



DOWNTOWN CONTEXT

Background

Downtown Topeka has seen a resurgence of public and private improvements in the last decade on Kansas Avenue between 6th and 10th Streets unlike any in the past 30 years. This unprecedented \$10 million public/private partnership (P3) led to a complete rebuild of Kansas Avenue and underlying utilities, reduction of vehicle lanes to emphasize pedestrian/bike modes, establishment of a national historic district, multiple pocket parks and art/statue installations, historic façade renovations, the opening of the Cyrus Hotel, the Iron Rail and Pennant restaurants, and Every Plaza. These investments have breathed new life into Downtown south of the Kansas River. North of the Kansas River, the NOTO Arts District flourished over this time and stands poised to experience further business and residential growth.



“If you don’t see it, before you see it, you’ll never see it”

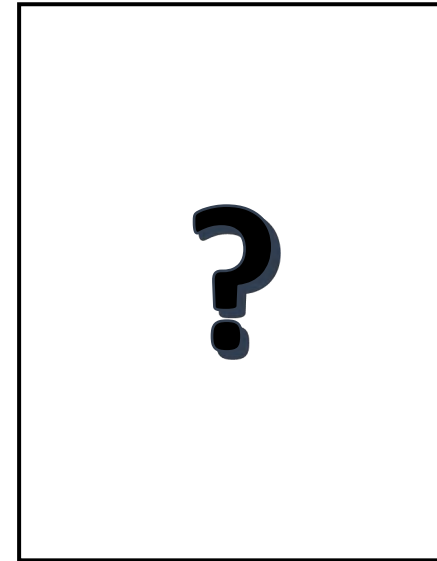
So why slow down to plan now? Isn't everything going great?

The seeds bearing fruit for the current generation of Downtown were sown in community planning efforts 10-15 years ago. And that built off the blooms of previous generations dating all the way back to the founding vision of Topeka by its father, Cyrus K. Holliday in 1854. Generation to generation had a chance to take a crack at visionary improvements. Each one builds off another and leaves a legacy for the next generation to build from .

Current Gen



Next Gen



Today, public investment based on the last 10-15 years of visioning is reaching its natural conclusion. And while private investment is still following that vision, the next vision for Downtown is unclear. Not because it has few visions, but because there are many visions. No less than 19 well-intended studies or plans, or major actions impact Downtown. All of these well-intended “boats” may be rowing forward but in different directions or not together. This includes an outdated 20-year old City of Topeka Downtown Redevelopment Plan. The primary goal of the Downtown Master Plan is to get us all rowing together in the same boat for at least the next 10 years of Downtown development.

“If you want to go faster, go alone. If you want to go further, go together”

Plan Purpose and Organization

Topeka's Downtown Master Plan (DMP) is an element of the City's Comprehensive Plan. Its purpose is to align many efforts into a singular shared vision. It is intended to be an affirmation of Downtown's strengths and re-imagining of its weaknesses. The momentum of the last few years focused on a game-changing, yet achievable vision. The DMP should be no different...a believable vision but with expanded scope to show how all of Downtown's assets could work together to achieve a whole greater than the sum of its parts. The foundation of the DMP includes:



Physical Development/Land Use Guide

- First and foremost, the DMP will establish a geographic framework for land use, development, and infrastructure decision-making. Where should development opportunities be targeted for optimal success? Where and how can public investment have the most impact to spur development?

Market-Based Vision (10 years)

- Land use development recommendations for the next 10 years will be grounded in the realities of the 2019 Downtown Market Study and Strategy. This includes projected demand for housing, retail, office, and hospitality.

Aspirational Vision (>10 years)

- Not all development in the DMP will necessarily be realized over next 10 years but imagining "what if" is just as important so ideas have time to take hold once the pace of the market and resources allow.

Plans Within a Plan

- In order to properly align the myriad of functions in Downtown with its vast area, nine (9) geographic District Plans will be defined with their own brand so they complement one another instead of compete.

The DMP is organized into the following three parts:

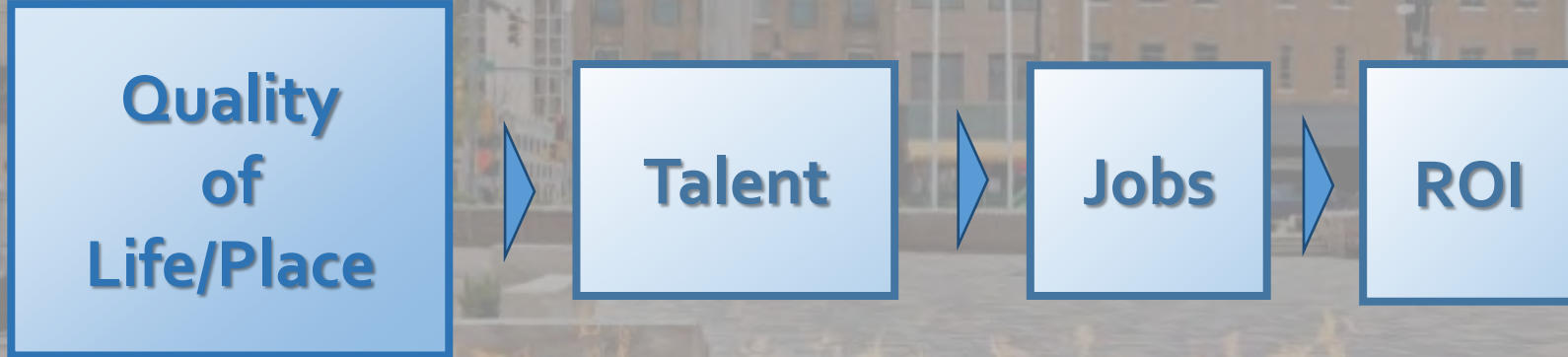
Part 1/Downtown Context – This section informs about the context of Downtown including purpose, boundaries, overarching goals, district framework, market demand, street network/circulation, incentives, land use, zoning, and design emphasis.

Part 2/District Plans – This section will translate the demand identified in the market study towards real life development projects on the ground. This is done in a way that is catalytic and intentional for downtown. The hope is that this will create confidence that can help inspire property owners and attract developers. Each district plan contains more specific recommendations with regards to branding, potential development and timing, circulation/streets, land use, and zoning for that geographic area and how the districts complement one another.

Part 3/Implementation – This section includes a framework for priorities and actions to help implement the district plans including infrastructure projects, catalytic development, zoning changes, and building design standards.

Goals and Objectives

The end game for the DMP is to not just put forth plans of future land uses and infrastructure investment, but to do it in a way that elevates the **quality of life** for Downtown Topeka as a premier economic development asset of the region and State. A vibrant and attractive mixed-use regional center is not only crucial for its function, but to compete with other metros for talent retention and attraction, particularly of young professionals. If we can continue to do that by investing in place-based strategies aligned with an achievable vision that signals Downtown is “everybody’s neighborhood”, then the DMP can really be more of a “talent attraction” plan than a “land use” plan. In the world of today and tomorrow, jobs follow talent. And it is in those jobs and subsequent push to be a part of Topeka as an employer or resident, that Downtown can leverage a return on investment (ROI) unlike any other in the community.



“Young professionals are the primary target group for Downtown Topeka (housing), particularly early on. They will expect high quality rental apartments and walkable amenities.” *Downtown Market Strategy (2019)*



Goals and Objectives

There are four (4) foundational objectives that will support a higher quality of life and place for downtown:

Welcoming

Downtown Topeka, with the State Capitol and I-70, is Topeka's front door to visitors and travelers. The image and quality of place should be inviting. To all. This will also raise civic pride for Topeka's residents and lead to greater localized spending patterns.

- Promote a high aesthetic in design/appearance in new construction, rehabilitation, and public realm. Include "green" streets, cooling effects, and landscaping
- Be authentic by reinforcing the existing character of Downtown. Tell Topeka's history.

Activating

Ramping up efforts to make streets/alleys more inviting for people to be outside will make downtown more interesting to visitor and residents alike.

- Support "3rd spaces" or those non-work or non-home spaces for people gathering such as plazas pocket parks alleys, art installations, greenspace, etc.
- "Bring the inside outside" along sidewalks and within on-street parking spaces.

Resiliency

Vibrant downtowns are diverse in both people and offerings. They are employment centers, residential neighborhoods, visitor destinations, entertainment venues, and shopping districts – and are the only places where such an array of experiences/uses can occur together. It is what makes them special. And what will also make them resilient and stable over time.

- Diversify living, business, visitor, and transportation choices within district framework.
- Extend stays by providing different purposes to use Downtown particularly on evenings and weekends ("Hey, I don't know what to do but let's go Downtown and we'll figure it out.")

Connecting

Enhance transportation choices and adjacency of living/work areas to promote an efficient, equitable, interconnected and accessible network including:

- Give attention to the human-scale of street spaces making them more walkable and bike friendly.
- Reinforce a vibrant Kansas Avenue as the primary spine of Downtown that all districts benefit from.
- Reimagine critical sites for new catalytic –type projects and activity hubs within walking distance of each other.
- Support compatible development in adjoining neighborhoods to reinforce symbiotic affect (see page 1.7)



Return on Investment

Why is ROI so good? Downtown is very job and building dense with a small land footprint. It can also be population dense. The community made a down-payment on downtown infrastructure years ago. There is no need for new infrastructure that will add to the operational costs of a municipality. Instead, modernizing and extending its life cycle for future generations in a densely developed area will lower operational costs and lead to a return on investment unsurpassed in the city as illustrated by the graphics below.

This ROI can also be expected to create a ripple effect in “near Downtown” neighborhoods as well. A common real estate marketing tip is to attach property in more challenging areas to stronger image areas they are in proximity to (e.g., “Potwin area”, “Wanamaker area”, etc.). Hence, any perceived or real value increase in the desirability of “Downtown” can overlap into the real/perceived value of nearby neighborhoods. The flip-side is true too. “Near Downtown” improvements on the edges should be supported just as much since it will have a symbiotic relationship on Downtown.

900 S. Kansas Avenue

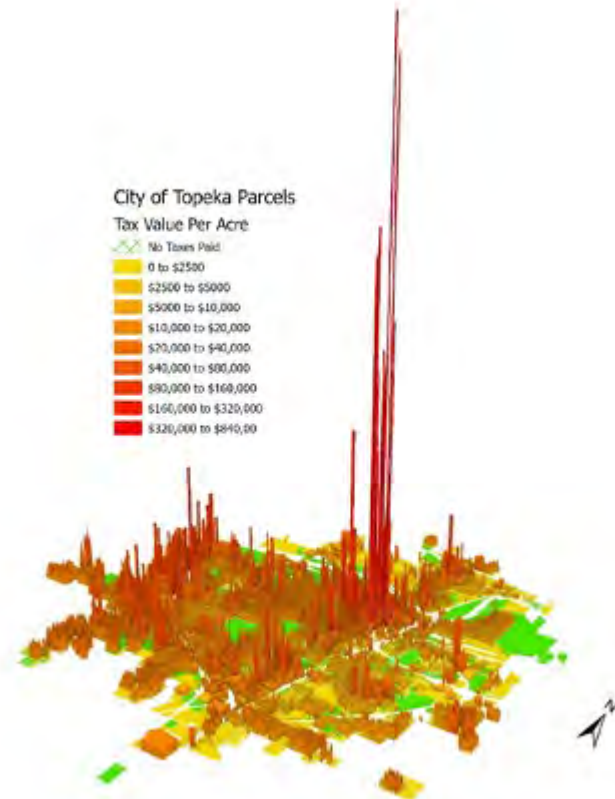
- Pre-Development Appraised Value/Acre- \$250,884*
- Post-Development Appraised Value/Acre - \$2,368,800*



*In 2014 \$

City of Topeka Planning Dept.

Building rehabilitation increased appraised property value/acre by 844%



Downtown property tax value per acre is 4-5 times greater than any other location in the city

Framework: Districts and Hubs

The 2019 Downtown Market Strategy revealed that development opportunities will need to be focused in target areas. In other words, there is not enough development opportunity to reinvest in all of Topeka's 740-acre downtown that need reinvestment today. So areas for future investment must be chosen carefully and intentionally. To do that, a "districts" and "hubs" framework is recommended to shape a coherent investment strategy that optimizes success for Downtown.

Districts

The character and functions of downtown distinguish themselves over time as geographic districts. A district framework sets the stage to not just recognize what that place has become, but what it can be. By having purpose for your audience, products, and places, it will lead to a set of branded districts that are unique yet complimentary to each other. This will avoid competing districts that dilute demand. It will create a unified downtown that is greater than the sum of its parts and lead to a higher "hit rate" with investment decisions.

In Topeka, there are 9 districts each with its own set of uses and unique brand that builds upon the assets of Downtown today and tomorrow as illustrated on the next page. Each of those districts will have its own specific branding and development recommendations as outlined in Part II.

Activity Hubs

The nine districts should be organized around and tied together by three overlapping corridors – Kansas Avenue, I-70, and Van Buren (new). **Kansas Avenue** is the most important to Downtown's success and must be reinforced as its primary north-south spine to continue building off of past investments. Right now, it is too fragmented in character or purpose outside of the Historic Kansas Avenue district to be a unifying force between all districts unless a series of activity hubs, or catalytic developments, can be established along it. Activity hubs are major destination points that draw people into downtown. But if they are spaced too far apart outside of comfortable walking distance, they may fail to have a synergistic effect on each other.

With the new **Evergy Plaza** acting as the primary activity hub, other activity hubs can be spaced from it appropriately at 5-minute walking intervals acting as stepping stones from one district to another. A 5-minute walking radius around the Plaza would denote where new development could be best positioned early on to take advantage of the Plaza's "pull" for a walkable core (i.e., new housing).

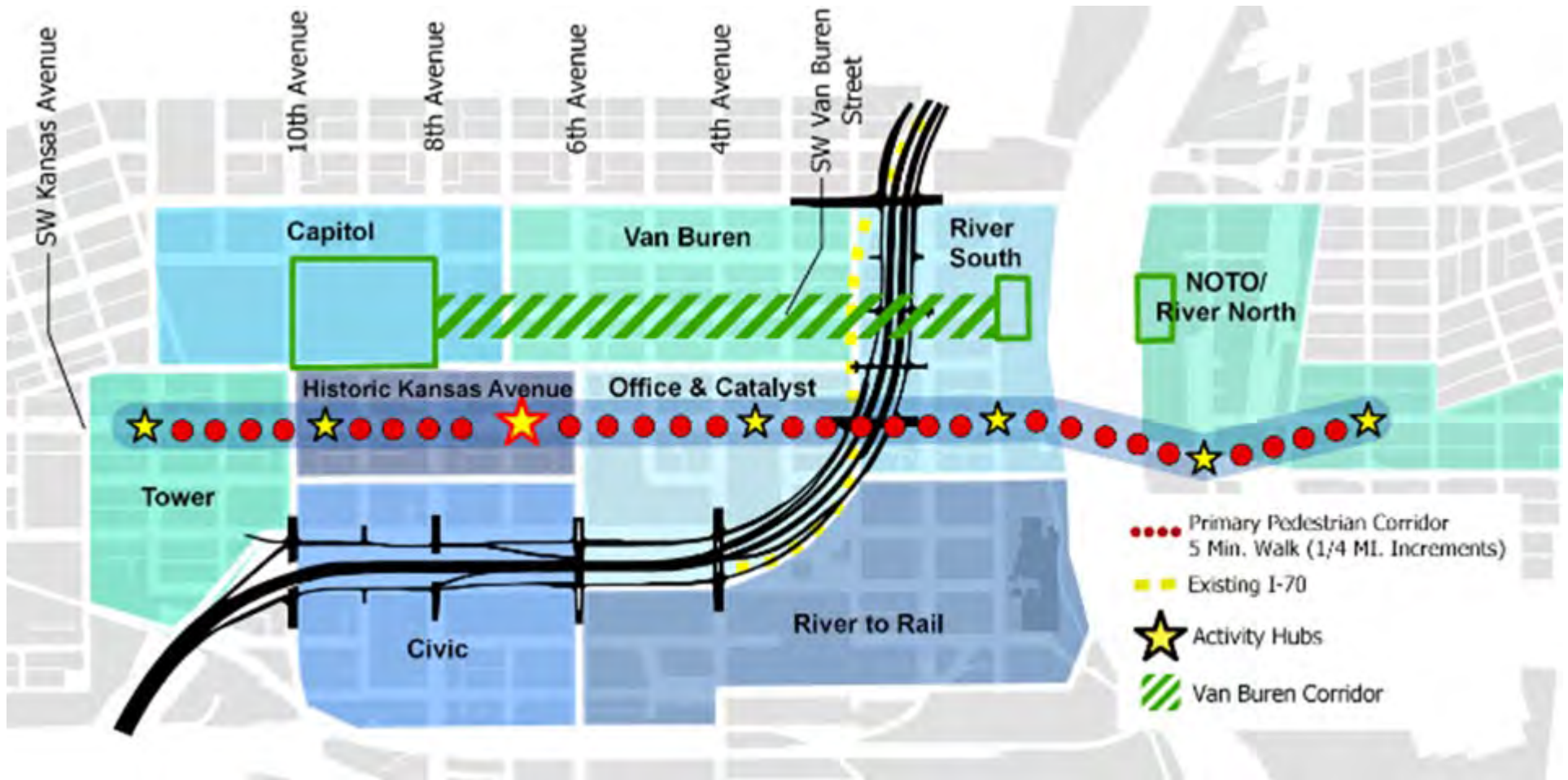
DOWNTOWN MARKET STRATEGY,
TOPEKA (2019)

*"There is not enough
development opportunity
to reinvent all areas of
downtown that need
reinvestment today."*

Development Strategies LLC

Districts and Hubs

Downtown Topeka



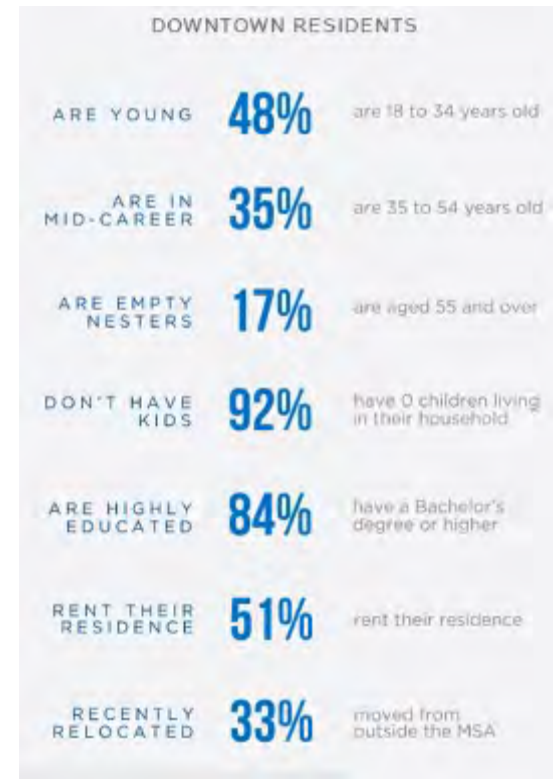
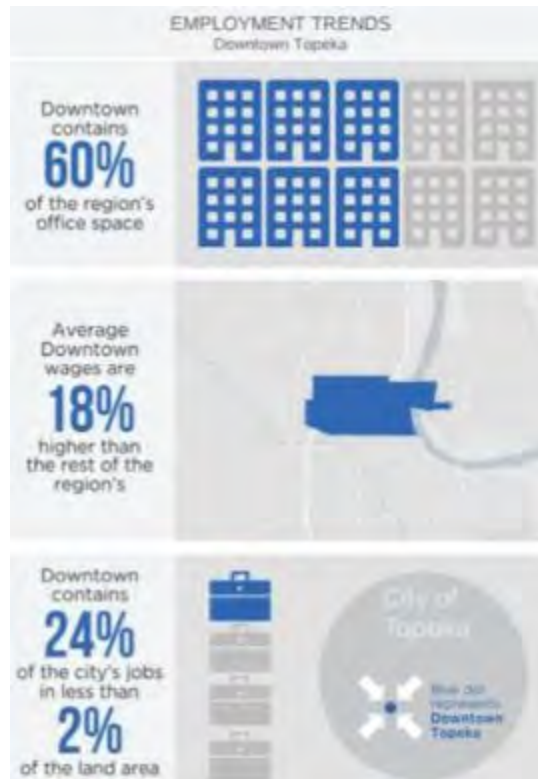
*Much like Kansas Avenue connects the districts it goes through, **Van Buren Street** has the potential to be a parallel north-south pedestrian-oriented spine connecting River South to the Capitol.

Market Summary

The Downtown Market Strategy was prepared for Downtown Topeka, Inc. in 2019. The document provides market analysis as a foundation of understanding what development demand and land uses need to be planned for over the next decade. Its conclusions show support for the following:

- 900 new housing units
 - Doubles current total and will drive the next generation of growth
- 690K supportable square feet of retail
 - Shrinks overall footprint from 800K
- 300K of new/rehabbed office space
 - Neutral footprint but transforms 5% (6M sf) to Class A or HQ space. 150K vacant in Historic Kansas Avenue District.
- 200 new hotel rooms
 - Subsequent market studies prior to COVID show 300 rooms could be supported

Each district plan in Part II will allocate where those new uses will be accommodated within the next 10 years, while also detailing development that may be beyond the 10 year horizon, but could occur if market trends are accelerated. It should be noted the market study was pre-Covid 19. Some other findings are illustrated here and on the following page.



Market Summary

PEOPLE



YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Target Demo (s) Singles Couples	Peak Activity Hours Evening/Late Evening Weekends
Income \$35,000-\$45,000	Product Types Apartments - New and Rehabbed
Tenure 80% Renter	Level Of Support High



MID-CAREER & EMPTY NESTERS

Target Demo (s) Empty Nesters Professional Couples	Peak Activity Hours Early Evening Weekends
Income \$70,000-\$75,000	Product Types Townhomes and Condo Apartments
Tenure 20% Renter	Level Of Support Moderate



STUDENTS

Target Demo (s) Graduates Undergraduates	Peak Activity Hours Evening Weekends
Income \$20,000-\$25,000	Product Types Apartments
Tenure 100% Renter	Level Of Support Low

PRODUCTS



NEW CONSTRUCTION

Avg. Rent Per Month \$850-\$1,200	Demand ± 350
Unit Sizes (Sq. Ft.) 600-950	Target Market Young Professionals Mid-Career Professionals Students
Avg. Rent Per Sq. Ft. \$1.25-\$1.50	



TOWNHOMES

Avg. Rent Per Month \$1,000-\$1,650	Demand ± 100
Unit Sizes (Sq. Ft.) 1,100-1,850	Target Market Empty Nesters Mid-Career Professionals
Avg. Rent Per Sq. Ft. \$0.90-\$1.10	



REHABBED APARTMENTS

Avg. Rent Per Month \$750-\$1,350	Demand ± 175
Unit Sizes (Sq. Ft.) 700-1,100	Target Market Young Professionals Mid-Career Professionals
Avg. Rent Per Sq. Ft. \$1.00-\$1.25	



FOR-SALE

Avg. Sale Price \$200K-\$350K+	Demand ± 250
Unit Sizes (Sq. Ft.) 1,500-2,500	Target Market Empty Nesters Mid-Career Professionals
Price Per Sq. Ft. \$120-\$150+	

Circulation

An ideal transportation system in a downtown area is a comprehensive and multimodal network of facilities that provides convenient access to goods and services, efficient vehicular circulation, and safe mobility for pedestrians and bicyclists. The transportation system in Downtown Topeka has many desirable features and offers a multimodal network of street, transit, and bicycle/pedestrian facilities.

There is room for improvement in the current transportation system. Planned improvements from other policy documents and recommendations from this Plan are geared towards improving the system for all modes.

The following is a discussion of the existing transportation network.

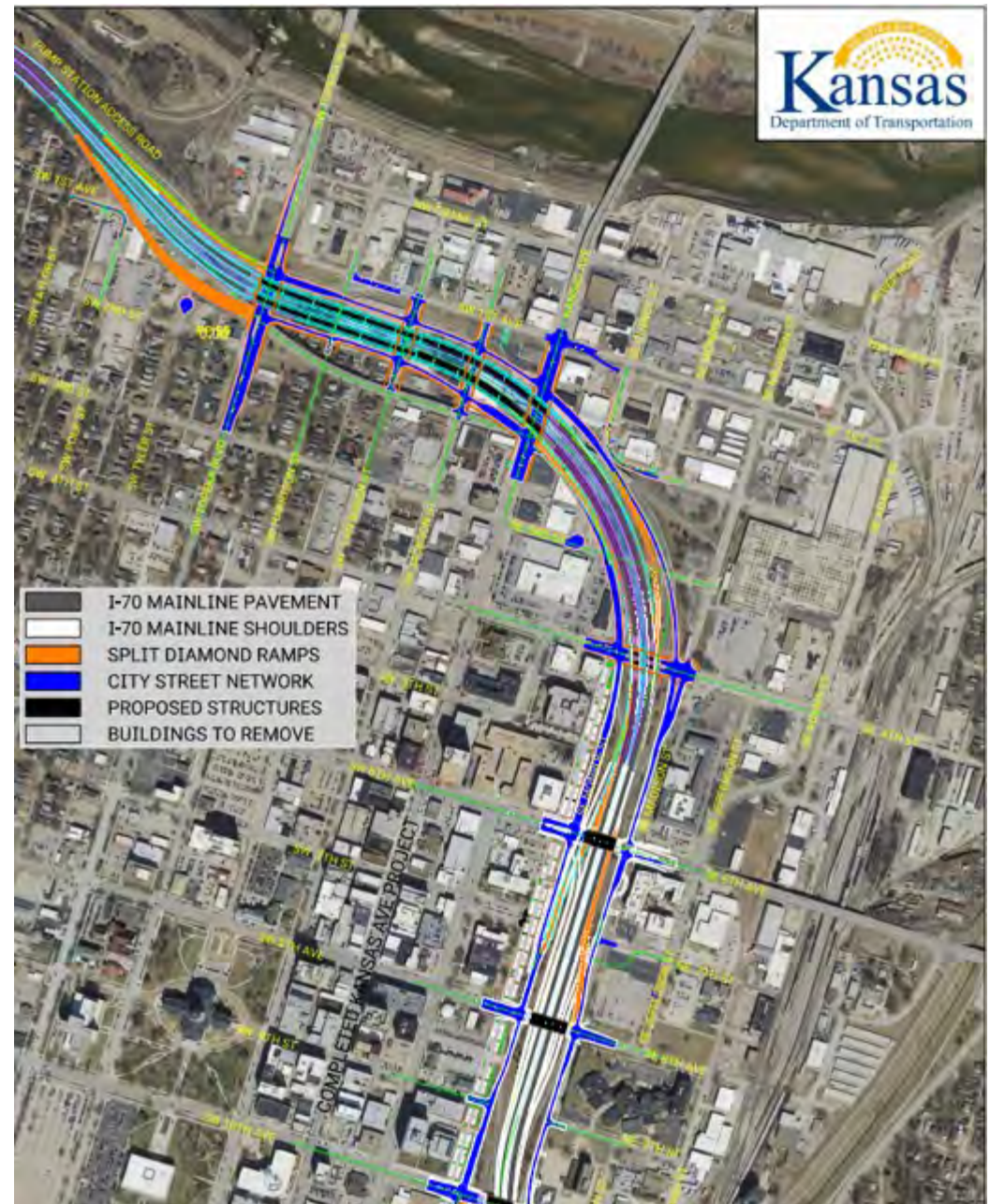
Polk-Quincy Viaduct

I-70 bisects downtown Topeka and has been in its current alignment since the 1960's when it was originally built. The portion of the highway that traverses downtown is known as the Polk-Quincy Viaduct (PQV). There is a current Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) project to widen PQV, soften the curve at 4th Street that has become a safety issue, and change the access ramps. Funding has been approved for Phase I of the project which will occur between SW MacVicar and SW 4th Street.

The PQV will also impact the local street system within the various districts. Each district plan will touch on those changes. As an example, northbound Van Buren Street currently terminates at I-70 in the Van Buren District. The PQV changes will allow Van Buren to extend under the viaduct and connect to the River South District. This opens a direct path/vista from the river to the Capitol that is not present today.

The City of Topeka has committed \$20 million in match dollars to the PQV project which is estimated to be a \$230-50 million project. The current design was undertaken when market conditions were different and plans showed the area around the River South District for much higher density of development than what is shown in this plan.

The City is working with KDOT on potential changes to the PQV design as reflected in the River to Rail and River South district plans.



Circulation

Sidewalks

Within Downtown, paved sidewalks are provided along both sides of streets. There are a few gaps in the pedestrian system that limit mobility and cause pedestrians to walk on the street. Some segments are in a state of disrepair.

Sidewalk widths vary Downtown. The widest sidewalks are along Kansas Avenue between 6th and 10th Street, which was recently reconfigured with reduced travel lanes and wider sidewalks. This treatment to the street improved the overall pedestrian experience and should be repeated north and south along Kansas Avenue and also along other streets where traffic lanes are proposed to be reduced.

Recommendations from the [Topeka Pedestrian Master Plan](#) include:

- Making pedestrians the priority
- Wider sidewalks
- Bulb outs for shorter pedestrian crossings
- Mid-block crossings

“Bringing the inside out” is an important - and often relatively easy - strategy for activating a street, attracting foot traffic, and introducing new audiences to programming and products. Strategies to bring the inside out include:

- Sidewalk dining areas
- Street parks (using parking spaces to create mini parks)



Circulation

Bike Network

There are two types of bicycle facilities present in Downtown:

- Bicycle lanes are marked on the street and provide dedicated and separated space for bicyclists.
- “Sharrows” designate routes where cars and bicycles share the road
- There is a gravel trail along the top of the levee on the north and south sides of the Kansas River.

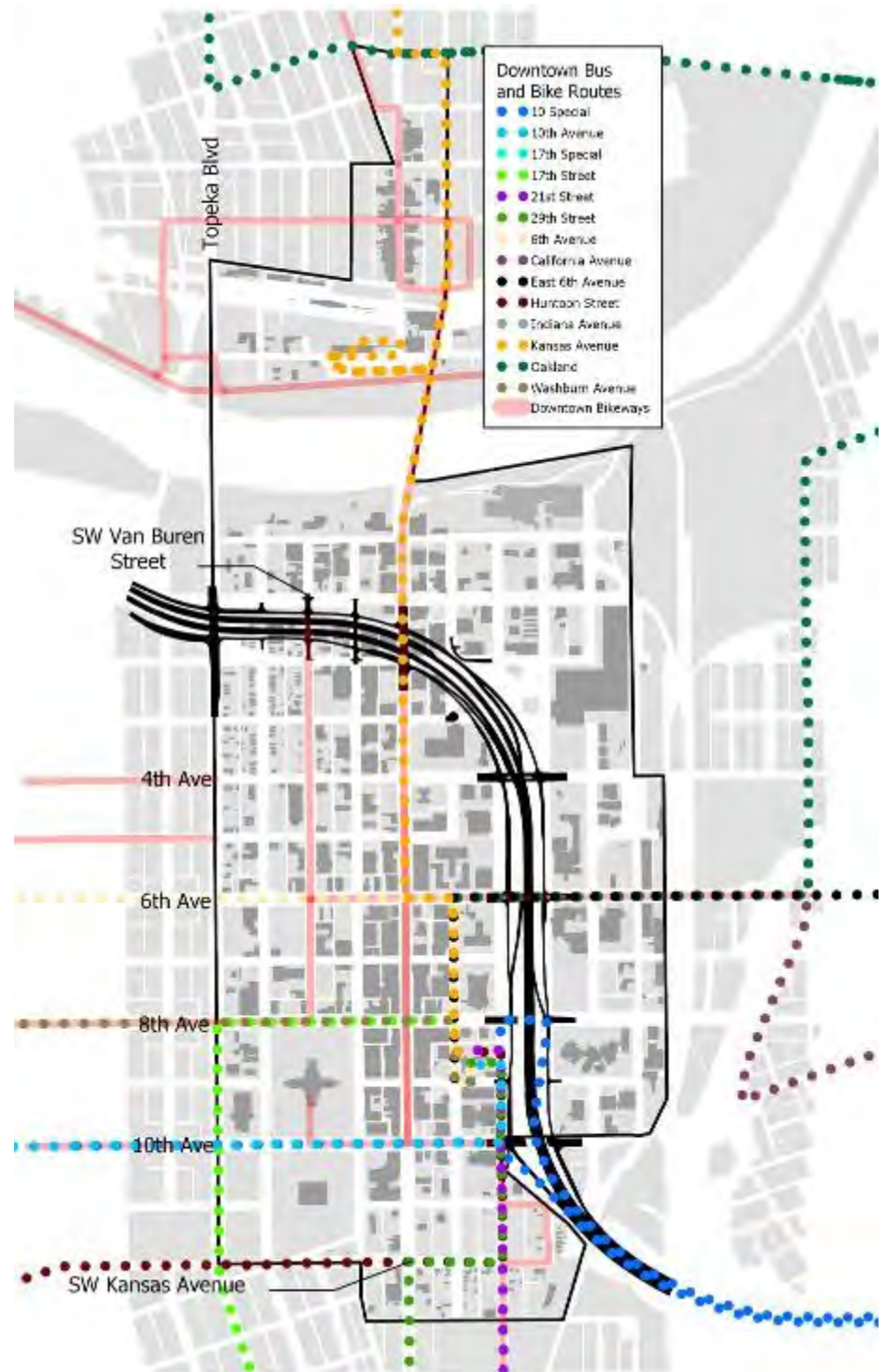
Recommendations from the [Topeka Bikeways Master Plan](#) include:

- Protected bikeways on Kansas Avenue bridge and links to riverfront levee
- Separated bike facilities along 6th & 8th Street
- Connecting downtown to neighborhoods via existing bike facilities and trails

Transit/Mobility

Downtown is well served by Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority (TMTA) bus service including a transit hub station at 9th & Quincy which connects Downtown to neighborhoods citywide. TMTA also has a maintenance shop and offices along the south bank of the river at NW Crane Street and N. Kansas Avenue in the River South District.

There is a need expressed to better connect all districts with a more frequent shuttle/trolley system and/or electric scooters (e.g., Bird) or bike sharing.



Circulation

Street Network

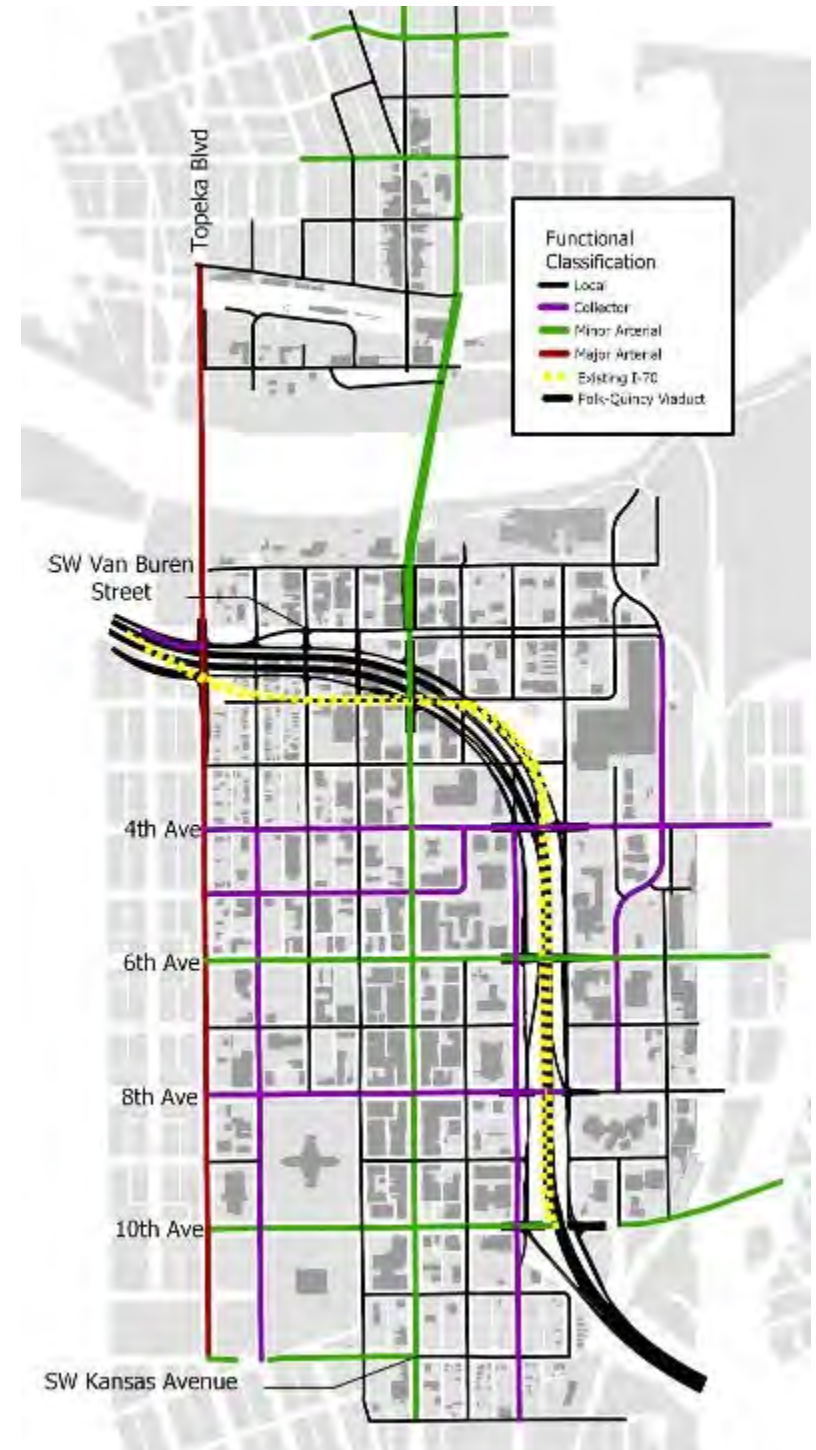
The existing street network in downtown is a grid pattern that functions well. It generally does well to move people in and out of downtown on a daily basis or for special events.

There is question, however, if the built capacity of some streets are overbuilt and whether or not the existing one way pair of streets are still necessary. Jackson and Harrison are the north/south one-way pairs and 4th and 5th are the east/west one-way pairs. Making changes to overbuilt or one-way streets can help enhance the downtown environment by creating a sense of place, enrich quality of life and improve opportunities for multi-modal transportation options.

The City is embarking on a signalization project to upgrade signal software and detection with a focus on Downtown intersections. This will increase adaptive control at the intersections with an overall goal of improving Downtown circulation. Greater control of signals can help facilitate the reduction of vehicular lanes on downtown streets and give that space back to buses, bikes and pedestrians while still having the ability to keep cars moving.

Complete Streets

The Topeka and Shawnee County Complete Streets Design Guidelines view streets as more than just a tool to move traffic throughout the city. Complete Streets provides an approach to streets that views them as shared public spaces that should complement the neighboring land uses, while providing and promoting multi-modal access and connectivity. These new street typologies should support places to live, shop, work, and play by proving a sense of safety and comfort for uses regardless of the intensity of uses in the surrounding area. Streets that are viewed through this lens can help shape our public realm and promote culture and creativity throughout the City.



Circulation

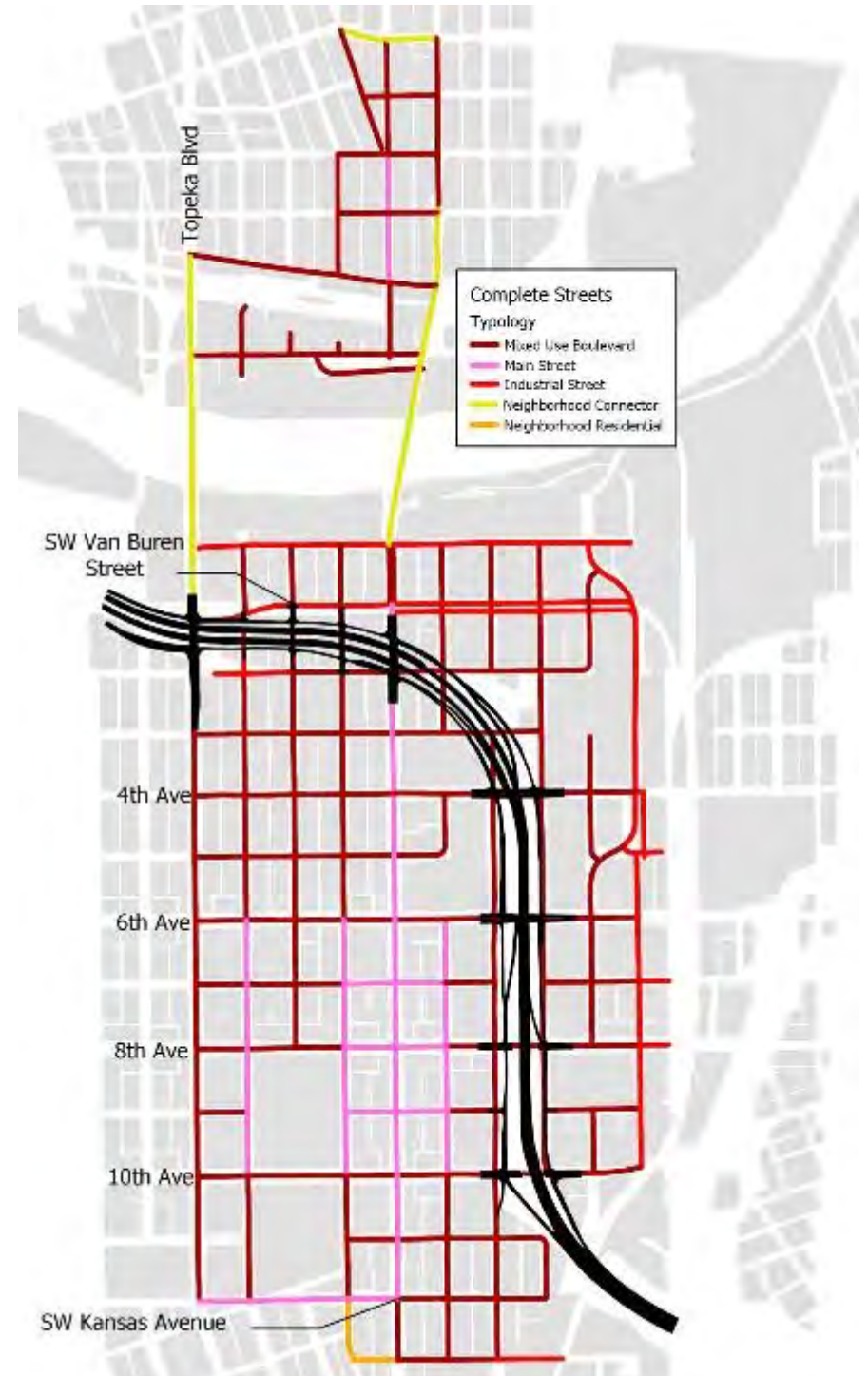
Downtown Street Typologies

Mixed Use Boulevard - characterized by their mix of medium to high density land uses and street presence, these streets should focus on serving residents, visitors, and workers. Design of these streets should support and encourage high levels of walking, bicycling, transit, loading, parking and deliver vehicles in a cohesive manner.

Main Street - found in areas lower intensity mixed land uses with a street presence, these streets can be enhanced through streetscape improvements that separate bicycle and pedestrian traffic from motor vehicle. These streets should focus on supporting pedestrian and bicycle activity but also can provide space for events and festivals.

Neighborhood Connector - the backbone of Topeka's street network, these streets connect neighborhoods between small business and retail nodes. Often these are dominated by motor vehicles but should accommodate bicycle and pedestrian activity. Street design in these areas should have pedestrians in mind and focus on reducing traffic speeds, improve street crossings, provide sidewalks, street lighting, and consider bus stops for neighborhood access to transit.

Industrial Street - serving as the industrial corridors these streets should be designed to accommodate commercial trucks. Design considerations for these streets should ensure adequate lane width and turning radii for commercial trucks while accommodating pedestrians and street trees.



Circulation

Speed Limits

Street segments throughout the Downtown Master Plan are designated for lane reallocation and conversion. The coinciding street typology identified through complete streets should be considered when designating speed limits for these segments of roadway. Streets identified as Mixed Use Boulevards or Main Streets need to accommodate high levels of pedestrian, bicycle and motor vehicle traffic, and speeds to be limited in a manner that ensure pedestrians and bikers alike feel safe while navigating these roads. Neighborhood Connectors, while dominated by vehicle traffic, should be considerate of pedestrian and bike traffic and limit speeds to ensure a safe environment for all users.

Rail

The Topeka Amtrak Station is located within Downtown along the Atchison Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad (ATSF) and within the River to Rail District. The station is owned by the railroad and is a stop for the Amtrak Southwest Chief passenger route.

ATSF operates a maintenance yard within the Rail to River District. Rail traffic in this part of Downtown is related to maintenance. Union Pacific Railroad operates a line that traverses through NOTO/North Topeka that has regular train traffic with an at-grade crossing at Kansas Avenue.



Parking

The City of Topeka conducted a [Comprehensive Parking Plan](#) in 2017, the plan includes reviews of existing parking facility utilization and efficiency, determining capacity of current parking supply to absorb additional daily demand for both on- and off-street facilities and determining a current and future rate structure to finance the long-term parking demands and goals of Downtown Topeka. In short, there is plenty of parking in the downtown area within walking distance but some blocks may be at capacity with regards to structured parking. Implementing aspects of the parking plan such as creating a more user-friendly public parking environment (e.g., smart garages and parking meters) and adding walkable complimentary parking opportunities will align well with other DMP quality of place recommendations such as making streets more multi-modal, shared parking for housing developments, and garage façade makeovers.

Land Use

Existing land use provides an inventory of every parcel in the Downtown to identify how land is used. Downtown's land uses have been broken into 13 land use designations.

Residential uses are a mixture of single-family and a range of higher densities of medium to high density multi-family. There are stand-alone residential buildings and residential uses located in mixed use buildings.

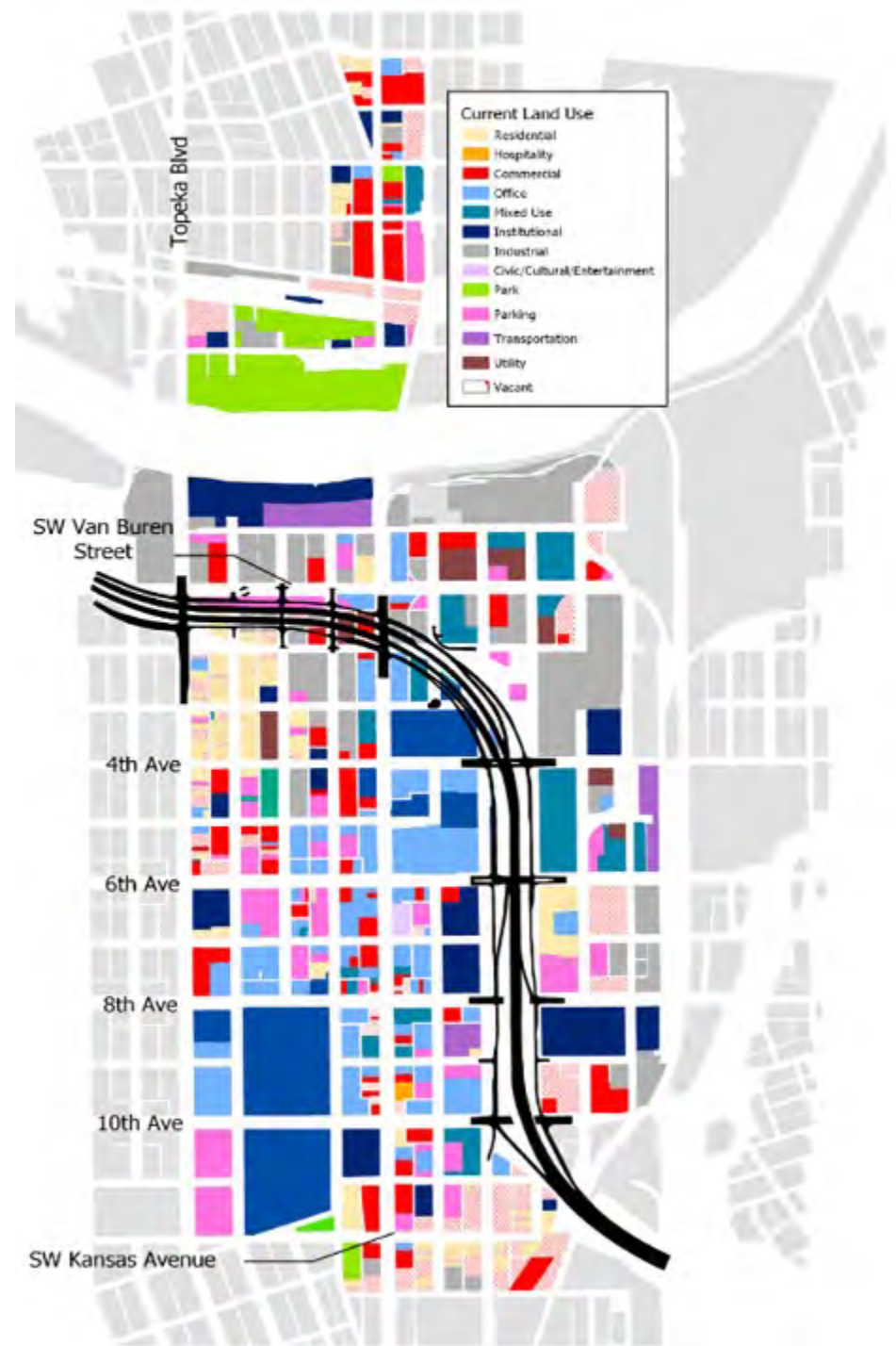
The recently constructed Cyrus Hotel on Kansas Avenue is an example of a hospitality use. Commercial uses are sprinkled throughout Downtown with a concentration located within the core of downtown along Kansas Avenue. There is a concentration of commercial uses within NOTO as well.

Downtown is a major office district. Downtown contains offices for the State of Kansas, including the Docking office building. There are many other offices located downtown, including offices for Evergy, Burlington Northern, the City of Topeka, and Shawnee County.

Mixed use buildings are primarily located along Kansas Avenue, north and south of the river. Churches and certain State of Kansas buildings make up institutional uses.

Industrial uses are found primarily along the south bank of the Kansas River and east of I-70. Major industrial businesses, such as Hill's Pet Food and Burlington Northern Railroad, make up the area along with smaller businesses.

Park spaces is primarily located on the north side of the Kansas River. There is an abundance of surface parking lots located in the downtown area, along with a number of public and private parking garages.



Zoning

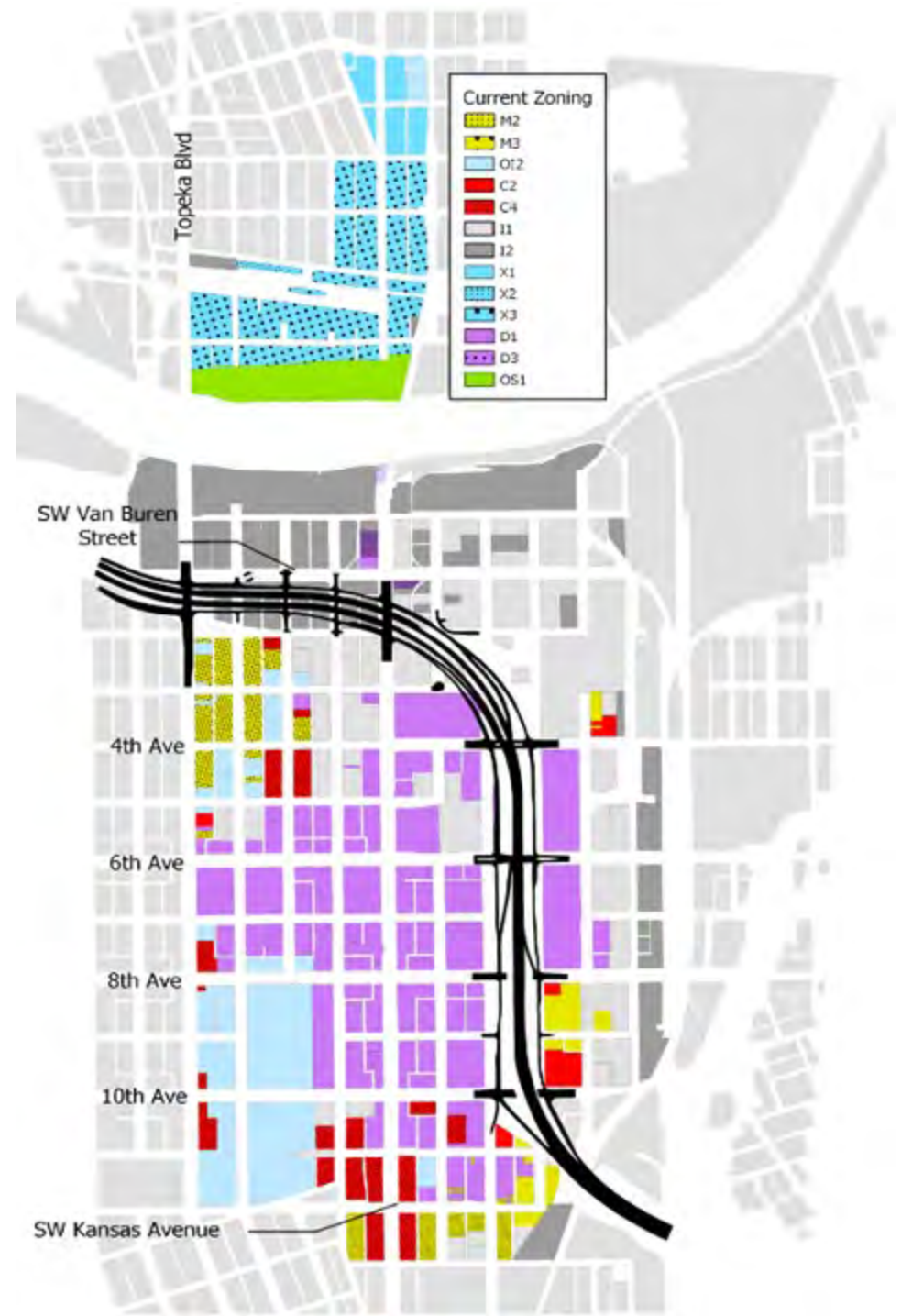
Land use in Downtown Topeka is regulated by the Topeka Development Code (Title 18). The Topeka Development Code includes regulations for 13 zoning districts located downtown.

The districts include a combination of mixed use districts - X Districts in NOTO/River North and D Districts south of the river. The X districts were implemented in the NOTO/River North area through the implementation of the Historic North Topeka Neighborhood Plan in 1999.

There are also residential zoning districts in the northwest corner of the Van Buren District and industrial districts along the south side of the river and west of the rail yards. Office zoning is primarily found around the State Capitol.

D District Zoning

The Topeka Zoning Code contains zoning districts specific to downtown. The downtown districts are provided to encourage a compatible mixed use activity. These districts have been partially implemented with the conversion of the former downtown C5 district to D-1 in 2017. See the Implementation section for recommendations to implement D District zoning throughout the rest of downtown. Below is a summary of the D Districts.



Zoning

There are **three downtown district classifications**. A review of the descriptions should be performed to see if an update to the purpose language is needed.

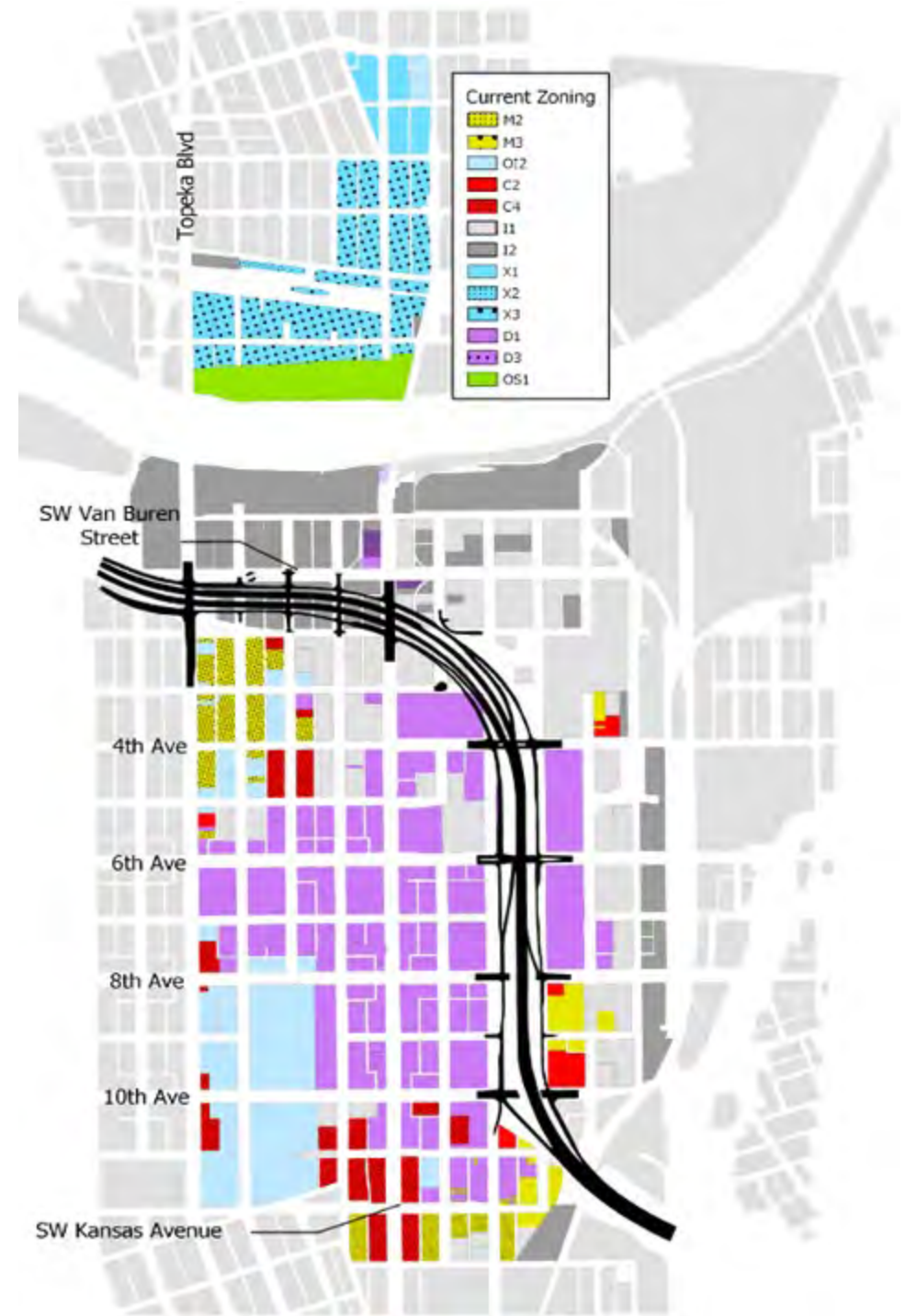
D-1 District - The purpose of this district is to facilitate a compatible mixed use activity center within the core area of downtown Topeka. The district is predominantly composed of State offices, as well as local and Federal facilities, commercial and retail uses. The district includes compatible residential, office, civic, and commercial retail/service uses which complement and support a high density of activity and facilitate pedestrian usage.

D-2 District - The purpose of this district is to integrate a compatible mixed use activity with urban residential neighborhoods. The district includes a balance of compatible residential, office, cultural, and neighborhood commercial retail/service uses of low to moderate intensity that complement and support neighborhood residential areas and pedestrian usage.

D-3 District - The purpose of this district is to reestablish the linkage between downtown and the Kansas River through intensive redevelopment of the area north of Crane Street to the Kansas River. The district includes housing, commercial and office uses that emphasize the relationship between downtown and the river, as well as expand cultural opportunities in the general downtown area.

Within the downtown zoning districts are adopted design guidelines. The guidelines primarily deal with non-residential building and parking. Using the model of the recently adopted city-wide non-residential design standards, the downtown design guidelines should be updated and converted to more prescriptive design standards. Further, design standards should also be created to provide design guidance to residential projects. This Plan will house the new design standards.

Finally, there are adopted downtown sign standards. These sign standards were recently crafted and adopted and are right sized for downtown.



Design

A high design aesthetic is promoted by this Plan as a way to protect property investments and help make downtown more welcoming. The overall design aesthetic should be based, in part, on the current built form and street wall of downtown as a way to “right size” the design expectation for downtown.

Built Form

The built form of a downtown describes the relationship of structures to one another, comparing size, massing, and proximity. Traditional downtown areas feature a built form based on mass, density, and the creation of a continuous street wall. Inline buildings, with little to no front and side yard setbacks are a common characteristic, creating compact, walkable areas. These buildings are built right up to the sidewalk, establishing a street wall of side-by-side, united structures. This built form provides a classic pedestrian environment unique to city centers. Establishing the built form for Downtown and how that differs based on the varying parts of Downtown is a key component of the Plan. The tower for the Cyrus hotel (photo on the right) was built set back from the lower two-story façade to help maintain the existing street wall and not overwhelm the street below.

Street Wall

The term street wall is used to describe a continuous row of structures along the property line, near the sidewalk, with no setbacks and minimal side yards. Street walls create a comfortable urban environment by establishing a sense of enclosure, providing easy access between adjacent uses, slowing automobile traffic, and emphasizing the pedestrian over the automobile in a way that improves safety. Maintaining a complete street wall is a valuable component of creating an active, vibrant, and pedestrian-oriented Downtown. The Plan should work to maintain the street wall where it is important to the design of Downtown. The image on the right is an existing street wall on 7th Street in the Van Buren District.



Design

Historic Properties

A large number of properties within Downtown Topeka are officially designated as historic. Many of these properties are individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places, while many are also included within nationally listed historic districts. The structures on all of these properties date from the 1890s through the mid-1960s, and represent a broad array of architectural styles.

In total, there are a total of 35 structures individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as well as three National Register Historic Districts. Highlights of individually listed structures include:

- the United State Post Office & Courthouse,
- the Kansas State Capitol Building
- and, the Kansas Free State Capitol Building.

The historic districts contain a total of 137 individual properties, each district representing a broad array of architectural styles and adaptive reuses. Several buildings within the Districts have been converted from warehouse or office to residential, and retail to office.

Design review for historic properties is performed locally by the Topeka Landmarks Commission and is based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The Downtown Topeka Historic District Guidelines also apply to the Mill Block and South Kansas Ave. historic districts.



Economic Incentives

There are a number of incentives available for development downtown. Certain incentives – like the NRP and historic tax credits – can be used to layer financing for the same project. However, if a project wishes to utilize the Dynamic Core TIF District, it cannot use the NRP as those incentives are both property tax based. There are links provided for additional program information for each of the incentives described below.

Neighborhood Revitalization Program

The City's Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) is a property tax rebate incentive. Qualified improvements are able to earn a property tax rebate on the taxes that are increased by the improvements. The standard rebate is 95% for 5 years and 50% for 5 years. Historic properties are eligible for a 95% rebate for the full 10 years. [Additional information.](#)

Dynamic Core TIF District

The Dynamic Core TIF District is a property tax based incentive that covers a district that includes downtown. The TIF District captures the increased property tax increment from all of the properties within the district. The funds are collected for use within the district. A development must apply to use the TIF funds. Eligible expenses include property acquisition, site preparation, utilities, and parking facilities. [Additional information.](#)

Historic Tax Credits

Historic tax credits are an income tax based incentive. Federal (20%) and State (25%) income tax credits are available to historic property owners for qualified rehabilitations costs. [Additional information.](#)

Opportunity Zones

Opportunity Zones offer investors preferential tax treatment for capital gains invested in low-income communities. The program is designed to encourage long-term investment in economically distressed areas and promote economic growth. These investments provide support to projects focused on a wide array of issues including, downtown revitalization, housing improvements and expansion of industrial parks and innovation districts. There are three opportunity zones in Topeka. They include Downtown and North Topeka. [Additional information.](#)

Star Bonds

There are no current Star Bond district downtown, but they remain a possibility. Sales Tax and Revenue (STAR) Bonds are a financing tool that allows Kansas municipalities to issue bonds to finance the development of major commercial, entertainment and tourism projects. The bonds are paid off through the sales tax revenue generated by the development. The intent is to increase regional and national visitation to Kansas. [Additional information.](#)

Demographics

The following graphic is a summary of the downtown demographics.

