

DOWNTOWN *Plan*

Madison, Wisconsin



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City of Madison

Downtown Plan

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Paul R. Soglin, Mayor

Prepared by the Department of Planning and Community and Economic Development

Steven R. Cover, Director

Bradley J. Murphy, Planning Division Director

Downtown Plan Staff Team

William Fruhling, Co-Project Manager

Michael Waidelich, Co-Project Manager

Bradley J. Murphy

Rebecca Cnare

Rick Roll

Ryan Jonely

Archie Nicolette*

David Kress*

*past participant

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SETTING THE STAGE

Madison's downtown is unlike any other in the world. In his 1911 *Madison: A Model City*, renowned city planner John Nolen said, "Madison is one of the most striking examples that could be selected in the United States of a city which should have a distinct individuality, marked characteristics separating it from and in many respects elevating it above other cities. Its topography, its lake scenery, its early selection as the Capital and as the seat of the State University, its population, its history, such influential factors as these should surely have found expression in a city plan, a city development and a city life with the form and flavor unlike that of any other place." Indeed, on the 100th anniversary of this seminal document in shaping today's Downtown, these tenets still hold true.

Downtown serves as Madison's signature. It is the geographic, economic, and civic heart of the community. When people think of Madison, images of the Downtown and its unique isthmus setting often drive their impressions. It is the place where the community comes together, especially for the many events it hosts and the abundant activities it provides. Downtown belongs to all Madison residents and all have a stake in its future, because an active and healthy downtown is important in ensuring the vitality of the rest of the community and region.



Downtown's iconic skyline view across Lake Monona

The decisions we as a community make today will shape the Downtown of tomorrow. Previous planning efforts, including *Madison: A Model City (1911)*, *Downtown – Proposals for Central Madison (1970)*, and *Downtown 2000 (1989)*, have had profound positive impacts on shaping today's Downtown. All set lofty expectations for the future and all made significant recommendations that have been implemented.

Downtown Madison has experienced a renaissance in the twenty years since the last downtown planning effort. This plan will set the stage for that momentum to continue. It proposes a framework to continue to enhance the qualities that make Madison a world class city while effectively addressing the issues of today and anticipating the needs of the next two decades and beyond.

This plan is about getting the fundamentals right and having a clear vision for the future grounded in enduring principles that will assure a successful future. It is about making deliberate choices to achieve that vision, instead of isolated decisions without concern for the precedent they may set or consideration for the cumulative impact of incremental actions. This plan builds on a rich planning tradition to provide a dynamic framework for the next twenty years. As we mark the 100th anniversary of John Nolen's plan for Madison, this latest Downtown Plan will guide the future growth of our dynamic and engaging downtown, while sustaining the traditions, history, and vitality that will continue to make Madison, a Model City.



Nolen's Madison: A Model City

Authentic Sense of Place

Ensuring that Downtown possesses an authentic sense of place-- one that builds on its unique qualities, reflects the values of the city's residents, and does not strive to replicate other communities-- is crucial in ensuring its long-term health. Sense of place refers to people's perceptions, attitudes, and emotions about a place. It is influenced by the natural and built environments and people's interactions with them. Successful downtowns are comfortable, but at the same time, exciting, fun, and places of continual discovery. Cities are ever evolving and, due largely to their compactness, such changes in downtowns are often more noticeable. It is a given that the Downtown of today will be different in twenty years. Successful downtowns

spend considerable resources planning for and working towards a desired future. This includes proactively addressing those things that need improvement. It also includes identifying and building on the things that work well, while recognizing and seizing new opportunities that will keep Downtown fresh and dynamic. Downtown Madison today is much different than the city John Nolen knew, but the natural features that provide the unique setting that so enamored Nolen continue to be the cornerstones influencing its evolution.



A typical Downtown street scene

Physical Setting

Downtown's location on a narrow stretch of land between two lakes, coupled with its rolling topography, provide a dramatic natural setting. In *Madison: A Model City*, John Nolen stated, "No other city of the world, so far as I know, has such a unique situation on a series of lakes with an opportunity for so much and such direct relationship to beautiful water frontages. The physical situation certainly is distinctly individual."



Downtown is located on a narrow isthmus, with Lake Mendota in the background and Lake Monona in the foreground

The isthmus is approximately a half mile wide in the planning area and is flanked by Lakes Mendota and Monona. The aesthetic contribution the lakes provide as well as the recreational opportunities make them integral to Downtown's identity. The two lakes are quite different from one another and the way the Downtown engages them differs as well. The Downtown Core is closer to Lake Monona and presents a more urban edge of taller buildings toward the shore. The Lake Mendota frontage has a more residential, "softer" edge with significantly less public access.

The highest point on the Isthmus was chosen as the location for the State Capitol building. The Downtown was designed to

emphasize the prominence of this iconic civic structure, with panoramic views of it from multiple vantage points, both near and far. The topography generally slopes down from the Capitol to the lakes. Mansion Hill is located on a high ridge between the Capitol and Lake Mendota. Another prominent hill adjacent to the planning area was chosen for the University of Wisconsin's most important building, Bascom Hall.

Downtown's Role

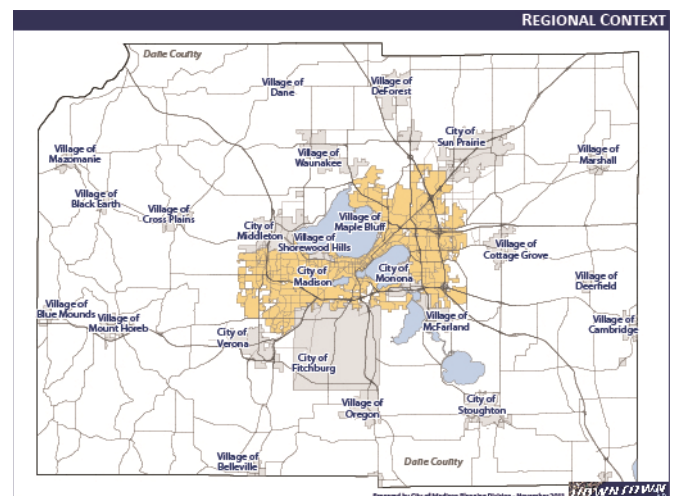
Downtown does not exist in isolation, but as an integral part of the State, region, city, and Isthmus. Madison is Wisconsin's capital city and the Capitol building, the University of Wisconsin, State museums, and numerous other places symbolic of the State are located Downtown. In this sense, many people from around the State feel a sense of pride and ownership in Madison's Downtown.

In addition to being the capital city, Madison is also the largest community in the region and Downtown is located right in the center. It represents the heart of the region where residents of Madison, its suburbs, and outlying communities have some connection to, and identify with. Whether it's living, working, or visiting one of the fine restaurants, shops, cultural or recreational venues, or attending one of the many events, Downtown is the place where residents of the greater Madison region come together.

On a more local scale, Downtown is also the center of the greater Isthmus area. Madison's near east and near west sides are home to great residential neighborhoods, important community institutions, bustling retail districts and other successful businesses. These near-Downtown areas benefit from their proximity to Downtown and contain much potential for future development. Fully integrating these areas with the Downtown planning area and ensuring that they are fully connected is an emphasis of this plan.



Wisconsin's Capitol



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PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE – NINE KEYS

This plan articulates nine keys for ensuring the vision (see sidebar) for the future of Downtown is achieved. Each contains numerous objectives and recommendations that, when taken together, provide a comprehensive and strategic framework for the next twenty years. The framework includes bold long-term projects that can have highly visible and profound impacts on the Downtown of the future. It also includes smaller, less glamorous recommendations that may be easier to implement, but which cumulatively can also have profound positive impacts. Each of these keys is briefly described below along with a highlight of some of the most notable recommendations.

VISION

Downtown Madison will be a flourishing and visually exciting center for the arts, commerce, government and education. It will be a magnet for a diverse population working, living, visiting and enjoying an urban environment characterized by a sensitive blending of carefully preserved older structures, high-quality new construction, architectural gems, and engaging public spaces-- all working together and integrated with surrounding neighborhoods, parks and the transportation system to create a unique and sustainable environment for the community, the region and beyond.

Key 1: Celebrate the Lakes



The number one priority during the planning process was to embrace the lakes and to make them more integral to the Downtown. This plan lays out exciting concepts for reconnecting Downtown with its lakes. It proposes sweeping changes to Law Park and the Lake Monona shore that will transform it from a narrow strip of land separated from the Downtown by a highway to a signature park that is expanded in area, offers a variety of recreational opportunities, serves as a new community gathering place, and reconnects it into the fabric of Downtown. This Plan also greatly increases public access to Lake Mendota by forwarding a concept for a lakefront pedestrian/bicycle path that will ultimately connect James Madison Park with the UW Memorial Union and Picnic Point.

Key 2: Strengthen the Region's Economic Engine



Attracting and retaining large and small employers, providing a thriving retail and service environment, and supporting activities that attract visitors and tourists are important components of Downtown's continued role as the region's economic center. This includes accommodating new growth opportunities within the Downtown. This plan sets the stage for a significant amount of new development, conservatively accommodating well over 4,000 to 5,000 new dwelling units and 4 to 5 million square feet of new commercial development over the next twenty years. This represents approximately 2 billion to 2 ½ billion dollars in new investment. Much of the anticipated development is in areas recommended for change over time with significantly increased density and a more engaging mix of uses.

Key 3: Ensure a Quality Urban Environment



Preserving Downtown's unique identity and building on the qualities that make it special is critical in continuing to attract new jobs, residents and visitors. This plan seeks to enhance these qualities, and makes recommendations on preserving important views, setting expectations for integrating new development, enhancing the design of streets and public ways, and other elements.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Madison's Comprehensive Plan includes the following a list of general "Desirable Downtown Characteristics" that served as guiding principles for the direction of this Downtown Plan.

- *Very high-quality urban architecture, site design and urban design. All development should comply with the Comprehensive Plan, City-adopted detailed neighborhood development plans, special area plans and urban design guidelines for the Downtown area and its sub-districts.*
- *Buildings should be spaced close together and placed close to the street. Stepbacks are recommended when needed to provide additional space between the upper floors of taller buildings to prevent a "walled in" look, or to maintain adequate access to sunlight along public sidewalks.*
- *Very high-quality pedestrian, bicycle and streetscape amenities.*
- *Very high-quality public open spaces, including smaller squares and plazas maintained on private property.*
- *Emphasis on historic preservation and neighborhood conservation as defined in City-adopted neighborhood, special area, and other special plans, such as historic preservation plans, and/or City zoning regulations and historic and urban design guidelines.*
- *Land use intensity should decrease as distance from the Downtown center increases, establishing a transition between intensive urban uses and adjacent lower-intensity development.*
- *Compact, highly interconnected pattern of relatively short, intensively developed blocks.*
- *Emphasis on multi-modal travel, especially for pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users.*

(continued on the next page)

Key 4: Maintain Strong Neighborhoods and Districts



This plan seeks to enhance the variety of special neighborhoods, districts, and smaller nodes that, although unique places in their own rite, in aggregate truly make Downtown more than simply a sum of its parts.

Key 5: Enhance Livability



Downtown is a great place to live. Since the adoption of Downtown 2000 (1990), Downtown has attracted a much more diverse population in age, income, and other characteristics. It grew by approximately nine percent between 1990 and 2010. This plan makes

recommendations to ensure that Downtown remains an attractive living environment by providing a diversity of living options and a safe environment. It includes recommendations for work force housing, low-and moderate-income households, students, seniors, special needs populations, and families with children.

Key 6: Increase Transportation Choices



It is critical to have a Downtown that is easily accessible for employers, residents, and visitors. This plan makes recommendations for improvements to the Downtown transportation network and also provides a framework for a comprehensive, multi-modal transportation study that will

examine in detail future transportation options. It recommends enhancing inter-city connections, establishing two multi-modal transportation centers, extending East Campus Mall to connect to Monona Bay, creating a mid-block walkway paralleling Langdon Street, developing a new Downtown circulator, improving wayfinding, and exploring the conversion of some one-way streets to two-way.

Key 7: Build on Historic Resources



One of the building blocks that helps frame a direction for Downtown's future is its historic buildings and districts. The plan includes recommendations for elevating these historic resources and making them a more prominent part of the Downtown environment through a more holistic approach that includes steps such as

enhancing historic districts' identities, considering new districts, providing preservation incentives, and addressing property maintenance.


Key 8: Expand Recreational, Cultural and Entertainment Offerings



As Downtown continues to grow, it must continue to provide parks and recreational facilities to meet the needs of its residents. This plan recommends enhancements to existing parks and the development of a new neighborhood park in the vicinity of Bassett and Dayton Streets. It recommends incorporating public art in public and private projects. An arts, culture and entertainment corridor is also proposed along State Street connecting the facilities near Capitol Square to facilities on the UW campus.

Key 9: Become a Model of Sustainability



Downtowns are inherently the most sustainable part of a community. They usually have higher residential densities, more jobs in close proximity to workers, a wider variety of transportation options, and more goods, services, and activities that are integrated into the urban fabric. This plan recognizes the interrelationships among these and other “urban systems” and the objectives and recommendations in each theme area advance the goal of having Downtown become a leader in sustainability. The “” symbol indicates objectives and recommendations directly related to the sustainability goals of this plan.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES (continued)

- *Well-served by arterial, collector and local streets.*
- *Excellent access to high frequency mass transit.*
- *Should be developed using Transit-Oriented Development standards.*
- *On street, structured and underground parking encouraged.*
- *Avoid large surface parking lots.*
- *24-hour regional activity center focal point.*
- *Mixed-use, multi-story buildings encouraged at locations defined in sub-districts*

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ABOUT THIS PLAN

The purpose of this Plan is to describe the desired vision for the future of Downtown and provide recommendations for realizing that future. It establishes a decision making framework to ensure that incremental actions (such as budgeting and land use decisions) made over an extended time achieve aspirations for the future. This is a plan for the next twenty years, but it should be reviewed (and updated if necessary) periodically so that it remains an accurate and forward-looking statement of community ambitions as circumstances change.

Although it has been over twenty years since the last comprehensive Downtown Plan was prepared, much additional planning has occurred within the planning area, including several neighborhood, small area, and specific project plans. These plans are the result of many people and groups working together over many months. This Plan builds on these previous plans, but to the extent there are differences, it is intended that this new plan will take precedence and that any changes needed to reconcile inconsistencies be incorporated into the other plans and adopted as a supplement to the *Comprehensive Plan*. This is not the first plan for Downtown, nor will it be the last.

Downtown Planning Area

Downtown Madison has traditionally been defined as the area between Lake Mendota and Lake Monona, bounded by Park, Regent, and Blair Streets, though there have always been relatively intensive development outside this boundary as well. It is not the intention of this document to draw a hard line on a map that defines “Downtown,” but its recommendations focus on the planning area described above. This is consistent with the framework set by the *Comprehensive Plan* and with the coverage of earlier downtown plans. The City’s *Comprehensive Plan* addresses many community- and region-wide issues in more detail, which allows this Downtown Plan to focus on issues specific to its planning area. This Downtown Plan recognizes that the entire central Isthmus is more urban in character than other parts of the community, and seeks to functionally and aesthetically weave areas adjacent to the Downtown into the fabric of the planning area. It should also be noted that each of the near Downtown areas have recently-adopted neighborhood or special area plans that are consistent with and reinforce the goals of this Downtown Plan.



Madison's Downtown is very compact, as illustrated in this comparison of the planning area to the Badger Interchange on the city's east side. The red box represents one square mile.
















Planning Process

Prior to the kick off of the Downtown Plan’s planning process in 2008, the *Downtown Advisory Report* (2004) and *Comprehensive Plan* (2006) provided the general vision and initial direction for this present effort. Building on those documents, this planning process began by exploring “the possibilities” for the future of downtown. Multiple iterations of general approaches and concepts to achieve the desired future were created, analyzed, and refined. This was followed by the development of a comprehensive set of draft recommendations to implement the plan’s goals and objectives, released for comment in the fall of 2010. This full plan document refines these recommendations and presents the Downtown Plan to guide decisions for the next twenty years.



The process relied heavily on public participation from beginning to end. There were over 125 group meetings with property and business owners, neighborhood and community groups, City boards and Commissions, and many others with an interest in the future of Downtown, representing well over 2,250 individual personal contacts. In addition, there were countless smaller meetings and contacts with individuals. For a more complete description of the planning process, see Appendix B.

DOWNTOWN PLAN MILESTONES

April 2008: <i>Kickoff</i>	June 2008: <i>Theme Workshops</i>	September 2008: <i>Downtown Plan Office Opens</i>	November 2008: <i>Public Meeting on General Approaches</i>	April 2009: <i>Public Meeting on Preliminary Concepts</i>	May 2009 - February 2010: <i>Refining Concepts</i>	March 2010 - September 2010: <i>Draft Recommendations</i>	October 2010 - September 2011: <i>Finalize Recommendations</i>
 <p>Comprehensive Plans The Comprehensive Plan provides an overall vision and wide policy.</p>  <p>Special Area Plans Special area plans provide detailed land use, transportation, open space, and other recommendations upon Comprehensive Plan.</p>  <p>Downtown Plan The Downtown Plan</p>	 <p>Open Space at Wisconsin Avenue</p>  <p>Better Maintenance in Historic Districts</p>  <p>Improve Parks & Recreation</p>	 					
<p>The planning process started with a review and affirmation of the Downtown Advisory Report as well as provisions of the City's 2006 Comprehensive Plan.</p>	<p>A series of public workshops were held on six planning themes, resulting in the identification of opportunities and issues for the Downtown Plan to address.</p>	<p>A Downtown Plan Public Information Office was established just off of State Street and the Capitol Square to allow for continued public interaction.</p>	<p>The development of basic approaches to each of the planning themes and the feedback received on them set a course for concept development.</p>	<p>Over 150 people provided valuable input on concepts regarding land use, building heights, open space improvements, transportation ideas, & potential growth areas.</p>	<p>Continued discussions with neighborhood groups, volunteer professionals, City committees, City staff, & others, provided significant feedback & help set the plan's direction.</p>	<p>After thoroughly working through concepts, project staff continued to meet with agencies, policymakers, & the public to develop a complete set of draft recommendations to achieve the plan goals.</p>	<p>Throughout 2011, Planning Staff met with residents, focus groups, policymakers, property & business owners to finalize plan recommendations and produce a draft plan for review & adoption.</p>

Plan Format

The balance of this document covers a variety of topics, providing background information, objectives, and recommendations organized by the nine keys described in the preceding section. It should be noted that many of the topics covered are multifaceted and could have been addressed under several keys, but they are presented only under the one that best fit with the organization of this document. Beginning on page 109, an implementation matrix assigns a timeline and identifies parties responsible for ensuring that priority recommendations are carried out.