

# COMMUNITY DESIGN ANALYSIS

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Schoolhouse Scoops

DeStefano  
Loren Harmon

verizon

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## Community Form and Visual Character

### Natural Features and Historical Development Pattern

Streams, hills, floodplains and woods often influence where a city is located and how it grows, and this certainly was the case in Hastings where the Mississippi, St. Croix and Vermillion Rivers were the major influences.

From its early beginnings, Hastings was shaped by its surrounding geography and water resources. Located near the junction of the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers, with the nearby Vermillion River Falls to provide water power, Hastings was a shipping and milling center for many years. With a deep water harbor, steamboats could unload goods and passengers easily.

Crossing over the rivers were several bridges: the Covered Bridge south of town, the swing railroad bridge (one of the first iron railroad bridges in Minnesota) and the unique Spiral Bridge over the Mississippi River.

The many lakes and springs provided clean water for beer brewing, dear to the heart of Minnesota's largest ethnic group, the Germans. The surrounding farmland provided incentive for generations of immigrants, and many of our farms continue today as Century Farms.

### Early Planning and Development

Many cities in the United States experienced their first period of major growth in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, as did Hastings. Civic pride of place was strong, and cities were often laid out in detailed plan, with parks and parkways, civic buildings, bridges and grand boulevards lined with trees. Building materials were often drawn from what could be found in the region, and structures were designed according to a set of commonly held principles of proportion, form and ornamentation.

The result was usually varied enough to be interesting, but the underlying continuity of built form created a harmonious whole. And, as the automobile had not yet begun to dictate the form of the built environment, the pedestrian-scaled city could be experienced and appreciated by all during the course of everyday business.

## Contemporary Influences

After World War II, a booming economy and new technologies contributed to both the rise of the family car as the primary mode of transportation, and the spread of new housing into the countryside. The natural controls that had kept built form within the familiar parameters disappeared, and enthusiasm for the streamlined forms and new technologies of the “Automobile Age” took off with the demand for new housing, business centers and infrastructure.

The results have been mixed, for the benefits of the freedom of the highway and the privacy and open space of the suburbs have had negative

consequences that touch almost all aspects of life, many of which are a direct result of the way cities are planned and built.

Long gone are the days when Hastings was known only as a farming and transportation center, and its image has changed, likewise. The physical design of the city – in both its private and public improvements – should evolve with these changes in industry and population. In an effort to understand the forces affecting contemporary built form, it is useful to study the major influences of the last 50 years.

## Dominance of the Automobile

Participation in the life of most contemporary cities or suburbs demands the use of a car. There is very little choice offered, as alternative modes of travel are either dangerous, prohibitively inconvenient or both. Large amounts of land are devoted to roadways, interchanges and parking. Traffic congestion in most cities is already at unacceptable levels, and new road construction often contributes to increases in the amount of traffic. The natural environment suffers as

water and air are polluted, natural resources are depleted, and wildlife habitat is destroyed in order to create new roads and parking lots. The negative consequences of sprawl are many, but perhaps none are so destructive as the distancing from nature and numbing monotony of the built environment that occurs when urban growth is overly concerned with automobile convenience.

## New Technologies

New building technologies have affected the look of all types of built structures. Tilt-up panel systems have made large, inexpensive buildings easy to construct but have made featureless, uniform structures a common element in the landscape. Vinyl siding and other man-made building materials are relatively inexpensive to produce but often do not age well and have hidden environmental costs both on the production and disposal ends.

The rise of Internet business and shopping have resulted in some reduced need for daily automobile trips. A related effect may be a resurgence of interest in the public realm, where a need for human contact and change of scene brings house-bound workers to their local coffee shop or neighborhood park. The demand for compact, aesthetically pleasing retail venues, safe public spaces, and a human-scaled environment will only increase in the coming years.



## Changing Market Trends

The trends of the last twenty years have seen an increase in the amount of sprawl and automobile-associated retail business and entertainment, as well as a resurgence of interest in urban living. While large-lot development is still pushing into undeveloped areas, a more compact, less auto-dependent lifestyle is becoming more desirable for many across a broad spectrum of household types.

A long view of population trends sees the aging (but still active) Baby Boomers seeking a high-quality-of-life environment for retirement outside of the planned retirement community.

The rise of single-parent households necessitates smaller, more convenient housing, close to public transportation systems, while concern over the confining effects of contemporary suburban life on children and teenagers may cause many families to seek a more “traditional” neighborhood way of life. Increased public discussion and education about the issues of sustainable living may also have an effect on market trends. The focus on aesthetics in placemaking strategies has also brought an resurgence of the arts and businesses and housing related to them.

## Pedestrian Nodes in a Varied Urban Environment

Regardless of which forms dominate the market in coming decades, all indicators suggest that a healthy, successful community will offer a range of housing choices and transportation alternatives within a varied, human-scaled public realm.

This suggests a need to build Hastings differently than the conventional approach to restore balance by countering the strong influence of the automobile.

# Analysis of Community Design Elements

## Geography, Natural Features and Pattern of Development

### Rivers and Hillsides

The broad Mississippi gave rise to Hastings and continues to dominate its image. Historic use of the river for industry and shipping now competes with

its contemporary benefit as an aesthetic resource. The eastern slopes leading to the Vermillion River define that side of the community.

### Entrance to Dakota County

The soaring Highway 61 Bridge over the Mississippi River provides a dramatic entrance to Hastings and Dakota County.



### Freestanding Community with an Historic Center and a Rural Edge

Hastings combines historic, small-town features with contemporary conveniences. It has both a center (the downtown) and a rural edge (rather than abutting another developed suburban city). It is simultaneously engaged in redevelopment and new growth areas.

The broad vistas across the southern farmlands, interrupted only the occasional woodlot, are in contrast with the forested river bluffs.

### Street Grid

In addition to its major natural features, the image of Hastings is defined by its street grid. The original town layout had street running perpendicular and parallel to the Mississippi River, such as in the downtown.

Outside the central core, the street pattern is mostly an interconnected and modified grid with

few cul-de-sac streets. Some people very much like cul-de-sacs for their low traffic volumes and the sense of privacy they provide. However, they break up the community, force more traffic onto major streets, make walking and bicycling very difficult and cause problems for buses, emergency vehicles and snow plows.

## Land Use Patterns

Housing density decreases from the central neighborhoods outward. Likewise, there is greater separation between housing and businesses in the perimeter locations. Recent neighborhood development projects have tended to include a diversity of attached and detached housing, which actually provides more choice than many of the older neighborhoods. Many people enjoy the greater diversity and tighter urban fabric of the older neighborhoods, and these are what many people point to as symbolic of Hastings,

but others prefer the more bucolic and private patterns of the newer areas.

Businesses line some of the major roadways such as Vermillion Street. For the most part, these businesses use a suburban strip-mall or medium-to-big box form with large, brightly lit open parking lots and pylon signs facing the roadways. These forms give way to older, smaller, single-story commercial, institutional and multi-family residential land uses closer to the city center.

## New Residential Areas

The visual appearance of newer residential neighborhoods (built since 1945) tend to be dominated by one type of housing versus another. That is, a district is usually composed entirely of detached housing or entirely of attached housing -- and usually the same type of attached housing. While this provides a comforting degree of consistency, it is also somewhat monotonous. In the case of attached housing, it often means an excess of one type of housing or even a concentration of attached housing in one location.

The neighborhoods of single-family detached housing tend to be dominated by garage doors, including garages that are set forward of the rest of the house facade. While this arrangement is cost-efficient, it conveys the impression that "only cars live here." A recessed garage and a front porch, especially when combined with a sidewalk and street trees, create a much warmer and inviting appearance throughout the neighborhood. That design approach would also be consistent with the older neighborhoods.

Some of the newer neighborhoods have trees in the street right-of-way while others only have

private landscaping. Likewise, not all streets in those neighborhoods have public sidewalks. Increased use of sidewalks and street trees would improve the appearance and livability of the neighborhoods.

Multiple-family housing in the newer neighborhoods is sometimes not stylistically compatible with detached housing. This is, it may lack the front door, window pattern, roof pitch and enclosed parking usually found in single-family housing. Consequently, it does not reinforce the street edge adequately. To the extent that multiple-family housing can emulate the basic architectural features of a single-family house, the greater will be its compatibility and desirability.

Too often, contemporary townhouses have their garages oriented toward the street so that the opposite side of the building can include a patio and grassy yard free of traffic. This trade-off harms the appearance of the public face of the building and should be avoided.

## Major Natural and Geographic Features



The Vermillion River provides good angling for the community.

Cultivated fields about the urban area on the west and south.



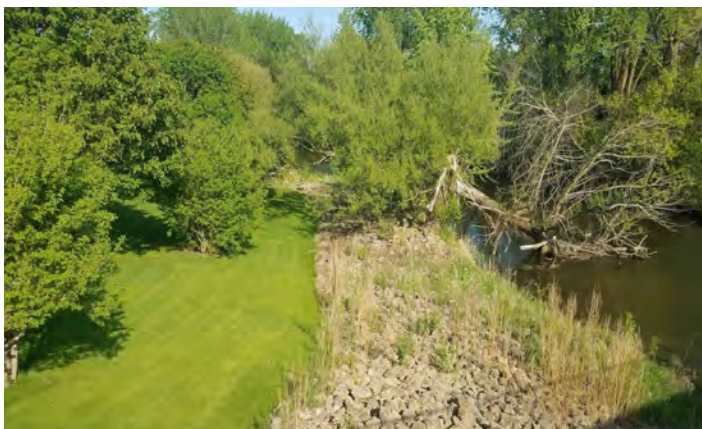
A pond near the Vermillion River.



Riffles in the Vermillion River near the General Sieben Drive Bridge.



The City has used zoning and site plan review to protect major natural features, especially those that sustain water quality.





## New Residential Neighborhoods



Front porches provide a transition between the house and the sidewalk.

A typical single-family structure in a newer neighborhood of Hastings.



Townhouses dominated by garage doors on the front.



Townhouses with front garages but a living space forward.



## Local Residential Street Design

The local residential street is the single most visually dominant element of any small city, greatly controls circulation (including that of pedestrians and bicyclists), and it is also the component over which local government has the most control.

It is visually dominant because it runs in front of every house and most multiple-family residential buildings and includes more lane-miles than all other road classifications combined. Also, it is defined as including sidewalks, grassy boulevard, trees and curb and gutter. Consequently, the local street can add to or detract from the appearance of the neighborhood.

Local street design greatly influences circulation to the extent that blocks are interconnected. A connected grid reduces the need of traffic to use arterial roads, particularly for short trips. Pedestrians are aided by these non-arterial links, especially when the local streets include sidewalks. Bicyclists take advantage of the linkages and the lower traffic speeds and volumes. Narrow local streets tend to reduce auto traffic speeds and increase safety for bicyclists. (Bicyclists, except for small children, should not use sidewalks or side paths because that practice interferes with pedestrians and creates hazards at intersections.) The local street is under the City's control through the design specifications contained in or referenced by the Subdivision Ordinance.

The recent practice in Hastings has been to build local residential streets in Hastings at widths of 34 or 36 feet, which is wider than necessary or desirable. Since most houses have two- or three-car garages and parking is not allowed overnight in the winter, local residential streets could be built 28 or 26 feet between curb faces without traffic or emergency vehicle problems. Parking could be restricted to one side of the street at 26 feet.

Most local streets in Hastings do not include sidewalks or trees in the right-of-way, although most collector streets do, fortunately. Some collector streets also include striped bicycling lanes or striped parking lanes, which serve bicyclists very nicely.

## Residential Streets



New collector streets in Hastings often include sidewalks, trees and a striped bicycling lane.

Off-street asphalt paths compliment striped bicycling lanes in some locations.



Most new residential streets in Hastings are overly wide, resulting in higher traffic speeds, reduced bicyclist safety, increased water runoff, and unnecessary use of land, materials and money.



# Established Neighborhoods

## Oldest Neighborhoods

The oldest neighborhoods of Hastings, especially those near the downtown, have an attractive pattern of narrow streets, sidewalks, street trees and porches. These districts were designed for

walking, and they glorify the sidewalk, porch and front yard. They serve as a reminder of the way the city once was, and also provides inspiration for the way it can be.

## Other Neighborhoods

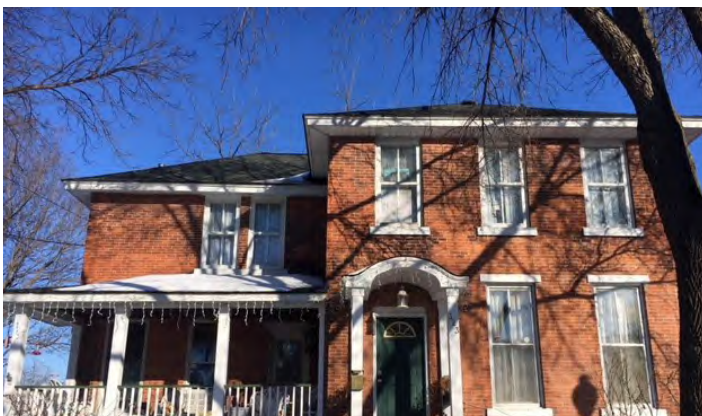
Other neighborhoods of Hastings are pleasant in their own ways, but the emphasis has shifted somewhat moved from walk-ability to automobile access. This has led to greater dominance of the garage door, a gradual shifting of the private outdoor space to the back of the house, wider streets and bigger lots. Apartment buildings and

townhouses have come to be designed with less sensitivity to the public space of the street, and have less resemblance to single-family houses. Consequently, these housing forms as not as compatible in the newer neighborhoods as they were in the old. Sidewalks were often built on only one side of the street if at all.

## Established Neighborhoods

Examples of the classic American architectural styles found in many established neighborhoods of Hastings. Some older houses have undergone rehabilitation and remodeling. Also shown in the

lower right photo is an example of infill townhouses designed to complement nearby housing to relate well to the sidewalk and street.



# Major Road Corridors

Major roads have a dramatic effect on the image of a city because a person may view many miles of them daily and because they are composed of both public space and private space. The major road corridors in Hastings include:

- Vermillion Street / Highway 61
- Highway 55

- Red Wing Boulevard / Trunk Highway 316
- 15th Street
- General Sieben Drive
- Nininger Road / County Road 42

## Vermillion Street Corridor

US 61 is a classic example of an arterial road being compromised. Part of a much longer national highway and a major north-south route through the city, lack of access control led to its roadway function being greatly diminished. With numerous driveways, left-turn lanes and street intersections, US 61 struggles to accommodate the demand to carry traffic across or past Hastings while serving as a local access street for businesses. No road can function well as both an arterial highway and a local street.

Now, the Vermillion Street corridor is a varied mixture of auto-oriented businesses, parking lots, billboards and business signs. It has little sense of place, entry or arrival. There is little accommodation for the pedestrian, even once they're out of the car in the parking lot, and there

is a poor relationship to the residential areas to the rear of the commercial strip.

The challenge for property owners and Hastings will be to improve the appearance of the commercial sites with better architecture, site planning, landscaping and signage while consolidating highway access points.

The development of Schoolhouse Square at the intersection of 10th Street has enhanced the feel of the corridor through. Well designed buildings with good pedestrian scale that are oriented to the street and provide ample parking that is not the focal point of the property.

## Highway 55 Corridor

The western Highway 55 corridor is Hastings' new location for shops and services, offices, multiple-family housing, county government services and high school education. Its appearance is much more influenced by the auto than that of downtown or the Vermillion Street corridor.

Although the County Government Center and Hastings High School are attractive buildings, the corridor overall fails to convey a Hastings identity and resembles many other American suburban commercial districts.

## Nininger Road Corridor

The Regina Medical Center, located along Nininger Road, along with the adjacent YMCA, forms a nucleus of attractive institutional buildings near the western river bluff. North of the County Road

is the historic Avent Hoffman family farm with its neat white buildings, stately trees and open fields.

# Major Road Corridors

The Highway 55 corridor includes median landscaping near General Sieben Drive.



City of Hastings, Minnesota  
**Vermillion Street Corridor Study**  
Adopted April 2018

The Vermillion Street corridor is the focus of the 2018 Vermillion Street Corridor Study regarding traffic controls, access points, signs, landscaping, lighting, land use and building placement. The study can be found here: <http://www.hastingsmn.gov/home/showdocument?id=6075>

The proposed alignment for the future extension of 170th Street, looking west from Highway 61.



## Suburban Commercial Districts

Suburban commercial districts built in the last 60 years often suffer from lack of edge landscaping, oversized signage, proliferation of billboards, too much lighting glare, lack of pedestrian amenities, visual dominance of parking, poor access design, lack of public space and having but a single type of land use. Consequently, various stages of retail decline and re-use can be seen in a progression



outward from the center of the city as newer, bigger more accessible “centers” are built.

An important urban design challenge for Hastings, as for many cities, is how these utilitarian business sites are initially designed, or later rehabilitated, repositioned or redeveloped.



## Riverfronts

Hastings is fortunate in that the features that have contributed to its success as an industrial and commercial center – the Mississippi and Vermillion Rivers – are also impressive physical and recreational assets. Although their beauty has long been recognized, its only in the last thirty years or so that their full value has been reflected in public policy and public interest.

In Hastings, as in so many other American cities, the demands of industry have historically taken precedence over scenic beauty, but residents

today have a greater appreciation for the recreational benefits of their environment. High on the list of livability factors are clean air and water, a visually pleasing public realm, and easy access to recreation and parks. Hastings, as a vital regional center, would be wise to make the most of its natural features, not only as an enriching amenity for its residents, but also as the base for recreation and hospitality-based industry. The community cannot afford to ignore its natural features as a means of enriching quality of life.

## Mississippi River Access and Orientation

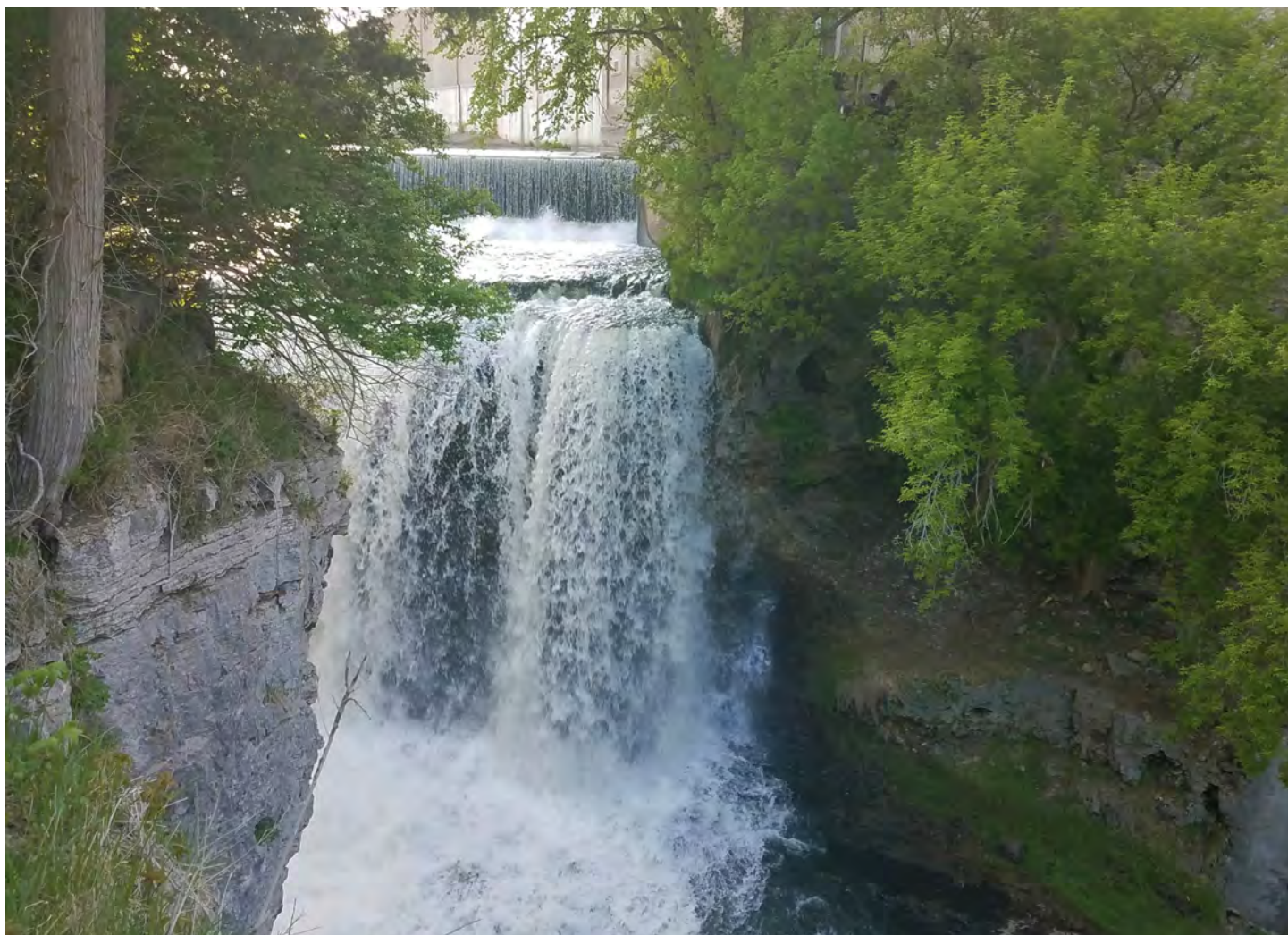
The Mississippi is an important visual, psychological and historic element for Hastings. Levee Park, which extends for three blocks along the water's edge, has the potential to be extended through redevelopment from Lea Street to Jaycees and Lake Rebecca Parks west of the Highway 61 bridge. Those redevelopment projects are the regional wastewater treatment plant located east

of the railroad bridge (planned for relocation) and the Hudson Manufacturing property. Jaycees and Lake Rebecca Parks provide a large a magnificent public open space along the river with views of both bluffs and the lock and dam.

## Vermillion River Access and Orientation

Although the Vermillion is a modest-size stream, it does offer the Falls of the Vermillion, formerly a source of water power for the Ardent Mills facility. The adjacent parks provide access to the riverfront and the falls. Upriver, the Vermillion includes a wide floodplain with bicycle trails. Downstream, the river winds past CP Adams Park before

disappearing into a maze of lowland marshes, with one branch bending north to the Mississippi and the main channel continuing parallel to the Mississippi another two miles before reaching the confluence.





# Downtown

Downtown Hastings maintains its historic role as the psychological and visual center of the community even if its economic role has diminished. The downtown was built before the advent of the auto. The buildings there are oriented toward the sidewalk and the street while parking is on-street, behind the building or on a separate site. Occasionally, offices or housing units are included on upper stories, and the district includes restaurants, bars, cultural activities and public spaces, all of which intensify land use and increase nighttime activity.

The result is a human-scaled and pleasant environment but one that is not as efficient for serving large numbers of retail customers from a broad geographic market because of the parking and access constraints. The downtown environment also provides many places for social interaction such as meetings or festivals and cultural events such as celebrations or parades. The benefits are a sense of place and importance, a feeling of urbanism, and an elevated role for public spaces.

## Streetscape and the Public Realm

Design in the Vermillion Street Corridor is not always mindful of the importance of creating attractive public space along the street for pedestrians. Essential features that are sometimes overlooked include windows and window displays, frequent

Downtown still has a large stock of well-preserved, attractive multi-story brick buildings. There are few visual problems and many fine, untapped opportunities. There are many attractive traditional commercial and mixed-use buildings that are punctuated by a few undistinguished or poorly modernized structures and open parking lots. As the visual and psychological center of the city, the downtown deserves a high degree of attention in terms of design treatment.

The recently constructed Artspace Hastings River Lofts are a fantastic addition of housing to the downtown area and will be a catalyst for continued downtown reinvestment. If the Red Rock Bus Rapid Transit line is ever extended to Hastings, it could have a historically-themed depot near the Tyler Street commuter parking lot.

doors, attractive façade materials, canopies, lighting, and well-maintained sidewalks. Surface parking should be screened with fences, walls and plantings along the sidewalk.

## Urbanism and Nearby Neighborhoods

The Downtown could use additional nighttime activity and a sense of after-hours security. There is insufficient downtown housing to give the area of feel of an urban neighborhood.

Buildings with housing or offices above shops would be an ideal addition. Continued developments like the Artspace Hasting River Lofts would also be a huge benefit to downtown. Additionally, row

houses with steps and patios along the street would be another product that would enliven downtown. Some downtowns have a public green or town square around which offices, shops and/or housing clusters and people congregate. Downtown Hastings has Levee Park and Oliver's Grove, Depot Park and the Public Square; all of which provide valuable spaces for congregating.

## Downtown

The commercial and residential districts that abut Downtown would benefit from public and private improvements that improve appearances, link, and define them better.

Features such as street trees, decorative lighting, public art, private landscaping, building orientation and land use intensity all could be used more effectively to accomplish those aims.

The Heart of Hastings Plan addressed these and other needs and opportunities.



## Public and Institutional Buildings

Public and semi-public buildings are an opportunity to express community pride, local cultural and social heritage or a sense of collective mission. Whether it is the City Hall or a water pumping station, public buildings should be designed with the knowledge that they will convey an important message to residents and visitors. Therefore, the design should express pride in civic life and accomplishment through architecture forms, materials, and siting. Public agencies should resist the temptation to cut corners on these features for the sake of current budgets as they leave a long-lasting impression. One important and impressive public building in Hastings is the City Hall.

Park structures are another way to express civic themes. Parks can also be designed as a center point for a neighborhood as well as having less-ornamental functions.

Schools, like parks, have symbolic power. Their design can express the importance that the community places on education and the welfare of its children.



# Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances

The city exercises major control over the appearance of private development through its zoning and subdivision ordinances.

## Zoning Ordinance

The Zoning Ordinance, Chapter 155 of the City Code, regulates features such as: the allowable use of each parcel of land, the minimum size of lots, minimum building and parking setbacks from property lines, the minimum lot size (in effect, the maximum density), the maximum building height, the minimum number of parking spaces, and the landscaping of new commercial properties, among other things.

Observations about the zoning ordinance as it relates to the appearance of the city are listed below. This review does not constitute a complete diagnosis of the zoning ordinance.

- **Residential lot dimensions:** The dimensions for lot size, lot width, and setbacks allow design flexibility and should not lead to excessively large lots or unduly low housing densities.
- **Residential zoning districts:** A range of detached and attached housing types are allowed in six districts, including a manufactured housing district.
- **Residential Mixed-Use District:** This district serves as a transition from commercial to lower density housing. It allows residential, commercial and combined buildings.
- **Original Hastings Design Guidelines:** This is a fine section intended to preserve and protect the streetscape character of the part of Hastings built between approximately 1845 and 1940.
- **Commercial zoning districts:** In addition to the usual array of businesses, the C-1, C-3 and C-4 districts allow housing over shops. There is also a district that primarily allows offices.
- **Downtown Core District:** Allows land use and design in keeping with the original character of the downtown. These features include housing or offices above the first floor of commercial buildings, small shops, offices, and no required building setbacks. Parking is closely regulated to minimize their visual and functional impact.
- **Industrial park:** Allows a wide variety of manufacturing and warehousing including screened outdoor storage. The I-2, Industrial Park Storage and Service district allows all the I-1 land uses plus vehicle impound lots, but this district is not expected to be expanded or replicated.
- **Business park:** The ordinance does not include a district intended for a combination of office buildings, office-flex space and attractive light industry in a campus or “business park” setting. Such a district should be added to the ordinance.
- **Site plan review:** This section provides a process for review the site plan of any proposed building site construction or alteration.
- **Landscaping:** Modest standards are provided for landscaping residential (more than eight units per building), commercial or industrial sites. These standards could be increased. However, the zoning ordinance does allow for constrained sites to meet some landscaping requirements with art.
- **Building facades:** Standards are provided to avoid the construction of buildings that have inappropriate exterior materials.

- **Signs:** Portions of the sign ordinance has been revised recently and includes a matrix that clearly outlines the City’s signage requirements by zoning district.

- **Non-conforming land uses:** This valuable section allows buildings or land uses that were built before the current zoning regulations were adopted to continue but not be enlarged; the City does not wish to promote their survival.

## Subdivision Ordinance

The Subdivision Ordinance, Chapter 154 of the City Code, regulates the process of dividing land and prescribes the standards for the design of public improvements, such as street widths, in new multi-lot subdivisions. Some of the features of the Subdivision Ordinance that have a bearing on the appearance of the community are:

- **Local residential street width:** 32 feet wide (as measured from the back of the curbing) in a 60-foot public right-of-way. Local street width was reduced from the prior standard of 36 feet, which was unnecessarily wide. Narrower streets may be allowed in unique circumstances where on street parking is to be restricted.
- **Sidewalks:** Sidewalks are not required along local residential streets unless they serve to link a neighborhood to a park or trail. Sidewalks and/or bicycle paths are required along collector streets.
- **Street trees:** Boulevard trees are required to be planted every 50 feet in new subdivisions.

- **Roadway access management:** The ordinance regulates the minimum spacing of public street or driveway intersections along collector and arterial roads.
- **Alleys:** New alleys may be permitted as part of planned residential developments (PRD).
- **Cul-de-sacs:** Are allowed with specific engineering reasons based on existing property condition, topography, or natural features.
- **Corner lots:** Corner lots shall be platted at least 10 percent wider than the minimum lot width required.
- **Park land dedication:** At its discretion and according to the comprehensive park system plan, the City may require land subdividers to dedicate to the City at least 11 percent of the site for use as a public park. Alternatively, money may be required in place of land if the park system plan does not call for a park in that particular location.





# COMMUNITY DESIGN PLAN

## Overview

The Hastings Community Design Plan is intended to guide public and private investments to create a more attractive community. The goal, objectives and policies of this chapter direct the City in terms of its ordinances, capital budget expenditures and public infrastructure design, especially in regard to streets and parks. Private actions are directed through the City's review of development applications and amendments to the City's zoning ordinance.

Urban design is both a professional discipline and an orientation or attitude towards the urban environment. As such, it touches almost every aspect of the physical form of a city, from land use to housing to transportation, parks and open space.

Therefore, many aspects of the Community Design Plan refer to, or are referenced in, other chapters of the comprehensive plan, especially under the topics of Land Use and Parks. The primary focus of this chapter is on the characteristics that make Hastings special (like its riverfronts) or that cut across many parts of the City.

The intent of the Community Design Plan is to create a community of distinctive neighborhoods that are supported by green public lands and vital civic and commercial centers. The recommendations direct Hastings to take better advantage of its major natural attributes such as the Mississippi and Vermillion Rivers, the river bluffs and the wooded hillsides. New neighborhoods should be designed with some of the valued characteristics of the City's traditional neighborhoods. Parks and greenways should be designed and connected to help build lasting neighborhood value. Downtown should be urban, diverse, dense, walkable, and linked to the river.

# Community Design Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Hastings should be beautiful, efficient and financially strong. This chapter of the Comprehensive Plan describes what the City would like to accomplish and the policies that the City will use to achieve that objective.

## Goal 1: Enhance the identity of the city by building on Hastings' traditional urban character, natural amenities and history.

### Objectives:

- **Overall Urban Character:** Design Hastings to incorporate the best aspects of both a small town and a major city.
- **Celebrate Hastings:** Use public improvements, public art and land development regulations to preserve, highlight and interpret the unique cultural history and natural environment of Hastings.
- **New Neighborhoods:** Design new neighborhoods to reflect the best qualities of the traditional neighborhoods of Hastings.
- **Established neighborhoods:** Maintain the traditional urban character of these neighborhoods and promote continuous public and private reinvestment to ensure that they remain attractive places to live.
- **Trees and Vegetation:** Encourage new neighborhoods and property owners to enhance and maintain trees and other landscape elements.
- **Mixed Use:** Encourage a mix of compatible land uses in a variety of locations and scales in order to create more vital and walkable activity centers.
- **Arts & Entertainment District:** Establish an Arts and Entertainment District in downtown Hastings and support the establishment of additional art galleries, performance theaters, fine arts studios, art lofts, and collaborative spaces.
- **Site Design and Exterior Architecture:** Ensure site design and exterior architecture reflects and highlights the unique history of Hastings. Work to further define architectural components.
- **Waterfronts:** Continue to enhance the visual quality and connections to the Mississippi River, Vermillion River and area lakes to support appropriate development and enhance the community's quality of life.
- **Major Road Corridors:** Improve the appearance of the major roadway corridors in Hastings through access management, site planning and sign controls. The Vermillion Street Development Plan is a good example of such a plan to improve and enhance a major roadway corridor.
- **Parks & Greenways:** Build parks and interconnected greenways to enhance the quality of residential neighborhoods and commercial districts, reflect Hastings's cultural heritage and honor civic life.



## Overall Urban Character: Design Hastings to incorporate the best aspects of both a small town and a major city.

Hastings wishes to protect and extend the best aspects of its residential neighborhoods while intensifying the urban atmosphere of certain nodes such as the downtown, Vermillion Street and Highway 55 West.

### Policies:

- 1. Urban Nodes in a Small Town:** Protect and improve the quiet, leafy and familial character of most residential neighborhoods while accentuating the sense of urban diversity and intensity in certain other districts and corridors. Become more urban in some locations (e.g., along Vermillion Street, in and around Downtown, along the Highway 55 corridor), and use that sense of urbanity as a marketing tool for long-term growth and stability for Hastings.
- 2. Downtown and the River:** Promote awareness of the Downtown and the rivers as highly interesting and as special aspects of the city.
- 3. Greening the City:** Create a network of interconnected greenways, parks, plazas, promenades, parkways and other tree-lined streets to beautify the community, provide recreation, enhance quality of life, boost property values and balance the effects of urban density.
- 4. Major Road Corridors:** Enhance the appearance of major road corridors through careful review of new development. Specific attention must be placed on the landscape plan, building location, lighting plan, signage, parking lots, and streetscaping to make sure certain development relates to the scale, massing, and materials within the corridor.
- 5. Pedestrian Access and Design:** Balance the needs of automobile access with pedestrian scale architecture and accessibility. Ensure pedestrian access between businesses, neighborhoods, and corridors. Make sure certain development is at a pedestrian scale.
- 6. Urban versus Rural Distinctions:** Preserve and accentuate the difference between the urban landscape and the rural landscape by urging neighboring rural townships to adhere to the Metropolitan Council's "2040 Thrive MSP" Regional Framework for land use.

## Celebrate Hastings: Use public improvements, public art and land development regulations to preserve, highlight and interpret the unique cultural history and natural environment of Hastings.

There are certain aspects of and locations in Hastings that make it distinctive, and accentuating those through public or private actions will help build a true "sense of place."

### Policies:

- 1. Economies:** Help residents and visitors understand the importance of the early river transportation economy through signs and interpretive monuments.

2. **Early Ethnic and Economic Heritage:** Interpret and highlight the early ethnic and economic heritage of Hastings with signs, interpretative monuments, use of historic place names and the creation of appropriate parks or plazas along with the policies of the Hastings Heritage Preservation Plan.
3. **Special Places:** Protect, interpret and enhance the qualities of the city’s “special places” that offer distinct and valued experiences. Some present opportunities for continued development, others for conservation. Examples of these “special places” include:
  - » The Mississippi riverfront along with its parks and trails
  - » The Falls of the Vermillion River
  - » The Vermillion River valley
  - » The Mississippi River valley
  - » The Second Street corridor through downtown
  - » The historic houses and churches along Vermillion Street
  - » The historic central neighborhoods
  - » The views of and from the bluffs of the Mississippi River
  - » The City Hall building
  - » The east side sand coulées and the Glendale Road valley.
4. **Community Entrance Corridors:** Design major entries into the city and major intersections with attractive gateway features including ground or monument signs, public art and suitable landscaping and sign controls.
5. **Views and Landmarks:** Hastings will strive to preserve and enhance important views and landmarks in order to maintain visual character and reinforce civic identity. Locations offering views of the riverfronts or of the city as a whole, should be designed for public use, where feasible, with interpretive signs, on-street or off- street parking or pedestrian access, and suitable landscaping. Citizen input will help to determine which views and landmarks are valued by the public and help guide strategies for preservation or enhancement.
6. **Wayfinding Sign System:** Continue to expand the existing, unified wayfinding sign system to advertise and make more visible Hastings’s major facilities and attractions.

## **New Neighborhoods: Design new neighborhoods to reflect the best qualities of the traditional neighborhoods of Hastings.**

The most desirable aspects of the City’s traditional neighborhoods should be carried forward and adapted to the design of new neighborhoods. These include relatively narrow lots (deeper than they are wide), and shallow front yard setbacks, continuous sidewalks, street trees and recessed garages (set back further than the principal façade). These are also the characteristics common to pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods, in which compact development patterns and interconnected streets encourage socializing, walking and bicycling.

### **Policies:**

1. **Minor Residential Streets:** Create an interconnected system with future minor or local residential

streets. Provide public street access in each cardinal direction unless impractical because of natural, environmental or similar conditions.

The street system is a fundamental element of the neighborhood design. The street pattern controls traffic flow, determines the ease of pedestrian and bicyclist movement, defines views and vistas, orients the user, unites the community, and creates a physical framework into which houses and other buildings are placed.

The function of minor residential streets should not be to move as much auto traffic as fast as possible but rather to move autos at slower speeds to and from the home while also encouraging bicycling and walking and creating an attractive forecourt for the housing.

Minor (local) streets should be built no wider than 32 feet (as measured to the back of the curbing) so as to encourage slow traffic speeds that enhance the safety and enjoyment of other users. (Refer to Table 4.1)

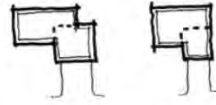
Refer to the Transportation chapter of this comprehensive plan for further direction on the design of future local residential streets.

2. **Alleys:** Alleys will continue to be allowed.
3. **Collector Streets:** Collector streets should be planned for each future neighborhood at the “sketch plan” phase and should link across neighborhoods to arterial roads and other collector roads. Planners should continue to work with each land developer to plan the general alignment of collector streets beyond the limits of smaller subdivisions to ensure neighborhood-wide continuity
4. **Sidewalks:** Require that residential developers include a five-foot-wide concrete sidewalk on at least one side of each new local street and both sides of each new collector street, where existing routes exist or are warranted.
5. **Street Trees:** Trees should be planted in the public right-of-way between the curb and the sidewalk, along every street, including commercially-oriented arterial roads and local residential streets. Landscaping along the streets should be a joint public and private effort that could take advantage of both the public right-of-way and the private setback space.

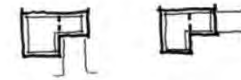
Trees regularly spaced along the street are a key ingredient for giving streets a residential character and making them feel more comfortable. Street trees add greenery, provide shade, give a street a lived-in feeling and contribute to neighborhood character.

6. **Garage Setbacks:** Encourage garages to be set farther from the street than the front façade of the house, townhouse or apartment building.

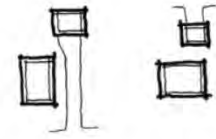
Standard garage relationship to house and street.



Typical setback positions for an attached garage: forward or turned.



Typical positions for detached garages, either accessed from the street (left) or an alley (right).



## Established neighborhoods: Maintain the traditional urban character of these neighborhoods and promote continuous public and private reinvestment to ensure that they remain attractive places to live.

A large portion of the urban development that will exist in Hastings by the year 2040 is already in place. These private and public improvements represent a tremendous investment and are essential to the quality of life and financial security of many thousands of people. In addition, the historic fabric of the community provides a sense of place and a physical environment that is nearly irreplaceable.

One of the strengths and beauties of older neighborhoods is the close-knit, compact mixture of different forms of housing, shops, offices, services and employment areas. It is these urban patterns that will help make Hastings and its older neighborhoods distinct, livable and competitive with other locations.

### Policies:

- 1. Neighborhood Protection:** Hastings will continue to protect established areas from negative effects such as excessive auto traffic or incompatible, unbuffered land uses. Simultaneously, blighted, deteriorating or obsolete activities will be phased out and those sites improved according to an established plan. Guided by the planning and urban design principles of the Hastings Comprehensive Plan and The Original Hastings Design Guidelines, private and public investments will aim to enhance or strengthen a sense of neighborhood identity in all established areas.
- 2. Context-Sensitive Redevelopment and Infill:** Encourage infill development in older traditional neighborhoods that respects the characteristics of those neighborhoods, as described above The Original Hastings Design Guidelines and in keeping with the prevalent housing styles in each neighborhood.

This principle does not imply that all housing will be of the same type (i.e., detached or duplex) but that older and newer housing will share many design elements. Redevelopment and infill are keys to strengthening older neighborhood and will always be done in a manner that responds to and builds on the strengths those neighborhoods.

Review zoning regulations that apply to the older neighborhoods so as to accommodate the non-conforming status of dwellings that were caused by setback or area requirements. Current zoning regulations sometimes create difficulties for property owners to properly maintain or upgrade

houses.

3. **Mixed Use in Neighborhoods:** Identify locations for mixed use in established neighborhoods that already have some diversity of uses, proximity to transit or major traffic corridors. The policies of this chapter regarding mixed use are applicable in the neighborhood context.
4. **Land Use Incompatibilities:** Some of Hastings's older neighborhoods have long been affected by incompatible land uses, such as industrial plants, materials or equipment storage, freight lines or truck routes in close proximity to residential areas. There is often no easy way to resolve these incompatibilities in the short term. In general, improved code enforcement, buffering and screening can reduce if not eliminate problems caused by to incompatibilities.
5. **Planning and Design:** The City will prepare specific plans for a neighborhood or district in which a need for additional guidance beyond this comprehensive plan is identified. When preparing plans or implementing public improvements, the neighborhood policies in this chapter will be observed.
6. **Historic Preservation:** Historic or architecturally significant buildings in established neighborhoods will be preserved because they express the city's heritage and add beauty and charm to their surroundings. As specified in the Heritage Preservation chapter of this plan, preservation does not necessarily involve historic designation but can be achieved through tools such as neighborhood conservation districts.

## **Trees and Vegetation: Encourage new neighborhoods and property owners to enhance and maintain trees and other landscape elements.**

Vegetation enhances the appearance, comfort and tranquility of a neighborhood. Encouraging the maintenance of landscaping both on private property and within the public right-of-way will not only improve the look of a neighborhood, but will help to encourage civic pride.

It is the goal of Hastings to encourage new tree planting on public and private property, to line its streets with trees, to plant trees in parks, to minimize tree hazards, and to maintain trees in a healthy condition.

The purpose of this objective is to create a community that has strong aesthetic features in all aspects of its developments. Landscaping can be used to improve air quality, reduce dust, act as a noise buffer, promote energy and wildlife conservation, visually facilitate traffic flow, promote water conservation through the use of low water adaptive vegetation, and mitigate the impact of otherwise incompatible uses.

### **Policies:**

1. **Tree canopy:** Maintain vision clearance between the ground and first floor of a structure by trimming tree branches. This allows for clear pedestrian and vehicular views for both safety and aesthetics.
2. **Education:** Hastings will provide educational materials on proper tree maintenance for residents and work to host workshops in neighborhoods as needed.

- 3. Standards:** Create standards for tree planting and landscaping as well as maintenance based on industry standards.

## **Mixed Use: Encourage a mix of compatible land uses in a variety of locations and scales in order to create more walkable activity centers and support resilient land use patterns.**

Zoning regulations can be used to promote private investment that is appropriate in size and composition for its location. In particular, some locations should be built with taller and more intensive structures, even mixing housing and shops vertically.

### **Policies:**

- 1. Commercial Districts:** In the commercial districts such as Downtown or the Vermillion Street corridor, encourage mixed land uses that combine a variety of compatible housing types with retail or office uses. The addition of upper-story housing, nearby townhouses and other types of attached housing can bring more people into these districts, enhancing their economic viability and urban vitality.

The Vermillion Street Development Corridor Study (2018) will be observed in that corridor; the study includes many design principles and guidelines that are applicable in other locations as well.

Design standards and guidelines can be used to ensure compatibility between diverse land uses and create a pedestrian-oriented environment. These include:

- » Placing of buildings and building entrances close to the sidewalk to enhance visibility and pedestrian access
- » Locating parking lot to the side and rear of buildings, not in front
- » Screening of parking lots from the street
- » A high degree of storefront transparency to provide both natural surveillance and visual interest
- » Building architecture that respects the neighborhood context, with building heights and massing that are compatible with adjacent residential areas
- » Pedestrian-scale lighting
- » Other streetscape elements such as street trees, benches and kiosks that help create a distinct identity for the neighborhood center.

- 2. Highway 55:** In Hastings' newer commercial districts, such as along Highway 55 West, mixed use development may be a viable strategy, but generally requires larger- scale development.

Many Midwestern communities with commercial "strips" are exploring similar strategies for redevelopment, including the use of "liner" buildings oriented to the street along the edges of parking lots, reorienting buildings to new internal streets, and introducing higher-density housing in conjunction with public open space. As the size of these sites and their exposure to regional

traffic increases, the size of individual businesses or buildings may also increase.

- 3. Downtown:** Downtown should contain a complete mix of uses, including offices, retail and services, government, arts, entertainment, housing, parks, trails and visitor attractions.

To strengthen the downtown's position as the center of the city, it should increasingly be a place that people can live, work, shop and enjoy cultural and recreational opportunities. The policies and recommendations of *Improving on the Original: A Plan for the Heart of Hastings* (2003) generally encourage this evolution.

The City has adopted zoning regulations and design guidelines that ensure that each new building (including parking structures) enhances the public realm and the totality of the downtown district.

## **Arts & Entertainment District: Establish an Arts and Entertainment District in downtown Hastings and support the establishment of additional art galleries, performance theaters, potters, art lofts, and collaborative spaces.**

An arts and entertainment district creates a mixed-use concentration of arts and cultural facilities to serve as an anchor attraction for Hastings. The district should reflect our mission, history and cultural development.

### **Policies:**

- 1. Destination:** Ensure city policies allow for artists--visual, literary, performing and folk--the opportunity to live, work and create within the district.
- 2. Design:** Ensure the design of the public realm of downtown allows spaces and opportunities for dynamic and participatory arts experiences. Such spaces could be plazas, stages, or even open streets.
- 3. Resist homogeneity:** The district will strive to preserve the cultural/ethnic and economic diversity that makes Hastings unique by supporting ventures for the development of arts enterprises.
- 4. Attract Artists:** Hastings will market and promote downtown to encourage artist relocation based on affordability of housing and proximity to major metropolitan area.
- 5. Branding:** Create brand for the area to increase awareness of the Hastings Arts and Entertainment District.
- 6. Public Art:** Increase public understanding of and appreciation for art in public spaces by creating a public art program.

## **Site Design and Exterior Architecture: Ensure site design and exterior architecture reflects and highlights the unique history of Hastings. Work to further define architectural components for resiliency.**

Ensure site design and exterior architecture reflects and highlights the unique history of Hastings. Work to further define architectural components.

The details of private site design, including landscaping, lighting and signs, are critical to the overall appearance of the city. Hastings should continue to review zoning and land use regulations in order to improve site design.

### **Policies:**

- 1. Diversity in Multiple-Family Housing Developments:** Each neighborhood should contain a range of housing types, densities, and building configurations including single-family detached, townhouses, apartments, and more specialized types such as seniors housing. Discourage large housing projects that consist of a single building type. Some portion of each type of housing will, ideally, be available for occupancy on either an ownership or lease basis.

Multiple-family housing should be diversified in style, size, price range and location for the sake of economic viability, interest, compatibility and sustainability. In its review of housing development applications that include attached units, the City Council will consider the diversity of the housing products in light of the number of units proposed and their relationship to nearby single-family neighborhoods.

- 2. Design Guidelines for Multiple-Family Housing:** Create attached housing as an attractive, compatible and acceptable alternative to conventional detached housing. Attached housing includes duplexes, townhouses, and buildings with four or more units that have an exterior entrance for each unit.

Multifamily housing includes apartment buildings that provide unit access via interior corridors and a variety of other configurations. In general, these housing types should be built in small groupings so that it fits into the overall residential context rather than being sequestered into large project sites.

- » Attached housing should emulate single-family housing in its basic architectural elements – pitched roofs, articulated facades, visible entrances, porches or balconies, and a maximum height of three to four stories. Attached housing should use the architectural “vocabulary” of single-family housing.
- » Design the front and back facades with appropriate levels of formality. The front, as the more public side of the house, will receive the more formal treatment, while trash/recycling storage, play equipment and outdoor storage will be located in the back. The main entry will face the street.
- » If a multifamily building or attached housing is developed near single-family detached housing, the width of the building facade should be similar to that of a single-family house. Attached units should be grouped in rows of no more than four or six units to avoid a monolithic appearance.
- » Buildings should address the street with varied and articulated facades, frequent entries and windows. Porches and balconies should be encouraged, and facades consisting of long blank walls or series of garage doors should be prohibited.



- » Driveways and garages should be located to the rear of the lot or interior of the block. When garages cannot be located to the rear or on the interior of the block, they should be set back similar to the requirements for single-family housing. Porches and front steps should face the local street.
- » Duplexes should be designed for visual compatibility with single-family housing, should be scattered among the neighborhood rather than concentrated, and may be used as a transitional building type near larger buildings and street intersections.

**3. Unity and Variety:** Require variety in the style and density of attached housing within each neighborhood. Avoid the appearance of large multi-family “projects.” Finely-grained diversity is a key to making attached housing compatible with single-family housing.

On larger sites, encourage unity as well as diversity by specifying a common design vocabulary throughout the buildings, a clear pathway system and shared outdoor space that unifies and integrates the site.

**4. Outdoor Spaces for Attached Housing:** Define all outdoor spaces, distinguishing between those reserved for residents and those open to the public. Provide visual indications of the boundaries between private space, public space and shared space. Enclose the shared outdoor space with buildings, low fences or hedges, and paths.

- » Provide convenient access to shared outdoor areas, amenities such as play equipment, seating and tables to encourage their use, and vegetation for seasonal shade.
- » Provide each housing unit with clearly defined private or semi-private outdoor space such as a yard, patio, porch or balcony, with direct access from inside the unit.
- » To the extent possible, provide each unit with a front entry that faces the street and is visible and accessible from an adjacent public path. The “backs” of each unit should be reserved for private outdoor space and resident parking. Where individual entries are not possible, minimize the number of units that share a single entry.
- » Use semi-private outdoor spaces such as porches and patios to increase the sense of privacy and security within the home. Provide opportunities for surveillance of outdoor areas such as streets, sidewalks and play areas from within the home.

**5. Connections:** Maximize visual and physical linkages between adjoining land uses that are similar or can coexist compatibly, such as offices and retail or high-density housing. Encourage pedestrian movement between adjacent sites rather than multiple trips by car. Where uses are less compatible (such as industrial and residential uses), provide adequate landscape buffers and screens to soften the transition between them.

**6. Efficiency:** Encourage sites to share functional site design elements such as shared access, shared parking, coordinated landscaping, connected open space, and surface water detention areas, when such elements support a more efficient and attractive development pattern.

**7. Landscaping:** Continue to require high quality planting plans for all new multi-family residential, commercial and industrial developments.

**8. Sensitivity to Context:** Design new development to respect surrounding development, whether this includes quiet low-density residential neighborhoods, traditional storefronts or major institutions such as the hospitals. New development should emulate the desirable qualities of traditional

urban settings, while protecting the integrity of existing neighborhoods.

- 9. Parking Design:** Locate parking lots behind or to the side of buildings or in block interiors wherever possible in order to reduce the visual impact of surface parking. Landscape and screen all parking lots and parking structures in order to improve their appearance from surrounding streets and properties.
- 10. Environmental Protection:** Continue to require protection of natural features such as major wooded areas, steep wooded slopes, streams, wetlands and stream edges in new developments. Propose an ordinance that regulate development of steep slopes.

Consider providing incentives for developments that protect natural areas or environmentally sensitive areas through land trusts, open space zoning or other techniques such as density bonuses for open space development.

- 11. Resilient Materials:** Encourage the use of quality construction materials that are resilient to changes in use, time and weather.
- 12. Open Space:** Preserve open space in new developments through the use of planned unit developments, conservation easements, parkland acquisition or dedication and other techniques.
- 13. Coordinated Signage:** Develop standards for coordination of multiple signs on a development site to ensure compatibility of size, colors, graphics and materials.

## **Waterfronts: Continue to enhance the visual quality and connections to the Mississippi River, Vermillion River and area lakes to support appropriate development and enhance the community's quality of life.**

Riverfront open space, especially with walking and bicycling paths, always adds to quality of life and economic development in any community. Hastings is blessed with not one, but two fine rivers. The City has taken advantages of opportunities that have arisen over the years to acquire riverfront land for parks, trails and floodplain open space.

Riverfront views also raise the value of nearby development and can be a powerful catalyst for investment. In some locations, the Mississippi riverfront is devoted to parking lots or to industries that do not use the water for either shipping or power. Thus, there are additional opportunities to redevelop land to take advantage of views to the Mississippi River.

### **Policies:**

- 1. Downtown Riverfront Access Plan:** The City will continue to follow the precepts of Improving on the Original: A Plan for the Heart of Hastings. If riverfront property cannot be acquired outright, the City will attempt to negotiate public access across private sites along the riverfront when plans show a desire for an extended public walkway.
- 2. Vermillion River:** Along the Vermillion River, neighborhood growth over the next 25 years will provide opportunities for the City to acquire a band of land outside the floodplain to create a linear park

and trail. That feature could add immeasurably to the community's enjoyment of the river and spread the beneficial real estate effects of the river far back into the nearby neighborhoods. That future linear park should be linked to the other public open space that exists downstream for a magnificent system. Sidewalks, striped bicycling lanes and other greenways may link the Vermillion Riverfront into the neighborhoods.

- 3. Relationships of Buildings to the Open Space Edge:** Private buildings along the Mississippi Riverfront linear park should provide windows, doors, landscaping, high quality materials and possibly outdoor private spaces such as dining to complement the public space.
- 4. Edge Treatments:** "Green" alternatives to rip-rap or sheet pile shoreline stabilization are recommended, including plantings with fast-growing stream bank vegetation in more protected locations.

### **Major Road Corridors: Improve the appearance of the major roadway corridors in Hastings through access management, site planning and sign controls. The Vermillion Street Corridor Plan is a good example of such a plan to improve and enhance a major roadway corridor.**

Every community struggles with the challenge of land use and urban design on the property fronting either side of a major road. These corridors are highly visible to all the community and contribute strongly to the image and appearance of the city.

Businesses covet the access and visibility the road provides but the community has an interest in protecting the function of the road while avoiding the sometimes unattractive aspects of linear commercial development.

Major roadways such as Highways 61 or 55, which serve many businesses, present the greatest challenge in terms of community image. They are intensely developed and also contain some of the less attractive visual environments in the city. Major issues are the constrained rights-of-way conditions, large expanses of pavement, overhead utility lines, proliferation of public and private signs, and lack of landscaping.

The following policies could help to greatly improve the image and appearance of the commercial corridors.

#### **Policies:**

- 1. Road Corridor Land Use Planning:** Plan the edges of arterial and collector roads for any appropriate and acceptable variety of land uses, ranging from single-family housing to shopping centers, as long as the roadway access guidelines presented in the Transportation Plan chapter are followed.

Generally speaking, access efficiency and visibility should tend to guide more intensive land uses to the edge of major roads and land uses that generate less traffic to minor roads.

- 2. Housing Abutting High-Volume Roads:** While housing developers may not view the edge of an arterial road as the most desirable environment, it is not necessary to line every stretch of arterial frontage with commercial or multiple-family development. In fact, allowing some low- density

neighborhoods along arterial roads is both necessary and desirable.

However, if housing is located along an arterial road, its access must conform to the spacing guidelines of the Transportation Plan chapter, meaning that intersections will be widely spaced and there will be no direct driveway access allowed.

In situations where housing abuts high volume roads (either facing or backing up to the road), landscaping will be required to mitigate the effect of the traffic on the housing. Such screening should consist of earth berms or of screen walls.

Landscaping treatments should be used for the berms and the screen walls, and the screen walls should be designed to complement the adjoining developments.

- 3. Commercial Site Landscaping:** One of the more noticeable negative features in a commercial corridor is the lack of screening for parking lots, which sometimes results in an expanse of pavement between building lines on opposite sides of the road.

The City will continue to require landscaping plans with commercial site plans as specified in City Code.

A row of deciduous trees along the roadside, spaced at 40 to 60 feet, would dramatically soften the appearance of the corridor, especially when viewed from an angle down the road.

Additional parking lot landscaping would also help to break up large expanses of pavement and identify pedestrian walkway areas.

- 4. Corridor Landscaping and Lighting Improvements:** To enhance their identity and to provide visual variety, special landscaping and lighting treatments should be applied to portions of the Highway 55 West and the Vermillion Street corridors. These designs could consist of unique landscaping treatments, distinct light fixtures or custom banners or signs. The City should prepare a plan for landscaping, lighting, signage and building massing in the Highway 55 corridor from Pine Street to Jacob Avenue.

- 5. Commercial Lighting:** Hastings will continue to require photometric plans to evaluate the placement and illumination of commercial lighting.

- 6. Access Points:** Multiple access points, such as along portions of Vermillion Street, can be confusing to the motorist and create greater opportunities for accidents. Multiple points also create a sense of clutter, require more pavement and reduce the opportunities for landscaping. Although it may not always be feasible to totally remove some of the access points, there may be opportunities to reduce or combine multiple access points to a single property or to adjoining properties.

This issue was studied as part of the Vermillion Street Development Guidelines project (2006-2008) but was not fully resolved. Redevelopment projects have had the greatest impact on reducing the number of access points. An excessive number of access points are not a problem in the Highway 55 corridor.

During site plan review, the City will apply the access management guidelines presented in the Transportation Plan chapter to limit the number of access points, regulate their spacing and

consolidate existing points.

- 7. Relocate Utility Lines:** Overhead utility lines are one of the major visual impacts in some of the arterial road corridors. Tall, wooden poles and the large number and complex pattern of lines create a congested and unsightly visual environment, and result in heavy, unsightly pruning of street trees. The poles occupy valuable space in already-constricted rights-of-way, and in some cases are dangerously close to the traffic lanes.

The City will consider paying to relocate utility lines underground or to less visible corridors in special instances such as when engaging in streetscape improvements, road widening and/or area revitalization projects.

Ideally, all overhead utility lines should be relocated underground, or, if that is not feasible, relocated to a less visible corridor. However, some overhead utilities, such as high-voltage lines, may be too expensive or impractical to locate underground. In that case, solutions should be explored to minimize the visual impact of the lines by designing special, less obtrusive utility poles and by combining as many of the lines in as few locations as possible.

Utility boxes can also be obtrusive, unattractive elements in new neighborhoods. The City will encourage their location in less visible locations.

- 8. Architectural Regulations:** The City will continue to apply the façade requirements described in Section 155.52, Architectural Standards, and Section 155.23B, Original Hastings Design Standards and section 30.10, Heritage Preservation Commission to:

- » Additions to and remodeling of existing commercial, industrial and institutional buildings.
- » Heritage preservation sites and districts.
- » Buildings and properties identified in the Original Hastings Design Guidelines.

- 9. Vermillion Street Corridor:** Vermillion Street Development Plan: The City will follow the principles and guidelines established in the Vermillion Corridor Street Corridor Study.

- 10. Western Highway 55 Corridor:** The current future land use plan proposes a mix of commercial, institutional and residential housing for the Western Highway 55 Corridor.

Shifts from brick and mortar stores to e-commerce in the past decade has led to the potential for a change in plans for future commercial land uses on the periphery of the city. Having too many opportunities for greenfield development of new commercial projects could lead to high vacancy rates and empty existing commercial developments in other areas.

The City of Hastings should consider preparing a more detailed plan for the western Highway 55 corridor to solidify the City's thinking and position on land use and urban design, raise awareness among city officials and staff, build public consensus and guide landowners and developers.

The following general statements and images should guide the district plan:

- » **Dense and Diverse:** The district will be a compact, architecturally diverse, pedestrian-friendly community with a distinct identity. It should include several types of land use such as retail or service business, office, housing, lodging, eating and drinking businesses, and park.

- » More Urban than Suburban: The district should be more urban than suburban in terms of density, building height, parking, and façade treatments. The district should be dedicated to the belief that we desire to integrate nature, home, work and leisure. It should be a place where people can live, work and play.

The southern side of the western Highway 55 corridor, looking east.

- » Design Quality: The City should insist on a high quality of design in buildings and public improvements. Design guidelines should be prepared and followed to promote an attractive environment with lasting value.
- » Honor the Street: Residential, office and retail buildings should face toward the public street to the extent possible. As much of the parking as possible should be located in structures, under buildings or to the rear of buildings.
- » Landscaping: Provide a generous amount of landscaping; pay attention to the details of lighting, signage, materials and fixtures.
- » Walking and Bicycling: Walking and bicycling should be encouraged through physical improvements, streetscape and building placement. Sidewalks and places for people to gather and socialize should be included.
- » Access Points: Community auto access should be provided at General Sieben Drive, Jacob Avenue, 4th Street W., 1st Street W. and South Frontage Road. Right-in, right-out auto movement should be provided at the mid point along Highway 55.
- » Relationship to Downtown: The district should not directly compete with or harm Hastings' historic downtown. The downtown should continue to evolve and grow by following its current plan, which emphasizes leveraging its historic stock of buildings, riverfront and park amenities, established mixed-use density, owner-operated specialty businesses and adjacent urban residential neighborhoods. The Western Highway 55 District should capture forecast growth and include businesses that could not feasibly locate in downtown.
- » District Plan: Because of the importance of this growing corridor to Hastings, a more detailed plan should be created for the Highway 55 corridor to supplement this comprehensive plan.

The boundaries of the study may be defined as Jacob Avenue on the west, General Sieben Drive on the east, South Frontage Road on the south and 4th Street W. on the north, potentially north to 1st Street W. (Featherstone Road) west of the high school. Aesthetic improvements in public right-of-way of Highway 55 itself should be addressed from Jacob Avenue on the west to River Street on the east.

## **Parks: Build parks and interconnected greenways to enhance the quality of residential neighborhoods and commercial districts, reflect Hastings's cultural heritage and honor civic life.**

Parks are an essential element of urban design in Hastings serving as a source of outdoor recreation as well as beauty. They soften the feel of urban development, add greenery to neighborhoods and protect some environmental features.

Properly planned and designed, parks can and should be the visual focus of a neighborhood or commercial district while greenways can connect parts of the city. Like streets and parkways, parks and greenways are major determinants of the appearance of a community and can contribute mightily to

its quality of life, while also enhancing property values. Parks should be viewed as one element of a larger system of civic spaces that are interconnected and complementary.

Additional policies that promote this objective are included in the Parks, Open Space and Trails chapter of this comprehensive plan.

## **Policies:**

- 1. A Network of Green Spaces:** The City will continue to build a system of green open spaces for recreation, urban beauty and natural protection that are linked by linear parks (greenways), off-road paths and on-street bicycle lanes, and generously landscaped roads known as parkways.
- 2. A System of Civic Spaces:** The City will regard the park and greenway system as one element of a larger system of civic spaces. Through a high quality of design and stewardship, these civic features will sustain the quality of life, private investment and economic competitiveness of Hastings. The system elements should be designed to complement one another visually and functionally and should be interconnected for motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians. Other elements of this system include:
  - » Parks of all types
  - » Plazas
  - » Public schools
  - » Civic buildings such as City Hall
  - » Local residential streets, sidewalks and street trees
  - » Minor arterial or collector roads
  - » Bridges
  - » Off-street and on-street bicycle lanes
  - » Wetlands and ponds
  - » Rivers and streams
  - » Wooded areas
- 3. Neighborhood Quality:** In addition to providing amenities for residents, parks, greenway and parkways should be used to improve the level of private investment in nearby housing and create lasting value in neighborhoods. These public spaces should be regarded as visual assets and designed as such. Each future neighborhood park should:
  - » Be open to the neighborhood on at least half of its perimeter
  - » Include generous landscaping to soften and direct views
  - » Have perimeter and internal walkways
  - » Have a defined entry and internal circulation paths
  - » Provide both active spaces and quiet, natural areas
  - » Use civic buildings such as a gazebo or picnic shelter as a focal point
  - » In a school-park situation, be designed in coordination with the facilities provided by the school.
  - » Include off-street parking designed in careful relation to the topography, plantings and views so as to minimize its visual effect; no more off-street parking should be provided than is reasonable in addition to on-street parking.
  - » Preserve historic character and reasons why the park was established.

- 4. Waterfront Public Open Space:** To the extent feasible, the City will acquire stream edges for public open space and parks, provide walkways and bicycling paths within that green space, protect key environmental features such as wetlands or floodplains, use environmentally-sensitive bank stabilization techniques instead of heavily engineered devices, and create visual and functional linkages between the waterfronts and nearby neighborhoods or districts.

In addition, a large portion of the edge of public linear open space should be about local streets rather than private lots in order to extend the benefits of that open space into the larger neighborhood and community.

- 5. Quiet Spaces:** Parks should include quiet spaces for strolling or sitting managed to retain their wooded or otherwise natural characteristics to invite exploration and discovery. Such places offer a small refuge from the bustle of the urban environment and offer opportunities to connect with nature on a daily basis.
- 6. Civic Pride and Local Heritage:** The City will design and maintain parks and other public spaces as the highest expression of civic pride and local heritage. Parks should be beautiful as well as functional so that current generations will enjoy their use and future generations will appreciate what they represent. Parks and greenways should be inspiring and represent the best of Hastings.
- 7. Park Buildings and Furnishings:** The City will adopt an architectural theme for its park buildings and related facilities after reflecting on local materials, building practices, cultural heritage and user needs. Buildings should be classic in proportions and materials, adaptable, and long-lasting. Care should be taken in selecting associated park furnishings such as benches, fences, signs or trash containers. They should complement the design of the major buildings and require relatively low levels of maintenance.
- 8. Public Art:** Public art can be used to beautify the city, express pride and convey local cultural heritage. It can come in many forms including murals (like those in the Downtown), statues and sculptures (“plop art”) and decorative infrastructure, among others. Art may be located in parks, along public streets, on rooftops, walls or bridges, in architectural design or in sounds. Ideally, art should be everywhere and part of every aspect of our daily lives as opposed to only being a special installation set off and labeled as ART. The City will encourage private interests to install public art on their outdoor premises and will seek to build some form of art into its major public infrastructure.



## **Goal 2: Hastings is a friendly and welcoming community that values inclusiveness and celebrates diversity.**

Hastings should be beautiful, efficient and financially strong. This chapter of the Comprehensive Plan describes what the City would like to accomplish and the policies that the City will use to achieve that objective.

### **Objectives**

- » Everyone has the opportunity to thrive economically and has access to the infrastructure to support good quality of life, including adequate housing, public transportation, and parks and recreation centers
- »
- » The City's practices reflect the needs of our diverse community; programs, services and decision-making processes are accessible to and incorporate members of all of Hastings' diverse members.

### **Everyone has the opportunity to thrive economically and has access to the infrastructure to support good quality of life, including adequate housing, public transportation, and parks and recreation centers**

#### **Policies:**

- 1. Infrastructure:** The City will invest in infrastructure projects to maintain high standards of services in all areas of the city.
- 2. Regulations and Ordinances:** The city will ensure their ordinances and regulations support a good quality of life for all residents.

### **The City's practices reflect the needs of our diverse community; programs, services and decision-making processes are accessible to and incorporate members of all of Hastings' diverse members.**

There are certain aspects of and locations in Hastings that make it distinctive, and accentuating those through public or private actions will help build a true "sense of place."

#### **Policies:**

- 1. Procedures:** The City will create procedures to implement when initiating services, creating programs and making decisions to ensure all interested parties are giving meaningful input prior to implementation by the City.
- 2. Notification:** The City will reach out to affected residents when appropriate to ensure an all-inclusive process.

