

## CHAPTER 3: downtown chaska today

Chaska's downtown occupies a unique and strategic site along the Minnesota River where the natural resources of the Big Woods, which covered much of central Minnesota, met up with the transportation possibilities of the Minnesota River. The river also was the source of the deep clay deposits that enabled the city's dominance in the brickmaking industry. Chaska's historic development as a traditional town, county seat, and Minnesota's Brick City has created a downtown with unique history, character and opportunities.

This chapter provides an overview of downtown Chaska today - its existing conditions, context and a brief history. Downtown's existing land uses, development patterns, street grid, natural features, parks, trails, and historic assets are described and analyzed within this chapter. The Downtown Master Plan is intended to build upon downtown's unique and historic development patterns to create a desirable and vibrant downtown environment for the Chaska community and its surrounding areas.

### Brief History of Downtown Chaska

Chaska's downtown area has a long and rich history. Prior to Anglo-European settlement of the downtown area beginning in 1851, it was an area of Native American settlements. There is significant evidence of mounds in the downtown Chaska area. Often times mounds were located along river valleys. Three Native American burial mounds remain in City Square today, which is a designated historic site. The primary band of Native Americans that settled in the downtown area was the M'dewakanton band of the Dakota (Sioux) tribe. The name "Chaska" is derived from a Dakota word meaning "first-born son".

In 1851, the Treaty of Traverse de Sioux was signed between the U.S. Government and the Dakota tribe, which officially made almost 24 million acres of land in southern and western Minnesota Territory, Iowa and Dakota Territory open for Anglo-American settlement. Land speculation and platting commenced in the downtown area almost immediately following after the signing of this treaty. The downtown area was originally platted in 1854. With its designation as the Carver County Seat in 1856, the town was re-surveyed and platted to facilitate the development of streets, public buildings and other city services. City Square was dedicated "for the purpose of a common park" in perpetuity at this time. Chaska incorporated as a village in 1871. By special legislative action in 1891, the village of Chaska was designated a city.

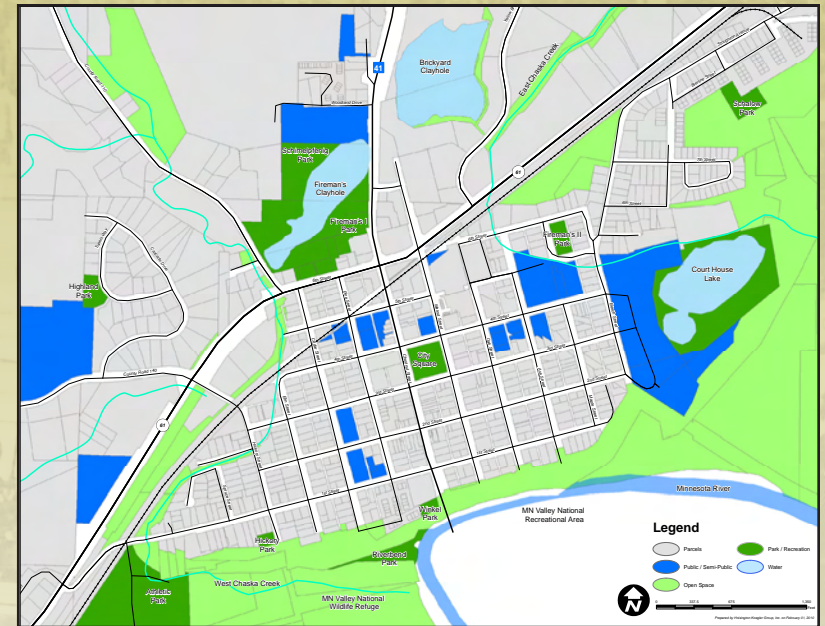


Figure 3-1. Map of the downtown study area.

The area around First St and Walnut St was the first to develop, beginning in the 1850s, with the the Linenfesler & Faber Building at Second St & Walnut St being the oldest remaining business building in downtown Chaska. Development soon stretched up Walnut St, along Second St and Chestnut St, and then up the hill to Pine St. By the time Chaska incorporated as a village in 1871, downtown's development pattern was in place.

Chaska's brickmaking industry began in 1857 with Lucius Howe's brickyard producing bricks for building construction in Chaska. When Chaska's brickmaking industry reached its peak near the turn of the century, there were eleven brickyards in the city. These brickyards were located on the edges of the historic downtown area. At its peak production levels, Chaska accounted for 30% of all the brick made in Minnesota. Brickmaking was the city's largest industry for 80 years, declining after WWII, and finally ending completely in 1971. The resulting clayholes, which have been turned into lakes, provide visual evidence of the city's past brickmaking industry.

Downtown's boom years generally coincided with its brickmaking industry boom, from the 1880s to the 1920s. The brickyards employed up to 20% of the City's population at its peak. Most of downtown's buildings were built during this time period. The brickmaking industry enabled complementary industries, such as metal foundries, machinery shops, and livery stables, as well as retail and services to prosper in the downtown area. In addition, many of downtown's buildings were constructed of Chaska Brick.

Chaska's downtown is modest, yet historically significant, because of its relatively early development in Minnesota and the smaller scale of its buildings - it developed as a village rather than a small city. "Most buildings in Chaska reflect



Figure 3-2. 2009 aerial photo of the downtown area.

a more simplified, modest character that many people would regard as more practical than high-style. Instead of being influenced by architectural high-styles that applied ornament decoratively, most of Chaska's commercial buildings are more honest and straightforward in using familiar materials in ways that were well-understood by the craftsmen who constructed the buildings." [Chaska's Downtown Preservation Design Manual, page 9] Many of downtown's commercial, civic and residential buildings were constructed of Chaska Brick. This concentration of Chaska Brick buildings makes downtown Chaska a truly unique place. Other somewhat unique features of downtown Chaska are the presence of spaces between and behind commercial buildings for exterior porches/balconies and the rail ornamentation that often protrudes out from the second story of historic commercial buildings.

Chaska experienced somewhat of a lull in population growth and development during the middle decades of the 20th century from the 1930s through the 1960s. Unfortunately, a substantial number of downtown's historic buildings were also lost during this time period, especially civic and commercial buildings. The 1970s brought the Jonathan New Town development, including residential and industrial development, and the onset of suburban expansion from the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Downtown has experienced a substantial amount of redevelopment and revitalization over the past two decades. In 1979, Congress authorized a major flood control project for Chaska; however, construction did not begin until 1989 with the final stage of the project completed in 1998. The new levee and creek diversion project provided flood protection for all of downtown, so properties previously located in the floodplain no longer needed flood insurance. State and Federal restrictions on expanding and remodeling buildings were also lifted, enabling property owners to safely consider reinvestment in both commercial buildings and homes in the downtown area. This flood protection project represents the City's most significant reinvestment in downtown's revitalization.

The 1980s and 1990s brought a major transition and expansion to the historic downtown area. The downtown was essentially expanded to include the former Klein brickyard area north of Chaska Boulevard (old U.S. Highway 212) and along Chaska Boulevard to the northeast. The City targeted the historic downtown area as more of a service-oriented district and the redevelopment area north of the highway as more of the convenience retail district. The Klein Brickyard Redevelopment project is the largest redevelopment effort undertaken by the City to

date. The focus of the project was to create a mixed-use area (retail, office and residential) that reflects and complements the character of the historic downtown, and also presents a positive image from both Chestnut St (MN Hwy 41) and Chaska Boulevard (County Road 61). This area includes a mix of retail businesses today, both in vertical mixed-use buildings and freestanding buildings, offices, and high-density residential buildings. The buildings are oriented toward the two highways as well as the extension of Walnut St that directly connects this expansion area to the historic downtown.

Other downtown redevelopment projects that have occurred relatively recently include the City Hall/Library/City Hall Plaza, River Gables mixed-use building (housing with retail at street level), Riverbend hotel and town homes, Werner Arcade office and commercial building, expansion and renovation of the movie theater, expansion of the Moravian Homes elderly care and housing facilities, and the City Square office building (Walnut St & Fourth St).

### **Recent Downtown Revitalization Efforts:**

- » Flood control project
- » 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

# Land Uses and Development

## Existing Land Use Patterns

Downtown’s existing land uses include a balanced mix of commercial, public/semi-public, residential, park/recreation, open space, and industrial, as shown in the map to the right.

The commercial land uses are located predominately along Chestnut St/MN Hwy 41 (“Main Street”), Second Street, and Chaska Blvd/ County Rd 61. Downtown’s historic commercial area is located along Chestnut Street, between First Street and County Rd 61, with most businesses concentrated in a two-block strip between Pine and Walnut Streets. Within this historic commercial area, most stores are small, independent establishments. The retail mix in this core area largely excludes stores such as clothing stores and consumer electronics stores, which typically seek locations in suburban malls and shopping centers.

A small number of franchise commercial businesses are located on the edges of downtown along Highways 41 and 61; the largest concentrations of such stores is located in the Brickyard Shopping Center and other properties in the northeast quadrant of the intersection of Highways 41 and 61. Restaurants occupy roughly 60,000 square feet, but most of this space is located outside the downtown core area.

Public/semi-public land uses are generally clustered along Fourth Street, downtown’s “institutional corridor”, including City Hall, Chaska Library, Police Dept., Carver County Government Center, Moravian Church, St. John’s Church, and Carver-Scott Educational Cooperative School. The Chaska License Center is oriented to Pine Street but near the Fourth Street institutional

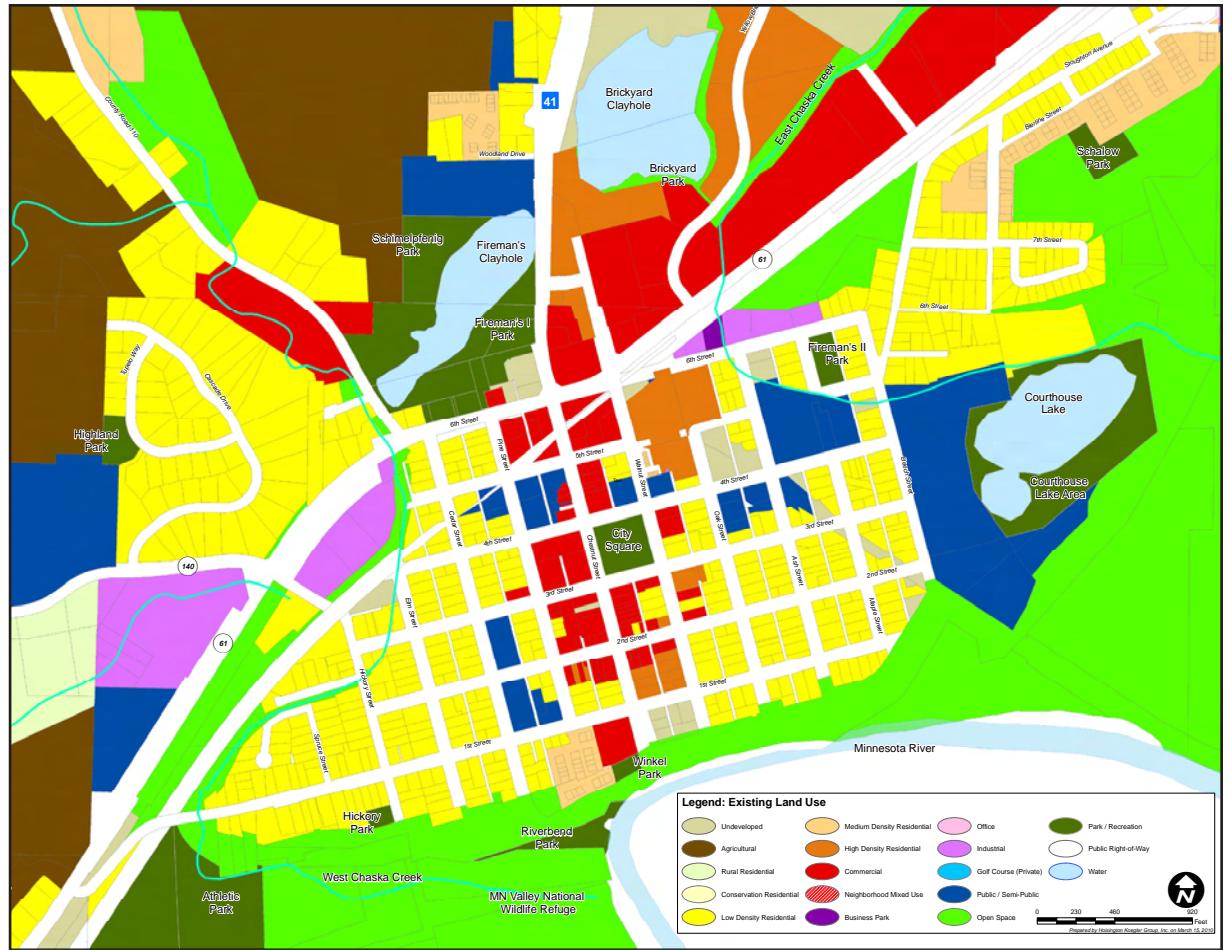


Figure 3-3. Map showing existing land uses in the downtown area.

corridor. Guardian Angels Church and School is oriented to Second Street, just west of the Second Street commercial area.

Downtown contains a broad range of residential land uses, including single-family houses, townhouses, apartment buildings, and senior housing facilities.

Park/recreation land uses include a community park (Fireman’s I Park), community playfield (Athletic Park), special feature parks (City Square, Winkel Park and Riverbend Park), mini-parks (Hickory Park and Fireman’s II Park), and a County park (Courthouse Clayhole Lake Area). Open spaces consist of the Chaska Greenbelt area along the Minnesota River (south and east of downtown), the river levee trail area, West Chaska Creek, East Chaska Creek, and a significant wetland area northeast of downtown.

### 2030 Planned Land Use Patterns

The City completed a major comprehensive plan update in 2010 resulting in its 2030 Comprehensive Plan. This update included a review, analysis and updates of the land use categories and the city-wide Planned Land Uses Map, shown to the right. Two (2) new land use categories were established which were Downtown Mixed Use and Business Park. The new Downtown Mixed Use category was applied to the blocks at the south end of Chestnut Street/MN Hwy 41. The large industrial site west of downtown, at the corner of Chaska Blvd/County Road 61 and County Road 140, was re-guided for High Density Residential land uses. The City refrained from additional downtown land use plan changes during the update process with the intent to use the Downtown Master Plan as the basis for any future land use changes in downtown.

The 2030 Planned Land Use Map shows commercial land uses stretching along both Chestnut St/MN Hwy 41 and the eastern portion of Chaska Blvd/County Road 61, including expansion of commercial to the NW corner of the 41/61 intersection (adjacent to Fireman's Park). The map currently guides three areas for mixed use: south end of Chestnut St/MN Hwy 41, north end of Chestnut St/MN Hwy 41, and the redevelopment sites along West Chaska Blvd/County Rd 61.

Most of the downtown area south of Chaska Blvd/County Road 61 guided for residential is Medium Density Residential. The 2030 Comprehensive Plan does not expand High Density Residential land uses much beyond existing high density residential buildings, which are primarily senior housing. Expansion of high density residential is guided for large sites on the edge of downtown, north/west of Chaska Blvd/County Road 61.

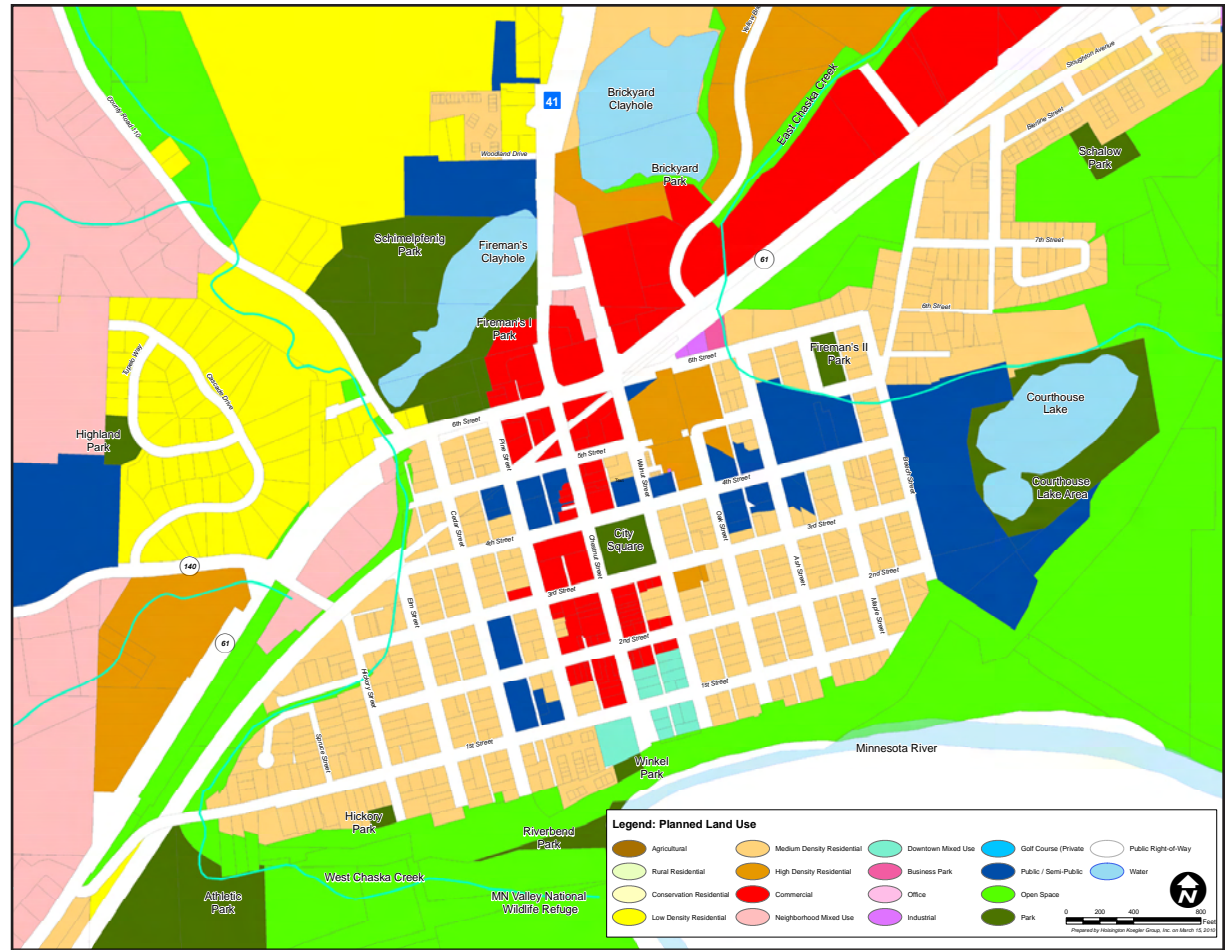


Figure 3-4. Planned Land Use Map from 2030 Comprehensive Plan for the downtown area.

Public/semi-public land uses are planned to remain as a significant part of downtown's land use pattern with some institutions anticipating expansion in the future.

The map shows significant planned areas for future residential development to the west (Heights of Chaska) and north (Hammers land and along Yellow Brick Road) of the downtown area.

It is anticipated that the Downtown Master Plan will provide direction for modifying the Planned Land Use, such as expansion of Downtown Mixed Use, adding High Density Residential areas, and adding Business Park areas along Chaska Blvd/County Road 61.

## Existing Street Level Uses

Since one of the main purposes of the Downtown Master Plan is to revitalize downtown as a vibrant “Main Street” district and community gathering place, existing street level uses were inventoried and analyzed in the downtown core area as part of the downtown master planning process. The map to the right shows the existing downtown land use patterns at street level.

As the map illustrates, retail and restaurant uses are fairly scattered along Chestnut St/MN Hwy 41, Second Street, and Chaska Blvd/County Road 61. While Chestnut Street contains mostly commercial land uses, it is dominated by service uses. The largest concentrations of retail and restaurant businesses are the Brickyard Shopping Center, followed by East Second Street, and City Square Center. These three areas lack any connectivity with each other and none of them are oriented to Chestnut Street, Chaska’s “Main Street”. In general, the Brickyard and City Square shopping areas are more auto-oriented than pedestrian- or “Main Street” oriented. Neither of these two retail/restaurant areas faces “Main Street”.

At street level, most downtown core streets are dominated by service and office uses. Only a few streets have “Main Street” storefronts up to the street on both sides: Second Street East, Second Street West, Third Street West, and Chestnut Street (between Second St and Third St). However, the Werner Arcade building, a 1990s redevelopment, on the Chestnut St has only one street entrance and is designed as an internal arcade rather than “Main Street” building at street level. Each of these “Main Street” character streets are just one block in length.

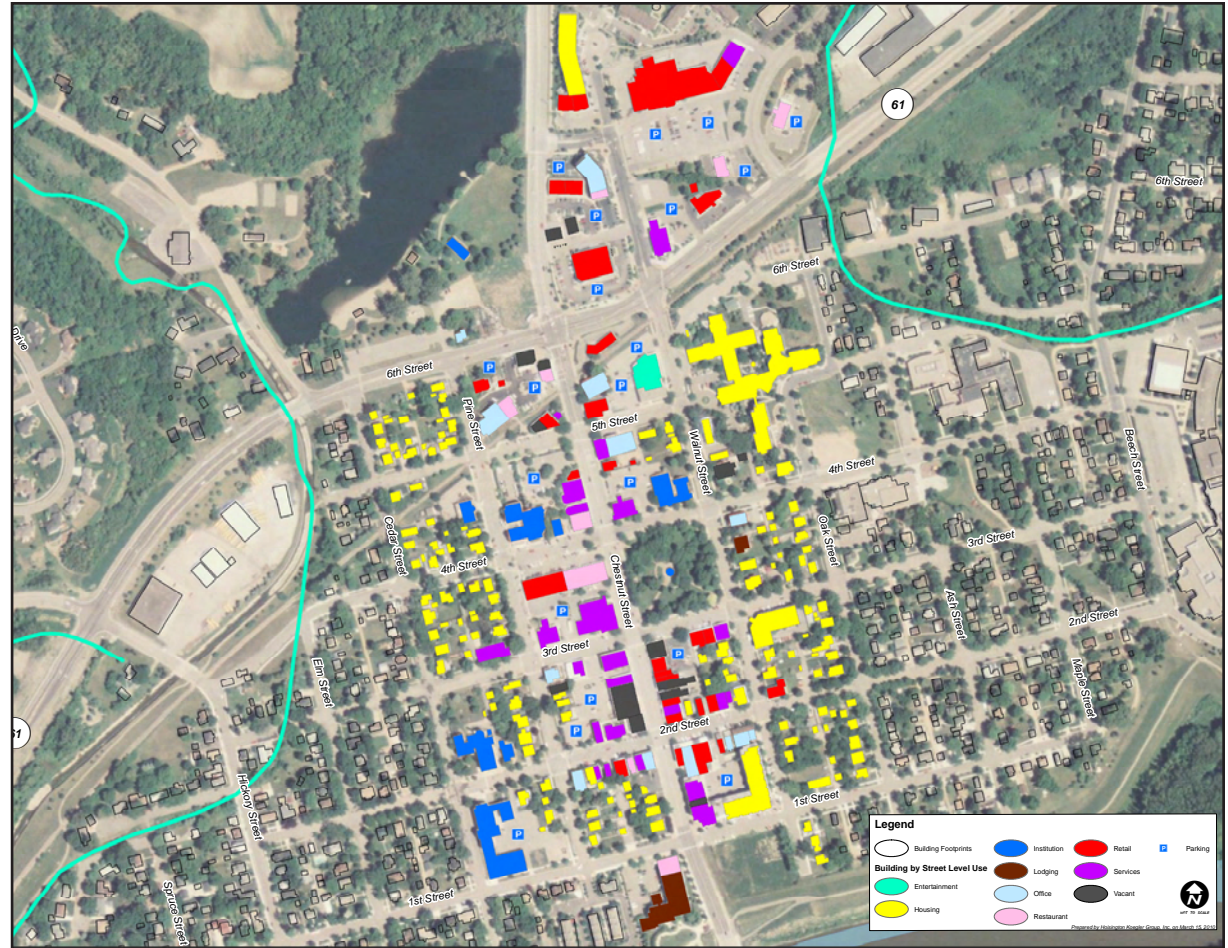


Figure 3-5. Map shows the existing pattern of land uses at street level in the downtown core area.

Other street level uses include institutions, entertainment, and lodging. The only entertainment land use is the movie theater. Within the core downtown area, institutional uses are oriented to Fourth Street and Second Street.

At the south and north ends of Chestnut Street, redevelopment projects have included commercial uses in the street level of multi-story mixed-use buildings.

# Historic Assets

## Designated Buildings, Places and a District

Downtown is home to a wealth of historic assets, including City Square, numerous buildings, several places, and one district. Downtown contains both locally and nationally designated historic sites, as shown in the upper right map. The City has officially designated approximately 45 historic resources within the downtown area. Downtown currently contains seven (7) sites that are also individually listed on the NRHP.

The City has officially designated the City Square/Walnut Street area as the Chaska Historic District. The Walnut Street National Historic District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), nearly matches up with the city-designated historic district. The NRHP identifies 29 “contributing properties” within the 3-4 block Walnut Street National Historic District.

In 2006, seven (7) additional downtown buildings/sites were designated by the Chaska City Council as local historic resources, including the three (3) brickyard clayholes. In 2007, the Mn DOT TH41 River Crossing Study identified ten (10) downtown properties that are “eligible” for NRHP listing, including Athletic Park, Guardian Angels church, the train depot, and seven residences. In 2009, the City designated Chaska Athletic Park as a local historic site.

## Types of Downtown Historic Sites

Downtown’s designated historic sites include a broad range of building types, including commercial, industrial, residential and institutional, as well as civic, recreational, and open space sites. As shown in the lower right map, historic commercial buildings are primarily located on Second Street with a few others scattered on Chestnut, Third, Pine and Fourth Streets. Historic institutional buildings consist of the three churches in downtown - Guardian Angels, St. John’s, and Moravian. Historic homes are clustered primarily on Walnut St, Third St East, and the southwest corner of downtown. There are three historic industrial buildings, including the train depot, located where the railroad intersects with Chestnut Street. City Square, Athletic Park, and the three (3) clayhole lakes are civic/recreational/open space historic sites.

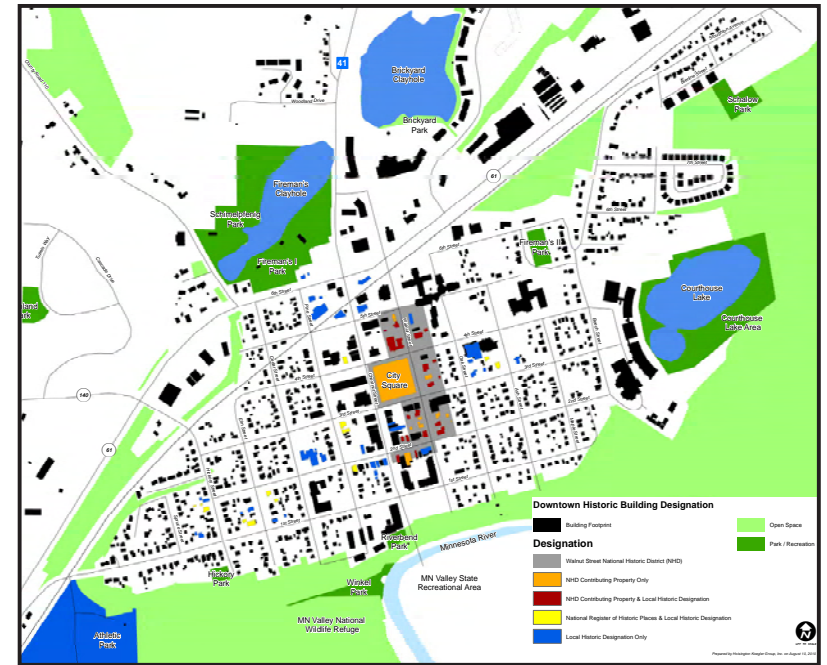


Figure 3-6. Historic building designations in the downtown area.

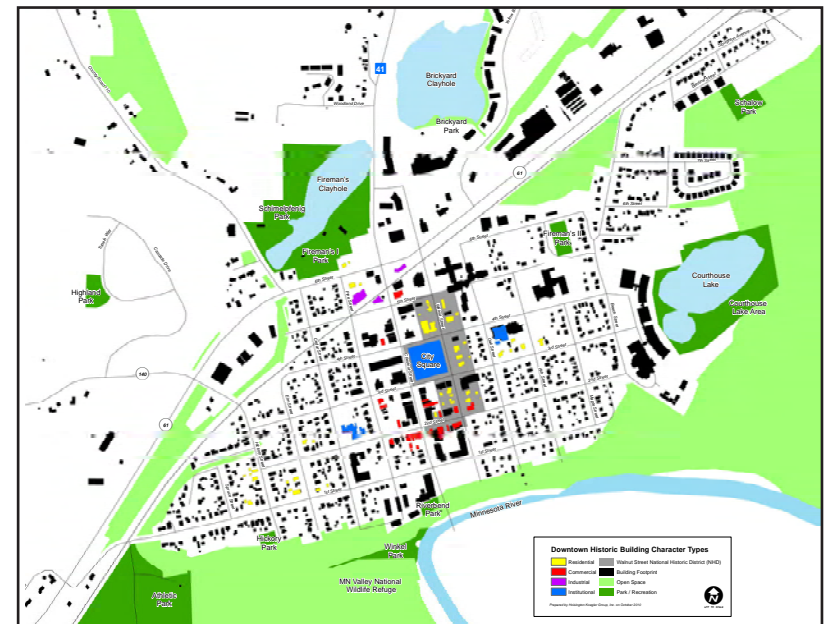


Figure 3-7. Map showing types of existing designated historic sites in the downtown area.

# Circulation System

## Streets and Highways

Most of downtown’s streets are under the City’s jurisdiction; however, Chestnut Street/MN Highway 41 is under Mn DOT’s jurisdiction and Chaska Boulevard/County Road 61 is under Carver County’s jurisdiction. Prior to new U.S. Highway 212 being completed in 2008, Chaska Boulevard/County Road 61 was U.S. Highway 212. Consequently, the design of Chaska Blvd today still reflects its past function as a state highway and it has the potential to be redesigned as a result of its turnback from Mn DOT to the County. Traffic volumes have increased substantially on MN Hwy 41 since the opening of new U.S. Highway 212.

From a functional perspective, Chestnut Street/MN Hwy 41 is classified as a Principal Arterial and Chaska Blvd/County Road 61 as a Minor Arterial. Fourth, Second (east of Pine), Walnut, Pine, and Beech/Stoughton are classified as Minor Collectors. All other downtown streets are classified as local streets.

Downtown’s streets are generally in poor condition and the City is planning to reconstruct all downtown streets over the next ten years. For example, the current downtown streets lack storm water drainage infrastructure.

Mn DOT continues its study of options for a future flood-proof highway crossing of the Minnesota River Valley in the vicinity of existing MN Hwy 41 to address existing and long-term traffic capacity issues.

## Trails and Sidewalks

South of Chaska Blvd/County Road 61, the existing City downtown trail system consists of the levee trail, the National Wildlife Refuge trail, and the MN Hwy 41 bridge trail. North of Chaska Blvd/County Road 61, there are existing trails within Fireman’s Park, along Chestnut Street/MN Hwy 41 (north of Fireman’s Park), around Courthouse Clayhole Lake and Brickyard Clayhole Lake, and west along Chaska Blvd/County Road 61 and County Road 140.

A majority of downtown streets contain sidewalks on both sides of the street, particularly south of Chaska Blvd/County Road 61.

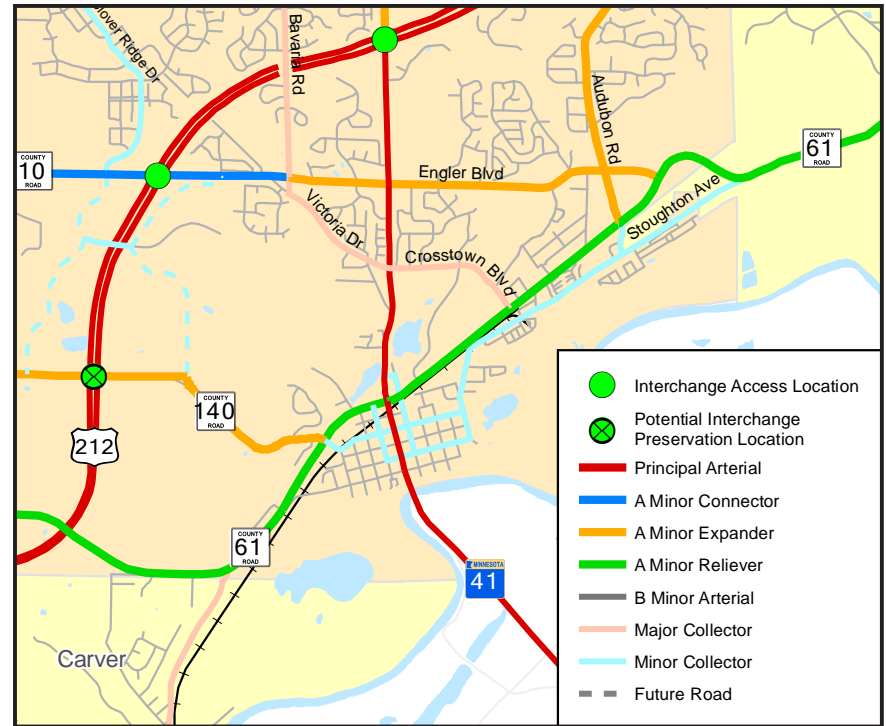


Figure 3-8. Future Street Functional Classification System in downtown area.



Figure 3-9. Trails map for downtown area from 2030 Comprehensive Plan.

### Existing Parking Options

Chaska’s downtown provides a number of parking options, including on-street and off-street parking. As shown in the map to the right, many of the core downtown streets offer diagonal on-street parking while the rest of the streets offer parallel parking. Currently, Chestnut Street/MN Hwy 41 provides parallel parking spaces on the street’s east side only and Chaska Blvd/County Road 61 does not provide on-street parking. In total, there are approximately 620 public on-street parking spaces in the downtown core area today. In addition, the City manages downtown parking availability by limiting on-street parking to two hours on some streets, including Second Street East, Second Street West, Third Street West, Fourth Street West, Fifth Street East, and Fifth Street West.

Off-street parking in downtown is provided by both public and private surface parking lots. Public parking lots are provided within the City Hall block and within the 200 block on the west side of Chestnut Street/MN Hwy 41 (behind the Werner Arcade building). Currently, there are approximately 100 public parking spaces between these two parking lots. There are approximately 450 parking spaces provided by the private sector in the downtown core area south of Chaska Blvd/County Road 61. In total, there are approximately 550 private parking spaces in the downtown core area today.

As part of the Downtown Master Planning process, a high-level parking analysis was undertaken that looked at four quadrants in the downtown core area, as identified in the map to the right, with Chestnut St/MN Hwy 41 and Third St as the dividing lines. This parking analysis, which is summarized in the table to the right, was based upon the City’s parking space requirements by square feet and the actual square footage of existing buildings. The analysis found that all four quadrants have sufficient parking available to meet the needs of existing development, however, the southeast quadrant has a tighter parking situation than the other quadrants. Other findings were issues with business owner/employee vs. customer parking needs, inadequate signage/enforcement of Two Hour Parking program, additional diagonal parking opportunities, and lack of parking on west side of Chestnut St/MN Hwy 41.

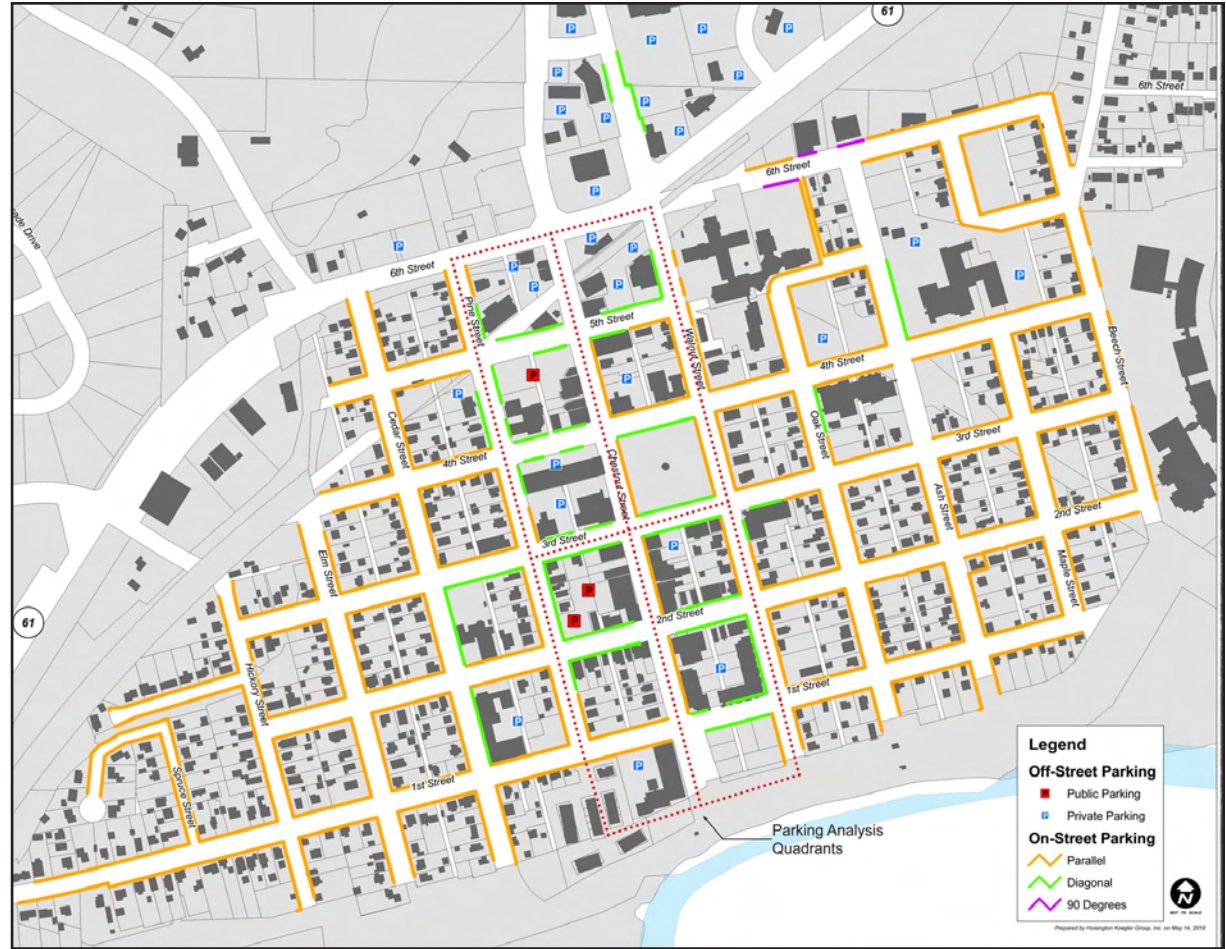


Figure 3-10. Map showing existing parking options in the downtown area.

Quadrant	Existing # of Parking Spaces	Estimated # of Required Parking Spaces	Excess or (Shortage) of Parking Spaces
NW	392	329	63
NE	335	185	150
SW	264	214	50
SE	238	230	8
Total	1,229	958	271

Table 3-1. Downtown core area parking analysis by quadrant.

## Parks & Open Spaces

Downtown’s existing park system includes two community parks, a community playfield, a County park, three special feature parks, and two mini-parks. Located in the heart of downtown, City Square is a historic and quintessential town square. A passive park, it hosts downtown events and is home to Native American burial mounds.

Fireman’s Park and Schimelpfenig Park surround Fireman’s Clayhole Lake, located on downtown’s northwest edge. The two parks complement each other to form the primary family “active use” park for the entire community, including a swimming beach, shelter buildings, fishing piers, and recreational facilities. Fireman’s Park is more open, flat and lakeshore-oriented, while Schimelpfenig is more wooded and hilly.

Four downtown parks are located adjacent to the Minnesota River Valley, including Athletic Park, Courthouse Clayhole Lake, Winkel Park and Riverbend Park. Chaska Athletic Park is a community playfield that is the home of the Chaska Cubs, an amateur town baseball team. In 2009, the City designated Athletic Park as a local historic site as a classic 1950s town team ball field. Located within the river valley floodplain in downtown’s southwest corner, Athletic Park is disconnected from the rest of downtown. Riverbend Park is essentially a boat launch area while Winkel Park is a small river overlook park. Located on downtown’s east edge, Courthouse Clayhole Lake is a Carver County park that offers fishing and trails.

Downtown does not have any neighborhood parks today; however, it does have two mini-parks (Hickory Park and Fireman’s II Park). The original and larger Fireman’s II neighborhood park was eliminated in the 1990s for the expansion of the Carver County Government Center.

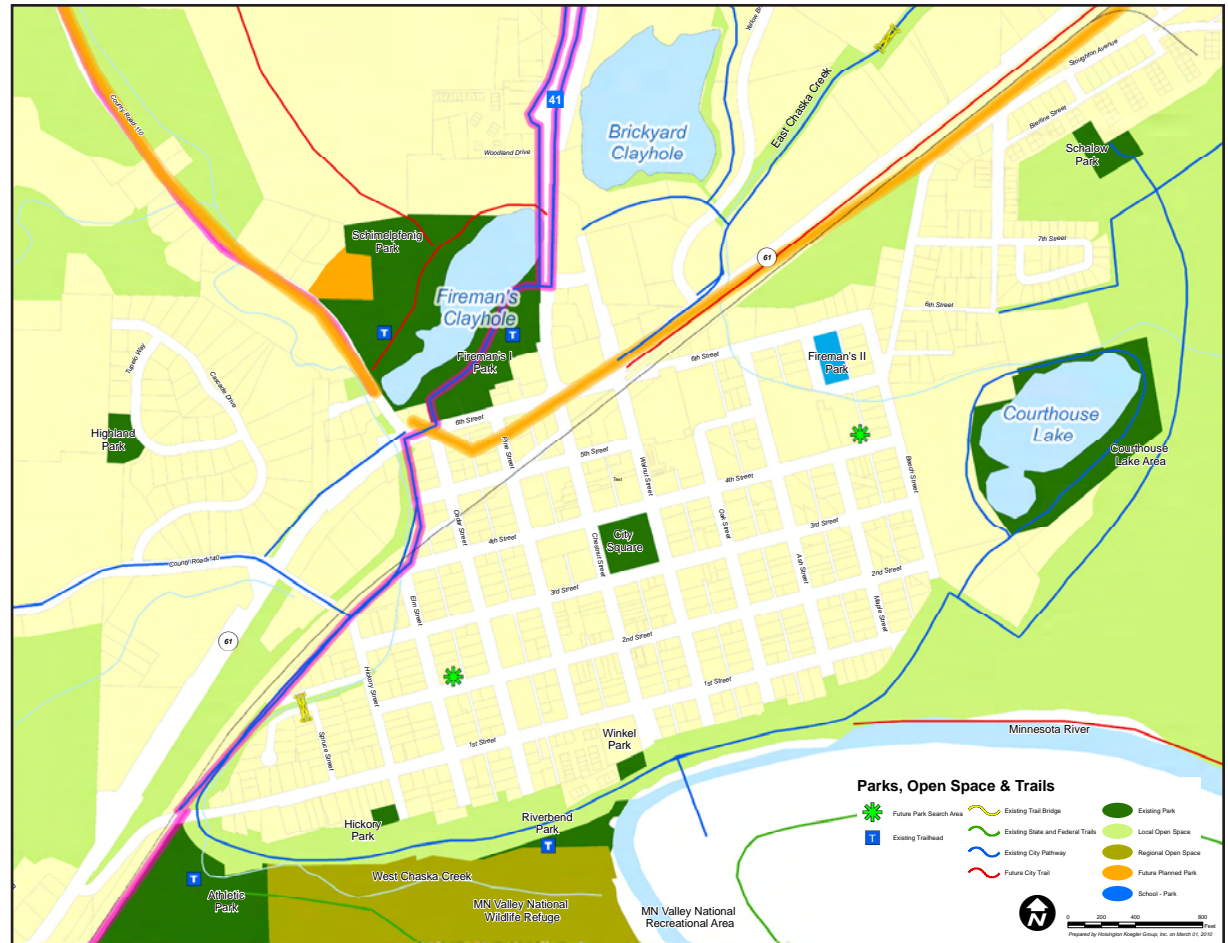


Figure 3-11. Map showing existing parks and open spaces in the downtown area.

Downtown’s open spaces consist of the Chaska Greenbelt area along the Minnesota River (south and east of downtown), the river levee trail area, MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge, West Chaska Creek, East Chaska Creek, and a significant wetland area on the northeast edge of downtown. The MN Valley State Recreational Area is located across the river.

Analysis of downtown’s existing park and open space system identified the following issues and opportunities: lack of downtown neighborhood parks; lack of connectivity between downtown and the Chaska Greenbelt including the MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge; opportunities for enhanced river-related open spaces; lack of connectivity, identity and visibility of Fireman’s Park; and opportunities for creating downtown plazas and greens.

## Community Input

As part of the planning process for this Downtown Master Plan, the City incorporated a community input process that engaged community members throughout the duration of the project. In order to achieve significant and committed involvement from the community, the City assembled a Project Task Force of 16 members that were appointed by the City Council. Project Task Force members were selected to represent key stakeholder groups within the community, which resulted in a larger task force than originally planned. In total, there were eight (8) meetings with the Project Task Force from February 2010 to April 2011. The Project Task Force meetings were very well attended and provided a significant amount of input to the project. In fact, additional task force meetings were added to the planning process to accommodate adequate presentation, dialogue, and input opportunities for the task force. The Project Task Force's input is included in the Appendix of the Downtown Master Plan in the form of meeting notes.

Community input opportunities were also provided through three (3) Joint Work Sessions with the City Council and Commissions (Planning, Parks/Arts/Recreation, Heritage Preservation, Human Rights), which were open to the general public. A Community Open House for the Downtown Master Plan was held in February 2011 at the Chaska Community Center. This meeting was well attended with an estimated 100-plus people in attendance. Input from the Community Open House is included in the Appendix to the Downtown Master Plan.

Another important source of community input was individual meetings between the Project Team and key downtown institutions, including Carver County Government Center, Carver

County Library, St. John's Church & School, Guardian Angels Church & School, Moravian Church, Carver-Scott Educational Cooperative School, Auburn Manor Homes and Southwest Transit.

From a market opportunities perspective, the project's market consultant also conducted individual interviews with a representative group of downtown development stakeholders, including existing business owners, property owners, potential developers, realtors, and major Chaska employers.

As part of the City's approval process, the Downtown Master Plan was reviewed and recommended for approval to the City Council by the following City Commissions:

- » Park Board on January 9, 2012
- » Planning Commission on January 11, 2012
- » Historic Preservation Commission on January 24, 2012.

The final Downtown Master Plan was approved by the City Council on February 6, 2012.

## Project Task Force Members:

- » City Council - Rick Ford (Chair, Downtown Business Council)
- » Planning Commission - Mike Hwang (Chair, Commitment to Community)
- » Heritage Preservation Commission - Debbie Boe
- » Parks, Arts & Recreation Board - Dave Roan
- » Chaska Commitment to Community Task Force - Kevin Norby (Chair, Downtown Council)
- » Chaska Downtown Business Council - Dan Keyport (Chair, Planning Commission)
- » Resident (Downtown Chaska) - Adella Pollack (Chair, Human Rights Commission)
- » Resident (Downtown Chaska) - Greg Swan (Chair, PR - Miller Shandwick)
- » Resident (Upper Chaska) - Brian Betlock (Chair, Downtown Chaska Wells Fargo)
- » Resident (Upper Chaska) - Stacey Harding (Chair, Attorney, small business owner)
- » Development Community (SuperValu) - Jim Hornecker
- » Upper Chaska Business (Ridgeview Medical) - John Prondzinski
- » Downtown institutions (Auburn Manor) - Mike Senden
- » Faith Based Community (Guardian Angels) - Gary VanEyll (former Mayor)
- » Faith Based Community (St. John's) - Bob Roepke (former Mayor)
- » Youth - Max Shinn

