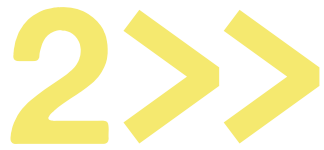


GOAL 2

**CREATE A TRUE
DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD
THAT IS HOME TO A DIVERSE
POPULATION**



CREATE A TRUE DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD THAT IS HOME TO A DIVERSE POPULATION

Downtown was once home to four department stores and a mix of housing, retail and services. Throughout the GR Forward process, Grand Rapidians have indicated the desire to have “more” Downtown -more retail, more services and more activity. These amenities require more people living within the City’s core. Housing is a driver to build more value Downtown and more demand for the services that people want. While welcoming new neighbors, we must continue improving services for existing residents and ensure that Downtown living remains accessible and affordable to a range of incomes.

118

2.1 LEVERAGE DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES TO HIT “CRITICAL MASS”

- 121 Change existing zoning and height regulations
- 121 Revisit development incentives
- 127 Remap the Existing City Center Zone
- 127 Change the Approach to Downtown Parking Requirements
- 128 Encourage infill development to close gaps within and between neighborhoods
- 134 Anchor the river with new development on select sites
- 150 Connect Heartside, Heritage Hill, and the Downtown core
- 153 Preserve historic character while accommodating growth

156

2.2 SUPPORT INITIATIVES THAT IMPROVE DOWNTOWN LIVING FOR EXISTING RESIDENTS & ATTRACT NEW DOWNTOWN RESIDENTS

- 156 Foster civic engagement and strengthen community ties Downtown
- 158 Unlock the potential of municipal data and online tools
- 159 Expand youth programming
- 160 Increase access to fresh produce Downtown
- 161 Explore financial incentives to attract new Downtown residents
- 161 Expand marketing efforts to promote Downtown living
- 161 Promote zero waste infrastructure and services throughout Downtown

162

2.3 PRESERVE AND EXPAND HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES

- 162 Ensure that Downtown maintains its share of affordable housing for a range of incomes
- 164 Diversify types of housing available Downtown
- 164 Encourage more students to live Downtown
- 164 Explore ways of expanding homeownership Downtown

UNITS TODAY			
MARKET RATE	INCOME-RESTRICTED	TOTAL	% INCOME RESTRICTED
2,213	1,179	3,392	38%
CURRENTLY PROPOSED			
MARKET RATE	INCOME-RESTRICTED	TOTAL	% INCOME RESTRICTED
1,071	180	1,251	14%
SUBTOTAL			
MARKET RATE	INCOME-RESTRICTED	TOTAL	% INCOME RESTRICTED

166

2.4 CONCENTRATE RETAIL AND CLOSE THE RETAIL SERVICES GAP [GROCERY STORE, PHARMACY, MORE DIVERSE STORES, ETC.]

- 166 Revisit zoning regulations for ground floor commercial in the Downtown area
- 171 Employ a targeted marketing strategy to attract anchor retail



172

2.5 REQUIRE CLEAN AND EFFICIENT ENERGY, GREEN BUILDING PRACTICES, AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES IN PROJECTS WITH LOCAL SUBSIDY

- 172 Manage stormwater at the micro level
- 172 Promote green building
- 173 Embrace sustainable site design principles



WHY THIS MATTERS

Downtown Grand Rapids is benefitting from a combination of national trends and local amenities that are driving new housing investment. The broader story relates to the national trend of a return to urban, and more specifically, downtown living. As summarized by Laurie Volk¹.

“The largest segment of the annual potential market is younger singles and couples. This generation—the Millennials—is the first to have been largely raised in the suburbs where cul-de-sacs substituted for neighborhoods, malls took the place of downtowns, and driver’s licenses became a necessity of life. In far greater numbers than predecessor generations, Millennials are moving to downtown and walkable neighborhoods. Younger households typically choose to live in neighborhoods that contain a diverse mix of people, housing types, and uses. For the most part, younger households tend to be ‘risk-tolerant,’ and will move into areas or neighborhoods that would not be considered acceptable for most families or older couples.”

¹ Laurie Volk is principal in charge of Zimmerman/Volk Associates’ market studies and is the firm’s primary analyst of demographic, market, and lifestyle trends. Since 1988, Zimmerman/Volk has completed more than 450 housing market studies.

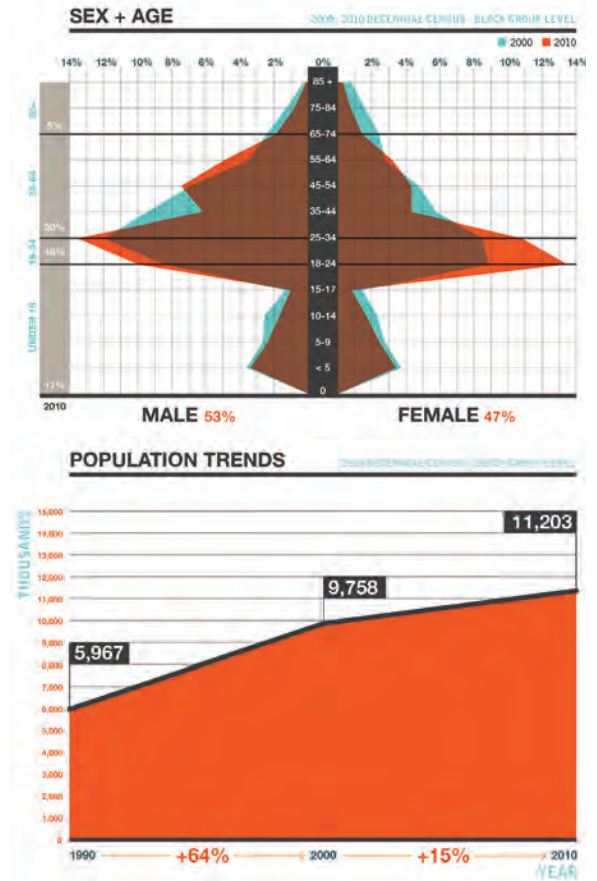
This trend is clearly on display in Downtown Grand Rapids. 18-34 year olds [Millennials] represented 48% of Downtown’s population in 2010. Currently, 73% of the Downtown market potential for housing is held by younger singles and couples. As noted in Zimmerman / Volk Associates’s [ZVA] Downtown housing market study in both 2008 and 2015, the diversity, and social and cultural amenities of the City are the primary attractions of urban living in Grand Rapids.

Since 2010, this trend in Downtown housing has only increased, which results in a greater annual market potential. DGRI notes that since 2000, approximately 2,350 units have been built Downtown, contributing to a 200% increase over the past 15 years. This helps to support the almost 250 merchants located Downtown and has helped to bring new destination restaurants and activities to the area. According to ZVA, at the time of this study, the rental units Downtown [not including income-restricted units] had a 98% occupancy rate and almost all of the condominiums in Downtown are fully sold.

Given the momentum Downtown is experiencing with respect to housing, ZVA now estimates that Downtown could support 2,000² new market-rate units over the next 5 years. These units comprise a mix of new apartments, condominiums, and for-sale attached townhomes. ZVA’s study reflects much of what

² ZVA’s market study is based upon both the market trends but also the pace of development. More than 2,000 units may be supported should the pace of development accelerate. The pace of development is often related to site control and the availability of land.

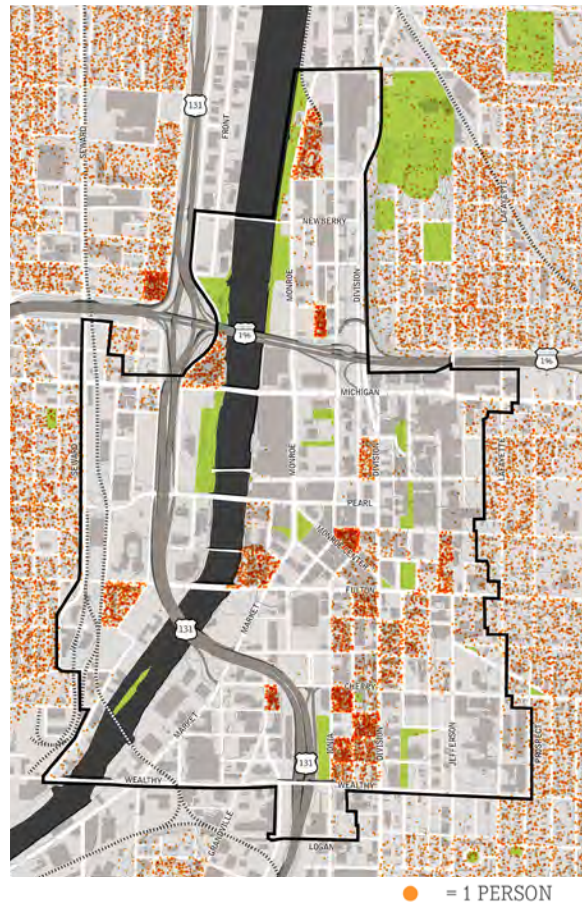
FIG 2.1: Downtown demographic Trends



the public expressed during GR Forward—that it can be difficult to find appropriate housing Downtown and that new housing types are needed to support varying household styles and preferences, most notably smaller micro units and attached townhomes, and at varying price-points.

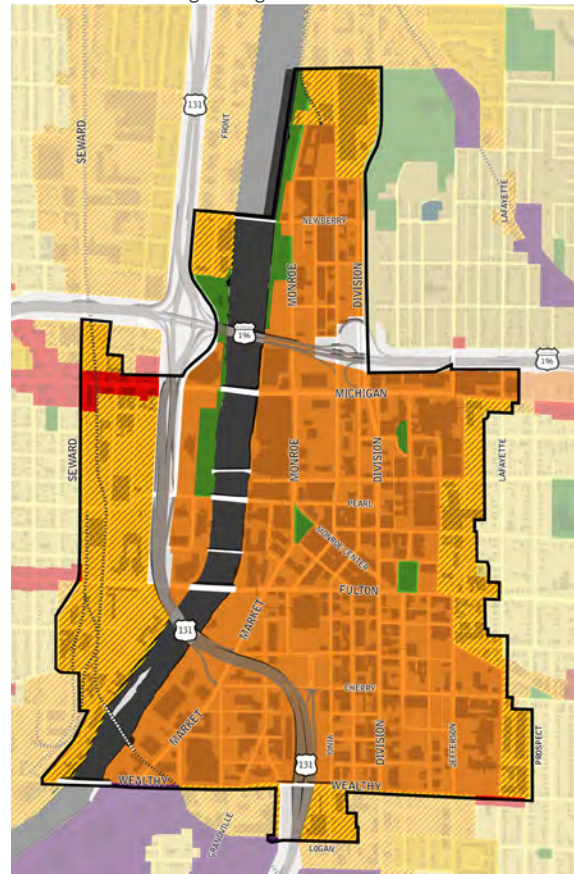
The opportunity is to guide the development of these new units in ways that help to re-establish a true Downtown neighborhood. Currently,

FIG 2.2: Downtown Population - 2010 Census Block Level



much of the new housing is isolated in areas that remain unconnected and discontinuous, as illustrated in a map of residents from the 2010 Census. Only portions of Monroe North and the area around Cherry and Division contain multiple housing developments within close proximity to one another. Downtown Grand Rapids must focus on the street life and connections between housing nodes, begin to brand Downtown as a series of unique neighborhoods, and support infill development and adaptive reuse to hit

FIG 2.3: Existing Zoning



To help achieve critical mass and create a true Downtown neighborhood, new development will need to fill the gaps separating existing housing [figure 2.2] and existing zoning [figure 2.3] will need to be updated to help achieve the kind of Downtown Grand Rapidsians are seeking.

- TRANSITIONAL CITY CENTER
- CITY CENTER
- TRADITIONAL BUSINESS AREA
- OPEN SPACE

the “critical mass” needed to support the kinds of commercial services that in turn support Downtown residents, workers, and visitors.

As pressure continues to grow for new housing, the reality is that the majority of the new development will be on property that is currently used for another purpose. Only 5% of Downtown is vacant—a very low number. However, there are underutilized sites that are opportunities for significant development, including 201 Market

Avenue—the location of City maintenance facilities along the River—and a number of DDA-owned surface parking lots. Redevelopment on these sites will change both the look and feel of Downtown. Better connections can be made to the Grand River and parking lots can transition to new garages “wrapped” with active uses. Grand Rapids has an opportunity to fill the gaps that currently separate uses and activities within Downtown.

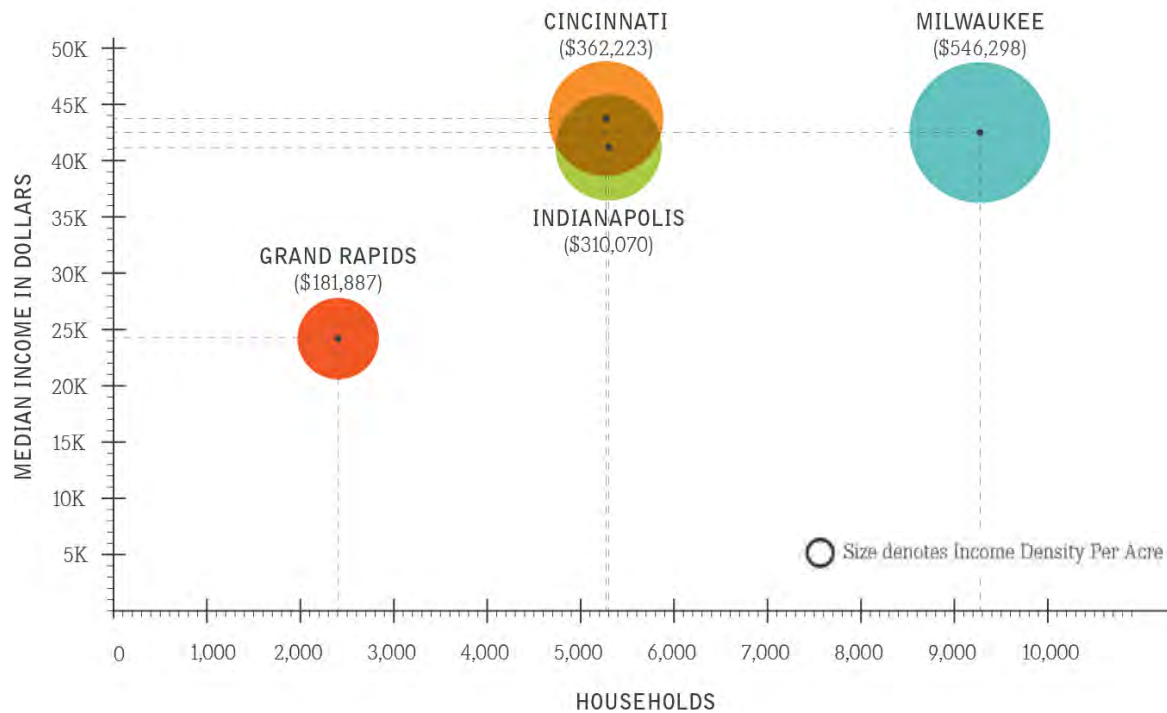
How Downtown Grand Rapids grows is extremely important to ensure that it remains home to a diversity of people. A constant refrain during the GR Forward process was to create a Downtown that is welcoming and inclusive. Indeed, if those seeking to live in Downtown are doing so, in part, because of the diversity, this is an asset worth preserving. At the same time, Downtown needs more income density to support additional retail services. Grand Rapids lags comparison cities in the numbers of people living Downtown and in the median incomes of Downtown residents. These comparison cities were chosen because of their benchmark status in the evolution of their downtowns as residential communities offering the range

of amenities described during the public engagement process. These cities are frequently cited in national publications and ratings as highly livable or up and coming downtowns. Moreover, these cities are also competing for the same talent pool as the evolving Grand Rapids economy. Because talent has options on where to live it was decided that Midwestern benchmark cities with residential downtowns that are also competing for similar talent pools was the proper comparison.

The objective of this benchmarking exercise is to create a point in time baseline comparison with more fully evolved communities. This data demonstrates the relationship between critical

mass of people and income [income density] with the ability to support a certain level of amenities. This is an important factor to consider because the proper scale is not the total size of the city [either geographically or population] but the density and income of people living in a given market area.

Less people and less income means less income density to support stores, restaurants and service. Downtown, therefore, needs both market-rate apartments and condominiums for young professionals and empty nesters but also housing that is accessible to those with lower incomes. To do this, zoning, policy and incentives for development should be designed to achieve the Downtown we want - one that includes a mix of housing types and a mix of incomes.



“ With all of this new development, how can we keep cost down so that all can enjoy the Downtown area? ”
 - Open house participant

Income density, the aggregated income of households within a defined area, is a critical measure for Downtown. Grand Rapids lags comparison cities in terms of both the number of households but also median income. These factors hold back Downtown’s potential as home to more retail and services.

FIG 2.4: Income Density Per Acre

FIG 2.5: Aerial view of Downtown today

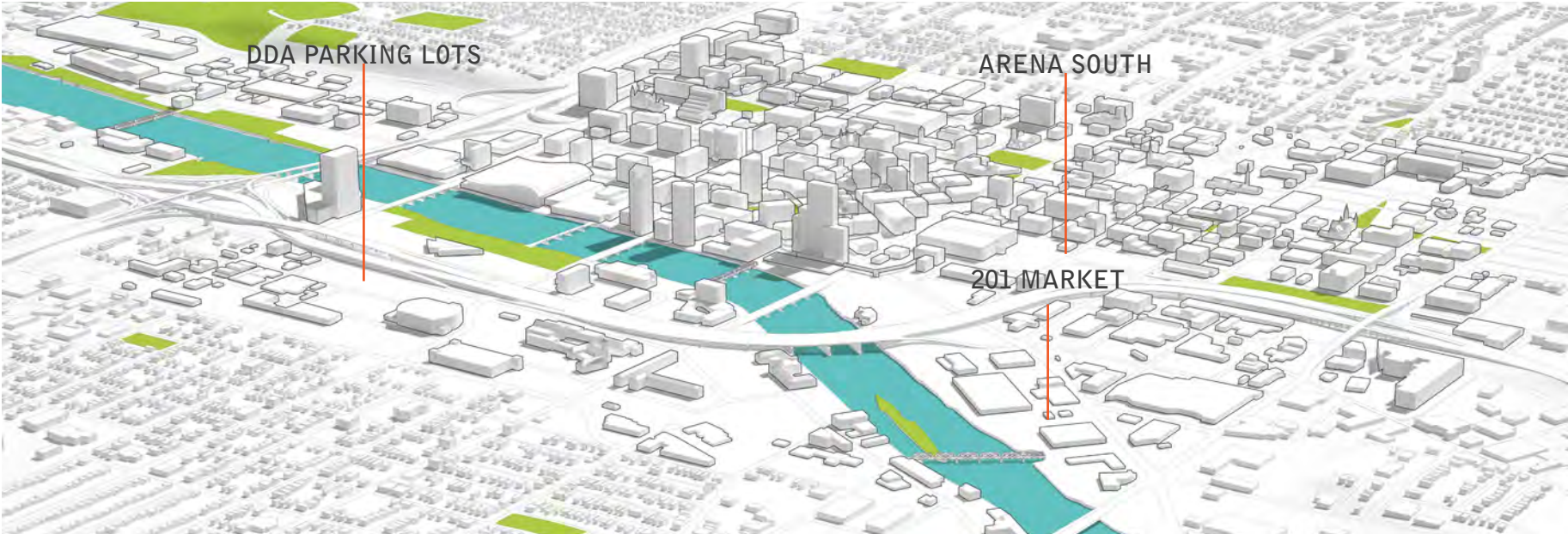


FIG 2.6: Currently proposed development [red] and rehabilitation [light orange] Downtown [2015]



2.1 LEVERAGE DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES TO HIT “CRITICAL MASS”

Creating Downtown neighborhoods is about establishing a place that is welcoming and engaging for people of all backgrounds whether they choose to live Downtown, work Downtown or visit Downtown. It should be a unique place that integrates housing, retail, employment, the environment, transportation choices and vibrant public spaces that bring people together.

One measure of a successful downtown is when the combination of these elements are driving activity throughout the week and not just during a week day. A tell-tale sign of this kind of success is when multiple coffee shops, stores and services are open and active on a Saturday morning. To achieve this goal, Downtown Grand Rapids needs to reach critical mass. 10,000 households, or roughly 12,000 residents, is the point at which other cities see these kinds of activities and services emerge and sustain themselves downtown. For this reason, encouraging growth and new housing

“Encourage more businesses and residential opportunities to expand Downtown to create a positive impact on establishing a sense of place. The City seems so small and feels limited to an outsider in town for the weekend.”

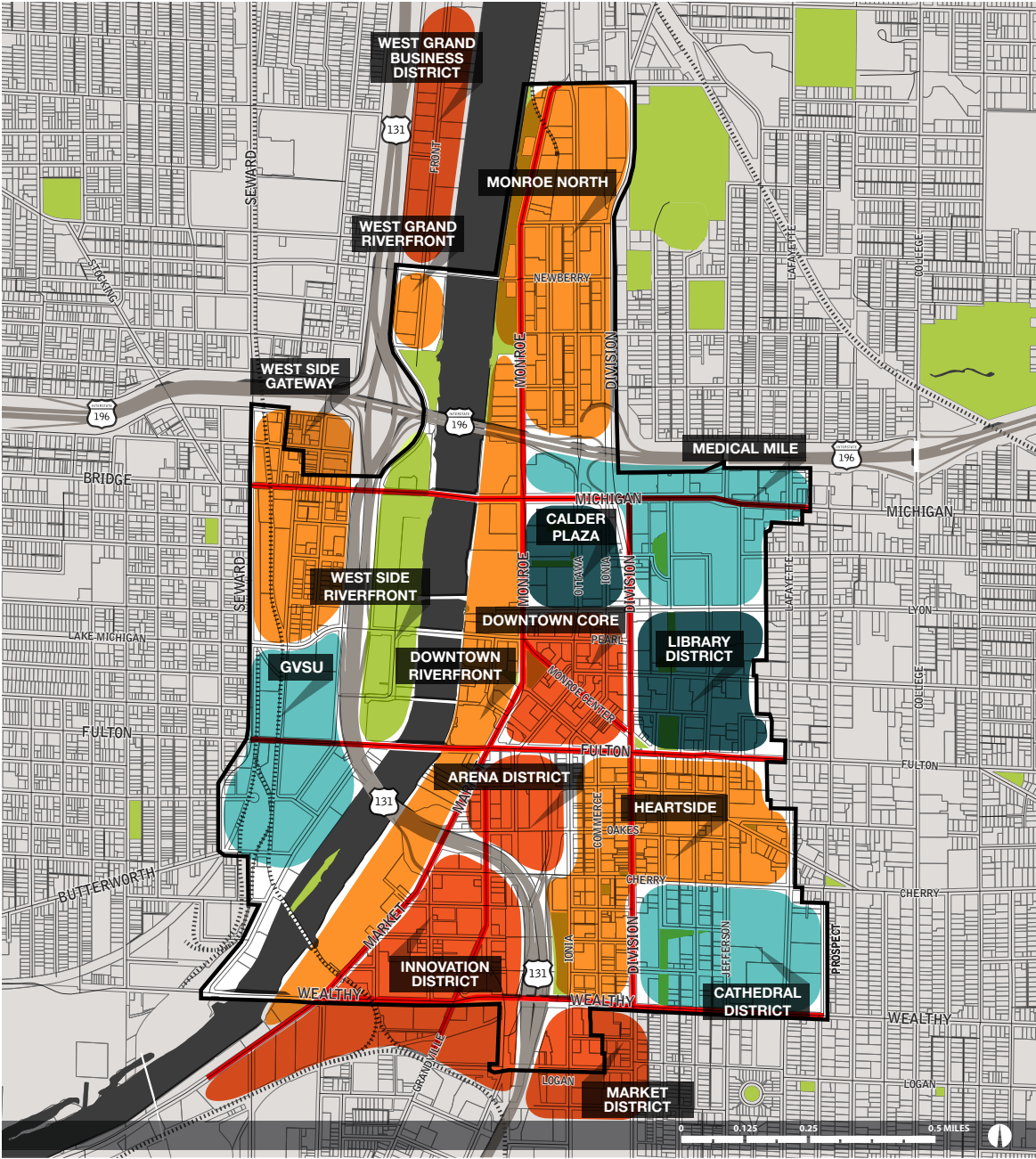
- Online collaborative map participant

is essential to attracting the retail and services that participants in the GR Forward have been asking for. Downtown pharmacies, a grocery, more restaurants, and more stores are all dependent on increasing the number of residents Downtown. There are significant numbers of employees Downtown [approximately 35,000] but many commute in and out of the City or have limited lunch breaks that prevent them from fully patronizing Downtown retail. While DGRI can work with employers to change some of these trends, residential growth is the most sustainable way to support local business.



Encouraging growth Downtown, however, is not a one size fits all proposition. Downtown is comprised of many smaller districts, each of which has their own unique characteristics and opportunities for growth. To help guide zoning changes and the design of specific sites, a “district character” map of Downtown was developed. This helped inform the approach to envision what type of development or other investments would be desirable to harmonize with district character and land use, explore opportunities for greater density and, shape the overall development framework for Downtown as a part of the GR Forward process.

FIG 2.7: Downtown District Character

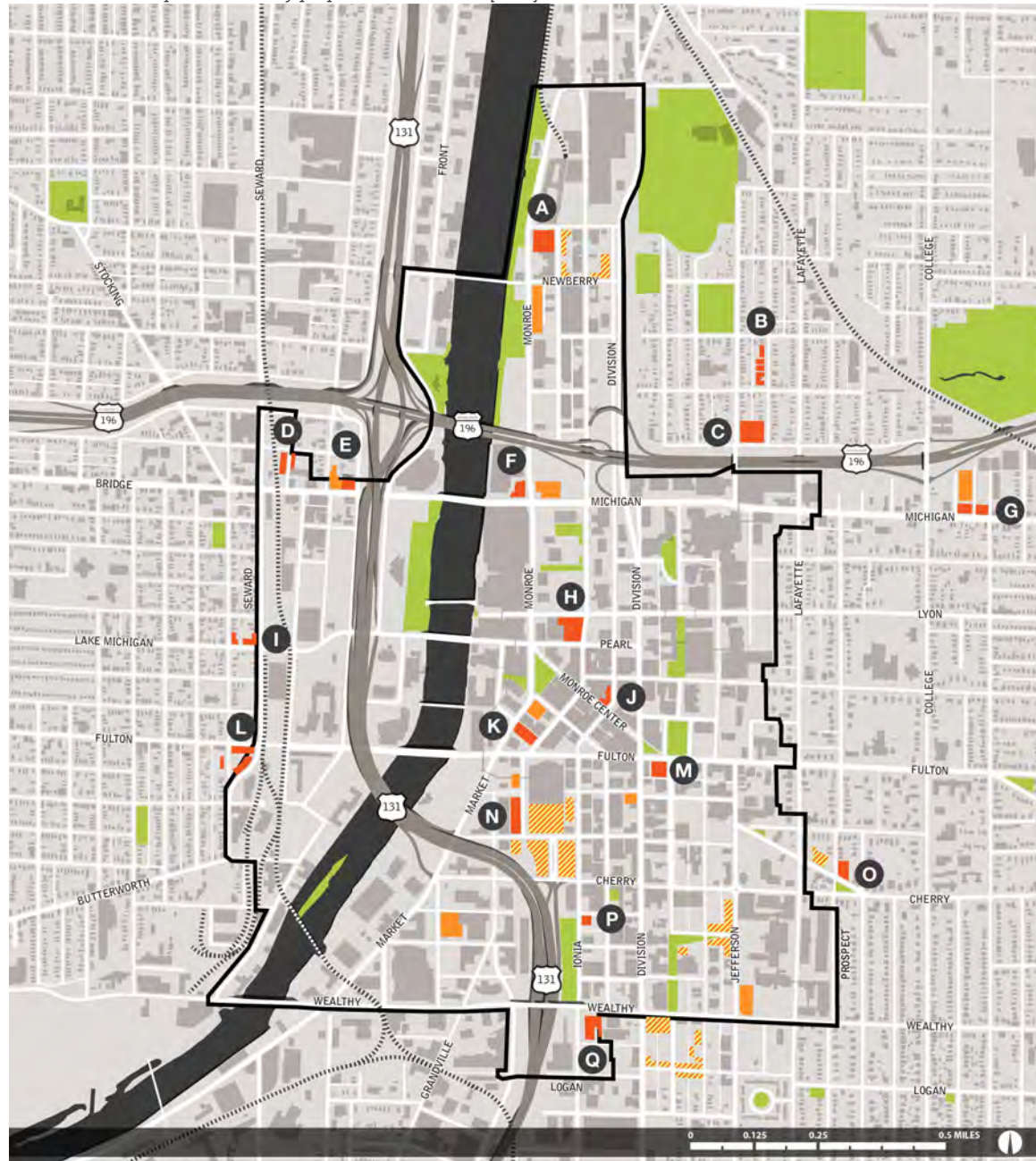


DISTRICT CHARACTER

- WEST GRAND BUSINESS DISTRICT** Accessible employment hub
Affordable office/startup space; Light industrial/artisanal manufacturing/maker spaces; potential infill construction of commercial buildings
- WEST GRAND RIVERFRONT** Downtown living with a Grand view
Mixed use multifamily high rise; Riverfront open space amenities
- MONROE NORTH** Mixed-use neighborhood on the river
Adaptive reuse of formerly industrial buildings for multifamily with some retail/restaurants, primarily along Monroe North; Affordable office/startup space; Primarily residential midrise new construction; Riverfront open space amenities
- MEDICAL MILE** The economic engine of Grand Rapids
Primarily medical & medical research facilities
- LIBRARY DISTRICT** Civic and Cultural Commons
Primarily civic and institutional
- CALDER PLAZA** A friendlier civic center
Retrofits to integrate large government and office buildings with the public realm
- DOWNTOWN CORE** The center of gravity
Ground floor destination retail, restaurants and entertainment businesses; High rise commercial office buildings; Corporate headquarters target area
- WEST SIDE RIVERFRONT** The West Side's front yard
Riverfront open space and cultural amenities
- DOWNTOWN RIVERFRONT** Development meets the draw
Riverfront open space amenities; Mixed use multifamily high rise; Ground floor destination retail, restaurants and entertainment businesses
- ARENA DISTRICT** Filling in the gap
Mid-rise mixed use district; Ground floor destination retail, restaurants and entertainment
- HEARTSIDE** Downtown Grand Rapids' southern anchor
Adaptive reuse of industrial buildings for multifamily; Some retail/restaurants; Mixed use midrise infill new construction; Opportunities for small businesses on Division
- CATHEDRAL DISTRICT** Growing health and medical hub
Potential for new development of additional institutional uses and mixed use mid-rises
- MARKET DISTRICT** Anchoring the southern reach of Downtown
Opportunity to leverage the Downtown Market as an anchor for continued adaptive reuse and new construction of mixed use development
- INNOVATION DISTRICT** Business and creative production incubator
Adaptive reuse for more affordable office/startup space; Light industrial/artisanal manufacturing/maker spaces; New construction/adaptive reuse mixed use TOD near Amtrak
- WEST SIDE GATEWAY** Stepping down to neighborhood scale
Mixed use along Bridge with required ground floor commercial; New construction of multifamily mid-rises east of the tracks; 3-5 story residential west of the tracks; Commercial uses along Lake Michigan from Seward to 131.
- GVSU** A connected downtown campus
Potential for commercial along Pearl St from Seward to 131; Infill institutional/commercial uses; Riverfront open space amenities

— MAJOR STREETS

FIG 2.8: Development currently proposed in Downtown [2015]



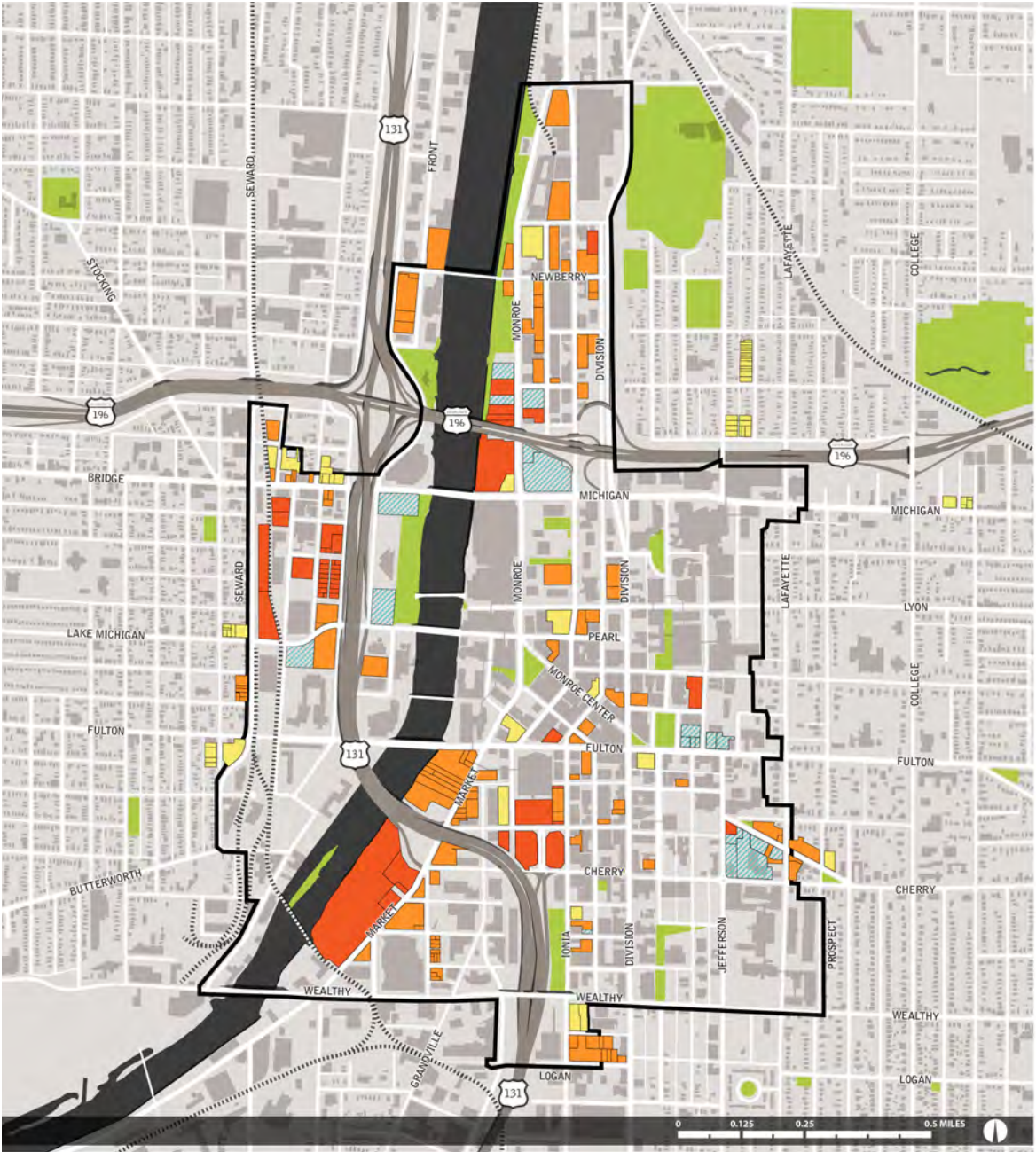
- A.** 820 MONROE - 85 Rental Units - Ground Floor Commercial
- B.** LOFTS ON CLANCY - 66 Units
- C.** GATEWAY @ BELKNAP - 86 Units - Commercial/Retail Space
- D.** LOFTS ON ALABAMA - 85 Units
- E.** NEW HOLLAND BREWERY - 35 Units - Commercial / Office Space
- F.** THE ROWE - 85 Units - Ground Floor Commercial
- G.** 555 / 601 MICHIGAN - 42 Units - Ground Floor Commercial
- H.** WATER BUILDING - 42 Units - Office + Hotel Space
- I.** CHERRY STREET CAPITAL - 63 Units - Ground Floor Commercial
- J.** MORTON HOUSE - 100 Units - Ground Floor Commercial
- K.** B.O.B EXPANSION - 90 Units - Music Venue - Beer Garden
- L.** ROCKFORD DEVELOPMENT - 98 Units - Ground Floor Commercial
- M.** 20 E. FULTON - 108 Units - Ground Floor Commercial
- N.** ARENA PLACE - 101 Units - Office Space - Ground Floor Commercial
- O.** 345 STATE STREET - 34 Units
- P.** 240 IONIA - 48 Units - Ground Floor Commercial
- Q.** KLINGMAN'S LOFTS - 83 Units - Ground Floor Commercial

TOTAL PROPOSED HOUSING:

1,251 UNITS

- PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT
- PROPOSED NON-RES. DEVELOPMENT
- PLANNED DEVELOPMENT

FIG 2.9: Potential development sites



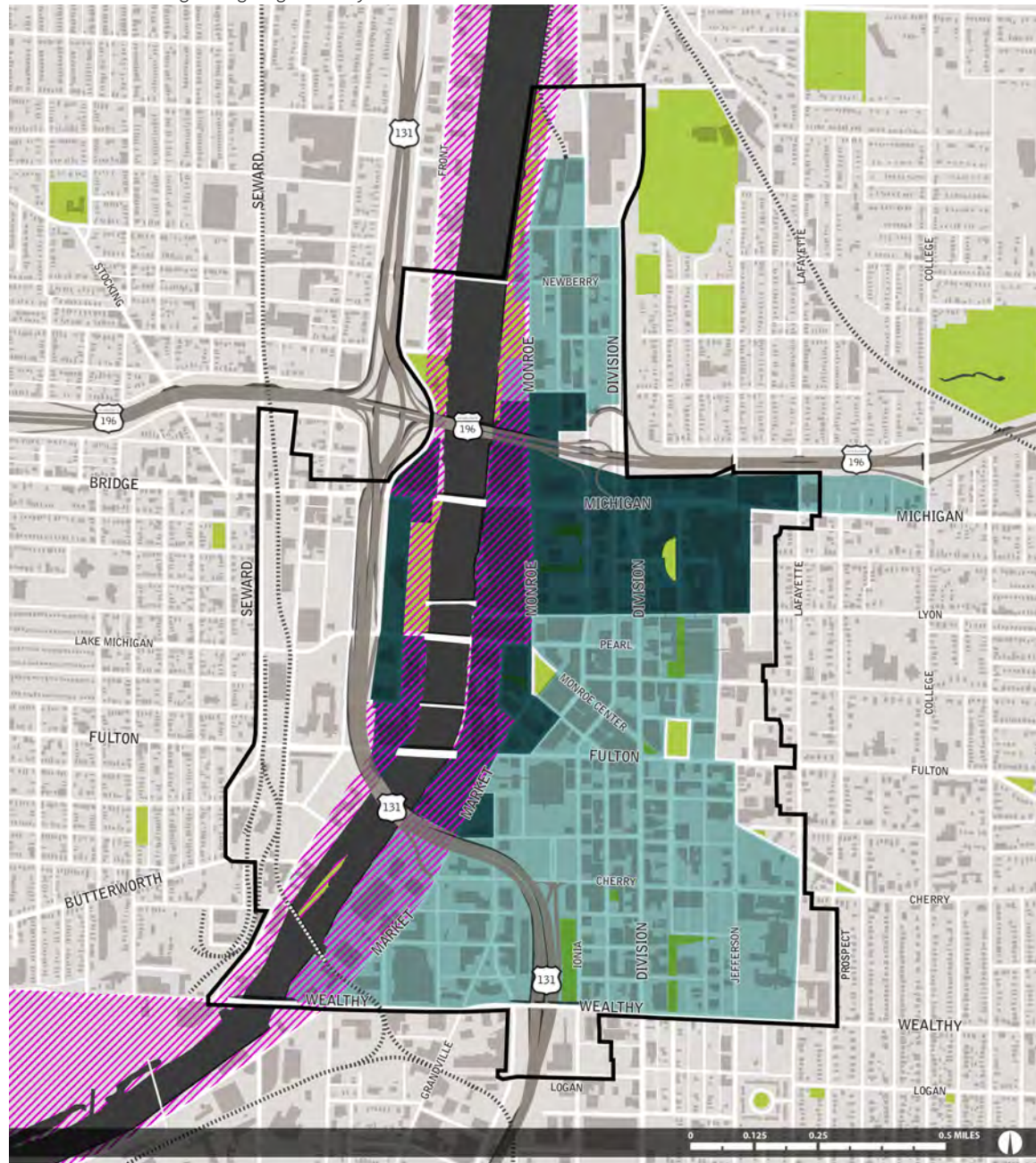
CHANGE EXISTING ZONING AND HEIGHT REGULATIONS

Achieving critical mass Downtown will take place through a balance of ramping up demand and expanding the capacity for development. With 1,250 housing units currently in various phases of development Downtown, not exclusive of the projected absorption of 1,860 to 2,300 new units over the next five to seven years, how and where do we plan to close a gap just shy of 4,500 households to reach critical mass? For one, achieving the vision and goals of GR Forward, such as creating amenities along the Grand River, recruiting a full service grocery store, reinvesting in public spaces, improving mobility across modes, and so on, will act to increase demand, setting projected absorption on a more rapid course as implementation progresses. Given the limited availability of development sites Downtown, allowing for increased height will improve the likelihood of achieving critical mass Downtown.

Currently, the Traditional Neighborhood Center City [TN-CC] zoning classification includes two overlay areas, highlighted in Fig 2.10. New developments in the Overlay B area are not subject to a height limit, whereas developments

- PUBLIC OWNERSHIP
- PRIVATE OWNERSHIP
- INSTITUTIONAL
- PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

FIG 2.10: Existing zoning height overlays



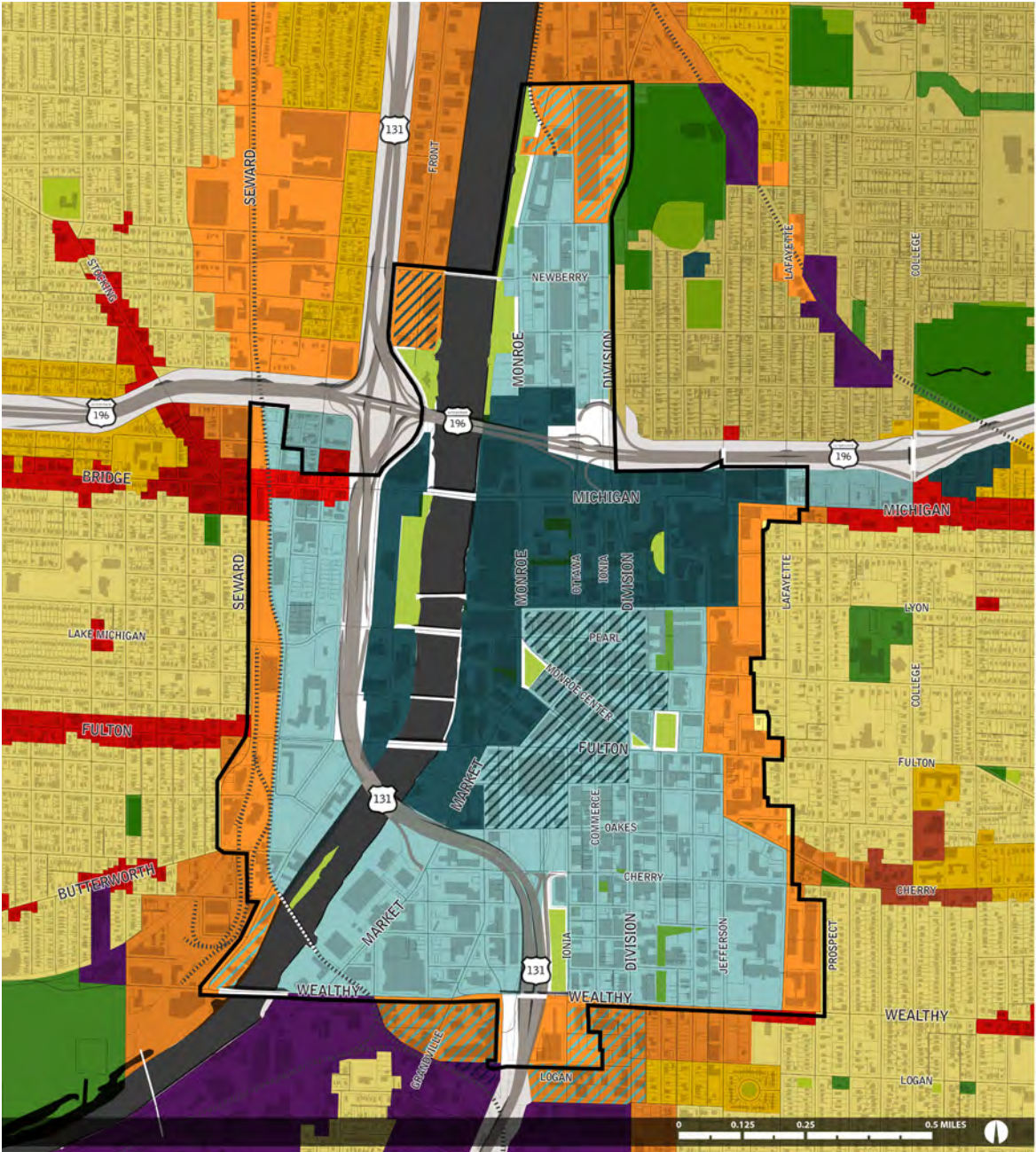
- HEIGHT OVERLAY (A): 85'
- HEIGHT OVERLAY (B): No Limit
- GRAND RIVER OVERLAY

in the Overlay A area are able to receive height bonuses, allowing them to max out at 14 stories.

>> Allow for greater densities Downtown while protecting nearby neighborhoods

To create a more gradual stepping down to the neighborhood scale of the Westside and Heritage Hill, while also accommodating greater densities around the edges of the Downtown core and along the riverfront, intermediary overlay classifications are proposed in addition to extensions of the Overlay A area where appropriate and revisions to the minimum and maximum building heights within the Downtown area, as illustrated in Fig 2.11. These are in addition to the existing Transitional City Center zones, which are in place to serve as the buffer district between the dense City Center Zone District and surrounding near-downtown neighborhoods. The TCC Zone District provides a transition in the intensity of the downtown development pattern for adjacent areas, and GR Forward seeks to preserve those zones, particularly where the Downtown Development Authority Boundary is adjacent to existing neighborhoods.

FIG 2.11: Proposed zoning height overlays



Changes to the height overlays include an expansion of Overlay [A] and two new intermediary overlays that will help to encourage density and better transition heights from Downtown to areas nearby. Bonus heights noted below are maximum heights allowed accordingly with the satisfaction of height bonus requirements described in the following pages. Since the recommendations include removal of the residential height bonus of 2-4 stories, the maximum height for Overlay [A] should be raised to 10 stories. The bonus height allowed would remain the same.

- DOWNTOWN HEIGHT OVERLAY (B)**
 MIN: 3 STORIES [PROPOSED: 5 STORIES]
 MAX: NONE

- PROPOSED INTERMEDIATE OVERLAY**
 MIN: 5 STORIES
 MAX: 12 STORIES
 BONUS: 25 STORIES

- DOWNTOWN HEIGHT OVERLAY (A)**
 MIN: 3 STORIES [PROPOSED: 4 STORIES]
 MAX: 85' [ROUGHLY 7 STORIES]
 [PROPOSED: 10 STORIES]
 BONUS: ADD LESSER OF 7 STORIES
 OR 90' [PROPOSED: ADD 4 STORIES]

- PROPOSED INTERMEDIATE OVERLAY**
 MIN: 3 STORIES
 MAX: 5 STORIES
 BONUS: 10 STORIES

- TRANSITIONAL CITY CENTER**
 MIN: 2 STORIES [PROPOSED: 3 STORIES]
 MAX: 3 STORIES [PROPOSED: 4 STORIES]
 BONUS: 5 STORIES

- TRADITIONAL BUSINESS AREA**
 MIN: 2 STORIES
 MAX: 3 STORIES [PROPOSED: 4 STORIES]
 BONUS: 4 STORIES [PROPOSED: 5 STORIES]

- EXISTING LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL ZONING**

In addition to creating new intermediary zoning classification, the map also represents a good urban design practice: allowing both sides of a street to have the same or similar height regulations. The existing zoning and overlay boundaries lay in the middle of the right of way, which can result in drastic shifts in building heights from one side of a street to the other. For instance, existing zoning on State Street could potentially result in two story buildings on the north side and 14 story buildings on the south side. This map proposes zoning boundaries that follow perimeter parcel boundaries.

>> Encourage investment on Bridge Street

In Downtown, there is only one area zoned as a Traditional Business Area [TBA], the area west of US 131 and south of I-196 along Bridge Street. As defined in the zoning ordinance, TBA zones are designed to reinforce a pedestrian- and transit-friendly environment in a compact area characterized by a mix of uses. Given Bridge Street's proximity to the Grand River and the urban core, as well as the additional investment taking place along the corridor and throughout the near Westside, the City should explore zoning changes in the Bridge Street / Stockbridge

Corridor area to allow for building heights of 4 stories adjacent to Bridge Street and Stockbridge Avenue, plus an additional, stepped-back fifth story. This proposal is consistent with the intent of the TBA zone, as well as the recently re-zoned New Holland Brewery project slated to open in 2016. Further, it will help preserve the existing character of the district, while also helping to achieve critical mass for Downtown. This proposed change would not be applicable to other TBA zones around the City.

>> Revisit development incentives

Looking at the City today, and anticipating the future of Downtown tomorrow, how do we want to encourage good development, a high quality public realm, and achieve critical mass? Certain changes have taken place in Downtown Grand Rapids since the height bonuses were established. It is now time to revisit the types of provisions that developments include in order to secure a height bonus. For example, the residential use height bonus, which currently allows one or two additional stories for the inclusion of residential use, is now obsolete given the more recently increased demand for residential development Downtown. Recognizing that the removal of this bonus reduces density in Downtown, the City should consider changing the maximum height allowed in Overlay [A] from 7 stories to potentially 10 stories. The total potential height with bonuses can remain the same. To further achieve the development goals put forth by GR Forward, other potential changes to development bonuses include:

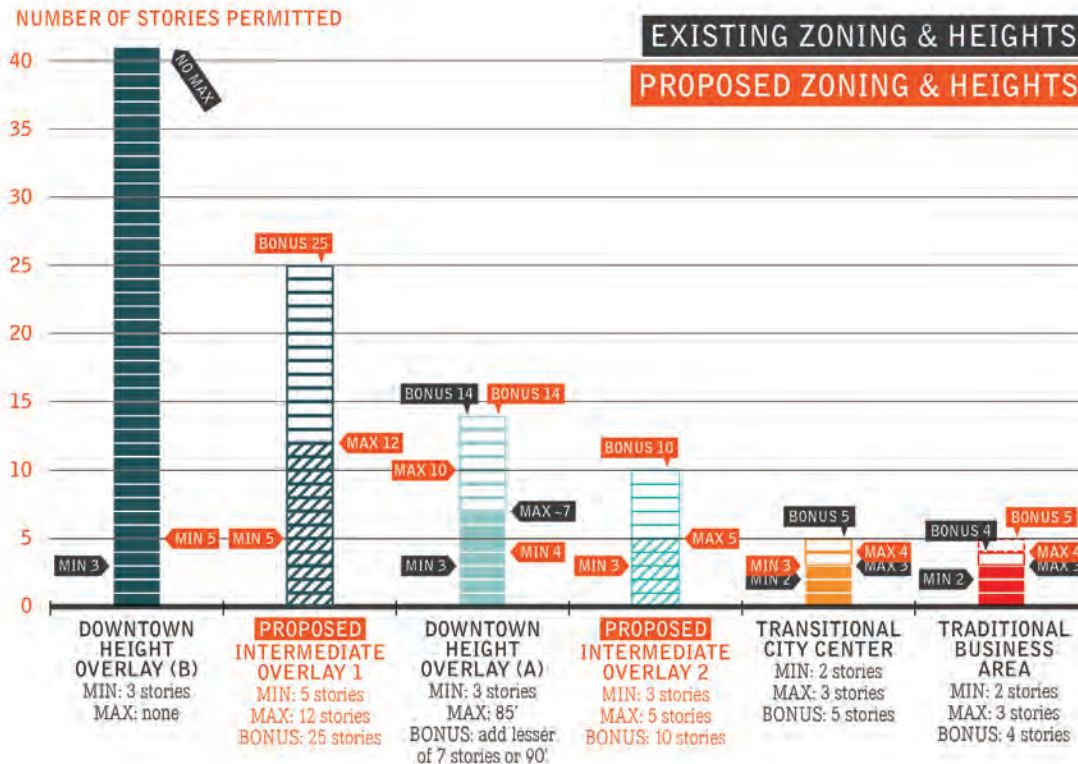


FIG 2.12: Chart of proposed height overlays

>> Open space fund height bonus

The existing height bonus for provision of urban open space encourages developers to provide amenities on-site and accessible to the public. However, while the bonus defines specific expectations for what the open space should provide [section 5.11.13 of the zoning code], it cannot guarantee a quality design that adds significant value to Downtown. Further, the bonus allows the façade at the Required Building Line to be lessened to 60%, which could result in a fragmented public realm. Rather than incentivizing scattered public spaces, the bonus could be leveraged more strategically as a funding mechanism to support planned or future improvements to existing parks and the provision of new meaningful open space assets.

>> Mixed-income housing height bonus

At present, height bonuses for affordable housing are not applicable within most of the Downtown area, as it is not an option within the TN-CC zone. Mixed income developments are a major challenge, given the difficulty of combining the Low Income Housing Tax Credit with market rate development. In light of the need to maintain housing affordability for a wide range of families and individuals as detailed more fully later in this chapter, the City should include a height bonus for developments providing 15% or more units to those earning below 120% of area median income. Alternatively, developers can make a payment to the affordable housing fund [Payment in Lieu] as currently defined by the code.

>> Ground floor active commercial uses

As outlined further in section 2.4, height bonuses for specified ground floor commercial uses, including Retail and permitted Entertainment, Hospitality and Recreation uses, should be concentrated on Targeted Retail and Entertainment Corridors.

>> Grand River Overlay bonus

Establishing the riverfront open space network envisioned through the GR Forward process will require considerable public and private investment. The amount of public space necessitates denser development; and taller buildings on more open sites would serve to preserve view corridors between Downtown and the river. Within the Grand River Overlay, height bonuses should be granted to developments that provide public access, amenities, and other resources towards the implementation of the Grand River corridor vision in the previous chapter. Specifically, the Grand River overlay should include the following:

- > All buildings shall maintain a minimum setback of 50' from the River
- > New development shall maintain a minimum of 30% green space
- > New development shall maintain a viewshed of the river - From the street side of the lot to the riverfront, allow for a continuous cone of visual access at street level that is at minimum 20% of frontage on the street side and a minimum of 35% on the river side. No building shall protrude

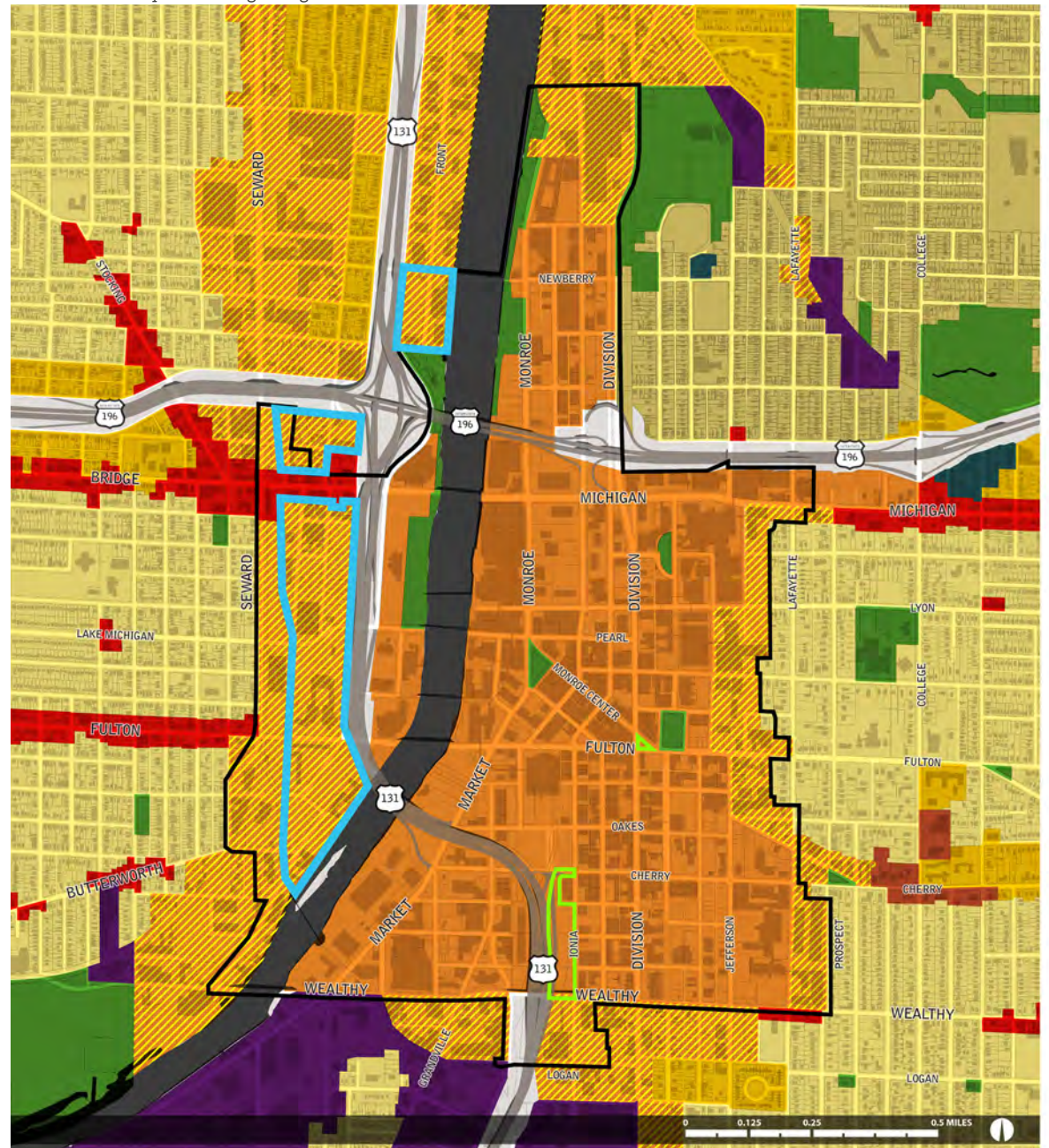
into the cone of visual access in vertical or horizontal dimension. The cone of visual access can be distributed.

- > Parking must not be visible from the road or the river side of the building
- > Curb cuts shall not be placed closer than 200 feet from one another. Curb cuts may not be larger than 25 feet. Continuous curb cuts are not permitted
- > In addition to the existing height bonus of 1 floor for every 10' of setback from the River, additional bonuses should be considered:
 - A bonus of one [1] story shall be given for the granting of public access on the existing utility [floodwall] easement adjacent to the river.
 - A bonus of one [1] story shall be given for the granting of public access on the cone of visual access.
 - A bonus of one [1] story shall be given for the creation of a multi-use trail consistent with local guidelines
 - A bonus of two [2] stories shall be given for the creation of a major recreational access point to the water to accommodate watercraft
 - A bonus of one [1] story shall be given for the creation of a minor recreational access point to accommodate pedestrian access into the river
 - A bonus of one [1] story shall be given for the provision of uses defined within the retail and entertainment cluster on the river side of the building

- A bonus of two [2] stories shall be given for the creation of a publicly programmable amenity larger than 1500 SF
- A bonus of one [1] story shall be given for the creation of a green stormwater management and/or water quality feature that treats via green roofs, water features, or infiltration the first 3" of precipitation on the site in a storm event
- A bonus of one [1] story shall be given for the creation of wetland habitat terraces along 40% of the waterside property edge with a width of 20' from the ordinary high water mark to the river side edge of the multi-use trail

- TO BE CHANGED TO CITY CENTER
- TRANSITIONAL CITY CENTER
- CITY CENTER
- TRADITIONAL BUSINESS AREA
- TO BE CHANGED TO OPEN SPACE
- OPEN SPACE

FIG 2.13: Proposed zoning changes



Note: Pekich Park is not identified to be changed to open space because it is located in the public right of way

REMAP THE EXISTING CITY CENTER ZONE

The existing Downtown as defined in GR Forward is currently zoned as City Center [CC], Transitional City Center [TCC] or Traditional Business Area [TBA]. These zones allow different densities and uses and, therefore, have different implications for growth. To help simplify the approach to guiding development Downtown, the area between the rail line and US 131 on the near Westside as well as the area immediately north of the Fish Ladder to the 6th Street Bridge should be re-zoned from TCC to CC. This would create one Downtown zone with the same rules to guide development. Other areas already zoned TCC would remain and serve their purpose - to help the transition from Downtown to surrounding communities. The existing TBA on Bridge Street should also remain. With this change, other recommendations contained in GR Forward with respect to encouraging retail and commercial uses, promoting mixed-income housing, encouraging density and regulating parking would all be contained within the CC zone rules and regulations.

CHANGE THE APPROACH TO DOWNTOWN PARKING REQUIREMENTS

The advantages of Downtown living - walkability, street life, thriving businesses - are diminished by the dominance of surface parking lots and garages that create gaps in activity. Further, building parking places a high cost on development and, when a development site is adjacent to an existing underutilized garage or lot, limits the ability to efficiently use the parking resources that exist. As described in Goal 3.2 of GR Forward, the intent is to provide transportation choice by better managing parking Downtown while investing in transit, bike lanes and sidewalks to make it easier to get around without a car.

Currently, existing parking requirements in the City's zoning ordinance can limit development by requiring each developer to satisfy a set amount of parking on each site. The code does allow the Planning Director and the Planning Commission to provide waivers for some parking requirements but these are determined on a case by case basis for each development. To encourage complete transparency in the rules of development, provide certainty to developers and align the zoning code with the desire to encourage growth Downtown, the parking requirements must change.

The current parking minimums should be replaced with parking maximums. This enables the developer to decide how much parking they believe is necessary for the users of their development. Parking maximums are widely practiced across the country and locally in West Michigan including the City of Wyoming, City of Muskegon, Spring Lake Township, and the Village of Middleville among others. In addition, if a developer seeks to exceed the established parking maximum for their project, they should be required to pay into a Downtown Mobility Fund. This kind of payment is already allowed in the current zoning code and the fund would be used to enhance existing parking facilities, create new ones and support improvements to sidewalks, bike lanes and transit.

“Critical Mass allows GR to get closer to the many things that we aspire to be.....whether that be more retail, better riverfront activation and access, better walkability, increased multi-modal activity, better inclusivity, and/or more diversity. Critical Mass feeds these things for GR.”
- GR Forward Steering Committee member

ENCOURAGE INFILL DEVELOPMENT TO CLOSE GAPS WITHIN AND BETWEEN NEIGHBORHOODS

To refer to Downtown Grand Rapids as one district is really a misnomer. Downtown is, in fact, a fragmented collection of many distinct, smaller districts. Highways, inactive street frontages, expansive surface parking lots, and the River itself serve as barriers between different Downtown districts. In seeking to reach the goal of critical mass and attract more services and amenities Downtown, strategic infill developments should be carefully planned to address and mitigate these divisions.

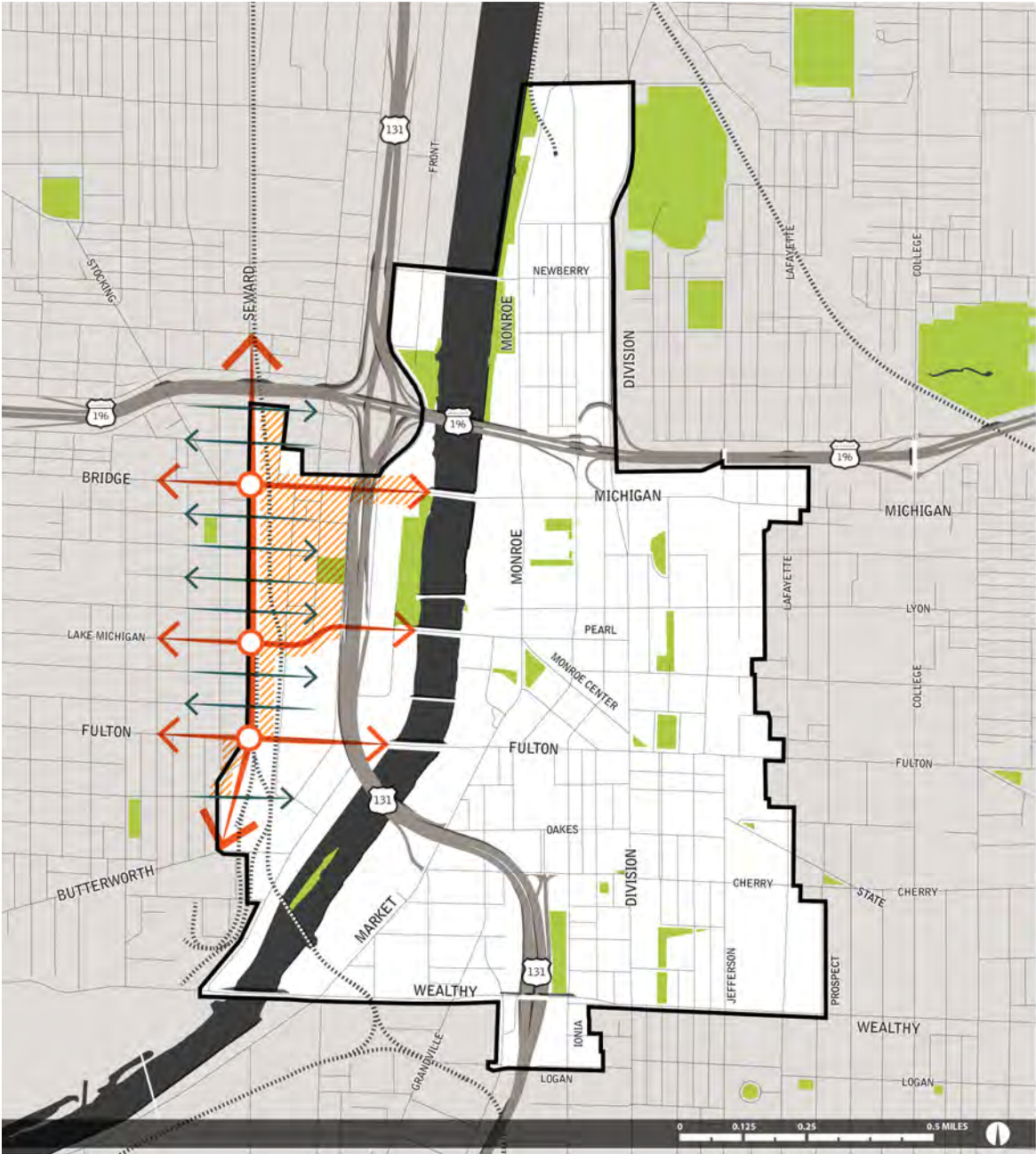
>> Better connect the near Westside to Downtown with targeted development

The near Westside of Downtown [broadly speaking, west of US 131 and east of Seward] is defined by GVSU buildings to the south, an up-and-coming commercial corridor on Bridge Street, and large expanses of surface parking lots. The area lacks a cohesive identity and is disconnected from the broader Westside, the riverfront, and the core Downtown area. The elevated sections of US 131 only reinforce the lack of connections within the near Westside.

Near Westside



FIG 2.14: Diagram of Westside development opportunities



-  MAJOR CONNECTION
-  SECONDARY CONNECTION
-  POTENTIAL PARK SPACE / DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY
-  DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

The opportunity is to encourage development that helps transition the Westside toward the River and Downtown. New infill development is proposed along Seward with higher densities focused east of the rail line near US 131.

FIG 2.15: Westside Considerations

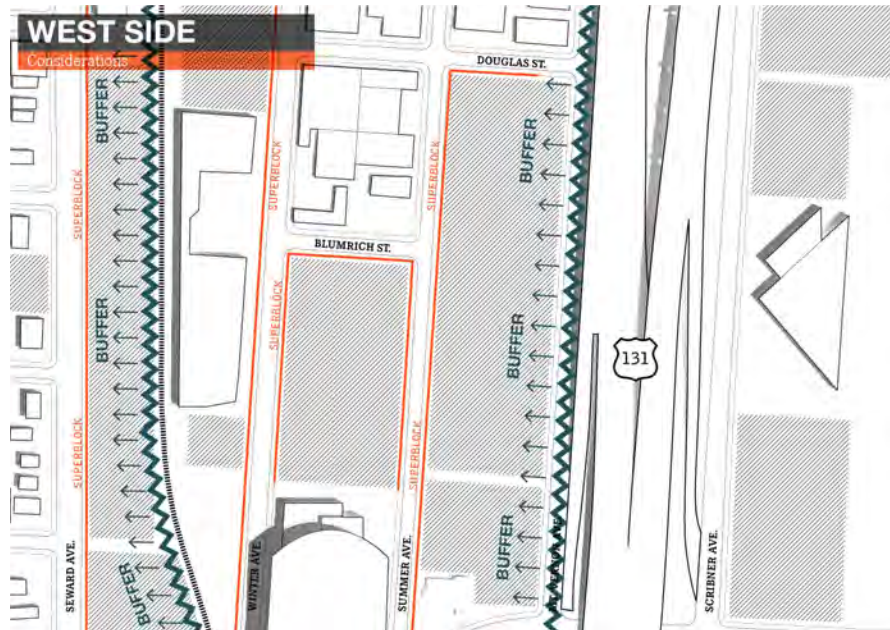
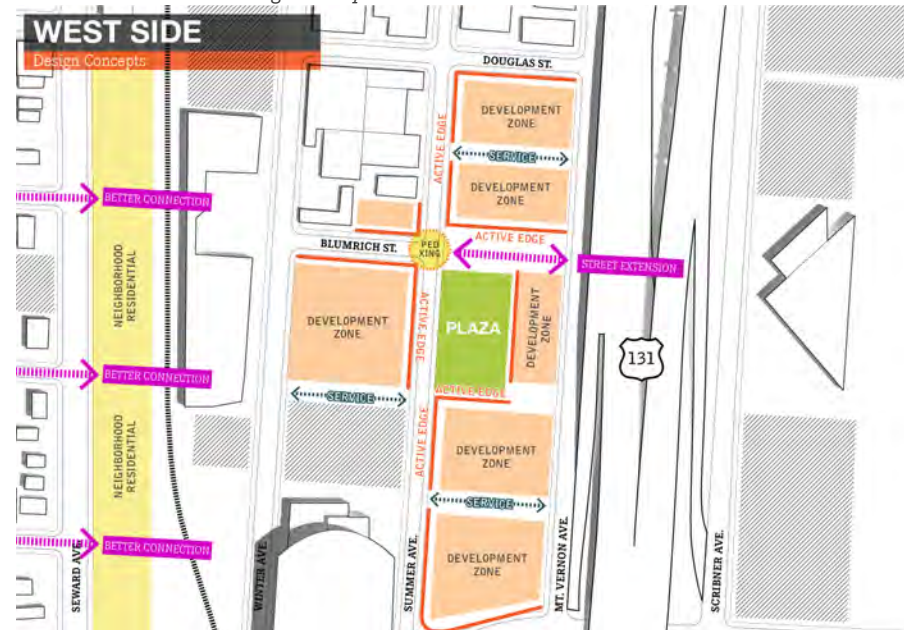


FIG 2.16: Westside Design Concepts



GR Forward took a 3-step approach to combat these challenges. The first is to address the transition from the Westside to Downtown particularly between Lexington and Seward. In accordance with the West Fulton Area-Specific Plan, this area should provide a range of housing types that help to transition the single-family Westside community to higher densities in Downtown. The range of housing include potential micro-units, attached and stacked neighborhood-scaled attached housing

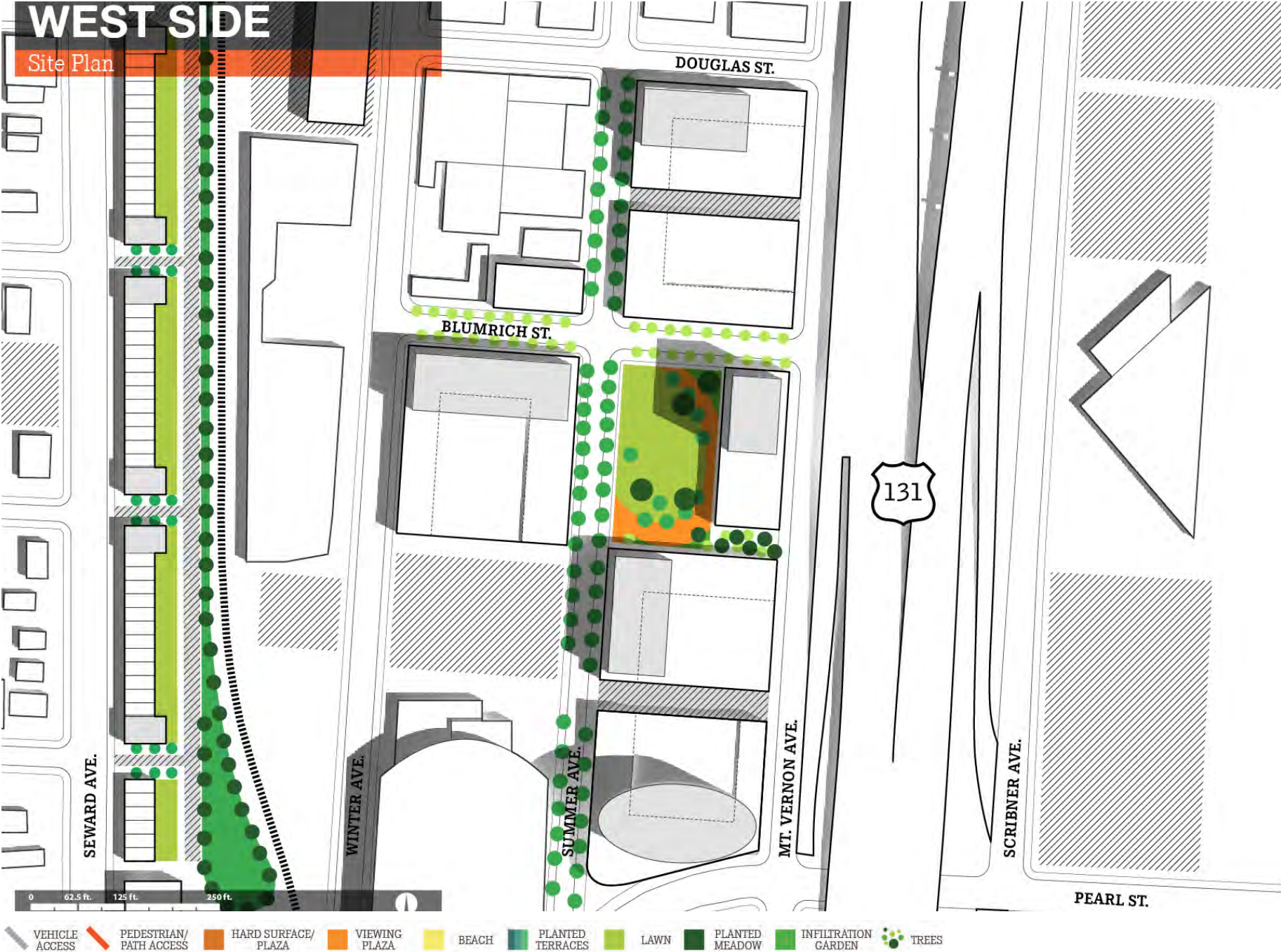
and multi-family apartments. This approach is reflective of recent and proposed/approved developments in the area.

The second recommendation is to improve the connections to the River and the Downtown core from the Westside. This can be accomplished by the development of new buildings [with ground floor commercial use] on major east-west streets including Bridge Street, Lake Michigan Drive, and Fulton Street. Bridge Street currently serves

as the primary commercial corridor for the neighborhood and the redevelopment of nearby parking lots will serve to create additional demand for new commercial uses. Although Lake Michigan and Fulton are comprised of larger institutional and commercial uses as well as parking lots, there are some opportunities for new development that would help to fill in some of the gaps between the near Westside and the River.

The conceptual plan for DDA-owned properties includes a mix of housing types and a new park [near Westside park] to serve as a gathering space for new and existing residents.

FIG 2.17: Westside Site Plan





Bridge Street Commercial Corridor on the Westside

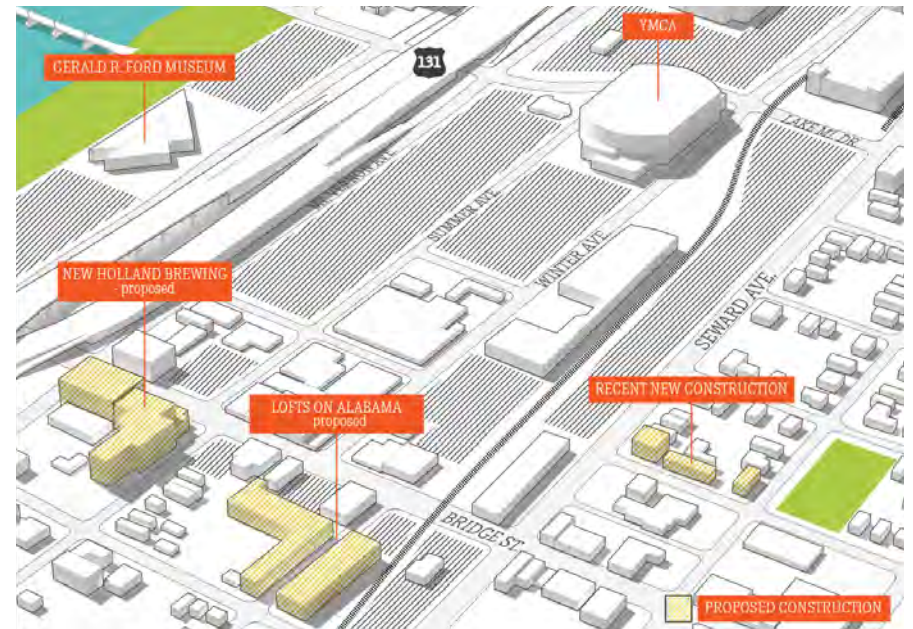


FIG 2.18: Westside Existing

Finally, the large parking lots bounded by Douglas, Mt Vernon, Lake Michigan Drive, and Winter Ave provide a unique opportunity to create a new neighborhood within the near Westside. The proposal is to extend Blumrich Street to Mt. Vernon to break the current “superblock” into a more suitable neighborhood scale. The site plan includes a new plaza south of the extended Blumrich Street that will serve as a gathering space for the neighborhood.

These improvements should serve to support GVSU’s ongoing campus investments. Once complete, these actions would serve to provide space for new residents, workers, and businesses, while forging much needed connections between the Westside and the River.

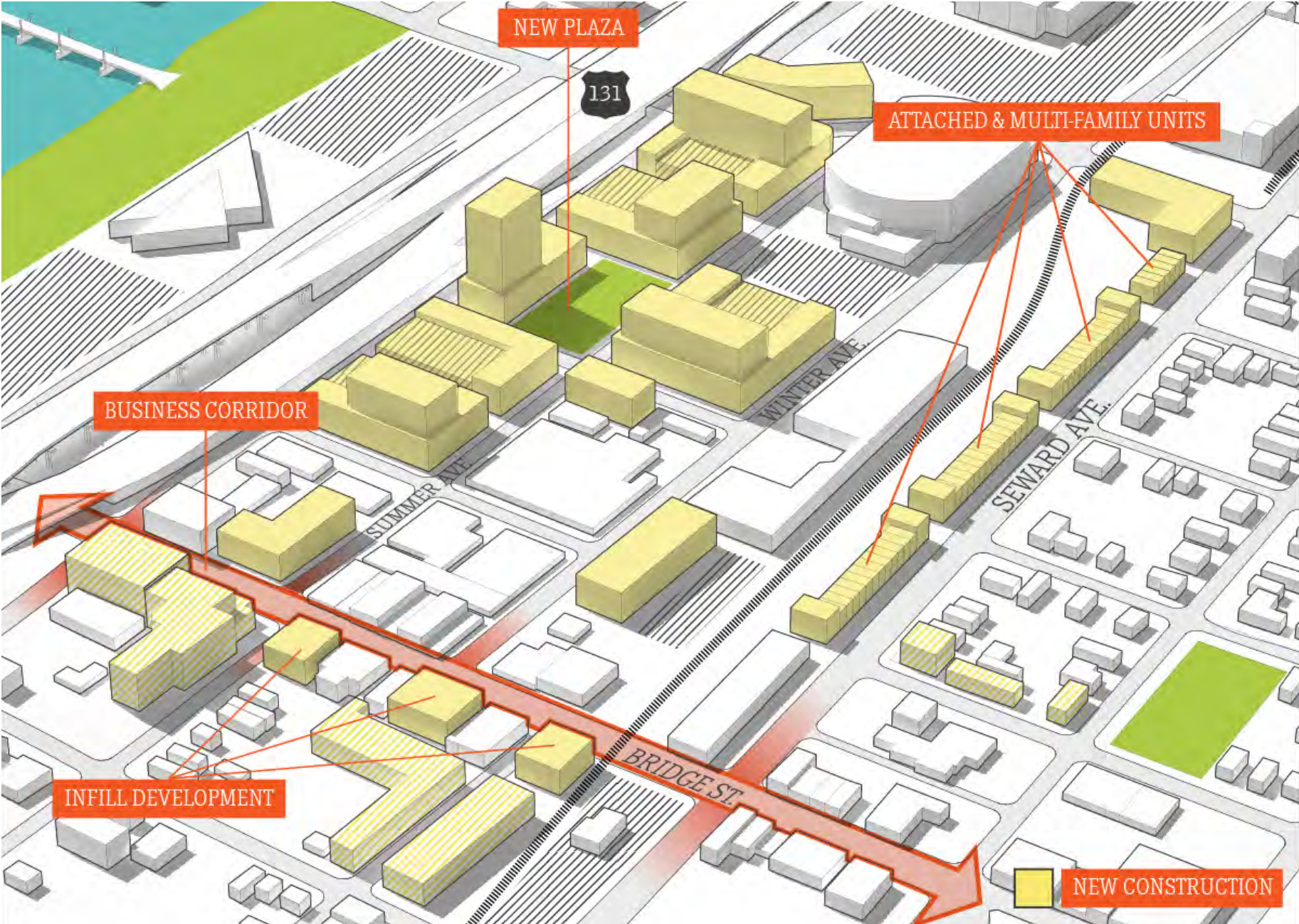


FIG 2.19: Westside Proposed

ANCHOR THE RIVER WITH NEW DEVELOPMENT ON SELECT SITES

Parallel to the river, Monroe Avenue and Market Avenue serve as the threshold between the River and Downtown. Development along this corridor should provide a new interface that connects the commercial activity of Downtown with the amenities of the River. Currently, that transition is either abrupt—buildings abut the river with high floodwalls—or nonexistent, comprised

of surface parking lots or parking garages along the River. In considering development opportunities along this corridor and toward the River, there should be a considerable River easement to allow access, programming and protective flood infrastructure. At the same time, the Market / Monroe street edge must include active uses such as new residential/

commercial development and river-related uses to provide a seamless transition between the River and Downtown. Three riverfront sites within Downtown are ideal for redevelopment in this manner.

201 Market Avenue



Fulton Street and Market Avenue



MSU/City/KC Site

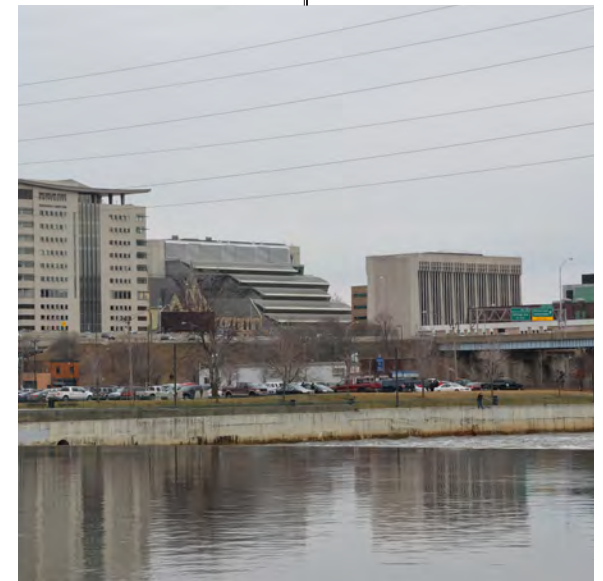
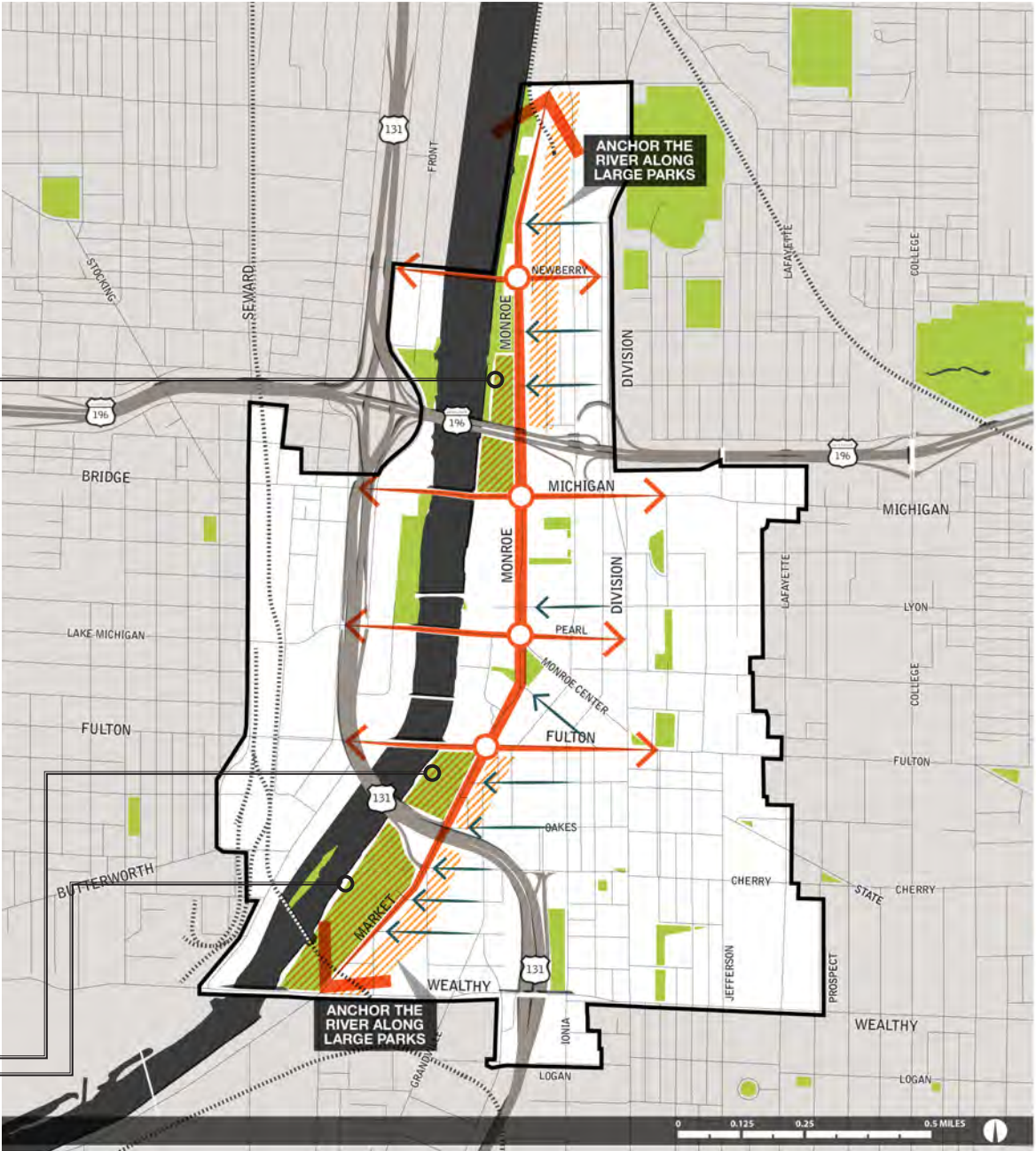


FIG 2.20: Diagram of development opportunities along the Grand River in Downtown



To help connect the River and Downtown, development and new open spaces are proposed on sites along Market and Monroe. The opportunities represent a mix of publicly-owned and privately-owned sites.

-  MAJOR CONNECTION
-  SECONDARY CONNECTION
-  POTENTIAL PARK SPACE / DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY
-  DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

FIG 2.21: 201 Market Considerations

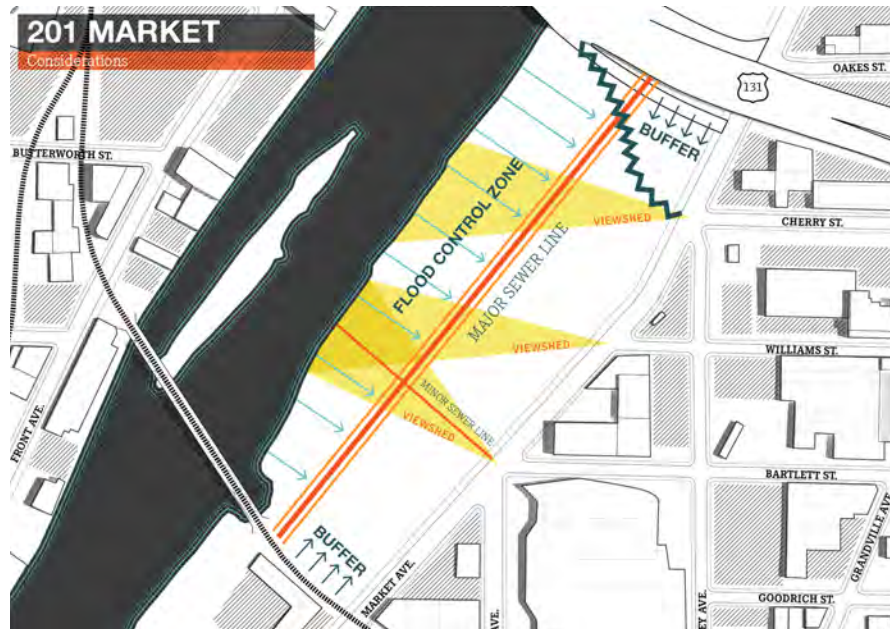
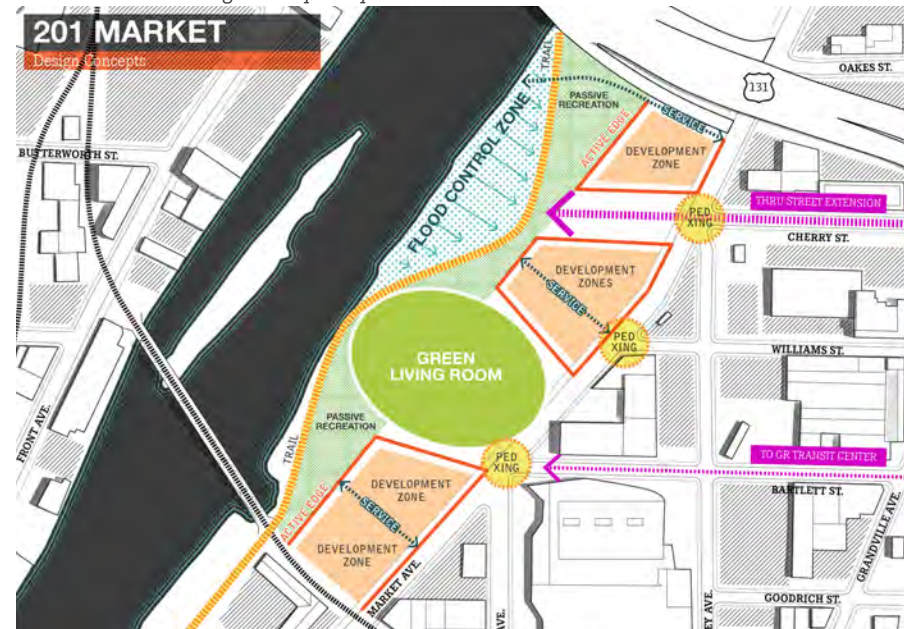


FIG 2.22: 201 Design Concepts - Option A



201 Market has a number of existing constraints to development including a sewer line, poor pedestrian crossings along Market and the need for new flood infrastructure that encourages River access.

>> 201 Market

Existing:

201 Market is a large riverfront property south of the US 131 S-curve, west of Market Avenue, and North of the freight rail lines. It is currently occupied by a variety of City maintenance facilities. With a renewed interest in River access and programming, as well as strong demand for new residential development, this site is a prime opportunity for redevelopment.

To develop the site, existing City operations need to be relocated and the site demolished. Once the site is cleared of existing uses, other development constraints must be considered, including an existing sewage pipe that is costly to remove and a highway exit that occupies a

great deal of land. Additionally, a large amount of space is required to create suitable flood infrastructure that encourages river access and programming.

Design Concepts:

The goals for the redevelopment of 201 Market include:

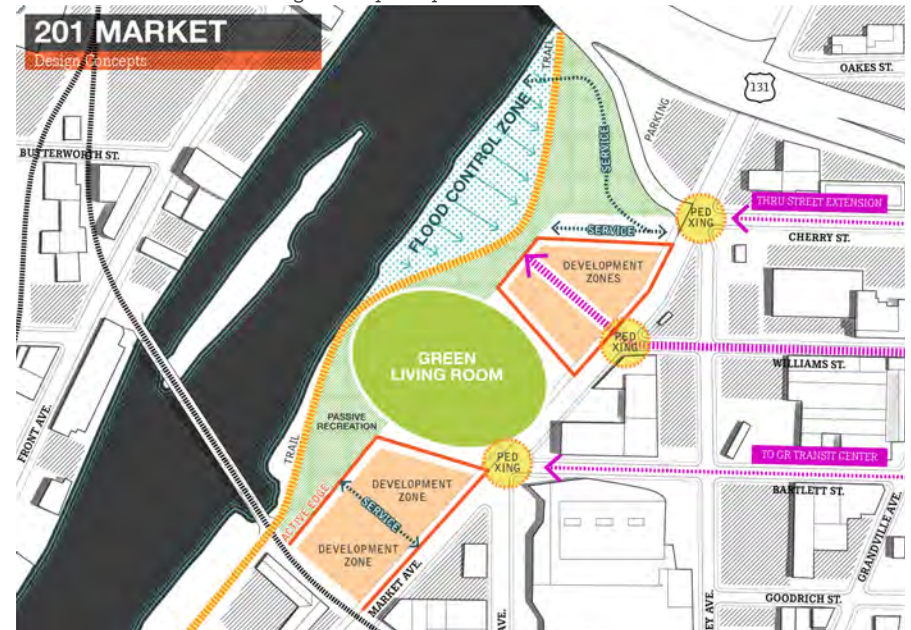
- > Create a destination, and large scale programmable open space
- > Manage flooding through the design of the landscape
- > Provide an ecological edge that manages on site stormwater and provides river habitat

- > Provide river access including boat access
- > Provide a continuous multi-use trail connection and a connection north
- > Ensure there are active uses facing both Market Avenue and the River
- > Buffer US 131 and the rail line from the open space
- > Create safe intersections along Market Avenue
- > Establish a gateway at Cherry Street
- > Establish new housing and supporting uses to active the River
- > Visually extend “Downtown” south along the River

FIG 2.23: 201 Market Design Concepts - Option B



FIG 2.24: 201 Market Design Concepts - Option C



The result is the proposal for a large “green living room” that acts as a centerpiece for the development and new signature park for the City and region. This space is large enough to accommodate a wide range of programs that are not suitable for smaller River sites. Surrounding this living room and River-related open space is a collection of development sites. Each site includes a parking garage [or access to one] lined with active uses on the ground floor. The upper floors are envisioned for new housing at Downtown densities to help offset the costs of relocation and provide dollars for park maintenance. Illustrated options show

keeping or removing the existing US 131 off ramp. Currently, Cherry Street is the only street that affords direct access to the River from neighborhoods to the east. Relocation of the off ramp closer to US 131 would provide visual access to the River and a safer crossing at Cherry and Market. If the off ramp cannot be moved, there is less development potential and the Cherry and Market intersection will require improvements to ensure safe crossings. Support from MDOT and a full traffic study should be completed to determine the feasibility of relocating the off ramp.



Existing 201 Market Avenue Site >>

FIG 2.25: 201 Site Conceptual Site Plan



Potential view along Market Avenue
with the redevelopment of 201 Market

NEW HOUSING

CAFE

NEW RETAIL

WIDE SIDEWALKS

REDESIGNED MARKET AVENUE

ON-STREET PARKING



FIG 2.26: *Fulton and Market Considerations*

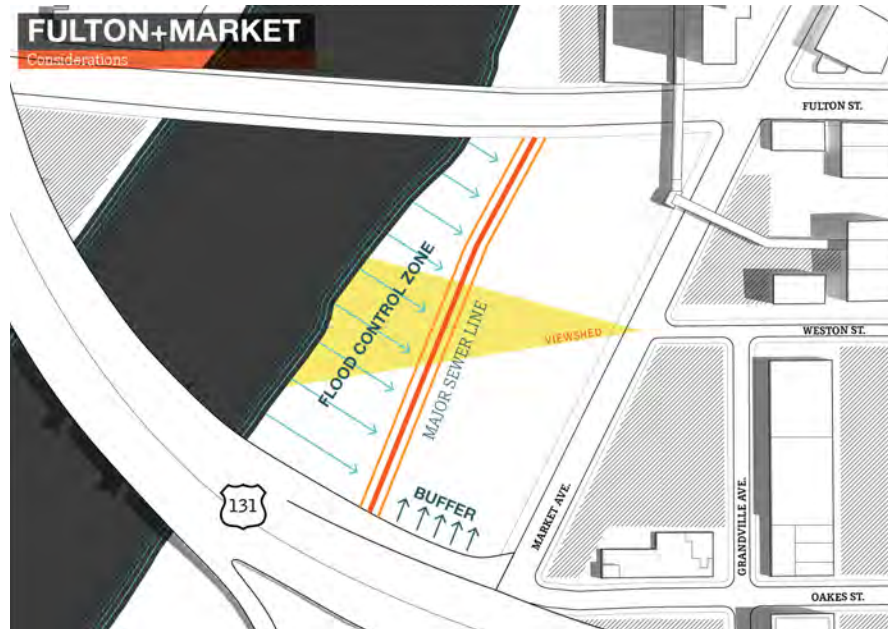
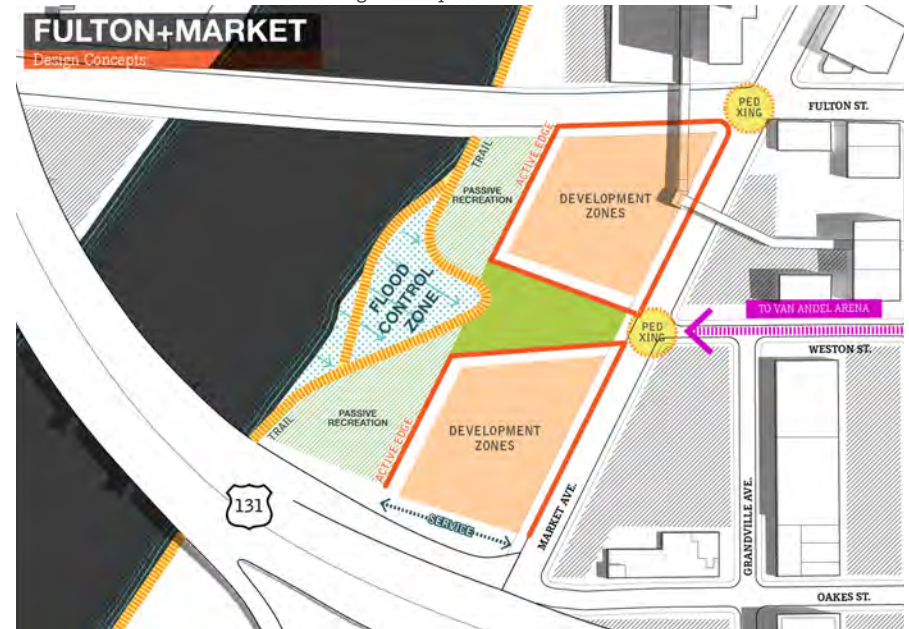


FIG 2.27: *Fulton and Market Design Concepts*



>> Fulton and Market

Existing:

Bounded by Fulton Street to the north, Market Avenue to the east, and the US 131 S-Curve to the south, Fulton and Market is occupied by a large, privately-owned riverfront surface parking lot and Charley’s Crab. Fulton and Market is a critical intersection of river and City on a major and highly visible thoroughfare, and deserves a thoughtful development approach.

A major sewer line runs through the site and should be retained to minimize costs. Maintaining flood protection is integral and will require development to be set back considerably from the river.

Design Concepts:

The goals for the redevelopment of Fulton and Market include:

- > Manage flooding through the design of the landscape
- > Provide a sloped/terraces landscape that allows the public to experience the river
- > Provide a continuous multi-use trail connection
- > Provide outdoor spaces to support ground floor uses
- > Bring water into the site, celebrate site stormwater management as a feature
- > Ensure there are active uses facing Market Avenue, Fulton Street and the River
- > Buffer US 131 from the open space
- > Establish a prominent gateway at Market and Fulton intersection
- > Establish new housing and supporting uses to activate the River
- > Provide new parking for the development and to serve Downtown day-time uses
- > Visually extend “Downtown” south along the River

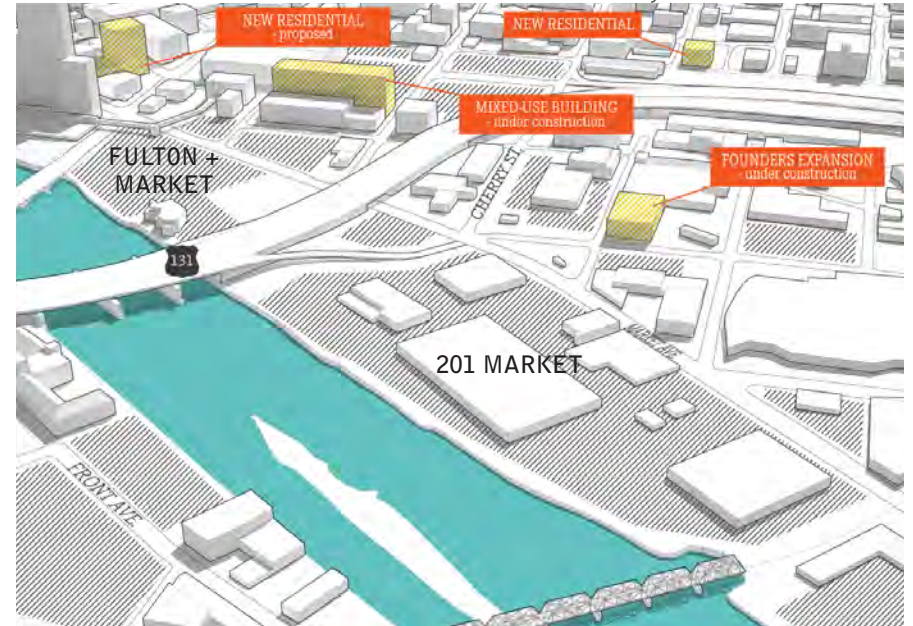
FIG 2.28: *Fulton and Market conceptual site plan*





Fulton + Market Site From Across the River

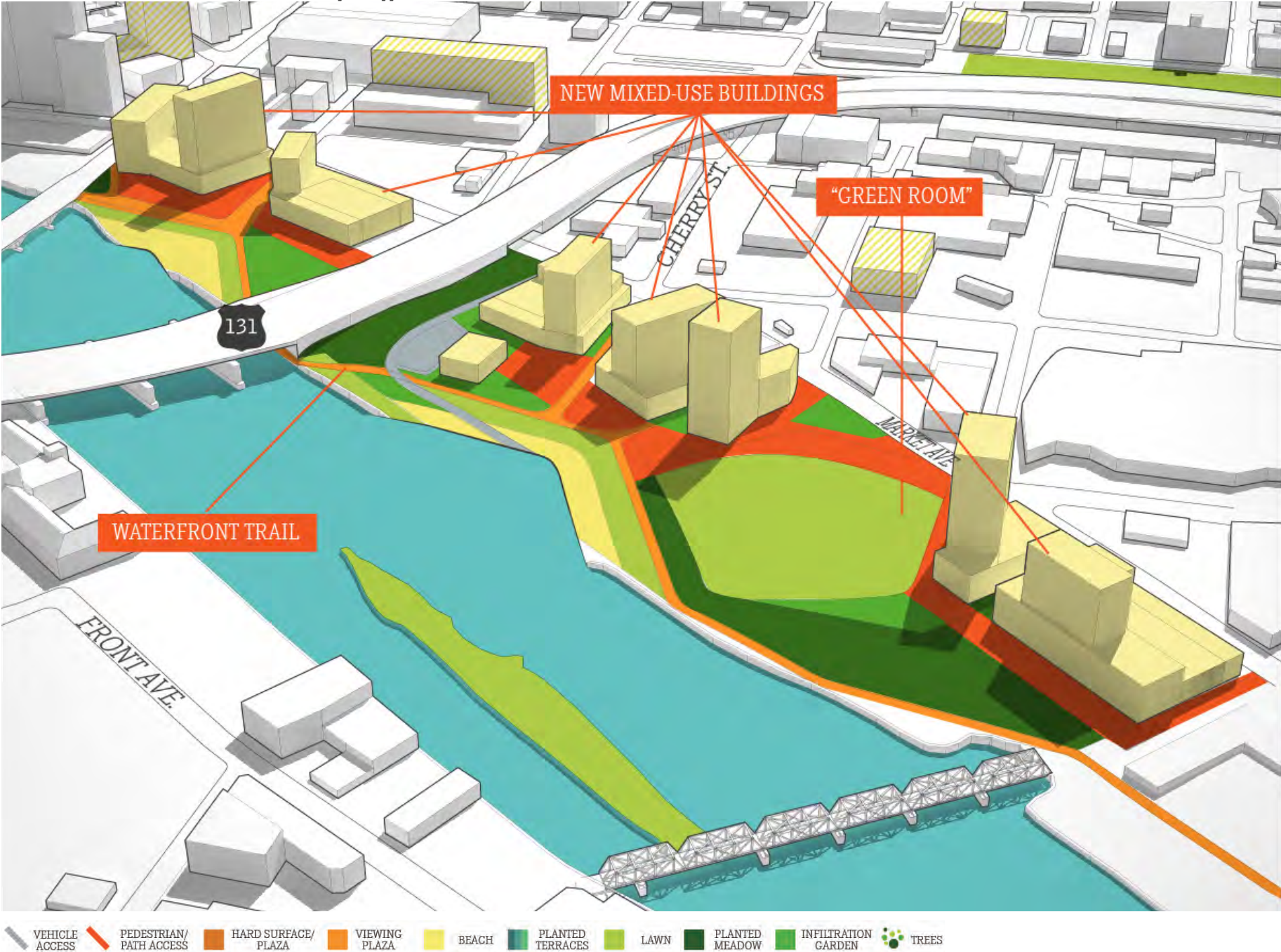
FIG 2.29: 201 Market north to Fulton and Market - conditions today



Due to the size of the site, there is potential to activate the street edge with new development as well as provide a publicly accessible riverfront open space. Ground floor commercial is integral to draw people to the site and the corner of Fulton and Market could serve as an attractive location for a larger retailer or grocer. A stepped flood control zone will protect the property while maintaining public accessibility and space for an extension of the River trail.

The redevelopment of both Fulton & Market and 201 Market just to the south will create a dynamic, publicly accessible open space along the River.

FIG 2.30: 201 Market and Fulton / Market: conceptual approach

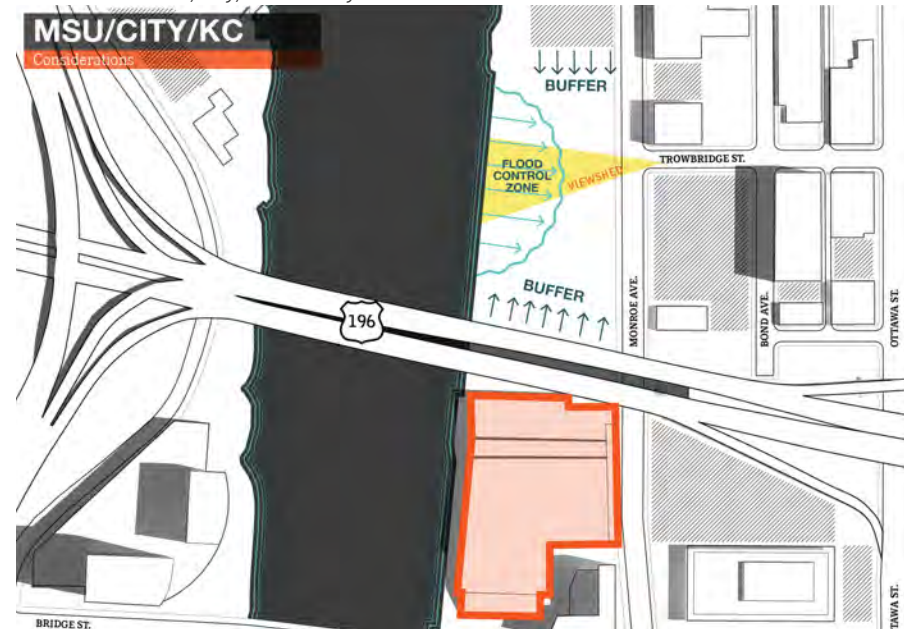


>>MSU/City of Grand Rapids/Kent County site

Existing:

This site immediately north of 196, occupied by a few surface parking lots, is underutilized given the opportunities for development and open space programming here at the threshold between Downtown and Monroe North. The entirety of the site has three owners complicating the end reuse potential. The City is currently seeking grant dollars to acquire the entirety of the site north of 196, which is a necessary first step to advance the redevelopment of the site. Bounded by the highway and an electrical substation, it is a narrow site that needs to address flood requirements while providing public river access in one of the prime locations to view river activities. Adjacent to this site is the existing post office, which backs up to the River. Relocation of this facility is a priority for many but also extremely costly.

FIG 2.31: MSU/City/Kent County considerations



Design Concepts:

The goals for the MSU/City/Kent County site include:

- > Manage flooding/stormwater through the design of the landscape
- > Provide emergency river access including boat access
- > Provide a continuous multi-use trail connection
- > Activate the River with programming
- > Buffer 196 and the substation from the open space
- > Establish a prominent gateway to Monroe North
- > Create an active edge that creates opportunities to watch River events
- > Provide connection to the river island
- > Allow for public views to the river
- > Make a connection from Downtown to Monroe North

FIG 2.32: MSU/City/Kent County design concepts - Option A

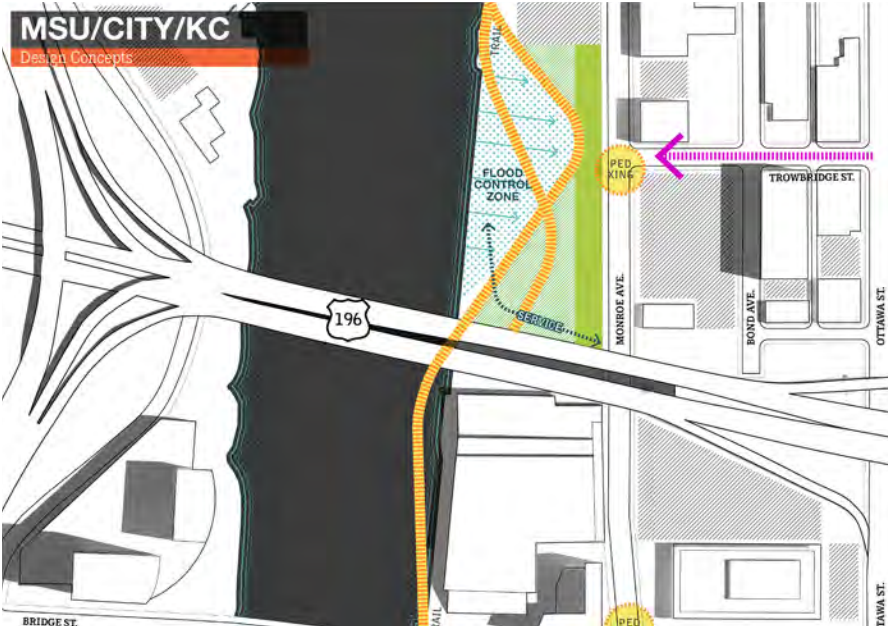


FIG 2.33: MSU/City/Kent County design concepts - Option B

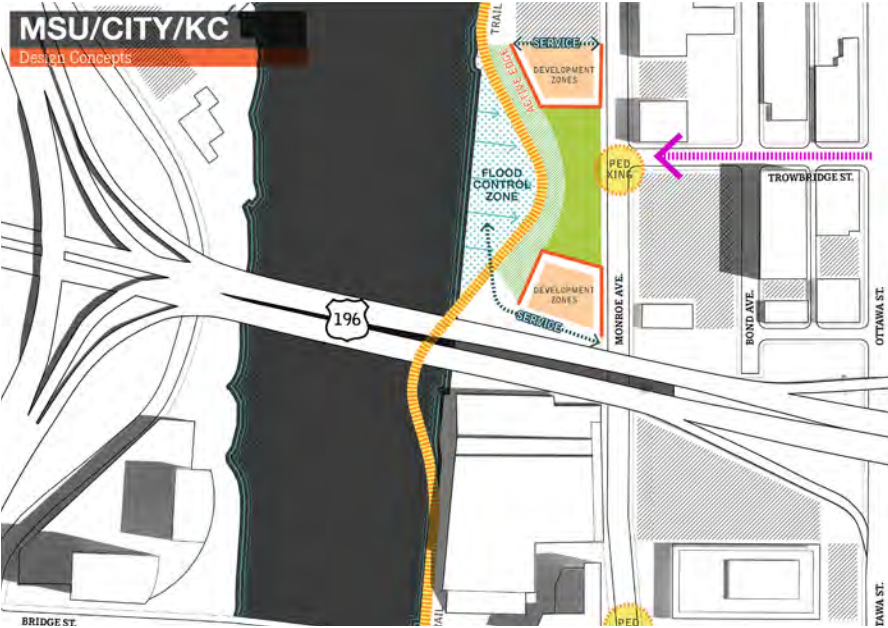


FIG 2.34: MSU/City/Kent County site section

If developed as shown in Option B, the MSU/City/Kent County site would offer the opportunity for active uses and public terraces overlooking the activity in the Grand River. This is one of the best locations for watching river-related recreational activities like kayaking.

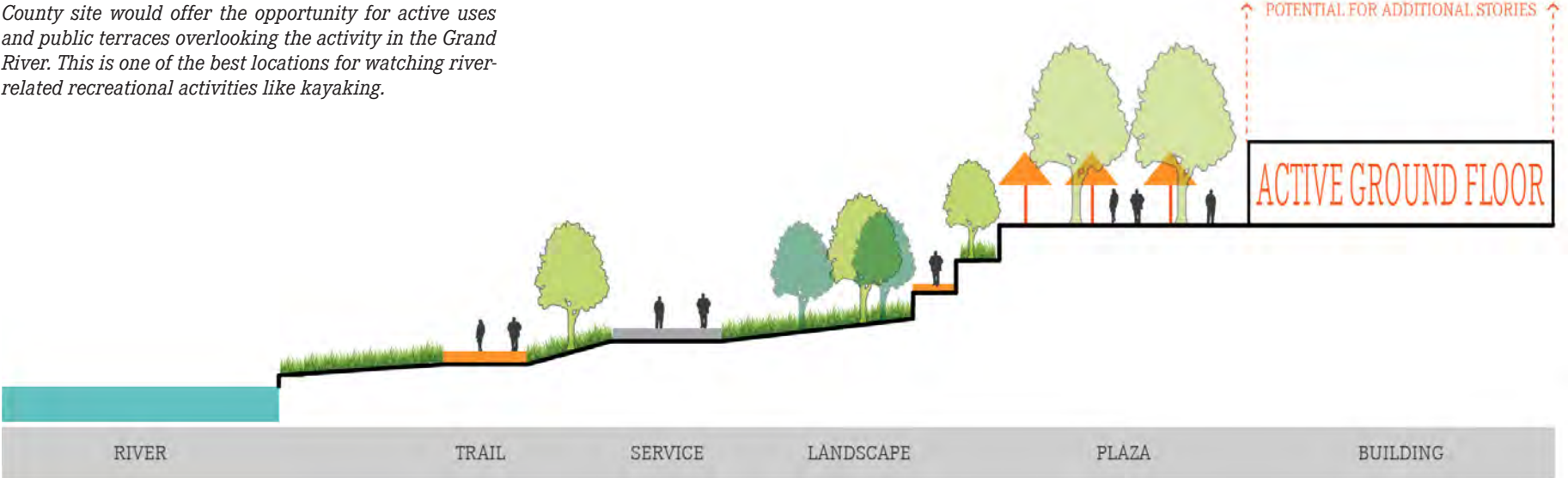


FIG 2.35: MSU/City/Kent County conceptual site plan - Option A

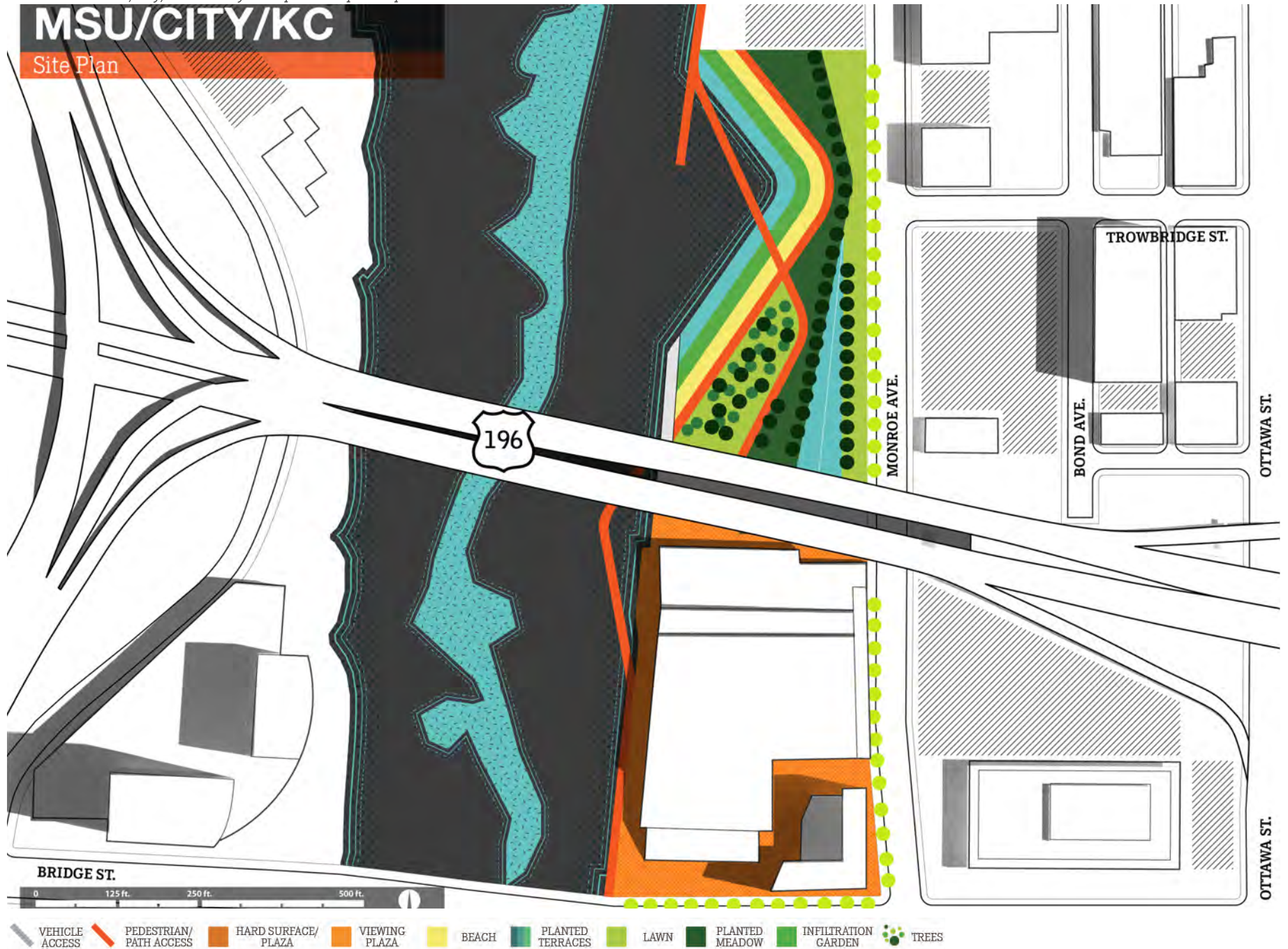
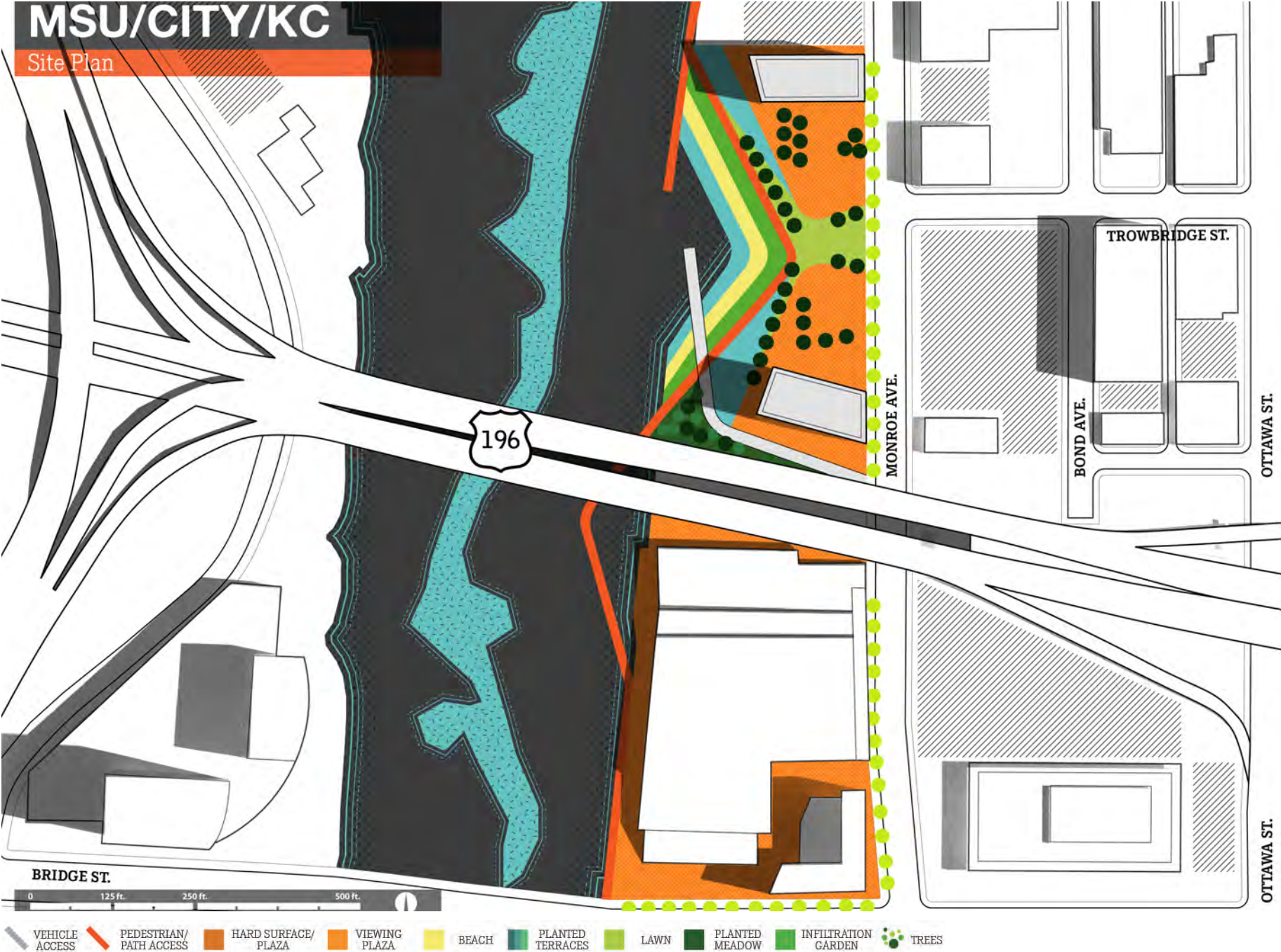


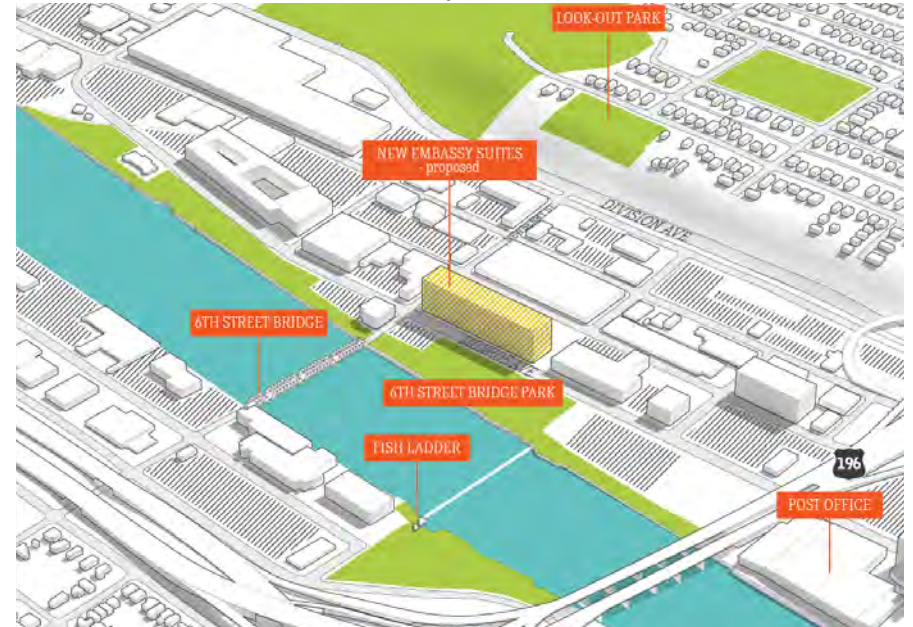
FIG 2.36: MSU/City/Kent County conceptual site plan - Option B





The MSU/City/Kent County site is a critical element within Monroe-North which has the potential for additional development for a mix of uses and can serve to connect residents with the River.

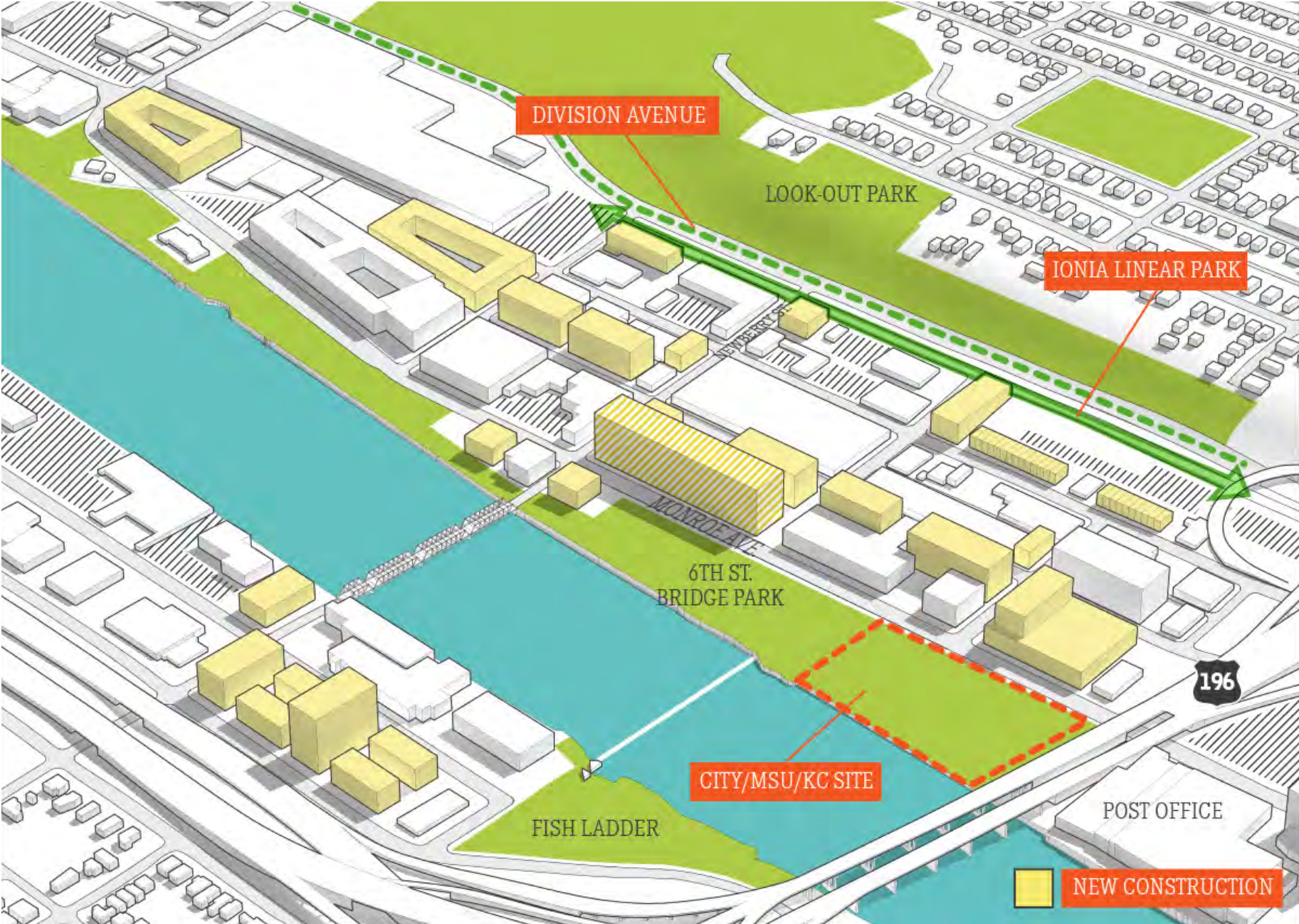
FIG 2.37: Aerial view of Monroe North today



The design concepts include two options and both include the post office facility.

- > Option 1 reflects the desire to create a large River front park north of 196. This park would include new flood infrastructure that encourages River access and an extension of the River trail. In this scenario, the trail is extended south, under the highway and adjacent to the post office along the existing flood wall.
- > Option 2 shows the potential development of new housing and ground floor commercial uses on both sites. Development north of 196 can be utilized to buffer the existing substation and the highway while affording views to River activities from the neighborhood. The opportunity in this case is to create viewing platforms connected to active uses to maximize the enjoyment of the River. Any redevelopment of the post office will need to include significant density [allowable under City Center Height Overlay B] to offset the cost of relocation.

FIG 2.38: Potential development in Monroe North based upon existing proposals and a GR Forward analysis of property



CONNECT HEARTSIDE, HERITAGE HILL, AND THE DOWNTOWN CORE

A unique cross-section of uses and development patterns are located South of Fulton Street on the east side of Downtown. The Arena South area is set to undergo major redevelopment in accordance with the Arena South Visioning Plan. A growing number of restaurants, bars and new housing have found their way onto Ionia, Commerce and Division. The area around Division known as Heartside is home to a number of social service agencies and missions and large institutional uses, including prominent churches and the Mercy Health/St. Mary's Hospital and Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital. Heartside is also a protected historic

district. To the east and up the hill is Heritage Hill, a beautiful and long-established Federally-designated historic neighborhood. Due to the prominence of surface parking lots, in some cases underutilized buildings and land, and inactive uses, these areas are poorly connected to one another and to Downtown. The State Street Corridor Area Specific Plan completed by the Heritage Hill Association sought to address this disconnection by promoting new development along State Street to fill some of the long-standing gaps on this important connector street.

In this area, Division Avenue plays a prominent role. Owing to its name, Division Avenue has historically acted as a dividing line between Grand Rapids and the surrounding townships when the area was first settled. Today, it plays a similar role physically and economically. For those familiar with Downtown, Division Avenue represents opportunity: to foster new businesses and encourage a true mixed-income district. To those less familiar with Downtown, Division Avenue is often perceived as unsafe. To reconnect the neighborhoods and range of uses in this southern edge of Downtown, there must be a focus on improving Division Avenue.

Heartside



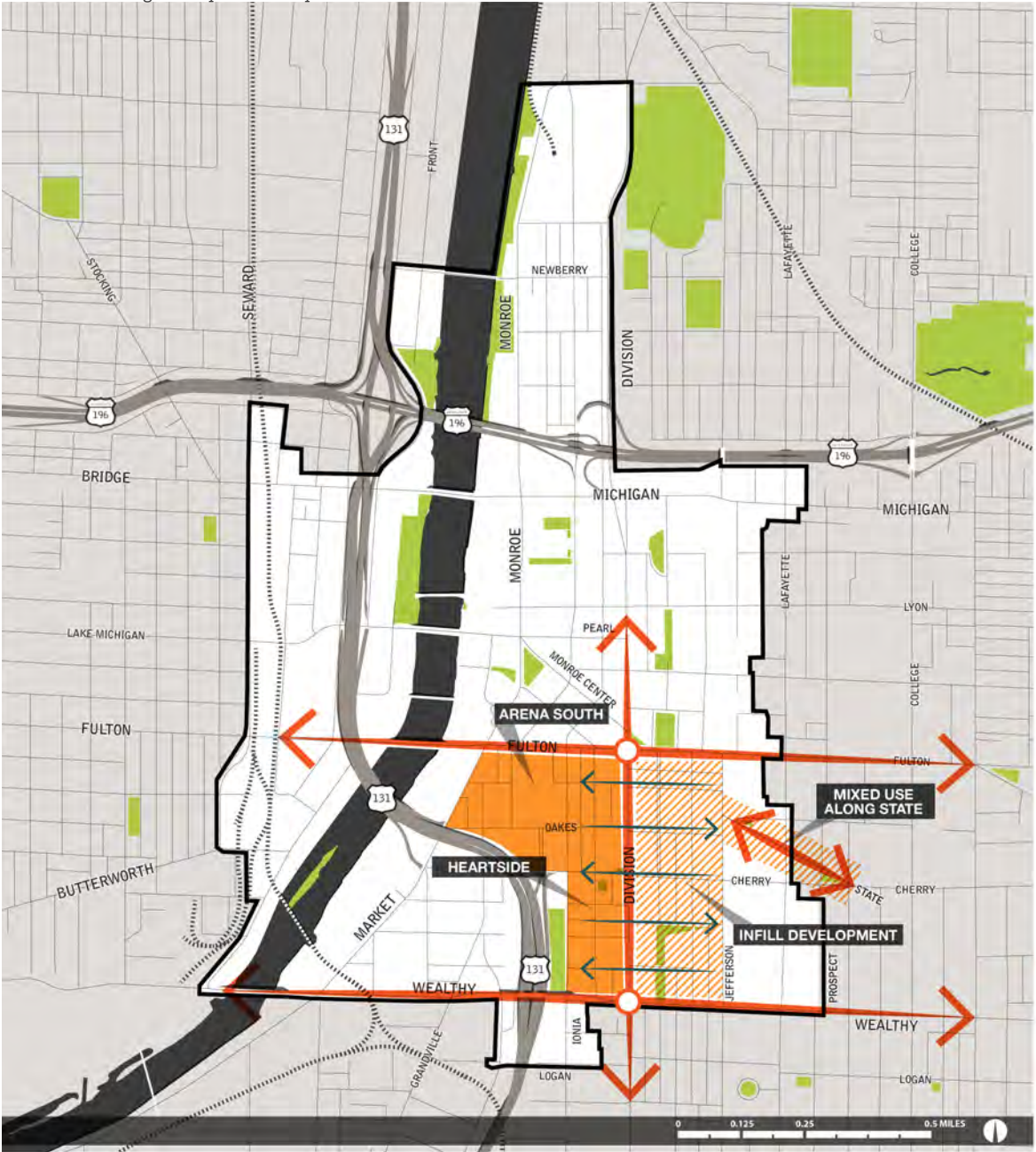
Heritage Hill



Downtown Core



FIG 2.39: Diagram of potential improvements in Arena South and Heartside



Arena South is planned for significant new development. On the other side of Division, however, there remains some empty spaces and a lot of surface parking. Focusing on Division, improvements are necessary to help connect Heartside to the River while also providing stronger connection to neighborhoods to the east.

- MAJOR CONNECTION
- SECONDARY CONNECTION
- EXISTING DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY
- INFILL OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of actions that should be considered to address the divisions between Heartside, Heritage Hill and the Downtown core:

>> Encourage the redevelopment of State Street

The zoning for State Street is different from one side of the street to another. Redevelopment should follow the concept plan advanced in the State Street Corridor Area Specific Plan that follows the densities supported by the Transitional City Center zoning designation.

>> Promote Division Avenue as a small business corridor

Currently, there are some unique offerings on Division but also a number of empty storefronts. The potential is to encourage new small businesses including retail, offices and services. Three potential incentives should be considered to promote this idea:

- > Assist in the creation of “white box” space: often times the condition of existing storefront spaces are the deterrent for new, cost-sensitive businesses. Create a series of “white-box,” ready to go spaces that require very few improvements to open shop.
- > Start a business plan competition with the winner receiving free rent for a specified amount of time on Division. Cleveland used this model in the Shoreway community to stimulate new small businesses.
- > Offer matching grants for business expansion on Division Avenue. These grants could help offset the costs for new equipment, space build out and, new product marketing / feasibility analysis.

>> Encourage residential on Division

There are already, of course, new apartments on Division. This idea is focused on reusing the upper floors of existing buildings or creating small units suitable for young professionals or students. More people in the area that appreciate city living will also create more street activity and improve the perceptions of safety. Smaller unit sizes should be developed along Division and potential partnerships explored with area colleges and universities.

>> Develop a lighting plan for Division Avenue

Given concerns raised about night time activity, work to develop a lighting plan for Division that highlights the area’s historic structures and helps to improve lighting on sidewalks. Partnering with property owners to share costs for façade-mounted LED fixtures would provide a cost-effective and immediately implementable option for upgrading lighting over time.

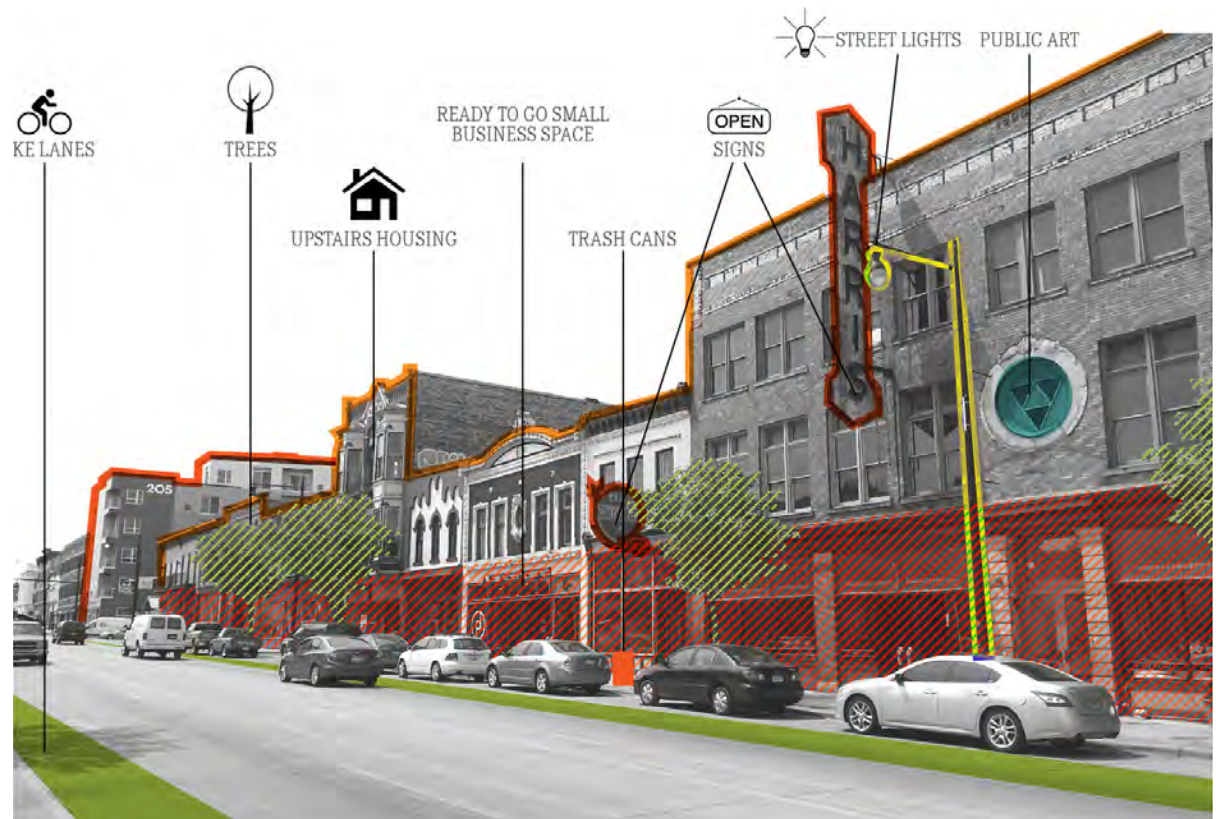


FIG 2.40: Diagram illustrating potential extension of existing Division Avenue improvements to South Division, from Fulton to Wealthy

PRESERVE HISTORIC CHARACTER WHILE ACCOMMODATING GROWTH

Grand Rapids has a very active and engaged historic preservation community. Founded in the late 1960s, the Heritage Hill Historic District adjacent to Downtown is one of the largest urban historic districts in the Country with a unique collection of distinctive homes. In Downtown, the Heartside Historic District was formed in the late 1970s and reflects the area's importance as a center for commerce, loading and wholesale. This history of commercial use is what makes the designation of Heartside as a historic district unique but also challenging with respect to current development pressures. The growing demand for new development Downtown has resulted in new housing along Division Avenue and proposals nearby. In addition, there are many more opportunities for investment on the vacant and underutilized property in Heartside.

There are rules guiding alterations and demolition of existing buildings in Heartside overseen by the Historic Preservation Commission. However, there is limited guidance

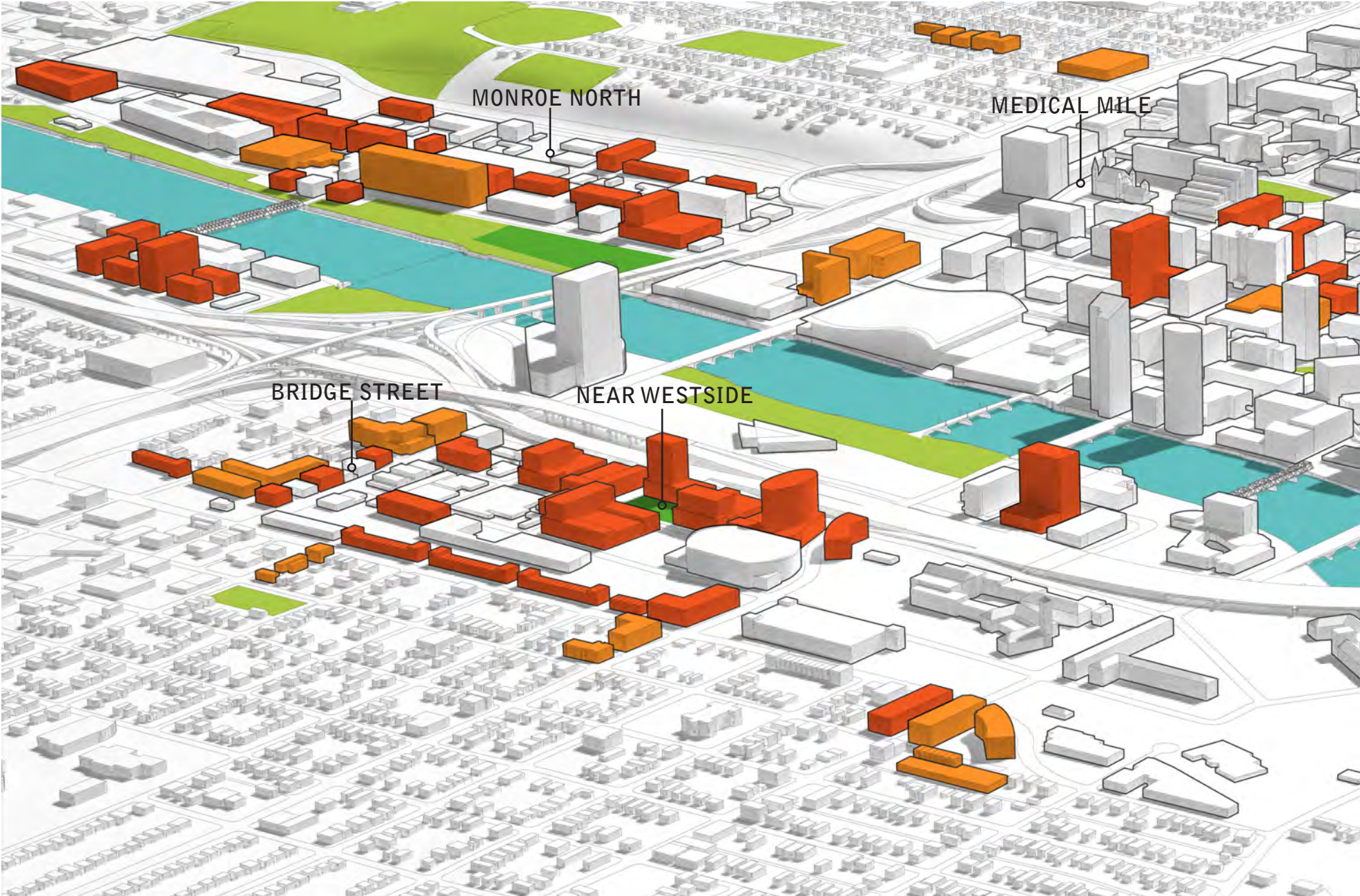
on the development of new structures in this unique, historical commercial district. The City should consider amending the existing local Historic Preservation Guidelines to create specific guidance related to increased height and density for the development of new buildings within the historic district. This set of guidelines for Heartside would establish a clear vision for new development and address critical aspects related to scale, massing, frontage, and the location of parking.

For areas outside the Heartside Historic District, the primary concern is with the proposed changes to allowable heights Downtown. This change, while necessary to encourage further growth Downtown, could also have the opposite effect of encouraging demolition and redevelopment with a taller structure. For properties with some historic value [but not legally protected], the following should be considered:

- > Maintain a list of historic structures in danger of demolition either due to condition or current use. Maintain contact with the property owners and local developers regarding potential reuse options and what financial assistance may be available for properties on the City's list of historic structures.
- > Consider a purchase of development rights approach enabling denser development in appropriate areas in exchange for salvaging structures that add character to Downtown.
- > Work with interested property owners to set up a conservation easement that would help protect properties from major alterations going forward. Property owners are eligible for a Federal Income Tax deduction in exchange for donating some rights to a non-profit organization that prevent specific types of alterations to the property. These agreements can be tailored to the interests of the property owner and, once conserved, the property is eligible for grants through the non-profit.
- > Track local and regional existing and emerging financial incentives for historic preservation, such as the Michigan Historic Preservation Network's cultivation of a Revolving Loan Fund, and ensure that information about resources is readily available to the development community active in Downtown Grand Rapids.



FIG 2.41: Potential Downtown build-out scenario; proposed development is in orange, potential development in red





2.2 SUPPORT INITIATIVES THAT IMPROVE DOWNTOWN LIVING FOR EXISTING RESIDENTS & ATTRACT NEW DOWNTOWN RESIDENTS

Downtown Grand Rapids's most valuable asset is its people. As the Downtown population grows steadily and residents are turning districts and areas into neighborhoods, local leadership is tasked with ensuring that civic infrastructure, programs, and services are improving in step with this evolution. The following strategies should be considered to continue cultivating growth and encourage Downtown residents to put down roots.

FOSTER CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY TIES DOWNTOWN

The numbers of people who participated in the GR Forward process in various ways speak for themselves: Grand Rapidians are eager for opportunities to be a part of the future of Downtown Grand Rapids. Community members who participated in the process also spoke for themselves: at the public open house, public forums, and other engagement events, the planning team regularly heard individuals voice the need for continued community engagement and input beyond the horizon of the planning process itself. City leaders are encouraged to create regular and structural opportunities for the community to be a part of shaping the future of Downtown and the Grand River.



>> Support efforts to establish a Downtown residents council

Many Grand Rapids neighborhoods have formalized civic groups to establish formal representation within city-level dialogues and leadership structure among neighborhood residents. Efforts recently begun to assemble a Downtown residents council should be supported in order to create more opportunities for community building and social interaction among Downtown residents, many of whom are living in disconnected pockets of the Downtown area; and establish a venue for community dialogue about change Downtown. Among the roles the council may decide to take on, it may consider ways of welcoming new residents, creating a communications infrastructure to facilitate information sharing specific to Downtown among residents, and ensuring that the views of Downtown residents are being represented in major decisions by Downtown leadership.

“Having lived in Heritage Hill for 27 years and loving the “neighborhood.” I would love to see the same “community” environment shared with Downtown residents.”

- Public forum participant

>> Educate residents about ways to be engaged in discussions around change Downtown

Outside of a comprehensive planning process, how will Downtown residents be able to continue taking part in guiding change Downtown?

- > Once established, the regular meetings of a Downtown residents council would act as appropriate venues for the City and Downtown leadership to engage the community in opportunities for input in decisions and priorities when appropriate.
- > Though some long-time residents may be familiar with channels of civic engagement, Downtown’s growing base of new residents will need some orientation. Grand Rapidians care deeply about the future of their City and form online discussion boards around development, transportation and green space among other topics. The opportunity is to spread this knowledge further and empower others across the City to better understand, and engage in, local planning and design issues. One example of this kind of initiative is Philadelphia’s Citizen’s Planning Institute [CPI], the education and outreach arm of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission. CPI offers courses and events designed to inform civic-minded community members about planning principles and municipal procedures around development and City decision making, including how to engage in opportunities for public input. Other cities pursue this idea outside of City government relying instead



PRECEDENT: CITIZEN'S PLANNING INSTITUTE

<http://citizensplanninginstitute.org/>

on local non-profits and development agencies. The City, DGRI and their partners should consider tapping into local expertise to develop a program focused on citizenship education. More informed and engaged citizens would benefit Downtown and communities across the City as well. As with the Citizen's Planning Institute, accommodations must be made to ensure the broadest participation possible across incomes and neighborhoods. CPI tracks participation in their programs in order to identify and address gaps in their services.

- > DGRI should continue to build local resident capacity through the membership of their Alliances and identify individuals that have an interest in serving on local boards and commissions.
- > The City's Connect & Engage webpage should be expanded to include an interactive calendar featuring all public meetings as well as current information about and timelines for ongoing and upcoming efforts, all sortable by neighborhood. Generally, an interactive map of neighborhoods and boundaries of resident councils; as well as centralized resources and information about how to get involved presented in a clear and accessible way would help foster continued engagement with community members.

>>Attract a diverse population to the Downtown neighborhood

While Downtown Grand Rapids is relatively racially diverse among neighborhoods in Grand Rapids, protecting and building upon that diversity is a critical and interrelated driver for all of the racial equity ambitions included in GR Forward. To achieve that ambition, GR Forward proposes to:

- > Provide a diversity of housing types and options, at different price points, to appeal to a wide range of people and families;
- > Protect affordable housing stock, and create tools to expand that supply. Modify incentive programs to assist in achieving GR Forward's target for affordable housing;

- > Modify the zoning code to reduce the development costs for new housing to keep prices more attainable; and
- > Identify effective approaches and tools to lower barriers to home ownership in Downtown.

UNLOCK THE POTENTIAL OF MUNICIPAL DATA AND ONLINE TOOLS

Many cities have discovered the great benefits of utilizing internet and mobile applications for data sharing and streamlining the experience of city services. In addition to improving transparency and engagement, cities have seen that a holistic approach to leveraging data and technology can improve efficiency of city services. Towards this end, the City of Grand Rapids is encouraged to pursue the following:

- > Continue working towards a comprehensive Open Data policy. Beyond providing an online venue for things like reporting potholes and paying bills, the more progressive examples of e-government have embraced Open Data policies in order to allow residents and business owners to participate in tracking trends in government performance improvement practices, crime patterns, street accident rates, City expenditures, parking utilization rates, and a wealth of additional raw datasets. Sharing data also allows IT developers to build apps or their own online tools, creating the opportunity for crowdsourcing and data interpretation



in useful and creative ways. Grand Rapids has made some progress towards this end, offering some data sets through various City web pages and offering links to data hosted on external websites, but the Louisville Metro Government's Office of Performance Improvement website offers an excellent model of making an extensive range of data and information accessible. Taking Open Data a step further, the Department of Technology and Change Management should pursue resources to continue to work to centralize municipal data collected across departments, make accessible a more comprehensive range of raw data, and host

online tools designed to allow users to view and interpret data.

- > Expand and centralize online interactive tools. The City already has a number of useful tools available through various web pages and, as the municipal office dedicated to providing “provide proven and effective enterprise technologies that enhance communication and information management to improve productivity, business processes, and support citizen’s engagement,” the City’s Department of Technology and Change Management is poised to continue efforts to bring these resources together. For instance, the City’s Inspection Services Portal provides convenient access to permit applications and code violation reporting, the Office of Special Events website has online applications for events and equipment rentals, and DGRI’s website features an interactive parking map. Hosting all of these tools in one place in a streamlined interface with Spanish translation would make them easier to find and use, as well as make it more apparent what’s missing. One example: In addition to the online tools previously suggested for citizenship education and engagement, an interactive map on the City’s website featuring real-time, place-specific information, such as roadway closures or utility work, would likely reduce City staff time spent fielding questions. The first step would be to take an inventory of what is already available and work with various departments and

management entities to create a centralized online portal, whether the Department of Technology and Change Management’s website or a stand-alone site, managed by a single entity working across departments.

EXPAND YOUTH PROGRAMMING

The involvement of GRPS in GR Forward reflects the commitment to provide services and programming for area youth and families. There are currently events scattered throughout the year in Downtown some of which are attractive to youth and families. These include Movies in the Park and skating at Rosa Parks Circle in the winter. Discussions with local institutions, residents and parents indicate the need for more youth oriented programming Downtown. Redevelopment of the River promises to bring more outdoor recreational opportunities that will appeal to youth. In addition, Downtown programming should specifically consider youth and families in the planning for new events much as last year’s youth camping in Downtown which exposed youth [and the adults] to Downtown in new ways. Urban scavenger hunts & geo-caching, youth-oriented movies and music as well as youth-oriented recreational opportunities like skateboarding and sports programs can help to boost Downtown’s role as a draw for youth and families. As a precedent example, Philadelphia has two nationally recognized programs hosted through and outside of schools that offer opportunities for teens with a range of interests: Students Run Philly Style - a running club for high school students [perfect



for new River trails] and; CRED Philly magazine - a youth arts magazine showcasing the work of area youth.

More broadly, the opportunity is to connect youth to potential employment and the improvement of Downtown. The Mayor’s 100 Campaign that seeks to link 100 local businesses with area youth for internships and skills training, is an excellent and progressive model in this regard. GR Forward should support and promote this program and help to identify ways in which area youth can help work to implement GR Forward recommendations. This could include putting their creative minds to good use through the design of storefronts and other elements that bring a youthful eye to Downtown.



INCREASE ACCESS TO FRESH PRODUCE DOWNTOWN

Healthy eating is one of the most important elements of maintaining a healthy lifestyle but a complicated one with significant barriers, especially for low-income households. Time, money, and habit are all factors that determine food choices. Improving access to healthy, fresh food is one important step toward improving eating habits and resident health outcomes in communities across the country.

One of the most common requests during the public engagement process is the desire for a Downtown grocery store. For those that live or work Downtown, there are no options for a full range of healthy foods. The Downtown Market



fulfills an important niche, but broader options are necessary particularly as the Downtown population grows. It will take time for there to be sufficient demand to draw a grocery store but that is a goal worth pursuing at sites with high visibility, like the corner of Fulton and Market, would provide an attractive location for this use. In the meantime, it is worthwhile to actively promote existing food resources including the YMCA Veggie Van and the Mercy Health farmers market [to name a few] and pursue opportunities to expand and/or create new ones. Similarly, local institutions, the Downtown Residents Council and DGRI could evaluate the potential to tap into and expand

local Community Supported Agriculture [CSA] options for Downtown residents. CSA's often accept food stamps and provide locally grown, healthy food to members [residents and/or institutions]. These measures would provide additional amenities Downtown until there is demand for a full grocery and help to provide those with limited transportation choices healthy food options.

“ Build affordable grocery stores Downtown accessible to low income folks with quality food. ”

- Online collaborative map comment

EXPLORE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES TO ATTRACT NEW DOWNTOWN RESIDENTS

Grand Rapids is home to a significant number of employees and some of the region's largest corporations. Currently, the majority of Downtown employees commute from outside of Downtown. Many will continue to choose to do so but others may be interested in owning or renting a home Downtown, close to where they work, with the right incentive. Employee Assisted Housing programs offer ranges of financial incentives to make the case for living near the office. Partnerships with major corporations could result in an incentive package for employees to choose housing options in or near Downtown. The Live Downtown Detroit program is just one example that utilizes a combination of forgivable loans, renter's assistance, and funds for home improvements to incentivize downtown living for employees of partner corporations. The result is less demand for transportation [and parking], often a cost borne by the employers, an incentive to retain local talent long-term, and an improved Downtown that better reflects the values of local employers.

EXPAND MARKETING EFFORTS TO PROMOTE DOWNTOWN LIVING

DGRI's website, along with others, are valuable in providing a virtual entry into the downtown lifestyle, highlighting local destinations, events, and urban amenities. Additional efforts to make the Downtown living experience come alive could include the production of short video clips or "webisodes," each highlighting particular themes. Bringing a first-person perspective through short resident testimonial video clips—from both long-time residents and newcomers—could be worthwhile in representing the diversity of neighborhoods and presenting a range of perspectives on why it's great to live Downtown. Some downtown living marketing strategies, such as Minneapolis's Explore Downtown Living campaign, have created tours specifically for those who may be considering relocating Downtown—a chance to learn about what Downtown has to offer, get some orientation on the lay of the land, meet other potential newcomers, and take a peek inside various housing options to get a sense of what's on the market.



PRECEDENT: LIVE DOWNTOWN DETROIT

<http://www.detroitlivedowntown.org/>

PROMOTE ZERO WASTE INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES THROUGHOUT DOWNTOWN

Reducing waste is a benefit for everyone. A growing movement is looking into ways to eliminate trash through careful planning and investments. A successful zero waste community can recover up to 90% of what is typically thrown away. DGRI and their partners should plan to transition Downtown toward zero waste and consider incentivizing zero waste infrastructure, planning and implementation in all Downtown buildings, both residential and commercial. To help raise awareness about waste, plan for a number of zero waste events Downtown that incorporate information about how to reduce waste including recycling and composting.

2.3 PRESERVE AND EXPAND HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES

ENSURE THAT DOWNTOWN GROWS AFFORDABLE HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR A RANGE OF INCOMES

Today, 35% of the 3,400 units of Downtown housing is currently “income-restricted” or “rent subsidized.” This means that these units were developed with funds that protects their affordability, typically for families earning up to 60% of the Area Median Income [AMI]. There are currently 1,250 units proposed for development in Downtown, of which 14% are income-restricted. After completion of these developments, 30% of Downtown housing units will be income-restricted. Further, some of the income-restricted units will at some point “age out” and be available for those able to pay market-rates. Downtown alone has lost more than 300 income-restricted units in the past 10 years.

At the same time, Downtown, after years of limited residential development, is now experiencing significant new investment. The market study completed for GR Forward documents this increasing interest in Downtown

“Downtown needs a comprehensive plan to ensure new housing is accessible to a variety of people with different incomes.”

- Online collaborative map comment

living resulting in new lofts and condominiums. This has added more Downtown residents, something sorely needed to achieve critical mass. As described in 2.1, a larger Downtown population drives positive changes in the look and feel of Downtown streets and public spaces but also supports more of the activities and businesses people are looking for. More to the point, more market-rate housing is necessary to create a true mixed-income neighborhood Downtown.

But with growth comes challenges. Costs for new units are high for many seeking to live Downtown. As documented in the City’s recent housing study, vacancy rates are extremely low across the City and in Downtown. With limited housing supply, the need is to build more housing but in Downtown there is a limited inventory of vacant land. Without encouraging greater densities, land and housing costs will continue to rise.

This issue was certainly expressed during the GR Forward planning process. 59% of Downtown resident survey participants ranked “Affordability of homes or apartments in the community,” Fair, Poor, or Very Poor—making it the third lowest ranked aspect of living Downtown. But affordable housing is a difficult definition to pin down. What is affordable to one family is not to another. Further, even if housing is priced to be affordable it does not guarantee that the housing is in good condition or meets the needs of modern families. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to create affordable housing particularly for those earning below 80% of area

median income. Tax credits and other programs that offers funds for housing at different income levels are hard to come by. The issue is not a lack of need nor desire for affordable housing but limited resources to do so.

For these reasons Grand Rapids, like cities across the Country, faces a struggle to create a Downtown affordable to a range of incomes. Unlike other cities, however, Grand Rapids has the benefit of a base of housing protected for low-income individuals and families. With proactive planning and policy, Downtown can grow but also retain its diversity and affordability.

In Downtown, the need is to provide a range of housing types and prices to offer true housing choice for families and individuals of all backgrounds. Specifically, GR Forward is seeking to address the two key concerns expressed throughout the planning process regarding housing costs and affordability:

- 1] How will Downtown retain income-restricted housing opportunities for the low and very low income? For definition, this includes housing for those earning below 60% of AMI and 30% of AMI respectively.
- 2] How will Downtown provide housing opportunities for the “missing middle” – those that are not low-income enough to qualify for subsidy but also not making nearly enough to afford market-rate units Downtown? For definition, this includes housing for those making between 60% and 120% of AMI.

DOWNTOWN HOUSING UNITS

UNITS TODAY			
MARKET RATE	INCOME-RESTRICTED	TOTAL	% INCOME - RESTRICTED
2,213	1,179	3,392	35%
CURRENTLY PROPOSED			
MARKET RATE	INCOME-RESTRICTED	TOTAL	% INCOME - RESTRICTED
1,071	180	1,251	14%
SUBTOTAL			
MARKET RATE	INCOME-RESTRICTED	TOTAL	% INCOME - RESTRICTED
3,284	1,359	4,643	29%
POTENTIAL FUTURE BUILD OUT			
MARKET RATE	AFFORDABLE	TOTAL	% AFFORDABLE
7,630	3,270	10,900	30%
			NET INCREASE IN AFFORDABLE UNITS
			2,091

Note: *Income-restricted refers to units subsidized for those earning below 60% of AMI. Affordable units under potential future build out refers to a range of units including maintaining the current numbers of income-restricted units*

FIG 2.42: Analysis of housing units Downtown: today and in the future

To ensure there are housing options for a range of incomes in the future, this plan recommends a goal of 30% of Downtown housing units be available for those earning below 120% of AMI. The 30% includes an additional goal of maintaining the current number of income-restricted units Downtown. With an increasing number of new housing units, **this 30% goal will result in a net increase of over 2,000 affordable units Downtown once achieving critical mass.** This goal should serve as a guide for regulating and encouraging

new development. There are two approaches to achieving this goal:

>> Support preservation of low-income housing and social services

Significant subsidies are required to enable households with incomes below 60% AMI to rent or own newly constructed housing Downtown. With 1,179 income restricted units, Downtown comprises about 20% of the City-wide total of project-based income-restrict housing based

on the City’s Consolidated Plan—an important share of affordable housing to maintain. LINC Community Revitalization, the Inner City Christian Federation [ICCF], and Dwelling Place, among others, provide a variety of affordable housing options, neighborhood services, and economic development throughout the City.

Keeping these housing options and services within close proximity to one another, as well as to the nexus of public transportation and job opportunity Downtown, makes things a little easier for those who have faced challenges in life. While roughly 700 of these units will be available to low income residents indefinitely, some of the units have a time horizon attached to the tax credits that enables them to eventually convert to market rate units. The City should work with affordable housing entities to manage the supply of income restricted housing Downtown and plan to preserve Downtown’s share of housing opportunity for low income residents. This includes proactively assembling sites and developing them for income-restricted housing. Another option to protect affordability Downtown is to form a community land trust. Land trusts are operated by nonprofit, community-based organizations that own the land but sell the buildings/units to private entities. The owner of the building or unit is allowed to sell at any time but the allowable sales price is controlled by the terms of the land lease in order to protect affordability indefinitely. Land trusts can be used for both residential and commercial uses and require extensive up front planning and discussion to ensure they are the right tool for a given city.

The first step is to recruit a housing affordability task force comprised of City representatives, local providers of affordable housing and social services, and other advocates, to explore models and policies to preserve Downtown's access to affordable housing in the long-term.

>> Ensure that the supply of workforce housing meets demand

Younger singles and couples are by far the largest segment of the market for new housing units of all types in Downtown Grand Rapids. However, typical housing costs Downtown are unattainable for a significant number of young people that are just entering the job market and living on their own for the first time. Two ways of addressing this challenge should be explored in order to ensure that housing options exist to retain talent and support the Downtown Grand Rapids workforce:

- > Within the TN-CC zone, provide height bonuses for providing 15% or more units for those earning below 120% of area median income
- > Consider instituting DDA tax abatement for workforce housing developments
- > As suggested in the housing market study, facilitating the development of Microlofts and Studio/Mezzanine Lofts has been a successful strategy in several cities towards making housing options affordable to recent grads and younger workers.

DIVERSIFY TYPES OF HOUSING AVAILABLE DOWNTOWN

As documented in the housing market study for Downtown, who is moving Downtown and what their preferences are continue to change. 73% of the market is comprised of younger singles and couples and this number is growing. Empty nesters and traditional/non-traditional families comprise 18% and 9% of the market respectively. Not only do all of these populations have different housing needs but there are variations within these markets as well. For instance, a portion of younger singles are very sensitive to housing prices due to large college debt.

To attract the people that have the potential to move to Downtown Grand Rapids, a range of housing options that cater to different needs is needed. Size, location, amenities and pricing are all factors to consider. Currently, the desire for higher-density urban rental housing continues to grow, representing about 46% of units Downtown in 2014. As the market grows, different models of Downtown living should be encouraged to offer product choices for residents. These include: Courtyard apartments [small-scale apartment buildings centered on a shared open space]; lofts [in reused, older structures or developed as new buildings]; liner buildings [apartments surrounding parking structures]; podium apartment building [small scale apartment building over ground floor parking and retail]; Microlofts [small apartments] and; attached townhomes. Microlofts and townhomes offer an attractive transition between Downtown density and nearby neighborhoods.

ENCOURAGE MORE STUDENTS TO LIVE DOWNTOWN

Affordable options for the more than 30,000 students attending the Downtown area's multiple institutions of higher education and wanting to live close-by are very limited. Aside from GVSU's two residence halls, the institutions themselves don't offer on-campus student housing and, with limited means of income, students don't compete well with young professionals and empty nesters for market rate housing Downtown. The benefits of providing student housing close to where they attend classes include laying the groundwork for retaining talent locally after graduation, reducing commuter miles, and encouraging more activity through nights and weekend Downtown. Development plans for 100 student housing units on the Westside are expected to break ground in 2015, and the City should promote future development in areas of the City particularly well positioned for student housing growth due to their proximity to local institutions. Microlofts, described previously in this chapter as a solution for providing workforce housing, could serve as an appropriate typology for students, as well as young professionals, living Downtown.

EXPLORE WAYS OF EXPANDING HOMEOWNERSHIP DOWNTOWN

As stated in ZVA's housing market study, "The realization of the full market potential for ownership units may continue to be challenging over the short-term, given restrictive mortgage underwriting by financial institutions, the

disinterest on the part of many younger households in becoming owners, the fact that many otherwise-qualified households, particularly current renters, lack the funds for a down payment, and the inability of many owner households to sell their existing single-family houses, or their reluctance to sell at a perceived loss of value.” All of this resonates with responses from the Downtown resident survey, which showed that while 50% of the survey participants said they would be interested in buying a home Downtown, those that said they would not consider it cited “I am not interested in buying a home,” “My personal financial situation,” and “Houses that are available in the community” among the top reasons for their lack of interest. Nevertheless, if 50% of Downtown renters are looking to buy, this is indicative of the well-observed lack of supply of home ownership products due to current conservative lending practices. Waiting lists for condo projects and housing focus-group discussions during the GR Forward process are indicative of the same. Overcoming this barrier and encouraging homeownership through other means would enable Downtown’s existing residents to put down roots, making them more likely to stay downtown longer term—not only a valuable community building opportunity, but a way of retaining talent Downtown. In the wake of tightened mortgage lending controls in 2009, trends such as pre-selling condos and seller financing can circumvent the development finance issues faced by developers and prospective homebuyers, though with these practices come additional issues of risk on both sides of the deal. Continuing conversations held

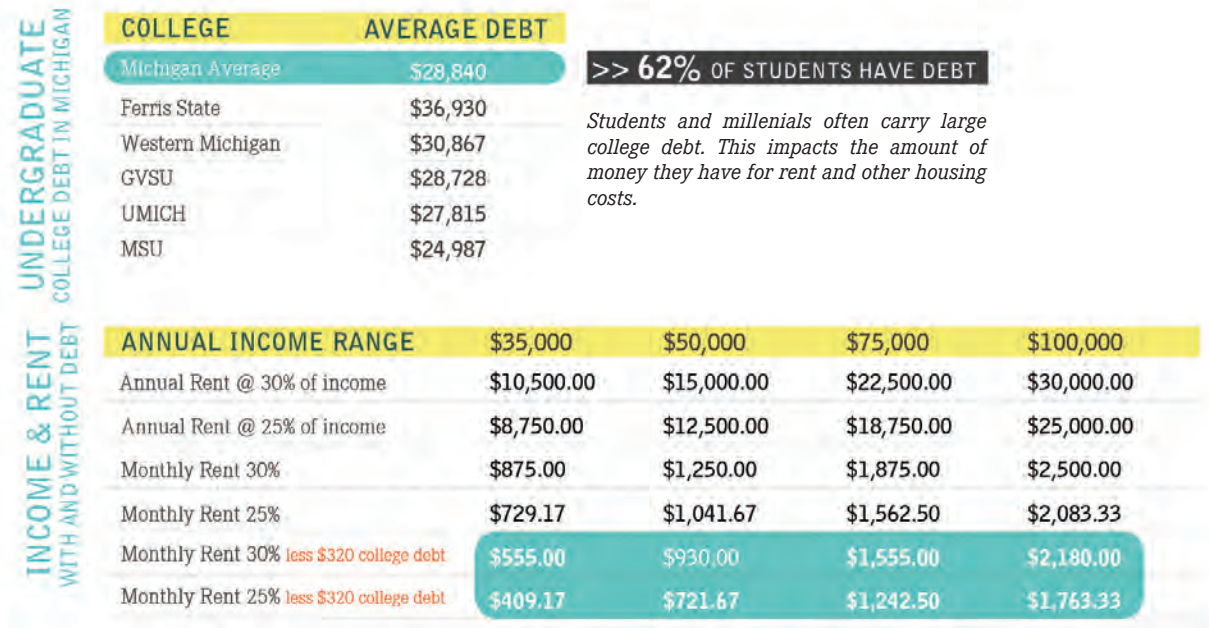


FIG 2.43: Analysis of student debt and housing costs

during the GR Forward process suggested the local development community and place-based nonprofits should work together to develop creative solutions in overcoming development finance barriers for homeownership and linking potential home buyers with the right opportunities when they are ready. Likewise, outreach to local waiting lists for future condo projects may be worthwhile in educating aspiring first time homebuyers about everything from prequalification to personal financial management.

2.4 CONCENTRATE RETAIL AND CLOSE THE RETAIL SERVICES GAP [GROCERY STORE, PHARMACY, MORE DIVERSE STORES, ETC.]

REVISIT ZONING REGULATIONS FOR GROUND FLOOR COMMERCIAL IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA

At present, the zoning ordinance provides the following schedule of height bonuses for gross area of retail uses at the ground floor within the TN-CC zoning district:

- > 20% of gross floor area of the ground floor designed and committed to retail use: 2 bonus stories
- > 50% of gross floor area of the ground floor designed and committed to retail use: 4 bonus stories
- > 75% of gross floor area of the ground floor designed and committed to retail use: 7 bonus stories

However, these height bonuses can be applied within the Downtown Height Overlay District A only, as developments proposed within the Overlay District B are not subject to a height limit, so bonuses have no value. The ground floor retail height bonuses are the extent of the current code’s encouragement of ground floor commercial uses. This is limiting in two ways: the “blanketing” of this height bonus over the Overlay District A area isn’t structured to direct retail uses specifically to Downtown’s main commercial thoroughfares; and the height bonus isn’t applicable to some segments of

“ One of the MAJOR things that Downtown GR is missing compared to other great towns is a street where you can walk for 6-8 blocks and go into different shops and Restaurants. Traverse City has Front Street, Holland has 8th street and Ann Arbor has Main St. All of these streets act as a central location for people from out of town can come and walk from shop to shop and eat out in a neighboring restaurant. I believe that Grand Rapids best opportunity to do this is along the Monroe center and Division corridors as there are many store fronts on division which are unoccupied and would do well for similar shops to those on 8th street, Front Street and main street in the towns mentioned above. ”

- Online collaborative map comment

FIG 2.44: Number of retail establishments by type for Grand Rapids and comparison cities

SOURCE: NE manual count based on downtown directories, Yelp, WalkScore
Grand Rapids lags other cities in terms of the number of retail offerings particularly with respect to restaurants. New residents will help provide support for more retail.

RETAIL TYPE	CINCINNATI (CBD)	INDIANAPOLIS (CBD/WHOLESALE)	MILWAUKEE (Juneau, Kilbourn, 3rd Ward)	GRAND RAPIDS (Downtown Heartside)
Retail (soft goods)	71	73	55	31
Food Products / Specialty Foods	29	8	14	14
Wellness (health clubs / yoga)	23	9	32	8
Bike shops	0	1	2	1
Full Service Restaurants	142	118	165	60
Entertainment Venues	19	21	38	12
Coffee Houses / Locations	49	26	37	15

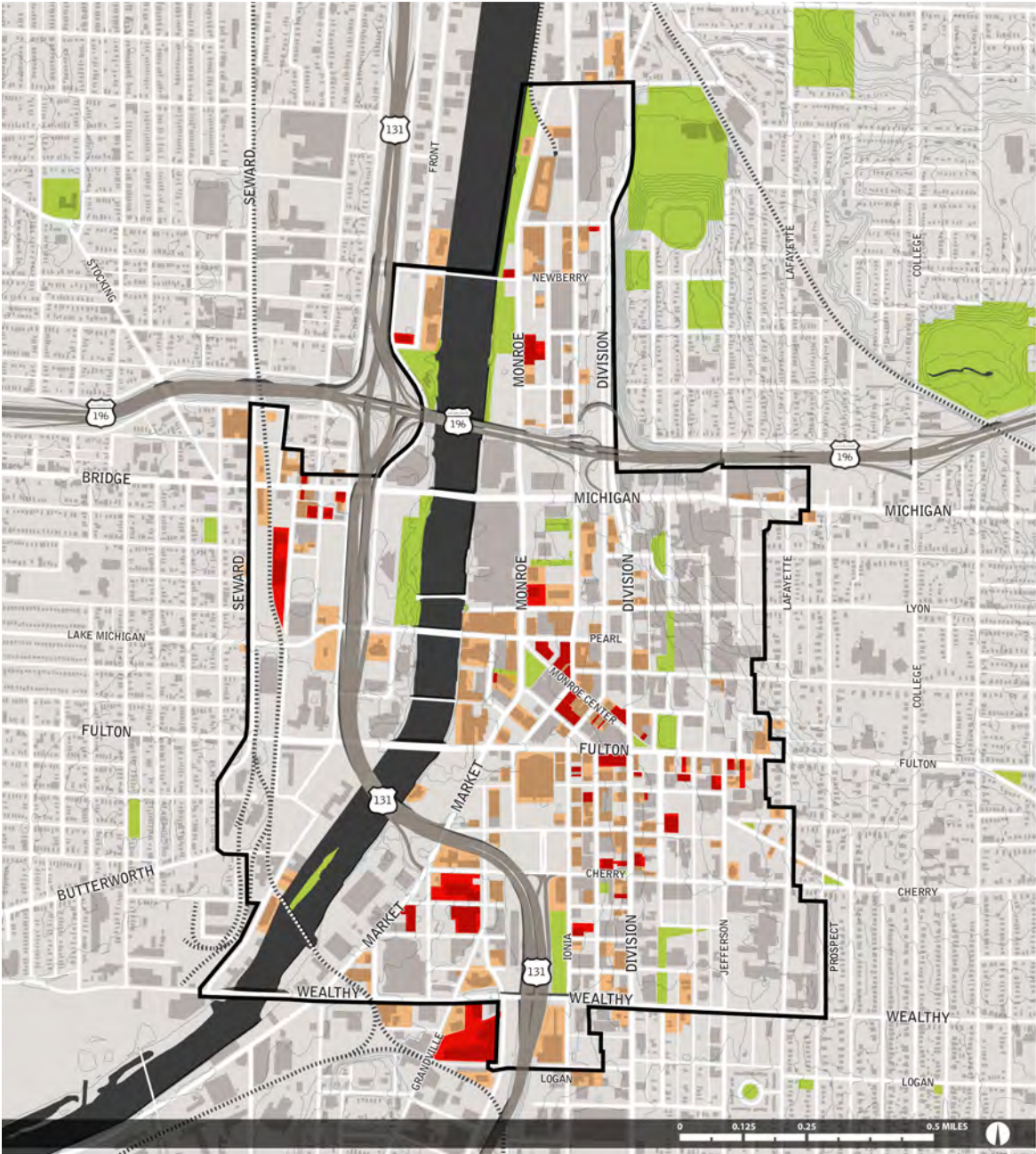
* Shopping Mall

Downtown’s primary commercial streets where they are within the Overlay District B.

Establishing two classes of commercial streets Downtown— a broader “Targeted Active Commercial Corridors” and, more

specific and concentrated, “Targeted Retail and Entertainment Corridors” – will utilize zoning requirements and height bonuses to encourage continuous commercial corridors by concentrating active ground floor commercial uses on specific streets.

FIG 2.45: Existing retail Downtown

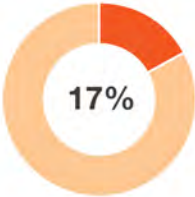


RETAIL

INTERFACE - STUDIO FIELD SURVEY

COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES:

281 TOTAL
49 RETAIL



17% of commercial properties have retail

- COMMERCIAL - RETAIL
- ALL COMMERCIAL

The map of existing retail businesses Downtown illustrates the need for more continuous retail and entertainment corridors, as the gaps between these establishments and discontinuous active ground floor uses tend to weaken and fragment the Downtown shopping experience.

>>Limit available height bonuses to encourage active ground floor commercial uses only on Targeted Active Commercial Corridors

Today, incentives are used to encourage ground floor retail throughout Downtown [except in Height Overlay B where there is no height limit]. With limited current demand for retail and commercial uses, these uses should be strategically encouraged along “Targeted Active Commercial Corridors.” The Targeted Active Commercial Corridors would replace the existing Overlay District A as the area in which developments can take advantage of height bonuses for ground floor retail. For all proposed developments and substantial renovations with frontage on a Targeted Active Commercial Corridor, height bonuses should be granted according to the following proposed schedule:



Empty storefront in Downtown

- > 50% of Targeted Commercial Corridor frontage and 25% of gross floor area of the ground floor designed and committed to permitted Retail or Entertainment, Hospitality and Recreation uses: 2 bonus stories
- > 75% of Targeted Commercial Corridor frontage and 50% of gross floor area of the ground floor designed and committed to permitted Retail or Entertainment, Hospitality and Recreation uses: 4 bonus stories
- > 90% of Targeted Commercial Corridor frontage and 75% of gross floor area of the ground floor designed and committed to permitted Retail or Entertainment, Hospitality and Recreation uses: 7 bonus stories

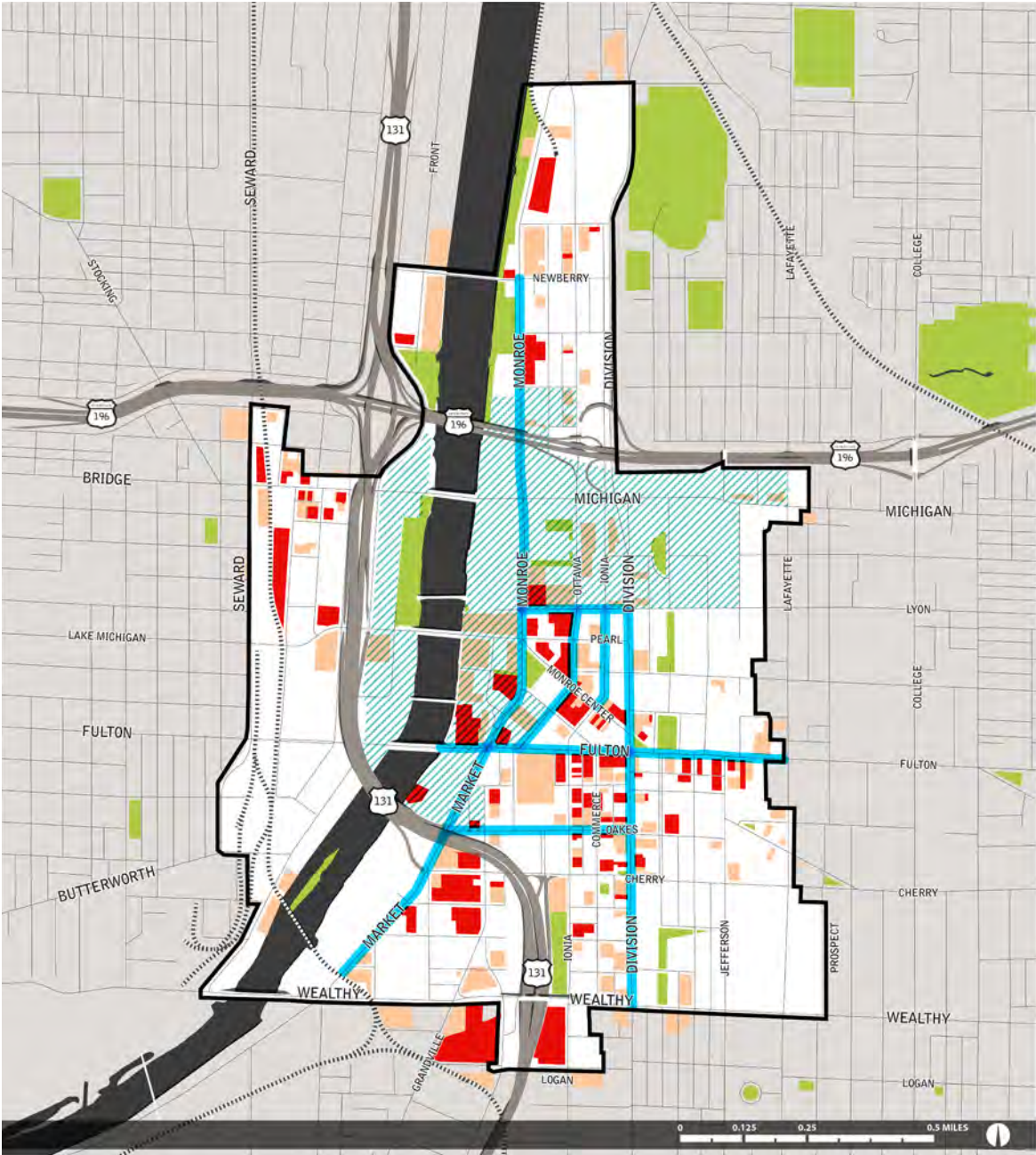
The existing zoning ordinance incentivizes retail uses, but there may be other non-retail commercial businesses that would bring positive activity and increase/diversify foot traffic as ground floor uses along corridors. Many uses within the Entertainment, Hospitality, and Recreation [such as Arcade, Restaurant, Bowling Alley, and others]; Personal Services [such as Dry Cleaning, Salon, Photo Finishing Service, etc.]; certain Office use categories; and certain uses not explicitly defined in current zoning, such as nonprofit arts and cultural entities and co-working spaces, should be considered as an appropriate ground floor use on a Targeted Active Commercial Corridor in Downtown Grand Rapids.

>>Require ground floor retail on “Targeted Retail and Entertainment Corridors”

Currently, the zoning code requires ground floor retail use along Monroe Center and Division Downtown. To help encourage a concentration of retail services, these targeted streets should be expanded and changed slightly. Specifically, Division should be removed from this requirement and instead identified as a Targeted Active Commercial Corridor described above. This will help to encourage a range of suitable uses, including small businesses, for Division. In addition, new streets should be considered as Targeted Retail and Entertainment Corridors including: Bridge Street, Ionia Street, and portions of Commerce and Pearl Streets shown in Fig 2.47. The following zoning revisions should be considered for developments or substantial renovations with frontage on Targeted Retail and Entertainment Corridors:

- > Minimum of 70% of Targeted Commercial Corridor linear front footage and 50% of gross floor area [or a minimum commercial depth of 30'] of the ground floor should be designed and committed to Active Commercial Uses
- > Active Commercial Uses should be accessed directly from the Targeted Active Commercial Corridors
- > Limit linear front footage of less active uses along the primary face of Targeted Commercial Corridors to a maximum of 20%. This would include uses such as banks and residential/office lobbies.

FIG 2.46: Targeted Active Commercial Corridors

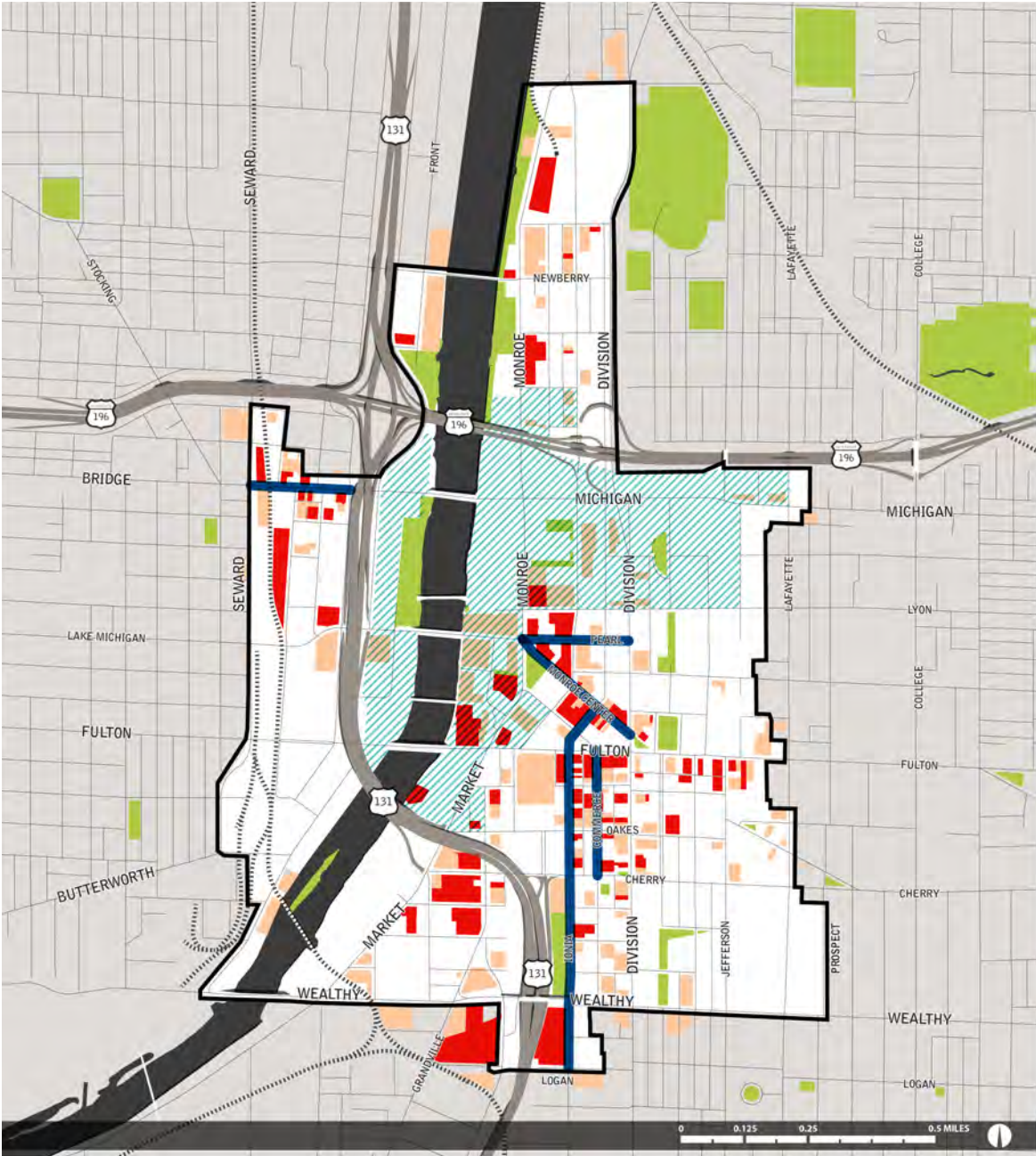


TARGETED ACTIVE COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS

Active commercial corridors represent those critical locations where we should encourage a range of ground floor, active uses including retail, restaurants, small offices and services like gyms. These are different than the Targeted Retail and Entertainment corridors shown on the next page.

- BARS/RESTAURANTS & RETAIL
- OTHER COMMERCIAL
- EXISTING OVERLAY B AREA
- TARGETED ACTIVE COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS

FIG 2.47: Targeted Retail and Entertainment Corridors



TARGETED RETAIL & ENTERTAINMENT CORRIDORS

Targeted Retail and Entertainment corridors represent the locations where there is the greatest potential to create a critical mass of Downtown retail. Ground floor retail and/or entertainment uses are required in these locations as they already are along Monroe Center.

- BARS/RESTAURANTS & RETAIL
- OTHER COMMERCIAL
- EXISTING OVERLAY B AREA
- TARGETED RETAIL & ENTERTAINMENT CORRIDORS

EMPLOY A TARGETED MARKETING STRATEGY TO ATTRACT ANCHOR RETAIL

Public input revealed a considerable demand for additional retail and commercial services throughout the GR Forward process. The additional market rate housing units, the strong convention business, coupled with the results from the retail benchmarking suggest room for some additional retail and restaurant activity in Downtown Grand Rapids. The retailing strategy needs to focus on the components that DGRI and the City can control. The recommended retail corridor strategy creates focus areas for shopping activity. The other opportunity is targeted marketing to draw anchor retailers to West Michigan's Downtown.

While the well-known "retail follows rooftops" phenomenon may well prove to be the case, a well "curated" retail mix may depend on targeted marketing efforts to bring in businesses that may be overlooking Downtown Grand Rapids. The selling points are threaded through this document: Downtown is booming with new residents and will continue to grow, Grand Rapids is the employment center of West Michigan, and planned reinvestment in recreation in and along the Grand River promises to bring an even greater influx of visitors who are likely to spend money Downtown while in town. Ensuring that messaging is well tuned to attracting national retailers, small business owners, and entrepreneurs and makes the case for locating in Grand Rapids is critical to the continued vitality of Downtown.

Restaurants, particularly restaurants with interesting concepts, have become the equivalent of destination retail for many urban centers. Moreover, discussions about talent attraction revealed that people returning to Grand Rapids have an expectation of similar amenities to the larger cities in which they have lived. This can be done through Local First with an eye toward growing locally-owned businesses but also by identifying and marketing to experienced restaurant operators with a track record of developing interesting concepts. An example of this type of operator is the Lettuce Entertain You Restaurant Group [leye.com]. It owns and operates restaurants across several states with significant concentrations in Minneapolis, Chicago, and an outpost in Milwaukee. Operators such as this bring both experience as well as financial capacity to support development.

In addition, exploring unique shopping opportunities may be appropriate. For example, a search of ETSY suggests that Grand Rapids area craftspeople create and sell 22,040 handmade products through the online marketplace. A potential opportunity to both build their businesses by expanding their exposure and access to potential customers and create a unique shopping experience may be worth pursuing.

“Right now there are just a lot of islands of retail and not a critical mass.”

- GR Forward interviewee

2.5 REQUIRE CLEAN AND EFFICIENT ENERGY, GREEN BUILDING PRACTICES, AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES IN PROJECTS WITH LOCAL SUBSIDY

Home of the nation's first LEED-Certified art museum, among a number of additional models of green practices, Grand Rapids is setting a leadership example in the country for sustainability. New projects with financial assistance from DGRI or the City should be required to incorporate energy efficiency and green building practices to decrease their environmental footprint and improve the environmental quality of life in the City. Today, greener living is no longer an exception but the rule. This recommendation will help the City meet their goals with respect to Low-Impact Development and also ensure lower utility costs for residents and businesses. Universal design principles result in products and environments that are usable by everyone, regardless of age or physical ability. By incorporating these design principles into public projects, the City will send a powerful message of support for all of its residents; public projects also will be a model for private developments.

The design for new and rehabilitated structures should be encouraged at a minimum to address the following three aspects of eco-friendly design.

MANAGE STORMWATER AT THE MICRO LEVEL

Projects should employ Low Impact Development [LID] techniques that aim to preserve or restore predevelopment hydrology systems and water quality by introducing a series of interventions that provide hydrologic and pollution control for small, frequently occurring storms. Stormwater management techniques including green roofs, raingardens, vegetated swales, dry wells, tree box filters and permeable pavements will minimize stormwater runoff by maximizing the water volume that infiltrates [sinks into the soil or green roof on site] and evaporates [from the ground or plant matter]. These techniques will reinforce and supplement the investments made to separate the City's combined sewer overflows [CSOs]. This commitment has resulted in a 98% reduction of sewer overflow into the River and improved water quality. The greenspace requirements of the zoning ordinance and Chapter 32 of the City Code encourage the use of Best Management Practices [BMPs] for stormwater management that helps to improve water quality. In addition, the City will soon release the Green Infrastructure Guidance Manual and Green Infrastructure Standards to provide tools and information for integrating stormwater management into streets, parks and development projects.

PROMOTE GREEN BUILDING

In accordance with City goals and policies, projects should adopt green building techniques resulting in improved energy and water efficiency; use renewable sources of energy, like solar and wind and; use building materials that are energy efficient, have high recycled content, low toxicity, and high durability. In addition, the GR Forward projects should seek to reduce the waste from construction, renovation, and demolition when possible as a significant amount of landfills are comprised on construction and demolition waste. Deconstruction policies to promote material recycling should also be considered including: Requiring a reuse and recycling plan for demolition and construction of large projects and; requiring projects that need subsidy to meet a targeted reuse rate [some cities strive for 75%].



A green wall in Downtown.

EMBRACE SUSTAINABLE SITE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Projects should promote walkability in Downtown, contributing to an environment that prioritizes the pedestrian and makes walking [and walking to transit] easier and more comfortable than driving. Where possible, white or green roofs should be encouraged and parking areas should be designed with light colored, permeable paving materials to lessen the urban heat island effect and allow for stormwater absorption and filtration. The City of Grand Rapids is making good progress in becoming a more environmentally sound and ecologically friendly city. New resources, guidelines, technical assistance, and programs are available and continue to be developed by the City for use by municipal departments, residents and developers. Examples of this include the partnership between the Environmental Services Department and Parks Department for treatment of storm water on park sites, Low Impact Design strategies implemented with new road projects and requirements of developers to retain and treat storm water on site.



A local example of integrated stormwater management.





IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

Implementation of Goal 2 strategies require a number of interrelated elements to move forward fostering new partnerships and expanding existing ones. While there are many strategies included in this Goal, their implementation revolves around the following actions:

- > Changing policy - to alter the rules governing development requires discussions with key City representatives, the Planning Commission and City Commissioners. GR Forward includes direction on the key outcomes and suggestions for alterations. Specific details will be determined by City government and their partners.
- > Creating viable incentives - some of the objectives with respect to development in terms of quality and affordability requires more than policy changes. The goals of GR Forward need to be aligned with those organizations that offer incentives and assist in development financing.
- > Facilitating development - Zoning and incentives can guide the development of privately-held properties but for public or DDA-owned properties, other actions are necessary including the creation of development plans, permitting and possibly the provision of new or improved infrastructure. Looking forward, land assembly and site control remain key factors in facilitating timely development.
- > Marketing - DGRI, the City, the Convention & Visitors Bureau, Experience Grand

Rapids among others all market the City and Downtown. To market Downtown as a neighborhood and to attract key retail uses, targeted marketing initiatives should build on the capacity of these organizations.

- > Engagement - DGRI and their partners can play a central role in helping to bring neighbors together and empower them in shaping how Downtown evolves. From making data readily available to forming Downtown youth programs, the engagement of residents and partner organizations is critical.

The following projects are implementation priorities for creating a Downtown neighborhood:

- Change the existing zoning and height regulations Downtown
- Revisit existing development incentives for open space, River access and mixed-income housing
- Revisit zoning regulations for ground floor commercial in the Downtown area
- Replace existing parking requirements with parking maximums
- Pursue full site control of properties north of I-196 owned by the City, County and MSU
- Develop promotional video, tours and information packages for prospective Downtown residents
- Support efforts to establish a Downtown residents council
- Encourage developers to pursue alternative housing models [including micro-units] and regularly provide data on housing preferences for Downtown residents
- Begin to develop designs and disposition plans for DDA-owned property on the near Westside for development

2 CREATE A TRUE DOWNTOWN, NEIGHBORHOOD AS HOME TO A DIVERSE POPULATION			
2.1 Leverage development opportunities to hit "critical mass" and close gaps between neighborhoods			
Recommendation	Timeframe	Responsibility / Partners	Source of Funds
Change existing zoning and height regulations	1st Year	City of Grand Rapids	-
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Discuss and create new zoning language to guide heights including potential interim height overlays			
Consider changes to allowable heights in the Downtown Overlay [A] and along Bridge Street in Downtown			
Revisit development incentives	1st Year	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / Developers	-
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Develop a package of new incentives to encourage key goals of GR Forward			
Remap the Existing City Center Zone	1st Year	City of Grand Rapids	-
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Introduce new City Center are for discussion			
Change the Approach to Downtown Parking Requirements	1st Year	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI	-
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Work with the Parking Commission [Mobile GR] to determine parking maximum policy and penalties for exceeding the maximum			
Encourage infill development to close gaps within and between neighborhoods	ongoing	DGRI / private developers / City of Grand Rapids	private equity / local incentives
> Near Westside	within 5 years	DGRI	DGRI
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Assemble and prepare the land for redevelopment - site prep costs to be determined			
Develop small plaza as a development anchor - see section 5.2b			
Offer opportunities to develop specific parcels through a developer RFP			
> 201 Market	within 10 years	City of Grand Rapids	private equity / local incentives
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Evaluate alternative sites for existing City facilities and develop a timeline for relocation			
Demolish existing facilities and prep the land for new development			
Finalize the site and landscape designs to guide development			

Recommendation	Timeframe	Responsibility / Partners	Source of Funds
> Fulton & Market	within 5 years	private owners / City of Grand Rapids	private equity / local incentives
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Coordinate with property owners on flood infrastructure and public space design			
> MSU/City of Grand Rapids/Kent County site	1st year	City of Grand Rapids / MSU / Kent County	City of Grand Rapids / private support / grants
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Pursue full site control			
Develop design approach to secure public access, improve flood infrastructure and shield the highway			
> Connect Heartside, Heritage Hill, and the Downtown core	within 10 years	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / Developers / local institutions	MDOT / DGRI / City of Grand Rapids / private equity
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Encourage the redevelopment of State Street - with local institutions and property owners			
Promote Division Avenue as a small business corridor - create ready-to-go “white box” space for new retail, business plan competition, matching grants for business expansion and/or equipment			
Encourage residential on Division - smaller housing units in upper floors targeted for single professionals and students			
Preserve historic character while accommodating growth	within 5 years	City of Grand Rapids	-
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Update the Historic Preservation Guidelines for Heartside [City of Grand Rapids]			
Discuss changes to Historic Preservation Commissioner appointments [City of Grand Rapids]			
Create and maintain a list of historic structures [designated or not] in Downtown including their condition, use and ownership status - maintain contact with owners [DGRI / City of Grand Rapids]			
Create and maintain a list of historic preservation financing options and incentives [DGRI / City of Grand Rapids]			

2.2 Support initiatives that improve downtown living for existing residents & attract new neighbors Downtown

Recommendation	Timeframe	Responsibility / Partners	Source of Funds
Foster civic engagement and strengthen community ties Downtown	within 5 years	DGRI / City of Grand Rapids / Downtown property owners and institutions	-
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Support efforts to establish a Downtown residents council			
Ensure diverse representation on local boards			
Educate residents about ways to be engaged in discussions around change Downtown			
Unlock the potential of municipal data and online tools	within 5 years	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / GRPS / The Rapid	-
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Explore a comprehensive Open Data policy			
Expand and centralize online tools			
Expand youth programming	within 10 years	City of Grand Rapids / local non-profits / GRPS / DGRI	-
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Design and organize 2-3 dedicated youth events each year - \$10,000 for marketing and organization per event			
Reinforce and promote the Mayor's 100 Campaign - engage youth on Downtown beautification			
Increase access to fresh produce Downtown	within 5 years	Health care providers / local institutions / DGRI	-
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Work with local institutions and Downtown residents to explore the option of tapping into a CSA			
Incentivize additional farmers markets Downtown			
Explore financial incentives to attract new Downtown residents	within 5 years	DGRI	-
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Coordinate discussions with major employers to discuss options for incentive packages to encourage employees to live close to where they work			

Recommendation	Timeframe	Responsibility / Partners	Source of Funds
Expand marketing efforts to promote Downtown living	1st Year	DGRI	-

Initial Action Steps -

Develop promotional video, tours and information packages for prospective Downtown residents

Promote zero waste infrastructure and services throughout Downtown	1st Year	DGRI/ City of Grand Rapids/ Property Owners	DGRI/ City of Grand Rapids/ Property Owners
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Initial Action Steps -

Plan and implement a zero waste event Downtown

2.3 Preserve and expand housing opportunity Downtown

Recommendation	Timeframe	Responsibility / Partners	Source of Funds
Ensure that Downtown grows affordable housing opportunities for a range of incomes	1st year	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / local non-profits	LIHTC / foundation support / grants

Initial Action Steps -

Support preservation of low-income housing and social services - site acquisition for affordable housing development

Ensure that the supply of workforce housing meets demand - development incentives for workforce housing

Diversify types of housing available Downtown	ongoing	DGRI / Grand Rapids Alliance of Cooperative Communities / private developers	private equity / local incentives
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Initial Action Steps -

Encourage developers to pursue alternative housing models - regularly provide data on housing preferences for Downtown residents

Encourage more students to live Downtown	within 5 years	DGRI / City of Grand Rapids / local colleges and universities	-
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Initial Action Steps -

Encourage new student housing on the near Westside and along Division Avenue through the development of micro-units

Explore ways of expanding homeownership Downtown	within 5 years	DGRI / private developers / Downtown prospective residents	-
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Initial Action Steps -

Explore ways to better link homebuyers with available and potential real estate

2.4 Concentrate retail and close the retail services gap

Recommendation	Timeframe	Responsibility / Partners	Source of Funds
Revisit zoning regulations for ground floor commercial in the Downtown area	1st year	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / property owners	-
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Concentrate active ground floor commercial uses on Targeted Active Commercial Corridors through height bonuses and incentives			
Change zoning regulations to require ground floor retail on Targeted Retail and Entertainment Corridors			
Employ a targeted marketing strategy to attract anchor retail	within 5 years	DGRI / City of Grand Rapids	-
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Targeted marketing strategies to retailers suitable for Downtown			

2.5 Require clean and efficient energy, green building practices, and universal design principles in projects with local subsidy

Recommendation	Timeframe	Responsibility / Partners	Source of Funds
Manage stormwater at the micro level	within 5 years	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / WMEAC / developers	-
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Conduct stormwater workshops to educate developers, property owners and residents about stormwater collection techniques			
Promote green building	within 5 years	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / USGBC	-
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Educate developers and property owners about green building design - create a summary document on green building best practices			
Embrace sustainable site design principles	within 5 years	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / developers	-
<i>Initial Action Steps -</i>			
Promote the City's Low Impact Development Guidelines when complete			