

# 8.0 FRAMEWORK ELEMENTS

## INTRODUCTION

During the course of the planning process, several prominent features were discussed on a recurring basis. Due either to their prominent role in the plan or their relevance and impact on other elements, these features became to be known as Framework Elements. Framework Elements consist of combinations of Districts; Corridors; Streetcar; and Riverfront Connections. These Framework Elements are discussed in further detail on the following pages.



*View of Downtown Omaha from above Council Bluffs*

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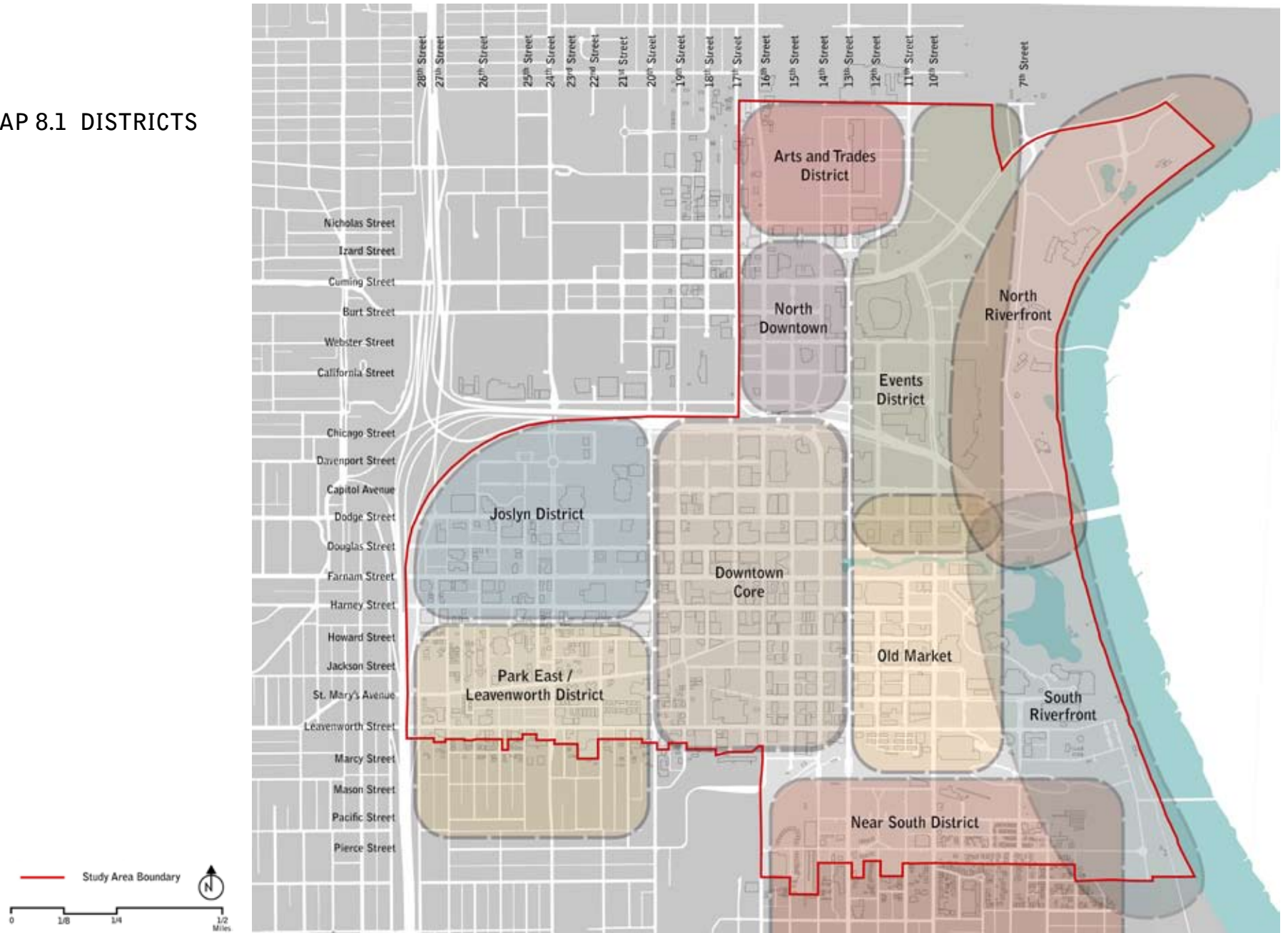
## 8.1 DISTRICTS

The Downtown Omaha Master Plan Study Area is 2.2 square miles in size. This large area contains a variety of neighborhoods and settings, each with its own identity. Instead of combining them into one homogeneous district, it was determined that it would be more useful, and appropriate, to break the Study Area into sub-districts. These sub-districts would be identified based on their location, primary use, scale, and other identifying features. In all, ten districts were identified:

- North Riverfront District
- South Riverfront District
- Events District
- Arts and Trades District
- North Downtown District
- Old Market District
- Downtown Core
- Joslyn District
- Park East / Leavenworth District
- Near South District

Many of these districts existed in a geographic sense, but were un-named and given formal names as part of the planning process. Other times, districts were known by their formal names, but did not have identified geographic boundaries. In the case of North Downtown, the eastern portion of the district was re-named as the Events District in order to more appropriately identify the activities occurring at Qwest Center Omaha and the new TD Ameritrade Park. Each District will be described in more detail in Chapter 11, Development Opportunities.

MAP 8.1 DISTRICTS

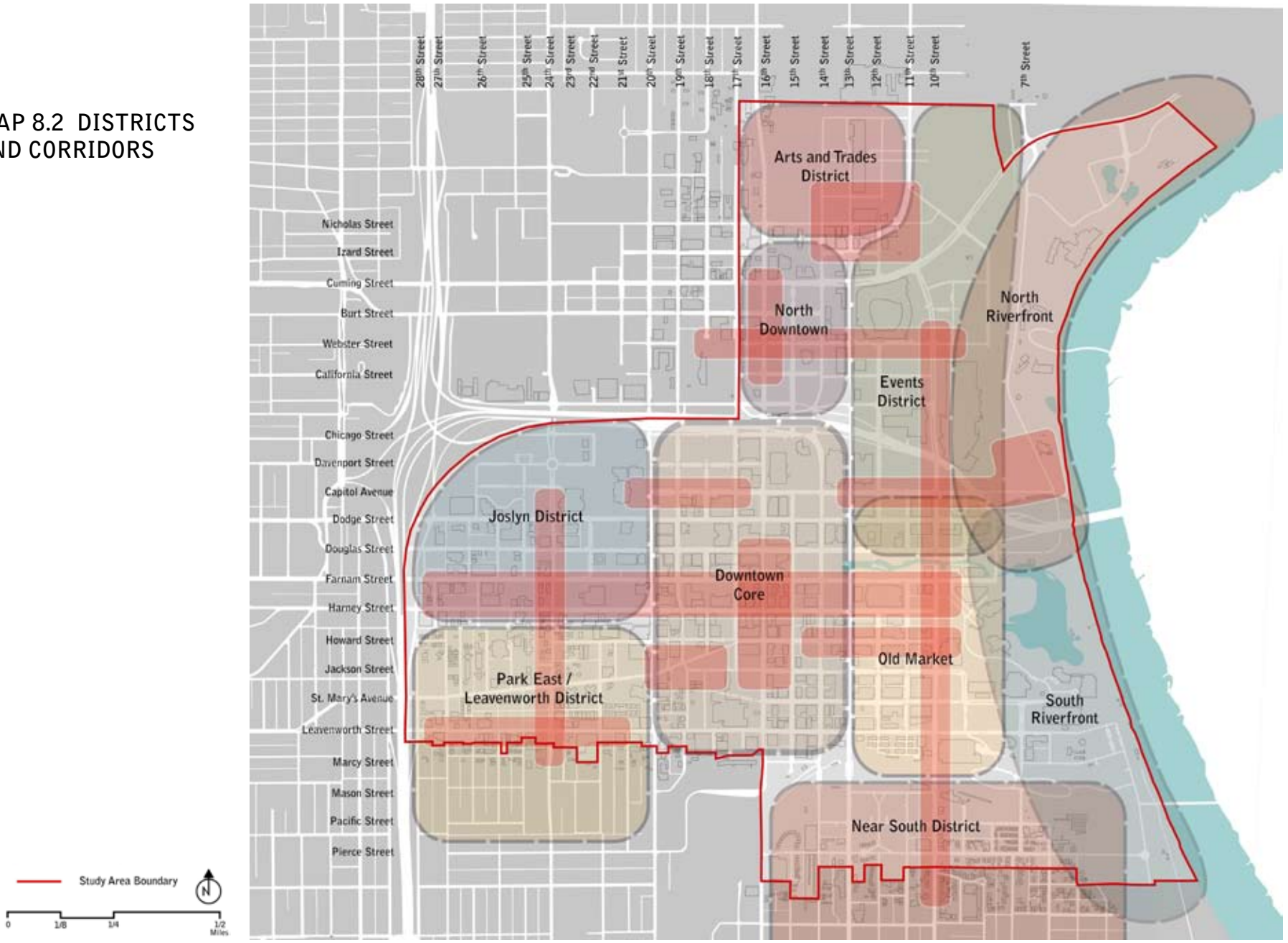




## 8.2 DISTRICTS AND CORRIDORS

Every great city has great streets. Great streets are not streets that just move vehicular traffic. Instead, they are streets that are known for their pedestrian activity, retail vitality, connectivity, and desirability as a sought-after address. Howard Street in the Old Market currently best fits this definition, while 16th Street formerly wore this crown. As the Downtown Plan comes to fruition, additional street corridors will be added to this list. Webster Street linking the Events District with Creighton University holds great potential as a very active and lively street. Portions of Capitol Avenue, St. Mary's, and Leavenworth also hold significant potential. If a system of streetcars is developed, the Farnam and Harney corridors will join together as a central spine lined by higher density development linking Downtown with Midtown. North/South streets that hold significant potential include 10th Street linking the Old Market and the Events District, 16th Street in the Downtown Core, and 24th Street linking Downtown to North and South Omaha.

MAP 8.2 DISTRICTS AND CORRIDORS





## 8.3 STREETCAR

Omaha has discussed the possibility of streetcars on and off for the last decade. Early discussion centered on a tourist-oriented Riverfront/North 24th Street route. In 2005, Heritage Services commissioned a Streetcar Feasibility Study that identified a North Downtown/Downtown loop. This later study differed from the previous study in its focus on the economic development benefits of a streetcar.

As additional modern streetcar systems have come on-line in recent years, the true benefits of a streetcar system have emerged. Streetcars are not only a form of transit or a tourist amenity. Instead, they are, first and foremost, a development catalyst that builds ridership in place. In other words, they provide neighborhood-level mobility and act as “walk extenders.” Instead of placing the streetcar tracks in corridors that are fully developed, successful cities have identified corridors where they desire new growth and redevelopment. Once the system is operational, new development generates a majority of the ridership. This concept is no different than when tracks were originally laid to Dundee and other “edge” locations during the last century. The tracks came first, followed by development and ridership.

The Master Plan process provided a new opportunity to look at the goals for Downtown Omaha, potential streetcar routes, and their redevelopment potential. A variety of routes were examined and three phases were recommended:

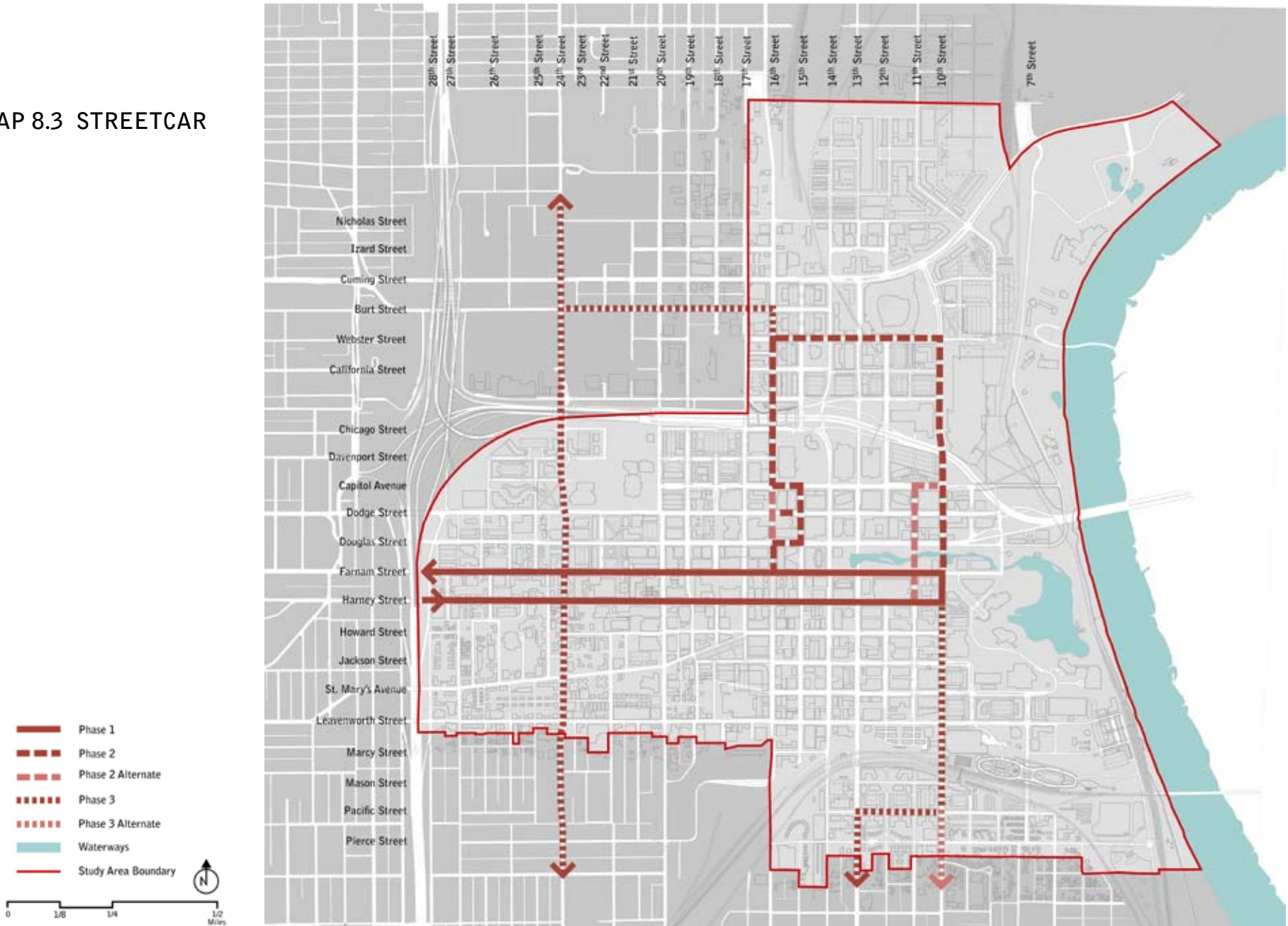
- Phase One - An out and back loop connecting Downtown Omaha with the University of Nebraska Medical Center. This

route would generally go from 10th Street to 42nd Street on Farnam and Harney Streets. It would link major corporate nodes, assist in developing the “long blocks” between 20th and 24th, and be a catalyst for the redevelopment of additional sites along its entire length.

- Phase Two – A bi-directional loop connecting the Downtown Core with the Events District and North Downtown. This loop would follow 10th Street, Webster Street, and 16th Street, and connect with the Farnam/Harney Loop. Eleventh Street could be an alternative if further analysis determined that traffic conflicts at the intersections of Dodge and Douglas negatively impacted headways. Likewise, 15th Street could be utilized depending upon the ultimate timing of the removal of the Doubletree Hotel and the re-opening of 16th Street. This loop would link Downtown/Midtown with Qwest Center Omaha and TD Ameritrade Park.
- Phase Three – Following completion of the first two phases, two additional routes should be considered. One route would connect Downtown Omaha with the Henry Doorly Zoo down either 13th Street or 10th Street. This route would assist in the redevelopment of the Near South District and connect “rooftops” to the Downtown Core. The second route would be along 24th Street, connecting North Omaha and South Omaha to Downtown.

With the identification of a recommended first phase for a streetcar, Heritage Services and the City of Omaha will move forward with a study of the financial feasibility of the recommended Phase One route. This study will determine planning level costs for the first phase and potential financing options (local and federal). Possible options include, among others, creation of a Downtown TIF District and pursuit of Federal funding (stimulus funding, Transportation Reauthorization Bill, earmark, etc.). If

MAP 8.3 STREETCAR





the Financial Feasibility Study leads to positive findings, ensuing steps include the establishment of a TIF District; initiation of the NEPA/Alternatives Analysis process; creation of an operations, maintenance, and financing plan; and preliminary engineering. The ultimate goal is implementation of the initial phases of the streetcar during the early years of the planning horizon.

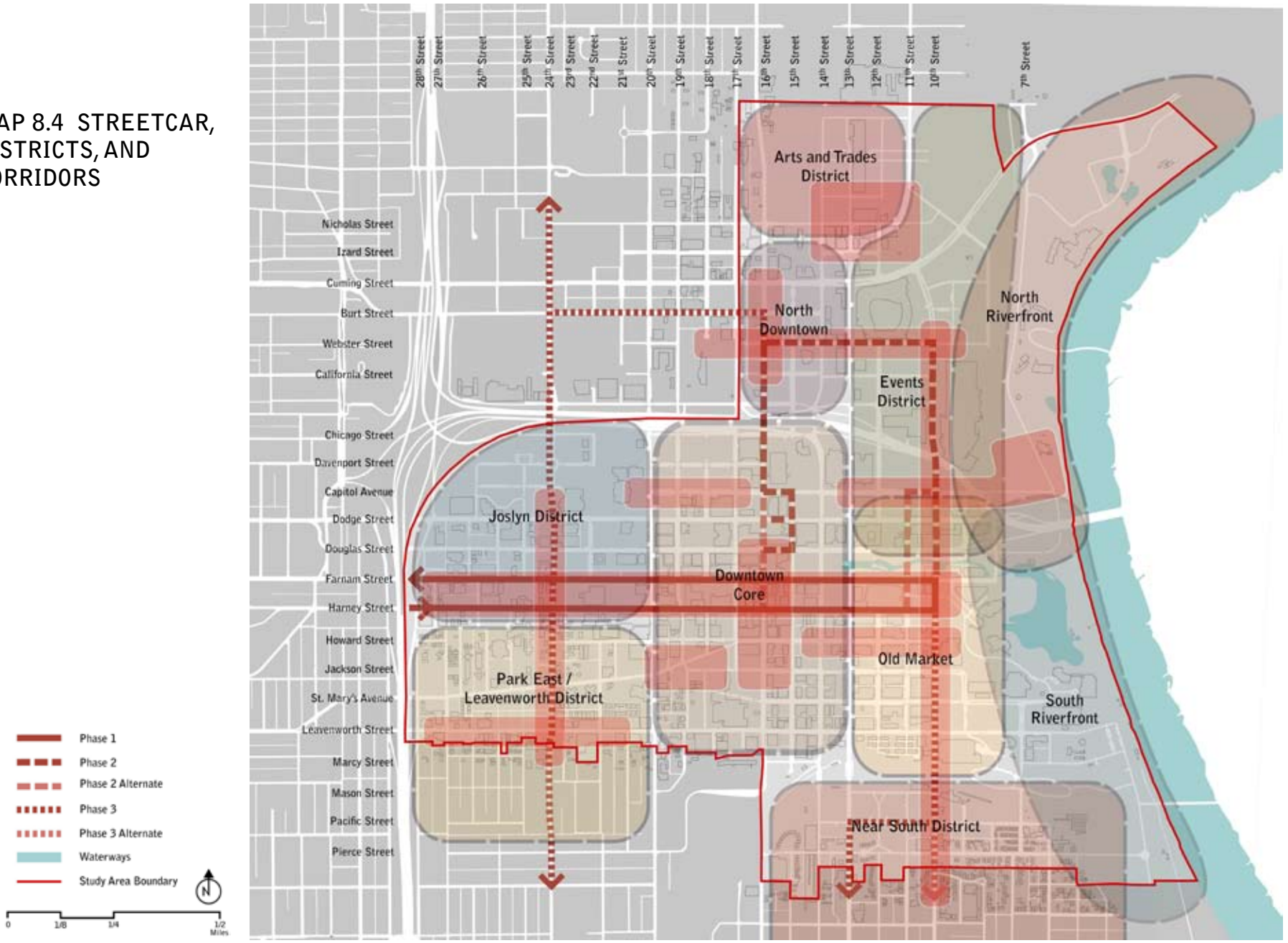
**Streetcar Implementation:**

- Establishment of TIF District
- Initiation of the NEPA/Alternatives Analysis process
- Creation of an operations, maintenance and financing plan
- Completion of preliminary engineering

## 8.4 STREETCAR, DISTRICTS, AND CORRIDORS

When the proposed streetcar routes are overlaid on top of the districts and corridors, the overall redevelopment framework for Downtown Omaha becomes apparent. Key emphasis is placed on the Farnam and Harney corridor, along with Webster Street, 10th Street, 16th Street, and 24th Street. These corridors will be the focal point of development and activity within Downtown, and will also help connect the various districts to one another, as well as adjacent neighborhoods. The value of the streetcar as a redevelopment catalyst for all of Downtown is emphasized.

MAP 8.4 STREETCAR, DISTRICTS, AND CORRIDORS





## 8.5 RIVERFRONT CONNECTIONS

Omaha has always been a “river city.” Its early growth and development was directly tied to the river, and recent development has returned the City “back to the river.” Although great strides have been made in reconnecting Downtown with its most prominent physical feature, the majority of the Study Area is still disconnected from the Riverfront. This notion became very apparent during the visioning process, in which many commented on this fact. As a result, significant emphasis during the design charrette was placed on identifying new opportunities to cross the railroad tracks and reconnect Downtown with the Riverfront.

Utilizing the existing Missouri River overlook in Heartland of America Park as an example, five additional riverfront connections were identified. These include:

- **The Webster Street Pedestrian Bridge** – This second, smaller pedestrian bridge would link Creighton University, North Downtown, and the Events District with the Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge.
- **The Grand Lawn/Capitol Avenue Connection** – This structure would span the “valley” between Qwest Center Omaha and Lewis and Clark Landing, as well as provide a large programmable area for major public events.
- **Douglas Street/Riverfront Drive Connection** – This structure would provide a direct connection between the Downtown Core and the riverfront, as well as create a new site for development.
- **Riverview Overlook** – This connection would be similar to the overlook in Heartland of America Park, and provide views of

the river from the OPPD Jones Street Station redevelopment site.

- **Pierce Commons Overlook** – An opportunity for an iconic overlook or viewing tower along the riverfront south of the Union Pacific Railroad Bridge.

These potential Riverfront connections will be described in further detail in the District Development Opportunities Chapter. Implementation of any of these riverfront connections could commence at any time. However, it should be the City’s long range goal to find a comprehensive solution that would ultimately relocate the riverfront railroad tracks and provide a direct connection to the river along the entire Downtown Riverfront.



*Riverfront railroad tracks do not allow direct connections to the River*

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MAP 8.5  
RIVERFRONT  
CONNECTIONS

