



**SHIVEHATTERY**  
ARCHITECTURE+ENGINEERING

# COMMUNITY BRANDING AND VISIONING

for the City of North Liberty

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**2019-2020**

**THINK  
FRESH!**

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City of North Liberty  
Collaborative Branding and Visioning  
Final Report

The City of North Liberty engaged de Novo Marketing and Shive-Hattery to develop a collaborative branding and visioning plan for North Liberty. After years of substantial growth city leadership wanted to pause, reflect on the current status of the city, and develop a brand and vision for the city based on the needs and wants of its residents. In order to assess these needs and wants it was imperative that we engage as many residents and city stakeholders as possible in this process to ensure voices were heard and goals were met.

de Novo led a community discovery process that included a session with city staff and other key community stakeholders, an online survey targeted to residents and a Spark event which allowed residents to submit and share their big ideas for North Liberty.

The discovery findings reinforced that North Liberty is well liked by its residents and generally has a positive reputation. Residents like where they live and are proud to be there. They perceive the community as centrally located and convenient to everything they need such as jobs, family and entertainment. They also feel a sense of community and safety within their neighborhoods.

The one area that was identified as having the most potential for improvement is the desire for more opportunities and spaces for community engagement and gathering. Although residents reported feeling close to their community, they also reported the need for a town square, larger rec center or some sort of focal point that is uniquely North Liberty. There was also a focus on activities and environmentalism (ways to be active: biking, swimming, trails, sidewalks, natural play areas, etc.; recycling, reducing carbon footprint, etc.)

Based on this information, de Novo developed a new brand identity that better reflects who North Liberty is today and who the community aspires to be in the future. A full brand identity package was provided that included logos, positioning line and brand standards.

While de Novo was developing the brand identity, Shive-Hattery was working on the physical design of the community, developing strategies that help form a sense of place and identifiable community identity. Shive-Hattery provided recommendations on areas of focus including Community Design, Trails & Greenways, Streetscapes, Community Identity Monuments, and Creating the “There” – the space that is unique and identifiable as North Liberty.

#### **Recommendations and Next Steps:**

**Brand Identity:** the new logo and positioning line have been rolled out to the community. Continue to replace the former branding with the new on signage, vehicles, etc. as budget and capital replacement



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schedules allow. Look for ways to incorporate the “Connected to What Matters” idea into communications.



**Community Identity in the Physical Space:**

We recommend that city staff and city council review the comprehensive plan to see if changes are needed to support the recommendations set forth, specifically as it relates to the Trails and Greenways plans.

Once the comprehensive plan is reviewed, we recommend setting a plan and priorities for the proposed elements below. The plans should include accounting for both capital costs and ongoing operations/staffing costs.

1. Reinvestment study for cherry street district as an opportunity to create the “There”.
2. Review and update Centennial Park master plan to ensure original plans meet future needs.
3. Undertake detailed streetscape design studies and costs to complete the elements.
4. Study and prepare a community signage and wayfinding plan.
5. Identify targeted land acquisitions for signage, parklets, greenways and trails and determine priorities and a schedule for securing these parcels.





# North Liberty

community identity framework

2 . 2020



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## Background

## Recommendations and **BIG IDEAS**:

- Community Design
- Trails and Greenways
- Streetscapes
- Community identity monuments
- Creating the “There”

## Future Steps



## scope & project goals

- The goal of this project was to use the community input gathered by deNovo to **SPARK** ideas about Community Identity
  - Perceptions of North Liberty today
  - Aspirations for North Liberty tomorrow
  - Branding
  - Physical design of the community
  - How all these things come together to form Community Identity
- Community Identity is not just one thing
  - Needs to work on multiple levels
  - Needs to engage different audiences
  - Needs critical mass to gain recognition





- Community Driven Wants
  - Bike, pedestrian, and park connections
  - Community entrances
  - Streetscape improvements
  - Community wayfinding
  - A more recognizable “downtown”
  - Art and interactive experiences
  - Distinctly different from neighbors
  - Fun, funky, clever, imaginative
  - Establishing a “there”





## BIG IDEA: Add some fun and playful elements!

- Public art
- Fun site furnishings
- Interesting design
- Interactive experiences

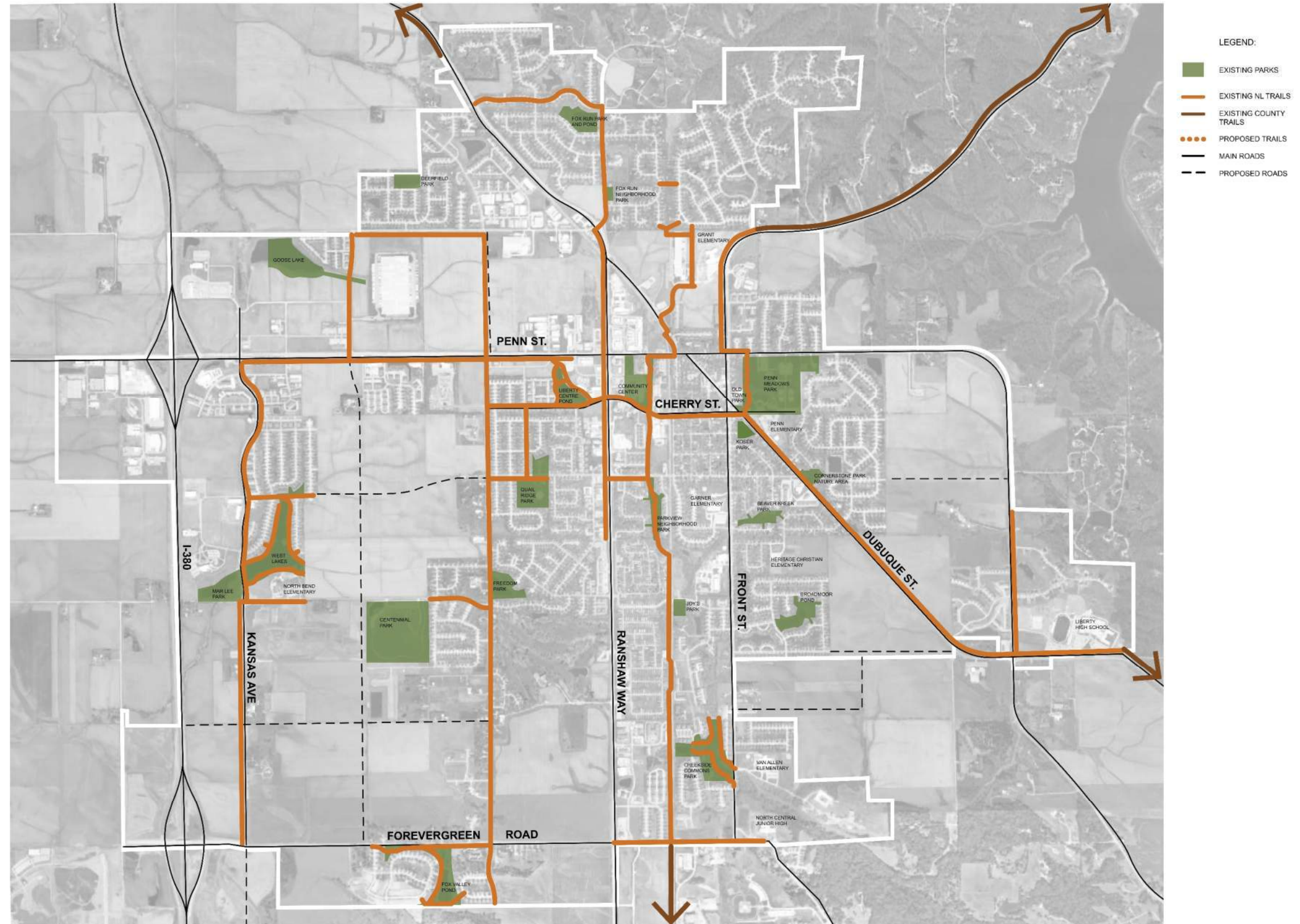




## building identity

### GREENWAYS & TRAILS

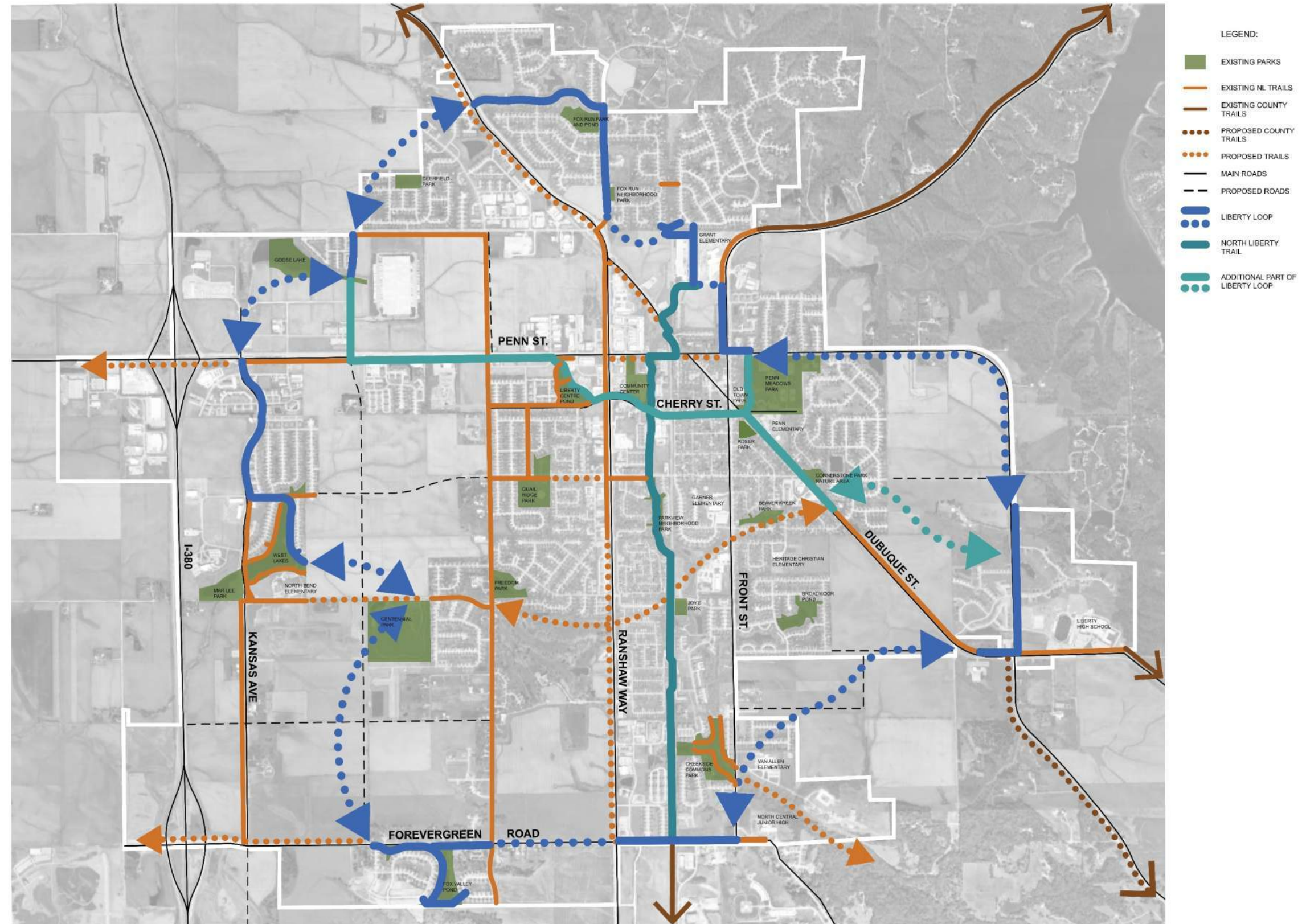
- Recommendation: Reassess greenway and trail plans.
  - Are they comprehensive and complete?
  - Are community destinations connected in a logical way?
  - Revise comprehensive plan if necessary





## BIG IDEA: Liberty Loop

- Main trail loop connecting destinations throughout the community
- Signature experience. Known distances. Great wayfinding. Services. Everyone knows what it is.
- Focal point for community events – bike rides, fun walks





## BIG IDEA: Liberty Loop

- Tie branding of Liberty Loop to Community Brand



LIBERTY  
LOOP



LIBERTY  
LOOP



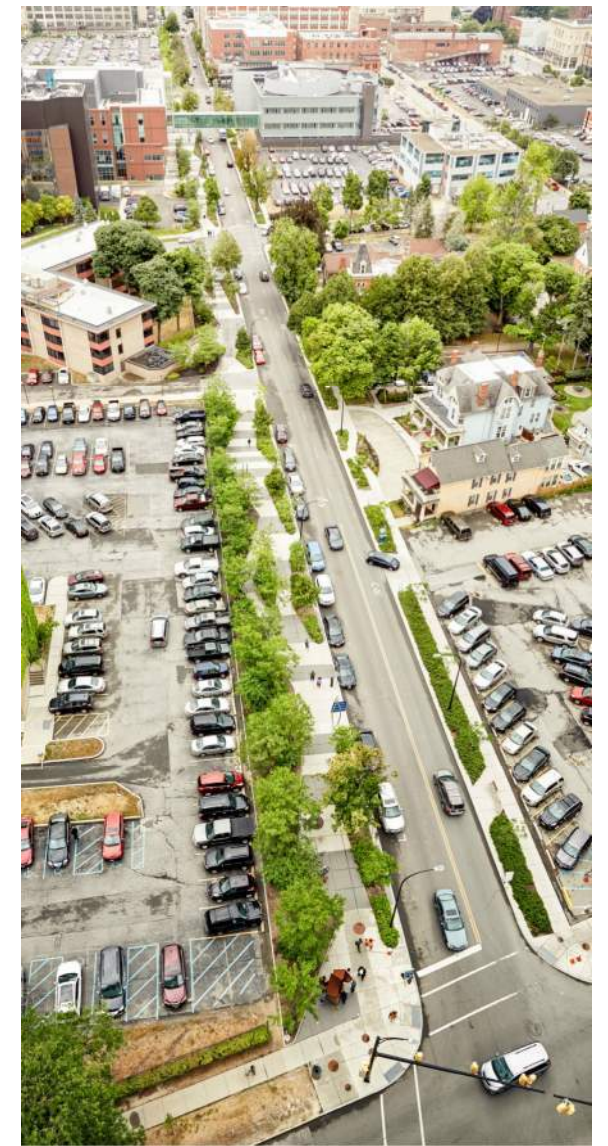
LIBERTY  
LOOP



## building identity

### STREETSCAPES

- Recommendation: Expand streetscapes throughout the community.
- Consistent design elements that establish an identity
  - Variations on a theme to provide interest
  - Build on Roundabouts vocabulary
- Provide a variety of experiences - including for pedestrians and bikes!
- Make it fun, interesting and exciting





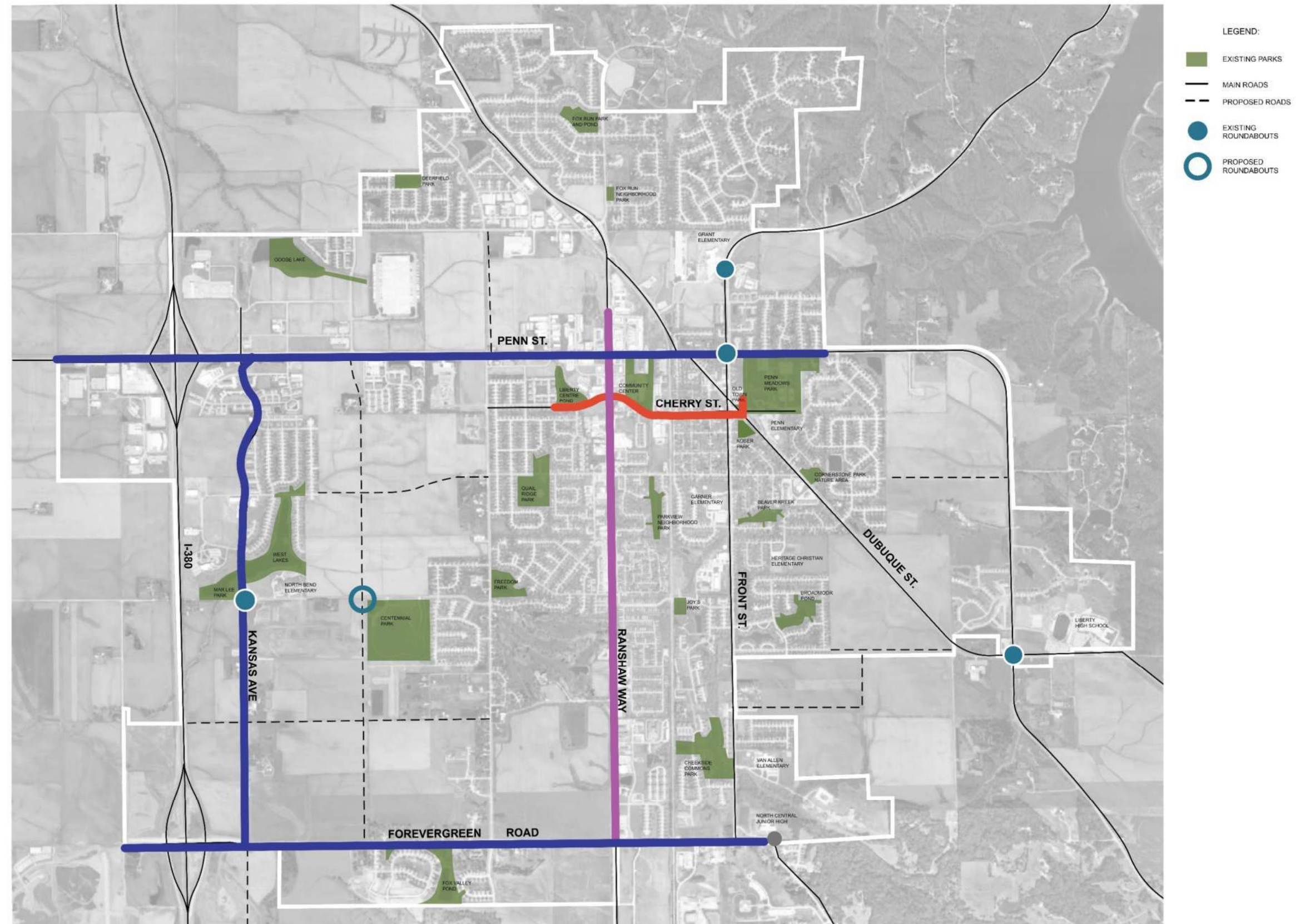
- Recommendation: Complete construction of Ranshaw Way improvements
  - Consider adding a new layer of amenities – playful seating, art, interactive pieces



## framework

### STREETSCAPES

- Recommendation:  
Extend streetscapes to  
Penn St, Kansas St,  
Forevergreen Rd and  
Cherry St
- Main elements:
  - Identity  
monuments
  - Street trees and  
landscaping
  - Sidewalks and  
trails – meander  
where possible
  - Parklets
  - Seating
  - Public art /  
interactive  
experiences
  - Extend  
roundabout  
paving patterns
  - Interesting  
crosswalks





building identity

STREETSCAPES

## Penn Street





# building identity

## STREETSCAPES

### Penn Street



ENTRANCE MONUMENTS



ARTISTIC CROSSWALK



FUN BENCHES





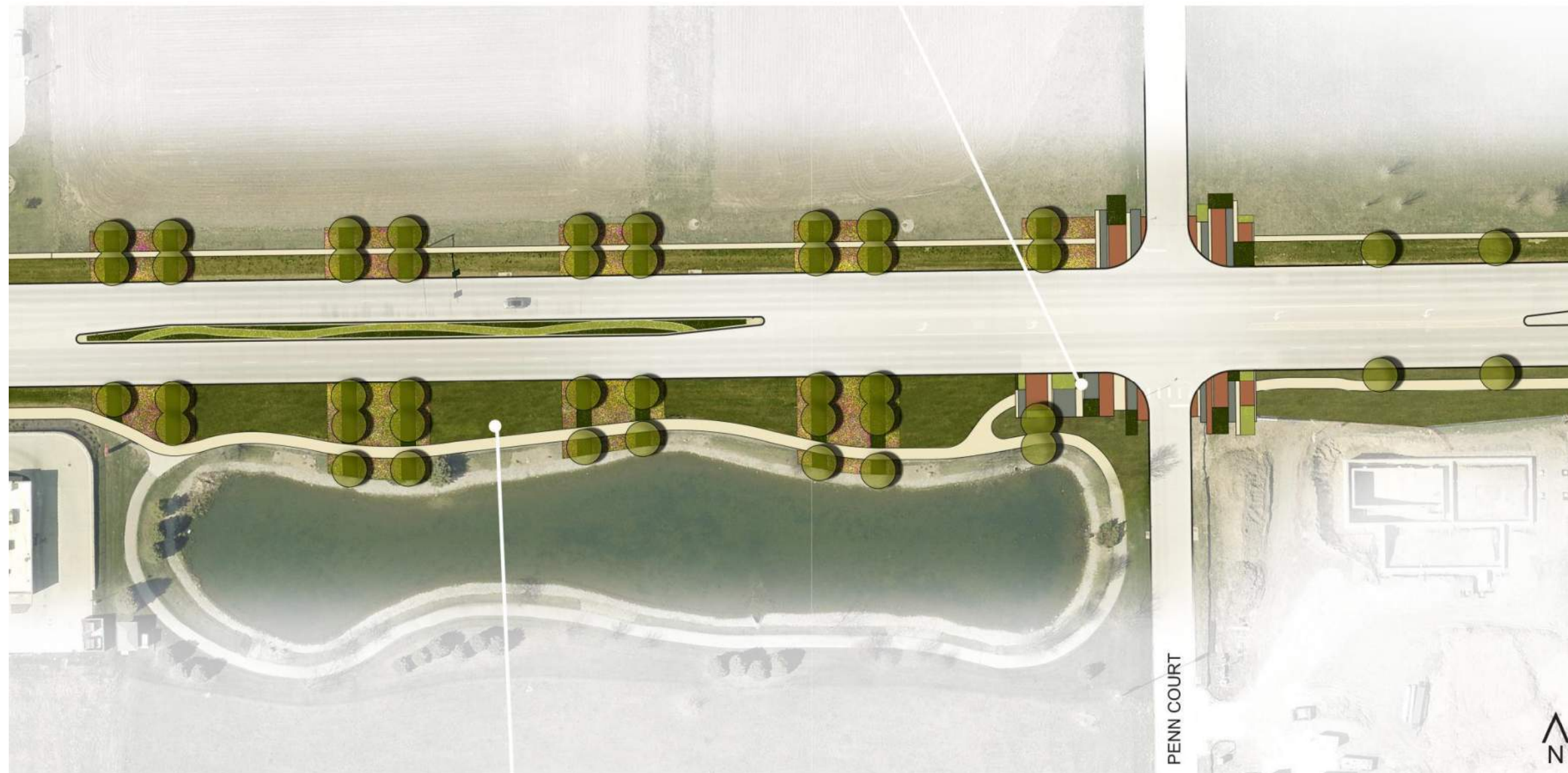
building identity

STREETSCAPES

Penn Street



SCULPTURAL ELEMENTS / ART



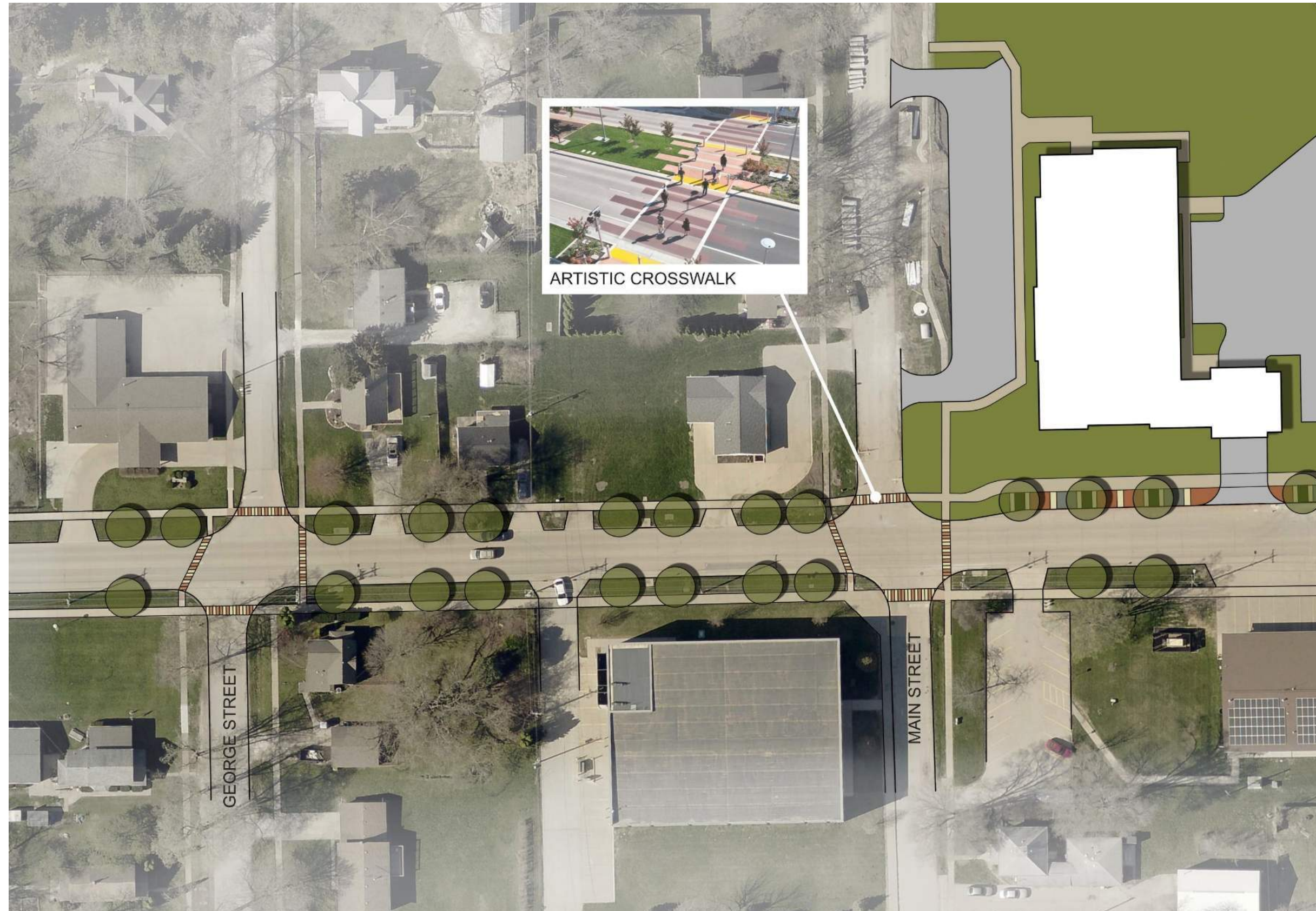
INTERACTIVE ART













building identity

STREETSCAPES

Cherry/Dubuque  
Street





## building identity

### STREETSCAPES

- Recommendation: Expand roundabouts throughout community where appropriate
  - Explore variations on design theme utilizing selected pavers, colors and plant palettes
  - Repeat elements of roundabouts elsewhere in North Liberty
  - Incorporate art or interactive elements in existing roundabouts

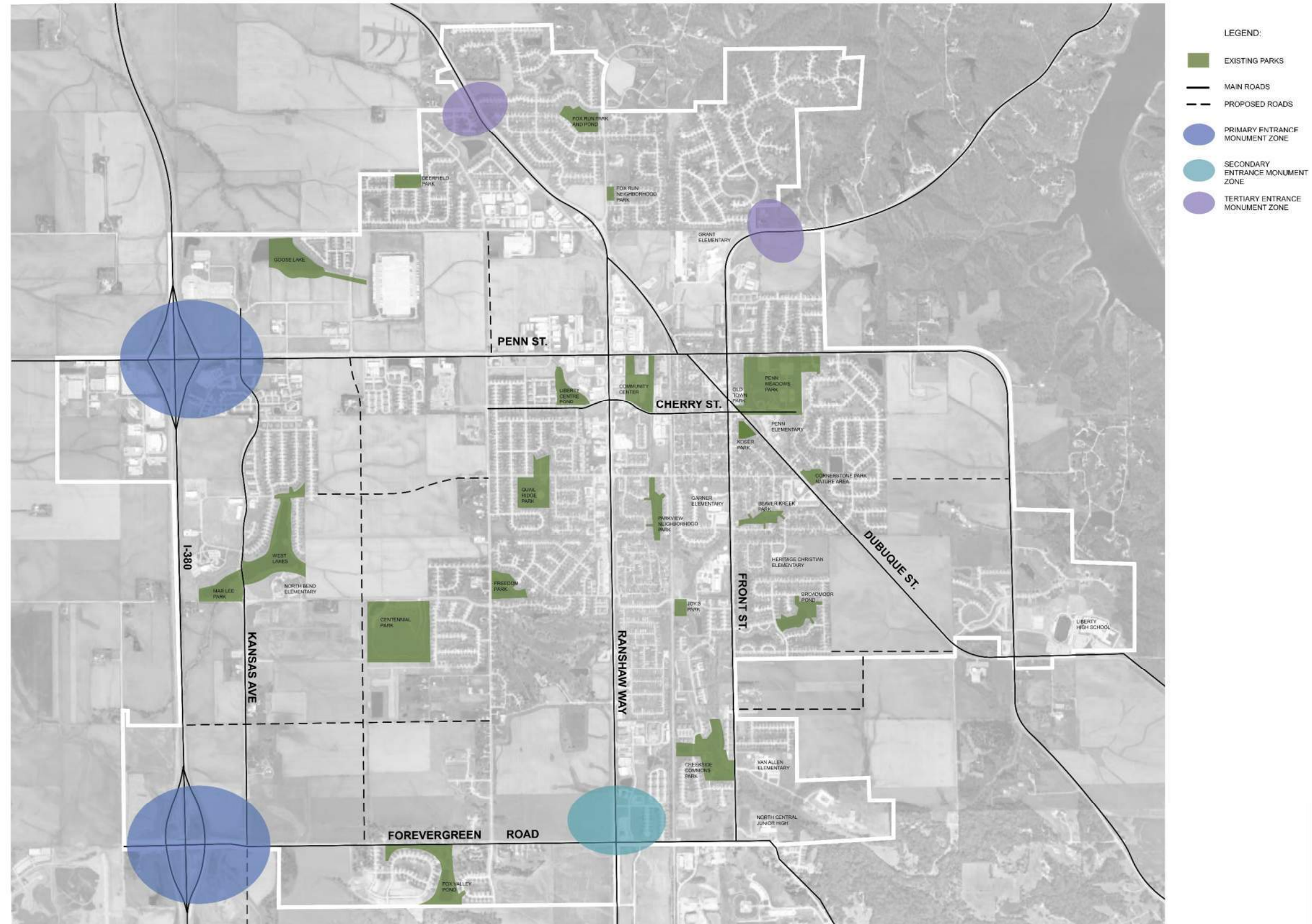




# framework

## COMMUNITY GATEWAYS-SIGNAGE

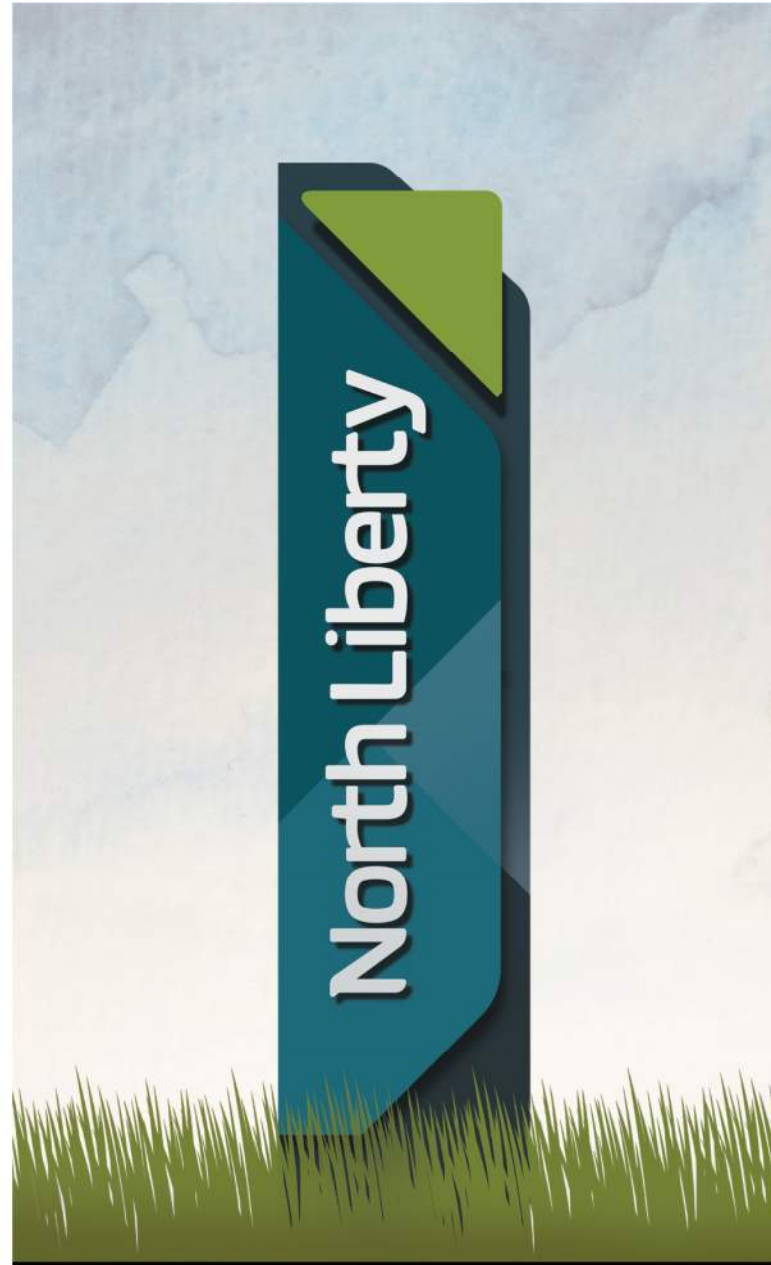
- Recommendation: Implement community gateway signage
- Primary gateways at I-380 exits
- Secondary gateways at Hwy 965 and Forevergreen Road
- Tertiary gateways at 965 North and F28

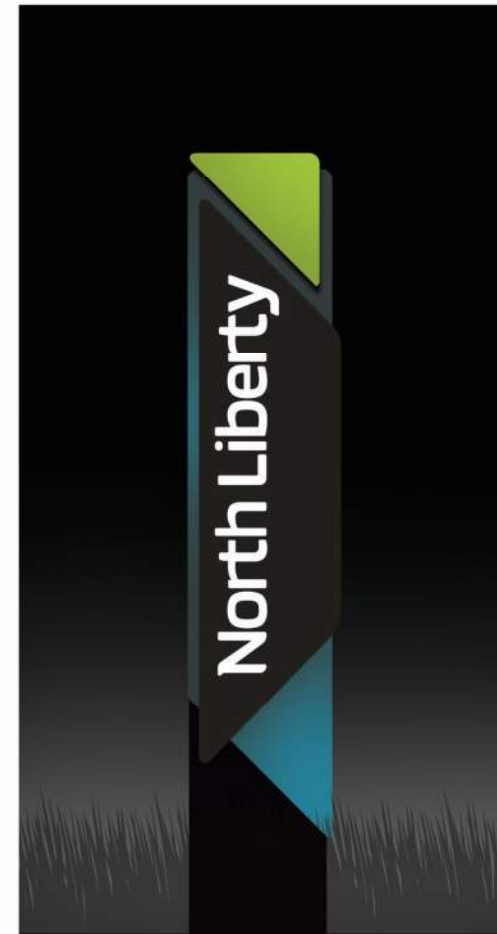




community entrance

SIGNAGE CONCEPT 1





community entrance

SIGNAGE CONCEPT 3



community entrance

SIGNAGE CONCEPTS

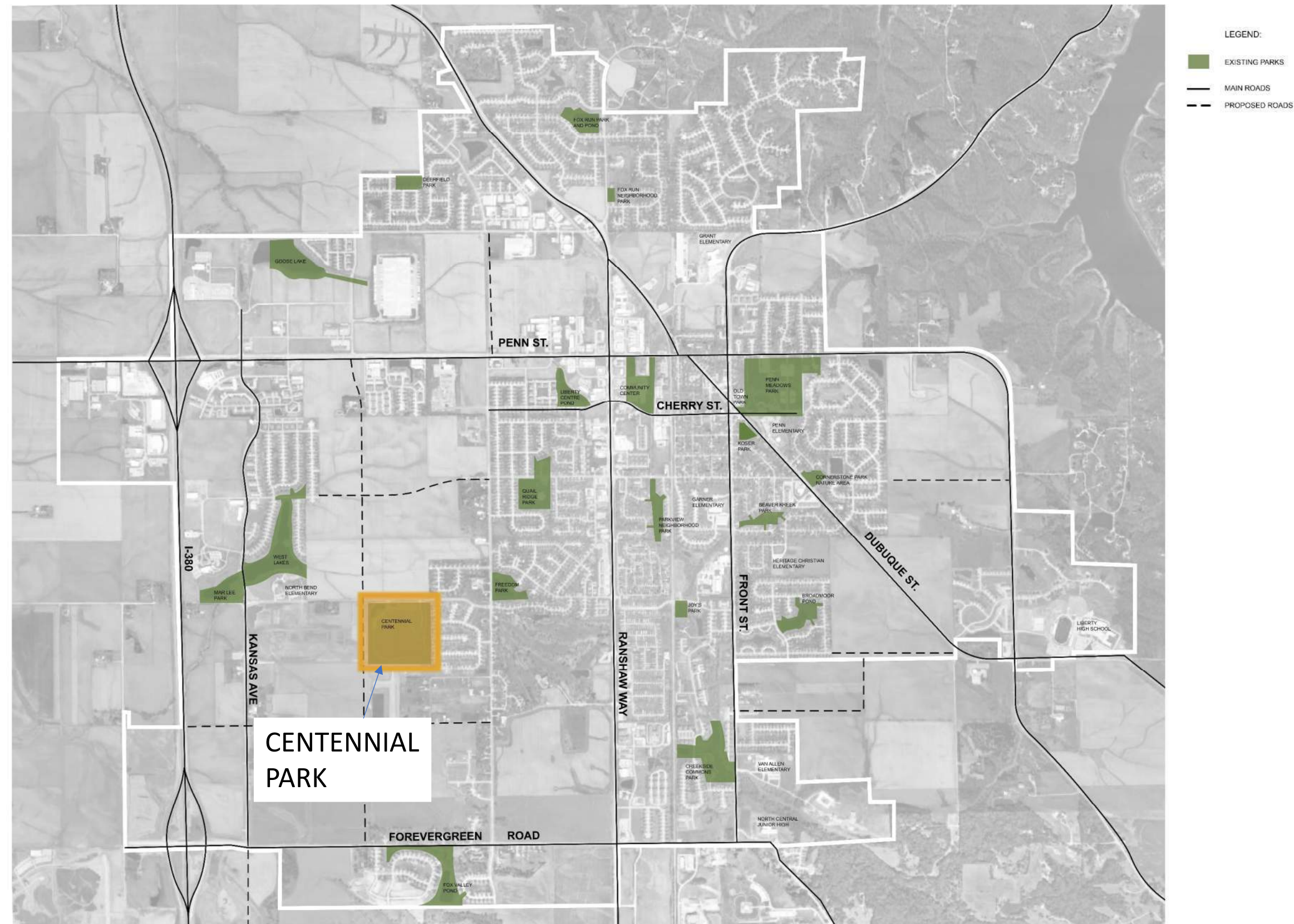




## framework

### CREATING THE 'THERE'

- Recommendation: Re-focus on Centennial Park as a major community resource





## framework

### CREATING THE 'THERE'

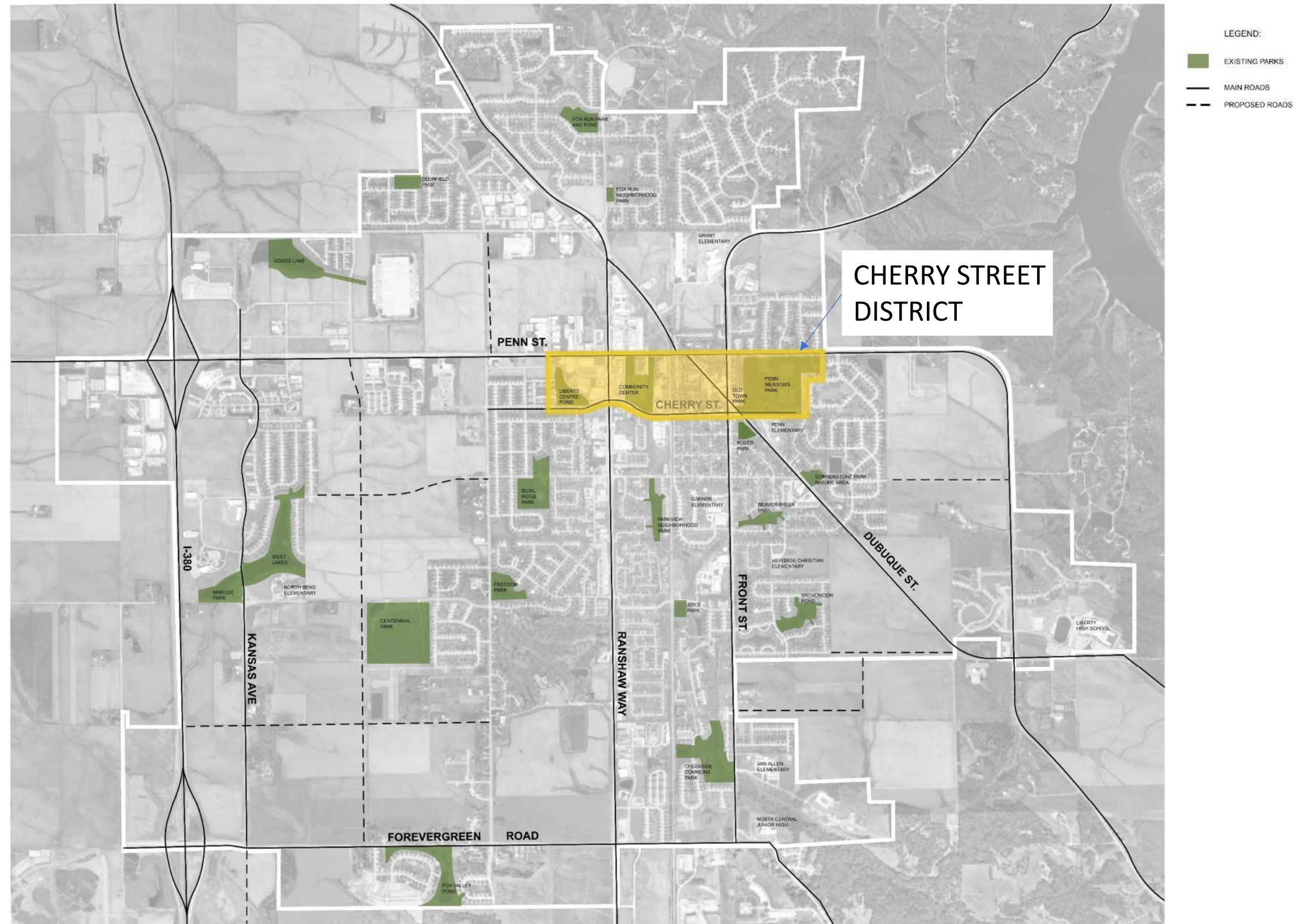
- Recommendation: Review Centennial Park Master Plan and prioritize projects
- City has made a significant investment to date – makes sense to leverage that investment
- Review Master Plan. Have needs or priorities changed?
- Focus on linkages to the surrounding neighborhoods and the community – especially the Liberty Loop!





## BIG IDEA: Cherry Street District Reinvestment

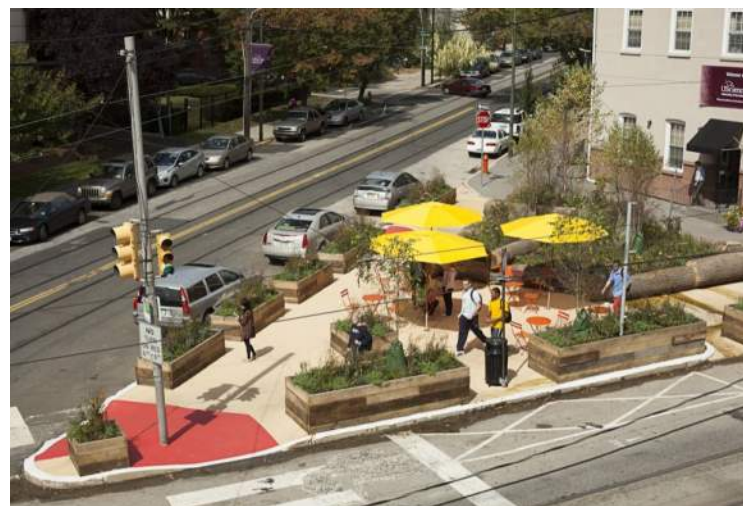
- Recommendation: Complete a Reinvestment Study for the District





# BIG IDEA: Cherry Street District Reinvestment

- Recommendation: Focus on the Cherry Street District as the center of the Community
- Vibrant mixed-use, pedestrian oriented district
- Build on core of public uses, parks and trail connectivity
- Build identity through own streetscape, graphics, etc
- Consider opportunities for additional shopping, dining, entertainment and housing.





## framework

CREATING THE 'THERE'

### BIG IDEA: What Else?!

Need to always ask:

- What's missing?
- Are there new ideas?
- Are there new needs?
- How can we best serve the community?





## How to accomplish these things?

- Understand this is a long-term process
  - Need a plan, need to set priorities and get going
  - Account for capital costs AND operations / staffing costs
- Review comprehensive plan. Are there changes that need to be made to support the recommendations?
  - Trails and greenways plans
- Reinvestment Study for Cherry Street District
- Review and update Centennial Park Master Plan





## How to accomplish these things?

- Detailed streetscape design and costs
- Community signage and wayfinding plan
- Target land acquisitions?
  - Signage
  - Parklets
  - Greenways and trails
  - Other?





# RESEARCH FINDINGS

**PREPARED BY**  
de Novo Marketing  
October 2019

**thinkdenovo.com**



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# RESEARCH REPORT



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## *Executive Summary*

Primary consumer research gives insight into the beliefs and opinions of your most important audiences. Sometimes the research reinforces what you already believe to be true, and sometimes the research challenges your current beliefs, forcing you to reevaluate your thinking and reshape your strategies.

The City of North Liberty research reinforced many of the commonly held beliefs about the community and provided valuable information about what residents deemed important about the community now and how they would like the community to evolve in the future.

By and large, North Liberty residents are extremely positive about their community. They like where they live and are proud to be there. They perceive the community as centrally located and convenient to everything they need such as jobs, family and entertainment. They also feel a sense of community and safety within their neighborhoods.

Although there is disagreement on a number of topics such as sustained community growth (some want to see growth continue, others would prefer it slows) and affordability (some perceived the community as expensive with no affordable housing options and high taxes, while others felt it was affordable compared to other options), even those that disagree are typically positive about North Liberty overall.

The one area that was identified as having the most potential for improvement is the desire for more opportunities and spaces for community engagement and gathering. Although residents reported feeling close to their community, they also reported the need for a town square, larger rec center or some sort of focal point that is uniquely North Liberty. Although this may not be a possibility at this time, it should be considered with future development plans.

North Liberty has a positive reputation, happy residents and engaged city leadership. The rebranding, visioning and streetscaping efforts will further reinforce the connection to the community and provide another opportunity to share North Liberty's community pride.



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## ***Research Objective***

Conduct a resident and visitor research study to understand perceptions of the City of North Liberty; uncover, define and share North Liberty's intrinsic brand; and help articulate a community vision based on resident ideas.

We sought to understand perceptions about North Liberty: why people love/don't love North Liberty; what drives people to choose to live in North Liberty; and how likely they are to recommend North Liberty to their friends and family. Although we believed we had a solid understanding of residents' feelings about their city, we wanted to confirm those assumptions with the research.

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## ***Methodology***

An in-person key stakeholder meeting was held with city leadership, staff, business and community leaders on June 4, 2019. Following the stakeholder meeting, an online survey with both qualitative and quantitative questions was developed and deployed using Survey Monkey. Respondents to the survey were asked to self-identify as a resident of North Liberty or as a visitor. Subsequent question paths were segmented based on which answers the respondent provided. Finally, a SPARK North Liberty community visioning event was held with members of the community.

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## ***Survey Distribution***

The online survey was deployed on July 10, 2019 and closed on August 9, 2019. It was distributed via email to the North Liberty City Government email list as well as posted on social media (primarily Facebook) and amplified to a wider audience via paid promotion. The survey included an incentive to maximize responses—a chance to win a North Liberty prize package for any participant who filled out the survey and provided their contact information.

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## ***Survey Promotion***

A series of four promoted posts and ads were placed on Facebook targeting users ages 18-65+ within a 10-mile radius of North Liberty.

TOTAL REACH: 26,762  
TOTAL IMPRESSIONS: 75,639  
TOTAL CLICKS: 2,240



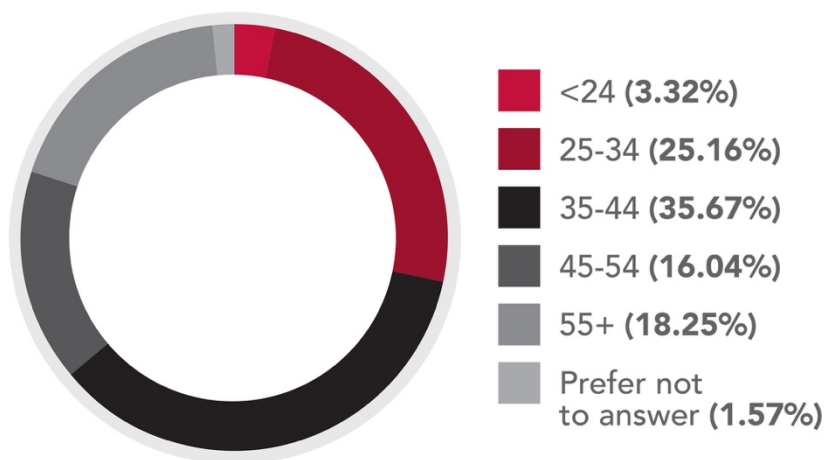
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## ***Respondent Information***

Our initial goal of receiving 400 responses was far surpassed as 1,386 people participated in the survey. Of that, 1,240 respondents (89.47%) self-identified as residents and 146 (10.53%) as nonresidents.

## **DEMOGRAPHICS**

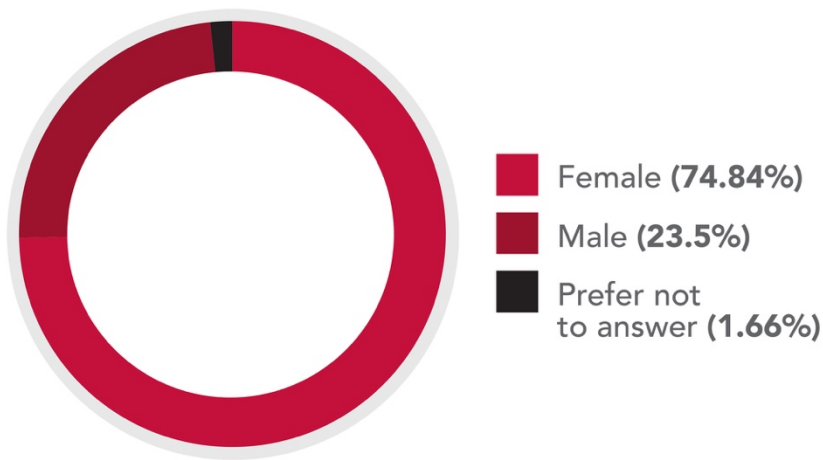
### **Q. What is your age?**



We had a fairly even distribution of age groups, which provided a cross section of respondents. The 35-44 age bracket had the highest number of responses, followed by the 25-34 age group. This falls in line with your city demographic breakdown from census data.

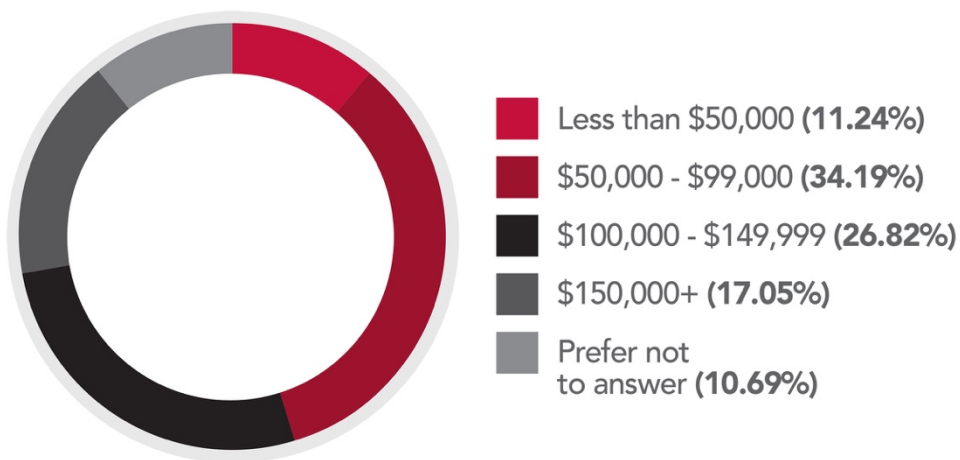


### Q. What is your gender?



We would have liked to see a more balanced breakdown between male/female respondents. However, we distributed the list via email and social media and were not targeting specific demographics. We were more concerned with generating a high number of quality responses versus targeting a specific demographic, as we thought that would be more valuable overall.

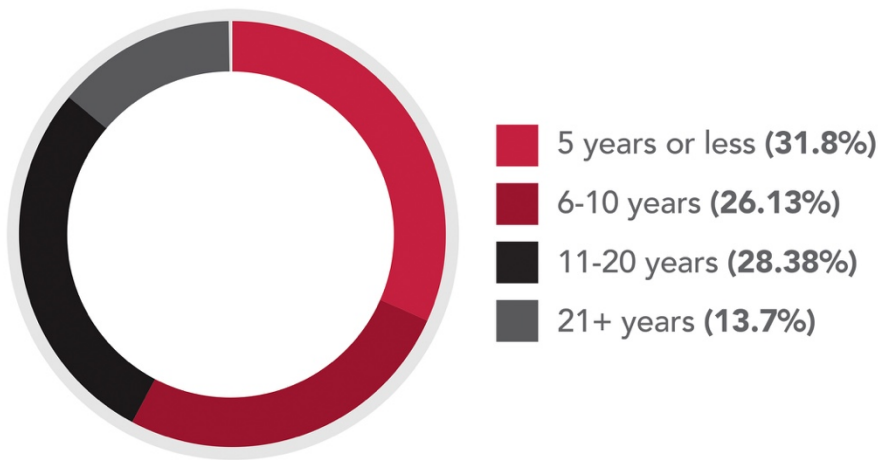
### Q. What is your household income?



Per the most recent census projections, North Liberty's median household income is just over \$57,600. The largest percentage of respondents fall in the \$50,000 - \$99,999 bracket, which is reflective of your community. We had a solid number of respondents in each bracket, which helps us build strategies that appeal to all residents, not just one segment.

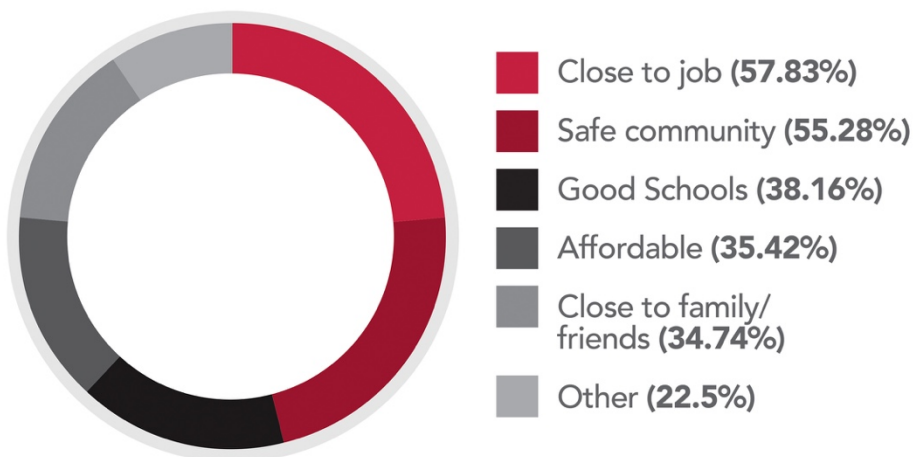
## RESIDENT FINDINGS

### Q. How long have you lived in North Liberty?



We were pleased to see an even cross section of length of time living in North Liberty. This gives us a broad range of perspectives from new residents to those who have been here for decades and have experienced firsthand the community's rapid growth.

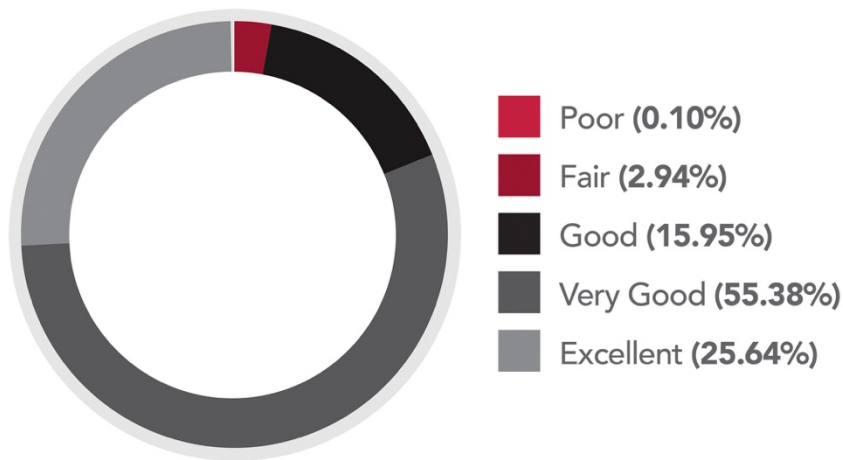
### Q. Why did you choose to live in North Liberty?



This question allowed people to choose multiple responses, which is why the responses add up to more than 100%. People choose to live in North Liberty for these main reasons. The "other" answers varied, but common responses included: between Cedar Rapids/Iowa City, location, close to UI and UI Hospitals, affordable houses/new houses, and small-town feel.

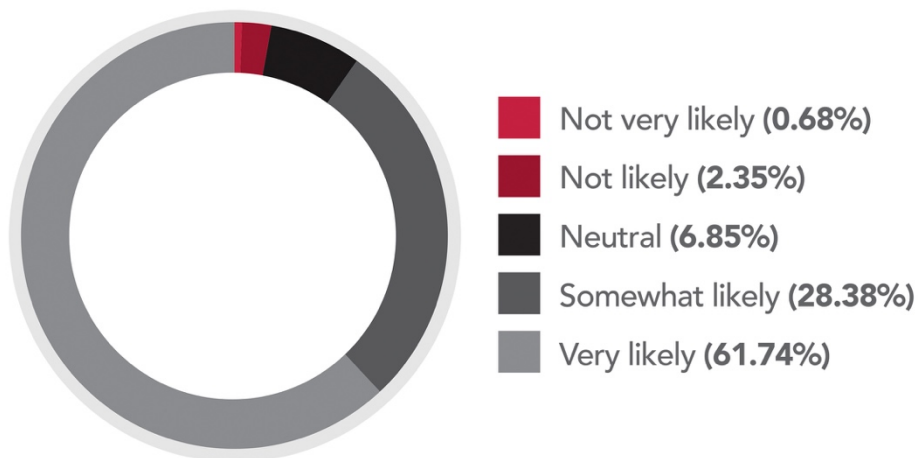


### Q. Generally speaking, how would you rate North Liberty as a place to live?



81% of respondents rate North Liberty as *Very Good* or *Excellent* as a place to live. When you add in *Good* as a response, 96.8% respond positively.

### Q. How likely are you to recommend North Liberty as a place to live to a friend, family member or acquaintance??



90% of respondents are *somewhat* or *very likely* to recommend North Liberty to others. This question is more about attitudes rather than behaviors. When used in conjunction with other attitudes, beliefs and satisfaction questions, it can be very informative in measuring present attitudes. It's a simple question that should be followed-up with an open-ended question to probe why a respondent selected the choice that they did. North Liberty ranks very highly on all of the attitude, beliefs and satisfaction questions, reflecting a high level of satisfaction by the majority of residents.

### Q. Why would you recommend North Liberty to others?

The most frequently provided responses to this open-ended follow-up question include community (13%) and small-town feel (8%). Other top responses: love, good, close, great, growing, housing, people, family, safe.

## A sampling of verbatim comments:

*"Beautiful. Progressive. Rec Center. Parks. Geographic Location between Iowa City & Cedar Rapids. Growth. Well-managed."*

*"Small enough to know the community but large enough for there to be a lot to do."*

*"A very safe and friendly community but some costs are high in the area."*

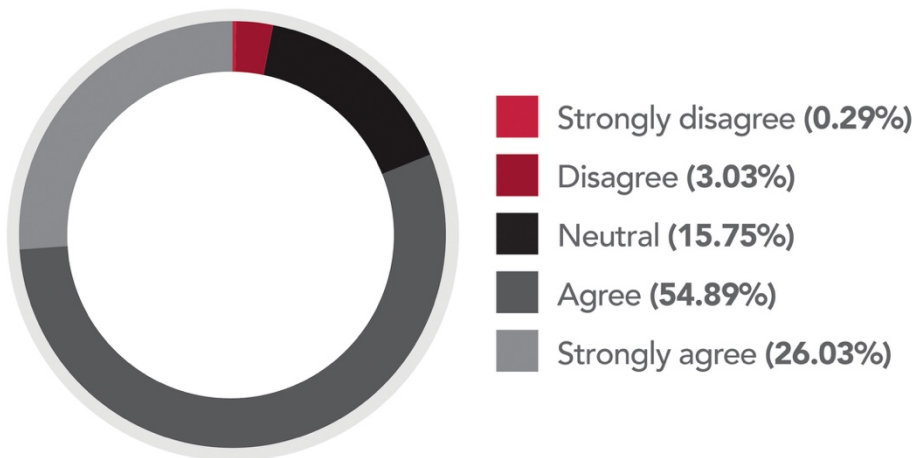
A full listing of responses is available in the addendum.

## Q. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

A simple, internal brand statement that helps to align community attributes with values was developed during the key stakeholder kickoff. This statement helps to define the unique attributes of North Liberty (engaged, connected, community) and the values that are relevant to the community (home, growth). This is the brand statement developed by the stakeholders:

*North Liberty is an engaged, connected community to call home and grow.*

Survey respondents were asked to rank whether they agreed or disagreed with this statement. The respondent breakdown is as follows:



81% of survey respondents *agree* or *strongly agree* with the statement, 16% were *neutral* and 3% *disagree* or *strongly disagree* with the statement.



### Q. What words best describe North Liberty?

Survey respondents were asked to provide three words that describe North Liberty. This question is aimed at gathering top of mind perceptions of the community. We were looking for repeat words and/or themes to help identify overarching perceptions. Dozens of words were submitted and a visual representation of the most frequently mentioned words is below.



A full listing of responses is available in the addendum.

## Q. What is the best thing about living in North Liberty?

This open-ended question was included to help identify key drivers of resident satisfaction and points of pride within North Liberty. This is important for the branding initiative but also for informing the community vision. Since this question is open-ended, there were more than one thousand unique answers. We grouped the responses into related topics and included the top five responses below:

1. Location
2. Community
3. Close
4. Small town feel
5. People

A full listing of responses is available in the addendum.

## Q. If you had one wish for North Liberty, what would it be?

The question “if you had one wish for North Liberty, what would it be?” was asked specifically to inform the vision for North Liberty. A variety of answers were provided; however, the major theme revolves around the desire for more opportunities and places for community engagement and gathering, including more social amenities, third spaces and connection to the community.

### A sampling of verbatim comments:

*“Growing smartly: minimizing the loss of a small town feel during all of the development.”*

*“More parks, especially near the areas that are being built up by the interstate.”*

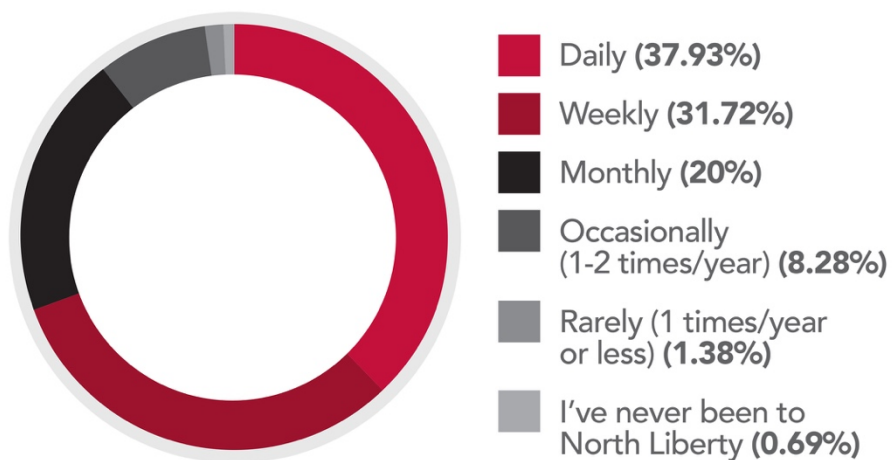
*“Quality public transportation”*

*“No more strip malls”*

A full listing of responses is available in the addendum.

## NONRESIDENT FINDINGS

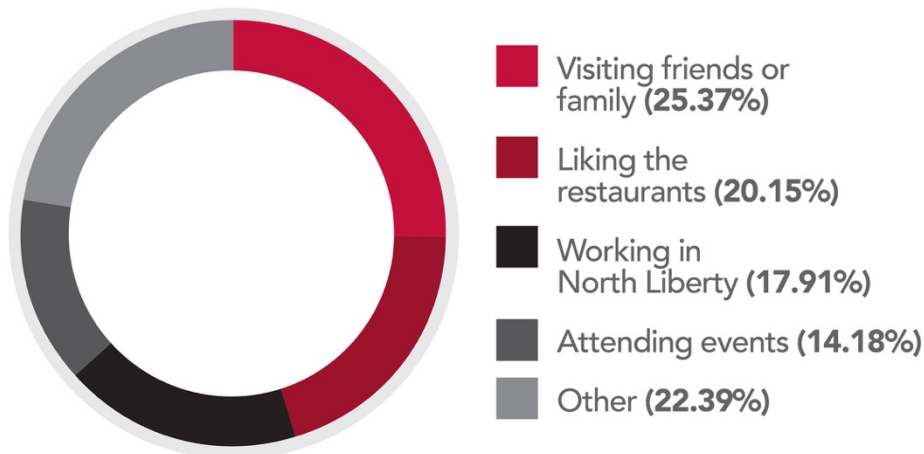
### Q. How often do you visit North Liberty?





## Q. What is the main reason you visit?

This question only allowed for one response per person. Although there may be multiple reasons for visiting, we wanted to know the main thing that brought people to North Liberty. The main reasons for visiting North Liberty include:



Many of the “other” responses belong in one of the categories provided, but there were a number of “shopping/errands/groceries” mentioned as well as the rec center and working out and/or going to the gym.

## Q. What words best describe North Liberty?

Similar to the resident survey, we wanted to gauge top of mind perceptions of North Liberty from nonresidents. We asked respondents to list three separate words that come to mind when they think of North Liberty. Similarly to residents, the majority of responses were positive.

Top responses include:

Growing	Busy
Friendly	Family Friendly
Clean	Construction
Small	Safe
Community	Food

# COMMUNITY IDENTITY IN THE ENVIRONMENT

This branding and visioning effort includes helping to determine what community identity elements within the environment are important to residents and help to define North Liberty. Working in tandem with Shive-Hattery, these findings will help to inform future streetscape and environmental branding priorities and investments.

Identifying when you are in a community is important, especially when it is bordered by other communities. We wanted to know if respondents could tell when they entered North Liberty by the elements within the environment. 74% of respondents report that they can tell when they arrive in North Liberty.

We also wanted to know which community identity elements were most liked and most impactful to the community. We provided five individual community identity elements and asked respondents to select yes or no to the question: “Does this element add to the community identity?” The percentage who believe these elements add to the community identity is below.

## Q. Does this element add to the community identity?



### **Roundabouts:**

80% believe roundabouts add to the community identity.



### **Lighted bridge elements:**

79% believe lighted bridge elements add to the community identity.





**Pole banners:**

89% believe pole banners add to the community identity.



**Intersection improvements:**

88% believe intersection improvements such as stone pillars and seat walls add to the community identity.



**Roadway median plantings and enhancements:**

72% believe roadway median plantings and enhancements add to the community identity.

Overall, residents believe the environmental branding elements are important and add to the community identity. We will take these findings and incorporate them in the streetscape and environmental plans moving forward.

## ***Key Stakeholder Kickoff Findings***

The key stakeholder kickoff is an important first step in the process. This serves as an introduction to our team and yours and other leaders in the community who may be involved in the process. We run through a series of exercises designed to draw out the intrinsic community brand, we find out what's really important to stakeholders, and we share hopes, dreams and visions for the community and the process. The meeting is focused on the future of the community and how we build a visual identity that supports the direction the community intends to go.

The stakeholders of North Liberty were engaged and passionate about the community. Many thoughts and opinions were shared in the meeting, with the largest takeaways being the following:

- Desire to rebrand for growth; have more of a plan to deliberately manage growth moving forward.
- Want more third spaces and community gathering spaces; would like a showplace/community hub.
- Want to be “known” without having to say (by IC/CR).
- Focus is on quality of life, with economic development as a secondary priority for branding.
- Desire to create a sense of place, not so transitional; want to be a place for families to put down roots and grow; multi-generational.

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## ***Spark North Liberty Event Findings***

Spark North Liberty is an event designed to engage the community with big ideas and storytelling. The purpose is to find out what North Liberty means to community members and uncover some big ideas that could potentially drive future innovation. This process allows the general public to be a part of the brand development and builds momentum and buy-in from the community. It also helps to identify those who will carry your brand forward in the future. This event was held at Tin Roost restaurant on Tuesday, July 30, and was attended by approximately 80 people with ten groups presenting ideas or stories.



The ten ideas and stories included a desire for a roller skating rink, a public park for extreme sports, a community garden/gathering space, co-housing/small housing community, a story about the folks you meet when walking to work in North Liberty, a new discovery school and a story about North Liberty linking the Corridor.

Most of the ideas centered around building more community gathering/engagement spaces. There was also a focus on activities and environmentalism (ways to be active: biking, swimming, trails, sidewalks, natural play areas, etc.; recycling, reducing carbon footprint, etc.) All of them reflected energy and community.