An aerial photograph of downtown Brainerd, Minnesota, overlaid with a semi-transparent blue grid and architectural outlines. The map shows a dense urban layout with streets, buildings, and green spaces. Labels for 'GREGORY PARK' and 'DOY REDMON FIELD' are visible on the map. The title text is positioned in the upper right and center-right areas.

# Revitalizing Downtown Brainerd

A City for All Seasons

## A Master Plan

Prepared for  
BUILD Task Force  
Brainerd Restoration  
and the  
City of Brainerd

Prepared by  
Damon Farber Associates  
February 2002

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# The Revitalization of Downtown Brainerd



In August of 2001, the Brainerd City Council authorized Brainerd Restoration to oversee the preparation of a plan to revitalize downtown Brainerd, which established a vision for this plan. The Downtown Revitalization Study was commissioned by Brainerd Restoration. Representatives of these groups, along with downtown business owners, concerned citizens and community stakeholders, formed the BUILD (Brainerd Urban Improvement Landscape Design) Task Force, whose mission was to direct the creation of this plan. The plan is intended to provide specific recommendations for how the downtown could be redeveloped in the future. This document is intended to act as a framework for decision making regarding improvements made within downtown and as a resource for general recommendations to property owners within downtown.

The intent is to use this document to promote a vision for downtown. This vision includes identity improvements, suggestions for future development, parking expansion options, opportunities for linking downtown to the expanding regional trail system and for safety improvements. Promoting a vision for future development and enhancing existing development within the downtown core is the primary goal of this plan.

Across the United States, communities are taking stock of their downtowns. Today, there is a greater recognition of the relationship between how downtowns function and look and their commercial and real estate successes. Brainerd offers great potential to build upon its existing character and stock of homes and businesses and open space to better meet the needs of the market it serves – in terms of both convenience and character. Brainerd's location as the "heart" of Brainerd Lakes tourism make it prudent for today's community leaders to step forward and to provide leadership and guidance for the future.

An underlying mission in this project is to extoll the resources that make downtown Brainerd an even more appealing place as it evolves and changes in the future. The first step in this process is to understand and appreciate the resources within downtown.

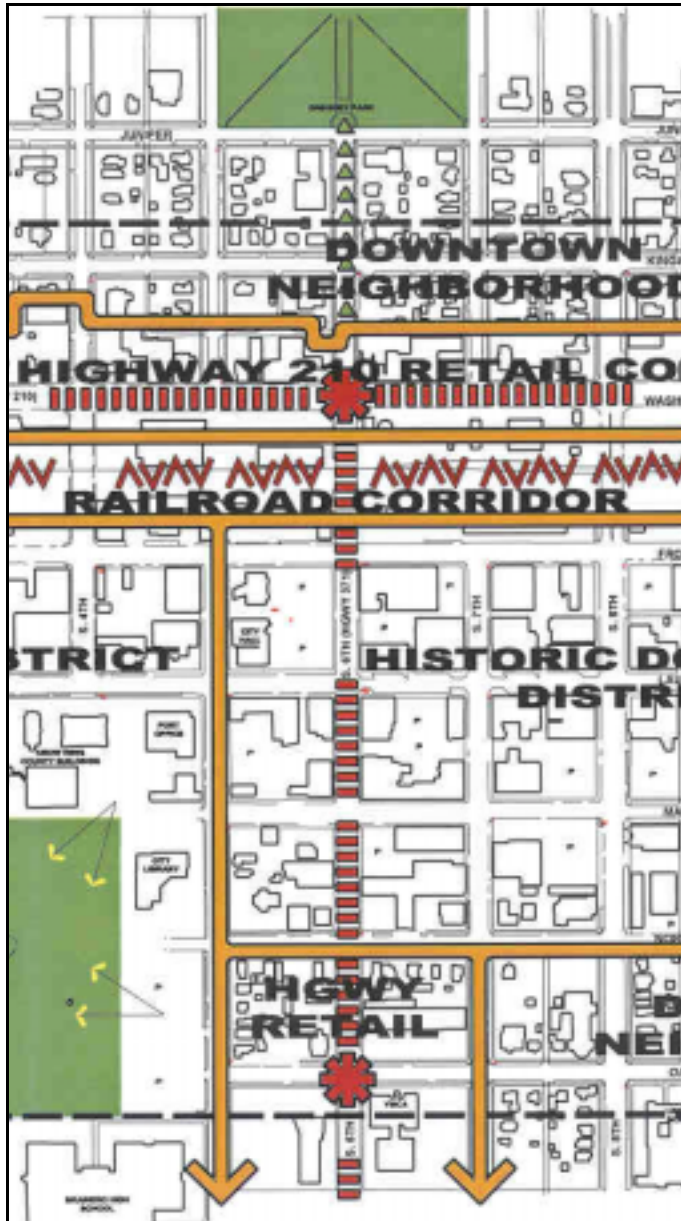
# Limits of Study



Downtown Brainerd today consists of a mix of business, civic and housing uses. The Crow Wing County Government Center, Federal Post Office and the Brainerd City Hall provide a strong civic presence downtown. The commercial district on Laurel Street, redesigned in the 1970's, is not reflective of current thinking regarding experiential downtown redevelopment. Sixth and Washington Streets bring traffic through town but conflict with pedestrian movement from nearby neighborhoods into downtown. Connections to the Mississippi River, Regional Trail System and Gregory Park are resources not currently fully utilized. Downtown Brainerd is a strong regional center and has the infrastructure, natural resources and commercial potential to become even stronger point of destination.

Geographic limits of the study are from Kingwood Street on the north to Oak Street on the south; lateral limits are the Mississippi on the west to Eleventh Street on the east.





The emphasis of this study is founded on the premise that downtown business owners, property owners, caring citizens and local governmental jurisdiction along with state agencies form the public – private partnership that is key to the project’s implementation and long term success. The process of this study has been structured around a series of three public meetings over the past five months, culminating in a City Council presentation. The document itself is designed as both a guideline and promotional tool.

Brainerd is a progressive community with an obvious commitment and desire to meet the needs of its residents, business owners and visitors as a more livable community in which to live, work, shop and recreate. The following is a summary of the public meeting process:

Public Meeting #1 – Held on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2001 @ Whittier School

- Introduce project and present analysis of existing conditions
- Explore opportunities and constraints with public
- Gather general impressions of downtown Brainerd from stakeholders

Public Meeting #2 –October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2001 @ Harrison School

- Present preliminary Master Plan & establish guiding principles
- Begin to establish priorities by “Stop Light” vote

Public Meeting #3 –January 14, 2002 @ Lincoln School

- Present refined Master Plan & Present phase one project – Downtown Improvements
- Gather final public input on future plans

Meeting with BUILD Task Force & Restoration Board –January 21, 2002

- Present final plan based on public input
- Establish priorities

Submit Master Plan to City Council –February 4, 2002

Present Master Plan & Priorities to City Council –February 25, 2002



The public was invited to respond to a series of questions, at the first meeting at Whittier School on September 10, 2001, regarding the existing character of downtown, what they imagined it would be like in the future and what they thought the obstacles were to achieving that vision. The following guiding principles were created based on their input.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- **Downtown Brainerd is a place for people.**

The Downtown District should be a pedestrian area. The Historic Downtown, streets, parking and open space areas should be designed to be flexible, attractive and to ensure a safe pedestrian environment.

- **An opportunity to establish a unique sense of place.**

By weaving a common theme of historical reference through the Downtown, it will provide a unique sense of place, which will become a signature for the City of Brainerd.

- **Wayfinding and convenient parking.**

Downtown will continue to be an important civic, commercial and residential district for the city of Brainerd. Signage and markers must clearly direct residents and visitors to convenient parking close to downtown businesses.

- **Downtown Brainerd is a good place to do business.**

The Downtown Brainerd revitalization effort needs to enhance the mix of uses located in the downtown, particularly on ground floors of businesses which open up to the street. The Downtown should promote a synergy between the community and businesses to allow for increased diversity and activity.

- **Accessibility and safety.**

Downtown should be for people of all ages and abilities and access by car, bike or feet should be safe and convenient.

- **A strategic approach to revitalization.**

The strategic process for Downtown Brainerd must be to enhance current development, be flexible and have adaptability over time. As resources are applied, they must be seen as a civic investment with a return that can be used to foster additional improvements.

- **Regional connections.**

The downtown should connect to nearby amenities and resources, such as the Mississippi River, Gregory Park, the Paul Bunyan regional trail and the adjacent Southeast and Northside neighborhoods.

Overall Guiding Principle:

- **Work together to attain common goals**

The success of the Downtown Brainerd Revitalization requires a vision for both long-term and short-term goals. Working together, Brainerd offers an environment that promotes a public – private partnership that can foster investment and civic pride.



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## PUBLIC COMMENTS ON APPEARANCE:

- Welcoming
- Appearance of downtown streets needs to be cleaned up – weeds and trash pick up
- Downtown not comfortable to walk
- Downtown is no longer aesthetically attractive
- Downtown needs consistent look - flowers, attractive places to sit
- Seedy bars deter family use of downtown
- Improvements should not block views to business signage
- Walking to church through downtown is not pleasant

Guiding Principle developed from public input:

- **Downtown Brainerd is a place for people.**

The Historic Downtown District should be a pedestrian area. People want to be where there are other people, and will have a greater sense of security where there is more activity. The Historic Downtown, streets and parking areas should be designed to be flexible, attractive and ensure a safe pedestrian environment.

## PUBLIC COMMENTS ON CHARACTER:

- An historic theme downtown would build pride in Brainerd's History
- Nicollet Mall down Laurel?
- Downtown should be an enjoyable environment
- Downtown is the heart of the city
- Murals and other creative ways to beautify should be considered
- Classic Historical theme – Eat & Shop downtown

Guiding Principle developed from public input:

- **An opportunity to establish a unique sense of place.**

By weaving a common theme or historical reference through the Downtown, it will provide a unique sense of place, which will become a signature for the City of Brainerd. Possible sources of inspiration include Mississippi River, Paul Bunyan, Railroad, Gregory Park, lumber industry, neighborhoods and downtown schools.

## PUBLIC COMMENTS ON PARKING

- More parking
- Walking distance between available parking and business
- Downtown should be accessible to visitors and easy to navigate and find parking
- Reconfigure parking to maximize number of spaces
- Add parking ramp

Guiding Principle developed from public input:

- **Convenient parking available at the center of Brainerd.**

Downtown will become an important commercial and residential district for the city of Brainerd. The public life of the city will take place in the Downtown, offering year-round attractions and activities appealing to a broad mix of customers and residents. Appropriate signage and markers must clearly direct residents and visitors to convenient parking close to downtown.

## LAND USE & BUSINESS MIX:

- Downtown has lost some basic services – loss of grocery store
- Getting individual business owners buy in will be critical to success of project
- Balance tourism needs and community needs downtown
- More service oriented businesses downtown
- More diversity in types of businesses
- More restaurants
- Government could lease downtown space
- Schools in and around downtown are a positive influence and should be kept
- Outside Cafés are needed
- Evening shopping
- Government must give incentives to redevelop
- Government must help businesses renovate
- Railroad property should be looked at as an opportunity
- Water Park & Municipal Pool

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## LAND USE & BUSINESS MIX (continued):

Guiding Principle developed from public input:

- **Downtown Brainerd is a good place to do business.**

The Downtown Brainerd revitalization needs to enhance the positive activities located in the historic downtown, particularly on the ground floors which open up to the street. The Downtown should provide a synergy between the community and businesses to allow for increased diversity and activity.

## SAFETY & ACCESSIBILITY

- Improve lighting
- ADA Access
- Difficult for pedestrians to cross South 6<sup>th</sup> and Washington streets
- Electrical service in alleys is a concern
- Enforcement of dedicated Accessible parking spaces
- Bridge over streets for pedestrian access
- Difficult to make left turns across Washington
- Access to downtown from north side is hindered by RR and Washington street corridors
- Traffic at the intersection of 6<sup>th</sup> and Washington is still busy
- Are skyways viable?
- Downtown should be accessible to all ages
- Brainerd has an aging population
- Wayfinding and signage should be addressed

Guiding Principle developed from public input:

- **Universal accessibility of the street.**

Streets are great meeting places. They offer people the chance to become active participants in their community and people watching is a chief form of entertainment. The Historic Downtown District should be universally accessible from all directions and by all ages. Pedestrian amenities should be aesthetically pleasing, consistent within each district and enhance a variety of pedestrian spaces. They should be near to, and visible from the street and sidewalk.

## HISTORY

- Downtown has great potential and should focus on positive things currently happening
- Proposed City complex along river would have detrimental effect on north side neighborhood
- Downtown has lost density and character by replacing buildings with parking lots
- Interpret history of Brainerd in Streetscape
- Historic preservation of downtown buildings

Guiding Principle developed from public input:

- **A strategic approach to revitalization.**

The development process for the Downtown Brainerd must be strategic in that it enhances current development, has flexibility and has adaptability over time. As resources are applied, they must be seen as a civic investment, with a return that can be used to foster additional improvements. This series of sustained actions will reinforce the organization of the streets and open space – the public realm of the City of Brainerd. Past studies and current proposals must be reviewed to analyze how they are and can contribute to the downtown.

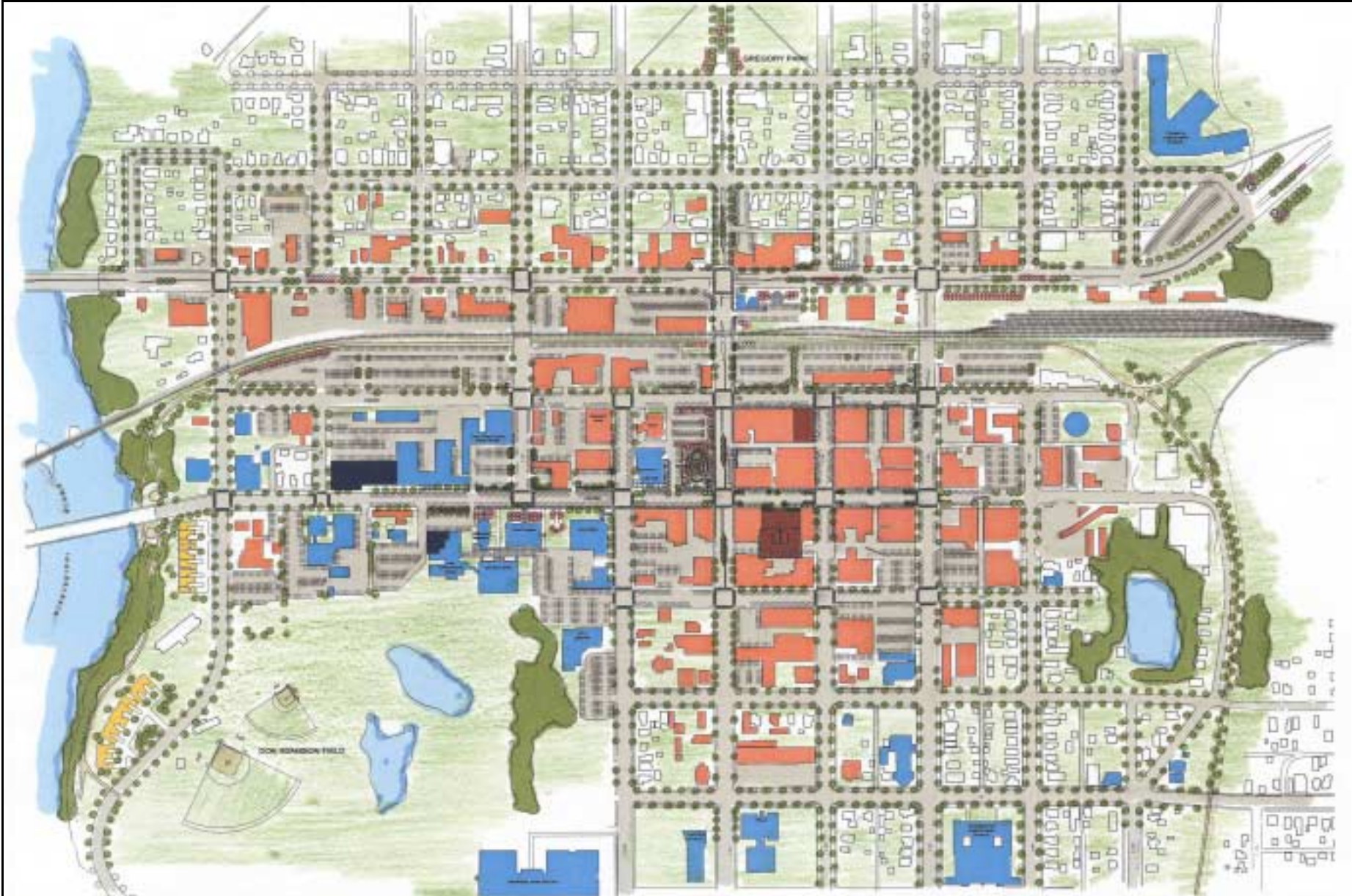
## OPEN SPACE CONNECTIONS

- Gregory Park is a community and north side focal point
- Connect to river
- Trail should be routed through downtown and connect to Paul Bunyan Trail
- Property ownership issues along river
- Celebrate history of river – “The Crossing”

Guiding Principle developed from public input:

- **Regional connections.**

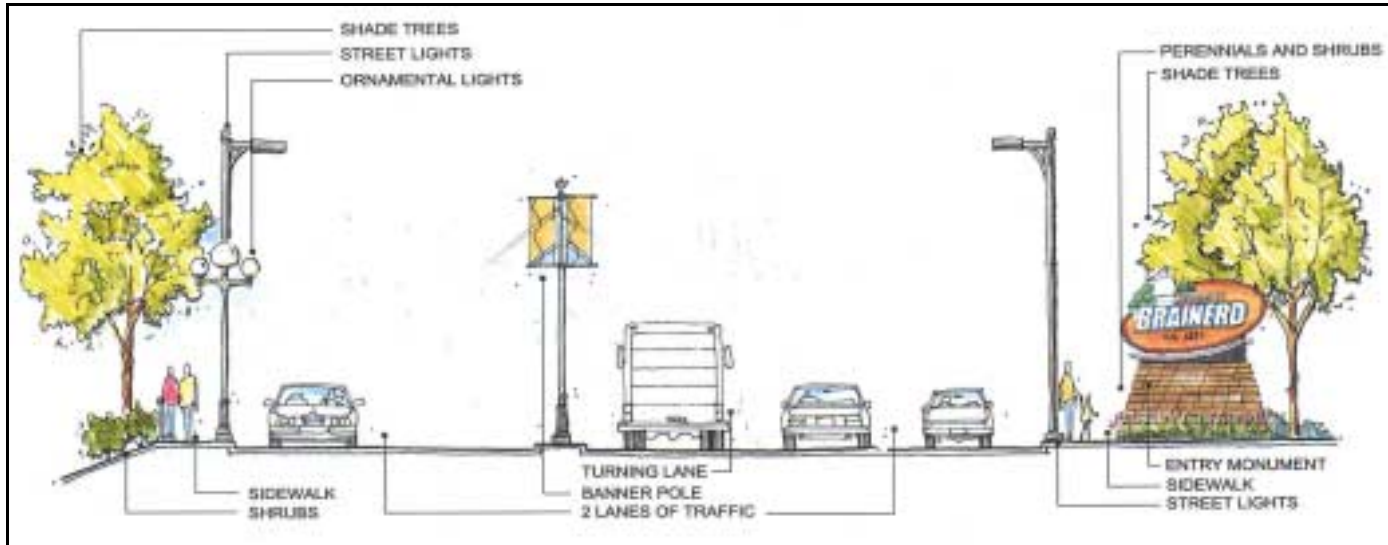
The revitalized downtown should connect to nearby focal points such as the Mississippi River, Gregory Park, the Paul Bunyan regional trail and the adjacent Southeast and Northside neighborhoods.



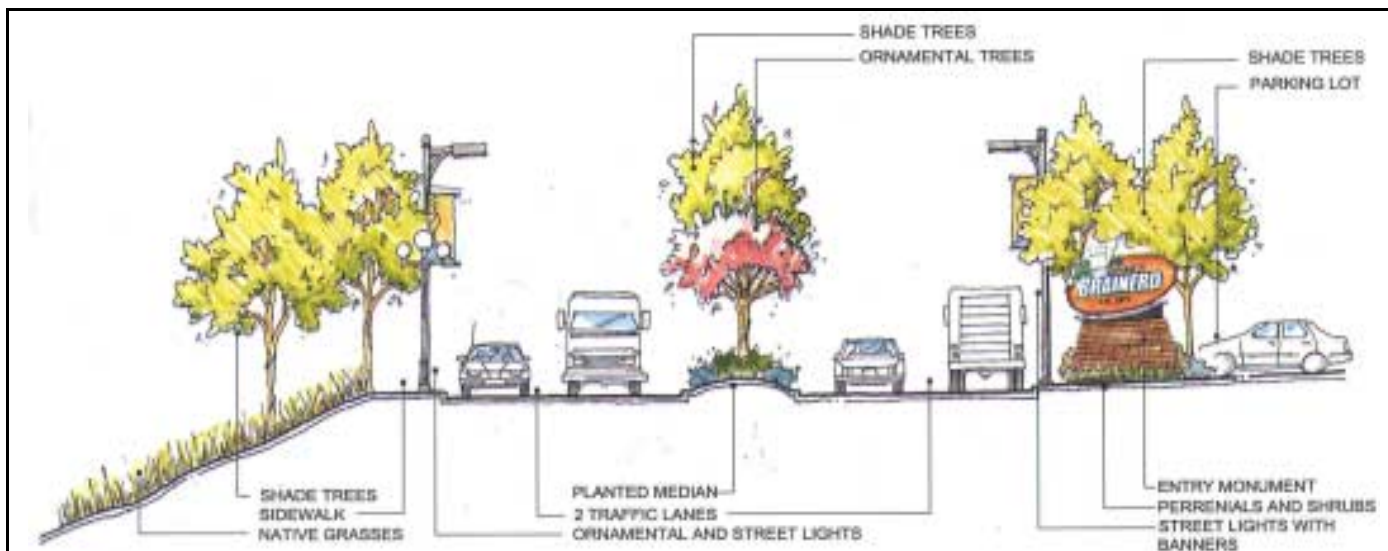
# Gateway Entry Treatments

Just as store front windows attract people to go into a business, gateways provide Brainerd an opportunity to make a lasting impression on visitors to the community.

Scheduled improvements by MnDOT to Washington Street and South Sixth Street provide the City an opportunity to enhance the character of the roadway to suggest a visual cue to entering Downtown Brainerd. Creating **A Positive First Impression** can mean the difference between someone stopping downtown or passing through.

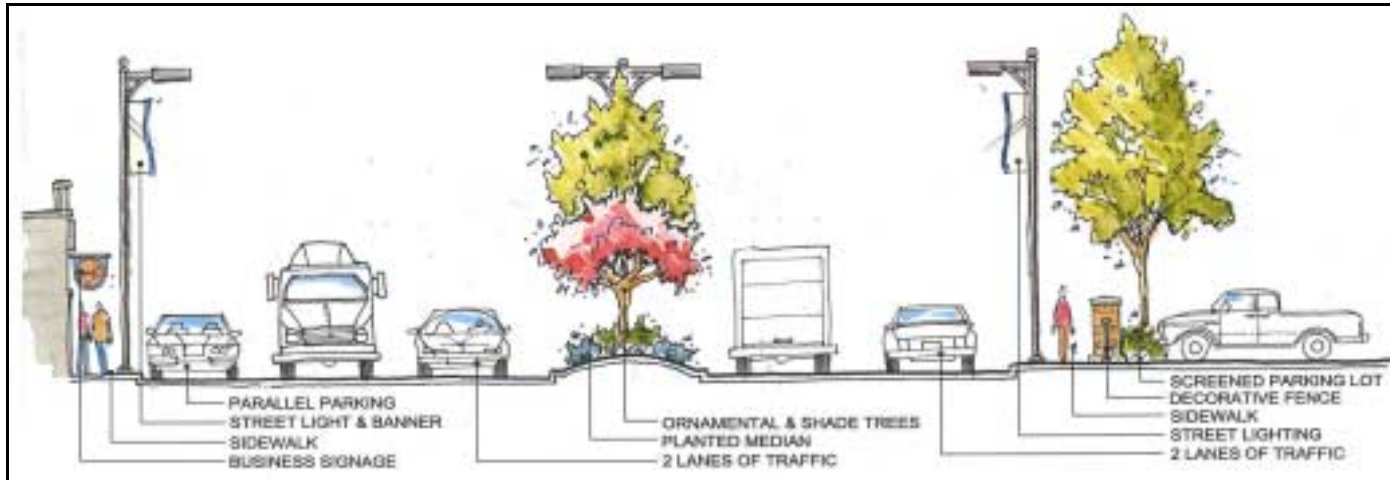


**West Entry on Highway 210 / Washington Street**

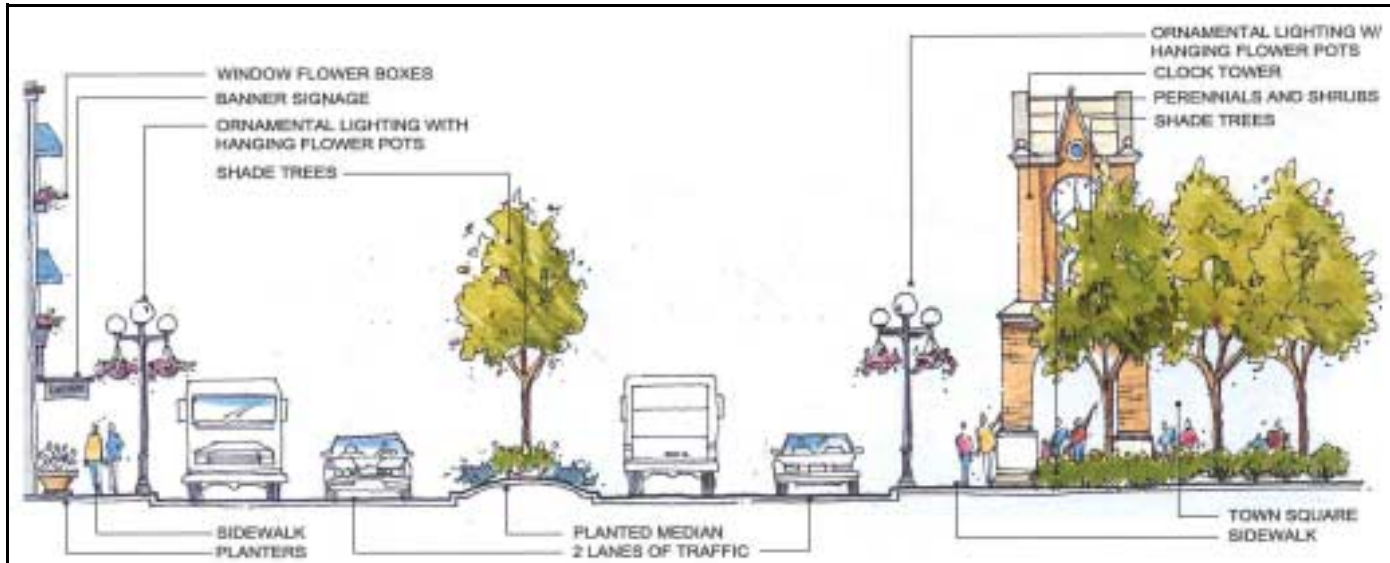


**East Entry on Highway 210 / Washington Street**

# Highway 210 & B371 Streetscape Enhancements



**Highway 210 / Washington Street Improvements**



**Highway B371 / Sixth Street Improvements**

Washington Street and South Sixth Street are the main conduits bringing residents, employees and visitors to Downtown Brainerd. The **Visual Character** of these streets helps visitors understand the level of service and quality of goods offered by downtown businesses. Improvements should focus on improved pedestrian crossings, visual character, lighting and screening of parking lots. Enhancements should coincide with the scheduled improvements proposed by MnDOT, thus minimizing the investment by the City and maximizing the benefit to the community.



# Northside and Southeast Neighborhood Enhancements



**Commercial Expansion**



**Historic Homes**



**Street Character**

The Northside neighborhood and the Southeast neighborhood are important to the continued growth of downtown and have an abundance of homes with an historic quality. This character should be enhanced by planting **Boulevard Trees** and by replacing current lighting with **Ornamental Street Lighting**.

Existing schools provide a stable civic presence within the neighborhoods and reflect community pride. They are cherished institutions.

## **Existing Conditions**

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**Retention of Civic Institutions**



**Preservation & Restoration  
of Historic Homes**



**Historic Lighting &  
Street Tree Planting**

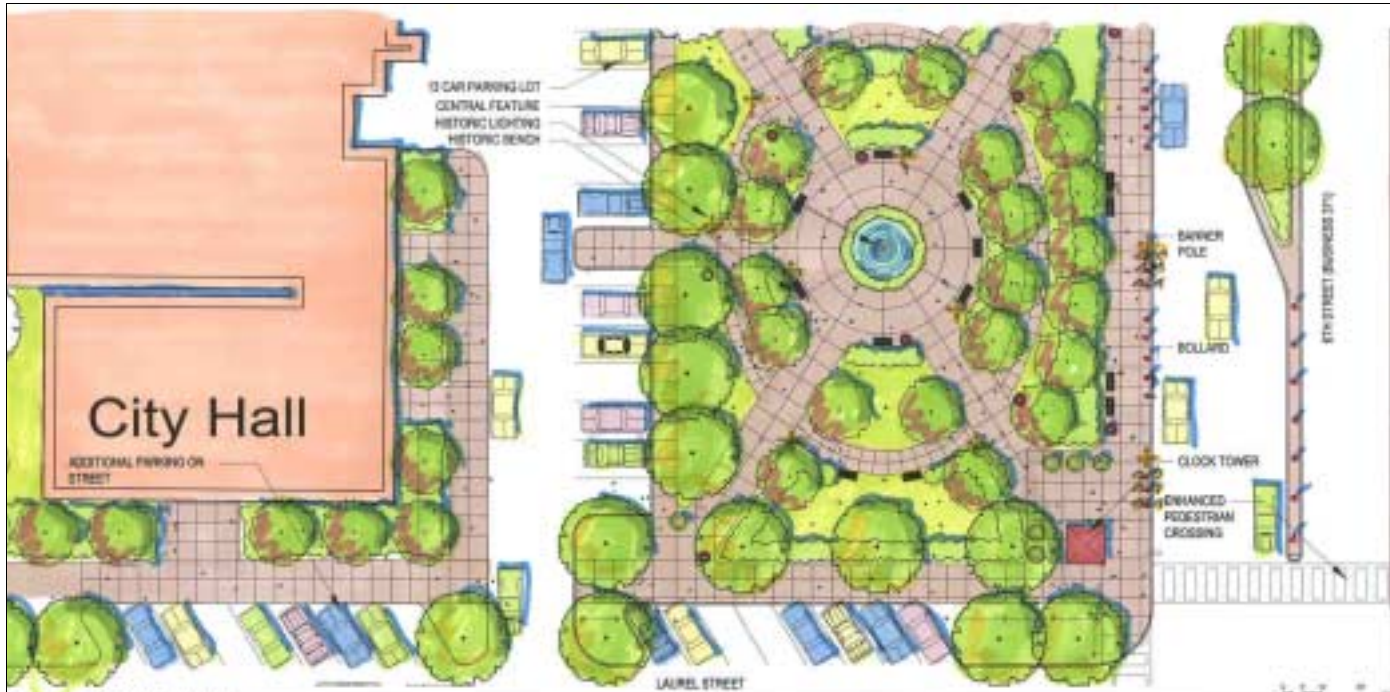
## **Proposed Enhancements**

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**Revitalizing Downtown Brainerd**  
**Brainerd Restoration and the City of Brainerd**

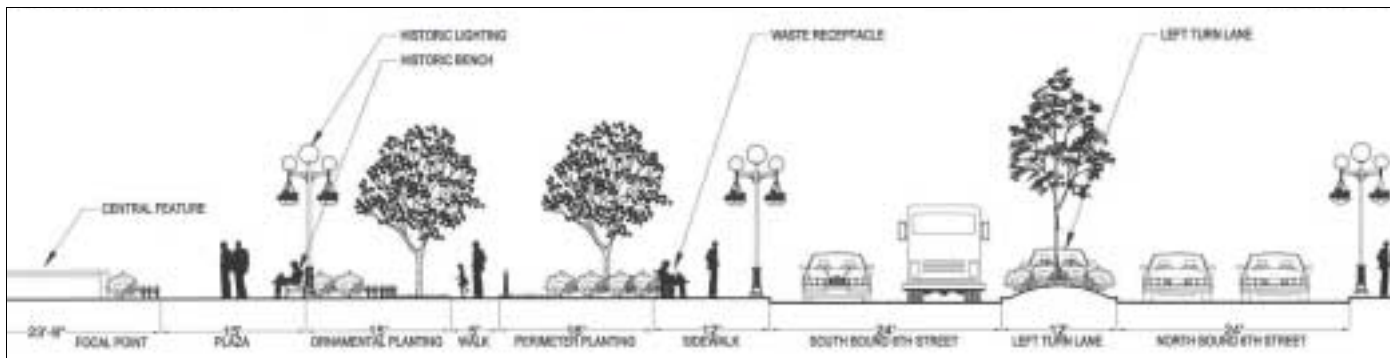


# Town Square



Downtown is not only a place to shop, but it is also a place to interact with local government, see people and be seen. As a resident in the first public meeting said, “**Downtown is the heart of Brainerd’s civic life.**” The Town Square provides a focal point in Brainerd, as well as an important link across South Sixth Street to connect commercial and civic districts. The location of the Town Square at the intersection of Sixth and Laurel and adjacent to City Hall insures that the “heart of Brainerd’s civic life” is located in the heart of downtown.

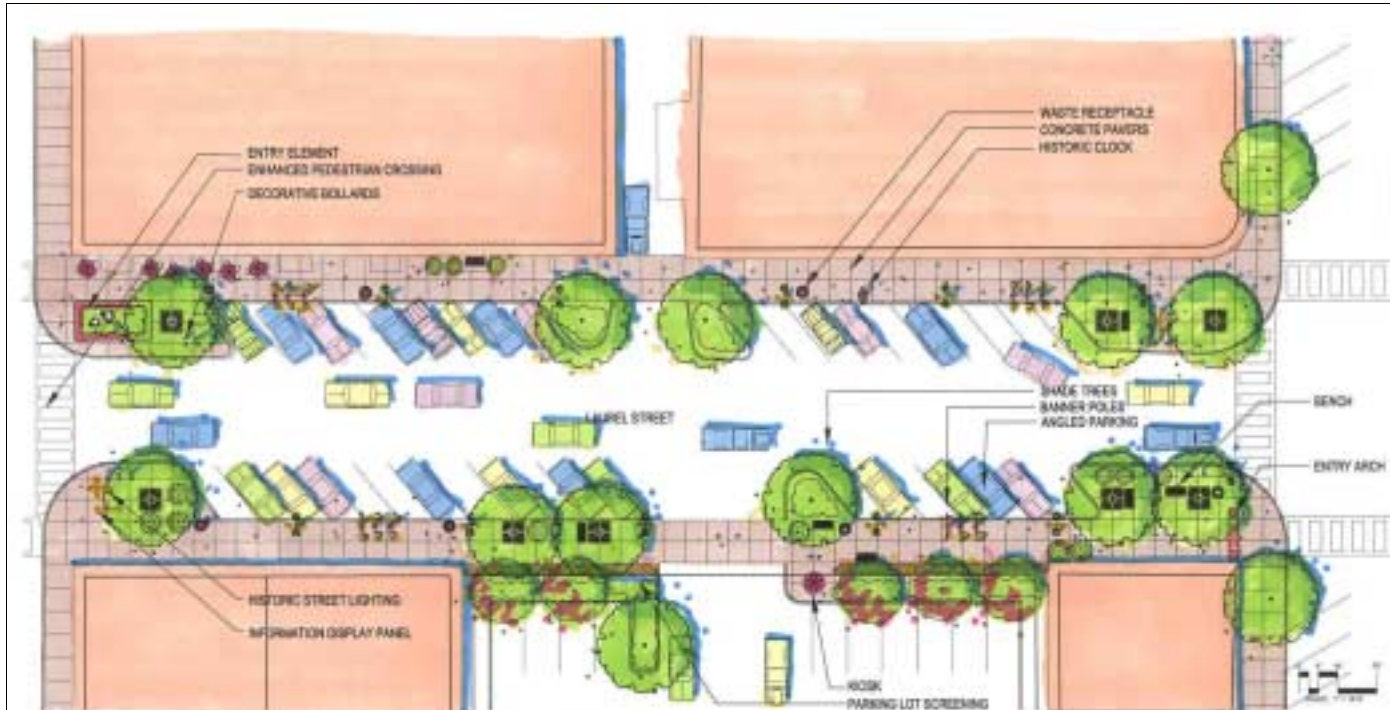
## Town Square Plan



## Town Square Section



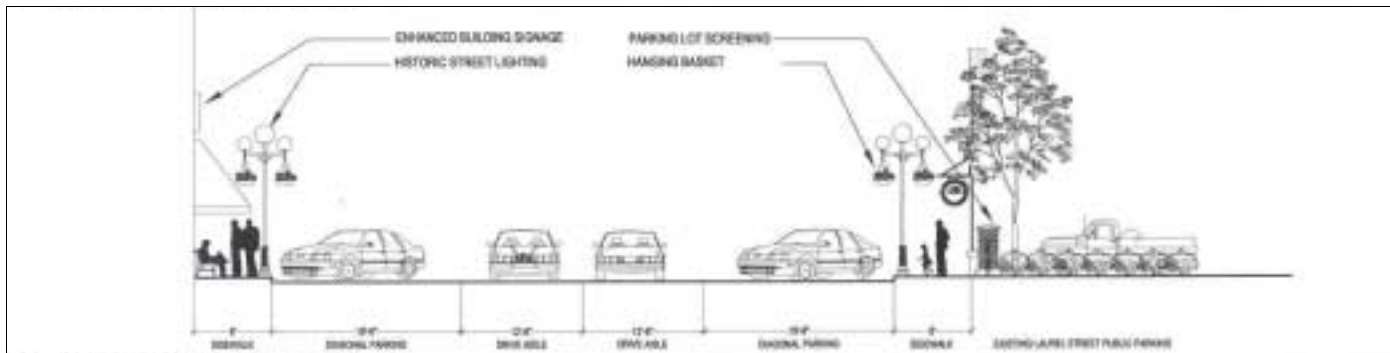
# Downtown Streetscape & Facade Improvements



**Laurel Street Typical Plan**

Downtown Brainerd provides the largest **Pedestrian Environment** in which to shop in the region. The character and image of the pedestrian environment should promote way-finding and accessibility, emphasize safety and enhance a positive commercial image. Specific elements are described in more detail on the next page.

Many of the building facades downtown have been preserved. Business owners should be supported and encouraged to restore and improve their buildings to enhance the overall visual image of downtown.



**Laurel Street Typical Section**



# Downtown Streetscape Character



**Street Lighting**



**Site Furnishings**



**Bollards**



**Bench**

A **Positive Commercial Image** starts on the street. A recent study by the University of Washington states that “Healthy and well-maintained trees send positive messages about the appeal of a district, the quality of the products there, and the quality of customer service.” Downtown will have amenities for people of all ages.



**Hanging Baskets**



**Tree Grates**



**Planters**



**Town Square**

**Elements** such as historic lighting, banners, seasonal planters, benches and business signage reinforce pedestrian atmosphere and promote the year round image as a vibrant and thriving downtown.



**Enhance Facades**



**Banners**



**Business Signage**



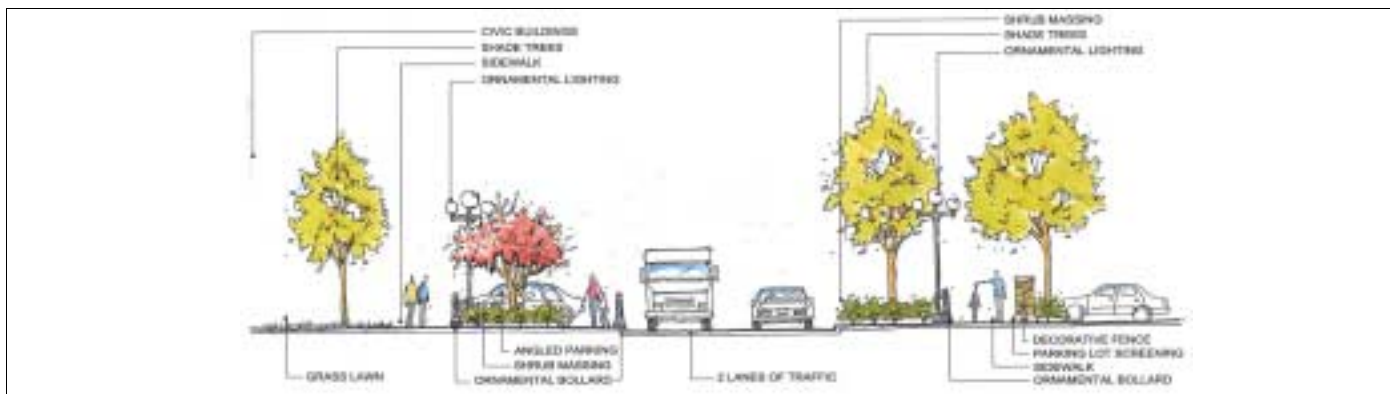
**Directional Signage**



# Civic District Streetscape Improvements



**Civic District Typical Plan**



**Civic District Typical Section**

The strong **Civic Presence** downtown is an asset to the community and brings people downtown. People should be encouraged to stay downtown to eat, shop and recreate.

Establishing a **Complimentary Visual Character** for the civic district will improve wayfinding downtown and links the civic district with the downtown commercial core. Planned improvements to Laurel Street can establish this identity immediately. Additional on-street parking provides convenient access to civic institutions.



# New Commercial/Retail In-Fill



**Additional 15,000 Square Feet of Commercial/Retail in the Core of Downtown**

## Downtown Core

**Revitalizing Downtown Brainerd**  
**Brainerd Restoration and the City of Brainerd**

The success of a commercial district is enhanced when there are **Opportunities** available for existing businesses to expand or new businesses to move in to further diversify the kinds of goods and services available to the community. There are existing city owned parking lots available downtown to make this happen.

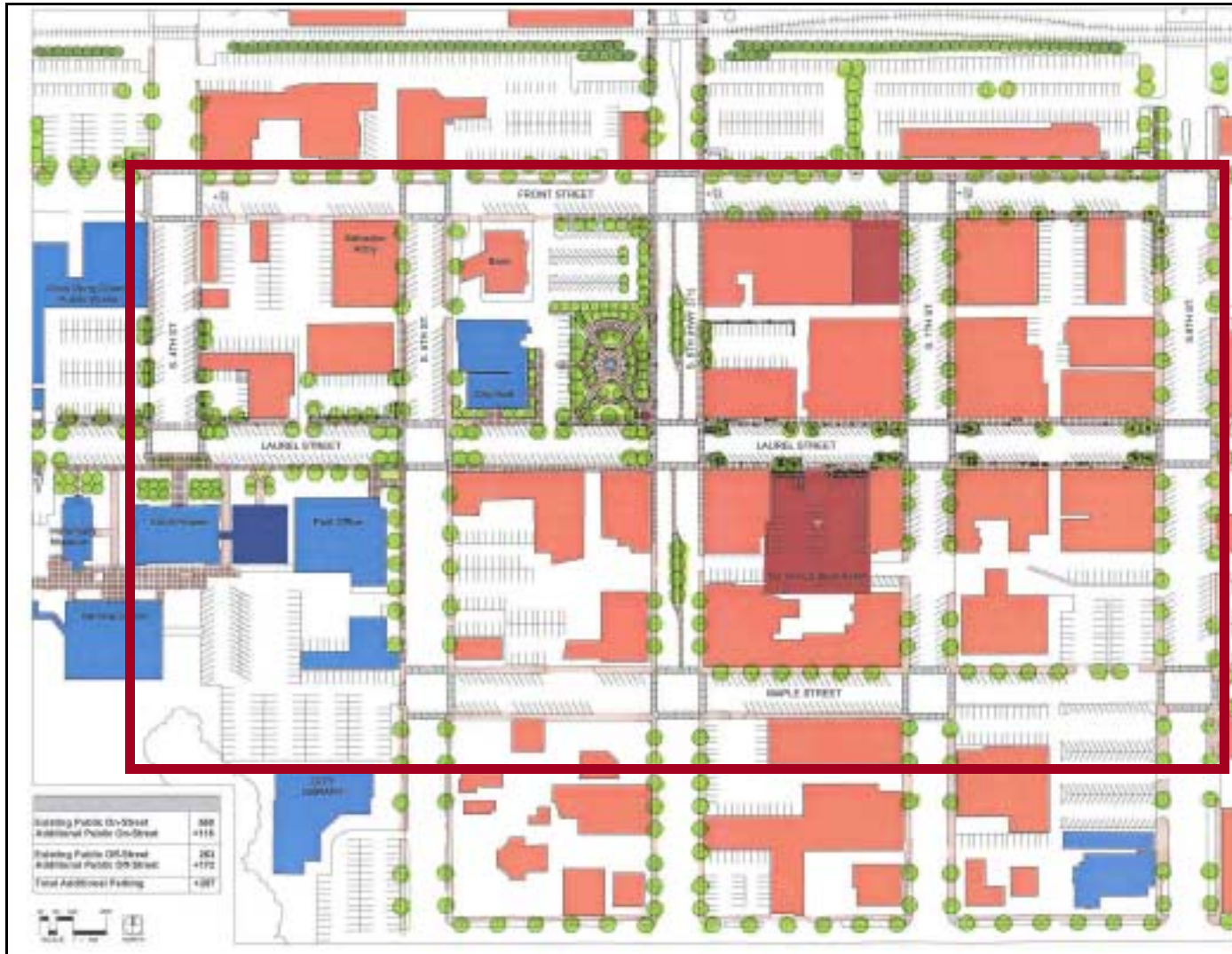
Revenue gained by the City through the sale of property can be used for replacing the loss of parking. The increased density provides business opportunity, as well as an improved pedestrian character.



# Additional On-Street Parking

**Safe, Convenient Parking** is critical to the success of downtown businesses. Maximizing on-street parking is a quick and cost effective way of increasing parking where it is needed most: close to businesses.

By converting the existing on street parallel parking to **Diagonal Parking**, there is an increase in the number of spaces available to the public within the downtown core by approximately 115. Traffic patterns will need to be studied prior to implementing this strategy.



**Increase On-Street parking within the Downtown Core**

**Downtown Core**

**Revitalizing Downtown Brainerd**  
**Brainerd Restoration and the City of Brainerd**

# Additional Off-Street Parking



Another opportunity to add parking space near the core of downtown is to increase the off-street **Parking North of Front Street**. There appears to be space for an additional 116 parking stalls adjacent to the railroad corridor. The north edge of Front Street will have parallel parking and one way traffic headed east, providing the space needed for a future recreational trail.

Future trail needs, cost to acquire property, construction costs and long-term maintenance are all factors that will need to be discussed and evaluated prior to embarking on this strategy.



**Increase Off-Street Parking North of Front Street**

**Downtown Core**

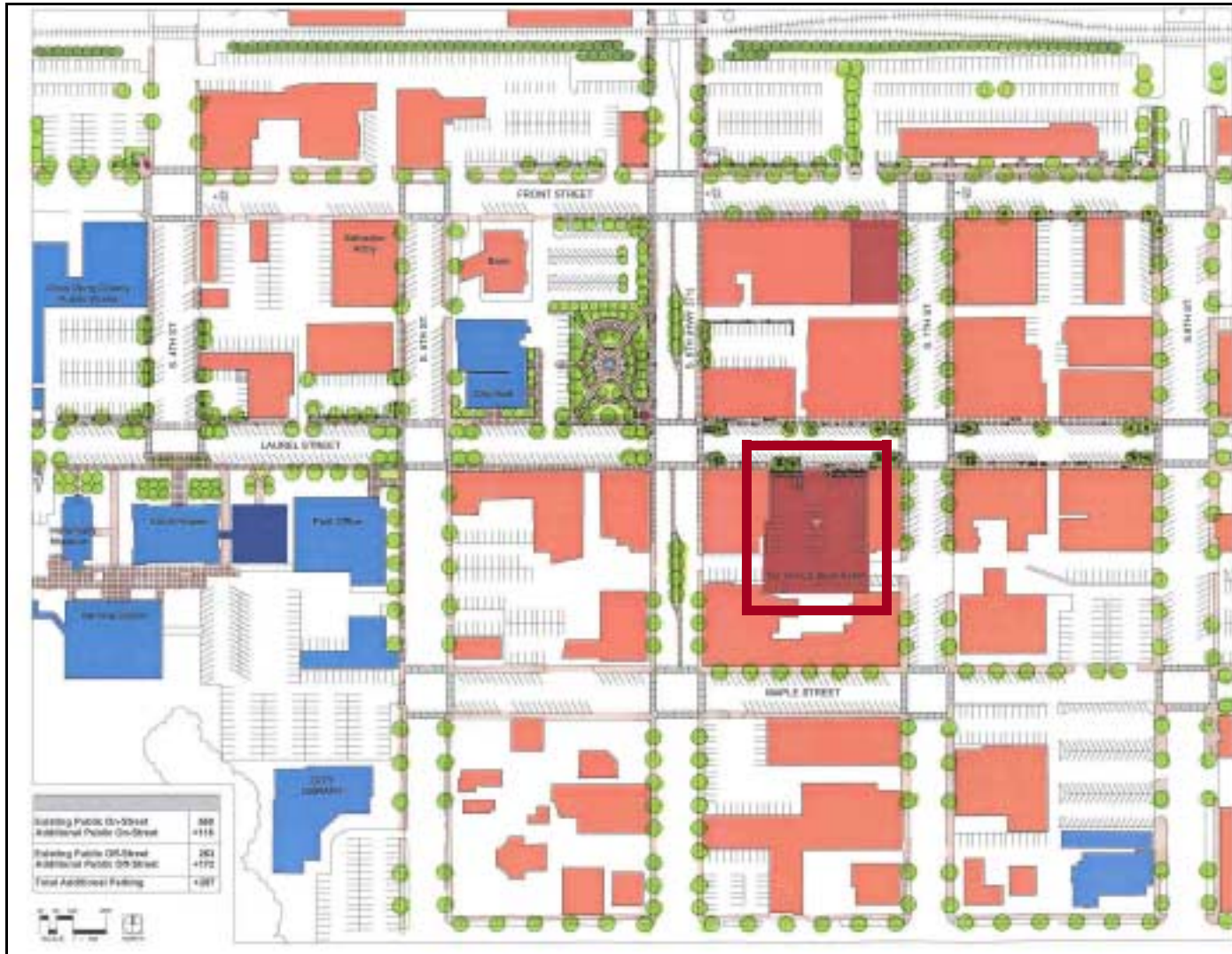
**Revitalizing Downtown Brainerd**

**Brainerd Restoration and the City of Brainerd**

# Structured Parking

A long term alternative would be to build a **Parking Ramp** in conjunction with the proposed retail in-fill south of Laurel, between Sixth and Seventh Streets. A three-story ramp could provide up to 80 more parking stalls than what currently exist in the same space. This option, although expensive, clearly gets parking where it is needed most: at the heart of the commercial core.

This alternative, because of current TIF laws, would require a public/private investment as well as the political will to see it through.

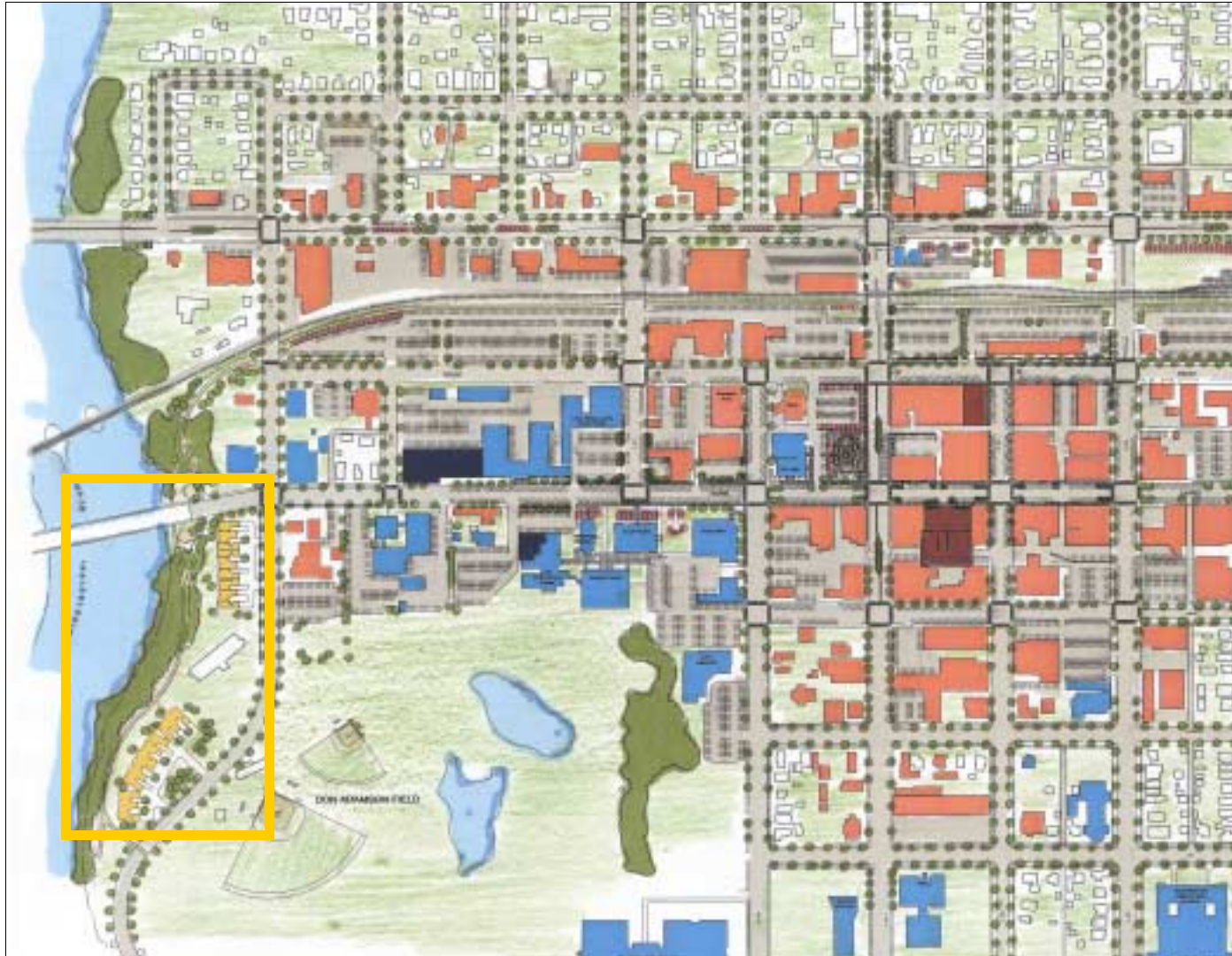


80 Additional Parking Spaces South of Laurel

## Downtown Core

Revitalizing Downtown Brainerd  
 Brainerd Restoration and the City of Brainerd

# Enhance Housing Opportunities Adjacent to Mississippi River



The Mississippi River provides the City its largest and most desirable natural amenity. Higher density condominiums and townhouses would enhance the diversity of housing types available downtown, as well as complement existing housing and professional office use already thriving in this area.

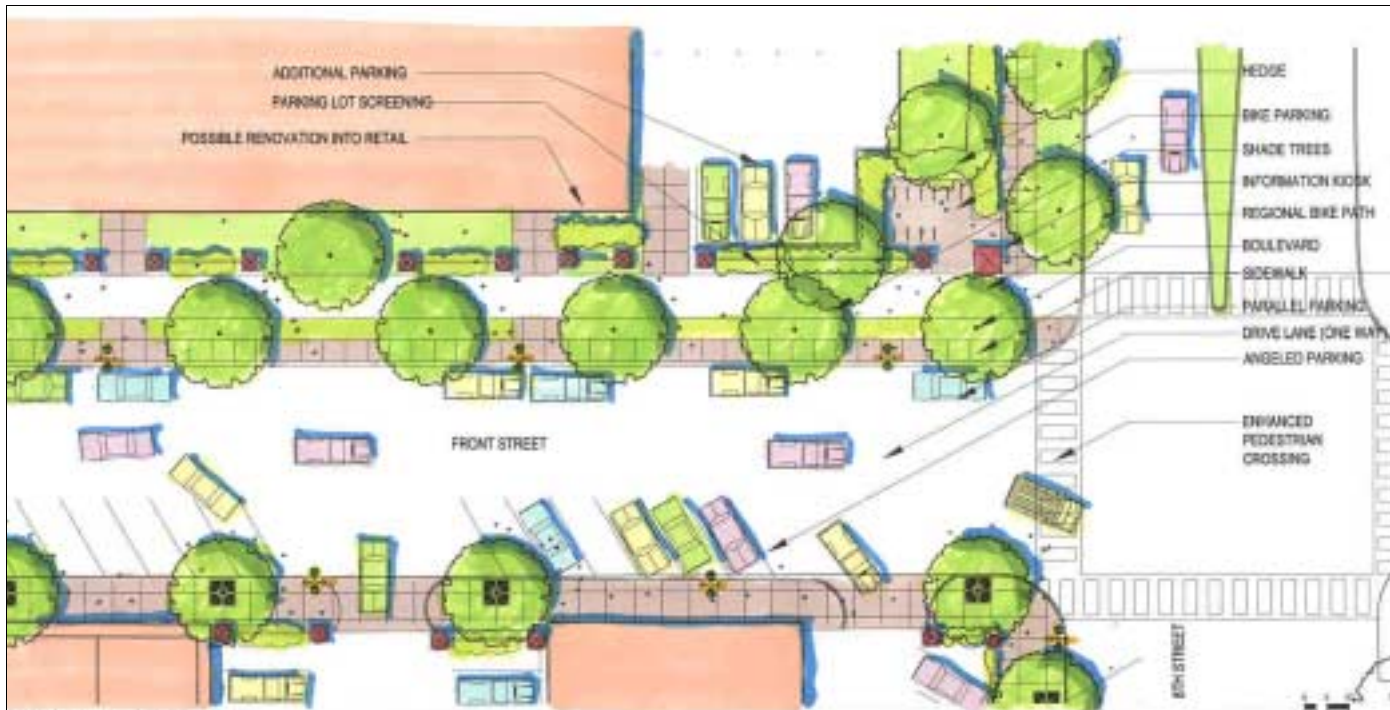
**A Downtown Neighborhood** adjacent to the Mississippi River would have access to recreational opportunities in and along the river corridor and would increase the tax base and users of downtown Brainerd.



**Housing capitalizes on largest natural amenity adjacent to City**

## **Master Plan**

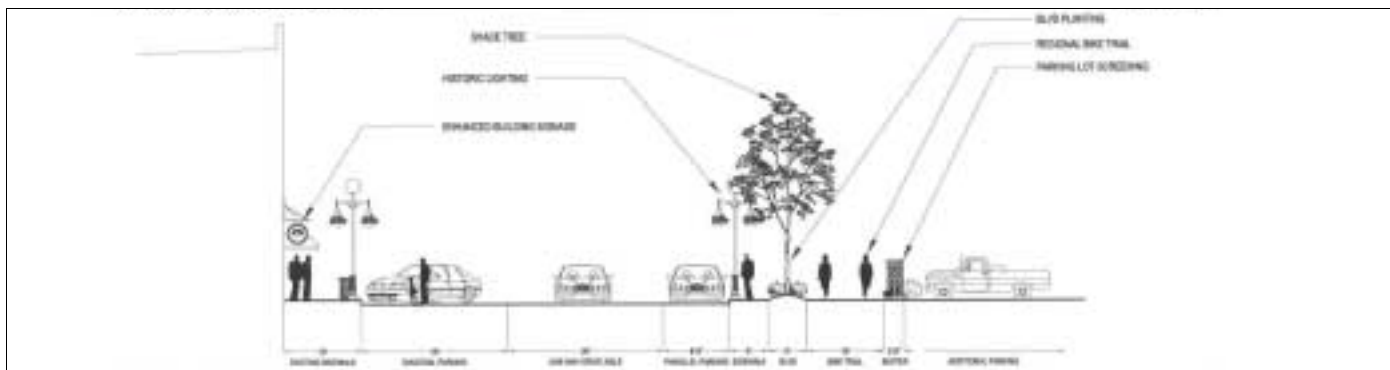
# Front Street Recreational Trail & Trailhead Facility



Communities of similar size have capitalized on recreation as a means to reinvigorate their downtown. The same opportunity exists in Brainerd. Planning efforts are already under way to **Connect Regional Trail Systems** to downtown.

A parallel bike trail and sidewalk are intentionally placed on Front Street to encourage trail users to get off of their bikes and walk, eat and shop downtown. Convenient bicycle parking, safe street crossings and information kiosks are amenities that will further enhance the Front Street recreational trail.

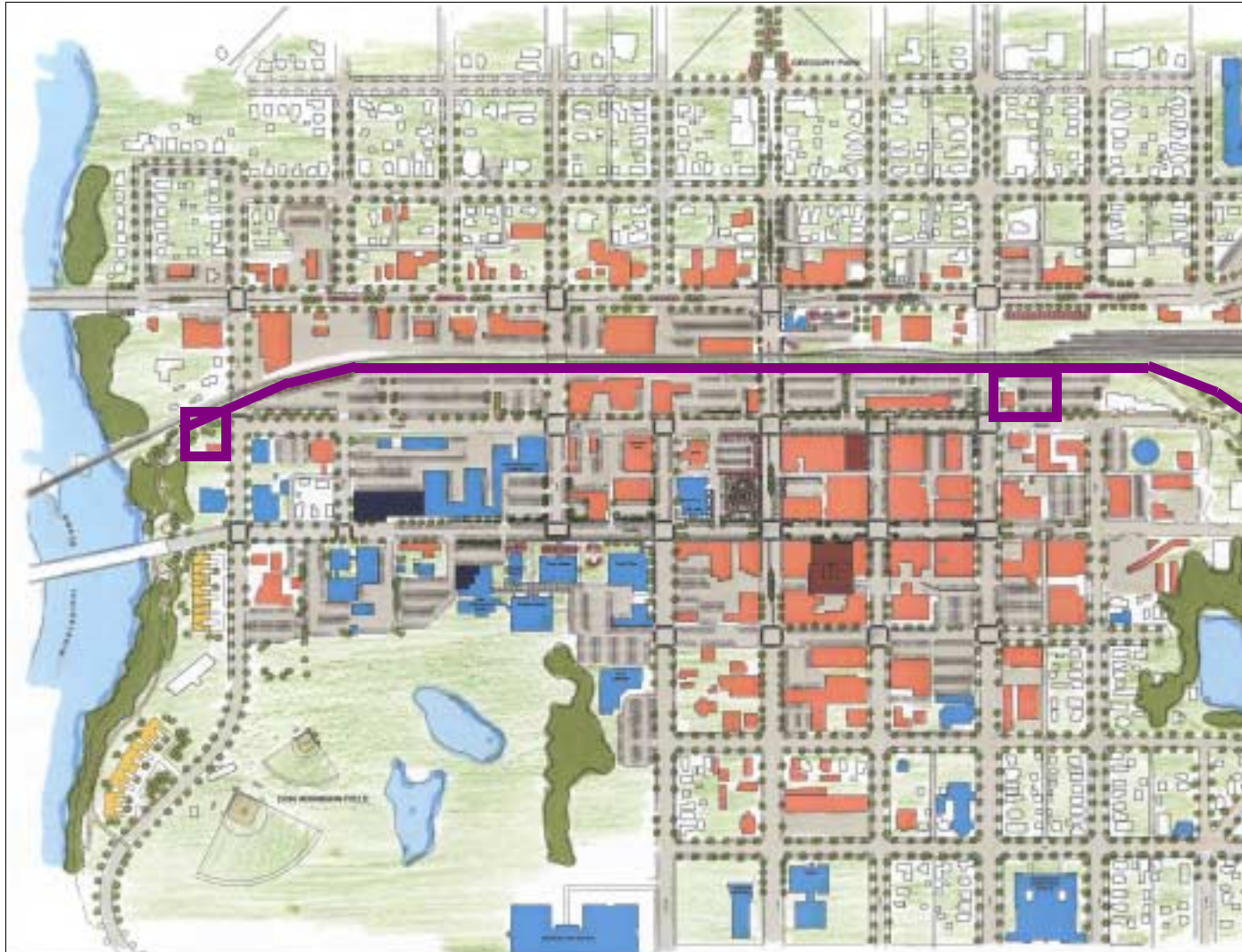
**Front Street Typical Plan**



**Front Street Typical Section**



# Railroad Corridor Secondary Trail & Snowmobile Access



A secondary recreational trail is proposed adjacent to the existing railroad corridor through downtown. This will create a secondary safe and fast way to access downtown and allow the Front Street recreational trail to retain its family recreational trail quality.

Snowmobile access is accommodated along the railroad corridor allowing downtown business to capitalize on this popular winter recreation. Snowmobile parking is located northeast of the Front and Eighth Streets intersection and at the terminus of Front Street on the west.



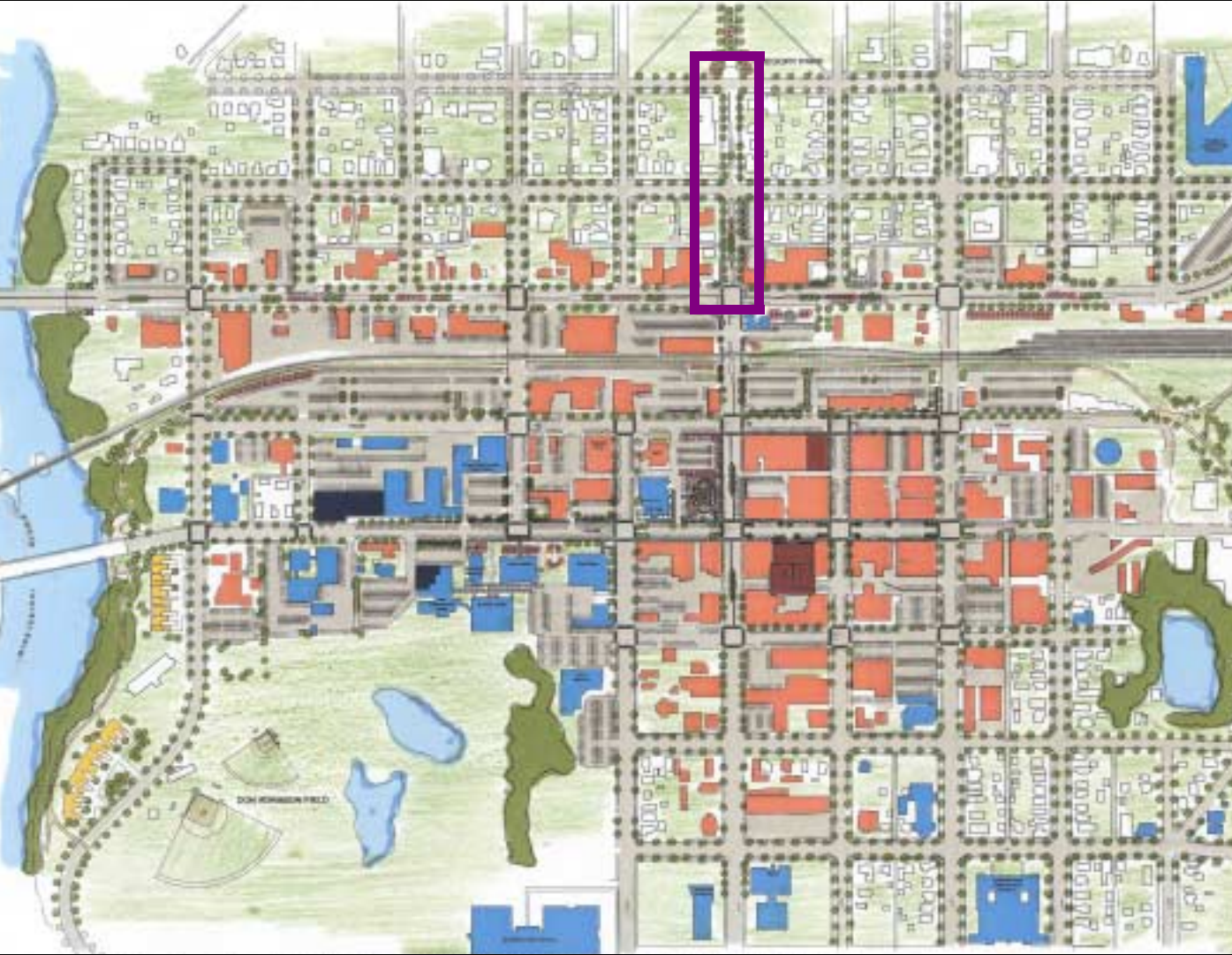
**Snowmobile Trail & Secondary Route through Downtown**

## **Master Plan**

# 6th Street Improvements to Gregory Park

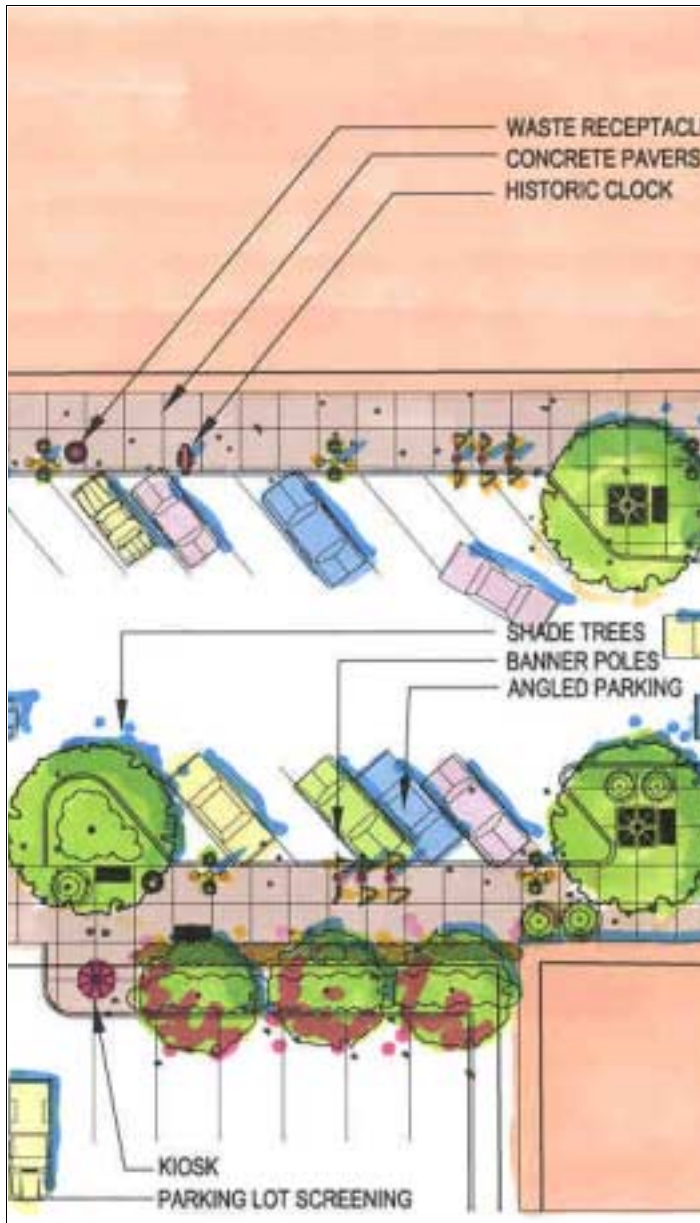
Gregory Park continues to play a key role in the future of Brainerd. It is not only the focal point of the Northside neighborhood, but it is historically the center of activity in the community. The recently completed 371 bypass allows the community to revisit the intersection of Washington and Sixth Streets and once again open access to and from the park to downtown.

Reinstallation of the Sixth Street landscaped median, historic lighting, boulevard trees and decorative signage begin to reestablish a physical and cultural connection to this civic treasure.



**Enhanced Connection to Gregory Park**

## **Master Plan**



The Master Plan is a culmination of a community wide effort to provide a vision for what Downtown Brainerd could be in the future. All of the projects shown on the preceding pages will enhance and enliven downtown celebrating Brainerd's four very distinct seasons, embracing daytime shoppers and nighttime revelers and capturing the spirit of the Brainerd Community.

The BUILD Task Force and the Brainerd Restoration Board met to establish priorities based on what projects within the plan can create a ripple effect of positive change within the community and spur private investment. The following priorities were established to capitalize on the currently planned roadway improvements to Washington Street by MnDOT, Laurel Street improvements by the City and regional trail improvements by the Minnesota DNR.

### **Highest Importance**

- Downtown Streetscape & Façade Improvements
- Civic District Streetscape Improvements
- Gateway Entry Treatments
- Highway 210 & B371 Streetscape Enhancements
- Pedestrian Connections across Highway 210 and B371
- Town Square
- Front Street Recreational Trail & Trailhead facility

### **Moderate Importance**

- Maximize On-Street Parking
- Additional Off-Street Parking
- New Commercial/Retail In-fill
- Railroad Corridor Secondary Trail & Snowmobile Access
- 6<sup>th</sup> Street Improvements to Gregory Park

### **Lesser Importance**

- Structured Parking
- Northside and Southeast Neighborhood Enhancements
- Enhance Housing Opportunities Adjacent to River



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## **BUILD TASK FORCE**

Chad Grover  
John Erickson  
Wayne Little  
Randy Klinger  
Dan Vogt  
Lisa Paxton  
Doug Grout  
Bob Olson  
Darlys Every  
Andrew Smith  
Gary Otterstad  
Ed Menk  
Mavis Verveille  
Shelli Urness  
Mary Lou Mondry  
Peter Herlofsky  
Vince Arnone  
Dale Parks  
Debbie Olander  
Jill Carlson-Ferrie  
Dave Pueringer

## **BRAINERD RESTORATION BOARD**

John Erickson – President  
Nila Patrick – Out-going President  
Chad Grover – Vice President  
Mary K. Scott – Secretary/  
Treasurer  
Judy Crowe – Director  
Dick Endres – Director  
Randy Moores – Director  
Gary Otterstad – Director  
Jerry Rosnau – Director

We would like to thank the many concerned citizens, business owners, City staff, State agencies and local politicians who contributed their time and ideas to the Master Plan. It is the dedication and hard work of such individuals that make Brainerd a thriving community today and will provide vision for its future.