

NOTO/RIVER NORTH DISTRICT



River North History

Life along the north bank of the Kansas River in Topeka began in 1842 as the exit point of Pappa's Ferry across the Kansas River. Pappan's Ferry provided passage to settlers travelling westward on the Oregon Trail. This point was roughly inline with Harrison Street, immediately east of Topeka Boulevard. Many travelers on the Oregon Trail did not continue beyond this crossing, however, choosing instead to make the north bank of the Kansas River their home. These settlers established their own community on the north bank of the Kansas River, prospering as a pivotal stop for other westward travelers. The growth and stability of this settlement was eventually founded as the **Town of Eugene** in 1865 by William Curtis.

Less than a year after its establishment, on New Years Day, the Town of Eugene welcomed the first Union Pacific train. The presence of the Union Pacific in the Town of Eugene resulted in the annexation of Eugene into the City of Topeka in 1867. This annexation gave the former Town of Eugene the status of the First Ward of the City of Topeka.

Development within the First Ward was heavily influenced by the presence of the Union Pacific Railroad as nearly all commercial and industrial development was located between the Kansas River and the parallel Union Pacific railroad tracks. This included a short, one-block mainstreet along Kansas Avenue immediately south of the railroad tracks. This mainstreet was anchored by the Union Pacific Depot and Hotel at its north end, accompanied by the presence of a barber, grocer, restaurants and saloons, a hardware store, drugstores, another hotel, along with other retail businesses.



Union Pacific Railroad Depot & Hotel
700 N. Kansas Avenue, facing east, 1887

Development to the west of Kansas Avenue along the railroad tracks was dominated mostly by the Union Pacific Railroad. By 1883, the Union Pacific had constructed their Freight Depot immediately south of the railroad tracks on the west side of Jackson Street.



Union Pacific Railroad Depot and Freight Depot, 1945

The Union Pacific replaced their freight depot with the new construction of their passenger depot in 1927, with the freight depot being shifted across Railroad Street to the south. Shortly thereafter, the Topeka Avenue Bridge was constructed in 1938 as a project through the Federal Works Progress Administration (WPA).

Most of area west of Kansas Avenue was occupied by modest homes, originally constructed during its era as a residential neighborhood. These residential uses gradually transitioned into heavier industrial uses over the next several decades.

In 1991, a new entity emerged within the River North area, that being the Topeka Rescue Mission Ministries. This ministry constructed a facility at Curtis & Kansas Avenue to house over 100 homeless men, women, and families. Since this date, the Mission has continued to expand its facilities and services on adjacent properties, and within the River North district.



Homes near the future site of the Topeka Avenue Bridge, 1935

NOTO History

The 2-block stretch of N. Kansas Avenue commonly referred to as the NOTO Arts District began its life in the 1850s as the Town of Eugene. Growth of Eugene as a town, brought on by settlers traversing the Oregon Trail, and the substantial growth of the Union Pacific Railroad, quickly created economic competition with the City of Topeka on the south side of the Kansas River. This competition ultimately led to the annexation of Eugene into the City of Topeka in 1867, thus creating the City of Topeka's 1st Ward.

During the late 19th Century, the area to the west of Kansas Avenue was developed as a low-density single-family neighborhood, commonly known as The Sands. The Sands was an Exoduster settlement, dedicated by Charles Curtis.

Charles Curtis, who later would become Vice President of the United States, dedicated his portion of the Half-Breed Reservation along the Kansas River to Exodusters seeking freedom and land after the emancipation of slaves after the Civil War. Living remnants of The Sands are still visible today in the 2nd Missionary Baptist Church, located at 416 NW Laurent, and St. Mark's AME Church at 801 NW Harrison St.



St. Mark's AME Church, 1919



Kansas Avenue Iron Bridge, 1870

Meanwhile, the North Topeka business district along North Kansas Avenue was flourishing. With the completion of the Kansas Avenue bridge in 1869, access between the commercial entities south of the river and industrial areas north of the river was convenient and reliable, allowing North Topeka to establish its own downtown. By the 1880s, North Kansas Avenue had established itself as a solid commercial core, consisting of banks, drugstores, clothiers, hardware and lumber, a post office, and even Topeka's Fire Station No. 1.



Fire Station 1 at Gordon and Kansas Avenue.
Fire Station No. 1, 1890



Flood damage along N. Kansas Ave., 1903

Flooding, however, took its toll on every part of this area. Floods in 1903 and again in 1951 washed away homes and businesses, and forced the demolitions and reconstruction of many more surviving buildings. It was not until the construction of the levee system along the north and south banks of the Kansas River immediately following the flood of 1951 that residential, commercial, and industrial development could proceed free from the concerns of regular flooding.

In recent years, the life of this area has revived. During the early 2000s, the NOTO Arts & Entertainment District was born, with new types of businesses occupying the storefronts that cater to an arts scene that had never before been served in Topeka at this scale.

NOTO



- Unique public art
- Active street life
- Walkable & urban
- Outdoor dining
- Creative office
- Live-work opportunity
- Entrepreneurial
- Local

Eclectic Arts District

NOTO has successfully positioned itself as the arts district in Topeka. This area has a charming, local, entrepreneurial spirit that distinguishes it from other areas of the city. The existing mural program should continue to be encouraged. A future strategy that increases the amount of public art will draw more visitors to the area. Street art could provide a funky and unique alternative to more traditional public art. Rotating outdoor displays could be used to encourage people to continually revisit the area. This increased traffic will help support retail and restaurant spaces which will help activate the district.



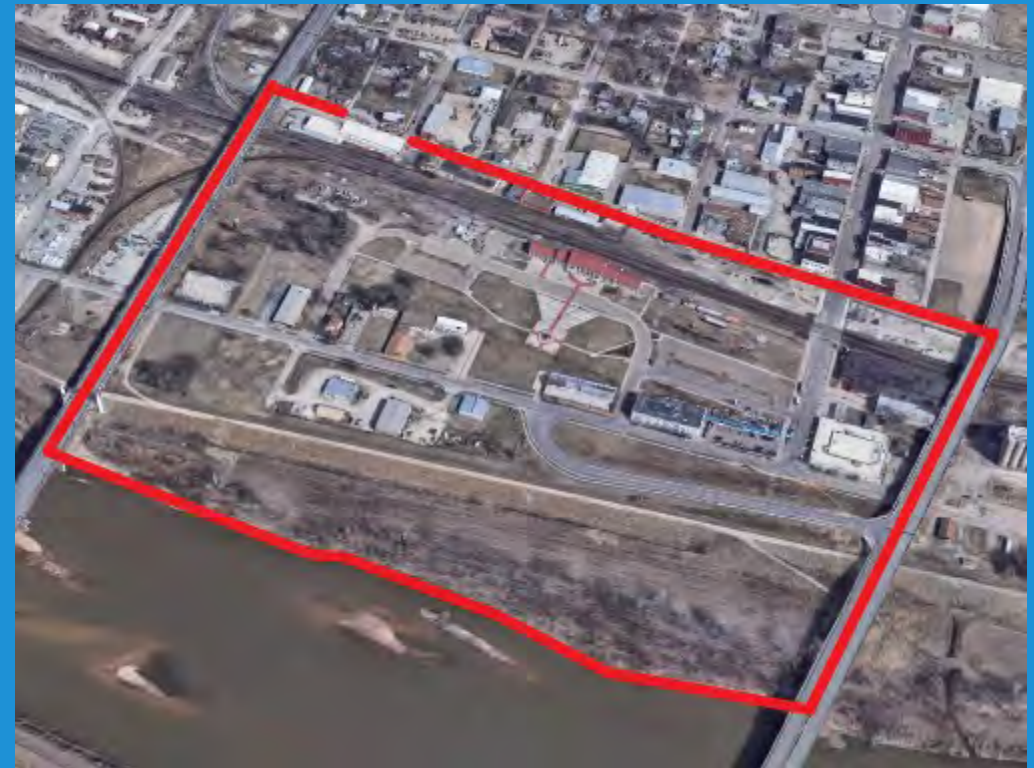
River North



- Build upon the Great Overland Station
- Develop a riverfront park
- Connect to the river
- Connect with greenways and trails
- Community event space
- Incorporate art
- Open space

Destination Park Space

Great Overland Station is a beautiful, historic asset that cannot reach its fullest potential without major improvements to the surrounding area. The planned Topeka Riverfront Park would make the area more appealing and provide another destination to bolster visitation. These improvements should include opportunities to meaningfully connect with the river by walking, biking, boating and perhaps even zip lines right over the water. Several nearby industrial properties should be adapted to infuse art into the district through major mural projects, decorating lighting, and potentially an immersive indoor art experience that could act as another anchor for the district.



NOTO

Potential Build-Out

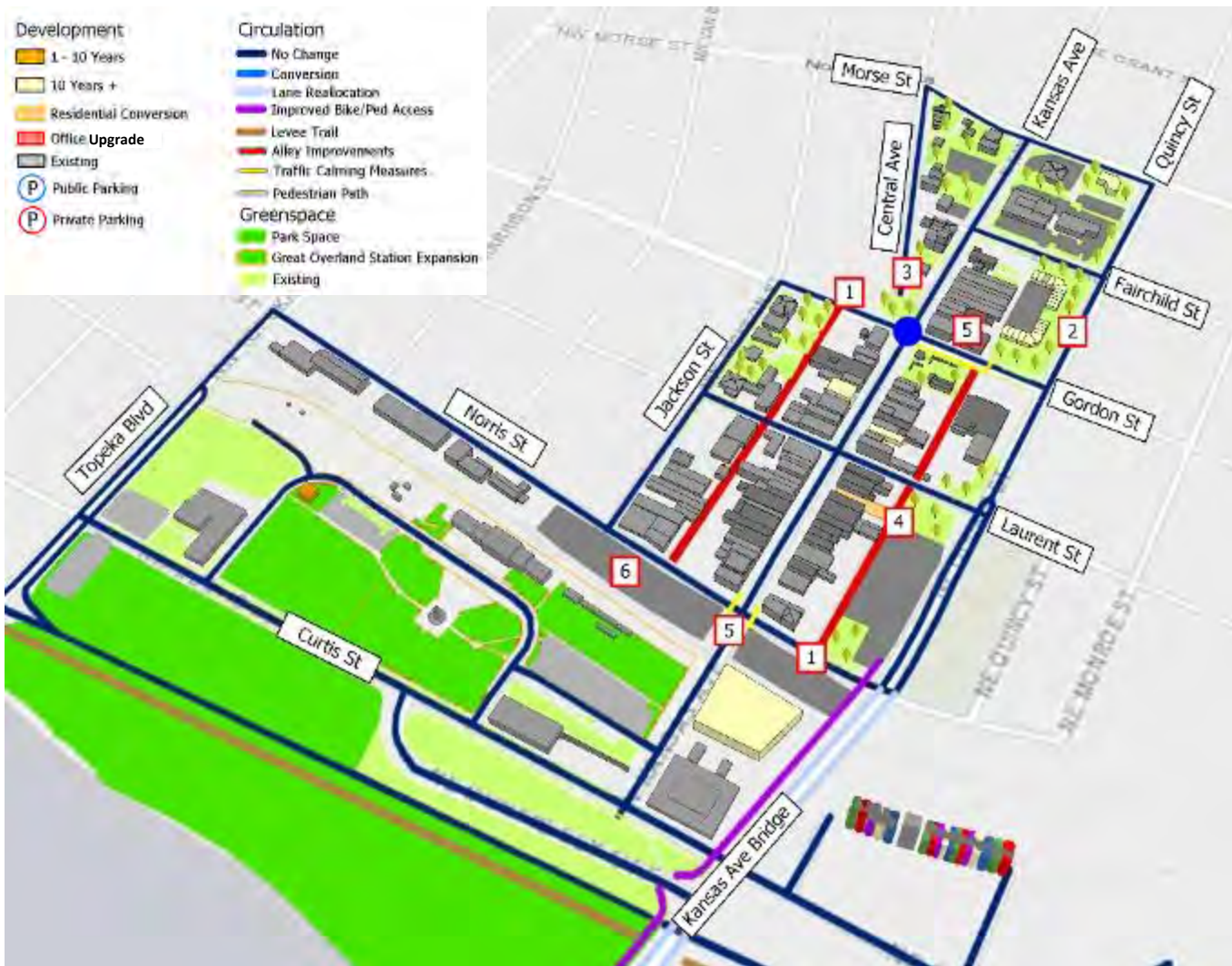
New Development & Conversions

1 Improved and Accessible Alleys - With potential to become “green corridors” these alleys can host special events and highlight local artists murals. These alleys could include wayfinding signage, plantings and pop-up people spaces.

2 New Artist Housing - Filling in currently vacant property, new townhomes could provide artist housing for the District. These new units proximity to Kansas Avenue could act as a model project for higher density housing within the district.

3 Cul-de-sac Park - Building off the energy of the adjacent Redbud Park, realignment of Central Avenue would allow for a new park space to be created. This park space could act as a “North Stage” for the district to feature special events and act as a gateway from the north.

4 Pedestrian Access - Connecting Kansas Avenue to the enhanced alleys. These corridors can highlight local art while driving pedestrians to Kansas Avenue.



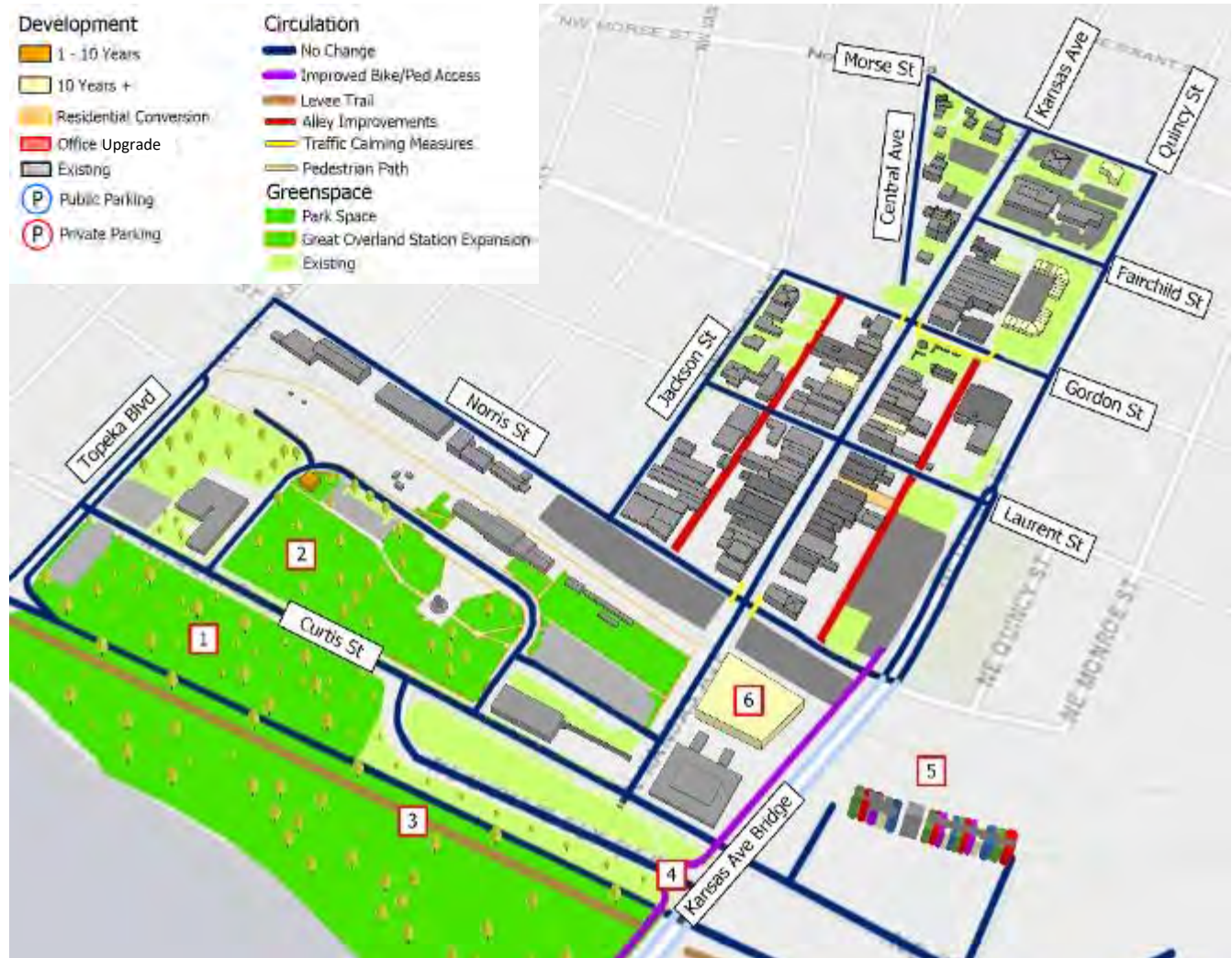
5 Traffic Calming Measures - As NOTO continues to be the premiere art district for Topeka, with an increased pedestrian presence, there will be a need to provide safe pedestrian passage from surface level parking to the core of the district.

6 Parking - With events like First Fridays flooding the district with pedestrians, there is a need for more parking within the district. By focusing on surface level parking on the periphery of the district, parking along Kansas Avenue can be used to create an improved pedestrian environment.

River North Potential Build-Out

New Development & Conversions

- 1 **Riverfront Park** - Keeping in line with the Papan's Ferry Charrette, the Riverfront park has potential to expand. Features of an enhanced riverfront park could include a new trailhead and parking, an amphitheater, river seating, overlook locations, and improved river access
- 2 **Great Overland Station Expansion** - With Shawnee County taking ownership of the Great Overland Station, an expansion could help the River North District act as a signature park space. Expansion would allow for an Oregon Trail retracement, flexible park space and programming making the River North district a true recreation destination.
- 3 **Kansas River Levee Trail** - Starting at the segment of the Curtis Fly-off, an enhanced trail will create a new recreational use connecting the Riverfront park to surrounding neighborhoods.
- 4 **Improved Pedestrian/Bike Access** - Conversion of one lane of the Kansas Avenue Bridge, to protected bicycle/pedestrian lanes, will enhance connectivity across the Kansas River. Enhanced connectivity will encourage more visitors to River North and the NOTO Arts & Entertainment District.



- 5 **Creative Lighting/NOTO Branding** - The currently unused grain silos present an opportunity to strategically brand the NOTO Arts & Entertainment District. Capitalizing on the artistic nature of the districts, lighting and or painting can of these silos can act as the welcome mat for the districts.
- 6 **New Hotel** - With few vacant parcels in the district, a new hotel on the eastern side of the district would provide new lodging for out-of-town visitors to NOTO Arts District

District Growth/Expansion

The NOTO District most closely reflects the NOTO Arts District Core, which is outlined in the NOTO Arts District Master Plan. This area acts as the heart of NOTO with the majority of recent investment occurring within this area. However, NOTO has long term plans to expand its district boundaries to assist in the revitalization of retail buildings. The growth of NOTO focuses on greater economic development in the surrounding residential, commercial and light industrial blocks.

Expansion to the Creative Arts and Technology Area will appeal to more than just artists, with additional focus on small commercial and industrial businesses associated with arts, design and technology. This area may focus on graphic design, architectural studios, internet start-ups, wood and metal working shops, and printing/framing stores

The area to the northwest of the Arts District Core will grow into the Creative District Housing (Artist Zone). This area is roughly eight blocks, with room for new infill housing catered towards artists and small business start-ups. New housing is important to the vitality of the area and bolster overall resiliency. New housing is important to the vitality of the area and bolsters overall resiliency. This area's close proximity to the Arts District Core helps facilitate an environment for creative minds to live, work and play.

For more information about the NOTO Arts District Core and surrounding areas please see the [NOTO Arts District Master Plan](#).



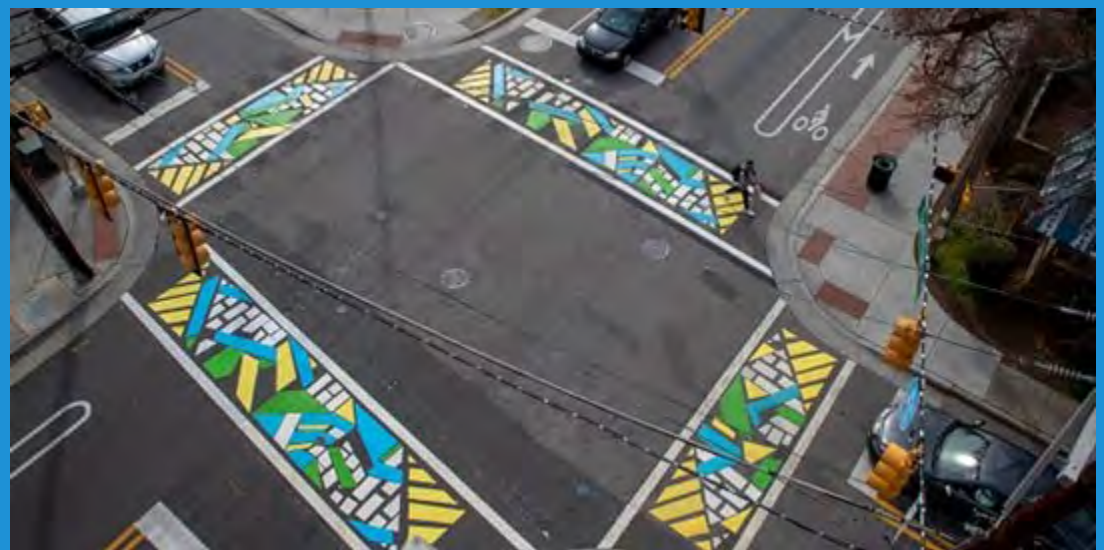
ARTS DINING CULTURE



HISTORY & TOURISM



IMPROVING THE PUBLIC SPACE



Circulation/Complete Streets



Changes to circulation within NOTO and River North Districts center around improved pedestrian and bicycle access. The Kansas Avenue Bridge will reallocate lanes to allow for dedicated bike lanes and a pedestrian path, while still allowing for two-way traffic. The intersection of Kansas Avenue and Gordon will be converted to improve pedestrian safety surrounding Rosebud Park and the proposed cul-de-sac park.

Type/Location	Recommendation	Complete Streets Typology	Ped	Bike	Bus	Car
No Change	Morse St	Neighborhood Connector	•		•	•
	Fairchild St	Mixed Use Boulevard	•			•
	Gordon St	Mixed Use Boulevard	•			•
	Laurent St	Mixed Use Boulevard	•			•
	Norris St	Mixed Use Boulevard	•			•
	Curtis St	Mixed Use Boulevard	•		•	•
	Quincy St	Mixed Use Boulevard	•		•	•
	Kansas Ave	Main Street	•	•		•
	Central Ave	Mixed Use Boulevard	•	•		•
	Jackson St	Mixed Use Boulevard	•			•
Lane Reallocation	Kansas Avenue Bridge	Neighborhood Connector	•	•	•	•

Kansas Avenue Bridge

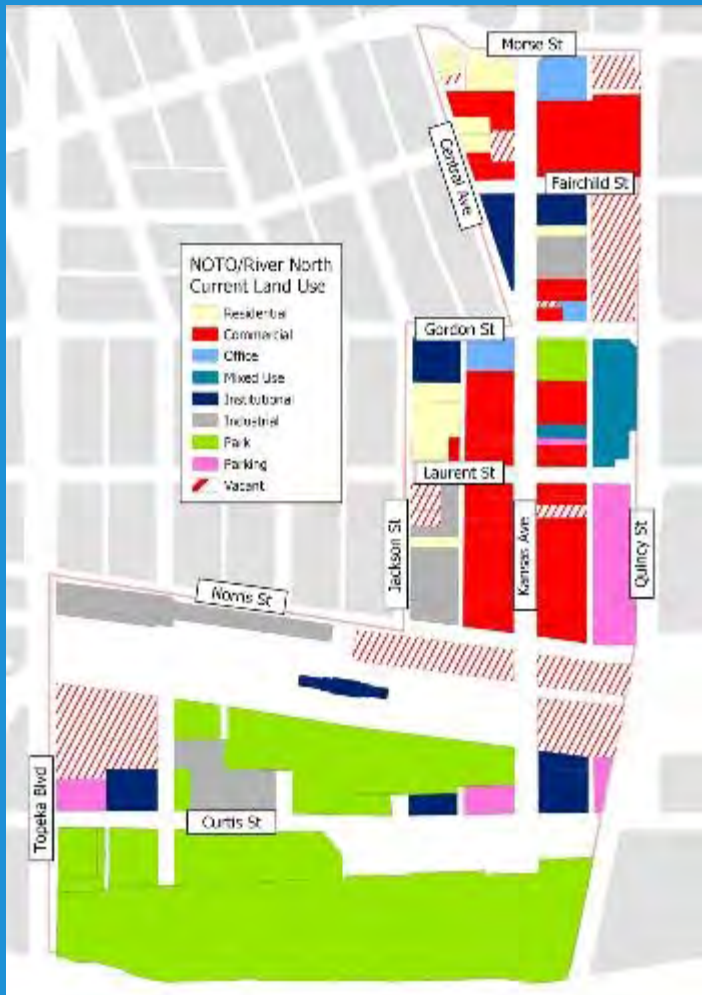


- ① Travel lanes maintained
- ② Lane Reallocation to accommodate bike/ped.
- ③ Protected bike lanes.
- ④ Pedestrian Path

Existing Character

Land Use

Land Use in NOTO and River North define a clear transition from open space to a commercial corridor with Kansas Avenue acting as the spine, with pockets of industrial, office and residential within the boundaries. Additionally, there are large segments of vacant property found throughout the two districts. Future land uses, and infill development, will likely be determined by their proximity to Kansas Avenue. Highlighting the desire for NOTO to become a 24 hour destination site, the landscape will likely be defined by a mixture of land uses. These mixed use sites would allow for first floor office and commercial and residential units on other floors. Industrial mixed use sites will ensure existing industrial uses can remain but provide an opportunity for heavier intensity art studios. New residential developments in the area are regulated by the X-1 zoning district that call for a traditional residential environment, thus limiting development density. Other new construction sites should fit the existing character of the surrounding built environment.



Existing Character Zoning

NOTO and River North are currently zoned “OI-2” Office and Institutional, “I-2” Heavy Industrial, “OS-1” Open Space, and “X-1, X-2 and X-3” Mixed Use. It is proposed all properties retain their current zoning classifications, with the exception of properties near the Kansas River should be considered for rezoning to “OS-1”. The retention of Mixed Use zoning districts will allow for the existing row stores to have commercial, office, and residential uses.

X-1 Zoning - facilitates a compatible mixed use activity center within a traditional residential neighborhood. The district includes a balance of compatible residential, office, civic, and neighborhood commercial retail/service uses of low to moderate intensity that complement and support dense neighborhood residential areas and pedestrian usage with quality urban design.

X-2 Zoning - facilitates a mixed use area that transitions from a higher intensity industrial use area to lower intensity neighborhood-scale residential areas and includes a balance of compatible residential, office, commercial/service, and light industrial uses.

X-3 Zoning - a destination-oriented mixed use that serves as the northern entertainment/cultural anchor of downtown. This zoning designation is intended to improve the area to a 24 hour destination for urban, culture, entertainment, community and residential experiences. Furthermore, this district should focus on the retention and attraction of businesses, workplaces and residences through adaptive reuse, rehabilitation, or redevelopment of vacant or underutilized properties, all of which should include high quality urban design that maintains a sense of history, human scale, and pedestrian-orientation.



Implementation Summary

	Recommendations	Other Considerations
Land Use	Promote mixed uses with office/commercial uses on lower floors with top floor residential.	
Zoning	Retain existing zoning.	See map in Existing Character
Housing	Potential to add 50 new housing units within the NOTO Arts District Core. New units may also be provided through rehabilitation and infill in the Creative District Housing Zone.	New top floor residential units will increase the number of housing units in the District.
Office	Rehabilitation of existing row stores will provide new office space.	Any growth in this category is reliant on rehabilitation of existing buildings.
Retail	Rehabilitation of existing row stores will provide new retail space.	Any growth in this category is reliant on rehabilitation of existing buildings.
Hotel	No new hotel beds.	
Parking	While structured parking is preferred, the demand for parking in NOTO is currently not being met. A focus on surface parking on the periphery of the district can provide much needed parking spaces.	
Building Design Standards	Follow existing design standards.	City-wide non-residential and X District dimensional and performance standards

