

Figure 2.22 Framework of Built Form Directions.

2.4 Public Realm

Investment in the creation of a consistent and high-quality public realm will help to attract new private investment and establish excellence in architectural, site, and open-space design for new uses drawn to the downtown core over time. It will also contribute to a positive experience for transit users.

While places such as Rice Park and Mears Park demonstrate Saint Paul's ability to craft beautiful streets and open spaces, other parts of downtown leave much to be desired. In many areas, overemphasis on accommodating the automobile has resulted in wide streets, broken sidewalks, and overall poor pedestrian conditions.

As LRT delivers more people into downtown's streets and open spaces, a high-quality public realm capable of attracting and supporting new levels of activity will be increasingly important. At station areas and along the Corridor, the public realm will act not only as a gathering place and staging ground for new activities but will provide an important link between the surrounding city and LRT.

The following Public Realm Directions provide guidance for priority investments, the expansion of the city's urban rooms and special places, and the gradual enhancement of downtown streets.



Figure 2.23 The station areas provide an opportunity to build on Saint Paul's legacy of creating great urban rooms.

1 Create Urban Rooms at Station Areas and Special Places

The LRT stations and special places should evolve as the collective hearts of an enhanced downtown. By building on the successful experiences of places such as Rice Park and the Farmers' Market, targeted public realm improvements at station areas and special places have the potential to rapidly change the image of downtown for the thousands of people who come via LRT each day. For example, the Children's Play Space at 4th/Sibley, across from Union Depot, is a valued amenity that helps make downtown a diverse, family-friendly neighborhood.

Improvements in these areas should focus on the creation of high-quality public spaces capable of integrating the needs of a wide range of users and accommodating pedestrians, cyclists, transit, and vehicular movement. As in Rice Park, the success of these improvements will be dependent on their ability to create an urban room that is flexible and capable of accommodating a range of civic activities, yet is distinct in feel and character.



Figure 2.24 The insertion of LRT creates an opportunity to enhance the streetscape along 4th and Cedar streets.

2 Enrich Streets Through Investment in LRT

The insertion of LRT through the heart of downtown represents an immediate opportunity to enhance the streets and spaces along its route. Working closely with the Central Corridor Project Office, an opportunity exists to establish a consistent streetscaping palette for the LRT zone to distinguish this Corridor in downtown. Emphasis should be on the careful integration of LRT in a way that celebrates the distinct culture and character areas and seamlessly weaves transit through the core.

Given the restricted right-of-way, it will be important to minimize streetscape clutter on the sidewalk by consolidating infrastructure where possible and enforcing restrictions on the use and placement of signage. Where street planting is not possible, creating an inviting, green, and people-friendly corridor will depend on urban greening techniques, such as hanging baskets or green "living" walls.



Figure 2.25 Opportunities to improve the public realm along 4th and Cedar streets in conjunction with LRT are limited due to the narrow right-of-way within which the train and associated hardware must fit. In particular, the frequency of vaults and areaways under sidewalks, and the proximity of LRT to the curb significantly limit possible locations for street trees. In response, public realm plantings will follow a pattern of urban gardens and urban forests along 4th and Cedar. Urban gardens (including large potted plants, hanging baskets and window boxes) will be planted along the street faces between stations. Urban forests (i.e. trees) will be concentrated at stations.

3 Link Urban Rooms and Places One Rung at a Time

Downtown Saint Paul possesses a largely intact grid of streets and pedestrian-scaled blocks that make the city easy to navigate on foot. While the structure of this grid provides good connectivity and multiple route options for pedestrians, the experience of moving through or occupying these routes is less satisfying. Wide streets capable of accommodating (in some cases) up to five lanes of traffic create large crossing distances, and leave sidewalks feeling dwarfed by comparison.

To complement the reconstruction of the Corridor and priority public realm improvements at station areas, a strategy should be put in place to support the greening and beautification of downtown streets over time. Emanating east from Rice Park and west from the Farmers' Market, a systematic program of gradual street improvements has the ability to radically change the character of downtown to create an enjoyable network of green pedestrian streets.

An incremental program of streetscape improvements should be integrated into infrastructure planning and capital programs to ensure that routine items such as road or utility repairs result in the gradual upgrading of street materials in these key locations over time. These improvements should be coordinated to ensure that they support new opportunities for the creation of active uses on the ground level of buildings, and could be complemented with a program of mandatory streetscaping for all new or redeveloped sites in the downtown.

Where public funds are available, a high priority should be placed on those streets (such as 5th, 6th, or Sibley) that lead from station areas to key destinations within downtown and along the riverfront.

Step 1: Preparing for LRT (Improving 5th and 6th)



Step 2: Linking Special Places Through Incremental Streetscape Improvements



Step 3: Completing an Enhanced Street Network Over Time



Figure 2.26 An incremental program of streetscape improvements that link 4th, 5th, and 6th in conjunction with LRT enhancements will help expand existing special places to create a pedestrian-friendly downtown over time.



Figure 2.27 Enhancing key riverfront connections will encourage pedestrian movement between LRT stations, downtown, and the riverfront.

4 Connect to the Riverfront

Though geographically located adjacent to the Mississippi River, physical barriers created by changes in elevation, rail and road infrastructure make it difficult for pedestrians and cyclists to access the riverfront. Where routes do exist, they are typically through long tunnels or down large flights of stairs that can be intimidating and uncomfortable for pedestrians.

A series of riverfront connections leading from urban rooms and station areas should be identified for targeted public realm enhancements. In particular, Sibley, Jackson and 2nd streets provide direct riverfront connections today that could be greatly enhanced as pathways to the riverfront. Improvements to the character and quality of viaducts could include streetscape enhancements, public art, increased lighting, and wayfinding. In addition, a vertical connection between the Lafayette Bridge and Sam Morgan Regional Trail should be constructed to bring bicyclists down to the riverfront.

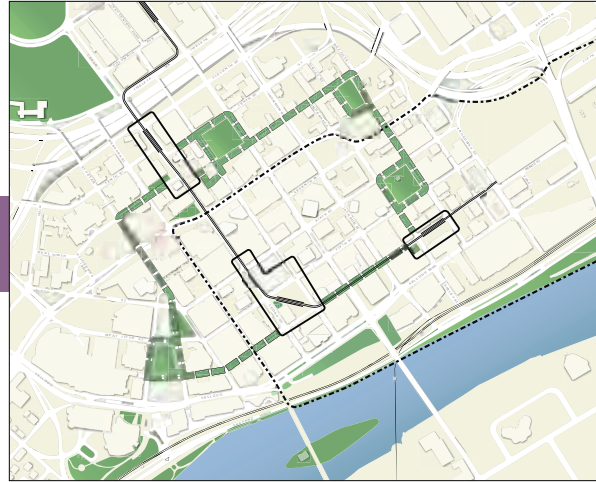


Figure 2.28 A ring of Park Streets will help create green street connections that link destinations and neighborhoods.

5 Green the Ring of Park Streets

In addition to creating a pedestrian-friendly circuit, connecting downtown's major neighborhood parks and the riverfront by a ring of Park Streets will extend the character and quality of the unique open spaces they connect. As green corridors ringing the downtown, the intent with these streets over time is to develop a lush network of boulevard streets capable of providing a delightful, shaded walk on a hot summer's day. To this end, an ambitious program of streetscape enhancements, sustainable infrastructure projects, public art expressions and street tree planting should be undertaken to create complete streets.



Figure 2.29 Public art, such as this piece embedded into the side of a parking ramp, will continue to make an important contribution to the livability of downtown.

6 Enrich Downtown with Public Art

With the recent adoption of a new public art ordinance, the City of Saint Paul has made clear its belief that public art strengthens public places, and enhances and promotes Saint Paul's identity as a livable and creative city. The ordinance encourages the engagement of artists in shaping the form and experience of the city through participation in planning and in the design of public buildings, open spaces and infrastructure.

The establishment of 4th Street as the Saint Paul Artway will play an important role in promoting Lowertown as both a vibrant artistic and cultural district and a linear, curated space. By making storefront windows and the sides of buildings available for art installations, projections, and murals, business and property owners will be essential partners in the production of curated art exhibitions that will attract residents and visitors alike. The path outlined by these rotating "exhibits," which would extend from Rice Park to Broadway Street, will invite visitors to the Rice Park Entertainment District to explore on foot the Lowertown neighborhood, and discover and support the local artist community.