Introduction

Purpose

For centuries, the city center was the heart and defining symbol of a community and region. It was the center of economic, social, civic, and cultural activities, a place where people came together to conduct business, meet, be entertained, share information and ideas, and live. It established a community's overall identity and personality through its physical attributes and social interactions. It was a vibrant and exciting place.

After World War II, many of the economic and social functions of the central city moved to the periphery, which not only impacted economic vitality but also cultural, civic and living conditions. The result has been a decline of the city center, which has adversely affected community identity, as well as social, civic and cultural gatherings and institutions.

This cycle is changing. We are in a new era – an era of grand economic, technological and social change. Competitive communities around the world are embracing these changes and distinguishing themselves in the marketplace for jobs, residents and visitors by refocusing on their city centers. Competitive communities have strong, healthy and vibrant city centers that provide a high quality of life for existing residents and are major attractions for new residents and businesses. Successfully revitalized city centers include strong leaders; active institutions; adaptive reuse of existing buildings and sites; historic preservation; a mix of housing types and prices; a diverse economy; an abundance of parks and recreation facilities; educational opportunities; arts and cultural activities; and safe and efficient transportation choices, systems and networks.

What is a Vision?

The Vision is the big picture concept of where the City Center is going over the next 15 years and beyond. It describes the desired City Center and generally how it might get there. It is, by its nature, very general; it is focused on visioning and doesn't drift toward too much detail or specific solutions. This is somewhat different from conventional planning documents, which identify specific redevelopment sites, improvement projects, and implementation strategies.

This Vision provides a starting point for the update of a more detailed City Center Master Plan, which will provide detailed recommendations necessary to achieve the vision.

Visioning establishes a framework for ideas and information; it makes a connection between the market condition and trends, past and present planning initiatives, goals and guiding principles, and action steps to achieve the vision.

Beloit must become well positioned to prosper in this new era. Our citizens, businesses, institutions, attractions, festivities, natural environment, location and record of success allow us to embrace the future full of optimism and excitement. This Vision provides directions to ensure that we succeed in this new era. To achieve this Vision, we must work together toward a clear and achievable goal. The goal of this Vision is to create a framework for the Beloit City Center and to establish a set of principles that will guide its future to become a great place. The Vision builds on our past, capitalizes on our strengths, and creates opportunities for our continued future success. Our Vision is broad and grand. It focuses on the Rock River that flows through the city, creates an overall strategy for continued economic renewal, inspires animated places and activities, provides connections, and is based on market realities and a positive identity.

Author David Brooks, in his book *On Paradise Drive*, encourages us to be future minded in the following passage: "The capacity to see the present from the vantage point of the future. It starts with imagination, the ability to see a vision with detail and vividness, as if it already existed. Then the future-minded person is able to think backward from that vision; to ask, 'what must I do to take the future that is in my head and make it exist in the world?'"

Our Vision for the City Center will pull us into the future.

City Center Vision

Process

Vision Elements

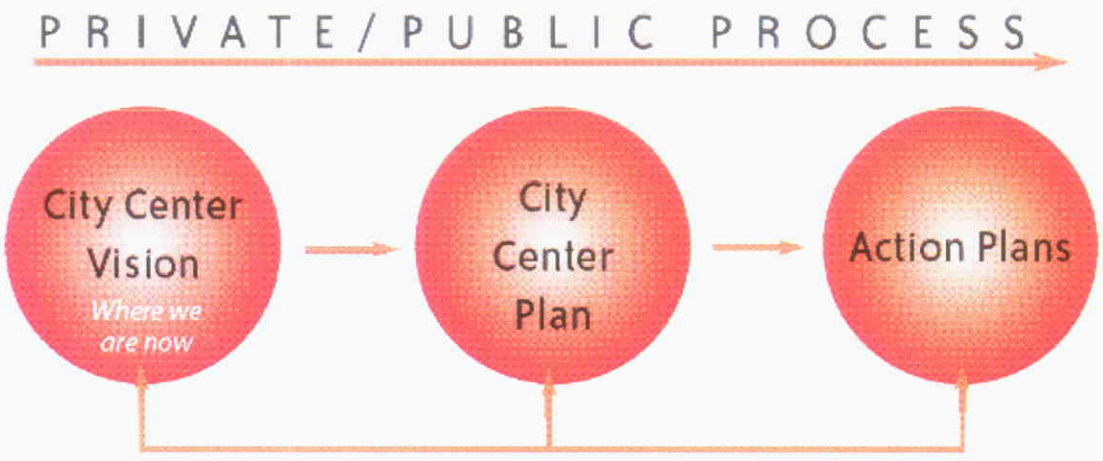
The Vision described in this report includes:

- The City Center in the Region
- The New Economy and the role of the City Center
- An understanding of the planning context (location and previous planning efforts)
- Process
- City Center Vision, Goals
- City Center Principles
- City Center Districts

City Center Plan

The future City Center Plan will set out in detail the path from vision to implementation. It will provide:

- District and site specific recommendations in narrative and graphic forms;
- Land use, zoning and development recommendations;
- Design guidelines and illustrations;
- Implementation and action plan;
- A second phase of the market assessment, including the identification and feasibility of specific project opportunities and a market-based implementation plan.



Steps

- Vision: Big picture concept for the future of the City Center described in this document
- City Center Plan: Detailed path from vision to implementation
- Action Plans: Strategies, steps and projects to implement the Plan

Focus for the Vision

City Center Vision

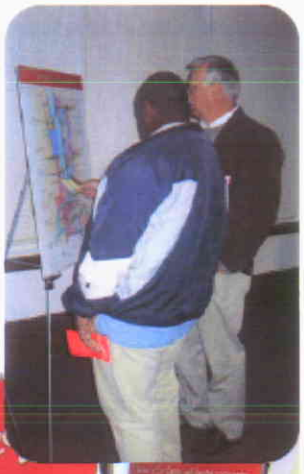
Vision Public Input Sessions

Engaging the public and stakeholder groups in a dialogue about the desired future of the City Center was the most important ingredient in creating this Vision. These focus group input sessions occurred April 27-29, 2005 at the Beloit Rotary River Center.

Focus group participants were asked to imagine what they would like the City Center to be in the year 2020 and then to actively help create and refine this Vision for the City Center.

Focus group participants included:

- Beloit 2020
- Neighborhood & City Residents
- Downtown Beloit
- Visit Beloit
- School District
- Beloit Memorial Hospital
- Cities of Beloit and South Beloit
- Elected & Appointed Officials
- Chamber of Commerce
- Realtors
- Businesses
- Beloit Foundation
- Beloit College
- Youth



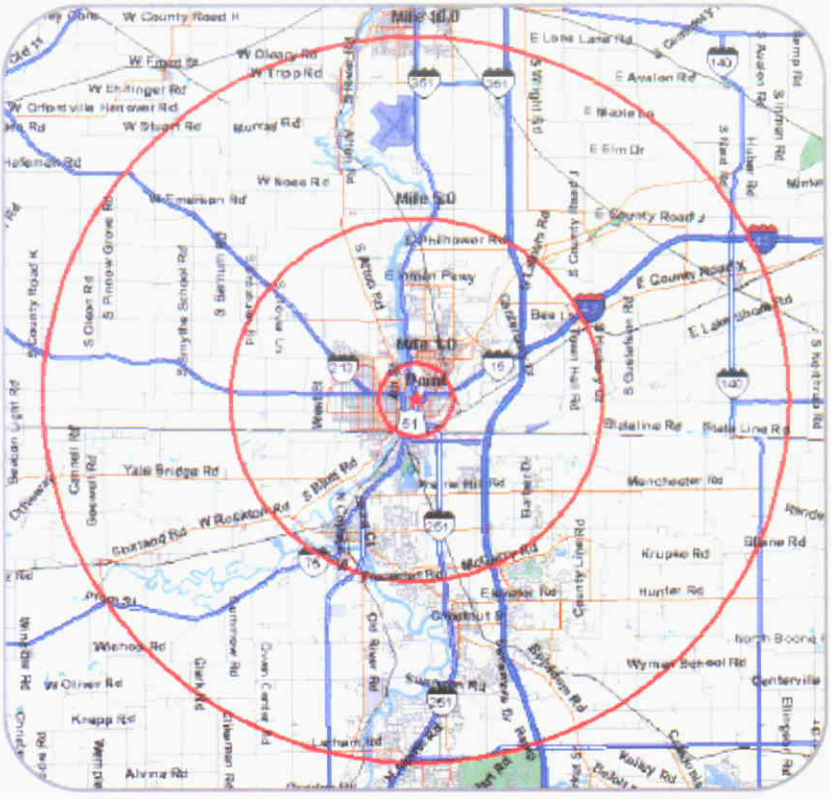
City Center Vision

A Regional Center

Location, Location, Location...

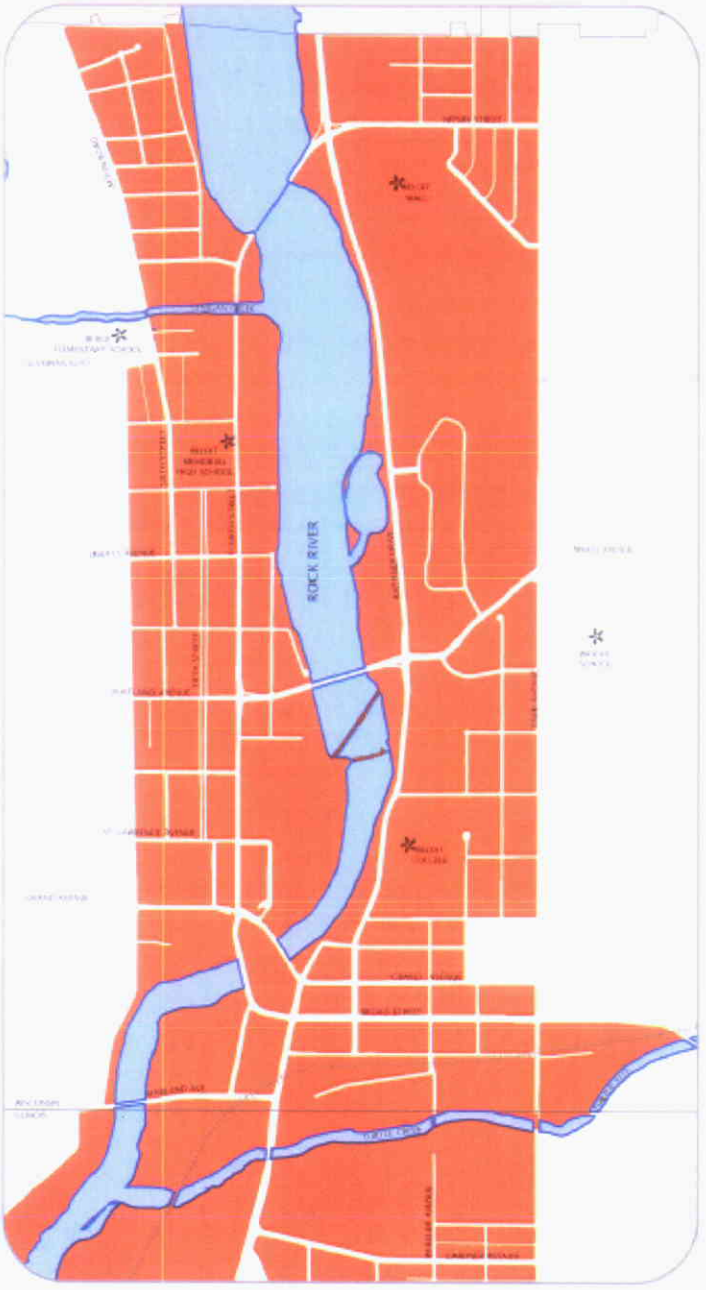
The City of Beloit is *strategically located in the heart of a cluster of communities* from Chicago to Milwaukee, up Wisconsin's Fox River Valley, across to the Twin Cities of Minnesota, down through the Quad Cities and back to Chicago, named *the "Circle City"* by distinguished regional planner Phil Lewis. This regional city contains within its circumference wonderful natural features such as the driftless area, vast agricultural lands, and impressive urban development at the center. Notably, Beloit is 60 miles from Milwaukee, 50 miles from Madison and 90 miles from Chicago.

Beloit City Center is the center of the Rock River Valley, and is a regional economic, cultural, educational, and entertainment hub.



City Center

City Center
Here and Now



Study Area

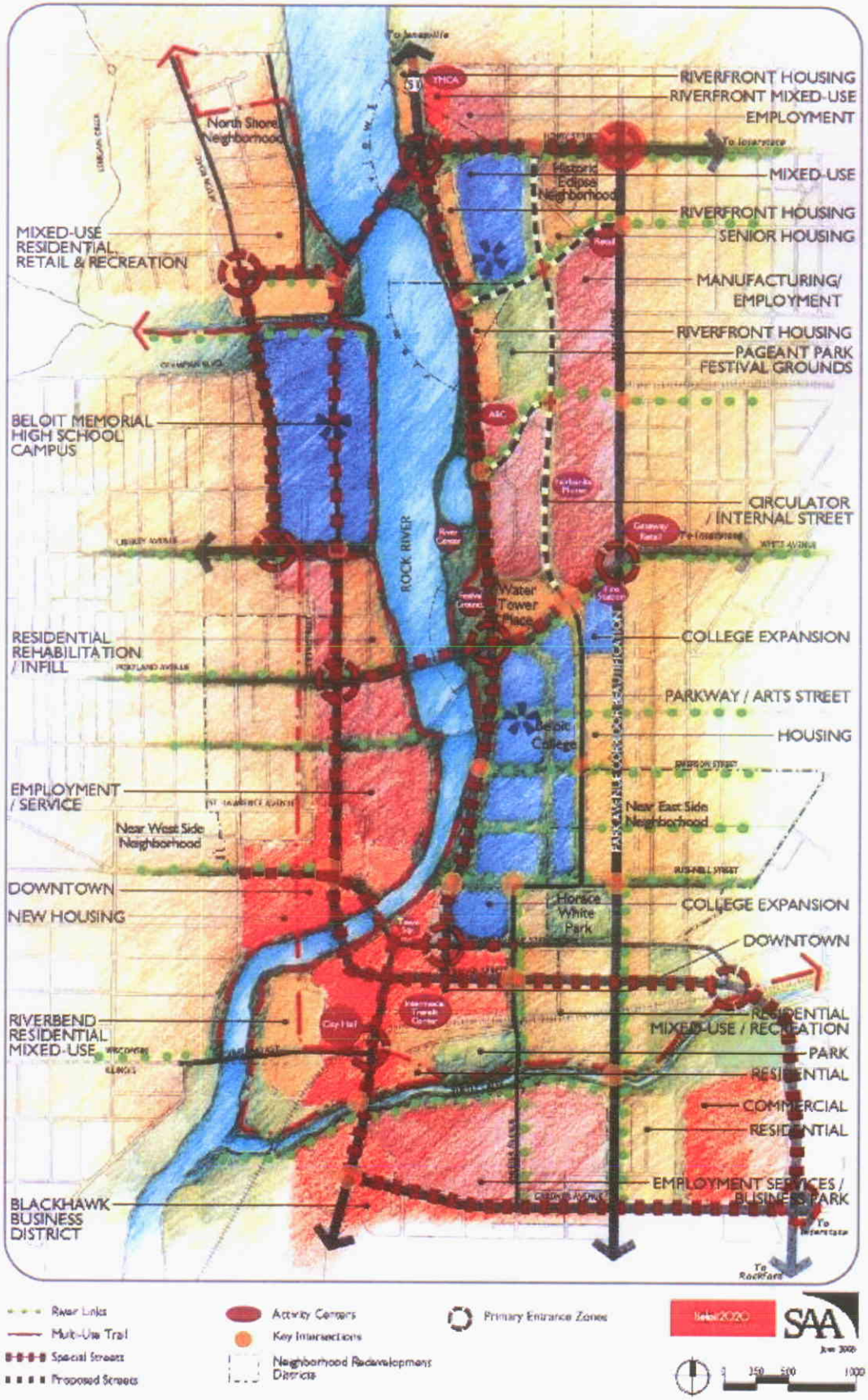
City of Beloit
Municipal Boundary

A Vision for the City Center

Beloit, Wisconsin

City Center will become the heart of the Rock River Valley. It is envisioned to be the cultural, social, educational, economic and civic center for the 100,000 people living within a 10-mile radius of the Beloit Visitor Center. The 700 acre area is the historic core of Beloit and South Beloit containing most of these cities' vital institutions.

In 2004, Beloit 2020 initiated a planning process to develop a vision for what City Center could become in 2020. Public participation has been significant throughout the process. Focus group and community meetings in Spring 2005 were highlights of this informed dialogue about City Center's future, culminating with unanimous votes in support of the 2020 Vision by the City Councils of Beloit and South Beloit.


RIVERFRONT HOUSING
RIVERFRONT MIXED-USE
EMPLOYMENT
MIXED-USE
RIVERFRONT HOUSING
SENIOR HOUSING
MANUFACTURING/ EMPLOYMENT
RIVERFRONT HOUSING
PAGEANT PARK FESTIVAL GROUNDS
CIRCULATOR / INTERNAL STREET
COLLEGE EXPANSION
PARKWAY / ARTS STREET
HOUSING
COLLEGE EXPANSION
DOWNTOWN
RESIDENTIAL MIXED-USE / RECREATION
PARK
RESIDENTIAL
COMMERCIAL
RESIDENTIAL
EMPLOYMENT SERVICES / BUSINESS PARK
MIXED-USE RESIDENTIAL RETAIL & RECREATION
BELOIT MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL CAMPUS
RESIDENTIAL REHABILITATION / INFILL
EMPLOYMENT / SERVICE
DOWNTOWN NEW HOUSING
RIVERBEND RESIDENTIAL MIXED-USE
BLACKHAWK BUSINESS DISTRICT
North Shore Neighborhood
Historic Eclipse Neighborhood
Water Tower Place
Beloit College
Near West Side Neighborhood
Near East Side Neighborhood
Horace White Park
ROCK RIVER
YMCA
River Links
Multi-Use Trail
Special Streets
Proposed Streets
Activity Centers
Key Intersections
Neighborhood Redevelopment Districts
Primary Entrance Zones
Beloit2020
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