

Existing Downtown Districts

There are currently three Downtown district designations: The Downtown Business District (B4); The Downtown Service District (B4S); and the Downtown Commercial District (B4C), (see Figure 6.1, page 109). In general, Downtown districts are not subject to minimum yard requirements unless they are in close proximity to residence and office-residence districts.

Existing Downtown Business District (B4)

The B4 Downtown Business District (more commonly referred to as “The Downtown Core”) is the area intended for the highest density retail and office uses within Downtown Minneapolis. The B4 district is subdivided into two sub-districts B4-1 and B4-2 which allow for building floor area ratios (FAR) of eight (8) and sixteen (16) respectively. The B4-1 sub-district surrounds portions of the northern, eastern, and southern edges of the B4-2 district. The lower FAR allows for a transition in building heights from the higher intensity center of the Core out toward the surrounding, lower density parts of downtown.

Inherent Challenges: While there are several underdeveloped blocks within the existing Core (particularly north of South 5th Street and south of Washington Avenue South), the market analysis conducted for this project indicates that redevelopment of those blocks alone would not provide enough space to accommodate the amount of commercial office space forecast over the next twenty years.

Proposed Solution: The boundaries of the existing B4-Downtown Business District should be expanded to include nine additional city blocks directly adjacent to the northeastern portion of the existing Core. Specifically, the new boundary of this district would stretch to Washington Avenue on the north and to Portland Avenue on the east (see Figure 6.2).

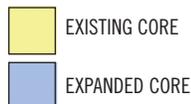
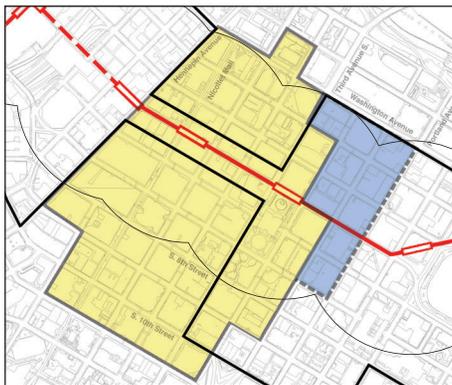


Figure 6.2
Map of Downtown Core Expansion

This particular area is proposed for expansion for four reasons. First, these blocks are all within easy walking distance of two proposed LRT stations, Government Station and Downtown East. Second, a significant portion of this expansion area is comprised of full block or nearly full block surface parking lots. Because less demolition is required, theoretically these blocks would be easier to develop more quickly thereby accommodating new growth while ridding the city of several unsightly surface parking lots. Third, new development in this area would help to forge a more consistently built-out environment that bridges the existing core with new development emerging north of Washington Avenue in the Historic Mills District. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, expansion of the Downtown Core in a northeast direction halts encroachment of high-intensity uses into the Elliot Park neighborhood, thereby allowing that neighborhood to seek development that will encourage – rather than undermine – continued progress toward the goals called for in the Elliot Park Master Plan.

As depicted in Chapters Four and Five, a significant linear parkway – one-quarter block wide – would run on the east side of these blocks, from Washington Avenue to South 7th Street along Portland Avenue. This linear park would form a visual and perceptual demarcation line between the high-intensity Downtown Core and new medium intensity mixed use development in Washington Village.

In addition, the City should consider a mandatory street-level retail requirement in the Zoning Code for designated retail streets, whereby a minimum percentage of ground floor retail space will be considered mandatory – rather than voluntary – in all future commercial office projects.

Existing Downtown Service District (B4S)

The B4S Downtown Service District is intended to provide an environment for a wide range of retail and office facilities that support those uses in the Downtown Core, particularly the provision of