The introduction of Omaha’s first bus rapid transit route, ORBT, brings the opportunity to facilitate Transit Oriented Development along the route. One goal of Omaha’s Transit Oriented Development initiative is to Respect Neighborhood Context. This document serves as a guide to neighborhood context. This document should be used to inform the design and form of new development within 1/2 mile of the Downtown ORBT Stations (see map on page 3).

Within this document you will find:

1. Area Characteristics - Facts from the 2017 Census American Community Survey and Douglas County Assessor
2. Map - A map of the area showing recommend Tiers of development and other areas of note
3. Recommendations - Recommendations for new development within the area

Downtown is a destination, it is classy, gritty, and evokes a certain excitement. Overall, the character of downtown is walkable. Buildings often include a mix of uses (blocks certainly do), density and height are welcome, and many minor and major redevelopment opportunities are available. Downtown is home to corporate headquarters, conventions, parades, marches, civic buildings, and the historic Old Market.
The Downtown ORBT Station Locations' (study area) area characteristics are very different than the city.

The majority of four census tracts are within 1/2 mile of the Downtown ORBT Stations (a small portion of a fifth census tract is within the 1/2 mile, but due to the limited size and that the majority of that area is City owned, it was not included in the analysis). The total population of the four census tracts is just over 11,000 persons. Population density and housing unit density are higher than citywide. Household size, the number of households with persons under 18 years of age, and median age are lower than the City as a whole. Fewer households have more than 1 car, more persons commute to work by public transportation or walking and the commute time to work is less. When compared to the City as a whole, the median home value is higher, median rent is lower, as is median household income. The following facts relate to TOD regulations or recommendations.

Land Uses (by acreage) within 1/2 mile of the Downtown ORBT station locations.

A variety of land uses exist within the study area. The predominate use is Institutional - largely due to the convention center. The Residential category represents all solely residential buildings - from single family detached to multi-family. Worth noting is the desire for mixed use buildings, and that they only represent 4% of the land area. Also of note is that transportation makes up 17% of the land area - this category represents railroad right-of-way, surface parking lots, etc. but not parking on the same property as another use (the property was classified as the other use, for example, office).
The Downtown station locations are the most appropriate for large scale and dense buildings - and include the largest number of registered historic buildings.

Tiers guide the height and scale of development. Tier 1 is the most intense with a minimum of 4 stories and unlimited height; 2-8 stories are appropriate in Tier 2; 1-3 story buildings including duplexes, townhomes, and small apartment buildings are appropriate for Tier 3; and Tier 4 is the least intense opening the door for accessory dwelling units in traditionally single family areas. The map above shows the appropriate Tier boundaries.

Two local historic districts, 5 national historic districts, 33 Local Landmark Sites, 67 National Register Sites, and 1 National Register Boulevard existing within 1/2 of the downtown station locations.
1. Context Summary

The general context of downtown is walkable, dense, and larger scale and mass the the rest of the city. Detailed contextual details emerge in districts. The districts, as identified in the Omaha Downtown Master Plan, include North Downtown (NoDo), Events District, North Riverfront, South Riverfront, Joslyn District, Downtown Core, Old Market, and Park East / Leavenworth District. Also of note, but not included in the Downtown Master Plan is the campus of Creighton University.

Scale, mass, and design vary by district from historic brick mid-rise to curtain wall high rise. Refer to the Omaha Downtown Master Plan for more detailed definitions of each district and its context.

As part of the public participation process, feedback was gathered on a series of images. Those with the strongest reaction are shown below and on page 5, along with highlights of the feedback received. It must be noted that participation was low and the following may not be reflective of the majority opinion of the area.

The majority of public meeting attendees and online voters found the above residential building “acceptable” or “excellent.” Voters liked the materials, decks, large windows, landscaping, and thought it looked like a modern brownstone.

The majority of public meeting attendees and online voters found the residential building to the left “acceptable” or “excellent.” Voters liked the large windows, materials, decks, proximity to the street, and “classic” look.

The majority of public meeting attendees and online voters found the above residential building “acceptable” or “excellent.” Voters liked the changes in facade depth, landscaping, setback, wide sidewalk, and colors.

The majority of public meeting attendees and online voters found the above residential building “acceptable” or “excellent.” Voters liked the height, landscaping, and change to a darker color on higher elevations.
The majority of public meeting attendees and online voters found the residential building to the right “acceptable” or “excellent.” Voters like the wide sidewalk, roof variation, and facade variation (not “boxy”).

The majority of public meeting attendees and online voters found the residential building to the left “acceptable” or “excellent.” Voters thought the height and materials were appropriate for downtown.

The majority of public meeting attendees thought the residential building to the left was “bad” or “close - but not acceptable.” Voters did not like the garage doors, first floor garage, minimal entrance, and thought it looked like a “fortress.”

The majority of public meeting attendees thought the above residential building was “bad” or “close - but not acceptable.” Voters did not like the lack of setback, landscaping, and entrance.

The majority of public meeting attendees thought the residential building to the left was “bad” or “close - but not acceptable.” Voters did not like the lack of pedestrian entrance, small windows, and projecting decks.

The majority of public meeting attendees and online voters found the above residential building “acceptable” or “excellent.” Voters liked the industrial feel, materials, large windows, facade depth, trees, and pergola.

The majority of public meeting attendees and online voters found the above residential building “acceptable” or “excellent.” Voters liked the large windows, materials, decks, and proximity to the street.
2. Specific Recommendations

New development should add to the existing context of the district. The appeal of areas neighborhoods, like the Old Market, is that they exhibit time tested principles of design in an era of pedestrian-oriented development. Those buildings and areas should be preserved and new development should adopt those time tested principles in new development.

Specifically, new development should:

- Avoid creating walls or perceived boundaries within the area. These are typically created by long and / or tall walls and / or fences.

- Small pedestrian scale blocks should be utilized. Large “superblocks” and street and alley vacations should be avoided as they degrade walkability.

- If long blocks are unavoidable, they should include pedestrian cut-throughs, pocket parks, plazas, and architectural treatments to break up the large block size. On street parking provides a buffer between the pedestrian and moving traffic. It should be preserved, and added, whenever possible.

- Integrate into the predominant scale of the neighborhood and / or particular block and be sensitive to the height, scale, setback, building footprint, etc. of adjacent uses. Use a combination of building setbacks, upper-story stepbacks, and articulated sub-volumes to sensitively and adequately transition to adjacent lower height buildings.

- Give equal design treatment and architectural consideration to all visible elevations.

- Multi-story buildings should be designed with a variety of scales. Create a scale and level of detail at the street level - including windows, architectural details, entrances, signage, amenities, etc. - appropriate to the pedestrian.

- Prioritize the safety of pedestrians by installing wide sidewalks, landscaping, minimizing the number and length of automobile - pedestrian conflict points, (including curb cuts), etc.

- Add to the affordable housing stock, at a minimum replace 1:1. A variety of price points should be offered in the area.

- Create and / or maintain a consistent and distinctive streetscape pattern including wide sidewalks, general landscaping, street trees, seating, trash and recycling receptacles, lighting, signage, etc.

- Additions to the public realm are encouraged, such as: outdoor dining, public plazas, pocket parks, alley activation, public art, etc.

- Parking should be located in a mixed use garage or at the rear of the property behind buildings. Where feasible, parking is encouraged in below grade structures. Additional surface parking lots in mixed use areas, particularly those with street frontage, are discouraged.

- Sharing parking among a variety of uses is encouraged.

- In residential areas, locate garages behind residences and access from any alley when possible. If alleys are not present, shared driveways are encouraged and driveway width should be limited to the minimum practical width.