

Design Elements

Connecting and differentiating the US Highway 169 Corridor District and the Downtown District is of high priority to the Community Vision for Commercial Development effort. Through natural and physical inventory research, discussion with the Steering Committee and the Community Design Workshop, certain features surfaced as being driving elements in connecting the two districts. As illustrated in Figure 3 (located at the end of the section), the landscape and urban grid form are prominent features influencing Belle Plaine's unique place in Minnesota.

The Landscape

The Minnesota River, bluffs and prairie landscape are significant features in Belle Plaine because the landscape helped shape the economy and culture of Belle Plaine. The City is located between the Minnesota River to the northwest and the bluffs to the southeast. The Minnesota River is significant as a design element for the Design Manual because of its historical and cultural importance and its regional connections to the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway and the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad Line. The Minnesota River has a wide valley with wetlands on either side. The bridge over the River provides access to Belle Plaine from the northwest and is a key gateway into the City. The bluffs, which are remnants from the ancient glacial Minnesota River Valley, reside on the southeast of Belle Plaine. The bluffs are important because they create a valley and the undulating topography with in which Belle Plaine is located. The presettlement landcover is prairie grasses. Belle Plaine's prairie landcover is significant because of the open views the grasses afford.

The Urban Grid Form

Belle Plaine's urban form is organized in a grid with land uses concentrically located in relationship to the historical Central Business District. Main Street and Meridian Street form the main downtown intersection and lead to the interchanges with US Highway 169. The urban grid is north-south and US Highway 169 intersects the grid at an angle. The grid form of the City is significant because it was the historic design of the City and the grid is well maintained today. As such, it is more dominant than the new US Highway 169.