

CHAPTER 6: downtown districts, neighborhoods & greenbelt

Our downtown area today was historically the entire town of Chaska – a traditional small town strategically located along the Minnesota River at the cross-roads of railroad lines and highways. The original town consisted of the traditional mix of a civic core area, “Main Street” commercial district, industrial areas, residential neighborhoods and major community institutions. In the context of today’s much larger Chaska community, our downtown area is often times viewed as a single place or destination. To be sure, the downtown area is a unique and identifiable place within our community for its traditional layout and historic character, in contrast to the more contemporary and suburban character of newer areas of the community.

At the same time, the various sub-areas of downtown have the potential to be integral yet unique downtown districts and neighborhoods. The Chaska Downtown Master Plan establishes seven (7) downtown districts, three (3) neighborhoods, and the downtown Chaska Greenbelt, which are primarily based on major land use patterns, landscape features, and circulation routes. To guide future changes and improvements to downtown Chaska, it is helpful to identify the desired identity, development character and design features for each downtown district and neighborhood.



Downtown East Neighborhood.



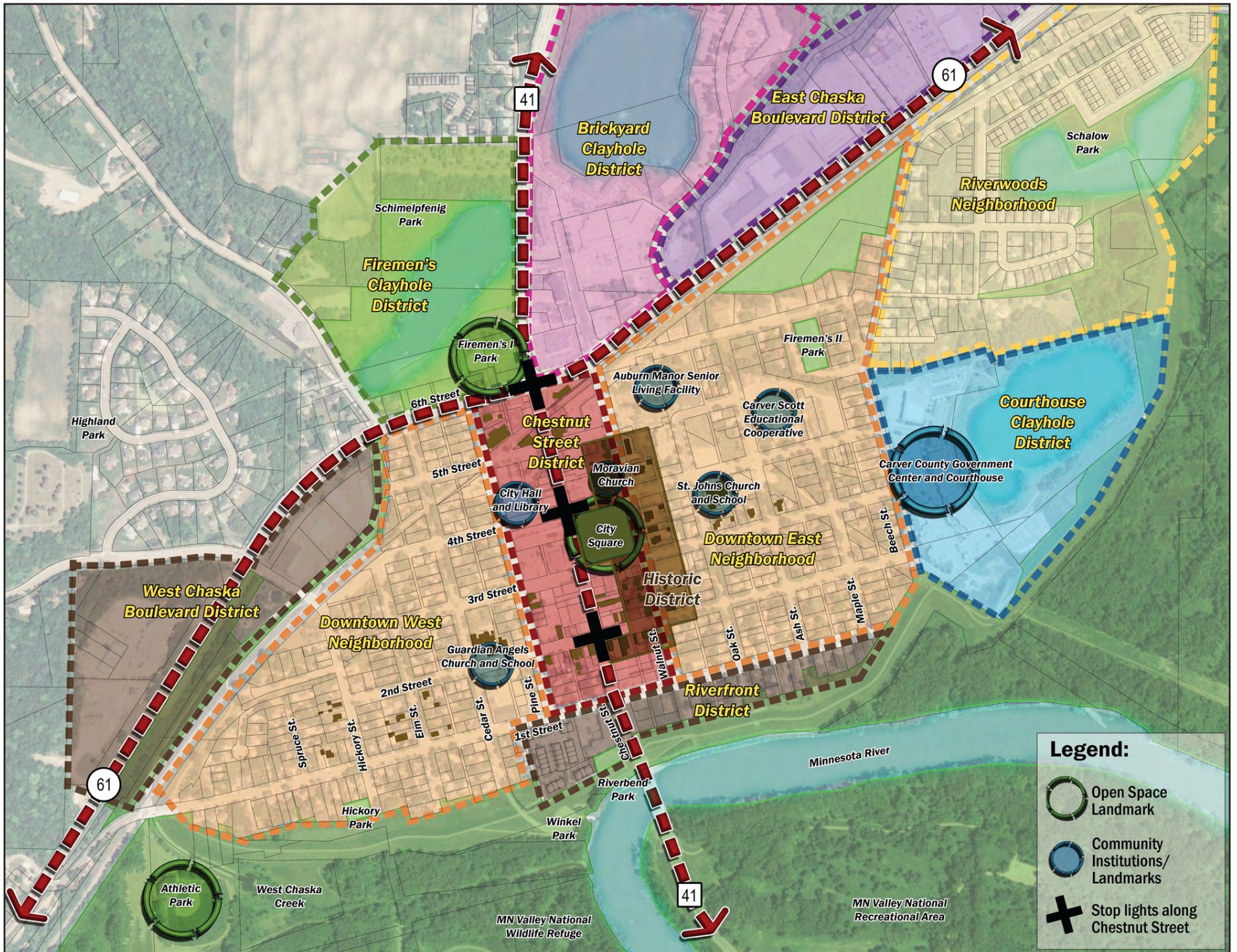
Riverfront District.



Fireman's Clayhole Lake District.



Chestnut Street District.



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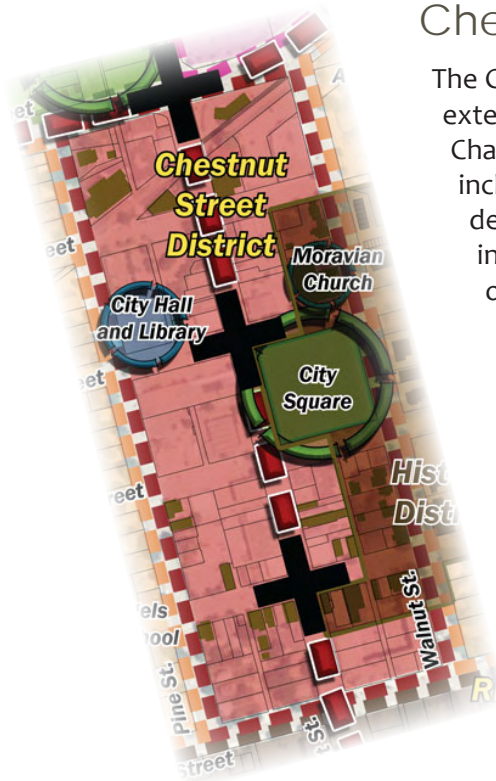


Mix of “Main Street” commercial buildings along Chestnut Street/MN Hwy 41.

Chestnut Street District

The Chestnut Street District encompasses the historic civic and commercial core of downtown Chaska. The district extends five blocks along both sides of Chestnut Street/MN Highway 41, which is Chaska’s “Main Street”, from Chaska Boulevard/County Road 61 to First Street and from Walnut Street to Pine Street. The Chestnut Street District includes a broad mix of uses, including retail, services, entertainment, restaurants, offices, civic, religious, higher density residential, and single-family residential. This district contains all the designated historic commercial and industrial buildings in downtown with the exception of one historic mixed-use commercial/residential building on the east side of Walnut Street. In addition, this district contains a portion of the Walnut Street National Historic District. This district also contains most of the downtown civic institutions, including City Hall, City Police, Chaska History Center, County Library, and County License Center.

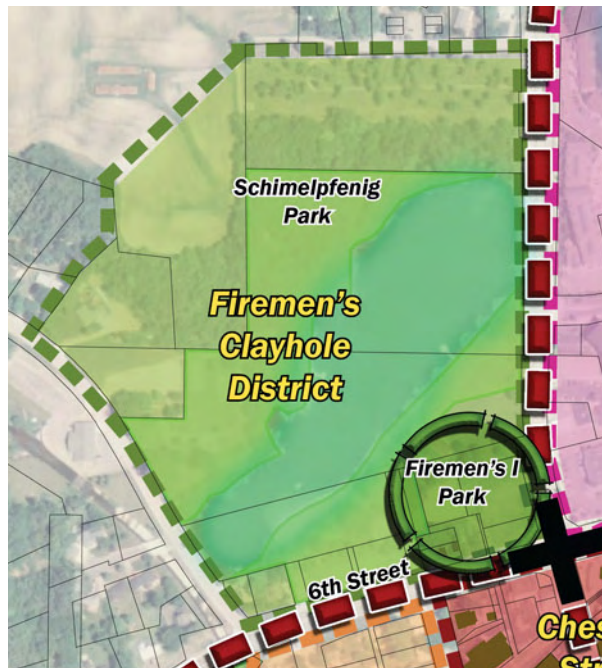
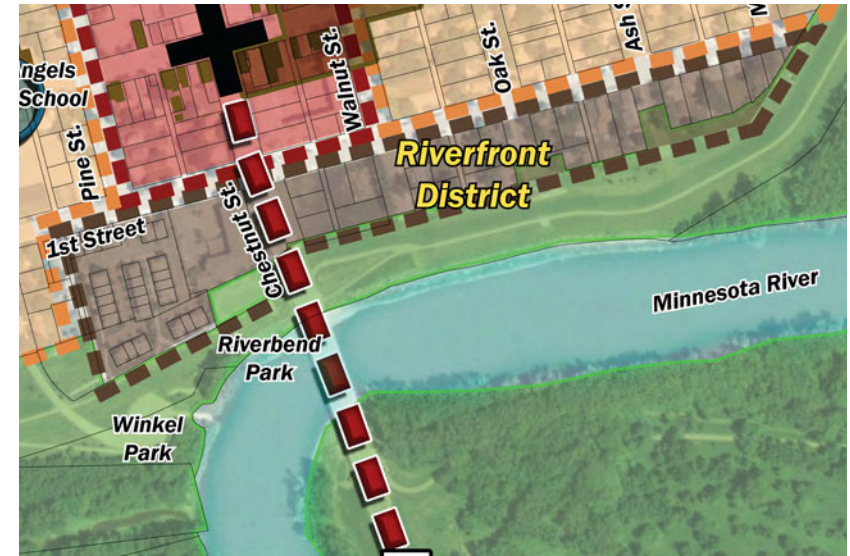
The Chestnut Street District is envisioned as a downtown mixed-use “Main Street” district dominated by traditional storefront buildings that complement downtown’s historic character and scale. Due to the current negative impacts of Chestnut Street/MN Highway 41 on businesses and pedestrian movement, this district should be the priority focus for improving streets, sidewalks, alleys and mid-block passages that create a high quality and convenient pedestrian environment. This pedestrian network should be designed to create a more connected and cohesive downtown business, entertainment, civic and historic district. Historic City Square will continue to be the heart of downtown but stronger connections are needed to the surrounding civic institutions, historic commercial buildings on Second Street, the converted historic industrial district along the former railroad, and the Walnut Street National Historic District.



Riverfront District

The Riverfront District is a unique district comprised of the five small blocks located along the Minnesota River before it turns southward – four blocks are east of Chestnut Street/MN Highway 41 and one block is west – between First Street and the levee. All of the properties east of Chestnut Street, which are all single-family houses today, are physically and visually separated from the river by the levee. The block to the west has been redeveloped with multi-story townhouses and a hotel that rise above the levee to take advantage of river views and access.

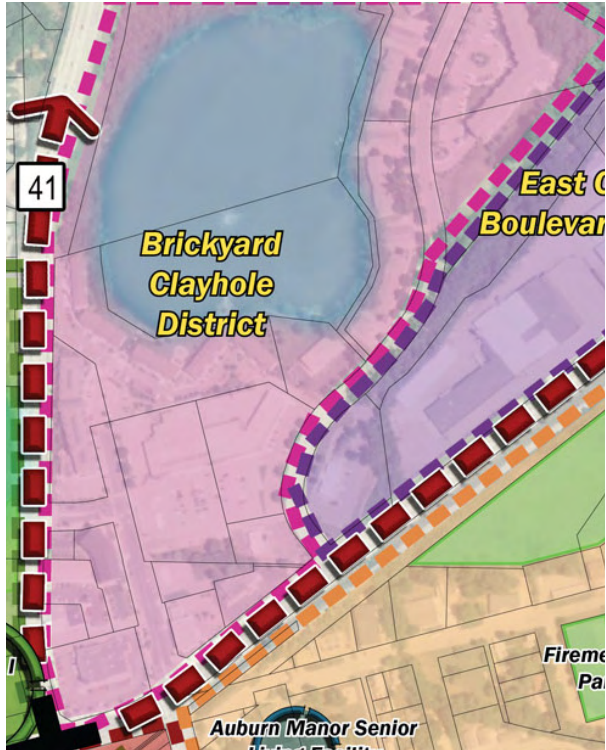
The Riverfront District's future identity should be one of riverfront housing in higher density residential buildings with convenient access to downtown shopping, services, entertainment, institutions, and natural amenities. Riverfront housing options should include townhouses, condos and apartments that are oriented to the river, adjacent open spaces, and future levee lanes. New housing should provide river views and optimize the extensive park, trail and open space system along the river. Mixed-use development would be appropriate at the intersection of Chestnut Street and First Street as the gateway corner to the commercial district along Chestnut Street. This district should be designed to provide public access points to the levee trail and connected open spaces via the levee lanes.



Fireman's Clayhole District

The Fireman's Clayhole District encompasses the quadrant northwest of the intersection of Chestnut Street/MN Highway 41 and Chaska Boulevard/County Road 61 that surrounds Fireman's Clayhole Lake. This area was the location of one of the major brickyards in Chaska and the clayhole lake is a remnant of this previous industry. This district contains two community parks – Fireman's Park south of the lake and Schimelpfenig Park north of the lake.

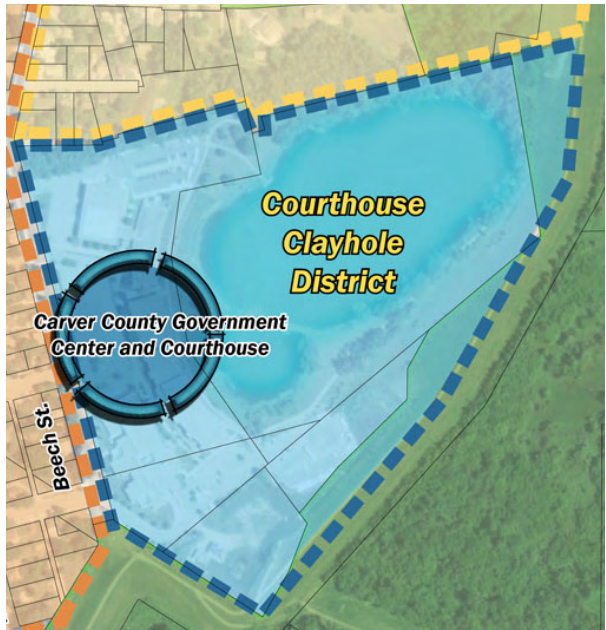
This district's future identity is envisioned as an expanded and enhanced signature downtown community park that serves as a downtown gateway, visual landmark, gathering place, trailhead and community destination with strong connections to Chestnut Street and the historic downtown commercial district. Fireman's Clayhole Park will be a major destination/trailhead on the future Southwest LRT Regional Trail, which is planned to run along Creek Road, looping around downtown via the levee trail to the south and connecting to Victoria to the north. Due to this district's strategic location at the intersection of two highways and downtown gateway potential, this district is envisioned to have complementary destination commercial businesses, preferably restaurants or entertainment, that have good highway visibility and connections to the park & lake amenities. The character of future development in this district should complement the surrounding development and celebrate the importance of this site to the City's brickmaking history.



Brickyard Clayhole District

The Brickyard Clayhole District is the quadrant northeast of the intersection of Chestnut Street/MN Highway 41 and Chaska Boulevard/County Road 61 and includes Brickyrd Clayhole Lake. Its eastern border is Yellow Brick Road and East Chaska Creek. The Brickyard Clayhole District is a former brickyard site that has redeveloped as an extension of downtown Chaska with higher density housing in both mixed-use buildings and townhomes, a mix of commercial businesses including downtown’s grocery store, and some professional offices/services including the Carver County Community Development Agency. Much of the housing in the district overlooks the Brickyrd Clayhole Lake.

The Brickyard Clayhole District’s future identity is envisioned as a mixed-use downtown district that offers higher density housing options with convenient access to downtown shopping, services and natural amenities. This district has convenient access to both Brickyrd Clayhole Lake and Fireman’s Clayhole Lake/Fireman’s Park. The Brickyard Clayhole District and Riverfront District are viewed as two ends of the downtown dumbbell that provides higher density downtown housing at each end of the Chestnut Street District’s commercial and civic assets. As this district continues to redevelop, street connections should be enhanced, such as a new four-way intersection at Yellow Brick Road/Ash Street/Chaska Boulevard and an east-west street connection between Walnut Street and Yellow Brick Road. Similar to Fireman’s Clayhole District, this district’s strategic location at the intersection of two highways and downtown gateway potential create opportunities for destination commercial businesses along Chestnut Street and Chaska Boulevard.



Courthouse Clayhole District

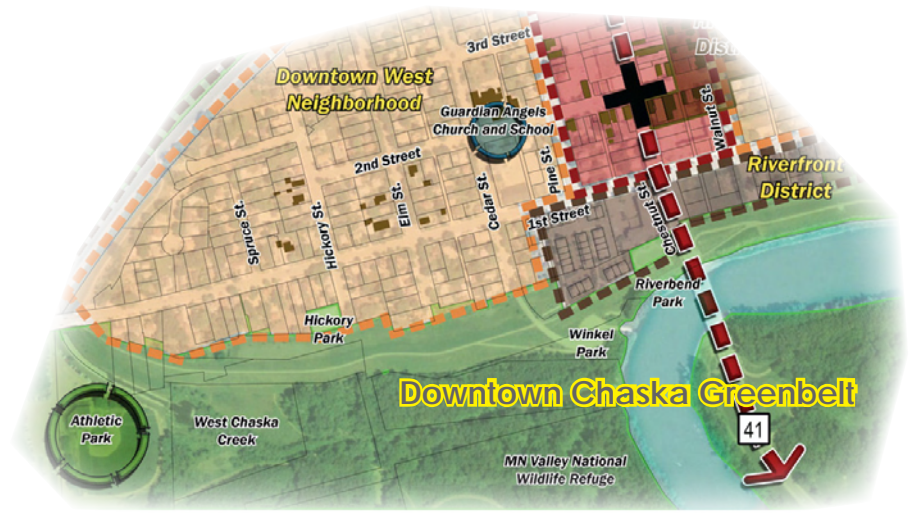
The Courthouse Clayhole District is located on the east side of downtown, between Beech Street and the levee, and consists of the Carver County Government Center and Courthouse Clayhole Lake. This district’s future identity will continue to evolve as a major civic and employment district within downtown Chaska. This district is also part of the Chaska Greenbelt. As Carver County continues to grow in population, the Carver County Government Center will need to expand as well. The City will continue to partner with the County on exploring opportunities for enabling expansion of the Government Center within downtown Chaska, including additional/shared parking facilities, shared County/City downtown facilities, and nearby downtown redevelopment sites.

Courthouse Clayhole Lake is also a major recreational destination for fishing, boating, walking and biking. This open space recreation area is a hidden gem and should be better connected to downtown’s park, open space & trail system via additional trail connections. Courthouse Clayhole Lake will also be a major destination/trailhead on the future Southwest LRT Regional Trail, which is planned to run along the levee trail connecting to Chanhassen to the east and Victoria to the northwest. Courthouse Clayhole Lake will continue to be a major feature of the Chaska Greenbelt in the downtown area and opportunities may be explored for better connecting this district to the large green open space between the levee and the river.

Downtown Chaska Greenbelt

The Chaska Greenbelt within the downtown area encompasses the green open spaces between the Minnesota River and the levee; from the railroad corridor/County Road 61 (west) to the East Chaska Creek diversion channel (east). Major features within the downtown area of the Chaska Greenbelt include the Minnesota River, West Chaska Creek, Chaska Lake, the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Athletic Park, Winkel Park, Riverbend Park, Courthouse Clayhole Lake, East Chaska Creek, and the levee trail. The Southwest LRT Regional Trail is planned to run along the levee trail connecting to Chanhasen to the east and Victoria to the northwest. Just across the Minnesota River is the Minnesota Valley National Recreation Area.

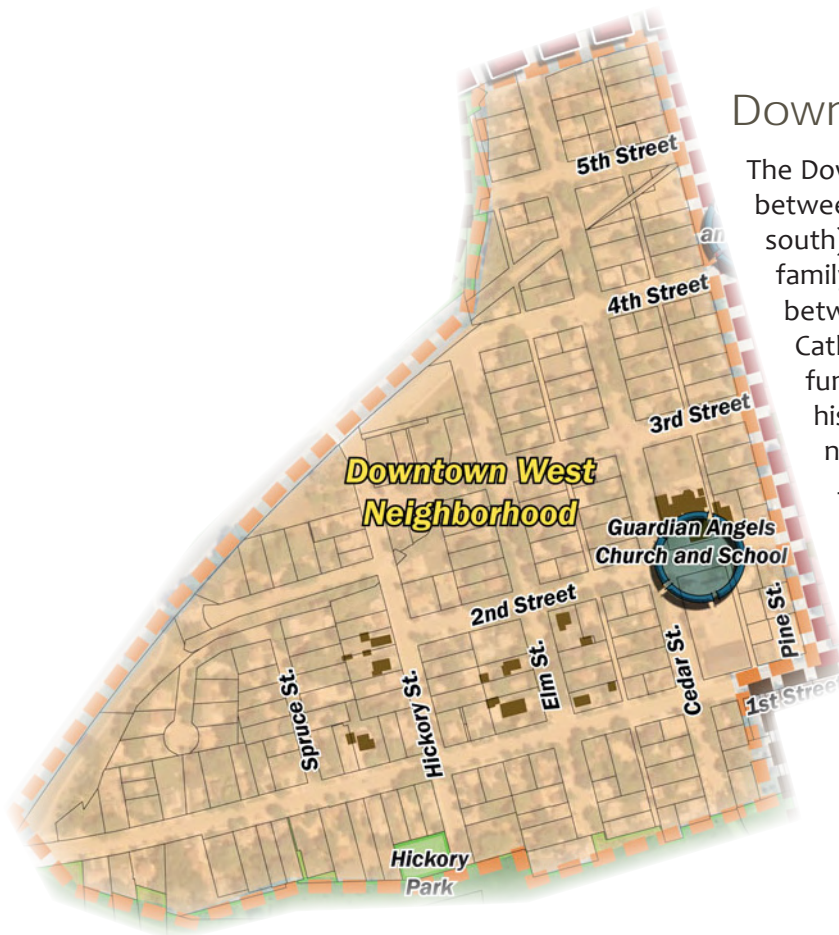
The downtown area of the Chaska Greenbelt is envisioned to become a more connected open space destination for downtown residents, employees and visitors.

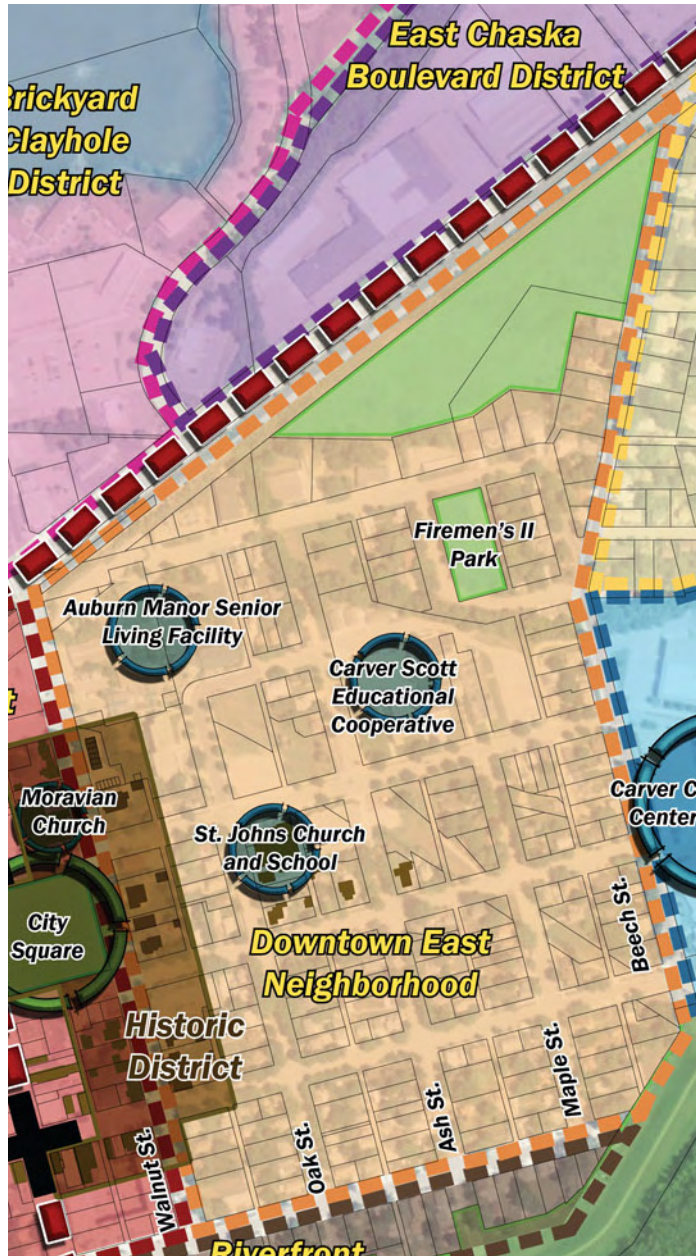


Downtown West Neighborhood

The Downtown West Neighborhood encompasses the primarily residential neighborhood between Pine Street (east) and the levee/West Chaska Creek diversion channel (west and south) and Chaska Boulevard (north). The neighborhood's homes are exclusively single-family detached today, including eight (8) homes with historic designation, all located between First St and Second St. The neighborhood is also home to Guardian Angels Catholic church & elementary school, Carver County License Center, and a private funeral home. The Guardian Angels church and friary buildings are also designated historic buildings. Hickory Park, a mini-park/tot lot, is located at the south edge of the neighborhood.

The future identity of this downtown neighborhood is envisioned as a traditional small town neighborhood that celebrates its historic character, traditional mix of housing styles, connections to the river's natural open spaces, and convenient access to downtown's services and amenities. Building upon the existing mix of activities along Pine Street, future changes along Pine Street may include higher density housing or neighborhood-friendly businesses. Desired improvements to the neighborhood include the addition of a neighborhood park, trail connections between the neighborhood and the levee trail, street reconstructions, stormwater drainage, bike trail connections/loops (e.g. Cedar Street), and enhancements to existing community parks (Fireman's Clayhole, Athletic, and Winkel). Opportunities for shared park facilities between the neighborhood and Guardian Angels school will be explored.





Downtown East Neighborhood

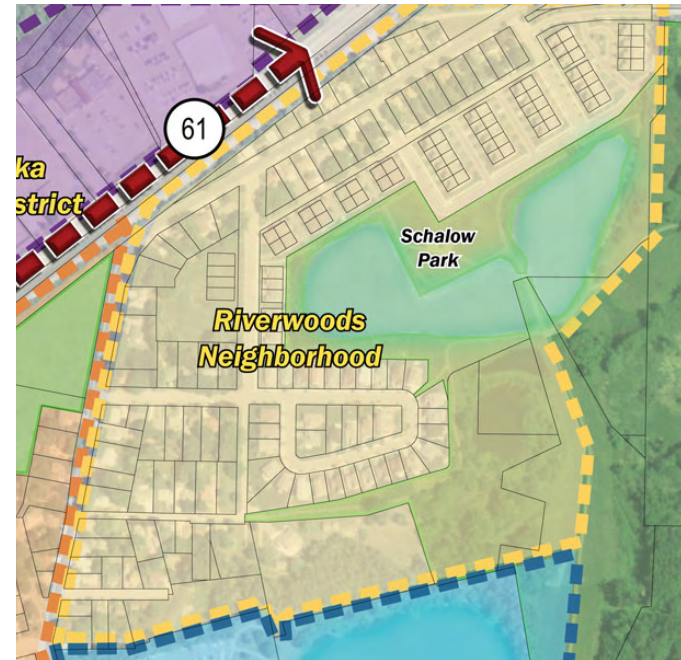
The Downtown East Neighborhood encompasses the neighborhood area between Walnut Street (west), Beech Street (east), First Street (south), and Chaska Boulevard/County Road 61 (north). The neighborhood's development pattern has been influenced by the West Chaska Creek channel, the former railroad/current overhead power line corridor that bisects the neighborhood, and the large wetland in the northeast corner. The northern portion of the neighborhood is a mix of residential, institutional, and industrial land use. It is home to St. John's Lutheran church & elementary school, Carver-Scott Educational Cooperative School, Auburn Manor Homes (housing & services for seniors), and Carver County Community Social Services. Fireman's II Park, which is park owned by the Chaska School District, is located in the northeast corner of the neighborhood. The southern portion of the neighborhood is almost entirely detached single-family homes, including ten (10) homes that have historic designations. The properties on the east side of Walnut Street, between Fifth St and 2nd St, are part of the Walnut Street National Historic District. There is a mix of land uses along Walnut Street, including high density residential, single-family residential, retail and office.

This neighborhood's future identity will continue to evolve into a downtown residential neighborhood with educational, religious and senior facilities at its core, strong historic character, traditional mix of housing styles, connections to the river's natural open spaces, and convenient access to downtown services and amenities. Significant changes in public infrastructure are anticipated that will enhance this neighborhood, such as discontinued use of the Union Pacific railroad line, relocation of the overhead power lines, and potential street connections to Chaska Boulevard/County Road 61 at Ash Street and Stoughton/Beech. Building upon the existing mix of activities along Pine Street, future changes along Pine Street may include higher density housing or neighborhood-friendly businesses. Desired improvements to the neighborhood include the addition of a neighborhood park, trail connections between the neighborhood and the levee trail, street reconstructions, stormwater drainage, bike trail connections/loops (e.g. Ash Street and Third Street), and enhancements to existing community parks (Fireman's Clayhole, Athletic, and Winkel). Opportunities for shared park facilities between the neighborhood and St. John's school will be explored.

Riverwoods Neighborhood

The Riverwoods Neighborhood consists of the neighborhood area between Stoughton Avenue (west), Zemble Street/levee (east), Chaska Boulevard/County Road 61 (north), and East Chaska Creek (south). This neighborhood encompasses the older homes along Stoughton Avenue as well as the newer detached homes and townhouses south and east of Stoughton Avenue. Schalow Park, a new neighborhood park, and the surrounding wetlands are at the center of this neighborhood.

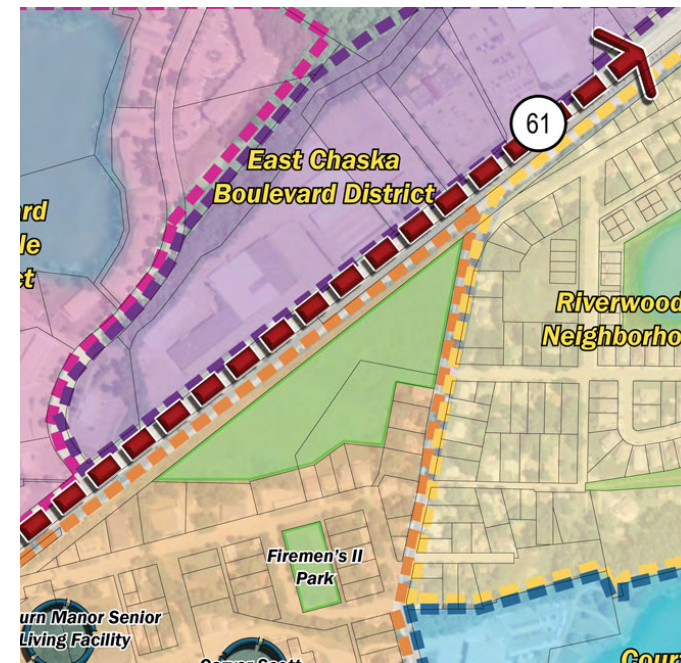
With its location on the eastern edge of downtown, this exclusively residential neighborhood is envisioned to be better connected to downtown and Chaska Boulevard/County Road 61 in the future. New trails are envisioned for the Union Pacific railroad corridor, Stoughton Ave/Beech St, and 6th Street. In addition, the Southwest LRT Regional Trail is planned to run along the levee trail connecting to Chanhassen to the east and Victoria to the northwest. A new street connection to Chaska Boulevard/County Road 61 is proposed at the west end of Stoughton Avenue to create an intersection with Fire Lane to the north.

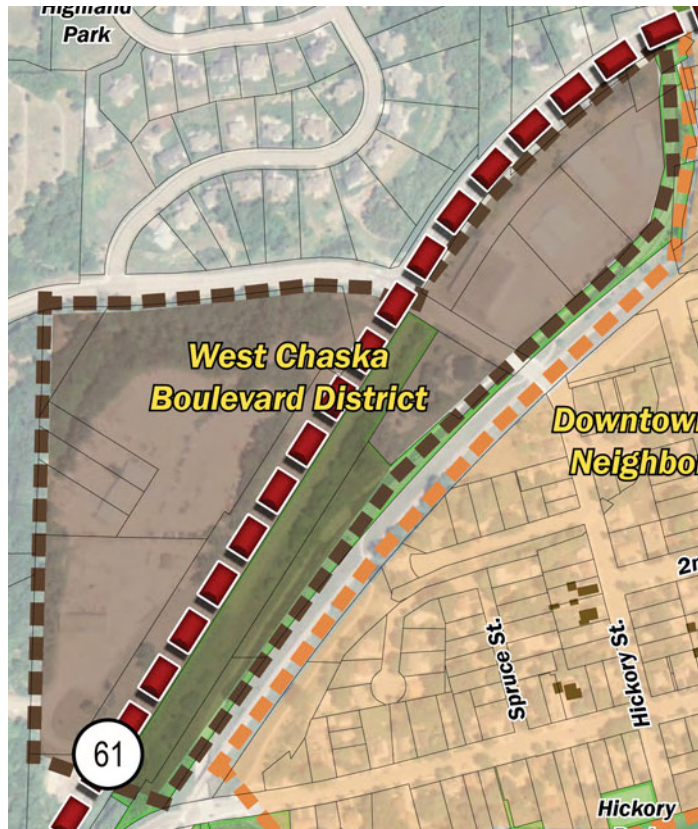


East Chaska Boulevard District

The East Chaska Boulevard District is the area east of downtown along the north side of Chaska Boulevard/County Road 61, between Yellow Brick Road (west) and Crosstown Boulevard (east), with East Chaska Creek as its northern boundary. This district has been developed with almost entirely commercial land uses today with the exception of a higher density housing development on Crosstown Boulevard. The current commercial uses are highway-oriented as a result of this corridor's long history as U.S. Highway 212, including three restaurants, gas station, car wash, auto sales business, and the Chaska Building Center/Hardware Store.

Now that new U.S. Highway 212 has been completed in central Chaska, this highway has been turned back to Carver County as County Road 61 and the City has renamed it Chaska Boulevard. In order to encourage the concentration and viability of healthy commercial businesses in downtown Chaska and provide opportunities for job growth near downtown, this district is envisioned to transition to more of an employment center. As this district redevelops, it is guided toward a mix of business park uses, such as light industries, offices, research and development services, and medical. The goal is to increase the diversity and concentration of jobs within the downtown area. Multi-story buildings may be appropriate to achieve higher jobs per acre and the needs of site redevelopment.





West Chaska Boulevard District

The West Chaska Boulevard District is the area west of downtown along both sides of Chaska Boulevard/County Road 61, between the Chaska Historical Marker (west) and the levee/West Chaska Creek diversion channel. This district essentially consists of two large redevelopment areas immediately west of downtown. The area east of Chaska Boulevard/County Road 61 is separated from the downtown core and neighborhoods by the levee and the former Union Pacific railroad corridor. Most of the area is currently used as the storage and maintenance site for school buses, while the site west of Hickory Street is a vacant residential site. The area west of Chaska Boulevard/County Road 61 consists of a large auto salvage operation and a Carver County Public Works facility.

This district is envisioned as a major redevelopment opportunity area that could benefit the viability of downtown Chaska as a vibrant commercial district. The site east of Chaska Boulevard is guided for redevelopment to business park uses. Similar to the East Chaska Boulevard District, the goal is to increase the diversity and concentration of jobs within the downtown area. Multi-story buildings may be appropriate to achieve higher jobs per acre and the needs of site redevelopment. The site west of Chaska Boulevard is guided for redevelopment to higher density residential uses. This site's unique characteristics, including its elevation above downtown and the river valley, wooded bluffs to the west, attractive views, and convenient access to downtown's services and amenities make it a premium redevelopment site for downtown housing.

