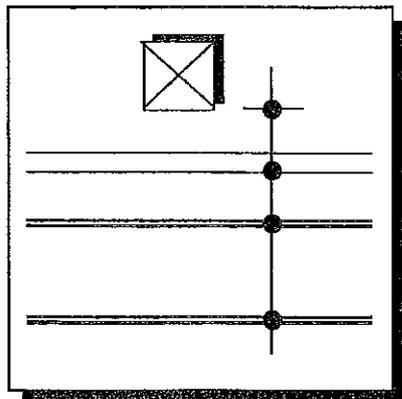
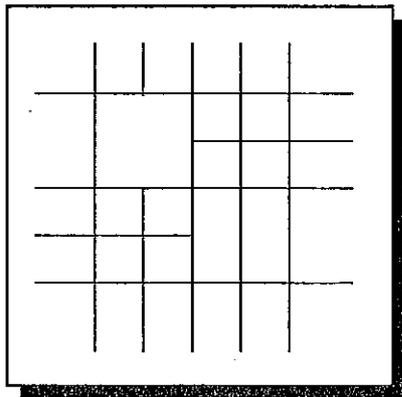


## NEW TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOODS

*New neighborhoods in Mount Vernon should reflect the design patterns and features of the traditional town. These neighborhoods should grow naturally from the fabric of the established town.*



Most of Mount Vernon's future residential growth will be located in three new traditional neighborhoods, the East, West and North Growth Centers. The following patterns should guide the development of these new growth centers:

### CONTINUOUS STREET GRIDS

MOUNT VERNON'S NEW TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOODS WILL PROVIDE GRIDS OF STREETS WITH PROPORTIONS AND DIMENSIONS THAT ARE CONSISTENT WITH THOSE OF THE TRADITIONAL TOWN.

Generally, the blocks that are created follow the eight lot pattern of the original plat or the twelve lot pattern of the Ash Park district.

Major characteristics of the Continuous Street Grids include:

- Maintaining street continuity and convenient access through the new neighborhoods by avoiding the use of cul-de-sacs.
- Providing open-ended street dedications at the edge of developments, to promote eventual extension beyond the twenty-year growth limit.
- Making extensive use of T-intersections, limiting the number of conflicting pedestrian and vehicular movements.
- Defining collector and local streets, to lead travellers successfully through the neighborhood.

### STREET AND SETBACK RATIOS

STREET WIDTHS AND SETBACK RATIOS SHOULD FOLLOW THE DIMENSIONS OF SUCCESSFUL STREETS IN THE TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY.

Mount Vernon's beautiful streets in its traditional residential neighborhoods gain part of their character through the pro-

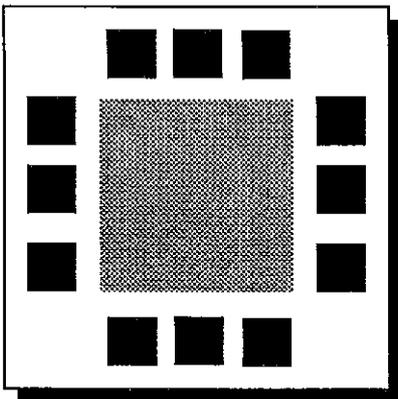
## NEW TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOODS

portions of street width, greenway area, and building setbacks. These defining features include:

- A relatively narrow street channel and right-of-way width.
- A generous greenway strip between curb line and sidewalk that permits growth of large overstory street trees.
- A separation between house facades that almost never exceeds 100 feet.

These principles should guide development in Mount Vernon's new traditional neighborhoods. These standards should include:

- A maximum 60-foot right-of-way width and 28-foot street channel width on residential streets (except boulevards).
- A minimum 10- to 12-foot greenway setback between the curb line and sidewalk.
- In traditional neighborhoods, a 100-foot maximum separation between facing house facades that are not separated by parks or boulevards. This produces a typical front-yard maximum setback of 20-feet. Garages may have a greater setback.



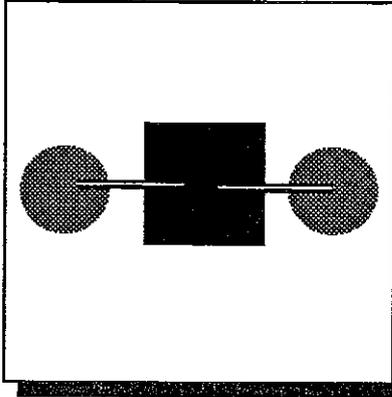
### ORGANIZATION AROUND VILLAGE GREENS

EACH NEW TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD SHOULD HAVE A VILLAGE GREEN THAT IS A FOCUS FOR THE DISTRICT'S PUBLIC LIFE.

The neighborhood open space needs of each new traditional neighborhood should be organized into central village greens. These greens should be:

- Surrounded on all sides by public streets, allowing them to remain the territory of all residents in the neighborhood district.
- Linked to Mount Vernon's park system by trails or boulevards.

## NEW TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOODS

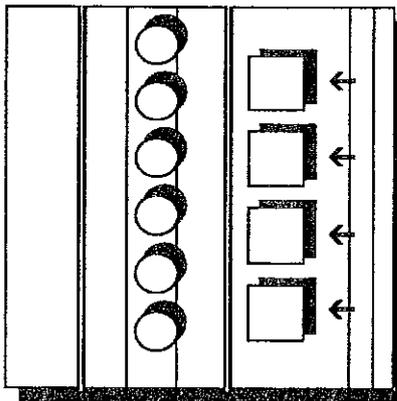


### BOULEVARD LINKS TO TOWN

NEW NEIGHBORHOODS SHOULD BE CONNECTED TO THE ESTABLISHED TOWN BY BOULEVARDS.

Strong connections between new neighborhoods and the established town are important to assure Mount Vernon's continued growth as a unified community. The Design Concept recommends strengthening these links by creating boulevard connections. These boulevards may include features such as ornamental lighting, landscaped medians, and additional greenway width and landscaping. The boulevards are designed to act as linear parks, leading people between the new and old parts of the community.

The boulevards also form organizing elements for new traditional neighborhoods, connecting to the village greens and becoming part of the town's system of public spaces.



### LAND USE ALONG GREENS AND BOULEVARDS

DEVELOPMENT ADJACENT TO GREENS AND BOULEVARDS SHOULD EMPHASIZE PEDESTRIAN ACCESS AND PROMOTE COMMUNITY ACTIVITY.

As key public features of their new communities, the village greens and boulevards should emphasize public use and minimize conflicts with automobiles. The following principles accomplish these goals:

- Land controls around village greens should encourage mixed use. These include multi-family residential development, along with neighborhood services. Multi-family development should avoid a "project" quality and should maintain a strong orientation to the street. Service uses, including day care and neighborhood services, may be incorporated into the lower level of multi-family buildings.
- Development along the greens and boulevards should have service access off parallel alleys, rather than from driveways on the street. This pattern prevents interruptions of

## NEW TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOODS

pedestrian flow and street landscaping by driveways; and, with careful design, increases the number of lots with frontage on these desirable public spaces.

- Land development regulations should require or encourage development of buildings along greens and boulevards to be two- or three-stories in height. This provides better definition along open spaces and complements the open qualities of green areas.



### FRONT PORCHES

MOUNT VERNON SHOULD ENCOURAGE ITS TRADITIONAL PATTERN OF FRONT PORCH DEVELOPMENT IN NEW TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOODS.

Front porches are important to Mount Vernon as both architectural elements and community themes. One of the city's main community events is a porch festival. New development should maintain this tradition. Therefore, single-family developments along village greens and boulevards should be required to have front porches, and other developments should be required to provide them.

## FIRST AVENUE CORRIDOR

*The First Avenue Corridor should be an attractive, economically strong entrance to town, characterized by a well-designed mix of uses and an improved public environment.*

**T**he First Avenue Corridor, Highway 1, is a major regional route and a street of major community importance. Its importance will grow with construction of a US 30 bypass and a Highway 1 and 30 interchange. First Avenue will become a southern extension of Uptown, linking the traditional center of town to the major regional access point on the south.

First Avenue could evolve as a location for office and limited commercial uses growing out of the Uptown district.

At present, First Avenue is a neutral environment, dominated by relatively heavy regional traffic. The design concept proposes complementing this regional transportation role with development policies that will also create a positive setting for new investment. The following patterns should guide development in this emerging corridor:

### A MIXED USE CORRIDOR

FIRST AVENUE SHOULD ACCOMMODATE A VARIETY OF LAND USES IN AN ATTRACTIVE PHYSICAL SETTING.

First Avenue already hosts a variety of land uses. This diversity should be recognized and ordered through the development of an urban corridor zoning district that guides future development along the street. The district should permit:

- Mixed residential, office, and limited commercial uses along the street between 1st Street and Palisades Road.
- Continuation of single-family use on the west side of the highway between North 2nd Street and Cass Street.
- Improved limited industrial uses on the east side north of North 3rd Street.

## FIRST AVENUE CORRIDOR

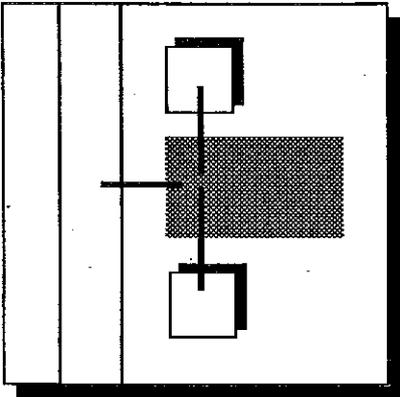
### AN IMPROVED PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT

THE FIRST AVENUE CORRIDOR SHOULD PROVIDE BETTER ACCOMMODATIONS FOR PEDESTRIANS, PROVIDING A SAFE SEPARATION BETWEEN PEDESTRIAN AND HIGHWAY TRAFFIC.

Improving the corridor's pedestrian environment is consistent with the street's emerging mixed use role in the city. Currently, sidewalks are located along the curb line, creating an uncomfortable and potentially unsafe conflict between pedestrians and highway traffic.

Policies to address this include:

- Upgrading alleys parallel to 1st Avenue as pedestrian greenways south of the town center. These greenways would also provide buffers between corridor uses and adjacent single-family houses.
- With adjacent development, increasing sidewalk setbacks from the curb line along 1st Avenue.



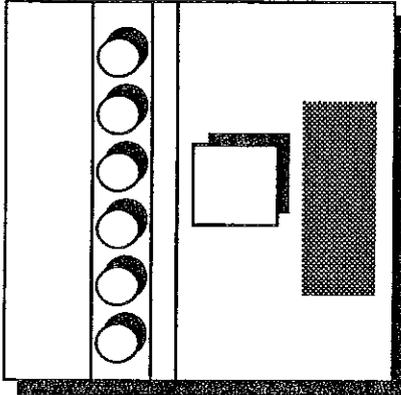
### FIRST AVENUE ACCESS AND PARKING

DEVELOPMENT ALONG 1ST AVENUE SHOULD MINIMIZE CONFLICTS WITH THROUGH TRAFFIC.

Traffic conflicts created by frequent curb cuts and conflicting local traffic movements will decrease the capacity of First Avenue to carry traffic and could increase safety problems. These issues could produce pressure to widen the street, a development that would be harmful to the character of the town. Therefore, corridor development should minimize conflicts and rationalize local transportation access. This can be accomplished by:

- Developing interconnected and common parking facilities, shared by more than one use.
- Providing primary access of intersecting east-west streets and prohibiting mid-block left turns.

## FIRST AVENUE CORRIDOR



### STREETSCAPE

FIRST AVENUE'S STREETSCAPE SHOULD BE CONSISTENT IN QUALITY WITH THE REST OF MOUNT VERNON.

As a primary entrance into Mount Vernon, 1st Avenue's streetscape should convey a sense of quality and attractiveness that is consistent with the town's environmental quality. Evolving land uses and new development provide opportunities for this kind of improvement over time. Regulatory and investment policies which can encourage this improvement include:

- Locating new buildings as close to the 1st Avenue right-of-way as permitted by the Iowa Department of Transportation. This more successfully defines a strong street corridor than deep setbacks.
- Development of parking lots to the side or rear of buildings, rather than along the highway frontage.
- Widening sidewalk setbacks and providing street landscaping in larger greenway preserves.
- Developing restrictive sign standards for the corridor, limiting the amount of total signage and the size of individual signs, as well as requiring the use of ground, monument, or attached signs.

## FIRST STREET CORRIDOR

*First Street is both a street and a great public space. Future policies should enhance this quality and extend the street's character into the surrounding region.*



**F**irst Street, at the top of the ridgeline that was so instrumental in defining Mount Vernon's early history, is one of the town's great public spaces, rich with historic significance as the route of the Lincoln Highway and as the "main street" of National Register historic districts. This historic importance is augmented by the beauty of the street, the quality of its adjacent architecture, its tree cover, and its civic importance. These qualities allow 1st Street to act as a linear park as well as a trafficway -- a street that tells the story of the best of the community.

The major policy for the future of 1st Street is relatively simple -- the preservation of its unique environment. However, several minor actions would further strengthen the street's role in the community:

### EAST SIDE PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS

MOUNT VERNON SHOULD IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE LINKS BETWEEN UPTOWN AND THE LISBON ROAD BIKEWAY AND SPRING CREEK PRESERVE.

Better pedestrian connections between Uptown and the Lisbon Road intersection would link the bikeway to Lisbon into the center of town. In addition, it would provide an improved connection between 1st Street and the proposed Green Network open space system by connecting the main street to a proposed open space preserve along Spring Creek.

### WEST SIDE ENTRANCE

MOUNT VERNON SHOULD STRENGTHEN THE HISTORIC LINCOLN HIGHWAY ENTRANCE TO TOWN FROM CEDAR RAPIDS.

This goal can be carried out by:

- Repair of the historic Lincoln Highway bridge over the Chicago and North Western. This bridge is open to



## FIRST STREET CORRIDOR

pedestrians only. Its rehabilitation may be funded through the Enhancement Program of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), which provides a funding category for restoration of historic transportation structures.

- View corridor preservation and protection. An existing billboard which blocks the view of town from the west should be amortized and removed. In addition, new sign regulations should be established which protect the view corridor along the old Lincoln Highway corridor from the west.



### LIGHTING

MOUNT VERNON SHOULD REINFORCE THE PEDESTRIAN QUALITY OF 1ST STREET WITH HUMAN-SCALED ORNAMENTAL STREET LIGHTING.

Night lighting provides a degree of magic to a special street. First Street's already excellent appearance would be improved by the installation of ornamental lighting, providing an intimate, pedestrian scale for the street. This would complement lighting that already exists within the Cornell campus and in Memorial Park.

## COMMERCIAL AND RESEARCH PARK

*Mount Vernon's industrial development efforts should be focused on creating a high-quality commercial and research park near a new US 30 and Highway 1 bypass.*

**C**ommercial and business park development related to the interchange of the proposed US 30 bypass and Highway 1 is an important regional development opportunity. The site's strategic location, combined with Mount Vernon's academic and environmental resources, could be attractive to such a project. This, in turn, would diversify Mount Vernon's economic base and encourage additional, desirable investment.

As with all new development, it is vital that this development occurs in a way that reinforces, rather than dilutes, community patterns. The following principles provide a planning framework to guide development of this important site.

### LAND USES

LAND USES IN THE BUSINESS PARK DISTRICT SHOULD INCLUDE USES THAT COMPLEMENT, BUT DO NOT COMPETE WITH, OTHER COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS IN TOWN.

Mount Vernon's highest community priority is preservation of its unique community character. Therefore, uses permitted in a new development area, with a high level of automobile access, should complement, rather than replace, the vital Uptown commercial district. On the other hand, the restrictiveness of the current zoning ordinance may be eased somewhat without threatening existing districts.

Uses permitted in the new district should include:

- Regional office uses, excluding local service offices. Generally, these should be uses that require over 10,000 square feet of office space and cannot be accommodated in the smaller scale development of Uptown or the 1st Avenue corridor.
- Research and development activities.
- Limited industrial uses that are associated with research or office activities.

## COMMERCIAL AND RESEARCH PARK

- Highway-oriented commercial uses, including travel services, restaurants, auto-oriented uses, and large-scale single-purpose retailers that the town center cannot accommodate.
- Commercial area in the park should be limited to 20 acres, consistent with the Land Use Plan.

### PLANNED ENVIRONMENT

THE PARK'S DEVELOPMENT SHOULD BE GOVERNED BY A MASTER PLAN, RATHER THAN DEFAULT TO SEPARATE, UNRELATED ACTIONS.

The proposed business park should be subject to a master development plan, rather than a simple subdivision that produces individual, unrelated projects. The plan should include the following features:

- Grouping of buildings to create a district, with common open space and a pedestrian orientation. Open spaces should be defined, usable environments, rather than space left over after placement of parking and buildings.
- Development of common parking, rather than separate parking lots, that serve all elements of the project. Buildings and open space, rather than parking, should be dominant features of the site design.
- Buildings should be connected by a continuous pedestrian system.
- Office, research, and commercial parts of the park should be related, allowing the commercial district to provide services to employees in other parts of the development.

### LINKAGE TO MOUNT VERNON

A NEW BUSINESS PARK SHOULD BE CONNECTED TO MOUNT VERNON'S PEDESTRIAN AND GREENWAY SYSTEM.

## COMMERCIAL AND RESEARCH PARK

Although the proposed development site is on the edge of Mount Vernon, it nevertheless should be connected to the life of the city. In addition, the project should be easily accessible on foot and by bicycle, making workers less dependent on automobile transportation and preserving the walkable character of the city.

Therefore, the site should be integrated into Mount Vernon's proposed Green Network system. Safe crossings should be provided at major streets, to encourage pedestrian and bicycle transportation. In addition, streets that serve the park should provide continuity to the existing street and sidewalk system.

## GREEN NETWORK

*Mount Vernon's park system should become a network of open spaces, which touches all parts of the town and connects major community features.*



**M**ount Vernon's park and recreation system is an important community asset. Major open spaces, including the four municipal parks, the school sites, and the Cornell College campus, provide vital open space and recreational services, as well as giving the city a sense of structure.

As Mount Vernon grows and takes advantage of new development opportunities, its open space system will become even more important. The Design Concept envisions a Green Network that serves all parts of the town, connecting new and old neighborhoods with one another and with major activity centers, and bridging barriers that might otherwise separate parts of the city from one another. Indeed, as a community grows, a community common that serves every resident is vital to preserving a sense of community.

The following principles and actions will help Mount Vernon create this Green Network.

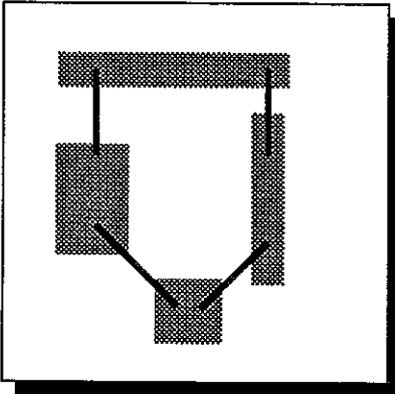
### EXPANDED NATURE PRESERVE

**MOUNT VERNON SHOULD DEVELOP AN EXPANDED NATURE PRESERVE USING EXISTING OPEN SPACE RESOURCES.**

Mount Vernon's largest park is the 10-acre Nature Park, located on the site of an abandoned quarry north of US 30 and west of 1st Street extended. The park provides a beautiful and secluded open space for passive recreational uses.

This resource should be expanded to the west and north to provide an expanded nature preserve. Such a preserve would provide an excellent complement to more active recreational uses in other parts of the city. Northward extension incorporates Spring Creek, whose valley and surrounding open space extends north of 1st Street. This wooded ravine environment is undevelopable, but would provide a superb connection to the 1st Street Corridor and the rest of a linked park system. A tax deductible contribution of this land would provide a long-term gift to the city and an economic advantage to the current owner.

## GREEN NETWORK

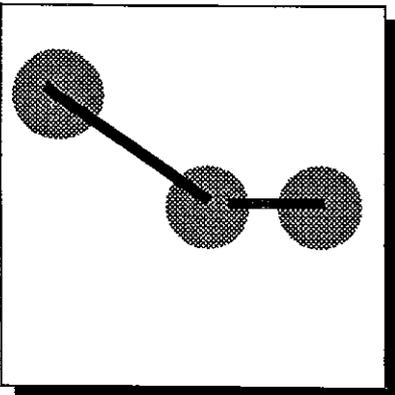


### LINKED GREENWAY SYSTEM

MOUNT VERNON SHOULD PROVIDE A CONTINUOUSLY CONNECTED GREENWAY SYSTEM, SERVING ALL PARTS OF THE CITY.

A fundamental principle of the Design Concept is development of a connected park system, providing a continuous greenway throughout the town. Elements of the Green Network include:

- The proposed Nature Preserve.
- A greenway along the former Mount Vernon Short Line right-of-way, extending north along the ravine. This greenway buffers a revitalized 1st Avenue industrial belt from the East Village Growth Center. If the proposed Mount Vernon Industrial Park proceeds, the routing of this greenway would be shifted to the east.
- A Northwestern Greenway, running parallel to and buffering the Chicago and North Western tracks from the North Village Growth Center. The greenway would connect to 8th Avenue and the Cornell campus, and to the historic Lincoln Highway pedestrian bridge.
- Boulevards and streetside trails providing access to proposed village greens and to major commercial and activity centers.
- A pedestrian crossing over the C&NW tracks, connecting the Northwestern Greenway with Davis Park.



### INTERURBAN GREENWAYS

MOUNT VERNON'S OPEN SPACE NETWORK SHOULD BE CONNECTED TO AN EMERGING REGIONAL GREENWAY SYSTEM.

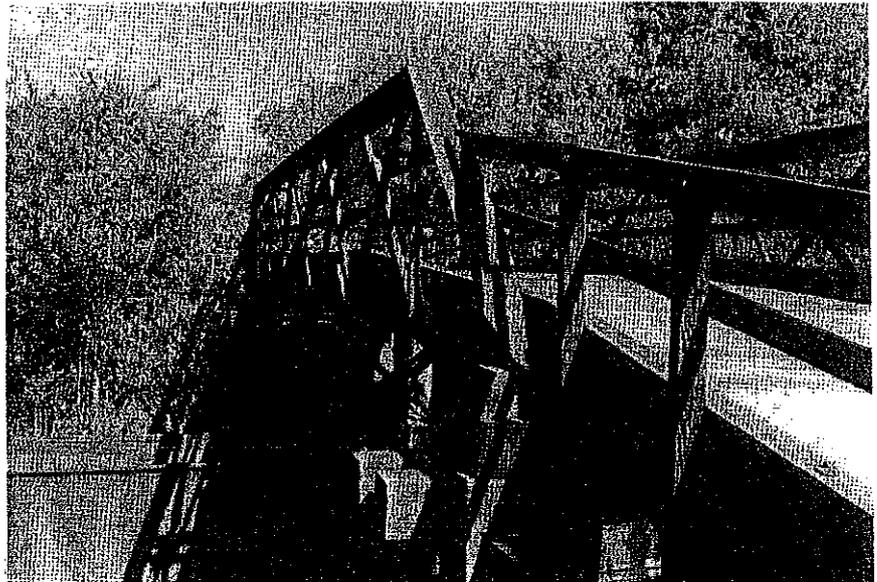
Mount Vernon's Green Network should provide links to its metropolitan region. Opportunities exist for connections to Lisbon and Cedar Rapids. A Lisbon Greenway could be

## GREEN NETWORK

developed along the right-of-way of the former Iowa Electric Light and Power interurban, complementing the Lisbon Road Bikeway. While greenway development in this corridor was opposed by adjacent property owners, trails and greenway experience in Eastern Iowa and elsewhere indicates that trails development generally benefits neighboring properties. A new greenway plan for this corridor should be developed with property owners, designed to address their security and privacy concerns.

In addition, Mount Vernon should work with the State, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, and the City of Cedar Rapids toward development of a Cedar Rapids Trail, following the right-of-way of either the interurban or Mount Vernon Road westward. This greenway would provide access to historic Abbe Creek School and regional parks, and would provide an alternate commuter route to Cedar Rapids.

*Lincoln Highway Bridge. This historic bridge, on the northwest edge of town, could be incorporated into a Cedar Rapids Trail linking Mount Vernon to its metropolitan neighbor.*



## GREEN NETWORK

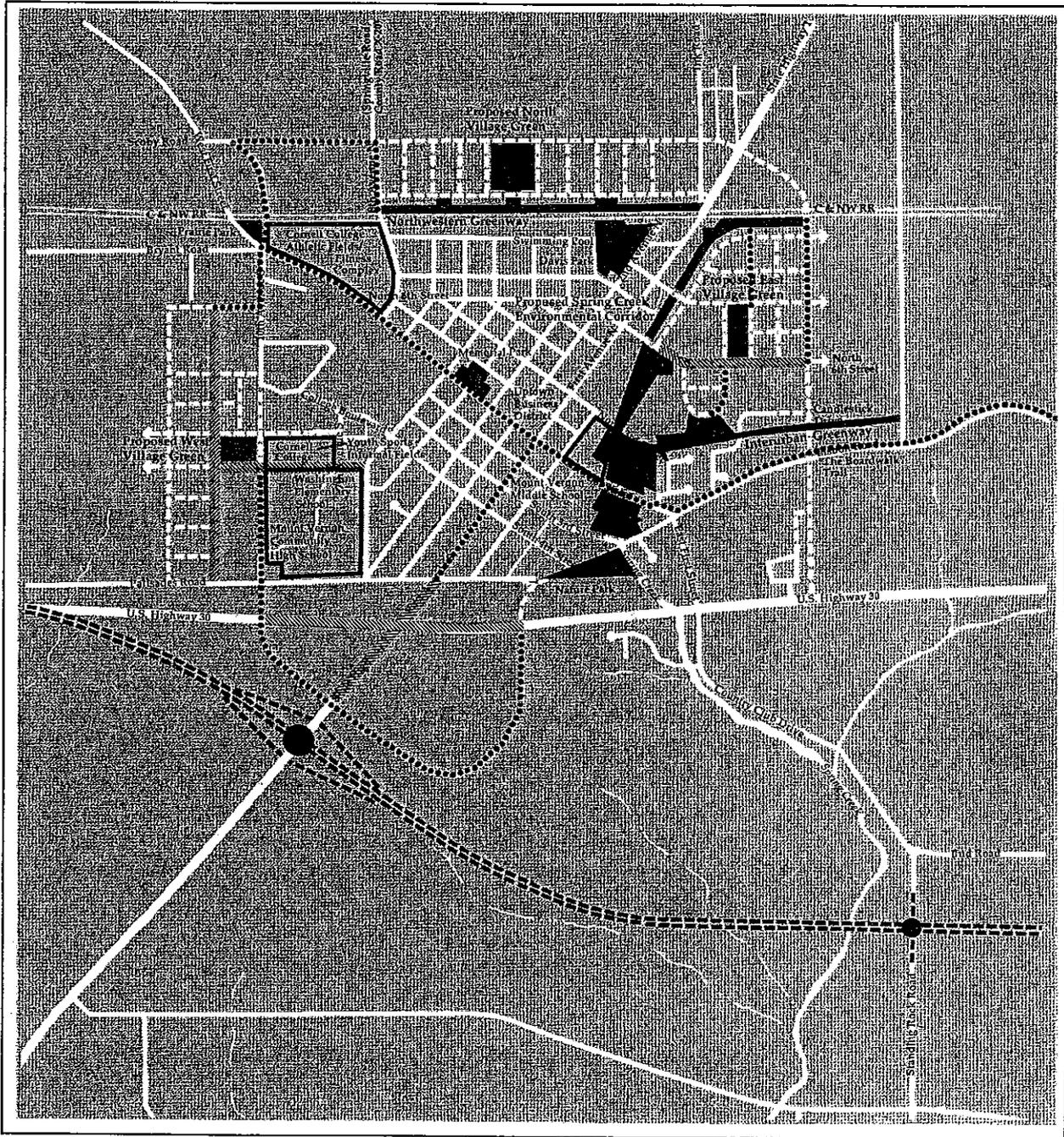
*Nature Park. An expansion of this scenic open space is an important part of the green network.*



*Davis Park. This open space is one of Mount Vernon's most intensively used recreational areas.*



# GREEN NETWORK



## A Green Network Summary Map

- Existing Parks, Noted by Name

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- Major Public/ SemiPublic Facilities

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- Future Parks and Open Spaces

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- Boulevards

---

- Green Streets and Parkways



## TRANSPORTATION THAT REINFORCES CHARACTER

*Mount Vernon's transportation system should be designed to reinforce the character of the town and reinforce its development objectives.*

**M**ount Vernon's transportation system is an important urban design element of the community. Often, streets are conceived only in their role as traffic movers. However, a transportation system can either reinforce or harm the character of a community. In Mount Vernon, it is vital that the potentially negative effects of the transportation system be minimized, and that the system works to reinforce community strength and character.

The town's transportation system is considered in detail in Chapter Six, addressing Infrastructure, Public Facilities, and Parks. This section presents general principles that will allow Mount Vernon's transportation system to serve larger community development objectives.

### **BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM**

**MOUNT VERNON'S TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM SHOULD BE COMPREHENSIVE, ADDRESSING VEHICULAR, PEDESTRIAN, AND BICYCLE MOVEMENT.**

Mount Vernon's character is partially determined by ease of movement around the city by pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as motorists. Therefore, transportation planning in the future should integrate all methods of movement. Major new streets along important activity corridors should include provisions for bicycle and pedestrian transportation. In addition, greenway systems that move people around the city without cars should have equal weight to road improvement projects in assessing priorities.

### **BYPASS ROUTING AND INTERCHANGE DESIGN**

**THE ROUTING AND DESIGN OF THE US 30 BYPASS SHOULD PROVIDE MAXIMUM ADVANTAGES TO MOUNT VERNON.**

Many factors go into corridor selection and design of a major road like the US 30 bypass. However, Mount Vernon should be certain that its community interest is also one of those

## TRANSPORTATION THAT REINFORCES CHARACTER

factors. This suggests the following principles:

- A near routing of the bypass, placing the new road about 1/2 to 3/4-mile south of the current highway intersection. This route should prevent obsolescence of the new road while maintaining a close connection between the right-of-way and Mount Vernon.
- A design which increases Mount Vernon's ability to develop and serve the proposed business and research park. Such a design should minimize impact on current land uses and provide adequate space to assemble a site and provide a service road loop. Consideration should be given to designs which minimize the amount of land needed for ramps.

### REDESIGN OF EXISTING HIGHWAY 30

THE CURRENT HIGHWAY 30 ALIGNMENT SHOULD BE A REDESIGNED LANDSCAPED BOULEVARD THAT UNITES RATHER THAN DIVIDES ADJACENT LAND USES.

When US 30 is relocated to a southern bypass, the existing alignment will revert to local access and city maintenance. The road should be redesigned to be more crossable by local vehicular and pedestrian traffic, avoiding the creation of a twin highway barrier. In addition, it should provide an attractive business street that reinforces the quality of a new business park.

This principle may involve the creation of a well-landscaped, divided boulevard with attractive lighting and graphics. This project should be incorporated into and funded as part of the Highway 30 bypass development.

## TRANSPORTATION THAT REINFORCES CHARACTER

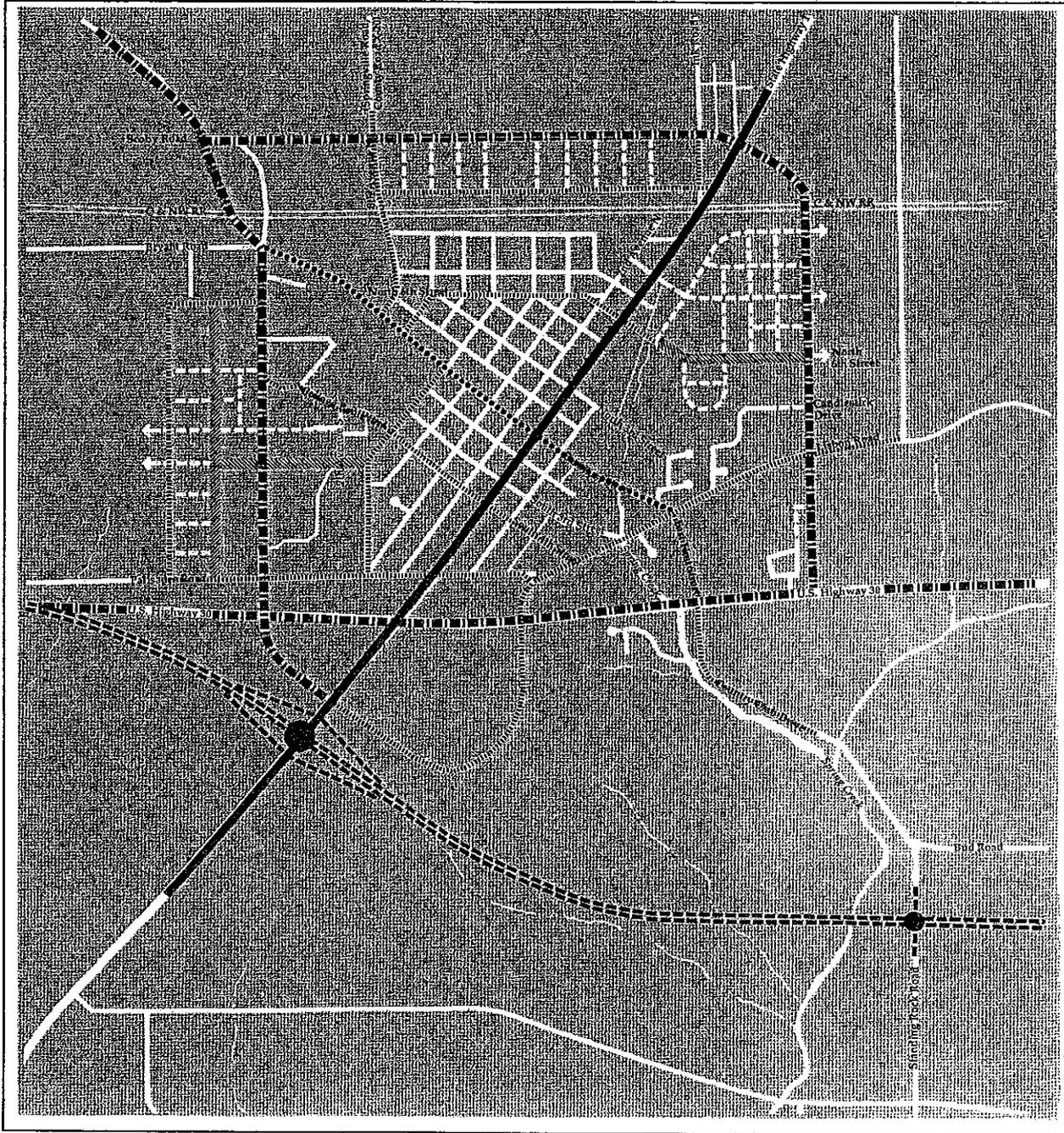
### STREET SYSTEM EVOLUTION

MOUNT VERNON'S STREET NETWORK SHOULD GROW AS NEW AREAS OF THE CITY DEVELOP.

The Design Concept calls for evolution of the street system to provide good links from newly developing areas to activity centers, and to maintain good circulation around the community. Elements of this evolving system include:

- South 10th Avenue to provide improved access on the west side of the town.
- A link between 7th Street Southeast (the continuation of Palisades Road east of First Avenue) and the existing US 30. This link would become part of a circulator loop serving the business park, connecting with the South 10th Avenue extension.
- Scoby Road extension to serve the North Village.
- East City Limits Road to serve the West Village Growth Center and form a peripheral collector with Scoby Road.
- A road on the half-section line west of 10th Avenue to serve the West Village Growth Center.

# TRANSPORTATION THAT REINFORCES CHARACTER



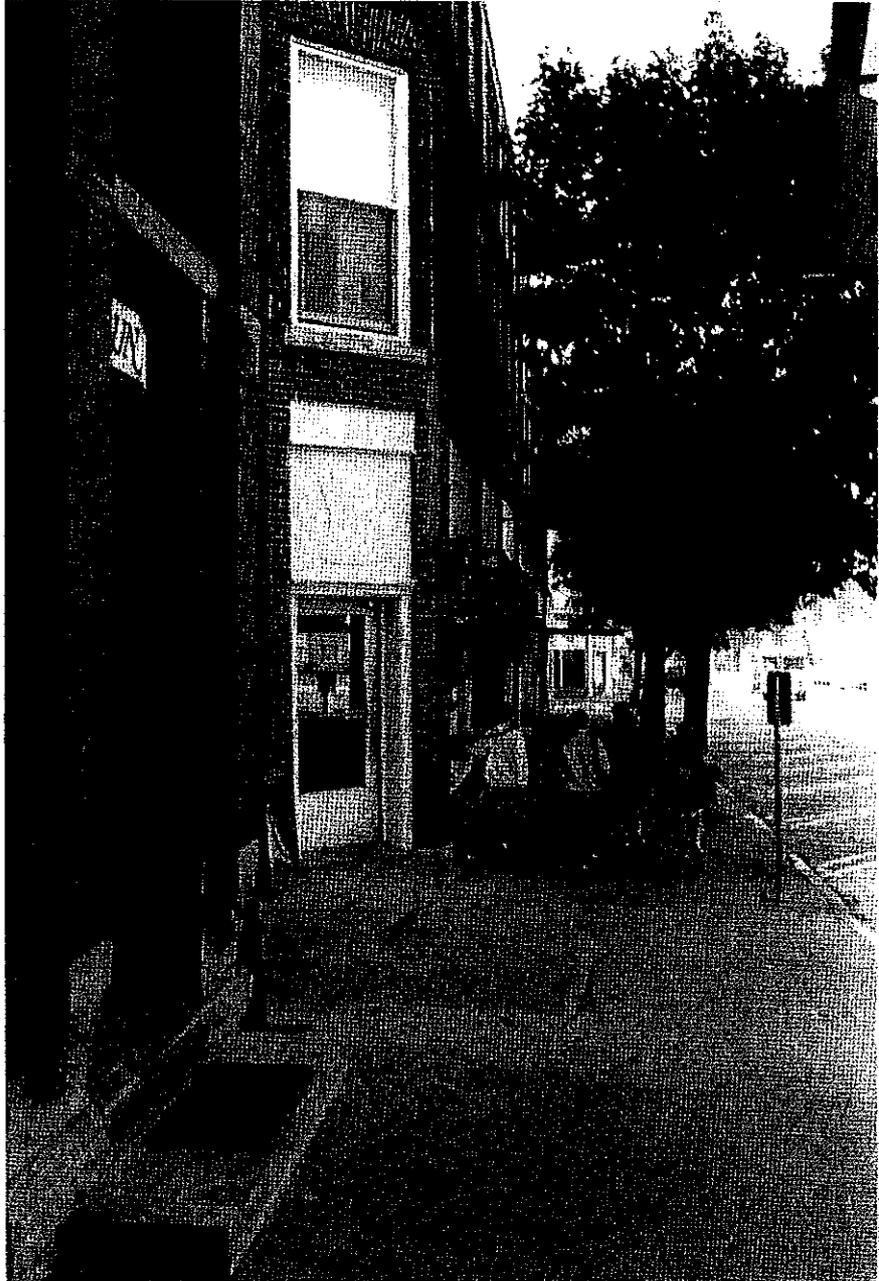
**Transportation that  
Reinforces Town Character**  
Summary Map

- Expressway (Near Bypass of U.S. 30)
- Expressway Interchange Access
- Major Arterials
- Other Arterials
- Community Streets
- Collectors
- Boulevard Links
- Future New Streets

## UPTOWN MOUNT VERNON

5

*First Street in Uptown Mount Vernon. The district is one of eastern Iowa's finest traditional town centers and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.*



# UPTOWN MOUNT VERNON



## A TOWN CENTER PLAN FOR MOUNT VERNON

*Mount Vernon's Uptown is a busy town center and a rich symbol of the quality of a beautiful small town. It remains a commercial crossroads of great economic vitality.*

**U**ptown Mount Vernon is a place of distinction and a crossroads for business. Its impressive physical presence is established by its location at the top of the highest hill in the center of town, and by the harmony of the composition of its buildings. Composed largely of nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings, this district contains a mix of retailing, government, services and housing uses. West First Street is the retail spine of the area, linking Uptown to historic Cornell College, situated less than three blocks to the northwest. These three blocks include a sequence of historic homes and churches and the city's traditional town square park, Memorial Park. Like Cornell College, Uptown Mount Vernon is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The recent construction of the Mount Vernon Bank added a beautiful new landmark to Uptown, designed and built in harmony with the historical context and architecture of the district.

From the founding of the city in 1847 to the arrival of the first automobile in 1901, Uptown Mount Vernon was a prosperous independent trade center. The coming of the automobile age encouraged travel between Mount Vernon and nearby Cedar Rapids. By 1914, interurban service was extended between Cedar Rapids, Mount Vernon and Lisbon by the Iowa Railway and Light Company. A brief residential building boom ensued between the town and Cedar Rapids, as many people began to establish residences between the towns. Ultimately, Cedar Rapids' growth as the dominant commercial center in the region altered the variety of commercial services available in Mount Vernon. The growing mobility of residents and shoppers continues to the present, presenting a challenge to merchants as they adapt to a changing retail environment.

## UPTOWN MOUNT VERNON: GOALS

Uptown Mount Vernon is the geographic center of the community and a traditional local center for commerce. The traditional harmony of Uptown Mount Vernon is joined to its status as a regional highway crossroads. Although modern-day US Highway 30 has been relocated one mile to the south, State Highway 1 (routed along First Avenue) bisects Uptown, and is a busy regional artery. Agricultural and industrial traffic from the region travels along Highway 1 through Uptown, between industrial service businesses at the north edge of the city and US Highway 30 about one mile to the south.

Uptown Mount Vernon is perched atop a high hill, with steeply sloped side streets that fall away dramatically from First Street. This unique physical form has restricted Uptown's outward development to a three block segment of First Street, between A Avenue and 3rd Avenue. These constraints, combined with growth in automobile-oriented businesses, has created a separate commercial area at the Highway 1 and 30 intersection to the south.

Today, Uptown Mount Vernon is still a district that awaits discovery by the traveler, tourist, and those who appreciate the virtues of its architectural character and small town environment. Residents of Mount Vernon are extraordinarily aware of the history, architectural significance and aesthetic appeal of their city, and have made great strides in preserving the best features of Uptown. Additional efforts should be made to revitalize Uptown and expand commercial investment opportunities. Strategic capital improvements and a creative new development scheme can support Uptown's continued success, preserve the character of its historic past and accommodate additional business activity.

In planning for the future of Uptown, Mount Vernon should:

■ **PRESERVE THE PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND HISTORIC INTEGRITY OF UPTOWN .**

The historic value of the city's town center and its role as a symbol of the character of Mount Vernon require measures to preserve and rehabilitate Uptown buildings. The creation of the Mount Vernon Commercial Historic National Register

## UPTOWN MOUNT VERNON: GOALS

District in 1993 was an important step toward achieving this goal. The city has several buildings more than a century old, and many other structures that can play a supporting role to the continued revitalization of the historic retail core of the city.

### ■ EXPAND RETAIL OPPORTUNITIES BY USING THE DISTRICT'S TOPOGRAPHY TO BEST ADVANTAGE.

Improvements can integrate existing, high quality streets, curbs, and sidewalks with underutilized spaces at the rear of the commercial blocks. Steep slopes behind buildings can be turned to the district's advantage by creating lower level business sites that can be entered at-grade from side streets and rear courtyards. These unique rear courtyards offer opportunities to increase utilization of existing historic buildings, encourage business development and refine Uptown's pedestrian network.

### ■ SHOWCASE THE UNIQUE HISTORICAL AND SMALL TOWN QUALITIES OF UPTOWN TO AREA RESIDENTS AND VISITORS.

The listing of the district on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993 highlighted the special characteristics of the built environment. Awareness of and support for historic preservation has been increasing, spurred by local efforts of the city beautification committee and other citizen groups. Uptown's historic buildings represent the heritage of the city, and are an important tourism resource. The historic image and amenities of the community have supported several local entrepreneurs operating antique and craft shops. Additional businesses can be developed to provide visitor services.

### ■ MAINTAIN AGING INFRASTRUCTURE TO PRESERVE PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE DISTRICT'S STRUCTURES.

Uptown preservation requires city investment in infrastructure improvements to keep pace with public service needs, including water mains adequate for fire suppression and prevention.

## HISTORIC RESOURCES



This section examines important features of Uptown that help define an appropriate development program, including the its historic resources, the quality of the public environment, land use patterns, building occupancy, building condition, and circulation and parking. This analysis concentrates on the primary commercial district along First Street, between A Avenue and 3rd Avenue. This section of analysis serves as the basis for a program of policies and actions to improve and expand Uptown Mount Vernon.

### HISTORIC RESOURCES

The historic character of Uptown is woven into the traditional fabric of the city. Cornell College and Uptown Mount Vernon share a promontory ridge in the city that elevates these historic structures to a physical as well as symbolic importance. Three historic districts have been established within a few blocks of Uptown, dominated by the Cornell College district.

Cornell College is the nation's only campus to be listed in its entirety on the National Register of Historic Places. Officially listed in 1980, the college district begins on the west edge of Uptown, incorporating two limestone churches, and extends west to the historic Lincoln Highway bridge across the railroad near Prairie Park. First Street is the backbone of the college and Uptown historic districts, and includes a sequence of churches, homes and educational buildings from the 1840s through the 1940s. These structures represent many of the popular building styles that characterized the upper midwest for more than a century. Many fine brick homes and college buildings constructed before 1870 were made from local clay and sand from the Red Cedar River and were baked on the construction site. A large number of these buildings remain in use, and convey the the charm of a classic 19th century small town.

Uptown Mount Vernon shares these features and represents a critical east anchor to this historical sequence, with an historical context that grows from the character of the community. Uptown shares an intimate pedestrian scale with

## HISTORIC RESOURCES

adjacent historical residential districts.

Table 5-1 rates the historic significance of buildings in Uptown Mount Vernon on a block-by-block basis. The Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District is a subset of this Uptown area, and comprises nine lots in a two block area in the geographic center of the community. Overall, about 57% of all structures in Uptown are considered to be of architectural or historic significance. Another 19% of all buildings in Uptown are contributory to the historic nature of the district. The architectural cohesiveness of the facades, scale and materials of Uptown's buildings along First Street is particularly important.

**TABLE 5-1: Historical Significance of Buildings by Block  
Uptown Mount Vernon, 1994.**

Block	Location	Total Structures	Significance Rating				
			1	2	3	4	5
1	1st Street-2nd Street N.; N. 3rd Avenue-N. 2nd Avenue	5	0	1	0	0	4
2	1st Street-2nd Street N.; N. 2nd Avenue-N. 1st Avenue	13	2	5	4	2	0
3	1st Street-2nd Street N.; N. 1st Avenue-N. "A" Avenue	5	2	0	0	1	2
4	1st Street-2nd Street S.; S. 3rd Avenue-S. 2nd Avenue	4	1	2	0	0	1
5	1st Street-2nd Street S.; S. 2nd Avenue-S. 1st Avenue	11	2	5	4	0	0
6	1st Street-2nd Street S.; S. 1st Avenue-S. "A" Avenue	4	3	1	0	0	0
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>42</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>

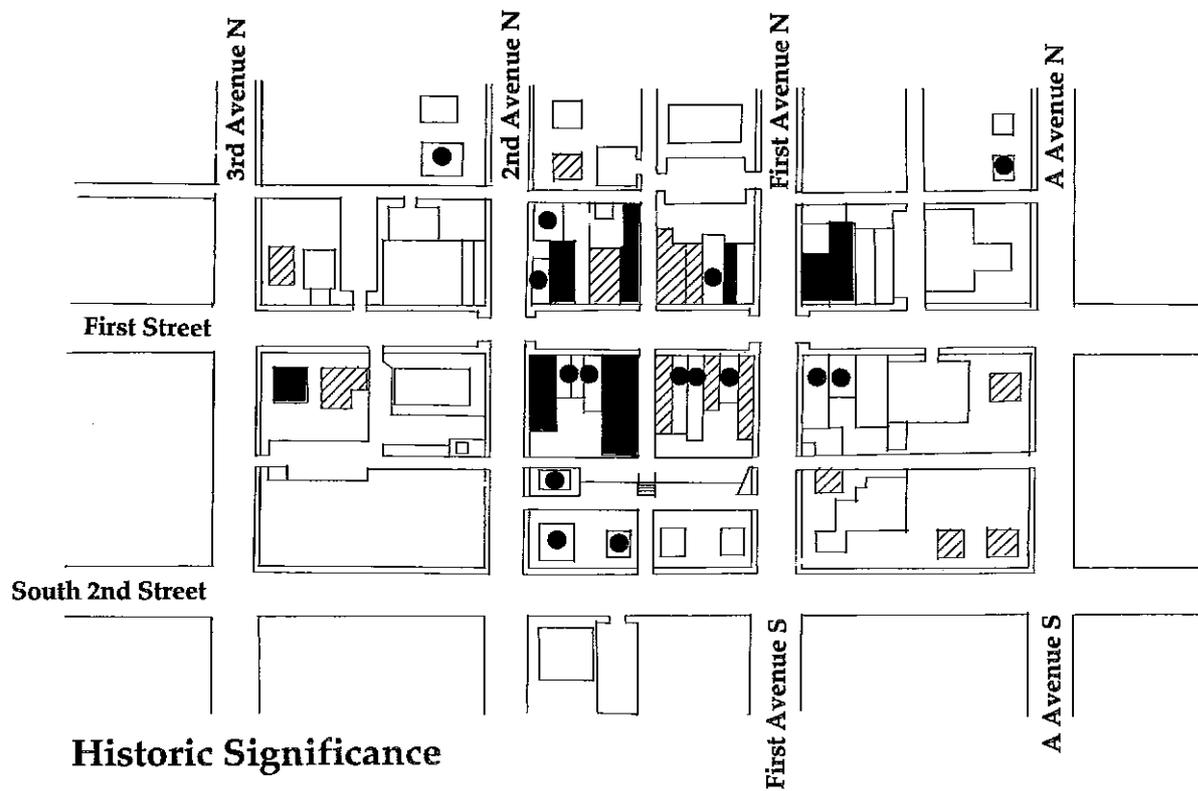
**Rating System:**

- 1: Extremely Significant, worthy of individual National Register listing. \*
- 2: Strong significance.
- 3: Medium significance, a contributing part of the historic district.
- 4: Minor historic significance or a background building.
- 5: No significance or a new building.

Source: RDG Martin Shukert, Inc., 1994.

\* The Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993, and contains 27 buildings. The historic district is comprised of the largest parts of blocks 2 and 5, and one corner structure each on blocks 3 and 6.

# HISTORIC RESOURCES



## Historic Significance

-  Major Significance: National Register Eligible
-  Moderate Significance
-  Contributing Significance
-  Less Significant



## URBAN DESIGN



### URBAN DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC ENVIRONMENT

The visual quality of Uptown Mount Vernon is not measured in its buildings alone, but in the harmony of scale between the structures and the streetscape between the buildings.

The design quality of the district is related to many factors, including the:

- *Proportional relationships between the sidewalks and building facades setbacks.* Most buildings in Uptown are built on the property line. The typical separation of 70 feet between building fronts creates an extremely intimate, human scale.
- *Street trees.* Trees have been planted at regular intervals along the district's ten-foot wide sidewalks. This dense planting pattern adds to the intimacy and green character of the district.
- *Pedestrian-scaled curb to curb dimensions of 1st Street.* First Street provides a clear driving channel of about 28-feet, flanked on either side by diagonal parking. This relatively narrow width allows easy crossing of the main street. This is reinforced by its relatively slow-moving, local traffic.
- *Architectural quality of 1st Street buildings.* Buildings in the district exhibit a high degree of architectural quality and cohesion. Many structures have highly ornamented brick facade construction and attractive Romanesque features. In addition, the scale of buildings has a proportional harmony with the width of the street. New buildings, including the Mount Vernon Bank and the City Hall, have maintained this architectural quality through tasteful applications of traditional styles.

In spite of the overall strength of Uptown's urban environment, the district also has several significant weaknesses. These include:

- *Unattractive rear facades.* While the front facades of buildings have an extremely high design quality, rear facades are

## URBAN DESIGN • LAND AND BUILDING USE

generally simple. Because of Uptown's ridgeline location, the rear facades have extremely high visibility.

- *Poor maintenance of rear yards.* Rear yards along alleys are often unpaved or poorly maintained. They provide extremely utilitarian service access to buildings, a significant problem because of their visibility.

- *Inaccessible parking.* Public parking lots which augment 1st Street's on-street diagonal parking, are located north and south of the parallel alleys. While these locations look convenient on a two-dimensional map, users must climb a steep hill to reach 1st Street storefronts.

- *1st Avenue barrier.* While 1st Street is an easy street for shoppers to cross, Highway 1 is a more significant barrier, dividing the east and west parts of the district.

### LAND AND BUILDING USE

The retail and services core of Uptown Mount Vernon forms a linear business district along First Street between A Avenue and 2nd Avenue. The new Mount Vernon Bank facility and civic uses, including City Hall and the First Presbyterian and United Methodist churches anchor the western edge of the district. The Post Office is located one block south of the retail core at the southeast corner of South 2nd Street and South 2nd Avenue.

The south side of 1st Street east of the highway intersection accommodates service-oriented uses. The services core also extends one block either side of Uptown along 1st Avenue. On the northeast, First Street contains service and retail uses, including True Value Hardware. Mount Vernon Middle School is located on the north side First Street at the eastern edge of the town center.

Second floors include service and residential uses. However, about 40% of the upper level floor area is vacant or used for storage. These second floor vacancies, as well as lower level, walk-out basement spaces represent significant opportunities for adaptive reuse.

## BUILDING USE

### ■ Building Use

Uptown's size, its mix of uses and its successful operating characteristics help determine its character. Table 5-2 summarizes building occupancy in Uptown Mount Vernon. Uptown includes just under 185,000 square feet of building area, of which 129,416 is first floor space. This total building area corresponds to the floor area of a small community shopping center. The overall Uptown vacancy rate is about 13%, although vacant second floor spaces represent nearly all of that total. The first floor vacancy rate is 1.9%, providing virtually no available space to accommodate new services or businesses. This rate is well below the usual 7 to 9% level that would be considered necessary to provide for turnover and choice for tenants.

Vacant second floor spaces represent a largely unused resource for Mount Vernon, with more than 21,600 square feet of building space with the potential to meet the city's

**TABLE 5-2: Building Occupancy (square feet),  
Uptown Mt. Vernon, 1994**

Building Use	First Floor		Upper Floors		Total	
	Area	%	Area	%	Area	%
Retail	42,193	32.60			42,193	22.88
Office	9,460	7.31			9,460	5.13
Services	37,808	29.21	4,512	8.20	42,315	22.95
Auto Sales/Serv	3,990	3.08			3,990	2.16
Entertainment	16,103	12.44			16,103	8.73
Civic	15,682	12.12			15,682	8.50
Residential (MF)	1,750	1.35	28,838	52.44	30,583	16.59
Industrial/ Whlse						
Vacant or Storage	2,430	1.88	21,645	39.36	24,075	13.06
<b>Total</b>	<b>129,416</b>	<b>100.01</b>	<b>54,995</b>	<b>99.99</b>	<b>184,401</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: RDG Martin Shukert, 1994.

## BUILDING USE



■ **Block One.** This block, at Uptown's west edge, includes City Hall and the fire station and transitions into civic and residential uses.



■ **Block Two.** This major core commercial block is part of the Commercial Historic District and includes a variety of service and retail uses.



■ **Block Three.** This block is located east of Highway 1, and contains entertainment, convenience service and retail uses.



■ **Block Four.** This block at Uptown's southwest edge is anchored by the Mount Vernon Bank, but transitions to residential uses.

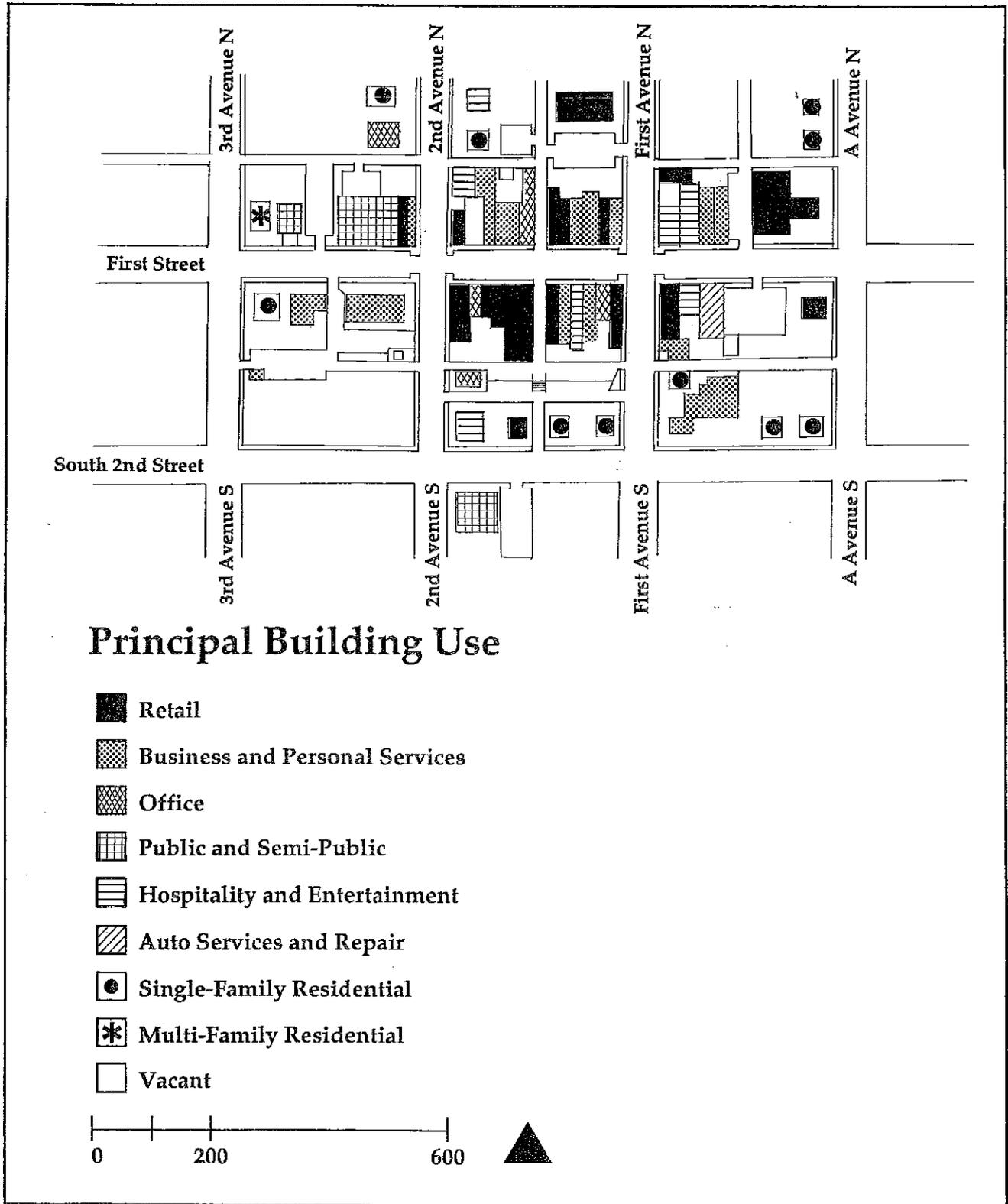


■ **Block Five.** This block contains the city's greatest concentration of retail uses, and contains Ben Franklin and Bauman's clothing store.



■ **Block Six.** This block east of Highway 1 contains retail and service establishments.

# BUILDING USE



## BUILDING USE • BUILDING CONDITION

services or housing needs. Beyond this, substantial underutilized space exists in the lower, walk-out levels of Uptown's buildings. Walk-out basements behind commercial buildings can provide additional business spaces in existing structures. For this effort to succeed, improvements to the public environment are needed to upgrade appearance, visibility and accessibility.

Service and retail uses are approximately equal in Uptown, together accounting for about 46% of total floor area. In common with many small, traditional downtowns, some of Mount Vernon's retail spaces have been converted to service and office uses. Retail uses represent nearly one-third of all street level uses. Residential uses represent almost 17% of all building space, followed by entertainment and civic uses, which comprise 8.7% and 8.5% of all land uses, respectively. In contrast with most small communities, the proportion of automobile-related service uses is very small, at only 2% of all land uses in Uptown.

### BUILDING CONDITION

Table 5-3 displays the basic soundness of the Uptown's building stock. Almost 93% of all structures are rated in "good" to "excellent" condition, corresponding to at most minor rehabilitation needs.

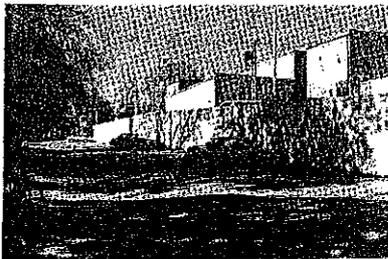
Only three buildings in the entire district demonstrate significant rehabilitation needs, and are rated in "fair" condition. All three of these buildings are located in the core retail area, and within the boundary limits of the Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District. Two of them are situated at Uptown's crossroads intersection and are highly visible structures. While the city can take pride in the excellent overall condition of buildings, rehabilitation of these key buildings must be undertaken to preserve the quality and integrity of the Uptown district.

## BUILDING CONDITION • CIRCULATION AND PARKING

**TABLE 5-3: Building Condition in Uptown Mount Vernon, 1994.**

Block	Location	Significance Rating				
		Total	Exc	Good	Fair	Poor
1	1st Street-2nd Street N.; N. 3rd Avenue-N. 2nd Avenue	5	3	2	0	0
2	1st Street-2nd Street N.; N. 2nd Avenue-N. 1st Avenue	13	7	4	2	0
3	1st Street-2nd Street N.; N. 1st Avenue-N. "A" Avenue	5	1	4	0	0
4	1st Street-2nd Street S.; S. 3rd Avenue-S. 2nd Avenue	4	2	2	0	0
5	1st Street-2nd Street S.; S. 2nd Avenue-S. 1st Avenue	11	5	5	1	0
6	1st Street-2nd Street S.; S. 1st Avenue-S. "A" Avenue	4	3	1	0	0
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>42</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>

Source: RDG Martin Shukert, Inc., 1994.



### CIRCULATION AND PARKING

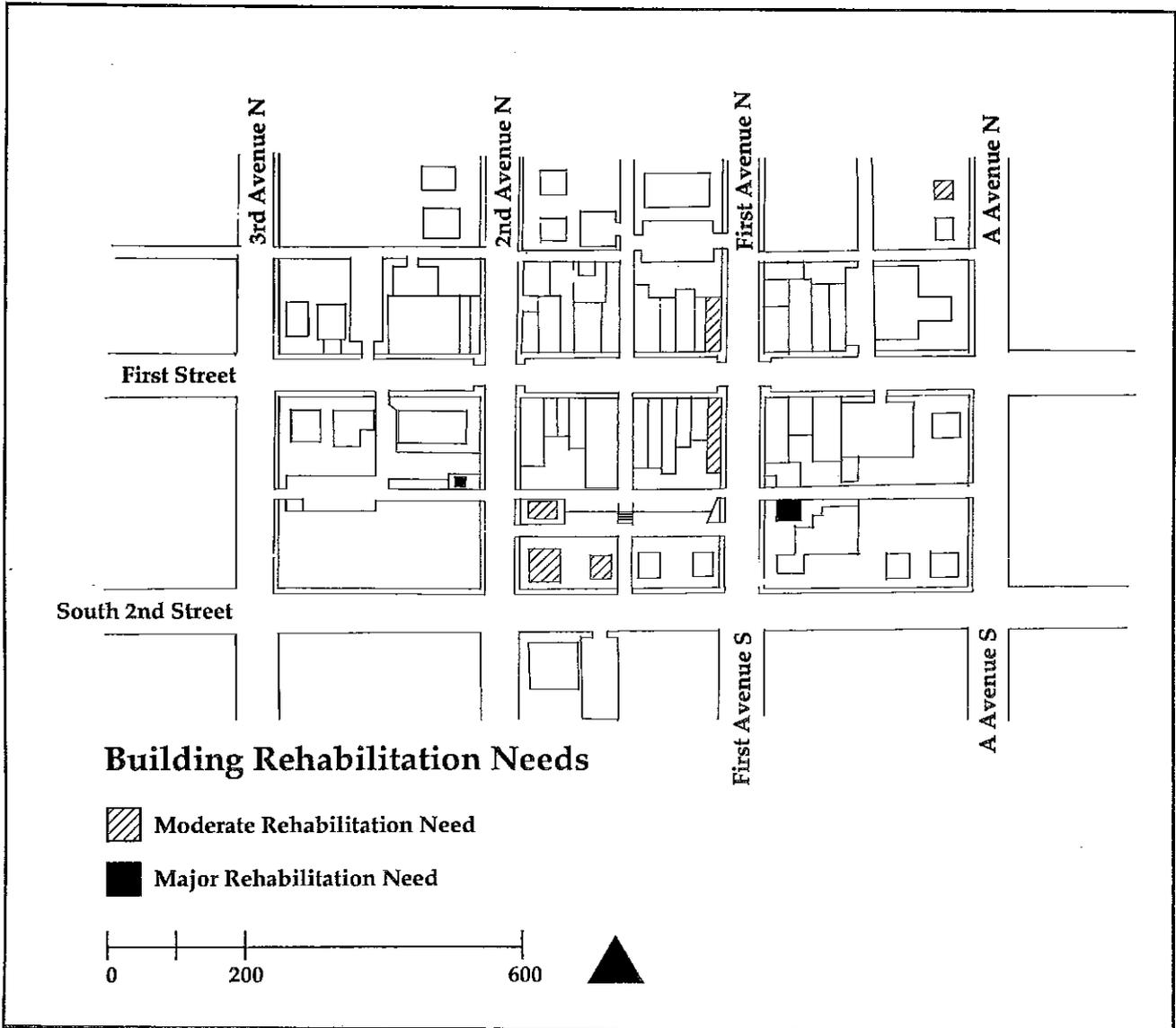
The ability of Uptown to accommodate the circulation of vehicles and pedestrians is important to businesses and residents alike. A successful Uptown must balance the needs of vehicular and pedestrian traffic and must accommodate the automobile without becoming dominated by it.

#### • *Traffic Flow and Circulation*

Uptown Mount Vernon exhibits good local traffic flow through the city's traditional street grid. Its major cross streets include northwest-southeast First Street, the principal community arterial, and southwest-northeast First Avenue. Other local streets descend steeply from Uptown into quiet, tree-lined residential areas.

Major regional access to Uptown is provided along First Avenue (Highway 1), which connects Uptown to US Highway 30 less than one mile to the south. Highway 1 itself is a major regional route that intersects with Interstate 80 near Iowa City. US Highway 30 provides connections to Cedar Rapids and Interstate 380, less than twenty miles to the west. Development of the proposed US Highway 30 bypass south of

# BUILDING CONDITION



## CIRCULATION AND PARKING

Mount Vernon is planned during the next decade. This improvement should have little effect on access to the city and Uptown Mount Vernon, since the new road will provide a major intersection with Highway 1, emphasizing the most direct route to the city center.

### • *Parking*

Parking in Uptown Mount Vernon is provided on public streets and in public and private, off-street lots. Uptown Mount Vernon supplies 197 off-street parking stalls and 208 on-street stalls. Off-street lots are well-located and distributed around the perimeter of Uptown. Table 5-4 presents an inventory of off-street parking facilities in Uptown.

Further analysis reveals whether Mount Vernon's existing supply of Uptown parking is adequate to support the needs of businesses and customers. Table 5-5 calculates the overall parking needs in Uptown, based on typical standards for parking demand by category of land use type. These standards have been adjusted to meet local conditions in Mount Vernon, and calculations rely upon parking requirements slightly below those applicable to more auto-oriented commercial settings, logical because pedestrians make up a significant number of local trips into the town center. Calculations also include a mixed use adjustment, since certain activities use parking spaces at different times during the day and a single parking stall can get multiple uses in the course of a day. For example, office buildings will generate a peak demand for parking during working hours on Monday through Friday, entertainment uses may be busiest during the evenings, and retail stores may have the most customers on Saturday afternoon.

A second calculation projects the additional development in Uptown of 80,000 square feet of retail, office and service business development, and residential uses. These uses may occupy some of the 24,075 square feet of vacant space identified in the building occupancy analysis, or may expand to occupy underutilized lower level spaces at the rear elevation of Uptown buildings. The calculation suggests that existing Uptown parking resources can accommodate the occupancy of 22,000 square feet of presently vacant upper story spaces

## CIRCULATION AND PARKING

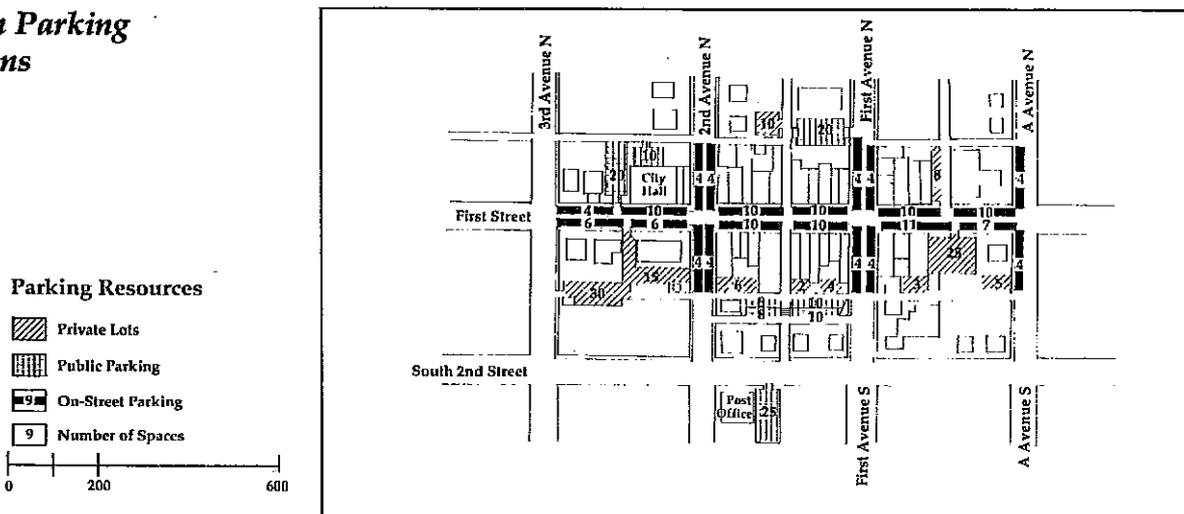
and the additional occupancy of 58,000 square feet of lower level space. Additional development of lower level spaces can increase profitability and utilization of Uptown commercial properties without straining Uptown's parking resources. This analysis suggests that Uptown does not have a numerical parking shortage. However, peripheral public parking is not used by some shoppers because of poor connections to 1st Street storefronts. Improved utilization of rear facades can decrease this perception of distance.

**TABLE 5-4: Parking in Resources in Uptown Mount Vernon, 1994.**

Block	Location	Number of Spaces		
		On-Street	Off-Street	Total
1	1st Street-2nd Street N.; N. 3rd Avenue-N. 2nd Avenue	30	30	60
2	1st Street-2nd Street N.; N. 2nd Avenue-N. 1st Avenue	36	30	66
3	1st Street-2nd Street N.; N. 1st Avenue-N. "A" Avenue	36	11	47
4	1st Street-2nd Street S.; S. 3rd Avenue-S. 2nd Avenue	28	45	73
5	1st Street-2nd Street S.; S. 2nd Avenue-S. 1st Avenue	36	48	84
6	1st Street-2nd Street S.; S. 1st Avenue-S. "A" Avenue	34	33	67
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>208</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>405</b>

Source: RDG Martin Shukert, Inc., 1994.

### *Uptown Parking Locations*



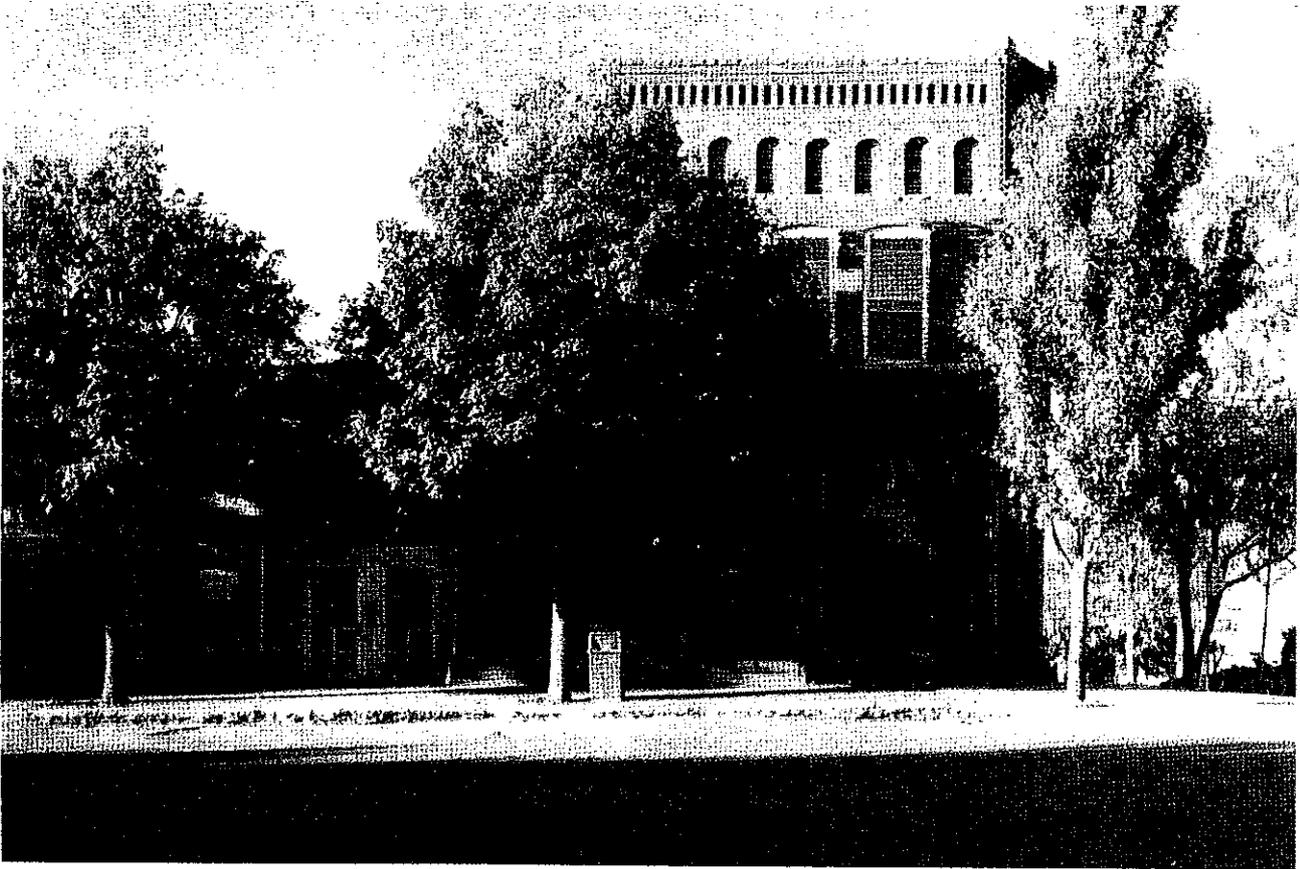
# CIRCULATION AND PARKING

**TABLE 5-5: Projected Parking Demand  
Uptown Mount Vernon, 1994**

Use	Stalls/ 1000 sq. ft.	Area	Required Parking
Retail	2.5	42,193	106
Office	2	9,460	19
Civic	2	15,682	32
Services	2	42,320	85
Entertainment	5	16,103	81
Residential	1 (exc single-family)	28,838	29
<b>Existing Total</b>		<b>154,596</b>	<b>352</b>
<i>Surplus Supply</i>			53
<b>Mixed Use Factors</b>			
Retail	25% reduction		(27)
Offices and Civic	25% reduction		(13)
Entertainment	50% reduction		(41)
Services	25% reduction		(21)
<b>Modified Existing Need</b>			<b>250</b>
<i>Modified Surplus</i>			155
<b>Potential Growth with Mixed Use Factor</b>			
Retail	2.5	10,000	25
Office and Services	2	60,000	120
Residential	1	10,000	10
<b>Total Potential Need</b>			<b>0</b>

Source: RDG Martin Shukert, Inc., 1994.

## UPTOWN DEVELOPMENT PLAN



## UPTOWN DEVELOPMENT PLAN

*Uptown's development strategy is based on making best use of the district's land and building resources, and enhancing and extending its magical small town environment.*

**T**his section presents a development strategy designed to help Uptown Mount Vernon maintain and expand its role as a vital business center and unique community feature. The program is designed to provide realistic steps to preserve Uptown's special quality and business vitality, accommodate new business, and enhance the area's quality pedestrian and public environments. These improvements are based on the district's distinctive character and its context as the traditional crossroads of the city. A comprehensive program to strengthen Uptown includes the following key elements:

- Continued development of Uptown as a mixed use district, combining retail, service, office, civic, and residential uses.
- Providing additional opportunities for business development by maximizing use of buildings through conversion of lower level, walk-out basements of existing structures.
- Improving Uptown's high quality public environment and extending it into secondary blocks on either side of the district's principal blocks and to the backyards and alleys flanking 1st Street.
- Establishing a management system to coordinate and implement the Uptown improvement program and to provide a unified marketing and promotional effort.
- Rehabilitating highly visible buildings at the Uptown intersection of First Street and First Avenue (Highway 1), together with pedestrian and streetscape improvements. The components of this program include:

- DISTRICT MANAGEMENT
- WALKOUT STOREFRONTS
- BACKYARD PLAZAS
- MIDBLOCK GREENWAY
- PARKING TO NORTH AND SOUTH
- GREEN STREET
- INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS
- THEMATIC LIGHTING
- ADAPTIVE REUSE AND PRESERVATION

## DISTRICT MANAGEMENT

UPTOWN SHOULD FORM AN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE TO MANAGE AND PROMOTE THE COMMERCIAL DISTRICT.

Single-owner shopping centers maintain unified management to promote businesses and the overall facility. Similarly, a vital district like Uptown similarly needs unified management to develop cooperative promotional programs and manage the overall development process. To meet this need, the city and the business community should create an Uptown Partnership. The corporation's agenda would include the preparation and distribution of promotional materials, the development of programs, the management of improvement projects, and the recruitment of businesses into Uptown. The partnership may function as part of the Chamber of Commerce, or as an independent organization. However, it should have staff directly responsible for its operation.

The Uptown Partnership will have both programmatic and capital responsibilities. It should organize and administer a development foundation, able to pool the resources of private contributors to make strategic investments in Uptown. The foundation should be established as a 501(c)3 organization, making contributions tax deductible. Investments may also be made on an equity, partnership, or loan basis. Examples of important investments may include rehabilitation of important Uptown properties, developing financing packages to maintain key retailers in Uptown, and acting as a general partner for significant development projects.

However, the most important part of the organization's efforts will be marketing and promotional events. Some directions for the partnership include:

- *Program of Activities and Events*

Community festivals, such as the Porches of Mount Vernon festival, demonstrate the power that events can have in attracting people to town centers. A full program of events can enhance Uptown's role as a special attraction, producing an increased civic and marketing presence that gives people reasons to return to and enjoy the district.

The Uptown Partnership should schedule an ongoing series of events, designed to identify the district as a center for activity, a place where families can come for a good time.

Events should be staged on a regular basis and can include concerts and plays, flea markets, antique and arts and crafts shows, historic building tours, and family athletic events such as walks, runs, and bicycle rides. Events should utilize local talent and resources to the greatest degree possible.

The city already provides seasonal events, such as special Christmas lighting. Expansion of these events can attract shoppers from the larger region during the most important retail seasons of the year.

The Visitors' Center and gazebo at Memorial Park can also act as a base for successful events that direct visitors to Uptown businesses.

- *Marketing and Management Programs*

The partnership should organize and manage a cooperative marketing and promotional campaign. Shopping malls successfully provide unified management of marketing and maintenance. Yet, town centers, with their multiple ownerships and individual small businesses, rarely use this highly successful technique. A district working cooperatively can succeed in ways that individual businesses working alone cannot. A marketing program should be directed toward residents of Mount Vernon and surrounding communities.

- *Service Standards and Store Hours*

Personal, individualized service can distinguish Uptown Mount Vernon from larger competitors. The partnership should work to develop a mission statement and uniform standards of service to be posted in each Uptown business and presented to employees. The mission statement should emphasize the dedication of businesses in the area to providing a superior level of customer service. It should be attractively produced and posted prominently in each Uptown business. The district's businesses should further back up the statement with unified service policies to be implemented by business owners and employees. These policies should deal with such issues as customer service and reservation of the most convenient parking in the area for consumers.

The partnership should also work to promote convenient, customer-oriented shopping hours, including one open night weekly and longer closing and weekend hours. The district should attempt to make business hours as uniform as possible.

- *Business Recruitment*

The Uptown Partnership and the city should create an active business recruitment and capitalization program, designed to encourage the location of targeted businesses in Uptown. The program should consist of:

- Identification of business targets.
- Contacts with potential businesses or businesspeople.
- Matching of business needs to specific buildings or sites.
- Development of an assistance program, if necessary, to encourage business location.

New business opportunities should emerge in Uptown buildings, and street and sidewalk improvements should integrate new service and office uses into the existing Uptown business environment.

## WALKOUT STOREFRONTS

UPTOWN SHOULD INCREASE SPACE FOR NEW BUSINESSES BY OPENING THE LOWER, WALK-OUT LEVELS OF ITS COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS.

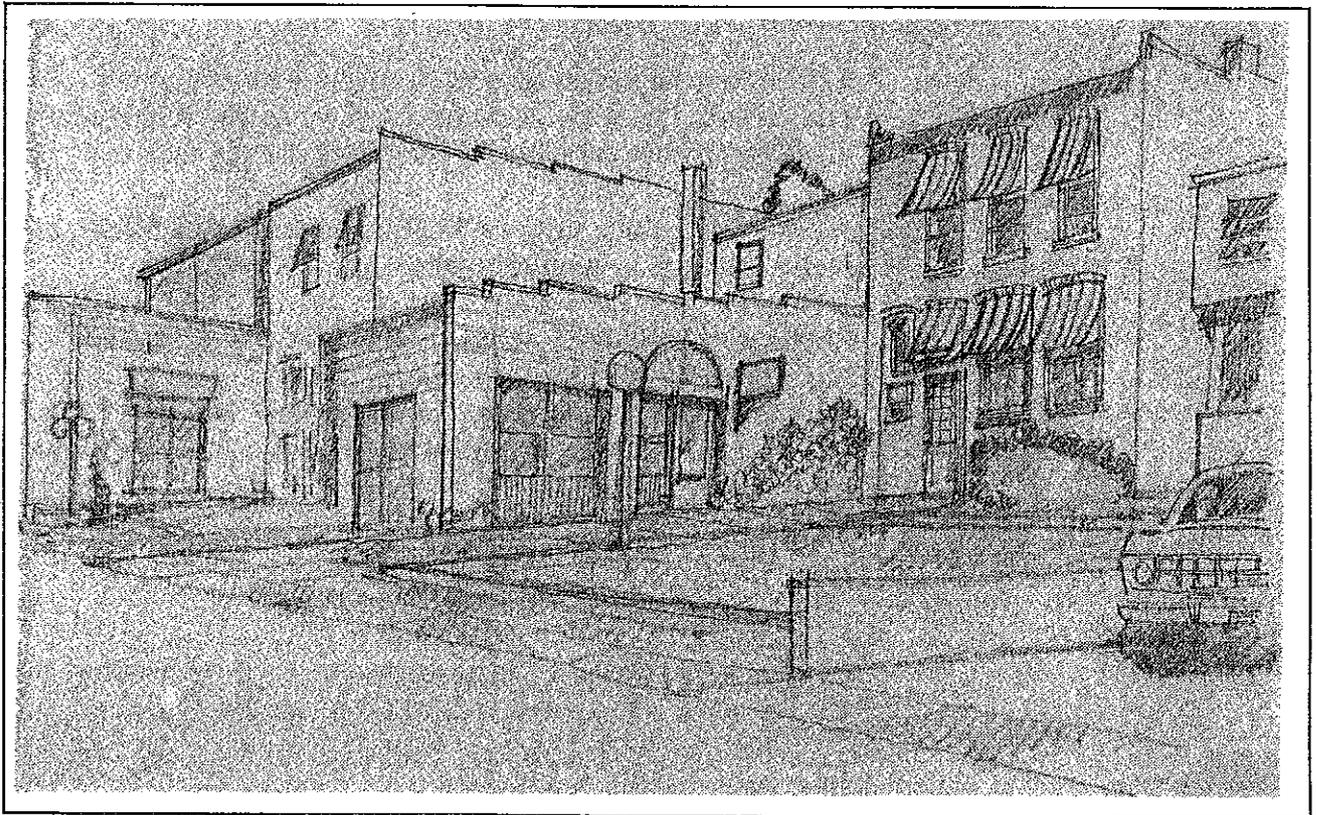
Uptown has an extremely low vacancy rate in its prime, main street storefronts. However, topographic and neighborhood constraints make horizontal expansion virtually impossible. Without additional space, Uptown cannot provide opportunities for new businesses; as a result, the district loses the ability to grow in diversity and vitality.

However, the sharp downgrade from 1st Street's ridge line provides an opportunity for building area expansion. New business and office development using lower level, walk-out basements of buildings in the retail core can affordably expand business spaces in existing structures. Increasing

## UPTOWN PLAN

## WALKOUT STOREFRONTS

*Walkout Storefronts and Backyard Plazas. Uptown's topography can be used to create new opportunities for commercial and open space expansion on the lower levels of First Street buildings.*



rentable space also improves the cash flow of Uptown buildings and provides incentives for needed upgrades of rear building facades. Ultimately, this program can create buildings with two main facades, improving the appearance of Uptown buildings from the major north and south approaches.

### **BACKYARD PLAZAS AND WALKWAYS**

REAR YARD AREAS SHOULD BE DEVELOPED INTO PLAZAS WITH CONNECTING WALKWAYS, LINKING REAR FACADES WITH 1ST STREET STORES.

A coordinated effort to open walkout storefronts requires supporting improvements and outdoor amenities. These improvements include:

- Backyard plazas developed from unused rear yards. These plazas provide areas for outdoor eating and landscaping, as well as access to new potential storefronts.
- Walkways along alleys which connect to north-south sidewalks and a proposed mid-block greenway.

Plazas and walkways should use uniform ornamental paving, lighting, and graphic themes. These improvements to the public environment can tie the "found" expansion space of lower levels to the established strength of the 1st Street commercial district.

### **MIDBLOCK GREENWAY**

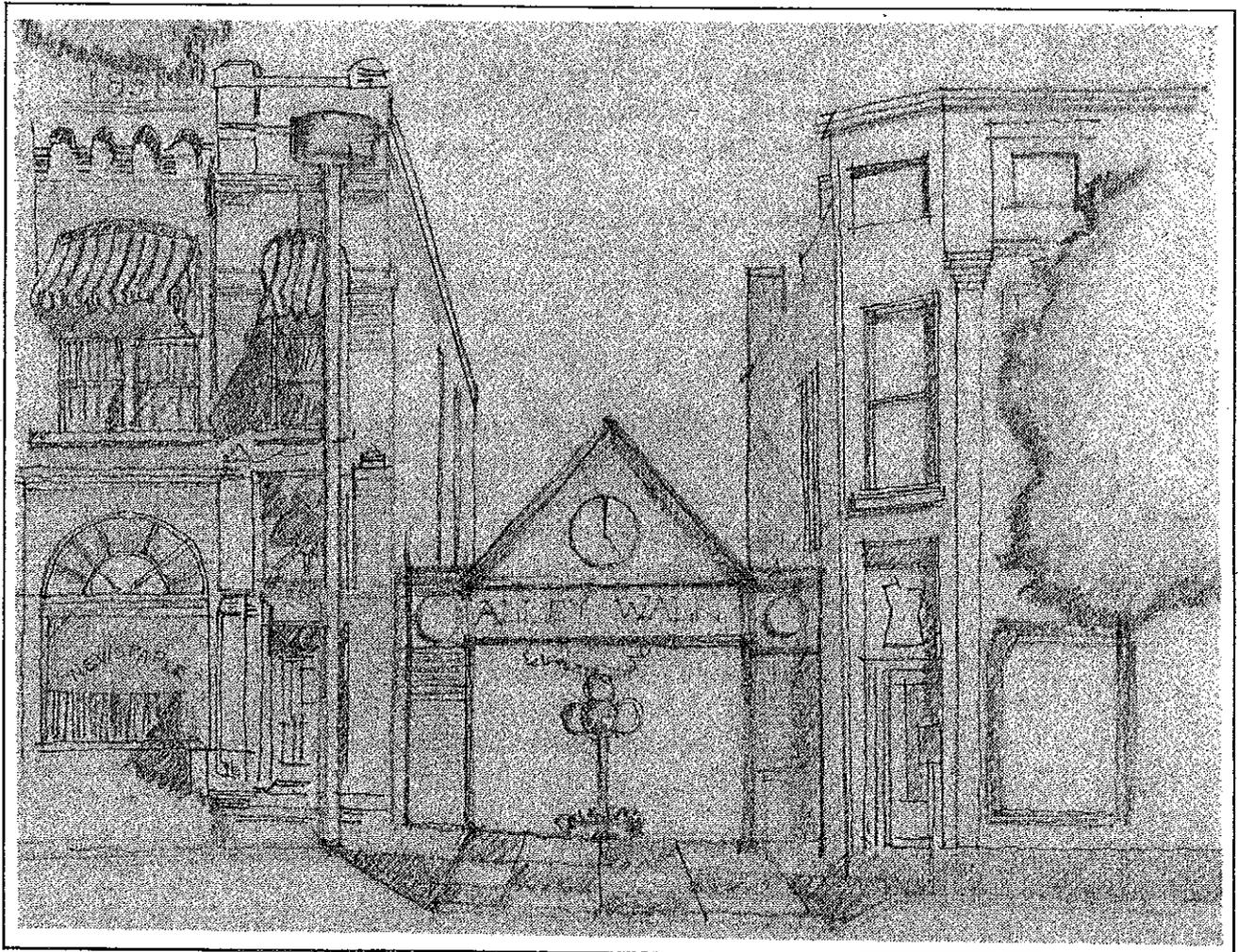
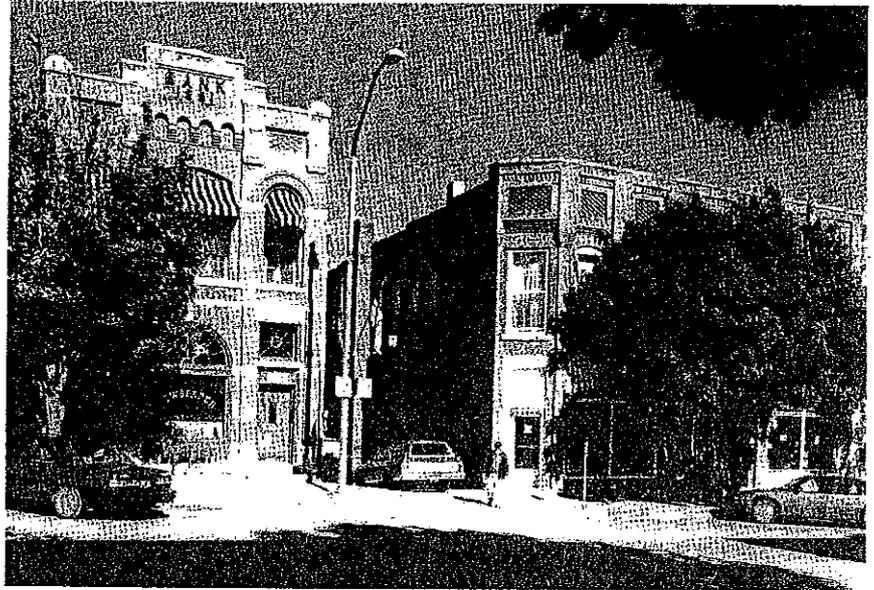
A NORTH-SOUTH ALLEY BETWEEN 1ST AND 2ND AVENUES SHOULD BECOME A GREENWAY THAT CONNECTS PUBLIC PARKING, NEW LOWER LEVEL STOREFRONTS, AND 1ST STREET.

A north-south alley runs between 1st and 2nd Avenues, connecting the two east-west alleys. This alley is narrow and has poor visibility to pedestrians along 1st Street. As a result, it produces safety hazards and is only marginally useful

## UPTOWN PLAN

## MIDBLOCK GREENWAY

*Midblock Greenway. A north-south alley can be redesigned as a greenway, providing pedestrian access to off-street parking areas, and to walkout storefronts and plazas parallel to First Street.*



for service vehicles.

The alley should be converted to a midblock pedestrian greenway, connecting public parking on the north to 1st Street, continuing across the street to public parking south of 1st Street, and leading to South 2nd Street. Alley walkways should interconnect to this mid-block greenway.

The greenway should be designed with ornamental paving and thematic lighting, consistent with other improvements proposed for the town center.

## **PARKING TO NORTH AND SOUTH**

**EXISTING PUBLIC PARKING NORTH AND SOUTH SHOULD BE EXPANDED AND IMPROVED.**

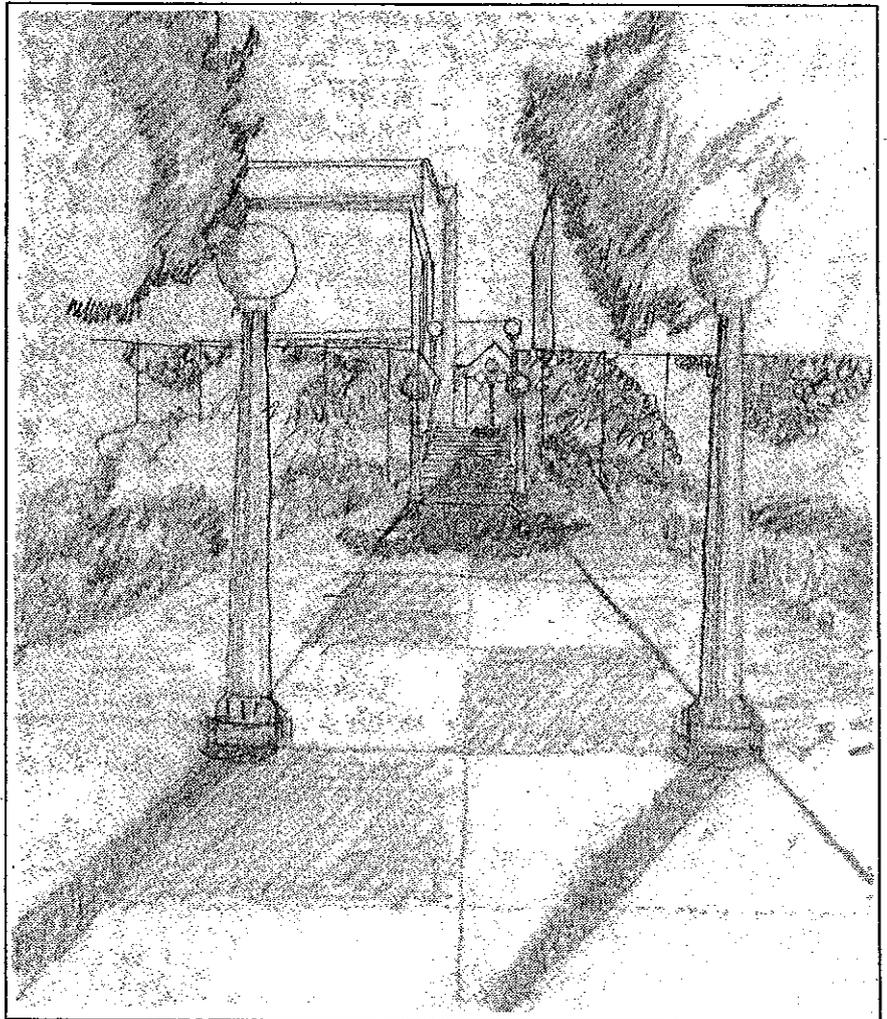
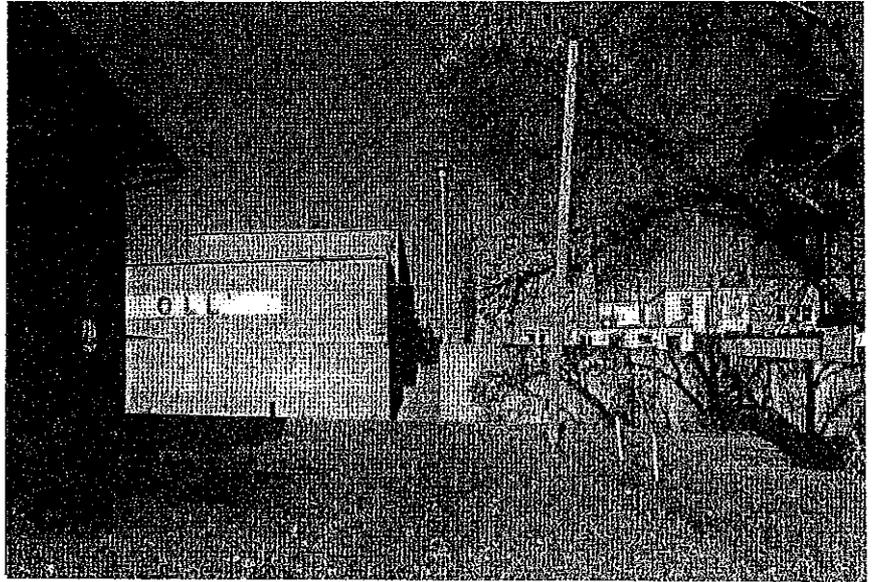
Mount Vernon maintains some public parking north and south of 1st Street. These lots should be improved in the following ways:

- Circulation through the north parking lot should be relocated, permitting development of a double row of parking with a center aisle. Sheds located south of the alley and west of the mid-block alley should be removed and converted to parking. This adds about 20 stalls to the lot.
- A small office building along South 2nd Avenue owned by the Chamber of Commerce can be removed, allowing expansion of the south parking lot to the west, adding approximately ten parking stalls.
- The stairway through the south parking lot should be improved and equipped with thematic lighting. The retaining wall separating the levels of this parking should be planted in ivy, providing a green cover for a highly visible concrete wall. The stairway becomes part of the Mid-block Greenway.

## UPTOWN PLAN

## PARKING TO NORTH AND SOUTH

*Parking to North and South. Redesign of a stairway and continuation of the proposed greenway can connect First Street, Second Street South, and Uptown's largest off-street parking lot.*



## GREEN STREET

SOUTH SECOND STREET SHOULD BE DEVELOPED AS A SOFTER, MORE LANDSCAPED COMMERCIAL STREET, COMPLEMENTING THE MORE URBAN TOWN CENTER.

South 2nd Street is made up of detached businesses, including the movie theater and houses converted for use as antique stores. This street is a more landscaped, quieter complement to 1st Street. It should be landscaped as a "green street" and connected to 1st Street by way of the Mid-block Greenway.

## INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS

CORNER NODES AND INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS SHOULD BE USED TO EASE CROSSING OF MAJOR STREETS AND TO INCREASE THE VISIBILITY OF PEDESTRIANS.

Corner and crossing nodes should be installed to ease crossing at critical points. Amenities of these nodes should include trees, benches, ornamental lighting, and information kiosks. Their design should include a contrasting paving surface, such as brick. In addition to concentrating landscaping and ornamental paving in strategic areas, nodes allow handicapped accessibility in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, decrease the length of street crossings for pedestrians, increase pedestrian safety, and protect parked cars.

Locations for these improvements include:

- 1st Avenue and 1st Street.
- 2nd Avenue and 1st Street.
- Crossings of the Mid-block Greenway at 1st Street and South 2nd Street.

## THEMATIC LIGHTING

UNIFIED ORNAMENTAL LIGHTING SHOULD BE INSTALLED AT KEY LOCATIONS, INCLUDING CORNER NODES, THE MID-BLOCK GREENWAY, AND 1ST STREET.

Lighting upgrades are an important part of an Uptown improvement project for Mount Vernon. Improved lighting in Uptown can provide a special evening atmosphere to the area that makes a major improvement to the public environment.

An Uptown lighting program should combine the needs for adequate light levels and attractive, atmospheric lighting. The city should consider a hybrid lighting system. Area lighting should be provided by modern, sharp cut-off fixtures. These contemporary lamps provide a controlled cone of light, avoiding glare and using lighting power efficiently. Ornamental globe lights should be used at corner nodes, mid-block areas, and in parking and circulation areas serving the proposed new lower level, walk-out business spaces. The glare-free character of cut-off fixtures gives the illusion that street lighting is provided by lower-level ornamental lamps. This device successfully combines good area lighting with attractive atmospheric features.

## ADAPTIVE REUSE AND PRESERVATION

HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND REHABILITATION OF KEY BUILDINGS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO COMPLEMENT OTHER PRIVATE AND PUBLIC INVESTMENT.

This principle should be implemented through three efforts: adaptive reuse, building facade rehabilitation, and a preservation ordinance.

### • *Adaptive Reuse*

The city and local lenders should encourage the improvement of several existing, occupied buildings in the center of Uptown, and develop an ongoing program to finance and

encourage the reuse of underutilized spaces.

The City should encourage the rehabilitation of key buildings at the intersection of First Street and First Avenue (Highway 1). With the participation of the City and lenders, an affordable financing program can be developed to support these efforts. The program could combine private funding with public funds such as CDBG to provide below market interest rate loans for building improvements. All rehabilitation work should be carried out in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation.

For desirable projects, the city should make a range of financial assistance programs available. Some of these include Tax Increment Financing, in which the added tax revenues created by a project are temporarily used to help finance debt service related to the development; Community Development Block Grants, awarded competitively by the Iowa Department of Economic Development; other Federal programs, including the HOME Investment Partnership Program, administered by the State and providing financing for rental rehabilitation and development projects; and historic and low-income housing tax credits.

- *Facade Improvements*

While major adaptive reuse projects are important to Uptown's future, the continued improvement of existing, occupied buildings is extremely important. The community should develop a facade improvement program, providing readily available and affordable financing for facade and code improvements in buildings. The program, with the participation of financial institutions, can combine private funding with public funds to provide below market interest rate loans for building improvements.

- *Preservation Ordinance*

The city should implement a program of Historic Designation and Design review. The existing Certified Local Government status provides a foundation and mechanism for development of such an initiative, which should be established by a Preservation Ordinance.