

DESIGN DOWNTOWN STL

DESIGN
DOWNTOWN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

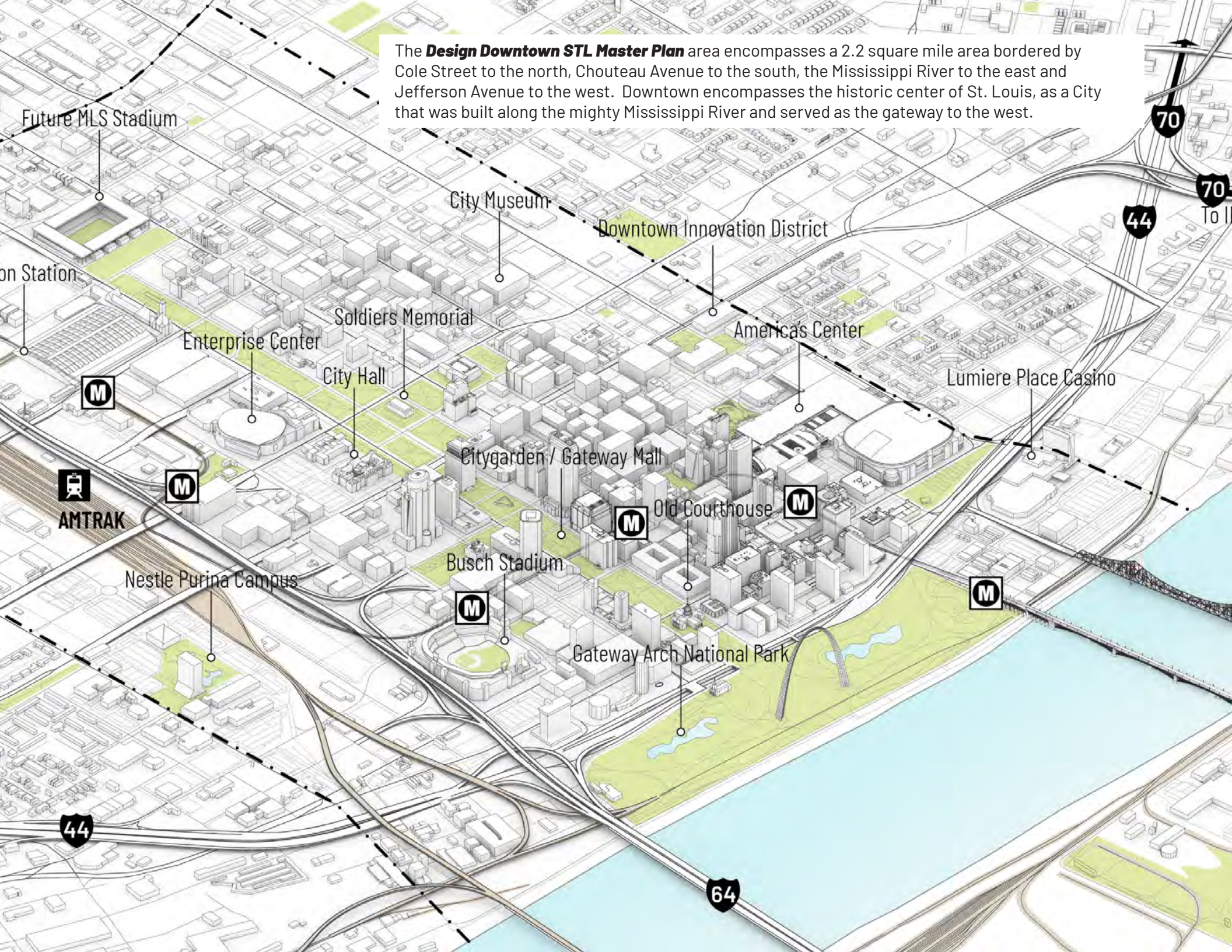
* Adopted by the City of St. Louis Planning Commission as a Neighborhood Plan and an element of the Comprehensive Plan on December 2, 2020

OVERVIEW

The ***Design Downtown STL Master Plan*** is the result of a year-long collaborative process to create a vision for the future of Downtown St. Louis. The planning process engaged people from all backgrounds in a conversation about the issues, opportunities, and potential of Downtown. Perspectives shared by local residents, business owners, community advocates, and elected officials about the future of Downtown were rich and often detailed, reflecting Downtown's importance as the economic, social, and cultural heart of the Region. The result is a roadmap for the next 10 years that will guide implementation of the community's vision for Downtown.



The **Design Downtown STL Master Plan** area encompasses a 2.2 square mile area bordered by Cole Street to the north, Chouteau Avenue to the south, the Mississippi River to the east and Jefferson Avenue to the west. Downtown encompasses the historic center of St. Louis, as a City that was built along the mighty Mississippi River and served as the gateway to the west.



Future MLS Stadium

on Station

City Museum

Downtown Innovation District

Soldiers Memorial

Enterprise Center

City Hall

America's Center

Lumiere Place Casino

Citygarden / Gateway Mall

Old Courthouse

Busch Stadium

Gateway Arch National Park

Nestle Purina Campus

AMTRAK

44

64

70

70

44

To I

\$2.2 billion worth of private investment has been invested Downtown in recent years.

Design Downtown STL comes at a critical time, marked by both opportunities and challenges for Downtown. On one hand, since the end of the Great Recession, Downtown has real momentum, powered by a mix of public and private investments recently completed, planned, or under construction with a value of more than \$2.2 billion. Downtown’s residential population has nearly doubled in the past decade, adding about 5,000 new residents and becoming even more diverse, more educated, and younger, with growth in the 25-34 year old demographic. Downtown continues its role as the City’s most important economic anchor, hosting about a quarter of all private sector employment in the City.

However, the potential of Downtown’s strengths is hindered by significant challenges. Compared to peer cities, Downtown has a less concentrated resident and daytime population and experienced weak job growth compared to peer cities in the post-recession period. This lack of density in the daytime and evening population makes it difficult to fully support the range and types of retail and restaurants normally associated with active downtowns. Critically, this lack of street activity exacerbates existing concerns around crime and safety in Downtown. This plays into long-standing regional perceptions about Downtown that are not in sync with what many newcomers and advocates

see - a place rich in history with unique amenities that rivals other major cities across the country. Vibrancy is the lifeblood of successful downtowns, and in St. Louis, Downtown improvements must strive to “connect the dots” with new uses and programming that reinforces recent investments, supports local businesses and residents, and inspires the necessary street life so important in creating a safe and welcoming environment.

The last plan for Downtown - **Downtown Now** - was completed over 20 years ago. New strategies are needed to meet long-standing and emerging opportunities and challenges. Nothing has made this more clear than the events of Spring 2020. Toward the end of this planning process, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted all aspects of daily life, causing businesses to shut down, unemployment to skyrocket, and tragic loss of life, disproportionately affecting communities of color. Amidst the ongoing public health and economic crises caused by the pandemic, communities across the country - gripped by immeasurable grief and rage - mobilized in protest of the police brutality and systemic racism that resulted in the murders of George Floyd in Minneapolis, among many other Black lives stolen in recent weeks and months. Downtown has been the backdrop to many of these uprisings and has

witnessed the powerful, peaceful, and community building actions of many in the name of racial justice. In that same timespan, Downtown has also weathered some destruction similar to what other cities have experienced.

As with other downtowns across the country, the physical realm, social network, and economy of Downtown St. Louis have undergone seismic shifts in mere months. With extremely low demand in the hospitality industry, hotels, stadiums and convention-related venues are closed or are operating at very low occupancy. Office workers stopped coming to the office, significantly altering the daytime population that supports local stores, coffee shops and lunch spots. Many small and local businesses who were grappling with how to reopen are now faced with rebuilding, intensifying the struggle to recover. At the time of writing this document, the pandemic continues to necessitate social distancing for some time to come. Downtown will need to work deliberately in the immediate stages of recovery to support and grow businesses and welcome back residents, workers, and visitors. **Design Downtown STL** includes specific actions to help in the COVID-19 short-term recovery but also puts forward strategies that serve to connect the recovery to our collective vision for Downtown. Despite the immediate and unforeseen challenges that have

altered this process, it has never been more important to plan, coordinate resources and work together for a more resilient, just, and inclusive Downtown.

Realizing the full potential of Downtown requires the continued collaboration that helped to build this vision. Civic economic development organizations are critical to Downtown's success, but they cannot drive implementation of this plan without the many individuals, organizations, stakeholders, and City leaders working as partners to take action. This is the playbook that helped St. Louis to achieve so much following the Downtown Now plan. Thanks to that effort and the partnerships formed to make it happen, Downtown now has: an entertainment district along Washington Avenue; reused historic buildings that previously were vacant eyesores; transformed Gateway Arch Grounds; a redeveloped Central Library that has received global architectural awards; redevelopment of the Old Post Office and creation of the Old Post Office Plaza; a new Busch Stadium; Citygarden; the Schnucks Culinaria grocery store; double the number of residents, and much more. St. Louis has always proven it can take on the big idea. Responding to today's extreme economic and health-related challenges, stepping up to meet the calls for a just and equitable Downtown community, keeping an eye on the big picture, and establishing the foundation for continued momentum are at the heart of this plan, **Design Downtown STL**.

The last planning effort focused on Downtown was over 20 years ago.

BUILDING EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY IN DOWNTOWN

The COVID-19 pandemic has had catastrophic impacts, but it is a temporary phenomenon. The racial injustices that galvanized the protests against systemic racism are, in contrast, both historic and ongoing. Unintentional and intentional racial bias and persistent racial gaps in employment, income, education, and other opportunities too often limit the ability of African Americans and other people of color to thrive in our City and region.

These gross discrepancies undermine our values of equity and justice, they hold families back generation after generation, and they also weaken our economy. In St. Louis, the racial wage gap is dramatic. According to the **Equitable Economic Development Framework** for St. Louis, Black/African Americans working in the City earn just 48% of what their White counterparts earn. The costs of inequity will only grow without intentional

action. Falling wages, decreased workforce skill, and reduced purchasing power to support local businesses represent just a few indicators that will worsen without intentional action.

Conventional economic recovery and growth is not sufficient to solve these persistent racial and ethnic inequities in our community. Toward this necessary end, **Design Downtown STL** recommends a series of strategies to simultaneously promote growth, equity of opportunity, and a Downtown that is safe and welcoming for all. These recommendations reflect what we heard from thousands of citizens and stakeholders who participated in **Design Downtown STL's** extensive engagement process.

Design Downtown STL envisions a Downtown where all people and communities come together and thrive – regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender/gender identity, sexual orientation, language, income, ability and other identity markers. This collaborative planning effort has sought out new and better solutions to ensure that ALL St. Louisans have the opportunity to participate and benefit as Downtown and its residential and business communities grow stronger. This work is informed by, and aspires to complement, the ongoing work community groups and networks are already doing to champion diversity, equity and inclusion across the City and region.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Over 2,000 residents and stakeholders participated in the *Design Downtown STL* process.

The public engagement process was intended to reach a broad spectrum of community members who make Downtown the heart of the St. Louis region. Throughout the course of the planning process, we engaged with residents, workers, visitors, and stakeholders through multiple formats, including open houses, pop-up events, online activities, and one-on-one and small group conversations. The varied approaches to community outreach enabled us to reach many different audiences that reflect the diversity of the Downtown consumer.



PROJECT DASHBOARD



130+

October 2019 Open House Attendees



1,151

Community Survey Responses



96

Stakeholder Interviews & Focus Groups



520/8

Attendees Pop-Up Events*
*Includes "Futurist" Lecture and Workshop



1,065

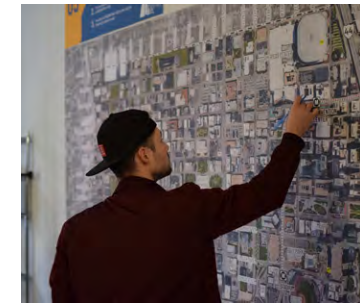
Collaborative Map Comments



604

May 2020 Online Open House Participants





You should see Downtown St. Louis today! You wouldn't believe how much it's changed.
Now it's...

“People actually want to live downtown now too, so there are people everywhere!”

“Booming! The streets are packed with people all throughout the day and night. A dog can be spotted on every sidewalk. I feel safe walking alone.”

“Much more populated with cultural activities, shopping, museums, and more. People are out all day and night.”

“Also, the streets are incredible. They have been paved and the street plates are gone.”

“Full of people and thriving businesses. I walked everywhere and even rode my bike without reservation of safety or hitting a pot hole.”

“Full of people! Hard to believe but people are out and about nearly 24/7 now! And the shopping options are amazing.”

“Walkable, transit-friendly to various multi-functional streetscapes and multi-oriented buildings.”

“So much safer, easier to get around, and a much better place to live. There are so many cool places to eat and so much to do.”

“Alive, bustling, green and clean!”

“DOWNTOWN TODAY IS/HAS...”

WORK STALE
 FRAGMENTED
POTENTIAL
 EMPTY
 DISJOINTED
 IMPROVING
 GROWTH
 HISTORIC
 SPOTTY
 UNDISCOVERED
 POSSIBILITIES
 LACKING
OPPORTUNITY
 UNDERUTILIZED
 SEPARATED
 UNSAFE

“DOWNTOWN TOMORROW CAN BE...”

ENERGIZED
ACTIVE
 EXCITING
 CONNECTED
 WELCOMING
VIBRANT
 LIVELY
 THRIVING
 BUSY
 POPULATED
 INTERESTING
 INNOVATIVE
 DENSE
 SAFE
ALIVE
 WALKABLE
 REVITALIZED
 CROWDED

Figure 1: Public feedback from the Design Downtown STL Open House

DOWNTOWN TODAY

Downtown has long served as the place that brings everyone together. It is the economic, cultural, and civic core of the St. Louis region - a center for sports, celebrations, music & culture, as well as a center for civic celebrations and protests.

Downtown is an employment center, with about 65,000 jobs and a **daytime population of approximately 75,000 people**, as well as the visitors from the region and across the world who come for the major attractions Downtown. The Gateway Arch Park, one of the most iconic national monuments in the nation, recently reopened with a \$400 million renovation to reconnect the park to Downtown. St. Louisans have long gathered Downtown for sports, and for many, Cardinals games and the St. Louis Blues are a key part of the Downtown experience - a legacy that will expand with the new MLS stadium. City Museum and the newly opened St. Louis Aquarium add to the draw of Downtown, while the Garment District/Washington Avenue, the Cupples District, Laclede's Landing, and Downtown West offer a variety of experiences that showcase Downtown's history. And there is more to come including the new headquarters for Square in a burgeoning "Downtown

Innovation District" and a critically important expansion of America's Center to ensure St. Louis attracts major conventions to Downtown.

Several major economic hubs, institutions, and destinations are nearby including the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency headquarters under construction just to the north. The proposed Brickline Greenway will help to reconnect Downtown to neighborhoods to the north, south and west by providing a link between Forest Park and the Gateway Arch, and from Tower Grove Park to Fairgrounds Park.

Downtown is not just a center of employment and tourism, but also a growing neighborhood. Downtown's residential population has grown significantly, nearly **doubling in the past decade to more than 11,000 residents**.



The **Design Downtown STL** process included extensive research into the people, places and businesses that shape Downtown. From this work, 7 critical “needs” were identified that this plan must address:

DOWNTOWN IS DISCONNECTED

Underutilized land and major roads like Cole Street create a clear divide between Downtown and north St. Louis and the seven lanes of asphalt along Jefferson Avenue divides Downtown West from Midtown. Similarly, I-64, freight rail lines and Chouteau Avenue all form barriers between Downtown and south St. Louis. These conditions require Downtown to work that much harder to make clear connections to the Lafayette Square, Soulard, Old North and Jeff-Vander-Lou neighborhoods, and to development along Locust Street and the Grand Center Arts District. There are just too many gaps that make Downtown feel emptier than it really is.

DOWNTOWN NEEDS TO CAPITALIZE ON ITS MOMENTUM

There has been steady investment Downtown in the past decades resulting in a number of distinct amenities including the Garment District, Laclede’s Landing, Ballpark Village, Union Station, City Museum, Citygarden, Kiener Plaza, and the improved Gateway Arch Park to name a few. Projects underway include Square’s new headquarters, a new MLS Stadium, the expansion of America’s Center and the proposed Brickline Greenway.



A strategy is needed to ensure these assets do not become islands unto themselves.

DOWNTOWN NEEDS MORE STREET ACTIVITY

Many of the participants expressed concerns about crime and the negative perceptions of Downtown stem from, and are reinforced by, how Downtown streets look and feel. The majority of Downtown’s streetscapes (83%) are “unfavorable”, a category that includes parking garages and lots, blank windowless walls, and long expanses of reflective glass without entrances. We cannot fix this issue with new retail alone due to the scale of the problem. How we activate streets is a product of how we design and program them.

DOWNTOWN NEEDS MORE RESIDENTS

Much of Downtown residential growth has been accommodated through the conversion of older buildings into residential lofts, made possible through the use of historic tax credits. However, Downtown is running out of old buildings to reuse, and different approaches are needed to create more new housing Downtown. Critically, this includes protecting affordable housing and expanding housing options for the “missing middle” of working households that need affordable spaces. But to improve and expand the Downtown neighborhood, quality of life concerns must be addressed including trash, street paving, sidewalk repair and lighting along Downtown streets.



“It’s gotten a lot better Downtown. I constantly look at who’s bought what buildings.”

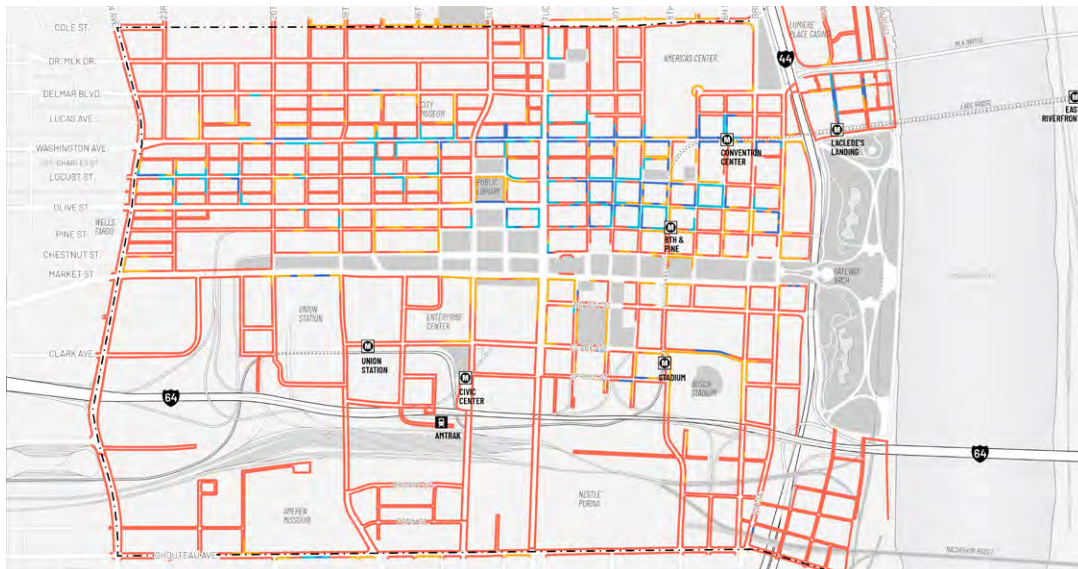


Figure 2: **Active frontages map: red indicates “inactive”**

DOWNTOWN NEEDS TO BECOME MORE SUSTAINABLE AND PROMOTE BETTER HEALTH

Downtown has 11.5 acres of open space per 1,000 inhabitants - roughly half of the 20 acres recommended by the National Recreation and Parks Association. When including Downtown’s daytime population, the ratio drops to 1.7 acres per 1,000 daytime users. In addition, with the exception of Gateway Arch National Park and certain sections of the Gateway Mall, Downtown is largely devoid of trees that contributes to the “heat island effect.” **Design Downtown STL** needs a focus on parks and trees to create a healthier environment, promote more Downtown activity and better manage stormwater.

Note: analysis completed prior to the construction of the MLS Stadium and recent additions to Ballpark Village

“We have a lot of national clients who come in to St. Louis. They say, ‘where is everybody?’”

DOWNTOWN NEEDS TO EXPAND JOB GROWTH AROUND ITS ADVANTAGES

While Downtown is a strong economic hub, it has distinct advantages in 5 key employment clusters representing 80% of Downtown’s workforce. The largest cluster, Business and Financial Services, accounts for almost 15,000 jobs. Downtown has had very weak private sector job growth compared to peer cities in the post-recession period, an issue that is reflected in Downtown’s high office vacancy rate of 19.7%, more than twice as high as the rest of the City. The challenge is clear that Downtown needs to accelerate job growth and create a more diverse and inclusive economy. Building on efforts by organizations like GeoFutures, We Power, St. Louis Promise Zone, Arch Grants and the proposed Downtown Innovation District among others, the opportunity is to attract established companies and talent, help businesses to grow and stay Downtown and, support the needs of minority and ethnically diverse companies.

CRIME AND THE NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY MUST BE ADDRESSED

Consistently cited during this process is the perception and reality of crime in Downtown. The view of Downtown as a dangerous place is one of the most serious impediments to Downtown’s growth and development. Downtown crime is overwhelmingly related to car break-ins (like other major downtowns across the country) and residents talk frequently about the issues associated with late-night drinking and cruising along Washington Avenue. Even before the pandemic, one high profile incident can instill a feeling in many that Downtown is unsafe. The most important way to address the reality and perception of crime is more activity—more housing, more businesses and more programming. The more people we have on the street at all times of the day and night, the more welcoming Downtown will feel. But there are also necessary short-term actions needed to help address these issues from lighting and temporary street closures to bringing back Downtown “ambassadors” that serve a key role in addressing the feeling of safety. Given the importance of the issue, strategies to address crime are integrated throughout Design Downtown.

VISION:

Downtown is the home of entrepreneurs, business leaders, makers, and dreamers; an energetic, inclusive and bustling community that reflects a mix of rich history with cutting-edge thinking and bold design.

Downtown St. Louis is a dynamic place to live and stands out among the country's most diverse neighborhoods as the only place with great restaurants, three major league sports teams, world-class cultural destinations, public spaces, and a national park and landmark all within a short walk, bike, or metro trip.

Downtown is a place to grow. Downtown is the home to inclusive entrepreneurship and intentionally supports the needs of diverse and growing businesses. Jobs that start Downtown stay here, and so do the people who power the Downtown economy even as their careers and lifestyles evolve.

Downtown is vibrant, ever-changing, and full of life. Downtown's streets and public spaces are active places, full of people and activities, and the place where St. Louisans from across the City and region come together.

SUMMARY OF GOALS & STRATEGIES

Goal 01

REALIZE DOWNTOWN'S POTENTIAL TO BE THE REGION'S PREMIERE WALKABLE, DIVERSE URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD

- 1.1** Encourage new housing development
- 1.2** Market Downtown as one of the City's most diverse neighborhoods
- 1.3** Broaden Downtown Neighborhood Association (DNA) and neighborhood civic participation in Downtown activities
- 1.4** Support the unhoused population
- 1.5** Protect Downtown affordability and encourage new workforce housing
- 1.6** Create a dynamic and safe Downtown neighborhood day and night



Goal 02

EXPAND THE DOWNTOWN ECONOMY TO SUPPORT STARTUPS, ENTREPRENEURS, EXISTING AND GROWING BUSINESSES

- 2.1** Target retail activity in key districts
- 2.2** Pursue alternative retail / restaurant models and support resilient food production and distribution
- 2.3** Encourage a broader set of economic activities Downtown
- 2.5** Increase the utilization of currently vacant commercial space
- 2.6** Expand business assistance to small- and mid-sized firms
- 2.7** Provide coordinated marketing for small businesses
- 2.8** Support the growth of the creative economy Downtown
- 2.9** Increase the presence of higher education institutions in Downtown



Goal 03
REDESIGN AND ACTIVATE OUR STREETS FOR A DYNAMIC BIKE, PEDESTRIAN, & TRANSIT NETWORK

- 3.1** Create a network of Downtown "boulevards"
- 3.2** Redesign critical streets
- 3.3** Create "mobility hubs"
- 3.4** Install new public space amenities
- 3.5** Pursue Downtown Transportation Demand Management Strategies
- 3.6** Expand curbside management practices



Goal 04
INVEST IN AN OPEN SPACE NETWORK TO PROVIDE VIBRANT PUBLIC SPACES AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGHOUT DOWNTOWN

- 4.1** Re-imagine the Gateway Mall to connect key Downtown attractions
- 4.2** Upgrade Aloe Plaza as a front door for Downtown West
- 4.3** Infill vacant lots with pop-up parks to serve existing residents & new uses
- 4.4** Continue to connect and celebrate the River
- 4.5** Transform infrastructural barriers into artful gateways
- 4.6** Grow the Downtown tree canopy

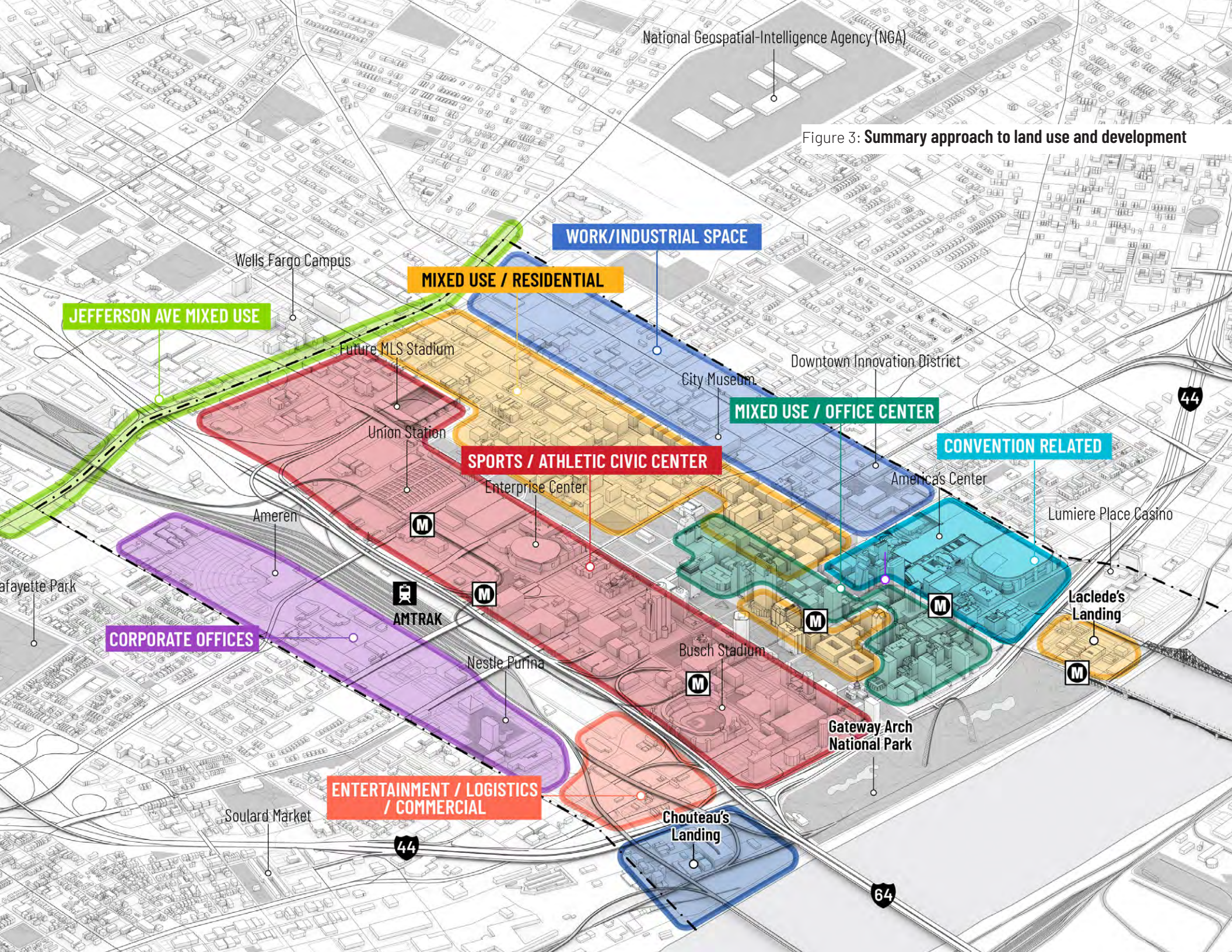


Goal 05
UNCOVER THE STORIES, PEOPLE, & PLACES THAT MAKE DOWNTOWN UNIQUE

- 5.1** Celebrate public art Downtown
- 5.2** Expand Downtown temporary programming
- 5.3** Activate Washington Avenue
- 5.4** Bring music to the foreground

National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA)

Figure 3: Summary approach to land use and development



To help transition this planning effort into a sustainable management structure for implementation, local partners should work toward transitioning and expanding the Advisory Committee into a **Design Downtown STL Task Force**.

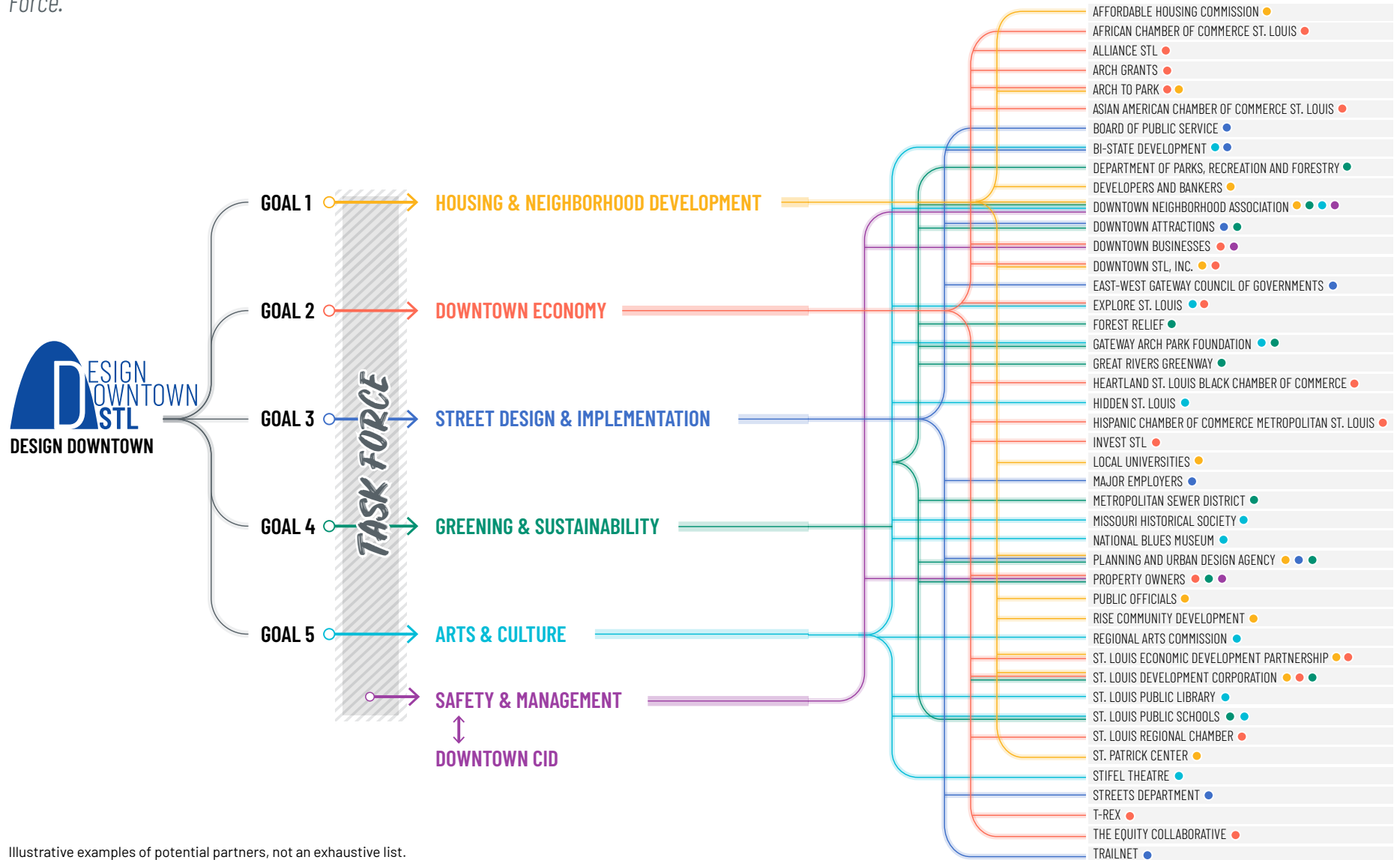


Figure 4: Key goals and potential partners

Illustrative examples of potential partners, not an exhaustive list.

PRIORITY ACTIONS

To jumpstart implementation on new catalyst projects, a series of initiatives from the recommended strategies were identified as early actions. These represent new initiatives that, together, can have an enormous impact on the character of Downtown.

By supporting a wide range of businesses, particularly those that are locally-owned and minority-owned, Downtown can offer real opportunities for inclusive entrepreneurship.

01 ESTABLISH DOWNTOWN AS A HOME FOR INCLUSIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

This key initiative is targeted toward expanding and diversifying the Downtown economy. Two thirds of Downtown jobs are related to white collar office jobs and tourism. Many of the traditional office jobs like legal services, financial services and corporate headquarters are facing increased competition from other cities and from other locations in the region. Without question, the move of 1,000 USDA jobs from the Mark Twain industrial area to Downtown is a huge benefit for local businesses. Expansion of America's Center, Square's new headquarters in the Downtown Innovation District and finding a new tenant for the AT&T building are essential projects to improve the Downtown economy. To supplement these initiatives, broad-based growth is essential across a wide number of businesses. By supporting food businesses, creative offices and even some light manufacturing Downtown, we can continue to add jobs and people. Most importantly, by supporting a wide range of businesses, particularly those that are locally-owned and minority-owned, Downtown can offer real opportunities for inclusive entrepreneurship. This is a competitive advantage for St. Louis and something many other cities cannot offer due to high costs or limited available commercial space.

An inclusive entrepreneurship program should marshal the resources and business services to support existing businesses and help new ones to start, find space and grow Downtown. To enable this to occur, this program could include a number of interlocking actions:

> CREATE "WHITE BOX" SPACE ON TARGETED BLOCKS: Work with realtors and property owners to market and improve unused spaces. These "white box" or ready-to-go spaces should be targeted in designated areas to help fill vacancies and add vibrancy to existing businesses. A little later, consider a "match.com" service for ground floor space that connects businesses and organizations or individuals seeking work space with property managers.

> CREATE HIGHLY FLEXIBLE SPACE FOR GROWTH-STAGE FIRMS UTILIZING "MASTER LEASE" MODEL: To encourage the activation of commercial space by local retailers or small businesses, a developer or property owner often needs some assurance that their ground floor tenant is "credit-worthy." Explore an option of master leases where one, credit-worthy organization leases the space and then subleases it to businesses that meet the objectives of this program. This role is typically taken on by a non-profit, like Downtown STL, Inc., or a business improvement district that has financial standing to obtain credit as well as the on-the-ground connections with local businesses and property owners.



> PROGRAM MOBILE RETAIL / RESTAURANT MODELS ON KEY CORRIDORS: Test new retailers and expand the reach of existing ones with pop-up and mobile retail and food trucks. Organize and market pop-up events for these businesses in different locations Downtown to support other events and activities.

> PROGRAM EVENTS AND TOURS THAT BRING PEOPLE TO SMALL BUSINESSES: Marketing is not something a lot of small businesses have the resources to do. Begin marketing specific Downtown businesses and coordinate campaigns like events and gift cards to attract more customers.

> CHANGE DOWNTOWN ZONING TO ALLOW FOR A WIDER RANGE OF BUSINESS ACTIVITY: Make sure zoning isn't holding back the economy by establishing a special use district for Downtown or amending the existing zoning district to clearly stipulate the range of allowable activity. Use other best practice models for managing light manufacturing activity in mixed-use districts.

The pandemic has wreaked havoc on Downtown businesses. A first step is to understand at what capacity businesses are returning.

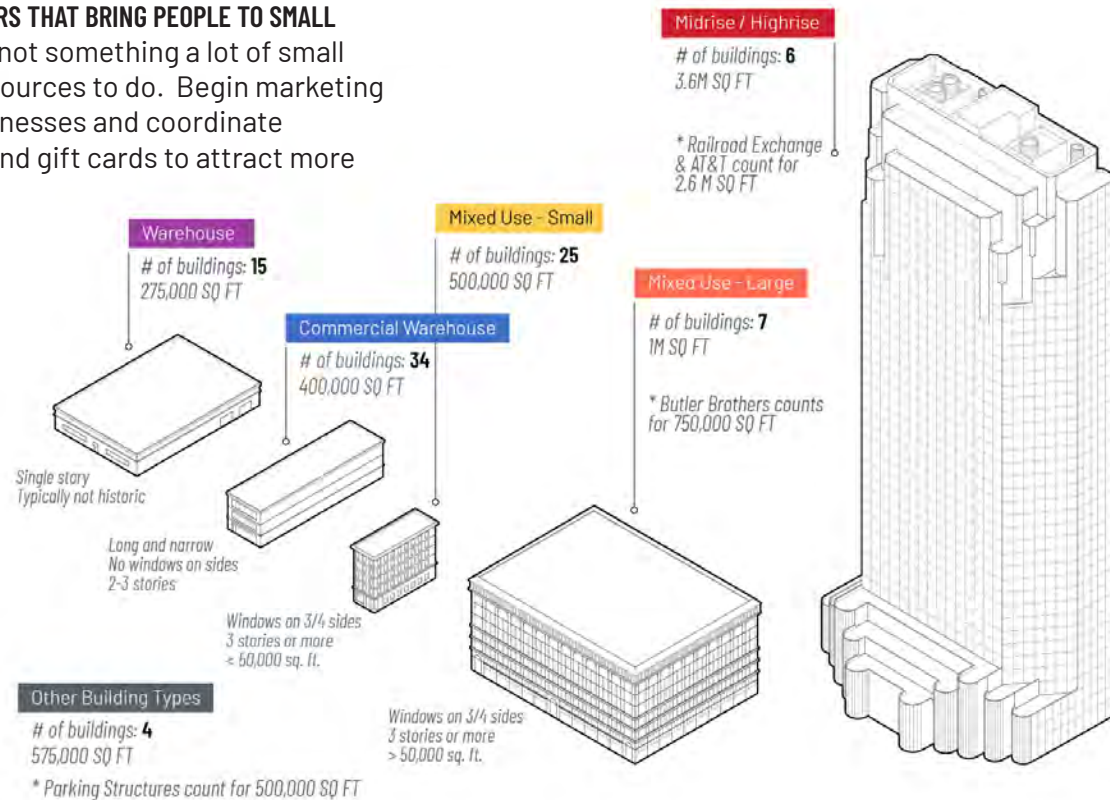
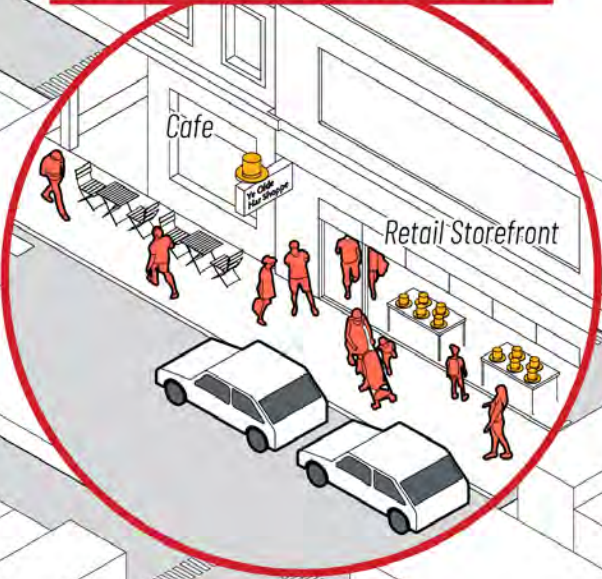
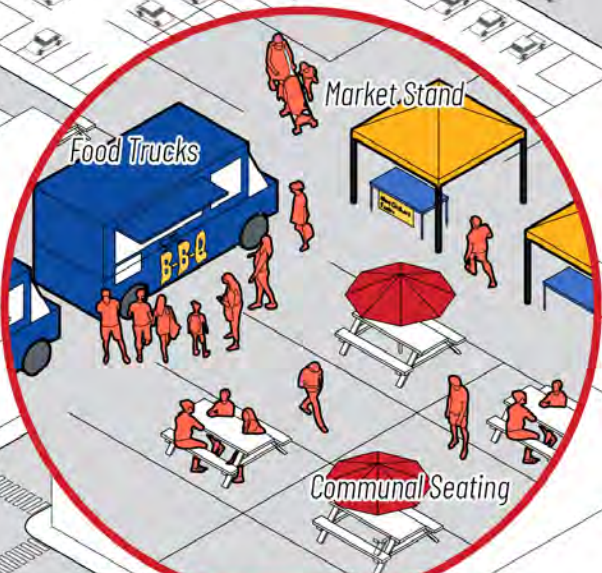
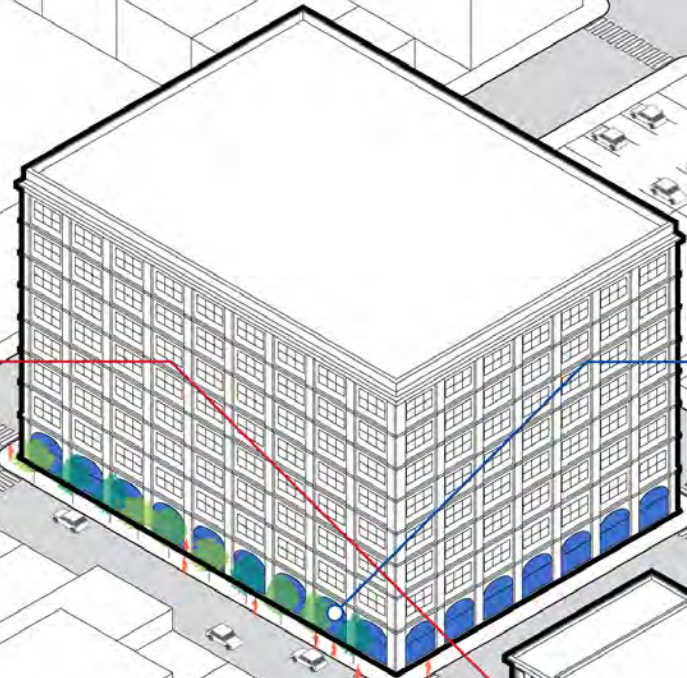
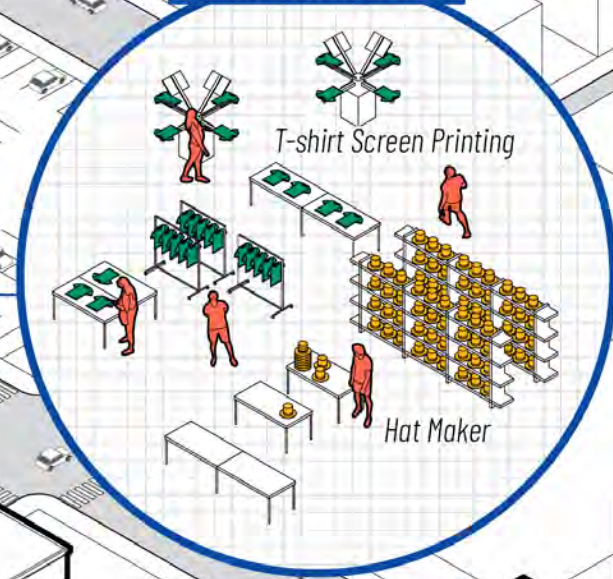


Figure 5: Vacant commercial space Downtown by type

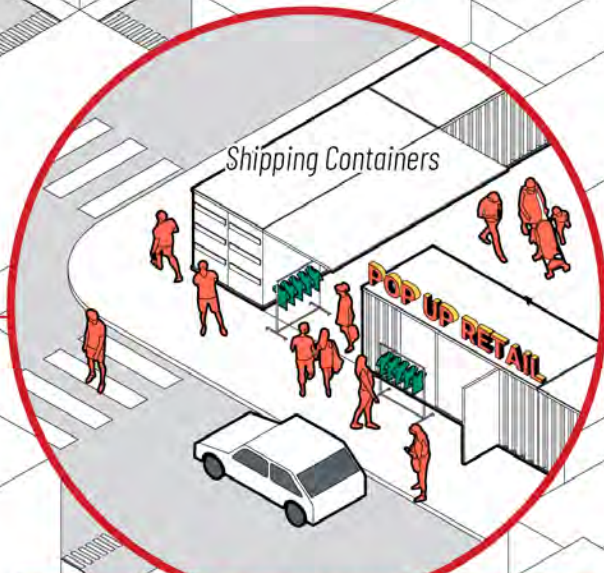
TRADITIONAL STOREFRONT RETAIL



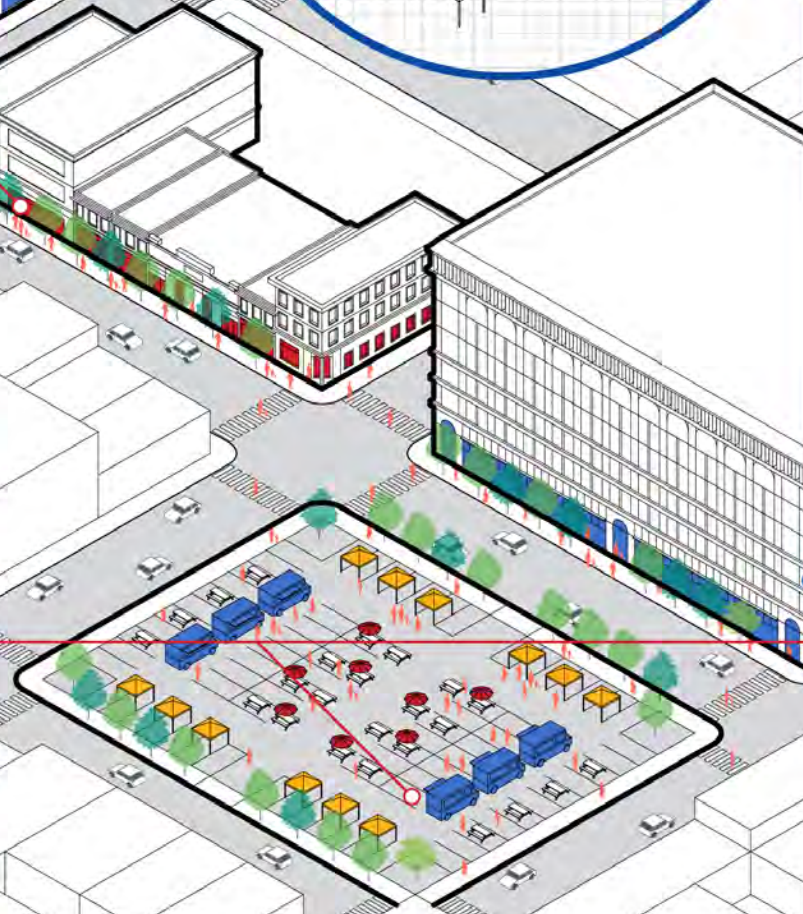
PRODUCTION SPACE



POP UP MARKET



POP UP RETAIL ON WASHINGTON AVENUE





DOWNTOWN HAS THE POTENTIAL TO CREATE A HIGHLY FLEXIBLE AND ACTIVE BUSINESS ECOSYSTEM THROUGH TEMPORARY PROGRAMMING AND NEW MODELS FOR EXISTING COMMERCIAL SPACES.

Figure 6: Downtown Business Ecosystem

Many Advisory Committee members and other community members expressed that events and programming is perhaps the most important improvement needed in Downtown today.

02 ACTIVATE DOWNTOWN STREETS AND PARKS

Much of this plan is about improving the Downtown experience in ways that make residents, employees, students, and visitors fall in love with Downtown St. Louis. Part of this calls for creating new spaces and new programs that give people reason to be Downtown, and part of this calls for finding new ways to help expand and/or deepen people's connections with Downtown. An early action priority is to support a series of smaller projects that help people see Downtown in a new light, encouraging more people to walk, explore, and observe, to bring guests to favorite Downtown spots, and to learn to see and appreciate Downtown's many unique features, histories, and present day stories. Many Advisory Committee members and other community members expressed that events and programming is perhaps the most important improvement needed in Downtown today. Examples of such projects that could function as initial implementation efforts that help make Downtown's stories more visible and accessible include:

> DEVELOP A TARGETED LIST OF TEMPORARY PROGRAMS TO REINFORCE DOWNTOWN AMENITIES: Develop a targeted list of mobile programs to reinforce Downtown amenities and events. This requires dedicated staff to design and acquire the materials necessary, establish a calendar of activities, install the programming and evaluate its impact to determine what programs work best in different Downtown locations. This needs to be an iterative process where a number of activities are tested and refined. Popular programs from the open house feedback include street festivals and open street events, beer gardens, outdoor concerts, food trucks, games, art events and outdoor movies. Passive programming should also be considered including parklets and hammock pop-ups to provide unique places to gather. Opportunity areas include Washington Avenue, Laclede's Landing, Kiener Plaza and along the Gateway Mall near Tucker Boulevard and to the west in Aloe Plaza.



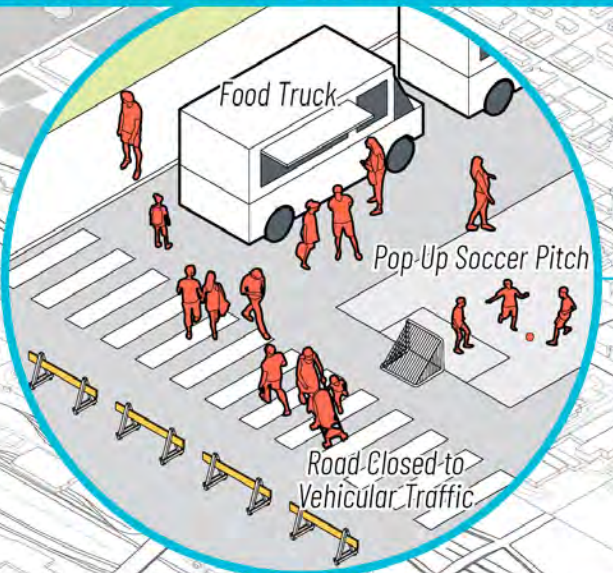
> CREATE A DOWNTOWN DESIGN COMPETITION WITH IMPLEMENTATION DOLLARS: Consider storytelling as a theme for the proposed Downtown Design Competition. Proposals might include podcasts, web apps that help people tour Downtown, or interpretive art, among other ideas, all geared to highlighting stories of Downtown St. Louis, yesterday and today.

> DEVELOP MURALS AT KEY SITES TO SUPPORT BEAUTIFICATION AND WAYFINDING: Make a splash with several large-scale murals that beautify and provide wayfinding between Downtown destinations. First steps include: scouting locations, seeking permission from property owners, working with destinations who might be featured on the wayfinding to determine if a portion of their marketing dollars could go towards funding the art and signage, and drafting an artists' call that allows for flexibility and creativity while also accomplishing stated goals of improved navigability. This work builds upon the InSITE 2020 public art program that was set to launch in the Spring of 2020 but postponed temporarily due to the pandemic.

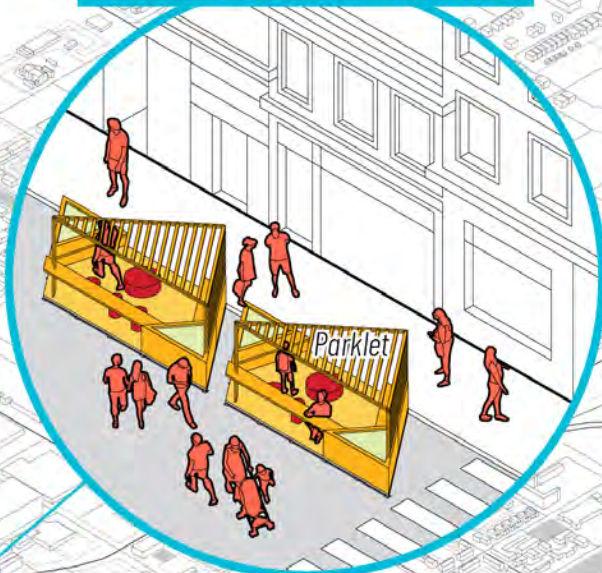
> CREATE A MINI-OUTDOOR MUSIC STUDIO FOR OUTDOOR PERFORMANCE: Musical instruments packaged in a mobile pop-up can bring people together from all backgrounds with an interest in music. This is an opportunity to showcase local talent and bring music more directly to the sound of Downtown. Work with MADE St. Louis or another local maker space to design and manufacture a small pop-up space that is easy to transport. Work with local music stores to purchase a range of instruments for use and test the concept in Kiener Plaza, along Washington Avenue near the National Blues Museum, in Laclede's Landing and later, near the new MLS Stadium.

> CREATE REGULAR "OPEN STREET" EVENTS: Streets are an opportunity to create more open space and more programming. Host "open street" events where the street is temporarily closed to make space for programming, food trucks and other activities. Choose different locations Downtown at different times of the week to support a range of businesses. Take advantage of temporary street closures by coordinating open street events on 20th Street with MLS game days once the stadium is complete.

20TH STREET CLOSURE DURING MLS GAMEDAY



PARKLETS ON WASHINGTON AVE.



20TH ST.

20TH & MARKET

WASHINGTON AVE.

14TH & WASHINGTON

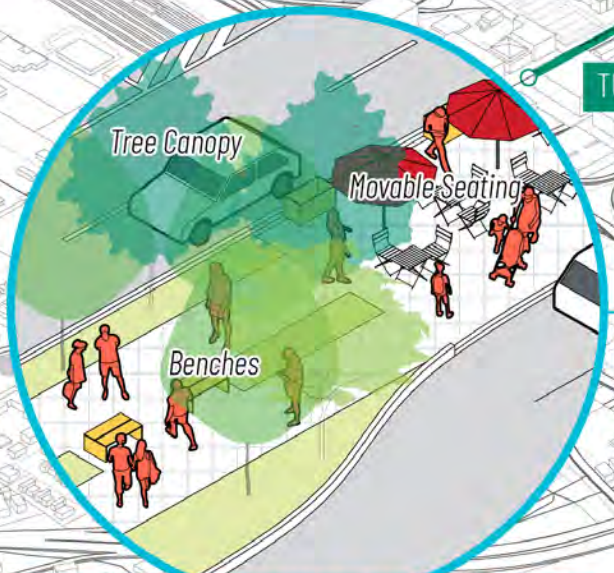
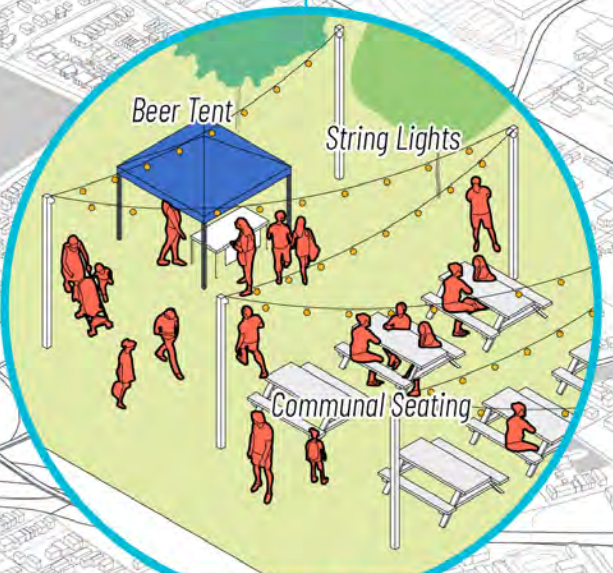
TUCKER MEDIAN

10TH & WASHINGTON

POELKER PARK

TUCKER BLVD.

KIENER PLAZA



POP UP BEER GARDEN

PASSIVE RECREATION IN TUCKER MEDIAN

BLUES MUSIC ON WASHINGTON AVE.

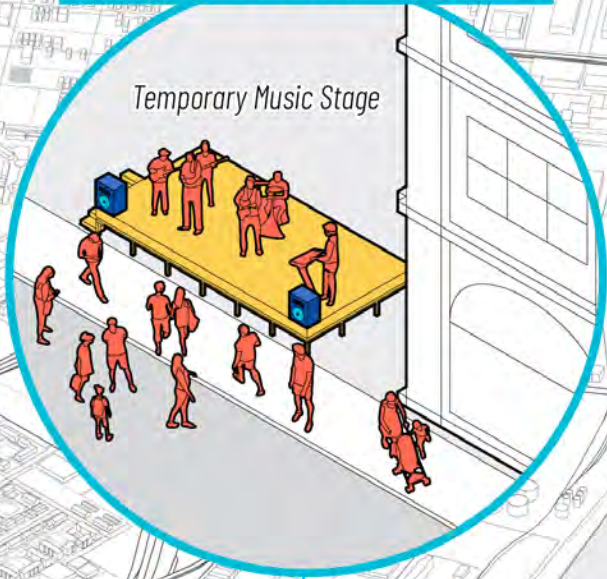
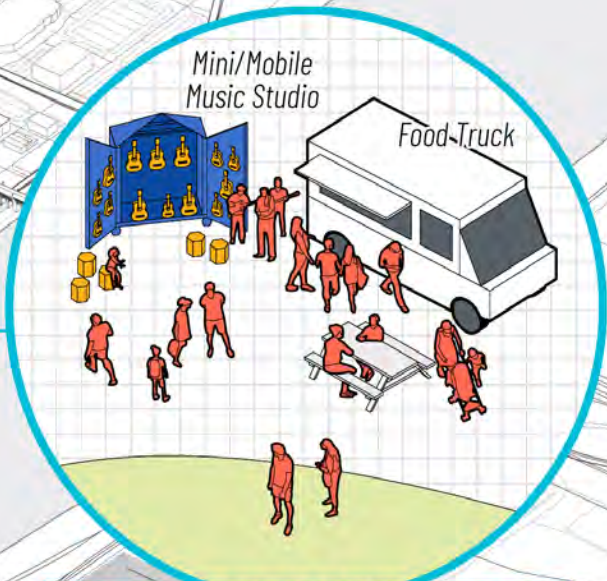


Figure 7: Potential Programming Opportunities for Downtown



MINI MUSIC STUDIO ON KIENER PLAZA

There is very little, if any, housing available for middle-income residents and households.

03 INVEST IN HOUSING AND GROW THE DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD

Downtown has grown over the past 2 decades due to the creative financing for adaptive reuse of older, historic buildings. Many of what were once empty structures are now lofts serving the Downtown population of just over 11,000 residents. Occupancy is high but there are limited buildings suitable for conversion to lofts – a reflection of how much has changed Downtown. For Downtown to continue to grow as a neighborhood, new housing construction is needed. Ballpark Village is the first development in over a decade to bring new apartments (and not just historic lofts) to Downtown.

Analysis and engagement with residents and developers indicate a series of issues that need to be addressed. The majority of the housing is currently priced on the upper end of the market with 18% reserved for those with incomes below 60% of the area median income. There is very little, if any, housing available for middle-income residents and households. The current housing environment is extremely narrow, consisting of either a “loft” or a high-rise apartment, with very little diversity in terms of size or design. Results from the last open house indicated that “new housing development” and “diversifying Downtown housing options” to include

townhomes, micro-units, co-living and other models, ranked as the 1st and 5th choice among all strategies. These other models of housing can help to provide a base of naturally affordable housing for residents. During the **Design Downtown STL** process, the importance of more housing for a variety of household types with a greater range of incomes was consistently stressed.

To address these trends, there are a few intertwined actions that need to be pursued quickly.

> PUSH FORWARD TO REHABILITATE REMAINING MAJOR HISTORIC BUILDINGS: With all of the lofts created in the past decades, there remains a few major structures that are currently empty. Railway Exchange, Jefferson Arms, the Chemical Building and the Butler Building represent a significant amount of unused space that could become additional Downtown lofts. At the time of this plan, there is a redevelopment proposal on the table for Jefferson Arms. Railway Exchange needs to be stabilized and requires significant fundraising for a full renovation that could include a mix of commercial space and housing.



Figure 8: **Potential housing development in Downtown West**

> CAPITALIZE A DOWNTOWN HOUSING FUND TO FILL THE FINANCING GAP FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION: Financing remains a significant challenge due in part to high land costs, but largely to the cost of construction when compared to the rental and sales rates. To create new housing at a range of price points, financial resources are essential to help close the financing gap. Bring together SLDC, local and national financial institutions, major Downtown employers, and philanthropic organizations to create a Downtown housing fund or loan pool. The fund or loan pool would bring together public and private dollars to help fill financing gaps, leverage other funding sources

like New Market Tax Credits and leverage the use of funds that typically go underutilized like 4% Low Income Housing Tax Credits.

> ESTABLISH A GOAL OF 25% OF HOUSING UNITS PRICED BELOW MARKET RATES: **Design Downtown STL** recommends that 25% of all housing Downtown be available at prices for those making below 120% of the area median income (AMI). To help achieve the goals of maintaining housing for a wide range of residents, tie local incentives toward this goal.

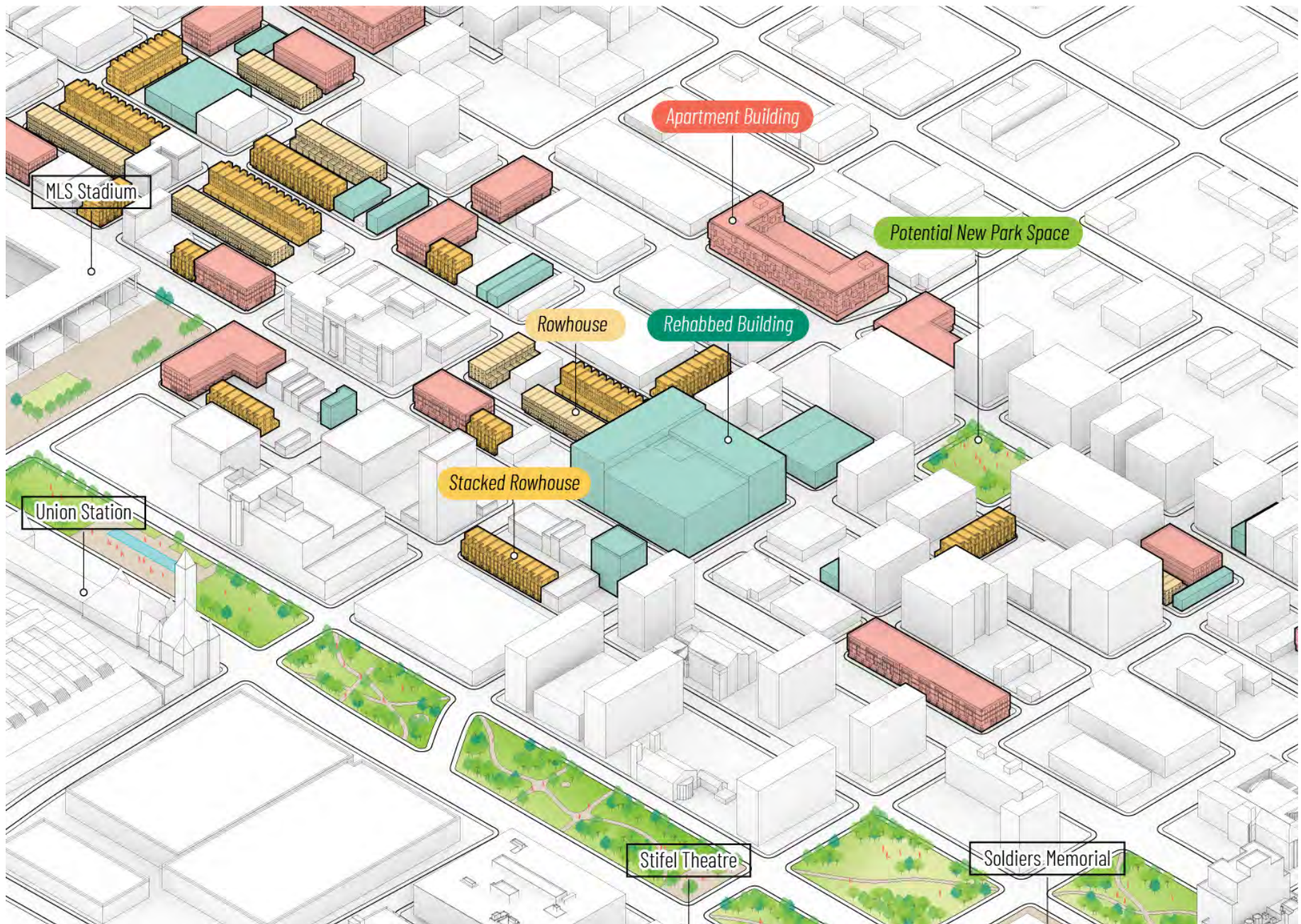


Figure 9: **Development opportunities in Downtown West**

04 ADDRESS CRIME, PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY AND STRENGTHEN THE DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY

For the Downtown neighborhood to thrive, concerns expressed by residents about crime and the feeling of safety must be addressed. A reduction in cruising, robbery and vandalism is essential to building confidence in the Downtown neighborhood. But to address the perception of safety Downtown, efforts are needed by the CID, the City of St. Louis and local partners to remedy issues with trash, potholes, poor sidewalks, and poor lighting. Focusing on these maintenance issues and working to address the recent spike in Downtown crime along with other aspects of this plan focused on programming, events and the arts, will attract more residents and visitors which, in turn, improves the feeling of safety in Downtown.

The most successful downtowns are shaped not just by a downtown organization but by the actions of their many residents who roll up their sleeves and pitch in to make the neighborhood a better place to live. To address quality of life concerns and crime *Design Downtown STL* needs active civic participation from Downtown residents to bring the vision to reality.

> CONSIDER BRINGING BACK AN AMBASSADOR PROGRAM: Bring back “Ambassadors” to make the efforts to create a safer Downtown more visible to everyone. Ambassadors provide valuable services to residents and visitors alike. These individuals would wear highly visible uniforms and be visible in Downtown on foot or by bike. Ambassadors would be unarmed, trained in de-escalation and anti-bias practices, and equipped with radios to report safety and security concerns to the police if a situation they encounter escalates.

> CREATE DOWNTOWN TASK FORCES TO ENSURE DIVERSE REPRESENTATION THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION: *Design Downtown STL* was built upon a wide-ranging engagement process to help identify partners for the future of Downtown. Though the planning process may be complete, there is a need for engagement more than ever. Create a task force of between 10-15 people for each goal in this plan to drive implementation activities. The task forces must reflect the diversity in backgrounds and race of Downtown residents and stakeholders.

> OFFER MINI-GRANTS TO SUPPORT LOCAL RESIDENTS TAKING ACTION: An incentive for residents to work toward a better Downtown is to offer a competitive mini-grant for any idea and action that helps to implement one the strategies in *Design Downtown STL*. Residents with winning project ideas could receive micro-grants for implementation.

> PROGRAM INTENTIONALLY FOR EQUITY AND INCLUSION: As activities grow and expand, it is essential that programming is intentionally inclusive, appealing and welcoming to individuals and families of all backgrounds. Ensure that diverse perspectives go into the planning and selection of activities, that programs have universal appeal and do not skew consistently towards one demographic, that participation and enjoyment of activities requires little to no cost, and that diverse local vendors and performers are hired wherever possible.

“Think of ways to make Downtown feel more welcoming to people of various ethnic backgrounds. Also celebrate the history and heritage of diversity in Downtown St. Louis.”

*Underutilized riverfront
that suffers from an
occasional flooding*

05 CONNECT TO THE RIVER

St. Louis was first established in Downtown due to its relationship with the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, and grew to become a major port and hub of economic activity. Though the Mississippi River continued to drive economic activity, persistent issues with flooding led to the development of flood walls to protect against rising waters. Today, these walls disconnect the City from the very amenity responsible for its early growth. Relatively recent renovations at the Gateway Arch grounds now provides a seamless connection from Downtown to the Arch and the River with space maintained by the Gateway Arch Park Foundation.

Laclede's Landing, offers the other primary location to see and connect to the water. Laclede's Landing has long served as a destination and entertainment district but the area has struggled in the past decade. As noted by many stakeholders, issues with crime and empty buildings take away from its draw as a destination. Laclede's Landing needs more activity to support the businesses and residents that call the Landing home and represents one of the best opportunities to connect Downtown with the River.

> **TRANSITION SURFACE PARKING LOTS TO NEW DEVELOPMENT:**

According to the recent Downtown Parking Study led by SLDC, the existing surface parking lots in Laclede's Landing are not operating near full capacity and should be targeted for new housing and mixed-use



development. Public and private leaders must come together around land acquisition, financing for new development and a district approach to parking.

> **COORDINATE WITH RIVERFRONT PROPERTY OWNERS TO CREATE WATERFRONT PARK:** Implement the GRG open space plan for Laclede's Landing through close partnership with nearby developers, property owners, Laclede's Landing businesses and Lumiere Place.

> **IMPROVE WASHINGTON AVE. UNDERPASS TO LACLEDE'S LANDING:**

Much has been done over the years to untangle this challenging and unwelcoming intersection of streets and highway on-ramps below the highway. Building on that foundation, integrate public art and lighting to ensure safe and attractive pedestrian and bicycle connections to and from Laclede's Landing that are clearly marked.

> **CONSIDER STREET CLOSURES:** Help address concerns around cruising and elevate the experience of the Landing by temporarily closing streets east of Commercial Street. Consider permanent closings where possible to improve pedestrian access to the River.

> **COORDINATE AND EXPAND RIVERFRONT PROGRAMMING:** Work with the Gateway Arch Park Foundation to coordinate and expand programming and events across the Arch Park, Kiener Plaza and Laclede's Landing.

Figure 10: **New trees south of the stadiums**

06 CREATE A GREENER AND MORE SUSTAINABLE DOWNTOWN

Downtown offers 11.5 acres of open space per 1,000 residents, far short of the 20 acres recommended by the National Parks and Recreation Association. Most of this space is comprised of the Gateway Mall which feels remote for many Downtown residents. Many residents expressed a need for both more green space and an improved Mall. Coupled with these challenges are stormwater issues and a lack of trees that raises the heat index in Downtown.

Trees, in particular, can be a powerful amenity that drives residential growth and economic development in downtowns. Implementing a tree planting campaign within the Downtown study area will expand the City's urban canopy, help reduce the impact of urban heat island effect, filter pollution, dampen the noise of city streets, and create a more attractive and welcoming location to live and work. This includes replacing the trees that have been lost on key Downtown streets and planting trees in new and upgraded parks, along key streets and at Downtown gateways. To do this right, there must be resources to not only plant trees, but also to maintain them.



> **COORDINATE PLANTING GUIDELINES:** Support the evolution of a diverse and healthy urban canopy with guidelines that include species lists to allow for genetic diversity within the canopy while being tuned to current and potential future climate and soil conditions in Downtown. Work with the City's Forestry Division to assist in the evaluation of tree health and life expectancy in order to promote planting of trees timed to replace aging trees and build a canopy in the specific context of Downtown's unique environment.

> **PILOT A TREE NURSERY INSTALLATION ON 2 KEY LOTS:** There is unused space on both publicly- and privately-owned property Downtown particularly close to rail lines and highways. Seek a collaboration with a university design studio that evaluates all potential usable space for tree plantings in Downtown.

Compared to other parts of the City, Downtown lacks adequate tree canopy cover, especially outside of city parks.

> ESTABLISH A VOLUNTEER CORP TO PLANT AND MAINTAIN TREES:

Improperly planted trees or those that are poorly maintained will not flourish. Maintenance is critically important to ensure a healthy tree canopy. Organizations exist to train and monitor volunteers to assist in this effort. Downtown residents, businesses and other stakeholders can volunteer where they live and work with the assistance of a volunteer leader at Downtown STL, Inc.

> ACTIVATE CIVIC COMMONS WITH RECREATION SPACES AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE:

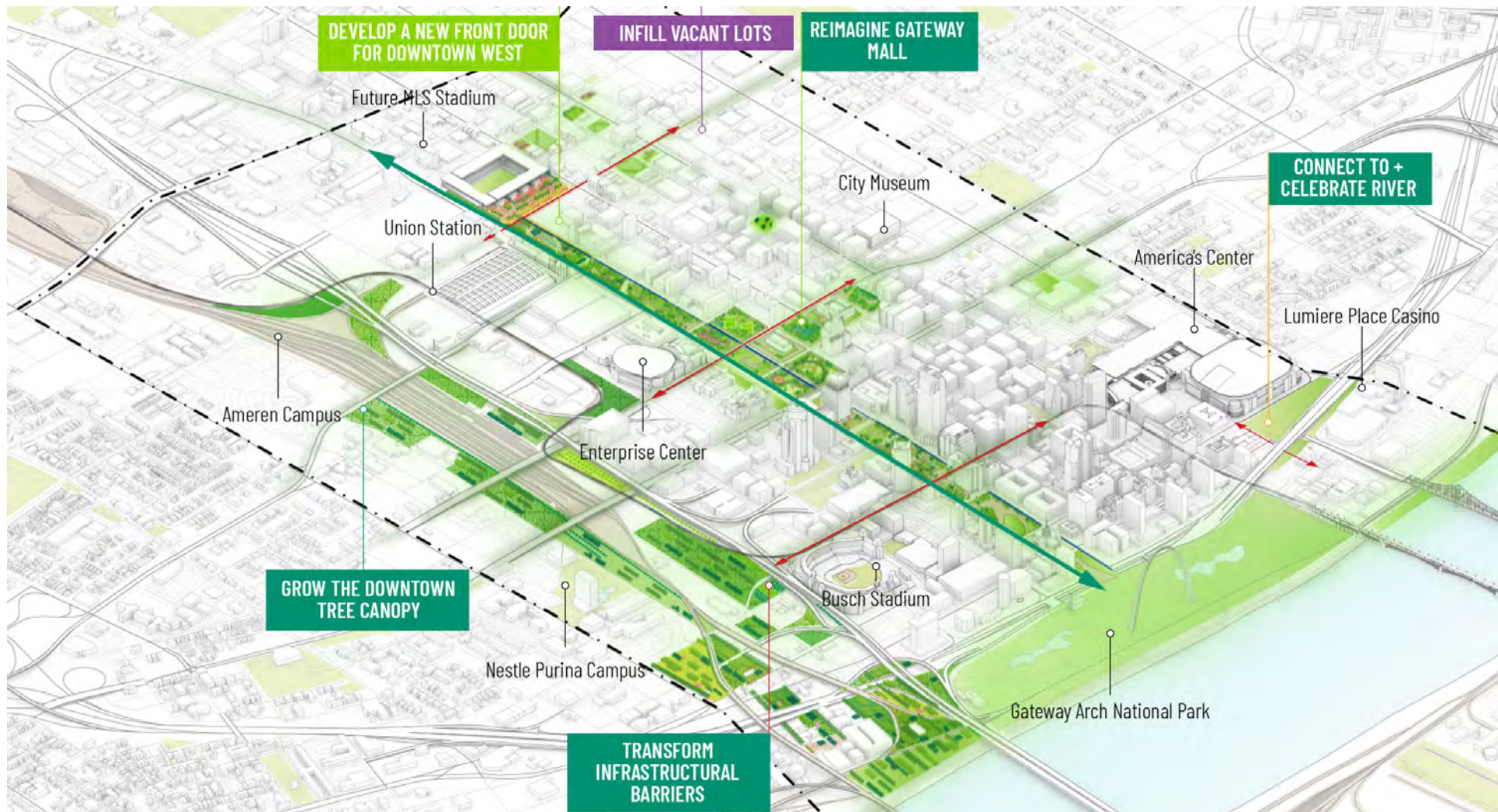
The Gateway Mall has been the subject of a previous study recognizing that it largely has not lived up to its potential. More recent investments in Kiener Plaza, Soldiers Memorial, and Citygarden have demonstrated what a great destination the Gateway Mall can be. As a front door for the City for visitors, it is also a potential amenity for residents if programmed differently. In concert with the Brickline Greenway, the central part of the Gateway Mall referred to as the “civic commons” in this document should be designed to support more active programming including temporary events, games and sports.

> REDESIGN ALOE PLAZA: Aloe Plaza, or the westernmost edge of the Gateway Mall, presents a singular opportunity - to serve as the linchpin that connects the attractions at Union Station with a new MLS stadium. The plaza needs to be designed to not only enhance game day events but serve as a day-to-day amenity for all Downtown residents and workers.

Figure 11: **Potential improvements to Aloe Plaza**



Figure 12: **Open space strategies for Downtown**



Downtown is a place with very specific needs and opportunities.

07 REIMAGINE DOWNTOWN STREETS

The streets in Downtown St. Louis are **wide**. Some streetscape improvements have been made along segments of Washington Avenue for instance, but most of the streets have more space than is needed to support cars in Downtown. This extra width presents a great opportunity for Downtown. Non-critical driving lanes can be re-allocated to expand space for people, non-motorized vehicles, landscaping, and trees that will contribute to the vibrancy of Downtown. This space also creates opportunities for creative use and flexibility of curbside space to support rideshare pick-up and last-mile delivery zones supporting Downtown businesses.

“Downtown’s walkability is its main asset.” This idea was echoed by many throughout the public engagement process. Many believe that the negative perceptions of Downtown come from how the streets look and feel. The Downtown Transportation Plan (approved by the City in 2018) was designed to improve multimodal connections Downtown and address many of these challenges.

Design Downtown STL provides recommendations for every street in Downtown with an emphasis on creating a network of boulevards to elevate some of the most visible and important Downtown streets and gateways. Oversized streets present an opportunity to build a connected network of linear parks where central medians and sidewalks can be extended to function as both parks and transportation or all.

An investment in the hardscape of Downtown including its streets and infrastructure is critical but difficult to do all at once. Budget limitations, competing ideas for available grants and the need for private investment and support often slow the pace of physical improvements. There are a few initial capital projects that have the potential to help transform Downtown including:

> **COORDINATE WITH BRICKLINE GREENWAY TO CREATE MARKET-CHESTNUT LOOP:** Great Rivers Greenway has identified multiple opportunities to create a greenway through Downtown to connect with neighborhoods to the north and south. The current alignment Downtown is along Market Street and 20th Street. Consider working with local institutions and employers to augment the Brickline Greenway with a Gateway Mall “health loop” by clearly marking Chestnut and Market Streets as a continuous 2-mile walking and recreational path.

> **REDESIGN TUCKER BOULEVARD:** Tucker Boulevard represents the location that generated the most comments from the public during this process. Tucker Boulevard already includes a fully designed 2-way cycle track which needs matching dollars to implement. **Design Downtown STL** proposes building on this initial design, while also including a wide median and other amenities deemed important by the public.

Figure 13: Potential improvements to Tucker Boulevard



MOVING FORWARD: THE FIRST 100 DAYS

The pandemic has wreaked havoc on Downtown businesses. A first step is to understand which businesses are in fact returning and at what capacity.

This planning process was nearing completion when Covid-19 came to the United States. This pandemic continues to change Downtown and St. Louis - at once creating unforeseen setbacks and hardships as well as powerful expressions of community members working to support one another. Businesses have closed, thousands of St. Louisans lost their jobs temporarily or for much longer, and the distancing measures are affecting the very fabric of our community. St. Louis elected officials, Downtown advocates and partners, and local businesses, residents, and service providers are in crisis-response mode, tending to immediate needs.

The coronavirus pandemic and the following community protests against systemic racism and the taking of Black lives underscores the importance of the values of **Design Downtown STL**: a healthy urban environment, physical and social connectivity, a strong local economy, and an equitable approach that serves all community members. Our streets, sidewalks and local parks have become our only source of refuge, yet many are lacking critical and safe walkable connections. These spaces are particularly important for residents in and around Downtown, who often lack private outdoor space.

Closures have exposed the fragility of our small businesses; the losses experienced directly by employers and employees are also felt by patrons who rely on these local goods and services and municipal governments as tax bases shrink. Local supply chains,

manufacturers, makers and producers are more important than ever, and our community is rallying behind small businesses. Cities that invest in their small businesses will be well-positioned in the recovery process; 67% of net new jobs after the Great Recession were created by small businesses. While St. Louis's top-notch medical professionals work non-stop to keep people healthy, we will do everything we can to support the health of our local businesses as they adapt to a new "business as usual."

The strategies outlined in this document are tailored to reinforce and grow the things that make Downtown unique - the people, places, and spaces that will bring us together again, in time. Sustained efforts to implement *Design Downtown STL* will yield a healthier, greener, more resilient and more equitable Downtown. Should additional stimulus or other such funds become available, the ideas in this document will guide investment strategically and position St. Louis to respond to these opportunities quickly. *Design Downtown STL* has done the homework and we are well positioned to take action together.

In this context, it is critical to transition from planning to implementation. There are strategies contained in *Design Downtown STL* targeted toward recovery that must chart the course of the first hundred days of implementation activity after plan adoption. These initial actions include:

> **ESTABLISH A CLEAR BASELINE:** A first step is to understand at what capacity businesses are returning.. The benefit is that *Design Downtown STL* collected detailed data less than one year ago which can serve as a starting point. Update and share this data to understand where we are starting in the recovery and what kinds of spaces are available for new businesses.

> **MAP OUT RECOVERY ACTIVITIES:** Develop a block by block plan for recovery focused on the needs of the businesses that remain and are returning. Match investment and support to the specific needs in different locations across Downtown.

> **PROVIDE DIRECT ASSISTANCE TO BUSINESSES:** Downtown STL, Inc., SLDC, the St. Louis Economic Development Partnership, and other local partners should continue to develop low and no interest loans for businesses, work with banks to address financing gaps for minority businesses, establish a small business navigator desk and provide assistance to Downtown retail and food businesses in transitioning to online sales and services. This is an ideal time to plan for events that drive customers to businesses and work towards creating a fund to support legacy businesses in Downtown.

> **ORGANIZE TO MANAGE IMPLEMENTATION:** Downtown STL, Inc. and Arch to Park will play key roles in driving investment. Form key partnerships and expand capacity to take on specific actions including programming and supporting local businesses. Organize the Task Forces of local stakeholders to oversee activities in each goal of *Design Downtown STL*. Work to create a mini-grant program for Downtown residents to take action.

> **CONTINUE TO ADDRESS THE IMMEDIATE CONCERNS AROUND CRIME:** Frustrations around crime are dominating current conversations about Downtown. The proposal to bring back Ambassadors and improve Downtown lighting will make a substantial difference. In the meantime, close streets where necessary to better manage access and bring together partners to program and bring more positive activities to Downtown.

> **BEGIN TESTING NEW PROGRAMMING:** Develop a short-list of new activities and design and install them in different locations Downtown. Focus on music and other activities that offer new ways to experience Downtown. Coordinate closely with the Gateway Arch Park Foundation, Great Rivers Greenway and America's Center. Implement the InSITE 2020 public art initiative slated for Spring but postponed due to COVID-19.

> **WORK TO UPDATE DOWNTOWN ZONING:** Work with the City to refine and translate the concepts in *Design Downtown STL* to establish clear rules around allowable uses and development expectations.

> **SUPPORT EXISTING INVESTMENTS:** Help to push forward major projects already in planning and development including the MLS Stadium, Ballpark Village, development in Laclede's Landing and the Downtown Innovation District north of Washington and, the rehabilitation of major structures like Jefferson Arms. Keep working to secure Railway Exchange and support current grant applications to redesign Tucker Boulevard and 7th Street.

The strategies outlined in this document are tailored to reinforce and grow the things that make Downtown unique - the people, places, and spaces that will bring us together again.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This plan was the culmination of collaboration over the past year and would not have been possible without the **thousands of local voices that helped shape this plan** – those of Downtown neighbors, employees, businesses, artists, community organizations, institutions, students, visitors, activists, City staff and elected leaders, among others. Thank you to everyone who contributed to ***Design Downtown STL*** by taking a survey, participating in an interview, sharing your vision for the future at an open house, attending a public meeting, or otherwise giving your time and ideas. The plan—and Downtown itself—are richer for your commitment to ***Design Downtown STL***.

A special thanks to the ***Design Downtown STL Advisory Committee*** who committed time, knowledge, and energy throughout the process to help develop this comprehensive plan for Downtown's future.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Keith Alper
Ola Ayeni
John Berglund
Dave Biales
Marilyn Bush
Bill Carson
Bill DeWitt III
Amy Gill
Patty Hagen
Alex Haimann

Jason Hall
Jassen Johnson
Missy Kelley
Ruth Kim
Mike Konzen
Karen Leverenz
LaShana Lewis
Emily Lohse-Busch
Margaret McDonald
Seamus McGowan

Steve O'Loughlin
James Page
Sharon Price John
Kitty Ratcliffe
Tom Reeves
Don Roe
Hank Webber
Otis Williams
Amadou Yattassaye

DESIGN DOWNTOWN STL INITIATIVE

Downtown STL, Inc.

Missy Kelley
Trey Buffington
Gabrielle Cherre

Soapbox PR

Tony Wyche

Arch to Park

Sarah Arnosky

Interface Studio

Scott Page
Jamie Granger
Ben Bryant
Yoona Ahn
Sarah Kellerman

Mass Economics

Teresa Lynch
Thomas Goff
Erin Kenney
Randy Gibbs

STOSS Landscape Urbanism

Chris Reed
Davi Schoen

**CBB Transportation
Engineers + Planning**
Srinivas Yanamanamanda
Jacque Knight

Star City Group

Anthony Townsend

CITY OF ST. LOUIS PLANNING COMMISSION

Design Downtown STL was adopted by the City of St. Louis Planning Commission as a Neighborhood Plan and a supplement to the City's Comprehensive Plan on December 2, 2020.

Members

Earl Strauther, Chairman
Jake Banton
Tracy Boaz
Ald. Jeffrey Boyd
Richard Bradley
Ald. Shane Cohn
Mary Goodman
Jacob Long
Denise Peoples
Randy Vines

Advisors

Jimmie Edwards
Greg Hayes
Curtis Skouby
Jamie Wilson

Don Roe, Executive Director,
Planning & Urban Design Agency

Cecilia Dvorak, AICP
City Planning Executive
Planning and Urban Design Agency

