

# 2010 DOWNTOWN COLUMBUS STRATEGIC PLAN

## **DOWNTOWN TODAY**

*Downtown Today is an examination of existing conditions throughout Downtown Columbus. This section addresses: land use and ownership, connectivity, open space, parking, residential development and density, employment, and visitors and attractions. This planning exercise both identifies opportunities and challenges and provides the foundation for developing planning principles, identifying conceptual catalytic projects and drafting implementation strategies.*



# DOWNTOWN TODAY

## INTRODUCTION

Downtown Columbus is a dynamic, ever-changing urban environment that has experienced a significant amount of reinvestment and repopulation over the past decade. With the addition of Huntington Park, the Arena District is now a year-round hub of sports and entertainment activity. The innovative Cap at Union Station provides a seamless connection along High Street connecting the Short North to the Downtown. Gay Street has been revitalized as a two-way street and is home to numerous independent restaurants, bars and shops. The CDDC has renovated the former Lazarus department store into a premier, “green” office building. Two new parking garages have opened in the last year to support new development. Spurred by the incentives created by the 2002 Downtown Business Plan, dozens of residential infill and rehabilitation projects have added more than 2,000 residents downtown—the first increase in population since 1950.

Leading up to the City’s Bicentennial in 2012, Downtown Columbus will have a new riverfront park along the Scioto Mile, Columbus Commons will have replaced City Center Mall, a new Franklin County Courthouse will be open, and two new bridges will be built over the Scioto River. Even in a down economy, there are more than 600 housing units currently planned, under construction or recently opened in Downtown Columbus. Work is also slated to start on several new projects, including a new full-service convention center hotel, the rebuilding the entire I-70/I-71 South Innerbelt highway system, and the potential return of rail service with the 3-C Connector that is being studied.

Downtown is also the hub of government, commercial and entertainment activity in the region. It is home to numerous assets including the Greater Columbus Convention Center, the Arena District, the State House, COSI, the Columbus Museum of Art, the Main Branch of the Columbus Public Library, office skyscrapers, numerous theaters, City Hall and the Franklin County Government Complex.

Despite recent and planned reinvestment and these significant assets and attractions, Downtown Columbus does not feel consistently vibrant and active. In part, this is due to the sheer size of downtown. It is difficult to energize the entirety of its 960 acres. While Downtown Columbus has several successful districts and independent success stories, little thought has been given to how to better connect these areas and combine planning efforts into a singular, cohesive vision for Downtown Columbus.

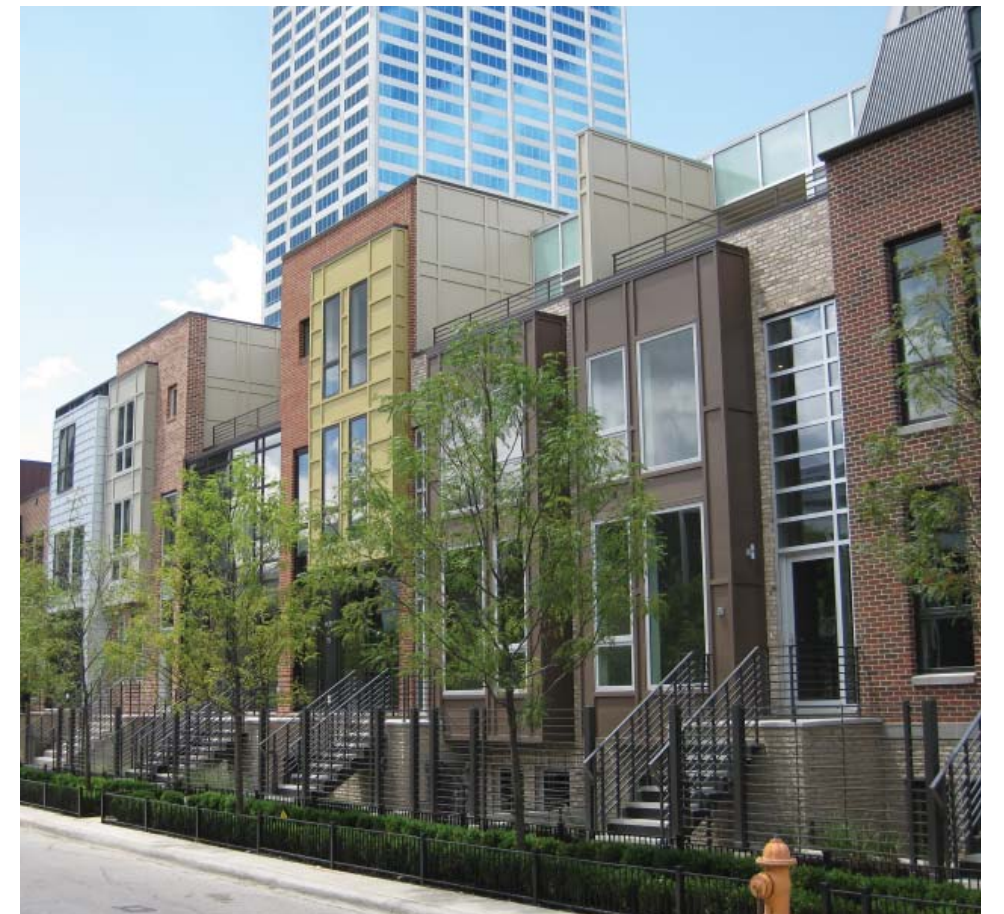
Though there have been numerous downtown planning efforts conducted over the past several decades, there is still no overall comprehensive downtown plan that acts as a framework for growth. Currently, all of Downtown Columbus is zoned as “downtown district.” The Downtown Commission uses this code to guide its decision making process when reviewing new developments. While the code allows for substantial design freedom, the Downtown Commission and the City do not have an overall plan that provides the necessary context and guidance for the Commission to properly and effectively review development proposals.

Due to the lack of an overall plan and other factors, there has been no comprehensive approach to redevelopment. Housing development has increased, but it is spread across a large area of downtown, minimizing its impact. Likewise, arts and civic anchors are located far apart from one another. There are ample vacant lots, empty buildings and abandoned storefronts, especially along South High Street. In order to be truly successful, downtown needs to develop a critical mass of interconnected residential density, pedestrian activity, arts and civic attractions, and retail destinations. This section will examine these issues in greater detail and set the stage for ideas and strategies that help create a more cohesive and active urban core.

**IN ORDER TO BE TRULY SUCCESSFUL, DOWNTOWN NEEDS TO DEVELOP A CRITICAL MASS OF INTERCONNECTED RESIDENTIAL DENSITY, PEDESTRIAN ACTIVITY, ARTS AND CIVIC ATTRACTIONS, AND RETAIL DESTINATIONS.**



*Huntington Park opened in spring 2009 in the Arena District and was named the best new ballpark in the country.*



*More than 250 residential units are being built east of 4th Street as part of the Neighborhood Launch project.*





The Arena District has transformed the former Ohio Penitentiary site into a year-round hub of sports and entertainment activity.



Downtown remains the employment center of the region.

**DOWNTOWN IS THE HUB OF GOVERNMENT, COMMERCE AND ENTERTAINMENT ACTIVITY IN CENTRAL OHIO.**



Figure 2 - Downtown Landmarks - 1"=1200'



# DOWNTOWN TODAY

## LAND USE & OWNERSHIP

Downtown Columbus is home to a diverse mix of uses. As the state capital of Ohio and the county seat of Franklin County, downtown has a preponderance of government offices and uses. These include the State House and state office buildings, the State Supreme Court, the Franklin County Government Complex and county offices, City Hall and city offices, and Federal courts and offices. While this provides a stable employment base for downtown, it results in a large amount of land dedicated to government office use which is not generating property tax revenues. It also reinforces a limited Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 activity base that creates peak traffic problems and leaves downtown vacant during non-work hours.

### Office

There is a significant amount of private sector office uses located throughout downtown. These office uses are found in the traditional clusters along Broad, High, Town and Front streets, but also in the Arena District, which has experienced strong office growth over the past 10 years.

### Attractions

Downtown is home to numerous regional and national attractions such as the Greater Columbus Convention Center, the North Market, Nationwide Arena, Huntington Park, the Columbus Museum of Art, COSI and various arts and theater venues. Prior to 2000, downtown was also the retail hub of the region. For nearly a decade after opening in 1989, the 1.3 million square foot City Center Mall was the place to shop in Central Ohio. As new regional malls sprung up in the suburbs, City Center was unable to compete. Capitol South re-acquired the property in late 2007 and plans to replace the monolithic structure with Columbus Commons, a mixed-use development that will eventually include park space, office, retail and residential uses. Demolition of the structure is complete and the park space will open in late 2010.

Elsewhere downtown, retail is located in the ground floor of buildings and scattered standalone structures. There is an estimated 152,000 square feet of vacant retail space along High Street alone.

### Residential

Residential uses have been increasing downtown in recent years, enough so that downtown recorded its first population increase since 1950. However, as can be seen in Figure 4, residential uses are scattered throughout downtown and in many locations downtown there is a lack of critical mass to create neighborhood vitality. In order to encourage new retail and other neighborhood amenities, the residential density issue will need to be addressed.

### Large Land Ownership

An analysis of large property ownership downtown also reflects the high number of government uses. A significant amount of land is owned by Franklin County, the City of Columbus, the State of Ohio and the United States Government. Other large land owners include museums, theaters and educational campuses. Almost one-third of all land downtown is held by public entities or large institutions.

Given that one of the largest impediments to redevelopment is land cost and acquisition, it is an advantage that government entities already have control of a sizable amount of under-utilized property. The fact that the City owns several large parcels on the Scioto Peninsula makes redevelopment on the west side of the river all the more possible. The CDDC sold several parcels it had aggregated in RiverSouth that are now being redeveloped as residential.

Other large land owners in downtown include educational institutions such as Columbus State Community College, Columbus College of Art and Design and Franklin University. These institutions are starting to better integrate their respective campuses into the urban fabric and have plans continue to make more effective use of their land. Together, these institutions have the potential to positively transform the eastern portion of downtown.



The Annex at RiverSouth has replaced surface parking lots with new residential development.



There is ample City-owned land on the Scioto Peninsula.

**DOWNTOWN IS DOMINATED BY OFFICE AND CIVIC USES, BUT RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT HAS BEEN STEADILY INCREASING IN RECENT YEARS.**





Columbus State's new bookstore on Cleveland Avenue represents a large step forward by the institution to embrace its urban surroundings.



High Street features a mix of modern office towers and older, traditional storefronts.

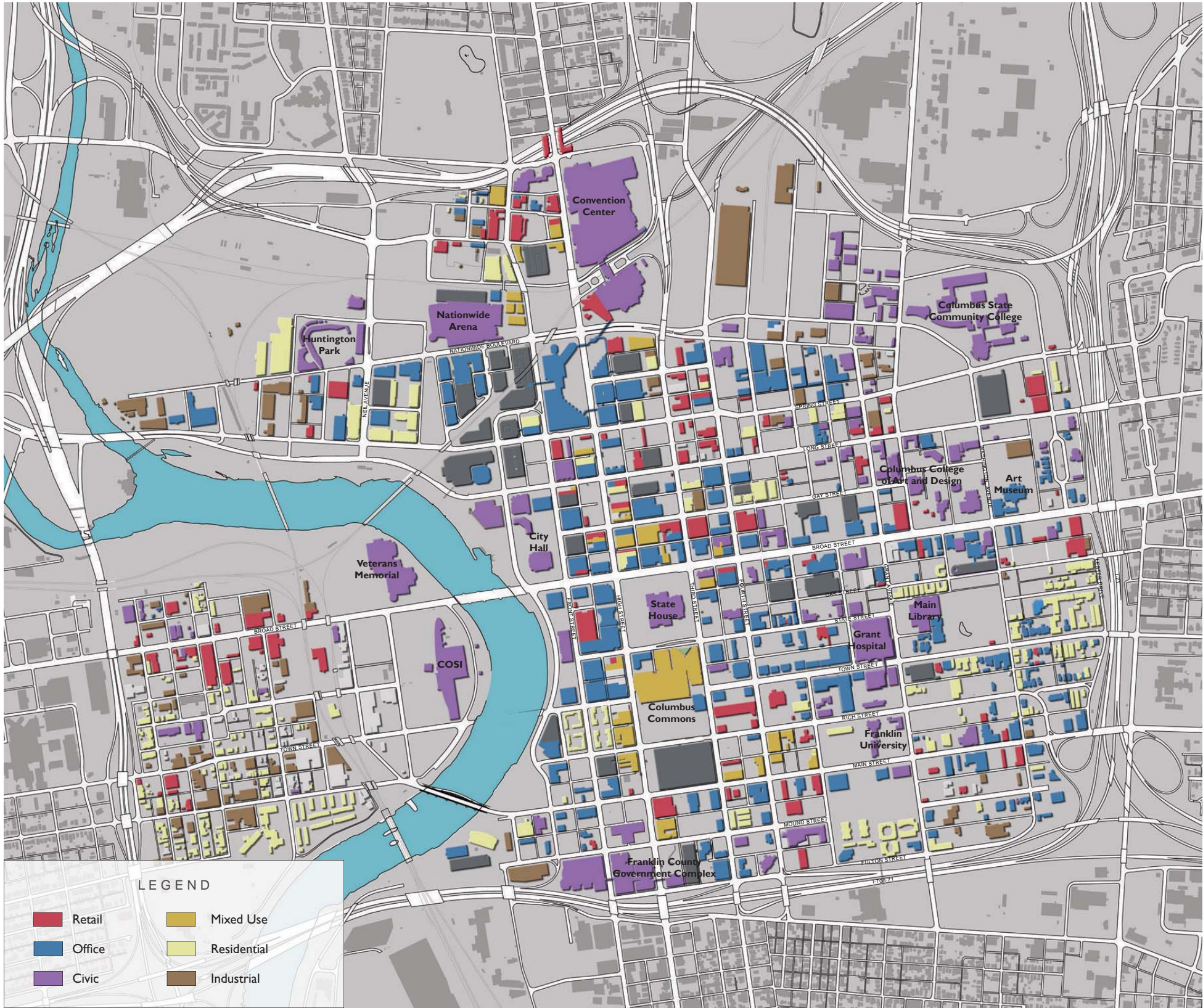


Figure 3 - Downtown Land Use - 1"=1200'



# DOWNTOWN TODAY

## CONNECTIVITY

### Streets

Today Downtown Columbus is oriented more toward automobiles than pedestrians. This is due in large part to the predominance of wide one-way and arterial streets that are focused primarily on moving automobiles in and out of downtown. While downtown must be accessible to vehicular traffic and maintain efficient traffic patterns, the over-reliance on one-way streets and wide arterials to allow for the quick movement of high traffic volumes for short peak intervals has severely impacted the pedestrian realm. One-way and arterial streets may be effective at moving traffic, but they also disrupt the traditional grid pattern of streets that make cities easy to navigate. Controlling directionality and turn movements makes it more difficult to navigate within downtown and impedes wayfinding.

### Blocks

The traditional city grid has also been altered over time with the development of large uses that span several blocks. The area between Front and High streets represents the traditional block size in Downtown Columbus. Measuring 440 feet by 440 feet, they are easily walkable and suited for pedestrians. In most areas this walkability is further enhanced by alleys and other smaller streets that break the blocks up into 220 foot by 220 foot quarter blocks. According to urban design and planner Jonathan Barnett, city blocks need to be less than 1,800 feet in perimeter area to maintain a walkable city. Downtown Columbus’ traditional block size meets that criteria. However, over time larger buildings such as the State House and City Center Mall and larger office buildings and garages disrupted this traditional, pedestrian-friendly block pattern (see Figure 4).

Aside from larger development blocks, the City has vacated or cut off streets and alleys to accommodate development and control traffic movements. This has resulted in larger than normal blocks. Evidence of this can be seen east of Fourth Street where Fifth Street was disconnected and several alleys vacated resulting in the blocks between Fifth and Grant streets and Grant and Washington streets that are overly large.

### Walking Distance

In addition to overly large block sizes throughout downtown, there are also long distances between downtown destinations. A generally accepted standard for the typical comfortable walking distance is one-quarter mile, or 1,250 feet. As shown in Figure 5, there are few major downtown destinations that are within a quarter-mile radius of one another. The fact that downtown lacks consistent activity and walkable attractions makes it less inviting to pedestrians and necessitates using automobiles to visit multiple locations downtown.

The diagram in Figure 6 focuses on the key activity centers in downtown, including the Convention Center, the Nationwide Arena, Broad and High, COSI, the Franklin County Government Center, the Main Columbus Library, and Columbus State Community College/CCAD. The only attractions that overlap in a meaningful way are the Nationwide Arena and the Convention Center. These two districts are both pedestrian friendly and have multiple destinations within walkable distances of one another. This is one reason both areas are experiencing growth and success. COSI and Broad and High also overlap. A visitor to COSI would be at the five minute walk limit just after crossing the Broad Street bridge, although with the development of the Scioto Mile this will create another destination that should serve to better link the Scioto Peninsula to downtown.

Outside of these two instances, downtown features large gaps both between and within walksheds. There is a significant activity gap between the Gay Street restaurant and bar cluster and the Arena District/Convention Center to the north. Columbus State and the Main Library are also well removed from other downtown activity centers. While residential redevelopment on Gay Street is planned to nearly reach Grant Street and bridge the gap between the Central Business District and the eastern edge of downtown, it will take more such developments with pedestrian activity to establish stronger connections.

These gaps represent opportunities for infill development. The large distances between activity centers also make the case for improved downtown transportation systems that could better link destinations and allow visitors, office workers and residents to park once and visit multiple locations downtown with ease.

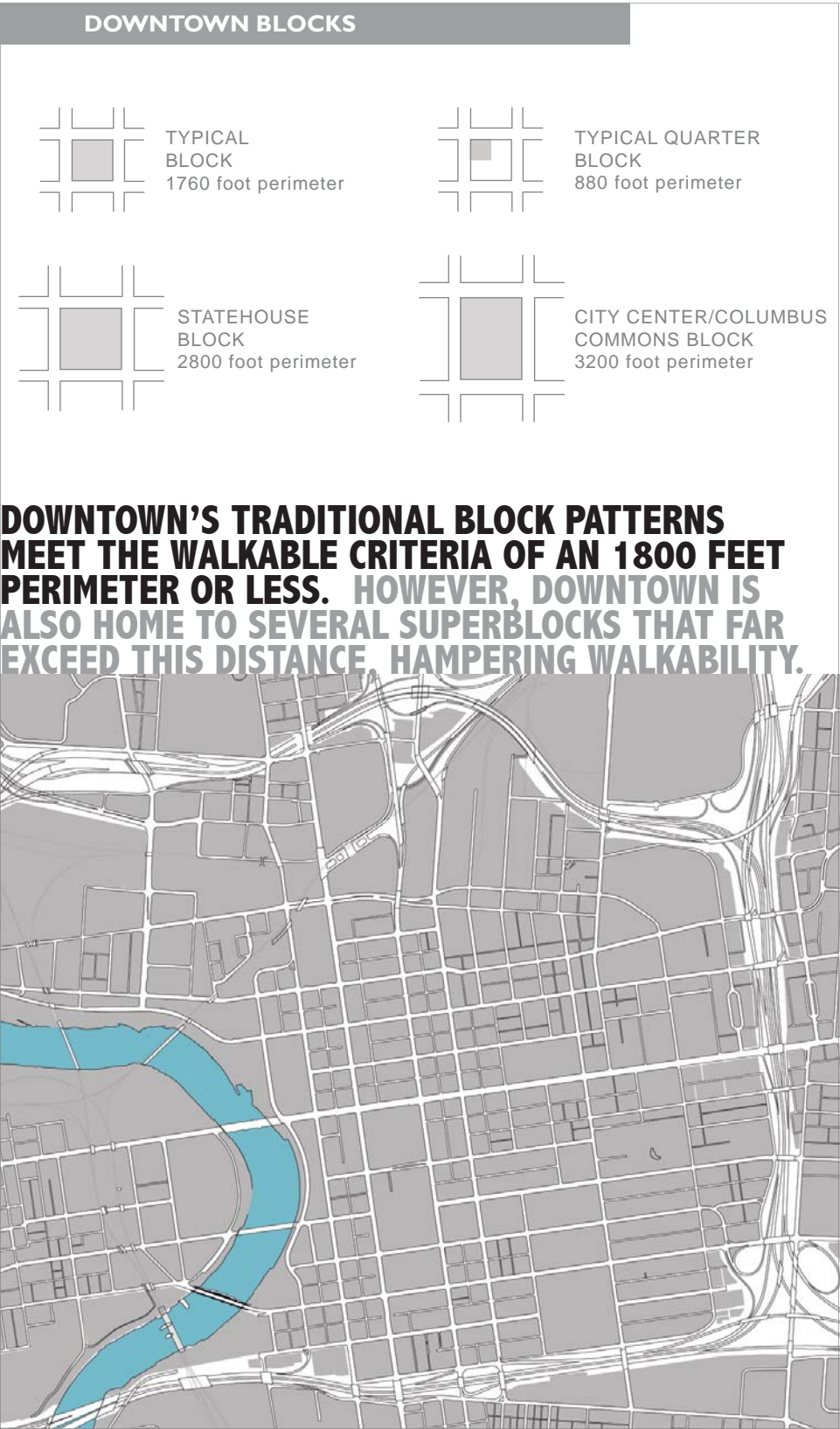


Figure 4 - Block Diagram - 1"=2000'





Ludlow Alley in the Arena District is an example of how to mitigate the impacts of a large block.



Broad and High is the historic and active center of Downtown Columbus. It is necessary to connect this activity zone with others downtown.

**FIVE-MINUTE WALKSHEDS ILLUSTRATE THE OVERLAP AND GAPS BETWEEN MAJOR USES DOWNTOWN. MOST USES ARE NOT WITHIN A COMFORTABLE WALKING DISTANCE OF ONE-ANOTHER.**



Figure 5 - Walking Distance Diagram - 1"=1200'



# DOWNTOWN TODAY

## OPEN SPACE

Open space downtown is largely concentrated along the Scioto River. Two new parks, McFerson Commons and North Bank Park, have been added to downtown in the past few years. The Scioto Mile project will connect these parks to the existing Genoa, Battelle and Bicentennial riverfront parks. This enhanced connection will help extend the energy of the individual parks along the entirety of the downtown riverfront. In addition to these new and recently opened parks, the Columbus Commons project will include new permanent green space as the anchor for the mixed-use redevelopment.

Aside from the riverfront, the only significant green spaces are the State House lawn and Topiary Park. Other uses such as City Hall, the Franklin County Government Complex, the Main Downtown Library, the Columbus College of Art and Design, and Columbus State Community College feature green spaces within their grounds. The remaining green space is limited to a handful of less successful pocket parks that are haphazardly scattered throughout downtown and have no meaningful connections to each other or surrounding uses and neighborhoods.

The area between Third Street and Grant Street has virtually no green space to speak of. Elsewhere in downtown, the addition or renovation of green space has proven to be an economic development spark and has helped to create an identity and focal point for a district or neighborhood. Therefore, there is clearly an opportunity in many areas of downtown to increase the amount and type of green space in an effort to provide gathering places for office workers, residents and visitors and to stimulate further reinvestment.

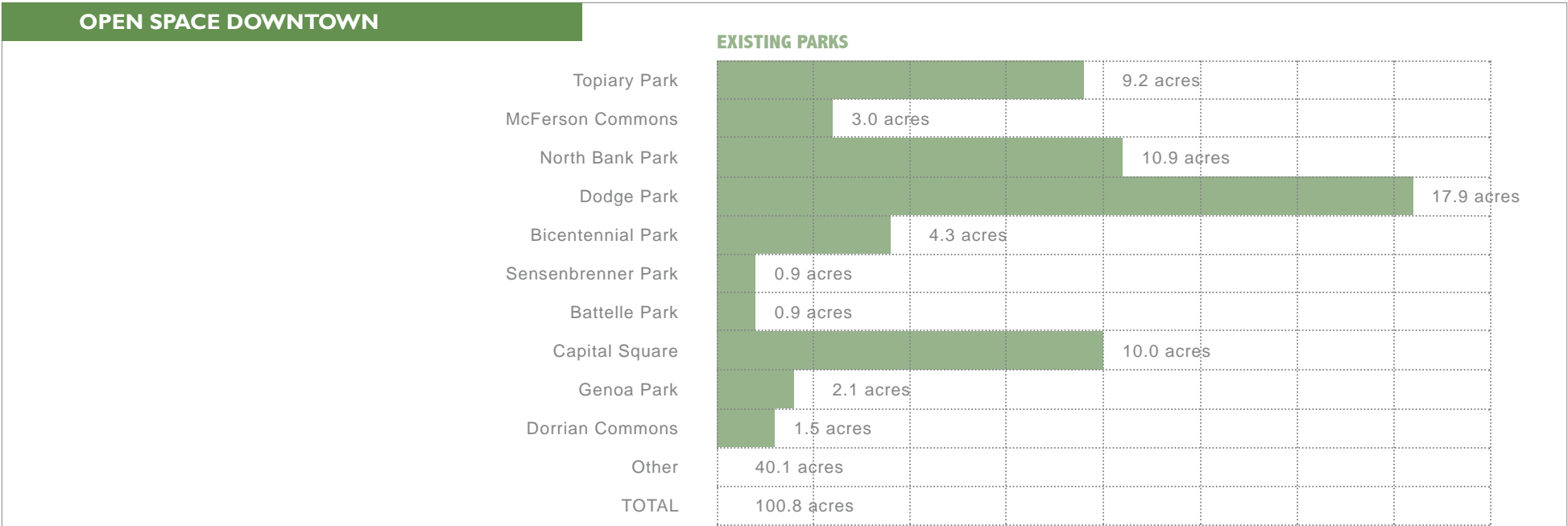


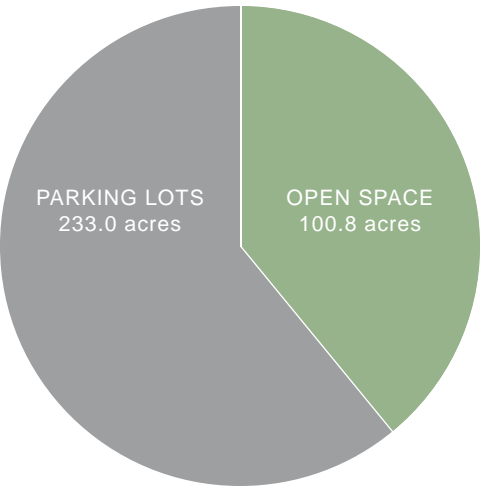
Table 1 - Existing Downtown Parks



North Bank Park is the newest addition to downtown's riverfront park system.



PARKING LOTS vs. OPEN SPACE



THERE IS MORE LAND AREA GIVEN TO PARKING LOTS THAN PARKS IN DOWNTOWN COLUMBUS.



Surface Parking Lots at High and Gay streets.

14 ACRES OF GREEN SPACE HAVE BEEN ADDED TO DOWNTOWN OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS AND A REDEVELOPED SCIOTO MILE WILL OPEN BY 2011. EVEN WITH THIS ADDITIONAL ACREAGE, THERE ARE STILL LARGE AREAS OF DOWNTOWN THAT LACK ADEQUATE OPEN SPACE.

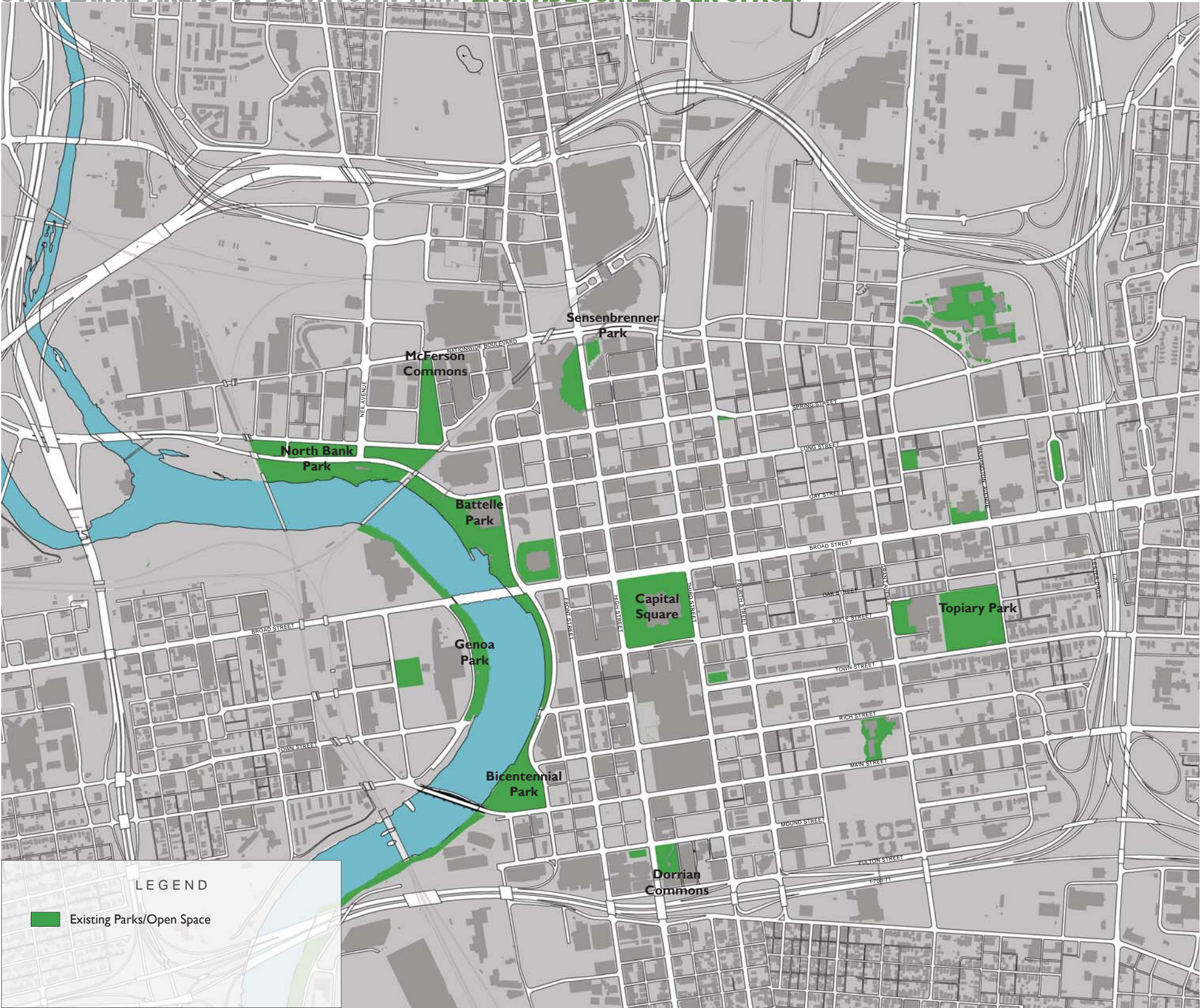


Figure 6- Open Space Diagram - 1"=1200'



# DOWNTOWN TODAY

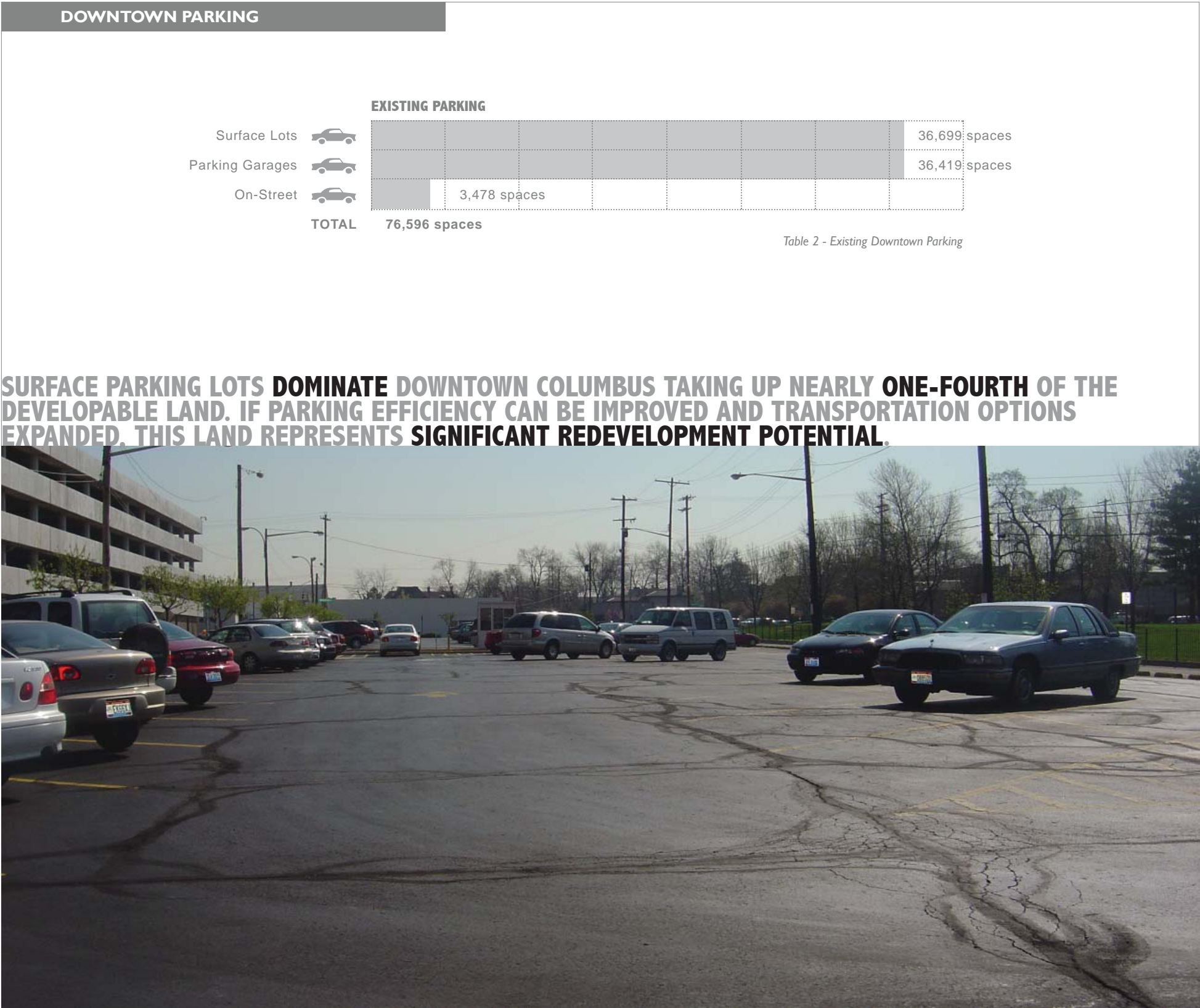
## PARKING

Parking is one thing that Downtown Columbus has in abundance. However, while the total amount of parking spaces in downtown is more than adequate, it is not necessarily located in close proximity to where it is needed. The lack of adequate parking close to the core employment centers downtown is limiting efforts to lease office buildings downtown.

The majority of garages in downtown are located in the Arena District and within the downtown core (between Front and Third streets). The office towers along Broad and High that have been built as downtown has grown over the past 50-plus years, however, lack adequate parking. This has resulted in the proliferation of surface parking lots throughout downtown to serve these large parking users, especially between Third and Grant streets. In order to put workers and visitors closer to their destinations, there is a need for increasing the supply of parking garages. This need is even more acute as development starts to occur on surface lots, removing parking supply from downtown.

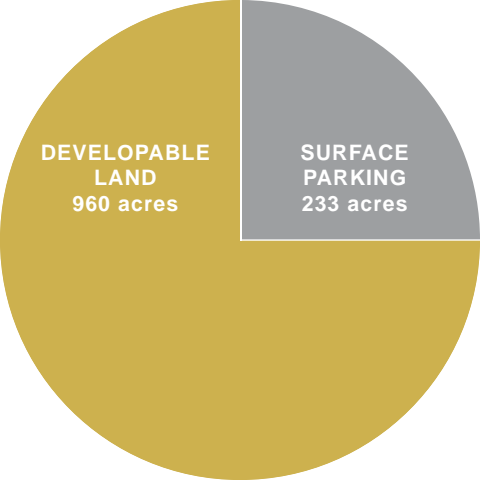
The City has responded to this need by investing \$28.9 million to construct two new parking garages at Front and Rich streets and Fourth and Elm streets that accommodate 1,450 cars. Given the infrastructure costs, over the long term it will require much more than just additional parking garages to solve the parking problem downtown. A comprehensive approach must be taken that includes alternative transportation options, peripheral parking facilities, and more downtown housing for workers.

Surface lots make up nearly half the total supply of parking in downtown. These surface lots represent 233 acres of land being used solely for the storage of automobiles. Most of these parking lots are empty after 5pm, making little contribution to the life of the city. The fact that 24% of downtown’s total developable land area is dedicated a non-productive and inactive use has adversely impacted the public realm. The built environment suffers because surface parking lots create dead zones that often extend across an entire block or several contiguous blocks. Today these surface parking lots are a liability, but in terms of future development ground, surface parking lots represent a significant opportunity to transform downtown.





**SURFACE PARKING vs. DEVELOPABLE LAND**



**THERE IS A TOTAL OF 233 ACRES OF SURFACE PARKING DOWNTOWN. THIS IS 24% OF THE TOTAL DEVELOPABLE LAND DOWNTOWN.**



The newly-opened RiverSouth Garage will support new and existing demand for parking spaces in RiverSouth.



Figure 7 - Downtown Parking Diagram - 1"=1200'



# DOWNTOWN TODAY

## RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT & DENSITY

Downtown Columbus has experienced a residential renaissance over the last decade, gaining population for the first time since 1950. Since 2002, more than 2,000 residents have moved into Downtown Columbus. Bucking the nationwide housing downturn, more than 600 housing units are planned, under construction or recently-opened in downtown.

This gain is due, in part, to the City's 2002 *Business Plan* which created a number of incentives including property tax abatement, utility tap fee credits, street and sidewalk improvement funding, and housing loan funds. The goal of this effort was to create 10,000 units in downtown in 10 years. While the total number of built, under construction and planned units is still short of this goal, it is significant progress. Downtown population was 3,488 in 2000 and the 2009 estimated population is 5,500. Combined with the resurgence of downtown's near neighborhoods, including Victorian Village, Italian Village and German Village, Columbus' urban core and its surroundings are becoming increasingly vital and vibrant.

### Range of Unit Types

There are a wide range of new downtown unit types available, including apartments, luxury condominiums, townhomes and warehouse lofts. In addition to new construction, a number of housing projects have renovated or added onto existing structures. The diversity of unit types and construction methods has enabled downtown housing to remain unique and retain its urban character.

### Lack of Critical Mass

The downtown residential market remains positive, despite the recent housing downturn. However, while the market has expanded and more people are moving downtown, there is still a lack of critical mass. Given the fact that residential incentives apply to all of downtown, new housing development has not been concentrated in any one area. Even in successful neighborhoods like the Arena District, the residential development component is not yet large enough to support a wide range of retail offerings. North of Broad Street between Fourth and Front Streets there has also been a number of new residential developments, but there is not enough concentration to result in significant activity within this 15 block area. Southern downtown and east of Fourth Street have not seen as much new residential development and contain large areas that have seen no development activity whatsoever.

### Affordability

Affordability has also been identified as an issue since the new residential development has largely been aimed at the higher end of the market. Affordable housing is seen by many as the key to retaining and attracting young professionals. The City-funded State of the Young Professionals in Columbus report concluded that the amount of downtown residential housing in the \$150,000 to \$200,000 price range and rental housing between

\$500 to \$700 per month needed to be increased. According to the study, providing affordable housing close to the activity centers in urban areas is attractive to young professionals who demand a certain "after hours" lifestyle. Since they are more likely to be single and starting out in their careers, their ability to afford high-end housing is limited.

According to the 2007 Danter Downtown Housing Analysis, the median sales prices in the downtown effective market area (this includes peripheral neighborhoods) was \$298,500. The report also showed a low apartment vacancy rate of 4% and noted that a limited amount of affordable rental products had been added to the market. In keeping with the Young Professional study, the Danter report found that there was a large market demand for for-sale housing units in the \$150,000 to \$199,000 price range and rental units between \$500 and \$750 a month, but that supply for both was limited. In response to this market demand, Lifestyles Communities is building apartments at the Annex at RiverSouth and Daimler is planning a multi-story apartment building at Gay and Grant streets that will be aimed at students.

### Need for Continued Growth

The renewed interest in the residential market is a positive trend and has sparked a new sense of optimism about the future of downtown, despite the economic downturn. The market for downtown housing will continue to expand and population figures are expected to continue trending upward. To achieve the missing critical mass, however, many agree that downtown will ultimately have to return to a residential population that is close to 1950 population level of nearly 30,000 full-time residents.



The Buggyworks in the Arena District is an example of a warehouse that was converted into urban lofts.

THERE HAS BEEN A RESIDENTIAL RENAISSANCE IN DOWNTOWN COLUMBUS DURING THIS DECADE, RESULTING IN **THE FIRST INCREASE IN POPULATION SINCE 1950**. WHILE THIS SUCCESS IS IMPRESSIVE, THERE IS STILL WORK TO BE DONE TO ACHIEVE ENOUGH CRITICAL POPULATION MASS TO MAKE DOWNTOWN VIBRANT AND ACTIVE.

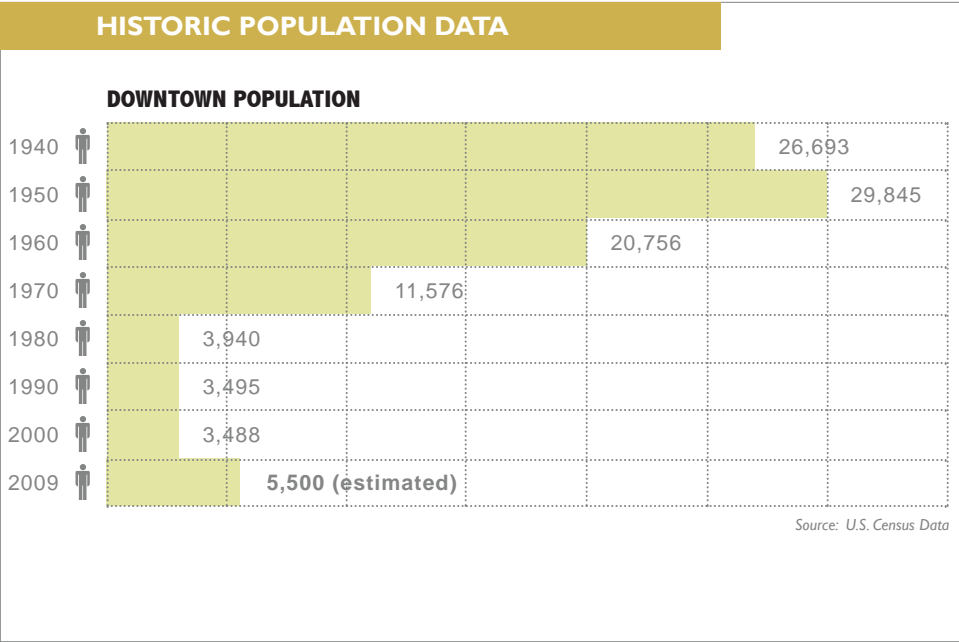


Table 3 - Downtown Population and Housing Data





Neighborhood Launch along Gay Street has replaced blocks of surface parking lots with infill residential development.



As one of the first luxury condominium developments, Miranova set the stage for downtown's residential growth.

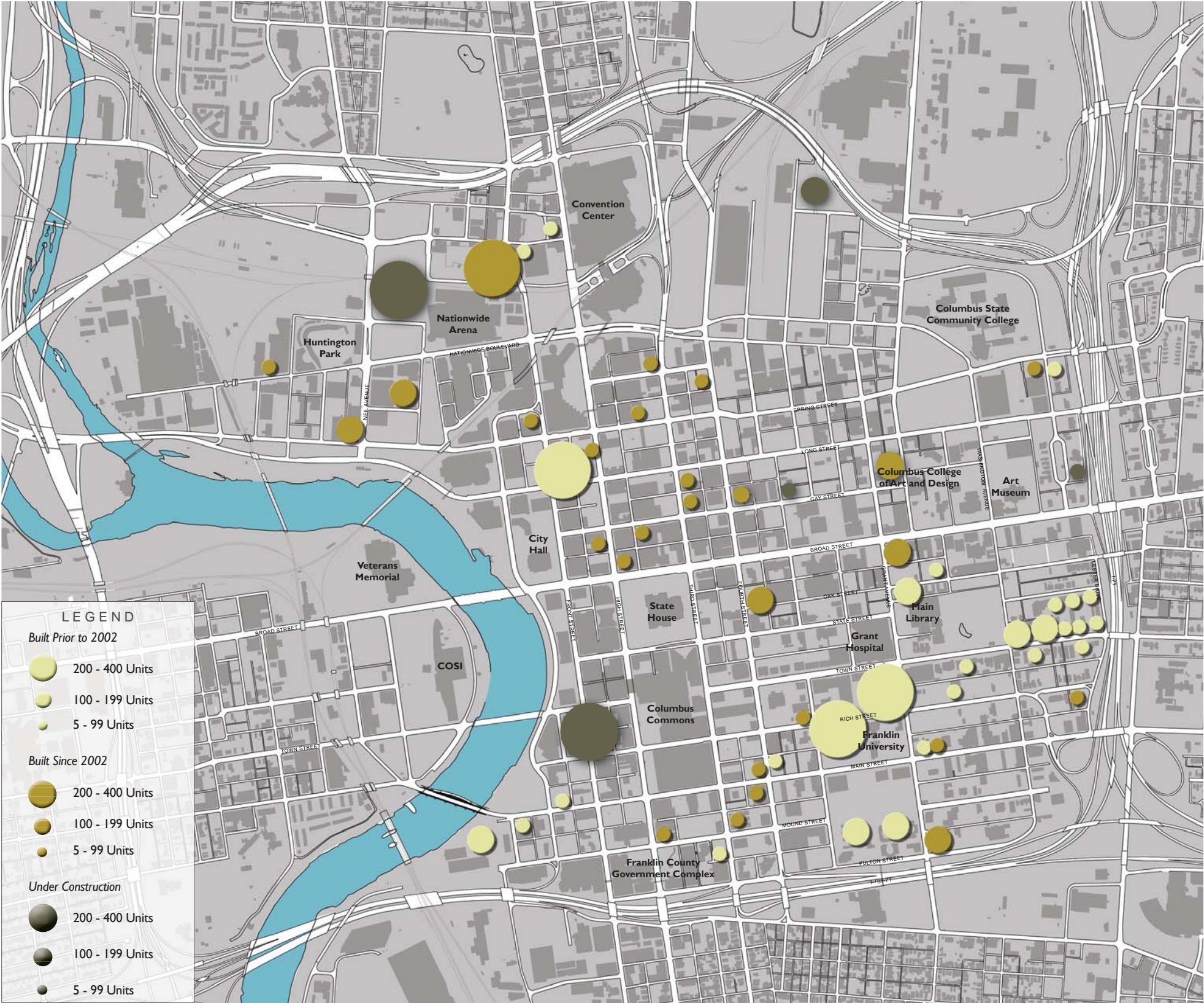


Figure 8 - Downtown Residential Diagram - 1"=1200'



# DOWNTOWN TODAY

## DEVELOPABLE GROUND

While it will likely take several more years, Downtown Columbus is on its way toward achieving the Mayor’s goal of 10,000 new housing units by 2012. Projects to-date have gone a long way toward repopulating downtown and have sparked renewed interest in urban living. If a multiplier of 1.5 residents per unit is used, the current new projects in the housing development pipeline will result in more than 1,000 downtown residents and a total downtown population of approximately 6,500. This is far less than downtown’s peak of nearly 30,000 residents in 1950, a number that many think will be necessary to recreate a vibrant 24-hour downtown.

With the goal of matching the 1950 population numbers and achieving at least 30,000 downtown residents in mind, the planning team analyzed the amount of available development ground in Downtown Columbus. Figure 10 shows the amount of development ground in downtown, which after subtracting non-developable areas and rights-of-way represents 960 acres. Subtracting areas of developed ground and institutions, leaves 163 acres of mostly parking lots and some vacant and underutilized buildings (see Figure 10).

The 163 acres represent the land that is most suitable to redevelopment downtown because it requires minimal removal of buildings and features largely contiguous sites. Assuming that residential development is the only type of use on all 163 acres, the dwelling unit/acre figures for four recent residential projects were applied to the highlighted areas to illustrate how different density levels would contribute to the total number of residents living downtown. With more than 2,500 units added in and adjacent to Downtown since 2002, three out of four recent downtown residential developments are built at densities that would exceed the Mayor’s 10,000 new housing unit goal. However, in order to reach the goal of having 30,000 residents downtown, more than 15,000 additional units would need to be constructed. While all types of density are appropriate in downtown, the average level of density of residential development in downtown would need to be somewhere between 67 to 126 DU/AC as shown in Table 5 in order to achieve this level of population.



Figure 9 - Development Ground Diagram (960 acres) - 1"=2000'

Figure 10 - Developable Ground Diagram (163 Acres) - 1"=2000'



ACHIEVING DOWNTOWN HOUSING GOALS

Achieving downtown’s housing goals will require the construction of a significant amount of additional residential units. Table 4 illustrates how many units will be necessary to meet downtown housing goals. Table 5 illustrates the dwelling units per acre (DU/AC) of four recent downtown residential developments and calculates the total number of units that could be constructed downtown and the number of new downtown residents if those project densities were applied across the available development ground downtown.

UNITS NECESSARY TO MEET HOUSING GOALS

CURRENT DOWNTOWN POPULATION:

5,500

ESTIMATED NEW RESIDENTS FROM NEW AND RECENT CONSTRUCTION:

1,000

NUMBER OF ADDITIONAL UNITS NEEDED TO MEET 1950 PEAK DOWNTOWN POPULATION OF 30,000\*

15,666

AVERAGE 96 DU/AC

\* ASSUMES A MULTIPLIER OF 1.5 PERSONS PER UNIT

Table 4 - Units Necessary to Meet Downtown Housing Goals

ANALYSIS OF CURRENT DEVELOPMENT





01 NEIGHBORHOOD LAUNCH	DENSITY: 35 DU/AC	02 THE RENAISSANCE	DENSITY: 67 DU/AC
	<p>ADDITIONAL DOWNTOWN UNITS POSSIBLE AT THIS DENSITY</p> <p>TOTAL NEW UNITS: 5,700</p> <p>TOTAL NEW RESIDENTS: 8,550</p>		<p>ADDITIONAL DOWNTOWN UNITS POSSIBLE AT THIS DENSITY</p> <p>TOTAL NEW UNITS: 10,900</p> <p>TOTAL NEW RESIDENTS: 16,350</p>
03 ARENA CROSSING	DENSITY: 126 DU/AC	04 60 SPRING	DENSITY: 155 DU/AC
	<p>ADDITIONAL DOWNTOWN UNITS POSSIBLE AT THIS DENSITY</p> <p>TOTAL NEW UNITS: 20,500</p> <p>TOTAL NEW RESIDENTS: 30,750</p>		<p>ADDITIONAL DOWNTOWN UNITS POSSIBLE AT THIS DENSITY</p> <p>TOTAL NEW UNITS: 25,200</p> <p>TOTAL NEW RESIDENTS: 37,800</p>

Table 5 - Analysis of Current Downtown Residential Development Densities



# DOWNTOWN TODAY

## EMPLOYMENT

Downtown is the employment center of the Central Ohio Region, with approximately 100,000 jobs. This represents 10 percent of the jobs in the region, and 22 percent of the jobs in the City of Columbus. Annual income tax revenue from these 100,000 jobs is approximately \$100 million. Put in perspective, the City has spent an average of \$10 million annually for the past ten years on capital improvements in Downtown Columbus. This means that the City gets back income tax revenue in one year what it has invested over 10 years through supporting a vibrant job market in Downtown Columbus. It is abundantly clear that continuing to invest in expanding this concentrated employment center plays a large role in the economic health of the City and the region as a whole.

### Office Vacancy Rates

The downtown office market is steadily improving after a brief downturn, despite the poor economy. While the suburban office supply has continued to increase over the past few decades, downtown remains the place to do business in Central Ohio. It is home to nearly 21 million square feet of office space. In the last few years, vacancy rates have steadily declined from a high of 26% in the first quarter of 2003 to a low of 13.06% in 2008. While the soft economy has caused vacancy rates to creep upward since then, downtown absorption has remained remarkably steady over the last couple of years. Since 2002, Downtown has added more than one million square feet of office space, much of it in the Arena District. The drop in vacancy rates can be attributed to both the addition of new Class A office space and the conversion of older office properties to residential uses.

### Advantages

One of downtown's primary employment advantages is that it is a government center. Because Columbus is a county seat and a capital city, the state, county and city all have major offices and institutions downtown. As the hub of state, county and city governmental functions, numerous legal and accounting offices are located downtown to take advantage of the proximity to government offices and institutions. In terms of the private sector, downtown is home to several large insurance companies, the largest of which is Nationwide Insurance that employs over 10,000 workers at its corporate headquarters downtown. American Electric Power, Huntington Bank and several other regional banking and utility company offices are also located downtown. In addition to Grant Hospital and numerous private medical practices downtown, Nationwide Children's Hospital just southeast of downtown is in the midst of a \$1 billion expansion.

### Opportunities for Growth

Government workers and the financial, insurance and healthcare industries currently dominate the downtown employment picture. There is very little occurring downtown to encourage start up businesses and entrepreneurship. Particularly lacking are high-technology businesses that are flourishing in other cities of similar size to Columbus. These are the types of new jobs and technologies that need to be focused if Downtown Columbus is to remain the major employment center of the City and the region as a whole.

## DOWNTOWN EMPLOYMENT IMPACT



**THE CITY GETS BACK IN INCOME TAX REVENUE IN ONE YEAR WHAT IT HAS INVESTED IN DOWNTOWN OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS THROUGH SUPPORTING A VIBRANT JOB MARKET IN DOWNTOWN COLUMBUS.**

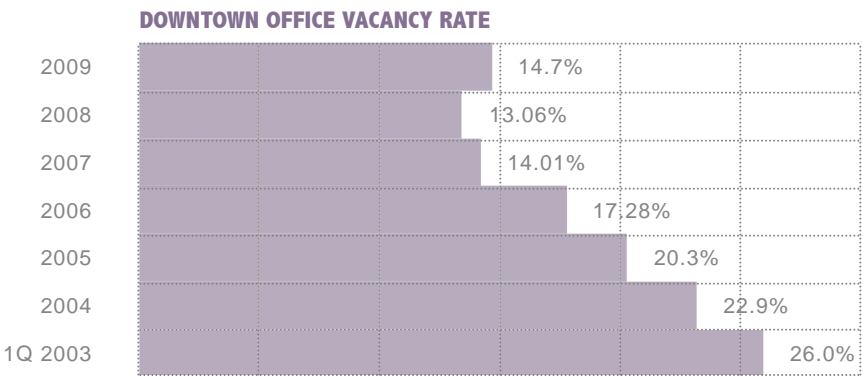


Table 6 - Employment Impact Data





The Huntington Center is one of the premier office spaces downtown.



The Ohio Supreme Court occupies a prime position along Front Street with views of the Scioto River.

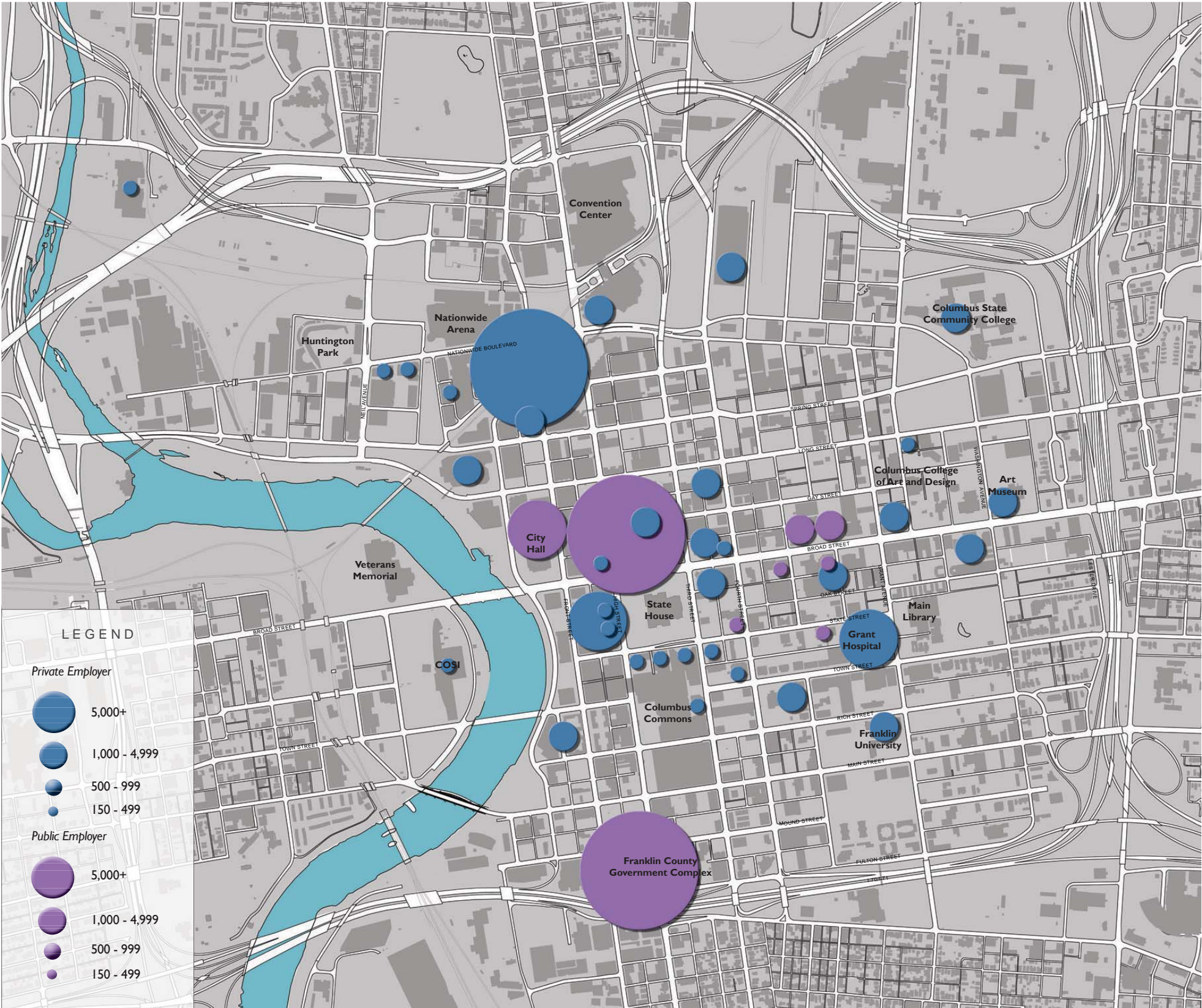


Figure 11 - Employment Centers - 1"=1200'



# DOWNTOWN TODAY

## VISITORS & ATTRACTIONS

Downtown is the arts and cultural hub of the region attracting nearly 8 million visitors yearly. Festivals account for almost 2 million visitors and other downtown attractions draw almost 6 million visitors. Downtown attractions can generally be divided up in to several clusters of activity including the Convention Center and Arena District, various Performing Arts facilities, the Scioto Mile, the Scioto Peninsula and the Discovery District. While these clusters have individual synergies, there is a lack of connectivity between them.

### Convention Center and Arena District

The Greater Columbus Convention Center and Nationwide Arena represent the largest two attractions downtown drawing more than 2 million visitors annually between them. These two attractions are located in close proximity to one another providing a strong synergy between the convention and sports and entertainment sectors. In addition to other restaurants, bars and a movie theatre, the Arena District is now home to Huntington Park baseball stadium. This addition solidifies its place as the sports and entertainment destination in Central Ohio.

The Convention Center also benefits from being close to numerous restaurants and adjacent to the Short North arts and entertainment district. The Convention Center is currently a successful regional venue, but has shortfalls that hurt its ability to host large national conventions. One of its major limitations is the lack of adjacent full-service hotels. There are approximately 3,000 hotel rooms in the whole of downtown, and only half qualify as full service. As a point of comparison, Indianapolis’ convention center has 3,000 full service hotel rooms directly connected or adjacent to its convention halls. In order to address this issue, plans for a full service hotel across High Street from the Convention Center are underway.

### Performing Arts

Downtown is also home seven performing arts venues that are located in close proximity to High Street. The Ohio, State, Capitol and Southern theaters along with the Riffe Center collectively draw 800,000 people annually. Adjacent to these performing arts venues is the Ohio State House which attracts 100,000 annually. While these attractions are in close proximity they are not in a tight enough cluster to generate the level of critical mass and evening activity to make downtown a more vibrant place to be.

### Scioto Mile

Festivals downtown are primarily located along the riverfront. These popular festivals are centered around Bicentennial Park on the southernmost section of the riverfront, but some extend north up Civic Center Drive and across to the west side of the Scioto River. The Scioto Mile improvements which are currently underway, will result in upgraded festival grounds and facilities, which should improve both the ability to manage crowds and enhance the visitor experience.

### Scioto Peninsula

The Scioto Peninsula also draws a significant amount of people downtown. COSI has more than 500,000 visitors annually and Veterans Memorial draws 750,000. While these are large amounts of people, there are no synergies between the two institutions. The Scioto Peninsula, which has been referred to as Columbus’ “Cultural Peninsula,” is largely made up of vacant ground and is in need of one or more complementary uses to fully become fully activated.

### Discovery District

On the eastern edge of downtown is the Discovery District, which is home to four higher education institutions, the Main Library for the Columbus Metropolitan Library System and the Columbus Museum of Art. The campuses of Columbus State Community College (CSCC), the Columbus College of Art and Design (CCAD), Franklin University, and Capitol University Law School represent more than 32,000 students. The Main Library attracts nearly one million visitors annually. The Art Museum, which is adjacent to CCAD and is currently planning to expand, has 250,000 visitors annually. While this district is largely cut off from all the other attractions downtown, it does contain some compelling synergies. Both CCAD and CSCC have completed new buildings and have made a commitment in their campus plans to better relate to the surrounding urban fabric.

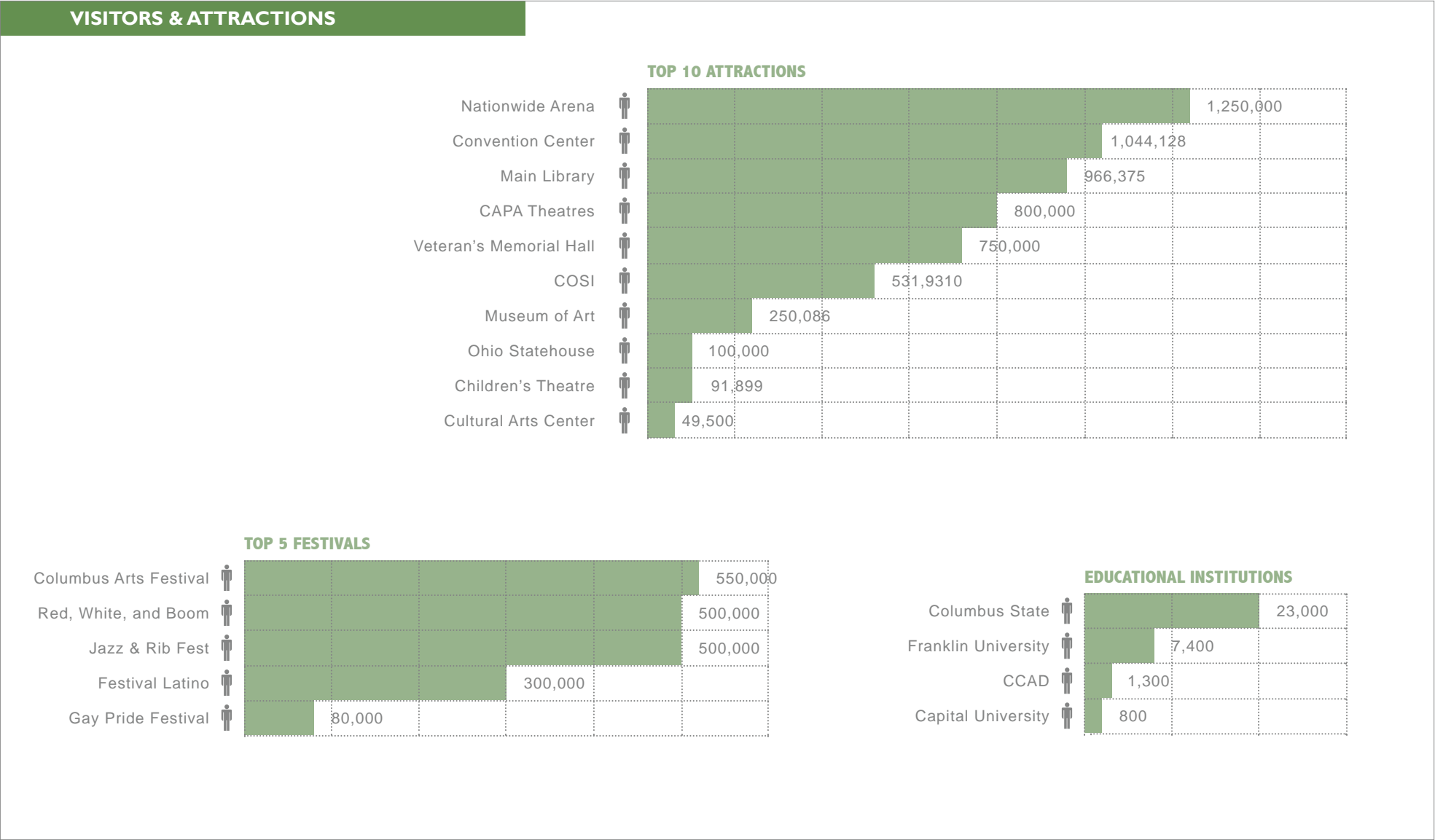


Table 7 - Visitors and Attractions Data





Nationwide Arena draws more than 1 million people downtown annually.



The Columbus Arts Festival is the largest downtown festival.

DOWNTOWN ATTRACTIONS ARE **WIDELY DISPERSED** THROUGHOUT DOWNTOWN WITH THE CONVENTION CENTER AND NATIONWIDE ARENA ON THE NORTH SIDE, A PERFORMING ARTS AND FESTIVAL CLUSTER IN THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN, AND THE MAIN BRANCH OF THE COLUMBUS PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM AND COLUMBUS MUSEUM OF ART ON THE EAST EDGE OF DOWNTOWN.



Figure 12 - Downtown Attractions - 1"=1200'