



# DISCOVERING DOWNTOWN URBANA

Defining a Downtown Neighborhood

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## ABSTRACT

Like all districts, the Downtown Urbana neighborhood is composed of discrete elements: nodes, paths, edges and landmarks.

Activity nodes in Downtown Urbana are concentrated in the central area, though major employment centers are



**Main Street at Race Street:** Though only a few blocks of historic Main Street remain intact, the commercial activities that take place here help to enliven Downtown Urbana. Photo: maltman23, Flickr.

somewhat more distributed. The existing nodes form two clusters, with the potential to establish a third cluster around Lincoln Square Village.

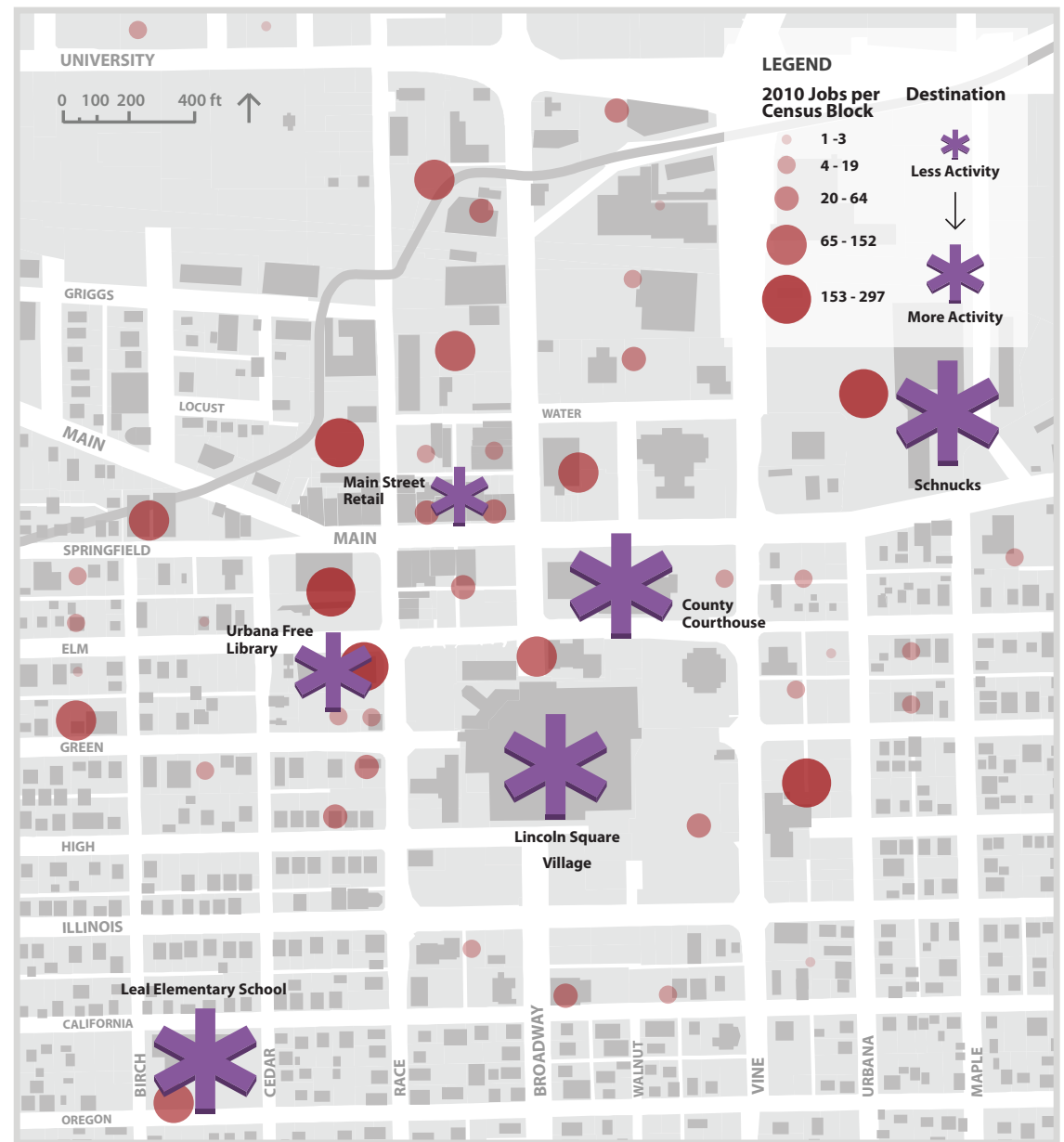
Downtown is well served by vehicular routes and transit service. Still, pedestrian paths are confined to the area surrounding Main Street, and some bicycle routes lack key connections. Four corridors—Race Street, Broadway Avenue, Main Street and Green Street—emerge as future connectors.

Three alternative plans define the Downtown neighborhood using these elements. The *Commercial Core* plan sets the boundaries based on existing uses and barriers, while the *Urbana Crossings* plan aspires to create an interconnected urban fabric using seams and paths. *Main Street Plus*, the preferred plan, balances activity and connectivity and builds on the elements that make Downtown Urbana unique: historic Main Street and Lincoln Square Village. By defining Downtown as a manageable corridor, the plan sets the stage for incremental improvements and design interventions.

## EMPLOYMENT AND DESTINATIONS

In 2010, the Downtown Urbana study area was home to more than 2,400 jobs. These jobs were concentrated in the central and northwest portions of the study area, with one additional employment center located in each of the northeast, southeast and southwest quadrants.

The destinations with the most activity tend to lie toward the center of the study area in the vicinity of historic Main Street and Lincoln Square Village. Schnucks and Leal Elementary School represent major activity centers located on the periphery of the study area.

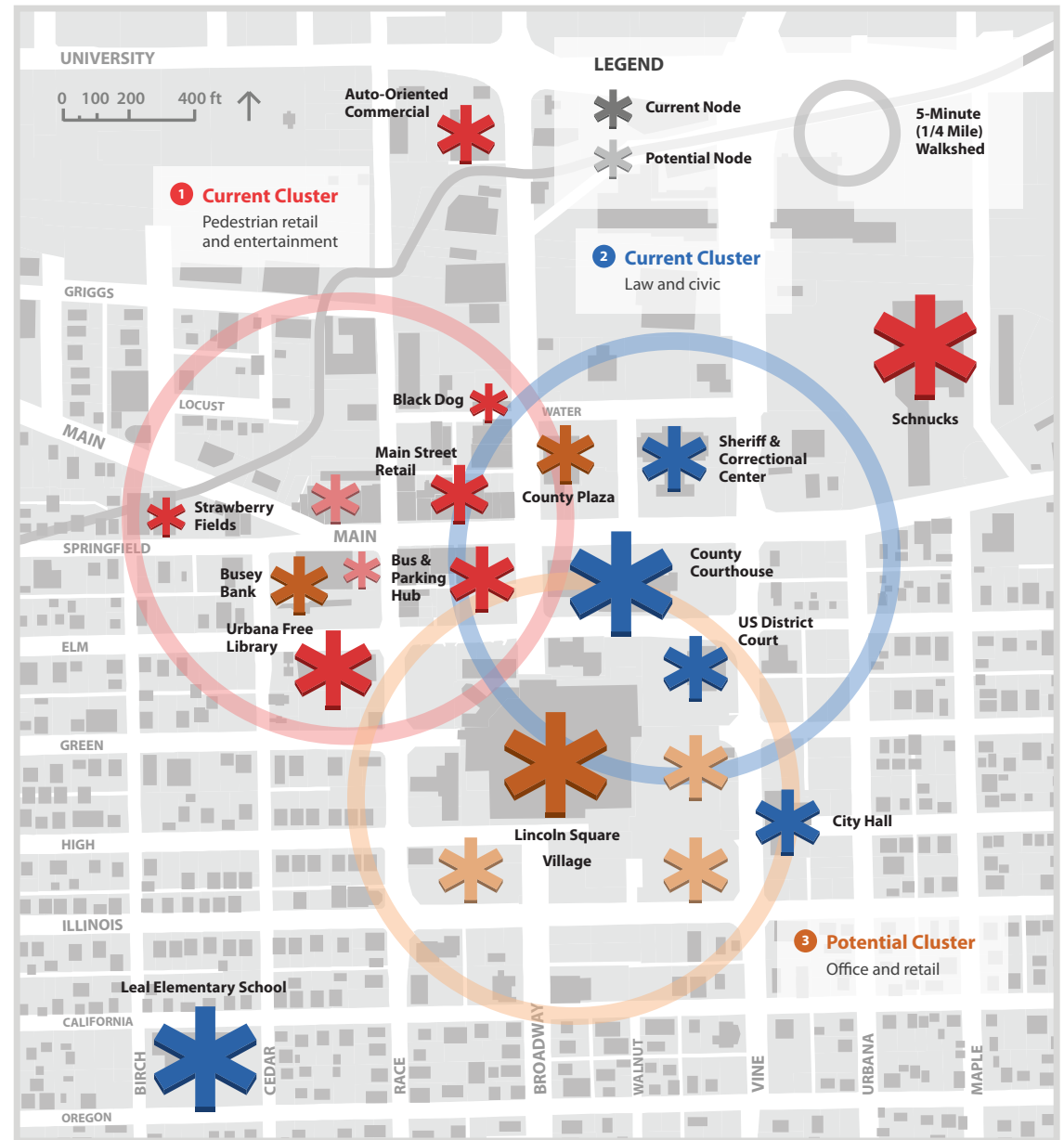


**Current Employment and Destinations:** Most of the employment and many of the destinations in Downtown Urbana are located in the central area surrounding historic Main Street. *Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics.*

## NODES AND CLUSTERS

Based on five-minute walksheds, downtown Urbana contains two existing clusters of activity nodes, with the potential to develop a third cluster:

- 1 Pedestrian Retail and Entertainment Cluster**  
 Centered on the historic core of Downtown, this current cluster provides a walkable environment for shopping and entertainment.
- 2 Law and Civic Cluster**  
 Surrounding the prominent County Courthouse, this current cluster is dominated by legal and government uses as well as many small law offices (not shown).
- 3 Office and Retail Cluster**  
 Currently surrounded by underutilized surface parking, Lincoln Square Village has the potential to anchor a mixed-use activity cluster.



**Current and Potential Nodes and Clusters:** Downtown Urbana contains two current clusters centered on the historic core and the County Courthouse, with the potential to develop another activity cluster around Lincoln Square Village.

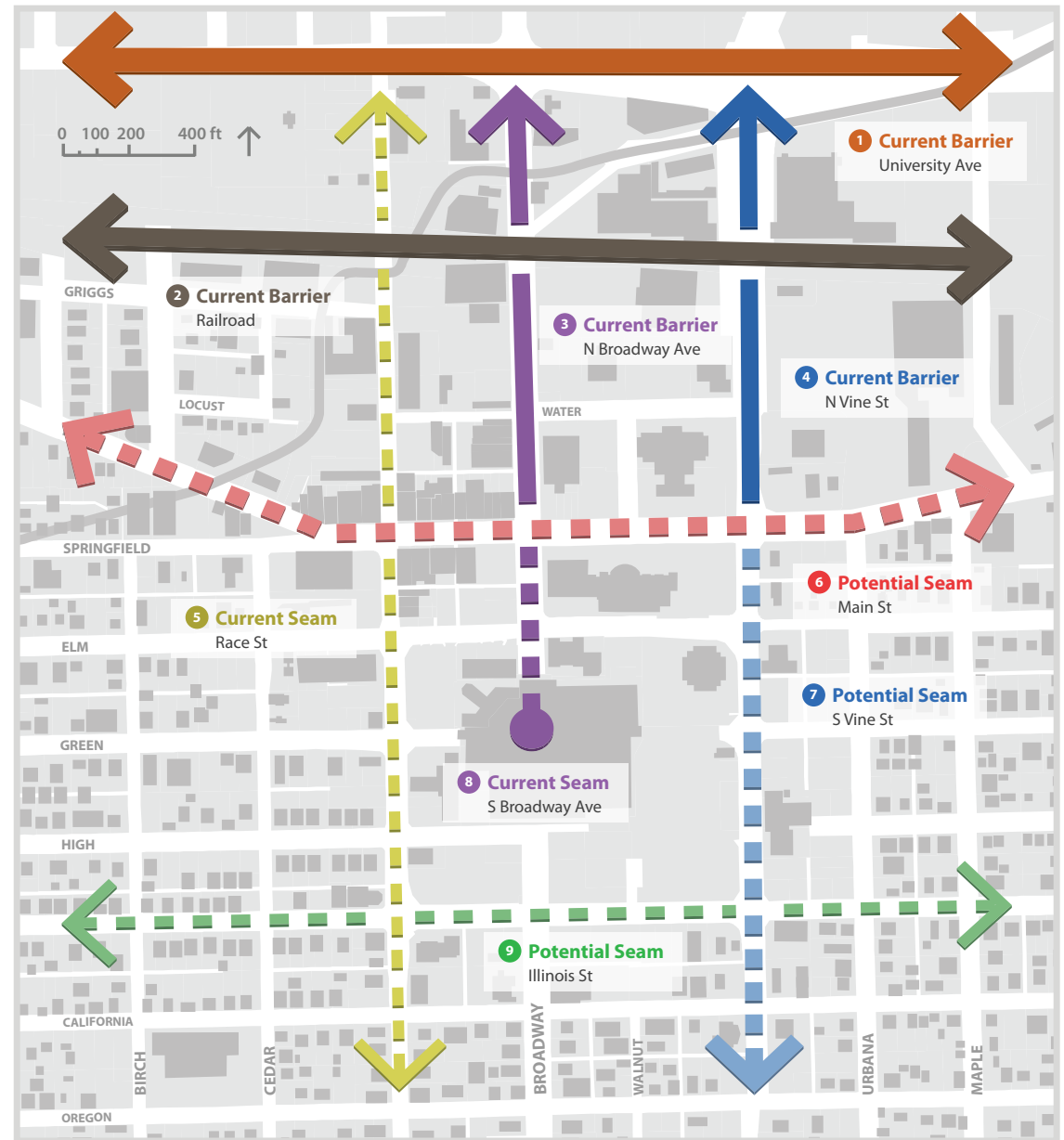
## SEAMS AND BARRIERS

Edges in the northern part of Downtown Urbana are dominated by existing barriers:

- 1 **University Avenue** carries high traffic volumes, blocking pedestrian movement to the north.
- 2 **The Mansfield Branch Railroad** limits connections to the northern part of Downtown.
- 3 **North Broadway Avenue** has a wide cartway, inhibiting east-west movement.
- 4 **North Vine Street** receives substantial traffic from University Avenue, limiting east-west connections.

Though the southern portion of the study area contains few existing edges, it presents opportunities to develop seams that will unify the urban fabric:

- 5 **Race Street** has the potential to connect residential uses to the west with commercial uses to the east.
- 6 **Main Street** can act as a unifying seam between commercial, institutional and residential uses.
- 7 **South Vine Street** has the potential to serve as a bridge between Lincoln Square Village and the residential neighborhood to the east.
- 8 **South Broadway Avenue** acts as a current seam, connecting Lincoln Square Village to retail and transit activity on Main Street.
- 9 **Illinois Street** can serve as a seam between commercial and residential uses.



**Current and Potential Edges:** Barriers present challenges to mobility in the northern part of Downtown. The southern portion of the study area is more permeable and presents opportunities to develop seams.

## CURRENT PATHS AND CIRCULATION

Despite the barriers that restrict movement, Downtown Urbana is well served by vehicular routes, bicycle routes and transit. Pedestrian corridors are located primarily in central Downtown:

### 1 Vehicular Traffic

University Avenue and Vine Street carry the highest volumes of vehicles, followed by Springfield Avenue and Main Street.

### 2 Bus Service

Central Downtown is served by high-frequency bus routes, while nearly all locations within the study area are within a five-minute walk of bus service.

### 3 Bicycle Routes

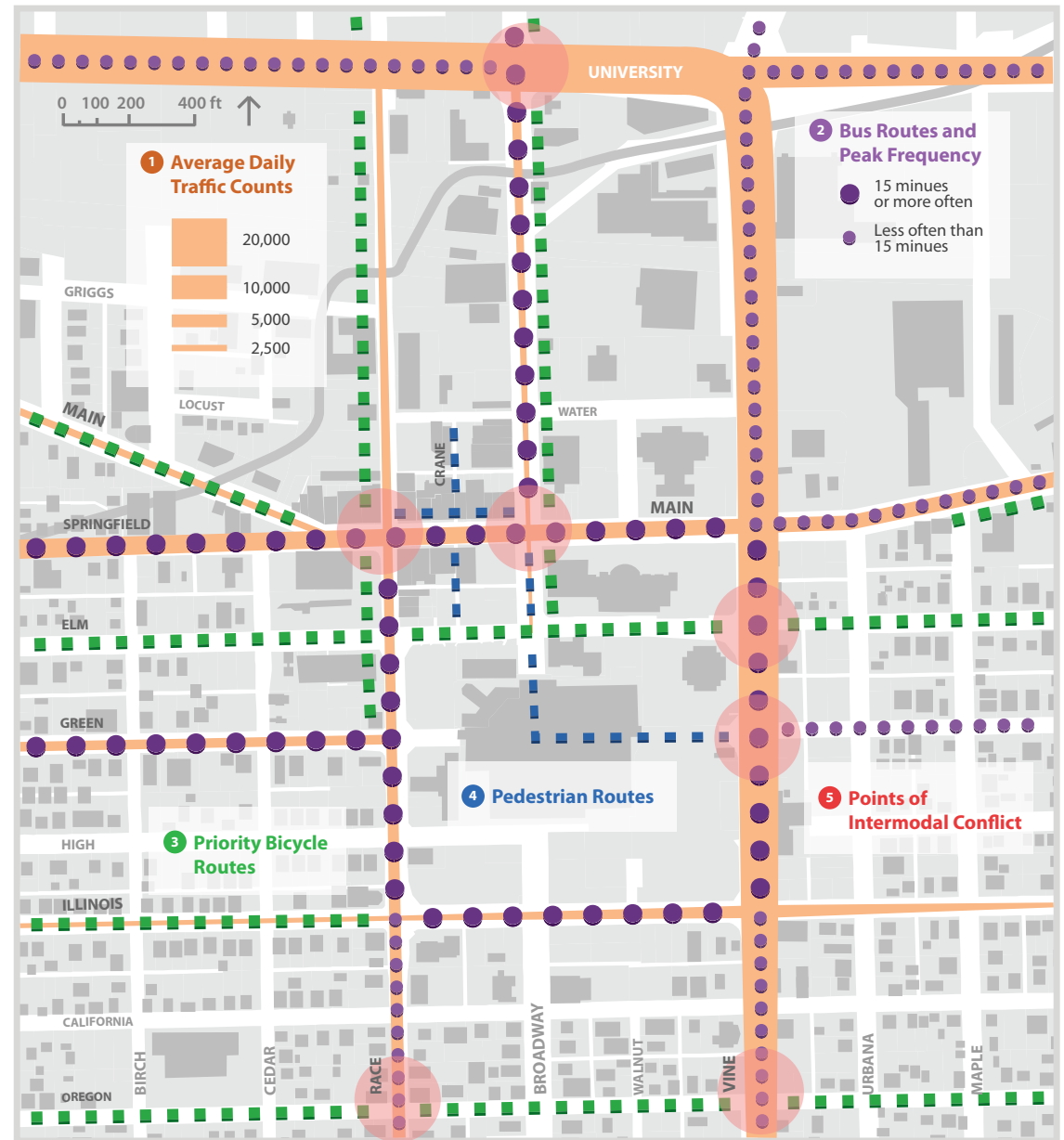
While Downtown Urbana lacks dedicated on-street bicycle facilities, it includes a wide range of streets that accommodate cyclists. East-west bicycle travel is particularly well served by Elm and Oregon streets.

### 4 Pedestrian Routes

Though most streets in the study area include sidewalks, pedestrian-priority streets are confined to a relatively small area in central Downtown. Alleys such as Crane Alley serve as important pedestrian connectors, particularly in large blocks.

### 5 Points of Intermodal Conflict

Where multiple modes of travel intersect, conflicts between modes present safety and accessibility concerns. As a result, these intersections require special design considerations.



**Current Paths and Circulation:** The major vehicular and transit routes form a loop around Lincoln Square Village, while surrounding streets act as connectors and serve bicyclists and pedestrians. *Data Sources: Getting Around Illinois, Illinois Department of Transportation; Champaign-Urbana Area Bicycle Map, 2010 Edition.*

## POTENTIAL CORRIDORS AND CONNECTIONS

Four corridors in Downtown Urbana present opportunities to improve connectivity, particularly for bicyclists and pedestrians:

### 1 Race Street Bicycle Route

Improving bicycle connections on South Race Street between Green Street and Oregon Street could create a continuous north-south bicycle corridor, linking residential and commercial uses.

### 2 Broadway Avenue Complete Street

The wide cartway and limited traffic volumes on Broadway Avenue provide an opportunity to improve pedestrian and bicycle facilities. Pedestrian traffic could pass through Lincoln Square Village while bicycle traffic could be routed around the building.

### 3 Maximizing Capacity on Springfield and Main

Higher densities and traffic volumes on Springfield Avenue and Main Street present capacity challenges, but a pedestrian link on East Main Street could significantly improve east-west connectivity.

### 4 Green Street Pedestrian Route

With high-frequency bus service and an existing pass-through at Lincoln Square Village, Green Street could benefit from targeted pedestrian improvements.

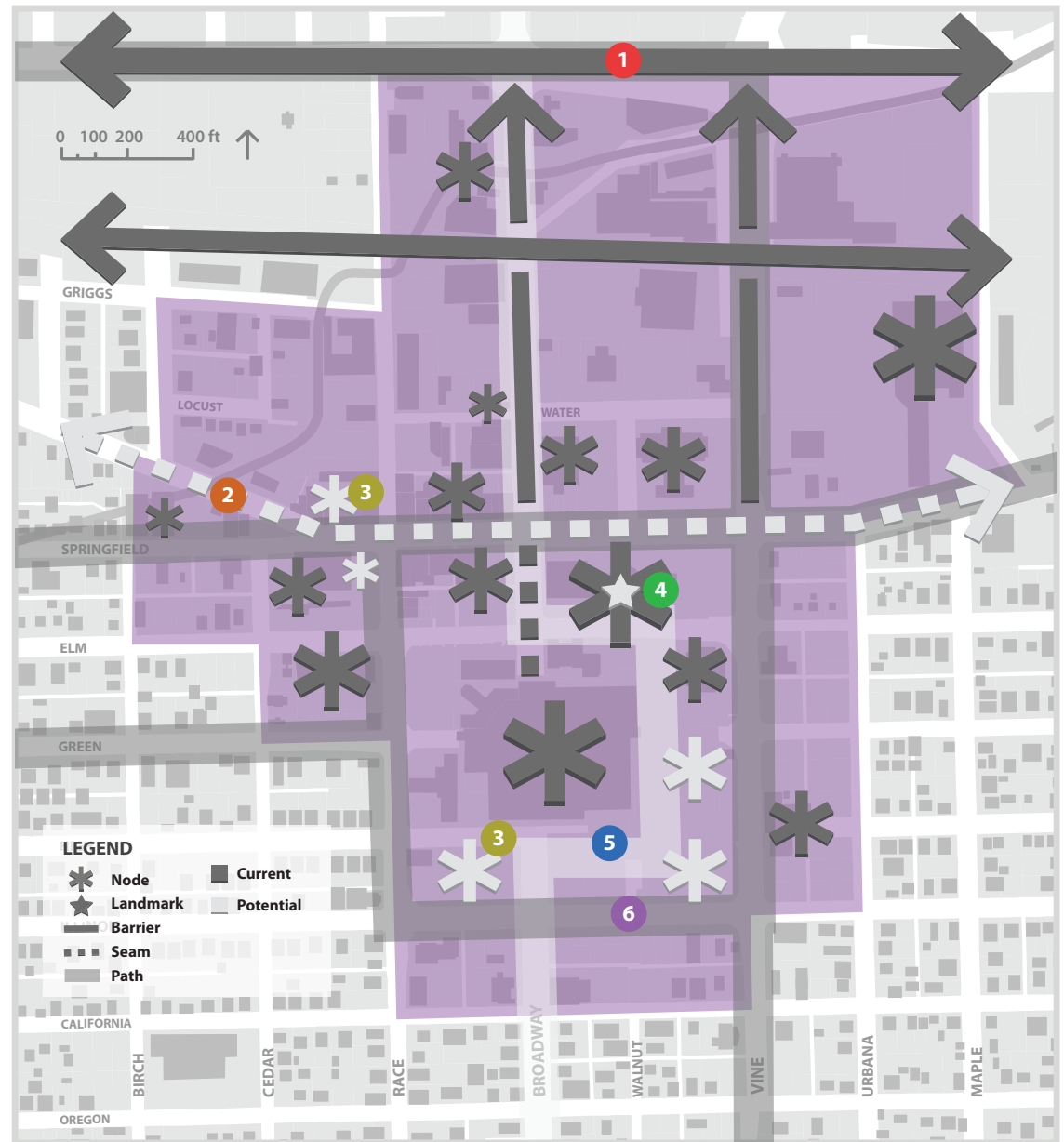


**Potential Corridors and Connections:** Pedestrian and bicycle improvements to two north-south and two east-west corridors could improve connectivity in Downtown Urbana.

## ALTERNATIVE ONE COMMERCIAL CORE

In this alternative plan, Downtown Urbana is defined according to existing commercial and institutional uses, producing a broad base for incremental improvements.

- 1 University Avenue Barrier**  
University Avenue serves as the northern edge of the Downtown neighborhood.
- 2 Main Street Seam**  
Main Street acts as a seam, uniting commercial uses to the north with office, institutional and residential uses to the south.
- 3 Potential Nodes**  
Opportunities for redevelopment on Main Street and infill around Lincoln Square Village promise to create a stronger Downtown cluster.
- 4 Courthouse Tower Landmark**  
Located at the center of the Downtown neighborhood, the courthouse tower serves as a visible and unifying landmark.
- 5 Broadway Avenue Complete Street**  
Additional facilities for bicycles and pedestrians can make this potential path an important north-south connector, improving accessibility.
- 6 Lincoln Square Circulation Paths**  
With connections to University Avenue and the University of Illinois campus, the streets surrounding Lincoln Square Village serve as the primary circulators for the Downtown neighborhood.

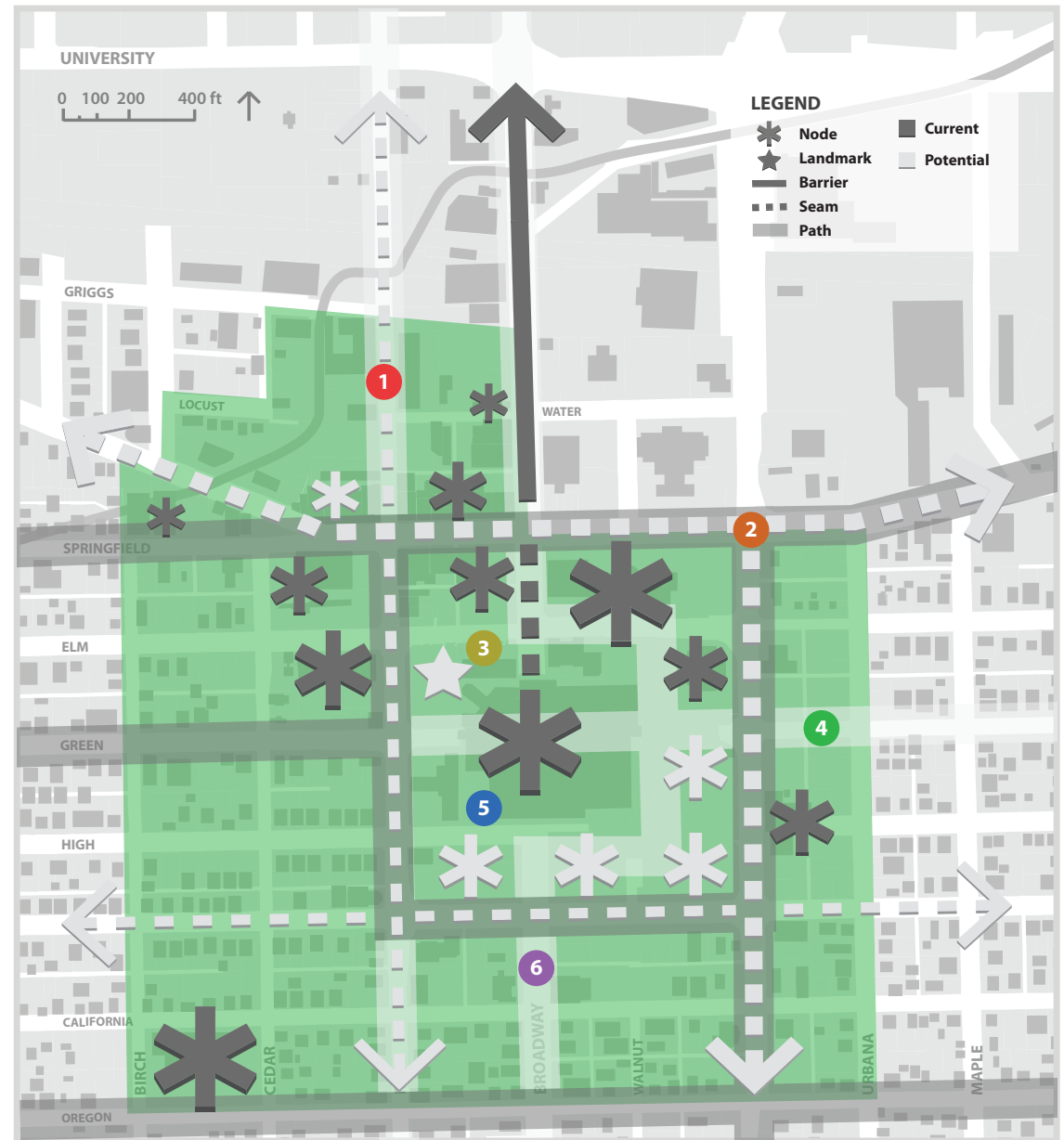


**Commercial Core Plan:** This alternative represents a broad vision for the Downtown Urbana neighborhood based on the historic core of commercial and institutional activity.

## ALTERNATIVE TWO URBANA CROSSINGS

The *Urbana Crossings* plan leverages the central location of Lincoln Square Village to create a vibrant and interconnected Downtown neighborhood.

- 1 North Race Street Potential Path**  
Race Street can be used to establish a connection to commercial activity on University Avenue.
- 2 Lincoln Square Potential Seams**  
In addition to acting as paths for vehicular movement, the streets around Lincoln Square Village can act as seams, smoothing the transitions between commercial, residential and institutional uses.
- 3 Lincoln Square Potential Landmark**  
A landmark at the northwest corner of Lincoln Square Village can serve as a focal point for Downtown.
- 4 Green Street Potential Pedestrian Path**  
Green Street can act as an east-west path for pedestrians, linking residential neighborhoods via an indoor path through Lincoln Square Village.
- 5 Lincoln Square Potential Nodes**  
The addition of nodes surrounding Lincoln Square Village can help to establish it as the activity center of the Downtown neighborhood.
- 6 Broadway Avenue Potential Complete Street**  
With improvements to pedestrian and bicycle facilities, Broadway Avenue can improve north-south mobility in Downtown.

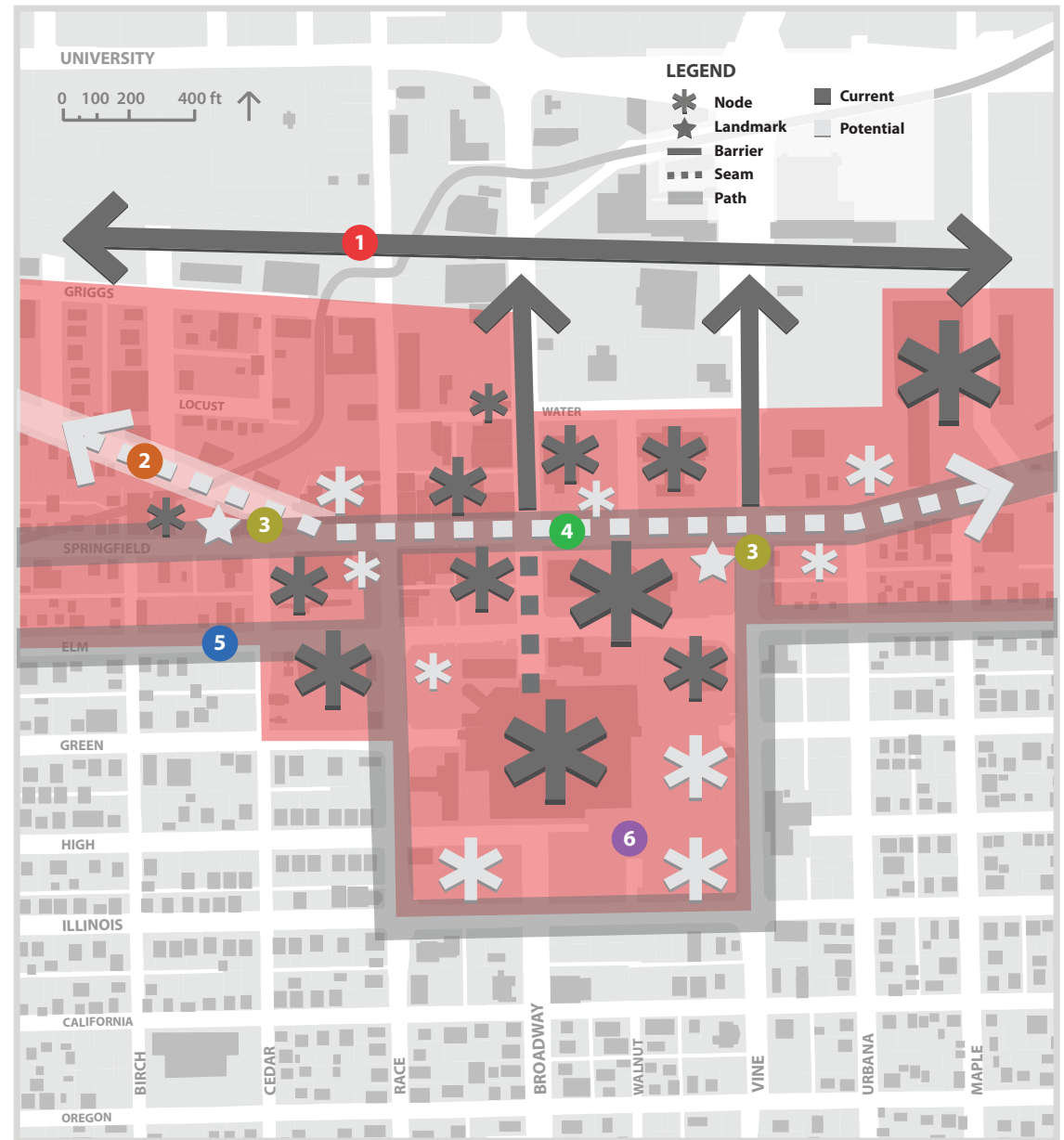


**Urbana Crossings Plan:** The *Urbana Crossings* plan represents a vision for a permeable, connected Downtown neighborhood centered on the mixed-use Lincoln Square Village.

## ALTERNATIVE THREE MAIN STREET PLUS

The *Main Street Plus* plan emphasizes east-west connectivity by building on the assets of historic Main Street and Lincoln Square Village.

- 1 Railroad Barrier**  
The Mansfield Branch Railroad serves as the northern boundary of the Downtown neighborhood.
- 2 West Main Street Potential Path**  
West Main Street becomes an important connection to the University of Illinois campus and residential uses to the west.
- 3 Potential Gateway Landmarks**  
Gateway landmarks at key locations on Main Street can help to define the Downtown neighborhood and orient visitors.
- 4 Main Street Seam**  
Main Street acts as the primary seam in the neighborhood, tying together current uses and encouraging the development of potential nodes.
- 5 Elm Street Pedestrian and Bicycle Path**  
Elm Street serves as an east-west route for active transportation, minimizing modal conflict.
- 6 Lincoln Square Potential Nodes**  
Infill development surrounding Lincoln Square Village can encourage pedestrian activity and capitalize on existing transit and infrastructure.



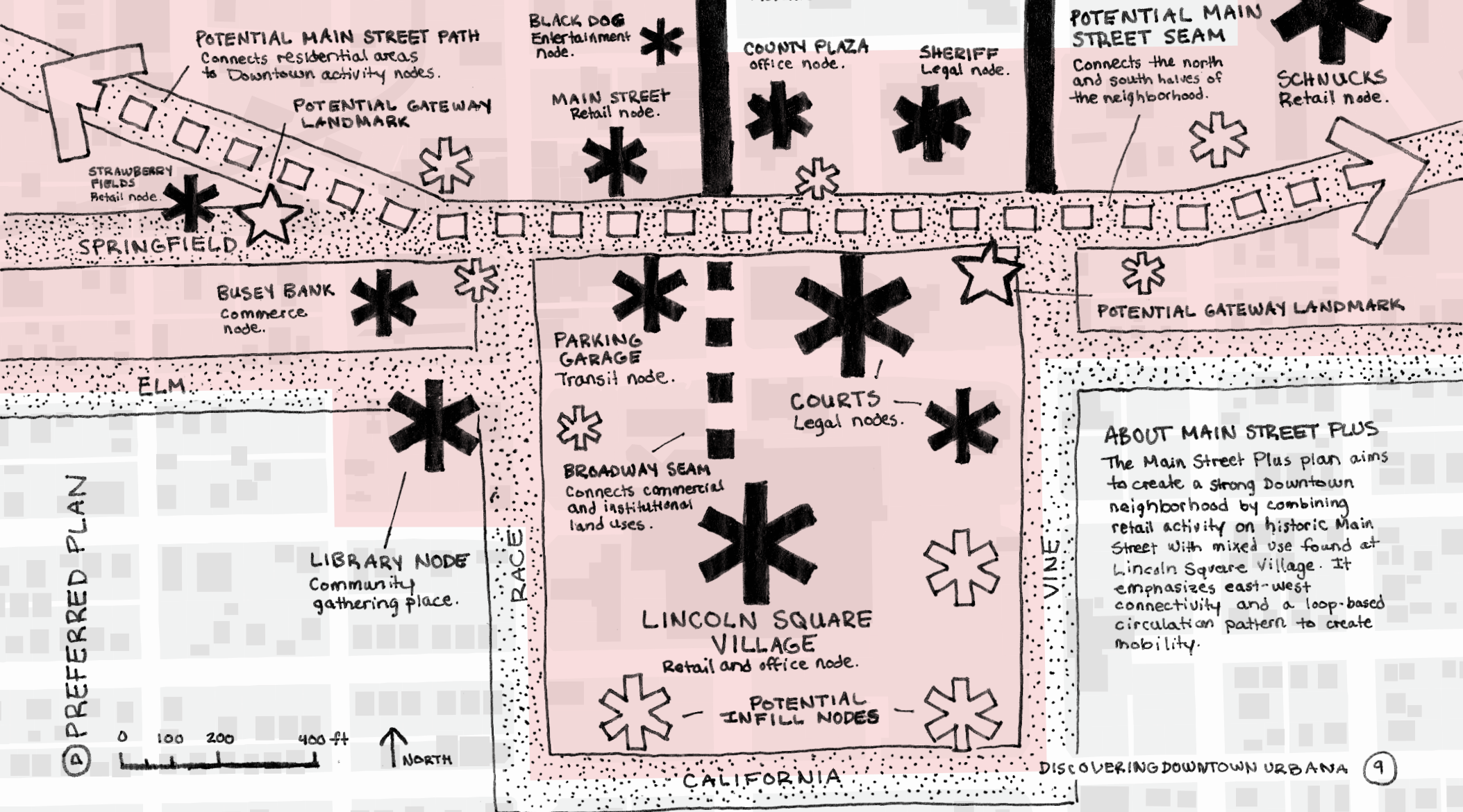
**Main Street Plus Plan:** This alternative connects Urbana's eastern and western residential communities with a Downtown neighborhood that builds on existing assets and activity centers.



RAILROAD BARRIER  
Restricts movement north.

## MAIN STREET PLUS

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE



POTENTIAL MAIN STREET SEAM  
Connects the north and south halves of the neighborhood.

SCHNUCKS  
Retail node.

BLACK DOG  
Entertainment node.

MAIN STREET  
Retail node.

BROADWAY BARRIER  
Wide cartway restricts movement.

COUNTY PLAZA  
office node.

SHERIFF  
Legal node.

POTENTIAL MAIN STREET PATH  
Connects residential areas to Downtown activity nodes.

POTENTIAL GATEWAY LANDMARK

STRAWBERRY FIELDS  
Retail node.

SPRINGFIELD

BUSEY BANK  
Commerce node.

ELM

PARKING GARAGE  
Transit node.

COURTS  
Legal nodes.

BROADWAY SEAM  
Connects commercial and institutional land uses.

LINCOLN SQUARE VILLAGE  
Retail and office node.

LIBRARY NODE  
Community gathering place.

ABOUT MAIN STREET PLUS  
The Main Street Plus plan aims to create a strong downtown neighborhood by combining retail activity on historic Main Street with mixed use found at Lincoln Square Village. It emphasizes east-west connectivity and a loop-based circulation pattern to create mobility.

POTENTIAL GATEWAY LANDMARK

POTENTIAL INFILL NODES

CALIFORNIA

## DOWNTOWN DISCOVERIES

Several key themes emerge from the analysis of the Downtown Urbana study area:

### 1 Activity and employment are centrally located.

Most activity nodes and most jobs in Downtown are located in the central part of the study area, though each quadrant contains at least one major employment center.

### 2 Drivers and transit riders are well served.

The existing network of paths provides ample connections for vehicles, and transit service is readily available throughout Downtown.

### 3 Opportunities exist to create active transportation corridors.

Four corridors have the potential to provide missing links for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Based on these findings, the *Main Street Plus* plan offers the best definition for a Downtown Urbana neighborhood. By incorporating current nodes and employment centers, maximizing existing street infrastructure and providing an east-west corridor for active transportation, it promises to spur on design innovation in Downtown.



**Main Street Commercial Activity:** Main Street establishments include galleries, professional offices and small-scale retail. The *Main Street Plus* plan leverages these assets to define a Downtown neighborhood.

Photo: Daniel Tse.