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## Introduction

Since its beginnings, the City of Minden has been known for its progressive, determined spirit. A brief glance in Minden's history book tells the story of the somewhat hostile takeover of the Kearney County seat from the community of Lowell. Even then, these settlers knew that to provide the best quality of life for their residents it would be critical to capture the promising opportunity of jobs and subsequent capital investment that would surely follow the development of the county seat.

The same foresight that the community exhibited in securing Minden as the Kearney County seat has continued to be evident through the apparent community support of many subsequent development efforts. From the tourism venues of Pioneer Village and the Minden Opera House to growth in services through the Kearney County Health System, the community readily exhibits a strong understanding of the correlation between the vitality of the local economy and the quality of place.

Much like it was in the beginning, the City of Minden is sitting at a crossroads. A community that was once largely agrarian is becoming increasingly more industrial and tourism-focused, causing a shift in employment, housing needs, and demographic composition. Arterial routes that help to keep farm equipment and large trucks off of busier residential and commercial neighborhood streets also help to keep cars carrying people from frequenting the many community retailers. Services that were once adequate for the population are now insufficient for the change in demographics.

As a result, the City of Minden set forth to create a plan that provides a tangible set of options to weave together the finest of their historical attributes, such as a budding tourism industry, a beautiful downtown and a great educational and health care system with prospective new development opportunity to ensure that the same spirit of progressivism and determination be carried through to the next generation of opportunity.

The plan that follows is intended to be a multiple-phased approach to improving the physical, economic and social dynamics of Minden. The InVision Minden plan is the first step in this process. Through analysis of both quantitative market facts and collection of qualitative community values obtained through visioning exercises, design and program suggestions have been created to provide community solutions or enhancement.

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### Population and Employment Trends

An analysis of population trends is an important element to understanding Minden's demographic and market demands.

Table 1.1 shows that Minden is unlike most rural Nebraska communities in that the community has not seen dramatic declines in population over the past 40 years.

Table 1.2 indicates that Minden's sustaining population can largely be attributed to the diversification of the local base economy. Smaller communities generally tend to be agrarian and, with increased mechanization, farm production jobs have decreased in availability. Fewer jobs in the base economic sector of a community leads to less revenue to spend on goods and services; hence, population losses from both sectors have become the result in many rural towns. Minden's employment data shows a large number of local concentration in manufacturing, educational services/health care, and retail trade employment. More diversification of the local economy has aided in sustaining the economic base of Minden.

It is important to note the data in Table 1.2 does not include employment in the county; hence, it is assumed that there are many additional members of the greater community employed in production agriculture that are not statistically represented here.

The composition of employment makeup in Minden is important for two key reasons. First, it is a firm indicator as to the receipt of tax revenues for the City of Minden and second, it helps to show potential growth and development opportunities.

The fact that manufacturing and the educational/health care sectors are two of the largest employers in the community provides an indication that the community is balanced and wealthy enough to support quality services. Manufacturing and health care, specifically, add elements of base economic support to Minden in that the products and services provided are often sold to sources outside of Minden, bringing new money into the community to cycle in existing retail businesses. These economic boosters are important to protect as they are vital to the economic base of Minden.

Table 1.1—Historical Population Change, Minden

2010	2000	1990	1980	1970
2,923	2,964	2,749	2,939	2,669

NDED: Population of Nebraska Incorporated Places, 1970-2010

### Minden's Economic Base

By comparing Minden's employment as a percentage to the total local employment with a larger region's percentage of employment, such as the State of Nebraska's, a clear picture forms as to which local industries employ beyond the local need, making for export opportunity. The following local Minden industries provide for export opportunity:

- Construction
- Manufacturing
- Information
- Educational Services, Health Care and Social Assistance
- Public Administration

Base or location quotient analysis is vitally important for the targeting of future economic growth. New development follows opportunities for cluster relationships. Hence, if the community is able to prove strength in areas that have export capability, bringing new money to the community by selling goods and services beyond the local economy, there is potential for further growth within those sectors. Decisions pertaining to the future planning for development should consider the role of the listed, local export industries.

While the community is widely known for the tourism and agricultural industries, statistical data shows that the majority of retail services are used by local residents. Tourism percentages do not show this industry as a strong, local export. Manufacturing, in the form of value-added agricultural processing, ties to the agriculture sector to make these two industry sectors the strongest within the community. Further, the health care and educational services provide a substantial amount of export revenues to the city, comparing their local share to the statewide average.

### Local Commuter Patterns

Table 1.3—Commuter Patterns, Minden

2009	17.8 minutes traveled to work
2000	16.7 minutes traveled to work

U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, ACS Selected Economic Characteristics: 2000 and 2005-2009

Minden both benefits and suffers from its close proximity to the larger city of Kearney and other nearby markets, such as Holdrege and Hastings. An analysis of data found in Table 1.3 shows that the mean travel time to work in minutes is 17.8 minutes, a slight increase slightly from the 2000 average of 16.7 minutes. This information indicates that a fair number of Minden residents are leaving the community for employment. The downside to high levels of out-migration of community residents for employment opportunity is the missed opportunity for tax revenues from companies that are employing Minden residents. Further, besides working outside of the community, the residents that are leaving each day for employment are also likely doing a lot of retail business in the community to which they are commuting, rather than in Minden. Community infrastructure needs, schools, and protection services are largely funded by taxes collected from businesses. It does appear that as time goes on, Minden residents are willing to drive further for employment.

Excellent quality of life is one indicator of the correlation between historical population and commuter patterns. It is apparent that in Minden, even with the increased mechanization of the agricultural economy, the population has stayed consistent over the last 40 years and residents have opted to drive further to work, if necessary, rather than move out of the community to find work.

## Market Facts

Table 1.2: 2009 Employment by Industry (16 and over)

	Minden	% of Total—Minden	Nebraska	% of Total—NE
Agriculture	35	2.7%	45,560	4.9%
<b>Construction</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>9.2%</b>	<b>61,965</b>	<b>6.7%</b>
<b>Manufacturing</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>14.1%</b>	<b>100,665</b>	<b>10.9%</b>
Wholesale Trade	35	2.7%	30,401	3.3%
Retail Trade	119	9.1%	108,917	11.8%
Transportation/Warehousing and Utilities	60	4.6%	55,922	6.0%
<b>Information</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>4.5%</b>	<b>19,001</b>	<b>2.1%</b>
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	97	7.5%	70,886	7.7%
Professional, Scientific, and Management Services	43	3.3%	72,999	7.9%
<b>Educational Services, Health Care, and Social Assistance</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>30.4%</b>	<b>208,607</b>	<b>22.6%</b>
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation, and Food Services	59	4.5%	72,529	7.8%
Other Services, Except Public Administration	24	1.8%	41,024	4.4%
<b>Public Administration</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>5.4%</b>	<b>36,093</b>	<b>3.9%</b>
Total Employment	1301	100.0%	924,569	100.00%

U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, ACS Selected Economic Characteristics—Minden, NE: 2005-2009

Bold type notates Minden's base industries.

### An Aging Population

Table 1.4 provides information on Minden's population by age. While estimates contained within this chart are subject to a significant potential margin of error, it appears that the median age of residents has increased from 40.2 years to 44.5 years over the past decade. The community will need to be conscious of services, infrastructure development/improvement, and promotion of developments to cater to an aging population. To attract younger families to the community, Minden will want to focus on supporting pro-growth policies and services that will cater to the needs of younger residents.

### Household Incomes and Purchasing Power

Table 1.5 provides information on household incomes for both 2000 and 2009.

Mean income increased by 23 percent between 2000 and 2009; however, the Consumer Price Index (U.S. Department of Labor) indicates that to achieve the buying power of the mean household income of \$46,417 in 2009 (the analysis period), a Minden household would have to bring in \$57,829 in income. While the community was close at \$57,128, it does appear that Minden incomes have not entirely kept rate with inflation and their buying power has diminished slightly over the past decade.

Table 1.4: Population by Age, 2000 and 2009 Estimates, Minden

	2000	2009
Total Population	2,964	2500*
Male	1,382	1,142
Female	1,582	1,358
18 Years to 64 Years	1,579	1,534
Under 18 Years	739	502
65 Years and Over	646	464
Median Age (Years)	40.2	44.5

U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, ACS Selected Economic Characteristics: 2000 and 2005-2009

\*The 2009 U.S. Census Bureau information is subject to sampling variability with a margin of error +/- 215 persons. According to NDED population statistics, Minden's current population is 2,923 persons. Decennial Census data, available in April of 2010, will provide the greatest level of accuracy in both total population and population by age demographics.

Table 1.5 Minden—Income by Household

Dollars Earned	2009	2000	% Change to Total
Total Households	1,181	1,159	-22
Less than \$10,000	4.10%	4.9%	0.8%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	10.70%	6.2%	4.5%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	11.00%	16.7%	-5.7%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	14.80%	13.7%	1.1%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	21.90%	22.9%	-1.0%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	18.60%	25.8%	-7.2%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	10.80%	5.3%	5.5%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	5.20%	3.9%	1.3%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%
\$200,000 or more	2.80%	0.3%	2.5%
Median income (dollars)	42,740	40,092	7% increase
Mean income (dollars)	57,128	46,417	23% increase

U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, ACS Selected Economic Characteristics: 2000 and 2005-2009

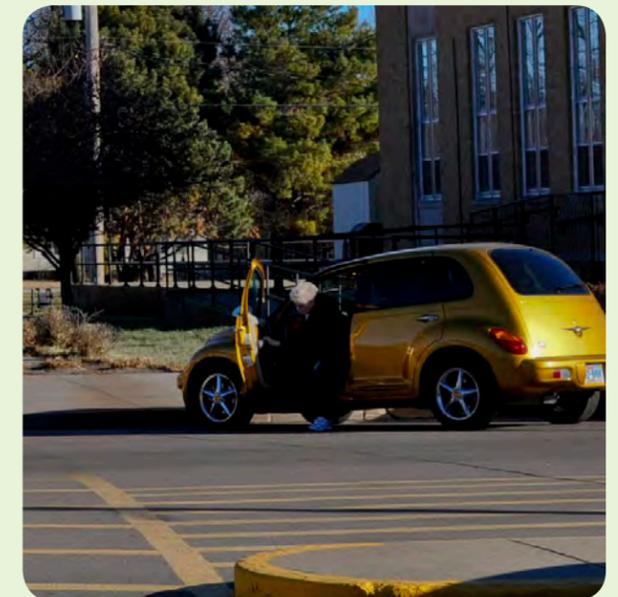
### Market Facts Conclusions

With the 2010 Decennial U.S. Census figures, Minden is expected to have maintained a stable population base with some growth in the median age of residents.

Review of the broad-based statistical market data for Minden provides the following significant conclusions:

- Minden has a diverse economy that includes strong manufacturing, health care, educational, and tourism sectors.
- Minden residents have seen a slight decrease in purchase power for their dollar from 2000-2009, with incomes falling short of baseline when adjusted for inflation.
- Minden residents are spending a significant amount of time commuting to and from work as many are employed outside of the community.
- The median age of the population is assumed to have risen over the past decade. The true amount of increase in median age will not become clear until the release of the 2010 Decennial Census data.
- There has been a decrease, as a percentage of population, in those 18 years and younger in the community.
- Base analysis shows that retail development is less than sufficient to support local needs.
- Base analysis additionally shows that health care and manufacturing are very strong base industries for Minden and provide for export revenues to the community.

## Market Facts



## Visioning Minden

The InVision Minden Plan is intended to be a multi-phased approach to improving the physical, economic, and social dynamics of Minden. This phase, Phase I, is the first of at least three phases and is largely visioning-oriented.

While the quantitative data and facts described previously are important indicators, there are many attributes of a community that simply can't be quantified. Collection of qualitative data is also critically important to understanding the larger scope of a community.

To gather this critical, qualitative community information, a visioning session was conducted with members of the InVision Minden Steering Committee to determine key attributes for promotion and improvement in Minden.

The following is a list of conclusions derived from the visioning session:

- Safety and walkability are important community attributes.
- Participants have fond memories of activities that center on community events and landmarks, such as the Christmas pageant and lights display, shopping in the square, swimming at the local pool, visiting Pioneer Village, and attending shows at the Minden Opera House.
- Participants are particularly proud of the Minden Opera House, community health care system, Pioneer Village, quaint shops in the downtown retail district, and the budding growth of new houses and new industries throughout the community.
- Minden is best described as supportive, proud, progressive, and community oriented.
- While Minden continues to grow and change, participants hope to maintain the stately feeling found on Brown Street, the "Norman Rockwell" feeling of the downtown, the museum and tourism properties, retail business offerings, and the educational and community health systems.

- Participants find significant value in organizing for community growth and change through participation in community organizations. While many exist currently, participants suggested that there could be more cooperation amongst the individual groups and within the groups; leadership succession appears to be an issue. Most participants were interested in seeing increased involvement from youth and young professional involvement in community organizations.
- Businesses are valued in Minden and the community recognizes that support of both base industries, such as industrial and agriculturally based companies, are vital to the long-term stability of non-base industries, such as retail and service businesses. Participants stressed that more connection between all businesses would be helpful to promoting the general business and service climate within Minden.
- Participants consistently stated that several sectors were lacking within the community, namely, service offerings, such as restaurants, hotels, and cottage activities, such as farmer's markets and new business start-ups.

Ideas generated during this meeting were then analyzed with quantitative, demographics analysis to determine how these ideas could be carried over into physical design changes to promote community assets.

## Connecting Market Facts and Vision...Creating Solutions

### Safety and Community Walkability

#### Market Facts

The recently completed blight study shows lack of ADA-compliant sidewalk infrastructure, street paving, curbing, and gutters throughout the study area. No pedestrian transit connection exists from north Minden residential to the downtown retail and service district.

#### Design Solutions

Development of a transportation route that will connect both vehicular and pedestrian traffic safely between residential areas within the community to needed retail and service offerings in the downtown district will bolster pedestrian safety and community walkability.

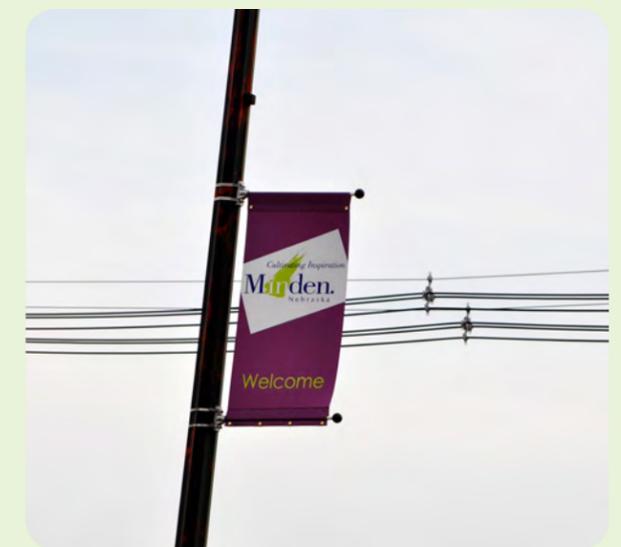
### Pride in community events, tourism venues, and community assets, such as parks and the community swimming pool

#### Market Facts

Community events, tourism venues, and community physical assets are serving both the local and regional population. These events and assets are not all easily found by visitors and are not marketed seamlessly.

#### Design Solutions

Development of a signage-based, wayfinding system will provide directional guidance for visitors looking to take advantage of Minden's assets. The system will also help to provide for further brand recognition and cohesiveness of Minden assets for residents.



The full results of this visioning meeting can be found in Appendix A.

## *Progressive attitudes toward development; pride in community image*

### Market Facts

The main north/south and east/west transportation arterials in Minden are lacking formal signage that cohesively ties multiple areas of the community. The lack of connection can be assumed to be contributing to retail revenue leakage as those using the most heavily traveled routes in Minden are not aware of, or being effectively directed toward, the downtown retail business core.

### Design Solutions

Community signage that presents a positive image to both residents and tourists while creating cohesiveness and linkage between major transportation routes, residential, retail, and commercial businesses will aide in improving community image. Framework has been provided for the development of window-scaping and downtown façade improvement programs that will help the community businesses to maintain their positive image through both funding opportunities and capacity building.

## *Embracing of community growth and services to support new economic opportunity*

### Market Facts

Community location quotient analysis shows more demand for retail services, both locally and regionally, than availability of service offerings.

### Design Solutions

New corridor design suggestions will create contiguous lots for retail and commercial business growth. These lots will be appealing to developers due to location near residential, for local sales, and along either major transportation arterial or collection routes, for regional sales opportunities.

## *Promotion of community organizations as a means of developing social networks and aiding in community development*

### Market Facts

Minden's demographic statistics show a shift in average age of resident from 40.2 years in 2000 to 44.5 years in 2009. An aging population brings aging organizational leadership and holes where community organizations should exist to meet the needs of younger community members for attraction of new residents.

### Design Solutions

Inclusion of information pertaining to the development of a community-wide leadership program will help to give Minden the framework necessary to work toward promotion of existing community organizations, development of new organizations to meet new needs, and opportunity for succession of leadership through education found within program participation.

## *Support of base employment and tax base found in the community's value-added agricultural/industrial operations*

### Market Facts

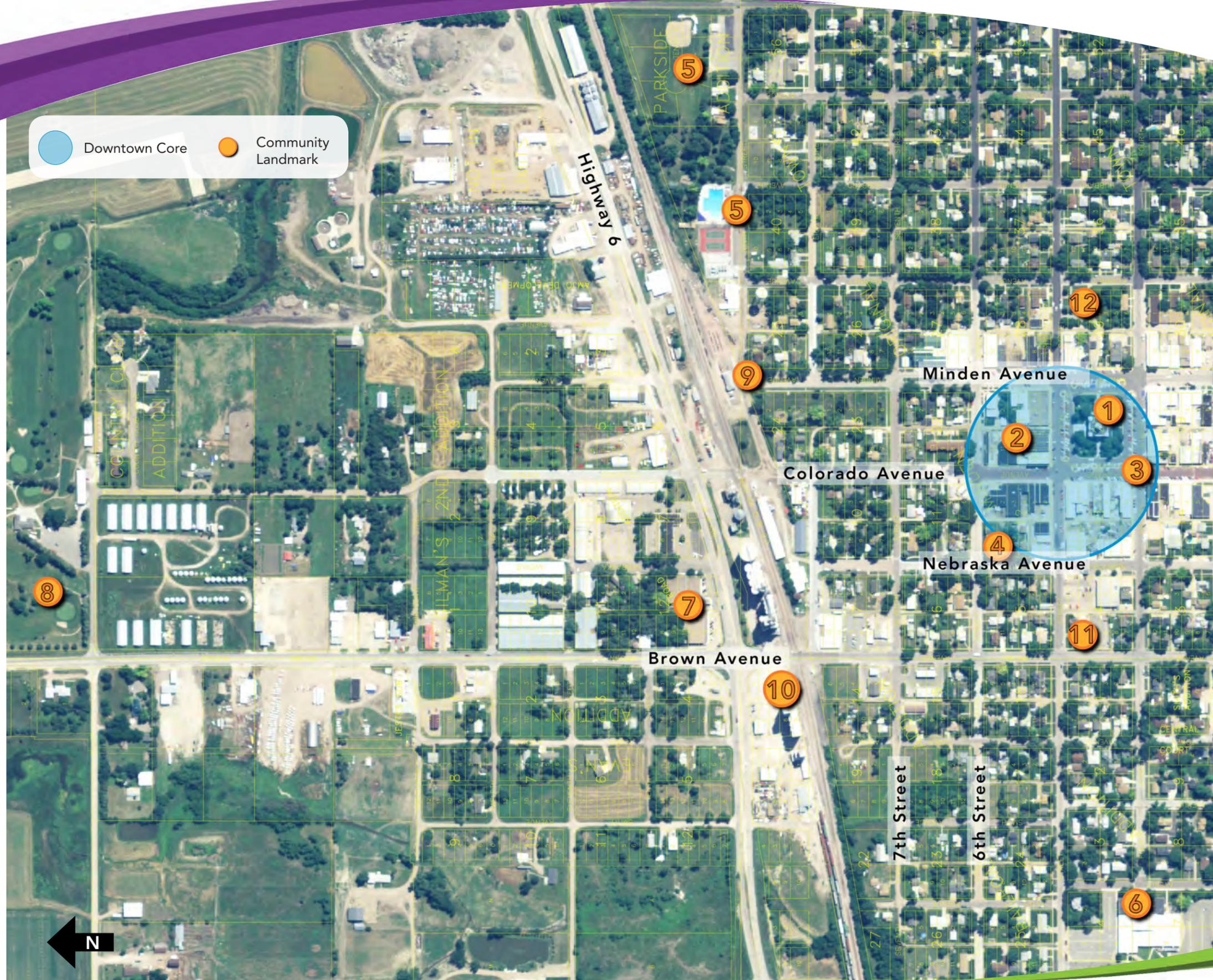
Minden's employment data shows a strong industrial sector that provides for export opportunity. Because these companies are selling outside of the general trade region, they bring new money to Minden for the purposes of multiplying additional retail and commercial opportunity. Services to support the recruitment of new or retention of existing businesses will be critical to the long-term vitality of this base economic activity.

### Design Solutions

Site selectors for industrial development consistently look for peripheral service offerings to determine community "quality of place." The addition of at least one chain hotel development is necessary in this instance and the InVision Plan site design suggests appropriate sites for this and additional needs, such as restaurants and commercial office space.



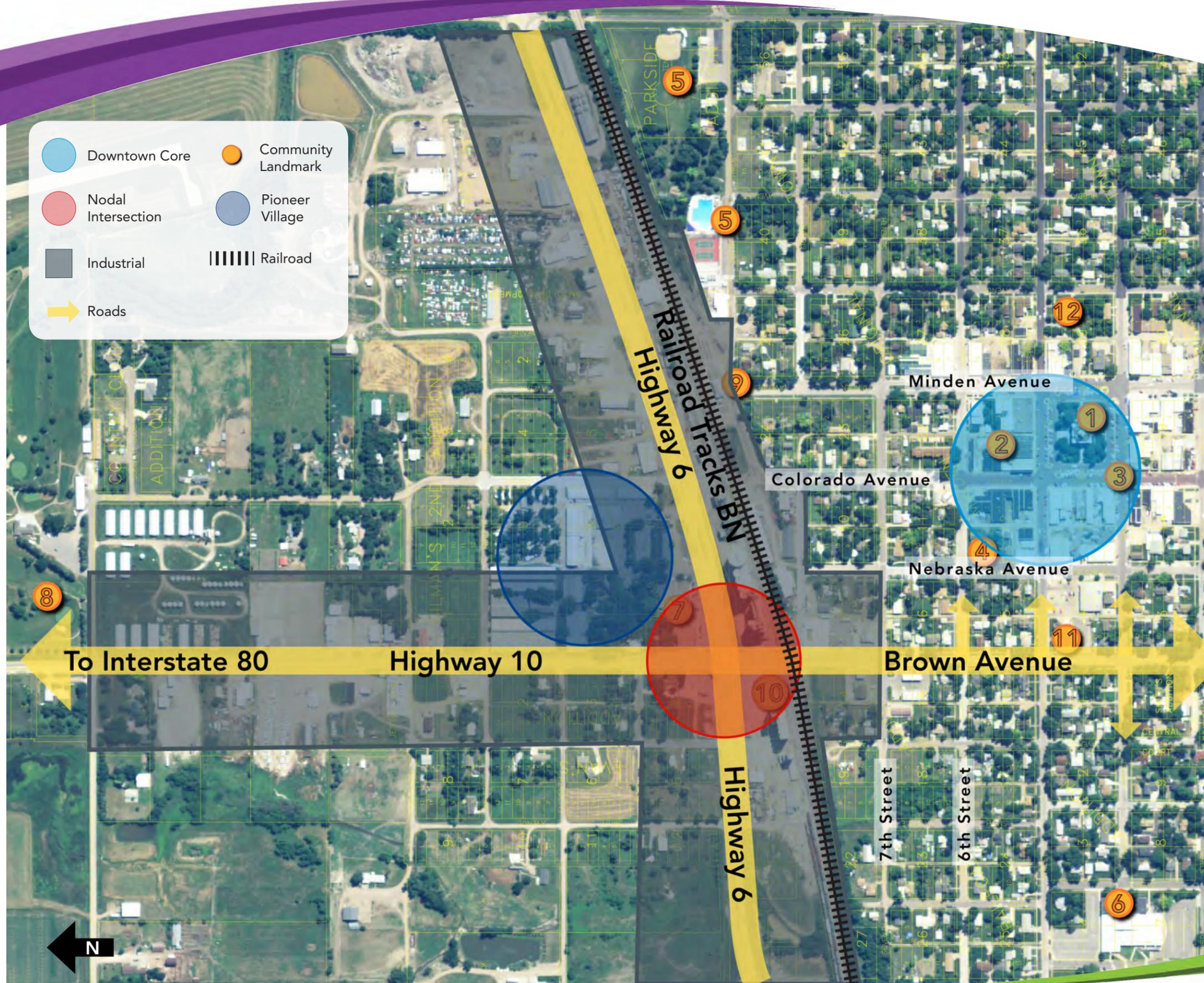




Minden has many valuable community assets. A quick glance at some of the locations of selected attributes shows that the arterial U.S. Highway 6 and 34 and Brown Avenue have been a catalyst for the development of these assets.

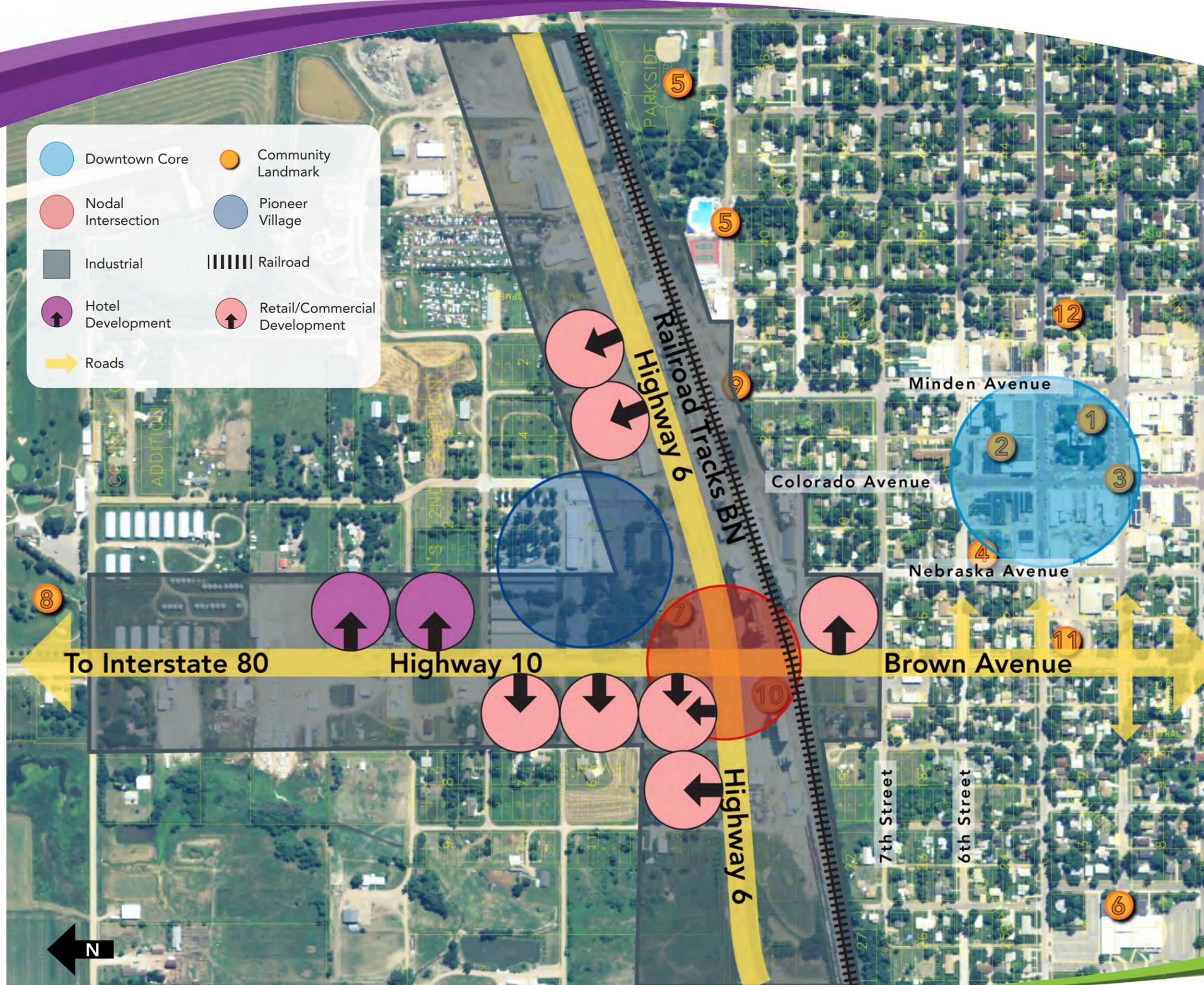
Protection of the existing community assets, identified by the InVision Minden Steering Committee, are vital to sustaining the local economy.

1. Courthouse Square
2. Opera House
3. Downtown Core
  - Library
  - City Hall
  - Retail Main Street
4. Historical Area
5. Community Parks
6. Schools
7. Pioneer Village
8. Golf Course
9. Depot
10. Grain Elevator
11. Churches
12. Jensen Memorial Library



In planning for future development opportunities, it is clear that multi-modal access, whether by foot, car, truck, or bike, will be an important factor to consider. Identification of quality tracts of land with great visibility and accessibility should be a priority.

There is an obvious disconnect between the retail hub in the downtown core and north Minden. Methods for connecting the areas both north and south of U.S. Highway 6 and 34 are necessary to provide better exposure and accessibility to local commercial and retail businesses.



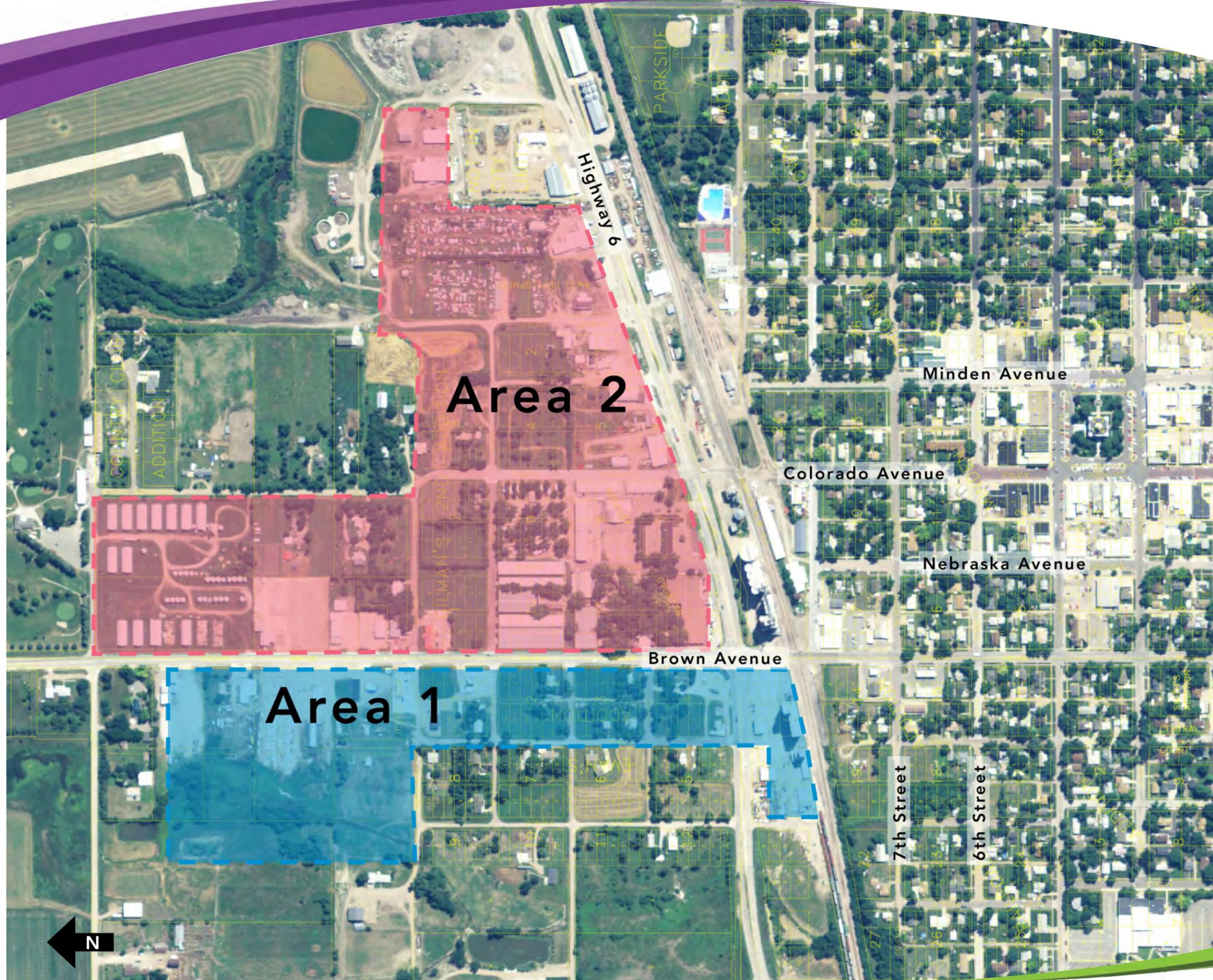
## *Current Development Opportunities*

Growth of the economy through development of new retail, commercial, and industrial development is also of great importance.

Businesses choose sites based upon location. Retailers and commercial businesses look to be located in areas where the consumer can easily find and access them. Visibility to the consumer is key. Industrial companies look to locate where the cost of goods sold is less than anywhere else. Accessibility for receipt of inputs and delivery of outputs is key. In both instances, transportation routes matter.

Currently, the only real opportunities for additional commercial and retail development exist in the U.S. Highway 6 and 34 and Nebraska Highway 10 corridors. These corridors lack quality pedestrian infrastructure. Visibility is present, but only the tracts with no relationship to the downtown for residual opportunities.

# *Blighted Area*



This map illustrates the area that has been designated blighted and substandard in accordance with the Nebraska Community Development Law. As a requirement of designation, a redevelopment plan was drafted detailing suggestions for area improvements. The suggestions for redevelopment align with the InVision Minden Plan, including the following:

- Adding ADA-compliant, pedestrian sidewalk infrastructure
- Paving of streets and roads that are unpaved and the addition of curb and gutter
- Improving to residential structures to correct window, siding and roofing dilapidation
- Encouraging retail and commercial development throughout the study boundary area

The Blight and Substandard designation allows the community to access special funding options, specifically Tax Increment Financing (see Funding Options for more information), for redevelopment and could assist in implementation of the InVision Minden Plan.



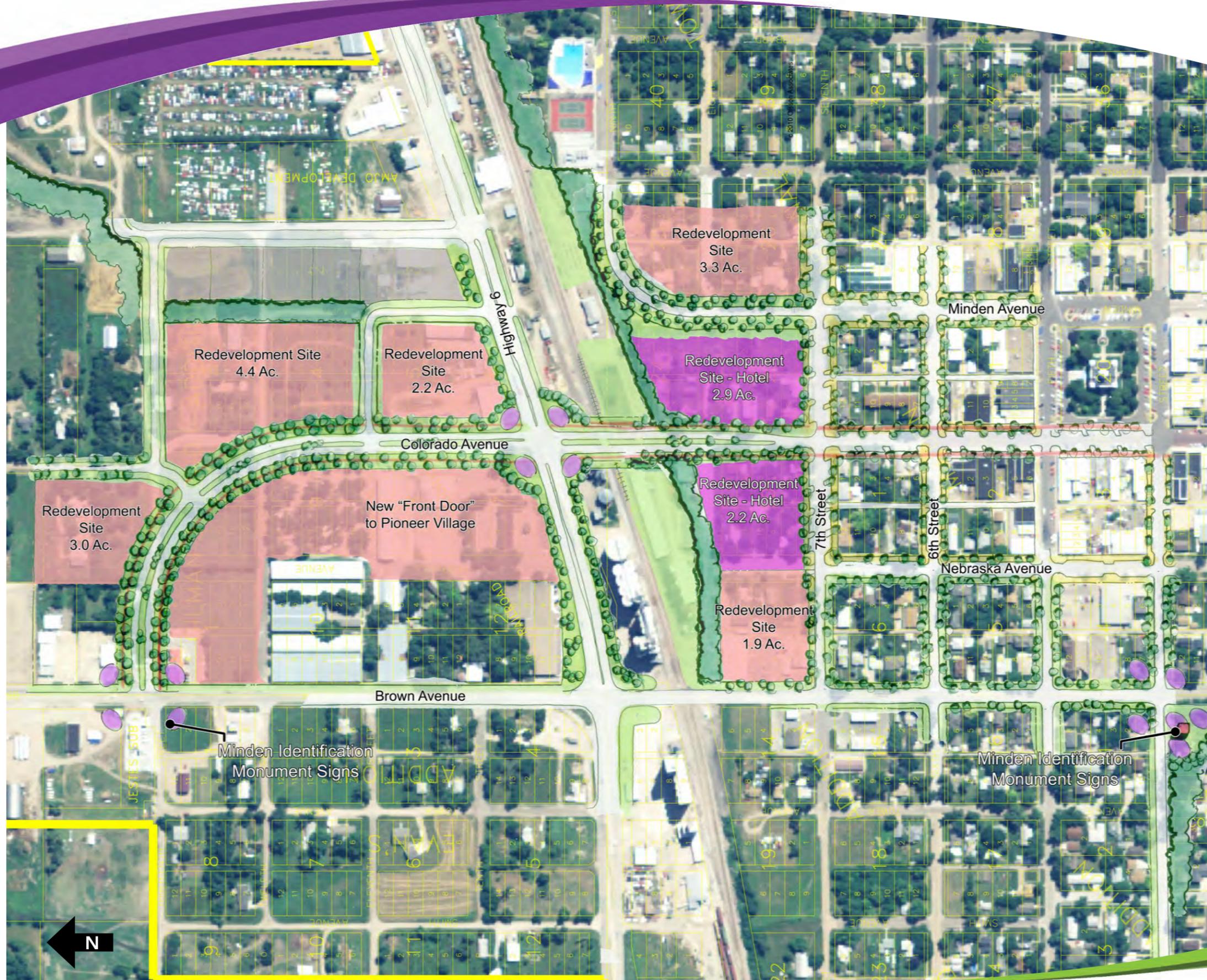
## *Development Options*

This illustration provides a design solution to the need for a north/south transportation connector that is accessible to both vehicular and pedestrian traffic for future retail and commercial development.

The current north/south route of Nebraska Highway 10/Brown Avenue, is effective in bringing vehicles into and out of Minden, but does not provide any exposure or connection to the retail hub found in downtown Minden.

Currently, if entering the community from the north, the traveler is welcomed into an area that feels largely industrial and uninviting. The suggested involves the development of new nodal intersections to enhance attractiveness and community wayfinding for traffic and pedestrians. As evidenced in the illustration, ample opportunity for redevelopment of this area for retail and commercial business exists and provides a direct connection between north Minden and the south, downtown retail hub. The new community entrance, combined with nodal development, welcomes traffic and pedestrians in a more inviting and aesthetically pleasing way.

Additionally, the majority of new development is suggested north of U.S. Highway 6 and 34. This area is slated for redevelopment in accordance with the adopted Minden Blight and Substandard Determinational Study.



## *Development Options*

This illustration fully encompasses market facts and the value and vision of the InVision Minden Steering Committee. Highlights of the plan include the following:

- Redevelopment of a blighted corridor providing additional sites for retail and commercial development through improved streets and pedestrian sidewalk infrastructure
- Creation of a new “front door” to the community through the development of Colorado Avenue as an additional arterial for vehicular and pedestrian traffic
- Establishment of a new transportation corridor that will effectively connect the downtown retail hub to the new, northern retail and commercial corridor
- Addition of entrance node improvements to include coordinated signage for ease of wayfinding, leading to increased exposure to community businesses for the traveler
- Identification of sites for needed hotel development to support tourism and industrial developments in addition to sites for new retail and commercial development opportunities

## Wayfinding and Signage

Wayfinding is a theory-based design field concerned with making spaces easy to navigate. Examples of those spaces vary greatly and include hospitals, museums, parks, retail districts and other community assets. Community planners have defined wayfinding as “spatial problem solving.” Simply stated, wayfinding is providing a visitor the information he or she needs to get to from his or her present location to a destination, when he or she may not know its precise location.

The key features a community should consider when designing a wayfinding system include:

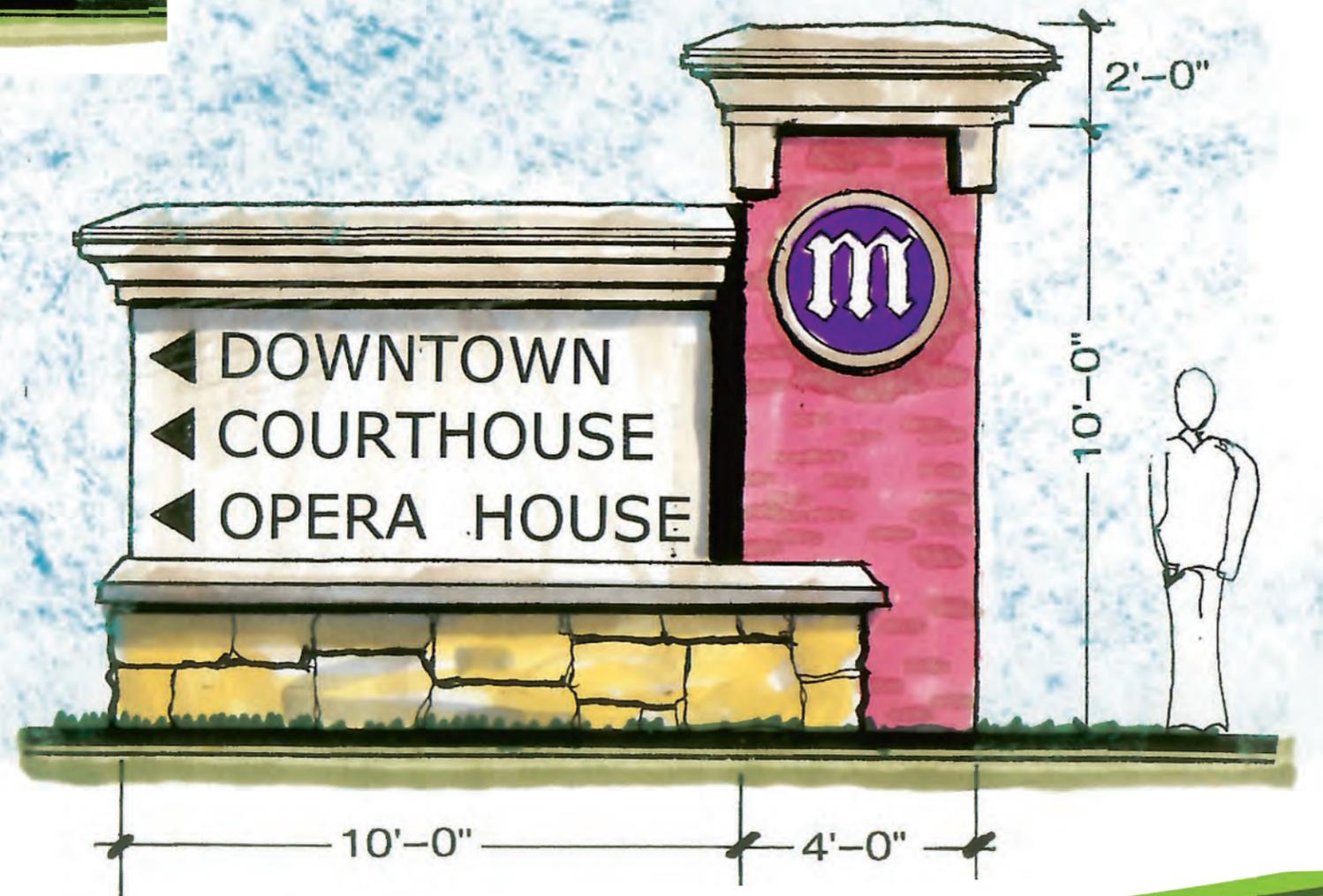
- *Paths*—streets, sidewalks, and trails
- *Landmarks*—prominent buildings, art, or natural features
- *Edges or barriers; regions*—neighborhoods or districts
- *Nodes*—intersections or areas of activity

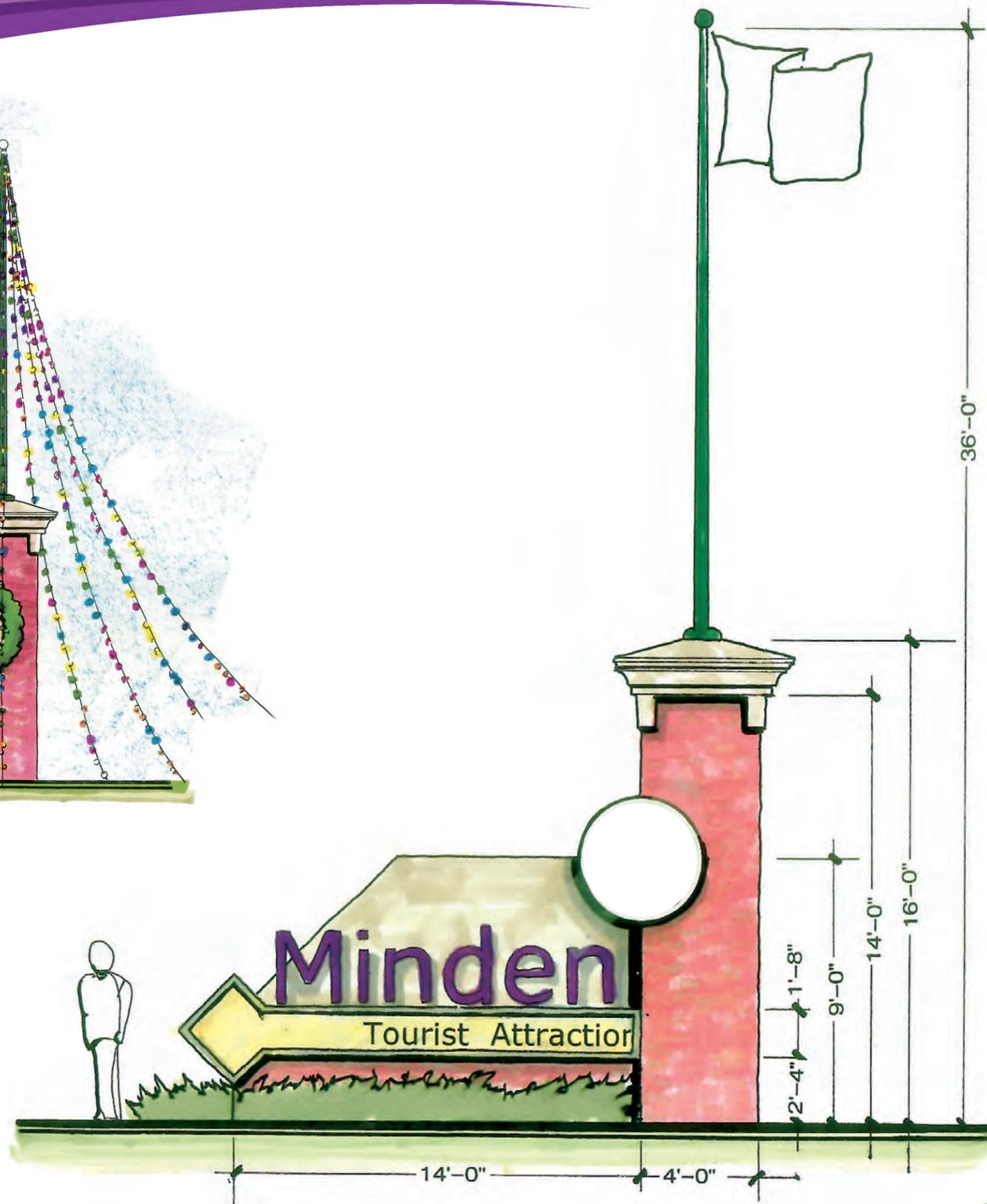
Example features in Minden for application of the wayfinding system may be:

- *Paths*—Nebraska Highway 10/Brown Street, U.S. Highway 6, Colorado Avenue, and 4th Street
- *Landmarks*—the golf course, Pioneer Village, the Kearney County Courthouse, and the Minden Opera House
- *Edges/barriers*—the railroad tracks
- *Regions*—the Courthouse square, the school campus, the U.S. Highway 6 corridor
- *Nodes*—the intersection of Nebraska Highway 10/Brown Street and U.S. Highway 6

Suggested wayfinding and nodal signage are designed to tie into architectural styles found in the historic downtown.

Attractive, easy to read signage that provides clear direction to community assets.





## Wayfinding and Signage

Combining Minden's key features and assets with community and economic development goals results in effective wayfinding. Benefits to Minden include:

- Creation of an identity at each location, different from all others
- Use of landmarks to provide orientation
- Creation of well-structured paths
- Creation of regions of differing visual character
- Limitation of the user's navigation choices
- Provision of signage at decision points to help get users to desired destinations
- Use of sight lines to show users what's ahead

This signage illustration is suggested as the new entrance node signage for Minden. The intention is to direct traffic coming from the north onto Colorado Avenue through the newly created commercial and retail corridor to the downtown square. The digitized sign board intentionally points east to entice south-bound traffic to travel through Minden using Colorado Avenue. It provides direction to the downtown and information on community events. The design is created to allow for easy promotion of Minden's long-standing Christmas City designation and activities.

The angle of the sign was created to resemble the new Minden "Cultivating Inspiration" logo.

## *Wayfinding and Signage*



Often, signage improvements are a better option than new signage. In the case of the important community landmark of the Jensen Memorial Library, the existing sign can be rehabilitated to provide for increased aesthetic appeal and clearer communication.

A glimpse of the existing sign and landscaping shows mismatched shrubbery to the height of the sign. In summer months, it is likely that this landscaping will cover the lower portion of the sign's verbiage, making the sign essentially useless to those unfamiliar with this community asset. The sign's foundation allows for the addition of rock and cornice improvements to add depth and color variance, while aesthetically tying it to other signs denoting community assets as suggested in this plan. As with the nodal signs, it is suggested that either the logo shown or a uniform logo of the community's choice be consistent throughout all community asset-based signage. The ability to honor the Christmas City tradition is possible through the design shown here with the optional inclusion of a seasonal wreath around the logo.

Simple improvements to signage often lead to significant improvement in wayfinding and community image.

