

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – NORTH DOWNTOWN STUDY OMAHA’S NEW URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD

Over the course of the next several years, North Downtown will evolve into one of Omaha’s most exciting and active neighborhoods. The neighborhood will be characterized by mid-rise buildings and urban character, whereby buildings, and the uses contained within them, address the street and activate the sidewalk. New development will be pedestrian-oriented in order to encourage walking and vibrant street-level activity. A variety of uses will be encouraged, and they will be mixed both horizontally and vertically. Active uses such as restaurants and retail will be located on the first level of buildings, while office and residential uses will be encouraged on upper floors. Residential options will be developed to encourage a variety of income levels within the area, from students and young professionals to corporate executives and empty nesters. Residential options will range from affordable units and apartments to lofts, condos, and live-work units.

Omaha’s newest urban neighborhood is the result of a year and a half study commissioned by the City of Omaha and the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce. The North Downtown Conceptual Redevelopment Study, as it was originally called, was undertaken in order to establish a redevelopment plan for Omaha’s “front door.” The 80-block Study Area is located astride the Cuming Street/Abbott Drive corridor, between Omaha’s new Riverfront and Creighton University’s expanded campus. Presented with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to proactively guide development in this highly visible location, the study process examined a variety of potential build-out scenarios for the area and ultimately created an implementation strategy to move the plan from vision to reality.

The planning process began in November 2003 and concluded in April 2005 with the unveiling of the final plan document. Throughout the process, a number of meetings were held with the clients, steering committee, major stakeholders, and the general public. Initial meetings were very broad in scope, while later meetings were more focused and served to further refine details from previous meetings. The result was a plan that achieved wide-spread consensus and provided a framework for future growth and development within the Study Area.

Based on the results of the meetings, input from the steering committee, and the market assessment done as part of the planning process, it was determined that North Downtown should evolve into Omaha’s newest and most exciting neighborhood. This neighborhood will be unlike any that currently exists within the metropolitan area. Instead of being auto-oriented and dominated by large set-backs, surface parking lots, and one or two uses, this area will transform, over time, into a very lively, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented urban neighborhood. This neighborhood will develop around two main corridors. Sixteenth Street will evolve into a major north-south mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented corridor, while Webster Street, which links Creighton University with the Riverfront, will evolve into the major east-west mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented corridor. The intersection of these two corridors will be North Downtown’s “100% corner,” and is the preferred location for a large pioneering project or land use anchor such as a community ballpark. Other possible uses are a museum district or a multi-block residential project. Significant features identified in the plan include an artist live/work district, an office/light industrial district, and a corporate headquarters/urban office park site.

In order to bring the vision for North Downtown to reality, the planning process established a comprehensive implementation strategy. This strategy examines both public sector and private sector initiatives and actions that are necessary to initiate and propel the desired level of redevelopment activity. Areas of focus include strategic policies, procedural requirements, regulatory initiatives, and infrastructure investments. The ultimate strategy allows for a phased approach to be undertaken by both the City of Omaha and the private sector development community. Ultimate build-out of North Downtown could occur within 10 – 15 years.