

FINAL DRAFT

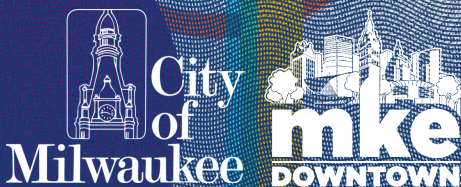
6/23/23



CONNECTING MKE

DOWNTOWN PLAN 2040

FINAL DRAFT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



MILWAUKEE
comprehensive Plan

JUNE 23, 2023

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CONNECTING MKE

DOWNTOWN PLAN 2040

FINAL DRAFT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – 2023



Grow the
Downtown population
to 40,000 residents
by 2040

Add ~15,000
housing units
Downtown
by 2040
20% of Units
Affordable

Grow
Downtown
jobs to 100,000
by 2040

Executive Summary

Connec+ing MKE: Downtown Plan 2040, co-led by the City of Milwaukee and Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21, sets a vision for the future of Downtown Milwaukee. Connec+ing MKE serves as the City's Downtown Area Plan, one of 14 area plans that together serve as the City's Comprehensive Plan. Updated and amended on an ongoing basis, the comprehensive plan guides neighborhood development with land use, urban design, and catalytic project recommendations.

The last Downtown Area Plan was adopted in 2010 and included recommendations for streets, public spaces, and new development that aimed to foster a distinct Downtown center, a strong sense of place, a connected Downtown, and to attract a density of vibrant uses Downtown. The 2010 Plan recommended a series of catalytic projects representing major public and private investments designed to have ripple effects throughout the area including: the addition of a fixed-rail streetcar system, the revitalization of W. Wisconsin Avenue, improvements to the Lakefront Gateway, and a strong Broadway Connection to better link Downtown to the Historic Third Ward.

Since the Plan's adoption in 2010, many of the catalytic projects have been implemented and more than \$4.6 billion has been invested in public and private projects Downtown, with an additional \$3.1 billion proposed or under construction.

Connec+ing MKE: Downtown Plan 2040 looks to continue the momentum of the 2010 Plan, build on the success of recently completed or announced projects, and lay out an aspirational vision for the future of Downtown — one that takes into consideration global post-COVID trends and Downtown Milwaukee's distinguishing physical

characteristics to unlock its full growth potential with a focus on creating great places connected by walkable streets, enhanced transit options, greater connectivity with surrounding neighborhoods, and active and inclusive gathering spaces and plazas.

The vision set forth in Connec+ing MKE represents Milwaukee's collective vision for our city center, and was generated through significant community engagement. This engagement included the formation of a Downtown Plan Community Council who helped shape plan recommendations through candid discussions surrounding racial and social equity, and by identifying opportunities to make Downtown Milwaukee more racially representative and inclusive. Key Downtown stakeholders served as a Plan Advisory Group to guide the recommendations of the Plan throughout the process.

During nearly two years of engagement and outreach, the Connec+ing MKE: Downtown Plan 2040 received robust public participation at multiple community open houses, extensive feedback received on the EngageMKE.com online platform, small group meetings with stakeholder groups, and one-on-one discussions. In total, more than 2,500 individuals — including participants from all Milwaukee zip codes — provided input on their vision for the future of Downtown. This robust and inclusive engagement shaped the eight overarching goals for the Plan, as well as "big ideas" and catalytic projects to guide public and private investment to continue to grow Downtown.





Goals for 2040

**1**

Housing & Neighborhoods

GOAL 1: Increase the Downtown population through density and diversity of housing, and improve the quality of life in Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

2

Business & Education

GOAL 2: Create environments and programs that support an increase of diverse businesses and a talented workforce.

3

Retail, Services, Food & Nightlife

GOAL 3: Create vibrant retail and entertainment districts with streets and public spaces that feature active uses and pedestrian friendly design.

4

Arts, Culture, Entertainment & Sports

GOAL 4: Create more opportunities for shared experiences, and highlight the diverse stories, people and places that make MKE unique.

5

Sustainability & Resilience

GOAL 5: Create an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable & resilient Downtown

6

Transportation & Mobility

GOAL 6: Redesign our streets to support walkability, and expand options for the safe, comfortable and enjoyable movement of people.

7

Streets & Public Space

GOAL 7: Invest in the public realm by improving streets, parks, and other public spaces in ways that encourage a more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient MKE.

8

Land Use & Development

GOAL 8: Create more opportunities for public and private investment in the built environment.

Big Ideas

Public input received throughout the planning process helped shape six “big ideas” for how public and private investment can drive physical changes to Downtown that meaningfully advance Connecting MKE goals.

Grow Downtown

- **Double the Downtown population through intensive housing development**
- **Significantly increase Downtown’s job and talent density**
- **Leverage publicly owned development sites to promote housing density and affordability and new economic opportunities.**

A connected Downtown is vibrant day and night, 7 days a week and encourages a wide mix of uses. Milwaukee has a competitive advantage by already having a larger share of residential uses Downtown than many peer cities. Encouraging new housing development Downtown to complement office, commercial, civic, and entertainment uses will bring new residents to support Downtown businesses and entertainment venues, reinforce efforts to bring improved transit options and public spaces Downtown, and grow the workforce for Downtown businesses.

Redesign Streets as Public Spaces

- **Focus on walkable streets designed for people, including Water Street, Wisconsin Avenue, King Drive, and Jefferson Street**

A connected Downtown is safe, fun, and easy to navigate for all. Public input throughout the planning process has been resounding that residents and visitors want to see changes to Downtown streets to make them safer and more enjoyable for people to walk Downtown and want to see Downtown streets redesigned and repurposed as vibrant and social public spaces.

Invest in Parks & Gathering Spaces

- **Create world class gathering spaces including improvements to Red Arrow Park, Pere Marquette Park, and Cathedral Square**

A connected Downtown has places for people to gather, celebrate, protest, and reflect. Downtown Milwaukee has a network of existing parks that can serve this purpose. The projects identified in this plan are based on public input received during the planning process and recommend improvements to existing parks and gathering spaces that work towards achieving a vision for world-class public spaces that bring together residents, workers, and visitors in Downtown.

Improve Streets to Support All Users

- **Create an enhanced transit experience including improvements to transit facilities on Wisconsin Avenue, Water Street, and 6th Street**
- **Build a bike network for all that connects to greater Downtown neighborhoods. This includes improvements to Kilbourn Avenue, 6th Street, Van Buren/Jefferson St; and connections to the Beerline, Oak Leaf and Hank Aaron Trails.**

A connected Downtown is welcoming and accessible to those arriving by foot, transit and bicycle, and prioritizes the experience of individuals who are walking, bicycling, and using transit while Downtown. Downtown streets should be designed to provide enjoyable experiences for those residents, workers and visitors in order to create a walkable and vibrant Downtown.

Expand & Enhance Transit

- Create robust transit options, including streetcar extensions, expansion of bus rapid transit, enhance transit user experience, and expansion of intercity rail between Milwaukee and neighboring cities

A connected Downtown provides transit options to connect to adjacent neighborhoods and to key destinations within the regional economy. Increased bus service and an improved experience for riders Downtown links residents to jobs and reduces the need for Downtown visitors to rely on private automobiles. The Hop has demonstrated the ability of the streetcar system to spur economic development, and planned extensions will bring this momentum and increased connectivity to residents and businesses in adjacent neighborhoods. New or improved intercity rail connections to Chicago, Madison, Minneapolis, Racine and Kenosha provide direct linkages to workers and businesses in growth sectors in the global economy.

Reconnect Places Divided by Human-made Barriers

- Create connections within Downtown, to the lakefront, and to surrounding neighborhoods
- Rethink I-794 by transforming the corridor in a way that creates new places and connections

A connected Downtown evolves constantly, including re-examining past decisions and striving to reconnect places that may have been divided by the creation of human-made barriers. The creation of the Riverwalk and the removal of the Park East Freeway show the transformative potential that comes from reconnecting people to the city's waterways and for reimagining how land devoted to transportation infrastructure may be repurposed for people, jobs, homes, and open space.



Catalytic Projects



This Plan recommends a series of public and private development projects that have the potential to bring significant improvements to Downtown. Among those, several are identified as catalytic projects, which represent high-priority projects with some of the largest potential to have transformative impacts Downtown, including generating momentum to spark complementary investments in the surrounding areas.

Catalytic Projects:

- Public Museum & State Office Building Redevelopment at MacArthur Square
- Place Management Organization for Parks & Public Spaces
- Streetcar Extensions
- Water Street Transformation
- Performing Arts Center Parking Garage Redevelopment Site
- I-794 Corridor & Clybourn Street
- Lakefront Gateway & Connections
- 6th Street Complete Street
- Haymarket District

Public Museum & State Office Building Redevelopment at MacArthur Square

See Chapter 8: Streets & Public Space + Chapter 9: Land Use & Development

The existing Milwaukee Public Museum Site should be redeveloped with high-density mixed-use development with a goal of including mixed income housing and neighborhood supporting commercial uses on the ground floor. Extending the street grid north of Wells Street to connect to MacArthur Square will also help to support additional infill development on surface parking lots in the area, and the reuse or redevelopment of the State-owned office building at 6th and Wells Streets.



Place Management Organization for Parks & Public Spaces

See Chapter 8: Streets & Public Space

for Implementation of:

- Red Arrow Park
- Pere Marquette Park
- Cathedral Square
- Zeidler Union Square

Creating a “place space management organization,” and identifying sustainable funding opportunities for the management and activation of public spaces will be critical to bringing about the improved public spaces envisioned by the Plan, including at Cathedral Square, Red Arrow, and Pere Marquette Parks. Milwaukee is not alone when it comes the need to address the fiscal challenges for the local park systems.

Cities across the country are turning to innovative funding and management structures to support the construction, maintenance, and programming of their Downtown public spaces. After initial upfront investments are made in parks, the most successful urban parks remain active with an abundance of free and inclusive activities designed to users of all ages and races, improving the ability of Downtown parks to be gathering spaces for ALL Milwaukeeans.



Streetcar Extensions

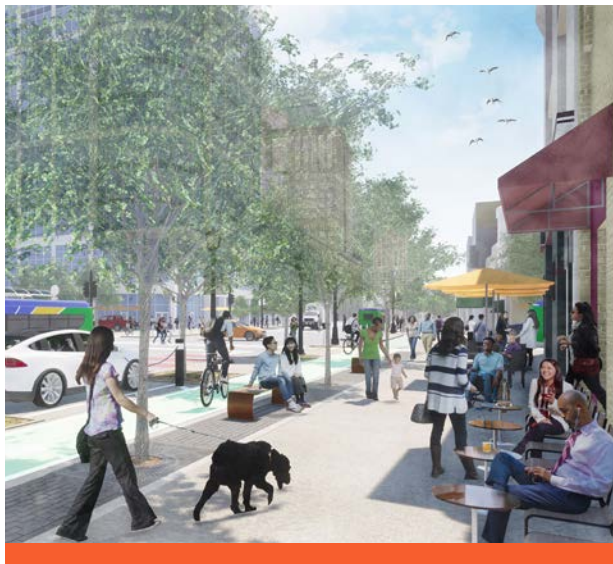
See Chapter 7: Transportation & Mobility

- Westtown
- Bronzeville
- Walker’s Point
- East Side

The vision for The Hop has always been to extend the system into the surrounding neighborhoods, providing enhanced connectivity and boosting economic growth throughout the Greater Downtown area. Efforts to expand The Hop are ongoing and have focused on future connections to King Drive and the Bronzeville Cultural and Entertainment District north of Downtown, the Walker’s Point neighborhood south of Downtown, and the East Side.

The City should continue to pursue these planned and future streetcar extensions, and work aggressively to secure funding and support for these extensions. The Hop provides a reliable, high-quality means of connecting people and places within Downtown in a way that is convenient, comfortable, and enjoyable for area residents, employees and visitors. The Hop has also shown its value as a catalyst for economic development, with dozens of large new developments rising along the route representing billions in new investment.

Catalytic Projects



Water Street Transformation

See Chapter 7: Transportation & Mobility + Chapter 8: Streets & Public Space

- Water Street Complete Street
- Water Street Entertainment District
- City Hall Square & Market Street Plaza

A redesigned North Water Street could reduce the number of motor-vehicle lanes and add safety improvements for transit riders and people walking and on bicycles. The added sidewalk space would provide an improved experience for all users and visitors to this area. Street improvements will also help spur development along the Water Street corridor, which includes a number of priority redevelopment sites with the potential to add significant new development.

This catalytic project would make Red Arrow Park more accessible, better connect pedestrians to a variety of destinations including the Riverwalk, City Hall Square, the North End neighborhood, and Wisconsin Avenue, and support the Water Street Entertainment District.



Performing Arts Center Parking Garage Redevelopment Site

See Chapter 9: Land Use & Development

The parking structure for the Marcus Center would be replaced with new high-density mixed-use development that adds density and vibrancy to the district. This could spur the development of underutilized sites in the area including surface parking lots along Water Street and the RiverWalk.



I-794 Corridor & Clybourn Street

*See Chapter 7: Transportation & Mobility
+ Chapter 9: Land Use & Development*

The I-794 Lake Interchange cuts through the heart of Downtown Milwaukee and serves as a barrier between the East Town neighborhood, the Historic Third Ward, and the Lakefront — three of the region’s most desirable areas. The location and design of this freeway spur is in conflict with the overarching goal of a Connected Downtown and should be reimaged.

Connecting MKE calls for exploring the eventual removal of the I-794 Lake Interchange and replacing it with a traditional connected grid of comfortable multi-modal streets, public spaces, and high-density mixed-use development.

The State of Wisconsin is currently undertaking efforts to study alternatives for this segment of I-794. The alternative that is selected through that ongoing process should be the one that best advances overall Connecting MKE goals, including safety and connectivity for all users.

If full removal is not feasible via this current project, any interim alternative should prioritize modernization of the infrastructure to reduce the footprint, activation of the public spaces and streets under the bridges, improvements to the ramp connections, and increased safety for pedestrian crossings.

Improvements in this area will also provide significant opportunities for a reimaged Clybourn Street, where public improvements that increase walkability and connectivity will spur private development along this key corridor.

Catalytic Projects



Lakefront Gateway & Connections

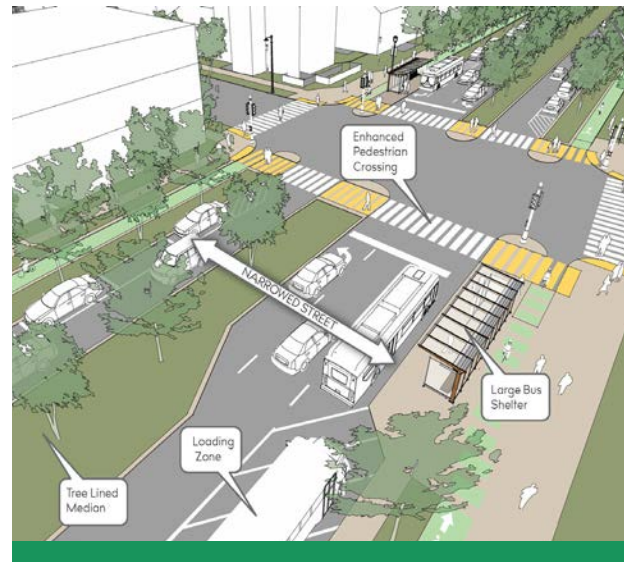
See Chapter 8: Streets & Public Space

Build the proposed Lakefront Gateway Plaza. The Plaza should include pedestrian and bicycle connections between Downtown and the Lakefront.

In addition to the plaza itself, efforts to better connect Downtown to the Lakefront should remain a priority to showcase Milwaukee as America’s Fresh Coast Destination. This includes several supporting projects found in other chapters including pedestrian safety improvements along and across Lincoln Memorial Drive, enhanced bike accommodations, and improvements to Museum Center Park.

In 2015, a national design competition was held with the vision of creating a world-class public space to anchor Milwaukee’s Downtown Lakefront. The winning design team proposed a dynamic free flowing design featuring a pedestrian bridge over Lincoln Memorial Drive, a water feature, and a commercial space to help activate the plaza.

This plan reaffirms the importance of this public space and the need to continue to look for funding solutions to build the plaza.



6th Street Complete Street

See Chapter 7: Transportation & Mobility

To accommodate interstate traffic North 6th Street was widened in the 1960s. This resulted in the removal of historic structures and the creation of a street that prioritized car traffic over the experiences of people who live, walk, work, and shop along the corridor. 6th Street should be redesigned as a priority transit street and enhanced bikeway.

Redesigning 6th Street will better connect both north and south side neighborhoods to Downtown via improved transit, pedestrian, and bicycle access. It will build on the momentum of the Future Museum being constructed on 6th and McKinley by making it a more accessible destination for residents of the city and the region and will spur adjacent private development. An improved 6th Street would embody the vision of a Connected Downtown, linking Bronzeville, Halyard Park, Hillside, MATC, the Brewery District, the Deer District, the Convention Center, West Wisconsin Avenue, the Iron District and Walker’s Point via a street that is truly designed for all users.



Haymarket District

*See Chapter 2: Housing & Neighborhoods
+ See Chapter 9: Land Use & Development*

Encourage the redevelopment of underutilized properties throughout the Haymarket district, with an emphasis on high and medium density residential uses. Rezone industrial properties in the area to allow for mixed activity. Encourage new mixed-use development along King Drive between Juneau and Cherry Streets to create a new walkable commercial node between Bronzeville and the Old World Third Street Entertainment District.

The Haymarket District, north of the Deer District and south of the Bronzeville Cultural and Entertainment District has significant potential for new development. The area is currently underutilized and represents a gap in activity between adjacent areas. Recent and proposed projects like the Fiserv Forum and the Future Museum have led to renewed development interest in the area.

Residential uses are currently prohibited in much of the district, which has generally retained its light industrial zoning classification. To reach its full potential as a unique Downtown neighborhood, the Haymarket area should be rezoned to allow for a mix of uses. This could allow existing businesses to remain while facilitating a gradual transition into a mixed-use neighborhood. Similar approaches have allowed former industrial areas like Walker's Point and the Historic Third Ward to transition into vibrant places with a diverse mix of activities.

40 Recommendations



The goals of Connecting MKE: Downtown Plan 2040 are intended to create a roadmap for city leaders over the next two decades. These goals were derived from a comprehensive public engagement strategy to ensure Downtown Milwaukee is a place where every resident, in every neighborhood, can feel welcome and connected to our city. The Plan includes 40 specific recommendations and related action strategies to achieve these goals.



GOAL 1**Housing & Neighborhoods**

Increase the Downtown population through density and diversity of housing, and improve the quality of life in Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

Connecting MKE envisions a thriving mixed-use Downtown with over 40,000 residents by 2040, more than doubling the current Downtown population. This will require continued high-density residential development, and new amenities to support a growing population. This Plan encourages new residential development on underutilized land throughout Downtown, and the adaptive reuse of existing buildings. The Plan recommends strategies to provide housing choices for all income levels, establishing a goal that at least 20% of Downtown housing units are affordable to low- and moderate-income households.

- 1** Increase the supply of Downtown housing, and grow the Downtown population.
- 2** Provide housing choices for all income levels.
- 3** Provide a range of housing types to meet the needs of a diverse population.
- 4** Increase opportunities for homeownership in Downtown.
- 5** Provide world class amenities to serve a diverse downtown population.
- 6** Support the growth and diversity of adjacent neighborhoods and strengthen neighborhood connections.
- 7** Reduce homelessness and provide support for the unhoused population.

GOAL 2**Business & Education**

Create environments and programs that support an increase of diverse businesses and a talented workforce.

As the economic hub of the State of Wisconsin, Downtown Milwaukee continues to attract new businesses and employees. Connecting MKE promotes an approach to expand economic opportunity for more Milwaukeeans, increasing the number of businesses from 2,400 to 4,000 and increasing Downtown employment from 60,000 to 100,000. The Plan also acknowledges the role of educational institutions in Downtown to attract and grow a talented workforce as well as the need to implement initiatives to encourage a larger presence of BIPOC owned businesses in Downtown, and be proactive in attracting, retaining, and growing small businesses owned by people of color and women.

- 8** Reinforce Downtown as the premier business center for the state of Wisconsin and one of the top employment centers in the Midwest.
- 9** Foster local innovation and entrepreneurship to increase the number and diversity of Downtown Businesses.
- 10** Attract, retain, and grow a diverse and talented workforce.
- 11** Extend economic opportunity in Downtown to the surrounding neighborhoods, and increase access to employment for city residents.

40 Recommendations

GOAL 3

Retail, Services, Food & Nightlife

Create vibrant retail and entertainment districts with streets and public spaces that feature active uses and pedestrian friendly design.

Retail, restaurants and nightlife establishments add life to our streets and public spaces and are a critical component of creating vibrant districts. Connecting MKE envisions a thriving retail environment with an increased number and diversity of retail, dining and service offerings. The Plan also emphasizes the need for coordinated management of the nighttime economy and improved streets and public spaces in our most active commercial districts.

- 12 Increase the number and diversity of Downtown retail, dining, and service offering.
- 13 Prioritize the development of walkable, pedestrian-scaled commercial districts through enhancements to the public realm and by fronting streets and public spaces with active uses and pedestrian friendly façades.
- 14 Embrace Downtown as the region's center for nightlife and social gathering, and ensure the proper management of the nighttime economy.
- 15 Develop a high concentration of retail, dining, and other active uses in the center of Downtown, and promote the Downtown core as a regional destination for the experiential shopping and entertainment.

GOAL 4

Arts, Culture, Entertainment & Sports

Create more opportunities for shared experiences, and highlight the diverse stories, people, and places that make MKE unique.

Downtown Milwaukee is the region's center for art, culture, entertainment, and sports. It's one of the reasons why over 20 million people visit our city each year. Connecting MKE envisions Downtown as the neighborhood for everyone, and seeks to expand opportunities for shared experiences, and highlight the diverse stories, people and places that make Milwaukee unique.

- 16 Reinforce Downtown as the region's center of art, culture, entertainment, and sports.
- 17 Expand access to positive shared experiences and build connections between people of different cultures and backgrounds.
- 18 Promote public art and provide more opportunities for creative expression.
- 19 Promote social gathering and celebrate the city's unique history and cultural diversity.
- 20 Preserve and restore Downtown's historic buildings.
- 21 Connect to the river, and reorient the lakefront as the "front door" to the city.

GOAL 5**Sustainability & Resilience**

Create an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable & resilient Downtown.

Connecting MKE envisions an environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable and resilient Downtown. This includes reducing greenhouse gas emission from buildings and transportation and protecting our rivers and Lake Michigan for future generations. The plan proposes a 45% reduction in emissions by 2030 and to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

The Plan also recommends using green infrastructure to capture the first ½ inch of rainfall across Downtown, keeping over 13 million gallons of stormwater out of the combined sewer system for each major rain event. To support economic and social resilience, the Plan emphasizes the need to grow the City's tax base, promote public health and safety, and eliminate racial disparities.

- 22** Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from buildings and transportation.
- 23** Reduce the amount of rainfall that enters the City's combined sewer system, and eliminate sewage overflows into Milwaukee's Rivers and Lake Michigan.
- 24** Increase the property tax base in Downtown to support services citywide.
- 25** Promote public health and safety, and eliminate racial disparities.

GOAL 6**Transportation & Mobility**

Redesign our streets to support walkability, and expand options for the safe, comfortable and enjoyable movement of people.

A diversity of options for connecting people and places is critical to a vibrant Downtown. Connecting MKE envisions redesigning our streets to create the most walkable Downtown in the Midwest. This includes making improvements to streets throughout Downtown to better serve people who are walking, biking, and riding transit, as well as creating signature streetscapes at key locations.

The Plan also recommends increasing bicycle ridership by building a bike network that is safe and inviting for all, enhancing the experience of using local bus routes, expanding The Hop streetcar to adjacent neighborhoods, and addressing human-made barriers to connections within Downtown and to surrounding neighborhoods.

- 26** Create the most walkable Downtown in the Midwest.
- 27** Increase the bicycle ridership and build a bike network that is safe and inviting for all.
- 28** Expand transit options to adjacent neighborhoods.
- 29** Prioritize slow motor vehicle speeds on all streets.
- 30** Manage the curb, and adapt Downtown streets to accommodate new trends and technologies.
- 31** Increase the efficiency of existing parking assets.

40 Recommendations

GOAL 7

Streets & Public Space

Invest in the public realm by improving streets, parks, and other public spaces in ways that encourage a more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient MKE.

Downtown Milwaukee is experienced through its streets and public spaces. Connecting MKE envisions a completely transformed public realm and seeks to focus investment in streets and public spaces that encourage a more vibrant, inclusive and resilient city. This includes designing streets for people, improving parks and open spaces, increasing the tree canopy within the public way, and using creative placemaking to enhance, activate and connect key places. Instrumental to this vision is the creation of a “public space management organization” to help fundraise, maintain, program, and promote our Downtown parks and public spaces.

- 32** Design streets as public spaces.
- 33** Invest in our parks, and expand efforts to activate and manage key public spaces.
- 34** Provide the amenities needed to support enjoyment of the public realm, and ensure that streets and public spaces are welcoming and accessible to all.
- 35** Increase the tree canopy Downtown, and encourage sustainable landscape design within the public realm.
- 36** Foster an authentic “sense of place” within Downtown districts and implement creative placemaking strategies to activate Downtown streets and public spaces.
- 37** Enhance connectivity between downtown and its adjacent neighborhoods that are physically separated by overhead highways and/or high volume surface streets.

GOAL 8

Land Use & Development

Create more opportunities for public and private investment in the built environment.

The continued growth and development of Downtown Milwaukee will help to bolster our economy, activate our public spaces, and generate revenue for infrastructure and public services city-wide. Connecting MKE envisions new development on underutilized land throughout Downtown, and supports policies that add to the density and diversity of land uses and building types. This includes ensuring zoning regulations continue to promote density and activity, and leveraging public land and economic development tools to create more opportunities for investment in the built environment. The Plan identifies more than 100 acres of land, mostly surface parking lots, that have the potential for redevelopment.

- 38** Encourage a diversity of compatible land uses and building types that contribute to cohesive districts and corridors.
- 39** Encourage buildings to engage the public realm and promote walkability.
- 40** Promote high density development and discourage development that is significantly less dense than the surrounding context.





CONNECTING MKE
DOWNTOWN PLAN 2040