

# PART III: IMPLEMENTATION



# Big Ideas – Implementation Path

Almost all of the ideas - big and small - represented in the Downtown Master Plan (DMP) evolved from various Downtown stakeholders who own property, work, live, advise, or represent organizations that do these things in the DMP area. Those ideas were further tested through a broader public lens by 1) direct mailing to all property owners in the nine districts, 2) virtual presentation on-line and at the Planning Commission, and 3) community-wide survey and social media outreach. This information was used to refresh the district plans and prioritize big ideas on an implementation path that reflects community values.

Downtowns must think boldly and inclusively post-pandemic. Ideas with the most wide-reaching and catalytic impacts for Downtown are categorized as “big ideas”. It is these big ideas that will ultimately change the face of Downtown during its next generation. **Not all big ideas can or will be able to be implemented in the next 10 years but to the extent that positive steps are taken to at least make these vision more “deal ready” will become their measure.**

## Community Survey

Data collected from a Downtown Topeka Citizen Input Survey between January 25 and March 1, 2021 provides valuable feedback for prioritizing these big ideas presented in the DMP. The survey asked what new developments were considered the highest priorities for Downtown over the next 10 years. The top 5 responses based on the number of times they were mentioned include:

- Dining/Café/Food/Beverage (62%)
- Riverfront Access (62%)
- Entertainment Venues (49%)
- Retail Storefronts (40%)
- Grocery Store (37%)

Honorable mentions include Aesthetic Makeovers (34%), sports Pavilion/Fieldhouse (31%), and Walkability/Mobility (31%). Nearly 60% of respondents have weekly interactions with Downtown with half of those having daily interactions. The second largest subgroup of respondents were those that had less than one visit per month to Downtown (19%). The full list of responses can be seen in Appendix B.





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This input allows us to view new developments through the citizen lens which sheds light on what citizens view as important vs. what is perceived as a public need. While not necessarily statistically valid for the entire citizenry, the survey did give us several key insights on an implementation path for the big ideas.

- **Riverfront Access.** The big idea of “Riverfront Access” was further described in the survey to include “parks, trails, kayaks, etc.” but not necessarily inclusive of “development”. Access to the Kansas River for recreation activity as a priority for Downtown was only surprising in that it tied for the top honor! This idea ranked high with both high and low use respondents of Downtown. The high interest in riverfront access shows a desire for increased recreational options Downtown and aligns nicely with the DMP’s objective to diversify the array of quality of life offerings. The visions in the River North/NOTO and River South districts to activate this space should be further explored on a more granular level through the Riverfront Authority. Many actions are in the works already - up-river weir, kayak chutes, levee trails, bikeways, etc. - to make this a greater destination for leisure activity downtown. Properties owned by government entities along the river should continue to be freed up for greater community use and made “deal ready” from private development consistent with the DMP.
- **Grocery Store.** Grocery stores bring people together. They are social hubs. It’s not a surprise a grocery store had the highest response rate for those who live/work Downtown other than riverfront access. This type of convenient amenity (think fresh produce) would not only have a profound effect on quality of life for those who use Downtown now, but be a game-changing draw for more resident, visitor, and worker growth in the future. By being strategically centered along transit routes as envisioned in the Van Buren district, it could also address some of the food desert needs of nearby neighborhoods and be a recipe to positively impact lower socio-economic groups.



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- **Housing.** Based on the 2019 Downtown Market Strategy, high quality residential living will be the bellwether of Downtown Topeka’s success and should be the highest priority for new development over the next 10 years. This includes both affordable and market rate. There is demand for at least 900 new housing units in Downtown Topeka over the next 10 years that could double the population and catalyze other investments. New units would target students, young professionals, mid-career and empty nesters. The Market Strategy should be followed for appropriate products. The biggest game-changer will be new construction units to broaden appeal beyond niche loft renovations and set market comps. The biggest gap fillers to incentivize housing will come through use of TIF funds (e.g., parking), an expanded 20-25 year NRP tax rebate program, and/or JEDO funding. Adding new households can be just as impactful as adding jobs if not more with greater local spending. While the survey feedback ranked housing outside the top 5, the 28% that believe it is a priority is a much higher percentage of the market that will personally ever live Downtown. That’s a very good sign. What separates housing from other big ideas critical to the future of Downtown is that it can be the accelerant to achieving so many other goals (e.g., Plug and Play, dining, entertainment, recreation, shopping, street life, grocery, etc.) and provide resiliency in changing economic times.
- **Hotel/Conference Center.** A pointed takeaway from the survey was that the big idea of a new hotel/conference center was not an instinctive “want” as it ranked last in priorities by respondents. The “need” is apparent as indicated in Visit Topeka’s 2019 market study where it was shown that there is a growing competitive gap between Topeka and other cities with regards to conference center capacity. A new signature hotel and convention center with structured parking in the downtown area would stem the loss of larger conferences to newer facilities in other cities and draw more “outside revenue” to support our visitor economy. Positioning it within walking distance to the Evergy Plaza at 4<sup>th</sup> and Kansas as envisioned in the Office and Catalyst District is critical to its appeal and synergy for vibrant street life Downtown. However, based on the survey results there may be a need for more public education on why this big idea, estimated around \$40M in value, can be a game-changer for Downtown as well as a big economic “need” for the community.





# Big Ideas– Implementation Path

- **Dining/Entertainment/Retail.** Dining/Café/Food/Beverage, Entertainment Venues, and Retail Storefronts all ranked in the Top 4 priorities of the survey. Not surprisingly, these scored much higher with those respondents who do not frequent Downtown as much. This may be telling for those who would like to frequent Downtown more. While more diverse and quality dining/entertainment/retail *experiences* contribute to a vibrant downtown, they require more people and longer periods of time to be spent Downtown. That is why having a mix of reasons for being Downtown or extending your stay is paramount to supporting this idea. For example, an influx of new residents to Downtown would check all of those boxes and provide more disposable income to be spent in a 12+ hour period beyond 5:00 PM for smaller businesses.
- **Sports Pavilion/Fieldhouse.** This big idea was middle of the pack as a priority for respondents but surprisingly higher for those who do not frequent Downtown as much. Again, creating more reasons for using Downtown is an economic resiliency theme emphasized over and over in the DMP. Based on the comments, it appears this idea would have garnered even more support if its purpose was clarified as a youth-oriented sports facility to drive more tournaments Downtown for indoor court, ice, or field events. This facility is not intended to support minor league sports. Much like the convention center/hotel, bringing thousands of visitors for tournaments to the heart of Downtown will have a decided ripple effect on demand for eating, shopping, hospitality, and recreation services. Plus, it will meet a continuously growing demand for local youth practice and event space that will save Topeka households time and dollars. A logical next step would be to perform a market study for such a facility Downtown, which is estimated in the \$30-40m range for an 80,000-120,000 square foot facility, and understand the scale and activities that could be supported. There are national firms that can advise, build, and operate this type of facility. A mega-project could combine this with a convention center/hotel in the Office and Catalyst or Tower District.



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- **Aesthetic Makeovers.** Next to riverfront access and grocery stores, there was no higher priority idea for those who live/work Downtown as the visual appeal of the area. While we often think of aesthetics as something that will be more welcoming to outsiders, it is clearly a priority for the quality of life and pride for those who spend more of their time here. Ultimately, things such as building facades, pocket parks, landscaping, urban design, and cleanliness are qualities that must be prioritized to retain expectations of the most ardent users who are our champions for Downtown.
- **Diversity and Inclusion.** One idea that is big but not necessarily a physical improvement, is embracing more diversity and inclusion of all people for Downtown. There was commentary that believed that Downtown’s future was not inclusive of people of color or lower socio-economic status. Or that it will lead to gentrification. Those were valid concerns as they would be contrary to the plan’s foundational objectives of being welcoming, authentic, resilient, and connected. The DMP prioritizes preservation, mobility for people without a car, bringing the public to the Kansas River, housing for all income levels, small business inclusion, revitalization efforts of adjacent neighborhoods, and diversification of offerings. Downtown is “everybody’s neighborhood” and must appeal to all Topekan to truly become the best version of itself.



Pictured: Brown v. Board Mural Project - Legacy & Vision | [artstopeka.org/mural/bvb](http://artstopeka.org/mural/bvb)



# Big Ideas– Implementation Path

- **Justice Center.** While the magnitude of this idea took on greater meaning in the shadows of nationwide civil unrest over criminal justice/police reforms in 2020, it still only managed to be a priority for 16% of respondents. There are many practical reasons to consider a new consolidated City/County law enforcement and court facility including the dire need for existing building upgrades, encroachment of the future Polk Quincy Viaduct, redevelopment of Kansas Avenue, cost-efficiencies, staff recruitment, etc. But the most powerful reason could be for the community to feel a sense of ownership creating a space of “justice” emblematic of all its citizens. The preferred location is at a gateway to Downtown that can stand as a new symbol of our collective unity. Minimum cost for a new LEC will be in the \$60 million range so careful considerations must be given to financing alternatives including private/public partnerships and any economic yield to be realized by redevelopment of the LEC site. A feasibility study should be conducted to further understand cost, savings, and scope of such a project before taking any next steps which certainly will need to include more community conversations.
- **Big “Big Idea” Financing.** It is an admittedly daunting task to begin lining up the price tags on achieving many of the bigger ideas. They will likely have different timelines and sources. Some more private. Some more public. But in almost all cases, the need for public/private partnerships (P3s) will be expected. P3s models where private entities can develop sites in return for the revenue stream may be much more palatable than heavy public bonding burdens or ownership. In other cases, traditional public incentives such as TIF, CID, NRP, IRB, local bonds, state/federal grants, etc. are in place to fill gaps in the financing model. But the most extraordinary financing measures that could make these a reality come through either a sales tax ballot measure and/or STAR bonds. For example, a 1/4 cent or less “public safety” sales tax could be used to finance the Justice Center and other needed public safety facilities. A STAR bond package of the Sports Pavilion, Convention Center/Hotel, and other entertainment venue projects could meet the minimum \$50-75 million investment to qualify for this State incentive. Other non-traditional options that could be sought include federal earmarks or stimulus funds.



# Big Ideas– Implementation Path

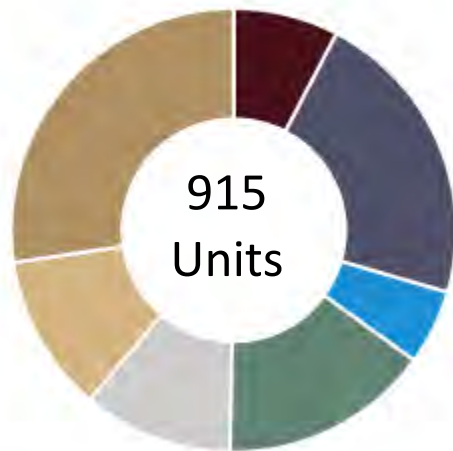
- **Innovation District.** Overall, this idea was ranked below average in priorities which belies its true catalytic impact reshaping Downtown and the local economy. High frequency Downtown users actually ranked it much higher as a priority. Topeka’s Plug and Play initiative will continuously cycle animal science start-up companies through the local economy every few months with bigger hopes that some of them will elect to stay and grow their company here. This can take shape as a “campus” early on in existing buildings along Kansas Avenue that will strengthen our spine. Future spin-off of companies that want to stay and grow could potentially be accommodated in a collaborative mix of old and new buildings along the riverfront as envisioned in the River South district. A key “public” greenspace and levee trail access would not only benefit workers in the area but pay tribute to the former City Park which served a largely segregated African-American neighborhood displaced by Urban Renewal in the River to Rail district. The long play of this vision will be accelerated if deliberate steps can continue to be taken to relocate public facilities, reclaim land for new building sites, mitigate any brownfield issues, activate levee trail access, budget for complete street improvements, and construct a new Polk-Quincy Viaduct. This includes potential for a new TMTA transit facility as recommended in the Civic district which could be largely financed through State/Federal transit grants to cover its estimated \$21-26 million cost. The Riverfront Advisory Committee should take the lead to ensure steps continue.





# Implementation Summary – District Allocations

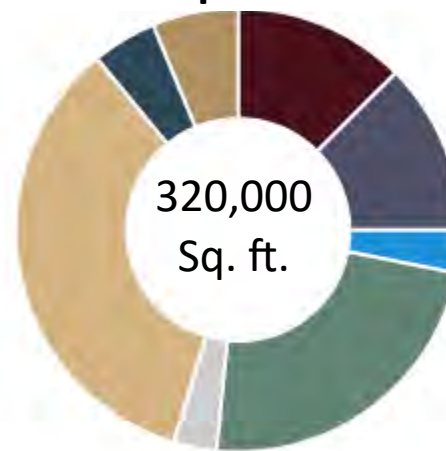
## Housing



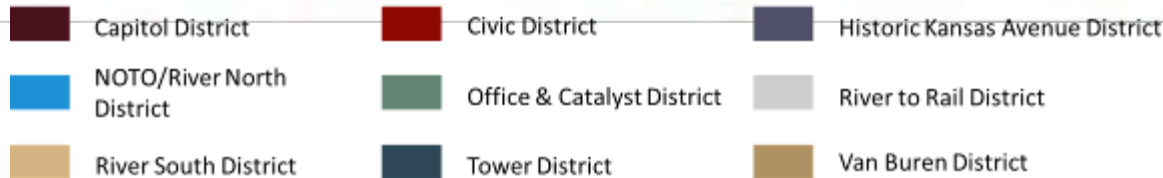
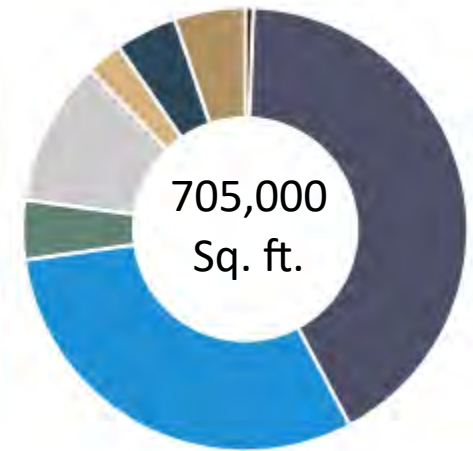
## Hotel Beds



## Class A Office Space



## Existing Retail



213,000 sq. ft. of proposed new retail

New housing units in Downtown Topeka will be through a variety of development, ranging from new builds to conversions. The three districts projected to gain the most housing units are the Van Buren District, Historic Kansas Avenue and the Office & Catalyst District. New units in the Van Buren District will likely come through new development, as surface level parking lots are replaced. Within Historic Kansas Avenue and the Office & Catalyst District, units will likely be conversions from office space to residential units with opportunity for additional units through mixed-use infill development.

A recent market study showed a need for additional hotel beds in Downtown Topeka. A likely site for this is within the Office and Catalyst District, where a new hotel and convention would alleviate much of the need for hotel beds. There is potential in 10+ years that additional smaller-scale hotels could be developed, as need dictates.

There is a current need for roughly 300,000 sq. ft. of new class A office space. It is anticipated that much of that growth will happen within the River South, Office and Catalyst, and Historic Kansas Avenue Districts. Within the River South District, much of the new class A space would be driven by new development. Within the Historic Kansas Avenue and Office & Catalyst District, the addition of new class A office space would come through upgrades to existing office space.

The allocation of retail space will likely continue to fall into two district. Currently, Historic Kansas Avenue and NOTO hold the largest footprint of retail space. Along Kanas Avenue there are empty storefronts that present an opportunity for growth of retail businesses. Similarly, as NOTO continues to be the prominent Arts District for Topeka, there is expected to be growth of retail square feet. The River to Rail District does feature a significant share of retail square feet, but these uses lean industrial retail or business oriented and not necessarily designed for leisurely shopping.

# Streets – Downtown Topeka Roadway Projects

There are numerous roadway projects identified in the Downtown Master Plan. Improvements will include repair and replacement of waterlines, storm water structures and piping, sanitary sewer mains, pavement, sidewalk infrastructure, streetscapes, and complete street elements. Projects fall into two categories - “independent” and “development dependent”. Independent projects are listed below in priority order and can proceed as funding allows. Development dependent projects are not listed in priority order but instead “float” until a future development proposal warrants them as a priority. The categories help to prioritize projects and establish a rough implementation sequence. It is recommended a “Downtown” line item be funded in the CIP to implement on an annual basis over 10 years using a variety of sources including G.O. Bonds, TIF, Grants, Sales Tax, Polk-Quincy match, etc.

Priority	Independent Projects (Proceed as funding allows)	Project Type
1	Quincy Street (6th Avenue to 8th Avenue)	Lane Reallocation
2	Quincy Street (8th Avenue to 10th Avenue)	Lane Reallocation
3	Kansas Avenue (4th Street to 6th Avenue)	Lane Reallocation
4	Gordon Street Intersection at Kansas Avenue	Intersection
5	Jackson Street (3rd Street to 14th Street) and 14th Street west of Kansas Avenue	Conversion
6	Harrison Street (2nd Street to 12th Street)	Conversion
7	Kansas Avenue (10th Avenue to 13th Street)	Lane Reallocation
8	4th Street (Topeka Blvd to Kansas Avenue)	Conversion + Lane
9	5th Street (Topeka Blvd to 4th Street)	Conversion + Lane
10	Monroe Street (11th Avenue to 17th Street)	Conversion
11	Kansas Avenue (13th Street to 17th Street)	Lane Reallocation
12	1st Street (Quincy Street to Adams Street)	Lane Reallocation
<b>Total Estimated Cost</b>		<b>\$28,200,000</b>

## Project Type:

**Lane Reallocation:** Reduction of travel lanes typically from five travel lanes to three travel lanes or as traffic demand models dictate.

**Conversion:** Change in direction of travel from one-way to two-way.

**Complete Street:** Complete Street projects will enhance the multi-modal travel with emphasis placed on bike/ped/transit improvements.

**PQV (Polk-Quincy Viaduct):** The PQV project presents an opportunity to make roadway improvements through various Federal, State, or Local sources .

Development Dependent Projects ("Floating" Priorities)	Project Type
Van Buren Street (6th Avenue to 8th Avenue)	Complete Street
Van Buren Street (2nd Street to 6th Street)	Complete Street
Quincy Street (10th Street to 11th Street)	Lane Reallocation
Kansas Avenue (3rd Street to 4th Street)	Lane Reallocation
Crane Street (Topeka Boulevard to Quincy Street)	Complete Street
Van Buren Street (1st Street to Crane Street)	Complete Street
Van Buren (1st Street to 2nd Street)	PQV/ Complete Street
Madison Street (2nd Street to 4th Street)	PQV
Kansas Avenue (1st Street to 3rd Street)	PQV
3rd Street (Kansas Avenue to Quincy Street)	PQV
6th Avenue (Branner Traffic way to Topeka Blvd.)	Complete Street
8th Avenue (Topeka Blvd. to Quincy Street)	Complete Street
4th Street (Monroe Street to Kansas Avenue)	Streetscape
<b>Total Estimated Cost</b>	<b>\$13,175,000</b>

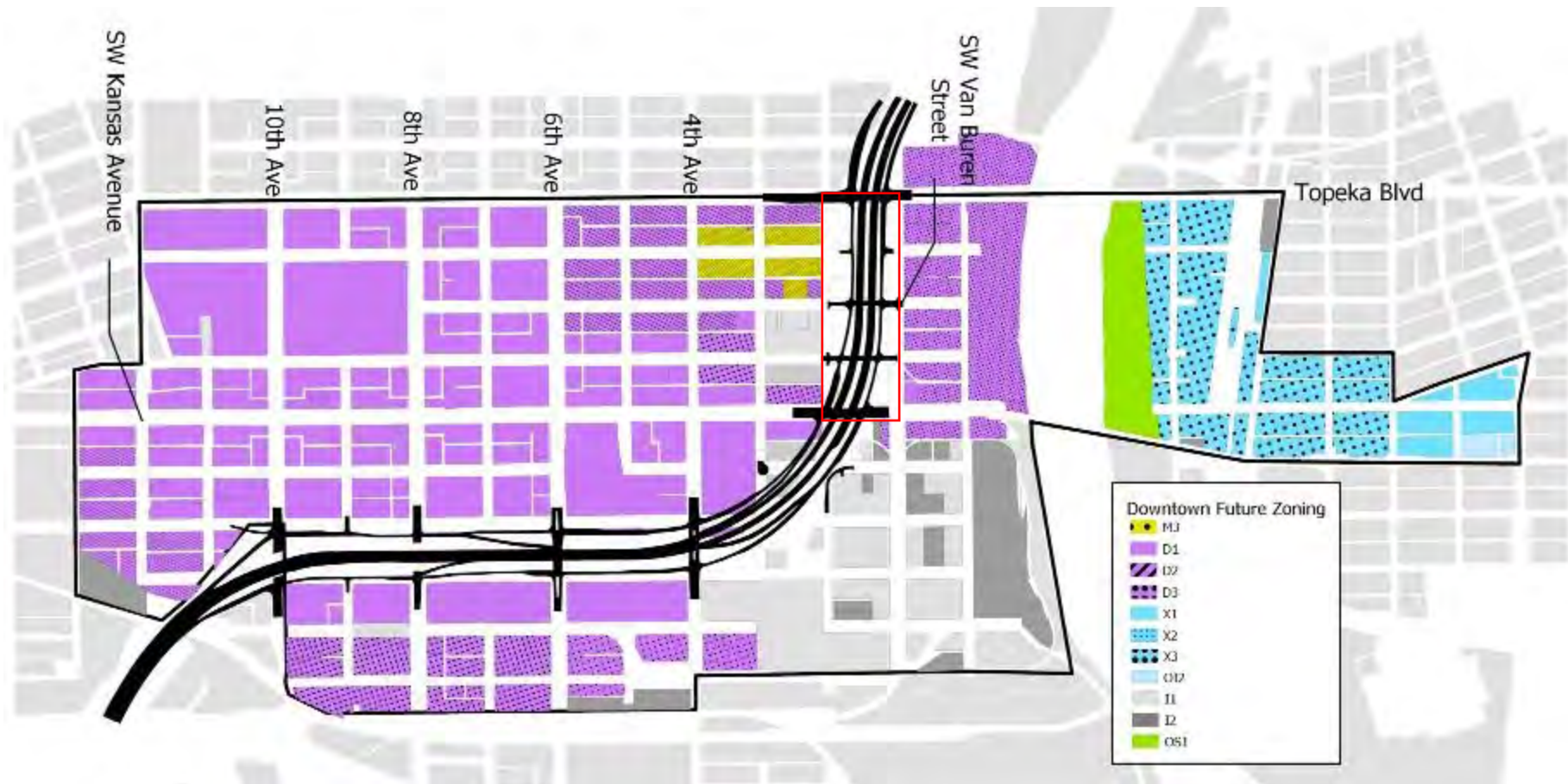



# Downtown Zoning Changes

There are a number of changes to the D Downtown Zoning Districts that are related to the adoption of this plan. Some of these changes are being implemented along with the adoption of the plan, while others will be worked on at a later date. The following is a summary of future downtown zoning changes.

## Future Changes

- Newly drafted design standards for residential and non-residential projects within the D districts are included in Appendix A and will be adopted by ordinance at a future date.
- Rezoning recommendations for properties are found within each district plan. These rezoning recommendations will be used to craft zoning cases that will be worked on after the plan is adopted.
- Minor tweaks to Section 18-200 D Downtown Districts – includes tweaks to the district classification descriptions – will also be worked on after the adoption of the plan.
- There will also be changes identified to the D Districts' use tables and also certain specific use standards.



 Parcels impacted by the Polk-Quincy Viaducts future zoning will be assessed based upon which parcels are acquired as right-of-way.