

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

During five days in January 2014, campus leaders, students, facilities staff, City of DeKalb leaders and local stakeholders collaborated with five experts from around the country to answer a simple question —



How can the campus of Northern Illinois University be improved to support the goal of student career success?



The following pages summarize the bold **ideas**, themes and recommendations that resulted from this effort. While these ideas still require further consideration and exploration, they provide a starting point to re-envision NIU's campus. This document conveys the belief by all that a comprehensive and coordinated set of actions could significantly improve the day-to-day lives of students and faculty, constructively re-engage NIU with the City of DeKalb, and create a place of inspiration, community and memory for all.

EIGHT BOLD IDEAS

Since the summer of 2013, a new presidency and a new era has challenged students, faculty, staff and community stakeholders to think boldly about NIU's future. Within the context of unleashing great ideas, **A Campus RE:ENVISIONED** identified eight coalescing ideas to shape the way NIU's campus looks, lives and engages the community at large.



1 / A TEN MINUTE CAMPUS

As the world becomes more attuned to the environmental and health challenges of automobile dominated development patterns, walking increases importance as a solution with multiple benefits. The Ten Minute campus is a fundamental principle to re-organize residential and academic uses into a more 'mixed use' approach, so people can get from their residence, their classroom, their office or their 'third place' quickly and comfortably all within about ten minutes - either by walking, taking a shuttle or using a bicycle. No need for cars on this campus!

2 / THE QUAD, THE SPINE, THE WATER

Memorable campuses, including NIU's historic core, were designed using a system of quadrangles framed by humane buildings that provide intimacy and containment while making access to uses easy and pleasant. Water - most clearly evidenced by the Lagoons - adds to the pastoral and parklike setting of the original campus. The Spine, a singular, organizing centerpiece has been contemplated since the 1980's, but never fully put into place. During the campus' rapid growth these elements lost their place as a more utilitarian approach took over to solve space issues, but without regard for place.



3 / DEKALB AS A WALKABLE, COOL TOWN

Great institutions of higher education do not stand alone. They are inextricably connected to great college towns. Ann Arbor, Berkeley, Boulder, Cambridge are great towns because of their institutions - and the education process is more powerful and memorable because they are in great towns. Great college towns do not occur by happenstance - they must be clearly connected and easy to access from campus. Have great lively sidewalks and welcoming businesses. Places for festivals and events, music venues and great theater. DeKalb has proximity and great Main Street architecture, the Egyptian Theater and a farmer's market. But work needs to be done to tame traffic on Lincoln, improve viability and activity of the storefronts, and create a stronger physical connection to the campus.



4 / A CAMPUS WITHOUT CARS

As walkability improves across the campus, cars can be moved further from the core. A series of parking structures and lots at the campus perimeter would allow arriving students and faculty to 'park once' for the day, and then avail themselves of frequent shuttles, shared bikes and new walkways to get from their cars to classrooms, to central meeting locations or day-to-day events.



5 / A GREAT CAMPUS MAIN STREET - LUCINDA

Cool college towns support the campus on weekends and some nights, but great campus 'main streets' are the center of a student's day-to-day life. In the Campus RE:Envisioned Lucinda takes on a new role within the campus as Main Street, with greatly improved streetscape, bike and bus lanes and renovated and new housing that is close to the campus core - helping to realize the 10 minute campus. On the north - a redeveloped edge of high quality daily services and an alternative site for affinity housing would exist, while a stronger connection to newer buildings such as Barsema, Anderson and Engineering would hold unite and transition the campus on both sides of this currently auto-dominated street.



6 / HILLCREST REBORN, THANKS TO THE STUDENTS

The Hillcrest Neighborhood is a highly visible and critical part of the larger campus environment at NIU. As the neighborhood succeeds or fails, so does part of NIU. With considerable strength in the areas of education, health services, public administration and business, an opportunity exists to help students gain real world experience while making a difference by engaging in the lives and dynamics of these neighborhoods as part of a deliberate and managed program of internships and teaching/ training experiences.

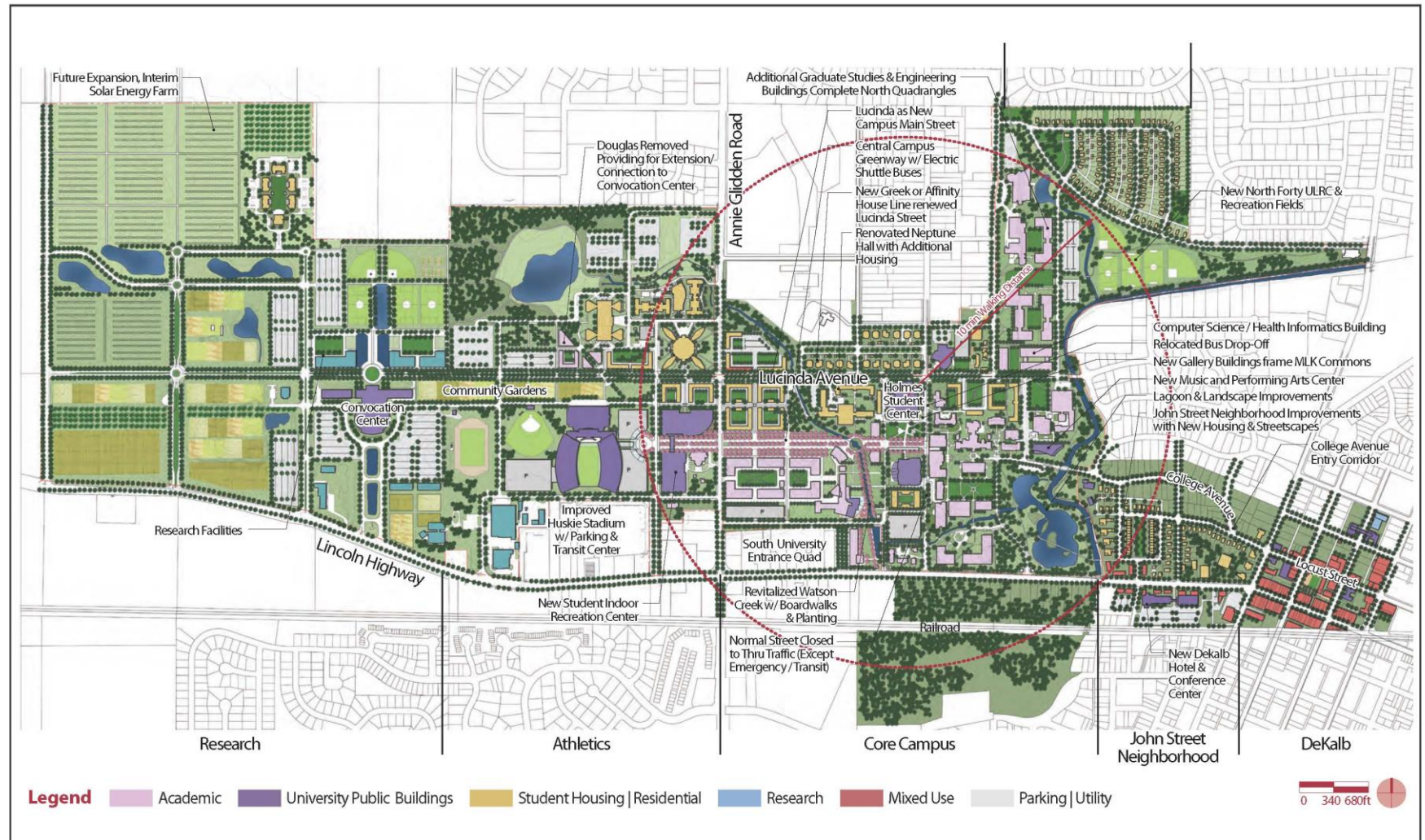
7 / STUDENTS WHO STAY . . . ALUMNI THAT RETURN

A robust program of concerts, theater, sports events and social activities would make NIU's campus an exciting alternative destination for 'suitcase students' who to date, see little reason to stay on campus over the weekend. As the quality of the campus and downtown improves, DeKalb can become a place where people want to hang out with their friends or visit for the weekend. With some 250,000 alumni within a 2-hour drive of NIU, a significant, untapped resource exists for internships, mentors, capital campaigns and 'real world' instructors. With new events and a better setting, chances greatly improve that alumni and students will meet more often - making connections, developing lifelong friendships and becoming part of NIU's history.



8 / RESIDENTIAL TOWER REDUCTION

The residential towers of NIU represent a bygone era and the needs of students at a different time. Since these were originally built in the late 1950's and 1960's, much has changed. Smaller scale, different living formats and more walkable housing is now desired by students of today, as demonstrated by the success of recent renovations of Gilbert or New Hall construction. As food service and life safety requirements take hold, the existing towers near functional obsolescence. The time is nearing for a two pronged approach of renovating core housing properties, with selective removal of aging towers.



A CAMPUS RE:ENVISIONED



RE:ENGAGE HOLMES and MLK PLAZA

Great public spaces combine comfortable human scaled space with a well proportioned building frame that is activated at its base. MLK Plaza, which serves as symbolic center of campus, lacks the human scaled edges to be a great public space. The buildings that do frame the plaza – Holmes and Founders Library, lack the kind of transparent, permeable and active edges needed to create a highly desirable and lively centerpiece. As re-envisioned in this concept, MLK Plaza will take on an enhanced role as a major destination for the improved campus 'spine'. With redevelopment of Holmes, an opportunity exists to create new uses to border the plaza - activating its edges while creating a stronger frame for the 'outdoor room' that it should be.

RE:DISCOVER the WATER

The lagoons of NIU's campus serve utilitarian and aesthetic functions. They provide a valuable service by storing and detaining stormwater during spring runoff. They are also one of the most memorable and imageable components of the campus landscape. As the campus has shifted its emphasis to the west, the Lagoons have less presence in day-to-day life. A Campus Re:Envisioned encourages stronger connections – walking paths, additional bridges and enhanced landscape to celebrate this iconic element

RE:DEFINE the SPINE

From the late 1980's master plan, an east-to-west pedestrian connection has evolved incrementally. But A Campus RE:Envisioned encourages the campus strengthen this gesture with consistent paving, flanking groves of trees, new lighting and banners - to create a very legible and visible organizing element that can help pull together the campus' incongruous architectural elements. The addition of small, clean emission, high frequency shuttle busses would turn this organizing element into a valuable tool for achieving two the bold ideas suggested previously – A Ten Minute Campus and A Campus Without Cars.

PLACES FOR PEOPLE



RE:INVENT LUCINDA STREET

Lucinda moves from campus edge to campus Main Street. With the removal of Douglas at its western end, the Avenue can now meet its destiny as a primary east to west connector. With new affinity housing on the north, and revitalized or newly constructed infill housing on the south, it becomes the center of student living complete with daily goods and services, tree lined sidewalks, bus and bike lanes. Anchoring the west is the center of Student Recreation and anchoring the east is the center of student life – a re-purposed and revitalized Holmes.

RE:POSITION JOHN HARRISON and DOWNTOWN

The John Street and Harrison Avenue as well as the adjoining Elmwood Neighborhood evidence great neighborhood design from a time past. The high quality street design, diversity of architectural styles and home sizes, great tree canopies all remind us of great neighborhoods that are hard to replicate in modern times. Their shared proximity to both downtown DeKalb and the campus should make them highly desirable to young professionals and retirees that want to be near the energy of a campus, or faculty and staff that would like to be more immersed in the university community. The years of decline and dis-investment in the John Street area can and should be reversed with selective rehabilitation of some structures, and directed redevelopment of other areas to support more innovative housing offering new living formats while taking advantage of the great views of the water and campus to the west.

RE: THINK ON-CAMPUS RESIDENTIAL The bold idea of reducing residential towers begs the question 'where will students live?' With an improved Lucinda and focus on densifying the campus core to achieve a 10 minute walk, new, mid-rise and low scale housing opportunities abound. In keeping with best practices for creating great neighborhoods – rather than warehousing people – well designed, accessible, energy efficient and daylight housing options should be developed over time to help shift the campus and student population closer to the core.

TEN GOALS FOR FIVE YEARS

The following ten milestones are believed to be tangible, measurable actions that can be accomplished by the time students arrive on campus in September 2019.

1

Holmes fully redeveloped as THE HUB of student life.

2

The Spine completed from end-to-end with low emission shuttles running on 3 minute headways.

3

Stevenson and Douglas Towers removed from campus.

4

Normal and Carroll Streets closed to traffic and used only for emergency vehicles, transit and pedestrians.

5

A new Hospitality Learning Center open and operating, with over 10% of its employee base being NIU interns.

6

Neptune Hall fully renovated and new infill housing adjoining it to provide over 2,000 residential units within five minutes of the campus core.

7

A New Health Informatics building complete and open as a next generation, collaborative research and teaching facility.

8

Annual Internships for ALL students is an established signature of the NIU experience.

9

The John Street and Harrison Avenue neighborhood is vital with new homeowners, including a significant percentage of faculty and staff from NIU.

10

Enrollment at NIU has achieved sustainable growth, reversing years of decline.

WHAT DO WE DO NEXT?

But September 2019 is a long way off! What can we do now? This year? This month? Thinking bold requires making changes everyday. Here are few ideas for NOW – things that we can be doing or working towards immediately!

Change the Wait

By re-rerouting bus pick up and drop off from the west side of Holmes to the east side, a larger waiting area will be available out of the cold and wind and the transit experience can be greatly improved.

Food Truck Fridays

How about a site where food trucks can be brought in to offer a diversity of food and add some fun to Fridays on campus?

Jazz Alley and More

With a nationally ranked Jazz program, how about one weekend a month where Holmes becomes alive with music in every nook and cranny, using local on-campus talent?

The Huskie Tram (Beta version)

The idea of a high frequency, small shuttle to run from end-to-end of campus could be started immediately. Let's try a few sample busses and play with the timing get it right, before committing dollars to the larger system.

The Hub@Holmes

Every fall students, arrive only to be overwhelmed by the number of offices and departments they need to visit to get settled in. Why not put every student-facing office in the Ballroom in a 'hub' format for 30 days, where new and returning students can get everything they need in one single location?

Campus Community Gardens

With increased interest in local food and high quality eating, let's use some of NIU's surplus space to create colorful and nutritious community gardens where students from dorms, clubs and affinity houses can all grow produce and compete, while learning more about the environment?

Love the Lagoon

The lagoons are NIU's most memorable landscape element. Re-introducing ice skating and canoeing on the water. Music, art installations and receptions along their banks — all to help celebrate what is unique about this place.

College Street as THE Great Entry Drive

A great connection from Campus to Downtown is already in place – it just needs a little TLC. Wider sidewalks, new signage, better lighting would go a long way to strengthening the connection while improving the campus image for new and returning students and their parents.

2,018 Trees

Think big! Imagine returning to NIU's barren campus this fall to be greeted by 2,018 new trees – lining the spine and framing new courtyards – providing shade, freshening the air and adding fall color. Why 2,018? Because that's the incoming class of freshman – let's welcome them big!

'Line the Spine'

Aside from trees, let's take the proposed spine and add tents and kiosks with food and art and supplies – everything a student needs to feel welcome and excited about their choice to be here!