



Maebashi Creative City:

International Competition for Urban Space Design from Maebashi Prefectural Office to Maebashi Station

Promoting Gunma as a world-class creative hub



Introduction

1

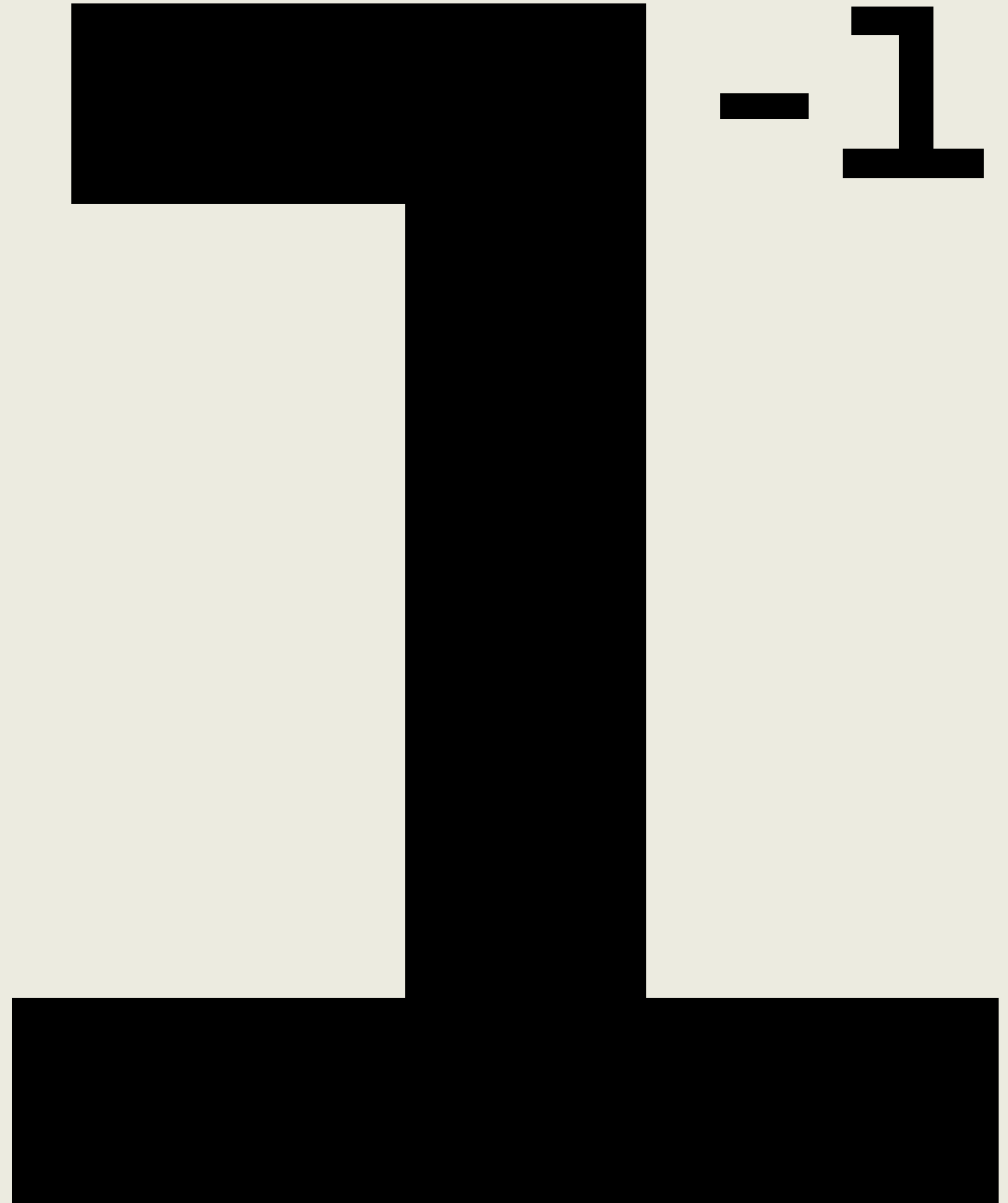
Project

2

Challenges

3

Introduction



INTRODUCTION

Maebashi, the capital city of Japan's Gunma prefecture, lies just 100 kilometers northwest of Tokyo at the base of Mount Akagi. The four seasons come in full force here, with muggy, hot summers and dry, cold winds in winter. Over the past decade, Maebashi has been working to reinvent itself as a budding art destination, drawing in creatives from around the world. By becoming a creative, design-centered city that prioritizes green spaces, slow-living, and overall well-being, Maebashi strives to solidify its brand identity as a “creative slow city.”

Despite revitalization efforts, foot traffic remains sparse, as most people prefer using cars to move around downtown, spending most of their time in the suburbs. This contributes to ongoing issues like traffic congestion at major intersections and poor pedestrian infrastructure.

Gunma aims to take inspiration from the walkability, mixed-use zoning, and creativity-infused urban landscape of Portland, Oregon along with the accessibility to green spaces and the sense of openness found in Melbourne, Australia. By reimagining the street experience, Gunma hopes to transform the main street into a space that interacts with the surrounding city in new ways while becoming a community gathering point. While new mobility solutions, such as autonomous public transportation, are being introduced to address these challenges, there is still an urgent need to transform Maebashi's downtown traffic flow.

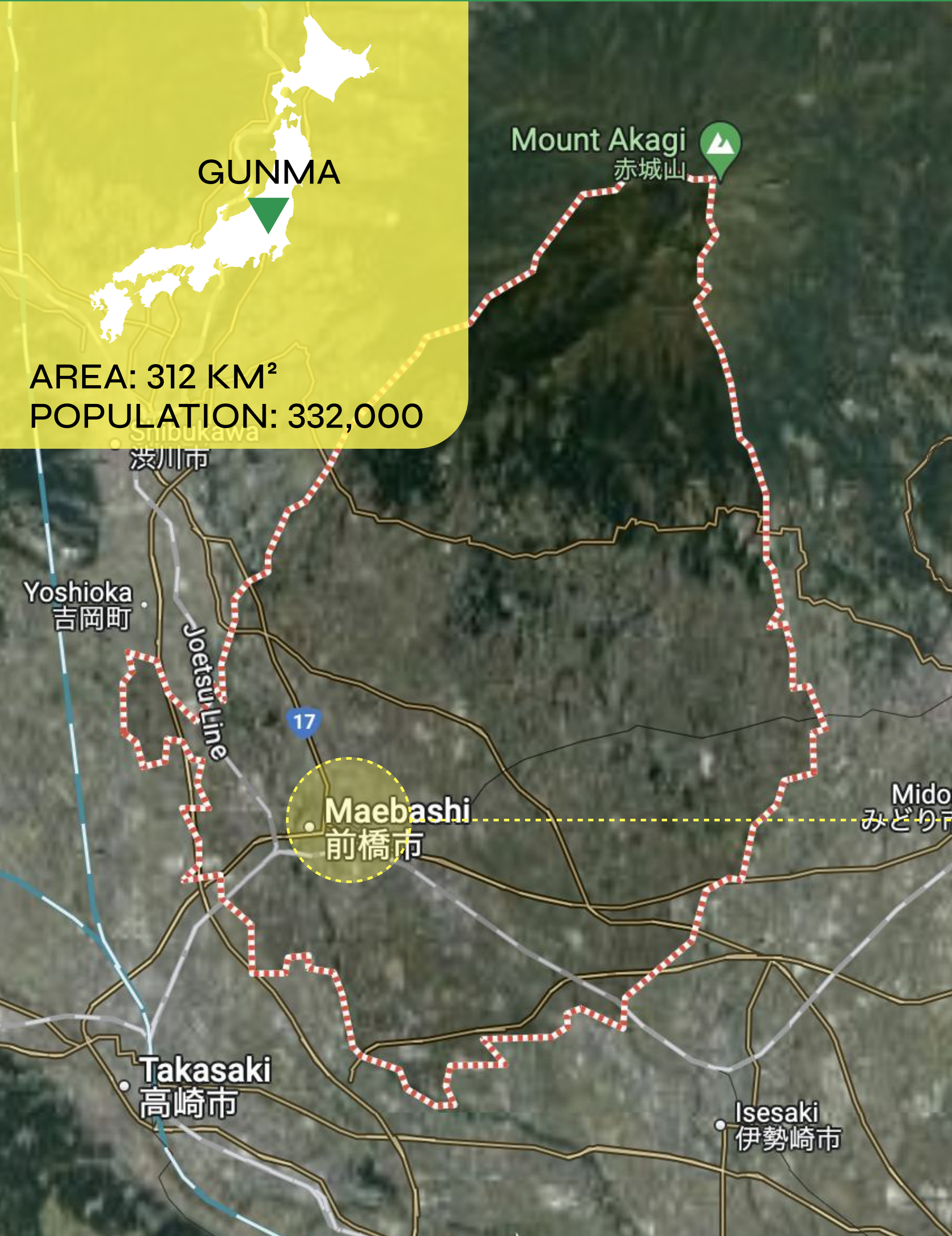
To realize a walkable, design-first downtown, Gunma prefecture invites local and international designers, architects, urbanists, and landscape architects to lead the redesigning of Maebashi into a global creative hub. This competition aims to collect innovative proposals for a forward-thinking, inspired “transit mall” design that is pedestrian-oriented while contributing to the city's art-focused revival movement.



Maebashi City

MAEBASHI CITY, GUNMA, JAPAN

SUBJECT ROAD





Introduction

Background of Maebashi City

-2



BACKGROUND OF MAEBASHI CITY

Surrounded by diverse natural landscapes, Maebashi is known as the "City of Water, Greenery, and Poetry" due to its rich natural beauty and cultural heritage. The city is set against the backdrop of Mount Akagi, a dormant volcano that is a popular destination for nature lovers, while being crisscrossed by two rivers that flow through the city, including the Tone River, which is one of Japan's longest and most historically significant waterways.

Culturally, Maebashi boasts a strong literary foundation as the hometown of several renowned Japanese poets, including Sakutaro Hagiwara, who is celebrated for his modern free verse poetry.

Historically, Maebashi was once a key player in the Japanese industrial revolution, being one of the hubs of the silk road in the late 1800s.



BACKGROUND OF MAEBASHI CITY

Like many other rural, smaller Japanese cities, Maebashi has faced a population crisis in recent decades. Many young people opt to move to larger cities for better work opportunities, resulting in an overall aging population.

Today, the city of Maebashi seeks to expand on its inherent small-city charm while establishing itself as an up-and-coming art hub that has easy access to both nature and the comforts of the city.



Introduction

Revival efforts

-3

REVIVAL EFFORTS

Maebashi city has been focused on promoting sustainable urban development through a number of public-private partnerships to enhance cultural and artistic exchanges within the city in recent years.

Through initiatives such as this competition, Maebashi hopes to establish itself as an arts and culture destination that prioritizes the well-being of its residents and visitors.



EFFORTS TO REVITALIZE THE MAIN STREET

1

Shotengai “Rose Avenue”



The *shotengai* is a covered shopping street lined with local stores. Once serving as the heart for Japanese towns in the 70s and 80s, they have been since been on the decline. Although Maebashi’s *shotengai* connects with the main street, as recently as 2017, it was a veritable ghost street lined with shuttered shops. Since then, efforts have been made to revitalize the *shotengai*, such as through the opening of *Machistanto*, which helps new residents find work, *Maebashi Mebuku Festival*, and *Maebashi BOOK*, heralding the revival of Maebashi’s *shotengai*.

[WEBSITE](#)

2

Shiroiya Hotel



Due to a lack of tourists and population decline, the historical 300-year-old Japanese inn, Shiroiya, closed down in 2008. Although it was originally scheduled to be torn down, the original structure was able to be saved and the building reopened in 2020 as the Shiroiya Hotel. The hotel’s redesign was led by acclaimed architect Sou Fujimoto and features an array of rooms by renowned designers such as Jasper Morrison, Michele De Lucchi, and Leandro Erlich. The project won the 2021 AD Great Design Hotel Award and has established itself as an art destination.

[WEBSITE](#)

3

Maebashi Galleria



The Maebashi Galleria opened in 2023 as a new multi-use complex that features both art galleries and apartment units with the goal of bringing art closer to the public. This complex and the nearby Shiroiya Hotel are vital parts of the formula to turn Maebashi into a creative hub.

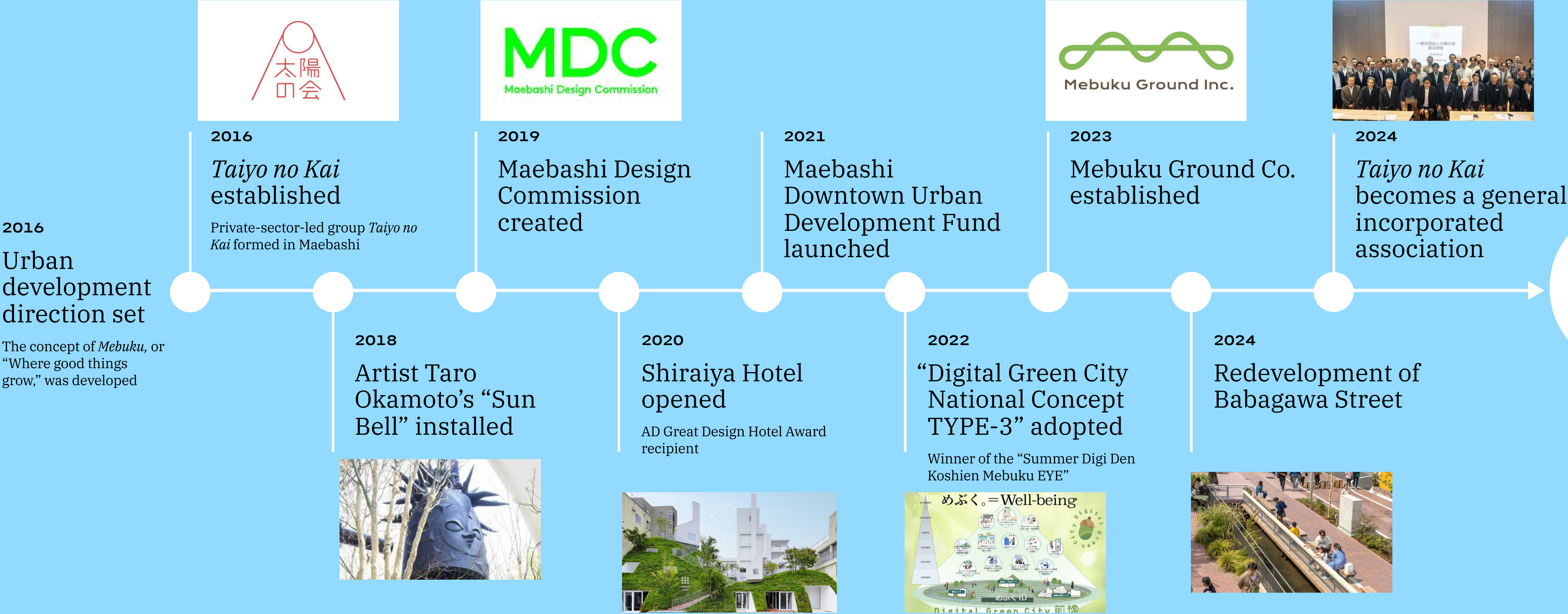
[WEBSITE](#)

Introduction

Sustainable Urban Development

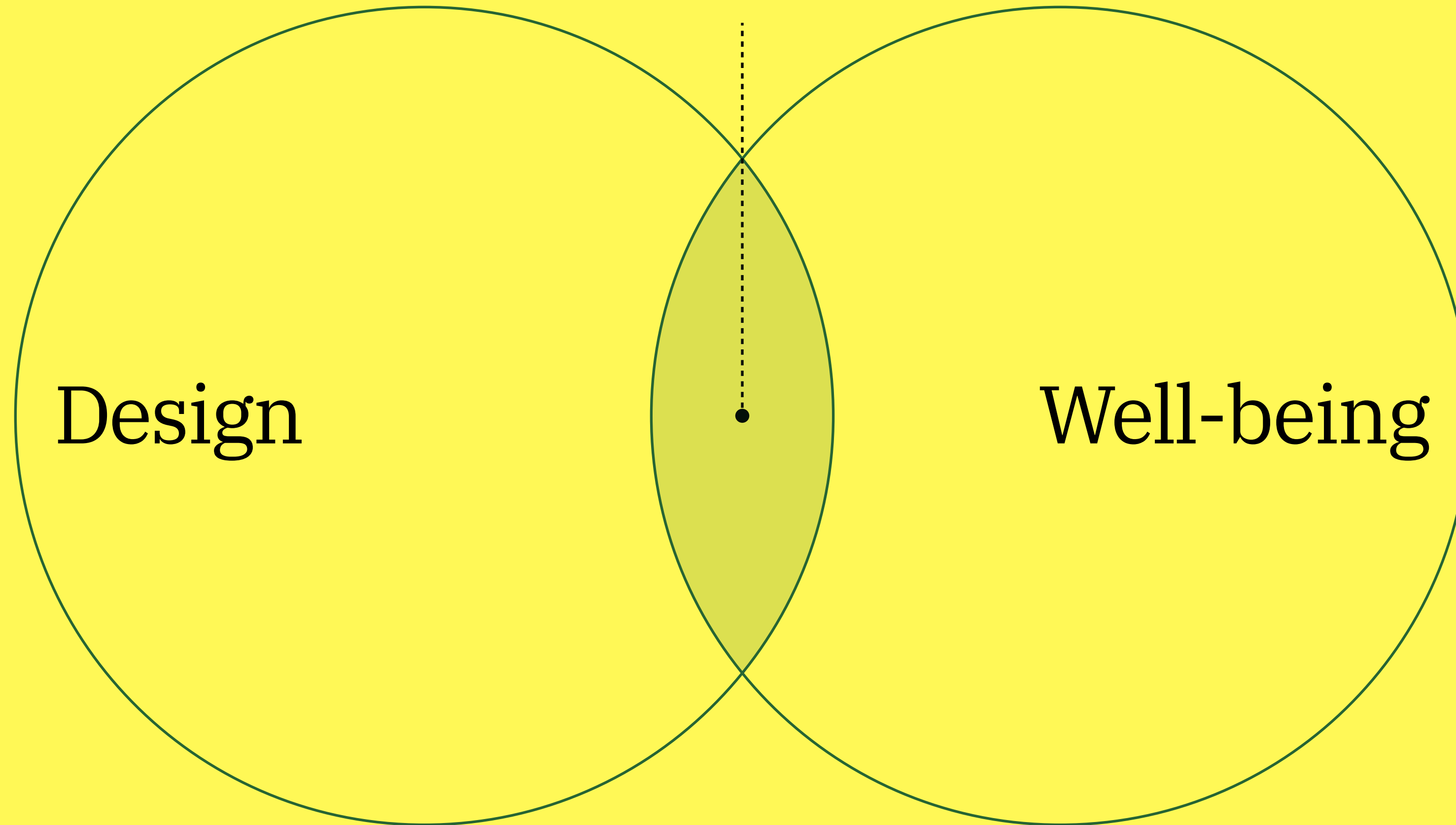
-4

SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT



Through public-private partnerships, Maebashi is seeking to foster pathways for sustainable urban development by supporting and kickstarting projects that will improve the overall vibrancy of the downtown area while connecting with the community.

Maebashi City's concept of
“Where good things grow”



In order to realize this vision, Maebashi is focusing on a strategic concept called *Mebuku*, or “Where good things grow.” Under this framework, the city hopes to build a design-driven city that balances a creative, innovative urban life with green spaces and relaxation. This way, the city hopes to encourage creativity and well-being in its residents.

Project



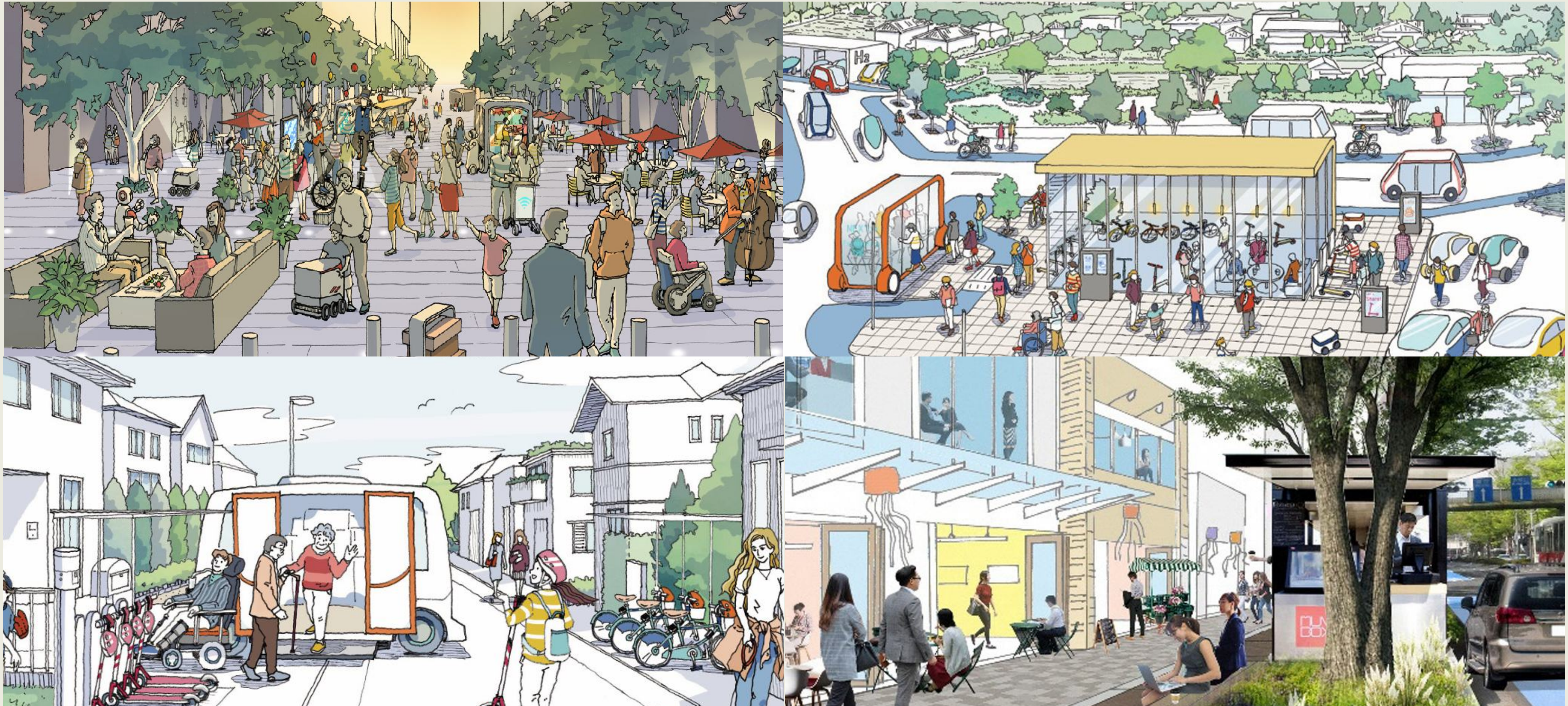
COMPETITION THEME

“Design an innovative, creative downtown that prioritizes sustainable urban infrastructure.”



COMPETITION PURPOSE

Maebashi hopes to redevelop into an innovative, creative city with future-minded infrastructure and residents' well-being at the forefront. To support this, Gunma prefecture is holding this competition with the goal of creating a walkable road space centered around pedestrians and public transportation. The images below show several ideas as references for the city that Maebashi hopes to create.



The five Pillars

5

The prefecture is leading Maebashi's urban redevelopment with the following five pillars in mind. Entrepreneurs are asked to strongly reference and incorporate these pillars in their design.

1

An Attractive, Vibrant Cityscape

Create a visually appealing urban environment by involving citizens in building vibrant and bustling streets and public spaces.





3

Increased Brand Value and Economic Growth

Concentrate businesses in key areas to increase the city's brand value and drive economic growth.

2

Framework Centered on Well-being

Enhance well-being by prioritizing residents' safety and comfort through their active involvement in urban planning and redevelopment.



4

Cultural Reflection in Urban Spaces

Weave Maebashi's unique cultural identity into public spaces, enriching the city's distinct cultural value.



5

Sustainable Infrastructure

Improve public transportation and transportation infrastructure to support sustainable, well-connected urban development.



Project

Design

References



DESIGN REFERENCES

To help orient the project's overall design direction, the competition organizers would like to highlight two locations that may be used as inspiration. Highlights are listed on the following slides that underscores points that the city is interested in implementing in upcoming urban development and are connected with the five pillars listed in the previous section.

DESIGN REFERENCE 1



The Goods Line
(Sydney, Australia)

DESIGN REFERENCE 2



The High Line
(New York City, USA)

THE GOODS LINE

What it is

Branching out from Sydney's Central Station, The Goods Line was born out of a repurposed old rail line renovation that was completed in 2015. Some of Sydney's most notable educational institutions, cultural attractions, and high-tech media hubs surround The Goods Line, which has been transformed into an urban hub of walkways, bike paths, parks, ping pong tables, outdoor workspaces and playgrounds.

Highlights

- 01 People can form connections through art, performances, festivals, and face-to-face interactions
- 02 Reutilizing disused infrastructure
- 03 Studying and exercise facilities
- 04 People can make new connections, highlighting the important role of public spaces
- 05 Connects the city with art, education, and cultural facilities to improve the overall quality of city life and integrate more isolated urban areas



THE HIGH LINE

What it is

More than just a park, the High Line is built on a historic, elevated rail line in New York City and hosts gardens, art exhibitions, performances, an array of food, and a place to connect with friends and neighbors. The High Line works closely with the local community to create a sustainable relationship with the surrounding neighborhoods and reimagines the role of public spaces.

Highlights

- 01 Reutilizing disused infrastructure
- 02 Establishing a sustainable ecosystem
- 03 Creating connections and enhancing existing community relationships while highlighting the role of public spaces
- 04 Encouraging urban revitalization
- 05 Hosting a variety of activities, dining experiences, and opportunities to form human connections



Challenges



Entrees should:

1

Transform

the main street into a
people-first transit mall

2

Redesign

the main intersection



CHALLENGES TO BE ADDRESSED

Transform the main street into a transit mall

Despite being tree-lined and featuring wide sidewalks in most sections, few pedestrians presently walk along the main street due to the lack of shops or points of interest. Because of this, most people who want to visit Maebashi's budding central area instead opt to get there by car, even though it is only a 10-15 minute walk from the station.

Gunma prefecture would like to see the street be turned into a people-first transit mall; a place where people choose to walk along it rather than doing so as a last resort.



INCORPORATE VARIOUS FORMS OF TRANSPORTATION

The main street is currently 4-6 lanes wide and prioritizes vehicular transportation above pedestrians. In an effort to cut down on traffic, the city of Maebashi is currently undertaking a project to implement Level 4 autonomous driving on certain bus routes by 2025.

Pedestrian, bike, car, and bus traffic should be taken into consideration.

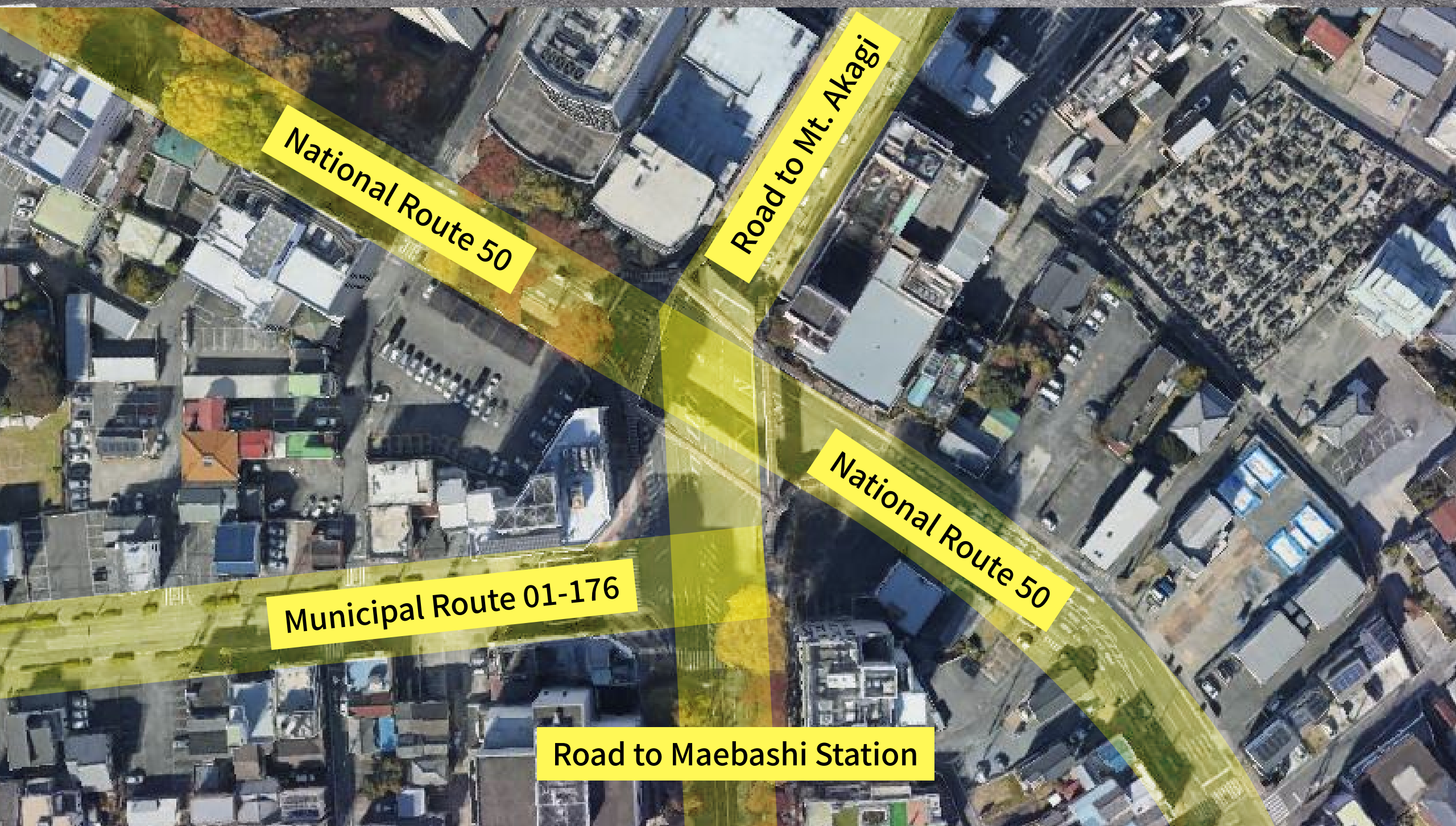


CHALLENGES TO BE ADDRESSED

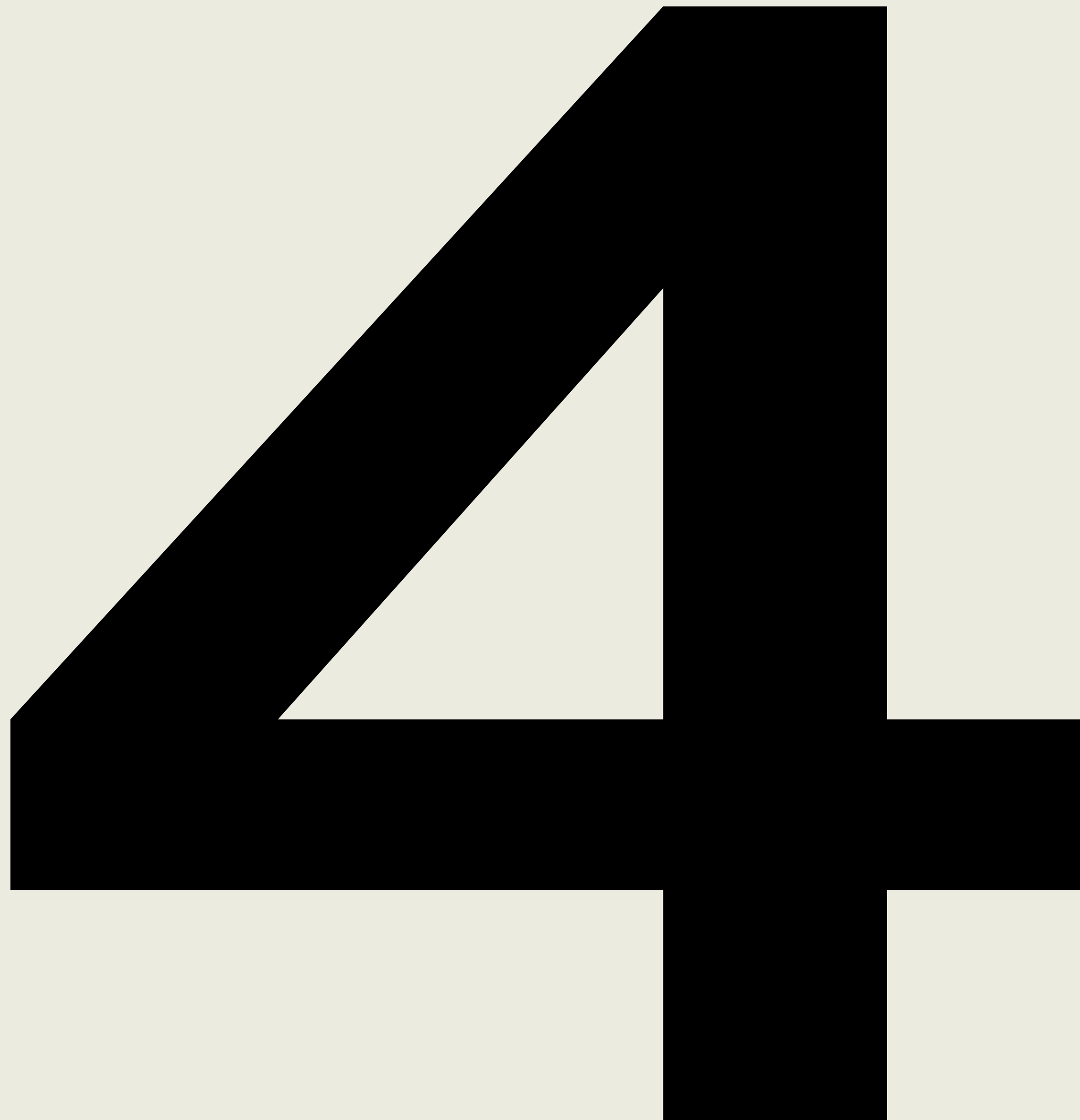
Redesign the main intersection

An overly-complicated five-way junction currently connects the road that leads from the station with the one that goes to the prefectural office. Difficult to use for motorists and pedestrians alike due to lengthy traffic signal wait times and its inaccessible pedestrian bridge as the only way for people to cross. This intersection currently also serves as a deterrent for foot traffic from the station to the central area.

Therefore, the residents would like to **see this intersection redesigned in a way that enables everyone to cross safely.**



Appendix

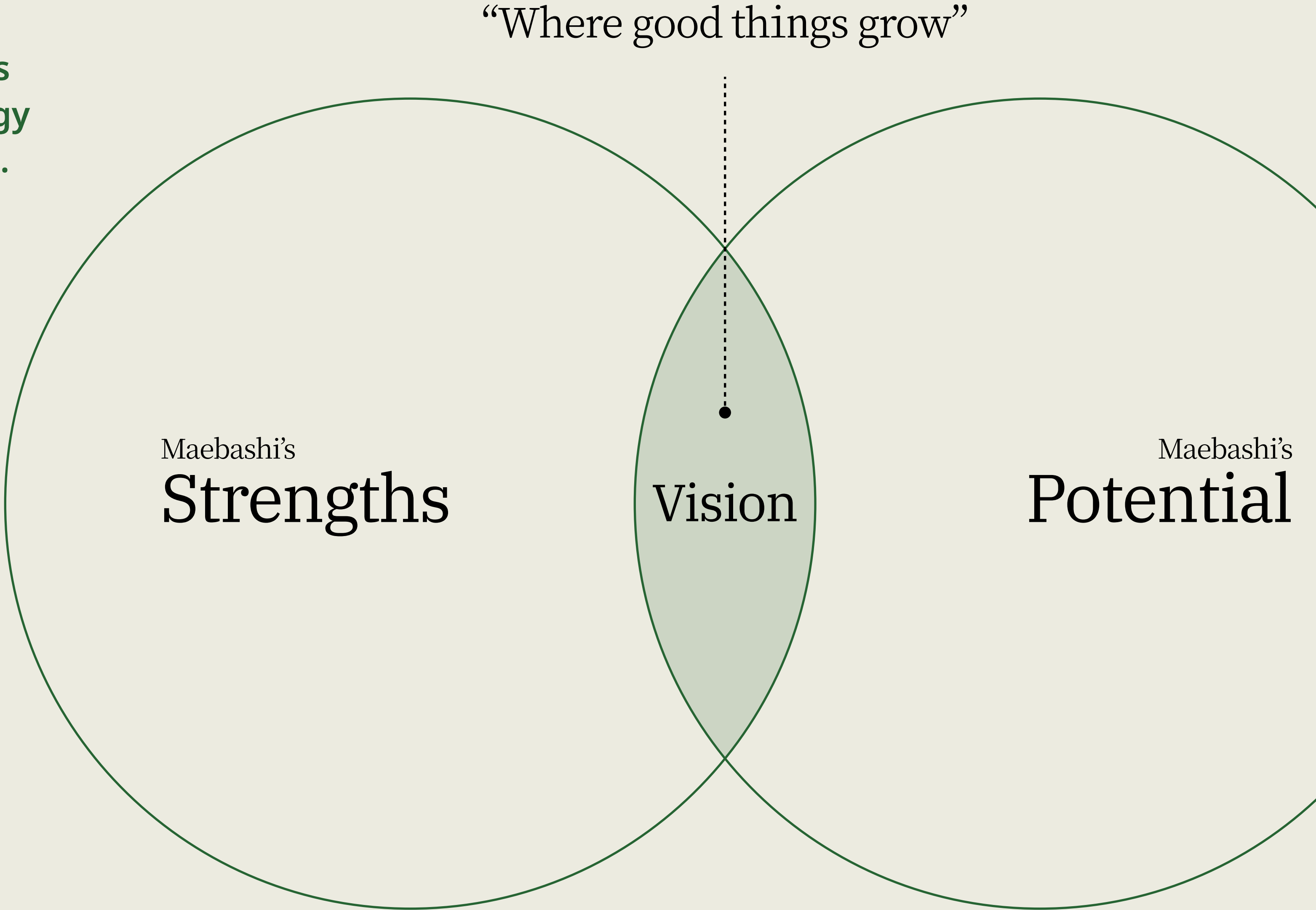


APPENDIX: BACKGROUND ON MAEBASHI'S STRATEGIC CONCEPT

In 2016, Maebashi collaborated with an overseas consulting firm to formulate a vision and strategy that reflects Maebashi's strengths and potential.

Maebashi's vision of *Mebuku* is based on the phrase "Where good things grow," which leverages Maebashi's strengths and potential and was developed to explore the city's possibilities.

The following page lists keywords that convey Maebashi City's strengths and potential.



APPENDIX: BACKGROUND ON MAEBASHI'S STRATEGIC CONCEPT

Maebashi's unique strengths

• Local

• Historically rich

• Welcoming

• Responsibility

• Caring

• Thoughtful

• Laid-back vibe

• Safe

• Collaborative

• Authentic

• Sustainable

• Open-minded

• Hospitable

• Countryside

• Dynamic

• Casual

• Accessible

• Community-oriented

• Polite

• Modest

• Green

• Calm

• Central location

• Useful

• Diverse

• Honest

• Respectful

• Concrete

• Humble

• Focused

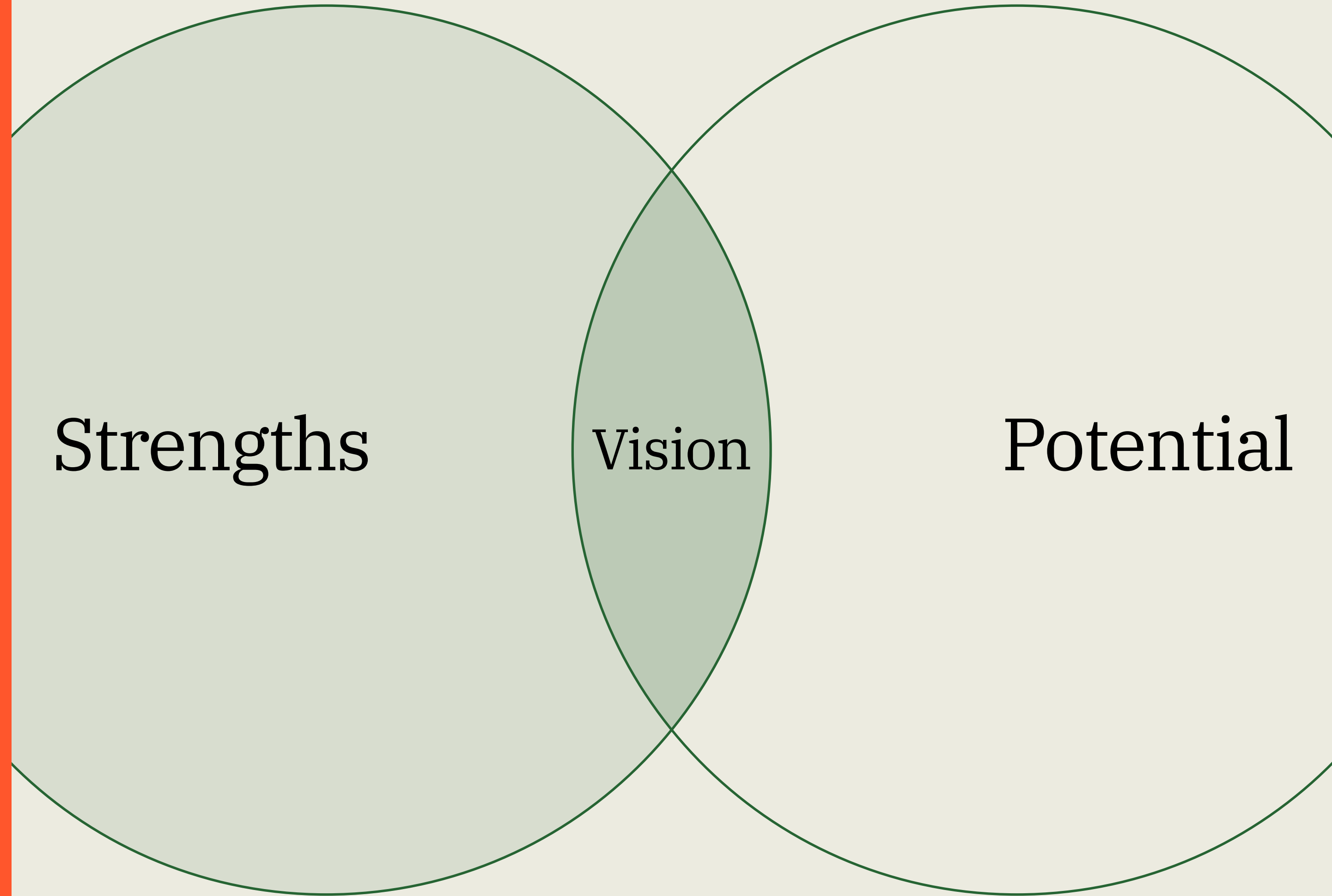
• Cooperative

• Inclusive

Strengths

Vision

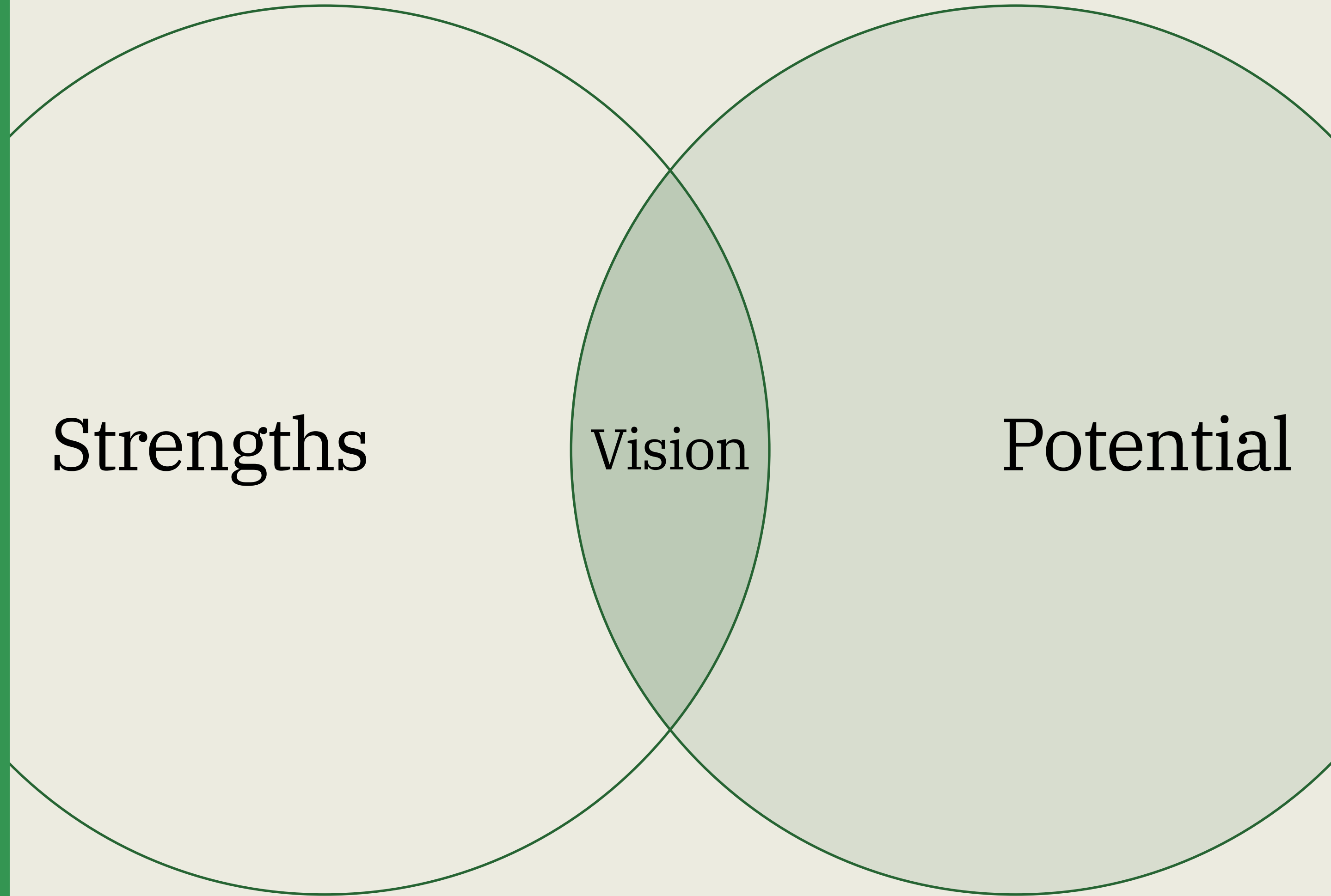
Potential



APPENDIX: BACKGROUND ON MAEBASHI'S STRATEGIC CONCEPT

Maebashi's potential for improvement

- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| • Progressive | • Speaking up |
| • Contemporary | • Exaggeration |
| • Desirable | • Youthful |
| • Beautiful | • Creative |
| • Unique | • Discreet |
| • Attractive | • Vibrant |
| • New | • Intellectual |
| • Fresh | • Carbon-neutral |
| • Significance | • Forward-thinking |
| • Green | • Positive |
| • Groundbreaking | • Fun |
| • Spectacular | • Focused |
| • International | • Natural |
| • Specific | • Organized |
| • Agile | • Outstanding |
| • Captivating | • Service-focused |



APPENDIX: BACKGROUND ON MAEBASHI'S STRATEGIC CONCEPT

Three core values towards the vision of "Where good things grow"

While Maebashi City exhibits a range of unique strengths and yet uncovered potential, it currently lacks a distinctive identity. To realize its vision, it is crucial to focus on three key core values: creating a tangible and active sense community, offering diverse experiences that stimulate creativity, and fostering sustainable communal activities. By focusing on these key points, Maebashi aims to fully unlock its potential.

