

# JOLIET

## Downtown Plan

Prepared For:  
Joliet City Center Partnership  
The City of Joliet, Illinois

Prepared By:  
Camiros, Ltd., with assistance from  
Gruen Gruen + Associates  
Charlier Associates, Inc.

August 2015



camiros

This page intentionally left blank

# Acknowledgements

---

This Plan was funded equally by the Joliet City Center Partnership and the City of Joliet. Camiros thanks the following individuals and organizations for their assistance and cooperation in the preparation of this Plan.

Client Representatives: Pam Owens, Executive Director; Joliet City Center Partnership  
Kendall Jackson, Director of Planning and Economic Development,  
City of Joliet

Joliet City Center Partnership Board of Directors

City of Joliet Mayor and City Council

Bob O'Dekirk, Mayor  
Bettye Gavin, District 4  
John Gerl, District 3  
Jan Hallums-Quillman, At-Large  
Larry Hug, District 1  
Jim McFarland, At-Large  
Terry Morris, District 5  
Pat Mudron, District 2  
Michael Turk, At-Large

City of Joliet City Manager, Jim Hock

Joliet City Center Partnership Board Chairman, Rod Tonelli

# Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	1
Chapter 1: Introduction, Purpose and Goals.....	4
Chapter 2: Existing Conditions Analysis .....	6
Chapter 3: Market Assessment .....	15
Chapter 4: An Improvement Strategy.....	25
Chapter 5: Improvement Program and Key Projects.....	31
Chapter 6: Implementation .....	40

## List of Figures

---

Figure 1: Study Area .....	4
Figure 2: Existing Land Use .....	7
Figure 3: Commercial/Mixed-Use .....	8
Figure 4: Public Use .....	9
Figure 5: Residential Use .....	9
Figure 6: Traffic Volume .....	10
Figure 7: Building Age .....	11
Figure 8: Building Condition .....	12
Figure 9: City Center TIF District .....	12
Figure 10: Average Household Income Within 3-Mile Radius of Downtown .....	18
Figure 11: Shifts in Business Composition .....	22
Figure 12: Stable vs Problematic Areas .....	29
Figure 13: Announced Catalyst Projects .....	29
Figure 14: Announced + Proposed Catalyst Projects .....	30
Figure 15: Functional Land Use Diagram .....	31
Figure 16: Short-Term Residential Development .....	32
Figure 17: Public Improvement Program .....	32
Figure 18: Chicago Street Cross-Section Design .....	33
Figure 19: Regional Bikeways .....	34
Figure 20: Bikeway Improvements .....	35
Figure 21: Long-Term Improvement Program .....	38

## List of Tables

---

Table 1: Land Use Composition .....	3
Table 2: Larger Residential Buildings .....	13
Table 3: Projected Annual Demand/Absorption for New Market Rate Multi-Family.....	15
Table 4: Inventory of Commercial/Office Building Space .....	16
Table 5: Downtown Action Agenda .....	37



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Plan Context

The Joliet Downtown Plan seeks to provide a “roadmap” for the improvement of downtown Joliet. Downtown Joliet is a truly unique place with a paradox of tremendous assets along with a number stubborn challenges to overcome. The assets include a rich heritage, strong architectural character, regionally significant uses, major entertainment and cultural attractions, and a strong rail and bus transportation network. Downtown Joliet has a very successful special events program, directed by the Joliet City Center Partnership, which draws thousands of visitors for events scattered throughout the year. Downtown Joliet is an urban place, with a size, scale and character of a city, not a suburb. Downtown Joliet can be very successful as a satellite urban center for the southwest suburban region, including portions of “downstate” Illinois.

To become successful, downtown Joliet must overcome the longstanding challenges that have stymied progress. Trends favoring suburban development have sapped the downtown of its former strength in the retail and office/employment markets, resulting in widespread vacancy in downtown buildings. These uses have not been replaced, and the decline in overall activity/vitality has led to image problems within the community at large. Some people have concerns over safety, while others are put off by the small offering of retail uses. Clearly, downtown Joliet needs to reinvent itself. New appeal, new attractions and new investments are needed that align with what people want from a downtown area, one with the characteristics of downtown Joliet.

While the challenges facing downtown Joliet are real, they can be overcome. The reason for the persistence of these challenges is twofold. First, there has not been a clear and workable strategy identified to organize downtown improvement actions around. In the absence of a clear strategy, improvement actions may not always build the kind of momentum needed. Second, there has been a lack of organization and commitment to downtown improvement. Part of the reason for this goes back to the absence of a clear strategy, without which it is difficult to organize effectively and commit to needed actions.



*Large crowd at one of downtown Joliet’s many special events.*

Joliet has focused on big projects as the basis for downtown improvement, and deserves credit for getting these built. These big projects include Harrah’s Casino, Silver Cross Field, Gateway Transportation Center and the pending new Will County Courthouse. These improvements have/will become important anchors for the downtown. However, they have not served to galvanize broad-based support for the downtown within the community. People come to the downtown for the anchors and special events, but have not made the downtown a part of their lifestyle. An approach to downtown improvement is needed that is more fundamental, one that will reach a broad constituency. This plan proposes such a strategy.

## Focus of the Plan

With such great potential combined with very real challenges, downtown Joliet needs a plan rooted in reality; one that provides a clear “roadmap” for improvement. This plan and process has been described as a “let’s get it done” plan rather than a vision-oriented “wouldn’t it be nice” plan. As such, the focus of the plan is to:

- Update the assessment of existing conditions.
- Provide an assessment of strengths and weaknesses.
- Conduct a realistic assessment of market conditions.
- Define a workable strategy for improvement.
- Provide guidance for private-sector investment.
- Identify a program of public improvements.
- Formulate a clear action agenda.

## Strengths and Weaknesses

Downtown Joliet is defined by both significant strengths and persistent weaknesses, as summarized below. The downtown improvement strategy must build upon strengths and mitigate weaknesses.

**Strengths:** Downtown Joliet possesses a series of primary strengths. Primary strengths are those that should serve as the foundation for the downtown improvement strategy. These primary strengths include:

- Entertainment and Cultural Attractions
- Government Services/Facilities
- Transportation Hub
- Authentic Urban Character

**Weaknesses:** The downtown’s weaknesses tend to be interrelated. Shifting trends in urban development in the post-war period resulted in the relocation of many businesses from the downtown to “greenfield” locations. This weakened the downtown market and gave rise to negative perceptions about the downtown within the community. Weaknesses include:

- Negative Community Perceptions
- Weak Market Conditions, Generally
- Weak Office and Retail Market Sectors
- Poor Regional Accessibility
- Poor Connections to Adjacent Neighborhoods

## Market Conditions

Subconsultant Gruen + Gruen Associates conducted an analysis of market conditions to help frame a viable downtown improvement strategy. Gruen + Gruen Associates submitted a separate report on market conditions to the City Center Partnership and the City of Joliet, the major findings of which are contained in Chapter 3 – Market Assessment, and summarized below:

- Market conditions in downtown Joliet are generally weak. The market analysis could not identify any unmet demand for space.
- Some market sectors are weaker than others. Office use appears to be the weakest, burdened by low lease rates and significant vacant space.
- While the analysis indicated that potential for residential development is constrained, residential use has not been a major part of the

downtown’s use mix historically. As a result, the downtown’s residential market is not burdened by vacant and obsolete dwelling units, and therefore, could be viewed as an opportunity.

- The downtown’s role as a retail destination ended decades ago. The current roster of retail uses is small, aside from eating and drinking establishments. With a small residential base, opportunities for near-term retail development appear small. However, existing property owners and investors expressed optimism about retail if certain infrastructure improvements were made, such as connecting Chicago Street and improving street maintenance.

## Downtown Improvement Strategy

Significant downtown improvement can be accomplished by following a strategy that builds upon strengths and mitigates weaknesses. A realistic approach is needed, one based on both private-sector and public sector investment under current conditions.

The improvement strategy must recognize downtown Joliet’s inherent role and function. The downtown evolved not as a suburban downtown, but as a true urban center. This is one of the downtown’s core strengths and improvement should be based on the downtown functioning as a *regional urban center*, which contains a series of regionally significant uses as well as local/community oriented uses. This role and function reinforces the downtown’s existing strengths.

An over-arching development strategy is needed to provide clear direction for actions and initiatives to drive real change in the downtown. The strategy identified for improving downtown Joliet is to:

### Make Joliet a Mecca for Young Adults

This is a strategy that leverages existing strengths, mitigates weaknesses, and can work in the downtown’s weak market context. The following points illustrate the strategy’s alignment with key existing conditions:

- Aligns with the downtown’s #1 strength; its entertainment and cultural component.
- With two colleges/universities, downtown Joliet is already a place with a significant presence of young adults.

- Housing for students and/or recent graduates is a potential source of demand.
- It is possible that Joliet Junior College or the University of St. Francis may cooperate with an early student housing development on some level.
- The downtown’s stock of older, inexpensive buildings could be adaptively reused for living units for young adults.
- The level of finish in the rental residential units could be adjusted to meet the price point of young adults.
- An emphasis on rental housing aligns with current downtown conditions; the downtown housing market is unproven and rental residential requires no long-term commitment or exposure to financial risk.
- Young adults, are less likely to rule out living in the downtown due to image/perception problems.
- With a growing residential base, more retail uses will be needed, including eating and drinking uses.

### Building upon Catalyst Projects

Another core strength of the downtown are its regionally significant uses and facilities. These include the Rialto Theater, Silver Cross Field, Harrah’s Casino and others. This list of regionally significant uses will grow in the future with the addition of a new Will County Courthouse and the new Gateway Transportation Center. These regionally significant uses can be thought of as “anchors.” Downtown Joliet has sufficient large, regionally significant uses to be successful. What it lacks are the smaller, locally oriented investments such as housing units, stores and offices. The *“Mecca for young adults”* strategy will begin the process of inducing local private-sector investment to create active places between the anchors, resulting in a vital downtown area.

### The Action Agenda

This Plan is an action-oriented plan. The centerpiece of the Plan is the Action Agenda, a program of short-term actions that align with the downtown improvement strategy and can all be implemented within a five-year period. These nine actions are:

1. Reconnect Chicago Street.
2. Reorganize stakeholder responsibilities for effective downtown improvement.
3. Extend the life of the downtown TIF district.

4. Stimulate residential development.
5. Improve the homeless/vagrancy problem.
6. Complete negotiations on the new County Courthouse.
7. Build a downtown square/park.
8. Improve on-street parking management/operations.
9. Redesign Chicago Avenue as an urban, multi-modal street.

### Long-Term Improvements

The essential need to move the downtown in a positive direction justifies a focus on the short-term action agenda. This said, very significant longer-term improvements are also important and should be recognized as a key part of the plan. These longer-term improvements include:

1. Mixed use redevelopment on larger sites, which would include ownership housing.
2. Rehabilitation of office space in the Rialto Theater to improve the facility’s financial performance.
3. Recruitment of a major new anchor use on the southeast corner of Chicago Street and Jefferson Street, which could take the form of a new university, a corporate headquarters, or high-rise mixed use building.
4. New transit-oriented residential development south of the Gateway Transportation Center.
5. Redevelopment of the existing Will County Courthouse facility.
6. Creation of a new downtown park along the Des Plaines River, which would include a protected lagoon for small boat recreation.

### Conclusion

The transformation of downtown Joliet into a vital and successful urban place appears very achievable, over time. The southwest metro area needs an authentic urban center, and Joliet is best poised to fulfill that need. The improvement strategy “a Mecca for young adults” builds upon the downtown’s existing strengths and mitigates its weaknesses. Implementing the short-term Action Agenda will put the downtown on the road to revitalization. Included in this agenda is the “reorganization of stakeholder responsibilities,” which is essential for effective implementation. The biggest threat to fulfilling downtown Joliet’s potential is inertia.



# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE AND GOALS

## 1.1 Project Background

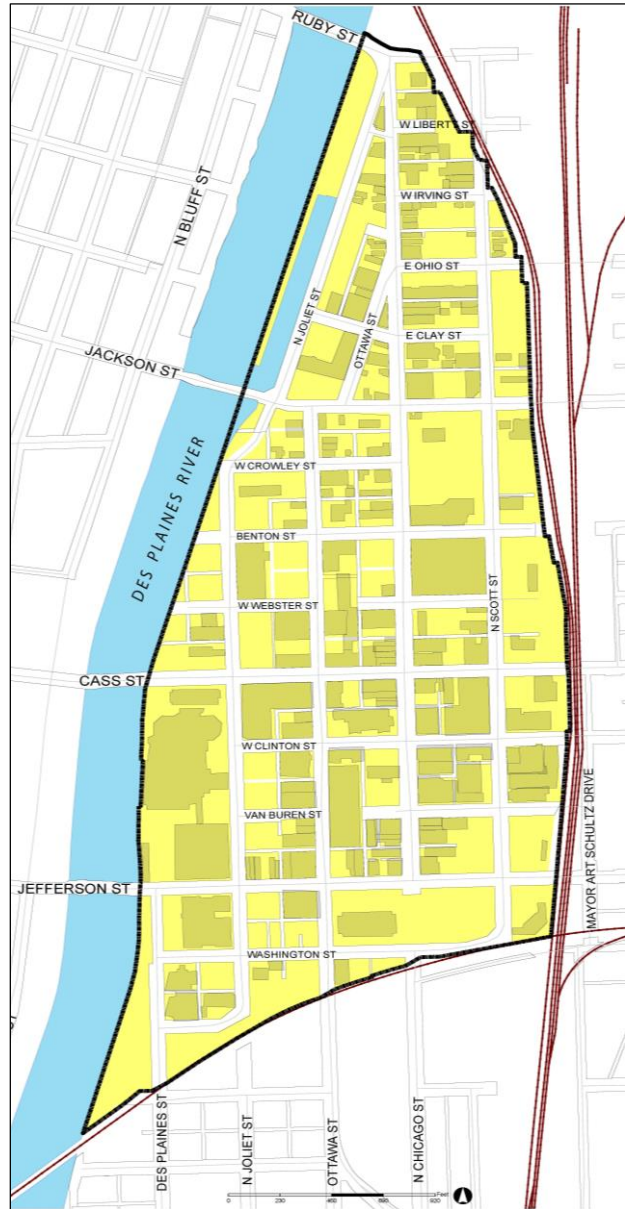
Downtown Joliet is a place of amazing potential and longstanding challenges. It has the potential to become an authentic mixed-use urban center serving the southwest metro area and beyond. Downtown Joliet possesses a combination of attractions and facilities found only in regional centers; a highly developed transportation system, Will County government facilities and entertainment/ cultural attractions that draw visitors from throughout the Chicago region. The downtown is also home to two institutions of higher learning, Joliet Junior College and the downtown campus of the University of St. Francis. It is known as the start of historic Route 66 and for cultural venues such as the Rialto Theater and the Historic Museum.

The downtown’s challenges include both real and perceived challenges. The downtown’s role and function has changed over the last sixty years, consistent with American urban trends. Once the focus of the community’s retail and office markets, trends have caused those uses to shift from the downtown to “greenfield” sites located close to interstate highways. The downtown’s real estate market has suffered as a result. Significant vacancy exists in downtown buildings. As retail and office use has declined, social service uses in and around the downtown, including homeless shelters, have filled the void. The decrease in traditional business activity and the increase in social service activity, and to some degree vagrancy, has given rise to negative perceptions about the downtown.

The impetus for undertaking the Joliet Downtown Plan at this time is the confluence of several major projects and opportunities that could act as catalysts for broad-based downtown improvement. Forming strategies on how best to leverage these major projects and opportunities is key. These major projects and opportunities include:

**Transportation Center:** Development of new buildings/facilities for Metra commuter rail service (two lines), Amtrak service, and Pace suburban bus service. The Transportation Center will advance multi-modal transportation service linking downtown Joliet to the rest of the community and to the region. The upgraded transportation service may serve as a draw for new uses and investment in the downtown area. Construction is now underway.

**Will County Courthouse:** Proposed construction of a new Will County Courthouse would include a consolidation of County offices into the new building



**FIGURE 1**  
**Study Area Boundaries**

and creating opportunities for the redevelopment of several key sites. Negotiations with Will County are ongoing, with completion of the new facility likely five years away.

**Joliet Junior College Expansion:** Nearly completed, the expansion includes a new building facing Chicago Street, elevating the profile of the college within the downtown and enlivening Chicago Street.



*Artist's rendering of new Joliet Junior College building*

**University of St. Francis Expansion:** Recently completed, the University of St. Francis added new classroom space in an elegantly rehabbed building located at 5 East Van Buren Street, increasing their presence in the downtown and complementing their existing downtown space.

**Evergreen Terrace Redevelopment:** The City of Joliet recently won a court battle to purchase the Evergreen Terrace housing development, a facility housing Section 8 tenants. Evergreen Terrace, located immediately west of the downtown added to the negative perceptions of the downtown. Plans for redevelopment are currently underway and will lead to a new mixed-income community that will be an asset for the downtown.

The addition of these new facilities to the downtown's major anchors of the Rialto Theater, Harrah's Casino, the Joliet Slammers Stadium, and the Joliet Area Historic Museum create a roster of attractions and activities that rivals any suburban downtown in the Chicago area. While the downtown possesses these high-level attractions, reinvestment in the properties between the anchors has languished. This Downtown Joliet Plan is intended to define a strategy for improvement that will leverage the downtown's assets to drive sustained, broad-based improvement.

## 1.2 Focus of the Plan

Given the current context of the downtown, this Joliet Downtown Plan must address the needs of downtown stakeholders and the community at large. The Plan needs to chart a course that will lead to increased private-sector investment in the downtown. The major projects and opportunities discussed in 1.1 Project Background, while representing key assets, are all public or institutional projects. That all the new major projects are public/institutional highlights the absence and need for increased private-sector investment.

Consequently, the Plan's focus is on identifying a sound strategy to induce downtown investment and a related action agenda to organize stakeholder to take a series of strategic actions that will lead to increased investment. Specific points of focus in the Plan include:

- Assess market conditions and identify opportunities for new development.
- Define an over-arching improvement strategy that aligns with market conditions.
- Identify key short-term public improvements needed to stimulate private investment.
- Formulate an action agenda to define key initiatives for stakeholders to implement.

## 1.3 Downtown Plan Goals

With the broad focus of the Joliet Downtown Plan clearly defined, the following specific goals for the Plan are outlined below.

- Achieve stakeholder consensus regarding downtown needs and initiatives.
- Frame the downtown real estate market to define the best development opportunities.
- Define a viable downtown improvement strategy.
- Reorganize stakeholder responsibilities to more effectively pursue opportunities.
- Identify potential redevelopment projects.
- Define a short-term public improvement program.
- Obtain City commitments for key initiatives.
- Identify ways to improve downtown operations and functionality.

# CHAPTER 2: EXISTING CONDITIONS

## 2.1 Overview

The analysis of existing conditions is essential to defining the downtown’s challenges, assets and opportunities. The understanding of existing conditions can then lead to identifying successful improvement strategies. This chapter summarizes the extensive analysis of existing downtown conditions performed by Camiros. The components of existing conditions analysis discussed in this chapter are:

*Land Use*

*Transportation and Parking*

*Building Stock*

*Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses*

## 2.2 Land Use

Existing land use conditions reveal much about the downtown’s assets, opportunities and challenges. Understanding the downtown’s land use characteristics requires examining conditions from different perspectives. The broadest perspective is looking at the downtown’s land use pattern as a whole, which is shown in Figure 2, [Existing Land Use](#). The proportional composition of land use in the downtown is represented in Table 1, [Land Use Composition](#). Key characteristics of the overall pattern of land use include:

The largest single use of land is **parking**, comprised of both surface parking and parking garages. This is not entirely surprising or alarming since parking supports all land uses and relatively few downtown uses supply their own parking on-site.

**Commercial use**, including mixed use buildings with commercial use, is the second largest land use. This use is considered essential for a healthy downtown and includes stores, restaurants and various types of business establishments. The size of the commercial use component is somewhat deceptive, as the downtown does not appear to have a strong commercial component. Harrah’s Casino is the largest single commercial use in the downtown, representing a complex of gaming space, hotel, restaurants and entertainment space on over two city blocks of land. The land use analysis also does not take into account vacant or partially vacant commercial buildings, which also contributes to the over-representation of commercial use.

TABLE 1:  
**Land Use Composition**

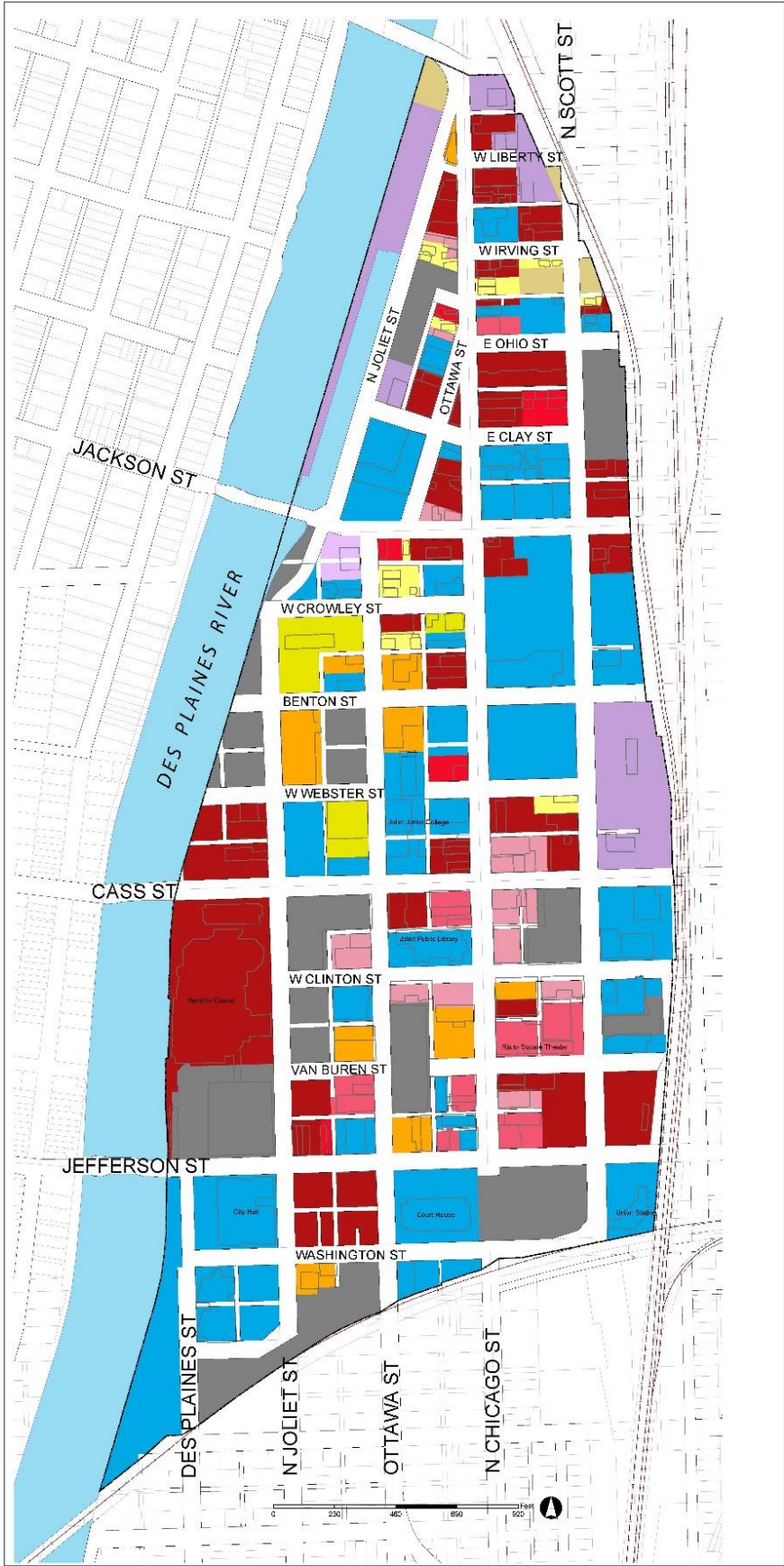
Land Use Type	Acres
Commercial	24.8 ac
Commercial Restaurant	1.3 ac
Mixed Use Commercial Office	2.3 ac
Mixed Use Commercial Residential	3.3 ac
Industrial	7.7 ac
Office	4.5 ac
Parking	63.8 ac
Public/Institutional	35.9 ac
Residential Single-Family	1.7 ac
Residential Multi-Family	2.5 ac
Utility	0.5 ac
Vacant Land	1.1 ac
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>149.4 ac</b>

Source: Camiros, Ltd.  
City of Joliet

The third largest land use is **public/institutional use**, comprised of governmental uses, places of worship, cultural facilities, schools and universities, and public transportation facilities. This reflects the downtown’s role as the focus of city and county governments, as well as a regional transportation hub. While strong public/institutional use creates prominence and draws people to the downtown, it tends not to have strong synergistic relationships with other uses.

**Office Use**, including mixed use buildings with office use, is a traditional use in the downtown that has declined steadily over the past decades. Office use consists of professional/business office space that is generally not of a retail nature. Typical examples include attorney offices and administrative offices for businesses. This use excludes governmental office use. Office use was historically more prominent in downtown Joliet, with a strong connection to governmental uses, but has declined as office users has relocated to “greenfield” sites.





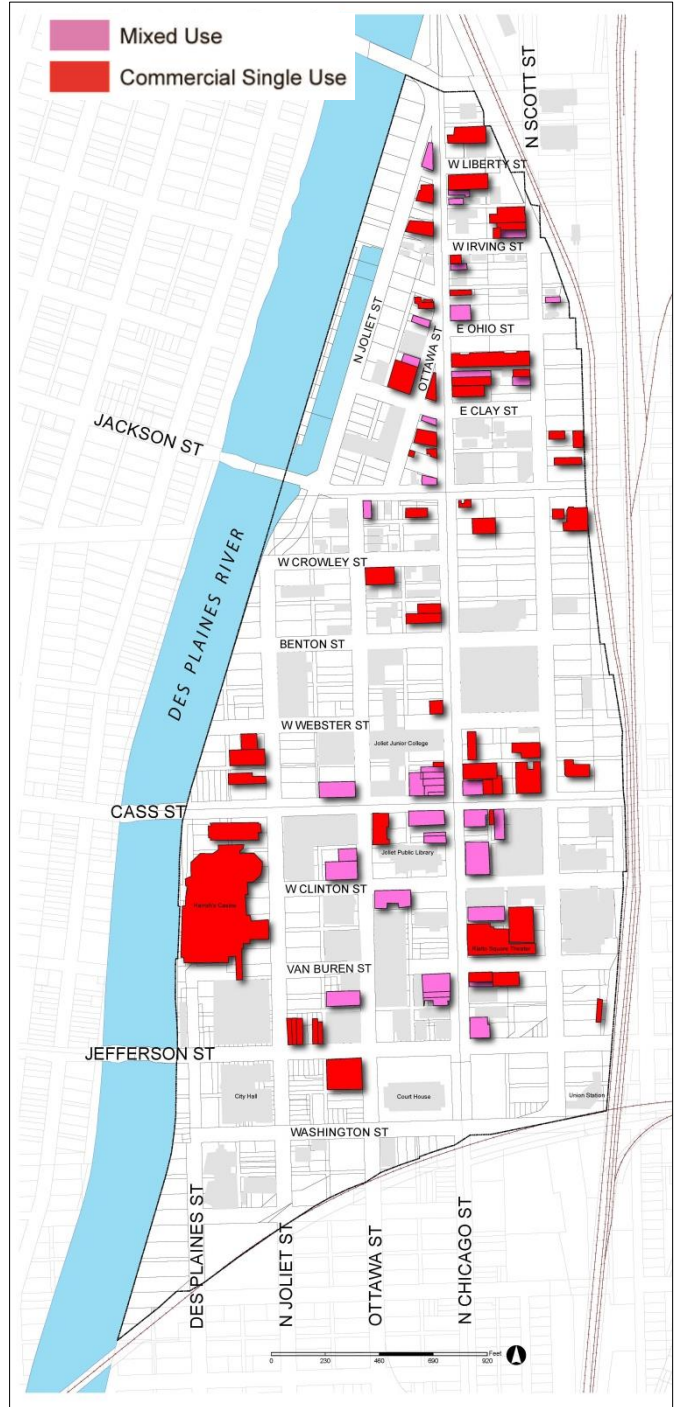
**FIGURE 2**  
**Existing Land Use**



**Residential use** is not well represented in the downtown, particularly the downtown core. Historically, the downtown did not function as a residential area. Residential use has been added to the downtown’s composition of land use in more recent decades. The portion of the downtown planning area located north of Cass Street has more of a neighborhood character and residential use has historically been a part of the land use pattern in this area.

The downtown can be thought of in terms of three distinct functional subareas. The southern subarea, located south of Cass Street, can be thought of as the core of the downtown. This is the portion of the downtown that contains the most prominent uses, including the Will County Courthouse, The Rialto, Harrah’s Casino and other major uses. Middle subarea, located between Cass Street and Jackson Street, is a transitional area that contains some prominent uses as well as lower intensity uses common in typical neighborhood settings. Prominent uses in the middle subarea include Joliet Junior College, the U.S. Post Office, and various Will County offices. The northern subarea is clearly of a neighborhood character. Land uses here are oriented to serve the local community and tend not to draw users from the region, as many of the prominent uses do in the other two subareas.

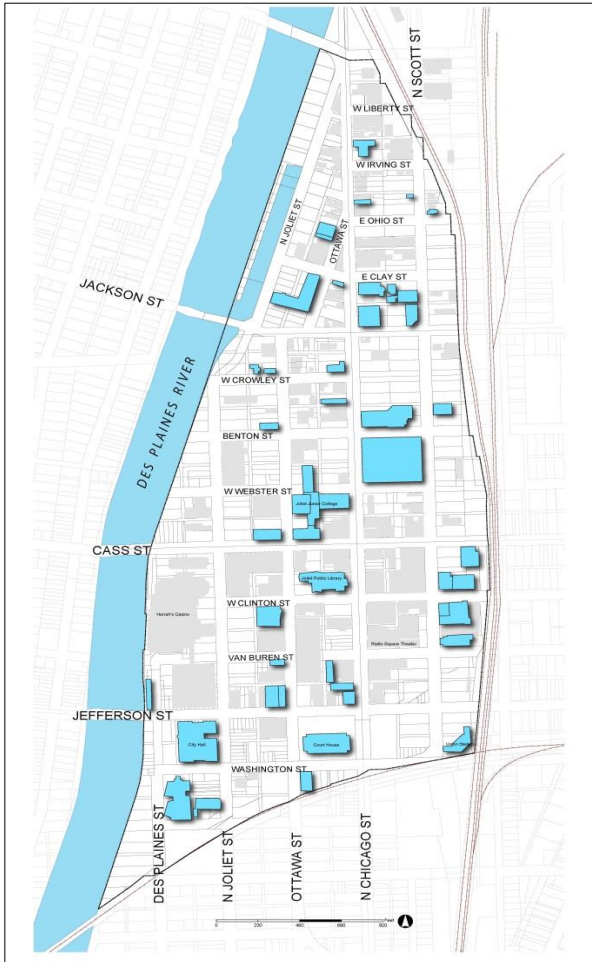
Examining various elements of land use in isolation from other uses helps to define the downtown’s pattern of land use and its functionality. Figure 3, Commercial/Mixed-Use, illustrates the pattern of buildings in commercial use, as well as those in commercial/office and commercial/residential use. Figure 3 shows the size/scale of Harrah’s Casino as the largest commercial use. It also illustrates the functional pattern of commercial use, which falls into two areas. The southern commercial/mixed use area associated with the downtown core is located between Webster Street on the north and Van Buren Street on the south. The buildings in this area tend to be taller and the overall intensity of use is higher. Commercial uses in this area have the opportunity to serve regional customers. The northern commercial/mixed use area is located between Benton Street and Ruby Street and reflects commercial use at a more neighborhood scale. The buildings are predominantly one and two-story buildings and serve customers largely from the local community.



**FIGURE 3**  
**Commercial/Mixed Use**

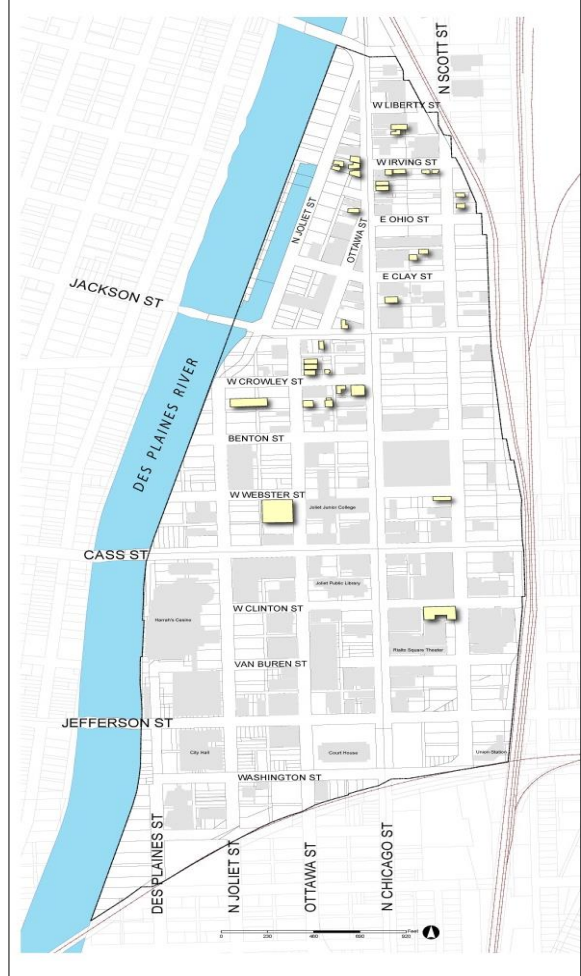


Figure 4, Public Use, shows the distribution of public buildings within the downtown, exclusive of parking and accessory land. This shows a fairly even distribution of public buildings throughout the downtown, although the height and intensity of public buildings in the southern core area is much greater.



**FIGURE 4  
Public Use**

is much more common in the northern portion of the study area, north of Benton Street, where the urban form is much more neighborhood in character.



**FIGURE 5  
Residential Use**

Figure 5, Residential Use, shows the distribution of residential use. The pattern of buildings in residential use illustrates the relative absence of residential use from the core of the downtown as a principal use. Only one building, the Louis Joliet Apartments at the corner of Webster and Scott Street, is classified as a residential building. However, several mixed use buildings exist in which upper story residential use is combined with first floor commercial or office use. Mixed-use buildings are normally the building type most often associated with residential use in downtown settings. Residential use as a primary use

**2.3 Transportation & Parking**

The transportation and parking analysis performed by Camiros and Charlier Associates was done to support the focus of this Plan, which is to identify a strategy to induce new development and private-sector investment. This work examines the functional aspects of the transportation system and the need for key upgrades and enhancements. The transportation system involves a number of components, which are addressed individually, below.

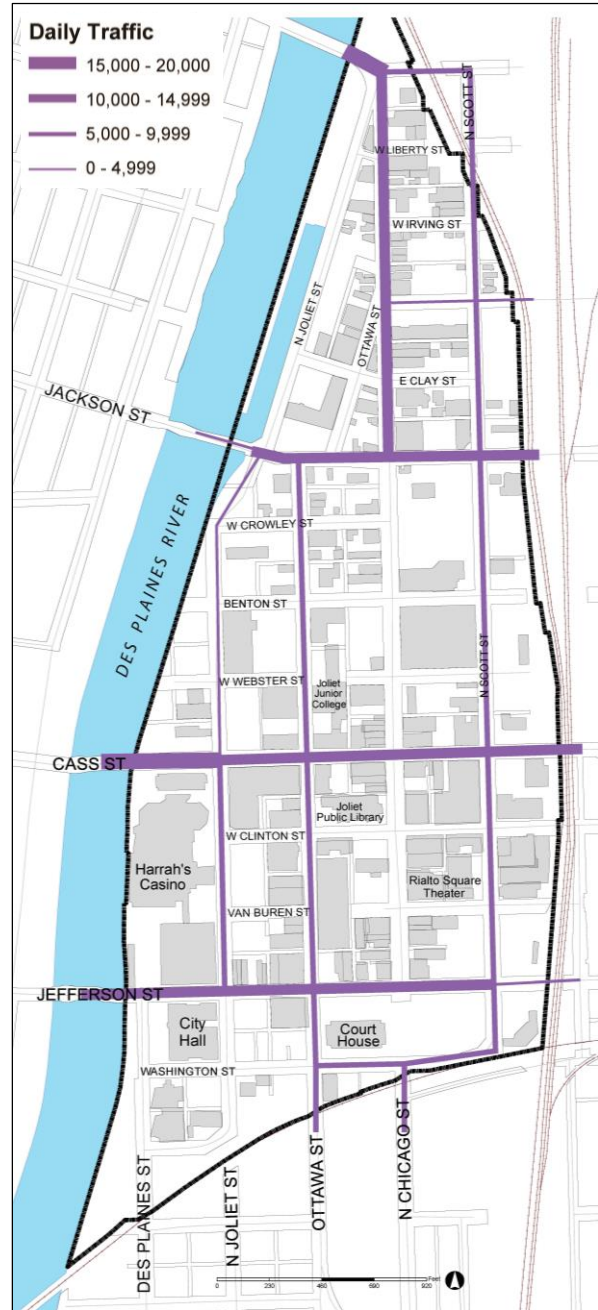
**System Overview.** The transportation system serving the downtown is multi-modal in nature, comprised of vehicular, pedestrian, commuter rail, Amtrak and suburban bus modes of transportation. The enhancements underway involving commuter rail, Amtrak and suburban bus modes are recognized as a major upgrade, which may induce various private and institutional uses to locate in the downtown. Evaluating further upgrades to the transit system is beyond the scope of this study.

The vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle modes of transportation are somewhat easier to modify. These are the focus of the Plan’s assessment of potential upgrades to the existing transportation system.

The vehicular transportation system is defined by north-south and east-west one-way pairs of Scott Street/Ottawa Street and Jefferson Street/Cass Street, respectfully. These one-way pairs are under IDOT jurisdiction and any modification of these right-of-ways require IDOT approval.

The layout of streets vis-à-vis the river and railroads constrains the connections between the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. The Des Plaines River defines the downtown’s western boundary and separates the downtown from neighborhoods to the west. Bridges at Jefferson, Cass, Jackson and Ruby Streets provide connections to these neighborhoods. To the north, south and east, railroads separate the downtown from adjacent neighborhoods, with connections provided by various street viaducts. The separation from adjacent neighborhoods is both an advantage and disadvantage. The advantage is that the downtown’s geography is distinct and separate from adjacent neighborhoods. The downtown can define itself independently from the adjacent neighborhoods, and, downtown redevelopment will less constrained by the condition of surrounding neighborhoods. The disadvantage is that trips to the downtown become more of an effort. Walking to the downtown from adjacent neighborhoods will be reduced by the distance and the visual separations. This situation is exacerbated by safety concerns.

**Traffic Volumes.** Traffic congestion does not appear to be a major problem for the downtown. The one-way pairs move traffic efficiently through the downtown. Traffic volumes on major streets suggest healthy vehicular activity, but not severe congestion, as illustrated by Figure 6, Traffic Volumes. The heaviest traffic volumes are on short segment of Cass Street between Joliet Street and the river, which is at 15,000 20,000 average daily traffic (ADT). Other volumes on



**FIGURE 6**  
**Traffic Volumes**

the one-way pairs are at 10,000 – 15,000 ADT. Most other streets in the downtown carry traffic of 5,000 – 10,000 ADT, with some streets in the downtown having less than 5,000 ADT. It should be noted that the bridges across the Des Plaines River are drawbridges that lift and open to allow barges and other boat traffic pass periodically, creating congestion and delays that negatively affect the downtown. This is a condition that is not likely to change in the foreseeable future.

A closer look at traffic volumes reveals a key challenge for the downtown, generating activity. As mentioned, a number of streets have traffic volume of less than 5,000 ADT, which includes Chicago Street. Chicago Street is the downtown’s “Main Street” and the focus of retail and entertainment activity. During much of the day, Chicago Street is largely devoid of activity, including car, pedestrian and bike traffic. This absence of activity is a detriment to attracting new development and private-sector investment. The ill-advised closing of the segment of Chicago Street between Jefferson and Washington Street long ago has much to do with this low level of vehicular traffic. However, low levels of activity are also due to the underutilization of space in downtown buildings for stores, offices and residential apartments. There is significant vacant space in downtown buildings, which will be addressed in Chapter 3 – Market Assessment.

**Truck Traffic.** Truck traffic is an aspect of the transportation system that is a concern to stakeholders for its possible negative effects on the downtown. According to data from IDOT, the downtown’s one-way pair system carries the bulk of the truck traffic. The volume of truck traffic varies between 300 – 500 trucks per day on various segments of the one-way pairs. Truck traffic does impact the ambiance for pedestrians. However, truck traffic is a fact of life, as is bus traffic and other large, noisy vehicles. Little truck traffic occurs on Chicago Street, Van Buren and Clinton Street, so truck traffic cannot be blamed for low levels of pedestrians and activity in general. Camrios and Charlier believe that truck traffic is not a significant impediment to the improvement of the downtown.

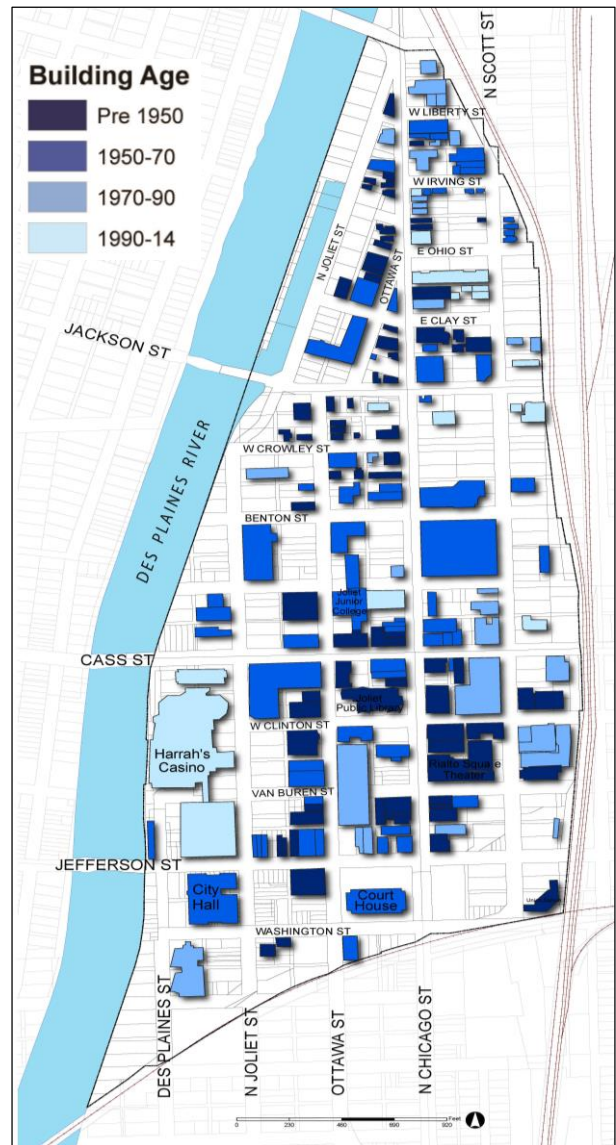
**Pedestrian/Bike Transportation.** Pedestrian activity ebbs and flows in relation to specific uses and events. The Will County Courthouse, City Hall and Harrah’s Casino generate significant pedestrian activity. The Rialto also generates significant pedestrian activity on performance nights and during special events. However, the observed level of pedestrian activity in the downtown overall is low and is not commensurate with that of a successful downtown.

Bike transportation was also assessed and represents an area of potential enhancement. Three major regional bike trails converge near downtown Joliet. The Old Plank Road, Wauponsee Glacial Trail and I & M Canal State Trail run through the downtown, using street routes to connect segments of dedicate bike paths. The Cass Street Bridge is used to cross the Des Plaines River. If Joliet’s downtown were more bike friendly, it might draw regional bike

tourists. Given the distances and separations between the downtown and the adjacent neighborhoods, bikes could also be a good transportation mode for nearby residents to access the downtown. The downtown is not particularly bike-friendly and enhancements for bicycle transportation could be important to increasing the overall level of activity in the downtown.

## 2.4 Building Stock

The building stock in downtown Joliet represents both an asset and liability. As shown in Figure 7, Building Age, much of the downtown’s building stock dates from the pre-1950 period, creating a great sense of historic character. The configuration of buildings, both new and old, creates a consistent street wall, which makes for a

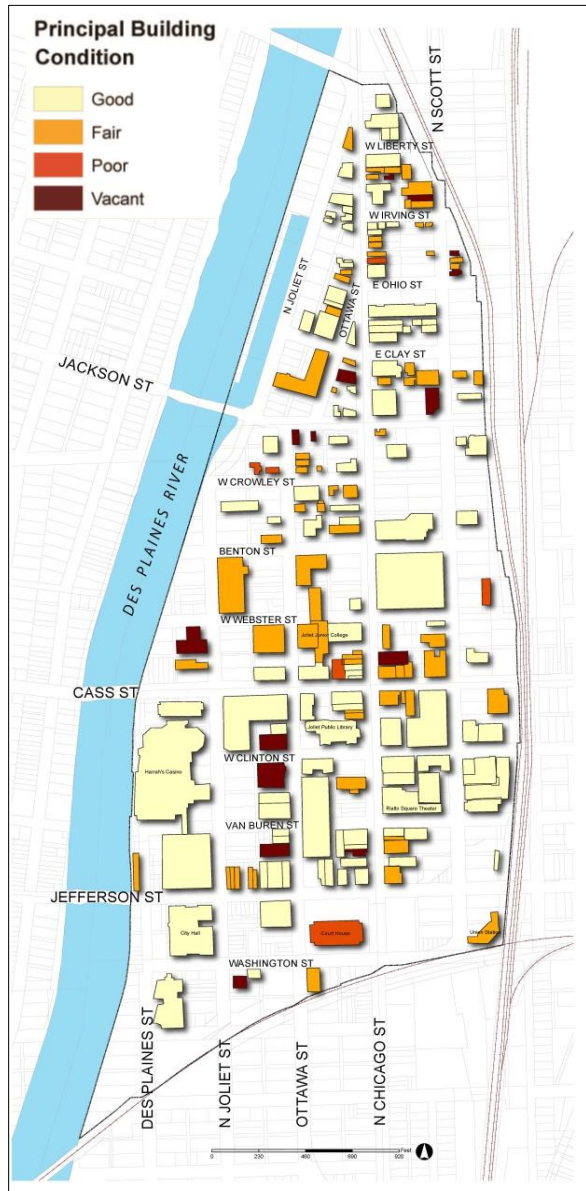


**FIGURE 7**  
**Building Age**



more pedestrian-friendly downtown. The exterior condition of the building stock, based on “windshield surveys,” was generally good, as shown in Figure 8, Building Condition.

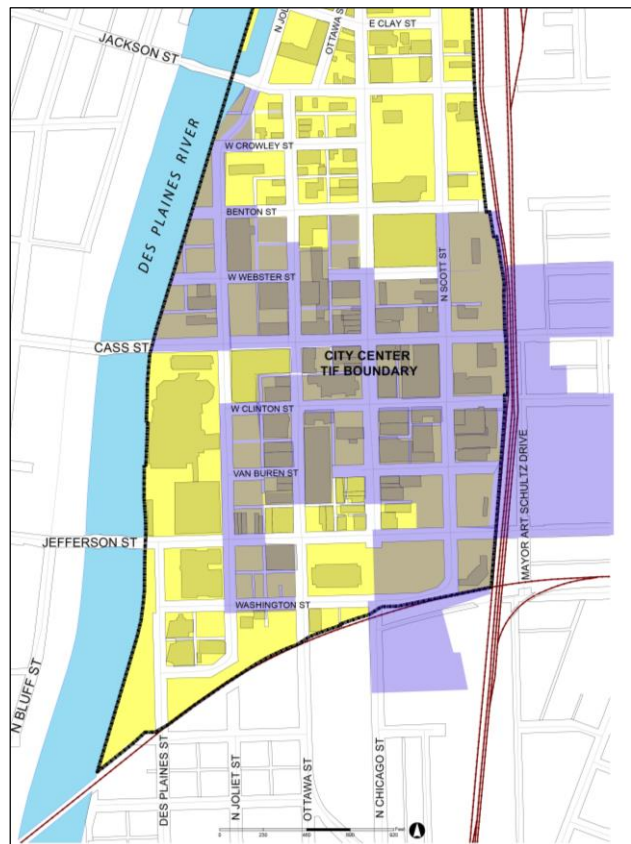
However, the good exterior condition of the buildings does not address the lack of modernization and interior amenities needed to make these buildings competitive in the market. With the generally low lease rates and low occupancy the downtown experiences, the cost to modernize buildings is difficult to justify.



**FIGURE 8**  
**Building Condition**

## 2.5 Economic Development

Downtown Joliet has been the subject of significant economic development activity advanced by the City of Joliet. For example, they City was a primary funder of Silver Cross Field, the home of the Joliet Slammers minor league baseball team and venue for a variety of entertainment/performance events. Currently, the City is in negotiations with Will County on the development of a new courthouse facility, which will require a City funding contribution. The City also has put into place the City Center TIF District and a special service area. Clearly, the essential pieces for effective economic development are in place, although the TIF district has only seven years of life remaining and the special service area must be reconstituted in 2016. While the tools are in place for effective economic development, a sharper focus and proactive use of these tools is needed to achieve more private-sector investment. Figure 9, City Center TIF District shows the location of the downtown TIF district.



**FIGURE 9**  
**City Center TIF District**

## 2.6 Strengths and Weaknesses

As stated in the introduction to this report, downtown Joliet possesses an amazing combination of assets, potentials, challenges and weaknesses. Camiros believes Joliet’s downtown possesses significant amenities that distinguish the downtown as a regionally significant place. These amenities, plus its size and density, give downtown Joliet the potential to become a successful sub-regional urban center. In order to do so, however, the downtown must overcome some longstanding challenges. Outlined below is a summary of Camiros’ assessment of strengths and weaknesses.

**Strengths:** Downtown Joliet possesses a series of primary strengths. Primary strengths are those that should serve as the foundation for the downtown improvement strategy. The downtown also has several secondary strengths, which are not specifically discussed, but are recognized as assets that can help advance improvement when they align with one or more primary strengths.

**Entertainment and Cultural Attractions.** Camiros believes the greatest strength of the downtown are its entertainment and cultural attractions. These put downtown Joliet “on the map” and draw large numbers of people to the downtown, in spite of its weaknesses. Large venues like the Rialto Theater, Silver Cross Field, and Harrah’s Casino are known regionally and draw many visitors who associate downtown Joliet with positive entertainment/cultural experiences. Smaller venues like MoeJoes nightclub are equally successful, but on a smaller scale, drawing smaller but devoted crowds for popular musical acts. These entertainment venues help support a small but important group of restaurants and bars. Included in this discussion is the highly successful special event program carried out by the City Center Partnership, which organizes a program of community events and celebrations throughout the year. The downtown’s entertainment and cultural attractions represent a successful component of the downtown’s use mix, something that can be built upon to draw development and private-sector investment.



**Rialto Theater Building**



**The Rialto Theater’s performance space.**

**Government Services/Facilities.** Downtown Joliet is the seat of City and County government. The synergistic benefits of government facilities is not as great as in times past, when many businesses valued a location close to government functions. Still, Joliet’s role as a major seat of government is very important. Government is the downtown’s largest employer and generates significant activity within the downtown. Government uses create a sense of prominence for the downtown, which can be helpful in drawing other users. Lastly, government uses cover a large land area within the downtown, which is important given the high level of vacancy in downtown buildings.

**Transportation Hub.** Downtown Joliet functions as a regional transportation hub, which will strengthen significantly with the completion of the Transportation Center. The combination of two Metra commuter rail lines, Amtrak service and Pace bus service represent a level of transportation access and service rarely found outside of a large city. The Transportation Center will help facilitate greater access to the different modes of transportation by users, thereby achieving higher leveraging of these assets. It is very possible that large companies or institutions may want to locate in downtown Joliet to take advantage of these transportation assets. Upgrading pedestrian and bike transportation systems would make the downtown’s role as a transportation hub even stronger.



**Rendering of the Gateway Transportation Center**



**Urban Character.** Joliet was a thriving, independent city before it became a suburb of Chicago. The downtown’s character is urban and dense. This character is fundamentally different than that of a typical suburban downtown, which often starts out as a rural crossroads cluster of buildings or as commuter rail stop. Downtown Joliet’s size, measured in building square footage, is much larger than that of a typical suburban downtown. While market weakness has resulted in the underutilization of this building space, downtown Joliet is capable of supporting a wide array of uses, making it fundamentally more interesting and diverse than other suburban downtowns. This urban character aligns with America’s orientation to urban culture and places. The downtown’s fabric can be a strength in its successful evolution as a regional urban center.



**Downtown Joliet Character; Chicago & Clinton Street**

**Weaknesses:** The downtown’s weaknesses tend to be interrelated. Shifting trends in urban development in the post-war period resulted in the relocation of many businesses from the downtown to “greenfield” locations. This weakened the downtown market and gave rise to negative perceptions about the downtown within the community. A discussion of individual weaknesses is presented below.

**Negative Perceptions.** Camiros believes the most significant weakness is the negative perception of the downtown within the community, and beyond. These negative perceptions take a number of forms. First and foremost are negative perceptions about crime and safety. While the perception of the threat to safety may be somewhat exaggerated, there is some basis for this attitude. The presence of homeless persons and the low level of business/commercial activity makes many people uncomfortable. Adding business, commercial and residential activity is probably the most effective way to counter such negative perceptions. Better management of the homeless issues is also achievable.

**Weak Market Conditions.** This weakness embodies a multitude of issues. First, it must be stressed that the urban trends that led to the exodus of many downtown businesses could not be avoided. Weakening real estate

market conditions were inevitable. Only relatively recently have trends begun to “come full circle” to make possible reinvestment and meaningful improvement in the downtown. Hopefully, the downtown’s real estate market has bottomed out, setting the stage for growth. This growth must occur incrementally over time, with reinvestment in property aligning with current market forces.

**Weak Commercial & Retail Component.** The small number of commercial/retail businesses in the downtown is a weakness. It suggests that the downtown has little to offer shoppers and visitors. The downtown’s large size and high level of vacancy makes the commercial offerings seem even smaller.

**Poor Regional Accessibility.** While the downtown is highly accessible by rail, it has relatively poor vehicular regional accessibility. Better/easier access to I-80, the downtown could attract employment uses that value this kind of accessibility. While the distance between the downtown and I-80 cannot be shortened, accessibility can be improved. The interchange at Chicago Street is a direct link to the downtown. Transforming the segment of Chicago Street between the interchange and the downtown into a formal approach would significantly improve the downtown’s link to the regional roadway system.

**Typical view of the Chicago Street approach to downtown, showing widespread vacant land and under-developed**



**property.**

**Poor Neighborhood Connections.** Downtown Joliet does not have close connections to adjacent neighborhoods, which would facilitate greater use of the downtown by nearby residents. In addition, the closest neighborhoods to the downtown are, for the most part, low-moderate income neighborhoods. The dynamic between the down-town and adjacent neighborhoods reinforces negative perceptions.



**Cass Street viaduct under railroads; typical connection to neighborhoods.**

## CHAPTER 3: MARKET ASSESSMENT

The market assessment of the downtown and potential development opportunities is a major part of this study. Consistent with its results-oriented focus, improvement, strategies for the downtown must be aligned with market forces. Improvement of the downtown must begin with development projects supported by market conditions, however weak the market may be.

The market assessment for the Joliet Downtown Plan was performed by Gruen + Gruen Associates as a subconsultant to Camiros. The following materials are excerpts from the full Gruen + Gruen Associates analysis, entitled *Assessment of and Strategies for a Vital Downtown Joliet*, which has been submitted separately to the City Center Partnership and the City of Joliet, and is available for review in its entirety.

### 3.1 Summary of Findings

#### ***Downtown Land Use and Building Space Composition Indicate Downward Shifts Have Occurred and Limited Private Market Demand for Downtown Space***

- Land uses including tax exempt and public use property, vacant land, and uses not typically associated with a healthy and vital Downtown such as industrial and automotive uses comprise the largest land use category consisting of approximately 61 acres or 73 percent of the Downtown study area. Private use land which includes all retail and commercial, office, and residential uses comprises another 19 acres of land or only about 23 percent of the total land area. • Over 80 percent of the Downtown building inventory was built pre-1950. Less than five percent of the building inventory has been built since 1990.
- The Downtown study area includes a very low taxable property value base of approximately \$29 million for private buildings. Over half of the base is comprised of office uses which had an estimated total market value of only \$15.3 million in 2013. Commercial/retail uses comprised the second largest source of market value at only about \$10 million. Residential uses comprised the smallest share of the property value base at nearly 12 percent or only \$3.6 million. On a per square foot basis, the market value for the Downtown is only

approximately \$42 per square foot of building space and \$40 per square foot of land. Office uses had the highest per square foot values of approximately \$52 per square foot of building space and \$53 per square foot of land. Residential and commercial/retail property values are estimated to be in the \$30 to \$35 per square foot range.

#### ***Employment Shifts Reflect Decline in Retail Base and Retail Demand, Decline in Private Office Space Demand, and Shift to Government Uses in Downtown***

- The Downtown area contained over 5,200 total jobs in 2011, up slightly from 5,000 jobs in 2002. Education, although a small employment sector, has been the fastest growing industry in the Downtown over the past 10 years. This is consistent with the expansion of the University of St. Francis and the Joliet Junior College. Sectors associated with office space demand and support for retail and eating and drinking activities, financial activities, professional and business services, and administration, & support, waste management & remediation each declined over the decade.
- Retail trade jobs decreased from 109 jobs in 2002 to only 71 jobs by 2011 consistent with the downward shift in retail uses in Downtown. In contrast, government employment expanded over the 2002-2011 period, growing from over 3,000 to 3,400 jobs in 2011. Government and educational and healthcare employment make up an extremely high 70 percent of the Downtown's job base in 2011 and offset the decline in employment in other sectors.

#### ***Land Use and Economic Base Changes Reflect Secular, Long-Term Decline in Market Support for Retail, Eating and Drinking, and Private Office Uses in Downtown Joliet***

- In 1975, the Downtown contained more than 300 establishments on Chicago, Ottawa, Clinton, and Van Buren Streets. By 2013, the number of establishments located on these streets declined to less than 170. Since 1985 the number of businesses on Chicago, Ottawa, Clinton, and Van Buren Streets has declined, with the number of traditional retail businesses experiencing a decline of approximately 75 percent. In 1975, these streets had a total of

more than 80 eating and drinking and retail businesses, but by 2013 this number had fallen to only 13 businesses in these sectors.

- The number of professional and business services businesses in Downtown has declined by about 50 percent between 1985 and 2013 to 75 businesses.

**Principal Conclusion of Patterns of Economic and Land Use Change**

The Downtown has been affected by the same downward shifts in office and traditional retail uses that have been noted in many other smaller-sized central cities. The Downtown has not shared in retail growth proportionally as much of the newer centers providing both shopper/comparison and convenience/necessity goods have been developed outside the urban core on the far west side of Joliet. Like many smaller-sized central cities, Downtown Joliet experienced a decline when retailers and office users moved out of the Downtown to more accessible and larger suburban agglomerations. Sears, J.C. Penney, and the Kline’s department store (all of which were previously located on Chicago Street) completed moving out of Downtown Joliet by the late 1970s, at about the same time the Louis Joliet Mall, a highly accessible 947,000-square-foot regional mall in Joliet opened southeast of I-55 and U.S Highway 30. Other large retail centers such as Joliet Commons, a 200,000-square-foot community center anchored by Target, PetSmart, Old Navy, Guitar Center, Office Max, and Jo-Ann Fabrics, Louis Joliet Pointe, and free-standing big box stores have located around the regional mall.

**3.2 Residential Market Overview**

Housing submarkets are defined as geographic areas in which properties of similar ages, physical quality, and characteristics tend to rent or sell for about the same price at any given time. Typically, the demand for a geographic area is relatively homogeneous so that if market prices per square foot for similar housing products tend to be comparable, the geographic area comprises a single housing market or submarket. The Downtown represents a distinct submarket with only two residential projects of any meaningful size located in Downtown Joliet – Louis Joliet Apartments and Senior Suites, as shown Table 2, Larger Residential Buildings.

<b>Name of Project/Address</b>	<b>Number of Units #</b>	<b>Occupancy %</b>
Louis Joliet Apartments 22-26 E. Clinton St.	61	92
Senior Suites of Joliet 215 N. Ottawa	90	100
	151	
Source: Gruen Gruen + Associates		

The Louis Joliet project is a mix of market rate and subsidized units. Originally built as a hotel in 1927, the building was bought by the current owner in 2000 from the City through its TIF district. The developer used federal affordable housing tax credits and TIF incentives to convert the property into apartments with 20 percent of the units subsidized. The units are a mix of one- and two-bedroom units ranging in size from 751 square feet to 1,104 square feet. Monthly rents range from \$656 to \$1,100 (approximately \$12 per square foot per year). The occupancy is currently 92 percent and according to the leasing agent, occupancy has increased over time. The units experience relatively high levels of turnover. Renters primarily come from within Joliet and nearby communities.

The Senior Suites of Joliet development is a conversion of an old YMCA building into 90 independent senior living units. The 71,940-square-foot building was renovated and an additional 25,160 square feet of new construction was completed in 2008.<sup>7</sup> The units are a mix of studios and one-bedroom apartments with the one-bedroom units averaging about 1,000 square feet in size. Monthly rents range from \$419 to \$848 for studios and \$449 to \$954 (\$5.39 to \$11.45 per square foot per year) for one-bedroom units. According to the leasing agent, the project is 100 percent leased and only occasionally are two or three units available. The building’s historic designation allowed the developer to utilized historic tax credits. Residents must meet certain income guidelines.<sup>8</sup>

7:<http://www.walshgroup.com/portfolio/commercial+building/senior-living/senior-suitesjoliet.html>.

8:[http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2006-11-26/business/0611250261\\_1\\_historic\\_ymca-affordable-apartment-projects-redevelopment](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2006-11-26/business/0611250261_1_historic_ymca-affordable-apartment-projects-redevelopment)

In addition to the two apartment projects shown on the table above, some of the Downtown commercial buildings have apartments on upper floors. According to one property owner which rents apartments above the retail store operated by the property owner, four units have remained generally well occupied and monthly rents range from \$700 to \$800 for 1,200 to 1,400 square foot units. The monthly gross rents equate to \$6.86 to 7.00 per square foot per year. Another apartment above a 2,000-square foot commercial space is rented by the owner of the business leasing the commercial space. The rent equates to about \$6.60 per square foot per year. The tenants attracted to units above ground floor space include students or people which work Downtown and are looking for low cost apartments convenient to school or workplaces. Rents have remained flat.

The Downtown demographics and rents differ from those associated with the apartment projects in the broader housing market. Other apartment supply options are located within Joliet but are also older and/or include subsidized units. Accordingly, in addition to conducting interviews with the representative of the only two larger multi-family projects described above and an interview with an owner of apartment units above ground floor space and sales agents to obtain data and insights on existing products and their locations, the demographic make-up and geographic origins of likely buyers or renters, and the advantages and disadvantages of the Downtown for residential uses, we reviewed for other apartment projects in the broader region the demographics of a three-mile radius surrounding each project and include the radius around Downtown Joliet. The figure below shows Downtown Joliet lies on the bottom rung of household income



*Louis Joliet Apartments*

ladder compared to existing and proposed apartment projects in the broader housing market within the region.

Figure 10 illustrates household incomes within a three-mile radius of downtown Joliet, indicating that the existing residents closest to the downtown have the lowest incomes in the three-mile area.

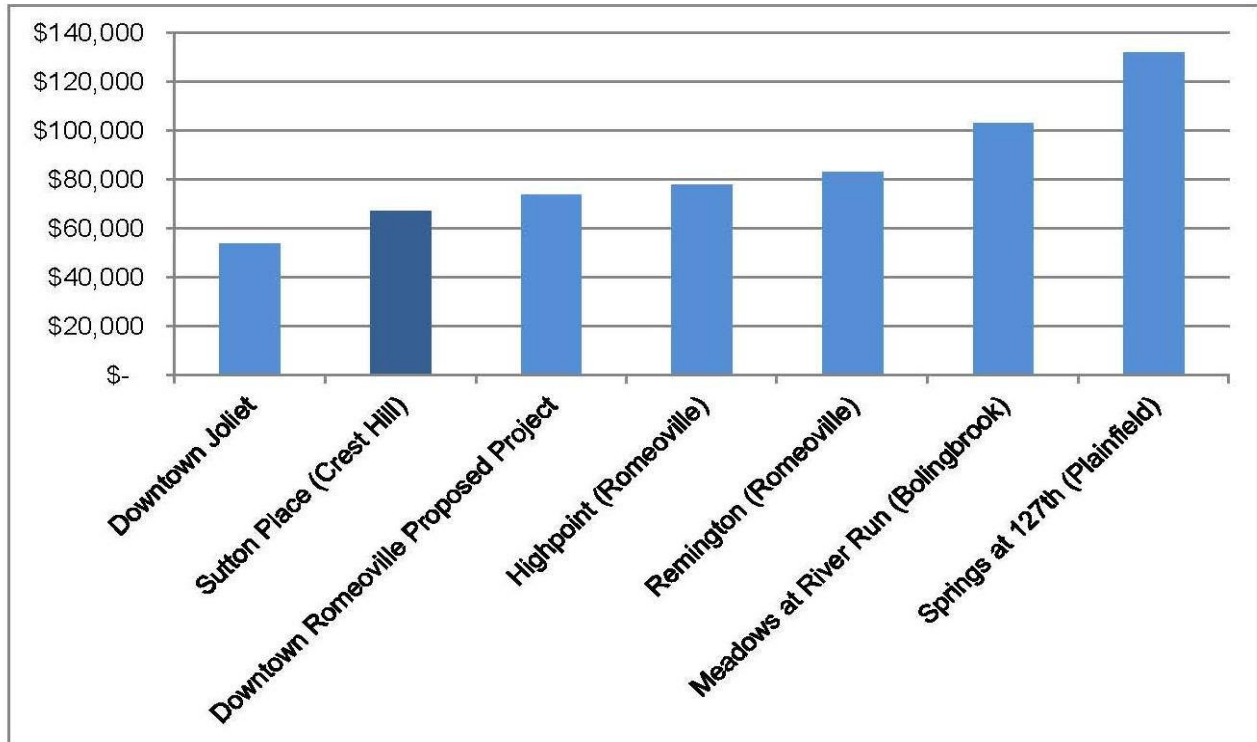
***Demographic Determinants of Demand Suggest Small Market For Multi-Family Uses***

The potential size of the market for new market-rate rental housing downtown is small. The tenure and income of Joliet households for new market-rate rental housing is as follows:

- According to the *2012 American Community Survey*, approximately 67 percent of renter households in Joliet have annual incomes below \$50,000. At a 30 percent expenditure rate, this means two-thirds of renters in Joliet can afford at most \$1,250 monthly on gross rent. This ability to pay level will not support new multi-story residential construction;
- For-sale housing in Joliet on average is very affordable. About 29,000 households in Joliet currently have annual incomes exceeding \$50,000. More than 85 percent of them own housing. Citywide, only approximately 4,100 renter households have incomes exceeding \$50,000; and
- The majority of occupied rental housing in Joliet is comprised by single-family and duplex units: approximately 57 percent of renters in Joliet are estimated to occupy single-family units, duplexes or mobile homes. Less than 19 percent of renters occupy units in multifamily buildings containing more than 20 units.

Another way to estimate obtainable apartment market rents is based on the proportion of household income that will be spent on housing ownership or rental costs. Based on the average household income of approximately \$54,000 for households within three miles of Downtown Joliet and assuming households are likely to spend approximately one-third of their income for rent equates to housing annual consumption costs of approximately \$18,000 or monthly housing costs of over \$1,500





**FIGURE 10**  
**Average Household Income Within 3-Mile Radius of Downtown Joliet and Nearby Apartment Supply**

Based upon the characteristics of Joliet households estimated in the 2012 American Community Survey, Table 3, Potential Demand/Absorption of New Multi-Family Development, below, summarizes an order-of-magnitude estimate of the potential size of the market for new multi-family rental product in Joliet and the Downtown. It draws upon characteristics of households by housing tenure and income, presence of children, frequency of moves, and type of rental housing currently occupied.

For the entire City of Joliet, we estimate that approximately 2,400 existing households meet the following criteria: (a) currently rent housing in Joliet; (b) possess annual incomes at or above \$50,000; and (c) include no children under the age of 18 in the household. This equates to about 17 percent of renter households in Joliet.

The average annual turnover rate of renter households in Joliet is estimated at approximately 17 percent. In other words, about 17 percent of renter households are likely to move in a given year. For simplicity and to be optimistic, our analysis assumes these movers remain within the City of Joliet. Applying the annual turnover rate to the estimate of candidate households suggests total annual turnover of about 420 market rate households with no children. As indicated previously, the vast majority of renters in Joliet occupy single-family housing, duplexes, and small multi-family buildings containing fewer than 20 units. Assuming the existing composition of rental housing demand applies (i.e. remains unchanged), we estimate that the turnover of existing housing in Joliet generate potential Citywide demand for market rate multi-family development of about 79 units per year.

	City of Joliet (2012)
Existing Renter Households with Annual Incomes Exceeding \$50,000	4,097
Percent of Existing Renter Households with No Children Under the Age of 18	58.8%
<b>Estimate of Market Rate Renter Households with No Children Under the Age of 18</b>	<b>2,409</b>
Annual Turnover Rate of Renter Households	17.4%
<b>Estimate of Market Rate Renter Households (with No Children Under 18) Which are Likely to Move in a Given Year</b>	<b>420</b>
Percent of Existing Rental Demand Composed by Multi-Family Buildings with 20+ Units	18.8%
<b>Potential Annual Demand/Absorption for New Market Rate Multi-Family Apartment Development (Citywide)</b>	<b>79</b>

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 American Community Survey; Gruen Gruen + Associates.



Even if the Downtown were capable of capturing 25 percent of this annual turnover demand, annual absorption would total less than 20 units. This implies that a new multi-family rental development in the Downtown containing 100-150 units, for example, is likely to take more than five years to absorb. This scale of potential demand is unlikely to support private feasible investment for a significant amount of market rate housing in the Downtown.

### 3.3 Commercial Market Overview

The Downtown contains no active retail space brokerage listings. Reported rents range from \$0 dollars for a 10,000-square-foot ground-floor art gallery space at the Rialto Square complex to \$6.67 per square foot per year for an approximately 1,800-square-foot coffee shop at 178 North Chicago and \$7.67 per square foot per year for insurance services business at 167 North Chicago.

Table 4, Inventory of Commercial/Office Building Space, summarizes the inventory of larger commercial and office buildings in the Downtown. Including buildings above 15,000 square feet of space a total of approximately 625,000 square feet of commercial and office space exclusive of office space for and owned by government entities. The inventory contains a high proportion of vacant or underutilized buildings.

The largest private office building in the Downtown at 58 North Chicago is across from the Will County Courthouse. The property’s long-time owner reported occupancy is at 82 percent, down recently due to the departure of a large tenant, which moved to the west of Downtown. The property owner reports that many of the building’s tenants are attorneys which locate to be proximate to the Courthouse. Over the past 10 years, the property owner reports attorneys have relocated west of the Downtown and west of the Des Plaines River. While still extremely important to the building’s tenant base, the lure of the Courthouse is not as strong of locational inducement as it was in the past. The building competes with other Downtown office buildings for users. Most tenants originate from the Downtown. Asking rents for the office space are approximately \$11.00 per square foot on a gross basis, but are negotiable.

<b>TABLE 4: Inventory of Commercial/Office Building Space<sup>1</sup></b>		
<b>Name/Address</b>	<b>Square Feet #</b>	<b>Estimated Occupancy %</b>
58 N. Chicago	47,600	82
65 N. Ottawa	40,000	38 <sup>2</sup>
103 N. Ottawa	38,430	Very low; Formerly occupied by Chicago Title Insurance
Bays Professional Center; 24 W. Cass	37,000	73
Pioneer Building 54 N. Ottawa	36,000	92
Executive Centre 120 N. Scott St.	59,000	Will be substantially vacant upon move-out of Will County
170 N. Ottawa	29,631	33
201-203 N. Ottawa	29,550	
212 N. Chicago	25,920	0/Vacant
BMO Harris Bank; 78 N. Chicago	23,072	
Crystal Square; 81 N. Chicago	20,000	65
The Mode Building 16-18 Van Buren	19,008	100; Educational Use Replaced Vacant Space
20 E. Cass	18,018	
150 Scott	17,406	
59-61 W. Clinton	16,296	
111 N. Ottawa	16,034	
1 E. Cass	16,000	0/Vacant
63 W. Jefferson	15,840	
155 N. Ottawa	15,834	0/Vacant
9 W. Cass	15,564	
262 N. Ottawa	15,523	0
Rialto/Two Rialto <sup>3</sup>	73,371	61
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>625,097</b>	
<p>1 Includes buildings above 15,000 square feet of space and non-government uses.                  2 Vacant other than space used for storage rental.                  3 Included even though the property is owned by a public entity because it has some private tenants and is a large and important building in the Downtown.</p>		

Sources: Joliet Township Assessor; Loopnet.com; GG+A Interviews; Gruen Gruen + Associates.

According to the owner, the 155 N. Ottawa building has been vacant for the entire period except for approximately 15,000 square feet of space, which is rented for storage of records, merchandise, and furniture for a very low rental rate. The mechanical systems and other building systems need overhaul and replacement. The interior improvements are obsolete. Prior to the Great Recession, occasional inquiries had been received for the potential reuse of the building for general office, apartment, or boutique hotel uses, but none of the inquiries progressed to a more substantial indication of interest. Since the Great Recession, few serious inquiries have been received.

The Bays Professional Center at 24 West Cass Street contains approximately 37,000 square feet of space and is currently 73 percent leased. The office space has attracted primarily attorneys and others which want to be located near the Will County Courthouse as well as financial services. The occupancy has been affected negatively by a decision of a law firm to consolidate offices in Downtown Joliet and DuPage County at a location in Lisle, in DuPage County.

No tenants have moved to the building or other Downtown buildings managed by Bays Investments from outside Joliet in at least five years. Rental rates are \$12 to \$15 per square foot per year. The ground floor of the building is occupied by a music venue MoeJoe's as part of the agreement with the City on the purchase of the property. This ground-floor use has deterred some prospective office space users from selecting the building. The property, however, had been vacant for an extensive period of time and in exchange for a favorable purchase price, the first floor was required to be reserved for an entertainment use. The night club/music venue has had multiple owners over the 10-12 year period. National acts are brought in that appeal to the Generation Y demographic.

The Pioneer Building at 54 North Ottawa has had a consistent tenant make-up of attorneys and other space users (drug and traffic school) as well as government tenants such as the Illinois Secretary of State. If the Courthouse were not present, the occupancy rate which is currently at 92 percent would be considerably lower. Users which consider the Pioneer Building tend to also consider other Bays Investments' buildings in Downtown Joliet. The trend over time has been for attorneys to reduce the amount of office space they lease in Downtown Joliet and to rent smaller satellite offices at which they can meet

clients. The gross rental rate is \$15 per square foot per year. Bays Investments also owns the approximately 59,000- square-foot Executive Centre at 120 North Scott Street. Approximately 78 percent of the building has been occupied by Will County which will be moving out of the building into a building it owns. Bays Investments also recently purchased the nearly 33,000-square-foot building at 168-179 Ottawa. PNC Bank occupies the ground floor but the upper floors have been vacant for 10 years. A non-profit organization focused on services related to foster care, domestic violence, sexual assault and related prevention and counseling services located in an old building in the west side of Joliet is expected to relocate to the upper floors.

Chicago Title vacated the approximately 38,000-square-foot building located at 103 North Ottawa. It has been significantly vacant for an extended period of time. We were unable to reach representatives of the owner but understand it was purchased after Chicago Title moved out and from information provided by the City that it generates a very small amount of water use indicating the occupancy of a small part of the building.

The Mode Building at 16-18 Van Buren had been owned by BMO Harris Bank which took ownership of the building through foreclosure in 2009. The building was built in 1908 and operated as a movie theater until the 1980's. The building was gutted and converted to office uses in 1985. BMO Harris Bank donated the building to the University of St. Francis ("USF") which has recently renovated the building and will utilize the building for its hospitality classes. USF also has its arts program in two floors of the Rialto Square Theater office building across the street from the Mode Building.

A review of a commercial real estate website, discussions with property owner and real estate brokers and our inspections indicate that some of the building space is completely vacant such as the 212 North Chicago Street and 1 East Cass Street buildings. The 212 North Chicago building was formerly occupied by the Turk Furniture Company. This three-story approximately 26,000 square foot building available for \$555,000 or approximately \$21 per square foot of space has been vacant for an extensive time. The listing broker has received a few inquiries expressing potential interest in converting the building into apartments, but apparently the inquiries have not progressed to subsequent due diligence or further consideration.

The City of Joliet owns the 1 East Cass Street building and is looking for a restaurant replacement for the vacant Crabgail's restaurant. According to the listing broker, after innumerable showings, a deal may be close to being finalized for the sale of the building to a user that would put in a replacement restaurant and at some time in the future renovate the 2nd and 3rd floors of the building. Asking prices for these two buildings are approximately \$18 to \$21 per square foot of building space.

We include the largest building on the list even though it is owned by the Will County Metropolitan Exposition and Auditorium Authority because private space users are encouraged to occupy the available space. The Rialto Square Theater office and commercial space consists of approximately 73,000 square feet. Approximately four years ago, the Arts and Design Department of the University of St. Francis became an anchor tenant of the complex by occupying over 16,000 square feet of space in the third and four floors of the Rialto Square Theater complex. The City of Joliet contributed funds in 2008 to facilitate USF moving the program to Downtown Joliet into the Rialto Square Theater complex. The rental rate for available office space is \$15 per square foot. The property is exempt from property taxes and the leasehold taxes in lieu of property taxes are nominal. The total office space suitable is approximately 61 percent leased with many long-time tenants including attorneys, a title insurance company, and other professional service providers. A 10,000- square-foot ground-floor art gallery is a tenant on a "day-to day" basis at no rent as a means of creating ground floor presence and activity. The occupancy rate has been affected by the departure of several law firms that moved out of the building three or four years ago, relocating to new office space on the west side of Joliet. Another long term tenant, a marketing firm, has recently moved out of the building because it concluded it no longer needed a Downtown location. When prospective tenants consider space in the Rialto Square complex, they also consider locations in other Downtown office buildings including the Bays Investments' portfolio.

The Rialto Square complex includes a total of nearly 50,000 square feet of building space, including basement, ground floor and a nearly 23,000-square-foot building to the north of the Theater that has been vacant for an extensive time. The building adjacent to the Theater has been vacant since 1990. The vacant space does not comply with current building code requirements. The extensive time in which the space has been vacant also means in addition to

significant building, ADA, and fire code type of improvements significant tenant improvements would be required to make the space suitable occupancy should demand arise.

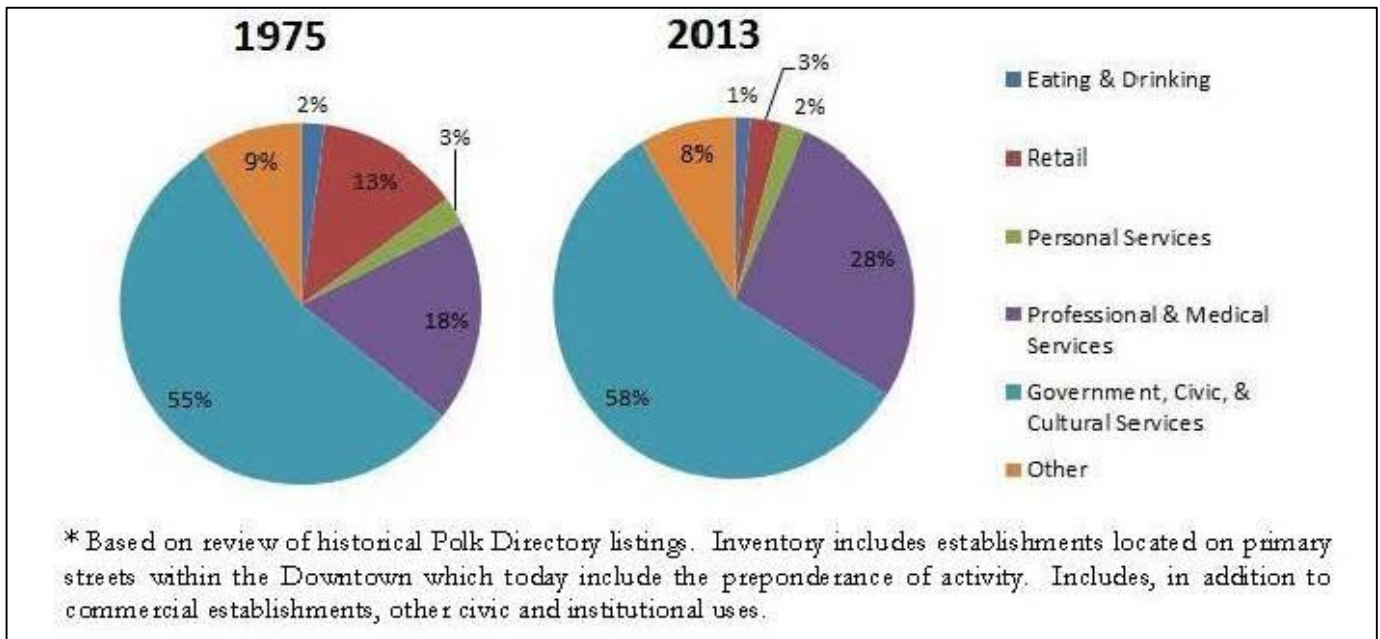
### **Joliet's West Side is a Distinct Office Submarket**

The interviews indicate that users considering Joliet's west side to which firms Downtown have moved do not tend to consider Downtown as an alternative location option. Examples of current listings for office space show rents and values are higher for office space located on Joliet's west side than in Downtown. Of the approximately 276,000 square feet of space, approximately 20 percent or 56,000 square feet of space in the examples of inventory on the west side is vacant. Given, however, the availability of newer, quality office space with parking conveniently provided, proximate to support services, shopping and sources of labor, the interviews indicate only extremely price sensitive users or users which need to be located very close to the Court House or other government functions will consider Downtown locations.

### **3.4 Shifts in Office & Traditional Retail Uses**

Figure 11, Shifts in Business Composition, shows the shift in the type of business establishments in the Downtown from 1975 to 2013. The information on type of business was collected from historical Polk Directory listings GG+A obtained from the Joliet Library and aggregated for four primary Downtown streets. It is not a complete inventory of business establishments in the Downtown but demonstrates clear patterns of business establishment changes that have occurred in the Downtown over the past 35+ years.

Since 1975 the number of establishments with the primary streets is estimated to have decreased by nearly 50 percent. In 1975, the Downtown contained more than 300 establishments on Chicago, Ottawa, Clinton, and Van Buren Streets. By 2013, the number of establishments located on these streets declined to less than 170. Between 1975 and 1985, the total change in the number of businesses was small with a decline from 321 businesses to 315 businesses. During this period, the number of professional and business services establishments more than doubled while the number of medical related businesses substantially declined. Since 1985 the number of businesses on Chicago, Ottawa, Clinton, and Van Buren Streets has declined with the number of traditional retail businesses experiencing a decline of approximately 75 percent. In 1975, these streets had a total of more than 80 eating and drinking and retail businesses, but by 2013 this number had fallen to only 13



**FIGURE 11**  
**Shifts in Business Composition**

businesses in these sectors. The number of professional and business services businesses has declined by about 50 percent between 1985 and 2013.

The number of civic, institutional, and cultural entertainment businesses have remained fairly steady with a small decline in the number of businesses from 33 in 2005 to 25 in 2013.

A major conclusion drawn from the review of patterns of economic and land use change described below is the Downtown has been affected by the same downward shifts in office and traditional retail uses that have been noted in many other smaller-sized central cities. The Downtown has not shared in retail growth proportionally as much of the newer centers providing both shopper/comparison and convenience/necessity goods have been developed outside the urban core on the far west side of Joliet. These newer centers have been located along or near the interstate highways closer to where many of the new residential neighborhoods and much of the newer office space construction has occurred. Like many smaller-sized central cities, Downtown Joliet experienced a decline when retailers and office users moved out of the Downtown to more accessible and larger suburban agglomerations. Sears, J.C. Penney, Radio Shack, and the Kline's department store (all of which were previously located on Chicago Street) completed moving out of Downtown Joliet by the late 1970s, at about the same time the Louis Joliet Mall, a highly accessible 947,000-square-foot regional mall in Joliet opened southeast of I-55 and U.S Highway 30.

Other large retail centers such as Joliet Commons, a 200,000 square-foot community center anchored by Target, PetSmart, Old Navy, Guitar Center, Office Max, and Jo-Ann Fabrics and free-standing big box stores have located around the regional mall.

### 3.5 Summary of Real Estate Market Conditions

#### Multi-Family

- The Downtown represents a distinct submarket with only two residential projects of any meaningful size located in Downtown Joliet—Louis Joliet Apartments and Senior Suites and still representing only 151 units obtain low annual lease rates of \$5 to \$12 per square foot.
- Rents for apartments above ground floor space range from \$6.60 to \$7.00 per square foot per year.
- The tenants attracted to apartment units include students or people which work Downtown and are looking for low cost apartments convenient to school or workplaces.
- The Downtown demographics and rents differ from those associated with the apartment projects in the broader housing market. Other apartment supply options are located within Joliet but are also older and/or include subsidized units. Downtown Joliet lies on the bottom rung of household income ladder compared to existing and proposed apartment projects in the broader housing market within the region.



- Within three miles of Downtown Joliet, the average household income approximates \$54,000. The average household income within three miles of the Sutton Place apartment complex in Crest Hill is higher at \$67,000. Other existing apartment supplies in Romeoville (Highpoint and Remington) and a proposed apartment project in Downtown (called Uptown) Romeoville are part of or near higher income neighborhoods than Crest Hill and Downtown Joliet. Properties located in Plainfield and Bolingbrook are each generally located in neighborhoods with annual household incomes exceeding \$100,000. Existing apartment projects in Romeoville, Crest Hill, and Bolingbrook are all 11 years or older. The average household income within three miles of the newest apartment project in the broader region, Springs at 127th development in Plainfield, for example, is estimated at \$132,000.
- Two other apartment projects in Joliet, Pine Meadows Apartments, Larkin Village, both located west of Downtown Joliet obtain higher (but still low) rents for comparably sized units than the Downtown apartment units. The two-bedroom units at both projects which are in the same size range as the Joliet Louis one-bedroom units obtain rents of \$1.10 per square foot or higher. The three-bedroom units at Larkin Village which are comparably sized to Louis Joliet two-bedroom units have advertised rents of nearly \$1.00 per square foot and above. The Birches, a 261-unit apartment project in Joliet is located close to Provena St. Joseph Medical Center and also obtains higher rents than for the Downtown projects. None of these older projects with small unit sizes compete with Downtown multi-family inventory. The submarket in which they are located also has slightly higher household income characteristics. The Crest Hill apartment projects advertise rents that are in the range of the two Joliet apartment projects that are located west of Downtown Joliet.
- Note that although the apartment rents are higher for the two west side Joliet projects and the Crest Hill projects, these projects are all older product. New residential multi-family projects would need much higher rents to amortize and obtain a return on the costs of significant rehabilitation and/or new construction. The newest project in the broader region, Springs at 127th in Plainfield which has

considerably more favorable demographics than pertains to Downtown Joliet is obtaining rents of close to \$1.30 per square foot and higher. Depending on unit size (the average unit sizes are larger than for existing Joliet and Crest Hill projects) gross monthly rents range from \$1,000 to \$1,900 at Springs at 127th.

- For-sale housing in Joliet on average is very affordable. About 29,000 households in Joliet currently have annual incomes exceeding \$50,000. According to the Chicago Association of Realtors, the average sales price for single-family detached housing in Joliet in 2012 was nearly \$108,000. Home sales prices in Joliet have declined by nearly 40 percent since 2006. As credit for housing becomes more widely available, consumer sentiment and employment conditions improve, the availability of affordably priced for-sale housing will constrain demand and pricing increases for multi-family product because higher-income households in Joliet will elect to purchase single-family housing units rather than rent in Downtown. More than 85 percent of existing Joliet households own housing and would not be likely candidates for rental housing in Downtown.
- For the entire City of Joliet, we estimate that approximately 2,400 existing households meet the following criteria: (a) currently rent housing in Joliet; (b) possess annual incomes at or above \$50,000; and (c) include no children under the age of 18 in the household. This equates to about 17 percent of renter households in Joliet.
- The average annual turnover rate of renter households in Joliet is estimated at approximately 17 percent. In other words, about 17 percent of renter households are likely to move in a given year. For simplicity and to be optimistic, assume these movers remain within the City of Joliet. Applying the annual turnover rate to the estimate of candidate households suggests total annual turnover of about 420 market rate households with no children. The vast majority of renters in Joliet occupy single-family housing, duplexes, and small multi-family buildings containing fewer than 20 units. 3 Assuming the existing composition of rental housing demand applies (i.e. remains unchanged), we estimate that the turnover of existing housing in Joliet generate

potential Citywide demand for market rate multifamily development of about 79 units per year.

- Even if the Downtown were capable of capturing 25 percent of this annual turnover demand, annual absorption would total less than 20 units. This implies that a new multifamily rental development in the Downtown containing 100-150 units, for example, is likely to take more than five years to absorb. The potential scale of demand is currently unlikely to support private feasible investment for a significant amount of market rate housing in the Downtown, even if the market area for Downtown would extend well beyond that currently served.

### ***Commercial and Office Markets***

- The Downtown contains no active retail space brokerage listings. Reported rents range from \$0 dollars for a 10,000-square-foot ground-floor art gallery space at the Rialto Square complex to \$6.67 per square foot per year for an approximately 1,800-square-foot coffee shop at 178 North Chicago and \$7.67 per square foot per year for an insurance services business at 167 North Chicago. Interviews with brokers and property owners indicate that the highest rents for ground floor space that could potentially be obtained (assuming an increase in the level of Downtown activity) would be mid-teens.
- In contrast, according to the leasing agent for the 267,000-square-foot, 99 percent leased Louis Joliet Pointe community retail center located in front of the 970,441-square-foot Louis Joliet Mall (a still viable solid mall), the location around the regional mall at Route 30 and I- 55 interchange remains the retail epicenter in Joliet with approximately 2,000,000 square feet of space. Most major retailers are located in the area. Two new retailers –Fresh Thyme grocery store and Sports Authority – are scheduled to open in a new center in 2015. Rents around the mall area are reported to be in the mid teen’s to upper \$20’s per square foot and occupancies above 90 percent. A fast casual restaurant in the community center was signed at rents of \$30 per square foot triple net. A secondary retail location on Route 59 between Route 52 and Caton Farm Road has also developed with Target, Wal-Mart, and Kohl’s located in the area. Mariano’s recently opened in a former Dominick’s store in the Route 59 area. None of the

retailers attracted to these locations would consider a Downtown location for their stores.

- Including buildings above 15,000 square feet of space, a total of approximately 625,000 square feet of commercial and office space is located in the Downtown, exclusive of office space for and owned by government entities. The inventory contains a high proportion of vacant or underutilized buildings (see Table II-12).
- Gross office space asking rents range from \$11 to \$15 per square foot for the best buildings in the Downtown.
- Office space on the west side of Joliet centers around the Provena St. Joseph Medical Center. Asking office rents mainly range from approximately \$15 to \$18 per square foot on a modified gross or full service basis. The buildings on the west side contain ample capacity to serve additional office space users (See Table II-13). Asking sales prices for office buildings range from \$86 to \$158 per square foot of building space, four to nearly eight times higher than asking sales prices for Downtown properties.
- Most office space users have been in Downtown and so some time. Many former users have moved out of the Downtown to locations west of Downtown. According to the largest landlord of privately owned buildings in Downtown, no tenants have moved to its Downtown buildings from outside Joliet in at least five years.
- Listing sales prices for commercial/office buildings in Downtown range from \$21 to \$25 per square foot. (The sales prices are less than annual rents for commercial space in many other Chicago region submarkets).

# CHAPTER 4: AN IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY

## 4.1 Market Guidance

Formulating an improvement strategy that aligns with market forces is central to the focus of this Plan. The intent is to delineate a comprehensive improvement strategy that can work, and will work, if diligently pursued. Since attracting private-sector investment is one of the downtown's greatest challenges, the strategy must work with current market forces. Recognizing market opportunities and limitations is essential, while at the same time "pushing the envelope" to maximize development potential.

The market analysis conducted by Gruen + Gruen is both comprehensive and insightful. It is Camiros' responsibility, with the input and advice of the Joliet City Center Partnership and the City of Joliet, to interpret the market analysis within the context of the full range of opportunities and constraints to formulate an improvement strategy that leads to real improvement. The following market analysis observations serve as a point of departure for an effective yet achievable improvement strategy.

- The findings of the market analysis are not unexpected. Anyone familiar with downtown Joliet over time knows that significant disinvestment and decline has occurred.
- Many of the market weaknesses identified in the market analysis are common to suburban downtowns in general.
- Weak current demand does not preclude cultivating market forces to generate future demand.
- The downtown has assets that can be leveraged to draw private-sector investments.
- Very real limitations exist with respect to certain development types.
- Initial absorption of any development type will be small.
- Public intervention is needed to stimulate new development to accelerate the downtown's recovery.

## 4.2 Building on Strengths; Mitigating Weaknesses

Formulating an effective downtown improvement strategy must combine the downtown's existing strengths with proposals for new development that can be supported given current market conditions. These factors must be considered very carefully in order to leverage the downtown's assets to induce new development. A review of the downtown's strengths and weaknesses to identify strategic approaches is the first step. These are listed below, along with points that help define strategic approaches.

### Strengths:

#### ***Strong Entertainment/Cultural Attractions***

- Define the downtown as a place of enjoyment and leisure-time activity;
- Synergy between entertainment/cultural venues and eating & drinking establishments;
- Appeal to all groups and income levels, but more so for those with disposable income;
- Appeal more to singles and couples without children at home, who have evenings free;
- Could help define downtown Joliet as a "happening place."

***Finding:*** This is a major strength to build upon. More such uses are desirable, but the improvement strategy must leverage this asset.

#### ***Strong Government Services and Facilities Sector***

- Major employer with some potential to draw employees as downtown residents;
- Creates prominence for the downtown, but little synergy with other uses;
- Historical synergy between government facilities and private business is on the wane;
- Some synergy with retail and restaurants, which can appeal to employees;
- Little new private-sector development expected from government facilities.

***Finding:*** While clearly a major strength, this sector will be difficult to leverage proactively.

### ***Downtown Joliet as Major Transportation Hub***

- Access to major transportation facilities can induce certain types of development;
- The effect of the new Transportation Center on new development is uncertain;
- Transit-oriented development is an ascending trend, which the downtown is positioned to benefit from;
- Uses needing a Will County location with strong transit access to the region may be attracted to the downtown;
- Residents who want to live in Will County and value transit access may be attracted.

**Finding:** This strength will be difficult to leverage in the short term, but will become increasingly important in the mid-to long term.

### ***Strong Urban Character***

- Downtown Joliet has a very urban character, which will appeal to certain groups, especially young adults who want a lively atmosphere;
- While the downtown has the look of an urban place, it does not currently possess the mix and density uses to support a typical urban dynamic;
- The recent downtown expansion of Joliet Junior College and the University of St. Francis has helped add activity and vibrancy;

**Finding:** Downtown Joliet has the “bones” of a city, not a suburb. This opens a range of potentials and should be central to the improvement strategy.

## **Weaknesses**

### ***Negative Perceptions***

- Negative perceptions exist and the improvement strategy must take this into account;
- Perceptions will improve once success builds and improvement takes off;
- Focus on new development that can work given the downtown’s current image;
- Immediate action to address the homeless problem is needed

**Finding:** Improvement strategy must lead to development that can work with current perceptions.

### ***Weak Market Conditions***

- While some sectors are weaker than others, there is no real sector of strength;
- The office market is particularly weak, with large vacant supply constraining rent growth;
- Retail appears weak, but investors voiced positive sentiment in community meetings;
- Once Chicago Street is opened, there may be an uptick in new retail;

- Residential was not a historic use and is not burdened with obsolete or vacant inventory, signaling possible development potential;
- The Joliet market in general, and downtown specifically, is very price sensitive.
- New development in the short term will need to focus on reuse of existing buildings to leverage low prices into price competitive product. The current market will not support the higher cost of new buildings at this time.

**Finding:** Improvement strategy must involve uses that are less weak, such as: rental residential; eating/drinking/entertainment; small-scale retail.

### ***Poor Neighborhood Connections***

- Little can be done to mitigate this weakness;
- The downtown must function as a destination to be successful;
- The downtown can also become a neighborhood unto itself through mixed-use development.

**Finding:** Given the relative weakness of most of the surrounding neighborhoods, the improvement strategy should focus on making downtown its own neighborhood.

### ***Weak Retail & Office Components***

- Traditionally associated with successful downtowns, improvement in the retail program can be cultivated slowly over time;
- Downtown Joliet must rely on other sectors to drive investment and improvement.
- Opening Chicago Street may stimulate some new retail use.

**Finding:** The improvement strategies should not rely on office use (employment) or retail (shopping) to drive future success, at least in the short term.

### ***Poor Regional Access***

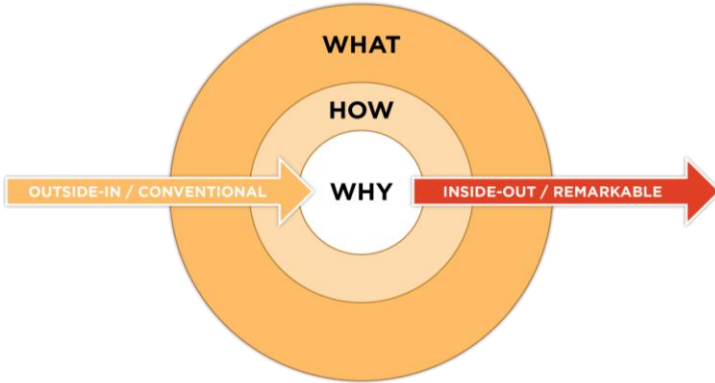
- Joliet is located on the fringe of the metropolitan area, which limits some opportunities;
- Located far from Chicago, the downtown can serve as an urban center for the southwest suburban region and portions of downstate Illinois;
- While not located close to an interstate interchange, the downtown’s regional accessibility for transit must be leveraged;
- The downtown is only 5-10 minute drive from the I-80 interchange with Chicago Avenue, and improving the Chicago Street corridor will benefit the downtown.
- **Finding:** This will not be central to the improvement strategy in the short term. Efforts to mitigate this weakness may pay dividends in the long term.



### 4.3 Downtown’s Role and Function

Formulating the right strategy requires understanding the proper role and function of the downtown. This in turn requires understanding what people in Joliet and the surrounding region want from the downtown, what would appeal to people.

The diagram below illustrates the fundamentals underlying the improvement strategy, and apply to every conceptual problem.



**Why?** At the center of the problem is “why?” For downtown Joliet, “why” is its reason for being. Why is downtown relevant? Why will people work, live, shop and play in downtown Joliet?

**How?** “How?” is the method for realizing the “why?” For downtown Joliet, how can the downtown’s assets be leveraged to achieve its role and function? This is the improvement strategy.

**What?** “What?” are the specific elements to be implemented? For downtown Joliet, “what?” would be the improvements, including new development, infrastructure improvements, improved transportation, organizational enhancements, etc. These are the improvement recommendations.

Camiros believes downtown Joliet can/will be successful as a *dynamic urban center*, functioning as a satellite urban center to Chicago and serving people in the southwest metro region. Much could be written here to substantiate this claim, however such material would represent a diversion from the plan for downtown. Suffice it to say that American culture is clearly urban focused. Major cities are now tourist destinations and represent the most valued places to live, as evidenced by real estate values. Downtown Joliet has a long way to go in becoming a dynamic center, however, it has the building blocks for becoming such a place. These include:

**Regionally Significant Uses**

**Regional Transit System**

**Urban Character**

**Regionally Advantageous Location**

**Size/Scale to Accommodate Diverse Uses**

Downtown Joliet needs to attract a host of varied uses in order to become a dynamic urban center. What makes this role and function achievable is that the downtown already has some of the attributes needed, without which the potential to become a dynamic urban center would be remote. The types of uses needed would include major institutional uses, perhaps another university or hospital, a major employer, and additional cultural and entertainment uses. A significant residential component is also needed. Successful urban centers are validated by being great places to live. Significant public investment in infrastructure and facilities will be needed to create the kind of place to attract this diverse mix of uses.



*Image of dynamic, mixed-use urban development*

### 4.4 Downtown Improvement Strategy

The downtown improvement strategy delineates how to fulfill the downtown’s role and function as a dynamic urban center. Clearly, some of the uses and improvements needed cannot be achieved given the downtown’s current condition. Short-term, incremental improvements are needed in order to set the stage for more significant improvements in the future. The improvement strategy outlined in this Plan represents a way to get the improvement process started.

An over-arching development strategy is needed to provide clear direction for actions and initiatives to drive real change in the downtown. Subordinate

strategies are useful and needed to respond to specific opportunities and conditions, which will change over time. Camiros' strategy for improving downtown Joliet is to:

### *Make Joliet a Mecca for Young Adults*

This is a strategy that leverages existing strengths, mitigates weaknesses, and can work in the downtown's weak market context. The following points illustrate the strategy's alignment with key existing conditions:

- The downtown's #1 strength is its entertainment and cultural component, including restaurants and bars. This appeals to young adults.
- Downtown Joliet has two colleges/universities, and is already a place with a significant presence of young adults.
- Housing for students and/or recent graduates is a potential source of demand.
- It is possible that Joliet Junior College or the University of St. Francis may cooperate with an early student housing development on some level.
- The downtown's stock of older, inexpensive buildings could be adaptively reused for living units for young adults.
- The level of finish in the rental residential units could be adjusted to meet the price point of young adults.
- An emphasis on rental housing aligns with current downtown conditions because no long-term commitment is needed and there is not the financial risk associated with ownership housing.
- Young adults, are less likely to rule out living in the downtown due to image/perception problems.
- With a growing residential base, more retail uses will be needed, including eating and drinking uses.

This improvement strategy illustrates an approach to stimulate private-sector investment and begin to build positive momentum. Clearly, not every action or improvement will relate to the "Mecca for young adults" strategy. There are many worthwhile actions that either



*Young people having fun in downtown Joliet*

appeal to a broad cross-section of people, or advance other strategic goals. Opening Chicago Street is an example of the former, while obtaining an agreement with Will County on a new county courthouse is an example of the latter. Nonetheless, a strategy to attract young adults is the best way to induce private-sector investment in the downtown, which is the most critical need.

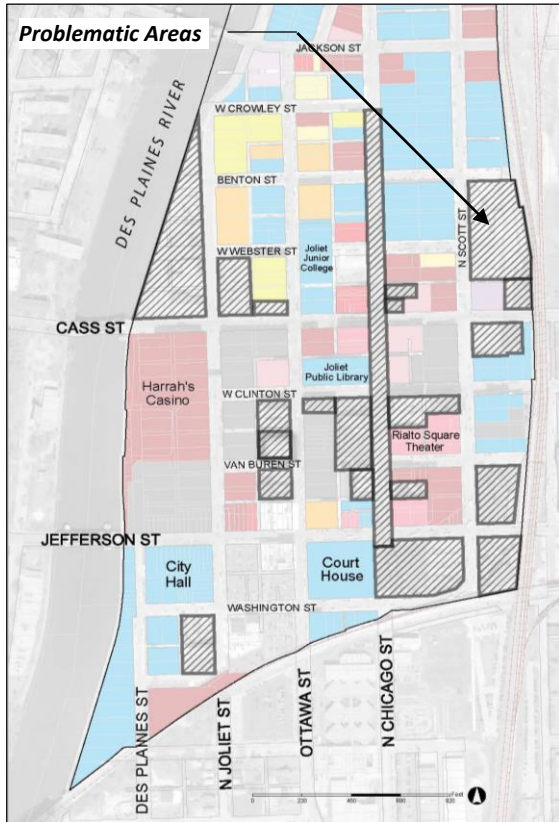


*A performance at MoJoe's*

## **4.5 A Sequential Approach to Improvement**

A key aspect of the improvement strategy is to recognize that improvement is a sequential process and that significant actions are already underway. While the downtown faces significant challenges, much of the downtown contains uses that are stable, productive uses suitable for a dynamic urban center. In addition, there are a series of projects announced and/or underway that would help build improvement momentum and induce private-sector development.

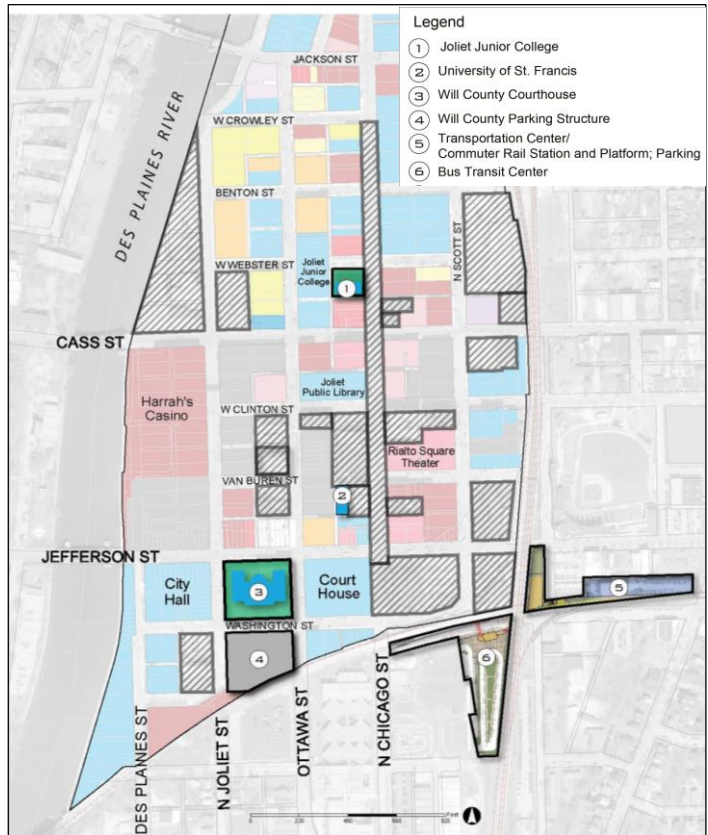
Stable properties within the downtown, which do not require redevelopment, are shown on Figure 12, Stable vs Problematic Areas. Figure 12 begins to paint a picture of which properties/areas in downtown need investment or redevelopment in the core area and which are stable. While a subjective evaluation, this begins to frame improvement needs. Both private and public lands need improvement. Private lands shown include vacant/underutilized buildings. Public lands shown include the county-building parking lot, which will be surplus when the new courthouse is built, and the Chicago Street right-of-way, which needs updating.



**FIGURE 12**  
**Stable vs Problematic Areas**

A series of important projects and improvements have been proposed for the downtown that could serve as catalysts of spurring new development. These are shown on Figure 13, Announced Catalyst Projects, some of which have been recently completed while others have not yet undergone final planning. However, it is reasonable to assume that all six projects will be completed in the near term (five years). The six projects shown on Figure 12 are all significant in their own way and are potential “game changers” to alter perceptions of the downtown and draw new development. These catalyst projects further frame the need for downtown improvement.

In addition to “announced catalyst projects,” there are a series of “proposed projects” that represent serious, viable proposals for new development and public improvements, as shown on Figure 13, Announced + Proposed Catalyst Projects. Certainly, not all of these projects will come to pass. In fact, some proposals, such as the rehab of the Plaza Hotel for market rate apartments, have been retracted. However, such serious development proposals suggest real viability, probability that another project proposal of a similar



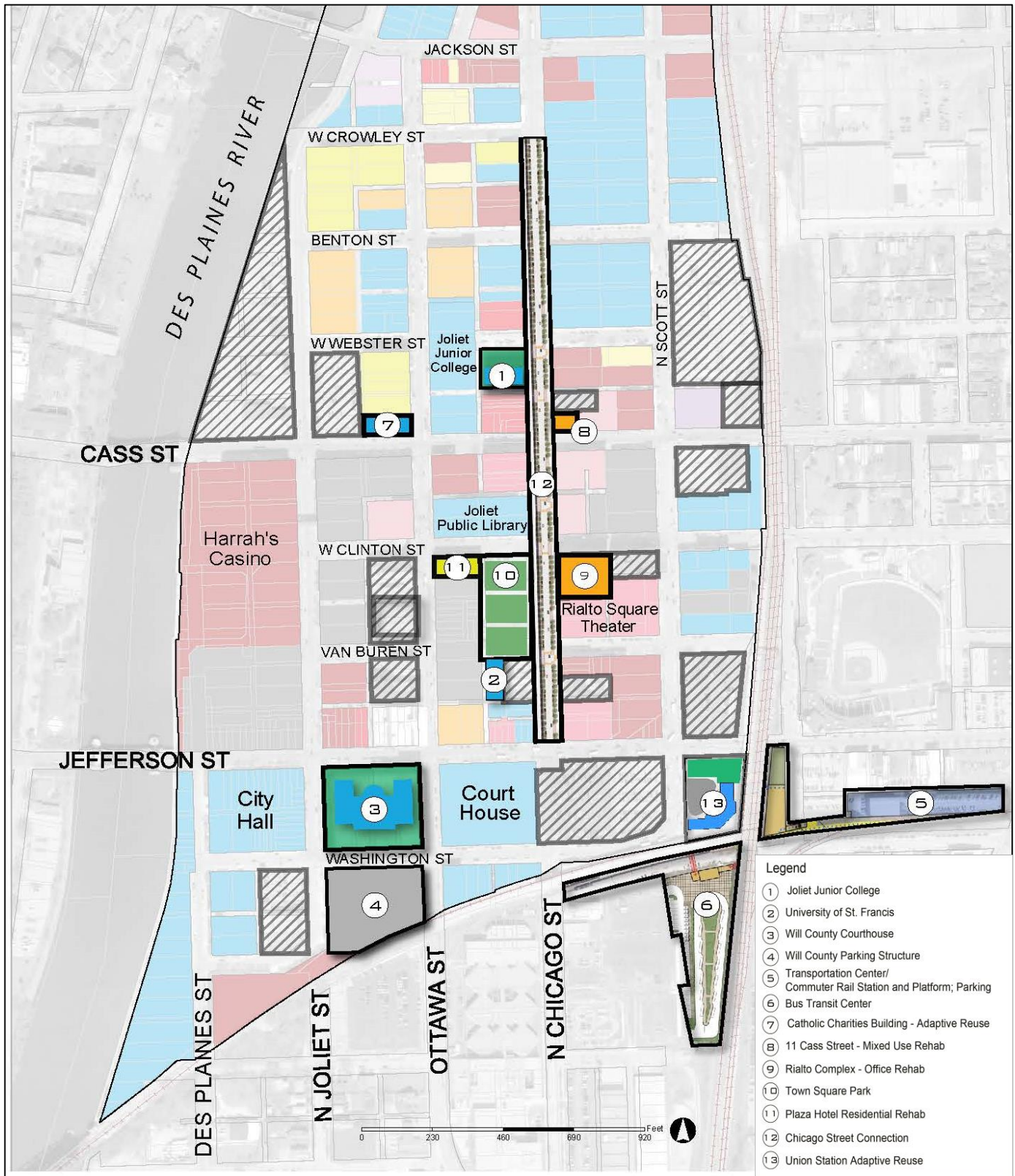
**FIGURE 13**  
**Announced Catalyst Projects**

nature could materialize. These “proposed projects”, when combined with “announced catalytic projects,” further frames the degree of improvement needed. Undoubtedly, many of the “stable” areas shown could be upgraded, but the point is, they are in stable use and the need for immediate improvement is limited. Proposals made in this planning process, such as the redesign of Chicago Street, to return it to its urban form, and the development of a town square or park at Chicago and Clinton Street, have been included because they have been discussed with both City staff of elected officials and have widespread support.

#### 4.6 Transportation Improvements

Transportation improvements are needed in the downtown. This study’s transportation assessment focused only on elements central to revitalization. It is acknowledged that the existing one-way street system is not user friendly. However, changing this system would require IDOT approval, which is unlikely. A comprehensive traffic study of the downtown may be needed to identify technical enhancements beneficial to improving downtown circulation.





**FIGURE 14**  
**Announced + Proposed Catalyst Projects**



# CHAPTER 5: IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM & KEY PROJECTS

## 5.1 Introduction

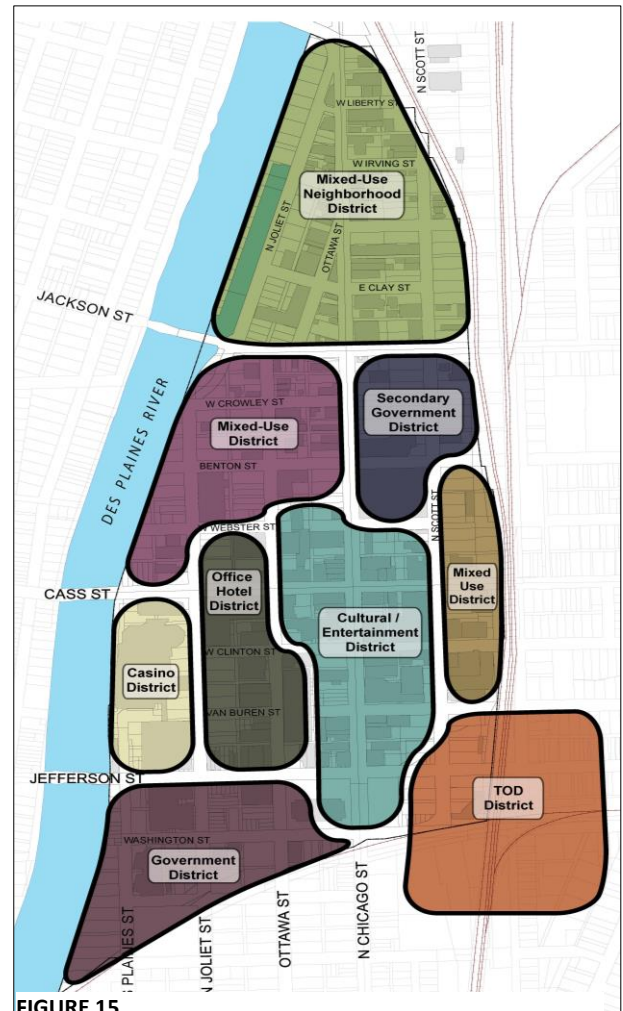
In the prior chapter, the downtown’s role and function, a *dynamic urban center*, was identified, which answers the “why?” element of the problem-solving diagram presented earlier. The overarching improvement strategy “*A Mecca for young adults*” addresses the “how?” element of the diagram. This chapter defines the “what?” element, that is, what are the uses, improvements, facilities, and policies that should be incorporated into an improved downtown Joliet. A detailed discussion of implementing these improvements is presented in Chapter VI – Implementation.

To be clear, the downtown improvement strategy “*A Mecca for young adults*” represents the strategy that best aligns with current conditions. Once improvement momentum builds, and market conditions become more favorable, more broad-based development will become possible. However, in the short term, public investments should, on the whole, reinforce and advance the “*Mecca for young adults*” strategy.

## 5.1 Land Use Policy

The overall pattern of land use in downtown Joliet is workable. The downtown reflects a series mixed-use districts with concentrations of certain uses in certain places. Figure 15, Functional Land Use Diagram, illustrates this land use pattern in functional terms. Key characteristics of the functional land use pattern include:

- The **government district**, with both City and County facilities, located in the southwest corner;
- The **transit-oriented district** located in the southeast corner;
- The **cultural/entertainment district**, which includes performance venues, arts/culture uses, restaurants/bars, education uses, and residential use, located in the heart of the downtown, focused on Chicago Street;
- An **office/hotel district** (suggesting hotel recruitment) located immediately west of the cultural/entertainment district and north of the government district;
- The **casino district** reflects existing casino facilities along the Des Plaines River between Jefferson Street and Cass Street;
- A **mixed-use district**, focusing on secondary commercial uses, retail service uses, and future residential



**FIGURE 15**  
**Functional Land Use Diagram**

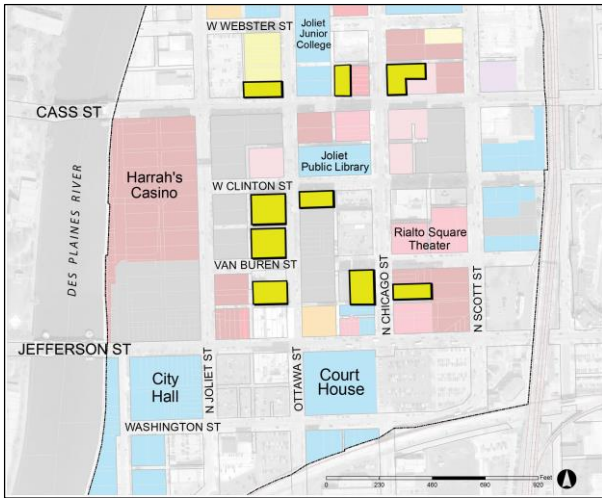
- redevelopment, located west of Chicago Street, north of Cass Street and south of Jackson Street;
- A **secondary government district**, including the post office and various government offices, located east of Chicago Street, south of Jackson Street and north of Webster Street;
- A **mixed-use district**, intended for commercial and residential/commercial/office mixed-use redevelopment, located along Scott Street; and
- A **large mixed-use neighborhood district**, including local commercial/retail use, small-scale residential use and future park/recreational use along the Des Plaines River, located north of Jackson Street.

Establishing land use policy through the functional districts shown on Figure 14 allows for the flexibility needed to promote the range of uses needed to advance the downtown’s role as a *dynamic urban district*.

### 5.2 Residential Development

A key element of the “*Mecca for young adults*” strategy is creating a significant rental housing component in the downtown, which would initially be filled by young adults but would transition to include ownership housing for a broad demographic range in the long term. Many existing buildings are candidates for conversion to upper story residential use. Figure 16, Short-Term Residential Development, illustrates the buildings Camiros views as the best opportunities. While residential development is welcomed anywhere in the downtown, focusing short-term development within the cultural/entertainment district would best advance the downtown improvement strategy. The buildings shown include key properties such as the Plaza Hotel, the Catholic Charities building, and buildings on Chicago Street with upper-story residential conversion potential.

FIGURE 16



Short-Term Residential Development

### 5.3 Public Improvements

Both private-sector investment and upgraded public facilities and infrastructure are needed to make downtown Joliet a dynamic urban center. Strategic public improvements will serve as a significant inducement to private-sector investment and development. This section discusses those strategic public improvements that align with the “*Mecca for young adults*” strategy. Figure 17, Public Improvements, illustrates this program of short-term strategic public improvements.

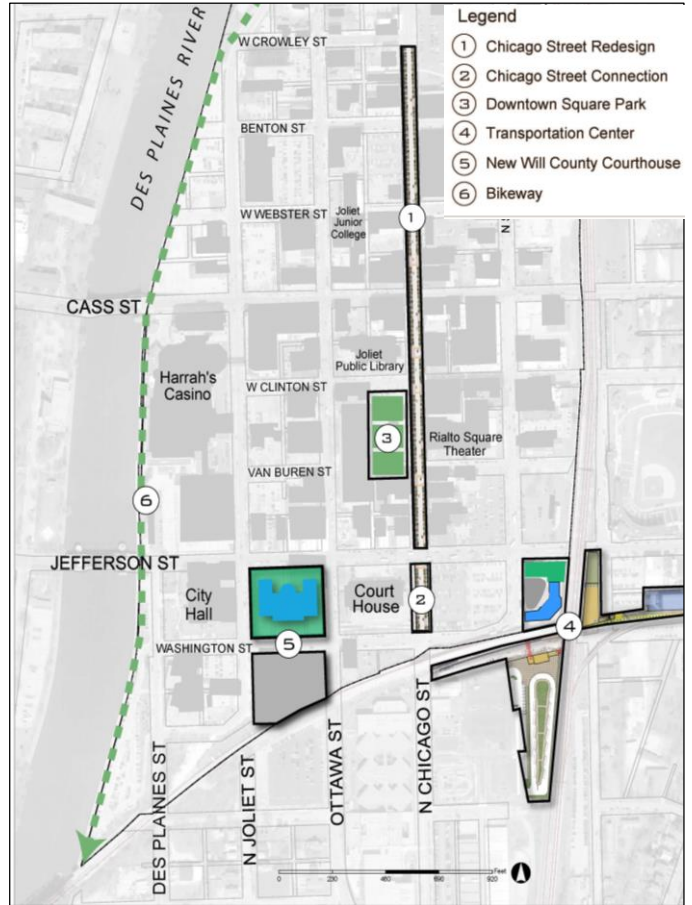
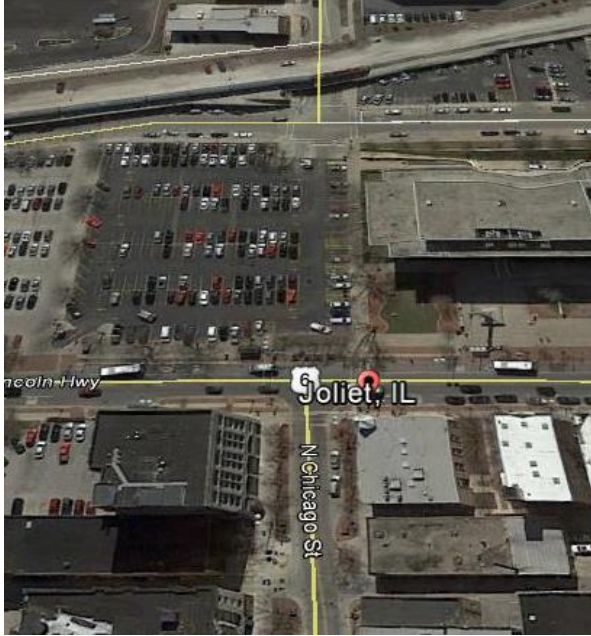


FIGURE 17  
Public Improvement Program

**Chicago Street Reconnection.** The single most important public improvement is the reconnection of Chicago Street between Jefferson Street and Washington Street. The street closure was part of converting Chicago Street into a “pedestrian mall,” which was an approach to downtown improvement common in the 1960’s and 1970’s that proved detrimental to downtown health and vitality. The reconnection of Chicago Street would produce both image enhancement and transportation benefits. In terms of image enhancement, this would represent a very visible sign that improvement and change is happening in the downtown. In terms of transportation benefits, the connection would bring traffic and people into the heart of the downtown, which would stimulate business activity. A prominent downtown property owner declared that reconnecting Chicago Street was central to his plans for additional reinvestment in downtown property.



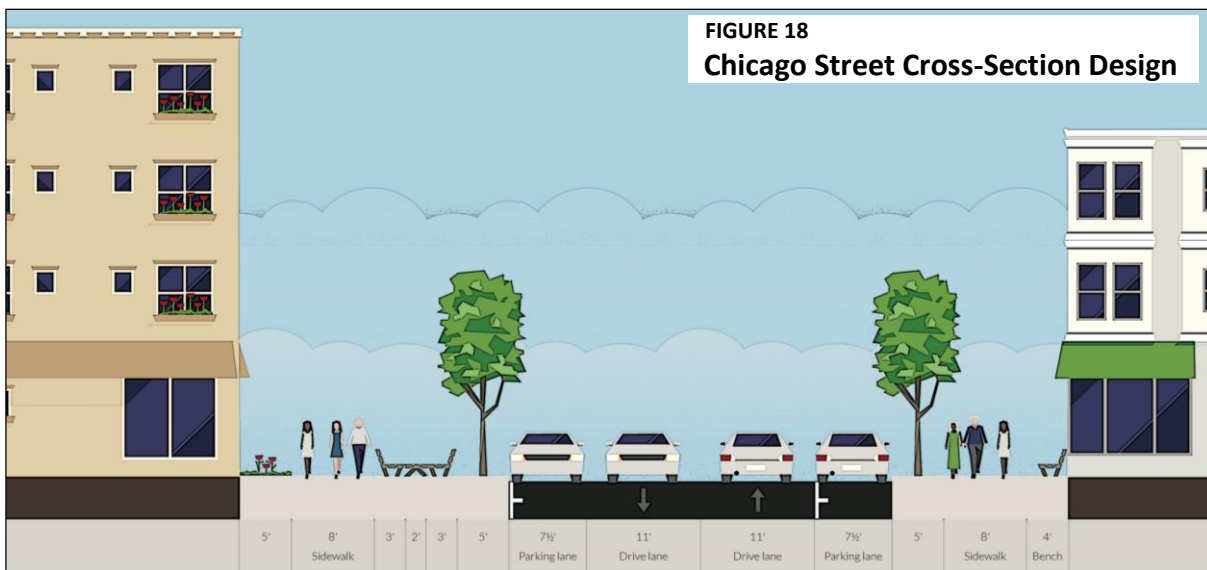
Google Earth photo of Chicago Street looking south, showing the disconnection between Jefferson and Washington Street

**Downtown Square Park.** The idea of creating a public gathering place in the downtown has been discussed for some time, and would be a much needed amenity for all downtown visitors. It would be particularly beneficial to the *“Mecca for young adults”* strategy. Residents of the downtown need recreational amenities. The downtown square park would serve as a special events gathering place and a multi-purpose green space at other times. The proposed location at Chicago and Clinton Street would also energize the cultural/entertainment district, including restaurants and bars. The specific design of the square/park should be the topic of a conceptual design effort. Camiros

recommends that it include passive green space for casual recreational activity, such as Frisbee, dog walking, etc.

**Transportation Center.** The Gateway Transportation Center is a transportation facility improvement of regional significance. The facility will result in a new Metra commuter rail and Amtrak station, and a new Pace bus terminal, along with parking and rider amenities. The facilities will be linked by convenient pedestrian connections to enhance the multi-modal service provided in downtown Joliet. This project was well underway, with construction funds committed, prior to the start of this Plan. Full construction of the facility will be done over a number of years.

**Chicago Street Redesign.** At the time Chicago Street was disconnected, it was also turned into a “pedestrian mall” with a curved street and large landscape beds. This design character looks very dated and does not reinforce downtown Joliet as a *“dynamic urban center.”* Chicago Street needs to be converted back to an urban street with a modern cross-section design that promotes a multi-modal transportation system. Camiros, with Charlier Associates, Inc., worked with CCP and City staff to formulate an updated cross-section design that would promote multi-modal transportation as well as on-street activity, such as café dining in front of restaurants. Specifically incorporating bike transportation specifically will help make the downtown more appealing to young adults, the group central to the downtown improvement strategy. Figure 18, Chicago Street Cross-Section Design, illustrates the preferred cross-section.







*Current design of Chicago Street is dated and inconsistent with the image of a dynamic urban center.*

**New Will County Courthouse.** As with the Transportation Center, the proposed new Will County Courthouse has been in discussion for some time. The new courthouse, when completed, will represent a major upgrade in legal, administrative and operations facilities for Will County. The facility will reinforce Joliet’s position as the primary seat of Will County government, with implications on real estate investment throughout all of Joliet.

The City has been in discussion with Will County officials on the ultimate construction of the facility. Reports on these discussions indicate that Will County expects some level of financial participation from the City of Joliet. While the new Will County Courthouse does not have direct alignment with the “Mecca for young adults” strategy, it is a source of strength for the downtown in terms of employees, prominence and overall activity. This Plan recognizes the new facility as a key anchor for the downtown and resolving details to advance construction is a clear policy of this Plan.

**Regional Bike Trail.** While bike transportation should be incorporated into the Chicago Street design, and other local streets, it is also important to connect the downtown to the regional bike trail system. Current connections to the regional trail system are via trail signs posted on city streets. To create a more bike-friendly downtown, a separate trail should be created along the River. Some portions of the trail would cross the Harrah’s Casino riverwalk while other portions would be incorporated into future redevelopment on parcels located next to the River. It is possible that easements could be obtain on these redevelopment parcels to allow the bike trail to be constructed before redevelopment occurs, which is a long-term proposition.

## 5.4 Bikeway Improvements

A significant area of emphasis in this plan is enhancing non-motorized transportation. Successful urban development is increasingly characterized by multi-modal transportation systems in which pedestrian and bike transportation are major components. Currently, downtown Joliet’s transportation system is automobile-oriented. The new Gateway Transportation Center, when operational, will increase transit service, and hopefully transit trips. Transit trips often lead to increased pedestrian and bike activity.

Upgrading non-motorized transportation will align the downtown with current trends in urban development and help attract new users, particularly young adults. Making the downtown more bike friendly is particularly important. Because the downtown is separated by adjacent neighborhoods from the river and railroads, distances are greater for those who come to visit the downtown. Bike transportation can effectively link the downtown to surrounding neighborhoods. Upgraded bike facilities are quite visible and can serve as visual cues that the downtown is changing and being reinvented.

Making the downtown more bike friendly can also help promote local tourism. Three major regional bike trails converge in Joliet not far from the downtown. By upgrading bike transportation facilities, the downtown’s cultural attractions could become a regional destination for those using the regional trails. Joliet could also become a “home base” for weekend bike tourists who want to explore the regional trails while lodging overnight. Figure 19, Regional Bikeways, illustrates Joliet’s advantageous location relative to these three regional bikeways, which connect through the downtown.

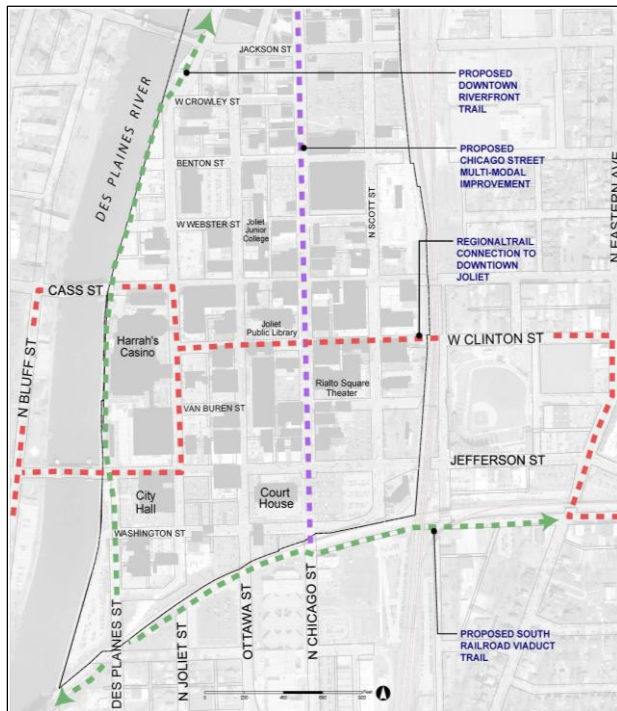


**FIGURE 19:**  
**Regional Bikeways**



Recommendations to improve bike transportation take three forms, as shown in Figure 20, Bikeway Enhancements, and discussed below.

- The regional trail system connections in downtown Joliet should be upgraded and made more prominent. These bikeways are “on-street” routes that are not well marked. Painting a portion of the street pavement as a designated bike route is a relatively easy and cost-effective way to emphasize these regional trails.
- Two new bikeways are recommended for the downtown. The first is a north-south riverfront bikeway that would connect with the I & M Canal Trail, which currently terminates directly north of the downtown. The second is an east-west trail south of the railroad viaduct that would connect the riverfront trail to the new Gateway Transportation Center. This trail would also connect with the regional trail system at Eastern and Washington Streets.
- Chicago Street is proposed for a comprehensive redesign to become an urban multi-modal corridor, as previously discussed. The bikeway within the redesigned Chicago Street would intersect with both the regional trail connection and the proposed east-west bikeway.



**FIGURE 20**  
**Bikeway Improvements**

## 5.5 Downtown Parking

Parking conditions were assessed to determine if the supply, location and/or operations of parking in the downtown were a critical factor in driving future improvement. It is Camiros’ opinion that the supply of parking is not impeding the downtown’s growth. This opinion is based on field observations, key person interviews and the review of a parking study report entitled *Parking Management and Operations Analysis* prepared by Rich & Associates. Specific observations and recommendations are highlighted below.

**Parking Supply:** Parking supply was not specifically addressed in the parking study and Camiros thinks the supply is adequate for the downtown’s current level of activity. There may be specific user groups, such as employees, who want more convenient and less costly parking. There may also be some localized areas of parking shortages. However, for the user group most important to revitalization, visitors and customers, the supply appears adequate. Comments were received from prospective downtown investors at the Community Meeting, indicating a concern about parking. While parking supply appears adequate for now, the City should be receptive to increasing supply as investment occurs and activity increases.

**Parking Utilization:** The parking study did not specifically address utilization. Based on anecdotal information regarding certain parking structures and the level of utilization of on-street parking, it appears that while certain parking structures may be utilized at a high level during peak periods, the overall utilization of the parking system as a whole is not high. This is both good news and bad news. The good news is that additional parking facilities do not appear to be needed at this time. The bad news is that the current rate of utilization does not produce sufficient revenue to provide for capital improvements/structural repair, or adequate maintenance. It is likely that a considerable increase in downtown activity/parking demand can be accommodated by the current system.

**Parking Maintenance:** The study suggests, and anecdotal comments have been received indicating that the maintenance of the public parking structures is a problem. Camiros has also observed poor maintenance of public parking structures. Such maintenance conditions in parking garages contributes to a negative image for the downtown and could inhibit some users from visiting the downtown. Based on the parking management organizational chart in the study, there appears to be only one staff person with maintenance

responsibilities, who also has substantial other responsibilities. This may be a case where low parking utilization does not produce enough revenue to provide adequate maintenance. It may be a good idea to assess alternative ways to maintain the public parking structures.

**Signage and Way-finding:** The parking study recommends an integrated signage and way-finding program that would help downtown users find parking and relate parking to the various points of interest in the downtown. Camiros agrees this is a need, however, the cost of such a signage program must be prioritized with other downtown improvement needs.

**On-Street Parking:** The parking study states that the 590 on-street meters provide a range of parking duration, up to 12 hours. It would be good if the time limits were easily discernable to drivers so users with need for longer-term parking could find these meters quickly. Camiros endorses the recommendation for upgrading the metered space to use Smart Cards for payment, which will also help upgrade the image of the downtown. Smart Card parking can be programmed to implement “fine grain” parking policies, which should include: 1) low cost on-street parking for downtown residents; 2) reorganizing locations of longer-term on-street parking; 3) demand-based parking fees to increase the supply of parking in high-demand parts of the downtown; and 4) adding fees remotely for users who extend their stay in the downtown.

## 5.6 Stakeholder Reorganization

One of the keys to successful downtown improvement is the effective organization of stakeholder roles and responsibilities. On the whole, downtown areas need the active and effective management of public agencies and organizations to be successful. The two primary public stakeholders responsible for the success of the downtown are the Joliet City Center Partnership (JCCP) and the City of Joliet. Private stakeholders include property owners and business owners, who are represented by JCCP. It is Camiros’ opinion that Joliet’s two public stakeholders are not sufficiently well organized in an integrated manner to effectively implement plans for the downtown’s success. This opinion is based on the following observations:

- The roles and responsibilities of the JCCP and the City of Joliet are not clearly established.
- Communication on the coordination of actions to pursue development opportunities is lacking.

- City staff have numerous demands and pursuing downtown initiatives must be prioritized with these other demands.
- There appears to be no clear plan for economic development in the downtown.
- Downtown improvement actions often appear reactive rather than proactive.

Clearly, both the JCCP and the City have vital roles to play in bringing about the downtown’s revitalization. By examining the various responsibilities for advancing downtown improvement, and organizing these in a clear and logical way, the full strength of the stakeholders can be applied to improving the downtown.

Camiros recommends that JCCP carry the primary responsibility for downtown improvement. JCCP’s sole focus is on the downtown, and this targeted focus is critical to the success of the downtown. JCCP and the City should work closely together, with JCCP performing much of the outreach and “leg work” involved in proactive implementation. For example, JCCP and the City should formulate a framework for TIF incentives for various types of projects. JCCP would then engage with and recruit development proposals consistent with the incentive framework. When the terms of the “deal” are worked out, the City would then get involved to finalize a redevelopment agreement. With JCCP acting as the lead, a much more proactive approach to downtown improvement can be put into place. The major responsibilities of JCCP would include:

- Lead responsibility for economic development, with an emphasis on development recruitment;
- Provide technical services to existing and prospective businesses to improve the business climate and promote the downtown;
- Administer the SSA and façade program;
- Manage downtown maintenance, landscaping, and special signage;
- Offer optional participation, for a fee, to property and business owners for key services such as snow removal, trash pickup, etc.;
- Establish a property acquisition and holding entity to facilitate developer acquisition of land;
- Work with the City to manage the downtown TIF district;
- Serve as a liaison between downtown property and business owner and the City to advance common downtown interests.

The reorganization of stakeholder roles and responsibilities is a major initiative that is central to the

downtown's success. This reorganization must be done through close coordination between JCCP and the City. It is recommended that the organization of roles and responsibilities be formalized, perhaps in an intergovernmental agreement between the JCCP and the City of Joliet. The City and JCCP must renew the SSA in 2016. This is the ideal time to put the reorganization in place. The renewal of the SSA should address funding and staffing needs to fulfill its expanded responsibilities.

## 5.7 Long-Term Projects

While the focus of this Plan is on policies and projects to build improvement momentum, it is also imperative that longer-term strategies be kept in focus. Given current market conditions, development of new buildings at higher price points is not realistic in the short term. However, after the *"Mecca for young adults"* strategy has been effectively implemented, more broad-based development projects at higher price points will become possible. This section describes the longer-term strategies and some of the key projects. Figure 21, Long-Term Improvement Program, illustrates recommended longer-term projects within the context of the shorter-term initiatives to convey the full effect of proposed improvements. Key policies and projects represented on Figure 17 include:

**Recruit Major Anchor:** To be successful as a dynamic urban center, downtown Joliet needs uses that are regionally significant. Once the new Will County Courthouse is complete, the existing surface parking lot immediately east of the current courthouse will be available for development. This is a very prominent site and should be reserved for an anchor use, such as a new university facility, hospital, major employer or large-scale mixed use building. (#19)

**Hotel/Conference Center:** Recruiting a new hotel to downtown Joliet would add a new element to the mix of uses. A hotel/conference center would increase the downtown's appeal for future office development, as well as support the downtown's cultural/entertainment district. The site on the northeast corner of Joliet and Cass Street would be an ideal location for this use. A hotel on this site would serve as an overflow facility for Harrah's Casino. It would also be close to the government uses to the south. The site is well located on one of the major arterial streets in downtown, Cass Street, and just east of the Cass Street Bridge over the Des Plaines River. (#22)

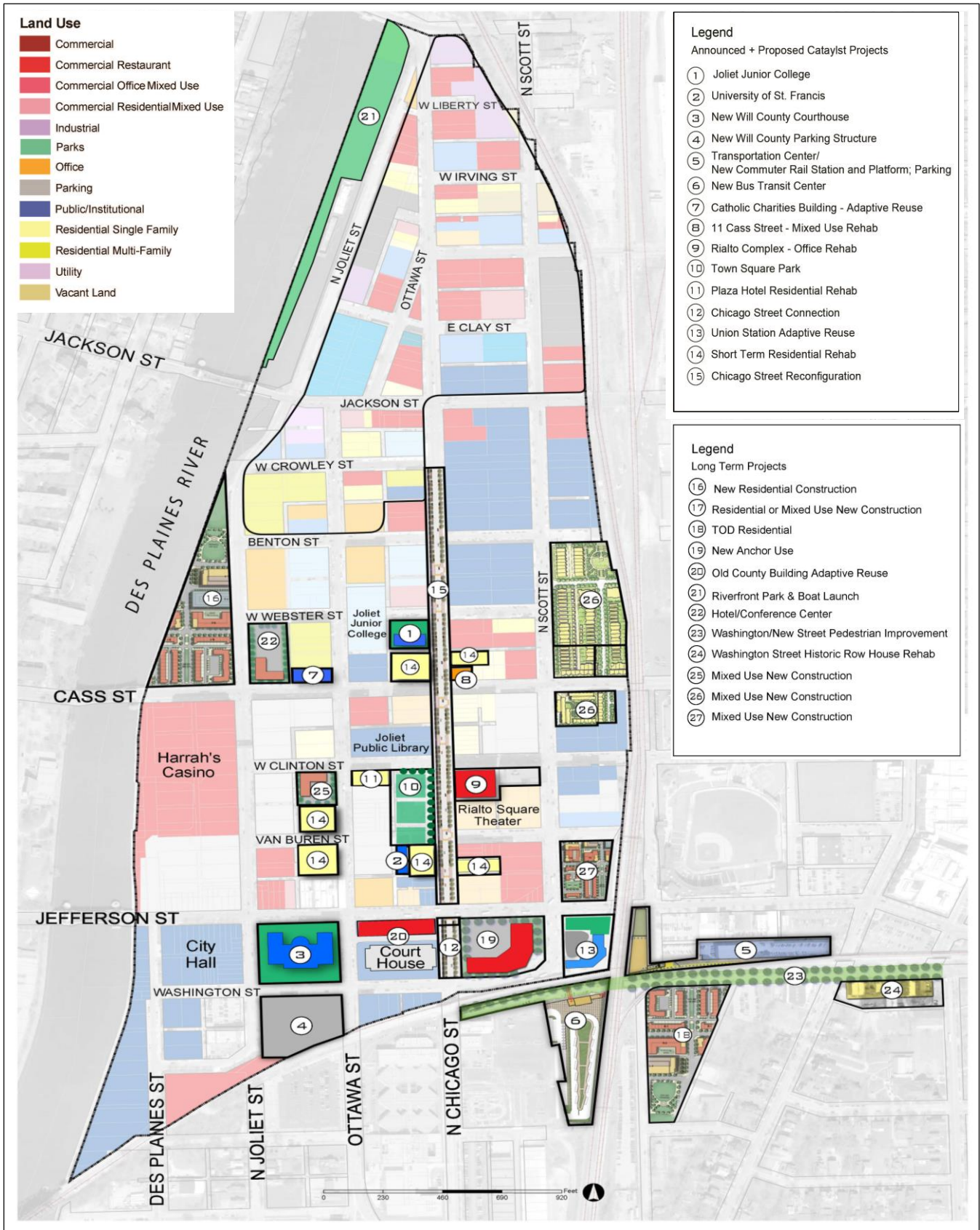
**River-Oriented Residential:** Once market conditions improve, the development of new residential buildings will become realistic. The site along the river at the northwest corner of Joliet and Cass Street would be an attractive location for new residential development. This development might take the form of ownership housing for "empty nesters," who would be attracted to the cultural/entertainment district, including an expanding roster of restaurants. (#16)

**Riverfront Park and Boat Launch:** Many downtowns benefit from a location along a river. Rivers are a natural attraction, offering open space and recreational opportunities, including boating. The Des Plaines River is a working river with active shipping, mostly in the form of barge traffic. As a working river, the Des Plaines River cannot be viewed solely as a recreational amenity. Nonetheless, people will be attracted to views of the river, as well as to watch the commercial shipping activity. The protected boat slip offers the opportunity for protected recreational use of this water body. Currently, this facility is used commercially as a loading area for barges. While this is a viable use, the site may have more value as a community park, which would support a growing residential population in the downtown as well as attract users from nearby neighborhoods to the downtown. (#21)

**Transit-Oriented Residential:** The upgraded transportation service made possible by the Gateway Transportation Center will, in the future, make the downtown more appealing for both new businesses and residents. The site south of Washington Street and East of York Street would be an ideal location for transit-oriented residential development. This site is directly adjacent to the Gateway Transportation Center and serves as a link to the neighborhood to the east. While the site is currently programmed for surface parking for the Gateway Transportation Center, it may become available for development once the center's parking structure is built. (#18)

**Courthouse Adaptive Reuse:** Once the new Will County Courthouse is built, the current courthouse will become surplus. This site will also be a prominent location for a major new use. There is some question as to whether the existing building can be adapted for reuse. Should this be the case, Camiros recommends that the existing plaza space in front of the building become a separate development parcel. Camiros thinks expanded retail use is possible along Jefferson Street, with this site being a prime location. (#20)





**FIGURE 21**  
**Long-Term Improvement Program**



**Various Mixed-Use Developments:** Underutilized sites along Scott Street are recommended for future mixed-use development. The most viable combination of uses, from a market perspective, appears to be residential-retail, although office-retail may prove viable should new businesses/employers be attracted to the downtown. (#25, #26, #27)

**Neighborhood Development Area:** Camiros recommends a policy of promoting neighborhood-oriented development in the northern portion of the

Study Area, as shown on Figure 17. This area is appropriate for a mix of smaller scale retail, residential, public and semi-public uses. As the core area of the downtown improves, additional demand will be generated for smaller-scale uses located within easy access of the downtown. Residential uses can include single-family residential, townhouse, and three-flat buildings. Retail uses can include those that serve the immediate neighborhood as well as those to the east and west.



*Photo of a modern, multi-modal urban street illustrating fewer lanes of traffic in favor of greater pedestrian and bicycle facilities as well as on-street parking.*

## CHAPTER 6: PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation is a major part of this Plan. Plan recommendations, no matter how insightful, will be of little value if effective implementation is not put into place. The approach to implementation for the improvements recommended in this plan is based on the following three principles:

**A Downtown Champion:** The downtown needs someone clearly identified as the “point person” for the downtown, someone who pulls everyone together and maintains focus on the improvement initiatives and responsibilities for taking action. Since the Joliet City Center Partnership is recommended as the proactive stakeholder, the

Executive Director is the logical choice to be the **downtown champion**.

**Maintain Consensus and Clarity:** In order for a high level of implementation to occur, consensus and clarity must be maintained among the various stakeholders. While the working relationship between the Joliet City Center Partnership and the City is key, the effective involvement of other stakeholders is also important. These include property and business owners, Will County and prospective developers. It is essential that all stakeholders know the status of the improvement program and where it is headed at all times.

**Commitment to Action:** While consensus on what needs to be done is essential, it is not enough. A **strong commitment to action** is needed by both the JCCP and the City of Joliet. The actions to be taken by JCCP involve most of the “on-the-ground” work. The actions taken by the City of Joliet involve strategic and policy actions to revise regulations, to make infrastructure improvements and fund certain initiatives. Forging a commitment to action is a point of emphasis in this Plan and will be addressed in the discussion of the Downtown Action Agenda.

### 6.1 Downtown Action Agenda

Joliet’s downtown needs some success to sway perceptions of the downtown toward a positive direction. People will accept certain conditions in the downtown if the prevailing attitude in the community holds that the downtown has “turned the corner” and is on its way to a new era of vitality. Achieving a series of successes to bring about this positive attitude is, in Camiros’ opinion, very achievable.

A commitment by the City of Joliet to take action on a series of short-term initiatives is required to help the downtown “turn the corner.” The primary focus of this

Plan has been to formulate workable policies and recommendations that can be put into action in the short term. This work has been synthesized into the Downtown Action Agenda, shown on Table 5.

The Downtown Action Agenda is the heart of the plan for implementation. It identifies nine short-term initiatives that are pivotal to creating an environment of self-sustaining improvement. The agenda is organized by individual initiative, which are organized by name and number. The agenda clearly delineates:

- the **benefits and outcomes** of each initiative;
- the **individual tasks** that are part of the initiative;
- the **parties responsible** for taking action; and
- the **funding source** for each initiative.

The nine key short-term initiatives of the Downtown Action Agenda are:

1. Reconnect Chicago Street
2. Reorganize Stakeholder Responsibilities
3. Extend Life of the Downtown TIF (12 Years)
4. Stimulate Residential Development Projects
5. Improve the Homeless/Vagrancy Problem
6. Complete Negotiations on New County Courthouse
7. Build the Downtown Square/Park
8. Upgrade Street Parking Operations/Management
9. Renovate & Redesign Chicago Street

The Downtown Action Agenda serves as a clear point of departure for organizing actions to improve the downtown. It must be stressed, however, that the Downtown Action Agenda must be updated on an ongoing basis to keep it current, to reflect completed initiatives and to reflect new realities regarding timing and funding. The items in the agenda are listed in order of importance based on achievability and funding requirements.

**TABLE 5:  
DOWNTOWN JOLIET ACTION AGENDA, Page One**

Initiative #1:	Benefits/Outcomes	
<b>Chicago Street Reconnection</b>	a) Immediately adds vitality, particularly to Chicago Street b) Serves as a highly visible sign of downtown transformation	
Actions	Carried Out By	Timing
1) Determine technical requirements	City Staff	Two Months
2) Intergovernmental agreement	City Staff, City Council & County Officials	Six Months

3) Prepare connection design	Consulting engineer w/City Staff	Four Months
4) Construct Improvement	General contractor w/ City contract admin.	Six Months
<b>Funding:</b>	<b>Order of Magnitude Cost: Low</b>	<b>Source: Downtown TIF District</b>

<b>Initiative #2:</b>	<b>Benefits/Outcomes</b>	
<b>Reorganize Stakeholder Responsibilities</b>	a) Establishes clear lines of responsibility for downtown improvement b) Establishes new roles for Joliet City Center Partnership and the City c) Designates JCCP as the lead organization d) Produces better downtown operations management/maintenance e) Charges JCCP with full time economic development responsibility f) Builds new role and responsibilities into SSA renewal f) Is essential to the downtown's success	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Carried Out By</b>	<b>Timing</b>
1) Prepare conceptual framework	Camiros; in consultation with stakeholders	One Month
2) JCCP to prepare detailed org. plan and budget	JCCP Staff	Three Months
3) JCCP and City coordination on SSA renewal	JCCP Staff and City Staff	Six Months
4) JCCP to reflect new role in SSA renewal	JCCP Staff w/City coordination	Nine Months
5) City budget & procedural adjustments	City Staff w/JCCP coordination	Twelve Months
<b>Funding:</b>	<b>Order of Magnitude Cost: Low</b>	<b>Source: Current Operating Funds</b>

<b>Initiative #3:</b>	<b>Benefits/Outcomes</b>	
<b>Extend Life of the Downtown TIF (12 Years)</b>	a) Provides essential funding for economic development and public/infrastructure improvements	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Carried Out By</b>	<b>Timing</b>
1) Confirm TIF extension is the right approach	JCCP; City Staff; TIF consultant	One Month
2) Secure support from local representatives in the Illinois General Assembly	City Council; City Staff; political lobbyist	Three Months
3) Adopt TIF Amendment and City Ordinance	TIF consultant, City Staff; City Council	Nine Months
<b>Funding:</b>	<b>Order of Magnitude Cost: Low</b>	<b>Source: Downtown TIF District</b>

**TABLE 5:  
DOWNTOWN JOLIET ACTION AGENDA; Page Two**

<b>Initiative #4:</b>	<b>Benefits/Outcomes</b>	
<b>Stimulate Residential Development Projects</b>	a) Puts into motion the downtown's key redevelopment strategy b) Starts to bring 24 hour activity to the downtown c) Validates the downtown as a quality place	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Carried Out By</b>	<b>Timing</b>

1) Cultivate residential investors & rehabbers	JCCP	Ongoing
2) Establish dialogue w/building owners	JCCP	Ongoing
3) Gain support from USF & JJC for student housing	JCCP	Three Months
4) Explore code accommodations for rehabs	JCCP and Building Dept.	Six Months
5) Stimulate start of two new residential projects	JCCP	Twelve
<b>Funding:</b>	<b>Order of Magnitude Cost: Low/Moderate</b>	<b>Source: Adjust JCCP Budget</b>

<b>Initiative #5:</b>	<b>Benefits/Outcomes</b>	
<b>Improve Homeless/Vagrancy Problem</b>	a) Significantly improves the downtown's image	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Carried Out By</b>	<b>Timing</b>
1) Adopt a zoning ordinance text amendment to make public/private social service uses a special use	City Staff & City Council	Three Months
2) Assess limits of police power; adopt procedures	Legal counsel; police dept.; City Council	Three Months
3) Prepare study identifying programmatic solutions	JCCP; City Staff and/or consultant	Twelve Months
4) Take action on study recommendations	City Staff & City Council	To be Determined
<b>Funding:</b>	<b>Order of Magnitude Cost: Low</b>	<b>Source: Current Operating Funds</b>

<b>Initiative #6:</b>	<b>Benefits/Outcomes</b>	
<b>Complete Negotiations on New County Courthouse</b>	a) Confirms Joliet as the seat of County government b) Continues economic benefit of County functions c) Allows for reuse of existing courthouse and parking lot d) Required to allow the reconnection of Chicago Street	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Carried Out By</b>	<b>Timing</b>
1) Continue actions already underway	City Staff; City Council; County Officials	End of Year 2015
<b>Funding:</b>	<b>Order of Magnitude Cost: High</b>	<b>Source: Special Appropriations</b>



**FIGURE 5:  
DOWNTOWN JOLIET ACTION AGENDA; Page Three**

<b>Initiative #7:</b>	<b>Benefits/Outcomes</b>	
<b>Build Downtown Square/Park at Chicago Street and Cass St.</b>	a) Creates an “iconic place”/downtown focal point b) Provides a space for downtown events c) Generates activity and vibrancy d) Supports the “Mecca for Young Adults” strategy e) Improves the downtown’s image f) Supports restaurants and bars	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Carried Out By</b>	<b>Timing</b>
1) Prepare conceptual plan and budget w/TIF funds	JCCP/City staff; design consultant	Four Months
2) City Council consensus & budget commitment	City Council; City Staff	Six Months
3) Intergovernmental agreement w/County	City/County Staff; elected officials	Nine Months
4) Prepare design and construction plans	Design consult.; JCCP; City Staff; City Council	Eighteen Months
5) Construct the Downtown Square/Park	General contractor; City Staff; design consult.	To be Determined
<b>Funding:</b>	<b>Order of Magnitude Cost: High</b>	<b>Source: Special Appropriations/TIF Funds</b>

<b>Initiative #8:</b>	<b>Benefits/Outcomes</b>	
<b>Upgrade Street Parking Operations/Management</b>	a) Improves the downtown’s image b) Makes the downtown more user friendly c) Provides more efficient use of parking resources	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Carried Out By</b>	<b>Timing</b>
1) Prepare operations plan identifying key changes to make street parking more user friendly	City Staff; JCCP; parking consultant	Six Months
2) Install “Smart Meters”	City Council; City Parking Division	Twelve Months
<b>Funding:</b>	<b>Order of Magnitude Cost: Low</b>	<b>Source: Downtown TIF District</b>

<b>Initiative #9:</b>	<b>Benefits/Outcomes</b>	
<b>Renovate Chicago Street as an Urban/Multi-Modal Corridor</b>	a) Aligns Chicago Street’s optics & function w/urban strategy b) Makes Chicago Street current with needs of young adults c) Provides more efficient use of parking resources	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Carried Out By</b>	<b>Timing</b>
1) Prepare conceptual plan and budget	JCCP/City staff; design consultant	Four Months
2) City Council consensus & budget commitment	City Council; City Staff	Six Months
3) Prepare design and construction plans	Design consult.; JCCP; City Staff; City Council	Eighteen Months
4) Construct the improvement	General contractor; City Staff; design consult.	To be Determined
<b>Funding:</b>	<b>Order of Magnitude Cost: High</b>	<b>Source: Special Appropriations/Grant Funds</b>

## 6.2 Feasibility of Taking Action.

Joliet’s downtown has its share of challenges, but it is also fortunate to have clear, achievable initiatives that will lead to real improvement. The nine initiatives on the Downtown Action Agenda are all achievable within the short term. As indicated by the timing column on Table 5, some of these items can be completed within a year, while others may take up to 4-5 years. Completing most of the items is entirely within the control of downtown stakeholders. Only one item, **“stimulate residential development projects”** is dependent on the private sector. Two others will require cooperation with Will County. **“Improving the homeless/vagrancy problem”** may require the cooperation of social service agencies. That stakeholders have control over fulfilling Downtown Action Agenda should be cause for considerable optimism.

Another aspect of feasibility is funding. The prospects for funding the Downtown Action Agenda is also positive. Only two of the action items, **“build the downtown square/park”** and **“renovate Chicago Street”** are capital intensive. Of these two, renovating Chicago Street will require greater funding and, hence, was identified as a lower priority. The other seven action items can all be achieved with relatively low levels of funding. Many of these seven actions could be funded through the downtown TIF district, which does not have abundant surplus revenues, but appears sufficient to fund these low cost items.



*Image of Chicago Street redesigned as a multi-modal street with on-street parking, café seating, bike and pedestrian amenities.*

The two capital intensive projects will require multi-year funding. Even so, preliminary work on conceptual design and budgeting can be done in the near term to make these projects shovel ready within three years. This will also give the City time to explore grant funding for these projects.

## 6.3 Consensus and Commitment

Commitment and consensus are absolute necessities for taking effective action. Distractions and inertia derail many a worthy implementation plan. One of the goals of this Plan was to build consensus and commitment, particularly at the decision-making level.

To build consensus and commitment, JCCP organized two rounds of one-on-one meetings for Camiros with City Councilmen and the Mayor. The first round of meetings focused on establishing a clear direction for the downtown. The second round of meetings specifically discussed the Downtown Action Agenda represented in this Plan. Not all councilmen were available for either round of meetings, however, four councilmen participated in each round. The former mayor participated in the first round of meetings and Mayor O’Dekirk participated in the second round of meetings.

The results of the meetings, particularly the second round of meetings, was very encouraging. Each councilman and the Mayor supported each item on the Downtown Action Agenda. Each councilman was asked if he/she would vote for policies needed to implement certain action items, such as amending the zoning ordinance to make new homeless shelters or social service agencies special uses. They were also asked about reorganizing responsibilities to give Joliet City Center Partnership the primary responsibility for taking action. Each councilman indicated a willingness to support such measures. Moreover, the councilmen and the Mayor indicated enthusiasm for Downtown Action Agenda, seeing it as an achievable and substantive step toward making the downtown a success.

The topic of funding was also addressed. Each elected official was asked if he/she would support funding of the action items. It must be stressed that the elected officials were not asked for absolute funding commitments, and none were given. At the same time, it was recognized that the funding needs for many of the action items is low and should not be a barrier to carrying them out, especially if there is a strong commitment to the downtown among elected officials. There was also support for preliminary actions on the two more costly action items, **“building the downtown**

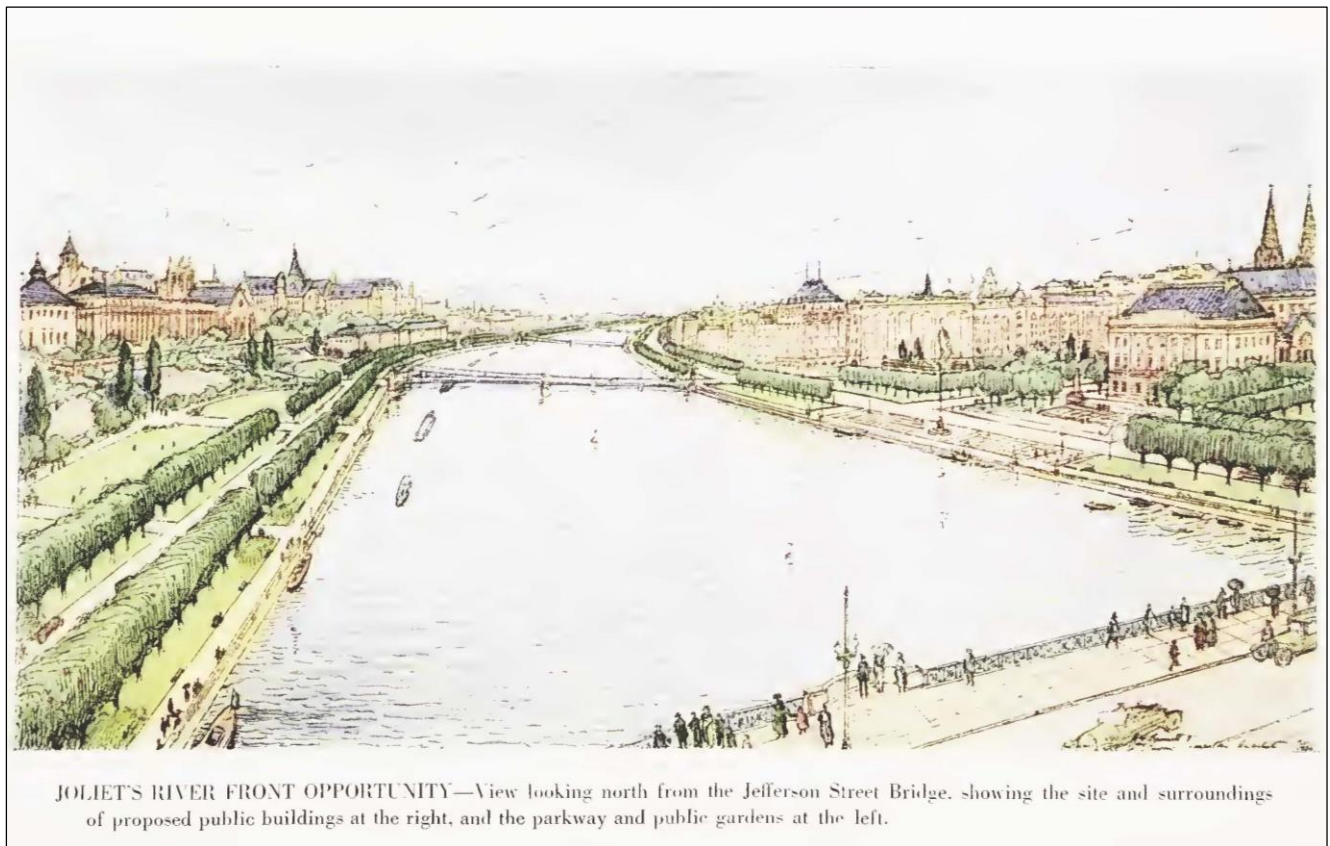
*square/park*” and *“renovating Chicago Street”* Showing a commitment to these projects is important. Preparing conceptual plans and formulating budgets would put the City on a path to implementing these items.

The elected officials of the City of Joliet were specifically engaged on matters of consensus and commitment because the City is central to the policy and funding decisions needed to carry them out. The JCCP board was also engaged on the Downtown Action Agenda and indicated unanimous support. In the proposed organization of stakeholder responsibilities, JCCP would provide the manpower and expertise, but the City must facilitate implementation through its policy and funding actions.

#### 6.4 Implementation Summary

The Downtown Action Agenda was formulated to align with the identified role and function of the downtown as a *regional urban center*, and the improvement

strategy, *“a Mecca for young adults.”* The Action Agenda is clearly feasible for implementation. It consists of only actions achievable in the short-term, but which will generate significant change and improvement in the downtown. Lastly, there is strong consensus and commitment for taking action among stakeholders, including elected officials. Clearly, this Plan has “set the table” for substantive and achievable improvement of the downtown, which should translate into self-sustaining improvement momentum.



*An illustration from the 1921 Joliet City Plan, illustrating the potential for the city’s riverfront. While this grand vision never came to pass, it illustrates Joliet’s strong planning and development heritage. When commitment to city improvement is combined with grounded and workable strategies, great things are possible.*