Wayfinding Analysis and Recommendations Document for
Ann Arbor, Michigan

| Developed by **corbindesign** for the Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority

First Presentation | March 19, 2007

Revised & Updated | March 30, 2007

Introduction

Consistently ranked highly on lists of top places to visit, live, and work, Ann Arbor is a brilliant collection of cultural to-dos and to-sees that constantly attracts new visitors and old friends. Plays, films, demonstrations, exhibits, cuisine, shopping, lectures, and park space energize the people who experience Ann Arbor, and they return the favor back to the City.

Visitors in the "old friends" category—former residents, regional day tourists, and foodies who never miss a stop-through on their travels—often know Ann Arbor quite well. They know how to reach Downtown, where to ditch their cars, and where to satisfy their cravings for good eats. Old friends with extra time on their hands enjoy exploring a little further, looking for new shops, sights, and restaurants, and actually relish moments of getting lost around town and making new discoveries.

For a first-time visitor, however, getting lost can be quite a distressing experience. In Downtown, complexities such as one-way streets, diagonal street intersections at entrances to Downtown, and an interwoven university-town relationship can make a confusing affair of navigating the City. Everyone has been truly lost in a new place, and the sensations of that experience are generally uncomfortable—frustration, fear and anxiety. Even after we get our bearings, our sense of the place is often shadowed by that first experience of being lost—in our mind the place was fun but confusing, lively but "I don't know if I can find it again."

A wayfinding system helps solve this issue by giving visitors unfamiliar with an area the information they need to avoid getting lost in the first place. A wayfinding system tailored to the City of Ann Arbor must be designed to clarify the presentation of information to help new visitors find their way, and then stand back to let the City's vibrant offerings shine through and add to Ann Arbor's character. The system's success will be determined by the degree to which it empowers first-time visitors to navigate the City comfortably, while not distracting from the city experience for residents and old friends.

Further, the system can create synergies for residents and visitors who may have been unaware of the location (or even the existence) of that next adventure; it can open doors to entirely new discoveries for those who know Ann Arbor well, and are open to knowing it better. This wayfinding system will provide tools for all audiences to connect and engage with the core of this dynamic City.

Corbin Design looks forward to this opportunity to develop a wayfinding system for the City of Ann Arbor DDA. Our intention is for new visitors to be empowered to explore more of the City than they may have first intended, and for residents and old friends to go on enjoying Ann Arbor as usual. This document serves to kick off the process of exploration, questioning, and creation.

We enthusiastically welcome the occasion to work with the DDA's Wayfinding Project Advisory Committee, and the community at large, as we design this system together.

The Ann Arbor Wayfinding Project Team

The Ann Arbor Wayfinding Project Team comprises the following members of the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) and wayfinding design consultants from Corbin Design.

Project Advisory Committee (PAC)
DDA Members:
Susan Pollay – Executive Director
Sandi Smith – Board Chair
Fred Beal – Chair, Capital Improvements
Lindsay-Jean Hard – Intern
Russ Collins
Rene Greff
Jennifer Hall
Roger Hewitt
John Splitt

Other PAC Members:
Sue Gott – University Planner, University of Michigan
Mary Kerr – Executive Director, Ann Arbor Convention and Visitors Bureau
Peter Pollack – Pollack Design Associates
Wendy Rampson – City of Ann Arbor Systems Planning

Corbin Design, wayfinding design consultants
Mark VanderKlipp, President, Senior Designer
Jim Harper, Vice President, Senior Designer
Shaunna Cahill, Designer
Heidi Jones, Project Manager

Throughout the process of developing the wayfinding system, Corbin Design will meet periodically with the PAC to share progress and receive direction.

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"This document sets out the foundation thinking for the subsequent tasks of visual design and detailed wayfinding planning."

Seven Steps to Highly Effective Wayfinding

We at Corbin Design are the first to say that each environment we study presents its own unique set of patterns, strengths and challenges. That said, throughout our years of experience, we have established a set of guidelines that have consistently proven helpful to developing a thoughtfully designed and highly effective wayfinding system. Our Corbin Design team will keep these seven steps top-of-mind throughout this project, and we invite the PAC to track along with us:

1) Ensure User Participation

It is important that the interested stakeholders in the City have the opportunity to provide input into the design of the new wayfinding system. We heartily support the creation of the PAC and look forward to engaging them as our primary interface regarding day-to-day design and technical issues. In preliminary discussions we learned of the PAC's priority to involve the public in evaluating visual design concepts for the wayfinding program. We will assist the PAC in developing recommended agendas and materials both for meetings of the PAC and for all public meetings.

Each community we've served has presented opportunities for unique working relationships. We recognize that political factors can often be the most challenging aspects of these projects; however, by encouraging broad participation, our shared research, analysis and testing of the system concepts and objectives will work to create consensus.

2) Design for the First-Time Visitor

We often say the shortest distance between two points may not be a straight line. This is particularly true for the first-time visitor, when assuring that the ease of finding one's intended destination may take precedence over the time required to get there. The important points to consider are to welcome the visitor, clearly define the area or district, and provide directions to high-traffic-generating destinations from multiple approaches, as well as directions to public parking and all other destinations of public interest, both for the driver and the pedestrian.

Our experience shows that 10 to 15 percent of the destinations in a downtown area typically generate 85 percent of the visitor traffic. Therefore, it is important to identify these destinations and design the system to deal effectively with their unique wayfinding needs.

Our experience in designing wayfinding programs for numerous cities and towns has given us a familiarity with the needs and expectations of a variety of visitors, whether they're city residents, suburban residents or out-of-staters. We look forward to learning more about the visitors who experience Ann Arbor regularly.

3) Support Intuition

Formal wayfinding systems work best when they recognize and build on routes and terms that are intuitive. This is particularly important to consider in the case of cities such as Ann Arbor, where residents and old friends are fiercely loyal to tradition. Relying on the existing fabric and culture of the City for inspiration is usually more successful than imposing artificial or arbitrary solutions.

4) Structure Information

Because of the number and variety of destinations in a downtown area, it is always necessary to establish an information hierarchy to organize the wayfinding experience. Such a hierarchy can work to direct visitors first to an area of the downtown (or specific parking venues), then to their desired destination. Corbin Design has championed this concept in wayfinding programs for numerous cities and campuses where such logic has proved appropriate.

The wayfinding system will clearly communicate logical routes through the City to a given destination, making the directions for drivers and pedestrians apparent when they need it, and transparent when they don't.

By providing information at key decision points in their journey, we help visitors to remain in motion on the path to their destination rather than overwhelming them with too much information.

5) Control Circulation

By controlling how visitors move into Ann Arbor as well as through it, we can minimize the confusion brought on by street geometry and one-way streets, alleviating congestion along the more heavily trafficked thoroughfares. Security issues can be addressed as well by determining the safest or most controlled routes to each destination. A properly designed wayfinding system can accomplish many objectives by carefully controlling circulation, including minimizing traffic through more pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods, which is always an important consideration.

6) Thoughtfully Define Destinations

It is important to call places by names that can be easily recognized by the public and that are as "mutually exclusive" as possible. We put as much effort into developing an information vocabulary for wayfinding destinations as we do into developing a visual vocabulary for the signage system that conveys that information. Many of the terms used may derive from the local culture while others may have to be "coined." In either case, agreement on terminology is of paramount importance, as is a consistent use of the terminology once adopted.

Any terminology inconsistent with the history, spirit and culture of the City will be seen as such by these perceptive and passionate audiences. Community input in this case will be paramount in avoiding the use of such inconsistent terminology. Finally, all communications devices, whether written or verbal, must make use of the same nomenclature.

When determining which destinations should be displayed on vehicular guide signage, it is important to understand that generally only destinations accessible by all the public (as opposed to private enterprises or purely commercial messages) are considered. This is due to the fact that vehicular guide signage will generally be located in the public right-of-way on state routes. Any sign that carries a commercial message is considered by city, state and federal codes to be an advertising sign, and as such, is prohibited from being located in the public right-of-way.

The following criteria are typically used to evaluate whether or not a public destination should be included on vehicular wayfinding:

- The destination should be opened to the public.

- The destination should have parking available nearby.

- The destination should meet certain minimum attendance requirements on an annual basis.

- The destination should have funds available to participate in an annual maintenance assessment for the Wayfinding Program.

On pedestrian guide and orientation map elements these types of restrictions generally do not apply. There may be the possibility of allowing any and all public commercial enterprises to have a presence on selected elements at the pedestrian level of experience. However, in all cases variables of legibility, message length, amount of verbiage and letter heights will be taken into account.

7) Test the System

We suggest that once the wayfinding system has been defined and the signage elements designed schematically, mock-ups of the various sign types and wayfinding elements be built and installed in selected areas for evaluation by the PAC as well as the community at large. We regularly employ such formal means of evaluation to assure that the system, as proposed, will function effectively and is aesthetically appropriate. This activity also helps build consensus within the community as well as a sense of ownership among the project participants.

Goals of the
Ann Arbor Wayfinding System

First-time visitors feel comfortable getting to where they know they want to go.

Will be supported by these efforts:

- Clarified confusing vehicular experiences such as difficult intersections (Washtenaw Ave./E. Stadium Blvd. and Broadway St./Depot St./Beakes St.), diagonal streets intersecting gridded street patterns, and one-way streets.

- Entry and exit to the City made quick and simple for those who need it most (medical campus visitors, stadium traffic) by guiding drivers along the most convenient routes.

- A unified presence of wayfinding information via consistency in nomenclature from MDOT highway signage to pedestrian signage and mapping to print/Web/word of mouth communication; a fully supported journey.

- Awareness of being within a defined Area and/or District.

All visitors become aware of more offerings throughout the City—they feel comfortable in getting to where they just learned they want to go.

Will be supported by these efforts:

- "Cross-pollination" between geographic areas and Districts made recognizable and easy to find—visitors feel empowered to explore on their own.

- Driving visitors park their cars and become pedestrians (the "Park Once" model).

- A unified presence of wayfinding information via consistent nomenclature throughout the system.

- Downtown Ann Arbor's public image is enhanced through the system's distinct, helpful graphics.

The visual components of the wayfinding system complement the physical and cultural character of the City.

Will be supported by these efforts:

- Corbin Design researches established aesthetics in the City.

- Public input is sought by the PAC during the design process.

- Wayfinding elements are designed to be no larger than necessary, and occur no more often than necessary, replacing or incorporating selected existing signage where feasible.

- The visual design can transcend a "trendy" or an "of the moment" character, yet be compelling and remain so.

- The design seems to belong nowhere else but in Ann Arbor.

Organizing the Presentation of Information within the Wayfinding System

Successful wayfinding depends a great deal on the simplifying of the information presented, so that visitors are not confused or put off by excessive and unnecessary information. We identify the decision points visitors will be faced with throughout their experience, and determine what layer of information is necessary at each decision point. This simplified layering of information leads visitors along a journey to their destination, allowing them to easily recognize and interpret messages.

Such a process should support the following **sequence of events** within a city experience:

1. Provide directional information along preferred routes
   (identifying the area at hand along the way)

2. Inform visitors that they have arrived by defining entering experiences

3. Direct first to the area of one's desired destination

4. Guide to the most convenient parking in the area, close to the destination

5. Orient visitors as pedestrians once they've left their cars

6. Direct visitors back to their cars

7. Provide "away from Downtown" information about accessing major regional routes as drivers are leaving the area.

This information layering at each event in the sequence should be supported by a coordinated family of wayfinding elements. Later, we'll discuss what those elements might be, and their functions.

> **Challenge |** Organize the information visitors will need, and layer it in a simplified, easy-to-follow sequence; not all at once.
>
> **Solution Opportunity |** Arrange the information presentation in a hierarchical sequence, categorized for vehicular and pedestrian audiences.
>
> *1. First, we will organize the information presentation for driving visitors. who enter the City from surrounding freeways.*
>
> *2. Then we will organize the information presentation for pedestrian visitors, who have become pedestrians by parking their cars in Downtown Ann Arbor.*
>
> The following sections of this document explain this organization.

**Two Levels of
Information
Encountered
by a Driver:**

DRIVING
Ann Arbor

+ THESE STAND-ALONE "SUPER DESTINATIONS"

LEVEL ①

The first information
encountered.

A BLENDED EXPERIENCE

									WORTHY OF DEVELOPMENT, BUT OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF THIS PROJECT
Downtown *(an Area)*	**UM Campus** *(an Area)*	Arboretum Nature Area/ Nichols Arboretum	Cleary University	Crisler Arena	Huron Hills Golf Course	Michigan Stadium	UM Medical Center	Washtenaw Community College	**Huron River Pathway** *(an Area)*
		Ave Maria School of Law *(Relocating to Florida in 2009)*	Concordia University	Gallup Park	Leslie Park Golf Course	UM Matthaei Botanical Gardens	VA Health Care System	Yost Arena	
				Gerald R Ford Library					

LEVEL ②

These destinations are
encountered within
the context of
the larger Areas.

The
Experiences
of
Emphasis

Downtown	UM Campus	Huron River Pathway
Kerrytown District	Exhibit Museum	Arboretum Nature Area/ Nichols Arboretum
Main Street District	Hill Auditorium	Bandemer Park
State Street District	Kelsey Museum	Barton Nature Area
South University District	Mendelssohn Theatre	Bird Hills Nature Area
The Ark ✳	Michigan League	Broadway Park
Blake Transit Center	Michigan Union	Cedar Bend Nature Area
Chamber of Commerce	Museum of Art	Concordia University
City Center Building	Power Center	Fuller Park
Convention & Visitors Bureau	Public Parking Venues (Various)	Fuller Pool
County Administration Building	Rackham Auditorium	Furstenberg Nature Area
County Courthouse		Gallup Park
Crisler Arena		Huron Hills Golf Course
District Library		Island Park
Farmers/Artisans Market		Kuebler Langford Nature Area
Federal Building/ Post Office		Riverside Park
Greyhound Station		Ruthven Nature Area
Hands On Museum		South Pond Nature Area
Kerrytown Concert House		
Kerrytown Shops ✳		
Michigan Theater		
Michigan Stadium		
Municipal Building: - City Hall - Police Station		
Nickels Arcade ✳		
Performance Network		
Public Parking Venues (Various)		
Post Office Branch		
State Theater		
Yost Arena		
Zingerman's ✳		

✳ Support of commercial enterprises will require careful evaluation and consideration against limits
imposed by federal and state DOT guidelines for display of commercial venues on signage
in the public right-of-way.

Analysis & Recommendations

The City of Ann Arbor
Wayfinding System Organization Chart

DRIVING

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For Driving Visitors—

Information Presentation at Level 1: *Areas*

At Level 1 of information presentation, for driving visitors, are the Areas: Large geographic regions that are "speakable" collections of destinations. For some visitors, an Area could be a destination in itself— *"Let's go* **Downtown** *and look around for a few hours."* In many cases, visitors come to downtown targeting a specific destination within a Level 1 Area.

We propose that the wayfinding system identify ~~three~~ two Level 1 Areas by the following names:
1 Downtown
2 UM Campus
~~3 Huron River Pathway~~

(The opportunity to develop the Huron River Pathway is outside the scope of this current project)

Downtown, as the cultural, business, and governmental center of the City, receives a large number of visitors and could attract even more if visitors are clearly guided there.

It is recognized that several "SuperDestinations" will receive vehicular wayfinding support at Level 1. These are stand-alone, drive-to, destinations, some at locations near the bounding freeways (and as such supported via MDOT signage) and others more closely related to the Downtown experience.

These would be:

	Highway or Downtown
Arboretum Nature Area/ Nichols Arboretum	D
Ave Maria School of Law (relocating to Florida in 2009)	H
Cleary University	H
Concordia University	H
Crisler Arena	D
Gallup Park	D
Gerald R. Ford Library	H
Huron Hills Golf Course	H
Leslie Park Golf Course	H
Michigan Stadium	H+D
UM Matthaei Botanical Gardens	D
UM Medical Center	H+D
VA Health Care System	H+D
Washtenaw Community College	H
Yost Arena	D

The Downtown Area

Huron River Pathway as an Area

We recognize the opportunity for consideration of the Huron River Pathway as a programmed Area of the Ann Arbor wayfinding system is beyond the defined focus of this specific project. Its consideration, study and general discussion of opportunity will not be pursued at this time.

Challenge | Collect the disparate northern destinations into a speakable geographic Area.

Solution Opportunity | Develop a geographic Area designation related to the Huron River—this east-to-west presence comfortably collects a northerly spread of destinations. Additionally, it serves to call attention to the presence of the river to visitors. Currently, the Huron River is practically "hidden" to many visitors who target Downtown and UM Destinations: Even though it is quite wide and borders several local parks, many visitors are not aware of it at all. Announcing its presence via the Area name on vehicular wayfinding signage, maps, etc. would increase awareness of the river and the subsequent tourism opportunities (mostly recreational) that it offers. We have suggested the name of Huron River Pathway here for the purpose of discussing it in this document, although it may be renamed by the PAC.

The Huron River Pathway Area

The UM holds a strong presence in Ann Arbor. We propose calling out only the Central Campus as an Area ("UM Campus"), including its destinations relevant to the visitor's experience of Downtown; the remaining campuses (UM East, UM North, and UM South) are controlled within the wayfinding system of the UM itself.
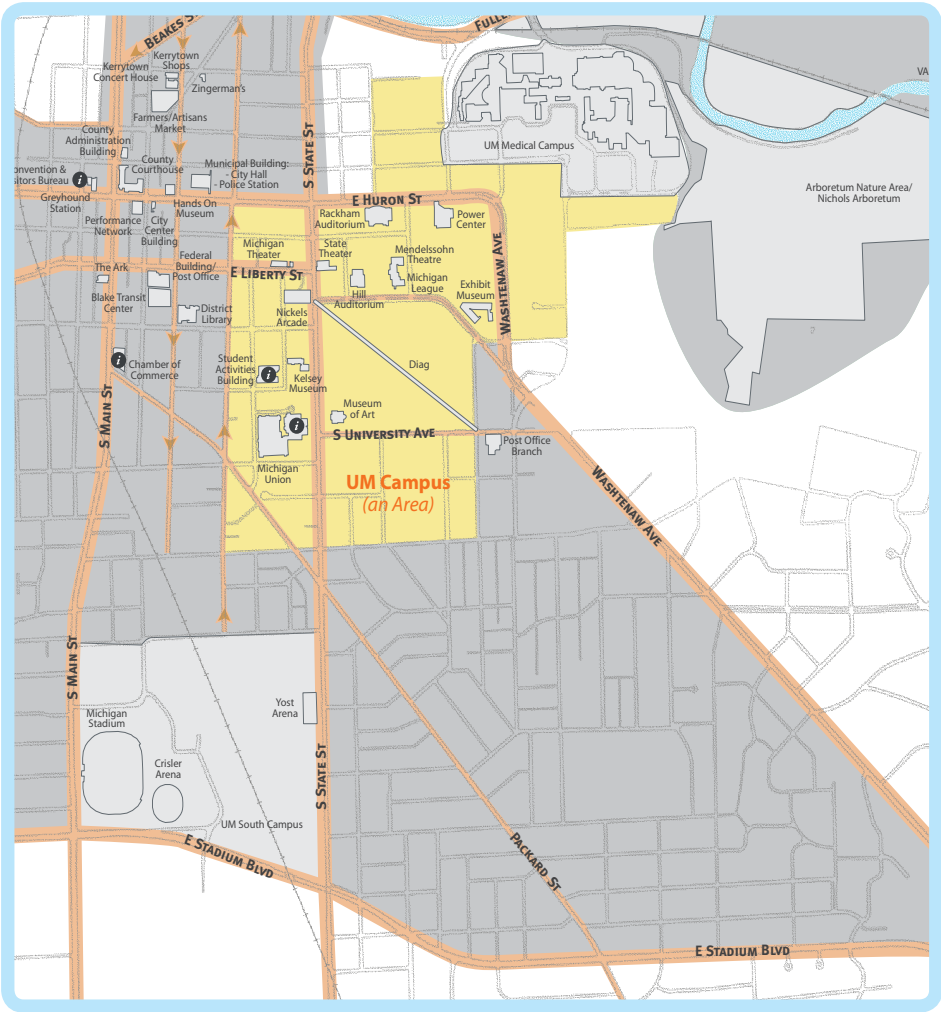
The UM Campus Area

As we develop this custom Downtown wayfinding program, we will rely upon, and reinforce where appropriate, the existing UM system of campus Boundary Markers, Building Identifiers as well as recently implemented Trail Markers. This will parallel our efforts working with the MDOT green and white signage.

University of Michigan
Campus Wayfinding & Signage Guidelines
August 2006   Draft

Typical mounting confirgurations
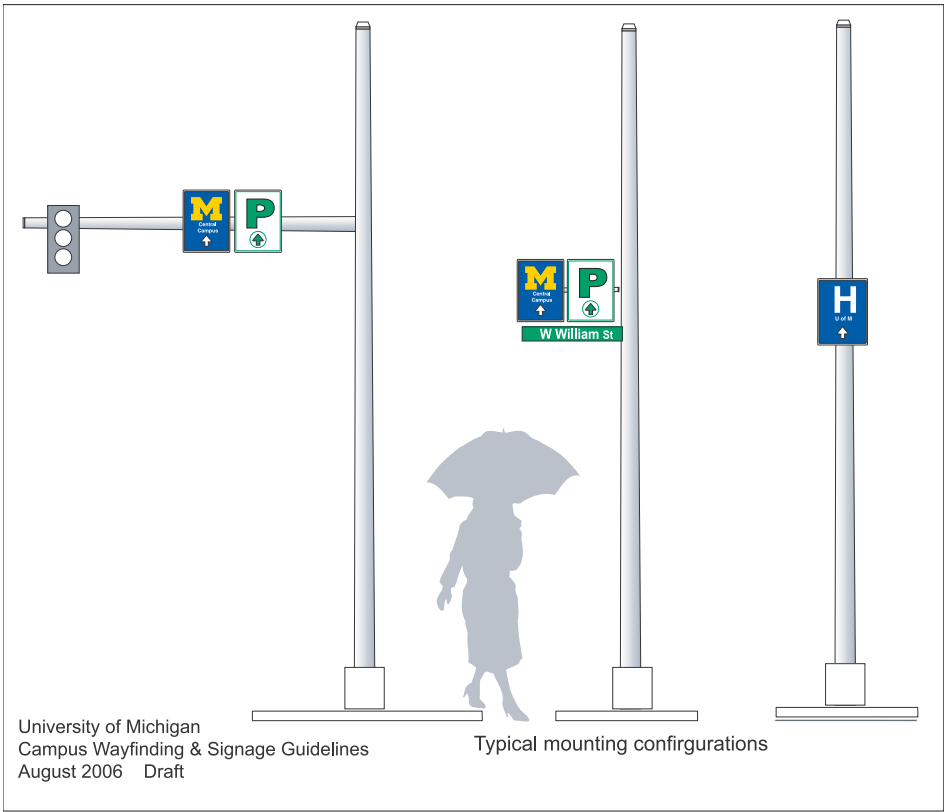
As the Wayfinding System Organization Chart indicated, vehicular wayfinding elements would be strategically located to guide driving visitors to, between and throughout the Areas.

Information Presentation at Level 1: *Destinations*

Certain Destinations should be presented on vehicular guide elements directly as driving visitors enter Ann Arbor. There are two reasons for this:

1) Some Destinations in this category (such as Michigan Stadium) generate such high attendance that they should be listed at the first level to best serve visitors to the City. These Destinations potentially attract as many visitors as entire Areas do. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) even classifies some of these Destinations as "Super Destinations," and identifies them on local highway exits. It makes sense then to pick up routing to these Destinations from the highways to their front doors.

2) Some Destinations in this category, due to their geographic location, do not fit comfortably into any Area (such as UM Mattaei Botanical Gardens). Some of them are located quite far away from other concentrations of Destinations, some immediately off of highway ramps. Again, visitors would be served best to see these Destinations listed on guide signage at level one.

Information Presentation at Level 2: *Destinations within Areas*

At level two of information presentation are the remaining Destinations, which are located within Areas. The Wayfinding System Organization Chart indicates how routing to these destinations would be displayed to driving visitors:

1) At Level One, directly off highways, visitors would follow guide signage to the appropriate Area;

2) at Level Two, as the visitor entered and/or navigated throughout the Area, they would see signage begin to guide to the Destinations within.
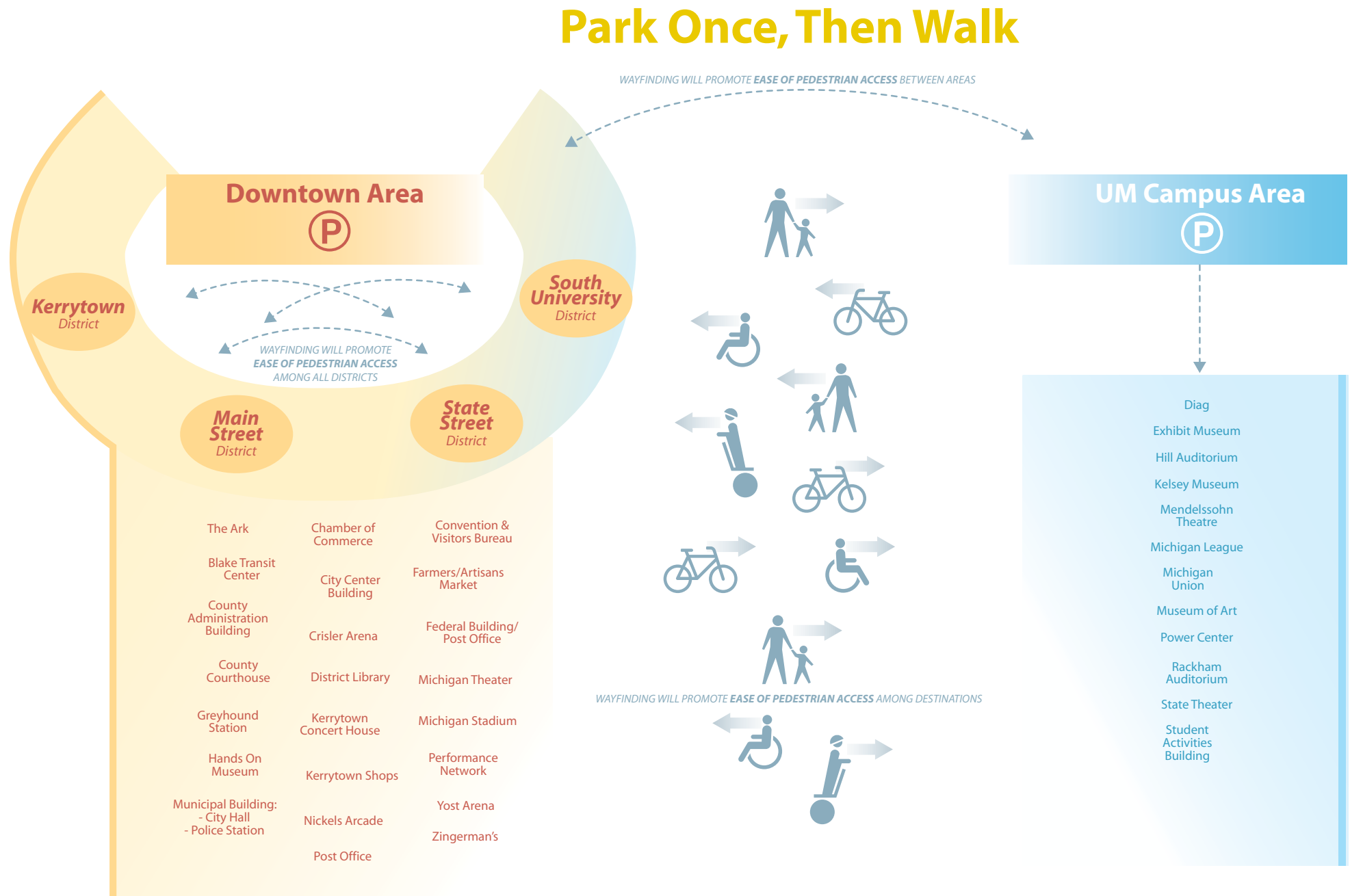
When visitors park their cars and become pedestrians, they would also encounter a system of wayfinding elements developed uniquely suited to their situation and needs. We will elaborate on the character of these elements further in this document.

Temporary or Special Event Routing/Destinations

Corbin Design anticipates that the wayfinding solution will need to accommodate a limited amount of temporary and/or changing messaging related to "event" destinations that occur at or near named destinations. The Art Fair is a prominent example of this. Both at the vehicular and pedestrian level, certain wayfinding elements in the system will have to incorporate this changeable/updatable message capability.

For Pedestrian Visitors—

Information presentation for pedestrian visitors begins within each Area at any public parking location—drivers become pedestrians by parking their cars. Just one level of information presentation exists for pedestrian visitors, where wayfinding elements guide them to nearby Destinations. Within the Downtown Area, wayfinding elements will also highlight and guide to the Districts.

Park Once, Then Walk

*WAYFINDING WILL PROMOTE **EASE OF PEDESTRIAN ACCESS** BETWEEN AREAS*

Downtown Area Ⓟ

Kerrytown *District*

South University *District*

*WAYFINDING WILL PROMOTE **EASE OF PEDESTRIAN ACCESS** AMONG ALL DISTRICTS*

Main Street *District*

State Street *District*

UM Campus Area Ⓟ

The Ark	Chamber of Commerce	Convention & Visitors Bureau
Blake Transit Center	City Center Building	Farmers/Artisans Market
County Administration Building	Crisler Arena	Federal Building/ Post Office
County Courthouse	District Library	Michigan Theater
Greyhound Station	Kerrytown Concert House	Michigan Stadium
Hands On Museum	Kerrytown Shops	Performance Network
Municipal Building: - City Hall - Police Station	Nickels Arcade	Yost Arena
	Post Office	Zingerman's

*WAYFINDING WILL PROMOTE **EASE OF PEDESTRIAN ACCESS** AMONG DESTINATIONS*

Diag

Exhibit Museum

Hill Auditorium

Kelsey Museum

Mendelssohn Theatre

Michigan League

Michigan Union

Museum of Art

Power Center

Rackham Auditorium

State Theater

Student Activities Building

Analysis & Recommendations

The City of Ann Arbor
Wayfinding System Organization Chart

PEDESTRIAN

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Wayfinding Elements

As we mentioned earlier, the decision points visitors will face in their experience of Ann Arbor should be supported by wayfinding elements that lead them seamlessly to their intended destinations. Through our work on wayfinding and signage systems, we've identified a family of elements that work effectively together to achieve this goal:

Regional DOT Signage (MDOT):
It is important to properly identify Ann Arbor from area highways and thoroughfares. Standard MDOT signage in place works well, but could benefit by some further examination of messaging used, to carry consistent nomenclature. Additional MDOT signage might be suggested to consistently support all major destination routes.

As stated, at the outermost approaches into Ann Arbor, via I-94, M-14 and US-23, the system of green and white MDOT signs offer a logical and effective vocabulary to guide the first-time visitor into Ann Arbor. Of significance in this existing system is the effort to route and/or otherwise call out uniquely, and by formal naming:

> Downtown
> Univ of Mich
> Michigan Stadium
> Huron River

Additionally it is noted that the UM has reinforced the standard MDOT "Blue H" hospital sign with their own version that brands the "H" with "U of M" beneath it.

In exploring what opportunities there may be in revisiting/reinforcing or augmenting the MDOT standard signage, we would offer these recommendations with regard to what is 1) *Practical*, 2) *Feasible* and/or 3) *Desirable*.

1) Practical
Work with (propose to) MDOT to reinforce ("fill-in") messages and signs within its existing signage system along I-94, US-23 and M-14.

a. Introduce the term "Downtown" into messaging on I-94 and US-23 (it currently is limited to appearances on M-14, north of Ann Arbor).

b. Further emphasize the exit options, and offer route reinforcement at the terminus points of the exit ramps off the three major entry arteries (I-94, US-23, M-14), for access to:
> "Michigan Stadium"
> "Univ of Mich"
> "Downtown Ann Arbor"

2) Feasible
All of #1 above plus:
Introduction, within the established MDOT and MUTCD visual sign type language, of selective exit ramp and trailblazing routing to:

> "Kerrytown District"
> "Main Street District"
> "State Street District"
> "South University District"

3) Desirable
Item #1b above plus:
Introduction onto the state routes M-14 and US23 (before exiting into Ann Arbor) of selected custom vehicular guide signage as will be designed in this program.

MDOT governs what can and cannot be placed within the public right-of-way along state and/or federal highways. Relating to this project those highways would be I-94, US-23 and M-14 most significantly. Ultimately the type of custom designed vehicular guide signage that will emerge from our efforts will be required to be evaluated by MDOT for its design-intent compliance with the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), the standard for federal and, in varying forms, many state guidelines for highway signage.

It is Corbin Design's desire that a satisfactory agreement can be reached with MDOT to acknowledge the exceptions, variances and/or modified conditions necessary to introduce a resulting custom-designed wayfinding system's visual design vocabulary into certain roadways that define the central and immediately surrounding areas of Downtown Ann Arbor.

Within the precisely defined visual sign type vocabulary of the MUTCD Corbin Design sees great opportunity to default to certain of those visual standards. In other instances, the degree of desired customized design will likely fall outside MUTCD guidelines but still comply with all ADA considerations as well as established legibility criteria in exterior environments.

Challenge | Properly and consistently identify Downtown Ann Arbor from area highways and thoroughfares.

Solution Opportunity | Standard MDOT signage is in place, but may need to be updated and/or augmented. As one example, the term "Downtown" is a part of current MDOT terminology supported in a very limited way on a few signs. We would recommend more use of "Downtown" in additional MDOT guide signs.

Corbin Design will propose messaging and layouts in standard MDOT formats, and will provide a package of detailed documentation sufficient for seeking MDOT's approval. Our documentation will include a discussion of circulation concerns, and a "business case" argument for our recommendations. Soon after Corbin Design's initial visual design presentation in April, we suggest establishing a dialog with the local MDOT office, bringing them in as early as possible. This will allow us to remain somewhat flexible with respect to their feedback.

Boundary Markers or Gateway Identifiers:
These elements highlight the perimeter of the City and tell visitors they've arrived in Ann Arbor, providing a welcoming entryway. They also help to create anticipatory value in the system by displaying design elements that visitors will see later in their journey. Currently in Ann Arbor, there are a few of these signs in the MDOT style, displaying sister cities and paying homage to the original boundaries of "Annarbour." Our recommendation will be to create a new Gateway Identification element, honoring the aesthetics of the new wayfinding system, that possibly integrates these existing elements.
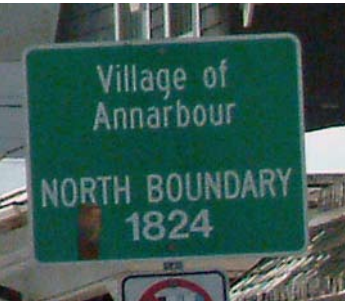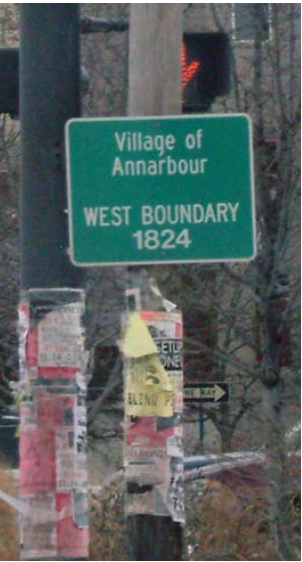
Existing "Village of Annarbour" signs

Vehicular Guide Signs:

These signs support wayfinding to parking and destinations in the vicinity of the sign location. Super destinations may appear on guide signs that are farther away from the destination, leading drivers in from regional entrances. In the sequence of encounter, guide signs lead visitors first to the vicinity of their destination, then to the destination, then to nearby parking.

Parking Identification Signs:

When drivers near their destination, it is important that they immediately recognize available parking. Public parking needs to be clearly identified so that drivers may park as close as possible to their desired destination. Existing public parking in Ann Arbor is generally quite clearly identified, and signage incorporates the universal circle "P" symbol. We will recommend that the new system maintain these positive qualities, and that a consistent graphic identity be considered to unite all of the public parking venues and possibly offer a means to convey relevant District .

Existing Parking Identification and Guide Signs

Pedestrian Guide Signs:

A Pedestrian Guide Sign functions much like a Vehicular Guide sign to navigate the pedestrian from parking areas to destinations within walking distance, while guiding the pedestrian along defined routes.

Pedestrian Kiosks:

Kiosks serve to orient pedestrians to their position within the larger area and often provide additional location and/or information of general interest. They incorporate a map element, oriented to the visitor's position when facing the map, with an easily understood "You Are Here" marker. Super destinations and other key destinations are identified on the map, along with parking venues. As noted, kiosks can also be a source for added information about the area, such as historical facts and seasonal events.

District and/or Area Identification:

It is expected that the design solutions proposed for the above-described primary wayfinding elements will graphically acknowledge Districts or Areas, both in relation to where the sign resides as well as in relation to guide or mapping information conveyed by the sign. Whether by name alone (as in "Kerrytown") or additionally with color, typography and defining iconography (logo, branding), this will be a significant part of our solution explorations.

In addition, we want to explore opportunities for elements which simply mark or identify the location. These may include street name signs that integrate the District or Area name/brand (the existing treatment for the Old Fourth Ward historic area, while elegant, could be better integrated with the street name sign), building corner-mounted street identifiers with District or Area name/brand, sidewalk embedment identifiers. The existing historic information panels (both the freestanding transparent units and the facade-mounted 1, 2, and 3 panel sets) are quite inviting, adding to the overall experience of Downtown, but they are few in number and do not easily identify the District.

Nomenclature

Consistent nomenclature is one of the most important supporting features of a successful wayfinding system. We make the assumption that destinations included in the wayfinding system (stadiums, theatres, medical centers, etc.) have taken care of consistency at both extreme ends of the wayfinding experience spectrum—naming presented on their owned brochures, advertising materials, and Web sites matches naming presented in the environment itself on building and parking identification signage.

As the project moves forward Corbin Design will want the team to confirm the names of all destinations for both formal identification as well as functional (i.e., sometimes abbreviated) but consistent use in wayfinding messaging. As an example, The University of Michigan will of necessity have to be reduced substantially in how it is identified on vehicular guide messaging. Equally, throughout this working document we have been using the term "District" as it relates to the four designated areas of focus in the project. It is quite possible that the term "District" will not become part of the formal nomenclature (e.g., is it "Kerrytown" or can it be "Kerrytown District"?).

The next point where naming is presented is on the more distant green & white highway signage. It is important to be aware of naming presented on signage provided by MDOT.

Challenge | Aim for nomenclature consistency from start (visitor learns about Downtown Ann Arbor, about a certain destination) to finish (arrival at destination).

Solution Opportunity | Concentrate on information on highways and leave custom aesthetic development for the portion of wayfinding signage within the City. Develop a program report of proposed informational additions and/or corrections. These would be made within the standard MDOT highway sign aesthetic vocabulary (i.e. green rectangular panel with white lettering). Present to local MDOT officials with focus on strengthening informational presentation. When within the City, develop a vehicular and pedestrian wayfinding system that supports MDOT's presentation and relies on consistent nomenclature across the spectrum of wayfinding elements.

The Experience of Getting to Ann Arbor Today

Who is visiting Ann Arbor, and why?

It is important to qualify and quantify the audience of visitors to Ann Arbor: Who is coming to Ann Arbor, and what are they doing here?

The Ann Arbor Area Convention and Visitors Bureau keeps tabs on visitor demographics, and provided the following helpful data:

A "visitor" to Ann Arbor is defined as someone coming from outside a 50-mile radius. Annually, Ann Arbor welcomes 4 million visitors.

- Ann Arbor is primarily a regional destination, with an exaggerated beyond-regional audience due to the presence of the UM.

- 40 percent of visitors are business travelers (for meetings and conferences, primarily related to the University and Integrated Park).

- 49 percent of visitors come to visit relatives or friends; this audience is largely generated by the University population. These visitors often access entertainment venues as part of their visit.

- 28 percent of visitors stay overnight, averaging 3 nights; most of these are visiting relatives.

- Most hotels are located outside of Downtown—only a couple of B&Bs and hotels are located near the UM campus. Most visitors drive from their hotel to Downtown, rather than taking the bus.

- Some visitors hold the perception that it's difficult to park Downtown, and choose to shop in the malls south of town.

- Touring performance events visiting in Michigan are sometimes booked exclusively to Ann Arbor rather than surrounding large venues, due to its college campus environment.

- Since Ann Arbor is the county seat, many visitors come to for governmental-related business.

- UM home football games are the largest attendance-generator in Ann Arbor.

- The Ann Arbor Art Fairs are the second-largest attendance generator.

- The UM Medical Center is a large draw for overnight visitors, reserving about 60 local hotel rooms nightly, plus 30 in-house rooms at the Med-Inn.

- Tourists come to Ann Arbor primarily for entertainment: dining, music, cultural events, weddings, special events, and athletic events (football, basketball, hockey, gymnastics, swimming, baseball, softball).

- 50 percent of visitors shop while in Ann Arbor (although this is generally not their primary reason for visiting).

Visitors to Ann Arbor are coming for a wide variety of reasons: Tourists are coming for entertainment and shopping, relatives are visiting family, patients are visiting the hospital, some have business at Governmental centers, others are bound for the University – the destinations and intentions are numerous and sometimes not mutually exclusive. Visitors from each audience group are in different mindsets, experiencing different levels of stress and comfort. A successful wayfinding system will address the desires and experiences of each audience, and will minimize the element of fear about an unfamiliar environment. Make it easy and intuitive for everyone to get around, and you'll keep them coming back!

To illustrate the journey our various audiences will experience, we'd like to introduce a cast of characters who will help us approach the project through their unique perspectives. They were chosen from a large pool of contenders because they represent a good cross-section of first-time vehicular and pedestrian experiences we've identified. We welcome your input (and stories!) as together we create an overview of the visitor's journey to and through Ann Arbor:
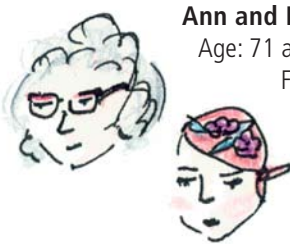
Ann and Linda
Age: 71 and 43
From: Fowlerville, MI
Intent: Ann is driving her daughter Linda to University Hospital for an oncology appointment. Linda is fatigued and not feeling well, so Ann plans to drive in for the 11:15 AM appointment and return home immediately afterward.
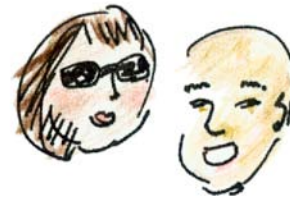
Cherie and Tim
Age: 52 and 58
From: Grosse Pointe, MI
Intent: Cherie and Tim drove into town for the weekend to visit their daughter Mallory, a first-year undergraduate student at the University of Michigan (UM). Mallory has polled her friends over the past week for the best restaurants on Main Street to hit when her parents are in town, and looks forward to indulging a bit with Mom and Dad.

Sid and Howard
Age: 39 and 41
From: Chicago, IL
Intent: Sid and Howard remain friends since they met as dorm roommates at Northwestern University. Ever Wildcat fans, they are making their way to Ann Arbor to watch a volatile match at the Big House at 3:30 PM. Sid's wife Nina is a Michigan alum who persuaded the guys to try dinner tonight at the Brown Jug.

Katya
Age: 31
From: Minneapolis, MN
Intent: Katya flew in this morning to Detroit Metro Airport from Minneapolis, and is driving her rental car into Ann Arbor to meet with a potential employer for a lunch interview.

Luke, Jaime and Max
Age: 30, 28, and 6
From: Traverse City, MI
Intent: Luke, Jaime and their son Max are staying with Jaime's cousins in Whitmore Lake for a week in summer. They have heard good things about Ann Arbor from their friends in Traverse City, and decided to include a day trip during their vacation.

From Home to the Highway

Visitors' experiences navigating Ann Arbor begin far earlier than when they begin to see landmarks of the City from their car windows, and sometimes even before they hop in the car. *It is important to realize that a comprehensive wayfinding system should consider the navigational experience beyond immediate physical geography and the abundance of information visitors may receive from various sources.*

Let's follow our characters as they make their way to Ann Arbor:

Ann and Linda

Ann received a printed map brochure from UM Health System in the mail last week, and feels confident about her short drive down US-23 to the University Hospital. She and Linda leave Fowlerville just over an hour before Linda's appointment time.

Cherie and Tim

Cherie used an online mapping tool to find directions to Mallory's dorm, which she printed out for the trip. She and Tim leave their home mid-morning for Ann Arbor, hoping to visit Mallory at her dorm room before taking her out to lunch.
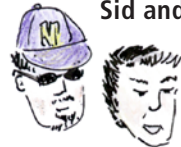
Sid and Howard

Sid picked up a map of Michigan from his AAA branch and has high-lighted the path that he'll drive with Howard to Michigan Stadium. They have a simple drive east on I-94 to exit 175, which Sid noticed from the map was closest in proximity to the Stadium. He picks Howard up at 8 AM for the 3:30 PM game and they make their way from the western Chicago suburbs to I-94.

Katya

Katya's flight arrived on time this morning just before noon, and she has picked up her rental car at the airport. The clerk at the rental counter highlighted the route to Main Street in Downtown on one of their map handouts.

Luke, Jaime and Max

Jaime's cousin verbalized the directions to Ann Arbor over breakfast this morning. Luke navigates via their Michigan highways map as Jaime drives south down US-23 into the City.

As the Convention and Visitors Bureau defines a visitor to Ann Arbor as someone coming from outside a 50-mile radius, most if not all visitors will enter the City from a surrounding highway. Ann Arbor is located in the midst of three surrounding highways:

- I-94: Runs east and west and borders the southwest side of the City

- US-23: Runs north and south and borders the east side of the City

- M-14: Runs east and west and borders the north side of the City, sprouting from I-94 to the west

Exiting the Highway and Entering Ann Arbor

Visitors exiting the surrounding highways have reached the threshold of where they begin to see evidence of and take impressions of the character of Ann Arbor:

Sid and Howard

A few miles before their exit, Sid and Howard encounter slow-moving, bumper-to-bumper traffic on I-94. They roll down their windows and absorb the energy of the crowd; Howard pops in a CD of the Northwestern marching band to make their loyalties known to U of M-flag-waving vehicles on their sides. Soon they see a green-and-white MDOT sign noting "Michigan Stadium: Exits 172 & 175." Sid re-checks his directions, which called for exiting via number 175. He wonders in the midst of the traffic if he should take 172, which comes up quickly, or wait. After several more minutes, they reach exit 175 and slowly depart from the highway. They follow the long stream of cars along Ann Arbor-Saline Road as it changes from a commercial thoroughfare into the residential Main Street. Finally they see Michigan Stadium looming up ahead and choose a lawn to park on for the day.

Luke, Jaime and Max

Luke calls out to Jaime to take Exit 3 to head into Ann Arbor for lunch. The highway exit identifier sign confirms that "DOWNTOWN Ann Arbor" can be found via that exit, and they coast along. They pass a long stretch of old, run-down buildings on their left, and a hill of rough brush and foliage on their right. Luke wonders aloud, "Are we here?" and Jaime's stomach growls. They pass under a rusty train trestle as Max cries, "Can we swim in there today?"—he has spotted the wide Huron River to their left, often difficult for drivers to notice. After another two minutes, Jaime notices the charming wood houses and then they hit the Downtown experience they were expecting—taller buildings, streetscaping, and pedestrians out walking and biking.
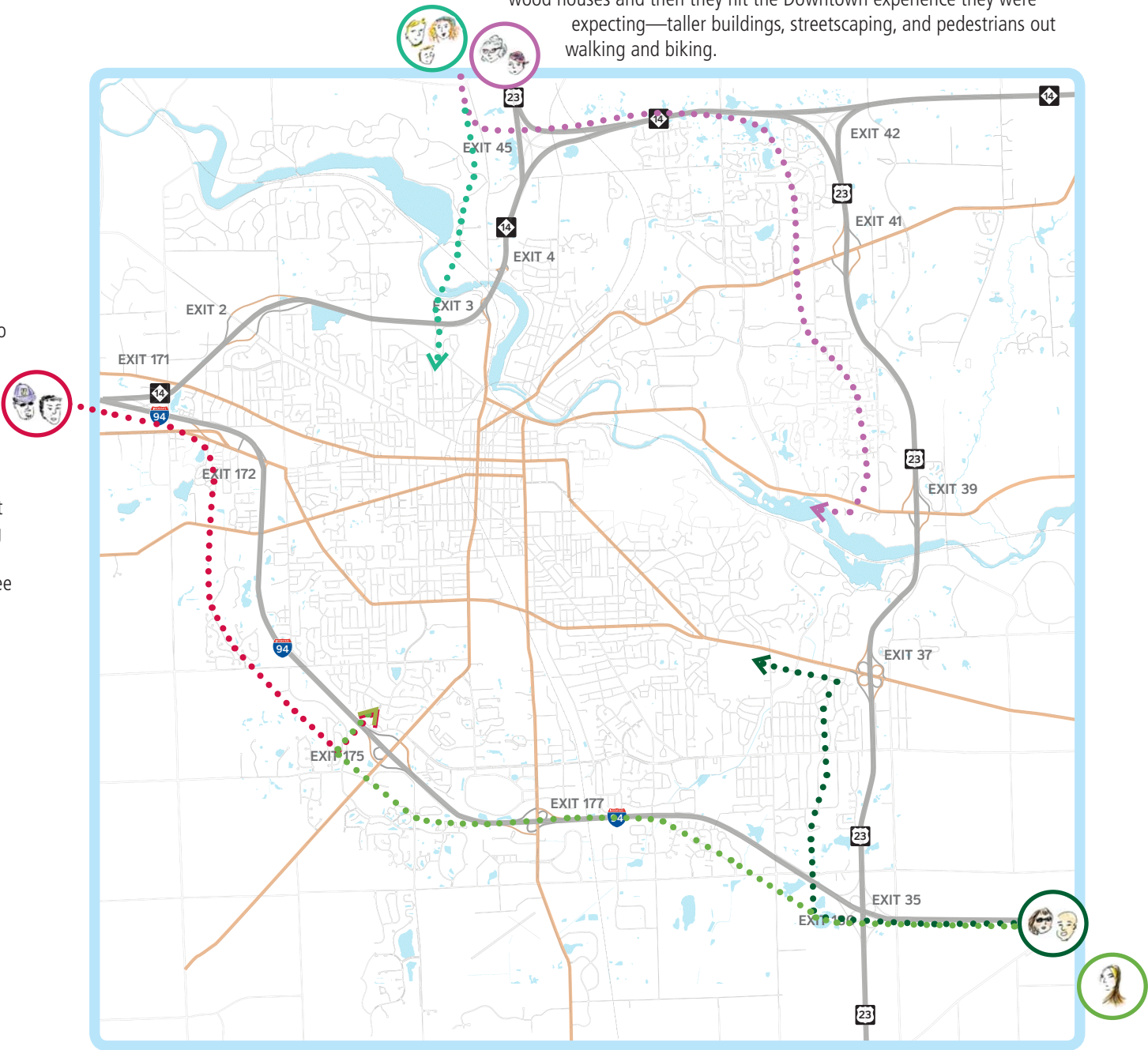
The Surrounding Highways and Their Exits to Ann Arbor

Exploring Ann Arbor

It could happen to you. You're planning to spend one, two or a few days in a town you've not been to. There may be a degree of anticipation; expectations of what the town, the area, should be; recommendations from others (friends, literature, the internet) of what to see, do, where to eat, stay. You're nearly an empty canvas on which the experience will be the painter.

While Ann Arbor is defined by a comparatively large geographic area, to the majority of visitors it is what we would call "Downtown" that would be of most interest. "Downtown" is generally limited by the trestle bridge on North Main Street near M-14, Stadium Blvd. at South Main Street, where Huron becomes Jackson Road and roughly South Seventh Street to the west. Not terribly large. All four of the defined operational Districts fall within this area as does much of the "Huron River Pathway" area.

In the main, a healthy individual could walk this area in a day's visit, or easily explore it via bike or Segway. **Walkability is a highly valued characteristic of a downtown experience.**

Characteristics beget "Character"

These are the definable environmental (spatial, architectural) characteristics that can either enhance or conflict with a place's character:

- Humanity

- Pedestrian/car interface

- Views & vistas of public spaces

- Architectural distinctiveness

- Linked (or linkable) series

- Street lighting

- Architectural heritage

- Development Cues

- Building setbacks

- Foliage

- Color, pattern, material

- Street furniture

- Hard/soft, active/passive areas

- Variety/diversity

- Nodes, edges, paths, districts, and landmarks

- Street block length (only 300' here; critical in promoting pedestrian experience

- Presence of pedestrians out and about is a cue to "Downtown"

These metrics for Ann Arbor's Downtown tend to work together to create the character desired. **The introduction of a comprehensive wayfinding signage and graphic system would, by definition, want to resonate well with these variable**s.

Downtown's Character

What creates the impression of Downtown Ann Arbor in the mind of the visitor? What gives the visitor a sense of being "downtown" as they may have imagined it? There are many adjectives, phrases, and statements which might capture that sense. We want to try and narrow down a potentially long list to a few key concepts:

- **Walkable (small, 300', street blocks, including to the UM Central Campus Area)**

- Good balance - small shops, restaurants, businesses

- Well-preserved architecture

- An "after-hours" life

- The "Center" of things

- **Older architecture, well re-purposed**

- Clean

- "Main Street"

- Vibrant

- **Eclectic**

- Something of interest in every block

- Enough of what I expected, to not be threatening

- **A college town atmosphere**

- Comfortable; safe

- A good starting point for a visitor

- **Contemporary, with an attractive patina of age**

Street Renovations: Huron, Fifth, Division

The current streetscape redesign work of Albert Kahn's and Beckett & Raeder's offices for the Huron Street and the Fifth & Division Streets, respectively, should introduce elements of "softening" of these heavy vehicular corridors, to make them more pedestrian-friendly.

With the University's planned student housing project at State and Huron there will likely be a strengthening of the natural pedestrian experience further north along State to Huron (historically visitors along State Street remained concentrated a block south of Huron as shops, restaurants and generally an engaging streetscape experience didn't continue much further north from that). With Huron Street's renovation extending this far east there should be further occurrences of busy pedestrian traffic here. Lastly, Huron Street's renovation work should also enhance the pedestrian's ability to cross Huron at Fourth Street and continue northward directly into Kerrytown.

The Districts; The Areas

One of the primary efforts of the wayfinding program is to promote and make easy the experience of getting from one District or Area to another as well as navigation within the District or Area, particularly as a pedestrian, after parking your car.

The four primary Districts are:

Kerrytown District
Main Street District
State Street District
South University District

Weaving around, through or into these, are the two primary "Areas":

Downtown
UM Campus

Liberty Street: A 5th District or a "Link Corridor"?

At a pedestrian level it becomes apparent that the ability to walk between the heart of Ann Arbor's Downtown and the University of Michigan's Campus, all within 10 minutes, is a significant characteristic of Ann Arbor.

This comfortable integration between campus and town parallels those found in Bloomington, Indiana and Madison, Wisconsin, to name two cities that have benefited from such pedestrian linkage.

It has historically been Liberty and Washington Streets that provided the most efficient & enjoyable walking routes, because of their mid-locations entering either Main Street or State Street (the western boundary of Campus) Districts. And Liberty Street seemingly captured a slightly greater degree of the pedestrian east/west traffic than Washington Street (again, possibly due to its very central point along each terminus District).

From a pedestrian wayfinding standpoint there is a good argument for this Liberty Street corridor to be promoted as "THE" pedestrian linking experience. Possibly we would want to explore, in nomenclature, a "Link Corridor" in order to emphasize a very specific linking route such as Liberty Street.

Similarities & Differences

All four Districts share many, if not all, of the environmental characteristics describing Downtown (as we recognize Kerrytown and the Main Street Districts are linked and to many people define the core experience of Ann Arbor's Downtown).

Each District presents a certain nuance of character or the "sense" of a place. All four have short, easy-to-remember names. For three, the names reinforce the District's geographic location (street naming). These three street-named Districts have a dominant linear spine (their street) with limited extensions of their experiences off the spine. Kerrytown's lack of this linearity may subtly reinforce linking its name to its experience (i.e. the expanse of a "town", not the linearity of a "street"); a positive advantage.

While all four Districts are equally walkable, there is a size difference that the visitor likely recognizes. However, the size disparities are comparatively small and we do not believe they impact visitor perceptions, either positively or negatively. Of more importance from a pedestrian wayfinding standpoint will be the value to a visitor of knowing how far the walk is from the District they are in to other Districts and to nearby Areas and primary destinations. This shall be a significant objective of the wayfinding solution.

The culture and atmosphere varies among Districts. Kerrytown and Main Street do not possess as strong a "campus" flavor as the other two, reflecting more of a sophisticated small-town sense. Equally, the State Street and South University Districts exude a dominant university/student culture and sensibility.

Linking and Cross-Pollination

A primary objective of the wayfinding is to enhance and dramatically encourage exploration by visitors into all Districts. This is likely to be most successfully accomplished via pedestrian wayfinding, *particularly at the visitor's interface with parking venues.*

We will explore solutions which establish at primary visitor "capture points" (parking, respite/congregating locations) strong informational (orientation mapping, landmark "learning") and arrow-based guide solutions that speak to the visitor and efficiently inform them of and route them to Districts other than the one they are in. Making the network or "interconnectivity" much more understandable & apparent among all four Districts will, by default, promote an awareness of the whole of Downtown Ann Arbor.

Concept Exploration Opportunities

As a result of our analysis and with the conclusions thus far drawn, as well as through input of the Project Advisory Committee, Corbin Design sees several opportunities emerging that we expect to pursue. These ideas will be expanded in the visualization process and shared with the team in preliminary sketch concept form in April.

Gateway
- design as part of resulting custom system the existing MDOT "Annarbour" boundary identifiers
- design treatment of repetitive series (rather than a single sign) identifying Downtown as you enter
- design treatment identifying entry into (or presence within) a District.

Vehicular Guide
- Freestanding?
- Attached to existing structure?
- Flexibility in messaging for temporal "event" destinations

Parking Venue Identifier
Potential of augmenting existing, strongly identified parking venues with a common, inexpensive, graphic device that
　1.) associates to relevant District(s) and/or
　2.) relevance to primary local destinations.
- Freestanding?
- Attached to existing structure?

Pedestrian Mapping
- Integral to an information kiosk?
- Only the map element?
- Freestanding?
- Attached to existing structure?
- Dimensional (slight relief) - "Hill" concept
- Capable of defining temporal "event" destinations

Landmark Learning
There are strong existing landmarks (Michigan & State Theatres, Stadium) and potential new significant landmarks (something within the redesigned Huron streetscape experience?) which could be "captured" by a wayfinding solution to advance or enhance both vehicular and pedestrian wayfinding.

Pedestrian Guide
- Freestanding?
- Attached to existing structure?
- Flexibility in messaging for temporal "event" destinations

Building Corner-Mounted District Identifier
- A custom dimensional element that combines into a single structure both the street names and the relevant District.
- Could equally be used to more fully integrate historical area markers (Old Fourth Ward) with street identification.
- By avoiding integration onto existing street signs or sign posts, there is greater flexibility in how/where bldg. corner identifier occurs.

Sidewalk-embedment District Identifier
- A cast panel integrated into the sidewalk finishes

System Management Processes

Once a program is finally implemented it will be critical to establish an effective mechanism for overseeing the maintenance and upkeep of the components.

A budget should be in place to handle maintenance and updating. We have found in our work with other city programs that if certain destinations successfully leverage for inclusion in the wayfinding signage system, it is possible to negotiate with them to carry some of the cost of changing or adding a sign. However, we often find that the likelihood of these requests coming at a time when other changes or updates need to be made is so great that it is not practical to expect a single destination to carry the total financial burden. An ongoing maintenance budget should be established before promoting the funding process itself. This budget can be supported by contributions made by venues appearing in the system messaging (based on frequency of name occurrence for example). Corbin Design will be able to assist the team in establishing these budgets prior to implementation.

Elements of the wayfinding system should be designed to accommodate changes over time. While the majority of destinations are not expected to change (particularly super destinations), additions and changes to existing signage should be cost-effective, as should system maintenance over time. Additionally, certain time-sensitive, event-driven destinations (games at the stadium, art fairs, etc.) will require that the wayfinding system adequately support changeability to meet their needs.

Given the nature of the destinations that will appear on signage, changes should be infrequent, and will probably for the most part be driven by repair/refurbish needs (i.e. damage by vehicle). A good rule of thumb for inspections seems to be every two to three years. Fully damaged or vandalized units need to be dealt with immediately. We recommend that the City keep a stock of blank sign panels that can be updated quickly if a sign is damaged and needs to be replaced. More complex signs, such as pedestrian kiosks, will have a longer lead time when updates or replacements are needed.

We recommend aligning with a local fabricator for updating message copy as needed. However, if design or wayfinding changes need to be incorporated into the system, we recommend contacting Corbin Design to maintain the integrity of the wayfinding system and design intent. Our Design Intent Manual containing all sign types in the system will be made available following fabrication and installation. The drawings will be bid-ready and will aid in the ordering of additional signs; the fabricator's shop drawings should also be referenced for construction details.

Sign maintenance instructions are supplied by the fabricator upon final installation. Typically, Corbin Design requests that fabricators provide a written five-year full-replacement warranty on craftsmanship and materials.

A central point of control should be designated for all signage changes and additions. We also recommend having a plan in place for the anticipated updating, as well as sign additions, repairs and changes. As part of communication and training to all staff involved, it should be emphasized that all signage must work as a cohesive system, and that procedures must be followed to ensure signage conforms to the standards as a part of a larger wayfinding system.

Strategic Implementation Plan

These are the tasks which must be completed over the course of the next several months. Responsibility is shared between Corbin Design and the team, with the team's responsibility falling to reviews and final approvals.

- Confirmation of primary vehicular and pedestrian circulation patterns

- Refinement of the destination list

- Approval of all information and logic aspects of the program

- Development and review of initial design concepts

- Design direction selection and further design development

- Development and refinement of the sign message schedule and sign location plan

Once approvals have been given on the above, the following activities are required to complete the implementation of the wayfinding system:
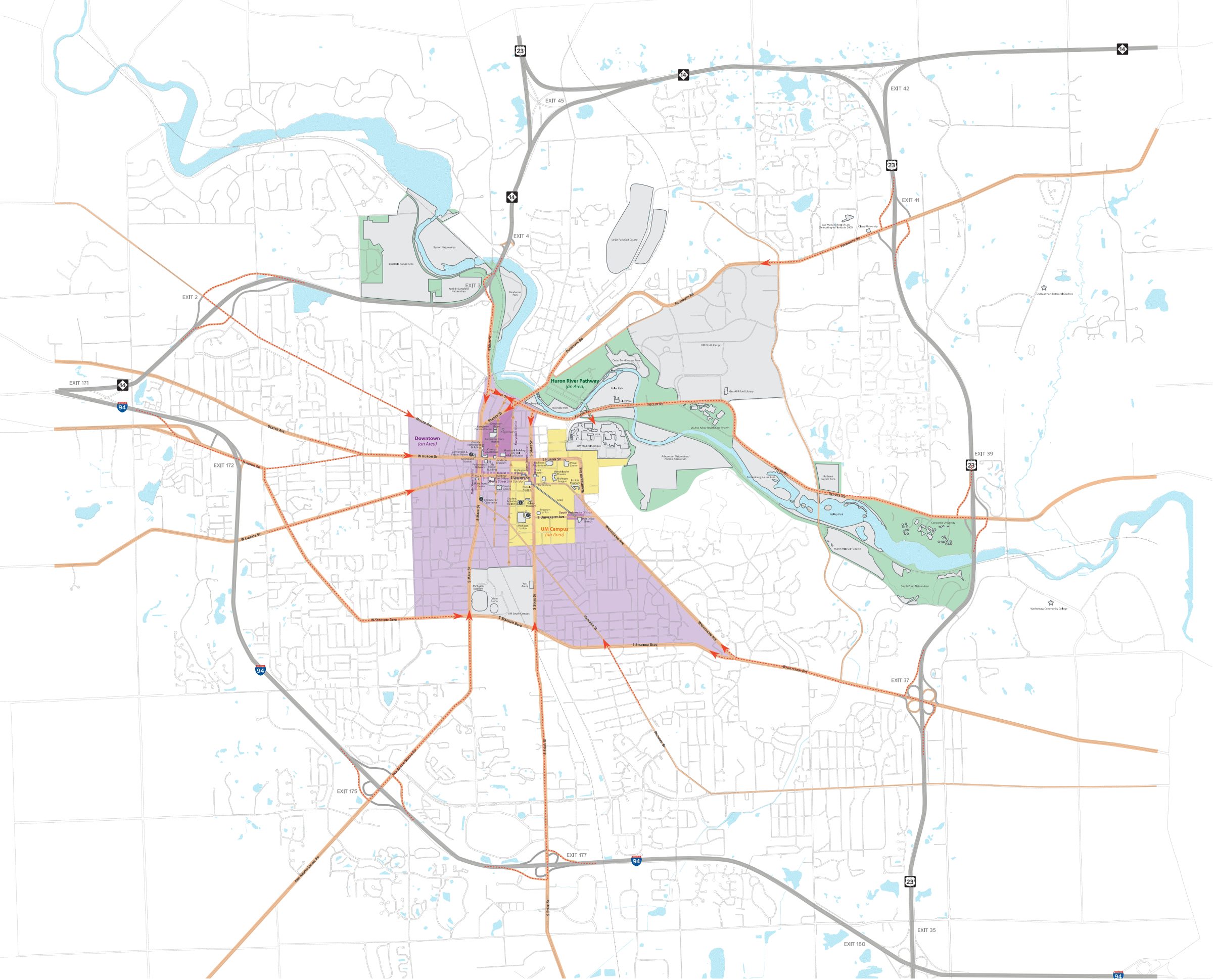
- Development of detailed fabrication specifications for pricing and fabrication

- Bidding

- Fabrication period (phased, if required)

- Installation period (phased, if required)

- Preparation of the final signage standards manual

Working Site Plan

The full-size version of this is available as a downloadable PDF graphic file from Corbin Design.
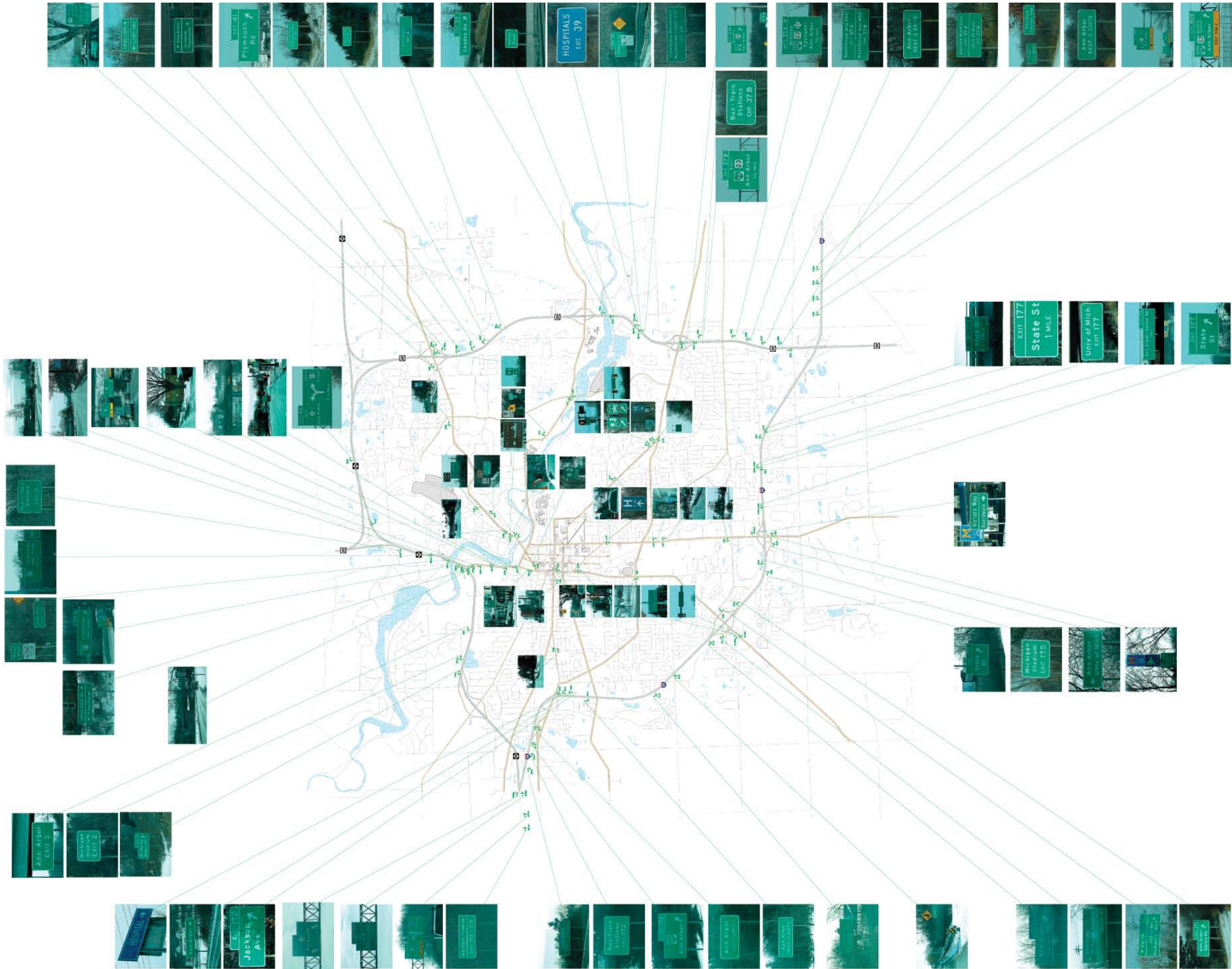
Analysis & Recommendations

The City of Ann Arbor
Wayfinding System Site Plan

>

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MDOT-Existing Signage

The full-size version of this is available as a downloadable PDF graphic file from Corbin Design.

Analysis & Recommendations

The City of Ann Arbor
MDOT-Existing Signage

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