

Appendix A to the 2006 Comprehensive Plan

A

S. Federal Avenue Corridor Study

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APPENDIX A TO THE 2006 MASON CITY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

S. Federal Corridor

The purpose of this appendix to the Comprehensive Plan is to identify development and redevelopment opportunities along the S. Federal Avenue corridor from the I. C. and E. Railroad tracks to the Avenue of the Saints.

For the purposes of this plan, the corridor is divided into two portions. The northern portion lies from the I. C. and E. railroad to about 29th Street. This area comprises a pattern of mixed development—residential, commercial, civic, and light industrial uses. The southern portion lies from 29th Street SW to the Avenue of the Saints. This, too, comprises a pattern of mixed development as well as large tracts of farmland.

The Northern Portion

In the northern portion, emphasis is made on improving the character of the corridor through changes to private and public property. The emphasis is on maintaining the urban character of the corridor. Landscaping along the street and within parking lots will be introduced when opportunities arise. The plan also identifies redevelopment possibilities for the Southport area.

A mix of existing uses characterizes the northern portion. Redevelopment opportunities are somewhat constrained by the shallow depth of the lots (typically 130 feet). Existing development lies on relatively small parcels, in buildings of generally mixed condition, and with minimal site amenities.

Revitalization of this corridor comes in three parts. The first is the corridor redevelopment opportunities identified on Map A.1. This map identifies opportunities for improvement on the public and private side. The City should work with property owners in examining whether these, or other, opportunities can be accomplished as investment in the corridor happens.

The second part concerns the potential future widening of S. Federal Avenue to allow for safer traffic flow and turning movements. The Iowa Department of Transportation is currently considering this option and has placed this section of US 65 in the corridor preservation program. As envisioned in this concept plan the right-of-way of Federal Avenue, from about 14th Street to about 19th Street, could be shifted to the west to allow for greater pedestrian safety

and landscaping amenities on the east side of the street. This realignment would also allow for a center median of approximately 16 feet width and provide for protected left-turn bays and attractive landscaping.

This realignment would involve moving the west curb line and right-of-way approximately 6 feet to the west. This additional right-of-way is available from the Southport frontage and the cemetery. The current 4 ft. wide sidewalk on the east side of the corridor could be widened to 5 ft. and a 10 ft. landscaping strip established between the sidewalk and the curb. A similar improvement could be established on the west side of the corridor. These added areas would allow for the planting of street trees, snow storage areas, and make a safer environment for pedestrians.

The third part is examining redevelopment opportunities for Southport. These opportunities, as illustrated on the concept map, might include creating a new “main street” into the site from 17th Street. New commercial sites within the existing parking lot could allow for several single or multi-tenant buildings. The focus of the redevelopment of the shopping center would be converting it to a highly pedestrian accessible development, with a well-defined internal pedestrian system.

Throughout this portion of the corridor, emphasis is on making a pedestrian-friendly environment through wider sidewalks, increasing the distance from the curbs to the sidewalks, improved landscaping, and marking pedestrian paths across streets and through parking lots.

The Southern Portion

In the southern portion, emphasis is on maintaining a high level of aesthetic attraction as new development occurs. One comment heard throughout the comprehensive planning process was, as a major undeveloped gateway to the City, there is only one opportunity to do it right. Design guidelines will strongly support a high degree of aesthetic accomplishment.

As development occurs along the west side of the corridor, emphasis will be on street planning so as to provide maximum access to development parcels with a limited number of street access points. In general, individual parcels will not have access directly to US 65 but, rather, will have access from frontage or backage roads. Existing direct access will continue but as development and redevelopment occurs, emphasis should be on eliminating or consolidating access points and providing a safer, alternative access. Development opportunities are identified in Map A.2.

Design Guidelines

For the entire corridor, guidelines should be introduced that accomplish the smart growth goals of the 2006 comprehensive plan. These goals include:

- Allowing mixed land uses,
- Encouraging distinctive communities with a sense of place,
- Making full and efficient use of urban resources,
- Create housing opportunities and choices,
- Create a walkable community,
- Conserve the community's natural resources,
- Diversify transportation modes, and
- Achieve stakeholder collaboration in development decisions and provide tools that encourage smart growth.

Guidelines should allow for the flexibility needed for existing uses and structures while encouraging them to conform to a higher aesthetic. For vacant parcels, the guidelines should not be a set of rigid requirements but should allow various options to meet the goal of a higher aesthetic. The purpose of the guidelines should be:

- To implement the City's comprehensive plan and any adopted appendix or amendment, including the smart growth principles of Chapter 3 of the 2006 Comprehensive Plan.
- To allow a mix of commercial, office, medium- and high-density residential, and limited light industrial uses along the S. Federal Avenue corridor.
- To encourage development and site design that reflects high quality physical character and image.
- To develop commercial and office projects that become valued places within the fabric of the City and contribute to the City's sense of place.
- To set minimum requirements for development layout, site design, landscaping, signage, and lighting without discouraging creativity and flexibility.
- To allow safe and convenient transportation access and circulation for motorized vehicles, non-motorized vehicles, and pedestrians.
- To respect the relationship of commercial and industrial development to surrounding neighborhoods.

To ensure that guidelines are followed and to allow for maximum flexibility, development review should be afforded through the Planning and Zoning Commission and City

Council review process as is now done in several zoning districts.

Land Uses

The detailed design guideline requirements are included in the proposed draft "South Federal Overlay District" currently under review. Regarding land uses indicated in the concept plan, it is intended that base zoning districts, subject to the South Federal Overlay District requirements, will be established at the time specific development projects are proposed, in accordance with the following:

"Flex" land use, as indicated on the concept plan, is intended to include office and light industrial office/warehouse. The base zoning for this area would most appropriately be I-L, Light Industrial, or C-A, Arterial Commercial. Compatible land uses; such as contractor's businesses could be included subject to compliance with the Overlay District design guidelines.

"Commercial" land use, as indicated on the concept plan, is intended to include those uses as permitted in the C-A, Arterial Commercial District, again subject to the Overlay District design guidelines. The indications of "Visitor Service, Entertainment, and Commercial Recreation" at the Highway 18 interchange is intended to convey the community's desire for a major tourist-oriented attraction, such as motel/water park facility. Because zoning and land use plans alone will not accomplish such a project, the community should consider incentives it is willing to provide to attract this type of development. Without such incentives, the interchange area may develop into more conventional traveler services such as chain motels, restaurants and gasoline service stations.