

**MEETING AGENDA
DESIGN REVIEW COMMISSION
THURSDAY, MARCH 24, 2016
5:00 PM**

North St. Paul City Hall – Castle Room
2400 Margaret Street



**NORTH
ST. PAUL**
extraordinary.

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL

Joe Stahlmann, Chair
Patrick Blee, Vice-Chair
Paul Anderson
Deb Fairbanks
Candy Petersen, Council Liaison
Lou Ann Stevens

III. ADOPT AGENDA

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Approve the February 25, 2016 regular meeting minutes.

V. MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Note: This is a courtesy extended to persons wishing to address the Commission concerning issues that are not on the agenda. This discussion will be limited to 15 minutes.

VI. COMMISSION BUSINESS ACTION ITEMS & RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Downtown Design Manual – Update and Open House

VII. REPORTS FROM STAFF

VIII. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Next meeting: Thursday, April 28, 2016

**CITY OF NORTH ST. PAUL
DESIGN REVIEW COMMISSION
Regular Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, February 25, 2016
5:00 PM**

City of North St. Paul Castle Room
2400 Margaret Street, North St. Paul, Minnesota

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:01 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Commission members present: Paul Anderson, Lou Ann Stevens, Candy Petersen, Patrick Blees

Absent: Joe Stahlmann, Deb Fairbanks

Staff: City Planner, Corrin Wendell, Planning Intern, Katerina Grengs

III. ADOPT AGENDA

The agenda was adopted without objection.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. On motion by Chair Anderson, the January 28, 2016 meeting minutes were adopted by consensus.

V. MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

None.

VI. COMMISSION BUSINESS ACTION ITEMS & RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Downtown Design manual- Discussion/ Schedule

City Planner Wendell introduced item VI.B. Downtown Design Manual – Discussion. Wendell presented items such as the glossary and finalized the North St. Paul Design Manual boundary. Glossary terms were assigned to be reviewed by commission members for further discussion next meeting.

The map includes areas bounded by the MU-1 Zoning District, but only properties that abut 7th Avenue and Margaret Street, and will not include the residential properties along 7th Avenue. It was seen that this new boundary would be more inclusive of what the City considers the “downtown” and include more businesses.

Discussion about open house along with advertising the event. Options are Lillie News, website, social media/Facebook, personalized letters to downtown owners/residents, survey. Open house will consist of a table for each topic we are highlighting (ex: public spaces, lighting, parking) where guests can voice opinion with dot exercises and/or comment cards. Dot exercises were highly encouraged by commission members. Treats and beverages will be provided at open house.

VII. REPORTS OF STAFF

A. Joint Council- Commissions Meeting Review

For bigger topics this type of meeting should be done more often.

VIII. REPORTS OF COMMISSION MEMBERS

IX. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 5:43 p.m.

MEMORANDUM

Date: Thursday, March 24, 2016



To: Chair Stahlmann and Design Review Commission
From: Corrin Hoegen Wendell, AICP, City Planner
Katerina Grengs, Planning Intern
CC: [Click here to enter text.](#)
Re: VI.A Downtown Design Manual – Update and Open House

BACKGROUND

Chair Stahlmann and Commission members:

The Design Review Commission is asked to discuss items related to the Downtown Design Manual update.

Below is the following schedule for the Design Manual Update:

- Newletter Article – March 2016
- Business Association Lunch – March 8, 2016 1130-1230pm
- Economic Development Authority – March 8, 2016 4-6pm
- Open House after DRC Meeting – March 24, 2016 6-8pm
- Working Draft to DRC – May 26, 2016
- Open House after DRC Meeting (Final Draft) – May 26, 2016 6-8pm
- Working Draft to Planning Commission – June 2, 2016
- Final Draft to DRC – June 23, 2016
- Final Draft to Planning Commission – July 7, 2016
- Final Draft to City Council – July 19, 2016

Review and Discuss:

Downtown Design Manual Update (materials brought to meeting)

Open House – March 24, 2016:

- Goals and Opportunities
- Purpose
- Principles for Creating a Vibrant Downtown
- Survey

Attachments:

Attachments will be brought to the meeting.

FINDINGS

[Click here to enter text.](#)

RECOMMENDED ACTION

To review and discuss the Downtown Design Manual.

FISCAL IMPACT

Budgeted Item? N/A

Fund / Department / Amount. Not Applicable

19 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Budgeted: \$ N/A Actual: \$ N/A

STRATEGIC PLAN

Strategic Plan Item? N/A

List the Strategic Area. Not Applicable

Describe the engagement opportunities? N/A

Design Ideas for Strengthening Downtowns

Drawing from his new book, *Rural by Design*, an experienced observer of rural and small town design reports on some of the more successful downtown revitalization strategies in use around the U.S.

By Randall Arendt, FRTPI

Creative design initiatives have helped enliven and strengthen downtowns in many communities, and are often part of broader strategies. The central lesson from Holland, Michigan (pop. 33,644), whose downtown is particularly successful and vibrant, is that no single action or approach will provide the answer. Complete solutions require initiatives on several different fronts. Many of them involve physical improvements, but intangibles such as commitments, relationships, and trust are equally important. The examples described here focus on the physical aspects, many containing important design components.



Maintaining traditional form and function

Town centers inevitably change over time, but such changes need not erase a community's special character.

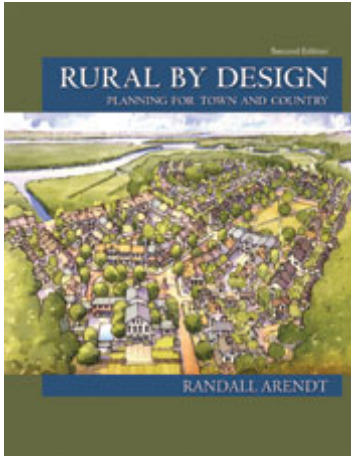
According to Phil Walker, AICP, author of APA's *Downtown Planning for Smaller and Midsize Communities*, "One of the greatest victories a downtown plan can achieve is a clear set of development policies to ensure that the traditional urban form of a downtown is protected and reinforced by future development." Here is a close corollary: A pleasant and useful mix of uses and activities must also be achieved and maintained.

Officials should think through the possible unintended consequences of current regulations. Better zoning provisions include establishing "*maximum* front setbacks" (or a "build-to" line), "*minimum* height" (or a "build-up" line), and requiring buildings to have traditional windows and front doors facing streets, plus off-street parking located behind buildings. (Alcoves are an exception to maximum setback rules; see photo on this page)

When multistory infill replaces single-story buildings, downtowns benefit in several ways. Such an approach is offered by form-based coding, detailed in "Simplify That Code!" (June), although a combination of basic form-related design standards can provide excellent protection as well. In Davidson, North Carolina, zoning requires all new commercial buildings to have at least two functional stories above grade, with floor space that can be occupied.

Promoting upper-story uses, particularly residential, is key. Most of the upper floors along Holland's main street are occupied. Not counting two large senior housing blocks with about 750 units, nearly half of that floor space is residential, ensuring that downtown streets stay lively after shops close.

Metrics that work



One of the more remarkable small town examples is Oxford, Ohio (pop. 21,782), where a dozen new multistory mixed use buildings have been built downtown since 2007. One basic rule is that at least 70 percent of the front facade must meet the right-of-way line, and a minimum height of two stories is required. In practice, however, most new infill projects have been taller, better matching the scale of many three- to four-story buildings.

Results are impressive: 12 new mixed use, multistory infill buildings providing 97 residential units housing 331 occupants (mostly students from Miami University), with eight new units housing 43 more residents in redeveloped buildings, above a total of 81,600 square feet of new ground floor commercial space. Although building height is limited to four floors, four-story slabs are avoided by limiting building area to three times the lot area. The upshot: Top floors are smaller than the rest, often stepped back beyond prominent third floor cornices, creating variety in apparent building heights. Limiting residential density to one

occupant per 200 square feet of lot area allows more variety in the number of bedrooms in each dwelling unit.

Ground-floor commercial must cover at least 70 percent of the lot area, and 30 percent more may be located above or below that. Because downtown land is valuable, there are no on-site parking requirements, a key aspect of Oxford's approach. Although some residents do not own cars, many who do park them in lots they can either walk to or reach by the free local bus service. These metrics have worked very well, according to local architect Scott Webb, designer of many of the new infill buildings. Notably, these results have been achieved without form-based coding.

Holland has provided parking on land behind its main street buildings, with maintenance provided by the municipality or by a business improvement district. These rear parking lots have been created, expanded, and landscaped over the years as parcels have become available or as buildings have come down. The city controls some parking through ownership and several lots through leases. The downtown development authority maintains all city-owned and leased lots and a relatively new downtown parking deck, which are funded through an annual assessment program. All on-street and public lot parking is free, although residents pay overnight parking fees.

Many merchants increase their business by opening rear doorways, allowing customers to enter from parking lots. Even when people use shops as shortcuts to the street, some retailers see this as an opportunity to display their wares and say hello. Interviews with shopkeepers have shown that most of them like the idea, and they report virtually no increase in shoplifting.

Creating attractive environments helps increase the number of downtown visitors and the frequency and length of their visits. Shade trees and benches are basic; they should be supplemented with colorful planters, widened sidewalks to accommodate dining tables, and a small fountain or two. Street musicians, performance artists, and public art help create a welcoming ambience, inviting shoppers and others to linger and enjoy their surroundings.

Holland attracts thousands of visitors every year during its annual springtime tulip festival; it also closes several blocks of its main street to cars every Thursday evening during the summer, converting it into a popular pedestrian promenade. Crowds of residents and visitors fill the street, enjoying food, music, aromas, shops, and each other's company.

When large downtown buildings become vacant, creative solutions are essential. In Northampton, Massachusetts (pop. 28,554), a three-story department store with 55,000 square feet of floor space was sensitively reconfigured (preserving its historic staircase, tin ceilings, and woodwork). Rechristened as Thorne's Marketplace, it leases individual spaces to dozens of small retailers and food purveyors, creating what has been described as a "contemporary bazaar." This imaginative and highly successful conversion has brought customers back to the downtown shopping and dining district. According to town planner Wayne Feiden, FAICP, "Thorne's was the single most important retail pioneer that helped bring downtown back alive."



Public space is valuable

Whether in new mixed use areas or retrofitted town centers, creating comfortable public spaces can provide economic as well as aesthetic benefits. A 1989 study of 21 rural towns in Georgia conducted by James Kenyon of the University of Georgia found that the vitality of the centers (expressed by their peak pedestrian volumes) was related, in part, to the physical form of the central business district. Of four broad physical forms identified (courthouse square, multiblock, cruciform, and stem), pedestrian activity was by far the strongest in the towns with courthouse squares.

In the West, plazas created by Spanish settlers anchor hundreds of downtowns, where artists display and sell their jewelry, pottery, weaving, and other works, fulfilling an age-old need for meaningful public places.

Such a need was recognized in Lewisburg, West Virginia (pop. 3,939), after a corner building dating from 1897 burned down in 1997. A 5,600-square-foot park was built in stages between 2005 and 2013, a result of joint efforts by citizens, officials, and two local foundations. Downtown foot traffic near the park — the heart of the shopping district — increased dramatically, according to Mayor John Manchester.

In the city of Bainbridge Island, Washington, a similar, but less elaborate, amenity was created when three buildings were replaced by a mixed use development designed in an L shape, facing a four-way intersection across a newly created green. Notably, this park would have been impossible had the new building maintained a traditionally close relationship to the streets, underscoring the need for flexibility in building siting.

Public art

Sheridan, Wyoming (pop. 17,916), is one of many communities recognizing that public art displays help revitalize downtowns. In any given year between 20 and 30 sculptures, on loan from artists around the country, are displayed in Sheridan's public spaces. In addition, the city has acquired 42 permanent sculptures for its parks and downtown. Those sculptures were donated by local businesspeople and residents, or purchased with commissions from sculpture sales, or funds raised by an annual golf tournament and the county's one percent sales tax.

Artists whose work is selected for display receive a \$500 honorarium from the city, which collects a 25 percent commission on works sold during exhibition periods. Even in a slow year such as 2011, loaned sculptures were sold for \$104,000, generating \$26,000, which the city spent on new sculpture acquisitions. Similar programs exist in Grand Junction and Loveland, Colorado; Lewiston and Coeur d'Alene, Idaho; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; and Gillette and Green River, Wyoming.



Small parks and parklets

Even modest downtown spaces can become much more special, as shown by the conversion of a remnant triangle of asphalt at a wide intersection in downtown Auburn, California (pop. 13,960). A small triangular park built in 2009 has greatly improved the attractiveness of a formerly very broad intersection with three small traffic islands. It is now filled with outdoor seating, trees, landscaping, a fire pit, and a rain garden to pretreat stormwater. The park became a possibility when an awkwardly angled intersection was rectified, freeing about 6,000 square feet of land for music, movies, square

dancing, and service club events.

Having seen successful parklets in curbside parking spaces in other downtowns, Nevada City, California (pop. 3,068), has approved a removable boardwalk seating area as a multiyear experiment, occupying three parking spaces on Commercial Street. The 50-foot-long parklet, with eight-foot-wide wooden planks level with the sidewalk, and separated from vehicles by bollards, provides space for benches, planters, and bike racks.

These small oases create synergy when located in front of businesses such as coffeehouses and sandwich shops. They work best on streets with low speed limits and in mid-block locations away from corners, where they could block views and impede turning movements. Parklets can help create innovative new public space, and their low cost allows cities to experiment with various forms and locations.

A tale of two bridges

Turning lemons into lemonade, a local women's club transformed an abandoned trolley bridge into a major tourist attraction in Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts (pop. 1,731). Since the late 1920s, lush plantings have lined both sides of a central meandering footpath crossing this bridge, whose surface is covered by several feet of soil. This "Bridge of Flowers" attracts as many as 36,000 visitors annually from more than 100 countries.

Spanning Sand Creek in downtown Sandpoint, Idaho (pop. 7,365), is the Cedar Street Bridge, reconstructed as an enclosed linear retail walkway in 1982 by local entrepreneur Scott Glickenhau. An outside walkway, four feet wide and roofed, allows pedestrian access when the shops are closed. This historic bridge at the end of Cedar Street, linking downtown businesses with the train depot, was closed to vehicular traffic in 1971, and condemned nine years later.

This project was influenced by Glickenhau's visit to Florence's Ponte Vecchio ("old bridge"), and by the transformation of Boston's historic Faneuil Hall Marketplace into a lively urban space for meeting and eating. "People like to sit; they love sun, shade, and water," Glickenhau says. "Those are the things you need to have a vibrant downtown, the colors and the smells. Those were the ingredients that went into (and) helped create the flavor of the bridge."

This addition to the downtown business district is thoroughly modern. The southern wall was built with 4,500 square feet of insulated glazing, creating a long solarium that lights and heats the space on sunny days. The north side resembles a traditional covered bridge, wood-clad with few openings. About 100,000 square feet of insulated concrete flooring absorbs the sun's energy and serves as a passive heat sink. In the winter, when the sun is lower on the horizon, its rays warm the enclosed airspace. The overall effect of walking through or sitting inside the bridge is extremely peaceful, with food aromas circulating throughout.

The bridge, 60 to 80 feet wide and more than 400 feet long, contains 26,500 square feet of retail space, divided into numerous shops and restaurants. A long, wide ramp provides easy access to the second floor. According to the Sonoran Institute, upon completion the bridge became an instant landmark and tourist attraction, drawing new customers to Sandpoint's downtown business district. The Cedar Street Bridge has evolved into a collection of cart vendors, restaurants, gift shops, jewelers, and boutiques.

Daylighting a downtown creek

After several decades of gradual economic decline — the result of Interstate 84 bypassing town — officials in Caldwell, Idaho (pop. 46,237), a once-thriving industrial center, identified Indian Creek as a potential key to downtown revitalization. They subsequently requested assistance from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to determine the feasibility of uncovering, or daylighting, Indian Creek as it flows through the city center. This impressive municipal effort, involving several departments, restored the creek to its former natural openness, creating a 120-foot-wide greenway with six acres of open space, paths for walking and biking, natural rock features, and a vastly improved natural habitat.

The creek corridor defines the geometry of downtown development and creates a framework for special districts and placemaking spaces with paved walkways, interpretive nodes, and historic lighting for people-centered and community-supported development in front of the restored train depot, according to the *Downtown Framework Master Plan*.

The large number and variety of creative approaches initiated by individual entrepreneurs, municipal governments, and volunteer groups interested in strengthening small downtowns across the country are extremely encouraging. In addition to the extra care taken in regulating the height and setbacks of new infill buildings, promoting residential occupancy and creating new and inviting public spaces are key aspects of successful strategies.

From displaying public art and daylighting covered waterways to finding new uses for vacant department stores or old bridges, there is virtually no limit to what can be accomplished when challenges are met creatively and cooperatively.

Randall Arendt is the author of Rural by Design: Planning for Town and Country, published by APA Planners Press. This article is adapted from the completely revised, second edition of the book, issued in April: www.planning.org/store/product/?ProductCode=BOOK_ARDP.

Resources

Images: Top — An exception to the "build-to" (or "maximum front setback") line is illustrated by this alcove in Southern Pines, North Carolina, where a recessed building arrangement allows for two shade trees and a bench — and also increases the number of shop windows visible to pedestrians, benefiting both customers and shopkeepers. Photo by Randall Arendt. Middle — The two photos show an inappropriately low infill building from the 1960s in downtown Oxford, Ohio, that was replaced by a new four-story mixed use building. With a shared vision and cooperation between officials and entrepreneurs, downtown streetscapes can be restored to their previous form and function. Photos courtesy Scott Webb. Bottom — Landscaping has transformed a disused trolley bridge into a major tourist attraction in Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts. It is now called the Bridge of Flowers. Photo courtesy Carolyn Halloran.

Downtown Planning for Smaller and Midsize Communities, Phil Walker, AICP. In print and e-book format, available at www.planning.org/store/product/?ProductCode=BOOK_AE1450.

"Simplify That Code!" Randall Arendt, *Planning*, June 2015, www.planning.org/planning/2015/jun/simplifythatcode.htm

Great Places: Year Nine

Neighborhoods, streets, public spaces.

By Ruth Eckdish Knack, AICP

Since 2007, when APA first recognized "Great Places in America," the program has been widely praised, with enthusiastic celebrations in big towns and small. But it was time for a change, says Whit Blanton, FAICP, who chairs APA's Education Task Force, which reviewed this year's nominations. First, the task force cut the selections in half, from 30 in past years to 15 this time. It also tightened the standards for selection.

"We made our choices this year primarily through the lens of diversity," says Blanton, noting that the APA criteria stress that winners should serve the entire community — as does a classic urban space like Hermann Park in Houston. "We were also interested in the ways in which the places were transformed — how, for instance, a former industrial area like the Wynwood neighborhood in Miami became an arts district. We had a hard time making our final choices, but in the end some stellar candidates stood out," says Blanton.

Neighborhoods

Crossroads Arts District

Kansas City, Missouri

Artists and entrepreneurs get along surprisingly well in the downtown Crossroads district of Kansas City. Two draws are the Kauffmann Center for the Performing Arts and Google Fiber, introduced in the metro area in 2012 (a first in the U.S.). The transformation started in the late 1990s with the city's FOCUS plan, which called for revitalizing the urban core. Adaptive reuse of the old industrial plants and warehouses was spurred by listing on the National Register of Historic Places and ensuing tax abatements. The 2010 *Greater Downtown Area Plan* called for doubling the district's residential population.

Today there's a healthy mixture of residential, commercial, retail, and office development. There are bicycle and pedestrian paths, and a two-mile streetcar line is scheduled to open next year. "The main reason for our success is very committed private-sector leadership, along with strong city support," says Drew Solomon, vice president of business and job development for the Kansas City Economic Development Corporation.



Wynwood

Miami

The Wynwood neighborhood, just north of downtown Miami, is known for the colorful murals that decorate the walls of the factories and warehouses of this former garment center. Their official name: Wynwood Walls. Mixed use zoning was introduced in a 1979 citywide reuse plan, but it wasn't until the last decade that the area took off. Today, rehabbed factories are filled with galleries, restaurants, offices, lofts, and even offshoots of an international attraction, Art Basel Miami Beach. (For more, see "When Arts and Culture Take Center Stage," November.)

According to Miami planner David Snow, the big change came with the passage in 2009 of the *Miami 21* plan, which incorporated new urbanist and smart growth principles. Special district plans followed, facilitating the transition from industrial to mixed use zoning, and allowing the transfer of development

rights to save "legacy structures" that contribute to the character of the neighborhood. "It's those targeted plans for specific districts that have made all the difference," he says.

Downtown Plano

Plano, Texas

Plano, just north of Dallas, is one of several successful examples of transit-oriented development in this year's roster of great places. Once a sleepy farm town, Plano now has a population of about 270,000, says deputy city manager Frank Turner, FAICP.

Anticipating a growth explosion with the arrival of the Dallas Area Rapid Transit light-rail line, the city in 1999 produced a vision plan that called for creating a transit village around a downtown station.

"We did a number of things to make downtown more attractive," says Turner, including introducing a historic tax exemption program to encourage the restoration of older structures. "We also redid our zoning along the lines of form-based codes." Today, there are more than 1,000 residential units within a quarter-mile of the DART station — some in historic buildings, others in larger, mixed use developments.

In 2013, the city completed *Downtown Plano: Vision and Strategy Update*, which updated its earlier transit village plan. It extended the transit village idea to include areas along another planned commuter rail line and areas that could be served by bus rapid transit.

Roosevelt Row

Phoenix, Arizona

A rail line has also had a dramatic effect on the Roosevelt Row corridor in downtown Phoenix. The Metro Light Rail station that opened in 2009 has brought new business and new life to a long-decaying part of Arizona's state capital. Roosevelt Avenue is now a "complete street," with wide sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and rows of trees. Murals on Latino themes decorate the walls of locally owned businesses that are part of the arts district. Gallery openings are scheduled for monthly Third Fridays.

Joshua Bednarek, a principal planner for Phoenix, refers to the form-based *Roosevelt Row Design Guidelines*, prepared in 2011, as a key factor in the success of the neighborhood. He also cites the Adaptive Re-Use of Temporary Space program, which puts vacant lots to productive use. Equally creative: planting sunflowers on a two-acre vacant lot owned by the city. (See all this for yourself next spring when Phoenix hosts APA's 2016 National Planning Conference.)

Streets

Fifth Street

Dayton, Ohio

Clearly, attitudes toward urban renewal have changed. In the 1960s, Dayton (pop. 141,000) fought against an urban renewal project that would have decimated its historic Oregon neighborhood, where many houses date back to the 1840s. Today, the neighborhood and its main commercial artery, Fifth Street, are national historic districts with a promising future.

According to Tony Kroeger, AICP, of the Department of Planning and Community Development, the Fifth Street revival stepped up when the city adopted its livable streets policy. He notes that Fifth Street is not only a key element of the downtown Oregon historic district but is part of an important corridor linking a local community college, the Terra Cotta Historic District, and several residential neighborhoods. There's still work to be done — too many storefronts are vacant, and parking remains a challenge — but the prospects look good, thanks in part to a strong community spirit.

Laura Street

Jacksonville, Florida

The five-block stretch of Laura Street ending at Jacksonville Landing on the St. Johns riverfront is the city's most vibrant street, according to local landscape architect Marty Child. "It is the most heavily traveled pedestrian corridor in the city," he says. Credit that in part to \$2.3 million worth of improvements: conversion to two-way traffic, widened sidewalks, and improved lighting and signage. Businesses have benefited from facade improvement grants and a creative mural program. Programming is another factor, with regularly scheduled events like Jazz Fest and monthly art walks.

Now, says Child, planners are looking at ways to revamp several iconic downtown office buildings — the Florida Life Building, the Bisbee Building, and the Marble Bank — and the Downtown Investment Authority is leading an effort to "reimagine" Jacksonville Landing, which was built by the Rouse Company as a festival market-place. The current plan calls for mixed use development.

Lexington Avenue

Asheville, North Carolina

Local residents refer to Lexington Avenue as the city's specialty shop district. In fact, its five downtown blocks are lined with some 200 shops and businesses, interspersed with restaurants and coffee shops. This one is another save. In the late 1970s, this part of downtown was in bad shape, with neglected and abandoned buildings on every block. One developer's solution was a giant shopping mall, which voters rejected in a bond referendum.

In 1982, the city created the downtown commission, which was charged with coordinating revitalization efforts. A network of art and history trails followed in the 1990s. Since that time, Asheville has adopted an impressive number of plans that affect Lexington Avenue. A center city plan adopted in 2003 as part of a larger comprehensive plan encouraged higher density, adaptive reuse, and infill development. The 2009 *Downtown Master Plan* prescribed management and growth strategies for the area. It was followed a year later by a hybrid zoning code, which supported a variety of uses on this stretch of Lexington. The city is now gearing up for an update of its comprehensive plan.

"We are excited about the vitality of this part of the city and continue to look for ways to make it even better — and to manage its success," says Alan Glines, Asheville's assistant planning director.

Third Street

McMinnville, Oregon

Like many other towns around the country, McMinnville, Oregon, saw suburban superstores begin to swallow up its downtown businesses. But McMinnville (pop. 33,000), about an hour's drive from Portland, fought back. In 2005 it adopted a streetscape plan, guided by its involvement with a state-sponsored Main Street program. Today, huge trees line six blocks of Third Street and more than 50 buildings, including the McMenamins Hotel Oregon, built in 1905, are included in a national historic district.

In 2013, the city created an urban renewal district for part of the downtown, coupling it with a tax increment financing program. Some of the area farmers have also changed their focus, from typical row crops to vineyards and wineries and culinary tours. It's part of making the town a tourist destination. "All this has taken lots of energy," says Cassie Sollars, executive director of the McMinnville Downtown Association, but it has been worth it.

Olvera Street

Los Angeles

Walk down Olvera Street in Los Angeles and step into history: all the way back to the founding of the original Pueblo of Los Angeles (then part of Mexico) in 1781. The block-long, shady pedestrian street, or paseo, known as Olvera Street is a celebration of Mexican culture. It's lined with shops filled with colorful crafts, street vendors, and restaurants. Fiestas, folkloric dancing, and vibrant holiday displays are common sights.

As the 19th century community of Los Angeles grew, the pueblo was neglected. By the 1920s, demolition threatened its historic adobes. They were saved through a strenuous campaign to preserve and restore the area, which opened in the '30s as a tourist destination. Today, Olvera Street is the focal

point of the El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historic Monument and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is protected under local zoning provisions as a historic resource, and the Central City North Community Plan, adopted in 2000, helps to guide its preservation, maintenance, and economic development. Other planning efforts, including reduced parking requirements and development standards for adjacent areas, as well as the improved pedestrian and transit connections spelled out in the master plan for nearby Union Station, offer further support.

"The paseo connects us to our local heritage," notes Christopher Espinosa, general manager of El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. "Any day of the year, Olvera Street is filled with activity, children's laughter, music, and the smell of good food. Viva Los Angeles!"



Public Spaces

Flint Farmers Market

Flint, Michigan

The farmers market is a bright spot in a city in need of encouragement. Flint lost many of its employers when the auto industry collapsed in the 1980s. The market itself dates back to the '20s. It flourished for decades in its original location until traffic congestion pushed it out of downtown to a site along the Flint River. By the late '90s, with the city struggling, the market had lost many of its vendors and much of

its appeal.

Then good news. The nonprofit Uptown Reinvestment Corporation, which had worked for years to find a new location for the market, came up with a downtown site: the unused *Flint Journal* printing plant. And that's where the market has been since June 2014. Some 50 food vendors set up their displays outdoors between May and October, with arts and crafts sold inside. Kevin Schronce, lead planner for the city, says the market is part of a promising new initiative, the Flint Health and Wellness District.



Hermann Park

Houston

In 1914, oil tycoon George H. Hermann donated 278 acres to the city to create a park. More acreage was added later to accommodate a zoo, Japanese gardens, and other attractions. Hermann Park draws some six million visitors a year. Management is in the hands of a nonprofit conservancy, which was founded in the late 1980s when the park was in disrepair.

Kelly Porter, AICP, a planner in Austin, Texas, and a member of APA's education task force, describes Hermann Park as "an oasis in the heart

of the city, a fabulous urban green space that is getting better every year." He notes that in a car-centric city, the park is accessible by bus, train, and bicycle: "It's a place for everybody to enjoy in one of the nation's most diverse cities." More connections will be available under the new *Bayou Greenways Initiative*, a plan by the city and the parks board to connect major regional parks.

Millennium Park

Chicago

In the early 2000s, the APA staff carefully supervised the construction of Millennium Park from its office windows overlooking south Michigan Avenue. The transformation was dramatic as more than 24 acres of abandoned railroad tracks and parking lots were replaced by landscaping, imaginative sculpture, a Frank Gehry-designed music pavilion, and year-round gardens. The park, which opened in 2004, has become a focal point for the entire city — and not so incidentally has helped to raise property values for blocks around.

Architect Edward Uhler, FAIA, now the executive director of the Millennium Park Foundation, has been involved since the beginning. "It was a huge risk," he recalls. "With no real master plan, we were designing as we were building, and we were not sure how our work was going to be received." As it turned out, the park drew raves from the public (although not always from the critics), and according to Uhler, has produced some \$1.2 billion a year in taxes and tourism spending. (Millennium Park was one of several "New-Age Central Parks" described in the July issue.)

Pearl Street Mall

Boulder, Colorado

Remember when pedestrian malls were all the rage? Most are gone now. But not the four-block-long Pearl Street Mall, which has flourished since it opened in 1977. Why did it succeed? One reason is timing. Mall construction began just when downtown Boulder was going downhill and needed a boost, says Richard Foy, who chairs the board of directors of Downtown Boulder, the group that runs the mall, and who helped Sasaki and Associates to write the mall's first design guidelines. "Another reason is that the design is timeless, with different species of trees on each block. And, of course, we have had excellent management," he adds.

When the mall turned 25, parts of it were redone. Now each block has its own special features — a way, Foy says, to ensure that people spend money along the entire length. The last reason for Boulder's success is a simple one: luck. The mall came of age during a long period of economic growth in Boulder, and now it inspires other communities.

Santa Fe Railyard

Santa Fe, New Mexico

For almost 100 years, Santa Fe was a railroad town. But by the 1980s, when rail traffic declined, its downtown railyards were largely deserted. When the *Catellus Plan* proposed a huge shopping mall for the site, the public rose up in opposition. A new mayor came to the rescue with a proposal for a new public space, and in the mid-1990s, planning began for the 37-acre North Railyard and the smaller Baca Street site. After months of community involvement, the 2002 *Railyard Master Plan*, prepared by a local firm (that was later bought by Design Workshop), was released.

The plan encouraged adaptive reuse of existing buildings with new development on small parcels. And now rail is back; a commuter line connects Santa Fe, the state capital, with Belen, some 100 miles to the south. "Public use has grown exponentially with visitors from all over the country," says Sandra Brice, director of events and marketing for the Santa Fe Railyard Community Corporation. Asked whether the Railyard poaches visitors from the old downtown, she says no, "not if we make sure that there is a diversity of uses in both places."

Balboa Park

San Diego

Any list of grand city parks must include San Diego's Balboa Park. Its beautifully landscaped 1,200 acres encompass a zoo, 15 museums, performance spaces, and splendid gardens. For this we owe thanks to the city's leaders who set aside land in 1868 for "City Park." The name was later changed to honor a Spanish explorer.

Like Hermann Park, this one is now managed by a private group, the recently formed Balboa Park Conservancy. Its CEO is Thomas Herrera-Mishler, who arrived last summer from Buffalo, where he

headed a similar effort. Now he must deal with parking issues (including a controversial plan to build a bridge to a garage); the results of years of deferred maintenance; and a decrease in state funding. The park's last master plan was done in 1989 (it's still valid, Herrera-Mishler says), but more recently the trend has been toward "precise plans" for specific areas.

The People's Choice

Colley Avenue

Norfolk, Virginia

This is the second year APA has taken to the streets (and social media) to ask you and your neighbors to weigh in on the People's Choice designee. And you answered: Colley Avenue in Norfolk, Virginia, is the latest great place.

What makes it special? The 18 blocks of Colley Avenue are the backbone of the city's grid, bringing together a vibrant restaurant scene, shopping, office and institutional uses, and historic homes — some dating from the 1890s. Pedestrians stroll down wide sidewalks, taking in a mix of architecture styles, including the Art Deco NARO Theater (above) and the modern brick and glass of the Eastern Virginia Medical School Jones Institute.



Resources

Images: Top — First Fridays events bring thousands of people to the Crossroads Arts District to experience local artists, buskers, performers, and culinary fare in an open-air setting. Courtesy City of Kansas City. Middle — Native dancers on Olvera Street in LA pose with Mayor Eric Garcetti at the city's 233rd birthday party in 2014. Courtesy El Pueblo De Los Angeles. Bottom — More than a place to buy produce and other wares, Flint Farmers Market is a spot to sit, mingle, take in local music acts, and meet friends and neighbors. Open year-round, it moved into its new facility in 2014. Courtesy Flint Farmers Market.

Go deeper: Check out APA's online Great Places in America coverage — including photos, an interactive map, videos, planning documents, and previous designees — at www.planning.org/greatplaces.

How locals celebrated their hometown Great Places:

Balboa Park, San Diego: <http://tinyurl.com/noffoaa>

Downtown Plano, Texas: <http://tinyurl.com/nwpzwxn>

Crossroads Arts District: Kansas City, Missouri: <http://tinyurl.com/optlmo8>

Fifth Street, Dayton, Ohio: <http://tinyurl.com/ouwo94u>

Hermann Park, Houston: <http://tinyurl.com/qgbnrzx>

Pearl Street Mall, Boulder, Colorado: <http://tinyurl.com/q5rmd8k>

Roosevelt Row, Phoenix, Arizona: <http://tinyurl.com/pgnb7kj>

Santa Fe Railyard, Santa Fe, New Mexico: <http://tinyurl.com/otwr9gg>

Lexington Avenue, Asheville, North Carolina: <http://tinyurl.com/nkottl7>