



*City of Sebekä, Minnesota*

# DOWNTOWN REDEVELOPMENT VISION PLAN

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# INTRODUCTION

Downtown Sebeka, Minnesota has gone through many transformations throughout its history. The name "Sebeka" is derived from an Ojibwe word meaning "town by the water," reflecting the town's connection to its natural surroundings. Sebeka was established near the depot of the K-line branch of the Great Northern Railway, which played a crucial role in the area's development. Initially, logging was the primary industry that drove the town's growth. Incorporated in 1898, the downtown area grew to include various businesses and services to cater to the needs of the growing population.

The City participated in a Kansas State University Technical Assistance to Brownfields workshop hosted by the Region 5 Development Commission in November 2023. In this workshop, the city identified issues in redeveloping its downtown, including vacant buildings, unknown ownership status, and potential contamination. Through this process, the city determined that a downtown vision would help drive contamination clean-up, promote redevelopment, and catalyze community engagement and investment.





Hubbard Ave

W Minnesota Ave

Jefferson Ave

Anderson Ave

**DOWNTOWN SEBEKA**







Downtown Sebeka runs west-east along Minnesota Avenue for four blocks. Minnesota Avenue features a mix of occupied businesses and vacant, dilapidated buildings. Many buildings along the downtown strip are empty, their facades showing signs of abandonment and disrepair. Some of these buildings have been abandoned for years, with ownership records unclear or outdated, making it difficult for the city to address the issue of deteriorating properties. This situation has created a patchwork appearance downtown, with a few well-maintained businesses among many vacant storefronts.

Despite these challenges, Sebeka's downtown still maintains several active businesses that continue to operate along the main street, contributing to the town's economic activity.

Sebeka Public School is situated one block away from downtown, which serves as a central institution for the community. The proximity of the school to the downtown area should create a natural connection between the town's educational and commercial centers, potentially contributing to foot traffic and activity in the area. Community input has highlighted a need for more offerings for students downtown and to involve students in the visioning process.

Sebeka City Park is located just one block from downtown and is a draw for residents and visitors. The park features camping facilities, a museum, and proximity to the Red Eye River. This proximity of natural amenities to the downtown area adds to Sebeka's charm and potential for revitalization. More connectivity between the park and downtown was highlighted during community engagement sessions.

# DEFINING DOWNTOWN

## Comprehensive Plan

This downtown vision follows the city's comprehensive plan update. Sebeka updated its comprehensive plan in 2023 through an iterative community process. The process culminated in the development of targeted, prioritized, and actionable goals based on community input and aligned with earlier engagement efforts.

The comprehensive plan outlines 5-year projects categorized by goal area. Projects that affect redevelopment of downtown and impact this downtown vision include:

- **Goal 27:** Research property ownership status in pursuit of addressing abandoned buildings in downtown Sebeka, reducing associated hazards.
- **Goal 28:** Repurpose/demolish abandoned buildings in downtown Sebeka, with the goal of accomplishing one per year in 2024, reducing associated hazards.

## Zoning Update

The comprehensive plan update resulted in an update to the city's zoning map. Downtown, previously commercial-only, has been changed to allow for mixed-use. This change encourages more development for housing and businesses, allowing for commercial use on the first floor and residential on other floors.

## Grants and Other Planning Processes

- The West Central Economic Development Alliance championed a **Business Retention & Expansion** project from 2018-2019 in which a number of community volunteers participated.
- From that process, Wadena County funded a **county-wide housing study** that included information specific to Sebeka.
- A **Rural Housing Preservation Grant** totaling \$111,708 was obtained in 2019 for external home repairs throughout the community.
- A **Small Cities Development Program grant** of \$609,000 is assisting homeowners and commercial businesses in the form of grants and low interest or forgivable loans.
- Two mobile homes, a dilapidated apartment building, and an old blacksmith shop have been demolished downtown since 2018.
- During the comprehensive planning process, an **Energy & Environmental Plan** was developed, from which grants were obtained to update streetlights throughout the city and at City Hall.
- A \$30,000 **Blandin Placemaking Grant** also assisted in the lighting upgrades, in addition to the red bridge at town square, new benches along main street, the trojan art/silhouette in town square, the planters, and the City Hall sign featuring the red bridge.

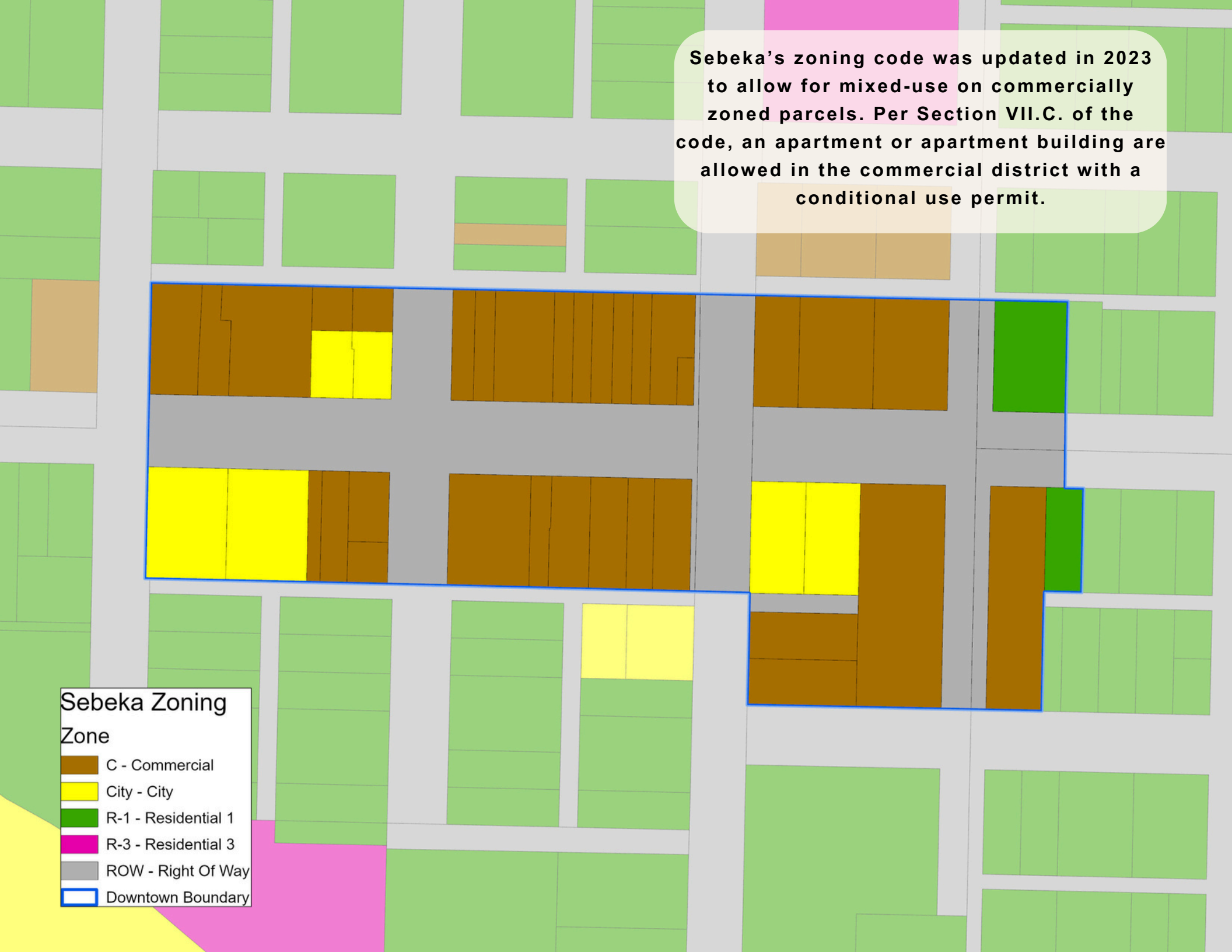
# WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE?

**Sebeka's zoning code was updated in 2023 to allow for mixed-use on commercially zoned parcels. Per Section VII.C. of the code, an apartment or apartment building are allowed in the commercial district with a conditional use permit.**

## Sebeka Zoning

### Zone

-  C - Commercial
-  City - City
-  R-1 - Residential 1
-  R-3 - Residential 3
-  ROW - Right Of Way
-  Downtown Boundary





# COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS- SUMMER 2024

Community workshops were held in July 2024 over two days. Attendees at both sessions participated in hands-on activities that included identifying example streetscapes that they prefer for a future downtown Sebeka, building their own downtown Sebeka by drawing on a map of downtown, identifying next steps for their own involvement in implementing the vision, and creating a headline they envision for Sebeka in five years.



In addition to the in-person workshops, a survey was sent to community members. The six-question survey asked respondents what they like most about Sebeka, how often they go downtown, their top four priorities for downtown, specific assets needed for downtown, big ideas for long-term future of downtown, and whether they planned to attend the visioning sessions.









## What do you like most about Sebeka?

Friendly people and sense of community

Rural, safe, and quiet

Small population

The city park

The school

Local businesses, such as Rife's and Hub 71

## Rank top four priorities for downtown

1

Creating a stronger business environment

2

Food/Restaurants

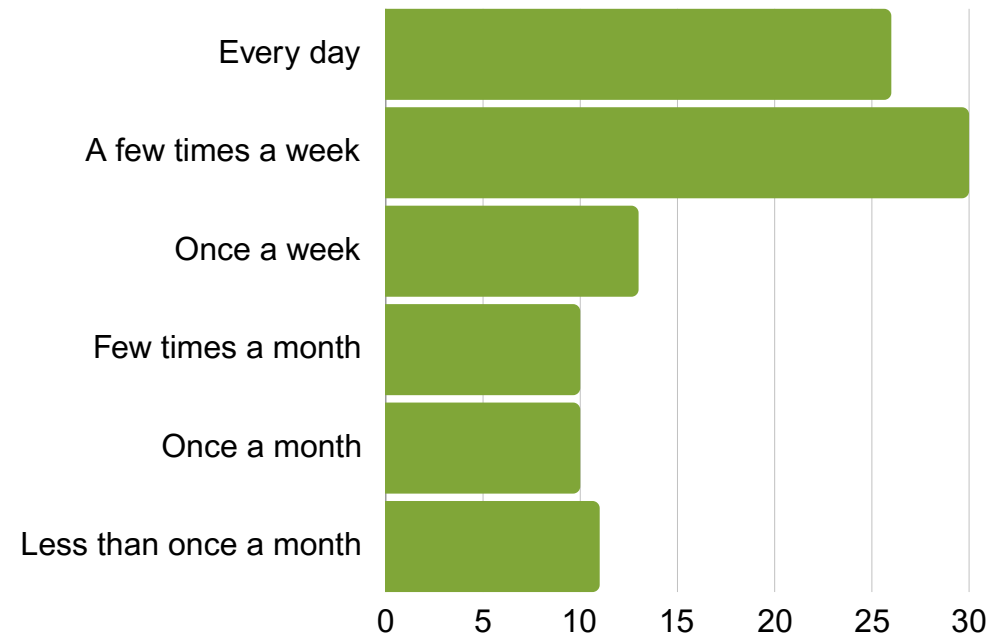
3

Improving access to parks and recreation

4

Personal services (hair salon, barber, massage therapist, etc.)

## How often do you go downtown?



## Specific assets needed for downtown

New businesses, especially retail, restaurants, grocery store

Revitalization/beautification and cleanup of community

More family-friendly activities and recreation

Green space/community garden

Housing

# SURVEY RESULTS





- Community assets
- Corridors from assets to downtown
- Buildings identified during community engagement
- Wayfinding signage opportunities
- Gateway signage opportunities

# ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES



# ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

## Issues

### **Issues identified through community engagement and in consultation with staff include**

- Abandoned, dilapidated, and likely contaminated buildings disincentivize future development downtown
- Need for a wider variety of businesses and activities to draw residents and visitors
  - More grocery stores, restaurants, coffee shops, and essential services
- Lack of housing options, including affordable housing, transitional housing for seniors, and mixed-use buildings
- Activities and recreation for children and teens are limited
- Need for more shade trees, planters, and other landscaping
- No outdoor dining or other seating, including poorly-maintained sidewalks
- Desire for more clearly-marked parking lanes, including diagonal parking
- Lack of public art, murals, and other art installations
- No marketing to attract visitors to downtown

## Opportunities

### **Opportunities identified through community engagement and in consultation with staff include**

- The nearby City Park serves as an attraction point for visitors
- The high school is located just one block north of downtown; integrating students into downtown redevelopment processes will be an asset
- Businesses across U.S. Highway 71 are already a stopping point for potential visitors
- Increased wayfinding signage along corridors from points of interest (City Park, school, local businesses on Highway 71) can direct potential visitors toward downtown
- Gateway signage can be added along Minnesota Ave to provide visitors with clear entry points into downtown



# REDEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the community engagement process, several redevelopment recommendations surfaced as community needs downtown. Frequently-mentioned recommendations include:

- Event center
- More restaurants, grocery, childcare
- Mixed-use
- Barber shops and personal services
- Wi-Fi cafes outside
- Rear parking for residents of second-story units
- Splash pad



## THEMES

## GOALS

## SUCCESS

Small-town atmosphere &  
community spirit

Maintain Sebeka's small-town charm  
through community engagement with  
regular events and activities

Sebeka will be a regional focal point  
for fun, community-centered activity  
and growth

Need for downtown  
revitalization

Address vacant and deteriorating  
buildings by either renovating or  
demolishing structures beyond repair  
to improve the aesthetic appeal of  
Main Street

In 10 years, Sebeka will see five  
properties redeveloped into community  
assets through strategic partnerships

Business development &  
economic growth

Create a stronger business  
environment by attracting new retail  
options, restaurants, and essential  
services like a grocery store to fill  
empty storefronts

Business owners, developers, and  
community members have a clear  
understanding of how to open and  
operate a business in Sebeka

Community amenities &  
recreation

Promote family-friendly activities and  
recreational opportunities by better  
connecting downtown to the city park  
and school

There will be specific curricula and  
intentional youth engagement  
downtown. Visible signage will direct  
visitors to downtown from the park and  
school.

Housing development

Increase housing options by  
developing mixed-use buildings with  
businesses on the ground floor and  
apartments above

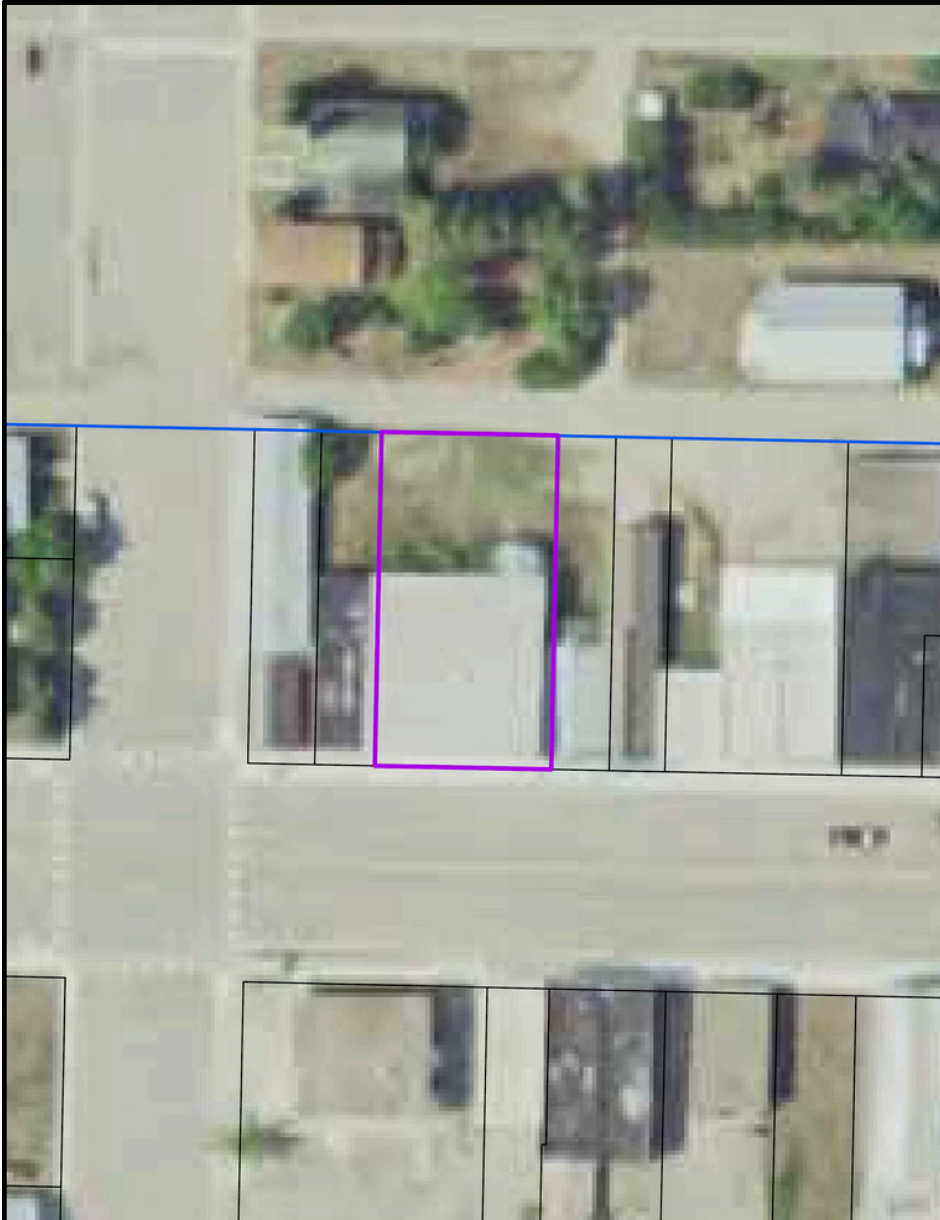
More buildings downtown will have  
living units above retail spaces. These  
units can be occupied by the  
building/business owner, or a private  
resident.

# THEMES, GOALS, SUCCESS

A large, solid dark teal circle is positioned on the left side of the page. Inside this circle, the text "REDEVELOPMENT SITE PROFILES" is written in white, bold, uppercase letters, centered horizontally and vertically.

# **REDEVELOPMENT SITE PROFILES**

# SITE PROFILE: 116 MINNESOTA AVE W



## Site Characteristics

- Size: 0.27 acres
- Zoning: Commercial

## Tax Information:

- Parcel number: 19-330-0040
- Structure type: Commercial/Non Homestead
- Taxable Market (2024): \$26,600

116 Minnesota Ave W was highlighted throughout the community workshops as a site to be redeveloped or demolished. Concerns about structural integrity of the building and potential contamination, such as lead-based paint, asbestos, and unknown soil contamination, have dissuaded development.

The building was once home to a restaurant, a massage parlor, and is now vacant. Ownership of the parcel is unclear, as the tax information includes a taxpayer but doesn't identify an owner.

According to Wadena County tax information, the property has decreased in value by 19% between 2020- 2024, from \$32,700 in 2020 to \$26,600 in 2024.



# 116 MINNESOTA AVE W NOW



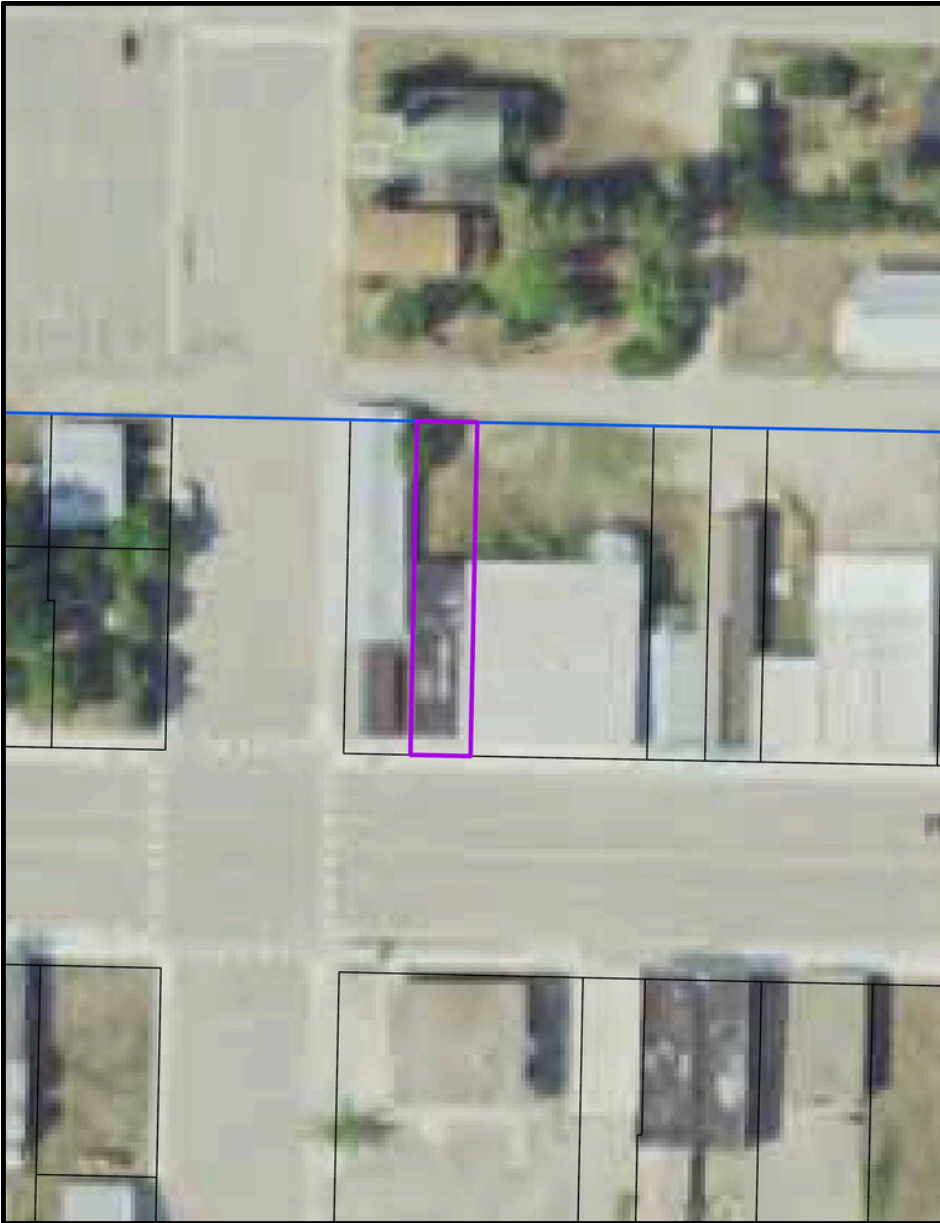


# 116 MINNESOTA AVE W REDEVELOPMENT SCENARIO



*Bar Restaurant*

# SITE PROFILE: 122 MINNESOTA AVE W



## Site Characteristics

- Size: 0.09 acres
- Zoning: Commercial

## Tax Information:

- Parcel number: 19-330-0020
- Structure type: Commercial/Non Homestead
- Taxable Market (2024): \$14,000

Similarly to 116 Minnesota Ave W, 122 Minnesota Ave W was highlighted throughout the community workshops as a site to be redeveloped or demolished for the same reasons: concern over building integrity and potential contamination.

The owner of this property is different from the taxpayer listed, but the taxpayer is the same as the one for the neighboring property at 116 Minnesota Ave W. An owner and a taxpayer of the same parcel may differ due to legal or administrative arrangements. The property might be owned by an entity like a trust or corporation, with another individual or organization designated to handle tax payments. Lease agreements, mortgage escrow accounts, inheritance issues, or co-ownership can also create this distinction. Additionally, tax bills might be sent to a property manager or financial agent, even if they are not the owner.

The property has increased in value by 2% between 2020-2024, from \$13,700 in 2020 to \$14,000 in 2024.



# 122 MINNESOTA AVE W NOW



*Art Center*

# SITE PROFILE: 124 MINNESOTA AVE W



## Site Characteristics

- Size: 0.1 acres
- Zoning: Commercial

## Tax Information:

- Parcel number: 19-330-0010
- Structure type: Commercial/Non Homestead
- Taxable Market (2024): \$16,500

Like its neighbors highlighted on the previous two pages, 124 Minnesota Ave W was identified throughout the community workshops as a site to be redeveloped or demolished for the same reasons: concern over building integrity and potential contamination.

Ownership of the parcel is unclear, as the tax information includes a taxpayer but doesn't identify an owner. The taxpayers listed are different taxpayers from the neighboring properties.

Most recently, the property was a pottery studio.

The property has increased in value by 12% between 2020-2024, from \$14,700 in 2020 to \$16,500 in 2024.



# 124 MINNESOTA AVE W REDEVELOPMENT



*Personal Services, Second Story Apartment,  
Outdoor Wifi Lounge*



# SITE PROFILE: 109 MINNESOTA AVE W



## Site Characteristics

- Size: 0.18 acres
- Zoning: Commercial

## Tax Information:

- Parcel number: 19-330-1120
- Structure type: Commercial/Non Homestead
- Taxable Market (2024): \$7,400

Like its neighbors on the north side of Minnesota Ave, 109 Minnesota Ave W was identified throughout the community workshops as a site to be redeveloped or demolished for the same reasons: concern over building integrity and potential contamination.

According to City partners, the owners of the property are interested in redevelopment and have been in communication with the City about redevelopment options. Sebeka staff have applied for an MPCA TBA grant.

Most recently, the property was a secondhand shop.

The property has increased in value by 12% between 2020-2024, from \$14,700 in 2020 to \$16,500 in 2024.

# 109 MINNESOTA AVE W NOW





# 109 MINNESOTA AVE W REDEVELOPMENT



*Grocery and Childcare*



# CASE STUDY PROGRAMS

Sebeká can look to the programs below as models for shaping its own redevelopment strategies, using proven approaches to provide business support, stimulate property revitalization, and spur economic growth.

## **Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission Revolving Loan Fund**

The UMVRDC Revolving Loan Fund is designed to provide gap financing for business and industry starting up or expanding in the five-county region of Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Swift and Yellow Medicine, and the Upper Sioux Community. The primary focus of the program is manufacturing and industrial-related businesses that will create or retain jobs.

### **Types of Activities Financed**

- Business start-ups or expansions with priority given to manufacturing, technology and/or diversification of the local economy.
- Non-profits are eligible for financing but must meet all other lending requirements.
- Commercial/retail activities must fulfill a local need for essential goods and services and not be in direct competition with a similar business

## **North Central Economic Development Association (NCEDA) Technical Assistance and Business Bootcamp Sessions**

One on one business development technical assistance is available upon request. Business Bootcamp Sessions are business-focused ‘shorts’ for people at all points in their business-owner journey. Workshop content is designed for people who have a business, future business owners, or people looking to elevate their side-hustle!

## **Save Your Town Training- Southwest Minnesota Initiative Foundation**

Save Your Town was featured at a Southwest Minnesota Initiative Foundation [presentation](#). They offer a variety of trainings and resources for small town development, specializing in vacant property redevelopment.

## **BAD (Brownfield, Abandoned, Dilapidated) Building Program**

The BAD (Brownfield, Abandoned, Dilapidated) Building Program is a West Virginia-based initiative that helps communities assess, clean up, and redevelop neglected properties. It provides technical assistance, funding guidance, and strategic planning to repurpose brownfields and abandoned buildings for economic and community revitalization. The program supports local governments and stakeholders in navigating environmental assessments, securing funding, and implementing redevelopment projects to transform blighted properties into productive spaces.



The large school parking lot can be used for summer community events.



- Gateway Signage
- School Partnership
- School parking lot-summer event space
- Existing building to be redeveloped
- Rear parking
- Streetscape improvements
- Existing building to remain
- Splash pad
- Wayfinding signage



This vacant, city-owned lot can be used as a splash pad. (Parcel No. R193301140)

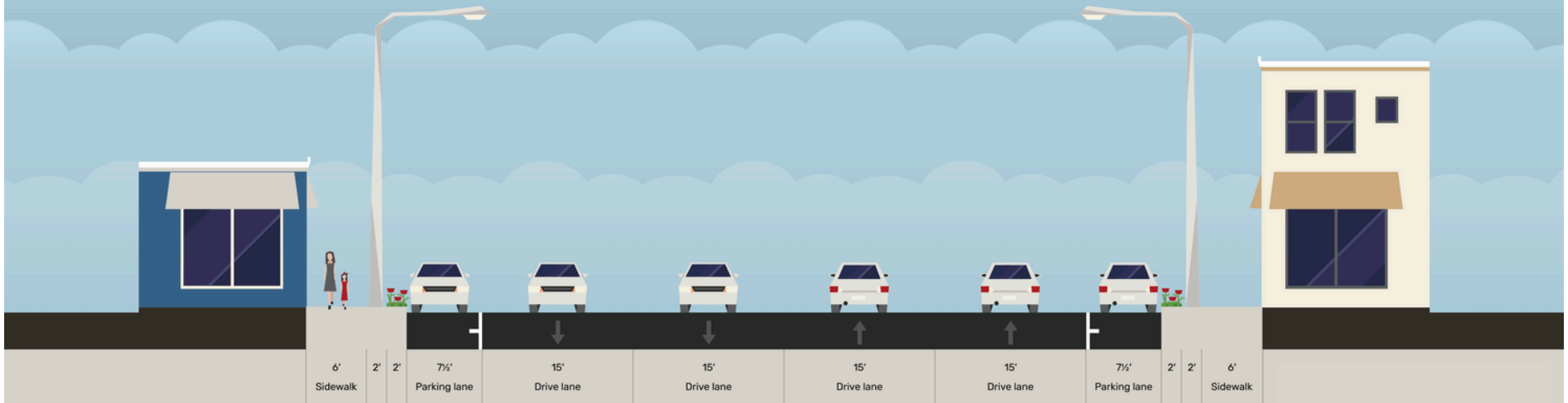
## DEVELOPMENT PLAN





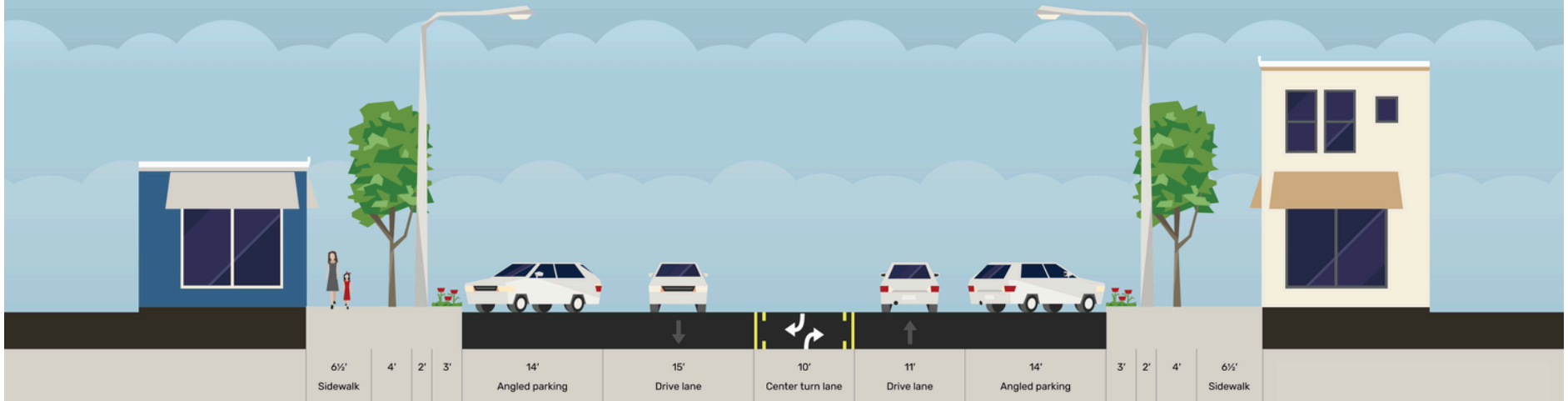
# Minnesota Ave

## Current Conditions



# Minnesota Ave

## Potential Future Conditions





CURRENT CONDITIONS





POTENTIAL NEAR-TERM FUTURE CONDITIONS



# IMPLEMENTATION- STATE BROWNFIELDS FUNDING

## **Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Opportunities**

### *Targeted Brownfield Assistance:*

- Offers free environmental site assessments for eligible properties
- Includes Phase I and II assessments, as well as cleanup planning
- Priority given to projects with community support and those providing essential services

### *MPCA Brownfield Program:*

- Fee-for-service program offering technical assistance
- Issues liability assurance letters to promote investigation and cleanup
- Serves property owners, developers, lenders, and local governments



## **Department of Employment Economic Development Opportunities**

### *Contamination Cleanup Grant Program:*

- Provides grants to help pay for assessing and cleaning up contaminated sites for redevelopment
- Available to development authorities and private entities
- Grants can cover up to 75% of project costs
- Applications typically due in May and November each year

### *Minnesota Main Street Program:*

- Provides framework for community-driven downtown revitalization
- Technical assistance and resources for participating communities

### *Redevelopment Grant Program:*

- Helps communities with the costs of redeveloping blighted industrial, residential, or commercial sites
- Grants pay up to 50% of redevelopment costs for a qualifying site

### *Small Cities Development Program:*

- Federal funds for housing, public infrastructure, and commercial rehabilitation projects
- For cities and townships with populations under 50,000

### *Minnesota Investment Fund:*

- Provides financing to help add new workers and retain high-quality jobs
- Focus on industrial, manufacturing, and technology-related industries



# IMPLEMENTATION- RECREATION & TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS FUNDING

## **Recreation Related Funding**

### *DNR Outdoor Recreation Grant Program:*

- \$15,000 - \$350,000 available for development projects
- Up to 50% of project costs covered
- Grants available for acquisition and development of local parks and recreation areas

### *Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF):*

- \$30,000 - \$500,000 available
- 50% local match required
- Funds acquisition and development of outdoor recreation areas and facilities

### *DNR Local Trail Connections Program:*

- \$5,000 - \$250,000 available for development projects
- 25% local match required
- Funds relatively short trail connections between residential areas and desirable locations

## **Transportation Related Funding**

### *MnDOT Transportation Alternatives Program:*

- 20% local match required
- Funds projects like multi-use paths, streetscapes, and safe alternative transportation options
- Applications accepted year-round

### *MnDOT Active Transportation Program:*

- No local match required
- Funds projects that improve biking and walking infrastructure and safety
- Biennial solicitation



# BROWNFIELD REDEVELOPMENT PROCESS

## Site Assessment

Once a site has been identified, there are several steps that should be taken ahead of acquisition and/or cleanup. An assessment helps a community understand environmental conditions on the property and whether those conditions could be harmful to residents and workers. The site assessment process can include a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment, a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment, and additional assessment activities.

A Phase I ESA is an historical look at past uses on a property. To complete a Phase I, an environmental professional reviews past and current land uses, reviews government databases (such as MPCA What's in My Neighborhood), visually inspects the site, and interviews current and past property owners, neighbors, and workers.

Once a Phase I ESA is complete, a Phase II ESA is conducted if evidence of known or potential contamination is found. The Phase II ESA reviews information found in the Phase I ESA to identify likely chemicals of concern based on historical property records, sample and test soil and groundwater, and develop cleanup plans.

## Cleanup Process

Brownfield sites may have unsafe levels of environmental contamination due to past or current industrial, commercial, residential, agricultural, or recreational uses. Contaminants can be present in the soil, water, or air. Cleaning up these contaminants is crucial to reducing or eliminating health risks for residents, workers, pets, and the surrounding environment. The extent of cleanup required depends on the specific contaminants, the level of contamination, and the intended reuse of the property.

## After Cleanup

When a site is cleaned up, different types of letters may be issued to document the process and compliance with environmental regulations. A Technical Assistance Letter provides feedback on site investigations when no assurance letter is issued. A Review of Response Action Plan (RAP) and Construction Contingency Plan (CCP) ensures proper management of contaminated materials and may lead to approvals for redevelopment. Completion of Soil Vapor Assessment and Completion of Vapor Mitigation letters confirm that vapor intrusion risks have been assessed or mitigated. No Action or No Further Action Letters indicate that contamination does not pose a risk or has been appropriately managed. Statutory liability assurances, such as No Association Determinations (NADs) or Lender Letters, protect certain parties from environmental liability. Additional determinations, such as Off-Site Source Determination and Certificates of Completion, provide confirmation of contamination sources and final site cleanup completion.



# NEXT STEPS

## Near-Term (0-2 Years)

### Property Inventory

Building off of findings in this report, engage property owners and evaluate structural integrity of highlighted properties.

### Team Building

Work with community members identified through the engagement process to formalize a group to build energy around redevelopment initiatives

### School Partnerships

Partner with school teachers, PTO, and student groups to promote downtown events, cleanup programs, and mural painting or art installations.

### Identify Low-Hanging Street Beautification Efforts

Using this report, prioritize street beautification efforts such as planters, art installations, and signage.

## Medium-Term (2 - 5 Years)

### Launch a Branding Campaign

With the team developed in Step 1, identify branding initiatives for downtown Sebeka. Consider hiring a marketing firm.

### Apply for Funding for Implementation

For identified sites, apply for MPCA and DEED grants for assessment, cleanup, and demolition (if needed).

### Install Wayfinding Signage and Gateway Signage

Working with Five Wings Art, school partners, and community volunteers, design and install signage to attract visitors to downtown

### Develop a Facade Improvement Program

Utilize the DEED Minnesota Main Streets Program to establish a grant program for storefront improvement.

## Long-Term & Ongoing (2- 5 Years And Beyond)

### Adopt a Vacant Building Ordinance or Property Maintenance Code

Utilizing examples from Centerville, SD and Stanhope, IA, develop codes to enforce vacant property maintenance.

### Create a Downtown Business Incubator

Consider short-term, reduced rent leases for small businesses in vacant storefronts.

### Small Business Training and Mentorship

Partner with WCEDA, DEED, and local businesses to provide trainings and mentorship programming for potential small business owners.

### Minnesota Ave Redevelopment

Work with MNDOT to promote a more pedestrian-safe Minnesota Ave, incorporating center turn lanes, angled parking, and wider sidewalks.