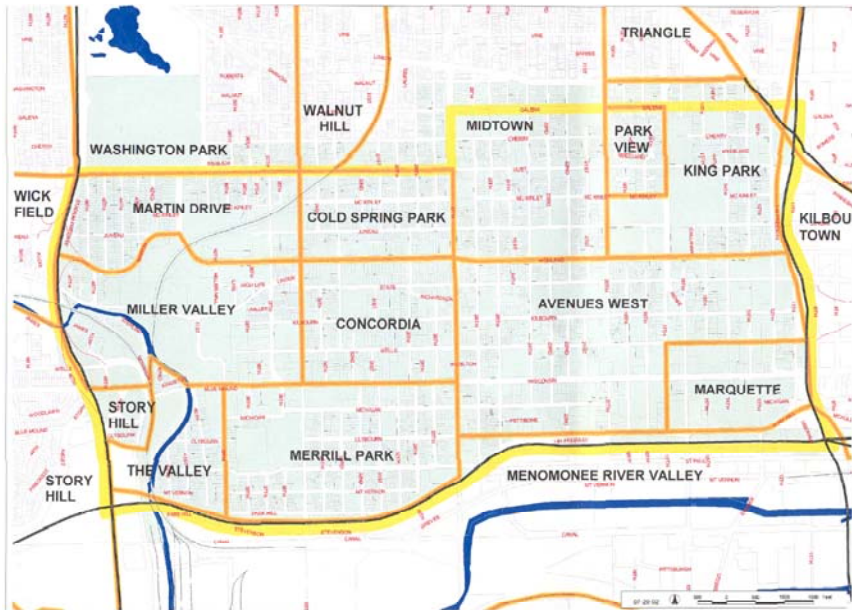


# Near West Side Comprehensive Plan

## Executive Summary (Revised)

April 2004 City of Milwaukee DCD



### **Boundaries**

The Near West Side Comprehensive Plan covers a broad area immediately west of Milwaukee's downtown. Its boundaries are US 41 on the west, I-43 on the east and I-94 on the south. On the north the border starts at Vliet Street and US 41, jogs north to Cherry Street at N. 27<sup>th</sup>, and follows Cherry Street to I-43.

### **Background**

The area is one of the most densely populated areas of Milwaukee, with 11,945 people per square mile. The largest employers in the Near West Side include Aurora Sinai Medical Center, Miller Brewing Company, Harley-Davidson Motor Company, Marquette University, Ameritech and the City of Milwaukee Housing Authority. As these employers grew, much of the Near West Side housing was developed to accommodate their workers. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, an increase in suburban development, highway access and the closing of hospitals and other institutions resulted in a decrease in people living in the Near West Side and therefore, an oversupply of studio and one-bedroom units.

Approximately 65% of all housing units in the Near West Side are rental units in multi-family apartment buildings or complexes. 49.6% of the households are comprised of just one person. Approximately 48% are households with female heads. The area's vacancy rate is over 13% compared to 6.8% citywide.

The plan makes note of recent developments that illustrate continued interest in the Near West Side. Examples include Marquette University's streetscape improvements on Wisconsin Avenue, the Neighborhood Improvement Development Corporation's rehabilitation of homes on Kilbourn east of N. 25<sup>th</sup> Street, and Harley-Davidson's housing initiatives on Vliet north of N. 35<sup>th</sup> Street. There is also the \$19 million HOPE VI Federal Housing and Urban Development grant for the Highland Park public housing rehabilitation.

### **Creating the Plan**

The city and its consultants, SmithGroup JJR, created teams of stakeholders who provided guidance through the process.

The Contract Management Team (CMT) was made up of funding partners with organized interests in the Near West Side. These included Marquette University, Marquette University High School, Avenues West Business Association, West End Development Corporation and the City of Milwaukee Department of City Development (DCD).

Members of the Study Advisory Committee (SAC) included landowners, business owners and operators, and residents. The SAC guided content and process for public sessions.

The public involvement effort included stakeholder interviews, focus group meetings, household surveys, an image preference survey and two half-day workshops.

### **Plan Findings**

The following key findings identify opportunity in the Near West Side:

- The Near West Side area closely approximates the City's overall racial and ethnic distribution. 65% are members of minority racial groups or are Latino or Hispanic, compared with 55% of all city residents. Many stakeholders view this diversity as one of the area's strongest assets.
- Wisconsin Avenue, which runs the length of the study area, is the gateway and main street of Milwaukee's downtown. It carries 1,200 bus trips daily-- one of the most highly traveled transit corridors in the city.
- Limited access freeways were added in the '50s and '60s. Freeways now border the area on three sides providing convenient access to the area.
- The large number of employees making up the daytime population is one of the Near West Side's greatest assets. Few businesses in the area currently serve that employee base.
- City Assessor's data indicates predominately single-family neighborhoods in the western and central portion of the Near West Side are stabilizing, with property appreciation equal to or exceeding citywide rates. The neighborhoods with the

greatest appreciation of single-family and duplex property values are Concordia, Cold Spring Park and Merrill Park.

- Potential exists for condominium style redevelopment of vacant studio and one-bedroom apartments in the neighborhoods closer to downtown, Aurora Sinai Medical Center, and Marquette University. Additional areas with condo potential are King Park and State Street between N. 14<sup>th</sup> and N. 15<sup>th</sup> Streets.

### **Plan Recommendations**

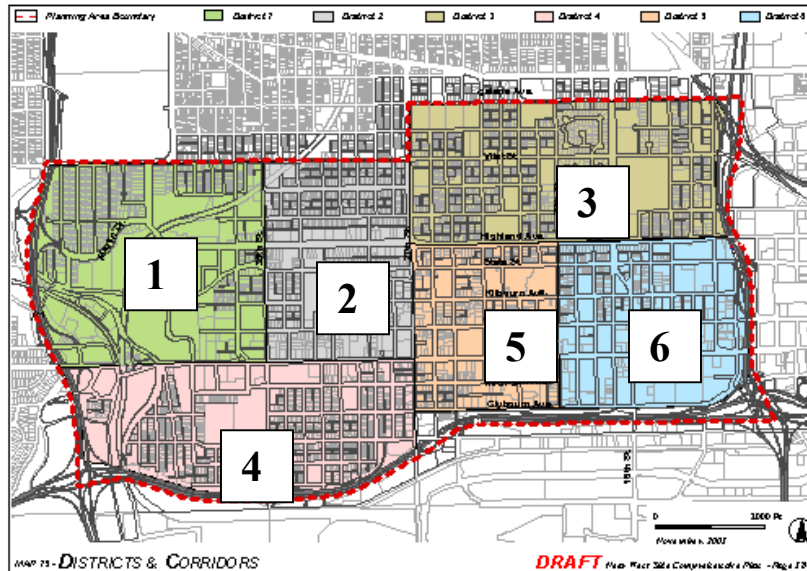
The plan recommendations are organized into 3 sections.

**The Land Use Policies** address the land uses, form, and redevelopment strategies planned for the Near West Side Planning Area as a whole. Recommendations are given for the following land uses: Residential, Commercial, Civic/Institutional, Open Space, and Transportation/Infrastructure.

Land Use Policies were written to further the following stated goals:

- Increase quality and maintain diversity of housing types that are compatible with and build upon the existing scale and character of the neighborhood. Reinforce and build upon the historic development patterns and assets of the neighborhood when designing new structures and rehabilitating existing structures.
- Concentrate commercial uses at nodes and areas on corridors while increasing the marketability to meet the needs of residents and attract commuters within the greater Milwaukee area.
- Use neighborhood open space as an economic development tool. Use different types of open spaces to meet the needs of diverse groups of people. Use varying sizes and treatment to enhance streets and provide places of refuge on busy commercial corridors. Use dispersed locations to serve different parts of the neighborhood.
- Create or develop civic and institutional uses as welcoming places for people to gather and as visual landmarks for the community at large.
- Create a hierarchy of public right-of-ways and blocks to successfully accommodate public transit, automobiles, bicycles, and pedestrians.

**The District Policies** include geographically related recommendations regarding land uses, form and redevelopment strategies specific to smaller geographic locations within the Near West Side Planning Area. District boundaries were based on differences in physical attributes of the smaller areas.



**District 1** is home to major industries and corporations including Miller Brewing, Harley-Davidson, and Ameritech. Viable residential exists north of Martin Drive and is being redeveloped south of Vliet and west of 35<sup>th</sup> Street. A commercial node is targeted for the 35<sup>th</sup> and Vliet Street intersection. Ideas for the 35<sup>th</sup> Street and Wisconsin Avenue intersection include a major commercial node with a potential for transit-oriented development.

**District 2** is residential in nature with several institutions and public spaces scattered throughout. Portions of the district include historically significant residences and mansions which can be used to spur redevelopment in the district. Assessed value of single family and duplex homes remains high. The district includes Concordia/Indian School site which is a former neighborhood institution. The future of this site is uncertain and presents opportunity for key redevelopment.

**District 3** includes a planned commercial node at Vliet between 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets. The existing housing stock has low assessed values and a large percentage of land is vacant. There is also an extremely high number of tax exempt properties. The area represents the best opportunity in the Near West Side for a large-scale redevelopment project. Plans for blocks north and south of the commercial/mixed use node include a mix of residential structures with an overall medium intensity of land uses.

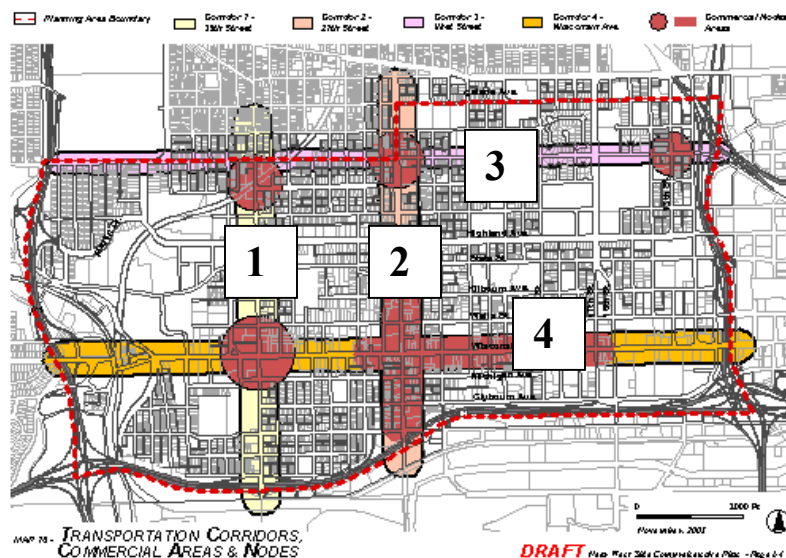
**District 4** includes the southwestern portion of 27<sup>th</sup> Street commercial corridor which present opportunities for main street type redevelopment. The southern portion of the Wisconsin and 35<sup>th</sup> Street commercial/mixed use node is in the district and also provides key redevelopment opportunities. There is currently a high number of single-family

homes and duplexes and a low number of multi-family units which suggests promoting home maintenance and infill opportunities.

**District 5** is mainly residential in character but includes portions of the 27<sup>th</sup> and Wisconsin Avenue commercial corridors. There is currently a high number of multi-family buildings and low number of single-family homes and duplexes. There is a light industrial corridor along Clybourn that is planned to remain. The Plan recommends decreasing studios and one-bedroom apartments and increasing homeownership.

**District 6** includes major institutions and a high number of tax exempt properties. There is a large population of 18-24 year olds with a need for community space to gather and recreate. The plan recommends developing condos and single-family housing for the nearby employees.

**The Corridor Policies** include recommendations for certain streets and the adjacent land. Several sections along the corridors are planned for areas or nodes of commercial activity.



**Corridor 1** is a major arterial street linking the planning area to I-94. Currently the street is auto-oriented and lacks a unified commercial density. The plan proposes to keep the corridor for businesses that require large floor plates and recommends high density housing along and adjacent to parts of the corridor. A key potential redevelopment site is the Ameritech site. The 35<sup>th</sup> and Wisconsin node is planned to remain commercial and attract a transit-oriented development.

**Corridor 2** Based on the traditional character of the southern stretch of 27<sup>th</sup> street, the plan recommends this stretch become a main street with street-level commercial and retail activity and residential and /or non-profit organizations located on the upper floors. A unifying theme could help make this redevelopment a success.

**Corridor 3** displays a mixed-use character with a range of commercial and residential uses along the entire corridor. Rehabilitation of the former County Welfare building will spark further investment within the identified commercial node along Vliet from 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> Street. Outside this commercial node and 35<sup>th</sup> and Vliet, residential development is allowed along the corridor.

**Corridor 4** includes a grand avenue (Wisconsin Avenue) lined with historically significant, formerly single-family homes and multi-family buildings. Redevelopment should follow the front and side setback patterns. Because of a concentration of social services, non-taxable properties are discouraged along the street level.

**The Catalytic Project Recommendations** address site-specific projects that would implement key aspects of the plan and would spur activity, investment and redevelopment. The plan includes 8 Catalytic Projects, some of which will begin shortly and some which the timing is contingent on decisions regarding privately owned land. Projects include the following:

- *27<sup>th</sup> Street as “Main Street”*
  - Apply for Milwaukee Main Street designation
  - Create a Tax Increment Financing District (TID) and Targeted Investment Neighborhood (TIN) Designation
  - Redevelop the 27<sup>th</sup> and Wisconsin corner for a specialty grocery store



- *35<sup>th</sup> Street Area Redevelopment*
  - Redevelop underutilized land on both sides of 35<sup>th</sup> Street north of Wisconsin Avenue.
  - Draft a renewal plan and create a TID



- *Vliet Street Revitalization*
  - Add taxable housing units
  - Bolster commercial activity between 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets



- *Norris Playground Conversion to Community Open Space*
  - Convert almost entire city block of an all asphalt surface into a community green space
  - Encourage infill housing around the perimeter

- *Wisconsin Avenue Enhanced Transit Opportunities/Amenities*
  - Enhance existing and provide additional transit service
  - Initiate a bus monitor pilot program



- *Reconnection of the Street Grid*
  - Remove street closures throughout the plan area to restore historic traffic patterns and

create more travel options

- *City on a Hill*
  - Redevelop parts of the former Good Samaritan Hospital
- *Indian Community School*
  - Reoccupy or redevelop the site as needed once the school relocates

### **Implementation**

The Near West Side Comprehensive Plan will be a critical tool for redevelopment and growth of the area. The document will be widely available to the public, and will be used as a guide for elected officials, appointed members of plan and zoning agencies, city plan examiners and other staff in their review or project proposals for the area.

Elements of the plan will be achieved through private development, public/private partnerships, and/or community-based initiatives that can be developed as catalytic projects. As projects are proposed within the planning area, city agencies will include opportunities for citizen input in their regular approval processes.

