

Chapter 5: Catalytic Projects

5.1 Implement a creative district or corridor for 5th/6th Streets and National Avenue

Background.

The 5th Street/6th Street and National Avenue corridor continues to have great potential and needs to be redeveloped.

The market is steadily moving into this corridor as timely strategic investment begins to take place. That means there is an opportunity to work with local residents and property owners to determine what they would like to see happen here--more destination venues, more neighborhood-serving businesses, or both.

The idea of a Cultural, Arts and Entertainment District as a catalytic project (described in the 2009 Near South Side Area Plan) originated as a way to build upon a growing cluster of arts, cultural and entertainment venues centered around South 5th and South 6th Streets and National Avenue--approximately Virginia Street on the north, Washington Street on the south, the I-43/I-94 freeway corridor on the west, to South 5th Street on the east. This Action Plan expands on the concept and suggests specific actions that can help it come to fruition.

It was, and still is, considered a “catalytic project” for its ability to build on a major shift or “sea change” in the market, a growing cluster of arts-oriented uses, a continued commercial hub for Hispanic businesses, and the investment of entrepreneurs and “creative businesses” in the area.

The core group of “creatives” has already made an impact. There are colorful restaurants, bars, artists’ co-ops, craftsmen and arts groups with a presence on the street. However, despite this bold start, developer/investor momentum has yet to fully take hold. On both 5th and 6th Streets, many businesses have not fully recovered from the Great Recession of 2007-09. Restaurants were doubly affected by the recession and cold winters. Scattered between successful businesses are storage buildings and underperforming properties, many that are showing signs of disinvestment--partial board-ups, broken or taped windows, and vacant storefronts.

Since the Near South Side Plan was completed, South 6th Street has become more blighted, resulting in large gaps in the street frontage, which may be due in part to economic conditions and in part to its function as a truck route connecting the freeway to the Sixth Street viaduct.

To address these issues, stakeholder meetings (businesses, residents, property owners, arts groups, local experts) were held to flesh out the specifics for this corridor--how to enhance the restaurants, add more neighborhood services, multifamily residential, smaller entrepreneurs or “creatives” (artisans, craftsmen, etc.)



5.1.1 Create a Business Improvement District (BID) or alternative group to manage the Creative Corridor.

The corridor has yet to form a Business Improvement District (BID) or dedicated organization to manage a redevelopment project, channel investment, advance the cluster of core “creative” businesses, and build on the assets of the corridor. Some of these functions may also be carried out by individual businesses working informally as a coalition. To some degree, that is happening now. However, a BID would be a more efficient and arguably more effective means of advancing the district (the Creative Corridor).

Typically, a BID is an umbrella organization that does business recruitment; performs basic services such as clean-up and safety/security; organizes events, marketing and promotion; and conducts special services such as tracking code violations with Department of Neighborhood Services. Along with the day to day operations, the BID also does long-range planning with its members. For the added taxes levied on property owners, they get in return an organization that makes their businesses more viable and their properties more valuable.

Based on this assessment, it is recommended that the Creative Corridor businesses do the following: Create a BID that can work directly with property owners and city departments to set and achieve local goals, as well as address the specifics of areas that affect business climate, such as pedestrian environment, parking, street repaving, building and vacant lot disposition, code enforcement, policing, and areas of mutual concern.

A BID could hire a director to represent the area, do marketing and promotion, and organize local events that increase the economic viability of the district.



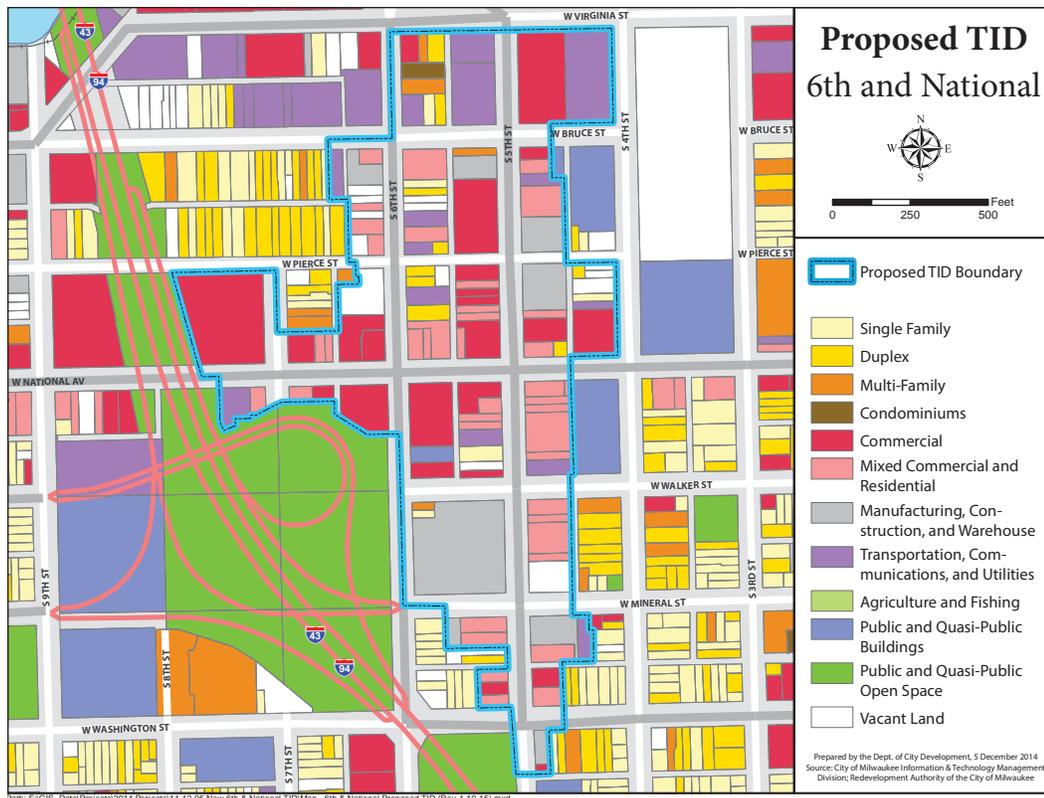
A BID could work with businesses and arts groups to develop arts programming for the creative corridor and coordinate arts groups’ performances with local events.

5.1.2 Business Improvement District alternatives.

If businesses are reluctant to form a BID, which means being subject to an additional tax assessment, they could instead form a merchants’ association, a Main Street organization, or a nonprofit 501(c)(3) community development corporation (CDC), that could perform some of the same functions.

A merchant’s association also works directly with property owners and businesses to set goals, as well as address specific areas that affect business climate, e.g., pedestrian environment, parking, safety and security, marketing and promotion. (A good model in Milwaukee would be the Vliet Street Business Association.)

A Main Street organization is another alternative. A good model in Milwaukee is the Historic King Drive Main Street organization, which incorporates a Main Street initiative within the operations of the BID. Typically, Main Street groups focus on design, safety, promotion and economic development, and do long-term planning as well.



Another option is to form a nonprofit 501(c)(3) community development corporation (CDC) to enhance the economic development activities of the BID. The Burleigh Street CDC is a good Milwaukee model and a source for more information. However, it is important to note that the Burleigh Street CDC operates in tandem with the BID and is funded through BID assessments.

The key difference between these alternatives and a BID is that a BID (working with the city) is a taxing authority, which provides a source of funding to achieve the above goals. Without that guaranteed funding source, the organization has to achieve its goals through voluntary business contributions, grants, or donor funds.

5.1.3 Create a TID to support improvements in the Creative Corridor.

A tax increment finance district (TID) is currently being created by the city and will provide a planning and financing vehicle for the Creative Corridor. Items that may be financed through the TID are development incentives, streetscape improvements over and beyond the city's base level, and other capital costs needed to improve physical character within the district. The TID boundary (see drawing above), which aligns closely with the Creative Corridor, was created in March of 2015. The TID plan will evolve with the growing district as needs arise.

5.1.4 Reconstruct South 5th Street as a complete street.

The City is ready to reconstruct the right-of-way for South 5th Street and has actually put reconstruction on hold in the interest of coordinating public improvements so that they support the Creative Corridor and draw from the results of this planning process and the financial resources of the TID to cover improvements over and beyond the city's base level, e.g., public art, custom street furniture, landscaping, pavers, planters, etc.

Typically, Department of Public Works (DPW) needs a streetscape plan (or a "final decision" on all aspects of the design) early in the year preceding the next year's paving plan. So in order to be included in the 2016 paving plan, the streetscape plan for South 5th Street needs to be submitted within the coming months. DCD and DPW staff will work with the local Alderman's office and local business owners to develop a streetscaping plan for South 5th Street during the summer of 2015.

A "final decision" (that includes community input) will address all aspects of the street design and reconstruction: complete street design; bike lanes; traffic calming measures:

widened sidewalks; curb extensions; parking lay-out (the possible switch from angle to parallel parking); added street trees; a banner and planter program; green infrastructure (permeable pavers, bioswales, or street design that reduces stormwater runoff); public art or street furniture; space for a public bicycle sharing station (provided there is a terrace or curb extension of at least seven feet, excluding the sidewalk); and the actual selection of a complementary group of streetscape elements.

Note: Some improvements such as curb extensions or bike lanes could be included in normal street repaving. There is MMSD funding for green infrastructure that could be incorporated.

For reconstruction of the South 5th Street corridor (and possibly the South 6th Street corridor later), the following tried-and-true approach to a layered streetscape should be taken into consideration. A layered approach can be described as starting with the City's basic streetscape elements; adding BID or TID-funded enhancements; adding personalized or signature elements from local businesses or property owners; and integrating innovative public features or public art that defines the district.



5.1.4.1 The City’s “kit of parts” or other special improvements to the public right of way.

Begin with a set of streetscape elements, a “kit of parts” common to the district. DCD and DPW staff will work with area business owners to determine right-of-way design, selection and placement of streetscape elements, etc.

Note: The Walker’s Point Association would like to see a “ground-up” design that includes residents with the possible involvement of Arts@ Large who might be able to facilitate as a consultant.

The Creative Corridor is also one of the potential sites for GMC’s Creative Place-making initiative as well as the subject of a UW-Milwaukee School of Architecture and Urban Planning urban development studio (See Appendix 6.4 for the UWM Urban Development Studio’s report.)

5.1.4.2 TID funded enhancements.

Over time, add BID or TID-funded enhancements to the streetscape. Consider hiring an artist to do a series of streetscape elements tailored to the district--benches, railings, kiosks, signs--to enrich the district’s sense of place.



5.1.4.3 Individual businesses’ “personalized” spaces or elements.

In addition to the right of way improvements mentioned above--again, this is an “over time” evolutionary process--businesses may add their own elements to enrich the streetscape, such as a signature bench, planter, an outdoor cafe, public seating area, an architectural fence, a “green screen,” personalized menu boards, public art, street pavers, landscaped entryways, or pocket parks. It also, enriches the streetscape to create transitional, semi-public or semi-private spaces adjacent to the public sidewalk (pedestrian corridor) that enrich the streetscape, e.g., sidewalk cafes, patios, garden space.

5.1.4.4 Other innovative and/or artistic approaches to recapturing public space and enhancing the corridor.

Innovative approaches to recapturing parts of the public realm such as the “parklet” movement, could be applied to the corridor. (Parklets are parking spaces or loading zones turned into creatively designed and landscaped outdoor seating areas, with permission from DPW and agreement of the adjacent businesses.)

Boulevards or wide medians can be ways of adding green seating, or recreational space to a corridor.

Public art should be incorporated in the Creative Corridor and it can be “high” or “low”--for example, creatively designed storefronts and building facades add character and identity to the district. A sculptural bike rack (or bench or patio railing) can be both artistic and functional. Artistic wall signs and well-placed murals can add richness to the streetscape. They all add to the character of the district.

5.1.5 Reverse blighting influences on South 6th Street.

5.1.5.1 Take advantage of economic opportunities.

If the economy continues to improve, and in all likelihood it will, the large empty parcels, particularly on the west side of South 6th Street, will be ready for redevelopment. Some lots are an oversupply of off-street parking, some are vacant lots waiting for the market to pick up. (One positive sign that the market is picking up is recent developer competition for the former Esperanza Unida building at 6th Street and National Avenue, a catalyst for the surrounding area.) In a similar vein, there are a number of buildings that are “on hold” waiting for reinvestment in the area to take off. Taken altogether, they represent a sizable concentrated development opportunity with the added advantage of close proximity to National Avenue, Downtown and the Menomonee Valley.

5.1.5.2 Redevelop vacant lots.

One of the challenges of South 6th street is the mix of smaller commercial buildings and small residential units with large vacant lots in between. The best solution for vacant lots is almost always infill development, or a combination of infill and green space.

5.1.5.3 Encourage adaptive reuse of existing buildings.

The decision to retain or demolish smaller buildings is usually made on a case-by-case basis. If the smaller building fits a niche market, or is historic in good repair, or blends into a cohesive street frontage, it does contribute to the district’s character and its economy, and should be saved.

5.1.5.4 Promote residential home improvement programs.

Residential property owners should be encouraged to apply for city programs such as the STRONG Homes Loan Program to make needed repairs to their homes.



5.1.6 Apply creative placemaking techniques to the corridor or district.

There is currently a lively discussion among artists, art funders, developers, neighborhood groups and elected officials about what is creative placemaking and what value it adds to communities. In a broad sense, creative placemaking is cultural identity shaping the public realm. For example, murals in the Mission District of San Francisco are exhibits of cultural identity, history, and the collected stories of both early and recent immigrants who began their new lives in the district. The murals are passionate, funny and descriptive. Some are historic. They have evolved to have different meanings over time. Some have “grown up” to be icons, landmarks and reminders of a shared struggle.

In a dynamic sense, creative placemaking is using art to change a place socially, physically and economically (ArtPlace definition). It can be a way to increase economic opportunity for low-income communities (Kresge). Artists are already challenging themselves to lead transformation in distressed and marginalized communities, bringing people together through arts and culture, doing the “work” of walking with and learning from those communities. Creative placemaking can be “up-cycling” or taking throwaway places and making them matter--thereby adding value to the urban environment. It can be public events and interventions that draw attention, change the way a place is perceived or used, break the mold, create a new course or a new identity.



From an economic standpoint, developers are discovering that arts and culture that creates a sense of place can “work” to boost their return on investment. One Milwaukee developer stated at a recent citywide creative forum that because of the public art and artistically developed park space surrounding his developments, his return on investment is 16% higher than his competitors.

In the “urban laboratory” of public space, creative placemaking can be about transformation of parks, infrastructure, urban trails, or streetscaping--even everyday elements like kiosks, bike racks and benches.

5.1.6.1 Ask local business and arts organizations to do “creative placemaking” and develop arts programming for the Creative Corridor.

Recently, several arts related organizations have moved to the corridor to add to the cluster already there: Arts @ Large; Walker’s Point Arts Center; the Pitch Project and Brenner Brewing. These groups are a logical consortium of bold thinkers and idea generators to spearhead projects and programs for an emerging cultural, arts and entertainment district.

5.1.6.2 Pursue grant opportunities to reclaim and reinvent Paliafito Park.

Paliafito Park (at 3rd Street and Walker Street) is an underused park with the potential to be a community gathering place and plaza. It is relatively small--a quarter of a block--but well positioned in the neighborhood, close to two schools, and just off the Creative Corridor. A coalition of

organizations, civic-minded individuals, and design partners have come up with an ambitious plan to make it a multi-purpose neighborhood plaza and play space and have also developed a program for funding it. The plan is to artistically transform the existing neighborhood park into an ECO-ARTS plaza to include a rotating outdoor public art gallery, an outdoor performance and community workshop stage, a natural playscape, and a raised bed community garden designed to teach families self-sustaining urban agriculture.

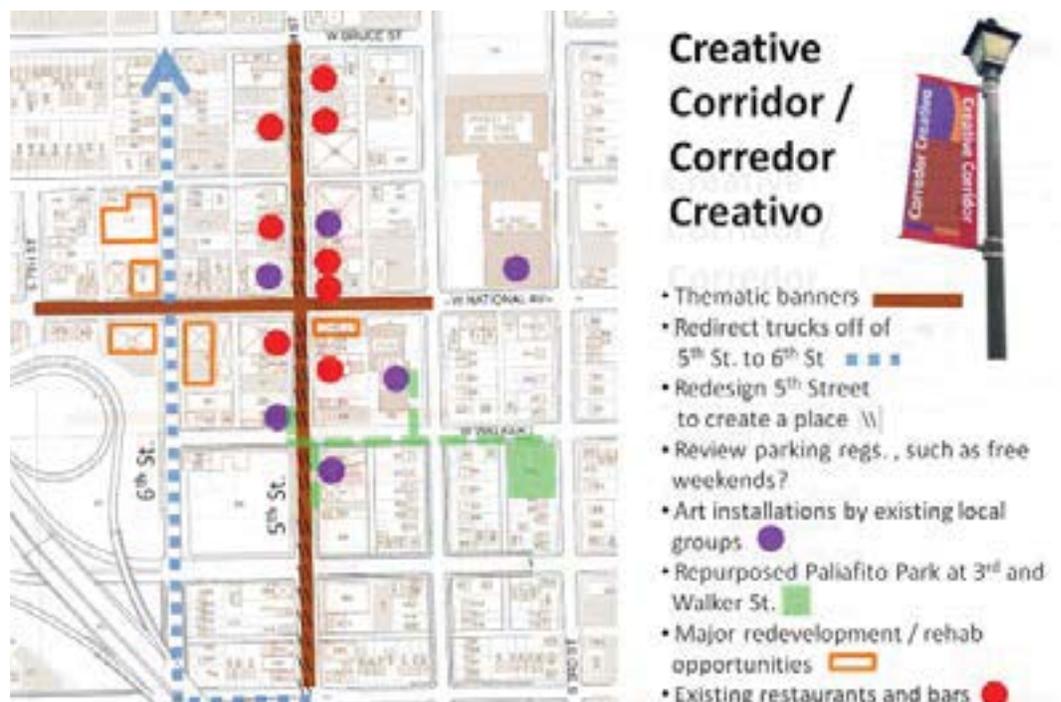
The project is a successful collaboration between Arts@Large and the residents of Walker's Point; Milwaukee Public Schools; Department of City Development; Alderman Jose Perez; UW-Extension; Home-town Building; Walker's Point Neighborhood Association; Reflo Water Sustainable Solutions; and Solutions in the Land.

Mayor Tom Barrett has endorsed this project for the 2015 National Endowment of the Arts "Our Town" grant. The map below shows preliminary design ideas, opportunities, a growing cluster of trending arts/lifestyle uses in the corridor--and potential for a direct tie-in to Palfaito Park (green square just east of the corridor).

5.1.7 Strengthen National Avenue as an east-west corridor through Walker's Point.

5.1.7.1 Create a "Main Street" district along National Avenue (1st Street to I-94).

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street program is arguably the most successful redevelopment program in the United States. It is a proven effective strategy that, if pursued rigorously by a dedicated group of local business owners, has the potential for transforming downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts. In Milwaukee, Historic King Drive (BID#8) and Historic Mitchell Street (BID #4) have both had considerable success using a Main Street style approach in combination with BID management. Several commercial districts in Milwaukee (some BIDs and some not) have taken a very similar Main Street style approach to development without having a formal relationship with the National Main Street Center (NMSC).





The National Main Street Center is headquartered in Chicago, IL. For more information, go to their website <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street>. Or e-mail at mainstreet@savingplaces.org.

The tried-and-true Main Street four points are: Organization; Promotion; Design and Economic Restructuring. Organization comes first. National Avenue must build an organization or working group to support a Main Street strategy. If it chooses to do so, Walker's Point Association could begin to organize the businesses on National Avenue to initiate and undertake a Main Street program (or if a position could be funded that would enable staff to do the start-up work). Once the program is up and running, goals are set and commitments are made--it will become more self-sustaining.

5.1.7.2 Long term goals for a National Avenue Main Street.

Long-term goals for a National Avenue Main Street organization might include: creating a complete street design to enhance walkability and bikeability; adding streetscape treatments; creating infill development where opportunities exist; doing substantial rehabilitation of historic buildings; upgrading building exteriors and storefronts with facade grants; creating a more balanced mix of uses; and creating a more pedestrian and customer-friendly environment.

National Avenue as a "Main Street" corridor could eventually expand east to the Kinnickinnic River and west of I-94 to the Walker Square area, as redevelopment supports or permits.

5.1.8 Redevelop opportunity sites within the Creative Corridor.

5.1.8.1 Redevelopable Buildings and Parcels.

To aid in identifying redevelopment opportunities, a Walker’s Point consortium of Continuum Architects + Planners, El Centro Hispano and Esperanza Unida, did an inventory of redevelopable buildings and parcels and assessment of their redevelopment potential. (For the complete study, see Appendix 6.2). The first of three drawings (below) shows the following opportunities: Number 1 is currently an underutilized vacant lot (former bar that operated in tandem with the now vacant Acapulco restaurant); Number 2 is a combination of parking, vacant lot and existing townhouse units; Number 3 is an isolated house surrounded by a parking lot.

The three drawings also include preliminary programming concepts for each site.\

In the second drawing (right, above), Numbers 4 and 5 are located further north along South 6th Street and would redevelop an existing used auto sales lot (owner has expressed an interest in redevelopment) and an existing parking lot.

The drawing also includes preliminary programming concepts for each site.

In the third drawing (right, below), Numbers 6, 8, and 9 are rehab opportunities, grand buildings that are not currently being used to their full potential. Two large buildings at 610 and 611 West National Avenue, a key intersection and major focal point of the district, are also excellent adaptive reuse opportunities as the market changes. (see 5.1.8.2 for an update related to 611 West National Avenue).

Building 7 is a potential new building which requires the demolition of a building, which may only be justified in an historic district if it actually serves to strengthen the urban fabric of the historical buildings around it.



BUILDING 1
 4 FLOORS - TOTAL 20,000SF
 5,000SF COMMERCIAL & 12 UNITS

BUILDING 2
 5 FLOORS - TOTAL 72,000SF
 8,000SF COMMERCIAL & 56 UNITS
 2 FLOORS PARKING* - 126 CARS

BUILDING 3
 5 FLOORS - 23,500 TOTAL SF
 1,300SF COMMERCIAL & 24 UNITS
 2 FLOORS PARKING* - 100 CARS
 (Requires demolition of 1 building)

Purple = Surface Parking Lots
 Red = Existing Buildings
 Yellow = Proposed Buildings

*PARKING = 1 floor below ground,
 1 floor on grade plus
 green roof play area

6TH STREET- southend



BUILDING 5
 4 FLOORS - TOTAL 48,000SF
 0 SF COMMERCIAL & 40 UNITS
 EXISTING SURFACE PARKING

BUILDING 4
 5 FLOORS - 24,800 TOTAL SF
 1300SF COMMERCIAL & 24 UNITS
 1 FLOORS PARKING - 50 CARS

Purple = Surface Parking Lots
 Red = Existing Buildings
 Yellow = Proposed Buildings

6TH STREET- northend



BUILDING 8
 RENOVATION EXISTING
 BERN BLDG - 523 W NATIONAL
 TOTAL 30,200SF

BUILDING 9
 RENOVATION EXISTING BERN
 BLDG - 511-517 W NATIONAL
 TOTAL 34,000SF

BUILDING 6
 RENOVATION EXISTING
 BUILDING - TOTAL 19,800SF
 16-18 UNITS - NO PARKING

BUILDING 7
 4 FLOORS - TOTAL 43,200SF
 0 SF COMMERCIAL & 40 UNITS
 2 FLOORS PARKING - 90 CARS
 (Requires demolition of 1 building)

NATIONAL AVENUE

5.1.8.2 Update - 611 West National (former Esperanza Unida building).

The city has sold the former Esperanza Unida building, 611 West National Avenue, that was taken in tax foreclosure in 2014. The Buyer proposes to renovate the first floor of the building for commercial uses. The second, third and fourth floors will be converted into 36 apartments (33 two-bedroom and 3 three-bedroom units). The Buyer will use WHEDA multi-family financing and federal and state Historic Tax Credits to fund the renovations. A condition of the WHEDA financing will require that 20 percent of the units will be restricted to individuals or families with incomes at or below 80 percent of the county median income. The remaining units will be market rate.

5.1.9 UWM Urban Development Studio Concepts.

In the Spring of 2015, an urban development studio in UWM's School of Architecture and Urban Planning did an in-depth study of the Creative Corridor to explore some preliminary concepts and examples of what could be accomplished with a successful redevelopment project. The studio's final report is included in Appendix 6.4.

The students investigated critical development issues suggested by Walker's Point Association neighbors and businesses and vetted by UWM faculty and city staff, and made the following suggestions (many which repeat familiar themes already discussed):

5.1.9.1 Greening the district.

To address the lack of parks or green space, the students suggested exploring street right-of-way opportunities, such as using boulevards and using street trees or other plantings to create a "green ribbon" or a buffer for pedestrians and bicycles. They presented a number of public way solutions that featured improved stormwater management, such as pervious pavers in "green" alleys or bioswales as part of streetscaping. There were quite a few reallocations of paved surfaces to small pocket parks and connecting green pathways (taking area from oversized parking lots, back to back lots). Green rooftop gardens were another suggested approach to recapturing space that could be used for outdoor recreation, gathering, dining, gardening, etc.



5.1.9.2 Opportunities (in no particular order).

- The restaurants in the area could benefit from a community garden that supplies fresh vegetables, similar to the Ohio City Farm in Cleveland that supplies the West Side Market and the restaurants in the City of Ohio Main Street district, or the Urban Roots farm in Youngstown that supplies a farmers' market, or Pete's Urban Farm (Core/El centro) in Milwaukee.
- Triangles created by street intersections or right turn bypasses are opportunities for green space and public art that provide mini-park spaces for neighborhood residents.
- The alley between 5th and 6th Streets is a more pleasant pedestrian or bicycle passageway than either of the streets--quieter, less traffic, a kind of shortcut. Alleys, with some attention to "clean-up fix-up", could be bike paths.
- Parklets can be used as amenities--seating areas with plants. Some can be used as bike corrals. Because these are part of the public right-of-way, they provide a visible place for bike parking.
- Many parking lots are only used for part of the day. If parking lots were fully used 24 hours a day there would be greater efficiency and less need for creation of more expensive parking structures.



- There are many rooftops that could be used for gardens or play space for neighborhood children.
- There may be opportunities through the city's adopt-a-lot program for re-purposing vacant lots, to add to green space in the area.
- There is a huge need for sheltered bus stops in the area. And bus stops can be identity features as well.
- Streetscape on South 5th and South 6th Streets could be a "green ribbon" that visually and physically connects and carries pedestrians from north to south and helps unify and identify the corridor.
- Parking lots and vacant lots together, particularly on 6th Street, are a huge infill opportunity. For example, row-houses could be used to define the street with landscaped parking placed to the rear. Live/work units could have a stacked model of commercial/office/residential/rooftop garden or patio.
- A redesigned roundabout could be a better gateway to the district, but it would have to be done in a more balanced way (cars, pedestrians, bike connections, green space, public art and amenities). And it should not be treated in isolation from the surrounding area.
- With the focus on food production businesses in the Menomonee Valley and the Food and Beverage Management program at MATC's Walker's Square campus – the creative corridor might work well for smaller, artisanal food production or microbreweries such as Brenner Brewing already established on South 5th Street.

5.1.9.3 Improving the gateway entry.

There is general agreement that the 6th Street roundabout that serves as the gateway entry to the south side needs a redesign for a number of reasons.

1. The roundabout is too small to be functional. A roundabout needs to be large enough to allow cars to smoothly enter and exit and should allow generous weaving room.
2. It does not do a good job accommodating pedestrians or bicycles. Even for automobiles, the southbound angles of entry and exit create too sharp a turning radius which in turn increases speeds more than they should be for a roundabout.
3. The traffic circle in the center lacks the kind of site-specific public art that might define a gateway--vertical, visible as a landmark.
4. There is no public art at the center or around the edges that gives a sense of entry to the South Side. (If there is a redesign, there needs to be better consensus about what role cultural identity plays).
5. The roundabout creates four 'leftover' remnant green spaces, three of which are assigned to parking lots. A redesign could create a better gateway and assignment and use of public land.

5.1.9.4 Complete streets and bicycle corridors.

There are several major streets that could benefit from complete street redesign (accommodation of motor vehicles, people on bicycles, pedestrians, and green space). The major focus of their study was 5th/6th Streets and National Avenue, although other streets in Walker's Point could benefit as well.

5.1.9.5 Balanced approach to parking.

Make parking lots and garages more shared and less proprietary, which should result in a greater number of parking spaces available to the public (a solution also suggested by the GRAEF parking study). Parking for Walker's Point should be gradually shifted to parking structures as new developments come online; and should be more out of sight than highly visible as it is now. Surface parking lots should gradually be replaced by a combination of green space or parks and new infill development.

5.1.9.6 Increasing the residential base.

Walker's Point, according to longtime residents, needs more neighborhood-serving businesses. However, the residential base needs to be increased to provide the market necessary to support these businesses. Most of the student's development scenarios incorporated residential as infill buildings--some mixed use, some single use. The scale and character of the residential

