

Lowell Downtown Plan Update Technical Memorandum 1:

Project Background, Context and Plan Review

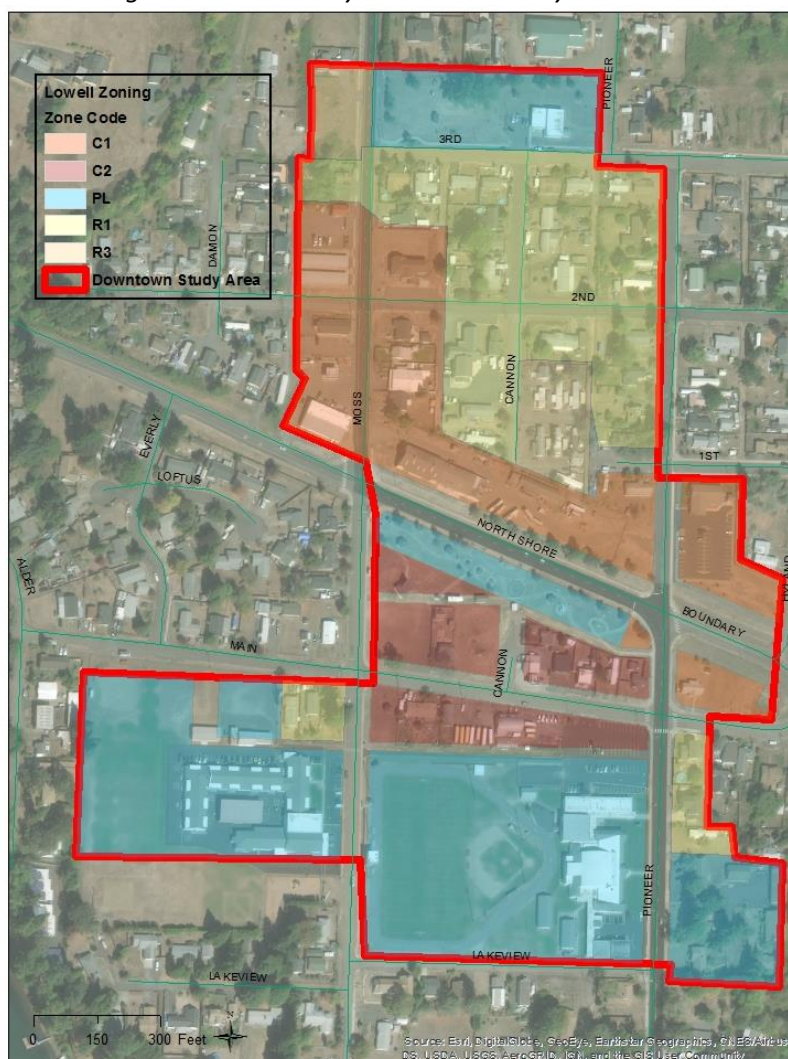
I. Introduction

The City of Lowell has secured grant funding through the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) to pursue a Downtown Master Plan. Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) has been contracted to work with local decision makers and stakeholders to prepare the Plan. The process is expected to be completed by June, 2019.

II. A Study Area for the Downtown Master Plan

LCOG and their subcontracted urban design firm, The Urban Collaborative, have conceptualized a preliminary study area for Lowell’s Downtown Master Planning process. The draft study area is depicted in Figure 1. Included in the draft study area are: City Hall, approximately 100 tax lots, four schools, two public parks, and six operating commercial businesses.

Figure 1: Preliminary Downtown Study Area



III. Historic Sketch of the City of Lowell

Lowell, also known as the Town of a Thousand Sunsets, is actually a fairly new city. Located only 20 miles southeast of Eugene, and surrounded by rich natural and recreational resources, Lowell is a highly livable community.

Originally settled in 1852, Lowell was initially named Cannon, after an early settler of that name. In 1882, Amos Hyland, who owned significant property in the area renamed the town Lowell after his hometown in Massachusetts. The City of Lowell was incorporated in 1952.



Construction of the dam at Lookout Point, 1952

The first sizable increase in population occurred in conjunction with the building of the Lookout Point Reservoir by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) in 1948. The dam ushered in a new era for the people who had settled on the Middle Fork of the Willamette River near Lowell. Much of the town of Lowell was relocated when the dam was built. Many of the houses had to be moved out of the river bottom east of town and new houses were built north of the town for the new employees hired to build the dam.

Over the years, the city has sought to maintain its viability as an attractive residential community with a limited local employment base. Lowell was a timber town until the late 1980s. The early industries in the area were hop raising, stock raising, and logging; the present town site of Lowell was once a huge hop yard.

Today, some timber-related industries, as well as public lands management and some agriculture, still operate in Lowell. The City's close proximity to Eugene-Springfield makes it easy for workers to commute to the metro area and nearby communities.

The Blackberry Jam Festival, which occurs every July, is a celebration of food and music that is celebrating its 24th year in 2018. Other events include a fishing derby, and the annual Columbia Speedboat Association Races, and other events associated with Dexter Lake.

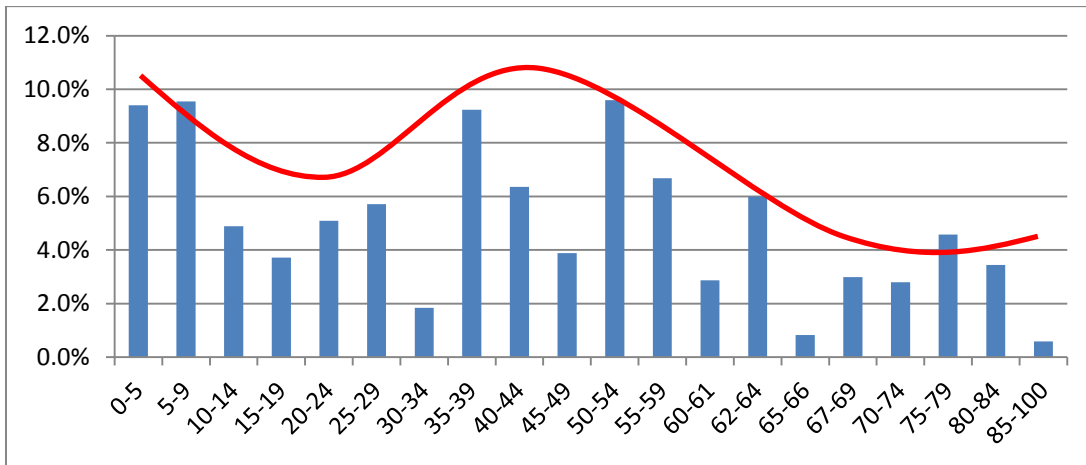
IV. Economic and Demographic Data.

An assessment of key economic and demographic data can help guide and inform the goals of the Lowell Downtown Plan and ensure that the Plan is reflective of all residents, and businesses located in Lowell.

Demographic

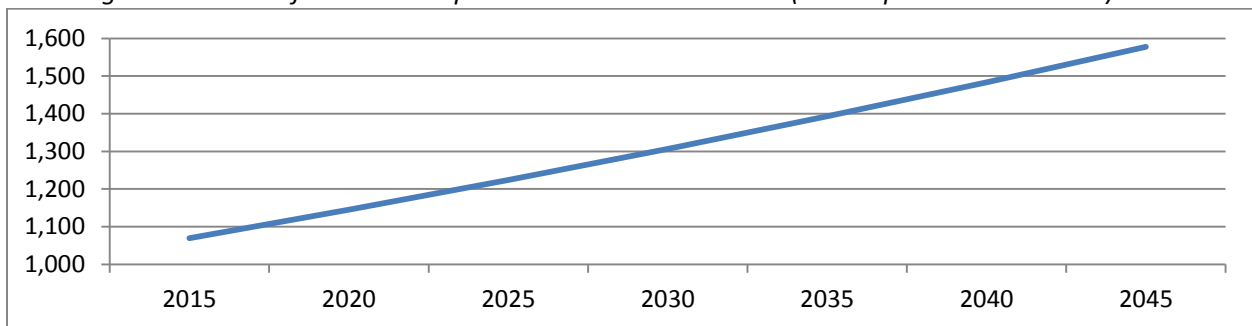
According to the 2012 -2016 American Communities Survey (ACS), Lowell has a total population of approximately 1,147. Figure 2, below depicts the percentage of Lowell’s population by age categories. The age ranges reveal a high percentage of elementary aged children. The data shows a relative dearth of the youngest adult category. According to the ACS data, Lowell is home to a large percentage of minors and middle aged residents and fewer young adults and retirement aged residents.

Figure 2: Population Pyramid for the City of Lowell, 2012-2016 ACS



Lowell has experienced an approximately 2.4% increase in population between 2000 and 2017. According to Oregon’s Population Research Center (housed at Portland State University), Lowell’s total population is estimated to reach 1,578 people by the year 2045. Based on the data, this represents an increase in population of 509 people from 2015 to 2045, or a 47% increase over that same time span, an annual growth rate of 1.5%. This growth rate is represented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Lowell's forecasted Population Growth 2015-2045 (PSU Pop. Research Center)



According to the 2016 American Community Survey, Lowell’s population is predominantly white. The second largest category in Lowell is Hispanics who represented 7.6% of the population in 2016.

Economic

According to Quarterly Census of Wage and Employment (QCEW) data from 2016 (the most current valid data), 35 businesses were listed as having a physical location within Lowell city limits. 20 of the 35 listed businesses report 0-2 employees. These are often home office businesses. This is confirmed by the geographic location of many of these businesses is; within residential neighborhoods. This is not a surprising finding in Lowell. Each business in the QCEW has an assigned North American Industry Classification (NAICS) Code. Because Lowell has a small number of businesses and employees, State confidentiality rules prohibit reporting specific employment by NAICS category. The NAICS categories with the most employees in Lowell are Education (39.3%), Construction (17.8%) and Transportation and Warehousing (7.3%). Manufacturing, Health Care & Social Services and “Other Services” all had 6.8%. Notably, Accommodation and Food Services made up less than 1% of the City’s employment in 2016.

Figure 4 below depicts median household income in Lowell in comparison to the county, state and nation according to the 2010 Census and 2009-2013 ACS. County income is lower than Lowell’s, but incomes are higher for Oregon and the United States.

Figure 4: Median Household Income and Poverty.

Area	Median Household Income	Individuals below the Poverty Level
US	\$53,046	15.1%
Oregon	\$50,229	15.7%
Lowell	\$45,300	8.0%
Lane County	\$42,931	19.7%

V. Existing Land Uses

The two primary controlling documents that guide planning and development in Lowell are the City’s Comprehensive Plan, and the Lowell Development Code (LDC). The purpose of comprehensive planning is to provide guidelines for conservation and development of community resources and to promote the public health, safety and general welfare of community residents. It is intended to ensure that the City’s livability will be enhanced rather than weakened when confronted with the pressures of growth and change.



An R-3 zoned duplex on North Moss Street.

Lowell’s downtown study area contains five of the City’s six distinct zoning districts, and one overlay district (see map on Page 1) . These districts determine and guide what types of development and activities are allowed in the area.

The purpose of the Single-Family Residential District (R-1) is to provide areas for low-density, urban, single-family residential use with provisions for associated residential or public service uses. Although the predominant zone in Lowell, the R-1 zone is understandably limited in the downtown study area.

The purpose of the Multi-Family Residential District (R-3) is to provide areas suitable and desirable for medium density multiple-family residential development. In the R-3 zone, the maximum dwelling units per acre is 15, unless approved as a conditional use. A relative concentration of multiple-family development has occurred along North Moss at the intersection with 4th Street. The southern part of this concentration of R-3 properties is located in the northern section of the downtown study area.



Street view of South Moss Street in the C-1 zone.

The purpose of the General Commercial District (C-1) is to provide areas appropriate for the full range of commercial activities to serve the needs of area residents and employees. Areas in the C-1 are should have good access to and from Lowell’s major thoroughfares and should be free from conflict with non-compatible land uses. In the C-1 zone, there is no minimum lot size, or maximum building height, except when abutting a residential zone. All development in the C-1 zone is subject to site plan review by the Planning Commission. The areas zoned C-1 in

Lowell are just north of the Downtown Commercial District, and are located along the northern edge of East North Shore Drive, near the intersection of West 2nd Street and North Moss, and the intersection of East 1st Street and North Pioneer.



An existing commercial use across from Rolling Rock Park in the C-1 zone.

The Downtown Commercial District (C-2) purpose is to provide a central shopping center for the community to serve the needs of area residents and employees. The area should be Lowell’s central feature of activity, supporting easy access, convenient pedestrian circulation and attractive amenities for all users. In the C-2 zone there is no set minimum lot size, a maximum building height of three stories, and all development is subject to site plan review by the Planning Commission. The areas zoned C-2 are along both sides of East Main Street, abutting Lowell High School to the south, and East North Shore Drive to the north. The Downtown Commercial District and adjacent properties will be the primary focus of the Lowell Downtown Master Plan.



Vacant lot in the C-2 zone on East Main Street.



The Gitty Goat, an existing commercial use in C-2 zone on East Main Street.

Comparison of Commercial Zones

The permitted and conditional uses in the two commercial zones in Lowell (C-1 and C-2) are similar with the main exception being in the C-1 zone residential care facilities, hotels or motels, and group child care facilities are allowed, but not allowed in the C-2 zone. In the C-2 zone

indoor commercial amusement and recreation uses are a permitted use, but not in the C-1 zone.

The purpose of the Light Industrial District (I-1) is to create, preserve and enhance areas for low intensity, light manufacturing and commercial development which create no obnoxious impact on abutting properties and are free from conflict with non-compatible uses. There is no I-1 zoning in the downtown study area. Presently, the only parcels zoned I-1 are in the northwest corner of Lowell along Seneca Street; this area is also known as the Lowell Industrial Park.

The purpose of the Public Land District (PL) is to establish development standards for public lands. Public lands are those owned by public entities, specifically, the Federal Government, State of Oregon, Lane County, and the City of Lowell, as well as special districts such as the Lowell Fire District and Lowell School District. Public parcels in the downtown study area are occupied by Lowell School District, Bridge Charter Academy, City Hall and Rolling Rock Park.

Non-conforming Land Uses in Downtown Lowell

Examination of the C-1 and C-2 zones identified non-conforming uses located in these zones. A non-conforming use is a use of property that was allowed under zoning regulations at the time the use was established, but which because of subsequent changes in those regulations, is no longer a permitted use. Non-conforming uses and structures are not illegal uses and structures; they are generally allowed to continue. There are currently six residences on parcels zoned for commercial use. Due to changes in the local land use regulations (including zoning), these uses would not be permitted today and are subject to regulations that discourage their perpetuation. What this means for Lowell is that over time, the City in a planning regulatory sense, is expecting the parcels zoned C-1 and C-2 to fully transition out of non-conforming uses and into commercial uses consistent with the purpose of the zone.

VI. Applicable Comprehensive Plan Goals and Policies

State Regulatory Framework

Since 1973, Oregon has maintained a strong statewide program for land use planning, and the foundation of that program is a set of 19 statewide planning goals. These goals express the state's policies on land use and on related topics, such as citizen involvement, economic development, housing, and urbanization.

Oregon's statewide goals are achieved through local comprehensive planning. State law requires each city and county to adopt a comprehensive plan, and the zoning and land-division ordinances needed to put the plan into effect. The local comprehensive plans must be consistent with the statewide planning goals. Plans are reviewed for such consistency by the State's Land Conservation and Development Commission (LCDC). Once acknowledged, the plan becomes the controlling document for land use in the area covered by that plan.

A review of Lowell’s Comprehensive Plan, last updated in 2005, found several goals and policies that should guide the Downtown Plan planning process. Goals are statements of purpose and specify, on a general level, what the planning effort is intended to accomplish. The policies are The means by which the city will implement the plan; policies are official statements of strategy or principle that specify the intent concerning the future growth and development of the community.



Rolling Rock Park in the Center of Lowell



Outdoor amphitheater used for community events.

Planning

The first goal of the Oregon Statewide Planning Goals is citizen involvement. Lowell has adopted several goals and policies that ensure the public is informed of the planning process, and every opportunity is provided to include all residents to be involved during every step of the process.

- Goal 1: *“to encourage development in a planned and considered manner consistent with the community’s vision, general health, safety and welfare.”*
- Goal 5: *“to achieve effective communication between city residents and city officials and to provide an ongoing opportunity for all persons to participate in all phases of the planning process.”*

Relevant policies with respect to the planning process and the Downtown Plan include

- Policy 8: *“An active and on-going citizen involvement program shall be maintained by the City to insure that all citizens have an opportunity to be informed and involved in the planning process”*
- Policy 9: *“The City of Lowell shall reinforce the applicable Statewide Planning Goals as they apply to the community through specific goals, objectives and policies in response to community needs.”*

Consistent with the Statewide Planning Goals and the Lowell Comprehensive Plan, a Downtown Steering Committee has been formed as a part of the Lowell Downtown Master Planning process. The Steering Committee is made up of Lowell residents that represent a diverse range of backgrounds, and interests. The volunteer Committee is composed of existing members of the Planning Commission, Economic Development Committee, Parks and Recreation

Committee, and at-large residents. It will be the Committee’s responsibility to guide progress, review deliverables, provide feedback, promote community involvement and provide direction to staff. Members of the Steering Committee include:

Lowell Downtown Master Plan Steering Committee:

Member	Affiliations
Aaron Graham	At-large resident, Parks and Recreation Committee
Pat Woodhurst	Parks and Recreation Committee
William George	Economic Development Committee
Michael Galvin	Lowell School Board, Economic Development Committee
Jerry Bjornstad	Planning Commission, Economic Development Committee
Lon Dragt	At-large resident
Lisa Bee-Wilson	Economic Development Committee
Don Swain	Planning Commission
Robert Burr	Economic Development Committee

Environment

Maintaining Lowell’s environmental quality is essential to the livability of the community. It’s important to consider how any future growth and development may impact the natural environment. The Downtown Steering Committee has made it evident that the community places a high value on the natural beauty and environmental resources Lowell has to offer.

- Goal 2 *“The City shall encourage developments that reinforce the aesthetic appeal of the community’s natural setting.”* This goal will be important to reflect on when developing street scape plans, and other landscape improvements for the downtown area.

Economy

Steering Committee members present a clear desire to realize what they view as Lowell’s potential to become more of a destination location. The Comprehensive Plan provides policies that are designed to strike this right balance between tourism and the needs of residents.

- Policy 1: *“The City of Lowell shall strive for continual and substantial progress toward improving the quality of life for area residents including livability and economic prosperity.”*
- Policy 2 *“The City shall actively encourage young families with children to locate in Lowell to support and maintain the Lowell School District.”*
- Policy 7 *“The City recognizes the need to create a centralized downtown business district in Lowell and shall encourage new retail, office and service commercial developments to locate there.”*

Housing

The Downtown Master Planning process includes looking at existing and potential locations for affordable housing. The Downtown Steering Committee has expressed interest in an active

downtown core that involves mixed uses with ground floor commercial and residential above. These mixed uses have the ability to reignite a downtown core by bringing both commercial uses and people into downtown. The Comprehensive Plan addresses the future need of a diverse selection of housing units to meet all income levels of Lowell residents, including the desire to see a variety of mixed uses locating in the downtown core.

- Goal 1: *“To increase opportunities for all citizens of Lowell to enjoy safe, decent, sanitary housing at affordable prices.”*
- Policy 1: *“The City shall strive to provide all citizens of the community with the opportunity to live in sound housing, adequate to their needs, at reasonable cost relative to their income.”*
- Policy 5: *“The City shall continue to support increased residential development while also encouraging business and commercial activities that support residential community needs.”*
- Policy 6: *“The City shall develop standards for mixed use housing and commercial use in its downtown commercial core as part of Downtown Development Plan.”*
- Policy 9: *“The City shall support a wide range of housing types and innovative residential design and planning concepts.”*
- Policy 14: *“The City shall support orderly in-fill development of underdeveloped land in existing residential areas.”*

Land Use

Lowell’s commercial core is strongly impacted by the close proximity to retail and service centers in Eugene and Springfield. Outside influences may continue to limit commercial development in Lowell until a larger population is achieved. The goals and policies of the land use element of the Lowell Comprehensive Plan are divided into five sections: general land use, residential land use, commercial land use, industrial land use, and open space. In a way, the land use section of the Comprehensive Plan reiterates and combines most of the goals and policies found elsewhere in the plan. For the purpose of this section, the following goals and policies apply:

- Goal 4 *“To provide an inviting Downtown Core Area enhanced with mixed uses, sidewalks, bike lanes, landscaping, distinctive lighting and underground facilities.”*

Residential

- Policy 3 *“The City shall encourage the removal and rehabilitation of unused or abandoned/dilapidated buildings.”*
- Policy 7 *“The City shall encourage in-fill development on over-sized lots.”*
- Policy 8 *“The City shall consider mixed use developments within the downtown core area.”*

Commercial

- Policy 10 *“The City shall complete a Downtown Development Plan to encourage commercial and public uses to locate within the Downtown Core Area.”*
- Policy 11 *“The City shall encourage commercial facilities that will serve the needs of the community as well as those of the visiting tourists and recreational participants.”*
- Policy 12 *“The City shall ensure that future commercial development will not have a significant adverse effect on surrounding land uses.”*
- Policy 13 *“Vehicular and pedestrian efficiency and safety shall be required criteria for all commercial developments.”*
- Policy 14 *“The City shall encourage redevelopment of existing commercial properties that are underutilized or those that have fallen into disuse.”*

Open Space

- Policy 24 *“The City shall require inclusion of landscaping as an integral part of site and street developments.”*

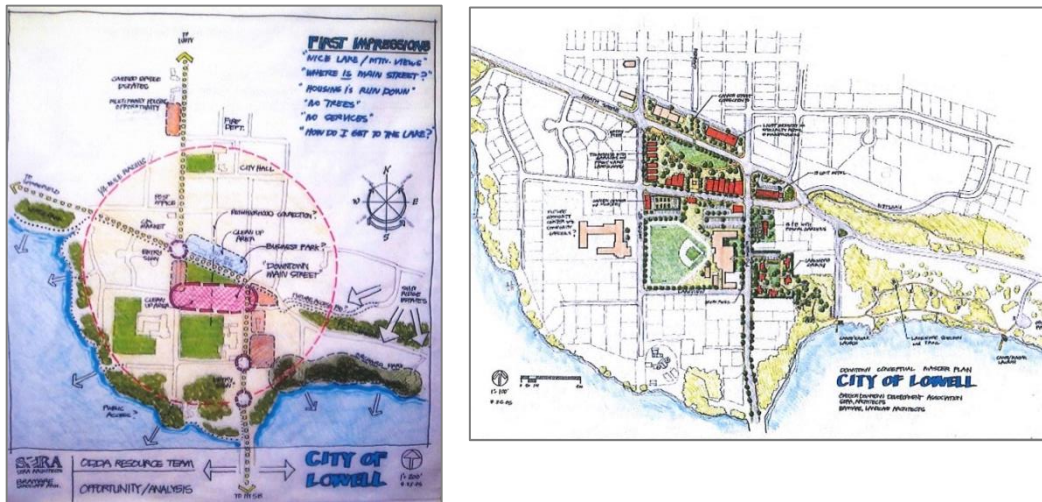
It must be noted that the Comprehensive Plan, developed in 2005, incorporated a vision, goals and policies for the downtown core, which resonates with much of what City staff and the Steering Committee have expressed a desire for: open space, mixed use, economic development, and housing.

VI. Applicable Plans and Studies

Downtown Lowell Resource Team Report, 2005

Out of all existing plans and studies, the Downtown Lowell Resource Team Report completed in 2005, is the most applicable to the current Lowell Downtown Master Planning process. The goals of the resource team were to assist revitalization of a downtown business district, including exploration of mixed use. The Resource Team was on-site in Lowell for three days over which they collected information and feedback from residents through a series of public meetings. Among the recommendations that resulted from the plan were to enhance Rolling Rock Park and improve its relationship with downtown, and to focus new business development and expansions within the downtown commercial district. The plan also included several beautification projects that involved improvements being made in public areas and to rights-of-way near the town entrance and downtown core.

Concept drawings from the 2005 Downtown Lowell Resource Team Report



Lowell Urban Renewal Plan, 2009

The Lowell Urban Renewal Plan was developed with the help of the Urban Renewal Advisory Committee. This committee is comprised of individuals representing varied interests in the Lowell community. The purpose of urban renewal is to improve specific areas of a city that are poorly developed or underdeveloped. These areas can have old or deteriorated buildings, public spaces that need improvements, streets and utilities in poor condition, a complete lack of streets and utilities altogether or other obstacles to development.

Urban renewal allows for the use of tax increment financing to fund urban renewal projects. Urban renewal is unique in that it brings its own financing: tax increment financing (TIF). Tax increment revenues, the amount of property taxes generated by the increase in total assessed values in the urban renewal area from the time the urban renewal area is first established, are used to repay borrowed funds.

The Urban Renewal Area in Lowell consists of approximately 138.6 acres of land including rights of way. Among the areas included are: Downtown adjacent to Main Street, Moss Street corridor, and the school districts properties.

Economic Development Strategic Plan, 2003

The plan is intended to assist the Lowell community in its economic development efforts and improve opportunities for long-term family-wage jobs in the Lowell area by identifying types of compatible employers that would most likely be interested in locating in the Lowell area and be able to market itself to potential employers.

The plan provides relevant demographic and economic data that describes the community, its economic status, and workforce. As the plan is nearing two-decades in age, some of the economic and demographic data may have changed and will need to be updated for use in the Lowell Downtown Plan; the same level of analysis that was completed in the 2003 plan is

unlikely to be repeated in the Lowell Downtown Plan, though will contain relevant economic and demographic data.

City of Lowell Strategic Plan, 2018

The City of Lowell's Strategic Plan, adopted by the City Council, is the management plan for the City. The Strategic Plan is a political, compliance, and inspirational document that serves two main purposes. First, the plan provides the Council's political direction in addressing the City's vision, mission, goals prioritized objectives, and evaluation criteria. Second, the Strategic Plan, with action taken by the Council in the prioritizing of the objectives, provides clarity and inspiration to the City Administrator and staff in addressing the priorities of the Council and community.

The Strategic Plan calls for several goals and objectives to be met with respect to the Lowell Downtown Plan. Under the goal and objective of community development and economic vitality, objective 5.5 calls for a Downtown Master Plan steering committee shall submit a progress report to City Council by the end of 2018. A Downtown Master Plan steering committee was formed during the May Planning Commission meeting. Under the strategic goal of quality of life include several elements that will be a part of the Lowell Downtown Plan, including, but not limited to, parks and recreation opportunities and community beautification efforts. Lastly, under the objective of planning and zoning, call for the City Administrator to identify and apply for funding opportunities to complete a Transportation System Plan (TSP) or Local Street Network Plan (LSNP) that shall include design standards for street, lighting and sidewalks.

Pavement Preservation and Maintenance Plan, 2018

The City regularly undertakes projects to maintain or improve key streets within the community. This project has been developed to evaluate the existing roads within the City that are in need of repair, and assist the City in completing repairs in an efficient and timely manner.

Lowell School District 10-Year Facilities Planning, 2016

In 2016, the Lowell School District completed a 10-Year Master Planning process that culminated in an open house for residents to learn about the plan and the future of the Lowell School District. The goal of the plan was to review all Lowell School District facilities in the context of current needs, enrollment and projections for the next decade. With the location of the High School and Junior High School near the downtown core of Lowell, the planning and public involvement should take into consideration the relationship between the schools and downtown in terms of aesthetics and pedestrian access.

Dexter Lake Shoreline Management Plan (SMP), USACE, 2008

In 2008, the US Army Corps of Engineers made a decision to update its Dexter Lake Shoreline Management Plan in response to dealing with a variety of controversial shoreline issues during 2005. The Willamette Valley Project staff recognized that the 1995 SMP did not provide sufficient detail and guidance to resolve many of the issues. The purpose of the SMP is to provide guidance for managing the Dexter Lake shoreline. The SMP addresses rules and

regulations, shoreline allocations, and requirements for permitting private facilities on public lands. The scope of the SMP is along the Dexter Lake shoreline and does not have a focus on the downtown core of Lowell. However, if future development occurs along Dexter Lake shoreline, the SMP will be a document in need of consultation.