

INTRODUCTION



PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The *Central City Master Plan* proposes an achievable vision — ideas with actions — for continuing the regeneration and transformation of Waukesha’s historic Downtown and surrounding Central City neighborhoods. This area has always been critical to the health and success of the City, as well as a significant asset to the broader Waukesha region.

The City of Waukesha includes a unique urban experience within Waukesha County and southeastern Wisconsin. Often considered to be a hidden gem, Downtown Waukesha and the surrounding neighborhoods offer a historic destination that has existed for more than a century. Through the years, this area has experienced cycles of growth, decline, and regeneration. The most recent resurgence has been sparked by the combined impact of the relocation of the Spring House, re-establishment of two-way traffic within the Downtown, a burgeoning arts scene, and the addition of destination-based businesses, including a variety of restaurants.

The City of Waukesha can now attain its former prominence as a unique destination that attracts even

more businesses, residents, and visitors from the region, State, and the upper Midwest. This Master Plan can help achieve such prominence, along with increased social, economic, and cultural value.

The *Central City Master Plan* considers the improvements made in the Downtown in the last decade and highlights new opportunities to further strengthen the area’s resurgence. Additionally, the Master Plan considers the importance of the adjacent neighborhoods to the health of the Downtown and the community as a whole. The Master Plan is intended to serve as the primary document guiding redevelopment and policy decisions for Downtown Waukesha and the surrounding Central City neighborhoods over the next decade.

The *Central City Master Plan* builds upon the recommendations made in the City’s 1998 *Downtown/Central City Comprehensive Master Plan*, as well as other recommendations and policies adopted by the Redevelopment Authority and the Community Development Department. The planning process for this *Plan* incorporated the input of a wide array of local stakeholders including business owners, residents, investors, developers, and elected officials.

Plan recommendations also derive from the market analysis prepared by Gruen Gruen + Associates entitled *Identification Of Market-Based Strategic Action Plan For Enhancement Of Central City Waukesha* (the report is included as *Appendix 1*).

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY AREA

The Downtown and Central City neighborhoods form the “heart” of the City of Waukesha, providing a uniquely urban experience steeped in a long social, cultural, and architectural history.

This area has cycled through several positive and negative trends over the years. Today, many people view the rejuvenation of Downtown enthusiastically and expect positive changes to continue. The ongoing success of the Downtown and surrounding Central City neighborhoods should remain a high priority. The health of the “heart” of Waukesha impacts the health of the community as a whole.

The target study area for *The Central City Master Plan* includes the Downtown core and the primarily

residential neighborhoods surrounding the core (Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3).

Downtown Neighborhoods

Generally speaking, the **Downtown neighborhood** includes the triangular area bounded by North Avenue, Wisconsin Avenue, and East Avenue/Buckley Street. This area incorporates a variety of development patterns and characteristics (Figure 1 on page 2), including three notable subareas.

The **Historic Core** is an area defined by buildings spanning Waukesha’s 150+ year history. The area reflects a consistent texture of smaller buildings with some notable exceptions. The architecture includes a wide range of styles and materials. The narrow street patterns are in line with the early development patterns in the City.

East Town is the portion of the Downtown immediately east of the Historic Core and south of the Fox River. Primarily developed over the last 50 years, this area is defined by larger building footprints and slightly less dense development patterns.

North River Valley is located between the Fox River and the northern bluffs, was previously characterized by a mix of industrial and business uses as well as some residential pockets. Today, much of this portion of the Downtown is in transition, with a mix of new development, large parking lots, various smaller historic buildings, and a few blocks of single family homes.

Surrounding Residential Neighborhoods

Surrounding the Downtown core are many residential neighborhoods, which include a mix of housing choices and styles, as well as several major institutions, industrial and commercial uses, civic buildings, and parks. For the purposes of the *Master Plan*, these neighborhoods have been grouped into three general geographic areas, referred to simply as **northwest, east, and south**.

The **Northwest Neighborhoods** include the residential areas north of the Fox River and are generally defined by North Street to the east, Summitt Avenue to the north, and Washington Avenue to the west. The primary local landmarks and institutions in the neighborhoods include: Horeb Springs Park, Dopp Park, Waukesha Memorial Hospital, and Blair Elementary School. Housing styles and choices vary throughout the neighborhoods, with a mix of older and more recent housing developments to the south, older traditional single family and duplex homes around the hospital (including a key historic district along Madison Street), and newer homes in the northern portion of the neighborhoods. Additionally, there are a variety of multi-family developments throughout the **Northwest Neighborhoods**, including some larger complexes towards the south.

The **East Neighborhoods** include the areas south of the Fox River, east of East Avenue, north of College Avenue, and west of Oakland Avenue. The **East Neighborhoods** incorporate several local landmarks and institutions including: Frame Park, Waukesha Springs Park, the YMCA, WCTC, La Casa de Esperanza, White Rock and Hadfield Elementary Schools, and a

portion of Carroll University. Housing choices in the **East Neighborhoods** primarily include single family and duplex units, ranging from brick bungalows toward the southern end of the neighborhood near Carroll University and Catholic Memorial High School to early-to-mid-century bungalows and cape cods in the middle portions of the neighborhood, and newer single family lots to the north with smaller homes.

The **South Neighborhoods** represent the areas bounded by East Avenue to the east, Newhall Avenue to the south, Prairie Avenue to the west, and the Fox River and Wisconsin Avenue to the north. Local landmarks and institutions include: Bethesda Spring Park, Cutler Park, the Waukesha Public Library, Carroll University, and Central Middle School. Residential areas in the **South Neighborhoods** are fairly diverse, with a mix of single family and duplex units throughout the area in addition to various sizes of multi-family buildings. This area also includes many key historic buildings and districts,

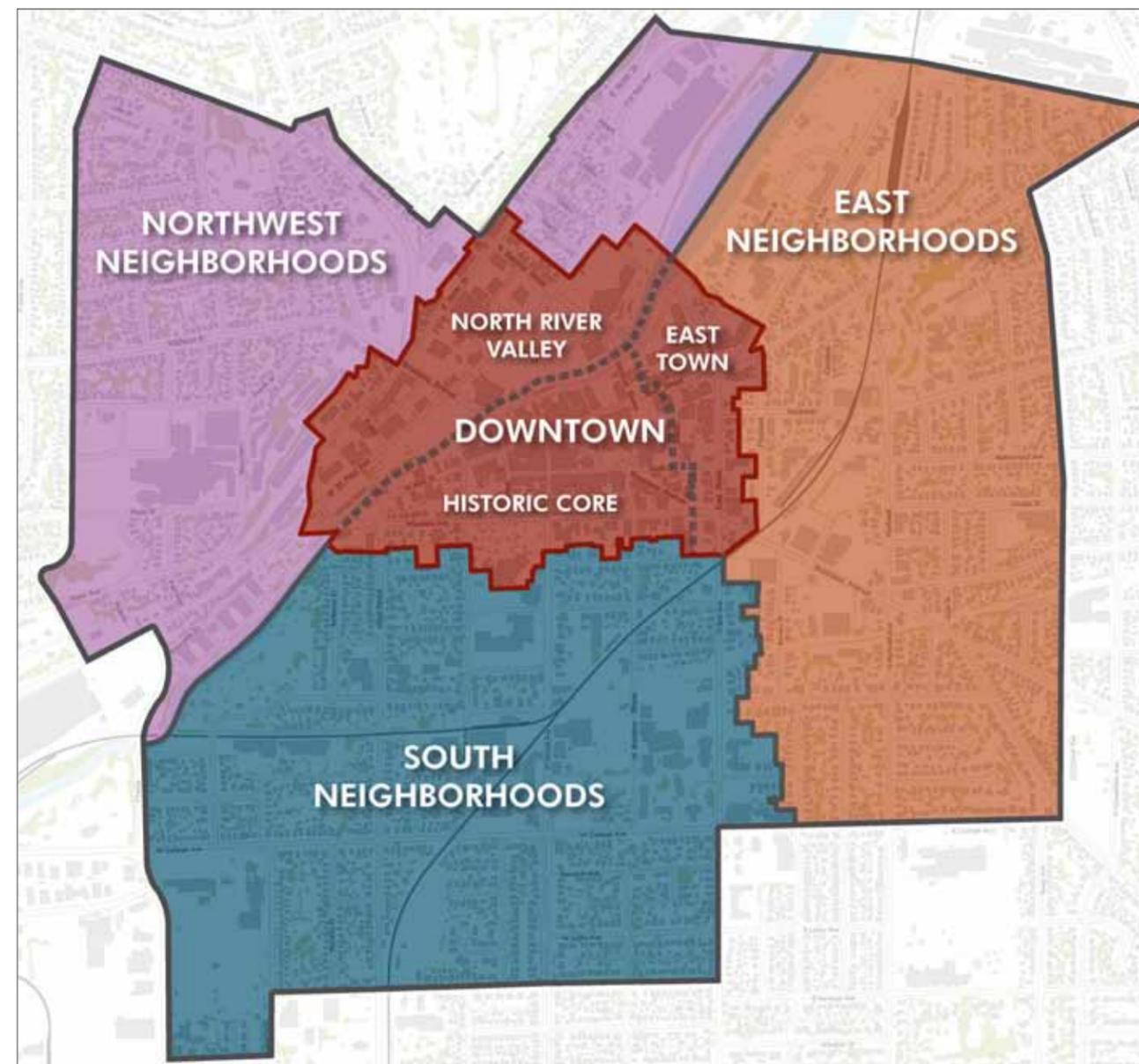
Downtown Waukesha and the surrounding Central City neighborhoods reflect the complexity of integrating various uses and forms of development. Each of the subareas are more fully outlined in the analysis of existing conditions, located in the *Urban Context* chapter.

PLANNING PROCESS

The *Central City Master Plan* is the result of a combined effort between the consultants, City staff, the Redevelopment Authority, elected officials, and key stakeholders including residents, business owners, property owners, and investors. Critical components of the multi-phased process involved meetings with the Steering Committee and City staff, workshops, reviews of prior studies, analyses of existing conditions, field observations of key sites, community workshops, confidential stakeholder interviews, and an open house presentation.

Figure 1. Central City Neighborhoods and Downtown Waukesha & Central City Waukesha Base Map

For purposes of this plan, the study area was further subdivided into the Downtown district and three subareas, each of which contains multiple residential neighborhoods (or portions thereof.) These boundaries do not represent jurisdictional areas, although they do match the pattern of perceptions voiced by many participants in the planning process. They are intended primarily as general guidelines to facilitate the organization of goals and recommendations.



The consultants used the knowledge gathered in the planning process to develop a vision for Central City Waukesha, along with accompanying goals and implementable actions. In the latter part of the process, recommendations were refined through additional discussions with committees, staff, and the community.

Committee Meetings

During project inception, the City identified the Redevelopment Authority (RDA) as the group to lead the master planning efforts. A Steering Committee, consisting of three RDA members and representatives from the Community Development Department, provided crucial guidance and review through the entire planning process.

Review of Prior Studies

A key step in the planning process was reviewing previous and ongoing studies relevant to the Downtown and Central City neighborhoods. This review provided a foundation of information regarding current conditions, procedures, policies, and decisions within Waukesha. The review also established a clear picture of the progress and pitfalls the City has experienced with regard to Downtown redevelopment over the last 10 years. A summary of key studies, including the *Downtown/Central City Comprehensive Master Plan* (1998), is included in the *Planning History* chapter.

Field Observation

As a component of the project orientation, field observations of key Downtown and Central City locations were conducted. Based upon input from City staff, the consultants walked through critical sub-areas within the study area to identify key features, areas of concern, and recent changes. This information was particularly useful in the development of key catalytic development concepts.

Stakeholder Interviews

A series of stakeholder interviews and small focus groups were held between December 2010 and January 2011 and included a cross-section of public and private stakeholders in the community. As the Master Plan was created, these comments played a central role in guiding the vision, goals, and recommendations for the Downtown and Central City neighborhoods. Stakeholders interviewed included:

- Business owners
- Residents and neighborhood organizers
- Representatives from major institutions
- Representatives from community organizations
- Chamber of Commerce
- Business Improvement District representatives
- Developers
- Brokers
- Elected officials

The information gleaned from the stakeholder interviews highlighted the strengths and opportunities of Downtown and Central City Waukesha, as well as some of the concerns about unique challenges and problems. Collectively, the input set the tone for more detailed reviews of existing conditions and the development of a vision and future recommendations for the area. A complete summary of the comments received during the stakeholder interview process is located in *Appendix 2, Public Participation*.

Community Listening Workshop

The first community-wide public participation event was a Listening Workshop, held on February 23, 2011. The event was designed to allow the consultants and City staff to hear input from the general public concerning the important issues and opportunities facing the Downtown and Central City neighborhoods. Attendees were asked to participate in several different ways, including:

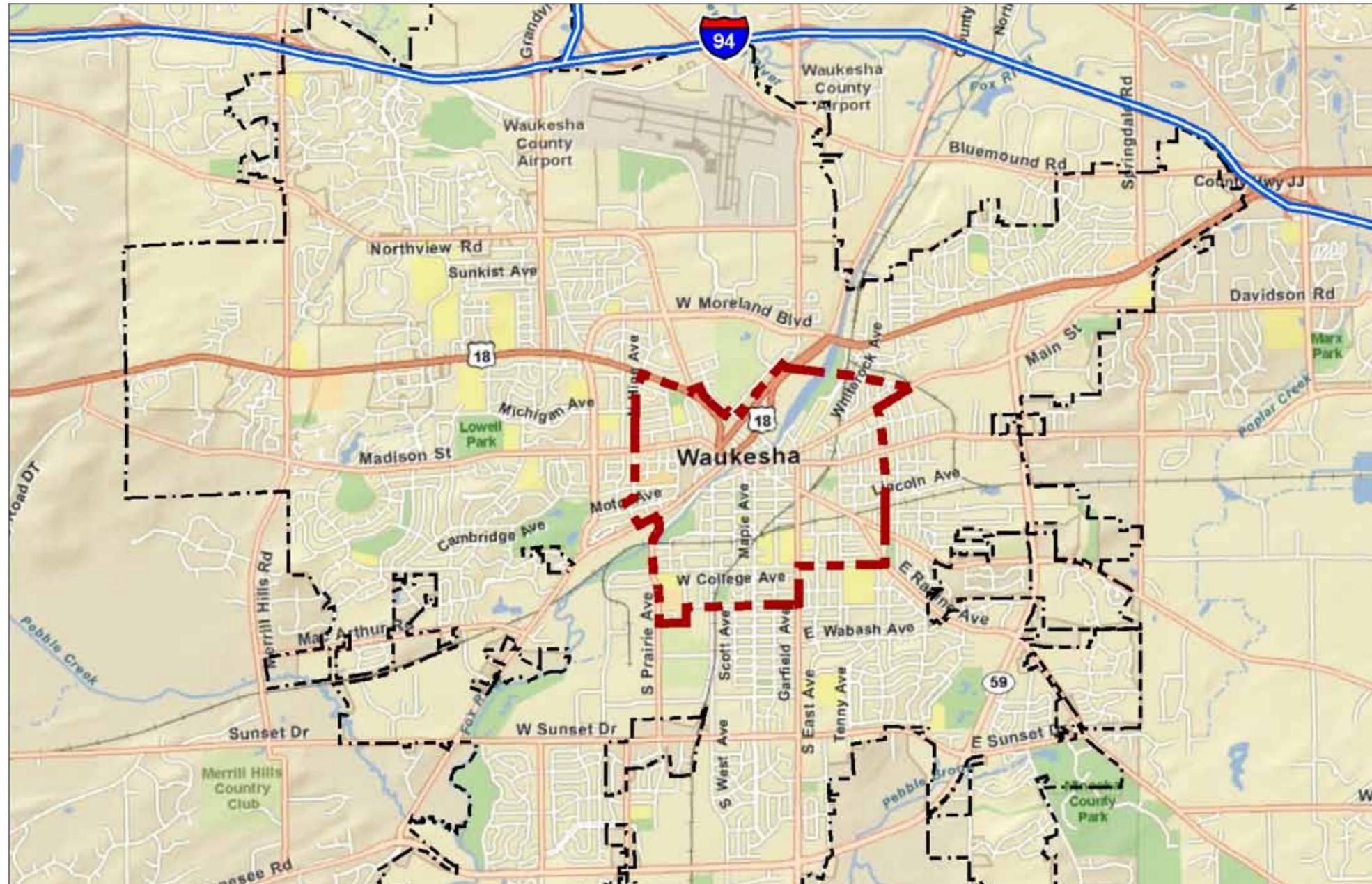
Figure 2. Downtown & Central City Waukesha Base Map

The base map shows the detailed streets, blocks, building patterns and key environmental features that define the unique character of the study area.



Figure 3. Regional Map for Downtown & Central City Waukesha

The area defined for this study is bounded by a dashed red line. The black line shows the larger jurisdictional boundary for the City of Waukesha. The I-94 freeway is the blue and white line located in the northern portion of the map. It is critical to note that the Central City can be accessed within five minutes from three different freeway interchanges.



- Watch the “What We’ve Heard” presentation, which highlighted the major issues and concerns GRAEF heard during the stakeholder interviews.
- Participate in a round-table discussion about the Downtown and Central City neighborhoods, divided into three smaller sections.
- Share ideas by providing “A Dot for a Thought” - participants placed numbered dots on various maps and then described a specific concern, idea, or comment about that location.

A summary of comments received during the Listening Workshop, as well as a record of the “A Dot for a Thought” activity, is located in *Appendix 2, Public Participation*.

Visioning and Feedback Workshop

The second community-wide event was a Visioning and Feedback Workshop, held on July 28, 2011. The purpose of the second workshop was to provide stakeholders the opportunity to review and comment on the preliminary recommendations developed as part of the Master Plan. This workshop also gave the community members an opportunity to confirm whether or not their prior comments and issues were reflected fairly in the preliminary plan. This workshop included a presentation of highlights of the draft recommendations as well as the preliminary concepts for key redevelopment areas. Following the presentation, participants were asked to review the recommendations and then participate in a question-and-answer session. A summary of comments received during the Visioning and Feedback Workshop is located in *Appendix 2, Public Participation*.

Public Meeting

At the end of the process a final public meeting was held to present and discuss the *Plan* along with the next steps needed for implementation and monitoring.