2026

Bennington Downtown Redevelopment Plan



JEO Consulting Group, Inc.

Introduction

This Bennington Downtown Redevelopment Plan (Redevelopment Plan) provides a guideline for the community to develop remedies for designated "Community Redevelopment Area(s)" exhibiting a variety of deteriorating or dilapidated physical, social, or economic conditions. This Redevelopment Plan attempts to eliminate problems and issues identified in these Community Redevelopment Areas that are detrimental to the social and economic well-being of the neighborhoods in which they exist. The existing conditions in these Community Redevelopment Areas are considered beyond the remedy and control of the normal regulatory process or impossible to reverse through the ordinary operations of private enterprise.

The purpose of this Redevelopment Plan is to identify general goals and objectives for the redevelopment of the area identified in the City of Bennington, Nebraska, Downtown Blight and Substandard Study Area. With the adoption of this Redevelopment Plan, the Community Development Agency (CDA) will recognize the need to utilize appropriate private and public resources to eliminate or prevent the development or spread of urban blight, encourage needed urban rehabilitation, provide for the redevelopment of substandard and blighted areas, and/or undertake such of the aforesaid activities or other feasible municipal activities as may be suitably employed to achieve the goals and objectives set forth herein.

The Bennington Downtown Redevelopment Plan consists of two major parts. First is the General Redevelopment Plan, which addresses the broader goals of the entire redevelopment area. In the future as specific projects are identified, there will be the second portion of the Redevelopment Plan with project specific redevelopment goals and objectives that address a specific area to greater detail but tier from the General Redevelopment Plan. These specific redevelopment projects shall comply with the Downtown Redevelopment Plan and the requirements under Nebraska's Community Development Law.

As these additional projects are approved, the Redevelopment Plan shall be amended to include the specific projects criteria and site plan.

Nebraska Community Development Law

The Nebraska Legislature enacted the Community Development Law (Neb. Rev. Stat. §18-2101 through §18-2154), which permits cities of all classes to establish a Community Development Agency (CDA). The laws permit CDAs to undertake broad urban renewal and municipal growth opportunities through a variety of mechanisms. The Community Development Law enables cities to take steps to eliminate blight through the acquisition, clearance, and disposition of property for purposes of redevelopment or through the conservation and rehabilitation of property.

The City of Bennington Community Development Agency, in accordance with the Nebraska Community Development Law, prepared the General Redevelopment Plan. Prior to recommending the General Redevelopment Plan to the City Council for approval, the CDA shall:

> *…consider whether the proposed land uses and building requirements in the redevelopment project areas are designed with the general purpose of accomplishing, in conformance with the general plan, a coordinated, adjusted, and harmonious development of the city and its environs which will, in accordance with present and future needs, promote health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and the general welfare, as well as efficiency and economy in the process of development, including, among other things, adequate provision for traffic, vehicular parking, the promotion of safety from fire, panic, and other dangers, adequate provision for light and air, the promotion of the healthful and convenient distribution of the population, the provision of adequate transportation, water, sewerage, and other public utilities, schools, parks, recreational and community facilities, and other public requirements, the promotion of sound design and arrangement, the wise and efficient expenditure of public funds, and the prevention of the recurrence of insanitary or unsafe dwelling accommodations or conditions of blight. Neb. Rev. Stat. §18-2113.*

General Redevelopment Plan Components

After an area has been designated as blighted and substandard, the CDA may proceed with the preparation of a General Redevelopment Plan. The purpose of the General Redevelopment Plan is to identify possible redevelopment projects in the identified areas, and it shall:

- Be consistent with the general plan of the community; and
- Indicate the actions that will be needed to conduct the redevelopment project, including land acquisition, demolition and removal of structures, redevelopment, improvements, rehabilitation, zoning changes, land uses, densities, and building requirements.

Redevelopment Plan Projects

The General Redevelopment Plan identifies general redevelopment projects within eligible Community Redevelopment Areas as identified in the Blight and Substandard Study. Project specific redevelopment plans shall conform to the General Redevelopment Plan added to the Bennington Downtown Redevelopment Plan.

Pursuant to the Nebraska Community Development Law, the CDA shall afford maximum opportunity for redevelopment of the area, consistent with the needs of the City as a whole and by private enterprise undertaking redevelopment activities within the areas discussed herein. A redevelopment project may involve a broad range of activities in a designated area, including:

- To acquire substandard and blighted areas or portions thereof, including lands, structures, or improvements the acquisition of which is necessary or incidental to the proper clearance, development, or redevelopment of such substandard and blighted areas,
- To clear any such areas by demolition or removal of existing buildings, structures, streets, utilities, or other improvements thereon and to install, construct, or reconstruct streets, utilities, parks, playgrounds, public spaces, public parking facilities, sidewalks or moving sidewalks, convention and civic centers, bus stop shelters, lighting, benches or other similar furniture, trash receptacles, shelters, skywalks and pedestrian and vehicular overpasses and underpasses, and any other necessary public improvements essential to the preparation of sites for uses in accordance with a redevelopment plan,
- To sell, lease, or otherwise make available land in such areas for residential, recreational, commercial, industrial, or other uses, including parking or other facilities functionally related or subordinate to such uses, or for public use or to retain such land for public use, in accordance with a redevelopment plan, and may also include the preparation of the redevelopment plan, the planning, survey, and other work incident to a redevelopment project and the preparation of all plans and arrangements for carrying out a redevelopment project,
- To dispose of all real and personal property or any interest in such property, or assets, cash, or other funds held or used in connection with residential, recreational, commercial, industrial, or other uses, including parking or other facilities functionally related or subordinate to such uses, or any public use specified in a redevelopment plan or project, except that such disposition shall be at its fair value for uses in accordance with the redevelopment plan,
- To acquire real property in a community redevelopment area which, under the redevelopment plan, is to be repaired or rehabilitated for dwelling use or related facilities, repair or rehabilitate the structures, and resell the property; and
- To conduct plans for a program of voluntary or compulsory repair and rehabilitation of buildings or other improvements in accordance with the redevelopment plan.
- A detailed proposal outlining the redevelopment project/or activity must be submitted to the CDA for evaluation prior to approval as a qualified Redevelopment Project.

Relationship to General Plan

The general plan for the development of the City of Bennington, Nebraska, known as "The Comprehensive Plan," is incorporated herein by reference. In the event the terms and conditions of this General Redevelopment Plan are not in conformance with the Comprehensive Plan, the provisions of the Comprehensive Plan shall supersede those of the General Redevelopment Plan. The adoption of this General

Redevelopment Plan, or any modifications, additions, or amendments thereto, shall not be deemed to be an amendment of the Comprehensive Plan.

Funding for Redevelopment Projects

There are a number of funding sources available for communities to use in order to initiate redevelopment activities in designated blighted and substandard areas. These include, in addition to city, state, and federal funds commonly utilized to undertake redevelopment activities, the use of Community Development Block Grant funding programs, special assessments, general obligation bonds, and tax increment financing. The following narrative further describes tax increment financing in Nebraska.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) in Nebraska is designed to finance certain costs associated with a private development and is a common tool utilized for redevelopment activities in designated blighted and substandard community redevelopment areas. TIF provides a means of encouraging private investment in deteriorating areas by allowing local governments to use the increase in certain property tax revenues to pay the costs of certain public improvements needed to attract private development. Under the Nebraska Community Development Law, local governments may use TIF only in designated blighted and substandard community redevelopment areas. Following such designation, the CDA prepares a General Redevelopment Plan and amends the General Redevelopment Plan as necessary. TIF projects may include commercial, residential, industrial, or a mix of these uses.

Generally, TIF funds can be used for land acquisition, public improvements, infrastructure, and utilities. The CDA shall conduct a ***cost-benefit analysis*** for each redevelopment project that proposes the use of TIF as a financing tool. This ***cost-benefit analysis*** must use a specific model developed for use by local projects, and shall consider and analyze the following factors:

- Tax shifts resulting from the approval of the use of funds pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §18-2147, as indicated below:
    - …any ad valorem tax levied upon real property in a redevelopment project for the benefit of any public body shall be divided, for a period not to exceed 15 years after the effective date of provision by the governing body, as follows:
    - That portion of the ad valorem tax which is produced by the levy at the rate fixed each year by or for each public body upon the redevelopment project valuation shall be paid into the funds of each such public body in the same proportion as are all other taxes collected by or for the body; and
    - That portion of the ad valorem tax on real property in the redevelopment project in excess of such amount, if any, shall be allocated to, and when collected, paid into a special fund of the CDA to be used solely to pay the principal of, the interest on, and any premiums due in connection with the bonds of, loans, notes, or advances of money to, or indebtedness incurred by, whether funded, refunded, assumed, or otherwise, such authority for financing or refinancing, in whole or in part, a redevelopment project. When such bonds, loans, notes, advances of money, or indebtedness, including interest and premiums due, have been paid, the CDA shall so notify the County Assessor and County Treasurer, and all ad valorem taxes upon taxable property in such a redevelopment project shall be paid into the funds of the respective public bodies.
- Public infrastructure and community public service needs impacts and local tax impacts arising from the approval of the redevelopment project.
- Impacts on employers and employees of firms locating or expanding within the boundaries of the area of the redevelopment project.
- Impacts on other employers and employees within the City and the immediate areas that are located outside of the boundaries of the area of the redevelopment project.
- Any other impacts determined by the CDA to be relevant to the consideration of costs and benefits arising from the redevelopment project.

After a project is approved, the CDA typically authorizes the issuance of TIF bonds to finance public improvements in the designated area. Since this process can work for large developments without increasing any tax rates or adding any new taxes or fees, it appeals to jurisdictions wishing to promote economic development or redevelopment of blighted and substandard areas.

Outline of the General Redevelopment Plan

All provisions of the Blight and Substandard Study are incorporated herein by reference. The General Redevelopment Plan will evaluate the Community Redevelopment Area and identify general redevelopment projects aimed at rehabilitating the Community Redevelopment Area. Project specific redevelopment plans shall follow the General Redevelopment Plan.

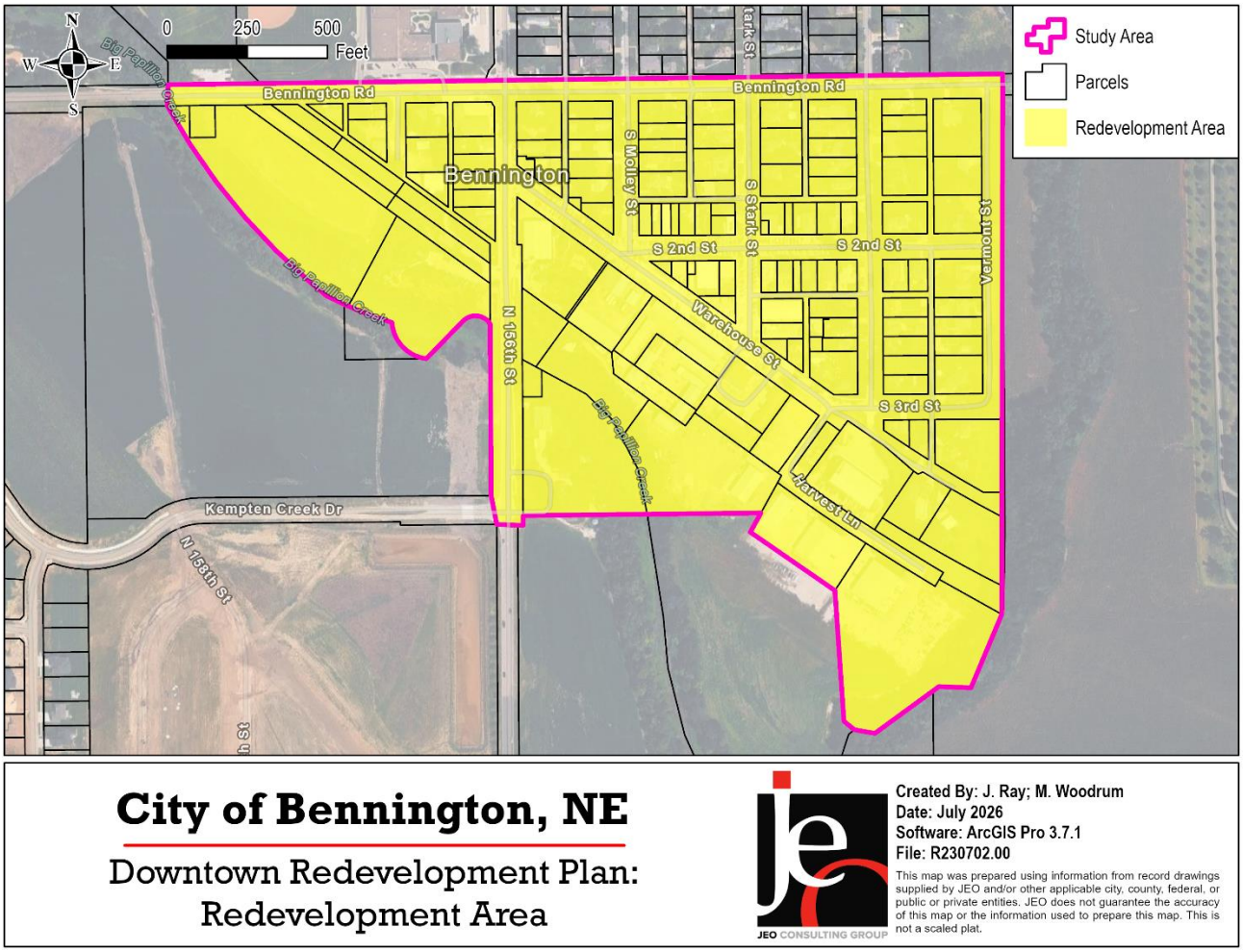
Redevelopment Area

The Redevelopment Area identified by the Bennington CDA and City Council can be found in Figure 1 below. For this General Redevelopment Plan, the 71.2-acre Designated Blight and Substandard Area will be known as the "Redevelopment Area."

The area can be further subdivided into different zones that have their own goals and objectives. Those zones are:

- Core Downtown Business Zone
    - This is the original downtown Bennington. It generally includes the buildings fronting on Warehouse Street and South Second Street between 156th Street and Stark Street.
- Industrial Zone
    - This is the area along Harvest Lane and along Warehouse Street east of Stark Street.
- SW 156th Street Commercial Zone
    - This area is south of Bennington Road, west of 156th Street and north of the Big Papillion Creek but excludes the Heritage Park and Arboretum.
- Residential Zone
    - This is the balance of the redevelopment area.

Figure 1: Designated Redevelopment Area



Legal Description of the Redevelopment Area:

A PARCEL OF LAND LOCATED IN THE NORTHWEST QUARTER OF SECTION 14 AND THE NORTHEAST QUARTER OF SECTION 15, ALL IN TOWNSHIP 16 NORTH, RANGE 11 EAST OF THE SIXTH P.M., IN THE CITY OF BENNINGTON, DOUGLAS COUNTY, NEBRASKA, BEING DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS: BEGINNING AT THE NORTHEAST CORNER OF SAID SECTION 15; THENCE WEST ON THE NORTH LINE OF SAID SECTION 15, A DISTANCE OF 1070 FEET, MORE OR LESS TO THE CENTERLINE OF BIG PAPILLION CREEK; THENCE SOUTHEASTERLY ON SAID CENTERLINE OF BIG PAPILLION CREEK TO THE WEST RIGHT OF WAY LINE OF 156TH STREET; THENCE SOUTH ON SAID WEST RIGHT OF WAY LINE TO THE INTERSECTION WITH THE WESTERLY EXTENSION OF THE SOUTH LINE OF OUTLOT B, ORIGINAL TOWN OF BENNINGTON; THENCE EAST ON THE SOUTH LINE OF SAID OUTLOT B AND ITS WESTERLY EXTENSION AND THE SOUTH LINE OF LOT C, ORIGINAL TOWN OF BENNINGTON TO THE SOUTHEAST CORNER OF SAID LOT C; THENCE SOUTHERLY AND EASTERLY ON THE SOUTH LINE OF THE EXISTING BENNINGTON CORPORATE LIMITS TO THE SOUTHEAST CORNER OF LOT 21, WAREHOUSE LOTS; THENCE NORTH ON THE EAST LINE OF LOT 21, WAREHOUSE LOTS, TO THE NORTHEAST CORNER OF SAID LOT 21; THENCE NORTH ON THE EAST LINE OF VERMONT STREET (NOW VACATED) TO THE NORTH LINE OF THE NORTHWEST CORNER OF SAID SECTION 14; THENCE WEST ON SAID NORTH LINE, A DISTANCE OF 1550 FEET, MORE OR LESS TO THE POINT OF BEGINNING.

Condition of the Real Property

The Redevelopment Area has several items contributing to the blighted and substandard conditions. Based on the information collected and analyzed pursuant to the Community Development Law, the Redevelopment Area has several items that were considered beyond the remedy and control of the normal regulatory process of the City of Bennington or impossible to reverse through the ordinary operations of private enterprise. These conditions include:

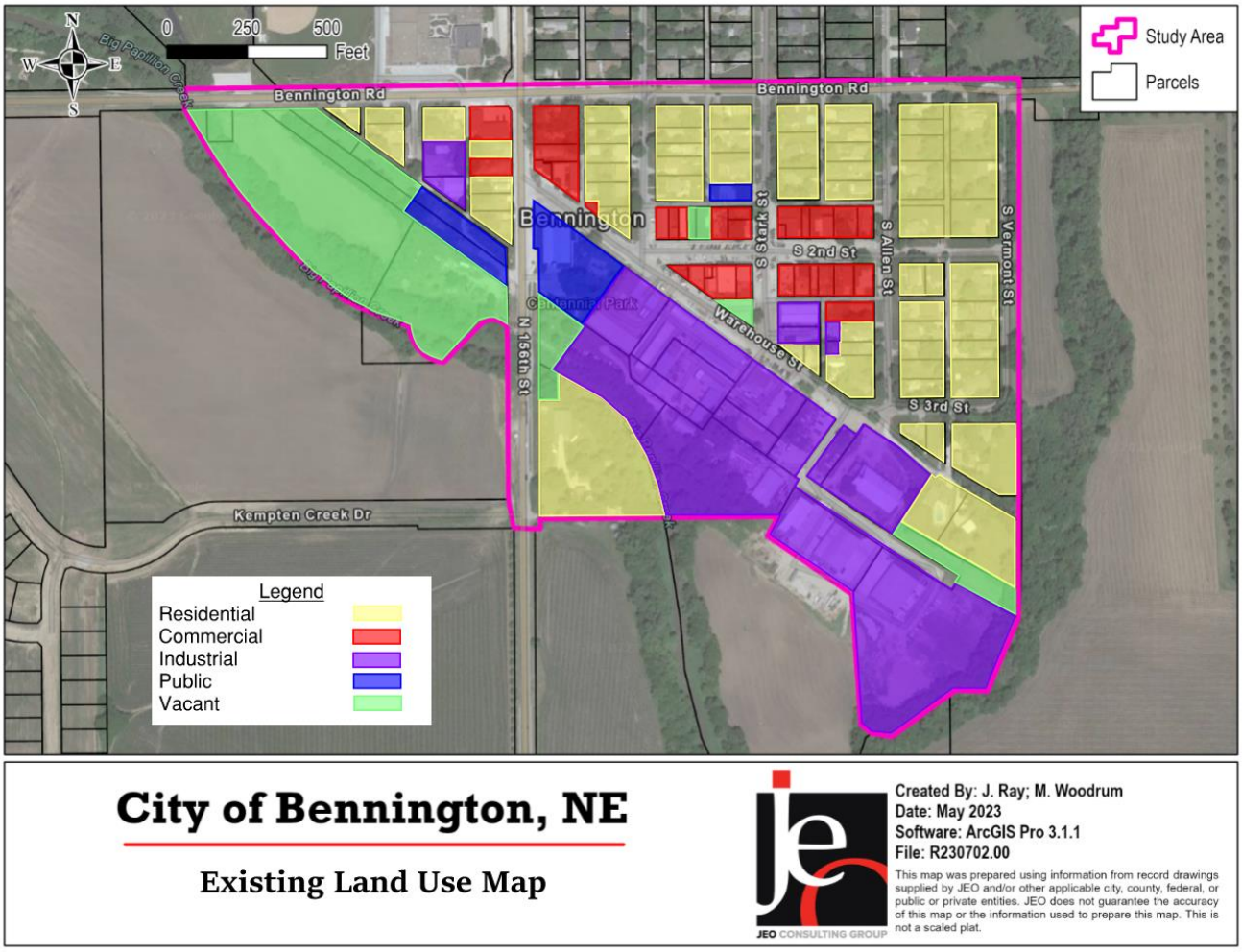
Table 1: Summary Matrix

Criteria	
Structure condition	Yes
Street layout	Yes
Faulty lot layout	Yes
Insanitary or unsafe conditions	Yes
Deterioration of site	Yes
Diversity of owners	Yes
Tax special assessment	No
Title conditions	No
Obsolete platting	Yes
Endanger life/property	Yes
Any combination	Yes
Age of structures	Yes
BLIGHT TOTALS	10/12
Exterior inspection of structures	Yes
Age of structures	Yes
Inadequate provision for ventilation, sanitation	No
Other Substandard – (conducive to ill health, floodplain, endanger life)	Yes
SUBSTANDARD TOTALS	**3/4**
TOTALS	**13/16**

A number of conditions within the Redevelopment Area were evaluated during the field survey which contributed to blighted and substandard conditions. The remediation of such conditions in the Redevelopment Area, Figure 1, are recommended for further action.

Existing Land Uses

Figure 2: Existing Land Uses in the Redevelopment Area



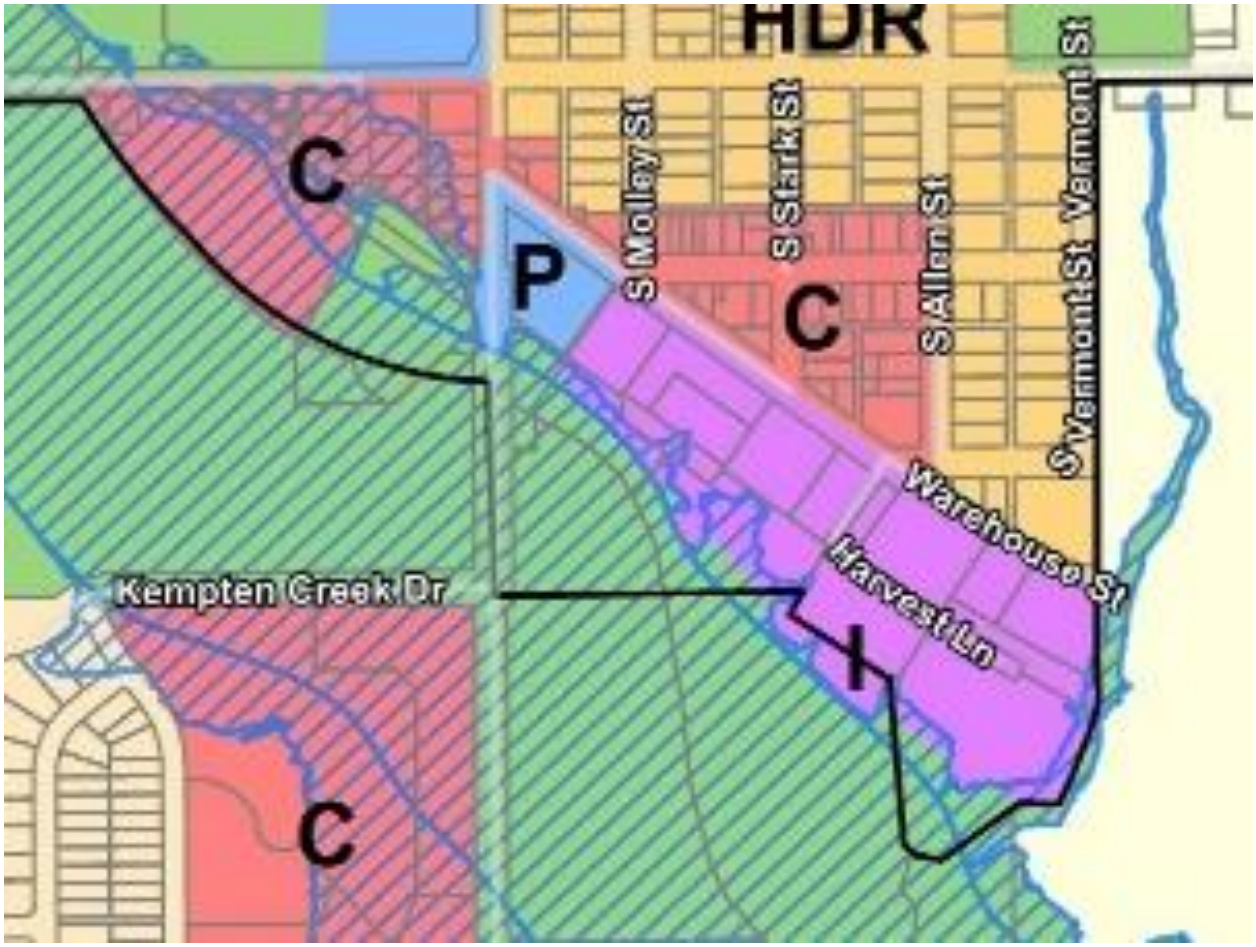
Redevelopment Area General Redevelopment Recommendations

As redevelopment projects are considered for the area, a number of existing conditions should be improved through planning and redevelopment activities. These activities include:

- Encourage and consider incentives to develop or redevelop parcels for job producing developments (commercial and industrial uses) within the Redevelopment Area.
- For underutilized or vacant properties, the City should encourage development that compliments the existing neighborhood and conforms to the Future Land Use Map of the Comprehensive Plan.
- Utilize nuisance abatement tools for the repair or removal of deteriorating structures and hazardous conditions on parcels in the Redevelopment Area.
- The development of a master plan for reconstructing or constructing portions of the infrastructure in the Redevelopment Area.
- Explore public trails and park space along Big Papillion Creek with adjacent commercial or public development to create a unique sense of place that engages the natural environment.
- The extension of paved public roads and utilities that continue the rectilinear grid of the community.
- Enforcement of the land use and zoning regulations that will guide the future development and redevelopment of structures within the Redevelopment Area as the existing Comprehensive Plan depicts for the area.

- Utilize best management practices for development near the flood plain.
- All new development should be consistent with the Future Land Use Map shown in Figure 3 and the standards of population densities, land coverage, and building intensities regulated by the Zoning Regulations of the City of Bennington.
- Removal of deteriorating or dilapidated structures, the determination of which will depend upon the severity of the substandard condition of the individual structures by adopting and enforcing a building and property maintenance code.
- Improvement of unsanitary and unsafe conditions related to inadequate drainage and other related infrastructure issues.
- Development and improvement of public infrastructure including streets, sidewalks, water, sanitary sewer, storm drainage, electrical, gas, and telecommunication systems, on a case-by-case basis to support redevelopment projects in the Redevelopment Area.
- The General Redevelopment Plan does not propose any changes to the zoning ordinance, street layouts, street levels or grades or building codes.
- Amend this General Redevelopment Plan upon review and approval of qualified project specific redevelopment plans within this Redevelopment Area.

Figure 3: Future Land Use Map



Source: The Bennington Comprehensive Plan, as updated (most recently in 2025)

Economic Activities

Community and government leaders across the country have come to the realization that they not only can but must initiate programs to enhance their local economy. Communities throughout Nebraska have sometimes provided enormous subsidies to try to entice large businesses to build manufacturing plants within their

communities, while others have started small loan funds to encourage "micro-enterprise" businesses or created "incubators" that provide office space and services to a variety of small businesses. Even with a booming economy and one of the lowest unemployment rates in modern history - on a national level, the long-term economic development goal of job creation and business retention remains at the forefront for the City of Bennington.

Core Downtown Business Zone Redevelopment Recommendations

As redevelopment projects are considered for the zone, they should support or improve the environment for existing and proposed businesses through planning and redevelopment activities. These include:

Entrepreneurial Development

Entrepreneurship is the starting point, the foundation, and the backbone of economies at every level. In fact, the origins of most large companies can be traced, directly or indirectly, to one or more entrepreneurial founders. Promoting entrepreneurial development, however, is a relatively new and increasingly popular approach to economic development for communities. The approach has gained favor because it builds on the skills and talent already existing within the community.

Entrepreneurs are at the heart of the American economy because they drive innovation. Small businesses are established on the premise that they can do a better job of creating new products and services, change the competitiveness of the market, institute new and dynamic ways of doing business, reduce economic leakages within the local economy, and connect the community to the larger global market. Creating value through innovation is a common theme that penetrates nearly every accepted definition of entrepreneurship.

The value of American entrepreneurship cannot be overstated. According to the Office of Advocacy, Small Business Administration, entrepreneurial businesses:

- Are typically owned and operated by individuals with higher education levels. Over two-third of all present-day college students intend to become entrepreneurs at some point in their career.
- Represent 99.7% of all employers.
- Employ half of all private sector employees.
- Pay 44.3% of the total U.S. private payroll.
- Generate 70% of net new jobs annually over the last decade.
- Create more than 50% of non-farm private gross domestic product (GDP).
- Produce 14 times more patents per employee than large patenting firms.
- Are employers of 39% of high-tech workers (such as scientists, engineers, and computer workers).
- Are 53% home-based and 3% franchises.
- Make up 97% of all identified exporters and produce 29% of known export value.

These staggering statistics prove that entrepreneurial development can serve as a powerful engine for economic development. Besides the tangible benefits, small businesses are known to be more environmentally friendly than large employers, have the unique ability to blend into the existing business climate, and radiate a quaint charm that attracts people to a community’s main street.

Effective entrepreneurial development requires a thorough understanding of obstacles faced by entrepreneurs. With the odds stacked squarely against them, small business concerns need cooperation from public and private stakeholders in devising intervention strategies that will enhance their chances of success. Common barriers faced by entrepreneurs include:

- Isolation from markets, service providers and other entrepreneurs.
- Limited opportunities for mentoring and networking.
- Absence of clusters to support networking.

- Lack of capital and other support infrastructure.
- Local culture that does not support entrepreneurship.

Creating support strategies that intentionally focus on the needs of entrepreneurs can provide small businesses and would be entrepreneurs with the intellectual resources essential to starting a business on solid footing, thereby maximizing their chances for greater success.

Physical Improvements

The storefronts and facades of a downtown provide the history and tell the story, true or false, of businesses and the community. These storefronts/facades can paint a picture of economic booms and busts. In addition, they are also the element that most typically defines the character of the downtown area. When working with the typical storefront of older downtowns, it is critical to respect the original character and architectural characteristics of the building. The 1940s through the 1970s saw too many storefronts being covered up with newer "industrial mass produced" materials. A lot of times these makeovers were also hiding potential problems and structure in need of repair.

Façade and Building Improvement Program

To support a healthy downtown business district the buildings must be in good standing and repair. A façade and building improvement program (FBIP) is a mechanism to improve the appearance, weatherization, and accessibility of commercial buildings throughout the downtown area. The City should survey property-owners in the downtown area to solicit feedback on a wide array of issues, ranging from the physical condition of their building, to their potential interest in participating in a façade and building improvement program, if one existed. This primary feedback will help the City establish the guidelines for a potential FBIP.

The FBIP should be flexible to encourage private reinvestment, however improvements should be limited to those that promote rehabilitation measures that maintain or restore the historical appearance, character, and integrity of contributing structures. Improvements should be comprehensive, incorporating enhancements/additions to several components of the existing façade. Examples of eligible improvements include painting, lighting if attached to the structure, windows, doors, stucco, masonry work, tile, signage, canopies, awnings, and restoration of historic properties. Further, the program should be flexible enough to address larger and more costly improvements such as structural, accessibility, roofs, and mechanical.

Customizing the financial assistance to meet the property owners' ability to repay the assistance will help remove the most cited obstacle to rehabilitate facades and remodel of commercial properties in a downtown area. Making these improvements affordable to business owners will create a positive visual impact on downtown Benington, stimulating private investment and complementing other community revitalization efforts.

Improving the appearance, functionality, and energy-efficiency of downtown buildings should be a priority of the City of Bennington.

Sidewalks

Sidewalks play a vital role in city life. As conduits for pedestrian movements and access, they enhance connectivity and promote walking/biking. As public spaces, sidewalks serve as the front steps to the community, activating streets socially and economically. Safe, accessible, and well-maintained sidewalks are a fundamental and necessary investment for communities and have been found to enhance public health and maximize social capital. The City completed a downtown improvement project in 2014 which replaced all streets and sidewalks within this zone.

Despite their importance, the necessity of constructing and replacing sidewalks remains a mammoth commitment and economic challenge for property owners and local governments. In an era where tight municipal budgets leave little room for non-essential services, facilities, and programs, most elected officials recognize that a period of consistent policy, planning, and action is required to make progress towards maintaining sidewalks within the downtown.

Soft Infrastructure

Downtown beautification programs are the cornerstone of small towns and big cities across the U.S. There are obvious reasons why downtown beautification is so popular: people want to be surrounded by beauty. Not only that, but it is also calming. The prior downtown improvement project included some small planting areas which are currently maintained by volunteers.

Expanding on the existing soft infrastructure in the downtown, including additional landscaping, signage, speakers, awnings, trash receptacles, banners, flags, façade improvements, murals, etc. can reveal the values and underpinnings of the local society (the opportunities and constraints therein) and serves as a measure of civic health and vitality. It can also:

- drive sales,
- drive tourism,
- increase community engagement,
- show personality, and
- be the cornerstone for ongoing and sustainable economic development.

When considering what kind of soft infrastructure to install in the downtown area, the City should consider high quality, maintenance free, and durable products that are proven to withstand the elements of Nebraska's extreme climate. Likewise, landscaping should be native and diverse plants/grasses that are conductive to a downtown setting.

Zone Growth

The current industrial uses along Warehouse Street, west of Stark Street, should be redeveloped in accordance with these recommendations to expand the Core Downtown Business Zone. The vision for this area is a commercial mixed-use development with residential uses above the first-floor commercial uses. The commercial uses could be a combination of retail and boutique shops/cafes/artist studios.

Industrial Zone Redevelopment Recommendations

As redevelopment projects are considered for the zone, creating an area with heavier land uses that support the downtown businesses would provide an appropriate transition which can be achieved through planning and redevelopment activities. These include:

Entrepreneurial Development Support

Fabrication, manufacturing or creation of products that can support entrepreneurial efforts would allow those businesses to grow and thrive in the redevelopment area as well as the entire City of Bennington. These types of uses or businesses are best within an industrial area to limit impacts of noise, vibration, odors, dust or other environmental impacts that may effect residential or commercial areas.

Physical Improvements

The facades of the industrial zone should blend with the existing downtown but do not need to match, create or maintain a historic building finish. This zone is at the southern end of the district and will not be as visible from 156th Street or Bennington Road as other zones. The building finishes will still be required to meet standards to support the downtown area.

Sidewalks

As discussed with the Core Downtown Business Zone, installation and maintenance of sidewalks is an important factor in creating a cohesive district. The current industrial zone has a minimal amount of sidewalks and installation of the walks will be required with any building improvements or additions. The City of Bennington could also work with property owners to create a sidewalk improvement district which would allow for construction of the walks with assessments to each property owner.

Soft Infrastructure

The uses in this zone will be more intensive and include less visits by the public than typical retail businesses. That would limit the need for and impact of any beautification programs. Continuing any way-finding signage styles and/or banners could maintain the sense of place and coordination with the downtown businesses.

When considering what kind of soft infrastructure to install in the industrial zone, the City should consider high quality, maintenance free, and durable products that are proven to withstand the elements of Nebraska's extreme climate. Likewise, landscaping if used should be native and diverse plants/grasses that are conducive to an industrial setting.

Zone Growth

The industrial zone does have the potential to expand to the east with property development. There is a creek crossing that would be required to create the connection along Harvest Lane. Expansion to the south is limited by the Big Papillion Creek Floodway.

SW 156th Street Zone Redevelopment Recommendations

As redevelopment projects are considered for the zone, they should encourage redevelopment of parcels transitioning to commercial or mixed-use buildings through planning and redevelopment activities. These include:

Entrepreneurial Development

The same programs as developed for the Core Downtown Business Zone would apply to this area as it is intended to be an extension of the original downtown with the benefit of being able to construct new buildings and include mixed uses within a single site. Some entrepreneurial efforts may require buildings or areas that the Core Downtown Business Zone cannot provide and this area can support that. The proximity and views of the Big Papillion Creek and parks would allow for development of businesses that support those activities.

Physical Improvements

The buildings in this area would likely be new construction, and the downtown overlay district would set the standard for their exterior look and finishes. If a building is being remodeled, the same façade and building improvement program (FBIP) could be used in this area. With its frontage along both 156th Street and Bennington Road (key access routes), they will be very visible to visitors and residents and form their impression of the city.

Sidewalks

Sidewalks would be required with any building construction or improvements. There are already walks along 156th Street and a portion of Bennington Road which would be maintained with any building projects. Sidewalks on the interior of this zone would connect to the existing walks to provide connectivity to the Core Downtown Business Zone.

Soft Infrastructure

The same standards set for the core downtown beautification programs would be required in this zone. This will provide continuity of the zone and provide the same benefits as discussed for the Core Downtown Business Zone.

Residential Zone Redevelopment Recommendations

As redevelopment projects are considered for the zone, they should support the continued residential uses while bringing improvements into line with current regulations. The adjacent residents are key supporters of the businesses in the downtown area. Maintenance and support for the residents will aid in the growth of the downtown. These include:

Physical Improvements

The homes around the downtown area have their own story, which includes the origin and growth of the city. These houses can expand the picture of downtowns economic booms and busts. In addition, they are also the element that most supports the character of the downtown area. When working with the residents around downtown, it is critical to respect the original character and architectural characteristics of the buildings. Mass removal of homes around the downtown area is not desired as the character of the area could be lost.

Home Improvement Program

Similar to the downtown FBIP, a home improvement program (HIP) can be a mechanism to improve the appearance, weatherization, and accessibility of residential buildings surrounding the downtown area. The City should survey property owners in the residential zone to solicit feedback on a wide array of issues, ranging from the physical condition of their homes, to their potential interest in participating in a home improvement program, if one existed. This primary feedback will help the City establish the guidelines for potential HIP.

The HIP should be flexible to encourage private reinvestment; however, improvements should be limited to those that promote rehabilitation measures that maintain or restore the historical appearance, character, and integrity of contributing structures. Improvements should be comprehensive, incorporating enhancements/additions to several components of the existing façade. Examples of eligible improvements include painting, windows, doors, stucco, masonry work, tile, and restoration of historic properties. Further, the program should be flexible enough to address larger and more costly improvements such as structural, accessibility, and roofs.

Customizing the financial assistance to meet the property owners' ability to repay the assistance will help remove the most cited obstacle to rehabilitate and remodel residential properties. Making these improvements affordable to homeowners will create a positive visual impact on downtown Bennington, stimulating private investment and complementing other community revitalization efforts.

Sidewalks

Sidewalks play a vital role in city life. As conduits for pedestrian movements and access, they enhance connectivity and promote walking/biking. As public spaces, sidewalks serve as the front steps to the community, activating streets socially and economically. Safe, accessible, and well-maintained sidewalks are a fundamental and necessary investment for communities and have been found to enhance public health and maximize social capital.

Like the discussion in the core downtown zone, the necessity of constructing and replacing sidewalks remains a mammoth commitment and economic challenge for homeowners and local governments.

The City of Bennington could develop a city-wide sidewalk improvement prioritization plan to identify and prioritize sidewalk routes. Once identified, the City of Bennington could investigate sidewalk improvement programs for residential areas being conducted by other local governments throughout the United States. This research will provide insight into incentives being offered to property owners for encouraging sidewalk construction/replacement. From this, the decision-makers can create a city wide sidewalk improvement program that is best tailored to the City of Bennington.

Soft Infrastructure

Encouraging property owners to improve and maintain landscaping around their homes helps enhance the City as a whole. Landscaping standards which coordinate with improvements to the downtown area can be created and should involve high quality, maintenance free, and durable products that are proven to withstand the elements of Nebraska's extreme climate. Likewise, landscaping should be native and diverse plants/grasses that are conducive to a downtown setting.

Zone Growth

The residential zone does have the potential to expand to the east with property development. The west side of Vermont Street could be developed with infrastructure improvements (water, sewer main extension and street paving). Further expansion to the east would require a creek crossing at either 2nd or 3rd Streets.

Conclusion

As stated in the Blight and Substandard Study, there are a number of factors contributing to the blighted and substandard conditions of the Redevelopment Area. The recommendations listed above will aid the City of Bennington and the CDA in creating a viable and sustainable urban environment in order to lessen the impact of the blighted and substandard conditions located in the General Redevelopment Area. In addition, portions of the area are critical to the redevelopment of and proper clearance of substandard conditions within the City, as well as preparing the area for redevelopment and/or the development of a specific project. The City should concentrate efforts to remove or rehabilitate some if not all the structures that were rated as deteriorating or dilapidated and development of the public infrastructure within the Redevelopment Area. This can be accomplished through either public or private development/redevelopment.

Project Specific Redevelopment Plans