

# CHAPTER 1: executive summary

## Vision

### ***Chaska's Community Vision***

*"To be the Best Small Town in Minnesota"*

Chaska's mission statement "To be the Best Small Town in Minnesota" is the foundation of the Chaska Downtown Master Plan. Chaska citizens view downtown as the heart of the community and physical embodiment of Chaska's historic and unique small town character. The community strives to maintain its small town character and sense of community while supporting well-planned future growth. Throughout much of its history, Chaska's character was that of a freestanding small town in the Minnesota River valley. The entire city was located below the river bluff at the crossroads of the river, rail lines and highways. The river bluff served as the community's edge. For much of Chaska's history, today's "downtown area" was the entire town. In recent decades, the Twin Cities metro region has grown and expanded outward to Chaska. As Chaska has evolved into a community within the metro region, it has experienced significant growth in population and land area. The city has expanded beyond the river valley with more of the community's residents now living above the river bluff than below the bluff and the Chaska Greenbelt serves as the community's edge.

### ***Chaska's Downtown Vision***

*"Revitalize downtown Chaska as the hub of community destinations and gathering places that reflect and celebrate our historic character, traditional small town atmosphere and values."*

The downtown vision encompasses five main elements which are:

- » *Community Gathering Places*
- » *Vibrant Main Street District*
- » *Historic Small Town Character*
- » *Thriving Anchor Institutions*
- » *Attractive Neighborhoods*



*Chaska City Hall, History Center, Library and City Hall Plaza continue to be important destinations and gathering places in downtown Chaska.*



*Historic City Square, with its gazebo and surrounding historic buildings, is viewed as the center of downtown.*

## Downtown Guiding Principles

- » Enhance the community's pride and historic sense of place in downtown
- » Reinvigorate the variety and vitality of downtown's main street destinations
- » Create signature community gathering places
- » Preserve and strengthen downtown as the hub for community institutions
- » Expand downtown's role as an employment center
- » Enhance downtown's neighborhoods and housing options
- » Create inviting downtown streets, sidewalks and trails
- » Strengthen downtown partnerships to achieve common goals

## Purpose of the Downtown Plan

The purpose of the Chaska Downtown Master Plan is to establish a holistic, long-term vision and plan for the downtown area. The purposes of this plan are to:

- » establish a big picture framework for clarifying and strengthening downtown's place in the community and the region;
- » build upon the City's prior planning initiatives and downtown project successes to identify the next steps in moving forward with downtown revitalization;
- » provide a guide for future reinvestment efforts by the public sector, private sector, and non-profit organizations in downtown over the next ten years;
- » create a fully functional downtown area with traditional small town character that is valued and used by Chaska citizens, employees and visitors.



*Chestnut Street is viewed as Chaska's "Main Street" although it's "Main Street" character is challenged by its current regional highway role as MN Highway 41 and a major crossing of the Minnesota River.*

## Legacy of Downtown Revitalization Efforts

In support of the community's mission to be the best small town in Minnesota, the City has consistently made downtown revitalization a community priority. Chaska has a strong legacy of downtown revitalization efforts over the years. These revitalization efforts include renovation of City Square, development of the new city hall/library building, street improvements, historic preservation, site assembly and redevelopment, housing development, and storefront rehabilitation loan program. Downtown revitalization efforts have involved the public sector, private sector, and non-profit agencies. However, the City's leadership, commitment and participation have been critical to downtown's revitalization successes thus far. For example, in the 1980s, the City made the critical decision to build a new city hall and library building in downtown rather than relocate it outside of downtown. The preparation of this Downtown Master Plan, the City's first, is the next big step in the City's legacy of downtown revitalization efforts.

The community's legacy of downtown revitalization includes the following efforts (not a comprehensive list):

- » Flood control project, including raising the levee and adding creek diversion channels
- » Addition of the levee trail
- » Renovation of City Square
- » Designation of historic buildings and the Walnut Street Historic District
- » Creation of the Downtown Preservation Design Manual and Historic Context Study
- » Restoration and reuse of Brinkhaus Livery Stable as the Chaska History Center
- » Reconstruction of streets: First St, Hickory St, Fourth St
- » Second St stoplight on MN Hwy 41 (federal economic stimulus funding)
- » Chestnut St/MN Hwy 41 streetscape enhancements: street median, corner bulbs (federal economic stimulus funding)
- » City's land subsidy and site/building design partnership for City Square commercial building redevelopment project in Walnut Street Historic District
- » Expansion of the Carver County License Center facility
- » Renovation of the Athletic Park grandstand structure
- » Storefront Loan Program renovations – more than 25 projects
- » Renovation of historic residences
- » City involvement in successful site redevelopments
- » New downtown housing added over past 20 years – approximately 600 units
- » Christmas in May house improvement projects



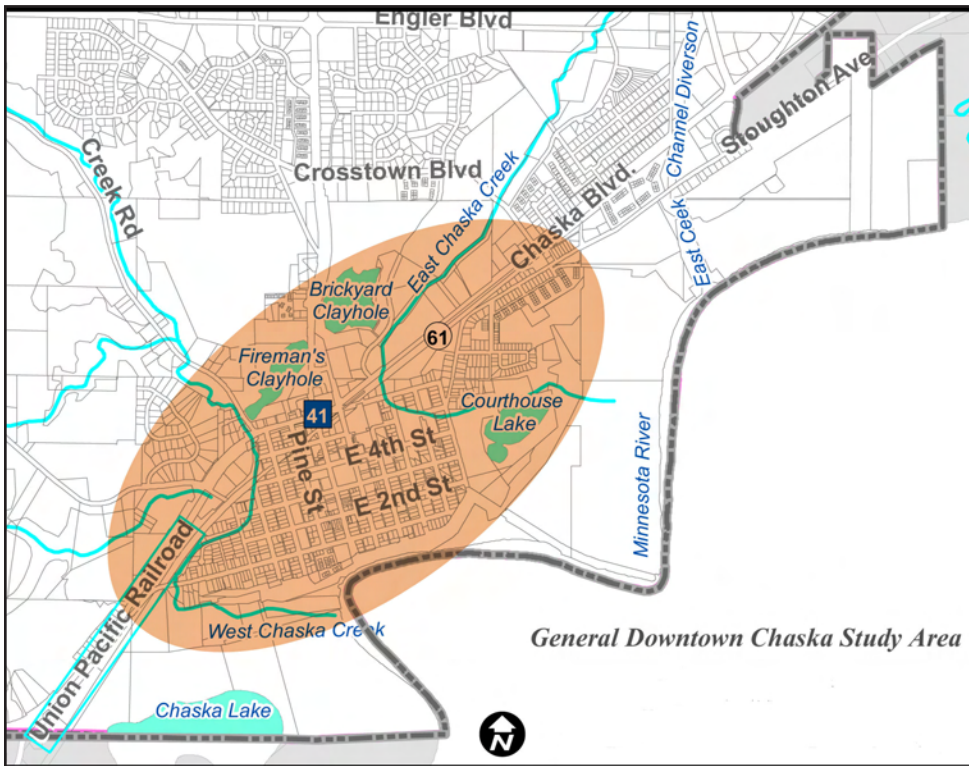
Development of the new city hall and library building in the 1980s is part of the City's downtown revitalization legacy.



Following a major fire, the historic Philip Henk building was entirely renovated by the building's new owner and now is home to a coffee shop with offices above. The project used the City's downtown preservation design manual and storefront loan program.



Chaska's downtown area is shown in the aerial photo above and the map below generally as the area between the Minnesota River and the river bluff, which encompasses the historic downtown area south of the railroad and Chaska Boulevard/CSAH 61 as well as the area just north of Chaska Boulevard/CSAH 61.

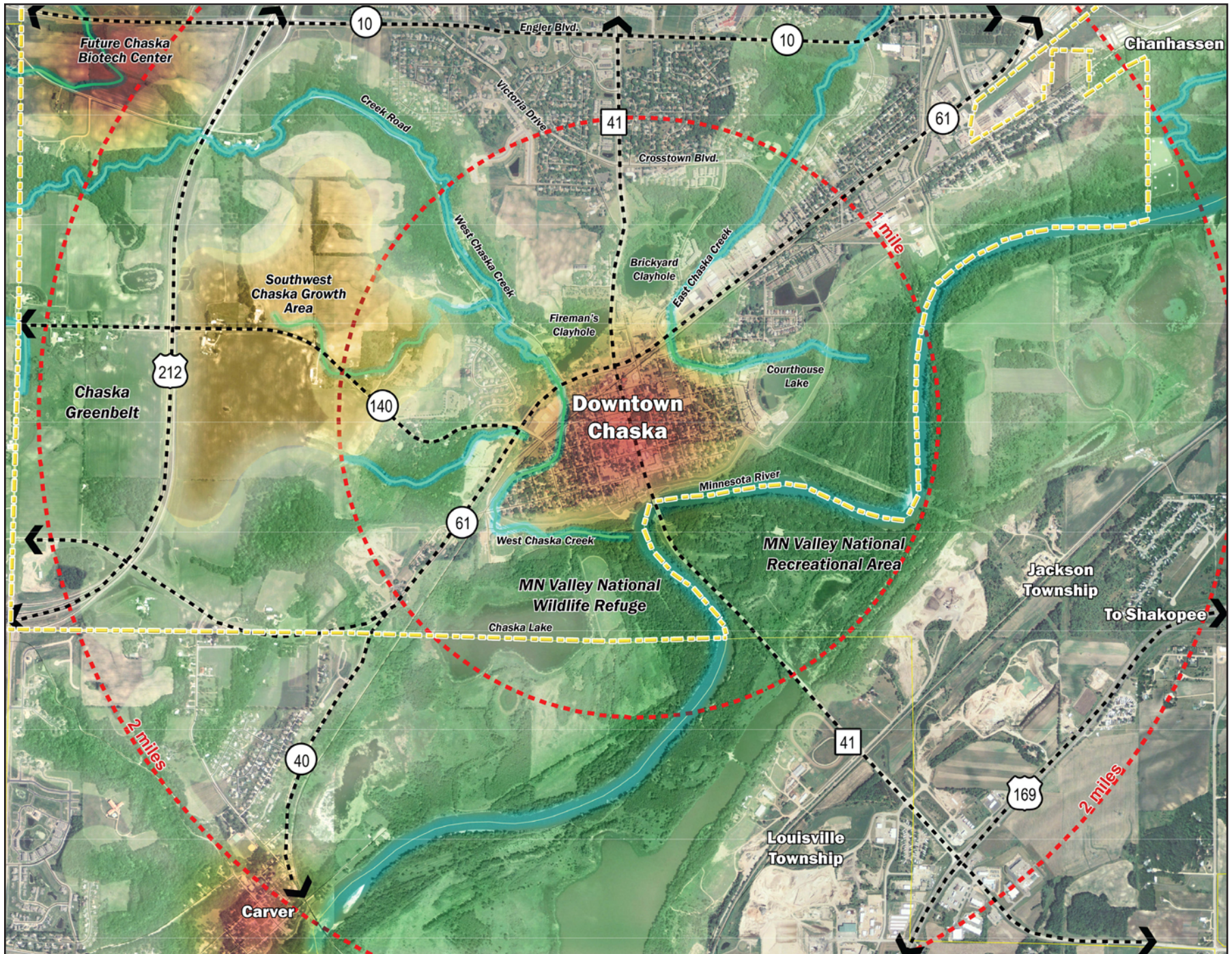


## Defining the Downtown Area

City Square is viewed as the center and strongest attribute of downtown. Chestnut Street/MN Highway 41, is viewed as Chaska's "Main Street". Although the historic downtown commercial area was south of Chaska Boulevard (old U.S. Highway 212) and the rail line, today's downtown commercial area has expanded to the north side of Chaska Boulevard. As shown in the aerial photo and the map to the right, the boundaries of today's "downtown area" are generally the river valley to the south and east, Chaska Boulevard/Cty Rd 61 to the west, the river bluff to the north, and Crosstown Boulevard to the northeast.

While the plan is focused on the downtown area, identifying and understanding the downtown's regional context is also very important. The map on the opposite page shows downtown's regional context, including the areas within a one-mile and two-mile radius of downtown. Major areas include the MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge, MN Valley State Recreation Area, new U.S. Highway 212 corridor, Chaska Biotech Center, Southwest Chaska Growth Area, Downtown Carver, and Shakopee.

The geography of downtown Chaska is dominated by its origins as a small river town on the Minnesota River, which cuts a wide riverbed with lakes and wetlands between Chaska and developed areas in Scott County to the south. Within the City of Chaska, downtown is located at the south end of the community, further away from the center of the metro region than the rest of the community. The downtown commercial area is complemented by other economic centers in the community, including the community commercial center above the bluff at Chestnut St/MN Hwy 41 & Pioneer Trail, as well as small neighborhood commercial nodes and Chaska Boulevard East highway commercial areas. As an employment center, downtown is complemented by the Jonathan industrial area (MN Hwy 41 & Lyman Blvd), Chaska Blvd & Audubon Rd, and the developing U.S. Highway 212 corridor, including the Chaska Biotech Center. In the larger context of the southwest metro, downtown Chaska competes most directly with downtown Chanhassen and Eden Prairie.



Regional market and context area for downtown Chaska includes significant growth areas to the west (Carver County) and south (Scott County), MN River greenbelt, and potential changes to the regional highway system.



Chaska has existing commercial and historic buildings along portions of its downtown commercial streets that give downtown its traditional yet unique character.



Potential redevelopment sites exist in downtown that could strengthen its draw as a community destination for retail, services and restaurants.

## Downtown Market Positioning

### ***Downtown's Strongest Market Assets***

Chaska's most effective market positioning strategies for downtown will capitalize on downtown's strongest assets. From a market and development perspective, downtown Chaska's strongest assets are its: continuing demographic growth, historic & traditional downtown ambience, and high traffic counts through downtown.

### ***Downtown Market Positioning Objective & Primary Strategies***

Based upon Chaska's overall vision for downtown and this market analysis, the downtown market positioning objective is to establish downtown Chaska as the primary community destination and gathering place for the Chaska community and its environs, including a "Main Street"-oriented business district.

The primary market strategies for strengthening downtown's business environment consists of:

- » Expanding Retail for an Underserved Market
- » Creating a Downtown Niche for Restaurants
- » Targeting a Mix of Independent as well as "Chain" Businesses

### ***Secondary Market Positioning Strategies***

- » Expanding Downtown Industry/Employment
- » Retaining Anchor Institutions and Critical Uses
- » Preserving and Using Historic Buildings

### ***Market Positioning Priorities***

In summarizing the market-based findings related to downtown Chaska revitalization, the key elements are an underserved local retail market, disconnected downtown destinations, and existing businesses, institutions and historic sites, which give rise to the following priorities:

- » Promote and support unique retail/restaurant redevelopment catalyst projects along Chestnut Street, Chaska's "Main Street", at Fireman's Park and City Square West sites;
- » Create a more cohesive, compact and convenient downtown district, strengthened by amenities, connections, parking and clear orientation;
- » Encourage industrial employment growth opportunities for redevelopment sites on the edges of downtown, as a means for generating additional customers for businesses in the downtown core and strengthening downtown as an employment center;
- » Retain key downtown businesses, institutions and historic buildings, which are important existing assets of downtown's economy and character.

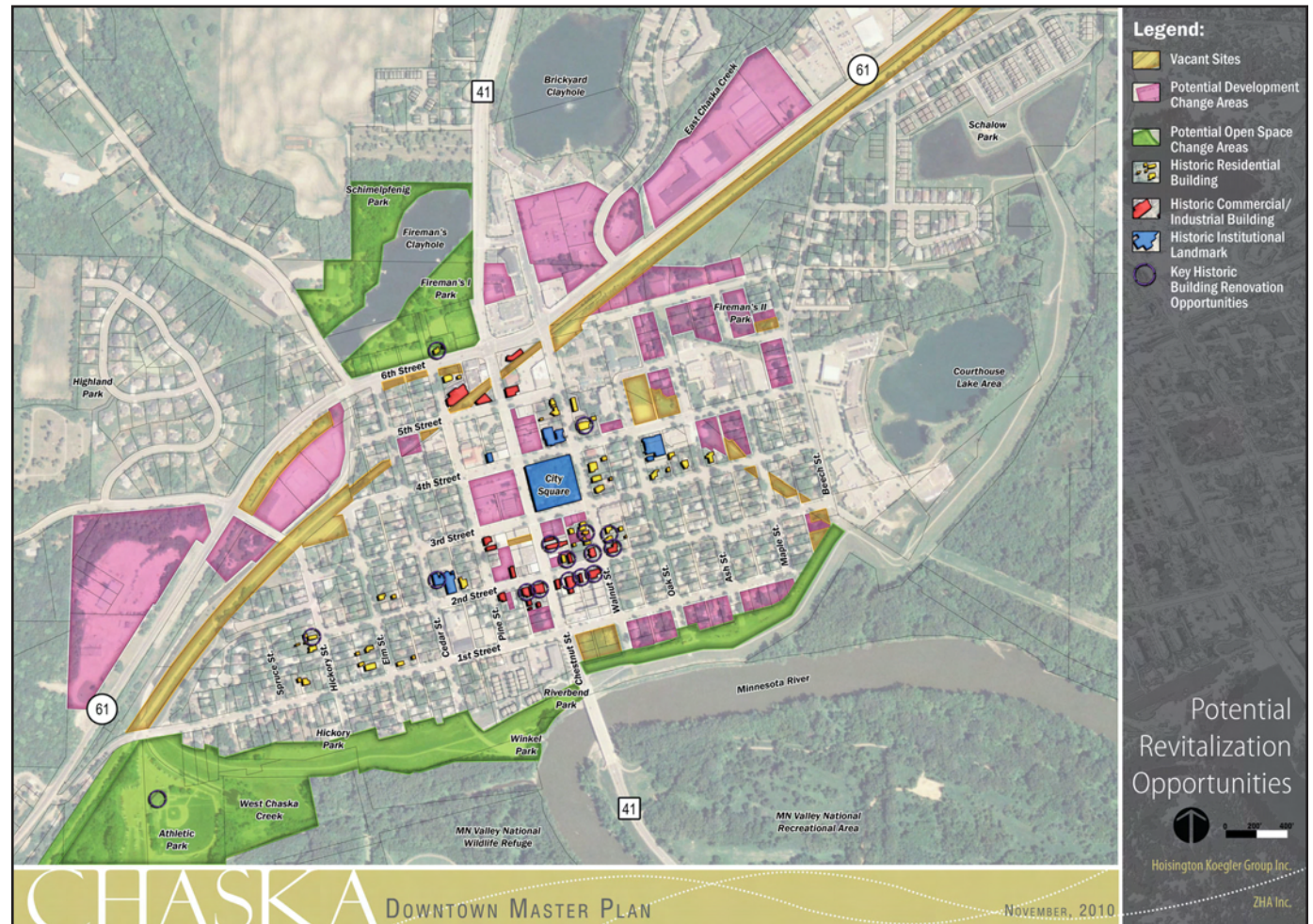
### Market Opportunity Focus Areas

**Concentration in Downtown Core:** In pursuing an objective of efficiency, revitalization efforts should focus on a more concentrated, walkable area, encompassing an area of roughly 10 blocks along Chestnut Street from Second Street on the south to the Fireman’s Clayhole and Brickyard districts on the north.

**Clear Connections & Orientation:** The downtown core should feature clear signage, physically visible cues and directories, safe crossings, and pedestrian amenities. In creating a clear sense of orientation, downtown Chaska’s key connections must clearly link Second Street, the blocks surrounding City Square Park, and the intersection of Chestnut Street (MN Hwy 41) and Chaska Boulevard (County Road 61).

**Priority Catalyst Redevelopment Sites:** In addition to needing market support, the feasibility of future downtown revitalization opportunities relies on the availability of suitable, competitive locations. This market analysis recommends two priority catalyst redevelopment sites: Fireman’s Clayhole District and City Square West Block.

*The Potential Revitalization Opportunities map to the right shows vacant sites, as well as potential sites for redevelopment, property improvements, or historic building renovations.*

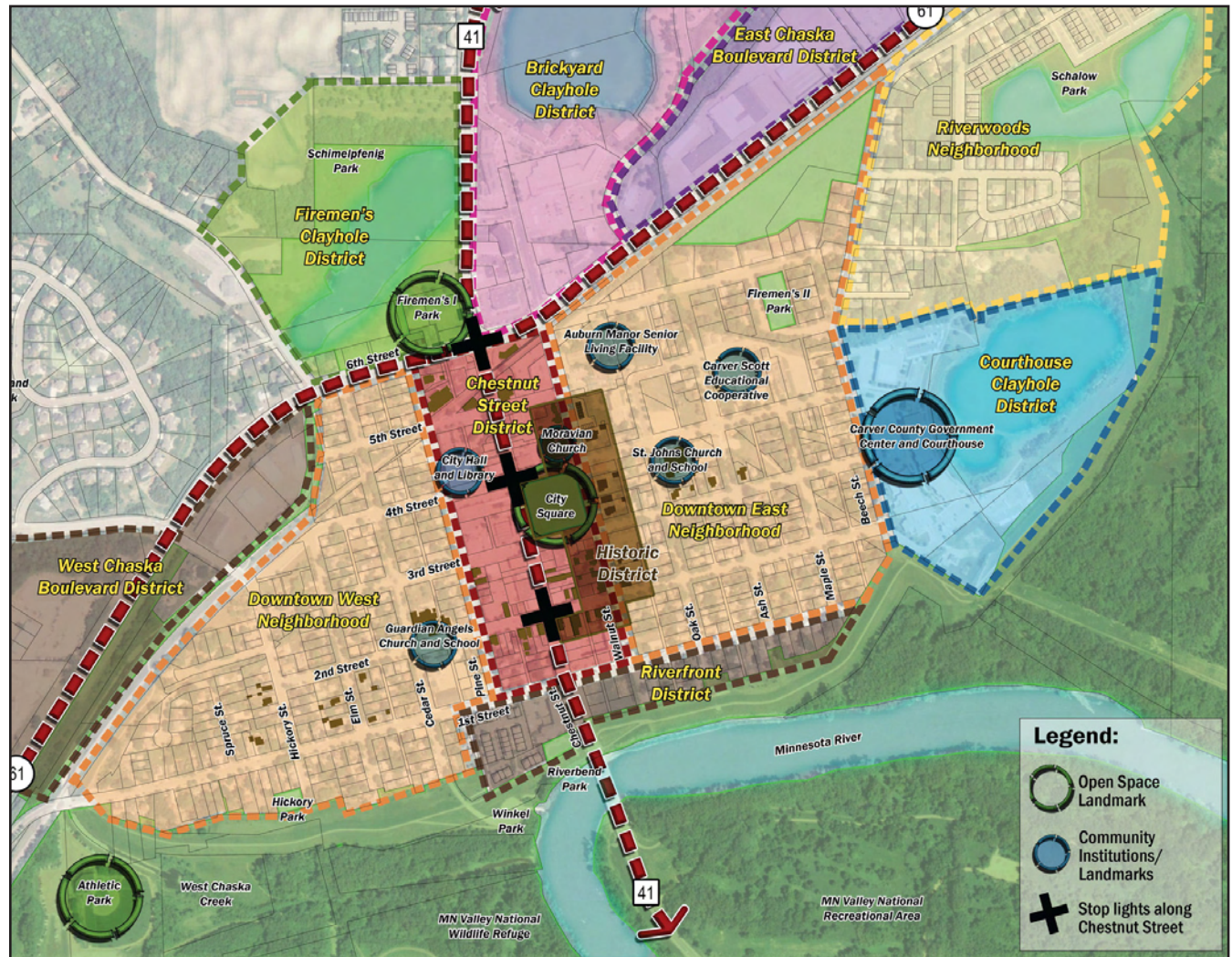


# Downtown Districts and Neighborhoods

As Chaska has grown significantly over the past 50 years, both in size and population, Lower Chaska or Old Chaska has evolved into today's Downtown Chaska area. The various sub-areas of downtown have the potential to be integral yet unique downtown districts and neighborhoods. Primarily based on major land use patterns, landscape features, and circulation routes, the Downtown Master Plan establishes seven (7) downtown districts, three (3) neighborhoods and the Chaska Greenbelt, as follows:

- » Chestnut Street District
- » Riverfront District
- » Fireman's Clayhole District
- » Brickyard Clayhole District
- » Courthouse Clayhole District
- » Chaska Greenbelt
- » East Chaska Boulevard District
- » West Chaska Boulevard District
- » Downtown West Neighborhood
- » Downtown East Neighborhood
- » Riverwoods Neighborhood

To better guide future changes and improvements to downtown Chaska, the Downtown Master Plan identifies the desired identity, development character and design features for each downtown district and neighborhood.



# Downtown Plan for the Future

The Downtown Plan for the Future envisions downtown as home to a wide variety of destinations. In order to attract people downtown, there needs to be a concentration or critical mass of destinations. These destinations need to be woven together and complement each other in order to restore downtown as the community’s main gathering place. As a traditional small town, Chaska’s downtown should be centered on City Square and “Main Street” – Chestnut Street - as its heart and spine. The Chestnut Street district should function as a series of “Main Street” destinations from the southern riverfront gateway to the historic Chestnut & Second St commercial node to the historic City Square node to the City Plaza node to the Chaska Boulevard node to the northern downtown gateways of Fireman’s Clayhole district and Brickyard Clayhole district. In particular, the Downtown Plan for the Future provides guidance for improving downtown’s built environment, connections (streets, sidewalks, trails and alleys), and parks/open spaces.

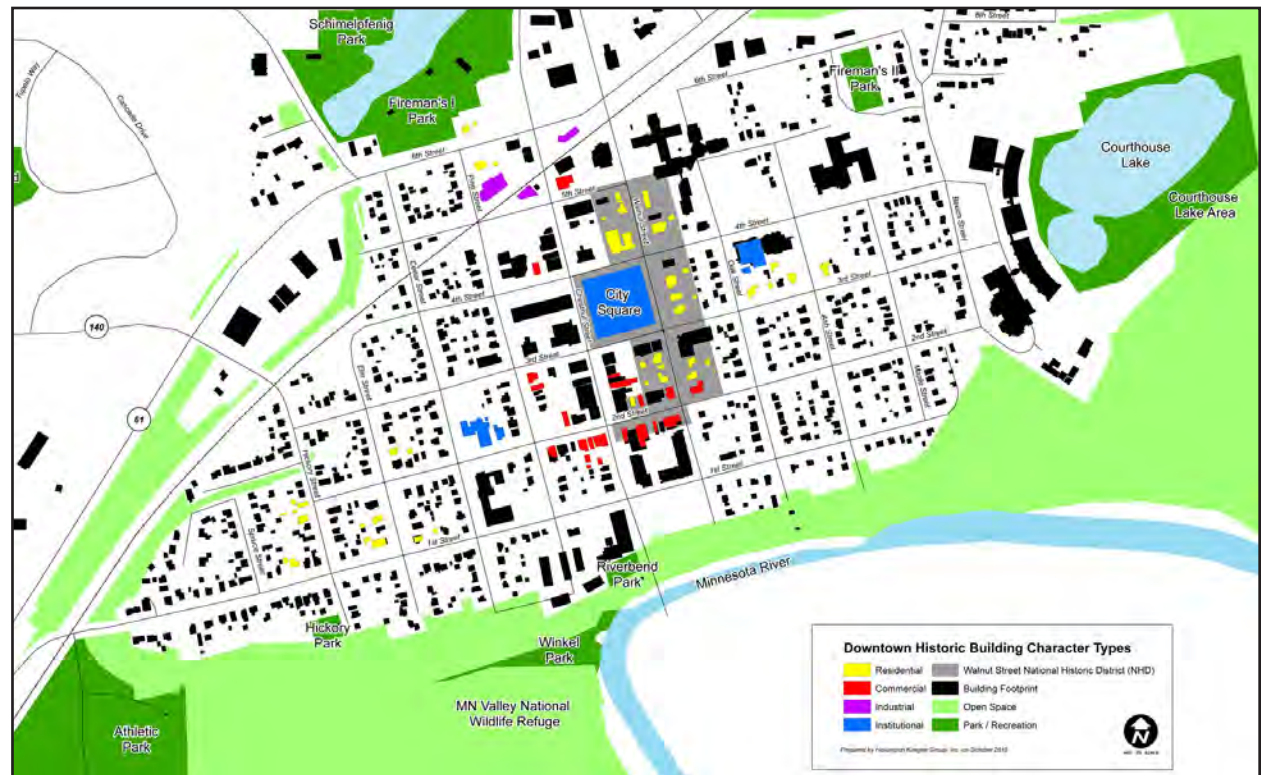
## Built Environment

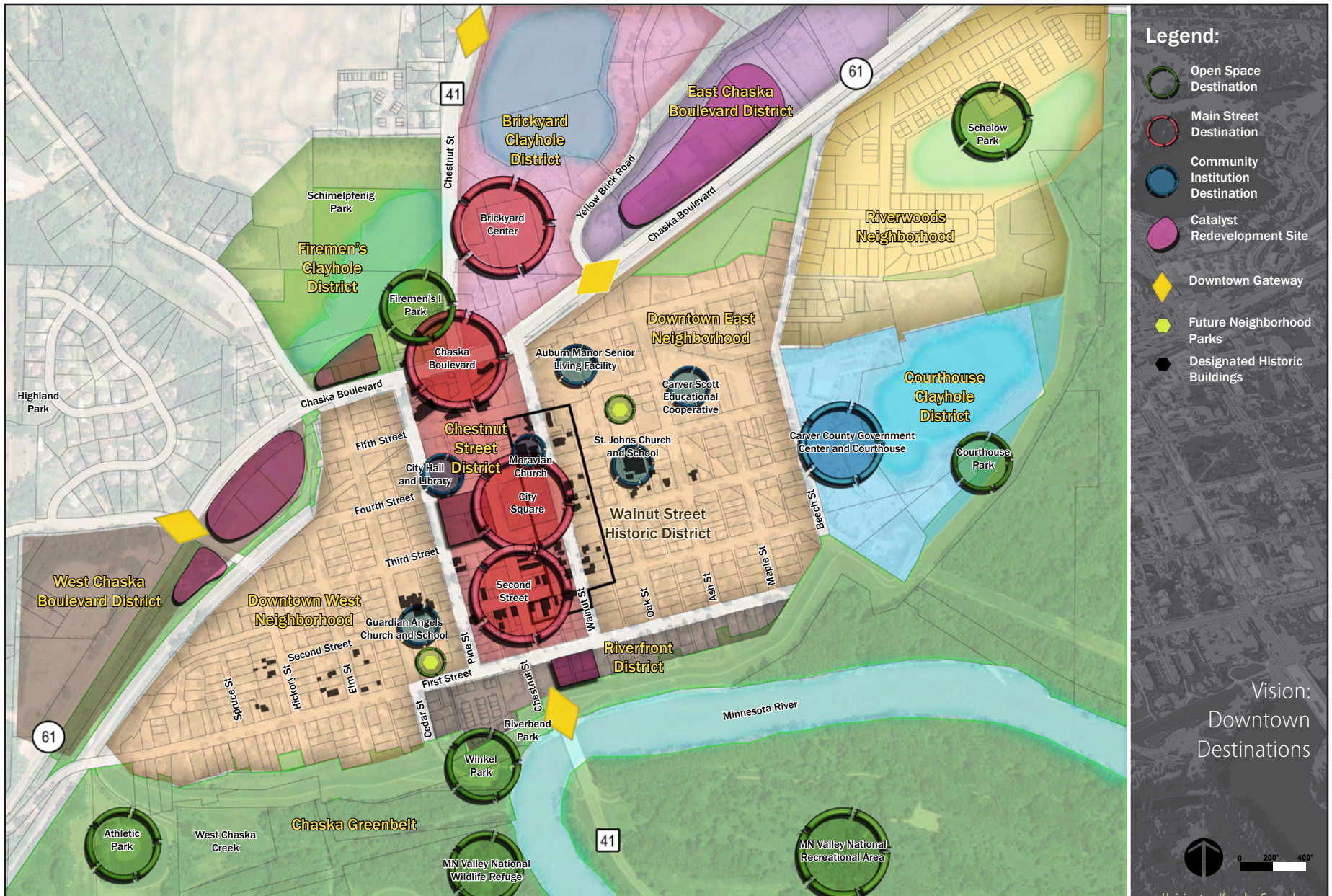
Downtown’s future built environment should celebrate its historic and traditional character yet embrace additions and improvements that enhance the functionality, attractiveness, and experience of downtown to meet the needs of today’s economy and lifestyles. Although downtown contains some potential redevelopment sites, it is not a redevelopment area in general.

- » *Minnesota’s Brick City* - Since, literally, no other downtown in the world has this unique Chaska brick building character, any future changes in downtown should complement and enhance the unique character of its Chaska brick buildings. Revitalization of downtown Chaska should capitalize on downtown’s unique potential as “Minnesota’s Brick City”.
- » *Traditional Small Town Character* - To strengthen the traditional small town character of downtown, some key revitalization initiatives will be to increase street network connections, particularly in the northeast quadrant, maximize on-street parking options and limit off-street parking lots that front onto streets, ensure heights and widths of new “Main Street” buildings fit with the traditional downtown scale, and place new buildings up to the sidewalk.



*The City Square office building on Walnut Street involved a public-private partnership to redevelop this strategic downtown site.*

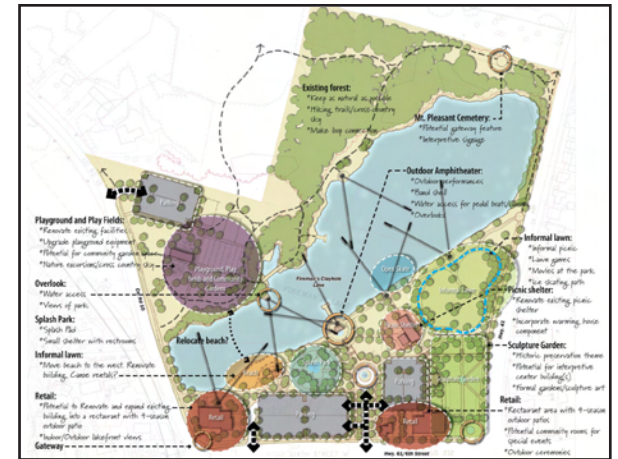




The Downtown Master Plan establishes a long-term Vision of Downtown Destinations.

Additional off-street surface parking options should be discouraged from harming the traditional character of side-by-side buildings along downtown core streets.

- » *Future Land Use Patterns* – In general, future downtown land use patterns should be dominated by mixed-use blocks along Chestnut Street, business/industrial employment redevelopment on downtown’s edges, and additional higher density residential along the riverfront and near the downtown core.
- » *Convenient Parking* – To support the success of existing downtown businesses and attract new businesses, downtown parking needs to be managed wisely for ensuring adequate quantity, convenience and quality of parking areas. A key strategy for a successful downtown parking program is to have a Downtown Parking Management Plan that is used, maintained and enforced. The parking plan should include designating on-street parking areas for customers/clients vs. business owners/employees, improving and expanding short term (two-hour) parking areas, increasing the quantity of on-street parking spaces by converting some parallel parking areas to diagonal spaces, setting up shared parking agreements between businesses, improving public off-street parking lots, improving signage for parking, and negotiating with MN DOT to redesign Chestnut Street (MN Hwy 41) with on-street parking on both sides.
- » *Catalyst Redevelopment Sites* – Three sites were identified for further study for redevelopment opportunities. Each site represents a significant opportunity for visible and positive change that can catalyze new interest and the revitalization of downtown Chaska. The three catalyst redevelopment sites are Fireman’s Clayhole District (the north gateway into downtown), the Riverfront District (the south gateway into downtown), and City Square West, which is the block west of City Square in the heart of downtown. The Downtown Master Plan provides multiple redevelopment scenarios to help the City move forward with the redevelopment process.



Fireman’s Clayhole District catalyst redevelopment site.



Riverfront District catalyst redevelopment site at Block 53 where Chestnut Street “Main Street” meets the river (Note: Blocks 50, 51 and 52 are seen as long-term potential sites for adding new housing options in downtown, if and when the City determines that it is critical to the success of revitalizing downtown and reconnecting to the river.

**Option 1: City Square West**

- Parking ramp
- Retail/office vertical mix - line for parking ramp
- Office - between Bldg A and B
- Retail/office/post office/bank/restaurant/residential mix on Chestnut

**Building A:** Retail (14,000 sf), Library (4,500 sf), Post office (2,200 sf), Live/work (8,000 sf), Residential (24 units)

**Building B:** Retail (14,000 sf), Ground/2nd Story Residential (2 or 3 townhomes) (10 units), 3rd/4th Story Residential (12 units)

**Parking Ramp (part of Bldg B):** Level 1: Below grade 70 spaces, Level 2: 70 spaces, Level 3: 70 spaces, Level 4: 70 spaces, Total spaces: 280 spaces

Surplus parking: 25 spaces (shared), 58 spaces (on street), 14 spaces (shared)

**Option 2: City Square West**

- Parking ramp
- Retail/office vertical mix - line for parking ramp on Chestnut
- Restaurant/post office/bank
- Post office - shifted west of alley centerline
- Residential on the Street - mix of housing types

**Building A:** Retail (11,100 sf), Live/work (8,000 sf), Residential (apts/townhomes) (14 units)

**Building B:** Retail (11,100 sf), Office (11,100 sf), Office (12,200 sf)

**Parking Ramp (part of Bldg A):** Level 1: Below grade 72 spaces, Level 2: 72 spaces, Level 3: 72 spaces, Level 4: 72 spaces, Total spaces: 288 spaces

Surplus parking: 144 spaces (shared), 48 spaces (on street)

City Square West catalyst redevelopment site.



Future changes to the MN Highway 41 river bridge and a potential reroute around downtown to connect to new Highway 212 will have major impacts on downtown.

## Connections

Because streets occupy the most amount of space in the public realm, they have a significant impact on how people experience downtown Chaska. Since streets are shared by drivers, pedestrians, cyclists and parked vehicles, the design of the streets should address the needs of all users. “Complete streets” are roadways designed and operated to enable safe, attractive and comfortable access and movement for all users. The streets in downtown Chaska should be thought of as a system of complete streets.

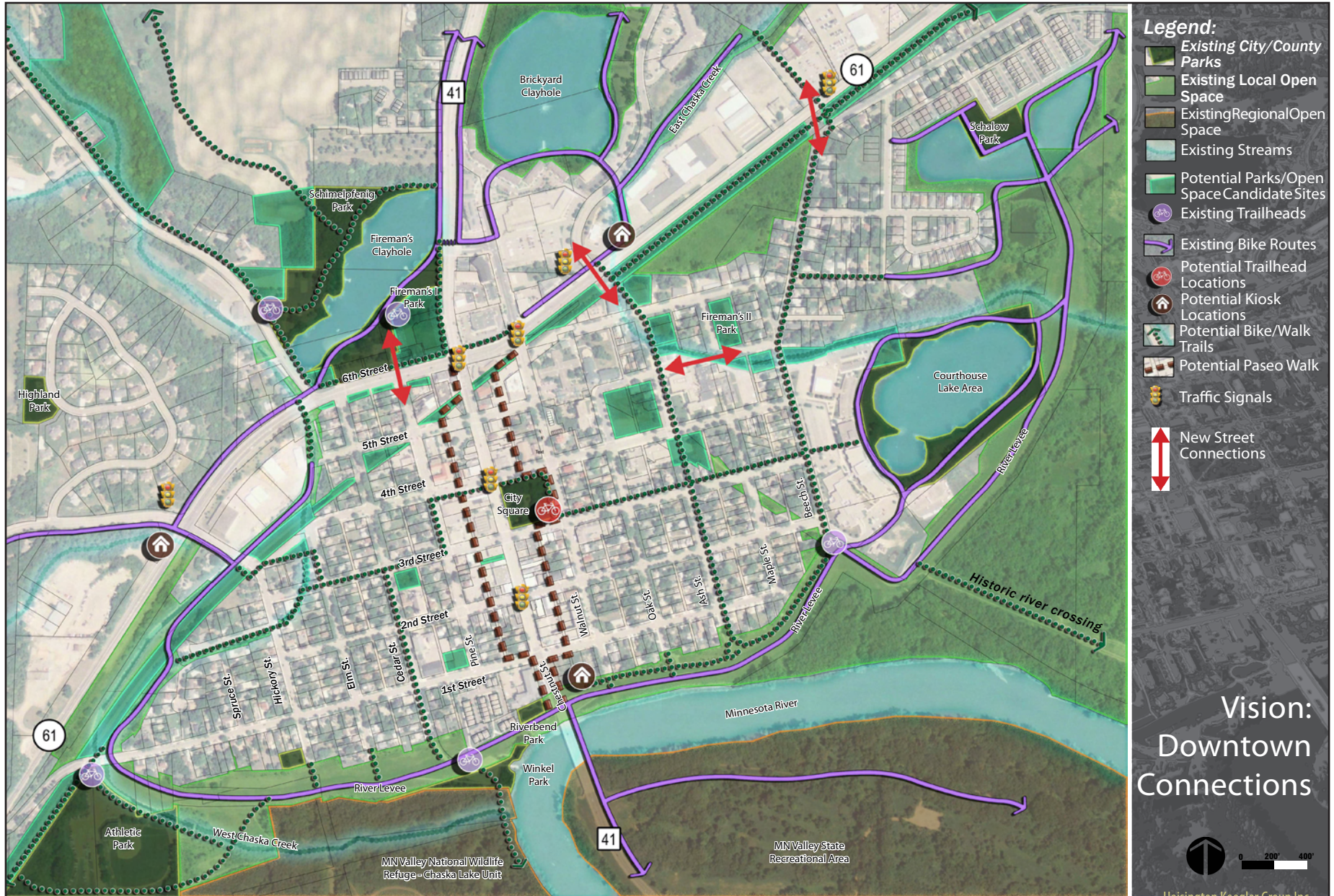
The Downtown Master Plan identifies the various street design types envisioned for downtown Chaska and defines the function, character, scale, and design elements included with each street design type. The downtown street design types consist of the following:

- » Town Center Streets
- » Commercial Edge Streets
- » Signature Streets
- » Trail Streets (two types)
- » Residential Streets
- » Levee Lanes
- » Brick City Paseos
- » Future Chestnut Street as “Main Street”



The Downtown Streets System Concept (map to the left) designates all streets within downtown as a particular street design type. Since most streets in downtown are slated to be reconstructed over the next ten years, the street type designations are intended to guide the design and reconstruction of downtown streets in the future. The Vision of Downtown Connections map on the following page identifies improvements to the connectivity of streets and trails in downtown.

Downtown Streets System Concept.

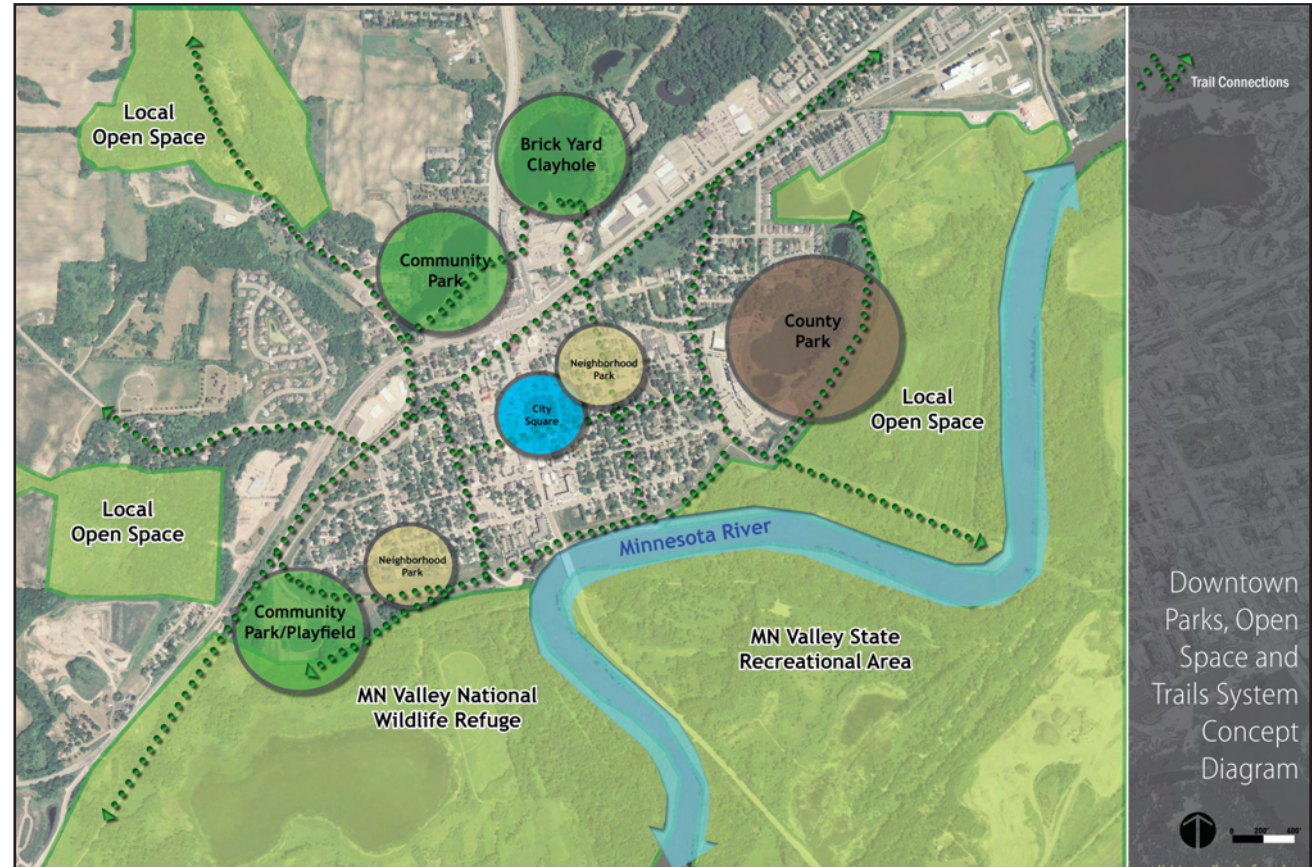


The Downtown Master Plan establishes a Vision for Downtown Connections, significantly improving the connectivity of both streets and trails.

## Parks and Open Spaces

Downtown has a tremendous opportunity to capitalize on its existing parks and open spaces assets, including historic City Square, Athletic Park's historic town ballfield, Fireman's Park, three clayhole lakes, Minnesota River Valley, the Chaska Lake National Wildlife Refuge, and the river levee trail. The Minnesota River Valley is part of Chaska's planned greenbelt.

- » *Trails & Connections* – The Downtown Master Plan proposes additions to the trail and trailhead system within downtown as well as connections to outlying areas and regional trails surrounding downtown. There is a tremendous opportunity to create a regional recreational destination in downtown as the “gateway” into the Minnesota River Valley and its nature-based recreational offerings including hiking, bird-watching, paddling sports, fishing and bicycling.
- » *Athletic Park* – Complete a park master plan for this historic town ballfield that enhances the traditions and experience of townball as well as incorporating other recreational uses for the recently expanded park space, better linking the park to both downtown and the Chaska greenbelt.
- » *Fireman's Park* – Enhance this park as downtown's signature park and an expanded community park that serves as a downtown gateway, visual landmark, gathering place, trailhead and major community destination.
- » *Special Feature Parks* – Enhancements to City Square, Winkel Park and Riverbend Park.
- » *Neighborhood Parks* – Partner with other downtown institutions to identify and build a neighborhood park in the two neighborhoods on each side of Chestnut Street/MN Hwy 41.
- » *Mini-Parks & Plazas* – In conjunction with downtown street reconstruction, identify and build unique mini-parks and plazas to enhance downtown's public realm.

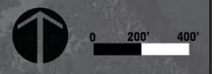




- Legend:**
- Existing City/County Parks
  - Existing Local Open Space
  - Existing Regional Open Space
  - Existing Streams
  - Potential Parks/Open Space Candidate Sites
  - Existing Trailheads
  - Existing Bike Routes
  - Potential Trailhead Locations
  - Potential Kiosk Locations
  - Potential Bike/Walk Trails
  - Potential Paseo Walk
  - Open Space Feature
  - 5 minute walk radius (approx. 1/4 mile)
  - Potential change 5 minute walk radius (approx. 1/4 mile)

Note: Goal is to identify one neighborhood park on each side of Chestnut Street in the Downtown Study Area.

# Downtown Parks, Open Space and Trails System Concept



The Downtown Master Plan establishes a vision for a connected downtown parks, open spaces and trails system.

# Implementation

## **Next Steps**

Implementation of the Chaska Downtown Revitalization Plan is not a single project or action. Implementation is a collection of public and private actions that occur over a period of years. Based on the anticipated needs, impacts and feasibility of all of these recommended implementation actions, the following next steps or priorities are identified to jumpstart downtown's revitalization efforts.

- » *Adopt the Downtown Revitalization Plan as a Sector Plan per the Implementation Chapter of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan*
- » *Update the City's 2030 Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance to reflect the directions of the Downtown Revitalization Plan*
- » *Develop schematic designs for all of the downtown street types, including the Brick City Paseo, prior to street reconstruction*
- » *Redesign and reconstruct Second Street, including off-street parking improvements and upgrading the adjacent downtown core alleys as the beginning of the Brick City Paseo*
- » *Establish Chaska Main Street Program to provide downtown-focused staff resources (public/private) to coordinate efforts with City Staff and the Chaska Downtown Business Alliance relating to downtown organization, design, marketing, and economic development*
- » *Establish downtown building signage design guidelines and revise sign ordinance*
- » *Establish Downtown Building Design Guidelines for non-historic building improvements, new buildings and residential structures in downtown*
- » *Retain, improve and expand downtown grocery store*
- » *Develop a Heritage Preservation Plan*
- » *Re-establish downtown parking management plan and provide adequate public parking options:*
  - *On-street parking - restriping from parallel to diagonal*
  - *On-street parking – street reconstruction*
  - *Off-street parking lot – Second St E/Chestnut St (Block 37)*
  - *Strengthen Two Hour Parking program*
  - *Establish parking management plan for business owner & parking*
- » *Fireman's Clayhole District - Create site master plan for new downtown gateway park and retail/restaurant businesses, including a developers' forum*

- » *City Square West Block - Explore financial & political feasibility of redeveloping as a mixed-use “Main Street” block, including potential public library, public parking structure, retail, office, residential, Brick City Paseo connection and transit park & ride facility, working with property owners, Carver County, and SW Transit*
- » *Riverfront District – Redevelop with a gateway building at entrance to downtown and the community*
- » *Redesign and improve Athletic Park, Winkel Park, and Riverbend Park as Downtown West Greenbelt, including connections to the Minnesota River and National Wildlife Refuge*

These next steps or priorities should be reviewed, discussed and updated on a regular basis. The City, in partnership with the Chaska Downtown Business Alliance, should create an Annual Downtown Action Plan as a means of maintaining the focus on current actions to be taken. The Annual Downtown Action Plan should include the following elements:

- » *Review of progress made over the past year*
- » *Identification and prioritization of steps to be taken in the next year*
- » *Assignment of responsibilities for guiding each implementation step*
- » *Determination of budget, funding needs, and possible funding sources*

