

# A GRAPHIC IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM FOR THE OLD MARKET

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# A GRAPHIC IDENTIFICATION PROGRAM FOR THE OLD MARKET

OMAHA'S OLD MARKET is one of the nation's most successful examples of adaptive reuse of an historic district for contemporary commercial and entertainment activities. The district's lively and diverse mix of shops, restaurants, galleries, places for entertainment, and residences infuse it with a special vitality and energy. Particularly notable is the district's history of steady, incremental growth, guided over a long period by a set of agreed-upon patterns and relationships. This phenomenon gives the district an authenticity and quality that is often absent in projects that developed as conventional real estate ventures. The Old Market has benefitted from the stewardship and nurturing of its environment by both property owners and businesses.

The Old Market's urbanistic and commercial successes have made it one of Nebraska's leading visitor attractions as well as one of the city's most recognizable features. In order to reinforce the area's character and to provide information to visitors, the Old Market Business Association (OMBA) received a grant from Douglas County in 1998 to design and install identifying graphic features. While banners have been used frequently to identify urban districts, OMBA members believed that other solutions were more appropriate to the character of the district.

This document presents a comprehensive graphic identification program for the Old Market, based on a series of planning meetings with Old Market property owners and merchants. The planning process identified three important functions for an identification and graphic information program:

- A WAYFINDING FUNCTION, leading visitors to the Old Market and providing them with important information about the location of the district and its features.
- AN IDENTIFYING FUNCTION, using subtle methods to inform visitors that they are within the district.
- AN INTERPRETIVE FUNCTION, to help tell the evolving story of the Old Market.

# WAYFINDING



*The directional sign system proposed in this plan conducts visitors to the Old Market district and points the way to other attractions and features along major approach routes.*

The Old Market is a visitor destination attracting people who may not be completely familiar with the district and its Downtown Omaha setting. Some visitors approach the Old Market from outside of the city, others from other parts of the metropolitan area. The wayfinding function of the Graphic Identification Program is to conduct these visitors to the district as expeditiously as possible and to help them “read” the Old Market in a convenient and attractive way. Users of the Old Market will in most cases drive to the district, park their cars, and experience the area as pedestrians. Therefore, the graphic system must provide information to visitors in both vehicular and pedestrian environments.

## **The Vehicular Environment**

The objectives of the proposed system are to:

1. Intercept visitors at major approach routes and provide clear directions to the Old Market and other Downtown attractions.
2. Providing cues that visitors have arrived in the Old Market.
3. Maintain the pedestrian nature of the Old Market by providing clear routes to parking facilities, encouraging visitors to become pedestrians as quickly as possible.

The design solutions for vehicular wayfinding include:

- *A directional system leading visitors to the Old Market along major approach routes.* This may be integrated into a directional system for the entire Downtown district. Potential routes for

signage include Harney Street east from Interstate 480, 14th Street southbound from Interstate 480, and 13th Street northbound from Interstate 80. The proposed signs would replace and augment existing small directional signs located along these routes.

The signs include two color fields with contrasting typefaces. The upper color field and copy provides directionals to districts, primarily the Old Market but potentially including other major district destinations such as Eppley Airfield or the Riverfront District. The lower color field provides directional information to specific destinations along approach routes.

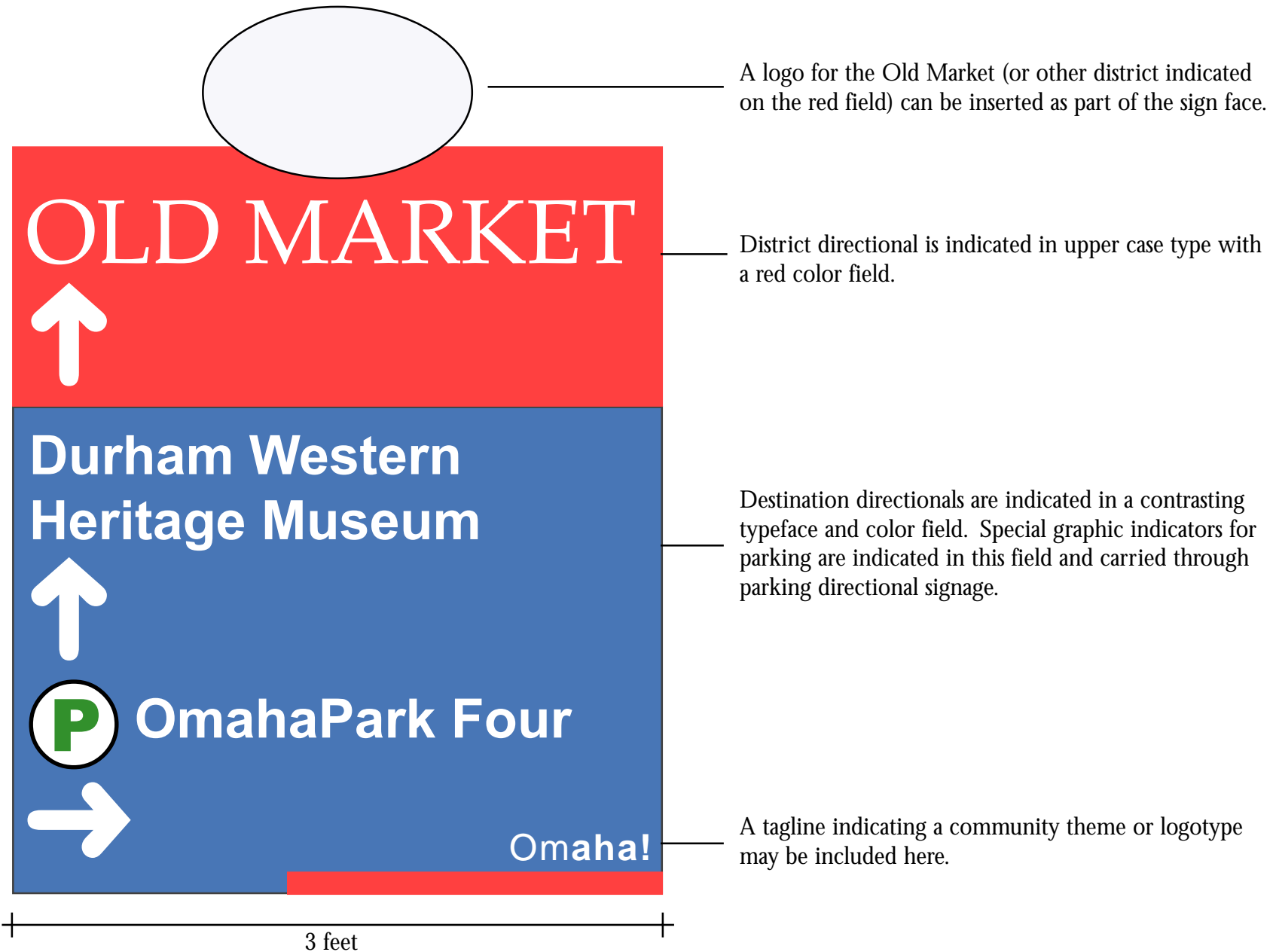
The sign may also include a general “tag line” relating to tourism or other community themes. Directional signs may also incorporate a logo for the Old Market or other district designators. Messages on signs are limited to no more than three per sign. Signs are three feet in width, with a maximum length of four feet. Maximum sign size is 12 square feet.

This directional system is based on a system successfully installed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and designed by Sussman/Prejza & Company of Culver City, California.

- *District identification signs.* These signs may be used to identify major entrances into the Old Market, informing visitors that they have arrived within the district.

- *Parking directional signs.* Parking signs are designed to direct motorists around major pedestrian precincts and to major off-street parking facilities that serve the Old Market, including OmahaPark Four and the Landmark Centre garage.

*27th and Harney. Directional information at the base of interstate exit ramps is particularly strategic. A new, comprehensive sign system would replace isolated existing signs at various locations.*



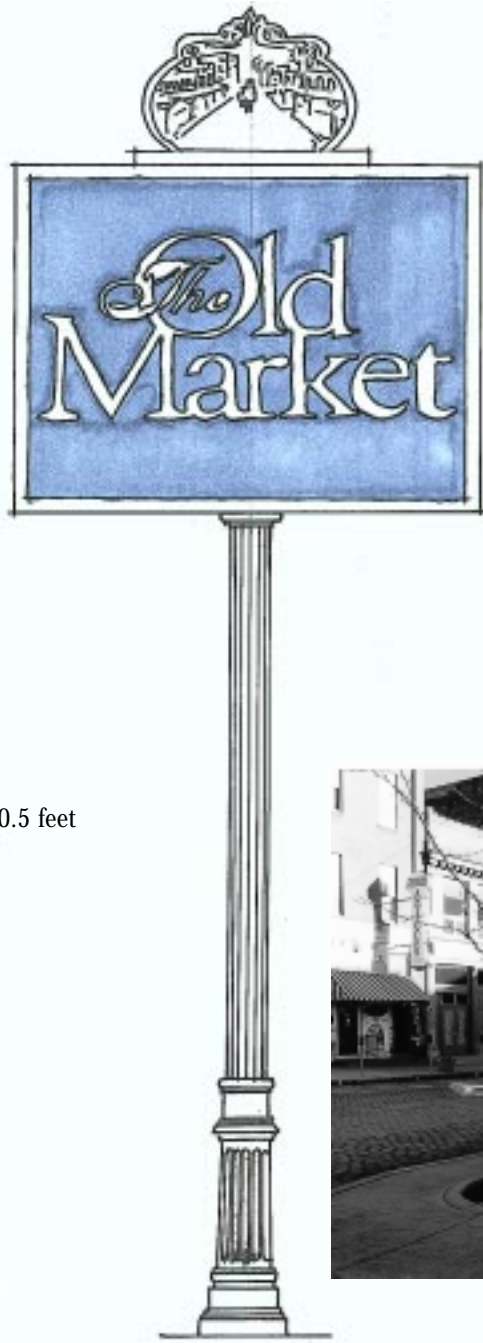
**Directional Signs along Approach Routes.** *These signs include directional information noting destination districts and specific features along the way.*



A logo for the Old Market (or other district indicated on the red field) can be inserted as part of the sign face.

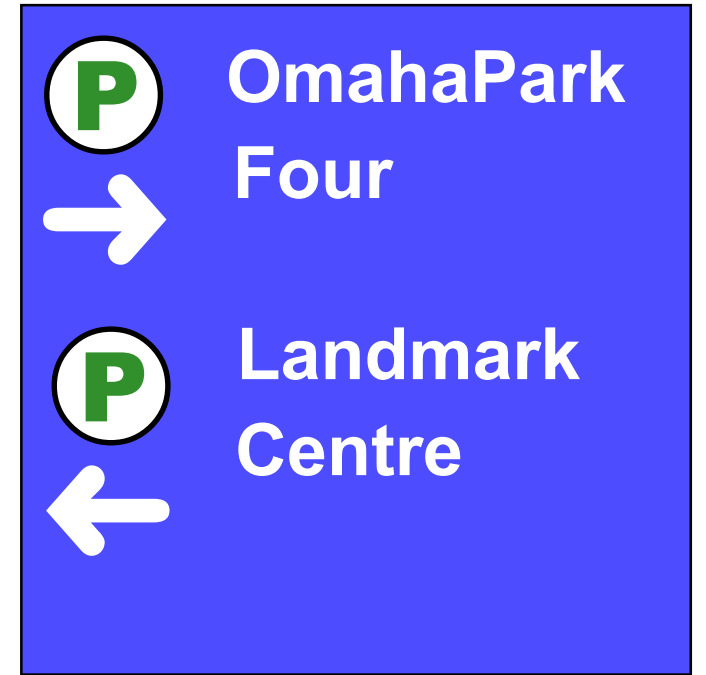
This example indicates three district designations on the primary color field. Such a sign may be located at the intersection or merge of a freeway exit. Examples include 14th Street south of the I-480 ramp and 27th and Harney Streets.

**Directional Signs along Approach Routes.** *A sign providing directions to multiple districts may be found at the base of interstate exits.*



10.5 feet

**Entrance Signs.** These signs could be used to announce arrival in the Old Market and may be appropriate at corner nodes, such as 13th and Howard, which are acknowledged as district entrances. The signs may incorporate an Old Market logo, such as the one indicated in the illustration at left. This located was designed by NVision of Omaha. Posts for these signs should match light posts ultimately selected for the district.



2 feet

**Parking Directional Signs.** These signs should be strategically located to direct motorists away from the pedestrian core of the Old Market and along convenient routes (such as Harney and Jackson Streets, to peripheral parking facilities).



*Near 11th and Howard in the heart of the Old Market. While vehicular traffic throughout the district is important to its vitality and economic life and should continue, the core of the Market should be a place where pedestrians remain primary.*

## **The Pedestrian Environment**

The Old Market is above all a pedestrian precinct. Much of its character is the result of its relatively small, intimate scale. The vehicular wayfinding system is designed to direct visitors arriving by automobile quickly and efficiently to the district and to encourage them to become pedestrians as quickly as possible. An information system for pedestrians complements the vehicular system by helping visitors “read” the Old Market. Objectives of this portion of the system include:

1. Orienting visitors to the Old Market and providing information about its various features and attractions.
2. Directing pedestrians to special features and public accommodations in the district and within walking distance of the Old Market.
3. Providing identifying features that are consistent with the character of the district.

The design solutions for pedestrian wayfinding include:

- *Information kiosks at strategic locations in the district.* The kiosks will provide a clear graphic map of the district and a directory of businesses and features. The graphic face will be a double-sided, enamelled flat-plate panel, designed for easy updating and modification. The panel will be placed in an ornamental, cast-metal frame with ceramic accents reflecting the herringbone-brick pattern of the Old Market’s streets. The kiosk will be front-lighted by appropriate fixtures attached to the frame. The kiosk is approximately six feet high.

Priority locations for the kiosks are points where orientation is particularly important, such as pedestrian exits from parking facilities. These larger installations are less necessary in the core of the Old Market.



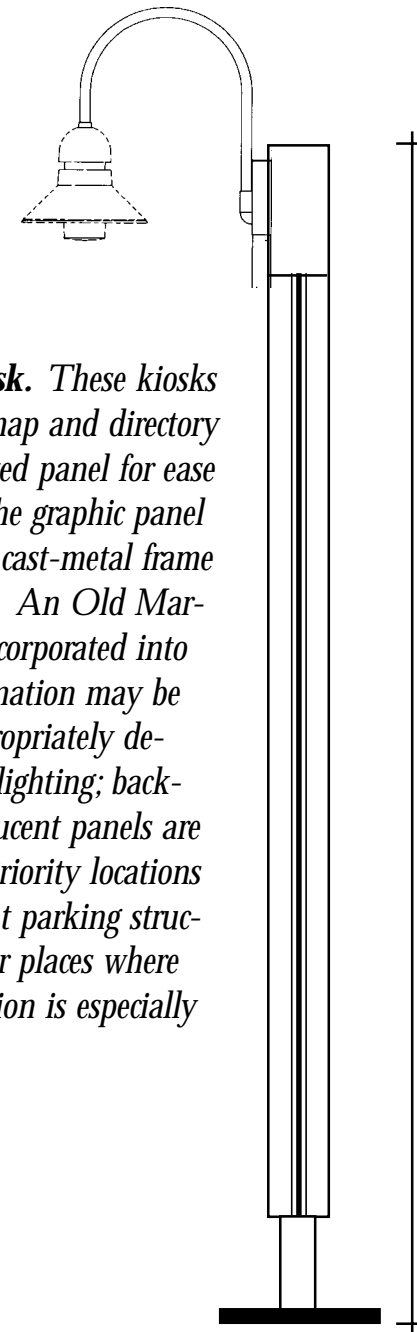
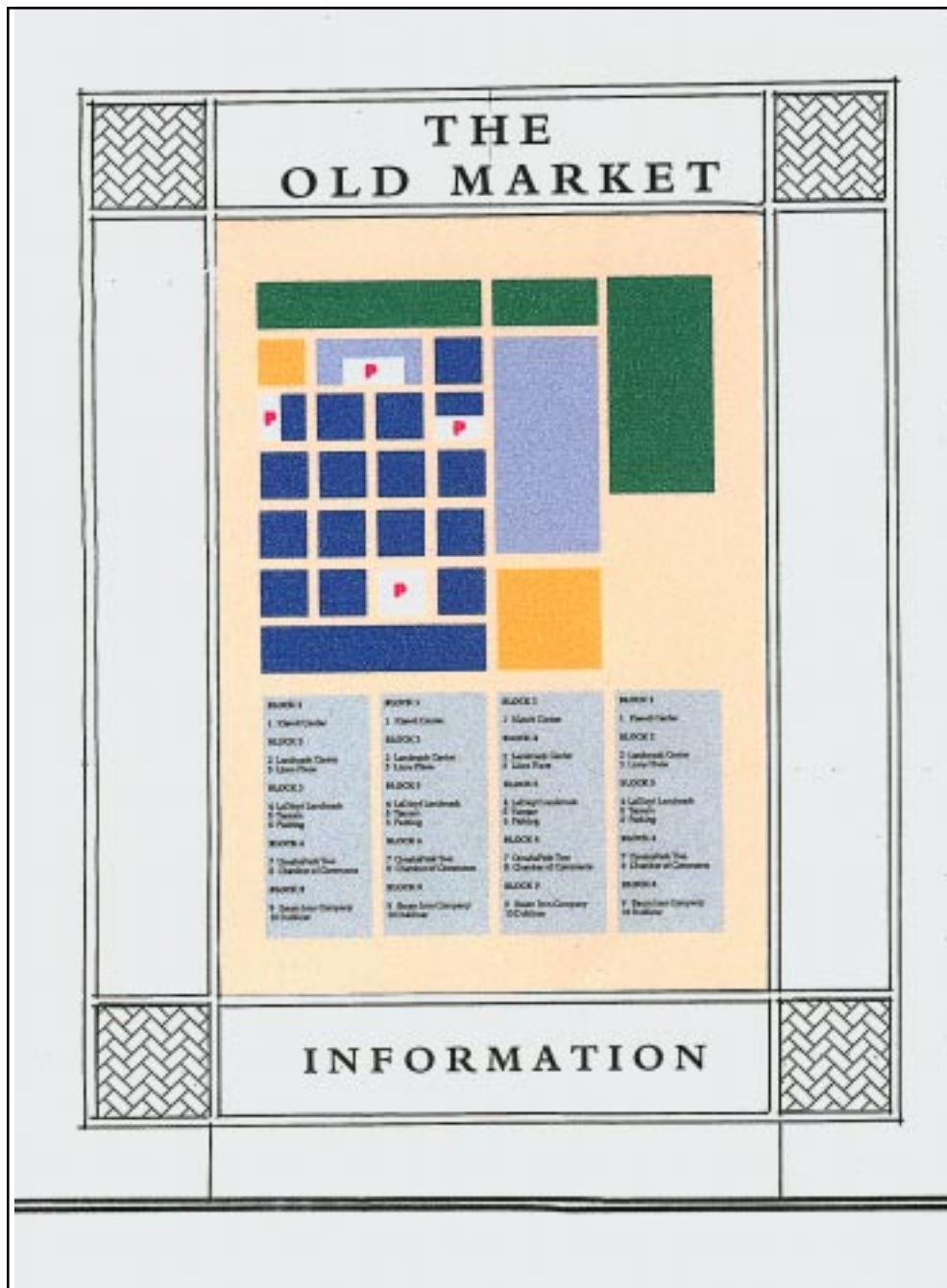
*Places where orientation is needed, such as exits from parking facilities, are priority locations for information kiosks.*

• *Small pedestrian signs.* A system of small, cast-metal signs mounted to light poles or free-standing poles will be utilized to direct pedestrians to features in and around the Old Market. This is patterned after a system of pedestrian directionals successfully used throughout visitor precincts in London. Mountings may indicate diagonal as well as orthogonal directions. In addition to providing information, the pedestrian sign system links the Old Market to other features in the vicinity, such as Heartland of America Park or the Western Heritage Museum, and provides an identifying feature. The system is expandable beyond the Old Market.

Generally, pedestrian directional should not indicate individual businesses. Directional messages should include:

- Parking facilities.
- Museums, parks, and arts and cultural facilities.
- Public accommodations, such as restrooms, transit stops, and visitor information.
- Groupings of businesses that are identifiable retail or service centers, such as the Old Market Passageway.
- Landmarks.

Signs to public accommodations should include a pictogram in a contrasting color for additional emphasis.



**Information Kiosk.** These kiosks include a graphic map and directory on a flat, enamelled panel for ease of modification. The graphic panel will be placed in a cast-metal frame with ceramic insets. An Old Market logo may be incorporated into the design. Illumination may be provided with appropriately designed direct front-lighting; back-lighting and translucent panels are not appropriate. Priority locations for the kiosks are at parking structure exits and other places where pedestrian orientation is especially important.

OMAHA PARK FOUR



BLUE BARN THEATER



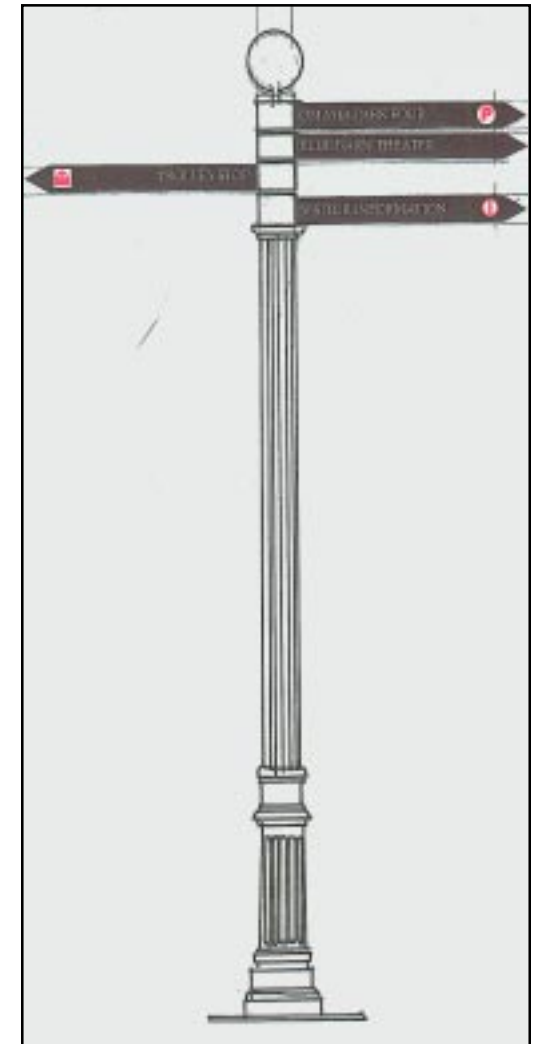
TROLLEY STOP

VISITOR INFORMATION



OLD MARKET PASSAGEWAY

***Pedestrian Sign Faces.** These small, cast-metal signs, approximately three inches in depth, direct pedestrians to major features, public spaces, and public accommodations in and around the Old Market. The directional system is adapted from a similar system implemented throughout London. These small signs can be mounted to street lighting poles or free-standing poles in a matching style. Directionals may indicate direct or diagonal directions.*



# IDENTIFICATION AND INTERPRETATION



*Historic Old Market street sign at 11th and Howard. Street sign installations can help to reinforce the identity of the district. New signs may be reconstructions of these historic signs, or less expensive single piece adaptations using the same style and content.*

The wayfinding components of the proposed Graphic Identification System direct visitors to the Old Market and its features. In addition to providing directional information, these components also help to identify the district. Two other mechanisms may be used to help provide additional identifying and interpretive information. These include:

- *Street signs.* Streets in the Old Market, and other parts of Downtown Omaha, historically were identified by white on blue street signs within metal frames. One of these signs remains at the 11th and Howard intersection. These signs may be reconstructed and installed in the Old Market district. Alternatively, new signs may be fabricated that are similar in shape and content, but are contained within a single signface. This less expensive solution was employed in New York City's Grand Central District and at other locations around the country.
- *Interpretive signage.* Interpretive graphics may be installed at appropriate locations in the district to describe buildings and other historic features. These panels may be mounted on buildings or may be utilize free-standing poles to match other installations in the Old Market.

## **Locations and Priorities**

The map following this section illustrates possible locations for graphics proposed in this program. Initial priorities include:

- The Map/Directory Kiosks.
- Initial installation of the pedestrian directional system.

S. 12 ST.

HOWARD ST.

HOWARD

S. 12 ST.

**Street Sign Adaptations.** *If reconstruction of original signs proves too expensive, an alternative is a modern adaptation, using similar shapes and content. These adapted signs would be fabricated from a single piece of sign material.*

G

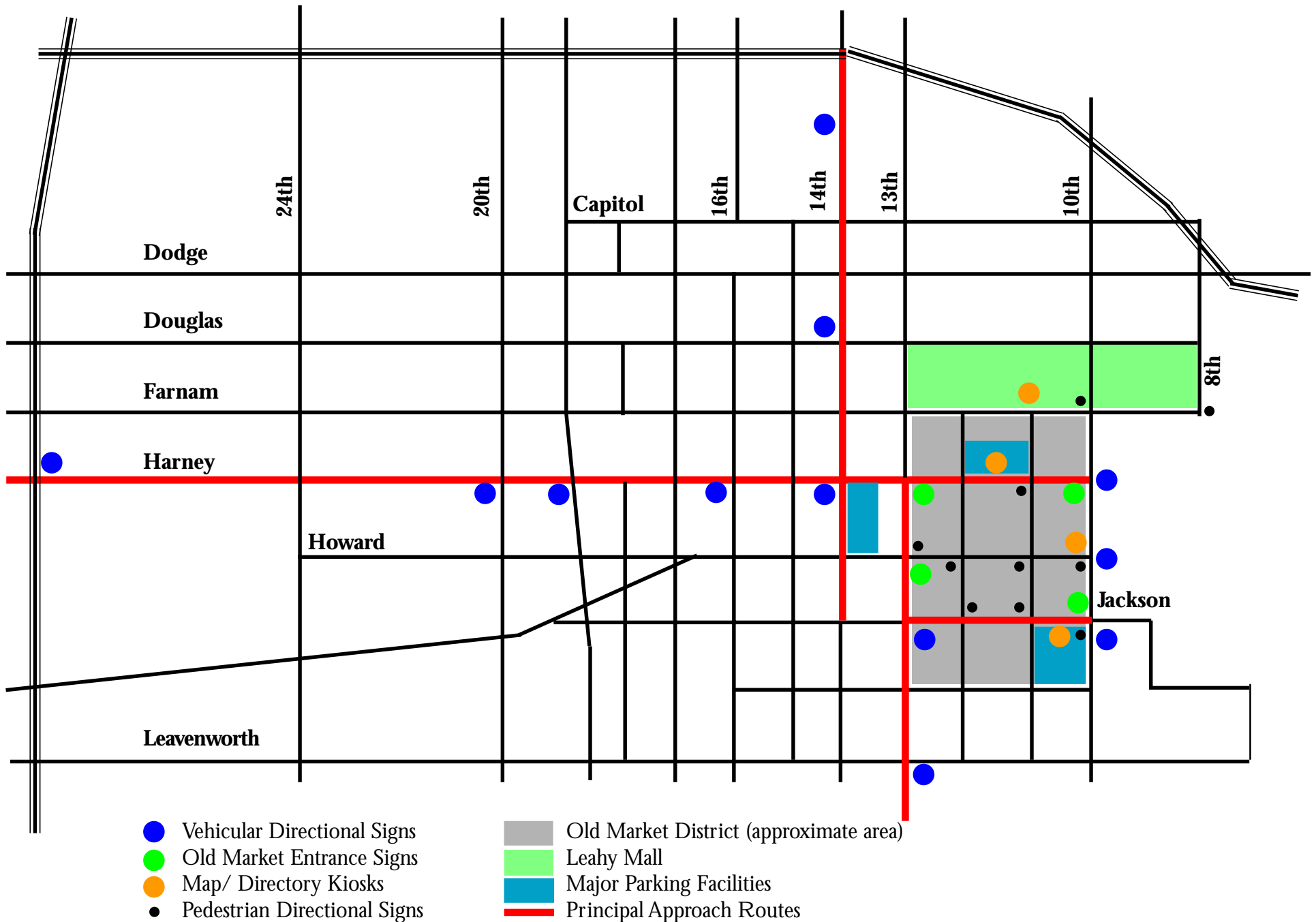
AHM BLOCK



The Gahm Block dominates the north block of Howard Street and was developed in 1895 by Mr. Gahm. The buildings served as a warehouse for a number of different companies. The block was one of the Old Market's largest buildings and has since been converted to other uses.

**Interpretive Graphics.** *Interpretive panels, describing the history of the district and its buildings, may be mounted flush on buildings or supported on free-standing poles matching other installations in the district.*





**Sign Locations.** This map suggests general locations for the various components of the Old Market graphics program.