

X. City Image, Aesthetics, and Historic Preservation

The city's image consists of the impressions and visual representations called to mind when one hears the name "Sioux Falls." A city's image may be positive or negative, but typically includes a little of both perspectives. It is in the city's best interest to cultivate and maintain a strongly positive image, which is shared by a majority of its residents, neighbors, and visitors.

Most of the community features which contribute to the city image are publicly owned. These include parks, schools, streets, and public facilities such as the airport, the zoo, City Hall, the County Courthouse, libraries, and museums. Other key components contributing to the city image are under private control and ownership. The central business district, the shops and buildings, which line major arterial streets, many historic landmarks, and the neighborhoods themselves are examples.

Of the many physical elements which together define the city's image, two stand out as the having the most important roles: the central business district and the entry points where people feel they have arrived at Sioux Falls. For many, it is the downtown area that gives Sioux Falls its personality and identity. The colors, textures, materials, architecture, cleanliness, public spaces, and the skyline of the downtown area help establish a distinctive, recognizable image. First impressions are also of great importance for a positive community image. The primary and secondary entry points into the city need to convey an attractive, welcoming appeal.

A positive image as an attractive place with its own unique identity is essential for sustained economic growth. The aesthetic appeal of the city plays an important role in creating the perception of a place with a high quality of life, which promotes the goal of remaining a desirable location for new businesses and industries. A positive image also helps to broaden and expand the local work force by attracting new residents, and is critical for drawing the conventions, tourists, and short-term visitors necessary to strengthen the local economy. A positive image helps maintain property values across the entire city.

A positive city image bestows social, cultural, and historic benefits, as well as economic advantages. Well maintained areas promote a commonly held sense of civic pride. The craftsmanship and intricate details of historic buildings is a form of public art. Their preservation and reuse gives the community a sense of continuity, helps its residents maintain their connection with the city's past, and provides the city's residents with their own special cultural identity.

Inventory of Aesthetic and Image-Defining Assets

Sioux Falls is fortunate to have a positive image that is largely defined by its numerous attractive, visually pleasing physical features. Although too numerous to list individually, the following broad categories of aesthetic assets constitute an inventory of the features which contribute to the positive image of Sioux Falls.

Central Business District. Downtown Sioux Falls survived the challenges of urban sprawl, suburban shopping malls, and urban renewal. Creative incentives to encourage private reinvestment have been coupled with investments in key public facilities to successfully maintain the economic viability of the district. A new image of downtown as a special place is emerging from the current trend of rehabilitating its distinctive old buildings for new uses. The architectural details of newer construction also reflects this 'old town' atmosphere. Current marketing efforts are based on appeal of an old style downtown that has an individualized character of its own. This approach helps build the city's overall image. The Central Business District and its relationship with the Historic District is shown on Map X(a).

Big Sioux River and the Greenway System. The river and its tree-lined banks, natural areas, wildlife habitat, groomed public parks, and recreational path system make a positive contribution to the city's image.

Neighborhoods. All of the city's residential areas are generally well maintained. But most receive such a high level of care that they qualify as aesthetic assets, building the community's image as an attractive "City of Homes." Their appearance is one of the great strengths of Sioux Falls. There are no genuinely blighted districts, and older units in need of repair are confined to small scattered pockets and individual sites.

Historic Districts and Historic Sites. Historic places and buildings by their nature differentiate a community from the bland uniformity of everywhere else, and provide a unique identity for the city. They are also irreplaceable, nonrenewable resources. Sioux Falls has five historic districts and more than two dozen individual sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Sioux Falls ("Cathedral"), All Saints, and McKennan Park Historic Districts are residential areas on the National Register. The Old Courthouse and Warehouse Historic District and the Sioux Falls Downtown Historic District include the majority of the city's nonresidential historic structures. The five districts are clustered near the center of the city, as shown on Map X(a). The designated landmark districts and buildings, along with the many other places eligible for historic register listing, represent the architectural heritage of the city. They play a central role in creating an individual identity that is uniquely "Sioux Falls."

Municipal Parks System. These numerous green spaces, both large and small, are strategically located in all areas of the city. Well maintained parks enhance property values, stabilize older areas, and elevate the local quality of life. Public parks help create a special sense of place and often give a neighborhood or area its own identity. Collectively, the park system tells a lot about the community's commitment to stewardship and quality.

Visual Landmarks/Icons. These are generally monuments, monumental buildings, structures on high vantage points, and highly unique features. Examples in Sioux Falls include the clock tower of the Old Courthouse, the Veterans Administration Hospital, the spires of Saint Joseph's Cathedral, the pioneer monument above north Cliff Avenue, the falls, and the various buildings and improvements constructed with cut blocks of quartzite stone.

View Corridors. There are many scenic street segments or streets that terminate in interesting views in Sioux Falls. Landscaping and mature trees often give these corridors their impact. Examples include Southeastern Avenue south of 26th Street, with its recreational path and nearby river nature areas; Eighth Street downtown with its center boulevard and canopy of trees; Ninth Street downtown looking east across the river; the 21st Street boulevard near McKennan Park; West Avenue between Sixth Street and Madison Street with its mature trees; and Main Avenue looking south from 14th Street toward the All Saints campus.

Areas of Critical Concern

Some image-defining assets are of critical concern because they have high-profile locations or are in need of some attention. The areas of critical concern which need either conservation or enhancement include main transportation routes, points of arrival, key visitor facilities and destinations, and commercial corridors.

Main transportation routes have high impact visibility and are important in creating a positive first impression upon arrival at Sioux Falls. Primary destination points within the city must also be consciously considered, along with the routes which connect them. Cumulatively, these features have the greatest impact on impressions of people coming to Sioux Falls, and shape the image of the community.

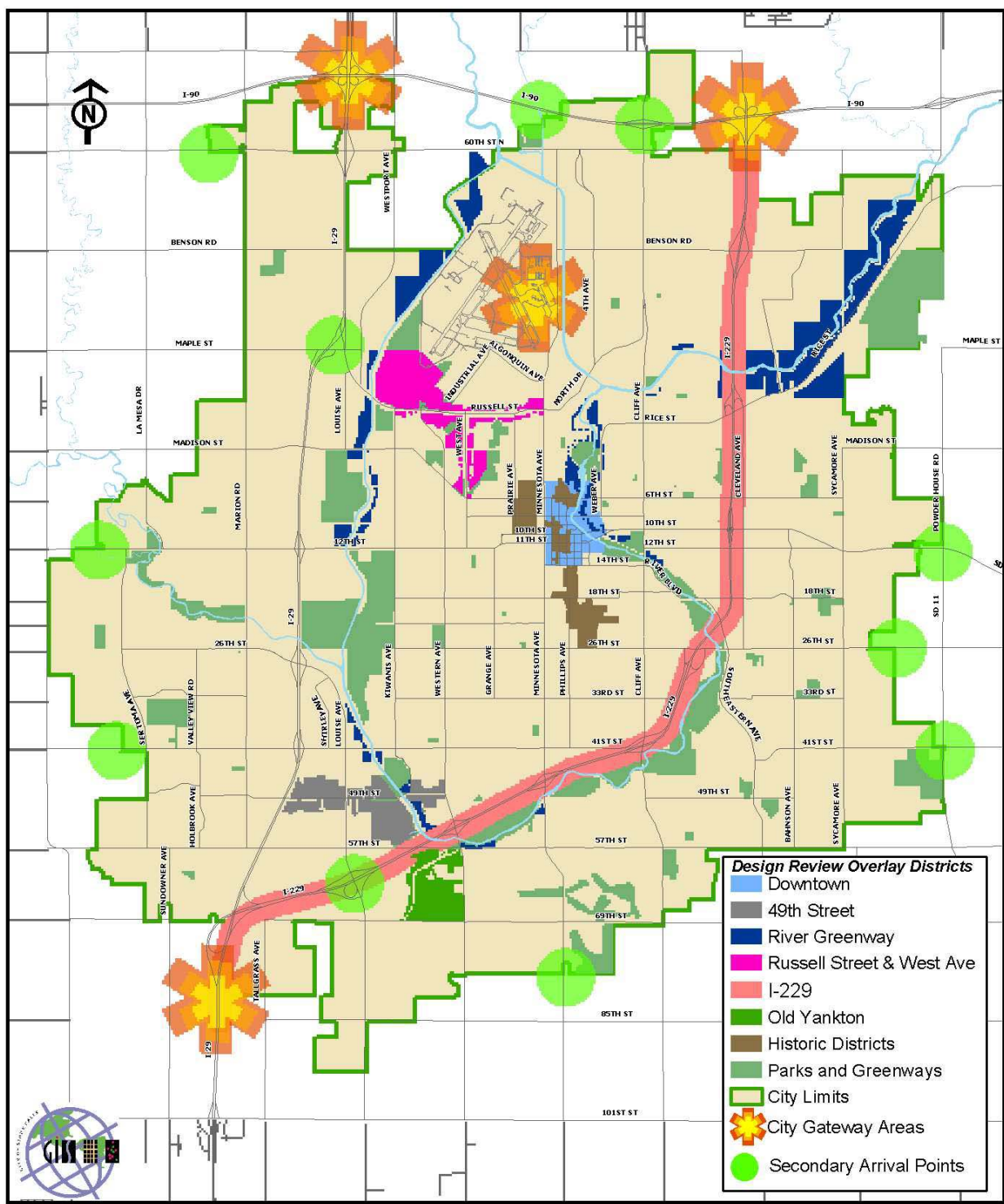
People coming to Sioux Falls at some point feel they have arrived at the city. The visible appeal at this physical location needs to be positive. Attractive building design, pleasing streetscaping, and an overall positive appearance is desirable at and near these arrival points. The Sioux Falls Tomorrow community-based planning project recommended the construction of attractively landscaped gateways to welcome visitors as they arrive in Sioux Falls. Map X(a) shows four of the most significant arrival points, and indicates the general vicinities where landscaped gateway features should be considered.

There are other arrival points in addition to the Airport and the interstate highway approaches to the city. Enhancement and conservation of their appearance is also desirable. These secondary arrival points include the intersection of Maple Drive and Russell Street, the Louise Avenue interchange on I-229, the Cliff Avenue and I-90 interchange, and the various state highway approaches to the city from the east and west (10th Street, 12th Street, 26th Street, and 41st Street, in particular).

An example of the need for attention is I-29 south of Sioux Falls. Visitors arriving by car from the south may form a negative first impression as they are greeted by the numerous billboards and the industrial areas near the Tea interchange. An intergovernmental agreement to adopt some design controls, such as those required in the city by the I-229 design overlay zoning district, could help improve appearances. An attractive landscaped entry gateway with a "Welcome to Sioux Falls" sign somewhere north of the Tea interchange, perhaps near the intersection of I-29 and I-229, can also help create the impression of arrival to the city.

One set of key destination points is comprised of the Airport, the Arena complex, and the central business district.

Map X(a) Image Conservation Areas and City Gateways



The addition of the Convention Center at the Arena and the completion of the Washington Pavilion of Arts and Science downtown will strengthen the role of these primary destination points. These three key areas and the connections between them need to be enhanced and well maintained. Russell Street and Minnesota Avenue are the main connection routes. Lighting, signs, and landscaping need to work together to present an attractive appearance. These corridors would ideally have the aesthetic appeal of West Avenue, between Sixth Street and Russell Street.

Another primary destination is the regional shopping district surrounding the intersection of Louise Avenue and 41st Street. Remodeling and redevelopment activities should focus effort on integrating building design, lighting, signage, and landscaping in an appealing manner.

All heavily traveled commercial corridors need continuing attention to avoid the negative image and visual clutter so often associated with commercial strip development. The main commercial corridors of Sioux Falls include Minnesota Avenue, 41st Street, West 12th Street, East Tenth Street, and Cliff Avenue. Here, too, well considered use of lighting, signage, landscaping, parking lot placement and design, and building design can improve visual appeal.

The Sioux River valley leaving the city along East Rice Street could also use attention. The future extension of the recreational path out to Brandon and the possible expansion of recreational uses of the bluffs in this area do not fit well with the appearance resulting from the railroad, extractive industries, and other existing industrial uses along the corridor.

Tourism and Visitors

Tourism is the second largest industry in the economy of the state of South Dakota, following closely behind agriculture. National surveys of those traveling for pleasure show that visiting historic sites and museums ranks a strong second among the considerations which determine destination and length of stay, just behind the combined category of general sight-seeing and shopping. The trend of relating tourism and historic preservation is strong and growing. The phrase "heritage tourism" has come into common use within the tourism industry.

One reviewer of the heritage tourism trend notes that "Authentic urban experience has become such a rarity that many places have become tourist attractions simply by virtue of being real towns." In other words, places like Galena, Illinois; Iowa's Madison County; and St. Joseph, Missouri; are finding success with tourism and historic site visits even though they have little else in terms of highly notable attractions.

A summer 1985 survey conducted for the South Dakota Division of Tourism by the Business Research Bureau interviewed travelers at visitor information centers. Respondents gave "general sight-seeing" as the most frequent recreational activity. "Visiting historic places" was the second highest activity with around 70 percent of the visitors responding that they were engaging in this type of recreation. Responses for all the other categories of activities fell below 35 percent.

A family of four that spends one extra night in Sioux Falls is estimated to spend an average of \$200 during the stay. This money is recirculated in the community when the local restaurant, hotel, and entertainment businesses and their employees spend the tourism generated income at other local support businesses. The city is uniquely positioned as a gateway for travelers passing through on the I-90 and I-29 corridors. Tourism benefits have helped the local economy, but the economic potential of the industry remains underdeveloped.

Attractions, activities, and unique sight-seeing opportunities are necessary to strengthen the tourism economy. The museums, zoo, recreational paths, shopping opportunities, parks, and Washington Pavilion of Arts and Science provide sufficient activities. Development of an additional major attraction and increased promotion to build awareness among the traveling public, however, is needed. The sight-seeing role can be strengthened by the city's numerous historic districts and sites,

which create the unique image needed to bring visitors into the city to discover the full range of existing attractions.

Just as the central business district is a crucial part of the image of Sioux Falls, the historic buildings of downtown have a crucial role in creating a sense of place not found in suburban shopping mall districts. Development and redevelopment pressures on these increasingly scarce buildings intensifies as the economy expands. Incentives for conservation are needed. The ideal downtown development project is one which serves more than one purpose. There have been many successful preservation projects which provide needed housing, supply functional commercial space, or serve other development needs in an economically viable, desirable way.

The city's inventory of historic resources remains strong, even though a number of significant buildings are endangered, and others have been lost to fire, neglect, and demolition. The Sioux Falls Board of Preservation has prepared a comprehensive historic preservation plan to identify existing historic resources, define geographical areas in need of additional site surveys and inventorying activity, and describe strategies for preserving the remaining historic assets.

The community needs to serve as a responsible steward, conserving those features which make Sioux Falls a unique, special place that is different from everywhere else. In the contemporary atmosphere created by prefabricated, mass produced, franchised, and strip malled architecture, retention of the unique charm and distinctive craftsmanship associated with old buildings and historic areas creates an appealingly distinct sense of place. This has value as a marketing tool for increasing tourism visits, and cultural value for residents. Incentives to rehabilitate historic buildings is a helpful conservation measure. All public actions which affect historic resources should consciously and publicly consider the individual and cumulative effect of the decision on the community's pool of historic buildings.

Urban Design

Patterns on the landscape help make Sioux Falls special and contribute to the sense of identification that its residents feel. As the community grows, it should maintain this distinctiveness and character. Sioux Falls citizens want to preserve the best of what exists, and see their community develop in ways that are consistent with this character. Urban design and historic preservation relate most directly to guarding and enhancing the community's physical image.

The Sioux Falls Tomorrow vision statement articulates the importance of the city's appearance, stating, "Sioux Falls is a safe, caring, progressive, and beautiful community which provides opportunities and resources for each person's fulfillment . . . Sioux Falls exercises responsible stewardship for its historical, cultural, and natural environments." The Sioux Falls Tomorrow project's goal to "establish a visual image and identity for Sioux Falls" expresses this priority. Specific actions recommended under this goal include the creation of landscaped gateways into the city, the establishment of a City Beautiful citizens movement, and promoting harmonious design of the city. Improvements to the visual appeal of Falls Park are also emphasized.

This vision and the goal can be advanced by encouraging aesthetic standards and a human scale in the design of new public and private development. Some recommendations include developing an urban design plan for the city, strengthening the design review functions of the city, support efforts to increase public awareness of good urban design, and support standards for the design and maintenance of public facilities, including adequate funding for ongoing maintenance.

The residents of Sioux Falls are very interested in the design quality of the built environment. The community's support for parks and open space, its investment in building an excellent downtown streetscape, and the maintenance of residential neighborhoods are evidence of this commitment. Additional areas of interest include developing standards for major commercial corridors that encourage stronger aesthetic amenities such as setbacks, landscaping, and building materials.

Continuous patterns of parking lots, heavy traffic, lighting and signage, and unattractive buildings are formidable barriers in existing older commercial areas.

Street design in Sioux Falls also provides another important urban design feature. Streets must meet functional and engineering design requirements, but consideration should also be given to their aesthetic role in the community—to their ability to create a front door for the city. Pedestrian and public facilities in the right-of-way need to be considered, with features such as pedestrian lighting and street trees incorporated into street improvement plans. Development standards that encourage additional improvements within the street corridor in conjunction with new private development projects are also needed, including requirements such as building and parking lot design, consolidation of driveways, sign requirements, and landscaping.