line to accommodate the realignment of Shirland Avenue and redevelopment opportunities outside the floodway. Extend park to include floodway lands south of Turtle Creek and to the east and west, effectively creating a linear park along both banks of Turtle Creek, extending from Blackhawk Boulevard to Turtle Creek Park.

**R3 >>> WEST END RESIDENTIAL:** South of Shirland Avenue, continue brownfield cleanup of contaminated site. Work with development community towards the development of a high-quality residential neighborhood along east bank of Rock River, on both sides of Shirland Avenue. Provide a range of housing options, including multi-family density to support continued commercial, civic, and employment viability in and around downtown. Maximize views to Rock River and ensure connection to existing and proposed bike and pedestrian networks.





**R4 >>> NORTH BLACKHAWK BOULEVARD REDEVELOPMENT:** Work with property owners and businesses to determine preferred relocations for incompatible land uses currently fronting Blackhawk Boulevard. Acquire and foster redevelopment of properties along Blackhawk Boulevard corridor with high-quality business and commercial uses. Utilize site and building design standards to ensure that a positive, consistent and effective impression of community identity is reflected in new development and redevelopment of this critical community gateway. Place buildings near sidewalk and avoid placing parking lots directly between sidewalks and main entrance to buildings, as rear parking is preferred.



**R5 >>> “PRIMECAST” REDEVELOPMENT:** Upon completion of South Beloit’s environmental remediation work at the northwest corner of Blackhawk and Gardner, facilitate redevelopment of this highly visible corner. Work with development community towards the development of an “anchor” at the corner with the potential to fill out the site with mixed commercial and office uses. Explore development of a new City Hall and other public uses adjacent to existing Fire Station. Strengthen the pedestrian realm by minimizing curb cuts and providing a continuous, minimum two-story blockface/storefront along Blackhawk and Gardner, with plaza space at the corner. Provide surface

parking to rear of buildings, with primary access off of a new public street to be aligned with Pershing Street.

**R6 >>> GARDNER STREET REVITALIZATION AND INFILL:** Revitalize the southeastern quadrant of the Blackhawk Boulevard - Gardner Street intersection as a unified mixed-use “district” rather than a progression of neighboring but unrelated sites. Update and/or create city development standards and land use controls that are consistent with principles of this plan, and ensure that existing and proposed development meets high standards for this corridor. Focus infill development and redevelopment of block between Blackhawk and Pershing to encourage shared rear parking with easy access off of Pershing Street. Consider accommodating “live-work” space for Clark Street, Eastern Avenue, and Pershing Street properties.

**R7 >>> LEGACY EMPLOYERS:** Seek to create a density of employment along Gardner Street by retaining existing businesses at the Warner Electric and Gardner Machine properties, while at the same time working with businesses, property owners and local economic development professionals to identify opportunities to fill currently vacant space. Adaptive reuse of the Gardner Machine building as incubator space, or as multi-tenant industrial/office space is preferred.





**R8 >>> SOUTH BLACKHAWK BOULEVARD REDEVELOPMENT:** Foster redevelopment of commercial and residential properties along Blackhawk Boulevard corridor from Elmwood to Charles/Northwestern with high-quality business and commercial uses. Assure site design that enhances pedestrian experience and complements proposed open space networks. Place buildings near sidewalk and avoid placing parking lots directly between sidewalks and main entrance to buildings, with rear parking preferred.

**R9 >>> CONFLUENCE PARK:** Establish a regional public open space destination around the confluence of the Rock River and Turtle Creek. Park amenities in the western two-thirds of the park include nature-based, mostly passive recreation such as low-impact trails, bank fishing opportunities, canoe and kayak access, and historical/interpretive displays celebrating the site's Native American heritage. Concentrate active uses such as a spray park, park shelter & restrooms, and parking areas in eastern portion of the park near Blackhawk Boulevard. Provide vehicular access to the park at Charles Street and a new road just south of the railroad crossing on Blackhawk Boulevard.

**R10 >>> NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION AND INFILL:** Protect the viability of existing residential neighborhoods in South Beloit. Ensure that property maintenance codes reflect the principles of this plan and support continued investment in private properties. Foster residential infill and redevelopment of predominately single-family areas, and focus multi-family residential development near commercial areas, public parks, and major transportation corridors.









**REDEVELOPMENT VISION | AERIAL PERSPECTIVE**

**2012 | 0908**





## STREETSCAPE ZONES ( S )

The following recommendations are for specific streetscape types to be established within each streetscape zone. Streetscape zones are delineated in *Exhibit 4.3 on Page 27*.

### Type I, Town Center Streetscape Zone (S1)

This is the primary streetscape zone proposed for the core of the Confluence Corridor planning area. This streetscape should receive the most intensive streetscaping to establish a strong pedestrian friendly character that relates to the Beloit Central Business District's historic theme and retail area. Typical Type I streetscape treatments could include the following: reduced width travel lanes, bike lanes, brick paver terraces, concrete walkways with broomed and troweled finish, historic period style street lights, street trees in planters with ornamental railings, historic period benches & trash/recycling receptacles, intersection bump-outs & mid-block crossings for increased pedestrian safety and convenience, bike racks, informational kiosks, bollards, banners, floral planters, and wayfinding signage.

### Type II, Vehicular Transition Streetscape Zone (S2)

This streetscape zone is proposed for mixed commercial-residential areas and transition zones where speeds reduce from highway speeds to neighborhood speeds. This level of streetscape is appropriate for the principal gateway corridors between Beloit and South Beloit, and would be appropriate for decorative roadway & pedestrian lights, landscaping, paved decorative or grass terraces with street trees, wayfinding signage, banners and enhanced pedestrian crosswalks.

### Type III, Urban Highway Streetscape Zone (S3)

This streetscape zone is proposed for the planning

area's eastern edges, specifically for Gardner Street (IL-75) and IL-251 (Dearborn Avenue) as they proceed eastward and southward, respectively, from their signalized intersection. While the land use dynamic and traffic patterns for both of these corridors will probably remain heavily auto-oriented for the foreseeable future, an enhanced streetscape approach for both will improve the sense of place, scale, and identity communicated upon arrival into South Beloit and Beloit from the east or south. Potential enhancements include roadway lighting, median or road edge street trees, and wayfinding and identity signage.

## TRANSPORTATION RECOMMENDATIONS ( T )

The following recommendations build upon the streetscape zone recommendations by identifying specific transportation improvements for the Connections planning area. These recommendations are intended to:

- Improve access to City Center for all travel modes in a manner that is consistent with both communities' transportation goals
- Improve traffic flow by reducing congestion and conflicts
- Strengthen the planning area as a neighborhood and a community destination
- Provide safe, attractive and convenient pedestrian and bicycle circulation patterns.

Refer to *Exhibit 4.3 on page 27* for the following keyed recommendations.

**T1 >>> ENHANCE MAJOR INTERSECTIONS:** Implement pedestrian/bicycle crosswalk improvements including colored and textured pavement, and bulbs or bump-outs at key intersections. Pedestrian warning lights should be used at signalized intersections to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety.

## **T2 >>> EXPAND PEDESTRIAN**

**ZONE:** Expand sidewalk and terrace widths as much as possible to provide space for safe and convenient pedestrian traffic and streetscape amenities. Extension of the pedestrian zone improves pedestrian circulation and comfort in the district while extending the capacity of the sidewalk to support outdoor cafes, A-boards (sandwich boards), sidewalk sales and special events.

**T3 >>> “ROAD DIET”:** Complete a “road diet” for Gardner Street, where Average Daily Traffic counts (ADT) are relatively low ( $\pm 7,500$ ) and current geometry consists of four lanes at widths of 12’ to 14’ with narrow terrace and sidewalks. Reduce the cross section to one 10’ to 12’ wide travel lane in each direction, with a center lane used for left turn lanes and/or median plantings, to allow for traffic calming and expansion of the pedestrian environment and pedestrian comfort. Park Avenue is another street that may benefit from the use of a road diet.

**T4 >>> MID-BLOCK CROSSINGS:** Provide mid-block crossings (see image to below) to provide safe pedestrian circulation and traffic calming. Mid-block crossings should be located to connect with other pedestrian circulation patterns to public parking, recreation systems, public buildings and spaces, parks, etc. and to calm traffic when designed as “raised”



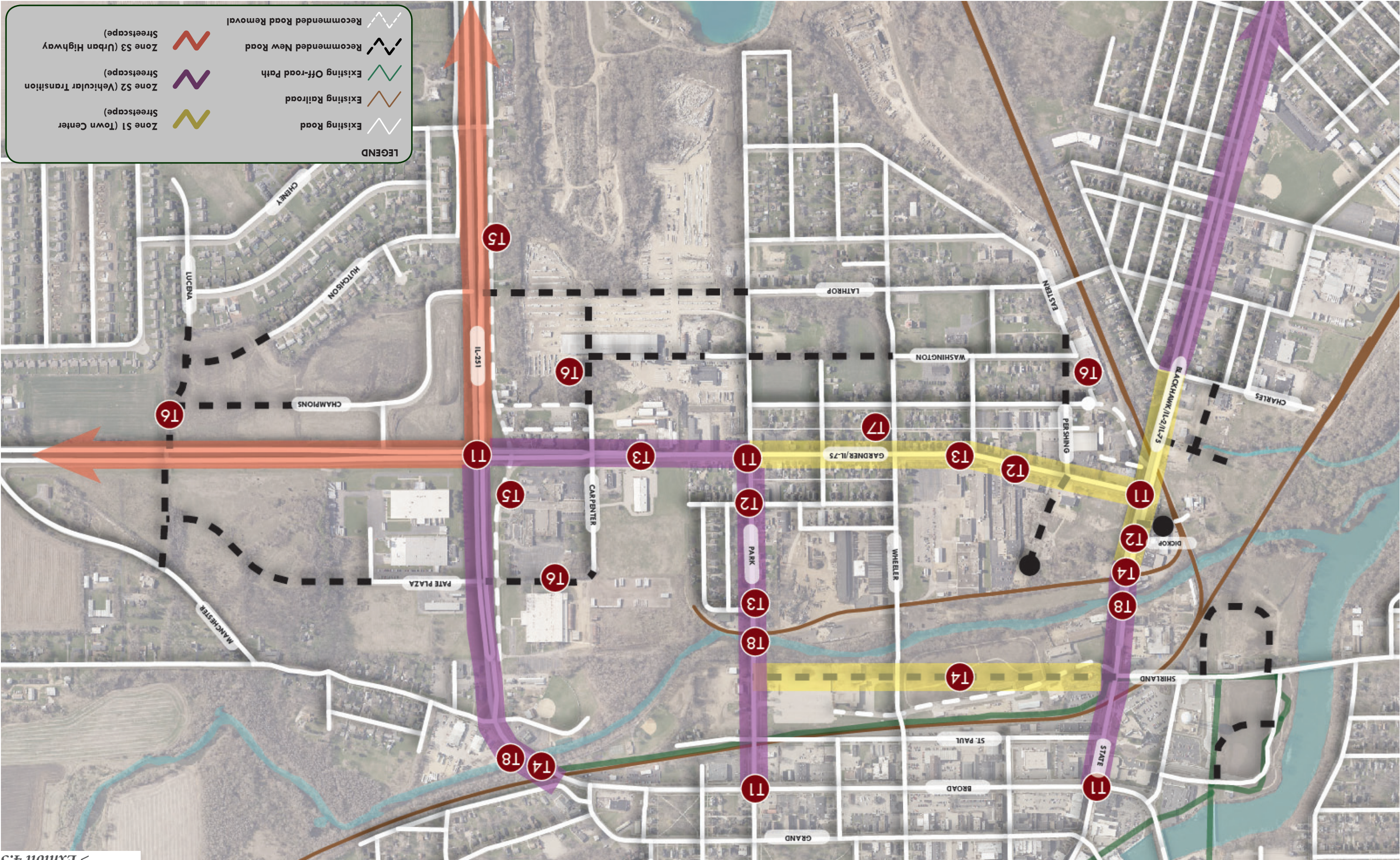
crosswalks.

## **T5 >>> PHASE OUT FRONTAGE ROADS:**

Work with the Illinois DOT to phase out frontage roads along IL-251, at least from the state line south to Cheney Drive. The existing frontage roads create additional conflicts at the busiest node in the planning area (Gardner Street and IL-251), reinforce an auto-dominated landscape, and introduce an additional pedestrian barrier. In tandem with the strengthened “grid” pattern (see T6), eliminating frontage roads will serve to greatly improve circulation and maximize development efficiency while improving the overall safety and function of transportation within the planning area. A possible alternative to elimination of the frontage road may be to limit access to only bicycles, pedestrians, and emergency vehicles. However, this alternative would only be practical if substantial design improvements were made to the intersection with Gardner Street, as the current configuration would be an unsafe bike crossing for all travelers.



STREETSCAPE & TRANSPORTATION RECOMMENDATIONS 2012 | 0908







**T6 >>> STRENGTHEN “GRID” AND IMPROVE CIRCULATION:** Although connectivity and legibility within - and especially north of - the planning area is relatively effective, opportunities remain to strengthen the connectivity and development potential of the planning area’s network of roads. Generally speaking, the roadway recommendations presented in this plan create a density and dimension of blocks to accommodate well-planned, appropriately scaled development and redevelopment, and also better define the hierarchy of roads by minimizing intersection conflicts and establishing well-defined nodes, paths, and blocks.

**T7 >>> ALLEYS AS ASSETS:** Many of the blocks within the planning area were originally platted with alleys serving the rear yards of properties. Especially for properties along Gardner Street, this rear access should be utilized in order to make left-turning traffic movements possible only at intersections rather than at every driveway along the corridor, as is currently the situation. Currently, alleys are evident but in relatively unkept condition. The city should work to improve the alleys to a better standard and to foster the redevelopment of properties to take advantage of rear access.

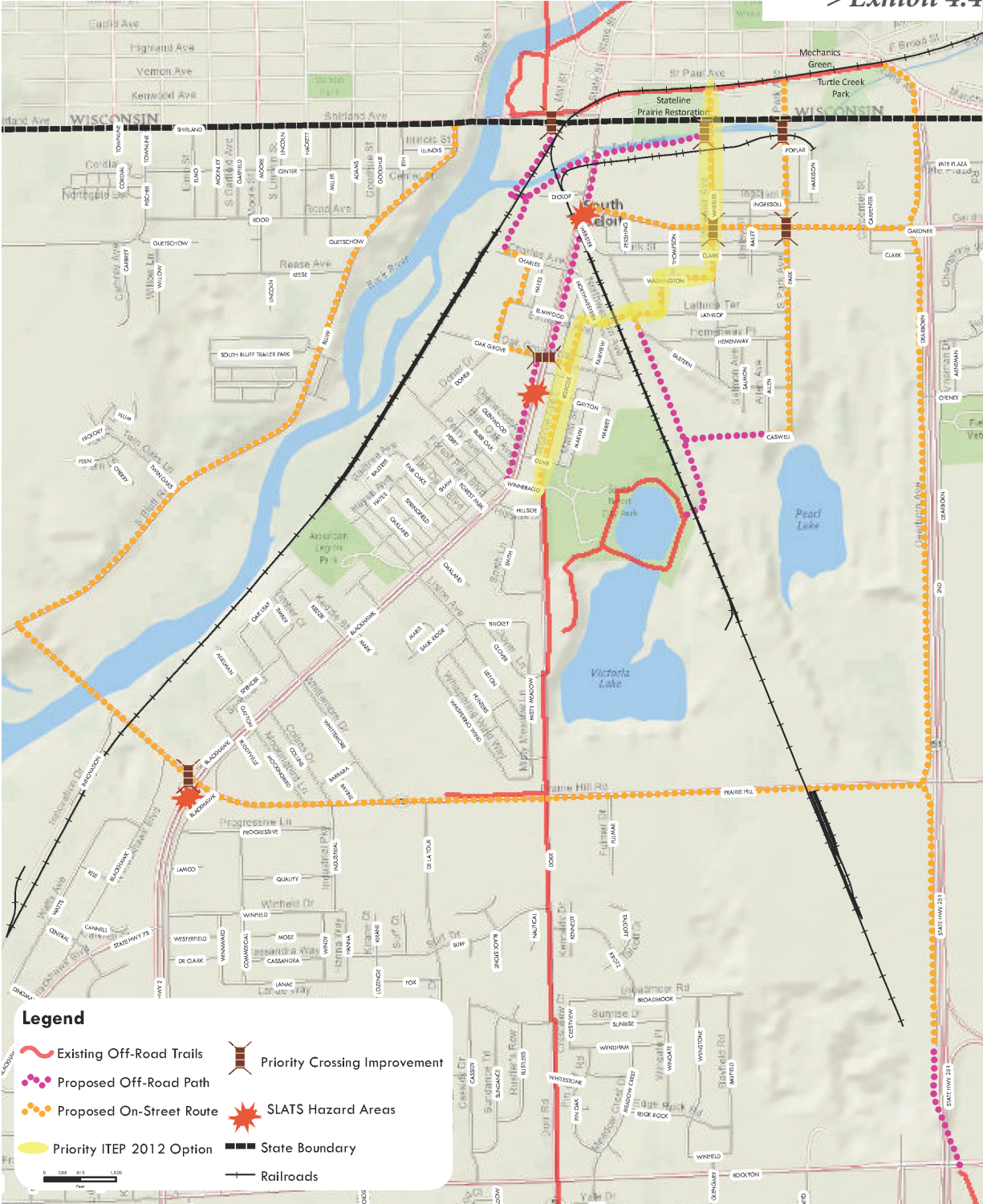
**T8 >>> BRIDGE ZONE:** Confirm the iconic stature of Turtle Creek by enhancing bridges on Blackhawk Boulevard, Park Avenue, and Dearborn Street to provide a unified character and welcoming experience upon crossing the creek for all modes of travel. This should include enhancing the pedestrian experience through the use of scaled lighting, informational signage, and creek overlooks, while celebrating each bridge with a subtle, cohesive, and distinctive aesthetic.

**T9 >>> IMPROVE BICYCLE CONNECTIVITY:** Bicycle networks are well-established both north and south of the planning area, but the planning area itself is literally the missing link in the currently separate Rock County and Winnebago County systems, as there is currently minimal formal bike accommodation. This plan seeks to eliminate that gap immediately once and for all, and to continue to strengthen connectivity through a comprehensive bicycle system for South Beloit’s core area. These connectivity improvements are illustrated in Figure 4.4, and the strengths and weaknesses of each depicted route are outlined in Figure 4.5. In an effort to improve bicycle connectivity, the City of South Beloit submitted an application to the Illinois Department of Transportation for Transportation Enhancements Funding in May 2012. If the application is successful, the city will use the funds to develop a bicycle route connection linking the Turtle Creek Path in Beloit (left) with the Dorr Road Path in South Beloit (below). Specifically, the city’s project will include the rehabilitation of the Wheeler Avenue Bridge as a bike and pedestrian bridge and the development of roadway, signage, and crossing improvements for the mostly on-road route.



BICYCLE CONNECTIVITY IMPROVEMENTS

> *Exhibit 4.4*



# CONSIDERATIONS

- high benefit
- moderate benefit
- low benefit

	Park Avenue - Trenwyth Option	Wheeler Avenue - Trenwyth Option	Wheeler Avenue - On-Street Option	Shirland - Confluence Option	Bluff Road Bike Lane Option
Enhanced bicycle/pedestrian circulation	●  gap on Park Avenue north of State Line	●  short gap on Prospect Street north of State Line - virtually no vehicular traffic	●  short gap on Prospect Street north of State Line - virtually no vehicular traffic	●  off-road gap to Shirland Avenue north of State Line; Shirland crossing challenges	●  considerable gap from Bluff Road terminus to existing Wisconsin system
Connectivity: jobs, housing, schools, parks, etc.	●  direct route, but at edge of neighborhood; good shopping/parks connectivity north of State Line	●  heart of neighborhood, bookended at two parks	●  heart of neighborhood, bookended at two parks	●  great connection between employment areas, transit, proposed park	●  direct route, touches edges of residential areas and provides link to High School for west side
Safety	●  relatively high-traffic on Park Avenue; "Trenwyth" property somewhat remote	●  land use/traffic compatibility w/ Behr site; "Trenwyth" property somewhat remote	●/●  land use/traffic compatibility w/ Behr site; mostly on-road may be deterrent to less experienced riders	●/●  off-road path segment provides security from traffic; Blackhawk crossing is a challenge	●  Entirely on-street, somewhat rural character may deter less experienced riders; Blackhawk crossing is a challenge
Plan Compatibility	●  first-priority project on SLATS Bike/Ped Plan	●/●  is on SLATS bike/ped plan; not first or second priority	●  first-priority project on SLATS Bike/Ped Plan	●  first-priority project on SLATS Bike/Ped Plan	●  second-priority project on SLATS Bike/Ped Plan
Aesthetic Improvement	●  potential to catalyze clean-up of Trenwyth property	●  potential to catalyze clean-up of Trenwyth property	●  negligible aesthetic impact	●  builds momentum and awareness to shape and define future public open space at "Confluence"	●  negligible aesthetic impact
Celebrates natural/cultural/historic resources	●  negligible ties to natural/cultural/historic resources	●  rehabilitates 113-year old bridge; route passes Wheeler House, State Line Prairie Restoration; Turtle Creek	●  rehabilitates 113-year old bridge; route passes Wheeler House, State Line Prairie Restoration; Turtle Creek	●  embraces Rock River & Turtle Creek; ties to Native American history	●  generally follows west bank of Rock River; provides bridge crossing over river
Private Property Impacts	●  off-road component requires easement or acquisition	●  off-road component requires easement or acquisition	●  entirely on-street	●  some coordination required with railroad, City of Beloit	●  entirely on-street
Regulatory/Permitting	●  proximity to lakes; serious slope/grade issues coming off Park/Caswell	●  proximity to lakes for off-road work; creek crossing; Gardner crossing	●  creek crossing; Gardner crossing	●  floodplain/wetland considerations; Blackhawk crossing	●  Blackhawk crossing; river crossing
Costs	●  Bridge/rail retrofits; off- road path construction w/ slope/grade issues	●  Wheeler bridge rehab; Gardner Street crossing improvements; rail underpass retrofit; off- road path construction	●  Wheeler bridge rehab; Gardner Street crossing improvements	●  Two new bridges; off- road path construction through floodplain areas; Blackhawk Blvd. crossing; Shirland Crossing	●  New paved shoulders for about half of segment; Pavement striping & signage; rail underpass retrofit; assumes county/state funding bridge rebuild



## Implementation Tools

TIMING	IMPLEMENTATION ACTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	COST	NOTES
<i>Immediate/ Ongoing</i>	<i>Update Capital Improvements Plans</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of South Beloit</li> <li>City of Beloit</li> </ul>	\$	Incorporate plan recommendations into local CIPs
<i>Immediate/ Ongoing</i>	<i>Continue Brownfield Remediation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of South Beloit</li> </ul>	\$\$\$	EPA lists three sites on Federal brownfields list
<i>Immediate/ Ongoing</i>	<i>Commit to Code Enforcement</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of South Beloit</li> </ul>	\$ - \$\$	Dedicate staff resources; identify target enforcement areas
<i>Early 2013</i>	<i>Develop Design Guidelines</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of South Beloit</li> <li>City of Beloit</li> <li>Consultant</li> </ul>	\$\$	Establish consistent standards for site design, building design, stormwater management, public space, and more
<i>Early 2013</i>	<i>Formalize Development Review Process</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of South Beloit</li> </ul>	\$	Current review process unclear, potentially ineffective
<i>Early 2013</i>	<i>Address/Analyze Floodplain Challenges</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of South Beloit</li> <li>City of Beloit</li> <li>Consultant</li> </ul>	\$\$\$	Consider regional stormwater management; South Beloit Comp Plan to include study
<i>Mid- to Late- 2013</i>	<i>Create Tax Increment Financing District</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of South Beloit</li> <li>Consultant</li> <li>GBEDC (as liaison)</li> </ul>	\$\$ - \$\$\$	Create a TIF district in accordance with Illinois Statutes (65 ILCS 110)
<i>Early 2014</i>	<i>Revise zoning ordinance &amp; map for consistency w/ Plan</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of South Beloit</li> <li>City of Beloit</li> <li>Consultant</li> </ul>	\$ - \$\$	Proposed development would not be allowed under existing zoning
<i>As possible</i>	<i>Strategic Property Acquisition</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of South Beloit</li> </ul>	\$\$\$	See Exhibit 4.4, page II:27; potential to leverage IDNR's OSLAD program for parkland acquisition

**KEY:** \$ = Minimal or low (\$10,000 or less); \$\$ = moderate cost (\$10,000 to \$50,000); \$\$\$ = high cost (\$50,000 or more)

This plan presents a comprehensive, long-term set of interrelated recommendations aimed at creating a pedestrian-friendly district that strengthens surrounding residential neighborhoods and complements downtown Beloit. These recommendations should serve as a guide for future decision making by both cities (Beloit and South Beloit) as they consider public improvements, land use decisions (both private and public), and transportation within and around the immediate planning area. Generally, these recommendations will be implemented incrementally over the course of several years or even decades. With that being said, the table on page 32 introduces a number of critical implementation steps that should be undertaken immediately following plan adoption in order to set the stage for the successful redevelopment and revitalization as envisioned in this plan. These implementation actions are summarized below.

## REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Redevelopment of improved urban sites is typically a more complex undertaking than “greenfield” development on undeveloped sites. A component of this challenge is often a regulatory framework - most often zoning codes - that effectively “outlaw” traditional “city center” patterns of development. It is essential that local land development regulations accommodate - rather than discourage - the reuse of existing developed sites, which typically need little in the way of public infrastructure investment and most often provide substantial improvements in property value and tax revenue. Through a concerted and coordinated effort, Beloit and South Beloit should both work to ensure that the regulatory framework within their respective communities is consistent not only with this plan, but also across municipal lines. While zoning ordinances will have characteristic differences between the two

communities, it is possible that Design Guidelines, as well as a development review protocol, can be “shared” for developments within the connections area.

## BROWNFIELDS

The City of South Beloit has benefitted from the experience of engaging and receiving grant funding from USEPA and IEPA for brownfields remediation of the Primecast and Shirland Avenue/PRS International sites. The city’s “Brownfields” initiative should continue to:

- Oversee implementation of Brownfields Redevelopment Initiative in order to prepare contaminated properties in the Connections Planning Area for new development;
- Foster community leadership and outreach through partnerships with local businesses, Beloit 2020, and GBEDC; and
- Solicit community opinion through the Brownfields redevelopment process

## PROPERTY ACQUISITION

A number of properties within the planning area, in particular within South Beloit, exhibit characteristics of obsolescence, blight, or incompatible land use that serves to stunt the redevelopment potential. Furthermore, several of these properties are within FEMA designated flood hazard areas. The city should work with property owners and businesses towards identifying more suitable sites for such challenged land uses, and potentially should seek to strategically acquire such properties to advance the principles and recommendations of this plan. One funding source that might be targeted include the OSLAD (Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development) program through Illinois DNR, which supports local communities acquiring and developing land for open space and recreational purposes.



## FLOODPLAIN ANALYSIS

Designation of properties within flood hazard areas by FEMA remains a substantial hindrance to the redevelopment potential of many sites in the Connections planning area. The City of South Beloit intends to develop a comprehensive plan in 2013 that will include, among other elements, a stormwater and flood management component if funding allows. Whether as a part of the city's comprehensive plan or as a stand-alone effort, a comprehensive and district-wide analysis of potential stormwater management strategies should be completed, with both South Beloit and Beloit cooperating.

## TAX INCREMENT FINANCE DISTRICT (TIF)

In order to set the stage for new development in the Connections planning area, both communities will have to finance some of the basic public improvements needed to serve as incentives to the private sector development community. The City of South Beloit should:

- Create a TIF district for the Connections planning area; and
- Coordinate public improvements in tandem with new private sector development

Essentially TIF allows financially strapped local governments to make needed public improvements, such as new roads or sewers, and provide incentives to attract new businesses or help existing businesses stay and expand. TIF is designed to bolster economic development without tapping into general municipal revenues or raising taxes, with local taxing bodies making a joint investment in the development or redevelopment of an area with the intent that any short term gains be reinvested and leveraged so that all the taxing bodies will receive larger

financial gains in the future. The funds for this investment do not come from current revenues, but from future tax revenues that are not otherwise expected to occur. These new revenues are generated by increased public and private investment in identified underperforming areas.

Illinois law specifies a number of requirements that must be satisfied for an area to qualify for Tax Increment Financing, beginning with identifying the TIF project area and the physical and economic deficiencies that need to be cured. In addition to meeting these "blighting requirements" called for under the TIF law, the municipality must also demonstrate that these conditions will not be addressed without some local action. What is often called the "but for test", calls for the municipality to show that 'but for' the public investment provided through the TIF, effective redevelopment or development will not occur.

Along with meeting these requirements, the law requires the city to prepare a plan laying out the actions that the municipality intends to take to improve the area, and a budget for the TIF district that includes the total TIF-eligible costs. Municipal officials and a Joint Review Board, made up of representatives from local taxing bodies, must review the plan for the redevelopment of the TIF area, allowing the various taxing bodies to provide their input and opinion on the matter to the municipal authorities. Following this, a public hearing must be held so that residents and other interested parties can express their thoughts on the subject.

In addition to the tools mentioned above, some additional, related strategies will be instrumental in the successful implementation of this plan and are presented on the next page.

## DOWNTOWN BUSINESS DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT

In order to breathe new life into the Connections area and prepare for growth, the City of Beloit should:

- Continue to revitalize the riverfront and adjacent business districts by encouraging new mixed-use development. The market for new businesses in downtown Beloit and along the Blackhawk Boulevard and Gardner Street corridors will expand as the number and density of residential units increases downtown;
- Facilitate upper-story and infill residential development downtown; and
- Preserve the City's downtown core through the codification of guidelines for historic preservation and new construction.

## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Rebuilding a legacy of employment within the planning area is a key principle of this plan, and to this end South Beloit and Beloit should work with local and regional economic development organizations, such as the Greater Beloit Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Beloit Economic Development Corporation, the Rockford Area Economic Development Council, and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), to enhance the area's profile as an excellent place to live, work, and learn in. Initiatives might include:

- Explore avenues for local entrepreneurial training and workforce development with local educational institutions and local banks;
- Promote assistance to help businesses with business startup and marketing plans, utilization of a small business revolving loan fund (RLF) program, and involve local lenders in the process; and
- Encourage the use of available business

financing mechanisms offered through state and local economic development programs, such as DCEO's grant and loan programs for business expansion, relocation, and training

## LEVERAGE EXISTING INDUSTRIAL SITES/ BUSINESS PARKS

As light industrial and production businesses consider relocation, both cities should be prepared to assist them with relocation to more suitable sites and/or into existing business parks. Gardner Machine should be seriously considered as an opportunity to accommodate the relocation of associated light industrial users (the row of machinists and metalworkers on Eastern Avenue comes to mind as a prime candidate), while business parks in both cities offer great sites for new or expanding businesses.

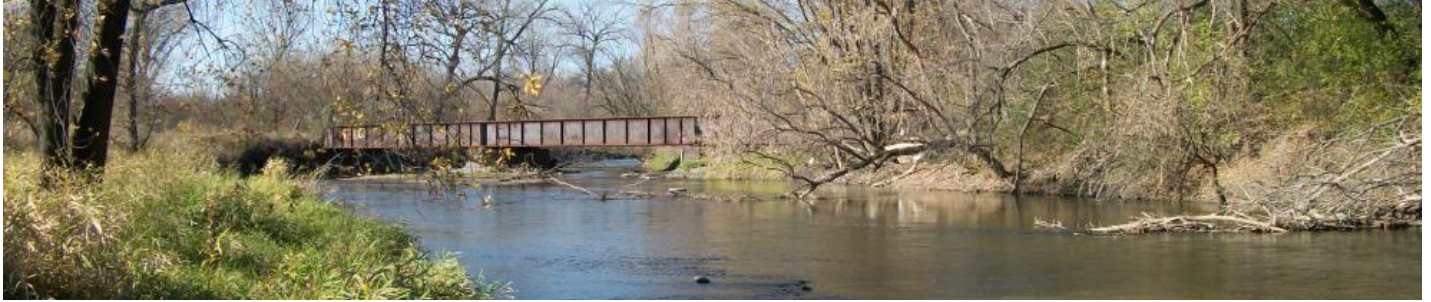
## PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS

The public improvements proposed in this plan will ultimately enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors of the greater Beloit area by reconnecting them with nature and encouraging recreational activity and tourism throughout the community. In the near-term, the cities of Beloit and South Beloit should:

- Pursue opportunities to enhance bicycle tourism and connectivity as promoted in this and past plans through a comprehensive off-road and on-street system;
- Work with IDNR and riverfront/creekfront property owners to implement the "Breezeway Path" connecting Turtle Creek Park, the restored Wheeler Avenue Bridge, and ultimately the Rock River; and
- Develop and construct a streetscape plan for IL-251/Dearborn Street to significantly enhance the eastern gateway to downtown Beloit and the Beloit College Campus

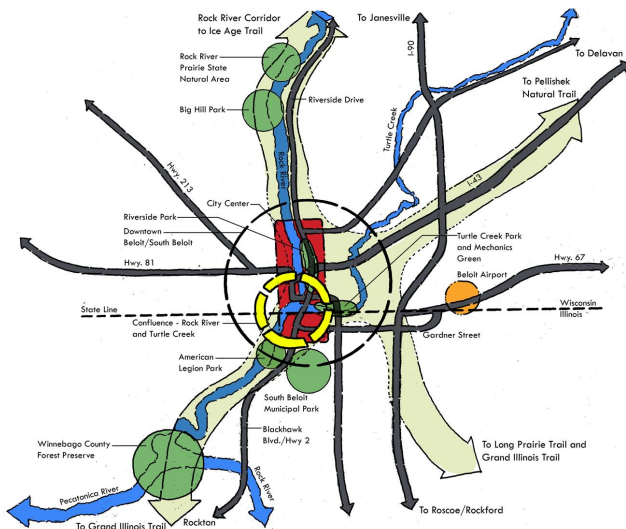


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## INTRODUCTION

This Opportunity Analysis summarizes existing assets, challenges, and opportunities for the “Connections Corridor” straddling the state line in Beloit and South Beloit - roughly bound by the Rock River to the west, Broad Street to the north, Dearborn Avenue to the east, and Gardner Street to the South. Envisioned as a precursor to a detailed planning and implementation strategy for the Connections Corridor, this report presents “big picture” concepts and ideas that are founded upon the area’s unique assets as well as unrealized potential identified through consultation with a wide spectrum of area stakeholders and an analysis of local and regional trends and market forces. Through consideration of the Connections Corridor’s unique history, geography, economy, and demographics, the Opportunity Analysis is intended to provide a fresh look at the area in order to identify the most effective catalysts for reinvestment and redevelopment. In addition to providing the context for a redevelopment plan for the Connections Corridor, the Opportunity Analysis is intended to serve as a companion document to the many city and regional plans that have been adopted in the past, and in those rare cases where disagreement might occur between this and past plans, this one should prevail.



## ASSETS TO BUILD UPON

The basis of all successful community planning is in a well-rounded understanding of past trends and current characteristics at play in the area being studied and planned for. Furthermore, understanding the relationships between different types of characteristics and how they’ve evolved over time is critical in developing a realistic and implementable plan for the future. As the profile of the Connections Planning Area discussed in this document reveals, there are substantial assets to build upon within the area, ranging from resounding support for a more bikeable and walkable district to a distinct network of natural resource, wildlife, and open space areas.

### Past Plans and Studies

- City Center Vision Plan (2005): The City Center Vision Plan is a long-range vision document for the entire “City Center” of not only Beloit but South Beloit as well. Two districts in particular are defined in the 2005 Plan that this (the current) study effort are meant to move forward: the Blackhawk Business District and the Turtle Creek District. Among other things, the 2005 plan identifies the Turtle Creek District as a walkable urban neighborhood convenient to shopping, dining, entertainment and employment opportunities. The south side of this district is envisioned as an urban employment node, a vision that is reinforced in the 2008 Beloit Downtown Redevelopment Plan. As for the Blackhawk Business District, a vision of renewal is introduced that creates a vibrant urban node around the intersection of Gardner Avenue and Blackhawk Boulevard that better integrates – both physically and aesthetically - with Turtle Creek, the Breezeway, and regional transportation networks as well as surrounding districts.
- Rock River Parkway Master Plan (2005): This plan



was a five year implementation plan that identified tasks to achieve the City Center Vision. With respect to the study area, the Rock River Parkway Master Plan identified two key tasks: to create a South Beloit Blackhawk Boulevard-Gardner Street Redevelopment Plan and to rehabilitate the Wheeler Avenue Bridge for use as a multi-use trail. It is anticipated that the importance of these tasks will be woven into this current effort.

- Life at the Center (2010): This strategy document intends to enhance the features, amenities, and programming needed to grow the urban character of City Center. Pertinent to the current study, Life at the Center echoes the recommendations of past city plans to implement the “Confluence Park” concept in South Beloit and to expand opportunities for the engagement of the City of South Beloit in improvements being realized in Beloit’s City Center.
- Beloit Downtown Redevelopment Plan (2008): This plan presents a comprehensive redevelopment strategy for Beloit’s Downtown, and overlaps geographically with part of the study area for the Connections Corridor. The most pertinent recommendations from the 2008 plan include centering an artisan/merchandising district on or near St. Paul Avenue and a master planned urban business park for the area north of Turtle Creek between State Street and Prospect Avenue south of St. Paul Avenue.
- Beloit Rental Housing Market Analysis (2010): The city commissioned a consultant to complete a study of the rental housing market in downtown Beloit, which concluded that economic and market conditions in City Center are not conducive to construction of new multi-family housing.
- Stateline Area Transportation Study Bicycle and Pedestrian System Plan (2010): The recent Bike & Ped plan update includes a number of recommendations for our study area. Intersection improvements are recommended at Gardner and Dearborn/251, at Gardner and Park, and at Gardner and Wheeler. Finally, improving the Wheeler Bridge for bicycle and pedestrian use is recommended, with Wheeler Avenue being envisioned as a part of an on road connection linking the Turtle Creek Path just north of the state line to South Beloit City Park Trailhead which

continues south along Dorr Road and on through Winnebago County.

- Stateline Area Transportation Study Long Range Transportation Plan (2006): This plan for roadways covers the entire “SLATS” planning area, which covers not only Beloit and South Beloit but also surrounding towns and the villages of Rockton and Roscoe. Using advanced modeling techniques, the SLATS plan measures the existing and forecasted level of service (LOS) of roadways. The plan identifies several segments of road within our study area currently exhibiting LOS C or worse, indicating at least some restricted movement and congestion along segments of Gardner, Park, Broad, and Blackhawk. The forecasted model illustrates pretty severe deterioration of LOS for almost every segment of each of these major roads by 2025. The only considered improvement identified in the SLATS plan is for an extension of Gardner west across the Rock River to connect with Fisher, then swing north about a mile and a half west on an alignment once proposed as a Highway 81 bypass. The 81 Bypass project, however, has been taken out of both Illinois’s and Wisconsin’s State Plans, and appears to be dead.
- City of Beloit 2006-2010 Parks & Open Space Plan (2006): Four City of Beloit Parks are located within the boundaries of the planning area: Turtle Creek Park, Mechanics Green Park, Zonta Memorial Park, and the Stateline Restoration Prairie (established as parkland in 2009). The city’s most recent parks plan makes several recommendations that impact the study area directly and indirectly. Improvements proposed for Turtle Creek Park include the installation of fencing along the creek, consideration of a new park entrance, construction of a new picnic shelter, and the determination of the future use of the existing pool house and the future use of parkland south of the creek. Additionally, the parks plan declares that a bicycle trail would be constructed through the park in 2007, but this project has not been completed to date. Recommendations for Mechanics Green include installation of new furnishings and period lighting as well as interpretive signage, renovating an existing gravel parking area with asphalt paving, constructing new walkways in the northern portion of the park, and installing tree identification

plaques where needed in the park. Zonta Park's only recommended improvement is the replacement of the existing sign with a standard city entrance sign. Of these recommendations, the installation of tree identification plaques was completed in the summer of 2010. The city is currently working to update its Plan.

- City of Beloit Comprehensive Plan (2008): The City's Comprehensive Plan, while more of a "macro" document, does include some general recommendations for the Study Area. Transportation recommendations basically echo those found in the SLATS plans, including establishing the Wheeler Avenue bridge as a bike/pedestrian route and establishing a bike and pedestrian path along the Turtle Creek corridor and the rail corridor south of St. Paul Avenue. Additionally, the "gateway" at the state line on Blackhawk Boulevard/State Street is recommended for improvement. The "Urban Business Park" concept for the area bound by the Creek, Blackhawk/State, the railroad, and Prospect/Wheeler is introduced here (and discussed further in the Beloit Downtown Redevelopment Plan). In general terms, the Comprehensive Plan proposes an urban mixed-use dynamic for the Study Area, focusing on office and commercial/mixed residential uses around the proposed business park.
- Winnebago & Boone Regional Greenways Plan: While truly regional in scope, this Plan Map envisions a recreational path connection from the state line near the confluence area, southward through South Beloit, and ultimately connecting with the existing Long Prairie Trail.

## Property Information

**Parcel Layout, Character, and Orientation:** The study area encompasses properties in Beloit and South Beloit, generally extending from Bluff Street on the west to Highway 51/251 (Dearborn Avenue) on the east, Gardner Street on the south and Broad Street on the north. Parcel configuration and orientation is quite varied throughout the area, and parcels range in size significantly. As a general rule, properties directly abutting several of the major roadways in the study area – Dearborn Avenue (HWY 51/251), Park Avenue, and Gardner Street – are rectangular and laid out in an urban grid pattern. Conversely, parcels abutting Blackhawk Boulevard and to a less dramatic extent Broad Street are irregularly shaped and oriented. This irregularity in shape and orientation can be attributed in no small part to the shaping influence of the Rock River, Turtle Creek, and IC&E Railway tracks that traverse the study area. It should be noted that dozens or more of the properties in the study area – particularly along Gardner Street in South Beloit, meet the definition of "nonconforming sites" found in both cities' zoning ordinances due to issues of site area and lot width.

**Parcel Ownership:** Although there are a few private entities that own substantial chunks or scattered sites, arguably the most substantial land owner in the study area is the City of South Beloit. Over the course of time, the city has acquired a number of properties immediately adjacent to Turtle Creek, such that an almost contiguous block of land from the confluence of the Creek with the Rock River to the Wheeler Avenue Bridge (about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of shoreline) is currently within City of South Beloit ownership.

**Land Use Mix:** With a range of land uses mixing single-family housing, neighborhood-based retail and services, public open space, and industrial, the study area has the potential to function as a dynamic and vibrant neighborhood. Generally speaking, however, the study area exhibits a decidedly auto-oriented land use tapestry, with service garages, used car lots, massive parking lots, and frontage roads being given much higher billing than (for example) amenities such as pedestrian ways or bicycle lanes (which are largely nonexistent or inaccessible at best). Whereas the east edge of the planning area provides an opportunity to coordinate and concentrate larger-scale highway-based uses, the west edge has a naturally softer, natural



resources-based focus due to the river, its confluence with the creek, and associated wetland and floodplain areas. Understanding these two distinct areas in their context, one might argue that the east-west transect between these two distinct ends of the study area could be more effectively coordinated and realized. That being said, there exist a number of “legacy” land uses within the study area which will warrant consideration throughout the planning and implementation process. These properties are highlighted below:

- 100 Dearborn Avenue: This inactive 21 acre property is developed with almost 116,000 square feet of office and industrial space in a single-level building. Currently owned by Hendricks Development Group, the site formerly housed Besley/Threadwell Inc., a tool manufacturer, and includes dock spaces, cranes and more. Located just south of the State Line on Illinois 251/Dearborn Avenue, redevelopment – or even reuse – of this property would be a major victory for the study area.



- 200 Dearborn Avenue (corner of Dearborn and Gardner, above): This property is the former South Beloit Inn & Conference Center, a hotel that has undergone a bit of ownership turnover in recent years. The roughly 10-acre property is developed with the hotel complex, which includes 161 guest rooms, an indoor swimming pool and spa, conference and banquet facilities, and a currently shuttered restaurant.
- 105 Park Avenue: Before relocating to a near-freeway location, Finnegan’s RV Sales and Service called this Park Avenue location home. Today, it is just a rather large (about 5 acres) vacant lot contributing to the image of disinvestment that seems to currently grip Park Avenue. Directly east

of this site is the City of Beloit’s Turtle Creek Park.

- Intersection of Blackhawk Boulevard & Gardner Street (below): This location is especially notable, as it could be a focal point of the entire planning area if reconfigured and redeveloped. The northeast corner of this intersection, the former “South Beloit Foundry”, is currently owned by the City of South Beloit and could be a prime redevelopment location. Just northwest of the intersection, a short east/west street (Dickop Street) leads back to a number of contiguous city-owned properties abutting the Rock River and Turtle Creek – including the “confluence” – and continuing northward to the State Line. This area could very well be ground zero – at least on the western edge – for the study area.



- 201 Wheeler Avenue (above): This property, owned and operated as a recycling center by Joseph Behr & Sons, Inc. sits on about 20 acres abutting Turtle Creek just south of the state line. This heavy industrial use is surrounded to the south and east by mostly residential uses and to the north by the creek and (across the creek) the former Cub Foods grocery store site.

- Turtle Creek Properties East of Blackhawk Boulevard (Turtle Creek Breezeway): The City of South Beloit also owns properties on either bank of Turtle Creek running eastward from Blackhawk Boulevard to Wheeler Avenue, including property up to the State Line abutting the City of Beloit's Stateline Restoration Prairie. It should be noted that a gap exists between this cluster of City-owned property and the larger cluster mentioned in the previous bullet point.



- Wheeler Avenue Bridge (above): This bridge over Turtle Creek at Wheeler Avenue (Prospect St. in Beloit) has been mentioned in numerous planning documents as a critical bike and pedestrian redevelopment project. The bridge is currently blocked off to all traffic and in increasingly deteriorating condition.
- Stateline Restoration Prairie: This public park space in the City of Beloit was established as a park in 2009, following the completion of remediation efforts of this former Behr Property. The property abuts Colby Street to the north, Prospect Street (just north of the Wheeler Avenue Bridge) to the east, and the State line (and City of Beloit-owned property) to the south.
- 20 Park Avenue: This site is the former Cub Foods Supermarket, vacant since early 2009. In addition to the nearly 10 acre grocery store site, there are two separate "outlots" fronting Park Avenue, both just over 1/2 acre in size. Given the site's visibility and central location within the study area, a well-considered and coordinated redevelopment planning strategy will be a crucial and high-profile project in the future.



- 1312 E. Grand Avenue (above): The City of Beloit's Turtle Creek Park is nestled back along Turtle Creek, with its vehicular access via a relatively inconspicuous driveway at the bend in E. Grand Avenue where it swings south to become Dearborn Street. The Park itself is about 11 acres in size and includes playground equipment, a softball diamond complete with fencing, dirt infield, and bench seating, views of Turtle Creek, and the now vacant bath house for the filled-in Turtle Creek Swimming Pool. On numerous visits to this site over the course of two years on different dates, times, and seasons, little activity has been evident. Limited/difficult access and visibility likely contribute to this, which is a shame given the fact that nearly 1/4 mile of Turtle Creek shoreline is accessible (on both banks) in this park. The park is bisected by the creek, with much of the southern half heavily vegetated and virtually inaccessible by any means of transportation.
- 1012 Broad Street: The City of Beloit's Mechanics Green Park is effectively two spaces on either side of Broad Street. The northern 2 acre site, also known as Rhodes Arboretum, is a charming public square containing over 50 species of mature trees, walking paths, and picnic tables. Interestingly, a row of about a half-dozen houses front on this space, with vehicular access for these residences contained to the rear via a narrow Wisconsin Avenue. The southern portion of Mechanics Green is a roughly one acre site furnished with a lighted basketball court, greenspace, and a few park benches. Directly across the railroad right-of-way southwest of this vibrant urban park space is Turtle Creek Park.



## Transportation

**Roadways:** The transportation network within the study area consists of urban streets ranging from minor local roads to divided principal arterial routes. Main north-south routes are Park Avenue and Blackhawk Boulevard/IL-2/IL-75 (State Street in Beloit), as well as Dearborn Avenue/USH 51/IL-251 (Dearborn Street in Beloit). Primary east-west streets are Gardner Street/IL-75 and Broad Street. Although each of these roads (and most of the minor streets in the study area) are fitted with sidewalks, the study area is predominantly auto-oriented, and aside from sidewalks there is little in the way of infrastructure enhancements targeted at increasing opportunities for alternatives to the automobile. That said, the roadway network does offer significant assets:

- **Interstate Access** – about 1 ¼ mile east of the study area's eastern edge, Gardner Street (IL-75) intersects with I-39/90 at a full-access interchange – the first Illinois exit for southbound travelers on the Interstate. This easy and very close access brings unrivaled potential market opportunity for the planning area.
- **Traffic Volumes** – as measured by IDOT in 2009, traffic volumes on the major roads in the planning area on the South Beloit side of the state line were higher than anywhere else in South Beloit (not counting I-39/90), with volumes ranging from 7,400 vehicles per day on Gardner at Dearborn to 12,700 vehicles per day on Blackhawk north of Gardner. Similarly, thousands of vehicles per day on average traverse Dearborn (10,700), Broad (10,900), State (8,100), and Park (7,890) north of the border in Beloit. These numbers attest to the importance of the Connections Corridor not only as a key gateway to City Center but also as a potentially highly visible and accessible destination point.

**Railroads:** The Iowa, Chicago, and Eastern Railroad traverses the heart of the study area, connecting the study area via rail with the economies of Rockford, Chicago, Janesville, Madison, Milwaukee, and points in between (and beyond). Current rail crossings exist at Blackhawk Boulevard, State Street, Shirland Avenue, Prospect Avenue, Park Avenue, and Grand Avenue. Although currently active, the right-of-way north of the state line which extends from about Shirland Avenue

to the east through the study area is identified in the SLATS Bike and Pedestrian Plan as future off-road path, beginning with the completion of a segment in 2011 from the Beloit Transit System facility on Shirland eastward through Turtle Creek Park to Grand Avenue. Although the SLATS Plan identifies this path as existing as of December 2010, it is not in fact completed as yet; in fact, the right-of-way is still owned by railroad companies (Iowa, Chicago and Eastern and Soo Line) according to the city's Parcel Ownership Database as of February 2011. The bottom line is that the railroad corridor – whether actively used by freight cars or bicyclists and pedestrians, significantly impacts the study area, and depending upon the redevelopment philosophy pursued can strongly enhance the character of the area.

**Walking/Bicycling:** On the Beloit side of the stateline, several existing and planned public off-road recreational paths converge near the new transit facility on Shirland Avenue. These paths are of particular significance in the study area, as the proposed east-west path follows a currently existing and active rail corridor through the midsection of the study area (between Colby Street and St. Paul Avenue) and on to Turtle Creek Park while the existing north-south path links to the Riverside Trail which itself extends north along the riverfront through Beloit. About 2 ½ miles down the railroad corridor extending to the southeast from the “confluence” area at Rockton Road, the Winnebago County Trail System has a trailhead and path system linking to a regional trail system. This rail corridor is identified in several planning documents as a future off-road path. Even closer in South Beloit is the recently completed Dorr Road Path, which originates at City Park in South Beloit (less than ½ mile south of the study area) and connects southward to Prairie Hill Road and South Beloit High School. In short, a substantial amount of on-the-ground work has been done to expand opportunities for bicyclists, walkers, and outdoor enthusiasts both within and nearby the Connections Corridor. The next step is to connect those pieces.

**Public Transit:** The Beloit Transit System operates a number of routes downtown, a few of which extend into the study area by way of Saint Paul Avenue and Broad Street. Currently, no transit service is available in South Beloit.

## Environmental Considerations

### Floodplains

Floodplains, defined by FEMA as “Any land area susceptible to being inundated by water from any source” and similarly defined in the various local and state regulatory agencies’ floodplain ordinances, will continue to be hugely influential in the future development and identity of the study area – arguably more so than any other factor. In fact, essentially the entire study area is identified on FEMA’s Flood Hazard Maps, with a very significant proportion of those lands (particularly south of the state line) falling within the floodway. The National Flood Insurance Program defines floodway as “The channel of a river or other watercourse and the adjacent land areas that **must be reserved** in order to discharge the base flood without cumulatively increasing the water surface elevation more than a designated height” (emphasis added). While floodplain (and specifically, floodway) regulations are not necessarily uniform from Wisconsin to Illinois, it can be assured that the prevalence of areas defined as floodway will require (at the least) additional permitting and other resources for future development and redevelopment and, in many cases, may hinder future development and redevelopment.

### Human Influenced Conditions

Approximately 30 sites throughout the study area are tracked via various Federal or State Agencies for potential or realized environmental concerns. A majority of these sites are of concern due to the potential of on-site activities (past or present) to contaminate soil or groundwater. Of these, only four are currently “open”, meaning that remedial activity is either scheduled to take place or is underway. Perhaps the most noteworthy site of environmental interest is the former Beloit Foundry Site at the northeast corner of the Blackhawk Boulevard/Gardner Street intersection. This property in the past has been envisioned as a component of a “Turtle Creek Breezeway”, providing public greenspace linkages between the Rock River and Turtle Creek on both sides of the state line.

### Wildlife Habitat

The western edge of the Connections Corridor, near the confluence, is especially notable in its relatively undisturbed state given the surrounding urban and

suburban development. While the plant and animal communities associated with the study area’s waterways and their wetlands and uplands are literally teeming with diversity, one especially notable resident group arguably warrants very special consideration: several nesting Bald Eagle pairs (reports range between seven to twelve birds having been sighted in the vicinity of the confluence). Still classified as a “threatened” species under the Federal Endangered Species Act, Bald Eagles and their nesting habitats are afforded certain protections under federal law. While specific activities at sites known to have eagle activity should be coordinated with a local Fish and Wildlife Service Field Office, some general parameters that should be in place for known roosting sites include keeping a distance between new human activities and nests, maintaining forested (or otherwise natural) areas between new human activities and around nest trees, and avoiding certain human activities (those with which are typically associated disturbances such as excessive noise, light, heat, other nuisances) during the breeding season.

### Natural Conditions

As noted, the Rock River, Turtle Creek, and associated floodplains are the most influential natural environmental feature or condition in the study area. Besides these critical natural features, the Illinois DNR identifies most of the Rock River shoreline in South Beloit as Wetland, and characteristically wet soils often associated with wetlands underlie much of the study area.



## Cultural Considerations

In addition to its rich tapestry of natural areas, open space and urban amenities, the Connections Corridor also has a unique cultural legacy – specifically to Native Americans – that contributes to its unique value as a “place” in South Beloit and Beloit. A historical marker located near the corner of State Street and Public Avenue in the City of Beloit reveals that Chief Black Hawk was sheltered by the Ho-Chunk during the Black Hawk War in 1832 at “Turtle Village.” As it happens, the Village itself stood on the east side of the River at or near its confluence with Turtle Creek, and was abandoned by the Ho-Chunk shortly after Black Hawk’s visit for fear of retaliation by the U.S. Military. History shows, however, that Turtle Village was a thriving Native American community, and that the confluence has served as a unique and vital destination for generations.

## Jurisdictional Considerations

The study area includes lands in two different cities, two different counties, and two different states, which presents a unique challenge specifically when considering implementation measures in the future. This “border-straddling” condition inevitably doubles the number of agencies that the study and future planning efforts must consider and consult. Coordination of efforts and understanding regulatory and practical differences on both sides of the state line will continue to be critical throughout the planning process. This is not to mention the local and regional political and quasi-political entities that operate within and around the planning area. In short, jurisdiction over the study area is more complex than simply coordinating with “Community A,” and the list below attempts to introduce those entities that will have significant influence over planning, implementation, and funding of issues and opportunities brought to light by this and future studies.

- City of Beloit
- City of South Beloit
- Winnebago County, IL
  - o Forest Preserve District
  - o Planning and Community Development
- Rock County, WI Parks Department
- WI Department of Transportation, Southwest Region

- Illinois Department of Transportation, District 2
- WI Department of Natural Resources, S. Central Region
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources (Northwest Region/Region I)
- Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Rockford Region
- Wisconsin Department of Commerce
- Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
- Beloit 2020
- Greater Beloit Economic Development Committee
- Stateline Area Transportation Study

## Issues to Resolve

The assets introduced in the preceding pages provide a strong foundation when planning for the future of the Connections Corridor. Still, there are challenges that must be addressed in the study area through extensive and specific planning, further discussion with government agencies, and continued collaboration between communities. Keeping in mind that the opportunities present in the Connections Corridor are broad and many in number, it’s equally important to remind ourselves that capitalizing on those opportunities is a relatively long-term initiative, and that there is no “magic bullet” project by which all of this (and other) study’s goals will be realized. By acknowledging and then addressing the challenges present in the study area, logical and meaningful future projects will become apparent, as will an understanding of how those projects can be prioritized and implemented.

### Recreational Paths and Trails – Gaps in Existing and Planned Systems

Especially over the last ten to fifteen years, the City of Beloit has been successful in improving the connectivity and accessibility of its neighborhoods and its downtown for bicycles and pedestrians, specifically through the construction of off-road trails and paths. It would seem there is tremendous momentum, and substantial public support, for the continuation of the path and trail network present in Downtown Beloit to a larger city- and region-wide system, and the Connections Corridor is (at least should be) a center piece within the heart of this network.

As the recently updated SLATS Bike and Ped Plan highlights, continuing the city's existing Riverfront Trail southward from its current terminus near the Shirland Avenue bridge is a crucial first step in making the city's system "regional" by crossing the border into South Beloit and ultimately linking with the Winnebago County System either at City Park or further south at Rockton Road. Perhaps a bit more long-sighted but nonetheless a crucial link in imagining the future regional network is an eastward link from the current terminus across State Street and through the new City of Beloit open space on Colby Street, and continuing through Turtle Creek Park before swinging northeastward to connect to the Rock County system envisioned for the eastern part of the County.

### **Floodplains/Floodways**

As discussed earlier in this report, the study area is heavily influenced by the presence of Floodway and Floodfringe areas on both sides of the state line, but particularly in the City of South Beloit. The most recent update to the floodplain maps was completed in 2006, which was a comprehensive, multi-state update of flood data and flood maps. While this update presents the most accurate and current data available for flood insurance rates, it may be desirable for the City of South Beloit to conduct a detailed, targeted flood study for Turtle Creek and the Rock River. The present condition (extensive floodway) in the Connections Corridor leaves little option for redevelopment or new development throughout much of the area. While a flood study and ultimately a map revision would be a significant undertaking, it may result in a more precise delineation of potential flood extents and, quite possibly, reveal opportunities for maintaining or improving development potential in the area without increasing flood impacts on properties in and surrounding the Connections Corridor. In any event, if the community does wish to modify the floodway map, IDNR and FEMA should be contacted before beginning any such studies as these agencies have specific map revision processes that must be adhered to.

### **Intergovernmental Coordination and Local Buy-In**

One of the most substantial challenges in meeting the goals of this study will be to coordinate projects, priorities, and funding opportunities on both sides of the state line. While agencies such as Beloit 2020, SLATS, and GBEDC are tremendous assets in that they serve

the greater Beloit area, it is ultimately up to the elected officials and staff representing both cities to maintain a line of communication and coordination when pursuing initiatives identified in this analysis and other plans and studies for the area. Considering that this Opportunity Analysis focuses considerably on the South Beloit side of the state line, the newly elected City Council in South Beloit has a tremendous – and fresh – opportunity to assume a leading role in planning the future of the Connections Corridor, a role which previously has not been as prominent.

Funding future projects presents a unique challenge, especially when considering funding assistance in the form of grants from sources such as State Departments of Natural Resources, Departments of Transportation, and so on. Most likely, critical pieces of information such as application requirements, application due dates, and distribution cycles will differ from agency to agency and most certainly from state to state. With this in mind, timing and preparedness on the part of the applicant (which will almost always be the city(ies)) will be essential when prioritizing, planning, and applying for funding of specific projects. As the Plan is fleshed out in Part Two of this process, key funding sources, dates, and application requirements will be presented to assist both communities in implementing projects.

## **Potential Project Partners**

Beloit City Council

South Beloit City Council

Beloit 2020

The Greater Beloit Economic Development Corporation

State Line Area Transportation Study



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### Turtle Creek Corridor “Connections”

#### Public Input Session

January 18, 2011

South Beloit High School

School Library

#### MEETING NOTES/OBSERVATIONS

The first of two public meetings was held as a public input session at South Beloit High School on January 18. The purpose of this meeting was to engage business owners, property owners, residents and public officials with a stake in the future vitality of the Turtle Creek Corridor. The discussion was focused around the study area’s core assets, opportunities and challenges that future plans and implementation strategies will need to address.

After a brief introduction of the planning process, an overview of the project area and meeting objectives, meeting attendees were divided into three smaller discussion groups. The conversation revolved around three key themes: Impressions, Attitudes and Aspirations. Each group was asked to respond to a series of framing questions aimed at drawing out the group’s impressions of the corridor as it exists today, experiences within the corridor and vision for the future.

#### Impressions:

Key themes in the impressions discussion include a lack of access to the corridor’s natural features and the desire for redevelopment in order to improve connections, recreational opportunities and continue efforts to make this a better place to live, work and play. The site has a history and a unique Native American connection; allowing opportunity for education and tourism potential. While efforts have been made to improve small parts of the corridor, there are still large areas of land that are viewed as underutilized, unattractive and, to some extent, unsafe. Untapped partnerships slow important initiatives such as the Rock River Trail movements.

#### Attitude:

Although there are a number of destinations within the corridor, largely restaurants and retail businesses, the groups felt that the area could become a destination in itself. The area has no real identity, has seen little commitment from either the private or public sector and has a great deal of unrealized potential. A vision that embraces the unique environmental conditions and recreational opportunities while serving the community’s needs is desired.

#### Aspirations

There is a strong desire to create connections to local and regional bike networks, expand opportunities for outdoor recreation, including improved water access, explore redevelopment opportunities and enhance the aesthetic character. The confluence of the Rock River and Turtle Creek is recognized as a unique environmental feature, affording distinctive opportunities, that has been underappreciated due to a lack of visibility and access. Strategic redevelopment, streetscape improvement, improved access and connections are all tools that could be utilized in order to improve perceptions of the corridor while making it a destination with its own unique identity.

#### Priorities

- Create Regional Connections
- Improve access and expand recreation opportunities
- Strategic redevelopment and aesthetic enhancement



1. Framing Questions from group discussions
2. Framing Question Response Summary
3. Priorities

### 1. Framing Questions:

#### Exercise 1 - Impressions:

- How would you describe this area? – What one word or phrase comes to mind when you're asked to describe this area?
- Is there any element of the area that you feel “epitomizes” the planning area? In other words, what (if any) thing is the area's signature?

#### Exercise 2 - Attitude:

- If you pass through this area regularly, what gets you to stop? If you don't stop, what would get you to stop? If you avoid this area, are there any factors that contribute to that avoidance?
- What place or places within the planning area are best for:
  - Shopping      - Dining/Nightlife      - Walking      - Bicycling
  - Quiet      - Viewing Nature/Wildlife      - Gathering with friends/family

#### Exercise 3 - Aspirations:

- Are there any places outside of the planning area that you enjoy/admire that could be successful if implemented in this area?
- What could you envision happening in this area?

#### Exercise 4 - Priorities:

- Impressions
- Attitudes
- Aspirations

### 2. Framing Question Response Summary

#### Impressions: Group 1

- Low cost of living
- Walgreens development is a positive
- Re use, redevelopment potential
- Untapped potential
- Lack of access
- Pockets of blight
- Potential for recreation
- Opportunity for better use/mixed use
- Open space is plentiful
- Retail/Residential/Recreation
- Challenge to develop
- Incongruent uses
- Wheeler Bridge (area icon)
- Water Ways (area icon)
- Confluence (area icon)
- Desire to bring families

#### Impressions: Group 2

- Would not come to area
- History
- Blackhawk Blvd Character
- Bike path at H.S.
- Gardner @ Blackhawk – poor amp
- Needs cleanup
- Turtle city – name
- Cheap to live, food, fuel
- Bald eagle roost
- Empty
- Dead
- Wet
- Industrial/Employment - Gardner St.
- Lack of big development
- Potential gateway
- Success areas
- Safety
- Access
- No destination
- Recreation
- Ecology
- Underfunded ideas
- Inexpensive to live

#### Impressions: Group 3

- Underutilized
- Old Industrial
- Abandoned
- Affordability
- Ecologically fragile
- Under appreciated
- Inaccessible/hidden
- Bottleneck – transportation (terrible traffic/roads)
- Haven for homeless
- Opportunity for eco-tourism (campsites)
- Untapped partnership w/Rock River Trail
- Underfunded plan implementation
- Behr Recycling
- Confluence of Rock & Turtle
- Recreational development opportunities
- Conservation design – for canoeing down to Rockton



### Attitudes: Group 1

- Unseen Opportunity
- Unseen redevelopment opportunities
- Lack of vision
- Bike connection – Pass through
- Restaurants/Businesses
- Antique malls
- Still some places to avoid
  - Broad St. Bridge
  - Park Ave. Bridge
  - Wheeler Bridge
- New park w/ S. Beloit has potential
- Pool
- Boat Launches (S. of confluence)

### Attitudes: Group 2

- Good restaurants
- Recreation-Bikes, River access
- Things for families
- History: Native American Heritage
- Dysfunctional Government
- Unified front
- Bike connections
- Access confluence
- Improve public space
- Water park
- Family activities
- Museum
- Access to creek and water
- Improve access
- Accessibility
- Lack of vision
- Lack of promotion
- Community partnerships
- RR work to cross tracks

### Attitudes: Group 3

- Restored Indian Village
- Recreation – Paddle & Trail
- Bike & ped accessibility
- Reopened Grocery Store
- (No) parking – Add parking
- Restored wetlands
- Parkways – more inviting
- Landscape
- Redeveloped Restaurant industry
- Shop – Everett's/ Tobacco Shack, antique malls
- Dining – Anna Maria's Imperial Palace
- Walk – within parks
- Bike – Outside of Planning Area
- Quiet – Confluence – can't get to it – wildlife
- Gather – Pear Lake, City Park (Outside of Planning Area)
- Why stop? Everett's, Dari Ripple, Pizzazz (Beloit), Fishing, Turtle Tap
- Avoid: Traffic flow, homeless, water quality

### Aspirations: Group 1

- Redevelop underutilized properties
  - Holiday Inn
  - Cub Foods
  - Blackhawk/Gardner
  - Finnegans
  - Besley Site
- Mixed use
- Improved hotel
- Streetscape improvements
- Connections
- Access to water and confluence
- Retail/Pharmacy @ Gardner
- Grocery
- Safety/convenience
- Access to confluence
- Clean Up
- Face lift of roadways/streetscape (Dearborn), Gardner, Blackhawk
- Turtle Cities image for regional identity

### Aspirations: Group 2

- Riverwalk, shoreline access
- Horticulture area
- Campsites
- Museums, Discovery Center
- Education
- Eco – tourism
- Make connections
- Canoe trail
- Visit draw
- Turtle City

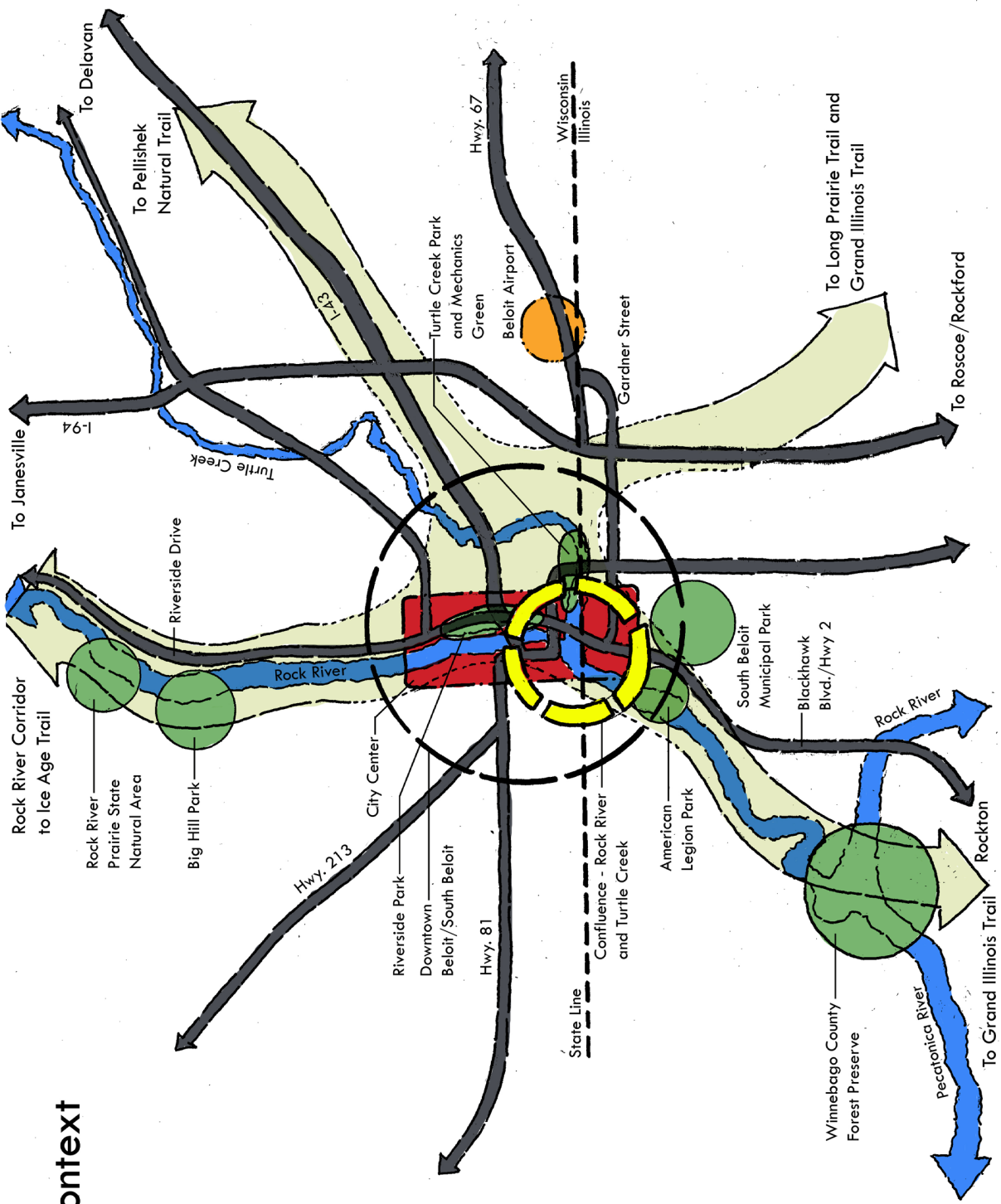
### Aspirations: Group 3

- Areas adjacent to Rockton – Rockford
  - Nygren wetlands – Macktown Hononegah
  - Riverside sports core
- Riverside Park (Beloit) – Beloit Inn/Riverside Dr.
- Preservation Park (Beloit)
- Whitewater – Cravath/Trippe Lake – Waters Edge
- Rockford – Sinnissippi Bike Path
- Thiebault opportunity (cabin remnants evidently in this area)
- Connections to counties, cities, bike paths

### 3. Priorities:

- Get rid of the war zone look at the confluence
- Secure greenspace along shorelines
- Water management
- Family places/activities
- Regional connections
- Streetscapes
- Strategic Redevelopment
- River Access
- Impressions:
  - Recreation
  - Accessibility (signage)
  - Stormwater control/prairie planting
- Attitudes:
  - Parking
  - Invest in potential





Regional Context

