



# GROWTH & PLANNING HISTORY 1

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## FINDINGS AND KEY QUESTIONS

### Findings

- The Town grew slowly from its 1854 founding until 1960, after which it grew rapidly. As fast as the population grew, the incorporated area of the Town grew even faster, leading to an overall decrease in population density.
- Illinois State University has had a significant influence on the formation and growth of the Town. The current economic challenges faced by the Town and the University necessitate a greater level of coordination to achieve a sustainable future for both. In recent years Normal has dedicated substantial resources to the redevelopment of Uptown and the Main Street corridor, both of which bring great benefits to the university and the broader community. Normal has also accommodated shifts in ISU policy regarding student housing. Mutual commitment to the evolution of the Town-Gown relationship is to the advantage of ISU, the Town, and the broader region.
- A landmark planning effort in Normal was the 2015 Report, adopted in 1990, which examined the Town's quality of life, impacts of growth and the importance of developing a more diverse and resilient local economy. The Town's most consequential recent planning effort is the redevelopment of Uptown Normal, applying New Urbanism and Smart Growth principles, which has brought the Town national recognition. These principles have also driven the ongoing Main Street corridor redevelopment.
- Regionalism was an overarching theme of the 2015 Report, which has an assertive discussion of this principle. It called for regional planning, policy development, code standardization, consolidation of government services, and a regional approach to growth management. While there are many existing regional cooperation arrangements, both formal and informal, between local governments, regional agencies, for-profit and not-for-profit entities, attempts at increased coordination have stalled. In the current era of fiscal uncertainty at both the local and state levels, heightened regional coordination is necessary to maintain the current quality of place and achieve positive change in the future.

### Key Questions

- What implications will the community's expanding physical footprint and declining population density have on the fiscal, social, and environmental aspects of the community? Is it possible to apply the same smart growth principles that guide the Uptown and Main Street redevelopments to the rest of the community? If so, how do we prioritize implementation?
- How can local governments continue to work with other partners toward a common vision that advances the immediate and long-term interests of the agencies and organizations involved and of the broader community? Who should lead the charge?

Normal has 150 years of growth and development to its credit, but rather than a steady progression, the Town's changes have followed an idiosyncratic pattern. From its beginnings with a handful of buildings and a few hundred residents, it took nearly a century for the population to reach 10,000 people. Once that milestone was reached, Normal grew at unprecedented levels, and it continues to grow today at a more moderate but still healthy pace.

Community-wide, the Town exemplifies development policy and implementation similar to many American cities and towns over the past 150 years. Normal generally has followed a typical pattern of expansion, moving outward from its core and using more land per structure over time. In more recent decades, that phenomenon has changed slightly with the arrival of university-oriented housing and the Uptown redevelopment projects. Map 1.1.2, depicting residential construction dates, illustrates this phenomenon.

## A CHRONOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT

### THE FOUNDING (1850s-1900)

The Town of Normal began in 1854 as the railroad junction of the Chicago and Alton Railroad and Illinois Central Railroad, just south of today's Uptown Circle. The Town consisted of a plot of land now bounded by North Street, Florence and Fell Avenues and Linden Street. See Map 1.1.1.

Incorporated in 1867, Normal had a quiet first century of growth, especially as the home to the first state-supported institution of higher



ISNU Old Main Building Circa 1860  
Photo courtesy of the Dr. JoAnn Rayfield Archives at Illinois State University

education. The "normal school" (Illinois State Normal University, or ISNU) and the Town influenced each other from the establishment of the campus onward.



Guided by Fell and other civic leaders, the Town and the university slowly grew alongside one another throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. In 1867, Normal became the site of the state Civil War Orphans' Home, later known as the Illinois Soldiers' and Sailors' Children's School (ISSCS), a dominant institution and feature of Normal's "east side" for over a century.

Early development was compact, mostly centered on government, institutions, or commercial features. Development spread away from the rail junction, for both residential and commercial uses, and for the ISNU campus.

Later in the 19th century further social and infrastructure development occurred, including paved streets, municipal water wells, electricity, fire response, the Town library and the founding of Brokaw Hospital (now the Advocate Bromenn Regional Medical Center). Businesses began and thrived, drawing on local agricultural and transportation resources.

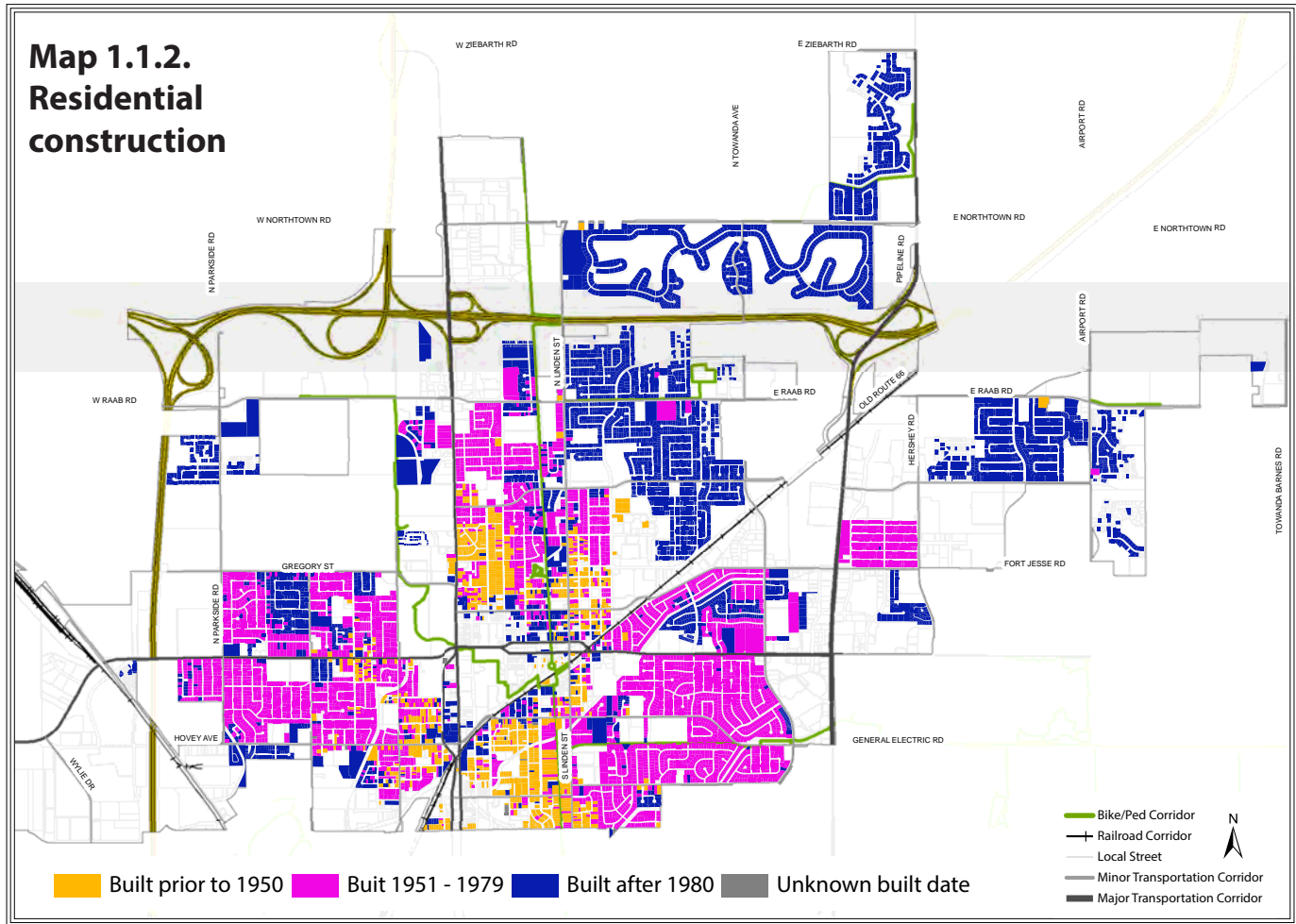
**Map 1.1.1**  
**1854 North Bloomington Plat**



 Original North Bloomington Plat  
 Constitution Trail



**Map 1.1.2.  
Residential  
construction**



A few of the built components of the Town's founding period remain; several impressive residences survive, as do a handful of university buildings and some late 19th century commercial structures in what is now Uptown.

#### **ACCELERATING MODERNITY (1900-1960)**

Innovation paved the way into the 20th century. New technologies found their way to Central Illinois via the same expanding transportation network that brought people and goods from larger cities to live, study, or work. Water and sewer systems expanded to accommodate growth. Electrical power became available and enabled the creation of an interurban light rail network.

An example of how innovation affected planning and development in the Town is the Cedar Crest subdivision. Built between the mid-1910s and 1920s, Cedar Crest abandoned the traditional street grid for curvilinear streets.

Vehicles are another shift of emphasis found in the houses in Cedar Crest, a number of

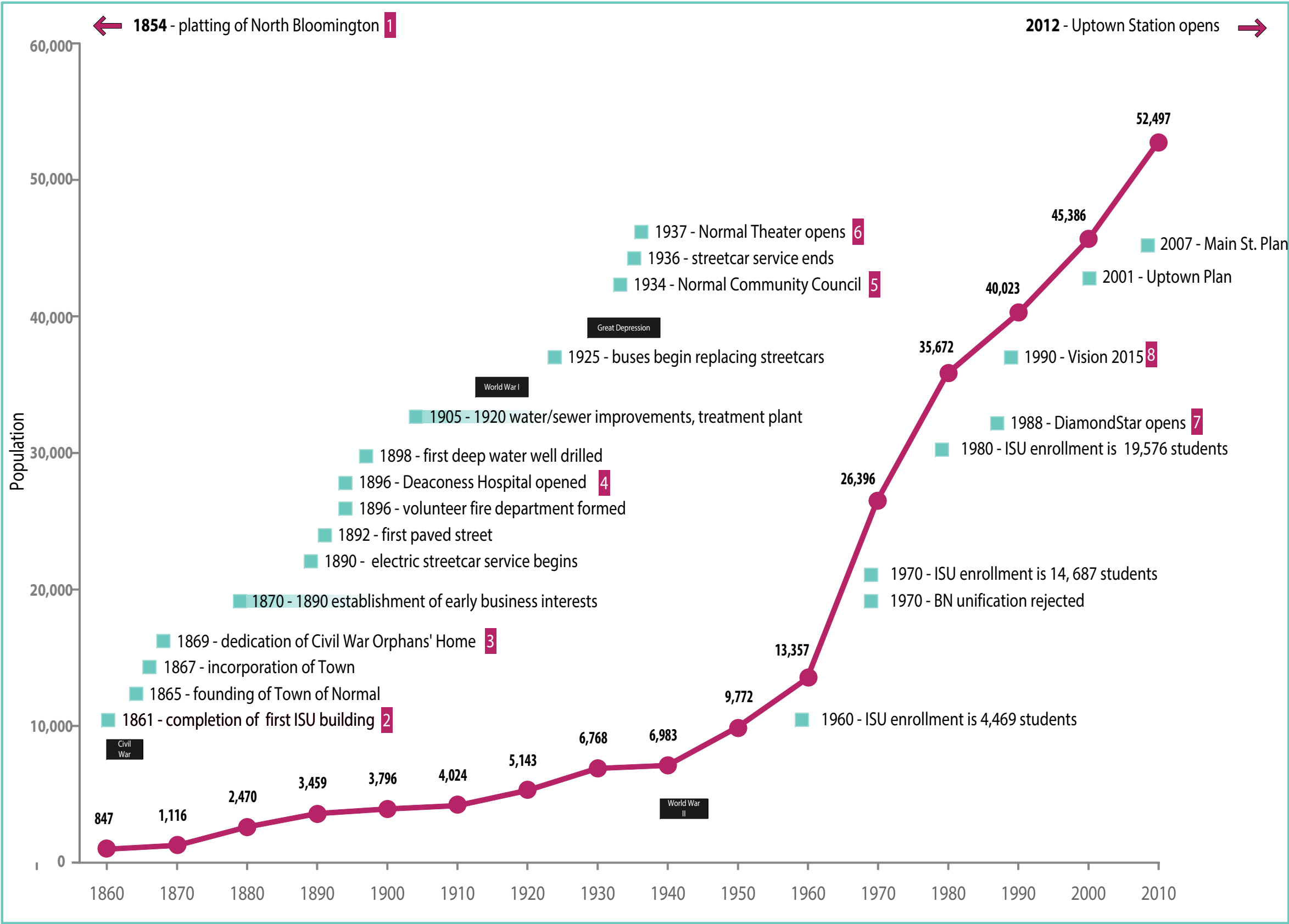
which have dedicated garages. In this era when private automobiles were still very new, the garages of Cedar Crest signaled acceptance that motor vehicles were part of daily life for households as well as governments. The proliferation of cars would reshape the Town's neighborhoods.

Accommodation of the car culture continued through the first half of the 20th century, as neighborhoods moved out from the Town core. Population growth remained slow during this period.

#### **RAPID GROWTH ARRIVES (1960-1990)**

The 1960s began an era of transition, from a small town with a small institution at its heart, to a rapidly growing community centered on a university with an expanded educational mission. Between 1960 and 1970, ISNU experienced growth which had more than quadrupled its enrollment. The population exploded, too: from 1960 to 1970, the Town's population nearly doubled, a challenging event for any community. This fast growth and

Figure 1.1.1  
Town of Normal  
Population and Development Milestones  
Census 1860 to 2010



Notes

1. This platted area would form the core of the Town of Normal
2. The Normal School began classes in Bloomington until the completion of "Old Main." This ISU campus icon was demolished in 1961.
3. The charter of the Orphans' Home was later expanded to include children orphaned by later wars, and was eventually renamed the Illinois Soldiers' and Sailors' Childrens' School, often referred to as ISSCS
4. Deaconess Hospital was renamed Brokaw Hospital, merged with Mennonite Hospital to become BroMenn, and today is the Advocate BroMenn Regional Medical Center.
5. The Community Council undertook projects for the welfare of Normal, including a community garden and a reading room that led to the formation of the public library.
6. The first theater in the area built specifically for sound films, with state-of-the-art sound and air conditioning.
7. A joint venture of Chrysler and Mitsubishi Motors; later became Mitsubishi Motors NA; production ended in November 2015
8. The Vision 2015 Report was the first of a series of visioning documents adopted by the Town mans revisited at 5-year intervals.



the arrival of new enterprises combined to challenge the Town's boundaries.

As the population began to boom in the late 1960s and onward, residential development followed models typical of the times. The Town had a period of standard suburban residential development characterized by reduced residential density. Changes in neighborhood form and density are illustrated in Map 1.1.2.

Commercial development shifted away from the compact core structure from which the Town began, although Normal was fortunate to retain distinctive downtown elements, such as the Normal Theater. In suburban-style retail, College Hills Mall has been through two models of concentrated retail development, the 1980 enclosed mall of its first iteration, and the "lifestyle center" model following the 2005 transition to the Shoppes at College Hills.

A significant industrial development event occurred in the late 1980s, when the Diamond Star (later Mitsubishi Motors) automotive plant began production on the west side of Normal, an annex-

ation to the Town that significantly expanded its incorporated area. Brought to McLean County by substantial incentives from the state and the Town, the plant employed auto workers from across the region, and spurred additional business development as companies supporting Mitsubishi also located in Normal.

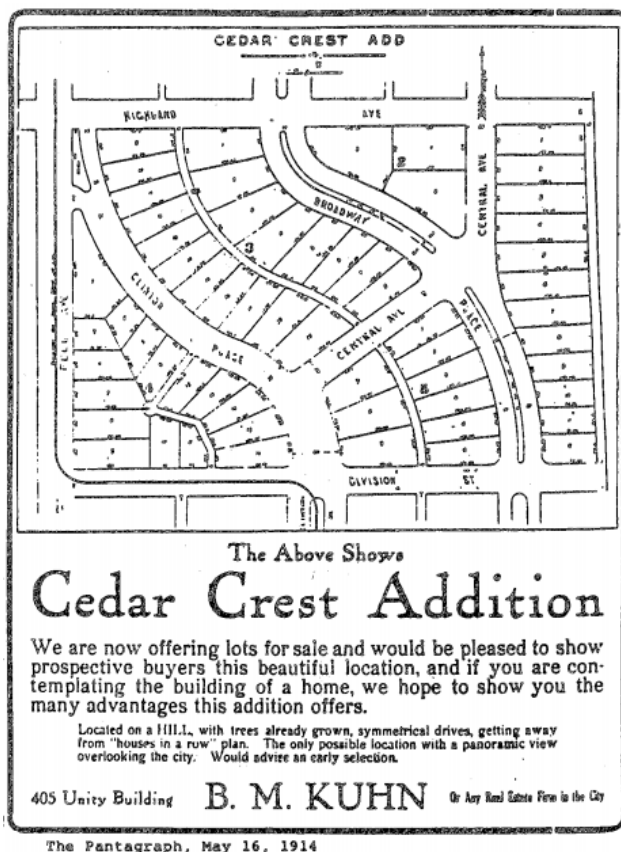
### RECENT TRENDS (1990-PRESENT)

The extraordinary growth seen in the second half of the 20th century has declined in intensity. The Town in the last 30 years continued a pattern of steady population growth. As illustrated in Map 1.1.3, this growth has occasioned new annexations (see Chapter 1.3, Land Use and Development for more discussion on this subject).

At the turn of the 21st century the Town encouraged efforts to adopt innovative development approaches, with the same spirit as the Cedar Crest development of the early 20th century. The Town has favored adoption of the "new urbanist" model for residential development, which stresses greater density, enhanced design standards, and a return to traditional neighborhood patterns, housing styles, street networks, and local amenities. This type of neighborhood development echoes the design of older neighborhoods, such as the area surrounding Fell Park or Old North Normal.

The Town has also been proactive in managing new off-campus residential development for university students. Projects in recent years have established new standards for student housing, and some have utilized vacant land or replaced older and deteriorated student housing lacking modern features. As with the more compact subdivision development, these newer student-oriented housing ventures have created localized areas of higher residential density.

Some areas of the community have undergone redevelopment or changes in use more quickly than adjacent areas. One example is the group quarters and multiple-unit housing targeted toward ISU students along Willow Street, which until relatively recently was still primarily single-family housing. As the ISU campus expanded north of the Quad, this street first saw conversion of single-family structures to house students, some in fraternities or sororities. As the pressure for off-campus housing intensified, converted hous-



Advertisement for Cedar Crest Addition c.1914  
Photo Credit: Pantagraph

es were replaced with purpose-built apartments, some of conventional design, and more recently, with units combining common space with individually rented bedrooms. Some of the “Greek” organizations replaced converted houses with new buildings designed for their specific needs.

While Normal has been largely sheltered from the worst of the Great Recession and its aftermath, recent developments point to future changes in the Town’s industrial makeup. Late in 2015, Mitsubishi announced its intent to shutter its U.S.-based manufacturing assets, and the Normal plant ceased production. This circumstance shifted the municipal and regional economic profile through its reduction in manufacturing, and was one of several events which prompted a regional economic analysis and strategy; see Chapter 1.4 (Economic Vitality) for more discussion of this initiative. Figure 1.1.1 illustrates milestones in the Town’s development and population growth.

## THE TOWN’S VISIONING, PLANNING, AND REDEVELOPMENT HISTORY

Throughout its history, the Town has actively planned for its future, from the early efforts of influential citizens to the current comprehensive planning process. This work has followed different approaches over the years, reflecting the concerns and the practices of the day.

Normal has periodically updated its comprehensive plan, most recently in 2006. The Town has also done extensive planning for specific areas of Normal and for infrastructure and economic development. These plans include the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, the Parks and Open Space Master Plan, TIF planning, and participation in the Regional Greenways plan, Main Street Corridor Plan and Main Street Transportation Improvement Feasibility Study. Notably, the 2015 Report, a milestone visioning effort, and the Uptown Redevelopment Plan changed the face of the Town.

### 2015 REPORT: A VISION FOR NORMAL

One landmark in the Town’s planning was initiated by Mayor Paul Harmon in 1989, as the Town prepared for its 125th anniversary. With the aid of one of his predecessors, former Mayor Carol Reitan, Mayor Harmon established the Normal

2015 Committee and tasked it to spend a year considering the needs and goals of the Town in the year 2015. Ms. Reitan assembled an executive committee and recruited some 50 citizen volunteers to examine and predict the Town’s needs and targets for regionalism, education, communication, growth management and quality of life. Within each of these areas, the sub-committees formulated both broad guiding concepts and specific items for direct implementation. The committee reported its findings and recommendations to the Town Council.

The 2015 Committee recommended that its process of examining and reporting on Normal’s future be repeated at five-year intervals, and the Town has made that commitment to advancing a vision for the community that reflects changing times and circumstances. The most recent iteration of this visioning process was carried out in 2010 through the Community-Wide Sustainability Plan Task Force.

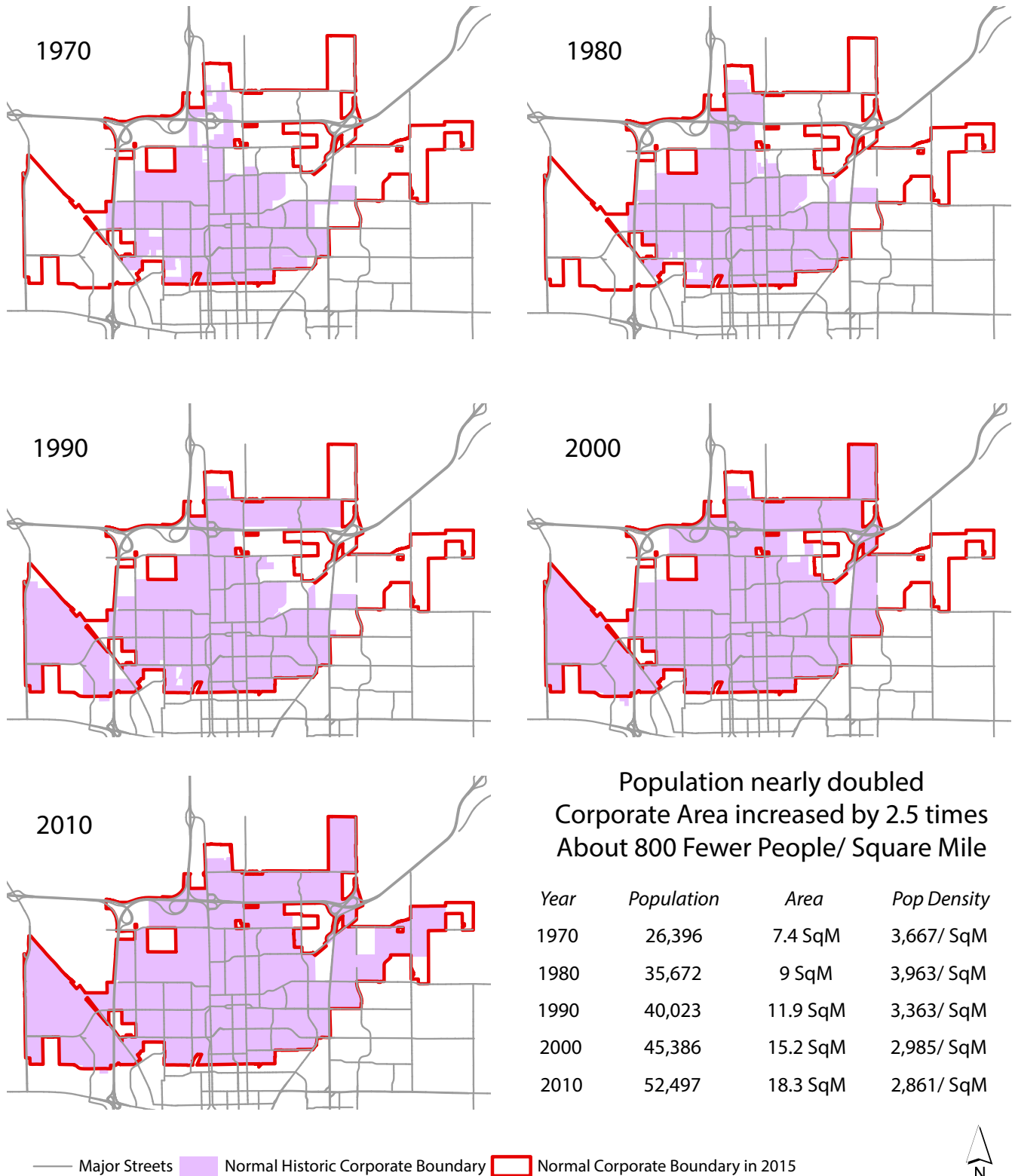
Regarding regionalism, the 2015 Report promoted intergovernmental cooperation in consolidating government services, regional planning, code standardization, and cooperation between the Town and ISU. The report included very specific community education proposals concerning environmental issues and a call to leverage the resources of all the educational institutions in Normal and Bloomington. Proposals regarding communications proved highly relevant to the changes in telecommunications technology over the past 25 years. The report considered broad long-term initiatives as well as targeted short-term actions, some so specific that they referred to staff assignments and new school curricula. The facilities at One Normal Plaza answered the need for a community center.

The 2015 Committee thought carefully about the impacts of growth, acknowledging that both positive and negative results are possible. The committee emphasized the importance of developing and expanding a diverse and resilient local economy, insulated as much as possible from changes in national economic conditions.

The 2015 Report also examined the Town’s quality of life as the ultimate result expected from implementation of the report’s recommendations. Some planning considerations and topics were



### Map 1.1.3. Corporate boundary changes since 1970



Data Source: Census, McGIS, MCRPC

essential to the Town's quality of life, and deserved separate consideration. Again, recommendations ranged from the very broad to the very narrow. The committee focused on environmental issues and made recommendations ranging from water and solid waste management to park expansion and the addition of a horticulturist to the Town staff. The committee also believed that quality of life is determined by the community's social environment, which is addressed through health care, social services and human relations, neighborhood organization, preservation, and the promotion of walking and biking.

Seen now from its target year of 2015, the report is remarkably prescient, and was successful in setting goals that would go on to be implemented. Many of the 2015 Report recommendations have reached fruition wholly or in part. Normal is designated as a Sterling Tree City and as a Bronze Level Bicycle Friendly Community. Uptown Station and the Children's Discovery Museum have achieved LEED® Silver certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, and a portion of Uptown has received Silver level LEED® for Neighborhood Development (LEED®-ND) designation, all pursuant to the adoption of a LEED® ordinance in 2002. The multi- and intermodal transportation functions of Uptown Station have drawn national praise, and remade the mobility choices in the Town's center. The success of the 2015 Report is a testament to the citizens who created it, and the work of the Town in implementing much of what was proposed in 1990.

The current comprehensive plan process will integrate the visioning work of the 2040 Committee, scheduled to begin in the spring of 2016. This existing conditions report will provide data for the committee's use, and in turn the 2040 Report will guide the vision expressed in the comprehensive plan.

## **UPTOWN PLANNING AND REDEVELOPMENT**

The Town's most consequential planning effort continues to be the redevelopment of Uptown Normal. While the Town could have opted for a downtown facelift approach, Normal instead opted for a full-scale reinvention of its historic center. The complex process of planning and executing the redevelopment began more than fifteen years ago

when the Downtown Renewal Plan was adopted in 2000.

Although the pace of implementation has recently been slower than first hoped, in part due to the global recession of the mid-2000s, an extraordinary amount of investment, building and business creation has taken place. In addition to the immediately visible changes, including the addition of the Carol Reitan Conference Center, a multi-modal transportation center, and two hotels to the Town center, the effort has produced important infrastructure improvements that will serve the Town for many decades. The new Uptown Circle is a good example; while its aesthetic value is visible to everyone, the sustainability features and other infrastructure modifications below the Circle are just as important.

The Town has now focused attention on the next stage of the Uptown redevelopment with the 2015 Uptown Normal Master Plan Update, expanding the area of attention to the south of the Union Pacific/Amtrak rail line and considering new types of projects, new partnerships, and an even greater commitment to community sustainability. Informally known as "Uptown 2.0," the plan calls for a substantial increase in housing development in the Uptown South area. This expansion of the vision for Uptown is incorporated in the 2015 Uptown Normal Master Plan Update.

## **THE REGIONAL CONTEXT**

Currently, the Town engages in ongoing coordination with the City of Bloomington and McLean County on a variety of municipal issues, often involving one or more regional agencies. These working relationships between municipal, county and regional actors cover policy and operational areas in which the individual entities do not have the resources to act or the authority to make policy decisions unilaterally. This approach has worked well in a number of areas, notably in economic development in concert with the Economic Development Council, environmental management and research with the Ecology Action Center, regional sewer and storm water management with the Bloomington Normal Water Reclamation District, public transportation with Connect Transit, and planning with the Regional Planning Commission.

These specific areas of cooperation can point the way to integrating the regional framework into other areas of local government policy and practice.

As identified earlier, Illinois State University has had a significant influence on the formation and the growth of the Town. Given the current fiscal challenges faced by the university, a greater level of coordination between the Town and the university are critical for a sustainable future of both entities. In recent years Normal has dedicated substantial resources and attention to the redevelopment of Uptown and the Main Street corridor, both of which bring great benefits to the university and the broader community. Normal has also accommodated shifts in ISU policy regarding student housing. Mutual commitment to the evolution of the Town-Gown relationship is to the advantage of both ISU, the Town and the broader region. The development of this comprehensive plan presents yet another opportunity to work closely with ISU and jointly pursue solutions for both the Town and the university.

### **AN EXPANDING ROLE FOR REGIONAL MANAGEMENT**

Regionalism was an overarching theme of the 2015 Report and many of the plans mentioned above. The 2015 Report begins with an assertive discussion of this principle, calling for regional planning, policy development, code standardization and consolidation of government services with other local governments, all identified as strategies to pursue in addition to the formation

of a regional council of governments comprised of the local jurisdictions. Beyond these specific regional recommendations, the 2015 Report abounds in regionalism applied to the themes of the report, particularly with respect to growth management, communication and quality of life. As noted above, there are existing regional cooperation arrangements between local governments and regional agencies in many areas. However, other attempts at increased regional coordination have stalled, such as merging select city services to achieve efficiencies. There are still opportunities for improvement. In the current era of fiscal uncertainty at both the local and state levels, heightened regional coordination is necessary to maintain the current quality of place and achieve positive growth in the future.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

The Town's recent actions and plans all point to a commitment to smart, compact, and sustainable growth. Its ongoing investment in its Uptown core and its focus on Main Street underscore a policy-level commitment to infill and redevelopment. The eco-friendly infrastructure embedded in Uptown Circle and the proposed environmental features in the Uptown 2.0 plan (backed by the Community-Wide Sustainability Plan) reflect an awareness of environmental realities and a will to reduce the community's ecological footprint. The new multi-modal transportation center in Uptown and the recent bike and pedestrian infrastructure improvements highlight the



Uptown (then Downtown Normal) prior to the redevelopment. This photo is showing Beaufort Street looking west.



Uptown Normal today. This photo is showing Constitution Blvd looking south.

importance placed by the Town on multi-modal travel. These priorities are consistent with what many in the broader community want (see section 3, Community Outreach, for more information).

Still, market forces, past annexation agreements, fiscal constraints and trying economic times, and an otherwise auto-oriented community culture all stand in the way of achieving growth in line with these priorities. The upcoming visioning and the comprehensive planning efforts should consider these challenges and priorities carefully while laying the path for the next 20 years.