



Columbus Downtown 2030 Strategic Plan

SEPTEMBER 2025



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Letter of Enthusiasm

The concept of “community” is one of the most variable and imaginative, yet practical and necessary ideas we embody in society. What our community looks like, how we behave and respond to needs, ideas, and opportunities, how welcoming we are, and in what way we evolve with changes and challenges all contribute to our community’s success.

In the 1960s, Columbus community leaders articulated a clear and compelling vision: “We want to be the best community of our size in the country.” Our community has devoted itself to achieving and maintaining that vision in all respects—educational offerings, economic strength, the design of public places, parks, and recreation facilities, and overall quality of life. In addition, the community strives to balance a heritage of Midwestern values with a tenacious practice of inclusivity for all who now live in and visit Columbus. And, Columbus’ downtown is the heart of our city, a central gathering place, our community’s “living room.”

Like so many cities around the country, we were affected by the 2020 shutdown and slow movement back to pre-pandemic normal. But was that normal really good enough? Shouldn’t we take this opportunity to be aspirational, as we create a vibrant, economically engaging downtown that lives up to our legacy?

Understanding this legacy, we began our downtown strategic planning process Columbus Downtown 2030, by identifying three key questions: How do we build a downtown where people want to be? How do we best use the spaces and places downtown, and where and what are the gaps that prevent us from being the best downtown to service residents, tourists, and businesses?

We wanted a plan which we could act upon, and one that included ideas, designs, wish lists, must-haves, and ‘wouldn’t it be great if’ concepts from community members, as we have a long tradition of collaborating with many stakeholders to solve thorny problems.



The Columbus Downtown 2030 strategic plan is a framework embracing a bold vision focused on specific prominent areas that will spark renewed energy and investment, shaping a vibrant future of downtown in the near and long term. We will accomplish this with three primary objectives:

- Expand and enhance 4th Street entertainment district;
- Activate historic Washington Street; and
- Create an Avenue of the Architects along the 5th Street corridor.

Downtown Columbus is critical to our overall quality of life and economic strength and must reflect our community’s best attributes and highest ambitions. The Columbus Downtown 2030 Plan recognizes the impact a vital downtown has on the lives of our citizens, residents, and businesses, as well as on our ability to attract and retain a talented workforce for generations to come.

Community matters, and we want to express our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who took the time to provide feedback on ways we can enhance our downtown. We also want to extend our appreciation to the consulting team of Sasaki, SB Friedman, and Storyboard for their expertise in developing our plan.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary K. Ferdon".

Mayor Mary Ferdon

Acknowledgments

This Strategic Plan is the result of contributions from thousands of community members who shared their time, input, and aspirations for the future of Columbus. Special acknowledgment is given to the following individuals and groups for their leadership and participation in the process.

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- Cynthia Boll, Commissioner
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- Jim Lienhoop, Commissioner
- Jason Major, Commissioner
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City of Columbus

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- Eric Frey, Executive Director of Administration
- Jacob Sipe, Community Development Director
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- Chris Bartels, City Councilor
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- Elaine Hilber, City Councilor
- Grace Kestler, City Councilor
- Frank Miller, City Councilor
- Jerone Wood, City Councilor

City Departments

- Columbus City Utilities
- Department of Parks and Recreation
- Department of Community Development
- City of Columbus – Bartholomew County Planning Department
- Department of Public Works
- Department of Engineering
- ColumBUS Transit

Community Organizations

- Bartholomew County Public Library
- Columbus Area Arts Council
- Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce
- Columbus Visitors Center
- Downtown Merchants Association
- Historic Downtown Neighborhood Alliance
- Office of Downtown Development

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Introduction

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We would like to see this community come to be the very best community of its size in the country.

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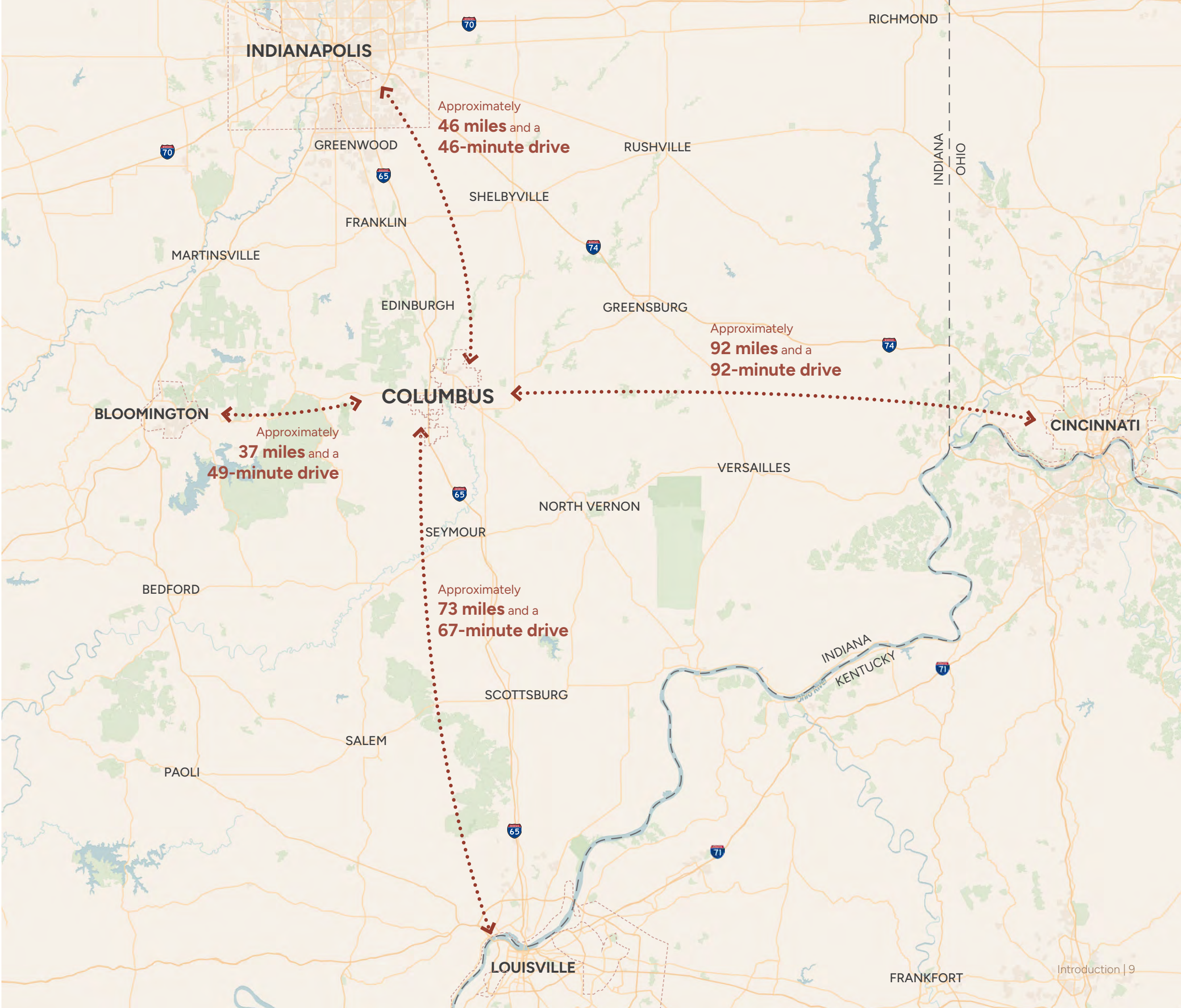
- J. Irwin Miller

Regional Context

Columbus Region

Columbus, Indiana is a community of approximately 50,000 people, located in south-central Indiana about 40 miles south of Indianapolis. The city is the urban center of Bartholomew County and is within an approximately 90-minute drive of Louisville to the south and Cincinnati to the east. Columbus serves as a regional economic and cultural hub, anchored by the presence of several manufacturing firms, including the headquarters of Cummins, Inc. The city balances industry with a strong commitment to design, community planning, and public art.

While modest in size, Columbus is internationally recognized for its modern architecture and design. Beginning in the mid-20th century, the Cummins Foundation, linked to the global engine manufacturer, began funding innovative public architecture. This initiative attracted renowned architects that draw architecture and design enthusiasts from around the world. In addition to architecture, Columbus offers a charming downtown, abundant parks, and a strong emphasis on community. This unique blend of innovation, culture, and small-town charm has earned Columbus a place on numerous lists of America’s best small cities and architectural destinations.



Downtown Study Area

The study area for the Columbus Downtown 2030 Strategic Plan is outlined in the plan. This area is defined by the Flatrock River and Mill Race Park to the west, the former wastewater treatment site south of Water Street to the south, Lafayette Avenue and a stretch of 2nd Street and its adjacent sites to the east, and 11th Street to the north. The street grid features prominent corridors such as Washington, Jackson, and Franklin Streets and includes a mix of civic, commercial, residential, and institutional uses.

This area contains Mill Race Park—a regional destination for recreation and events and a vital green asset adjacent to the urban center. The downtown street network is compact and walkable, with several

blocks featuring historic architecture, small businesses, and significant cultural landmarks. Key transportation access points include State Road 46 and U.S. 11 to the southwest and a variety of arterial connections into surrounding neighborhoods and commercial zones.

Given the proximity to the riverfront, major parks, and civic institutions, the area presents unique opportunities for enhancing pedestrian connectivity, promoting mixed-use development, preserving architectural heritage, and integrating sustainable design strategies. This Strategic Plan aims to reinforce downtown Columbus as a vibrant, resilient, and inclusive center for the community.

MILL RACE
PARK

Lindsey Street

Brown Street

8th Street

5th Street

4th Street

3rd Street

2nd Street

1st Street

Water Street

Jackson Street

Washington Street

Franklin Street

11th Street

Lafayette Avenue

FLATROCK RIVER

46

What Are We Planning For?

Planning Process

The Columbus Downtown 2030 Strategic Plan is an initiative of the Columbus Redevelopment Commission. The Commission issued an RFP for a planning consultant in July 2024 and ultimately selected the team of Sasaki, SB Friedman, and Storyboard to facilitate the planning process. The planning process was overseen and advised by a Guiding Team, composed of leaders from the City and organizations throughout Columbus. The team assembled in November 2024 and issued its final recommendations nine months later, in September 2025.

In initiating and leading this planning process, the Redevelopment Commission sought to recognize recent redevelopment efforts, incorporate current initiatives, and provide a clear, comprehensive strategy for continued advancement downtown. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 global pandemic, Downtown Columbus, like many downtowns across the country and the world, has seen sluggish progress in rates of daily workers and visitors returning downtown.

Priority Sites

While the Strategic Plan explores opportunities and makes recommendations for the entire downtown study area, the Redevelopment Commission identified a selection of sites throughout downtown for greater focus and more specific recommendations. These priority sites were identified as strong candidates for near-term reuse or redevelopment. Some sites host development already today, others are vacant, and still others are today components of downtown’s public realm.

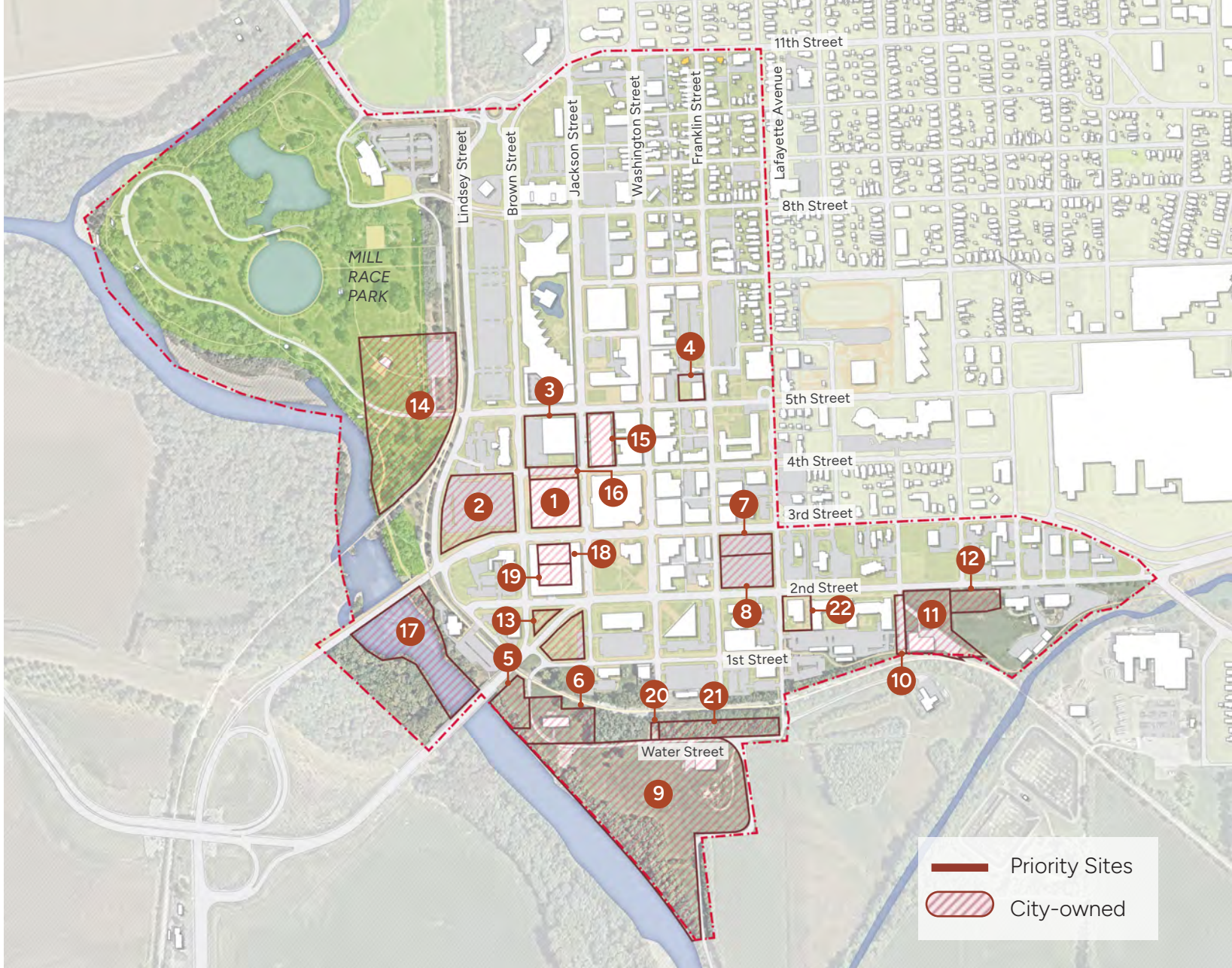
A subset of these sites are today owned by the City. This public ownership offers the chance for the City and community of Columbus to play a more proactive role in shaping the future of these sites and readying them for growth and further investment. Other sites, under private ownership, will be the focus of recommendations for enhancements or redevelopment as well as opportunities for support and partnership from downtown’s many stakeholders.

How do we build a downtown where people want to be?

How do we maximize the use of the spaces and places downtown?

What gaps do we have downtown, and how do we address those gaps?

Three big questions posed by the Columbus Redevelopment Commission in the July 2024 RFP for the Columbus Downtown 2030 Strategic Plan



Strategic Plan Priority Sites

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|---|
| 1 | Former Sears Building: 318 Brown Street | 13 | Downtown Entrance Plaza |
| 2 | Former Sears Parking Lot: 100 4th Street | 14 | Mill Race Park + Amphitheater |
| 3 | U.S. Post Office: 450 Jackson Street | 15 | Jackson Street Parking Garage: 401 Jackson Street |
| 4 | Irwin Block: 440 5th Street | 16 | 4th Street Entertainment Corridor |
| 5 | Water Street Properties: 327 Water Street + 15 Brown Street | 17 | Riverfront Development Project |
| 6 | | 18 | Second Street Parking Garage: 203 3rd Street + 200 Jackson Street |
| 7 | 2nd + 3rd Streets Parking Lot: | 19 | |
| 8 | 215 Franklin Street | 20 | Washington Street Terminus |
| 9 | Water Street Site: 327 Water Street | 21 | Corner of Water + Lafayette Street |
| 10 | 2nd Street Property Easement | 22 | 2nd Street Retail Building: 725 2nd Street |
| 11 | 2nd Street Property (Former REMC Building) | | |
| 12 | 2nd Street Property (Former Gas Station) | | |

Columbus Planning Context

Columbus is a community with a long legacy of thoughtful and proactive planning. Over the past several years, the city has undertaken a coordinated series of studies, plans, and assessments that have laid a strong foundation for the next generation of downtown and community development. These initiatives reflect a continued commitment to thoughtful urban design, inclusive growth, and public engagement, reinforcing Columbus’ legacy as a nationally recognized leader in city planning and architectural excellence.

Recent efforts have focused on enhancing the physical and experiential connections between key civic assets, public spaces, neighborhoods, and corridors. Significant work is underway to re-imagine downtown’s primary arrival point at State Road 46, where the city is redesigning its central entrance plaza to better reflect Columbus’ identity while improving safety, accessibility, and visual coherence. At the same time, investments along key corridors such as 2nd Street are reshaping major thoroughfares to be more pedestrian-friendly, better connected to adjacent neighborhoods and development sites, and prepared for long-term growth.

The city continues to leverage the unique natural setting of the Flatrock and White Rivers, with renewed focus on improving access and visibility to the riverfront, enhancing safety, and restoring ecological function through initiatives like the “Our River... Our Riverfront” project. Together, these investments build stronger physical and visual links between the core and surrounding parklands.

New mixed-use developments, such as The Taylor and projects at 6th and Washington Streets and 11th and Washington Streets, are introducing hundreds of new residential units and commercial spaces downtown, helping to meet rising demand for urban living while supporting walkability and economic vitality. Complementary studies, including a comprehensive housing needs assessment, are informing how Columbus can expand housing options across income levels while preserving affordability and supporting an inclusive community.

Together, these efforts represent a strategic and values-driven framework for future investment and growth. They position Columbus to build on its legacy while responding to new opportunities and challenges with clarity, creativity, and community vision.



BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PLAN

Adopted in April 2022, Columbus’ City of Columbus Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan presents a long-range vision for expanding and enhancing mobility through safe, inclusive infrastructure. Building on the People Trail network—over 30 miles of low-stress shared-use paths that connect parks, schools, neighborhoods, and iconic architecture—the plan integrates these trails into a broader citywide network of sidewalks, bike lanes, and pedestrian crossings. Emphasizing equity and accessibility, it recommends protected and buffered bike lanes, pedestrian improvements in under-served neighborhoods, and wayfinding signage throughout the trail system.



COLUMBUS HOUSING STUDY

Completed in late 2024, the city’s first housing study in over a decade identified a need for about 300 new housing units per year through 2035, spanning affordable, mid-range, downsizing, and higher-income segments. The process combined analysis of demographic, census, property databases, and building data with robust community input via open houses and surveys. Based on seven guiding goals, the study recommends targeted strategies including expanding affordable home production (e.g. single-family infill under \$250K), supporting adaptive reuse, and incentivizing varied housing types to meet evolving demand. The study serves as a roadmap for guiding policy, grant applications, and developer engagement.

ENVISION COLUMBUS

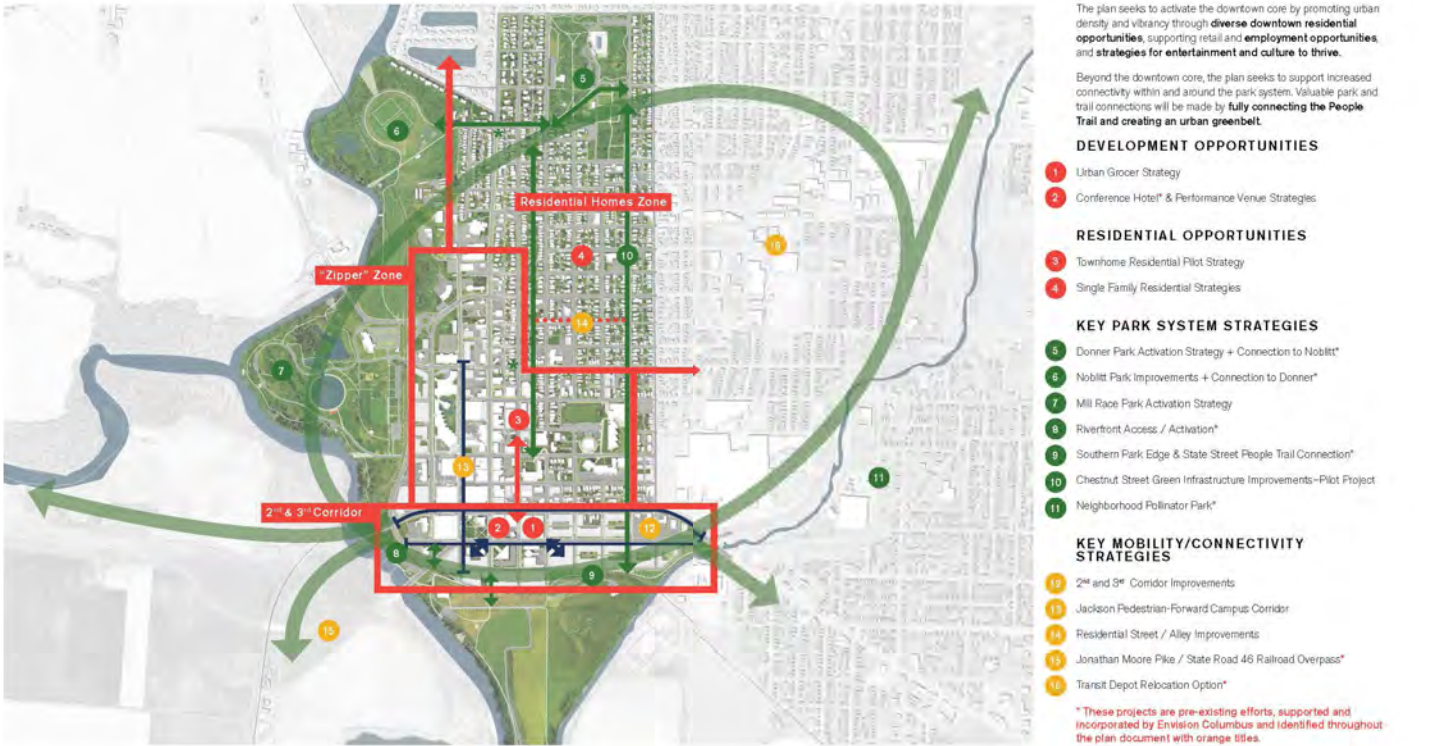


Completed in 2018, Envision Columbus laid out a vision for the future of Downtown Columbus and its surrounding neighborhoods. Led by the Heritage Fund, the plan sought to guide growth and reinvestment through a framework grounded in equity, livability, and design excellence. It focused on strengthening downtown as a regional hub—socially, culturally, and economically—through a mix of housing, public space improvements, mobility upgrades, and new community amenities.

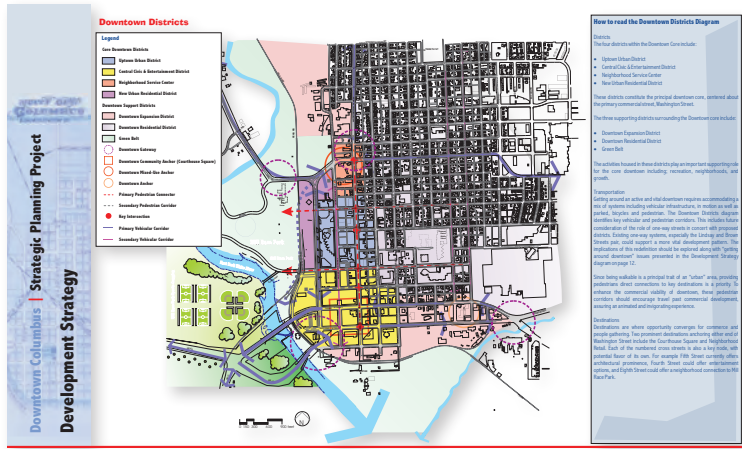
Key strategies included increasing housing diversity—particularly through “missing middle” infill like townhomes—and reinvesting in adjacent single-family neighborhoods to support affordability and neighborhood stability. The plan also called for a downtown grocery store and cultural venues to enhance access to services and stimulate daily activity. Expanded trail connections and new public spaces were envisioned to improve connectivity between downtown and major parks such as Mill Race, Noblitt, and Donner. To support a more walkable urban core, Envision Columbus recommended reconfiguring key corridors, converting one-way streets, and prioritizing pedestrian safety.

While the plan was ambitious and well-received, its implementation was significantly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis altered downtown activity patterns, slowed development momentum, and shifted public priorities. Remote work, changing retail dynamics, and new health-related considerations complicated efforts to advance some of the plan’s recommendations, particularly those tied to office- and foot traffic-dependent development. Projects like the urban grocer and cultural venue concepts faced new feasibility challenges under evolving economic conditions.

Nonetheless, several foundational efforts rooted in Envision Columbus have moved forward. The Taylor—a mixed-use development with housing and a planned grocery space—broke ground in 2022. The plan’s emphasis on housing diversity informed the city’s recent Housing Study and new residential projects along key corridors. Public realm goals have shaped follow-up initiatives, including the redesign of the downtown gateway plaza and riverfront activation plans.

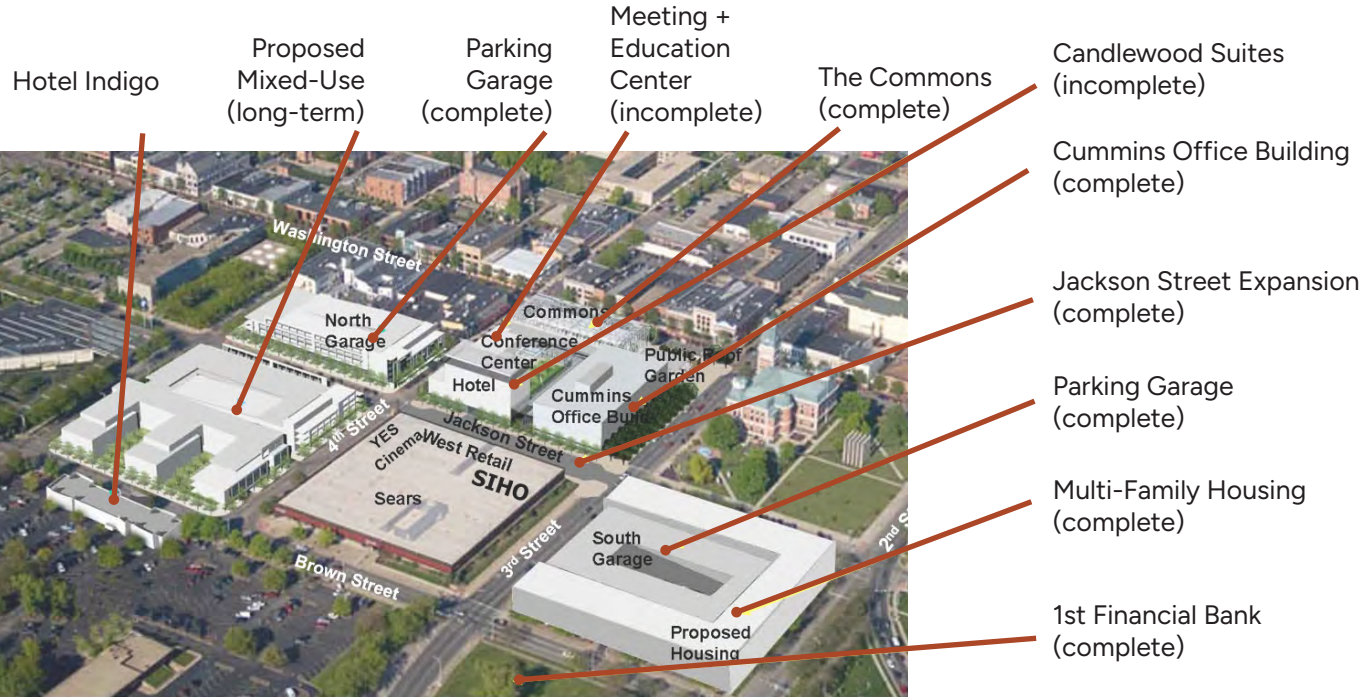


Envision Columbus overall framework plan



VISION 2020

Vision 2020 was a community-driven strategic plan for Columbus, Indiana, launched in 2005 to guide the city's long-term development across key areas such as economic growth, education, health, and quality of life. It emphasized collaboration among civic institutions, businesses, and residents to enhance Columbus' competitiveness and livability. Key initiatives included downtown revitalization, talent attraction, workforce development, and improved public health outcomes. Vision 2020 also championed design excellence and sustainability, reinforcing the city's national reputation for innovative planning. The plan served as a foundation for subsequent efforts, including Envision Columbus and ongoing downtown and neighborhood initiatives.



PARKING STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS (2022 UPDATE)

The City conducted a downtown parking assessment and plan in 2013. That study was updated in 2022 with refreshed counts and implementation guidance for still-relevant and updated recommendations. The study recommends implementing moderate paid parking in Columbus' downtown core to improve availability, supported by modern kiosks and mobile apps. It proposes consolidating employee permits into a three-tier system, enhancing wayfinding signage, and expanding pedestrian, bicycle, and transit infrastructure. New recommendations include

digital parking validation, shared parking via mobile pay, and flexible curbside use. For events, the study suggests pre-paid parking and bike valet services. The study suggests that enforcement should prioritize compliance over revenue, with a focus on education and fairness to support downtown recovery and improve user experience post-COVID.

COLUMBUS ARTS & CULTURE FEASIBILITY STUDY (2024)

The Columbus Arts & Culture Feasibility Study found strong community interest in local performing arts, though current venues are underutilized due to coordination and cost challenges. While building a new venue or renovating the historic Crump Theatre is possible, both options require significant capital and ongoing subsidy. The study recommends first investing in non-venue strategies—such as supporting programming, coordination, and better use of existing spaces—to quickly enhance arts access and test demand. This phased approach enables immediate community impact and helps inform future decisions about major capital investments in new or renovated performance venues.

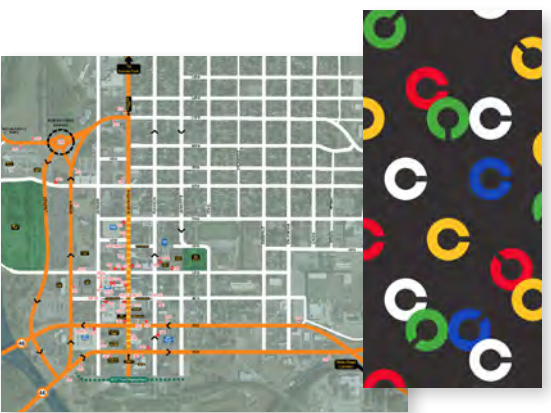
CONFERENCE/HOTEL STUDY UPDATE (2022)

The updated study recommends a 150-room, full-service conference hotel in downtown Columbus, Indiana, featuring 15,000 square feet of meeting space, a rooftop event area, outdoor patio, and extensive F&B amenities. The preferred location is a site near The Taylor development. Strong demand from corporate and group segments supports the project, with projected stabilized occupancy of 79% and ADR beginning at \$163. The hotel is expected to generate \$804 million in new spending, 316 jobs, and \$22 million in tax revenue over 20 years. A public subsidy of approximately \$11.8 million is required to bridge the financing gap.



RIVERFRONT PROJECT

Columbus is advancing its "Our River...Our Riverfront" initiative to revitalize the Flatrock Riverfront downtown. After recently scaling back costly in-river recreation features, the City refocused on key priorities including, removing the low-head dam, stabilizing riverbanks, and extending the People Trail to better connect Mill Race Park and downtown. Funding combines \$11.5 million in TIF, \$5.6 million in READI funds, and state and private grants. Initial west bank stabilization and site preparation began in early 2025, and contractors were awarded an \$11.8 million contract for east bank improvements. Construction now underway emphasizes safety, access, and community gathering spaces.



CITY WAYFINDING

Led by the Columbus Visitors Center, a wayfinding plan and system design is underway for downtown Columbus. Planning and design work had begun at the commencement of this plan and paused to dovetail efforts with recommendation from the Downtown Strategic Plan. The wayfinding plan establishes a graphic system for downtown and proposes specific locations and wayfinding content for production and installation. Recommendations of this plan are aimed at informing that study and the eventual recommendations and designs that result from it.

A Plan Shaped by Community Input

Columbus is a city of highly engaged community members. Here, projects are undertaken in “the Columbus way”—meaning thoughtfully, with an orientation toward solutions, and collaboratively as a community. The Columbus Downtown 2030 Community Plan is no exception. Over the course of ten months, the planning team engaged with thousands of downtown stakeholders and community members through a multi-faceted in-person and online engagement campaign.

Hundreds of community members showed up to two community workshops to engage in dialogue with their fellow community members and express their observations of and priorities for the future of downtown. The first of these two events focused on understanding community experiences with, perceptions of, and aspirations for Downtown Columbus. Community members engaged with a large downtown map to identify areas that they loved, areas they considered full of opportunity for change, and areas that were not great or problematic today. Participants also completed event passports that asked them to provide more information about their experience with downtown before engaging in tabletop discussions with their neighbors about their ideas and desires for downtown.

The second community workshop, hosted in the middle of the project, reported to community members major themes of the first phase of engagement and findings from the market study conducted as part of the Strategic Planning process. At this event, community members came together to play a custom-designed board game that asked them to grapple with the opportunities and challenges associated with siting new development and investment downtown, concentrating activity to create critical mass, and understanding the catalytic effects of growth on the market.

Community members also had the opportunity to contribute their perspectives, ideas, and priorities via a series of online tools. These included a dedicated project website packed with resources and up-to-date information on upcoming events and milestones, two online surveys, and an online comment form for communicating directly with the planning team.

Over the course of the project, hundreds more community members and leaders participated in focus group interviews, one-on-one discussions, and community meetings. These more focused conversations with community groups and subject matter experts enabled the planning team to dive deeper into key topics and issues addressed by the plan and learn about past and ongoing efforts across multiple organizations and levels and departments of government. These smaller sessions enabled the planning team to develop a better understanding of how various public, private, and non-profit entities across the city and the region were working together on a great many initiatives to improve downtown and the community more largely.

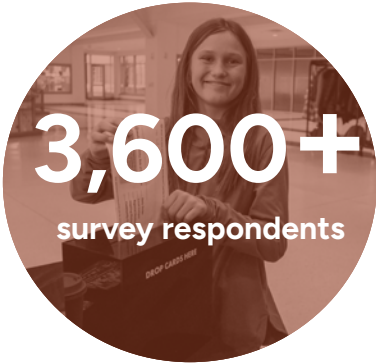
The planning team also sought to encounter community members as they went about their lives in Columbus to inform them about the plan and hear their unique points of view. The team participated in several community events with a pop-up booth promoting the planning process and opportunities to get involved. A diverse group of community members were also interviewed and asked to share their stories of downtown and its role in their personal, familial, or business experience in the city.



Photo Credit: Hadley Fruits



Photo Credit: Hadley Fruits



State of Downtown



Downtown Columbus

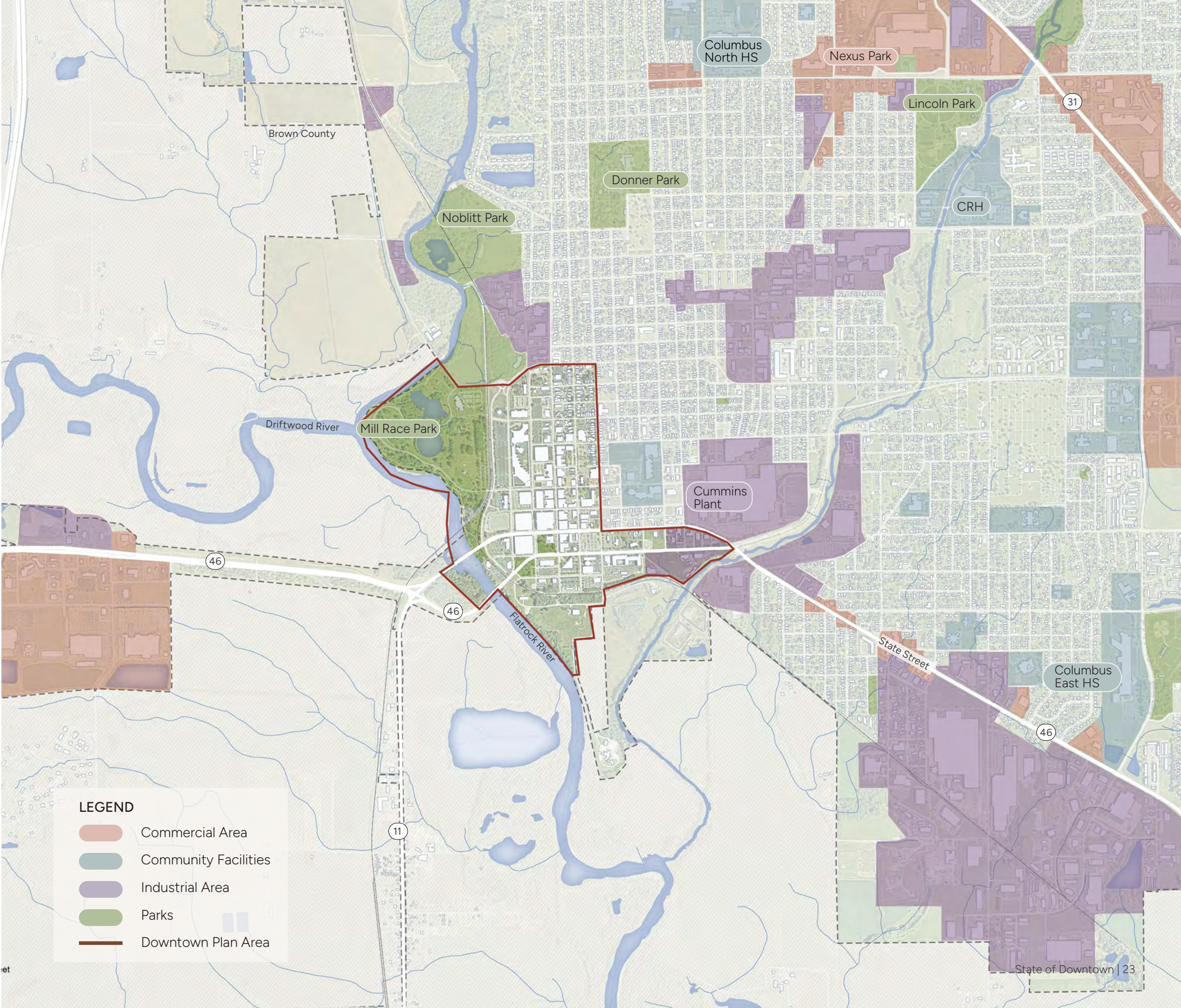
Introduction

Downtown Columbus is a place of convergence—where history, design, and community ambition meet. Before charting a course for its future, it's essential to first understand the conditions that define it today. This chapter provides a snapshot of the downtown's existing context, including market dynamics, population trends, key destinations, urban character, mobility systems, and visitor activity. Together, these elements shape how people experience and interact with downtown Columbus.

The downtown area reflects both the strengths and challenges of a small, design-rich Midwestern city. Known for its world-renowned architecture and strong civic identity—often referred to as “the Columbus way”—the city benefits from high levels of community investment and a culture of public-private collaboration. Anchored by institutions like City Hall, the Commons, Mill Race Park, and Cummins’ global headquarters, downtown serves as both the civic and cultural heart of the city. But like many downtowns across the country, it faces pressures from shifting demographics, evolving retail trends, and increased demand for walkability, housing options, and multimodal access.

Population growth in Bartholomew County has remained steady, but the composition and expectations of downtown users—residents, workers, students, and visitors—are changing. These shifts are influencing how space is used, what services are needed, and how infrastructure must adapt. The market conditions reflect these changes as well, with growing interest in mixed-use development, expanded retail offerings, and enhanced public realm experiences.

This chapter assembles baseline data, community perspectives, and spatial analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of where downtown Columbus stands today. It is both a reference point and a foundation for planning—ensuring that future strategies are rooted in the real, lived conditions of a downtown with deep character, great potential, and a proud tradition of thoughtful progress.



Downtown Today

Downtown Columbus is a destination for a wide range of people coming from around the community and around the world. It is a neighborhood, an employment center, a community hub, and a tourist destination. Understanding the size and behavior of these populations is essential to understanding how downtown works today and what opportunities exist to achieve the goals of this Strategic Plan.

Living

Downtown Columbus is home to 951 residents, accounting for just 1.8% of the city's total residential population. There are currently 420 housing units in the downtown area, indicating a relatively modest residential presence. This data highlights the opportunity to grow downtown's residential base, especially given national trends toward urban living and walkable neighborhoods. More housing could support local businesses, increase street-level activity, and contribute to a more vibrant and inclusive urban core.



Visiting

Downtown Columbus is a regional, national, and even global destination, primarily due to its renowned architecture and design legacy. Visitors are drawn to the area to experience world-class modernist buildings, art installations, and public spaces. In addition, the food and beverage scene—which includes restaurants, cafes, and bars—adds to downtown's appeal as a leisure destination for both locals and visitors. Downtown's hospitality options are limited, with one hotel and a small bed and breakfast. These venues support a modest amount of overnight tourism and business travel. Visitation plays a crucial role in the local economy, offering additional opportunities to enhance the visitor experience and connect tourism with broader community goals.



Gathering

Downtown also serves as a civic and cultural gathering space for the broader community. Key gathering places include Mill Race Park, which hosts large events throughout the year; community institutions, such as churches, libraries, and public service organizations; and entertainment venues that provide nightlife and cultural programming. This mix of gathering spaces contributes to the social and civic vitality of downtown, reinforcing its role as a center of community life. Maintaining, celebrating, and building upon these amenities and the foot traffic they bring downtown are important opportunities to enhance the experience of Downtown Columbus.



Working

Downtown Columbus plays an outsized role in the city's employment landscape. It contains approximately 1.5 million square feet of office space and 416,000 square feet of retail and commercial space. These spaces support around 13,000 jobs, which is 29.2% of the city's total employment—a significant concentration given the relatively small geographic footprint of downtown. This concentration of jobs speaks to downtown's importance as an economic engine and center for professional services, retail, and business activity. It also underscores the importance of mobility, access, and amenities that support a large daytime workforce.



Transportation

Columbus is a driving city. While opportunities exist to get and move through downtown via transit (ColumBUS), biking, and walking, 97% of survey respondents told the planning team that driving is their primary means of getting downtown. While some streets provide slow, intentional, and high-performing multimodal experiences (e.g. Washington Street, 4th Street), others focus on the experience of driving through downtown at the cost of pedestrian safety and comfort. The experience of Columbus' streets and gateways are central to the experience of downtown. As such, planning for the future of downtown will require a comprehensive review of and improvements to key corridors and modes of accessing downtown.



Conclusion

Together, the populations that live, work, gather, and visit downtown Columbus form an interconnected system that defines its identity and function. The data presented in this snapshot illustrate both the strength and potential of downtown as a mixed-use environment. With relatively low residential density but high employment and visitation, the area is well-positioned for strategic investment that builds on its architectural heritage and civic culture while welcoming new residents, businesses, and public life.



Observations of Downtown Today

In the first phase of community engagement as part of the Strategic Planning process, the planning team asked community members about their observations and experiences with downtown. Community feedback revealed a considered mix of appreciation and aspiration. Residents recognize downtown’s strengths—particularly its architectural character and family-friendly environment—but also express a desire for more vibrancy, cohesion, and opportunity for connection.

A common theme is the feeling that downtown is good, but not great. While it offers some of the conveniences and attractions of a vibrant downtown, many note it lacks intentionality and could benefit from a clearer sense of identity. Architecture remains a valued asset, and community events are a major draw, with several residents saying they find joy in the moments when downtown comes alive. However, these moments are seen as episodic rather than consistent.

Several observations highlight concerns about downtown’s limited activity outside of business hours. Descriptions

such as “empty after 7 p.m.” and a lack of young adult presence suggest that the area is not fulfilling its potential as a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood. There’s also frustration about the prevalence of offices at street level and not enough engaging public or commercial spaces to invite gathering, leisure, or casual exploration.

Participants call for greater vitality and diversity—in both businesses and programming. While downtown merchants work hard to attract foot traffic, the current mix of storefronts and offerings is seen as insufficient to sustain consistent engagement.

Overall, the community believes in downtown Columbus’ potential. There’s recognition that it has grown and evolved over the years, but many feel there is still “plenty of opportunity to turn it into an economic and cultural hub”—especially in the post-pandemic environment. The desire is not just for more amenities or businesses, but for a more intentional, welcoming, and energized downtown that reflects the creativity and civic pride of the wider community.



“It’s good, not great. Close to being cohesive, but not here. Doesn’t feel intentional.”

“We need more vitality—diversity of business/store fronts. Downtown merchants work hard to create events to bring people downtown.”

“Empty after 7 pm, not many young people, but kid friendly.”

“Downtown has definitely grown and evolved in recent decades, but there is still plenty opportunity to turn it into an economic and cultural hub.”



“It is a neat downtown with our architecture. Sometimes it is pretty quiet. I find that people find a lot of joy coming downtown for community events.”



Getting Downtown

Transportation + Traffic

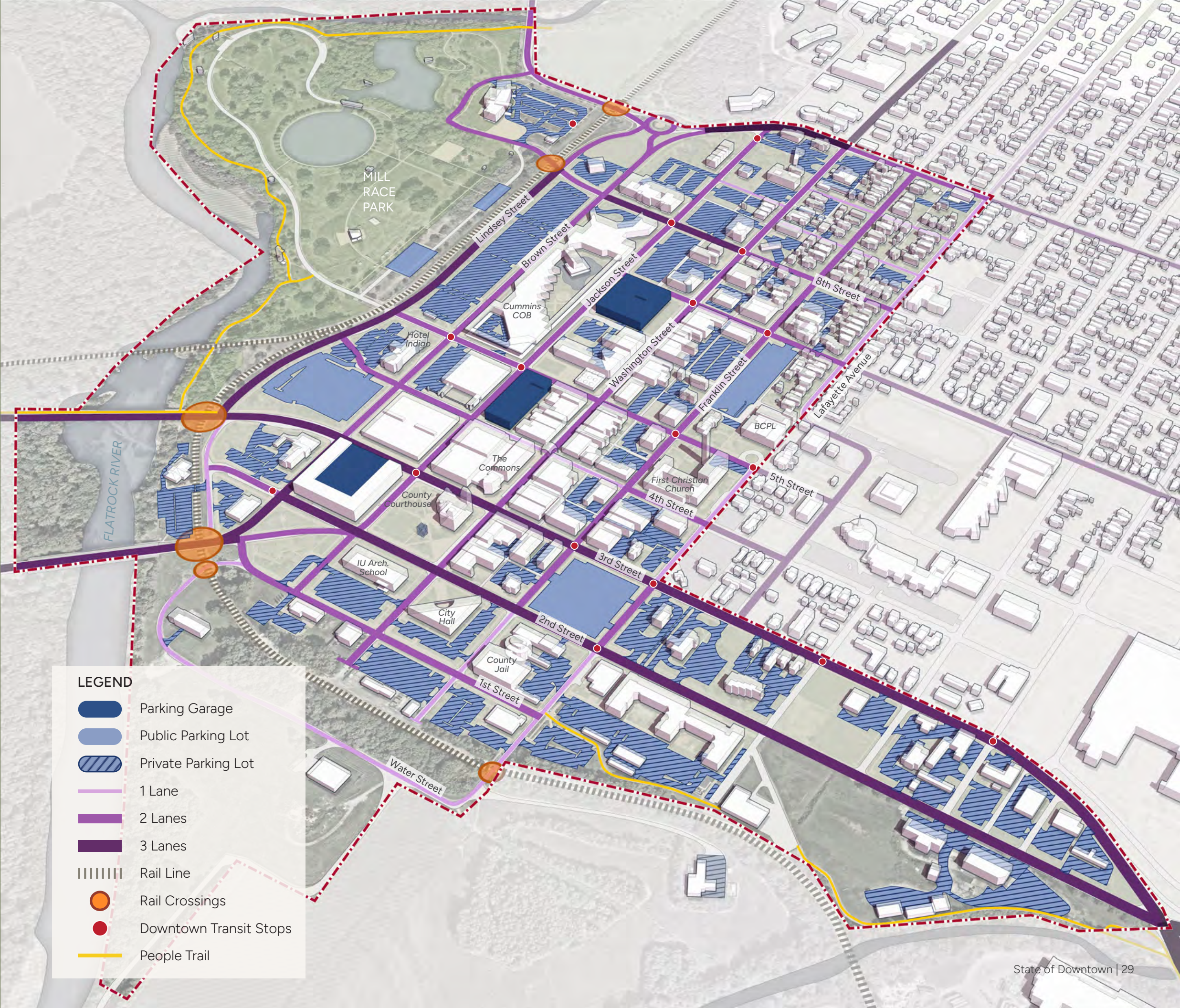
Today, whether arriving from afar or within the community, the vast majority of people access Downtown Columbus via car. When asked in a survey how they primarily accessed downtown, a whopping 97% of respondents (a vast majority of whom were themselves locals) answered driving.

The primary routes into and out of downtown include Washington Street, which stretches from the southern end of downtown almost to the airport, near the northern boundary of the city and two one-way couplets—one stretching east-west and the other north-south. 2nd and 3rd streets are the one-way pair from the east and west, providing access to and from I-65, approximately two miles west of downtown. Brown and Lindsey Streets are the two-way pair connecting downtown from the north, where Indianapolis Road and 11th Street connect to provide access from the interstate and northern communities and Columbus' western neighborhoods, respectively.

While Washington Street provides a single lane of traffic in each direction, the others provide three and in some cases, four lanes of traffic in each direction, making them the most auto-intensive corridors within downtown. This results in a condition where these one-way streets serve as both primary connections to downtown and primary barriers to pedestrians within downtown.

The rest of the downtown street network primarily consists of two-lane, bidirectional streets, some of which feature street parking and some of which do not. There is no dedicated bicycle infrastructure on streets downtown, though branded bike racks can be found throughout downtown and the rest of Columbus. All of downtown streets offer sidewalks within the right-of-way. The sidewalk network extends northward for about half a mile beyond the study area's north boundary, within the city's historic core, but it quickly becomes more sporadic and fades entirely thereafter, while neighborhoods to the west lose sidewalks beyond Central Avenue, for the most part.

Downtown Columbus is connected to the Columbus People Trail—a regional multi-use trail that extends to the north, west, and northeast of downtown. The single gap in this regional system exists downtown, where the eastern and combined northern and western segments of the trail fail to connect through the southern portion of downtown.



Living Downtown

Housing + Amenities

Downtown is a modest but growing residential neighborhood with a diversity of unit types, including single family, duplex, townhomes, multifamily, and mixed-use multifamily developments. Approximately 950 people call downtown home in 2025. They live in some of the city's most historic homes and neighborhoods and some of the city's newest and most dense developments. This population represents only about 1.8% of the city's total population, making it proportionally equal to the land area of downtown relative to the rest of the city (1.8%). This is a lower proportion of the residential population living downtown than is found in most cities.

With the exception of dozens of largely single family homes in the Columbus Historic District in the northeast corner of downtown, residential living downtown is a relatively new option in Columbus. Over eighty percent of downtown's 420 units are contained in just two multifamily buildings—The Cole and The Taylor—each of which was built in the last 12 years, with the latter containing 200 units opening in 2022. Two additional multifamily buildings are in the development pipeline, both of which will be located along Washington Street, at the intersections with 6th Street and 11th Street. These two mixed-use developments will increase the residential unit count downtown by 40%, adding an additional 170 units.

Downtown's residential population is supported with amenities like recreation destinations, restaurants, cafes, and some specialty shopping but with very few daily needs like a grocery store, convenience retail, or a pharmacy. Downtown residents today must either order these items for delivery or drive a few miles out of downtown to access these essentials.

951 residents

420 housing units

1.8% of the city's residential population



LEGEND

- Multi-Family
- Single-Family
- Daily Needs
- Community Resource

Working Downtown

Commercial + Office

Downtown is Columbus’ largest employment center, with over 13,000 jobs across multiple sectors accounting for over 29% of all Columbus-based jobs. This includes office workers at corporations like Cummins, public employees at City Hall and the county courthouse, jail, and library, and workers at individual businesses including restaurants, retail shops, hotels, and personal/professional service firms.

Most of these jobs are concentrated within two blocks on either side of Washington Street and the vast majority of downtown’s restaurants and retail shops are either along Washington Street or within one block of Washington on perpendicular streets.

While downtown accounts for a significant number of the city’s jobs, the number of people coming downtown for work has dropped dramatically since the COVID-19 pandemic. Analysis with Placer.ai, a cell phone data analytics service, shows that visitation for work has dropped 42% between 2019 and 2024, when counting average weekly employees over the course of each year. This significant drop, which largely reflects lingering changes in remote and hybrid work patterns since the pandemic, has had a significant impact on foot-traffic downtown and the ability of downtown vendors to do sustainable business.

- 1.5M SF office space
- 416K SF retail/commercial space
- 13,000 jobs downtown
- 29.2% of the city’s jobs



Gathering Downtown

Community + Events

Downtown offers a variety of public spaces and community facilities that serve as gathering places for residents, workers, and visitors. Civic spaces such as the Commons provide a central hub for concerts, festivals, and casual recreation—attracting people of all ages throughout the year. Nearby plazas, small parks, and landscaped streetscapes offer informal meeting spots, from lunchtime breaks to evening socializing. Public art, architectural landmarks, and cultural venues—including the library, arts center, and museums—draw both planned audiences and spontaneous passersby, fostering a sense of shared identity and pride.

Community facilities play a vital role in supporting social connection and engagement. The library offers not only books but also meeting rooms, educational programming, and a platform for diverse community events and art installations at its 5th Street plaza. Churches, event halls, and recreational facilities host gatherings ranging from neighborhood meetings to citywide celebrations. Seasonal events, farmers markets, and cultural festivals further animate the downtown, with Mill Race Park serving as a primary destination for local and regional events.

These gathering spaces—whether large programmed venues or small informal nodes—contribute to the vibrancy of downtown life. They create opportunities for interaction, strengthen community bonds, and support a welcoming atmosphere that encourages people to return, linger, and participate in shared experiences.



Visiting Downtown

Destinations + Attractions

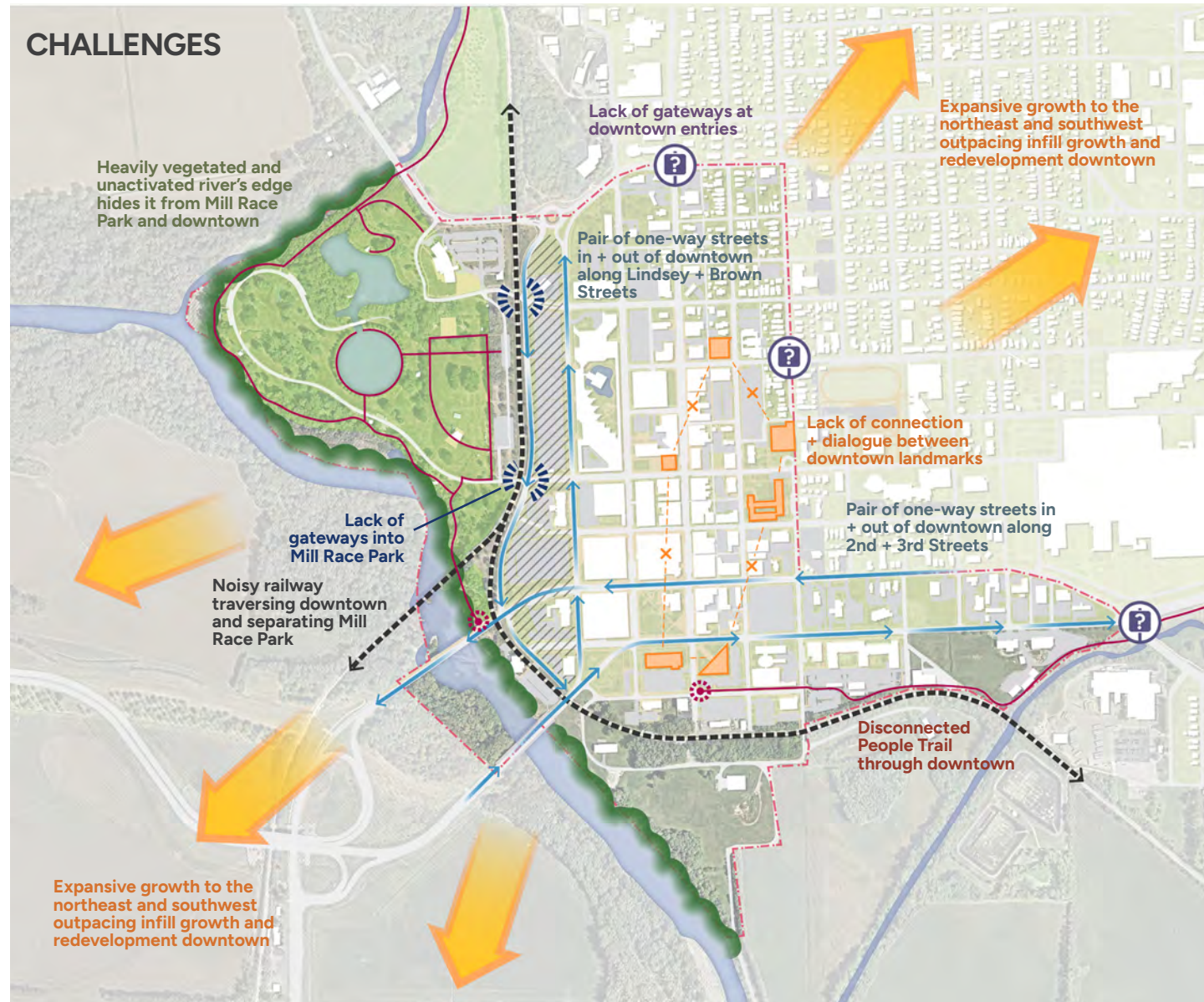
Visitation to Downtown Columbus has shifted since the pandemic, with patterns showing both resilience and areas for recovery. Between 2019 and 2023, average daily visitor counts (excluding residents and employees) declined by about 15%, recovering to roughly 85% of pre-pandemic levels. In contrast, resident visits increased by 55%, reflecting a growing downtown residential population, while employee visits dropped by around 40%, largely due to remote work. Weekends have been more resilient, with Saturday and Sunday visitation down only 4% and 12%, respectively, compared to sharper weekday declines.

Major attractions—Mill Race Park, The Commons, and the Columbus Visitors Center—continue to anchor tourism and day trips. Events like Exhibit Columbus, the Festival of Lights, and 6th Street Arts Alley draw substantial crowds, and programmed activities in Mill Race Park often lead a share of attendees into the downtown core. However, the park’s physical separation from main commercial areas limits cross-traffic.

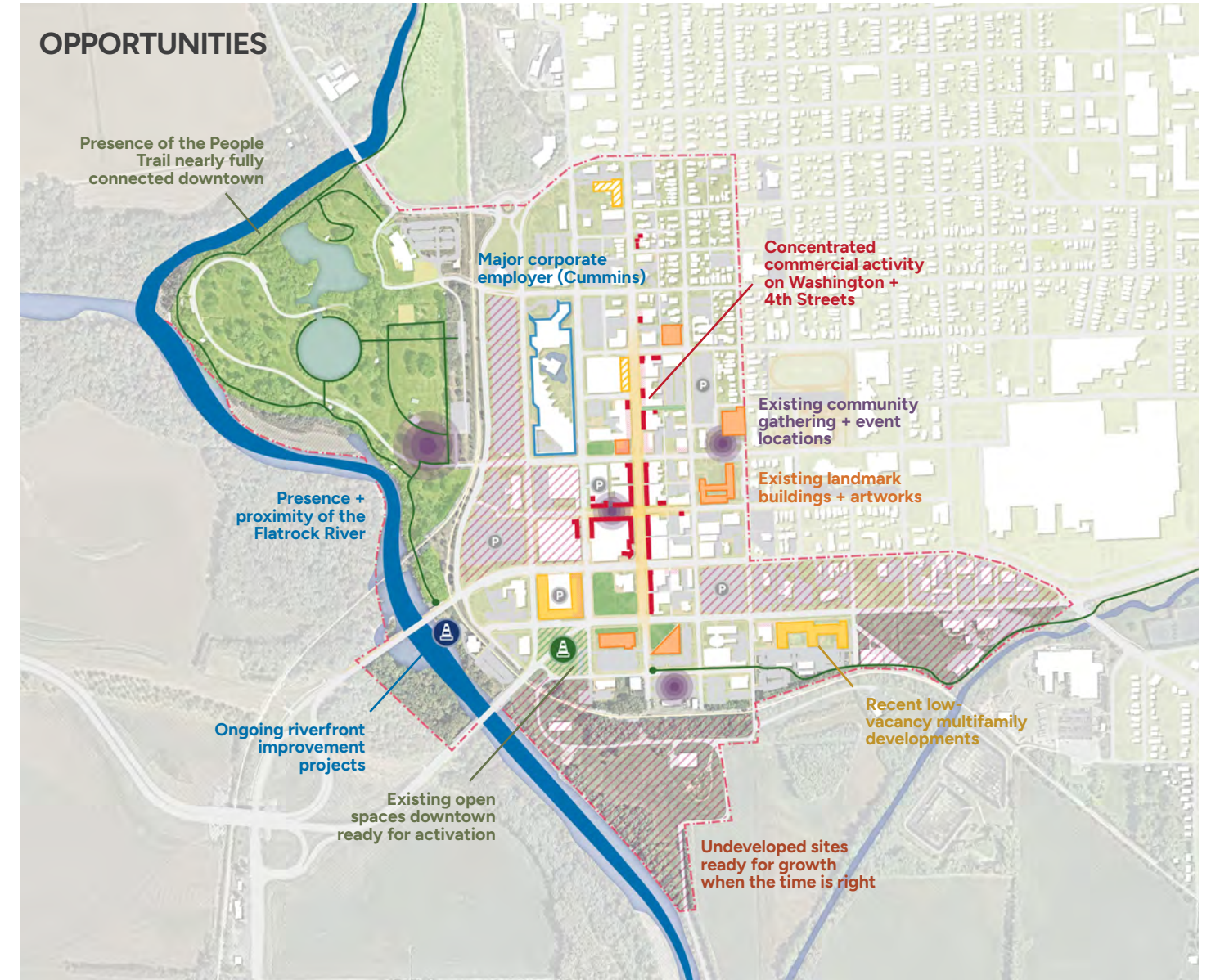
Overall, while total visitor numbers remain slightly below pre-pandemic peaks, downtown maintains a steady stream of tourists and regional visitors, supported by signature events, cultural assets, and public spaces. Strengthening connections between attractions, expanding year-round programming, and enhancing walkability could further boost visitation.



Opportunities + Challenges



As downtown becomes more of a destination for residents, workers, and visitors, key challenges identified in this strategic planning process will need to be addressed. Today, significant barriers like the railway and fast-moving vehicular traffic separate downtown from Mill Race Park and the Flatrock Riverfront. Community members complain that parking downtown is a challenge, due to a lack of parking visibility, coordination, and clarity around what and where parking opportunities exist. These and other challenges present opportunities for growth and improvement within downtown.



Downtown Columbus, as it is today, makes for a strong foundation for future growth. Downtown's historic charm, design legacy, and present-day role in people's lives as a home, a workplace, and a destination for things to do cements its place as the heart of the city. Its combination of presently unmet market demand and underutilized sites gives it room to grow and increase the foot traffic and visitation that is necessary to sustain uses people want to see more of.

At the same time, downtown is one of many desirable neighborhoods and commercial centers where people and companies could go in Columbus. Downtown's best opportunity to capture more of the existing and future demand for housing, retail, and employment space and the people that come along with it is to ensure it provides a unique and compelling urban experience.

What's Next for Downtown?

Analysis Takeaways

Several themes emerged from the planning team's analysis and assessment of Downtown Columbus today. These themes resonate strongly with input from community members, downtown business owners, and those who lead programming and activation efforts downtown. These themes include:

Room to Grow: While downtown comprises some of the most historic and dense development in the city, there are plenty of undeveloped and under-developed sites that could be built-up to complete the built fabric of downtown and provide more opportunities for future residents and businesses downtown.

More than a Workplace: Following the global Covid-19 pandemic, the number of workers downtown on a daily basis has dropped and never fully recovered. With the future of full-time in-person work undetermined, downtown needs to become a destination for more than just employment.

Making the Market: Existing foot-traffic downtown is insufficient to sustain and attract new businesses. Increasing daytime and nighttime populations downtown and visits is essential to attracting and supporting the kinds of things Columbus community members want to see and do downtown.

Using What's Here: Downtown has several great venues for community gathering and events. Mill Race Park, the library plaza, 4th and Washington Streets, and several presently underutilized green and open spaces provide excellent venues for increased programming and activation that will bring more people downtown.

A Strong Identity: Columbus is a destination for tourists and students of great architecture, art, and design. Leaning into this identity with more programs, activities, branding, and promotional efforts focused on downtown and its collection of sites, buildings, and artworks can broaden its appeal and impact.



LEGEND

— Strategic Plan Priority Sites

Market Study

Market Study Methodology

The market study for the Strategic Plan employed a multi-faceted methodology to assess current conditions and future opportunities. The analysis began with an evaluation of the existing real estate market, examining supply, demand, and vacancy trends across key property types. Market pricing data—including rents, sale prices, and absorption rates—were compiled to understand the competitive position of downtown relative to other locations.

The study also reviewed recent and planned developments in and around downtown to assess momentum, competition, and potential synergies. Recent developments were analyzed to understand their financing gaps, highlighting where public or private interventions have been needed to realize projects downtown.

A peer city comparison was conducted to benchmark Columbus against similar communities, focusing on strategies and outcomes that could inform local decision-making. To ground the analysis in real-world experience, interviews were conducted with local and regional developers to gather insights on market

perceptions, barriers to investment, and opportunities for catalytic projects. Together, these components created a comprehensive picture of market dynamics, challenges, and possibilities, providing an informed foundation for strategic recommendations that align with downtown’s economic potential and community vision.

Growth Projections

Recent analyses conducted as part of the 2024 citywide housing study show that Columbus is expected to grow. The study projects strong population and household growth over the next 10–15 years, driving significant new housing demand. The city’s population is expected to increase by roughly 6,600 residents by 2035, adding about 2,900 new households. Growth will be fueled by continued employment expansion, in-migration of workers and families, and demographic shifts toward smaller households. Employment is forecast to grow by nearly 4,000 jobs, particularly in manufacturing, health care, and professional services, further reinforcing housing demand.

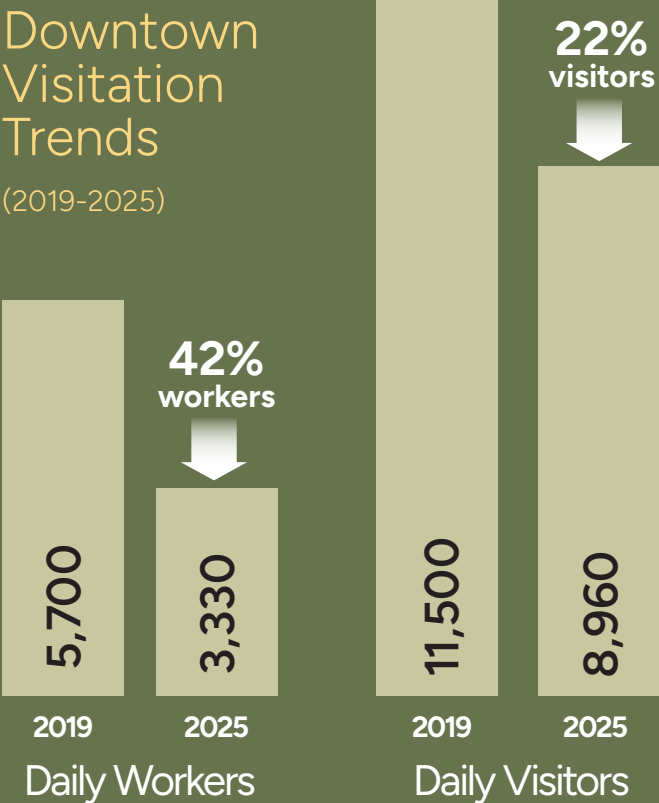
Housing needs will span a range of price points and types. The analysis estimates that Columbus will need approximately 3,740 additional housing units by 2035—about 2,200 owner-occupied and 1,540 rental units. This includes both market-rate and affordable options. Demand will be particularly strong for smaller units such as apartments and townhomes, reflecting growth in young professionals, empty-nesters, and single-person households. At the same time, there will remain steady demand for family-oriented single-family homes.

The study highlights a significant affordability gap: many households cannot afford newly built homes at current prices. The median sale price in Columbus has risen sharply in recent years, while wages have not kept pace. This gap is most acute for households earning below \$75,000 annually, indicating a need for targeted affordable housing strategies and mixed-income development.

Downtown Columbus is expected to capture a portion of this growth, especially in multifamily housing, which has seen strong absorption in recent years. Walkable, amenity-rich neighborhoods are projected to attract both younger residents and downsizing older adults.

Downtown Visitation Trends

(2019-2025)



Market Demand

The market study for Downtown Columbus finds that the area is a critical employment and cultural hub but is heavily weighted toward office space—over half of the city’s total—primarily tied to major employers like Cummins Inc. Since COVID-19, in-person employee visits have declined about 40% and visitor visits are down 15%. Events at Mill Race Park and within downtown attract significant activity, but the park is physically disconnected from the core. Columbus is growing in both population and employment, creating demand for more housing, retail, and services. Downtown’s relatively small number of households are mostly younger renters, with lower incomes than the citywide median.

Real estate analysis shows a weak market for speculative office development, though co-working may have potential. Multifamily demand is strong: 900+ units have been built citywide since 2015, 22% of them downtown, and new units have been quickly absorbed. The city needs over 940 new multifamily units by 2035, suggesting room for additional downtown projects beyond the 170 units currently in the pipeline. Hotel supply is concentrated near I-65, with one downtown property—Hotel Indigo—potentially expanding. New downtown hotels may be viable if they target niche markets. Retail in the city is dominated by suburban clusters, but downtown offers small-scale, walkable spaces. Near-term, new retail will likely backfill existing vacancies, while in the long term, a grocery store, restaurants, and entertainment uses could strengthen downtown’s appeal.

Peer city comparisons (Appleton, WI; Holland, MI; Wooster, OH; Staunton, VA) highlight that successful downtowns balance office space with greater shares of retail, residential, and hospitality, leverage historic assets, offer year-round programming, and enhance walkability. Many use riverfronts or public spaces as event anchors and close streets for festivals. Compared to peers, Downtown Columbus has more office and less retail/hotel space, suggesting a diversification opportunity.

The study concludes that Columbus should:

- Expand housing downtown, including varied residential types (townhomes, small- and large-scale multifamily).
- Support retail and entertainment that attracts both residents and visitors, with emphasis on food, beverage, and cultural venues.
- Increase year-round programming and events.
- Better connect Mill Race Park to the core, and explore activating the Flatrock River.
- Target specialized hotel markets if expanding beyond Hotel Indigo.
- Maintain office stability but consider flexible/co-working space rather than speculative builds



Office



- Context
- New office development has been limited *mostly built-to-suit)
 - Office market appears fairly weak for new office development
 - Some potential for co-working space



Multifamily Residential



- New projects have been absorbed quickly
- Over 200 units have been built downtown since 2015
- Downtown could accommodate more development beyond the current pipeline



Hotel



- Average daily rates have been strong since 2020 (despite occupancy still falling below pre-pandemic levels)
- Additional hotel development downtown could be feasible



Retail



- New retail development will first require increased visits downtown from all sources

Strategic Growth + Investment

Developing a plan for greater growth and bustle downtown requires a strategic approach to near-term investment that can spur and catalyze medium and longer term development and programming. Based on present and projected market conditions assessed as part of this Strategic Plan, some uses, such as housing, were identified as near-term opportunities to bring more people downtown, while others, like new retail, hotel, and office, are seen as longer-term targets, recognizing the lack of demand anticipated in the present and near future. Many of these uses identified for longer-term investment will likely see increased demand following the realization of shorter-term projects which will increase foot-traffic and spending capacity downtown.

Given the need for more housing citywide identified in the 2024 Housing Study and the strong demand for urban living options, housing development is the strongest near-term opportunity for growth downtown. Several sites downtown are well positioned for redevelopment with housing, following models established by the successful recent implementation of both The Cole and The Taylor. Siting new developments at a walkable distance to the core of downtown can bring hundreds of residents to downtown's streets and businesses on a regular basis. Alongside housing development, near-term opportunities to spur activity and increased visitation downtown include public realm improvements that focus on creating a comfortable and walkable environment, activations of existing public spaces, and enhanced programming that re-centers downtown as the civic and cultural heart of Columbus.

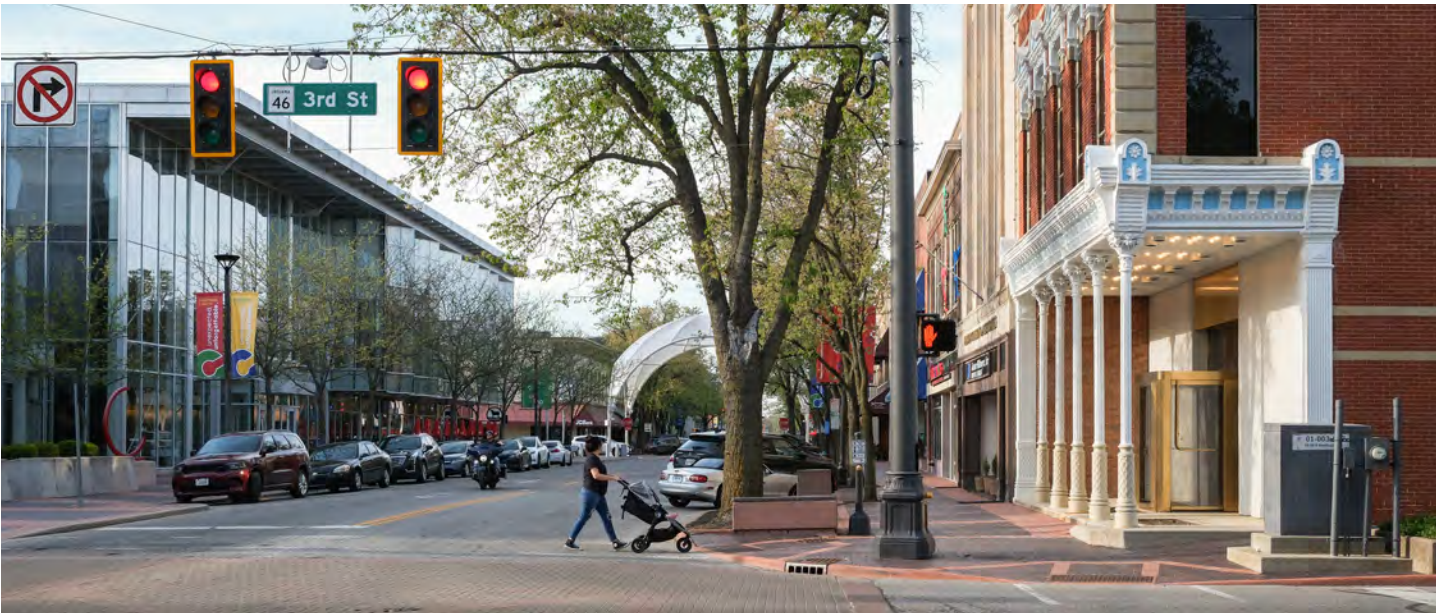
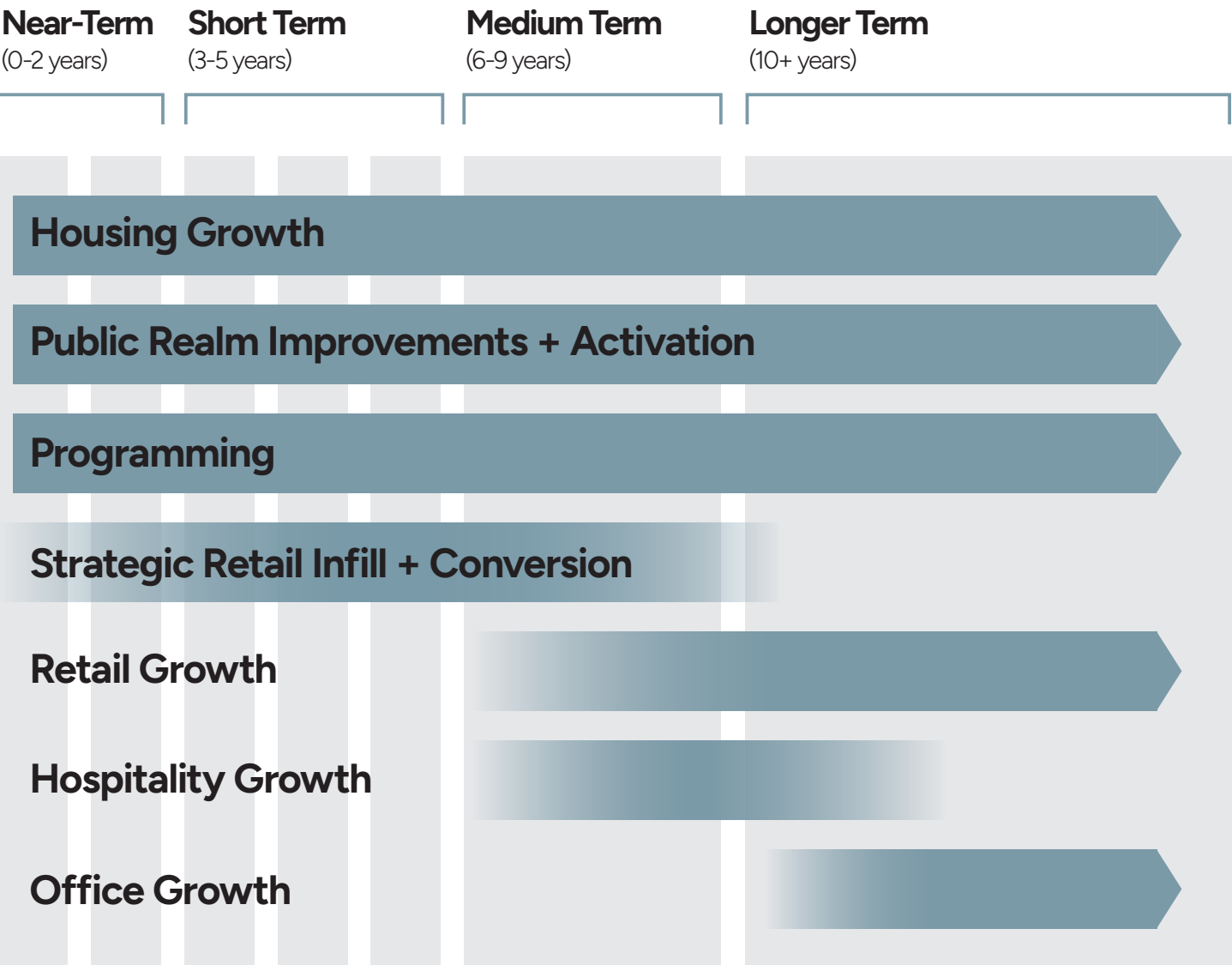
Presently, demand for more retail within downtown is fairly low. In the near- and short-terms, efforts to expand retail offerings should focus on infilling vacant storefronts on Washington Street and 4th Street. As downtown's residential, office, and event populations increase, new retail demand and venues may emerge in the medium and long-term.

The market study and prior analyses have identified demand for a new hotel and conference center downtown. While these uses may not be viable in the immediate or short terms, such a project could be viable in the medium-term, or sooner, should market conditions improve or earlier projects take shape and have positive effects downtown quickly.

Given the underutilization of existing office space downtown and uncertainty around the future role of office space in the post-pandemic period, demand for new office space is expected to be low through the medium-term. There is the potential of increased demand in the future as more companies revise work-from-home and hybrid work policies and as other uses grow downtown's appeal and offerings—but from the vantage point of today, new development of office space is considered a long-term potential.

	Residential	Employment
Trends	- Downtown's share of the citywide population is increasing. - From 2010 to 2024 Columbus grew 1.3%. Over the same period, Downtown Columbus grew 3.8% (average annual rate).	- Downtown Columbus accounted for approximately 89% of all job growth in the city from 2012 to 2022. - From 2012 to 2022 employment in Downtown Columbus grew by 3,310 jobs while employment elsewhere in Columbus grew by 400 jobs.
Projections	- The city's population is projected to grow from 52,416 to approximately 55,500 by 2030. - The city will need an additional 3,500 units in that time, of which approximately 940 could be multifamily units.	New entries into the downtown area are planned, but growth is slow and unpredictable.

Anticipated Viability of Growth in Downtown Columbus



Downtown Vision



Crafting a Plan

In embarking on this Strategic Planning process, the City of Columbus and Columbus Redevelopment Commission charged the planning team with crafting a plan that answers three questions:

- 1. How do we build a downtown where people want to be?
- 2. How do we maximize the use of the spaces and places downtown?
- 3. What gaps do we have downtown, and how do we address those gaps?

These questions and the recommendations that address them target strategic solutions and opportunities for growth and renewed investment in Downtown Columbus. The plan aims to express a compelling, aspirational vision for downtown that can be achieved within the next 5-10 years.

The planning team kicked off the strategic planning process working to understand the existing physical and

market conditions within and around downtown. These data, observations, and findings were discussed with city leaders and community members to understand their preferences and priorities for the future, as informed by practical opportunities and constraints.

From there, the planning team explored a variety of scenarios for the future of downtown, each of which considered different potential “big moves” that organized and clustered growth to achieve different outcomes. From there, the planning team and City/Commission leadership worked together to create a single unified downtown growth and development framework to guide investment and redevelopment efforts within the next ten years. Individual projects, improvements, and future uses were explored, discussed with the community, and detailed within this overall downtown framework.

The recommendations and vision detailed in this and subsequent chapters represents the culmination of this work and the strategic plan roadmap to achieving Columbus’ goals for downtown.



Strategic Plan Objectives

Enhancing downtown as a complete place and destination for locals and visitors alike requires focused investment across many layers of life and business. Working with city leaders and downtown stakeholders, the planning team crafted a set of objectives. These objectives establish overarching Strategic Plan guidance in response to planning goals articulated by the Redevelopment

Commission at the outset of the project, opportunities and constraints discovered through downtown analysis and the market study, and engagement with community members in Columbus. These objectives will be advanced by the individual projects described in plan recommendations.

Diversify downtown offerings to ensure multiple engines of growth and opportunity.

Downtown Columbus is home to a diverse range of businesses and destinations, but there is plenty of room to grow and diversify its offerings to appeal to more people, attract more foot-traffic, and better insulate downtown from market fluctuations and dynamics that may impact specific sectors or industries.

Focus energy and activation strategically downtown.

Creating a critical mass of energy and activity downtown requires clustering people and active uses to create a compelling and cohesive experience of downtown. Focusing investment, activation, programming, and growth within a downtown core can help create that critical mass.

Make downtown a vibrant residential neighborhood.

In prior decades, downtown was seen primarily as a commercial center, but as the role of downtowns evolves, Columbus should aim to be as great a neighborhood as it is a workplace. As downtown’s residential population grows, the City and its partners should focus on creating a supportive platform for a high quality of life downtown.

Improve connections between Downtown Columbus and its surrounding neighborhoods.

As new and enhanced destinations and programs emerge downtown, improvements to the experience of getting downtown can help better connect it to the daily lives of neighboring communities.

Enhance and expand Downtown Columbus’ role as a regional destination.

Columbus is today a destination for events, many of which bring people and spending to downtown. Building on these events and better capitalizing on the unique venues downtown offers for community and regional gathering can have a meaningful impact on activity downtown.

Enhance and expand access to Mill Race Park.

Mill Race Park is a beautiful and beloved community amenity and its location adjacent to downtown makes it a great destination for casual and large-scale events. Today, the park can be difficult to access from downtown given the challenges of crossing the fast-moving Lindsey Street, the active railway, relatively few entries into the park, and a lack of active uses between downtown and the park. Improving these connections and arrival moments can help better stitch Mill Race Park into the experience of downtown.

Continue Columbus’ legacy of excellence.

Columbus is world-renowned for its ethos of design excellence and perhaps more locally well known for its pursuit of excellence in community life. Building and expanding on this legacy of excellence will continue to differentiate Columbus as a high quality place to live and visit.

Make downtown a pedestrian-first place.

Columbus is a driving city. While that predominant dynamic is unlikely to change in the near future, there are opportunities to make downtown a better environment for pedestrians. A pedestrian-first focus and improvements that make walking downtown more comfortable can ease parking demand and encourage visitors to spend more time strolling downtown and patronizing its destinations and businesses.

Make downtown an accessible and enjoyable destination for all.

Downtown is both a local and regional center and serves as the downtown for a large population beyond the people who live and work there. Downtown should be a place where people of all ages, abilities, and income levels can find enjoyment and things to do.



A Vision for 2030 + Beyond

This strategic plan establishes recommendations for growth and investment in Downtown Columbus over the next several years and an achievable vision for the long-term future of downtown. The plan prioritizes focused growth and investment in key areas of Columbus' downtown core and reinvestment in the quality and connectivity of important components of downtown's public realm.

The plan establishes three focus corridors as the organizing feature of a framework for investment—Washington Street, 4th Street, and 5th Street. Together, these corridors constitute the downtown core. Each of these corridors serves as a destination within downtown today and each has its own identity that can be built

upon to drive more growth and visitation downtown. Washington Street is Columbus' historic downtown retail street and serves as a major connector through downtown and to its northern neighborhoods. 4th Street is the city's entertainment district, with a collection of retail venues and the ability to be closed down to vehicular traffic for community events. 5th Street is Columbus' "Avenue of the Architects", hosting a collection of significant modernist architecture and serving as a destination for visitors from around the country and the world. Importantly, both 4th and 5th Streets present the opportunity to forge stronger connections between downtown and Mill Race Park.

Beyond recommending a focus on these three corridors, the plan outlines a specific set of recommendations for priority sites—those identified by the Redevelopment Commission and others that offer the opportunity for near-term transformation. The plan makes recommendations for both publicly-owned and privately-owned sites, with a focus on those that could potentially catalyze further investment, activation, and increased foot-traffic downtown. Recommendations call for a combination of public and private investment to achieve the community's goals.

Community Guidance

Following initial engagement with community members earlier in the process, where the project team heard about community experiences with and aspirations for Downtown Columbus, the community came back together in a second phase of project engagement and heard takeaways from the team’s analysis and market study. Community members at a second community event were asked to play a board game together.

The game was designed for Columbus and aimed at creating a fun way to collaboratively plan for growth and investment downtown. Using the findings of the market study to inform choices about where and when different kinds of foot-traffic driving growth—like housing, hotel, and office development—could take shape, community

members engaged in discussion about benefits and trade-offs, prioritization, and the impacts of growth on the experience of downtown. These discussions and their own game play informed scenarios that sited and phased growth and active uses (the fun stuff like cafes, restaurants, entertainment uses, and events) throughout downtown—with an emphasis on the framework plan’s three focus corridors of Washington Street, 4th Street, and 5th Street.

Takeaways from this activity and similar questions posed to community members via an online survey, informed the planning team’s final framework development and plan recommendations.

Community Preferences + Priorities

The planning team heard a lot from the community about their experience with, observations of, and priorities and aspirations for Downtown Columbus. Contributions from community members in events and online surveys revealed a clear preference for a more vibrant, connected, and livable downtown. Residents consistently expressed a desire for spaces and amenities that encourage year-round activity, social interaction, and local pride.

The most frequently requested uses for downtown activation included a greater variety of restaurants, entertainment venues such as bowling alleys or arcades, and a year-round farmers’ market. Additional priorities included water features or splash pads and the activation of existing parks and open spaces. Residents also supported creating event and social hubs, improving bike and pedestrian connections, and reiterated interest in a grocery store, convenience stores, and pharmacies downtown—each of which shows up in community input across many recent plans for Columbus.

These priorities align with five overarching aspirations voiced by the community. First, residents envision a vibrant social and entertainment hub that offers diverse cultural and recreational experiences. Second, they seek enhanced retail and dining opportunities with an emphasis on local businesses and first-floor activity. Third, there is a strong call for essential services and livability, including everyday shopping needs and residential options that support a car-free lifestyle. Fourth, residents emphasized improved connectivity and mobility, calling for safer crossings, better pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, and enhanced transit links. Finally, the community values identity and placemaking, prioritizing the preservation of architectural heritage, public art, inclusive gathering spaces, and development along the waterfront.

Together, these insights provide a community-driven foundation for shaping a lively, accessible, and distinctive downtown that reflects Columbus’ identity and meets longstanding and future needs.



Top 10 Desired Uses for Downtown Activation

1. Restaurants
2. Entertainment venues (e.g. bowling, arcade)
3. Farmers’ market venues (year-round)
4. Grocery store
5. Water feature/splash pad
6. Activations of existing parks and open spaces
7. Event/social hub
8. Bike/pedestrian link
9. Convenience store/Pharmacy
10. Youth center



Priority Sites

As a framework for downtown took shape and site-specific recommendations began to emerge, the priority sites were organized into categories describing their role in the framework and strategic plans for Downtown Columbus. The four priority site categories include:

Catalytic Sites

Catalytic Sites are located within the core of downtown and present the greatest near-term potential for transformation. These sites are both ready for change and capable of delivering high-impact results quickly. They offer prime opportunities to advance the Strategic Plan's objectives and set the tone for broader downtown revitalization.

Opportunity Sites

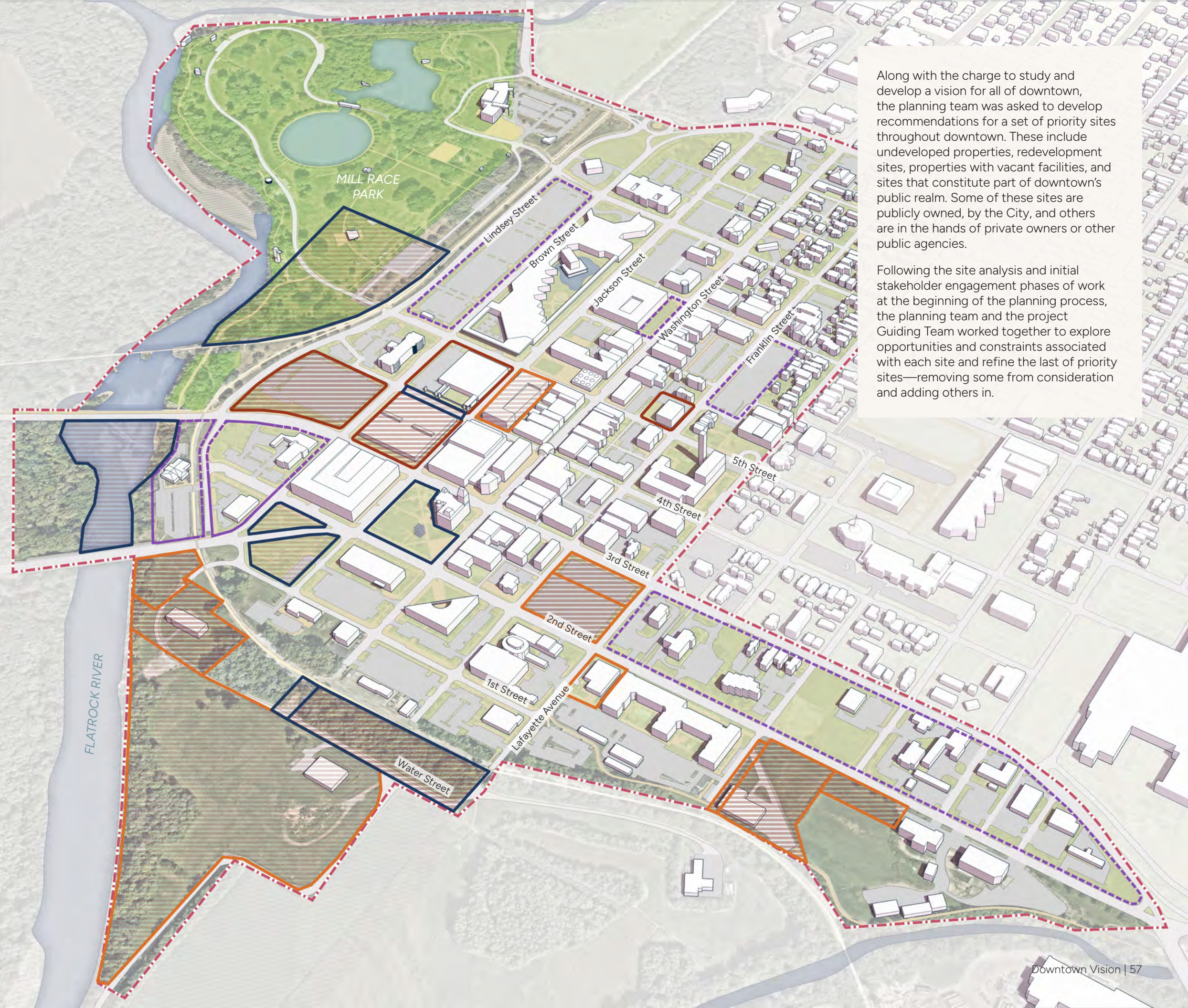
Opportunity Sites are generally located along the edges of downtown and their transformation will be influenced by market conditions. While their redevelopment could occur anywhere between the immediate and long term, these sites hold strong potential to advance Strategic Plan goals. They can help increase downtown foot-traffic and strengthen connections with surrounding neighborhoods.

Public Realm Sites

Public Realm Sites are areas that currently contribute, or could contribute, to downtown's shared public spaces and programming. These sites are ideal candidates for physical improvements, enhanced pedestrian and cycling connectivity, and increased programming or activation. Investments here can foster greater community engagement, activity, and accessibility across downtown's parks, plazas, and streetscapes.

Other Potential Growth Sites

Other Potential Growth Sites are not identified as Strategic Plan priorities but still offer valuable opportunities for growth. They can help increase downtown's residential and workforce populations while supporting the city's long-term objectives. Strategic investment in these sites can complement core projects and broaden the overall benefits of downtown development.



Along with the charge to study and develop a vision for all of downtown, the planning team was asked to develop recommendations for a set of priority sites throughout downtown. These include undeveloped properties, redevelopment sites, properties with vacant facilities, and sites that constitute part of downtown's public realm. Some of these sites are publicly owned, by the City, and others are in the hands of private owners or other public agencies.

Following the site analysis and initial stakeholder engagement phases of work at the beginning of the planning process, the planning team and the project Guiding Team worked together to explore opportunities and constraints associated with each site and refine the last of priority sites—removing some from consideration and adding others in.

Strategic Growth + Development

Using site analysis conducted at the outset of the planning process, a review of prior and ongoing planning work, the market study findings, community input, and the downtown framework plan as guides, the planning team developed recommendations for future development within downtown—with a specific focus on the priority sites. Much of this proposed development and nearly all of the proposed active ground floor, commercial, and retail development is focused on available sites along the plan focus corridors of Washington Street, 4th Street, and 5th Street.

With housing identified as the major opportunity for new development throughout the city and within downtown, several sites are recommended for higher density residential development (relative to typical developments throughout Columbus). These sites represent some of the most immediate opportunities for redevelopment and growth downtown. The plan identifies five sites that could be developed or redeveloped for housing. Future development of these five sites are expected to add between 600 and 950 units (depending on development type and configurations). When combined with the two residential projects already in the development pipeline along Washington Street, this plan locates approximately 750-1,100 units that could take shape in the near future.

Other proposed projects include commercial and retail infill along Washington Street and new active ground floors concentrated along 4th Street, west of Washington Street. A small node of riverfront dining is envisioned for the riverfront sites south of the 2nd Street bridge. An expanded Hotel Indigo and a new hotel and conference center are planned for the western edge of downtown, where 4th and 5th Streets meet Lindsey Street and Mill Race Park.



Downtown Public Realm

Downtown contains some of Columbus' most beloved community spaces, including Mill Race Park, Washington Street, 4th Street, and the Bartholomew County Public Library plaza. It also hosts a collection of presently underutilized public spaces that could contribute more to the experience of downtown, including the County Courthouse and City Hall lawns, the Entrance Plaza space bisected by 2nd Street, and areas of the riverfront south of 3rd Street. New formalized spaces for existing and desired programming downtown, including a new year-round market hall at the end of 4th Street and a flexible event park and plaza at 5th and Jackson Streets, can help create more regularity and diversity in downtown programming.

The plan envisions a future downtown where these spaces experience more frequent programming and activation—both for casual daily use and for special events that draw regional audiences. Improvements to procedures for reserving and hosting spaces for events and the introduction of simple amenities to encourage casual usage can help bring more people and creative activities to these spaces. Improvements to Mill Race Park that make it a more suitable place for events and activities that are in demand today, including places for kids and more flexible venues for events of all types, can reinforce its role as one of the community's central gathering places.

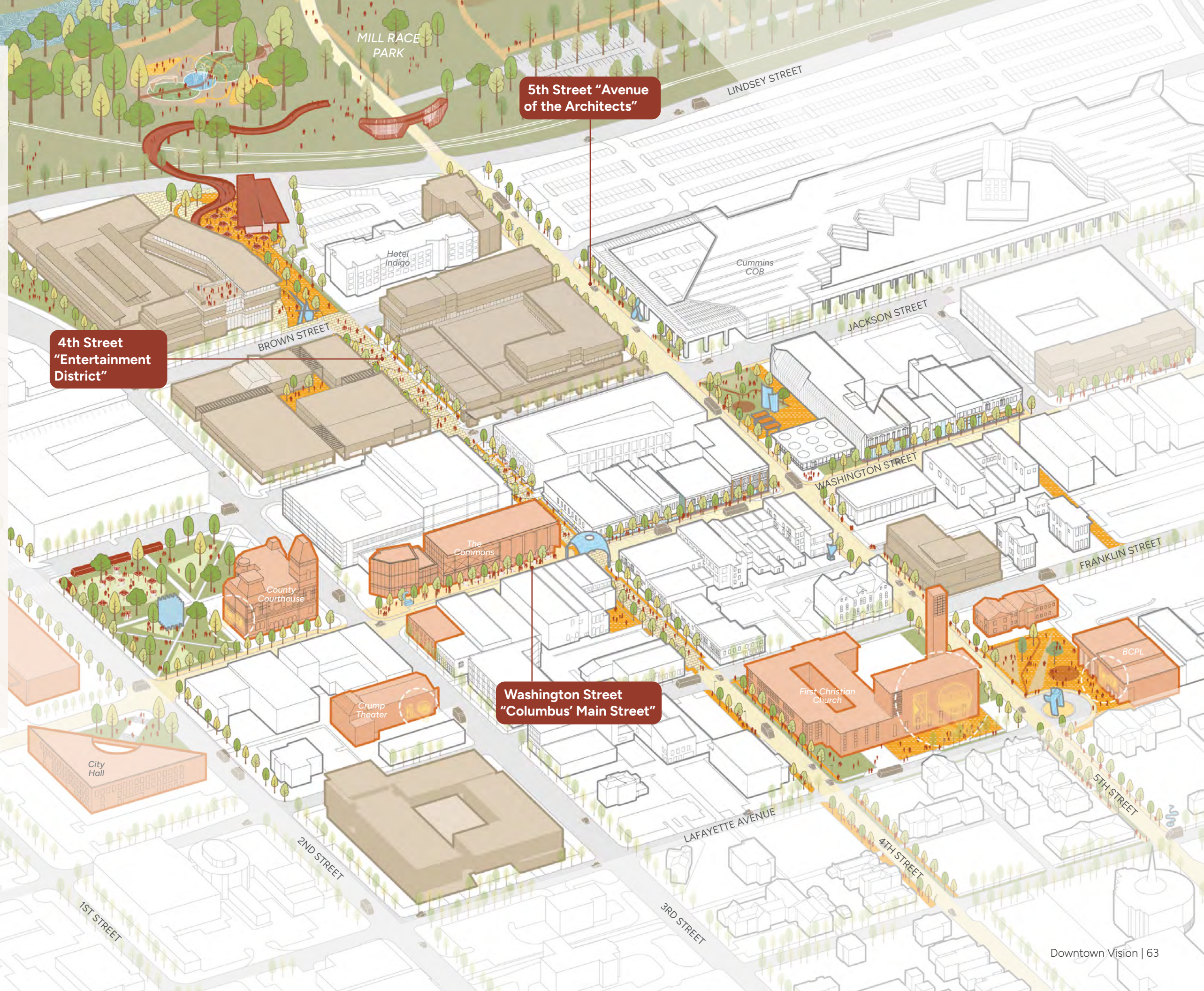
Connectivity and visibility between destinations and usable public spaces is key to their success and broader activation. A key feature of the plan is improving connectivity between downtown and Mill Race Park. Two new gateway features are proposed to strengthen and enhance connections into the park at 4th Street and 5th Street, including a new seamless pedestrian connection and a monumental gateway structure, respectively. Implementation of clear wayfinding, place branding, and interpretive signage can help people navigate and discover places downtown to broaden their experience and enjoy more of Columbus' unique destinations.

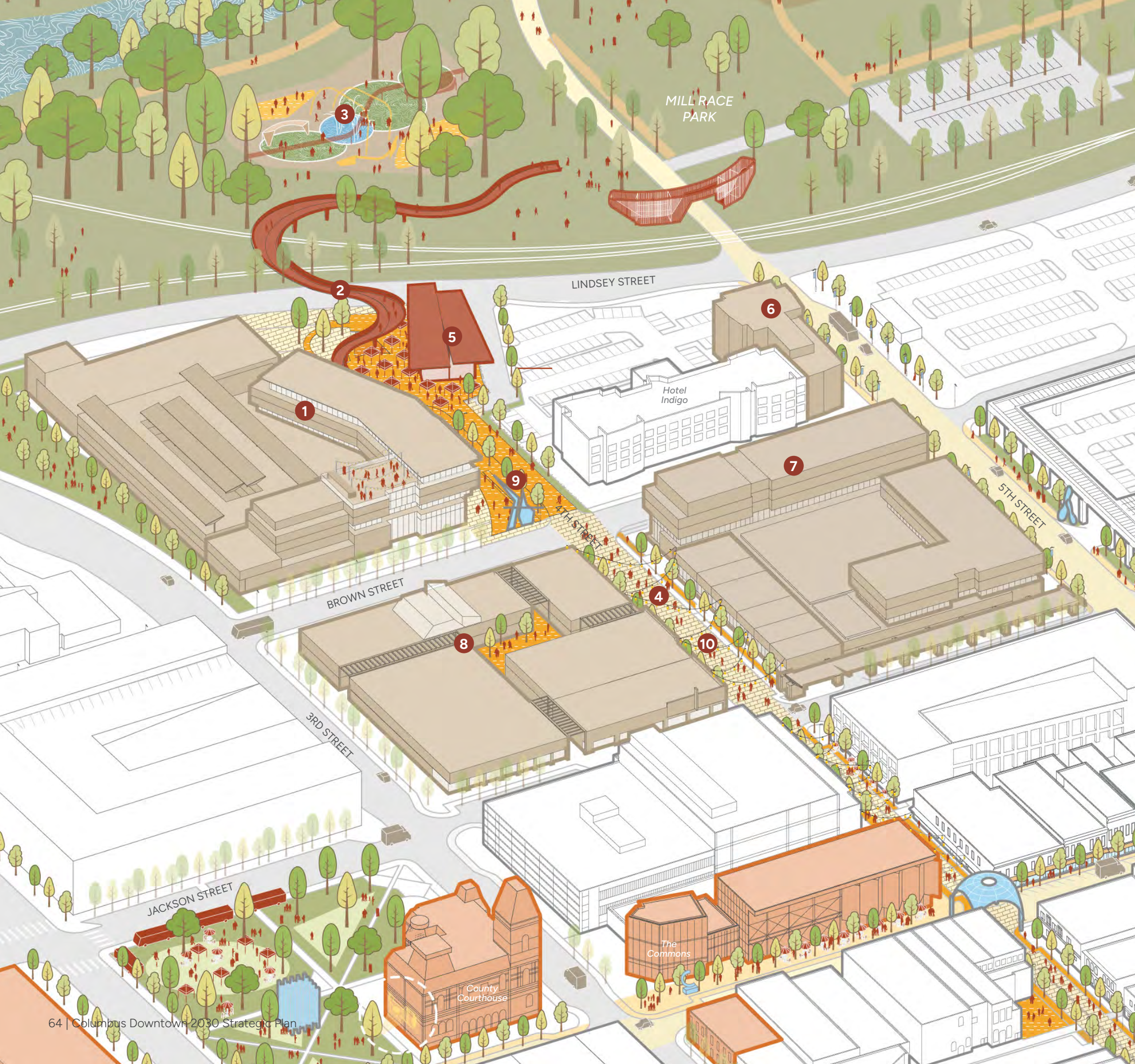


Investing in the Core of Downtown

While this plan makes project, program, operational, and investment proposals for the whole of downtown, it calls for a strategic focus on the core of downtown. This core is defined roughly as the approximately 20-block area between 6th Street to the north, Lafayette Avenue to the east, 2nd Street to the south, and Mill Race Park to the west. The three focus corridors, each with their own distinctive identity, collection of assets, and proposed programming and activation strategies are the primary organizing features of the downtown core.

Building a critical mass of active places, including shopping/retail destinations, food and beverage establishments, cultural and entertainment venues, and places for events and programs is key to creating a cohesive, walkable, and enjoyable experience of downtown. The Strategic Plan recommends focusing all immediate and short-term ground floor activity along the three focus corridors within the downtown core to create a central node of energy and destinations within downtown. Public realm improvements can also be prioritized here.





Finish 4th

4th Street is Downtown Columbus' "entertainment district" and features one of the most dynamic urban experiences in the city. In 2012, the City installed operable gates on 4th Street at Jackson Street and Franklin Street and made street and sidewalk improvements that enable full pedestrianization of the space for events and festivals. With the redevelopment of the Commons site the year before, retail spaces with spill-out space on 4th Street activated both sides of the street between Washington Street and Jackson Street. The introduction of the Interoculus sculpture above the intersection of Washington and 4th Street as part of Exhibit Columbus in 2023 solidified 4th Street as the key intersection with Washington.

The recommendations of this Strategic Plan focus on continued investment on 4th Street to expand the pedestrianization and activation of the corridor westward, to meet Mill Race Park. This series of investments, dubbed "Finish 4th", includes redevelopment of three key sites just west of the Jackson Street gates on 4th Street. The plan proposes new, dense developments on the former Sears site, the post office site, and the former Sears parking lot site. Each site would include active ground floor retail and other uses along 4th Street and a combination of housing, hotel, other commercial uses, and integrated parking on the rest of the blocks. These redevelopments should be accompanied by an extension of the 4th Street streetscape improvements west of Jackson Street, culminating in a new pedestrian and event plaza, year-round flexible market hall, and pedestrian bridge crossing into Mill Race Park at the western end of 4th Street.

1. New mid-tier hotel and conference center
2. Pedestrian bridge to Mill Race Park
3. Playground and splash pad in Mill Race Park
4. Continue pedestrianized streetscape and activation on 4th Street west of Jackson Street
5. Year-round market hall and event plaza
6. Future expansion of Hotel Indigo
7. Redevelopment of post office site as housing and ground floor retail on 4th Street
8. Redevelopment of Sears building for new and enhanced entertainment and retail uses
9. Pedestrian plaza at terminus of 4th Street
10. Festival lighting over 4th Street



4th Street

A conceptual view of the improvements, redevelopments, and public amenities proposed for 4th Street west of Jackson Street. This perspective depicts the proposed western end of 4th Street as viewed from the middle of 4th Street between Jackson and Brown Streets looking west toward Mill Race Park. Visible in the image are new active ground floor uses on the former Sears building site (left foreground) and the post office site (right foreground), a new hotel and conference center on the former Sears parking lot site with ground floor retail on the corner of 4th Street and Brown Street (left background), the Hotel Indigo (right background), and the new proposed flexible market hall structure, pedestrian/event plaza, and pedestrian bridge stretching from 4th Street to Mill Race Park (center).

Washington Street

Washington Street is Columbus' "Main Street", lined with historic buildings reflecting traditional downtown urban design and linking and clustering together retail shops, food and beverage establishments, entertainment venues, architecture, public art, and public spaces. The Washington Street corridor provides an enjoyable and walkable experience of discovery within the downtown core, for approximately five blocks between 2nd Street to the south and 7th Street to the north.

As this section of Washington Street is nearly fully built-out and already hosts active ground floors and significant pedestrian infrastructure, recommendations for the corridor within this area consist mostly of policies, programs, and partnerships to better utilize and drive foot-traffic and patronage to existing and new businesses on Washington. Programs to support improvements to private property can accompany longer-term public realm reconstruction projects to enhance the experience of Washington Street and give visitors more places to visit and things to do there. New public art, wayfinding, signage, place branding, and efforts to encourage outdoor dining and drinking can help enliven the corridor and create a legible and navigable experience of Washington Street.

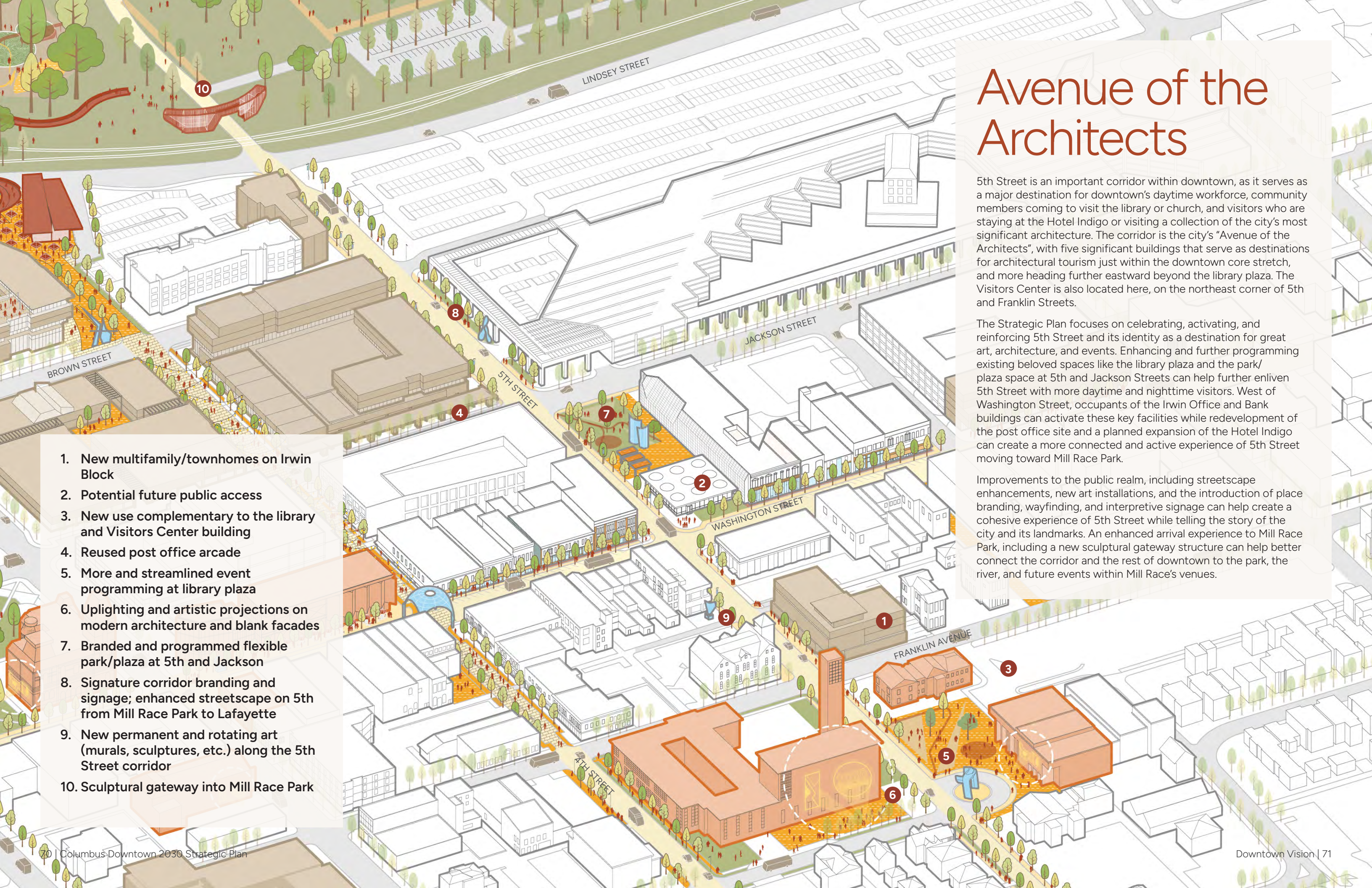
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1. Focus processional events (parades, marches, marathons) on Washington Street
 2. Small-business focused community events on Washington Street
 3. Facade and property improvement programs
 4. Casual programming and amenities for daily use of Courthouse and City Hall lawns
 5. New visitor destinations on Washington Street
 6. Prioritization of the Washington Corridor for new retail
 7. Streetscape improvements and more outdoor seating
 8. Upper floor activation with office and residential conversions
 9. Activated alley between the Jackson Street garage and Washington Street, between 4th and 5th Streets, with creative programming and placemaking strategies

Avenue of the Architects

5th Street is an important corridor within downtown, as it serves as a major destination for downtown's daytime workforce, community members coming to visit the library or church, and visitors who are staying at the Hotel Indigo or visiting a collection of the city's most significant architecture. The corridor is the city's "Avenue of the Architects", with five significant buildings that serve as destinations for architectural tourism just within the downtown core stretch, and more heading further eastward beyond the library plaza. The Visitors Center is also located here, on the northeast corner of 5th and Franklin Streets.

The Strategic Plan focuses on celebrating, activating, and reinforcing 5th Street and its identity as a destination for great art, architecture, and events. Enhancing and further programming existing beloved spaces like the library plaza and the park/plaza space at 5th and Jackson Streets can help further enliven 5th Street with more daytime and nighttime visitors. West of Washington Street, occupants of the Irwin Office and Bank buildings can activate these key facilities while redevelopment of the post office site and a planned expansion of the Hotel Indigo can create a more connected and active experience of 5th Street moving toward Mill Race Park.

Improvements to the public realm, including streetscape enhancements, new art installations, and the introduction of place branding, wayfinding, and interpretive signage can help create a cohesive experience of 5th Street while telling the story of the city and its landmarks. An enhanced arrival experience to Mill Race Park, including a new sculptural gateway structure can help better connect the corridor and the rest of downtown to the park, the river, and future events within Mill Race's venues.

- 
1. New multifamily/townhomes on Irwin Block
 2. Potential future public access
 3. New use complementary to the library and Visitors Center building
 4. Reused post office arcade
 5. More and streamlined event programming at library plaza
 6. Uplighting and artistic projections on modern architecture and blank facades
 7. Branded and programmed flexible park/plaza at 5th and Jackson
 8. Signature corridor branding and signage; enhanced streetscape on 5th from Mill Race Park to Lafayette
 9. New permanent and rotating art (murals, sculptures, etc.) along the 5th Street corridor
 10. Sculptural gateway into Mill Race Park



A Plan for Strategic Growth

Implementation Guidance

Implementing the recommendations of this plan will require coordinated effort between Downtown Columbus' many public-sector and private-sector stakeholders. This chapter provides implementation guidance for each of the Strategic Plan recommendations and each priority site. Priority sites are described in terms of the opportunities they present for increased downtown activation and their potential future role in the public realm and experience of Downtown Columbus. Urban design principles are provided to inform future siting, design, program distribution, and architectural expression to ensure compliance with Strategic Plan objectives and conformity with the overall downtown framework.

As the projects and initiatives described here will undoubtedly take shape in phases, with some projects commencing immediately and others not for many years, this chapter provides varying levels of detail on implementation guidance. Recommendations for earlier and more catalytic projects on priority sites are accompanied by site-specific urban design guidance to inform future design and development.

Finally, each plan recommendation is catalogued with a description and high-level guidance on several dimensions of practical implementation considerations. This includes ideas on potential implementation leadership, partners, funding sources, and action steps required to move forward on each proposed project, policy, program, or partnership. This guidance is meant to serve as a starting place for plan implementers and interested investors to take action on realizing projects. As conditions downtown change and projects are refined, much of this guidance will need to be revised or adapted to evolving realities.

Site-by-site Concepts

Urban Design Guidance

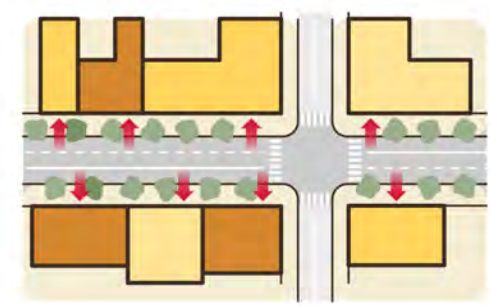
Detailed Recommendations



Urban Design Principles

As new development takes shape downtown, and especially in high-priority areas within the downtown core, it is important that project implementers consider the impact of these developments on downtown, the public realm, including streets, parks, plazas, and other gathering places, and existing and

future adjacent development. These urban design principles are guidelines that can be used to inform all future development and redevelopment projects downtown to ensure adherence to the Strategic Plan vision and a thoughtful integration of new structures into the downtown environment.



Clustered Entries
Position development entries on major corridors.



Activate Focus Corridors
Activate ground floors with public uses along focus corridors.



Upper Floor Step-backs
Step building massing back from the street edge after the 3rd or 4th floor.



Contextual Heights
Arrange massing and heights on site to respond to adjacent building heights.



Activated Edges on Public Spaces
Orient active building edges to adjacent public and open spaces.



Pedestrian-scale Development
Break down development massing to create a more pedestrian-scale building.



Adaptively Reused Features
Adaptively reuse or incorporate significant or historic facades and features in new developments.



Strong Street Relationships
Minimize setbacks in the core of downtown to establish a strong relationship with the street.



Screened Garages
Screen all street-facing parking garages with art or architectural screening.



Pedestrian Comfort
Consider pedestrian comfort by limiting sun exposure and planting trees along all streetscapes.

Catalytic Sites

Priority sites were established by the Columbus Redevelopment Commission as sites of particular interest and focus for the Strategic Planning process. Through the work of analyzing and assessing sites, the planning team, including the Columbus Guiding Team and Sasaki refined and categorized this group of priority sites. The catalytic sites in this section (outlined in red in the image to the right) are a subset of the overall set of priority sites (outlined in gray).

Catalytic Sites are priority sites located within the core of downtown and present the greatest near-term potential for transformation. These sites are both ready for change and capable of delivering high-impact results in the short term. Realization of these projects will help bolster the downtown population and create more downtown activation that can attract more visitation from residents locally and around the region. These sites offer prime opportunities to advance the Strategic Plan’s objectives and set the tone for broader downtown revitalization by catalyzing further investment and development.

Detailed strategic plan recommendations can be found in the next chapter. These recommendations are coded into the pages in this chapter for reference. Recommendations are organized and coded with two letter prefixes designating one of three categories, including Real Estate + Economic Development (RE), Public Realm + Infrastructure (PR), and Activation + Programming (AP).

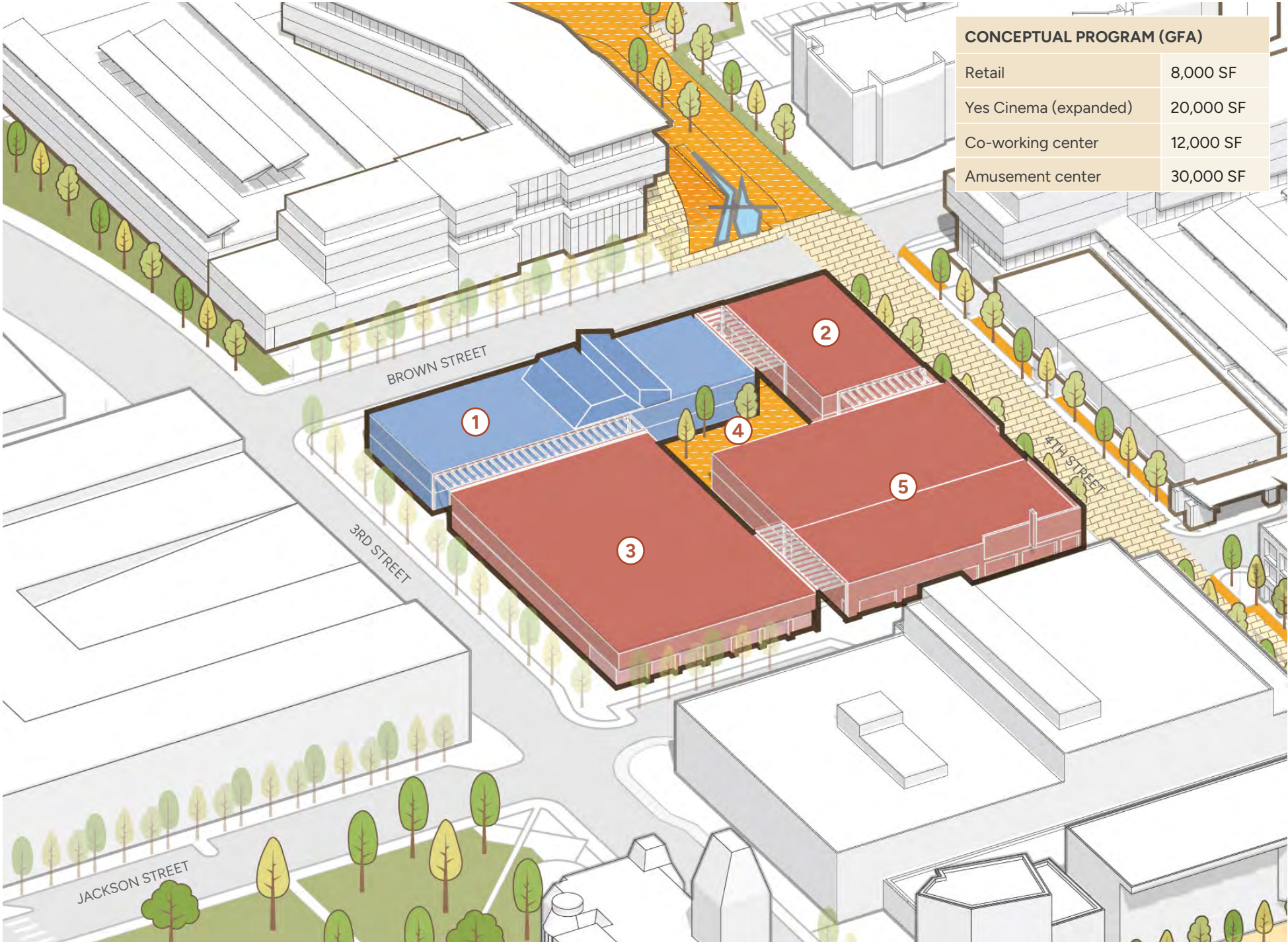
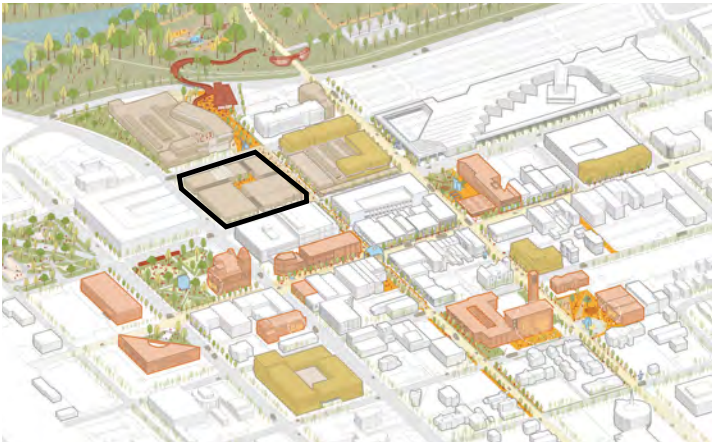


CATALYTIC SITES

Sears Block (RE-10, RE-16)

The approximately 2.3-acre site of the former Sears store southwest of the 4th Street and Jackson Street intersection is developed with the now-vacant former department store structure and the Yes Cinema building. The approximately 90,000 SF department store building was constructed in 1973 and was designed by world-renowned architect César Pelli as part of the overall Commons mall and public space project. Yes Cinema opened in its current location in 2004. Since 2014, when Sears closed, the department store building has been used intermittently—most recently as office and onboarding space for Cummins, before it was fully vacated in 2024 and purchased by the Columbus Redevelopment Commission.

This site presents unique opportunities to advance Strategic Plan objectives. Its location along 4th Street and one block west of Washington Street means future uses here can play a critical role in activating Columbus’ downtown core and focus corridors and strengthening connections between downtown and Mill Race Park. Given the presence of Yes Cinema and the somewhat architecturally significant Sears building on site, the existing department store structure is a potential candidate for creative adaptive reuse. Should adaptive reuse prove too difficult, time-consuming, costly, or undesirable, the site is also a candidate for partial or complete redevelopment—with Yes Cinema either incorporated in the redeveloped site or relocated elsewhere within the downtown core.



CONCEPTUAL PROGRAM (GFA)	
Retail	8,000 SF
Yes Cinema (expanded)	20,000 SF
Co-working center	12,000 SF
Amusement center	30,000 SF

Redevelopment Concept

- 1. Co-working Space:** Co-working within a ground-floor retail space.
- 2. 4th Street Retail:** Ground-floor retail on 4th Street with patio space for outdoor seating.
- 3. Amusement Center:** An indoor amusement center facility offering a range of family-friendly and adult activities, potentially including duckpin bowling, an arcade, shuffleboard, indoor lawn games, food and beverage service. If feasible, encourage adaptive reuse of a portion of the Sears building structure.
- 4. Shared Central Courtyard:** Shared central courtyard space within the block where Yes Cinema, the amusement center, co-working, and retail uses can spill out. Use the existing east-west axis established by the old Sears skylight for the Jackson Street entry.
- 5. Yes Cinema:** Maintain and encourage the expansion of Yes Cinema.

CATALYTIC SITES

Sears Block (RE-10, RE-16)

Site Positioning

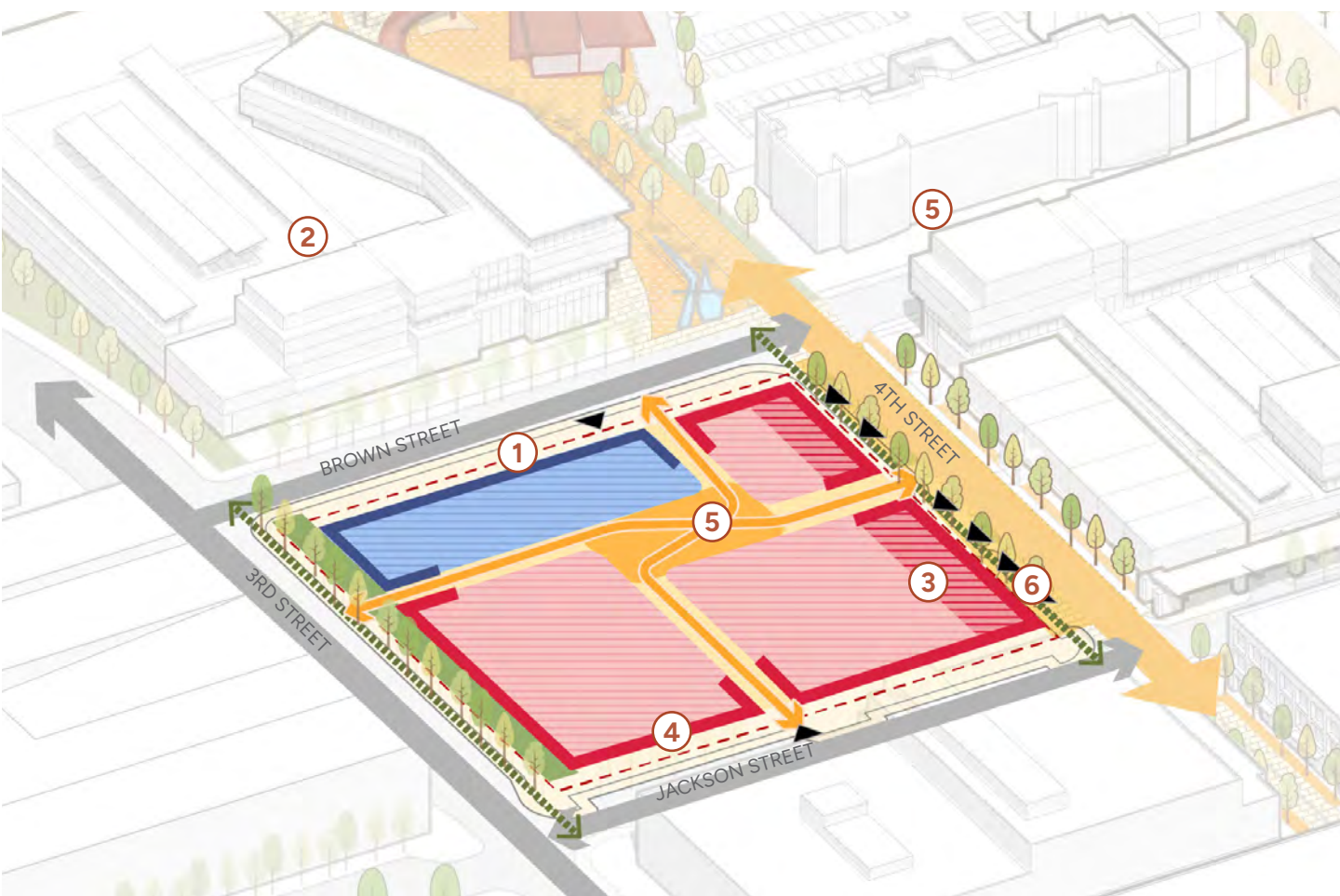
- 1. BUILD-TO LINE**
Development on site can extend to the parcel edges, with active ground floors having a setback to allow for pedestrian movement, and outdoor programming.

2. PARKING
If the site is partially or fully adaptively reused, parking is unlikely to be accommodated on-site. Instead, future site operators should enter into agreements with operators of nearby lots and structures.

3. RETAIL EDGES
Redevelopment of the site should include active ground floor retail on the full extent of the 4th Street edge. Active frontages can wrap the corners of this edge and extend down Jackson Street if the site is composed of multiple retail vendors.

4. ACTIVE EDGES
As a site that is centrally located downtown, active ground floors, including retail, entries, lobbies, amenity spaces, etc., should abut as many streets as possible, with retail focused on 4th Street.
- 5. PEDESTRIAN ACCESS**
The 4th Street side of the site should be prioritized for development entries. Redevelopment or adaptive reuse of the site should consider opportunities to introduce pedestrian pathways through the block. Such passages could be activated by adjacent development with spill-out dining and beer gardens. A courtyard at the center of the block could connect these passages and offer a shared programmable space for on-site businesses or just a well-activated outdoor space for people to rest and hang out.

6. SIDEWALK TREATMENT
Redevelopment of the site should include streetscape enhancements on all four sides, including street trees (on 4th and 3rd Streets at minimum), accessible sidewalks, street furniture, and lighting. Pedestrian zones along 4th Street should include amenity/spill-out space for retail venues.

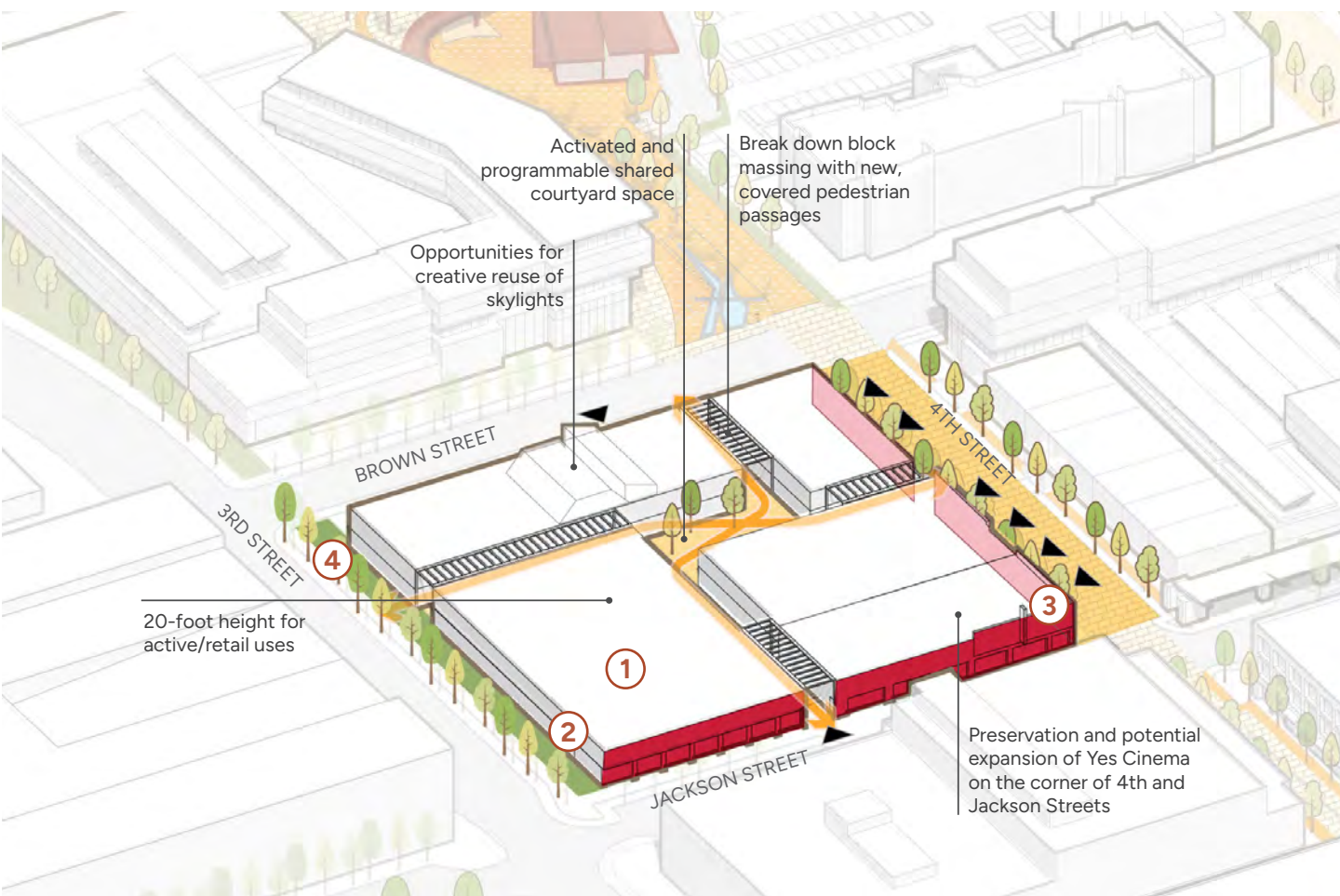


Design Guidance

- 1. MASSING**
If redeveloped or adaptively reused as single-story commercial, the block’s massing should be broken up into distinct volumes to allow better site access, a diversity of indoor and outdoor spaces, and better servicing of a collection of smaller-scale vendors than the department store the building was designed for. If the site is redeveloped as a mixed-use, multi-level building, follow guidance provided for the Post Office site to guide development form at this site.

2. HEIGHT
Development of this site should be in keeping with the context of the downtown core. Adaptive reuse of the former Sears building could maintain the single story height of the site while all other redevelopment projects should reach at least three stories.
- 3. ACTIVE FACADES**
The site’s active ground-floor zones, including retail, food and beverage, amenities and services, and office uses should be prioritized on 4th Street. Beyond 4th Street, active ground floors can expand along Jackson Street.

4. LANDSCAPE BUFFER
3rd Street is located directly south of the site. This fast-moving corridor is a primary route out of downtown. Projects taking shape on this site may benefit from an approximately 10-foot landscaped buffer between development and the edge of 3rd Street.



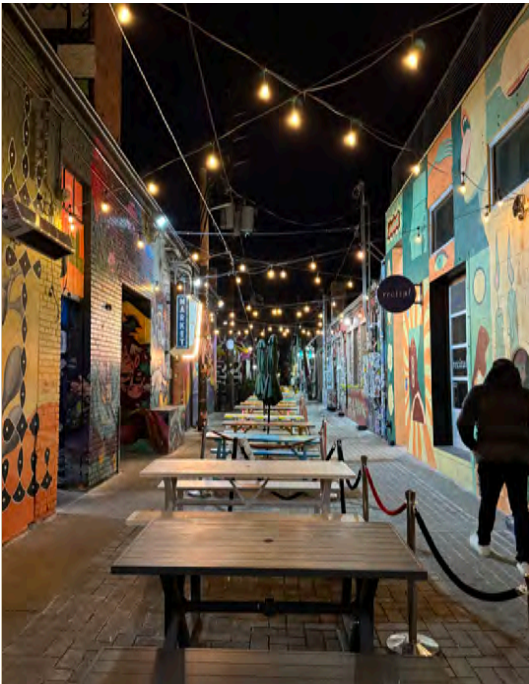
CATALYTIC SITES

Sears Block (RE-10)

Precedent Places



Vibrant multi-use spaces like an adult amusement center that offers games, dining, alcoholic beverages, and other activities could give people another thing to do downtown.



Activated alleys and passages can create wonder and unexpected experiences.

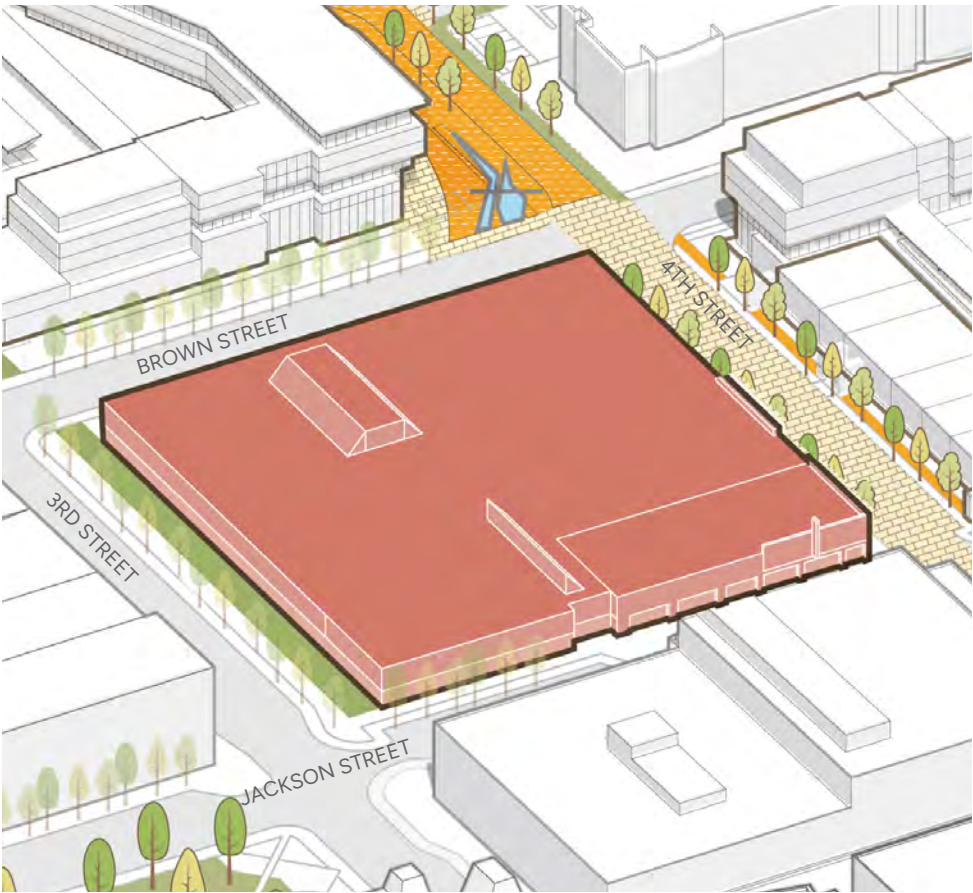


Creating a central shared courtyard offers a unique activation opportunity downtown.



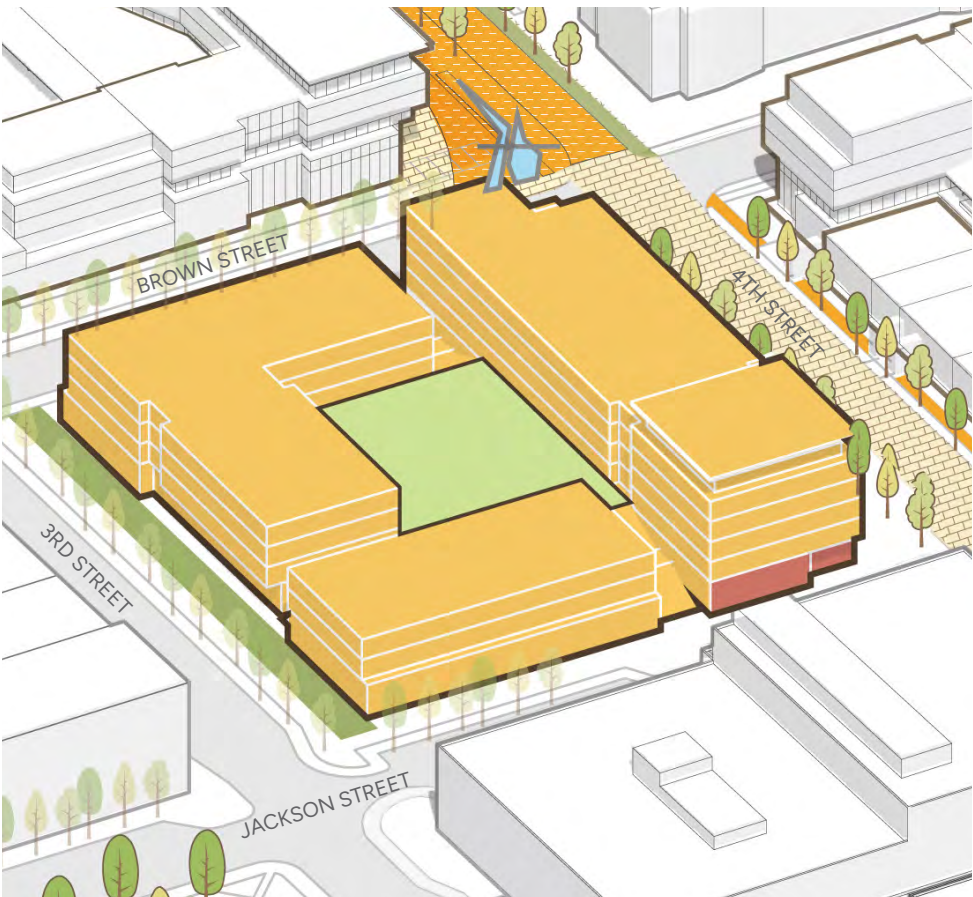
Co-working spaces can be sited in existing or new storefronts, especially those that are presently sitting vacant. These uses can activate the street.

Alternative Proposals



Adaptive Reuse
If feasible, the former Sears building could be reused for different kinds of commercial users. Adaptive reuse for a single or multiple users is possible within the single story floor plate.

Retail/commercial	90,000 SF
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Multifamily Residential
The site is a good candidate for wholesale redevelopment for high-density multifamily housing with retail on the ground floor along 4th Street, an integrated parking structure, and an amenity roof deck.

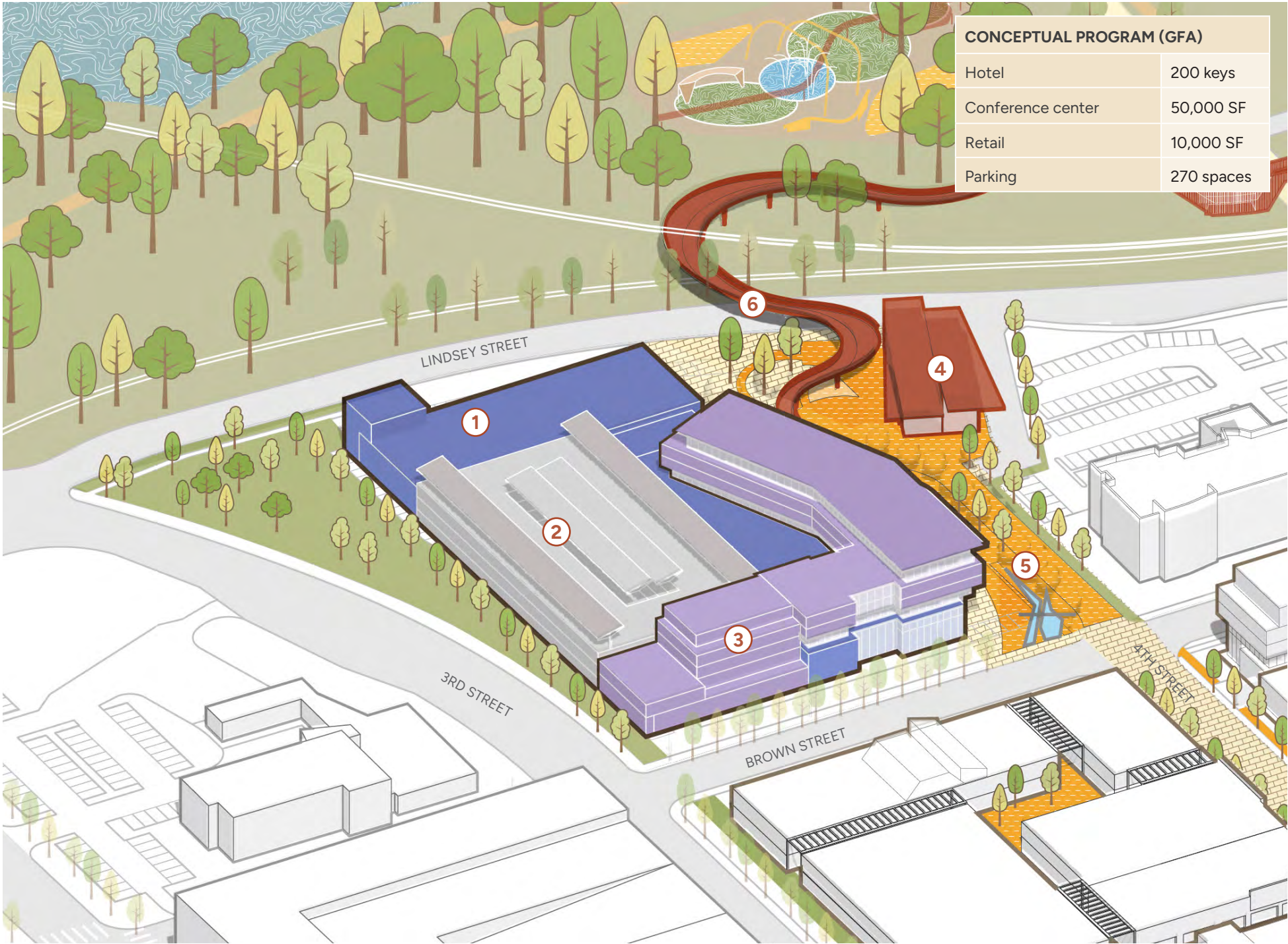
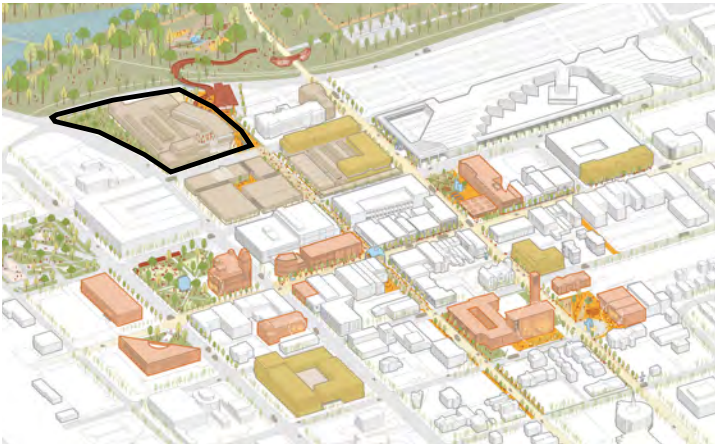
Retail/commercial	20,000 SF
Multifamily housing	175 units
Parking	250 stalls

CATALYTIC SITES

Sears Parking Lot (RE-24, RE-22, PR-08, PR-18)

The approximately 3.75-acre former Sears parking lot site sits along 4th Street, directly west of the former Sears site. Its western edge, along Lindsey Street, fronts onto Mill Race Park. Today, the site is owned by the Columbus Redevelopment Commission and hosts a surface parking lot.

As a large undeveloped property located along 4th Street and adjacent to Mill Race Park, the former Sears parking lot site is a prime redevelopment opportunity within downtown. The site has the potential to create a western gateway into downtown and to support a prominent connection from downtown to Mill Race Park. The size of the site permits significant gross square footage of new development, including parking needed to support that development and other uses downtown. Given the proximity of the site to the active railway immediately to its west, future uses should include those that will not be detrimentally impacted by the sounds emitted by the trains throughout the day and night.



Redevelopment Concept

- 1. **Conference Center:** Develop a moderate-scale conference center integrated with the hotel on the former Sears parking lot site.
- 2. **Parking Structure:** Integrate a parking structure within the interior of the block on the first three levels of the building.
- 3. **Mid-scale Hotel:** Develop a mid-tier hotel at the corner of 4th and Brown Streets.
- 4. **Flexible Market Hall:** Develop a flexible market hall that can be used for indoor markets (e.g., farmers',

- makers', artists', etc.) as well as other community and commercial events.
- 5. **Event Plaza:** Construct an event plaza along 4th Street between Brown Street and the market hall.
- 6. **4th Street Pedestrian Bridge:** Build a sculptural pedestrian bridge connecting the western terminus of 4th Street with Mill Race Park over Lindsey Street and the rail line. Explore integrating the structure with one of the two hotel structures and the market hall.

CATALYTIC SITES

Sears Parking Lot (RE-24, RE-22, PR-08, PR-18)

Site Positioning

- 1. BUILD-TO LINE**
Development should be sited on the Brown Street edge of the site, where it can extend to the lot line. Setbacks for pedestrian plaza and retail spill-out space should be incorporated in the design of the site's 4th Street edge. Development can step back more significantly from the heavily trafficked 3rd and Lindsey Streets.

2. PARKING
Parking for new uses on-site can be integrated with the development of a parking structure that can be accessed from Lindsey Street to the west and 3rd Street to the south.

3. RETAIL EDGES
The northeast corner of the site forms and edge of the new proposed pedestrian/event plaza and the 4th Street Entertainment District. This corner should be prioritized for any on-site retail.
- 4. ACTIVE EDGES**
Active edges, including lobbies and amenity spaces should be extended from the northeast corner south along Brown Street and west along 4th Street.

5. PEDESTRIAN ACCESS
Pedestrian entries to on-site development should be located on Brown Street and 4th Street.

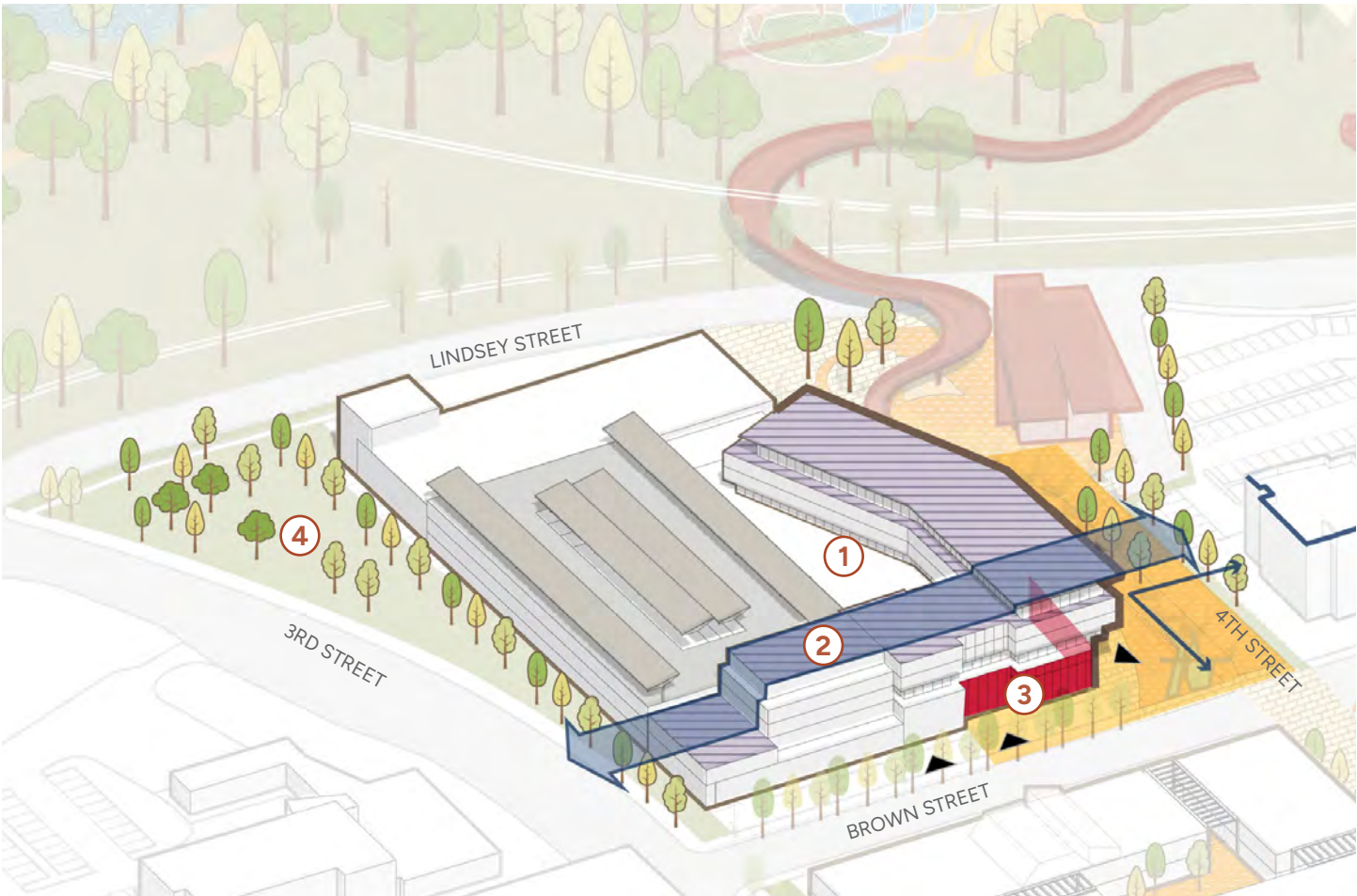
6. SIDEWALK TREATMENT
The site sits at the western terminus of 4th Street and design for exterior landscape and public realm should carefully consider an integrated experience with 4th Street and the proposed pedestrian plaza. Improvements to Brown Street alongside development should further extend a pedestrian edge. Development siting and landscaping along 3rd and Lindsey Streets should take advantage of views of Mill Race Park, the bridge, and the river while skillfully separating inside uses from the vehicular and rail traffic just outside.

Design Guidance

- 1. MASSING**
The proposal for this site includes a hotel, conference center, and parking garage. Overall massing should respond to the site's context, positioning taller volumes, such as the hotel bars, along 4th Street and Jackson Street, matching the massing language established by the adjacent Hotel Indigo. Lower volumes, such as the conference center, should be positioned along other site edges. A parking structure integrated with the development should be sited in the center of the development with no exposure to the north and east sides of the site and minimized exposure on the western edge.

2. HEIGHT
Development heights should be contextual. The nearby Hotel Indigo establishes a four-story precedent for Brown Street. The relatively undeveloped western edge of downtown that overlooks Mill Race Park maintains a lower profile. Any development here should not exceed two stories.
- 3. ACTIVE FACADES**
Development on site should maintain active frontages on the 4th Street and Brown Street edges, with a focus on activating the northeast corner of the site where future development meets the proposed pedestrian/event plaza.

4. LANDSCAPE BUFFER
Future site design may incorporate landscape buffers between development and the rail line to the west and 3rd Street to the south.



CATALYTIC SITES

Sears Parking Lot (RE-24, RE-22, PR-08, PR-18)

Precedent Places



A future conference center along Lindsey Street could provide expansive views out to Mill Race Park and the riverfront.



A new hotel could offer a rooftop bar experience with a great views.

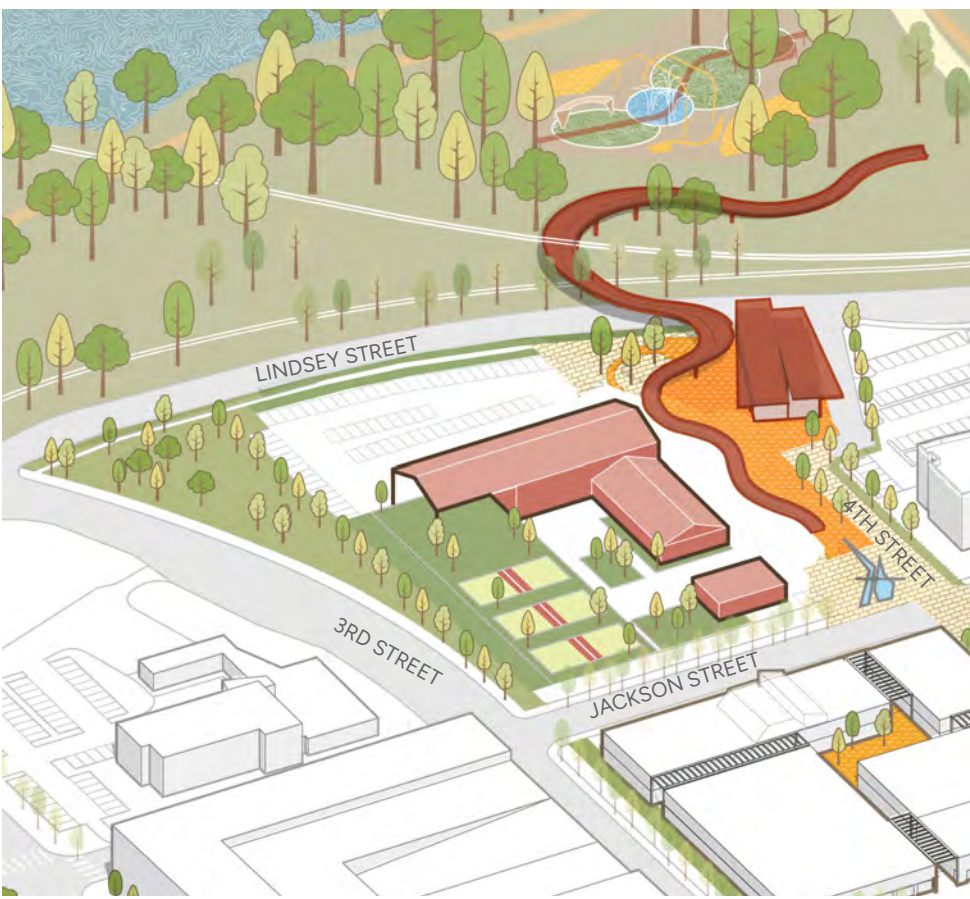


Ground floor retail can anchor the hotel's corner at Brown and 4th Streets.



An integrated hotel and conference center could serve existing needs in town while also attracting new visitors to downtown from around the region and country.

Alternative Proposal



Temporary Food and Beverage and Casual Recreation Venue (RE-09)

A potential interim use for the former Sears parking lot site could include a temporary food and beverage/casual recreation venue. These indoor/outdoor venues often offer beer and pub fare alongside pickleball courts, lawn games, and a fun atmosphere. They require large sites and on-site parking and can open for as little as a few years before a site transitions to a new, more permanent use.

Retail/commercial	30,000 SF
Parking	150 spaces



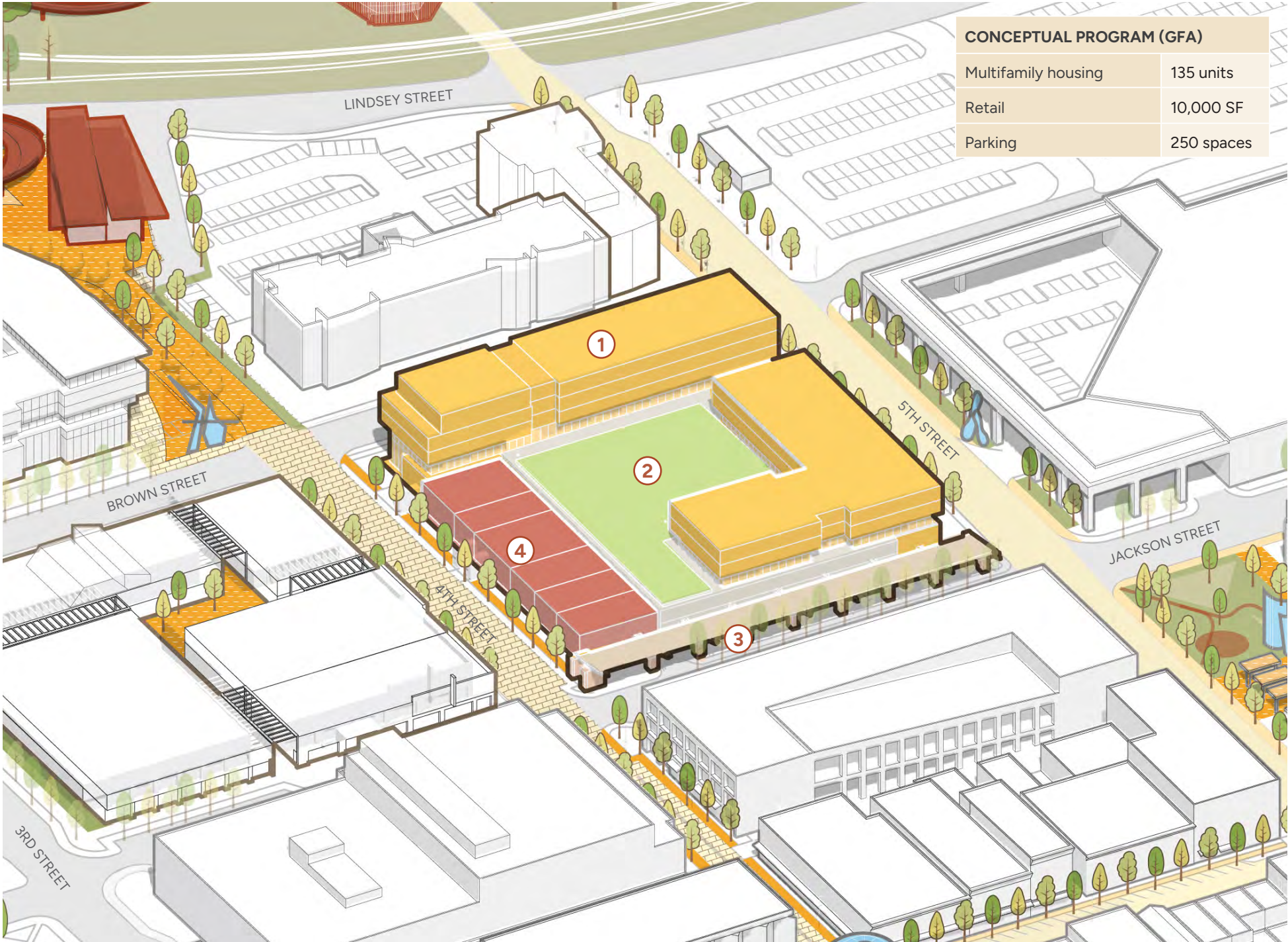
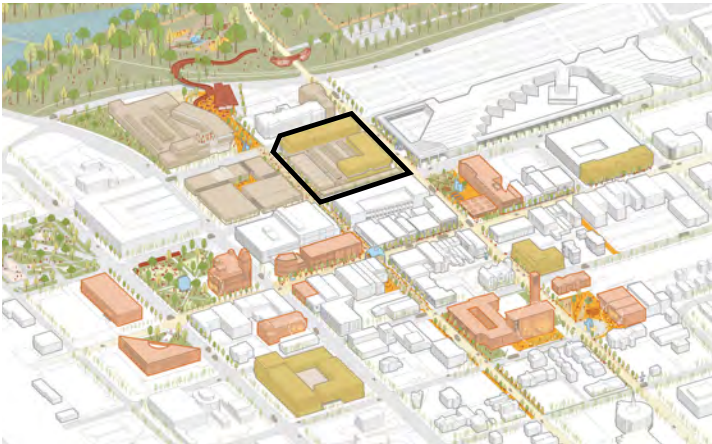
One successful operator of these venues is Chicken N' Pickle. They often open these facilities as temporary activators of parking lots and sites slated for future development.

CATALYTIC SITES

Post Office Site (RE-08)

The approximately 2.3-acre U.S. Post Office site at the northwest corner of the intersection of 4th Street and Jackson Street is developed with a post office facility that includes both retail service and regional sorting and distribution functions, along with a parking lot and large service yard. The post office building was designed by Kevin Roche and opened in 1970. Today, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) has indicated that the sorting and distribution functions of the facility are no longer needed downtown (though still needed within Columbus). The USPS is interested in maintaining retail service downtown.

As of today, the facility and site are underutilized. Given the USPS’s openness to relocating sorting and distribution operations away from downtown, this site presents a significant opportunity for redevelopment and densification to bring more people and activity downtown and to the important 4th Street and 5th Street corridors.



CONCEPTUAL PROGRAM (GFA)	
Multifamily housing	135 units
Retail	10,000 SF
Parking	250 spaces

Redevelopment Concept

- 1. Medium-Density Housing:** Redevelop the post office site as a mixed-use building with medium-density multifamily housing above ground floor retail and integrated parking.
- 2. Parking Structure:** Integrate a parking structure within the interior of the block on the first two levels of the building. Provide access on Jackson and/or Brown Streets. Provide an amenity deck on the roof of the garage.
- 3. Adaptive Reuse:** Explore reusing unique architectural elements of the post office, such as the Jackson Street pergola. Preservation of this element would continue the shading provided by the Cummins COB facility pergola on the critical lunchtime route between Cummins and 4th Street.
- 4. Ground Floor Retail:** Activate the ground floor of the new development with retail along the 4th Street edge and retail or active uses along the 5th Street edge.

CATALYTIC SITES

Post Office Site (RE-08)

Site Positioning

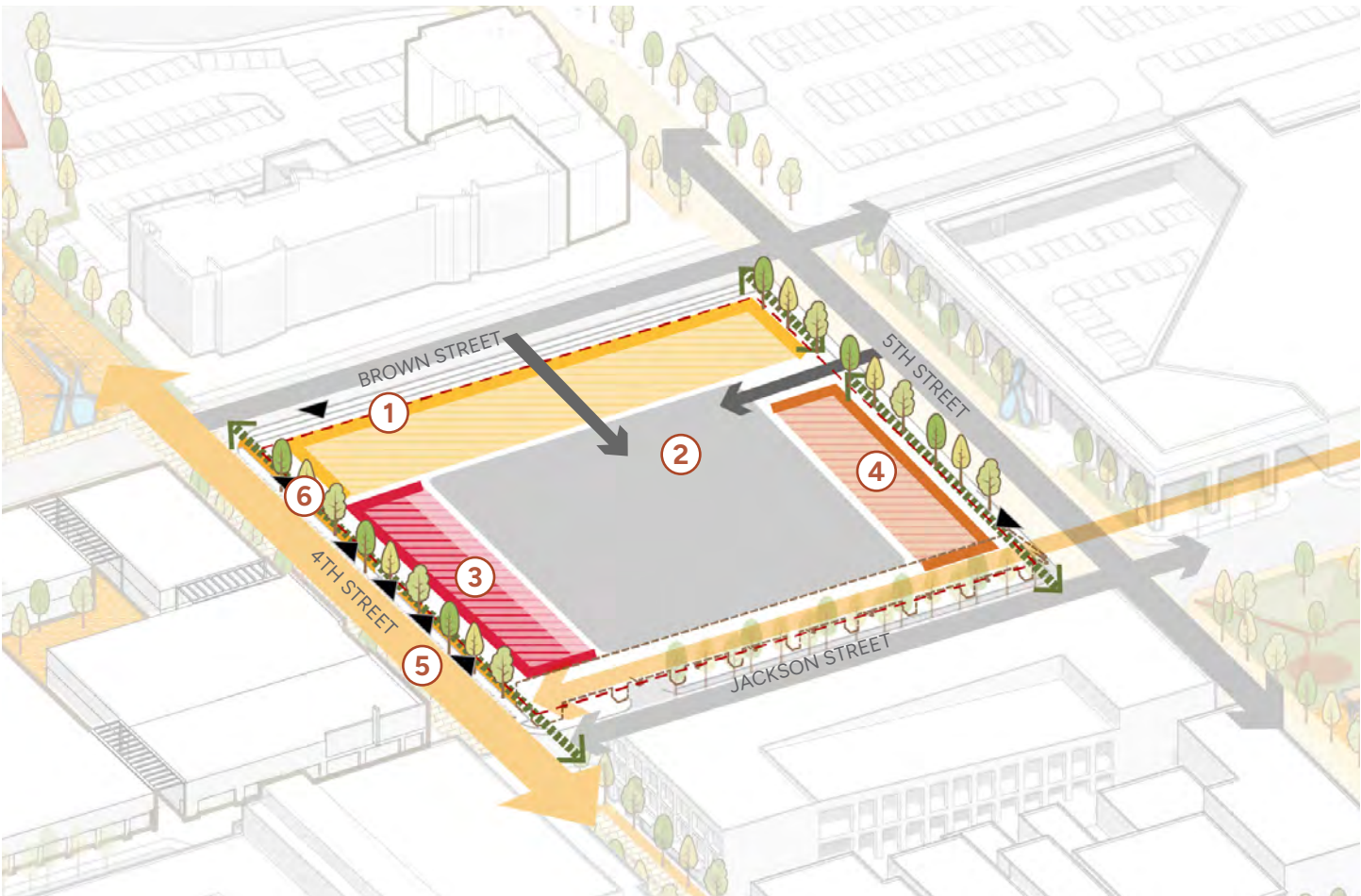
- 1. BUILD-TO LINE**
Development on site can extend to the parcel edges, with active ground floors along 4th Street having a setback to allow for pedestrian movement and outdoor programming.

2. PARKING
Parking for new uses on-site can be integrated with the development of a parking structure that can be accessed from 5th Street or Brown Street.

3. RETAIL EDGES
The southern edge of the site sits along the proposed extension of 4th Street's streetscape enhancements and ground-floor activation. Redevelopment of the site should include retail and active ground floor uses along the full length of the 4th Street edge.
- 4. ACTIVE EDGES**
Active edges, including lobbies and amenity spaces should be sited along the ground floors along 5th Street and Brown Street.

5. PEDESTRIAN ACCESS
Primary pedestrian access to development on site should be located along 4th Street and 5th Street.

6. SIDEWALK TREATMENT
The site forms a northern edge to 4th Street and the southern edge of the development should form an integrated experience with 4th Street. Improvements to Brown Street and 5th Street, alongside development, should enhance the experience of downtown's pedestrian and public realm.

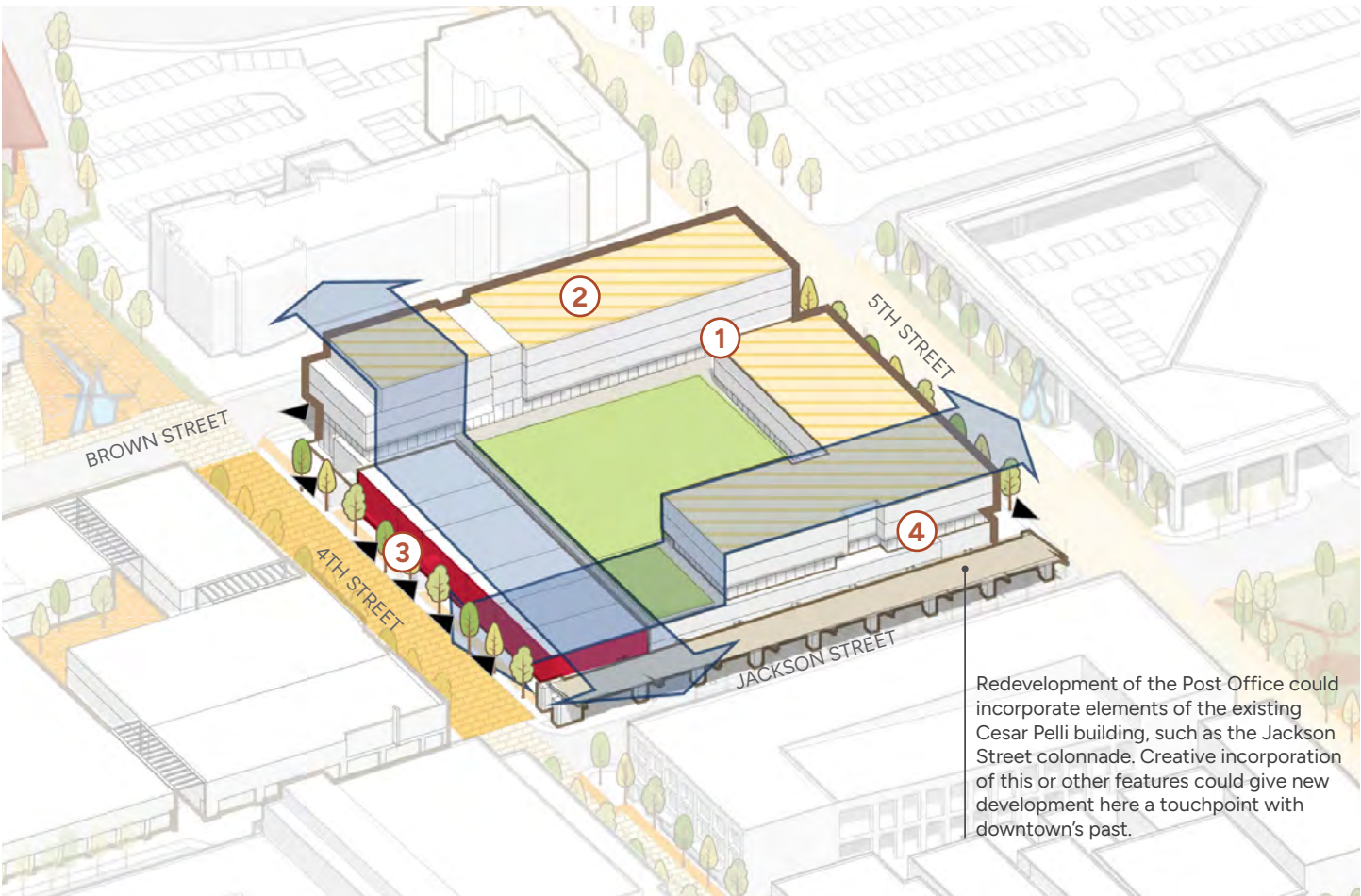


Design Guidance

- 1. MASSING**
The proposal for this site includes multifamily housing, ground-floor retail, and a parking garage. Overall massing should respond to the site's context, positioning taller volumes, such as the residential bars, along Brown Street and Jackson Street, matching the massing language established by the adjacent Hotel Indigo and Jackson Street parking garage. Massing could step down at 4th Street to meet the scale of the single- or double-story retail that characterizes much of the historic commercial fabric downtown. A parking structure integrated with the development should be sited in the center of the development with no exposure to the north or south sides of the site and minimized exposure on the eastern and western edges.
- 2. HEIGHT**
Development heights should be contextual. The nearby Hotel Indigo establishes a four-story precedent for Brown Street. Development should not fall below three stories for any edges of the site, with the potential exception of 4th Street.

3. ACTIVE FACADES
Development on site should maintain active frontages on the 4th Street and Brown Street edges, with a focus on activating the northeast corner of the site where future development meets the proposed pedestrian/event plaza.

4. FACADE + MASSING ARTICULATION
As proposed development for this site will fill out the entire block, development should be designed with thoughtful articulation to break up long volumes, vary heights, and add complexity to facades.



CATALYTIC SITES

Post Office Site (RE-08)

Precedent Places



Multifamily residential development can contribute to the overall aesthetic of the city, providing novel design and active edges.



A rooftop amenity deck above an integrated parking structure could provide a great space for residents.



Streetscape enhancements alongside development can provide a high quality public realm to support increased foot traffic.



Ground-floor retail along the southern edge of the site could extend the experience of 4th Street further west, helping connect to Mill Race Park.



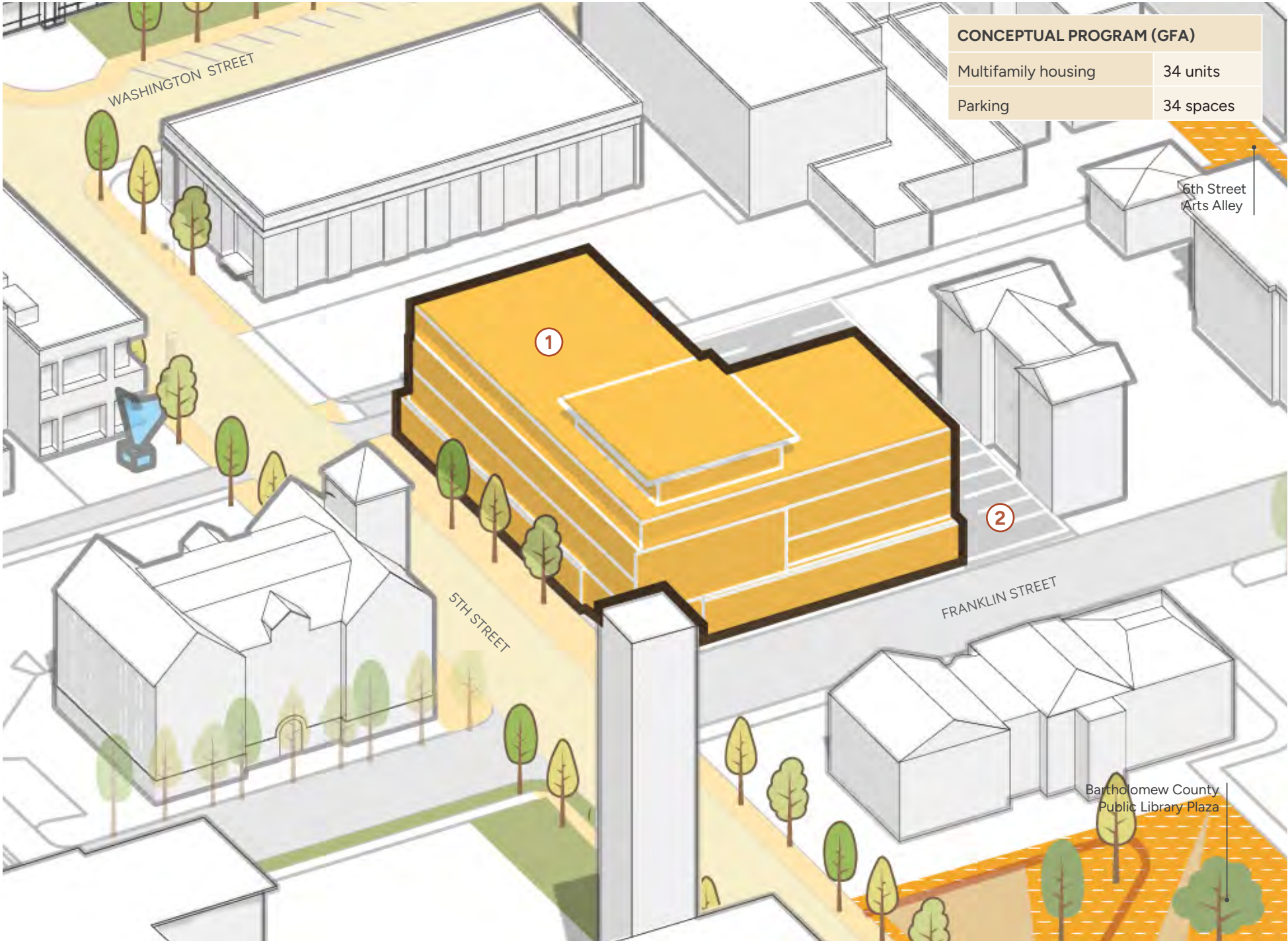
Existing features of the Kevin Roche post office building could be adaptively reused on site in the redevelopment effort. Features like this outdoor arcade could provide a nice platform for pedestrian enhancements along Jackson Street.

CATALYTIC SITES

Irwin Block (RE-11)

The site known locally as the Irwin Block consists of two parcels comprising a combined half-acre northwest of the intersection of 5th Street and Franklin Street. The site hosted historic mixed-use structures throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries before falling victim to a fire in 2022 that resulted in on-site buildings being condemned by the city. The stately 1892 Queen Anne-style building on the western side of the site was demolished after the fire, while the shorter 1925 building on the eastern side of the site remains, damaged and vacant. The Columbus Capital Foundation-owned site is a contender for wholesale redevelopment to reintroduce urban development in this key location downtown.

Situated prominently on 5th Street, across from the Columbus Visitors Center and between some of the city's most notable pieces of architecture, the Irwin Block site could host a new structure similar in scale and density to what was there before, with a strong relationship to 5th Street.



Redevelopment Concept

- Housing:** The Irwin Block is large enough to accommodate a small multifamily development. A structure of approximately four stories would maximize efficiency on site while adhering to the character and scale of the area.
- Parking:** Housing on site can be parked via an on-site surface lot behind the development.

CATALYTIC SITES

Irwin Block (RE-11)

Site Positioning

- 1. BUILD-TO LINE**
Development on site can extend to the parcel edges along Franklin and 5th Streets. With residential program, structures can maintain a small setback from the parcel line to accommodate yards, porches, or stoops.

2. PARKING
Parking for new uses on site can be accommodated with an on-site surface parking lot or combined surface and tuck-under condition. Parking will be located behind development and should not front onto 5th Street or be accessed via 5th Street. Parking access should be provided along Franklin Street, opposite the intersection with 5th Street.
- 3. ACTIVE EDGES**
The primary active edge, which could include lobbies and amenity spaces, should be sited along 5th Street.

4. PEDESTRIAN ACCESS
Primary pedestrian access to development on site should be located along 5th Street or along Franklin Street at the intersection with 5th Street.

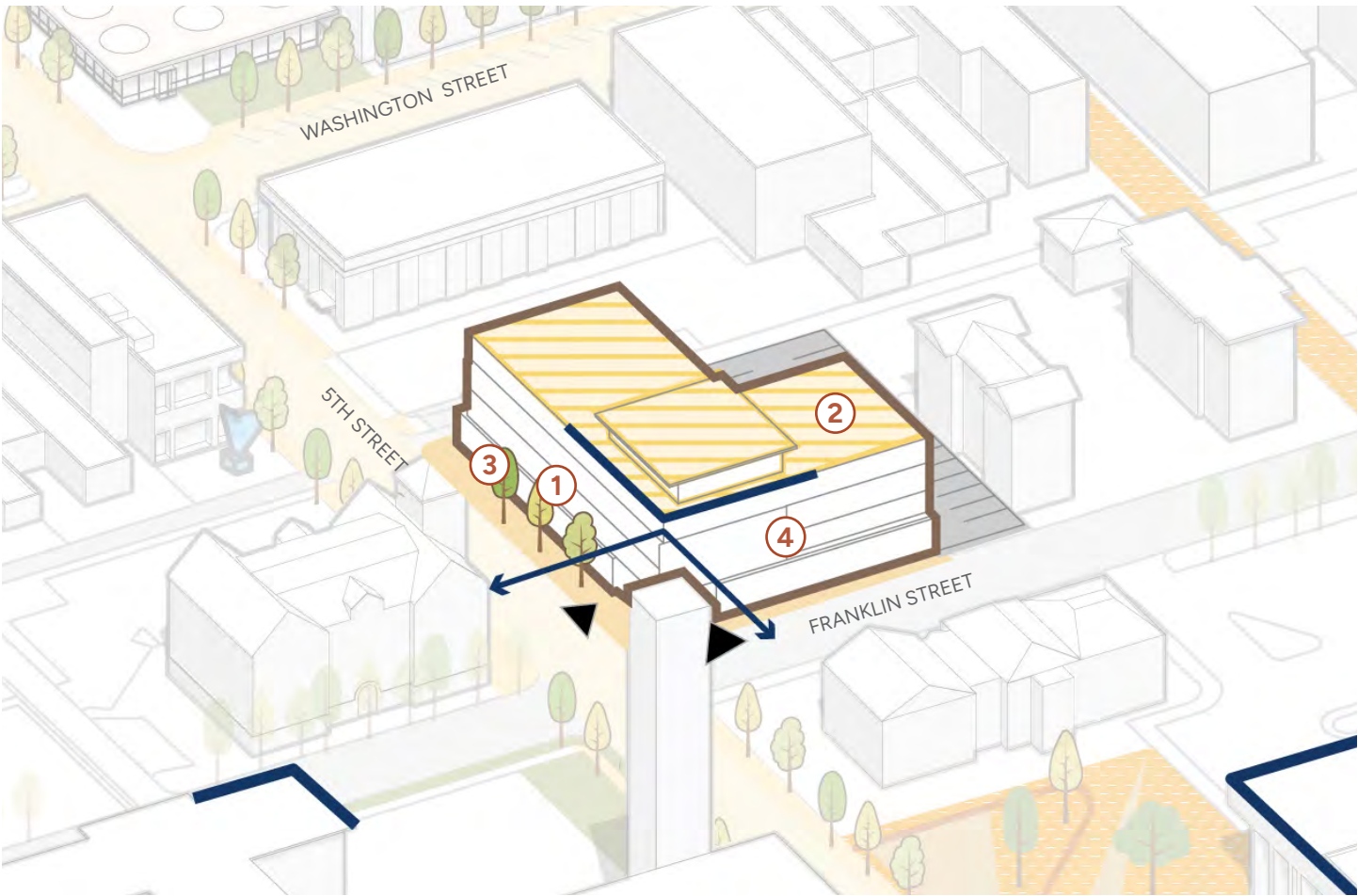
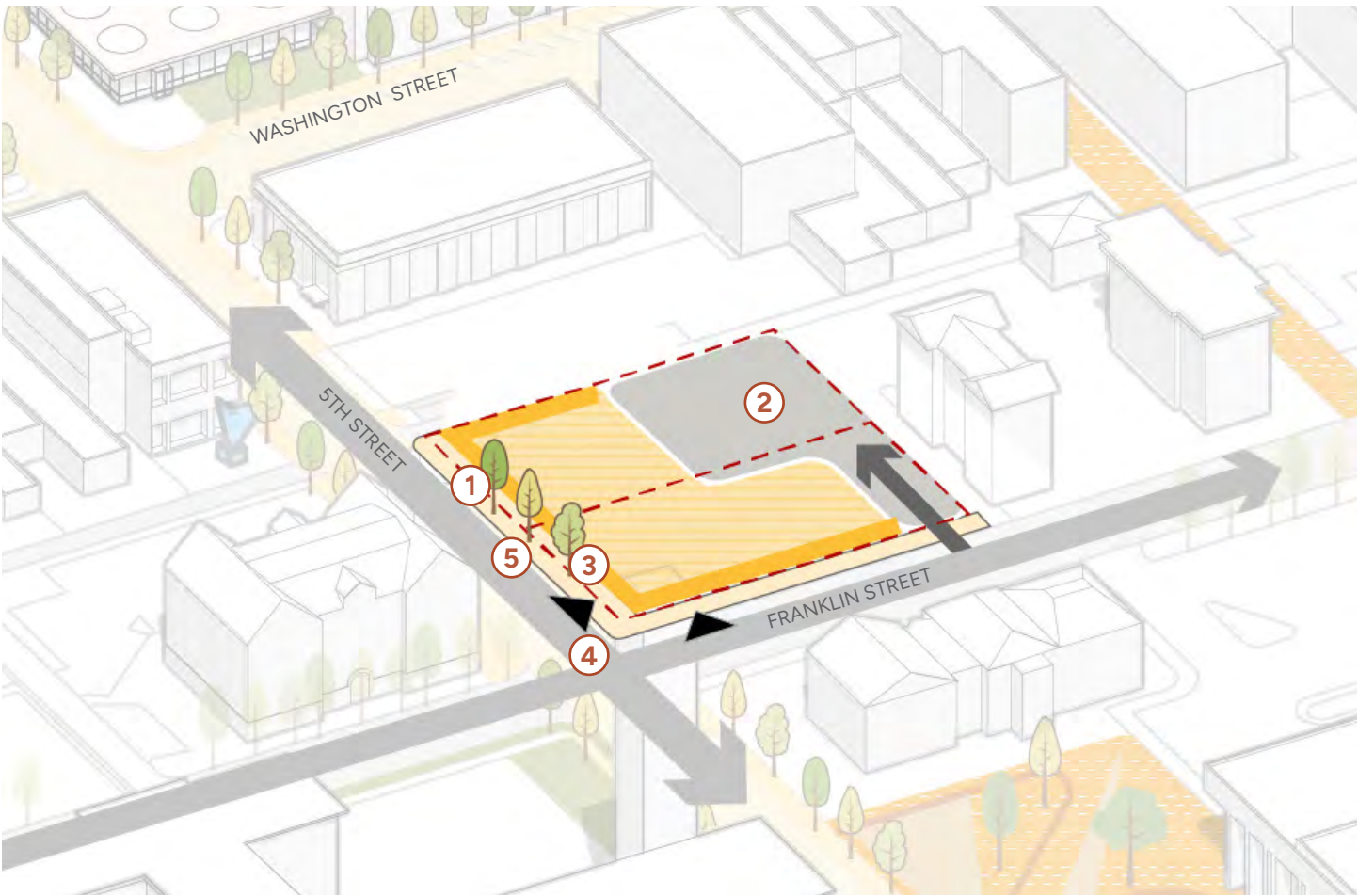
5. SIDEWALK TREATMENT
The site forms a northern edge to 5th Street. As a Strategic Plan focus corridor, 5th Street should provide a comfortable, safe, and enjoyable pedestrian experience. Development on the Irwin Block site should take extra care to create a high quality streetscape along 5th Street.

Design Guidance

- 1. MASSING**
The proposal for this site includes multifamily housing and surface parking. Overall massing should respond to the site's unique context. Located along 5th Street and within one half block of two architectural monuments, development massing on the Irwin Block should not deviate significantly from surrounding structures.

2. HEIGHT
Development heights should be contextual. Nearby structures enable a building of approximately four residential stories will fit in well. Development should not fall below three stories.
- 3. ACTIVE FACADES**
Development on site should maintain active frontages on the 5th Street. This could include lobbies, amenity spaces, and transparent or compelling facades along with any outdoor uses associated with development.

4. FACADE + MASSING ARTICULATION
Development should be designed with thoughtful articulation to break up long volumes, vary heights, and add complexity to facades. The location at the prominent intersection of 5th and Franklin Streets warrants an architectural articulation of the corner with a slightly elevated or otherwise distinguished tower structure.



CATALYTIC SITES

Irwin Block (RE-11)

Precedent Places



The Irwin Block development, which stood on site from 1892 to 2022. The three-story structure, pictured here, is a great representation of the kind of urban density that characterized U.S. downtowns throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This kind of dense, mixed-use development can still serve as a model for the future of the site. Similarly, the textured and articulated 5th Street facade and transparent and activated ground floor provide great lessons in activating great urban streets.



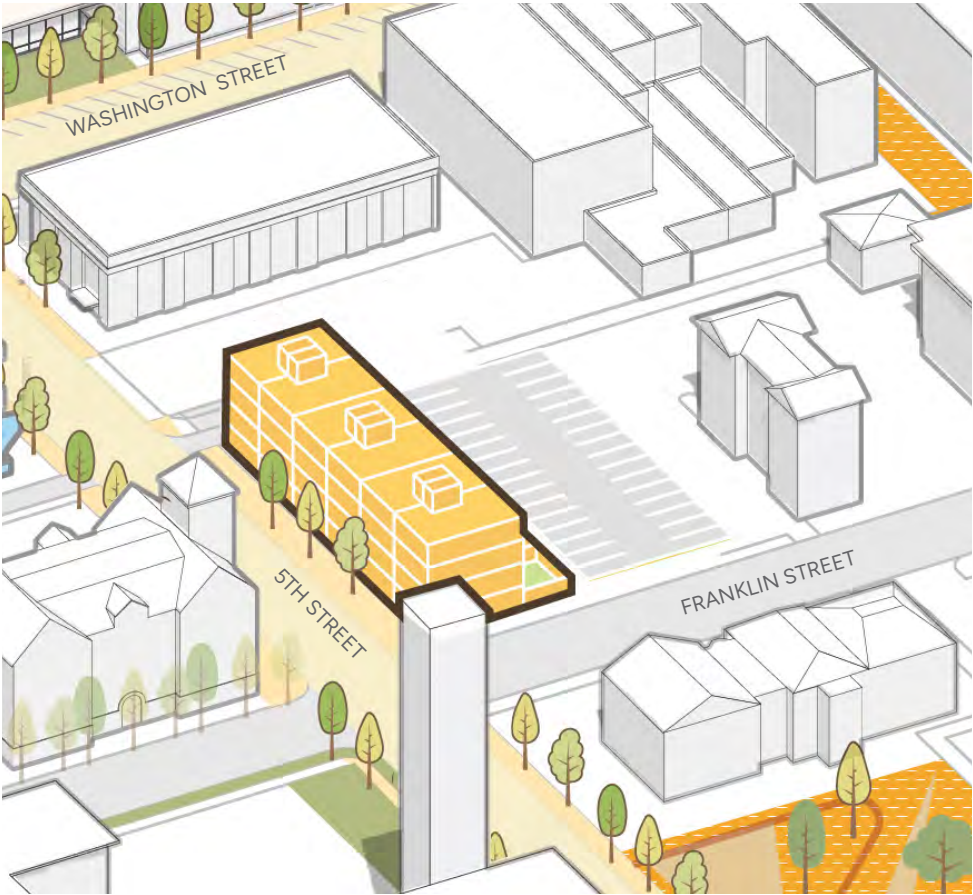
Credit: Peter Clarke

Townhome development could be unique and contribute design character to 5th Street. All development should prioritize human-scale features and texture.



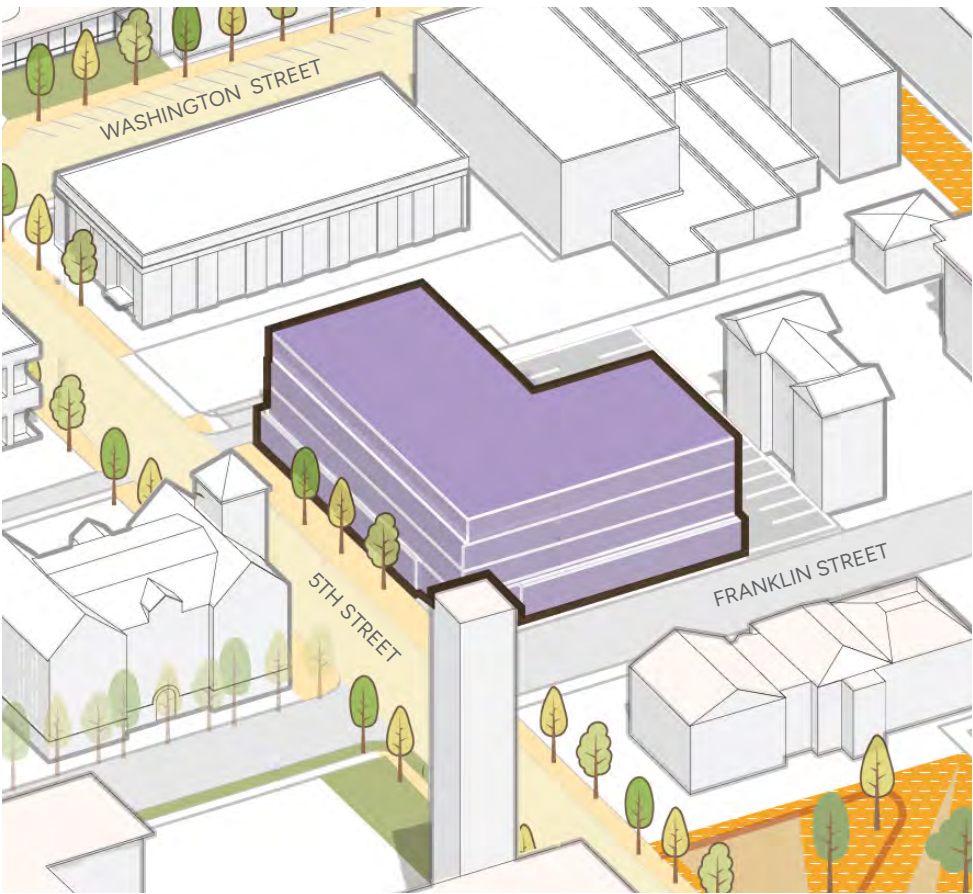
Multifamily development can introduce a lot of units in a small space.

Alternative Proposals



Townhomes
The Irwin Block site is well-suited for townhome development as well as small-scale multifamily. A row of approximately six townhome structures, each either single or stacked, could line 5th Street, with parking in the back.

Townhomes	12 units
Parking	30 spaces



Boutique Hotel
Within a similar development footprint and volume as small-scale multifamily housing, a boutique hotel could also take shape on site. The smaller size of each unit would result in a higher efficiency of hotel rooms as compared to residential units. Parking for a boutique hotel could utilize the same parking strategy as the multifamily development.

Hotel	60 keys
Parking	34 spaces

Opportunity Sites

Priority sites were established by the Columbus Redevelopment Commission as sites of particular interest and focus for the Strategic Planning process. Through the work of analyzing and assessing sites, the planning team, including the Columbus Guiding Team and Sasaki refined and categorized this group of priority sites. The opportunity sites in this section (outlined in orange in the image to the right) are a subset of the overall set of priority sites (outlined in gray).

Opportunity sites are generally located along the edges of downtown and their transformation will be influenced by market conditions. While their redevelopment could occur anywhere between the immediate and long term, these sites hold strong potential to advance Strategic Plan goals. They can help increase downtown foot-traffic and strengthen connections with surrounding neighborhoods.

Opportunity sites are generally best suited for housing development, with a couple of sites serving as strategic exceptions, where new commercial and retail uses can be introduced downtown to enliven key areas and serve downtown populations.



OPPORTUNITY SITES

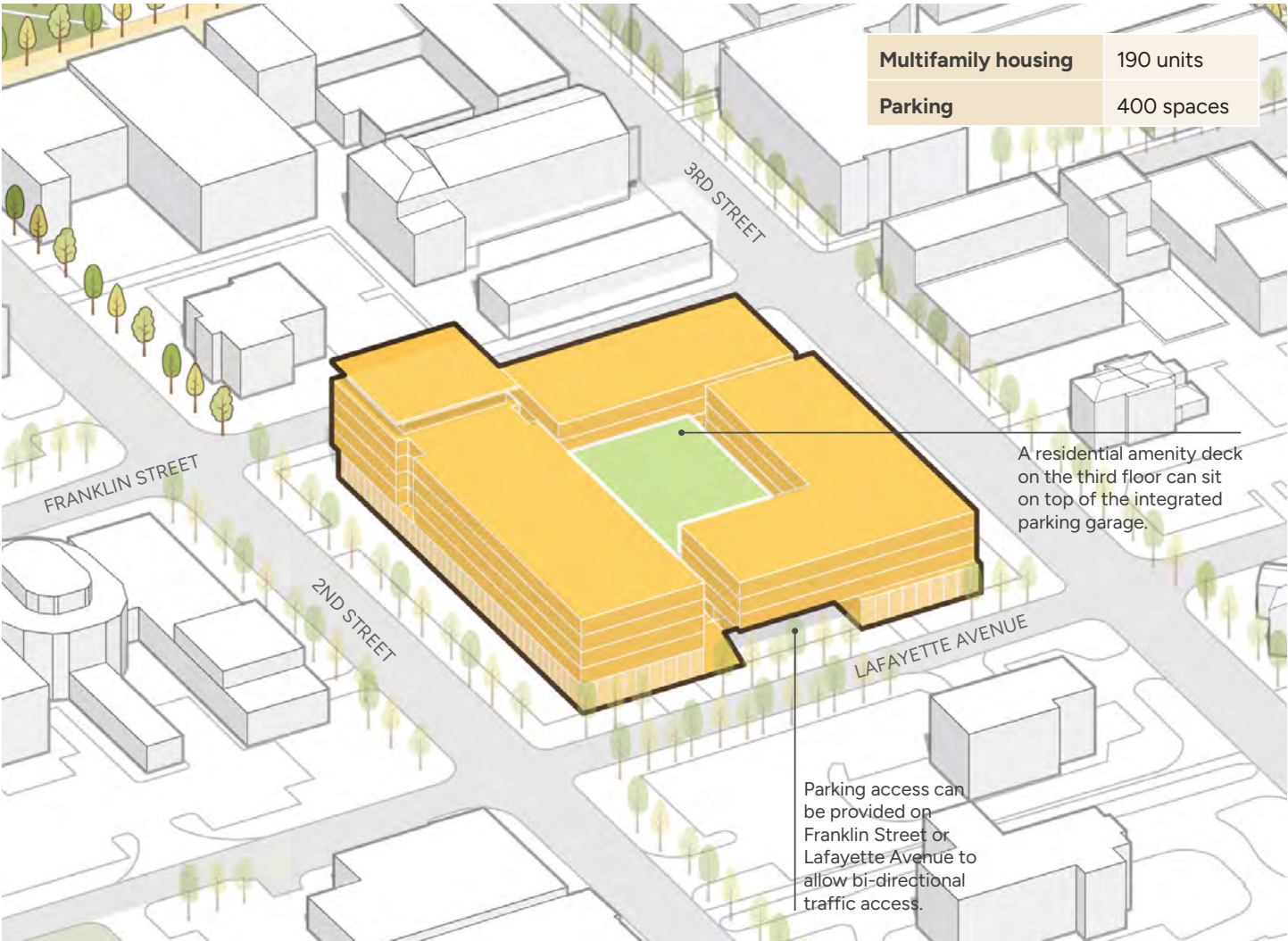
2nd + 3rd Street Parking Lot (RE-12)

The parking lot located southeast of the intersection of 3rd Street and Franklin Street is composed of two parcels, both owned by the Columbus Redevelopment Commission, and which together constitute approximately 2.25 acres. The site is free of structures and presently used for parking by several employers downtown.

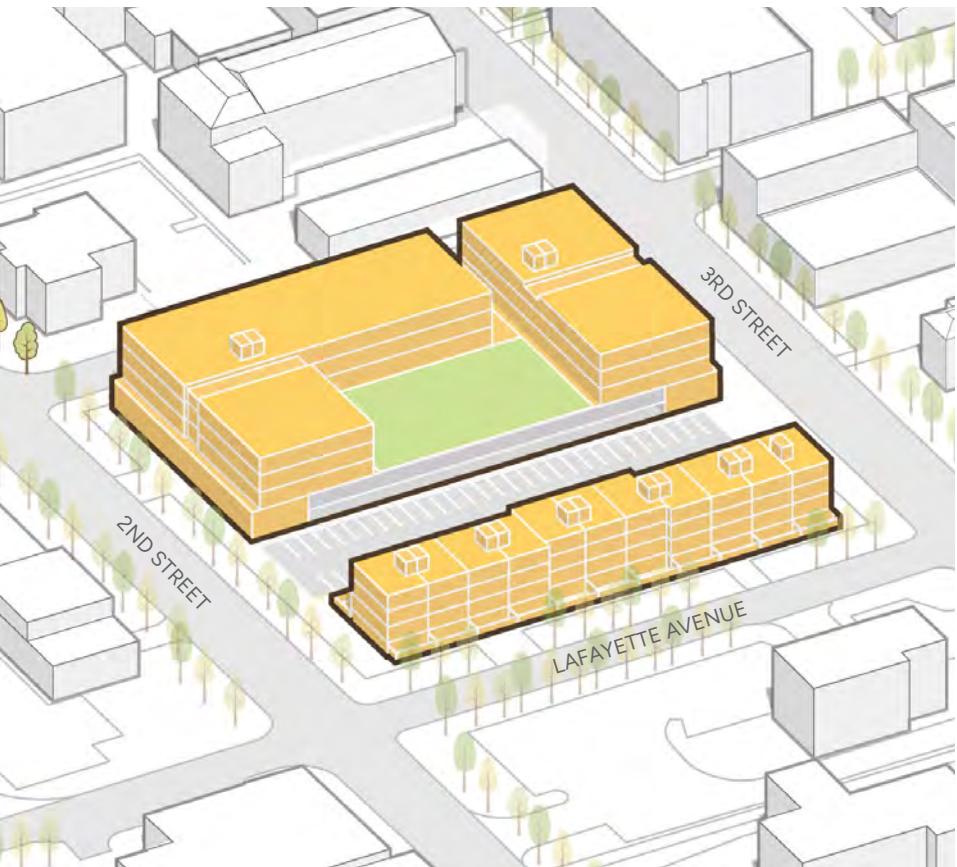
The site’s size and location make it a prime candidate for future residential development accompanied by on-site parking. Given existing parking commitments, future development should be designed with excess parking that can fulfill existing commitments and serve as public parking in the future.

The proposed development depicted below shows a residential podium development, with a parking structure integrated into the center of the site with residential units lining the exterior on all four sides.

Development Concept



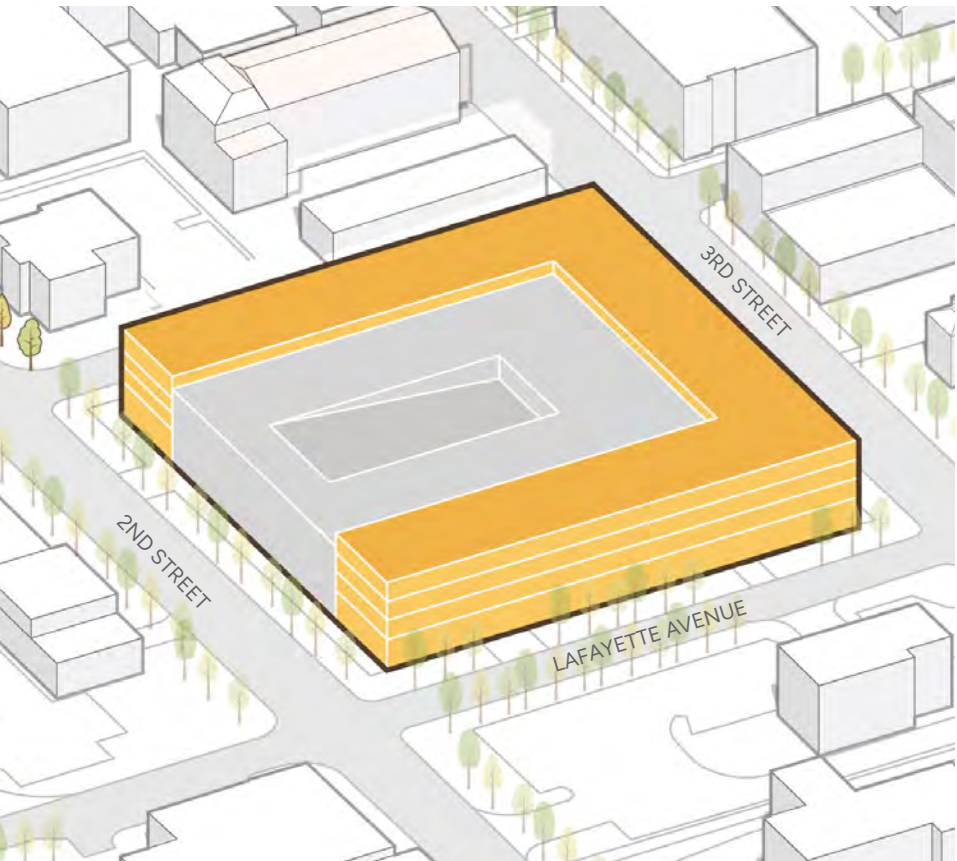
Alternative Proposals



Multifamily + Townhomes

The site is suitable for both multifamily and townhome development, or potentially a hybrid of the two. The concept depicted here develops half of the site with multifamily podium development and half with stacked townhomes that are surface parked. The scheme positions the taller multifamily structure to the west, closer to downtown, while the smaller-scale townhomes face east, closer to Columbus’ residential neighborhoods.

Multifamily housing	100 units
Townhomes	22 units
Parking	215 spaces



Multifamily Wrap

Projects like The Cole prove the viability of a multifamily residential wrap product, where units front an integrated parking structure on three sides of the site. This typology allows for the development of a large parking structure that fully meets demand created on-site with associated development and plenty of excess capacity for public and rentable parking.

Townhomes	150 units
Parking	600 spaces

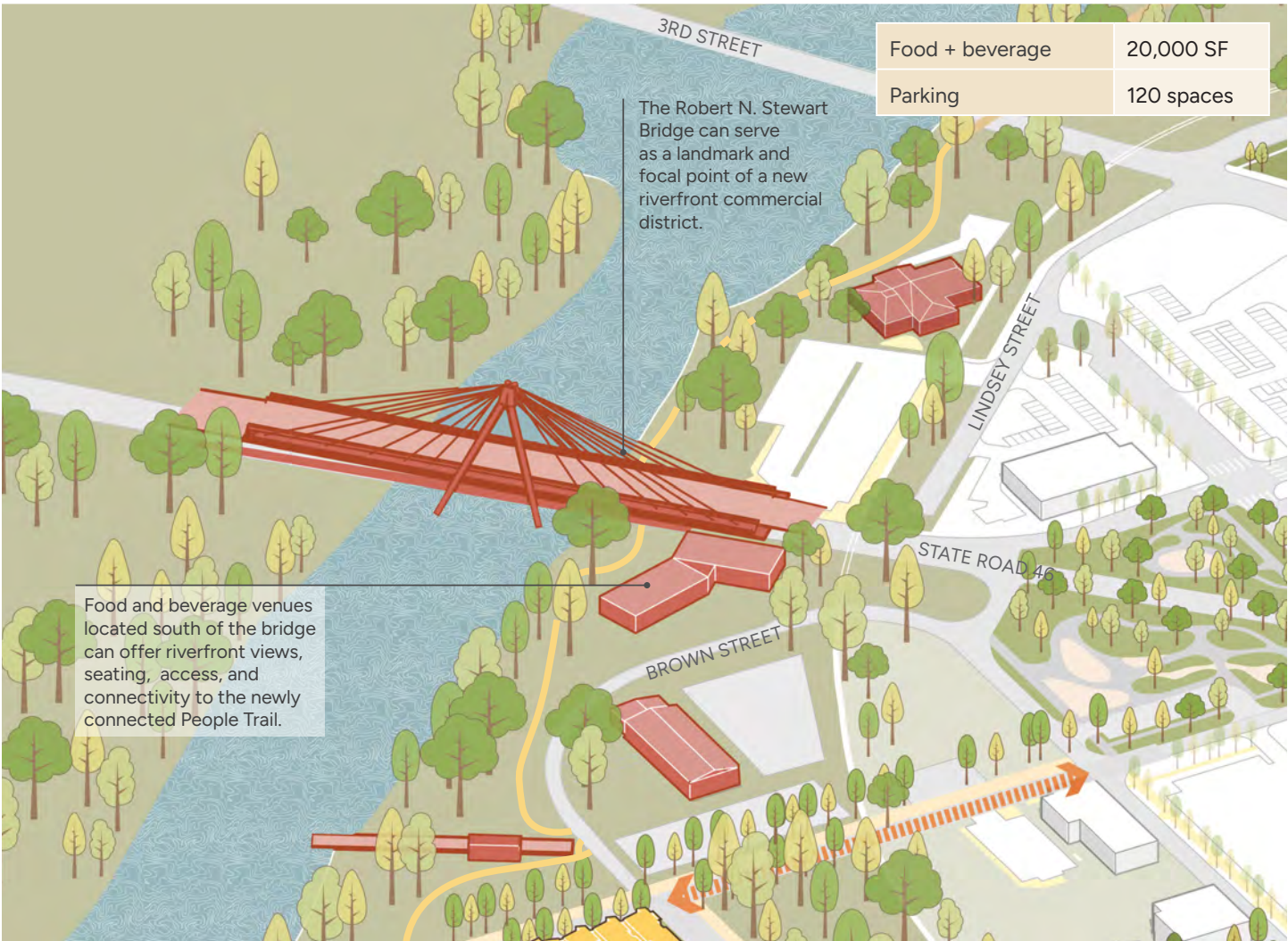
OPPORTUNITY SITES

Brown Street Riverfront Sites (RE-27)

Two sites, together comprising approximately 3.5 acres, sit along the Flatrock River, bisected by Brown Street, south of 1st Street. These sites are owned by the Redevelopment Commission and today sit vacant. The larger of the two sites, comprising approximately 2.4 acres, contains a portion of Brown Street as it curves east and turns into Water Street. This larger site also presently hosts an approximately 9,000 square foot vacant utility shed structure.

Serving as a bridge site between downtown and the 18.8-acre redevelopment site south of Water Street, this combination of sites could serve as active commercial or retail uses, expanding the experience of the Flatrock Riverfront in Downtown Columbus. Food and beverage facilities, similar to the restaurant and brewery at the Pump House, could take shape here, creating a unified and multi-destination riverfront zone south of 3rd Street. There is potential for the existing vacant shed structure to be reused for such uses, if its structure is deemed viable for adaptive reuse.

Development Concept



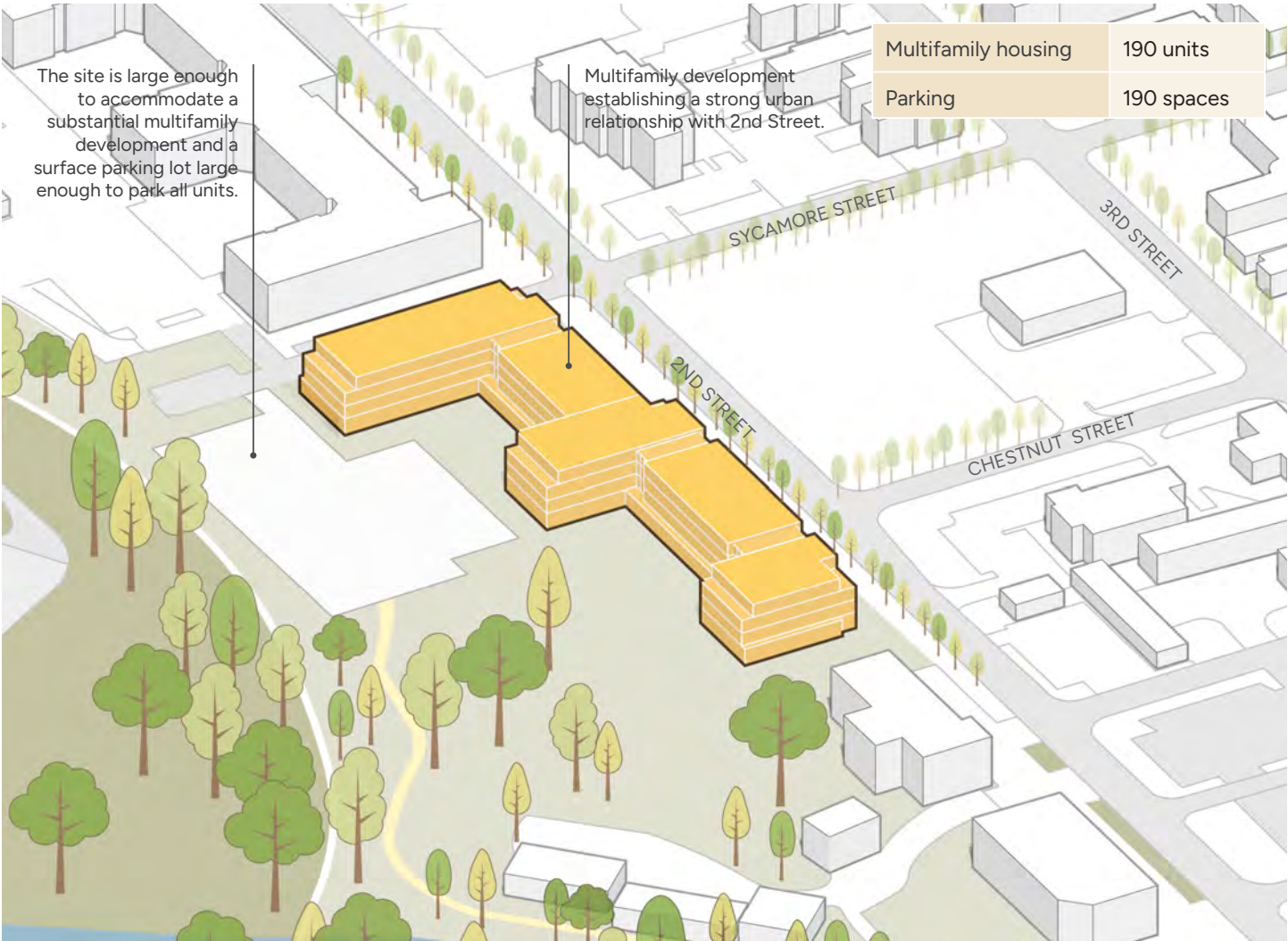
OPPORTUNITY SITES

2nd Street Site (RE-17)

The site along 2nd Street, roughly located between Sycamore Street and California Street is composed of three parcels, all owned by the Columbus Redevelopment Commission, and which together comprise approximately 4.2 acres. The combined site has been cleared of structures, with the exception of an approximately 14,000 SF shed structure on the south side of the site, abutting the east-west railway that passes the site.

The site is a strong candidate for near-term redevelopment as medium-density multifamily, townhomes, or a similarly urban housing solution. The success of the adjacent Taylor development could serve as a model for the site, where development fronts onto 2nd Street and parking is positioned in the back, between the building and the railway.

Development Concept



OPPORTUNITY SITES

Water Street Site (RE-26)

The approximately 18.8-acre riverfront site south of Water Street is the former home of Columbus’ wastewater treatment plant. The plant was recently shut down and demolished and the site was transferred to Columbus Redevelopment Commission ownership. At the time of the property transfer, a restrictive covenant was adopted and tied to the deed. This restricts certain activities on site and limits the kind of development that can take shape there to avoid ground contaminants from impacting future site users.

Given the size and location of the site, this plan recommends redevelopment with housing. The site offers an opportunity to develop a sizable riverfront neighborhood that is walkable to downtown. Residential opportunities range from dense, small-lot single family development to townhomes and garden-style multifamily apartments.



Credit: Alison Brooks Architects

Attached or detached townhomes can accommodate parking within each structure and offer small community spaces on site.



Small-scale multifamily and garden apartments can provide a substantial number of residential units in buildings that still feel small.

Redevelopment Concept - Garden Apartments



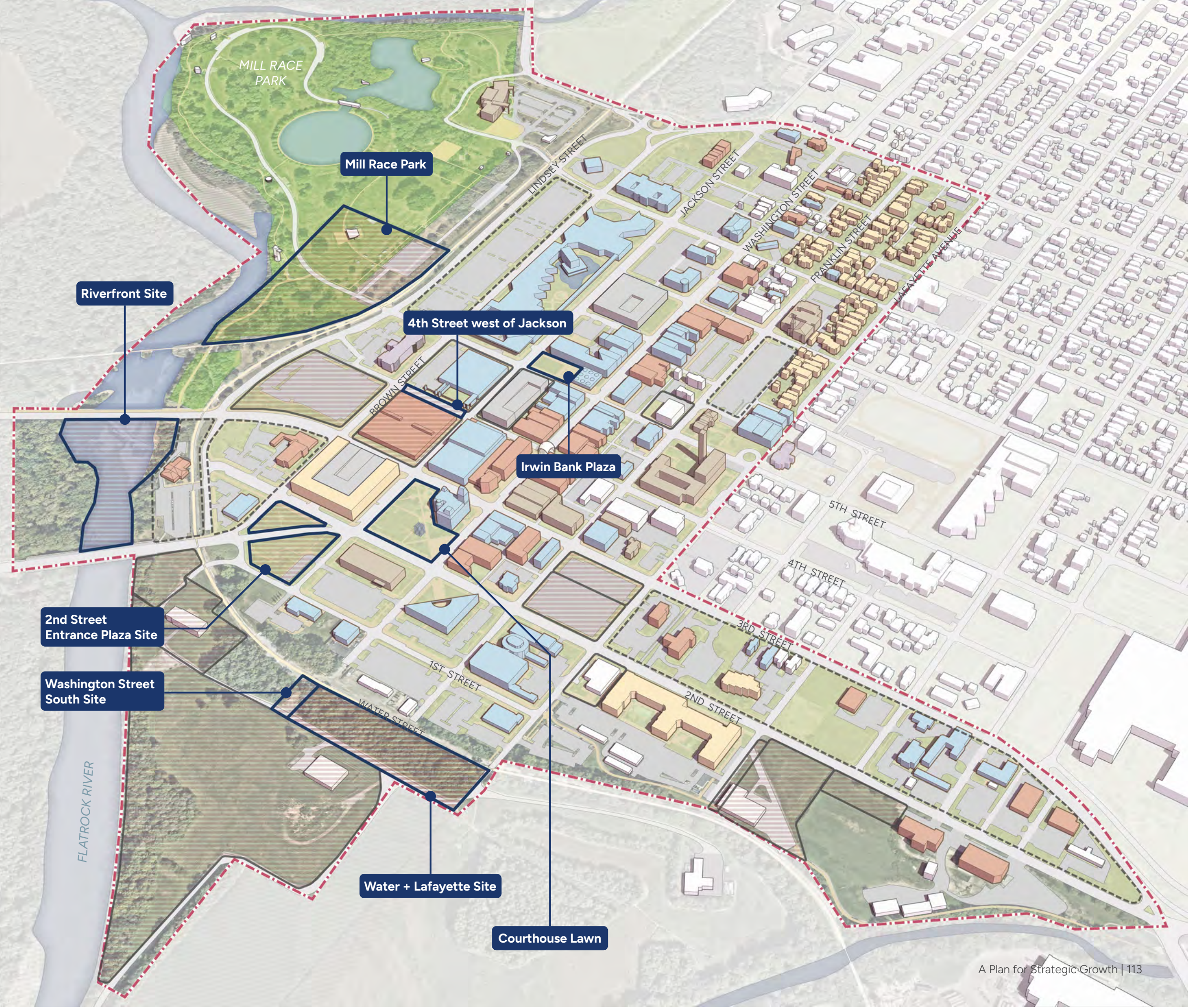
Alternative Proposal - Townhomes



Public Realm Sites

Priority sites were established by the Columbus Redevelopment Commission as sites of particular interest and focus for the Strategic Planning process. Through the work of analyzing and assessing sites, the planning team, including the Columbus Guiding Team and Sasaki refined and categorized this group of priority sites. The public realm sites in this section (outlined in blue in the image to the right) are a subset of the overall set of priority sites (outlined in gray).

Public realm sites are areas that currently contribute, or could contribute, to downtown’s shared public spaces and programming. These sites are ideal candidates for physical improvements, enhanced pedestrian and cycling connectivity, and increased programming or activation. Investments here can foster greater community engagement, activity, and accessibility across downtown’s parks, plazas, and streetscapes.



PUBLIC REALM SITES

Mill Race Park (PR-03, PR-04, PR-10, PR-12, PR-18, AR-05, AR-06)

Mill Race Park is a beloved place within the Columbus community—serving as host to both daily casual recreation and regional-scale community events, year-round. A key opportunity for the near future and a key objective of this Strategic Plan is to better activate Mill Race Park and connect it more fully and legibly to Downtown Columbus. The recommendations here are intended to inform a more comprehensive forthcoming master planning process for Mill Race Park.

- 1. **4th Street Pedestrian Bridge:** Connect 4th Street to Mill Race Park with a pedestrian bridge that crosses over Lindsey Street and the railway.
- 2. **5th Street Gateway:** Introduce a sculptural gateway at the 5th Street entry that marks arrival into the park and establishes a landmark to view from 5th Street.
- 3. **Playscape:** Introduce a great children’s playscape with a splash pad on a site that is close to the Mill Race Park gateways and downtown.
- 4. **Riverfront views:** Selectively clear vegetation to reveal views and provide platforms and launches for viewing and launching small craft onto the river.
- 5. **Event space:** Rehabilitate or redesign the festival and event spaces and amenities to support regional events.



Precedent Places



A splash pad in Mill Race Park would provide a comfortable, safe, and vibrant amenity to the park and bring many more families downtown.



Creative playscapes can be a regional draw and offer a distinctive amenity to Mill Race.



A pedestrian bridge to Mill Race can better connect it to downtown and offer a unique and compelling experience.



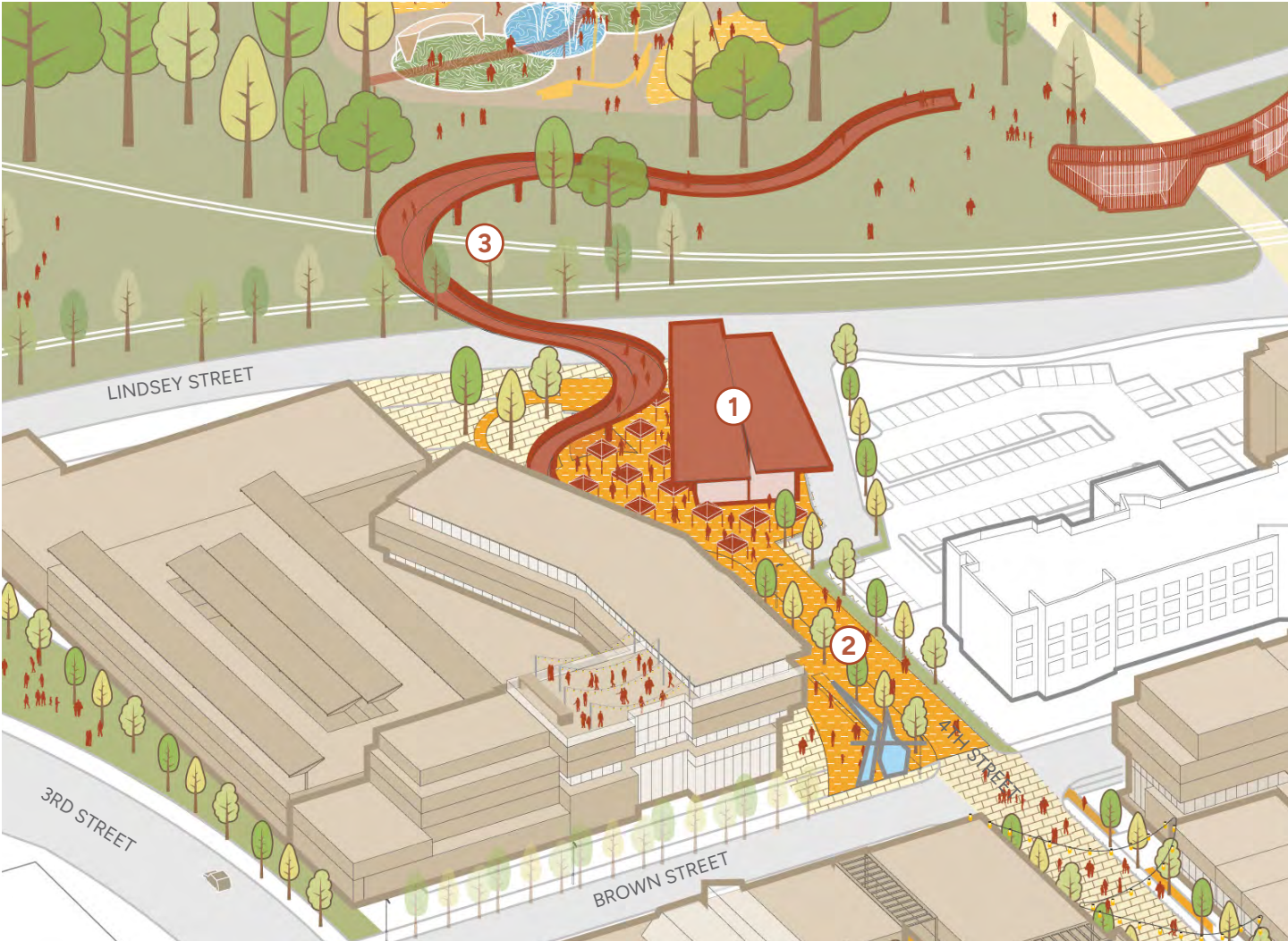
A sculptural gateway into Mill Race Park at 5th Street can enhance this entry point, strengthen downtown’s relationship with the park, provide a beacon, and offer services that support park usage.

PUBLIC REALM SITES

Market Hall + Plaza (RE-22, PR-08)

The vision for downtown focuses in large part on activating 4th Street as a distinctive destination within the downtown and better connecting the whole of downtown to Mill Race Park. This vision includes introducing a new pedestrian connection to Mill Race Park from 4th Street, via a pedestrian bridge, turning the western terminus of 4th Street into a vibrant pedestrianized plaza for events and festivals, and building a new, simple, and flexible market hall building that can host a year-round farmers’ market in the heart of downtown.

- 1. **Market Hall Building:** Develop a flexible, architecturally beautiful market hall structure with minimal indoor conditioning and utilities to facilitate year-round events. Design it to have a flexible and permeable relationship with the plaza outside.
- 2. **4th Street Plaza:** Create a pedestrian and event plaza between Lindsey Street and Brown Street. The space should be designed to accommodate a wide range of events from festivals to outdoor markets.
- 3. **Pedestrian Bridge:** Design and construct a sculptural bridge stretching from the proposed 4th Street Plaza, over Lindsey Street and the railway, and into Mill Race Park. Design the bridge to offer a seamless route from 4th Street to the park.



Precedent Places



A pedestrian and event plaza at the western terminus of 4th Street creates an anchor destination and a strong connection point with Mill Race Park.



Farmers’ and other market activity can spill out of the proposed market hall and into the plaza.



The proposed market hall structure can be simple and low-maintenance while providing shelter from the elements for year-round activation.



The proposed market hall structure can be architecturally distinctive, adding a new landmark to downtown, while offering flexibility for indoor/outdoor programming.

Entrance Plaza (PR-17, AP-02, AP-04)

The Entrance Plaza site, along with the Robert N. Stewart Bridge, serves as a gateway into downtown for those approaching from State Road 46, from the west. The site is undergoing a redesign and reconstruction project, led by the Columbus Redevelopment Department. The emerging plans involve incorporating spaces for community activation, enhanced views, more and more diverse planting, and the incorporation of spaces that allow for passive recreation and small gatherings. In addition to those ideas for the park and plaza areas that are under development, several Strategic Plan recommendations address the role of this site downtown.

- 1. **Gateway Plaza Redesign:** Continue efforts to implement the Gateway Plaza redesign produced by Merritt Chase.
- 2. **Improved 2nd + 3rd Street:** Implement ongoing planning and design updates for 3rd Street and create plans for 2nd Street streetscape enhancements. Introduce traffic calming where possible.
- 3. **Gateway Signage + Wayfinding:** Add new signage and wayfinding to create a true gateway experience.



Merritt Chase’s concept design for an enhanced Entrance Plaza includes a variety of spaces and features that cater to daily life and special events in the space.



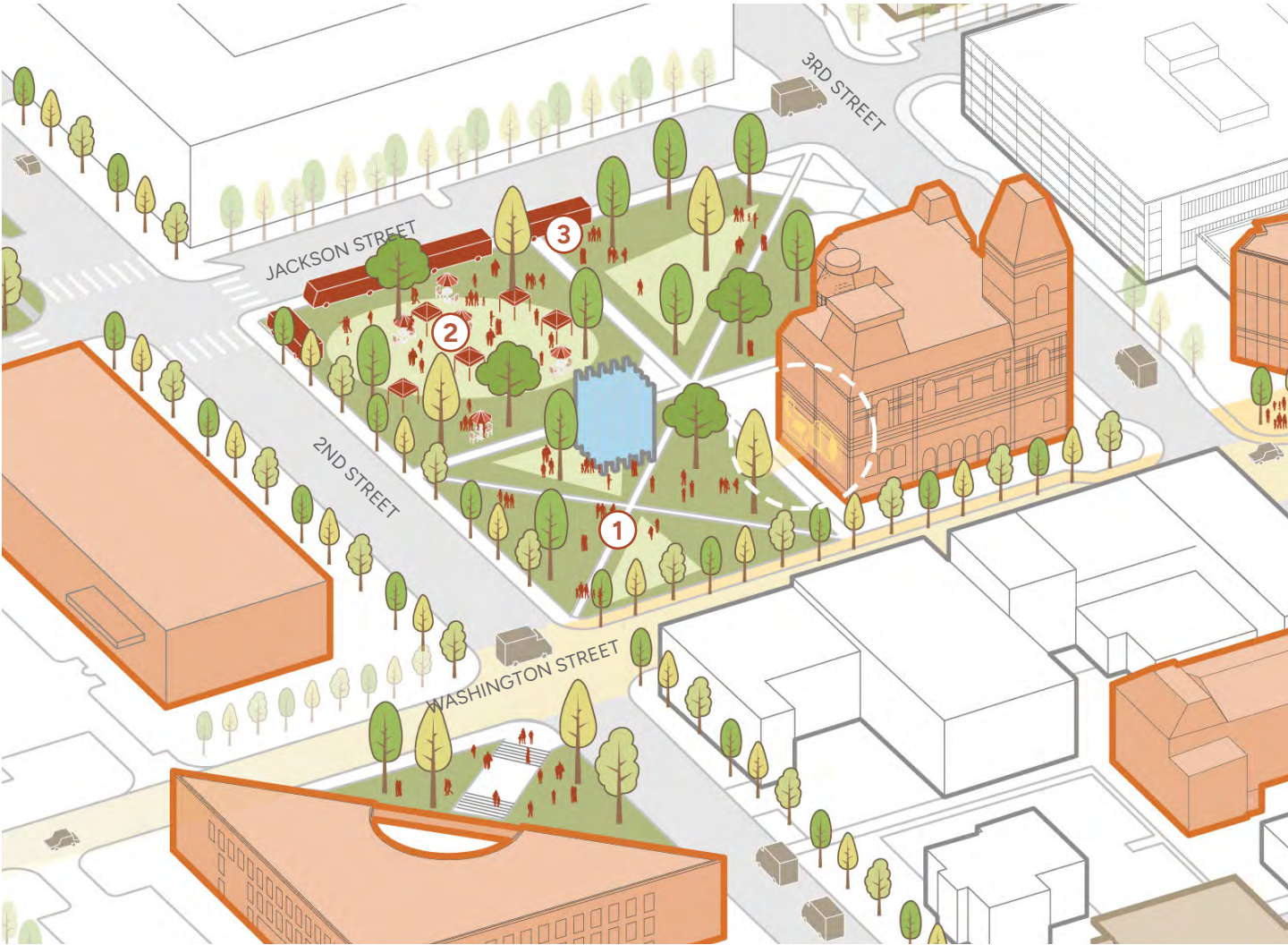
Prominent gathering spaces join small enclaves and grand welcoming gestures to create a rich and potentially vibrant public space in the heart of Downtown Columbus.

PUBLIC REALM SITES

Courthouse Lawn (PR-17, AP-02, AP-04)

Downtown Columbus’ County Courthouse lawn is ideally located for greater community activation. It sits between 2nd and 3rd Streets—primary gateways into and through downtown—and serves as part of the southern terminus of the downtown Washington Street experience. This plan identifies opportunities to better use the space and tie it into the fabric of downtown, with casual daily events and activities that maintain a respectful distance from the site’s historic and civic buildings, monuments, and memorials.

- 1. **Give Permission to Hang Out:** Encourage casual, daily use of the space with visual cues and amenities that support gathering. Provide flexible seating, lighting, tables, lawn games, etc. Consider pop-up vendor spaces where the City or other entities can distribute blankets, cushions, umbrellas, etc.
- 2. **Promote DORA:** Promote the DORA district and encourage participation within the Courthouse Lawn area with signage, seating, activities, receptacles, etc.
- 3. **Activate with Food:** Designate an area for food trucks and other pop-up food vendors to serve daytime/ lunch, and event traffic. Provide basic services needed to facilitate good food truck service and etiquette.



Precedent Places



Frequent temporary activation of public open spaces with fun activities, seating, games, and vendors can help change the community’s perception of the space and give them “permission” to adopt the spaces as their own, for a great variety of daily uses.



Setting up seating areas and designating space for food trucks can help rapidly create a destination, where programming and creative uses can follow.



Offering amenities for casual hanging out, like picnic blankets, chairs, umbrellas, and cushions, can encourage more activity.

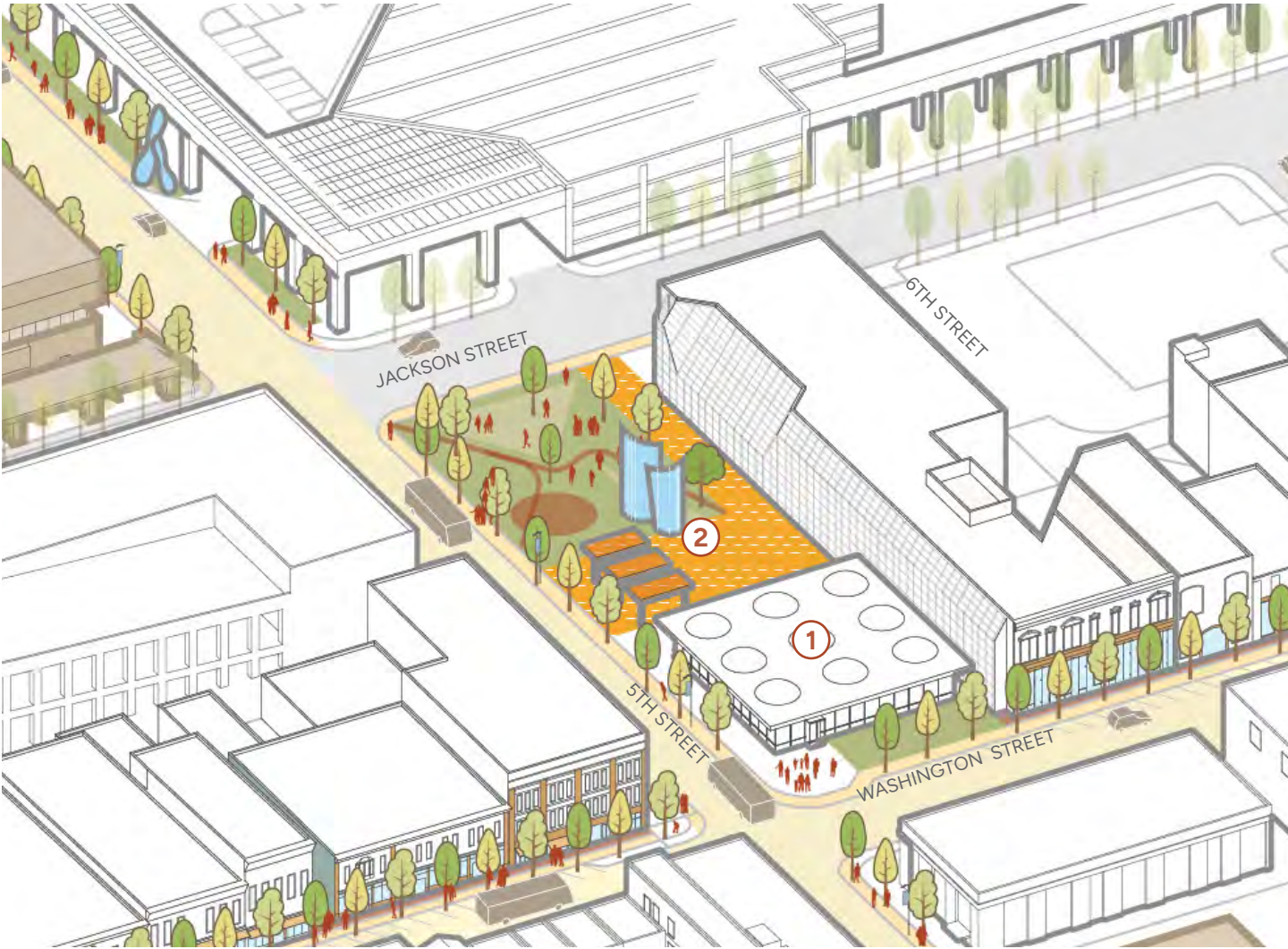
PUBLIC REALM SITES

Irwin Bank Plaza (PR-09, AP-8, AP-09)

The Irwin Bank 5th Street Plaza and Lawn consists of a landscaped plaza space on a 1.56-acre site between Washington Street and Jackson Street, immediately north of 5th Street. The plaza is adjacent to two notable pieces of architecture, including a 1954 Eero Saarinen bank building (listed on the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmark in 2000) and an office building with a dramatic set of three-story glass arcades, designed by Kevin Roche in the early 70's.



Flexible, branded park spaces that adapt to community needs, where moveable furniture and thoughtful design create versatile gathering areas for events, relaxation, and connection.



A view of the Irwin Bank and Office Buildings and the park /plaza at 5th and Jackson Streets as seen from Jackson Street.

- 1. New Publicly-Accessible Use:** Aim for a future use for the Irwin Bank building that makes it publicly-accessible—adding this gem of a building to the must-see list of every visitor. A potential opportunity for publicly-oriented uses could include the following:
 - Visitors' Experience:* Repurpose the historic bank building as a new visitors' experience, prominently located at the corner of 5th and Washington Streets.
 - Restaurant/Cafe:* A mid-century/bank themed fine dining restaurant or cafe and co-working space with seating at the corner of 5th and Washington.
 - Gallery:* Featuring exhibits on the ground floor and multimedia (e.g. theater) in the basement, showcasing Columbus' role in mid-century and modern design and rotating exhibits.
- 2. 5th Street Plaza + Lawn:** Brand, program, and promote the plaza and lawn space on 5th Street with a regular calendar of community events. Daytime use should align with public uses at the bank building, occupants of the Irwin Office Building, and Cummins (outdoor lunching, meeting spot).



A view from inside the Irwin Bank Building, showing original architectural and interior design elements along with reproduced pieces and furniture.

Other Potential Growth Sites

Other Potential Growth Sites are not identified as Strategic Plan priorities but still offer valuable opportunities for growth. They can help increase downtown’s residential and workforce populations while supporting the city’s long-term objectives. Strategic investment in these sites can complement core projects and broaden the overall benefits of downtown development.



OTHER POTENTIAL
GROWTH SITES

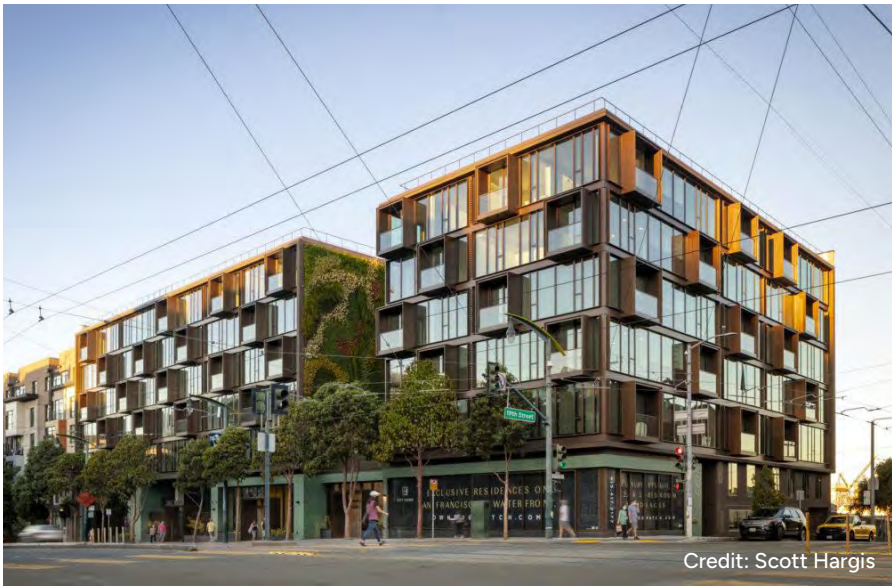
Precedent Places



Multifamily development with retail ground floors should be largely reserved for the core of downtown in the short-term, but larger footprint uses like a grocery store might be better suited for sites just outside the downtown core, where vehicular traffic can be better facilitated.



Development of new multifamily buildings should include adequate and well-designed public and private outdoor space.



As downtown and Columbus grow, residential development in the form of multifamily units will become increasingly important in downtown. These buildings have the opportunity to build on Columbus’ legacy of design excellence.



Almost all of downtown’s potential redevelopment sites would be good candidates for townhome development. The typology exists well in downtown and near-downtown settings as it helps activate streets.



Implementing the Vision

Development Strategies

Realizing the vision shaped by the Columbus community and articulated in this plan will require input, coordination, and leadership among downtown champions in the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Proposals for redevelopment and growth downtown are included in this plan for sites currently held in public and private hands. The approach to implementing development recommendations will be different in each case.

Columbus is well-equipped to carry forward the recommendations of this plan through implementation. In the final stages of planning, the City, under the leadership of Mayor Mary Ferdon, began organizing itself into groups for carrying plan recommendations forward. These included an overall implementation Steering Committee, chaired by two community leaders, and three Action Teams, each focused on the implementation path for different sets of recommendations, organized by type. These teams include Real Estate + Economic Development, Public Realm + Infrastructure, and Programming + Activation.

Each Action Team includes a membership of 10-12 community leaders within local government, private industry, and community groups. This diverse mix of people and organizations will be important to ensure the perspectives, resources, networks, and passion of all of Columbus are represented and working together to achieve the community's goals. These Action Teams and the Steering Committee will meet regularly and work in smaller, more focused teams to advance plan recommendations and advise City leadership on investments and next steps for each.

Real Estate + Economic Development Recommendations

Many of the recommendations for Downtown Columbus are proposed for publicly-owned sites. In some cases, these sites are part of the community's existing public realm, including parks, open spaces, and streetscapes. In each of these cases, recommendations focus on enhancements, programming, and activation strategies to expand their accessibility and visitation by the Columbus community. Other publicly-owned sites are either presently undeveloped (e.g., surface parking lots) or host development that is either vacant or in transition. For these sites, the plan recommends redevelopment and activation with uses that are well-suited and in furtherance of Strategic Plan goals for Downtown Columbus.

In cases where public land is being recommended for future development or reactivation through adaptive reuse, the City of Columbus should explore different development, funding, and partnership models based on its immediate and long-term interests in the property. Some of those models are described here.

Public-Private Partnerships

Public-private partnerships can help deliver development in line with community goals and policy objectives. Often, municipalities take a more active role in facilitating development by helping to define project goals, parameters, requirements, and desired development strategies. Cities, in their role as a partner in this type of arrangement, can also help ensure that the project moves forward, typically by mitigating development risk and using economic development tools to improve the feasibility of the project.

The specific actions a municipality can take for a given site depends in large part on land ownership and existing commitments on the property. Public-private partnerships are negotiated between the controlling public authority and a selected private vendor. Though there are many models and arrangements that can be made with a private partner, public-private partnerships typically involve a city or other government entity maintaining ownership over a property.

Role of the Redevelopment Commission

The Columbus Redevelopment Commission (CRC) plays a central role in guiding economic development and revitalization efforts in Columbus, Indiana. As the overseer of the city's tax increment financing (TIF) districts, it has historically used captured property tax revenue to fund public infrastructure, land acquisition, and redevelopment projects that encourage private investment. By strategically investing in key areas, the Commission can continue its work strengthening the local economy, support housing and business opportunities, and ensure the long-term vitality of Downtown Columbus.

CRC's role in implementing the Downtown Strategic Plan is to projects that further economic development in Downtown Columbus. In addition to prioritizing and dispersing TIF funds, the CRC's ownership of several priority sites downtown enables it to unlock the growth and development potential identified in this plan. A key recommendation of the plan is to facilitate development on these sites and to transition them to private ownership. The specific strategy for divesting the CRC's ownership in each site will vary by site.

The City and CRC should develop and adopt a formal policy for divesting itself of these properties through a variety of approaches, including land sales, land grants for gap-financing, and long-term ground leases. Each of these approaches should have an associated process and timeline.

Disposition of Publicly Owned Sites

On publicly-owned sites, the City can define its own priorities and development strategy. The most successful development strategies are grounded in a vision shaped by the community, informed by real estate market realities, and based on planning and development best practices. Using this Strategic Plan as a starting place, the City and its implementation partners should define the parameters of a potential partnership, development approach, and development program.

The City can select its development partner, usually through a competitive developer solicitation process (i.e., a request for qualifications/proposals) that includes review of developer experience and qualifications and the specific features and terms of their development proposal. The City should use the Strategic Plan as a guide for developing an RFP/Q that reflects the adopted vision and guidance for the site and Downtown Columbus more largely.

In some cases, the City may instead prefer to go through a negotiated transaction with a preferred development partner. This may be the case with uniquely qualified/experienced developers or partners with a stake in the future of the site. If the City prefers to explore this route, it can negotiate a redevelopment agreement with the developer that covers topics like the development program, project performance standards, public financial assistance, and land price, among other topics.

Privately Owned Sites

With privately-owned sites, the City will play a less active role in development efforts, but can still guide and incentivize preferred development outcomes. Using other policy, program, and partnership recommendations of this Plan and other tools that exist today, the City can support and ensure outcomes that reflect community preferences and Downtown Columbus's legacy of thoughtful and high-quality design and development.

The City should proactively reach out to property owners with sites addressed by the Strategic Plan to understand their goals and how they may align with those of the City and the Plan. The City and its partners should develop an understanding of any anticipated timelines for transformation on target sites and the expectations/goals of their current owners when it comes to possible sales or partnerships in redevelopment efforts.

The City can offer public financial assistance to projects that align with the City's goals. For example, the City

provided TIF assistance to The Taylor, a mixed-use project in the downtown. Lastly, the City can strategically purchase sites from willing property owners, if the purchases enhance the marketability of existing CRC properties or if purchases facilitate implementation of the downtown plan. The CRC has acquired several properties, including the former Sears Building, and is now looking to solicit developers for private development to activate the downtown.

Financial Assistance for Projects

Most public-private partnerships, whether on publicly- or privately-owned sites, require public-sector participation to improve project financial feasibility and achieve desired development outcomes. Public financial assistance can attract private investment and make both new construction and renovation projects more feasible. The City has several available tools to fill financial gaps, including tax increment financing (TIF), tax abatements, and land write-downs for publicly owned sites. However, the City should work to right-size any public financial assistance to reach minimum private sector investment returns and/or to achieve public goals such as affordable housing. Projects that aren't as strong from a market perspective, such as certain specialty commercial uses, may require a greater share of public assistance to be feasible. The City should also structure its redevelopment agreements to mitigate the public risk.

The City should approach investment in privately-led development downtown with a structured, criteria-based framework to balance public benefit and financial risk. Key considerations include:

- **Public Benefit:** Quantify how the project supports City and Strategic Plan goals—such as increasing housing, jobs, tax base, or cultural amenities—and whether it fills a demonstrated gap (e.g., housing shortage, retail demand).
- **Financial Gap Analysis:** Require partners/developers to show the “but-for” need—i.e., the project would not happen, or not at the desired scale/quality, without public support.
- **Return on Investment:** Evaluate projected tax revenues, increased property values, and secondary economic impacts compared to public costs.
- **Risk Management:** Structure incentives (grants, TIF support, infrastructure investments) so the city shares upside but limits exposure if the project under-performs.
- **Leverage:** Ensure the private sector is contributing substantially more than the public side, demonstrating developer commitment.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Use clear agreements with performance benchmarks, claw-backs, and timelines to protect taxpayer funds.

In summary, the city should invest only the minimum necessary to close financing gaps, ensure measurable community benefits, and catalyze broader downtown revitalization.

Market Hall

Based on community input and the success of models in comparable cities and downtowns (e.g., Bend, OR; Milwaukee, WI), the Strategic Plan recommends the development of a year-round, flexible market hall structure in the core of Downtown Columbus. This structure would accommodate and expand the calendar of the beloved Downtown Farmers’ Market and offer a venue in the heart of downtown for a range of public and private events. Recommendations also include the development of a pedestrian and event plaza outside the market hall to enable spill-out activity in temperate months.

Market halls can be developed by the public or private sector, and many are developed through a public-private partnership. While some smaller markets have been funded and built entirely by the private sector, most recent projects have been developed with significant public funding in the form of municipal, state and/or federal grants or with various tax credit programs. Once built, market halls are rarely operated by the public sector. Many are managed by a non-profit or private operator.

Case Study

Milwaukee Public Market

Milwaukee, WI

Built in 2005, the Milwaukee Public Market features 14,000 square feet of market space and 19 independent vendors. The market cost \$10 million to develop. Funds came from a mix of public and private sources, including a \$2.5 million EDA grant, and \$3 million from foundations, corporations and individual donors. The market was developed by the area Business Improvement District (BID), an entity that has its own staff and a Board of Directors that consists of representatives of area businesses. The market’s operations are funded through vendor fees and BID sources. No public dollars are provided to the Market’s annual operating budget.



Case Study

Farmer’s Market Pavilion

Eugene, OR

The Farmer’s Market Pavilion is an 8,500 square foot building that was completed in 2022 following a community-driven design process. The City of Eugene planned, designed, and built the pavilion and adjacent plaza. Most of the funding for the \$9.3 million project came from local TIF funds managed by the Eugene Urban Renewal Agency, with Lane County also contributing \$900,000. City continues to own and operate the market pavilion, paying for operations with General Fund dollars. The local farmers market has a rental agreement with the City to use the pavilion for its events.



Public Realm + Infrastructure Recommendations

When it comes to public realm and infrastructure recommendations, the City of Columbus will be the primary implementer of projects, as most of these recommendations apply to publicly-owned and controlled sites. In most cases, these projects—including streetscape redesign and reconstruction, improvements to landscapes like Mill Race Park, and downtown signage and wayfinding—can be advanced and implemented through existing City processes, through the Departments of Community Development, Parks and Recreation, Public Works, and Engineering.

In the case of other recommendations, such as the pedestrian bridge from 4th Street to Mill Race Park and the Mill Race Park gateway at 5th Street, a special implementation apparatus and new partnerships may be required. Dedicated entities for these projects could include multiple public, private, and non-profit partners who can support funding, design, construction, and ongoing maintenance and operations of these features.

Some sites that are considered part of the overall downtown public realm are privately controlled, including the proposed programmable park/plaza space at 5th and Jackson Streets—presently owned as part of the Irwin Bank and Office Building site. For this and other similar sites, the City can play either a lead or supporting role in facilitating implementation of the recommendations of this Strategic Plan. A supporting role involves providing incentives, financial support, administrative support, programming support, and other services to supplement efforts of private owners to make more accessible and activate spaces. Should the City desire to play more of a lead role in the programming and activation of these spaces, they could seek to acquire the sites and administer reconfiguration, programming, and ongoing maintenance and operations of the sites.

Pedestrian Bridge

Pedestrian bridges are generally public infrastructure; they are typically built by the public sector. However, many larger projects rely in part on private funding. Recently, architecturally significant pedestrian bridges raised between 30% and 60% of total project costs from private sources including corporations, foundations, and individual donors. In certain cases, private funding was provided in exchange for bridge naming rights.

Hotel + Conference Center

Interviews with the Hotel Indigo owner show robust occupancy for that property, leading to their desire to expand the Hotel Indigo. Many of the largest employers in Columbus have expressed a need and desire for a hotel and conference center to hold trainings and other corporate events. The 2022 Hunden hotel-conference market study identified that a 150-key hotel and conference center could capture significant demand from corporate and group market segments. A conference center would also be able to attract event programming that isn’t currently captured within the local market. However, conference centers do not tend to be financially feasible without public subsidy. The Hunden study identified a \$11.8M gap related to the hotel/conference center and an additional \$10M gap associated with structured parking. Over the long-term, this initial public spend could be offset by economic activity driven by new visitor spending, which could also help activate existing businesses downtown.

Programming + Activation Recommendations

Developing, promoting, and facilitating downtown programming and activations is the purview of all downtown stakeholders, including the City and its departments, local businesses and business groups, and community members and non-profit organizations. In some cases, the Strategic Plan recommends expanding on events and activities downtown that are already successful

and significant magnets for downtown foot-traffic. In other cases, the plan recommends activating existing spaces with new programs and events.

Ahead of embarking on efforts to expand events and activities downtown, the Strategic Plan recommends undertaking projects, programs, policies, and partnerships to prepare venues for increased and enhanced programming. These recommendations include operational improvements to better empower community leaders to host more events downtown, improvement projects that enhance and expand the streets, plazas, and green spaces that support programming and activation, and new partnerships to best leverage the strengths of Columbus’ community groups and networks.

A lot of additional awareness and participation in Downtown Columbus can be gained with greater coordination between entities that already host events and conduct programming there. Other recommendations include “branding” and promoting events designed to bring the community together to celebrate downtown, its businesses, and its public spaces.

Case Study

Barbara Walker Footbridge

Portland, OR

The Barbara Walker Footbridge was developed by the Portland Parks Foundation through a public-private partnership with the City of Portland and Metro. The bridge, which opened in 2019, connects a popular trail over a busy road. The project cost \$4 million to build, \$2.1 million of which came from the Portland Parks Foundation’s donor campaign. Several design and engineering companies provided hundreds of hours in pro bono services for the design, engineering and construction of the bridge. The City and Metro contributed funding and were active partners throughout the process.



Conceptual Phasing

Implementation of the vision for Downtown Columbus that is articulated in this plan will not happen all at once. Full realization of the projects and growth envisioned for downtown will likely happen in the long-term, as market demand increases and early projects catalyze interest and investment in more growth and development.

At this early stage, proposed phasing should be considered a first draft—something that is flexible to the changing dynamics of public interest and the private market. This conceptual phasing plan can be used as a guide for deliberation among plan implementers to determine the prioritization and sequencing of projects and investments. Projects recommended for earlier implementation are envisioned as potential “quick wins”—or, projects that can be implemented on a short timeline and at a relatively smaller investment. Other early projects are envisioned as catalytic, meaning their early implementation could create momentum for additional projects by bringing more people downtown and unlocking more potential investment.

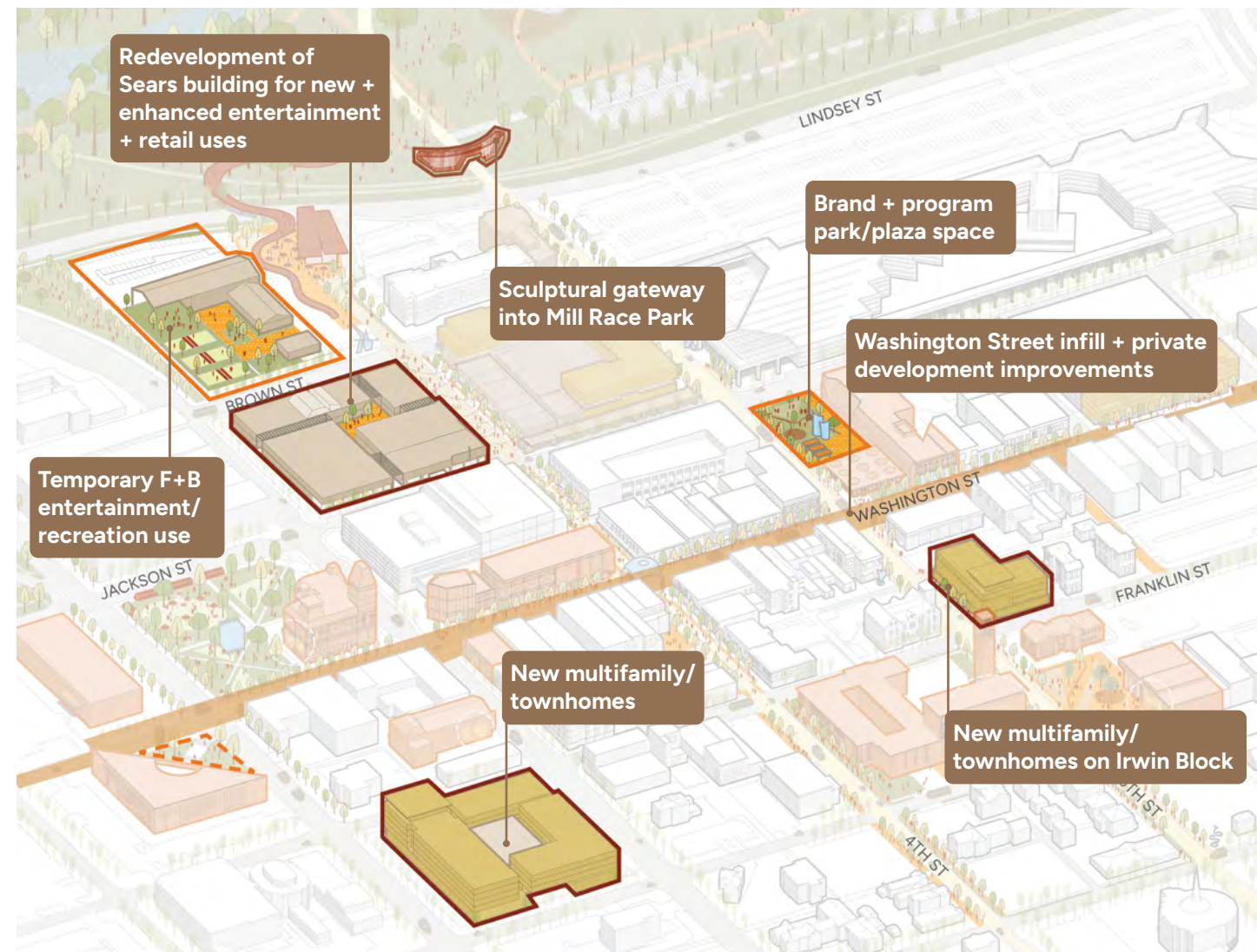
Projects slated for the longer term are typically those that rely on stronger market demand or more intensive site preparations before they can take shape. These include projects that are high priorities for the Columbus community, but which require more people downtown on a regular basis before a private implementer might be interested. It is important to the success of each project that an accurate assessment of market demand informs implementation timelines.



Near-term (0-2 years)

Projects envisioned for immediate-term implementation could commence and take shape within approximately the next two years. These include opportunities to reinforce elements of downtown and increase visitation, awareness of downtown's offerings, and activation of presently underutilized spaces. Some potentially immediate-term (zero to two years) projects include:

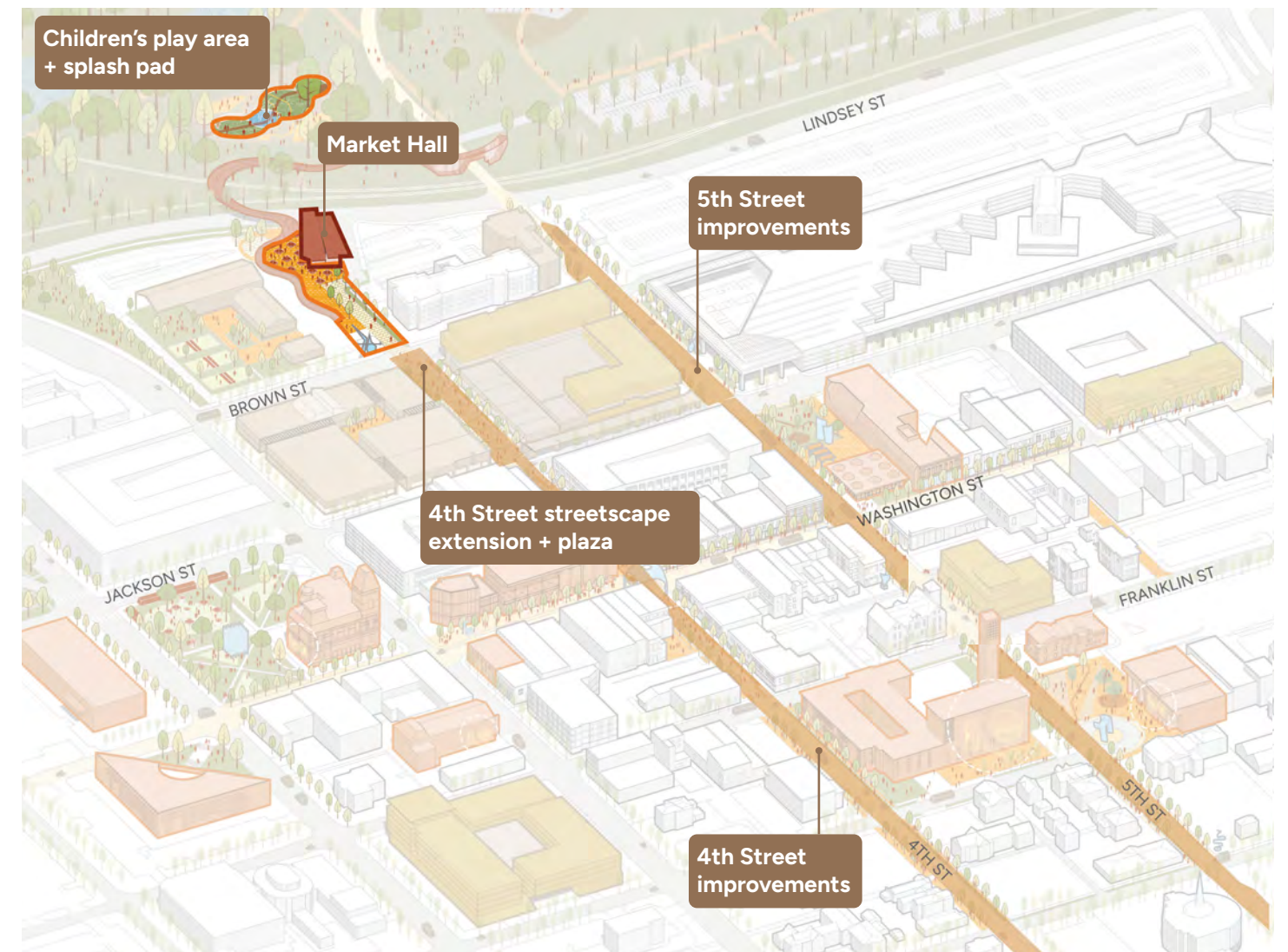
- Drive new retail, food and beverage, and other active commercial uses to existing venues along Washington Street.
- Increase programming and activation at key places within downtown's, including Mill Race Park, the County Courthouse lawn, 4th Street, and the library plaza.
- Redevelop the former Sears building with active commercial ground floor uses (and potentially multifamily housing).
- Design, build, and install a signature gateway structure at the entry to Mill Race Park at the western end of 5th Street.
- Explore the opportunity of moving the Columbus Visitors Center to a new location on 5th Street.
- Redevelop the Irwin Block site for housing.
- Explore the introduction of a temporary food and beverage and outdoor entertainment destination on the former Sears parking lot site.
- Develop the parking lot site at the corner of 2nd and Franklin Streets with multifamily housing.
- Brand and program the park/plaza site at 5th and Jackson Streets.



Short-term (3-5 years)

Short-term projects are envisioned as those that could be implemented within the next five years. These projects have the potential to have a transformative impact on Downtown Columbus, but may require several years to plan and realize, given project complexity, funding requirements, and procedural steps that precede implementation. Some potentially short-term (three to five years) projects include:

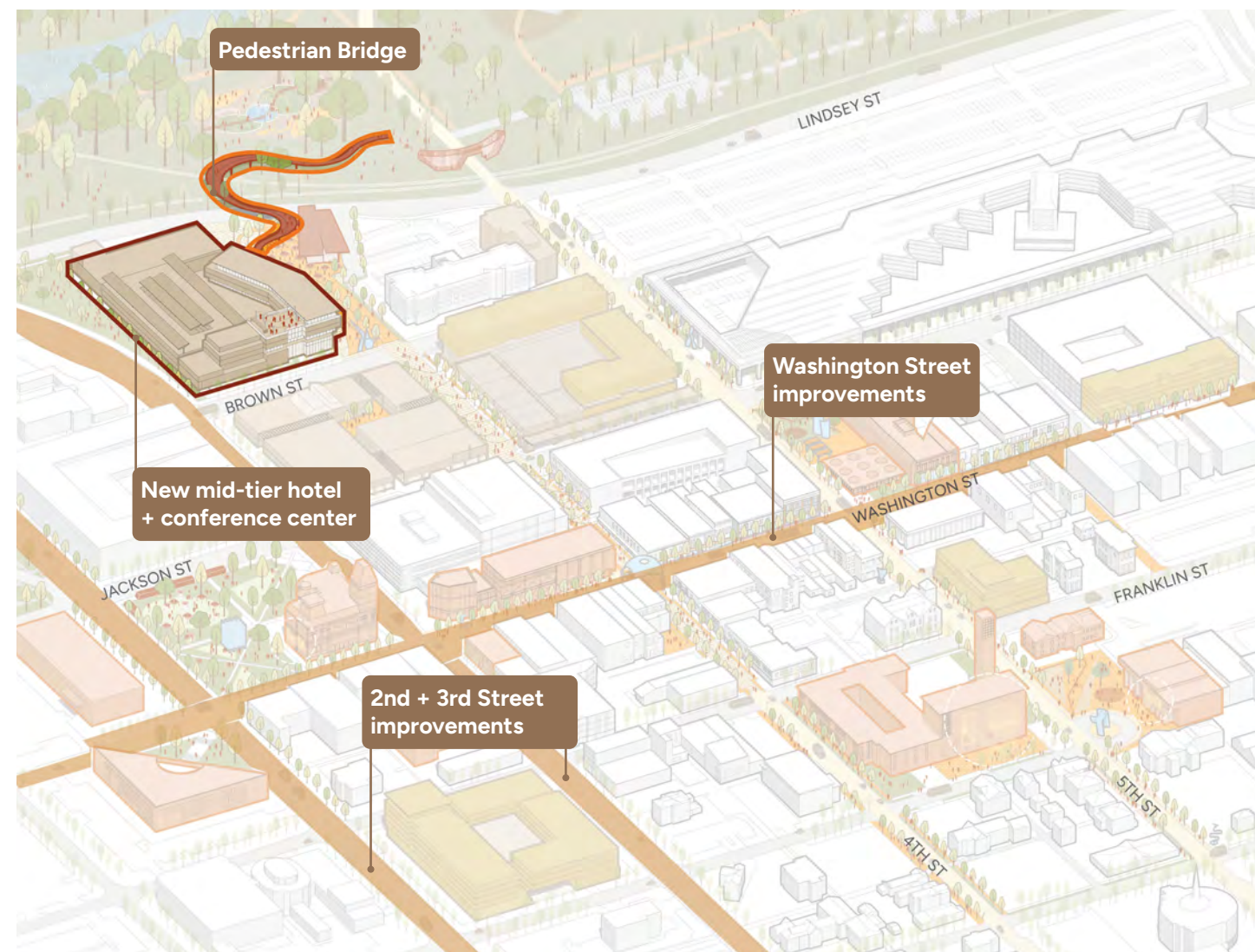
- Extend the 4th Street streetscape project west of Jackson Street.
- Implement improvements to the 5th Street streetscape.
- Design and build a children's play area and splash pad within Mill Race Park, close to downtown.
- Develop a year-round market hall at the west end of 4th Street, where it meets Mill Race Park. Develop a pedestrian/event plaza for outdoor activation.
- Conduct streetscape upgrades along 5th Street to facilitate improved pedestrian experiences and more opportunities for spill-out commercial activity and events.
- Develop the 2nd Street site (east of The Taylor) with multifamily housing (project located off-map).



Medium-term (6-9 years)

Medium-term projects generally require extensive partnership, investment, and coordination between public and private implementers. These projects are envisioned for completion within the next nine years. Early steps for realizing these projects include the development of an RFP or other mechanism by which the City can assess potential implementation partners and site preparation work. Some potentially medium-term (six to nine years) projects include:

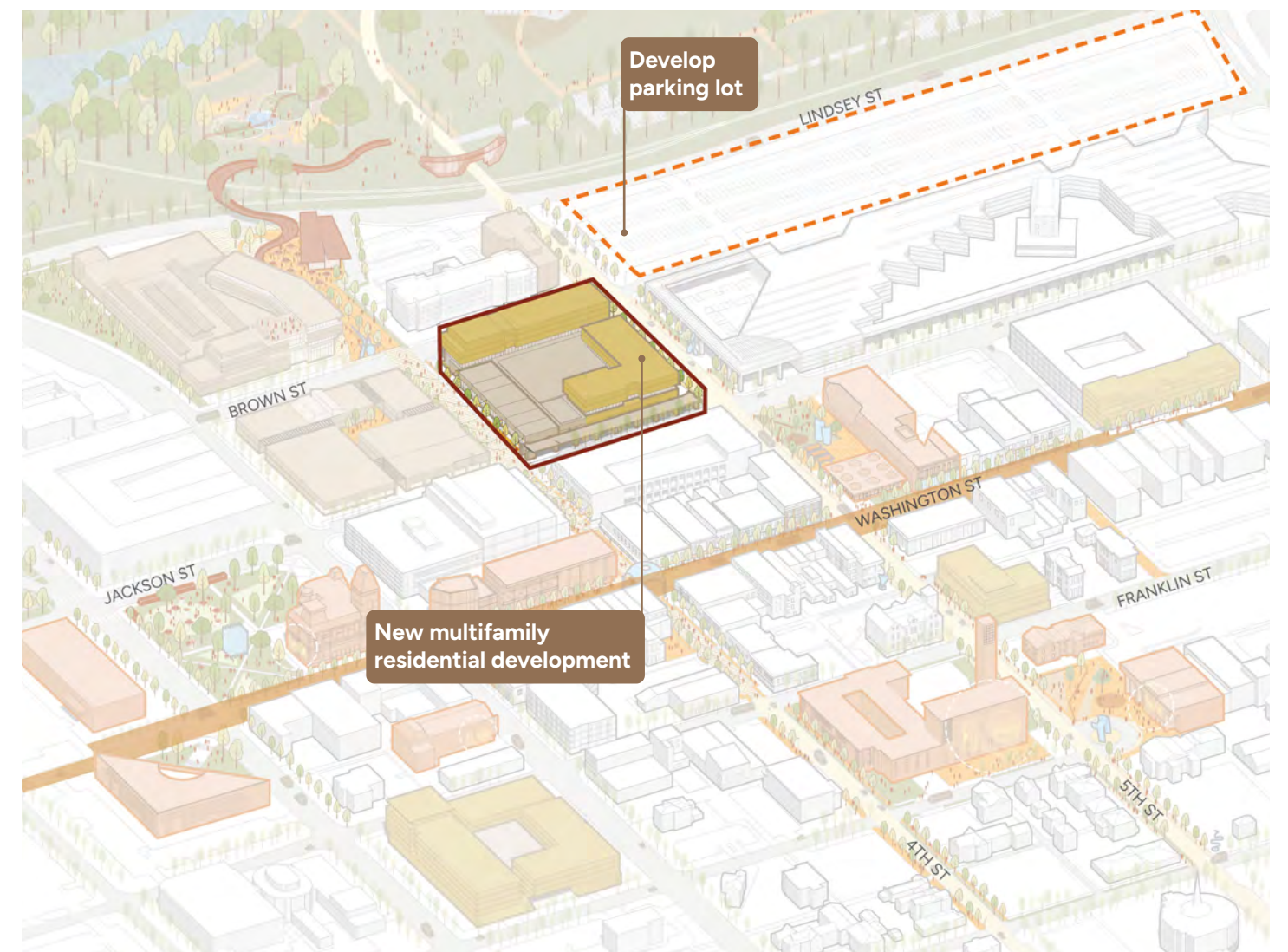
- Construct a pedestrian bridge from 4th Street to Mill Race Park, over Lindsey Street and the railway, to create a seamless pedestrian and bike connection from downtown to the park.
- Construct new mid-tier hotel, moderate-scale conference center, and integrated parking structure on the former Sears parking lot site.
- Implement improvements to the Washington, 2nd and 3rd Street streetscapes.



Long-term (10+ years)

Projects recommended for implementation in the longer term generally require substantial funding and growth in the downtown market before they are viable endeavors. In some cases, properties that are recommended for longer-term implementation are limited by existing commitments, leases, or ongoing operations. Some projects recommended for implementation in the longer term (ten or more years) could include:

- Redevelop the post office site with a mixed-use multifamily residential building with retail on the ground floor along 4th Street.
- Develop the edges of the Cummins' Brown Street surface parking lot with a consolidated parking structure in the center of the site.
- Encourage expanded commercial development along the Flatrock Riverfront, near the Upland Columbus Pump House (project located off-map).
- Redevelop the Franklin Street parking lot (project located off-map).



Strategic Plan Recommendations

This section catalogs the recommendations of the Columbus Downtown 2030 Strategic Plan and provides preliminary guidance for implementation, including recommendations on key implementers, potential funding sources, and initial action steps.

Recommendations in this section are organized into three categories, including Real Estate + Economic Development (RE), Public Realm + Infrastructure (PR), and Activation + Programming (AR). Recommendations within each grouping are ordered by the anticipated phase of implementation, including near-term (0-2 years), short-term (3-5 years), medium-term (6-9 years), and longer-term (10+ years).

Site-specific recommendations are coded to their sites on this page and all recommendations are detailed on the following pages. The following recommendations are not site-specific and therefore not included on the image to the right:

- RE-01
- RE-02
- RE-03
- RE-04
- RE-05
- RE-06
- RE-07
- RE-15
- RE-18
- RE-19
- RE-20
- PR-01
- PR-13
- PR-14
- PR-15
- AP-01
- AP-03
- AP-04
- AP-10
- AP-12
- AP-13

- RE-00** Real Estate + Economic Development
- PR-00** Public Realm + Infrastructure
- AP-00** Activation + Programming



REC NO.	RECOMMENDATION	IMPLEM. PHASE	PAGE NO.
RE-01	Continue to encourage, support, and incentivize infill development in and around downtown.	Near-term (0-2 years)	148
RE-02	Incentivize housing development ranging from townhomes to multifamily apartments and condos throughout the downtown.	Near-term (0-2 years)	149
RE-03	Target a diversity of shops, eateries, and entertainment venues for existing and new ground floor retail locations throughout the downtown to expand offerings beyond what is available today.	Near-term (0-2 years)	150
RE-04	Continue to support improvements of privately-owned buildings within the downtown.	Near-term (0-2 years)	151
RE-05	Develop a process by which the City/Redevelopment Commission can strategically exit the role of landlord for downtown facilities and/or divest itself of property in accordance with Strategic Plan recommendations, priorities, and guidance.	Near-term (0-2 years)	152
RE-06	Prioritize projects from the Strategic Plan for Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF funding through the life of the district (through 2035).	Near-term (0-2 years)	153
RE-07	Encourage the development of workforce and affordable housing downtown.	Near-term (0-2 years)	154
RE-08	Start the process of relocating U.S. Postal Service facilities outside of downtown and redeveloping the present-day post office site.	Near-term (0-2 years)	155
RE-09	Activate the former Sears parking lot site with a temporary “eatertainment” venue.	Near-term (0-2 years)	156
RE-10	Redevelop the former Sears site with new and expanded active commercial uses.	Near-term (0-2 years)	157
RE-11	Redevelop the Irwin Block site with housing.	Near-term (0-2 years)	158
RE-12	Develop housing on the parking lot at the corner of 2nd and Franklin Streets.	Near-term (0-2 years)	159
RE-13	Pursue a business for the built retail venue west of The Taylor that meets the daily needs of the downtown population—fulfilling a longstanding need within the downtown.	Near-term (0-2 years)	160

REC NO.	RECOMMENDATION	IMPLEM. PHASE	PAGE NO.
RE-14	Build on Columbus’ emerging reputation as a destination for local alcoholic beverages by attracting more breweries, cideries, and distilleries to open operations and tasting rooms/beer gardens within the downtown.	Near-term (0-2 years)	161
RE-15	Forge a more formal partnership between the Office of Downtown Development and the City’s Community Development Department to implement Strategic Plan projects and priorities.	Near-term (0-2 years)	162
RE-16	Support the continued presence and expansion of Yes Cinema within the core of downtown.	Short-term (3-5 years)	163
RE-17	Develop the 2nd Street site (east of The Taylor) into multifamily housing.	Short-term (3-5 years)	164
RE-18	Continue efforts to attract an urban grocer to any of the available Opportunity Sites within the downtown study area.	Short-term (3-5 years)	165
RE-19	Encourage the introduction of a co-working space in Downtown Columbus.	Short-term (3-5 years)	166
RE-20	Continue to grow Downtown Columbus’ identity and role as a center of creative arts and design with more organizations and institutions.	Short-term (3-5 years)	167
RE-21	Encourage and support the redevelopment of sites in the Downtown Southeast area for urban housing.	Short-term (3-5 years)	168
RE-22	Develop a flexible, multi-purpose market hall at the western end of 4th Street between Brown and Lindsey Streets.	Short-term (3-5 years)	169
RE-23	Relocate the Columbus/Bartholomew County Visitors Center to a Washington Street location.	Short-term (3-5 years)	170
RE-24	Develop a hotel and conference center on the former Sears parking lot site.	Medium-term (6-9 years)	171
RE-25	Develop the edges of the Cummins’ Brown Street surface parking lot and consolidate parking into a structure in the center of the site.	Longer-term (10+ years)	172
RE-26	Develop a residential neighborhood on the riverfront site south of Water Street that formerly hosted the city’s wastewater treatment plant.	Longer-term (10+ years)	173

REC NO.	RECOMMENDATION	IMPLEM. PHASE	PAGE NO.
RE-27	Encourage additional specialty food and beverage venues along the riverfront downtown, south of the Upland Columbus Pump House.	Longer-term (10+ years)	174
RE-28	Encourage and support the densification of the two sites straddling 2nd Street between Brown and Lindsey Streets.	Longer-term (10+ years)	175
RE-29	Redevelop the Franklin Street parking lot and the consolidation of the parking lot into a parking structure.	Longer-term (10+ years)	176

PR

PUBLIC REALM +
INFRASTRUCTURE

REC NO.	RECOMMENDATION	IMPLEM. PHASE	PAGE NO.
PR-01	Advance ongoing wayfinding planning and design with a special focus on downtown; include interpretive signage.	Near-term (0-2 years)	177
PR-02	Extend the People Trail along 1st Street, in accordance with the 2022 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, to close the gap that exists in Downtown Columbus.	Near-term (0-2 years)	178
PR-03	Conduct a planning effort for Mill Race Park that focuses on improvements and functions that serve the desires of the community.	Near-term (0-2 years)	179
PR-04	Create an improved arrival experience to Mill Race Park at 5th Street with public realm enhancements and a new architectural gateway into the park at Lindsey Street.	Near-term (0-2 years)	180
PR-05	Maintain and enhance the Water Street site as a forested buffer between the railway and future development.	Near-term (0-2 years)	181
PR-06	Enhance mobility and connectivity through downtown by converting some streets from one-way to two-way vehicular traffic.	Short-term (3-5 years)	182
PR-07	Improve the experience of arriving to downtown at key gateways.	Short-term (3-5 years)	183

REC NO.	RECOMMENDATION	IMPLEM. PHASE	PAGE NO.
PR-08	Implement improvements to the public right-of-way along priority corridors and major routes into and out of downtown: 4th Street.	Short-term (3-5 years)	184
PR-09	Implement improvements to the public right-of-way along priority corridors and major routes into and out of downtown: 5th Street.	Short-term (3-5 years)	185
PR-10	Build a destination children’s play area and splash pad in Mill Race Park.	Short-term (3-5 years)	186
PR-11	Establish more connections from existing trails that encircle downtown to and through the heart of downtown.	Short-term (3-5 years)	187
PR-12	Create a stronger dialogue between Mill Race Park and the Flatrock River with enhanced trail connections along the riverfront, selective clearance of vegetation for views, and the addition of viewing platforms.	Short-term (3-5 years)	188
PR-13	Build and deploy novel, high-design bus shelter at stops around downtown.	Short-term (3-5 years)	189
PR-14	Engage in a program to replace downtown street trees and enhance the street tree canopy with native, sustainable, and low-maintenance species.	Short-term (3-5 years)	190
PR-15	Continue to explore the designation of a rail quiet zone downtown.	Short-term (3-5 years)	191
PR-16	Implement improvements to the public right-of-way along priority corridors and major routes into and out of downtown: Washington Street	Medium-term (6-9 years)	192
PR-17	Implement improvements to the public right-of-way along priority corridors and major routes into and out of downtown: 2nd and 3rd Streets.	Medium-term (6-9 years)	193
PR-18	Create a pedestrian connection from 4th Street into Mill Race Park.	Medium-term (6-9 years)	194

REC NO.	RECOMMENDATION	IMPLEM. PHASE	PAGE NO.
AP-01	Expand and promote the City’s community calendar as a single, central resource for all community events.	Near-term (0-2 years)	195
AP-02	Activate existing inactive public spaces downtown, including the Courthouse Lawn, the City Hall Green, and the Entrance Plaza.	Near-term (0-2 years)	196
AP-03	Develop an expedited approval process and lower criteria for outdoor programming and events downtown.	Near-term (0-2 years)	197
AP-04	Program and promote opportunities to enjoy beverages outside as part of the downtown’s designation as a DORA (Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area) district.	Near-term (0-2 years)	198
AP-05	Activate Mill Race Park with new and refreshed programming and activation that will increase visitation.	Near-term (0-2 years)	199
AP-06	Establish Mill Race Park as a focus area of community organizations.	Near-term (0-2 years)	200
AP-07	Support efforts to rehabilitate the Crump Theater for flexible entertainment.	Near-term (0-2 years)	201
AP-08	Enhance the identity of 5th Street as a destination for prominent architecture, design, and art with strategic interventions, enhancements, and programming.	Near-term (0-2 years)	202
AP-09	Brand and program the open space and plaza on the Irwin Bank and Office Building site at the corner of 5th and Jackson Streets.	Near-term (0-2 years)	203
AP-10	Bolster community commitment to and shared responsibility to support local businesses downtown.	Near-term (0-2 years)	204
AP-11	Activate the alley between the Jackson Street Garage and Washington Street and between 4th and 5th Streets with creative placemaking and public realm improvements.	Near-term (0-2 years)	205
AP-12	Enhance connectivity between downtown and Nexus Park and other destination for traveling youth sporting events.	Short-term (3-5 years)	206
AP-13	Bring on a coordinator for programming, events, and activations downtown.	Short-term (3-5 years)	207

RECOMMENDATION

Continue to encourage, support, and incentivize infill development in and around downtown.

RE-01

Continue and expand the city’s infill development support programs, with a focus on sites within the downtown area and a special focus and priority on sites within the downtown core (along the focus corridors of Washington Street, 4th Street, and 5th Street within the downtown). Partner with downtown property owners to offer support and highlight available resources for undertaking these projects. Consider using downtown TIF funds to close financing gaps in projects within the downtown core that further the goals of this Strategic Plan.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Policy
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, Columbus Redevelopment Commission	Office of Downtown Development, City of Columbus/Bartholomew County Planning Department, Property owners, Development community
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Attract participation from downtown landowners in the city’s Providing Affordable Construction and Transformation program (through December 15, 2026). 2. Develop an infill development toolkit that centralizes guidance, information about development approvals processes, available resources, etc. 3. Offer a seminar or office hours for direct consultation with planning department staff to help property owners considering such projects to get their questions answered 4. Establish criteria and set up a grant program, funded by the CCAA TIF fund to support downtown infill projects that meet that criteria. TIF disbursement should follow appropriate underwriting practices, including analysis of financial gap, so projects are not being over-subsidized.	• Private investment • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund • City of Columbus Providing Affordable Construction and Transformation (PACT) program

RECOMMENDATION

Incentivize housing development ranging from townhomes to multifamily apartments and condos throughout the downtown.

RE-02

Residential growth within and around downtown is a primary focus of this Strategic Plan. To facilitate increased development as soon as possible, the City should continue efforts to incentivize housing construction. This could include updates to zoning that reward housing development with density bonuses if strategically sited within priority areas and designed in accordance with community objectives, financial support in the form of land subsidies and gap financing, access to city-controlled parking, temporary tax abatements, etc.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Policy
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, Columbus Redevelopment Commission	Office of Downtown Development
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Target and conduct outreach to residential developers who might be interested in undertaking projects in Columbus. 2. Determine which incentives the City will make available to residential developers in the downtown and publicize available incentives to the development community. 3. Update the City’s zoning code (if needed).	• Private investment • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Target a diversity of shops, eateries, and entertainment venues for existing and new ground floor retail locations throughout the downtown to expand offerings beyond what is available today.

RE-03

Aim for a mix of vendors, including fine dining, fast casual dining, retail shops, personal services, entertainment options for people of all ages, and nightlife.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Program
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Office of Downtown Development, Chamber of Commerce	Private owners
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Conduct market study for ground floor retail space. 2. Conduct outreach to potential tenants and market available sites and properties to desired operators.	• Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Continue to support improvements of privately-owned buildings within the downtown.

RE-04

With many vacancies in commercial spaces above the ground floor along Washington Street and across Downtown Columbus, there is an opportunity to grow the residential and workforce population of downtown by renovating and filling these spaces. Many of these spaces are challenged with outdated interiors and a lack of elevator access. With support and incentives from the City and other downtown stewards, these spaces could become appealing opportunities for new housing and small offices—especially professional and personal services such as banks, lawyers, insurance offices, etc.

The City and its partners could play a key role in supporting the rehabilitation and adaptation of these spaces for

new uses that would bring more people downtown. Replenishing and expanding the existing Office of Downtown Development program that offers financial support in the form of grants to qualified improvement projects within the Downtown Improvement Area, including facade improvements, installation of an elevator, other ADA compliance measures, subdivisions of space, circulation/egress improvements, tenant suite improvements, window replacements, etc., could expedite efforts to open more unused or underutilized spaces to new residential, office, and service uses. Grants should be scaled to the scope of the project and the potential impact of improvements, with an emphasis on Washington Street, 4th Street, and 5th Street projects.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Program
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Office of Downtown Development	City of Columbus, Private owners
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Expand and extend the grant program that awards funds to downtown property owners for improvement projects. Prioritize projects that rehabilitate and activate presently unused real estate downtown, such as qualified improvements to rentable upper-floor space to attract new tenants/users. 2. Determine overall investment and funding sources. Establish grant thresholds for projects of different scales and levels of impact on downtown. Grants could be paired with no/low-interest loans to further support projects. 3. Create a streamlined application for property owners to apply for and receive grants and plan for projects.	• Private investment • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund • Heritage fund

RECOMMENDATION

Develop a process by which the City/Redevelopment Commission can strategically exit the role of landlord for downtown facilities and/or divest itself of property in accordance with Strategic Plan recommendations, priorities, and guidance.

RE-05

Transitioning some properties currently held by the Redevelopment Commission to private hands is a high priority to facilitate near-term investment and development of those sites. While this Strategic Plan provides guidance on the kind and intensity of developments recommended for each of these sites, the strategy for divesting the City’s ownership in each site will depend on the specific plans for each. The City and Redevelopment Commission should develop and adopt a formal policy/program for divesting itself of these

properties through a variety of approaches, including land sale via solicitation by public/invited RFP, land contribution for desired development, public-private partnerships, long-term ground leasing, etc. Each of these approaches should have a process and timeline associated with it.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Policy
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, Columbus Redevelopment Commission	Office of Downtown Development, development community, commercial real estate brokers
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Develop an off-ramp roadmap with different options based on individual characteristics. 2. Prioritize sites that align with downtown plan recommendations; go through disposition process for priority sites. 3. Engage in developer solicitation for specific projects and sites. 4. Develop RFQ/P process and timelines for key sites.	• Private investment • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Prioritize projects from the Strategic Plan for Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF funding through the life of the district (through 2035).

RE-06

Many projects are identified by this Strategic Plan as good candidates for investment from the Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF district. The City of Columbus, the Redevelopment Commission, and the Strategic Plan implementation teams should work together to prioritize projects for investment with these funds and organize projects by timeline and level of investment.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Policy
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Strategic Plan Steering Committee + Action Teams	City of Columbus, Columbus Redevelopment Commission, Office of Downtown Development, property owners
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Create a forward-looking plan for use of available/uncommitted TIF funds that aligns with the Downtown Plan recommendations; consider funding key public realm projects and real estate projects. 2. The Redevelopment Commission should consider contributions of property to plan-compliant projects as part of gap-financing strategy.	• Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Encourage the development of workforce and affordable housing downtown.

RE-07

Provide priority access to TIF funds and other public investment in housing development for any units and developments that provide low-income and workforce-priced housing.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Policy
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus	Columbus Redevelopment Commission, Department of Community Development
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Formalize a policy of priority access to Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF funds for projects that incorporate workforce or affordable housing. Establish a formula that establishes levels of priority based on the quantity of affordable/workforce units proposed. 2. Consider creation of workforce housing set-aside requirements (e.g., 10% of units) for projects utilizing public financial assistance.	- Private investment - Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Start the process of relocating U.S. Postal Service facilities outside of downtown and redeveloping the present-day post office site.

RE-08

The existing downtown post office building is greatly underutilized, as much of the processing and sorting operations that were once housed there have moved to other regional facilities. The United States Postal Service has indicated that they are open to vacating the facility and relocating what operational functions do remain to another site within the city (outside of downtown) while maintaining a smaller retail presence within the downtown. As a high value site located in the heart of downtown Columbus, this facility is a prime target for near-term redevelopment. The Strategic Plan identifies a mixed-

use program, including housing, retail, and structured parking, as viable and desirable for this site. Before any work can move forward on planning for the future of this Redevelopment Commission-owned land, the City must engage in dialogue with USPS around a timeline, strategy, and negotiated agreement for vacating the site.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, Columbus Capital Foundation	U.S. Postal Service, Columbus Redevelopment Commission
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Engage USPS in discussions around their needs and the future of the Jackson Street facility. Establish a deal and mutually-agreed upon timeline for closure. 2. Identify a new location within the downtown for continued retail operations after the Jackson Street facility closes. 3. Redevelop the existing postal facility on Jackson Street. Reuse iconic architectural components (e.g., arcade, facade blocks) in new development.	- Private investment - Columbus Capital Foundation - Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Activate the former Sears parking lot site with a temporary “eatertainment” venue.

RE-09

The former Sears parking lot site is large enough and well-situated within the downtown core for the installation of a temporary indoor/outdoor “eatertainment” venue offering snacks and meals, adult beverages, games, light sports, and other activities. These venues (e.g., Chicken N’ Pickle) often serve as shorter-term activation on sites poised for longer-term redevelopment. These vendors often utilize prefabricated structures and an easy-to-deploy model for laying out sites like parking lots. Such a use would require the inclusion of parking on site and may require negotiated

agreements for off-site parking as well. The proximity of this site to Washington Street, 4th Street, the Hotel Indigo, and Mill Race Park make it a great candidate for this kind of venue in the short-term.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Columbus Redevelopment Commission, Office of Downtown Development	Chamber of Commerce
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Develop a fact-sheet on the site with high-level information about Downtown Columbus. 2. Engage in conversations with targeted operators about the potential of establishing a location on the site.	• Site use agreement

RECOMMENDATION

Redevelop the former Sears site with new and expanded active commercial uses.

RE-10

The Sears building sits on an important site within the downtown core. Located between 3rd and 4th Streets, one block west of Washington Street, it is at the heart of the envisioned extension of activity along 4th Street between Washington Street and Mill Race Park. The building is today entirely vacant, with the exception of the popular destination that is Yes Cinema, on the northeast corner of the block. The former Sears building itself is notable, as it is a Cesar Pelli structure with clean modernist lines along its four facades. The site is a candidate for early redevelopment with new and expanded active ground floor uses to create new destination to Downtown Columbus and the city’s 4th Street Entertainment District.

Redevelopment on this site could take on a number of forms, including adaptive reuse of the existing structure for new commercial uses, partial reuse and rehabilitation of the structure with significant interventions to better scale the site rentable area to modern commercial uses with projected demand, or wholesale redevelopment of the site. Any redevelopment approach should consider any viable opportunities to reuse portions of the building for historic reference and sustainable redevelopment. If feasible for the preferred future use, site designers should incorporate small open spaces and pedestrian cut-through to break down the scale of the block and provide opportunities for commercial spill-out space.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Columbus Redevelopment Commission, private developers	Office of Downtown Development
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Engage the Lincoln-Central Neighborhood Family Center in discussions around the future of the cinema, redevelopment scoping, and the proposed approach to engaging with a developer. 2. Solicit developer proposals through a competitive RFQ/P process. 3. Negotiate a redevelopment agreement with preferred developer.	• Private investment • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Redevelop the Irwin Block site with housing.

RE-11

The fire and flooding event that destroyed the buildings on the Irwin Block were devastating for Downtown Columbus. This site featured historic, beautiful buildings that contributed character and valuable real estate to 5th Street. Redeveloping the Irwin Block with housing of a similar density and height as to what was destroyed can help restore this missing link along 5th Street between the Washington Street Corridor and the library plaza.

The development here could include townhomes, multifamily development, or even a boutique hotel. Any configuration should include parking on site to ensure

a marketable product. Ground floors along 5th Street should restore the transparency and activity that was featured in the destroyed building. As retail is prioritized for Washington Street and 4th Street through at least the medium term, these ground floors could contain a building lobby, porches, and other tenant/guest service uses. Future development should restore the articulated cadence and fine design nature of the former Irwin Block structure facade, as an opportunity to contribute to the architectural and design character of 5th Street.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Columbus Capital Foundation, private developers	Columbus Redevelopment Commission, Office of Downtown Development
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Solicit developer proposals through a competitive RFQ/P process. 2. Negotiate a redevelopment agreement with preferred developer.	• Private investment • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Develop housing on the parking lot at the corner of 2nd and Franklin Streets.

RE-12

This Redevelopment Commission-owned parking lot is a strong candidate for near-term housing development to increase the residential population of Downtown Columbus. Development of the site can follow the example provided by other recent residential developments downtown, including The Taylor and The Cole—both of which offered a variety of unit types in a dense urban configuration that establishes a strong urban relationship with the surrounding streets. The development will need to include structured parking to serve future residents and surplus spaces to serve the commitments/contracts that are in effect to serve other entities who presently use the surface parking on site.

As a downtown site, housing development here should be higher density, including attached/stacked townhomes or multifamily development. If a variety of housing types are included on site, overall built forms should negotiate the difference in scale in response to the context. Lower heights and densities should be oriented to the east (facing Columbus’ lower density single family fabric) and taller volumes and higher densities should be oriented to the west (facing downtown). Site planning and architectural design should pay particular attention to the proximity of the County Jail immediately south of the site and the combination of high-traffic and high-speed routes of 2nd and 3rd Streets to the north and south of the site.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Columbus Redevelopment Commission, private developers	City of Columbus, Office of Downtown Development
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Solicit developer proposals through a competitive RFQ/P process. 2. Negotiate a redevelopment agreement with preferred developer.	• Private investment • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Pursue a business for the built retail venue west of The Taylor that meets the daily needs of the downtown population—fulfilling a longstanding need within the downtown.

RE-13

Target retailers that meet the needs of a growing residential base, with a priority given to an urban grocer or convenience store/pharmacy to meet an existing need downtown.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Partnership
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Office of Downtown Development, Chamber of Commerce, Flaherty & Collins	City of Columbus, Chamber of Commerce
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Continue to implement projects, policies, programs, and partnerships that increase number of residents and visitors in the downtown to create a more enticing market for this type of retail. 2. Conduct outreach to desired retailers.	• Private investment • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Build on Columbus’ emerging reputation as a destination for local alcoholic beverages by attracting more breweries, cideries, and distilleries to open operations and tasting rooms/beer gardens within the downtown.

RE-14

Targeting and creating a distinctive environment for makers of local beer and spirits can create a distinctive experience and identity within Downtown Columbus. The City and its partners in downtown stewardship can conduct proactive outreach to these businesses to tell the story of the opportunity within Columbus. The City can offer services and public realm enhancements to support those seeking to open these establishments downtown.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Program
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Office of Downtown Development, Chamber of Commerce, Dept. of Community Development	City of Columbus, Columbus Redevelopment Commission
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Conduct site analysis to understand feasibility of new permanent or temporary (modular) commercial venues on riverfront sites between the Pump House and the segment of Water Street south of the rail line. Explore the potential of raised structures to mitigate potential flood risk. 2. Update zoning to entitle appropriate sites. 3. Conduct outreach to potential commercial partners who might be interested in building and/or operating these venues. 4. Make necessary infrastructure, environmental, and access improvements to enable site development.	• Tax abatements • ODD real estate improvement grant

RECOMMENDATION

Forge a more formal partnership between the Office of Downtown Development and the City’s Community Development Department to implement Strategic Plan projects and priorities.

Initiate weekly meetings between the heads of ODD and the DCD to organize around priorities, programs, programming and activation, partner outreach, and investments.

RE-15

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Partnership
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Office of Downtown Development, Department of Community Development	N/A
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
N/A	N/A

RECOMMENDATION

Support the continued presence and expansion of Yes Cinema within the core of downtown.

As downtown grows and redevelops, Yes Cinema’s role as a beloved community anchor and destination should be preserved and expanded when feasible. The Lincoln-Central Neighborhood Family Center, who operate the Yes Cinema, have expressed interest in expanding both the theater and conference spaces within the existing facility. As a significant entertainment draw and activator of downtown, Yes Cinema should be encouraged and supported in its expansion efforts. As the theater’s present-day location at 4th Street and Jackson Street is

ideal for future plans to expand activation of the 4th Street corridor westward, expansion on-site is highly encouraged. However, if an approach that involves wholesale redevelopment of this site is preferred, the City and its downtown partners should work with Yes Cinema to find a suitable alternative site within the downtown core.

RE-16

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Partnership
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Yes Cinema/Lincoln-Central Neighborhood Family Center, City of Columbus	Columbus Redevelopment Commission, Office of Downtown Development
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
- Incorporate the goals and plans for expansion of Yes Cinema in solicitation and RFP/Q materials development and distributed for the redevelopment of the former Sears building. - Prioritize proposals for the Sears site redevelopment that include preservation and expansion (or opportunity for expansion) of the Yes Cinema in its current location OR proposals that facilitate the relocation and expansion of Yes Cinema to a desirable alternative location.	Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Develop the 2nd Street site (east of The Taylor) into multifamily housing.

RE-17

The recent introduction of the Taylor into the downtown market has proven the success of its model of residential development. The collection of three small parcels to the Taylor’s immediate east is owned by the Columbus Redevelopment Commission and shares similarities with the Taylor development. This collection of sites should be developed with a similar density, product type and mix, and overall relationship to 2nd Street as that of the Taylor. The site can accommodate surface parking for residents on the southern portions of the site, with the development along 2nd Street.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Columbus Redevelopment Commission, private developers	Office of Downtown Development
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Solicit developer proposals through a competitive RFQ/P process. 2. Negotiate a redevelopment agreement with preferred developer.	• Private investment • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Continue efforts to attract an urban grocer to any of the available Opportunity Sites within the downtown study area.

RE-18

Community members and past planning efforts have all identified a strong desire for a grocer in the downtown area. While the residential population in downtown is growing, all indications suggest more growth is needed to attract an urban grocer to open a location downtown. While the purpose-built facility west of The Taylor on 2nd Street remains vacant, it is likely too small for many grocers. As such, a new facility will likely be needed to accommodate the needs of such an operator. The City and its partners should continue their efforts to attract a grocer, but grocers may not see a viable opportunity until downtown’s residential population grows. The City and its partners should assemble materials and conduct outreach to highlight the opportunity of Columbus’ growing

downtown. As residential development projects advance, pitch materials should be updated to reflect pipeline projects and growth assumptions. Grocers should be invited to build on any of the Strategic Plan Opportunity Sites (including Other Potential Growth Sites), in an urban format, with development abutting the primary street edges and parking in either a structure or behind the store. Grocers who will build as part of a mixed-use project with residential, office, or other uses above the ground-floor store should be invited to any of the Catalytic or Opportunity sites.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Policy
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Office of Downtown Development, Chamber of Commerce	City of Columbus
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Assemble a fact sheet with relevant recent, ongoing, and planned growth figures that may be interesting to a grocer. Include a plan with potential sites for their consideration and key details on the implementation roadmap for selected sites (i.e., CRC-owned sites). 2. Conduct outreach to regional grocers to continue expressions of interest in their expansion to Downtown Columbus. 3. Update the fact sheet with emerging projects as they enter the pipeline.	• Tax abatement • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Encourage the introduction of a co-working space in Downtown Columbus.

RE-19

Work with local stakeholders and interested parties to reach out to a co-working operator and promote the opportunity to set up a location within Downtown Columbus. Site the space within the Columbus’ Downtown Core.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Partnership
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Office of Downtown Development, Chamber of Commerce	Columbus Redevelopment Commission, community members with relevant experience/expertise
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Assemble a promotional package to share with co-working operators with a presence in the state and/or peer cities to Columbus to promote the opportunity of opening a location in Downtown Columbus. 2. Conduct outreach to potential operators, potentially employing a commercial real estate broker. 3. Offer/propose potential existing spaces for retrofitting (e.g. 301 Washington, retail space within Sears Building redevelopment, other retail space along Washington Street, 4th Street, or 5th Street) with approximately 3,500 - 7,500 SF.	- Private investment - Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Continue to grow Downtown Columbus’ identity and role as a center of creative arts and design with more organizations and institutions.

RE-20

In addition to its collection of modernist architecture, public art, and events-centered events, Downtown Columbus is home to numerous arts organizations and institutions, including the Indiana University J. Irwin Miller Architecture Program, the Columbus Arts Council, and the Landmark Columbus Foundation. These destinations, events, and entities create a dynamic and attractive programming environment that serves as a magnet for downtown visitors. As a community that is known for and thrives in this space, Downtown Columbus is rich with opportunity to expand on these features to capture more foot-traffic, increase the visibility and accessibility of its assets, and reinforce the community’s identity as a place of art and design excellence.

City leaders and downtown stewards should proactively promote Downtown Columbus as a destination for art, design, cultural, and other creative organizations, institutions, and programs, such as higher education art and design programs, non-profit institutions, cultural institutions celebrating art and design (e.g. a Mid-century Modern Museum), and arts-focused community institutions and venues. These entities can benefit from the creative synergies of existing organizations and institutions and serve as attractors and programmers of downtown.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Partnership
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Office of Downtown Development	City of Columbus, Columbus Arts Council
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Consider designating a portion of Downtown Columbus as the “Columbus Arts District” (focused on 5th Avenue and the 6th Street Arts Alley). 2. Catalog available spaces into a arts-focused pitch deck for sharing and discussion with organizations and institutions. Highlight real estate opportunities, programmable venues (e.g., 6th Street Arts Alley), public art, etc. Include references to ongoing and future projects recommended in this plan and elsewhere to bolster visibility and accessibility of existing features. 3. Conduct proactive outreach to regional, statewide, and national organizations and institutions to raise awareness and highlight opportunities in Columbus.	- Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund - Heritage Fund

RECOMMENDATION

Encourage and support the redevelopment of sites in the Downtown Southeast area for urban housing.

RE-21

The corridors of 3rd Street and 2nd Street serve as major connections between downtown and Columbus’ eastern and western neighborhoods. The segments of these corridors between Lafayette Avenue and where they meet at Central Avenue are well-positioned for densification and transformation. Presently, these blocks host a collection of low density residential, commercial, and light industrial uses. The success of the nearby and recently completed Taylor development proves the viability of residential development in this part of the city. Dense, urban residential development within these sites, including multifamily, attached or stacked townhomes, or tightly configured detached single family can increase

the residential population of downtown while helping to create a transition zone between the heart of downtown and the city’s eastern neighborhoods. Future residential development in this area should establish a strong relationship and dialogue with 2nd and 3rd Streets, helping to improve the experience, walkability, and safety of these corridors alongside redevelopment.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Policy
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, private developers	Office of Downtown Development

ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Consider rezoning these sites to allow multifamily residential by-right. 2. Provide access to gap financing for proposed redevelopments that adhere to the objectives and guidance of this Strategic Plan.	• Private investment • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Develop a flexible, multi-purpose market hall at the western end of 4th Street between Brown and Lindsey Streets.

RE-22

A new market hall in the heart of Downtown Columbus could become a major destination within the downtown. The venue could become the new home of the popular Downtown Columbus Farmers’ Market while also hosting a year-round calendar of events, including artists’/makers’ markets, special events and performances, indoor games and sports, holiday festivities, private events, and more. The space could be rented out or used as extension space by the future conference center. The structure could be a signature architectural addition to Downtown Columbus and could be a candidate to receive funding from the

Cummins Foundation Architecture Program. Plans should include a public plaza between the market hall and 4th Street that can accommodate outdoor seating for daily use, regular outdoor market use, and large events.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, Columbus Redevelopment Commission	Private or nonprofit operator

ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Identify desired program and functionality of facility and adjacent open space. 2. Secure the site and adjust entitlements as necessary. 3. Work with project partners to build a project capital stack through grants and other funding sources. 4. Identify and partner with an operator for the market hall 5. Conduct outreach to vendors in the County and State. 6. Develop a unique brand and identity for the venue and the plaza space outside it.	• Cummins Foundation Architecture Program • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund • Foundation grants (e.g. Lilly Endowment - Community Development) • Federal and state grants • Private donations

RECOMMENDATION

Relocate the Columbus/Bartholomew County Visitors Center to a Washington Street location.

RE-23

The Visitors Center today provides a great introduction to Columbus and all the features and places that make it special. However, the Center’s present location is a block removed from the Washington Street corridor and its existing facility is quite inward-facing, without much on the exterior to invite passers-by in or advertise the great bounty of information and opportunities to explore the city that are offered there.

In alignment with recent planning conducted by the Visitors Center, it is a recommendation of this Strategic Plan to relocate the Visitors Center to a more prominent and visually transparent location on Washington Street. A presence on Washington Street and on or near 5th Street,

where visitors have easy access and visibility to many of the city’s tour destinations is ideal. The future Visitors Center should feature a transparent ground-floor, where people strolling on Washington Street can see the many offerings and exhibits inside. The future facility would also benefit from outdoor space, including potentially a cafe and a park/plaza that can be activated with events, waiting visitors, and queues for tours. To create a truly special welcome to the city and preview of its distinctive architectural offerings, the Visitors Center would ideally be located inside one of the historic mid-century modern buildings.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Columbus Area Visitors Center	City of Columbus, Columbus Capital Foundation
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Develop/refine the required and desired programs and required areas for a relocated Visitors Center facility. 2. Develop a short list of candidate spaces along Washington Street that are available and could accommodate the required/ desired program. 3. Engage with project partners to determine feasibility of renting/acquiring short-listed spaces. 4. Select a preferred space and engage in negotiations with owner.	• Heritage Fund • Columbus Capital Foundation

RECOMMENDATION

Develop a hotel and conference center on the former Sears parking lot site.

RE-24

Bringing a conference center to Downtown Columbus has been a goal articulated in a handful of prior planning efforts and continues to be a priority for many downtown stakeholders today. Businesses and organizations throughout Columbus have identified interest in a facility for larger events and conferences and those focused on attracting more visitors have expressed interest in advertising Columbus as a destination for regional and national conferences. Through comparative analysis with a selection of peer cities, the Strategic Planning team estimates that Columbus could support a facility with approximately 25,000 to 50,000 square feet of rentable space. While these facilities are infrequently self-supporting at this scale and can rely on public funding for initial costs and a co-located hotel to offset ongoing costs, they and their associated hotels, can significantly increase

visitation to the city—bringing conference-goers year-round to the downtown core.

The Strategic Plan market study identified some demand for more hotel keys downtown. More specifically, the market could support a mid-tier hotel product and conference venue. While the planned expansion of the Hotel Indigo can satisfy some of that demand in the shorter term, another hotel offering upward of 200 additional keys could be supported in the longer-term. This new hotel facility could be co-located with the conference center and an incorporated parking structure at the former Sears parking lot site, creating a small hospitality cluster at the western end of 4th Street.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Medium-term (6-9 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Columbus Redevelopment Commission, private developers	Office of Downtown Development, Visitors Center
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Solicit developer proposals through a competitive RFQ/P process. 2. Negotiate a redevelopment agreement with preferred developer.	• Private investment • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Develop the edges of the Cummins’ Brown Street surface parking lot and consolidate parking into a structure in the center of the site.

RE-25

The parking lot between Cummins COB and Mill Race Park offers a tremendous opportunity to grow and densify downtown while forging a strong connection between Washington Street and Mill Race Park along 5th Street. As one of the downtown’s only large, undeveloped sites, a more efficient parking solution for Cummins employees in the form of a parking structure at the center of the site

could free up key sites along the major corridors of 5th and 8th Streets for urban development. These streets provide direct access to Mill Race Park and new developments on the Cummins parking lot that front onto these streets with active ground floors could serve as gateways between the heart of downtown and Mill Race Park.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Longer-term (10+ years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Cummins	City of Columbus
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Assess long-term parking needs of Cummins. Explore feasibility of building a parking structure to free up land for development. 2. Study opportunities and constraints to site redevelopment based on Cummins’ present-day and planned future use of the site and on-site utility infrastructure. 3. Using the findings from the Strategic Plan market study, explore potential future uses for the site. 4. Strategize around the future relocation of the utility facilities on 5th Street. 5. Partner with a developer to develop specific proposals and a phasing plan for each site. 6. Commence development as soon as feasible.	- Private investment - Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Develop a residential neighborhood on the riverfront site south of Water Street that formerly hosted the city’s wastewater treatment plant.

RE-26

This large downtown-adjacent site is well-suited for residential neighborhood development. As it sits approximately five blocks south of 4th Street and over a rail line, it is too remote from the downtown core to successfully support and contribute commercial activity. Its proximity to the downtown core and major routes to and through downtown and its adjacency to the river make it a compelling future residential address. Future residential development could include high-density single family development (clustered single family, townhomes) or low-density multifamily development (e.g., garden-style

apartments). Any future development should connect the site as fully as possible to the existing downtown network of streets and paths to the north. Development should be accompanied by improvements to the segments of Brown Street and Lafayette Street that cross the rail line into this area. Development and on-site open space should be oriented to provide a strong relationship with the riverfront, neighborhood park spaces, and extensions of a multi-use trail along the riverfront southward to connect to this neighborhood.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Longer-term (10+ years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Columbus Redevelopment Commission, private developers	City of Columbus
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Confirm requirements, limits, and permissible uses as controlled by the site’s restrictive covenant. 2. Rezone the 18-acre property at the site of the former wastewater treatment plant from Public/Semi-Public Facilities to Commercial: Downtown or another district that allows for both multifamily and townhouse single family development. 3. Extend infrastructure and conduct any outstanding environmental remediation as needed to get the site ready for redevelopment. 4. Follow a strategic disposition process, as recommended by this Strategic Plan, to facilitate site transfer and redevelopment.	- Private investment - Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund - State and federal environmental grants

RECOMMENDATION

Encourage additional specialty food and beverage venues along the riverfront downtown, south of the Upland Columbus Pump House.

RE-27

Expand the experience and special nature of dining/ drinking along the riverfront, as exemplified by the Upland Columbus Pump House, with indoor/outdoor venues that have a relationship with the river. This could include the rehabilitation of the existing public utility shed at 15 Brown Street to a suitable use, such as a brewery or restaurant and event center. Extend riverfront access and provide views to the riverfront and the 2nd Street Bridge from these venues. Consolidate parking for multiple venues where possible.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE	
Longer-term (10+ years)	Policy	
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS	
City of Columbus, Columbus Redevelopment Commission, private developers	Office of Downtown Development	
ACTION STEPS		POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Conduct site analysis to understand feasibility of new permanent or temporary (modular) commercial venues on riverfront sites between the Pump House and the segment of Water Street south of the rail line. Explore the potential of raised structures to mitigate potential flood risk. 2. Update zoning to entitle appropriate sites. 3. Conduct outreach to potential commercial partners who might be interested in building and/or operating these venues. 4. Make necessary infrastructure, environmental, and access improvements to enable site development.		- Private investment - Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Encourage and support the densification of the two sites straddling 2nd Street between Brown and Lindsey Streets.

RE-28

The two blocks bounded by 3rd Street to the north, Brown Street to the east, State Road 46 to the south, and the rail line to the west and bisected by 2nd Street are important opportunities for future transformation in furtherance of the objectives described by this Strategic Plan. The two sites are presently occupied by First Financial Bank (northern site) and a Franciscan Physician Network Primary & Specialty Care facility (southern site). Both sites are significantly underutilized for their location from a density perspective. These two sites sit immediately proximate to the core of downtown, are situated along

some downtown’s major streets, and are directly adjacent to the riverfront, the Entrance Plaza, and other prime redevelopment targets. These could host much denser and more active uses while further strengthening connections and walkability between the downtown core and the Flatrock River and Mill Race Park. The City, its partners, and the owners of these sites should coordinate and discuss opportunities to redevelop these sites.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE	
Longer-term (10+ years)	Policy	
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS	
City of Columbus, private land owners, on-site businesses	Office of Downtown Development, Department of Community Development	
ACTION STEPS		POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Start discussions with land owners to understand their immediate and long-term plans for these properties. 2. Direct information and resources to land owners for consideration in future planning for these properties.		- Private investment - Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Redevelop the Franklin Street parking lot and the consolidation of the parking lot into a parking structure.

RE-29

The Franklin Street parking lot, located north of the Visitors Center, represents a great opportunity for longer-term growth and density within the downtown area. Today, the site’s parking is well-utilized and the proximity of many community assets and commercial venues points to a long-term need for significant parking here. As downtown continues to grow the City and its partners should consider opportunities to develop this site, consolidating its current surface parking into a parking structure.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Longer-term (10+ years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, Columbus Redevelopment Commission	Bartholomew County Public Library, Visitors Center
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Study the potential for higher and better uses of this site, including the feasibility of and projected gaps in financing development along with structured parking that will serve present-day and future growth in parking demand. 2. Solicit developer proposals through a competitive RFQ/P process. 3. Negotiate a redevelopment agreement with preferred developer.	• Private investment • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Advance ongoing wayfinding planning and design with a special focus on downtown; include interpretive signage.

PR-01

The Visitors Center and its partners are engaged in a citywide wayfinding design and deployment campaign. In furtherance of the objectives described in this Strategic Plan, implementers should expand on the proposed wayfinding system to promote the unique identities of downtown’s areas and corridors. While the city’s primary wayfinding system, colors, and proposed applications should come through as the primary graphic language, more specific area-based features could become a secondary, distinguishing characteristic of the system within the downtown.

Signage and unique graphic components can promote the Washington Street corridor, the 4th Street Entertainment

District, and the 5th Street Avenue of the Architects. Future sub-identities could include the riverfront, the historic residential district, and the downtown southeast sites along 2nd Street. (The latter’s proximity to the Cummins plant and proposals of this plan to encourage residential growth here could lend themselves to a unique neighborhood identity in this part of downtown.) These place-based identities can come through on signage, branding, street furniture, and artwork. The system could also govern interpretive signage on 5th Street and elsewhere in downtown that tells the city’s history and the stories of important and architecturally-significant buildings.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Visitors Center, City of Columbus	Dept. of Public Works, Office of Downtown Development, Dept. of Community Development, Dept. of Parks and Recreation
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Explore the addition of unique identities for the Washington Street, 4th Street, and 5th Street corridors as a layer within the proposed wayfinding system for Downtown Columbus. Explore expressions of those unique identities on signage, banners, street furniture, etc. 2. Explore the creation of a unified historical and architectural interpretative signage system in the same graphic and material language as the wayfinding system. 3. Finalize the citywide and downtown wayfinding strategy, design, and deployment plan. 4. Install wayfinding signage and update banners and other interchangeable components of the streetscape.	• Heritage Fund • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Extend the People Trail along 1st Street, in accordance with the 2022 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, to close the gap that exists in Downtown Columbus.

Formalize a multimodal trail connection within the public right of way, in keeping with the recommendations of the 2022 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. Provide ample shade cover and pedestrian amenities (e.g., seating, lighting, receptacles, bike racks, etc.)

PR-02

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Department of Parks and Recreation, Planning Department	Private and public land owners
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Adopt and advance plans established in the 2022 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.	Columbus Park Foundation

RECOMMENDATION

Conduct a planning effort for Mill Race Park that focuses on improvements and functions that serve the desires of the community.

PR-03

Mill Race Park is in need of attention and investment to address maintenance needs and plan for its role in the next generation of Downtown Columbus. The City and Parks Department are in the early steps of launching a master planning effort for Mill Race Park. This master plan should address five key areas at a minimum, including:

- Facilities + Maintenance:** Plan for the future of park facilities. Remove bespoke and hard-to-repair park structures and replace with new structures designed with ease of maintenance of manageable long-term costs as a priority.
- New + Revived Uses:** Introduce spaces and amenities that serve the modern needs and desires of the community.
- Enhanced Programming:** Create modernized, flexible spaces for increased events. Focus on the different users and programming opportunities for each of Mill Race Park’s spaces and amenities.
- Connectivity to Downtown:** Improvements and investments in safely and comfortably moving between Downtown and Mill Race Park. Specific projects are described in subsequent recommendations.
- River Dialogue:** Plan for projects that enhance connectivity between Mill Race Park and the Flatrock River, including improved views, touchpoints, recreational opportunities, etc.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Department of Parks and Recreation	Columbus Parks Foundation
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
- Conduct a master planning effort for Mill Race Park. - Source funding for major improvements and projects. - Execute improvements to park facilities, lighting, and infrastructure to better support events. - Implement projects in Mill Race Park identified in this Strategic Plan. - Conduct improvements to connectivity between Mill Race Park and Downtown Columbus.	- Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) - Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund - Lilly Endowment (Community Development)

RECOMMENDATION

Create an improved arrival experience to Mill Race Park at 5th Street with public realm enhancements and a new architectural gateway into the park at Lindsey Street.

PR-04

Include a public realm and landscape plan for the 5th Street and Lindsey intersection and its immediate environment in the master plan for Mill Race Park. Include improvements to pedestrian crossings (safety and visibility), lighting, street furniture, plantings, etc.

Construct an iconic, sculptural gateway into the park, fitting with Columbus’ pursuit of design excellence. Consider outfitting the gateway with public-serving amenities (e.g., bathrooms, bike repair station, water fountains, etc.). Design the structure to serve as a visual landmark to people on 5th Street, including uplighting the structure at night.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE	
Near-term (0-2 years)	Project	
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS	
Department of Parks and Recreation, City of Columbus Public Works	Columbus Park Foundation	
ACTION STEPS		POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Conduct public realm and landscape planning for the 5th Street entry to Mill Race Park and its intersection with Lindsey Street via a master planning effort for Mill Race Park. 2. Conduct concept design for a new gateway structure at the entry to Mill Race Park at 5th Street. Explore participation in the Cummins Foundation Architecture Program and/or engagement of the J. Irwin Miller Architecture Program’s design/build program. 3. Advance design of gateway, public realm improvements and implement when funded and feasible.		• Cummins Foundation Architecture Program • Columbus Park Foundation • Heritage Fund grants

RECOMMENDATION

Maintain and enhance the Water Street site as a forested buffer between the railway and future development.

PR-05

The forested site owned by the Redevelopment Commission and bordered by the railway, Lafayette Avenue, Waster Street, and the alignment of Washington Street is unlikely to see demand for new uses due to its proximity to the railway. For the foreseeable future, it is recommended that the site continue to serve as forested a natural amenity and buffer.

A new residential neighborhood is envisioned for this 18-acre riverfront site and a natural, densely vegetated buffer like the one that exists on the Water Street site provides that valuable separation from the active rail line to its north. Any improvement projects should consider green stormwater infrastructure for detention capacity on site, if feasible.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE	
Near-term (0-2 years)	Project	
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS	
Columbus Redevelopment Commission, private developers	City of Columbus	
ACTION STEPS		POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Assess the plantings and any needed improvements. 2. Establish a pedestrian crossing at Washington Street (Jackson and Franklin Streets as second priorities) and fill in planting at gravel yard following its relocation. 3. Enhance planting in coordination with redevelopment plans for the 18-acre riverfront property south of the site.		• Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Enhance mobility and connectivity through downtown by converting some streets from one-way to two-way vehicular traffic.

PR-06

Streets that facilitate two-way vehicular traffic are better for downtowns than streets that facilitate one-way vehicular traffic. Two-way traffic naturally encourages slower and safer driving, while one-way traffic encourages faster driving and less caution from drivers. Two-way streets also allow for more possible routes through downtown, offering more visibility to businesses and fewer vehicle miles traveled as drivers take shorter, less circuitous routes to arrive at their destination or find parking. In the short term, the City should convert Brown Street, Lindsey Street, and Franklin Street from one-way

traffic to two-way traffic. In the longer-term, the City and its partners should explore the potential and benefits of converting 2nd Street and 3rd Street to two-way traffic.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Program
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, Department of Public Works	Office of Downtown Development, Department of Community Development, Indiana Department of Transportation
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Conduct/update traffic study modeling traffic on streets proposed for conversion in consideration of the other projects, closures, and developments proposed in this Strategic Plan 2. Develop cost estimates for viable projects; align conversions with streetscape upgrade and other improvement projects. 3. Phase conversions in accordance with Strategic Plan priorities.	- City funding - Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Improve the experience of arriving to downtown at key gateways.

PR-07

Traffic into Downtown Columbus largely arrives via a small collection of gateways at the edges of downtown, including:

- Washington Street at 11th Street from the north;
- The roundabout at 11th Street, facilitating arrivals from the northeast (via 11th Street) and northwest (via Indianapolis Road);
- State Street and Central Ave via 3rd Street from the southeast and east; and
- 2nd Street via the Robert N. Stewart Bridge from the west.

Today, each of these gateway moments is unmarked and underwhelming—with the exception of the monumental arrival experience provided by the Robert N. Stewart Bridge, along State Road 46/2nd Street. To help reinforce the boundaries of the downtown area and alert visitors to their arrival within downtown, the City should explore improvements at these key gateways. Improvements could include branded signage, signature markers, improved landscaping, and public art.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, Department of Public Works, Department of Engineering	Columbus Visitors Center
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Determine the arrival moments (e.g., intersections, roundabouts) where gateway signage and installations are desired. 2. Design a program and palette of interventions for marking arrival to downtown at these moments. Ensure alignment with City branding and wayfinding aesthetics and standards. 3. Explore the incorporation of large-scale public art to enliven and beautify these spaces, in keeping with Columbus’ identity and commitment to art and design. 4. Commence a program of installing and maintaining gateway moments.	- City funding - Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Implement improvements to the public right-of-way along priority corridors and major routes into and out of downtown: 4th Street

PR-08

Focus on extending the pedestrian-first experience of 4th Street that exists between Washington Street and Jackson Street to the zone between Jackson Street and Mill Race Park. As the downtown area’s primary streetscape for street festivals, the pedestrian zone should blend seamlessly with the travel lanes to facilitate full pedestrianization during events, when the street is closed. Focus on flexible and adaptable design where ground floor-retailers can easily activate the sidewalk for outdoor seating.

Incorporate signature lighting, signage, pedestrian furniture, planting, and ample seating. Consider adding permanent or seasonal festival lighting over 4th Street between Washington Street and Brown Street in concert with development along 4th Street between Jackson and Brown Streets. Include storm water detention capacity and green stormwater infrastructure in all streetscape reconstruction projects. If possible, include excess capacity to offset required stormwater detention requirements for future development.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, Department of Public Works	Office of Downtown Development, Department of Community Development
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Conduct streetscape design work for the segment of 4th Street, west of Jackson Street, as identified in this plan. Design streetscape improvements with plans for redevelopment of adjacent sites in mind. 2. Implement improvements in phases. Phase improvements on the 4th Street segment between Brown and Lindsey Streets in coordination with construction of the proposed market hall and 4th Street connection to Mill Race Park.	• City funds • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund • State and federal grants • Heritage Fund grants

RECOMMENDATION

Implement improvements to the public right-of-way along priority corridors and major routes into and out of downtown: 5th Street

PR-09

5th Street is perhaps Columbus’ most distinctive destination corridor. The city’s “Avenue of the Architects” connects several existing and new proposed landmarks. This collection of buildings, gathering spaces, and public art coalesce in a unique experience of downtown and Columbus’ design legacy. Improvements should focus on creating a pedestrian-first experience with comfortable sidewalks and ample planting zones. Streetscape design should incorporate lighting, pedestrian furniture, and planting in a unique way from the rest of the downtown, contributing to the street’s role as a center of design and creativity. Incorporate signature place-branded signage, wayfinding, and interpretation celebrating and telling the story of the street as the Avenue of the Architects and each of its constituent parts. Include storm water

detention capacity and green stormwater infrastructure in all streetscape reconstruction projects. If possible, include excess capacity to offset required stormwater detention requirements for future development.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, Department of Public Works	Office of Downtown Development, Department of Community Development
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Conduct an updated 5th Street streetscape study to identify needed improvements. 2. Develop designs in collaboration with business and property owners to meet their needs and the objectives of this Strategic Plan. 3. Implement improvements with a phased approach.	• City funds • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund • State and federal grants • Heritage Fund grants

RECOMMENDATION

Build a destination children’s play area and splash pad in Mill Race Park.

PR-10

A major takeaway from engagement with the Columbus community through this planning effort is their desire for a destination children’s play area and splash pad. These amenities are becoming increasingly popular in communities like Columbus. Siting such a community amenity downtown can create a significant draw to the area for local and regional visitors. The City and Department of Parks and Recreation should develop a destination children’s playscape that includes an experiential playground and a splash pad within Mill Race Park. This should be located close to the entries into Mill Race Park at 4th and 5th Streets. Adequate enclosure will be necessary to ensure safety near the streets and rail line that sit just beyond Mill Race Park.

In planning and designing for this amenity, consideration should be given to co-located amenities for adults accompanying children to the space, including potentially permanent or temporary food and beverage vendor stalls, seating areas, shade, areas for food trucks, etc. As most of Mill Race Park is sited on land that regularly floods, and playscape should be designed to be floodable while permanent structures with conditioned space should be sited outside the flood zone. Expanded on-site parking may be required to accommodate demand and/or the City can explore a potential parking agreement with Cummins for usage of their Lindsey Street parking lot.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Department of Parks and Recreation	Department of Community Development, Columbus Park Foundation
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Conduct programming and facility planning via a master planning effort for Mill Race Park. 2. Evaluate potential sites and select preferred site; conduct required testing and assessments. 3. Generate schematic design and cost estimating for play facilities. 4. Fundraise for project. 5. Develop and implement design.	• Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund • Lilly Endowment (Community Development) • Heritage Fund grants

RECOMMENDATION

Establish more connections from existing trails that encircle downtown to and through the heart of downtown.

PR-11

Prioritize connections between the People Trail and 4th and 5th Streets. Pursue public realm and pedestrian experience improvements along major pedestrian corridors identified in the 2022 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan to create more east-west pedestrian and bicycle connections through downtown—prioritizing improvements on 4th and 5th Streets.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Department of Parks and Recreation	Private and public land owners
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Adopt and advance plans established in the 2022 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. 2. Identify priority connections from downtown gateway sites and rights-of-way to parks and trails. 3. Design connections, inclusive of signage and basic amenities. 4. Implement connections in phases, based on priority.	• Columbus Park Foundation

RECOMMENDATION

Create a stronger dialogue between Mill Race Park and the Flatrock River with enhanced trail connections along the riverfront, selective clearance of vegetation for views, and the addition of viewing platforms.

Strategically clear trees along the river’s edge to reveal views of the river from Mill Race Park. Construct overlooks and platforms that allow people to get close to the river. Feature views of the Robert N. Stewart bridge from these platforms. Better reveal and promote the boat launch for small vessels. Make upgrades and enhancements to riverfront trails as needed to support more usage.

PR-12

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Department of Parks and Recreation	State of Indiana, Bartholomew County, Army Corps of Engineers
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Conduct programming and facility planning via a master planning effort for Mill Race Park. 2. Generate a plan for strategic vegetation clearance and riverfront amenities. 3. Implement clearance and riverfront view/access enhancements in accordance with the timeline established by the forthcoming Mill Race Park master plan.	• Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund • Lilly Endowment (Community Development)

RECOMMENDATION

Build and deploy novel, high-design bus shelter at stops around downtown.

PR-13

Develop a signature bus shelter for deployment in special locations throughout downtown, such as ColumBUS stops at Washington and 5th Streets, at Mill Race Park gateways, and near landmark buildings. These stops can simultaneously create compelling advertisements for local transit service, create comfortable places for people to wait for service, and advance the community’s reputation as a destination for experiencing high design in everyday life. Creative or bespoke bus shelter designs downtown could become a feature of downtown’s identity and another element of the living museum that is Downtown Columbus.

These shelters should include unique forms, seating, coverings providing protection from the sun and rain, wayfinding and signage, up-to-date service schedules and city/downtown branding. The custom shelter designed by IU’s J. Irwin Miller Architecture Program students and installed at Nexus Park is a great example of this type of project. Copies of this structure in Columbus’ brand colors could be installed in more places throughout downtown. Alternatively, the city could host a competition for designs and deploy a variety of winners, partnering with local fabricators to build and install them.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus Public Works, ColumBUS Transit	J. Irwin Miller Architecture Program at Indiana University
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Assess the level of effort and cost associated with adding more special bus shelters in key locations downtown based on the process and cost of installing and maintaining the shelter at Nexus Park. 2. Fabricate and install more of these Nexus Park model structures at key locations downtown, or 3. Host a design competition for additional novel designs with plans to simultaneously implement a selection of winners.	• Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund • Heritage Fund

RECOMMENDATION

Engage in a program to replace downtown street trees and enhance the street tree canopy with native, sustainable, and low-maintenance species.

PR-14

Replace street trees when they become outsized, damaged, or diseased with a new palette of trees that are native to the area and perform highly in measures of sustainability, urban resilience, weather resilience, and reasonable maintenance regimens. All newly planted street trees should meet these specifications.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Program
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, Department of Public Works	Office of Downtown Development
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Conduct/update a downtown tree inventory and health assessment. 2. Prioritize tree replacements based on findings of the assessment. 3. Conduct replantings alongside streetscape improvements and upgrades; prioritize focus corridors first.	• Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Continue to explore the designation of a rail quiet zone downtown.

PR-15

Today, the railway that runs west of Lindsey Street serves as a barrier between downtown and Mill Race Park and the sound of its horn blasting several times a day can be a nuisance to residents and hotel guests. The City should continue to study and formalize conclusions for implementing a railway quiet zone throughout the downtown. If the City and its partners decide to proceed with establishing the quiet zone and reach an agreement with the railway operator, they can explore the establishment of a rail improvement fund with special taxing powers to implement required improvements along the railway.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Policy
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus	L&I, CSX, Federal Railroad Administration, Office of Downtown Development
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Convene downtown leaders and stakeholders to gauge interest in implementing a railway quiet zone within Downtown Columbus. 2. Explore options related to collecting and sequestering funds to pay for required improvements now and in the future. 3. Engage L&I to conduct required studies for commencing a quiet zone designation process. 4. Implement funding mechanisms to raise capital for improvements.	• Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund • State and federal grants

RECOMMENDATION

Implement improvements to the public right-of-way along priority corridors and major routes into and out of downtown: Washington Street

PR-16

Washington Street is Columbus’ “Main Street” and its primary retail street. The public realm and pedestrian environment should convey the special nature of this street and focus on making Washington the most walkable street in the city.

Make necessary upgrades to sidewalks for pedestrian safety and long-term durability. Allow for more outdoor dining space for current and future restaurants and cafes with designated zones on the sidewalk where feasible and with an option to extend out into street parking zones where not feasible on the sidewalk. Include ample planting, street furniture (e.g. seating, waste receptacles,

bike racks, lighting, etc.) wayfinding, and branded graphics along Washington Street from 2nd Street to 7th Street, with plans to extend northward as more demand for dense, active ground floors emerges in the long term. Include stormwater detention capacity and green stormwater infrastructure in all streetscape reconstruction projects. If possible, include excess capacity to offset required stormwater detention requirements for future development.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Medium-term (6-9 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, Department of Public Works	Office of Downtown Development, Department of Community Development
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Conduct an updated Washington Street streetscape study to identify needed improvements. 2. Develop designs in collaboration with business and property owners to meet their needs and the objectives of this Strategic Plan. 3. Implement improvements with a phase approach.	• City funds • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund • State and federal grants • Heritage Fund grants

RECOMMENDATION

Implement improvements to the public right-of-way along priority corridors and major routes into and out of downtown: 2nd and 3rd Streets

PR-17

2nd and 3rd Streets serve as two of the main corridors into and out of Downtown Columbus. They offer access to downtown from its eastern and western neighborhoods and to the larger region via direct connections to I-65 to the west. As a pair of one-way streets with ample lane capacity, traffic moves very quickly along these corridors and the pedestrian experience is quite poor, as crossing can be difficult and waits can be long. As downtown continues to grow and densify and open spaces along these corridors activates more regularly, the projects should be undertaken to calm traffic and improve the pedestrian experience of 2nd and 3rd Streets.

Focus on creating a pedestrian-first experience with traffic calming, road diets, speed limit reductions, improved sidewalks and planting zones with more tree coverage, and more public infrastructure such as street furniture and wayfinding. Include storm water detention capacity and green stormwater infrastructure in all streetscape reconstruction projects. If possible, include excess capacity to offset required stormwater detention requirements for future development.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Medium-term (6-9 years)	Policy
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, Department of Public Works	Office of Downtown Development, Department of Community Development, Indiana Department of Transportation
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Evaluate existing reconfiguration plans to identify any opportunities to make updates that would better align the future of 2nd and 3rd streets with the vision and recommendations of the Strategic Plan. 2. Develop plans and designs for sections of 2nd and 3rd Streets where unimplemented improvement plans do not already exist. 3. Prioritize improvements in ongoing mobility and downtown public realm budgeting.	• City funds • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund • State and federal grants • Heritage Fund grants

RECOMMENDATION

Create a pedestrian connection from 4th Street into Mill Race Park.

PR-18

As one of downtown’s primary retail and event destinations, 4th Street plays an important role in the pedestrian experience of downtown. As the City and private development community make investments that extend the experience of 4th Street westward, toward Mill Race Park, they should take the opportunity to connect 4th Street to Mill Race Park to create a stronger relationship between the two and facilitate future daily and special event activity that leverages both components of downtown.

Building this connection with a signature pedestrian bridge that crosses over Lindsey street and the railway presents a unique opportunity to introduce an iconic piece of infrastructure to Downtown Columbus and a seamless pedestrian experience between downtown and Mill Race Park. Such a bridge could further exemplify Columbus’ commitment to bold and novel design while offering dramatic views of downtown, the Flatrock River, and the Robert N. Stewart Bridge.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Medium-term (6-9 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, Department of Parks and Recreation, Dept. of Public Works	J. Irwin Miller Architecture Program at Indiana University
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Explore options for a pedestrian crossing and entry from 4th Street into Mill Race Park in a master plan for Mill Race Park. 2. Explore the potential of submitting a pedestrian bridge project for participation in and funding by the Cummins Foundation Architecture Program. 3. Conduct a capital raising campaign to get grant funding for the bridge design and construction. 4. Implement the project with enhancements to the public realm on either side.	Cummins Foundation Architecture Program Columbus Park Foundation State and federal grants Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund Lilly Endowment (Community Development) Heritage Fund grants Philanthropy

RECOMMENDATION

Expand and promote the City’s community calendar as a single, central resource for all community events.

AP-01

Columbus has a wealth of community events occurring downtown throughout the year. Still, many community members describe having difficulty finding what is going on downtown. The existing “Columbus Calendar”, hosted on the city’s website (<https://columbus.in.us/calendar/>), is a great central location that is easy to access for everyone in Columbus. Consolidating contributions and promotions of events through this one online calendar could help with clarity and access to information for those seeking out or looking to stumble upon events downtown.

In addition to partnerships and engagement efforts that work to centralize contributions, enhancement can be made to the calendar to further promote happenings

downtown. Consider creating a “Downtown Events” tab, prominently accessible on the calendar homepage. Staff the calendar tool appropriately to simultaneously capture more community and downtown events and widely promote the calendar as a regional resource.

Consider the installation of screens in public places downtown that rotate through posters displaying information promoting events from the calendar and the calendar itself as a resource.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Columbus Visitors Center	City of Columbus, Columbus Library, Columbus Area Arts Council, Heritage Fund, Chamber of Commerce, Office of Downtown Development
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Develop a plan to enhance staffing and servicing of the Columbus Calendar. 2. Update Columbus Calendar with a convenient feature to view events downtown. 3. Develop an outreach and promotional campaign to centralize contributions, postings, and advertising of events to the Columbus Calendar. 4. Develop a plan to deploy displays/signage that rotate with different upcoming events throughout downtown.	City funding Visitors Center

RECOMMENDATION

Activate existing inactive public spaces downtown, including the Courthouse Lawn, the City Hall Green, and the Entrance Plaza.

AP-02

Existing green spaces downtown, like the Courthouse Lawn, City Hall Green, and the Entrance Plaza at 2nd Street provide opportunities for informal recreation and daily activation. These spaces today feel formal and create the perception that they are not accessible and usable by community members. Several strategies can invite community members to better utilize and activate these spaces on a regular basis.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Program
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Department of Parks and Recreation, Office of Downtown Development	City of Columbus, Bartholomew County
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Pilot small incentives/grants for creative temporary activations of existing public spaces. Arrange selected projects on a calendar and promote forthcoming activations. 2. Introduce adirondack chairs in the Columbus brand package's primary colors to open spaces like the courthouse lawn, City Hall green, and reopened Entrance Plaza. 3. Explore the creation of modular/portable vendor stalls or vehicles for deploying at informal gathering spaces. Stalls could be used to sell food and beverages or as places where community members can rent or borrow equipment like chairs, blankets, and lawn games. 4. Designate locations along open/green spaces for food trucks to set up. 5. Invite proposals from local businesses to set up temporary/pop-up shop in existing downtown spaces. Explore opportunities for the City or its partners providing basic infrastructure (e.g. cart, truck, tent, etc.)	• Heritage Fund • Private sponsors • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Develop an expedited approval process and lower criteria for outdoor programming and events downtown.

AP-03

Diverse downtown activation and programming is key to bringing sustainable levels of foot-traffic and energy to support existing and new businesses and to further establishing downtown as the city's primary destination for events and things to do. Throughout the strategic planning process, community members communicated that barriers to hosting events across many venues downtown (e.g. Washington Street, 4th Street, the library plaza, Mill Race Park, etc.) are too high. These barriers results from a complex application process, high costs, and steep requirements that many smaller community organizations are unable to meet.

As the City makes investments in the public realm and opens new opportunities to activate existing public spaces, the application process for community members and organizations to host events should be streamlined to reduce barriers to organizing more events kicking off. Establishing low-threshold prequalifications and criteria for fast-track processing can help reduce this burden. The City should also explore lowering costs and requirements for events.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Program
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus	Department of Community Development
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Conduct an engagement process with Columbus residents and organizations who regularly host or have attempted to host events in Downtown Columbus to understanding their experiences, challenges/pain points, and recommendations for improving the process of hosting events. 2. Update process and procedure for securing permission to host events at venues identified for increased activation in this Strategic Plan (e.g. Library plaza, Mill Race Park, courthouse lawn, 4th Street, Washington Street, etc.). 3. Work with the city's legal department to update and lower barriers created by requirements of prospective event hosts and a process for pre-qualification that allows pre-qualified organizations to expedite approval. Formalize a program by which individuals and small organizations can partner with pre-qualified organizations to help facilitate approval and event hosting. 4. Designate priority spaces and/or times on the calendar for fast-track approval (e.g. 4th Street will be closed every Friday night and the City will offer expedited approval for community organizations seeking to host events there meeting certain criteria).	N/A

RECOMMENDATION

Program and promote opportunities to enjoy beverages outside as part of the downtown’s designation as a DORA district.

AP-04

Downtown Columbus’ Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area (DORA) district is a great platform for enhanced vibrancy and activation of downtown. To better leverage this designation, the City and its partners should work in a coordinated fashion to increase visibility and usage of this flexibility throughout downtown, with a focus on targeted components of the public realm.

The City and its partners in downtown activation should create a visually compelling and easily-identifiable graphic language that provides information related to the DORA district (e.g. a signature color, icon, branded font, etc.) Use this identity in clear and consistent ways with creative applications on signage, furniture, and venues. Add more

casual outdoor seating in public places (perhaps using the DORA color) where downtown patrons can socialize and enjoy a beverage. Encourage creative outdoor use like picnicking with to-go or packed food, game play, reading, etc. Create a comfortable environment in these spaces with flexible seating, tables, ample tree cover, umbrellas, regularly maintained receptacles, signage promoting DORA. Develop simple wayfinding materials to promote the DORA district, including maps that identify the extent of the DORA district, participating vendors downtown, and ideas for where patrons can enjoy beverages (e.g., open spaces, public seating areas). Use consistent signage (and perhaps cups) at DORA vendor locations advertising their participation in the program.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Program
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Office of Downtown Development, Chamber of Commerce	Downtown business owners, Department of Public Works, Department of Parks and Recreation
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Unify the DORA program under a clear and visually compelling graphic brand identity. 2. Develop a plan to enliven public spaces throughout the DORA district that features the brand identity and program participation. 3. Work with vendors to unify the experience of their participation in the program. 4. Integrate DORA opportunities into event programming downtown.	• Private dollars • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund • Office of Downtown Development • Chamber of Commerce

RECOMMENDATION

Activate Mill Race Park with new and refreshed programming and activation that will increase visitation.

AP-05

Mill Race Park is already a destination for major community and regional events. Special events, such as the city’s Ethnic Expo, Marathon, Pride event, and more bring thousands of people to Mill Race Park and Downtown Columbus. A core component of enhancing activation downtown is better utilizing Mill Race Park as a daily and special event destination. New and enhanced large-scale community and regional events should take shape alongside physical park improvements to activate the park year-round. Furthermore, existing park amenities can be better leveraged and activated, like Round Pond, to create enjoyable and attractive experiences for locals and visitors in Mill Race Park.

Potential seasonal programming could include:

- **Ice skating:** Ice skating at the Round Pond in the winter. Offer rentals and pop-up venues for operators to rent and offer refreshments.
- **Swan boats:** Reintroduce swan boats to the Round Pond in the warmer months.
- **Amphitheater:** Establish a summer concert series that utilizes the amphitheater venue and portable equipment.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Program
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Department of Parks and Recreation, Office of Downtown Development, Columbus Park Foundation	Other community organizations
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Conduct a master planning effort for Mill Race Park that identifies opportunities for enhanced regular programming and activation, opportunities for better leveraging built infrastructure within the park, and gaps in the large-scale event calendar where additional community and regional programming can take shape. 2. Identify a community partner to help organize and facilitate a consortium of community partners responsible for hosting events and organizing activities at Mill Race Park. 3. Experiment with daily/seasonal activations; promote widely and co-program with events. 4. Identify sponsors for large-scale and seasonal programming and activations.	• Heritage Fund • Ticketed events

Establish Mill Race Park as a focus area of community organizations.

AP-06

Mill Race Park first opened in 1993. In the more than 30 years since then, its spaces and facilities have been challenged by floods, vandalism, normal wear-and-tear, and the high costs of operations and maintenance. As a park space that contributes to the Columbus community, culture, downtown vibrancy, and reputation as a place of design excellence, the community should continue to invest in efforts to repair, modernize, and activate Mill Race Park. As the City and its partners focus on updates and improvements, passionate local stakeholders and community organizations should focus on continuing and expanding programming and activation of the park.

potentially another entity) to focus some of its efforts and resources specifically on Mill Race Park. By establishing the park as a strategic focus, this and other organizations can work to raise funds for its updates and upkeep and undertake projects and programming. These community partners can raise funds to supplement those from the City’s existing general funds, ensuring Mill Race Park can receive the funding it needs as a special park within the City’s system and a major driver of visitation to Downtown Columbus. In particular, more large-scale and revenue-generating programming can be very effective in driving more business to Downtown Columbus.

One such opportunity for enhanced stewardship of the park is for the Columbus Park Foundation (and/or

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Partnership
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Columbus Park Foundation, other community partners and organizations	Department of Parks and Recreation
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Collaborate to explore and determine precise mechanisms and organizations for taking on an enhanced or new leadership role in fundraising and programming for Mill Race Park. 2. Target gaps in event calendar to explore new community/ regional-scale events and programs for Mill Race Park. 3. Explore opportunities to introduce new daily/special activation, such as proposals listed in other recommendations within this section. 4. Host twice annual “Mill Race Park Days”, including a range of fix-up projects that community volunteers can help execute.	• Philanthropy • Heritage Fund

Support efforts to rehabilitate the Crump Theater for flexible entertainment.

AP-07

The emerging “Encore” project for the rehabilitation and reinvention of the historic Crump Theater is an exciting and promising opportunity to breathe new life into this cherished downtown asset. A renewed theater will blend historic charm with modern outfitting and the ability to accommodate a wide variety of contemporary programs and shows. Once reopened, the Crump will again become a major destination for Downtown Columbus and will become a regional draw. This increased foot-traffic and nighttime programming will become strong contributors to the kind of energy and vitality that will help Downtown Columbus thrive. The City and its partners should support efforts to rehabilitate and reopen the Crump Theater in the near-term. Efforts to expand the footprint and offerings

at the Crump with a dedicated outdoor space should also be supported, to add a new and unique destination to Downtown Columbus.

To the greatest extent feasible, the reopened Crump should partner with ongoing downtown programming and community events, including Exhibit Columbus, Yes Cinema’s film festival, cultural events, and more.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Policy
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Crump Center for the Performing Arts	Columbus Capital Foundation, Heritage Fund, Visitors Center, Office of Downtown Development, City of Columbus
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Assign a City partner/department to oversee City coordination and support for entertainment venues and projects within Columbus. 2. Collaborate with Project Encore to facilitate rehabilitation and reopening of the Crump Theater.	• Private investment • Philanthropy • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund • Lilly Endowment (Community Development), • Historic tax credits

RECOMMENDATION

Enhance the identity of 5th Street as a destination for prominent architecture, design, and art with strategic interventions, enhancements, and programming.

AP-08

5th Street is perhaps Downtown Columbus’ most distinctive street. It hosts downtown’s primary entrance to Mill Race Park and a collection of modernist architecture masterpieces that have given the street the name, the “Avenue of the Architects.” As the City and its partners work to grow visitation and activities downtown, 5th Street’s identity and role as a destination for experiencing great art and design should be enhanced.

The City and its partners in downtown success and cultural significance should establish 5th Street as a living, indoor-outdoor museum to modern art, design, and architecture. This includes investing in public-realm, private-realm, programming, and activation projects that are unique to 5th Street. Some potential ideas include:

- Streetscape improvements that create a signature streetscape identity for 5th Street, including lighting, signage, street furniture, custom paving, etc. (See the Public Realm + Infrastructure recommendations for more detail).

- Signature wayfinding an branded interpretive signage that tells the story of 5th Street’s architectural icons (See the Public Realm + Infrastructure recommendations for more detail).
- Identify and designate a series of places along 5th Street in Downtown Columbus that can serve as canvasses for permanent and rotating large-scale public art pieces, such as murals, sculptures, interactive art, pieces integrated with architecture, pieces suspended over the street, and more. Use blank facades on properties like the Post Office (while it remains), Cummins COB, the Jackson Street Garage, the Irwin Bank Office Building, and 432 Washington Street to feature artwork. Integrate these canvases with LCF and Exhibit Columbus.
- Develop a program for using Downtown Columbus’ modernist architecture as a canvas for the projection of light shows and art, including the BCPL and First Christian Church.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Program
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, Dept. of Public Works, Dept. of Community Development, Office of Downtown Development	Columbus Area Arts Council, Visitors Center
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Conduct planning and design work for upgrades and improvements to the 5th Street streetscape and right-of-way. 2. Create a unique brand identity for 5th Street that fits within the overarching citywide brand. 3. Activate significant and underutilized properties and open spaces along 5th Street. 4. Design and install wayfinding and interpretive signage along 5th street and its architectural assets. 5. Establish an art and event framework for 5th Street that allows for existing community organizations, institutions, and community members to propose and realize projects. 6. Partner with the LCF to utilize spaces for Exhibit Columbus during their exhibit cycles and feature/sponsor local artists when Exhibit Columbus is off-cycle.	Heritage Fund Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund Columbus Capital Foundation

RECOMMENDATION

Brand and program the open space and plaza on the Irwin Bank and Office Building site at the corner of 5th and Jackson Streets.

AP-09

The park and plaza space at the corner of 5th and Jackson Streets is well-sized, configured, and located to play a bigger role in the activation of Downtown Columbus. The space is located along 5th Street, only a half block from Washington Street and two blocks from Mill Race Park. Across Jackson Street sits Cummins, with its thousands of daily workers. To the north and east sit the Irwin Bank and Office buildings, that will bring new workers downtown and new public access to portions of these facilities. And to the south is the Jackson Street Parking Garage. This siting downtown gives this park/plaza daily visibility and foot-traffic for everyday activation, access to downtown’s main corridors and a substantial bank of parking in the garage across the street, and an address on the extraordinary focus corridor of 5th Street. As the City and its partners invest in greater activation of downtown, this park/plaza space should be a primary target for new daily activation, community programs, and special events.

This space could be branded and promoted as a destination for events, including movies in the park, food festivals, yoga/ workout classes, family programming, and art exhibits. An emphasis on arts and cultural programming could tie the space nicely into the recommended identity of 5th Street. Outside events, the space could be casually activated on a daily basis with visitors, downtown workers lunching, and small gatherings. “Permission” to use the space casually everyday is reinforce through signage, branding, and the enhancement of street furniture and amenities.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Cummins	Department of Parks and Recreation, Arts Council, Office of Downtown Development, City of Columbus
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Develop a plan for the site to enable it to host a variety of community and private (for a fee) events. Partner with vendors to support the space and event hosts. 2. Create a brand and identity for the park/plaza space that focuses on its flexibility, adaptability, location, and accessibility for small and large events. 3. Identify/hire staff to operate and manage the space and the variety of community and private events. 4. Develop a calendar for booking/leasing the space for community (public) or private events. 5. Host a regular schedule of community events (free or ticketed) to establish and spread the word about the space as a venue and destination for events.	Private investment Heritage Fund Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund Columbus Capital Foundation Ticketed events

RECOMMENDATION

Bolster community commitment to and shared responsibility to support local businesses downtown.

AP-10

Implement a seasonal “Shop Downtown” campaign focused on designated days where participating businesses offer specials, discounts, or unique in-store offerings to customers. Consider hosting a street festival alongside the events with vendors/shops out on the street, food, music, activities, and entertainment. Schedule these to coincide with regional events that brings visitors to Downtown Columbus, if possible.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Program
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Chamber of Commerce, Office of Downtown Development	City of Columbus, Visitors Center

ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Work with businesses downtown to outline a framework for a “shop local” campaign, potentially featuring events that promote shopping at businesses downtown. 2. Establish campaign messaging, outreach, and coordinated events and activities. 3. Host events within downtown regularly (quarterly, semi-annually, annually).	• Private investment • Heritage Fund • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Activate the alley between the Jackson Street Garage and Washington Street and between 4th and 5th Streets with creative placemaking and public realm improvements.

AP-11

The alleyway that connects 4th and 5th Streets one-half block west of Washington Street presents a unique opportunity to create a special urban moment and enhanced connection between two focus corridors (4th and 5th Streets) and priority sites (4th Street Entertainment District and the Irwin Bank + Office Complex). This alley space is already partially activated with businesses like Fresh Take Kitchen and outdoor seating for the Bespoke venue that fronts on Washington Street, murals at the intersection with 4th Street and incorporated into the Jackson Street Garage, and Friendship Alley, which connects this alleyway to Washington Street in the middle of the block.

Street that back onto this alley make this a compelling opportunity to enhance the public realm in the downtown core and provide a unique experience in the heart of the city. Property owners abutting the alley, the City of Columbus, and other local partners focused on art and activation should work together to implement improvements and enhancements to the aesthetic character of the space, the incorporation of artworks, pedestrian furniture, and spill-out/gathering space for adjacent businesses. Project stewards should develop a programming and activation plan that provides specific recommendations and provides a brand identity for the alley that can help it become a destination. Any future plans for the space will likely need to maintain the alley's primary function as a service zone.

Its location, these placemaking elements, and forthcoming investments in the properties along Washington

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Near-term (0-2 years)	Project
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Private landowners, City of Columbus	Office of Downtown Development, Columbus Area Arts Council, Department of Public Works

ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Assemble a consortium of private land owners abutting the alley and other project stakeholders to organize a plan of action. 2. Partner with a design/public space activation firm to explore opportunities for physical improvements, activation strategies, placemaking interventions, and space identity and branding. Ensure alignment with plans for the block, including the continued success of existing businesses and the opportunity for new ones to emerge. 3. Consider programming the space with special events and using it as a venue/palette for artistic installations.	• Private investment • Heritage Fund grants • Lilly Endowment grant • Consolidated Central Allocation Area TIF fund

RECOMMENDATION

Enhance connectivity between downtown and Nexus Park and other destinations for traveling youth sporting events.

AP-12

As Nexus Park becomes more a destination for various events, including traveling youth sports competitions, visitors to Nexus Park should be provided with information about and enhanced access to downtown’s many offerings. The City and its partners should explore offering enhanced ColumBUS service between downtown and Nexus Park and other sites hosting youth sporting events throughout the city when Columbus/Nexus Park plays host to travel competitions. The aim is to provide incentive for these visitors to stay in and/or explore downtown Columbus during their visit.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Program
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
City of Columbus, ColumBUS, Department of Parks and Recreation	Visitors Center, Office of Downtown Development
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Pilot a program that offers enhanced ColumBUS transit service on a route between Nexus Park and Downtown Columbus with shorter lead times and enhanced signage/ advertising. Coordinate pilot with a major event (establish a visitor/attendee minimum threshold), and offer service during designated times (e.g., around lunch and dinner). 2. Couple the pilot program with promotional efforts to showcase downtown’s offerings.	• City funding

RECOMMENDATION

Bring on a coordinator for programming, events, and activations downtown.

AP-13

If the community is to be successful in making downtown a destination for more year-round programming and activation of public spaces, a dedicated coordinator could help work with the many organizations and entities involved in organizing and hosting events across downtown’s many existing and proposed future venues. This role could sit within one of Columbus’s non-profit organizations, such as the Arts Council, and could partner with the City, private landowners, community organizations, companies, and civic/cultural groups to ensure efficient processes and right-sizing events and activations to the appropriate venues downtown.

This role could also help facilitate planning and design work, alongside owners, for various future improvements and upgrades to venue spaces. The coordinator could also take on the responsibility of updating the community calendar and conducting outreach and promotion of downtown events to the community.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	RECOMMENDATION TYPE
Short-term (3-5 years)	Partnership
IMPLEMENTATION LEAD	IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
Columbus Area Arts Council, Heritage Fund	Office of Downtown Development, Visitors Center, City of Columbus, Department of Parks and Recreation, local arts organizations
ACTION STEPS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
1. Work with local and regional partners to identify potential funding sources for such a role. 2. Generate a job description, determine if the role is full-time or part-time, and identify the appropriate organization for the role to fit within. 3. Connect with all potential local and regional public, private, community, and non-profit entities that host events and/or offer venues for downtown programming and activation. 4. With funding, a role description, and a host organization for the role identified, conduct a search for individuals interested in the role.	• Heritage Fund • City of Columbus

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