Connecting Communities with Vernor Crossing
Southwest Detroit, Michigan
PlacePlan

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September 26, 2014
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MIplace Partnership

PlacePlans is supported by Michigan State University (MSU) and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) as a component of the MIplace Partnership. The MIplace Partnership is a statewide initiative with the purpose of keeping Michigan at the forefront of a national movement known as placemaking. It is based on the concept that people choose to live in places that offer the amenities, resources, social and professional networks, and opportunities to support thriving lifestyles. The partnership helps communities create and bolster those places. Learn more at miplace.org

Local Partners

The PlacePlans team would like to acknowledge the Southwest Detroit Business Association staff and board members for their constant support and assistance. The local partners ensured that the team had data, documents and the community input necessary for developing this report. Special thanks to Kathy Wendler, President of SDBA, and Theresa Zajac, Vice-President, for coordinating our local efforts.

In addition to program support from MSU and MSHDA, the Southwest Detroit project received additional funding from the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

The PlacePlans team would also like to express gratitude to the Detroit residents, business owners, and other community leaders who participated in meetings and provided feedback during this process. Placemaking begins with a community-supported vision for what makes a place a true destination; without you, this process would not be possible.
Southwest Detroit has a tremendous opportunity to capitalize on its many assets and enhance the community’s connectivity, walkability, and entrepreneurship efforts. Already the area is thriving with activity—from locally owned storefronts, children walking to school, to street vendors—and improving the connection between the east and west ends of Vernor can enhance the local economy.

Redeveloping Vernor Crossing into a community-oriented area can be a linchpin project to retain and attract residents, businesses, and fill gaps in services, retail, and public space. To maximize this potential, however, all actors must look at the project differently: Vernor Crossing isn’t just a single redevelopment property, but an economic development catalyst and a hub for a growing community.

**Report Contents**

The following section of this report, *Why Plan for Place?* provides more detailed background on the project history and timeline and the choices made about technical experts who were brought into the process. The detailed recommendations from the technical consultants are attached as appendices. In addition to the appendices, the Place Assets section of this document articulates a number of recommendations that apply more generally to Southwest Detroit and the Vernor communities.

**Key Action Areas**

While all of the recommendations contained in those parts of the document are important, there are a few key steps project leaders must take first to help seize the opportunity the Vernor Crossing project presents. To continue the project’s momentum, the Michigan Municipal League (the League) recommends the following steps moving forward:

1. **Work with hired consultant to complete a full Target Market Analysis (TMA) of both commercial and residential needs**

   LandUse USA completed a preliminary analysis of the local commercial market for the charrette Southwest Detroit Business Association (SDBA) hosted in July. Work with the consulting group to complete a full TMA of local commercial and residential demands and prepare a summary to highlight exciting and important community needs.
2. Begin an environmental site assessment for the department of public works service building

Before any work can begin on the brownfield site, all environmental and safety needs must be met. Continue to work with the philanthropic community, business owners, and government departments to facilitate a baseline environmental assessment of the property. Follow all documentation and reporting requirements and prepare a summary and cost analysis of the required improvements.

3. Using results, ideas, and data from reports prepared for this project, develop a vision for Vernor Crossing that highlights aspects of the project SDBA and the community will support

Placemaking should incorporate a number of different perspectives and disciplines to maximize impact. With the mindset that Vernor Crossing will be designed as a community gathering space and catalyst for economic development, use the TMA, environmental report, design recommendations from Archive DS, and the asset analysis from the League (in the Place Assets section of this report), to develop a vision and highlight strategies SDBA and community partners believe in and will advocate for.

4. Present the plan vision to partners in the city of Detroit, the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC), and Detroit Future City (DFC)

While the city of Detroit and DFC were initial partners on the Vernor Crossing project, their participation was somewhat inconsistent. It’s important to have full support of the local government and DFC, who will be key players in seeking funders and developers as the project progresses. Present the community vision—which is supported by evidence, data, and recommendations from various analyses—to these partners and discuss options moving forward. In this collaboration, identify roles and responsibilities of each group, a desired timeline, and plans for attracting funders and developers.

With a clear understanding of market demands and a set vision of design priorities and community needs, the project team must remove any zoning or environmental obstacles developers may face if they take on the project. For example, examine existing city zoning codes to ensure any design changes will fit into current requirements. If not, work with the city to update zoning codes to allow for the more creative and usable public spaces the Archive DS report recommends before bringing the project to developers.

5. Work with partners to reach out to potential contributors, including local foundations and government agencies

The collaboration between SDBA, the city, and DFC should lead the way into the project implementation phase. This is likely to involve a number of funders and regulatory entities, both from nonprofit philanthropies and state government. Many local foundations support projects that enhance placemaking, art, walkability, entrepreneurship, and many other aspects featured in the Vernor Crossing plan. For example:

a. The Department of Transportation may be interested in supporting project elements that enhance walking and biking connections;

b. The Housing Development Authority will have a keen interest in any mixed-use development that includes housing units;

c. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Economic Development Corporation both have programs to support food-related entrepreneurs and infrastructure investment;

d. Environmental Quality staff support green infrastructure and low-impact development.

All of these agencies, as described in the next section, work together via an interdepartmental committee that supports placemaking projects and thus may be willing to tackle Detroit’s project as a team rather than independently.

6. With the support of partners and potential funders, promote the project to potential developers

Throughout each action item, continue to build the case for potential developers that this is a location worth their investment by building a visible coalition of community supporters. Uncertainty is a major barrier to development, and all pieces of this work address that by establishing predictability: the charrette report provides an overall vision that helps a developer know what to expect next door, the TMA will help them understand the market opportunities, and a vocal neighborhood consensus around the plan promises a smooth public process.
All of these advantages should be communicated to assemblies of developers and related professionals to bring their attention to the city-owned parcel and to available sites nearby. Organizations like the Michigan chapters of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) and Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU), and events like the International Council of Shopping Centers’ annual Idea Exchange event (usually held in July in Novi) will be valuable channels for this outreach.

7. Throughout the entire process, work with community partners to make tactical, low-cost improvements to public spaces within the plan

Keep the community involved and excited about the project’s scope and don’t wait for large-scale developments to improve the area. Using low-cost, tactical placemaking improvements, begin to make changes in the area’s streetscape, parking lots, storefronts, and other public spaces residents and visitors can enjoy. Archive DS provides step-by-step improvements throughout their report and the League recommends small-scale placemaking changes throughout the Assets & Opportunities section, with more project examples at placemaking.mml.org.

Crowdfunding provides an interesting and viable funding option for many of these “lighter, quicker, cheaper” placemaking projects. Crowdfunding is a way to raise money for a specific project or venture (usually) through an online platform. Many people contribute varying dollar amounts until a final goal is met or timeframe runs out. Patronicity2 is a Detroit-based crowdfunding site that supports community projects across the state. Improvements to Vernor Crossing and the greater southwest community could be funded, or partially funded, through crowdfunding. Crowdfunding is also a way to build excitement, community awareness, and additional support for projects.

Public Spaces Community Places3 is an opportunity that launched this summer through the Patronicity platform. MEDC is offering a matching grant, up to $100,000, for public projects that fit certain criteria and meet their funding goal. The goal is to help fund public plazas, green spaces, access to public amenities, farmers markets, alley rehabilitation, and other place-based, public projects. A full application guide with eligibility information, scoring, and other details is available at https://patronicity.com/puremichigan.

As SDBA and partners continue this work, the League stands ready to assist.

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2 Patronicity: https://patronicity.com/
3 Patronicity: https://patronicity.com/puremichigan
Why Plan for Place?

PlacePlans is a pilot program that began in 2012 as a collaboration between the Michigan Municipal League (the League) and Michigan State University (MSU), with funding support from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA). The program supports and guides communities as they carefully invest in key public spaces that will drive economic development and help attract and retain residents and businesses. PlacePlans aims to positively impact a community’s ability to leverage their place-based assets as economic drivers to help them attract and retain residents and businesses. Project reports also provide municipalities across Michigan with examples and lessons for how to improve their own community. Detroit is one of twelve cities participating in the PlacePlans pilot program.

MSU and MSHDA define placemaking as the process of creating quality places where people want to live, work, play, and learn. Successful placemaking is a dynamic, strategic approach to community and economic development based on an individual community’s strengths. PlacePlans demonstrates elements of the placemaking process, working with and supporting the leadership of local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and residents. The PlacePlans process is customized to each project and community, but each involve the collaborative effort to select a priority site and an intensive local engagement strategy with direct work with community stakeholders.

Products of PlacePlan projects include conceptual designs, market studies, analysis of community assets, implementation recommendations, and better connections to state agency support tools. For more information about placemaking in Michigan and the PlacePlans program, visit placemaking.mml.org.
Connection to Statewide Initiatives

The MPlace Partnership (www.miplace.org) is a statewide initiative dedicated to keeping Michigan at the forefront of the national placemaking movement. It’s based on the concept that people choose to live in places that offer the amenities, resources, social and professional networks, and opportunities to support thriving lifestyles. The partnership helps communities create and bolster those places through education, technical assistance, and implementation tools. MPlace is led by MSHDA and coordinated through a public/private leadership collaborative known as the Sense of Place Council. Both MSU and the League are members of the council, which also includes numerous other statewide institutions.

The League also developed the Partnership for Place policy agenda, which proposes to change the way local and state governments invest in and support quality places. The agenda builds a stronger partnership between the State of Michigan and its municipalities that will support sustainable economic growth and invest in key places. The agenda focuses on four key action areas:

- **Funding for the Future**
  Making sure that appropriate funds and tools are available to operate efficiently and work regionally in order to succeed globally.

- **Michigan in Motion**
  Shifting from near-exclusive vehicular-based investment to alternative modes of transportation that will accommodate all users.

- **Place for Talent**
  Partnering with the State to attract and retain talented workers in our communities through placemaking policies.

- **Strength in Structure**
  Seeking out solutions to invest in infrastructure and development where it will produce the best results and target resources with maximum outcomes.

You can find more information about the Partnership for Place at mml.org/advocacy/partnership-for-place.html.

Detroit’s Project History

Southwest Detroit was selected for participation in PlacePlans through a statewide competitive selection process in the fall of 2013. The review panel was impressed with Southwest Detroit Business Association’s (SDBA) partnership with the city of Detroit, Detroit Future City (DFC), and the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC) to improve the area. SDBA’s relationships with local business owners, the community, and leadership in streetscape projects with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Urban Land Institute (ULI) also played a major role in the panel’s selection.

The project targeted Vernor Square, a vacant, city-owned brownfield site. The Urban Land Institute Advisory Services Panel convened a group of specialists to undertake a comprehensive study of potential uses for the site. The final report recommended Vernor Square become community-oriented development incorporating local retail, employment, and meeting space.

Building off the ULI report, SDBA expressed interest in a community design workshop (or charrette) to delve into more detail on practical, implementable solutions for improving the property, but also the surrounding streets and commercial corridors. SDBA also requested additional naming/branding ideas for the site, as alternatives to Vernor Square.

MML contracted with Detroit-based architecture firm Archive DS to lead the design process in May 2014. During May and June, staff from SDBA, the League, and Archive DS engaged in a series of preparatory meetings and site research. In July 2014, SDBA hosted the charrette over the course of three days at its headquarters and rebranded the site as Vernor Crossing. The final set of design concepts and recommendations from that process is attached to this report as an appendix.
Department of Public Works Building

Source: Archive Design Studio

Vision for Redevelopment from Community Charrette

Source: Archive Design Studio
While we can’t easily, nor should we try to, change the underlying fabric of our communities, we need to acquire a deep understanding of what will make communities more competitive now and in the future, and actively seek to push them in this direction...So what does [placemaking] mean for community builders and government officials? It means that we need to forget much of what we learned in the last half of the 20th century and begin implementing new strategies and systems for everything from business attraction programs to service delivery methods.

– Michigan Municipal League
Executive Director & CEO
Daniel P. Gilmartin
Place Assets
Recommendations for Action

The Placemaking approach helps communities identify and build upon their unique strengths and personalities to grow and thrive: it leverages the public spaces within the community, and the activities of people in those spaces, to build virtuous cycles of use. Whether applied to a single lot, a street, or an entire downtown or neighborhood, placemaking helps communities raise up their distinct character both to best serve their residents and to attract new residents and businesses.

Much of the community planning practice of the 20th century focused on separating potentially incompatible land uses, providing for the rapid growth in detached single-family housing stock, treating commercial real estate as a commodity to serve the global investment market’s demand for standardization, and facilitating increased mobility through the personal car (to travel between these newly separated destinations). Unfortunately, the broad application of these trends ignored the human-scale interactions of traditional downtowns and neighborhoods, weakening many of our communities.

Communities must differentiate themselves to attract residents and businesses as the economy continues to globalize. Placemaking’s approach of engaging around existing assets supports this goal while honoring local culture and community.

Detroit Skyline

Photo Source: Michigan Municipal League
The Eight Asset Areas
While each community will have a different mixture of assets and opportunities, several common elements support placemaking in a broad variety of locations. These common elements provide a sound foundation that communities can build on with their individual assets through the placemaking process.

These common assets can be grouped into eight general areas:

• Physical Design and Walkability
• Environmental Sustainability
• Cultural Economic Development
• Entrepreneurship
• Welcoming to All
• Messaging and Technology
• Transportation Options
• Education

Summary of Evaluation
In support of the work performed by consultants Archive Design Studio, League staff scanned the project area for opportunities in these eight asset areas.

The following pages explain each asset area’s importance in building vibrant communities, call out some of the strengths and weaknesses of the downtown area, and identify several opportunities to leverage these assets in support of the entrepreneurial component and the development of a multimodal transportation network for the neighborhood. While no single recommendation will be sufficient to transform the prospects of the area, they can help build momentum towards the successful expansion of entrepreneurship opportunities and the development of a strong district identity around the area’s culture and many assets.

The following pages explain each asset area’s importance in building vibrant communities, highlight some of the strengths and challenges of the area, and identify several opportunities to leverage these assets in support of the report. The recommendations span from specific to city-wide. While no single recommendation will be sufficient to transform the prospects of the area, they can help build momentum towards better connecting southwest Detroit and expand economic opportunity.

Many sections also include a short summary of a related project from across the state. Full details on these and other placemaking examples from communities around Michigan can be found at http://placemaking.mml.org.
Physical Design and Walkability

The physical design and walkability of a community helps create interest, connectivity and overall “sense of place.” Walkability and connectivity can afford people safe and convenient access to the places they live, work, shop, and play. Examples include a traditional downtown with easy access from historic and architecturally pleasing residential areas, mixed-use development, traffic, and other infrastructure design features that consider pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized uses of the space.

Most Michigan streets are designed to prioritize cars, aiming to move them through a community as quickly as possible. Market analysis continues to show that preferences are changing and more people want to live in neighborhoods with walkable downtowns, access to cultural, social, and entertainment opportunities, and with a variety of transportation options. Walkability not only helps to create a strong sense of place, it promotes a strong local economy and healthy lifestyle.

Asset Analysis

Southwest Detroit is one of the city’s most densely populated areas and much of Vernor is busy with business activity, vehicle traffic, pedestrians, and bicyclists. The central area of Vernor and Livernois has a Walk Score of 66, making it the 11th most walkable Detroit neighborhood. Within a 20-minute walk, residents can get to a number of businesses, grocery stores, schools, parks, and other important amenities. The Michigan Department of Transportation is investing in the area by narrowing the road, adding bump-out parking, bicycle lanes, crosswalks, and improved lighting.

The Southwest Detroit Business Association has positively contributed to the area’s walkability by establishing the West Vernor and Springwells Business Improvement District and organizing public and private partners to improve lighting, sidewalks, and landscaping. Prioritizing these projects will quickly improve walkability and resident quality of life.

However, the pedestrian experience is far from perfect. Sidewalks are in poor condition and there are few trees or landscaping to help improve the quality of the space. Some buildings are in traditional downtown form, where the building is positioned right along the sidewalk, but others have a more suburban layout with underused parking lots lining the street. Commercial blight, vacancy, and unsightly industrial buildings are scattered throughout Vernor and, given its proximity to the international bridge crossing, the community suffers from high truck traffic. The trucking industry contributes to poor air quality, traffic problems, and dirt lining the streets. In some instances, business owners sweep their sidewalks more than once a day to keep their storefront clean. Barriers, such as the poorly maintained rail underpass between Livernois and Waterman, make it difficult to connect the east and west business districts of Vernor by anything other than a vehicle.

Below are recommendations to improve the community’s connectivity and walkability, which can dramatically enhance residents’ health and quality of life.

4 WalkScore: http://www.walkscore.com/score/vernor-hwy-wayne-county-mi-us
## Recommendations

- Collaborate with the Detroit Complete Streets Coalition to ensure a local ordinance is adopted in Detroit.
- Re-join the Michigan Fitness Foundation’s Promoting Active Communities (PAC) Program in 2015 by assessing the neighborhood and getting connected to additional information and resources.
- Use existing documents, such as the Detroit 2009 Master Plan[^5] and Detroit Future City’s Neighborhoods Plan[^6], and others to guide future community planning.
- Connect with nearby schools’ Safe Routes to School program to coordinate and streamline sidewalk and lighting improvements.
- As described in the Archive DS report, identify opportunities to promote more active uses of surface parking lots.

## Implementation Opportunities

- Send a letter of support to council members to quickly pass the Complete Streets ordinance. Information at [www.michigantrails.org/detroit completestreets/or](http://www.michigantrails.org/detroit completestreets/or) by contacting Myra Tetteh at mmtetteh@gmail.com.
- Register at [www.mihealthtools.org/communities](http://www.mihealthtools.org/communities) and begin the online assessment to stimulate economic development and promote healthy lifestyles. Contact Michelle Snitgen at msnitgen@michiganfitness.org for more information.
- Continue community conversations and engagement exercises to enhance the quality of public spaces in Southwest Detroit. Southwest organizers should work in partnership with the local government, council, and the Detroit Future City to facilitate future changes.
- Contact Bennett’ and Harms’ elementary schools to prioritize improvements and streetscape projects.
- Use “lighter, quicker, cheaper” techniques, like landscaping, local art, and sidewalk furniture, around the edges of parking lots to provide a buffer for pedestrians. Reference Project for Public Spaces[^9] or the League’s Berkley Placemaking Experiment[^10] case study for more information and examples.
- Encourage temporary uses such as food trucks or outdoor cafes in parking areas adjacent to sidewalks, as described in the Archive DS report on page 29.

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[^7]: Bennett Elementary School: [http://detroitk12.org/schools/bennett/](http://detroitk12.org/schools/bennett/)


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<tr>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Implementation Opportunities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Encourage business owners to keep their store fronts attractive and interesting to pedestrians.</td>
<td>• SDBA can encourage business owners to put out and maintain potted plants, keep their sidewalks free of trash and dirt, and even participate in a fun competition for which business has the best storefront. Figure out a low-cost incentive (a gift card, recognition on websites, an article in the local newspaper, etc.) that will keep business owners engaged. Use the League’s Berkley Placemaking Experiment case study as an example.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Review off-street parking utilization and existing parking requirements.</td>
<td>• Working with the City, consider reducing off-street parking requirements for development and identify any under-used parking areas that could be used for development.</td>
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The Tour de Troit has grown from a small group of people exploring Detroit by bike to Michigan’s largest bike ride and an important tool to promote safer streets for non-motorized users.  

Source: http://placemaking.mml.org/tour-de-troit/
Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability initiatives are critical for any community intending to be viable in today’s economy. Placemaking is strongly connected to environmental concerns because of the critical role that Michigan’s waterways, parks, and green spaces play in defining our communities. Whether through access to healthy local food, recreational trails and safe streets for walking and biking, or clean air and water, the environment is a vital part of healthy vibrant communities.

Asset Analysis

The Vernor and Livernois area has long been suffering from environmental hazards that directly impact the lives of residents. Surrounded by heavy industry and vehicle exhaust, the community has some of the state’s highest asthma rates and is considered one of Michigan’s most polluted areas. Many Southwest streets are littered with trash, tires, and burned-out houses, even when residents and children continue to live on the street. Old homes in the community are lined with lead paint, which is difficult and expensive for residents to remove on their own. Recent controversies, such as the storage of petroleum coke in the community, are attracting larger public awareness of the environmental issues and may lead to greater clean-up initiatives.

Despite these large-scale issues, the community is populated with well-programmed parks such as Clark Park11 and Patton Park at either end of the community, and small green spaces residents can enjoy. Recycle Here12, a local recycling center, has a satellite drop-off location the fourth Saturday of the month at Clark Park and a coalition of environmental leaders facilitate regular community clean-ups and have developed the community’s environmental vision13. Supporting the community’s active environmental leaders and assets could have a dramatic impact on residents’ safety and health.

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13 Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision: http://www.sdevweb.org/

Some of a large group of volunteers from businesses, neighborhood groups and organizations weed and beautify Roosevelt Park, located directly in front of the historic and troubled Michigan Central Depot, in Detroit in June. Groups hope to make over the city green space into a more vibrant, useful and beautiful space for residents. Photo credit: Bridge photo/Rod Sanford
Environmental Sustainability continued...

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<td>• Offer incentives and recognition to businesses and developers that pursue environmentally sustainable practices.</td>
<td>• Encourage local commercial and industrial businesses to join the US Department of Energy’s Better Building Challenge¹⁴, which provides technical assistance and solutions to energy efficiency.</td>
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<td>• Create a local reward and recognition program for businesses with the most energy efficient buildings. More information about example programs in this vein is available on MML’s Green Communities site¹⁵ under “Economic Development.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Help residents become more energy efficient.</td>
<td>• Promote DTE Energy’s Home Energy Consultation¹⁶ and EcoWorks¹⁷ to nearby residents for free energy assessments and energy saving products (lights, faucet head, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Partner with local environmental groups to address health and environmental issues the community struggles with.</td>
<td>• Participate and promote Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision¹⁸ initiatives and programs to enhance the environmental well-being of the community.</td>
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<td>• Partner with Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice¹⁹ to promote their citywide environmental agenda²⁰.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Promote the great things already happening in Southwest Detroit parks.</td>
<td>• Keep kids registered in activities at nearby parks and partner with local nonprofits to coordinate clean-up days throughout the year.</td>
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¹⁴ Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision: http://www.sdevweb.org/
¹⁶ DTE Energy: https://www.dteenergy.com/
¹⁷ EcoWorks: http://www.ecoworksdetroit.org/
¹⁸ Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision: http://www.sdevweb.org/issues
¹⁹ Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice: http://www.dwej.org/
Cultural Economic Development

Arts and culture are essential components of a thriving, knowledge-based economy. A healthy creative sector attracts and retains residents and businesses, and produces economic benefits including jobs, a stronger tax base, downtown and neighborhood revitalization, and tourism.

Asset Analysis

Southwest Detroit has a vibrant art scene and year-round cultural events that celebrate the Hispanic heritage of many residents. Many buildings along Vernor are decorated with murals, there are numerous art galleries and youth art programs scattered throughout the community, and programs like The Alley Project$^{21}$ promote positive street art and productive ways for young people to express themselves. Southwest has many long-time artist residents, but also seems to be attracting new, younger creatives into the community.

Coordinating local artist efforts and focusing initiatives on public spaces could have a dramatic effect on the Southwest neighborhoods by improving aesthetics, safety, education, social opportunities, and residents’ connection to the community. A current undertaking at the former Holy Redeemer auditorium and classrooms, for example, can serve as a community cultural center.

$^{21}$ Michigan Municipal League: http://placemaking.mml.org/the-alley-project/

Source: http://placemaking.mml.org/the-alley-project/
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<tr>
<td>Encourage local artists and art institutions to focus their work on public spaces.</td>
<td>Organize a group of business owners who want a mural painted on the side of their building. Seek grants that can help pay artists for their time and materials, but also encourage business owners to make the financial investment in their community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activate public spaces and underutilized areas with art and cultural activities. Focus on locations emphasized in the ArchiveDS report to identify priority spaces.</td>
<td>Use Archive DS’s report as a guide to enhance safety by seeking creative opportunities to improve the Vernor viaduct. Work with Midtown Detroit Inc. and the New Economy Initiative, who led a similar project in Midtown.</td>
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<td>Promote an identifiable brand or icon for the community and promote it throughout the main arteries and popular side streets. The city of St. Joseph, for example, populates downtown with unique sculptures decorated by area artists, which has helped the community attract tourism.</td>
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<td>Partner with larger organizations to promote temporary art throughout the community. For example, the Detroit Institute of Arts partners with communities to bring reproductions of masterpieces to the streets and parks of metro Detroit. Explore the opportunity through the Inside</td>
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<td>Build community through neighborhood-specific activities that bring people together to work on a common goal. Work with residents and community partners to start a Southwest-specific Detroit SOUP event.</td>
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<td>Be sure arts and culture events are getting promoted to regional news sources to encourage visitors to the community.</td>
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<td>Funding opportunities, such as from ArtPlace America, can help fund placemaking efforts.</td>
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### Recommendations

- Ensure creatives are involved in discussions around community planning and local policy.

### Implementation Opportunities

- Make an effort to invite local art organizations and artists to the table when doing community planning and discussing local issues. Creatives often have a unique way of thinking about the world and can come up with out-of-the-box solutions.

- Catalogue and promote arts and culture grants across the community.

- There are numerous local and national grants to promote art and culture. Ensure local organizations are aware of these opportunities by cataloguing grants and sending out quarterly messages to remind groups of application dates. Don’t hesitate to use an intern or volunteer to help organize these opportunities.

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Entrepreneurship

Local communities are fueled by small start-ups and independent business owners. This type of entrepreneurial activity resonates especially with students and millennials looking to apply their optimism, energy, passion and skills for a positive, tangible impact.

Asset Analysis

Southwest Detroit is known for its great restaurants and small businesses. The community’s culture has a distinct entrepreneurial spirit, which is characterized by a wide range of business owners. Larger businesses like grocery and furniture stores are existing alongside taco trucks and bicycle-based ice cream vendors. Vernor has two distinct commercial districts that are divided by the Livernois intersection, industrial area, and train underpass. Better connecting the two commercial districts will allow shoppers to more easily move between the two ends and contribute more to the local economy.

A revitalized Vernor will provide a new link between the east and west ends of the community by blending the now separate markets. Better connecting the Livernois area and encouraging new businesses to expand to the area will be key to defining it as a “place” in and of itself, rather than merely a new way to get from point A to point B. While existing and new traditional small businesses operating out of storefronts will activate the street and the area surrounding it as a vibrant public space, allowing ease of entry for nontraditional small businesses—such as the many food trucks and fruit stands—is equally important. With the capacity to support a mix of uses, including retail, office, and professional services, non-retail businesses should also be encouraged to locate along the corridor. Be sure to use the target market analysis provided through this project as a way to ensure the community is attracting the appropriate businesses.
## Entrepreneurship continued...

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<tr>
<td>• Future development efforts on Vernor should focus on finding spaces for new and expanding businesses.</td>
<td>• Examine zoning and right-of-way permitting to allow expansion of outdoor seating for new and existing restaurants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review local ordinances as needed to allow nontraditional businesses—such as food trucks and sidewalk stands—to operate legally on Vernor.</td>
<td>• Ensure a mix of retail, office and professional service uses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take advantage of the new crowdfunding law (the Michigan Invests Locally Exemption, P.A. 264 of 2013) and other crowdfunding options to attract and support entrepreneurs and local businesses to Vernor.</td>
<td>• Ordinance language can be calibrated to allow such businesses to operate only during certain hours or during key times as determined by the local community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coordinate technology-related initiatives (i.e. Ponyride, Quicken, and ALMMII all within a block radius) and promote Southwest Detroit as a potential tech-hub.</td>
<td>• Consult <a href="http://www.crowdfundingmi.com">www.crowdfundingmi.com</a> for information on “investment crowdfunding” as a powerful economic development tool for using local capital to support and grow local businesses, fund start-ups, and nurture an entrepreneurial environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promote opportunities for entrepreneurs to establish themselves as small businesses in the community. See ArchiveDS’ description (page 34) of the possible brownfield redevelopment</td>
<td>• Explore opportunities through crowdfunding platform Patronicity to apply for a matching grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. The Public Spaces Community Places grant gives qualifying projects an opportunity to double their donation if they meet their online funding goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expand partnerships with ProsperUS, an entrepreneurship program specializing in working with immigrant and minority communities.</td>
<td>• Explore opportunities to develop a business incubator/accelerator space in Vernor Crossing, as described in Archive DS’s report (see pages 12 and 34 for details). Work with TechTown Detroit, one of the region’s most-established business incubators to get started.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bring business pop-ups to Vernor with Revolve Detroit.</td>
<td>• Expand partnerships with ProsperUS, an entrepreneurship program specializing in working with immigrant and minority communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Redevelop a space, like Ferndale’s Rust Belt Market, to allow for small business owners to rent space for a low cost.</td>
<td>• Bring business pop-ups to Vernor with Revolve Detroit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Build on the food truck culture of Southwest Detroit and allow for vendors to sell in a particular area, like they do at Mark’s Carts in Ann Arbor.</td>
<td>• Redevelop a space, like Ferndale’s Rust Belt Market, to allow for small business owners to rent space for a low cost.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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27 Patronicity: [https://patronicity.com/puremichigan](https://patronicity.com/puremichigan)
Multiculturalism and Diversity

Successful 21st century communities are inclusive and welcoming to all, embracing diversity and multiculturalism as a competitive advantage. These types of communities are most attractive to new businesses, and today’s fluid, mobile, and global workforce seeks out places that embrace people of all ages, religions, ethnicities, national origins, and races.

Asset Analysis

Southwest is one of the most diverse communities in Detroit and has many families from across the globe. The neighborhood’s Hispanic culture has helped it become a popular tourist destination, with many restaurants featuring Mexican cuisine and music. There are also a number of dining options that feature food from the Middle East, Italy, countries across South America, and even southern comfort and traditional American options.

Because of the diverse makeup of the community, many organizations make sure to publish important information in multiple languages—some Southwest-focused newspapers are even dedicated to Spanish speakers.

The community hosts cultural events throughout the year that celebrate many residents’ Mexican heritage. During special events Mariachi bands and traditional Mexican dancers often give a special presentation. These festive experiences are important to the community and bring the streets a celebratory feel.

Building off of many of the multicultural assets Southwest Detroit has, the community should continue to market itself as an immigrant-friendly community, and continue to feature other cultures and celebrations.

Some community members raised concerns during this process that attracting new residents and businesses to the neighborhood could weaken Southwest’s unique sense of place by pricing out the smaller, “mom and pop” retailers and restaurants that give the area its multinational heritage. While maintaining a distinctive character is important to Southwest’s continued vitality, an exclusionary attitude towards new neighborhood development cuts against the community’s strength of inclusion. Restricting new businesses or new business types also limits the benefits that could come to residents through access to additional goods and services. Instead, community members should seek to preserve the cultural diversity of Southwest through policies and programs that maintain affordability for existing residents and businesses and access to resources for neighborhood residents to start new businesses.
### Multiculturalism and Diversity continued...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Implementation Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Promote Southwest as an immigrant-friendly community.</td>
<td>• Use examples from cities across the nation that are working to boost their population with immigrants. Welcome Dayton[^32] is a great place to start.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Continue to support events where diverse groups can connect and interact.</td>
<td>• Supporting accessible events, such as outdoor concerts, parades, and outdoor markets, are a great way for people to connect and understand the cultures of their neighbors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identify and promote policies that support the continued diversity of Southwest’s business community.</td>
<td>• Ensure zoning and development standards require creation of spaces appropriate for small, locally-owned businesses alongside any larger-scale floor plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consider the community land trust model for long-term affordable access to business property[^33].</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Develop programs to support small businesses in owning their buildings, reducing exposure to future rent increases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Coordinate any of these strategies with entrepreneurial support concepts (discussed previously).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Messaging and Technology

People communicate, connect, and engage differently today than they did ten years ago, or five years ago, or last year, or even last month! Continually evolving internet and communication technologies are allowing people to share information in the virtual world in unprecedented ways. Communities that use cutting-edge strategies in their approach to branding, engagement, and communication with new demographics, businesses, cultural institutions, and philanthropic communities are ahead of the game.

Asset Analysis

Besides a few resident-based discussion boards and email lists, the community could certainly improve its online presence and better connect residents to technology, but also potential visitors to the community. Some residents, particularly in the Hubbard Farms neighborhood\(^{34}\), have organized themselves and started sending out alerts and messages and do a good job promoting the community on social media.

Because of the lack of online presence, it’s challenging to residents and visitors to know about events, meetings, and other important information. Many residents don’t have internet at home, but visit the library or use their cell phone to gain access to the web. A more unified and organized online presence could greatly benefit residents and visitors.

### Messaging and Technology continued...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Bring Wi-Fi to public spaces.</td>
<td>• Work with parks, schools, and local businesses to improve Wi-Fi access throughout the community. Consider the Wireless Ypsi(^{35}) model of creating Wi-Fi access throughout the business district by working with businesses to share their existing broadband connections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensure important community websites are optimized for mobile devices.</td>
<td>• Seek technology-based grant opportunities to offer local organizations and government entities that help make websites mobile optimized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work with local organizations to put out a regular email newsletter that promotes upcoming events and opportunities to residents and frequent visitors.</td>
<td>• A unified and collaborative message to residents can help improve communication. Look to Midtown Detroit Inc.(^{36}) for a positive example.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promote Southwest to potential visitors over social media.</td>
<td>• Assets, such as cultural events, restaurants, and businesses, should be promoted through an organized means of communication. Work with partner organizations to collect information and feature events or places on a daily basis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Transportation Options

Thriving regions offer a range of transit options, from walking and biking to buses and other modes of transit. Developing effective transportation options is a necessary tool for all communities interested in attracting and retaining residents, workers, and businesses. Research shows that people across the nation are choosing communities that offer various modes of transportation, with easy access to the places they live, work, learn, and play. Multimodal transit can be as complex as rail systems and as simple as trails and bike paths.

Asset Analysis

Southwest Detroit is divided by major highways and rail lines, making it challenging for pedestrians and bicyclists to get across the community. Motor vehicles are still a priority, but Vernor’s recent road diet, which reduced a vehicle lane with a bike lane and parking, is a positive direction for the community. Although some residents and business owners opposed the change, it’s likely that in a few months traffic will run more smoothly and residents will become more comfortable with sharing the road. Truck traffic, which was once a major issue on neighborhood streets, is still a challenge near the Livernois intersection, but future changes related to the international bridge development will likely help ease the congestion.

Public transportation across Detroit is a challenge to many residents, and Southwest buses are no exception. Recent partnerships with the Detroit Bus Company have been a positive way to get young people in the community to and from work and should be explored as a potential expansion project to help all residents.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Promote bicycle culture, improve awareness, and promote the community by organizing rides throughout the community.</td>
<td>• Organize a weekly bike ride that’s carried out and promoted by a local cycling organization, such as Southwest Rides³⁷. Look at Slow Roll³⁸ and Critical Mass³⁹ for examples. The League’s case study on Flint’s Berston Bicycle Club⁴⁰ can be used as a starting point for getting youth involved in biking around the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Explore partnerships with private bus companies and ride-share opportunities to help residents get around.</td>
<td>• Be sure to have an active social media presence that will promote the activities to residents and visitors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Detroit Bus Company seems to be proving itself as a positive partner. Exploring opportunities to expand regular services in Southwest could be a major improvement for residents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Inviting ride-share programs, like Zip Car⁴¹, into the community could be helpful to residents who need to use a car once in a while, without the cost associated with owning a car.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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³⁷ Southwest Rides: http://www.swriderdetroit.com/
³⁸ Slow Roll: http://www.slowroll.bike/
³⁹ We Are Mode Shift: http://wearemodeshift.org/detroit-critical-mass
⁴⁰ Michigan Municipal League: http://placemaking.mml.org/the-berston-bicycle-club-project/
⁴¹ Zip Car: http://www.zipcar.com/
Education

Education is key to competing in a global, 21st century economy, and centers of education are vital anchor institutions within communities. From K-12 schools to community colleges, and technical schools to state universities, educational institutions bring innumerable benefits to a community. They are the hub not only for learning, but sports, entertainment, arts and culture, healthcare, and recreation, and serve as engines of economic development. Vibrant communities successfully collaborate with a full range of educational institutions to develop intellectual, human, and physical capital. Collaboration can be as simple as sharing physical facilities such as ballparks and swimming pools, or as complex as formal town-gown strategic plans.

Asset Analysis

Similar to other areas of the city, Detroit Public Schools has closed many neighborhood schools across Southwest. The abandoned schools dramatically increase blight and are often used as a dumping ground for old furniture and tires, which is a challenge for neighbors to deal with. Even with the school closures, education is valued in the community and many families are active in the schools. There are some high performing schools in the area, such as private school Cristo Rey (which is known for its unique student internship program), and some public schools have seen new investments, such as Earhart Academy, a new, state-of-the-art building off of Clark Park.

Some Southwest schools are also experimenting with a new model, Community Schools, which promotes more formal and extensive connections with the community (i.e. offering social services inside the school). These partnerships, which are coordinated by Southwest Solutions, are a potential opportunity to improve the overall education system.

Even before kids start kindergarten, there are opportunities in Southwest Detroit for children to learn and grow at local preschools and Head Starts. Sometimes these centers see low enrollment, which makes it hard to attract additional federal dollars. Promoting the positives aspects of early learning could help ensure kids stay engaged through high school.

Organizations in the community also offer adult learning courses, which are especially important to residents who never finished high school or are learning English as a second language. More grassroots education groups, such as a group of neighbors meeting weekly to practice English and Spanish in the Hubbard Farms neighborhood, make the community unique.

Southwest is within just a few miles of two major universities, Wayne State and University of Michigan–Dearborn, but there are few associations to the schools in the community. Continuing to keep the community valuing education is a great way to encourage local leadership to prioritize education, but expanding connections to local universities is a potential area of growth.

42 Southwest Solutions: http://www.swsol.org/articles/community_schools
43 Michigan Head Start: http://michheadstart.org/
## Recommendations

- Encourage residents to consider higher education by keeping nearby schools on their mind.

## Implementation Opportunities

- Work with Wayne State University, University of Michigan–Dearborn, and other nearby schools to make sure there are informational stands at events, banners and signs throughout the community, and paraphernalia available at local shops.

- Continue to support and expand adult learning opportunities.

- Work with and support centers, such as the Adult Learning Lab on Vernor, to make sure residents know opportunities exist.

- Promote volunteer opportunities available at these centers to residents and visitors who have time and energy to invest.

- Promote unique ESL opportunities, such as Even Start44, which invites non-native English speaking parents into the classrooms of their elementary school students for English education.

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44 Southwest Solutions: http://www.swsol.org/family

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Harms Elementary School

Photo Source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/29/Harms_Elementary_School_(Detroit)_2.jpg
Appendix
Acknowledgements

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  Luke Forrest
  Adam Cook
  Richard Murphy
  Sarah Craft

On-Site Charrette Team: (left to right) Ralph Nunez, Dorian Moore, Mark Nickita, Mark Hoffman, Marcus Colonna, Jon Tull
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Southwest Detroit Business Association

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Established in 1957, the Southwest Detroit Business Association (SDBA) fosters innovation, drive, and commitment. We work with investors, entrepreneurs, customers, and neighbors to capitalize on Southwest Detroit's competitive advantage. We support our community's vision for a healthy, vibrant neighborhood. The Association is a coalition of businesses and community interests committed to facilitating the continuation and enhancement of a stable, economically healthy Southwest Detroit. We accomplish this by employing strategies that support existing business and industrial enterprises, enhance the climate for public and private investment and economic growth, and act as a vehicle for cooperative ventures that support economic development in Southwest Detroit.

Kathy Wendler
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Southwest Detroit Business Association

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Phone: (313) 842-0986
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Executive Summary

Site Location, Program, Goals

Corridor development is currently at the forefront of regional planning. The corridor is the connective tissue that links neighborhoods, districts, towns and cities. The Vernor Highway corridor affects its area at the neighborhood and district level. It links neighborhoods and districts of varying character. This presented the design team with many unique issues. Among these issues were the following:

- Bringing together three areas in southwest Detroit along common themes.
- Coordinating with the efforts of community organizations and City Departments working to enhance the identity of Southwest Detroit.
- Developing a community vision for the 2.5 mile length of the corridor while focusing on the enhancement of the Vernor Crossing area.

This document can be applied to the corridor as a whole, but has been focused on the Vernor Hwy and Livernois Ave area, and depends on the individual stakeholders and the community development corporation for follow-through. The Vernor Crossing masterplan should be used to guide development decisions and approval processes in the future.

The Vernor Crossing masterplan had three process components:

1. Background information studied by the design team such as: land use/built form, circulation and connectivity of the Vernor Hwy environment formed the basis for the decisions made within the plan’s recommendations.

2. The public participation meetings, which provided stakeholder goals and feedback for the framework and goals.

3. The design charrette itself, which provided the opportunity for the design team to interact with the public.

The design team brings experiences studying numerous communities nationwide and the programs that have fostered the identity that the Southwest Detroit Business Association (SDBA) and Michigan Municipal League (the League) is seeking.

Commercial corridors such as Vernor Hwy. have been the subject of development and planning debate for decades, yet the features that characterize these areas have not changed much over the years. Today’s corridors, like yesterday’s strips, drags, and ribbon development areas, share a number of common components. Existing characteristics that epitomize the Vernor Hwy. corridor are:

- Varying degrees of quality in upkeep and design of individual store fronts
- A generally uncoordinated approach to the design, location and planning of new development, quite often due to the fact that these corridors stretch across neighborhoods of different levels of quality.
- Scattered vacant and/or underutilized pieces of land and/or buildings
- Unscreened and underutilized surface parking areas
- Little or no landscape of public or private property
- Few street amenities, except sidewalks

Visually Vernor Hwy. lacks a sense of consistency of quality from one end to the other, and this lack of consistency reflects poorly on the corridor.

Fortunately these issues are being addressed by the SDBA through current streetscape improvements and the charrette process undertaken by the design team.

It is believed that through this process the corridor can be developed in a sustainable manner.
What is a Charrette?

The French word, "Charrette" means "little cart" and is often used to describe the final, intense work effort expended by art and architecture students to meet a project deadline. This use of the term is said to originate from the École des Beaux Arts in Paris during the 19th century, where proctors circulated a cart, or “charrette”, to collect final drawings while students frantically put finishing touches on their work.

Why use a Charrette?

A charrette involves the entire community and encourages participation. The event promotes the project and its potential. This awareness sets the project vision on a path of implementation.

Who uses Charrettes?

- Planners and Designers
- Architects
- Public Officials and Organizations
- Planning and Community Development Directors
- Public and Private Developers and Land Owners
- Citizen Activist Groups
- Non-Governmental Organizations

Charrette Project Types

Though charrettes can be used for virtually any project type, they can also be used any time a product needs to be created or designed. Examples include:

- Specific Site Planning
- Neighborhood Revitalization Planning
- Regional Planning
- Comprehensive Planning
- Rewriting Development Codes
- New Community Master Planning
- Precinct Planning
Stakeholder - Process, Comment/Summary

Interview Process

One of the significant aspects of the charrette process is the importance of incorporating as many ideas from the community as possible. As a part of this process of idea gathering, the design team interviewed community stakeholders to gather feedback and ideas for the design concept. These stakeholders included business and building owners, members of the city planning department, civic leaders within the community, residents, churches and senior citizens. The comments and ideas from the interviews and the public input were recorded on large aerial plan photographs of the district, graphically identifying thoughts that were passed on.

After the interview, the large 30”X40” annotated photograph, was placed in the design team room, displaying all of the stakeholders points and ideas. This room acted as a source of ideas and was utilized by the design professionals to incorporate the stakeholders recommendations into the development concepts for the overall plan area.

Interview Comments

Stakeholders Input: Retail

• Take a “lean” approach to retail
• House the existing informal retail, with low barriers to entry
• Develop a Southwest Detroit version of Eastern Market
• Accommodate local food trucks, Horchata vendors, etc.
• No “more of the same” (insurance, dollar stores, cell phone stores)

Stakeholders Input: Physical Connectivity

• West Vernor/Dix intersection needs improvement to guide people down West Vernor Avenue
• Make the triangular area between Livernois and Dragoon Street create a focal point with a visual statement for the area
• Use the railroad viaducts as a place to creatively display local art

Stakeholders Input: Public Activity Space

• Movie theater, bowling alley—potential to use the space for various activities
• Exercise park or circuit training park
• Stage space for events and festivals
• Any space needs to be adaptable for winter use
Observations - Assets/Liabilities

**Assets**
Along the 2.5 mile long corridor, there are many existing assets that can serve as catalysts or precedents for the new planning approach and redevelopment strategy. In many instances, these urban elements will be actual built fabric (both buildings and infrastructure) that reinforces a traditional urban environment. Also, the very strong cultural psychology of the area plays a significant role in how it is defined.

- Strategic location within Southwest Detroit
- Two strong commercial and residential districts adjacent
- Strong ethnic identity
- Direct accessibility from major streets, freeways

**Liabilities**
The negative aspects of the corridor center around economic abandonment and traffic/circulation issues. In some respects, solving one of these liabilities could also dramatically change the impact of the other on the corridor. These liabilities, though general in nature, take specific form along the corridor and will need to be addressed on an individual level.

- Truck traffic
- Perception as a gap between two strong districts
- Abandoned properties
- Auto-oriented commercial areas intercepts the pedestrian-oriented areas
- Proximity to industrial commercial districts

Observations - Opportunities

**Opportunities**
The opportunities along the corridor are numerous. From adaptive reuse of existing structures to new ways of thinking about local commerce, when one looks at the corridor from a fresh perspective, the possibility of reshaping the physical and social structure of the entire area is great. The opportunities lend themselves to small, incremental, yet bold moves. These opportunities are uncovered and exploited through a thorough study of relevant precedent and an in-depth analysis of the physical and cultural characteristics of the place.

- To create a destination
- Create a symbol of community pride and gathering
- Create an example of adaptive reuse as an anchor for community development
Precedent - Summary

The design team studied a variety of precedents that relate to the program for the Vernor Crossing charrette. The major areas of study included: Light Imprint Structures, maker spaces, adaptive re-use of existing structures, mixed-use structures, multifamily structures, and walkability/non-motorized systems. The study of these conditions provided the charrette participants insight into the possibilities for redevelopment that would potentially be incorporated into the study area.

Walkability/ Non-Motorized Systems
The charrette site and the corridor itself is divided by a heavily used railway line and suburban-style commercial development. Incorporating Complete Streets elements could accommodate bikers and roller blading as well as pedestrian activity and can take on a variety of forms. The precedent study identified various accommodations for these systems in urban areas.

Light Imprint/ Lean Urbanism
In urban areas currently, short-term, immediate impact physical design moves are making a big difference in changing the perception of a district. Pavement striping, plantings, and temporary, quick-build structures can help create a stable, sustainable district.

Maker Spaces
Currently, entrepreneurial activity has been a key ingredient in emerging urban areas. The design team studied numerous examples where space has been dedicated for the creative process of manufacturing goods. These efforts become the foundation of a local economy by focusing on the diverse talents of individuals within a community.

Adaptive Re-use
For urban districts that have various existing structures, adaptive re-use opportunities should be considered. Existing structures provide redevelopment potential that may not be available with regard to a new structure. Some of these advantages include cost savings, historical value, unique characteristics and location.

Multi-Family Residential Structures
By definition, a neighborhood should include a variety of housing types and sizes for the diverse demographic that is encouraged to be a part of the community. Multi-family developments or condominiums appeal to young couples, empty nesters and single professionals because of their specific characteristics. These include minimal maintenance and appropriate size for their requirements.

Infill Mixed-Use Structures
This type of development provides options for projects to incorporate multiple uses within one structure or geographical area. Typically, within a building, these uses include retail activity along the first floor with upper floors that include residential or office uses. A mixed-use district refers to the concept of numerous adjacent buildings in a defined area, with a variety of uses for each building.
Precedent - Walkability/Non-Motorized Systems

The charrette site and the corridor itself is divided by a heavily used railway line and suburban-style commercial development. Incorporating Complete Streets elements could accommodate bikers and roller blading as well as pedestrian activity and can take on a variety of forms. The precedent study identified various accommodations for these systems in urban areas.
Precedent - Light Imprint Development/ Tactical Urbanism

In urban areas currently, short-term, immediate impact physical design moves are making a big difference in changing the perception of a district. Pavement striping, plantings, and temporary, quick-build structures can help create a stable, sustainable district.
Precedent - Maker Spaces

Currently, entrepreneurial activity has been a key ingredient in emerging urban areas. The design team studied numerous examples where space has been dedicated for the creative process of manufacturing goods. These efforts become the foundation of a local economy by focusing on the diverse talents of individuals within a community.
Precedent - Adaptive Re-use

For urban districts that have various existing structures, adaptive re-use opportunities should be considered. Existing structures provide redevelopment potential that may not be available with regard to a new structure. Some of these advantages include cost savings, historical value, unique characteristics and location. These precedent images illustrate the potential for an area that contains numerous existing buildings to become redeveloped with adaptive re-use projects. Adaptive re-use simply means adapting an existing structure for a new use or a variation of its original use.

Potential Uses
Adaptive re-use projects can incorporate many uses including retail, residential, office and institutional. Many industrial, manufacturing and institutional existing structures are versatile and can accommodate new uses. Additionally, these spaces are often large, open areas and provide unique conditions for the new users.

Alternative Office Uses
Current trends in the office market indicate that there is increasing demand for unique spaces, especially for creative users. These types of office environments often are the result of adaptive re-use projects.
Precedent - Multi-Family Residential Structures

By definition, a neighborhood should include a variety of housing types and sizes for the diverse demographic that is encouraged to be a part of the community. Multi-family developments or condominiums appeal to young couples, empty nesters and single professionals because of their specific characteristics. These include minimal maintenance and appropriate size for their requirements.

**Townhouse Condominiums**

Townhouses are a typical urban neighborhood housing typology often referred to as rowhouses and sometimes brownstones. They are essentially houses that are connected along the sidewall. They can also consist of two units stacked on to each other, which provide additional densities. In some areas of the charrette boundary, these types of housing units would be considered appropriate alternatives to single-family houses. Specifically, empty nesters find townhouse condominiums attractive because of the low maintenance of the site.

**Loft Condominiums**

Loft residential units can be incorporated into existing buildings or can be created in new structures. This popular unit type is appropriate for the charrette area, specifically, within the former industrial zone near the abandoned rail corridor. Characteristics of loft units typically include high ceilings, exposed structure and mechanical systems and, large windows with an abundance of light. Sizes can range from 600 square feet to many thousands.

Parking is an important element for all of these projects. It is usually included on site for a residential use. Parking requirements can be accommodated by including one or two stories of parking with a minimum amount of retail as a liner at the street level along the sidewalk frontage.
Precedent - Infill Mixed-Use Structures

This type of development provides options for projects to incorporate multiple uses within one structure or geographical area. Typically, within a building, these uses include retail activity along the first floor with upper floors that include residential or office uses. A mixed-use district refers to the concept of numerous adjacent buildings in a defined area, with a variety of uses for each building.
Regional Context

Within the overall regional context there exist relatively few urban ethnic enclaves. Vernor Crossing can become a regional draw as well as an anchor specific to the southwest Detroit area. Uncovering the characteristics that make the area unique aids in positioning the community within the region.

Local Context

The Vernor Crossing area fits into the framework of existing functioning districts within Detroit. As shown in the accompanying graphic, there is a natural link between the downtown and the Vernor corridor. The gap occurs at Vernor Crossing. This potential link includes the historic Corktown neighborhood, Mexican Town, The Vernor/Clark Park area, The Vernor/Junction area and the Vernor/Springwells area. This linkage can also be extended to downtown Dearborn. Strengthening the Vernor Crossing area has the potential to create one of the most interesting and vibrant corridors in the metropolitan area.
Site Conditions

As part of the inventory and analysis of the site area, the charrette team focused on the assessment of the existing site’s (the former DPW facility located at Vernor Hwy. and Livernois Ave.) conditions at the micro scale and in the overall context at the corridor scale. To be successful, any design strategy must address the issues of the immediate site as well as its overall context. In order to fully understand the potential of the charrette area site, one must consider its strengths and also the issues that will need to be addressed.

The strengths of the immediate site include:

• Within walking distance of Vernor Hwy east and west commercial corridors and all of the activity and amenities that they provide.
• Located along the well known Vernor Hwy corridor with convenient access to other important districts within the city.
• Direct connection to Interstate 75 which leads to all of the major expressways in the area
• A significant employment base and population base within the area
• An “entrepreneurial spirit” that pervades the entire Southwest Detroit area.

A significant advantage of the Vernor Crossing charrette area, is the potential of the existing neighborhood structure. A well developed neighborhood consists of various housing types and a diversity of uses. There are single and multi-family structures that are historically a part of the neighborhood. The existing former Detroit Public Works Building and the industrial and commercial buildings within the charrette area enhance this diversity.
Examples of ad-hoc entrepreneurial activities within the project area

Examples of Entrepreneurial Activities Within the West Vernor Hwy Corridor
Site Analysis - Overview

Site and context analysis is the cornerstone of successful urban design. The charrette team examined the existing infrastructure, the history of the site, land use patterns, pedestrian and vehicular circulation, commercial street frontage, available development parcels, surrounding developments, and previous planning concepts for the area. The thorough review of these components created the framework used by the team to assess and incorporate the stakeholder comments.

A thorough analysis of the site conditions uncovered opportunities that were not initially evident. The Vernor Crossing Charrette area has a variety of unique conditions that could lead to positive opportunities for the entire existing neighborhood.

The analysis revealed opportunities that relate to the following:

• The adaptive reuse of the existing industrial building on the site as well as nearby structures
• The opportunity for promotion of entrepreneurial activities
• The redevelopment of the underpass of the rail corridor
• The potential development, long term, of mixed use activity which would increase convenience and connectivity along the Vernor Hwy Corridor.

**Figure Ground:** This graphic illustrates the relative density of the built structures in the overall project area and the Vernor Crossing project zone. The drawing provides, at a glance, the strengths and challenges of the existing physical urban fabric. (Site is denoted by the shaded circle)
Analysis: Street Grid, Green, Residential, Commercial

Street Grid: The network of streets within the area helps to shape the neighborhood fabric. It is also interrupted by large, immovable industrial infrastructure. The grid provides convenient access to commercial areas from the residential areas. This is a critical factor in determining the long-term viability of the Vernor Crossing district.

Residential: The single-family residential structures located throughout the Vernor Crossing area establish the basis of the neighborhood. The overall context includes neighborhoods separated by the rail corridor as well as those with excellent access to the commercial areas along Vernor Hwy.

Greenspace: Throughout the Vernor Square area there are various parks and greenspaces that provide recreational space for the residents of the community. Some of these spaces have play structures for children while others have large open spaces with no organized uses. The Vernor corridor is anchored by two of the most prominent parks within the city of Detroit, Patton Park and Clark park. There is an opportunity, through redevelopment along the corridor to create a stronger connection between these existing spaces and to determine a more effective way that they may serve the residential community.

Commercial Activity: Along Vernor Hwy. there is a variety of commercial activity. These stores and businesses provide important amenities to the charrette area. Currently, commercial activity along Vernor Avenue near the Vernor Square site is underutilized. However, the area could physically accommodate more retail space as well as potentially incorporate mixed-use structures in the future.
Analysis: Transit, Highway Arterials, Focal Point, Railways

**Transit:** Transit is a key component for any district revitalization effort. The Vernor Crossing area is well served by transit. Access to the district is a crucial factor in analyzing the area’s potential for job growth. While a large amount of the enhancement of the area may come from entrepreneurial initiatives, there will be a large contingent of workers from outside the area, many of which will be using transit.

**Highways and Arterials:** The vehicular access to the Vernor Crossing area establishes the potential for this to be a catalytic site for the area. Its access to other nearby city districts and its access from major east-west and north-south thoroughfares enhances its ability to become a destination as well as a resource for the community.

**Focal Points:** The visual organization of a district is an often overlooked element. The experience of the pedestrian can be greatly enhanced through the proper disposition of landmarks, public spaces, and public art. The varying street grid conditions within the area expose opportunities to organize the district around a series of potential locations for terminated vistas.

**The Industrial Rail Corridor:** The rail corridor provides the establishment of a major employment generator in the area. It also creates one of the major weaknesses of the area by promoting unrestrained truck transport access through the area.
Analysis: Site Concept Studies - Organization

There were many organizing concepts studied during the charrette. Some of the ideas that were generated are presented as options for the redevelopment of the charrette area.

This sketch positions the overall site within the context of the corridor and illustrates the three areas of major concern.

This sketch conceptually explains the role of the site within the overall framework of the urban context. The realized design for the site must engage its immediate surroundings as well as act as a connective tissue for the east and west areas of the Vernor Highway corridor. It must act simultaneously as place and transition.
The Pedestrian Shed/ Walkability Analysis: A five minute walk or approximately 1/4 of a mile (5 Minute Walking Radius) has traditionally been used as a measure of the distance that the average American will walk comfortably before driving becomes the desired option. This unit of measure has been used by planners to create successful pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods and districts, as well as to analyze specific site accessibility to and from area amenities. Traditionally, this can be seen in older North American cities, such as Detroit, which are typically laid out on a 1/2 mile street grid. The 1/2 grid typically denotes major arterials and the edges of specific neighborhoods and/or districts. In developing concepts for redevelopment within the project area, this criteria was considered to promote a walkable environment.

The Urban Frontage Gap Analysis illustrates the relative strength or weakness of an area based the percentage of frontage that contributes to a traditional urban feel. The Gap Analysis reveals that there are serious weaknesses in the connectivity of existing development in this section if the corridor. The spaces demarcated in red visually indicates areas that should be addressed from a pedestrian experience and urban land value perspective.
Development Principles

Based on the site analysis and concept studies, the Design Team developed several, location-specific design principles for the Vernor Crossing Charrette. The team emphasized a clear, straight-forward approach to urban redevelopment. It is believed that through these areas of focus a framework can be put in place as a decision-making tool for the future. This framework is as follows:

1. Encourage entrepreneurship by providing flexible, innovative spaces for new businesses.
2. Promote incremental design moves as a way to enact change throughout the area.
3. Develop the central area as a link between the two traditional commercial districts.
4. Establish the vacant industrial building as an anchor for the community through creative adaptive reuse.
5. Resolve traffic issues through urban design.
6. Enhance areas of transition along the corridor by implementing physical improvements that facilitate movement

Design Considerations:
- Traffic calming initiatives
- Increase non-motorized enhancements
- Tactical Urbanism – identify opportunities for the inclusion of innovative concepts
- Street edge development – pedestrianization of the sidewalk condition
- Vegetation concepts – streets trees, passages, parkettes, public space, edges, walls

Assumptions

- Create an identity for the site/area
- Create connections to existing amenities
- Create an environment that encourages innovative development
- Create a destination
- Create a symbol of community pride and gathering
- Create an example of adaptive reuse as an anchor for community development

Approach

- Lean approach to recommendation and redevelopment
- Focus on implementation
- Cost effective solutions
- Short-term strategy - kit-of-parts
- Long-term strategy-development opportunities
- Truck traffic repositioned over time
Development Concepts

For the enhancement of the Vernor corridor environment the design team employed two design strategies:

**Design Consideration:**

**Short term - Kit-of-Parts**
Strategy 1 entails implementation of a "kit-of-parts" approach to short term enhancement. The kit-of-parts consist of light imprint wood structures that can be quickly assembled to provide space for entrepreneurial efforts. The street infrastructure is also seen as an element of the kit-of-parts. The Design Team recommended that minor street revisions (such as, street painting, landscaping) be implemented to set the stage for future investment.

- Light imprint structures
- Complete Streets proposals
- Vegetation enhancements
- Signage development
- Aesthetic/Public art enhancements
- District Identity and Branding

View along Vernor Hwy looking east showing wooden maker spaces

View along Vernor Hwy looking west with street infrastructure enhancements

Proposed Typical Complete Street Condition adjustments along Vernor Hwy

Proposed Typical Street Condition - Section
Development Concepts - Continued

Design Considerations:

Long term - Development Opportunities
Strategy 2 identifies key parcels within the charrette area that could be developed as market demand increases over time. This strategy does not call for a complete buildout of every available underutilized space. However, it establishes a vision that allows for each individual site to be developed independently, over time. Therefore, the development concepts, evolving in this manner, can be responsive to the changing needs of the community.

The incremental enhancement of the available sites or frontage gaps can be addressed in phases - prioritized below:

- Street narrowing, lane reductions
- Street reconfiguring/rerouting
- Public streetscape development and enhanced infrastructure
- Site redevelopment recommendation/intensification, infill structures

Edge Condition A: Typical edge condition with two lanes of vehicular traffic, a parking lane and a designated bike lane.

These images illustrate the phasing of a development opportunity site along the corridor.

Edge Condition B: This phase indicates the further enhancement of the sidewalk edge with a knee wall and street trees.

Edge Condition C: The addition of crosswalks and further enhancement of the bike path with color paint. Additionally, the sidewalk edge is strengthened with a screen wall and seating.

Edge Condition D: Final enhancements include curb bump-outs, sidewalk vegetation, planters and infill building development.
Strategy 1: Masterplan - Immediate Action

This drawing indicates the rendered implementation of the Development Concepts as they are placed altogether in an aerial plan of the Charrette boundary. The areas that have been studied for aesthetic enhancement or for infill development are shown connected by streetscape improvements. This drawing illustrates how the implementation of discrete urban design moves can happen incrementally over time.

Major Plan Moves
1. Identification of developable sites within the Charrette boundaries of the Vernor corridor based on its underutilized properties
2. Relocation of the existing railyards truck entry to a point immediately west of the Vernor/Dix intersection to facilitate redevelopment of that traditional node
3. Redevelopment of the existing Detroit Public Works building into a unique community-oriented environment
4. Development of a new public square
5. Introduction of traffic calming and flow measures at the Vernor Hwy/Dix Hwy intersection
6. Enhancement of the existing railway overpass to encourage pedestrian traffic
7. Development of a strategy to accommodate entrepreneurial activities as development demand increases
Strategy 2: Development Opportunity Plan - Long Term

The longer-term Development Opportunities plan denotes prospective development sites within the charrette area as well as possible incarnations of the desired built form. The ultimate build out of the downtown will be determined by a series of private investments and proactive public initiatives (see Implementation section). The Development Opportunities Plan shows the possible long term build out of the masterplan as a series of decrere projects that can be initiated as opportunities arise in the future. This plan is based on reasonable proposals for projects that can become catalysts for future development. It is envisioned that some of these projects can be achieved during the first ten years of the plan’s implementation. It is not the intent of the plan to suggest that all of the proposed developments would or should be built out within the stipulated timeframe. A cursory review of development trends in cities across the country reveals that this scenario is a very practical and a likely outcome of the planning process.
Development Zone A

Vernor East/ Redeemer

This area is characterized by a varied landscape of commercial conditions. It begins on its easternmost end with a strong traditional urban storefront fabric. On its western end it is characterized by suburban-styled commercial facilities.

The challenge for the design team was to create conditions by which, over time, this zone could transition to a fully-functioning walkable urban zone.

To achieve this end we employed the “Kit-of-Parts” that was identified earlier in this report. By looking at this, as well as the other areas in both the short and the long term, the team was able to recommend light imprint structures to heal the damaged urban street frontage, specifically at the transition from the traditional to the auto-oriented environment starting at Cavalry Street (see images below and next page).
Development Zone A - Continued

Vernor East/ Redeemer

The wood structures are used to activate the street, especially at the auto-oriented commercial venues. They house the types of services that are currently being delivered from trucks in many of the vacant lots throughout the area. These temporary structures pave the way for additional long-term development opportunities by increasing the livability, walkability, and value of the area.
Development Zone B

Vernor Central/ Livernois

This zone contains the primary site of the charette’s focus. There were numerous issues for the design team to address including traffic patterns that make the area virtually unpassable from a pedestrian’s or cyclist’s perspective.

In order to give this area a sense of purpose and importance within the overall southwest community, the Design Team designated the industrial facility and its surroundings as a publicly-oriented venue.
Development Zone B - Continued

Vernor Central/ Livernois

The edge condition along Vernor Hwy near Livernois Avenue currently has minimal pedestrian-friendlty elements. The following images illustrate the potential for incremental enhancements over time.
Development Zone B - Continued

Light impact wood structures are used to create an active street frontage along Vernor Hwy while also creating a permeable edge to the plaza space. These structures are used to house entrepreneurial and maker activities that are currently being implemented on an ad-hoc basis throughout Southwest Detroit.

The accompanying sketch illustrates initial conceptual thoughts around the potential organization of the primary site at the Vernor Hwy/Livernois Ave intersection. By segmenting the site along rather rudimentary geographic lines specific rational design moves become apparent. The illustration portrays potential short and long term development opportunities for portions of the site.
Development Zone B - Continued

The existing former DPW building is marked for use as a display and sales oriented maker space. The building is reimagined as a facility that physically opens out to the community (see accompanying sketch) and invites it in.

The immediate surrounding of the existing building is redesigned as a “woonerf” a Dutch concept that denotes a living street where pedestrians and cyclists have equal priority to motorists. The concept is one of shared space in this way the space can also be flexible. The Design Team envisioned the space as one that can be used as a major public plaza and, at appropriate times, as an area that could accommodate parking. The decorative treatment of the plaza surface extends into the existing building to connect the interior and exterior venues both physically and psychologically.
Development Zone C

Vernor Hwy/Railroad

Zone C is dominated by the railway overpass. This element provides an opportunity to create a transition between the Vernor Central area to the Vernor West commercial district that celebrates the pedestrian and cyclist experience rather than impeding it.

The Design Team approached the challenge presented by the large, imposing concrete structure with a strategy to “open up” the transitional space. This is achieved through creative lighting and the introduction of a horizontal element that draws the pedestrian and cyclist through the transition visually as well as physically.

The introduction of color is also a key element in the transformation of the overpass. The application of color allows the structure to be experienced in a more comfortable manner. An element that is currently a liability is redeveloped as an artistic asset for the community.

Overhead metal mesh screen with downlights to illuminate the path below and the wall-mounted artwork

Wall mounted artwork by local artists

Tile mosaic artwork by local artists applied as decorative element

Painted concrete with potential artwork integrated

Defined walking path, adjacent and separated from bicycle path

Non-motorized painted pathway designated and signed

Safety fence and curb to differentiate auto and non-motorized pathway

Striping to define one lane on traffic
Development Zone D

Vernor Hwy/ Dix Hwy Intersection

This intersection was cited as a major concern from the standpoint of district flow. Motorists consistently are directed away from the Vernor West commercial district when travelling westbound.

The Design Team approached the abandoned light industrial structure on the south side of Vernor Hwy as an opportunity for maker spaces. One of the consistent themes of the redevelopment concepts is the promotion of the maker culture. This approach will assist in creating a refined identity for the district as a whole.
Development Zone D - Continued

Vernor Hwy/ Dix Hwy Intersection

The Design Team viewed this as one of the major areas for incremental change. The vehicular infrastructure is modified through a process that begins with low cost street striping and gradually builds to physical streetscape modifications to redirect the traffic and emphasize the continuation of Vernor Hwy.

Image A: Existing conditions of intersection looking north from Waterman St.

Image B: Enhancement - Street trees, brick edge walls

Image C: Enhancement - Crosswalks, sidewalk edge screen walls

Image D: Enhancement - Infill mixed-use developments

Vernor/Dix Plan: Existing conditions

Vernor/Dix Plan: Striping enhancements

Vernor/Dix Plan: Curb bump-outs and new vehicle entry
Development Zone D - Continued

Vernor Hwy Transition: Viaduct to Dix Hwy

This area currently is foreboding from a pedestrian perspective because of its lack of development. It is also the beginning of a very complicated vehicular and transport truck interchange. The entry to the existing railyards are located in this zone and causes the area to be very congested.

The Design Team looked at the opportunity for enhancement that could be afforded by the relocation of the transport entry to the railyards. Freeing this space from that high traffic function allowed the team to propose landscape and infrastructure changes that will make the area walkable and visually appealing. A small landscaped plaza is proposed along the street and is augmented by the addition of dense grove of trees. These straightforward design moves helps to reenvision this as a place and a respite along a newly conceptualized pedestrian system.

Existing condition at railway overpass looking east

Proposed condition at railway overpass looking east
Overall Aerial Drawing of Development Concept

This image illustrates Strategy 1, the immediate action plan fully implemented.
Branding

Vernor Crossing is the centerpiece of the next phase of evolution for the corridor. Understanding the goals for the site area is key to identifying its “brand.”

The goal for the site area is to provide a sense of transition as well as unity. Its elements include: identity, streetscape improvements, the character and tone of the visual environment and the lighting of the environment. The design team has identified the following items that constitute the elements that will begin to create the brand of the Vernor Crossing area. They are as follows:

Development of the Name

The Vernor Corridor runs through a series of nodes or district centers that have established identities in recent years. These areas are identified by either their significant cross streets (example: Junction, Springwells) or a significant community asset in the area, such as Patton and Clark Parks. In each case the district is focused around a hub of commercial activity.

The Vernor Crossing name was developed by assessing the contextual situation of the project area. The Livernois Avenue and Dragoon Street intersection creates an intersection distinct to this area. Additionally, the railway corridor and viaduct presents a very strong transitional zone leading the design team to refer to the area as a “crossing”. This name reflects the areas dual nature as both a destination and a transitional node.

Identity

Identity development allows a two-dimensional logo type or three dimensional element to take prominence in the district. Typically these elements are related to actual brick and mortar applications in high profile areas. A family of signs or environmental graphic elements should be established to address varying and diverse field conditions. A key element of the identity is the ability to establish a strong and continuous design theme, usually through landscape and streetscape elements, gateways, environmental signs, street and pedestrian lights, banners, color and logo type.

Streetscape Improvements

Street trees and non-motorized systems will be used to enhance the “edges” of the Gateway. A variety of deciduous types is preferred. These types, as they change with the seasons, will have a variety of decorating opportunities.

For non-motorized transportation in the Vernor Crossing area coordinate bicycle/path network with efforts outlined in the city of Detroit’s Non-Motorized Masterplan. Non-motorized transportation and walkability are key decision-making criteria for many people looking to relocate to a particular district.

Character and Tone

Because of the general neutral nature of most of the building materials in communities traditionally, and the generally overcast lighting condition of our area, the built environment often takes on a very drab appearance. Color usage is a simple but high impact leading way to create unity along the corridor. The application of color will be in those situations that are most undesirable; transforming a perceived negative into a perceived positive (ie, the electric towers, the bridges). The coloration of elements can be achieving through new technologies such as LED lighting or painting.

Street Lights

Street lights along the corridor are at present inconsistent. The design team proposes a traditional street lamp for those locations between the festive district markers. These lights, along with the addition of street trees, begin to reduce the perceived scale of the street as well as creating a comfortable walking environment for the pedestrian.
Design Conclusions

The charrette process concluded with a series of design directives that are intended to be the basis for a redevelopment strategy. These conclusions assist in establishing a vision for the community, the city and interested developers. The goal is to encourage a collaboration that would support the implementation of the vision.

**Re-establish Vernor Hwy as a Focal Point – Edge Condition**
The Vernor Central area and the quality of built form on each side of it establishes its importance. The charrette team identified this area as a primary element within the overall context. Specifically, this area makes the connection between the east and west commercial districts. With the renovation of the existing industrial building and land prime for infill opportunities all facing Vernor Hwy, it acts as the spine for the overall charrette project area.

**Development of Urban Public Spaces to Display Local Maker Talents**
The vacant land in the area provides opportunities for new types of public spaces for display of homegrown entrepreneurial talent and to respond to the call for new infill development as the opportunities arise. This new way of thinking about public space will aid in solidifying the brand for the area.

**Promote Pedestrian Accessibility and Scale**
To encourage pedestrian-oriented elements within the area, the charrette Design Team identified opportunities to increase areas where new development would increase the walkable environment. The scale of the buildings, active sidewalks, open public spaces, and non-motorized infrastructure all would support a more pedestrian-friendly environment. The charrette identified where pedestrians currently travel along Vernor Hwy and within the adjacent neighborhoods and looked to encourage additional pedestrian connections. This would be specifically targeted for promotion within the redeveloped area.

**Integration of New and Existing Structures**
One of the primary assets within the charrette project boundary is the quality of some of the existing industrial and commercial structures. The charrette team was encouraged by the development opportunities of the vacant and underutilized buildings. Therefore a development approach that promotes infill projects around existing structures is critical to achieve the potential vision for the area.
Design Recommendations - Immediate Actions

The first and most crucial step on any implementation strategy is to decide and commit to the agreed upon results if the charrette process. Once the shared recommendations are committed to, prioritization must occur. This creates a "road map" for the realization of the vision.

Recommendation Elements

- Develop public/private partnerships
- Develop of an entrepreneurial/start-up nurturing program
- Revenue bond generation - TIFA type district
- Develop a continual public involvement program
- Review of existing zoning for compatibility with charrette goals
- Identification of program/funding opportunities

Recommendation Actions and Relative Prioritization:

1. Redirection of truck traffic and relocation of entry to the railyards
2. Restripe Vernor Hwy and Dix Hwy intersection (first phase-see pg.36)
3. Rebuild Vernor Hwy and Dix Hwy intersection (final phase-see pg.36)
4. Create light imprint structure guidelines and demonstration project
5. Realignment of Dragoon Street and McMillan Street (see pg.30)
6. Streetscape improvements (underway)
7. Complete Streets implementation
8. Develop a marketing rebranding campaign
9. Redevelop the railway overpass to become a community-friendly asset
10. Rezone industrial properties for mixed-use opportunities

The following recommendations were identified as steps to implement a successful redevelopment of the Vernor Crossing charrette area. They will assist in establishing an integrated series of urban elements that will enhance the quality of life within the adjacent neighborhood and potential mixed-use district.

Encourage the Redevelopment of the Existing Industrial Building

Historic structures are always an asset to a community, rooting it to the past and embracing unique characteristics. The existing industrial building should be considered an important part of the community structure and be promoted as an important element for its future.

Encourage Private/Public Participation for Infrastructure Development

Private/public participation can be a logical system for development projects specifically regarding the conversion of the abandoned rail corridor into a new street and park system.

Encourage Private Developer Involvement for Market-Rate Mixed-Use Development

Based on the understanding and potential of the mixed-use and residential market, developers should be encouraged to consider the Vernor Crossing area as an optimal location for new infill development.

Establish City Ordinances and Zoning that Support the Vision

Working with the City and the business community, there are potential zoning and ordinance change options that may encourage development which would allow for the implementation of the vision.
Implementation Strategies

A primary objective of this charrette was to create consensus for the future development of the charrette area. This future development should be planned to be mostly “market-based” and driven by entrepreneurial activity and developer interest. The intention would be to integrate not-for-profit developments into the redevelopment of the area to ensure a diverse mix of development throughout the area. Additionally, the plan should consider the interests of the City of Detroit and look for opportunities to integrate procedures and create partnerships to achieve similar goals, especially with regard to infrastructure improvements.

The redevelopment of existing urban neighborhoods and districts presents numerous challenges to the project coordinator. The implementation of many of the concepts from a charrette requires a level of commitment and resilience to meet the goals for success. Overall, there are two key preconditions to consider: wherever possible, the project promoter, non-profit development group or municipality should get control of as much land or buildings as is feasible. This allows for the maximum ability to direct projects that align with the community vision for future development. Secondly, the municipality needs to be engaged so that it takes a partnership and leadership role in the implementation. This may entail establishing directives that can assist in making the vision a reality such as rezoning the area, infrastructure investment and potential gap funding for projects. Through the involvement of the public sector, regeneration of underutilized areas can become attractive to private developers.

One of the primary goals of the charrette was to maximize the use of underutilized land parcels within the charrette area. Specifically, the site offers great opportunities in southwest Detroit that speaks to developer interests and marketability for investment interests. The charrette process incorporated ideas of uncovering ways that the Vernor Crossing charrette site can be utilized to encourage investment and development activity while being responsive to the interests of the residents. Thoughtful development would also have the added benefit of increasing tax revenue to the City of Detroit, as well as services to the residents.
Implementation Strategies - Public/Private Initiatives

Generally traditional urban districts lend themselves to relatively small-scale infill development, essentially to repair and reinforce the existing built fabric. Opportunities offered to developers would be for projects that would infill existing vacant lots.

It should be noted that within the Vernor Highway corridor there are certain subareas which are considerably more underutilized than others. In addition to a higher percentage of vacant property there is also a significant incidence of privately owned properties in poor condition.

Public – Private/Partnership:
In the plan, public-sector participation should be employed only as a means of engaging the resources of the private-sector. This plan is to be market-based and entrepreneurial-based. Therefore, implementation of the masterplan is to be achieved through a mix of specifically targeted public and private sector actions.

The primary public-sector players in this case would be organizations that have established relationships in the area such as H.U.D., the Michigan Department of Transportation, the SouthEast Michigan Council of Governments, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, the Department of Agriculture, Michigan State University in conjunction with the SWDBA, which is expected to use their resources to facilitate the development of the local infrastructure of utilities, services, and streetscaping, and to facilitate the enhancement of entrepreneurial opportunities.

Private-sector participation in the implementation will be in the financing, development and marketing of the majority of the development and re-development opportunities which will provide the mixed use facilities and showcase the Plan’s success.

There are also numerous businesses within the greater Southwest Detroit Business Association area that should be approached for creative partnering. Businesses such as The Ideal Group, The O.J. Group, Hyundai, CSX, and Renaissance Global can be strategic resources for guidance and assistance in the realization of the Masterplan.

Implementation Strategies - Development Responsibilities

Public/Private Development Responsibilities:
The SDBA would:
• Identify the total scope of ad-hoc entrepreneurial activity currently taking place
• Develop incentives to encourage expanded entrepreneurial activity
• Identify city, state, or county-owned properties that could be assembled and then reconfigured according to market demand
• Market the offerings to appropriate for-profit as well as not-for-profit developers
• Undertake necessary infrastructure improvements
• Enforce plans and guidelines outlined in this report for the proposed redevelopment to ensure that potential developers have a clear understanding of the form of development being sought
• Undertake a program of infrastructure improvements that set the stage for the design recommendations outlined in the charrette report
• Review the development-approval process to minimize hassle to developers, while at the same time ensuring the development of a quality district

Private developers would:
• Acquire the above properties at fair-market value,
• Supplement assembly where appropriate by private acquisition,
• Develop and market the land in accordance with the detailed masterplan and development guidelines.
• Develop detailed plans, based on the design guidelines in this report and financial offers in response to the SWDBA’s call-for-proposals
• Acquire for redevelopment, at fair market value, the parcels being sold by the City, finance, construct and market the new facilities
Conclusion

The intention of this document has been to recommend and illustrate strategies that would offer the corridor the prospect of a return to regional importance. It should be stressed, once again, that the Vernor Crossing Charrette is a beginning, not an end. It is not a framework plan or zoning ordinance document, but is meant to inform both in the future.

The Vernor Highway corridor is at a critical juncture. Corridor development is the new frontier of metropolitan planning nation-wide. A cautious, deliberate approach to the entrepreneurial characteristics of southwest Detroit must be married to a comprehensive and proactive approach to development in the area. The SDBA should capitalize on the demand for “places” within the region by building an image of a safe, welcoming, mixed use corridor.

The proposed masterplan is a strategy in which the corridor regains its vibrancy. The corridor will become welcoming, attractive, pedestrian friendly, and alive with activity. It will be an area of diverse interconnected zones, accessed by the automobile and coordinated transit, yet coming completely alive when experienced on foot.