



Rochester, Minnesota Market-Based Downtown Plan

Part II: Niche and Development Strategies

August, 2004

Contents

I.	Downtown Rochester Niche Strategy	1
II.	Downtown Development Districts	2
a.	Downtown Core District	
b.	Civic/Cultural District	
c.	Urban Village District	

Part II Appendix

A.	Downtown Development Districts Map	
-----------	---	--

I. Downtown Rochester Niche Strategy

Part I of the Rochester Market-Based Downtown Plan included an economic profile, evaluation of comparable business districts, 1,800 responses to a community attitudes survey, perspectives from more than 100 downtown stakeholders and the input from members of the Downtown Planning Task Force. The key conclusions from the Part I Competitive Analysis, which are found on pages 33 and 34 of the Part I report, include:

1. The eyes of Rochester are focused on its Downtown.
2. Rochester understands the importance of a vital downtown.
3. Downtown has access to several existing robust local markets.
4. Overall, Rochester retail is bland and one dimensional.
5. Providing a unique, vibrant “urban experience” is a differential advantage for Downtown.
6. Downtown’s existing infrastructure can accommodate additional night and weekend activities.
7. Downtown must reclaim its street appeal and sense of place.
8. Downtown needs a stronger private/public champion.
9. The timing is right to make downtown attractive, inviting, fun and livable.

Part I concluded that most of the raw materials for revitalization are in place. Downtown is blessed by a strong employment base, attractive natural assets, a core group of successful unique retailers and restaurants, cultural facilities and special events. The resulting recommended niche strategy for downtown Rochester can be summarized as:

Downtown Rochester should position itself as a unique, vibrant urban experience -- a central gathering place for the community that is attractive, inviting, fun and livable.

There are several key phrases within this strategy that differentiate downtown:

- ***Unique:*** Downtown will offer unique one-of-a-kind attractions, ranging from its myriad of arts and cultural venues to shops and restaurants that are primarily locally-owned, independent and distinctive to Rochester.
- ***Vibrant Urban Experience:*** Downtown is a collection of activities that together create a multi-dimensional “vibrant urban experience” – a place to walk, see and participate in a variety of activities. Our research finds that Rochester residents, particularly in the 25 to 49 age demographic, are already predisposed to patronize downtown, particularly if it offers additional dining, entertainment and special events.
- ***Central Gathering Place:*** Downtown lacks a central gathering space or “town square”. Downtown must enhance its public realm and develop a space (or spaces) that is readily identifiable and inviting to the community – the place where the annual Christmas tree is lit or the destination of a summer family bike ride.
- ***Attractive, Inviting, Fun and Livable:*** These words become the guiding principles for improving downtown Rochester over the next five to ten years. In order for downtown to capitalize on its core niche strategy as a unique, vibrant urban experience, new investment should be channeled to help make it more attractive, inviting, fun and livable.

The remaining recommendations within this plan are oriented to building upon this niche strategy.

II. Downtown Development Districts

Downtown includes a large geographic area, broadly defined for the purposes of this plan from Civic Center Drive to the north, the Mayo Clinic campus to the west, Soldier's Field to the south and the Zumbro River to the east. This area encompasses more than 50 square blocks and a variety of uses.

Downtown development districts are recommended to help guide the methodical and sequential clustering of downtown uses. In order to be successful, many complementary uses require a "critical mass" of activity to convey a sense of place and provide a suitable destination to attract patrons.

For downtown Rochester, we are recommending four logical development districts, including: (1) Downtown Core District, (2) Civic/Cultural District, (3) Urban Village District, and (4) Mayo Medical District. Development strategies for each of the first three districts are provided in the following pages and a map illustrating the physical layout of the districts is provided on the final page of this section. Recommendations for the interior of the Mayo Medical District are not provided since this area is governed by its own development and management plan.

Overall Downtown Development Framework: The proposed downtown development districts are intended to contribute to and create an overall physical framework that is founded on the following principles:

- **Build on inherent strengths:** Downtown's history, distinctive scale, river access, hospitality and cultural infrastructure and proximity to the Mayo Clinic enhance its overall ability to deliver a unique urban experience. We aim to build upon existing strengths as opposed to creating a manufactured theme.
- **Capitalize on "anchors" and connect attractions:** Downtown's anchor attractions include Mayo Clinic, Mayo Civic Center and related arts facilities, restaurants, the library and the neighboring government center. The development strategy aims to capitalize on the activity generated by these anchors and to connect them to attractions in between.
- **Make downtown functional and easy to use:** The development strategy recognizes the physical and psychological constraints of downtown development – downtown must be a manageable scale and easy to use. Development districts will aim to take advantage of existing infrastructure -- particularly parking – and suggest additional public improvements that will make downtown more attractive and inviting.
- **Respect the scale and expectations of the marketplace:** Development districts are tailored to meet reasonable expectations of the Rochester marketplace. Downtown can become more vital, but change will occur in an incremental and methodical pattern – not an overnight transformation.

1. DOWNTOWN CORE DISTRICT

Location: The Downtown Core District includes about 15 blocks generally located east of the Mayo Clinic, north of 2nd Street, south and west of Civic Center Drive. The Core includes two sub-areas, including the hotel/office sub area encompassing 10 blocks generally south of 2nd Street North and a mixed-use sub-area in the remaining blocks generally north of 2nd Street North.

Role and Relation to the Niche Strategy: The Downtown Core District is the traditional center of Rochester business and commerce, characterized by high density mid and high-rise buildings. It is the signature “urban” component of downtown. Along with the Mayo Clinic, the core district creates downtown’s distinctive skyline. The district also provides support infrastructure (i.e. hotels, professional services, restaurants) to downtown’s primary economic generators – the Mayo Clinic to the west and the Civic Events Center and government complex to the east.

Sense of Place: Within the Downtown Core, there are two distinct sub-areas generally bisected by 2nd Street North. These sub-areas include:



Hotel/Office Sub-Area: As downtown’s district of highest density development, the hotel/office sub-area of the Downtown Core District will retain a character of larger buildings and parking structures. Given its economic support role to both the Mayo and Civic/Cultural districts, this area should receive priority for the completion of downtown’s extensive skywalk and tunnel system.

To provide a central identity for the district, and solidify its visual connection to Mayo, we propose that one block of 1st Street SW be closed to traffic between 1st and 2nd Avenues and an active civic space be developed. Ideally, connected to and coupled with the existing Peace Plaza, this civic space would activate the street level in all seasons. We also propose that active ground level uses and attractive streetscape be encouraged for key pedestrian connections through this district, notably 2nd Street east to the Civic/Cultural District and the 1st Avenue SW corridor south to the Urban Village District.



Central Park

Mixed-Use Sub-Area: Generally north of 2nd Street North, the Downtown Core is characterized by a concentration of relatively high density housing, mostly consisting of elderly housing and extended stay lodging, and Central Park, a one-block historic park that is several blocks north of today’s center of the Core. There are several historic structures sprinkled in this area. This area also serves as a primary gateway and “first impression” for visitors and other traffic arriving into downtown from the north. Strategies in this area include preserving historically significant buildings, encouraging the development of mixed-use product types that include housing and providing support services for an elderly population cluster.

Suggested Uses and Activities: The uses within the Downtown Core District should embody and strengthen existing use patterns, including:

- Hotels and extended stay lodging
- Office buildings and primary employment
- Mid and high rise residential apartments and condominiums, particularly in the mixed-use sub-area of the district
- Traditional retail, including apparel (a strength of downtown), gifts and home furnishings. The district retail strategy will focus first and foremost on strengthening the Galleria
- Visitor services
- Traditional dining



Views of 1st Street Plaza



Development Challenges and Opportunity Sites: Parking is perhaps the most significant challenge to support continued high density development in this area. Parking issues include providing an adequate supply of employee and visitor parking through well designed structures that minimize adverse visual impacts and the displacement of active street level uses.

With street level sidewalks, pedestrian tunnels and skyway bridges, downtown's pedestrian circulation system can be confusing to navigate, particularly for infrequent visitors. A comprehensive wayfinding system is needed for the entire downtown study area that guides visitors from vehicular gateways to desired destinations on foot.

The other major challenge in this district is the Galleria retail mall. While the mall continues to be tangled in litigation, once its ownership status is resolved we suggest that retail and restaurant uses within the Galleria be consolidated within the street and skywalk levels. Less active uses, including offices, professional and personal services, might be suitable for the remaining levels of the property. Given the failure of the previous movie operation, the number of new first run movie screens in the Rochester market and availability of in-room movies in hotels, it is unlikely that a first run movie theater will be attracted back to the Galleria. However, other use options for this space include educational classrooms, community theater, an independent film operation or, perhaps, conversion of the space to offices or another alternative use.

Opportunity sites within the core include 1) the block to the north of the new Broadway Plaza, 2) the Days Inn hotel site (either for renovation or redevelopment) and 3) the surface parking lot located east of Oakwood Broadway Plaza between Center Street and 1st Street SE (this site could be developed in conjunction with additional structured parking). Uses on these sites will build upon the existing strengths of the core, including lodging, office, commercial/restaurant and housing.

Linkages to Other Districts:

- The Downtown Core District provides the primary support infrastructure (i.e. hotels, professional services, traditional retail and dining) for the adjacent Mayo Medical and Civic/Cultural districts.
- Opportunities exist to share parking resources with the Civic/Cultural District, particularly since much of the Civic/Cultural parking demand is during off-peak hours.
- An active civic space along 1st Street SW between 2nd Avenue and the Galleria can provide an identifiable central gathering place for Rochester plus solidify a strong street level linkage between the Mayo Clinic and the core of downtown.
- Primary pedestrian linkages to other districts include 2nd Street eastward to the Civic/Cultural District and 1st Avenue south to the Urban Village District.

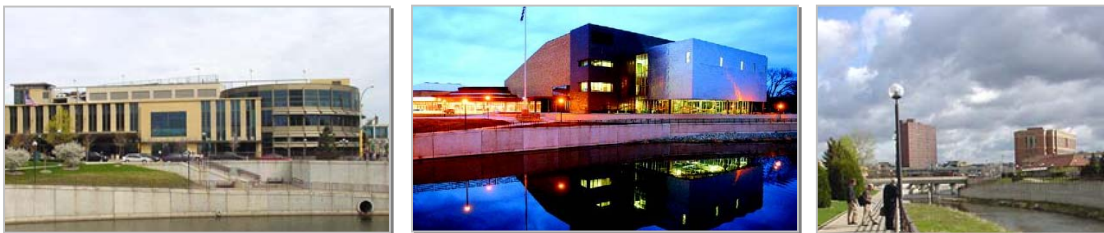
2. CIVIC/CULTURAL DISTRICT

Location: The Civic/Cultural District encompasses the Mayo Civic Center, the Rochester Art Center, Rochester Civic Theater, Rochester Public Library, Mayo Park and the city/county government center. The area is bordered by the Zumbro River to the east, the Hotel/Employment District to the north and west, and 4th Street to the south.

Role and Relation to the Niche Strategy: The Civic/Cultural District provides much of the existing “vibrancy” to Rochester’s urban experience, hosting a variety of concerts, festivals and the farmer’s market. After downtown’s restaurants and the Mayo Clinic, the public library is downtown’s third largest activity generator for locals. The Civic/Cultural District can continue to evolve as a center for arts, culture and mass-market entertainment for Rochester and beyond.

Sense of Place: While the Civic/Cultural District has many inspiring destinations, it is a sprawling campus of large disjointed buildings and open spaces separated by wide and busy streets. We suggest several visual improvements to give the area a stronger visual identity and calm traffic, including:

- Transform 3rd Avenue and Civic Center Drive into an “Avenue of the Arts” with distinctive streetscape, banners and public art.
- Create a defining sculpture, monument or other visual focal point in front of the Civic Center at the convergence of 2nd Street SE, 3rd Avenue SE and Civic Center Drive. This feature should be visible from the Mayo Medical District looking eastward along 2nd Street.
- Explore ways to enhance the street level relevancy of the library, including the introduction of a coffee shop or other complementary retail venture.
- Create an “arts walk” between parking structures and various cultural destinations. The “arts walk” could be extended westward along 2nd Street to visually connect the Civic/Cultural Center to all the other downtown districts.
- Create stronger pedestrian crossing zones at key intersections along 3rd Avenue and Civic Center Drive, particularly at 1st and 2nd Streets.



The Civic/Cultural District provides much of the existing “vibrancy” to Rochester’s urban experience.

Suggested Uses and Activities: The uses within the Civic/Cultural District should embody and strengthen existing use patterns, including:

- Civic and government uses
- Community cultural and entertainment facilities
- Outdoor concerts, large community festivals and art fairs in the park
- Trail connections with the river



Civic/Cultural District

Development Challenges and Opportunity Sites: Any future expansion of civic and cultural facilities should be encouraged northward across Center Street. Green spaces within the district, notably Mayo Park, should be preserved and utilized for community events.

Conveniently located parking is a challenge to support enhanced use of cultural facilities in this area. Many cultural activities require parking during off-peak hours which creates opportunities to share parking resources with the Downtown Core District. However, there are supply constraints during peak business hours. Additional structured parking should be considered, particularly as part of any civic facility expansion plan.

While the Civic/Cultural District contains Rochester’s most significant arts and cultural institutions, there is a lack of coordination and joint marketing among the various venues, organizations and events. To become a stronger regional destination for arts and culture, we suggest the creation of a “Downtown Arts Council” to improve communication, coordination, education, marketing and elevate the overall image of arts and culture.

Broadway Avenue, a state highway, is a significant barrier separating the Civic/Cultural District from the rest of downtown. Additional pedestrian crossing opportunities should be explored via street level and skywalk with the Downtown Core District and via street level enhancements with the Urban Village District. Connections should also be enhanced through a downtown-wide wayfinding signage system.

Linkages to Other Districts:

- Opportunities to share parking resources with the Downtown Core District.
- Primary pedestrian linkages to other districts include 2nd Street westward to both the Downtown Core and Mayo Medical Districts, and 3rd Street to the Urban Village District. 3rd Street is also a key linkage to the Zumbro River trail system.
- A potential downtown “arts walk” that includes public art, banners and other treatments, beginning in the Civic/Cultural District along both 3rd Avenue and Civic Center Drive, then connecting to the rest of downtown westward along 2nd Street.

3. URBAN VILLAGE DISTRICT

Location: The Urban Village District is centered along the 1st Avenue SW corridor south of 2nd Street to Soldier’s Field, including the historic buildings along Broadway south of 3rd Street.

Role and Relation to the Niche Strategy: The Urban Village is the one area of downtown Rochester that has the potential to fit the “fun and livable” qualities of the niche strategy. We envision the evolution of a mixed-use neighborhood targeted to young professionals in the 25 to 49 age demographic plus empty nesters looking for a more walkable, urban lifestyle.



The Urban Village District would be centered along the 1st Ave. SW corridor

Sense of Place: The Urban Village District vision is for the feel of an urban neighborhood that would be an extension of current development patterns in the vicinity of 1st Avenue SW and 3rd Street. We envision mixed-use buildings of two to five stories with ground level retail, restaurant and entertainment uses at key locations. Buildings would be constructed at the street with parking below and/or behind. Development along both 1st Avenue and Broadway should be designed to activate the street – encouraging transparent active first floor uses, wide sidewalks and attractive streetscaping. Along 1st Avenue, ground floor retail should be encouraged at the northern end of the district, and then selectively at key cross streets (i.e. 4th and 6th Streets) – retail is unlikely to be sustained along the entire corridor. 1st Avenue will be a pedestrian street while Broadway will continue to be primarily a vehicular thoroughfare; however, Broadway needs to be interesting and inviting as the key entryway into downtown from the south – the “billboard” for the urban village.

Skywalks should be discouraged from this entire district.

To enhance the visual appeal of the 1st Avenue corridor, we recommend the continuation of angle parking south of 4th Street with landscaped “bulbs” at intersections to reduce the width of crosswalks and enhance the pedestrian character. We also recommend the installation of a new entry point to Soldiers Field Memorial Park, highlighted by a visual landmark (i.e. public art) at the terminus of 1st Avenue.

Remaining historic buildings in the area bounded by 2nd and 4th Streets along both 1st Avenue SW and Broadway should be protected. This is the only significant assemblage of historic and pedestrian-scale buildings remaining in downtown.

Suggested Uses and Activities: The uses within the Urban Village District would build upon the evolving active use mix that currently exists in the vicinity of 1st Avenue and 3rd Street, including:

- Housing, including two to five story mixed-use, flats, live/work and loft-style units, with ground floor retail and dining at strategic locations.
- Conversion of existing vacant second floor space to residential uses.
- Contemporary and ethnic restaurants
- Boutiques, specialty retail and neighborhood services
- Bed and breakfast inn(s)
- Entertainment venues, including live music, comedy and independent theater



Urban Village District – 1st Avenue SW looking north

Development Challenges and Opportunity Sites: The Urban Village District creates an exciting opportunity for new investment in downtown. Given the area’s existing attributes, including proximity to downtown employment, adjacent civic center and recreational amenities (including the YMCA), and existing and potential restaurants and entertainment, we suspect that there is market demand for a mixed-use housing product that can be immediately realized.

Challenges include assembling development sites, attracting appropriate and innovative development models and investors, creating design standards for a development type that will be new to Rochester and ensuring that the regulatory system is prepared to encourage new mixed-use development.

Crossing Broadway at 3rd Street is critical to linking the Urban Village District with the strong amenity package of both the Civic/Cultural District and the river trail system. A pedestrian crossing light should be sought for this major connection.

Linkages to Other Districts:

- The Urban Village District has the potential to create the sizzle that supports downtown’s core, including both the Mayo Medical and Hotel and Employment Districts. It is the area that could appeal to Rochester’s 25 to 49 age demographic – a market critical to Rochester’s continued overall economic prosperity.
- 1st Avenue SW is the spine of the Urban Village District. To the north, it connects to the Mayo Medical and Downtown Core Districts, and to the south it leads to recreational assets including the YMCA and Soldier’s Field.
- 3rd Street is a critical linkage to the Civic/Cultural District and the recreational trail system along the Zumbro River. A pedestrian crossing at Broadway needs to be installed.

City of Rochester Market-Based Downtown Plan: Downtown Development Districts

July, 2004

Prepared by Progressive Urban Management Associates, Inc.

