

## CHAPTER FIVE



*Illustration of East Main Street from Elm to Walnut Street by Matt Frisbie, Architect.*

# CHARACTER & DEVELOPMENT

The City's character is largely determined by urban design. Policies, urban design guidelines, and design standards seek to create a continuous urban fabric and foster an environment friendly to the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and future transit. Guidelines in this document are advisory and convey how private development can be more responsive to the City's traditional, pedestrian-oriented urban pattern. They will also provide a base for design review. In addition to the standards enumerated here, development should conform to standards stipulated elsewhere in this document. For development in specific areas, the following should also be consulted:

- Downtown Design Plan,
- Historic Preservation Plan Handbook,
- Sewer Service Area Water Quality Management Plan,
- Traditional Neighborhood Development Ordinance Handbook, and
- Large Scale Retail Development Ordinance.

The City Code contains development standards for all districts and may contain additional design standards that are not included here.

### THEMES

- **Character.** Maintain and respect River Falls' unique personality, sense of place, and character.
- **Community-Oriented Development.** Maintain and foster an urban fabric that promotes vehicular/pedestrian circulation, parks, conservation/open space areas and neighborhood services.
- **Sustainable Growth.** Ensure that development is sustainable and that growth, conservation, redevelopment and natural resource protection are balanced.
- **Urban Form.** Promote a compact urban form that encourages sensitive/ compatible infill development.
- **Mixed Use.** Provide a mix of land uses and housing densities and types in all areas of the City.
- **Community-Oriented Downtown.** Enhance and maintain community activities in the downtown area.
- **Transportation Alternatives.** Maintain and promote alternative modes of transportation.
- **Economic Diversity.** Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to increase job opportunities, maintain a diverse economy, and promote art and small businesses.

- **Housing.** Actively participate in the creation of affordable housing.
- **Quality of Life.** Enhance the quality of life of the community and ensure the availability of community services for residents.

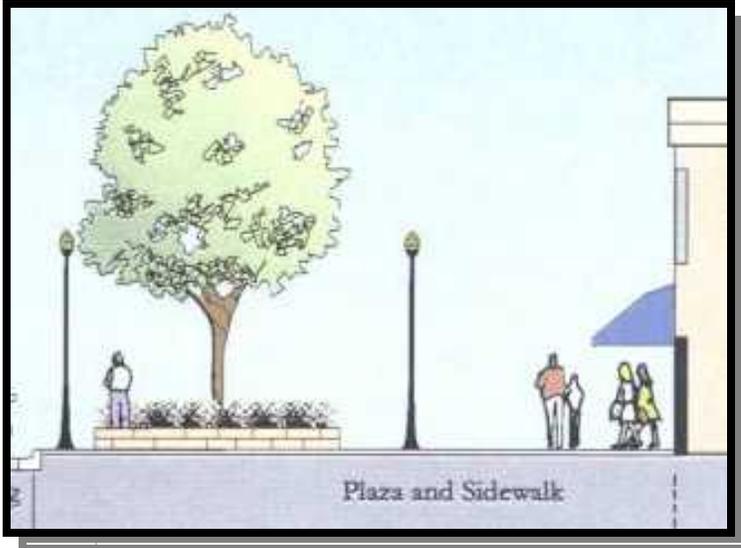


Illustration of Parallel Parking, a Plaza, and Sidewalk to Promote Pedestrian Use.

## 5.1 DOWNTOWN AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The downtown is a unique place valued through the years by the community and those who visit it. The original plat of the City is tilted (19 degrees) so that downtown and other streets are oriented to the scenic Kinnickinnic River. Just south of downtown is UWRF, incorporated in 1874. The central Historic Business District is over 150 years old. It is these visual characteristics and heritage resources that this Plan intends to further by appropriately managing and integrating them into urban design and development strategies.

Since the arrival of Joel Foster in 1848, one of the first people to settle in what would soon be officially known as River Falls, the downtown has been a focal point of the region. The community has acknowledged that downtown is not just a place of commerce and services, but also the “heart” of the community and a symbol of pride.

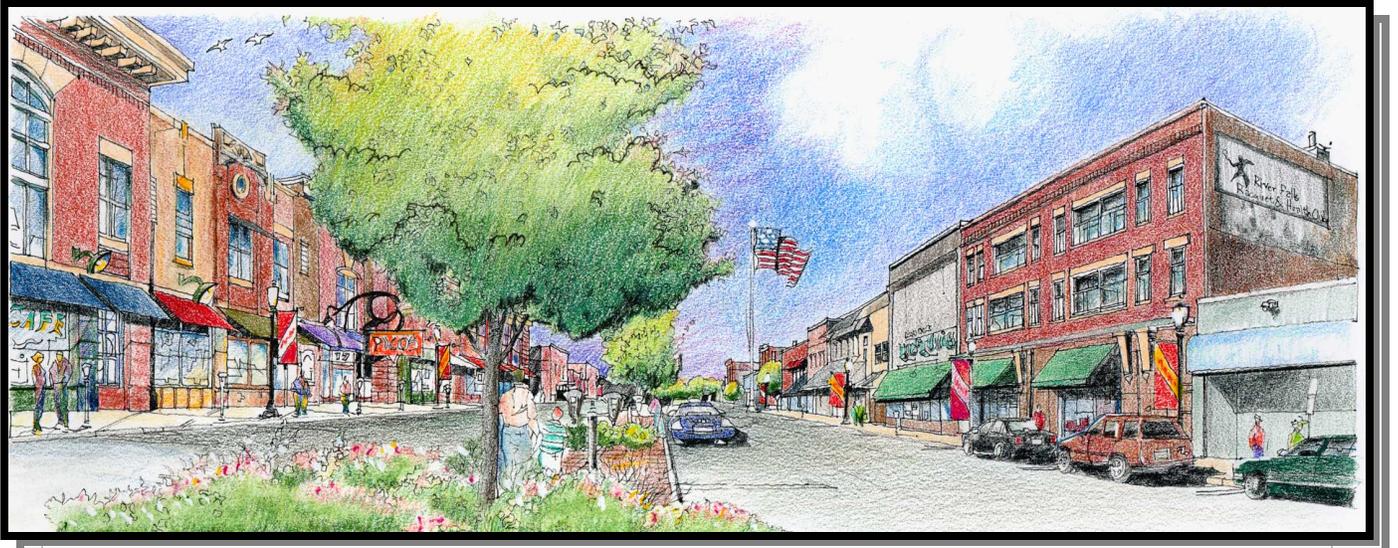
In order that the City’s downtown sense of history and sense of place is cared for, sensitive management of identified resources must take place. These resources include sites—architectural, historic, natural and economic. Cooperative strategies and partnerships between both public and private sectors will be required to effectively manage the downtown. This partnership is needed for investing in infrastructure, development, recreation, and restoration. The partnership will benefit not only the downtown but also the community.

### 5.1.1 Downtown Design and Redevelopment

Through public participation; a visual preference survey and the use of past plans, reports, and studies, community preferences were defined. The results served as a starting point for both public improvements and the design guidelines for private development.

In analyzing conditions in the downtown, the physical conditions and circulation patterns were documented. Second Street and the Kinnickinnic River bound the heart of downtown. The river acts as the spine of a system of parks, paths, and green space that extends into the downtown. Primary gateways into downtown are Division Street to the north and Cascade Avenue to the south.

One of the primary issues noted in the inventory is the need to provide a clear pedestrian circulation pattern between parking lots in block interiors, the alleys serving those blocks, and Main Street itself. Parking and pedestrian circulation from the riverside alley west of Main Street is similarly and the potential attractiveness of the riverbank is lost.



*Illustration from the Downtown Design Plan, Looking South along Main Street.*

### 5.1.2 Downtown Design Framework

In order to distinguish the range of treatments proposed for different streets, the downtown is divided into a series of subdistricts, each with its own array of urban design elements, some of which are shared with other subdistricts (Figure 5-1). The subdistricts are:

- **Main Street District.** At the heart of downtown, this district includes the most comprehensive “palette” of street furnishings and signage.
- **City Center District.** This district is a short east-west pedestrian-oriented open space connection that has the potential to function as a town square.
- **Second Street District.** Is a well-landscaped street with a mix of office, residential, and institutional uses. Improvements to signage, landscaping, alleys, and crosswalks will better define this area in relation to Main Street and the residential district to the east.
- **Main Street/Riverfront Alley District.** This riverfront district west of Main Street is in need of restoration both as a natural resource and a public amenity. Decorative paving, lighting, reconfigured parking, and a better-defined pedestrian walkway will help to accomplish this goal,

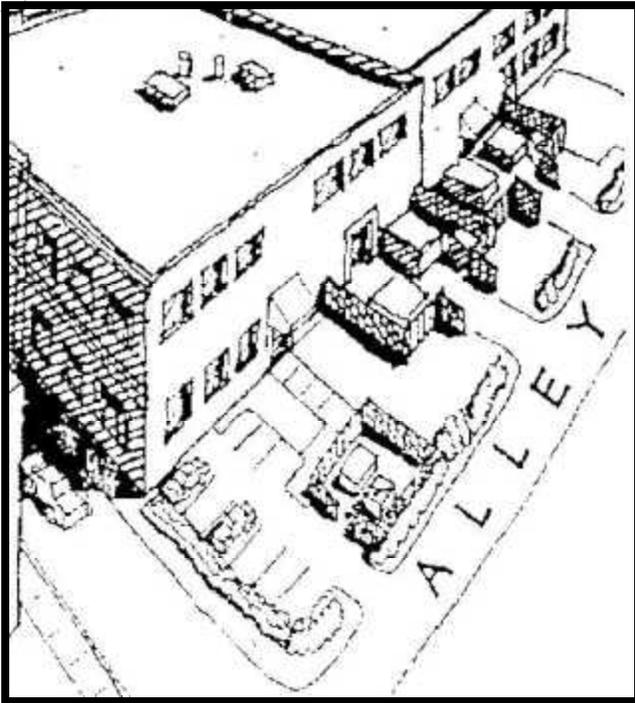
along with improvements to building facades and riverside entries.

- **Waterfront District.** This district encompasses the entire loop trail and green space system on both banks of the Kinnickinnic River.
- **Westside District.** This district is an older, underutilized industrial area with the potential to become a new extension of the downtown, redeveloped for a mix of office and medium to high density residential uses and riverfront open space.

### 5.1.3 Design Districts

Guidelines will apply within two design districts that have been defined based on their differing characteristics (Figure 5-2).

- The **Central Business District.** Located along both sides of Main Street, the Central Business District is a traditional “Main Street” district, dominated by storefront buildings built to the sidewalk, served by alleys on either side, with remote off-site parking. Primary land uses are retail, entertainment, government, and office uses, with some upper-story housing.
- The **Transitional District** marks the transition between the Central Business District and surrounding residential neighborhoods, as typically found along Second Street.



*A rear building entrance with well -defined access and screened refuse and mechanical*

#### 5.1.4 Downtown Design Guidelines

The visual character and historic resources of River Falls' downtown are key characteristics to preserve and enhance. The manner in which private development is carried out can have substantial impact on this visual and historic character. Many of these impacts are related not to the type of use but to design, and the way that design responds to the surrounding context of buildings, streets, and open space. The Design Guidelines focus on private development—how the individual building or building facade, structure, parking lot, rear entrance, or outdoor courtyard is remodeled or otherwise improved. The guidelines have two primary functions:

- To guide developers or business owners wishing to propose expansion, renovation or new construction of buildings or parking within the commercial districts; and
- To assist City officials and the public in reviewing development proposals.

The following outlines the heart of the City building design objectives and illustrates, through photographs and sketches, the design intent of the objective and associated zoning code. Each new building and major exterior renovation proposed in the Central Business District shall be reviewed in terms of details, placement, shape, scale, and materials, as well as its relationship to adjacent buildings and contribution toward a positive image. The following outlines the objectives for the Central Business District and Transitional District. For additional explanatory materials and standards see the Downtown Design Plan.

- **Building Context and Character.** Each new development and major exterior renovation should relate and contribute toward a positive image in terms of details, placement, shape, scale, character, and materials, as well as its relationship to adjacent buildings.
- **Architectural Style.** To ensure general consistency with historic architectural styles found in downtown River Falls.
- **Building Setbacks.** To maintain a consistent street edge, in keeping with traditional downtown character.
- **Corner Buildings.** To emphasize the importance of corner locations for pedestrian circulation and visibility.

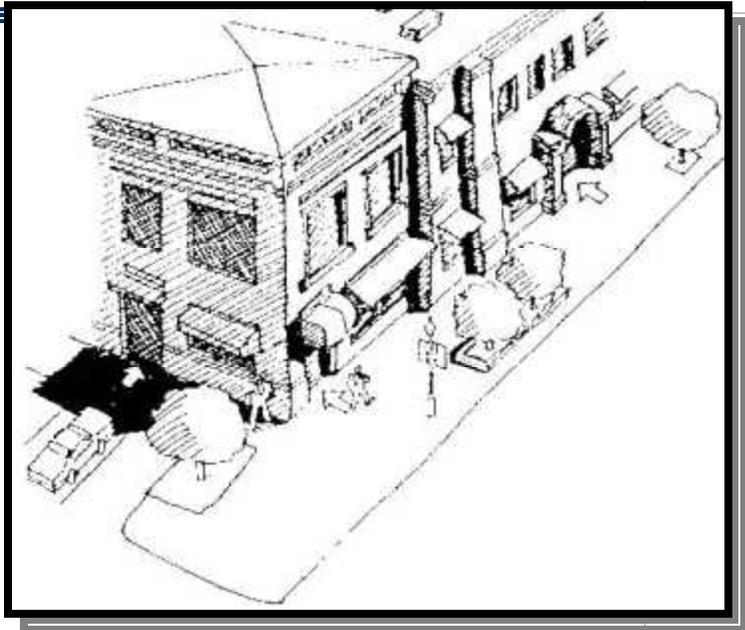


*1948 Vernacular Commercial Architecture on Main Street. The building had been stuccoed over by 1962.*

*Figure 5-1 Design Framework.*

*Figure 5 -2 Design Districts.*

- **Building Width and Facades.** To reflect typical building widths found in downtown River Falls and to avoid long building facades with a monolithic or monotonous appearance.
- **Ground Level Expression.** To maintain consistent building proportions with traditional storefronts and to emphasize the importance of the ground floor as the primary retail or service area.
- **Roof Treatment.** Roof forms should provide visual interest that is consistent with the building and adjacent rooflines and buildings.
- **Building Height.** To encourage taller buildings in order to better define the street edge, provide a sense of enclosure for pedestrians, and provide opportunities for upper-story housing, offices, or studios.
- **Facade Transparency.** To complement existing patterns of openings on traditional commercial buildings and bring in the streetscape and enhance security by providing views into and out of buildings.
- **Front Entries.** To establish the visual importance of the primary street entrance, and to ensure those entries contribute to the visual attractiveness of the building and are readily visible to the customer.
- **Awnings and Canopies.** To encourage the use of awnings as a way to shelter customers, reduce glare, and conserve energy and provide additional accent color to building facades.
- **Rear Facades and Entries.** To improve the appearance of rear facades, to orient customer parking or walking to the rear of buildings, and to provide safe and convenient access to building entrances.
- **Materials – Front Facades.** To ensure that high-quality, durable, and authentic materials typical of River Falls traditional downtown commercial buildings continue to be used within the downtown.



*Well-Defined Primary Entries.*

- **Materials – Side and Rear Facades.** Building materials of similar quality should be used on front, side, and rear facades. However, jumbo brick and exterior insulating finish systems (EIFS) may be used as primary materials on rear facades.
- **Roof Materials.** Generally, flat roofs should be used. Covering with gravel ballast to reduce heat gain and glare. Asphalt shingles are discouraged.
- **Architectural Details.** Incorporate architectural details to serve as identifiable and visually interesting enhancements to building facades and help establish a pedestrian supportive environment.
- **Color.** To ensure that building colors are aesthetically pleasing and compatible with surrounding buildings.
- **Franchise Architecture.** To encourage new building design that is supportive of the historic urban “main street” context being reinforced in downtown River Falls.

- **Mechanical Equipment.** To ensure that views of rooftop equipment and service areas from public streets or pedestrian ways are minimized.
- **Parking Lot Layout.** To ensure that buildings, rather than parking lots, dominate the appearance of the downtown streetscape.
- **Landscaping and Screening of Parking Areas.** Soften and buffer the appearance of parking lots when viewed from abutting streets or sidewalks.
- **Signs.** Complement site and building appearance; enhance the architectural, structural, and landscape features; and supplement the dimensional standards in the Downtown Overlay District regulating signs.
- **Outdoor Space.** Encourage outdoor dining and seating facilities.
- **Gateways.** Enhance and create distinctive gateways to the Central Business and Transitional Districts.

## 5.2 NEIGHBORHOOD AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

### 5.2.1 Residential Areas

A century of City history has resulted in a wide variety of neighborhoods and housing types. The earliest of these neighborhoods, adjacent to the Kinnickinnic River, were the result of traditional, incremental growth of extended family and settlements. Main Street and other streets are oriented to the river and are tilted 19 degrees. The original plat of the City conforms to a common midwestern form consisting of square blocks set on a grid of streets intersecting at right angles. Later plats, such as Powell's Plat, followed survey lines and compass points for creating the familiar rectilinear grid.

The width of Main Street was determined by the ability of a horse and wagon to turn around to deliver goods. Streets are wide, straight, and uniform, providing an apparent system in their direction. The houses are built close to the street with alleyways to the back. There was a degree of density with a variety of architectural styles and sizes of houses. The housing units were well planned and sited, although inconsistent in size and shape, yet they blend with each other in a unique and satisfying way. These are truly traditional River Falls' neighborhoods.

As the City grew, larger developments were laid out, surrounding Main Street and the river. While the typical housing type in many of these neighborhoods was single family, many of the older neighborhoods integrated single family and multifamily units following a traditional grid pattern. Development to the east and west of UWRF developed with scattered single-family housing and higher density multifamily area such as River Meadows (Sawdust Hills). As development occurred to the south and to the east of Main Street, lots and blocks became bigger with more cul-de-sacs and looped roads.

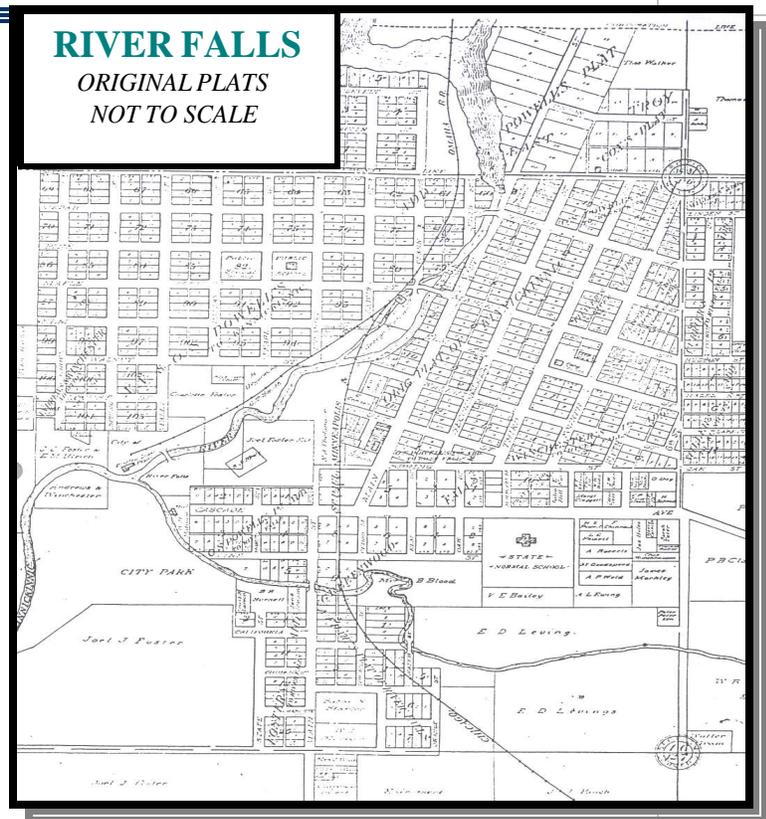


*Rooflines, materials and use of color enhance a residence in the Transitional District.*

Existing mobile homes, which provide affordable housing, are located to the north and south of the City limits. The Foster Trailer park, near Main Street and just south of Lake George, has some of the last remaining mobile homes in the downtown area.

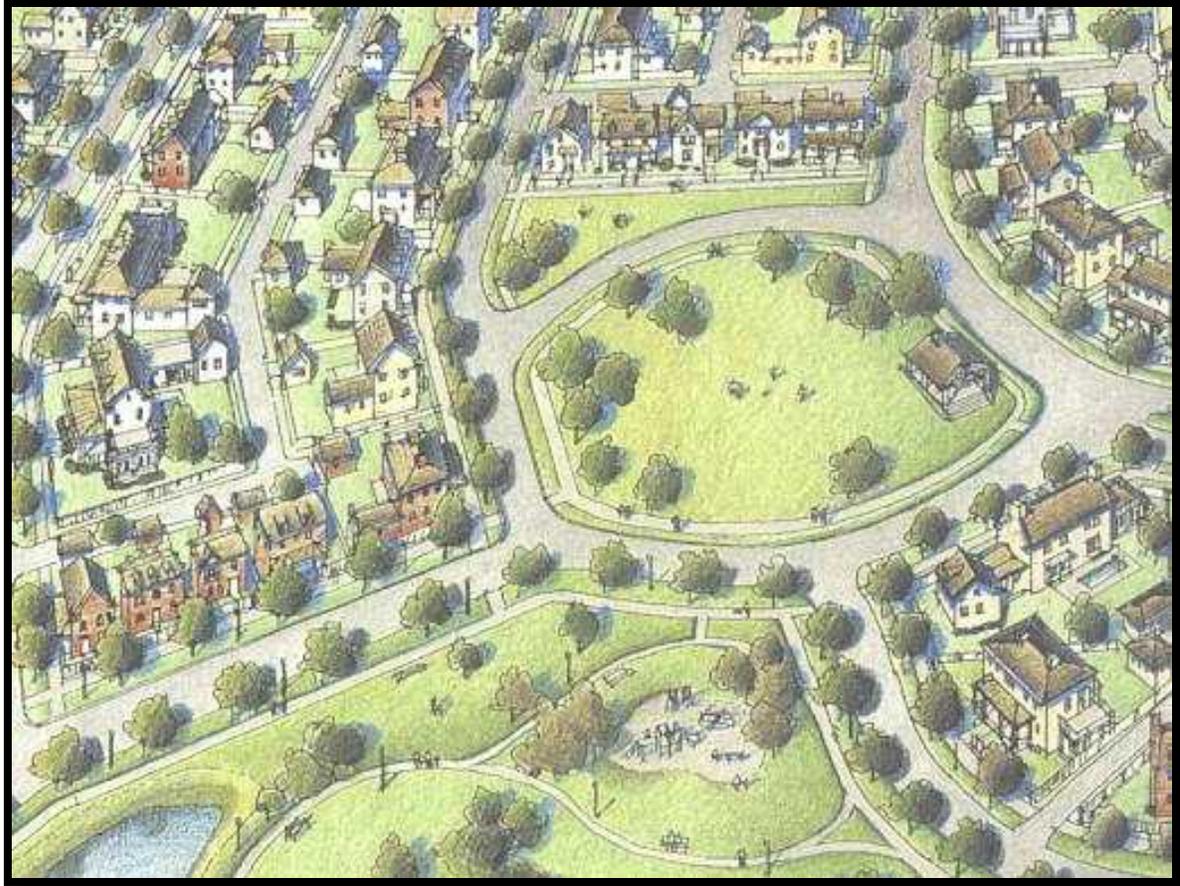
### 5.2.2 Evaluation of Existing Residential Development

- **Street Length.** Some of the original plats (subdivisions) in the City of River Falls consisted of shorter blocks. These blocks also determined the street length that runs through these neighborhoods. Most of these streets consisted of wider streets and shorter street length. *Thus, it is not the total length of the street in neighborhoods that define its urban structure, but the manner in which the streets are laid out.* This traditional mid-western square block with wider streets actually required more space for streets than some of the present-day conventional subdivision street layouts.
- **Density.** Because of the mature vegetation in the neighborhoods, the variety of sizes of homes, lots and width of the streets, most people would perceive the densities as being lower than in many other neighborhoods. Some of the newer developments have larger lots, wide streets, less vegetation and lower densities. With the mapping and approval of the Traditional Neighborhood Developments (TND) Ordinance, the density will increase.
- **Intersections.** The number of street intersections in a neighborhood makes it possible to reach destinations within the neighborhood with short routes. Each intersection is a decision-making spot offering a choice. As noted above, the original plats were set up in a typical grid allowing a variety of options for reaching a designated area. Newer subdivisions, such as River Oaks or Rocky Branch, tend to have longer street lengths. In some cases, this is due to the difficult terrain, which requires the use of the automobile to get to destinations that only a few hundred feet away.



*The City of River Falls Platted in Approximately 1907-1908, Including Original Plats of Kinnickinnic, Greenwood, and Malone Towns.*

- **Through Streets.** Through streets are more prevalent in the older developments. It is possible to get through these neighborhoods on most streets, sometimes with up to three options. There are also fewer loop streets and cul-de-sacs. Some of the newer developments have loop streets and cul-de-sacs, which reduce the number of through streets in the neighborhood.
- **Neighborhood Accessibility.** Neighborhood accessibility is defined as entrance by a street that connects to at least one other street in the neighborhood. Accessibility measures how well the neighborhood is interconnected; the higher the number of connecting points, the less introverted the neighborhood. The concern is to watch for both loop and cul-de-sac designed neighborhoods that purposely reduce accessibility. Some of these may be found in developments prior to the 1950s.



*A Traditional Neighborhood Development.*

- **Garages.** Garages have been common in subdivisions dating back to the original plats. Garages were located off of an alleyway and were attached or within a short walking distance from the home. Garages in newer developments are not just single or double, but three-car garages built on narrow lots. This creates a visual problem when garages and large driveways dominate the front of the house.

### 5.2.3 Building and Preserving Neighborhoods

Preserving and enhancing neighborhoods is a fundamental concern of this document. In several public meetings, residents stated that they would like the City to “approve neighborhoods, not subdivisions,” and to orient development in the community to foster public life.

Some organizing principles for residential development and neighborhoods are depicted on Figure 3-6 and in the following policies:

- City comprised of a cooperative network of neighborhoods related to the human-scale and focused on a core with essential neighborhood services, (Human-scale is defined as “the relationship between the dimensions of a human body and the proportion of the space of which people use.”)
- Mix of housing types in all neighborhoods,
- Neighborhoods and uses located to foster transit-friendly development,
- Promotion of small-lot single-family dwellings,
- Encouragement of shorter blocks, and
- Minimization of noise impacts.



Mixed-use with retail on the bottom and housing on top.

### 5.2.4 Traditional Neighborhood Development

- **Principles and Objectives.** TND means: compact, mixed use neighborhoods where residential, commercial, and civic buildings are within close proximity to each other. It is a planning concept of small towns and city neighborhood development principles. TND is, in part, a reaction to the often inefficient use of land and infrastructure and lack of a sense of community in many of the newer developments that have been occurring in the River Falls area over the recent past and throughout the State of Wisconsin. The TND concept is found in older parts of River Falls as well as in Wisconsin's cities and villages. Most of these neighborhoods were developed prior to World War II.

The concept of TND is the subject of a growing body of literature. While there is no single model for a TND, certain principles define the type of development. Understanding the principles and objectives of TNDs was an important process in developing the City's TND Ordinance. As part of drafting this ordinance the development patterns and designs of River Falls were analyzed to develop the context and specific standards contained in this ordinance. These principles are discussed below and were used to guide the development of this ordinance.

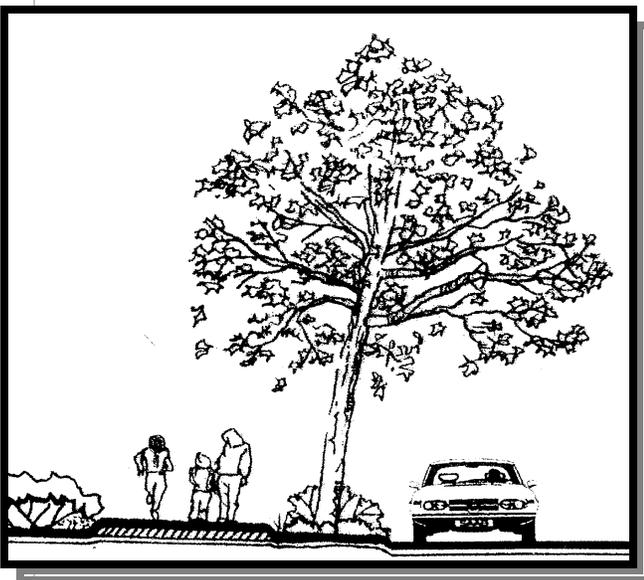
- **Compact Development.** TND utilizes compact development patterns that promote a more efficient use of land and lower the cost of providing public infrastructure and services. Compact development is designed on a human scale. This includes paying attention to walking distances, building heights, design of signs, streets, and streetlights, sidewalks and other features. Compact development can also promote social development by including civic spaces such as parks and public buildings. Also residential, commercial, and civic buildings are within close proximity to each other, which can encourage people to walk between the various uses.
- **Mixed Uses.** TND is designed to include a mixture of uses. This means that nonresidential land uses, such as commercial (limited), civic, and open spaces, are mixed with residential land uses. Mixing land uses can broaden the tax base of a community. Mixing uses also promotes walking between the various uses, and different modes of transportation are promoted in the community, such as bicycling, public transit, and automobiles.

Mixed uses also provide a community center or focus area. A community center may be a public facility such as a park, recreational facility, school, library, or it may be a retail area. Mixed uses also means promoting a mix of public housing types and sizes to accommodate households of all ages, sizes, and incomes. This means allowing a variety of lot sizes, densities, and housing types, such as attached single-family residences, townhouses, duplexes, fourplexes, and specialty houses for seniors. A TND shall have approximately 30% of the residential units designated for attached houses (multifamily) and small lot (fifty feet or less in width) detached houses. Mixed uses may also mean that housing is provided above commercial uses such as shops or offices.

▪ **Multiple Modes of Transportation.**

TNDs generally provide for access by an interconnecting network of circulation systems, which facilitate walking, bicycling, and driving. Streets are designed to provide for the safe and efficient use of different transportation modes. An interconnected street pattern limits the use of isolated cul-de-sacs that force circulation onto a few major roads. The use of cul-de-sacs should be limited within a development. Short blocks and traditional grids create multiple, more direct routes for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists. Independent sidewalk networks for bicycles complement the street network.

TNDs are also meant to be pedestrian friendly. Given the compact design of the neighborhood, streets may be narrower than what is required in conventional subdivision ordinances. Narrow streets and other traffic calming techniques help slow down traffic to promote pedestrian safety. Front porches and other amenities like tree-lined streets can also encourage walking. The mixed uses of TNDs will also be pedestrian friendly if shops, offices, and public services and facilities are within walking distance.



*A boulevard planted with trees and shrubs.*

▪ **Response to Cultural and Environmental Context.**

The significant cultural and environmental features of a site (amenities as well as constraints such as steep slopes, wetlands, critical wildlife areas, and highly erodible soils) influence the way the site is developed. Development with a clear sense of place requires careful design and siting of buildings, streets, and other infrastructure. This includes the provision of adequate open space, neighborhood parks and playgrounds, environmentally responsive storm water management systems, the use of indigenous vegetation, and energy conservation measures in the design and orientation of structures; it also helps create sustainable development. The historic and architectural characters of the community are other important design influences.

### 5.2.5 Future Development

As the City looks to the future, managing growth and development will be of primary concern to both citizens and decision makers. Traffic congestion, parking, wastewater capacity, preservation of open space and the Kinnickinnic River and its tributaries, and affordable housing are among the issues that will affect the future of the community and whether River Falls will continue to be perceived as a good place to live. Managing development will involve balancing growth in residential development and employment opportunities. Growth management decisions should be made to ensure that development is sustainable and that the quality of the environment is protected. Cooperation with the four towns and two counties is essential if River Falls is to achieve a compact urban form and reduce or eliminate future problems associated with suburban sprawl. As the urban area boundary is defined, a staging plan for future development can prioritize the construction of infrastructure, cultural amenities, and other necessary public services.

### 5.3 OFFICE AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

In order to sustain economic development, there will be an increasing need for new office space, both in freestanding office buildings within existing commercial areas and in new business parks. Sites that can accommodate flexible office space and research and development facilities will be needed in order to diversify the local economy.

The Future Land Use Map (Figure 3-6) on page 19 provides approximately 250 acres for freestanding office development. Additional office space is provided downtown, in neighborhood centers, and in business parks. Offices are also permitted in community commercial areas where new office uses may be located above the first floor or as a secondary use in multi-tenant buildings in order to promote retail continuity at the street level.

Because employment intensity (building space per employee), site configuration, access, and other requirements for industrial uses vary dramatically, this document provides about 150 acres of land for new industrial development in a variety of settings and locations. Sites north of the Whitetail Ridge Corporate Park are reserved for business park establishments.

Plan policies also seek to increase the supply of rezoned, ready-to-go industrial land to enhance River Falls' competitiveness and decrease start-up time for new industrial development.

### 5.4 IMPLEMENTING URBAN DESIGN POLICIES, GUIDELINES, AND STANDARDS

The urban design framework outlined in this chapter reflects a desire to achieve a particular goal, and implementation of the policies and guidelines will require sincere commitment, openness, and cooperation between the City, businesses, and residents.

The design guidelines will be implemented incrementally, as centers are developed/redeveloped. While large-scale developments will provide opportunities for a full realization of the guidelines and standards in this chapter and in the City Code, small-scale site-level changes can also make important contributions to the vitality and community-friendliness of the centers. The urban design elements in the policies, guidelines, and standards seek to maintain traditional River Falls neighborhood values and heighten a sense of community. The City Code will ensure that development is in accord with the policies and guidelines and will not only benefit the community at large, but also benefit project proponents economically.

The City Code contains development standards relating to building heights and setbacks and may contain additional design standards. If design guidelines and standards are to be implemented, three additional points should be considered:

- **Participation.** An ongoing program for the participation of affected stakeholders should be established. Neighborhood residents and organizations, businesses and business organizations, institutions, and property owners should be included in the decision-making process. The guidelines and standards should also be integrated into neighborhood and area plans.
- **Partnerships.** The implementation of guidelines and standards will require formal and informal interagency agreements, private-public partnerships, and neighborhood-civic partnerships, a shared vision and a civic spirit.
- **Process.** Develop a process that will allow communities to measure the benefits of implementation of the guidelines and standards. The guidelines and standards should be periodically reviewed, embellished, and amended to respond to changing conditions and community needs and preferences.

**GUIDING AND IMPLEMENTING POLICIES**

**5-1-G-1** Preserve and enhance the downtown (Main Street) and protect neighborhoods from encroachment by non-neighborhood oriented commercial development.

**5-1-I-1** Implement the Downtown Plan, its design guidelines, design standards and design review committee.

**5-1-I-2** Develop a North and South Main Street Corridor Plan that provides guidelines and standards for new and redevelopment areas.

**5-2-G-1** Preserve existing neighborhoods and encourage new neighborhoods to provide a mix of housing types, sizes and services that are linked by streets, parks, trails and open space.

**5-2-I-1** Develop standards and guidelines for compact, mixed-use neighborhoods with a variety of single-family lot sizes and housing styles that may include provisions for live-work sites in appropriate neighborhoods.

**5-2-I-2** Develop standards and guidelines for neighborhood centers so nonresidential uses are compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.

**5-3-G-1** For Office and Industrial Development see Chapter 9 Community Services Guiding and Implementing Policies 9-G-2 and 9-2-I-1-3.