"Develop for City Council consideration, a strategic plan for the area and an underlying concept plan, similar to the plan prepared for the downtown area by Sasaki Associates. The Sasaki plan should be used as a base for the expanded area."

The Downtown Leadership Council followed a similar process to that of Sasaki Associates in the Land Use and Urban Opportunities Study in developing under-utilized site criteria, determining opportunity sites for the enlarged study area, and mapping areas that are considered under-utilized. (See synopsis of Sasaki Study at beginning of Task 3 and Appendix D.) The DLC has been given a broader task than the Sasaki effort. The process of preparing a strategic plan for the greater downtown Columbia described by the DLC is beyond the resources of the Downtown Leadership Council.

The next step, and recommendation from DLC, is for the City to hire an urban design consultant who will conduct public forums using the opportunity map to identify potential catalytic projects. Once those projects are identified, the planning consultant can provide its professional recommendation(s) on where to best site those catalytic projects in identified spaces.

The recommended Downtown Urban Design Charrette, described in "Overview of Urban Design" will produce several community-based outcomes including workshops, conceptual plans and implementation plans.

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The Sasaki Study helped identify existing commercial properties that are under-developed and do not fulfill their potential.

FORM-BASED ZONING

Form-based zoning (also known as form-based code, FBC) is a method of regulating development to achieve a specific urban form. Conventional zoning codes (including Columbia's current zoning ordinances) are usually concerned with segregation of land and building uses, whereas form-based codes are concerned with such things as building configuration, grouping, scale, massing, features, streetscapes, and other physical characteristics of the built environment.

Because of this emphasis on coherent and consistent visible outcomes, FBCs may be tailored to help implement community visions, which are not as well served by conventional zoning concepts such as floor-area ratios, standardized setbacks, etc. Conventional zoning, based on use and density, makes mixed-use development difficult (or illegal). It takes a "one-size-fits-all" approach and encourages monotony of design.

A typical FBC comprises several elements:

- ***a regulating plan*** showing the plan area with locations or zones having different form standards;
- ***building form standards*** – usually including illustrations, tables and diagrams – that specify configuration (e.g., alignment, height, frontage, etc.) and features (e.g., architectural elements) of buildings in each zone;
- ***public space standards***, specifying elements within the public realm, such as streets, on-street parking, travel lanes, street trees, sidewalks, parks, squares and plazas, etc.;
- an ***administration*** section that defines the application and review process; and
- a ***definitions*** section to ensure precise and consistent use of terminology.

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The corner of Locust and Eighth streets is targeted in the Sasaki Study as a mixed-use opportunity site for retail, residential and office space. A hotel/conference center would be planned for the corner of Cherry and Eighth streets, across from the Tiger Hotel.

One popular template for FBCs is the SmartCode, now currently in process or adopted by dozens of U.S. cities. SmartCode generally supports outcomes of walkability, mixed-use, conservation, housing diversity, and vibrant downtowns. Because every city is different, each city or area that adopts a SmartCode-type FBC must calibrate the code to reflect the local context. This is a necessary step in the code development process.

Form-based codes, as opposed to design guidelines, are regulatory and not advisory. A FBC is a unified development ordinance that brings together the content of zoning and subdivision ordinances in one code. Incorporation of FBCs into existing development regulations may be phased in several ways. Following is a partial list of common FBC implementation strategies:

- ***Mandatory codes.*** Mandatory codes require compliance but are also the most difficult to implement, because they must seamlessly mesh with existing zoning code or completely replace it. Such code can take the form of an overlay, but more often completely overrides the existing ordinance for a specific area or city.
- ***Optional or parallel codes.*** These serve as an alternative to existing ordinances. Compliance is voluntary, so that a developer can choose the FBC or the conventional zoning, but not both (or parts of each). A developer may choose the FBC because it offers a more streamlined process or includes incentives. Although simpler to deploy than mandatory codes, optional codes are more difficult to administer for city staff (because there are two sets of regulations), and furthermore may result in "spot" or patchwork zoning that can compromise area planning efforts.
- ***Floating-zone codes.*** These codes are used in conventional zoning to facilitate planned unit developments (PUDs), but are now also being written as FBCs to facilitate urban

development. A floating-zone FBC omits the regulating plan but includes development standards that developers are required to follow when preparing their own regulating plans. Base standards include such parameters as street and building types, open space, accessibility, sidewalks, etc.; developers then have the freedom within these parameters to create regulating plans, which are submitted for review and approval. Upon approval, the regulating plan becomes binding, and the floating zone replaces the prior zoning for that property.

FBCs are frequently based on *transects* – continuous cross-sections of the human environment, ranging from natural to rural to urban, that are divided into distinct zones. Each transect zone has its own complex character and has different requirements for planning.

The purpose of the transect is to allow the possibility of gradated zoning that is tailored to different levels (intensities) of use. For example, buildings adjacent to the street are appropriate in central city areas, but are not necessarily appropriate in lower-density residential areas. A zoning code that takes transect zones into account can require that setbacks be smaller in urbanized areas. Columbia's current Euclidean zoning regulations apply the same rules to all areas of the city – a "one size fits all" approach that does not support forms/uses that are appropriate to the existing built environment.

The District
Form-based Code addresses public standards such as street trees, shown here on Ninth Street, to achieve a specific urban form.

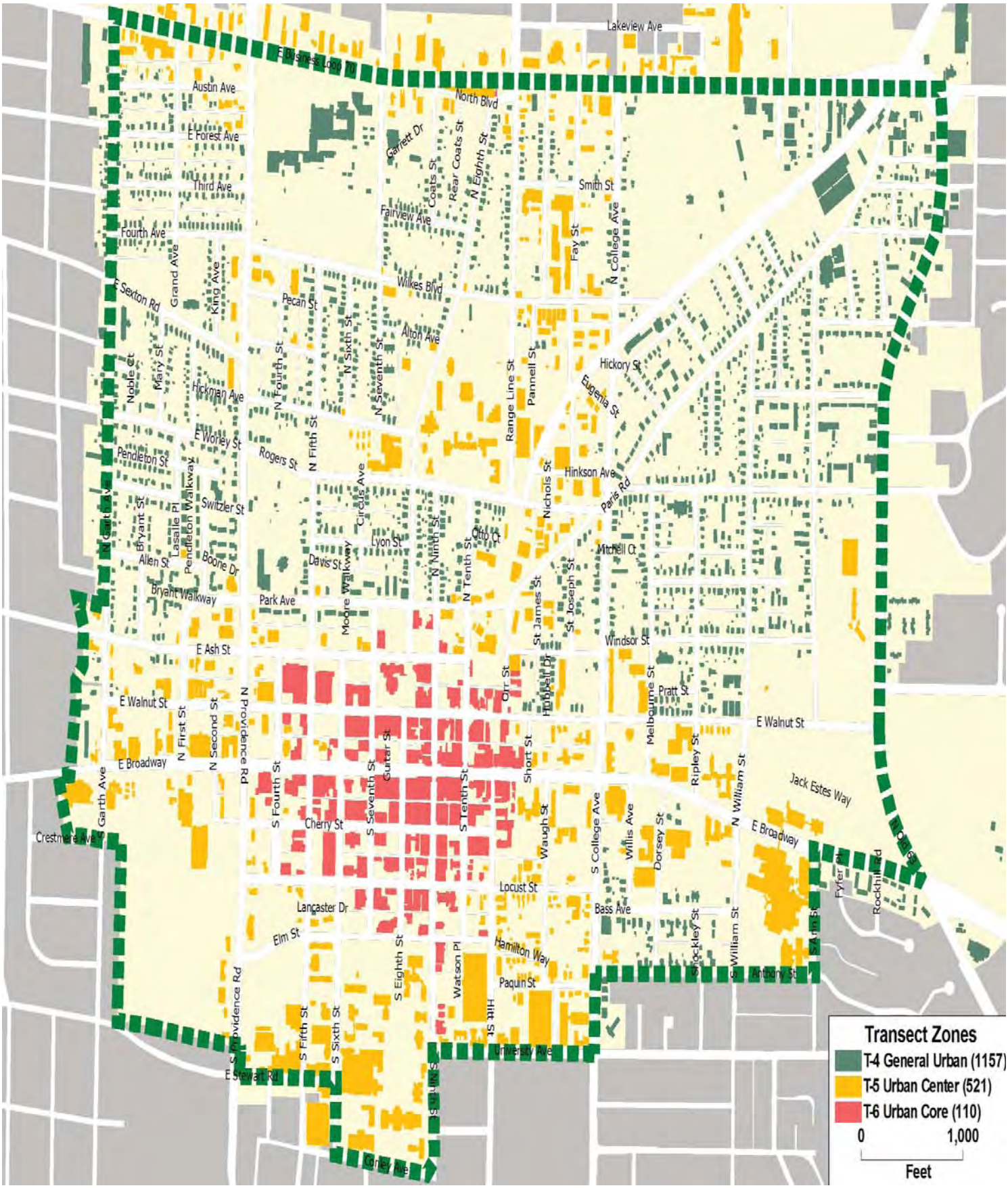
The Transect Zones map (see page 24) generally follow the definitions provided in SmartCode v9.2, with slight calibration for the Columbia context (specifically, building heights in this transect are different from the SmartCode base). This transect map shows that the DLC study area comprises three T-zones:

T-4 General Urban, the least intensive use in this area, consists of a mixed-use but primarily residential urban fabric with a wide range of building types, setbacks, and landscaping. Streets with curbs and sidewalks define medium-sized blocks.

T-5 Urban Center consists of higher density mixed-use buildings that may accommodate retail, offices, rowhouses, and apartments. It has a tight network of streets, with wide sidewalks, street trees, and mostly attached buildings set close to the sidewalks.

T-6 Urban Core — what we usually think of as "downtown" — consists of the highest density and height, with the greatest variety of uses, and civic buildings of regional importance. It may have larger blocks; streets have steady street-tree planting and attached buildings are set close to wide sidewalks forming a "street wall."

The next steps in development of form-based code should include:

- continued review of FBCs (including review of any potential legal issues);
- education of the community about FBCs; and
- consideration of a planning charrette to engage the public in the selection of code format.

TRANSECT ZONES MAP