



*National Manufacturing Building
October 2010*

Section 3

EXISTING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS

To establish the basis for the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan, existing conditions were inventoried within Sterling's Downtown and Riverfront areas. The existing conditions analysis is the product of community outreach and data collected and analyzed by the Consultant.

Community outreach is the involvement of the community at-large in the creation and management of their surroundings. The planning process for the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan involved community residents, business owners and elected/appointed officials in planning and decision making, promoting a sense of community and an avenue by which information about local conditions, needs and attitudes can be channeled. Allowing the community to participate in the formation of a plan can help foster a sense of stewardship by allowing people to feel their ideas have influenced the final decisions.

Data collection and analysis focused on current conditions and influencing factors within the project study area. The Consultant Team reviewed past plans and studies, inventoried existing land use and development patterns, and evaluated existing transportation features to determine their impact on the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan.

The Existing Conditions Analysis establishes the "foundation" or "starting point" of understanding, to better facilitate the development of the vision, goals, objectives, and planning recommendations in the upcoming steps of the riverfront redevelopment process. Existing conditions detailed in this report include:

- ◇ Past Plans and Studies
- ◇ Existing Land Use and Development Patterns
- ◇ Parks, Open Space and Environmental Features
- ◇ Transportation: Access, Circulation and Infrastructure



Past Plans & Studies

An assessment of past plans and studies was conducted to gain a better understanding of initiatives, assessments and objectives previously undertaken by the City of Sterling and other entities. Understanding the intentions and results of these documents provides insight into the Sterling community and is important in identifying the potential of the City's Downtown and Riverfront areas. As conditions change over time, the relevance of some of these documents is lessened, while components of other documents continue to provide direction and remain representative of community aspirations.

Past plans and studies were assessed to determine their relevance to, and consideration for, the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan. Key recommendations of the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan are influenced by this assessment and are designed to address any shortcomings identified in previous plans and studies. A brief summary of relevant past plans and studies is presented below, and includes the following:

- ◇ City of Sterling Comprehensive Strategic Plan;
- ◇ City of Sterling Design Guidelines;
- ◇ Whiteside County Greenways & Trails Plan;
- ◇ Sterling Downtown Master Plan & Streetscape Design;
- ◇ Rock Falls – Redevelopment Opportunity Analysis;
- ◇ Rock Falls – Reliant Redevelopment Plan;
- ◇ Sterling Mural Society;
- ◇ National Register of Historic Places;
- ◇ IDOT Rock River Bridge Replacement Project/Plans; and,
- ◇ City of Sterling Zoning Ordinance.

Comprehensive Strategic Plan

The City of Sterling's Comprehensive Strategic Plan was adopted in August of 2006 and provides specific recommendations for the City's land development over the next 20 years and beyond. One of the recommendations identified in the Comprehensive Strategic Plan is the creation of a Downtown/Riverfront Neighborhood. This Neighborhood consists of Downtown, the former Northwestern Steel and Wire lands, and other industrial properties along the Rock River extending from the Upper Dam downstream to the oxbow. Within the Downtown/Riverfront Neighborhood, the Plan recognizes that the Rock River is not a celebrated or well-used feature of the community and that greater attention must be given to the riverfront area by the City and other economic development entities.

Specific strategies identified to rehabilitate the Rock River and adjacent lands include the following:

- ◇ Relocating existing industrial uses along the riverfront to other industrial/business park areas in the City to encourage/allow for the development of active space along the river.
- ◇ Developing mixed-use opportunities along the river where retail, office, entertainment and residential uses are integrated seamlessly with one another.
- ◇ Creating a continuous riverwalk that encourages pedestrian and bicycle use and connects to a larger, regional trail system.

Remarks

- ◇ The Comprehensive Strategic Plan recommended the creation of a Downtown/riverfront-specific redevelopment plan to provide a framework outlining issues, opportunities, physical improvements, policies and advocacy for the River and its environs.
- ◇ The Comprehensive Strategic Plan conceptualizes mixed-use redevelopment with cultural/public spaces, a riverwalk, artisan guild, hotel/waterpark, history center and "dockominiums" along the Rock River riverfront.
- ◇ A shortcoming of the Comprehensive Strategic Plan is the identification of "dockominiums" in an area where boating is inhibited by two nearby dams.

City of Sterling Design Guidelines

The purpose of the City's Design Guidelines is to promote the "public health, safety, and welfare" by aiding in the planning, design and re-design of the built environment of the City. The Design Guidelines aim to enhance and unify the City's visual character while avoiding monotony and repetition. The document provides Site Design Standards and Architectural Guidelines to be used by the Community Services Department and Plan Commission as they evaluate development proposals.

Remarks

- ◇ The Design Guidelines are intended to be applicable city-wide, thus redevelopment along the Rock River would be required to comply with the regulations set forth in this document.

Whiteside County Greenway & Trails Plan

The Whiteside County Greenway and Trails Plan was completed by a coalition of local and county-wide agency representatives with involvement from select State agencies. The primary goals of the Greenway and Trails Plan are to increase/enhance greenway and recreational trail connections throughout Whiteside County; and, ultimately, link Whiteside County trails to the Grand Illinois Trail. This would be achieved by providing a continuous path stretching from the Hennepin Feeder Canal, traveling cross-county to the Mississippi River and the Great River Trail to the west. The Plan identifies local priorities for each municipality in Whiteside County. At the time the Plan was adopted, the following priorities were identified for the City of Sterling:

- ◇ Riverfront trail from upper dam to Oppold Marina
- ◇ Lynn Boulevard Trail from Lincoln Highway to Locust Street
- ◇ Lynn Boulevard Trail from Locust Street to Westwood
- ◇ Marking, striping, and bicycle safe storm sewer grates of shared use routes

Remarks

- ◇ Two shared use routes are recommended within the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Area project study area boundaries. These are planned along 4th Street and 1st Avenue. The Plan defines shared use trails as low-volume streets or rural roads to be shared by existing vehicular traffic and bicycle and other non-motorized uses.
- ◇ The recommended riverfront trail is located east of the Riverfront Redevelopment Area.



Downtown Sterling has an established streetscape composed of recycled red brick, green metal benches and litter receptacles, rockfaced limestone and more.

Sterling Downtown Master Plan and Streetscape Design

The City's Downtown Master Plan and Streetscape Design was prepared in 2001 to provide recommendations for physical improvements to the City's downtown core in an effort to restore the charm and character of the area. The Downtown Master Plan and Streetscape Design included perspective sketches, building façade overlays and schematic streetscape plans. The streetscape plans were complemented by proposed concrete paving areas, brick accent paving, light fixtures, street trees, understory plantings, seating, informational markers and gateway signs.

The Streetscape Project was divided into nine phases that unfolded over the course of eight years. Details for each phase are presented in the table above.

Remarks

- ◇ Elements from the Plan may be carried over into the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Area to establish a visual connection between the Downtown and Riverfront, as well as to bridge the gap that occurs along the Union Pacific Railroad.
- ◇ The Downtown's proximity to the Riverfront Redevelopment Area provides opportunities to extend the streetscape design towards the riverfront.

Rock Falls – Redevelopment Opportunity Analysis

The City of Rock Falls adopted the Redevelopment Opportunity Analysis in September of 2006. This document examined opportunities for redevelopment on two key riverfront sites in the City of Rock Falls: the former Reliant Fastener site and the former Northwestern Steel and Wire property. The Analysis developed "big picture" ideas inspired by community assets and by unrealized potentials. Key opportunities and assets identified for Rock Falls include:

- ◇ Transportation and regional location;
- ◇ Accessibility;
- ◇ Technology and logistics;
- ◇ Manufacturing; and,
- ◇ River recreation.

The document promotes a mix of retail, residential and hospitality uses along the riverfront as redevelopment occurs.

Remarks

- ◇ Community input indicated a general concern that the development/redevelopment in Rock Falls will compete with development/redevelopment in Sterling, or that Sterling's Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan will include too many duplications.

Rock Falls – Reliant Redevelopment Plan

The Reliant Redevelopment Plan is a preliminary master plan for the former Reliant Fastener site located south of the Rock River and east of 1st Avenue in the City of Rock Falls. The Plan identifies over 180,000 square feet of retail, hospitality, residential and mixed-use buildings oriented towards the Rock River. An amphitheater is planned adjacent to the river, and continuous bike trails are envisioned along the shoreline.

Remarks

- ◇ Community input indicated a general concern that the development/redevelopment in Rock Falls will compete with development/redevelopment in Sterling, or that Sterling's Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan will include too many duplications.

Sterling Streetscape Phasing

Phase	Boundaries	Completed	Cost
I	First Avenue: Viaduct to Fifth St.	2002	\$805,000
II	Locust Street: Third St to Fourth St.	2003	\$341,000
	Fourth Street: Locust St. to First Ave.		
III	Locust Street: Fourth St. to Fifth St.	2004	\$410,000
	Fifth Street: Locust St. to First Ave. SE & SW Corners: Locust St. & Third St.		
IV	Locust Street: Second St. to Third St.	2005	\$394,000
	Second Street: Locust St. to First St. North side of Third Street: Third Ave. to Fourth Ave.		
V	Third Street: First Ave. to Third Ave.	2006	\$496,000
VI	Second Avenue: Second St. to Fourth St.	2007	\$381,897
VII	Locust Street: Fifth St. to Seventh St.	2008	\$198,000
VIII	Second Street: First Ave. to Third Ave.	2009	N/A
	Third Avenue: Second St. to Brinks Cr.		
IX	Light Street Alley	2010 (current)	N/A



Rock Falls - Reliant Redevelopment Plan



Mural: the first Pioneer steam engine pulling into Sterling on July 17, 1856

Rock River Redevelopment Area/Rock River TIF

The Rock River Redevelopment Area consists primarily of privately owned properties available for redevelopment along the Rock River. Historically, this area was used for industrial purposes; however, the City has plans for future redevelopment of the area to include a riverfront park, steel mill museum, shopping areas and community-use areas. Infrastructure improvements and site wide cleanup are two priorities that will need to be addressed prior to redevelopment occurring. Currently, private funding and Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) grants are assisting with environmental investigations and cleanup in the area.

To help the City achieve its ultimate redevelopment goals for the Rock River Redevelopment Area, the Rock River Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District was created. The TIF is a public/private partnership between the City and a number of private businesses including Sterling Steel and its parent company Leggett-Platt. Much of the Rock River TIF spending is focused on remediating environmental concerns left behind after industry was displaced.

TIF districts are financing tools that can be employed by municipalities in hopes of reviving blighted areas like Sterling's Riverfront. Once a TIF district is created, assessed property values within its boundaries are essentially frozen for the life of the district. As the area begins to redevelop and assessed values rise, any additional property tax revenue is placed in a special fund for public improvements, land assemblage or to help finance private investment in the district. The maximum life of a TIF district in the State of Illinois is 23 years although it can be extended via approval from the State legislature.

Remarks

- ◇ A sizable portion of the Riverfront Redevelopment Sites is located within the Rock River TIF District boundaries, which will allow the sites to benefit from TIF funds.
- ◇ Environmental investigations and cleanup continues throughout the Rock River Redevelopment Area and on the Riverfront Redevelopment Sites.
- ◇ Rock River TIF funds may be used for public improvements, land assembly or to help finance private investment on the Riverfront Redevelopment Sites.

Sterling Murals

The Sterling Mural Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to documenting the heritage of the Sterling area by promoting the painting of murals on buildings. The society works in conjunction with the Sterling Mural Commission, which is appointed by the Mayor and approved by the City Council. Sterling currently has eighteen murals located within the City.

Remarks

- ◇ Seventeen out of the eighteen murals that currently exist within the City are located within the Downtown and Riverfront areas.
- ◇ Opportunities or locations for additional murals may be created in key gateway areas as redevelopment occurs or the Sterling Mural Society promotes the painting of new ones in the Riverfront area.

National Register of Historic Places

There are five sites within the City of Sterling that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, two of which are located within the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan's study area boundaries. These two sites include the First Congregational Church of Sterling located at 311 Second Avenue, and the Sterling Masonic Temple located at 111-113 West 3rd Street. Both are significant in terms of architecture and engineering and were added to the Register in the 1990s.

Remarks

- ◇ These two sites connect area residents and visitors to the City's historic past and enhance its sense of place.
- ◇ These two sites will need to be preserved and could potentially be enhanced as a part of the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan.

IDOT Rock River Bridge Replacement Project/Plans

The purpose of this project is to replace the IL 40 (1st Avenue) bridge over the Rock River for structural reasons. Project limits are 2nd Street in Rock Falls on the south to 2nd Avenue in Sterling to the north. The new bridge design features two travel lanes in each direction and a 10 foot wide bike/walkway on each side. Additionally, the bridge design incorporates four scenic outlook points overlooking the Rock River. Partial removal of the Lawrence Hardware building will be required. An underlying goal of the project is to lower the bridge profile so that the crest is reduced before 1st Avenue travels under the Union Pacific Railroad, and to improve sight distance for northbound traffic into Sterling.

Remarks

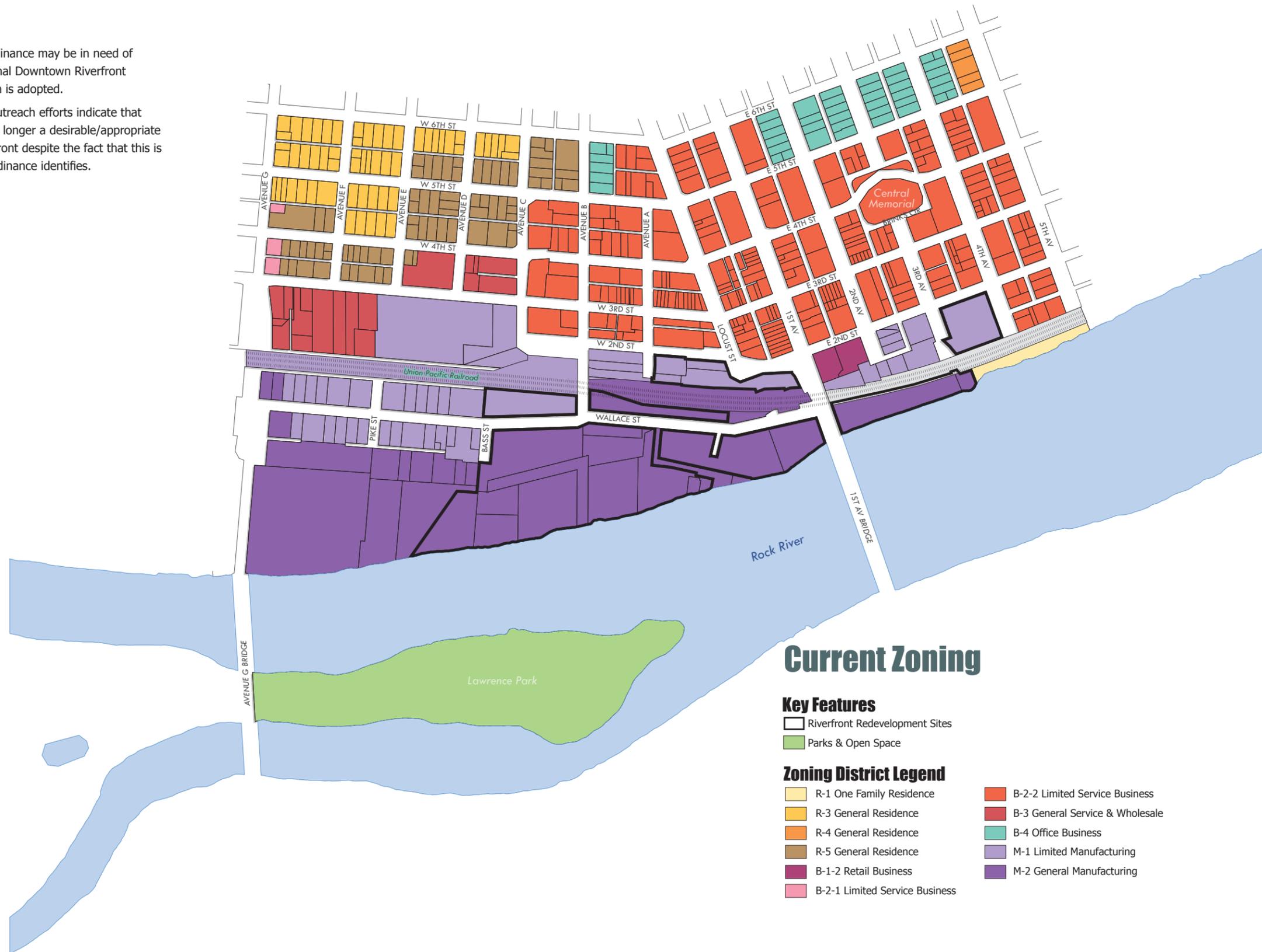
- ◇ The bridge functions, and will continue to function, as the main gateway/entrance into the City, Downtown and Riverfront areas.
- ◇ The Rock River Bridge Replacement Project requires demolition of a small garage attached to the Lawrence Brothers building; however, the original building is not affected by the Project.

City Zoning Ordinance

The City's Zoning Ordinance was adopted in May of 1995, and has been updated periodically since then to respond to changing community concerns and priorities. Within the project study area, land is predominantly zoned B-2-2 Limited Service Business District, M-2 General Manufacturing District or M-1 Limited Manufacturing District. Upon initial review, the B-2-2 zoning district appears to be appropriate for the Downtown based upon existing land uses and development intensity. It promotes denser development with up to 100% lot coverage and floor area ratios (FAR) of 3.0 or higher. However, the M-1 and M-2 districts no longer appear to be relevant along the riverfront and may prohibit the desired future land uses and redevelopment.

Remarks

- ◇ The City Zoning Ordinance may be in need of updates once the final Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan is adopted.
- ◇ Initial community outreach efforts indicate that manufacturing is no longer a desirable/appropriate use along the riverfront despite the fact that this is what the Zoning Ordinance identifies.





Existing Land Use & Development Patterns

Existing land uses and development patterns within Sterling's Downtown and Riverfront areas collectively distinguish the areas from the rest of the City and play an important role in the creation of the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan. The current character of these two areas differs greatly as the areas along the river consist of vacant industrial buildings and the Downtown is the more intensely developed with a diverse array of land uses. Previously, the riverfront functioned as the industrial core and employment center of the City; however, the decline of local industry and inadequate property maintenance evokes a sense of blight and underutilization. The Downtown continues to function as the City's central business district and the "heart" of the community.

Masonic Temple • June 2010

Within the Downtown, development is pedestrian-oriented, but this quickly transitions to auto-oriented businesses as you move away from the core. The Riverfront Redevelopment Sites themselves are not easily classified as pedestrian-oriented or auto-oriented; rather, the sites lack orientation and are disconnected and separated from Downtown by the Union Pacific Railroad, and they lack both a consistent street grid and pedestrian amenities.

This section of the Plan includes an inventory of the existing land uses and development patterns within the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan's project study area. The inventory is based upon reconnaissance undertaken in the summer of 2010 and includes each parcel within the project study area.

Existing Land Use

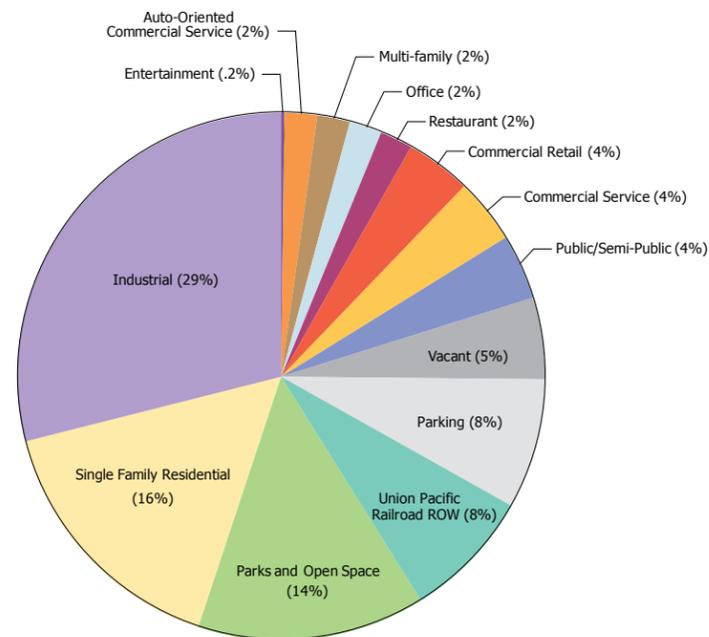
Within the project study area, the majority of land uses consist of commercial businesses, restaurants, professional offices and public/semi public uses. Industrial and manufacturing uses are primarily located adjacent to the Rock River and several vacant parcels comprise the Riverfront Redevelopment Sites.

Achieving an appropriate mix of land uses is key to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Riverfront Redevelopment Sites. A successful riverfront area typically includes several coexisting uses that provide a sense of urban vitality and activity at the water's edge.

The table above highlights the land uses currently present within the Downtown and Riverfront areas, as well as their square footage.

Existing Land Use Breakdown

Land Use	Total Square Footage	Percentage of Project Study Area
Auto-Oriented Commercial Service	136,487	2%
Commercial Retail	358,887	4%
Commercial Service	328,402	4%
Entertainment	13,429	0.2%
Industrial	2,547,854	29%
Multi-Family Residential	155,534	2%
Office	196,952	2%
Parking	685,257	8%
Parks and Open Space	1,205,681	14%
Public/Semi-Public	387,674	4%
Restaurant	139,283	2%
Single Family Residential	1,411,483	16%
Union Pacific Railroad Right-of-way	684,755	8%
Vacant	504,183	5%
Total	8,755,861	100.00%



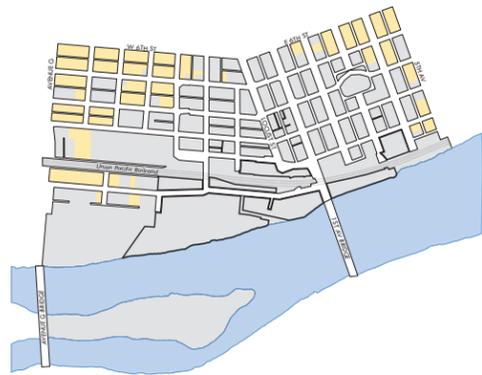
Existing Land Use

Key Features

■ Riverfront Redevelopment Sites

Land Use Legend

- Parks & Open Space
- Entertainment
- Single Family Residential
- Office
- Multi-family Residential
- Public & Semi-Public
- Commercial Retail
- Industrial/Manufacturing
- Commercial Service
- Parking
- Auto-oriented Service
- Union Pacific Railroad
- Restaurant
- Vacant

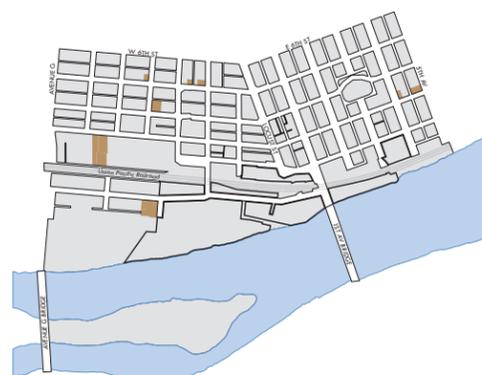


Single Family Residential

Established single family neighborhoods occupy the fringe of the Downtown and Riverfront study area and are not anticipated to undergo significant redevelopment in the future. The majority of homes in these areas are older and their condition and architectural styles vary. Single family neighborhoods within the project study area were developed with a traditional grid and alley system which provides a uniform layout due to standard street and lot dimensions. The average single family residential property is approximately 140 feet deep and the typical home size is approximately 1,500 square feet. Single family areas are generally walkable with sidewalks present on both sides of the street. Some residential structures may be significant to Sterling's local history.

Potential Influences & Implications

- ◇ The single family land use itself will have minimal influence on the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan; however, the concerns of the residents in these neighborhoods should be incorporated during the planning process.
- ◇ As the Downtown and Riverfront are revitalized and redeveloped, single family homes in the project study area may experience additional development pressure in consideration of their age and proximity to the redevelopment sites.



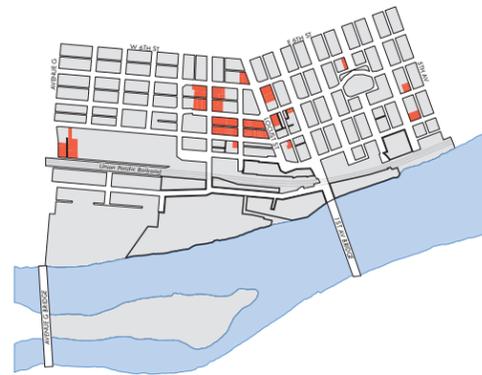
Multi-Family Residential

Approximately two percent of the project study area is currently developed with multi-family residential housing. Fragmented multi-family units are interspersed throughout the Downtown and include attached single-family homes, apartment buildings, condominiums and barrack-style townhomes. There are also a few instances in which multi-family apartments are located on the upper floors of mixed-use buildings.

A key component of many successful, vibrant downtowns and riverfront areas is multi-family residential as it provides a consistent customer base to patronize nearby businesses. The small amount of multi-family housing does not appear to provide a desirable residential density in the Downtown or Riverfront area.

Potential Influences & Implications

- ◇ Existing multi-family residential land uses will have moderate influence on the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan because it is scattered and secondary to commercial uses within Downtown.
- ◇ Multi-family residential may be desirable along the Riverfront as standalone buildings or as elements of multi-story, mixed-use buildings to create a healthy mix of uses and housing options within the community.



Commercial Retail

Commercial retail uses are businesses that sell goods to consumers such as groceries, clothing and other household items. Approximately four percent of the project study area consists of commercial retail, making the area one of the largest retail concentrations in the City. Retail uses generally range from small to large scale independent businesses-national retailers are typically located outside of the project study area along Illinois Route 2. The Country Market is the largest commercial retailer within the Downtown area.

During the community outreach process, a desire for a healthy mix of uses and a pedestrian-friendly atmosphere was expressed. Attracting new retail businesses was cited as a key objective of the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan

Potential Influences & Implications

- ◇ Existing commercial retail uses will have an influence on the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan as it anchors the Downtown area and has the potential to help attract additional retail businesses.
- ◇ The Riverfront Redevelopment Sites have the potential to attract pedestrian-oriented retail, which could draw new customers and visitors to the Riverfront area.
- ◇ The Sterling community desires retail in combination with public gathering spaces along the Rock River riverfront.
- ◇ The community's desires for retail along the water may create competition for Downtown.



Restaurants/Entertainment Uses/Taverns

Though there are a number of restaurants/entertainment uses/taverns within the Downtown and Riverfront study area, they only make up 2.2% of the total land area. These uses include a mixture of national chains like Taco Bell and independent businesses such as Kelly's, Maria's Pizza, Sterling Theater, Bullseye and more. These businesses reinforce the project study area as a destination point for community residents and visitors, and are active during the day and night.

Potential Influences & Implications

- ◇ Restaurants and entertainment uses will have significant influence on the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan because they are active during the day and night.
- ◇ Restaurants/entertainment uses/taverns can offer opportunities to enhance the streetscape of the Riverfront area by providing outdoor seating and gathering areas.
- ◇ Promoting restaurants and entertainment uses along the Riverfront could help create a destination for nearby residents and employees attract visitors to the area.

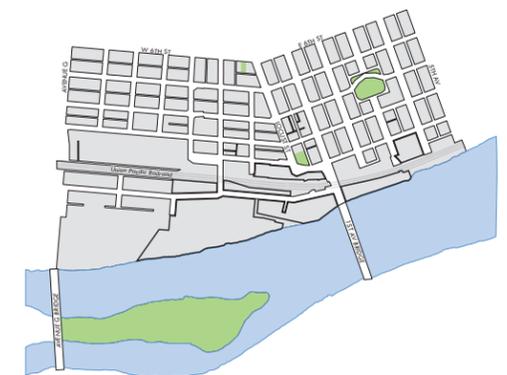
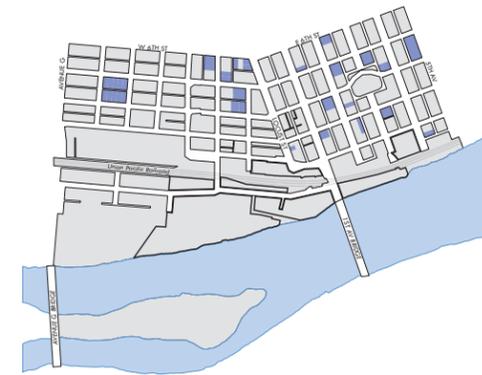
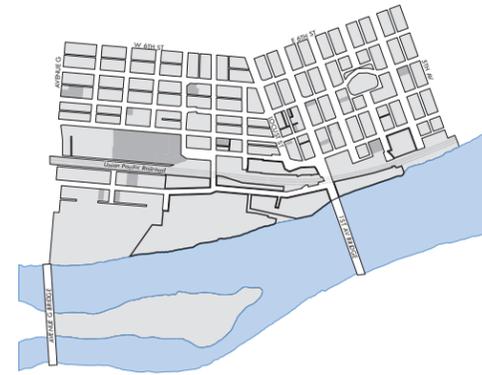
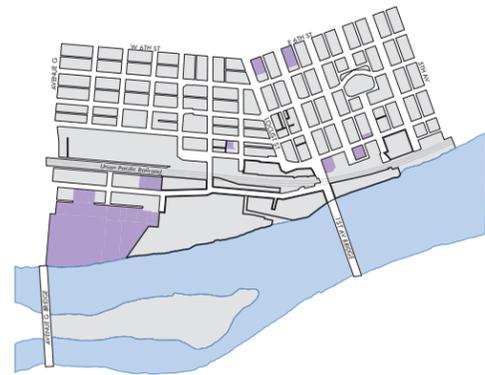
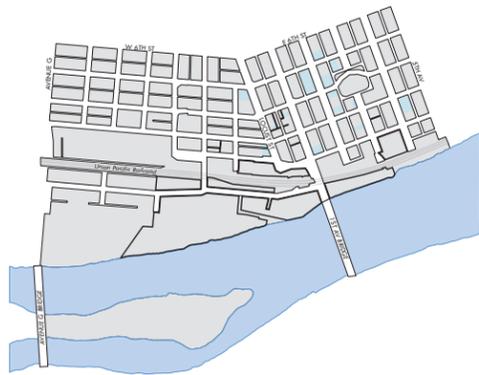


Commercial Service

Commercial service uses are businesses that provide services to consumers such as consultations, personal assistance or repairs. Four percent of the project study area is currently composed of commercial service uses, ranging from auto repair shops to hair studios. Commercial service uses do not typically attract people to an area.

Potential Influences & Implications

- ◇ Commercial service uses are important to sustain nearby residential development, thus these types of uses will have moderate influence on the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan.
- ◇ If residential development occurs in the Riverfront area, the demand for commercial services will increase.
- ◇ The community's desires for commercial along the river may create competition for Downtown.



Office

Two percent of the project study area is composed of office land uses including accounting and financial offices, medical offices and law offices. These types of offices do not generate a high amount of pedestrian activity though they are important components of a traditional downtown fabric. In general, office space works best in an urban environment when combined with other commercial uses. This allows the population of office buildings to patronize nearby businesses. Offices are desirable on the upper floors of mixed use buildings rather than on the ground floor where pedestrian generators are more appropriate and conducive to an active public realm.

Potential Influences & Implications

- ◇ Existing office uses will have minimal influence on the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan, though it may be appropriate to encourage their relocation to upper floors of mixed use buildings.
- ◇ Most office uses do not generate a high amount of pedestrian activity, thus are not desirable on the ground floors of buildings in the Riverfront area; however, they are desirable in a downtown as they bring visitors and employees to the area.
- ◇ Office uses could be promoted on the upper floors of mixed-use buildings along the Riverfront, which would allow pedestrian-generating uses to locate on the ground floors.

Industrial/Manufacturing

This land use category includes industrial properties, manufacturing, storage, and warehouse/distribution facilities within the project study area. Historically, much of the land along the Rock River riverfront was used for industrial purposes; however, changes in industrial processes and market conditions beyond the City's control have caused many of these businesses to close or relocate, vacating sites and buildings with little concern for their reuse or condition. The majority of vacant industrial/manufacturing buildings make up the Riverfront Redevelopment Sites.

In addition to the vacant industrial properties, small-scale industrial businesses continue to operate along 2nd Street. It may be appropriate to encourage relocation of these businesses to other sites in the City, or to incorporate these businesses into a comprehensive redevelopment scenario.

Potential Influences & Implications

- ◇ The industrial/manufacturing land use designation itself will have minimal influence on the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan; however, the sites and buildings these uses are located in will have significant influence as they make up the Riverfront Redevelopment Sites and are the focus of redevelopment efforts by the City.
- ◇ Adaptive reuse and preservation of historic structures and elements may strengthen connections with the history of the area; however, adaptive reuse of industrial buildings is challenging.

Vacant

The vacant parcels within Downtown and Riverfront areas generally make up the Riverfront Redevelopment sites thus hold substantial significance towards the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan. The majority of these sites contain aging, deteriorating buildings, thus removal and/or rehabilitation will need to occur prior to redevelopment. Adaptive reuse or preservation of historic buildings or features that are in good condition might also be appropriate, provided it can be done without compromising the viability of redevelopment.

Potential Influences & Implications

- ◇ Vacant sites and buildings will have significant influence on the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan because they generally make up the Riverfront Redevelopment Sites which are the Plan's primary focus.
- ◇ Though there are many negative connotations associated with vacant sites and buildings, vacancies present significant opportunities for the surrounding community because they offer locations for new businesses to locate in and opportunities for redevelopment. Vacant parcels provide easier targets for redevelopment since there is not usually a reluctant property owner to negotiate with.
- ◇ Environmental contamination was cited as a concern on vacant properties throughout the community outreach process and will need to be addressed prior to redevelopment.

Public/Semi-Public

Four percent of the project study area is comprised of a mixture of public/semi-public buildings including City offices, Township offices, churches and educational facilities. These types of land uses can help attract private investment and serve as important anchors, promoting a sense of place within a community. Public and semi-public facilities include institutions such as the Sterling Public Library, City Hall, First Congregational Church of Sterling and Sterling Masonic Temple, both of which are on the National Register of Historic Places. (insert photos of these uses)

Currently, no public/semi-public facilities exist in the Riverfront area though residents and property owners have expressed a desire for new public facilities to be developed on the Riverfront Redevelopment Sites.

Potential Influences & Implications

- ◇ Though important components of a traditional downtown or riverfront, existing public/semi-public buildings will have minimal influence on the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan because they are established and positioned in the Downtown. Existing facilities are not envisioned to relocate to the Riverfront area.
- ◇ The community has expressed an interest in developing new public/semi-public facilities in the Riverfront area including a museum, higher-education facility, recreational facility and/or a public amphitheater.

Parks and Open Space

Parks and open space are important components of an area and provide numerous functions and benefits. They offer residents and visitors a place to play and relax while enhancing the quality of life for surrounding neighborhoods. During the community outreach process, a desire for a continuous trail system and recreational amenities was expressed by residents and stakeholders.

Currently, the project study area currently has three park sites including Central Memorial Park in the Downtown, Lawrence Park on the Rock River, and a small pocket park at the northeast corner of 2nd Street and Locust Street. No public parks or open space exist on the north bank of the Rock River.

The Rock River is a unique natural feature that helps define the character of the Riverfront area. Incorporating additional park and open space can help reinforce the distinctiveness of the area and attract additional visitors. Additional discussion on parks and environmental features can be found on page X.

Potential Influences & Implications

- ◇ The Sterling community has expressed a desire for a publicly accessible riverfront that is complemented by gathering places and recreational opportunities.
- ◇ Opportunities for continuous public access or multi-use trails could exist along the Riverfront.
- ◇ Lawrence Park provides scenic vistas of the entire Riverfront Redevelopment Area and has many amenities including: fishing; boat launching; grills; horseshoe courts; picnic areas; playground equipment; open play areas; and, shelters.

County Market is an example of an auto-oriented use in the project study area as it caters predominantly to users arriving by automobile; however, the photo on the right illustrates a pedestrian-oriented street in the Downtown.



Existing Development Patterns

Development patterns can be influenced by both land use and the surrounding road network. Downtown Sterling's road network is generally characterized by a traditional grid pattern that is highly walkable, but this road network terminates before reaching the Riverfront area. The large parcels and "super-block" structure that exists within the Riverfront area does not make way for an organized road network and impacts the area's walkability.

As previously outlined, there is strong pedestrian orientation within the Downtown where the traditional grid system is in place; however, as one transitions beyond the Downtown's limits, development patterns become increasingly auto-oriented or disconnected. The Riverfront Redevelopment Sites themselves are disconnected and separated from Downtown by the Union Pacific Railroad. Wallace Street serves as the main east-west roadway in the Riverfront area, but does not promote efficient circulation between the Riverfront Redevelopment Sites or along the riverfront.

Pedestrian-Oriented Development

The Downtown is characterized by a pedestrian friendly environment and dense development that has been shaped by the existing street grid pattern. Pedestrian-oriented development is conducive to walking between destinations. It may include sidewalks, buffers, street trees, benches, fountains, transit stops, pedestrian-oriented signs and lighting, public art, and buildings that are visually interesting at the street level. Pedestrian-oriented businesses benefit from "walk-by traffic," and typically generate additional pedestrian movement. Examples of these types of businesses include cafes, markets and retail shops.

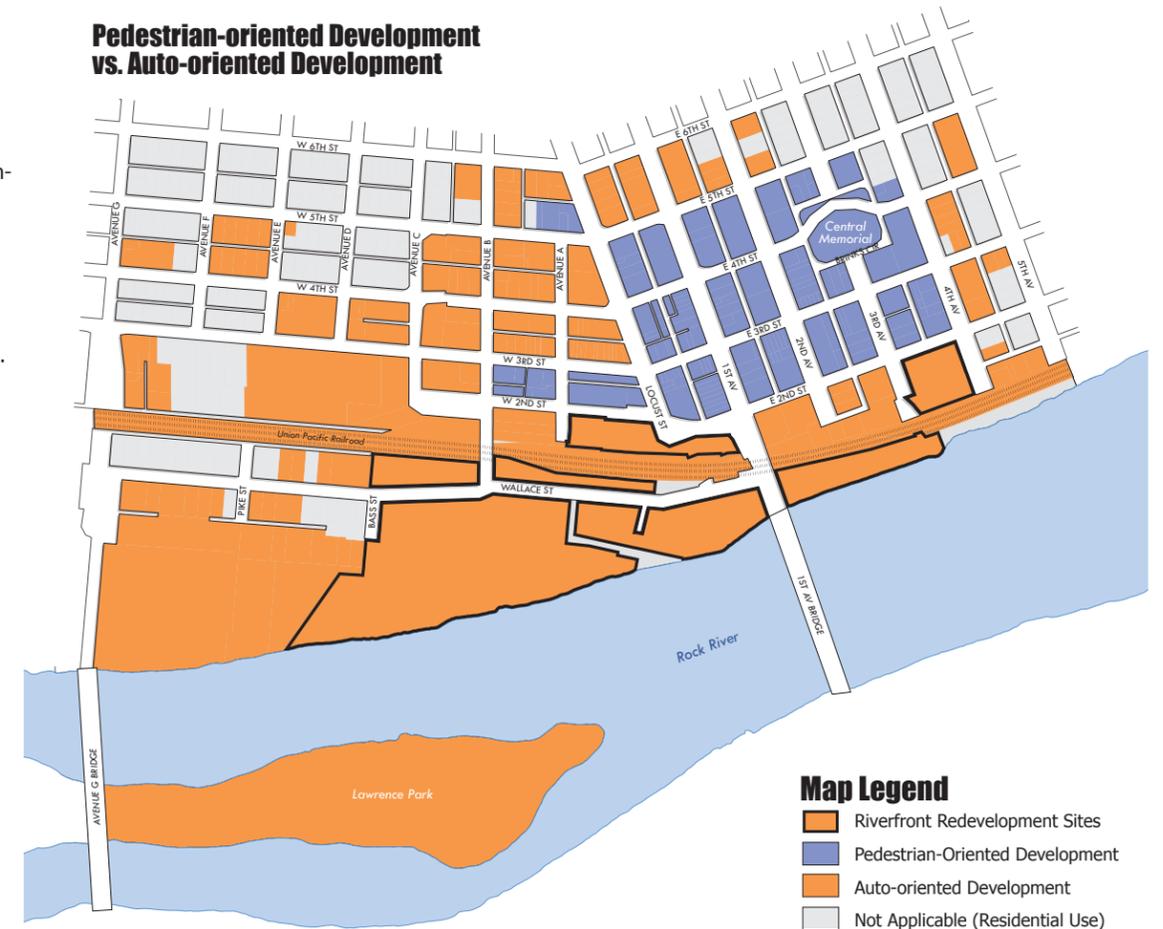
Auto-oriented Development

Auto-oriented development caters to users arriving by automobile. This type of development generally neglects the pedestrian and does not contribute to a traditional downtown atmosphere. Unlike pedestrian-oriented development, auto-oriented development generally functions as a destination for consumers and does not typically benefit from "walk-by traffic." Examples of auto-oriented businesses include large grocers, discount stores, home building stores and other big boxes, and banking or financial institutions.

Potential Influence on the Riverfront Redevelopment Sites

- ◇ Opportunities to extend the Downtown's block structure or grid system into the Riverfront area should be explored.

Pedestrian-oriented Development vs. Auto-oriented Development





A traditional streetwall is maintained throughout much of Sterling's historic downtown.

Streetwall

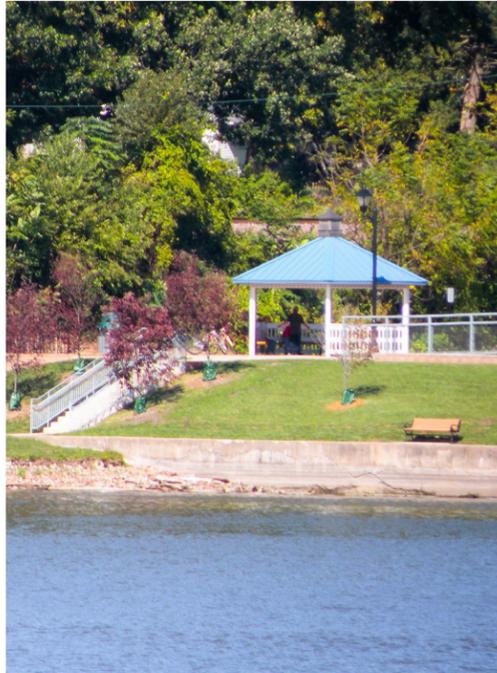
"Streetwall" is the term used to describe a continuous row of buildings, side-by-side, with little or no front setback so they are positioned adjacent to the sidewalk. The success of a pedestrian-oriented corridor can be undermined by a discontinuous streetwall with large gaps between buildings, buildings setback substantially from the sidewalk, or parking areas adjacent to sidewalks without perimeter landscaping, fencing, or screening. A more inviting pedestrian environment and denser development patterns are achieved when a continuous streetwall is maintained.

An attractive streetwall creates a "Main Street" type atmosphere that is more appealing and creates a better pedestrian atmosphere. Pedestrian amenities in combination with a streetwall, are a powerful tool in dictating the character and development pattern of an area. An attractive and effective streetwall is typically enhanced with the following features to promote a pedestrian-oriented atmosphere:

- ◇ Windows on the ground floor.
- ◇ High quality materials and architecture.
- ◇ Attractive lighting fixtures at a pedestrian scale.
- ◇ Attractive, high quality signage.
- ◇ Crosswalks with clear demarcation.
- ◇ Landscaping/Streetscaping elements.

Streetwall Locations





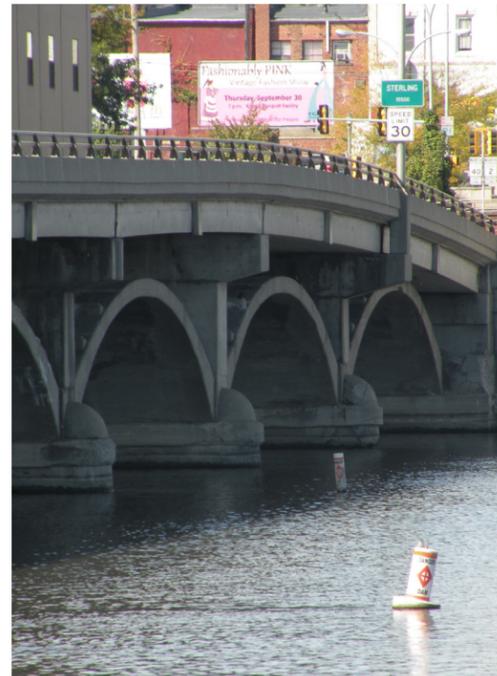
Riverwalk Opportunities



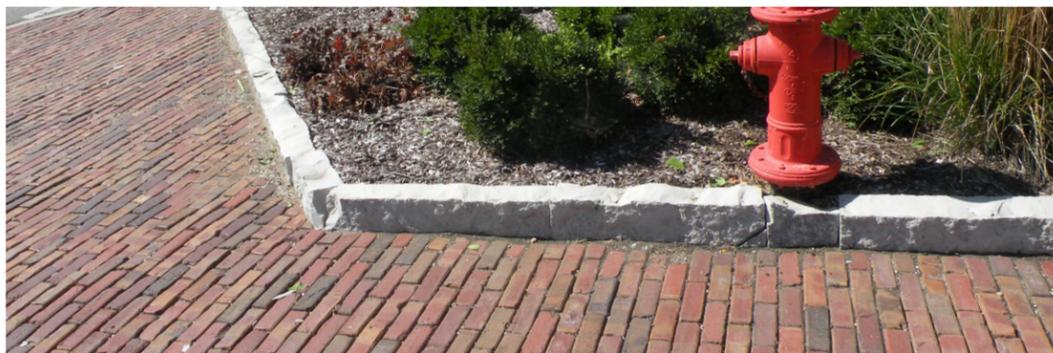
Concrete Retaining Walls



Rockfaced Limestone



Route 2 Bridge Improvements



Recycled Red Brick

Existing Downtown Streetscape Design Elements

The City implemented a Downtown Master Plan and Streetscape Design to physically improve the downtown core and restore the area's charm. This section of the Plan includes an overview of existing streetscape design elements within the project study area. The inventory is based upon reconnaissance undertaken in the summer of 2010.

Rockfaced Limestone

Rockfaced limestone has been used extensively for planting bed borders. This is a good use of an indigenous material and recalls the historic details of limestone in both buildings and in site grade transitions. As used, the material is a little out of scale. Larger and thicker stones would make better impact. Concrete footings and more refined cap stone would improve the longevity of this material.

Concrete Retaining Walls

Concrete retaining walls are frequently used in front of shops having grade transitions due to streets sloping toward the river or for parking lots and the gateway sign on 1st Avenue. The walls are poured-in-place and unfinished. Capstones are rockfaced limestone, typically with smooth tops, but sometimes not. It is a unique industrial look, but a bit harsh for a pedestrian environment.

Recycled Red Brick

Recycled red brick has been used typically at sidewalk corners, and in street median locations. This is an excellent example of reuse of an available material. In some areas the brick may be too rough for elderly, women in heels or baby strollers.

Concrete Sidewalks

Large expanses of concrete sidewalks lack texture, color and plant material relief.

Street Light Standards

The acorn style street light standards have a turn-of-the-century look and are compatible with the downtown architecture.

Benches and Litter Receptacles

Green metal benches and litter receptacles are an attractive contrast to the light stone and concrete materials.

Crosswalks

Pedestrian crosswalks and traffic calming are lacking.

Signage

The existing gateway sign on 1st Avenue is understated. Coordinated street and wayfinding signage is needed.

Other Comments

Riverwalk

Continuation of the riverwalk east from the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment to the Sinnissippi Park will either be a pathway between residences and the railroad or a low-flow style pathway at the river edge.

Lawrence Park

The character of Lawrence Park is very open, park-like with mature trees. This is similar to workshop #1 Highest Ranked Riverfront character.

Route 2 Bridge Improvements

Route 2 bridge improvements included a Jersey Barrier for pedestrian protection. This would be a brutal looking detail for the primary gateway to the city.



Lawrence Park • June 2010

Parks & Environmental Features

The parks, open space and environmental features in a community contribute to the community's overall quality of life, image, character and aesthetics. They provide places for residents and visitors to play, relax and enjoy nature. This section highlights existing parks, open space and environmental features in the Downtown and riverfront areas. These features are a natural complement to the project study area's location along the northern bank of the Rock River and could serve to enhance the community's access to the river. Riverfront locations, and the environmental features they incorporate, lend themselves to both passive and active opportunities for recreation and exposure to nature.

Parks

Lawrence Park

Lawrence Park is owned and operated by the Sterling Park District. Acquired in 1925, it is considered the first park of Sterling and is situated on Avenue G Island. Amenities at the park include: fishing; boat launching; grills; horseshoe courts; picnic areas; playground equipment; open play areas; and, shelters.

At this time, there is no definite plan for the future of the site and it is possible that the park will no longer be a destination once the pool is closed.

The park is approximately 25 acres in size, almost entirely surrounded by the Rock River. It boasts picturesque views of the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Area, thus holds a significant amount of potential for the future.

Central Memorial Park

Central Memorial Park is a City-owned park facility on Brinks Circle within the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Area. It features an outdoor amphitheater named the Grandon Civic Center, picnic areas, a gazebo and pedestrian paths. The Grandon Civic Center features live music performed by Sterling Municipal Band as well as other musical groups and attracts a number of visitors each year.

Environmental Features

Rock River

The Rock River is both a local and regional amenity that exceeds 280 miles in length. It is a tributary that meanders through the states of Wisconsin and Illinois before joining the Mississippi River in Rock Island, Illinois. The River provides tremendous opportunities for parks, residences and commercial establishments along the riverfront.

Though the Rock River never became the major navigational water route as was once hoped, it does have strong historical ties to the City of Sterling. Historically, the river provided power for saw and grist mills and later provided power to the City's booming industrial base.

Today, the Rock River functions as a recreational amenity for fishermen in the area. It contains catfish up to 50 pounds in weight, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources makes a concerted effort to maintain the River's stock of walleye and other fish. Further east, the Rock River expands into Sinnissippi Lake where people enjoy boating and other water sports; however, these recreational activities are prevented from entering to the Sterling Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Area due to two dams operating near the 1st Avenue bridge.

Rock River Dams

Two dams are also located downtown and impact navigation along the Rock River. The Sinnissippi Dam, located east of downtown is under the jurisdiction of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and was reconstructed in 2003. The structure holds back water along the river that forms Lake Sinnissippi, a recreational boating area east of Sterling. The second dam, located just west of the 1st Avenue Bridge, is an electrical generating station/dam operated by the Rock Falls Electric Department, but is under the jurisdiction of IDNR. The dam was built in 1988 and provides approximately 10% of Rock Fall's annual usage needs. Both dams are in excellent condition and will serve the area well into the foreseeable future.

Lawrence Park Boat Ramp

The existing boat ramp at Lawrence Park is one of twenty six locations in the State of Illinois that can accommodate trailered power boats along the Rock River, though boating is inhibited by the two dams in the Riverfront area. Oppold Marina and Hennepin Canal Lock 29 Access are the closest locations that also offer boat ramps that can accommodate trailered power boats.

Wetlands

Wetlands exist within environmental corridors and in other isolated locations. They are defined by vegetation, hydric soils, and surface and ground water conditions which can make it difficult, and oftentimes not permissible, to develop on them.

There are wetlands identified within the project study area's boundaries, predominantly on the east side of the 1st Avenue bridge. Redevelopment in this area will need to be mindful of wetland boundaries.



Retaining walls exist along much of the shoreline, reducing the flood zone.

Flood Zones

A flood zone is an area near a water course that has a history of flooding or has been identified as an area that is prone to flooding. Oftentimes, flood zones are identified as 100-year or 500-year. A 100-year flood zone indicates that the level of flood water is expected to be equaled or exceeded every 100 years on average, meaning there is a 1% chance of a 100-year flood occurring in any single year. A 500-year flood has a 0.2% chance of occurring in any single year.

In the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Area, much of the land immediately adjacent to the Rock River is found to be prone to flooding. The flood zones are most intense at the western portion of the study area, downstream from the dams. Generally, parks and open space areas are considered suitable uses within a flood zone, while development is oftentimes limited or prohibited. It is not recommended that a permanent structure be built in a flood zone; however, it may be desirable that the flood zone be reduced rather than preserved. Upon redevelopment/development, the riverfront area could potentially be built up with fill and a retaining wall to accommodate an exciting, riverfront development.

Issues and Opportunities

The Rock River, adjoining Downtown Sterling flows from east to west. The Rock River is designated as a State's Public Waters under the jurisdiction of Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and is subject to the Illinois Administration Code Part 3704 Rules titled "Regulation of Public Waters". The Departmental Standards under Section 3704.90 prohibit activities which result in an obstruction to and interference with the navigability of river or result in bank or shoreline instability. Activities that would be a public benefit maybe permitted upon Department's evaluation. Many activities permitted under this Part also require review of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

Additionally, portions of downtown Sterling west of Locust Street are located within the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) Zone AE floodplain by the Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM), Whiteside County Map Number 17195C0237E published by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). FEMA has recently completed the Flood Insurance Study (FIS) and modernization of Whiteside County's FIRM which will become effective on February 18th, 2011.

The new FIRM has established the 100-year Based Flood Elevation (BFE) along Rock River. Should any of the redevelopment along the riverfront place fill below the BFE, compensatory storage for 1.5 times the fill volume below the base flood elevation would be required by the Whiteside County Stormwater Code. New building construction within the 100-year floodplain must be elevated at least one foot above the BFE. Chapter 11 of the County's Code for Floodplain and Stormwater Regulation will govern any proposed developments within regulatory floodplain and detention requirements.

Flood Zones





4th Street (illustrated above), is an example of a one-way street in Downtown Sterling.

Transportation

Downtown Access and Circulation Overview

Access and circulation to downtown Sterling is influenced by a grid pattern of streets that includes two-way and one-way streets, key bridges and the presence of the Union Pacific Railroad that runs along the riverfront. The existing street system includes a hierarchy of arterial, collector and local streets that provide access to downtown from the surrounding region and provide for circulation within downtown.

Traffic & Roadway Operations

Traffic operations are largely influenced by the one-way street system that accommodates local and through traffic from the surrounding area. Locust Street & First Avenue comprise a one-way couplet north-south, while Third Street and Fourth Street comprise a one-way couplet east-west. Average daily traffic (ADT) along Locust Street / First Avenue peaks at roughly 8,000 vehicles downtown while ADT along Third/Fourth Street peaks around 6,800 vehicles a day. The construction of the County Market grocery store has slightly altered traffic operations, as Fifth Street is also used as part of the one-way roadway system between First Street and Avenue C.

Other principal streets within downtown are Second Street and G Avenue, with ADT volumes of 8,100 and 10,500 respectively. The remaining roadways downtown are two-way streets, which are controlled by traffic signals at major intersections and stop signs at local roads.

Peak hour traffic volumes in downtown reflect the nature of home to work and work to home trips in the morning and evening, when peak hours represent 8-12% of the ADT on major streets. Even during peak travel times, traffic along streets within the downtown core is fairly light, which suggests that there is opportunity for downtown redevelopment to be accommodated.

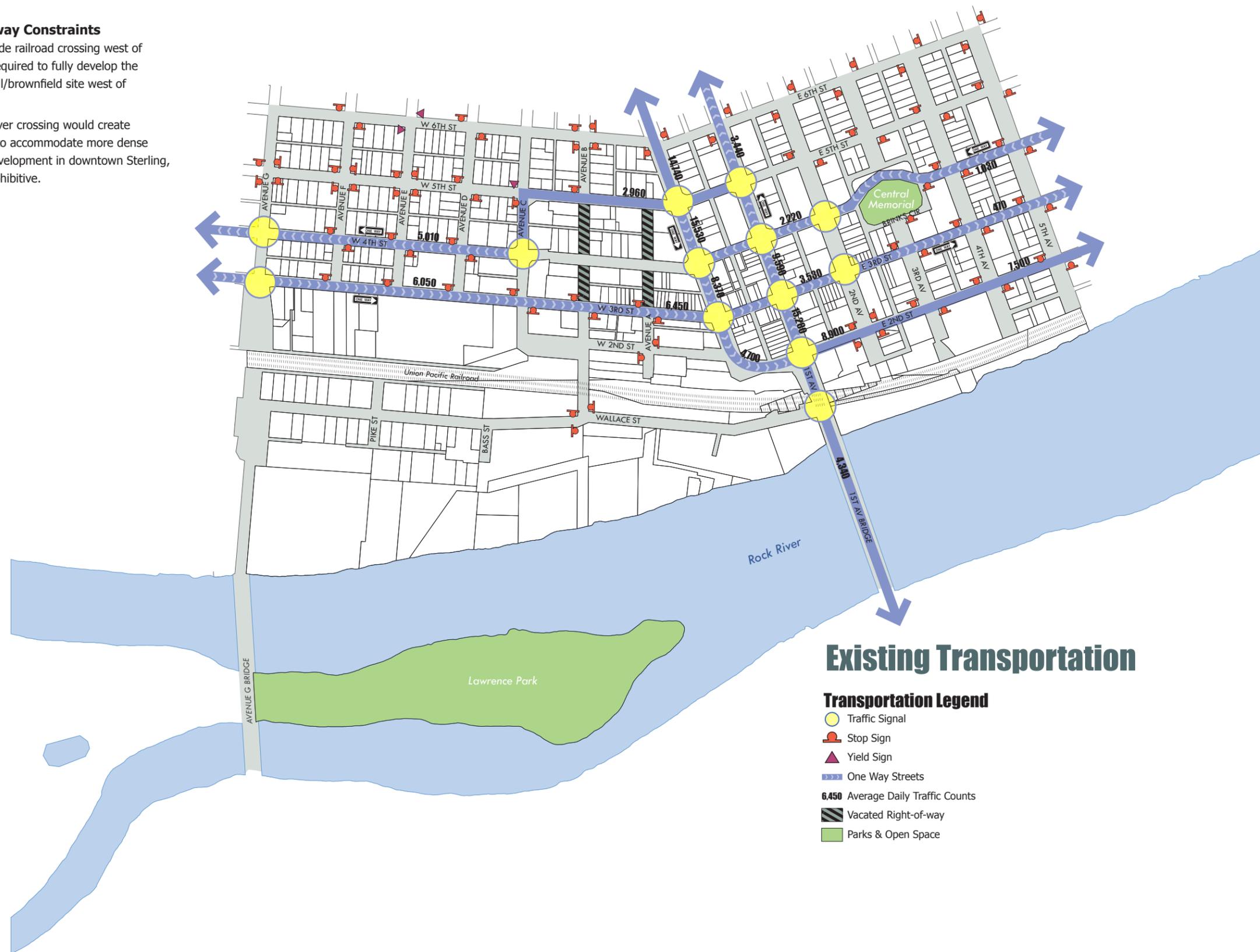
The First Avenue Bridge across the Rock River has an ADT of 21,500 vehicles. The bridge is planned to be rebuilt in 2013 and will be a significant infrastructure investment that can be capitalized upon.

Traffic and Roadway Opportunities

- ◇ Relatively low traffic volumes downtown suggest that fully or partially converting the existing one-way couplets to two-way operations may be possible to create a more pedestrian friendly environment.
- ◇ The recent jurisdictional transfer of Illinois Route 2 west of Locust Street from IDOT to Sterling provides an opportunity for the City to revise the existing street network to two-way operations.
- ◇ The replacement of the IL Route 40 (First Avenue) bridge should provide additional sidewalk space for pedestrians. The railroad viaduct will also be replaced, and the road profile changed, offering a much more open vista into downtown Sterling.

Traffic and Roadway Constraints

- ◇ An additional at-grade railroad crossing west of Avenue K may be required to fully develop the abandoned steel mill/brownfield site west of downtown.
- ◇ Although another river crossing would create additional capacity to accommodate more dense development / redevelopment in downtown Sterling, the cost may be prohibitive.





Illinois Route 2 Bridge

Pedestrian Amenities

Overall, pedestrian walkability downtown is very good. The existing grid of streets and regular pattern of blocks create a highly walkable framework that could be extended to the riverfront as redevelopment occurs. Sidewalks are generally in good condition and are present on both sides of the street. Pedestrian crosswalks are located at major traffic signal installations within downtown and are mostly well delineated for the volume of downtown pedestrian traffic present.

Pedestrian Opportunities

- ◇ Potential may exist on one-way roadways to widen sidewalks if roadways are converted to two-way operation.
- ◇ Crosswalks incorporating special treatments such as brick, stamped asphalt or other methods could enhance the pedestrian crossings.

Pedestrian Constraints

- ◇ The existing sidewalks along the IL Route 40 (First Avenue) bridge over the Rock River are very narrow, creating a pedestrian disconnect between the City of Sterling and Rock Falls. However, it is our understanding that that IDOT will provide wider sidewalks when the bridge and railroad viaduct replaced in 2013. Pedestrian access to the Rock River is cut off due to the presence of the Union Pacific Railroad tracks adjacent to the river.
- ◇ The railroad creates a challenge for pedestrian access to the riverfront area. Although also costly, at least one pedestrian underpass should be considered, so as to better connect the riverfront with the rest of downtown Sterling.

Parking

Parking downtown is provided by a combination of on-street, off-street, and private parking lots. The City of Sterling owns 11 public parking lots in the downtown area for permit parking, with a total of 216 spaces provided. Lots provide a mix of permit only and hourly parking. Open spaces may be purchased on a quarterly basis, for \$15 per month. Spaces are available on a first-come, first-serve basis. Those already owning permits do receive first consideration to renew their permits.

On-street parking in the downtown is free. Our observations suggest that the downtown area has an ample supply of public and private parking options for existing uses and potential new development. Thus, a detailed inventory of parking was not conducted. Future demands will be tested in the next phase of study to ensure that adequate prime parking will be available for downtown residents and shoppers.

Zoning Ordinance Parking Requirements

The Sterling Zoning Ordinance dates back to 1971 and the City desires to update it. In terms of parking, the City will be flexible on current parking strategies, such as demand management, shared parking, and parking lot design dimensions.

Parking Opportunities

- ◇ Overall, parking availability downtown is generally good, with spot locations where parking is considered tight.

Parking Constraints

- ◇ There may be occasional parking shortages in downtown at the larger buildings, as drivers expect and anticipate to be able to always park "at the front door".

Transit

Sterling does not have local bus service. In addition, no regional transit service, such as Greyhound bus or Amtrak trains are currently available or being considered in the short or long term.



Sterling Park District Trail Crossing the Sinnissippi Dam

Bicycling and Trail Provisions

Whiteside County has completed two countywide greenways and trails plans in 1999 and 2008. Future planned bicycle route and trail extensions include a planned trail generally paralleling Lynn Boulevard north of downtown and a trail along the Rock River between the Upper Dam and Oppold Marina, paralleling the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. Current bicycle routes in downtown Sterling include portions of First Avenue, Second Street, 16th Avenue, and Fourth Street.

Bicycling and Trail Opportunities

- ◇ Sterling’s downtown has relatively low traffic volumes that could accommodate bicyclists by providing signage, shared use markings, or dedicated bike lanes.
- ◇ The currently proposed riverfront trail could be extended west along the riverfront to connect with downtown Sterling and the abandoned steel mills west of First Street.

Bicycling Constraints

- ◇ The lack of a bicycling culture downtown requires further education of motorists to create a safer environment for bicyclists downtown and around Whiteside County.
- ◇ Additional bicycle parking is needed downtown to encourage more cycling.
- ◇ The existing G Street Bridge over the Rock River to Lawrence Park is very narrow and difficult for bicyclists to traverse on the roadway or the sidewalk.

Railroad Operations

The Union Pacific railroad operates within downtown along the riverfront. The three lane track serves as a principle freight route within the Union Pacific network to Chicago. A grade separated railroad crossing is provided at First Avenue (IL Route 40), and will be replaced along with the bridge by IDOT in 2013.

Existing Infrastructure and Environmental Conditions

The City’s existing network of water mains, storm, and sanitary sewers are more than adequate to meet the demands of additional development. The existing utility infrastructure is oversized due to prior industrial uses. In addition, redevelopment areas along the riverfront are well above the existing floodplain, and a flood/retaining wall exists along the riverfront through much of downtown.

Infrastructure & Environmental Opportunities

- ◇ Existing industrial buildings adjacent to the river could potentially be reused if environmental remediation and rehabilitation are economically achievable.
- ◇ The existing steel mill buildings could be incorporated into new development.

Infrastructure & Environmental Constraints

- ◇ Several environmental contaminants, including cyanide and asbestos are known to be present at properties along the Riverfront. The costs of the environmental remediation of the properties are not known at this time, but are anticipated to be paid by the existing property owners.

