

OLD TOWN/DOWNTOWN MONTGOMERY URBAN DESIGN ANALYSIS

The physical area of Downtown Montgomery occupied by commercial uses is rather small, even for a community of its size. Moreover, Downtown Montgomery is a collection of retail, service, and food service uses in three distinct but physically separated clusters. As we shall see in the following analysis, this condition is not conducive for downtown development and deprives the downtown of the necessary critical mass and the necessary elements or puzzle pieces that can stimulate investors and excite the public and make Downtown Montgomery a vibrant, vital people place.

Downtown Montgomery is distinguished by several features or characteristics. Of course, the Fox River is a dominant feature in the Downtown. The Fox River forms one edge of the Downtown and is virtually concealed from public view in the downtown. Second, the vestiges of Montgomery's industrial heritage remain and occupy critical space and views in the neighborhood and, in the case of Lyon Metal, are physically dominant features in Downtown Montgomery.

Third, Downtown Montgomery is geographically constrained. The mammoth Lyon Metal building on Main Street, the Riverside Cemetery, the Fox River, and the adjacent "Old Town" neighborhood conspire to limit the physical space the downtown may occupy. In the short-run, these constraints are a non-issue since the Downtown has large amounts of under-developed and under-utilized land. In the long-run these constraints may function as the logical "build-to" line for Downtown Montgomery. Finally, Downtown Montgomery is located along a transportation corridor but is not situated at the intersection of two or more transportation corridors.

URBAN DESIGN ANALYSIS

The purpose of the *Urban Design Analysis* is to identify the already important elements of an area in order to ensure that they are maintained and/or strengthened in the public consciousness. Urban design analysis is based on a vocabulary of urban form that people inherently understand but do not necessarily label as such. For example, using the "Montgomery Tap" at the corner of Mill Street and River Street as a landmark, or why people feel uncomfortable walking along River Street. Or, why when a reference is made to "Downtown Montgomery," people will immediately envision the "district" that is the group of restaurants at the intersection of Mill Street and River Street or some other such uses or group of buildings.

The Urban Design Analysis addresses a number of characteristics and design issues, but largely focuses on the pedestrian experience. If the public space is not safe, attractive, inviting and comfortable for pedestrians it will not attract pedestrians and without pedestrians it is doubtful an effective downtown re-investment program can be achieved.

Streetwalls

Streetwalls are the facades of buildings along the street sidewalks. The streetwall contributes to the enclosure of the public street, defining the physical limits of the public realm, and helping make the pedestrian feel comfortable on the street or sidewalk. Consequently, building materials, building height and architectural details at the sidewalk level become important considerations in designing buildings along downtown streets.

Except for special buildings or physical features, streetwalls should be uninterrupted by parking or open spaces, e.g. front and side yard setbacks. Where the streetwall is interrupted a fence, wall, hedge or some other vertical element continuing the vertical plane along the street should be provided. Plazas and courtyards would be examples of the exception to this general rule.

Plazas and courtyards are urban design elements the Village can incorporate in its downtown redevelopment plan. As a design feature, plazas and courtyards are reserved for special spaces, usually civic in nature or purpose. Where civic buildings are sometimes set back from the street, the space between the street and building wall should be designed as a public plaza or courtyard. A plaza is generally a pedestrian open space between a building and a street. A courtyard is an open pedestrian area enclosed by buildings on at least two sides and may or may not have street frontage. Generally, both plazas and courtyards have a hard surface and may have landscaping, seating areas, fountains, artwork, and other pedestrian amenities or attractions located in them.

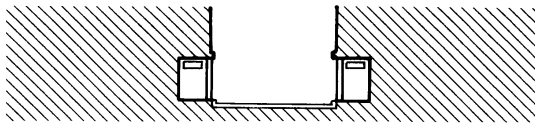
Downtown Montgomery is characterized by the lack of streetwalls, although there are a few that remain intact in Downtown Montgomery and are of average quality. The storefronts on the east side of Main Street at Webster Street provide a strong streetwall, and the north side of Webster between Main Street and River Street provides a streetwall that can be improved. However, the few remaining streetwalls are isolated from each other and need to be connected. The existing streetwalls will be important catalysts and models for future downtown redevelopment.

There are seven *frontage types* that create streetwalls (Figure 1). The predominant frontage types in Downtown Montgomery are the *shopfront*, and the *front lawn*. The *front lawn* and the *porch and fence* are the predominant frontage types in the adjoining neighborhoods. The *arcade* and the *stoop* types do not currently exist in Downtown Montgomery or the surrounding neighborhoods. These frontage types are not inappropriate but their introduction to Montgomery should be carefully considered and limited to short street frontages or unique development sites in the downtown.

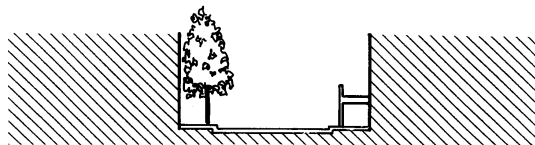
The front lawn frontage type is not the recommended frontage type in a downtown environment. This frontage type places the building façade too far from the sidewalk and provides nothing of interest for the pedestrian. One of the attractions of downtown streets is the ability to stroll along the sidewalk and window shop. The front lawn frontage type deprives pedestrians of this opportunity.

Block frontages dominated by parking lots and driveways crossing the sidewalk are obstacles for pedestrians and discourage pedestrian activity. Blocks lacking a continuous

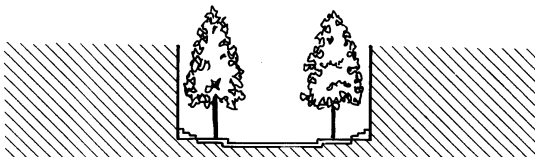
streetwall, such as River Street, as well as sections of Main Street and Webster Street, do not create an inviting pedestrian environment and generally present a poor visual



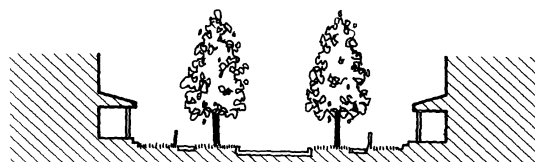
ARCADE The building façade overlaps the sidewalk while the storefront remain set back from the street. This type is excellent for retail use, but only when the sidewalk is fully covered so the pedestrian cannot bypass the colonnade. An easement for the right-of-way encroachment is required.



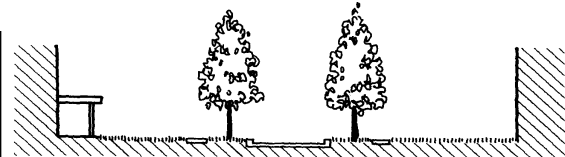
SHOPFRONT The façade is aligned directly on the front lot line with the entrance at grade. This type is conventional for sidewalk retail. It is often equipped with an awning or colonnade. A transition line should separate the signage from the façade above. The absence of a setback discourages residential use on the ground floor, although it is appropriate on floors above.



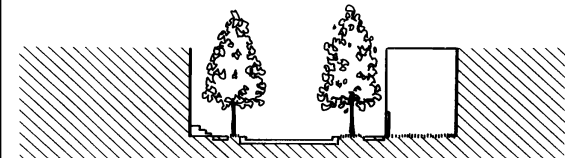
STOOP The façade is aligned directly on the front lot line with the first floor elevated to secure privacy for the first floor windows. This type is suitable for residential uses such as rowhouses and apartment buildings. An easement may be necessary to accommodate the encroaching stoop. This type may be interspersed with the shopfront type.



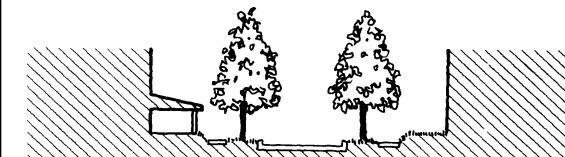
PORCH AND FENCE The façade is set back substantially from the front lot line with an encroaching habitable porch. The porch should be within a conversational distance of the sidewalk. A fence at the front lot line demarcates the boundary of the yard.



FRONT LAWN The façade is set back substantially from the front lot line. The front lawn thus created should be visually continuous with adjacent yards and should be unfenced. The ideal is to simulate buildings sitting in a rural landscape. A front porch is usually not appropriate since no social interaction with the street is possible at such a distance. The large set back can provide a buffer from heavy traffic.



FORECOURT The façade sets back and is replaced by a low wall at the front lot line. The forecourt thus created is suitable for gardens, vehicular drop-offs, and workshop (un)loading. This type should be used sparingly and in conjunction with shopfront and stoop types, as a continuous blind wall is boring and unsafe.



DOORYARD The façade is set back from the front lot line, with an elevated terrace or garden between. This type can effectively buffer residential quarters from the sidewalk while removing the yard from public use. The terrace, when roofed, is suitable for restaurants and cafes as the eye level of the sitter is comfortably level with that of the passerby.

Figure 1. Frontage Types

appearance resulting from the disconnectedness of the buildings and out-of-scale open spaces between and about the buildings.

Building height contributes to the comfort of the street and needs to be proportional to the width of the street. Very wide streets should have three or four story buildings or wide parkways to accommodate shade trees that can be used to reduce the scale of buildings. One-story buildings should be avoided except on the narrowest streets or in particularly unique contexts. With few exceptions, building separation and setbacks along the street frontage should be avoided when retail or restaurant uses are located at street level.

Urbanity requires the delineation of public space by buildings. Spatial definition is not a result of architectural style or ornament, nor of decorative urban furnishings. Successful spatial definition is achieved by two physical conditions: bounding buildings are aligned in a disciplined manner; and, the defined space does not exceed a certain ratio of height to width.

The condition of alignment occurs when the facades of buildings cooperate to delineate the public space, as walls form a room. Urban building articulation must take place primarily in the vertical plane or façade. Appendages such as bay windows, porches, balconies and loggias, which do not obliterate the primary surface of the façade wall are not destructive to the alignment.

The condition of enclosure generated by the height-to-width ratio of the space is related to the physiology of the human eye. If the width of a public space is such that the cone of vision encompasses less street walls than the opening to the sky, then the degree of spatial enclosure is slight. The ratio of one increment of height to six increments of width is the absolute minimum, with 1:3 being a good effective minimum, *if a sense of spatial enclosure is to result* (Figure 2). As a general rule the tighter the ratio, the stronger the sense of place, and often, the higher the real estate value. Spatial enclosure is particularly important for shopping streets, which must compete with shopping malls which provide the very effective spatial definition. In the absence of spatial definition by facades, disciplined tree planting is an alternative. Trees aligned for spatial enclosure are necessary on thoroughfares that have substantial front yards.

Nodes

Nodes are readily recognizable clusters of like or similar uses or a collection of different uses clearly differentiated from its surroundings. In Downtown Montgomery there are five identifiable nodes:

- The "Auto Node" comprised of the gas station and car repair shop on Webster Street
- The "Service Node" formed by the service businesses at Main Street and Clinton Street
- The "Food and Drink Node" at Mill Street and River Street
- The "Retail Node" on Webster Street between Main Street and River Street
- The cluster of commercial uses at Mill Street and South East River Drive (IL 25)

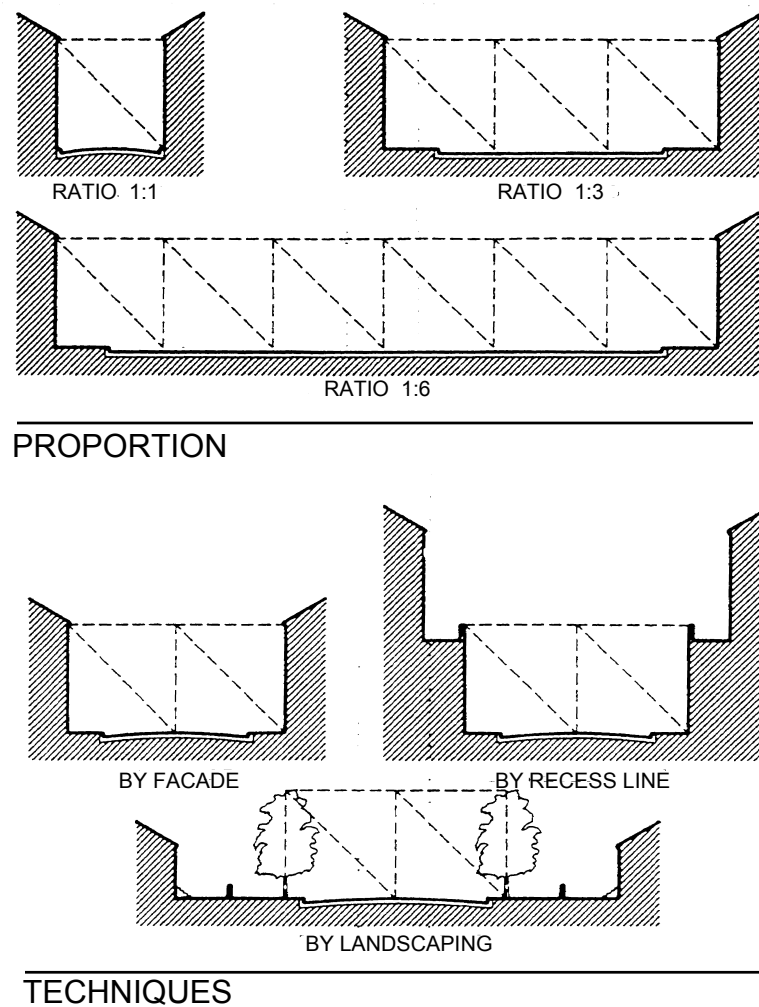


Figure 2. Spatial Enclosure

Paths and Corridors

Paths and corridors are the channels along which the observer customarily or potentially moves. They are the predominant urban design element. For many people, they observe and experience the Village while moving through it, and along paths and corridors other urban design elements are arranged and related.

Paths and corridors are linear in nature and have a distinct character or appearance defined by their surroundings. Corridors tend to be multi-modal and are unified or identified by design or land use characteristics. Paths tend to be more exclusive and decidedly pedestrian in scale (if not purpose). Paths are not always as well-defined as corridors and need not necessarily follow streets or established trails, such as the bike

trail. In Downtown Montgomery all public streets and the Fox River function as paths and corridors. Main Street and the Webster Street-River Street-Mill Street connection are the dominant or primary paths. The railroads are a corridor. The bike trails and surface parking lots also constitute some of the paths in Downtown Montgomery.

Conflict between transportation modes is prevalent in corridors and paths. Downtown Montgomery is no exception. Each mode of travel in Downtown Montgomery is at conflict with the others: automobile and pedestrian, pedestrian and bicyclist, bicyclist and automobile. The presence of truck traffic serving the adjoining and nearby industrial uses further raise the level of conflict. The response to these conflicts has been to separate the various modes throughout the downtown; bikes on bike paths, cars on paved surfaces, pedestrians off the streets. In an urban environment, such as Downtown Montgomery, paths and corridors, particularly street corridors, must be designed and maintained to accommodate all modes of transportation, particularly the pedestrian.

Wayfinding to and around Downtown Montgomery is lacking. There is no indication along IL 31 that Downtown Montgomery exists, let alone give direction to finding it if one were so inclined. Streets leading to Downtown Montgomery should have special signage, banners, lampposts or other visual elements to help establish the street as a special corridor to a special place in Montgomery.

Edges

Edges are linear elements and are not considered paths by the observer. They are boundaries between two elements or phases of urban design. Edges may be barriers, or seams, the lines along which two distinct regions or neighborhoods are related and joined together.

As an urban design element, edges are helpful cues to people for understanding when they have arrived or departed a particular neighborhood, node, or district. Edges are important to a downtown in defining the center's intensity of activity and the mix of land uses and how well this transitions to the surrounding predominantly residential neighborhoods. The center should not be allowed to keep expanding, but should also not conflict with neighboring uses.

Edges in Downtown Montgomery are easily recognizable:

- The Fox River
- The Lyon Metal building and parking lot
- Riverside Cemetery
- The rear lot line of the lots along the south side of Webster Street provides a distinct edge between the downtown business district and residential uses in Old Town Montgomery.

Edges are important to a downtown in defining the center's intensity of activity and the mix of land uses and how well this transitions to the surrounding predominantly residential neighborhoods. The center should not be allowed to keep expanding, but should also not conflict with neighboring uses.

Views and Vistas

Downtown Montgomery's topography and the Fox River afford many opportunities to provide views and vistas contributing to its desirability as a place to visit and experience.

But much of the Fox River is hidden from view in Downtown Montgomery unless one is on the Mill Street bridge or traveling along River Street (north of Mill Street) or along IL 25. Only Webster Street extends to the river but the vista and view of the river is limited or obscured by foliage or other obstructions. The bike trail along the Fox River provides innumerable views and vistas all along the river.

Additionally, certain buildings or features function as focal points terminating vistas throughout Downtown Montgomery. A terminated vista is a view that is shortened by a focal point, i.e. a building, a gazebo, tower, or a landscape feature. Important focal points that terminate vistas in Downtown Montgomery include;

- Lyon Metal building at Clinton Street, Mill Street, Madison Street and Taylor Street
- George's Restaurant at the southwest corner of River Street and Webster Street

Because they are a focal point or feature, buildings that terminate a view or vista should be designed with a higher level of architectural design and detail.

Landmarks

As an urban design element, landmarks are a point-reference and are usually a simple defined physical object: a building, storefront, sign, or natural features that a pedestrian or motorist can use as a reference point as he negotiates the urban landscape. Landmarks, in this sense, are not a reference to historic characteristics or attributes about a building or place. However, they can include significant buildings or buildings in a significant location, i.e. terminating a vista.

Landmarks, as an urban design element may be distant (seen over the top of smaller elements), or local, being visible only in restricted locations or from certain approaches. They are used as clues and seem to be increasingly relied upon as a journey becomes more and more familiar. In Downtown Montgomery, landmarks include:

- Gray's Mill, the Montgomery Inn, and Mill Street Tap
- The Lyon Metal building
- the Fox River
- the Episcopal Church at Webster and Main Street
- the Nicholson Elementary School on Main Street
- Riverside Cemetery
- The Mill Street bridge
- The railroad

Districts

Districts are relatively large areas of a city which the observer can mentally go inside of, and which have a common character. They can be readily recognized internally and occasionally can be used as an external reference as a person goes by or toward them.

In Downtown Montgomery the districts are not large when compared to the size of the Village, but they are discernable to many observers (*Planning Districts Map*). There are three small districts in Downtown Montgomery:

- The Open Space District formed by the Fox River and riverside park lands, Riverside Cemetery, and Austin Park

- The Industrial District anchored by Lyon Metal and extending west to Orchard Road
- The Residential District formed by “Old Town” Montgomery south of Webster Street.

The districts may in reality overlap in some areas, and their boundaries may be less discernible in some areas than others. The *Planning Districts Map* is intended only to illustrate the general locations of these different areas where similar characteristics or influences are concentrated within Downtown Montgomery. There is not necessarily any direct correlation with the Village Zoning Map or other land use mapping.

Building Inventory

Downtown Montgomery has a limited number of historic/architecturally significant buildings located within it. Gray’s Mill and the small house at the southwest corner of Clinton Street and River Street are the two historic structures in Downtown Montgomery.

Existing buildings in Downtown Montgomery occupy a small percentage of the land area. The *Building Figure Ground Map* graphically shows just how small of a ratio is present. It also illustrates how few streetwalls remain along block frontages in Downtown Montgomery.

Conversely, the physical area of Downtown Montgomery devoted to cars is overwhelming, if not disillusioning. The *Vehicle Use Area Map* illustrates the extent to which vehicle use areas dominate the Downtown landscape. The *Vehicle Use Area Map* identifies all of the areas devoted to motor vehicles: streets, alleys, parking (driveways are excluded for drafting reasons). On many lots, there is more area devoted to surface parking than to the building itself. This contributes to the feeling that Downtown Montgomery is designed for cars, not people.

The Public Realm

Downtown streets, bike trails and the riverside parks constitute the public realm in Downtown Montgomery. The public realm portrays community values and attitudes, in that it is the communal ‘living room.’ Generally, Downtown Montgomery streets are not pedestrian friendly, if not hostile pedestrian environments. With few exceptions throughout the downtown the sidewalks are too narrow, street trees are lacking, street furniture (e.g. light poles, benches, planter boxes, trash receptacles, bike stands) are missing or uncoordinated in their design and appearance. The public realm in Downtown Montgomery reflects a community that places more value on the convenience of the motorist, which is the antithesis of a functioning downtown. But in instances where a positive public realm is provided, such as the bike trail corridor, the results are predictable: the public accepts the space and uses it.

The quality of the experience in the public realm is greatly influenced by what is provided in the adjacent private realm. Much of Downtown Montgomery is surface parking lots with much of the parking located against the street (sidewalk). This has a debilitating effect on the public realm because it fails to create streetwalls and generally makes the public realm less inviting. This is why streetwalls are generally considered to be part of the public realm and should be designed as part of it.

However, unique to Montgomery is the quantity of underutilized private property in the Downtown. This urban design liability turns out to be a resource for redevelopment opportunity in Downtown Montgomery.

OLD TOWN/DOWNTOWN MONTGOMERY RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that follow should be viewed as a “to-do list” with many of the items being completed in phases over time. Some recommendations can be completed or implemented only by the Village, others by landowners and downtown investors. In some instances, the Village will need to use its authority and power to assist downtown investors in achieving these recommendations.

Some recommendations are related or connected to others, meaning implementing one recommendation without the other may require special coordination, for example, if the recommendation involves public infrastructure, or may mean the end result of completing one recommendation without the related recommendation may be less than satisfying.

The recommendations are provided in no particular order. But the recommendations can be classified as near-term (within one to three years), long-term (four years or more), and ongoing.

NEAR-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **REVISE THE ZONING ORDINANCE TO CREATE A ZONING DISTRICT FOR DOWNTOWN MONTGOMERY.** The downtown and adjacent neighborhoods need to be protected from encroachment and undesirable development and uses. Many of the design recommendations of the Master Plan are not permitted in the B-1 District, the prevailing zoning classification in Downtown Montgomery. One recommendation is that a new commercial district classification specifically for Downtown be established. Regardless what zoning classification is used for the Downtown, the zoning regulations need to:
 - permit residential dwelling units on all floors above street level retail or office;
 - provide a higher floor area ratio (FAR);
 - permit a zero front and side building setback; and,
 - restrict the location of drive-up windows facilities;
 - restrict the location of off-street parking on a lot in order that parking is not placed between the street and the building;
 - permit outdoor dining areas; and,
 - permit the use of the public sidewalk for outdoor dining and display of merchandise.

2. **DEVELOP AND APPLY DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR OLD TOWN AND DOWNTOWN MONTGOMERY.** Related to the amendment of the Zoning Ordinance, adopting design guidelines for new construction in the downtown and the adjacent Old Town neighborhood is essential to protecting the character of the neighborhoods. When the Metra commuter station is operational and Downtown Montgomery begins its redevelopment and transformation the Old Town neighborhood will experience increased redevelopment pressure. The residential area is solid and sound but is marked by small structures and/or small lots that pose inviting targets for tear-down opportunists. This should not be construed as a policy prohibiting tear-downs or redevelopment. Rather, this is an acknowledgement that these opportunities exist but, if exploited, they will not be allowed to destroy the character of the neighborhood.
3. **DEVELOP, FUND AND IMPLEMENT A FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM.** The Village should offer incentives or inducements to downtown and Old Town property owners to improve building facades in a manner that will contribute to the collective character of Downtown Montgomery. Such a program should be structured to apply to landscaping and screening parking areas.
4. **IMPLEMENT A STREETSCAPE PROGRAM.** The public realm in the downtown is lacking in many of the attributes that make for a pleasant pedestrian environment and contribute to successful downtowns. The lack of commercial buildings and an established streetwall notwithstanding, the public right-of-way in Downtown Montgomery requires a fair amount of attention to change people's perceptions about the downtown and Montgomery in general.

It is recommended the streetscape program rely upon simple, but elegant, streetscape design solutions. For example, brick pavers are beautiful and pleasant to look at, but are costly to install and to maintain. Simple concrete sidewalks with unique scoring patterns or imprints made into the surface or color tinting the concrete can achieve the same results for less cost. Placing less money on the sidewalk surface allows the Village to upgrade the vertical elements, such as decorative light fixtures, banners, street trees, and the like.

Among the items to address in a streetscape program are: increasing the width of sidewalks (five feet is inappropriate and unsuitable for downtown streets); providing seating benches; decorative and functional street lighting; shade trees; bicycle parking; and, items that would add to pedestrian comfort.

5. **ACKNOWLEDGE LYON METAL AS A PERMANENT FIXTURE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD.** Lyon Metal represents the largest landowner and the largest use in Old Town and Downtown Montgomery. For perspective, the building occupied by Lyon Metal is as large as all of downtown Montgomery. For

this reason, the fate of Lyon Metal is significant for Montgomery. If the building were to become vacant it would present a new set of challenges and opportunities, as well as hardships, for Montgomery. A building such as Lyon Metal's cannot easily accommodate a new and different use, thus the prospects for future users is reduced markedly.

The widely held perception in Montgomery that this business is going to leave is unfounded. Instead, the Village should figure out how to dance with a 900 pound gorilla. Until the business enterprise is shuttered, redevelopment plans are futile and groundless. Redevelopment of this property is not going to occur without massive public assistance. Demolition and environmental remediation costs will be difficult to absorb in a development *pro forma* without increasing the density and intensity of the redevelopment out of scale with Old Town and Downtown Montgomery.

The Master Plan acknowledges the presence of the facility and integrates it into the redevelopment plan. Portions of the building façade should be improved to make the building, or at minimum, strategic parts of the building, more attractive and positive contributions to the public realm in downtown Montgomery.

The parking lots at Lyon Metal need to be landscaped and screened with an ornamental fence, not chain link. In this setting, the chain link fence contributes to the aura that this part of Old Town is a de-militarized zone. A different style of fence and landscaping would dramatically transform this neighborhood.

The loading docks at Lyon Metal should be screened from Main Street, too.

6. **EXPAND MONTGOMERY PARK NORTH OF THE DAM.** The homes along the east side of River Street between Ashland Avenue and the dam should be acquired and the land used as open space. The structures and lots are situated in the floodplain and the continued long-term use of the structures is not recommended or advocated. The resulting open space would provide no space for programmed activity or facilities but would increase the amount of riverfront physically and visually accessible for all Montgomery residents and visitors to enjoy.
7. **REHABILITATE THE IL 25 COMMERCIAL AREA.** The small commercial area on IL 25 between Mill Street and 1st Avenue should be the focus of façade improvement and landscaping efforts. Expansion of the CBD to this area is not recommended since it is physically detached from the core area and expansion of the Downtown will only dilute the economic feasibility of the Downtown.
8. **CONSTRUCT A PUBLIC OVERLOOK ON THE FOX RIVER AT THE END OF JEFFERSON STREET.** The Old Town neighborhood south of Webster Street has no

public access or frontage along the Fox River. Constructing a public overlook at the end of Jefferson Street at the river would provide a physical and visual connection to the River that neighborhood residents not as fortunate to have riverfront property can enjoy.

9. **BEGIN A TREE PLANTING PROGRAM ALONG MAIN STREET.** The segment of Main Street from Ashland Avenue to Mill Street is a harsh visual environment. Planting shade trees in the parkway would go a long way towards humanizing the street and would help to screen the massive Lyon Metal building.
10. **DEVELOP HIGH-DENSITY SINGLE-FAMILY USES ALONG WEST SIDE OF RAILROAD STREET BETWEEN THE FIRE STATION AND JEFFERSON STREET.** The proximity of the railroad should not be viewed as a liability to developing this parcel for residential purposes. Introduction of any other use would be detrimental and out of character with the neighborhood. It is envisioned that small lot single-family homes could be placed on this parcel, with a small number of attached single-family, e.g. townhouses, to reinforce the residential character of the neighborhood.
11. **ESTABLISH HIGH DESIGN STANDARDS FOR THE "ASHLAND WEDGE."** The wedge-shaped parcel lying on the south side of Ashland Avenue between Main Street and River Street presents a challenging development opportunity. The shape and configuration of the parcel is such that it is an elongated, nearly triangular parcel. Development of the property will require unconventional thinking, but any development that occurs on the property needs to be compatible in scale and appearance with the adjacent neighborhood. The "Wedge" also occupies a critical location in that it is, literally, the gateway to Old Town and should be developed in manner that provides a visual statement and sets the character of Old Town.

It is envisioned that a small-scale multiple-family project can be developed on the site. Development of the property is recommended to establish a visual character to this section of Ashland Avenue. As it presently sits, Ashland Avenue is an inhospitable wide street with no sidewalks, street trees, or any buildings along its frontage. The rear yard of homes on James Street are visible from Ashland Avenue and do not provide a pleasing visual image and hardly provide an appropriate gateway treatment for Old Town or Montgomery.

12. **ESTABLISH A GATEWAY AT WEBSTER STREET AND IL 31.** The northeast corner of Webster Street and IL 31 is an appropriate place to create a gateway element for Old Town/Downtown Montgomery. It is recommended that the old Montgomery signal tower be reconstructed on this site and a park or plaza be created around it. The signal tower would be a visual statement and would have ties with Montgomery's railroad history, as well as compliment the adjacent railroad tracks. The Village of Franklin

- Park recently completed a similar project but its signal tower is not in a visible nor easily accessible location.
13. **ESTABLISH A GATEWAY AT ASHLAND AVENUE AND IL 25.** The corner of Ashland Avenue and IL 25 should receive some streetscape attention in order to improve the appearance of this entryway into Montgomery and Old Town. An architectural element, such as an obelisk or a pergola, would provide an interesting visual clue that one is entering Montgomery
 14. **IMPROVE DOWNTOWN WAYFINDING AND GATEWAY FEATURES.** The downtown is not readily recognizable from the main traffic arteries and even when one stumbles into the downtown there are few visual cues that you are entering the downtown.
 15. **ESTABLISH A TRUCK ROUTE IN DOWNTOWN MONTGOMERY.** The presence of industrial uses adjacent the Downtown and in the vicinity places a fair amount of truck traffic on Downtown streets. In order to make the streets more comfortable for pedestrians truck traffic should be limited to certain streets.

LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **ESTABLISH A PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION TO THE FUTURE METRA COMMUTER STATION SITE.** The proposed Metra commuter station will provide little benefit to the Old Town neighborhood if residents cannot walk to it. A significant pedestrian linkage to the station site should be provided. This linkage should be more than a five-foot wide sidewalk and include seating areas landscaping and shelters from the elements. This connection should be conceived, designed and constructed as a linear park for neighborhood residents.
2. **VACATE PEARL STREET BETWEEN MILL STREET AND CLINTON STREET.** The block bounded by Pearl Street, Mill Street, River Street and Clinton Street is too small to permit viable redevelopment or maximum use of the existing parcels within the block. Vacating this section of Pearl Street will serve to make the block larger to accommodate a wider range of development options. Note: The vacation of Pearl Street is essential to the implementation of the “Central Square” recommendation.
3. **DEVELOP MUNICIPAL PARKING LOTS IN THE DOWNTOWN.** The small blocks and lots characteristic of Downtown Montgomery do not lend themselves to providing the optimum number of parking spaces and commercial space on each parcel while achieving other urban design objectives, namely maintaining the streetwall along downtown streets. On-street parking is essential but cannot provide all of the required parking spaces. Moreover, the uses in the downtown may benefit from shared parking arrangements, or off-peak hour usage, in which case municipal lots would provide the pool of parking spaces for downtown uses.

If the Village proceeds with this recommendation, the Village should implement a “pay for parking” ordinance in the downtown whereby land owners would contribute funds to the Village in-lieu-of providing parking spaces on their property. This would allow the landowners to maximize the use of the downtown parcels and provide the Village control of the parking and reimbursement of some or all of its costs in developing the supply of downtown parking.

4. **RELOCATE THE INDUSTRIAL USES ALONG PEARL STREET.** If the present uses located along Pearl Street, between Taylor Street and Mill Street, are viable and contribute to the Village’s economy, they should be relocated to more appropriate locations in the Village. In the interim, a general clean-up and facelift of the properties should be initiated. This area is characterized by unimproved streets, undefined parking and loading areas and a general unkempt appearance.

If the uses are relocated or removed the parcels north of the Mill Street Tap property should be redeveloped as high density attached single-family dwellings. It is recommended Madison Street be extended to River Street to reconstruct the street grid north of Mill Street, and to facilitate redevelopment of this area. The proximity of this redevelopment area to the downtown and the Fox River and its riverbank parks and Riverside cemetery could justify an above entry-level housing price point.

5. **DEVELOP A “CENTRAL SQUARE.”** The Master Plan calls for a new “Central Square” to be developed along Main Street, between Mill Street and Clinton Street. The Square is intended to be a focal point for redevelopment of the downtown and to be a new civic space that could become the signature feature for the downtown. The Square is intended to evoke the “Main Street” qualities and emotions that are inseparable from many small communities throughout Illinois and the Midwest.
6. **RELOCATE THE VILLAGE HALL TO THE DOWNTOWN.** One of the key uses, if not the principal feature, in a downtown—large or small—is that the downtown is the location of the local government offices (and other local institutions). When the present Village Hall facility has outlived its usefulness, building a new civic building in the downtown would cement the downtown as the civic and cultural heart of Montgomery. Or to describe it another way, the downtown needs an anchor, and the Village government should be the anchor. Another civic use that is traditionally found in a downtown is a library. A branch or storefront facility in Downtown Montgomery could augment a new Village Hall as downtown anchors.
7. **ANTICIPATE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE VFW SITE.** Of all the parcels in downtown Montgomery, the VFW property presents the greatest opportunities for redevelopment. It is the largest parcel in the downtown and enjoys riverfront access and views. It is a strategic parcel along River

Street, in that it represents a significant frontage along River Street. It also possesses the possibility to provide the densest development in all of the downtown area. The redevelopment of Downtown Montgomery is not, nor should it be, dependent upon redevelopment of the VFW site. Rather, reinvestment in Downtown Montgomery must occur independently of the future disposition of the VFW site.

However, the VFW site is somewhat of a liability for the Downtown since its use and operation is sporadic and the physical characteristics of the site do not provide meaningful contributions to the quality of the public realm in the Downtown. Until the site is redeveloped, façade improvements to the building and landscaping enhancements to the parking lot, including screening the parking from River Street should be encouraged and implemented.

If and when the VFW site is redeveloped, maintaining a view of the Fox River from Clinton Street would be desirable and help re-connect the downtown with the river. Additionally, providing a public promenade along the river would greatly enhance the public's desire to visit the site once it is redeveloped.

8. **RECREATE RIVERVIEW PARK.** Perhaps more ambitious than redeveloping the downtown, transforming the Avaya (nee, Western Electric) property back to the fabled Riverview Park could be an epochal event for Montgomery and set it apart from all other communities in the region. In its heyday the former Riverview Park was a popular destination point—a respite from the rigors of working and daily functions—for many in the Chicago area around the turn of the last century. While some of the park's attractions would not be replicated, e.g. the roller coaster, many others can be substituted or made more impressive given today's technologies. The new Riverview Park would be a passive recreation area but not a regional use, as was the original. Rather it should be more local in orientation. Uses such as an open amphitheater and band shell, walking trails and formal gardens, picnic groves, reflecting pools and paddle boats, a carnival area, a conservatory, ice rinks, and the like would provide Montgomery with a connection to its past and provide current residents with an amenity unlike any other community in the Fox Valley.

One of the features of the original Riverview Park that should be incorporated in the new Riverview Park is the carousel. The carousel would be the signature feature and the attraction to draw people on a regular basis. The idea of operating a carousel as a civic attraction is not new or unusual. The Elk Grove Park District operates one in their new recreation facility, and the City of Sandusky, Ohio has a carousel as the centerpiece of a museum and a focal point in the middle of its downtown.

Whether the new Riverview Park would be developed and operated as a civic site or a facility of the Oswegoland Park District may need to be eventually sorted out, but is not material to this recommendation.

9. **INDUSTRIAL USE AT WATKINS AVENUE AND MAIN STREET.** It is recommended that the present use of the property continue. The property is probably best suited as an incubator space for fledgling enterprises. In the event the property becomes obsolete, it is best suited for high-density residential development, given its proximity to US 30, the future Metra station, and IL 31. To minimize its impact on the surrounding neighborhood, the redevelopment should fit-in visually (architecturally) with parking below grade, copious amounts of landscaping, and building height stepping down from Railroad Street to Main Street.
10. **PROVIDE PEDESTRIAN AND ARCHITECTURAL ENHANCEMENTS ON THE MILL STREET BRIDGE.** It is recommended that the appearance of the Mill Street be improved and enhance the pedestrian environment on and approaching the bridge. Adding a sidewalk on the south side of the bridge, widening the north sidewalk, providing overlooks, walkway coverings, ornamental railings and numerous other design improvements should be considered and applied to the bridge.
11. **PROVIDE A PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE ACROSS THE FOX RIVER AT THE DAM.** The only river crossings with pedestrian access are the Mill Street and Ashland Avenue bridges. The distance between the two bridges is significant and inconvenient for pedestrian (and bicyclists) on the east side of the river wishing to get to the west side and Downtown Montgomery. A pedestrian bridge would help to improve the pedestrian environment and access to Downtown by providing an alternative to the Mill Street bridge which is an unpleasant pedestrian environment.

ONGOING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **PROVIDE A SAFE, ATTRACTIVE AND INVITING PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT.** A Downtown without pedestrians is doomed. If re-investment in Downtown Montgomery is going to occur the physical environment must attract pedestrians and in order to attract pedestrians, a safe and pleasing physical environment must be provided. Shopping trips are as much about experience as they are utilitarian in function. Downtown streets (and sidewalks) need not be reserved only for those intending to buy or consume. Plenty of people like to stroll and window shop and people watch and the public realm should be comfortable and inviting for these groups of downtown visitors, too.
2. **FILL THE GAPS.** Downtown Montgomery is a collection of disconnected establishments with large distances of parking and/or underdeveloped land between. This condition fuels the perception that Downtown is non-existent and dilutes the critical mass necessary to make the Downtown

- viable, vital and visually attractive. Priority should be placed on encouraging redevelopment of parcels that will fill in gaps between existing commercial/retail/food service uses and begin to re-establish the streetwall and to define the public realm. Screening parking lots with ornamental fences and landscaping as an interim solution should be part of this strategy.
3. **CREATE CIRCUITS FOR MOTORISTS AND PEDESTRIANS.** A key attribute of a successful downtown is the ability of motorists and pedestrians to negotiate the downtown in a circular manner and finding interesting and appealing things along the way. Linear commercial streets are not successful in the long run since people tend to avoid places where the circuit or route they need to travel doubles back over space they've already traveled.
 4. **NO EXPANSION OF COMMERCIAL USES SOUTH OF WEBSTER STREET.** The present depth of commercial uses/development along the south side of Webster Street is sufficient and should not be extended beyond its present limits. To do so would jeopardize the integrity of the adjacent neighborhood.
 5. **ENCOURAGE MIXED-USE BUILDINGS IN THE DOWNTOWN.** In order to improve street life in the Downtown and to make redevelopment opportunities more economically feasible, mixed-use buildings are a necessity in Downtown. With retail or food service uses on the street level, upper floor are devoted to residential and/or office uses. Small apartments or condominium units in the Downtown on upper floors would provide a 24/7 population. The location with respect to the Fox River and future Metra commuter station and access to US 30 should make marketing for residential uses relatively easy.
 6. **IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN AMENITIES AND FEATURES.** The vitality of a downtown depends upon a safe pedestrian environment. The present pedestrian environment can best be described as hostile. The sidewalks are narrow, there are few cars parked on-street, intersections are very wide, travel speeds on Webster Street and River Street are high and intimidating to pedestrians, there are no shade trees along the streets, there are no benches or other street furniture items that would contribute to the comfort of the pedestrian, or, at minimum, allow the pedestrian to feel welcome in the downtown. The lack of pedestrians in a downtown is anathema to a successful downtown.
 7. **CALM DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC.** Related to improving the pedestrian environment, the Village should initiate steps towards calming downtown traffic. The actions range from simple enforcement and signage to physical improvements such as reconfigured curb radii at intersections, marked crosswalks, raised crosswalks, lane chokers, or traffic signals.
 8. **PROHIBIT FUTURE CONVERSIONS OF RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURES TO COMMERCIAL USES.** Residential buildings do not provide the same visual effect as

commercial buildings and in a downtown this is key. When the distinction between residential and commercial buildings blurs, both the residential and commercial neighborhood suffer. Also, residential buildings, generally, cannot provide same amount of usable space as efficiently as a commercial building. Building code and life safety codes also limit the flexibility and the extent to which a residential building can be converted to commercial use.

9. **ADD PUBLIC ART TO THE PUBLIC REALM.** The Village should encourage the addition of public art throughout the Downtown. Public art may take on numerous forms and may include monuments, sculpture, and kinetic sculpture, and can be medallions or tiles in the sidewalk, decoration attached to buildings or street light poles or a bridge. Public art accomplishes several things. It raises the collective consciousness and discourse in the community; it provides an opportunity for artists to expose their talents; it attracts people and visitors; and, it makes the community feel better about itself by showing the world that it respects the creative forces within individuals. It also adds value to the property and neighborhood in which it is located.
10. **MARKETING STRATEGY.** Establishing a concept or theme to attach to the Downtown is a delicate thing. Provided the theme is legitimate and indigenous to the community, a theme could be successful. But there is a danger a theme can be carried too far and become artificial and phony and take on the appearances of a movie set or theme park.

Nonetheless, there are a number of concepts or themes the Village can attach to Downtown redevelopment and re-investment. Recreation has been identified as a possible theme, given the proximity of the Fox River and the Fox River Bicycle Trail.

However, there are a few shortcomings with this proposal. First, the bike trail is on the opposite side of the river and the connections to Downtown are less than desirable from a bicyclist's point-of-view and there are no destinations or reasons for bicyclists to venture off the path into Downtown Montgomery. Secondly, the water levels in the Fox River below the dam and adjacent the Downtown fluctuate widely and in summer months the water level is so low it is possible for people to safely walk across the river, thus boating and canoeing are not viable river activities adjacent the Downtown. Fishing, a viable activity along the river, generally is not a recreation activity that will positively impact Downtown businesses, except the bait shop. Finally, the recreation angle does little to distinguish Montgomery from other Fox River communities, unless the recreation opportunities were distinctly different from other communities.

If the Village wanted to pursue the recreation angle and distinguish itself from the competition, it may want to investigate the feasibility of creating

a white water kayaking course on the Fox River. It is possible with a little engineering and the appropriate materials to transform a section of the river into such a facility. During the reconstruction of the Main Street bridge in St. Charles a white water section was accidentally created with the coffer dam around the bridge and attracted kayakers, much to the surprise and chagrin of St. Charles and IDOT officials. Illinois DNR explored the possibility of doing the same in Batavia as part of the dam removal project in that community. Imagine, Montgomery being the capitol of white water kayaking in the Midwest!

There are other viable, and equally interesting possibilities for Montgomery. Tourism is the fastest growing segment of the economy and tapping into this industry could provide more measurable benefit for Montgomery. The community's history provides several legitimate themes it can parlay into tourism, civic events, and business development: the railroads, the Civil War, and the Capone-era.

Montgomery's development coincided with that of the railroads and its location on a key railroad in the development of this nation should not be overlooked or underestimated. Many communities across the country herald their relationship with the railroad and benefit from tourism as well as business development related to the railroads and tourism. Businesses and restaurants could incorporate the railroad theme in their shops or restaurants. A railroad museum or a model railroad clubhouse could be established and provide diversions for local residents, as well as attract visitors to Montgomery. The City of Rochelle created a railroad park at the junction of two transcontinental rail lines and rehabilitated several railroad structures from which the public can safely view trains in operation in that community. This creation has proven to be quite popular among railroad buffs and others.

The old stockyards also provide Montgomery with opportunities. Businesses and restaurants could incorporate the stockyards theme in their shops or restaurants.

Montgomery has strong attachments to events large and small during the Civil War. Gray's Mill processed grain for Union troops and a Union Camp was established in Montgomery where the old stockyards was located. Civil War enthusiasts have a voracious appetite for sites and locales that have any connection with the Civil War and this historical connection could provide a treasure trove of business development opportunities for Downtown Montgomery.

Additionally, Montgomery had direct connection with Chicago gangster Al Capone and his "business" and recreation pursuits. While there may be a stigma attached to anything "gangster" and a reluctance to be associated with a figure such as Capone, this bit of history provides interesting opportunities for tourism and business development.

Wouldn't a restaurant disguised as a speak-easy be an interesting attraction?

Each of these historical characteristics can be the theme for community events: "Railroad Days," Civil War re-enactments, the "Montgomery Stampede" to honor the stockyard days, and "Roaring Twenties Weekend" are only a few of the many events the community could stage. Incorporating the tourism angle with any redevelopment/re-investment plan for Downtown Montgomery has the added advantage of tourism grant dollars from any number of agencies.

These themes have particular appropriateness for Montgomery since they are indigenous to Montgomery. Like "Dick Tracy Days" in Woodstock heralding one of that community's favorite sons (Chester Gould), using these historical ties would differentiate Montgomery from other communities and given business development themes to exploit, and they would provide legitimate connections with the Village's past.

Whatever "theme" the Village chooses to apply in the Downtown, it needs to be authentic so that it can withstand the test of time. Themes that are artificial or contrived are doomed to be short-lived. Even theme parks have to re-invent themselves every few years to keep themselves interesting and attractive to consumers.

OLD TOWN/DOWNTOWN MONTGOMERY PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Village of Montgomery held an open house on September 17, 2002 for the purpose of collecting public comments and input concerning the findings and recommendations of the Old Town/Downtown Montgomery Re-Investment Study. Interested residents and downtown property and business owners reviewed the plan graphics and recommendations and generally supported the recommendations.

Two areas of concern or suggestions were offered by open house participants: the need to establish a truck route in Downtown Montgomery, and providing a pedestrian bridge across the Fox River near the dam. The Plan Recommendations have been revised to incorporate these suggestions.

In addition, key stakeholder interviews were conducted with selected individuals representing various Downtown Montgomery interests. Interviewees generally had positive hopes for the future of Downtown Montgomery and saw great untapped potential in it. However, the small inventory of commercial buildings, and the “secluded” location of the Downtown were viewed as serious drawbacks. The general appearance of the Downtown did not receive high marks or comments and some interviewees expressed hope the Village would initiate a façade improvement program to help encourage property owners to improve the physical appearance of their properties. Those interviewed for this assignment also indicated streetscape improvements would be, in their opinion, essential to revitalizing the Downtown.

Interviewees lamented the passage of the “good old days” of Downtown Montgomery. Historically, Downtown Montgomery was closely tied to and reliant upon the industrial businesses and their employees that populated the area not too long ago. As the large employers in the area reduced shifts, cut employment, relocated, or closed altogether, Downtown Montgomery businesses bore the brunt of these changes.

When asked what type of business or use would be most appropriate and/or successful in Downtown Montgomery, interviewees indicated food service types would likely be popular and successful, citing the popularity of the existing restaurants in and around the Downtown.

Interviewees also indicated mixed-use buildings are needed to provide a daylong population and to provide some life on the Downtown streets. It should be noted that mixed-use buildings would also benefit the economic performance of individual properties, too. Often the upper floors can financially support the entire building and relieve the retail or food service or office uses of paying prevailing rents. Thus, if properly structured, a mixed-use building could

subsidize the retail space for a short period while the business establishes a clientele and reputation.

Interviewees did not see commercial development in the surrounding area necessarily competing with or hurting business development in Downtown Montgomery. Many felt the Downtown should provide a different kind of shopping experience than what can be found on Douglas Avenue or Orchard/Randall Road.

It should be noted that Downtown Montgomery lies in the same retail “market sheds” or capture areas as commercial development on Douglas Avenue, Orchard/Randall Road, and even Fox Valley Shopping Center. While the Downtown may not necessarily compete with these and other commercial areas it is competing for the limited spendable income available in the market. In this respect, Downtown Montgomery will need to provide *an environment and atmosphere* that compete with and overcome the offerings of conventional shopping areas. Generally, interviewees were of the opinion that the improvement of the physical appearance and attention to pedestrian features in the Downtown would be critical in capturing some market share.