



City of Sterling
Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan
Interim Document
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Lawrence Brothers Property October 2010

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The City of Sterling has undertaken the development of a Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan to address current issues, challenges and opportunities confronting the Rock River Riverfront. The Plan will provide a conceptual redevelopment plan for six functionally obsolete industrial sites, collectively referred to as the “Riverfront Redevelopment Sites.”

This document is the first deliverable in the planning process and is representative of the first four sections of the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan and will evolve into the final plan document.

History & Regional Context

The City of Sterling is located along the Rock River in Whiteside County, Illinois, approximately 100 miles west of Chicago. Prior to settlement, the territory was occupied by the Fox and Sauk Indian tribes. The territory became attractive to settlers after the Black Hawk War in the early 1800s due to the area’s abundant natural features such as the Rock River, Elkhorn and Sugar Creeks, and a combination of woodlands and prairie. In 1834, Hezekiah Brink was the first person to build a cabin in the area. He was soon joined by other settlers.

In 1836, the community of Harrisburg was created when a steamer pilot by the name of Captain D.S. Harris delivered a load of supplies to the area via the Rock River. In turn, Harris received a half-interest in the community and it was named in his honor. Around the same time, William Kirkpatrick laid claim to property located near Harrisburg that came to be known as the settlement of Chatham. The residents of Harrisburg and Chatham became rivals as they competed for possession of rented office space and a post office called the Rock River Rapids. It was not until 1838 that Harrisburg and Chatham made their peace and merged in hopes of becoming the county seat. The two settlements united under the new name of Sterling in honor of Major James Sterling from the Black Hawk War; however, the county seat was moved to Morrison, Illinois and remains there today.

Original settlers’ hoped to utilize the Rock River as a navigational route. This plan never came to fruition because the river had too many rapids. Instead, the settlers harnessed the river’s power to run saw and grist mills. Since navigating the Rock River was not an option, the state authorized construction of a canal to run along the south side of the river and bypass the shallow waters. Financial problems caused this project to be abandoned as well. While Brink was somewhat successful in running a ferry service on the Rock River to attract travelers, other means for crossing the river were unsuccessful.

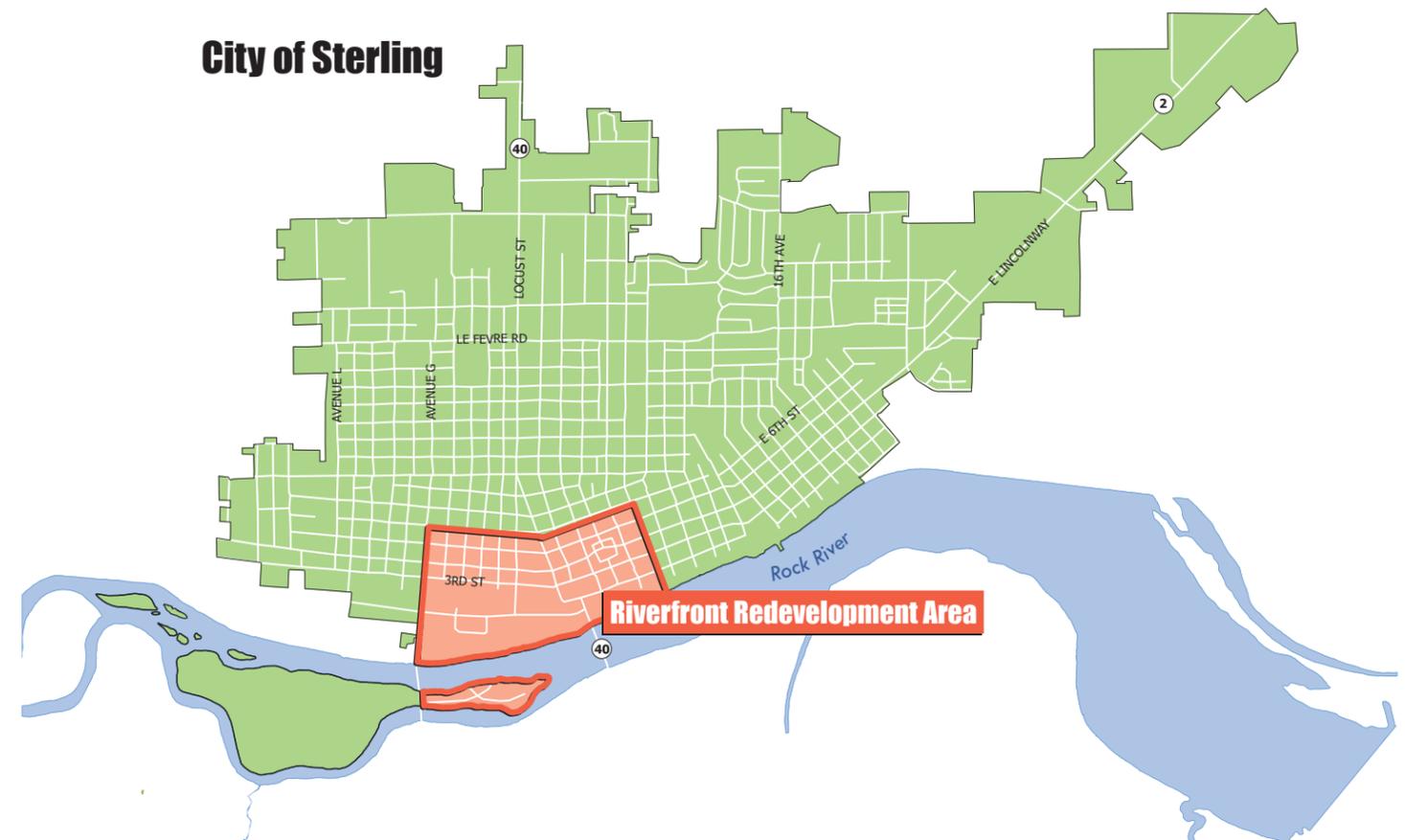
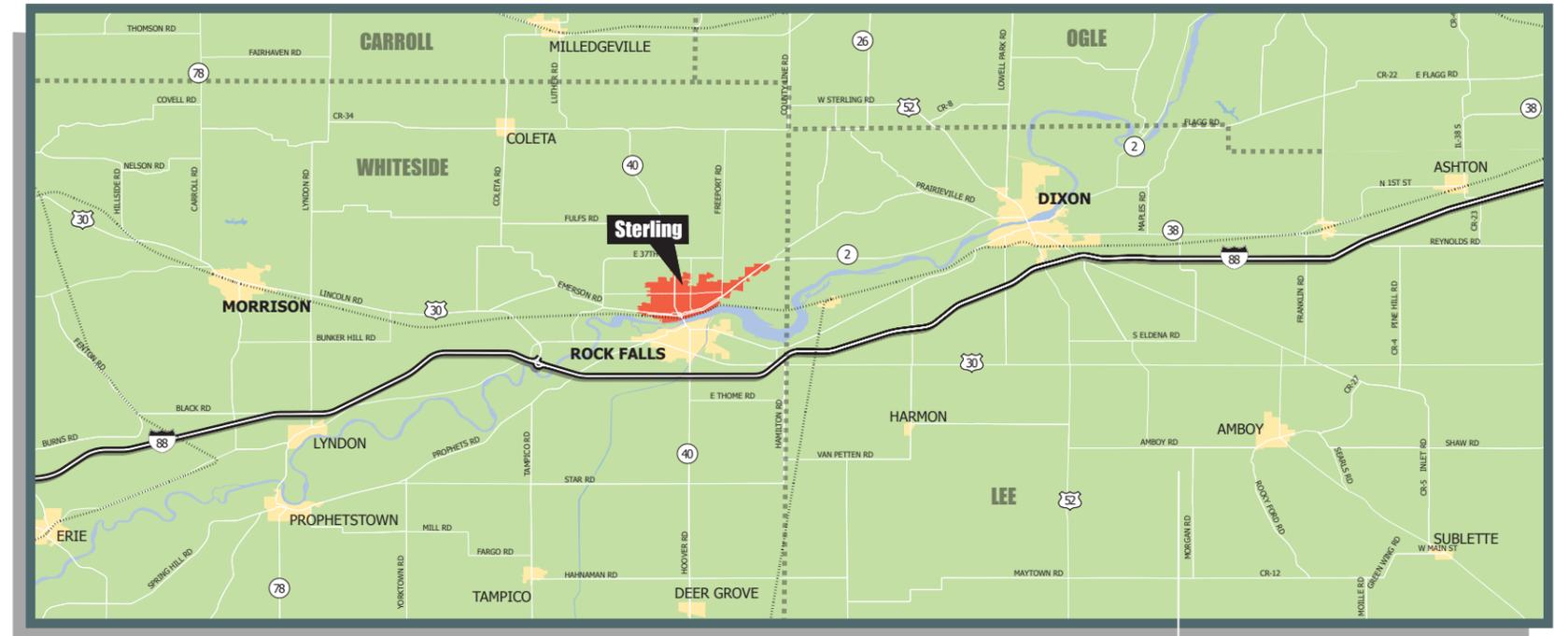
The first train arrived in Sterling in July 1855 and was the cause for great celebration for the town. With the power from the river and the transportation provided by the railroads, Sterling’s business and industry began to grow. One of the first factories built was the Mitten Factory owned by A.P. Smith, the founder of Rock Falls. Shortly after, Northwestern Steel & Wire Co., Lawrence Brothers Inc., National Manufacturing Co., the Wahl Clipper Corporation and others were founded along the Rock River shoreline.

In 1856, attempts to construct the first bridge across the Rock River were undertaken. The bridge was never completed and eventually washed away before it could be used. Other bridges were built and destroyed by the elements, including a toll bridge in 1863 and another later in 1904. The bridge built in 1904 was expected to last forever, but fell to ruins in 1906.

Sterling was incorporated as a city in 1857, when it received a special charter from the General Assembly. An election of officers was held and Lorenzo Hapgood was chosen to be the first mayor. In 1869, the charter was revised and Sterling was governed under amended provisions until it was incorporated under State law.

In July 1889, the installation of a system to light the City with electricity and the construction of an electric railway progressed simultaneously. However, the electric transportation project was complicated and was dormant for 10 years. One of the few electric lines to be successfully implemented was the Sterling, Dixon and Eastern Electric Railway (SD & EER). The SD & EER ran a trolley service between Sterling and Dixon from 1904 to 1925.

Regional Setting





Purpose of the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan

To address current issues, challenges and opportunities confronting the Riverfront, the City undertook the development of a Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan. The City is at a unique point due to a culmination of events including the decline of industry in the area and the displacement of Downtown businesses as development transpires on the City's periphery. To respond to these altering events, an inventive and implementable plan must be put into place. It is important that the Plan be grounded in market realities and incorporates the three pillars of sustainability: economic, environmental and cultural.

Sterling's Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan provides a conceptual redevelopment plan for several parcels of functionally obsolete industrial sites along the Rock River; and, potentially, adjoining areas. The area addressed could total more than 35 acres and cover nearly one mile of shoreline. The sites are characterized by aging, vacant structures and a gritty appearance. The Riverfront Redevelopment Plan provides an opportunity to address these issues in addition to future redevelopment along the Rock River.

The Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan presents a "blueprint" to guide the City and other stakeholders in their efforts to reinvent and reclaim the Riverfront. A fundamental goal will be to establish the Riverfront as an amenity and destination rooted in the City's historic past, while providing opportunities for the future.

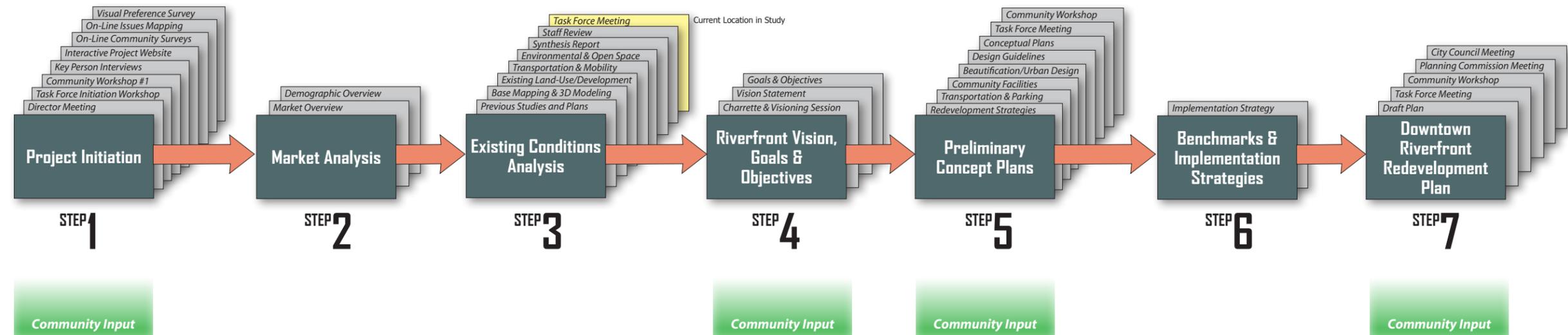
As an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan, this Plan is the official, adopted policy guide for future development/redevelopment and design improvements along the Rock River riverfront. It sets forth goals, analyzes existing conditions and trends, and illustrates a long-range vision for the physical, social and economic characteristics of Sterling's Riverfront.

The Riverfront Redevelopment Sites

The Riverfront Redevelopment Sites consist of four parcels along the Rock River riverfront. The sites were previously used for industrial purposes but have fallen into disuse after businesses have closed. Details of each parcel are highlighted above.

Additional parcels to the east or west may be looked at or pursued in the future should conditions permit.

Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan Planning Process



The Planning Process

The Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan is the product of a multi-step, community-driven planning process. The planning process engaged the Sterling community, analyzed existing conditions, identified opportunities and constraints, and established a community vision, goals and objectives for the Riverfront area.

Riverfront Redevelopment Task Force

A Riverfront Redevelopment Task Force was established to work with the Consultant Team throughout the course of the study. The Task Force was appointed by the Mayor and consists of City staff, elected and appointed officials, and volunteers who are willing to shepherd the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan on a day-to-day basis.

Organization of the Report

This document serves as an interim document of the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan. It is representative of the first four sections of the final Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan.

This interim document is divided into 4 sections:

Section One: Community Outreach

Section Two: Market Analysis

Section Three: Existing Conditions

- ◇ Past Plans and Studies
- ◇ Land Use & Development Patterns
- ◇ Downtown Streetscape Design Elements
- ◇ Parks, Open Space and Environmental Features
- ◇ Transportation

Section Four: Issues & Opportunities

Additional sections will be added as the planning process progresses. Upon completion, the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan will present the results of the planning process and provide recommended policies and guidelines for promoting high quality redevelopment and reinvestment along the Riverfront.