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**Minneapolis Planning Department**

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**MEMORANDUM**

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DATE: June 6, 2002

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Merland Otto – Planning Department

SUBJECT: Approval of Concept Plan for Lowry Avenue Corridor Study

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**Supporting Documents**

Commission members received copies of the study with their package of materials for the May 30 COW meeting.

**Background**

The Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan was initiated in November 2000. It is an initiative of Hennepin County, the ten Lowry Avenue neighborhoods and the City of Minneapolis. The project lead is Hennepin County Community Works who retained a consulting team bringing transportation, market research, environmental assessment, and historic preservation to the project.

The study included the area one block on each side of Lowry from the western City border at Theodore Wirth Parkway extending across the City to the eastern border at Stinson Blvd.. The corridor length is approximately five miles long.

The proposed plan is a long range plan with an implementation period over 30 years. Project phasing is broken down into five phases with phase one addressing the segment between Fremont and I 94.

**Community Involvement**

Partners in the planning process include MCDA, the Minneapolis Park Board, members of various business communities, as well as the area neighborhood associations. A series of three workshops were held over the course of the study to introduce the planning study, solicit participants' input of strengths and weaknesses of the corridor and of their vision for the future. Over 230 residents and property owners participated in the workshops. A total of seven meetings (Feb. 21,22,26; June 12 and 18; and Nov. 5 and 8, 2001) have been held in development of the conceptual plan. All ten neighborhood organizations were represented on the Community Advisory Committee.

A draft of the plan was distributed January 7 and 8, 2002 to members of the Technical and Community Advisory Committees with comments due by the end of January. Additionally, the County has had the draft plan posted on the web at lowryave.com since approximately the same time. CD's of the final draft were distributed June 4, 2002.

Several neighborhood organizations have indicated that they will be hosting meetings to review and discuss the plan in more detail and it is anticipated that these comments would be tendered to Hennepin County or the City as appropriate for consideration in future phases of the work.

### **Description of the Project**

The study focus is on improving transportation flow along Lowry including transit, bike, and pedestrians, enhancing the pedestrian experience, reinforcing commercial activity nodes, and strengthening connections to public facilities.

Workshop participants identified the number and variety of businesses serving residents; access to downtown and the rest of the City; and the river, parks and greenery as the three greatest strengths. The greatest weaknesses identified were the pedestrian unfriendly environment (lighting, aesthetics, shared sidewalks, lack of snow storage), roadway and parking problems, and derelict properties.

Meyer-Mohaddes and Associates, transportation consultants, analyzed traffic needs for the next twenty years. The consultant found that the current roadway will likely be sufficient to handle anticipated traffic for the foreseeable future. The traffic analysis determined that the western and eastern ends of the avenue could accommodate traffic on two lanes of roadway while the traffic volume and characteristics would require a minimum of four lanes in the central portion of the corridor. Hennepin County has reviewed the consultant's traffic analysis and concurs with the analysis.

The study recommends that improvements be made within the existing 80' wide right-of-way from the west terminus to Lyndale and on the east side from Central Ave. to Stinson Blvd. Both of these segments are more heavily residential than the center part of the corridor. The study recommends acquisition to widen the right-of-way in the central portion of the corridor in order to accommodate the types of pedestrian and streetscaping improvements desired as well as to function effectively as a transportation corridor. Without acquisition, there is no space for boulevards, turn lanes, wider sidewalks, or landscape buffers. The plan recommends widening the R.O.W. from it's current 80' to 132' from Lyndale to Marshall Ave and from University Ave to Central. The most heavily traveled segment between Marshall and University is recommended to be developed within a 138' corridor which would allow for development of four travel lanes, left turn lanes, a median, bike lanes, boulevard and sidewalks. In order to implement this plan, it will be necessary to acquire property one lot deep either on the north or south side of the current right-of-way. No decision has yet been reached on which side would be more desirable to acquire with a number of factors currently being analyzed.

### **Consistency with Minneapolis Plan**

The Lowry Avenue Corridor Study embraces and incorporates many of the implementation policies outlined in the Minneapolis Plan for community corridors. Most specifically the plan actively incorporates the following concepts and policies:

*Promote more intensive residential development along these corridors where appropriate. Plan Component—(infill medium density residential)*

*Require that street design for these corridors preserves and enhances the strong residential character and pedestrian orientation of these streets while maintaining the street's capacity to carry current volumes of traffic. Plan Component—(wider sidewalks, streetscaping lane design based on capacity needs)*

*Support the continued presence of small scale retail sales and commercial services along Community Corridors. Plan Component—(commercial nodes, infill development)*

*Ensure that commercial uses do not negatively impact nearby residential areas.-- Plan Component—(small scale, nodal development, limited parking)*

*Minneapolis will maintain and enhance the elements of a responsive transportation system through balancing the interests of economic development and neighborhood livability.--Plan component—(street design, supportive retail and services, pedestrian oriented streetscape)*

*Minneapolis will strengthen the transportation system in favor of transit alternatives in order to make transit a better choice for a range of transportation needs.—Plan component—(bus dropoffs, traffic separation, transit nodes)*

*Minneapolis will continue to enhance the opportunities for cyclist movement. —Plan Component—(bike lanes, racks, separation from pedestrian traffic)* It should be noted that early in the study, a 10' wide multiple use trailway was proposed. That idea subsequently was dropped in favor of wider sidewalks in part due to concerns of mixed uses on the trail, safety considerations and maintenance concerns. Some of the older plan view drawings in the report erroneously do show a 10' trail.

*Minneapolis will coordinate land use and transportation planning on designated Community Corridors through attention to the mix and intensity of land uses, the pedestrian character and residential livability of the streets, and the type of transit service provided on these streets. Plan Component—(redevelopment, infill development, pedestrian orientation, design based on volumes and separation of modes)*

## **Areas of Concern**

The conceptual street design for the westerly segment of the corridor is proposed to be narrowed to two traffic lanes allowing for parking, bike lanes, sidewalks, and boulevard plantings fitting within the existing 80' ROW. An option yet under consideration is whether a busway would continue on this segment requiring additional space.

Land acquisition required to implement the plan will no doubt cause some degree of controversy (north side vs. south side, affected properties, dislocation, timing, property management, costs, etc.). No acquisition plan has yet been developed.

Dependent on the acquisition and specific re-development plans (particularly at the commercial nodes), there may be conflicts which will need to be resolved between existing development and the concept plan. Most notable of these is the Central/Lowry intersection.

On a longer term basis, plan implementation will require some re-zoning and associated up and down zoning issues. This is particularly required at the designated commercial nodes and areas of commercial or medium density residential development.

The long term implementation period of the plan (estimated at 30 years), by its nature, will require re-visiting from time to time.

### **Action Required**

Hennepin County is requesting City of Minneapolis **approval of the concept plan only**. It is further desired by the County to obtain Council approval of the concept plan on July 12 so that grant applications, funding opportunities and conceptual design elements can move forward expeditiously. The County will be undertaking additional analysis and preliminary design development including alternative street alignments.

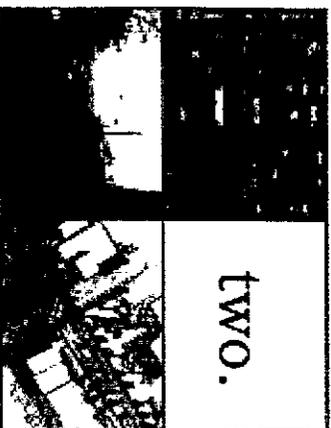
### **Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommends approval of the concept plan presented in the Lowry Avenue Corridor Study document dated May, 2002 subject to the following:

- That Hennepin County continues to coordinate with the Technical Advisory Committee and Community Advisory Committee as it moves into subsequent stages including but not necessarily limited to the acquisition plan, redevelopment plans, preliminary roadway alignments, preliminary and final design stages.
- That separate approval of the preliminary roadway alignment is required.
- That separate approvals of subsequent design phases are required.

### Additional Concerns

- The commercial/ transit nodes (particularly in acquisition areas) are critical chokepoints or bottlenecks for roadway design. It would be prudent to have a priority phasing plan for these key intersections so that the roadway design concept is not jeopardized by interim development at these intersections. Such a phasing plan may indicate that action at the Central/Lowry intersection should be a Phase 1 or 2 element rather than waiting until Phase 3 or 4.
- A detailed acquisition plan evaluating the optimum acquisition within each corridor segment should be pursued prior to development of conceptual roadway alignments. The evaluation should include but not necessarily be limited to condition of properties, market value, environmental cleanup potential, probable parcel remnants, historic/architectural interest, and relationship to re-development plans. Conceptual roadway design could then consider whether additional traffic calming opportunities such as gentle curvatures would be possible.
- It's recognized that an acquisition plan done now would need some flexibility allowing for the possibilities of changes between now and the time when that segment of the corridor might reasonably proceed. On the other hand, without some preliminary assessment of acquisition costs, potential environmental clean up costs, etc. ; the entire phasing and implementation schedule may be unrealized due to funding limitations.



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## Executive Summary

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The Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan was developed through a cooperative effort of Hennepin County, the City of Minneapolis, other public agencies, and the residents and business owners along Lowry. The study envisions a coordinated, phased plan for the entire Lowry Avenue corridor, and was based on three goals adopted by the County for the Lowry Avenue corridor: enhance access to jobs through public transportation; effectively link civic spaces through transit, bicycle and pedestrian connections; and congregate services, retail and office space around transit centers/nodes.

### Analysis

The Plan includes analysis of land use, market conditions, potential environmental contamination, historical elements, and transportation and traffic. Significant neighborhood input from community meetings identified the need for a more pedestrian-friendly environment with more greenery and renovation or removal of problem properties. The transportation and land use analysis concludes that Lowry Avenue needs to be widened in certain segments to accommodate traffic, new bike lanes, parking, and streetscape improvements.

### Roadway Improvements:

- Widen Lowry Avenue to four lanes (two lanes each direction) plus dedicated left turn lanes, plus a new landscaped median, between Marshall Street and University Avenue to handle anticipated traffic volumes and turning movements in this segment;
- Maintain Lowry Avenue at four lanes (two lanes each direction) with a new landscaped median from Lyndale Avenue to Marshall Street and from University Avenue to Central Avenue to handle anticipated traffic volumes in these segments;
- Narrow Lowry Avenue to two lanes (one lane each direction) from Xerxes Avenue to Lyndale Avenue and from Central Avenue to Stinson Boulevard.
- Acquire the first property abutting Lowry Avenue, either on the north side or south side, between Lyndale Avenue and Central Avenue to accommodate roadway requirements, parking, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and landscaping.

**Pedestrian, Bicycle and Other Improvements:**

- Sidewalks at least 6 feet wide (8 feet in most segments) both sides of Lowry along the entire corridor;
- One-way on-street bicycle lanes 5 feet wide on both sides of the entire corridor.
- Added boulevards at least 6 feet wide with landscaping, from Xerxes Avenue to Central Avenue. No boulevards from Central Avenue to Stinson Boulevard;
- On-street parking in bumpouts with landscaped nodes along the entire corridor.

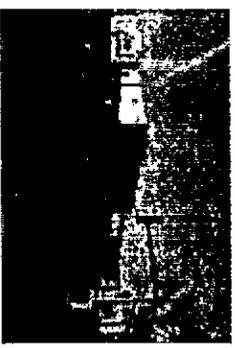
**Redevelopment:**

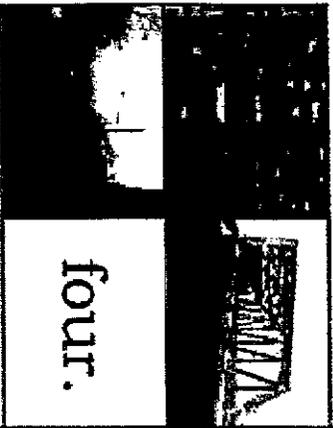
- Major redevelopment on several blocks around the Emerson-Fremont node, including added retail and residential uses, and accommodations for transit riders.
- Major redevelopment on several blocks around the Lowry/Lyndale intersection to include added retail, service and residential uses, with accommodations for transit.
- Redevelopment at the Lowry/Central node, with added retail and residential uses, and accommodations for transit, taking advantage of Central's strong commercial base.
- Extension of 31st Avenue between Dupont Avenue and Humboldt Avenue to improve access and provide better connection between public uses and the commercial node.
- A green space connection along Humboldt Avenue between the Jordan School south of Lowry and Folwell Park north of Lowry Avenue.
- A green space connection along 4th Street North between Cityview School on the north and Farview Park on the south.
- Concentration of commercial uses at key intersections, reintroduction of residential uses between these key nodes.

**Phasing:**

- Phase 1: Fremont Avenue to I-94
- Phase 2: Xerxes to Fremont
- Phase 3: Mississippi River to University Avenue
- Phase 4: University Avenue to Central Avenue
- Phase 5: Central Avenue to Stinson Boulevard

Redevelopment at major commercial nodes is recommended





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## Recommendations

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The Lowry Avenue Corridor Study envisions improvements along the entire Lowry Avenue corridor through a cooperative venture among Hennepin County, the City of Minneapolis, the neighborhoods, the Minneapolis School Board and others. The improvements will include:

- Roadway Improvements
- Property Acquisition
- Sidewalk/Trail Improvements
- Landscaping/Aesthetic Improvements
- Commercial Nodes
- Transit Nodes
- Green Space Connections
- Five Phases

These are described below and illustrated on the attached concept drawings.

### Roadway Improvements

Roadway improvements will be as described in the Transportation analysis above, and will include:

- Widening Lowry Avenue to five lanes (two lanes each direction plus continuous left turn lane) between Marshall Street and University Avenue to handle anticipated traffic volumes and turning movements in this segment.
- Maintaining Lowry Avenue at four lanes (two lanes each direction) from Lyndale Avenue to Marshall Street and from University Avenue to Central Avenue to handle anticipated traffic volumes in these segments.
- Narrowing Lowry Avenue to two lanes (one lane each direction) from Xerxes Avenue to Lyndale Avenue and from Central Avenue to Stinson Boulevard, with parking in bumpout nodes.
- Intersection improvements, including left turn lanes, at key intersections identified in the transportation analysis.

These recommendations are in conceptual form only and detailed geometrics and intersection analysis will need to be performed later. The final design of the roadway will meet state aid design standards.

## **Property Acquisition**

Accomplishing the above improvements will require acquisition of the first property abutting Lowry Avenue, either on the north side or south side, from just west of Lyndale Avenue to just east of Central Avenue. This added property will accommodate roadway requirements, parking, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and landscaping. No specific acquisition scenario has been proposed or accepted at this time. A summary of the characteristics of each block in this segment is included in Appendix E.

The size and depth of the properties varies. Where a property is acquired with its narrow dimension perpendicular to Lowry, typically 50 feet, this would be enough depth to construct the roadway, boulevard, bicycle lanes, median, and sidewalk and trail improvements. Where the acquired property is deeper, there would be room for additional landscaping and buffering to the remaining properties. Where a property is acquired with the long dimension perpendicular to Lowry, typically 100-150 feet deep, there may be adequate depth to construct the necessary improvements to Lowry and leave a new developable parcel. Where there is at least a 50-foot-wide remainder parcel, new residential development such as a single family home or a twin home would be possible. Where there is a deeper parcel, larger, more intense residential or commercial development may be possible. On blocks between major commercial nodes, this new parcel would be developed with residential uses. At or near commercial nodes, it would be redeveloped with commercial uses.

**Decisions about buffering, landscaping, or redevelopment potential would need to be made on a parcel-by-parcel basis once an acquisition plan is agreed to.**

## **Sidewalk/Trail Improvements**

Improvements adjacent to the roadway will include the following:

- Sidewalks at least 6 feet wide (8 feet in many places) on both sides of Lowry along the entire corridor
- One-way on-street commuter bicycle lanes 5 feet wide on both sides of the entire corridor

## **Landscaping/Aesthetic Improvements**

In addition to the above, aesthetic improvements are recommended, including added boulevard landscaping and landscaped nodes at regular intervals along the entire corridor. The streetscape treatment would include boulevard trees, lighting, decorative paving, a hedge or railing at the right-of-way edge where there are no buildings, and landscape enhancements for adjacent properties where needed. In some cases where property is acquired, small remnant parcels might be dedicated to the adjacent parcel. Detailed designs will need to be developed more fully later.

## **Commercial Nodes**

Planning for the consolidation of commercial space, services, retail and office around transit centers/nodes is one of the stated goals of this corridor planning process. Several recent studies have already recommended concentrating commercial activities at key nodes along Lowry (Penn/Lowry 1998, Lowry Corridor Study 1999). Having commercial activities located around key intersections can play an important role in creating mutually supportive environments by making a node a destination point, maximizing the utility of transit linkages and transfer points, and by giving a commercial area the critical mass needed to undertake further improvements. The coordinate effort of numerous parties is required for the community to see this type of land use change actually occur. Implementation requires a plan to guide it, the energy to undertake it, and the political will to follow through with it. This corridor plan recommends:

- Major redevelopment on several blocks around the Emerson-Fremont node, including added retail and residential uses, and accommodations for transit riders. The plan for this area also includes extension of 31st Avenue N between Dupont and Humboldt Avenues to provide better access to the commercial node, public uses, and residential uses.
- Major redevelopment on several blocks around the Lowry/Lyndale intersection to include added retail, service and residential uses. The plan for this area also includes realignment of 31st Avenue N on either side of Lyndale Avenue to provide better access.
- Redevelopment at the Lowry/Central node, including added retail and residential uses, and accommodations for transit riders, taking advantage of Central Avenue's strong commercial base.
- Consolidation of commercial uses at other key nodes, including Penn Avenue, Marshall Street, 2nd Street NE, and University Avenue.

## Consolidation of Commercial at Key Nodes

Zoning is the underlying regulator of land use in the city, defining what uses are permissible where. For a policy of concentrating commercial uses at key corners to succeed over time, certain changes to zoning will need to be undertaken. For zoning changes to occur numerous factors have to be present:

- The local community must have a well-articulated, broadly supported vision for the area.
- The proposed land use vision must be part of a broader plan to rejuvenate the area. This plan should include incentives for affected property owners to participate, or at least not actively resist. Standing alone, land use changes will be ineffectual.
- The City's comprehensive plan must contain policies that support the local community's vision for the area and tie these into an integrated development plan for the City.
- The local vision must have the active support of city elected officials including a willingness to work and a commitment to make the necessary difficult decisions.
- The staff of the Planning Department and the members of the City Planning Commission must share the vision as well in order to expedite the process as quickly as possible.

It should be noted that this is a policy of incremental and evolutionary change. Uses made non-conforming by changes to zoning are not closed down. A legal use rendered non-conforming by a change in zoning may continue to operate at its present capacity, have normal repairs made and maintenance done, even change ownership, subject to restrictions on expansion, reconstruction, and change of use as described in Chapter 531 of the Minneapolis Zoning Code. In this instance commercial uses scattered between the nodes would continue until they either closed or moved of their own accord, at which point the land use on those properties would need to change to reflect the new zoning.

The five necessary factors for land use changes listed above appear to now be in place. The fact that the recommendations included in this plan and others have come as the result of significant community outreach efforts is one example of community support for the vision. The anticipated endorsement of this plan by affected neighborhoods will be an even stronger example of a community vision (first prerequisite). This plan contains a number of specific recommendations that go a long way to providing the supportive broader revitalization plan needed to make land use changes effective (second prerequisite). The Minneapolis Plan contains many policies supportive of the land use vision being promoted along the corridor by this plan (third prerequisite). Minneapolis

City Council members with wards along the corridor have indicated their support for the recommendations contained in the report. The extent to which this support translates into action remains to be seen but the initial impression is positive (fourth prerequisite). The Planning Commission and Planning Department will need to review and approve of the plan (fifth prerequisite). The Planning Department's ability to rank this as a high priority depends largely on the direction they receive from City Council.

### **Transit Nodes**

Two key intersections, Emerson-Fremont and Central Avenue, are recommended as transit nodes, with accommodation for bus riders and other features such as service and retail uses (the Emerson-Fremont node is also a key intersection in one of the options being discussed in the CR 81/Northwest Corridor busway project). These two cross streets have the largest volume of bus ridership of any along Lowry, and the intent is to encourage easy use of the transit system and increase the number of residents in close proximity to these lines. This designation includes design of the roadway itself to handle bus stopping in Lowry and the cross streets, enlarged pedestrian transit plazas at the intersections, targeted redevelopment in the immediate vicinity to provide commercial development appropriate to transit riders, and the addition of appropriate medium and high density housing within easy walking distance to the intersections. These features are illustrated in concept on the attached drawings.

### **Green Space Connections**

Creation of green corridors and connections to public uses off Lowry Avenue is recommended, including:

- Enhancement of the gateway to the west end of Lowry Avenue in some fashion to be coordinated with improvements proposed to West Broadway (County Road 81).
- A green space connection along Humboldt Avenue between the Jordan School south of Lowry and the Fowell Park north of Lowry Avenue.
- A green space connection along 4th Street North between Cityview School on the north and Farview Park on the south. This will require acquisition of property on the south side and acquisition or swapping of property on the north side.

- Connections to the Mississippi River and associated green spaces and linkages envisioned in the Upper River Master Plan.
- Careful planning of green spaces along the corridor that might be made available through acquisition of properties required by the roadway improvements.

## **Phasing**

The redevelopment proposed in this plan is recommend in five phases:

- Phase 1: Fremont to I-94. Property acquisition on one side of Lowry from west of Lyndale to I-94, adding sidewalks, bike lanes, parking, landscaping, and connections to Cityview School and Farview Park. Beginning of redevelopment of the Emerson/Fremont and Lyndale nodes per market study recommendations.
- Phase 2: Xerxes to Fremont. Roadway improvements, including narrowing to one lane each direction, adding sidewalks, bike lanes, parking and landscaping.
- Phase 3: Mississippi River to University Avenue. Property acquisition on one side of Lowry from Marshall Street to east of University Avenue, adding sidewalks, bike lanes, turn lanes, parking and landscaping.
- Phase 4: University to Central. Property acquisition on one side of Lowry from east of University Avenue to west of Central, adding sidewalks, bike lanes, turn lanes, parking and landscaping. Redevelopment at Central would include transit accommodations and new housing.
- Phase 5: Central to Stinson. Roadway improvements, including narrowing to one lane each direction, adding sidewalks, bike lanes, parking and landscaping.

Figure 24  
Emerson-Fremont Redevelopment Concept Plan

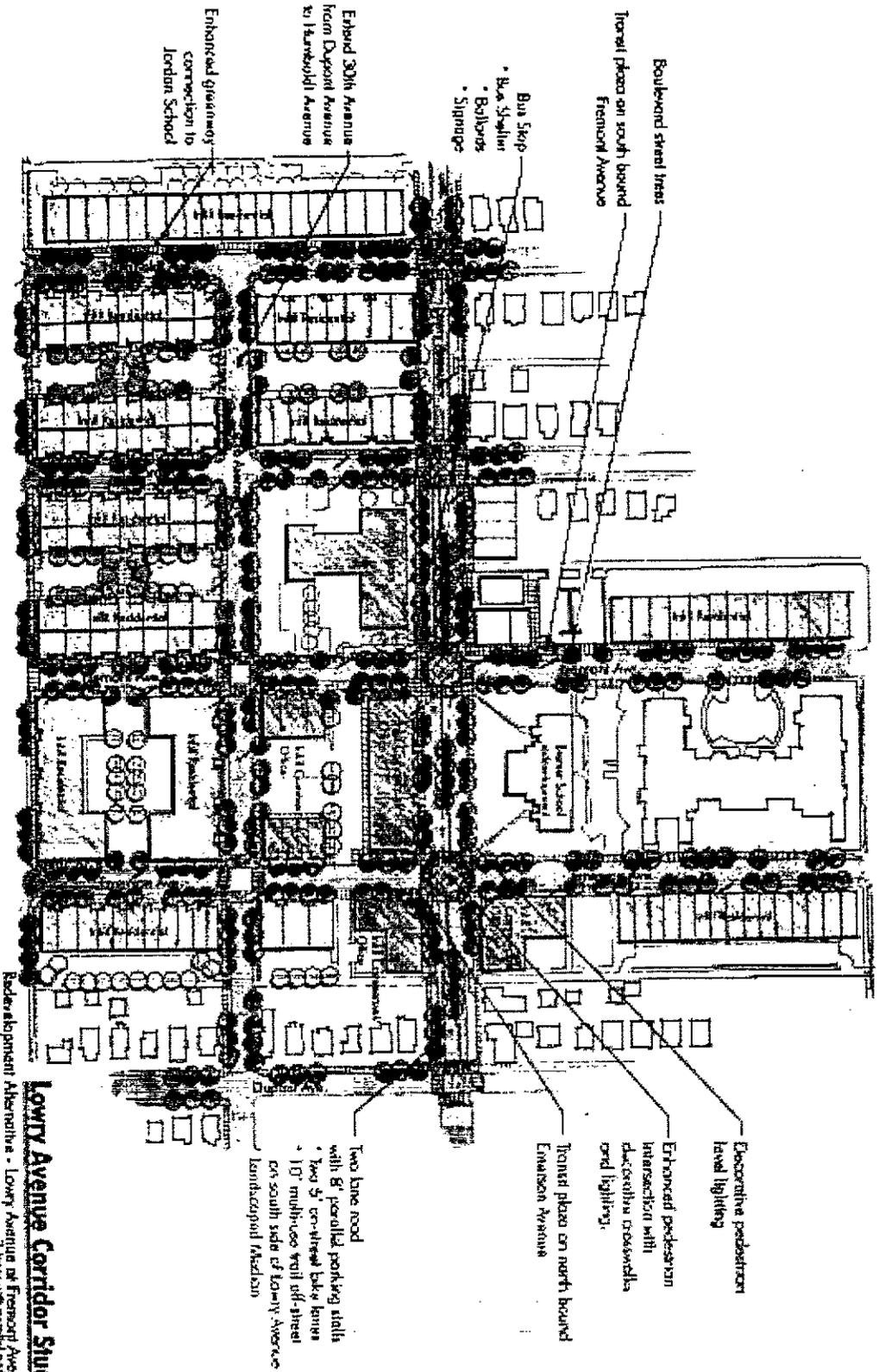
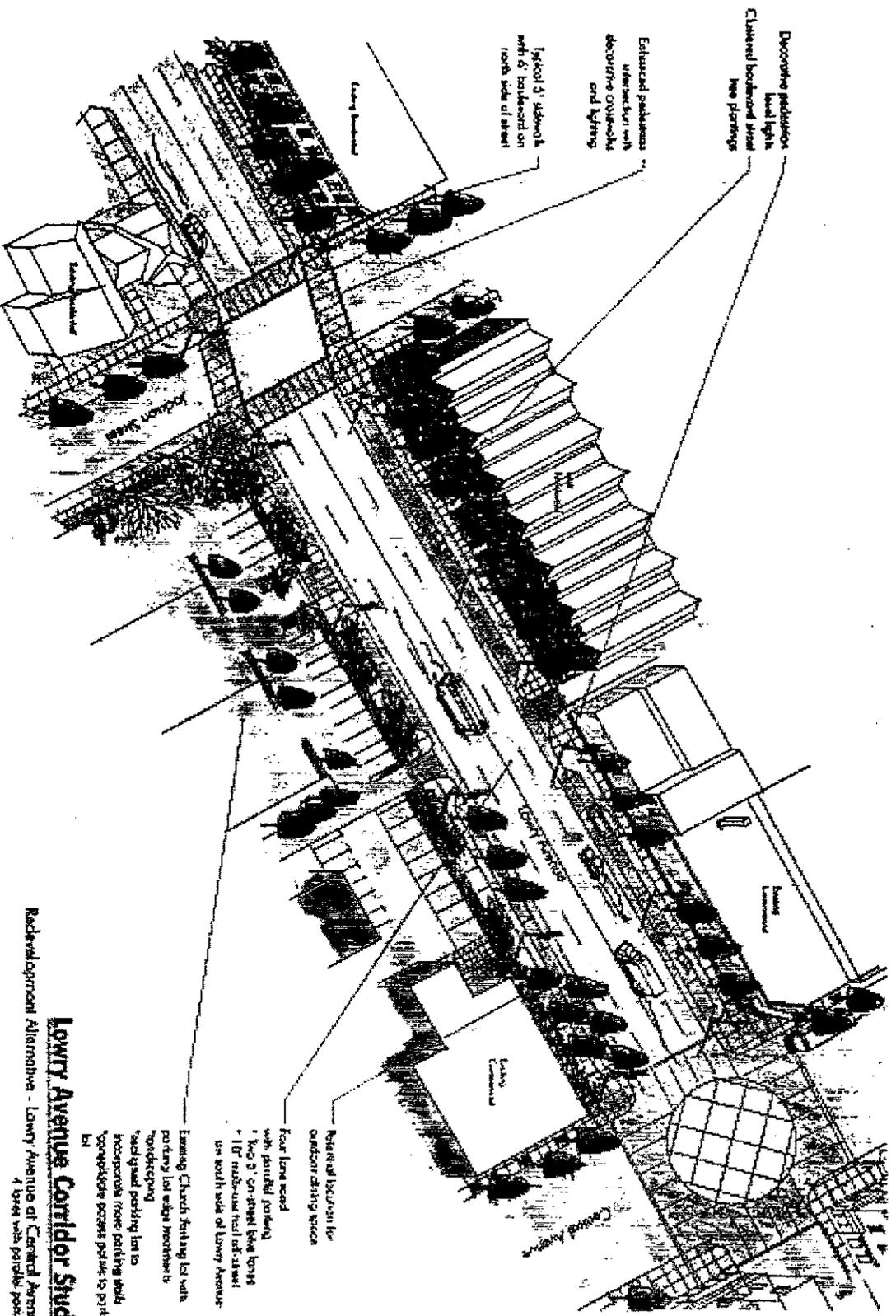


Figure 35  
Central Redevelopment Concept Axon



**Lowry Avenue Corridor Study**  
Redevelopment Alternative - Lowry Avenue of Central Avenue  
4 levels with parallel parking

**NOTE:** Additional supporting documents are available for viewing in the office of the City Clerk. For more information, please contact the Committee Coordinator.