

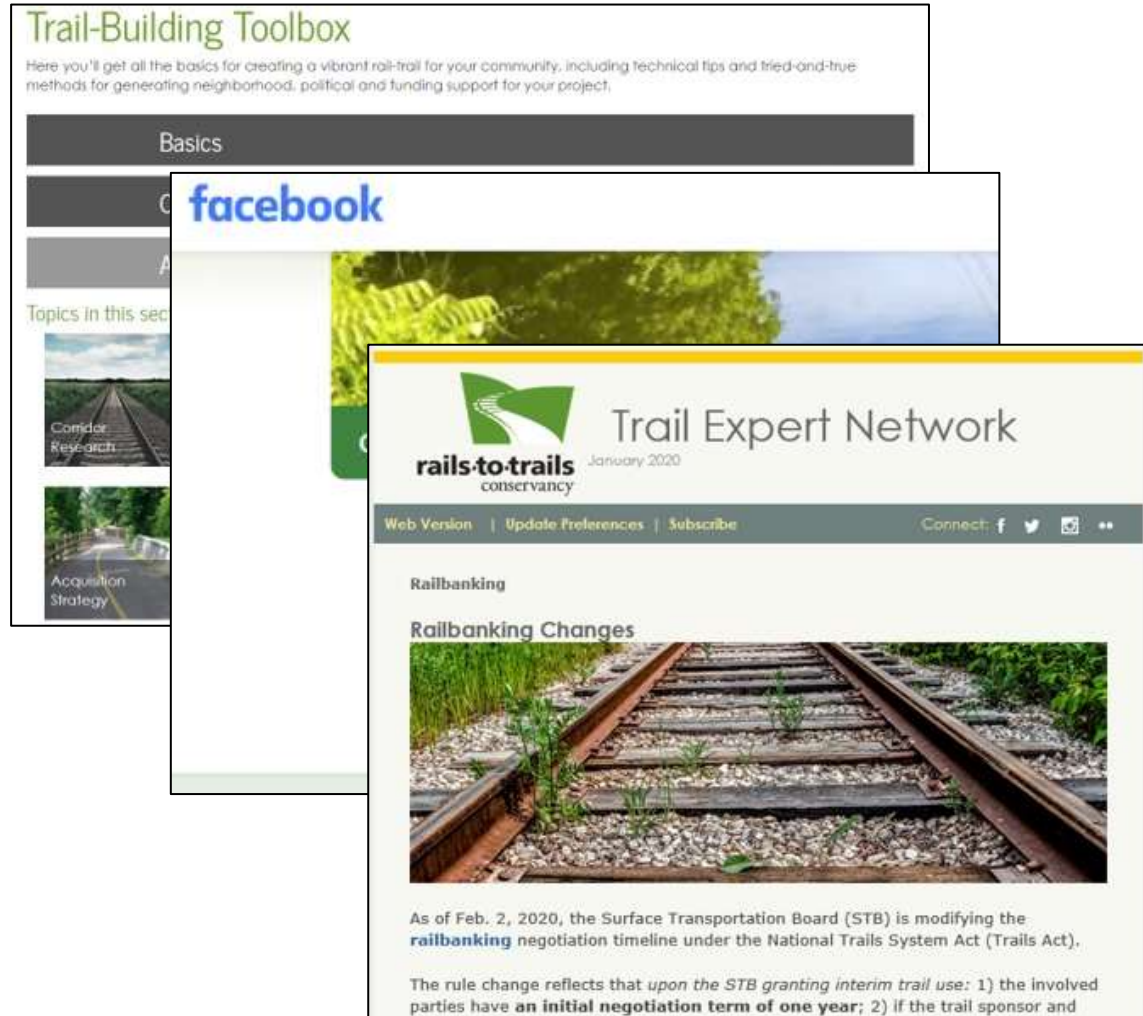


# ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF THE GREAT AMERICAN RAIL TRAIL

JUNE 28, 2022 WEBINAR

CASPER RAIL TRAIL | COURTESY PLATTE RIVER TRAILS TRUST

# Join the Trail Expert Network (TEN) today



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# Great American Rail Trail







# Liz Thorstensen

Vice President of Trail Development,  
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

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**Trails and trail networks are foundational to economic opportunity & overall economic competitiveness**



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THE AVENUE

## Improving quality of life—not just business —is the best path to Midwestern rejuvenation

John C. Austin, Amanda Weinstein, Michael Hicks, and Emily Wornell · Wednesday, January 26, 2022

THE AVENUE



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# Menino Survey of Mayors

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- Three out of every four mayors expect residents to spend more time visiting parks and greenspace than they did before the pandemic;
- Roughly two-thirds expect residents will spend more time biking or walking.
- If these expectations hold, equitable investment in parks and open spaces will become even more critical as a foundation for an inclusive city.

# More Than a Trail!

---

“There are no cheap silver bullets in economic development, but a long-distance trail comes close; it brings in tourist dollars while also creating local activity in the towns it runs through, helping sell shoes, bikes and pumping up streetscape vitality.”

*—Jon Snyder, Senior Outdoor Recreation and Economic Development Policy Advisor to Washington Gov. Jay Inslee*

- One of the goals of the Great American Rail-Trail is to support community economic development
- RTC estimates that the Great American Rail-Trail will cost approximately \$1 billion to complete (recouped within five years by direct visitor spending along the route, per the findings of the study)
  - Since the trail was announced in 2019, more than \$54 million has been invested in projects that fill critical gaps along the route.

# Trail Connectivity Matters!

- It's about access: when trail connections are made, usage increases by 40-80% -Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
- A 2020 study by the National Association of Realtors found that people who had more walkable amenities near their homes were most satisfied with the quality of life in their neighborhood







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**[Railstotrails.org](http://Railstotrails.org)**



# Megan Lawson, PhD

Economist,

Headwaters Economics

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ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF THE

# GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL<sup>®</sup>

 **HEADWATERS**  
ECONOMICS







# HEADWATERS ECONOMICS

Independent Nonpartisan Research



*Methods*

*Visitor spending  
& economic impacts*

*Other measurable  
community benefits*

*Tailoring your  
message*



# Methods

*Visitor spending  
& economic impacts*

*Other measurable  
community benefits*

*Tailoring your  
message*





# How we measure economic impact

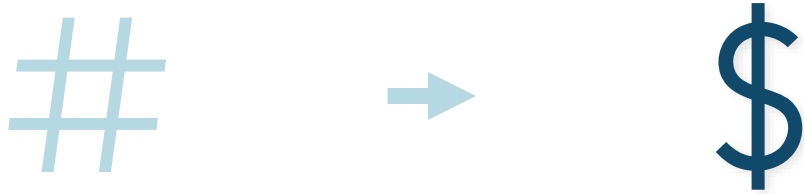
## #

### Trail Users:

- Trail Counter Data
- Statistical Modeling



# How we measure economic impact



## Trail Users:

- Trail Counter Data
- Statistical Modeling

## Visitor Spending:

- Previous studies





# How we measure economic impact

#



\$



## Trail Users:

- Trail Counter Data
- Statistical Modeling

## Visitor Spending:

- Previous studies

## Economic Impact:

- IMPLAN statistical model



HEADWATERS ECONOMICS



Methods

# Visitor spending & economic impacts

Other measurable  
community benefits  
Tailoring your  
message



HEADWATERS ECONOMICS

# DIRECT IMPACT

DIRECT BENEFITS  
FROM SPENDING RELATED  
TO THE TRAIL.

A trail visitor spends money  
at local restaurants, gear stores,  
and other businesses,  
supporting workers' salaries.



# INDIRECT IMPACT

BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS PURCHASES  
IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN STEMMING  
FROM USE OF THE TRAIL.

The restaurant is supported  
by suppliers, delivery companies,  
and other industries.



# INDUCED IMPACT

EMPLOYEES IN THE BUSINESS  
SUPPLY CHAIN SPEND THEIR  
WAGES IN THE COMMUNITY,  
CREATING A RIPPLE EFFECT.

Workers at the restaurant, supply store,  
delivery company and other supporting  
industries spend their salaries in the community  
for everyday needs, supporting diverse businesses.



# The Great American Rail-Trail could generate annually:



25.6M TRIPS



2,500  
NEW JOBS



\$229.4M  
IN VISITOR SPENDING



\$104M  
IN LABOR INCOME

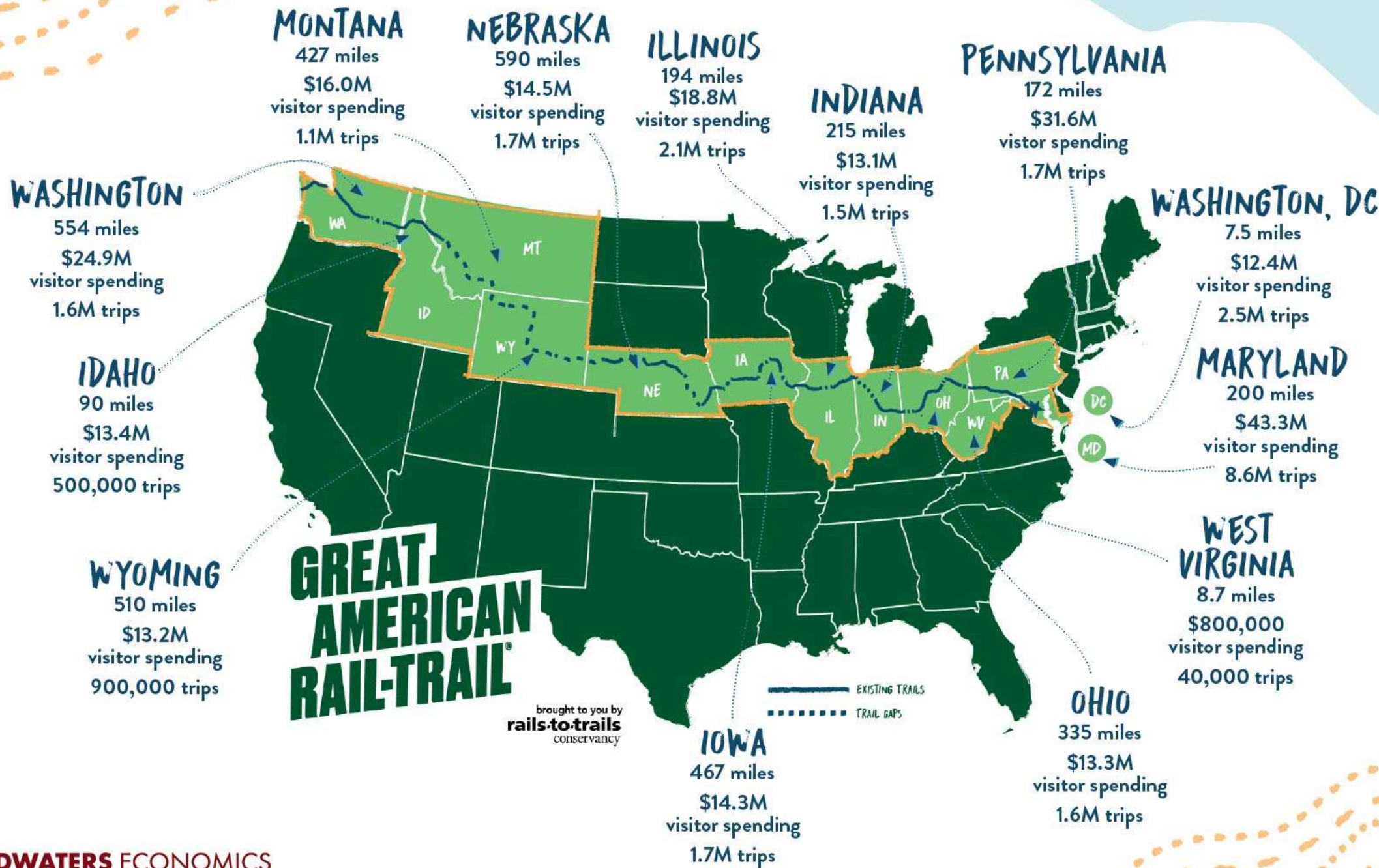


\$22.8M  
IN NEW TAX REVENUE

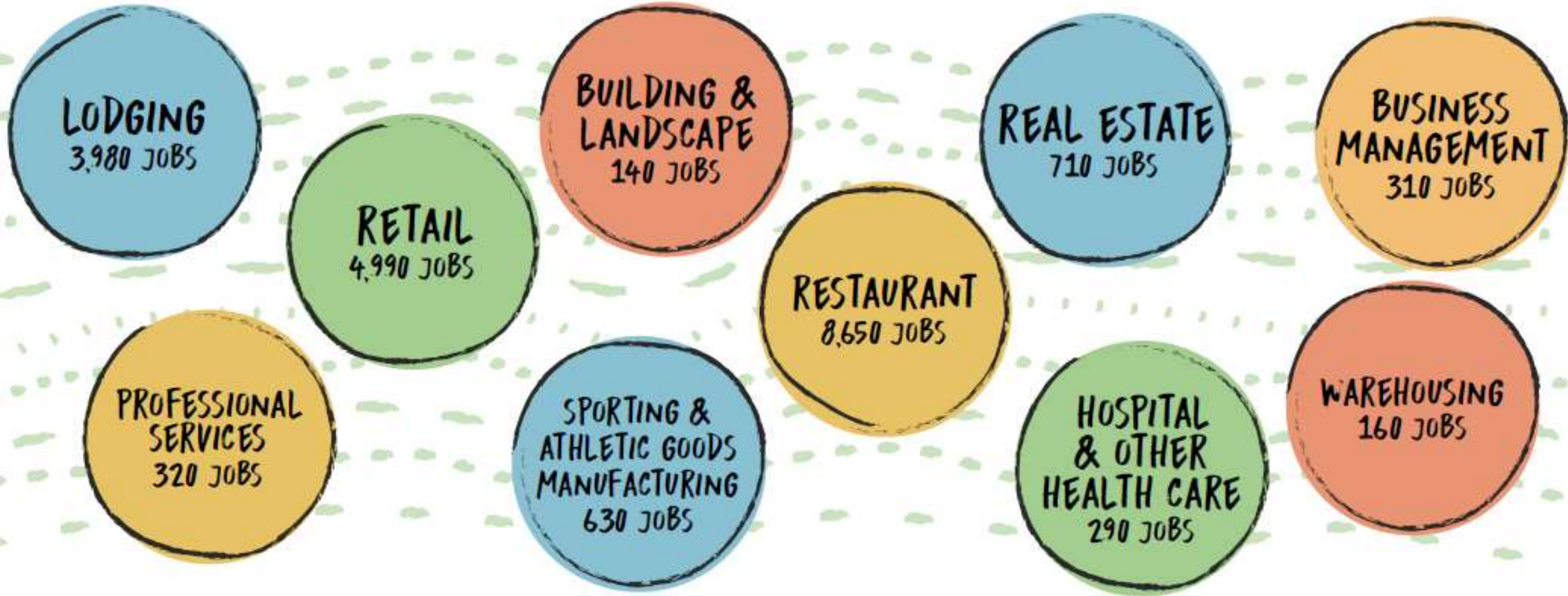


\$161M  
GDP CONTRIBUTION





# GRT will support diverse industries





# IOWA

In Iowa, the trail is expected to generate annually:

**\$1.2M**

in new  
tax revenue

**\$8.9M**

GDP contribution

**\$14.3M**

in visitor  
spending

**1,700,000**

trips

**170**

new jobs

**\$5.8M**

in labor income



HEADWATERS ECONOMICS



## WASHINGTON, DC

## IOWA

## WYOMING

## NEBRASKA

## MARYLAND

## ILLINOIS

## MONTANA

## PENNSYLVANIA

## OHIO

## IDAHO

## WEST VIRGINIA

## INDIANA

## WASHINGTON

In West Virginia, the Great American Rail Trail® travels through the Northern Panhandle through the town of Weston along the Ohio River. West Virginia contains the last number of miles along the Great American Rail Trail of any state across the nation. The West Virginia section is located along the Cleveland to Pittsburgh corridor of the proposed 1,500-mile [Industrial Heritage Trail](#).



In West Virginia, the trail is expected to generate annually:



A dozen trails will boost the preferred route of the Great American Rail Trail® in Indiana which will take a significant portion of the route from Richmond to the Chicago metropolitan area. The route is home to well-trodden trails such as the Centerville Greenway, which connects the eastern side of the state to urban Muncie and Marion, and the Nickel Plate Trail—which features the famous double corn-belt landscape the Hoosier State is known for.



In Indiana, the trail is expected to generate annually:



Washington State's history of trail development has resulted in some of the country's most iconic and well-used trails, making it ideal as a centerpiece for the Great American Rail Trail®. The trail route will begin at the Idaho-Washington border on the developing Palouse to Cascade State Park Trail, which is a rail-trail that travels in a variety of ways of the state, ending in Cedar Falls. From there, a variety of trails in King County carry the Great American Rail Trail into the Seattle area, where the trail will eventually continue west to the Pacific Ocean along the burgeoning Olympic Discovery Trail.



In Washington, the trail is estimated to generate annually:



Since the Old Mill Race Trail was first built through western Washington in 1911, it has been a trail that has been a part of the region's identity. Today, residents inspired by the 2020 Bold Plan for a new trail are working toward the goal.

"There is no cheap, short-term economic development. There is only a long-term investment in the future. It is long-term investment in the future that will create jobs, income, and a better future for all of us. That is the only way to build a better future for all of us." — Joe Spitzer, Mayor of Everett, Washington

*Methods*

*Visitor spending  
& economic impacts*

# Other measurable community benefits

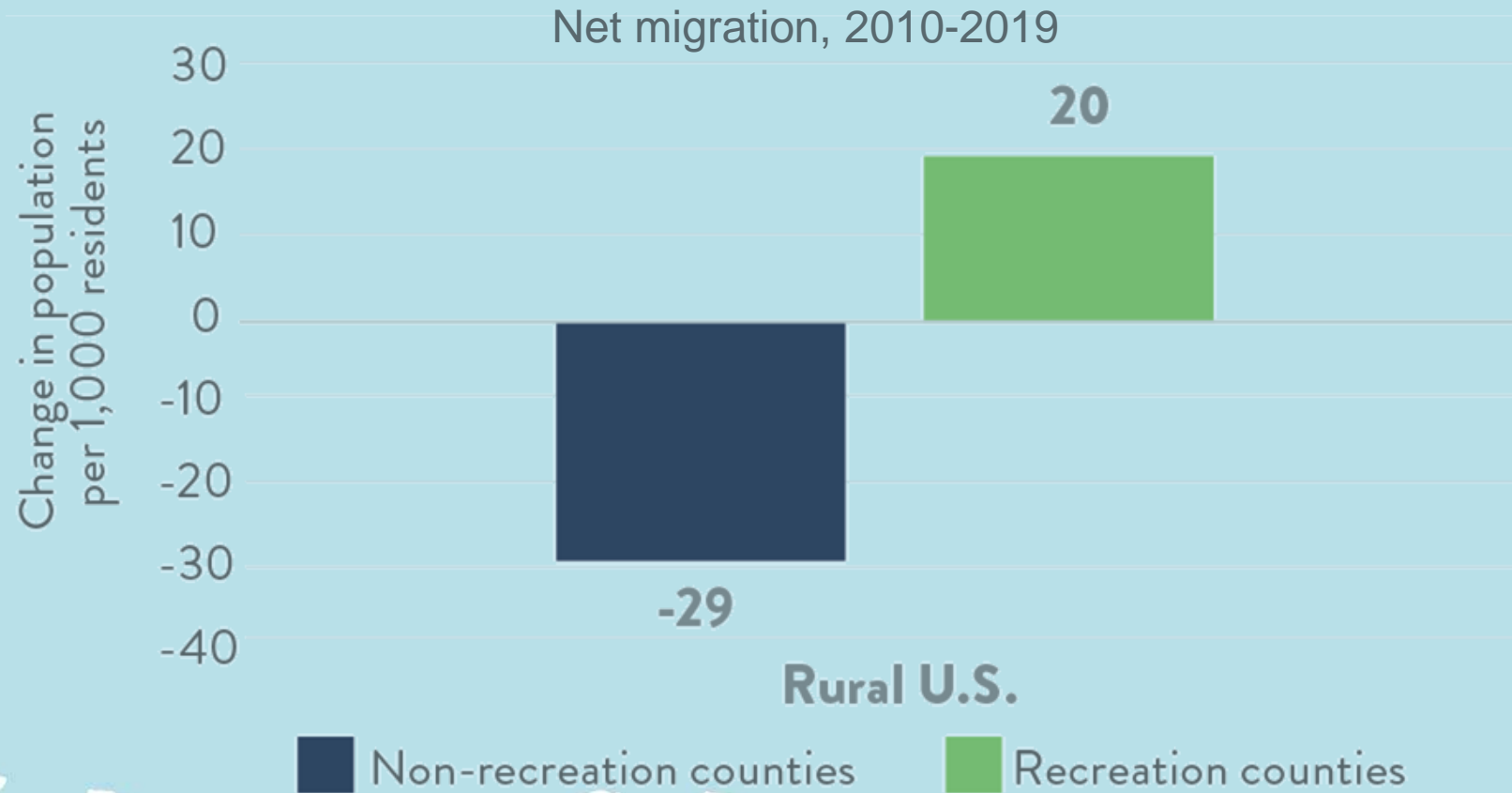
*Tailoring your  
message*





# Rural recreation counties gain population

Non-recreation counties lose population



*Methods*

*Visitor spending  
& economic impacts*

*Other measurable  
community benefits*

# Tailoring your message







# GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL®

Camp Chase Trail; Photo courtesy Jay LaPrete

## TAILORING YOUR MESSAGE

# Strategies for impactful advocacy



**AUDIENCE**



**ISSUES OF INTEREST**



**MESSAGES TO  
EMPHASIZE**



# Strategies for impactful advocacy



## **AUDIENCE**

- Public officials and agencies
- Businesses
- Private Citizens

# Strategies for impactful advocacy



## **ISSUES OF INTEREST**

### **For public officials and agencies:**

- Community health, safety, and welfare
- Fiscal responsibility and budgeting
- Economic diversification



# Strategies for impactful advocacy

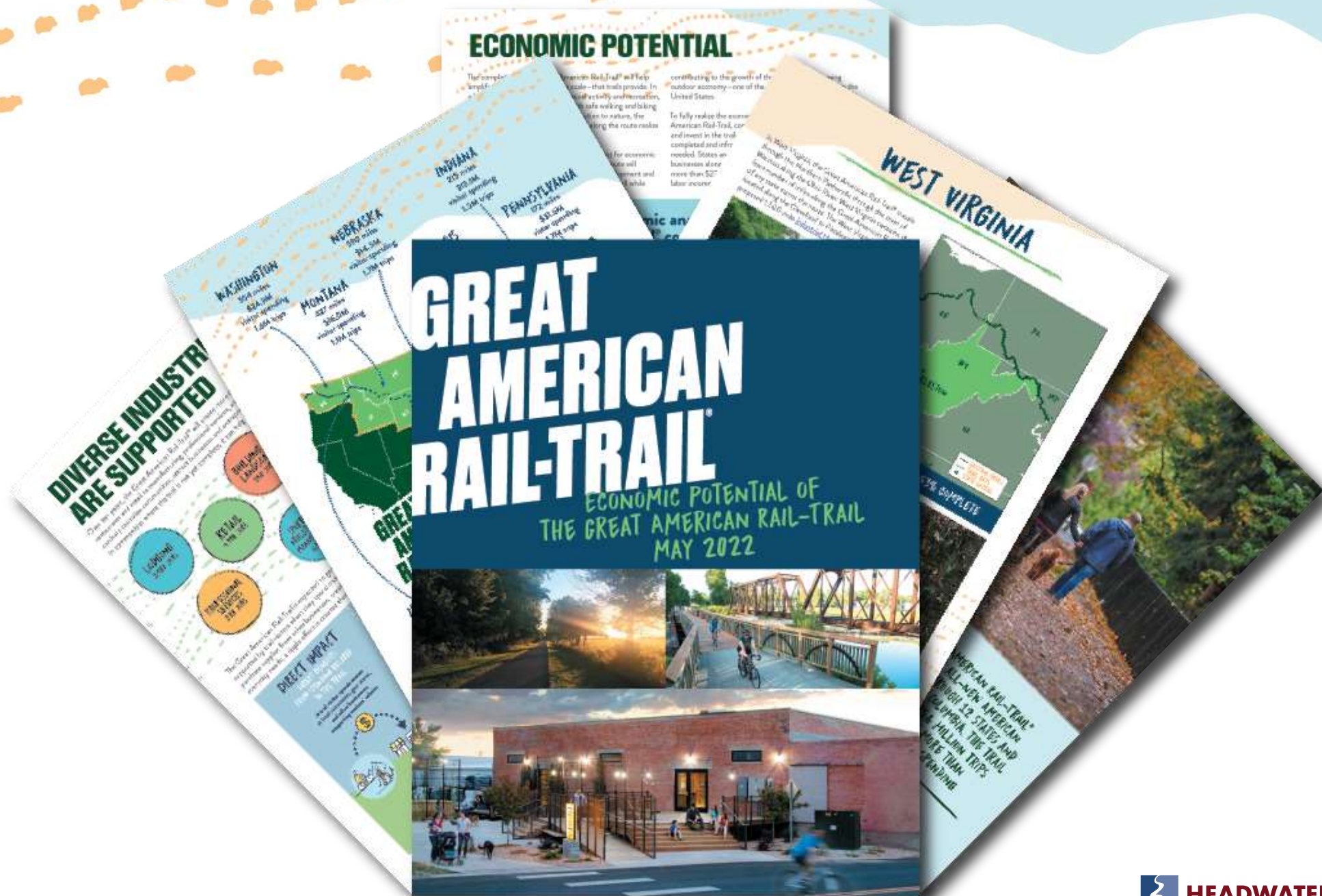


## **MESSAGES TO EMPHASIZE**

- Increase state/local revenues by attracting visitors
- Source of community cohesion and pride
- Complements existing community plans and strategies







# Subscribe to updates!

[headwaterseconomics.org/contact](https://headwaterseconomics.org/contact)







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# Brandon Garrett

Chief of Staff,  
City of Council Bluffs, Iowa  
[bgarrett@councilbluffs-ia.gov](mailto:bgarrett@councilbluffs-ia.gov)





# Economic Potential of the Great American Rail-Trail

June 28, 2022



# Our Mission:



*To continuously improve the quality of life and attractiveness of the City of Council Bluffs.*

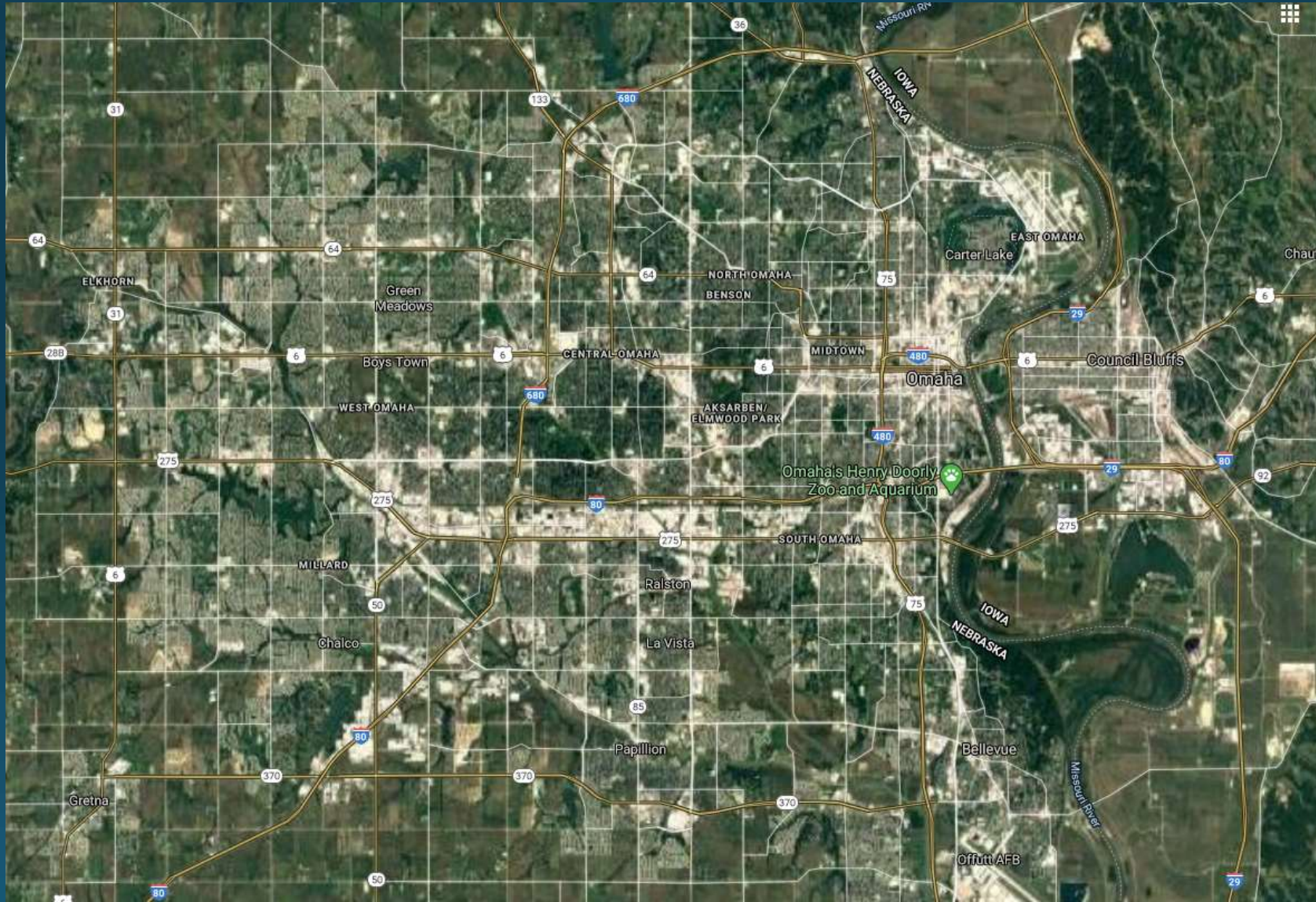


# Where is Council Bluffs, Iowa?



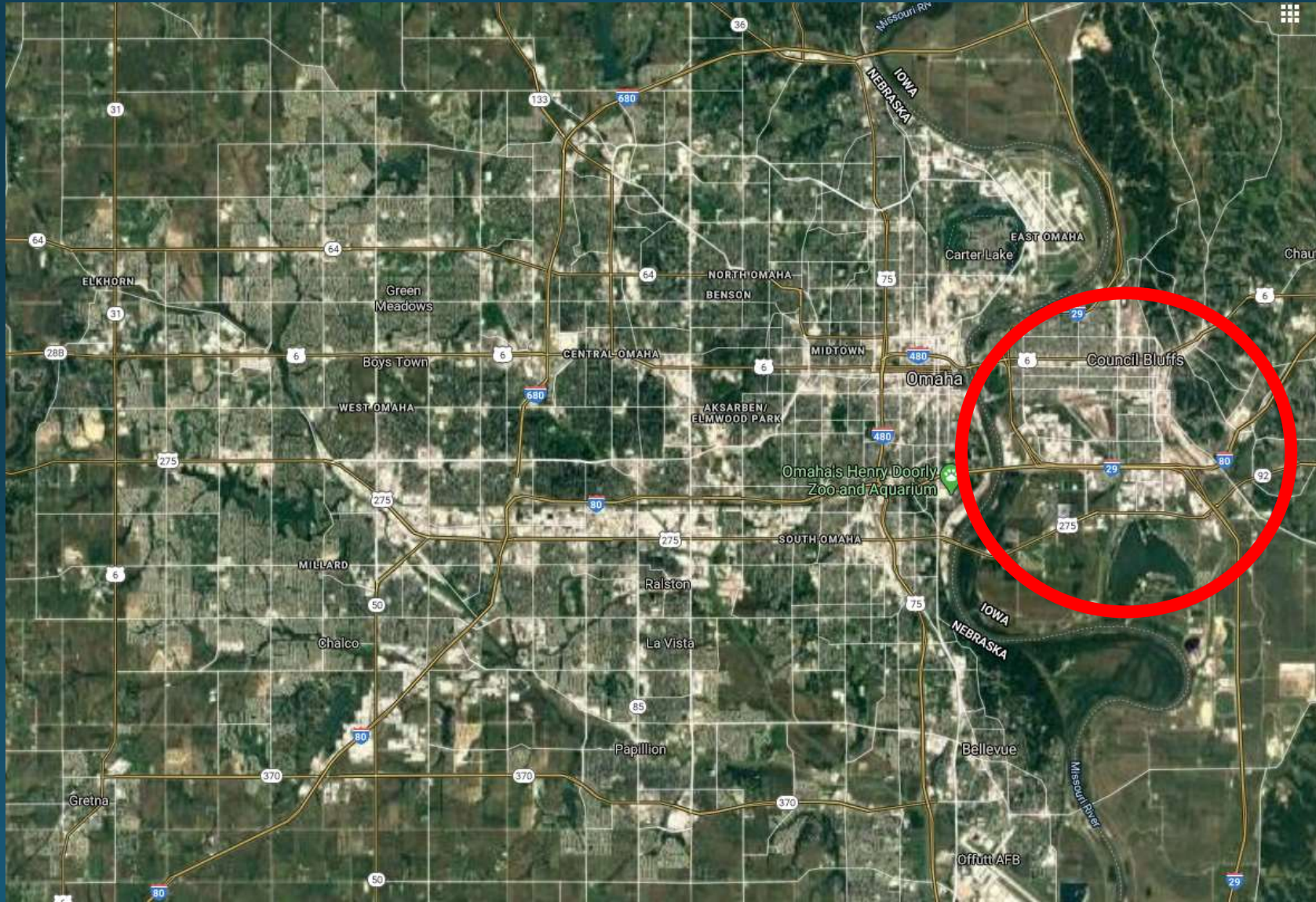


# Where is Council Bluffs, Iowa?





# Where is Council Bluffs, Iowa?





# A Growing Metro



- *The Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA has a population of 1.06M people*
- *The metro is expected to grow by 500,000 people over the next 30 years*



# A Growing Metro



- *Population of Council Bluffs is about 63,000*
- *Approximately 50% of households below poverty level*





# A Growing Metro

- UNMC's "NExT" project: c. 8,700 new jobs
- Less than 3 miles west of Council Bluffs



# A Growing Metro

- Mutual of Omaha's new corporate headquarters
- Less than 1 mile west of Council Bluffs





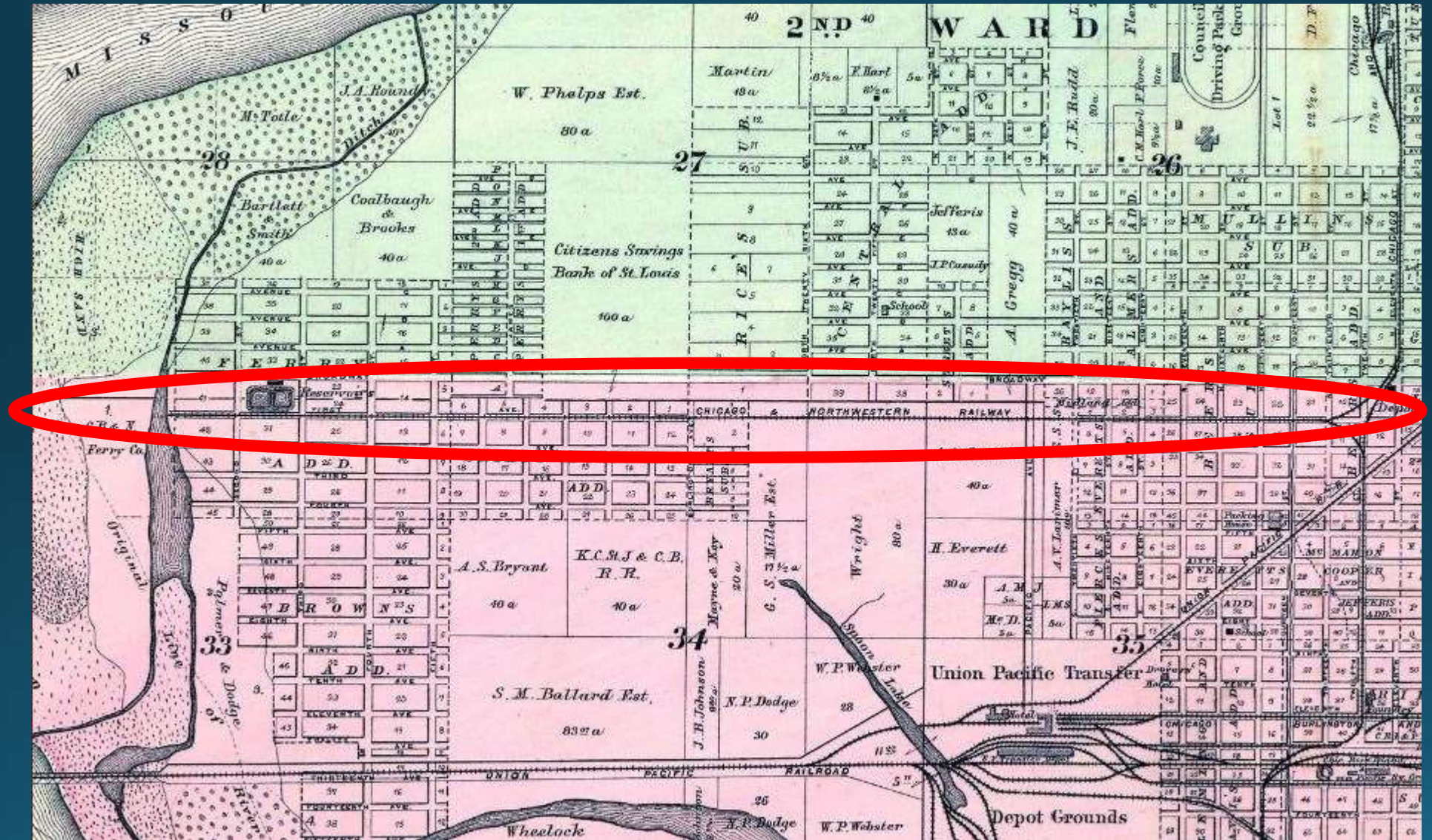
# Where will they go?

- Suburban Omaha is 30-45 minutes away from Downtown
- Council Bluffs is on the doorstep of Downtown Omaha





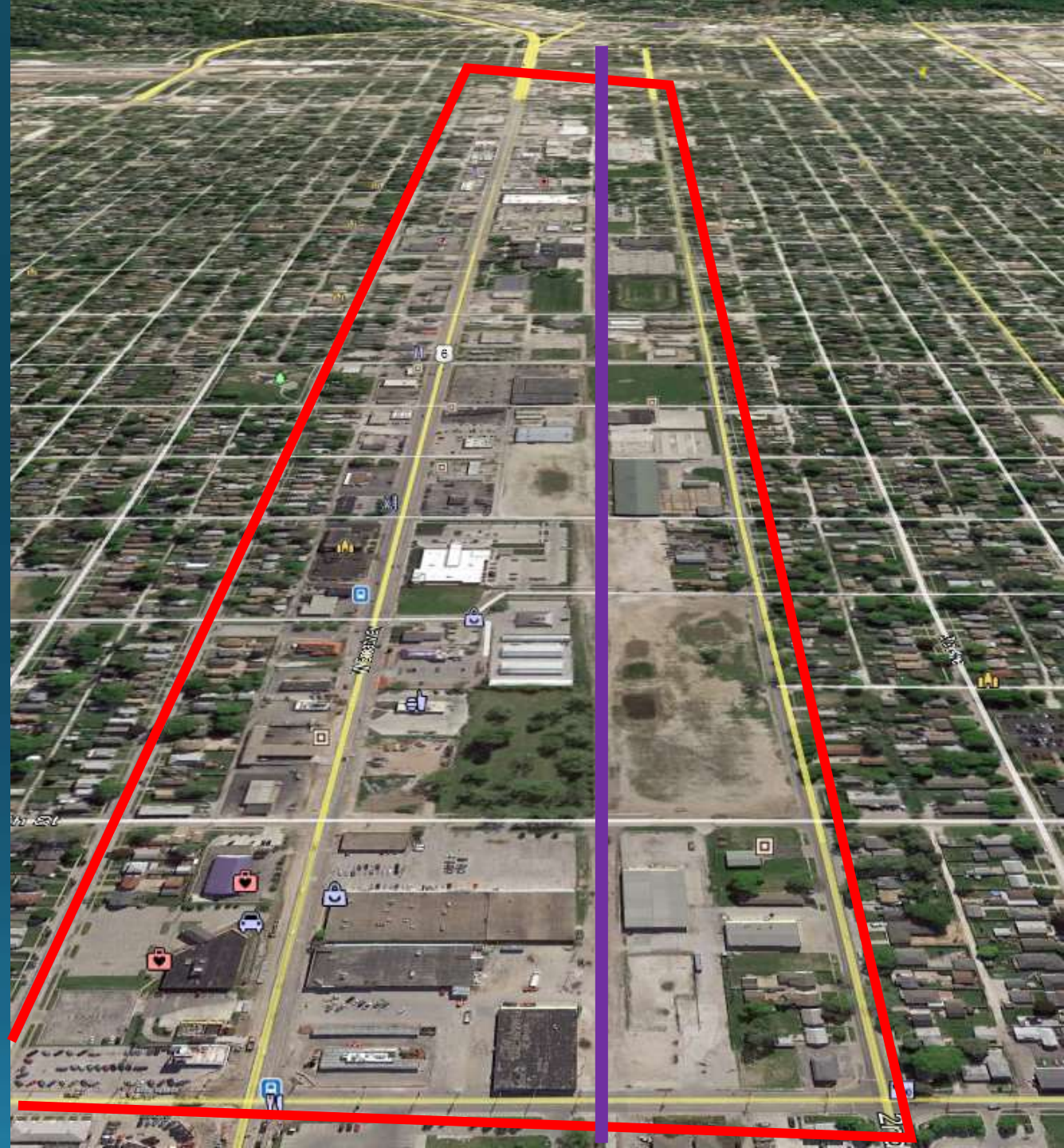
# Chicago & Northwestern Railway





# 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue

- City-owned ROW
- Former railroad; tracks removed
- 1 block south of W. Broadway
- 66' wide
- 1.8 miles from 16<sup>th</sup> to 35<sup>th</sup>







*"It's more  
than a trail."*







Furthering  
Interconnections,  
Revitalization,  
Streetscapes,  
Transportation, and  
Aesthetics for a  
Vibrant  
Economy





Furthering  
Interconnections,  
Revitalization,  
Streetscapes,  
Transportation, and  
Aesthetics for a  
Vibrant  
Economy





# Big Picture: Connections

- Bike trails
- Bike lanes



# Big Picture: Connections

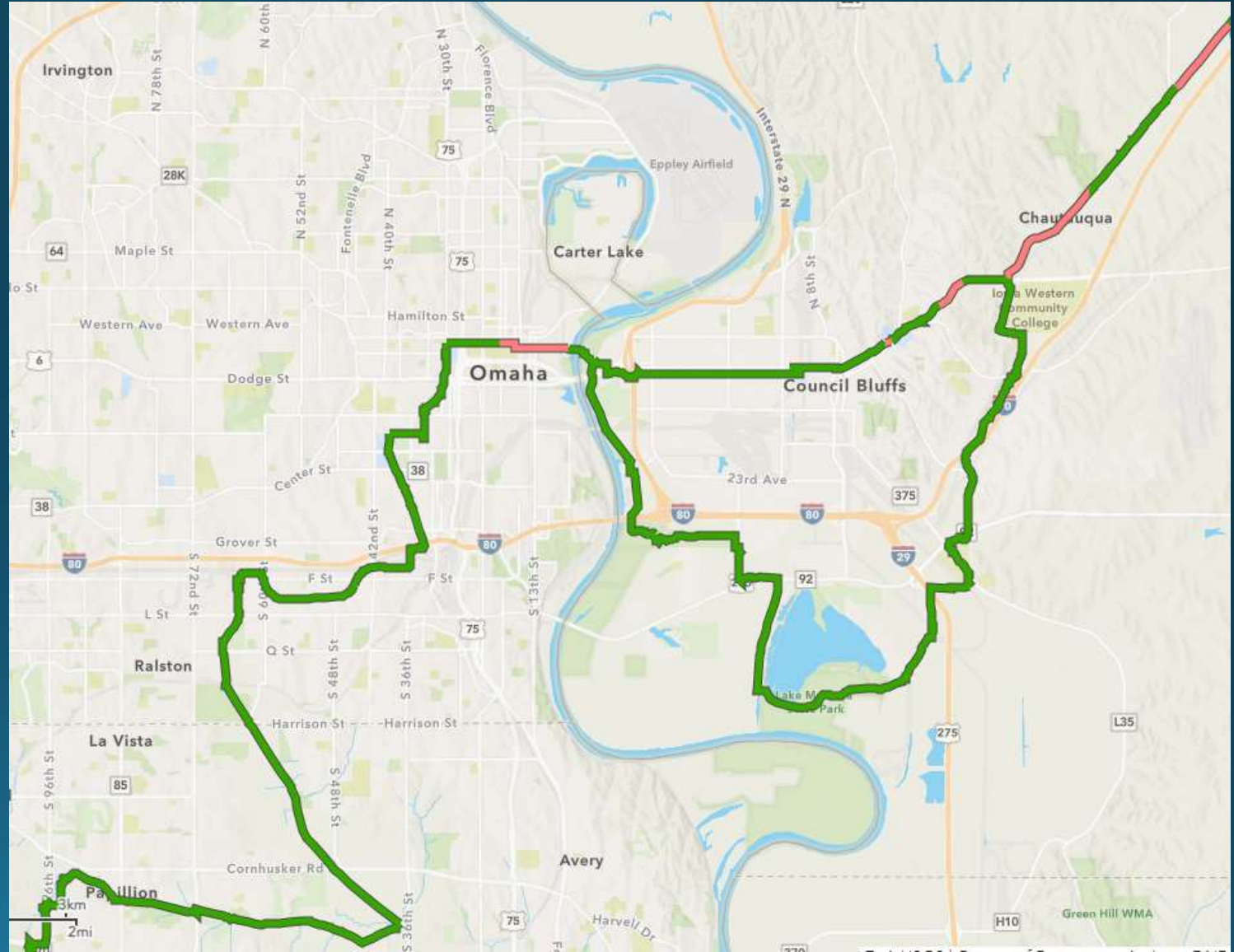




# Big Picture: Connections

Two GART routes:

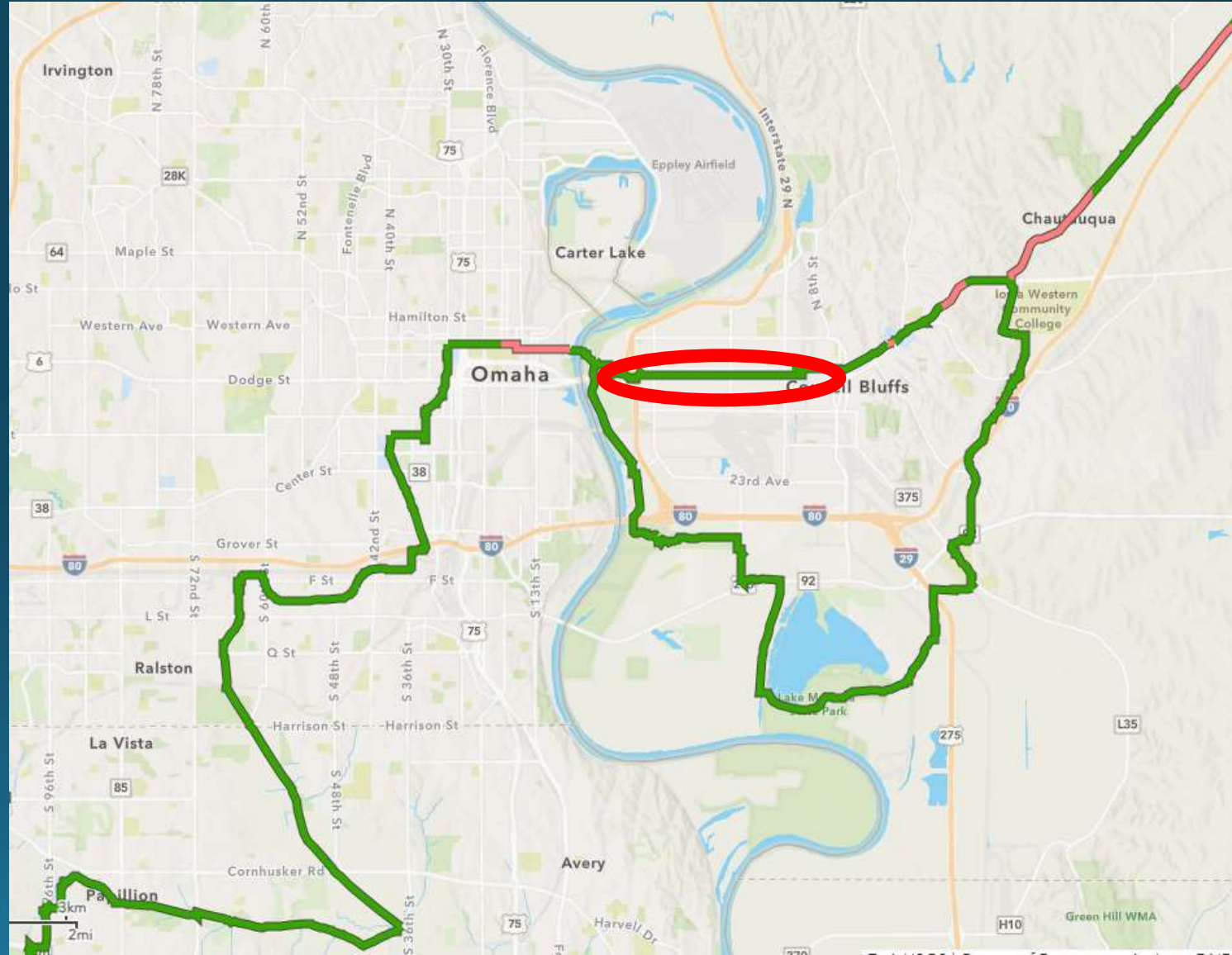
- Scenic greenway
- Heart of the Community



# Big Picture: Connections

Two GART routes:

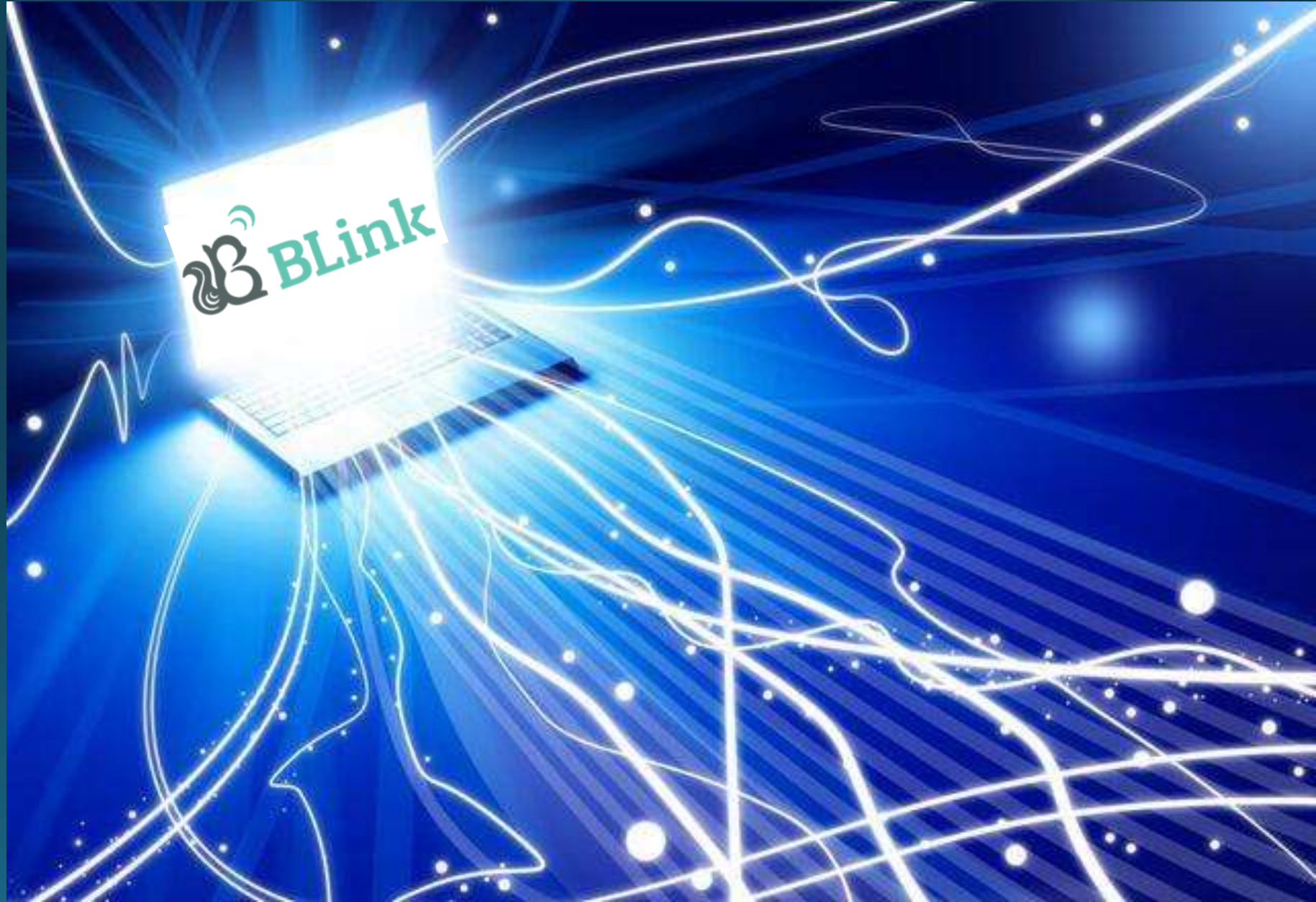
- Scenic greenway
- Heart of the Community





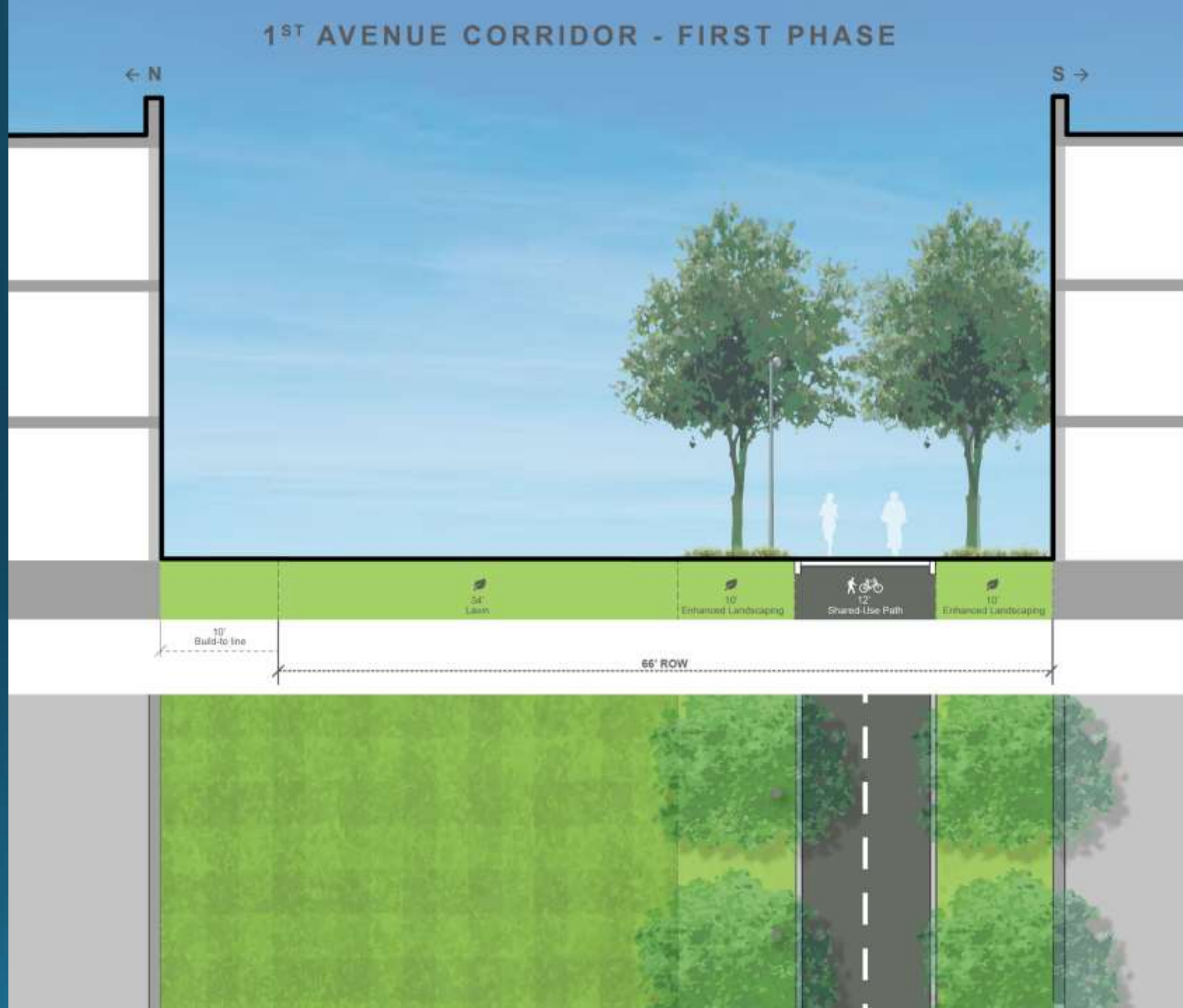
# Big Picture: Connections

Free City  
wifi in the  
corridor



# A Multi-Use Trail

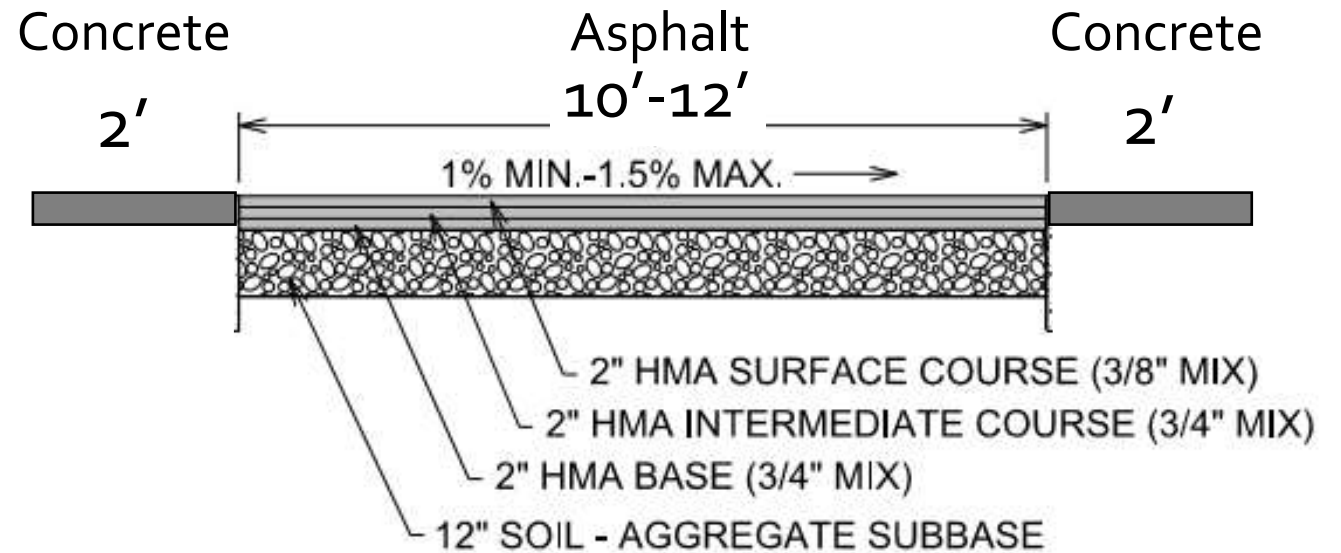
- 66' of ROW
- Trail Concept
- Offset to south side





# A Multi-Use Trail

- Trail Concept
  - 14'-16' wide:
    - 10'-12' asphalt
    - 2' concrete shoulders
  - Smooth, continuous surface
  - City has equipment to make repairs
  - Funded by the City's CIP and generous grants from the Iowa West Foundation



# Trail Concept





# Fall Color Corridor





# Trail Lighting





# Thomas Jefferson High School Campus



Before FIRST AVE



# Thomas Jefferson High School Campus



After FIRST AVE





# Thomas Jefferson High School Campus





# Thomas Jefferson High School Campus





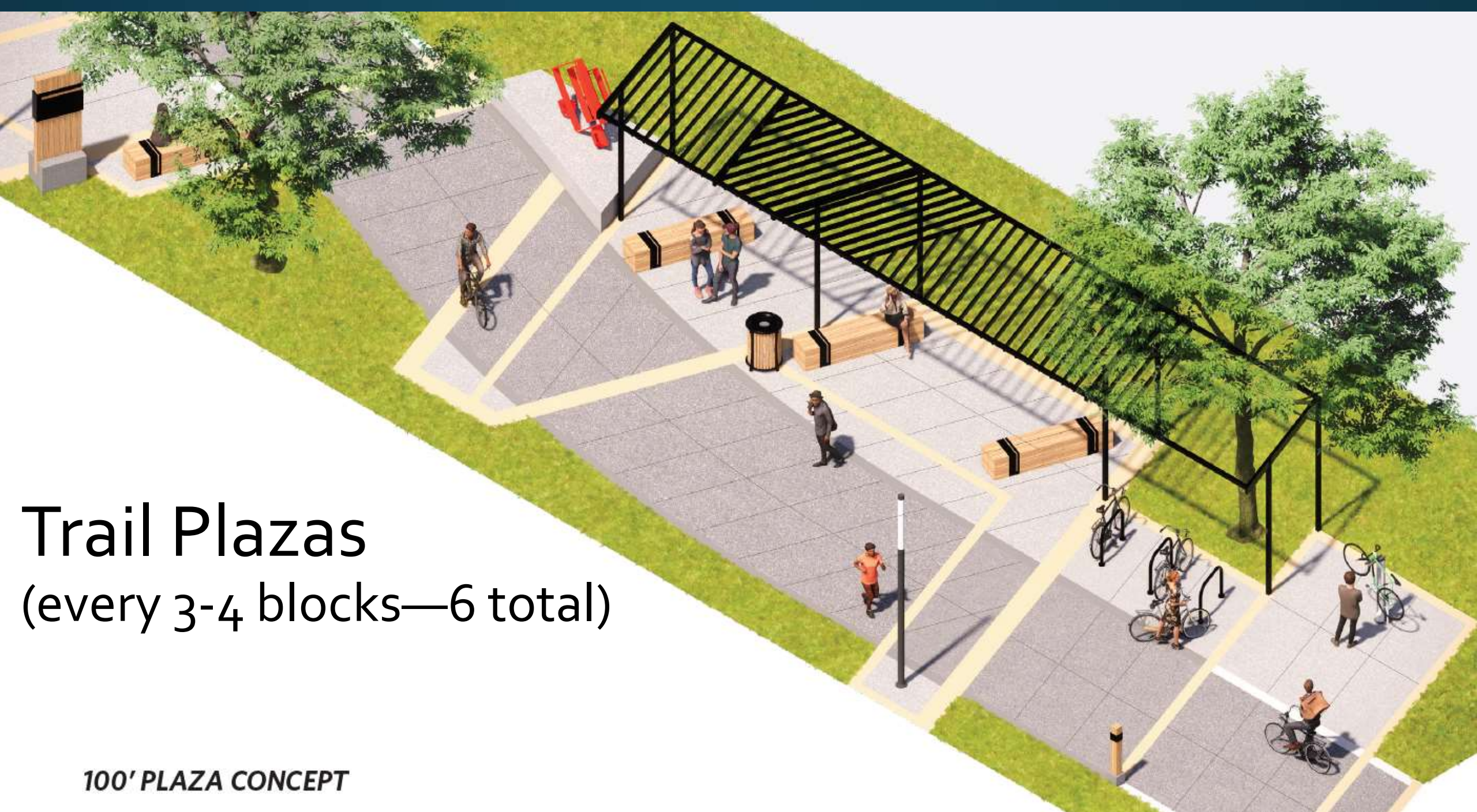
# Thomas Jefferson High School Campus



# Thomas Jefferson High School Campus





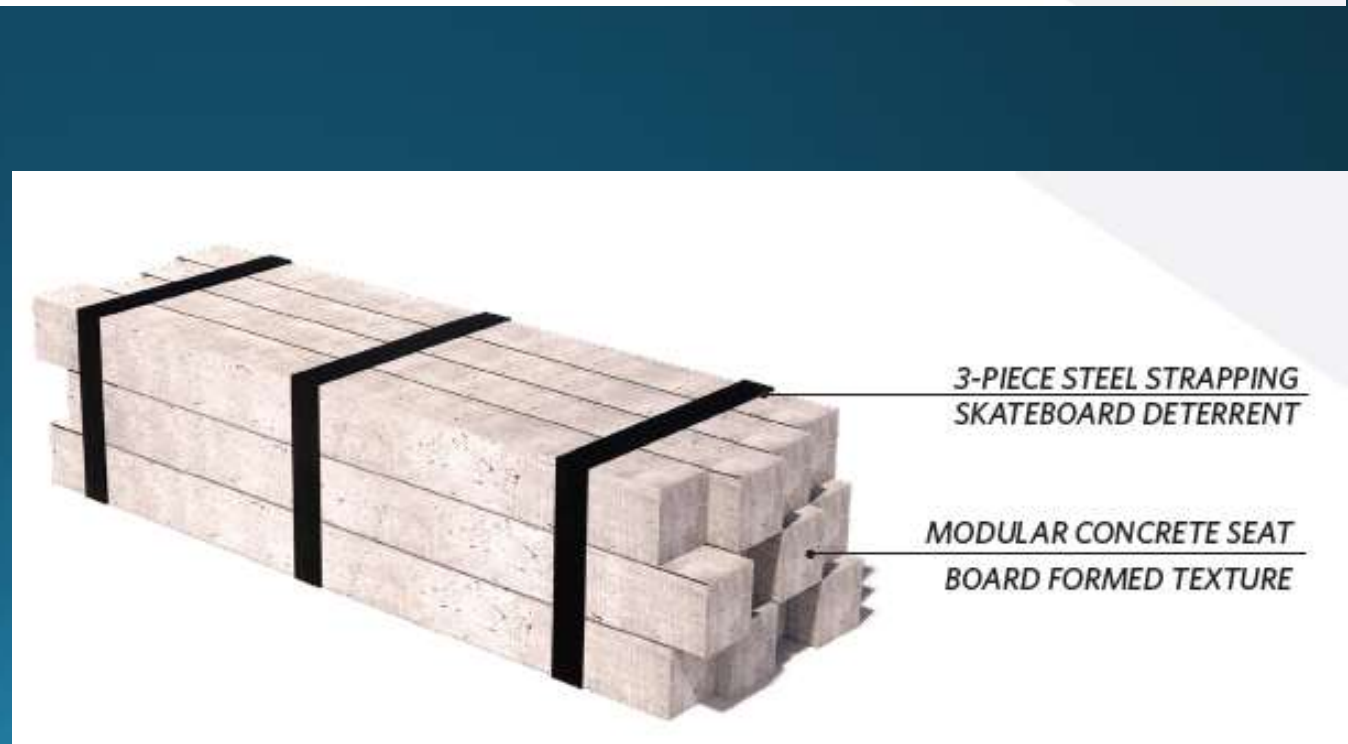
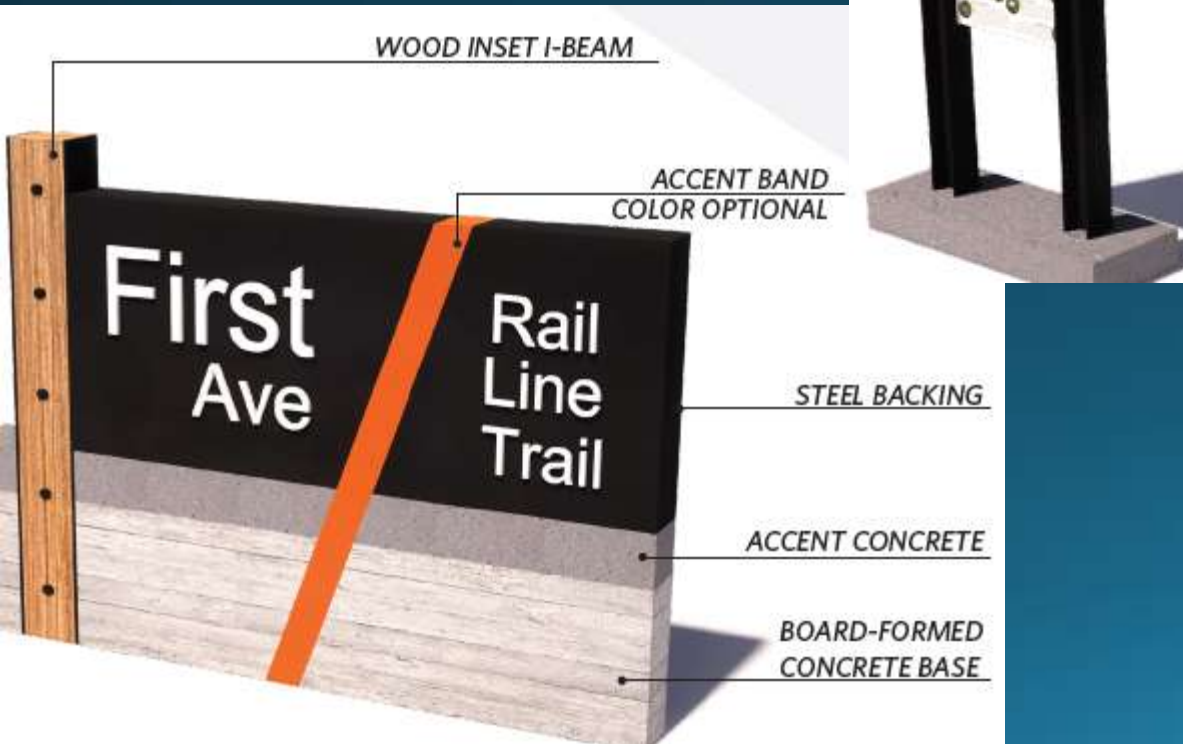
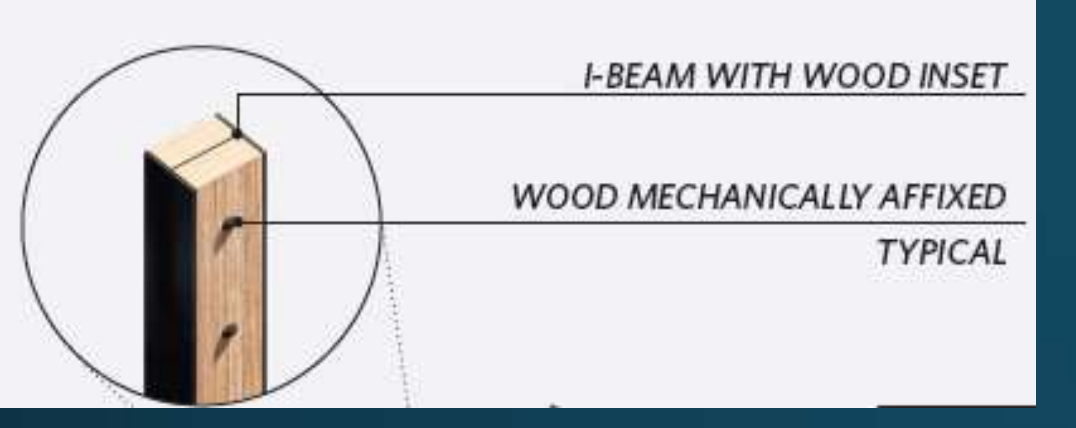


# Trail Plazas

(every 3-4 blocks—6 total)

100' PLAZA CONCEPT





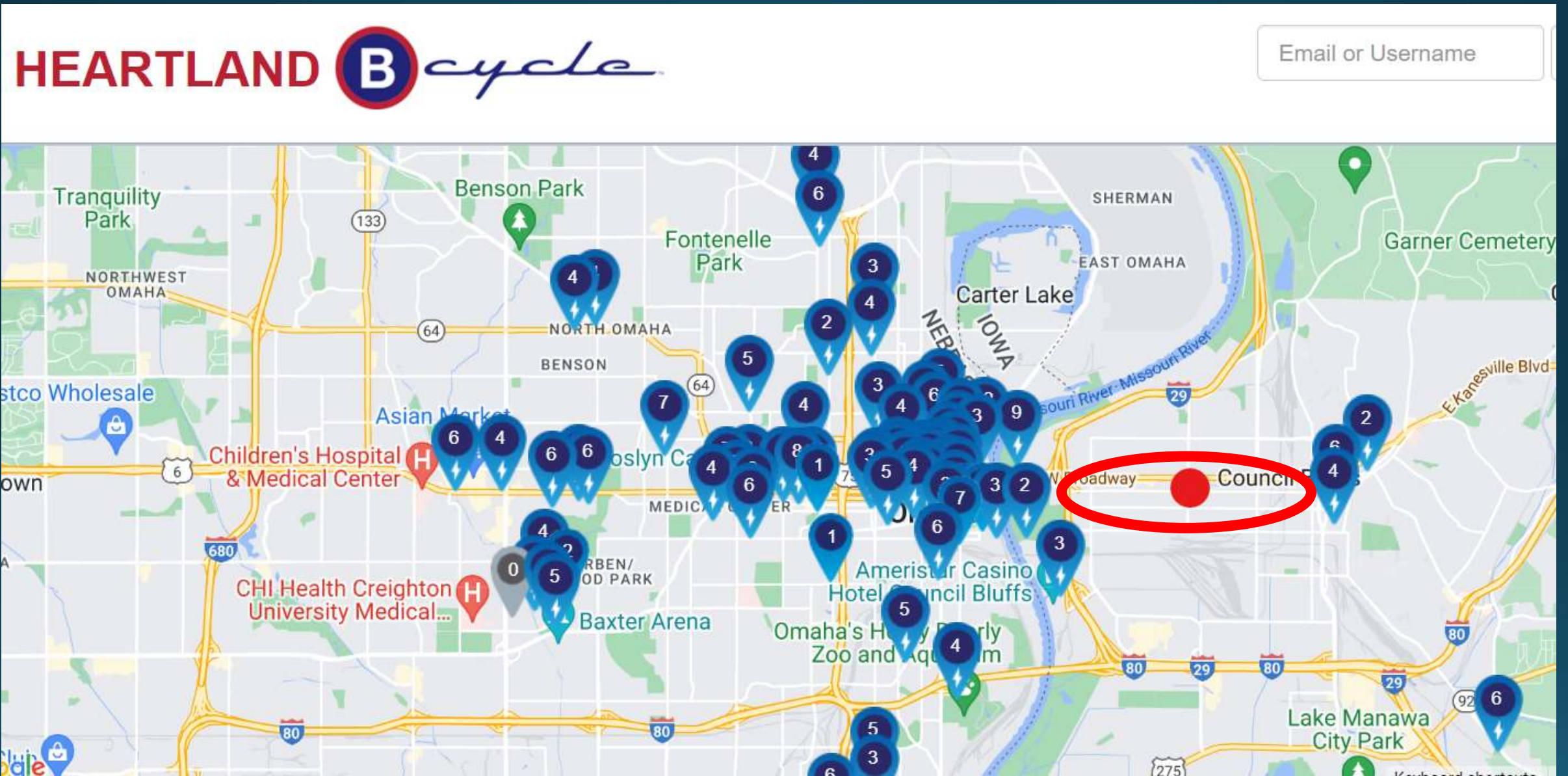


# Trail Plazas





# Big Picture: Connections







# Public Art

-Pedestals for sculptures



# Public Art

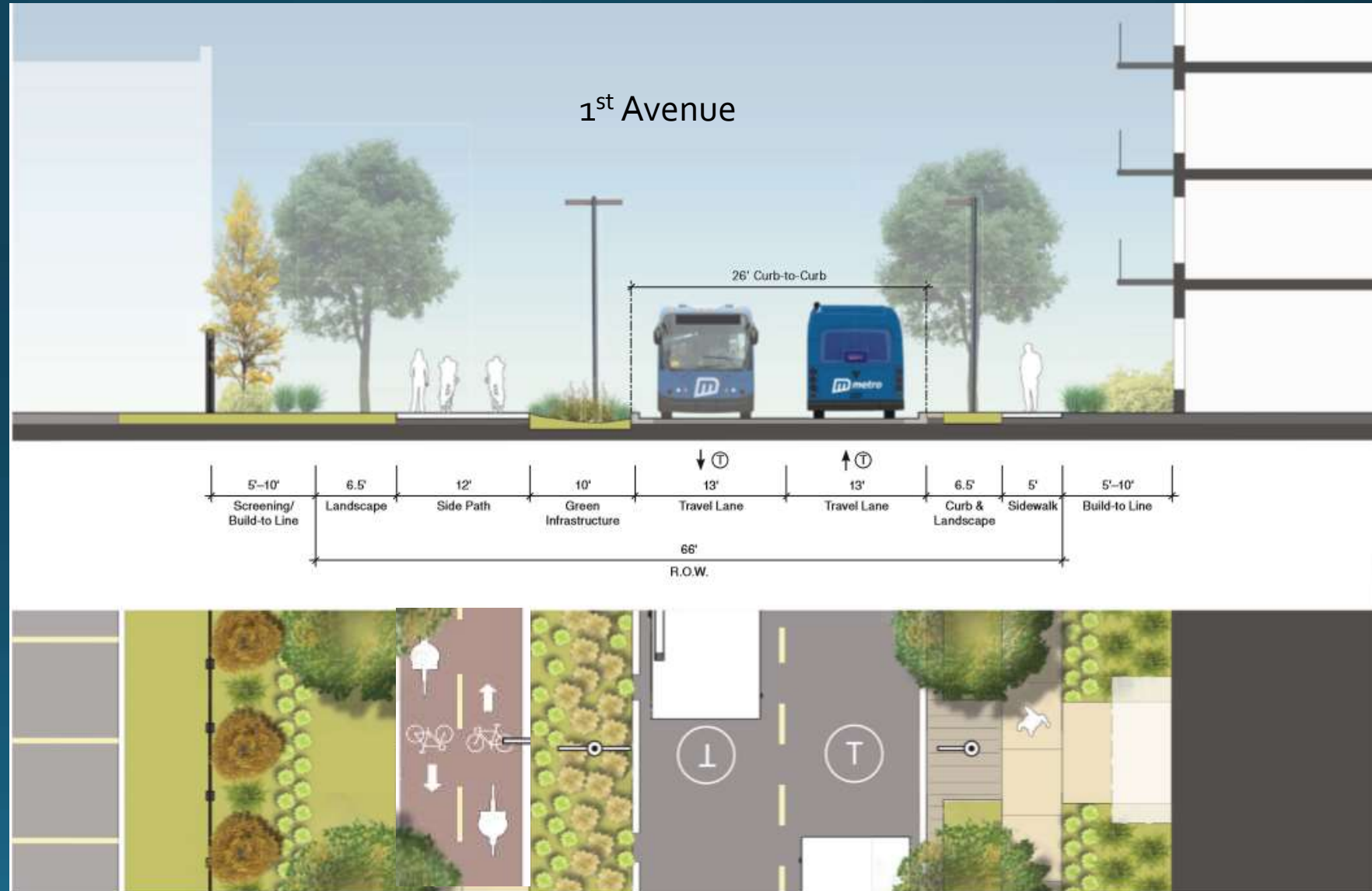
-Murals on backs of  
W. Broadway businesses





# A Multi-Modal Corridor

- 2015 West Broadway Master Plan





# Re-Zoning Effort





# Design Standards

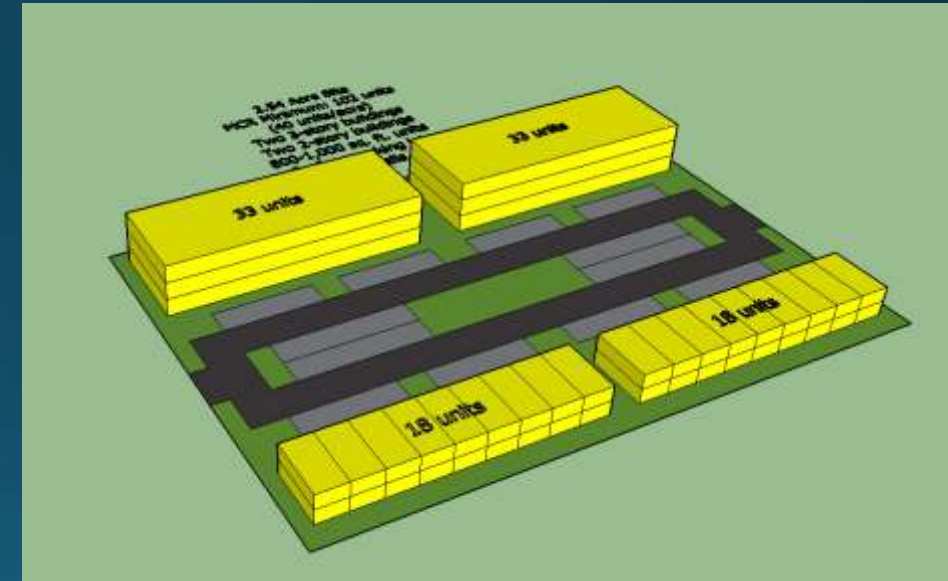
- Architectural Standards
  - Primary focus on facades facing W. Broadway and Major Streets
  - Quality, durable materials
  - Visual interest/pedestrian orientation
- Site Development Standards
  - Building orientation: primary focus on W. Broadway and Major Streets
  - Buildings along fronts; parking to sides and rears of buildings



# New Zoning District in 2019: Mixed Commercial Residential District

## Highlights:

- Limited commercial and residential uses
- Minimal setbacks (0-10')
- Minimum density: 40 units/acre
- Architectural design standards
- Landscape standards
- Street trees
- On-street parking
- Parking minimums AND maximums
- Underground detention
- 50 sq. ft. of "site amenity" per dwelling
- Added limited administrative authority for CD Director on plan amendments





# Proposal Selected for 28<sup>th</sup> Street:





# Proposal Selected for 34<sup>th</sup> Street:





# Big Picture: Connections

- Bike trails
- Bike lanes



- Future transit?

# Modern Streetcar?



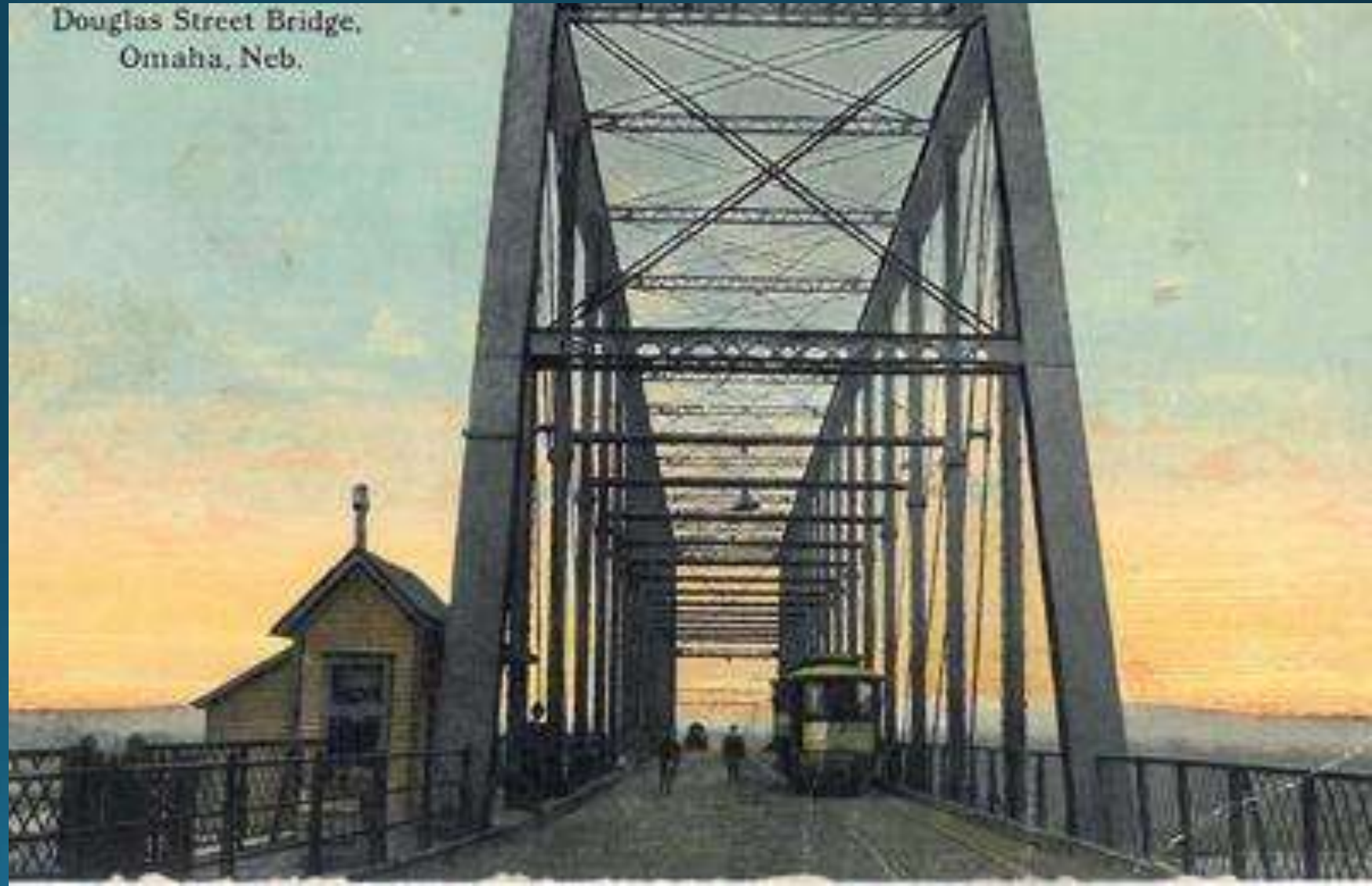


# OMAHA Streetcar Corridor



# Multi-Modal Bridge

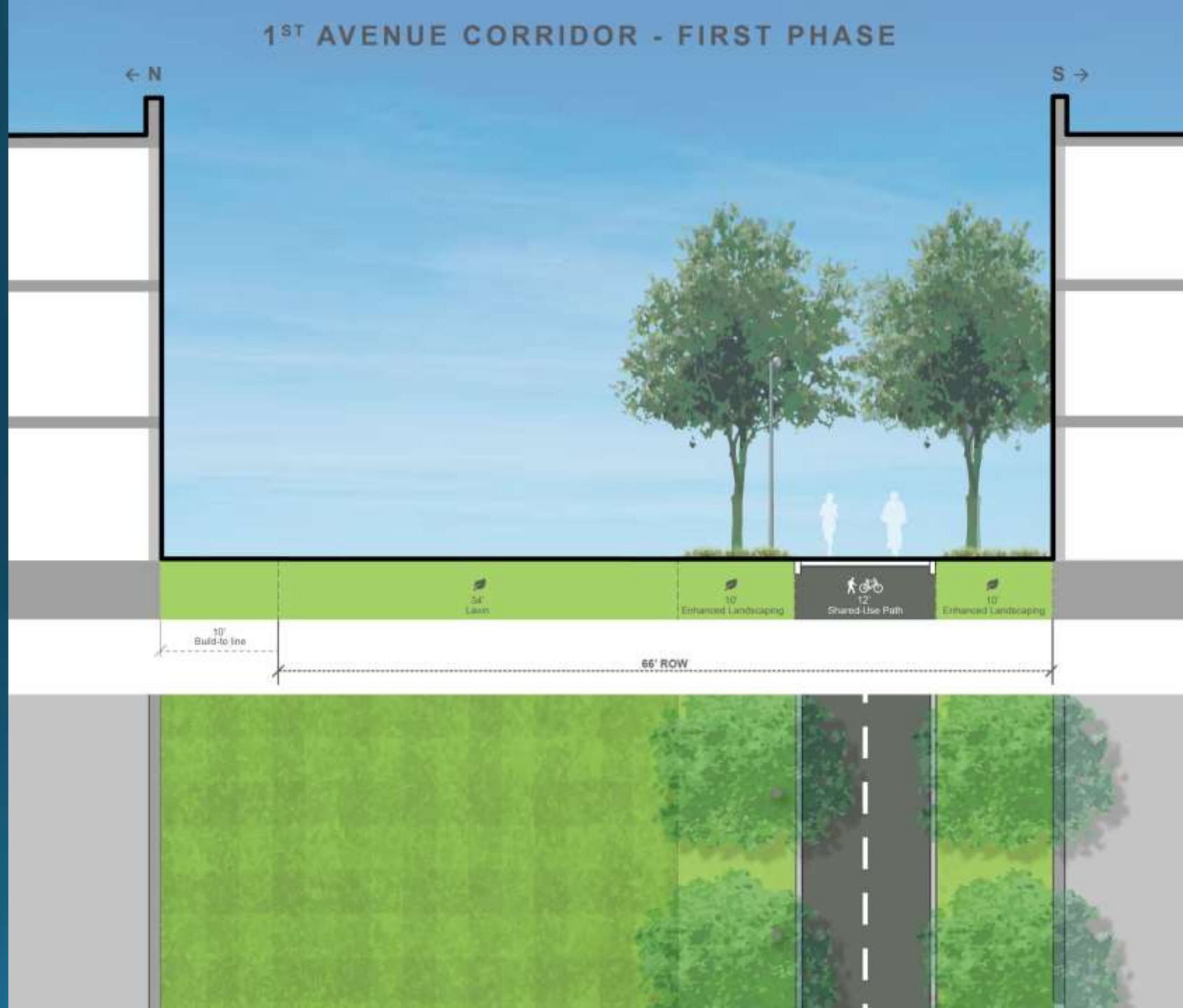
- Pedestrians
- Cyclists
- Micromobility
- Streetcar





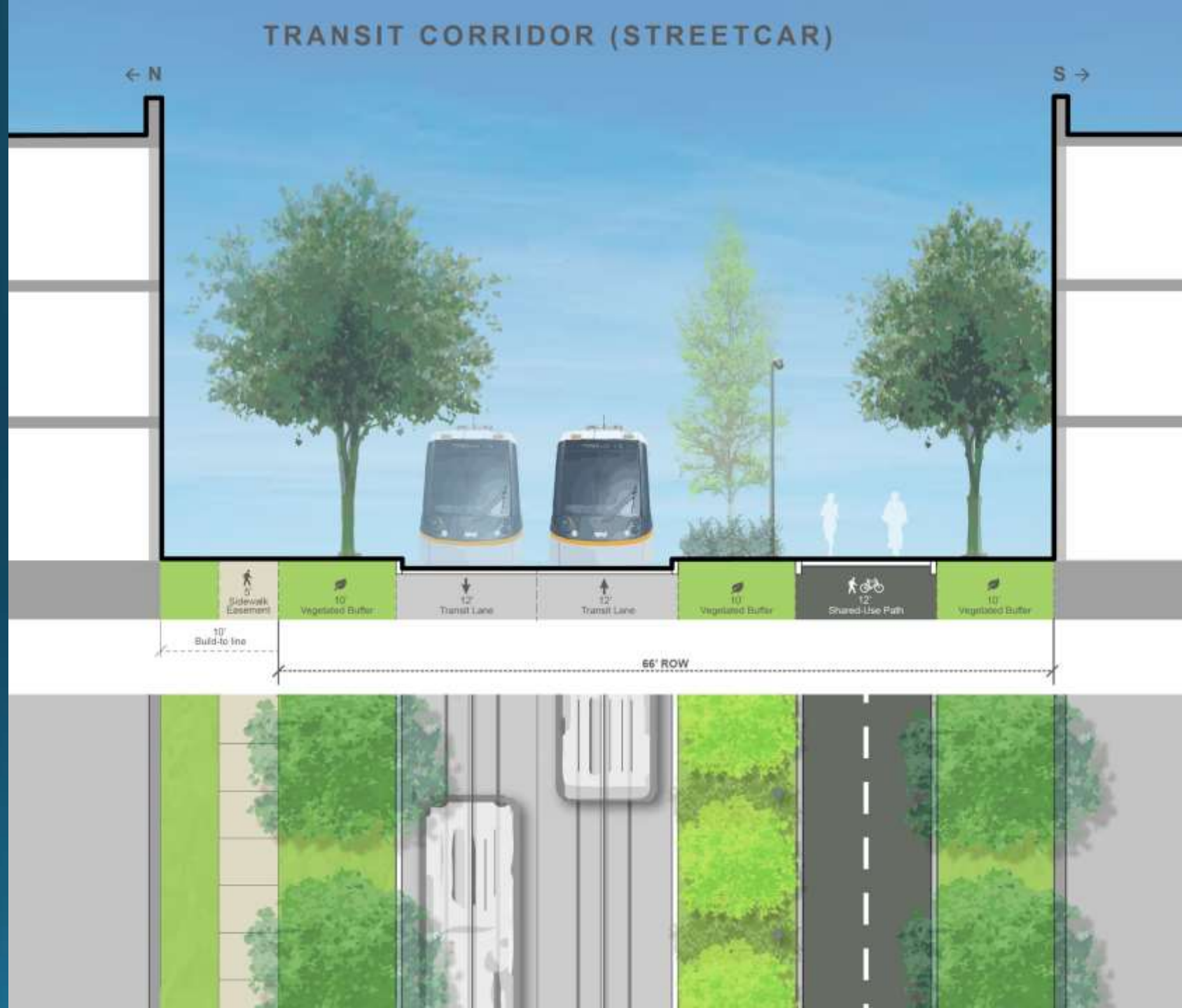
# A Multi-Modal Corridor

- Multi-use Trail should be complete by end of 2022



# A Multi-Modal Corridor

- Concept with future transit





# Plazas Convert to Transit Stops (every 3-4 blocks—7 total)

100' PLAZA CONCEPT





# Trail Plazas Convert to Transit Stops





# Big Picture: A Connected Metro Core





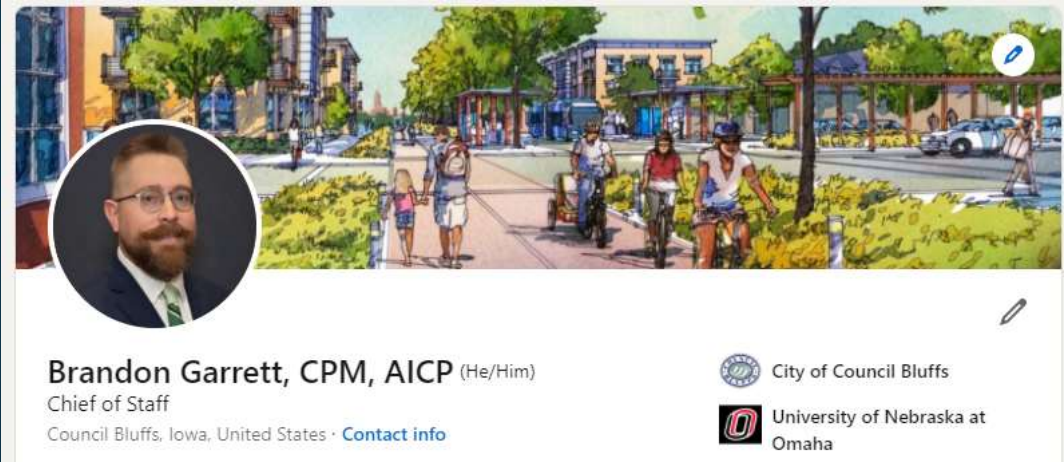
# Podcast



OnFIRSTCB.com







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**[Railstotrails.org](http://Railstotrails.org)**



# How Do You Leverage a Trail/ Trail Network for Economic Development?





# **Involve Everyone!**

**Elected Officials**

**Trail Planners/ Advocates**

**Local/Regional/State Agencies**

**Economic Development Orgs/Chambers**

**Main Street Organizations**





# Intentionality Is Everything!

Support funding for trails, recreation and conservation

Utilize trail network and recreation projects as OPPORTUNITIES for leveraging larger economic development initiatives, rather than separate projects

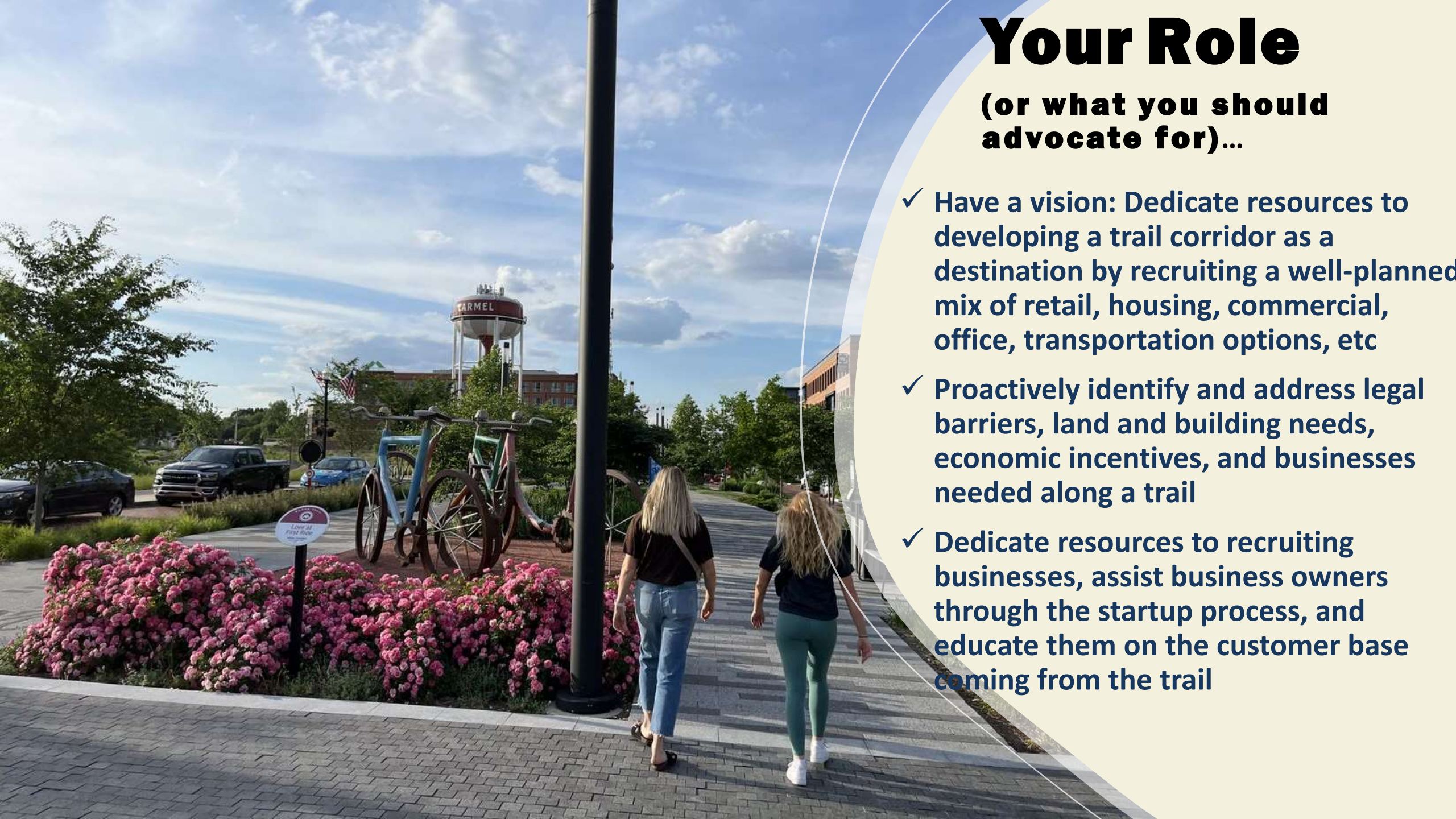
Planning trail networks and active transportation systems provides opportunities to pull multiple agencies such as parks/rec, economic development, health, planning and transportation together to leverage resources and have more impactful outcomes

Thoughtful and coordinated marketing and promotion: events, events, events!

# Your Role

**(or what you should advocate for)...**

- ✓ Have a vision: Dedicate resources to developing a trail corridor as a destination by recruiting a well-planned mix of retail, housing, commercial, office, transportation options, etc
- ✓ Proactively identify and address legal barriers, land and building needs, economic incentives, and businesses needed along a trail
- ✓ Dedicate resources to recruiting businesses, assist business owners through the startup process, and educate them on the customer base coming from the trail







# Your Role

**(or what you should advocate for)...**

- ✓ Take action from the initial planning phases of a trail: establish a community land trust to keep costs artificially low for new businesses (or affordable housing).
- ✓ Implement creative policy initiatives to incentivize and encourage businesses to locate along the trail.
- ✓ Harness anticipated future growth to fund infrastructure improvements using value capture tax instruments such as Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) or Tax Increment Financing (TIF).
- ✓ Assess trail-adjacent business owners' perceptions of the trail's impact and how to maximize it to benefit their business: interviews and surveys!

# Political Leadership and Buy-In

- Indiana - Next Level Trails is the largest infusion of trails funding in state history.
- Addtl \$60m American Rescue Plan
- **“Trails have been an important resource for Hoosiers’ physical and mental well-being throughout the pandemic,” Gov. Holcomb said. “These projects are a transformational investment in quality of life for communities across our state and a valuable tool for economic and tourism development. We are creating important connections that take us one step closer to becoming the most trail-friendly state in the country.”**

## NEWS • PUBLIC AFFAIRS

MARCH 8, 2021

### Indiana Awards \$30M In Funding For New Trails Projects

ASSOCIATED PRESS  

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Indiana has awarded nearly \$30 million to communities and nonprofit groups for construction of 70 miles of new trails Gov. Eric Holcomb says will boost local tourism and economic development.

The \$29.6 million in funding announced Thursday for 18 communities and non-profit organizations is the part of the second round of Holcomb's Next Level Trails program. More than \$24 million for 17 other trail projects totaling 42 miles were announced in May 2019 in the first funding round.

Whitcomb said trails improve the quality of life in the state and are “a valuable tool for economic and tourism development.” He said Hoosiers have frequented trails during the coronavirus pandemic.

“Trails have been an important resource for Hoosiers’ physical and mental well-being throughout the pandemic,” he said.

Dan Bortner, the director of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, said the agency is excited to partner with local governments and nonprofits on the trails projects. He said Hoosiers visited the trails and parks “in unprecedented numbers” during the past year.

“Demand for trails has never been higher,” Bortner said.

The newly awarded [grants include 10 regional projects and eight local projects](#). The deadline for applications for the third round of Next Level Trails funding is Dec. 1.



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# Discussion and Questions

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# Thank You!



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