

BLIGHTED AND SUBSTANDARD DETERMINATION STUDY AND REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

City of Ashland, Nebraska
December 2007

Part A – Blighted and Substandard Determination Study

Purpose of the Study

The purpose and intent of this study is to determine whether all or part of each the designated Redevelopment Study Areas qualify as a blighted and substandard area within the definition set forth in the Nebraska Community Development Law, Section 18-2103.

Four (4) Redevelopment Areas were identified and the findings in this study are based on surveys and analyses conducted for each Redevelopment Study Area.

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 1): This redevelopment study area is bordered by Birch Street on the North and 4th Street on the East. The South border is Fir Street, while the area is bounded by 9th Street on the West. (See the study area map on page 13.)

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 2): This redevelopment study area is bordered Boyd Street on the North and Birch Street on the South. The area extends from 11th Street on the East to 17th Street on the West. (See the study area map on page 15.)

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 3): This redevelopment area consists of Highway 6 from the East city boundary to the West city boundary. The area also extends north to Silver Street. The area includes all structures located along the Highway. (See the study area map on page 18.)

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 4): This redevelopment study area lies South/Southwest of Highway 6 and West of Highway 66. The area is approximately twenty-one (20.9) acres extending to the south and west of Highway 66. (See the study are map on page 20.)

BASIS FOR BLIGHTED AND SUBSTANDARD DETERMINATION

Substandard Area

As set forth in the Nebraska Revised Statutes, a substandard area shall mean one in which there is a predominance of buildings or improvements, whether nonresidential or residential in character, which by reason of the presence of one or more of the following factors:

1. Dilapidated/deterioration;
2. Age or obsolescence;
3. Inadequate provision for ventilation, light, air sanitation, or open spaces;
4. Existence of conditions that endanger life or property by fire or other causes:
 - (a) High density of population and overcrowding; or
 - (b) The existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes; or
 - (c) Any combination of such factors that are conducive to ill health, transmission of disease, infant mortality, juvenile delinquency, and crime, and is detrimental to the public health, safety, morals or welfare.

This evaluation included a survey of the Study Areas, a parcel-by-parcel land use inventory, a field reconnaissance of the Study Areas, conversations with City staff and a review of pertinent reports, including the Ashland Comprehensive Development Plan and additional documents containing information that could substantiate the existence of substandard conditions.

Blighted Area

The Nebraska Revised Statues explicitly details the qualities of a blighted area within Section 18-2103. A blighted area shall mean an area, which by reason of the presence of one or more of the following factors:

1. A substantial number of deteriorated or deteriorating structures;
2. Existence of defective or inadequate street layout;
3. Faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness;
4. Unsanitary or unsafe conditions
5. Deterioration of site or other improvements
6. Diversity of ownership;
7. Tax or special assessment delinquency exceeding the fair value of the land;

8. Defective or unusual conditions of title;
9. Improper subdivision or obsolete platting;
10. The existence of conditions that endanger life or property by fire or other causes;
11. Any combination of such factors, substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of the community, retards the provision of housing accommodations or constitutes an economic or social liability; and
12. Is detrimental to the public health, safety, morals or welfare of its present conditions and use; and in which at least one or more of the following conditions exist:
 - a. Unemployment in the study or designated blighted area is at least one hundred twenty percent of the state or national average;
 - b. The average age of the residential or commercial units in the area is at least 40 years;
 - c. More than half of the plotted and subdivided property in an area is unimproved land that has been within the City for 40 years and remained unimproved during that time;
 - d. The per capita income of the study or designated blighted area is lower than the average per capita income of the City in which the area is designated; or
 - e. The area has had either stable or decreasing population based on the last two decennial censuses.

This evaluation was made on the basis that existing blighted and substandard factors must be present to an extent which would lead reasonable persons to conclude public intervention is appropriate or necessary to assist with any redevelopment activities.

Conclusion (Site 1)

The Study findings support a blighted and substandard designation for the Redevelopment Study Area (Site 1). The presence of blighted and substandard factors would indicate the study area is in need of revitalization and improvement to ensure that it will positively contribute to the physical, economic, and social well being of the city of Ashland. The results of the study indicate that the Redevelopment Study Area has not been subject to comprehensive, sufficient growth and development through investment by the private sector nor would the area be reasonably anticipated to be developed without (but for) the potential aid provided in the Nebraska Community Development Law.

The Ashland City Council is encouraged to review the findings detailed within this Study with legal counsel to compare these findings to the requirements of the Nebraska Community Development Law and take into consideration the declaration of the Redevelopment Study Area as blighted and substandard.

Substandard Factors

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 1)

In this study area three of the substandard factors are present to a reasonable extent. The first substandard factor involves the conditions of the buildings that are contained within the redevelopment study area. Based on a comprehensive site analysis, thirty-seven of the fifty-seven buildings surveyed (64.9%) are dilapidated and/or deteriorated. The second factor involves the age of the structures within the redevelopment study area. The majority of buildings within this area are between 40 and 100 years old. The third substandard factor involves the existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes. A significant portion of the redevelopment study area is used as an unorganized and poorly secured outdoor storage/junk yard, adversely affecting public health and safety. Individually, these concerns provide sufficient evidence for substandard determination. Collectively, these conditions provide overwhelming evidence of substandard determination.



Photo 1: Deteriorating structures and roadways

Blighted Factors

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 1)

Of the twelve blighted factors set forth in the Nebraska Community Development Law, five are present to a strong extent. The blighting factors that are present are reasonably distributed throughout the redevelopment study area.

Strong Presence

- A substantial number of deteriorated or deteriorating structures
- Existence of defective or inadequate street layout
- Deterioration of site or other improvements
- The existence of conditions that endanger life or property by fire or other causes (fire)
- Is detrimental to the public health, safety, morals, or welfare of its present conditions and use
 - The average age of the residential or commercial units in the area is at least 40 years



Photo 2: Conditions that endanger life or property by fire or other causes



Photo 3: Absence of sidewalks fails to meet ADA standards

Conclusion (Site 2)

The Study findings support a blighted and substandard designation for the Redevelopment Study Area (Site 2). The presence of blighted and substandard factors would indicate the study area is in need of revitalization and improvement to ensure that it positively contribute to the physical, economic, and social well being of the city of Ashland. The results of the study indicate that the Redevelopment Study Area has not been subject to comprehensive, sufficient growth and development through investment by the private sector nor would the area be reasonably anticipated to be developed without (but for) the potential aid provided in the Nebraska Community Development Law.

The Ashland City Council is encouraged to review the findings detailed within this Study with legal counsel to compare these findings to the requirements of the Nebraska Community Development Law and take into consideration the declaration of the Redevelopment Study Area as blighted and substandard.

Substandard Factors

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 2)

In this study area three of the substandard factors are present to a reasonable extent. The first substandard factor involves the conditions of the buildings that are contained within the redevelopment study area. Based on a comprehensive site analysis, fifteen of the twenty-nine buildings surveyed (51.7%) are dilapidated and/or deteriorated. The second factor involves the age of the structures within the redevelopment study area. The majority of buildings within this area are between 40 and 100 years old. The third substandard factor involves the existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes. A significant portion of the redevelopment study area lacks quality and/or paved roadways and appropriate pedestrian infrastructure. Many of the sidewalks are poorly maintained, uneven, and lack curb cuts. The redevelopment study area lacks a consistent sidewalk network, and the absence of sidewalks within the area fails to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.



Photo 4: Aged and dilapidated buildings provide evidence for substandard determination

Blighted Factors

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 2)

Of the twelve blighted factors set forth in the Nebraska Community Development Law, five are present to a strong extent. The blighting factors that are present are reasonably distributed throughout the redevelopment study area.

Strong Presence

- A substantial number of deteriorated or deteriorating structures
- Existence of defective or inadequate street layout
- Deterioration of site or other improvements
- Any combination of such factors of such factors, substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of the community, retards the provision of housing accommodations or constitutes an economic or social liability
- Is detrimental to the public health, safety, morals, or welfare of its present condition or use
 - The average age of the residential or commercial units in the area is at least forty (40) years



Photo 5: Lack of pedestrian infrastructure impairs sound growth of the community



Photo 6: The absence of a sidewalk network fails to meet ADA standards

Conclusion (Site 3)

The Study findings support a blighted and substandard designation for the Redevelopment Study Area (Site 3). The presence of blighted and substandard factors would indicate the study area is in need of revitalization and improvement to ensure that it positively contribute to the physical, economic, and social well being of the city of Ashland. The results of the study indicate that the Redevelopment Study Area has not been subject to comprehensive, sufficient growth and development through investment by the private sector nor would the area be reasonably anticipated to be developed without (but for) the potential aid provided in the Nebraska Community Development Law.

The Ashland City Council is encouraged to review the findings detailed within this Study with legal counsel to compare these findings to the requirements of the Nebraska Community Development Law and take into consideration the declaration of the Redevelopment Study Area as blighted and substandard.

Substandard Factors

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 3)

In this redevelopment study area two of the substandard factors are present to a reasonable extent. The first substandard factor involves the inadequate provision for ventilation, light, air sanitation, or open spaces. Highway 6, as a state highway, and main corridor through Ashland, is poorly lit in the areas which fall within city limits. This condition poses a threat to local citizens at certain periods of the day. The second substandard factor involves the existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes. A significant portion of the redevelopment study area lacks quality pedestrian infrastructure. Of the limited sidewalks which do exist within the redevelopment study area, all are either poorly maintained, uneven, or lack curb cuts. The redevelopment study area lacks a consistent sidewalk network, and the absence of sidewalks within the area fails to meet ADA standards.



Photo 7: Inadequate pedestrian lighting combined with poor pedestrian infrastructure pose a danger to local citizens

Blighted Factors

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 3)

Of the twelve blighted factors set forth in the Nebraska Community Development Law, three are present to a strong extent. The blighting factors that are present are reasonably distributed throughout the redevelopment study area.

Strong Presence

- Faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness
 - Inconsistent land use
- Unsanitary or unsafe conditions
 - Lack of a consistent sidewalk network
- Any combination of such factors, substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of the community, retards the provision of housing accommodations and constitutes an economic or social liability



Photo 8: Inconsistent land use along the Highway impairs economic growth within the community



Photo 9: Many structures located along Highway 6 do not comply with the City of Ashland Zoning Ordinance

Conclusion (Site 4)

The Study findings support a blighted and substandard designation for the Redevelopment Study Area (Site 4). The presence of blighted and substandard factors would indicate the study area is in need of revitalization and improvement to ensure that it will positively contribute to the physical, economic, and social well being of the city of Ashland. The results of the study indicate that the Redevelopment Study Area has not been subject to comprehensive, sufficient growth and development through investment by the private sector nor would the area be reasonably anticipated to be developed without (but for) the potential aid provided in the Nebraska Community Development Law.

The Ashland City Council is encouraged to review the findings detailed within this Study with legal counsel to compare these findings to the requirements of the Nebraska Community Development Law and take into consideration the declaration of the Redevelopment Study Area as blighted and substandard.

Substandard Factors

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 4)

In this redevelopment study area one of the substandard factors are present to a reasonable extent. The substandard factor involves the existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes. A significant portion of the redevelopment study area lacks quality pedestrian infrastructure and roadways. The redevelopment study area currently contains only one non-paved accessible road. This lack of accessibility could potentially be detrimental to public health and safety. The redevelopment study area lacks a consistent sidewalk network, and the absence of sidewalks within the area fails to meet ADA standards.



Photo 10: Future development on this site is dependant on the provision of accessible paved roadways and pedestrian infrastructure

Blighted Factors

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 4)

Of the twelve blighted factors set forth in the Nebraska Community Development Law, four are present to a strong extent. The blighting factors that are present are reasonably distributed throughout the redevelopment study area.

Strong Presence

- Existence of defective or inadequate street layout
- Unsanitary or unsafe conditions
- Improper subdivision or obsolete platting
- Any combination of such factors, substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of the community, retards the provision of housing accommodations or constitutes an economic or social liability



Photo 11: Currently, the site is improperly subdivided and platted



Photo 12: The proposed development in this site will place a heavy burden on the Highway 6 and Highway 66 intersection

Part B – Redevelopment Plan

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the Redevelopment Plan is to guide the implementation of community development within the previously examined Redevelopment Study Areas in the City of Ashland. The Nebraska Community Development Law states that this plan should promote the general welfare, enhance the tax base, promote the economic and social well-being, and promote the development of public activities and public events in the area.

The required elements of the Redevelopment Plan include:

- Boundaries of the redevelopment project(s) with a map showing the existing uses and conditions (see the attached study area maps)
- A land-use plan showing proposed uses for both areas (see the attached study area maps)
- Potential demographic characteristics after redevelopment
- A statement of proposed changes to zoning ordinances, street layouts, building codes, etc.
- A site plan for redevelopment areas, and
- A statement regarding new public facilities for both redevelopment areas

Furthermore, the Redevelopment Plan should demonstrate that proposed redevelopment efforts are in conformance with the Comprehensive Development Plan for the City of Ashland. Also, the Plan should demonstrate through its design and implementation the efficient use of public funds and the mitigation of blighted and substandard conditions.

Moreover, the redevelopment recommendations provided are general in nature and are intended to provide a framework for future development within any of the study areas identified. While these recommendations do not specifically identify future land uses, they are meant to guide any proposed development. All future development within any of these redevelopment study areas must reflect the intent of this study and/or The City of Ashland Comprehensive Development Plan.

For the purposes of this report, the focus of this section will be two-fold. First, the section will address any policy or specific recommendations for each of the four (4) redevelopment study areas included in the Comprehensive Development Plan. Secondly, recommendations will be made for future land uses and redevelopment projects for each redevelopment study area which will “promote the general welfare, enhance the tax base, promote the economic and social well-being, and promote the development of

public activities and public events in the area.” Furthermore, all recommendations should be used to attract and guide any and all future redevelopment projects within each of the four study areas and the City of Ashland.

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 1)

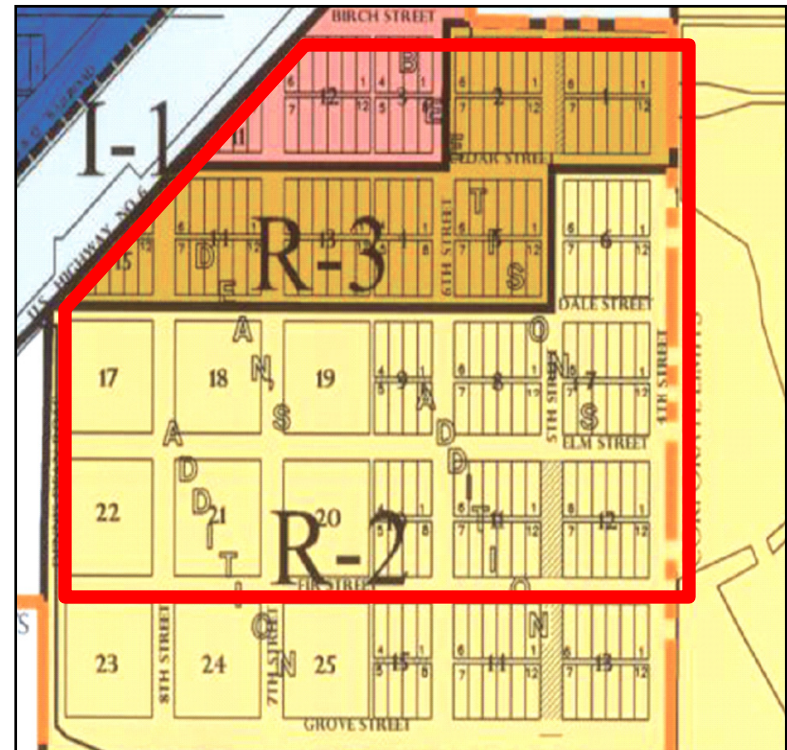
Redevelopment Study Area (Site 1) Recommendations from the Comprehensive Development Plan:

Page 60. Improve Ashland’s Quality of Life

- *Develop new housing opportunities and enhance existing housing. Work with this city to continue rehabilitation of housing units in the community. In addition to existing housing rehabilitation, the community should develop additional opportunities for elderly housing in the community. These activities will allow Ashland to rehabilitate existing housing thus improving the image of the residential neighborhoods. While development of elderly housing will aid in attracting and maintaining a major asset in small towns, the people who aided in Ashland’s development. The time frame for this objective should begin immediately and continue annually.*

Page 62. Phasing Plan

- *Phase 1 Development is intended to be the primary area for development within the Ashland area. This area is contained within the current corporate limits. This area is predominantly serviced at present, only a slight amount of utility service extensions will be necessary to accommodate growth. Besides existing infrastructure, this area has the capacity to be redeveloped and rehabilitated in the future. The primary concerns of this area should be the following:*
 - *Infill existing lots using already established utilities*
 - *Redevelopment of substandard property*
 - *Redevelopment of underutilized property*



Redevelopment Study Area Site 1

Boundaries

North – Birch Street

South – Fir Street

East – 4th Street

West – 9th Street

Page 85. Community Action Plan

- *Identify properties within Ashland's planning jurisdiction which are in need of redevelopment. These may include junkyards, deteriorated homes and structures. Once identified and the CRA is in place, work with the law to upgrade the value of these projects through redevelopment of the properties.*

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 1) Consultant Recommendations:

Recommendations ordered in terms of priority:

- Improvement and advancement of housing and infrastructure
 - New street layout and grid system
 - Development of standards which mandate consistent housing orientation
 - New and/or improved sidewalk, curb, and gutter conditions
- Advancement of wayfaring and directional signage
 - Promotes economic development by directing visitors to their destinations quickly and easily
 - Establishment of consistent and usable signage
- City acquisition of junkyard site/land
 - Possible future site for visitor's center
- Development of design guidelines which require more pedestrian oriented development

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 2)

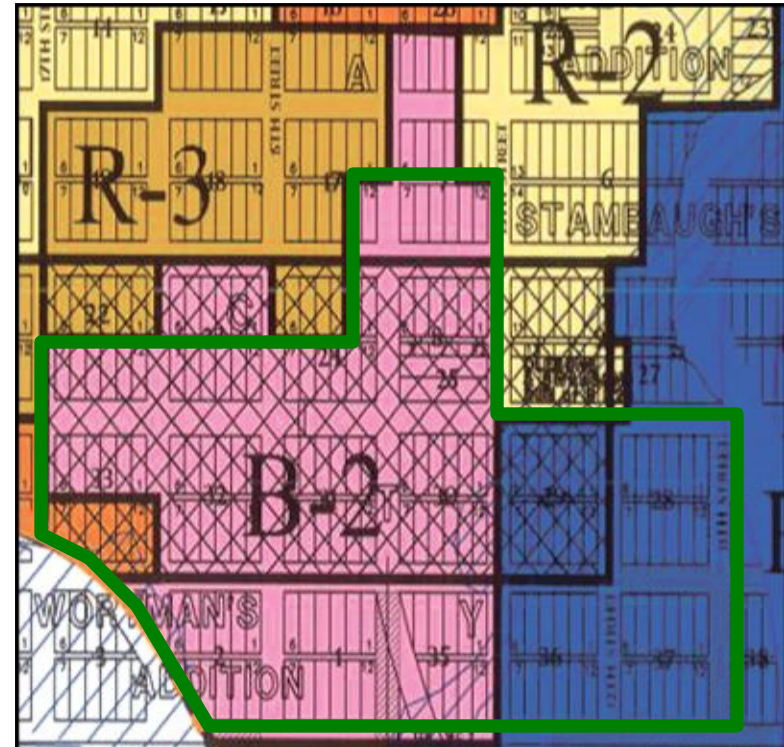
Redevelopment Study Area (Site 2) Recommendations from the Comprehensive Development Plan:

Page 48. Parks and Recreation Recommendations

- Another project which should be undertaken is the redevelopment of the floodway area into a major community park as proposed in the 1987 Ashland Comprehensive Development Plan. However, the concepts and plantings list should be revisited to identify trees and plantings which may create problems during the periods of flooding. Also, the park area should be increased to include as much of the vacant floodway area as possible. This will serve a couple of needs in the community, these are:
 - Transform vacant overgrown property into usable park and recreation space to serve Ashland's residents and residents from the surrounding area, and
 - Transform the main entrance into an attractive sight for residents and visitors into the community.

Page 49. Parks and Recreation Recommendations

- The city of Ashland should lead a joint effort with Saunders County and Cass County to develop a Trails Master Plan for the Ashland area. This Master Plan should look at:
 - Potential routes connecting Ashland to locations within the two county area, especially, Mahoney State Park / SAC Museum area and Linoma Beach,
 - Possible routes which decrease the amount of land taken from tax roles,
 - Possible ways to generate revenue for all partners,



Redevelopment Study Area Site 2

Boundaries

North – Boyd Street

South – Birch Street

East – 11th Street

West – 17th Street

(Area bounded by Corporate Limits on West)

- *Signage and promotion of the proposed trails system, and*
- *Many other issues.*

Page 59. Improve Ashland's Quality of Life

Begin to build several new community facilities in Ashland. These facilities include but are not limited to:

- *Expansion of the existing library or construction of new library*
- *Construction of a community center*
- *Development of an expanded sports complex*
- *Continued expansion of the soccer field project*

Page 60. Improve Ashland's Quality of Life

- *Develop new housing opportunities and enhance existing housing. Work with this city to continue rehabilitation of housing units in the community. In addition to existing housing rehabilitation, the community should develop additional opportunities for elderly housing in the community. These activities will allow Ashland to rehabilitate existing housing thus improving the image of the residential neighborhoods. While development of elderly housing will aid in attracting and maintaining a major asset in small towns, the people who aided in Ashland's development. The time frame for this objective should begin immediately and continue annually.*

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 - *Infill existing lots using already established utilities*
 - *Redevelopment of substandard property*
 - *Redevelopment of underutilized property*

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 2) Consultant Recommendations:

Recommendations ordered in terms of priority:

- Improvement and advancement of housing and infrastructure
 - New street layout and grid system
 - Development of standards which mandate consistent housing orientation
 - New and/or improved sidewalk, curb, and gutter conditions
- Advancement of wayfaring and directional signage
 - Promotes economic development by directing visitors to their destinations quickly and easily
 - Establishment of consistent and usable signage
- Expansion of a regional sports/soccer complex
 - This study recommends the complex be located on the opposite side of Salt Creek as the Comprehensive Development Plan originally states, citing vehicular and pedestrian accessibility issues, as well as total available land
- Advancement of a regional trail system along and through the floodway as a part of a larger effort to integrate “eco-recreation” into the area
 - Development of a recreation trail head for biking, hiking, and canoeing
- Guidelines for the strategic development of City owned park and open spaces
- Future additional hotel and restaurant opportunities more closely located along the Highway 6 and Highway 66 corridor

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 3)

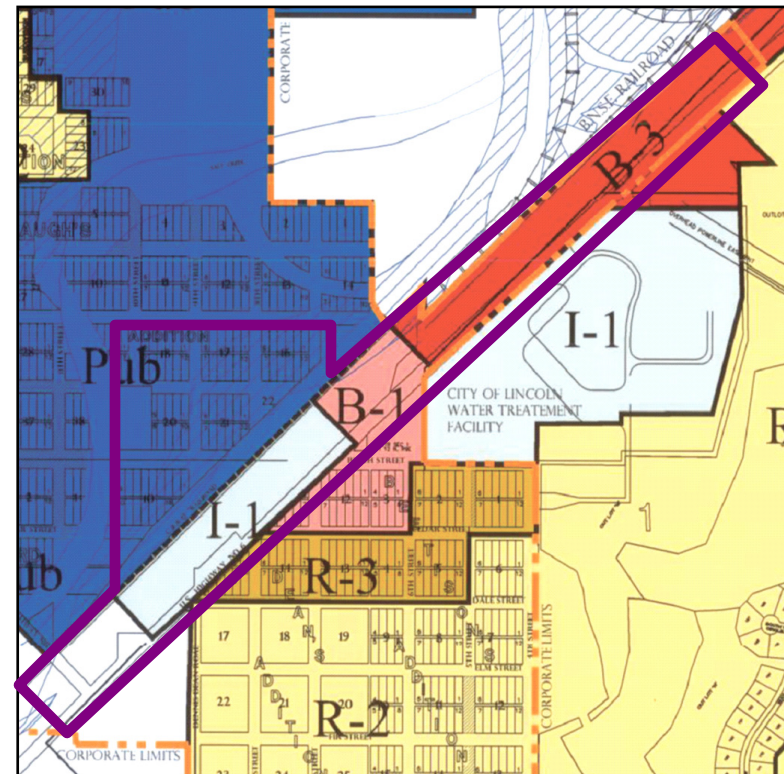
Redevelopment Study Area (Site 3) Recommendations from the Comprehensive Development Plan:

Page 60. Improve Ashland's Quality of Life

- *Develop new housing opportunities and enhance existing housing. Work with this city to continue rehabilitation of housing units in the community. In addition to existing housing rehabilitation, the community should develop additional opportunities for elderly housing in the community. These activities will allow Ashland to rehabilitate existing housing thus improving the image of the residential neighborhoods. While development of elderly housing will aid in attracting and maintaining a major asset in small towns, the people who aided in Ashland's development. The time frame for this objective should begin immediately and continue annually.*

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 - *Infill existing lots using already established utilities*
 - *Redevelopment of substandard property*
 - *Redevelopment of underutilized property*



Redevelopment Study Area Site 3 (Highway 6)

Boundaries

North – Silver Street

East – Corporate Limits

West – Corporate Limits

Page 84. Enhance the Economic Development programs within Ashland

- *Recruit new businesses and industries which will work to solve two conditions:*
 - *Meet the skills of the present workforce*
 - *Fill leakages in the current economic base*
- *The following activities need to be accomplished in order to achieve two conditions:*
 - *A survey of the present labor force needs to be undertaken to determine specific skills which may be underutilized or unknown*
 - *A survey of present employers in and around Ashland needs to be conducted in order to determine what skills are already required*
 - *Based upon the current analysis of Economic Base, new business and industries should be recruited or developed*

Page 85. Community Action Plan

- *Identify properties within Ashland's planning jurisdiction which are in need of redevelopment. These may include junkyards, deteriorated homes and structures. Once identified and the CRA is in place, work with the law to upgrade the value of these projects through redevelopment of the properties.*

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 3) Consultant Recommendations:

Recommendations ordered in terms of priority:

- Enforcement or new guidelines which regulate a consistent land use along the Highway
 - Recruitment of Transit-Oriented Business to better utilize the potential increased traffic along the Highway between Omaha and Lincoln
- Acquisition of the historic Train Station
 - The rehabilitation of the Train Station into a visitors center and/or headquarters for regional trail system
- Advancement of wayfaring and directional signage
 - Promotes economic development by directing visitors to their destinations quickly and easily
 - Establishment of consistent and usable signage
- Initiation of a Street Tree program and Streetscape guidelines along the Highway

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 4)

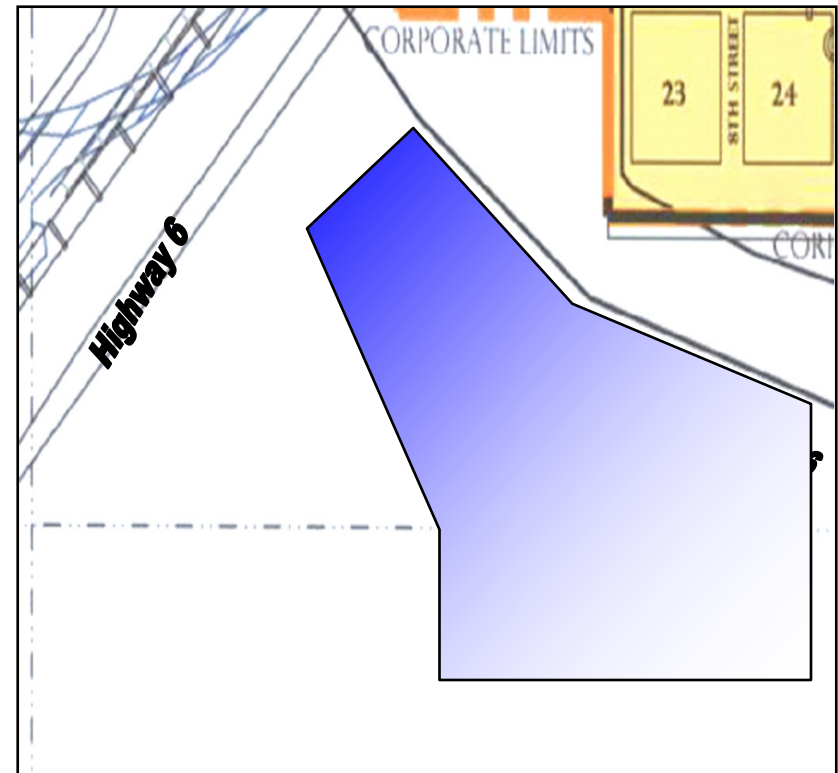
Redevelopment Study Area (Site 4) Recommendations from the Comprehensive Development Plan:

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 4) is not currently located within the City of Ashland Corporate limits, therefore the Comprehensive Development Plan does not address nor recommend any future development action for the site as of now.

Redevelopment Study Area (Site 4) Consultant Recommendations:

Recommendations ordered in terms of priority:

- Annexation of site land (20.9 acres) which parallels the Blight and Substandard Determination Implementation
- Designating the site "Commercial" within the City of Ashland Zoning Ordinance



Redevelopment Study Area Site 4
Boundaries
20.9 Acres
South/Southwest of Highway 6
West of Highway 66