

Chapter 4 Downtown Robbinsdale

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Section 1: Introduction

The redevelopment of Robbinsdale’s Downtown central business district has taken place over the last thirty-five (35) years. Over this period of time, there have been seven redevelopment plans created. Several elements of each of those plans have been implemented. For a variety of reasons, including changing economic conditions and demographic shifts, other elements in these plans have not been carried out. A more detailed history of Robbinsdale’s downtown development is contained in Appendix B.

From 1965, until the early 1980s, the Downtown redevelopment plans have been oriented toward the accommodation of the automobile and conventional suburban site planning and roadway design. Redevelopment plans over the past thirty years included safe, plentiful and convenient parking, as well as freestanding buildings. Large parking lots, both private and public, characterized the redeveloping portions of the Downtown. Although the City and the development community made an effort to provide pedestrian improvements, the automobile had a stronger presence.

In 1990-1991, the redevelopment concept for the Downtown once again stressed a better balance between all the development variables. The adopted direction focused on a pedestrian-oriented “Main Street” that would be safe, functional, and attractive. Downtown would continue to permit the automobile, but with reduced accommodation. This new direction was confirmed and given a market-based foundation with the endorsement of the 1993 Hyett-Palma Economic Enhancement Strategy for Downtown Robbinsdale, a study commissioned by the Economic Development Authority.

Today, private redevelopment and public infrastructure improvements are transforming the Downtown. Streetscape projects have improved the aesthetics of Downtown. The Downtown has begun to take on a traditional Main Street image that is composed of compact and moderate density development, is pedestrian-oriented, and includes residential and commercial mixed land uses linked to convenient transit service.

The City of Robbinsdale desires to continue this direction to revitalize the Downtown and stabilize its market niche in the northwest metro area. The Comprehensive Plan broad framework for future change in the Downtown is to rebuild and intensify historic West Broadway/Hubbard Avenue, enhance the drawing power of Downtown as a regional destination, and connect the different sub-areas through pedestrian and transit improvements to the streetscape.

Section 2: Plan Direction - Robbinsdale 20/20 Downtown Vision Statement

The following Vision Statement was adopted by the Comprehensive Plan Task Force to describe Robbinsdale's Downtown in the Year 2020:

When people frequent Robbinsdale's Downtown and other commercial areas in year 2020 they will find places and businesses that fulfill their needs. These places and businesses will be supported by modern and well-maintained infrastructure. The architecture of structures will represent the true character of the community and its past. It is a place that is safe, clean and well maintained. It is the focal point of the community. Robbinsdale's Downtown and other commercial areas are a symbol of the past and an opportunity for growth and prosperity in the future.

Robbinsdale is a node for a diverse group of people and a variety of needs. People will come and go from Robbinsdale by many means including state of the art transit, the automobile, bicycle, and by foot. Multi-modal transportation brings to the businesses a new market from outside the community and support for a pedestrian scale Downtown.

A source of community pride is the downtown, which has continued to evolve without losing touch with its history. The downtown functions like a much larger Downtown but with a small town feel. Accessibility and convenience for the pedestrian and the automobile are the key elements to Downtown's success. West Broadway continues to be the Main Street of Robbinsdale and continues to have a hometown feel. Downtown Robbinsdale is a hub for activity with a mix of compact, interdependent commercial and residential land uses that include higher-density housing, restaurants, offices, retail, service, commercial, and public facilities.

The following Guiding Principles flow from this vision statement:

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A special, attractive and safe place to shop, work, dine, live, and enjoy community events - The community will continue to provide an attractive and safe business environment. Public and private places such as urban parks and outdoor seating will help support a stronger sense of place, public realm, community, and safety. Community policing and appropriate lighting will enhance real and perceived safety. Architectural design guidelines and continued streetscape improvements will define an image for Downtown, with an emphasis on pedestrian amenities and connections.

A vibrant and prosperous Downtown – The community and its businesses take pride in making Downtown a great place to shop and do business. Public and private efforts should continue to secure Downtown’s future as a focal point for the community and surrounding region. However, the Downtown should be redeveloped further with a broader mix of uses that encourage people to live, shop, and work, with a synergy between these activities that encourages walking rather than auto-dependence.

A strong business community – The City shall continue to retain and support existing businesses while attracting quality new businesses that complement them. This principle is key to a healthy and strong business environment. The City, through its Economic Redevelopment Authority, shall continue to assist business expansion and new business start-up. Communication must be honest and helpful, with the City and the Chamber of Commerce working as partners in this effort.

Section 3: Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Overall Goals

1. The City should stimulate growth and change in the Downtown within the context of the Metropolitan Regional Blueprint, and ensure that Robbinsdale is connected to Minneapolis and other northwest suburban centers.
2. The City should strengthen the character and marketability of the Downtown through the differentiation of existing commercial nodes toward three distinct and interconnected districts shown in **Figure 4A**:
 - Old Town
 - Town Center
 - Downtown South
3. The City should promote an attractive Downtown that evokes a strong sense of place and attractiveness through high standards of design in public and private developments.
4. The City should promote development that supports broader citywide goals.
5. The City should provide a balanced circulation network that emphasizes pedestrian convenience.
6. The City should foster real and perceived public safety.
7. The City should retain and support existing businesses and attract complementary new ones.
8. The City should encourage communication and coordination amongst businesses, especially in marketing Downtown.

OBJECTIVE ONE:

ADOPT A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE PLAN FOR DOWNTOWN

POLICY

The City should transform the Economic Enhancement Strategy and the directions embodied in this chapter of the Comprehensive Plan into a comprehensive development guide plan for the Downtown. This development guide plan would be the primary reference for policy and land use decisions by the City Council and Economic Development Authority, as well as for existing business and potential real estate and business investors.

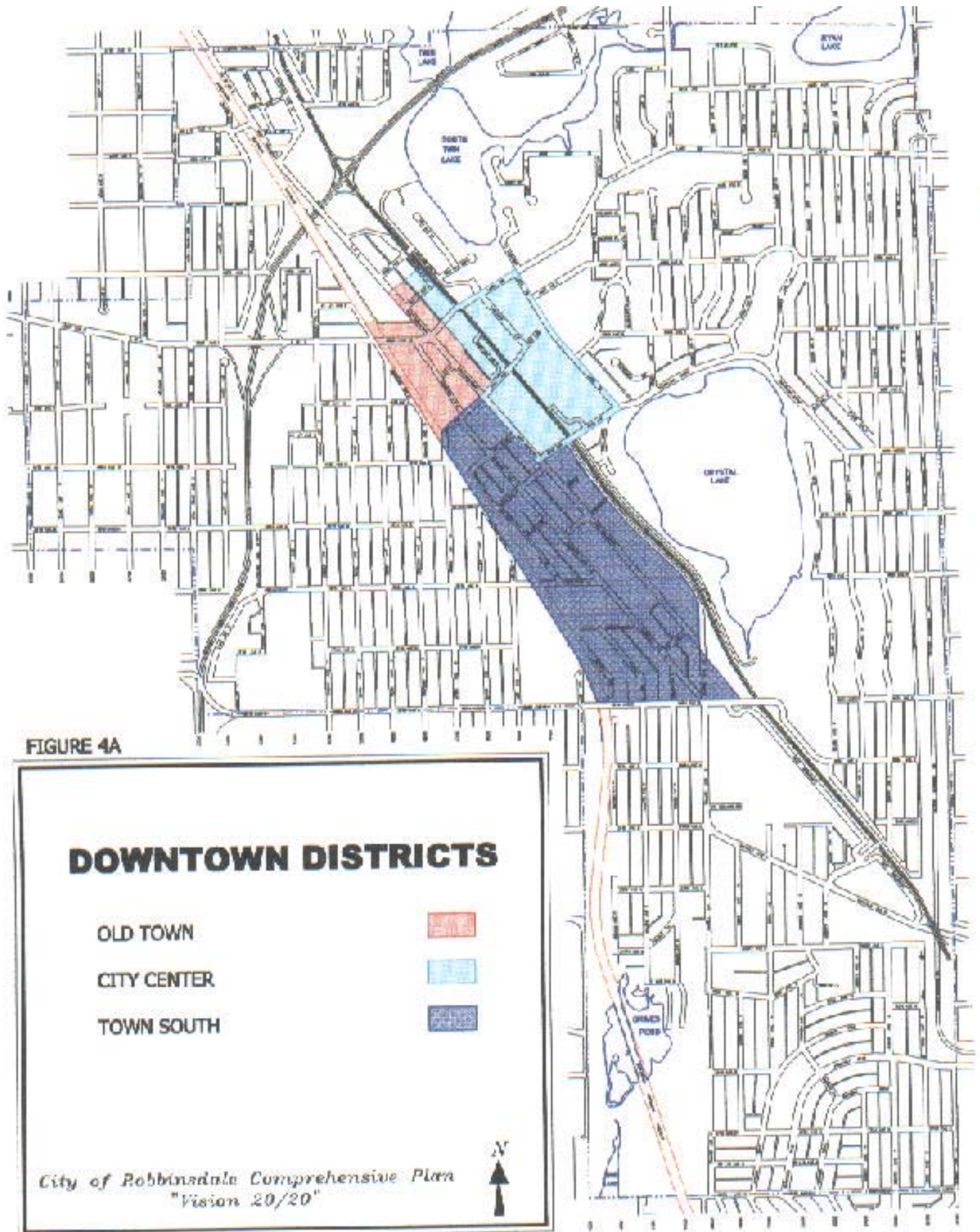


FIGURE 4A

DOWNTOWN DISTRICTS

OLD TOWN



CITY CENTER



TOWN SOUTH



*City of Robbinsdale Comprehensive Plan
"Vision 20/20"*



OBJECTIVE TWO:

ENHANCE DOWNTOWN'S IMAGE, CHARACTER, STRUCTURE AND MIX OF USES

POLICIES:

1. The City should provide development regulations and design guidelines to guide new development and redevelopment/renovation toward contextual design and siting, repairing and connecting the private development to the public realm.

Old Town

2. The City should reinforce the small-scale, Main Street shopping character of West Broadway (from 40th Avenue to 42½ Avenue) and in the Hubbard Avenue area.
3. The City should encourage the incremental redevelopment and/or renovation of individual buildings rather than large-scale redevelopment.
4. The City should reinforce the developing mixed-use character with retail/restaurant uses at street level, and either service/office uses or residential uses on upper stories.
5. The City should require that new buildings have an infill character, have a sense of being grounded in history, and respond to the scale, patterns and materials of nearby older buildings.
6. The City should promote a street-level design for buildings that creates a strong connection between building use and the public realm, through architectural detailing, windows, and entrances.
7. The City should conserve as much of the historic townscape as possible through adaptive reuse, and preserve structures that feature materials and spaces that would be difficult to achieve today.
8. The City should permit and promote mixed-use developments to encourage the presence of people working and living in Downtown, and to attract a wide range of customers and visitors.

Town Center

1. The City should enhance existing auto-oriented Town Center and Robin Center mall development through incentives for continued renewal and rehabilitation of the buildings, and improved landscaping of the parking and service areas.
2. The City should improve pedestrian, bicycle, and transit connections between these auto-oriented areas and other Downtown areas.

Downtown South

1. The City should promote the development of new market rate townhouses or other similar types of units to respond to the growing market of empty nesters and others that desire this type of life-cycle housing.
2. The City should provide incentives, both regulatory and financial, for the rehabilitation of existing apartment buildings to extend their viability as affordable housing.
3. The City should provide development regulation flexibility to permit a broader range and mix of commercial and residential uses at moderate density and with an overall residential character.

OBJECTIVE THREE:

CREATE BALANCED CIRCULATION AND PARKING THAT ENHANCES THE PEDESTRIAN USE OF DOWNTOWN

POLICIES:

1. The City should promote increased transit use through the provision of sensitive and supportive street and streetscape design, street-friendly transit vehicles, frequent service, and comfortable transit shelters/stops.
2. The City should promote shared parking facilities, including public parking to respond to deficiencies related to older, existing “Main Street” buildings. The City should promote a pattern of facilities that emphasizes customer parking near businesses, employee parking on the periphery, and residential parking adjacent or underground.
3. The City should minimize the visual impact of parking areas with landscaping, including generous provision of trees, railings and other visual enhancements.
4. The City should discourage and limit new curb cuts/driveways on West Broadway, between 40th Avenue and 42½ Avenue.
5. The City should transform County Road 81, from Lowry/southern City boundary to 42nd Avenue North, into an urban parkway, including significant landscaping and lighting features to calm vehicular traffic and promote pedestrian and bicycle use.
6. The City should provide improved street and streetscape redesign of 40th, 41st, and 42nd Avenues to provide pedestrian and bicycle links, and safe, but de-emphasized, vehicular connections.

OBJECTIVE FOUR:

STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND A PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED PUBLIC REALM AND OPEN SPACE NETWORK

POLICIES:

1. The City should provide varied, accessible, and interconnected open space to be used by a wide range of people throughout the year.
2. The City should provide facilities that promote pedestrian use, including places to sit, bicycle racks, sculptures/works of art and other features of interest, with pedestrian-scale lighting and other urban design features to encourage nighttime use in a safe environment.
3. The City should provide public plazas and mini-parks.
4. The City should pursue a “greening the streets” program that would include significant tree planting on all Downtown streets.

OBJECTIVE FIVE:

CREATE MARKETING PROGRAM TO PROMOTE BUSINESS AND TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES

POLICIES:

1. The City should recognize and celebrate Robbinsdale’s history and community organizations.
2. The City should support community celebrations, such as Whiz-Bang Days, and seek out new activities events that promote Downtown as a gathering place.
3. The City should develop a media program that markets Downtown activities and events.
4. The City should support arts activities that reinforce the cultural heritage of Robbinsdale residents and institutions, as well as the changes and diversity of its evolving traditions.
5. The City should expand opportunities for youth participation in Downtown activities, and enhance intergenerational connections.
6. The City should promote a safe and secure Downtown through community policing and the scheduling of a variety of activities throughout the year.