

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Walker's Point - Need for an Action Plan.

The Walker's Point neighborhood is one of the most dynamic, "hottest" real estate markets, and rapidly changing neighborhoods in the City of Milwaukee. Location is a big part of that, although its "urban village" character is at the heart of its appeal. Walker's Point is wrapped by three rivers--the Milwaukee, Menomonee and Kinnickinnic--positioned between Downtown and the Third Ward on the north, Bay View to the south, The Menomonee Valley to the northwest, the I-94 freeway corridor to the west, and the Harbor District to the southeast.

Walker's Point is one of five neighborhoods in the City's 2009 Near South Side Comprehensive Plan Area. In the six years since the Near South Side Plan was adopted by Milwaukee's Common Council, there has been substantial progress in implementing many of the key recommendations and catalytic projects that the Area Plan laid out for Walker's Point. At the same time, a growing population, exciting new developments, and overall shifts in the market have converged to create a series of issues that Walker's Point residents and business owners have asked the City to analyze and work in partnership with neighborhood stakeholders to address. The goal of this Walker's Point Action Plan is to make recommendations that ensure actions regarding land use, public infrastructure, and neighborhood development are carried out in a manner that positions Walker's Point for continued growth while at the same time maintains the diversity and character that have made the area a neighborhood of choice for its current residents and businesses.

1.1.1 Recent trends demonstrate fundamental changes.

There are a number of trends that have helped give rise to the need for the Walker's Point Action Plan:

- **Population Growth.** The population of Walker's Point is growing rapidly and this change is one of the primary reasons to prepare this Action Plan. However, it is worth pointing out that from a demographic standpoint, Walker's Point is re-densifying. Some would say it is re-intensifying.

The population of the neighborhood, along with the rest of Milwaukee, shifted downward with post-war outward migration to the suburbs, and is now shifting back upward again with the return of Millennials and empty nesters to the city. This neighborhood has all of the elements of why these groups are returning to urban living and is still for the moment, relatively affordable. It is a walkable, bikeable, diverse mix of workplaces, housing, entertainment and recreation.

Census tract 1864 includes two neighborhoods: the Third Ward, which is the neighborhood north of Walker's Point across the Milwaukee River, and the part of Walker's Point north of Florida Street. Between 2000 and 2010, this census tract was the fastest growing census tract in Milwaukee, both in absolute numbers and by percentage. During that ten-year period, the population grew from 490 to 2,341. The addition of 1,840 people more than quadrupled the population of the area.

Of the 2,341 residents of the census tract, it is estimated that 843 live in Walker's Point north of Florida St. This figure was estimated by prorating the population between the neighborhoods by their respective share of residential units.

As there were in 2000, no major housing developments in Walker's Point north of Florida Street, virtually all of these residents are likely new to Walker's Point. Additional demographic information for the neighborhood can be found in Chapter 2.

- Changes in Land Use.** Responding to recent changes in land use and managing future changes is another critical reason to create the Walker's Point Action Plan. The growth in the population of Walker's Point has led to additional demand for residential development. As a result, there have been multiple conversions and changes in land use as previous warehousing, storage, unused buildings, and vacant lots have been converted to loft apartments and condominiums (many of these developments are discussed in Chapter 2).
- New Demand from Creative Sector and Other Businesses.** Walker's Point has always had a significant number of small creative businesses and artist's studios, and small manufacturing companies that located in Walker's Point after they were priced out of redeveloping neighborhoods like the Third Ward. As residential developers discovered the value in rehabilitating the older stock of warehouse buildings, businesses seeking lower rents than available downtown and the qualities of a high density, "walk-to-work," urban lifestyle also discovered Walker's Point. Many of these businesses are in Milwaukee's expanding creative sector, where geographical clustering may be especially beneficial to their growth.
- Growth as an Entertainment Destination.** At the same time, Walker's Point's reputation as a destination for restaurants and entertainment has grown rapidly. The district is home to some of Milwaukee's trendiest restaurants and bars, along with some traditional favorites, with new establishments
- opening on a seemingly weekly basis, including craft breweries/distillers and other artisanal food producers.
- Parking Pressure.** All of these trends have contributed to increased demand for parking in Walker's Point, making addressing difficulties in parking one of the most important goals of the Action Plan. Former land uses in the neighborhood were not as parking intensive, while new apartments and condos need designated parking for their residents; cafes, restaurants, and bars need parking lots for their customers; and growing businesses need parking for their employees. Despite private parking options connected to recent developments, demand for parking has created intense competition for street parking in some locations, much of it currently without length-of-time restrictions or paid meters.
- Gentrification as a Double-edged Sword.** With the above named development pressures comes an influx of new residents, businesses and tax base, along with a fear by existing residents and businesses of being priced out of the market, both residential as well as commercial, and of losing the socio-economic and racial diversity that currently exists. Maintaining diversity and affordability are the number one concerns of Walker's Point neighbors based on two surveys that were conducted during the study period. See Appendix 6.3 Summary of survey comments



1.2 Overview, history, boundaries, role in city development.

1.2.1 Overview and “Sense of Place”.

More information about the demographic makeup of Walker’s Point and a discussion of recent development and planning efforts in the area will be provided in Chapter 2; however, no introduction would be complete without a brief description of the features that give Walker’s Point a sense of place.

Walker’s Point--long bypassed by much of the development that has made downtown so office-and-parking dominated and the Third Ward upscale, hip and “trendy”--still survives as a dense diverse urban village reflective of a time when industry of all types operated cheek to jowl with warehouses, craftsman studios, worker housing, boating and recreation, churches, schools, taverns, theaters, and shopping.

Major routes coming into Walker’s Point reveal its dramatic change in character. From downtown, the major bridges of Sixth Street, Plankinton Avenue, Water Street and Pittsburgh Avenue give a real sense of entry into this historic place. Riverfront development on the north end is a blend of old manufacturing buildings, docks and piers, street stub ends, some with public access points and overlooks, as well as restaurants, cafes and bars at the riverwalk level. From the west, the commercial corridors of



National Avenue, Greenfield Avenue, and Historic Mitchell Street are a journey back in time to an earlier era of neighborhood shopping as both social destination and household economic activity. Interstate I-94 / I-43 on the western edge shows it from above--the most notable icon being the Reynaldo Hernandez ‘Peace’ mural on the former Esperanza Unida building. The transition of South Water Street to South First Street to Kinnickinnic Avenue offers a cross-section of worker housing, antique shops, restaurants, railroad bridges connecting the harbor district to a panoply of utilitarian buildings as you head south out of Walker’s Point to the thriving neighborhood of Bay View.

A unique street pattern found in Walker’s Point is created by north-south principal arterials paired with parallel streets one block away. The principal arterial moves traffic while the parallel street provides a main street setting for storefront businesses. South 5th Street complements South 6th Street with an interesting mix of businesses and non-profits as does West National Avenue, which connects them. South 2nd Street plays a similar role for South 1st Street, offering cars, bicycles, and pedestrians a chance to slow down and explore the neighborhood. This is an uncommon pattern and provides unique opportunities for entrepreneurial activity as well as the entertainment venues on South 2nd and South 5th streets.

One of the more striking examples of new development in Walker’s Point is The Point on the River, a 12-story condominium

building built atop a four-story cold storage building on the very “point” of Walker’s Point at 106 W. Seeboth, which refers to being able to see both the Menomonee and Milwaukee rivers. The project was almost complete in 2008, when progress was stalled by the Great Recession. Today, The Point on the River’s 147 condos are fully occupied and provide dramatic views of Downtown and the Milwaukee River. This and other multi-family buildings extending east along the Milwaukee River define the northern edge between Walker’s Point and Downtown and serve as a gateway to the neighborhood.

Walker’s Point is a noted entertainment district with many popular locally-owned and farm sourced restaurants, cafes, clubs and bars. These include, in no particular order: Braise, Screamin’ Tuna, The Noble, Mera-ki, Zak’s, Ginger, Crazy Water, La Merenda, Engine Company No. 3, Blue Jacket, AP, and c.1880. Traditional neighborhood bars such as Steny’s, Caroline’s and O’Lydia’s are the mainstays. There is also a cluster of alternative lifestyle, “metal” and “underground” establishments. Weekends in Walker’s Point bring crowds of both locals and tourists eager to tour the Milwaukee Brewing Company, the Great Lakes Distillery, Brenner Brewing and the Pitch Project, or to just spend a leisurely few hours visiting its coffee houses and antique shops.

Those looking for cultural opportunities can choose from a show at Next Act Theater, ComedySportz, Walker’s Point Center for the Arts, or other local art galleries and performance spaces. A number of long-standing establishments provide entertainment and social opportunities catering to



Milwaukee’s LGBT community. South 6th and South 5th streets offer a vibrant and artistic setting for an evening out and are home to restaurants such as Conejitos, La Fuente, La Perla, Botanas and others at the heart of what is often referred to as Milwaukee’s “Culinary Latin Quarter.”

Visitors looking for something flavorful to take home can pick up locally produced cheese from Clock Shadow Creamery, Wisconsin’s first urban cheese factory, or ice cream from Purple Door Ice Cream. For those who are exhausted after a long day touring the neighborhood, the Iron Horse Hotel offers high-end accommodations with unique Milwaukee character.

Walker’s Point is also home to a hub of innovative educational institutions, health organizations, and social service agencies. Arts@Large combines experiential learning, the arts, a cafe, workspace and community development into one of the top programs of its kind in the country. Walker’s Point Center for the Arts offers an after-school arts program for children and a gallery for local artists. Milwaukee’s listener-supported radio station 88.9 Radio Milwaukee has called Walker’s Point home since 2013.

Centro Hispano offered the first bilingual social services in the city and continues to provide a wide variety of programs from Head Start to elderly housing. Patients in need of holistic care receive treatment at Core El Centro in the new Clock Shadow building. Core El Centro serves nearly 3,000 clients annually, of whom 90% are low-income and 79% are Latino.



MC2, Milwaukee Community Cyber High School, is a charter school which blends face-to-face instruction, online instruction, independent learning, and collaborative grouping. Its parent organization, Seeds of Health, converted a former manufacturing building into computer labs and classroom space. Other schools in the district include Bradley Tech High School, Vieau Elementary School, and La Causa Charter School.

Towards the southern end of the neighborhood, the industrial character transitions and blends with more traditional Milwaukee residential neighborhoods including the Clock Tower Acres neighborhood, which gets its name from its location in the shadow of the Rockwell Automation (formerly Allen-Bradley) clock tower. Rockwell remains a major employer in the area, joined recently along Greenfield Avenue by the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee's new School of Freshwater Sciences.

The UWM School of Freshwater Sciences, the 20+ companies who have found a home in the Global Water Center since its 2013 opening, and the emerging water industry business park at Reed Street Yards mark Walker's Point as the center of the region's water technology hub.

Rivers and railroads still help define the image of the community. Today, Walker's Point is one of the City of Milwaukee's most dynamic areas. It has striking new condo and apartment buildings, trendy bistros, entrepreneurial businesses occupying former industrial buildings, and walkable commercial centers. Despite the new energy, residents still value the unique mix of quiet residential historic districts, both traditional and transitioning industrial areas, and the exciting range of small businesses, shops, taverns, churches, art and theater venues, etc., nestled in between.

1.2.2 History of Walker's Point in summary.

(The following text is excerpted and adapted from the "Discover Milwaukee" Neighborhood Poster for Walker's Point, written by John Gurda and published by the Milwaukee Department of City Development in 1988.)

Walker's Point, along with Kilbourntown and Juneautown, is one of the three original communities that predate the founding of the city and were formally combined in 1846 to create the City of Milwaukee. In 1834, George H. Walker claimed land to the south of the Milwaukee River and built a log house on the peninsula that is located near the current intersection of Barclay and Seeboth streets. Walker's Point is the only one of Milwaukee's neighborhoods that the Menomonee, Milwaukee, and Kinnickinnic rivers all flow through, making it a natural hub for transportation, warehousing, wholesaling, and manufacturing uses. Walker's Point has always been a diverse neighborhood, with the early population being a mix of German, Irish, Scandinavian and "Yankee" families. An important legacy of these groups is the large number of distinctive churches in the neighborhood. Initially, homes in Walker's Point were built on the high ground south of Oregon Street and west of 2nd Street, with factories built as the wetlands along the rivers were filled in. Walker's Point offered abundant land, water, and access to the harbor and rail lines. As Milwaukee became the "workshop of the world," Walker's Point was at its industrial heart, home to some of Milwaukee's largest manufacturing firms such as





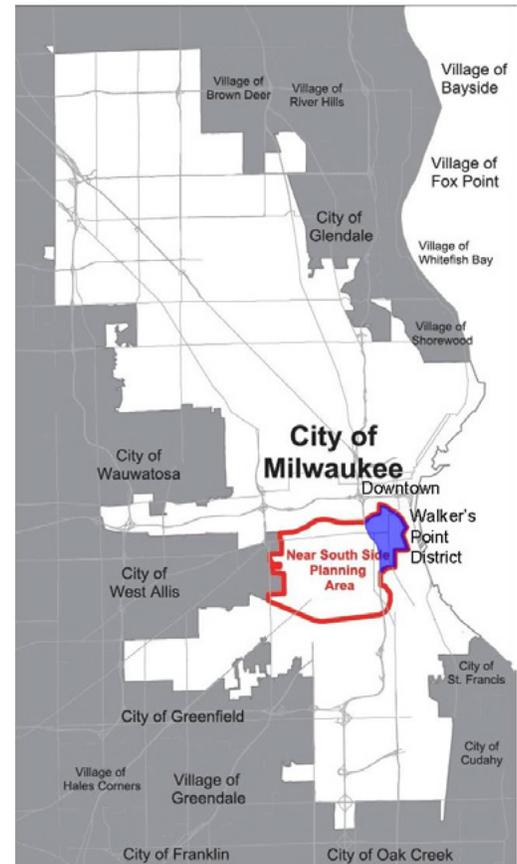
Allis-Chalmers, Nordberg, Allen-Bradley, Harnischfeger, and A.O. Smith, producing everything “from church bells to straw hats, from sawmills to cookies.”

The Polish community grew in Walker’s Point around the turn of the century, helping spur the development of what was then the neighborhood’s “downtown” around the area of Fifth and National. Walker’s Point continued to be the point of entry for new groups in Milwaukee, from Serbs, Greeks, Poles, and Austrians in the early part of the century to Mexican and other Latino immigrants towards the middle of the century. Eventually, Walker’s Point became the center of the largest Latino community in the State of Wisconsin.

The construction of Interstate 94 in the 1960’s bisected the neighborhood, creating a physical separation from the area to the west. In the 1970’s, interest in the historic structures of Walker’s Point grew, culminating in its becoming the first section of Milwaukee to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Walker’s Point has been called Milwaukee’s “last relatively intact nineteenth-century neighborhood.” No other neighborhood in the City has the variety and number of traditional Milwaukee housing types present in Walker’s Point, where bungalows, Polish flats, brick mansions and small frame cottages can be found on adjoining blocks.

More on the four National Register historic districts in Walker’s Point can be found in Chapter 5, Section 5.5

1.2.3 Boundaries for planning purposes.

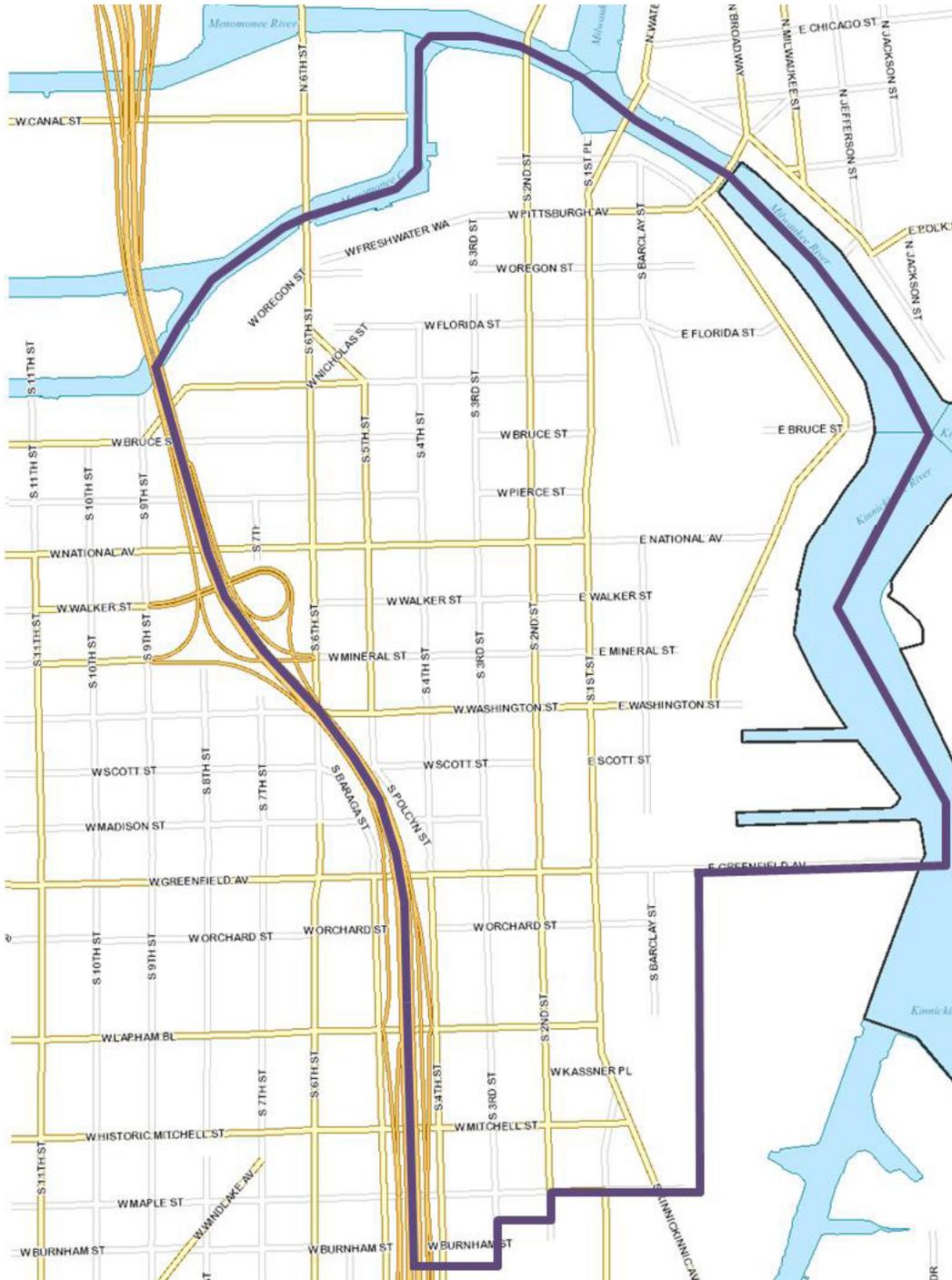


This Action Plan will use the same boundaries for Walker’s Point that the Near South Side Area Plan used to define the Walker’s Point neighborhood. Starting at the westernmost point of the neighborhood, where I-43/94 crosses over the Burnham Canal, the district boundary extends northeast along Burnham Canal to the South Menomonee Canal, northeast and then north to the Menomonee River, east to the Milwaukee River, southeast to the Kinnickinnic River, south to East Greenfield Avenue, and then west and south in a stair step pattern to the point at which East Burnham Street intersects with I-43/94, then heading north and then northwest along the I-43/94 freeway corridor and back to the starting point. The stair step pattern was used to avoid dividing the businesses comprising the Kinnickinnic River Business Improvement District #35, which lies outside of Walker’s Point’s boundary for purposes of this Plan.

1.3 Planning Context and Issues.

The purpose of this Action Plan is to identify strategic priority actions - be they policies, programs, or projects - that should be undertaken by the City, Walker's Point residents, businesses, developers and other partners to further the Area Plan's

recommendations for the continuing redevelopment, preservation and growth of the neighborhood. These could include such things as zoning changes, modified parking regulations, and civic improvements. The Near South Side Area Plan will be amended to incorporate the recommendations made by this Action Plan in light of new trends and changing needs that impact Walker's Point.



Above (confirm) is a street map of Walker's Point with the study area boundary.

By formally amending the Near South Side Area Plan to incorporate this Action Plan, the Action Plan will become a part of the City of Milwaukee's Comprehensive Plan, which was developed to comply with the State of Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law, Wis. Stats. 66.1001. The law provides the framework for developing comprehensive plans and procedures for adopting them. Importantly, the law requires that all actions taken by a city relating to official mapping, subdivision regulations, and zoning activities be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

In light of the trends described earlier, a number of goals were identified at the onset of the planning process for particular focus in the Action Plan:

1.3.1 Investigate parking problems, real and/or perceived.

This Action Plan, in tandem with a parking study conducted by GRAEF (in cooperation with the WPA and City of Milwaukee), should describe the extent of the parking problem (real or perceived) in Walker's Point and recommend solutions. The Near South Side Area Plan identified six possible locations for parking structures. The GRAEF study will look at the need, feasibility, and possible location of a new parking structure for public parking, and the management of existing surface parking lots and street parking. (See recommended actions in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3. The GRAEF Walker's Point Parking Study can be found in Appendix 6.1)

1.3.2 Expand upon the idea of a cultural, arts and entertainment district.

Expanding the cultural, arts and entertainment district centered on 5th St. and National Ave. was identified as a catalytic project in the Near South Side Area Plan. This Action Plan should further develop that concept as a "Creative Corridor" and make recommendations for its implementation. (See Chapter 5, Section 5.1 for more discussion of a Creative Corridor.)

1.3.3 Investigate the merits of a locally designated historic district along S. 2nd Street.

This Action Plan should examine the merits of creating a locally designated historic district on South 2nd Street, to get ahead of current development trends, encourage adaptive reuse of historic buildings and to avoid any potential loss of building stock. (Chapter 5, Section 5.5 discusses the merits of a locally designated historic district on South 2nd Street.)

1.3.4 Find ways to improve pedestrian and bicycle connections.

Find possible ways to add to or improve existing pedestrian and bicycle connections in conjunction with current planning being conducted by Department of Public Works. Items should be reviewed or discussed in this Action Plan. (Items for improvement are discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.3)

1.3.5 Recruit more neighborhood-serving businesses to Walker's Point.

Seek a balance of "destination" and neighborhood-serving businesses in Walker's Point. Introduce more neighborhood-serving businesses that draw customers from Walkers Point, Third Ward, Downtown, Bay View and markets to the north, south and southwest.



At the time of the original public input for this Plan, many residents of Walker’s Point expressed a desire to see a full-service grocery store locate within the neighborhood. The City has since then identified an appropriate location and is currently working to implement that project as described in this Action Plan. (For more about neighborhood-serving businesses, go to Chapter 5, Section 5.1)

1.3.6 Complete the planned build-out for the Reed Street Yards.

Reed Street Yards, a major new business park and eco-district for water-based industries that was also a catalytic project identified in the Near South Side Plan, is being developed in Walker’s Point. Further planning to maximize the positive impacts this development will have on the surrounding neighborhood will be folded into this Action Plan. (Reed Street Yards is described in more depth in Chapter 5, Section 5.4)

1.3.7 Review zoning for alignment with land use planning.

As part of this Action Plan, review zoning for land uses for underutilized parcels in Walker’s Point (e.g. between South 1st St. and the Kinnickinnic River) to identify changing needs and any potential discrepancies. (Recommendations related to zoning can be found in Chapter 4, Section 4.1.3)

Additional goals and actions that were identified by residents, business owners, and other participants in the planning process were also included in the Action Plan based on community input as the study was carried out. The Action Plan also contains recommendations designed to assist the neighborhood achieve these community and economic development goals.

1.4 Planning partners and other stakeholders.

This Action Plan was spurred by the Walker’s Point Association (WPA) requesting the assistance of the City of Milwaukee in guiding the continued development of Walker’s Point. This planning partnership between the City of Milwaukee and WPA was initiated in 2013 and has been critical throughout the planning process.

WPA has assisted the City in connecting to the Walker’s Point community and engaging the many business, nonprofit and neighborhood stakeholders during the creation of this Action Plan.

