

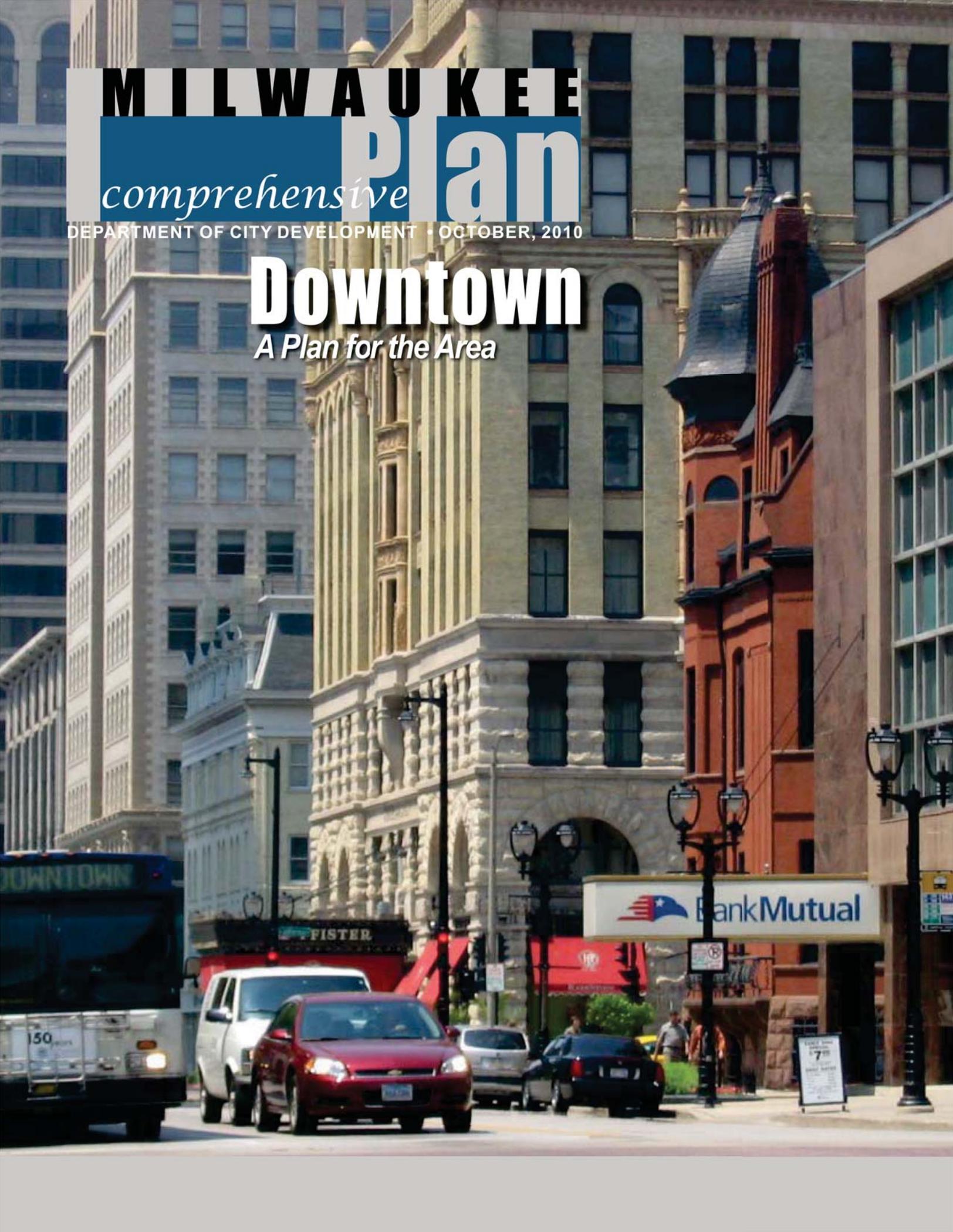
MILWAUKEE

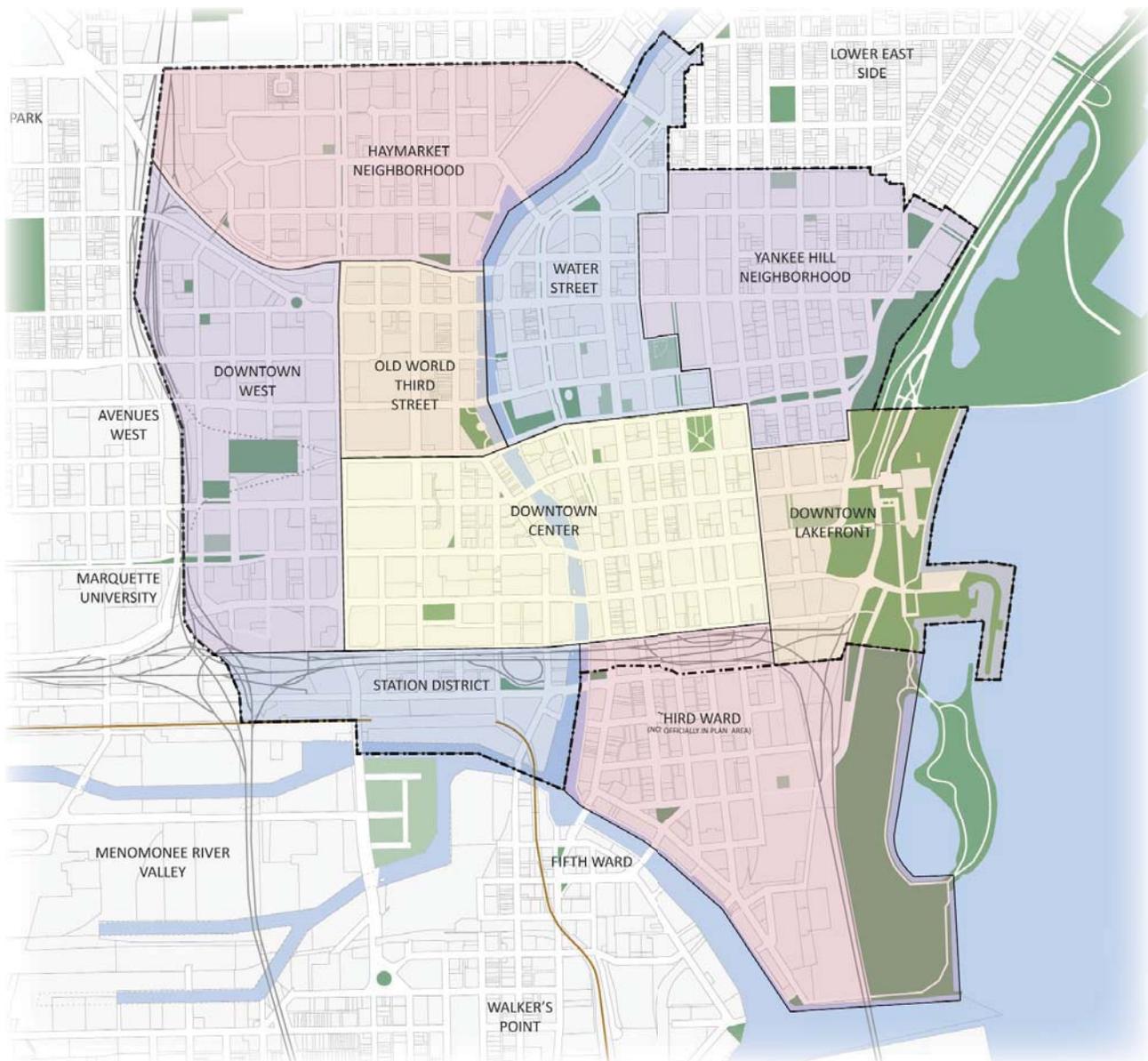
comprehensive **Plan**

DEPARTMENT OF CITY DEVELOPMENT • OCTOBER, 2010

# Downtown

*A Plan for the Area*





## Chapter 4

# Districts

The organization of Chapter 4 into districts enables the Plan to address various areas of Downtown in greater detail. The districts are not hierarchical in importance; rather, an economically and socially vital Downtown depends upon the diversity and variety offered by a number of districts that are distinct and mutually reinforcing. Numerous approaches to identifying districts were considered, and the outline that follows is a result of much analysis and debate.

Many, if not all, of the “districts” that follow merge into adjoining districts and blend into surrounding areas. Districts do not have defined edges, but rather have either geographic focal points, functional or economic synergies, or both.

In the Downtown Center District, for example, there is a strong geographic relationship to the rest of Downtown. The dominant uses are offices and retail within a dense core area of overlapping synergies, reinforced by major investments surrounding the District. In the Old World Third District, the sports arena functions are directly reinforced by synergies with proximate dining and entertainment venues on Old World Third and Water Streets. A good example of a district in functional or economic transition is the Station District. While the Station District is recognized as an area south of Clybourn, the expanding train and bus services at the Intermodal Station can be expected to increasingly influence business location decisions northward to Michigan or even Wisconsin Avenue. As another example of overlapping districts and synergies, the Lakefront District’s office area is oriented eastward while blending into the Central District. It is also part of an extended cultural, recreational and park zone along Lake Michigan.

## Downtown Lakefront District



Lakefront terminus of Wisconsin Avenue



The Downtown Lakefront District consists primarily of a Class A office district located east of Van Buren Street and a large lakefront with surrounding open space and major cultural institutions, such as the War Memorial, the Milwaukee Art Museum; Discovery World Science Museum; and the Betty Brinn Children’s Museum. With Lake Michigan in the foreground and the Santiago Calatrava designed art museum addition along with the vertical residential and commercial buildings in the background, the Lakefront District is essentially the picture post card image for the entire city.

The Lakefront district can be viewed as being comprised of three distinct parts: 1) The Lakefront cultural and recreational amenities; 2) The Milwaukee County O’Donnell park pavilions and parking complex ; and 3) the office district west of the O’Donnell complex comprised primarily of the US Bank and Northwestern Mutual campuses as well as the Ernst & Young building. The main arteries that serve the Lakefront District are Lincoln Memorial Drive and Michigan Street. Both feed traffic onto the adjacent interstate (US 794), the Hoan Bridge, and lakefront cultural destinations such as Henry Maier Festival Park (Summerfest grounds).

The major challenge for the Lakefront District is a grade change that separates the Lakefront from the downtown proper, effectively cutting off the two areas from one another and preventing a smooth interaction between the Lakefront and the built environment of Downtown.

A second challenge are restrictions upon Lakebed Grant Land (most of the Lakefront is regulated by the State Department of Natural Resources), to land uses related to navigation,

fisheries, or public access to the waterfront. The positive result of this is a Lakefront that is predominantly public park, museum or recreational space. The limiting result is that there are almost no private venues that might enhance the public realm, such as restaurants, etc.

A third challenge is that access to the Lakefront is primarily designed for the automobile with pedestrian access more of an after-thought. This car-centric approach originated with a proposed Lakefront freeway in the 1960's when city planners and traffic engineers designed context free roadways for suburban commuters, and high volume thru-traffic; multi-modal design for pedestrians, bicyclists, etc. was secondary or non-existent. Preference was routinely given to vehicular traffic and the resulting by-products can still be seen today in a spaghetti string collection of highways, roads, and associated empty right-of-way remnants. The epitome of this car-centric style of planning is located around a distinctly pedestrian unfriendly intersection at Lincoln Memorial and Michigan that contains multiple dedicated turning lanes and a "frogger" style crossing for pedestrians attempting to access the Lakefront festival grounds and attractions.

O'Donnell Terrace is the major transition point from Downtown to the Lakefront. There is a lack of active uses anywhere near the lower grade level of Lincoln Memorial Drive. This configuration does not help address the design problem of how to resolve the grade differential from Downtown to the Lakefront while creating a dramatic approach and enhanced access. The Calatrava addition and Discovery World (set back from Lincoln Memorial hugging the lakefront) do help compensate by creating a visual and physical destination point. However, the overall composition suffers from the harsh presence of the O'Donnell parking garage which has little more than a grassy mound and a freestanding sign facing pedestrians on Michigan Street. At the same time, the Downtown Transit Center has windowless precast walls with little chance for interaction except at the small, unremarkable entrance. The O'Donnell Park garage could be improved with modifications to the south of the existing structure, whereas the Downtown Transit Center will need significant changes or removal/replacement to improve this negative pedestrian condition at such a premier site.

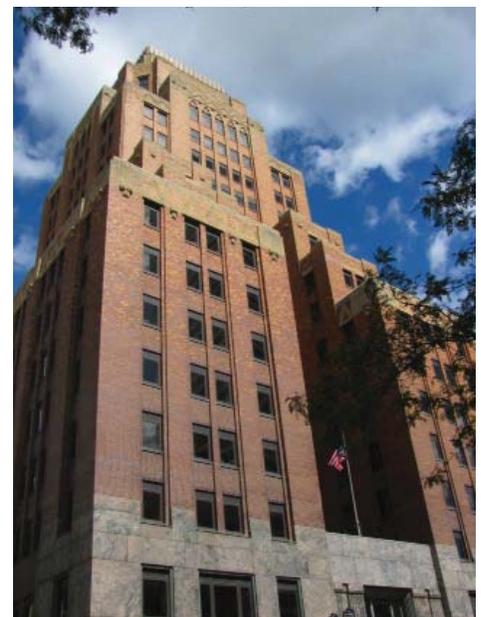
If Milwaukee wishes to elevate itself and its image onto a more favorable and competitive level in terms of place-making and overall urban design, a better connected, pedestrian friendly Lakefront area needs to be realized. Its current design is inconsistently good, somewhat functional, but falls short of its potential. In short, the pieces are in place to make it truly grand.



A redesigned lakefront interchange could create better pedestrian connections to the Lakefront and also create new redevelopment opportunities



Intersection of Michigan Street and Lincoln Memorial Drive



## Downtown Lakefront District Recommendations:

### Michigan and Wisconsin Avenue Corridors

- Make physical infrastructure changes to narrow the gap between the Downtown CBD and the Lakefront, such as creating a more hospitable pedestrian environment.
- Streetscaping, activation of building facades, enlivening uses and interesting places should all be a part of any solution to make E. Michigan Street a more prestigious address for current and future office and residential tenants.
- Eliminate the right-turn by-passes at the Michigan Street and Lincoln Memorial Drive intersection.
- Re-align Michigan Street to accommodate future development on either side at the Lincoln Memorial intersection.
- Extend the two-way traffic pattern of Van Buren and Jackson Streets south to Wisconsin Avenue.
- Treat Wisconsin Avenue as an extension of the art museum and transform it into an “Avenue of the Arts” lined with significant public art and sculptures that will draw visitors to and from the Downtown and Lakefront attractions.

### Lincoln Memorial Drive

- Relocate the Downtown Transit Center to the Station District to complement the Intermodal Station and proposed streetcar line.
- Develop vertically above the transit center site with a single or a mix of uses with a public plaza or public wintergarden occupying the ground floor and terracing down to Lincoln Memorial Drive.
- Consider redevelopment opportunities to the south of the O’Donnell parking garage at the intersection of Lincoln Memorial Drive and Michigan Street.
- The Mason Street bridge overpass on Lincoln Memorial Drive serves as a southbound gateway to the Downtown Lakefront. Use public art, lighting or other visual effects under and around the bridge to signify this transition between the passive open spaces of the Lakefront to the north and the active and engaging uses of the Downtown Lakefront.
- Re-align Lincoln Memorial Drive between Michigan Street and Clybourn to meet the geometry of Municipal Pier.
- Take advantage of the Lincoln Memorial re-alignment and create a new plaza that in effect extends the Municipal Pier from Harbor Drive out to Lincoln Memorial Drive.
- Program the new plaza with fountains, public art, sculptures, benches, water-themed play areas, along with food, beverage, retail kiosks and pavilions.
- Consider a public art piece that serves as a gateway element to the Lakefront at Michigan. If possible, combine this with traffic calming and an intersection redesign to create a more inviting experience for pedestrians coming to the Lakefront from Downtown.



Michigan Street and Lincoln Memorial Drive, with the Milwaukee County Transit Center in the background

### Third Ward Connection

- Strengthen the connection between the Milwaukee Art Museum and the Third Ward, generally considered Milwaukee’s “arts district”. Ideally, a re-design of the I-794 Lakefront Interchange could best mitigate existing disconnects and improve the overall area for redevelopment.
- Consider the descending leg of the Hoan Bridge to meet a descending I-794 expressway at an at-grade point to best achieve this connection and at the same time create a dramatic gateway into the Lakefront, much like the 6th Street viaduct bridge suspensions signal an entrance to the Menomonee Valley and Milwaukee’s Near South Side.
- If an at-grade scenario is not practically or politically feasible, alternative improvements to the interchange with less obtrusive and more artfully designed cross-over ramps could yield some improvements, if tied to ground level improvements such as landscaping, lighting, etc.

