

# 10.0 URBAN DESIGN ELEMENTS

## INTRODUCTION

Great cities happen by choice, not by chance. From the placement of buildings and parking on a site to streetscape design, open space, and architectural detailing, great cities make strategic decisions that guide their appearance. Left to chance, the sum of a city's parts is rarely greater than its individual pieces. The Downtown Plan is not taking this for granted and will instead take a proactive approach to Urban Design. The following are part of a comprehensive package of elements that will help positively shape and define Downtown Omaha well into the future.

## 10.1 AREAS OF CIVIC IMPORTANCE

The Urban Design Element of the Omaha Master Plan has identified Downtown Omaha as an Area of Civic Importance (ACI). Development within ACI districts is required to meet special urban design zoning intended to improve key image forming centers of the City of Omaha. The urban design provisions address site design and architectural design. The goals established by the downtown master plan will be supported by rapid implementation of the ACI overlay zoning for Downtown. This process should include:

- The planning department shall study the downtown and connecting areas to determine the extent of the ACI district.
- An examination of existing conditions shall be performed to best calibrate the ACI zoning.

- Property owners receiving the ACI zoning should be notified and provided with information about the zoning and how they will be affected.
- The planning department should prepare the necessary materials to move the proposed district through the approval process.

### **Area of Civic Importance Implementation:**

- The City should take immediate action to begin implementation of the ACI zoning for the downtown study area and adjacent areas.



Figure 1: Areas of Civic Importance



## 10.2 DESIGN STANDARDS

Design standards are created to help shape and form the built environment. To supplement the ACI and assist Downtown reach its potential, design standards for the entire Downtown Study Area should be adopted. These standards should be graphically-oriented and form-based, and guide new development on redevelopment and infill sites. The design standards should include lot and building standards, frontage type standards, fence standards, architectural standards, and sign standards. As part of the Downtown planning process, a draft set of design standards has been created for three key areas of Downtown:

- Workplace (Leavenworth Corridor) Design Standards
- Downtown Core / Streetcar Corridor Design Standards
- Single-Family Residential Design Standards

The design standards included in Appendix A are intended to serve as a starting point for a full set of form-based standards for Downtown. They should be adjusted and modified as needed.

### **Design Standards Implementation:**

- Develop a complete set of Downtown design standards in concert with the ACI for the remainder of Downtown Omaha.
- Meet with downtown property owners and developers to review and adjust standards if needed.
- Adopt a Neighborhood Conservation and Enhancement (NCE) Overlay District for Downtown that incorporates the design standards or modify the Central Business District (CBD) zoning classification to incorporate the standards.

## 10.3 POTENTIAL NEW OFFICE TOWER LOCATIONS

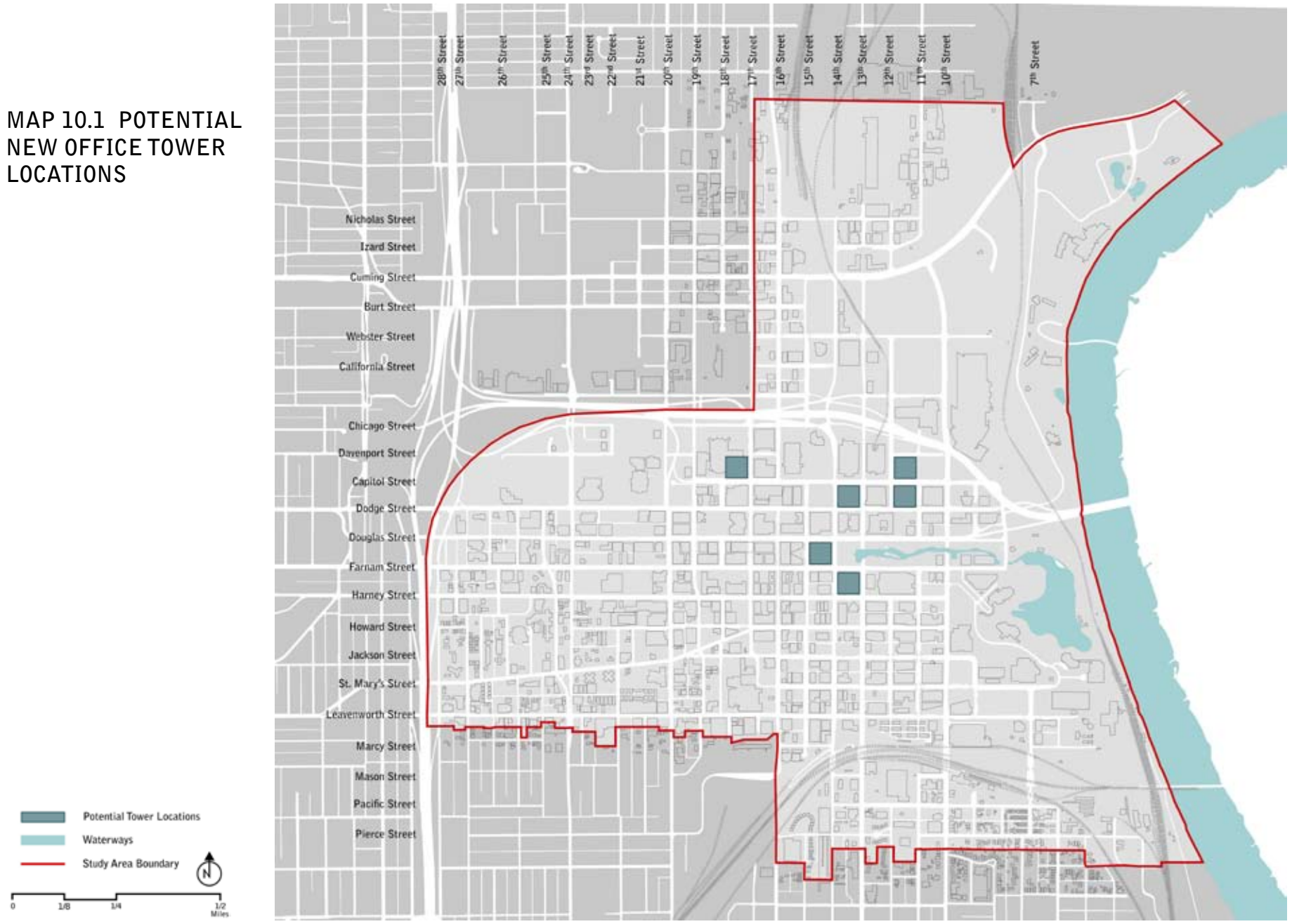
The development opportunities assessment identified the need for up to 8 new office tower sites Downtown within the next 30 years. The typical prototype would be a 20 – 40 story tower (500,000 – 1 million sq. ft. with floor plates between 20,000 and 25,000 sq. ft.). Six preferred sites for these new towers are identified in the plan. These sites are strategic for their redevelopment potential, size, and context (proximity to the Downtown Core). Tower sites are purposely kept out of the Old Market due to its historic context and difference in mass and scale. The six identified sites include the following:

- Pinnacle Site
- Pinnacle South Site
- World Herald Park Site
- W. Dale Clark Library Site
- Kiewit Conference Center/State Office Building Site
- Civic Auditorium Site

### **Office Tower Locations Implementation:**

As opportunities for new office towers arise, entities such as the City and Omaha Chamber should actively market the identified sites.

MAP 10.1 POTENTIAL NEW OFFICE TOWER LOCATIONS





## 10.4 PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Downtown Omaha has a number of existing parks and open spaces. Some are formally designed for use, while others are remnant spaces that function as public space. Key existing facilities include the Gene Leahy Mall, Heartland of America Park, and First National Bank's Spirit of Nebraska Wilderness Park.

An important element of the new plan is the inclusion of additional parks and open spaces within Downtown. The visioning process identified a strong demand for dog parks, skate parks, and community gardens. Locations for these parks have been identified, along with additional active and passive recreation space. These spaces are important not only for their quality of life benefits, but also for their potential to act as a development catalyst. These sites are typically located as focal points for their respective neighborhoods, and are connected to the remainder of the Study Area by priority streetscape corridors, which will be discussed in the following section. Details of individual parks and open spaces will occur in the following chapter.

### **Parks and Open Space Implementation:**

- Identify a priority list for new parks (based on their potential of being a development catalyst)
- Identify funding sources such as public/private partnerships, TIF Districts, etc.
- Examine new opportunities/funding sources for operation and maintenance

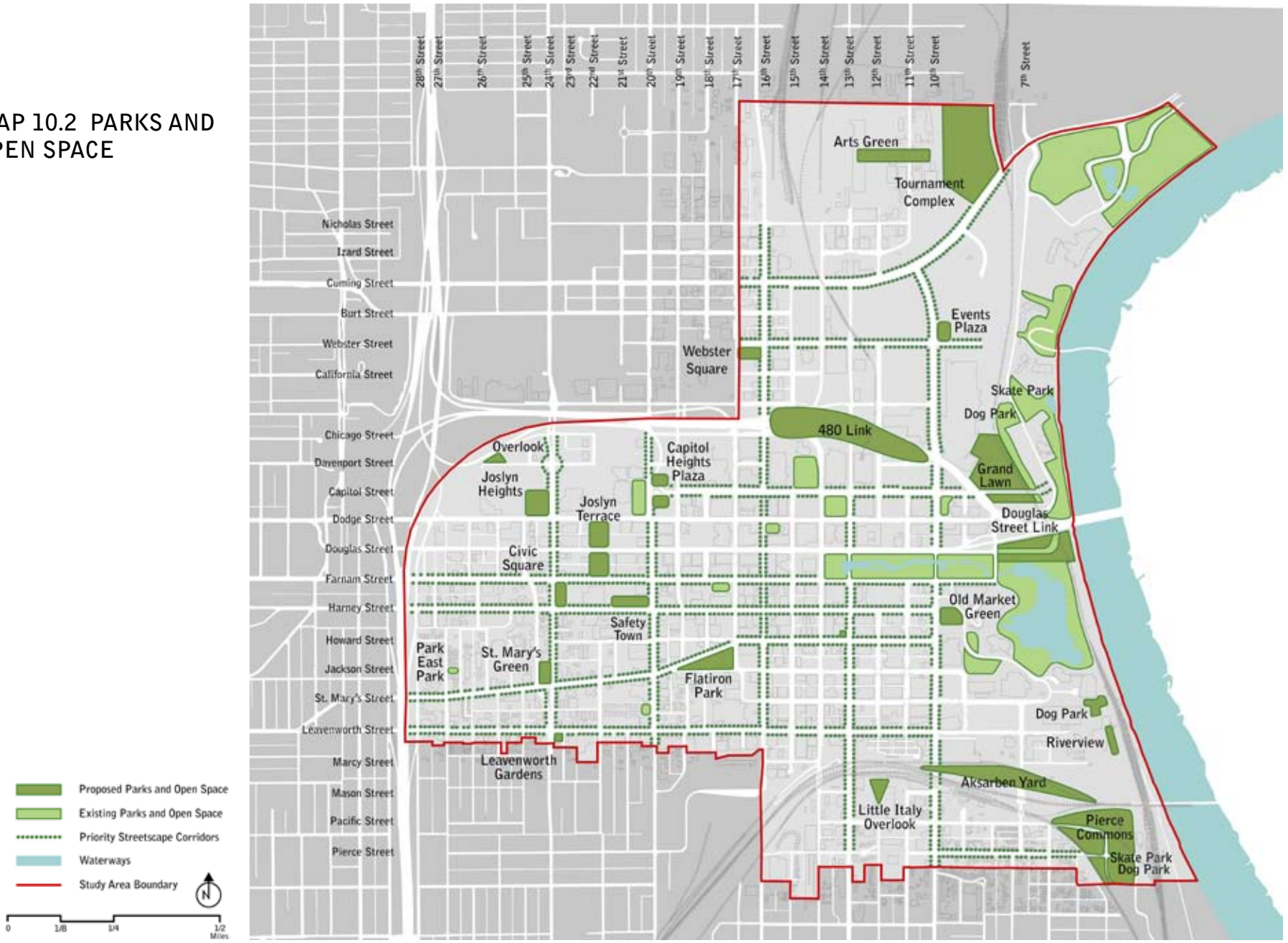


*Gene Leahy Mall*



*Pioneer Courage Park*

MAP 10.2 PARKS AND OPEN SPACE





## 10.5 PRIORITY STREETSCAPE CORRIDORS

Priority Streetscape corridors should be designed as the highest quality examples of urban streetscape environments in Omaha. Special urban design standards shall be developed by the City in order to create a basis of design for subsequent improvement projects. The City shall prioritize the development of streetscape improvement projects and funding along priority streetscape corridors. Because there is little precedent within the City for the implementation of high quality, urban, multi-modal streetscape design projects, an evaluation of means and methods should be performed. This process should include:

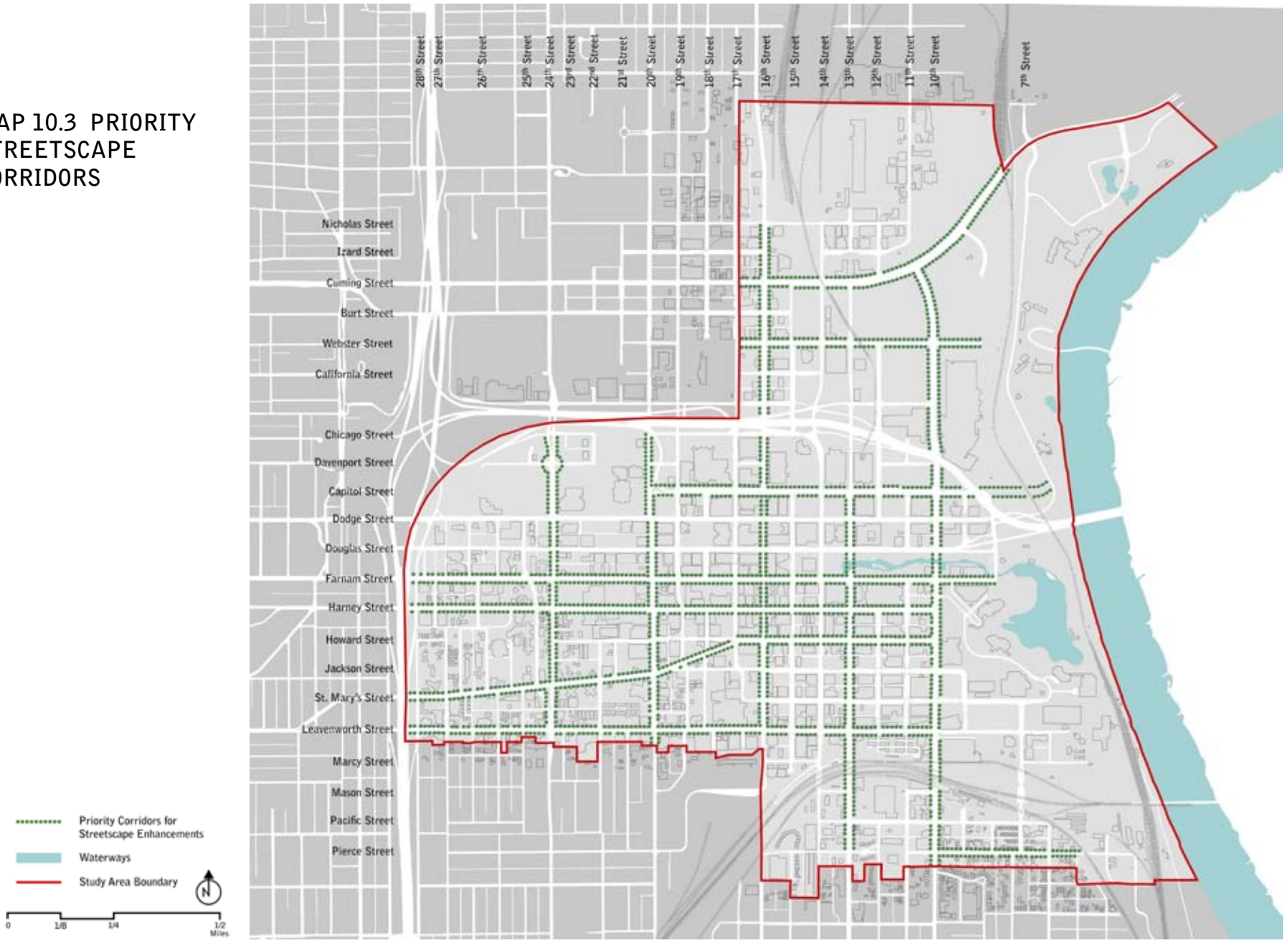
- Individual components identified within the “Omaha Streetscape Handbook” shall be addressed.
- In depth research and evaluation of existing design, specifications, and construction and maintenance practices should be performed to determine the optimal design outcome.
- Priority streetscape improvement projects shall utilize the Context Sensitive Solution (CSS) design methodology published by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE).
- Priority Streetscape Improvement projects shall incorporate a “Complete Street” policy suitable to the context.
- Priority streetscape improvement projects are required to receive approval from the Urban Design Review Board.
- An interdepartmental task force should be established to ensure the efficient implementation of higher design standards, quality of construction and maintenance of streetscape improvements.

Three new prototypes for priority streetscape corridors were developed during the planning process to supplement the standard 50’ residential street ROW. These prototypes are based on 64’ and 100’ right-of-ways, and include an 64’ ROW concept for new residential streets in the Study Area, a 100’ ROW concept for a 2-lane “complete” street, and a 100’ ROW concept for a 4-lane “complete” street. All of the proposed sections accommodate pedestrians, bicycles, vehicles, and transit. The 64’ ROW is intended to be used for higher density residential streets, to easily accommodate two traffic lanes with parking along both sides of the street. The 64’ ROW may also be used to transition from the standard 100’ ROW in Downtown to the standard 50’ residential ROW in adjacent neighborhoods. Typical street sections for these three new prototypes are found in Appendix B.

### **Priority Streetscape Corridors Implementation:**

- Identify a priority list for priority streetscape corridors (based on redevelopment activity or their potential of being a development catalyst)
- Identify appropriate funding source(s)

MAP 10.3 PRIORITY STREETScape CORRIDORS





## 10.6 PARKS AND OPEN SPACE WITHIN DISTRICTS AND CORRIDORS

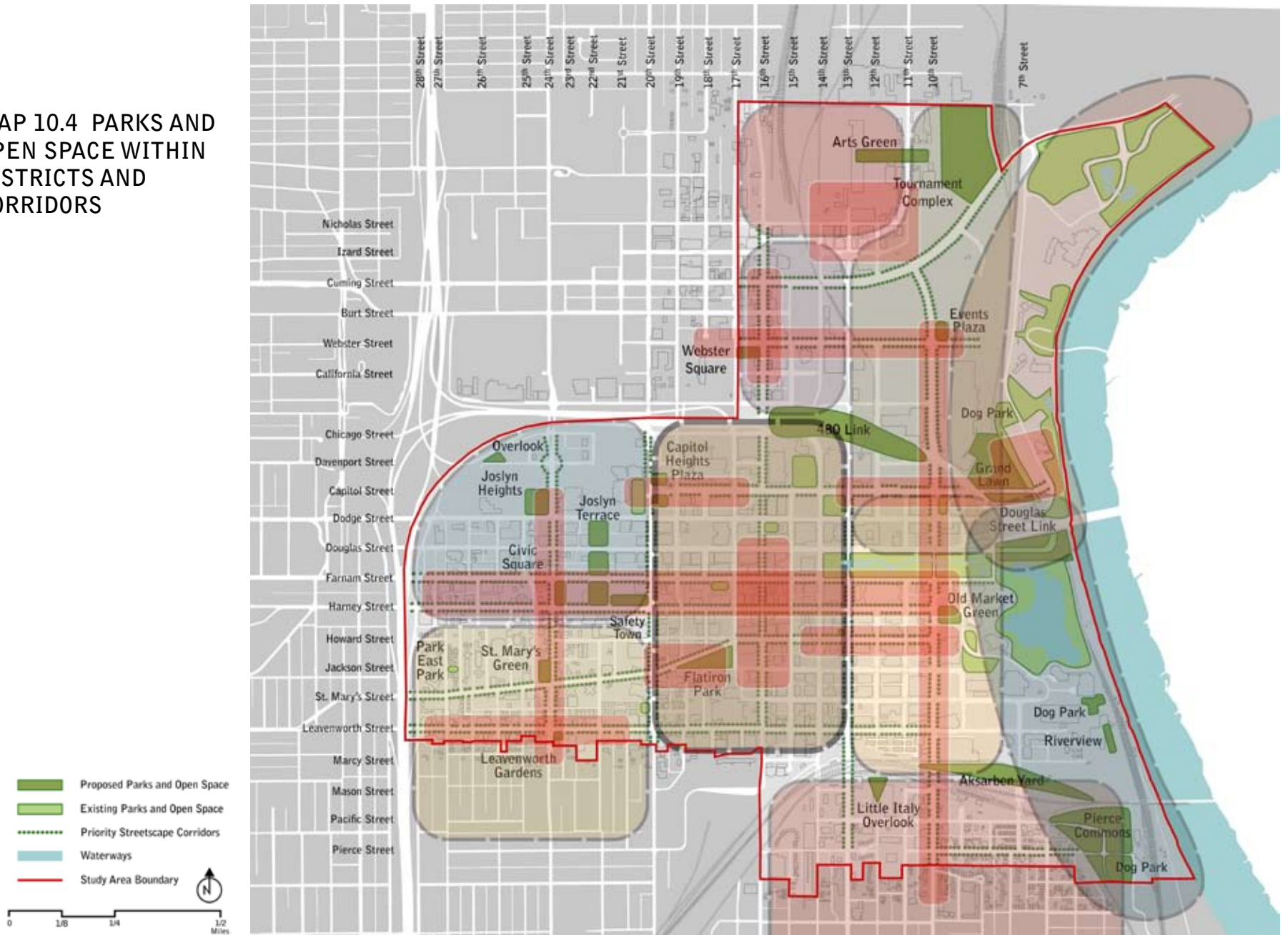
The parks and open spaces identified during the planning process work in concert with the priority streetscape corridors. As mentioned earlier, parks are proposed not only for their quality of life benefits, but also to act as focal points and development catalysts for their respective districts. The parks and districts are then linked together by the priority streetscape corridors, in much the same way as Omaha's turn of the century park system was connected by its boulevard system. This allows for enhanced connectivity between Downtown's various districts via pedestrian and bicycle-friendly green streets.



*Downtown open space*



MAP 10.4 PARKS AND OPEN SPACE WITHIN DISTRICTS AND CORRIDORS





## 10.7 ENTRANCE GATEWAYS

Many cities, Omaha included, often celebrated the entrance into their downtowns with ceremonial archways, signage, and other features. The four decorative towers at the intersection of 10th Street and Cuming Street are a prime example. Many participants of the visioning process identified new opportunities for enhanced entrance gateways. These gateways fall into several categories:

**Six Bridges** – The Public Works Department is currently working on a concept to enhance the six bridges over I-480 (Dodge Street, Douglas Street, Farnam Street, Harney Street, St. Mary’s Avenue, and Leavenworth Street). These bridges will be enhanced with decorative lighting and new structural elements.

**Missouri River Bridges** – The Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge set the standard for bridge enhancements leading into Downtown Omaha. Taking a cue from its design and decorative lighting, many participants identified enhanced lighting as an opportunity for both the I-480 Bridge and the Union Pacific Bridge over the Missouri River.

**Railroad Bridges and Underpasses** – Citing the decorative design of the new 10th Street Bridge over the Union Pacific railroad tracks, many participants identified the need to upgrade the remaining railroad bridge and underpass crossings. This included decorative lighting and railings on the 16th Street Bridge and pedestrian enhancements and decorative lighting at the three underpasses (7th Street, 13th Street, and 14th Street).

**Neighborhood Gateways** – Entrance gateways from adjacent neighborhoods were also identified as opportunities for enhanced

gateway features such as signage and lighting. Possible locations include 20th Street at I-480, 24th Street at I-480, Cuming at 17th Street, 20th Street at Leavenworth, and 24th Street at Leavenworth.

### Entrance Gateways Implementation:

- Establish priorities and budgets for enhancements with respective entities (Public Works, Union Pacific, NDOR, IDOT, etc.)



*7th Street underpass connecting the South Riverfront with the Near South District*

MAP 10.5 ENTRANCE GATEWAYS

