



# Chapter 14 Downtown Plan

## Executive Summary

City of Appleton Comprehensive Plan 2010-2030

Appleton, Wisconsin



# Planning for Downtown Appleton's Future

**WHY A DOWNTOWN PLAN?** The Downtown Plan is intended to facilitate wise public policy and private investment decision-making, building on the physical, natural, cultural, and social assets of the City. The overall purpose is to align the resources and talents of the City, Appleton Downtown Incorporated (ADI), private businesses, non-profits and the broader community around a shared vision for the future of downtown and portions of the riverfront.

**THE PROCESS** A committee representing a broad cross-section of public and private interests provided direction to the consultant team over a 9-month period in 2016. Public workshops, a design charrette, walking tours, a community survey, focus groups, and an interactive online map were among the tools used to solicit input from the public. A set of key issues was identified, as well as an overall vision and guiding principles. The plan articulates priorities for downtown investment and a set of initiatives to guide plan implementation. Following a review by the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee and City of Appleton Plan Commission, the Common Council adopted the Chapter 14 Downtown Plan on March 15, 2017.

**OUR PROUD HISTORY** The decisions of the past shape every moment of every day. As this newest document is reviewed and considered, we must recognize how the following themes re-emerge and continue to influence our decision-making for downtown's growth.

- Three historic communities—Lawesburg, Appleton and Grand Chute-- shaped our downtown. Each had separate commercial districts and key features that still define today's downtown.
- The river's relationship with downtown has changed over time. The success of industry driven by waterpower and the coming of the railway refocused downtown away from the river.
- A diverse population, including African Americans, Greeks, Italians, Chinese, Irish, and Germans fueled downtown's growth.

**OUR BRIGHT FUTURE** As the City, ADI and its partners continue to plan and invest in downtown Appleton, they will be guided by the following vision and principles:

**"Downtown Appleton is a great American urban neighborhood and employment center with world class arts and entertainment."**

1. Fully embrace and leverage the diverse arts, cultural, and educational assets of the community
2. Invest in the growth of downtown neighborhoods with diverse housing options and residential amenities
3. Increase connectivity, trails, and recreation opportunities between the downtown, the Fox River, and the region
4. Foster a culture of walking and biking
5. Promote quality development along the Fox River by embracing the region's industrial and natural heritage
6. Support diverse partnerships which make downtown more attractive for residents and visitors through: activities and events; public art and place making; on-going maintenance; and promotion and marketing
7. Create a safe, welcoming, inclusive and accessible downtown
8. Grow downtown as an employment center for the region
9. Continue to support events and entertainment which draw visitors to downtown Appleton
10. Support a destination Fox Cities Exhibition Center as a unique attraction and community asset
11. Support unique, independent businesses

The market findings (opposite page) are taken from the Appleton Downtown Market Analysis. Priorities listed reflect public input and discussion among members of the steering committee. The Chapter 14 Downtown Plan will be implemented through eight initiatives and their associated strategies as contained in the following pages.

\*Historical perspective provided by the History Museum at the Castle



## Office



\*Appleton's office inventory is over 90% occupied. There are numerous, readily available smaller spaces however significant office space demand will require new construction. Targeted uses include: small medical device, labs, or clinics; training related specialty schools; commercial arts-related businesses.

## Residential



\*The downtown Appleton housing market can absorb 385 units (conservatively) of multifamily rental housing over the next five years, as well as 50 condo units.

## Retail



\*Targeted uses include: arts and crafts related businesses including those with opportunities for participation in 'hands-on' activities; technology-based businesses; specialty retail including women's clothing; discount retailers; and small scale specialty food

## Hospitality



A very strong category already. More family oriented dining is desired including healthy options.

# Market Findings

## KEY ASSETS

1. Large daytime workforce
2. A thriving arts/entertainment/culture/educational scene
3. The Fox River, an extensive parks system, and growing trail network
4. Diverse events and programs draw thousands of visitors
5. Strong business mix
6. College Avenue, which is walkable and economically vibrant

# Priorities

Residents, business owners, visitors, and other organizations and individuals identified a set of community priorities:

## Development Priorities

- Residential Development - A mix of multifamily, townhouse, and condo housing into downtown, with a focus north of College Avenue.
- Office Development - New office downtown, including north of College Avenue.
- Hospitality - Few deficiencies exist, more restaurants.
- Retail/Commercial - Focus on strategically filling existing spaces.
- City Center Plaza/Public Market - Explore public market concept.

## Community Priorities

- Construction and Successful Operation of the Fox Cities Exhibition Center
- Balanced Riverfront Revitalization
- New or Remodeled Appleton Public Library
- Develop Ellen Kort Peace Park & Revitalize Jones Park
- A Walkable Downtown
- Strong Downtown Neighborhoods
- Traffic Flow Improvements
- Maximizing Use of Current Parking Assets
- Enhanced Streetscapes throughout Downtown
- Expand Public Art & Creative Culture
- Continued Partnership with Lawrence University

\*Market recommendations from Appleton Downtown Market Study

# Initiative #1 Urban Form & Design

## DESCRIPTION

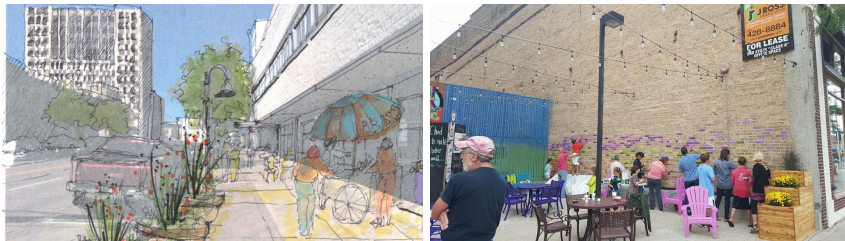
Downtown is an urban place, but is also the cultural, social, and civic heart of the community. It has a distinctive image different from other parts of the city.

The character and the quality of downtown's public and private spaces should reflect the importance of the district to the community. A mix of land uses, historic buildings, well-defined streets, pedestrian walkways, public gathering spaces and civic buildings combine to create a memorable experience for visitors and a strong positive image of downtown.

The City and its partners will continue to invest in the downtown, creating a great quality of life for a growing residential population while also strengthening downtown's draw as a unique destination for visitors.

## KEY STRATEGIES

- 1.1 Continue development of entry features on major routes into the downtown
- 1.2 Continue to enhance the civic campus south of Lawrence Street
- 1.3 Implement appropriate streetscaping projects throughout the downtown
- 1.4 Install sculpture, murals, and other art in public locations throughout the downtown
- 1.5 Continue to encourage quality urban design throughout the downtown through voluntary measures
- 1.6 Add flexible outdoor space throughout the downtown area



LEFT:  
Sketch showing reimagined  
College Avenue streetscape  
and volunteers painting  
Parklet Place

BELOW:  
View looking west down Soldier's Square  
toward Zuelke Building (inset) and  
perspective of redeveloped YMCA parking  
ramp into civic plaza with mixed use  
building



SOLDIER'S SQUARE  
AERIAL PERSPECTIVE

Engberg  
Anderson  
ARCHITECTS



## KEY STRATEGIES

- 2.1 Maintain and strengthen the vitality of the arts and entertainment niche
- 2.2 Pursue opportunities to attract more artists and arts related businesses to the downtown
- 2.3 Create new venues for arts and entertainment activities in the downtown
- 2.4 Continue to support the Fox Cities Exhibition Center as a vital component of the downtown
- 2.5 Foster an arts education focus downtown
- 2.6 Create more Fox River to Downtown tourism opportunities and connections
- 2.7 Support creation of a new or remodeled library downtown, which will significantly contribute to the arts and culture of downtown Appleton
- 2.8 Establish an Arts and Culture Plan for the

The Fox Cities Exhibition Center will bring additional visitors downtown to support local business, with an anticipated annual economic impact of \$6.5 million.

# Initiative #2 Tourism, Arts, Entertainment & Education

## DESCRIPTION

Tourism and local visitation creates business opportunities. Visitors stay in downtown hotels, shop in downtown stores, and eat in downtown restaurants, helping to maintain the district's vitality past normal business hours. Investments such as the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center have helped increase the flow of tourists to the downtown. The Fox Cities Exhibition Center and a new or remodeled library will create additional opportunities to attract visitors downtown. Downtown will continue to provide a unique business environment and a vibrant mix of arts, cultural, and educational offerings unique to the region.



As major trip generators, mixed-use libraries enliven downtowns while contributing to their tax base.



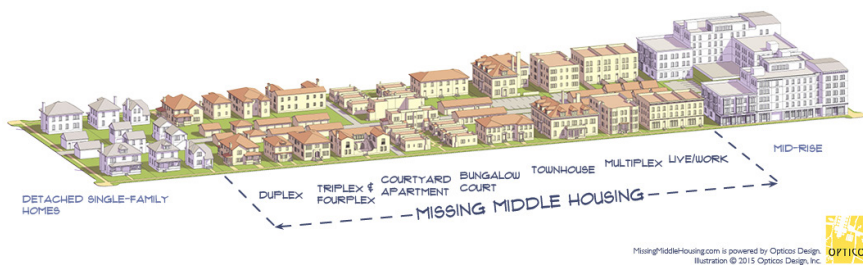
PARKing Day, College Avenue.  
(Credit: Erin DeMuyne)



# Initiative #3 Neighborhood & Residential Development

## DESCRIPTION

Residential development is critical to the success of downtown. The community envisions a mix of mid-density residential, higher density residential, and mixed-use redevelopment in several locations surrounding the core downtown district as illustrated in the redevelopment framework. In areas adjacent to downtown, pockets of attractive older homes will be preserved and rehabilitated, while other areas are identified for redevelopment. Townhomes, pocket neighborhoods, and apartment units will offer an expanded variety of housing options in an attractive urban setting. These new residences will be served by additional neighborhood retail and services.



BELOW: Conceptual perspective of mixed use infill development as identified in the redevelopment framework. Vantage point is from the corner of Drew Street and Washington Street.



## KEY STRATEGIES

- 3.1 Encourage mixed-use and mid-density residential redevelopment on under-utilized sites on the edge downtown
- 3.2 Preserve and enhance historic neighborhoods adjacent to downtown
- 3.3 Promote development of neighborhood serving businesses to meet the basic shopping and service needs of downtown and nearby residents
- 3.4 Evaluate the need to amend the Zoning Code and evaluate other tools to facilitate redevelopment in mixed-use areas bordering the downtown CBD
- 3.5 As future housing is added downtown, Coordinate efforts with the Appleton Area School District (AASD)
- 3.6 Enhance the image of downtown north of College Avenue
- 3.7 Support green energy and sustainable infrastructure development
- 3.8 Promote a broad spectrum of housing types within the downtown study area
- 3.9 Fund and implement a "Quiet Zone"
- 3.10 Promote well-designed transitional areas between higher density development downtown and adjacent, largely single family neighborhoods



## KEY STRATEGIES

- 4.1 Sustain and grow the retail niches which have formed downtown
- 4.2 Identify and aggressively recruit target industries
- 4.3 Protect the existing retail blocks on College Avenue
- 4.4 Add depth to retail nodes beyond College Avenue by encouraging new businesses on side streets and fronting Soldier's Square
- 4.5 Facilitate and pursue entrepreneurial business development in the downtown
- 4.6 Create opportunities for smaller offices and business services to locate downtown, including north of College Avenue
- 4.7 Maintain an environment favorable to larger employers in the downtown
- 4.8 Support private sector efforts to redevelop and invest in downtown
- 4.9 Implement the block level conceptual ideas contained in Section 4 of the full chapter

# Initiative #4 Downtown Development & Business Retention

## DESCRIPTION

Businesses are finding downtowns highly attractive. Younger employees find the downtown setting to be particularly appealing, and all employees enjoy the access to restaurants, services, and entertainment. This environment is the unique selling point for downtown. It can be equally appealing to home-grown businesses and to corporations. A mix of strategies will ensure downtown continues to be a desirable business location for many different types and sizes of businesses.

RIGHT: Shoppers visiting downtown Appleton

BELOW: Conceptual perspective of mixed use infill development as identified in the redevelopment framework. View is from the current library site toward back side of City Center Plaza.



# Initiative #5 Mobility and Parking

## DESCRIPTION

Several recently completed studies are steering Appleton toward a more comprehensive approach to mobility. The mobility and parking initiative is intended to facilitate access to and through the downtown for all forms of transportation, and sufficient, appropriately-located parking in the downtown area. This initiative recognizes the growing importance of bike and pedestrian access, as well as providing greater access to people of all abilities.

Implementing the recommendations from the City's 2015 Downtown Parking Study, 2016 Downtown Mobility Plan, and 2016 Appleton Trails Master Plan will enhance quality of life and strengthen downtown's draw as a unique tourism destination.

## KEY STRATEGIES

- 5.1 Support Access Appleton initiatives through the City and BID
- 5.2 Continue to proactively address real and perceived parking needs as they arise
- 5.3 Improve pedestrian and bicycle connections to and through the downtown
- 5.4 Implement the recommendations contained in the 2016 Downtown Mobility Plan
- 5.5 Endorse a system of public transportation centered on downtown
- 5.6 Plan, design, and implement bike and pedestrian wayfinding signage
- 5.6 Promote downtown development best practices which encourage walkability



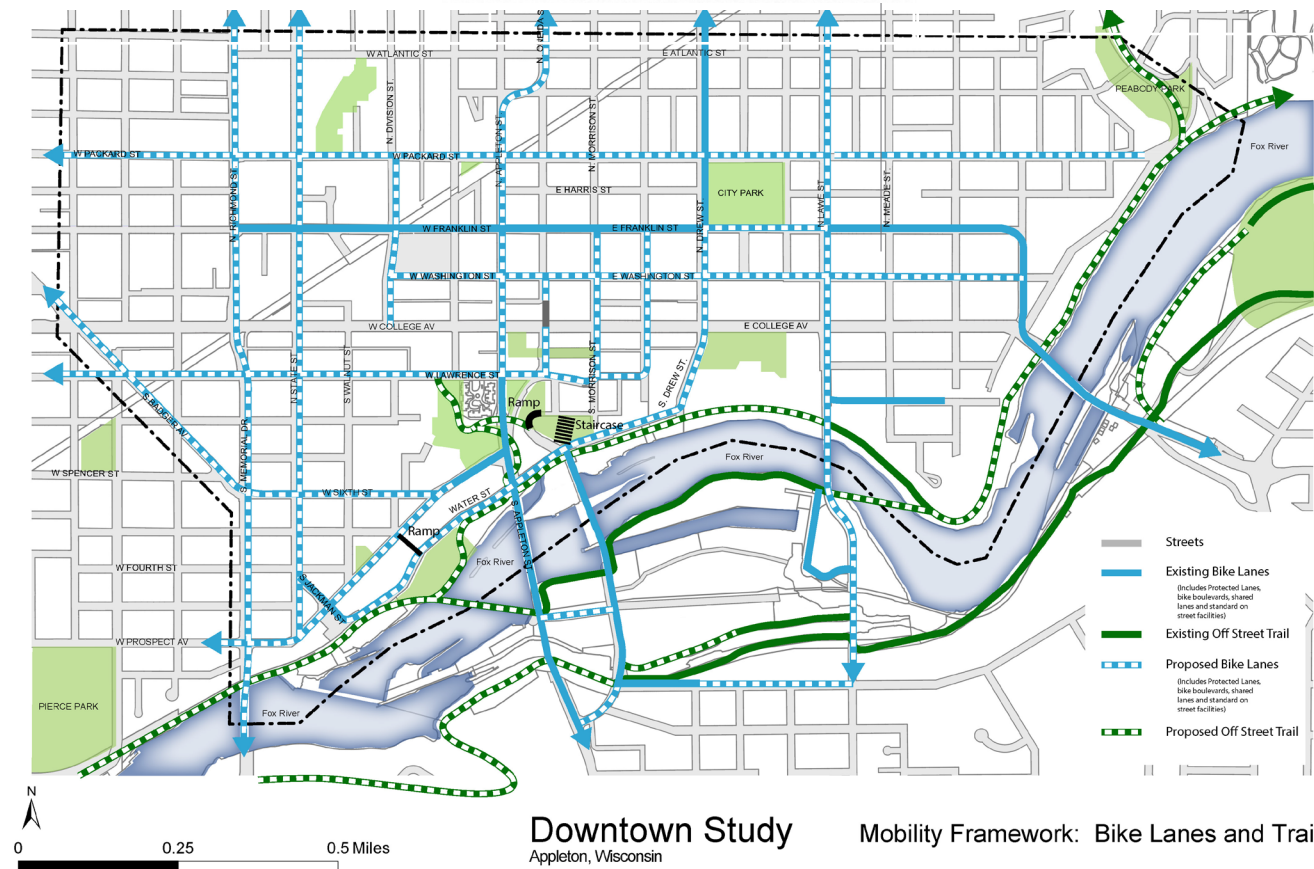
Mixed-use parking garage



Wayfinding signage



Trailhead concept





## KEY STRATEGIES

- 6.1 Update the Downtown Plan as initiatives are completed or new opportunities arise
- 6.2 Uphold support for Appleton Downtown, Inc. and the Business Improvement District
- 6.3 Ensure the cleanliness and safety of the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods
- 6.4 Continue to explore potential for formation of a Riverfront Business Improvement District (BID)

# Initiative #6 Downtown Management

## DESCRIPTION

Downtown management and revitalization is an on-going process. As more and more people call downtown Appleton home, ensuring the cleanliness and safety of the area will become increasingly important to the neighborhood. Other priorities within this initiative include examining the potential for a riverfront BID, which would help support additional investment along the Fox River and create a branded district with strong ties to downtown.

The City, ADI, and its many partners will continue to support diverse partnerships which make downtown and the riverfront more attractive for residents and visitors through activities and events; public art and placemaking; on-going maintenance; and marketing.



Placemaking—combining elements of the built environment in a compelling way that attracts people—is the essence of real estate development. Creative placemaking takes that concept further, with the placemaking effort led by arts and cultural considerations that help shape not only the physical character of a place, but also its social character

-Urban Land Institute, "Growing Value through Creative Placemaking."



Downtown map showing recent place making activities

# Initiative #7 Public Spaces & Riverfront

## DESCRIPTION

Public spaces make cities more livable by offering opportunities for exercise, gathering, activities, or simply relaxation. They serve an important role in establishing the downtown as the central social district for the region. They also serve as venues for a wide variety of programming which bring visitors downtown year-round.

Appleton is preparing to invest in improvements to Jones Park and Ellen Kort Peace Park, as well as several trails in and adjacent to downtown. These improvements will stimulate private sector investment creating additional tax base.

Looking ahead, the City and ADI will forge new partnerships and use a combination of parks, trails, wayfinding, lighting, and other strategies to define a distinctive waterfront district strongly tied to downtown. This will be done in a manner which ensures accessibility to people of all abilities, while celebrating Appleton's rich history and culture.

Jones Park framework plan highlights strategies to increase connectivity between downtown Appleton and the Fox River. Inset photos illustrate opportunities to brand the riverfront through the use of lighting, and to create destination social gathering places for the community.

## KEY STRATEGIES

- 7.1 Complete proposed trail segments along the Fox River
- 7.2 Construct a grand stair case and similar stair and ramp linkages which connect downtown to the river
- 7.3 Consider developing a civic plaza on a portion of the YMCA ramp site when it comes down
- 7.4 Plan, design, and construct improvements to Jones Park and Ellen Kort Peace Park
- 7.5 Continue to support public and private efforts to identify and develop pocket parks, alleyways, and other pedestrian opportunity zones off of College Avenue
- 7.6 Promote the identity of the riverfront through creative use of lighting
- 7.7 Support creation of a new or remodeled library downtown providing space for contemplation, creation and collaboration.
- 7.8 Continue both public and private redevelopment along the Fox River Corridor





# Using the Downtown Plan

## BUILDING ON EXISTING MOMENTUM

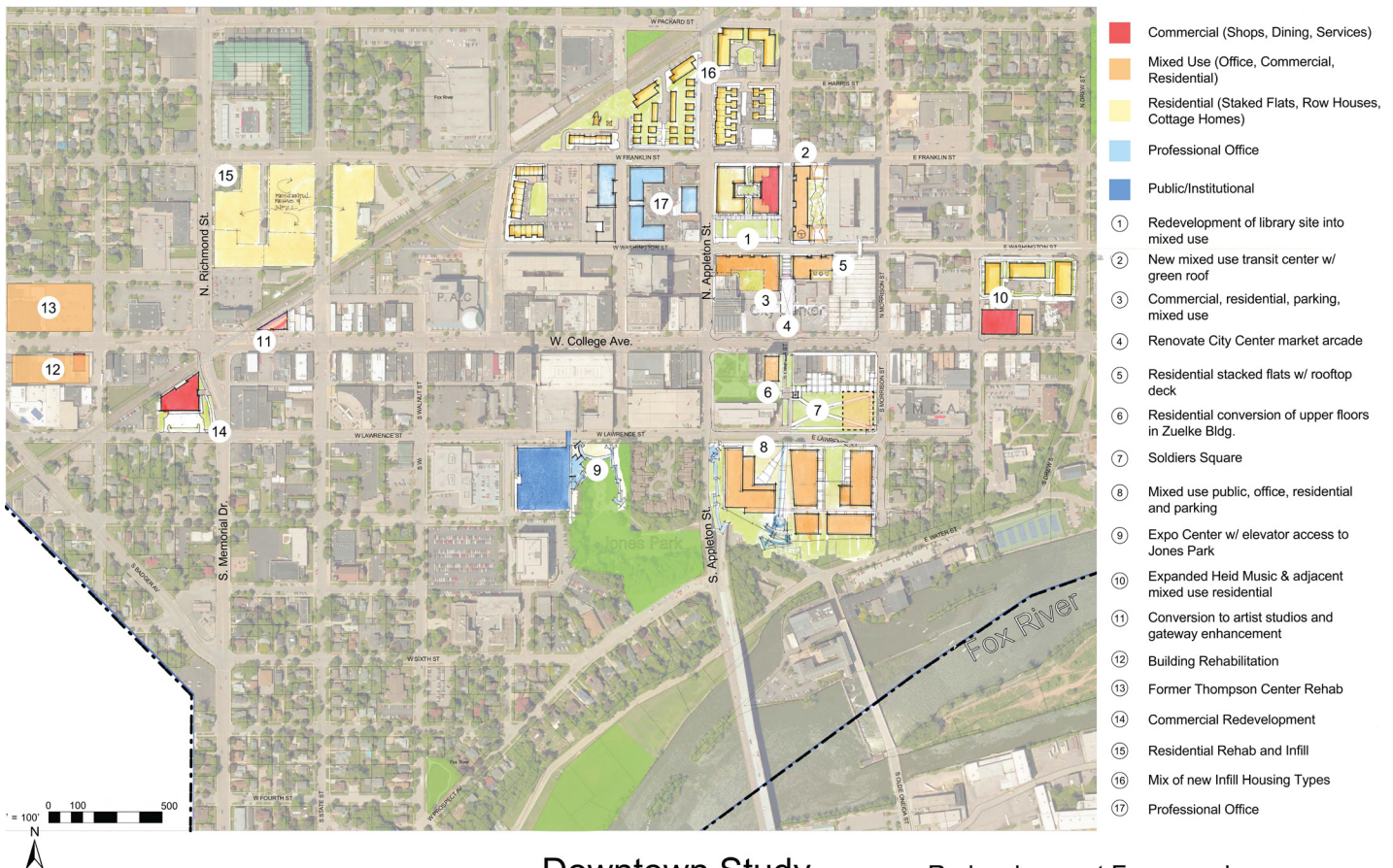
Downtown Appleton is thriving. New parks, plazas, trails, and murals are going up. Events such as Mile of Music continue to grow and construction of the Fox Cities Exhibition Center is underway. Along the Fox River new hotels, restaurants, and housing is being built. The Downtown Plan is intended to build off of the current momentum with the goal of creating a great urban neighborhood with world class arts and entertainment.

## A PHASED APPROACH

Building a great City is an on-going project. A phased approach is required in order to be successful. The Downtown Plan identifies long-term redevelopment opportunities as shown in the Redevelopment Framework below. It also identifies short-term actions, such as continued investments in placemaking which make downtown more inviting and attractive by the day.

## PARTNERSHIPS & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Achieving the vision requires teamwork. The City of Appleton, Appleton Downtown Incorporated, and the Business Improvement District work closely together every day. Property owners, business owners, and downtown visitors are also a critically important part of what makes downtown Appleton one great place. The Redevelopment Framework below is intended to serve as a guide for public and private investment. Increasing residential density, supporting additional office growth, and stimulating investment north of College Avenue are all priorities.



**Downtown Study**  
Appleton, Wisconsin

**Redevelopment Framework**





For a full copy of Chapter 14 Downtown Plan, including detailed recommendations, visit the City's website:

<http://www.appleton.org>

To volunteer or find out more about Appleton Downtown Inc (ADI) visit:

<http://www.appletondowntown.org>

To learn more about downtown development opportunities, contact the Community & Economic Development Department at 920-832-6468

