9. Community Character, Aesthetics, and Design

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Principles of Design
- The Public Realm
- Streets
- Housing
- Concept Renderings

Land Use Connection

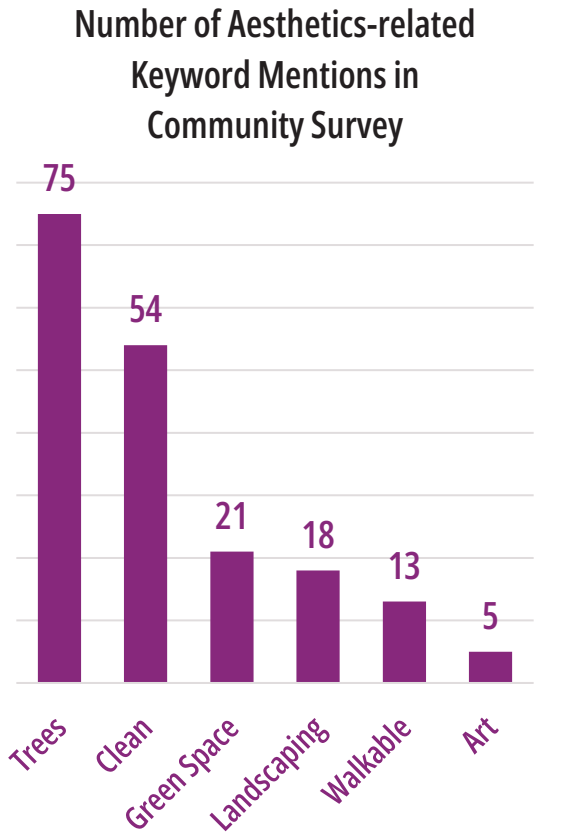
Land uses along major city streets and within view from major gathering areas, such as the State Fairground and Downtown, are important when considering someone's impression of Minot – whether a resident or visitor. These areas play a special role in defining first impressions of Minot. To many, these areas define Minot's identity and community character, which the City promotes to prospective residents, workers, and visitors.

WHY DESIGN?

Community character, design, and aesthetics are important considerations for the Plan. The design and appearance of the community impacts thousands of residents every day. Everything we build is designed to last for decades and will impact the way future generations experience Minot.

Minot residents are strongly interested in the character and aesthetics of the community. Words like "trees", "cleanliness", "art", and "appearance" were frequently mentioned in response to the question: **When you visit other communities, what is one thing you love that Minot needs?**

Good design and aesthetics promote community development and community pride, helping to attract and retain residents and businesses. Thoughtful design creates lasting value for property owners and encourages active use, which helps support the city's tax base.



PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

Our mental image of the city is shaped by paths, nodes, landmarks, edges, neighborhoods, and districts. Paths and nodes form the street network. Gateway corridors are paths and edges. Downtown is a district. The Scandinavian Heritage Center is a landmark, and so on. Design principles focus on improving these elements and the relationships between them.

CC-2: Coordinate development design within neighborhoods and corridors.

This chapter highlights four design principles:

1. **Mix** – Aesthetic diversity stimulates interest. Corridors and neighborhoods need diverse building types, massing, façades, etc.
2. **Definition** – The most cohesive corridors, neighborhoods, and districts have a clear definition. Spatial relationships between buildings define public space. The spaces for pedestrians and automobiles are clearly defined.
3. **Transition** – Urban design promotes a layered transition in development scale and intensity. Scale diminishes from major activity centers and roadways.
4. **Human-centric design** – The built environment should be scaled to human proportions. Placing the focus on people promotes active use of space and improves our image of the city.

THE PUBLIC REALM

The public realm includes streets, sidewalks, parks, trails, and other public spaces. These elements are highly visible and open to all, so they strongly influence community character and aesthetics. The public realm is largely planned by public entities – Minot Parks District, Public Works, and NDDOT, for example. But the private sector plays an important role.

Role of Development

The public realm is highly influenced by development that occurs adjacent to the right-of-way. Architectural design impacts the aesthetic, comfort, and use of public space. Development should enhance shared spaces, provide visual and physical connections to the public realm, and instill an attitude of caring for the public realm.

Street Connectivity

Street connectivity determines how direct or indirect connections are and the number of paths that connect two places. The level of connectivity depends on the number and quality of intersections versus the number of links or centerline miles within a network. Shorter block lengths produce higher connectivity. Older areas of the city invariably have higher connectivity than newer, suburban-style neighborhoods.

Good connectivity helps distribute traffic and provide relief to the arterial system. Connectivity influences mode choice. A highly connected street network with short block lengths is conducive to bicycle travel. A disconnected street network comprised of superblocks is much less supportive of bike/ped travel, even when bike/ped facilities are present.

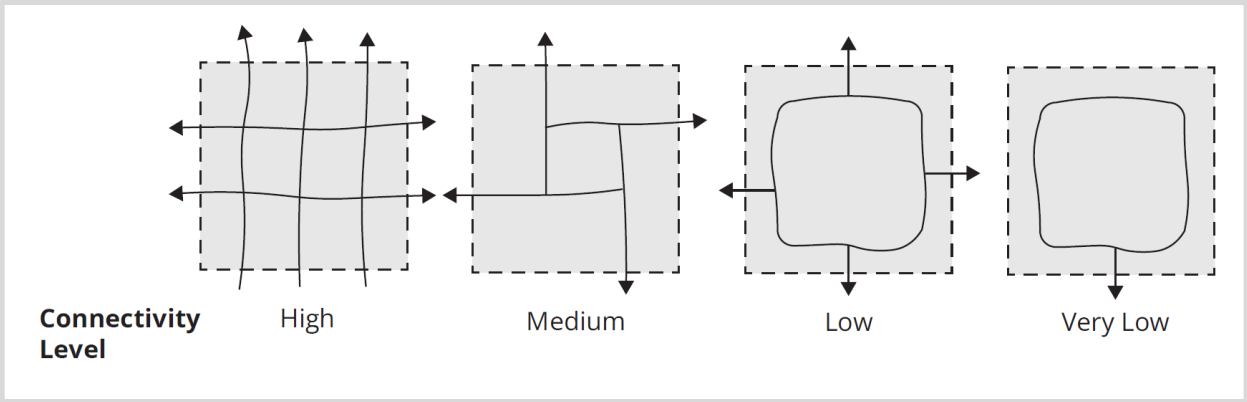
Engineering and zoning standards determine how the roadway system is laid out. For example, access spacing guidelines determine spacing for arterials

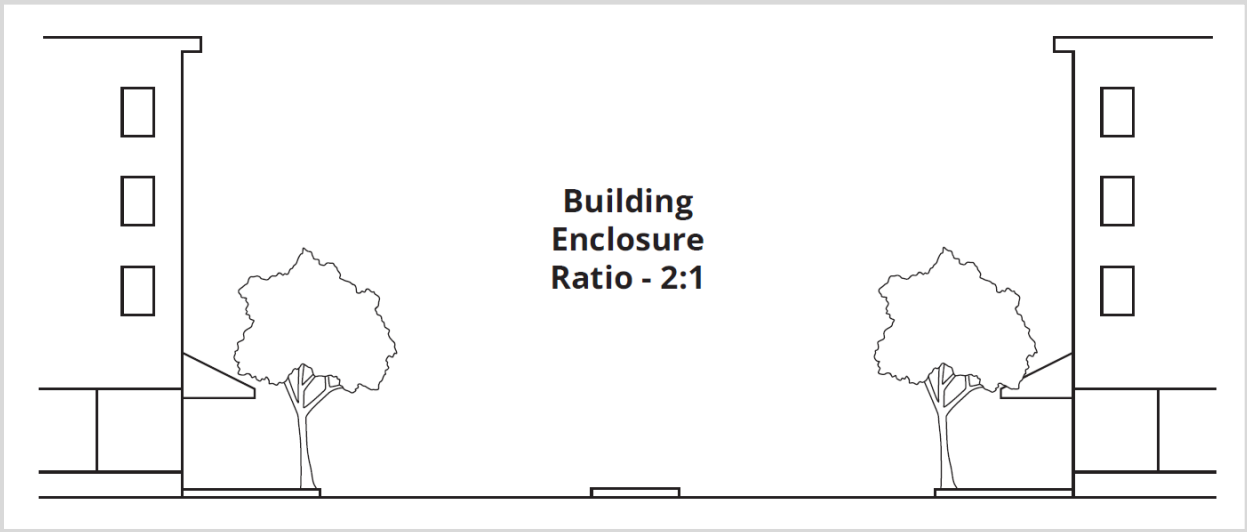
and collectors. To promote connectivity, some communities specify a maximum block size or maximum intersection spacing in certain areas (e.g., mixed-use centers). Redevelopment also provides an opportunity to retrofit the street grid.

T-2: Promote development patterns and transportation infrastructure that support access and connectivity for all travel modes.

Building Relationships

The space between buildings creates a public room. Building enclosure is a design metric that relates the height of buildings to the separation between them. The Land Development Code controls dimensions for right-of-way, setback, and building height standards, which shape the character and aesthetic of public space and influence how the public realm is perceived and used. Streets with good enclosure feel intimate and inviting, while streets with wide enclosure may be disorienting and unpleasant. Human-centric design considers the relationship between buildings from a human perspective.





Building Orientation

The building/street interface is a primary focus of design. This space defines the transition between the public realm and private space and creates a sense of enclosure along the street. Ideally, buildings are located close to the street with parking toward the rear. A building's primary façade – i.e., the side with the main entrance – should address the street and be connected to the sidewalk. It may be tempting to orient residential buildings away from the street out of a concern for safety/privacy, but orienting buildings toward the street can increase street activity and puts more "eyes on the street".

Setbacks

Minot's Land Development Code determines setback widths. Setback standards, along with right-of-way standards, determine the space between buildings. Setback standards should consider both the characteristics of the roadway (e.g., number of lanes/traffic volumes) and the characteristics of the building (i.e., building height and bulk). Building setbacks should be consistent along a block.

Above: *Back yards and fences line both sides of 31st Ave SE, creating an alley effect. This suburban development pattern is a common byproduct of the functional classification system/access management.* ***Below:*** *Multifamily development on 13th Street SE places parking to the rear, but these buildings are still disconnected from the sidewalk. The primary faced is in the back.*

Low-rise buildings oriented toward the street and connected to the sidewalk.

Outlets development improves building enclosure and shields Walmart's parking lot.

Gateways

Gateway corridors are highly visible locations that communicate Minot's image to travelers who are entering and leaving the city. Highway 83 is an important example, as it links the airport and major destinations, including Minot State Univesrity, Downtown, and the South Hill shopping complex.

CC-1: Improve aesthetics of highway entry corridors, arterials, and collectors.

Minot's gateways are predominantly characterized by wide roads, wide setbacks, and single-story buildings, which creates almost no sense of enclosure. This serves the goal of highway mobility but actively discourages other travel modes, even when sidewalk/trail facilities are present. It can also be difficult for transit to serve these locations. Buses may not be able to enter private property, so stops are farther from destinations.

Gateway areas can be enhanced by:

- Expanding landscaping, particularly around primary nodes
- Refining design standards for buildings visible from the right-of-way
- Controlling the amount of outdoor storage
- Reducing setbacks and promoting out lot development to improve corridor definition
- Promoting maintenance of landscaped buffers and medians within the public right-of-way.

Elevated design standards can be applied through a corridor overlay zone.

All gateway corridors are owned and operated by NDDOT, so all improvements and maintenance activities within the right-of-way must be coordinated with NDDOT. Aesthetics are not NDDOT's primary concern, so Minot must continue to promote aesthetics within these corridors.

Landscaping

Minot residents would like to see more landscaping across the community. Most streets should include street trees. Alternative landscaping, such as native plants, can also be incorporated on the roadway frontage. Wider streets and boulevards can integrate additional landscaping and innovative stormwater management. Species should be selected to improve diversity and promote resilience. Landscaped areas need to be maintained by property owners and the Forestry Department.

Maintenance concerns should not supersede aesthetic considerations.

Parking lot landscaping improves aesthetics, provides clearly defined spaces for pedestrians and vehicles, and supports stormwater management.

Parking

Large surface parking lots detract from community activity, property utilization, and aesthetics. There are several ways to mitigate the visual impact of parking lots:

1. Screen the perimeter of parking lots from the roadway.
2. Apply landscaping to the interior of the parking lot to differentiate smaller spaces. This also supports stormwater management and vehicle circulation.
3. Orient buildings to shield parking areas.
4. Reduce the amount of required parking.

Historically, surface parking has been oversupplied. Minot's planners recognize that large areas of excess parking detract from placemaking and thwart related planning objectives, such as walkability and fiscal goals. **With this in mind, Minot's parking standards were significantly reduced in the 2021 Land Development Ordinance update.** Parking standards are intended to be flexible, promote reasonable parking requirements, and reduce impervious surface area. For example, deviations up to 20 percent may be approved administratively, without the need for a variance. The Ordinance also promotes shared parking reductions.

HOUSING

The Monotony Challenge

In Minot and across the U.S., housing development can have a "cookie-cutter" feel. Monotony is a symptom of development economics; while monotonous design is more prevalent in

newer subdivisions, it can also be seen in workforce housing created during the postwar period.

Garage design (and consumer preferences for large garages) contribute to monotony. A two-car garage is 20-24 feet in width. New development in Minot often includes three-car attached garages, which are 30 feet wide or more. A three-stall garage will easily represent 50 percent of the façade; when half of facades are identical, it becomes more difficult to differentiate homes. With modern development, the primary entrance to the home is often located through the street-facing garage, relegating the front door to a minor recess.

"All of the houses look the same." Identical massing, roof lines, and facades, highlighted by a lack of landscaping.

Another factor is community lot standards. Narrow lot widths promote higher density – an admirable objective – but constrain architectural flexibility to differentiate facades. Higher density also means that more dwellings are visible from the street/sidewalk, which emphasizes monotony if buildings are similar.

Design standards can require homebuilders to introduce more variation.

Design Solutions

Some home builders follow internal standards to bring more variation to subdivisions. They may use different colors or textures on the garage, varied roof trims, and ornamental materials to differentiate buildings. Design standards may also be implemented through zoning. Generally, these types of standards apply to the primary façade only.

Tools for combatting monotony include varying lot widths, floor plans, massing, and façade details. Requiring more variation in housing models diversifies the neighborhood. For example, Minot could require neighborhoods to include a mix a mix of ranch-style homes, 1.5-story, and 2-story floor plans. Rotating and/or reflecting the floor plan is an economical solution to introduce more variety into single-family development. HOAs can also play a role in promoting variation in housing design.

Monotony is most obvious when subdivisions are new. Over time, residents customize their lots, construct additions, improve landscaping, and make other improvements that lend more variety to the neighborhood. Building codes and zoning codes should not be so restrictive to impede these types of changes.

A side-loading garage frees up this façade, providing space for the porch and a well-defined entryway.

FOCUS AREA DESIGN CONCEPTS

Concept renderings were produced for several growth focus areas identified in this Plan, including

- Northwest Growth Area
- Southwest Growth Area
- Extraterritorial Area (northern highway entry corridor)
- Downtown
- Flood Impact Neighborhoods

Renderings are included in Chapter 3 (Land Use), Chapter 7 (Parks, Trails, and Open Space), and Chapter 8 (Economic Development. Additional renderings are included here to communicate the design and aesthetic concepts discussed in this chapter.

Multimodal Corridors

The design concept for the Flood Impact Neighborhoods envisions North Broadway as a multimodal connection between MSU and Downtown. A road diet is shown, creating space for wider sidewalks, trees, and a landscaped median. Open plazas extend public space and create new focal points within the neighborhood. Buildings address the street, with reduced setbacks that improve the sense of enclosure. Development and corridor improvements promote street activity. Flood protection supports denser development, including multistory buildings with views of the river.

Broadway North

North Broadway corridor concepts, looking north from 4th Ave North.

Broadway North

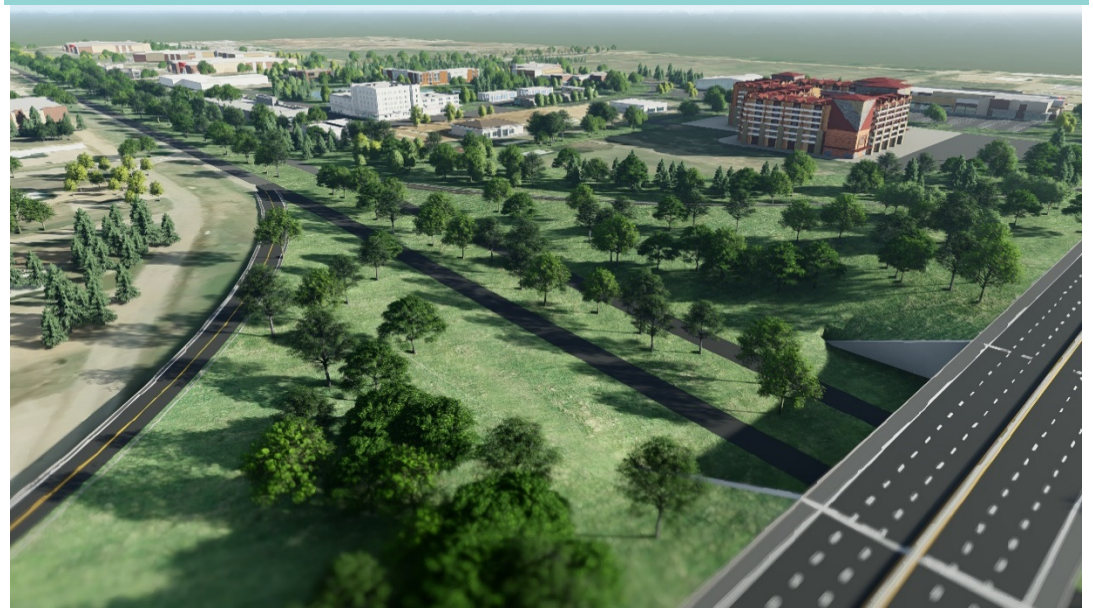
Looking east at North Broadway. This corridor is planned for general commercial, which should be geared toward dining, retail, and amenities that serve MSU's student population and surrounding neighborhoods. The building arrangement creates public and private open space, plazas, and courtyards. The corridor concept includes wider sidewalks and landscaping to promote street activity.

Highway Entry Corridors

Highway entry corridors are critical areas that require thoughtful planning and design. US Highways 2, 52, and 83 give the first impression of the community and convey several thousand vehicles per day. All corridors can be improved by elevating design standards, but the Highway 83 entry corridor north of Minot provides the best opportunity. Unlike other highway entry corridors, this corridor is not hampered by existing development or topography.

Design renderings envision a future interchange with landscaping improvements and supportive highway-oriented development. Buildings are oriented toward the interchange, building massing reflects the scale of the interchange, and facades incorporate articulations and accent materials.

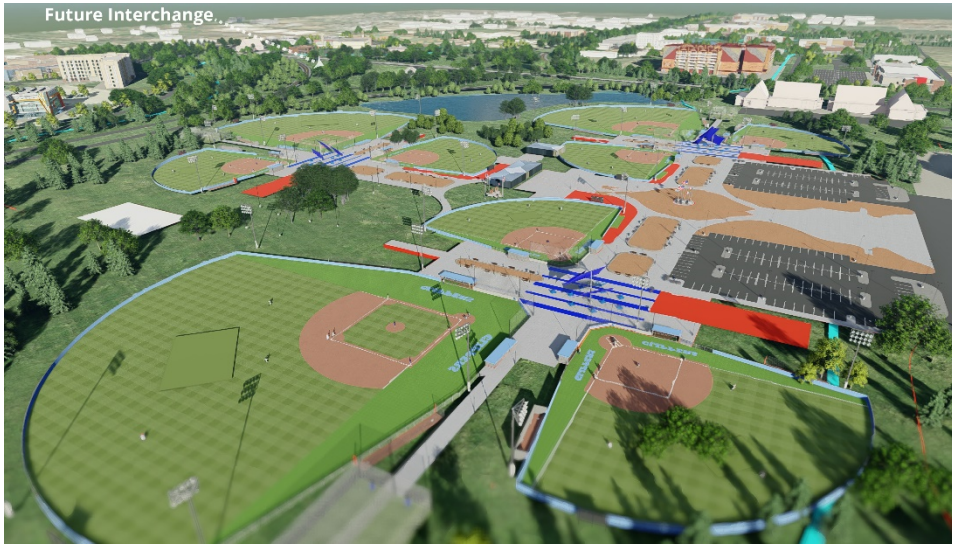
U.S. 83 – Northern Highway Entry Corridor



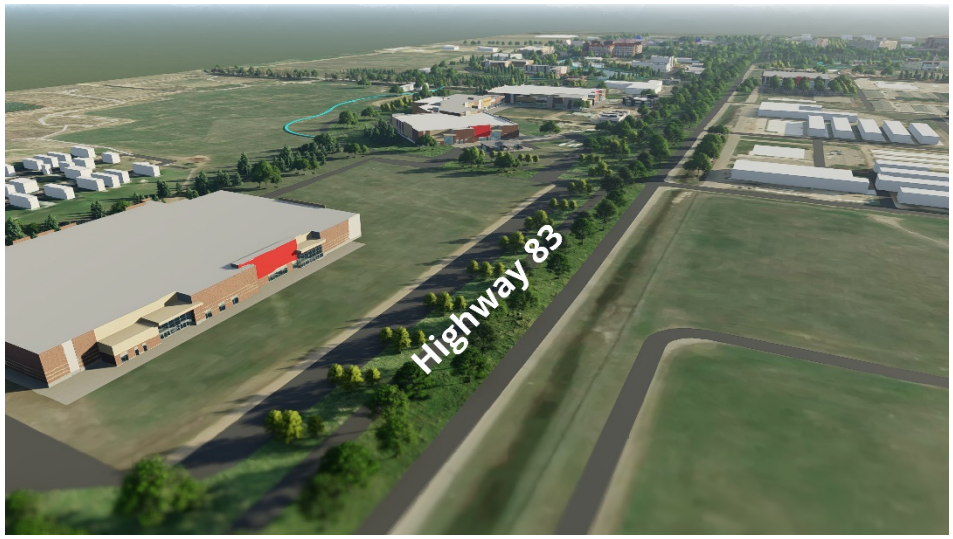
***Above**: Looking southeast from the interchange. **Below:** Looking southeast from the northeast quadrant.*

U.S. 83 – Northern Highway Entry Corridor

Looking northeast, with the interchange in the backround.



Northwest quadrant of the interchange.



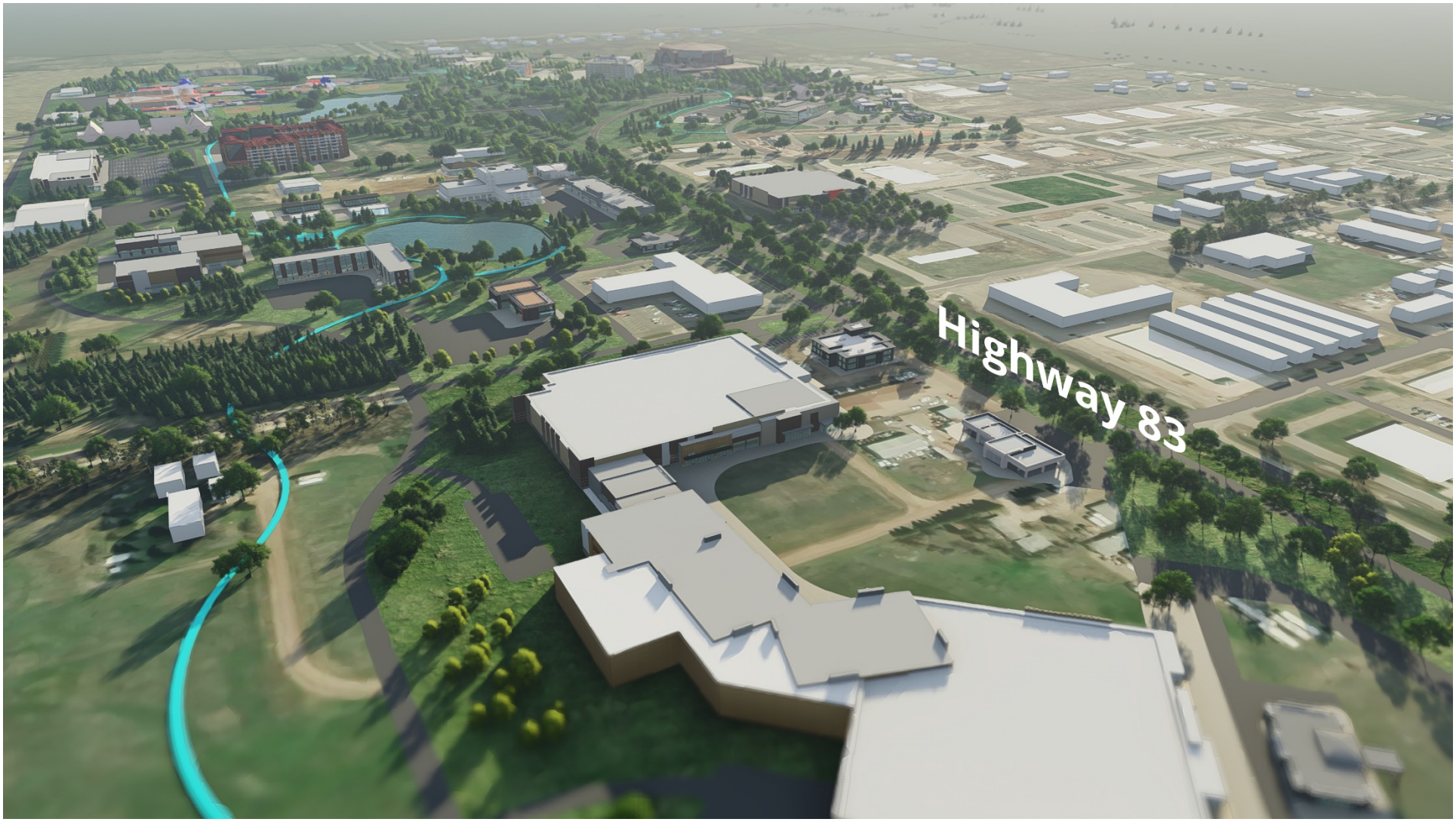
Looking south toward the city, with existing development on the left.

Top Left: The interior of development provides circulation for pedestrian and bicycle travel. Natural wetlands are integrated into the stormwater management plan and become development amenities. Parking lots are set behind or to the side of buildings.

Top Right: The gateway corridor could be an excellent location for a future sports complex. Figure 7-2 (Parks, Trails, and Open Space) identifies the need for a future community park in this general area as North Hill develops.

Bottom Left: Landscaping the median improves the sense of enclosure and sends a signal to travelers that they are leaving the countryside and entering the community.

U.S. 83 – Northern Highway Entry Corridor



US Highway 83, looking northeast.

STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Corridor Overlay Zone

Developing a corridor overlay for highway entry corridors and other major thoroughfares would elevate design standards for high-visibility roadways, while retaining the requirements of base zoning districts. A corridor overlay could guide building massing and orientation, parking lot placement, landscaping, facades, signage, and other design elements. Adopting design standards might also encourage the redevelopment/improvement of existing problem properties. **Figure 9-1** depicts principal arterials to consider for the overlay. Minot may also wish to extend the corridor overlay standards to important minor arterials, such as 37th Avenue South, or prominent intersections. However, standards should be context-sensitive and may need to be differentiated for different roadway types.

The City of Grand Forks uses a corridor overlay zone that could be a model for Minot. Their code differentiates roadway types and applies a 400-foot offset from the right-of-way edge.

Downtown Overlay Zone

Like the corridor overlay, a Downtown Overlay zone would apply special standards to Downtown. Standards might apply to building massing, facades, parking, landscaping, or signage. A design overlay could also promote active utilization. For example, it could require retail on the ground floor, promote desired hours of operation (availability during nights and weekends), or provide incentives to discourage vacancies.

Residential Design Standards

Codifying residential design standards would require housing developers to introduce more diversity within a subdivision. Design guidelines could also consider how housing addresses the street (e.g., requiring connectivity to the sidewalk). Formalizing design standards will show developers what the community wants and expects, while also facilitating staff review.

Design Review

Installing a design review committee for development review would ensure that each development considers its surroundings and actively enhances the public realm. This would provide a forum for design experts as well as residents to comment on the design elements of a project.

CITY OF MINOT

2040 Comprehensive Plan

Aesthetic Priority Areas

Figure 9-1

Legend

- City Limits
- 2-Mile Boundary
- Gateway Corridors
- Activation Areas

Future Interchange

Future Interchange + Arterial Connection

N BROADWAY
S BROADWAY
21ST AVE NW
8TH ST NW
16TH ST NW
3RD ST NE
27TH ST NE
BURDICK EXPY W
BURDICK EXPY E
16TH AVE SW
16TH AVE SE
3RD ST SE
HIAWATHA ST
VALLEY ST
13TH ST SE
31ST AVE SE

83 2 10 10A 19 15 12A 52 14

0 0.5 1 1.5 2 Miles