



Nebraska

# THE STITCH @30TH STREET RECONNECTING COMMUNITY

Omaha, Nebraska



Technical Assistance Panel | January 7-8, 2025

# About

## Urban Land Institute

Urban Land Institute is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 48,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 84 countries.

Cover photo: A view the land surrounding the highway interchange at I-480 and US Hwy 75. (ULI Panel)

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## ULI Nebraska

As the preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local, national, and international industry leaders and policymakers dedicated to creating better places. ULI Nebraska brings together real estate professionals, civic leaders, and the community for educational programs, initiatives impacting the region, and networking events, all in the pursuit of advancing responsible and equitable land use throughout the region. ULI Nebraska provides a unique venue to convene and share best practices in the region. ULI Nebraska believes everyone needs to be at the table when the region's future is at stake, so ULI serves the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines—from architects to developers, CEOs to analysts, builders, property owners, investors, public officials, and everyone in between. Using this interdisciplinary approach, ULI examines land use issues, convenes forums to find solutions, and impartially reports findings.

## ULI Nebraska Leadership

### Jay Lund

ULI Nebraska Chair  
Principal, GreenSlate Development

## Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Program

Urban Land Institute harnesses its members' technical expertise to help communities solve complex land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) provide expert, multidisciplinary, and unbiased advice to local governments, public agencies, and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use and real estate issues in the region. Drawing from its professional membership base, ULI Nebraska offers objective and responsible guidance on various land use and real estate issues ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions. The sponsoring organization is responsible for gathering the background information necessary to understand the project and present it to the panel. The ULI panelists spend two days interviewing stakeholders, evaluating the challenges, and ultimately arriving at a set of recommendations that the sponsoring organization can use to guide development going forward.

# About

## Technical Assistance Panel

### Panel Co-Chairs

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## Acknowledgments

ULI Nebraska would like to thank the Greater Omaha Chamber for inviting ULI to study the potential for new development on excess land close to the 30th Street and Dodge Street intersection. Additionally, ULI would like to thank Physicians Mutual for its wonderful hospitality during the TAP work days. Finally, ULI would like to thank the stakeholders who generously shared their time and experience with the panel during their discovery phase.

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# Executive Summary

The construction of the interstate highway system helped cities move cars and commuters further and faster across their landscapes. In the process, the highways claimed space that once belonged to individuals, neighborhoods, and local businesses. For the city of Omaha, there is an exciting opportunity to reclaim some of that space and return land once dedicated to the interstate back to the community and the residents of the city. The 20 acres adjacent to and west of the merge of Interstates 480 and US Highway 75 present such an opportunity.

Working with the Greater Omaha Chamber and the Urban Land Institute (ULI), ULI members from across the region convened a technical assistance panel (TAP) to study a site created by 20 acres of underutilized land remaining after the 1973 cancellation of a westward extension of I-480. Today, the site is bordered by the interstate to the east, Dodge Street to the south, 31st Street to the west, and an interstate off-ramp to the north. It is owned by the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) and is crossed by two highway off-ramps and one on-ramp. Acres of open land sit between and are landlocked by the ramping infrastructure.

As one of the few remaining sizable and largely vacant land parcels in the city, civic leaders recognized the development potential at the site and asked ULI to study the site and make recommendations for its future use. Using its trusted TAP process, a panel of ULI

members toured the site, interviewed stakeholders, deliberated their findings, and arrived at a series of recommendations that community and civic leaders can leverage as they seek a higher and better use for this parcel of land.

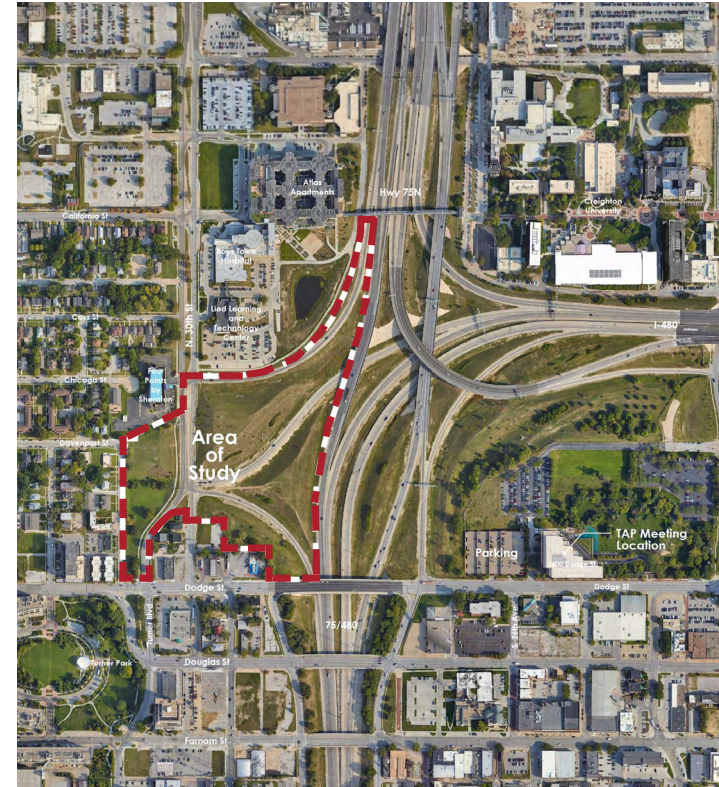
## The Stitch

The study site is surrounded by a variety of uses, including The Atlas apartments, Boys Town Hospital, Turner Park, Midtown Crossing, Creighton University, Physicians Mutual, the Joslyn Art Museum, Gifford Park neighborhood, and more. The 20-acre site also creates a significant barrier between all of these uses.

By reclaiming the space between these prized community assets and returning the parcel to active use by bringing housing, retail, and more back to the site, the study area can once again serve the neighborhood and work to strengthen the fabric of the community. The panel's development recommendations, called "The Stitch," enable such transformation and provide civic leaders with a roadmap for implementation.

## Design Framework

In its design vision for the site, the panel drew from previously published plans, advancing viable solutions and layering important community goals of reconnection and walkability. The following five core elements serve as the framework for enhancing connections around the study area and preparing the land for new development.



The TAP study area, outlined in red, is marked by a significant amount of underutilized interstate ramping and often inaccessible open space.

- 1. Realign interstate ramps.** The interstate ramps that traverse the study site are underutilized with approximately 10,000 vehicles combined using the three ramps daily. The two off-ramps should be combined into one ramp that runs parallel and close to the interstate, intersecting at Dodge Street with a four-way intersection. The existing on-ramp should be eliminated and traffic shifted south to an improved two-lane on-ramp at Harney Street.

**2. Address the 30th Street streetscape.** The roadway along 30th Street is overly wide for the traffic it carries and should be reduced to three lanes. This reconfiguration would include space for a dedicated bus lane, should city transit plans call for it, or on-street parking. Expanded and enhanced sidewalk and trail assets would also be incorporated into this enhanced street redesign.

**3. Connect the trail along the historic boulevard.** Following the path of the historic Lincoln Boulevard, which used to travel through the site, the existing trail connector should be widened to a 12-foot wide path from Dodge to Burt Streets and connect to the city's protected trail network.

**4. Configure a new roundabout, redesign Dodge as a multi-way boulevard, and create a new S-curve.** Directly north of the intersection of 30th and Dodge Streets, 30th Street should be reconfigured to include a roundabout, bringing the roadways into alignment with Turner Boulevard and Park Avenue. The wide expanse of Dodge Street should become a multi-way boulevard, with center lanes for through traffic separated from frontage lanes for local access and on-street parking, creating safer spaces for pedestrians moving around the area. The panel also re-envisioned the "S-curve" connection, moving it out of Turner Park to a new bridge space spanning US Highway 75. This pulls traffic out of the

park, returning the space to recreational use. While this infrastructure improvement was not been factored into the panel's development estimates, this improvement is strongly recommended and would align well with the plans for the I-480 lid.

**5. Create a Davenport Street pedestrian connection.** Although Davenport's vehicular traffic dead-ends at 31st Street, a pedestrian connection to a redesigned 30th Street should be created to ease circulation around the neighborhood. The panel envisions a grand staircase at the connection point to address the grade change and connect people to new park space at the foot of the stairs.

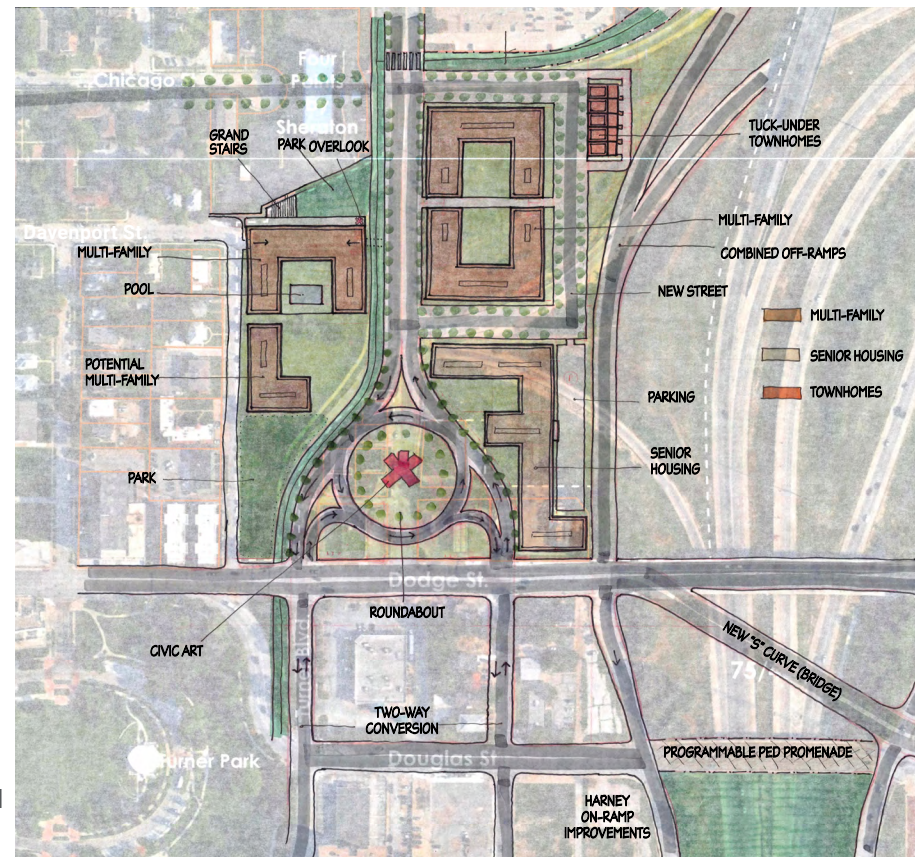
### Implementation and Strategy

After evaluating prior planning efforts, market drivers, and community goals, the panel used its design framework to conceptualize the development potential at the site. The development proposal, which delivers housing, retail, and other commercial uses, is outlined below with requisite early implementation steps.

**Deliver housing and commercial at the site.** The panel estimates that 12.5 acres of the study site will be developable following

the ramping reconfiguration. Within those acres, a mix of uses, including multi-family residential, retail and entertainment, and some office could spread across a number of buildings totaling approximately 650,000 of new space. Approximately 500 new housing units, 240 of which would be affordable, could be added to the neighborhood achieving the density desired for the Urban Core.

**Cost considerations.** Using the development scenario above, the panel estimates that the

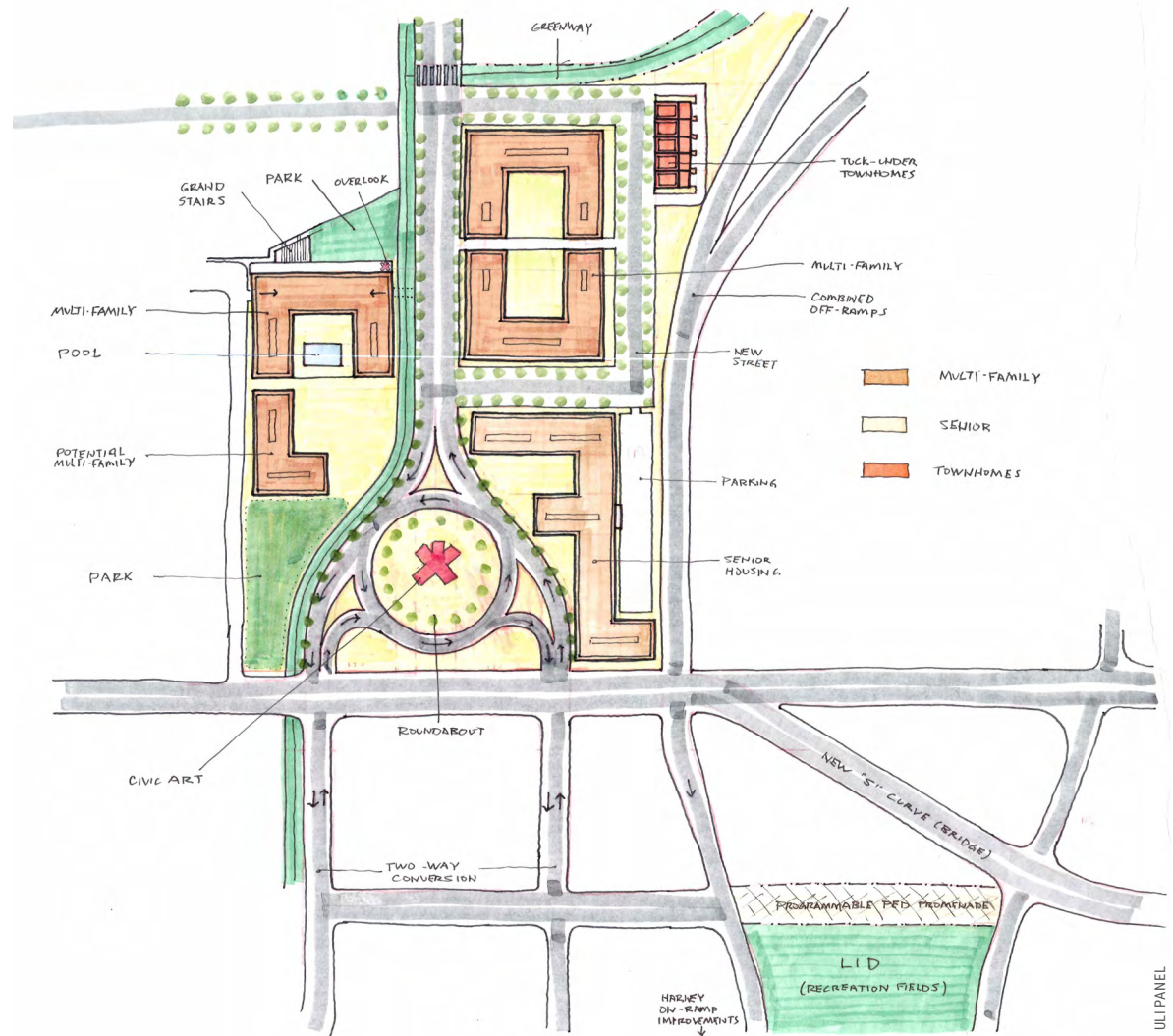


The panel's vision for the site reconnects and improves the street, sidewalk, and trail network while making efficient use of the developable land for multifamily housing, commercial space, and more.

project cost would be close to \$214 million, which would be developer-led. In addition, \$31 million in City-led funding is anticipated for predevelopment costs—ramp and road demolition, new ramp construction, utility work, and the 30th Street improvements. The total development costs break down into \$162 million in hard costs (new roads, utilities, and vertical improvements), \$35 million in soft costs related to design and engineering, and \$17 million related to site acquisition.

**Acquisition of NDOT-owned land.** While typical land sales would use pricing based on the land’s fair market value, the unique nature of this site, lack of available comparable sales, and lack of viable uses in its current state led the panel to explore key exceptions in NDOT’s disposition regulations. The panel believes these exceptions apply in this instance and would allow the City of Omaha (the City) to acquire the land for a nominal fee (\$1). The City, working in partnership with a developer, could then commence site improvements.

**Financing mechanisms.** Financing the development envisioned by the panel will require a capital stack that is likely to include tax increment financing, transportation bonds, New Markets and/or Low-income Housing Tax Credits, and traditional debt and equity. The potential return calculated by the panel, approximately five to six percent, means that additional resources, likely in the form of philanthropic participation will be needed to increase the return and lessen development risk for potential development partners.



The panel’s design for the study area also took into account improved connections in the immediate surrounding streets, providing improved access to and through the site and improving walkability across the area.

### Conclusion

The Stitch provides the city of Omaha with a viable path forward in reclaiming underutilized land in the urban core for improved connectivity, greater walkability,

and additional housing opportunities for those who want to call Omaha home. It is an exciting vision for the city and a compelling opportunity to reclaim this piece of the urban core.



# Introduction and Background

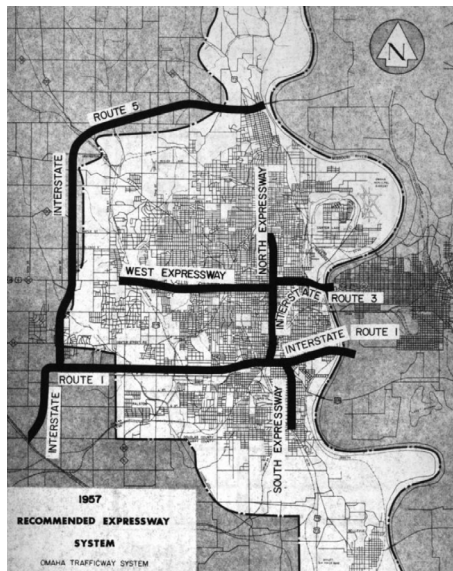
Like many major American cities, Omaha's landscape has been reshaped over the years by the interstate highway system. While these new roadways reduced commuting times and facilitated residential development well beyond the urban core, many neighborhoods, homes, and businesses were sacrificed in the process. The construction of the Interstate 480 loop around downtown Omaha was no exception, with neighborhoods like the Near North Side and Montclair unable to halt the roadway's construction progress. The proposed expansion of the interstate west into the Gifford Park neighborhood, however, did meet significant opposition and by 1973, plans for the West Freeway were dropped. This construction shift left behind acres of cleared land and three highway ramps connecting onto and off Interstate 480.

Over the years, modifications have been made to this defunct expansion area, including the demolition of one of the initial on-ramps and incidental work between 30th Street and the western edge of I-480. Approximately 20 acres of open space remain, left unusable due to the surrounding highway infrastructure, fast-moving traffic, and lack of safe connections to and across the land. This 20-acre parcel, however, holds potential for new development close to the city's downtown and near institutional neighbors, parks, Midtown Crossing, and surrounding residential neighborhoods.

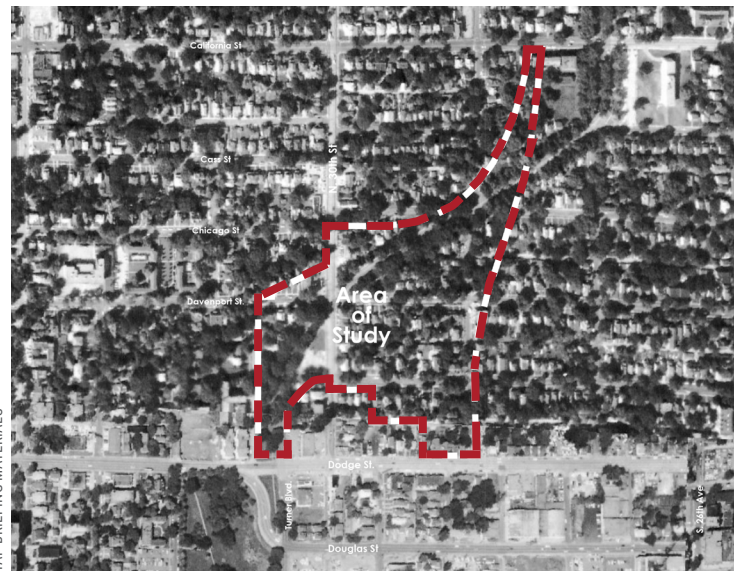
Understanding the complexity related to potential development at this site—given the interstate proximity, the active on- and off-ramps crossing the site, and the historic boulevard park system in place in the

## TAP Questions

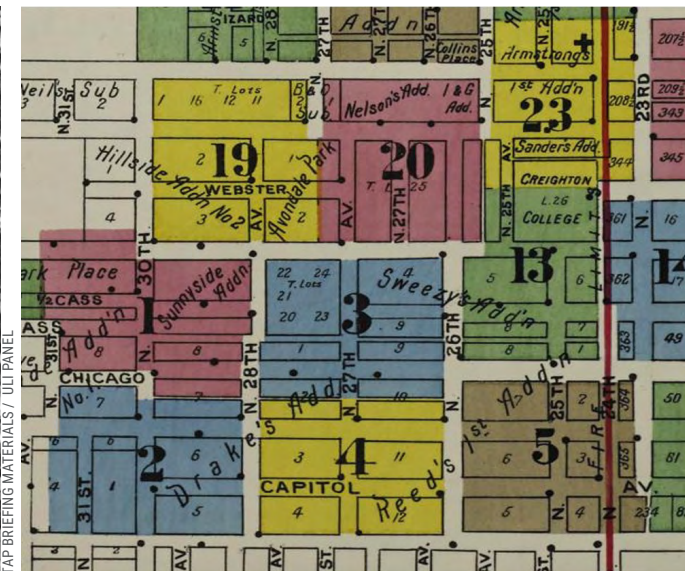
1. What is the ideal reconfiguration of the interchange that maintains essential access, while improving community connectivity?
2. What is the best and highest use of the development area and what does that vision look like?
3. What financing / funding mechanisms would make this plan a reality?



A 1957 map of Omaha shows how the West Expressway was planned to extend from the study area well into western neighborhoods.



Prior to interstate construction, the study area, outlined in red, was home to a relatively dense urban neighborhood.



Historic maps depict the various neighborhoods that used to grace the study area.

southwest corner of the area—civic leaders at the Greater Omaha Chamber turned to the Urban Land Institute (ULI) for guidance. Led by a group of ULI members in Nebraska, ULI convened a technical assistance panel (TAP) comprised of real estate professionals in the areas of development, finance, architecture, urban planning, and land use law to address the development questions posed by the Greater Omaha Chamber.

The TAP process, which spans two working days, leverages the expertise of the assembled panel while also folding in tours of the study area and interviews with area stakeholders. Through these conversations and following a review of briefing materials and other studies conducted on and around the site, the panel arrived at a set of recommendations that meet the goals of the TAP and can serve as a roadmap for further action at the site.

## Study Area Context

The study area encompasses approximately 20 acres or six city blocks and is loosely bound by Dodge Street to the south, Interstate 480 to the east, North 31st Street to the west, and, to the north, the curve of a US Highway 75 off-ramp (which turns into Chicago Street).

Two off-ramps and one interstate on-ramp cross through the top, middle, and bottom of the study area respectively. Between the on- and off-ramps, large landscaped hills have been created to help shield the roadway from the neighborhoods to the west and attenuate some of the traffic noise.

In the southwest corner of the study area, an area that was once a portion of the city's historic boulevard system remains protected from development and is open green space with some tree coverage.

Along the southern edge of the site, a fast food restaurant, a gas station, and a vacant commercial building face Dodge Street, and a few residential duplexes are situated just north of Dodge on the island of land formed by the splitting of 30th Street into northbound and southbound lanes.

The multiple converging roadways and diverging traffic patterns and directions are confusing to drivers and dangerous for pedestrians and bicyclists, creating an environment where few feel safe moving through the area regardless of modality.

Traffic volume on the on- and off-ramps is light in comparison to other interstate access points across Omaha. With approximately 2,000, 6,000, and 3,400 vehicles using each of the ramps daily, the volume does not warrant the type of priority connection that the ramps afford. The off-ramp traffic could be consolidated into one roadway and the on-ramp traffic could be rerouted and combined with another on-ramp to the south.

To more fully understand the site's mass and use potential, the panel viewed the site in relation to other well-known and active areas in the city. As shown on the following page, the site is large enough to fit Charles Schwab field or several blocks of the city's beloved Old Market Square. These comparisons



ULI PANEL



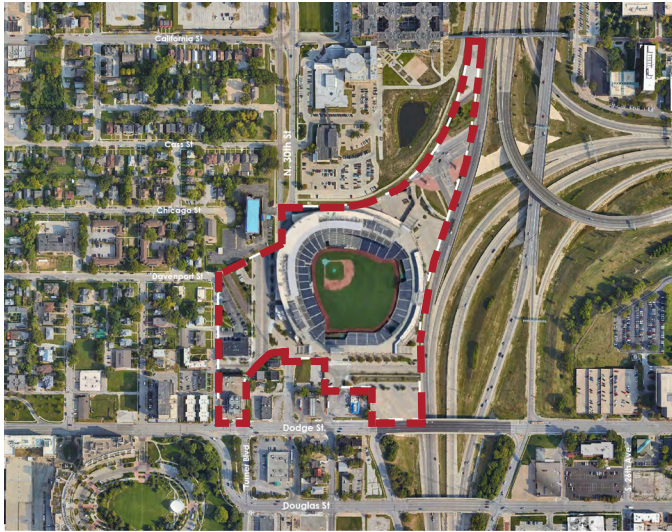
ULI PANEL



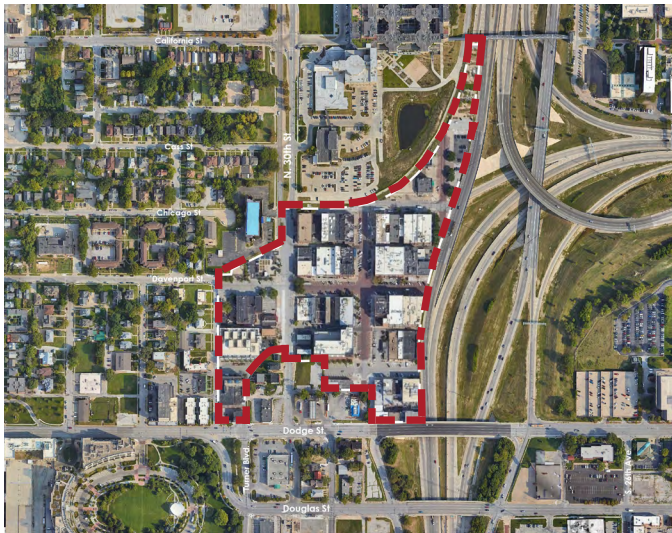
ULI PANEL

The panel's tour of the study area highlighted the vast expanses of unusable open space, the complexity of the existing road and ramp network, and the handful of homes and businesses that remain situated between the various roadways.

highlight the potential for significant development on the parcel. Combined with the site's proximity to downtown and other community assets, the site poses an exciting opportunity for new development in Omaha.



GOOGLE EARTH / ULI PANEL



GOOGLE EARTH / ULI PANEL

These aerial images show how other familiar spaces, Charles Schwab Stadium and five-plus blocks of Old Market Square, could fit within the study area footprint, highlighting the size of the vacant parcel.

## Urban Core Strategic Plan

Commissioned by the Greater Omaha Chamber and the Urban Core Committee, a March 2022 study evaluated the highway interchange parcel as a function of a broader study focused on improving the performance of the city's urban core. Recognizing that a more efficient use of the land around the interstate could open approximately six city blocks for development, the authors of the



URBAN CORE STRATEGIC PLAN

The 2022 planning work focused on Omaha's urban core and included initial concepts for the study area.



URBAN CORE STRATEGIC PLAN

The site as new developable land with improved and consolidated interstate ramping.

[Urban Core Strategic Plan](#) recommended shifting these parcels from State of Nebraska right-of-way into land that could be used to meet the community's needs, primarily additional housing development. The plan's authors understood how this shift could address several civic goals, including providing much needed housing in the area, converting the land a more productive use for the community, and returning the land to the City's tax rolls. These improvements would also support a stated goal of the [2010 Downtown Omaha Master Plan](#), helping to attract "roughly 30,000 jobs and 30,000 residents over a 30-year period."



URBAN CORE STRATEGIC PLAN

Designers envisioned consolidated ramping that could unlock land for new development in the area.



ULI PANEL



ULI PANEL



ULI PANEL

Housing, a hotel, and other development surrounds the site, which acts as a barrier to walkability and greater community connectivity.

## Stakeholder Views

The panel interviewed a wide variety of stakeholders about the challenges and opportunities they see at the site. While a list of themes can be found to the right, the following key factors influenced the panel's discussions and played a significant role in its final recommendations:

- The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) owns the land in question and does not have any plans for its modification. When asked about the potential for rerouting ramps or modifying the land uses on the site, a common reply was, "It's not a 'no.'" The site is not a priority, but the department is willing to listen to ideas.
- The surrounding neighborhood residents, many of whom remember the businesses and buildings that used to line the streets before the highway ramp construction, would like to see new uses at the site that could improve their quality of life, including new housing, affordable housing, and community amenities.
- Improved connections were important to all stakeholders, be they connections to and through the area or connections from the area to the surrounding neighborhoods and institutional assets. The land in the study area is an island today, isolated and acting as a barrier to all of the surrounding businesses, institutions, and residences.

## What the Panel Heard

Interviews with stakeholders—including municipal staff and officials, institutional leaders, community members, and more—uncovered the following themes.

- The parcel is leftover land
- The roadways are underutilized
- There are little bits of everything and competing interests in the area
- Find a better use and return on investment
- The boulevard system once crossed the site
- It should provide a regional draw and expand beyond the Omaha metro area
- The site should reconnect to the neighborhood and Creighton University
- Walkability and connectivity are priorities
- The existing pedestrian bridge is an asset
- Solutions should be multi-modal
- Safety and traffic and sound buffers are important
- 30th Street is changeable and could include a road diet or a new streetscape
- The panel should plan for the future without creating unintended consequences
- Green space should be at human scale
- Respect inclusion—neighbors want to be included in the process and decisions
- Transparency and engagement are key
- People appreciate the focus on the area
- Community members want a grocery store
- Affordable housing and density are needed
- The site should include community space and community amenities
- A framework is needed to enable progress
- The plans should be implementable



# The Stitch

In pursuit of the reclamation of land, improved connectivity, and new development in the study area, the panel envisioned **The Stitch**, which presents an opportunity to **reclaim the space between to strengthen the fabric of our community.**

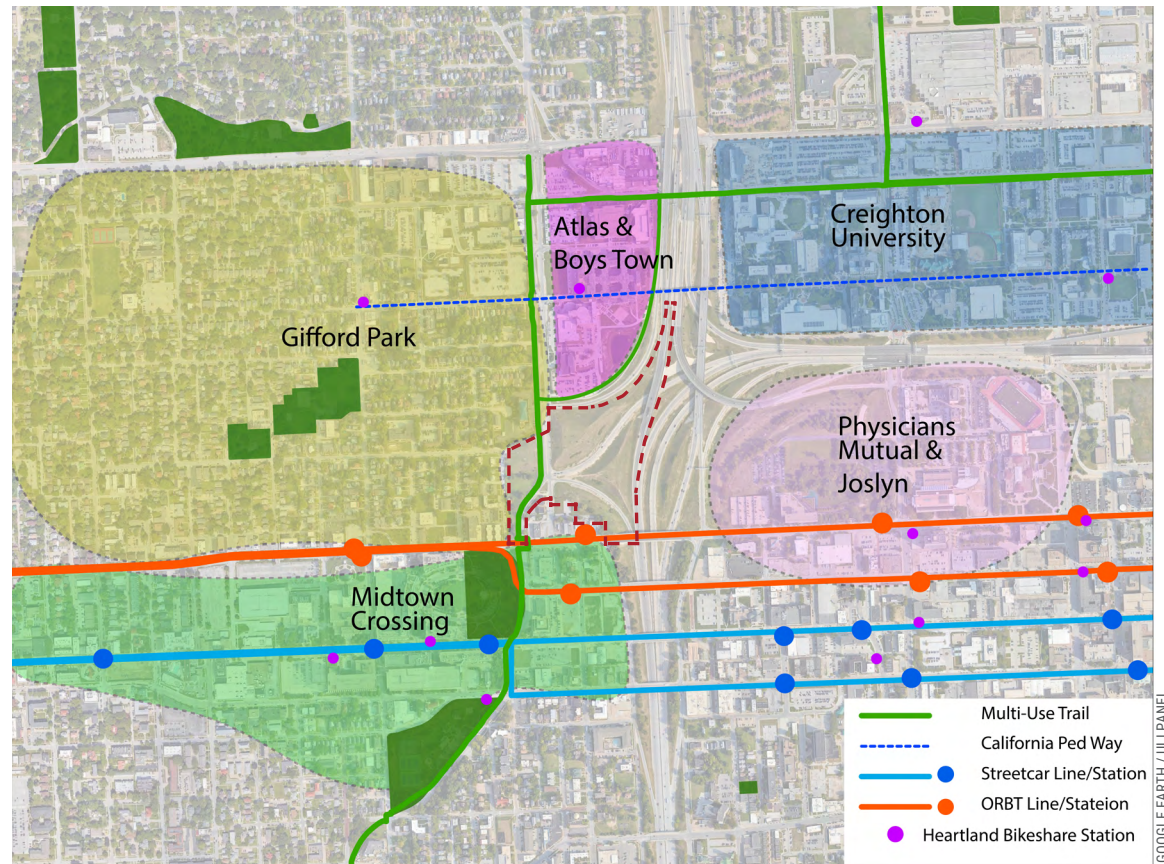
The map to the right depicts several of the community assets around the study area, including Gifford Park, The Atlas, Boys Town, Creighton University, Midtown Crossing, Physicians Mutual, and the Joslyn Art Museum. Highway infrastructure creates significant barriers to access between most of these assets and busy roadways separate others.

Public transit via the ORBT Line and forthcoming streetcar can facilitate additional east-west movement in the broader neighborhood. Outside of vehicular use, however, north-south connectivity remains limited. A multi-use trail and Heartland Bikeshare stations can assist in these north-south movements, but greater connectivity is needed, and reducing barriers to movement can help.

This vision for the study site was informed by previous plans, stakeholder input, and the professional expertise of the members of the 14-person panel. The recommendations that follow align with a two-pronged approach to the challenge: the creation of a design framework for the study site and its immediate surroundings; and an implementation strategy that can guide the work, bringing the site to life.



The panel's stakeholder interviews identified community priorities for the site.



The study site, outlined in red in the center, acts as a barrier to connectivity in all directions and limits direct access to the surrounding cultural and recreational assets, institutions, and residential neighborhoods that surround it.



# Design Framework

The panel's design framework brings to the forefront the goals and aspirations of previous plans and advances ideas for the site that can connect the surrounding neighborhoods and institutions, stitching the urban fabric back together, and creating something that is truly additive to the community.

The following five elements serve as the foundation for the panel's recommendations for improving circulation, enhancing connections around the study area, and preparing the study site for new development.

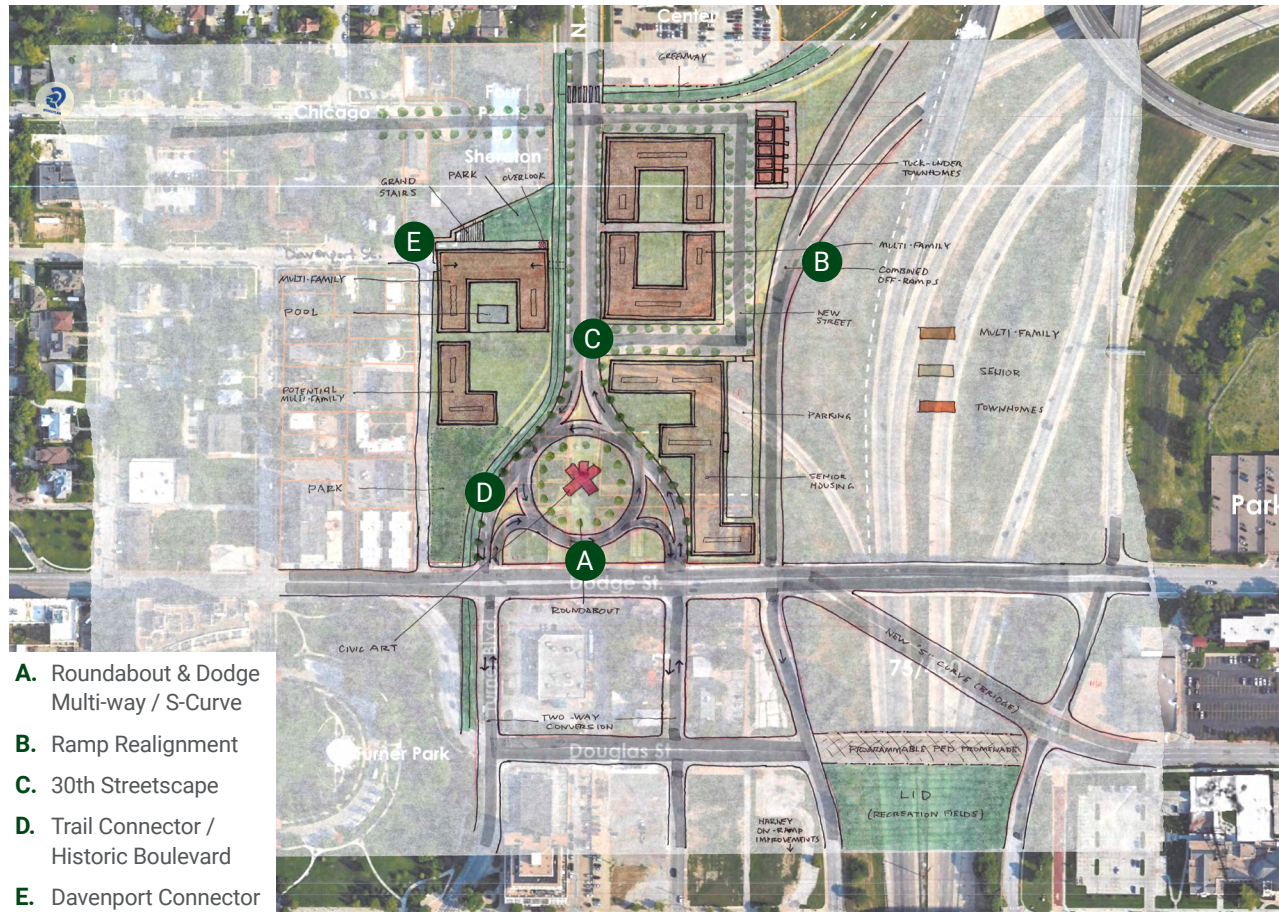
### Utilize a Roundabout Intersection, a Multi-way Boulevard on Dodge Street, and a New S-curve

Stakeholders consistently noted that the roadways in and around the study area and the connections to the surrounding street network were confusing and challenging to navigate. The intersection of 30th Street and Dodge Street was of particular concern, and the one-way nature of both Turner Boulevard and Park Avenue only added to navigation confusion.

- **Re-align the roadways using a roundabout.** Reconfiguring the roadway into a roundabout on the north side of Dodge Street can bring the roadways back into alignment with Turner Boulevard and Park Avenue creating clearer and safer paths of movement.
- **Return to two-way streets.** Turner Boulevard and Park Avenue should be

returned to two-way traffic to enhance traffic flow in the area and reduce the potential for navigation confusion.

- **Place iconic art at the center.** In the center of the roundabout, a signature civic art installation can add visual interest to the intersection and create an iconic entrance to the neighborhood beyond.
- **Redesign Dodge Street as a multi-way boulevard.** The panel re-envisioned the



The five primary elements of the new design framework for the site help restore connectivity across the site and improve access into the site and the surrounding neighborhood and street network.



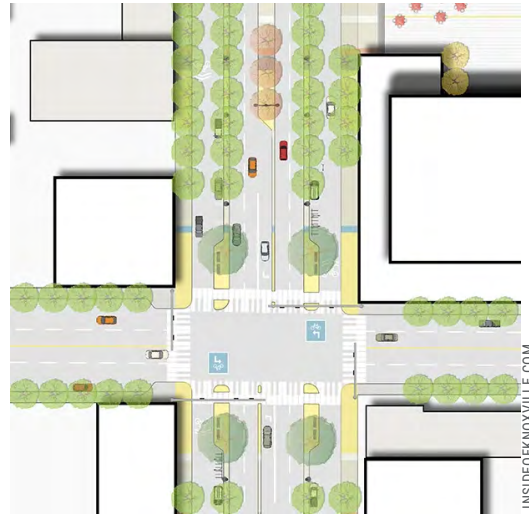
GOOGLE EARTH



ULI

The above images, in Paris and New York City, and the rendering to the right show how a boulevard can separate into through lanes and local access lanes.

wide expanse of Dodge Street as a multi-way boulevard similar to the historic boulevard system that once graced the area. As a multi-way boulevard, the center lanes would be dedicated to through traffic, and frontage lanes along the outside edges would provide access to businesses along the street and space



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for on-street parking. This redesign would encourage future redevelopment close to the edge of the slower frontage road, which would expand development potential. Sidewalks would be protected from faster traffic, and pedestrian crossings could be safer with the addition of pedestrian refuge islands created by the lane separations.

- **Shift the S-curve.** The panel also re-envisioned the current “S-curve” that cuts through the northeastern corner of Turner Park. By shifting the curve to a new bridge that would span I-480, as depicted in the Urban Core Strategic Plan, traffic is removed from community recreation space and moved to the highway corridor. This shift returns the corner of the park to recreational use.
- **Use Douglas Street as pedestrian space.** The Urban Core Strategic Plan envisions



HDR

This rendering shows how Dodge Street could be divided to provide safer passage for all modalities and increase development potential by encouraging building closer to the street.



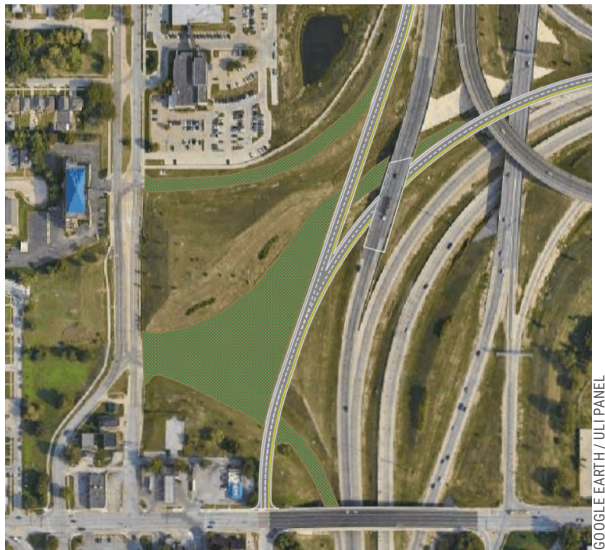
URBAN CORE STRATEGIC PLAN

This rendering of the Lid also shows a new S-curve over the highway and the conversion of Douglas Street into a pedestrian thoroughfare.

capping the depressed lanes of I-480 for two blocks between Douglas and Harney Streets. This cap or highway lid would provide new open space in the area, which could balance the conversion of the study site's unusable open space into development, and could be used for active recreation and ballfields, which are currently lacking in the surrounding neighborhoods. With the new S-curve bridging the highway and carrying traffic, Douglas Street, which forms the northern edge of the lid, could be converted from an active roadway into programmable pedestrian space for the lid.

### Realign the Ramps

With an estimated 10,000 vehicles accessing the three interstate ramps in the study area,



The ramp realignment and consolidation across the site will help reclaim acres of land for more productive use.

there is significant room for improvement in roadway efficiency and enhanced land use.

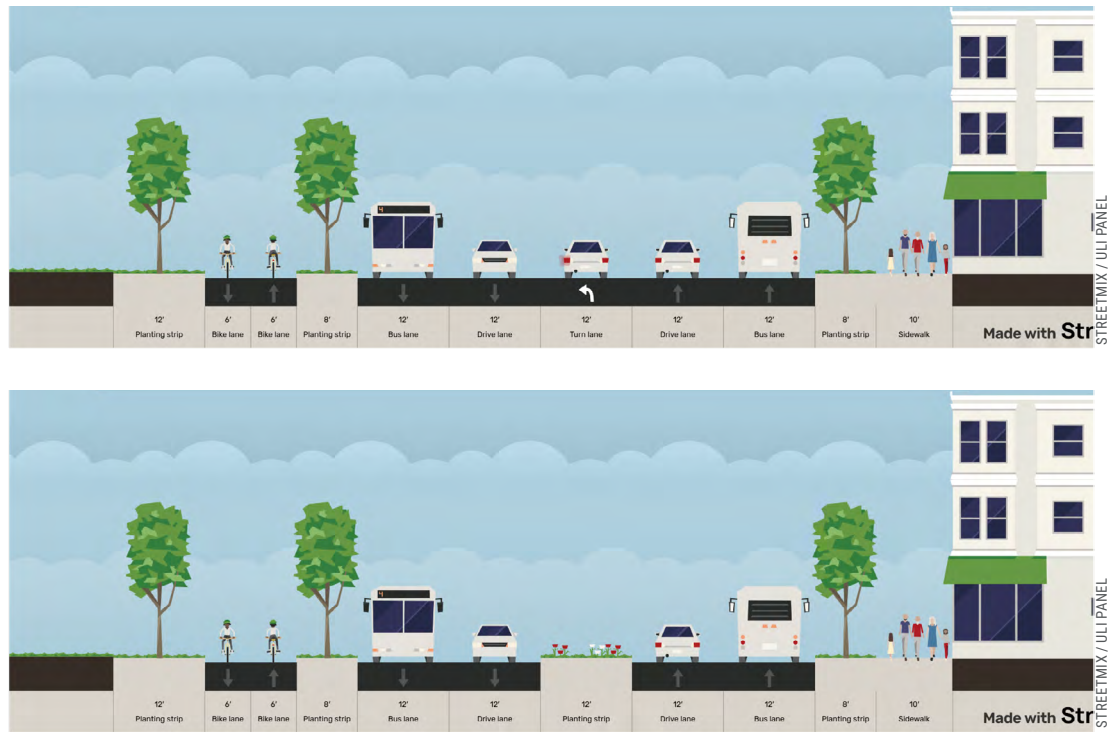
- Consolidate the off-ramps.** The two off-ramps into the site, one from US Highway 75 traveling south and the other from I-480 traveling west, could be combined into one off-ramp that would serve both roadways and intersect at a new four-way intersection at Dodge and 29th Streets. While there are significant topography changes in this area, the fill that will be removed from the "hills" between the current ramps could be

shifted to this consolidated off-ramp, ultimately creating an at-grade roadway.

- Move the on-ramp traffic south.** With an existing on-ramp at Harney Street, the traffic entering the interstate on the study site's current on-ramp could be moved to an improved and wider two-lane on-ramp at Harney Street.

### Improve the 30th Street Streetscape

The roadway along 30th Street is overly wide for the volume of traffic it handles, which



These renderings depict how 30th Street could be redesigned to create more space on the edges for pedestrians and trail use while still allowing adequate room for vehicular traffic and a possible dedicated bus lane. The top image uses a center turn lane at the approach to intersections while the bottom image shows how a planted median would occur along the rest of the roadway.

encourages speeding in the area and makes the wide pedestrian crossing even more challenging.

- **Reduce the roadway to three lanes.**  
The current four lanes of traffic should be reduced to two lanes with a median that shifts to a center turn lane when nearing and at intersections. This reduction allows room for the addition of a dedicated bus lane should the ORBT extension connect north through the area. If the bus route moves elsewhere, the space for the bus lane could shift into on-street parking or be incorporated into the planting strip and buffer between the cars, sidewalk, and trail.

- **Expand and enhance pedestrian assets.**  
The land reclaimed from the roadway can also be used to widen the existing sidewalk and trail system that runs along the roadway, creating more effective and wider buffers between the roadway and the pedestrians and bicyclists beyond. This road narrowing will also make crossing the roadway east-west easier and safer for all.

### Enhance the Trail Connector and Leverage the Historic Boulevard

As a function of narrowing the roadway, additional attention should be paid and land dedicated to the trail system that connects the area from north to south along

the west side of 30th Street. Following the path of the historic Lincoln Boulevard that once wound through the area, this trail connector will enhance the walkability of the community, which was a frequent concern of stakeholders.

- **Enhance the trail experience.** The land gained through the road diet can be used to widen the trail into a 12-foot wide path from Dodge Street to Burt Street. This widening also allows the trail to separate north- and south-bound users.
- **Connect into a protected trail network.** The enhancements to the trail in the study area will provide important connections to the system of protected trails, including the Market-to-Midtown



The historic boulevard that was once in the area is marked by the yellow hashed line.



The existing trail space along 30th Street (left) could be widened and improved, creating space for a “heels and wheels” division or separated into north- and southbound lanes (right).



Bikeway on Farnam Street, and the Field Club Trail to the south, and to the north Burt Street, Mike Fahey Street Bikeway, and the North Omaha Trail.

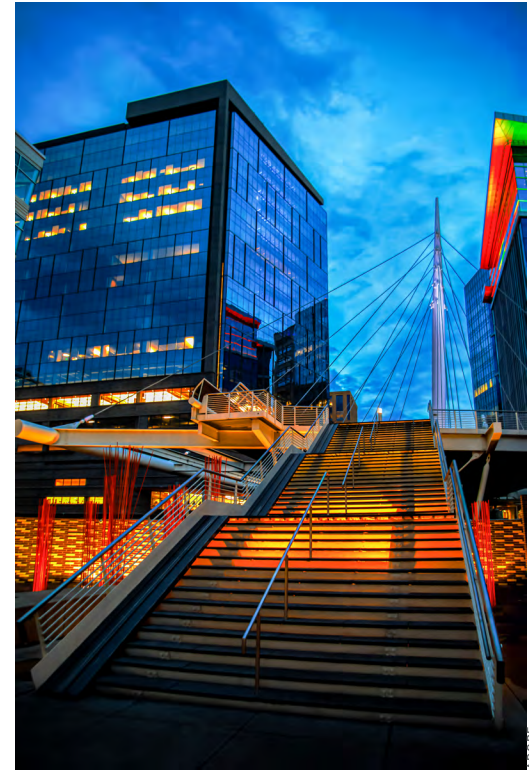
### Davenport Connector

The area between Davenport Street and the study site is marked by a 20-foot grade change sloping west to east, and vehicular

traffic does not connect through to 30th Street. While the panel is not recommending that the street reconnect, it does stress that other connections should be facilitated, including visual connections through an overlook at the terminus of Davenport and physical connections through a grand stair that would help people move between Davenport, 30th Street, and beyond.



Using the topography on the western side of the study site, a building could tuck parking into the hillside and position all residential spaces above grade.



The Millennium Bridge in Denver, at the western end of the 14th Street pedestrian mall connects pedestrians between elevations and adds a striking element to the streetscape.

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# Implementation and Strategy

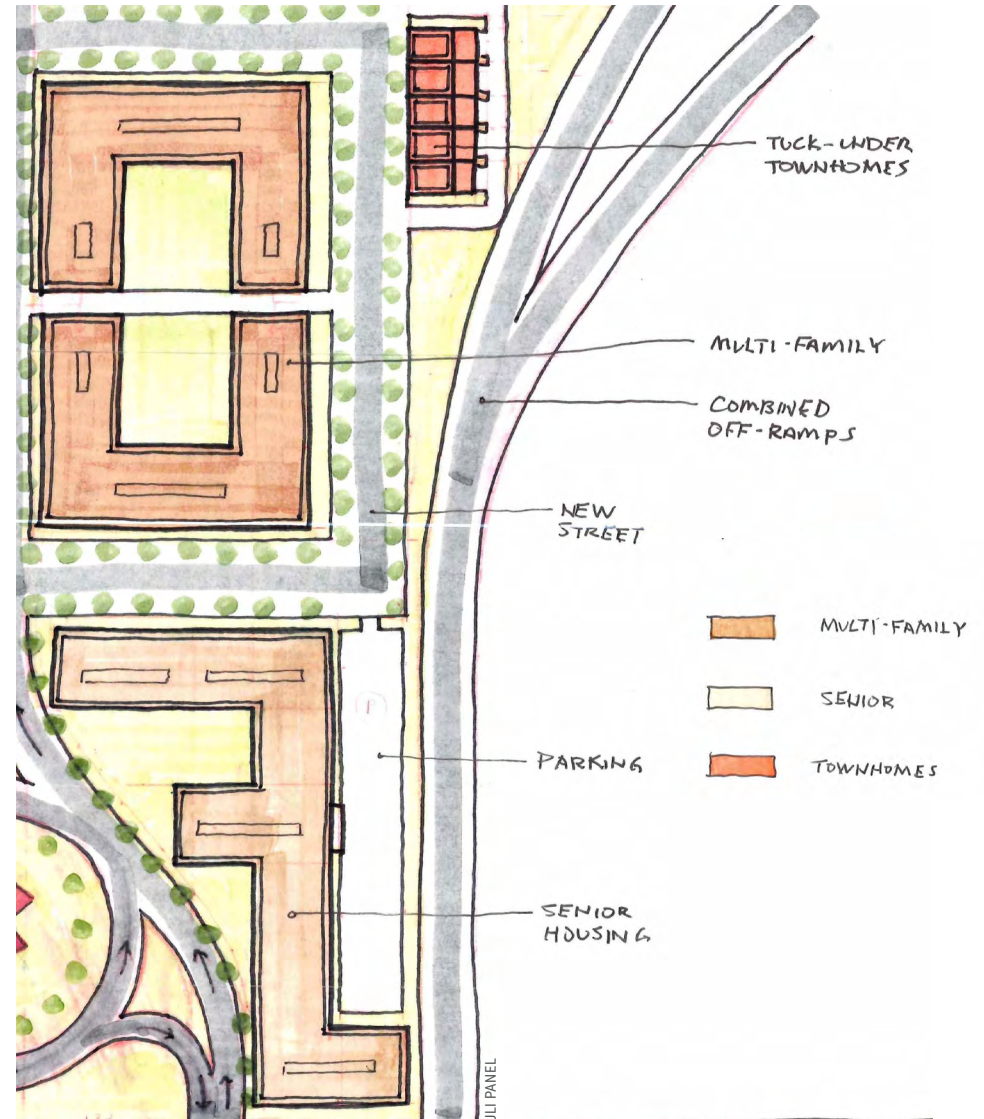
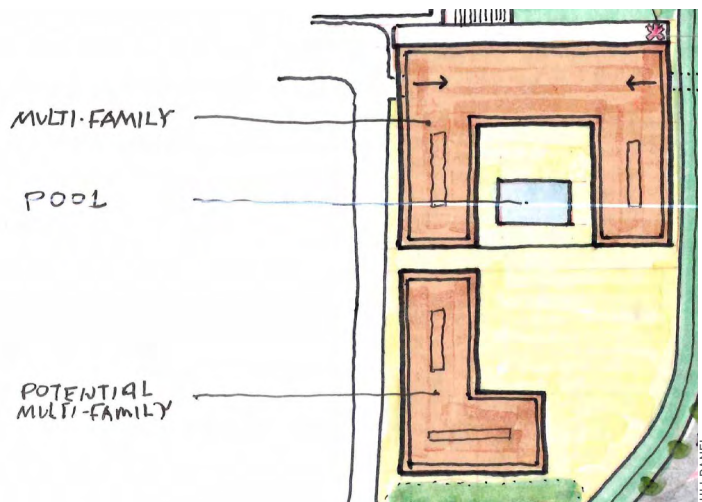
As the panel contemplated the land that could be available for development, once the ramping infrastructure was rerouted, it took time to consider previous planning efforts, current market drivers, and the wants and needs of the community as shared during the stakeholder interviews. Additional housing, particularly affordable housing, rose to the top of the list as did some additional retail and other commercial uses.

### Development Potential

Given the urban nature of the surrounding environment and the density that would be required to offset the costs of preparing the site for development, the panel recommends a mix of uses at the site marked by a predominance of multi-family residential offerings and few retail offerings to help activate the ground floors of the buildings.

Once the ramp infrastructure is re-routed and new roads installed, the panel estimated that 12.5 acres of the site will be potentially developable. Using a floor area ratio (FAR) of 1.2, similar to yet more dense than a potentially comparable development, the

panel estimated that the site holds potential for approximately 650,000 square feet of new space. (The 1.2 FAR takes into account the additional density that will be required to offset the costs of the ramp realignment). The 650,000 square feet would include 500



new housing units of which 240 would be affordable. The proposed mix of uses across the site is as follows:

- 364,000 square feet of multi-family residential space, including affordable units;
- 123,500 square feet of senior living space, including affordable units;
- 84,500 square feet of retail space;
- 45,500 square feet of office space; and
- 26,000 square feet of entertainment space.

## Cost Considerations

Using the development scenario above and factoring in the site preparation work, the panel estimated that the total project cost of delivering 650,000 square feet of space on the site could cost approximately \$214 million.

### Predevelopment Costs

Of the total cost to develop the site, the panel estimated that \$31 million of City-led funding would be required to pay for predevelopment work including:

- **Demolition of ramps and roads.** The on- and off-ramps will need to be removed as will the roadways that connect to the surrounding street network.
- **Construction of new ramps.** There will be new construction associated with the reconfiguration of the off-ramps into one continuous ramp that ends at Dodge Street. (The costs associated with ramp work south of Dodge, to accommodate

the additional on-ramp volume, were not included in this estimate.)

- **Utility work.** There are utilities that run along the 30th Street roadway and in other portions of the site. All utilities will need to be identified, relocated, reconfigured, or removed to make way for the new roadways and development.
- **Pad and road work.** The land will need to be graded and prepared for building pads and a new road network, including the continuation of Chicago Street to the east and connecting it to potential new segments of both 29th Street and Capitol Avenue.
- **30th Street improvements.** The reconfiguration of the intersection of 30th and Dodge Streets into a new roundabout is factored into this estimate as is the consolidation of the 30th Street roadway into one travel lane in each direction with the center turn lane and median.

### Development Costs

With total development costs estimated at \$214 million, which would be borne by the site developer, the panel also divided up the costs into hard costs, soft costs, and anticipated acquisition costs.

- **Hard Cost: \$162 million.** This estimate includes the construction cost for the new internal road network, the utilities, and the vertical improvements, including the new consolidated ramp and buildings.

- **Soft Cost: \$35 million.** This estimate includes the design, engineering, legal, and financing costs associated with the development of the entire site.
- **Site Acquisition (to developer): \$17 million.** This cost is explained in greater detail below.

## Acquisition of NDOT-owned Land

In estimating the potential acquisition costs of the land at the study site, the panel evaluated the potential of paying fair market value for the NDOT right-of-way. Fair market value is based on an appraisal of the land, which is typically determined by an evaluation of comparable properties.

### Challenges with Fair-market Appraisal

In this instance the study site becomes quickly difficult to appraise due to the following factors:

- **Lack of comparable sales.** There are no real estate transactions in Omaha that involve land that could be deemed comparable to the site.
- **Lack of access.** Future uses at the site will be influenced by available access points, which are heavily impacted by the interstate infrastructure, roadways, and ramping across the site. One of the parcels within the site is landlocked and currently lacks any available access point.
- **Limited uses.** In its current state, there are very few if any viable uses that could be located at the site to help determine appraisal value.



ULI/PANEL

The site does not fit into typical fair-market appraisal strategies and could instead be ripe for an exception to NDOT's disposition requirements.

- **Value adjustments.** The site's value will be impacted by surrounding nuisances, including traffic across and around the site and blighting influences at nearby properties, all of which will adjust the value down.
- **Timing.** The timing of a potential appraisal can also prove problematic. An appraisal would likely occur after the infrastructure improvements are made, the costs of which will be borne by the City of Omaha (and thus taxpayers) and then factored into the value of the appraisal. The result would not be an accurate representation of the value of the land.

There is also an important benefit to NDOT through its sale of this right-of-way. After selling the 20 acres, NDOT will no longer be responsible for the ongoing maintenance across the site, including mowing, tree maintenance, stormwater management, and more.

### Exceptions to Fair Market Valuation

There are exceptions to using fair market value in property appraisal for NDOT land. According to the department's [Right-of-Way Manual \(May 2023\)](#), fair market payment may not be required in the following instances.

**Exceptions.** "Exceptions to the general requirement for charging fair market value or rent may be approved by the Federal Highway Administration in the following situations:

- "6.04A2a. When the Department and/or Local Public Agency, clearly shows that

an exception is in the overall public interest for social, environmental, or economic purposes; non-proprietary governmental use; or uses under 23 U.S.C. 142(f), Public Transportation.

- "6.04A2d. Use for bikeways and pedestrian walkways in accordance with 23 CFR Part 652."

In the case of the panel's suggested development of the parcel and reconfiguration into a more accessible, connected, and walkable site that delivers additional housing to the area, the case should be made for an exception to the fair-market valuation of the site.

### Social and Economic Impact

The panel evaluated the potential social and economic impacts further, in support of a conveyance of the land in the study site to the City of Omaha, and estimated the following benefits could come to the community through the development of the site.

- **Development impact - \$175 million.** The construction work related to the development the panel envisioned could create 500 or more direct construction jobs and over 300 additional support positions. The total estimated economic impact of the development could reach \$175 million.
- **Estimated ongoing impact - \$100 million annually.** Once complete, the panel estimates that 160 primary jobs will be created, filling the proposed commercial office space, and 148

secondary jobs could be created through the retail space proposed and management of the housing units. The ongoing total estimated economic impact is anticipated to reach \$100 million annually.

- **Property tax receipts - \$3.5 million.** Today, as interstate right-of-way, the land at the study site is not producing any tax revenue for the City. In pursuit of development at the site, the panel recommends the formation of a tax increment financing (TIF) district to capture initial tax revenue in order to finance the considerable infrastructure improvements needed at the site to enable development. Once the repayment of the TIF is complete, the panel estimates that future property tax receipts would reach \$3.5 million annually, which could help fund public schools and other municipal services.
- **Enhanced safety.** Stakeholders noted issues with safety in the area, created primarily by speeding vehicles on the on- and off-ramps and experienced by pedestrians crossing the area's expansive roadways. The development proposed by the panel will create further separation between highway and neighborhood traffic and create intersections that are both easier to navigate for drivers and safer for pedestrians to cross.

- **Improved connectivity.** The development posed by the panel is founded on improved connectivity across the site and into the surrounding neighborhood. This connectivity will benefit the public as will the improved transportation infrastructure created by the consolidation of roadways and improved intersections.
- **Additional housing.** By delivering approximately 500 housing units, 240 of which are estimated to be affordable units, to the market, the community will benefit from additional housing, particularly affordable housing supply.

### Financing Mechanisms

Financing a development of this magnitude will likely require a variety of sources to fund the work through to completion.

#### Predevelopment Financing

The anticipated \$31 million in predevelopment costs at the site could come from three primary sources: TIF, land sales, and transportation bonds.

- **Tax Increment Financing.** The panel estimates that a portion of the TIF funding in the area could generate \$13,300,000 to pay for approximately 43 percent of predevelopment costs.
- **Land sales.** Once the land is improved, it is estimated that the enhanced value of the land and associated sale to

developers could generate \$16,120,000 to cover 52 percent of predevelopment costs.

- **Transportation bonds.** The TIF and land sales estimates leave a five percent financing gap that additional tools such as transportation bonds could cover.

#### Development Financing

Financing the development costs will likely require a complex capital stack layered with a mix of both public and private sources. For this site, a public-private partnership is likely in order and could prove to be a transformational project for the city.

- **Tax Increment Financing.** Again, TIF will play an important role in funding the early work at the site and the continued improvements needed as the individual buildings are constructed. At this stage, the TIF will require an amendment to the Community Redevelopment Area so the entire area can be deemed highly blighted and therefore TIF eligible, which will allow a 20-year extension and maximization of TIF funding.
- **New Market Tax Credits (NMTC).** NMTCs can provide an incentive for investment in low-income communities for community development and economic growth. These credits typically apply to commercial projects, but there are applications for residential development as well. The tax credit is sold to investors, delivering equity to the

developer and valuable credits against federal income taxes for the investors.

- **Multi-family Low-income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC).** LIHTCs are a tax credit that subsidizes the acquisition, construction, and rehabilitation of affordable rental housing for low- and moderate-income tenants. These credits are likewise sold to investors, delivering equity to the developer.
- **Development loan and equity.** A traditional development loan (debt) will form one of the layers of the capital stack as will straight equity from other investors.

### Potential Return and Funding Gap

Using the above financing scenarios and estimated development costs, the panel anticipates that there will be a 5.1 percent return on equity and a 5.6 percent return on investment.

Without additional resources, the 5.1 percent return will not be adequate to attract developers to the project. Additional incentives will be required and philanthropic support could provide the additional financial resources needed to generate a more attractive return on the development.

Additional funding sources might include:

- **Occupation Tax.** An occupation tax, also referred to as a “privilege or license tax,” is a tax on businesses within a defined boundary and typically applies to hotel operators, car rental companies, telecommunications providers, restaurants, and bars.
- **Street Improvement District (SID) and Business Improvement District (BID).** Improvement districts also relate to defined geographies and collect a separate tax that is then applied to improvements related to the streetscape, in the instance of SIDs or in the case of BIDs, physical improvements to public areas, facade grants, promotions, programming, and more.
- **Philanthropic donations.** Omaha is home to a notable number of philanthropies that continue to support important work across the community. A transformational project, such as the one envisioned here by the panel, may be just the type of project one of the region’s philanthropic organizations may be willing to support financially.



The development potential at this site, and its potential to deliver a substantial number of new housing units to Omaha, could provide the type of transformational impact philanthropic donors may seek.



# Development Delivery

The conveyance of land from the State of Nebraska DOT into the hands of capable developers will take time and require a clear process to ensure the land is available for the intended use, maximizes the potential value for the public, and is financed in a manner that makes the potential return attractive enough to warrant private sector attention.

The panel outlined the following path for development delivery of all 20 acres of the study site.

- 1. Issue City bonds.** The City of Omaha will first issue bonds to cover the cost of highway ramp demolition and related infrastructure development.
- 2. NDOT makes improvements.** Leveraging the City's bonds, NDOT will proceed with improvements to the highway and ramping to create the new combined off-ramp through the eastern edge of the site.
- 3. Land is replatted.** Working together, NDOT and the City of Omaha will need to plat the property in its new configuration.
- 4. Land acquisition occurs.** The City of Omaha will acquire the property from NDOT for a nominal sum (\$1).
- 5. Development RFP issued.** The City of Omaha issues a request for proposal (RFP) for development work at the site.
- 6. Infrastructure improvements are made to the land.** Either the City of Omaha or the City working together with the selected developer(s) make the infrastructure improvements to the site, including roadwork, utilities, stormwater improvements, etc.
- 7. Vertical development begins.** As the infrastructure improvements are completed and allow, vertical development begins on the site.



The Gifford Park neighborhood is seen along the western edge of the site at Davenport Street.

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# Conclusion

The panel's recommendations for the 20 acres at the study site are built upon a foundation of connections and reconnections, delivering resources the community needs, and providing opportunities to reclaim space that the community once enjoyed.

The Stitch concept draws from regional and urban core strategies that civic leaders and community members alike have vetted.

The Stitch scenario provides a public return on investment for the community. Although the development costs are not insignificant, the cost of doing nothing should also be considered, which includes the continued separation and disconnection created by this site and the barrier it creates between the surrounding neighborhoods, cherished Omaha institutions, and other community amenities.

The Stitch creates value for the City, the community, and the partners and delivers broad community benefits. The value is both tangible, as with the new affordable residences residents can call "home," and intangible, as with the enhanced sense of community and belonging in an area that is no longer separated by unusable open space and massive concrete infrastructure.



It is time to reclaim this space for the community.

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# About the Panel



**Scott Dobbe**  
Panel Co-Chair  
Omaha By Design

Scott Dobbe, AIA, is an architect and advocate for people-centered urban design. As

Executive Director of Omaha by Design, he leads a cross-disciplinary team dedicated to shaping a more vibrant, livable, and resilient city. Through policy innovation, community engagement, and design leadership, Scott and his team advance initiatives in land use and development, transportation planning, public art, affordable housing, and other key civic priorities.

A native of Kearney, Nebraska, Scott holds a Bachelor of Science in Architecture from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and a Master of Architecture from The Ohio State University. His leadership extends beyond his role at Omaha by Design—he is a founding member of the ULI Nebraska Executive Committee, a Leadership Omaha graduate, and a recipient of the *Midlands Business Journal* 40 Under 40 award. He also serves as Chair of the City of Omaha Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission, where he champions the preservation and adaptive reuse of the city’s historic assets. Scott’s work is driven by a belief that well-designed places have the power to strengthen communities, foster economic opportunity, and enhance quality of life for all.



**Abby Newsham**  
Panel Co-Chair  
Olsson

Abby is a seasoned urban designer and planning consultant with nearly a decade of experience

shaping context-driven, sustainable, and pragmatic solutions. A proud Midwest native, she is deeply committed to enhancing the economic and social resilience of small- and mid-sized communities through thoughtful urban design and planning strategies.

Driven by a belief in the transformative power of grassroots initiatives, Abby emphasizes incremental development, human-scaled design, and the thoughtful design of public spaces to foster vibrant and resilient communities. Her expertise lies in championing bottom-up strategies that empower residents and inspire meaningful change, reflecting her vision of urban design as a catalyst for stronger, more connected communities.

Beyond her project work, Abby actively contributes to the field of urban planning through her advocacy and leadership. She is the founder of Small Developers of KC, an initiative focused on building the capacity of local entrepreneurs seeking to improve their own neighborhoods. She is a member of the Congress of the New Urbanism and host of Strong Towns’ Upzoned podcast. Abby also co-chairs the Urban Land Institute’s Technical Assistance Program, and was formerly the co-chair of their Young Leaders Group.



**Doug Bisson**  
HDR

Doug Bisson serves as HDR’s Central Region Urban Design, Planning and Landscape Architecture Principal

and has expertise in urban design and redevelopment. He is an expert in bringing together key city leaders, business owners, and residents to stimulate economic development and neighborhood revitalization through the use of environmentally friendly, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development practices. He was the Project Manager/Principal for several notable initiatives within the region, including Aksarben Village, Destination Midtown, the Downtown Omaha 2030 Master Plan, the University Village Master Plan, the River’s Edge Master Plan, the Des Moines Market District Master Plan, and the Urban Core Strategic Plan. In addition, Doug serves on numerous community-based boards and working groups.



## **Matt Cavanaugh**

### **Boyd Jones Construction**

Matt is a dynamic leader with a goal-oriented mindset and a proven

track record in the construction industry. With experience spanning roles as a Project Engineer, Project Manager, and Superintendent, Matt brings a detailed project management approach that ensures projects are completed efficiently and successfully. Matt specializes in scheduling, constructability analysis, change management, and quality assurance. Known for his strategic vision/ planning and hands-on leadership style, Matt has a proven track record of successfully delivering complex projects on time and within budget. His ability to energize and motivate teams fosters a collaborative environment where excellence thrives, ensuring high-quality results and stakeholder satisfaction. With a strong commitment to continuous improvement and innovation, Matt consistently seeks ways to enhance project performance and team dynamics, making him a driving force in any construction endeavor.



## **Kurt Cisar**

### **Holland Basham Architects**

Kurt Cisar, AIA is a Principal at Holland Basham Architects (HBA) and has been with

the firm since 2005. He is a leader in master planning, commercial real estate developments and focuses on HBA's workplace sector, including projects such as Applied Underwriters and the Crossroads and Sterling Ridge developments. An Omaha native, he is active in the community and currently serves as the Chair on Omaha's Urban Design Review Board. He is also an alum of Leadership Omaha (Class 40) and MBJ's 40 under 40.



## **Manne Cook**

### **Lamp Rynearson**

As a creative entrepreneur, urban planner, and spatial practitioner Manuel (Manne) works to create vibrant places and more

livable built environments. Nearly a decade of experience working with federal, state, local, and grassroots agencies and a refined skill set that includes city planning, community engagement, community development, placemaking, cartography, geographic information systems (GIS), and real estate development. He specializes in the planning and development of projects and initiatives that leverage community assets, art, history, and culture to create more livable, people oriented, environments of health and healing.

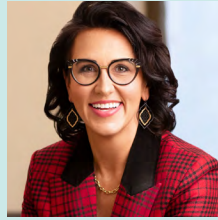


**Alec Gorynski**  
Greater Omaha  
Chamber

Alec Gorynski is a community and economic development leader with nearly twenty years of

leadership and practitioner experience across private, nonprofit, and government sectors. Currently Alec serves as the Sr. Vice President of Economic Development for the Greater Omaha Chamber and Greater Omaha Economic Development Partnership. In this role Alec leads the development and execution of the economic development strategy for the greater Omaha region including business attraction, site preparation, small business development, workforce development, and equitable economic development. Prior leadership include serving as the President and CEO of Lincoln Community Foundation, Vice President of Community Development for FNBO and President of the FNBO Community Development Corporation, Vice President for Community Development at Bank of the West, Deputy Grant Administrator for the City of Omaha Office of the Mayor, and prior roles in economic development, community planning, workforce development, and community services.

Alec's career also includes extensive professional community service where he co-founded three community development financial institutions, has been appointed by the Governor to two State of Nebraska boards, and has held numerous board, officer, and committee roles with over a dozen foundations and community development organizations. Alec holds a Masters of Public Administration from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and Bachelor of Science degree from Peru State College.



**Amy L. Lawrenson**  
Baird Holm

Amy L. Lawrenson is a partner at the law firm of Baird Holm LLP. Her practice focuses

on commercial real estate, construction and renewable energy matters. She represents developers, investors, and owners of commercial real estate in all aspects of real estate including acquisition, financing, sale and development of real property, leasing, management, land use development and zoning, mineral rights, title review and construction contracting. Amy regularly represents developers, investors and lenders of wind and solar energy generation projects. She currently serves as a member of Baird Holm's Executive Committee and is also the Chair of the firm's Real Estate practice group.



**Jon McCarville**  
Olsson

Jonathan is an accomplished engineer and group leader for Olsson's Site Design team.

He oversees project management, quality control, and project execution within his group to ensure the successful completion of projects. Jonathan brings a diverse breadth of professional experience, ranging from large-scale redevelopment projects to small building updates. He has worked on various types of land development projects, including healthcare, industrial, residential, commercial, and transportation projects. His expertise in site civil engineering encompasses mass grading, drainage analysis, stormwater and utility design, stormwater pollution prevention plans, permitting, and data management. Jonathan has led the civil engineering efforts on several master plans, including those for healthcare systems, college campuses, military complexes, and municipalities. He collaborates closely with stakeholders to find creative solutions to challenges that may arise during a project. Jonathan is a member of the Society of American Military Engineers, the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, and the Engineers Club of Omaha. He was also a member of the Leadership Sarpy County Class of 2021.



## Mark McLaughlin

### City of Omaha

Mark McLaughlin is an urban planner at the City of Omaha. As a long range planner, Mark is planning and

implementing active transportation throughout the city. Prior to working at the City of Omaha, he worked as an urban planning consultant across the Midwest working improve active transportation, land use policies, and housing affordability.



## Jacquelyn Morrison

### City of Omaha, Mayor's Office

Jacquelyn Morrison currently serves as Deputy Chief of Staff for

Economic Development Mayor Jean Stothert where she coordinates economic development projects for the City of Omaha. Jacquelyn attended law school at Georgetown University and received her bachelor's degree in accounting from George Washington University. Prior to working for the City, Jacquelyn worked as a tax attorney for both the Nebraska Departments of Economic Development and Revenue. Jacquelyn is passionate about community redevelopment and using neighborhood amenities to spur economic development.

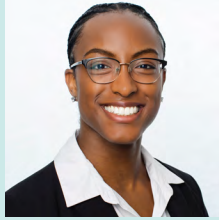


## Kene Okigbo

### RDG Planning and Design

Kene Okigbo, ASLA is a licensed landscape architect in RDG Planning & Design's

Urban Design & Planning Studio. He graduated from North Dakota State University, earning his Bachelor of Landscape Architecture and Bachelor of Science in Environmental Design. He considers design of the public realm a heavy responsibility and he values the lessons shared by his industry peers. Kene imagines new mediums through which innovative voices in landscape architecture can be amplified and is fascinated by emerging project typologies and technologies that can offer solutions to pervasive global and societal issues. He and his work have been recognized with numerous awards and he is a frequent speaker at universities and conferences across the country.



## Jewel Rodgers

### Noddle Companies

Jewel is a Development Manager at Noddle Companies, where she supports new commercial

development, brokerage, and special projects across the Midwest. She is the co-creator of PlaceMade, a revolving resident-led initiative focused on transforming blighted areas into community amenities, creating privately held spaces for public use in North Omaha. Jewel's expertise extends to urban engagement, having worked with the institutional and grassroots clients to lead neighborhood-scale community engagement strategies. Her grassroots accomplishments include the completion of Tierra Park, a pocket park at 2413 Spencer St, and Caden's Corner, a skate ramp and community garden at 3703 Florence Blvd.

In addition to her real estate and urban development work, Jewel is an interdisciplinary poet, performer, and visual artist. Jewel is the 2025 Nebraska State Poet and has been recognized as a three-time Omaha Entertainment and Arts Award nominee for Best Performance Poet in Omaha and a three-time TEDx speaker. Her artistic practice complements her professional endeavors, creating dynamic connections between the built environment and creative expression.



## Ryan Zabrowski

### Investors Realty

Ryan Zabrowski has developed a reputation for expertly handling some of the most complex commercial

real estate projects in the Omaha Metro area. Clients trust Ryan to represent them by negotiating fair pricing and terms and by helping them solve any issues that arise.

Ryan's expertise is in working on complex projects including multiple parcel assemblage, user representation in a purchase or build-to-suit, and buildings that may have a functional or economic obsolescence. He specializes in selling older, difficult, and often complicated properties, and has advised investors and users in the development or redevelopment of their real estate assets. His experience with clients includes sales and leasing of industrial, commercial, and investment properties, as well as assisting tenants, owners and investors.

Ryan enjoys active industry involvement in The Society of Industrial and Office Realtors, The Counselors of Real Estate, and The Urban Land Institute. Outside of the office, Ryan gives his time and talent to a number of nonprofit organizations in Omaha. Ryan and his wife Molly are proud parents to daughter Emily. Ryan is an avid runner and enjoys reading and golf.