



# 4

## Chapter Four: **Downtown Vision**

## Chapter 4: Downtown Vision

### A Development Plan for Downtown Schuyler

The first three chapters of the Downtown Revitalization Plan addressed the people and economics of Schuyler and potential markets for Downtown, existing conditions, and the perceptions and insights of residents, businesses, and other stakeholders as they think about the district’s future. This section presents an ambitious but realistic vision for Downtown Schuyler, based on its special assets and potential markets.

Downtown Schuyler, like many communities across Nebraska, began to experience stagnation in the 1980s and into the 1990s. Unlike many of these communities, Schuyler has reversed this trend and over the last 10 to 15 years has filled downtown space with new businesses providing a mixture of longtime businesses and new enterprises. Like Schuyler’s early history, the growth has been spurred by new immigrants. New Hispanic residents to the community have opened a variety of businesses including restaurants, clothing and general merchandise stores, and service related businesses. The district’s new businesses are the reason for increased traffic and vitality in the downtown both during the day and in the evening.

As identified in the 2004 Comprehensive Plan and reinforced in the previous chapter, the downtown still struggles with a lack of cohesiveness among the businesses and in the overall look and feel of the district. The district’s strong commercial and civic base provides a foundation for the emergence of an even stronger Downtown, with an intimacy and scale that are increasingly valuable to customers. This plan builds on the Comprehensive Plan’s goal of creating “a vital small town center, focused on service-oriented retail, office, civic, entertainment, and new residential uses.”

## THE PROGRAM FOR DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT

### Development Program

The Downtown concept begins with establishing a program, much like the architectural program for a building project. The program establishes the ingredients of development – the amount of space that markets can absorb, present and future community needs, current projects that are pending, and other



opportunities. The recommendations are based both on the existing conditions and market analysis, and on comments from stakeholders regarding issues and opportunities. The development program for Downtown Schuyler includes the following:

**Retail and related commercial development.** Schuyler serves both local customers and a significant Hispanic population from a large surrounding area. Downtown now accounts for about 40% of the city’s current retail space. The analysis presented in Chapter One indicates a community-wide potential for about 51,000 square feet of new retail and allied consumer space. Assuming that one-third of that demand is allocated to Downtown generates a demand for about 17,800 square feet of new downtown space.

**Capacity for additional office space.** Schuyler’s downtown office market is a mixture of banking, civic, insurance, and attorneys. As many downtowns experienced retail stagnation, they saw vacant storefronts fill with services and office type uses. This did not happen in Schuyler and the district still has capacity for additional office space. New office development in the downtown should avoid competition for historic storefront space, adding economic activity without displacing retailers.

**New residential construction.** As outlined in the 2006 Schuyler Housing Strategy, the city has significant demand for new residential construction. Downtown Schuyler has a limited amount of downtown housing; and there is some concern about the quality of this housing. Rental rehabilitation, as outlined in the Housing Study, along with new construction, should increase the vitality and economic diversity of the downtown. This project assumes that on average the downtown could capture 10% of the total community demand, or about 12 additional units over the next five years.

**Emerging public uses.** The downtown program should be able to accommodate other significant public uses, some of which may emerge in future years. These include:

- *A new public library.* Already in the early stages of development, a new library would replace the existing public library, which is in need of additional space. The existing facility at 12<sup>th</sup> and A Streets is located in an attractive historic structure that will need to be preserved and adapted for a new use. The Library Board has selected a new site at the intersection of 11<sup>th</sup> and A Streets, a highly visible and strong location for a new library.
- *A new Police Station.* The Police Station is located in the historic city hall building, an attractive



and iconic building in downtown Schuyler. The department needs additional space and looking at options that will best serve the community and police needs. If it is determined that the department needs to move to a new location, action will need to be taken to occupy and preserve the historic structure.

- *The Historic Carnegie library.* The Carnegie library building, along south B Street, has sat empty for a number of years with significant upgrades needed for occupancy. These upgrades will require the commitment and passion of residents and/or a prospective tenant. Because the building is one of the city’s architectural treasures, every effort should be given to preserve the building and occupy it once again.

**Public Open Space.** While Railside Green provides a large open space in central downtown, the space is underutilized, not designed or located for maximum use, and not connected to other green spaces in the community. Public space should be an important focus of the Downtown, and should create a strong image. In addition, existing and proposed green spaces should be connected to the city’s trails and park and recreation system.

### A Community Agenda

In addition to the Downtown development goals presented in Chapter 3, the Downtown Development program should also address several community and functional issues. Community issues include:

**Major Public Open Space.** While Downtown has a green space in Railside Green, it lacks an urban space that provides customer amenities and platforms for smaller events. Many citizens envisioned a public space or “public square,” speaking to their belief in the need for effective, heavily utilized small urban spaces that bring visitors and customers to the downtown.

**Liveliness and Vitality.** People have distinct memories of Downtown Schuyler – the experience of shopping, eating at a special restaurant, or experiencing the activity of the district on a Saturday night. These experiences stay with people with a power that is unique to downtowns and special districts. One of the great things that a downtown has to offer is the pleasure of the experience. There are aspects of this in the district today but there is also a lack of spaces that can bring life and vitality to the district. By making the experience of being downtown better, we can increase satisfaction that people feel with the city center, in turn building pride and increasing the frequency of return trips.



**New Downtown Streetscape.** Downtown streets and gateways communicate the district’s health and character to customers, residents and visitors. The district’s streetscape is older, including lighting that is over 50 years old. An affordable streetscape program should support the business community by creating a street with detail, color, and customer accommodations to the street. Downtown’s entrance points should also announce arrival into a distinctive central district with signage, landscaping and graphics. Overall themes included in the streetscape should reflect the concept of one downtown with a diversity of businesses and experiences.

**Building Appearance and Maintenance.** Improvement of downtown building facades and interiors was an important community agenda item in the 2004 Comprehensive Plan. Efforts have been made in this area, with the development of a Façade Improvement Fund. However, new strategies should be employed to ensure the longevity of buildings both physically and economically. Strategic public actions and investments should also be taken to strengthen the overall appearance of the downtown, supporting the economic health of the downtown and private market investment.

**Preservation of Historic Structures.** While often not considered one of the traditional “historic” communities of Nebraska, downtown Schuyler has excellent examples of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century commercial architecture. Historic preservation was a noted concern of some residents - concern that once significant structures are lost they will never be replaced with the same level of detail. Many of the recommendations of this plan identify new construction projects that will add life and investment to Downtown, but preservation of historic structures will remain at the core of the district. Preserving buildings such as the



Carnegie library create important excitement and vitality in the district.

**Marketing and District Presence.** Downtown Schuyler sits within minutes of two of the state’s largest cities, making it difficult for the district to have a distinct presence in the market. However, Schuyler has been able to do this to some degree. Marketing the district’s distinct restaurants and services along with creating a lively environment is one of the next steps in creating a distinctive presence in the region.

## A Functional Agenda

The functional issues that must be addressed by the development program include:

**Access and Visibility.** Unlike many Midwestern downtowns, Downtown Schuyler’s “main street” is not a highway corridor. Instead, the major corridor, Highway 15, runs parallel to the district with one major entrance at the base of a viaduct. With no signage at this entrance or at the secondary entrance at 16<sup>th</sup> and B, the district can often be missed by visitors. A successful development program for the downtown must find new ways for both residents and visitors to both see and access the district.

**Pedestrian Safety.** Pedestrian crossings throughout Downtown, including B Street, are uncomfortable for many pedestrians and discourage two-sided business patronage. Other pedestrian access concerns include the crossing of B Street at the railroad and the crossing of Colfax at 11<sup>th</sup> Street. These crossings are two of the most important entrances to the downtown, accessing large portions of the city to the north and west.

**Connectivity.** The city’s major highway corridors are on the edges of the district, moving traffic around the Downtown and not through it. The connections that link Downtown to the rest of the city and connect features of the District together are very important. Downtown’s transportation network should be multi-modal, providing safe and secure routes for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists within public rights-of-way. The network must also include good wayfinding, directing both motorist and pedestrians to their destinations.

**Parking Convenience.** Like many downtown districts, Schuyler struggles with the need to provide convenient parking. While a shortage of parking is often a perception issue if parking is not available immediately in front of a destination, Schuyler does have an actual shortage of parking. In addition, some



customers have difficulty finding their way to the city's parking lot. A district-wide parking strategy includes adding to the parking supply, creating greener parking lots, improving directional signage, and providing better paths from car door to store door.

## THE DOWNTOWN CONCEPT

The vision for Downtown Schuyler emerges by following the program based on markets, existing projects and priorities, and community-wide needs. The components of this vision include:

- *The Downtown Framework*, a conceptual diagram showing the relationships of major downtown elements.
- *The Public Environment*, projects within the public realm that improve the quality of the downtown and strengthen the investment climate.
- *Key Projects*, self-contained projects that, together, create a transformed downtown district.
- *Connections*, addressing the fabric that links major projects together and links the District to the larger Schuyler community.
- *Policies*, describing in more detail methods by which various needs and markets are met and projects are implemented.

### The Framework

The Framework establishes the overall structure for the Downtown development program. Its key elements include:

- **A public gathering space** that is interactive and brings life and energy to the downtown, connecting the Colfax County Courthouse lawn to the south and parking to the north.
- **A reinvigorated B Street** retail and civic core anchored by a stronger 12th and B Street intersection and improved street environment.
- **An improved Railside Green**, bringing a community green space into the Downtown with defined pathways and additional parking.
- **A major downtown entrance** at the intersection of 11th and Colfax Streets. The entrance should proudly speak to the energy and history of the district. Signage and theming amenities should be replicated at the 16th and B Street entrance, directing travelers to the district.
- **Commercial and mixed-use developments**, including residential, on major sites that surround Downtown. These should be amenity-driven sites, with parking and landscaping that make the sites inviting and elevate the quality of the downtown.
- **Capitalizing on existing opportunity sites** in the Downtown for new and exciting uses. These include the currently occupied Police Station and Library but also the vacant Carnegie Library.

### The Public Environment

A city's streets and public environment can say a lot about a community. Jane Jacobs once said "If a city's streets look interesting, the city looks interesting; if they look dull, the city looks dull." This can be painfully true for a downtown district. Schuyler has an active downtown but most visitors arrive in the downtown for a specific destination or purpose, not for the enjoyment of spending time in the district. Investments in the public realm are an important way the city can improve the atmosphere of the district, specifically:



*11<sup>th</sup> & B Street Intersection*



*Improved 11<sup>th</sup> & B Street Intersection*

- **Intersection improvements**, creating a greener and safer environment. Research has found that shoppers spend more time and money, make more return trips, and have the perception of better customer service in business districts that have greener (trees and other plantings) environments. Creating this environment can easily be done at the District’s intersections. Constructing nodes at each of the intersections:
  - Produces a safer pedestrian environment by shortening the distance a pedestrian must travel to cross the street and improves the visibility of the pedestrian to the motorists.
  - Creates a space for trees and other plantings that do not obstruct the view of individual businesses.
  - Provides a shaded refuge for visitors to the district and additional space for amenities such as benches.

Intersection improvements should also include contrasting crosswalks that define the pedestrian crosswalk. Beyond the intersections, the downtown’s brick streets are important assets that are

distinctive and slow traffic through the district. The city should preserve these streets and avoid asphalt patches that disrupt the aesthetic appeal of the streets.

Cost for these improvements could vary depending on the intersection and specific costs related to storm sewer intakes. Probable cost for a four node intersection would be \$130,000. This includes new curbs, stained concrete, plantings, and design and engineering. Completion of the major six intersections in one phase would likely be the most cost effective approach for the city. This approach would likely offer lower construction and design costs. As part of the larger street improvement project, the city should also replace the existing 1950s street lighting. Depending on the design and style, each fixture could cost in the range of \$8,000 to \$18,000 and would not necessarily need to be replaced on a one-to-one basis.

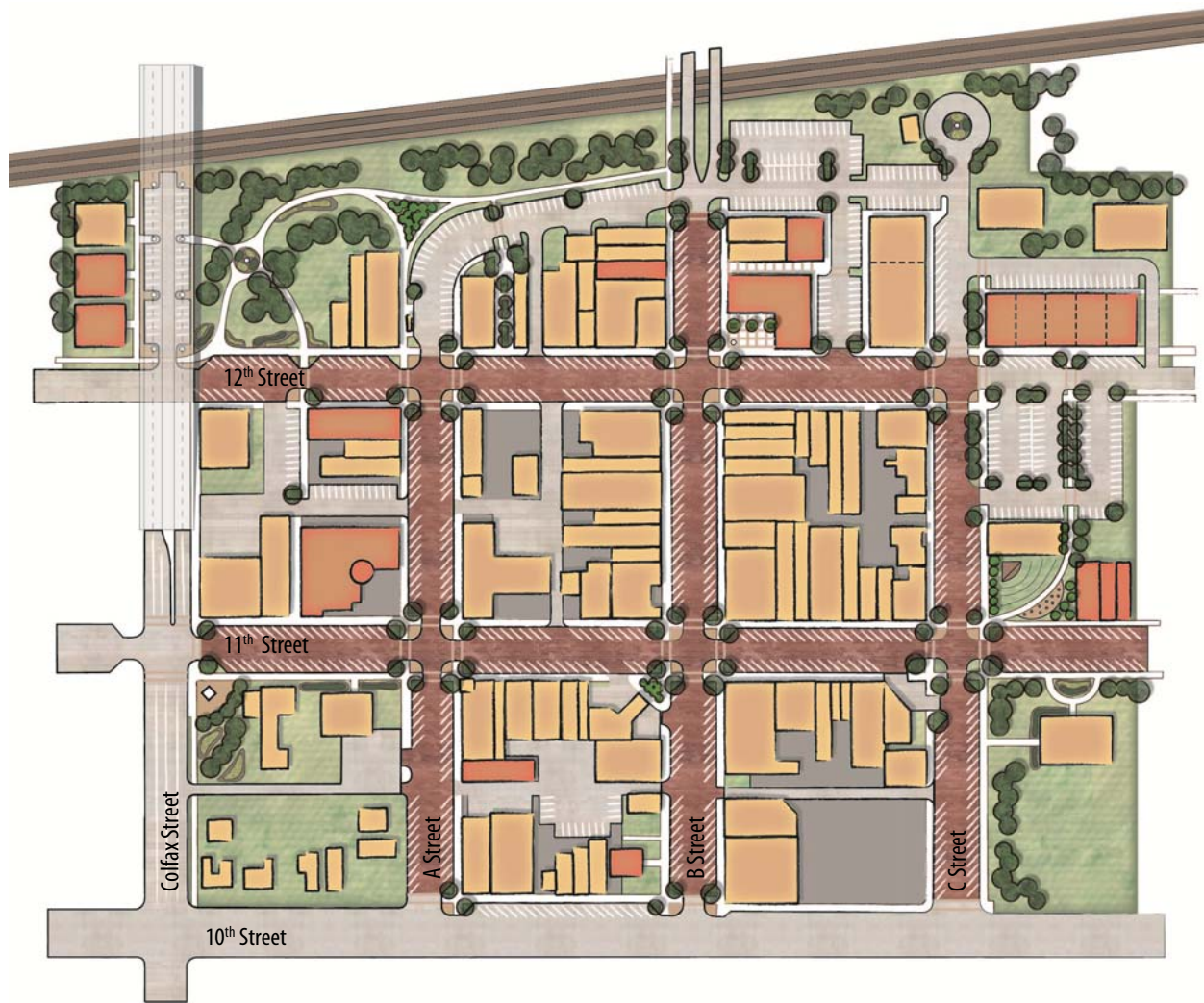
Funding for these improvements could come from a mixture of sources including:

- Community Development Block Grants
  - The city’s Capital Improvement Program
  - Transportation Enhancement Funds
  - Sales tax dollars
  - A special bond issue
- 
- **Pedestrian and trail access**, connecting the downtown to the entire city. Schuyler is a very walkable city with beautiful tree-lined streets on flat grades. The city has successfully started implementation of a trail system that should continue and include connections to the downtown. An important component of these improvements includes planned safety improvements at the intersection of 11<sup>th</sup> and Colfax streets and 16<sup>th</sup> and B streets. Families should welcome the opportunity to walk to the downtown and enjoy an ice cream cone or a concert in the Square. Specific improvements to the system should include:
    - Defined trails within Railside Green
    - Connections between Railside Green and the city’s larger trail network.
    - Improved crossing at 11<sup>th</sup> and Colfax streets
    - A widened sidewalk along South B Street connecting to the 9<sup>th</sup> Street trail, as proposed in the city’s Comprehensive Plan.

## KEY PROJECTS

The Downtown vision and program is comprised of six major projects. These include:

- Railside Green
- A Corner Anchor
- Bridge Environment
- 12<sup>th</sup> Street Development
- Town Square
- Highway 15 Gateway
- Public Investments



## Railside Green

Railside Green was the City's first opportunity to bring more greenery into the downtown district. The Green filled in over the years and by 2003 had become somewhat overgrown. During the development of the city's Comprehensive Plan many residents felt the space was overgrown and did not feel comfortable walking through the area. Since that time residents have cleared overgrowth and developed concepts to further improve the space. Railside Green is an important buffer between the downtown and the heavily used railroad. Improvements should create a greater sense of safety, have gateway features to the downtown, connect businesses to parking, and link the downtown to the larger city wide trail system.

### Program

The program for Railside Green area includes:

- A signature public open space that attracts people, is a link within the city's trail system, and offers unique features.
- Additional parking and paving that improve the feel of the area.
- Improvements to the overall comfort of the downtown by minimizing the impact of the railroad.

- Supporting private development opportunities that take advantage of the green space and quality building stock surrounding the Green.

### *Components of the Concept*

- **A Railroad Quiet Zone.**

While the railroad is a part of everyday life for many residents of Schuyler, the regular blowing of the train horn through the downtown can decrease the quality of the visitor experience. The construction of a median on B Street in the downtown, and at Denver and G Streets,



would allow for the establishment of a quiet zone. The quiet zone limits the need for the trains to blow their horns as they move through the city.

- **Railside Green Pathways.** The construction of clearly defined and maintained pathways from B Street to sidewalks along 12<sup>th</sup> Street and the parking area under the Colfax Street bridge is a necessary improvement to increase use of the Green. The pathways should follow existing open grass walkways with links to 12<sup>th</sup> Street at several locations and to the parking area under the Colfax Street bridge. The pathways should improve the safety of the Green and could include more subtle pedestrian lighting and public art. It should connect to the city-wide trail system through downtown to the existing 9<sup>th</sup> Street trail and link the district with an improved crossing at 16<sup>th</sup> and B Streets.
- **Parking and Paving Improvements.** Railside Drive has essentially functioned as an unpaved alleyway but improvements to the street and its connection to A Street would greatly benefit the district in two ways.
  - It would provide up to 55 additional parking stalls for the downtown.
  - With more general traffic it would improve the visibility and therefore the safety of what is now a mostly hidden area.
- **Alley Walkthrough.** The spaces between buildings should allow for comfortable pedestrian access between downtown businesses and parking along Railside Drive. Improvements could include landscaping or wall murals.
- **Lincoln Highway Gateway Themeing.** B Street from 16<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> Street was part of the original Lincoln Highway. The space within the railroad medians would provide an opportunity to recognize the history of the street and welcome visitors to the district. An entrance feature at this location should be tied to signage or theming at the intersection of 16<sup>th</sup> and B Streets, directing visitors to the downtown.
- **Building Reinvestment.** The building stock surrounding Railside Green is generally in very good condition except for the building at 1211 B Street. The city should continue to move forward with planned improvements to this building and eventual resale. This is an important investment for the community. Not only does its eventual sale bring additional tax value to the city, but it also strengthens the block and an important entrance to the community. Investments like these also

increase the level of security that surrounding buildings owners have in their properties and potential for improvements.

**Project Cost**

Table 4.1 presents an opinion of probable cost for the Railside Green projects.

**Table 4.1: Railside Green, Opinion of Probably Cost**

Description	Subtotal	Contingency	Design & testing	Total
<b>Public Costs</b>				
Pathway & Park Improvements	\$120,000	\$18,000	\$14,000	\$152,000
Railside Drive Improvements	\$151,000	\$23,000	\$18,000	\$192,000
B Street Quiet Zone Improvements (North & South side)	\$77,000	\$12,000	\$9,000	\$98,000
1211 B Street Improvements	\$30,000			\$30,000

**Financing Tools**

- *Private contributions and foundation support.* A major community open space like Railside Green, providing a community wide benefit in its trails and educational arboretum, is attractive to private contributors and foundations, and should utilize a well supported development campaign.
- *General Obligation Bond.* As part of the city park and recreation system, Railside Green should be included in a larger park bond that would include phased improvement of the city’s overall park system.
- *Union Pacific.* While Railside Green was developed and maintained by the city, it is located on Union Pacific right-of-way. The city should reach out to Union Pacific as a strategic partner in the improvements to the area. Their approval and involvement in the quiet zone will also be essential to the overall vision of the area.
- *Local Option Municipal Economic Development Act.* Money from this funding source could be used in the renovation of the 1211 B Street building and for parking improvements in the downtown if it is tied to the location or improvement of a downtown business.

**A Corner Anchor**

The corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and B Streets is one of the most heavily traveled intersections and a strategic business location in the city. For these reasons the deterioration of the building located at the northeast corner is of special concern to downtown business owners and residents. Redevelopment of this site should include a significant corner anchor that welcomes visitors to the district and reinforces the marketability of surrounding businesses.



### *Program*

The program for the 12<sup>th</sup> & B Intersection includes:

- New mixed-use developments offering new commercial, office and possibly upper level residential.
- A small but strong plaza at the entrance of the new building that anchors the corner and provides a public space.
- Improved entrance at the intersection of B Street and the railroad along with additional parking.
- Pedestrian improvements that will connect businesses with both on- and off-street parking.

### *Components of the Concept*

- **New Mixed-Use Buildings.** While every effort should be made to preserve the district’s historic building structure, efforts must also be made to ensure the viability of this important intersection. The concept proposes the redevelopment of the northeast corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and B streets with the construction of a new mixed-use building. The building should incorporate a strong corner entrance that could include a plaza type feature. The site could also include the construction of an additional building to the north on existing parking.
- **Railroad Right-of-Way.** The area south of the railroad tracks on the east side of B Street is used by the railroad for storage. The area is graveled with material scattered throughout the site, creating a weak entrance to the district from the north. The district could also use additional and accessible parking. The concept would consolidate Union Pacific storage to create a new and well landscaped parking lot. The design and landscaping of the parking lot will be very important both as a statement for visitors entering the downtown but to also visibly define the quality that the city would like to see in the entire community.

The additional parking, along with a reconfiguration of the parking west of the Latino Club, would allow for the development of an additional building in the downtown. The site allows for approximately 2,750 square feet foot print for office or service oriented business space in the downtown.



- **“C” Street Improvements.** The terminus of C Street should be improved with a round-about area for cars to turn around. Parking on the north and east side of the Latino Club should be improved. With greater visibility of the area the roundabout would also be the ideal location for a public art piece.

### Project Cost

Table 4.2: Corner Anchor

Description	Subtotal	Contingency	Design & testing	Total
<b>Private Costs</b>				
New Mixed Use Building	\$2,226,000	\$334,000	\$267,000	\$2,827,000
New Office/Service Building	\$330,000	\$49,000	\$40,000	\$419,000
North Side Parking	\$193,000	\$29,000	\$23,000	\$245,000
<b>Public Costs</b>				
C Street Improvements	\$66,000	\$10,000	\$8,000	\$84,000

### Financing Tools

In its role of community redevelopment the city may need to purchase the 12<sup>th</sup> and B site. The city would then be able to establish a redevelopment agenda for the site through a request for proposals to work with a private developer to redevelop the site. Tools for financing this and other projects in the area include:

- *Local Option Municipal Economic Development Act.* Money from this funding source could be used in the purchase of the 12<sup>th</sup> and B buildings and for parking improvements in the downtown if it is tied to the location or improvement of a downtown business.
- *Tax Increment Financing.* The construction of a new buildings or even the rehabilitation of existing buildings would likely utilize Tax Increment Financing. This important tool often allows otherwise difficult but important projects to move forward while future owners continue to pay their full tax obligation.
- *Private contributions and foundation support.* Private organizations or companies could play an important role in the proposed projects for this area. Any public art incorporated in the downtown will require the assistance of a private organization. A private group could also be involved in the developed of the plaza area at 12<sup>th</sup> and B Streets.
- *Union Pacific.* As a major land owner and strategic neighbor the Union Pacific should be approached as a participant in the improvements to the area. The improvement of the B Street entrance to the downtown cannot move forward without their involvement.

### Bridge Environment

The space below the Colfax Street overpass should become a community destination as a covered public space, improving the



opportunities to redevelop the former lumber yard buildings. The area provides some parking but basic improvements to the parking and bridge columns would create a more appealing space and additional parking for new development. A more active area will also improve the perceived safety of the area. With few people and sporadic lighting the space can often feel isolated and unsafe.

**Program**

- Covered public space for such events as a farmers market.
- New curbs and defined parking under the Colfax Street Bridge.
- Improvements to the bridge area including curbs, lighting, and graphic wraps around the bridge columns to add color and interest.
- Construction of new commercial or service oriented buildings on the former lumber yard site.



*Colfax Street Area Today*



*Colfax Street Possibilities*

### Components of the Concept

- **Redevelopment of the Lumber Yard.** The two large, metal buildings located north of 12<sup>th</sup> and Colfax are no longer used for lumber storage and should transition to more commercial, downtown oriented buildings. The former brick lumber yard building on the north side of the block is a good example of early commercial architecture and should be preserved for office or service oriented use. Any new construction on the south side of the block should reflect the scale and detail of the historic office to the north. The new buildings provide 7,000 square feet of additional commercial or service oriented space in the downtown.
- **Improved Parking.** Improvements to the parking area underneath the bridge should welcome more use from the downtown but also create an energized space for community events such as a revitalized farmers market. Creating a more inviting and safer feeling environment is important to the redevelopment of this area. This should include new pedestrian scaled lighting and aesthetic improvements like graphic wraps around the bridge supports.

### Project Cost

**Table 4.3: Bridge Environment**

Description	Subtotal	Contingency	Design & testing	Total
<b>Public Costs</b>				
Lighting, Paving, and Column Wraps	\$336,000	\$50,000	\$40,000	\$427,000
<b>Private Costs</b>				
Lumber Yard Redevelopment	\$1,237,000	\$185,000	\$148,000	\$1,570,000

### Financing Tools

- *Local Option Municipal Economic Development Act.* Money from this funding source could be used in the redevelopment of the former lumber yard buildings. The Schuyler Development Company could also consider purchasing this site as a spec site for potential businesses.
- *Tax Increment Financing.* The construction of new buildings or even the rehabilitation of existing buildings would likely utilize Tax Increment Financing. This important tool often allows otherwise difficult but important projects to move forward while future owners continue to pay their full tax obligation.
- *Transportation Enhancement Funds.* These funds can be used to build and restore transportation infrastructure across the state. Improvements to the pedestrian transportation system and the historic at-grade Colfax Street would improve the quality of life in the area and strengthen the redevelopment opportunities in the area.

### 12th Street Development

While the core of the downtown has remained strong it is often the edges of Downtown Schuyler that need strengthening. Like the improvements to the Colfax Street bridge, improvements in this area should strengthen an entrance to the district, improve parking and create additional commercial and service oriented business opportunities. The existing parking lot at 12<sup>th</sup> and C Streets is under used and the same



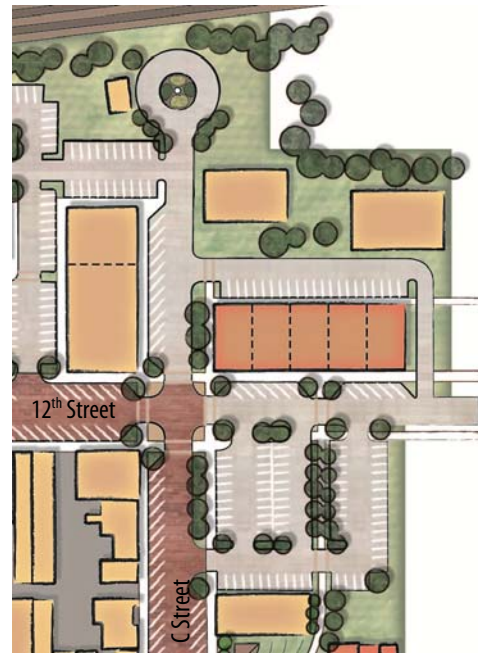
could be said for the land to the north of the parking lot. These areas should welcome visitors, improve amenities for pedestrians and generate new development opportunities.

### *Program*

- Improved city parking lot
- New commercial development
- Pedestrian improvements

### *Components of the Concept*

- **Improved City Parking Lot.** The city parking lot at 12<sup>th</sup> and C is well located for access to the core business district along B Street but is often under used. Like many districts, visitors often want to park immediately in front of the business they are visiting. Parking at the lot must be appealing in several ways but most important is that the lot itself is appealing and safe and that the walk from the lot to one's destination is appealing in itself. Reconfiguring the parking lot should add additional spaces but also add landscaping and trees. The landscaping will improve the feel of the lot, shading visitors in the summer and protection in the winter. The walk to and from the lot is also very important. Visitors should feel they have reached their destination, the downtown district, when they arrive at the lot - not that an individual business must be their destination. Earlier in this section streetscape and pedestrian improvements were discussed. These improvements will create a positive public atmosphere and welcome visitors to walk from the lot to the businesses in the district.
- **New Mixed-use Buildings.** The north side of 12<sup>th</sup> and C Streets should eventually redevelop with new mixed use buildings. These buildings should provide additional commercial or service oriented space on the lower level. A possible second floor should offer new, quality living space in the downtown. New parking would be provided to the north of the development site and along the street.
- **Street Improvements.** Improvements to the street environment were discussed earlier in this section and focused on the corner nodes. Different from the rest of the district improvements, this area should include a mid-block bump in the curb line. This bump-out should function as a mid-block crossing, connecting the city parking lot to new development on the north side. This crossing should then clearly connect to a parking lot path and eventually to a new public event square to the south at 11<sup>th</sup> and C Streets.



### Project Cost

**Table 4.4: 12<sup>th</sup> Street Development**

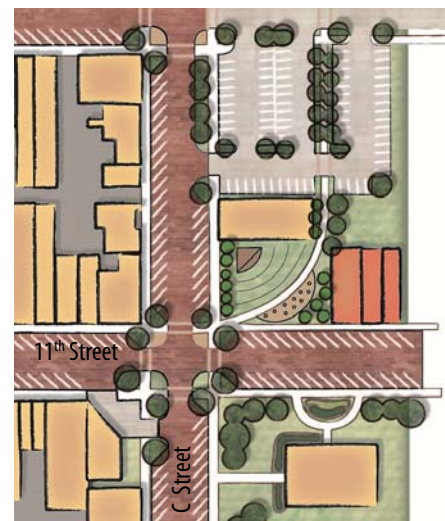
Description	Subtotal	Contingency	Design & testing	Total
<b>Public Costs</b>				
City Parking Lot Improvement (50% pavement replacement)	\$206,000	\$31,000	\$25,000	\$262,000
<b>Private Costs</b>				
New Mixed Use Building	\$1,462,000	\$219,000	\$175,000	\$1,857,000

### Financing Tools

- *Capital Improvement Program.* Improvements to the city parking lot could be planned for as part of the city’s Capital Improvement Program. These improvements should include restriping the parking lot and adding landscaping to the lot.
- *Local Option Municipal Economic Development Act.* Money from this funding source could be used in the redevelopment of the north side of 12<sup>th</sup> Street, attracting additional business to the city.
- *Tax Increment Financing.* The construction of new buildings or even the rehabilitation of existing buildings would likely utilize Tax Increment Financing. This important tool often allows otherwise difficult but important projects to move forward while future owners continue to pay their full tax obligation.
- *Land Acquisition.* In the long term the city could consider acquisition of the buildings along the north side of 12<sup>th</sup> Street and the development of a proposal process to work with a developer to redevelop the site. However, as will be discussed later, this is not a priority project and could possibly be accomplished through other initiatives.

### Town Square

Downtown districts today need to be more than just places that people come to shop and meet with service providers. Viable districts provide more; they provide an atmosphere of energy and entertainment. This is especially important for Schuyler’s growing Hispanic population. The new Hispanic malls and districts across the country are thriving because they provide a mix of businesses and activities. Latino families tend to shop with several generations; therefore, having a mix of venues, including kid-friendly areas and benches, is important. Latinos also often tend to live in smaller housing units, increasing their demand for more open public spaces. Downtown Schuyler has also lacked space for community events and entertainment that create the unique evening and weekend energy in a district. Once again, the Latino community can add to the schedule of events, including celebrations for Cinco de Mayo, Mexican Independence Day in September, and Christmas Holiday traditional events.



**Program**

- A signature public square that attracts people of all ages, and provides a special destination for Schuyler’s young families.
- A welcoming pedestrian connection to the city parking lot that creates an enjoyable walking experience for visitors to the district.
- Supporting expansion and improvement of the county annex building that allows for continued growth of county services in proximity to the Courthouse, while preserving the Courthouse lawn.

**Components of the Concept**

- **Development of a Community Square.** Downtown Schuyler has always lacked a public space in the downtown for community events like the Labor Day celebrations. At the same time the former Sky Theater at the intersection of 11<sup>th</sup> and C Streets has deteriorated severely. Located across the street from the Colfax County Courthouse, it leaves visitors with the wrong impression of an otherwise vibrant downtown district. A new public event space should include a small stage area for performances and features that are appealing to families for those times when scheduled events are not occurring. This may include an interactive water feature that can be activated by kids. During scheduled events this could be turned off for additional seating areas. The space should also be well landscaped, offering shade and greenery that complements the Courthouse lawn.
- **Pedestrian Walkway.** A well-defined walkway should connect the Square with the parking lot to the north. This walkway connects to the 11<sup>th</sup> and C intersection and the Courthouse, providing a welcoming walk for those visiting the Courthouse or VFW.
- **County Annexes.** Like many counties and governmental agencies, modern services and technology often require additional office and storage space. The county currently has some offices on the block north of the Courthouse. The area east of the square should allow for additional County space while preserving the historic Courthouse lawn. New construction should have a pedestrian scale that complements the town square while also reflecting features of the County Courthouse.



*Interactive Fountain at Bayliss Park, Council Bluffs, IA*

### Project Cost

**Table 4.5: Town Square**

Description		Subtotal	Contingency	Design & testing	Total
Public Costs					
	TownSquare	\$224,000	\$34,000	\$27,000	\$284,000

### Financing Tools

- *Land Acquisition.* The city would need to acquire the land necessary to develop the square. The ownership of much of the property is currently in question and would need to be cleared before the city could move forward. During that time the city will need to closely monitor the status of the structure for deterioration that could affect the health and safety of residents.
- *Private Contributions and Foundation Support.* The city should work closely with private foundations and organizations for support and development of the site. The development of this site provides a community wide benefit that large organizations or companies often find appealing to support.
- *General Obligation Bond.* As part of the city park and recreation system, the Town Square could be included in a larger park bond that would include a phased improvement of the city’s overall park system.
- *County Involvement.* Colfax County could also be a partner in the development of the site. Providing amenities or features that recognize the larger county.
- *Local Option Municipal Economic Development Act.* Money from this funding source could be used for improved parking and access to parking for the surrounding businesses. Funding could also be used for office development to the east of the square, especially if these offices are private businesses that support Courthouse functions.

### Highway 15 Gateway

Traffic along Highway 15 or Colfax Street can move fairly quickly through the city. The railroad overpass means that traffic could only stop at the 16<sup>th</sup> Street intersection. The 11<sup>th</sup> Street intersection is located at the base of the overpass and can easily be missed by those traveling either north or south. The district needs to have more of a presence as this intersection, announcing the district and welcoming visitors.

### Program

- A strong entrance feature, announcing the district to passing motorists
- Improved crosswalks, connecting the district to neighborhoods on the west side of Colfax



- Clearly defined turning movements for motorists

*Components of the Concept*

- **An Iconic Entrance Feature.** The vacant lot at the southeast intersection of Colfax and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets offers an ideal location to develop an iconic entrance feature. The lot is currently owned by the city and development of the lot could be difficult because of access issues. As a State Highway, the Department of Roads would likely not favor a new entrance to this lot off of the Highway. The entrance should also be iconic in the sense that it should reflect the architecture and scale of the district but should include a vertical element that is visible to those traveling along Colfax Street.



Themes for the entrance could include the historic city hall clock tower or Lincoln Highway. Improvement could include the purchase of the house located to the east of the vacant lot or at least screening of this house from the intersection.

- **Improved Pedestrian Crosswalks.** Although this intersection is not the primary trail route into the district, which occurs two blocks to the south along 9<sup>th</sup> Street, the crosswalks should be clear to passing motorist. Cars and trucks along Colfax Street tend to travel at a fairly high rate of speed - amenities and signage should not only welcome motorists to the district but make them aware of the pedestrians traveling across Colfax over the next several blocks.

### Project Cost

**Table 4.5: Colfax Street Entrance**

Description	Subtotal	Contingency	Design & testing	Total
<b>Public Costs</b>				
Site Improvements	\$109,570	\$16,000	\$13,000	\$139,000
Entrance Monument				\$60,000 to \$100,000

### Financing Tools

- *Private Contributions and Foundation Support.* The city should work closely with private foundations and organizations for support and development of the site.
- *General Obligation Bond.* As part of the city park and recreation system, the Entrance could be included in a larger park bond that would include a phased improvement of the city’s overall park system.
- *Capital Improvement Program.* A share of the improvements at this intersection could also be part of the city’s Capital Improvement Program.
- *Transportation Enhancement Funds.* These funds can be used to build and restore transportation infrastructure across the state. Sidewalk and trail improvements in the area would improve access to the downtown and create a safer pedestrian environment along Highway 15.

### Public Investments

Over the next several years the city will addressing key public investments. These include construction of a new community library and expansion of the police station. Both of these are important public entities that provide a multitude of services to the community and have historically been iconic structures in communities across the county. Location is especially important to



Public Investments

both organizations, needing both visibility and ease of access to the rest of the community.

**Program**

- A new library space that will approximately double the amount of space the Library currently has, ensuring the needed services for a diverse community
- An expanded and possibly relocated Police Station that has easy access to the entire community and visibility to residents
- Reuse of the city’s existing library and possibly the historic City Hall building where the Police Department is located. Both of these buildings are an important part of the historic architecture of the Downtown.

**Components of the Concept**

· **Schuyler Community Library.** By the fall of 2009 the Library Board was moving forward to develop a new library on the site of the city’s former Public Works building at 11<sup>th</sup> and A Streets. The Board had owned land at 10<sup>th</sup> and A Street but had swapped this land with the city for the former public works site at 11<sup>th</sup> and A. The plan was to remove the former public works building and construct a new library. However, many have felt, including the Nebraska State Historical Society that the former Public Works building contributed significantly to the historic nature of the district and should be preserved. This leaves the Library Board with three possible options:

1. Find a new locations that provides the same level of visibility and access as the site at 11<sup>th</sup> and A. The Library is a key community service that generates a significant amount of traffic and should be kept in the downtown.
2. Move forward with plans to remove the building at 11<sup>th</sup> and A, constructing a new building on the site. This action would limit the funding sources available to the Board.
3. Try to preserve the façade of the historic building while constructing a new building that provides the modern and open floor plan that the Library Board desires. This approach should also include the small art deco building to the north of the Public Works.



*Library Option 3*

Reuse and preservation of the existing Library building will also be important to the district. The building is in excellent condition and is a great example of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century commercial architecture. The building could become a great mixture of commercial and upper story residential. The open floor plan and large amount of natural lighting on the second floor would make the space very appealing as an artist studio and living space.

- **Schuyler Police Department.** The city is currently evaluating the facility needs of the police department. The Department's current location in the historic City Hall building at 11<sup>th</sup> and A Streets provides a limited amount of space and lacks modern security and technology needs. There is room for a 2,800 square foot addition to the building on the south side. However, this space may not be able to fully meet the Departments diverse needs and relocation may be necessary. Location is very important to the Department and finding an appropriate site in the downtown may be difficult. The current building is listed as a Historic Landmark, making preservation and reuse of the structure a necessity. Again this could be a great mixed-use space with the opportunity for a substantial public-private partnership.

## Connections

The previous discussion considered the design of the district's major development projects that make up the heart of the downtown development program. This section describes the essential connections that link features of the District together and connect it to the rest of the city. Connections include:

- 16<sup>th</sup> & B Street
- Community Vocabulary
- Wayfinding Enhancements

### *16th & B Street*

The 16<sup>th</sup> Street corridor is an important commercial corridor in the city, including the city's largest grocery store and a number of restaurants. The former Highway 30 corridor can be a visitor's only exposure to the city, bypassing the downtown. Each business district fills a special niche in the community and therefore should support each other. As outlined in the 2004 Comprehensive Plan, improvements to 16<sup>th</sup> Street should enhance the corridor, creating an environment that caters to both the pedestrian and the automobile. These enhancements should include signage that directs visitors to the downtown. Historically there had been a large arrow sign that pointed down B Street at the 16<sup>th</sup> Street intersection. If possible this sign or a similar sign should be installed and a consistent theme and additional landscaping installed down the B Street corridor to the railroad tracks. The arrow signage would likely complement a possible Lincoln Highway theme at the B Street railroad medians.

### *Community Vocabulary*

Schuyler's Downtown business district is a unique destination for a large regional trade area. The spirit of the community should be expressed through unified themes that are apparent at strategic sites or frequently visited locations. Schuyler expresses its image in several unstructured ways from its history as a railroad community to the silo's image as an agricultural based community. The community leaders will need to better define the image of the community and express this image at key community gateways, including exits along Highway 30, 16<sup>th</sup> and B, and 11<sup>th</sup> and Colfax. This community vocabulary can be expressed through:

- **Community Logo.** For Schuyler an iconic city logo could be expressed in several ways. The image of the historic City Hall clock tower, its history as a railroad community, or the original Lincoln Highway route. A common image for the downtown business district and city could strengthen the city's marketing image.

- **Materials.** Harmonious construction materials in the public environment reinforce an impression of caring and quality for the entire city. For example, planters and street furnishings used in the downtown district should be consistent in materials and form.
- **Plantings.** Plant selection in the public environment should reinforce community themes. Street trees planted at regular intervals can define major corridors and provide shade. Consistent palettes of plants used in planters, flower baskets, and other locations within close areas can also strengthen the composition of individual elements in the public realm.
- **Streetlighting and traffic signals.** Downtown Schuyler’s street lighting is nearing 60 years old and will need to be replaced in the coming years. The city should consider a mixture of ornamental pedestrian scale lighting with larger, auto-oriented lighting at the intersections. A limited fixture variety may emphasize special areas such as the 16<sup>th</sup> Street corridor and other community destinations.

### Wayfinding Enhancements

Schuyler should implement a community wayfinding system to provide useful direction to visitors and display attractions available in the city. The spine of this system should be located along the Highway 30 corridor directing traffic off of the highway and into the community. The system should reinforce the connections between Downtown and other community destinations, including the Oak Ballroom, schools, and park and recreation system. Individual signs should be located along the key connecting routes off of Highway 30 to help visitors to Schuyler find the city’s attractions, including Downtown.

### Policies

The previous elements of this vision plan establish the physical parameters of the Downtown Development Concept. This section addresses policy considerations for key issues and components of the plan. These general policy areas include:

- Façade Improvement & Design Guidelines
- Sign Improvement Program
- Building Reuse
- Historic Preservation
- Housing and Adaptive Reuse
- Retail and Service Development

### Façade Improvement and Design Guidelines

#### Overall Policy

Strengthen the image of Downtown Schuyler and the community in general with a façade improvement program that stresses the design quality of the city’s historic structures. Schuyler has successfully developed a facade improvement program that has



provided visible success in the downtown. However, the program could provide more guidance for business owners in the use of that funding.

#### Major Policy Approaches

- Establish design guidelines for rehabilitation and new construction. These guidelines should be a tool for building owners and not regulations. The guidelines should direct owners in best practices for rehabilitation of older and historic structure that extend the life of the structure, do not conceal historic articulations, and improve the value of the building.
- Require illustrations and/or drawings for review of any projects that receive funding from the Façade Improvement program. These drawings should be reviewed in light of established design guidelines.
- Prohibit the use of certain materials that damage facades or take away the historic quality of a building.

### Sign Improvement Program

#### Overall Policy

Develop a sign improvement program that assists businesses in ways that strengthen the image of the downtown and the community gateways.

#### Major Policy Approaches

- Develop sign design guideline that assists building owners in sign materials and resources, the guidelines should be bi-lingual
- As part of a retail education program, described under Retail and Service Development, provide business owners training on signage and marketing
- Establish a sign program similar to the city's façade improvement program but dedicated to signage.

### Historic Preservation

#### Overall policy:

Establishment of a building development policy that uses preservation and adaptive reuse as cornerstones. Historic preservation and adaptive reuse are extremely important to Downtown Schuyler, which has a number of buildings listed on the national Historic Register. Community history and the Downtown's historic structures should be considered core community assets.

#### Major policy approaches:

- Adopting building codes that encourage upper level residential adaptive reuse. Housing development has been a foundation of successful downtown revitalization around the country and could be an important component for Schuyler. Federal tax incentives, construction costs, the nature and preferences of residents in urban districts, and knowledge of successes in other



Nebraska cities and historic districts can encourage residential use of upper levels. Schuyler’s building codes should encourage adaptive reuse without compromising life safety standards. They should also consider design standards in the central district that guide reuse and rehabilitation projects.

- Providing gap financing for major rehabilitation projects. Appropriate historic rehabilitation may not be economically feasible without some form of financing assistance or participation. Elements of a potential financing program for projects in Schuyler include:

- Historic tax credits. The historic tax credit provides a 20% investment tax credit against passive income for certified rehabilitation projects.
- Tax Increment Financing. The city should consider TIF to leverage substantial rehabilitation efforts.
- Community Development Block Grants. CDBG funds can be used to provide gap financing for projects that meet statutory requirements for the program. CDBG funds are administered by the Nebraska Department of Economic Development and awarded to cities on a competitive basis. However, program income from loan repayment ordinarily remains with the city, for use in other program eligible activities.
- Other local public and private resources. The public and private sectors could collaborate to offer financing that provides a real incentive to participants. The result could have major benefits to both property owners and the community’s business community.

- Utilizing design guidelines. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards provide an excellent starting point for evaluating downtown rehabilitation projects. Particularly important is restoration of buildings that have been “modernized” or severely modified with unsympathetic facades. New development in the downtown core should preserve the scale, materials, and character of traditional architecture in the District.

- When a building is removed or replaced, retaining a strong street orientation and the fabric and patterns of Downtown is important. On occasion, rehabilitation will not be feasible under any circumstances because of severe structural deterioration. Downtown growth is a process, and natural growth requires change as well as preservation. However, new buildings should maintain a strong orientation to the street, even if the project’s architecture is contemporary in nature. A retained or reconstructed façade may also provide a gateway to support parking lots behind the main street.



### Building Reuse

Overall Policy

To create a more economically and

environmentally sustainable community while reusing historically significant and viable buildings for new businesses.

While older buildings are not always easy to retrofit to meet modern needs, a high priority should be placed on the reuse of key buildings within the downtown. Schuyler has several significant buildings that are or will become available for reuse in the coming years. The existing vacant historic Carnegie Library is the most visible of these buildings. A recent analysis of the building estimated a cost of rehabilitation that, too many people, seems disproportionate to the value of the building. However, a community at times must also place a historical value on a building and ensure the historic integrity of a community when the private market is unable.

The departures of the Police Department from the historic City Hall building and the Library from the Otradosky building will be important reuse opportunities for the community. Both of the buildings are structurally sound and could develop into viable private market enterprises.

#### Policy Approaches

- Establish a Downtown Committee that includes key community stakeholders to work with building owners to develop reuse plans for strategic buildings in the downtown if they become vacant. For city owned buildings, these plans should be used as the basis for developing proposal requests from developers.
- Encourage upper story residential use to provide a unique housing alternative and create more downtown activity.
- Provide gap financing for necessary remodeling of structures.

### Housing Development

#### Overall Policy

Place a high public and private priority on new housing development and adaptive reuse of upper levels for residential development.

As discussed above and in the market analysis section, housing is a key element of most downtown revitalization programs and could be important to this plan's vision of Downtown Schuyler as a lively mixed-use neighborhood. Residential development adds 24-hour occupancy to the district and helps downtown become a living neighborhood.

#### Policy Approaches:

Housing development policy in Downtown Schuyler envisions mostly upper level adaptive reuse but should be open to the opportunity for new construction where appropriate. Many upper-level units will initially be rental-occupied, although some may provide owner-occupied apartments for people who live over their businesses or otherwise seek



equity settings. Existing tax-driven incentives such as the Low-Income Housing tax Credit and Historic Tax Credits are oriented to rental housing.

Public actions and policies necessary to encourage delivery of downtown housing include conservation codes and building permit policies that encourage upper level reuse, production financing programs including the use of available federal tax credits, and dedication of some spaces in off-street parking lots for residential use. In some cases, shared vertical circulation and cooperative development of several adjacent buildings can improve project feasibility.

- Adopting building codes that encourage upper level residential adaptive reuse. Housing development has been a foundation of successful downtown revitalization around the country. Federal tax incentives, construction costs, the nature and preferences of residents in urban districts, and knowledge of successes in other Nebraska cities and historic districts can encourage residential use of upper levels.
- Providing gap financing for major rehabilitation projects. Appropriate historic rehabilitation may not be economically feasible without some form of financing assistance or participation. Elements of a potential financing program for projects in Schuyler include many of the same tools for Historic Preservation including.
  - Historic tax credits.
  - Tax Increment Financing.
  - Community Development Block Grants

Schuyler should also look at opportunities to leverage its relationship with NeighborWorks and the efforts that have been made to implement housing policy across the city.

- Utilizing design guidelines. This will be especially important for any new construction. New residential development in the downtown and the major rehabilitation of an existing structure should maintain a scale and context that is appropriate to a pedestrian-oriented downtown district.



## Retail and Service Development

### Overall Policy:

- Consolidate and strengthen the existing retail and service environment, focusing on solidifying existing retailers, expanding the number of people who come Downtown for activities, filling available space, and, in some situations expanding the supply of space.
- Increase the demand for retail space in the market by increasing the number of people who use Downtown as a destination.

### Major approaches to these policies include:

- Directing desirable changes in land use patterns by developing small projects that provide alternatives for non-retail downtown businesses. These can include mixed-use and adaptive reuse projects with upper level office space and housing. Live/work units and office development around the edges of the district implement this strategy.
- Implementing a low cost retail education and consulting program after strengthening the Chamber or becoming a Main Street community. These consulting services can advise retailers as needed on marketing, window display, and merchandise presentation. In addition, engage Schuyler's proven and innovative retailers as mentors for potential new retail and service entrepreneurs. This is especially important for the Hispanic-run businesses and may include the involvement of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.
- Marketing and recruiting retailers in Downtown, while matching needs with available space. Focus on areas of demonstrated potential for Downtown and in-town retailing, as well as for areas where substantial "gaps" between consumer expenditures and retail supply occur.
- Establishing a program of events with special themes and promotions. Providing high quality ongoing events that complement traditional celebrations like the Labor Day parade, and extend fun and festivity throughout the year.
- Taking extra steps to put fun and festivity into the Downtown shopping experience. New amenities should enrich the experience of living and working in the district.