



MISITES

2016: VOLUME 10, NUMBER 2 **MICHIGAN** CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY
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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings fellow landscape architects and friends!

As I write this, I am struggling to believe that 2016 is more than half over, but am pleased that the Michigan Chapter has accomplished so much in the first half of this year. Once again, I am amazed at the dedication and hard work that the Executive Committee and chapter subcommittees bring through planning our many social events and hard work through advocacy and awareness efforts.

This past spring, we had a great set of events for World Landscape Architecture Month. Hopefully, you accepted my challenge and were able to attend one of the many awareness activities or utilized social media to tag your “Designed by a Landscape Architect” photos. In May, our President Elect Ben Baker and Trustee Bob Ford along with myself and several other Michigan constituents, attended Advocacy Day in Washington DC. This annual event, hosted at the National level, proved to be a success as we discussed current landscape architecture related issues with our members of congress and state representatives. Attended by over 180 chapter leaders from all over the country, our group focused on the importance of green infrastructure in transportation projects and passage of the National Park Service Centennial Challenge legislation.

Coming this fall, we hope you have marked your calendar to attend the MiASLA Annual Meeting and Awards Gala September 28-29 in Grand Rapids. We celebrate art in the landscape this year as our conference takes place during the internationally known ArtPrize competition. In addition to Thursday’s keynote speaker, Susan Weiler from OLIN, several chapter events are being planned including our second “LA Ride” and an evening social which includes a scavenger hunt in downtown Grand Rapids. Continue to check back to www.michiganasla.org for more information.

Thank you to all of our current members who continue to support the chapter through your renewed membership and dedication of time to chapter activities and events. ■

Clare Jagenow, PLA, ASLA
President, Michigan Chapter of ASLA

For more information, please visit our website at www.michiganasla.org, or find us on Facebook or LinkedIn.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

MSU LA Alumni Golf Outing, Sept. 16th
East Lansing, MI

LA Ride, Sept. 28th
Downtown Grand Rapids, MI

ArtPrize Scavenger Hunt & Social, Sept. 28th
Downtown Grand Rapids, MI

2016 MiASLA Annual Meeting, Sept. 29th
Thousand Oaks Golf Club, Grand Rapids, MI

2016 ASLA Annual Meeting, Oct. 21-24
New Orleans, LA

GR FORWARD

By Tim Kelly
Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc.

GR Forward is a community plan and investment strategy that envisions the future of downtown Grand Rapids and the Grand River – two of the City and region’s strongest assets. Grand Rapids is poised to become a resilient, waterfront city and an urban playground for all ages centered around a progressive and lively downtown. GR Forward was designed to guide this ongoing transformation. All members of the community – those who live, work, learn, and play in and near downtown and the river – were welcomed participants, invited to help craft a collective vision for the future and identify key actions for change to make the vision become reality.

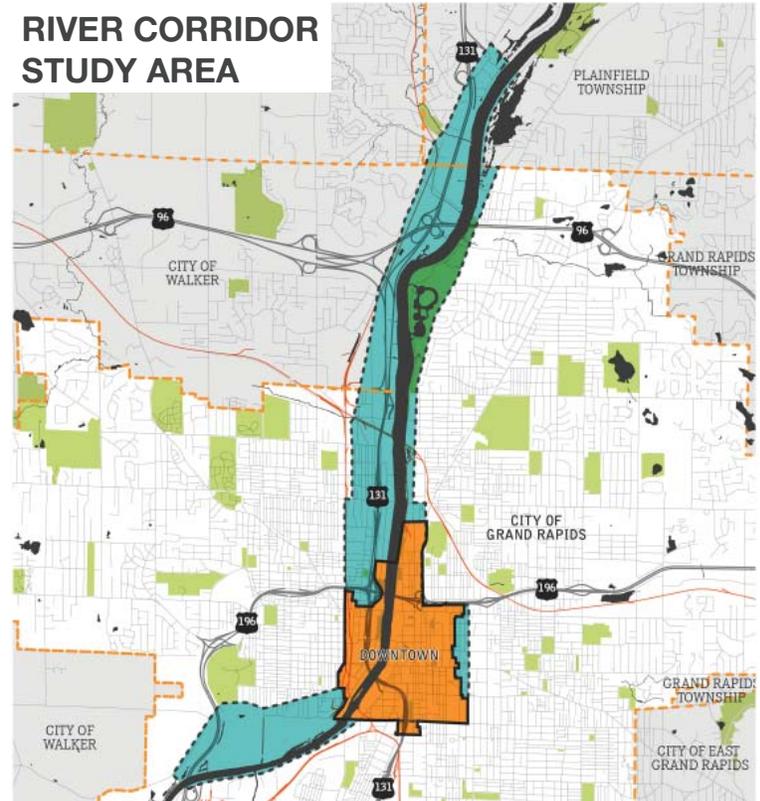
ORIGINALITY AND INNOVATION

Facilitated by Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. (DGRI), the City of Grand Rapids and Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS), GR Forward is the roadmap to guide, change and direct investment in the coming years. The final plan of action, developed through the most inclusive community engagement process in the City’s history, envisioned downtown Grand Rapids as the civic heart of West Michigan and outlined the following six broad goals:

- 1 Restore the Grand River as the city’s draw & create a connected and equitable river corridor
- 2 Create a true downtown neighborhood, home to a diverse population
- 3 Implement a 21st century mobility strategy
- 4 Expand job opportunities & ensure continued vitality of the local economy
- 5 Reinvest in public space, culture & inclusive programming
- 6 Retain & attract families, talent & job providers with high quality public schools

Each goal was accompanied by a set of innovative strategies for implementation, all of which were designed to highlight and celebrate the qualities that are unique and original to Grand Rapids. Further, and perhaps most importantly, GR Forward recognized that to create a sustainable city we needed a fundamentally new approach to achieve growth with prosperity that

RIVER CORRIDOR STUDY AREA



-  RIVER STUDY AREA
-  DOWNTOWN STUDY AREA

ABOVE: GR Forward river corridor study area.
OPPOSITE: Proposed river trail enhancements at the Fish Ladder.
Image courtesy of DGRI.

is widely shared by all residents. To that end, 20 policy and program recommendations were provided to advance the ongoing work of championing diversity and inclusion while building equity in downtown Grand Rapids.

THE GRAND RIVER

Among the goals and strategies in GR Forward, restoring the Grand River and its edges as a draw is the game-changer for Grand Rapids that will attract talent, serve as a catalyst for development, and provide a recreation amenity for the entire region. The river corridor presents the opportunity to offer a range of connected, unique experiences around outdoor adventures not usually found within urban centers. Investing in the river and promoting redevelopment along its edges will serve as an economic generator, particularly if built upon the idea that the Grand River re-establishes Grand Rapids' brand as a waterfront city. Reimagined flood infrastructure can serve as a framework for the transformation of the river, its edges, and the opportunity sites along the river corridor.

One of the approaches to creating a waterfront destination is to enhance the existing riverfront trail. Twelve different trail systems exist currently in Grand Rapids, and some offer the potential to provide new modes of recreation and travel to the lake shore and interstate destinations. Further, a completed trail network can serve as a more precise tool that changes land use site by site. As waterfront access is created, particularly in the light industrial areas along the Westside and the Southeast side along Market Avenue, uses will shift to take better advantage of the river.

The activated Grand River edges will also provide access to view and participate in the revitalized Grand River. Since 2011, Grand Rapids White Water has led the charge to remove existing dams and restore the City's namesake rapids to aid in the restoration of river habitat and provide a unique urban amenity. The restored river and revitalized edges will transform the Downtown and the River Corridor, and create the future waterfront Grand Rapidsians envision.





GR FORWARD (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

PUBLIC SPACE

Along with the waterfront, GR Forward also envisioned enhanced public spaces, both in parks and in the public right-of-way. The perception of place is dictated largely through the experience in public spaces, and it's paramount to ensure those experiences are positive. GR Forward proposes enhancements to existing public space assets and the expansion of cultural programming to bring people together.

Many of the public realm strategies are an extension of the positive trends already established in Grand Rapids. Transformations to public space including streetscape design, tree planting and gateway enhancements were activities that the City, Friends of Grand Rapids Parks, and DGRI have expertise and knowledge in completing. These include adding green infrastructure elements to streets to create a stress-free pedestrian experience for all ages and abilities in addition to finding solutions to further activate public spaces like Calder Plaza.

To accomplish these goals, a combined effort, coupled with forging strong links to existing businesses in locations designated for improvements, will be needed to move quickly from design to implementation. Similarly, the design and implementation of downtown park improvements requires not only advancing concepts into construction, but also a concerted fundraising effort that creates partners amongst those that will benefit from these enhancements. To expand programming will require additional resources and partners so as not to take away from existing activities undertaken by DGRI and their partners.

The improvements outlined for the public realm will create a more vibrant and attractive downtown and raise expectations about what the Downtown should look like, how it should function, and how it will be managed. To meet tomorrow's expectations, implementation today needs to take into account long-term maintenance and sustainability of both spaces and programs.

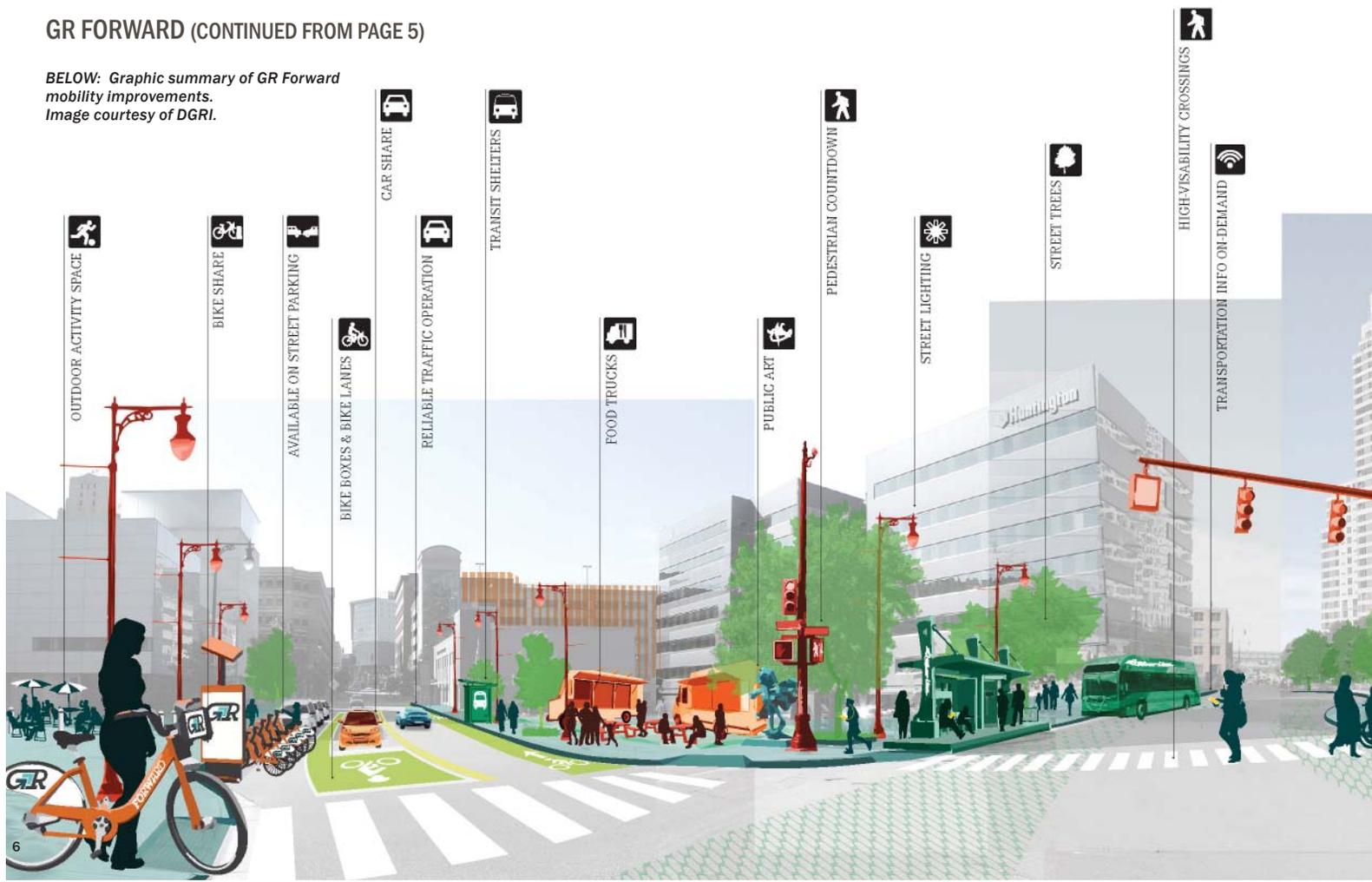
LEFT: Proposed 201 Market Avenue aerial rendering.

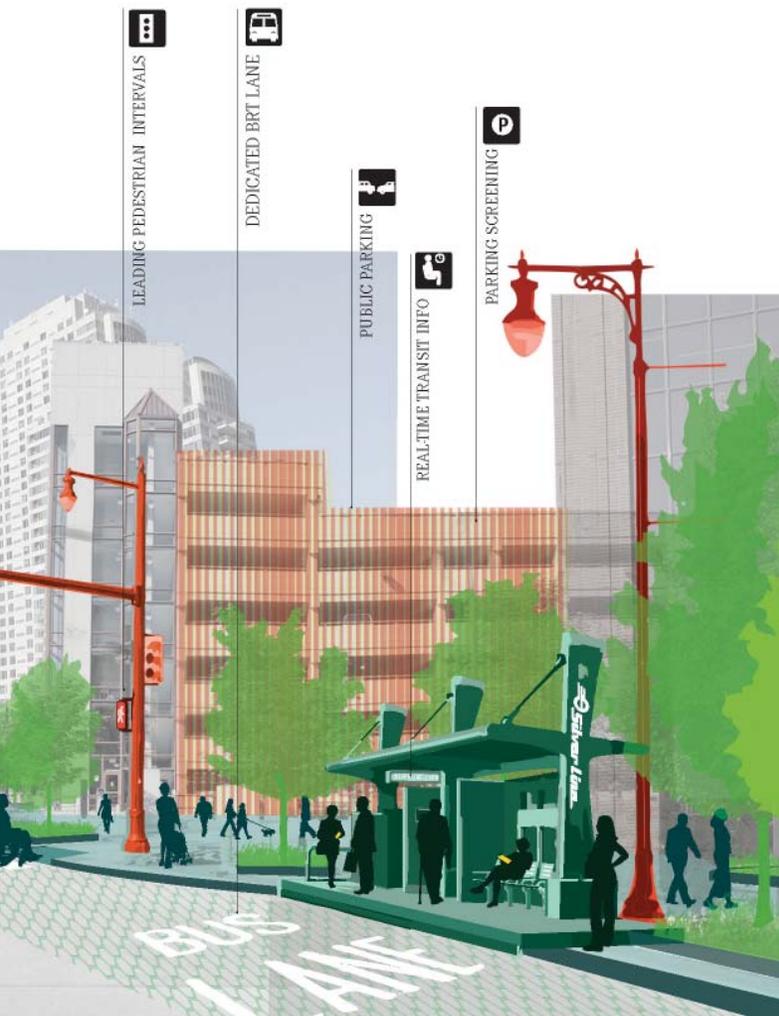
OPPOSITE: Illustration depicting vision for future Innovation Central Campus. Images courtesy of DGRI.



GR FORWARD (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

BELOW: Graphic summary of GR Forward mobility improvements. Image courtesy of DGRI.





IMPLEMENTATION

With GR Forward now an approved amendment to the City's Master Plan, DGRI has continued to work diligently in aligning its budgets with the Plan's recommendations. Of the 103 programs, projects, and initiatives proposed, the upcoming fiscal year's budget includes 92 specific initiatives recommended by GR Forward. 82.52% of the proposed Downtown Development Authority's program and project expenditures are directly related to GR Forward. This includes transforming four highway overpasses that create barriers within downtown, developing a flexible re-design for Calder Plaza, advancing Lyon Square designs, the DASH system reboot, expanding the downtown tree canopy, advancing more winter programming, and integrating more public art.

EFFECTIVENESS

The effectiveness of GR Forward is found most simply in the fact that it provides a roadmap for achieving a shared community vision, and is a reflection of the needs of Grand Rapids in the 21st century. The previous downtown plan was adopted in 1993, and while it set the stage for significant downtown investment, GR Forward is grounded in the reality of our City's current needs. The ambitious goals of GR Forward are inspiring action across public, private, and philanthropic sectors throughout the Grand Rapids community. By recognizing our shared vision, and working collectively to achieve it, GR Forward has further cemented Downtown Grand Rapids and the River Corridor as the civic heart of West Michigan, and a place welcoming to all residents, nearby neighbors, and visitors. ■

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20TH ANNIVERSARY OF BIRMINGHAM MASTER PLAN CITY PLANNERS CREATE AN INDUSTRY STANDARD OF URBAN PLANNING

By Robert J. Gibbs, AICP, ASLA
Gibbs Planning Group, President

Birmingham, Michigan has a history of innovative plans designed to create a beautiful, vibrant city. In the 1920s, its City Beautiful plan created a central civic square bounded by a library, city hall, and post office. The 1960s brought a plan to build five parking decks along Ring Road, which enclosed the downtown core and allowed high rises to be built. This resulted in more than 3 million square feet of new commercial buildings and a remarkably upscale downtown for a Midwest city of its small 20,000 population size.

However, despite this apparent success, citizen complaints led city officials to repeal permitted densities and limit new construction to a floor-area ratio of one, including the basement. This stalled new downtown development for two decades.

These decisions resulted in stagnant commercial growth, and decay began to consume Birmingham. By the 1990s, top retailers and commercial tenants had moved out, Ring Road – which was designed for high-speed traffic – cut off the city's downtown from the residential neighborhoods around it, the city's approvals process grew cumbersome and time-consuming, and the city was dealing with a 20 percent population loss. Birmingham faced a crisis that could have decimated it.

To address the situation, in 1996 city officials decided to develop a new, 20-year master plan, referenced herein as the Birmingham 2016 Master Plan. They selected a team of national and local planners and consultants led by the noted architect Andres Duany, along with local planners Gibbs Planning Group, McKenna Associates, and The Green Group. This core planning team assembled 50 top architects, economists, planners, and engineers to address the problems at hand. Andres Duany's work is known globally, as he is credited with the plan and code for Seaside, Florida, the first new traditional community. He also works closely with Prince Charles and serves as a consultant for the Prince's Foundation for Building Community, planning new towns across the United Kingdom on a regular basis.



*Birmingham Streetscape.
Image courtesy of Gibbs Planning Group.*

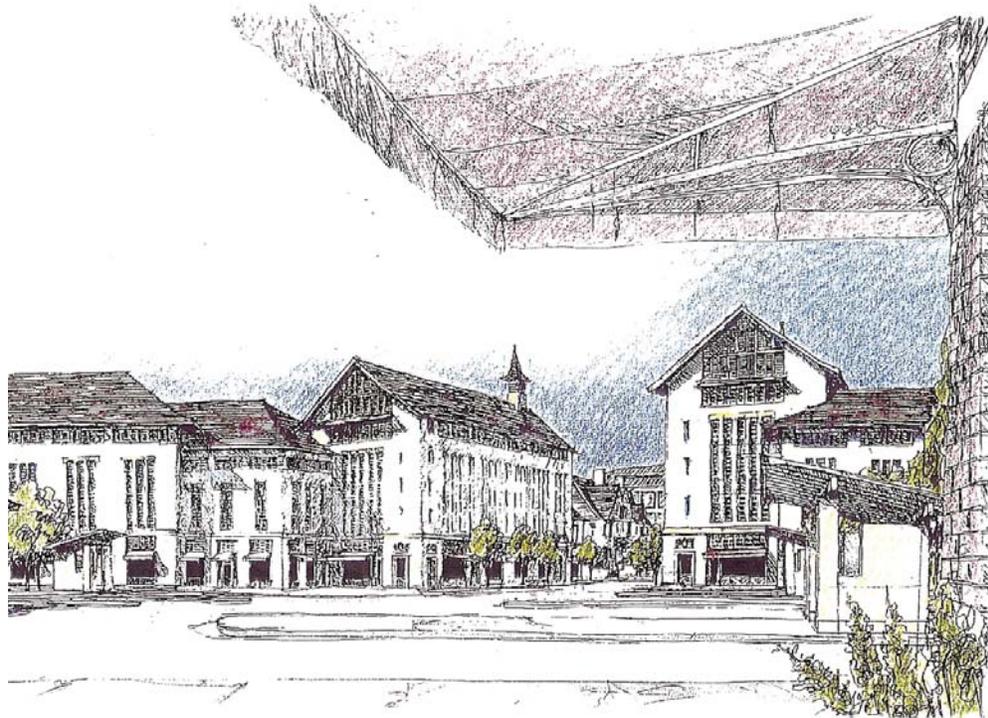
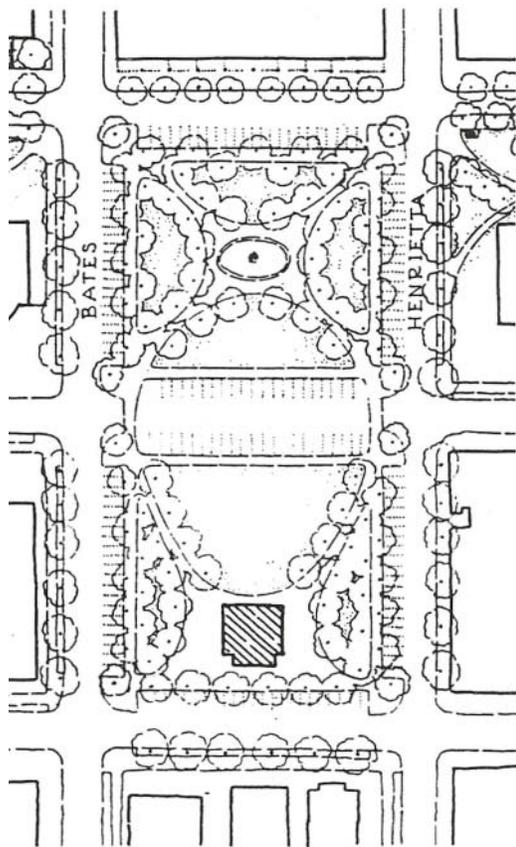


The Birmingham 2016 Master Plan began with three months of community educational and information-gathering sessions, culminating with a seven-day charrette in a downtown storefront. The intensive accommodation of public input was designed to develop community support for, and ownership of, the new plan. This level of public engagement was one of the most successful aspects of the plan, encouraging its participants to reach agreement on the city's future size and character. More than 2,500 citizens, business and property owners, developers, elected officials, and others attended more than 70 meetings during the charrette. Real-time feedback was gathered and incorporated into the plan, alternatives for which were presented twice daily. The principles from the 1996 plan were so helpful and successful, they continue to influence policy discussions 20 years later.

The decision was made to grow Birmingham from a town into a small city. The 2016 Master Plan reflected this desire by recommending numerous policy revisions, streetscape improvements, park expansions, traffic-calming measures, and the first form-based code in Michigan history. In fact, it was one of the first form-based codes implemented in the U.S.

A form-based code utilizes the physical form of the structure, rather than being based on separation of uses, such as commercial, residential, etc. A form-based code offers a powerful alternative to conventional zoning regulation, and is adopted into city, town, or county law. This was revolutionary in the fact that form-based codes address the relationship between building facades and the public realm and the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another. They are integral to a regulating plan that designates the appropriate form and scale and therefore the character of development, rather than only distinctions in land-use types.

This allowed the team to create a plan that was based on market research and included a form-based overlay-zoning district, which prescribed building dimensions and placements, building forms and materials, and permitted uses. New techniques in urban traffic calming were engineered and installed, all without reducing vehicular capacity and narrow sidewalks were allowed to expand for outdoor dining by permitting the leasing of adjacent on-street parking stalls. A public surface parking lot was converted into a park without losing a single stall.

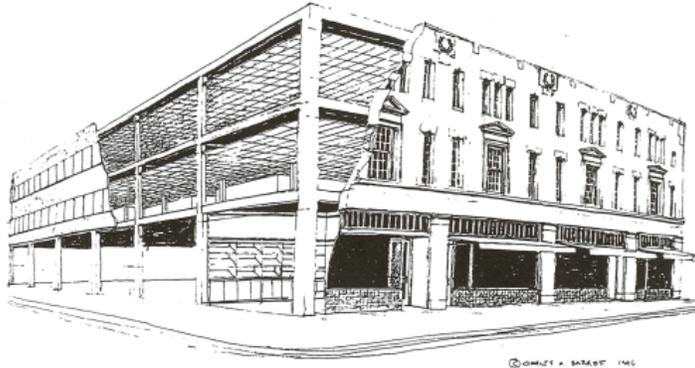


THE ENTRANCE TO DOWNTOWN
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Prohibited

Allowed



TOP: Original photo of Birmingham charrette.

BOTTOM: Updated building design standards.

OPPOSITE LEFT: Site plan of bandstand for downtown Birmingham.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: Downtown Birmingham entry sketch.

Images courtesy of Gibbs Planning Group.

Additionally, ten park improvements were designed, including a civic square expansion, and traffic-calming boulevards. The plan also specified an entirely new streetscape plan, including lighting, benches, and paving, with all fixtures and signage painted “Birmingham Green,” which both improved the fixtures and gave a unified identity to the downtown.

With its new plan in place in 1996, Birmingham was able to turn a corner during the 20 years that followed. Today, in 2016, more than 30 major, mixed-use buildings have been constructed, including a multi-screen regional cinema, a new five-level Class-A office building, and a luxury restaurant. Birmingham now has the highest commercial rents and land values in Michigan, and is considered one of the most walkable and commercially successful small towns in America.

Birmingham’s success has been noticed. Many of the innovative principles and techniques developed for its 2016 Master Plan have been implemented in cities throughout the country. They have become the foundation for form-based codes, smart-growth codes, traffic-calming measures, and the public charrette planning process. The planning methods that were developed, tested, and proven during the Birmingham 2016 Master Plan process are now common best practices. Birmingham has become a model of urban excellence and success and has over two million square feet of office and one million square feet of trendy upscale shopping. ■

Robert Gibbs is founder and principal of Gibbs Planning Group in Birmingham, co-planner of the Birmingham 2016 Master Plan - and the author of Principles of Urban Retail Planning and Development.

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MICHIGAN ASLA

ANNUAL MEETING & AWARDS DINNER

SEPTEMBER 29, 2016

Thousand Oaks Golf Club, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Featuring:

Susan Weiler, FASLA/The Olin Studio

John Harris/a5

Heather Whitlow/The Landscape Architecture Foundation

John Running-Johnson/Artist

Jay Steffen, ASLA/City of Grand Rapids

John Sauvé/Artist

Tim Kelly/Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc.

Lori Singleton, ASLA/SmithGroupJJR

Katie Moore/ArtPrize

Richard Zweifel, FASLA/Past President for National ASLA

Join us for a tour of Grand Rapids during our LA Ride bicycle event, prior to the ArtPrize scavenger hunt and social in downtown Grand Rapids.

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Want to get involved? MiASLA is always looking for chapter members to participate at a greater level. Please feel free to reach out to the Executive Committee or staff members: manager@michiganasla.org

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