CITY OF MERRILL

REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

AGENDA ● TUESDAY NOVEMBER 7, 2017

Regular Meeting	**City Hall Council Chambers**	**8:00 AM**

I. Call to order

II. Minutes of previous meeting(s)

1. Consider approval of RDA meeting minutes from October 3rd

III. Public comment

IV. Agenda items for consideration:

1. Consider resolution amending the 2010 development agreement TIF development incentive payment time frames for One Way Collision Center LLC (424 E. First Street)
2. Update on and discussion of 2018 and 2019 Tax Increment District (TID) infrastructure projects, including E. Main St. (between Stuyvesant St and Cleveland St.) - Downtown Vision Plan

V. Next RDA meeting(s)

VI. The RDA may convene in closed session per Wis. Stats. Sec. 19.85(1)(e) – deliberating or negotiating the purchasing of public properties, the investing of public funds, or conducting other specified public business, whenever competitive or bargaining reasons require a closed session to consider:

1. Consider approval of closed session minutes from RDA meeting from October 3rd
2. Potential sale of property and potential TIF development incentives in TID No. 3 to facilitate new commercial development
3. Consider potential priorities for property acquisitions to facilitate "blight" elimination and future redevelopment opportunities in Merrill TIDs

VII. The RDA may reconvene in open session to take action on closed session items related to potential sale of property and potential TIF cash development incentives in TID No. 3

VIII. Adjournment

City of Merrill
Meeting of Redevelopment Authority (RDA)

Tuesday, October 3rd, 2017 at 8:00 a.m.
City Hall Common Council Chambers

RDA Present: Bill Bialecki, Ryan Schwartzman, Clyde Nelson, Tony Kusserow, Jill Laufenberg, Tim Haight, and Sheila Polak

Others: City Clerk Bill Heideman, City Administrator Dave Johnson, City Attorney Tom Hayden, Finance Director Kathy Unertl, Public Works Director Rod Akey, City Building Inspector Darin Pagel, Ken Maule from Lincoln County Economic Development Corp. (LCEDC), Bob and Jane Dehnel (One Way Collision) and Jim Brickner (Brickner's Park City)

Call to Order: Bialecki called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

New RDA Commissioner Sheila Polak was introduced. She is replacing Karen Karow.

Consider approval of RDA meeting minutes from August 8th

Motion (Schwartzman/Nelson) to approve the meeting minutes from August 29th.

Public Comment: None.

Review and discussion of 2018 Tax Increment District (TID) budget requests:

In the agenda packet were lists of TID cash development incentive payments scheduled for 2018, as well as potential City infrastructure projects. Public Works Director/City Engineer Rod Akey is preparing fiscal estimates for the infrastructure projects.

Unertl distributed a one-page overview of TID projects, as well as the debt service schedules for the Tax Increment Revenue Bonds for TID No. 3 (East Side) and TID No. 4 (Thielman/Pine Ridge). Updated TID budget summary and detailed budget requests will be provided to RDA Commissioners once pending borrowing process is completed.

Continued discussion of future directions related to housing in City of Merrill:

Laufenberg, whom is also on the Merrill Area Housing Authority (MAHA) Board, reported that partnership plans are being finalized for proposed multi-family residential development at the former Fox Point site (TID No. 10).

Laufenberg and Bialecki provided update on Merrill Area Housing Authority (MAHA) Park Place – Stonebridge Apartment project. MAHA is waiting on Federal HUD authorization to proceed with construction.

City staff will be issuing Requests for Proposals (RFP) for former Anson-Gilkey site (TID No. 9) and former Kienitz site (TID No. 11).

Attachment: 2017-10-03 RDA Minutes (2924 : Consider approval of RDA meeting minutes from October 3rd)

Next RDA meeting: Tuesday, November 7th at 8:00 a.m.

Bialecki read the following notice:

The RDA may convene in closed session per Wis. Stats. Sec. 19.85(1)(e) – deliberating or negotiating the purchasing of public properties, the investing of public funds, or conducting other specified public business, whenever competitive or bargaining reasons require a closed session to consider:

a. Consider approval of closed session minutes from August 29th

b. Consider potential sale of properties and potential TIF development incentives in TID No. 3 to facilitate new commercial developments

c. Consider potential priorities for property acquisitions to facilitate "blight" elimination and future redevelopment opportunities in Merrill TIDs

Motion (Schwartzman/Laufenberg) to move to closed session. Motion carried on 7-0 on roll call vote at 8:16 a.m.

- **Motion (Nelson/Kusserow) to approve the closed session meeting minutes from August 29th.** Carried.

- RDA Commissioners reviewed preliminary site concept plan for Lot 2 (i.e. 2500 block of E. Main St.) for proposed new vehicle body shop and vehicle sales/services. Bob and Jane Dehnel (One Way Collision) and Jim Brickner (Brickner's Park City) provided information on their proposed joint development and responded to RDA Commission and City staff questions.

- Since there has been turnover as to RDA membership, Unertl verified whether RDA Commissioners had the Downtown and Westside redevelopment concept plans. For next meeting, Unertl is requesting input from RDA Commissions on future priorities.

Reconvene in Open Session: Motion (Schwartzman/Kusserow) to reconvene in open session at 8:57 a.m.

Motion (Schwartzman/Nelson) to recommend transfer of Lot 2 of the new CSM (i.e. Highway 64 frontage that City is purchasing from Badger Portfolio, LLC) and development agreement with $75,000 TID No. 3 development incentive with One Way Collision/Brickner's Park City for new vehicle body shop and associated vehicle sales/services. Carried.

Adjournment: Motion (Schwartzman/Laufenberg) to adjourn at 8:58 a.m. Carried.

Minutes prepared by RDA Secretary Kathy Unertl

Attachment: 2017-10-03 RDA Minutes (2924 : Consider approval of RDA meeting minutes from October 3rd)

RESOLUTION NO. ____

A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING MODIFYING THE TIF DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVE PAYMENT TIMEFRAME FOR ONE WAY COLLISION CENTER, LLC

WHEREAS, the Common Council of the City of Merrill authorized a development agreement in Tax Increment District (TID) No. 6 on April 13, 2010 via Resolution No. 2158; and

WHEREAS, One Way Collision Center, LLC expansion and equipment modernization at 424 East 1st Street has generated more than the projected new tax increment and the business will be building a new facility in the 2500 block of East Main Street; and

WHEREAS, there are four remaining years of the $1,000 annual TIF development incentive payments under the terms of the development agreement.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF MERRILL, WISCONSIN this 14th day of November, 2017, that the Finance Director is authorized to issue the remaining $4,000 TIF development incentive payment in January 2018.

Recommended by:
Redevelopment Authority (RDA)

Moved: _____

Passed: _____

CITY OF MERRILL, WISCONSIN

_____
William R. Bialecki
Mayor

_____
William N. Heideman
City Clerk

Attachment: One Way Collision-424 E. Main St. (2921 : Amend 2010 Development Agreement - One Way Collision Center)

1004261

RESOLUTION NO. 2158

A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING A DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT BY AND BETWEEN THE CITY OF MERRILL, WISCONSIN AND ONE WAY COLLISION CENTER LLC

WHEREAS, the Common Council of the City of Merrill created Tax Increment District (TID) No. 6 (Downtown Area) on May 12, 2009; and,

WHEREAS, One Way Collision Center, LLC is expanding and modernizing a commercial development on property located within TID No. 6; and,

WHEREAS, the City of Merrill finds that the proposed development and the fulfillment of the items and conditions of the attached Agreement are in the vital and best interest of the City of Merrill, Redevelopment Authority and City residents and serve a public purpose in accordance with State law; and,

WHEREAS, the City and One Way Collision Center, LLC have negotiated the development agreement to provide incentive payments to facilitate the building expansion and modernization;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF MERRILL, WISCONSIN this 13th day of April 2010, that the Mayor and City Clerk are authorized to sign the development agreement by and between the City of Merrill and One Way Collision Center, LLC and to facilitate the implementation thereof.

Recommended by: Redevelopment Authority – March 16th, 2010

Moved: Alderman Proulx

Passed: April 13, 2010 8-0

CITY OF MERRILL, WISCONSIN

Douglas C. Williams
Mayor

William N. Heideman
City Clerk

Attachment: One Way Collision-424 E. Main St. (2921 : Amend 2010 Development Agreement - One Way Collision Center)

f. This development incentive is for financial assistance for demolition and replacement of existing building and paint booth and fire protection system installation.

ONE WAY COLLISION
2010

ARTICLE II

INCENTIVE PAYMENT TO DEVELOPER

The City shall pay a development incentive to Developer in the aggregate amount of fifteen thousand and no/100 Dollars ($15,000). This incentive shall be paid to One Way Collision Center, LLC as follows:

Within 30 days after occupancy (Anticipated 2010)	$2,500
By September 1, 2011	$2,500
Annually by September 1`st for ten (10) years Beginning in 2012 through 2021	$1,000

Balance
2018 - 2021
4 X $1,000 =
$4,000

ARTICLE III

MISCELLANEOUS

Section 3.01 Restriction on Sale.

Prior to the earlier of January 1, 2036 or the date TID #6 is dissolved, the Developer shall not sell, transfer, convey or assign the Development Area or any part thereof to any person, entity or in any manner which would render the Development Area exempt from property taxation without the prior written consent to the City. As an express condition for such consent, the City shall require purchaser to annually pay to the City an amount equal to all property taxes, which would have accrued to the Development Area if it were subject to property taxation. Any such payments shall be considered tax increment and shall be applied as set forth in above.

Section 3.02 Indemnification.

One Way Collision Center, LLC and the City, its successors and assigns shall indemnify and same harmless and defend the other party and its respective officers, agents and employees from any and all liabilities, suits, actions, claims, demands, losses, costs, damages and expenses of every kind and description, including attorney costs and fees for claims of any character, including liability and expenses in connection with the loss of life, personal injury or damage to property or any of them brought because of any injuries or damages received or sustained by any persons or property on account of or arising out of or occasioned wholly or in part by any act or omission on the other party's part or on the part of its agents, contractors, subcontractors, invitees or employees provided that the foregoing indemnification shall not be effective for any claims of the

Attachment: One Way Collision-424 E. Main St. (2921 : Amend 2010 Development Agreement - One Way Collision Center)

City of Merrill - TID No. 6

Tax Increment generated for 424 E. 1st St. - One Way Collision Center, LLC

Tax Increment:

	Land Valuation	Improved Valuation	Total RE Valuation	Personal Property
2010	$27,700	$70,600	$98,300	$39,600
2016	$24,400	$119,200	$143,600	$88,030
New Tax Increment	($3,300)	$48,600	**$45,300**	**$48,430**

Projected Tax Increment:

Const. Year	Value Year	Revenue Year	TID Value Increment	Tax Rate	Projected Tax Increment	
2010	**2011**	**2012**	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2013	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2014	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2015	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2016	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	**Through**
		2017	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	**2018 =**
		2018	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	**$20,936**
		2019	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2020	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2021	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2022	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2023	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2024	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2025	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2026	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2027	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2028	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2029	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2030	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2031	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2032	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2033	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2034	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2035	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
		2036	$93,730	31.91	$2,991	
					$56,828 Total	

Attachment: One Way Collision-424 E. Main St. (2921 : Amend 2010 Development Agreement - One Way Collision Center)

Update and discussion of 2018 and 2019 Tax Increment District (TID) infrastructure projects (including Downtown Vision Plan)

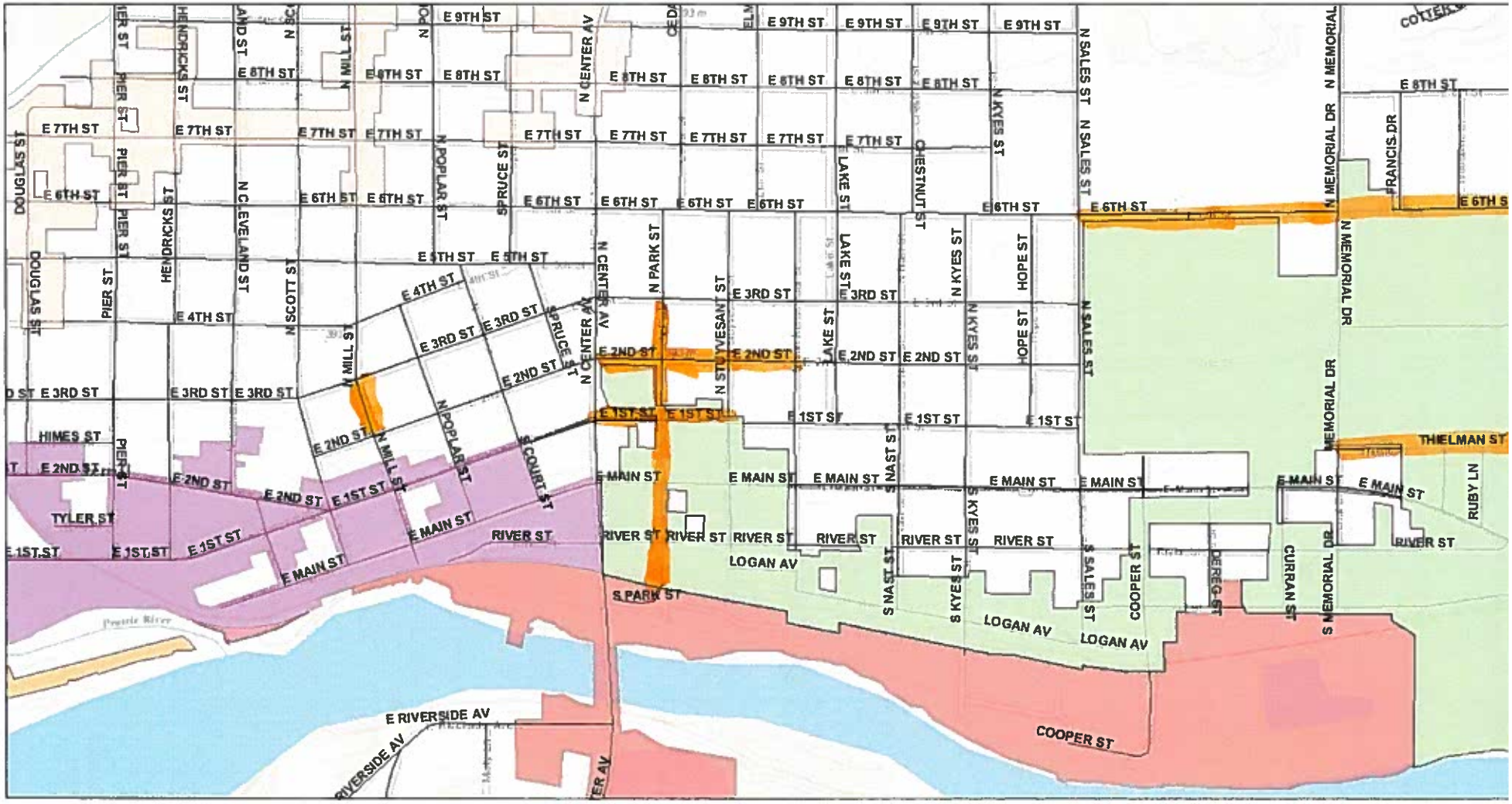
The 2018 capital improvement budget includes: E. Main St. east of Center Ave. (along with S. Park St. from E. 2nd St. to the RR tracks) and 2019 capital improvement plan includes E. Main St. west of Center Ave. (likely to Cleveland St.).

Several potential items for review and discussion:

- Potential for "bump outs" - Although nice-looking on concept pictures, this feature is not practical for WI winter weather.
- Streetlighting –comparable to those in Courtview access way (by Nienow Law Office)? Something else?
- Façade improvements – how to better market availability of both low-interest loans and potential TID grants?

Kathy Unertl, Finance Director/RDA Secretary 11/1/2017

Tax Increment Districts



October 31, 2017

- TID 3
- TID 6
- TID 7
- TID 9
- TID 12
- Roads

2018 street Infrastructure Projects

1:9,028

0 0.075 0.15 0.3 mi

0 0.175 0.35 0.7 km

Sources: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), swisstopo, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS

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Attachment: TID Infastructure-Downtown Vision Plan (2922 : Update and discussion of 2018 and 2019 Tax

City of Merrill - Proposed Infrastructure Projects - 2018

Right-of-way acquisition and engineering design for future extension of N. Pine Ridge Ave. from Zastrow's The Beer Man to Lincoln County Highway G would occur in 2018 with planned construction during 2019 or 2020.

TID No.	Street	From:	To:	Total $	Curb/Gutter/ Paving	Water	Sewer	Special Assessments
N/A	Chestnut St.	E. 6th St.	E. 10th St.	$230,000	$120,000	$60,000	$50,000	$20,000
3	S. Park St.	E. 3rd St.	RR Tracks	$300,000	$170,000	$80,000	$50,000	
3	E. 2nd St.	N. Center Ave.	Van Rensselaer St.	$160,000	$120,000	$0	$40,000	
3	E. 6th St.	Sales St.	Memorial Dr.	$230,000	$220,000	$5,000	$5,000	
3	E. 6th St.	Memorial Dr.	Johnson St.	$220,000	$210,000	$5,000	$5,000	
3	Thielman St.	Memorial Dr.	Gem St.	$150,000	$140,000	$5,000	$5,000	
3	Gem St.	Thielman St.	E. Main St.	$50,000	$50,000			
3	Pearl St.	Thielman St.	E. Main St.	$35,000	$35,000			
3	E. 10th St.	Sales St.	Memorial Dr.	$200,000	$200,000			$90,000
3	E. Main St.	N. Center Ave.	Stuyvesant St.	$150,000	$130,000	$10,000	$10,000	
3	Mill St.*	E. 1st St.	E. 2nd St.	$40,000	$40,000			
			Total	**$1,765,000**	**$1,435,000**	**$165,000**	**$165,000**	**$110,000**

*Within 1/2 mile TID3 boundary

	GO Borrowing	**$100,000**	**$20,000**
	TID 3 Revenue Bonds	**$1,345,000**	**$90,000**
	Water/Sewer Funds	**$165,000**	**$165,000**

Other Projects reviewed/discussed at Board of Public Works - for future years:

TID No.	Street	From:	To:
N/A	E. 10th St.	Cedar St.	Lake St.
N/A	Court St.	E. 2nd St.	E. 5th St.
6	Poplar St.	E. 1st St.	E. 2nd St.
N/A	Poplar St.	E. 2nd St.	E. 4th St.
N/A	Cleveland St.	E. 4th St.	E. 6th St.
12*	Logan St.	E. 5th St.	E. 6th St.
12*	E. 6th St.	Logan St.	Blaine St.

*In conjunction with paving Athletic Park parking lot

Attachment: TID Infastructure-Downtown Vision Plan (2922 : Update and discussion of 2018 and 2019 Tax

City of Merrill Downtown Vision Plan

Reshaping the Downtown

- 2015 -

REDEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

Attachment: Merrill Downtown Vision - 2015-03 (2922 : Update and discussion of 2018 and 2019 Tax

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Attachment: Merrill Downtown Vision - 2015-03 (2922 : Update and discussion of 2018 and 2019 Tax

Introduction

The City of Merrill, like much of north central and northern Wisconsin, was originally inhabited by Chippewa Native Americans. The first settlement was named Jenny Bull Falls and before 1850 a dam was constructed over the Wisconsin River by Andrew Warren, who also built the first saw mill in Merrill powered by that dam. T.B. Scott succeeded Warren and is credited with creating a successful logging industry. In 1870 the city was renamed Merrill in recognition of the contribution by Mr. Sherburn S. Merrill who was general manager of the *Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad*. In 1883 the first city council met with T.B. Scott being named the community's first mayor. Throughout these early days, Merrill flourished and grew to have a population of 7,000 residents by 1885.

Over the years Merrill, as an enterprising community, has seen remarkable development in commerce and manufacturing. Although the city today has a population of only 3,000 more residents than in the late 19th century, it is the county seat for Lincoln County government and is a successful city serving its residents and businesses. Today, as well as historically, the central business district represents an important sector of the city's economy; and yet the downtown area requires continuing investment to maintain its economic position and contribution to the community.

The Vision Plan aims to renew and re-energize the downtown in order to produce greater benefit for the City of Merrill. In consideration of the city's recently approved Strategic Plan, the Vision Plan focuses on the entire downtown (rather than individual properties) and continues addressing blight concerns by outlining necessary investments for four districts within the downtown. It should be noted that in an effort to affect appreciable change in both appearance and function of the downtown, the geographical scope of this vision plan is limited to the area along East Main and East First Streets. While Merrill's Westside Business District and Sixth Ward continue to be an active priority of the City in its revitalization efforts, these areas fall outside the scope of this project.

Recommendations included within the plan consist of varying sized investments which are intended to revitalize Merrill by initially reshaping its landscape and ultimately the downtown economy. The recommendations are based on a methodology which included a combination of city staff input, observed conditions, downtown business focus group meeting, empirical research, individual interviews and project experience from other communities.

Benefits from both public and private investments are intended to recast downtown Merrill from its current function and image to one which will better serve residents, support the existing downtown retail and service base and better enable the city to attract visitors and new business. These objectives are directed toward meeting Merrill's overall goals of stabilizing and developing additional tax base, creating jobs and generating incomes for individuals and families.

Attachment: Merrill Downtown Vision - 2015-03 (2922 : Update and discussion of 2018 and 2019 Tax

The 'REAL' Importance of Downtown

Downtown areas have changed substantially over time due to changing demands within the marketplace, automotive and transportation improvements and general land use patterns as a result of growth. Historically, central business districts were the center of local economies and were thought of as 'the place to go' for nearly all resident and business needs; products and services. If it couldn't be made or baked at home, one went downtown to buy it. But the marketplace has changed dramatically over the past 60 years. While some communities have adapted to the change, others still rely on the old (now aging) model.

As changes have occurred within communities, downtowns have become less dominant economically, particularly when viewed as individual parts of the whole. Without adapting in order to keep pace with growth, downtowns do represent a smaller portion of the community's overall assessed value, and will weaken further without intervention. That said, an alternative perspective offers a vastly different view of the value of downtown areas: Instead of considering a downtown as a collection of small, independent, individual businesses, modern downtowns function economically because of the value added from relationships and experiences that occur among the various businesses. Taken as an economic ecosystem, downtowns produce greater economic result than if each business were attempting to contribute to the same goal independently. Considering practical day-today economic goals of adding tax base, creating jobs and generating incomes, downtown Merrill offers significant value to the community.

When taken as a whole – that is, viewed as a single corporation rather than many small retailers, downtown Merrill is, indeed, one of the city's largest and most important corporations. In examining the data for all taxable property within the study area the downtown represents an assessed value of approximately $10,854,100. It is estimated to have approximately 430 (full and part time) employees and (in 2012 the Wisconsin Department of Workforce development estimated) an $18,769 annual wage per employee). These jobs generate approximately $8,070,700 in wages paid. Commercial properties within the downtown Vision Plan study area represent slightly over 10% of the city's total commercial property value and downtown employment levels represent approximately 7% of the city's total jobs. According to information from the city's assessor, the downtown when considered as a whole is one of the top three private, taxable and employing corporations within the entire City of Merrill. These factors are very significant.

Based on its assessed value of $10,854,100, the real importance of downtown Merrill is that it has greater taxable value than the top three manufacturers in the city. And at 93% of Walmart's $11,595,400 assessed value the downtown provides a very powerful and significant contribution to the economy and the community overall. From an economic development perspective policy makers and city staff would rightfully ask themselves, "To what extent would a city invest in retaining or recruiting a corporation to town which would create over 400 jobs, $8M in wages and generate $10M in tax base"? Investment appears obvious.

Attachment: Merrill Downtown Vision - 2015-03 (2922 : Update and discussion of 2018 and 2019 Tax

Fundamentals of Revitalization

Every community lies somewhere on the 'Redevelopment Spectrum' - from not having made any redevelopment investments in itself, to witnessing a renaissance in revitalizing their downtown economies. Some of the fundamentals associated with redeveloping central business districts include both programmatic and structural elements. Even though different, they are intended to work together.

For example, opening up the waterfront and connecting it to downtown can be both structural (physical improvements) and programmatic (hosting activities) in nature, which serve to link residents and visitors to the waterfront. In addition, fundamental concepts which are considered 'basic' in many ways should not be taken for granted: clean and litter free conditions are requisite to accommodating both structural and programmatic elements.

Fundamental concepts include:

1) ***Infrastructure Assessment and Improvements***. Keeping the infrastructure serviceable and up-to-date is important and serves as a framework to accommodate all existing as well as new investments. Traditionally, municipal infrastructure includes streets, sidewalks, signage, lighting, curb and gutter, bridges, water service, sanitary and storm water. However, access to high speed internet has become a fundamental necessity for the daily activities of both businesses and residents alike. Communities that offer services such as WIFI access in their downtown not only enhance the "downtown experience" for visitors and residents; it also supports the businesses located in downtown areas.

   In addition to the provision of critical infrastructure, servicing the existing infrastructure (including snowplowing, street sweeping, and refuse collection) is also important. Developing a partnership with Wisconsin Public Service Corporation would also serve to manage and maintain gas and electric utilities.

2) ***Parking and Traffic***. Parking is a universal issue. No matter how much or where it's located, parking is usually viewed as insufficient to serve downtown especially when downtown patrons cannot find a parking space in front of or immediately adjacent to their intended destination. Developing public parking can change as conditions change. This may be especially true for constructing or moving surface parking lots to accommodate new development. One guiding rule is that surface parking located on waterfront property is an ineffective use of land and should be avoided where possible. Within downtown Merrill traffic and parking doesn't appear to be problematic except for possible future use of waterfront property as surface parking.

Attachment: Merrill Downtown Vision - 2015-03 (2922 : Update and discussion of 2018 and 2019 Tax

3) ***Blight Elimination*** is the single most important activity which can be undertaken to improve downtown. Together with other activities, blight elimination creates an immediately improved inventory of property. The City of Merrill has undertaken a meaningful effort at thwarting blight which has occurred over (and for the most part has gone unattended for) decades. Blighting influences are the most destructive factor in revitalizing downtown Merrill and are akin to cancer. It can metastasize or spread to adjacent properties block to block, and like any illness or problem, the time and cost associated with remedying it grows, if not treated early.

4) ***Commercial Building Stock*** is an essential part of the downtown which primarily houses retail and service functions serving the entire community. Having appealing downtown buildings is critical to maintaining value, attracting both new building owners and tenants as well as storefronts signaling to prospective customers the quality of the merchandise or service within. Creating appealing storefronts in older downtowns means returning them as close as possible to their original style and character. Rehabilitation includes historic design, materials, scale, color and craftsmanship.

5) ***Land Banking*** is an important technique which has as its purpose to renew and re-energize an area in order to fulfill a future redevelopment goal. It consists of acquiring property for future use to produce greater economic development benefit either directly (as a host site for a new development) or indirectly (as a contribution to a larger project or purpose). A building or property may be purchased outright, optioned, gifted or condemned in consideration for a combination of cash and tax benefits, exchanged or otherwise acquired. Land banking requires an initial outlay for future benefit, which is an investment oriented concept.

6) ***Waterfront*** property and its use have changed dramatically in every community from its early days. Originally, rivers were devoted to industrial and utility uses and in consideration of that, the waterfront was viewed as mostly undesirable property. History has resulted in river front land being used for heavy manufacturing, utilities, trade and railroading and has resulted in deteriorating old buildings, environmental contamination and has separated the community from its waterfront. Now that economies have evolved cities are seeking to reclaim waterfront property for new and higher uses. Waterfront land is being viewed as desirable and increasing in worth. It is incumbent on Merrill for its downtown to re-connect to the Wisconsin River waterfront and so that downtown can utilize the waterfront.

Attachment: Merrill Downtown Vision - 2015-03 (2922 : Update and discussion of 2018 and 2019 Tax

7) **Programmed activities** which draw people into the downtown are nearly as important as 'structural elements'. ***'People' are the single most important element to creating or developing a successful downtown;*** everything undertaken, whether structured or programmed, is aimed at attracting people into the downtown area. Creating events, festivals and celebrations are important beyond attracting people because they bring the community together and create a sense of place for downtown Merrill. The caveat, of course, is that a venue (either outdoor space or an indoor facility) is needed in order to host a variety of programmed activities. Examples of programming elements are discussed in the recommendation section of the Main Street District.

Whether structural or programmed activities, the basic idea is to bring people into the downtown. The concept of 'live, work, play' is a strategy of "new urbanism" and has been underway in communities for years. Successful downtowns are often associated with green space, experiences and, often, new housing development. Reshaping Merrill is about undertaking fundamental structural and programming activities and investing at all levels. The goal is to bring people, people and more people into Merrill's downtown.

Attachment: Merrill Downtown Vision - 2015-03 (2922 : Update and discussion of 2018 and 2019 Tax

Revitalization Investment – Levels of Impact

Investments take different forms in terms of size and purpose and yet each are aimed at actualizing future benefits. A city's economic investments differ from financial investments in that they generally do not primarily seek an accumulation of wealth within a specific time frame, but are instead focused on supporting public goals with the expectation of some future advantage or effect. Whether made by either a single corporation, or by a city for the revitalization of an entire downtown corporation, investments may take several forms.

When engaging in community revitalization, there are three types of investment scales that will deliver varying redevelopment effects; they include 1) *small scale*, 2) *impact level* and 3) *transformative change*.

Each of the investment levels represents a means to affect change in downtown revitalization, and can be applied in varying order; however, small scale investments are typically preparatory for larger scale developments. Most often the municipality is responsible for stimulating the majority of initial small scale investments with responsibility for larger and more impactful investments to be shared by both public and private sectors and the private sector is most always responsible for transformative change.

Levels of Investment include:

1) ***Small Scale*** – Amenities which enhance appearance and beauty create a pleasant atmosphere. These aesthetics are highly effective in attracting and accommodating people to downtown areas. Examples include installation of benches, bicycle racks, banners and flags, flowers and planters, signage, music, streetscaping and particularly landscaping and lighting.

2) ***Impact Level*** – Impact activities are those which bring about a strong result in changing the redevelopment environment over the long term and create a basis for future developments. Types of investments which represent 'impacts' include improving the downtown commercial building stock especially those historic in nature, new infrastructure designs, blight elimination and events and festivals.

3) ***Transformative Change*** – Investments which shape new experience and inspire positive changes create a powerful effect and a beginning for economic change. Projects which may instill transformation include accentuating existing focal points, green space, new construction on redevelopment sites and riverfront development.

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The cost associated with the varying levels is generally low for the small amenities and escalates through the impact and transformative scales. In addition, there's a close correlation between cost and timeframe in which to complete improvements. The cost for installing ornamental lighting and planting trees along Main Street is relatively inexpensive and can be accomplished within one season. Acquiring, remediating and designing new spaces to create a downtown redevelopment impact will come at a greater expense and may require several years to complete.

As mentioned above, small scale amenities are usually undertaken first in an effort to create an appealing environment which is aimed at attracting future additional investment. It can be said that undertaking numerous amenities and impact-type developments can achieve transformation - when accomplished synchronously through a management-type capital improvement approach. For example, a regular program of installing urban amenities together with creating green space and rehabilitating commercial storefronts will transform a downtown without having to make transformative level investments like building a hotel or sports arena.

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Business / Market Environment

Merrill's downtown as identified previously is segmented into various areas by geography. In the area outlined in this revitalization effort, the market hosts a variety of retail and service businesses which form a solid mix and lend to a rich shopping opportunity for residents and visitors.

In the study area there are 106 taxable properties generating over $10 million in taxes and creating hundreds of jobs. The business mix is a good base of retail, banking, restaurant/bar and services.

On January 20, 2015, Redevelopment Resources hosted a Downtown Business & Property Owner's meeting, aimed at providing information and feedback on the Downtown Visioning Plan and process. This included site-specific conversations and input on highest uses for vacant sites. Information on Local Business Support Programs was also provided. Site-specific feedback:

A) Former Bakery Site (E. 1st Street)
Known issue: Parking is an issue for commercial use
Stated Preferred use: Green space

B) 900 E. 1st Street
Known issue: Building is deteriorated, lacks sufficient plumbing and would require significant investment
Stated Preferred use: Parking for downtown users

C) Former Guy's Shop Site
Known issue: Lack of Downtown "Gathering Space"
Stated Preferred use: Green space

D) Former Thelma's Building
Known issue: Large retail space vacancy
Stated Preferred use: Retail or Incubator space

E) General Feedback
- ✓ Parking: Businesses support angled parking downtown
- ✓ Would like to see a heavy office user for the downtown
- ✓ Would like to see partnership with Merrill High School art department for:
  - Customized bike racks
  - Downtown mural

Most important of all:
Have a Positive Attitude for Merrill and its possibilities!

In addition so site-specific feedback, the participants were asked to respond to questions directly related to the need for a new Downtown Vision, both from their perspective as a business owner, and from the perspective of their customers over the past few years.

Questions from the cards and response highlights include:

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Question 1: Do you believe that Downtown Merrill has reached its full potential as an economic engine for the City of Merrill? (Y/N, comment) Yes: 0 No: 13

"The trail is creating sense of place, momentum"
"Not anymore – it was years ago, but retail and housing has changed"
"We need to make it more charming so it is an attraction in and of itself"
"Buildings need façade work, streets need decorative lighting, bike racks"
"Buildings need updating, repairs, lacking real businesses, better lights, bike racks, benches"
"So many opportunities"
"I see it as ripe with untapped potential"
"No, in fact just the opposite – it's been failing to a certain extent for years. The development needs to happen to keep the great businesses that are already there."
"With the development out east of town it's been difficult. I truly believe that one significant event could spur development."

Question 2: Have you heard feedback from your customers about the condition of Downtown Merrill (positive or negative)? (Y/N, comment) Yes: 9 No: 1

"I've heard from constituents that assets are present, but hidden. People are asking how these things can surface"
"Need to keep buildings full & retail / restaurant"
"Negative or neutral"
"Downtown is not attractive. Empty stores don't help"
"Negative…"
"Negative – buildings dropped – not the focal point of City Government"
"Aesthetics are undesirable. Active business are negatively influenced by vacant store fronts"
"We're becoming empty"

As indicated to some extent above, many retail and service businesses can be found in downtown Merrill. However, the current momentum has been pulling development eastward toward the Highway 51 area due to the recent opening of the new Walmart, restaurants and gas station/convenience stores. In an effort to keep retail interest in downtown, it will be important to provide a "place-based" shopping and entertainment experience, requiring a focus on interactive and customer service oriented businesses.

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Gaps and leakage in the marketplace are evident in a number of categories according to the Retail Marketplace Profile report for an area within a 15 minute drive time of the downtown. The following categories show opportunity for capturing sales dollars which are currently leaking to outside the market area:

Electronics & appliance stores
Building material & supplies dealers
Clothing & clothing accessories stores (including shoe stores)
Sporting goods, hobby, music and book stores
Other general merchandise stores (not Walmart)
Specialty food retail including organic/whole foods, wine, beer, spirits
Limited service eating places

Service related businesses which impact the day time population of the downtown are also desirable. Categories to pursue include medical offices (including physical therapy, chiropractic, dental, massage, etc), high tech development and service companies, office / administrative activity locations and other traffic generating services. Companies which are complementary to existing retail and service businesses can generate more traffic and sales for existing businesses as well.

Setting the stage for new development in the downtown is already underway. Through the work over the past four years in downtown blight elimination, the City of Merrill has become better positioned to attract visitors, residents and investment to the downtown core. This plan is intended to move beyond piecemeal projects and into a systematic and systemic transformation that could re-establish downtown preeminence as 'the' place to go in Merrill. By making the investments aimed at repairing and rebuilding upon the original foundation of quality downtown building stock laid at its inception, the City of Merrill sets the stage for a thriving downtown for generations to come.

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Merrill Vision Plan Recommendations

Within the context of community and economic development, downtowns are the single most important identifying feature of any city; and it is the basis upon which visitors and investors first judge the entire community. Visitors are lured to experience new and different places and events; (travel and tourism in Wisconsin is a $16B annual business) while new investors come into communities with a desire to be a part of a successful, healthy, attractive and supportive community with good schools which supports their business and families.

By reshaping downtown Merrill into an appealing destination, the City will create the opportunity to benefit from attracting new residents, tourists, and new successful businesses. An equally compelling and underlying tenet for improving the central business district is to sustain existing businesses and better serve Merrill's current residents - the city's primary customers.

Creating a new vision for downtown Merrill means having a clear intention and purpose and then supporting that purpose. Based on an assessment of the existing conditions and status of the downtown the following recommendations consist of investments intended to meet economic goals by developing an attractive environment.

The following recommendations are offered for each of the four identified downtown districts: the ***'Gateway District'***; the ***'Riverfront Alley District'***; and the '***Main Street'*** and '***First Street District'***. Each recommendation is outlined according to its level of impact.

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Gateway District

The Gateway District represents the Eastern entry into downtown Merrill. The Gateway entry begins at the intersection of Stuyvesant and Main Streets, which is host to the highest traffic counts in the City. This is also the point from which the downtown view shed to the west (and the Lincoln County Courthouse) is first observed. This location provides an opportunity to welcome motorists and signals that they have arrived at an important destination.

The Gateway District is characterized by a small group of retailers and services. The two block distance from Stuyvesant to Center Avenue is unremarkable, although several properties, like Lincoln Community Bank, Central Carpet, the Merrill Veterinary Clinic (1301 E. Main Street), the Knab Insurance Agency building (1314 E. Main Street) and the Century 21 Real Estate property (1316 E. Main Street) contribute interest and service to the community.

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An example of a successful private-sector led rehabilitation is that of the former "Van's Meat Market" located at 1216 E. Main. Now occupied by a salon/spa and apartments, this building has been transformed from a blighting influence to an asset in what would be an otherwise largely unremarkable area.

Gateway District is an area which appears to have experienced little new development and contains many outdated, aging and underutilized properties. While the area includes two multi-unit dwellings that, in some cases, boast a view to the Lincoln County Courthouse and bring much-needed life to the downtown, the units are not well-kept or of the quality that young professionals seek when considering a downtown core for their place of residence.

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Small Scale Investments:

- **Street lights** –Street lights were first introduced in the Arab Empire in the 4th century and as technology improved (from candle to gas to Edison-invented electric lights) the first U.S. city to install electric street lights was Wabash, Indiana, in 1880. Today street lighting is found in every community within the United States primarily for safety purposes.

Installation of ornamental street lights for the Vision Plan study area should begin at the primary intersection of Main & Stuyvesant Streets and proceed westward. Ornamental streets lights are intended to illuminate the sidewalks and contribute an accent to the area thus they should not be over installed too frequently. Based on distances of Main Street within the Gateway District of approximately 600 lineal feet and installing an accent light every 75', the total number of ornament lights is estimated at 8 lights. Cost is estimated at $6,000 per light, which, depending on the quality of the hardware, may not include concrete foundations and/or conduit, as needed.

  - Cost: Estimate based on post and lamp quality: $48,000
  - Timing: Immediate.

- **Signage** – This Gateway intersection begins the city's opportunity to direct the public to important downtown destinations. This element may include a 'Welcome to Downtown Merrill" sign.
  - Cost estimate per directional sign set: $1,500
  - Cost estimate for 'Welcome' sign: $5,000
  - Timing: Immediate

- **Landscaping** – Providing greenery at the primary intersection and in other locations west along Main Street to Center Avenue is intended to create a more natural scene than what currently exists. However, it is not recommended to 'over landscape' these two blocks (from Stuyvesant to Center) but install greenery to soften the existing hardscape. Types of landscaping may include in-ground trees, planters and hanging baskets.
  - Cost: Varies based on type and extent: $30,000
  - Timing: Immediate to 2 years.

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Impact Scale Investments

- **Blight Elimination** – Blighting influences, as discussed in the 'Fundamentals of Revitalization', are exactly the opposite of the image which should represent a gateway into the downtown. It is recommended the city acquire and redevelop buildings and properties which are aging and underutilized or vacant. Properties identified as candidates for redevelopment include the pawn shop at 1319 E. Main Street; Van Der Geest property located at 1307 E. Main Street and the Salon Building at 1219 E. Main Street. The ability to successfully redevelop property either through repurposing or land banking will depend on property availability, affordability, its size and configuration as well as the condition of the building.
    - Cost: Varies based on acquisition/demo/relocation: $400,000
    - Timing: Can be phased over 5 years

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- **Commercial Rehabilitation** – One of the most effective strategies for improving the image and appeal of downtown is to offer residents and visitors an attractive commercial building stock. In partnership with building owners the city should offer rehabilitation assistance (usually in the form of grant and loan combination) to restore buildings as close as possible to their original style and character. An example of a successful rehabilitation project is Central Carpet and Flooring located at 1320 E. Main Street.

The rehabilitation process includes preparation of architectural design, construction scope of work and bidding followed by construction. One candidate for rehabilitation is the Car Quest property located at 1209 E. Main Street. Commercial Rehabilitation program success will be based on re-establishing historic nature of building storefronts and remedying poor previous storefront design schemes.

  - Cost: *Rehab* estimate -$35-$65,000 per building
  - Cost: *Acquisition* estimate – 125% of assessed value plus required relocation expenses, if any.
  - Cost: *Demolition* estimate – by bid; $225,000
  - Timing: 1-4 years

- **Entry Features** – Downtown Merrill (within the context of the Vision Plan) has four gateways which are located at 1) the intersection of Stuyvesant and Main Street on the east; 2) at North Cleveland and First Streets on the west;

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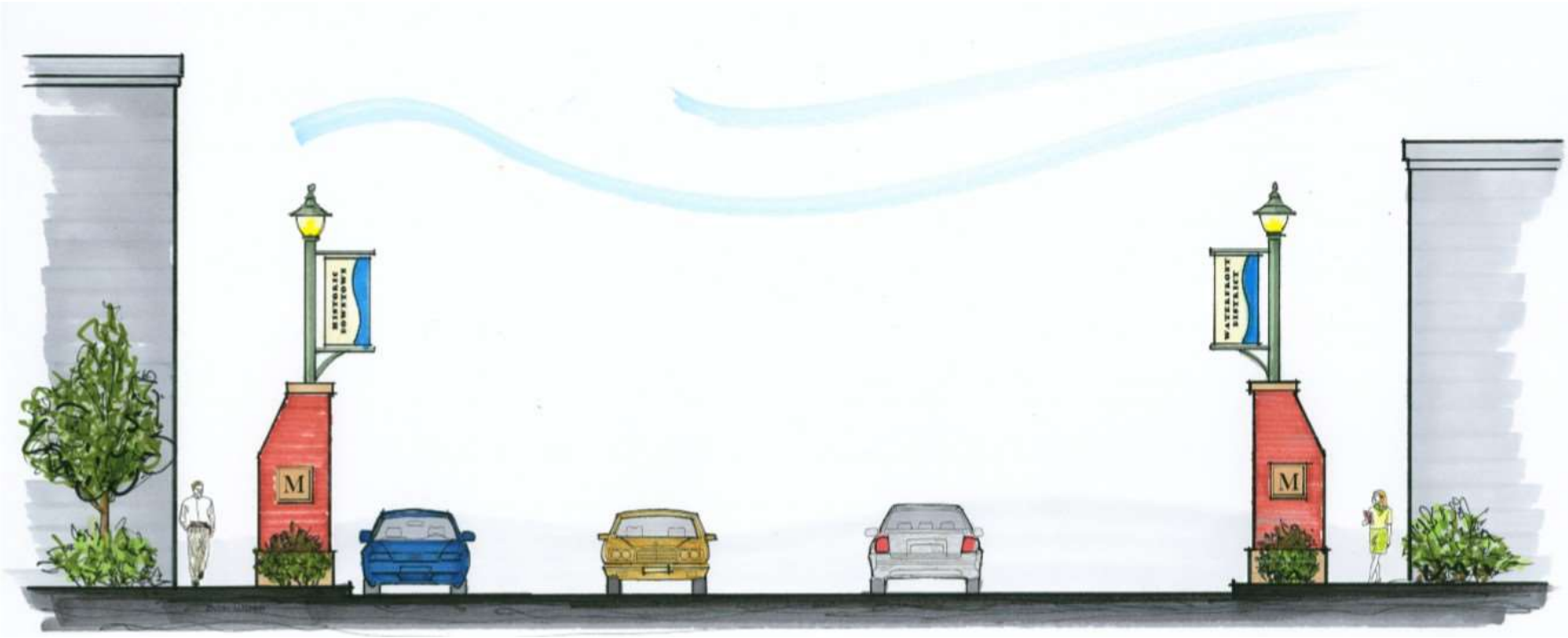
3) North Center Avenue at the roundabout and 4) the Main Street at the Wisconsin River bridge. These four intersections constitute portals to the central business district and deserve exceptional treatment to showcase their status and importance of products and service located beyond.

It is recommended that two primary gateway or entry features (with landscaping)be designed and constructed at intersection at 1) Stuyvesant and Main Street and 2) Center Avenue and Main which announce arrival into an important destination: Downtown Merrill!

- Cost: $45,000
- Timing: Immediate year 1



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ENTRY MARKER

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Riverfront Alley District

The Riverfront Alley District consists of property extending from South Park and River Streets under the Wisconsin River bridge, west along the waterfront to South Cleveland Street. The district has evolved from its early history of industry and rail service along the Wisconsin River to vacant land, rail, storage buildings, parking and utility service. It's characterized by little new investment, declining conditions and functions as rear (service) entrances to Main Street buildings.

This district represents a northbound motorist's first view of downtown Merrill and provides little in offering an attractive welcoming vantage (but for the courthouse tower in the background). Challenges to converting the riverfront alley district from its current conditions to higher and better uses include the prohibitive long term rail and utility functions of the area; however, improvements from municipal investments can and will enhance the district's image.

Recent investments in the River Bend Trail by the River District Development Foundation will bring this area to the fore for tourism and visitor activity. As such, it is imperative for the future of the City that investments are made in the elimination of blight and

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enhancement of properties in this area. Appendix A: *Experiencing the Downtown via the River Bend Trail* provides a step-by-step photo tour of the downtown experience from the vantage of a trail user.

Small Scale Investments

- **Landscaping** – Improve 'greening' beginning on South Park and River Streets, which is the only publicly approved access to the downtown waterfront, and continue measured landscaping throughout the entire alley and lower level parking area. River Street from South Park to the bridge serves as a mini-gateway to the larger riverfront alley area so additional amenities would enhance this function.
    - Cost: $45,000 allowance
    - Timing: 1-3 years

- **Lighting** – Install ornamental street lights along Park and River Streets to direct visitor entry to the bicycle trailhead and main service and rear parking areas. Lighting in these areas is intended to accent and enhance the image of the area not necessarily intended to provide full illumination for all pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Considering the estimated distance of 1,590 lineal feet on Park Street and west along River Street, installing a light every 75' would total 21 ornamental lights. At an estimated cost of $6,000 per light totals approximately $126,000.
    - Cost estimate: $126,000
    - Timing: Immediate year 1 and phased-in over near term.

- **Specialty Lighting** - Different from street lighting; specialty lighting is intended to accentuate and distinguish a building or other structure to create a distinct effect. The bridge over the Wisconsin River is one structure which when highlighted could create a remarkable entry into the central business district. This portion of the project would require coordination with the Wisconsin DOT.
    - Cost estimate: $5,050 (based on 4 strands of LED rope lights)
    - Timing: Immediate 1 – 2 years

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- **Signage** – Design and install directional signs (similarly styled to that like the Gateway District) at the intersection of Main and Park Streets directing visitors to the river edge and bicycle trailhead. Two sign sets are estimated at $1,500 per set.
    - Cost: $3,000
    - Timing: 1-2 years

Impact Level Investments

- **Blight Elimination** – Blighting influences, which consist of vacant, underutilized properties and declining, code deficient buildings contribute to continuing deterioration of those properties and spreads to surrounding areas. Recommended actions include acquisition, assessment of environment conditions and repurposing or demolition of the B & D Auto property at 300 (and 302) Park Street. The same strategy should be employed for the Kamke storage building located at 1202 River Street next to the bridge.

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Blight elimination also includes an assessment, programming and maintenance of municipally-owned property and infrastructure. The identified items include street/alley pavement, concrete revetment walls, parking lot(s), public utilities including water, sanitary and storm, if needed. Property located south, southeast and west of B&D Auto at the southern terminus of Park Street should be considered for re-purposing from semi-trailer parking to green space or other new development.

The public parking lot (formerly used by county employees) should be converted to green space to soften the otherwise industrial-looking hardscape. Overhead private utilities (electric, telephone, cable) should be assessed relative to trenching so as to minimize visual clutter.

- Cost estimate: $35,000 (force account)
- Timing: immediate - year 1

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- **Land Banking** – Several properties within the riverfront alley district are candidates for land banking. They include the above mentioned B&D Auto building and adjacent truck parking plus the property lying immediately to the east which currently hosts semi-trailer parking (mentioned above in the blight recommendation).

In referring back to the Fundamentals of Redevelopment, these properties are good examples of 'Blight Elimination' and 'Programming 'Elements' in that re-purposing this land would improve visual landscape and may serve as an outdoor venue for events and

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entertainment, especially in connection with the riverfront bicycle trailhead. Any other property along the riverfront which is currently for sale or may become available should be considered for acquisition, if it conceivably contributes to the district's and vision's goals.

- Cost Estimate: $500,000 set-aside
- Timing: Phased over 3 to 10 years

- **Commercial Rehabilitation** – Continuing city building and property inspection services will be necessary especially in connection with the rear of the Main Street buildings exposed to the alley. Although rehabilitating the rear of commercial buildings is unlike the usual storefront renovations, it should be conducted in accordance with the same process of identifying code issues of the rear facades including windows, stairs, lighting, hand rails and building signs, but should employ the same process as storefront rehab to include re-design, scope of work and construction bidding.
  - Cost Estimate – $150,000
  - Timing – Immediate to midterm (5 years)

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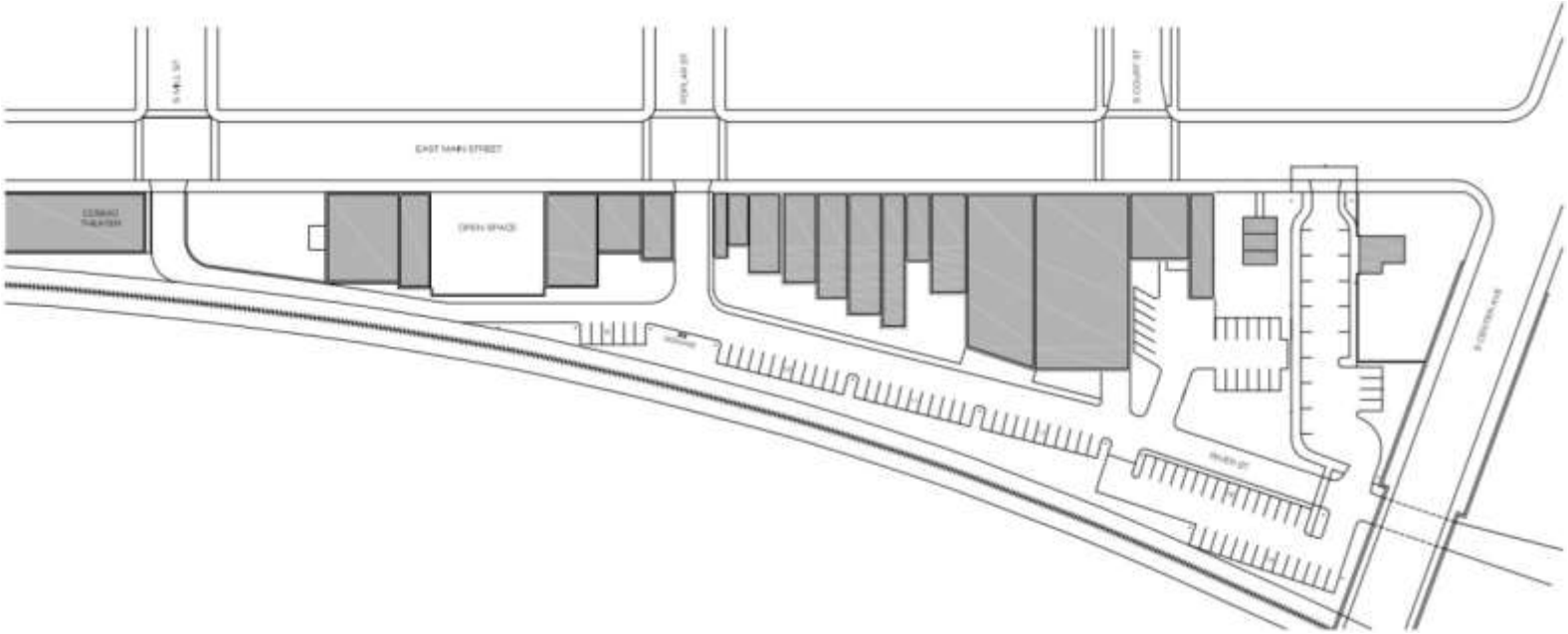
- **Infrastructure Improvements** – In addition to small scale elements mentioned above, the entire alley serving the rear of Main Street buildings should be improved. An assessment of the area indicates that public utility work (water, storm water and sanitary especially) should be improved where needed. In addition the entire alley way and all of the parking area should be reconstructed. Asphalt should be removed followed by re-design and reconstruction and done so in consultation with the city administrator and street superintendent. While undertaking necessary infrastructure improvements, landscaping should be incorporated into the area and deteriorating walls should be removed. Decorative fencing between the parking area and the railroad could be considered a safety measure and also improve the area's visual image. A good example of how this alley area should be improved is the former Courtview apartment property where new parking surfaces, fencing, landscaping and lighting was installed.
    - Cost: $500,000
    - Timing: Year 2-3



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Note: the concept drawings for this area have been developed for the purpose of visualization. Actual layouts and final site planning will occur following formal evaluations on overhead and underground utility placement, as well as post-trail vehicle, bike, and pedestrian traffic pattern studies.

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Main Street District

The Main Street District is "the heart of the downtown". Because of its size, density, age of buildings and its array of services Main Street could adequately serve as a city center for any small Wisconsin community. Considering investment in a combination of small scale, impact and transformative investments, 'Main Street' also offers the opportunity to re-establish the historic nature of the downtown.

Merrill is an example, like many cities, of its downtown being separated and disconnecting itself from the waterfront evidenced by buildings having turned away from (its historical industrial, rail and utility-based riverfront corridor along) the Wisconsin River. Reconnecting to the riverfront together with making both public and private investments can restore Main Street to its original status to better serve its local market but also create interesting places and spaces to attract new residents and visitors.

The Main Street District extends from Center Avenue west to South Cleveland Street and is characterized as being Merrill's main downtown retail center (with its mix of services and products) and its collection of older buildings. It is anchored by the Lincoln County Courthouse and many usual destinations some of which have served the community for generations. Ace Hardware, Checkered Churn, Hargrave Appliance, Courtside Furniture and the Cosmo Theater are examples of the business mix which have long served the City of Merrill and immediately surrounding area.

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The Main Street District is not only challenged by its separation from the Wisconsin River but also by new development on the far-east end of the community near Highway 51. That new developing retail competition is having a dramatic effect on Merrill's entire downtown and the Main Street District. Rather than attempting to compete with or prohibit new east side development (by zoning), "Main Street' should consider re-purposing itself in a manner not unlike the 'live, work, play' theory where mixed uses like residential development, business and entertainment combine to create a place where this clustering together creates a sense of community.

Note: Small scale investments and amenities should be designed and installed in a consistent way throughout the four districts. Consistency offers identity and ties the downtown together.

Small Scale Investments

- **Landscaping** – Greening of Main Street creates a contrast between the existing hard surfaces of streets, sidewalks and buildings against natural soft elements adding attractiveness to the environment which people enjoy. Landscaping includes adding in-ground trees. The Park Department should be consulted relative to species selected for color, shade, disease, etc. In ground trees are pleasant during the growing season but also offer opportunity for lighting either year round or during Christmas. Maintaining the existing flower baskets and adding additional plantings to create impact is important. In addition, installing turf areas, planters and shrubbery will cumulatively provide soft natural features in the downtown.
    - Cost: $65,000 allowance
    - Timing: immediate 1-2 years

- **Amenities** – Taken only by themselves small attractive features will make the Main Street District more pleasant and comfortable for residents and visitors but when placed with other small investments will also create a greater impact than when individually installed. These amenities include bike racks, flags and banners, benches, trash receptacles, tree grates and other similarly styled features.

  "Bump outs" are extensions of curbs located at intersections and extend the sidewalk onto a small portion of the street. Not only does experience with bump outs offer improvement to slowing traffic they are also intended to be used as sidewalk extensions reducing the crossing distance for pedestrians and allowing vehicles to clearly see

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pedestrians crossing the street. These small additional areas also offer space to provide bollards, benches, greenery and other street furniture (to minimize consuming adjacent walkway space). Usually crosswalks (with brick or colored pressed concrete) add to the 'presence' of the intersections.

- Cost: $125,000 Allowance
- Timing: Immediate 1-2 years

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- **Lighting** – Lighting consists of two types: ornamental street lights and specialty lighting. Ornamental street lights are intended to improve illumination on sidewalks for pedestrians and add to the historic nature of the downtown. These street lights should be consistent with other ornamental light in the other downtown districts and placed periodically from Center Avenue west to South Cleveland with a focus between Court Street and South Mill Street. Based on the distance of Main Street the recommendation is for 11 lights to be installed at an estimated expense of $6,000 per light, dependent on hardware quality and associated concrete foundation and potential conduit costs.
    - Cost: $66,000
    - Timing: Phased; Installation should begin within the focus area.

- **Specialty Lighting** – The effect of specialty lighting evokes a sense or mood of excitement. It is intended to highlight or observe a unique time and place, as downtown Christmas lights do during the holiday season. However, special lighting can also mark the importance of downtown Merrill and create a sense of festivity and enjoyment. It is recommended that lighting (akin to Christmas lights) be strung over Main Street affixed to standard either street lights and/or buildings (or both) to create a hallmark effect celebrating downtown and offering residents and visitors a sense that, when they come to downtown Merrill, they have arrived at an important and special destination.
    - Cost: estimated at $2,500
    - Timing: Immediate year 1

- **Signage** – Signage is important for both storefronts and as directional indicators to important destinations, or special points of interest like a bicycle trail or river walk. As discussed in the Gateway District, directional signage should be consistent throughout the downtown and should be themed with color, interesting design, easily visible and provide a sense of or be complementary to history.

  Storefront signage is important for identifying both retail and service providers within the Main Street District. Signs should comply with Merrill's sign ordinance (113-194 and 113-195: Specific Business and Industrial Sign Standards and Miscellaneous Specific Sign Requirements) and designed with an appropriate scale to the façade. The usual 'Blade' signs (those which are installed in a perpendicular angle to the storefront) and façade signs (lying flat against the façade) can and should complement the historic nature or original architecture of the building can be designed and decoratively bracketed to the storefront.

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- Cost: $15,000 allowance
- Timing: near term 1-3 years

- **Parking** – Parking is a universal issue in every downtown. To serve the district there are approximately 82 on-street stalls along Main Street from Center Avenue west to South Cleveland. In addition there are approximately 104 parking spaces located behind commercial businesses on the north side of Main Street from South Court Street to South Mill Street. Approximately 47 stalls have been dedicated in the public parking lot located at Main and S. Scott Street; however, much of that parking lot is utilized by patrons and properties located in the First Street District of the downtown. This parking lot is aging and should be re-designed with landscaping and reconstructed or resurfaced as necessary.

  In order to improve public parking which serves Main Street patrons, it is recommended that two block faces (of the four available) between Court Street and South Mill Street should be converted from parallel parking to angled parking. Providing angled parking together with other proposed amenities (bump-outs and crosswalks) will slow traffic, provide a safe environment and increase the approximate 38 parallel stalls within the Court to Mill Street area by approximately 20+% or 8-10 additional (angled) stalls.
  - Cost: for Main and S. Scott public surface lot: $50,000
  - Timing: Immediate Year 1

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Note: Depending on the nature, extent and timing of redevelopments within downtown Merrill, there may be a future need for a parking structure within the Main Street District or elsewhere. Location of any future parking structure will depend on how all investments evolve into new developments within the study area. At approximately $25,000 per stall construction of a new 200 stall structure would be about $5.0M with additional 8% cost for architectural and engineering expenses; plus land acquisition and relocation activity, if any.

Impact Scale Investments

As outlined previously in the 'Investment Level' discussion, Impact scale investments are intended to create important changes to downtown's redevelopment environment. These type investments create notable impact and do so usually at greater capital costs whether by either the public sector or private individuals and companies and yet they also begin to yield additional property value, job creation and ultimately increase incomes.

- **Commercial Rehabilitation** – The Main Street District has the greatest concentration of commercial buildings within the entire central downtown area. The inventory of properties shows various types and styles many of which are original to Merrill's downtown but vary widely relative to building condition and appearance.

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Renovating these commercial properties, as close as possible to their original style and architectural character, will create the opportunity to recapture Merrill's historic nature. This historical theme improves the downtown's image and the experience for both local customers and new visitors. A new formal commercial rehabilitation program should be considered wherein it consists of architectural design, construction scope of work and bidding with qualified local builders. Commercial rehabilitation should also include consideration of the upper levels of buildings to improve their utility for either residential or office use.

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Financing for rehabilitation will come from a combination of building owner, city, tax credits (depending on age and nature of the property) and a local lender(s). Examples of successful city and owner - financed commercial rehab projects in Merrill are 406 W. Main Street, 811-813 First Street and 1320 E. Main Street.

- Cost: $250,000 initial allowance
- Timing: Immediate with continued phasing

- **Blight Elimination** – Properties which exhibit blight do so in a variety of ways. Blight is a condition which adversely affects communities and has been addressed by the Wisconsin legislature through state statutes under Chapter 66.1331-1333. Blight can be defined widely ranging from vacant and underutilized property to code deficient and seriously deteriorating buildings. Properties which exhibit blighting influences (may be either publicly or privately owned) and most usually continue to deteriorate providing little or no value, creating no new jobs and generate little, if any, additional income and wages.

Within the Main Street District several properties exhibit blight whether code deficient or (over time) are deteriorating in nature. Representative properties include some commercial storefronts and buildings; and one example of a blighted property was the former Courtside apartment building, which was acquired by the city, razed and improved to become landscaped public parking.

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Other properties which are candidates for revitalization (to improve downtown conditions) are The Trophy Bar located at 808 E. Main Street and the tavern located at 1007 E. Main Street. Based on status and property conditions various redevelopment actions should be considered. These actions may include one or more of the following: 1) acquisition, 2) demolition, 3) land banking for future revitalization, 4) reconstruction and 5) rehabilitation.

- Cost: $400,000 allowance
- Timing: Long term (multiple years)

- **Community Events, Arts and Entertainment** – As mentioned in the 'Fundamentals of Redevelopment' portion of the plan, attracting people into Main Street and other areas is the most important element to successfully revitalizing a downtown. Programming a variety of events, art-related and entertainment activities requires a venue and event management. It is recommended that the 800 block of East Main Street be designated as a possible venue or site for several community events. Traffic volume is generally lighter than in other areas of the downtown and public parking is immediately adjacent to the street. Main Street's retail and service function fades beginning at Mill Street and extending west to the terminus of South Cleveland Street. Designating the 800 block an open-air event center would create an 'Anchor' and draw attention (and people) to the entirety of Main Street not just the courthouse to Mill Street core.

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The 800 block of Main Street should be assessed relative to condition of pavement, curb and gutter, sidewalk and (together with the extension of previously mentioned small amenities) also add small accent features to enhance this event-style center.

Examples of activities and events which could be hosted on this area of Main Street include:

1) ***Farmer's Markets*** are the best known gathering of residents and visitors to a downtown locale and supports local agricultural producers and markets.

2) ***Seasonal Celebrations*** including the Christmas Parade, 4th of July, Pumpkin Fair, Easter egg hunts and street dances in the summer months.

3) ***'Arts Means Business'*** is the mantra of the arts community and arts does, indeed, generate economic activity. Art galleries, art fairs, chalk fest, children's art displays or other special art related events tend to include a large segment of residents and visitors.

   Public art, as in murals and interesting art symbols and designs are also recognizable ways to highlight the downtown, improve building elevations and add a unique quality to Merrill. Several building elevations which are 'blank' or otherwise suitable for improvement can contribute to increasing the downtown's vitality.

4) ***Entertainment*** is the greatest draw of people coming downtown (except for Main and First Street's primary retail and service sector). Music is the central element to providing entertainment.

5) ***Special Events*** like a veteran welcoming ceremony, bicycle race or other festivals and impromptu occasions can be celebrated to further enhance downtown as a destination.

The cumulative effect of small scale and impact level investments on Main Street will dramatically improve attractiveness of the area, reshape its image and begin to transform Merrill. Public investments are most often necessary to initiate revitalization and serve to 'reset' a community's outlook to stimulate local private investment. The opportunity for new outside investment and other sources of outside funding is vastly improved when communities invest in themselves first.

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Transformative Investments

Investments at the transformative level are aimed at creating new experience(s), re-energize downtown and (usually) inspire continuing change for future success. They are investments which meet Merrill's redevelopment goals and ultimately will serve residents, support existing businesses and attract new investment within the Main Street District.

- **Redevelopment** - The single most important possibility for new development in the Main Street District is the existing former Lincoln House site. This property consists of approximately 15,000 square feet or .345 acres. Although the site's configuration is considered developable, additional property would improve its 'redevelopability'. The Lincoln House site is a centerpiece property prominently located at the northwest corner of Main Street and South Mill Street.

  The contemplated type of development to occur on the Lincoln House site would, indeed, inspire change. Ideally, a development could include new housing, retail/service, commercial office and or a mixed use development. Any new taxable project would add revenue to TIF District 6 and therefore it is important that proposals for construction maximize the site's potential.

  Merrill's zoning and development standards (lot area coverage, height, parking requirements, setbacks, etc) will guide new construction and yet consultation with the city's building and zoning administrator should occur early-on in the development process. The Redevelopment Authority, Plan Commission and Common Council should consider accommodating a new development to the extent that's practical.

  Conceptually, a 30,000 sf new building costing approximately ~$150 per sf for construction would be ~$4.5M plus 8% architectural and engineering costs plus land value and any related financing and legal expenses. Depending upon a proposed project Merrill's investment would be predicated upon the desirability of any proposed development and a demonstrated need based on its financial pro forma.
    - Cost: unknown; set-aside 10-20% of total project cost or approximately ~$575,000-$1,150,000
    - Timing: unknown; as soon as practical.

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- **Downtown Park** – Developing green space has proven as a successful strategy for improving a downtown's image and service to its residents. The landscape is improved; it serves as restive space in contrast to the urban-built environment and of course parks may host activities and becomes a focal point for the community.

It is recommended that 911 E. Main Street (the former Guys Shop) be developed into a small park. This proposed in-fill, pocket park is envisioned with landscaping, primarily turf areas w/ brick accents, benches, ornamental lighting and a festival style permanent tent. It is recommended the space offer few other permanent structures so as to maintain a center openness and be flexible for any events scheduled to be held in the park.

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Operationally, the park would be primarily approached by residents and users from Main Street with temporary service and maintenance vehicles and equipment accessing the site from its riverside alley. Water service and electric power to serve the site could be installed (underground) from the riverside alley as well.

Decorative fencing and stairs at the rear of the site would define the area and serve pedestrians. Note: As downtown becomes more activity and entertainment oriented, public restrooms will have to be considered whether at the pocket park (creating demand for more space) or nearby elsewhere.

- Cost: $175,000
- Timing: Year 1-2

- **Wisconsin River Access** – Connecting with and utilizing the Wisconsin River waterfront is a fundamental redevelopment function. Sponsors of the River Bend trail, already under construction, recognize the value of linking people to the waterfront. The economic impact from bicycling is significant and expanding. As the industry grows, more recreational users – both cyclists and pedestrians alike - will make frequent use of the trail.

  Merrill should attempt to capture this market near its downtown as well as offer opportunity for passive and active recreational use of the river front to its residents and visitors.

To connect downtown to the waterfront, it is recommended that the City of Merrill develop a pedestrian bridge from an E. Main Street property south (over the rail line) onto land adjacent to the Wisconsin River. This recommendation actually constitutes a grade separation project where pedestrian and bicycle traffic is separated from railroad by height so as to not to conflict and disrupt when they intersecting with each other. Discussions between the city and both the railroad and other area stakeholders would include design, legal, financial, location, property use and safety considerations.

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The overhead pedestrian bridge should be located as close to the central area of Main Street as practicable, with siting conducted in coordination with area stakeholders. As an example, one possible location may be the western terminus of E. Main Street (this area is profiled in Appendix A). As a first step toward implementation, a design drawing should be prepared to form the basis for initial discussions.

- Cost: $475,000
- Timing: 2-4 years

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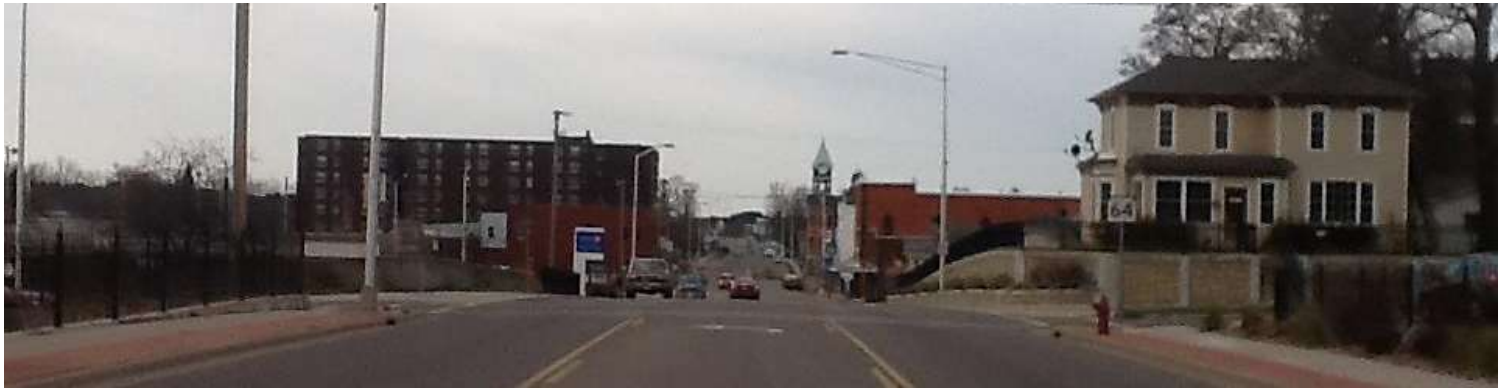
First Street District

The First Street District, which extends from the Courthouse Roundabout at Center Avenue and First Street west to 2nd and North Cleveland Street, has several distinguishing features. The most prominent of which is that the district is anchored by the Lincoln County Courthouse on the east and the original Merrill City Hall on the west; both of which are significant architectural properties and are listed on the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Register of Historic Places. First Street is also the only designated state highway within the Vision Plan study area and thus this district carries the greatest volume of average daily traffic (9,300 vehicles) through Downtown Merrill. In addition, First Street has the greatest variety of land uses including government (Lincoln County Courthouse, Law Enforcement Center, City Hall), housing (Jenny Towers) an active commercial/retail sector as well as park property (the adjacent Streeter Park).



The First Street District is characterized by an inventory of older commercial buildings (but for the recently updated City Center property) except that building density exists on a smaller scale than the Main Street District. Many of these buildings have disregarded façade design guidelines when last updated and are currently in earnest need of storefront updates in a way which captures the historic nature of the district.

The most recent noticeable infrastructure investment is the reconstruction of STH 64, which has improved the appearance of the district. Like other districts within the Vision study area, the First Street District lacks amenities to offset First Street's hardscape (see above photo) and is compounded by 'through traffic' and building lot coverage which results in lack of opportunity for new large scale redevelopment possibilities.

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Treatments to assist in revitalizing the First Street District are aimed at enhancing the area's assets and minimizing its liabilities. Assets may be destination businesses and include the First Street Coffee Station, Skippers, City Center, Blooming Wishes and Studio 808 as of late. Other assets include a concise mixed retail sector; two significant architectural properties in the Courthouse and original city hall building (plus the recently painted Italianate styled home at the northwest corner of First and North Poplar Streets); the adjacent Streeter Square Park and the yet to be developed former fire station at First and Cleveland streets.

Liabilities are reflected in the high speed, high traffic volume on First Street/STH 64; lack of off-street parking; declining storefronts, and little land available for new development. Preserving and maintaining the assets and investing in and improving the liabilities will contribute to a more prosperous district. The strategy for the First Street District is similar to Merrill's other downtown districts in that small scale and impact level investments are requisite to creating a basis to attract new investments which will stimulate future economic development.

Small Scale Investments

- **Lighting** – Ornamental street lighting is a feature which provides illumination for pedestrians and lights storefronts. Lighting adds a quaintness factor and supports the theme of recapturing the historic nature of downtown Merrill. Installation of ornamental street lighting should be added to the extent necessary to achieve a new look but emphasis should be made at both the courthouse/ roundabout and near the original city hall/ Cleveland Street area to create a significant definition anchoring both ends of the district. In addition, an entry feature (as discussed in the Gateway District) should be added in the area near the original courthouse to Cleveland).

  Specialty lighting, similar to that recommended in the Main Street District, should be considered for the First Street block (between Mill Street and Scott Street). Consultation with the city's Street Department and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (due to state highway jurisdiction) will be necessary. Rather than lights installed over the operating roadway (STH 64) specialty lighting could be designed from the sidewalks emphasizing the main block of commercial businesses and give both pedestrians and vehicles a sense of having arrived at an important 'destination'.

  Depending upon lamp locations along the six block area and for specialty lighting between Mill and Scott Streets approximately 22 street lights should be installed to achieve the effect of highlighting the area.
  - Cost: $132,000
  - Timing: Immediate, but phased

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- **Landscaping** – There are only two areas where street trees exist within the district: along First Street by the courthouse and Second Street near Cleveland Street. Adding landscaping within the district will help renew this portion of downtown Merrill by increasing the area's appeal, screening noises and glare and (according to research) landscaping increases property value by 7.5+%. The Parks Department should be consulted relative to location, types of trees, flowers and other plantings.
    - Cost: Varies; $50,000 allowance
    - Timing: 2 -3 years

- **Amenities** – Like with all small scale amenities planned for downtown Merrill, the type and extent of improvements in the First Street district should be consistent in order to carry the 'historic theme' throughout all districts. Amenities include benches, flags and or banners, bicycle racks and trash receptacles.

  One of the distinctive features of First Street is the decorative fencing from Poplar to Mill Street which appears to have been installed during First Street's reconstruction. This is an attractive addition to the area and lends a quality finishing touch to the streetscape. It is recommended that additional (similarly-styled) fencing be added where appropriate to accent First Street.
    - Cost: $50,000 Allowance
    - Timing: near term, 2 years

- **Parking** – Parking is always an issue in central business districts for both businesses and patrons. Service and delivery vehicles and customers are often challenged to find easy and convenient spaces in which to park. Within the First Street District there are 61 spaces for county use and 37 spaces at city hall (mostly dedicated to employees). On-street parking along First Street and Second Streets provides 50 parallel parking spaces; 10 spaces on Cleveland, 11 on North Scott and 18 private stalls at City Center. The public parking lot identified earlier along Main Street and S. Scott also serves businesses on the south side of First Street, e.g., First Street Coffee Station.

  If approved by the Wisconsin DOT (due to its jurisdiction of STH 64), angled parking should be considered on 2nd Street from Scott to Cleveland Street depending on width of right-of-way.

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On-street parking on 1st Street (between Mill and Scott Streets) is about 75-85% occupied during regular business hours and oftentimes 100% occupied during busiest hours. As one option for parking, it is recommended that the Redevelopment Authority and the Common Council consider acquiring the vacant building located at 900 First Street for redevelopment or for use as a future surface parking lot to serve customers patronizing the First Street District. The most recent assessment for 900 First Street is $67,400 dated 2010. (Taxes have been consistently delinquent for 6 years with a current amount due of approximately $12,084.26).

- Cost: acquisition, demo, and reconstruction approx. $175,000
- Timing: near term 1-3 years.

- **WIFI** – Access to wireless internet service in the downtown can increase daytime populations, resulting in a more active, vibrant downtown area. WIFI has become an amenity that is, if not outright expected, considered a "normalized" amenity for municipalities as they work to support and attract young professionals as well as businesses to the area. WIFI access adds value to residents, visitors.
  - Cost: $30,000 allowance
  - Timing: Immediate – year 2

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Special Note: Streeter Square Park, located on 2nd Street between Mill and Scott Streets, offers passive and open space play. According the City of Merrill Outdoor Recreation Plan dated February 2013 "…This (Streeter Square) park is used mainly as a quiet spot…" and the only recommendation includes small minimal improvements to the baseball field. Streeter Square was not listed in Capital Improvements section of the 2013-2018 plan.

Mitchell Square, downtown Stevens Point. Base: poured slab w/ drain; Plumbing: DPW; Fountain Fixture cost: $48,000

Veteran's Memorial Park, Plainfield; est. final cost, slab, fixtures and installation: $175,000

Considering that water is the single most important ingredient to recreation, in consultation with the city's Parks and Recreation Department, Streeter Square Park should be evaluated as to having a need and sufficient space to accommodate a small water fountain or splash pad. This feature would generate additional people into the downtown, complement businesses like Studio 808, would dramatically increase play activities for youngsters, increase perception of municipal services (as they are extremely popular), and have demonstrated success in downtowns as close as Wausau and Stevens Point.

- Cost: $100,000 allowance
- Timing: Immediate – 1 year

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Impact Scale Investments

- **Commercial Rehabilitation** - Commercial Rehabilitation is a process by which a community's building stock is rejuvenated to serve current and new business and attract more residents and visitors into the downtown. An initial assessment reveals that many of the properties in the First Street District and most all of the properties on 1st between Mill and Scott would benefit from being rehabilitated. The exceptions include City Center, Blooming Wishes, Antiques and the former Mustard Seed vacant property located at 801 E. 1st Street. However, painting brick is far from an ideal long-term rehab technique due to the damage paint causes to brick material.

  The goal of rehabilitating commercial buildings is to return the façade, as close as possible, to its original character. If like 811/813 1st Street, the building still retains much of its historic nature then the goal would be to recapture that original architecture during renovation.

If a building, like Skippers (812 E. 1st Street) has both historic and an outdated more modern storefront together, a rehab effort would then address the original historic portion of the storefront separately but the newer 40 year old portion of the façade would be treated with a complementary design.

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For district buildings similar to 810 1st Street, an investigation into whether the original façade could be recaptured (at a practical cost) or whether an all new treatment would be employed to improve the building's exterior. Financing for proposed commercial rehabilitation projects would come from a combination of both public and private sectors and would consist of owner cash, commercial lender, small grant and public loan funds. Each project would be managed to be customized for individual properties and evaluated as to the contribution generated by the final product.

- Cost: $150,000 initial set aside
- Timing: Immediate with continued phasing

These Vision Plan recommendations are aimed at reshaping downtown Merrill by adding vitality through various scale investments. Both public and private improvements when taken together will transform all four districts within the study area. Initial efforts to invest and implement basic activities will create improvements now and, as changes occur in the downtown and its economy, the vision becomes a 'working document', require a review and re-ordering to account for the new opportunities in the future.

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Investment Matrix

District	Investment Scale	Activity	Est. Cost per Feature	Total Feature Est. Cost	Timing	Totals
Gateway	Small	Decorative Street Light Installation	$6,000	$48,000	Immediate	$90,000
		Signage Installation - Welcome	$5,000		Immediate	
		Signage Installation - Directional	$1,500		Immediate	
				$9,000 - $12,000		
		Landscaping		$30,000	Immediate - 2 years	
	Impact	Blight Elimination (varies)		$400,000	Phased - 5 years	$1,145,625
		Commercial Rehabilitation			1-4 years	
		Rehab Estimate	$35 -65,000 per building	Variable		
		Acquisition Estimate		$475,625		
		Gateway' Lots	$172,125			
		Note: may be Rehab candidate -- Other-A	$109,125			
		Other-B	$168,500			
		Other -C	$25,875			
		Demolition Estimate		$225,000		
		Entry Features (2)		$45,000	Immediate - year 1	
Riverfront Alley	Small	Landscaping		$45,000	1-3 years	$179,050
		Decorative Street Light Installation	$6,000	$126,000	Immediate - year 1	
		Specialty Light Installation		$5,050	Immediate - year 2	
		Signage	$1,500	$3,000	1-2 years	
	Impact	Blight Elimination			Phased - 5 years	$1,393,750
		Acquisition Estimate		$258,750		
		B&D Complex	$180,000			
		Kamke Building	$78,750			
		Greenspace Development - force account		$35,000	Immediate - year 1	
		Land Banking-Allowance		$500,000	Phased - 3-10 years	
		Commercial Rehabilitation - Allowance		$150,000	Immediate - 5 years	
		Infrastructure Improvements		$450,000		
Main Street	Small	Landscaping		$65,000	Immediate - year 2	$273,500
		Amenities		$125,000	Immediate - year 2	
		Decorative Street Light Installation	$6,000	$66,000	Phased	
		Specialty Light Installation		$2,500	Immediate - year 1	
		Signage		$15,000	Year 1-3	
	Impact	Commercial Rehabilitation - Initial Allowance		$250,000	Immediate, with Phasing	$650,000
		Blight Elimination - Initial Allowance		$400,000	Long Term (multiple years)	
	Transformative	Downtown Redevelopment set-aside		$575,000 - 1,150,000	As soon as practical	$1,800,000
		Downtown Pocket Park		$175,000		
		Pedestrian Bridge for Wisconsin River access		$475,000	2-4 years	
First Street	Small	Decorative Street Light Installation	$6,000	$132,000	Immediate, with Phasing	$537,000
		Landscaping - Allowance		$50,000	2-3 years	
		Amenities - Allowance		$50,000	Immediate - 2 years	
		Parking - Acquisition, Demolition & Development		$175,000	Year 1-3	
		WIFI - Allowance		$30,000	Immediate - year 2	
		Splash Pad - Allowance		$100,000	Immediate - year 2	
	Impact	Commercial Rehabilitation - Allowance		$150,000	Immediate, with Phasing	$150,000
Vision Totals	Small				Immediate - 3 years	$1,079,550
	Impact				Phased over 3 - 10 years	$3,339,375
	Transformative				As soon as practical	$1,800,000

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Appendix A: *Experiencing the Downtown via the River Bend Trail*

The following series of images provides an overview of the visual impressions of Merrill's downtown core provides from the vantage of the River Bend Trail. As this trail is perceived to provide a critical amenity, serving to link from the downtown to the river, it is important that these vantages be considered when engaging in a process of improvements for the downtown core. Locations where visual impressions were logged are indicated on the map below, which correlates with the Vantage Series' titles of A - J.

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Vantage Series A: Visual impression for visitors or residents entering the trail off E. Main Street along Park Street.

Vantage Series B: Visual impression for visitors or residents at corner of Park and River Streets; includes view west towards Riverfront Alley District and north towards E. Main.

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Vantage Series C: Visual impression for visitors or residents at Park Street rail crossing; includes south view towards trail and north towards East Main.

Vantage Series D: Visual impression for visitors or residents as they enter the Trail at Park Street trailhead.

Vantage Series E: Visual impression for visitors or residents as they approach, pass under and go through the Center Avenue Bridge.

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Vantage Series F: Visual impression for visitors or residents as they approach the hydro dam and area amenities.

Vantage Series G: Visual impression for visitors or residents as they pass through the (existing and former) WPS properties; includes some rear-sides of E. Main commercial properties.

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Vantage Series H: Visual impression for visitors or residents of the rear-side of E. Main Street commercial properties.

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Vantage Series I: Nearest access to E. Main Street from the River Bend Trail, located at the far-west terminus of E. Main Street. Images include the approach to the recently renovated pedestrian bridge, the relationship of the trail to the active rail line, as well as the vacant land located at the E. Main Street terminus. This site is referenced on pages 41-42 of the report as a potential site for linking the River Bend Trail to the downtown.

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Vantage Series J: Nearest access to E. Main Street from the River Bend Trail, located at the far-west terminus of E. Main Street. Images include the relationship of the vacant land located at the E. Main Street terminus to the River Bend Trail (indicated by the RBT's pedestrian bridge). This site is referenced on pages 41-42 of the report as a potential site for linking the River Bend Trail to the downtown.

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