

SOUTHTOWN

BUSINESS AREA SPECIFIC PLAN

DECEMBER, 2019 (FINAL)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The project team thanks the Southtown Corridor Improvement District (CID) Board, Southtown Steering Committee, City of Grand Rapids, business and property owners, and residents in developing the Southtown Business Area Specific Plan.

SOUTHTOWN BUSINESS AREA SPECIFIC PLAN (BASP) STEERING COMMITTEE

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Sam Evans	Alger Heights Neighborhood Assn.	Alger Heights
JoAnn King	Oakdale Neighborhood/Resident, Retired Educator, Entrepreneur	Boston Square
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Alexander Thomas	Grand Rapids Black Chamber of Commerce/ Retired Business Developer, City of Grand Rapids	Outside
Carlos Sanchez	Grand Rapids Housing Commission	Boston / Division
Eric Meister	Notions Marketing	Seymour Square and Madison Square
Christy Knetsch	Madison Square Church	Madison Square
Dr. Pat Pulliam	Southtown CID Board	Seymour Square
Senita Lenear	Southtown CID Board	Grand Rapids City Commissioner
Bill DeJong	Southtown CID Board	Alger Heights

SOUTHTOWN CID BOARD

- Helen Harp
- Commissioner Senita Lenear
- Jarvis Beene
- William DeJong
- Dr. Patricia Pulliam
- Robert Lyon
- Anissa Eddie
- Brittney Williams

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS

- Layla Aslani, *Design, Development, & Community Engagement*
- Kyama Kitavi, *Economic Development*
- Kara Wood, *Economic Development*

CONSULTANT TEAM

- SmithGroup
- Streetsense

YOUR COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE recommends adoption of the following resolution to adopt the Southtown Business Area Specific Plan as an amendment to the 2002 City of Grand Rapids Master Plan.

WHEREAS:

1. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA) authorizes the Planning Commission to prepare a Master Plan for the use, development and preservation of all lands in the City; and
2. Efforts related to the Southtown Business Area Specific Plan have been underway since December 2017, led by a Steering Committee comprised of Southtown Corridor Improvement Authority board members, area residents, neighborhood association representatives, business owners, and other stakeholders; and
3. On September 24, 2019, the City Commission received and reviewed the Southtown Business Area Specific Plan and authorized distribution of the Plan to the Notice Group entities identified in the MPEA; and
4. The Planning Commission held a public hearing on November 14, 2019 and voted in support of recommending the Plan for adoption; and
5. The City Commission finds that the Business Area Specific Plan is desirable and proper and furthers the use, preservation, and development goals and strategies of the City for the land within the boundaries of the Business Area Specific Plan; and
6. The City Commission made the foregoing determination based on a review of existing land uses in the City, a review of the existing Master Plan provisions and maps, input from the public engagement process and public hearing and with the assistance of a professional planning group; and
7. The MPEA authorizes the City Commission to assert by resolution its right to approve or reject the proposed Master Plan amendment; therefore

RESOLVED that the Southtown Business Area Specific Plan is hereby approved by the City Commission as an amendment to the 2002 City of Grand Rapids Master Plan.

Prepared by Layla Astani

CORRECT IN FORM

DEPARTMENT OF LAW

City Commission
Resolution of Adoption
December 3, 2019

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OVERVIEW

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PURPOSE AND INTENT

WHY A BUSINESS AREA SPECIFIC PLAN?

The City of Grand Rapids created the Southtown Corridor Improvement District (CID) in 2016, as an expansion of the previously formed Madison Square CID.

The Southtown CID was formed to empower the community's voice to guide and shape positive changes in the community that improve the health and success of business districts in southeast Grand Rapids. Ultimately, it will direct investment and physical improvements to the commercial corridors and business districts where it can provide the most benefit to business owners and residents alike.

The Southtown BASP identifies those positive changes and creates a roadmap that will lead to an improved commercial core and public spaces that support existing and new businesses, appeal to neighborhood residents, encourage pride in places, and attract visitors.

The Southtown CID encompasses six individual and unique business districts including **Alger Heights, Boston Square, Franklin and Eastern, Madison Square, and Seymour Square**. The sixth district, **Division South**, is within the Southtown CID district but is planned as part of a separate, parallel planning process and covered by its own planning document.

The BASP provides physical, program, and policy recommendations to support the business districts of the Southtown CID. The BASP can help strengthen and expand cultural and neighborhood assets and bring vitality to the districts. Both the plan development process and implementation strategies are based on business community feedback, public engagement, and ownership of outcomes. The plan's recommendations are written to be implementable by the community to ensure that greater equity is achieved in Southtown.

Overall, the BASP provides strategies that are specific to each business district while providing overarching recommendations that cover the full district.





The goal of the Business Area Specific Plan is to support the Southtown Corridor Improvement District by establishing solutions that strengthen the business districts.

PAST PLANNING

WHAT IS THE CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT ?

The Southtown CID Board, formed in 2016 as an expansion of the Madison Square CID, is comprised of business owners, community members, and leaders. The board collects a portion of tax revenue increases to reinvest directly back into the Southtown district. The Southtown CID Board's responsibilities are to implement the TIF development plan, communicate with the business community, identify challenges and opportunities to strengthen the district, determine how to allocate funding for implement projects, and champion project/program implementation.

PRIOR PLANNING EFFORTS

The following prior neighborhood and other planning documents for surrounding areas (or city-wide) that affect Southtown were reviewed to see how they might align with the intent and recommendations of the Southtown Business Area Specific Plan. The plans included:

2002 - CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS MASTER PLAN

The City Master Plan spans 20 year of working closely with the community to plan for Grand Rapid's future. The Master Plan is updated regularly to include plans and initiatives desired by different communities and neighborhoods in the city.

2002 - MADISON SQUARE COMMUNITY DESIGN CHARRETTE

Madison Square worked to come up with a desired plan for the community. This included a Corridor Development Plan, with suggested land use strategies, and streetscape enhancements for Hall Street and Madison Avenue.

2010 - BOSTON SQUARE BUSINESS DISTRICT

The plan focuses on design recommendations, suggested land uses, development priorities, public spaces amenities, and enhancing connections into and through the neighborhood.

2013 - FRANKLIN & EASTERN DESIGN WORKSHOP

LINC helped to facilitate an engagement process to identify land use strategies and streetscape improvements for Eastern Ave. Multiple public input sessions were held during the planning process.

2014 - AN EQUITY PROFILE OF GRAND RAPIDS

The plan focuses on creating pathways to good jobs, connecting younger generations with older ones, integrating immigrants into the economy, building communities of opportunity throughout the county, and ensuring educational and career pathways for all youth so that Grand Rapids can put all residents on the path toward reaching their full potential, and secure a bright future for the everyone.

2016 - SOUTHTOWN CID TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF) & DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The plan outlines improvements to public or private properties that will prevent further deterioration of property values within the district and encourage new investment. Development plans may be funded by tax increment financing and other grants.

2016 - SEYMOUR SQUARE BUSINESS OWNER SURVEY

This survey was distributed to Seymour Square business owners asking them to rank which activities and streetscape projects they would like to see in Seymour Square.

2016 - VITAL STREETS

The plan focuses on improving the City of Grand Rapids transportation network through strategies that will invest in the streets. The design guidelines provide recommendations for complete streets that are accessible, safe, functional, and increase economic opportunity for all.

TAKEAWAYS FROM PRIOR PLANS THAT ALIGN WITH THE INTENT AND FOCUS OF THE SOUTHTOWN BUSINESS AREA SPECIFIC PLAN:

- Encourage historic preservation.
- Pursue business development opportunities.
- Enhance visual appeal and walkability.
- Promote economic prosperity, social equity, and environmental stewardship.
- Promote community revitalization and diversity.
- Support local job creation.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Guiding principles shape how the steering committee operates and makes decisions throughout the planning process. They speak to what the planning process itself hopes to accomplish, how the work will be done, and the types of outcomes that are desired. The following guiding principles were established through discussion with the steering committee during the initial kick-off meeting at the start of this project.

OVERALL

- Empower the community voice.
- Respect the cultural and historical context in Southtown.
- Leverage existing assets.
- Guide and shape changes in the business districts.
- Guide investment and physical improvements in ways that do not lead to displacement of businesses, jobs, and residents.
- Be a community-driven process for plan development to promote transparency and engagement of the community.

OUTCOMES

- Have the tools in hand to feel confident about making important business district decisions.
- Understand the benefits and impacts of land use changes.
- Be able to distinguish between development opportunities and threats.
- Build the tools to be good negotiators on behalf of the business districts.





SOUTHTOWN ASSETS

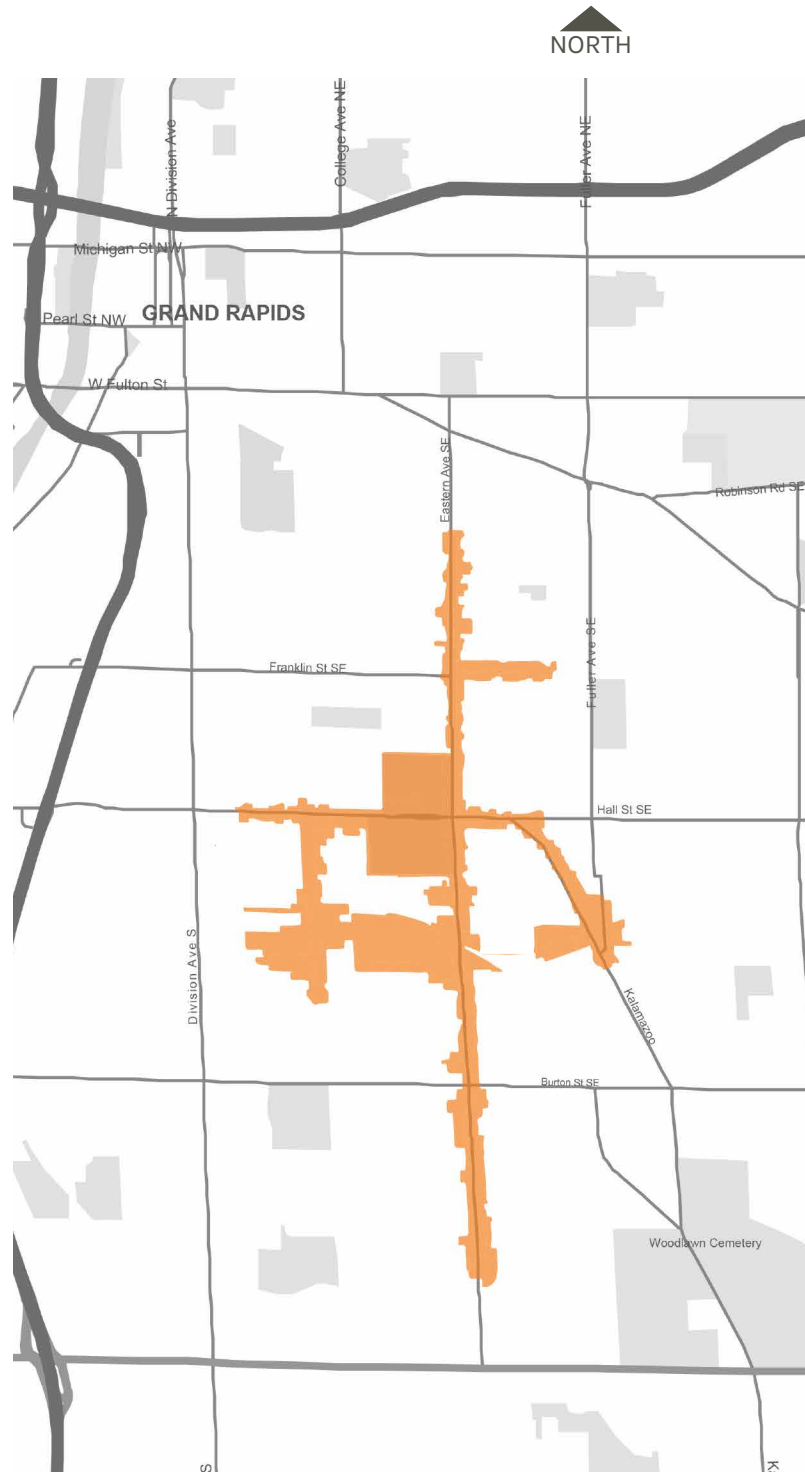
The Southtown CID lies in the southeast portion of Grand Rapids and is one of the city's more diverse communities, with a wide range of businesses and employment opportunities. Southtown has a high rate of homeownership and neighborhood stability, with a population density higher than the City of Grand Rapids overall and comparable to other traditional neighborhood areas.

As a corridor-focused district, the Southtown CID (Alger Heights, Boston Square, Franklin and Eastern, Madison Square, and Seymour Square) consists of rights-of-way and properties fronting the major corridors of Eastern Avenue, Franklin Street, Hall Street, Madison Avenue, and Kalamazoo Avenue. Well-trafficked corridors provide good visibility and accessibility. In addition to serving local transportation, these corridors also handle larger volumes of crosstown commuter traffic in and out of the city's downtown.

These corridors are a mix of single- and multi-family residential with pockets of commercial properties in the Traditional Business Area (TBA) zoned locations. Additionally, the Southtown CID also includes a band of industrial and light manufacturing zoned businesses and properties following on or near the railroad corridor. In total, the Southtown CID represents an area of over 340-acres of land (parcels and rights-of-way). This includes 21% vacant storefront space that with reinvestment can be restored to vibrant spaces.

Why is having an BASP important right now? The City of Grand Rapids is going through a major economic growth period with significant levels of redevelopment occurring across the city. This plan responds proactively to this by pressure by directing potential growth in a manner that is consistent with the values, integrity, and character of the existing community. It provides mechanisms for the community to be able to influence potential projects and address concerns such as: the displacement of people, jobs, and businesses; the cohesion and identity of the community itself; and the health and well-being of Southtown overall.

The BASP provides a vision, goals, and recommendations for the Southtown CID that advocates for stabilizing, equitable, and positive outcomes for the business districts' future.





Boston Square Business District
(Boston St & Kalamazoo Ave)



Franklin & Eastern Business District
(Eastern Ave & Sherman St)



Seymour Square Business District
(Eastern Ave & Burton St)



Franklin & Eastern Business District
(Eastern Ave & Franklin St)



Alger Heights Business District
(Eastern Ave & Alger St)



Madison Square Business District
(Hall St & Madison Ave)

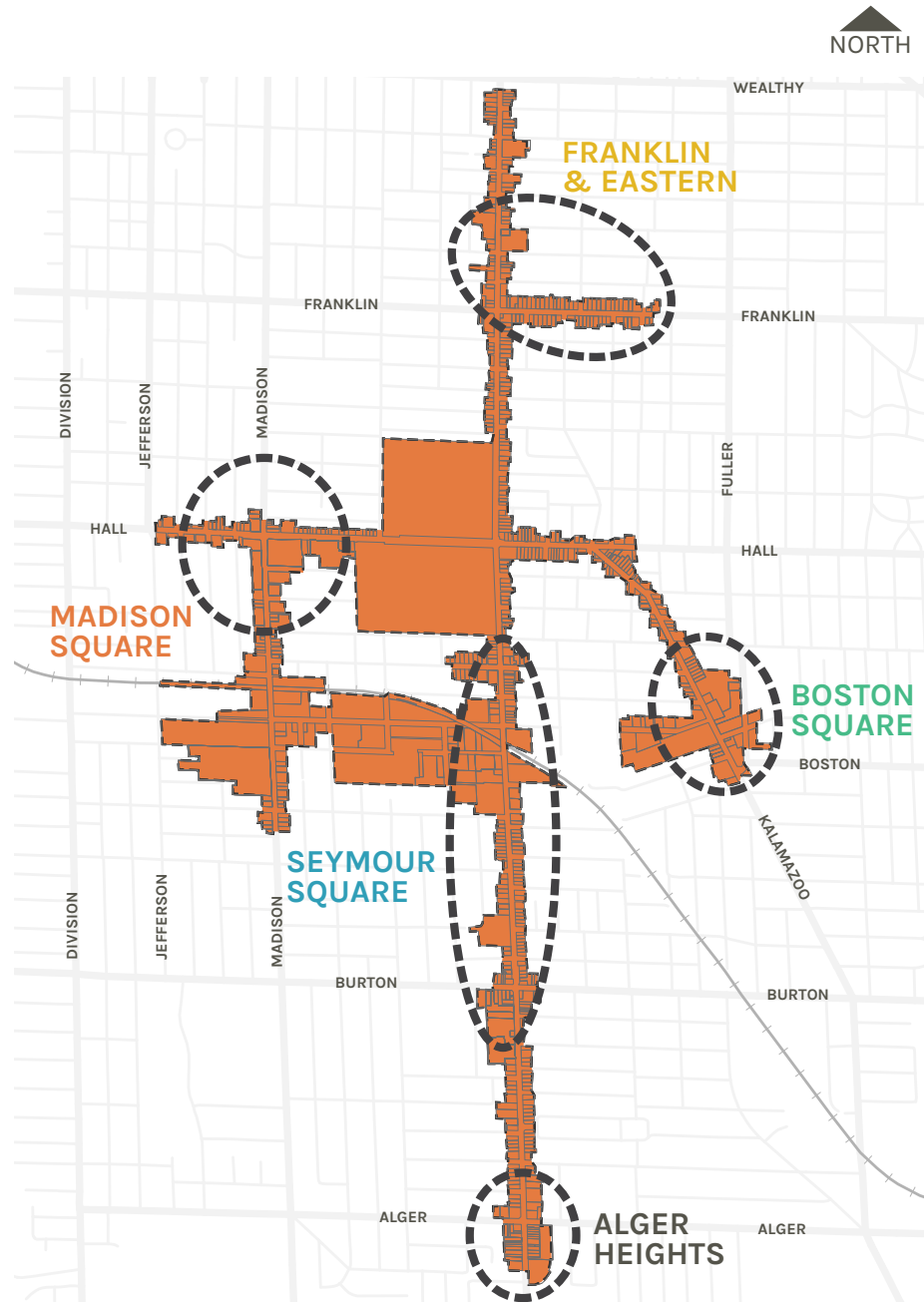
SOUTHTOWN BUSINESS DISTRICTS

The Southtown CID is comprised of six distinct business districts (with all but Division South covered by this document) and the properties that connect between them along the major road corridors from Wealthy (north) to Mulford (south) and Jefferson (west) to Kalamazoo (east).

Note that portions of Hall and Division are also formally part of the Southtown CID but are part of a separate planning and not discussed in this planning document.

Additionally, there are residential neighborhoods that exist around the Southtown corridors. A challenge and concern is that the neighborhood boundaries, in some cases, overlap multiple business districts or other neighborhood boundaries.

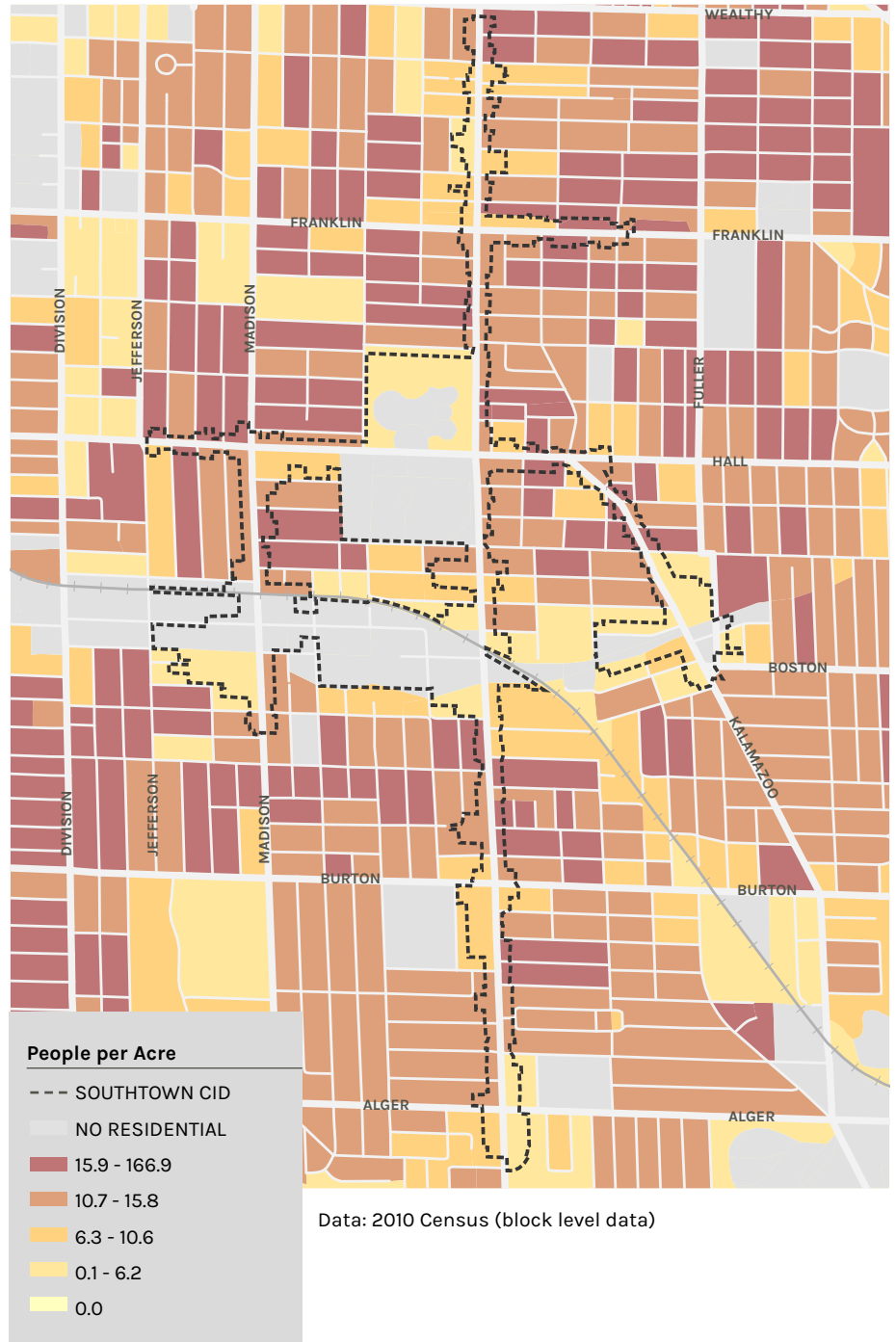
A retail and storefront analysis was conducted as part of this project. This analysis inventoried existing building uses and the types of businesses present in Southtown. The analysis provided context for the retail conditions in Southtown and helped inform the planning process and frame opportunities for growing, enhancing or establishing new businesses in Southtown. See Appendix for the full retail conditions summary.





POPULATION SUMMARY

The overall Southtown community contains approximately 42,000 residents. Of this total, nearly 8,500 residents live within census blocks directly touching the Southtown CID boundary.

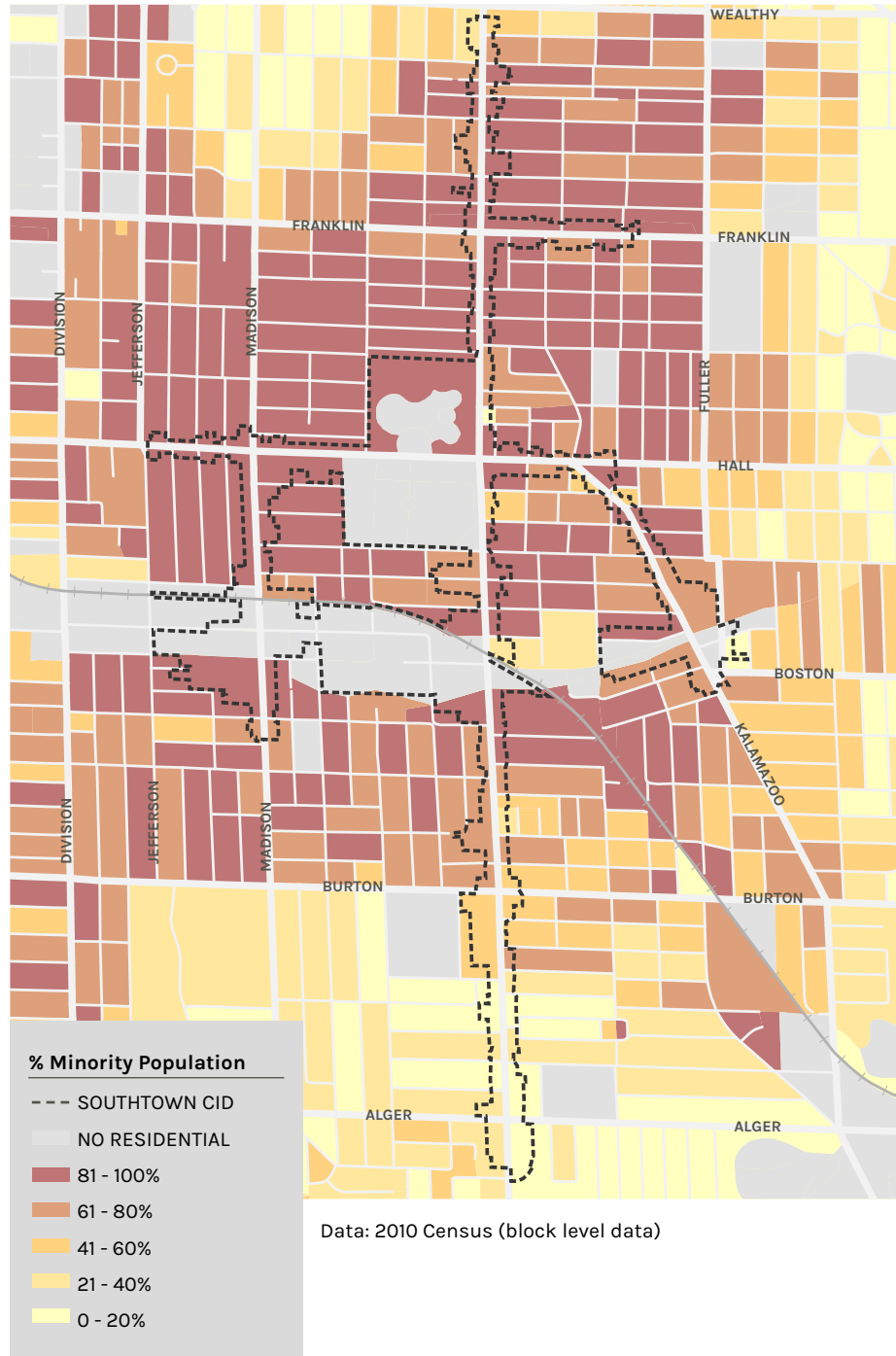




POPULATION SUMMARY (CONTINUED)

The Southtown community is one of the most racially and culturally diverse communities within Grand Rapids and the surrounding region. Overall, the Southtown area is 46% African-American and 22% Hispanic. Most of the residential areas north of Burton Street and south of Franklin Street are over 80% African-American or Hispanic.

These facts are important to recognize, particularly within the context of growing concern over gentrification, with corresponding impacts on neighborhoods and local businesses, and the need for greater equity.





SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

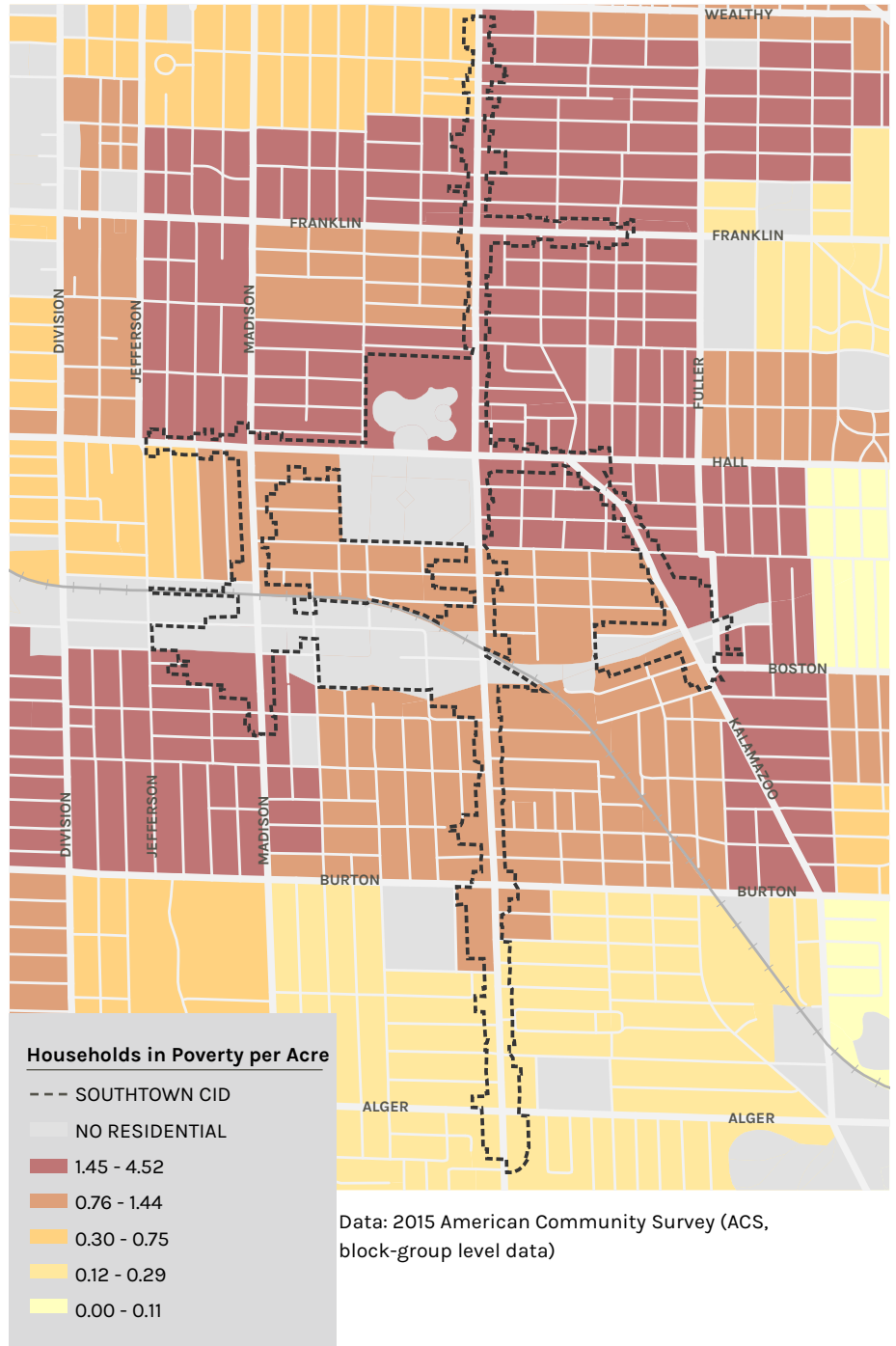
The Southtown area contains approximately 13,000 households. Of these, 56% are owner-occupied and 15% are vacant. Overall, homeownership rates in Southtown exceed those of Grand Rapids as a whole, which is at 54.3% owner-occupied.

The median household income of Southtown residents is approximately \$34,300.

The Grand Valley Metropolitan Council's 2040 Transportation Plan (published in 2015) indicates an increase in jobs across the City of Grand Rapids from 2010 to 2040 of 21,787 jobs. The vast majority of job gains are in the service sector. Total population is anticipated to rise by 9,800 people.

As the economy grows and more jobs are added to Southtown and beyond, making sure that Southtown residents have access to new job opportunities is an important objective of this plan.

ESRI data on median household income across the Southtown area shows a rise from \$34,693 in 2018 to \$38,539 in 2023.

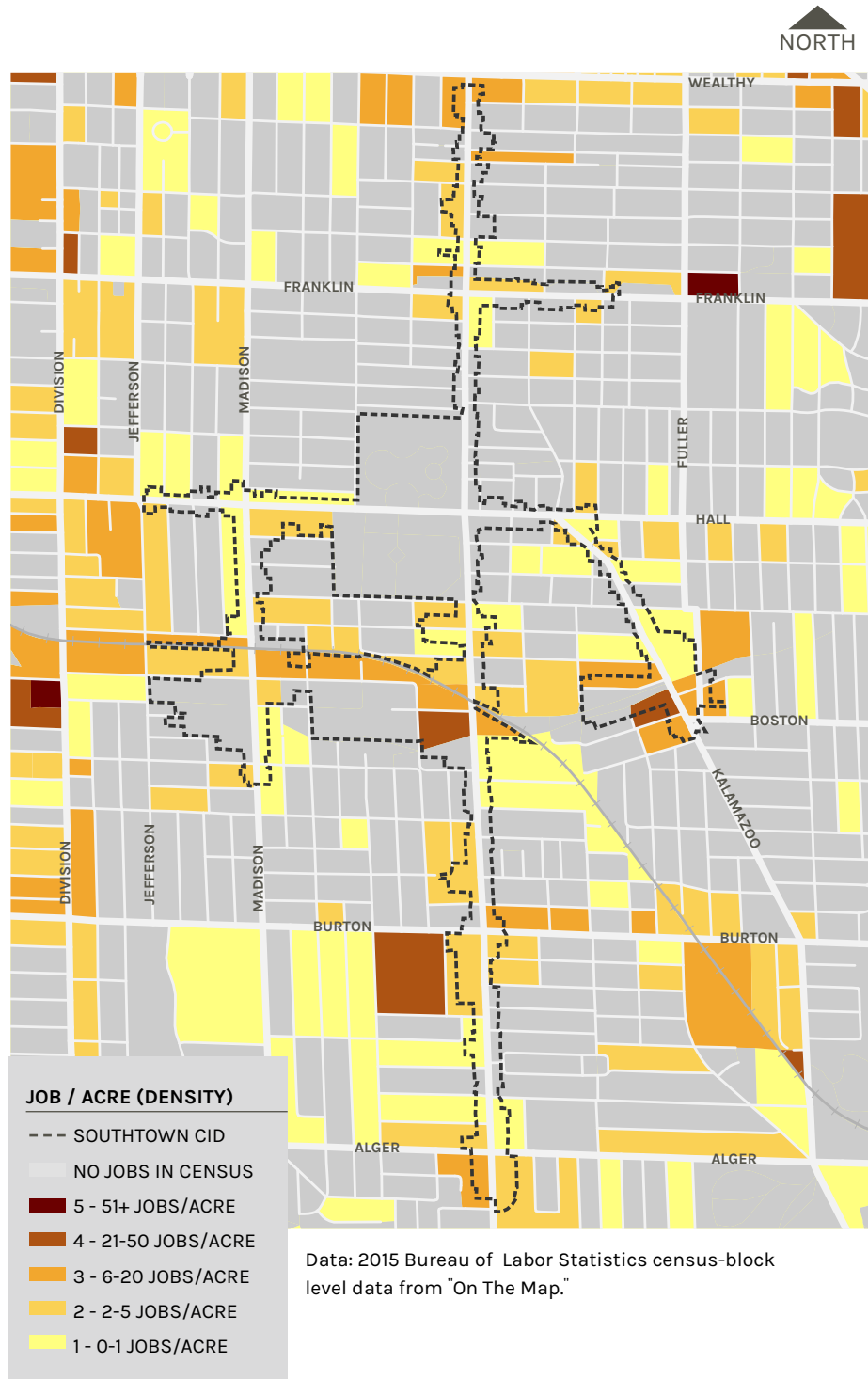


COMMERCE AND EMPLOYMENT

Approximately 830 business are in operation within the Southtown area, employing over 11,000 employees.

The greatest concentration of jobs, in terms of density and overall totals, is within the Cottage Grove commercial/industrial area, but there are also concentrations at many of the retail districts (e.g. Seymour Square and Boston Square). Note that the census data doesn't fully reflect the exact numbers of employees in a census block, as often times employee counts are attributed to a business office location that is different from the site where employees may actually be working. This is true for many areas within Cottage Grove.

The International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) estimates that office workers with access to retail convenience goods and places to eat spend an average of \$7,075.50 annually. With 11,000 employees in the district, that is over \$77-million in potential sales that could be captured within the Southtown area.



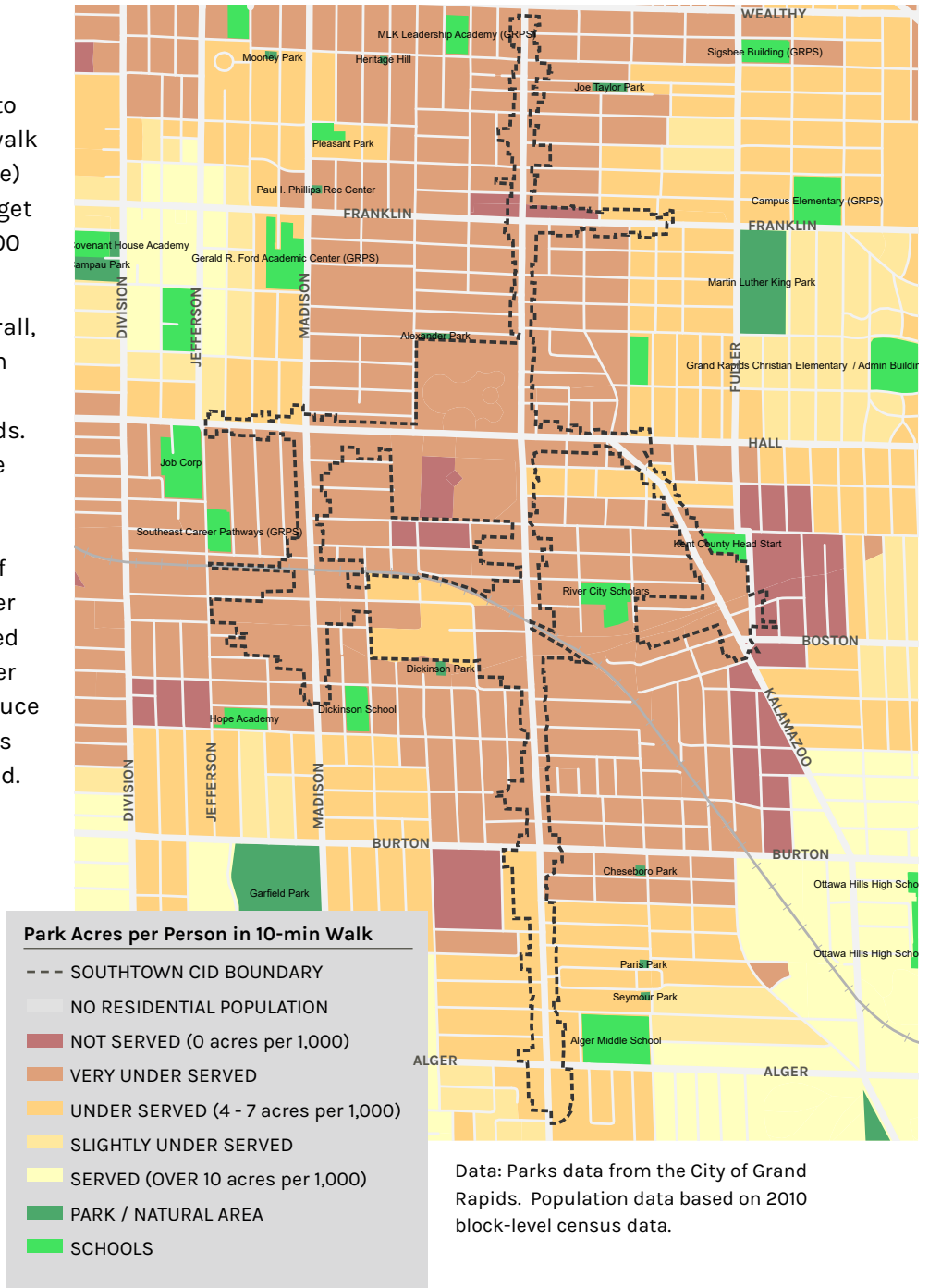


ACCESS TO OPEN SPACE

This analysis examined access to park space within a 10-minute walk (approximately 1/4-mile distance) of residents, using a desired target of 10 acres of park space per 1,000 residents.

The Southtown community, overall, has relatively low access to open space (park lands) compared to many other parts of Grand Rapids. This assessments of open space includes public schools with play fields that can also provide open space amenities outside of school hours. However, a number of schools in the area have closed or have been converted to charter schools. These changes can reduce the amount of usable open if it is privatized and/or not maintained.

Garfield Park in the southwest of the Southtown area, and Martin Luther King Park in the northeast are both large community parks. However, many Southtown neighborhoods remain underserved in terms of walkable open space within close proximity.



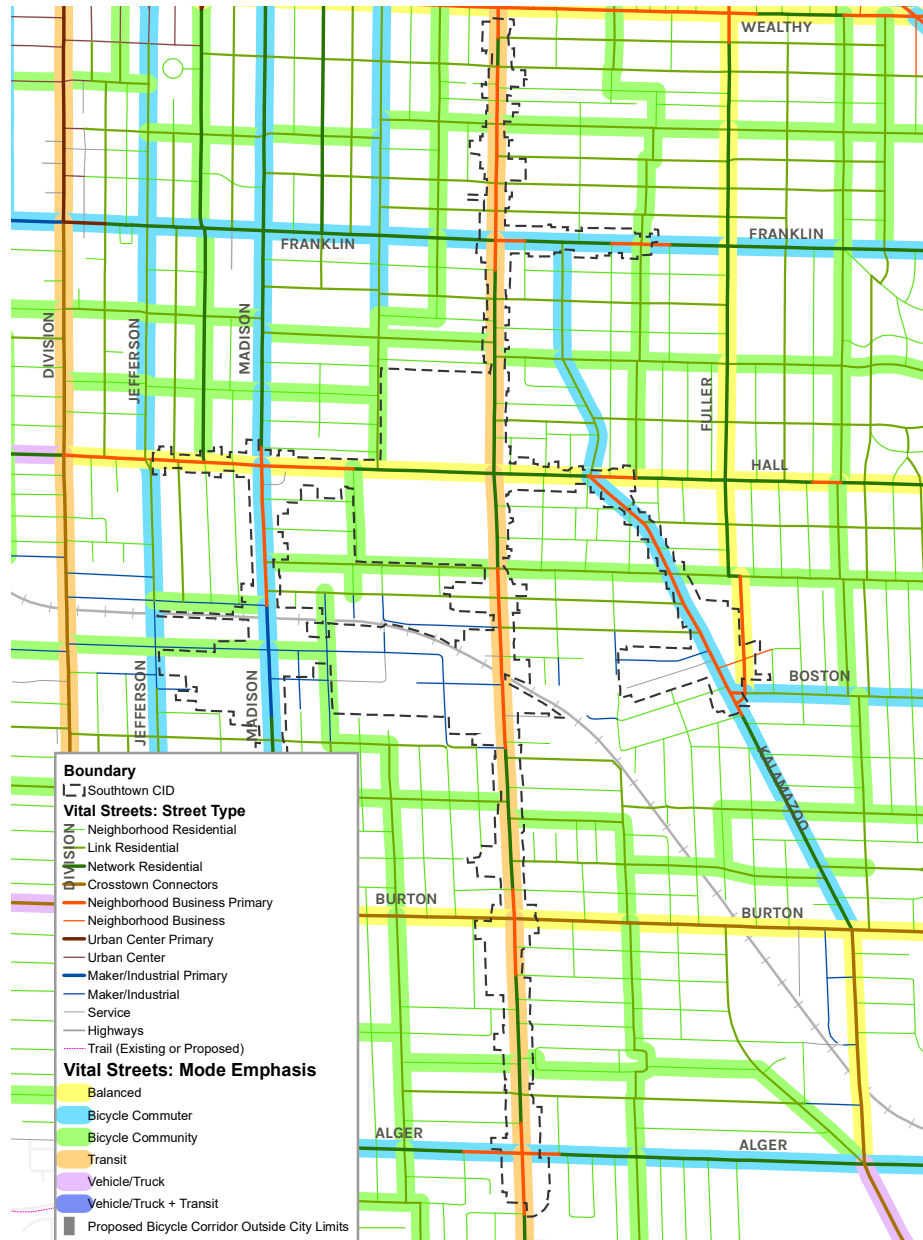


VITAL STREETS/TRANSPORTATION

The Grand Rapids Vital Streets Plan (Vital Streets Plan) categorizes streets based on their **Mode Emphasis** (the mixes of different modes of transportation on the street) and **Street Type**, which relates to both volume of transportation along a street, as well as its surrounding land use context.

Outside of the commercial areas (TBAs), most of the major streets are Crosstown Connectors or Network Residential Streets with a Balanced Mode of emphasis. This means that these streets accommodate relatively larger volumes of traffic, yet also have other competing demands for roadway space, including use for pedestrians, bicycles, parking/loading, and street side uses.

The Vital Streets Plan stresses the importance of designing streets with safety first, for all users. Slower (and safer) vehicle speeds are important to realizing safety benefits and designing more people-friendly streets.



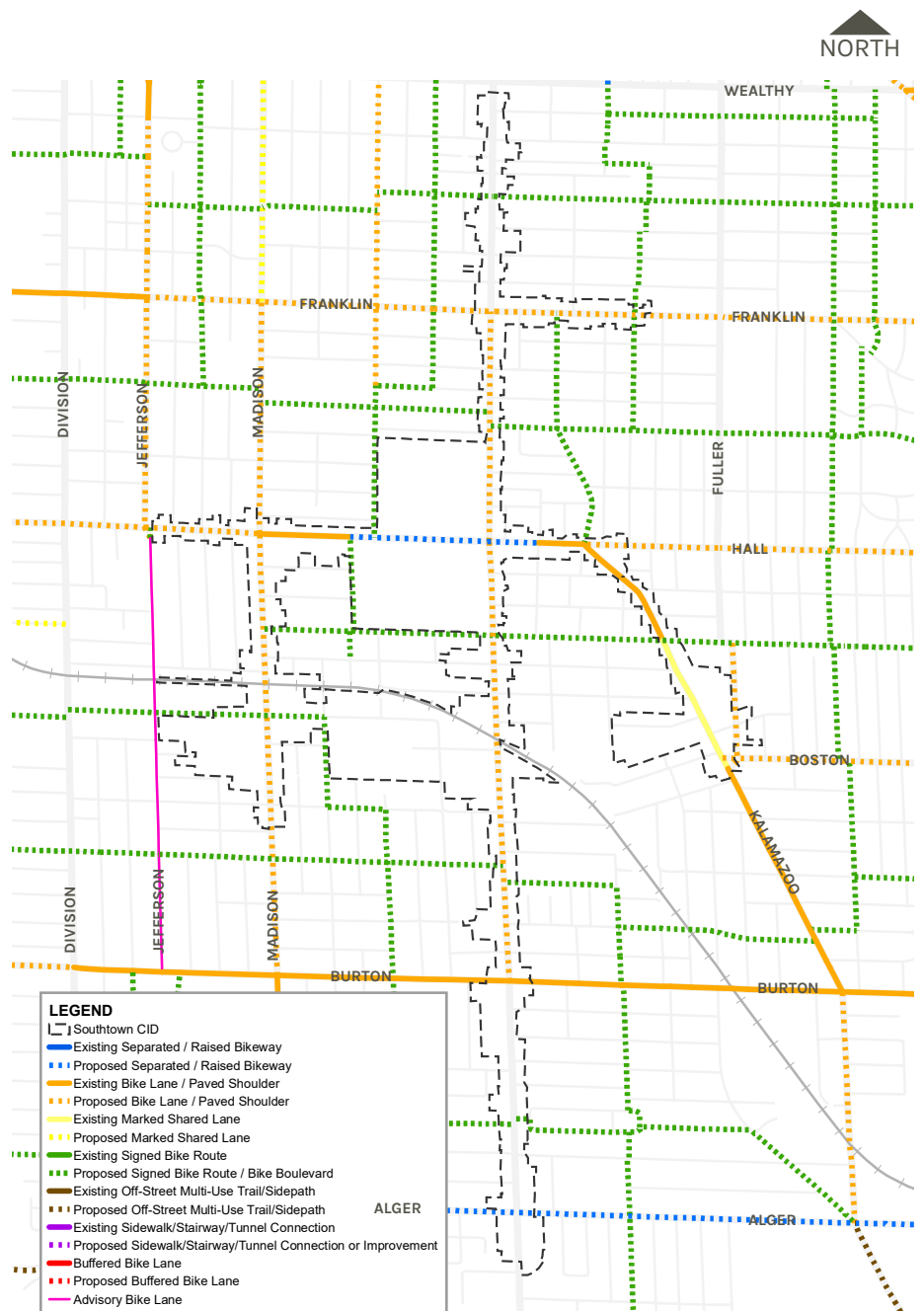
NON-MOTORIZED FACILITIES

Non-motorized facilities refer to sidewalks, trails, and bicycle infrastructure. While most trips in the Southtown area are still conducted by vehicle, there are many people who cannot or choose not to drive, and it is important that safe facilities be provided to make the streets (and destinations along them) more accessible for everyone.

The Vital Streets Plan identified **community bicycle routes**, and **commuter bicycle routes**.

Streets emphasizing **community bicycle routes** are typically on slower moving, lower traffic residential streets. These are often streets designed as signed bike routes. Other bike improvements, especially at road crossings, may be included as well.

Commuter bicycle routes are those often provide direct access to jobs, retail areas, and other important destinations. These tend to be larger streets and rely on dedicated bike improvements (e.g. bike lanes) to provide safe travel.



PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process for the Southtown BASP proceeded for over a year and was structured around a broad engagement and outreach strategy. Engagement occurred throughout the project at a number of different levels:

SOUTHTOWN BASP STEERING COMMITTEE

A 12+ member steering committee was assembled prior to the start of the formal planning process. This steering committee was comprised of business owners, residents, organizational representatives, and members from the Southtown CID Board. The steering committee was charged with providing regular input to the project team through monthly meetings. The steering committee was responsible for leading community engagement—be it with business owners, residents, or others—at the local grassroots level. The insights and input from the steering committee shaped the direction of this BASP and associated recommendations.

PROJECT TEAM

Key staff from the city, two steering committee members, and the consultant team were organized into a project team responsible for carrying out the day-to-day logistics of the planning process, facilitating meetings, organizing outreach, and preparing materials for the steering committee, public, and final BASP report. The project team met through weekly video conference calls over the course of the project.

SOUTHTOWN CID BOARD

The Southtown CID Board consists of nine members that are appointed by the City Commission to oversee the Southtown CID. The board will use the Southtown BASP as a guiding document to help make informed decisions about where to invest tax increment financing (TIF) money in local improvements, programs, or other efforts to stabilize and improve the business environment.

AMBASSADORS

Over the course of the planning process, a group of volunteer ambassadors helped with on-the-ground outreach and notification—such as distributing meeting notices to businesses and nearby residences and talking with people in their community about the project. Ambassadors were engaged early on through a training session.

FOCUS GROUPS

Seven focus group meetings were held over the course of the project to solicit input and directly engage local businesses owners, community organizations, resident groups, and other entities active within the Southtown area.

PUBLIC WORKSHOPS

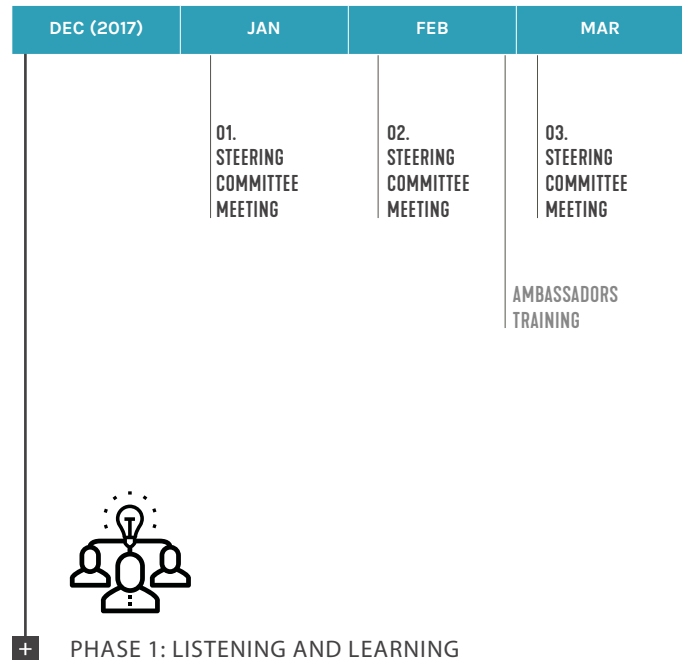
Four public workshops were utilized during the planning process, three during a series of day-long open house sessions throughout the first phase of the project, and one during the second phase of the project. A variety of tools were used to solicit input during these workshops, including dot-voting boards, paper surveys, web-based surveys, mapping exercises, and Q&A sessions. Pop-up workshops were conducted on the street in each of the business districts, providing a opportunity to directly meet with business owners and patrons.

Food and refreshments were provided for workshop participants along with children’s activities in an effort to further increase participation rates. Additionally, Spanish language interpreters were in attendance to help those with language needs.



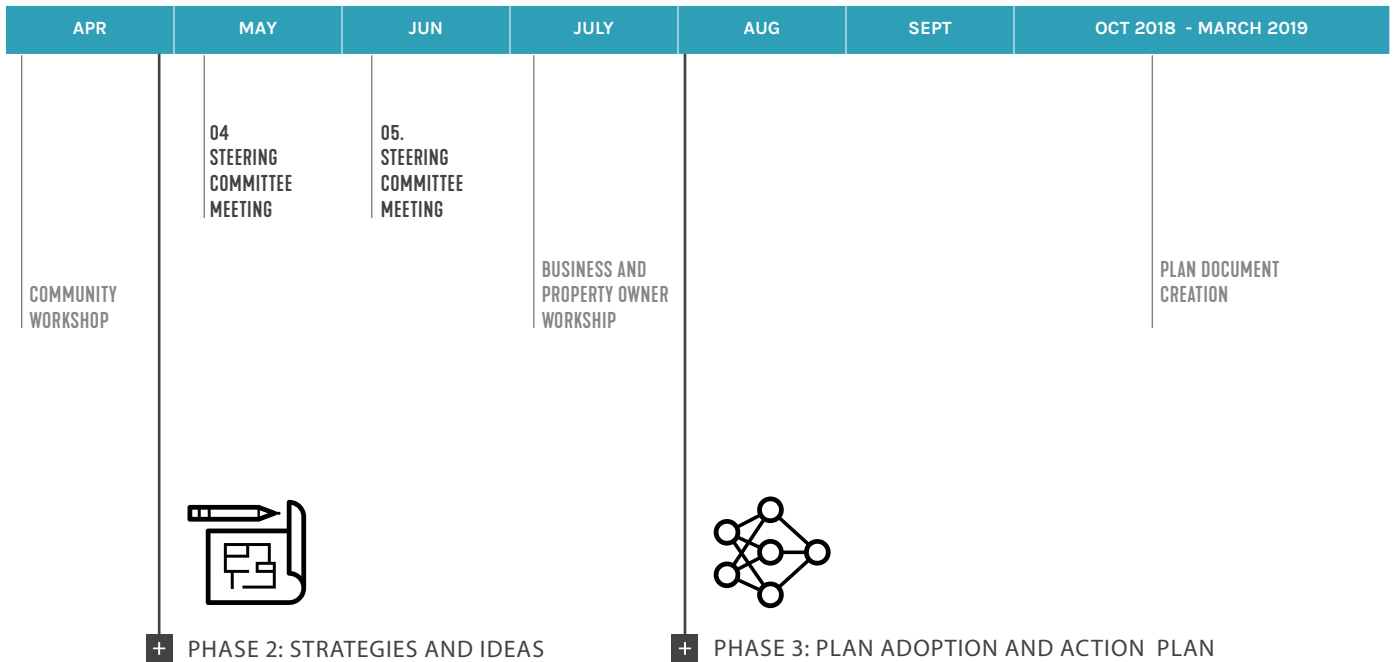
TIMELINE AND ENGAGEMENT PROCESS - PLANNING PHASES

The overall process was organized into three phases:



This phase focused on reviewing past planning efforts and meeting with key stakeholders and the public to understand the critical issues and needs in Southtown, as well as crafting an initial vision and goals for the BASP.

- This phase of work culminated with a three-day series of presentations, focus group meetings, and public open houses. The meetings and open houses were held in different locations around the district, and the day-long open-house format provided opportunities at almost every time of the day to engage, allowing people to find a time that worked in their schedule to meet.
- In addition to the workshops and open houses, a web-based and matching paper survey were developed to ask business owners and residents specific questions about Southtown.



This phase of work tasked the project team with distilling the input from Phase 1 into a series of key challenges and issues that the BASP would need to address. From there, the project team drew on local expertise and knowledge, a retail market analysis, best practice guidance, and other resources to develop a menu of strategies that respond to the community's goals.

- A two-day sequence of engagement was structured around six pop-up workshops at different times of the day and in each of the business districts. These pop-up workshops focused on reaching out directly to business and property owners within the business districts.

The final phase of work refined the strategies and actions into coherent recommendations and developed the BASP report document, including relevant background information, an action plan, and appendices.

02

OPPORTUNITIES AND GOALS

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COMMUNITY INPUT

The public engagement process created an environment of collaboration between business owners, residents, and organizations with the goal of understanding how the business districts are used, how people are moving through the corridors, and what improvements the community would like to see.

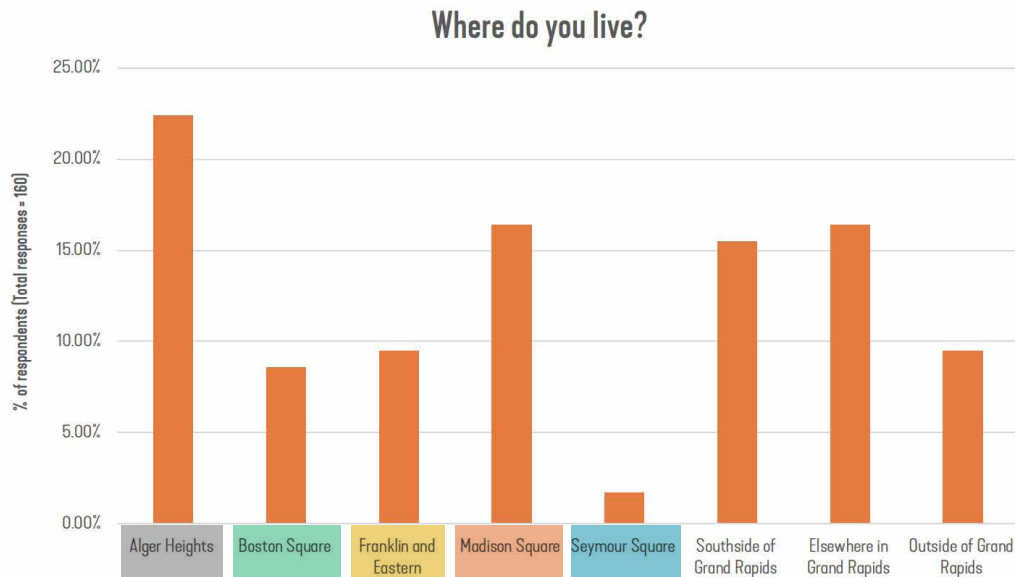
LISTEN AND LEARN: APRIL WORKSHOPS (3 DAYS)

- Three days of workshops were held in April to hear from businesses, residents, and community stakeholders. Day-long open houses were held at different locations each day, with formal presentations and Q&A sessions provided at different times.
- During the April workshops, four focus group meetings were held, two with business owners, one with community organizations, and one with developers.
- A web- and print-based survey was issued during the workshops and in the month that followed to solicit additional feedback. Project ambassadors and steering committee members attended local events and issued surveys.
- Over 240 people were engaged during the April workshops.

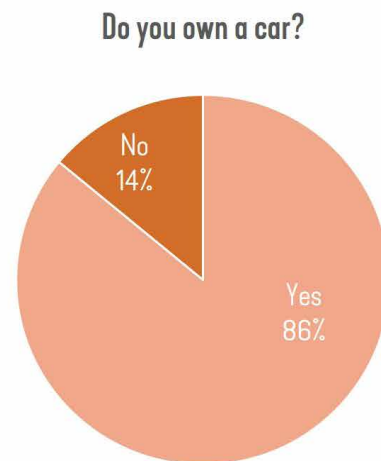
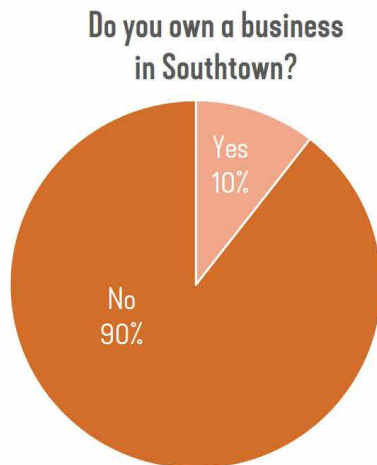
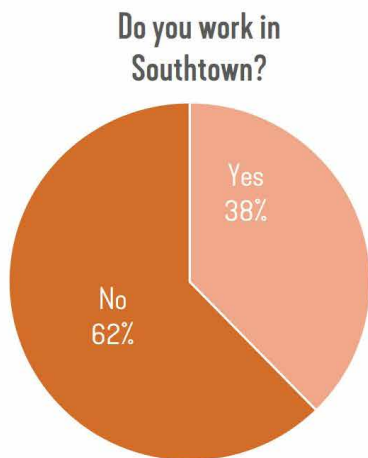
STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS: JULY WORKSHOPS (3 DAYS)

- Three more days of intensive workshops were conducted in July. In order to better meet directly with businesses, half-day pop-up workshops were held in each of the five Southtown business districts covered by this plan and included walking door to door, allowing the project team to directly meet and engage with business owners and patrons.
- An additional evening workshop was held for business owners to review plans and ideas in depth and provide their feedback directly to the project team.
- Two other workshops were held during this time frame. The first one engaged community partner organizations to report out on the Business Area Specific Plan (BASP) process and discuss opportunities. The second was focused on residents and provided them an opportunity to review the plan's strategies and ideas for the retail areas.

LISTEN + LEARN - SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS



- 74% of respondents said they lived in the Southtown area or southside of Grand Rapids.



Out of the 256 responses to the survey, only 17 respondents said they they did not live, work, or own a business in Southtown

- These 17 respondents reflect only 6.6% of the results.
- While some people may not live, work, or own a business in Southtown, they may nevertheless shop at stores, use services, or have friends or family living in Southtown.

WHAT WILL MAKE SOUTHTOWN A THRIVING BUSINESS DISTRICT?

"A **diverse area**. Please don't kick out all my amazing neighbors of color"

"**Businesses that are affordable** for people within the community"

"**Live urban music venue**"

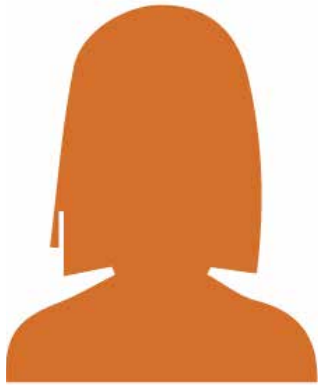
"**Black arts district**"

"Businesses that **hire local neighbors** and are felony friendly"

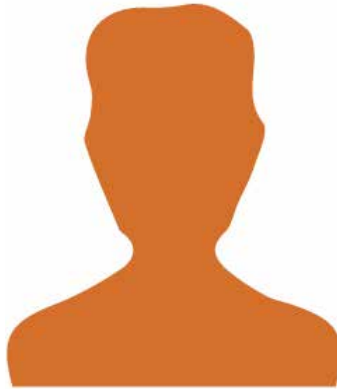
"More bike lanes not "sharrows," fewer liquor stores and gas stations/convenience stores, more **family businesses** with attractive store fronts"



WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU FEEL WELCOMED? SAFE? VALUED? CELEBRATED?



"Affordable
housing options"



"Knowing my voice
is heard, matters,
and is considered
in decision making
process"



"Culturally able
law enforcement"



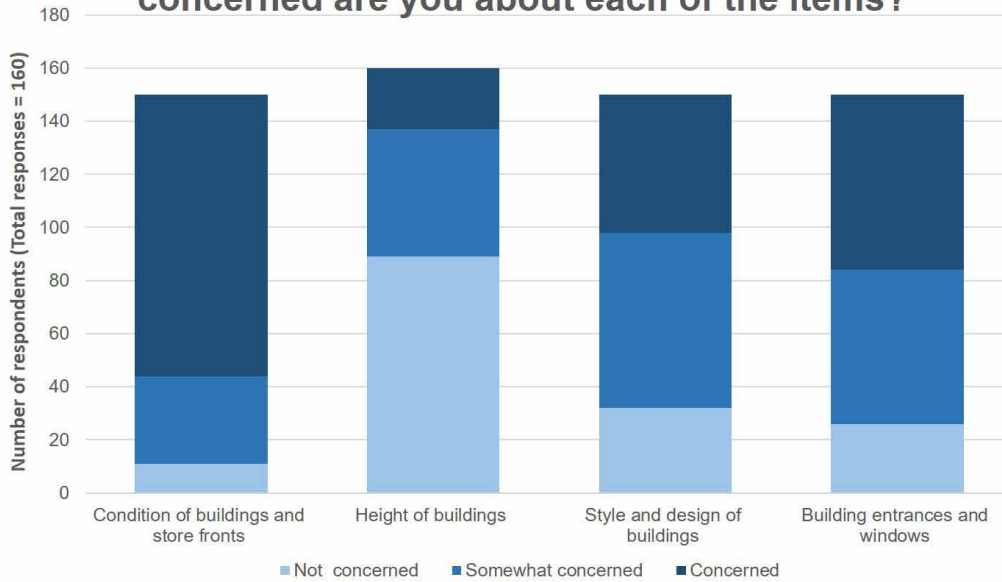
"Vibrant and connected
communities organized
from the grassroots"



"Building resident
business leaders"

BUSINESS DISTRICT

For the Southtown Business District, how concerned are you about each of the items?

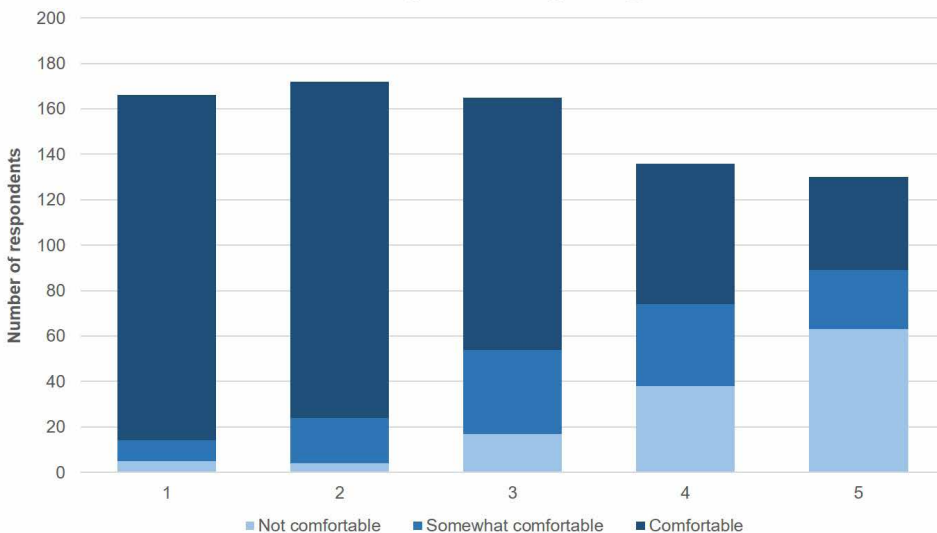


- The survey respondents are **concerned with the condition of the buildings and store fronts.**
- The survey respondents are **mostly not concerned with the building heights.**
- The survey respondents are **somewhat concerned with the style and design of buildings.**

Each response was weighed as follows:

- Not Concerned - 3
- Somewhat concerned - 2
- Concerned - 1

How comfortable are you with each of the following building heights?



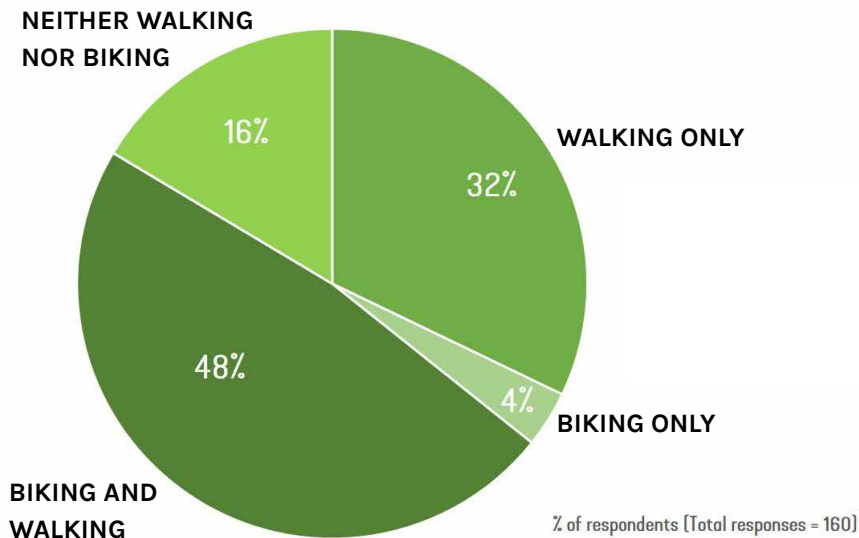
- The survey respondents are generally quite **comfortable with 1-3 story building heights.**
- The survey respondents are **less comfortable with 4-5 story building heights.**

Each response was weighed as follows:

- Not comfortable - 1
- Somewhat comfortable - 2
- Comfortable - 3

MOBILITY

Other than driving or taking the bus, how would you like to get around in the Southtown Business Districts?



- **84%** of the survey respondents would like to get around more by walking and/or cycling.

When shopping or running errands, how do you get to the following Business District?



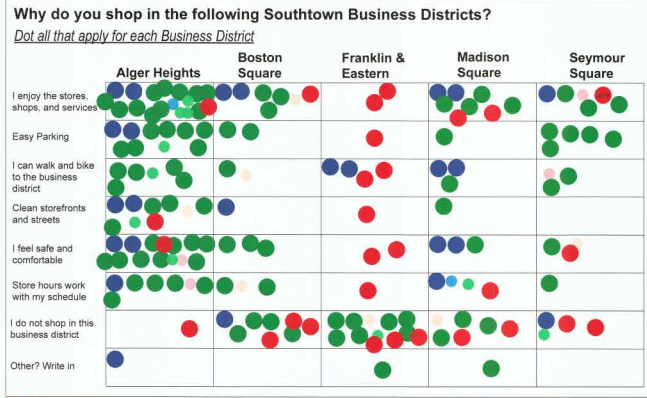
- A majority of the survey respondents drive to each business district.
- It is important to take note that **people are also using other modes of transportation (riding the bus, cycling, and walking) at moderate rates** to get to each of the business districts.
- These results do not reflect how frequently people use each mode. Respondents could indicate multiple modes of travel for each business district.

WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR THE SOUTHTOWN DISTRICT?

Write your vision on a sticky note!

What would make you feel WELCOMED? SAFE? VALUED? CELEBRATED?

HOW DO YOU USE THE BUSINESS AREAS?



SAMPLE OF LISTEN & LEARN PHASE FEEDBACK

This page shows a sampling of the feedback boards used during the stakeholder outreach activities. Sticky boards were used to capture people's vision and desire for Southtown (upper left). Questions were asked about how people engage and access each business district (upper right), and what perceptions are of district character, like building heights and style (lower right).

Different color dots represented responses from different workshops during the project's engagement sessions.

Additional maps and feedback boards are provided in the appendix to this report.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT DISTRICT CHARACTER?



SOUTHTOWN AREA SPECIFIC PLAN

STRATEGIES: Place up to 3 dots next to the strategies you think are the most important.

FRANKLIN + EASTERN
SEYMOUR SQUARE

Improve transit facilities

- Higher level stops along major transit lines
- Screen against snow/ice and splash
- Provide information, maps, time to arrive
- Adequate lighting
- Seating
- Waste receptacles

District and Cultural Identity Building

- Branding and Signage
- Art

Refine zoning and land use strategies

- Scale back TBA zoned area to focus on retail priority areas (TBA Core Nodes)
- Create TBA "transition zone" that allows non-retail ground floor uses
- Mixed Density Corridors should preserve existing single-family neighborhoods by limiting mixed density areas to primary corridors.

Parking Lot Improvement

- Shared parking and consolidation
- Lighting / Signage / Walking paths to store fronts
- Flexible parking lots - Re-purpose for community events
- Parking lot edge treatments
- Service areas / waste handling

Facade Improvement

- Window replacement
- Update materials
- Repairs
- Architectural accents (e.g. awnings, building lighting, higher quality signage)

Street Trees and Landscape

- Aesthetic benefits
- Shade and comfort
- Amenity zones (e.g. outdoor dining/shopping)
- Retail spending benefits

Alleyway Improvement

- Pedestrian walks and plaza space
- Space for local artwork
- Outdoor dining and cafe uses

People-Friendly Street Design

- Wider sidewalks for pedestrian comfort and safety
- Provide amenity zones for outdoor use
- Safe parking configuration and consolidate driveway
- Reduce vehicle speeds
- Provide quick drop-off and pick-up

Bicycle Facilities

- Dedicated bicycle lanes
- Recognize retail benefits that bicyclists can bring
- Incorporate bicycle parking (bike hoops, lockers, etc.) into streetscape designs

Southtown Area Specific Plan

SEYMOUR SQUARE

Why this area: This commercial core is the intersection of two well-trafficked corridors: Burton Street SE and Eastern Avenue SE, which provide good visibility and accessibility for retail spaces to the surrounding neighborhood. Current conditions in the area of several buildings and empty impromptu parking opportunities in front of the Harvest Health Foods complex. Concrete work is required to ensure the success of Burton and Eastern, which will require several streetscape improvements (pedestrian, sidewalk, etc.) and be critical to ensuring the positive impacts of this non-retail use and building types at the district's main intersection.

Existing Conditions:

- Mix of different parking arrangements
- Different character
- Address intersection at Burton - buildings very close to road edge, limited sidewalk space
- Commercial to residential transition
- Road diet on Burton
- Locate a right turn lane for more sidewalk space
- Commitment to residential transition
- Build out back into building to create a consistent look
- Retail storefront should focus on Eastern not Burton

Ideas for improving the business area:

We want to hear from you: Place up to 3 dots next to ideas you think are the most important.

- Formalize parking single bay of parking in rear with Consolidate driveways
- Convert to parallel street parking
- Consolidate driveways
- Pedestrian comfort
 - Increase sidewalk space for pedestrians
 - Pedestrian alleys to frontage
- Intersection improvements
 - Bumpouts
 - High visible crosswalks
 - Transit stops, Etc.
- Street trees/lighting/furnishings/signs
- Road Diet
 - Reduce right turning lanes
- Keep existing curb as much as possible
- Building facade improvements
- Maintain a consistent edge of retail
- Artwork opportunity along facade of buildings

Southtown Area Specific Plan

SAMPLE OF STRATEGIES & IDEAS PHASE FEEDBACK

During the strategies and ideas phase, pop-up workshops in each of the business districts provided an opportunity for stakeholders (business owners, patrons, etc.) to identify strategies most important to them (upper left). In addition, plan view drawings of some of the priority investment areas were shared in the pop-up workshops, allowing people to see and comment on what the strategies might look like once put into effect (upper right and lower right). This feedback was invaluable for helping to shape and prioritize strategies that were most important to supporting the business districts in Southtown.

Different color dots represented responses from different workshops during the project's engagement sessions.

Additional maps and feedback boards are provided in the appendix to this report.

FRANKLIN AND EASTERN

Why this area: Although Franklin and Eastern is not a major intersection for a major commercial in this neighborhood, this intersection is one of the most heavily trafficked streets, serving surrounding local customers and accessibility for tenants located there. The intersection is characterized by its historic nature, surrounding historic and historic commercial and residential buildings. The intersection has other historic and commercial buildings that are alternative locations for housing a new corner in this neighborhood.

Existing Conditions:

- Small strategies
- Opportunity to use small space well to complement existing retail along frontage
- Lots of open land in area
- Limited sidewalk width in many areas
- Too much parking fronting onto the street and breaking up building edge
- Ground floor flexibility to allow occupancy for other uses in adjacent spaces
- Residential on ground floor
- Housing and other use to help densify the market

Ideas for improving the business area:

We want to hear from you: Place up to 3 dots next to ideas you think are the most important.

- Formalize parking single bay of parking in rear with Consolidate driveways
- Parallel Street Parking
- Pedestrian comfort
 - Increase sidewalk space for pedestrians
 - Pedestrian alleys to frontage
- Intersection Improvements
 - Bump outs
 - High visible crosswalks
 - Transit stops
- Street trees/lighting/furnishings/signs
- Mid-block crossings
- Keep existing curb as much as possible
- Building facade improvements
- Maintain a consistent edge of retail
- Consolidate driveways

Southtown Area Specific Plan



KEY FINDINGS

From Engagement & Research

The Southtown community, business districts, and commercial corridors have a range of important issues to address and which can be turned into opportunities to strengthen the business districts. This Business Area Specific Plan (BASP) identifies important goals and specific strategies for meeting those goals. The strategies that are recommended, through this community-driven planning process, will help address community challenges and build on the strengths and assets that exist. It will turn these challenges into new opportunities for Southtown, ensuring that its business districts thrive and prosper even more.

EQUITY IS AN ESSENTIAL CONSIDERATION FOR THE FUTURE PROSPERITY OF SOUTHTOWN.

- Grand Rapids ranked second to last in 2015 Forbes ranking of economic conditions facing African-Americans in the top 52-largest cities in the country.
- There is a heightened awareness of how public and private investments impact displacement and lead to gentrification risks.

THE SUCCESS OF THE RETAIL CORRIDOR IS TIED TO THE SUCCESS AND STABILITY OF THE COMMUNITY.

- Ultimately, local business districts are going to thrive in part based on the stability and economic vitality of the surrounding community.
- Housing affordability (both home ownership and rentals), job opportunities, workforce training, property investment opportunities, and more affect the stability and welfare of the residential neighborhoods—which in turn are the primary patrons of local businesses in Southtown.

INSTITUTIONAL AND IMPLICIT RACISM CONTINUES TO IMPACT OPPORTUNITY FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH.

- Stakeholders engaged during the planning process highlighted the presence of institutional racism that affects the welfare of Southtown. Most notably, this concern was raised in relationship to lending practices that make access to capital and loans for businesses owners and/or homeowners difficult.

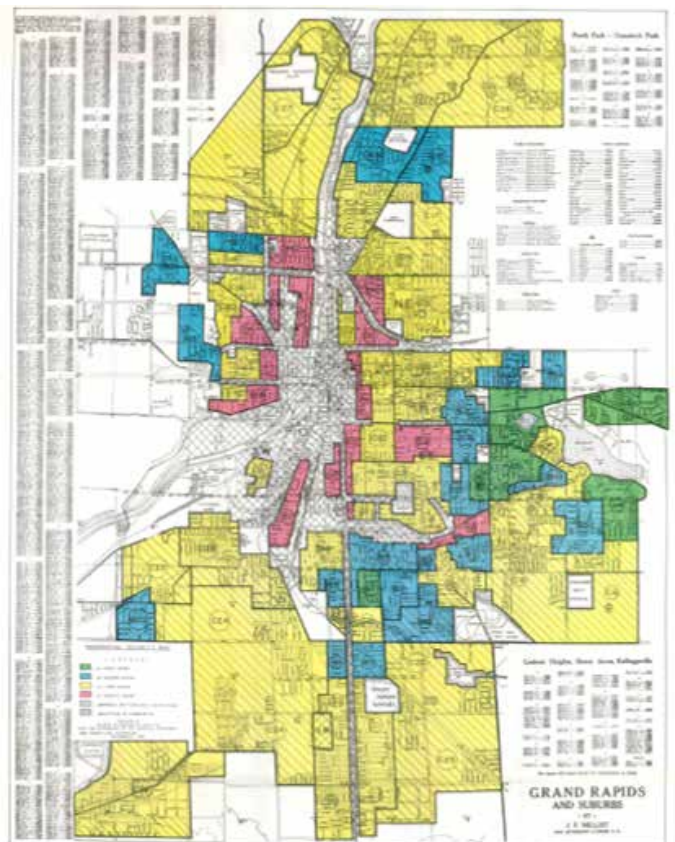


COMMERCIAL PROPERTY AFFORDABILITY IMPACTS STABILITY.

- For businesses operating Southtown, the affordability of commercial space is a key concern. Many businesses noted that commercial properties are owned by out-of-town landlords with limited understanding of the context in Southtown. Rents and other prices are rising consistently with the rest of the city, with little regard to the unique circumstances in Southtown.

CONCERNS AROUND POLICING PRACTICES, SAFETY, COMMUNITY IDENTITY, AND THE SENSE OF VALUE.

- Historically, Grand Rapids neighborhoods were served by a greater preponderance of community police officers that had a closer connection to the local environment, neighborhoods, and people. Outcomes from policing activities were seen as more positive compared to the situation today—where there is not the same level of community-based policing.



1937 Redlining Map

DRUG ADDICTION AND TRANSITIONAL RECOVERY SERVICES IMPACT FAMILIES.

- People dealing with drug addiction and/or transitioning out of the criminal justice system face added challenges—particularly in regards to their employment prospects. There is an opportunity for services and programs that can help connect people working through challenging life circumstances to employment prospects.

THERE IS A LACK OF TRUST IN WORKING WITH EXTERNAL GROUPS.

- There is a significant mistrust of many public and non-public entities that work or engage in the Southtown area—including the City of Grand Rapids, public institutions, non-profits, and the development community. Finding ways to increase transparency and collaboration in decision-making and communication is a significant need.

NEED TO CONTINUE TO BUILD COMMUNITY CAPACITY AROUND ENGAGEMENT, ADVOCACY, AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT.

- The Southtown community has a need for technical support for conducting outreach and communication and assisting with the implementation of local programs and initiatives.

Together
Everyone
Achieves
More



OTHER TAKEAWAYS

- While most people drive, there are many people walking/cycling or riding the bus. Improving comfort and safety for all users will make business districts more attractive to all people.
- Sense of safety and lack of bicycle storage are barriers.
- Desire to find ways to repurpose vacant lots or buildings to create a more positive image.
- Desire to preserve and maintain the character of the areas. Concern that taller buildings could change the character of the area. However, there is generally more concern about building condition and character than building height.
- Strong desire to see more events and activities in all of the business districts. 50% or more of respondents want each of the suggested types of activities to occur more often.
- Improving access to capital for property and business owners to improve their stores/buildings is critical.
- Desire to feel respected, heard, and worth being invested in.





GOALS



BE A MORE STABLE AND THRIVING BUSINESS COMMUNITY WITHOUT DISPLACEMENT



BE A HIGHLY VALUED BUSINESS COMMUNITY THAT CELEBRATES AND PROMOTES CULTURAL AND NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS



BE A MORE VIBRANT PLACE TO WORK, SHOP, PLAY, LEARN, LIVE AND DO BUSINESS



BE A SAFER ENVIRONMENT FOR EVERYONE

FROM GOALS TO OBJECTIVES

The four goals and individual objectives (below) were formulated over the course of the planning process in response to steering committee input, business owner engagement, and public workshops and surveys. These goals address a broad range of challenges but speak to the overall importance of strengthening the commercial vitality and stability of the Southtown CID and its business districts.

Below each goal, multiple objectives are listed. These goals and objectives can help the Southtown CID Board and other community members assess opportunities and progress going forward—making sure that changes that occur in the Southtown CID have a positive and beneficial outcome.

#1 - BE A MORE STABLE AND THRIVING BUSINESS COMMUNITY WITHOUT DISPLACEMENT

- Retain, grow, and recruit businesses and employment, especially minority and locally owned.
- Promote affordability.
- Build ownership. Expand equitable access to capital for new and existing business owners.
- Provide direction for the desired land uses and development patterns across the Southtown CID.
- Build organizational capacity within existing organizations—such as business district associations—to better guide/inform plan implementation.
- Support the health and integrity of residential neighborhoods to retain current residents, including renters and property owners.

#3 - BE A MORE VIBRANT PLACE TO WORK, SHOP, PLAY, LEARN, LIVE AND DO BUSINESS

- Improve the overall business climate of the district and deter economic decline.
- Support social cohesion. Grow community programs and activities and hold regular events aligned with each business district to bring people together.
- Be a healthy place to live—for people and the environment.
- Improve access to open space and recreation.

#2 - BE A HIGHLY VALUED BUSINESS COMMUNITY THAT CELEBRATES AND PROMOTES CULTURAL AND NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS

- Reflect the area's history, character, and uniqueness. Recognize and respect the longevity and diversity of businesses and residents, by supporting black-owned businesses and international clusters.
- Leverage "placemaking" opportunities through local expression and participation by supporting authentic and distinctive businesses, art works, cultural events, and landmarks.
- Prioritize the "place" value of streets in the district over the "through" value to fast moving traffic.
- Connect people to healthy and cultural food opportunities.

#4 - BE A SAFER ENVIRONMENT FOR EVERYONE

- Improve the retail corridor environment. Improve safety and comfort. Be clean and welcoming. Have a cohesive identity.
- Provide improved transit and bus service accommodations.
- Improve bicycle and pedestrian safety.
- Improve personal safety and crime, in tandem with improving policing practices.



STRATEGIES & KEY THEMES

KEY THEMES

In order to meet the goals and objectives of this plan, many different strategies will be employed. These strategies are described in detail in the next chapter, and are organized by goal. The strategies themselves include tools, practices, design approaches, and more that highlight ways to bring investment, energy, and greater stability into Southtown.

The strategies themselves fall under four broad themes and are assigned a letter and number label. These labels are used later on in the plan where specific district plans are presented.

The key themes include:

- BUSINESS DISTRICT VITALITY
- EQUITABLE ECONOMY
- MOBILITY AND STREET DESIGN
- NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY

BEST PRACTICES

Creating an environment where businesses—from retail stores and shops to local service outlets—can thrive and be successful is essential for the health and vitality of Southtown.

The following pages describe “best practices” within many of the key themes. These best practices should be kept in mind as all of the strategies outlined in the following chapter are pursued and implemented.

BEST PRACTICES FOR BUSINESS DISTRICT VITALITY

CONTINUOUS RETAIL FRONTAGE

Successful districts are characterized by a contiguous line of diverse businesses, which encourages customers to shop at more than one retailer per visit. Not only do customers enjoy a ‘one-stop-shop’ for their goods and services, retailers and businesses thrive in a centralized structure. Especially in urban neighborhoods, this will help guarantee a level of traffic that might not be achieved if the retailer were located in isolation. Additionally, retail clusters often serve as places where the community gathers for shopping, entertainment, and socializing. Retailers and the community alike reap the benefits of strategic planning that foster and preserve these clusters.

HIGH VISIBILITY AND EASY ACCESS

Visibility is of utmost importance to ensure customers can clearly identify the storefront, understand what a business sells, and be enticed to make a purchase. In urban retail markets, retailers benefit from pedestrians who, unlike those traveling by automobile, have a longer window of time to experience each storefront. The customer will easily identify the store based upon clearly and uniformly identified street numbers, varied signage, and large storefront windows.

BUSINESSES ON BOTH SIDES OF THE STREET

When both sides of a street include occupied retail spaces, retailers have the greatest exposure to pedestrian and vehicular traffic by taking advantage of activity on both sides of the street.

CLEAN, SAFE, WELCOMING

Across all business types, low vacancy rates and well-lit sidewalks and storefronts increase the perception of safety along retail corridors. Buildings and landscaping should be designed to promote visibility. The biggest deterrents to crime, especially property crime, includes clear sightlines, street and storefront lighting, and a general sense that the community and jurisdiction are involved in maintaining safe streets, indicated by minimal litter and vandalism. Visible vandalism is an indicator that crime occurs in the area and is a psychological deterrent for potential customers.

AMPLE SIDEWALKS, STREETScape, ETC.

Retail environments can suffer if the streetscape is overpopulated with fixtures and furnishings. Sidewalk furniture, plantings, and narrow pavement widths can create difficulties in directly accessing shops. Benches should face towards shops to encourage patronage. Trees should not obscure or block signage. Outdoor seating should be placed curbside, ensuring pedestrian traffic is alongside the storefront.

APPROPRIATE RETAIL SPACE

A storefront width module of 25- to 30-feet with a depth of 60- to 70-feet, with clear height of ceilings at a minimum of 14-feet, appeal to a wide number of tenants and retail types. This is important as turnover in the retail market occurs—a space built for one tenant can easily be reconfigured to accommodate a different tenant later. Tenant space that is designed to be flexible will have the best chance of long-term sustainability and will be able to meet the needs of diverse users. Ideally, a space can be used by national, regional, independent or local tenants for restaurant, retail, service or retail-equivalent uses.

BEST PRACTICES FOR AN EQUITABLE ECONOMY

FOCUS ON WEALTH BUILDING

One of the most effective strategies for stabilizing a community and in turn supporting a thriving business district is to focus resources on projects and programs that help build wealth and ownership.

For businesses in the Southtown area, building wealth can take a number of forms, such as increasing opportunities for business owners to own the properties they are located in, reinvest into their stores/businesses, and reduce debt.

Being able to build wealth provides financial security for businesses, while also giving businesses the flexibility to try new ventures or services that can grow their success.

COLLABORATION, PARTNERSHIPS AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Building relationships between business owners, property owners, patrons, community leaders, institutions, and non-profit organizations is critical for the success of business districts.

At the individual business level, creating opportunities for business owners to learn from one another and build success collectively is important. This is especially important for people wishing to start new businesses.



BEST PRACTICES FOR MOBILITY AND STREET DESIGN

Public streets and rights-of-way are the primary means by which most people experience their community. Whether as a driver, a pedestrian, a bicyclist, an employee, or a business patron, we all utilize public streets to access destinations. The following best practices should be considered as recommendations are implemented and pursued across the Southtown CID.

DESIGN FOR SAFETY FIRST

Streets should be safe and comfortable for all users, regardless of modes of travel. Safety should be the primary decision factor when determining how to change streets and roadways. While getting from A to B as fast as possible is desirable for most people, that should not take emphasis away from protecting human life.

ALIGN WITH VITAL STREETS FRAMEWORK AND DESIGN GUIDELINES

The city-wide Vital Streets program provides a comprehensive framework and guidelines to inform the design of streets in the city. This framework identifies the primary transportation modes that are emphasized on certain corridors, while also identifying ways in which the streets can be designed to be more compatible with adjacent land uses, whether they are commercial or residential in nature.

RECOGNIZE THE “PLACE” VALUE OF STREETS

While streets do need to serve transportation needs—moving automobiles, trucks, bicycles, pedestrians, and transit vehicles—it is critical to acknowledge that streets are also “places.” They are front lawns, the entrances to business, gathering places, locations for outdoor dining, retail, and more. While accommodating transportation needs is of course essential, design decisions should look to balance these needs against the place value of the street and adjacent properties.

DESIGN FOR ALL AGES AND ALL ABILITIES

Different people have different abilities to move around. Streets should be designed to be accommodating for people regardless of their condition and ease of moving around, particularly for pedestrians and those with mobility challenges. Providing clearly marked sidewalks, smooth surfaces free of tripping hazards or other obstacles, and adequate protection from fast moving vehicle traffic is important. For the business districts, this approach will make commercial streets more welcoming and inviting to people, encouraging them to patronize local businesses.

BUSINESS DISTRICT VITALITY

STRATEGIES:

- B1** ESTABLISH INVESTMENT PRIORITY NODES
- B2** ENCOURAGE BUSINESS SUPPORTIVE REUSE OF UNDERUTILIZED SPACES
- B3** EXPLORE VIBRANT, INVITING ALLEYS
- B4** PROMOTE RETAILER RETAINMENT, RECRUITMENT AND OUTREACH
- B5** IMPLEMENT A BRANDING AND MARKETING PROGRAM
- B6** PROGRAM SPECIAL EVENTS
- B7** IMPLEMENT A FACADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM
- B8** ENHANCE PUBLIC GATHERING SPACES
- B9** DESIGNATE SERVICE AND DELIVERY ZONES
- B10** ESTABLISH A BUSINESS WATCH SAFETY PROGRAM
- B11** EVALUATE ON- AND OFF-STREET PARKING FACILITIES FOR EACH BUSINESS DISTRICT
- B12** ENFORCE CODES AND COMMUNITY STANDARDS

EQUITABLE ECONOMY

STRATEGIES:

- E1** ENCOURAGE EQUITABLE BUSINESS & INVESTMENT ALONG DISTRICT CORRIDORS
- E2** INCREASE ACCESS TO SMALL BUSINESS FINANCING
- E3** ENCOURAGE LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND WEALTH BUILDING
- E4** STRENGTHEN BUSINESS DISTRICT ASSOCIATIONS AND CAPACITY
- E5** ENCOURAGE LOCAL HIRING PRACTICES
- E6** FACILITATE MENTORING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

MOBILITY AND STREET DESIGN

STRATEGIES:

- M1** INSTALL SITE FURNISHINGS
- M2** COORDINATE WITH IMPROVEMENTS TO BICYCLE FACILITIES
- M3** INSTALL STREET TREES AND LANDSCAPING
- M4** IMPROVE TRANSIT FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS
- M4** IMPROVE STREET LIGHTING
- M6** INSTALL SAFE PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS
- M7** IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY AND COMFORT

NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY

STRATEGIES:

- N1** ESTABLISH PARTNERS FOR ECONOMIC PROGRAMS
- N2** PROMOTE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY
- N3** SUPPORT MIXED-USE HOUSING
- N4** EXPAND ACCESS TO HEALTHY AND CULTURAL FOOD
- N5** ASSESS GREEN SPACE NEEDS
- N6** STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY AND POLICE RELATIONSHIPS

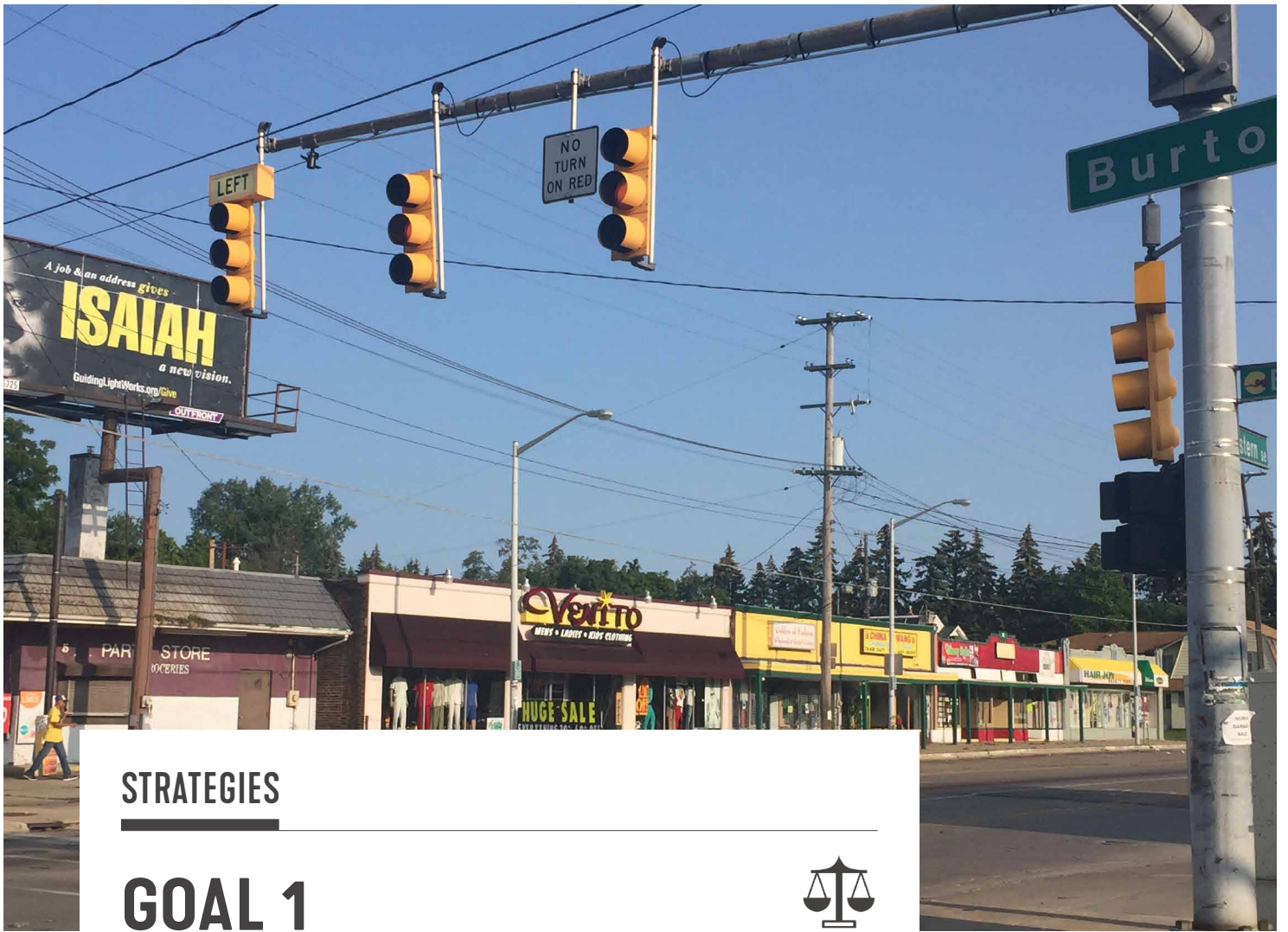


03

CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

CHAPTER CONTENTS:

- 50 **GOAL 1 - BE A MORE STABLE AND THRIVING BUSINESS COMMUNITY WITHOUT DISPLACEMENT**
- 66 **GOAL 2 - BE A HIGHLY VALUED BUSINESS COMMUNITY THAT CELEBRATES AND PROMOTES CULTURAL AND NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS**
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STRATEGIES

GOAL 1



BE A MORE STABLE AND THRIVING BUSINESS COMMUNITY WITHOUT DISPLACEMENT

- Retain, grow, and recruit businesses and employment, especially minority and locally owned.
- Promote affordability.
- Build ownership. Expand equitable access to capital for new and existing business owners.
- Provide direction for the desired land uses and development patterns across the Southtown CID.
- Build organizational capacity within existing organizations—such as business district associations—to better guide/inform plan implementation.
- Support the health and integrity of residential neighborhoods to retain current residents, including renters and property owners.

STRATEGY:

ESTABLISH INVESTMENT PRIORITY NODES

MAP
REFERENCE

B1



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Priority investment areas are zones that currently contain—or the opportunity to exists to build—a concentration of businesses in retail-appropriate space (i.e. storefronts). Consequently, investments (e.g. streetscape projects, renovations, facade improvements) made into a priority area can benefit a greater numbers of business due to their close proximity to such investments.
- Retail is a perfect example of the adage “less is more.” When too much retail space and too many tenants are spread throughout an area, few establishments achieve the minimum sales volumes needed to justify operations.
- By designating priority investment areas at critical locations throughout the Southtown CID, investments made by the Southtown CID or other resources can be concentrated where they can serve the greater numbers of businesses, and especially retail, which benefit by investments that increase customers and customer spending. Retail space outside of these districts can be targeted for non-retail renovation and occupation.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Not every street is a main street and not every location is a retail location. Highly visible corner lots on streets that have high traffic counts—and therefore high visibility—are strong places to concentrate retail businesses.
- The overall objective of the Southtown CID is to concentrate resources to improve conditions along the corridors. Focusing time, energy, and funds for optimizing retail stability and opportunity in the retail priority areas will enable several sparks to set the tone for opportunities along the corridors and within the neighborhoods.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Retail priority areas can be formalized through a zoning process (i.e., an overlay zone) or through an economic development program (i.e., enterprise zone).
- This approach delineates an area for target retail/storefront improvements, new development, and investments.
- The next chapter shows proposed zoning changes, in alignment with this strategy, across the entire Southtown CID.

STRATEGY: ENCOURAGE BUSINESS SUPPORTIVE REUSE OF UNDERUTILIZED SPACES

MAP
REFERENCE

B2



- As a temporary or long-term treatment, vacant properties can be re-purposed as public gathering spaces, providing places for business patrons, employees, and residents to gather. Gathering spaces can also make the business districts more attractive and welcoming.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- This strategy contributes to the revitalization of the corridors to include appropriate, ground-level uses that activate sidewalks.
- Sharing information and placing control in the hands of community stakeholders is central to the successful implementation of the overall study.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- The Southtown CID board, business district associations and business owners can identify vacant or underutilized lands and determine what opportunities might best benefit the business district (e.g. public gathering spaces, new commercial spaces).
- Once opportunities are identified, other project partners can be sought out to help implement the project. For example, working with a community garden group to plant landscaping and create an attractive gathering space.

WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Vacant or underutilized land within or in close proximity to investment priority areas and other business uses in the district can be activated with new business uses to bring more patrons to the business districts. Such uses should be compatible and fit the scale and character of the business districts today.
- Within the priority investment areas, new development should provide retail and business appropriate spaces. Outside of the investment priority areas, ground-level spaces can be occupied by a greater range of uses, but they should still be compatible with and supportive of businesses throughout the districts.
- Multi-level buildings can provide opportunities for shops, services, and storefronts on the ground floor with other supportive uses such as professional offices or housing on upper floors, while avoiding housing on the ground floor of traditional business areas (TBA zones)
- Uses such as “light industrial/maker space” are also appropriate for ground-level occupation in investment priority areas. Examples of this type of tenant might include a coffee roaster, glass blowing studio, or brewery.

STRATEGY: EXPLORE VIBRANT, INVITING ALLEYS

MAP
REFERENCE

B3



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Alleys are typically viewed as functional spaces within the urban environment, as a place for utilities and equipment, deliveries and service, and waste handling. However, in addition to being functional, alleys can also be clean, welcoming, and interesting and help strengthen the character of the whole business district.
- Alleys can also serve as pedestrian corridors and offer opportunity for creative enhancements such as:
 - Providing unique spaces by highlighting the identity (history/culture) of the neighborhood through murals and public art
 - Enhancing local businesses by provide a space for retail and special events or outdoor dining. Can also be used as additional square footage (i.e. fitness gym).



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- The physical design and maintenance (or lack thereof) of the urban environment impacts to the pedestrian's perception of safety. Clean and re-purposed alleys contribute to a safe, vibrant, and valued public space.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Business associations and the CID board can talk with the business/property owners along the alley about how they use the alley currently and what they would like to see in the future.
- Identify improvements that may be implemented in the alley to activate the space, such as artwork, lighting, business activities (e.g. outdoor dining), or other improvements.
- Collaborate with local artists to create temporary installations and permanent works.

STRATEGY: ENCOURAGE EQUITABLE BUSINESS & INVESTMENT ALONG DISTRICT CORRIDORS

MAP
REFERENCE

E1



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Under the goal of preventing displacement of existing businesses and residents, investments along the district corridors must be responsive to potential displacement impacts and must be carried out in a manner that leads to equitable outcomes for Southtown business districts.
- This strategy describes a variety of methods for achieving more equitable outcomes, including: (1) underutilized land repurposing strategies (see strategy X for more); (2) established process for being informed of development practices, process and reviewing development projects; (3) establishing benefits agreements that mitigate displacement impacts; (4) future land use; and (5) having sound displacement policies in place.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- New investments or development projects have the potential to displace existing businesses and residents, many of who may lack the financial means to avoid displacement – e.g. they may be priced out of a rental property or pressured into selling property they own (see “Support Housing Programs” strategy). This applies to business owners and residents both.
- A key component to building a stable and thriving community without displacement is creating opportunities for wealth building and greater ownership, so that businesses and residents are more secure and remain connected with their community.
- Gentrification is a significant concern among Southtown businesses owners and residents, and many times well-intended investments and development projects end up leading to greater gentrification. Being upfront and clear about the ramifications of such projects and having a clear and transparent process to discuss investment projects and provide business district input is vital for transparency and sound-decision making across Southtown.



HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Future land use (see District Plans section for future land use proposals) - If new commercial, residential, or mixed-use developments occur, they should be designed with an appropriate scale and size that it compatible with the character of district corridors and supports the integrity and health of the business districts. Allowable uses should be more flexible in terms of supporting business and commercial activity along the corridors.
- Proactively assessing underutilized or vacant land and aligning potential investment opportunities on those properties with outcomes that will be supportive to and benefit the health and vitality of business districts. This may include identifying equitable developments but can include other uses such as a public gathering space, parking lots, landscaped areas, recreational space and other uses that can benefit the business districts.
- Establish a process within the Southtown CID board (or a sub-committee of the board) for reviewing development proposals in the Southtown CID. The review process acts as a means to notify the CID board and the community at large about potential new projects. The CID board can provide feedback to project owners and can provide a letter of support (or concern) to the Planning Commission or City Commission describing the alignment (or misalignment) of the project with the Southtown BASP goals.
- Establish a set of desired community benefits for investment projects that either avoid or mitigate displacement impacts. Community benefit agreements can stipulate a wide range of desired outcomes, such as local hiring practices, commercial/business space affordability and ownership options, and housing relocation or affordability provisions tied to Southtown residents that are impacted.
- Support efforts at the city-wide level to develop an equitable displacement and relocation policy for people displaced because of new developments that receive public resources (i.e. brownfield funded projects).

STRATEGY:

INCREASE ACCESS TO SMALL BUSINESS FINANCING

MAP
REFERENCE

E2



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- In Southtown, small business owners are an integral part of the community but may lack access to capital.
- Minority-Owned Business Enterprises (MBEs) are more likely than their white counterparts to experience “real and perceived challenges in securing external capital.”
- Many times, the first to invest are those who know and trust the entrepreneur (friends, family, and the entrepreneur themselves) but due to a variety of circumstances, Southtown business owners may not have access to investors, so they must rely on finding other avenues to fund their start-ups and business improvements.
- The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) has a variety of loan programs which are distinguished by their different uses of the loan proceeds, their dollar amounts, and the requirements placed on the actual lenders.
 - 7(a) loan program
 - CDC/504 loan program
 - Micro-loan program
 - Disaster loans

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Access to capital is vital for launching, expanding, and growing successful businesses.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Host targeted small business workshops in the community.
- Connect entrepreneurs and small business owners to resources and training opportunities, such as:
 - Local chambers of commerce.
 - SBA Michigan District Office and SBA’s online learning center, which provides free online courses, workshops, podcasts, and leaning tools.
 - Grand Rapids SCORE. SCORE is a group of active and retired business owners and executives working with local businesses to improve the success of businesses in West Michigan.
 - Develop a Southtown Entrepreneurial Match Program by working with local banks and credit unions to develop a small business micro-loan (\$1,000 to \$50,000) and matching grant program.
- Advocate for city policies that:
 - Provide comprehensive start-up incentives and support packages for small business.
 - Reexamine the fees, taxes, and simplicity of business development processes to help streamline this procedure. Explore the feasibility of a one-stop-shop model.
 - Support legacy business owners.
 - Provide tax relief to small business owners based on certain criteria.

STRATEGY:

ENCOURAGE LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND WEALTH BUILDING

MAP
REFERENCE

E3



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Policies, programs, and initiatives to increase access to capital that can be used to build wealth and local ownership.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Central to strengthening the equity and vibrancy of Southtown is building up local wealth and ownership. For businesses, this can mean owning buildings, facilities, and equipment directly instead of having to rent commercial space.
- The opportunity for long-term, fulfilling employment that allows for personal growth, self-sufficiency, and wealth creation is an essential element of quality of life for businesses and residents alike.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Promote “Small Business Saturday” type events that encourage people to shop locally within business districts.
- Encourage residents to spend money in the community through marketing and branding campaigns. Identify gaps in goods and services that could be provided locally.

- Prioritize policies, programs, and projects that build opportunities for local business property ownership.
- Work with Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) to determine specific opportunities and pathways for raising capital for new business endeavors and for creating greater ownership for existing businesses.
- CDFIs can provide funding and tools to attract or develop community centers, early childhood development centers, affordable housing, and access to healthy food and wellness resources.
- Align CDFI funded projects with locations in the Southtown CID to strengthen the area and open opportunities for community members to build their local economy and address existing community needs.
- Support locally owned businesses and the development of cooperatives that allow businesses to share resources.
- Support the development of low-cost, shared co-working spaces. These can be especially useful for new startup businesses so that they can minimize rent and facility expenses early in their operations.

STRATEGY: ESTABLISH PARTNERS FOR ECONOMIC PROGRAMS

MAP
REFERENCE

N1



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- By applying for grants collectively and approaching foundations and financial institutions with a unified strategy for economic vitality in Southtown, the community can positively impact multiple individuals and businesses. When capacity is limited, neighborhood business groups may only have the ability to bring in speakers and sessions on an annual or quarterly basis or perhaps connect businesses with resources. Organized groups may be able to manage programs such as grant or loan programs, host regular workshop series, or even operate physical spaces such as incubators/ accelerators, co-working spaces, or resource centers.

WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Economic development requires building and nourishing local partnerships and assembling multiple kinds of funding (philanthropic, government, private investment).
- Other partners include foundations and financial institutions such as the Grand Rapids Community Foundation and Chemical Bank.
- It is important to identify these potential partners and communicate regularly with them as they may provide needed resources to the district.
- Build on existing programs, such as Nehemiah Project that helped establish Rising Grinds Cafe, that provide employment and professional development services to residents. These financial and community partners play an important role in creating economic opportunities.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Identify the priority needs and focus. This may be a specific business type or “industry cluster” or it may be a particular service such as business counseling, design assistance or capital for building improvements.
- Gather baseline data, both quantitative and qualitative, to craft a plan and narrative used to seek out partners and inspire funders.
- Identify local capacity to support new programs in collaboration with existing local organizations (e.g. LINC UP).
- Identify partners whose mission aligns with the community vision for economic development programming. Seek out multi-year commitments.
- Take advantage of programs for economic development.

STRATEGY: PROMOTE RETAILER RETENTION, RECRUITMENT AND OUTREACH

MAP
REFERENCE

B4



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- In a small city like Grand Rapids, attracting the attention of commercial brokers to neighborhoods such as Southtown can be challenging. The reasons for this situation are multi-faceted, but are most often the result of brokerage semantics—newer, suburban strip center sites require less explanation, less renovation, and therefore, less risk for their retail clients.
- As a result, few potential retailers are made aware of available and viable spaces in Southtown. With the implementation of the previous proposed strategies, the disconnect between the local commercial brokerage community and Southtown retail can be bridged.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Even with the best plans and strategies, the revitalization of the Southtown CID's commercial areas will not be completed without the participation of the private sector “dealmakers.”

- The most important component of this solution is community involvement in the brokerage process. Incorporating neighborhood stakeholders into dealmaking gives the community “behind the scenes” access to their retail renaissance.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Designate an interested CID board member as retail representative of available properties and spaces located within retail priority areas. Work with local economic development organizations to prepare materials to assist brokers in finding and sharing Southtown opportunities.
- Consider asking a local commercial broker to be an advisor to the Southtown CID board to guide this effort.
- Identifying retail and local service needs and opportunities, and working to recruit compatible businesses may require dedicated staff to pursue and realize opportunities. Explore mechanisms for funding such a position.

STRATEGY: STRENGTHEN BUSINESS DISTRICT ASSOCIATIONS AND CAPACITY

MAP
REFERENCE

E4



(Photo from W.K. Kellogg Foundation)

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- An effective management structure focused on the retail priority areas is important for implementing many of the recommendations in this plan.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- The Southtown CID Board can work with businesses in each of the business districts to coordinate, strengthen/formalize, or establish a business association. Resources from the Southtown CID can be used along with contributions and engagement from local business owners.
- Business associations can work with adjacent residential areas to better align and establish a shared identity between business districts and neighborhoods.
- Business district associations should meet regularly (e.g. monthly) and establish a clear line of communication and roles within the association.
- Business district associations and the CID board can provide a venue for local discussion and collaboration regarding development projects and ensure that projects balance the needs of the community, business districts, and developers.
- Business associations should work with the City to identify and communicate with all property owners in the area, especially for vacant properties.

WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Business District Associations are comprised, ideally, of owners, managers, or other representatives from each of the businesses in a commercial area. For Southtown, these associations can be concentrated around the investment priority nodes.
- Business associations are a mechanism for pooling resources and actions in order to have more successful and efficient outcomes. Business associations typically address the following types of needs within a commercial area:
 - Inform and guide physical changes to the business districts, including its streets and properties.
 - Manage shared-spaces, such as a parking lots, loading zones, pedestrian spaces, landscape beds, and other physical infrastructure.
 - Collaborate on routine maintenance activities, such as waste pick-up, litter removal, and snow clearing.
- Business associations can be aligned with adjacent neighborhoods and help strengthen connections between commercial and residential areas.

STRATEGY:

ENCOURAGE LOCAL HIRING PRACTICES

MAP
REFERENCE

E5



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Encourage anchor institutions to hire people facing barriers to employment (e.g. people transitioning out of the criminal justice system or recovering from addiction).

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Shared prosperity will depend on the ability of residents to secure employment at the major institutions and corporations in the city.
- Business owners strongly influence organizational practices such as hiring, wage setting, and procurement and often serve in positions of civic and social leadership. One reason MBEs are so important to the city is that they are more likely to hire minority employees and utilize minority suppliers, thus increasing opportunity for a large number of residents.
- Fair hiring practices sets a foundation for workforce culture.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Establish clear mechanisms for recruitment and hiring of city residents (i.e. round table discussions with local employers regarding perceptions and misconceptions of workers and benefits of local hiring).
- Establish a volunteer working committee and advocate for city-wide policies on fair employee hiring practices. Encourage employers to follow these best practices.
- Maintain a list of businesses that hire past felons and share with neighborhoods and business district associations.

- Encourage employers to embrace diversity as part of their core values. Encourage a culture of diversity by providing a variety of training outlets, driving diversity initiatives with full leadership support, and ensuring all employees are given the same promotional opportunities based on their abilities and work ethic.
- During the hiring search, encourage employers to connect with workforce agencies that support women and minorities, as well as veterans and rehabilitated individuals who may not have traditional educational backgrounds but have gained significant experience and skills.
- During the hiring process, businesses can use a values-based process, establish a standardized process of using the same hiring questions and information requests for all applicants, and clearly identify disqualification reasons.
- During the interview, encourage employers to use a diverse interview panel, train interviewers on inclusion, diversity, and bias; take and retain notes; maintain interview notes in a secure, centralized location; base interview questions on job analysis; ask effective, open-ended and behavioral, questions; ask each candidate the same interview questions; use a detailed rating scale; and, assess candidate responses objectively.
- A number of city organizations and agencies use fair hiring practices today. Local organizations can host a joint meeting/summit with these agencies to share resources and report out information to the community.

STRATEGY:

FACILITATE MENTORING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

MAP
REFERENCE

E6



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Connect Southtown residents to workforce development opportunities by leveraging the assets of regional talent and emerging high-tech manufacturing, medical, and information technology sectors.
- Encourage local entrepreneurship and minority business participation.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- A skilled and knowledgeable workforce is important for growing new businesses and providing residents with good paying job. In turn, residents can afford to spend their money locally in support of businesses in Southtown.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- The CID board and individual business districts can advocate for entrepreneurship skills development, job training, and apprenticeship programs.
- Connect businesses to counseling and mentoring services through Grand Rapids SCORE.
- Promote workshops and hiring events hosted by Michigan Works!
- Provide continual employee-owner training, along with wrap-around services for the disadvantaged.
- Facilitate relevant training opportunities such as financial literacy for households and specific job training programs linked to actual jobs.
- Advocate for the creation of inclusive, living wage jobs that help families from all walks of life enjoy economic security.

STRATEGY: PROMOTE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

MAP
REFERENCE

N2



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- A network of community organizations can include neighborhood associations and block clubs.
 - Block clubs are groups of people who live on any given block and have organized to improve the quality of life in their neighborhood. Residents can develop block clubs to share information, identify concerns, and act collectively to address those concerns. Block clubs can help create a sense of community.
- Neighborhood associations can speak to housing affordability, code enforcement, police department practices and engagement, and help identify needs and challenges in the neighborhood.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Building capacity produces residents who are engaged in creating a safe community and committed to the future. Residents will feel like they have the tools and a strong network of neighborhoods to implement actions within the plan. Engaging residents at this level also creates opportunities to build an authentic neighborhood identity.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Define organizational structures in the community. Examine roles of existing community organizations, organize neighborhood-based committees and assign volunteers, and form a network of block clubs.
- Develop neighborhood group purpose statements to help clarify what the members of the neighborhood hope and expect to achieve through the group.
- Clarify and communicate how neighborhood groups can interface with city leadership to discuss concerns and report on activities.
- Develop a community policing strategy.
- Hold events, like parties or barbecues, to maintain interest in the block club and to demonstrate that it is an active organization.
- Hold neighborhood walks to identify abandoned properties, illegal dumping, and other markers of illegal activity like graffiti.
- Organize neighborhood clean-ups and gardening efforts to create a clean and safe-looking neighborhood.

STRATEGY: SUPPORT MIXED-USE HOUSING

MAP
REFERENCE

N3



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Support housing choices for people of all income levels, household sizes, and stages of life. This includes leveraging existing housing programs and working to ensure that affordability and ownership is encouraged.
- Mixed-use development can help revitalize a commercial corridor by bringing both environmental and economic benefits to a community. These projects can also disrupt life for existing residents and businesses, and potentially lead to the displacement of existing residents and businesses.
- Affordable housing developments should be made affordable to location residents.
- Encourage programs that help homeowners maintain and retain their properties. Elevate the voice of business owners and residents to encourage retention of residents and businesses and avoid displacement.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- From a business perspective, a stable residential population is more likely to spend money close to home at local shops and businesses. Supporting mixed-use housing provides greater exposure to customers and maintains a business environment.

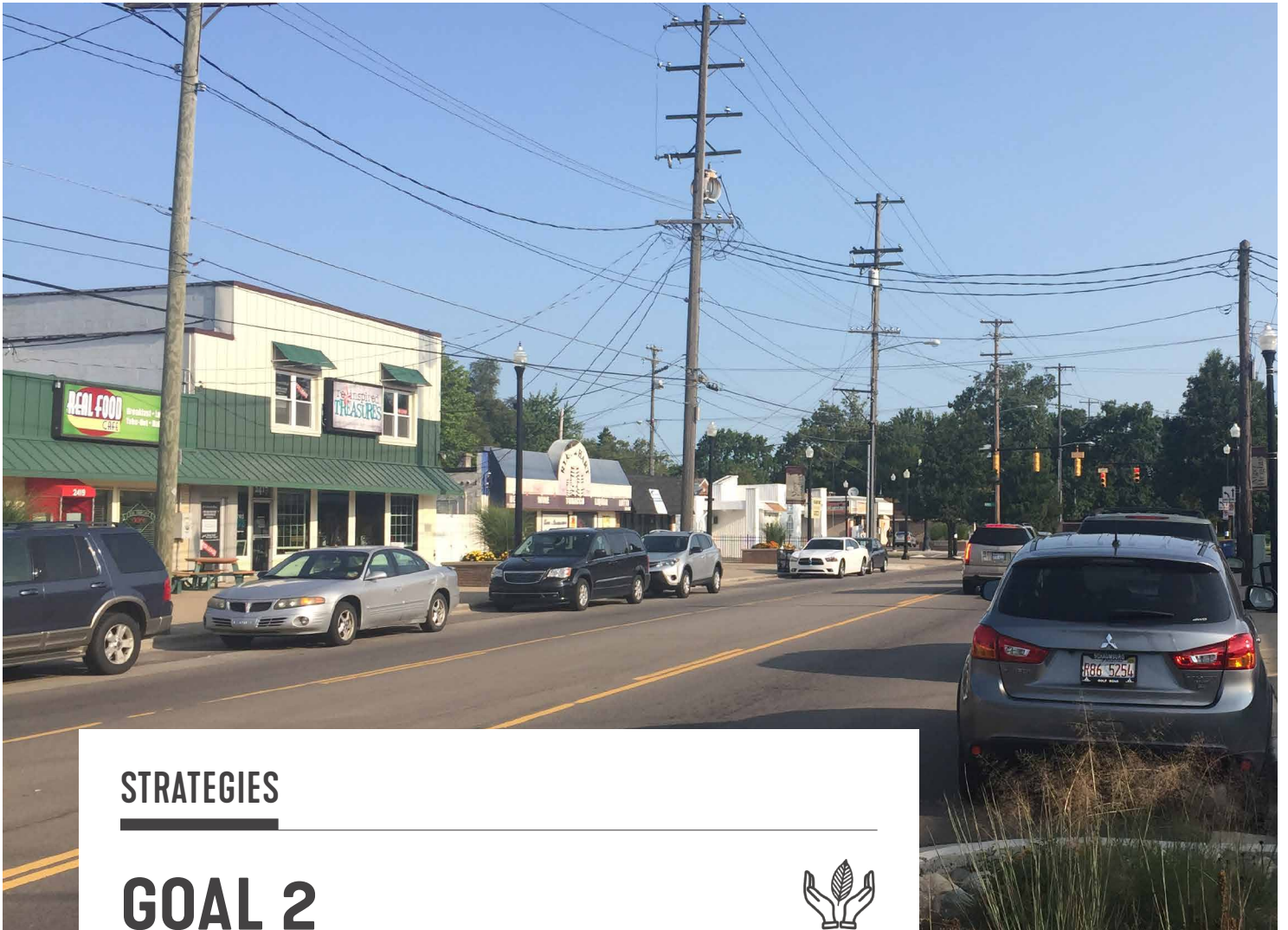
HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- While several actions can be executed at the local-level, fully implementing this strategy will require continued support and coordination with the City.
 - Encourage the development of accessory dwelling units (ADUs). Accessory dwelling units are permitted in certain zones in the city. ADUs could provide affordable housing options and an opportunity for wealth-building for property owners. (Regulations of Accessory Dwelling Units can be found in Section 5.9.03. of the Zoning Ordinance.)
 - Work with the City's business community to expand existing, and explore new, employment-workforce housing partnerships

STRATEGY:
SUPPORT MIXED-USE HOUSING



- Support housing partners when they coordinate with other City policies and initiatives, and in housing-appropriate locations. Policies and initiatives can include, but not limited, to:
 - **Homebuyer Assistance Fund:** The city has a Homebuyer Assistance Fund that provides down payment and closing cost assistance to first-time homebuyers with low or moderate incomes, but it only applies to specific target areas of the city. The City could expand the geographic area of the fund to give down payment assistance to people across the entire city.
 - **Home improvement & Tax Cap / Tax Relief Programs:** These are critical tools for helping to maintain single-family home ownership and preserving affordability.
 - **Development Agreements:** Support developers who voluntarily meet measureable goals like affordable housing. The City’s Voluntary Equitable Development Agreement Policy provides for such agreements for large development projects (such as providing a certain percentage of housing at affordable rates).
 - **Density Bonus:** Support loosening zoning restrictions on minimum lot size in order to make the project possible if a housing development for multiple families includes a certain portion of units that would be priced for households making the 40 to 50% AMI in particular neighborhoods.
 - **Universal Design:** Advocate for the inclusion of universal design principles as a criterion for projects receiving city monies to enable current and future seniors to age in place.
 - **Affordable Housing Community Fund:** The city budget for fiscal year 2018 allocated \$1 million for a new affordable housing fund. The Affordable Housing Community Fund will eventually be managed by an oversight board, and the City aims to make it a subsidiary of a community foundation or a non-profit. Over time, the fund will grow to \$10 million, which will be used to help low-to moderate-income homebuyers with incentives and financial assistance for housing developers and rental developers. The fund will also be used to invest in the creation and preservation of owned and rented affordable housing units.



STRATEGIES

GOAL 2



BE A HIGHLY VALUED BUSINESS COMMUNITY THAT CELEBRATES AND PROMOTES CULTURAL AND NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS

- Reflect the area’s history, character, and uniqueness. Recognize and respect the longevity and diversity of businesses and residents, by supporting black-owned businesses and international clusters.
- Leverage placemaking opportunities through local expression and participation by supporting authentic and distinctive businesses, art works, cultural events, and landmarks.
- Prioritize the “place” value of streets in the district over the “through” value to fast moving traffic.
- Connect people to healthy and cultural food opportunities.

STRATEGY: IMPLEMENT A BRANDING AND MARKETING PROGRAM

MAP
REFERENCE

B5



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Areas of retail throughout the Southtown CID may need to be reintroduced to the broader Grand Rapids customer base as compelling places to shop and eat.
- Southtown can define an overall brand and image, with each business district having its own “sub-brand” to the overall CID that highlights unique aspects of that business district (i.e., answers the “why should I go there?” for each area).

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- The retail resurgence in the Southtown CID, with the optimal benefit to existing businesses, will be directly related to the area’s ability to attract new customers and increase patronage from current ones.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Several business owners should be identified as representative spokespeople for the Southtown CID and should be assigned as media contacts for the neighborhood’s revitalization. A branding and media relations person or firm should be engaged to identify “unique selling propositions” for the Southtown CID and the individual retail priority areas.
- This branding effort should also include creating a list of local media outlets and bloggers to be notified of events (for example the study’s completion, festivals, business openings) throughout Southtown.
- Contact information for a group of Southtown spokespeople, including a Southtown CID Board representative and selected retailers, should be circulated to local media outlets and bloggers.
- Signage and marketing materials should be designed and used in a flexible manner that is not contingent on certain specific businesses, recognizing that businesses come and go, changing the districts over time.

STRATEGY: PROGRAM SPECIAL EVENTS

MAP
REFERENCE

B6



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Special events, pop-up retail experiences, and cultural activities programmed in each retail priority node.
- Special events can include art, music, or cultural festivals, races or athletic events, street fairs, parades, food festivals and cook-off competitions, and more.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Community events bring people together, building relationships and fostering a sense of pride.
- Events serve to attract customers from within and outside the surrounding neighborhoods and help to create a unique identity for each retail node.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Each business district association can coordinate potential events in collaboration with the CID board. Work with community organizations and local businesses to set a calendar of events that will maintain regular interest and activity in the district.
- Each business district can identify one or more annual programs to host within their business district—preferably in alignment with the retail priority nodes. The Southtown CID board can help raise awareness about local events and/or provide funding assistance for the events themselves.

STRATEGY:

EXPAND ACCESS TO HEALTHY AND CULTURAL FOOD

MAP
REFERENCE

N4



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Healthy food includes fresh vegetables, fruits, and other items that are nutritious and nourishing. For many people, access to such foods is either too expensive, too far away, or otherwise too challenging to acquire. Programs to make healthy food more affordable and accessible for people plays an important role in supporting community health and wellbeing.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Food access is not simply a health issue, but also a community development and equity issue. For this reason, access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food is a key component not only in a healthy, sustainable local food system, but also in a healthy, sustainable community.
- Social interaction and a sense of place, social and health equity, access to culturally relevant, healthy food, economic opportunity, and ecological resilience all contribute to a successful district and sustainable neighborhood. All these factors (and more) are connected in one way or another to the food system.



- Access to fresh foods leads to better eating habits and a healthier community.
- Opportunities that encourage social cohesion among residents around food that is both healthy and reflective of the cultures in the neighborhood.
- Builds a community that values the voices, preferences and needs of the residents. Promotes respect for local diversity and uniqueness.
- Contributes to food access and security.

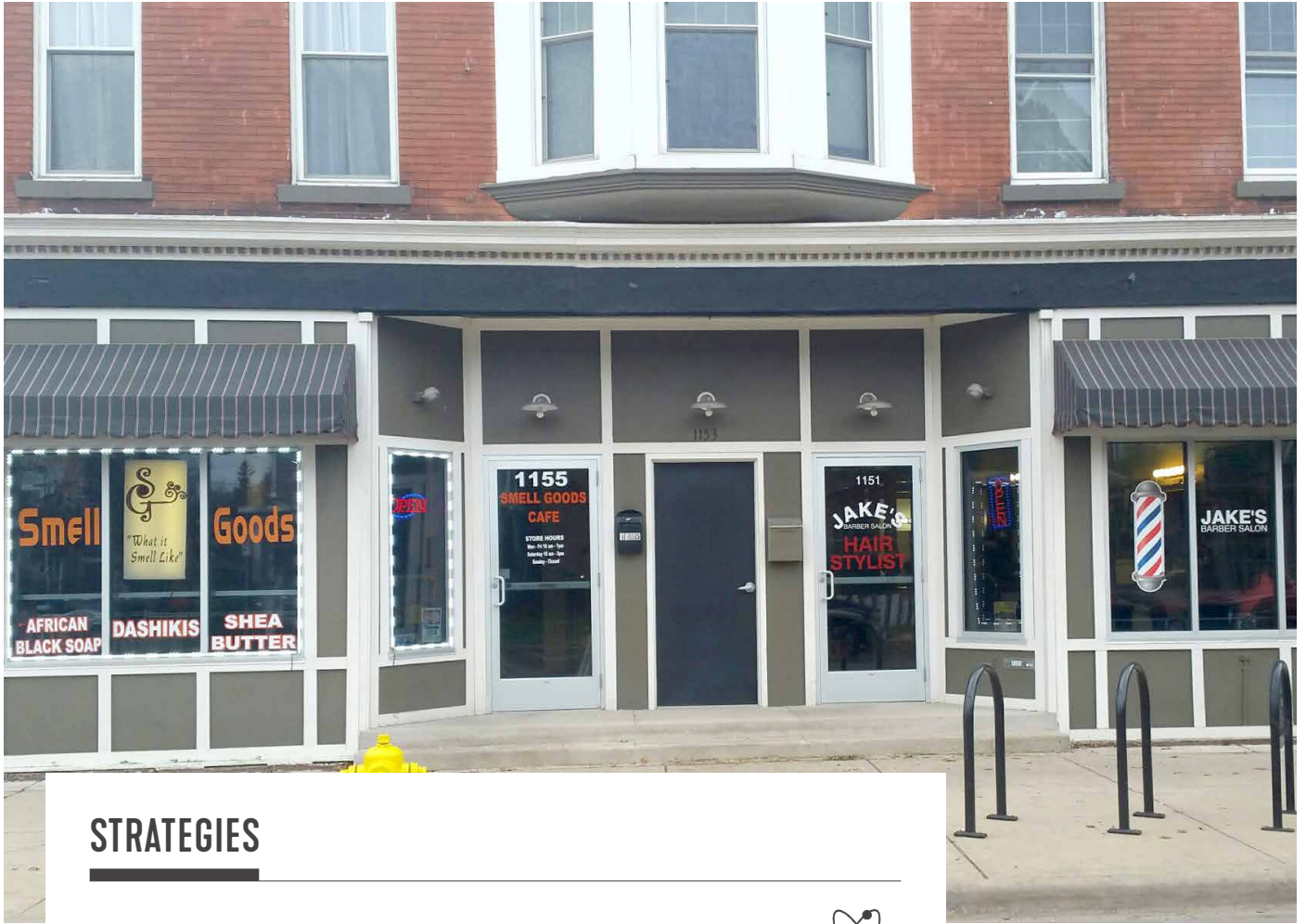
STRATEGY:

EXPAND ACCESS TO HEALTHY AND CULTURAL FOOD (CONT.)



HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Continue to support urban pop-up farmers markets that reflect the traditions, foods, and health practices of a multicultural community.
 - Local governmental departments can play a role in supporting healthy, sustainable local food systems. They do this by assisting in the development of plan goals, objectives, and policies, but also by implementing key food-related policies, programs, and projects and monitoring and tracking change in the food system over time. Partners include the City Planning Department, local university, health agencies, school district, regional planning agency, etc.. Specific activities for implementation include:
 - Use education and events to promote healthy food choices at the individual level.
 - Partner with local foundations to support community engagement, food assessment activities, and long-term coordination.
 - Facilitate the creation of a farmers’ market. Farmer’s markets are currently allowed in all mixed-use zones within the city.
- Encourage pop-up markets through partnerships with places of worship and local health organizations.
 - Support new opportunities for non-commercial urban agriculture (e.g., community gardens).
 - Set space aside for community gardens in the neighborhood park.
 - Create an “adopt-a-garden” program to enable residents to develop gardens on vacant land and public parks.
 - Improve access to community gardens.
 - Support new opportunities for commercial urban agriculture (e.g., urban farms).
 - Support ecologically sustainable food production practices.
 - Facilitate the reduction, reuse, or recycling of food-related waste.
 - Improve the variety of healthy foods sold at small grocery stores and convenience stores.
 - Encourage and promote composting to both avoid yard and food waste going into landfills and providing a natural fertilizer for gardens.



STRATEGIES

GOAL 3



BE A MORE VIBRANT PLACE TO WORK, SHOP, PLAY, LEARN, LIVE & DO BUSINESS

- Improve the overall business climate of the district and deter economic decline.
- Support social cohesion. Grow community programs and activities and hold regular events aligned with each business district to bring people together.
- Be a healthy place to live—for people and the environment.
- Improve access to open space and recreation.

STRATEGY: IMPLEMENT A FACADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

MAP
REFERENCE

B7



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- A storefront facade improvement program may allow property owners or tenants (depending upon the conditions of the incentive program) to make critical changes to exteriors that are dated or have suffered from deferred maintenance.
- These strategies often have an effect on perception that is twofold: investments show potential retailers that there is support in the community, and improved appearances reinforce the idea that Southtown is a safe place to do business and shop.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- A neighborhood's commercial district is often a visitor's first impression of the community. Physical improvements of retail exteriors can have psychological (evidence of investment), economic (improved sales from more engaging storefront), and emotional (renewed pride in the neighborhood) effects on visitors.
- Storefront improvements have been credited with retail retention and attraction in similar cities.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- A storefront facade improvement program for the Southtown CID is most likely to be implemented as a core activity of the Southtown CID Board, potentially in coordination with a city-wide program.
- The Southtown CID Board can develop guidelines and application process for loans for facade improvements that are funded through the district's tax increment financing (TIF) funds.
- Storefront improvement assistance is typically obtained through a competitive application process. Financing takes the form of grants or low-interest matching loans.

STRATEGY: INSTALL SITE FURNISHINGS

MAP
REFERENCE

M1



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Pedestrians' needs are basic: comfortable, safe, and interesting places to walk and a diversity of destinations within walking distance.
- A truly walkable place that also offers comfortable places to sit and wait will encourage people to spend more time in the business district.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Site furnishings contribute to creating a welcoming place for people of all ages and abilities.
- Providing litter receptacles—especially in the retail priority areas—along with a consistent program to empty them and collect trash is important to creating a sense that a place is clean, safe, and welcoming.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Permanent/fixed seating can be incorporated into the design of the streetscape or public space and limited to locations that can be viewed and monitored.
- Litter receptacles can be installed in each retail area by the business association or with the assistance of the Southtown CID. Collection of litter from receptacles and the street can be coordinated between business owners in each district and municipal waste collection services.
- Movable tables and chairs in larger gathering spaces allows for greater flexibility. While theft may be a concern initially, “eyes on the street” and adequate lighting tend to provide enough security. In time, residents and businesses start to take ownership and pride over the space.

STRATEGY: ASSESS GREEN SPACE NEEDS

MAP
REFERENCE

N5



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Parks and open spaces are critical quality of life elements for city residents.
- The Trust for Public Land recommends providing at least 10 acres of open space per 1,000 residents within a 10-minute (approximately 1/4 mile) walking distance.
- The City of Grand Rapids Parks & Recreational Master Plan

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Parks and green spaces provide places for people to recreate and exercise and gather together as a community. This in turn encourages public health and greater social cohesion.
- Parks and open spaces tend to increase and/or stabilize property values nearby.
- Parks can help connect people to more naturalized landscapes.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- The Grand Rapids Park & Recreation Strategic Masterplan identifies a broad range of projects, new programs, and needs for the park system. Neighborhood associations and local non-profits can utilize the city-wide park plan to advocate for improvements to parks and open space.
- Many areas of Southtown do not meet the 10 acres of open space per 1,000 residents (see map in Chapter 1). Neighborhood associations can identify vacant or underutilized property where new pocket parks or other open spaces can be created.
- Collaborate with the city environmental and stormwater management department (and regional agencies) to find locations to create open space and parks that can double as stormwater management facilities, natural habitat restoration, and park space for people.

STRATEGY: COORDINATE WITH IMPROVEMENTS TO BIKE FACILITIES

MAP REFERENCE

M2



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Bicycle lanes provide an alternative mode of transportation to the Southtown community. On-street lanes alert motorists to the presence of a bicycle route, allow cyclists to use the street with less interference from traffic, and increase comfort for cyclists and predictability for all roadway users.
- Conventional bicycle lanes do not provide a comfortable space to bike for most residents. Separated or protected bicycle lanes that provide a physical barrier between vehicle traffic and bicycle riders are important.
- Bike parking (bike hoops and bike lockers for example) within business districts to provide safe, visible areas where customers, patrons, and employees can secure their bikes.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- People are cycling in the Southtown district today, often with few dedicated or protected facilities. Bicycle facilities should be installed to improve public safety.

- Economically, providing access to retail areas for cyclists has been shown to provide greater economic return compared to on-street parking, with cyclists typically spending more money and staying in retail areas for longer periods of time.
- People are less likely to use their bike if they cannot lock it at a secure location at their destination. For people what rely on using their bike, this can be a barrier for them to access stores and shops in the business districts.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- The design and implementation of bicycle facilities, especially protected or separated facilities, will be led by the City's Design Team and in alignment with the Vital Streets Plan and the city's Bicycle Action Plan.
- Additional consideration is required where bicycle lanes intersect with bumpouts, both at corners and mid-blocks, due to potential conflicts with pedestrians.

STRATEGY: INSTALL STREET TREES AND LANDSCAPING

MAP
REFERENCE

M3



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Street trees and landscaping are an important part of the urban environment that fundamentally makes places more welcoming and attractive.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Street trees and landscaping provide a range of benefits, such as managing stormwater volumes, providing shade for pedestrians, making streets safer and more appealing, enhancing the aesthetic character of the street, and reducing the urban heat island effect.
- Street trees improve the way shoppers feel about a place and result in a greater willingness to visit retail areas with pleasant tree cover more often and to stay longer. Surveys indicated that shoppers will pay 9 to 12% more for goods and services in shopping areas with large, well-cared for trees.
- Street trees add value to adjacent homes and businesses and, as a result, to the tax base. Realtor based estimates of street tree versus non-street tree comparable streets show a \$15,000-25,000 increase in property value when street trees are present.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- The Southtown CID Board can work with business associations to determine locations for potential tree plantings and coordinate installation and maintenance with city forestry staff and resources.
- Requirements for tree and landscape spacing depend upon a number of key factors and should be tailored to the chosen species, standard (or desired) size, fixed property lines, setback from the curb, and integration with street lights and other furniture.
- Landscape planters typically contain a variety of suitable and tolerant perennial plant species and may be used to accommodate street tree plantings.
- Maintaining healthy street trees can be a challenge in dense urbanized environments, but proper consideration of the growing environment yields large and healthy street trees that provide maximum benefit.
- The use and abundance of landscape planters within the amenity zone must be carefully considered alongside other competing uses.

STRATEGY:

ENHANCE PUBLIC GATHERING SPACES

MAP
REFERENCE

B8



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Public plazas transform underutilized areas into public spaces for surrounding residents and businesses. These plazas can be designed as multi-use areas where community art, performances, vendors, and markets can add activity to the business districts.
- Public plazas are frequently the result of a successful partnership between the property owner, the city, and a neighborhood group or business association.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- On a day-to-day level, public gathering spaces provide informal spaces for people to meet up, relax, and enjoy their community. For business districts, they can provide places for people to rest in between shopping or other errands.
- In addition, gathering spaces can help provide space for local art or cultural expression, and can be places to host community events and programs.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Using low-cost materials, such as epoxied gravel, movable planters, and flexible seating, public plazas reconfigure and revitalize space along the corridor.
- The Southtown CID Board can identify specific areas in need of gathering space and/or help finance improvements to these areas.
- Local artists, business owners, residents, and local organizations can be engaged to help collaboratively design and build public spaces.
- Adjacent landowners and businesses may have a role in helping to maintain, oversee, and program the spaces.
- While many public plazas can take years to design and implement, consideration should be given to creating quicker-to-build pop-up spaces in existing parking lots and vacant parcels. This can allow the community to build support for and benefit from the public space in the near-term before major capital construction.

STRATEGY:

DESIGNATE SERVICE AND DELIVERY ZONES

MAP
REFERENCE

B9



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- A loading zone for services and deliveries is a dedicated space at the curbside (or on private property) intended for short duration use to directly service nearby businesses or properties.
- Loading zones are primarily used for material deliveries.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Loading zones help promote a strong economy and a vibrant retail environment. A sufficient number of loading zones, appropriately located and designed, can dramatically improve the safety, operation, and vitality of a street. Loading zones may reduce the frequency of trucks double-parking and the cost of delivery borne by local businesses and their consumers.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Loading zones are generally used by a number of businesses or properties on a block and are a shared resource. Business districts should discuss collectively the need for loading zones, the amount of space needed, and the ideal locations. Providing shared loading zones can allow for better use of curb-size spaces, freeing up land for other uses (e.g. customer parking).
- Alleys should be used for loading whenever possible. Off-street loading facilities are generally required for new developments and should be designed and managed to facilitate their use.

STRATEGY:

IMPROVE TRANSIT FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS

MAP
REFERENCE

M4



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Transit emphasis corridors prioritize the efficient and reliable travel of transit vehicles.
 - Eastern Avenue has been identified by the The Rapid as an opportunity for increased transit service, such as a “light” bus rapid transit (BRT) type system.
- Bus stops are designated places where riders can board or alight the bus. It is important to recognize that some bus stops mostly serve people getting off the bus, whereas other locations mostly serve people waiting to board. Amenities and improvements to bus stops (shelters, route information, etc.) should be concentrated in locations where people are primarily waiting to board.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Not everyone owns a car and many people who do own cars may choose to ride public transit. Safe, welcoming, and efficient public transit services are important for supporting the mobility of a community, and in turn create a more equitable place where people can access jobs, services, and other daily needs easily.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Coordinate street improvement and other infrastructure changes with The Rapid and the City’s Design Team.
- Bus bulbs enable buses to stop in the travel lane and hold traffic behind them, which reduces transit travel time, enhances reliability, and improves the passenger experience.
- Transit queue jump lanes are used at congested intersections to permit buses to bypass passenger cars.
- Bus stops typically occur in the pedestrian zone of the street and should be considered in the overall context of the sidewalk area.
- Bus stops should be located proximate to designated crosswalks since riders often cross the street to get to or return from the transit stop.
- Bus stops are most successful when they are appropriately scaled to the volume of riders, provide comfortable places to wait, and deliver sufficient information to transit riders to understand the services provided.
- Covered shelters are very important for transit rider comfort, and should be used where feasible.



STRATEGIES

GOAL 4



BE A SAFER ENVIRONMENT FOR EVERYONE

- Improve the retail corridor environment. Improve safety and comfort. Be clean and welcoming. Have a cohesive identity.
- Provide improved transit and bus service accommodations.
- Improve bicycle and pedestrian safety.
- Improve personal safety and crime, in tandem with improving policing practices.

STRATEGY:

ESTABLISH A BUSINESS WATCH SAFETY PROGRAM

MAP
REFERENCE

B10



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Socially-sensitive approaches can include hiring security services that train and utilize employees that live in and/or are very familiar with the Southtown area. Practices that position security staff more as business district/Southtown ambassadors, rather than a "security guard" will provide "eyes on the street" while reducing the negative connotation of having security guards.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Personal safety and the perception of safety are critical for ensuring a welcoming environment for retail and commercial activity. Programs and practices that help provide "eyes on the street" and a sense that people are actively watching commercial areas will help improve security and safety.
- These practices can be an opportunity to hire and train local residents while building better relationships within the community.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- The Southtown CID Board and Business associations should engage existing security companies, job training services, and other local non-profits to discuss opportunities for a local safety program in the different business districts.
- Funding support should be considered from a range of sources, including the Southtown CID Board, Business associations, non-profits/charities, and grants.
- Coordinate these programs/practices with Grand Rapids Police and community engagement staff.

STRATEGY: IMPROVE STREET LIGHTING

MAP
REFERENCE

M5



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Street lighting within business districts includes lighting for both pedestrian spaces as well as the vehicular roadway. Typically this means using a combination of pedestrian-scaled and taller street lighting.
- Street lighting improves the overall function and aesthetic of lighting within the business district. Lighting should consider private building lighting as well as public street lights.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Safety is key to a successful business district. Too little lighting can create unsafe conditions, while too much lighting may become a nuisance and detract from the character of a district. As such, lighting must be selected to create a balance between functionality and aesthetics.
- Lighting also contributes to real and perceived safety by providing visibility and deterring crime. Lighting, as an aesthetic feature, also contributes to making a place more vibrant.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Review and/or update design standards and zoning regulations for private development to require adequate lighting along building edges and sidewalk spaces. First-floor uses should utilize decorative, fixtures adjacent to and/or above awnings. Neon or flashing lights should not be used.
- The City of Grand Rapids has a standard decorative light pole typically used in business districts and commercial districts. Using this same fixture may provide greater cost savings.



- Pedestrian-scale lighting can be achieved using decorative lamp posts. Also, lights on utility poles should be replaced. Decorative lamp posts should be used to 'brand' the Southtown area by incorporating banners or permanent signage.
- Selected fixtures should eliminate upward glare and light pollution. All light sources (building, pedestrian, ground, and lamp) should be LED that emit warm (light, white) lighting.
- Achieving consistent and adequate light levels are the most important thing for promoting visibility and safety.
- For private buildings and properties, establish lighting standards for facades, security lighting (alleys and entrances), parking lots and signage lighting.
- Provide additional lighting at transit stops, intersections, and mid-block crossings for improved safety and visibility.

STRATEGY: EVALUATE ON- AND OFF-STREET PARKING FACILITIES FOR EACH BUSINESS DISTRICT

MAP
REFERENCE

B11



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- To enhance the business corridor, off-street parking facilities should be well designed with green elements, decorative elements, screen walls, pedestrian features, and lighting incorporated.
- Managing access of vehicles and pedestrians to minimize driveways will enhance the pedestrian experience. Opportunities to encourage movement to front entrances and eliminate public rear business entrances should be explored.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- The appropriate design and use of parking facilities contributes to a safe, healthy, and vibrant space for residents, employees, and visitors.
- By making parking lots more aesthetically pleasing, they can also be activated as flexible community spaces for local events and gatherings.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Making changes to zoning ordinances can require development projects to build parking lots to a higher design standard - such as requiring knee walls and/or landscape along more active sidewalk areas (as seen in above image).
- The CID board and business associations can work with property owners to develop shared parking agreements and/or find ways to consolidate multiple parking lots into single more efficiently laid out lots.
- Consideration should be given when evaluating parking lots to service areas and waste handling needs of businesses.
- Parking lots should include basic improvements such as lighting, signage, and walking paths to store fronts.
- Develop guidelines for parking lot edge treatments, like plantings, knee walls that match building edges, and screen walls adjacent to residential areas.

STRATEGY: ENFORCE CODES AND COMMUNITY STANDARDS

MAP
REFERENCE

B12



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Local codes and ordinances cover a wide range of issues related to the maintenance and standards of care for properties and adjacent public rights-of-way. For example, the signage ordinance specifies what kinds of signage is allowed to be posted in windows and on buildings.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Having a clear and equitable process enforcing codes and community standards is important for maintaining a clean, attractive, and welcoming environment, particularly in retail priority areas.
- Excessive clutter, trash/waste that is not picked up, buildings in disrepair, signage that blocks visibility into and out of stores all negatively affect the perception of business districts and may discourage customers.
- It is also important to be sensitive in how code enforcement activities are handled and business and property owners should continue to be encouraged to rectify issues and concerns on their own prior to issuing any fines or penalties.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- The Southtown CID Board can work with Business associations to develop a standard procedure for addressing potential code or ordinance violations, and raising awareness of this procedure.
- The Southtown CID Board and Business associations can help connect business/property owners to resources and guidance to rectify code or ordinance concerns before any official citations are given.
- In many cases, property/business owners may be aware of the problems, but not have the resources or means to solve these problems on their own. Business associations should help such business/properties by identifying areas of concern proactively.

STRATEGY: STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY AND POLICE RELATIONSHIPS

MAP
REFERENCE

N6



IMAGE CREDIT: Aquoinette L. Blair



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Identify models of policing practices that build closer relationships between law enforcement and the local community.
- Community officers have been used in the past in-lieu of at-large officer patrols as a way to better integrate law enforcement and policing into the local neighborhoods.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- There are significant concerns in the community regarding the equity and sensitivity of policing practices in the Southtown area.
- More sensitive approaches to policing that are better ingrained and aware of the community context can lead to better outcomes for residents and improve the perception of business districts and neighborhoods.

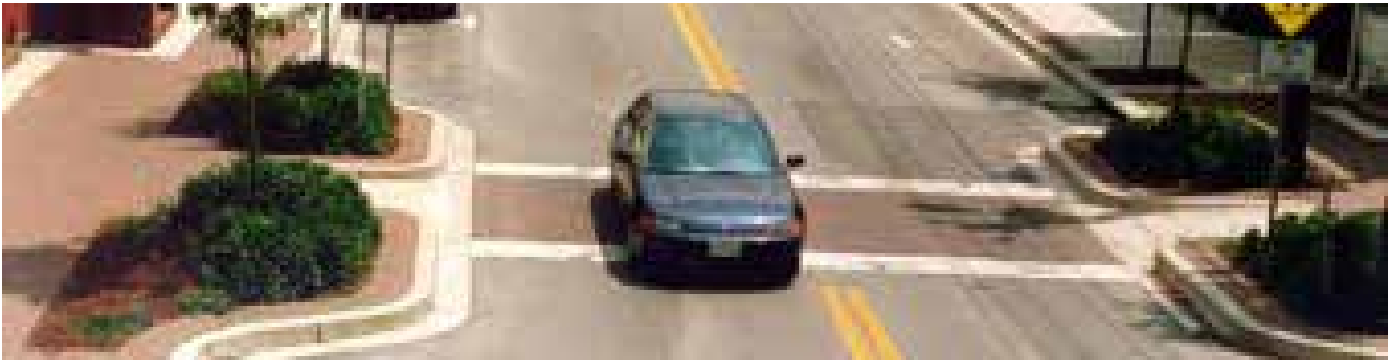
HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- Strengthen and empower neighborhood associations to reach out and work with the police department. Engage with and support on-going programs such as:
 - Citizens Police Academy
 - Policing with the speed of trust
 - National Night Out Events
- Build a network of community/neighborhood ambassadors that can help coordinate with and/or act as a liaison to law enforcement.

STRATEGY: INSTALL SAFE PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

MAP
REFERENCE

M6



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Supporting a walkable district and making pedestrian connectivity logical, safe, and convenient relies on well designed crosswalks.
- Crosswalks are the portion of the roadway zone designated for pedestrian use while crossing the roadway. Crosswalks are typically provided at controlled intersections (i.e. all-way stops or intersections with traffic signals).
- Crosswalks can also be provided in mid-block locations (between major street intersections).
- Marked crosswalks provide pedestrians a safe and clear place to cross the street on foot, while requiring motorists to stop for pedestrians entering or about to enter the crosswalk.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Many of the major roadway corridors in Southtown (e.g. along Eastern Avenue) have infrequent pedestrian crossings and so pedestrians will cross streets with fast moving traffic in an unsafe manner. Providing frequent, well-marked, and visible crosswalks is important for creating a safer environment and encouraging walking to destinations.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- The Southtown CID can work with Business associations and the City's design team to review proposed locations for enhanced pedestrian crossings.
- Best practice guidance from the Vital Streets Plan, as well as national guidelines (i.e. National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) Urban Street Design Guide) should be utilized to determine the most appropriate location and design for intersection and mid-block crossings.
- Consider, where feasible, raised crossings, high-visibility crossings, use of bumpouts to narrow crossing distances, and pedestrian signals with countdown timers at signalized intersections.

STRATEGY: IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY AND COMFORT

MAP
REFERENCE

M7



WHAT IS THE IDEA?

- Designing streets for pedestrian safety and comfort includes the following types of treatments:
 - Buffers (landscape beds, bollards, sign posts, light poles, furnishings, wider sidewalks, on-street parked cars, etc.) between pedestrian spaces and vehicular travel lanes
 - Safer and more visible crossings
 - Wider sidewalks that can accommodate higher volumes of pedestrian traffic
 - Sidewalk amenities such as benches, and shade trees to create a more comfortable walking environment
 - Sidewalks or walkways through and from parking areas to sidewalks and the main entrance to businesses
 - Adequate pedestrian-scaled street lighting
- Frequent curb cuts for driveways can also impact the safety of pedestrian spaces. Opportunities to close and/or consolidate curb cuts into smaller shared driveways when in higher volume pedestrian areas should be pursued.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Ultimately, everyone is a pedestrian when they walk in the front door of a business. Creating a pedestrian environment that feels welcoming and is safe supports commercial activity.

HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

- The district area design plans (next chapter) identify many locations for widening sidewalks and improving the safety of crossings. Business associations should work with the Southtown CID Board to identify the most critical safety and comfort needs the business district.
- Determine which projects can be a capital project funded through (at least in part) the Southtown CID Board versus those which may be projects implemented by the City of Grand Rapids directly. In all cases, work with the City's Design Team to ensure improvements follow best practices for safety.

04

DISTRICT AREA PLANS AND IDEAS

CHAPTER CONTENTS:

91 **OVERALL**

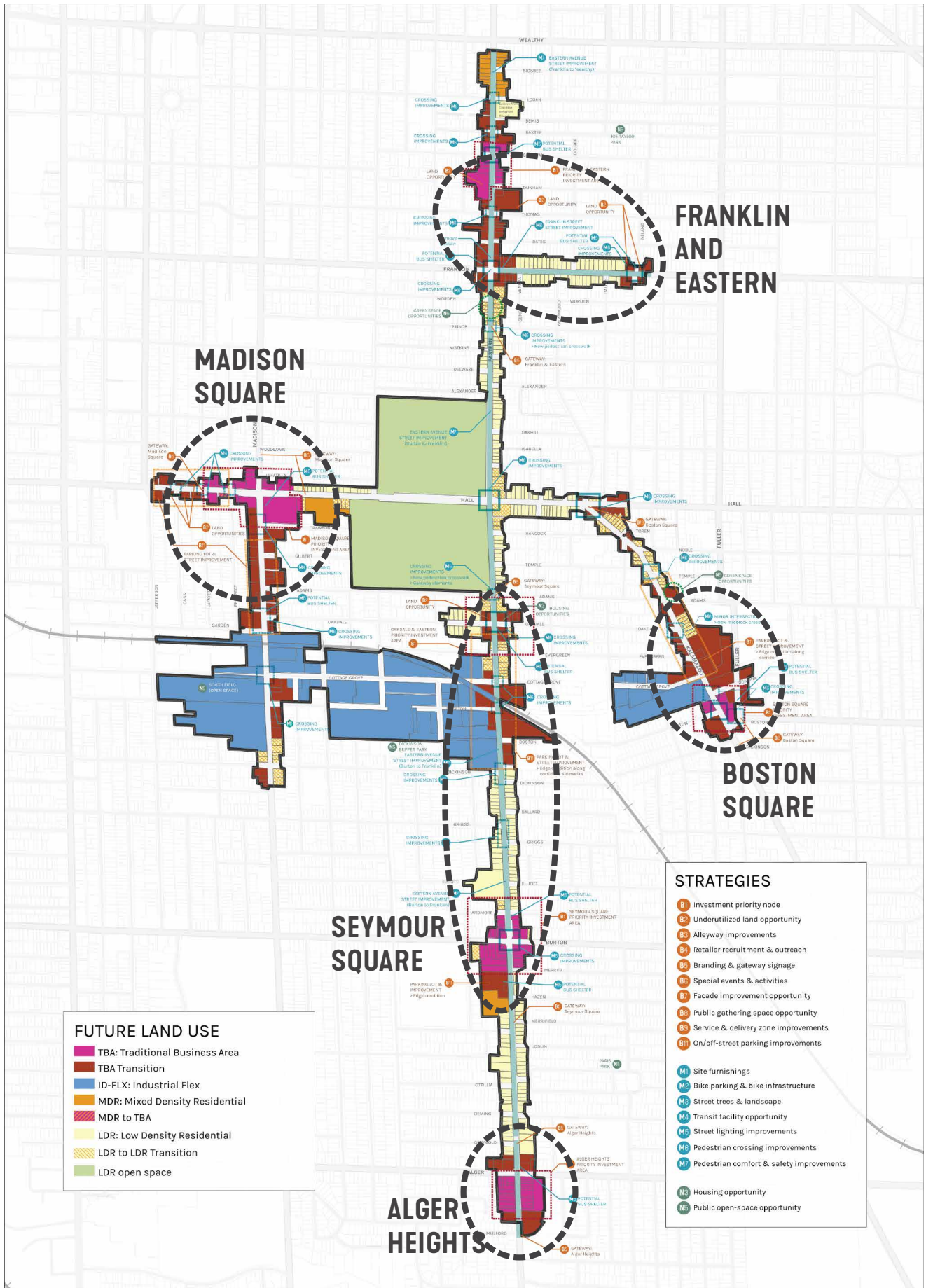
94 **FRANKLIN AND EASTERN**

102 **MADISON SQUARE**

110 **BOSTON SQUARE**

116 **SEYMOUR SQUARE**

124 **ALGER HEIGHTS**



MADISON SQUARE

FRANKLIN AND EASTERN

BOSTON SQUARE

SEYMOUR SQUARE

ALGER HEIGHTS

FUTURE LAND USE

- TBA: Traditional Business Area
- TBA Transition
- ID-FLX: Industrial Flex
- MDR: Mixed Density Residential
- MDR to TBA
- LDR: Low Density Residential
- LDR to LDR Transition
- LDR open space

STRATEGIES

- Investment priority node
- Underutilized land opportunity
- Alleyway improvements
- Retailer recruitment & outreach
- Branding & gateway signage
- Special events & activities
- Facade improvement opportunity
- Public gathering space opportunity
- Service & delivery zone improvements
- On/off-street parking improvements
- Site furnishings
- Bike parking & bike infrastructure
- Street trees & landscape
- Transit facility opportunity
- Street lighting improvements
- Pedestrian crossing improvements
- Pedestrian comfort & safety improvements
- Housing opportunity
- Public open-space opportunity





OVERALL DISTRICT PLAN

The overall district plan, shown on the prior page and enlarged for each business district on the following pages, provides an overview of where different strategies described in the previous apply throughout the corridor. Underlying this district plan are proposed **future land uses** that go along with many of the recommended strategies. It is important to note just because an area is designated with a different future use, it doesn't mean the change is required or necessary. Rather, it is suggesting that if land uses do change or properties are developed differently, that those changes conform to the identified future uses. Existing land uses can continue to remain in their **current use patterns**.

EXISTING & FUTURE LAND USES





The following lists future land use designations used in the Southtown CID. The first group of land uses ("Existing Land Use Designations") refer to land uses where the zoning designation has not changed for a given parcel. However, there may be proposed revisions and changes in specific uses or physical building forms within these zones that are described in more detail in subsequent descriptions.

FUTURE LAND USE - ESTABLISHED DESIGNATIONS

-  TBA: Traditional Business Area (195 parcels)
-  MDR: Mixed Density Residential (124 parcels)
-  LDR open space (2 parcels, cemeteries)
-  LDR: Low Density Residential (326 parcels)

The future land use designations below refer to new land use descriptions and where land uses are proposed to change from one type to another type.

FUTURE LAND USE - PROPOSED DESIGNATIONS

-  ID-FLX: Industrial Flex (69 parcels)
-  LDR Transition - from LDR (127 parcels)
-  TBA Transition - from TBA (283 parcels)
-  MDR to TBA (1 parcel)

The intent of these designations are described in greater detail on the subsequent pages. The future land uses in the maps are assigned at the parcel-level.

TRADITIONAL BUSINESS AREAS (TBA)

- Currently, Traditional Business Area (TBA) zoned parcels require ground-floor space be designed for retail uses. These areas would continue to function as they do today, with ground floor retail appropriate space being required. Upper floor uses such as professional services, offices, and residential would continue to be allowed.
- Building heights in TBA zones are preferred at 3-stories or less, consistent with existing TBA zoning and community survey results.
- TBA zones are intended to be a place to investment – such as for facade improvements or infrastructure projects (e.g. a CID projects for new pedestrian-scale street lighting). These areas are intended to help maximize the value of investments for the greatest number of local businesses (e.g. concentrating investment rather than spreading it out too thinly).
- This does not mean that investments by the CID or others can only be made in the priority investment areas. Investments outside of priority areas to support established, existing, business can certainly still be made.
- New businesses looking for a new location or existing businesses looking to relocate could be encouraged to locate into the priority areas to take advantage of improvements to those areas (e.g. CID-funded projects)
- The investment priority areas delineated are informed by the retail square footage forecasted to be supportable in the near-term. They have been distributed throughout the corridor in areas that have all or some of the following characteristics:
 - Density of existing businesses, building patterns that create a walkable business district, continuous building frontage, buildings close to the street, and transparent building facades.

TBA TRANSITION (PROPOSED LAND USE)

- In order to provide greater flexibility in the kinds of business-supportive uses allowed along the corridor, portions of the existing TBA zones are changed to TBA Transition.
- The **TBA Transition Areas** are intended to:
 - Act as a transition between the core TBA areas and the adjacent residential areas.
 - Allow a broader range of uses by-right, without requiring a special land use permit. These can include professional services, office uses, maker-spaces, live-work units, and potentially other uses that presently require special or conditional land use permits.
 - Ground floor housing is not preferred in TBA Transition areas, but may be considered provided potential projects are reviewed and supported by the Southtown CID, obtain a special land use permit, conform to the goals and vision of the BASP, and adequately address displacement and equity concerns.
- Building heights in TBA Transition zones are preferred at 3-stories or less, consistent with existing TBA zoning and community survey results.

ID-FLX: INDUSTRIAL FLEX

- Industrial Flex areas provide locations where business growth, entrepreneurship, workforce training, and economic activity is desired to flourish. This plan recognizes that industrial areas are changing and need to allow a more flexible range of commercial uses.
- Industrial Flex areas would continue to allow uses allowed under the SD-IT zoning category.
- In addition, permitted or special land uses allowed within the TN-TCC Mixed-Use Commercial District are generally desired, **with the exception of residential land uses**, which are not a desired land use in this area.
- Building heights to remain capped at 3-stories or 45-feet, whichever is less, as per the current SD-IT zoning.

MDR: MIXED DENSITY RESIDENTIAL

- Relates to existing areas of MDR. No changes are proposed to these areas.

MDR TO TBA (PROPOSED CHANGE)

- These are areas currently zoned MDR that are located between existing TBA zones areas. From a future land use perspective, allowing a continuation of commercial land uses is preferred to create a more complete commercial space.
- There is a single parcel in the Madison Square area where this change in use makes sense for the above reasons.

LDR: LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL

- This plan prefers that areas within the Southtown CID district that are zoned LDR should remain as single-family housing, with a preference for owner-occupied housing. There is concern that current zoning allows construction of multi-family housing within LDR zoned areas by use of a special land use permit.
- Recent zoning changes to the LDR district allows up to four attached units (i.e. townhouse-style units) by right on **vacant** property provided it is also within 500-feet of a TBA zoned area (including TBA Transition). Attached units that do not meet these requirements are permitted with a special land use permit.
- If LDR zones within the CID district are under consideration for redevelopment, the scale and character of housing is desired to have a height of no more than 2.5 stories and structured as attached housing units. A special land use permit should be required in this case.



LDR TRANSITION (PROPOSED LAND USE)

- LDR Transition areas areas currently zoned as Low Density Residential (LDR). While the desire is for these areas to remain as single-family housing in order to prevent displacement, if land areas are to be redeveloped they should conform to the following:
 - Preference for no high density **multi-family** housing within the LDR Transition areas (limit or remove special land use permit exceptions).
 - Desire to limit medium density housing to townhouse style or similarly-scaled attached housing units that are no more than 2.5 stories tall.
 - New housing should be owner-occupied housing. At a minimum, one owner-occupied unit should be provided for each existing owner-occupied unit that is lost.
 - Allow live-work style units within the LDR Transition zone as a means of providing additional business growth opportunities within the districts.

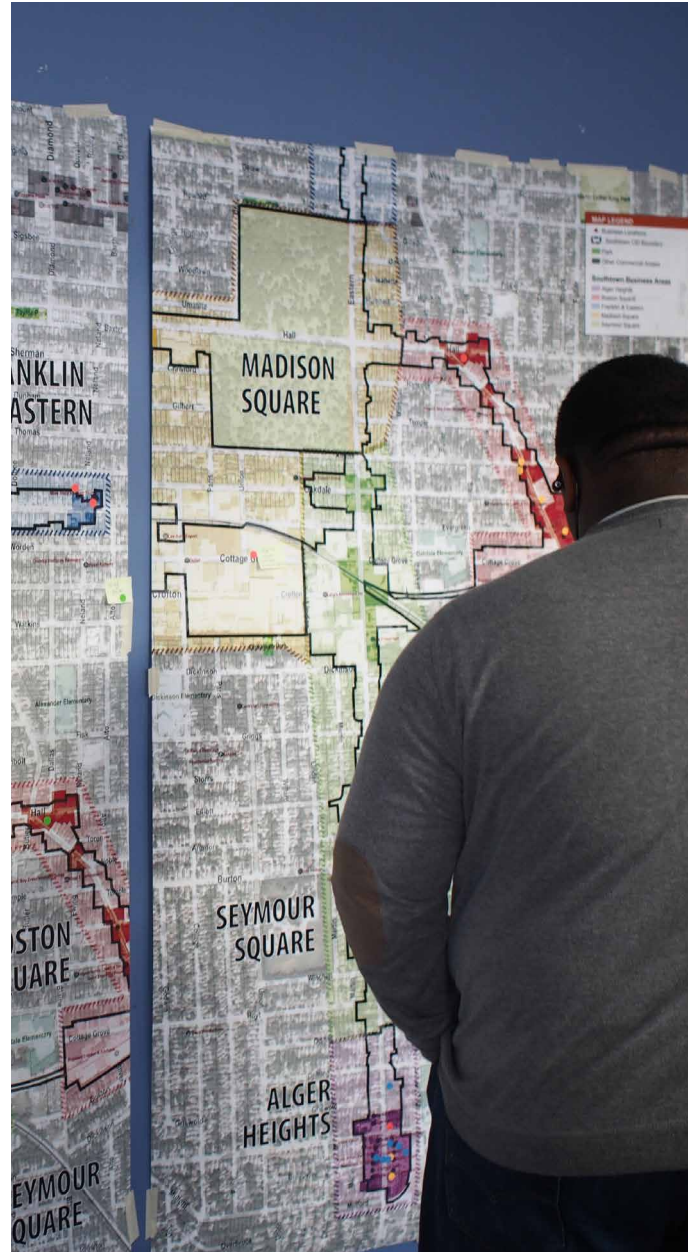


LDR OPEN SPACE

- The existing cemeteries are zoned as LDR - and we simply colored these areas green to distinguish them from actual residential uses in other LDR zoned areas.

SPECIAL LAND USE PERMITS

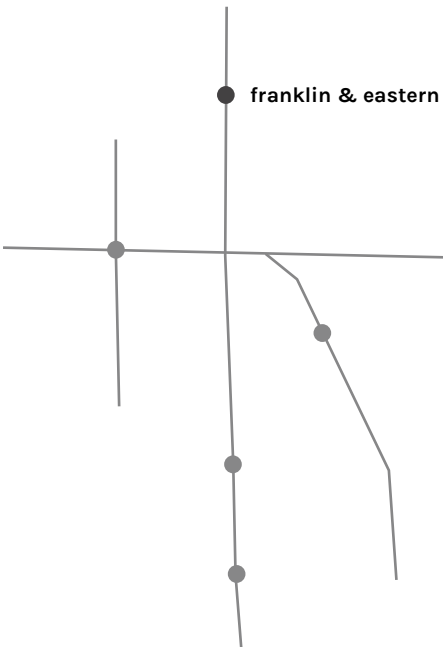
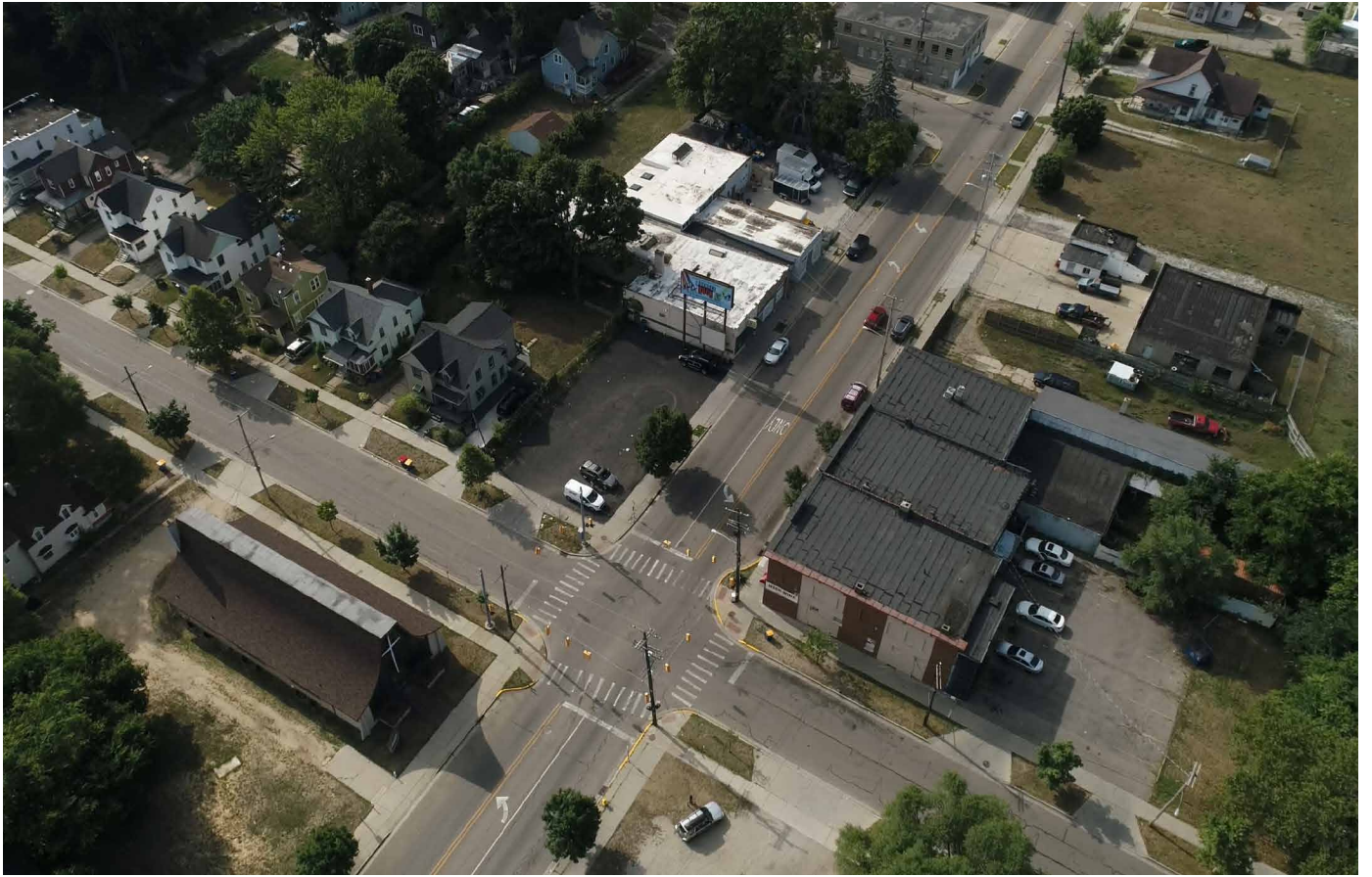
- Obtaining a special land use permit requires meeting certain criteria and going through an approval process with Planning Commission.
- As part of the process of obtaining a special land use permit, this plan recommends that applicants engage with the Southtown CID board, well in advance, in order to ensure that such projects are in alignment with the goals and recommendations of the Southtown BASP.





DISTRICT AREA PLANS AND IDEAS

FRANKLIN AND EASTERN



Developing – the place to be.

FRANKLIN AND EASTERN

The Franklin and Eastern district has a many high potential retail buildings that can work together with new development to create a strong retail core at the intersection of Eastern Avenue and Sherman Street and eventually down to Franklin and Eastern.

Although Franklin Street and Eastern Avenue is the logical intersection for a retail concentration in this neighborhood (the crossroads of the two most heavily trafficked streets, thereby ensuring best visibility and accessibility for tenants located there), its four corners are challenged by inflexible uses, including gas stations and a banking facility.

Eastern Avenue’s intersection with Sherman Street was identified for the following reasons:

- The intersection is the midpoint along Eastern Avenue between two roads that serve a larger, even regional, community—Wealthy Street and Franklin Avenue. The block south of Eastern Avenue/Sherman Street allows this retail node to be focused on the needs of the immediate, surrounding neighborhood.
- Ideal conditions along a retail street are created when retail spaces are continuous (not interrupted by vacant lots, non-retail uses, or parks) and when streets are “double-sided” with tenants. The block south

of Eastern Avenue/Sherman Street has historic retail space still intact and the ability to add to this space in available development parcels that are currently unpaved, surface parking areas.

Improving walkability through improved pedestrian crossings at key intersections and enhanced streetscape along Eastern and Franklin will improve the experience of shopping in the area. The streetscape improvements should include traffic calming through road narrowing and bumpouts, widened sidewalks wherever possible, the addition of corridor standard streetlights and street trees. Linking a new streetscape from Wealthy Avenue’s retail area through the regional connector at Franklin Avenue will promote a strong identity for the area and encourage passersby to return.

Increasing density in the transitional areas can increase spending through the addition of higher density affordable residential and live/work type space (combination of residential unit with a retail, office or other commercial use attached).

STRATEGIES

BUSINESS DISTRICTS:

- B1 Investment priority node
- B2 Underutilized land opportunity
- B3 Alleyway improvements
- B4 Retailer recruitment & outreach
- B5 Branding & gateway signage
- B6 Special events & activities
- B7 Facade improvement opportunity
- B8 Public gathering space opportunity
- B9 Service & delivery zone improvements
- B11 On/off-street parking improvements

MOBILITY & STREETS:

- M1 Site furnishings
- M2 Bike parking & bike infrastructure
- M3 Street trees & landscape
- M4 Transit facility opportunity
- M5 Street lighting improvements
- M6 Pedestrian crossing improvements
- M7 Pedestrian comfort & safety improvements

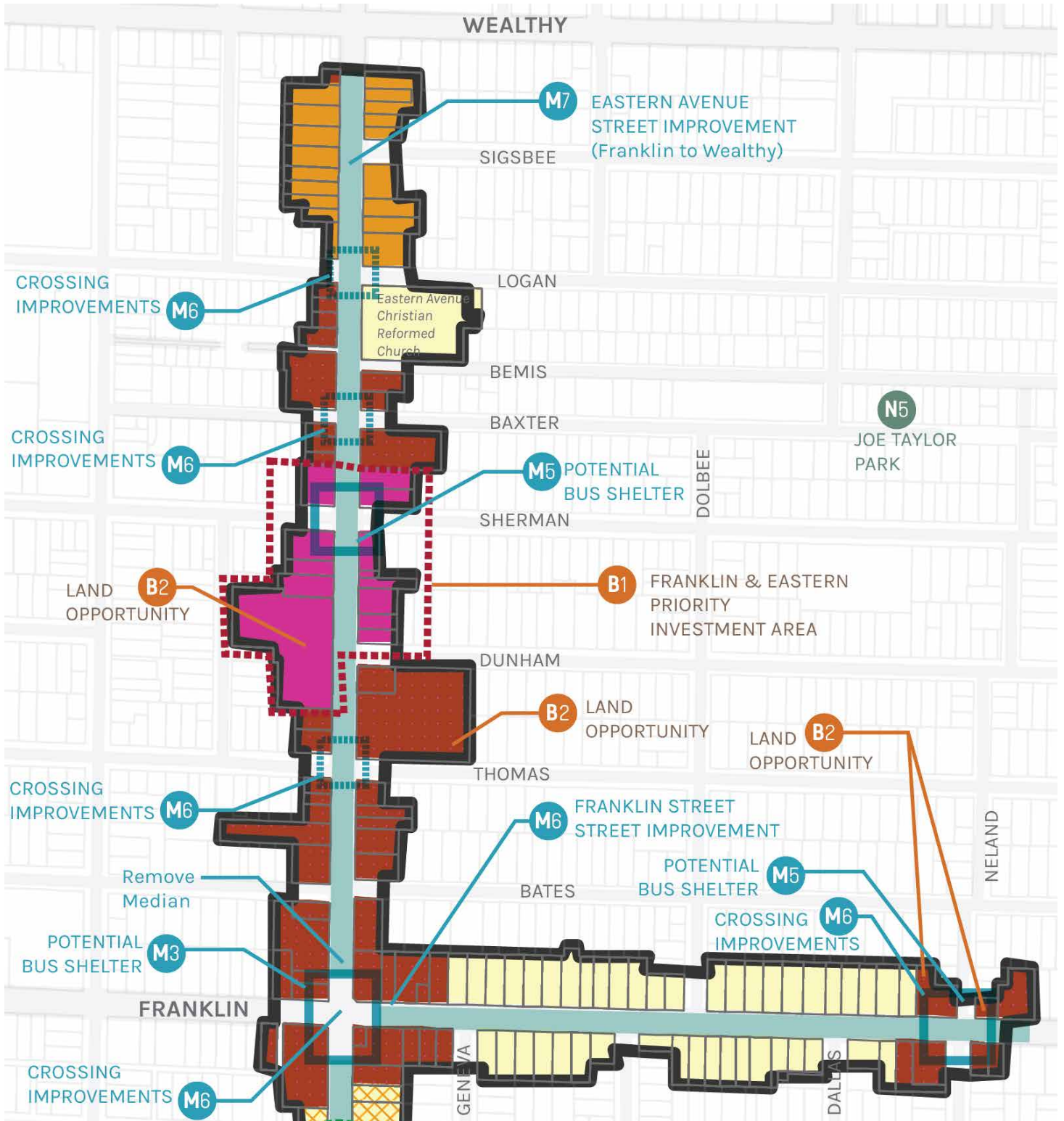
NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY:

- N3 Mixed-use housing opportunity
- N5 Public open-space opportunity

LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

- TBA: Traditional Business Area
- MDR: Mixed Density Residential
- LDR open space
- LDR: Low Density Residential
- ID-FLX: Industrial Flex
- LDR Transition - from LDR
- TBA Transition - from TBA
- MDR to TBA

Note: The gray outlines and land use designations reflect the existing parcel boundaries for properties within and surrounding the CID district.



STRATEGIES

BUSINESS DISTRICTS:

- B1** Investment priority node
- B2** Underutilized land opportunity
- B3** Alleyway improvements
- B4** Retailer recruitment & outreach
- B5** Branding & gateway signage
- B6** Special events & activities
- B7** Facade improvement opportunity
- B8** Public gathering space opportunity
- B9** Service & delivery zone improvements
- B11** On/off-street parking improvements









MOBILITY & STREETS:

- M1** Site furnishings
- M2** Bike parking & bike infrastructure
- M3** Street trees & landscape
- M4** Transit facility opportunity
- M5** Street lighting improvements
- M6** Pedestrian crossing improvements
- M7** Pedestrian comfort & safety improvements

NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY:

- N3** Mixed-use housing opportunity
- N5** Public open-space opportunity

LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

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Note: The gray outlines and land use designations reflect the existing parcel boundaries for properties within and surrounding the CID district.



FRANKLIN AND EASTERN - RETAIL PRIORITY AREA



The intersection at Franklin and Sherman includes several well located buildings with the potential, with reinvestment, to become the core of an enhanced retail district. New retail should be encouraged to fill all four corners of the intersection, and fill vacant parcels with a more continuous street edge to promote walkability between businesses.

Streetscape improvements should calm traffic by widening sidewalks at intersections, which also serves to shorten pedestrian crossing distances for safety. Sidewalks

lined with street trees and new decorative lighting will highlight the node as a special along the corridor and will create a more desirable retail environment.

Turn lanes should be eliminated where possible to calm traffic speeds and increase sidewalk widths. A traffic study should be completed throughout the Franklin and Eastern business district to determine impacts of potential lane reductions on traffic patterns and levels of vehicular service.



STRATEGIES

BUSINESS DISTRICTS:

- B1 Investment priority node
- B2 Underutilized land opportunity
- B3 Alleyway improvements
- B4 Retailer recruitment & outreach
- B5 Branding & gateway signage
- B6 Special events & activities
- B7 Facade improvement opportunity
- B8 Public gathering space opportunity
- B9 Service & delivery zone improvements
- B11 On/off-street parking improvements

BUILDINGS

- Existing Buildings
- Conceptual Buildings

MOBILITY & STREETS:

- M1 Site furnishings
- M2 Bike parking & bike infrastructure
- M3 Street trees & landscape
- M4 Transit facility opportunity
- M5 Street lighting improvements
- M6 Pedestrian crossing improvements
- M7 Pedestrian comfort & safety improvements

NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY:

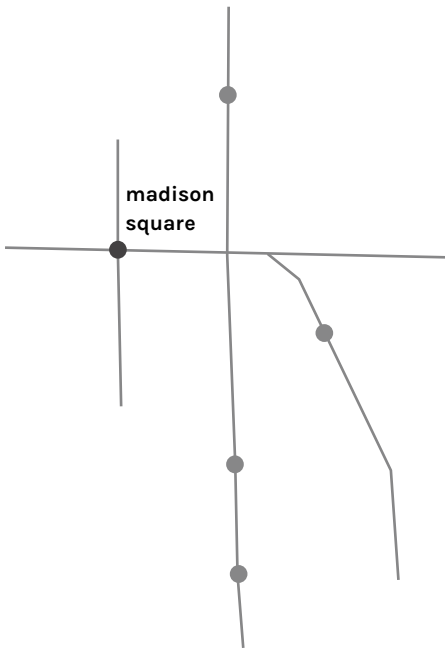
- N3 Mixed-use housing opportunity
- N5 Public open-space opportunity





DISTRICT AREA PLANS AND IDEAS

MADISON SQUARE



*Hospitality for shoppers,
residents and visitors with a
traditional and modern flair.*

MADISON SQUARE

Madison Square is an existing retail hub, commercially anchored by Great Giants. The district includes large footprint retail buildings set back from the street, as well as dense blocks of retail buildings set close to the street. Building a distinct retail node around the existing businesses at Hall Street and Madison Avenue will strengthen the destination as a retail hub. This will entail consideration of appropriate development to provide more continuous street frontage along Hall Street.

The Grand Rapids Public Library branch at the intersection of Madison Avenue SE and Hall Street SE is a civic use and potential anchor in district.

It is one of the two neighborhood districts in the Southtown CID with a concentrated cluster of Class A retail space (Alger Heights is the other), and is further bolstered by an concentration of existing Class B space.

Growth to the north and south along Madison Avenue is compromised by adjacent, non-commercial spaces. For this reason, including a more favorable traffic count, Hall Street SE is the preferred spine for the Madison Square commercial core.

New developments in the transition area outside this hub should focus on providing affordable housing with first-floor flex spaces that could transition to retail in the future when market conditions expand.

Street improvements can include lane reductions and the addition of bumpouts to slow traffic and reduce the distance for pedestrian crossings at intersections.

Existing decorative streetlights can be augmented with new additional lighting further down Madison and Hall streets, further highlighting the district at night and enhancing the sense of safety and comfort. Tree-lined streets promote walkability and enhance district character.

STRATEGIES

BUSINESS DISTRICTS:

- B1 Investment priority node
- B2 Underutilized land opportunity
- B3 Alleyway improvements
- B4 Retailer recruitment & outreach
- B5 Branding & gateway signage
- B6 Special events & activities
- B7 Facade improvement opportunity
- B8 Public gathering space opportunity
- B9 Service & delivery zone improvements
- B11 On/off-street parking improvements









MOBILITY & STREETS:

- M1 Site furnishings
- M2 Bike parking & bike infrastructure
- M3 Street trees & landscape
- M4 Transit facility opportunity
- M5 Street lighting improvements
- M6 Pedestrian crossing improvements
- M7 Pedestrian comfort & safety improvements

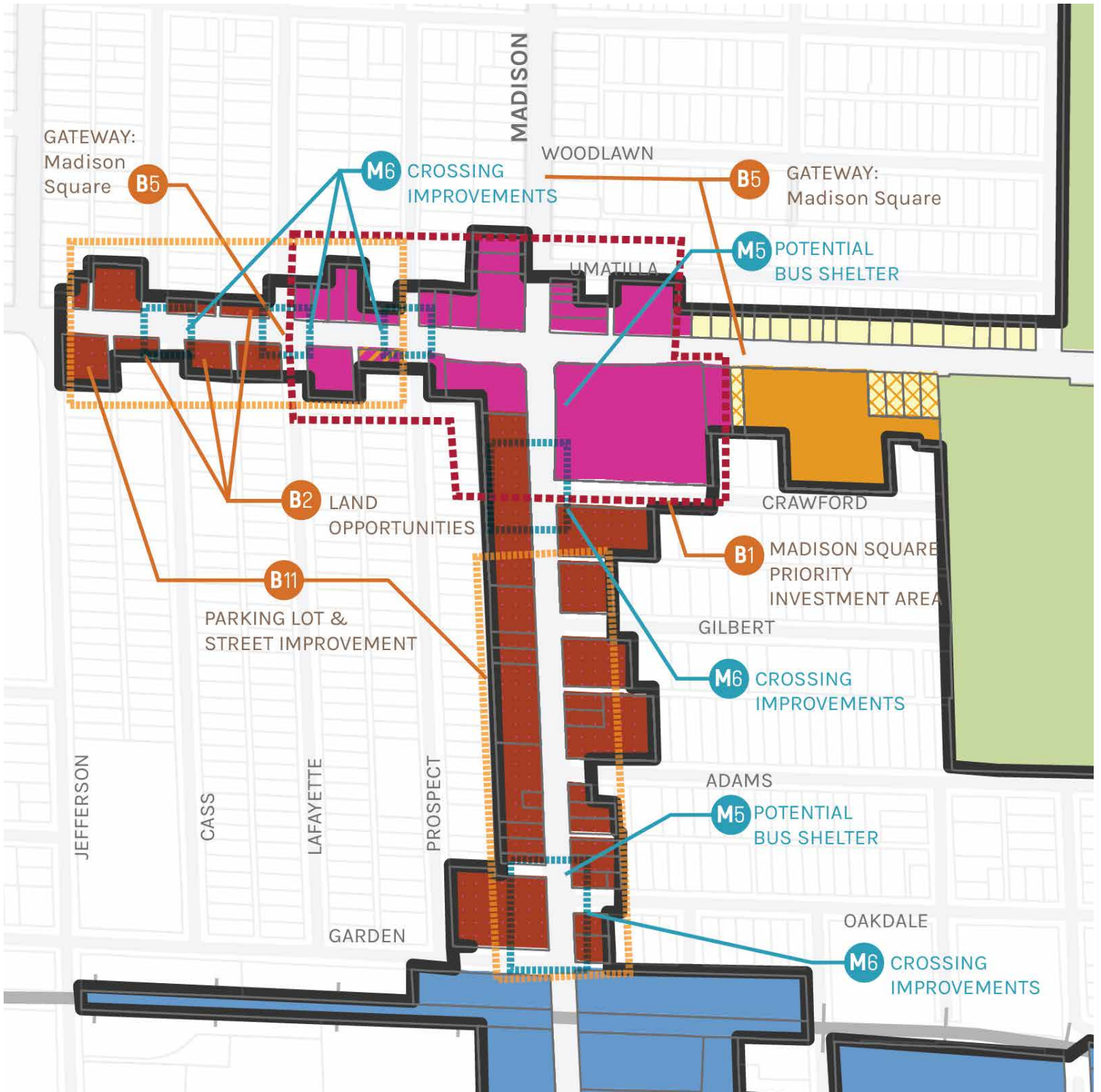
NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY:

- N3 Mixed-use housing opportunity
- N6 Public open-space opportunity

LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

-  TBA: Traditional Business Area
-  MDR: Mixed Density Residential
-  LDR open space
-  LDR: Low Density Residential
-  ID-FLX: Industrial Flex
-  LDR Transition - from LDR
-  TBA Transition - from TBA
-  MDR to TBA

Note: The gray outlines and land use designations reflect the existing parcel boundaries for properties within and surrounding the CID district.



STRATEGIES

BUSINESS DISTRICTS:

- B1** Investment priority node
- B2** Underutilized land opportunity
- B3** Alleyway improvements
- B4** Retailer recruitment & outreach
- B5** Branding & gateway signage
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- B9** Service & delivery zone improvements
- B11** On/off-street parking improvements









MOBILITY & STREETS:

- M1** Site furnishings
- M2** Bike parking & bike infrastructure
- M3** Street trees & landscape
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- M5** Street lighting improvements
- M6** Pedestrian crossing improvements
- M7** Pedestrian comfort & safety improvements

NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY:

- N3** Mixed-use housing opportunity
- N5** Public open-space opportunity

LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

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-  LDR open space
-  LDR: Low Density Residential
-  ID-FLX: Industrial Flex
-  LDR Transition - from LDR
-  TBA Transition - from TBA
-  MDR to TBA



Note: The gray outlines and land use designations reflect the existing parcel boundaries for properties within and surrounding the CID district.



MADISON SQUARE - RETAIL PRIORITY AREA



Madison Square has great potential to be a centerpiece of the surrounding community. By adding new retail buildings to create a strong four-corner intersection at Hall Street and Madison Avenue, and buildings in vacant and underutilized parcels, the district will have two blocks of continuous, walkable retail frontage (and can extend further to the west towards Division in the future).

Parking areas can be reorganized to link parking lots together and facilitate general use for district shoppers. Parking can be connected with pedestrian

'alleyways' and enhanced with lighting and public art, that draw users from rear parking to front building entrances to promote an active and vibrant streetscape environment.

A new gathering space along the street along Hall Street at LINC UP can be a community destination, programmed for events and activities, and can link to the existing parking areas to support larger events.

The existing streetscape can be strengthened to extend street trees and decorative lighting throughout, and enhance landscape areas with lively, seasonal plantings.

STRATEGIES

BUSINESS DISTRICTS:

- B1 Investment priority node
- B2 Underutilized land opportunity
- B3 Alleyway improvements
- B4 Retailer recruitment & outreach
- B5 Branding & gateway signage
- B6 Special events & activities
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- B11 On/off-street parking improvements

BUILDINGS

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- Conceptual Buildings

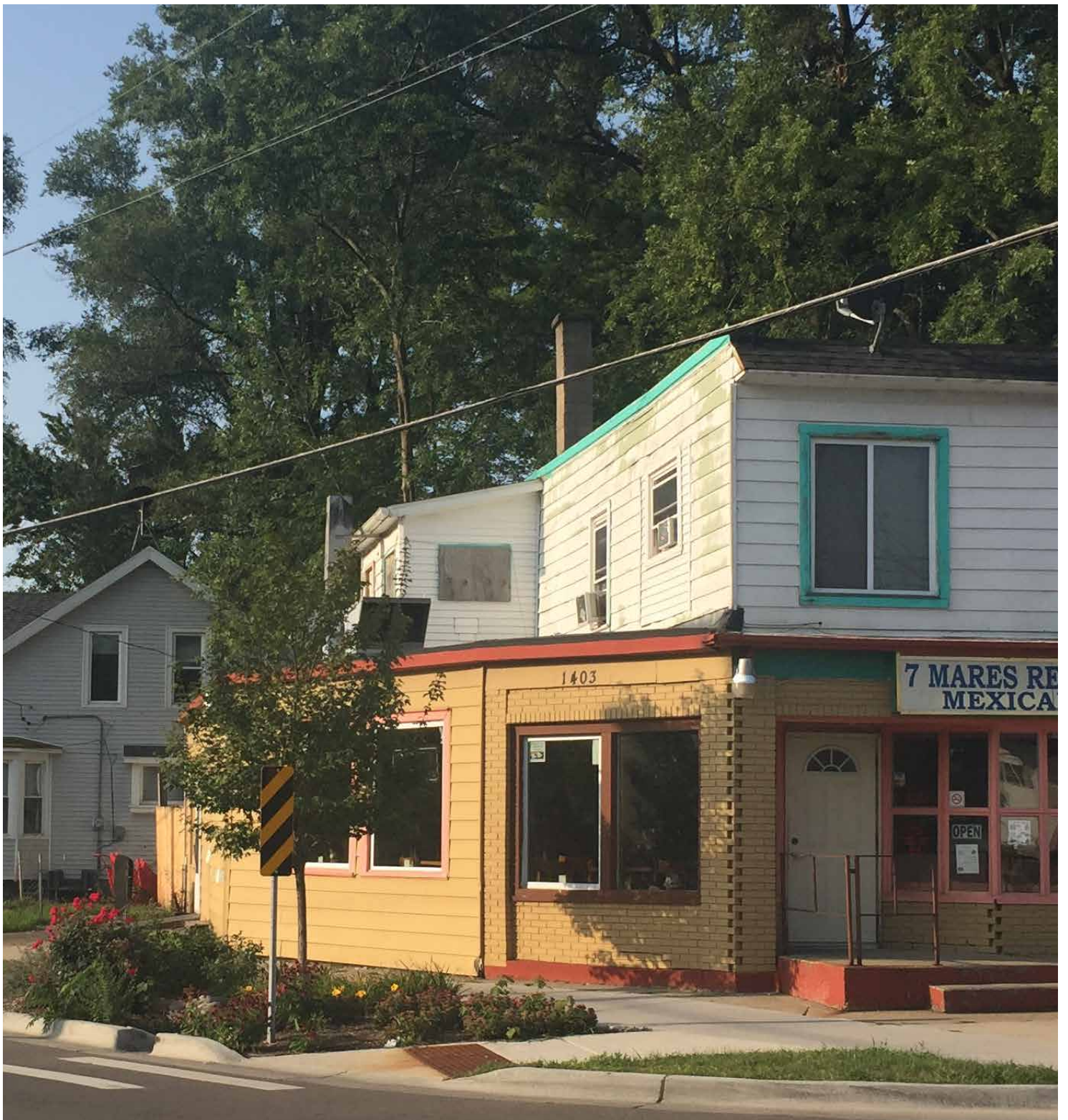
MOBILITY & STREETS:

- M1 Site furnishings
- M2 Bike parking & bike infrastructure
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- M4 Transit facility opportunity
- M5 Street lighting improvements
- M6 Pedestrian crossing improvements
- M7 Pedestrian comfort & safety improvements

NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY:

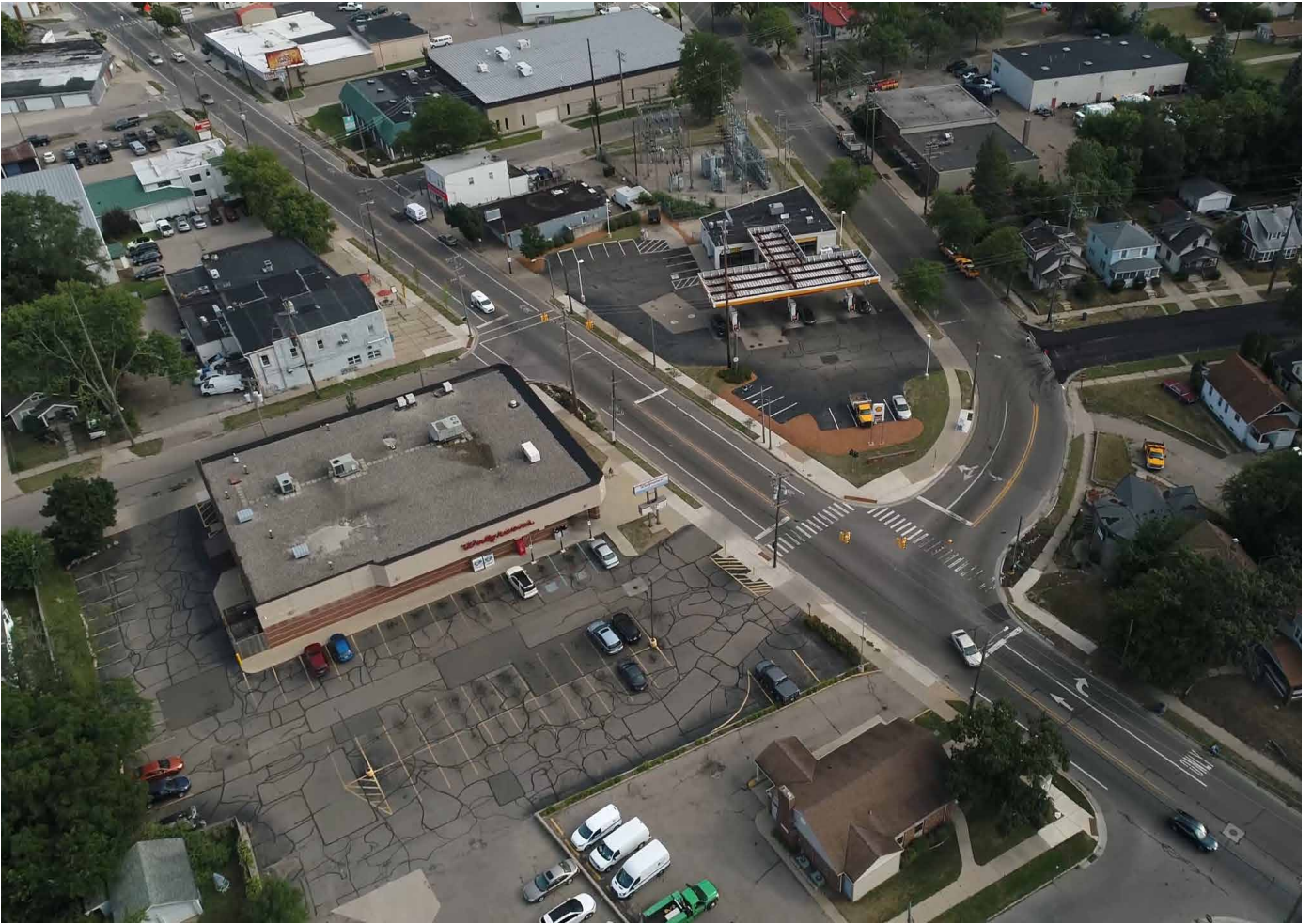
- N3 Mixed-use housing opportunity
- N5 Public open-space opportunity



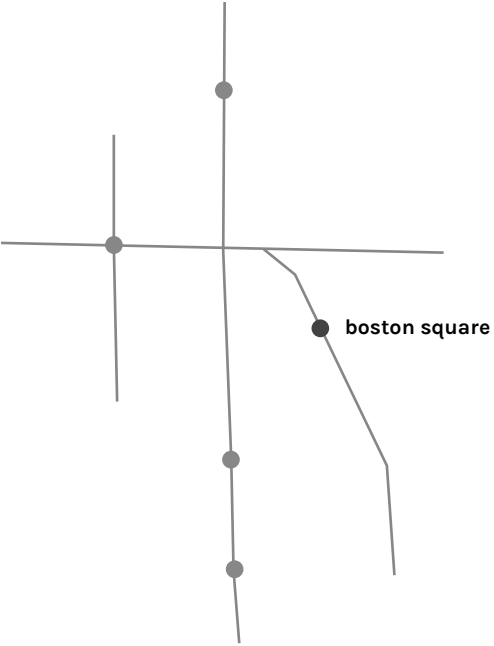


DISTRICT AREA PLANS AND IDEAS

BOSTON SQUARE



*A business district on the move
for generations.*



BOSTON SQUARE

Boston Square is a commercial gateway at Southtown's eastern end, anchored by Walgreens, Standard Lumber, and Modern Hardware. The well-trafficked section of Kalamazoo Avenue provides accessibility and visibility opportunities for Boston Square retailers.

The district includes an existing concentration of small, local retailers with widely distributed retail and a high level of vacancy. Focusing retail in a more concise area will strengthen its viability and create a strong sense of place where retail exists.

Opportunities in the transition areas just outside the retail priority area can include more dense residential or live/work uses that will increase the residential population and support retail growth.

Pedestrian walkability and safety through improved intersection crossings will improve access. Streetscape improvements can build on improvements to Kalamazoo Ave made in 2016.

Additions can include gateway improvements that highlight the unique character of the retail district, additional decorative street lighting, street trees, and mid-block street crossings.

STRATEGIES

BUSINESS DISTRICTS:

- B1 Investment priority node
- B2 Underutilized land opportunity
- B3 Alleyway improvements
- B4 Retailer recruitment & outreach
- B5 Branding & gateway signage
- B6 Special events & activities
- B7 Facade improvement opportunity
- B8 Public gathering space opportunity
- B9 Service & delivery zone improvements
- B11 On/off-street parking improvements

MOBILITY & STREETS:

- M1 Site furnishings
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- M3 Street trees & landscape
- M4 Transit facility opportunity
- M5 Street lighting improvements
- M6 Pedestrian crossing improvements
- M7 Pedestrian comfort & safety improvements

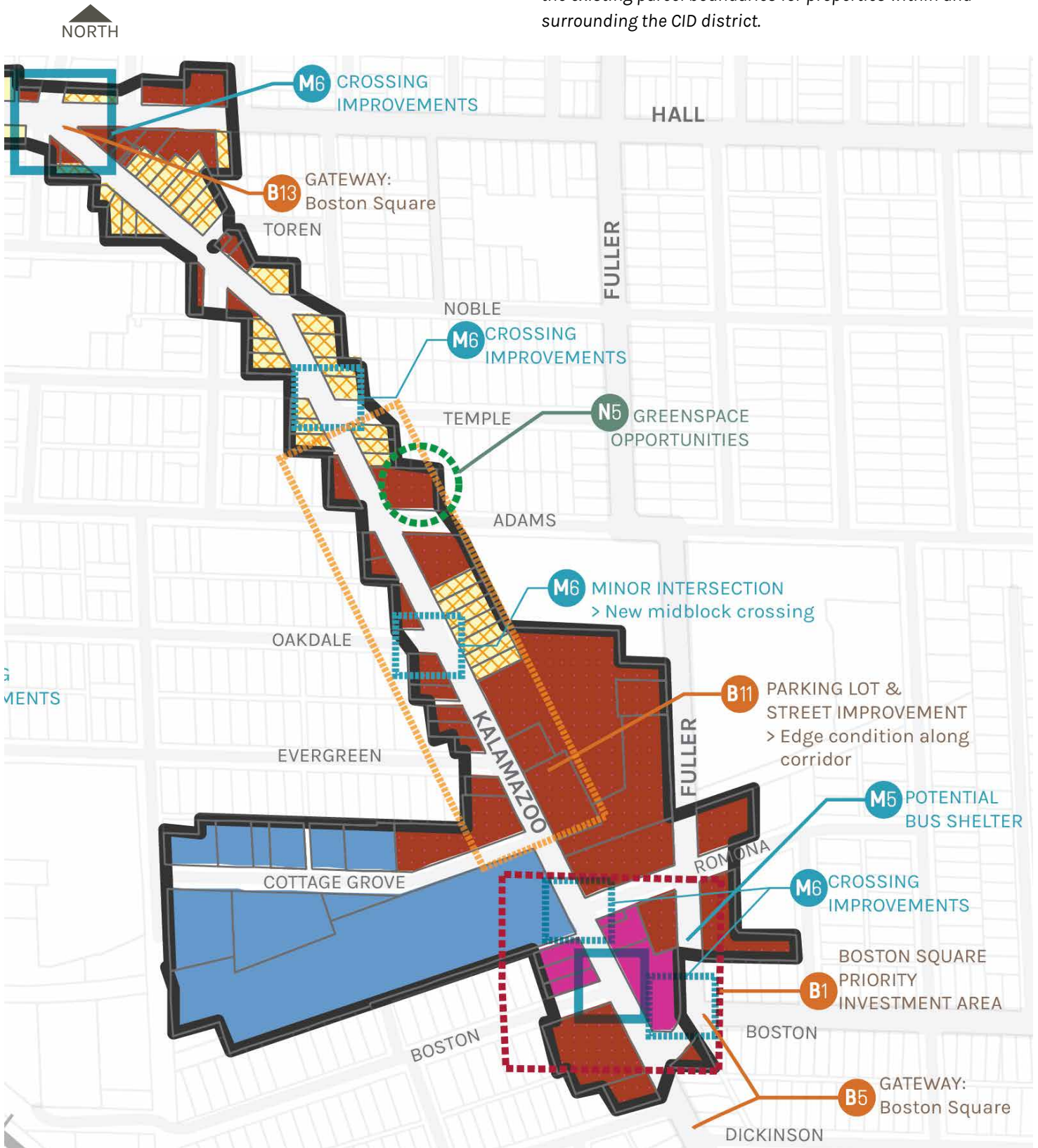
NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY:

- N3 Mixed-use housing opportunity
- N6 Public open-space opportunity

LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

-  TBA: Traditional Business Area
-  MDR: Mixed Density Residential
-  LDR open space
-  LDR: Low Density Residential
-  ID-FLX: Industrial Flex
-  LDR Transition - from LDR
-  TBA Transition - from TBA
-  MDR to TBA

Note: The gray outlines and land use designations reflect the existing parcel boundaries for properties within and surrounding the CID district.



BOSTON SQUARE - RETAIL PRIORITY AREA



Boston Square is a smaller retail node, but includes several buildings with great street frontage and walkability. In particular, a wide plaza space in front of the Boston Square Ice Cream & Cafe group of buildings can grow into a vibrant gathering space.

On the south side, shared parking for employees should be explored with Walgreens to preserve parking for patrons behind the building.

Within the immediate Boston and Kalamazoo area (above), additional bumpouts can be added along with midblock crossings (near Romona Street for example) to further slow cars and reduce crossing distances for pedestrians.

Street trees and site furnishings along the street, including trash receptacles and outdoor dining, will enhance the area as an outdoor dining destination.

Retailers should consider coordinating hours to provide synergy between dining venues for lunch and dinner audiences. Over time, service uses should be replaced by retail uses, with service being relocated to areas outside the retail priority area.



STRATEGIES

BUSINESS DISTRICTS:

- B1 Investment priority node
- B2 Underutilized land opportunity
- B3 Alleyway improvements
- B4 Retailer recruitment & outreach
- B5 Branding & gateway signage
- B6 Special events & activities
- B7 Facade improvement opportunity
- B8 Public gathering space opportunity
- B9 Service & delivery zone improvements
- B11 On/off-street parking improvements

BUILDINGS

- Existing Buildings
- Conceptual Buildings

MOBILITY & STREETS:

- M1 Site furnishings
- M2 Bike parking & bike infrastructure
- M3 Street trees & landscape
- M4 Transit facility opportunity
- M5 Street lighting improvements
- M6 Pedestrian crossing improvements
- M7 Pedestrian comfort & safety improvements

NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY:

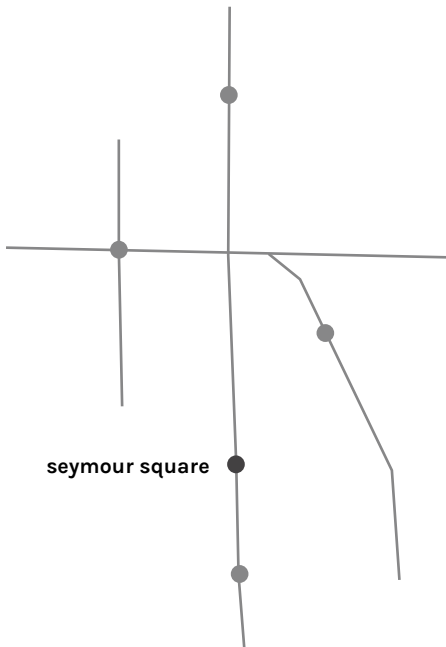
- N3 Mixed-use housing opportunity
- N5 Public open-space opportunity





DISTRICT AREA PLANS AND IDEAS

SEYMOUR SQUARE



seymour square

A soulful business district in an historical setting where residents and visitors of different cultures, shop, eat, drink and perk.

SEYMOUR SQUARE

Seymour Square is an existing retail hub, commercially anchored by Harvest Health Foods. The U.S. Post Office at this location provides a civic anchor in this district and could benefit from reinvestment to make it a more positive user destination.

The commercial core is the intersection of two well-trafficked corridors, Burton Street SE and Eastern Avenue SE, which provide good visibility and accessibility to the surrounding neighborhood. A large portion of identifiable storefront space remains intact, and with some reinvestment, can transition into a vibrant and walkable hub.

Parking opportunities are limited, and diagonal parking opportunities provide some parking, but is also perceived as unsafe. Non-retail uses on the southern corners of Burton Street and Eastern Avenue will require special treatments, such as artistic features on the

building walls or on the sidewalk, to improve the character and sense of connection between the retail concentrations on opposite sides of Burton Street.

Pedestrian conditions in the district are challenging, with narrow sidewalks, fast moving traffic, and confusing bicycle lanes that result in bicycles utilizing sidewalks for travel. Pending a more thorough traffic analysis, the area around Eastern Avenue and Burton Street would benefit from lane narrowing, reduction of unnecessary turn lanes, and the addition of bumpouts to increase sidewalk widths.

Streetscape enhancements throughout the corridor should focus on improving the safety of pedestrian crossings and enhancing the corridor with decorative street lighting and street trees.

STRATEGIES

BUSINESS DISTRICTS:

- B1 Investment priority node
- B2 Underutilized land opportunity
- B3 Alleyway improvements
- B4 Retailer recruitment & outreach
- B5 Branding & gateway signage
- B6 Special events & activities
- B7 Facade improvement opportunity
- B8 Public gathering space opportunity
- B9 Service & delivery zone improvements
- B11 On/off-street parking improvements









MOBILITY & STREETS:

- M1 Site furnishings
- M2 Bike parking & bike infrastructure
- M3 Street trees & landscape
- M4 Transit facility opportunity
- M5 Street lighting improvements
- M6 Pedestrian crossing improvements
- M7 Pedestrian comfort & safety improvements

NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY:

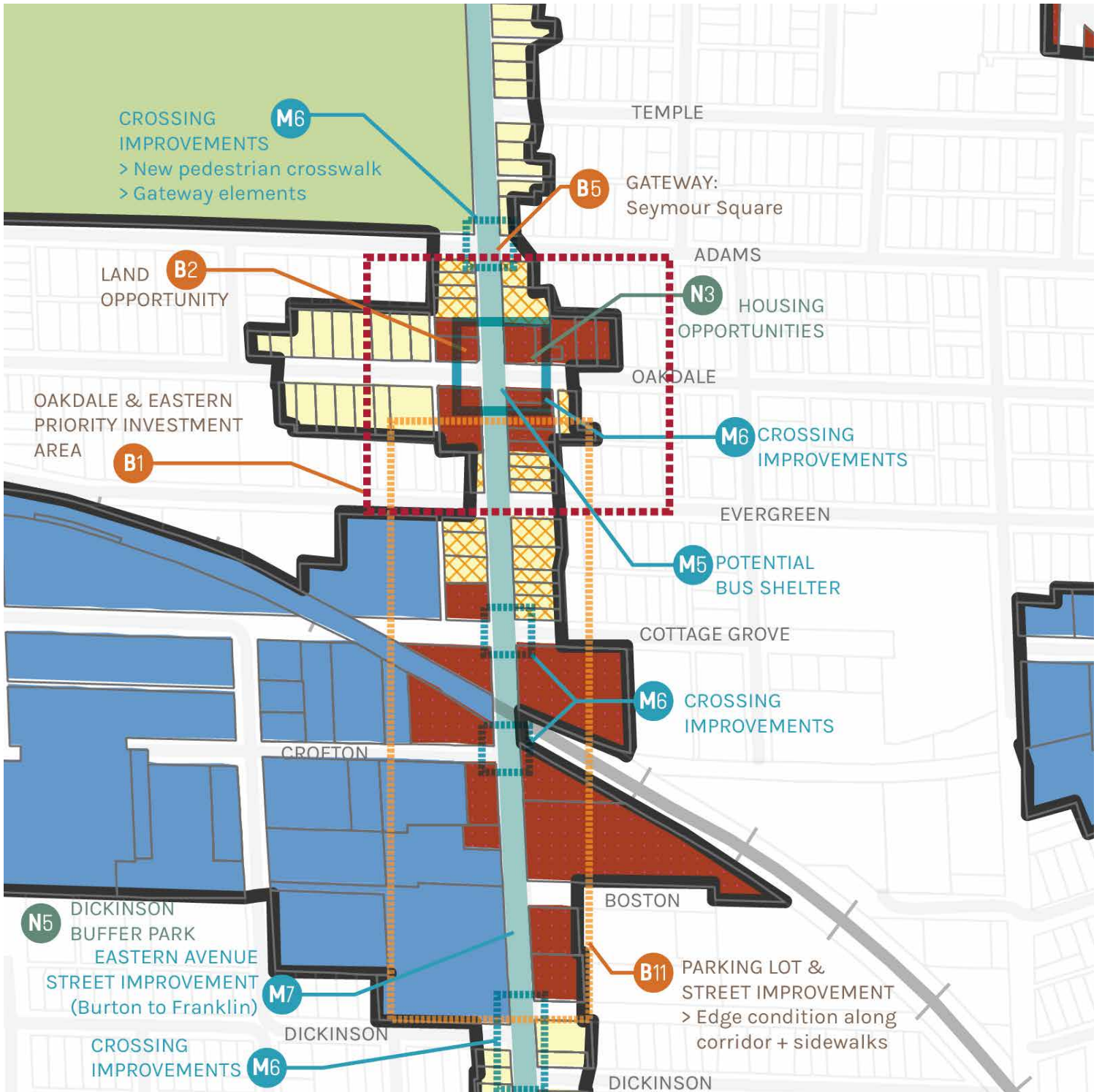
- N3 Mixed-use housing opportunity
- N5 Public open-space opportunity

LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

-  TBA: Traditional Business Area
-  MDR: Mixed Density Residential
-  LDR open space
-  LDR: Low Density Residential
-  ID-FLX: Industrial Flex
-  LDR Transition - from LDR
-  TBA Transition - from TBA
-  MDR to TBA



Note: The gray outlines and land use designations reflect the existing parcel boundaries for properties within and surrounding the CID district.



STRATEGIES

BUSINESS DISTRICTS:

- B1** Investment priority node
- B2** Underutilized land opportunity
- B3** Alleyway improvements
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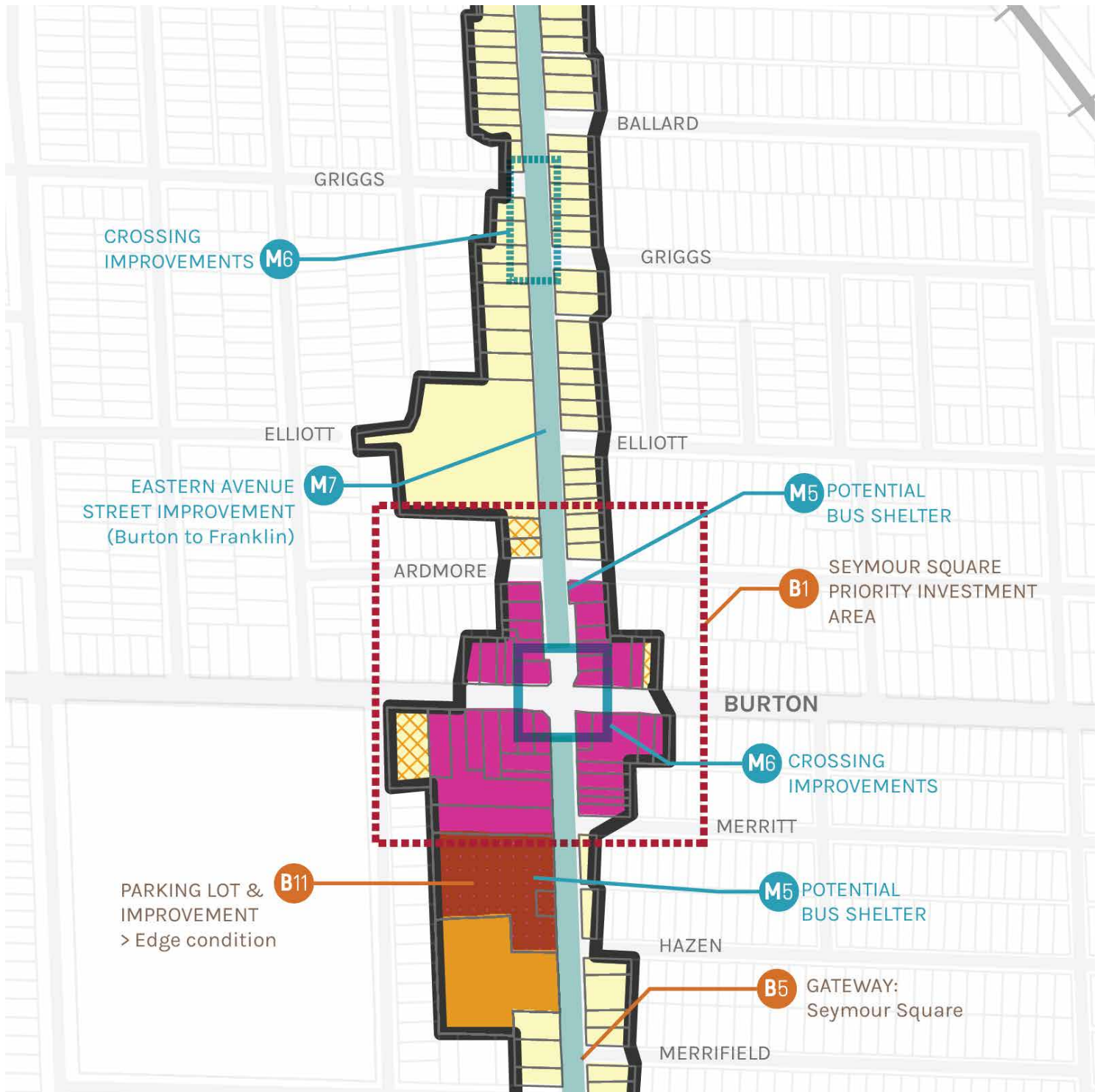
- N3** Mixed-use housing opportunity
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LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

-  TBA: Traditional Business Area
-  MDR: Mixed Density Residential
-  LDR open space
-  LDR: Low Density Residential
-  SD-IT: Special District Industrial
-  LDR Transition - from LDR
-  TBA Transition - from TBA
-  MDR to TBA



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SEYMOUR SQUARE - RETAIL PRIORITY AREA



The Seymour Square retail node includes several active retailers, in addition to opportunities for redevelopment of existing buildings and parcels. There are a number of anchors stores (e.g. Harvest Health Foods) that can draw people from well outside of Southtown district to shop here.

While there is a good supply of parking in the business district, parking lots can be linked together when possible to accommodate a shared approach to parking between businesses and easy navigation for customers. Where possible, alleyways can be enhanced to better link rear

parking areas to front building entrances to reinforce a more vibrant streetscape environment for patrons and pedestrians.

On-street parking should be reconfigured as parallel parking to increase the pedestrian areas and make parking more consistent from district to district to promote safety.

A facade improvement program will improve the character of the area and strengthen its identity. Enforcement of signage restrictions and increased trash collection will improve the sense of cleanliness.

Turn lanes that are not warranted (as deemed by a traffic study) can be eliminated and sidewalks widened to promote safer and more comfortable crossings and sidewalks.

New decorative streetlights and street trees will highlight the area as a retail destination and make it even more friendly to pedestrians.

STRATEGIES

BUSINESS DISTRICTS:

- B1 Investment priority node
- B2 Underutilized land opportunity
- B3 Alleyway improvements
- B4 Retailer recruitment & outreach
- B5 Branding & gateway signage
- B6 Special events & activities
- B7 Facade improvement opportunity
- B8 Public gathering space opportunity
- B9 Service & delivery zone improvements
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BUILDINGS

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MOBILITY & STREETS:

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NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY:

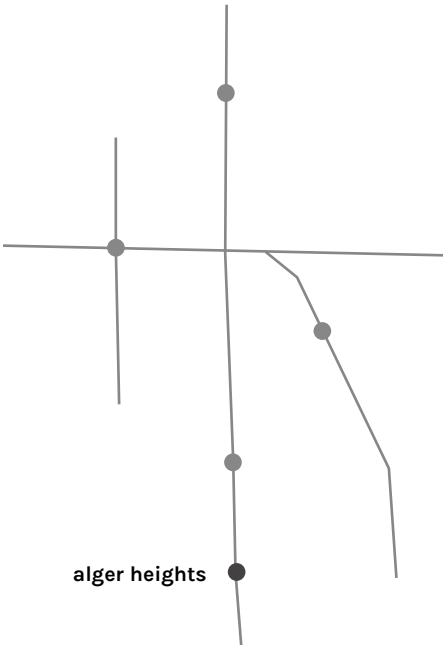
- N3 Mixed-use housing opportunity
- N5 Public open-space opportunity





DISTRICT AREA PLANS AND IDEAS

ALGER HEIGHTS



A small town feel inside the city.

ALGER HEIGHTS

Alger Heights is an existing, intact retail hub, commercially anchored by Alger Hardware, two banks, several shops, and a few eateries. The Grand Rapids Public Library branch provides a civic anchor at the northeast corner of Alger Street and Eastern Avenue. The two banks create a “bookend” for the district’s southern end.

Wide sidewalks to the south of Alger Street along Eastern Avenue provide opportunities for a more refined, district-identifying streetscape treatment.

Parking lots to the rear have caused retailers to close their entrances along Eastern Avenue and orient their front doors to the parking lot in the rear of the building, instead

of to the front / streetside face of the building. This condition, reduces the amount of pedestrian traffic along Eastern Ave and creates a less vibrant walking environment, which could be energized by reorienting entrances to the front and strengthening streetscape design.

Sidewalks enhanced with high-branching trees will foster shaded and canopied street cafe space. Decorative street lights that extend beyond the limits of the retail node can create a visual gateway and establish the area as a special destination along the Eastern Avenue corridor.

STRATEGIES

BUSINESS DISTRICTS:

- B1 Investment priority node
- B2 Underutilized land opportunity
- B3 Alleyway improvements
- B4 Retailer recruitment & outreach
- B5 Branding & gateway signage
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MOBILITY & STREETS:

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NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY:

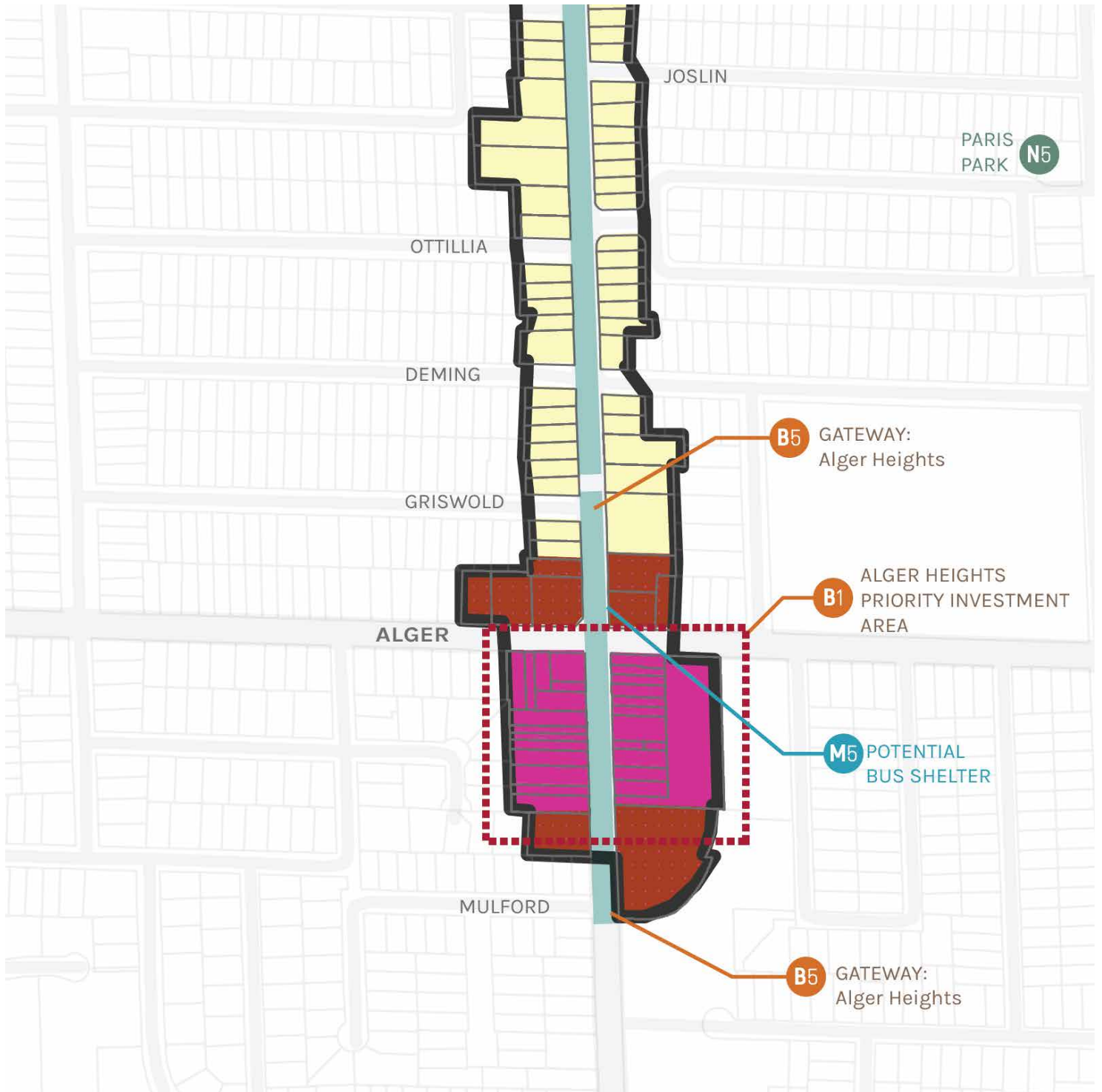
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- N5 Public open-space opportunity

LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

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-  LDR open space
-  LDR: Low Density Residential
-  ID-FLX: Industrial Flex
-  LDR Transition - from LDR
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-  MDR to TBA



Note: The gray outlines and land use designations reflect the existing parcel boundaries for properties within and surrounding the CID district.



ALGER HEIGHTS



Alger Heights can build on its existing strengths by refocusing pedestrian activity to the street fronts. By returning business entrances to the street side and improving the street environment with canopy trees, decorative street lights, plantings and public artwork can create a more vibrant and active frontage.

Service alleys established along the rear face of buildings can clarify loading and service entrances. Overtime, pedestrians should be encouraged to access businesses from front doors (Eastern Ave building face) in order to create more activity along the street.

Opportunities can be explored to remove a building on the east side to facilitate a pedestrian through-way from the parking lot.

Simplified and consolidated parking could maintain a strong district-based approach to parking.



STRATEGIES

BUSINESS DISTRICTS:

- B1 Investment priority node
- B2 Underutilized land opportunity
- B3 Alleyway improvements
- B4 Retailer recruitment & outreach
- B5 Branding & gateway signage
- B6 Special events & activities
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06

ACTION PLAN

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139 **GOAL 3 ACTIONS**

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ACTION PLAN

Implementation of the Southtown Business Area Specific Plan (BASP) will be accomplished overtime and through a variety of means. This document, and especially the Action Plan detailed in the this chapter, is a living document and can be updated overtime to reflect changing needs, opportunities, and implemented recommendations.

The Action Plan table (further below) lists the recommendations from the plan (Chapter 3) and outlines the individual tasks or actions that can be considered to advance implementation. This format serves as a useful checklist to track accomplishments and priorities. It also services as a checklist to facilitate annual reviews of the plan and its progress. The recommendations are summarized in the chart on the following pages by goal and in approximate order of priority.

REGULATORY AND POLICY

Recommendations are provided for amending city ordinances to support plan proposals. Most of these actions should be implemented as part of an update to the zoning ordinance and other regulations related to land use, mobility and streets, business development, neighborhood stability, and an equitable economy for Southtown.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROJECTS (CIP)

Land use, mobility and streets, business development, neighborhood stability, and equitable economy are the integral framework for Southtown that supports quality development. In this plan, capital projects have been identified and constructed to help support and promote desired development and to meet the needs of residents and businesses in Southtown. The number of projects and project timing are influenced by several factors, for example, the costs, approval of Southtown CID Board, City of Grand Rapids and other organizations, and funds available.

PARTICIPANTS

While the City of Grand Rapids is in a position to coordinate many of the plan's implementation tasks, the Southtown CID Board will serve as the facilitators to determine and review the decisions made for Southtown. The Southtown CID Board will be the point of contact for stakeholders having key roles and ways to participate in working towards the action plan. Partnerships between the City of Grand Rapids, business owners, community organizations, and developers are important and will lead to successfully implementing the plan's initiatives. Partnerships will also range from sharing information, funding, and services. As different organizations come to together the goal is to make sure that cooperation will be sustained to benefit everyone in the region.

List of participants for each action item is not fully inclusive, and there may be other participants not listed that can have a role to play in implementation.

FUNDING

There are a variety of ways the recommendations will be funded. The Southtown CID Board will establish priorities for the use of tax increment financing to support development projects.

OVERARCHING ACTIONS

MANAGE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOUTHTOWN BUSINESS AREA SPECIFIC PLAN (BASP) IN A FLEXIBLE, SMART, AND ADAPTABLE MANNER.

- The Southtown BASP provides a vision, goals, and toolbox of strategies to be used in strengthening the business districts in Southtown. Implementation of the recommended projects, program, and policies should consider changing conditions in Southtown. As a consequence, the Southtown BASP should be viewed as a guiding - yet flexible - document, particularly with respect to the projects and activities conducted directly by the Southtown CID.
- The Southtown CID Board of Authority has the authority to amend this plan by following the correct process.
 - In accordance with Act 280, the Southtown Corridor Improvement Authority has the right to amend this Plan to add new improvement projects, add additional parcels, extend the duration of the Plan, or for other lawful purposes. Any amendments shall be approved by the Authority and the City Commission in accordance with the requirements of Act 280. (Southtown CID Development Plan & Tax Increment Financing Plan, Section 21.2(p), pg 17)

THE CID BOARD WILL WORK TO PRIORTIZE ACTIONS FOR WHICH THEY ARE LISTED AS AS THE "LEAD" PARTY RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION.

- The Southtown BASP provides a broad range of strategies and project ideas, both in terms of physical infrastructure changes in the business districts and potential new programs and policies. However, the Southtown CID's resources are finite and can only go so far. Resources should be used judiciously where they can have the biggest impact.
- The CID Board should work to establish priorities for implementing projects, in accordance with their Southtown CID Development Plan, where they are listed in the action items below as the lead party responsible.

THE CID BOARD WILL WORK WITH CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS AND OTHER RESPONSIBLE PARTIES TO IDENTIFY CITY-WIDE OR BROADER POLICIES THAT AFFECT EQUITY AND WEALTH-BUILDING IN SOUTHTOWN

- Many existing policies affect equity and disparity outcomes in Southtown. Reviewing these policies to identify issues that negatively impact Southtown businesses and residents, as well as finding gaps or opportunities for new policy solutions, is an opportunity for the CID Board to collaborate on bold and significant structural changes to policy.

GOAL 1 ACTIONS

BE A MORE STABLE AND THRIVING BUSINESS COMMUNITY WITHOUT DISPLACEMENT

ESTABLISH INVESTMENT PRIORITY NODES

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ CID Board to establish a set of priorities for investments and use of CID resources. Support existing land owners through CID-backed programs that help improve and stabilize the business districts. ■ Work proactively with prospective developments to determine locations, uses, and building forms that support the character and vitality of the business districts. 	CID Board (Lead), City of Grand Rapids Economic Development	Regulatory/Policy
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Amend zoning map and zone descriptions based on the future land use recommendations in this BASP. 	City Planning, CID Board (Lead)	Regulatory/Policy

MAP REFERENCE: **B1**

ENCOURAGE BUSINESS SUPPORTIVE REUSE OF UNDERUTILIZED SPACES

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Work with existing property owners identified as an opportunity for business district supportive enhancement to understand the potential range of improvements and define an effective process for project implementation that supports the economic vitality and equity in the district. 	CID Board (Lead), Business District Associations, Neighborhood Associations	Program

MAP REFERENCE: **B2**

EXPLORE VIBRANT, INVITING ALLEYS

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Work with property owners to assess whether alleys should be pedestrian walkways and/or commercially supportive spaces. 	CID Board (Lead), City Public Services Department	CIP, Program
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide alley improvement program with funding for special lighting, art, landscape, furnishings, and special pavements. 	CID Board (Lead)	CIP, Program

MAP REFERENCE: **B3**

ENCOURAGE EQUITABLE BUSINESS & INVESTMENT ALONG DISTRICT CORRIDORS

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a development review process as part of the CID board to act as point of contact and information sharing for potential development projects or land use changes, and to provide input and feedback on how such projects align with the vision and goals of the Southtown BASP. 	CID Board (Lead), City of Grand Rapids Economic Development, City Planning	Program, Policy
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a process for utilizing community benefit agreements to ensure that development occurs in an equitable manner beneficial to the business districts. 	CID Board (Lead), City of Grand Rapids Economic Development, City Planning	Policy
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize displacement policies developed by the City of Grand Rapids to push for equitable development and investment outcomes. 	CID Board (Lead), City of Grand Rapids Economic Development, City Planning	Policy

MAP REFERENCE: E1

INCREASE ACCESS TO SMALL BUSINESS FINANCING

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster relationships with Community Development Financial Institute (CDFI) and other Economic Development Organizations that can provide resources to the business community. Host targeted small business workshops in the community. 	CID Board (Lead), City of Grand Rapids Economic Development, CDFI's, Other Economic Development Organizations	Program

MAP REFERENCE: E2

ENCOURAGE LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND WEALTH BUILDING

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop Southtown business attraction strategies, prioritizing local businesses 	CID Board (Lead), Business District Associations, City of Grand Rapids Economic Development, Chambers of Commerce (resource), and other local organizations	Program

MAP REFERENCE: E3

GOAL 1 ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

ESTABLISH PARTNERS FOR ECONOMIC PROGRAMS

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage collaboration of neighborhood associations with business district associations. 	CID Board (Lead), City Planning, Neighborhood Associations, Grand Rapids Community Development	Program
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support neighborhoods that do not have an association. 	City Executive Office, Neighborhood Associations, Grand Rapids Community Development	Program

MAP REFERENCE: **N1**

PROMOTE RETAILER RETENTION, RECRUITMENT AND OUTREACH

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with city and regional partners to identify potential retailers and brokers. 	CID Board (Lead), Economic Development, Chambers of Commerce	Program
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host a retailer/small businesses matchmaking event. 	CID Board (Lead), MEDC, City Economic Department	Program

MAP REFERENCE: **B4**

STRENGTHEN BUSINESS DISTRICT ASSOCIATIONS AND CAPACITY

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and strengthen business district associations. CID Board can help facilitate capacity building workshops between existing and prospective business district associations. Hold regular meetings to discuss plan implementation, business district needs/challenges, operational needs, maintenance, and collaboration with other partners. 	CID Board (Lead), Business District Associations, CID Board	Program

MAP REFERENCE: **E4**

ENCOURAGE LOCAL HIRING PRACTICES

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CID Board to encourage local hiring in connection with the equitable economic development strategic plan 	City of Grand Rapids Economic Development	Regulatory/ Policy Program

MAP REFERENCE: **E5**

FACILITATE MENTORING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect businesses to counseling and mentoring services such as Grand Rapids SCORE, Small Business Administration and other service providers. 	Chambers of Commerce, Grand Rapids SCORE, Small Business Administration	Program
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify business owners/leaders that can serve as community mentors/advisors for other businesses. 	Chambers of Commerce, Grand Rapids SCORE, Small Business Administration	Program

MAP REFERENCE: E66

PROMOTE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage collaboration of neighborhood associations with business district associations. 	City Planning, Neighborhood Associations, Grand Rapids Community Development, Grassroot Organizations	Program
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support neighborhoods that do not have an association. 	City Executive Office, Neighborhood Associations, Grand Rapids Community Development, Grassroot Organizations	Program

MAP REFERENCE: N2

SUPPORT MIXED-USE HOUSING

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the location and configuration of any housing is consistent with the overall district plan (i.e. no ground floor housing in TBA zones and a preference for no ground floor housing in TBA Transition zones). Upper floor housing is acceptable. 	GR City, Planning Department, Housing Commissions, Neighborhood Associations, CID Board, Local Non-Profit Housing Organizations, Developers, City Economic Development	Program
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with affordable housing providers to better align rent prices with community AMI (Area Median Income). Have affordable housing providers give priority access to current residents in order to minimize displacement. 		

MAP REFERENCE: N3

GOAL 2 ACTIONS

BE A HIGHLY VALUED BUSINESS COMMUNITY THAT CELEBRATES AND PROMOTES CULTURAL AND NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS

IMPLEMENT A BRANDING AND MARKETING PROGRAM

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Create and implement branding, messaging and graphic standards to establish a district-wide identity and individual business district identity through the use of banners, gateway identification signs, wayfinding. 	CID Board (Lead), City Environmental Services Department's Lighting Division	CIP

MAP REFERENCE: **B5**

PROGRAM SPECIAL EVENTS

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Create a calendar and promote and host regular series community events (e.g. Rock the Block) that bring people into business districts and connect residents to local commerce. Emphasized new events in business districts that currently have few or no special events. 	CID Board (Lead), Business associations, local organizations	Program

MAP REFERENCE: **B6**

EXPAND ACCESS TO HEALTHY AND CULTURAL FOOD

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Work with current businesses to improve access to and marketing of healthy and cultural food options. ■ Work with local businesses and brokers to locate healthier food options and businesses in Southtown. ■ Collaborate with established farmers' market organizations and community gardens to provide more frequent and accessible opportunities for fresh, healthy food. ■ Identify cultural food establishments and potential new opportunities across the district. Promote and market cultural food assets. 	Local Organizations, Non-Profits, Neighborhood Associations, CID Board, Business District Associations, Kent County Health Department	Program

MAP REFERENCE: **N4**

GOAL 3 ACTIONS

BE A MORE VIBRANT PLACE TO WORK, SHOP, PLAY, LEARN, LIVE & DO BUSINESS

IMPLEMENT A FACADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify best practices and develop design guidelines ■ Identify code violations that could be addressed by a facade improvement program. ■ Establish a design review board (if separate) and determine eligibility requirements and selection criteria. ■ Allocate/secure funding and determine total amount and match requirements. ■ Establish process for property owners to apply for program. 	CID Board (Lead), City Economic Development	Regulatory/Policy

MAP REFERENCE: **B7**

INSTALL SITE FURNISHINGS

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Install waste receptacles in priority retail areas. ■ Implement a program to ensure that waste collection occurs on a regular basis. ■ Creative seating 	CID Board (Lead)	CIP

MAP REFERENCE: **M1**

ASSESS GREEN SPACE NEEDS

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Assess open space needs or opportunities within each business district and determine opportunities. 	CID Board (Lead along corridor)	Program
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Coordinate with the Grand Rapids Parks & Recreation Strategic Masterplan to assess broader open space opportunities in the neighborhoods. 	Neighborhood Associations, GR Parks, and other local non-profit organizations	Program

MAP REFERENCE: **N5**

GOAL 3 ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

COORDINATE WITH IMPROVEMENTS TO BIKE FACILITIES

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate with bicycle facility improvements per the Grand Rapids Vital Streets Plan and in conjunction with planned street construction projects. 	Mobile GR and Parking Services (Leads)	CIP
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Install bicycle racks and bicycle parking areas. Work with business district associations to determine the best locations for bike parking within each business district. 	CID Board (Lead), Mobile GR and Parking Services (Leads)	CIP

MAP REFERENCE: **M2**

INSTALL STREET TREES AND LANDSCAPING

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess condition of existing trees and landscape beds. Determine maintenance or replacement needs. Work with business district associations and property owners on collaborative maintenance. 	City Design Team, City Public Services, City Forestry, CID Board, Business District Associations	CIP

MAP REFERENCE: **M3**

ENHANCE PUBLIC GATHERING SPACES

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each business district to identify locations for pop-up events (i.e. parking lots configured for events, gathering spaces). Host a kick-off event to establish spaces for community gathering. 	Business District Associations (Leads), CID Board, Neighborhood Associations, GR Parks and Rec	CIP

MAP REFERENCE: **B8**

DESIGNATE SERVICE AND DELIVERY ZONES

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Business districts to collaborate on best practices for deliveries and loading. ■ Assess potential conflicts between service and delivery and patron entrances in each of the business districts. Determine best locations for loading delivery and opportunities for sharing loading and delivery space. ■ Engage delivery and service workers to determine best times for handling deliveries and service. Work to optimize delivery schedules across the entire business district to reduce conflicts and congestion. 	Business District Associations, Mobile GR	Regulatory/ Policy

MAP REFERENCE: **B9**

IMPROVE TRANSIT FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Install covered shelters and intelligent transportation system notifications. 	The Rapids, Mobile GR and Parking Services (Leads)	CIP
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Partner with The Rapid to ensure best locations for bus stops. 	The Rapid, CID Board, City Design Team (Leads)	Regulatory/ Policy

MAP REFERENCE: **M4**

GOAL 4 ACTIONS

BE A SAFER ENVIRONMENT FOR EVERYONE

ESTABLISH A BUSINESS WATCH SAFETY PROGRAM

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop safety ambassador program 	CID Board (Lead), Business District Associations, Grand Rapids Police Department	Regulatory/ Policy, Programs

MAP REFERENCE: **B10**

IMPROVE STREET LIGHTING

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate with the Environmental Services Department to establish district-standard pedestrian-scale street lighting. Install in priority retail nodes and approach. 	CID Board (co-lead) with City Engineering (co-Lead), Environmental Services Department's lighting Division	CIP

MAP REFERENCE: **M5**

EVALUATE ON AND OFF-STREET PARKING FACILITIES FOR EACH BUSINESS DISTRICT

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish shared parking lot agreements. Review parking system within each business district and clarify where parking is allowed/disallowed Promote on-street spaces as higher turnover spaces with signage indicating parking time limits and encourage remote employee parking 	Mobile GR and Parking Services, CID Board, Business District Associations	CIP

MAP REFERENCE: **B11**

ENFORCE CODES AND COMMUNITY STANDARDS

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a process for providing code compliance review. 	City Code Compliance	Regulatory/ Policy

MAP REFERENCE: **B12**

STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY AND POLICE RELATIONSHIPS

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Build stronger community engagement relationships and review and discuss policing practices in the Southtown business districts. ■ Improve dialogue between community groups and police to address divides. ■ Work together with the City of Grand Rapids Police Policy and Procedure Review Task Force to incorporate safe policing efforts in Southtown. 	Neighborhood Associations, Local Organizations, City of Grand Rapids Police Department	Regulatory/ Policy Program

MAP REFERENCE: **N6**

INSTALL SAFE PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ CID and business district associations to pro-actively engage and meet with Mobile GR and Parking Services staff to discuss intersection and safety improvements ■ Install new pedestrian mid-block or pedestrian controlled intersection crossings throughout the corridor (between priority retail areas) to provide more frequent safe crossing points. 	Mobile GR and Parking services in consultation with CID and Business District Associations	CIP

MAP REFERENCE: **M6**

IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY AND COMFORT

	ACTION	PARTICIPANTS	TYPE
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure that sidewalk widths are consistent with city standards as part of new/redevelopment and streetscape improvements. ■ Provide adequate buffering pedestrian spaces and vehicle travel for comfort and safety (i.e. trees, landscape beds, furnishings, planters). 	Mobile GR and Parking services in consultation with CID and Business District Associations	CIP, Regulatory/ Policy

MAP REFERENCE: **M7**