



FOX LAKE

DOWNTOWN PLAN

| NOVEMBER 2025

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**THE
LAKOTA
GROUP.**

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About The Plan

Introduction

Downtown Fox Lake is the heart of the Village, a place where community life has long been centered, memories have been made, and future opportunities are taking shape. It serves as a center of civic life, local business, cultural identity, community spirit, and the historic foundation of the Village's early development. With its unique lakeside setting and small-town character, downtown holds tremendous potential to become a more vibrant, accessible, and economically resilient destination for residents and visitors alike. However, like many small downtowns, Fox Lake's core faces challenges with aging infrastructure, fragmented land use, limited public spaces, and underutilized or vacant properties that dilute the overall experience.

As the Village of Fox Lake embarked on the development of its new Comprehensive Plan "Fox Lake Community Reflections," it became clear that downtown required a deeper level of attention and detail than a typical comprehensive plan would provide. While the Comprehensive Plan offers a broad umbrella framework, tying together various planning topics through future strategies, the Fox Lake Downtown Plan will dive deeper into the Village's core. Given downtown's critical role in shaping Fox Lake's identity, economy, and quality of life, this Plan offers a more focused vision supported by tangible improvements, based on market realities and a strong leadership driven vision. The overall vision and goals of this Plan will be incorporated into the final Comprehensive Plan.

The Downtown Plan provides a bold yet practical roadmap for revitalizing the core district over the next decade. It identifies strategic priorities, physical improvements, and key actions that will guide Village leadership to set up Fox Lake on the path to success, reestablishing downtown as a vital center of community life. The Plan places particular emphasis on strengthening connections between downtown and the lakefront, diversifying the business mix, improving the public realm, and enhancing the overall sense of place.

As part of this process, the Downtown Plan also includes a series of development scenarios focused on opportunity sites that are especially critical to the future of downtown. Such strategic sites include gateway locations, properties that can strengthen connections to the lakefront, parcels adjacent to key open spaces, and underutilized or vacant properties. In addition, sites with the potential to introduce new uses that increase activity, attract businesses, and boost overall foot traffic are key considerations for downtown revitalization. By illustrating susceptibility to change and proposing potential redevelopment concepts, these scenarios provide a vision for how strategic investments in key sites can catalyze broader transformation throughout the downtown area. Each scenario is designed to reflect the highest and best use for its location, balancing private investment potential with the public benefits of a stronger, more cohesive downtown.



What is a Downtown Plan?

A Downtown Plan is a strategic document that outlines a community's long-term vision for its central business district. It identifies opportunities for growth, investment, placemaking, and redevelopment, and provides detailed guidance on how to strengthen downtown's role as the heart of the community. While every Downtown Plan is unique to its local context, most share a common goal, focused on creating a vibrant, walkable, and economically strong center that reflects the identity and aspirations of the broader community.

A Downtown Plan typically addresses several key elements, including land use, urban design, transportation and mobility, public spaces, economic development, housing, and branding or identity. It also considers factors such as evolving market trends that may impact future development.

Importantly, a Downtown Plan is not just a static vision — it is a practical, action-oriented tool. It sets clear goals, strategies, and implementation steps that public agencies, private investors, and community partners can use to guide future projects and investments. Through coordinated efforts, a Downtown Plan helps communities strengthen their economic base, attract new businesses and residents, and create memorable places that foster pride, connection, and opportunity.

Desired Outcomes & Guiding Principles

The revitalization of Downtown Fox Lake is guided by a series of desired outcomes that articulate the community's goals for the future and define the vision for how downtown can evolve into a more vibrant, accessible, and resilient center of civic life. Each desired outcome is paired with a guiding principle, offering a straightforward statement to help decision-makers and community members stay focused as implementation moves forward. Together, they establish a foundation for action, ensuring that every step taken aligns with the community's aspirations for downtown.

1. CREATE A REALISTIC AND ACTIONABLE 10-YEAR INVESTMENT ROADMAP

To achieve meaningful change, downtown revitalization must be anchored by a clear, phased investment strategy. Fox Lake needs a long-term plan that sequences improvements in an achievable way, balancing vision with practical steps that match available resources and Village capacity. This roadmap will guide partnerships, policy decisions, and potential funding strategies, ensuring that progress is continuous and visible.

Guiding Principle #1: *Develop a phased, achievable plan that guides investment decisions and supports continuous growth and progress downtown.*

2. ALIGN FUTURE PLANNING WITH COMMUNITY NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

Downtown must serve the current needs of Fox Lake's residents and businesses, reflecting both current gaps and emerging trends. The success of revitalization efforts will depend on understanding and responding to local priorities, such as walkability, dining and entertainment options, public gathering spaces, and family-friendly activities, and ensuring planning remains community-driven over time.

Guiding Principle #2: *Ensure initiatives are driven by the real needs, values, and goals of the Fox Lake community*

3. SET A BOLD VISION FOR DOWNTOWN TRANSFORMATION

Downtown Fox Lake must aim high. A clearly defined, ambitious vision will rally residents, attract investment and quality development, and guide coordinated action toward a stronger, more vibrant downtown that serves the entire community and draws new opportunities to the Village.

Guiding Principle #3: *Define a clear, ambitious vision that inspires action, investment, and community support for downtown revitalization.*

4. STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS BETWEEN DOWNTOWN AND THE LAKEFRONT

Separated by US Route 12, downtown and the lakefront must be better connected to function as a unified environment. Improving physical and visual access across US Route 12, enhancing wayfinding, creating a stronger draw, and offering incentives for visitors to move between the waterfront and downtown are essential to strengthening the relationship between the Village's core and its most prominent natural asset.

Guiding Principle #4: *Improve physical and visual connections to the lakefront to better integrate downtown and the water.*



5. DIVERSIFY, SUPPORT, AND STRENGTHEN THE DOWNTOWN BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

A thriving downtown depends on both attracting new destination businesses and supporting the long-term success of local entrepreneurs. Expanding dining, retail, entertainment, and cultural uses will create a more dynamic and resilient downtown economy, offering experiences that serve residents and attract visitors seeking unique, lakeside destinations. At the same time, providing tools such as grants, financing options, marketing support, and downtown events will help stabilize existing businesses, foster entrepreneurship, and encourage continued investment in the downtown core.

Guiding Principle #5: *Encourage a diverse business mix and provide strong support for local businesses to create a resilient and vibrant downtown economy.*

6. BUILD A DISTINCTIVE COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND IDENTITY

Downtown Fox Lake should visibly reflect its lakeside identity, legacy, history, and community spirit. Through urban design, public art, programming, and branding, the downtown can express a strong and authentic identity that creates a sense of place for residents and leaves a lasting impression on visitors.

Guiding Principle #6: *Reinforce Fox Lake's unique history and lakeside identity through enhanced urban design, programming, and experiences in downtown.*

7. REIMAGINE AND IMPROVE THE URBAN FABRIC OF DOWNTOWN

The physical environment of downtown must be strengthened to support walkability, active storefronts, and vibrant public spaces. Improving existing buildings, filling gaps in the streetwall, and enhancing streetscapes will create a more connected and inviting downtown that encourages longer stays and greater economic activity.

Guiding Principle #7: *Reimagine the urban fabric, structures, buildings, streetscapes, and infill development to create a cohesive, walkable downtown.*

8. FOSTER SIGNIFICANT YET RESPONSIBLE GROWTH

Future development should reinforce downtown's walkable character and emphasize the Village's lakeside environment where feasible. Sustainable and responsible growth strategies, including mixed-use and compact development, will guide downtown's growth in a more vibrant and resilient direction.

Guiding Principle #8: *Strive for a compact, walkable, and active downtown through responsible growth, enhancing long-term resilience.*



9. IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

A thriving downtown must enhance daily life for residents and provide a welcoming experience for visitors. Prioritizing safe public spaces, pedestrian access, beautification, and a diversity of amenities will ensure downtown is a center of civic life and community pride.

Guiding Principle #9: *Make downtown a safe, accessible, and welcoming place that supports everyday needs and community pride.*

10. GROW A YEAR-ROUND BASE TO SUSTAIN DOWNTOWN VITALITY

Fox Lake must strengthen its downtown economy to drive more activity, attracting more people year-round. Housing options, indoor attractions, regular events, and off-season activities will help ensure that downtown remains lively and economically stable beyond the summer boating season.

Guiding Principle #10: *Strengthen the downtown economy by expanding housing, activities, and amenities that attract people year-round.*



Supporting Plans

Over the past decade, the Village of Fox Lake has developed several plans that include aspirations for the downtown and lakefront area. While these efforts responded to the community's needs at the time and set important goals that may align with this Plan, many are now considered outdated and were developed under different economic and demographic conditions. In today's rapidly changing environment, there is a clear need for a renewed vision — one that reflects current community needs, addresses persistent gaps, and is grounded in market realities and implementation potential.

Downtown and Lakefront Vision Plan (2011): Outlined strategies for seven key districts focused on streetscapes, mixed-use development, branding, and lakefront access. Community-driven, but few recommendations have been implemented.

Comprehensive Plan and Policies Update (2012): Updated the Village's land use policies, with focus areas including downtown, US Route 12, and the North Gateway. Addressed growth, housing, business retention, and infrastructure expansion.

Fox Lake Station Area Planning Study (2013): Promoted transit-oriented development around the Metra station. Recommended walkability improvements, mixed-use growth, parking, and stronger downtown-lakefront connections.

Current Initiatives

While this Downtown Plan presents a long-term vision, it is grounded in the momentum already being built in Fox Lake through a series of recent public investments and strategic initiatives. These efforts, both large and small, reflect the Village's commitment to enhancing public spaces, supporting local businesses, and strengthening downtown's role as a community and regional destination.

- **Lakefront Park:** Lakefront Park is one of the Village's most significant and visible investments, with over \$12 million dedicated to transforming the lakefront into a vibrant, multi-functional gathering space. The park has quickly become a beloved community asset, drawing residents and visitors alike for recreation, events, and everyday enjoyment. The planned addition of a public pier will further solidify the park's role as an anchor downtown and a natural gateway for boaters exploring the Chain O'Lakes. Its location offers a unique opportunity to pull water visitors into the heart of the community.
- **Placemaking:** Smaller-scale investments have also contributed to placemaking and civic pride. The recent installation of string lighting across Main Street has generated community excitement and highlights the value of simple, visible enhancements. These improvements will have an even greater impact as downtown attracts new businesses, fills vacant storefronts, and welcomes new residents through downtown mixed-use development that increases foot traffic and supports a stronger local economy.
- **Millennium Park:** Immediately south of Main Street, Millennium Park is another key public space with growing potential. There is an opportunity to expand the green space further north to strengthen its presence and connection to downtown. Whether through a physical connection or through enhanced programming and amenities, Millennium Park can evolve into a more visible and valued gathering space that meets the needs of both current and future residents.
- **Economic Development:** The Village has also advanced several economic development initiatives that complement these physical improvements. This includes a targeted focus on new business attraction, support for existing businesses, and expanded marketing. The launch of a new economic development website and branding campaign "This is the Life" highlights Fox Lake's assets and promotes available opportunity sites to private investors and developers. The Village's existing facade improvement program, currently a \$4,000 matching grant, is also under review, with plans to increase funding to support more significant upgrades and enhance visual appeal throughout downtown. The Village received a grant from the Regional Transportation Authority's Pilot Program for Transit-Oriented Development Planning to explore strategies that support economic development, boost transit ridership, enhance multimodal connectivity, and improve pedestrian and bicycle access. The effort also aims to engage the private sector, identify infrastructure needs, and promote mixed-use development near transit stations.



Conversations

As part of the Fox Lake Comprehensive Plan and Downtown Plan processes, a series of community conversations were held to gather input about the future of downtown. Early feedback came from a broad mix of residents during the comprehensive planning phase, while more recent discussions focused specifically on downtown property and business owners. These conversations offered valuable insights into the existing challenges, aspirations, and ideas for a more vibrant, functional, and inclusive downtown.

1. ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS WITH COORDINATED SOLUTIONS

Concerns about the growing visibility of individuals experiencing homelessness in downtown Fox Lake surfaced repeatedly in stakeholder discussions, particularly among property and business owners. The issue was most frequently linked to vacant or inactive buildings and storefronts, such as the former furniture store, which have become informal gathering spots. Owners described a cycle in which vacant properties attract loitering, which in turn deters tenants and customers, leading to disinvestment.

Participants acknowledged that while this issue directly impacts their businesses and buildings, it is not one that can be solved through punitive enforcement alone. Recent changes to the Illinois Bill of Rights for the Homeless Act have constrained the Village's ability to take direct action. The law prohibits municipalities from removing individuals from public spaces solely on the basis of housing status and protects access to public facilities and freedom

of movement. As a result, stakeholders acknowledged that any effective approach would require a shift toward coordinated, compassionate, and service-oriented responses.

Rather than focus on enforcement, many suggested forming a working group or coalition that would focus efforts on partnerships with social service organizations, faith-based groups, and regional housing providers. Stakeholders expressed interest in seeing more intentional leadership from the Village on this issue, not only to support those in need, but also to help restore safety, stability, and confidence in the downtown environment. Activating spaces with a mix of uses and programming will lead to increased foot traffic and a decrease in loitering.

The issue is not unique to Fox Lake, but it's deeply connected to the Village's ability to revitalize downtown. Addressing it will require long-term, collaborative approaches that combine public space design, housing resources, and ongoing community partnerships, all while ensuring businesses feel supported and downtown remains safe and accessible for everyone.

“We’re trying to fix up our spaces, but then people are sleeping in the doorway.”

- STAKEHOLDER ”

“You can’t just clean it up. You need leadership, a group that’s ready to work with people and bring solutions.”

- STAKEHOLDER ”

2. REINVEST IN VACANT BUILDINGS AND FILL EMPTY STOREFRONTS

Vacancy across downtown Fox Lake remains one of the most visible and impeding challenges for local property and business owners. Many stakeholders expressed a sense of stagnation, that the same storefronts sit empty year after year, and even when property owners try to lease them out, they are met with hesitation or walkaways. Some noted that vacant properties aren't just underperforming assets, they also create a sense of disinvestment and discourage foot traffic in adjacent areas, especially when these structures are not well kept.

Property owners pointed out that they are willing to improve their buildings, but without a clear path to occupancy, the cost is tough to justify. They called for more meaningful financial incentives and technical support from the Village to help activate vacant spaces. While a \$4,000 facade grant exists, many described it as too modest to make a difference, especially for major repairs or improvements that would be required to make a building tenant-ready and leasable.

Stakeholders also discussed the value of proactive recruitment and policy support. They believe the Village can take a more direct role in attracting potential tenants, smoothing out permitting or zoning barriers, and even acquiring and repurposing strategic sites that are unlikely to be filled through private reinvestment alone.

Vacancy is both a physical and psychological barrier to downtown revitalization. It creates a negative feedback loop that discourages investment and weakens momentum. By combining financial tools, policy changes, marketing strategies, and a cohesive vision to attract private investment, the Village can reactivate underutilized buildings and restore life to the core of downtown.

“Vacancy doesn't just hurt my building, it hurts the block. It makes the whole downtown feel forgotten.”
- STAKEHOLDER

“If you're serious about fixing downtown, help us fill these storefronts. You can't have a thriving district if half the spaces are dark.”
- STAKEHOLDER



“I've offered space for \$1 per square foot just to get someone in the door — still no takers.”
- STAKEHOLDER

3. IMPROVE WALKABILITY, TRANSPORTATION, AND PARKING DOWNTOWN

Navigating downtown Fox Lake, especially on foot, remains a challenge for both residents and visitors. Stakeholders repeatedly pointed to the barrier created by US Route 12, which divides the lakefront from the rest of downtown and makes walking across feel unsafe and inconvenient. Even with existing traffic signals, cars rarely slow down, and some property owners said they actively avoid walking to businesses on the opposite side of the highway. This divide limits movement, discourages foot traffic, and weakens the relationship between downtown and the waterfront.

Participants shared several ideas to improve safety and connectivity, including installing mid-block crossings, introducing traffic-calming features like curb bump-outs or raised crosswalks, and revisiting long-shelved concepts like angled parking along Grand Avenue. Investments along US Route 12 will require interventions from the Illinois Department of Transportation who owns and manages this state route. Others noted the need for better pedestrian lighting and clearer pathways, particularly near the Metra station and on the east side of the tracks, where sidewalks are inconsistent or poorly maintained.

Parking was also a recurring concern. While the Metra lot provides some relief, business owners described a lack of customer-friendly parking, unclear signage, and few designated locations for deliveries or trash. These operational barriers can prevent small business owners from reaching their full potential.

Improving walkability and circulation isn't just about safety. It is essential to unlocking downtown's full potential, making it easier to explore, more comfortable to spend time in, and better connected to its assets and businesses.



“We need better crossings, more walkability, and a reason for people to get out of their cars.”
- STAKEHOLDER ”

“There’s no place for deliveries, no place for trash, and no place for customers to park for even ten minutes.”
- STAKEHOLDER ”

“Crossing US Route 12 is terrifying. I usually just skip businesses on the other side.”
- STAKEHOLDER ”

4. DELIVER MORE EVENTS AND EVERYDAY PROGRAMMING

Fox Lake residents and business owners clearly value events, and many described past programming as some of the few times when downtown feels truly alive. From fireworks to Friday night movies and seasonal celebrations, events have proven to be powerful tools for drawing people together and creating foot traffic. However, many stakeholders expressed concern that too many events are concentrated solely at Lakefront Park, which functions more as a destination than an integrated part of downtown. As one stakeholder noted, people “drive there, park, and leave.”

Participants want to see more programming in the downtown core catering to different demographics. There were calls for family-friendly events, youth-oriented activities, health and wellness events like 5Ks, and more creative and playful formats like themed pop-up bars, rooftop restaurants, or rotating food truck nights to activate downtown during the week, as opposed to a focus on special occasions.

Some also pointed to surrounding communities as examples. McHenry, Round Lake, and Antioch were all cited as places where event programming has helped activate downtown blocks, support restaurants, and build a sense of place.

Events cannot be viewed as add-ons. They are essential ingredients in creating a vibrant, inclusive downtown, one where businesses benefit from increased visibility and residents feel proud to gather.

“Why can’t we have events on Grand Avenue? Not everything needs to be by the lake.”
- STAKEHOLDER

“When something’s happening downtown, people actually come out. We just need it to happen more often.”
- STAKEHOLDER

“Bring back fireworks but also do new stuff. We need events for families, for young people, for everyone.”
- STAKEHOLDER



5. CREATE A DOWNTOWN ANCHOR THAT DRAWS ACTIVITY YEAR-ROUND

The absence of a major destination or public anchor in downtown Fox Lake was a common theme discussed by stakeholders. While the lakefront serves as a regional draw in summer months, there is no equivalent year-round attraction that keeps people circulating through the downtown core. Business owners spoke about the need for a central indoor space, one that could be flexible, community-oriented, and programmed throughout the seasons.

Ideas ranged from event venues to shared office and recording spaces, community centers, or a new multi-use facility that could host concerts, markets, educational programs, and civic functions. Some referenced other towns that have repurposed old theaters or large-format buildings into performance venues or cultural hubs.

Stakeholders agreed that this kind of anchor would bring more people into downtown and encourage longer visits, spurring investment in nearby properties and better defining Fox Lake's identity as a place where things are happening.

The right anchor could transform downtown's trajectory. With strategic investment, it can become a driver of economic development, a gathering space for the community, and a symbol of what Fox Lake has to offer.

“Other towns turned their old theaters into something amazing. We have buildings just sitting there.”
- STAKEHOLDER

“We need a place that brings people together – something indoors, that works year-round.”
- STAKEHOLDER



“An anchor is what pulls everything together. Right now, people come in for one thing and leave.”
- STAKEHOLDER

6. STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION WITH THE VILLAGE

Throughout the stakeholder meetings, there was a strong sense that communication between the Village and downtown business and property owners has been inconsistent and underwhelming. Many participants were unaware that meetings were taking place. Others noted that they had never been informed about programs such as the Business District incentive fund or the facade improvement grant. This lack of coordination has contributed to frustration, misalignment, and missed opportunities.

Several stakeholders emphasized that effective revitalization requires transparency and regular communication between the Village's plans and the realities faced by local entrepreneurs. They want to be part of the conversation and decision-making process. Some acknowledged that staff responsiveness has improved, but there is still a long way to go to build trust and a true sense of partnership.

Participants expressed a desire for direct engagement, through ongoing business roundtables, regular updates, grant workshops, or one-on-one outreach. They also stressed the importance of the Village leading by example. If public agencies are seen investing downtown, business and property owners said they would be more inclined to follow suit.

Revitalization will only succeed if it is built on shared ownership and accountability. Better communication is the first step toward rebuilding confidence and activating meaningful private-sector support.



“*The facade program is a start, but it’s not enough – and not many people even know about it.*
- STAKEHOLDER

”

“*If you want buy-in from us, we need to see that the Village is in this with us.*
- STAKEHOLDER

”

7. STRENGTHEN DOWNTOWN'S SENSE OF PLACE AND PROMOTE MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT

Many stakeholders described downtown Fox Lake as lacking a clear identity. While the community has a strong lakeside culture and rich history, downtown itself does not feel cohesive or memorable. Business owners noted that the experience of walking through downtown varies block by block, and that the east and west sides of the tracks feel like entirely different places. Along US Route 12, downtown is almost invisible, with little to signal to passersby that something worth exploring is nearby.

Participants called for stronger placemaking and branding, including visual improvements like landscaping, signage, facade restoration, and lighting, as well as a clearer definition of what Fox Lake wants downtown to be. They also noted that a walkable, mixed-use environment could help fill in the gaps, bring new residents into the core, and increase foot traffic for small businesses. Most agreed that new development must prioritize high-quality design and compatibility with the surrounding context.

Several stakeholders expressed concern that while new development is important, it should not come at the expense of character or accessibility. They want to see buildings that reflect Fox Lake's identity, create opportunities for small businesses, and provide housing for people who will contribute to downtown life.

Creating a stronger presence along US Route 12 and investing in high-quality mixed-use development can help Fox Lake define itself, not just as a lake community, but as a vibrant, inclusive downtown district in its own right.

“We need downtown to have a stronger identity — something that tells people they’re here, not just passing through.”
- STAKEHOLDER

“You shouldn’t have to know someone who lives here to know that downtown exists. Right now, it’s easy to miss.”
- STAKEHOLDER

“We want to see housing, restaurants, and shops all in one place. That’s how you keep people here.”
- STAKEHOLDER





VILLAGE OF FOX LAKE

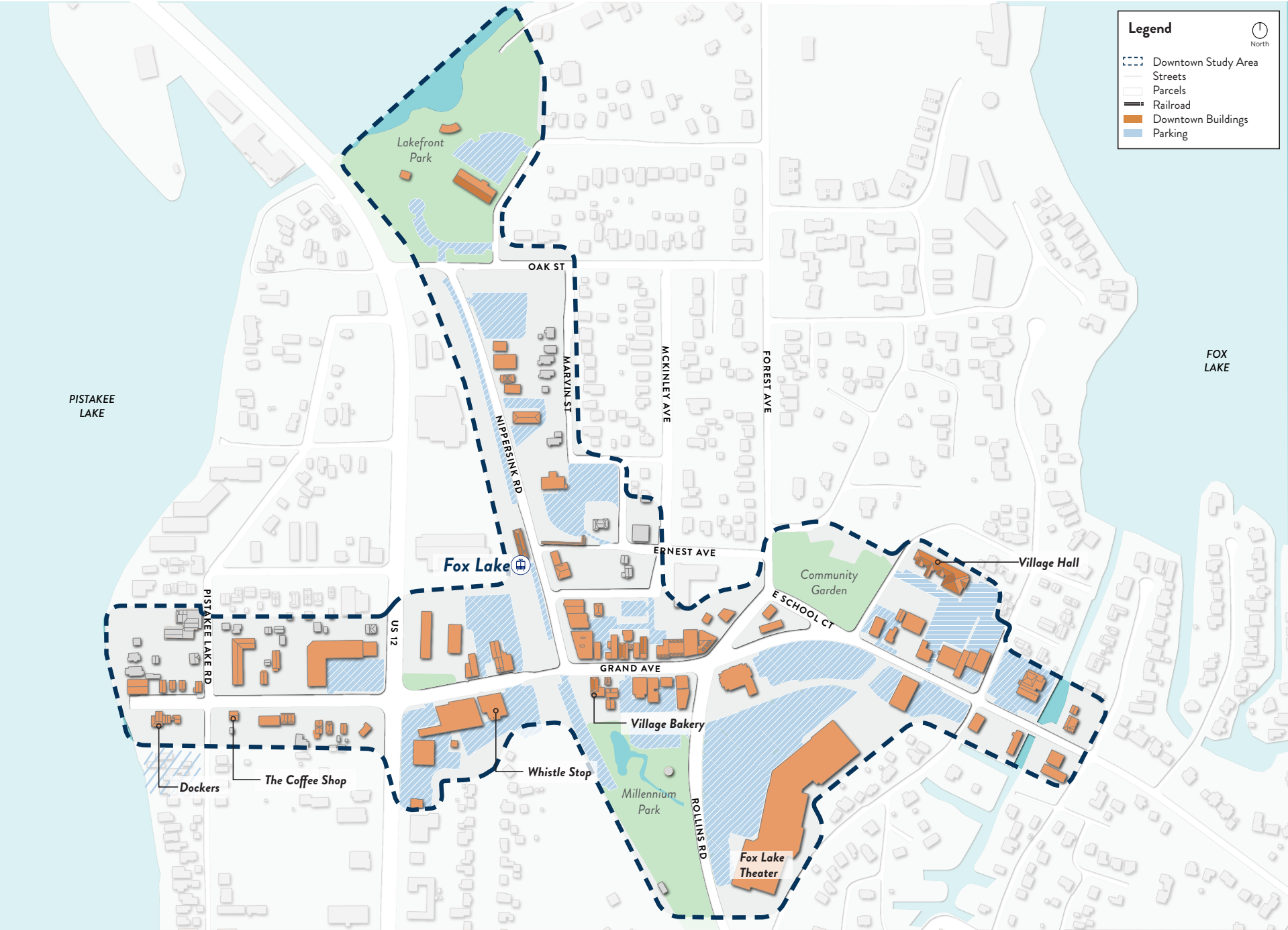
Downtown Fox Lake Today

Background

The Village of Fox Lake, located in northeastern Illinois near the Illinois-Wisconsin border, is strategically positioned along US Route 12, providing direct access to neighboring communities and southern Wisconsin. Fox Lake sits at the heart of the Chain O'Lakes system, nestled among three of its most prominent lakes: Fox Lake, Nippersink Lake, and Pistakee Lake. This prime location places the Village at the center of the region's recreational activities, including boating, fishing, watersports, and lakeside leisure. Fox Lake also features two stops along Metra's Milwaukee District North (MD-N) Line, Fox Lake and Ingleside, providing convenient commuter access to the Chicago metropolitan area. This blend of accessibility and outdoor recreation makes Fox Lake an attractive destination for residents and visitors seeking the tranquility of lakeside living with easy connections to urban amenities.

Downtown Fox Lake is in the central part of the Village, adjacent to US Route 12, within walking distance of the waterfront, and directly accessible from the Fox Lake Metra station. The heart of downtown centers along Grand Avenue at its intersection with Nippersink Boulevard, where many of the Village's "main street" style buildings are clustered. Downtown extends along Grand Avenue from the lakefront westward to approximately Holly Avenue to the east, offering a variety of uses and a mix of character along the way. It also extends north along Nippersink Boulevard, culminating at Lakefront Park, the community's newest destination featuring an amphitheater, the first public beach along the Chain O'Lakes, pickleball courts, a playground, and other vibrant amenities. Additional civic anchors, including Millennium Park and Village Hall, offer opportunities to further strengthen downtown's identity. Adjacent residential areas, all within easy walking distance, present opportunities to deepen the sense of community and reinforce connections to downtown Fox Lake.

Figure 1: Downtown Study Area



Downtown History

Downtown Fox Lake has long served as the heart of the community, shaped by the Village's unique position along the Chain O'Lakes. Nestled between Pistakee, Nippersink, and Fox Lakes, the area first attracted Native American tribes such as the Potawatomi and Miami, who relied on the abundant natural resources. Early European settlers found the wetland terrain challenging, but by the late 1800s, the area began transforming into a sought-after retreat, especially for wealthy Chicago sportsmen arriving by steamboat.

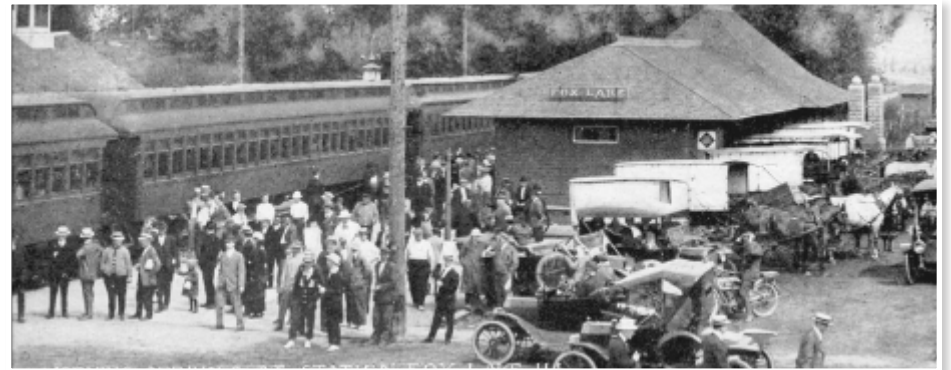
The arrival of the railroad and the opening of Fox Lake Station in 1901 marked a turning point for downtown. Suddenly, Fox Lake became one of the most accessible resort destinations for Chicagoans seeking lakefront recreation. Downtown quickly evolved, with the construction of general stores, saloons, taverns, and restaurants to serve seasonal crowds. Landmarks like Koeth's Tavern, situated just across from the train station, and the original Village Hall, perched on the hill where the water tower stands today, anchored a bustling town center.

By the 1910s, downtown Fox Lake and surrounding lakeside towns had become a regional entertainment hub, boasting over 40 saloons and restaurants, as well as open gambling. During Prohibition, it gained a colorful reputation for speakeasies and ties to Chicago gangsters, adding to the downtown's storied character. Despite periodic fires and shifting trends, the downtown continued to thrive into the 1940s, home to a wide mix of grocery stores, pharmacies, hardware shops, and locally owned businesses.



Following World War II, Fox Lake, like much of the region, began to suburbanize. The rise of the automobile and improved highways brought new residents and made year-round living more practical. As shopping habits changed, Lakeland Shopping Center downtown opened in the 1960s, drawing some activity away from a traditional main street downtown.

Today, downtown Fox Lake reflects the evolution of the community from resort town to suburban village to recreation destination while maintaining its historical roots. Landmarks like Lakefront Park, just north of downtown, continue to honor Fox Lake's identity as a lakefront destination. Revitalization efforts now focus on enhancing downtown's walkability, reactivating storefronts, and celebrating its vibrant legacy as the cultural and commercial core of the Village.



Downtown Community Profile

A demographic snapshot of downtown Fox Lake, based on an assessment of the area within a half-mile radius around the intersection of Grand Avenue and Nippersink Boulevard, provides insight into the community living in and around the downtown area. As of 2020, the Village's total population was 10,978, with the downtown study area accounting for approximately 14 percent of that total, or 1,578 residents. Household income levels in the downtown area are comparable to the Village overall, with a median household income of \$63,343 compared to \$65,500 for the broader community. Of the Village's 5,828 housing units, 15 percent (890 units) are located within the downtown.

Figure 2: 2020 Village and Downtown Comparison

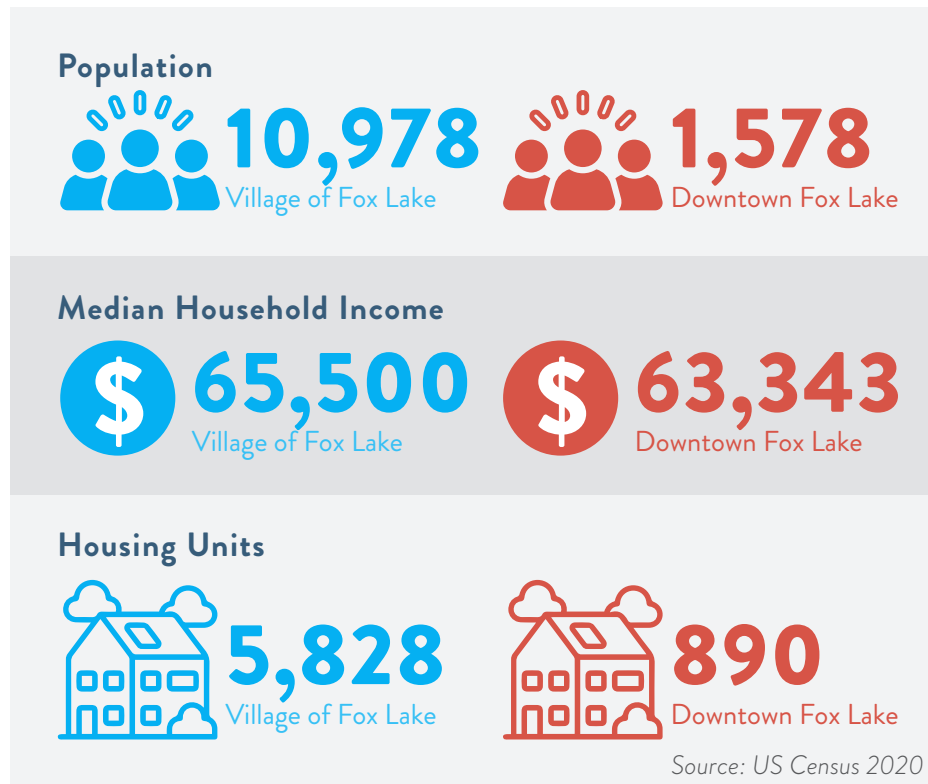


Figure 3: Downtown Half-Mile Radius Study Area



HOUSING SNAPSHOT

Housing is a key factor in supporting a vibrant downtown. Having a strong residential base within walking distance increases foot traffic, which in turn can attract new businesses, events, and activities.

In downtown Fox Lake’s half-mile radius study area, most households are owner-occupied. As of 2020, owner-occupied units accounted for 50 percent of downtown housing, compared to 60 percent across the Village. Renter-occupied households made up 40 percent of downtown housing, higher than the Village wide share of 30 percent. Vacancy rates in the downtown study area stand at 12 percent, similar to the Village’s overall vacancy rate of approximately 10 percent.

Single-family homes dominate the downtown housing stock, making up 79 percent of units compared to 71 percent across Fox Lake. Most of the downtown single-family homes are detached, but they sit on smaller lots, naturally creating denser neighborhoods compared to single-family areas elsewhere in the Village. Downtown also offers a range of small multi-unit housing options, with 2–4-unit buildings making up 5 percent of the housing stock, 5–9-unit buildings accounting for 2 percent, and larger 10+ unit buildings representing 14 percent. These percentages are generally lower than in the Village overall.

The downtown area features an older housing stock, 80 percent of homes were built before 1980, and over half (54 percent) were constructed prior to 1960. In contrast, most homes across Fox Lake were built later in the 20th century, with 54 percent constructed between 1960 and 1999. Additionally, nearly a quarter (24 percent) of the Village’s homes were built after 2000, reflecting more recent development trends outside the downtown core.

While the area benefits from a stable residential base within walking distance of downtown amenities, the dominance of older, predominantly single-family homes and the relatively limited supply of newer or diverse housing options suggest a need for strategic reinvestment. Introducing new and diverse housing options could attract a wider range of residents, support local businesses, and enhance the long-term vitality of downtown.

Figure 4: 2020 Housing Tenure Comparison

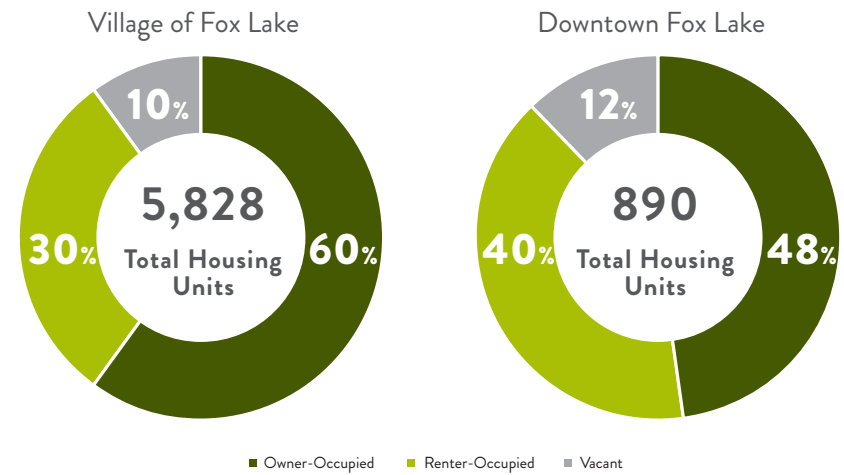
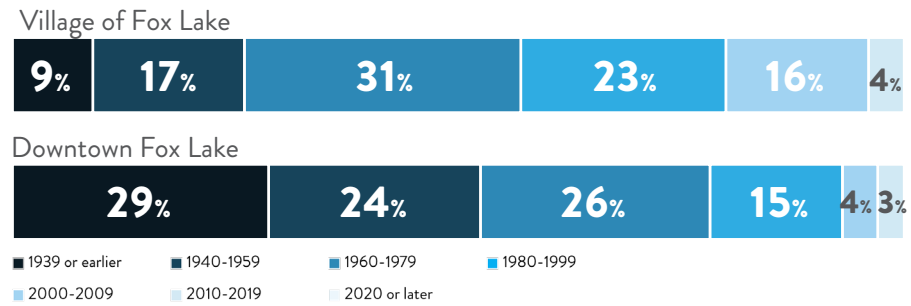
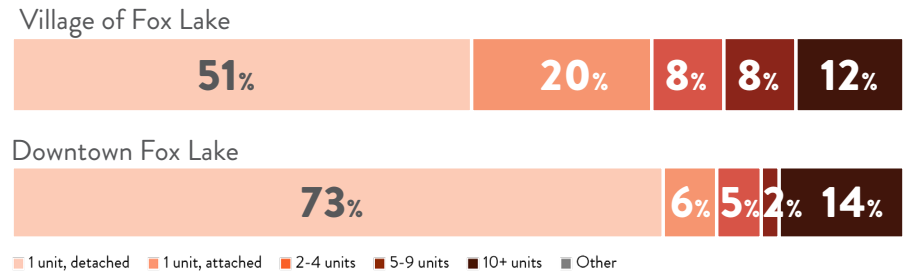


Figure 5: 2020 Housing Stock by Type and Age Comparison

Housing Stock by Age



Housing Stock by Type



Source: US Census 2020

DOWNTOWN VISITATION TRENDS

Downtown Fox Lake recorded 1.8 million visits in 2023. Most visitors came from Fox Lake or nearby communities such as Lake Villa and McHenry. When compared to peer downtowns across Lake County, Fox Lake performs well in terms of total annual visitation. However, between 2019 and 2023, total visits declined by 6 percent, and average daily visits have been slow to return to pre-COVID levels. Over the same period, many peer communities experienced increases in downtown activity. Early data from 2024, though representing only a partial year, suggests a modest recovery, with visitation trending upward through the first eight months.

Figure 6: Total Annual Visits to Downtown

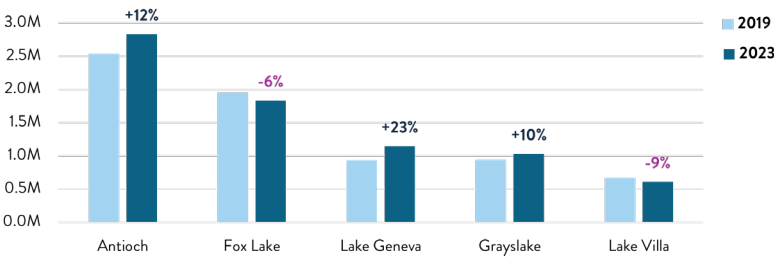
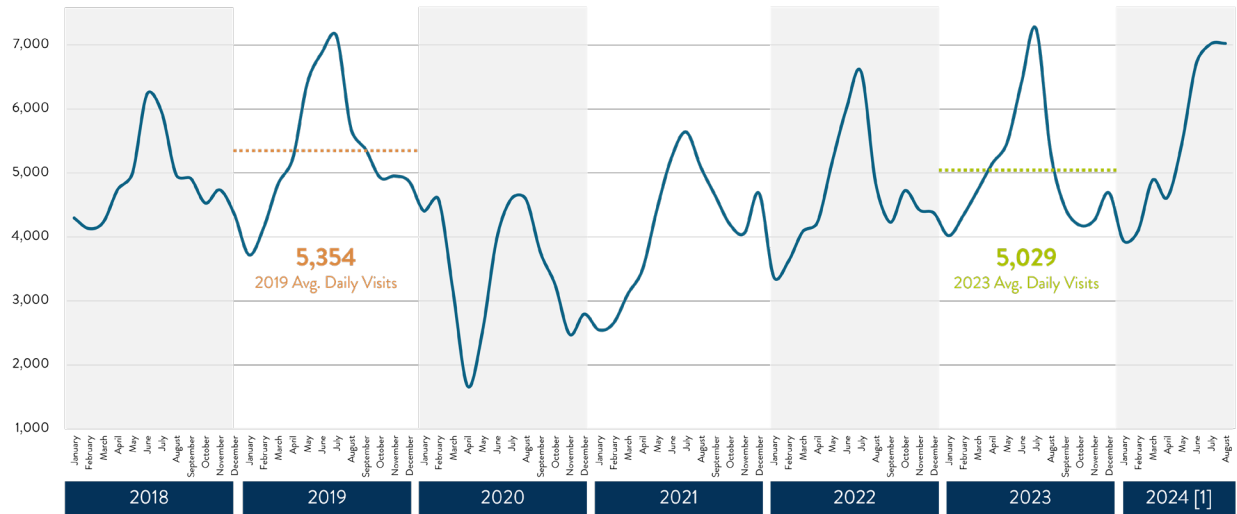
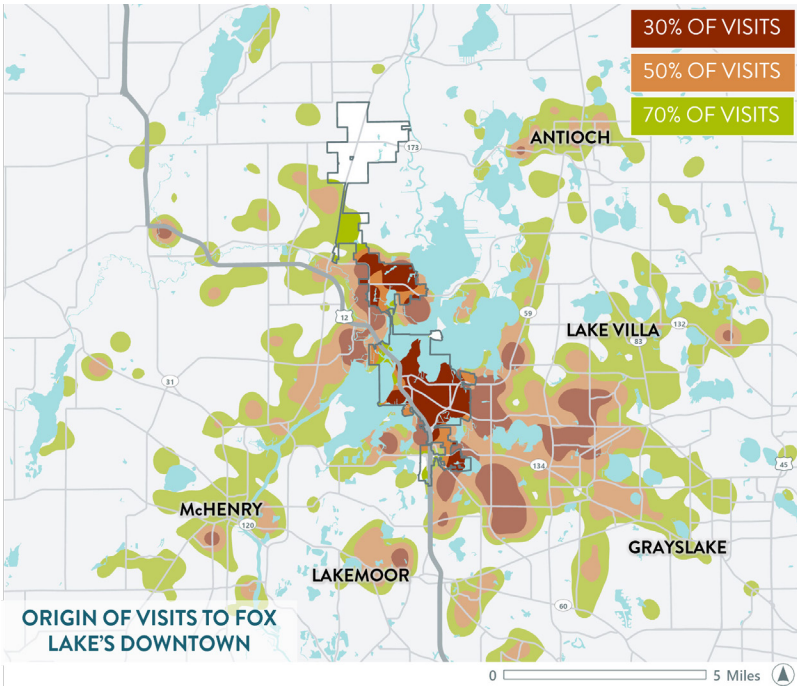


Figure 7: Downtown Visitation Trends Over Time



[1] YTD as of August 18, 2024
Source: Placer.ai, SB Friedman

Figure 8: Origin of Visits to Fox Lake's Downtown

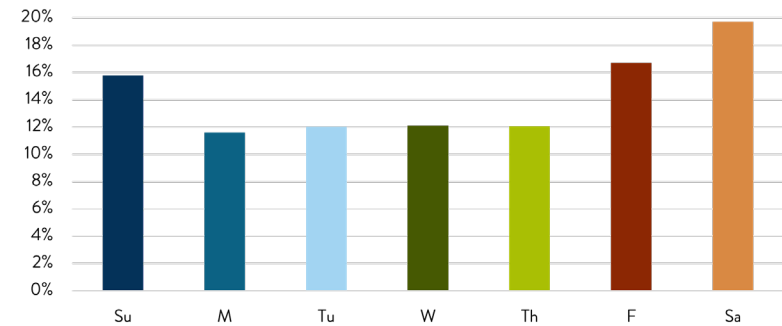


Visits to the downtown peak during weekends and mealtimes. Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays account for over half of all weekly visits, with Saturdays being the busiest day, representing 20 percent of all 2023 visits. Visits typically peak during mealtimes (11 a.m.–1 p.m. and 5 p.m.–7 p.m.), with a noticeable drop-off after 8 p.m., suggesting a prevalence of restaurants and a lack of evening destinations and activities within the downtown core.

The Village recently completed the first phase of improvements to Lakefront Park, at the northernmost portion of the downtown, which opened in June 2024. Enhancements included an outdoor amphitheater, pickleball courts, a splash pad, playground, nature play area, restroom facilities, and the Chain O'Lakes' only public access beach. Summer attendance at Lakefront Park more than doubled from 17,400 visitors in 2023 to 39,200 visitors in 2024. Black Lung Brewing, located adjacent to Lakefront Park, has emerged as a key destination for park visitors. However, data shows that few visitors to Lakefront Park continue to explore Downtown Fox Lake afterward, highlighting an opportunity to better connect these two major assets.

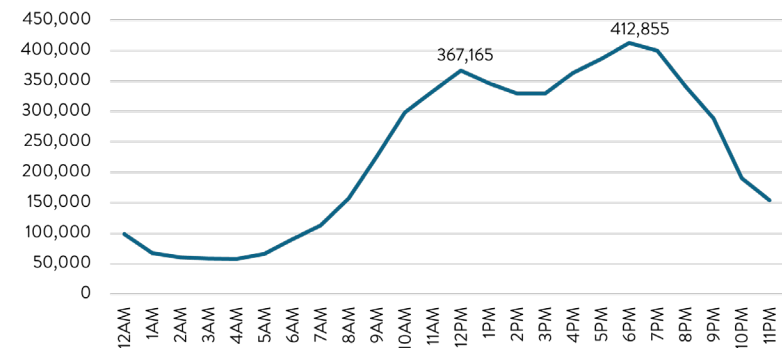


Figure 9: Percentage of Total Visits by Day, 2023



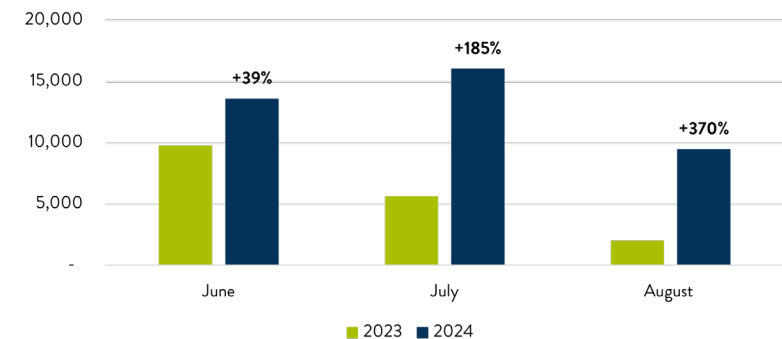
Source: Placer.ai, SB Friedman

Figure 10: Total Annual Visits by Time of Day, 2023



Source: Placer.ai, SB Friedman

Figure 11: Lakefront Park Monthly Attendance



Source: Placer.ai, SB Friedman

DOWNTOWN BUSINESS INVENTORY

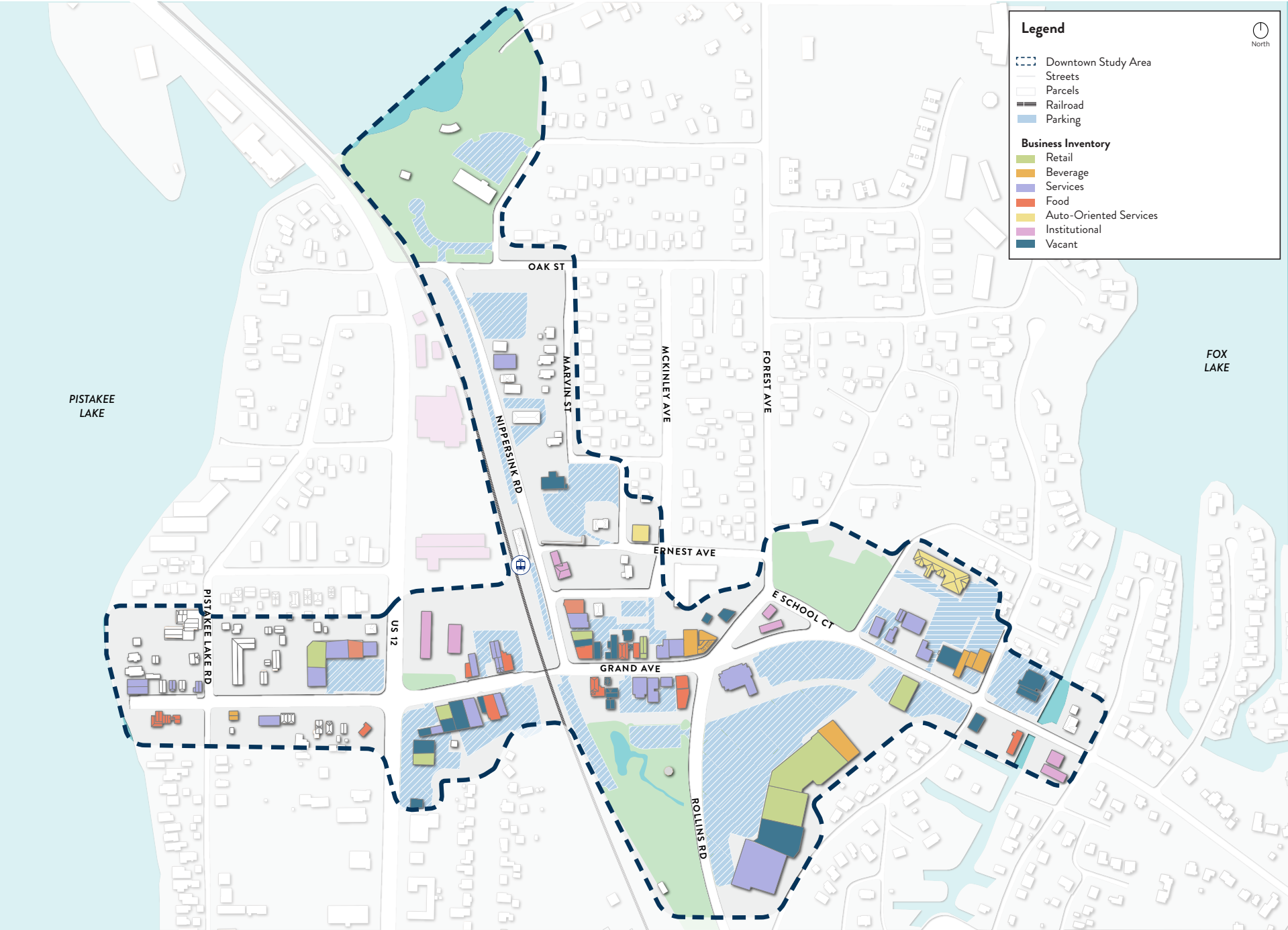
The core of Downtown Fox Lake is centered along Grand Avenue, between Nippersink Boulevard and Rollins Road, where most storefronts are located in a compact, walkable setting with a traditional downtown character. The business mix in this area primarily consists of food and service establishments, along with some retail, beverage-focused businesses, and noticeable vacancies. Closer to Grand Avenue, Nippersink Boulevard also features more traditional commercial uses, but transitions to primarily parking areas with a few food and service businesses as it extends north. Moving east along Grand Avenue, the built environment becomes more spread out and auto-oriented, featuring larger uses such as the Lakeland Shopping Center, gas stations, and surface parking lots. Businesses in this stretch are mainly retail, service, and beverage-related, with some vacancies. On the west side of Grand Avenue, between the railroad tracks and US Route 12, most properties are vacant, though a few food, service, and retail businesses remain. Beyond Route 12, Grand Avenue includes a mix of service and food establishments.

Downtown Fox Lake contains a mix of legacy storefronts and auto-oriented commercial properties, with pockets of vibrancy surrounded by notable gaps in activity and continuity. While food and service businesses are the predominant uses, the area suffers from, vacant or underutilized commercial space, auto-centric design that breaks the walkable rhythm of the downtown core, and limited retail diversity, reducing the area's potential as a comprehensive shopping destination.

Strategic efforts to increase retail variety, reduce vacancy, enhance pedestrian infrastructure, and support small business development could significantly strengthen the downtown business environment and attract greater foot traffic and investment.




Figure 12: Downtown Business Inventory



COMPARABLE DOWNTOWNS

Like many downtowns, Fox Lake's downtown offers shopping, dining, essential services, and access to public parks. However, other successful Midwest downtowns also feature attractions such as museums, breweries, distilleries, wineries, and entertainment venues—amenities that help draw a wider range of visitors. Expanding the mix of attractions in Fox Lake's downtown could enhance its appeal. Elements like active storefronts, lively streetscapes, inviting public gathering spaces, and residential units above businesses also contribute to the vibrancy and charm of thriving downtown districts.

	Fox Lake, IL	McHenry, IL	Galena, IL
			
Permanent Population	10,978	27,135	3,308
Downtown Average Daily Visits (2023)	+/- 5,400	+/- 11,000	+/- 4,400
Transportation	Fox Lake Metra Station, US 12	McHenry Metra Station, IL-120	US Hwy 20
Downtown Retail SF	300,000	180,000	137,000
Downtown Uses	Shopping, bars, restaurants, banking, office, movie theater	Shopping, restaurants, banking, convenience stores, bars	Shopping, restaurants, office
Nearby Major Attractions	Chain O'Lakes	Fox River, McHenry Brewing Company	Historical Museums, Galena Cellars Winery
Urban Form	One- to two-story traditional main street storefronts, pocket park	One- to two-story traditional main street storefronts, consistent streetwall, pocket parks	One- to four-story traditional main street buildings with residential above, consistent streetwall, vibrant storefronts
Streetscape	Pockets of landscaping, community banners and hanging baskets on street lighting, hanging string lights	Street lights with hanging baskets, outdoor dining, landscape curb extensions, street trees, pavers	Street lights, paver crosswalks, narrow streets, pocket parks

Source: City of Lake Geneva, Chimney Monkey Fox Lake, Galena Country, Harbor Country Chamber of Commerce, Naturally McHenry County, Placer.ai, Pure Michigan, U.S. Census Bureau

Land Use & Zoning Assessment

Land Use

Downtown Fox Lake's predominate land use is commercial, with majority of businesses fronting Grand Avenue. Two major public parks, Lakefront Park to the north and Millennium Park to the south, occupy a significant portion of the downtown footprint. These parks serve as civic anchors, offering spaces for community gathering, events, and seasonal programming that attract both residents and visitors. Key institutional uses are interspersed throughout the area, including Village Hall, the post office, and the old Fire Station and community center.

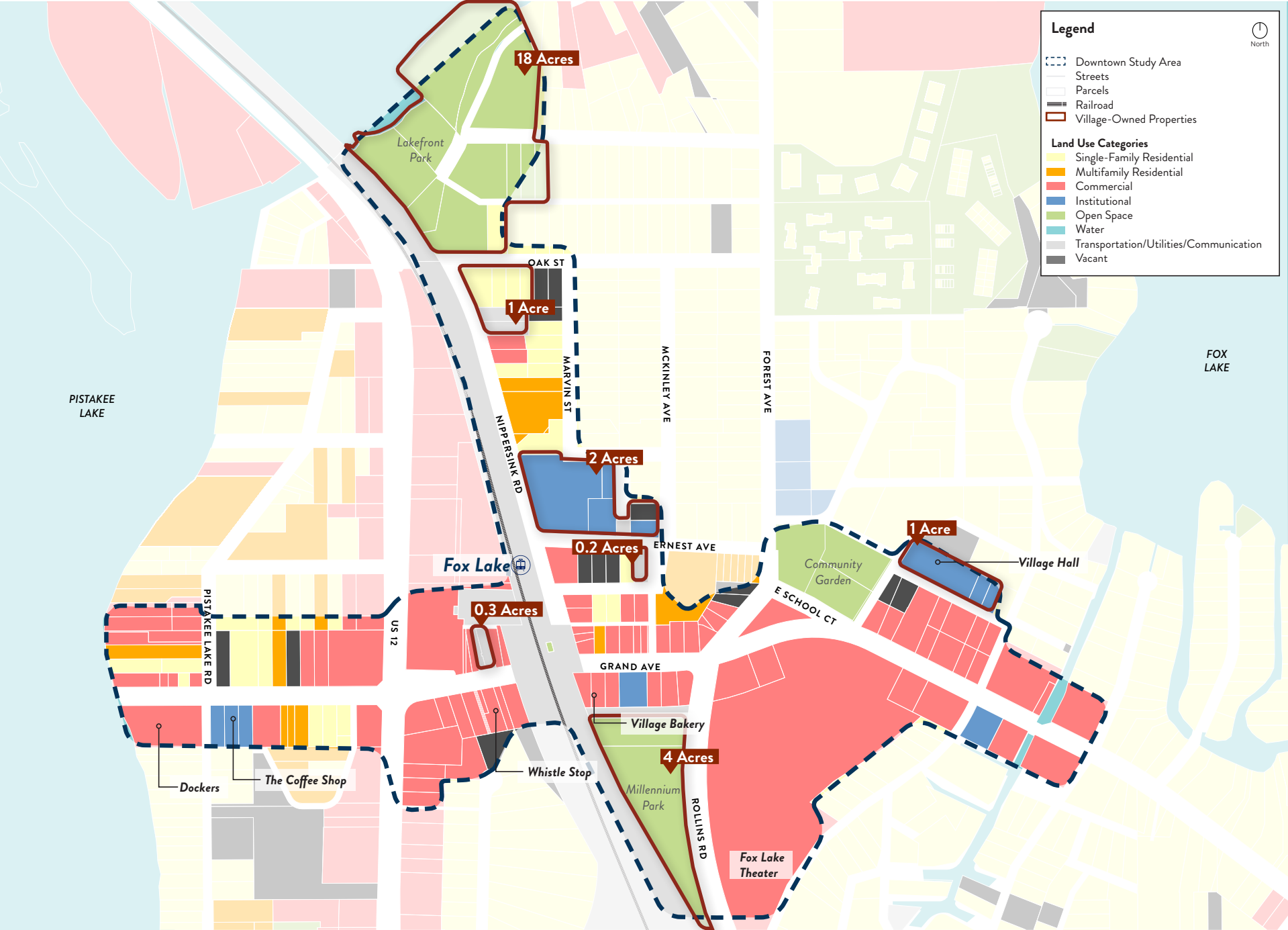
Residential uses, both single-family and multifamily housing, are integrated into the downtown fabric and extend into adjacent neighborhoods, contributing to a diverse mix of uses and housing options. Scattered vacant parcels are present throughout downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, representing opportunities for new development and strategic infill.

The Metra station, associated rail line, and adjacent commuter parking are centrally located and serve as critical transportation infrastructure, reinforcing downtown's role as a regional transit node.

The Village owns approximately 27 acres within the downtown area, including Lakefront Park, Millennium Park, Village Hall, the former community center, and the old Fire Station. These publicly owned properties present valuable opportunities for reinvestment, whether as development sites under Village control or as enduring civic destinations that continue to draw activity and support downtown vibrancy.



Figure 16: Downtown Land Use



Zoning

The predominant zoning district in the downtown area is the Downtown Business District (D), which extends along Grand Avenue from Pistakee Lake Road to York Street. Designed to promote a pedestrian-oriented shopping experience, the Downtown Business District encourages mixed-use development with ground floor businesses and upper-floor residential or office uses.

Several other commercial zoning districts are also present in and around the downtown:

- **B-2 General Retail and Limited Service District (20,000 square feet minimum lot area):** Intended for neighborhood-scale retail and service uses. In addition to shops similar in character to those in the Downtown Business District, permitted uses include grocery stores, service and repair shops, and automobile sales.
- **B-3 Commercial Service and Wholesale District (1-acre minimum lot area):** Accommodates highway-oriented retail, wholesale businesses, and commercial recreation uses. This district serves both local and regional customers with uses such as convention centers and golf courses.
- **B-4 Resort Business District (1-acre minimum lot area):** Focuses on short-term lodging and recreational uses, promoting access to natural amenities through resorts, hotels, and related businesses.
- **B-5 Marina District (1-acre minimum lot area):** Supports water-oriented commercial activities such as boat sales, rentals, launches, and waterfront dining.

Residential zoning within the study area includes:

- **R-2 High Density One-Family Residence District:** Allows higher-density single-family neighborhoods complemented by community services. R-2 zoning is primarily located along Nippersink Road and the surrounding neighborhoods.

- **R-4 High Density General Residence District:** Facilitates a more urban, higher-density multi-family residential environment, located northeast of the Nippersink Road and Grand Avenue intersection.

Park and institutional uses do not have dedicated zoning districts and are typically located within areas zoned commercial or residential.

Downtown Fox Lake's zoning framework reflects a blend of pedestrian-focused planning and regional commercial activity. The core Downtown Business District supports a walkable, mixed-use environment, but the presence of multiple, larger-lot commercial districts—designed for auto-oriented or regional uses—can dilute this vision. While there is some high-density residential zoning nearby, limited land is currently zoned to support a significant increase in downtown housing. Strategic rezoning, overlays, or an updated zoning code may be needed to better align land use regulations with the Village's goals for downtown revitalization, infill development, and stronger connections to the lakefront.

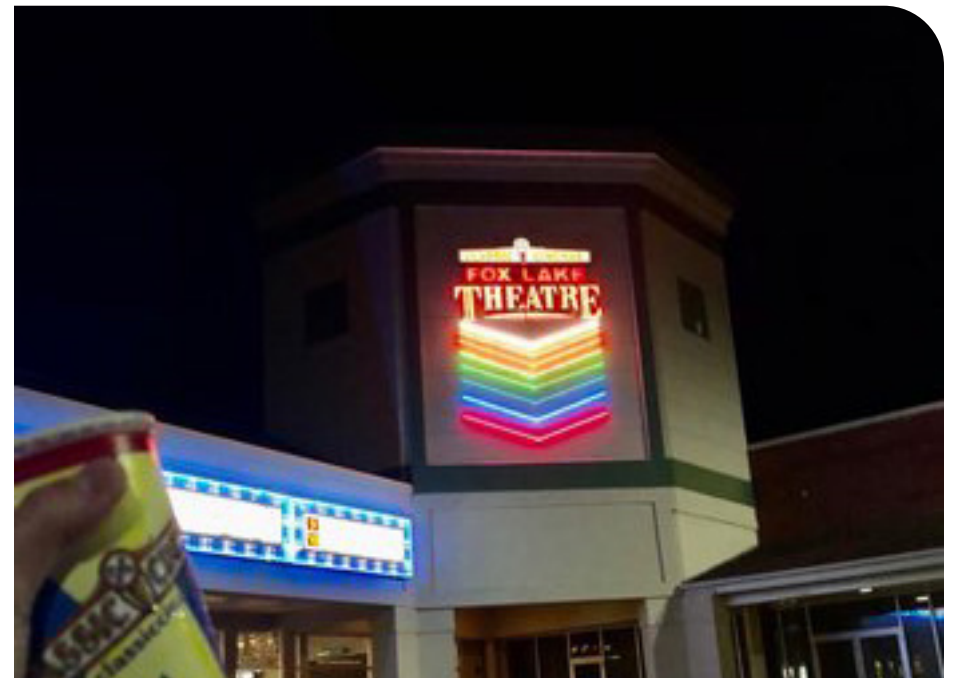
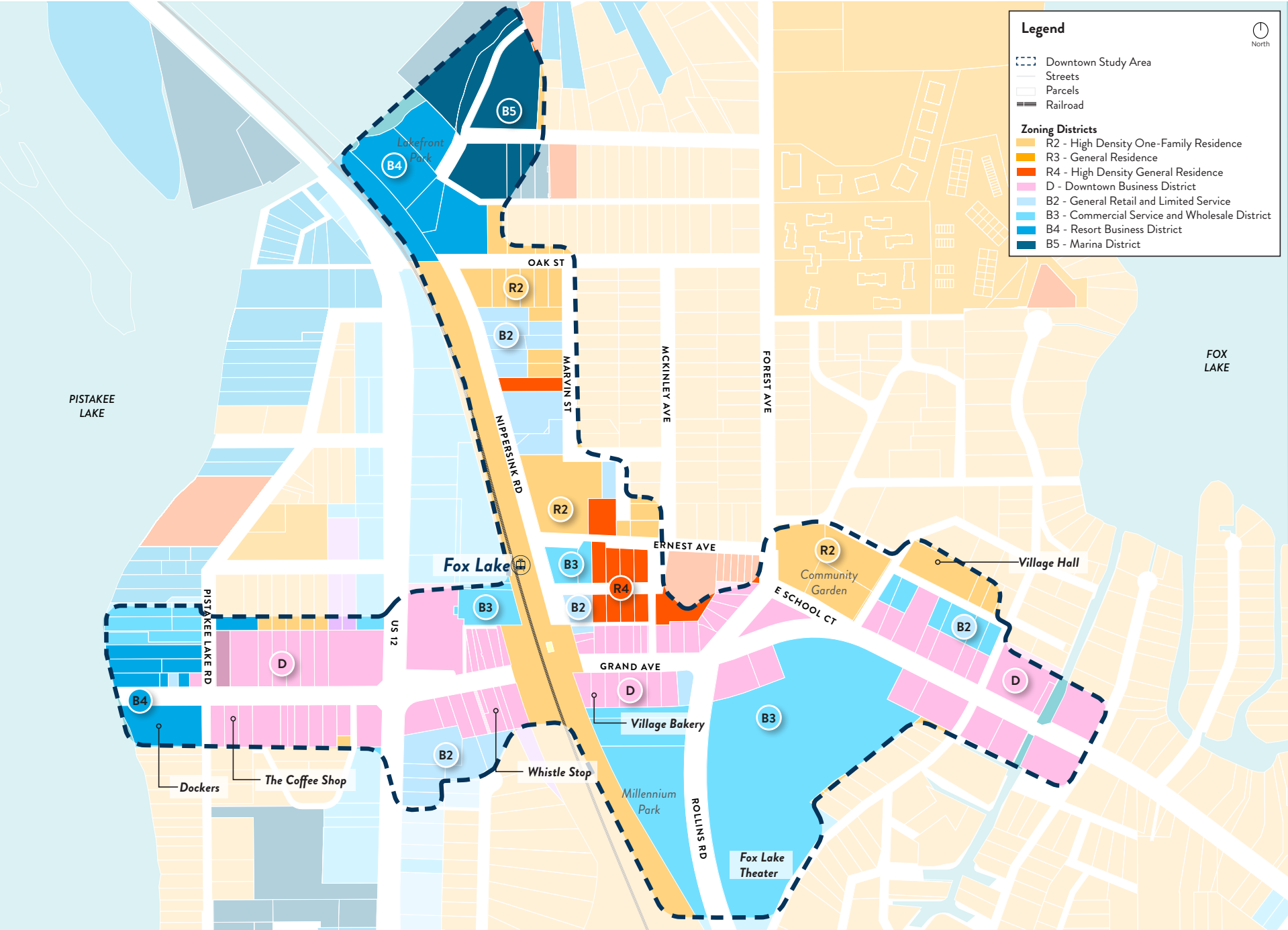


Figure 17: Downtown Zoning



Mobility & Connectivity Assessment

Downtown Fox Lake is organized along Grand Avenue, the primary east-west spine of the district, and is intersected by key north-south corridors including US Route 12, Rollins Road, and Nippersink Boulevard. US Route 12 functions as a major regional arterial, carrying approximately 21,400 vehicles per day (AADT, 2023). It serves as a critical connector through northern Illinois into Wisconsin. However, its current configuration acts as a physical and visual divider between the east and west sides of downtown. Despite its regional significance, the intersection of US Route 12 and Grand Avenue lacks a clearly defined gateway treatment, missing an opportunity to serve as a formal entry point into the downtown core.

Rollins Road, located on the eastern edge of downtown, sees approximately 5,350 vehicles per day (AADT, 2023) and plays an important role in linking downtown to adjacent southern and eastern communities and to the northern downtown residential neighborhoods. The intersection of Rollins Road and Grand Avenue also serves as a key entry point into downtown and would benefit from design enhancements that signal arrival and improve pedestrian comfort.

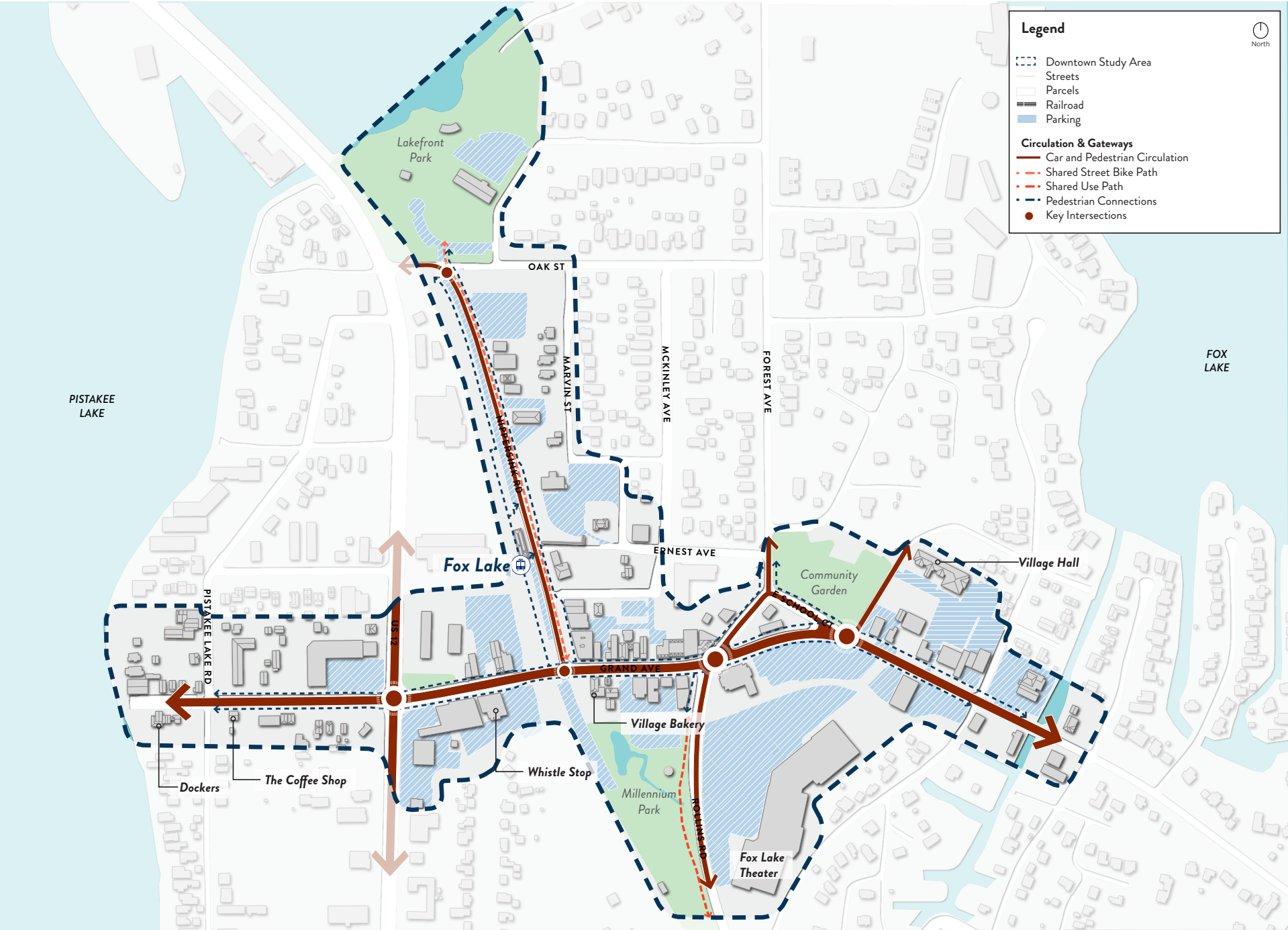
Nippersink Boulevard is a smaller north-south connector and is the secondary downtown spine that carries roughly 650 vehicles per day (AADT, 2023) and is home to the Fox Lake Metra station as well as several commercial and residential uses. It links Lakefront Park directly to downtown and presents a unique opportunity to become a more active and pedestrian-friendly corridor, reinforcing connections between downtown amenities and community anchor institutions.

The downtown benefits from several existing active transportation assets. A dedicated on-street bike lane runs along Nippersink Boulevard and an off-street shared-use path along Rollins Road provides a direct connection south to community destinations beyond the downtown. Most of the downtown corridors are equipped with sidewalks; however, US Route 12

remains an exception, with sections lacking sidewalks and others featuring narrow paths directly adjacent to heavy traffic, which poses a barrier to safe and comfortable pedestrian travel. Enhancing sidewalk coverage, improving pedestrian crossings, and integrating streetscape improvements along key corridors would greatly strengthen the walkability and aesthetic character of downtown.



Figure 18: Downtown Mobility



Urban Design Assessment

While Downtown Fox Lake is compact in size, existing land use patterns and physical conditions segment the area into distinct character zones. Despite this fragmentation, the downtown benefits from several strong foundational assets, including a strong downtown core, access to the Metra station and the lakefront, and two public parks Lakefront and Millennium Park. However, disjointed development patterns and inconsistent streetscape design have resulted in a disconnected urban fabric that limits the downtown's cohesion and walkability. The downtown can be organized into four key character areas:

WATERFRONT DISTRICT

Located along Grand Avenue west of US Route 12, this is the smallest of the downtown zones. It features a mix of uses oriented towards visitors, including Docker's Restaurant and The Coffee Shop, as well as office and service uses located in converted residential structures. The area has a more residential feel, with a combination of single-family and multifamily housing, and it enjoys direct access to the lake via a small pocket park. Streetscape elements include sidewalks, limited street trees, and wide travel lanes with on-street parking on both sides. Enhancements to the pedestrian environment, such as improved landscaping, signage, and gathering spaces could help establish this area as a true lakefront district and gateway to the water. This district has the potential to expand into properties north and south along the waterfront, as they become available, to expand public access to the water.

US ROUTE 12 CORRIDOR

Retail properties along US Route 12 are among the most actively occupied downtown, featuring auto-oriented uses such as dealerships, repair shops, food and beverage, and general retail. While this corridor sees high commercial activity, its urban design is inconsistent with the walkable environment found in other parts of downtown. The streetscape

is dominated by wide travel lanes, minimal sidewalks, and large intersection crossings that feel unsafe and uninviting to pedestrians. Additionally, this area lacks a defined sense of identity or gateway treatment that signals entry into downtown. Implementation of the recent wayfinding signage program, streetscape improvements, and cohesive design elements could greatly enhance safety, comfort, and wayfinding for both residents and visitors.

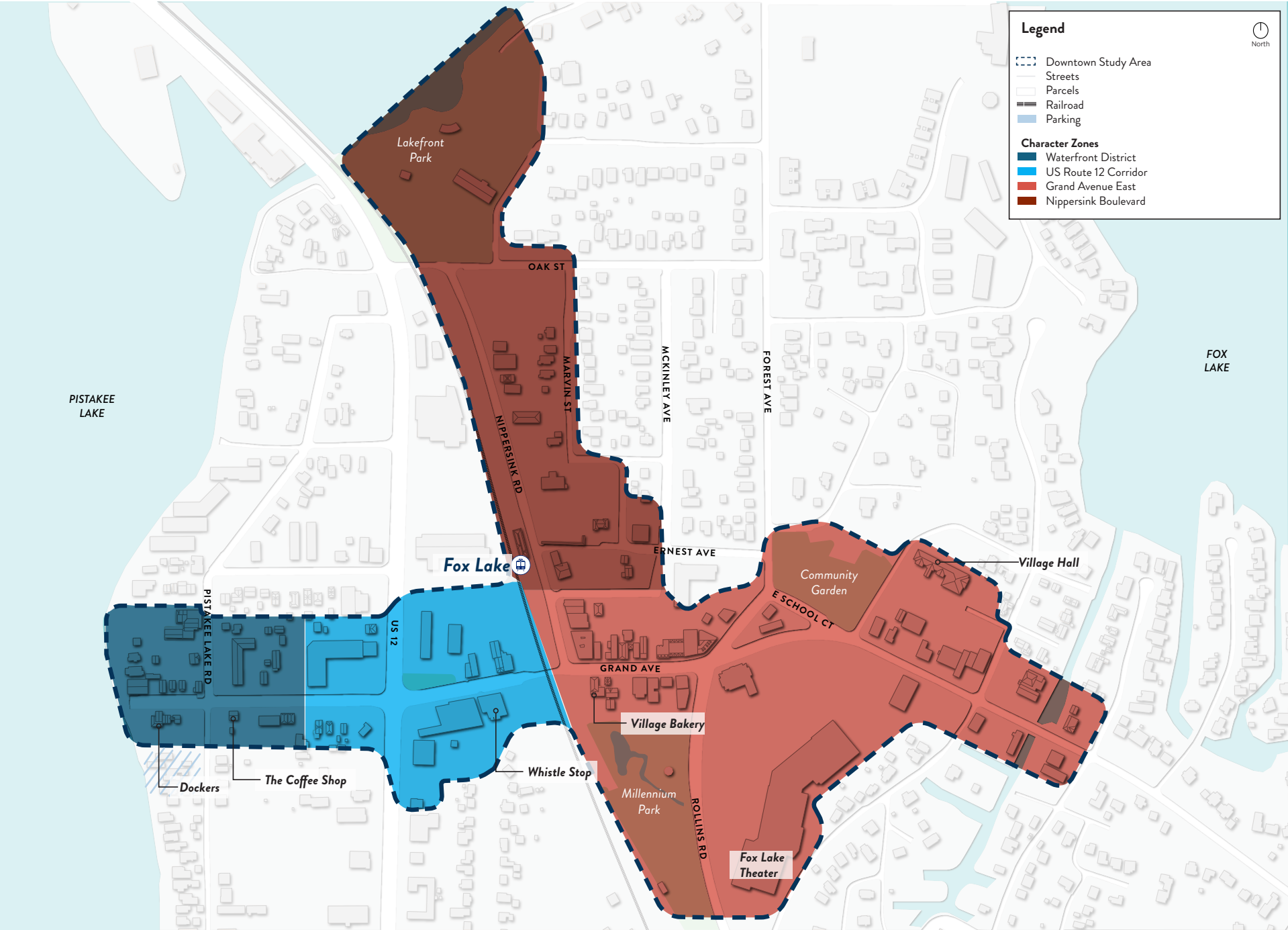
GRAND AVENUE EAST

East of the rail line, Grand Avenue features a mix of traditional main street-style buildings with zero setbacks and larger single-use retail buildings on bigger lots. While the built form supports a walkable environment, this area has a noticeably higher vacancy rate than other downtown zones. The streetscape includes sidewalks, some landscaping, decorative street lighting, and community banners. However, the public realm lacks additional urban design features, such as street furniture, planters, or gathering spaces that could enhance placemaking and reinforce the area's role as the commercial heart of downtown.

NIPPERSINK BOULEVARD

This corridor includes a range of uses such as Metra station parking, neighborhood-serving commercial and service businesses, and residential properties. An on-street bike lane and sidewalks on both sides support multimodal access, but the corridor would benefit from targeted urban design improvements to better connect Lakefront Park with the core of downtown. Enhancing the pedestrian and cyclist experience here could help activate the corridor as a key spine for community life and mobility.

Figure 19: Downtown Character Zones



Downtown Site Assessment

A comprehensive review of the downtown study area has identified several sites with future development or redevelopment potential. These opportunity sites are organized into three categories based on their current use, physical characteristics, ownership, strategic location, and alignment with long-term community goals. Each category reflects a different level of viability, investment priority, implementation readiness, and degree of Village involvement.

MAJOR OPPORTUNITY SITES

These sites (dark red sites on Figure 20) are considered the most viable and strategically important for near-term development. They typically possess favorable characteristics such as prominent locations, underutilized or vacant conditions, and fewer barriers to redevelopment. Due to their visibility and potential catalytic impact, these sites present the greatest opportunity for transformative change within the downtown and may warrant proactive involvement by the Village to facilitate implementation.

SECONDARY OPPORTUNITY SITES

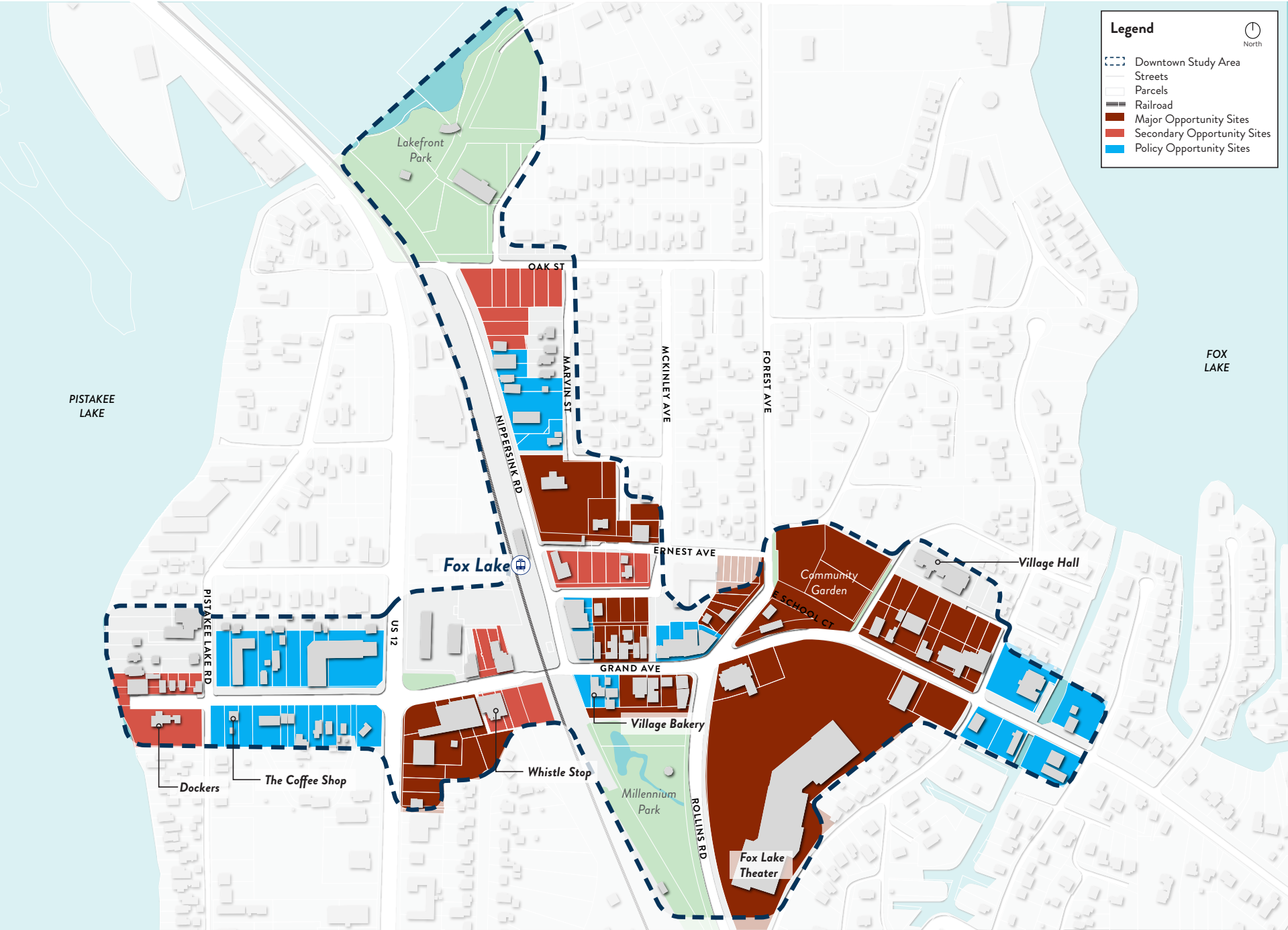
Secondary sites (light red sites on Figure 20) hold long-term development potential but face greater constraints, such as existing uses that are not easily relocated or other physical and market barriers. While these properties may not carry the same weight as priority sites, they still offer incremental redevelopment opportunities that could support broader revitalization goals over time. These areas may benefit from ongoing monitoring and engagement, with redevelopment efforts likely to evolve organically as market conditions and adjacent investments shift.

POLICY OPPORTUNITY SITES

These sites (blue sites on Figure 20) are not currently considered high priority for active redevelopment but could support increased density or more appropriate land uses through policy interventions. Many are located on the eastern and western edges of the downtown core. While these properties may not offer immediate development potential, they contribute to the district's character and vibrancy. Infill development, adaptive reuse, or zoning updates could better align these sites with the community's long-term vision, without displacing existing assets.



Figure 20: Downtown Opportunity Sites



Key Observations

1. **Strategic Location & Access:** Downtown Fox Lake benefits from its proximity to US Route 12 and the Fox Lake Metra Station, making it highly accessible by both car and train. Its location along the Chain O'Lakes strengthens its identity as a regional recreation destination.
2. **Food & Service Business Mix:** Fox Lake has a rich history as a resort and entertainment hub, with a legacy of taverns, speakeasies, and lakefront attractions. Today, food and service businesses are the most common downtown commercial uses. There is limited retail variety and few evening entertainment options, resulting in brief visits primarily centered around mealtimes. Activity drops off significantly after 8 p.m., suggesting a lack of nightlife, entertainment, or after-dinner destinations.
3. **Walkable Core:** The downtown core, centered around Grand Avenue & Nippersink Boulevard, retains a traditional, walkable form, especially near the Metra station. However, the pedestrian experience is hindered by surface parking, auto-oriented development, vacant properties, and unsafe pedestrian conditions.
4. **Limited Waterfront Access for Visiting Boaters:** With roughly 25,000 registered boats on the Chain O'Lakes, Fox Lake sees significant water traffic. However, the Village currently lacks public docking facilities that would allow boaters to stop and easily access downtown businesses.
5. **High Visitation but Limited Retention:** Downtown Fox Lake saw 1.8 million visits in 2023; however, foot traffic has declined since 2019, even as peer communities experienced growth. Nearby Lakefront Park has seen a significant increase in visitors following recent improvements, yet few of those visitors continue downtown. This points to a missed opportunity for cross-promotion and underscores the need for strategies to reactivate and better connect the area.
6. **Aging Housing Stock with Limited Diversity:** Housing within a half mile of downtown is older and predominantly single-family. There is limited presence of townhomes or newer multifamily housing, reducing residential diversity and density needed to support downtown businesses.
7. **Modest Population Base with Development Potential:** Approximately 1,578 residents live within a half mile of downtown, about 14 percent of the Village's population, offering a built-in base for local activity. Underutilized parcels, vacant buildings, and scattered infill sites present opportunities to expand this base through new residential and mixed-use development.
8. **Civic and Recreational Anchors:** Lakefront Park and Millennium Park serve as key public assets, offering recreational space, events, and public amenities. While these civic anchors can support downtown vibrancy, stronger physical and programmatic connections to surrounding businesses are needed.
9. **Public Ownership of Key Properties:** The Village owns approximately 27 acres in the downtown area, including major parks and vacant parcels, positioning it to play a proactive role in redevelopment.
10. **Potential for Destination Development:** There is an opportunity to attract destination-type uses such as specialty retail, entertainment, arts, or tasting rooms (e.g., distilleries, wineries). Enhancing downtown's identity and expanding evening and cultural offerings could help reposition it as a more robust, year-round destination.



Downtown Goals & Strategies

Introduction

The goals outlined in this Downtown Plan were carefully selected to advance the core objectives of the project, which center on strengthening downtown Fox Lake as a vibrant, accessible, and economically resilient year-round destination.

More broadly, the goals and strategies aim to activate key opportunity sites within the downtown and its adjacent neighborhoods—transforming underutilized parcels into productive, community-oriented spaces that contribute to the Village’s identity and long-term prosperity. While the vision for downtown Fox Lake is ambitious, it recognizes that redevelopment is a gradual process. Market conditions, development readiness, and public-private coordination will all influence the pace and nature of implementation.

To that end, this Plan emphasizes the importance of aligning the Village’s actions with those of residents, developers, property and business owners, and other essential partners. Success will depend on a shared commitment to advancing the goals set forth in this Plan and adapting strategies over time as conditions evolve.

The Downtown Plan establishes a clear vision for the future of downtown Fox Lake and presents six strategic goals to guide the Village and its partners in achieving that vision. These goals serve as the foundation for action—providing a roadmap for reinvestment, design improvements, and long-term economic development that reflects the community’s values and aspirations.

THE VISION

Downtown Fox Lake is a welcoming and walkable destination where everyday life is infused with lakeside charm. It's a place where residents gather, visitors linger, and entrepreneurs invest, drawn by a unique mix of local businesses, lake-facing housing, and inviting public spaces. From morning coffee on Grand Avenue to concerts at the waterfront and sunset strolls down Nippersink Boulevard, the downtown offers moments both big and small that reflect the spirit of Fox Lake. A variety of mixed-use developments and housing typologies introduce new living options in the heart of downtown, bringing more people into the district, supporting local businesses, and fueling a vibrant daytime and nighttime economy. Strengthened by year-round activity, community traditions, and a stronger connection to the lake, downtown Fox Lake serves as the heart of the Village and a place that feels proudly local, yet open to all.

Goal 1:

Improve, enhance, and expand the vibrancy of downtown Fox Lake.

Goal 2:

Develop and enact targeted economic development initiatives to support the downtown Fox Lake business environment.

Goal 3:

Support business development downtown to maintain and improve the economic base and create a sense of place.

Goal 4:

Cultivate a vibrant public realm in downtown Fox Lake.

Goal 5:

Maximize development potential of new opportunity sites in downtown Fox Lake.

Goal 6:

Strengthen walkability and connectivity to boost downtown vitality and accessibility.

Goal 1

Improve, enhance, and expand the vibrancy of downtown Fox Lake.

Downtown Fox Lake has strong fundamental characteristics, including access to a Metra Station, a public waterfront, and Millennium Park. However, downtown retail is fragmented, and existing land use has resulted in a disconnected retail landscape. Strategic placemaking initiatives, combined with a focused effort to increase residential development—through mixed-use buildings, attached single-family homes, and apartments—can help generate foot traffic, support existing businesses, and attract new investment to create a more vibrant, walkable downtown.

STRATEGY 1.1: Focus downtown efforts on placemaking to enhance vibrancy and walkability.

- **Action 1.1.1:** Invest in public art, landscaping, streetscaping and safety improvements.
- **Action 1.1.2:** Pursue state grants for a downtown plaza and other placemaking investments.
- **Action 1.1.3:** Consider tactical closures of minor streets, such as School Court, for community events like food truck festivals or wine walks.
- **Action 1.1.4:** Utilize incentives, such as designating special service areas (SSA), to fund signage or facade improvements.

STRATEGY 1.2: Encourage residential development within proximity of the downtown core and near the Metra station to create a “built-in” consumer base.

- **Action 1.2.1:** Consider proactively acquiring additional strategic sites near the Metra or within downtown to facilitate transit-oriented development residential opportunities.

- **Action 1.2.2:** Refine the zoning code to allow flexibility in residential uses, such as live/work and mixed-use, in the downtown commercial districts.
- **Action 1.2.3:** Utilize incentives, such as Business Development District (BDD), to support residential and mixed-use projects that would not occur but-for the public assistance.
- **Action 1.2.4:** Reduce or waive fees for residential projects that align with community priorities.
- **Action 1.2.5:** Create a Shovel-Ready Program that streamlines and expedites the permitting process for residential development.
- **Action 1.2.6:** Conduct outreach to residential developers to identify potential partners and increase awareness of Village sites and incentives.
- **Action 1.2.7:** Provide incentives to help property owners conduct architecture and engineering assessments on second floor spaces and evaluate the feasibility of renovating for residential use.
- **Action 1.2.8:** Host a neighborhood Open House to showcase available residential properties in and around the downtown and generate excitement for living downtown.



STRATEGY 1.3: Support the placemaking efforts of local businesses.

- **Action 1.3.1:** Expand space for cafés, outdoor dining, and other opportunities for sidewalk seating to create destinations with more social activity and interaction downtown.
- **Action 1.3.2:** Encourage pop-up shops, event spaces, and more flexible commercial leases to support the activation of currently vacant commercial storefronts.
- **Action 1.3.3:** Sponsor downtown-wide events to support retail businesses (e.g. art nights).
- **Action 1.3.4:** Market events on the Village website, social media, and newsletters and through City of Chicago partners to expand visitor reach.
- **Action 1.3.5:** Collaborate with local businesses to host “Women’s Nights Out” featuring women-owned businesses, networking opportunities, and themed activities.
- **Action 1.3.6:** Develop a rotating themed market series (e.g., artisan

markets, night markets, vintage fairs) to provide opportunities for small businesses and local creators.

- **Action 1.3.7:** Engage local restaurants and breweries in culinary events, such as a “Taste of Fox Lake” festival or chef-led cooking demonstrations.

STRATEGY 1.4: Develop and market fall, winter, and spring programming to attract additional visitors to downtown businesses year-round.

- **Action 1.4.1:** Emphasize different seasonal activities throughout the year, such as hayrides and pumpkin pop-ups in the fall, ice skating in the winter, and easter egg hunts in the spring.
- **Action 1.4.2:** Market downtown events and other programming on the Village website, social media, and newsletters and through City of Chicago partners to expand visitor reach.

Goal 2

Develop and enact targeted economic development initiatives to support the downtown Fox Lake business environment.

To foster a thriving economic environment, Fox Lake is committed to implementing strategic initiatives that bolster local downtown business development and enhance the area's overall economic health. This goal seeks to transform the downtown area into a vibrant hub of activity that attracts both residents and visitors by nurturing a supportive environment for businesses and enhancing the appeal of the locale. The focus is on creating sustainable economic growth that can lead to long-term prosperity, increase employment opportunities, and improve the quality of life for the community.

STRATEGY 2.1: Establish a Special Service Area (SSA) to manage and fund improvements downtown.

- **Action 2.1.1:** Advocate for and facilitate the establishment of an SSA, working closely with downtown property owners and other stakeholders to outline the benefits and responsibilities.
- **Action 2.1.2:** Develop a clear budget and plan for the use of SSA funds, focusing on marketing, beautification, and infrastructure improvements.
- **Action 2.1.3:** Collaborate with a newly developed 501(c)(3) non-profit organization or a Village managed Economic Development Commission to act as the service provider for the SSA, establishing a governance structure that includes representatives from local businesses and property owners.
- **Action 2.1.4:** Work with the service provider to define the types of initiatives that will be supported by the SSA funding.
- **Action 2.1.5:** Create a transparent reporting system to show the impact of SSA investments to stakeholders and the community.

STRATEGY 2.2: Implement a 'Shop Local' campaign to encourage community support for downtown businesses, increasing local spending and economic vitality in the area.

- **Action 2.2.1:** Design and implement a 'Shop Local' campaign using both digital and traditional marketing methods to highlight the value of supporting local businesses.
- **Action 2.2.2:** Coordinate with local businesses to offer discounts, loyalty programs, and special event promotions that encourage frequent visits.
- **Action 2.2.3:** Organize themed shopping days or weekends, such as "Small Business Saturdays," that feature activities, entertainment, and sales.
- **Action 2.2.4:** Use social media platforms to regularly feature local businesses, share their stories, and promote community support.



STRATEGY 2.3: Create a more supportive environment for small business development and retention in the downtown area by identifying and addressing key barriers to business success.

- **Action 2.3.1:** Conduct a small business needs assessment to survey existing and potential small business owners to gather insight on key challenges.
- **Action 2.3.2:** Host a series of small business roundtables with downtown business owners, aspiring entrepreneurs, and local partners to validate findings from the assessment and foster trust with the business community.
- **Action 2.3.3:** Develop a downtown business resource toolkit based on the identified needs and promote available resources.
- **Action 2.3.4:** Create feedback loops through annual surveys to ensure responsiveness and evaluate the program.



Wicker Park Bucktown Special Service Area #33

Chicago, Illinois

[The Wicker Park Bucktown Special Service Area](#) has been successfully serving the Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods of Chicago as the business improvement district since 2005. This SSA is managed by the Wicker Park Bucktown Chamber of Commerce and is guided by local business owners, property owners, and residents on a volunteer commission. Through providing supplemental services and programs, the SSA maintains clean, prosperous, attractive, and competitive commercial districts for the neighborhood.

Goal 3

Support business development downtown to maintain and improve the economic base and create a sense of place.

Despite strong amenities, including the Metra Station, waterfront, and Lakefront Park, downtown retail lacks cohesion. Supporting business development downtown can help create a more connected environment, generate more visits downtown, and boost the village's economic base. It could also increase the exposure of local businesses and increase profits for local businesses.

STRATEGY 3.1: Strengthen downtown as the village's core experiential retail corridor with additional retail, restaurant and entertainment uses to balance activity throughout the entire day.

- **Action 3.1.1:** Educate nearby brokers, land use attorneys, business owners, and developers about desired types of development and tenants.
- **Action 3.1.2:** Provide assistance navigating the process to relocate to the downtown
- **Action 3.1.3:** Enhance code enforcement to encourage investment and rehabilitation of older commercial and mixed-use structures.
- **Action 3.1.4:** Conduct business outreach to raise awareness of available resources for business owners and encourage businesses to leverage Fox Lake's facade improvement program, TIF district funds, and business district funds.

STRATEGY 3.2: Improve cohesiveness of downtown through economic development tools, such as facade improvements, banners, and landscaping; use the new Fox Lake brand to strengthen the sense of place.

- **Action 3.2.1:** Designate an SSA downtown to provide funding to business owners for facade improvement, signage, landscaping, and other enhancements to commercial properties and public space.
- **Action 3.2.2:** Further leverage incentives, such as BDD to support small businesses improvements, address critical vacancies, and make physical improvements that add to the downtown's character.
- **Action 3.2.3:** Increase awareness of the Fox Lake brand amongst the local business community.



STRATEGY 3.3: Work to attract or support the development of destination retailers, which can drive consistent foot traffic and create a steady demand for local services and retail.

- **Action 3.3.1:** Initiate discussions with potential destination retailers and businesses.
- **Action 3.3.2:** Develop a package of incentives, such as tax breaks or reduced utility rates, to attract these institutions to downtown Fox Lake.
- **Action 3.3.3:** Help make sites “shovel ready” by ensuring adequate infrastructure is in place to support the needs of the destination retailers, including transportation and utilities.



Shovel-Ready Sites Initiative

Westerville, Ohio

Facing limited space in its successful Westar Place district, the City of Westerville, Ohio launched the [Shovel-Ready Sites Initiative](#) to support continued economic growth. Shovel-ready programs aim to streamline development by preparing sites with the necessary infrastructure—such as roads, utilities, and zoning approvals—so they’re immediately ready for construction. To meet growing demand for commercial space, the City acquired 88 acres near Westar Place and prepared five development-ready parcels. With over \$30 million invested in infrastructure improvements, Westerville enabled private construction to proceed in tandem with public projects, significantly reducing development timelines and attracting new business investment.

Goal 4

Cultivate a vibrant public realm in downtown Fox Lake.

Downtown Fox Lake is set to become a more vibrant, engaging, and aesthetically pleasing space that enhances community life and supports local businesses. The focus is on transforming the area into a dynamic urban center where public interaction is woven into the everyday landscape, making it a place where residents and visitors naturally gather. By enriching public spaces, improving streetscapes, and elevating the overall downtown experience, Fox Lake aims to foster a strong sense of community and pride.

STRATEGY 4.1: Create and enhance public spaces in Downtown Fox Lake to foster community interaction and support local businesses.

- **Action 4.1.1:** Develop multifunctional shared streets, plazas, parks, and parking lots that can host markets, festivals, and community gatherings.
- **Action 4.1.2:** Create a local program that encourages temporary public space activations tailored to Fox Lake. This could include pop-up parks, outdoor galleries, and temporary event spaces.
- **Action 4.1.3:** Designate areas for permanent public art installations that reflect local culture and history.

STRATEGY 4.2: Enhance the streetscape and green infrastructure in downtown to improve environmental resilience and aesthetic quality.

- **Action 4.2.1:** Implement a comprehensive urban greening plan that includes tree planting along streets with little to no current canopy.
- **Action 4.2.2:** Upgrade street furniture to improve aesthetics and comfort, incorporating sustainable materials and innovative designs.
- **Action 4.2.3:** Establish green roofs and walls on suitable downtown buildings to enhance environmental resilience and aesthetic value.





STRATEGY 4.3: Promote a cohesive and active downtown experience that attracts both residents and visitors, enhancing the area’s identity and vibrancy.

- **Action 4.3.1:** Launch a unified branding and signage program to strengthen downtown identity and navigability.
- **Action 4.3.2:** Coordinate with local businesses and organizations to schedule regular downtown events that attract residents and visitors.
- **Action 4.3.3:** Develop a strategy for integrating technology into the public realm, such as interactive digital kiosks and free public Wi-Fi zones.



“Play See Shop” South Shore

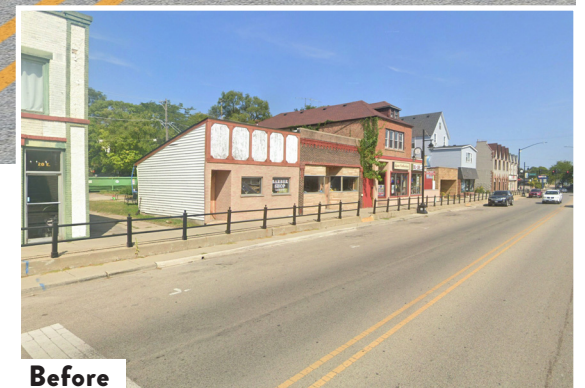
Chicago, Illinois

Chicago’s South Shore neighborhood witnessed a transformative initiative that revitalized a prominent storefront after being vacant for more than a decade. This pop-up activation, the [“Play See Shop” project](#), repurposed an empty storefront along 71st street into three vibrant new spaces: a children’s play space, fine art gallery, and an artisan collective market venue. Spearheaded by the South Shore Chamber of Commerce, this initiative exemplifies how temporary activations can serve as catalysts for community engagement and economic revitalization.



Grand Avenue Placemaking Improvements

- A Activated Pedestrian Alleyway with Gateway Signage.
- B Outdoor Dining Area.
- C Adaptive Reuse and Facade Improvements.
- D Improved Streetscape Conditions.
- E Sharrow Bike Lanes.



Before

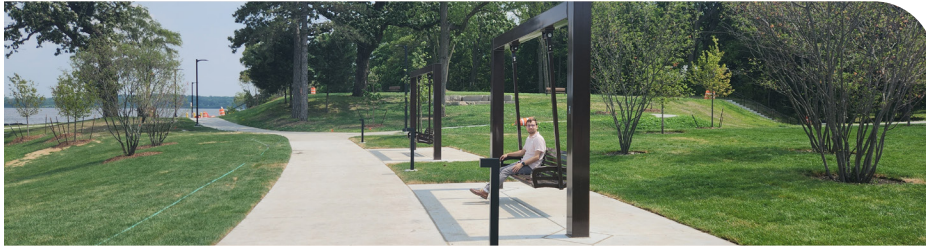
Goal 5

Maximize development potential of new opportunity sites in downtown Fox Lake.

To elevate the current state of downtown, Fox Lake is focused on maximizing the development potential of its prime real estate, particularly those sites near the lake. This initiative seeks to transform underutilized spaces into vibrant, high-value areas that attract both investment and community engagement. By leveraging its picturesque lakeside location, Fox Lake aims to introduce higher and better uses that complement its natural beauty and enhance its appeal as a destination. The strategic development of these areas will improve the economic landscape and enrich the community's quality of life, making downtown a thriving hub for business, recreation, and waterfront activities.

STRATEGY 5.1: Encourage and facilitate public-private partnerships to fund and develop mixed-use projects that can enhance the economic and social fabric of downtown.

- **Action 5.1.1:** Identify key development projects that could benefit from public-private partnerships.
- **Action 5.1.2:** Enforce design standards that require new buildings to have transparent, active ground floors that engage with the street.
- **Action 5.1.3:** Develop a legal and administrative framework to guide public-private partnerships, ensuring transparency and mutual benefits.
- **Action 5.1.4:** Promote the consolidation of adjacent properties to create larger development sites, facilitating more impactful mixed-use projects that can transform the downtown landscape.
- **Action 5.1.5:** Launch a call for private sector partners who are interested in investing in downtown revitalization projects.
- **Action 5.1.6:** Hold community consultations to ensure public support and input on the proposed development projects.
- **Action 5.1.7:** Negotiate and finalize partnership agreements that detail each party's contributions, responsibilities, and benefits.
- **Action 5.1.8:** Advocate at County level for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding to support projects that align with County priorities within Fox Lake.



STRATEGY 5.2: Establish a design overlay district with a design review process in downtown Fox Lake.

- **Action 5.2.1:** Set up a Design Review Board composed of professionals in architecture, urban planning, and local business to review project proposals and ensure they meet the design guidelines.
- **Action 5.2.2:** Assign a qualified staff member or consultant to oversee design reviews until the Design Review Board is operational.
- **Action 5.2.3:** Hold informational sessions to explain the design guidelines to property owners, developers, and the public.
- **Action 5.2.4:** Ensure that the Design Review Board works closely with the Planning Commission to integrate design standards with broader planning efforts.
- **Action 5.2.5:** Periodically review and update the guidelines and the review process to keep them relevant and effective.



STRATEGY 5.3: Attract entertainment and water-related activities.

- **Action 5.3.1:** Partner with developers to explore the feasibility of entertainment venues like theaters, breweries, or water-based attractions that link downtown to Fox Lake.
- **Action 5.3.2:** Design public spaces that can accommodate seasonal water-related activities, such as kayak rentals or waterfront dining.
- **Action 5.3.3:** Implement zoning incentives that encourage the development of tourist-attracting facilities and businesses.

STRATEGY 5.4: Implement sustainable and community-oriented building practices.

- **Action 5.4.1:** Develop guidelines that promote sustainable building practices, such as energy-efficient designs and materials.
- **Action 5.4.2:** Require new developments to include public amenities like plazas, courtyards, or balconies that enhance community interaction.
- **Action 5.4.3:** Advocate for designs that minimize the visual impact of parking facilities, integrating them behind or beneath buildings.

Goal 6

Strengthen walkability and connectivity to boost downtown vitality and accessibility.

Improving walkability and creating strong connections between downtown Fox Lake, the lakefront, and surrounding community assets is vital for supporting local businesses, encouraging active lifestyles, and enriching the visitor experience. An expansion of the existing wayfinding and signage program, with clear, detailed, and tactical signage can help direct residents and visitors to key destinations, including local businesses, restaurants, and attractions such as Lakefront Park. Revitalized corridors, like Grand Avenue, can encourage walking, cycling, and other non-motorized transportation, improving accessibility for both land and water-based visitors. These efforts not only foster a vibrant and welcoming downtown but also contribute to sustainable urban development by integrating the natural and built environment.

STRATEGY 6.1: Enhance pedestrian and bicycle mobility in Downtown.

- **Action 6.1.1:** Allocate budget resources for public works to install low-cost tactical mobility enhancements, such as curb bump-outs with bollards, shared bicycle lane markings, updated crosswalk striping, flex posts, jersey barriers, or planters.
- **Action 6.1.2:** Ensure new developments provide ample space for pedestrians, including pedestrian plazas, streetscape amenities, outdoor dining areas, gathering spaces, and connections to parks, recreational areas, and the water.
- **Action 6.1.3:** Explore the feasibility of installing street trees or green infrastructure along Grand Avenue to enhance the pedestrian experience.
- **Action 6.1.4:** Consider widening sidewalks and removing the split-level sidewalks along Grand Avenue from Nippersink Boulevard to Holly Avenue to improve walkability and comfort.

STRATEGY 6.2: Create a pedestrian promenade along Grand Avenue and Nippersink Boulevard to connect the lakefront to Downtown.

- **Action 6.2.1:** Modify on-street parking to create a wider, more comfortable pedestrian route along Grand Avenue between the lakefront and US 12.
- **Action 6.2.2:** Remove on-street parking from one side of the street and reduce travel lane width.
- **Action 6.2.3:** Extend streetscape design elements, such as streetlights and signage, from Downtown to the waterfront to create a cohesive experience.
- **Action 6.2.4:** Link the pedestrian promenade along Grand Avenue to a waterfront overlook, providing enhanced views and access to the lakefront.



STRATEGY 6.3: Enhance tactical wayfinding in Downtown Fox Lake.

- **Action 6.3.1:** Develop a focused signage package that emphasizes tactical directions for parking, pedestrian pathways, and key local amenities.
- **Action 6.3.2:** Improve and clarify parking signage for the Downtown Metra parking lot to enhance user experience and accessibility.
- **Action 6.3.3:** Allocate budget resources for public works to advance current wayfinding efforts to guide residents and visitors to key destinations within Downtown and the broader community.
- **Action 6.3.4:** Enhance visibility and accessibility of downtown bus stops by installing clear signage, designated waiting areas, and route information to encourage public transportation use.



Clark Street Wayfinding

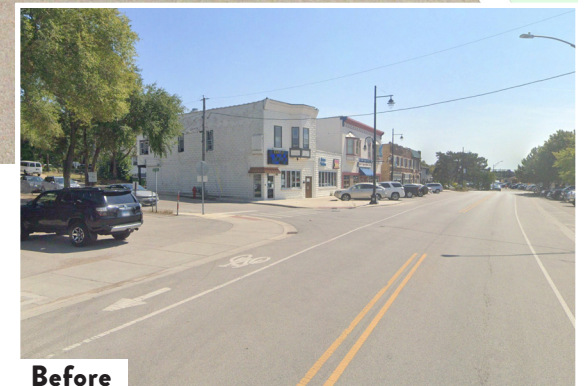
Chicago, Illinois

The Lakota Group worked with the Lincoln Park Chamber of Commerce to develop a custom wayfinding system for Clark Street in Lincoln Park, a Chicago neighborhood. Through this process, Lakota helped the chamber define identity hubs for different areas within Lincoln Park, using “Lakefront Clark Street” as the test case. Logos and identities were developed for each hub that highlight the specific character of each area, but all still tie to the greater identity of Lincoln Park, with its teal arch as a unifying element. From these identities, signage concepts were developed—ranging from pedestrian kiosks to vertical and horizontal gateway options to custom crosswalk options.



Nippersink Boulevard Pedestrian Promenade

- A** Community Gathering Space.
- B** Improved Streetscape Conditions.
- C** Mural Installation.
- D** Improved Crossing Conditions.
- E** Defined On-Street Bike Lanes.



Before

SECTION 4

Downtown Development & Design

This section ties together the wide range of strategies and action items presented in Section 3 into a cohesive, long-term development vision for Downtown. It begins with a strategic framework that outlines the overarching approach to future land use and planning across the district. This is followed by a set of potential development scenarios for key opportunity sites, demonstrating how the proposed strategies can be implemented in real-world contexts. The section concludes with design guidelines that address urban form, architectural character, and site landscaping to ensure a cohesive and high-quality built environment.

Planning Framework

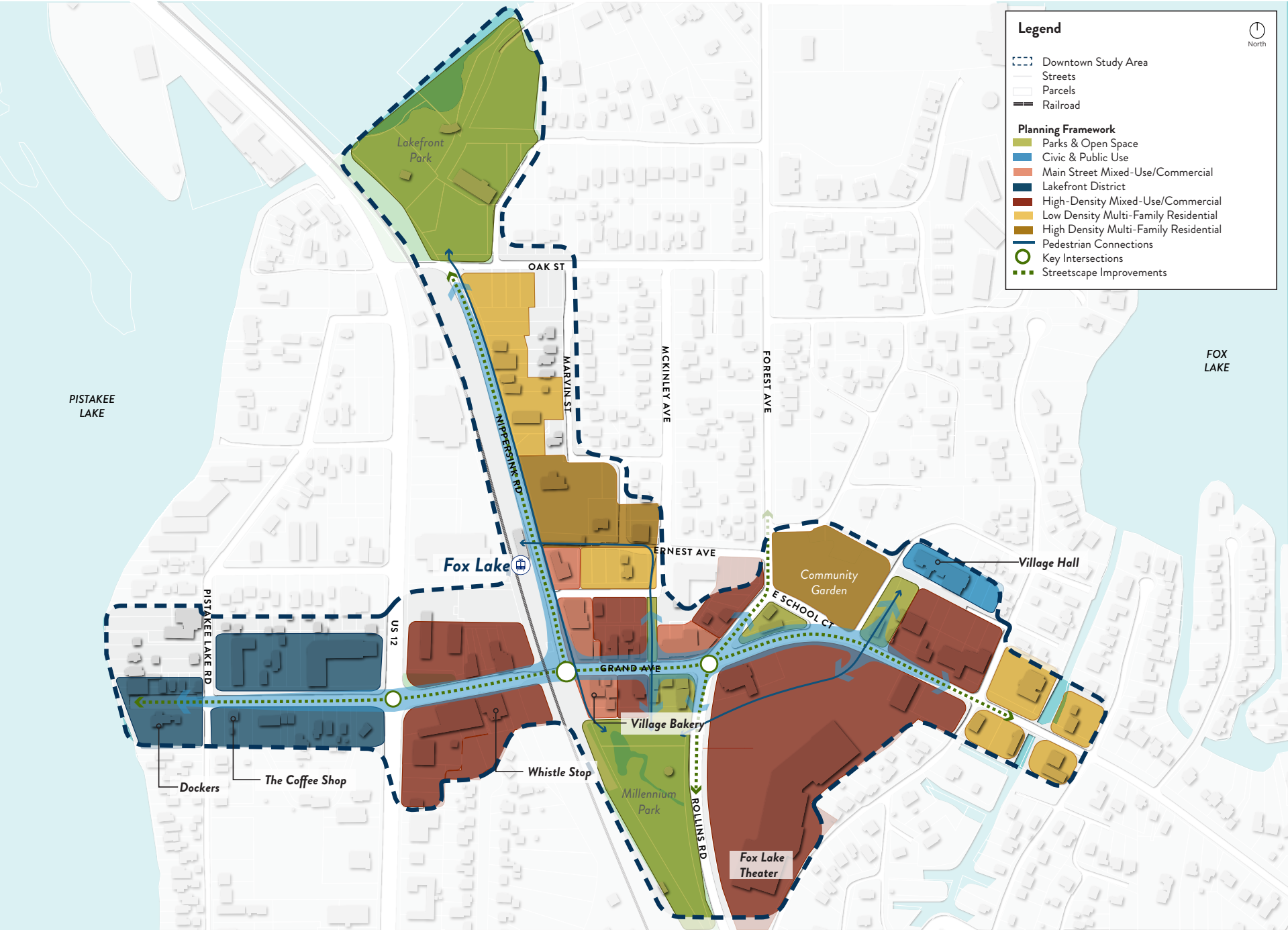
The planning framework for downtown Fox Lake integrates future land use character with mobility enhancements to illustrate the area's long-term potential, guided by the vision and goals outlined in this Plan.

A central feature of the framework is the introduction of a Lakefront District along Grand Avenue west of US Route 12. This district emphasizes a mix of residential and commercial uses that leverage proximity to the lakefront, fostering a strong visual and physical connection to the water. Streetscape enhancements in this area aim to establish a neighborhood character that encourages walkability and promotes access to the lake.

Grand Avenue west of US Route 12 is envisioned as a corridor of high-density, mixed-use commercial and Main Street-style character, prioritizing increased building intensity, active ground floor uses, and a pedestrian-oriented streetscape. These improvements are designed to foster a more vibrant, compact, and connected downtown experience.

Nippersink Boulevard is reimagined as a pedestrian promenade, lined with a mix of low- and high-density multifamily residential typologies and streetscape enhancements. This corridor provides a seamless link between the downtown core and Lakefront Park, while introducing new housing options that support downtown vitality. The following opportunity site scenarios further demonstrate how the planning framework can be translated into development strategies.

Figure 21: Downtown Planning Framework



Opportunity Site Scenarios

Opportunity sites in downtown represent rare and catalytic prospects for transformative change. Selected for their high susceptibility to change, these sites have the potential to drive strategic reinvestment across the area. Key selection factors include their location, such as gateway entry points, proximity to the lakefront and key open spaces, along with current vacancy or underutilization and ownership status. Each site offers a unique opportunity to introduce new uses that increase activity, attract businesses, and generate greater foot traffic throughout downtown.

Given the significance of these sites, it is essential that future development plans are carefully crafted with both community priorities and market realities in mind. To support revitalization efforts, a series of conceptual plans have been developed for several of these opportunity sites. These scenarios are intended to illustrate how strategic investment could drive a broader transformation across downtown. They do not represent a single preferred solution, but rather demonstrate possible outcomes aligned with the community's vision and serve as a tool for evaluating future proposals.

Each scenario reflects plausible uses for each specific location, balancing private development potential with the public value of a more vibrant, connected downtown. The following Downtown Development Guidelines will help the Village assess future development plans and ensure individual projects contribute meaningfully to broader district goals.

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

- Increase density and diversify building types by promoting a range of residential units and mixed-use developments within and around the downtown core.
- Prioritize active commercial and residential uses on ground floors to create a vibrant and engaging streetscape, particularly along key corridors.

- Require high-quality design standards and enhanced frontage conditions along Grand Avenue, Nippersink Boulevard, Rollins Road, and US Route 12 to elevate the visual appeal and walkability of downtown.
- Expand opportunities for outdoor dining and gathering by integrating flexible, people-focused spaces in both public and private developments.
- Redesign parking areas to be more efficient, visually appealing, and supportive of walkability, while balancing the needs of downtown visitors and businesses.
- Establish a cohesive visual identity through consistent signage, lighting, street furniture, and landscaping that reinforces downtown's character.
- Integrate residential units into mixed-use developments to bring more residents into the downtown and support a 24/7 environment.
- Promote active transportation options by improving infrastructure for walking, biking, and public transit access.
- Enhance public access to the lakefront and strengthen visual and physical connections between the downtown and waterfront.
- Support a diverse mix of buildings and land uses that meet a variety of market demands and foster economic resilience.
- Encourage infill development on underutilized or vacant parcels to strengthen the fabric of the downtown and make more efficient use of land.



Opportunity Sites

- 1 US Route 12 Gateway Site
- 2 Water Tower Site
- 3 Central Grand Avenue Site
- 4 Forest Avenue Site
- 5 Village Hall Site
- 6 Lakeland Shopping Center Site

1. US Route 12 Gateway Site Scenarios

The US Route 12 Gateway Site is located at the southeast corner of US Route 12 and Grand Avenue. Today, the site features a shopping center with a large corner parking lot, a vacant standalone commercial building, and an expansive area dominated by surface parking and multiple curb cuts. Sidewalks are absent along Route 12 within the site, and what should serve as a prominent entrance into downtown lacks wayfinding or gateway signage to indicate that more lies ahead along Grand Avenue.

The concept scenarios for this site envision transforming it into a true gateway to the heart of downtown. They focus on improving connectivity between the east and west sides of downtown, introducing a mix of new and diverse uses, and enhancing the site's ability to generate pedestrian activity. The concepts also address the site's street frontage, proposing vibrant building edges with parking relocated behind buildings to support a more attractive, pedestrian-friendly environment.

By adding sidewalks and traffic-calming measures, the designs aim to create a safer, more walkable setting that naturally slows vehicles at this busy intersection and visually draws people toward the businesses and amenities on both sides of Grand Avenue.



CONCEPT A

Concept A takes a minimal-intervention approach focused on enhancing the site's existing assets. Parking is relocated to the rear of buildings, allowing portions of the current surface lot to be reimaged as public gathering spaces that support outdoor dining, community programming, and a stronger visual identity. The concept emphasizes adaptive reuse, facade improvements, and targeted business attraction and retention strategies to reactivate the shopping center. Updates to zoning regulations will support these improvements by encouraging aesthetic enhancements and promoting a more diverse mix of businesses.

CONCEPT B

Concept B envisions a more transformative approach, with the full redevelopment of the existing shopping center into a higher-density, mixed-use destination. A prominent public plaza anchors the corner, creating a welcoming and active gateway into downtown. New development is oriented towards the street, with parking placed behind the buildings to support a more walkable environment. Enhanced streetscape elements strengthen connections to Grand Avenue and the broader downtown area. This concept includes approximately 50-75 new residential units, 110 parking spaces, and 16,500 SF of new commercial space.



Figure 22: Concept A



Figure 23: Concept B



2. Water Tower Site Scenarios

The Water Tower Site is a prominent, Village-owned parcel located along Nippersink Boulevard. Situated on a hill above the street, it is nestled within a residential neighborhood and connected to Nippersink Boulevard by a pedestrian walkway. A decorative retaining wall lines Nippersink Boulevard, providing an attractive frontage. The site includes the existing Fox Lake Water Tower and service building, which will remain, along with the old Community Center and a large surface parking lot. Directly across the street is the former Fire Station 1, which is no longer in service.

With respect to the surrounding context, this site presents a strong opportunity to introduce new housing options and add residential density to the downtown. Its elevated position offers the potential for exceptional views of the lake to the west. Key considerations for future development include creating a buffer around the water tower, designing efficient circulation, and ensuring adequate parking to support the site's long-term viability.

CONCEPT A

This concept envisions a new rowhome neighborhood overlooking Nippersink Boulevard. A thoughtfully designed roadway connects the site to the surrounding context while establishing a buffer from the water tower to create a clear separation of uses. The plan introduces 16 new residential units, contributing to downtown housing diversity and walkability.

CONCEPT B

Concept B capitalizes on the site's ideal location by maximizing lake views and introducing increased downtown residential density. This concept proposes a new multi-family residential development, adding approximately 37-47 new units to the neighborhood. The plan also incorporates 57 surface parking spaces to support the needs of future residents.

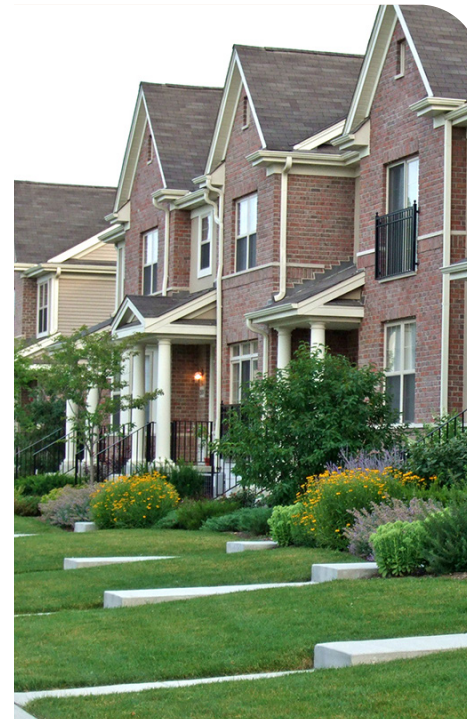


Figure 24: Concept A



Legend

- 1 Two- to Three-Story Front-Loaded Rowhomes.**
 - 12 total units (2,520 – 3,780 SF/unit)
 - 2 car garage
- 2 Buffer and Green Space.**
- 3 Two- to Three-Story Rear-Loaded Rowhomes.**
 - 4 total units (2,520 – 3,780 SF/unit)
 - 2 car garage

Figure 25: Concept B



- Legend**
- 1 Three-Story Residential Development.**
 - 37-47 residential units
 - 57 surface parking spaces (1-1.5 cars/unit)
 - 2 Buffer and Green Space.**
 - 3 Public Overlook.**

3. Central Grand Avenue Site Scenarios

Located in the heart of the traditional downtown strip, the Central Grand Avenue Sites feature a mix of one- to three-story traditional main street buildings. While the area has strong bones, a significant number of buildings in this area are either vacant, in poor condition, or underutilized, presenting opportunities for reinvestment and more productive uses that better support the downtown core.

The existing streetscape offers some appealing features, such as a consistent streetwall and a pocket park, but it is interrupted by surface parking, vacancies, and underutilized pedestrian alleys. The street itself includes wide travel lanes, parallel parking on both sides, and sidewalks with minimal urban design elements, leaving room for enhancements to walkability and visual appeal.

The primary goal for this opportunity area is to encourage more efficient and vibrant use of some of downtown's most valuable land. Key strategies include expanding or upgrading commercial space, activating public spaces, and enhancing the public realm to create a more cohesive, attractive, and walkable environment.



CONCEPT A

Concept A focuses on minimal intervention prioritizing placemaking and beautification strategies to enhance the downtown environment. A central feature is a new pocket park on the south side of Grand Avenue, creating a direct visual connection to Millennium Park and offering an opportunity to reinvigorate an existing parking lot. The northern portion of Grand Avenue highlights pedestrian alley activation to provide outdoor dining space and a stronger sense of place. Adaptive reuse of existing buildings, facade enhancements, and targeted business attraction and retention efforts bring new life to vacant and underutilized storefronts and strengthen the downtown core.

CONCEPT B

This concept scenario proposes replacing underutilized and vacant buildings with new mixed-use development. The plan introduces approximately 24–35 new residential units, 12,200 SF of new commercial space, and 80 parking spaces. Streetscape enhancements, including street trees and upgraded pedestrian amenities, help strengthen the public realm and create a more welcoming environment. An activated alley on the south side of Grand Avenue provides a direct, walkable connection to Millennium Park, supporting downtown vibrancy and accessibility.

CONCEPT C

Concept C envisions transforming underutilized and vacant buildings with new mixed-use development and a central green space to revitalize the downtown core. On the north side of Grand Avenue, a new mixed-use building complements the existing streetwall, adding ground floor commercial space, outdoor dining, and upper-story housing. A two-story parking garage behind the building serves residents and visitors. Across the street, a second mixed-use development anchors a new public park at Rollins Road and Grand Avenue, strengthening the connection to Millennium Park and creating a gateway to the downtown. Improvements to the existing alley, including realignment and paving create a more welcoming link between the downtown and park. The concept introduces approximately 26–35 residential units, 19,000 SF of commercial space, and 90 parking spaces.

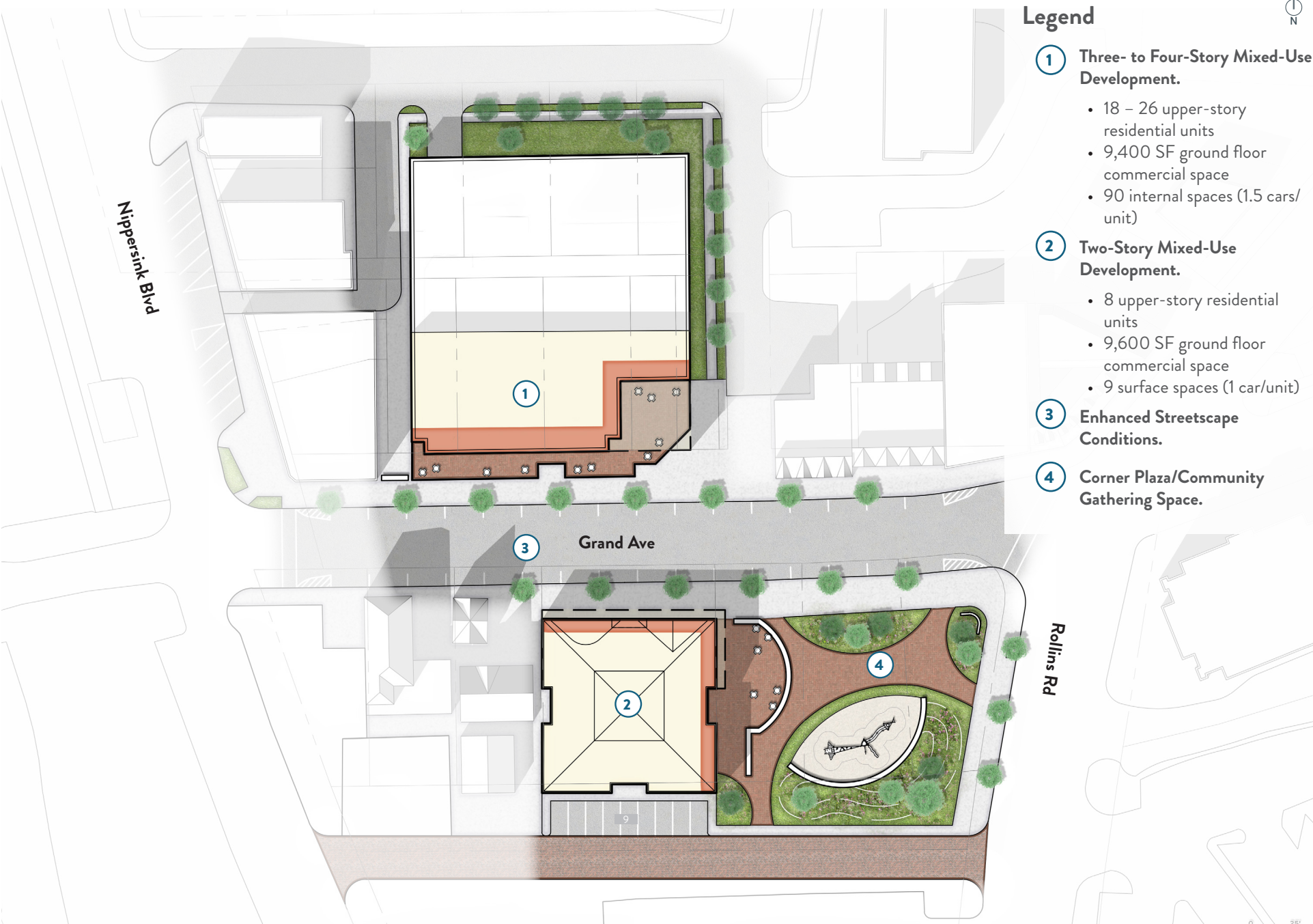
Figure 26: Concept A



Figure 27: Concept B



Figure 28: Concept C



4. Forest Avenue Site Scenarios

Located at the intersection of Forest Avenue and Grand Avenue, the Forest Avenue Sites represent a key opportunity to strengthen the core of downtown. Spanning a series of underutilized parcels along a prominent stretch of Grand Avenue, this area holds untapped potential to enhance the walkability, connectivity, and vibrancy of the district. The sites include a vacant building to the east of Forest Avenue, a 2-acre community garden to the west, and a centrally located gas station on a site between Forest Avenue and School Court.

The current configuration disrupts the street wall of Grand Avenue and creates safety and circulation challenges for pedestrians and vehicles. Redevelopment of these sites offers a chance to reweave them into the fabric of downtown through active ground floor uses, new residential options, and improved urban design. With thoughtful planning, the Forest Avenue Sites can evolve into a more cohesive, livable, and economically productive part of the downtown.



CONCEPT A

Concept A envisions transforming these sites into a vibrant, mixed-use district offering a variety of housing options. The plan includes approximately 43 to 53 new residential units, 6,000 SF of commercial space, and 43 dedicated parking spaces. West of Forest Avenue, a new mixed-use building adds active ground floor commercial space and extends the main street character of Grand Avenue. To the east, the existing community garden site is reimagined as a rowhome neighborhood with a new community park. The concept also features enhanced streetscapes, safer pedestrian crossings, and integrated gathering spaces, creating a more walkable, inviting, and pedestrian-friendly environment.

CONCEPT B

This concept scenario envisions removing the existing gas station to realign Forest Avenue with Grand Avenue, creating a new intersection anchored by community green space. This gateway enhances safety and creates a more welcoming experience along Grand Avenue, while supporting new residential and commercial development. West of Forest Avenue, a new mixed-use building with active ground floor retail and an outdoor patio overlook the open space. To the east, the current community garden site is transformed into a new neighborhood featuring an apartment complex, rowhomes, and a community park. Internal circulation provides local access and parking. The plan introduces approximately 72-100 new residential units, 10,000 SF of commercial space, and 100 parking spaces.

Figure 29: Concept A



Figure 30: Concept B



5. Village Hall Site Scenarios

The 2.5-acre Village Hall Site comprises a cluster of one-story commercial buildings located along Grand Avenue, directly in front of Village Hall. These buildings currently house a mix of service-oriented and commercial uses but are characterized by their dated design and limited activation of Grand Avenue. The site is dominated by surface parking lots with multiple curb cuts onto Grand Avenue, creating a fragmented streetscape that impedes walkability and diminishes the pedestrian experience. At the rear, the buildings back up to Thillen Drive, where Village Hall is located, contributing to an “alley-like” atmosphere that disconnects Village Hall from the downtown core. Overall, the area suffers from a lack of cohesive identity and underutilization of valuable real estate.

Future concepts for this site explore opportunities to strengthen the connection between Village Hall and Grand Avenue by reimagining site circulation, building orientation, and public realm improvements. Potential redevelopment scenarios include the introduction of a diversity of uses including a mix of housing, the integration of community green space, and a streetscape that extends the character and walkability of the surrounding downtown. With strategic design and reinvestment, this site can serve as a more welcoming gateway to Village Hall and a vibrant extension of the heart of Fox Lake.



CONCEPT A

Concept A envisions a vibrant new park along Keystone Avenue that creates a visual and physical connection between Grand Avenue and Village Hall. A newly designed central drive offers a direct route from Grand Avenue to the entrance of Village Hall, incorporating thoughtfully placed parking to support both civic and commercial uses. The plan features a mixed-use development that frames the new park and is anchored by a prominent retail or restaurant space at the corner, positioned to attract park visitors and activate Grand Avenue. Concept A introduces approximately 65-87 new residential units, 7,500 SF of commercial space, and 120 parking spaces. Enhanced streetscape improvements tie the site into the surrounding downtown, extending walkability and creating a more inviting and accessible experience for residents and visitors alike.

CONCEPT B

Concept B explores the potential relocation of Village Hall to a new, prominently positioned building fronting Grand Avenue. This shift would open the opportunity to create a new rowhome neighborhood along Keystone Avenue and Thillen Drive, organized around a central boulevard that enhances connectivity and visual appeal. The new Village Hall would anchor the eastern edge of the site, designed within a walkable, pedestrian-friendly setting with parking discreetly located behind the building. Additional residential development would be introduced along Holly Avenue, just behind the relocated Village Hall, further reinforcing the site's transition into a cohesive, mixed-use neighborhood. This concept includes approximately 34 to 38 new residential units, 10,700 - 21,400 SF of institutional space, and 94 parking spaces.

Figure 31: Concept A

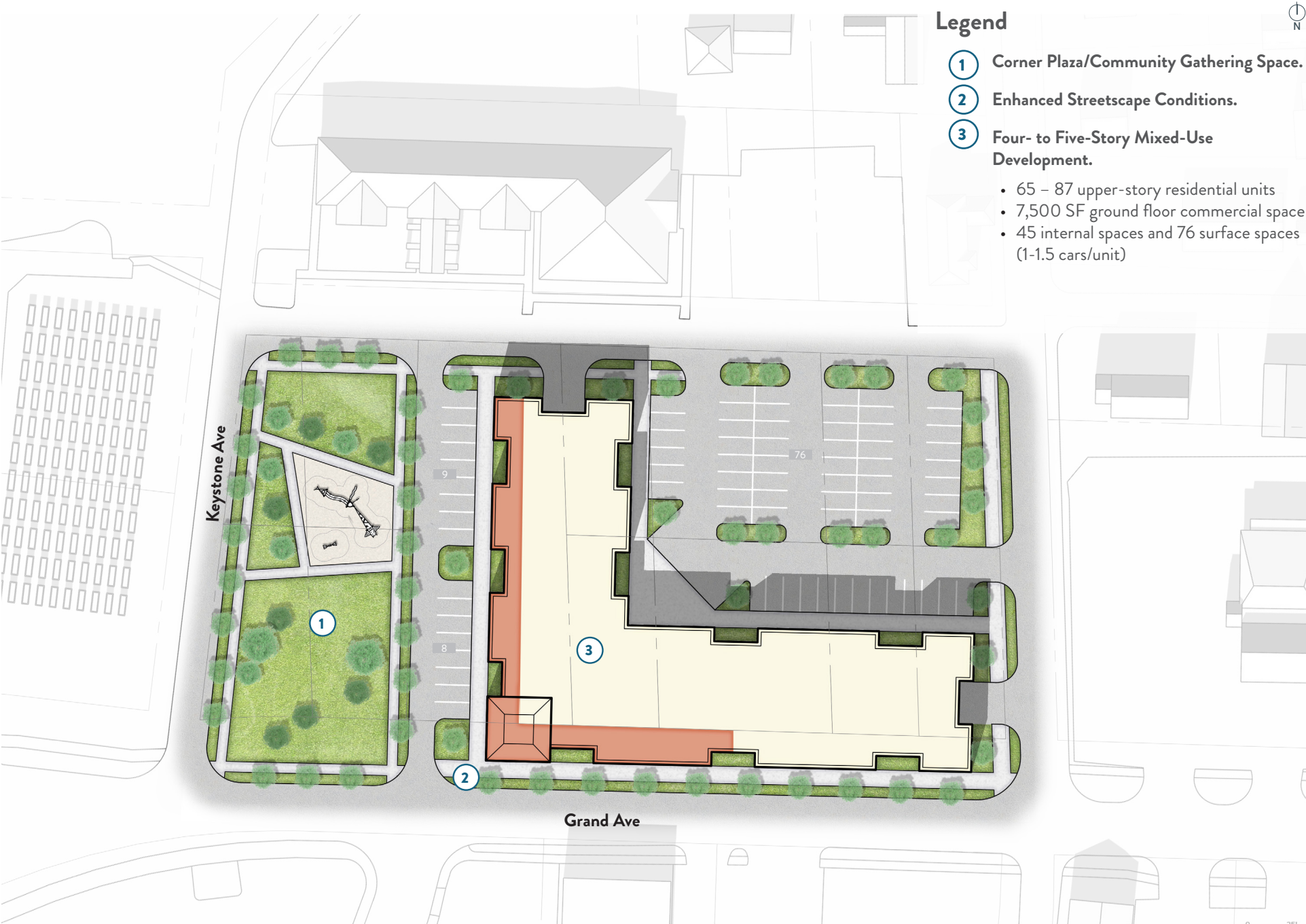
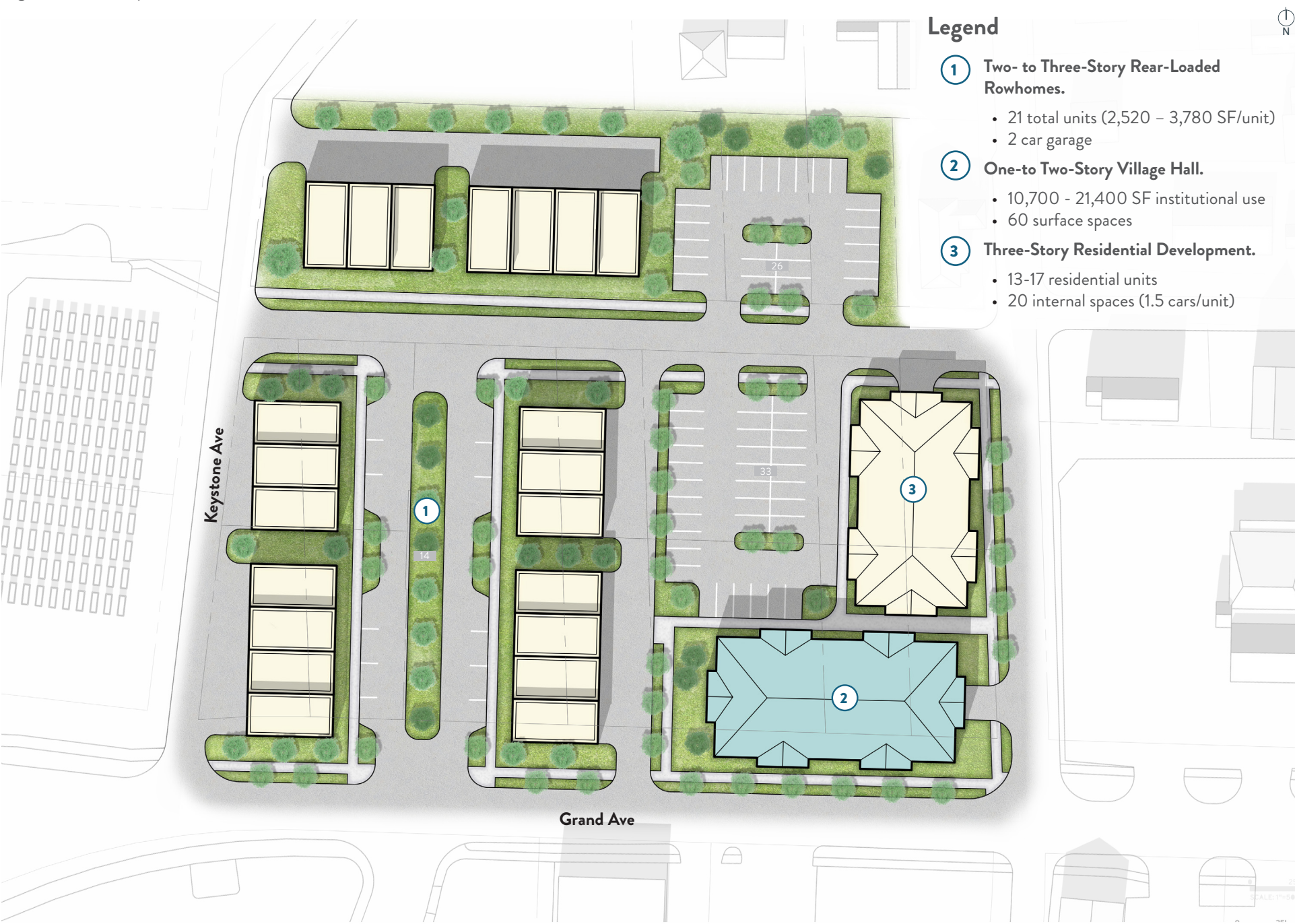


Figure 32: Concept B



6. Lakeland Shopping Center Site Scenarios

The Lakeland Shopping Center is the largest redevelopment opportunity within downtown Fox Lake, encompassing approximately 11 acres. Currently, the site includes a single outlet bank that anchors the prominent corner of Grand Avenue and Rollins Road, while the remainder of the retail strip is set back from the street, buffered by expansive surface parking. This configuration creates a gap in the downtown streetscape and limits walkability and visual cohesion along two key corridors. The shopping center hosts a mix of retail, service, and beverage-oriented businesses, though some storefronts remain vacant. Its most iconic tenant is the Fox Lake Theater—a long-standing and cherished institution within the community.

Future concepts for the site envision a more integrated and dynamic urban presence by reorienting buildings to frame Grand Avenue and Rollins Road with active frontages. Infill development would introduce new commercial, residential, and mixed-use buildings that establish a continuous street wall, foster vibrancy, and create a more engaging pedestrian experience. The Fox Lake Theater remains a central feature, with enhancements to surrounding parking and pedestrian pathways that better connect it to the broader downtown environment. Overall, the reimagined site seeks to transform Lakeland Shopping Center into a more walkable, activated, and seamlessly connected district at the heart of Fox Lake.



CONCEPT A

This concept scenario envisions a transformation of the Lakeland Shopping Center that brings new retail along Grand Avenue, creating an active street frontage while shifting parking to a more centralized location within the site. Portions of the existing shopping center are removed to allow for a more cohesive site layout, with a new pocket park introduced to support the surrounding businesses. Existing storefronts would receive facade enhancements to improve the site's overall appearance and better reflect the character of downtown Fox Lake. Curb cuts are consolidated to reduce conflicts and improve traffic flow, while upgraded streetscape elements establish a clear and welcoming entrance into this emerging district. The concept includes approximately 30,000 SF of new retail space and 387 parking spaces.

CONCEPT B

Concept B envisions the transformation of the existing shopping center into a vibrant, mixed-use district that enhances connectivity with the surrounding downtown core. At the corner of Grand Avenue and Rollins Road, two retail anchors define the gateway into the district, while a thoughtfully integrated rowhome neighborhood extends east of the site. The historic Fox Lake Theater remains a key destination, with reconfigured parking and improved circulation strengthening its ties to both the new development and the greater downtown area. The concept includes approximately 30,700 SF of retail space, 40 new rowhomes, and 200 parking spaces.

CONCEPT C

This concept scenario reimagines the Lakeland Shopping Center as a vibrant, higher-density mixed-use district. Grand Avenue is framed by two mixed-use developments, while a rowhome community is thoughtfully arranged around a central green space on the eastern portion of the site. The plan introduces between 107 and 127 residential units, 8,000 SF of commercial, and 140 parking spaces, balancing density with walkability. A network of internal pathways and improved circulation routes strengthen connections to the downtown core. At the southern end of the site, the Fox Lake Theater remains a key destination, with redesigned parking and circulation.

Figure 33: Concept A



Figure 34: Concept B



Figure 35: Concept C



Design Guidelines

The Fox Lake downtown design guidelines establish a foundation for creating a vibrant, cohesive, and pedestrian-friendly district. Rooted in the community's vision, these guidelines are intended to guide both public and private investment by promoting high-quality design, encouraging placemaking, and reinforcing a consistent urban character throughout downtown.

While the guidelines are not rigid standards, they establish clear expectations for new development and improvements, emphasizing flexibility, creativity, and excellence in design. They aim to ensure that individual projects contribute to a unified and engaging downtown experience, with special attention given to the character of streets, public spaces, building form, and the interface between the public and private realms.

Although many of the diagrams and illustrations reference a portion of Grand Avenue, the principles and guidance offered here are broadly applicable and encouraged throughout the downtown area.

Urban Form

Urban form guidelines address building mass, scale, and articulation to guide the size and configuration of individual buildings, ensuring they fit appropriately within their surrounding context. Thoughtful site and building design will help avoid potential conflicts and ensure that independently developed parcels contribute to a unified and cohesive vision for the downtown.

- **Consistent Street Frontage.** Encourage infill development, with buildings or public spaces, fronting Grand Avenue and Nippersink Boulevard to establish a continuous “street wall” that enhances pedestrian comfort and supports an active streetscape.

- **Building Heights.** Downtown buildings should typically range from two to four stories. Additional height may be appropriate on key sites or strategic locations where greater intensity supports broader community goals.
- **Building Orientation.** New development should front primary streets, with clearly defined ground floor entries, ample windows, and architectural detailing facing the public realm. Active ground floor commercial uses are encouraged along Grand Avenue in the downtown core.
- **Upper Floor Step-Backs.** Incorporate step-backs on upper floors, typically beginning at the third floor or in response to adjacent building heights, to create a gradual transition to adjacent lower-scale buildings. Step-backs should generally begin at the third story, or as appropriate to the surrounding context. Step-backs should be deep enough to visibly reduce perceived building mass and maintain a pedestrian-friendly scale.
- **Building Setbacks.** Minimize front building setbacks along Grand Avenue within the downtown core, to reinforce an urban character. Strategic exceptions may be used to introduce architectural interest and accommodate amenities such as seating and dining. In other locations, building setbacks should align with existing development patterns.
- **Facade Articulation.** Break up long building facades with architectural elements such as material changes, vertical and horizontal articulation, increased transparency, or focal features to create visual interest and support a high-quality public realm.
- **Off-Street Parking & Loading.** Locate parking, loading, and service areas behind buildings or within block interiors whenever feasible to preserve the integrity of the streetscape and prioritize pedestrian access.

Urban Form Design Guidelines



PARKING & LOADING
Locate parking behind buildings or within block interiors.



BUILDING ORIENTATION
Front primary streets with defined ground floor details.



FACADE ARTICULATION
Break up long facades with architectural elements.

Architecture

Architecture guidelines emphasize the importance of architectural detail, material quality, and building features that contribute to a visually rich and inviting downtown environment. The guidelines encourage varied roof lines, thoughtful detailing, and appropriate material use to create visual interest, particularly along prominent facades.

- **High-Quality Design.** Promote architectural excellence and durable, high-quality materials that define downtown as a distinct destination. Key building features should be oriented toward the public realm to maximize visual impact.
- **Unified Design.** Buildings should exhibit a cohesive design language through coordinated colors, patterns, and materials. While variation is encouraged, all elements should contribute to a unified whole and reflect a human scale.
- **Avoid Monotony.** Buildings with continuous street-facing facades that are longer than 50 feet should incorporate a variety of architectural treatments such as changes in materials, facade modulation, or window groupings, to break up massing and reduce visual impacts of the development.
- **Ground Floor Definition.** Use materials and features to clearly distinguish the ground floor, especially in multi-story buildings. Features such as windows, display areas, canopies, awnings, public art, and other architectural features can activate the street and enhance pedestrian appeal.
- **Primary Entrances.** Highlight building entrances with distinct architectural features, especially at key locations such as gateways or notable views. Where buildings occupy prominent corners include entrances on both primary and secondary facades when feasible.
- **Corner Elements.** Highlight buildings at prominent intersections, key locations, or those facing public spaces with distinctive architectural features, such as towers, chamfered or rounded corners, balconies, or other design elements, that emphasize the corner's importance and strengthen the district's visual identity.
- **Materials.** Utilize traditional materials, such as brick, stone, or wood siding, that complement the historic fabric of Grand Avenue. Contemporary interpretations and contrasting materials may be appropriate when used thoughtfully to enhance visual interest without detracting from the overall downtown character.
- **Windows.** Design window placement and proportions to express individual modules of space, establish scale, and create rhythm along a block. Design windows to create depth, shadow lines, and visual texture on the facade.
- **Roof Style.** Use roof forms and articulation that are appropriate to the building's architectural style. Roof lines should visually connect new construction to adjacent structures and introduce variety and interest along the streetscape.
- **Building Signage.** Encourage pedestrian-scale signage, including blade, canopy, and wall signs that contribute to a unified downtown identity. Freestanding monument signs, oversized wall signage, and large neon displays should be avoided in the downtown core to maintain visual harmony.



Architecture Design Guidelines



PRIMARY ENTRANCES

Highlight entrances with distinct architectural features.



CORNER ELEMENTS

Highlight buildings at key locations to emphasize a corner's importance.



AVOID MONOTONY

Incorporate a variety of architectural treatments.



ROOF STYLE

Roof lines should visually connect new construction to context.

Site & Landscape

Site and Landscape guidelines focus on the shared elements of the public and private realms, emphasizing the importance of cohesive site design and high-quality landscaping throughout downtown. A variety of open spaces, streetscape enhancements, and sustainable design practices are encouraged to create a vibrant, walkable, and resilient environment.

- **High Quality Streetscape Character.** Establish a consistent, high-quality streetscape that supports a safe and comfortable pedestrian experience. Sidewalks should be wide, continuous, and well-maintained along all streets with a system of secondary pedestrian paths through large blocks and between parking areas. Streetscape elements should include street trees in grates, pedestrian-scale lighting, furnishings, and decorative features such as movable planters and bollards.
- **Unified Public & Private Realm Character.** Ensure that amenities, materials, furnishings, and landscaping within setback areas complement and enhance adjacent streetscape conditions.
- **Pedestrian Safety & Comfort.** Prioritize pedestrian comfort and safety year-round. Maintain clear, unobstructed sidewalks and ensure safe, highly visible crosswalks at all intersections. Pedestrian pathways should be well-lit, accessible, and navigable in all seasons.
- **Minimize Curb Cuts.** Reduce or consolidate curb cuts wherever possible to enhance pedestrian safety and reduce conflicts along sidewalks. Vehicular access to parking and loading areas should be located on secondary streets or alleys rather than on primary frontages.
- **Public Space Network.** Integrate a diverse range of public and semi-public gathering spaces throughout downtown. These spaces should vary in size, program, and use, while collectively supporting community interaction, pedestrian activity, and a strong sense of place.

- **Outdoor Dining.** Within the core, encourage outdoor dining and seating areas within front setback areas and within the public-right-of-way when appropriate. A clear pedestrian path of at least four feet should be maintained to ensure accessibility and flow.
- **Landscape Buffers.** Screen parking lots, loading areas, and service equipment with landscape buffers or decorative metal fencing to reduce visual clutter. Screening treatments should be consistent throughout downtown to support a unified aesthetic.
- **Site Landscaping.** Use landscaping to define site edges, frame entrances, enhance public spaces, and guide pedestrian movement. Thoughtfully placed plantings should enrich the streetscape, provide visual interest, and encourage active use of outdoor areas.
- **Placemaking Elements.** Reinforce downtown's brand through an intentional mix of streetscape features, public art, wayfinding signage, gateway elements, banners, and interactive installations. Strategic use of murals, sculptures, or creative displays can help spark curiosity and foster a memorable sense of place.
- **Sustainability Practices.** Promote sustainable site design by incorporating native plantings, continuous street trees, and green infrastructure strategies such as rain gardens, permeable pavers, and landscape islands. Incentivize private property owners to adopt best practices in stormwater management and reduce impervious surfaces wherever feasible.



Site & Landscape Design Guidelines



PUBLIC SPACE NETWORK

Integrate a diverse range of public and semi-public gathering spaces.



LANDSCAPE BUFFER

Screen parking lots and service areas with landscape buffers.



SITE LANDSCAPING

Use landscaping to define edges and enhance public spaces.



STREETSCAPE CHARACTER

Establish a high-quality streetscape that supports a safe pedestrian experience.

Downtown Action Plan

Introduction

The future of Downtown Fox Lake will be shaped not only by vision, but by the community's commitment to action. While the vision laid out in this Plan is ambitious, it represents a long-term aspiration, one that promotes the downtown's potential and desire for change to businesses, property owners, residents, and future developers.

This Action Plan acknowledges that redevelopment is a gradual process. Progress must be realistic and aligned with the Village's financial capacity, political will, and physical conditions. Market trends, development readiness, and strong public-private partnerships will all play a role in shaping the pace and form of change. Ultimately, success will depend on a shared commitment to advancing the goals in this Plan and a willingness to adapt as conditions evolve.

This section outlines the policy tools, organizational structures, partnerships, phasing strategies, and implementation priorities needed to bring the Plan to life. It builds on past planning efforts and current momentum, drawing on community input, existing assets, and Fox Lake's unique role as a regional waterfront destination.

Zoning & Regulatory Tools

Downtown Fox Lake already benefits from a flexible zoning framework, particularly parcels zoned as Downtown Business District (D), a designation that promotes a walkable, mixed-use environment without requiring off-street parking. However, if Downtown is to transition to a cohesive, active, and identity-rich core, zoning and regulatory tools can evolve to support that ambition. Targeted refinements will help guide redevelopment, raise expectations for quality, and better align zoning designations with the vision laid out in this Plan.

1. Strengthen and Modernize the Downtown Business District (D)

The D District is a strong foundation, yet it currently lacks the regulatory teeth to ensure cohesive character, appropriate massing, and pedestrian first design. New development today risks defaulting to outdated suburban design patterns unless expectations are clearly articulated.

RECOMMENDED ENHANCEMENTS:

- **Design Standards for the Core:** As mentioned in earlier sections of this Plan that outline the role of design guidelines in shaping a vibrant downtown, the Village can introduce standards intended to be integrated directly into the zoning framework, that build off the guidelines outlined in this Plan, particularly for the Downtown Business District (D) and any future overlay. Rather than creating a standalone design guidelines document, these focused standards provide clear expectations for redevelopment that reinforce the walkable, mixed-use character of Grand Avenue and surrounding blocks. They serve as a practical bridge between long-term vision and short-term development decisions.

- **Build-to Lines and Height Minimums:** Require buildings to sit closer to the sidewalk and consider setting a two- to three-story minimum in key nodes to encourage vertical activation. Example sites would include Grand Avenue and Nippersink Road.
- **Public Realm Integration:** Require wider sidewalks or build-to lines that accommodate outdoor seating, landscaping, and pedestrian amenities where appropriate.

These refinements should apply within a designated core downtown area—roughly from Pistakee Lake Road to York Street, and signal to developers the level of design quality expected in the heart of the Village.



2. Create a Downtown Form-Based Code

Beyond traditional zoning reform, a form-based code (FBC) offers a more precise and effective tool to shape the physical character of downtown development. A form-based code regulates the form, massing, height, frontage, and placement of buildings in relation to streets and public spaces, ensuring a consistent, pedestrian-friendly urban fabric.

For Fox Lake, a targeted FBC could apply to the highest-priority blocks along Grand Avenue and at key intersections, reinforcing the traditional downtown character and supporting incremental infill. This approach allows for flexibility in use (e.g., retail, office, live/work), while ensuring that the built environment contributes to a vibrant downtown.

FBCs support the use of build-to lines, setbacks, and height transitions to create a human-scaled streetscape, while managing the physical transitions between the more active downtown core and adjacent residential neighborhoods. By focusing on how buildings relate to the street and public spaces, form-based codes reinforce public realm design through clear standards for entrances, window transparency, streetscape interaction, and massing rhythm, ensuring that every new development contributes meaningfully to the character and walkability of the downtown.

3. Align Zoning with the Vision Through Strategic Rezoning

Currently, the zoning map of downtown and the surrounding area, while focused on the Downtown Business District (D), creates a patchwork of zoning designations and regulations. This includes large-lot commercial zoning (e.g., B-2 and B-3) and single-use residential districts that do not support the kind of compact, mixed-use development envisioned by the community.

Rezoning targeted parcels, including underutilized commercial lots such as the Lakeland Shopping Center, would allow mixed-use or higher-density residential with compatible ground floor uses.

Figure 36: Zoning & Regulatory Strategy

Parcel/Area	Current Zoning	Recommended Actions
Grand Avenue Core (D District)	Downtown Business (D)	Refine design standards; Intro-duce build-to lines and mini-mum heights
Grand & Nippersink Intersection	Downtown Business (D)	Apply Form-Based Code overlay for highest design control
Lakeland Shopping Center	B-2 General Retail	Rezone to Mixed-Use or Down-town Business (D); Incentivize infill
Peripheral B-2 & B-3 Parcels	B-2 / B-3	Rezone for compatibility with downtown character and intensity
Publicly-Owned Sites (Fire Station, Comm. Center, etc.)	Varied (Mostly D or Civic)	Bundle into strategic development sites; consider overlay or special zoning

Downtown Governance & Oversight

Downtown revitalization is rarely accomplished by government alone. It requires sustained energy, local ownership, and mechanisms for funding and coordination. To maintain momentum beyond the adoption of the Plan, Fox Lake should establish a dedicated downtown governance structure that blends public leadership with stakeholder collaboration, as well as drive funding for sustained improvements.

Establish a Special Service Area (SSA)

A Special Service Area (SSA) is one of the most effective tools for funding and managing downtown improvements over time. In Illinois, an SSA is a locally authorized mechanism that allows municipalities to levy a small additional property tax within a defined boundary, with the revenue dedicated to services and improvements beyond the municipal baseline. Often SSAs will focus on streetscape and amenity maintenance, placemaking initiatives, downtown marketing and branding, business attraction and supporting programs, event programming and public art, and more.

CAN THE VILLAGE MANAGE THE SSA?

In short, the answer is yes. In Illinois, a municipality initiates, administers, and holds fiduciary responsibility for the SSA. While the Village would serve as the legal taxing authority and fiscal agent, the day-to-day direction of how funds are used can be guided by an SSA Board of Trustees, which can also be referred to as a Downtown Advisory Body.

This Downtown Advisory Body, often composed of downtown property owners, business owners, civic partners, lawyers, design specialists, and more, does not need to be a 501(c)(3). However, the Village may choose to partner with a nonprofit or create a local Fox Lake Chamber of Commerce for service delivery, marketing, or programming support. This approach ensures transparency, local control, and strong community buy-in.

The SSA establishes a predictable, locally controlled funding stream that is insulated from shifting budget priorities. This consistent source of revenue allows the Village and its partners to plan multi-year improvements, maintain downtown enhancements over time, and respond quickly to emerging needs, whether it's marketing a new event like Taste of Fox Lake, repairing street furniture, or supporting local businesses.

STEPS TO ESTABLISH AN SSA:

To establish a Special Service Area (SSA), the Village must first define a boundary, encompassing properties along Grand Avenue and key adjacent streets. From there, the process includes proactive outreach and education to property owners and tenants within the proposed area to build awareness and support. A detailed services plan and budget must be developed, outlining how funds will be used and what benefits stakeholders can expect. The Village Board must then pass an enabling ordinance, which is subject to a public hearing and a defined objection period under state law. Once adopted, an SSA Advisory Committee should be formed to guide the use of funds, recommend annual budgets, and ensure that the SSA remains transparent, responsive, and aligned with downtown goals.

Phasing Strategy

To chart an achievable path forward, this Plan includes a phased implementation strategy. Recognizing the ambitious scope of the vision, the strategy prioritizes early momentum, strategic coordination, and ongoing community engagement. Each phase builds on the success of the previous one to foster lasting transformation.

Phase 1: Early Wins & Laying the Foundation (Years 0-3)

Objective: Build community trust and momentum, along with development and business community buy-in, through visible, low-cost improvements, that establish the groundwork for long-term growth.

- **Policy and Planning Groundwork:** Complete zoning updates, streamline permitting processes, strengthen property codes, and develop downtown design guidelines.
- **Marketing, Branding, & Identity:** Promote this Plan through targeted marketing and launch a cohesive downtown brand and wayfinding system.
- **Temporary Placemaking & Appearance Improvements:** Implement streetscape beautification (planters, lighting, murals), pop-up events, and tactical urbanism (e.g., parklets or temporary pedestrian plazas).
- **Activation of Underutilized Spaces:** Encourage temporary or flexible uses for vacant lots or storefronts.
- **Downtown Governance:** Establish an oversight body such as an SSA and explore public-private financing tools (TIF, BID, tax abatements, grants) to support investment.

Phase 2: Targeted Development & Private Investment (Years 3-7)

Objective: Leverage early public investments to attract and guide private investment.

- **Public Realm Improvements:** Enhance infrastructure, streetscapes, sidewalks, crosswalks, signage, and accessibility.
- **Nippersink Boulevard Pedestrian Promenade:** Implement streetscape, wayfinding, and zoning changes to support a pedestrian-friendly corridor.
- **Events and Programming:** Launch a coordinated, year-round calendar of downtown events to attract residents and visitors.
- **Infill Housing and Mixed-use:** Support residential growth downtown and in surrounding neighborhoods, including upper-story housing and missing middle typologies.
- **Catalytic Site Development:** Acquire strategic properties and issue RFPs for Village-owned parcels. Use public-private financial strategies to support catalytic redevelopment.



Phase 3: Expansion & Economic Resilience (Years 7-12)

Objective: Broaden the downtown district's reach and ensure its long-term sustainability through economic diversification and reinvestment.

- **Catalytic Site Development:** Continue redevelopment of strategic and Village-owned parcels to attract new investment.
- **Administrative Support:** Facilitate building or block consolidation to enable larger-scale redevelopment opportunities. Create zoning accommodations (special use or PUD) for priority sites.
- **Public Financing:** Expand use of incentives and tools to support private development and infrastructure improvements.
- **Infrastructure & Connectivity Investments:** Upgrade streets, trails, and open spaces to reinforce district character and accessibility.
- **Business Growth & Entrepreneurship:** Support small business retention and expansion, including entrepreneurship hubs and co-working spaces.
- **Ongoing Community Engagement:** Update plan components and performance metrics based on progress.

Phase 4: Long-Term Vision Realization (Years 12+)

Objective: Fully realize the community's long-term vision while remaining flexible and responsive to emerging trends.

- **Transformative Development:** Advance major reinvestment efforts such as road realignments and gas station relocation at Forest and Grand Avenues and creation of public park spaces near Village Hall and Grand Avenue/Rollins Road.
- **Policy refinement:** Reassess regulations, development incentives, and land use to ensure alignment with current conditions and future goals.
- **Enhanced Mobility & Regional Connectivity:** Introduce new mobility options such as bike share, microtransit, or greenway connections to expand accessibility.
- **Plan Refresh:** Revisit and update the Plan every 10–15 years to recalibrate goals, priorities, and tools based on progress and changing conditions.



Staying the Course

Downtown revitalization in Fox Lake will not happen overnight, but with the tools, leadership, and energy described in this Plan, it can move forward one step at a time. Downtown Fox Lake includes a variety of underutilized properties, some publicly owned, others privately held, that present meaningful opportunities for reinvestment. These sites vary in ownership, visibility, development potential, and readiness, but collectively, they offer the spatial leverage to catalyze downtown transformation.

To support effective implementation, opportunity sites have been grouped into three tiers:

- **Catalytic Sites:** Highly visible or centrally located sites with strong potential to spark broader momentum.
- **Village-Owned Sites:** Parcels under public ownership that can be shaped intentionally through demonstration projects or public-private partnerships.
- **Policy & Incentive-Based Sites:** Sites that require targeted zoning or incentive changes to unlock their potential due to current use, fragmentation, or private ownership limitations.

Each site category benefits from a distinct toolkit of implementation actions, described below.

Catalytic Sites

Examples: Grand & Nippersink intersection, Village Hall Sites, Lakeland Shopping Center

These are the most impactful sites in the downtown core. With prominent locations, large footprints, or adjacency to major intersections, they offer the clearest short-term opportunity to demonstrate the Plan's vision in action.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES:

- **Predevelopment Studies:** Conduct site analyses, environmental reviews, and market studies to reduce barriers to investment and speed up developer interest.
- **Request for Proposals (RFPs):** Issue targeted RFPs to solicit developer interest in mixed-use or signature public-private projects that align with the community's design and programming goals.
- **Planned Unit Development (PUD) Process:** Establish PUDs for critical sites to ensure Village oversight and guidance for future development.
- **Facade & Streetscape Improvements:** Use interim improvements (lighting, murals, signage, temporary landscaping) to visually activate key corridors while long-term redevelopment is pursued.
- **Anchor Development with Public Realm:** Tie catalytic development to adjacent park enhancements or new public gathering spaces, ensuring early projects build synergy with lakefront amenities and streetscape investments.



Village-Owned Sites

Examples: Old Fire Station, Former Community Center, Civic Parcel Assemblies

With over 27 acres of publicly owned property downtown, including parks, buildings, and civic parcels, Fox Lake is uniquely positioned to lead reinvestment without relying exclusively on the private market.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES:

- **Bundle Sites for Redevelopment:** Combine adjacent or compatible parcels into larger redevelopment packages, increasing their marketability and ensuring comprehensive outcomes.
- **Activate with Temporary Uses:** Test potential uses with pop-up businesses, seasonal installations, or rotating public art displays. This helps animate the space and build buy-in before long-term redevelopment.

Policy & Incentive-Based Sites

Examples: Strip retail centers, aging commercial parcels, legacy-use properties

These sites are typically privately owned and underperforming but may be highly visible or located along critical corridors like Grand Avenue. Many suffer from poor design, dated structures, or low occupancy—but have potential with the right support.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES:

- **Zoning & Use Reform:** Adjust zoning to allow for mixed-use, housing, or alternative uses (such as event venues or makerspaces), particularly where B-2 or B-3 zoning is incompatible with the downtown vision.
- **Property Owner Outreach:** Initiate one-on-one conversations with property owners to share the goals of the Plan, identify barriers to reinvestment, and explore interest in participating in revitalization programs.



Site Prioritization Framework

To help guide phasing and strategic investment in Downtown Fox Lake, each opportunity site can be evaluated using a scoring framework based on five key criteria. These criteria reflect the Village's goals around implementation readiness, community benefit, catalytic impact, and partnership potential, drawing from national best practices in downtown redevelopment.

While this framework suggests scoring sites on a scale from 1 to 5, it's important to recognize that not all criteria are strictly objective. Some are quantitative and easily measured (e.g., public ownership, grant eligibility), while others, such as catalytic potential or readiness, are more nuanced and multifaceted, often blending physical condition with strategic judgment.

The goal is not mathematical precision but practical direction. When in doubt, we recommend leaning toward lower scores to reflect uncertainty or barriers that may not be fully understood. The purpose of this exercise is to elevate high-impact, feasible, and community-aligned sites, not to produce perfect ranking.

This framework should be used collaboratively, with input from staff, stakeholders, and local partners, and should be revisited over time as conditions change. Example sites are provided to demonstrate how the framework can be applied and to spark discussion.



Framework Criteria

1. READINESS

How soon can the site be activated or redeveloped?

- Ownership clarity (e.g., Village-owned vs. multiple private owners)
- Environmental condition (e.g., brownfield vs. clean)
- Existing tenant leases (short-term vs. long-term)
- No major infrastructure hurdles

Sites with higher readiness can be implemented more quickly and deliver visible early wins.

2. CATALYTIC POTENTIAL

Will development on this site influence adjacent blocks or shift market perception?

- Prominent location (e.g., Grand Avenue frontage, corner site)
- Proximity to other public investments (e.g., parks, streetscape upgrades)
- Ability to anchor new activity (e.g., mix of housing and retail)
- High visibility to residents and visitors

Sites with strong catalytic potential can spark broader reinvestment and help redefine the image of downtown.

3. FUNDING & PARTNERSHIP POTENTIAL

Does the site align with available funding or attract private-sector interest?

- Eligible for grants (e.g., OSLAD, DCEO, RAISE)
- Potential to bundle with other investments
- Strong interest from private or nonprofit partners

Sites that align with funding or partner interest can be timed strategically to leverage outside resources.

4. PUBLIC OWNERSHIP OR LEVERAGE

Does the Village own the site or have influence over it?

- Owned outright by the Village
- Located adjacent to public land (e.g., parks, streets)
- Leverage through incentives or policy tools (e.g., TIF)

Sites with public control or leverage are easier to shape, activate, and ensure alignment with the community's vision.

ALIGNMENT WITH COMMUNITY VISION

Does the site support the type of development the community wants to see?

- Supports placemaking, housing, or retail
- Reflects lakefront identity and values
- Reinforces goals voiced during engagement

Rather than scoring Alignment as a fifth equal-weighted criterion, we recommend treating it as a final lens and a way to resolve “close calls” between sites that may score similarly on other criteria.

Because Alignment reflects deep community values and public trust, it serves as a strategic compass that can validate or challenge site priorities. For example, a site that scores highly in readiness and catalytic potential but conflicts with long-standing community goals may not be the right place to start. Conversely, a site that may score more modestly across the board but clearly embodies the vision and values expressed in this Plan may be worth advancing sooner.

In short, alignment can elevate a site or temper expectations. It's the community filter through which every decision should ultimately pass.



Example Site Prioritization

COMMUNITY GARDENS SITE

(Part of the Forest Avenue Site Scenarios)

1. Readiness: This site is privately-owned, fully vacant, and free of known development barriers, making it ready for near-term implementation. No tenant relocation, environmental remediation, or parcel assembly is needed. Its clear title and physical openness allow the Village to move quickly on issuing an RFP, conducting pre-development, or launching interim placemaking efforts.

Readiness Score = 3

2. Catalytic Potential: Located at a major intersection and directly across from the Lakeland Shopping Center site, this parcel holds strong potential to serve as a driver and land use catalyst. Development here could directly influence reinvestment interest across the street and create a cohesive node along Grand Avenue. As a highly visible site, it can reset expectations for downtown redevelopment.

Catalytic Potential Score = 5

3. Funding & Partnership Potential: With open space and infrastructure readiness, this site could support housing, open space, and potential public realm enhancements, potentially qualifying for grants through IDNR, CMAP, or USDA. It may also be appealing for developers seeking a shovel-ready infill site.

Funding & Partnership Potential Score = 4

4. Public Leverage: The sites adjacency to the theater site and near Village Hall make it a strategic location to leverage redevelopment. By coordinating redevelopment strategies across both parcels, whether in timing, mix of uses, or design, the Village can influence the evolution of a key intersection and establish a new downtown anchor.

Public Leverage Score = 4

OLD COMMUNITY CENTER

(Part of the Water Tower Site Scenarios)

1. Readiness: This site is Village-owned and currently vacant, making it highly ready for redevelopment. There are no tenant relocations or complex ownership barriers, and its clean title and central location make it an ideal candidate for near-term investment. Any structural evaluation would apply only if reuse were being considered, but the current plan anticipates full redevelopment.

Readiness Score = 5

2. Catalytic Potential: As a former civic property located within the downtown footprint, this site provides a highly visible opportunity to introduce new housing typologies that bring more people to live near the downtown core. Proposed redevelopment as an apartment or townhome complex could anchor surrounding blocks, support existing or prospective nearby businesses, and strengthen connections to adjacent public spaces, enhancing the area's activity and vibrancy.

Catalytic Potential Score = 4

3. Funding & Partnership Potential: The site's size, location, and public ownership make it attractive for residential developers, especially with Village support for infrastructure, entitlement streamlining, or potential use of TIF.

Funding & Partnership Potential Score = 4

4. Public Leverage: The Village has full control over the property and can determine the development timeline, partner criteria, and community benefit expectations. This makes the site highly leverageable as a policy-driven opportunity to shape a model residential infill project.

Public Leverage Score = 5

OLD FIRE STATION

(Part of the Water Tower Site Scenarios)

1. Readiness: The Old Fire Station is a vacant, Village-owned property located directly across from the Water Tower Site. Because it requires no demolition or tenant relocation, the parcel is fully available to be bundled with the Water Tower site as part of a larger redevelopment. Its status and location make it highly ready for integration into a comprehensive housing project.

Readiness Score = 5

2. Catalytic Potential: While modest in size, the Old Fire Station site plays an important supporting role in the larger Water Tower Site vision. When combined with the Old Community Center, parking lot, and water tower buffer area, it enables a more cohesive and efficient development footprint. Whether used for enhanced access, additional parking, or part of the building footprint, this parcel adds functional value to a high-visibility infill project that can transform a major edge of downtown. It reinforces the area's catalytic potential by expanding design flexibility and boosting residential density.

Catalytic Potential Score = 4

3. Funding & Partnership Potential: The parcel enhances the viability of a larger project by allowing for higher unit counts and better site design, two factors that improve project economics and developer interest. While the parcel itself may not attract stand-alone funding, its inclusion in a larger project may strengthen eligibility for infrastructure support, site prep grants, or inclusion in TIF-based incentives that support the full Water Tower Site redevelopment.

Funding & Partnership Potential Score = 4

4. Public Leverage: Because the Village controls the Old Fire Station along with the rest of the Water Tower Site, it can bundle all components under a unified vision or development RFP, ensuring cohesive design, phasing, and community benefit. This level of comprehensive control offers strong leverage to attract high-quality development and guide the project's implementation from concept to construction.

Public Leverage Score = 5

Figure 37: Site Prioritization Matrix

Site	Readiness	Catalytic	Funding Potential	Public Leverage	Total
Community Gardens Site (Part of the Forest Avenue Site Scenarios)	3	5	4	4	16
Old Community Center (Part of the Water Tower Site Scenarios)	5	4	4	5	18
Old Fire Station (Part of the Water Tower Site Scenarios)	5	4	4	5	18

Implementation Matrix

The implementation matrix serves as a practical, working document to guide Village staff in carrying out the Plan’s goals and strategies. It is not a static tool, but one that is meant to be updated annually as progress is made, conditions evolve, and new opportunities arise. The matrix supports transparency, accountability, and alignment by tracking implementation over time and helping decision-makers stay focused on what matters most. Each action is categorized with detailed information to guide effective follow-through and collaboration. Each action item in the matrix includes the following:

PRIORITY

- **High:** Identified as essential or foundational
- **Medium**
- **Low**

TIME FRAME

- **Immediate:** 0–1 years
- **Short-term:** 1–5 years
- **Mid-term:** 5–10 years
- **Long-term:** 10+ years
- **Ongoing:** Implemented across the life of the plan

PARTNERS

- Stakeholders involved or required to support implementation.

TYPE

- **Capital Improvements:** Infrastructure projects and facility investments.
- **Policies and Programs:** New or revised guidelines, processes, or services.
- **Regulations and Standards:** Updates to zoning, codes, or design criteria.
- **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Coordination with other agencies, organizations, or stakeholders.
- **Targeted Planning:** Focused plans for specific areas, corridors, or themes.

METRICS FOR SUCCESS

- Measurable indicators used to evaluate progress and impact over time.

	Priority	Time Frame	Partners	Type	Metrics for Success
Goal 1: Improve, enhance, and expand the vibrancy of downtown Fox Lake.					
Strategy 1.1: Focus downtown efforts on placemaking to enhance vibrancy and walkability.					
1.1.1: Invest in public art, landscaping, streetscaping and safety improvements.	High	Ongoing	Village; SSA (if applicable); Property Owners	Capital Improvements	Total investment in placemaking improvements in the downtown
1.1.2: Pursue state grants for a downtown plaza and other placemaking investments.	High	Mid-term	Village; DCEO; Lake County	Financial Planning	Grant dollars awarded
1.1.3: Consider tactical closures of minor streets, such as School Court, for community events like food truck festivals or wine walks.	Medium	Mid-term	Village	Policies and Programs	Number of visitors to Downtown
1.1.4: Utilize incentives, such as designating special service areas (SSA), to fund signage or façade improvements.	Medium	Mid-term	Village; SSA (if applicable)	Policies and Programs	Number of improvements funded
Strategy 1.2: Encourage residential development within proximity of the downtown core and near the Metra station to create a “built-in” consumer base.					
1.2.1: Consider proactively acquiring additional strategic sites near the Metra or within downtown to facilitate transit-oriented development residential opportunities.	High	Mid-term	Village	Targeted Planning	Acres of land acquired
1.2.2: Refine the zoning code to allow flexibility in residential uses, such as live/work and mixed-use, in the downtown commercial districts.	Medium	Long-term	Village	Regulations and Standards	Building permit activity
1.2.3: Utilize incentives, such as Business Development District (BDD), to support residential and mixed-use projects that would not occur but-for the public assistance.	High	Ongoing	Village	Policies and Programs	Building permit activity
1.2.4: Reduce or waive fees for residential projects that align with community priorities.	Medium	Short-Term	Village	Regulations and Standards	Building permit activity
1.2.5: Create a Shovel-Ready Program that streamlines and expedites the permitting process for residential development.	High	Short-Term	Village	Policies and Programs	Building permit activity
1.2.6: Conduct outreach to residential developers to identify potential partners and increase awareness of Village sites and incentives.	Medium	Short-Term	Village	Partnerships and Collaboration	Building permit activity
1.2.7: Provide incentives to help property owners conduct architecture and engineering assessments on second floor spaces and evaluate the feasibility of renovating for residential use.	Low	Mid-term	Village	Policies and Programs	Total square feet renovated

	Priority	Time Frame	Partners	Type	Metrics for Success
1.2.8: Host a neighborhood Open House to showcase available residential properties in and around the downtown and generate excitement for living downtown.	Low	Mid-term	Village	Partnerships and Collaboration	Number of Open House attendees
Strategy 1.3: Support the placemaking efforts of Local Businesses.					
1.3.1: Expand space for cafés, outdoor dining, and other opportunities for sidewalk seating to create destinations with more social activity and interaction downtown.	Medium	Ongoing	Village; Local Businesses	Partnerships and Collaborations	Number of visitors to downtown Fox Lake
1.3.2: Encourage pop-up shops, event spaces, and more flexible commercial leases to support the activation of currently vacant commercial storefronts.	Low	Ongoing	Village; property owners	Partnerships and Collaborations	Leasing activity
1.3.3: Sponsor downtown-wide events to support retail businesses (e.g. art nights).	High	Mid-term	Village; Local Businesses	Partnerships and Collaborations	Number of visitors to downtown Fox Lake
1.3.4: Market events on the Village website, social media, and newsletters and through partners to expand visitor reach.	Medium	Ongoing	Village	Public Information and Outreach	Online and social media engagement
1.3.5: Collaborate with Local Businesses to host “Women’s Nights Out” featuring women-owned businesses, networking opportunities, and themed activities.	Low	Mid-term	Village; Local Businesses	Partnerships and Collaborations	Number of visitors to downtown Fox Lake
1.3.6: Develop a rotating themed market series (e.g., artisan markets, night markets, vintage fairs) to provide opportunities for small businesses and local creators.	Low	Mid-term	Village; Local Businesses	Partnerships and Collaborations	Number of visitors to downtown Fox Lake
1.3.7: Engage local restaurants and breweries in culinary events, such as a “Taste of Fox Lake” festival or chef-led cooking demonstrations.	Low	Mid-term	Village; Local Businesses	Partnerships and Collaborations	Number of visitors to downtown Fox Lake
Strategy 1.4: Develop and market fall, winter, and spring programming to attract additional visitors to downtown businesses year-round.					
1.4.1: Emphasize different seasonal activities throughout the year, such as hayrides and pumpkin pop-ups in the fall, ice skating in the winter, and easter egg hunts in the spring.	Low	Ongoing	Village	Partnerships and Collaboration	Number of visitors to Fox Lake; number of social media impressions
1.4.2: Market downtown events and other programming on the Village website, social media, and newsletters and through Village of Fox Lake partners to expand visitor reach.	Low	Ongoing	Village; Chain O’Lakes Chamber	Partnerships and Collaboration	Number of visitors to Fox Lake; number of social media impressions

	Priority	Time Frame	Partners	Type	Metrics for Success
Goal 2: Develop and enact targeted economic development initiatives to support the downtown Fox Lake business environment.					
Strategy 2.1: Establish a Special Service Area (SSA) to manage and fund improvements downtown.					
2.1.1: Advocate for and facilitate the establishment of an SSA, working closely with downtown property owners and other stakeholders to outline the benefits and responsibilities.	High	Short-Term	Village; property owners; Non-profits	Targeted Planning	SSA implemented
2.1.2: Develop a clear budget and plan for the use of SSA funds, focusing on marketing, beautification, and infrastructure improvements.	Medium	Mid-term	Non-profits	Policies and Programs	SSA budget created
2.1.3: Collaborate with a newly developed 501(c)(3) non-profit organization or a Village managed Economic Development Commission to act as the service provider for the SSA, establishing a governance structure that includes representatives from Local Businesses and property owners.	Medium	Mid-term	Village	Policies and Programs	SSA implemented
2.1.4: Work with the service provider to define the types of initiatives that will be supported by the SSA funding.	Medium	Mid-term	Village	Partnerships and Collaboration	N/A
2.1.5: Create a transparent reporting system to show the impact of SSA investments to stakeholders and the community.	Low	Mid-term	Village	Policies and Programs	Public portal
Strategy 2.2: Implement a ‘Shop Local’ campaign to encourage community support for downtown businesses, increasing local spending and economic vitality in the area.					
2.2.1: Design and implement a ‘Shop Local’ campaign using both digital and traditional marketing methods to highlight the value of supporting Local Businesses.	High	Short-Term	Village; Local Businesses; Chain O’Lakes Chamber	Partnerships and Collaboration	Share of sales tax collections attributable to Local Businesses
2.2.2: Coordinate with Local Businesses to offer discounts, loyalty programs, and special event promotions that encourage frequent visits.	Low	Short-Term	Village; Local Businesses	Partnerships and Collaboration	Number of small business programs
2.2.3: Organize themed shopping days or weekends, such as “Small Business Saturdays,” that feature activities, entertainment, and sales.	Medium	Mid-term	Village; Local Businesses	Partnerships and Collaboration	Number of small business events
2.2.4: Use social media platforms to regularly feature Local Businesses, share their stories, and promote community support.	Medium	Ongoing	Village; Local Businesses; Chain O’Lakes Chamber	Partnerships and Collaboration	Number of social media posts; total social media impressions

	Priority	Time Frame	Partners	Type	Metrics for Success
Strategy 2.3: Create a more supportive environment for small business development and retention in the downtown area by identifying and addressing key barriers to business success.					
2.3.1: Conduct a small business needs assessment to survey existing and potential small business owners to gather insight into key challenges.	High	Short-term	Village; Local Businesses	Partnerships and Collaboration	Number of survey respondents
2.3.2: Host a series of small business roundtables with downtown business owners, aspiring entrepreneurs, and local partners to validate findings from the assessment and foster trust with the business community.	Low	Short-term	Village, Chain O'Lakes Chamber; Local Businesses	Partnerships and Collaboration	Number of roundtable participants
2.3.3: Develop a downtown business resource toolkit based on the identified needs and promote available resources.	Medium	Short-term	Village	Policies and Programs	Completed downtown business resource toolkit
2.3.4: Create feedback loops through annual surveys to ensure responsiveness and evaluate the program.	Low	Mid-term	Village; Chain O'Lakes Chamber	Partnerships and Collaboration	Number of survey respondents
Goal 3: Support business development downtown to maintain and improve the economic base and create a sense of place.					
Strategy 3.1: Strengthen downtown as the village's core experiential retail corridor with additional retail, restaurant and entertainment uses to balance activity throughout the entire day.					
3.1.1: Educate nearby brokers, land use attorneys, business owners, and developers about desired types of development and tenants.	High	Short-term	Village	Partnerships and Collaboration	N/A
3.1.2: Provide assistance navigating the process to relocate to the downtown.	Low	Mid-term	Village	Policies and Programs	Number of new businesses
3.1.3: Enhance code enforcement to encourage investment and rehabilitation of older commercial and mixed-use structures.	High	Short-term	Village	Regulations and Standards	Building permit value
3.1.4: Conduct business outreach to raise awareness of available resources for business owners and encourage businesses to leverage Fox Lake's façade improvement program, TIF district funds, and business district funds.	Medium	Short-term	Village	Partnerships and Collaboration	N/A

	Priority	Time Frame	Partners	Type	Metrics for Success
Strategy 3.2: Improve cohesiveness of downtown through economic development tools, such as façade improvements, banners, and landscaping; use the new Fox Lake brand to strengthen the sense of place.					
3.2.1: Designate an SSA downtown to provide funding to business owners for façade improvement, signage, landscaping, and other enhancements to commercial properties and public space.	High	Mid-term	Village; SSA (if applicable); Non-profits	Targeted Planning	Establishment of SSA
3.2.2: Further leverage incentives, such as BDD, to support small businesses improvements, address critical vacancies, and make physical improvements that add to the downtown's character.	Medium	Ongoing	Village; Property Owners; Local Businesses	Policies and Programs	Investment activity
3.2.3: Increase awareness of the Fox Lake brand amongst the local business community.	Medium	Ongoing	Village	Public Information and Outreach	N/A
Strategy 3.3: Work to attract or support the development of destination retailers, which can drive consistent foot traffic and create a steady demand for local services and retail.					
3.3.1: Initiate discussions with potential destination retailers and businesses.	Low	Long-term	Village	Partnerships and Collaboration	Number of new retailers
3.3.2: Develop a package of incentives, such as tax breaks or reduced utility rates, to attract these institutions to downtown Fox Lake.	Medium	Mid-term	Village	Policies and Programs	Number of new retailers
3.3.3: Help make sites "shovel ready" by ensuring adequate infrastructure is in place to support the needs of the destination retailers, including transportation and utilities.	Medium	Long-term	Village	Capital Improvements	Investment activity
Goal 4: Cultivate a vibrant public realm in downtown Fox Lake.					
Strategy 4.1: Create and enhance public spaces in Downtown Fox Lake to foster community interaction and support Local Businesses.					
4.1.1: Develop multifunctional shared streets, plazas, parks, and parking lots that can host markets, festivals, and community gatherings.	Medium	Mid-term	Village	Capital Improvements	Number of activated public spaces; frequency of public events
4.1.2: Create a local program that encourages temporary public space activations tailored to Fox Lake. This could include pop-up parks, outdoor galleries, and temporary event spaces	Medium	Short-term	Village; Artists; Event Planners; Local Nonprofits	Policies and Programs	Number of temporary activations per year

	Priority	Time Frame	Partners	Type	Metrics for Success
4.1.3: Designate areas for permanent public art installations that reflect local culture and history.	Medium	Mid-term	Village; Artists; Historical Societies	Policies and Programs	Number of permanent public art installations
Strategy 4.2: Enhance the streetscape and green infrastructure in downtown to improve environmental resilience and aesthetic quality.					
4.2.1: Implement a comprehensive urban greening plan that includes tree planting along streets with little to no current canopy.	High	Mid-term	Village	Capital Improvements	Number of trees planted; square footage of shaded sidewalk areas
4.2.2: Upgrade street furniture to improve aesthetics and comfort, incorporating sustainable materials and innovative designs.	Medium	Mid-term	Village	Capital Improvements	Number of new or upgraded street furniture installations
4.2.3: Establish green roofs and walls on suitable downtown buildings to enhance environmental resilience and aesthetic value.	Medium	Long-term	Village; Property Owners	Partnerships and Collaboration	Square footage of green infrastructure added
Strategy 4.3: Promote a cohesive and active downtown experience that attracts both residents and visitors, enhancing the area's identity and vibrancy.					
4.3.1: Launch a unified branding and signage program to strengthen downtown identity and navigability.	High	Short-term	Village	Policies and Programs	Completion of branding/signage program; wayfinding usage satisfaction
4.3.2: Coordinate with Local Businesses and organizations to schedule regular downtown events that attract residents and visitors.	High	Ongoing	Village; Local Businesses; Property Owners	Partnerships and Collaboration	Number of downtown events per year
4.3.3: Develop a strategy for integrating technology into the public realm, such as interactive digital kiosks and free public Wi-Fi zones.	Low	Long-term	Village	Public Information and Outreach	Digital engagement metrics

	Priority	Time Frame	Partners	Type	Metrics for Success
Goal 5: Maximize Development Potential of New Opportunity Sites in Downtown Fox Lake.					
Strategy 5.1: Encourage and facilitate public-private partnerships to fund and develop mixed-use projects that can enhance the economic and social fabric of downtown.					
5.1.1: Identify key development projects that could benefit from public-private partnerships.	High	Short-term	Village	Targeted Planning	Number of public-private partnerships executed
5.1.2: Enforce design standards that require new buildings to have transparent, active ground floors that engage with the street.	Low	Mid-term	Village	Regulations and Standards	Increased leased retail space
5.1.3: Develop a legal and administrative framework to guide public-private partnerships, ensuring transparency and mutual benefits.	High	Short-term	Village	Policies and Programs	Number of public-private partnerships executed
5.1.4: Promote the consolidation of adjacent properties to create larger development sites, facilitating more impactful mixed-use projects that can transform the downtown landscape.	High	Ongoing	Village	Targeted Planning	Investment activity
5.1.5: Launch a call for private sector partners who are interested in investing in downtown revitalization projects.	Low	Short-term	Village	Partnerships and Collaboration	N/A
5.1.6: Hold community consultations to ensure public support and input on the proposed development projects.	Medium	Ongoing	Village	Partnerships and Collaboration	Number of engagements
5.1.7: Negotiate and finalize partnership agreements that detail each party's contributions, responsibilities, and benefits.	Medium	Mid-term	Village	Policies and Programs	Number of public-private partnerships executed
5.1.8: Advocate at County level for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding to support projects that align with County priorities within Fox Lake.	Medium	Ongoing	Village; Lake County	Partnerships and Collaboration	Grant dollars awarded
Strategy 5.2: Establish a Design Overlay District with a Design Review Process in Downtown Fox Lake.					
5.2.1: Set up a Design Review Board composed of professionals in architecture, urban planning, and local business to review project proposals and ensure they meet the design guidelines.	High	Short-term	Village; Local Professionals; Architects	Regulations and Standards	Design Review Board established

	Priority	Time Frame	Partners	Type	Metrics for Success
5.2.2: Assign a qualified staff member or consultant to oversee design reviews until the Design Review Board is operational.	High	Immediate	Village	Policies and Programs	Design review process initiated
5.2.3: Hold informational sessions to explain the design guidelines to property owners, developers, and the public.	Medium	Short-term	Village; Property Owners	Partnerships and Collaboration	Number of participants in informational sessions
5.2.4: Ensure that the Design Review Board works closely with the Planning Commission to integrate design standards with broader planning efforts.	High	Short-term	Village	Partnerships and Collaboration	Regular check ins or joint meetings
5.2.5: Periodically review and update the guidelines and the review process to keep them relevant and effective.	Medium	Ongoing	Village	Policies and Programs	Frequency of revisions
Strategy 5.3: Attract entertainment and water-related activities.					
5.3.1: Partner with developers to explore the feasibility of entertainment venues like theaters, breweries, or water-based attractions that link downtown to Fox Lake.	Low	Mid-term	Village	Partnerships and Collaboration	N/A
5.3.2: Design public spaces that can accommodate seasonal water-related activities, such as kayak rentals or waterfront dining.	Medium	Long-term	Village	Capital Improvements	N/A
5.3.3: Implement zoning incentives that encourage the development of tourist-attracting facilities and businesses.	Low	Long-term	Village	Regulations and Standards	Number of new businesses
Strategy 5.4: Implement sustainable and community-oriented building practices.					
5.4.1: Develop guidelines that promote sustainable building practices, such as energy-efficient designs and materials.	Low	Long-term	Village	Policies and Programs	Sustainable building guidelines adopted
5.4.2: Require new developments to include public amenities like plazas, courtyards, or balconies that enhance community interaction.	Medium	Ongoing	Village; Developers; Property Owners	Regulations and Standards	Number of new developments with public amenities
5.4.3: Advocate for designs that minimize the visual impact of parking facilities, integrating them behind or beneath buildings.	High	Ongoing	Village; Developers; Property Owners	Regulations and Standards	Number of developments with concealed parking

	Priority	Time Frame	Partners	Type	Metrics for Success
Goal 6: Strengthen walkability and connectivity to boost downtown vitality and accessibility.					
Strategy 6.1: Enhance pedestrian and bicycle mobility in Downtown.					
6.1.1: Allocate budget resources for public works to install low-cost tactical mobility enhancements, such as curb bump-outs with bollards, shared bicycle lane markings, updated crosswalk striping, flex posts, jersey barriers, or planters.	High	Mid-term	Village	Capital Improvements	Number of tactical mobility elements installed
6.1.2: Ensure new developments provide ample space for pedestrians, including pedestrian plazas, streetscape amenities, outdoor dining areas, gathering spaces, and connections to parks, recreational areas, and the water.	Medium	Ongoing	Village; Developers; Property Owners	Regulations and Standards	Number of new developments with intentional pedestrian spaces
6.1.3: Explore the feasibility of installing street trees or green infrastructure along Grand Avenue to enhance the pedestrian experience.	Medium	Short-term	Village	Targetted Planning	Completion of feasibility study
6.1.4: Consider widening sidewalks and removing the split-level sidewalks along Grand Avenue from Nippersink Boulevard to Holly Avenue to improve walkability and comfort.	Medium	Long-term	Village	Capital Improvements	Sidewalk improvements
Strategy 6.2: Create a pedestrian promenade along Grand Avenue and Nippersink Boulevard to connect the lakefront to Downtown.					
6.2.1: Modify on-street parking to create a wider, more comfortable pedestrian route along Grand Avenue between the lakefront and US 12.	Medium	Mid-term	Village	Capital Improvements	Completion of promenade
6.2.2: Remove on-street parking from one side of the street and reduce travel lane width.	Low	Mid-term	Village	Capital Improvements	Completion of street reconfiguration
6.2.3: Extend streetscape design elements, such as streetlights and signage, from Downtown to the waterfront to create a cohesive experience.	High	Short-term	Village	Capital Improvements	Continuity of streetscape elements
6.2.4: Link the pedestrian promenade along Grand Avenue to a waterfront overlook, providing enhanced views and access to the lakefront.	Medium	Long-term	Village	Capital Improvements	Construction of overlook completed / utilization of overlook

	Priority	Time Frame	Partners	Type	Metrics for Success
Strategy 6.3: Enhance tactical wayfinding in Downtown Fox Lake.					
6.3.1: Develop a focused signage package that emphasizes tactical directions for parking, pedestrian pathways, and key local amenities.	Medium	Short-term	Village	Targetted Planning	Signage package developed
6.3.2: Improve and clarify parking signage for the Downtown Metra parking lot to enhance user experience and accessibility.	High	Immediate	Village, Metra	Capital Improvements	Improve signage, higher utilization rates
6.3.3: Allocate budget resources for public works to advance current wayfinding efforts to guide residents and visitors to key destinations within Downtown and the broader community.	Medium	Medium-term	Village	Financial Planning	Funding allocated / spent
6.3.4: Enhance visibility and accessibility of downtown bus stops by installing clear signage, designated waiting areas, and route information to encourage public transportation use.	High	Short-term	Village; Transit Agencies	Targetted Planning	Number of upgraded bus stops, higher utilization rates



