North 27th Street Corridor Strategy

A Part of the Near West Side Area Plan

MILWAUKEE comprehensive Plan

City of Milwaukee
Department of City Development

January 2018

City of Milwaukee

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City of Milwaukee

Prepared by the City of Milwaukee
Department of City Development

January 2018

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special Thanks:

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Appendix (CPTED Audit): city.milwaukee.gov/AreaPlans/NearWest/North-27th-Street-Corridor-Strategy-1

City of Milwaukee

Office of the City Clerk

200 E. Wells Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202
Certified Copy of Resolution

FILE NO: 171110

Title:
Resolution approving the North 27th Street Corridor Strategy and amending the Near West Side Area Comprehensive Plan to include the North 27th Street Corridor Strategy as part of Milwaukee's Overall Comprehensive Plan, in the 4th Aldermanic District.

Body:
Whereas, North 27th Street is a key commercial corridor that sits at the heart of the City's Near West Side neighborhood and its revitalization was identified as a catalytic project that shaped the recommendations of the City of Milwaukee's ("City") Near West Side Area Comprehensive Plan; and

Whereas, On March 19, 2004, the Common Council adopted File No. 031371, which approved the Near West Side Area Comprehensive Plan as an element of the City's Comprehensive Plan; and

Whereas, Recent development trends, shifting market conditions and opportunities and the formation and efforts of the Near West Side Partners ("NWSP") have necessitated a more refined analysis and updated strategy to further the goals of the Near West Side Area Comprehensive Plan and advance the catalytic project recommendations for the North 27th Street corridor; and

Whereas, A detailed commercial corridor plan has been prepared, which is titled the North 27th Street Corridor Strategy, a copy of which is attached to this Common Council File; and

Whereas, The North 27th Street Corridor Strategy was created to supplement the City's existing Near West Side Area Comprehensive Plan to identify strategies to support this important corridor and to establish an implementation framework to best achieve economic success along North 27th Street; and

Whereas, On December 13, 2016, the Common Council adopted File No. 161076 that approved an amended Update and Amendment Procedure for amending Area Comprehensive Plans; and

Whereas, The creation of the North 27th Street Corridor Strategy involved public outreach, input and cooperation with area stakeholders and a properly noticed public hearing consistent with that procedure and the public process followed in the development of the City's thirteen Area Comprehensive Plans; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee, approves the North 27th Street Corridor Strategy, as recommended by the City Plan Commission, and amends the Near West Side Area Comprehensive Plan to include the North 27th Street Corridor Strategy as an element of the

City's Overall Comprehensive Plan; and, be it

Further Resolved, That the amended Area Comprehensive Plan, as approved, shall include, as an appendix, a text reference to consult the North 27th Street Corridor Strategy as a supplement to provide further guidance and serve as the basis for decision-making by the Common Council in its consideration of matters related to and located within the North 27th Street commercial corridor; and, be it

Further Resolved, That the Department of City Development, the Department of Neighborhood Services, the Department of Public Works and other appropriate City departments and agencies are directed to work toward implementation of the North 27th Street Corridor Strategy; and, be it

Further Resolved, That the Commissioner of the Department of City Development is authorized to send copies of the North 27th Street Corridor Strategy to the parties identified as having responsibility for implementation of the North 27th Street Corridor Strategy for their reference and use.

I, James R. Owczarski, City Clerk, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of a(n) Resolution Passed by the COMMON COUNCIL of the City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin on January 17, 2018, published on December 7, 2017.

James R. Owczarski

January 29, 2018

Date Certified

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The North 27th Street Corridor Strategy is a comprehensive land use and development strategy to revitalize a key commercial corridor on Milwaukee's Near West Side. This Strategy also updates the Near West Side Comprehensive Area Plan, which was completed in 2004 and identified continued reinvestment along North 27th Street south of Highland Boulevards (otherwise known as "SoHi") as a "catalytic project." The recommendations that make up this Strategy are informed by the recently completed Near West Side Market Analysis, the 2016 Near West Side Design Charrette, current and planned projects, and input from Near West Side stakeholders. The intent of the North 27th Street Corridor Strategy is to articulate a path forward for the successful redevelopment of SoHi.

The strategies and recommendations that make up the North 27th Street Corridor Strategy fall within four categories: zoning and land use; transportation; urban design and landscaping; and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design(CPTED), all with an overarching goal of making SoHi an attractive, safe, and pedestrian friendly commercial corridor for Near West Side residents, businesses, and visitors.

The Strategy also identifies four locations on North 27th Street as priority sites based on their susceptibility to change, findings from the 2017 Near West Side Market Analysis, input and recommendations from Near West Side stakeholders, and the potential for the redevelopment of these sites to attract additional investment to the SoHi corridor.

Change on North 27th Street will require significant public and private investment, further reinforcing the need for a wide ranging and current plan embraced by all stakeholders that respects the role they all have to play in the ongoing revitalization of SoHi. What makes current efforts unique from past initiatives and intentions is the formation of the Near West Side Partners (NWSP). Created by five anchor institutions in the Near West Side, the NWSP hold the organizational, political, and financial capacity to bring about visible change to the neighborhoods that make up the Near West Side. This North 27th Street Corridor Strategy can serve as the detailed and overarching redevelopment strategy to guide the NWSP, the City of Milwaukee, and all other involved stakeholders as they work to fulfill the vision of bringing back a bustling and vibrant commercial Main Street to Milwaukee's Near West Side.

Zoning and Land Use Strategies

- Maintain the dominant Local Business (LB2) zoning classification for the SoHi corridor in order to support its commercial and mixed-use character.
- Ensure that zoning on North 27th Street can accommodate various maker space functions that may otherwise only be permitted in industrial zoning districts.
- Support existing and future light manufacturing uses at the south end of North 27th Street, primarily between West Clybourn and West St. Paul Avenues.

Urban Design and Landscaping Strategies

- Preserve and enhance the traditional store fronts with clear and ample glazing, attractive signage, improved lighting and other decorative elements.
- Promote and enforce parking lot landscaping requirements to improve aesthetics and create a more appealing walking environment.
- Improve the overall appearance of SoHi by reducing the number of blank walls and vacant spaces.

Transportation Strategies

- Reduce reckless driving by considering curb bump outs and eliminating unnecessary curb cuts along North 27th Street.
- Improve the pedestrian and bike experience by exploring alternatives to the present right of way configuration, such as removing or relocating the existing bike lane and replacing it with either a protected bike lane or a wider sidewalk and trees.
- Vacate the segment of North 28th Street between Wisconsin Avenue and Wells Street to facilitate redevelopment of the former Wisconsin Avenue School and City-Campus properties.

CPTED Strategies

- Conduct an annual CPTED audit of SoHi and share findings with property owners.
- Increase "eyes on the street" by installing LED lighting over entryways and in parking lots, and promoting and maintaining clear, un-obscured storefront windows and entrances.
- Trim overgrown landscaping to eliminate blind spots.

Priority Redevelopment Sites

1. City Campus Complex

Redevelop the former Milwaukee County City Campus complex as a Food and Beverage (FaB) Center of Excellence. Administrative, lab, and incubator spaces can occupy the former County offices, with start-up and existing food and beverage retailers and restaurants tenanting the largely vacant historic storefronts.

2. Wisconsin Avenue School

Repurpose the vacant Wisconsin Avenue School with hospitality or office uses. As part of the redevelopment, improve the northwest corner of North 27th and Wisconsin Avenue with landscaping, decorative fencing and other pedestrian amenities.

3. Southwest Block of North 27th and Wisconsin Avenue

Revitalize the mostly vacant and underutilized southwest block of North 27th and Wisconsin Avenue by acquiring and razing blighted and condemned properties and using land assemblage to attract new office or mixed use developments at this key and visible intersection.

4. North 27th and Wells Street Historic District

Use the recently designated 27th and Wells Commercial Historic District to rebrand the corridor as "Historic SoHi" and use available historic tax credits and other funding tools to improve the traditional storefronts and apartment spaces for future residents and local businesses.

SECTION 1
INTRODUCTION, CURRENT CONDITIONS, AND PREVIOUS STUDIES

1. Introduction and Study Purpose

The formation of the Near West Side Partners (NWSP) during 2014 has brought new attention and energy to the revitalization of Milwaukee's Near West Side. NWSP was formed with the support of the neighborhood's long standing anchor institutions: Aurora Health Care, Harley Davidson, Marquette University, Miller Coors, and Potawatomi Business Development Corporation. The NWSP have partnered with the Near West Side Business Improvement District #10 and established neighborhood organizations in the area to coordinate efforts to revitalize and sustain the Near West Side as a thriving business and residential corridor.

One of the most critical factors that will determine the overall success of the NWSP's and the City of Milwaukee's efforts in this area will be what occurs on North 27th Street in the coming years. North 27th Street, between West Highland and West St. Paul Avenues, has consistently been identified as the area in the Near West Side that presents some of the more vexing challenges and greatest susceptibility to change, while at the same time providing some of the most unique opportunities to attract development that has the potential to positively shape the future of the Near West Side neighborhoods.

While a significant amount of recent planning and analysis of the Near West Side, and of North 27th Street specifically, has been completed in recent years, the NWSP have called for the development of an actionable strategy for North 27th Street that consolidates the numerous recommendations of planning efforts, reconciles them with current market conditions, and articulates a path forward. This document provides the vision and strategy for an attractive and revitalized North 27th Street commercial corridor that will benefit not only the Near West Side but the entire City of Milwaukee.

Another purpose of the 27th Street Corridor Strategy is to provide an update to the Near West Side Area Plan. The Near West Side Area Plan was adopted in March of 2004 and is one of 13 area plans that make up the City of Milwaukee's Comprehensive Plan. As part of the Comprehensive Plan, all land use and zoning actions undertaken by the City of Milwaukee in the Near West Side must be consistent with the recommendations of the Near West Side Plan. In the years since the adoption of the Near West Side Plan there have been significant changes in market conditions and property status within the plan area, necessitating

an update to the recommendations for North 27th Street. Further, some of the recommendations of the multiple planning efforts that have occurred since the adoption of the Near West Side Plan further refine the goals of stakeholders for the corridor. Upon adoption by the Common Council, this North 27th Street Corridor Strategy will become an amendment to the Near West Side Area Plan.

2. Study Scope: Organization and Components

The North 27th Street Strategy is comprised of four sections: 1) Background Information and a Summary of Existing Conditions; 2) Strategies and Recommendations; 3) Priority Sites; and 4) Conclusion and Implementation.

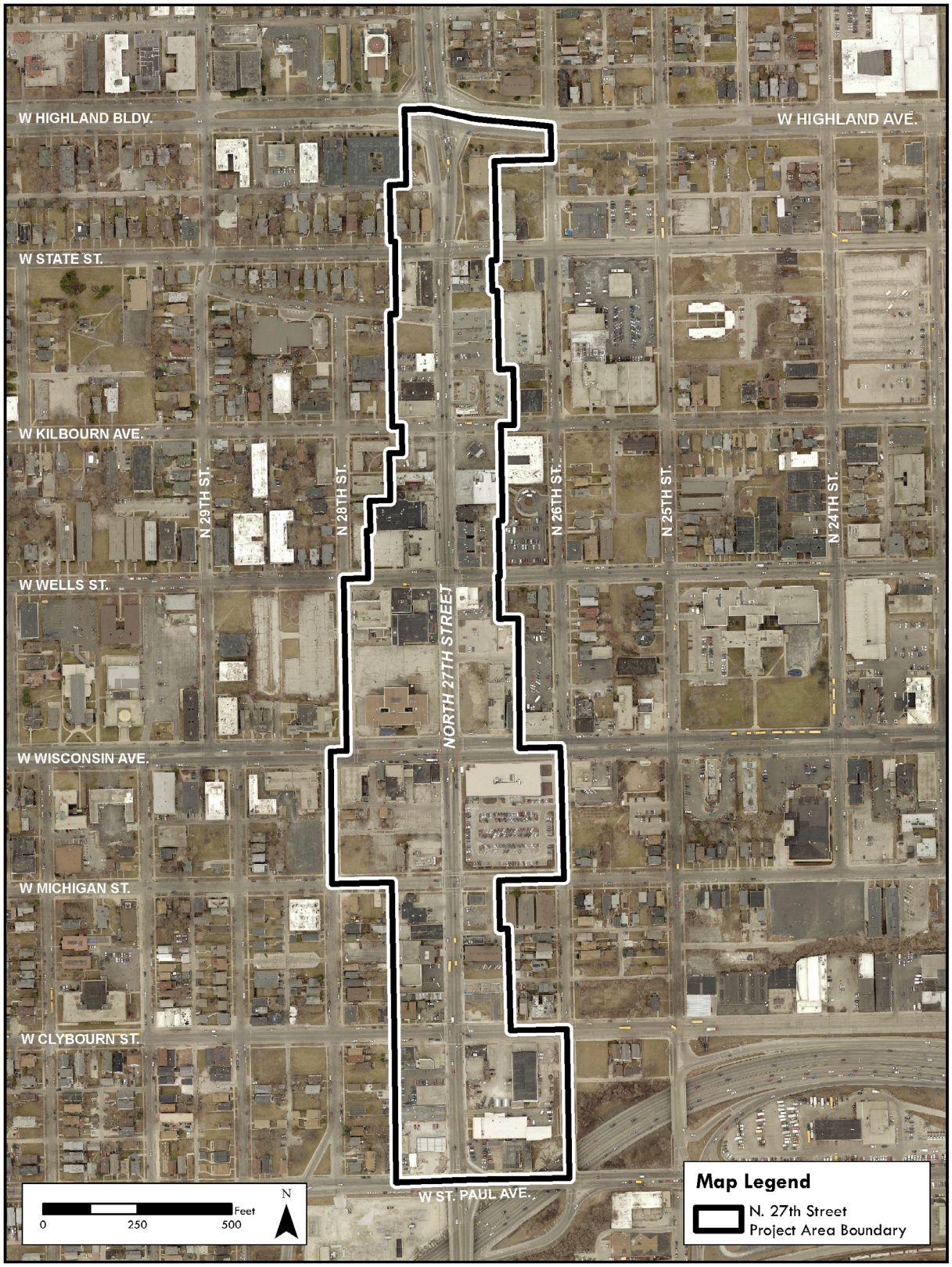
Section One explains the purpose and scope of the study and provides relevant background information that informs the remainder of the plan. This includes a general description of existing conditions of the study area, focusing on zoning, land use, traffic counts, and the current business mix. In addition, market data including vacancies, rents, and neighborhood income is included to provide context for the land use recommendations. Lastly, prior plans and studies that make recommendations related to North 27th Street are summarized given their central role in shaping many of the recommendations and the overall strategy contained within this document.

Section Two provides recommended strategies and policies to facilitate desired improvements to North 27th Street and will include: recommendations to address shortcomings or capitalize on opportunities identified by the Near West Side Market Study, suggested façade improvements, identification of possible zoning or land use changes for individual parcels, recommended right-of-way improvements, recommendations to improve safety on the corridor using Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) techniques, and will identify strategies and programs to attract the end users needed to ultimately create the desired outcome of a revitalized North 27th Street corridor.

Section Three highlights priority sites on North 27th that have been identified as most susceptible to change in the near or mid-term and can provide a catalyzing effect throughout the rest of the 27th Street corridor and the Near West Side as a whole. Recommendations in this section will build on those found in Section Two but be applied to the specific priority sites.

Section Four offers concluding remarks regarding the roles and responsibilities of the major stakeholders involved with the implementation of these strategies and will highlight financial tools and programs available to assist small businesses and property owners.

PLAN BOUNDARY



3. Study Boundary

The study boundary encompasses what has historically been referred to as "SoHi" or South of Highland, and includes seven blocks of North 27th Street, from West Highland Avenue on the north to West St. Paul Avenue to the south for the properties fronting along North 27th Street. The boundary also extends to include the entire block at the southwest quadrant of North 27th and Wisconsin Avenue.

4. North 27th Street Description

This section of North 27thStreet, like much of the street both to the north and south of the plan area, is and has traditionally been primarily a commercial corridor serving the many neighborhoods it traverses through. The historic commercial function of SoHi can be observed through the building stock constructed during the first half of the 20th Century that still remains, particularly between West State and West Wells Streets. These buildings consist of attractive and well-proportioned brick and masonry, are two and three-story buildings with a mix of uses, with ground level storefront space, and residential, office, or additional commercial on the upper floors. SoHi was one of six areas that comprised Milwaukee's five year Main Street Program and received its designation in 2005. During this time, one of the most significant historic buildings on the corridor was renovated, with the revitalization of the SoHi building at the southeast corner of North 27th Street and West Wells Street. The first floor tenant was originally a national chain restaurant and the space now houses a local restaurant. A second floor office tenant has just moved in. Rounding out the Main Street feel is the building placement up to or just behind the front property lines, creating an attractive and human-scaled street wall and providing SoHi some of its best redevelopment opportunities.
The remaining building stock along this corridor originates from the post-freeway construction era. The buildings are generally single-use, single-story structures with accompanying surface parking or drive-thru service lanes.

North 27th Street north of Wisconsin Avenue resembles a more traditional urban main street with an older building stock and higher densities.

North 27th Street south of Wisconsin Avenue is less dense with a more contemporary car-centric building stock.

Typical pedestrian realm condition on N. 27th Street.

Photo of SoHi branding.

There are three notable exceptions to the traditional main street pattern along this portion of North 27th Street: the former Wisconsin Avenue School, the Penfield Children's Center, and the State of Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Office Building. Despite their design differences reflecting the different architectural styles from when they were built, the latter two buildings have their backs to North 27th Street, all three are larger floor-area buildings, between two and three stories in height that have adjacent surface parking lots to accommodate their, space and use needs.

Street Right-of-Way and Traffic

North 27th Street itself is a typical commercial arterial in Milwaukee. The street consists of a 66 foot wide right-of-way with two 8 foot wide sidewalks and a 49 foot street width that is divided between an 11 foot travel lane, along with a nine foot parking lane and a five foot bike lane in each direction. For comparison purposes, this segment of N. 27th Street resembles Kinnickinnic Avenue in Bay View and the majority of North Avenue. Traffic counts on North 27th Street have been trending lower over time. Average 2015 traffic counts between West Highland Boulevard and St. Paul Avenue were 15,800 cars per day, compared with 17,500 cars per day in 2006, representing a 10% decline over 9 years. This decline was higher on Wisconsin Avenue at North 27th Street where traffic counts fell from 15,900 in 2009 to 12,700 in 2015, or a 15% decrease which may support more complete street considerations where users of differing modes of transport are accommodated within the right-of-way.

Bike lanes have been installed between W. Hazelton Court to W. Richardson Place. Because Wisconsin State Highway 57 runs concurrently with North 27th Street, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's complete streets policy applies when local capital improvements use State or Federal funding. Consequently, for future projects using these funding sources, accommodations for bicyclists and pedestrians must be given due consideration.

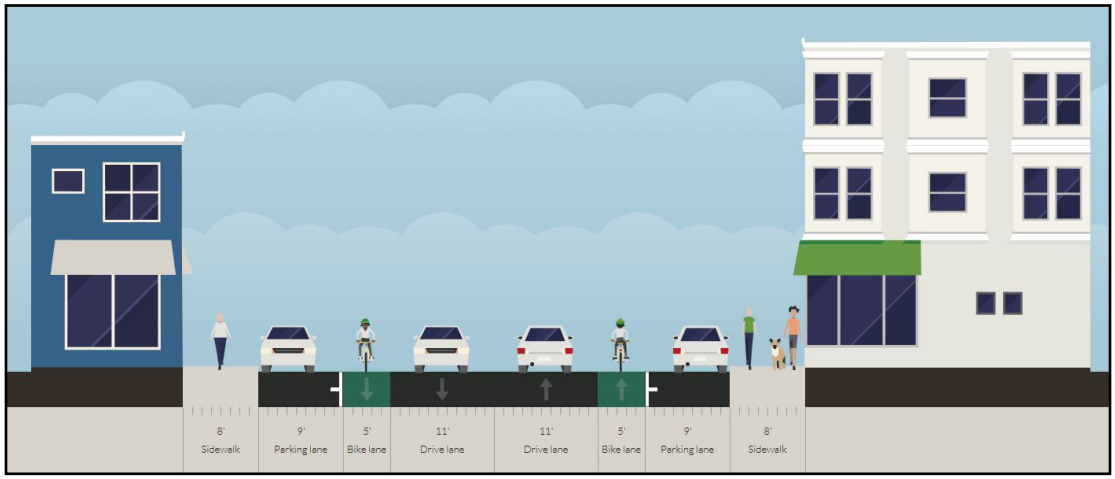
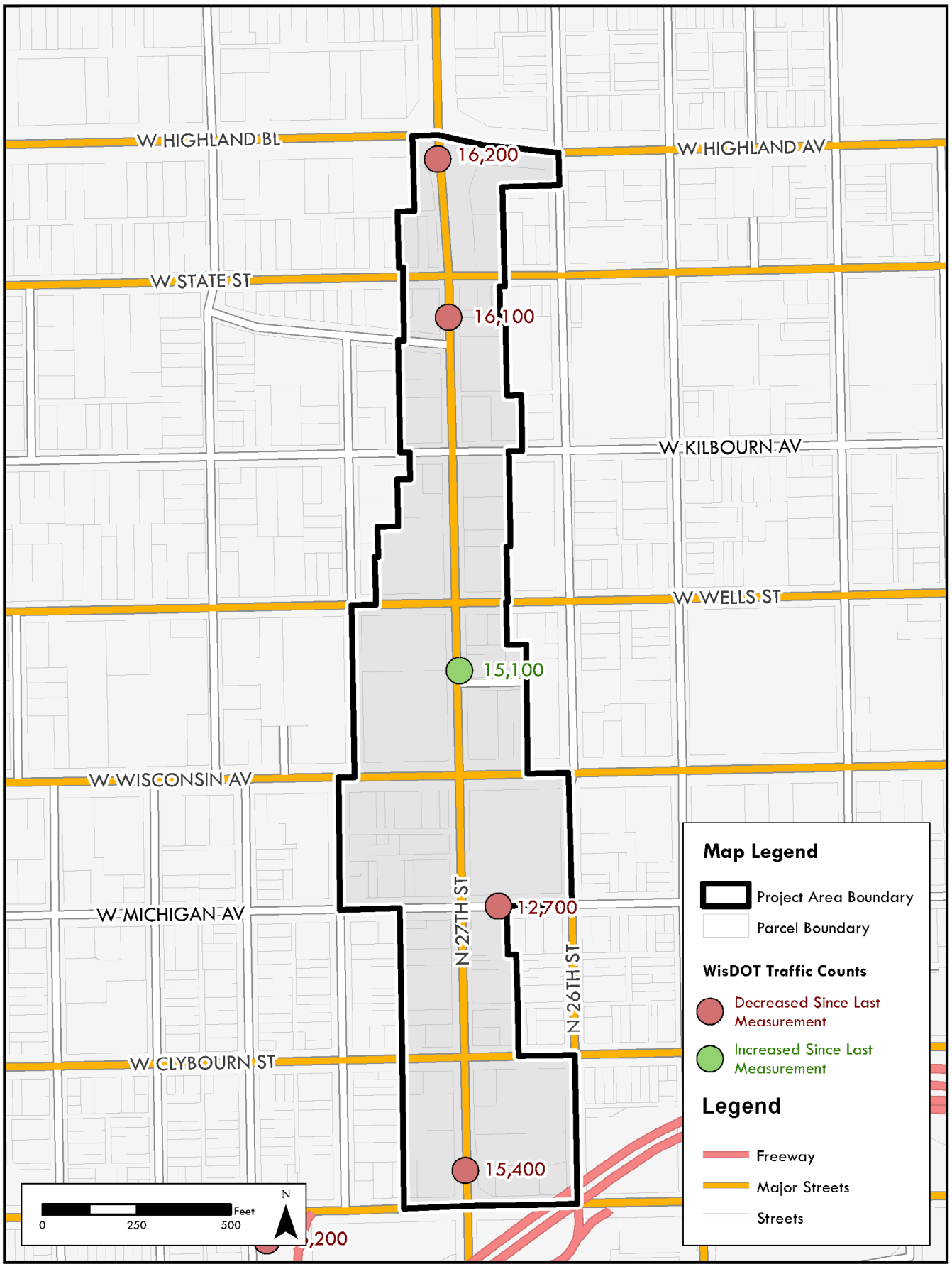


Image depicting the current cross section of North 27th Street north of Wisconsin Avenue. (Credit: streetmix.com)

TRAFFIC COUNTS



Zoning

In the City of Milwaukee zoning code there are three local business zoning classifications: LB1, LB2, and LB3. The typical LB1 district is characterized by a more suburban development pattern that allow for larger lots and deeper setbacks. An LB2 district tends to be more urban allowing for smaller lots and setbacks and is the most common local business classification in the city. The LB3 zoning classification was created in 2012 and is the most urban oriented local business district and is characterized by design standards appropriate for areas that have the densest level of development, allows for taller buildings than in the LB1 and LB2 districts and have been applied to key neighborhood commercial and transportation nodes.

As befitting its status as a traditional urban commercial corridor, this segment of North 27th Street is primarily zoned local business, LB2, with three exceptions being the former Wisconsin Avenue School, the State of Wisconsin Office Building, and Penfield Children's Center, which are zoned RT3, RO2, and RM6 respectively. A less visible exception to the LB2 zoning is the historically industrial quadrant at North 27th and St. Paul Avenue.

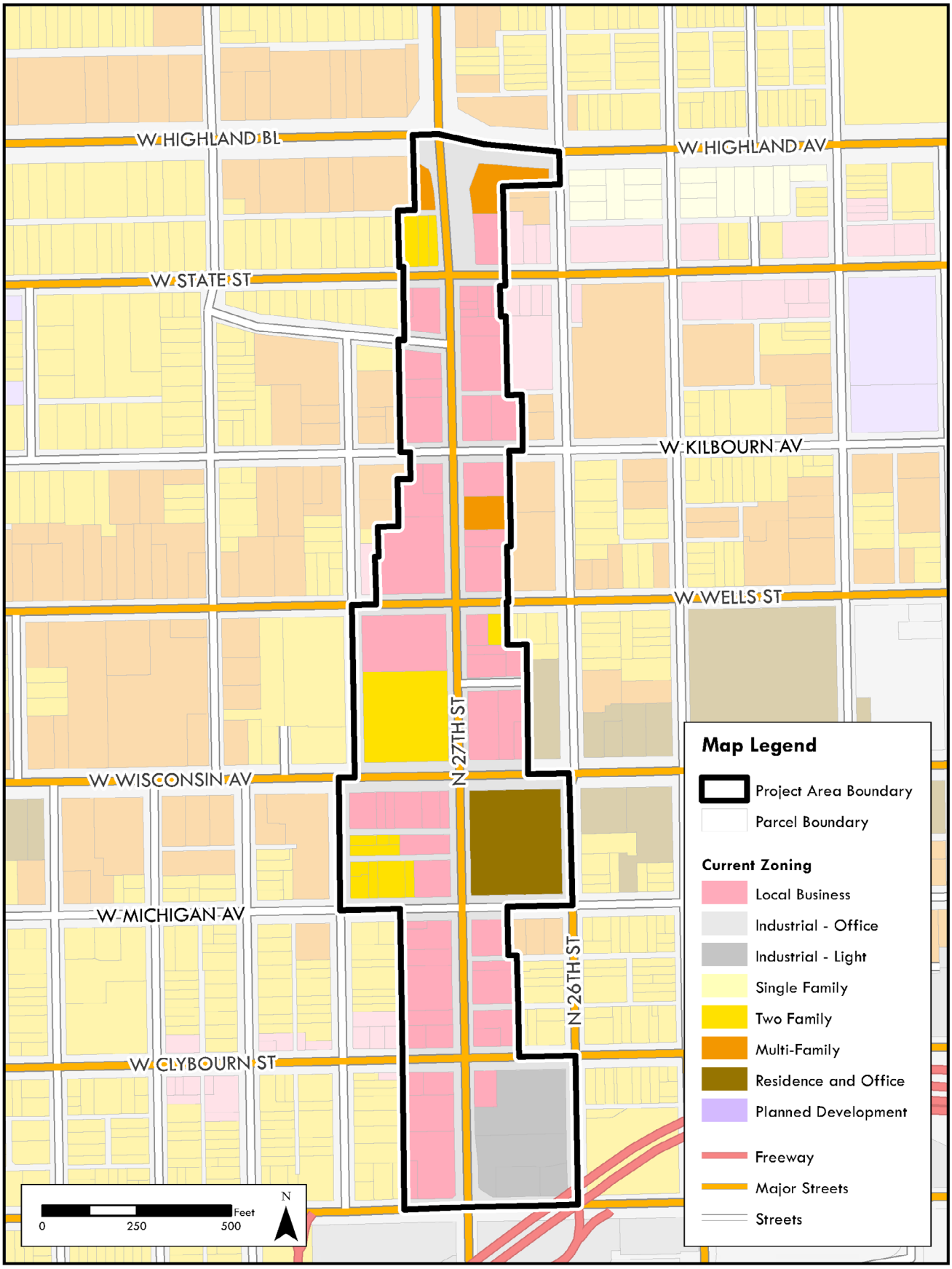
LB2 zoning allows for a wide range of commercial uses suitable for a commercial or retail corridor, including stand alone and mixed use residential buildings. Buildings in LB2 districts can be no taller than 60 feet high but not shorter than 18 feet, and primary street facing façades require a glazing area of 60%. Off-street parking is not required.

Land Use

The land use pattern on North 27th Street is consistent with that of a traditional commercial corridor and reflects the general description of the street detailed above. The majority of this segment of North 27th Street is either commercial or mixed-use commercial, where residential units are above ground floor retail or offices uses, and is consistent from north of State Street to south of Clybourn Avenue where the industrial influence of the Menomonee Valley begins to be evident, particularly at St. Paul Avenue.

There are only a few exceptions to the commercial-dominant land use pattern on North 27th Street. The most visible are the two institutional uses at the intersection of 27th and Wisconsin Avenue: the State of Wisconsin Office Building and the former Wisconsin Avenue School. The other land use outlier are the multi-family apartment buildings at the intersection of 27th and Wells. It should be noted, however, that while the Penfield Children's Center is classified as a commercial land use, its activities are similar in nature to an institutional use similar to an early education and therapy center.

ZONING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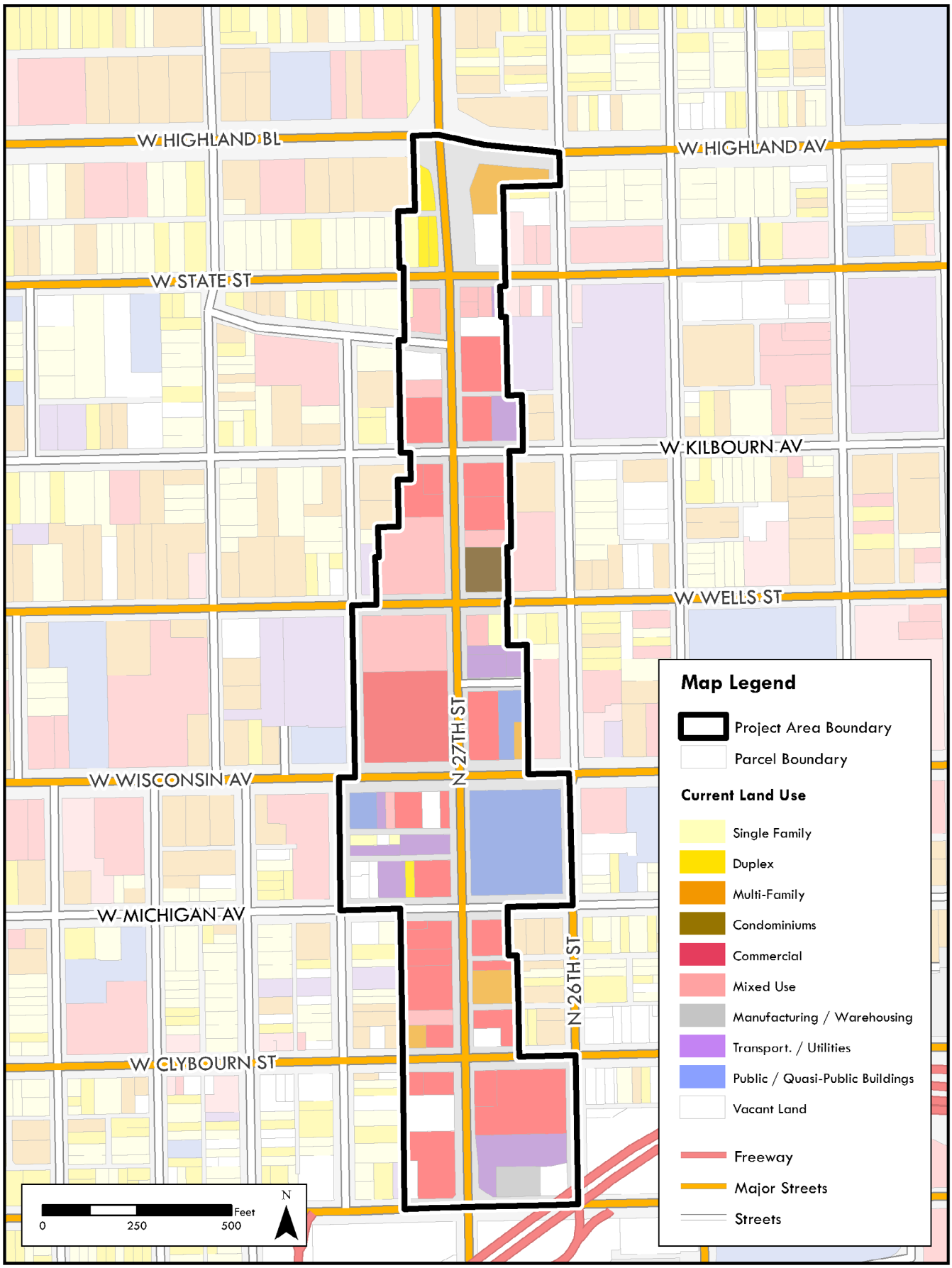
W WELLS ST
N 27TH ST
N 26TH ST
W WISCONSIN AV
W MICHIGAN AV
W CLYBOURN ST
Map Legend
Project Area Boundary
Parcel Boundary
Current Zoning
Local Business
Industrial - Office
Industrial - Light
Single Family
Two Family
Multi-Family
Residence and Office
Planned Development
Freeway
Major Streets
Streets
0
250
500
Feet
N

LAND USE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W CLYBOURN ST
Map Legend
Project Area Boundary
Parcel Boundary
Current Land Use
Single Family
Duplex
Multi-Family
Condominiums
Commercial
Mixed Use
Manufacturing / Warehousing
Transport. / Utilities
Public / Quasi-Public Buildings
Vacant Land
Freeway
Major Streets
Streets
N
Feet
0
250
500

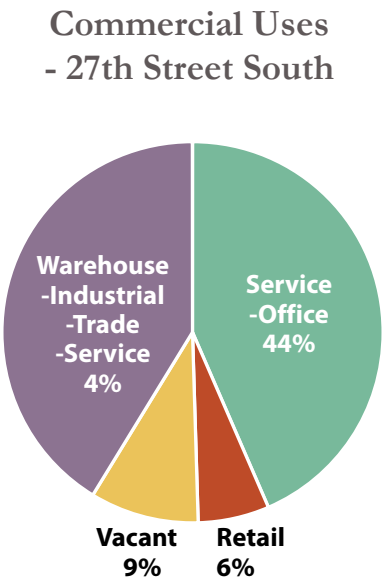
5. Business Mix and Market Information

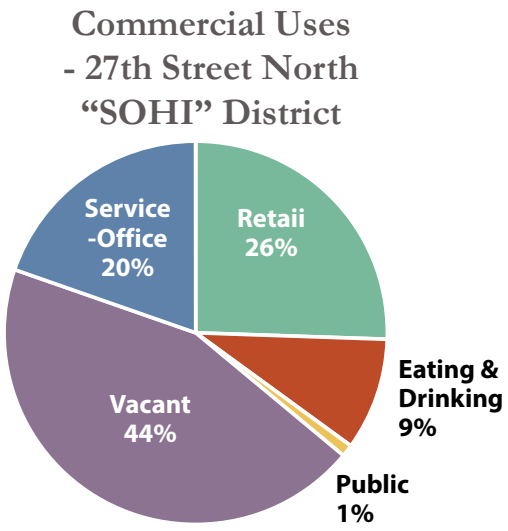
The 2017 Near West Side Market Study classifies the various businesses along North 27th Street into six commercial categories that generally reflect uses that would be found on a typical urban commercial corridor: retail, eating and drinking, professional or commercial services including office, warehouse and industrial trade, public and civic uses, and vacant space. The segment between Highland and Wisconsin Avenue contains the majority of the traditional Main Street physical stock and not surprisingly contains the largest concentration of retail along the corridor, with 26% of all uses in this stretch classified as retail.

It should be noted that in spite of the ample storefront retail space, the stand alone Family Dollar store accounts for almost a third of this retail space.

The Penfield Children's Center is an unmistakable presence along the SoHi corridor and represents two-thirds of all of all office and service space north of Wisconsin Avenue, which contrasts with the relative paucity of other business services that traditionally populate similar commercial corridors. Only 20% of land uses on this stretch are classified as business or commercial services.

The corridor also consists of a small number of eating and drinking spaces including Daddy's Soul Food, a newer locally-owned restaurant that already serves as an anchor for SoHi. Overall, eating and drinking businesses make up 9% of the business mix.



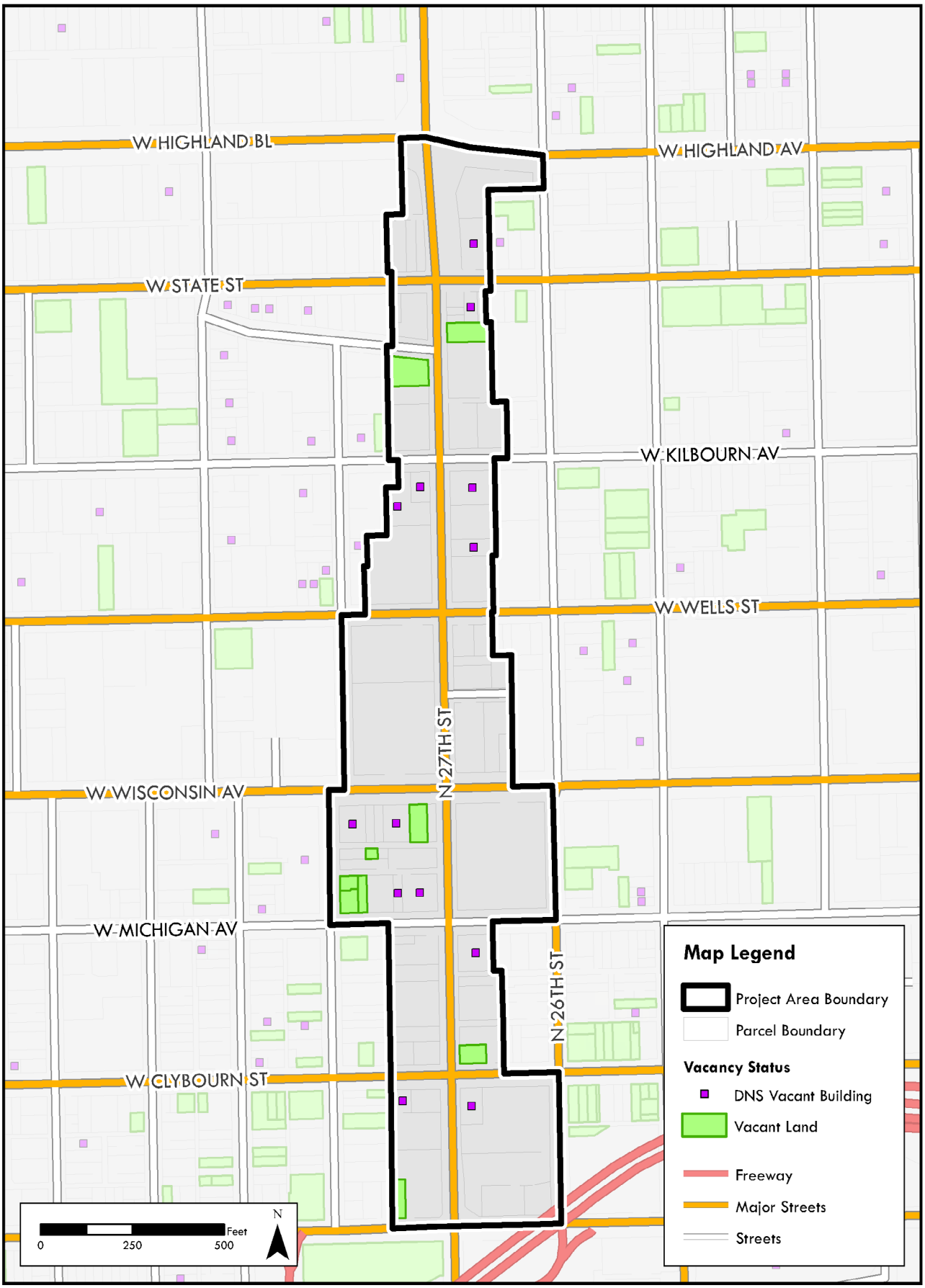


Vacant space represents the largest category of use within this corridor and accounts for nearly half (44%) of all total space north of Wisconsin Avenue. Much of this space is concentrated at Wells and State streets and includes the former Milwaukee County City Campus building and many of the storefronts on the west side of 27th Street north of Wells, although temporary uses such as UW-Milwaukee's mobile design box are currently contributing to filling ground floor level commercial spaces. If the former Wisconsin Avenue School is included, the vacancy rate is even higher. However, recent changes in property status at a number of key sites pave the way for possible new investment in this corridor. The ownership of the vacant City Campus complex and the mixed-use building at 801 North 27th Street have recently been consolidated under single ownership with redevelopment and land banking plans being considered while the Wisconsin Avenue School was recently listed by the City of Milwaukee for sale and redevelopment for commercial use. 1% of the remaining mix is public space.

South of Wisconsin Avenue, the business mix is noticeably different from what it is north of Wisconsin Avenue and is comprised primarily of service and office uses (44%) and warehouse and industrial trades (41%) with a more modest amount of vacant space (9%) with retail (6%) rounding out the remaining mix. The State of Wisconsin Department of Children & Families Office Building office is by far the single largest office use on North 27th Street. There is no dominant business type. The reminder of the street consists of smaller, standalone office or commercial buildings offering a range of services including legal, veterinary, automotive, and dry cleaning. The sole retail establishment is the convenience store portion of the full service gas station at 27th and St. Paul. The remaining businesses reflect the industrial nature of the area from St. Paul into the Menomonee Valley with the uses primarily light industrial, warehousing, and storage.

Despite the relatively high square footage of vacant space along this corridor, there are few properties classified by the City of Milwaukee as tax delinquent. According to the accompanying map there are a total of seven properties that are tax delinquent as of the summer of 2017 and of those only one, a privately owned automotive site, is currently three or more years delinquent. This suggests that property owners believe that there is value in retaining their properties in this area, perhaps sensing that the ongoing revitalization efforts may lead to higher property values in the future. This also suggests that the City may not passively acquire large amounts of real estate in this corridor through the tax foreclosure process and will need to deploy other strategies to facilitate the change in ownership of properties where owners may not be actively maintaining their properties or trying to fill vacancies.

VACANCIES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W WELLS ST
N 27TH ST
W WISCONSIN AV
W MICHIGAN AV
N 26TH ST
W CLYBOURN ST
Map Legend
Project Area Boundary
Parcel Boundary
Vacancy Status
DNS Vacant Building
Vacant Land
Freeway
Major Streets
Streets
Feet
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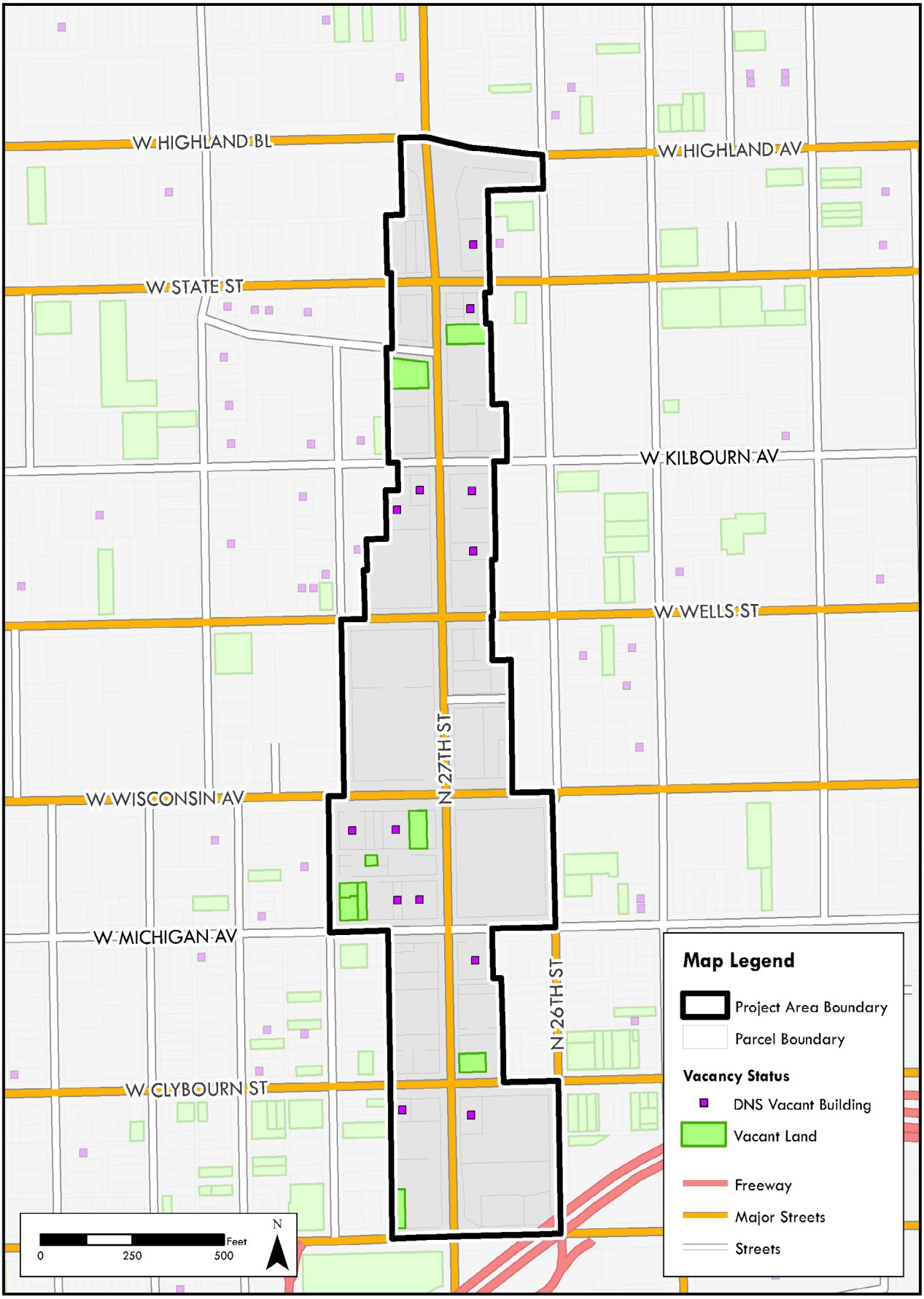
TAX DELINQUENT PROPERTIES

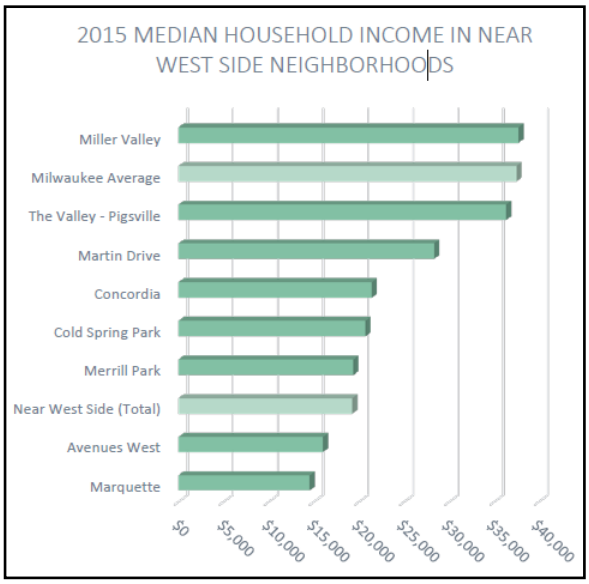


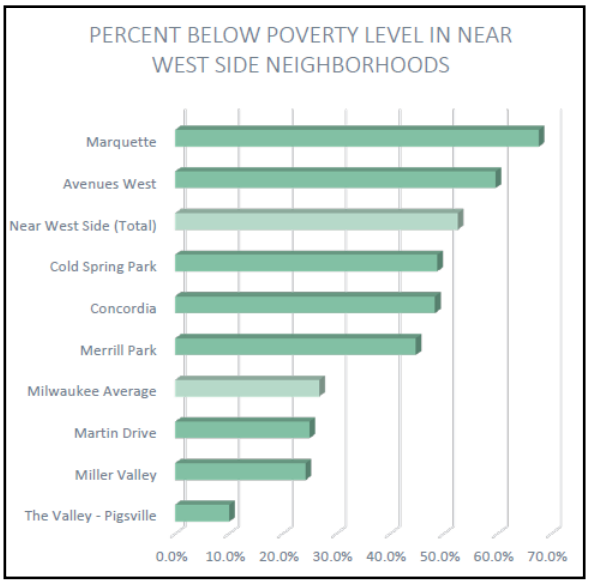
Market Rents

A snapshot of estimated market rents for the North 27th Street corridor by business type is available from City of Milwaukee Assessor's Office records. Retail rents are fairly consistent along the corridor whether the businesses in the traditional storefronts between State and Wells streets or in strip-mall or is a free standing model such as Family Dollar. Available rents range from a high of $10.40 to a low of $5.70, with a typical rent rate of $8.40 per square foot. Estimated rents for local restaurants in the corridor also fall in this range, while the estimated rent for national fast food operators may be higher, as is custom throughout the City. Estimated rents for office and personal service uses are, like the retail rates, fairly consistent throughout the corridor, averaging $10.35 per square foot.

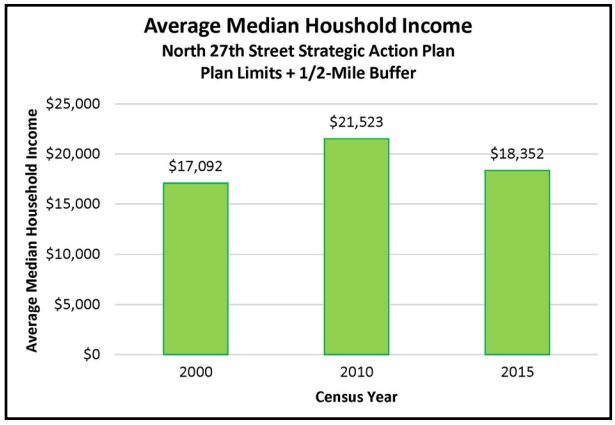
Household Income

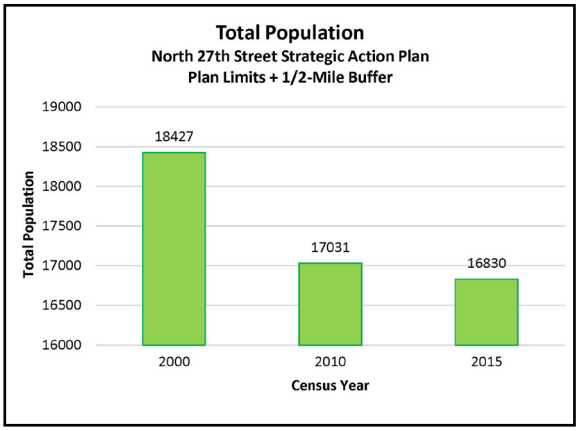
Current median household income in the Near West Side is approximately $18,000, half of the citywide average of approximately $36,000. However, the figures for the Near West Side are skewed downward by the inclusion of students on the Marquette campus. The poverty rate for the area is close to 60%, again, well above the city average of 25%. It is also important to note that median household incomes in the census tracts surrounding the North 27th Street commercial corridor are falling. In 2010, median household income was $21,523. In 2015, median household income was $18,352, or a decrease of approximately 15%. These figures represent a major hurdle that may prevent national retailers from locating to the North 27th Street corridor and reinforces the need for existing small businesses to draw customers from outside the neighborhood in order to remain





successful in the longer term. However, the 2017 Near West Side Market Study also highlighted the purchasing power of employees who work in the neighborhood and demonstrated the market demand that can be met by local entrepreneurs and other small business development in the area.





6. Previous Studies and Recommendations

A number of previous plans and studies form the basis for the recommendations contained within North 27th Street Corridor Strategy. Given all of the recent planning efforts that utilized extensive stakeholder engagement to examine and make recommendations for this corridor, this 27th Street Corridor Strategy itself is primarily a consolidation of those existing recommendations to ensure that they are memorialized within the City's Comprehensive Plan. While there was additional public outreach carried out to prepare the 27th Street Corridor Strategy as called for in the City's process for Public Participation in Comprehensive Planning, that outreach was focused on ensuring that the highest priority recommendations were being advanced and that these recommendations still reflected the collective goals of stakeholders for their neighborhood.

Near West Side Area Plan (City of Milwaukee, 2004)

The Near West Side Area Plan was originally adopted in 2004 as part of the City of Milwaukee's Comprehensive Plan and includes revitalizing North 27th Street as a catalytic project. The plan recognizes North 27th Street as one of the primary commercial corridors in the Near West Side that has many of the hallmarks of a traditional shopping district, with smaller storefronts fronting the street, on-street parking, and a walkable environment. To capitalize on these assets, the plan makes a number of recommendations, including:

- Focus on retail and artist live/ work units so that North 27th Street remains a main neighborhood shopping street
- Increase the attractiveness of existing commercial buildings
- Provide unified streetscape amenities: planters, trash cans, benches, harp lights, and colored sidewalks/crosswalks
- Encourage relocation of non-commercial and non-taxable uses to upper floors
- Create a Tax Incremental District to help fund physical improvement and a Targeted Investment Neighborhood to support home ownership

SOHI District Master Plan (April 2007)

Developed in 2007, the SOHI District Master Plan put forward the following principals, with accompanying recommendations, to guide redevelopment and revitalization of North 27th Street:

- Create a strong positive identity for the SOHI (SOuth of HIghland) District
- Quality buildings with a diversity of architectural expression
- Safe and clean streets
- Enhanced pedestrian experience
- Unique retail and dining to the area

Avenues West Action Plan (Avenues West Association and BID #10, Spring 2015)

In late summer 2014, the Avenues West Association, Inc. and Business Improvement District #10 engaged Layton Boulevard West Neighbors, Inc. (LBWN) to create a plan that would prioritize areas in and around the Avenues West neighborhood for future development. Related to North 27th Street, the plan recommends continuing the SOHI branding effort to create a recognizable retail district, as well as installing gateway signage at St. Paul and Highland Avenue to further brand the corridor.

The plan also identifies opportunities, as catalytic projects are developed along 27th Street, to leverage the opportunity to provide supporting retail, such as restaurants and dry cleaners. The plan recommends using inactive storefronts on North 27th Street as a way to market under-utilized properties and create pop-up venues for local events such as business workshops, gallery nights and other events that help bring activity to the corridor.

Near West Side Partners Strategic Plan (Near West Side Partners, 2015)

The strategic plan identifies goals and makes recommendations related to community engagement, safety, commercial corridors, housing, marketing and branding, transportation and infrastructure, and organizational stability. Related to North 27th Street, the plan identifies the SOHI district as serving the purpose of a traditional main street for the Near West Side neighborhood. The plan identifies an opportunity to fill vacant storefronts with businesses that will appeal to people visiting MillerCoors, Harley-Davidson, Marquette University, Potawatomi, and Aurora Healthcare. The plan also recommends concentrating commercial uses at intersections and encouraging façade improvements to improve the curb appeal of the area

Near West Side Design Charrette (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2016)

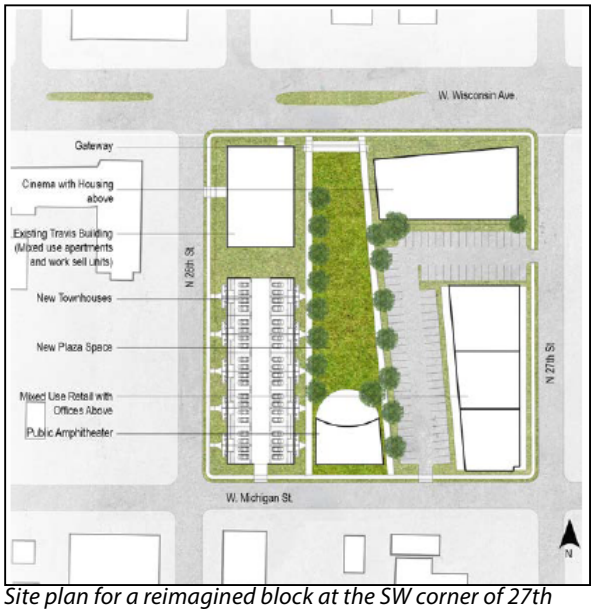
To help community stakeholders develop a future vision for priority sites in the Near West Side, the City of Milwaukee and the NWSP sponsored the Near West Side Design Charrette.

After conducting a series of focus groups with local residents, business owners, brokers, lenders, and developers, Community Design Solutions (CDS) led an all-day design charrette for the Near West Side in April of 2016. Three of the charrette sites were located on North 27th Street and reflected both the strategic location of this corridor and the redevelopment potential currently available.

- On the vacant northeast corner of Wisconsin and North 27th Street, the charrette proposed a new six-story office building with a restaurant on the first floor. A public plaza would activate the corner.
- At the southwest corner of Wisconsin and North 27th Street, the proposed design included townhomes, a cinema, an amphitheater, and an interior plaza.
- Between Wells Street and Kilbourn Street along North 27th Street, a community center was proposed that would have space for a fitness center, a farmer's market, maker space, and a café.

The uses proposed in the charrette were ones that were identified as highly desirable on the Near West Side. Market considerations will ultimately determine how these sites are redeveloped. While the charrette proposed specific locations for office uses, restaurants, new housing and entertainment uses, as well as new food and retail options, there are many sites in the area that could ultimately accommodate those desired uses and the intent of the charrette was not to limit the uses of a particular site, but rather to showcase how these desired uses can be woven into the existing fabric of the Near West Side and provide City officials and stakeholders with site specific and more overarching goals to strive for when attracting new development to the Near West Side.

Corner of 27th and Kilbourn. Credit: NWSP



Site plan for a reimagined block at the SW corner of 27th Street and Wisconsin Avenue.

Near West Side Market Analysis DRAFT (Summer 2017)

A Market Study for the Near West Side was completed during 2017 to determine market potential for various uses throughout the Near West Side, including along the 27th Street Corridor. While noting existing market challenges along North 27th Street, the Market Study concluded that there was support for office and restaurant uses on the northeast corner of Wisconsin and North 27th Street, as envisioned by the design charrette. The Market Study identified this intersection as one of the priority redevelopment sites in the entire Near West Side given the other assets centered upon the intersection and the potential that investment in the high-profile sites on this corner will reverberate throughout the area. Notable recommendations and observations related to the SoHi corridor include:

- Overall, focus should be on improving the pedestrian realm to address negative safety perceptions and to set the table to transition SoHi to a more walkable, local business oriented corridor, which is its target market.
- A small (approximatley15,000 square feet) format grocery store could be feasible at the southwest corner of North 27th and Wisconsin Avenue if site assemblage on this block is feasible.
- Personal service uses could be accommodated on the SoHi corridor and a natural location exists for local start-up restaurants or small businesses in the store front commercial stock.
- The former school building at the southeast corner of North 28th Street and Wisconsin Avenue is suitable for a Class B office tenant or two to three single story fast casual restaurants if the building would be razed.
- The market would support office use for the City Campus site at Wells Street and North 27th Street.
- The potential exists to accommodate small scale light industrial, repair or business service uses on the southern end of the N. 27th Street study area near West Clybourn and St. Paul Avenues.
- Efforts by the City or NWSP to land bank vacant or under-utilized parcels for future redevelopment should continue.
- The findings of the market study were used to inform recommendations of the North 27th Street Corridor Strategy and a copy of the full market study can be found online at **milwaukee.gov/AreaPlans/NearWest** or on the NWSP website at **nearwestsidemke.org**.

North 27th Street Corridor Strategy Kick-off Meeting (Summer 2017)

Near West Side residents, business owners, property owners and others with an interest in the Near West side were invited to a North 27th Street Kick-off meeting to hear from City staff about the intent of a change to the Near West Side comprehensive plan in the form of a North 27th Street redevelopment strategy. Approximately one dozen stakeholders attended to hear a presentation on major issues in the SoHi corridor and updated planning and development news. Following, attendees were asked for input and comment for SoHi redevelopment. Common themes that emerged centered on the need for traffic calming, the importance of redeveloping the historic blocks, and the need for outside funding to restore buildings and storefronts properly to attract desirable uses. Overall, the attitudes from those attending the Kick-off meeting were positive and believed the area has improved in recent years, largely due to the shutting down or removal of problem properties.

A North 27th Street Kick-Off Meeting was conducted in the UWM Mobile Design Box space at North 27th and Wells Street.

Neighborhood House Youth Outreach (Summer 2017)

A second public outreach meeting to inform the SoHi redevelopment strategy was conducted at the Neighborhood House of Milwaukee and sought out comment on SoHi from approximately 25 area teens. An introduction to basic commercial corridor planning elements was given and followed by a walk of North 27th Street and the participants were asked to point out problems they observed on the street where to provide solutions or changes to be had. Comments from the participants included the need for other food options beyond fast food, un-kept and rundown parking lots attracting loiterers making for an intimidating presence, reckless driving making bike lane use dangerous, and an overall feel of neglect due to the physical condition of the street facing facades.

A planning workshop centered around elements that make for a successful commercial street was conducted with campers from the nearby Neighborhood House of Milwaukee community center.

Section Two

Strategies and Recommendations

The goal of the strategies and recommendations set forth in this document are to consolidate the priority recommendations contained within the plans identified in Section One and to address obstacles in order to capitalize on the opportunities identified in the 2017 Near West Side Market Study. Taken as a whole, these recommendations will continue to help refashion North 27th as a decidedly pedestrian-oriented street at its core. While the market and area economic conditions cannot be influenced by government or committed local organizations alone, their actions to make North 27th Street as safe, attractive, and pedestrian friendly as possible can set the table for a more welcoming environment to attract new residents, visitors, and businesses to the area. See the maps on pages 40-43 for a graphical summary of the recommendations found in this section.

1. Zoning and Land Use

Vision

Zoning along SoHi is maintained to preserve and expand the mixed-use nature of this commercial corridor, supporting future uses that are compatible with the vision detailed in this plan. Zoning and associated design requirements are adhered to and enforced, especially glazing and landscaping requirements that are in place to create a more welcoming and attractive urban environment that attracts businesses, customers, and residents alike.

Recommendations

1.1 Redevelop the former Wisconsin Avenue School property into a commercial and/ or hospitality use to further anchor the Historic SoHi district and to improve the North 27th Street and Wisconsin Avenue intersection.

1.2 The vacant property at 2622-2626 West State Street is a viable redevelopment opportunity and should retain its commercial land use and LB2 zoning designation.

1.3 Maintain LB2 zoning for the property at 848 North 27th Street. Should the property be acquired by an adjacent property for use as surface parking, ensure that the edges of the parcel adhere to LB2 parking lot landscaping requirements until the parcel is redeveloped.

1.4 Support the location of future retail/maker spaces, including distilleries or micro-breweries that may arise from the clustering of food and beverage (FaB) businesses in the SoHi corridor. This includes supporting special use requests when all applicable criteria are met.

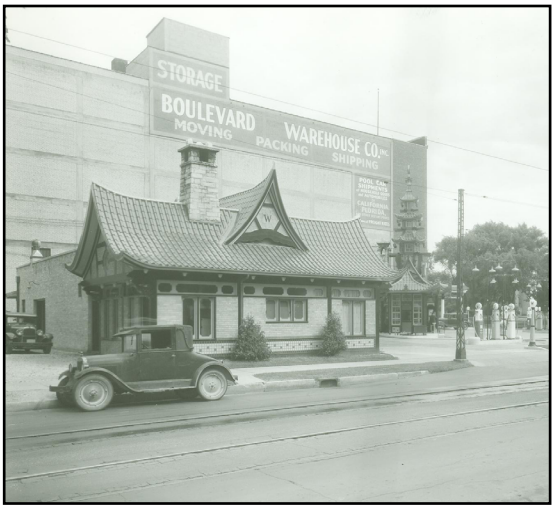
1.5 Support the redevelopment of, including any possible razing, of the properties at 839 and 853 North 27th Street and maintain the present LB2 zoning.

1.6 Should development necessitate it, consider rezoning to LB3 the quadrant of properties comprising the intersection of North 27th Street and West Wisconsin Avenue. In particular, these properties include the RACM-owned parcel at 2630 W. Wisconsin Avenue, the former Wisconsin Avenue School at 2708 W. Wisconsin Avenue, and portions the southwest block of this intersection. LB3 zoning is appropriate for commercial hubs, transit oriented development, and major urban commercial corridors, all of which apply to this parcel and location.

1.7 Target future uses for the 2630 W. Wisconsin Avenue parcel that are consistent with those envisioned by the Near West Side Charrette. This includes mixed use residential and commercial or office uses with ground floor retail to compliment a future Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) stop at the North 27th and Wisconsin Avenue intersection.

1.8 Expansion or accommodation for larger floor space needs from the 2630 property can be accommodated by expansion into the adjacent former industrial building at 2620 West Wisconsin as detailed by the UWM charrette and as seen in the accompanying image.

1.9 South of Clybourn Avenue, land uses transition away from retail to varying office and even light industrial uses reflective of its closer proximity to the Menomonee Valley. Maintain this current commercial and light industrial mix and ensure landscaping standards are followed and enforced.



Historic photo of the northeast corner of North 27th Street and Wisconsin Avenue. Photo credit: CIty of Milwaukee

Rendering from the UWM Near West Side charrette of a conceptual development for the now vacant parcel at the northeast corner of North 27th and Wisconsin Avenue. Credit: UWM / Community Design Solutions

2. Transportation and Parking

Vision

Transportation infrastructure on North 27th Street serves multiple purposes and all users. Not only does the design of the street promote safety and the smooth flow of traffic but, just as importantly, it balances the needs of all modes of transit and does so in a manner that utilizes urban design principles to create an attractive walking and driving environment. On-street parking is generally available within a comfortable walking distance of all destinations, and, combined with attractive options to reach the corridor by foot, bicycle, and public transit, the transportation infrastructure of the corridor attracts increasing numbers of visitors to the area from a wide range of neighborhoods.

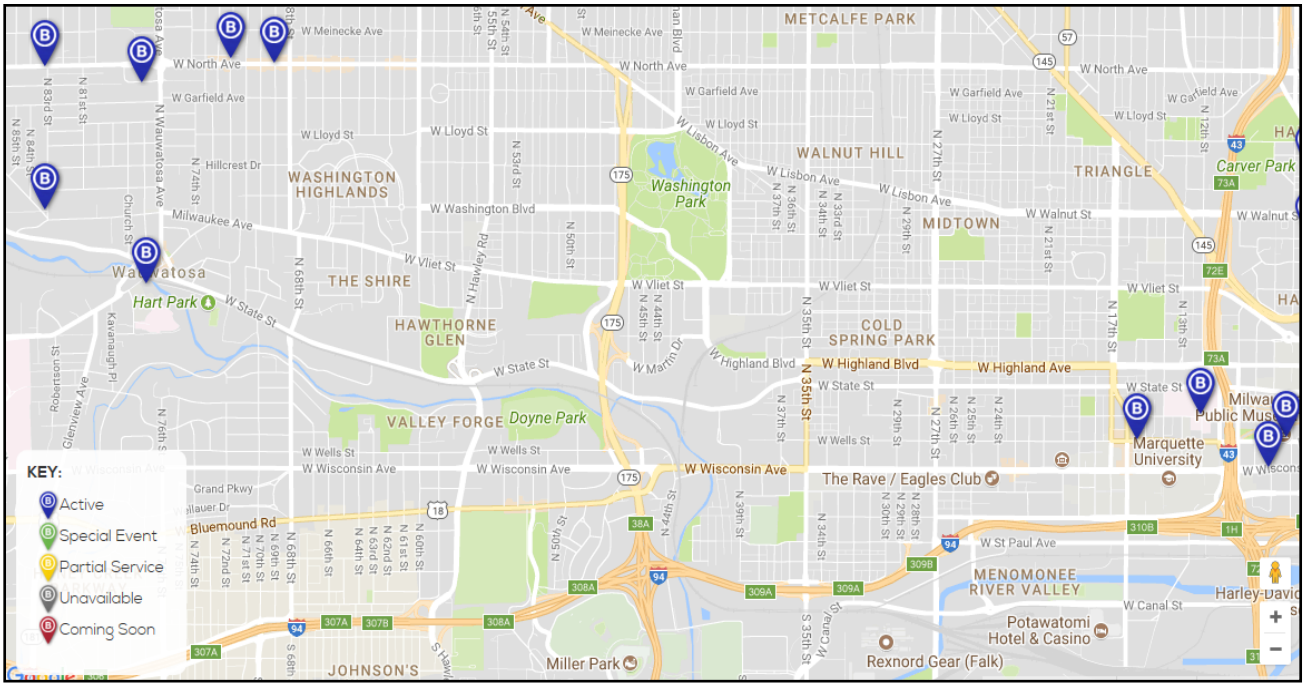
Recommendations

2.1 Support the development of the proposed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route on West Wisconsin Avenue. The planned BRT line will have stops at Wisconsin and North 27th Streets and will likely use the existing bus stop locations. Funding efforts, both public and private, should be employed to replace the existing shelters with improved shelters that include added capacity, attractive design, and SoHi branding that aligns with the overall vision for the neighborhood.

2.2 A Bublr bike share coverage gap currently exists between existing or planned stations in Wauwatosa and at Marquette. Redevelopment sites around the intersection of North 27th Street and West Wisconsin Avenue should take into account the feasibility of a Bublr bike station and include the potential set-up of electrical chase or conduit to support any future Bublr station near existing transit stops and the proposed BRT stops.

2.3 As redevelopment occurs, continue to work to eliminate right-turn bypass lanes on West Highland Avenue and North 27th Street and at the northeast corner of West St. Paul Avenue and North 27th Street. In the urban grid these traffic lanes are a holdover from the 1960's when increasing the flow of traffic at the expense of pedestrians was the priority. Removing these lanes will also allow for a more welcoming entrance into SoHi and emphasize the desire to have a more balanced and walkable urban street.

2.4 Reduce the number of curb-cuts on the west side of North 27th Street between Wisconsin Avenue and Michigan Street and allow for



Map of current Bublr bike stations in Wauwatosa and the west side of Milwaukee. A bike share gap is evident in the western portion of the Near West Side. Photo credit: Bublr website

Alternative bus stop in place of standard MCTS bus stop provides visual interest.

Right turn bypass lane at the intersection of North 27th and Highland Avenue.

additional on-street parking. There are currently five curb cuts which creates unsafe conditions for cars, bikes, and pedestrians in addition to limiting development opportunities along this block face.

2.5 Study the feasibility of adding curb bump-outs at select locations on North 27th Street to reduce dangerous traffic weaving into the bike and parking lanes.

2.6 When the need arises, allow for a limited number of short-term on-street parking zones to attract additional food and beverage uses and Near West Side employees who prefer a grab-and-go or carry-out lunch format.

2.7 The City of Milwaukee Department of Public Works is expected to create a new complete streets policy by the end of 2017 which may impact the future accommodation of differing transit modes on North 27th Street as redevelopment occurs. At a minimum, an overall goal of improving the corridor for pedestrians and bikes should guide any future transportation actions on North 27th Street.

2.8 In the short term, extend bike lanes to continue to Wisconsin Avenue to create additional multi-modal opportunities with the planned BRT route. The existing bike lanes on North 27th Street currently stop at Hazelton Court.

2.9 In the medium or long term, if bike usage on North 27th Street remains sparse because of traffic counts, automobile travel speeds, and the lack of buffering between traffic and bicyclists, query stakeholders on the feasibility of a pilot project to place the existing bike lane between the sidewalk and on-street parking to increase safety and comfort for future bikers. Doing so will also slow traffic speeds which is conducive for a successful retail corridor in term of both pedestrian comfort and business attraction.

2.10 If buffered bike lanes are determined to not be an option in the long term, consider relocating the bike lane on North 27th to a less travelled adjacent street and utilize the resulting available space to install wider sidewalks and tree boxes in order to provide much needed landscaping and shade to a pedestrian oriented street that currently has little of either.

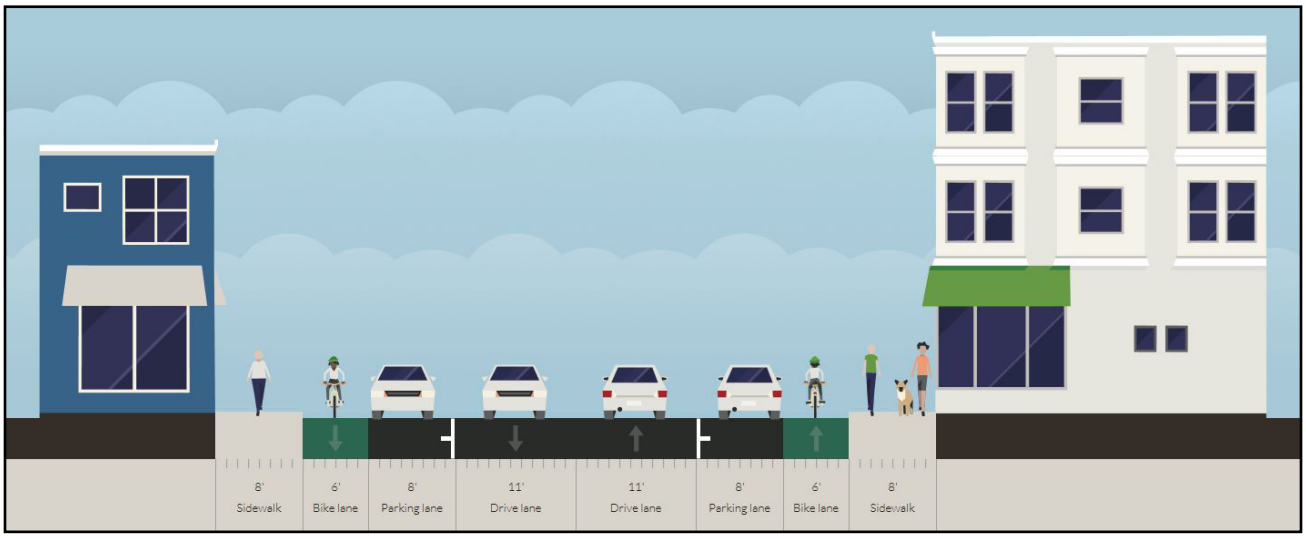


Image 1: Conceptual image of North 27th Street cross section with bike lanes buffered by the parking lane. Credit: Streetmix.com

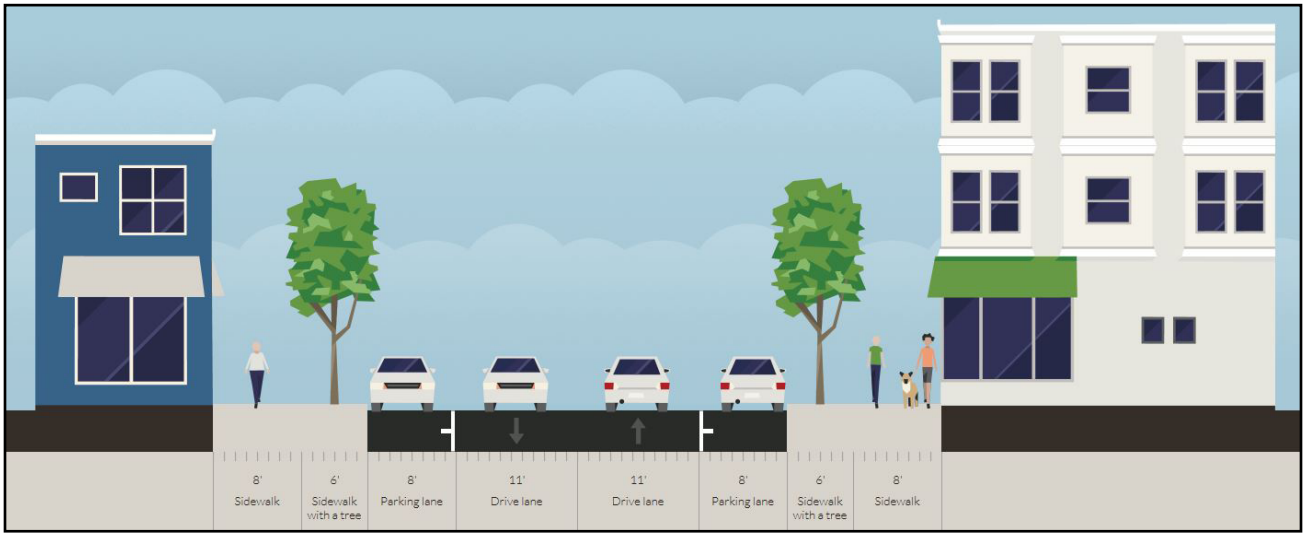


Image 2: Conceptual image of North 27th Street cross section with the bike lane replaced with a tree lane. Credit: Streetmix.com

2.11 Vacate or redesign North 28th Street between Wells and Wisconsin to facilitate and accommodate redevelopment of the City Campus property.

2.12 Traffic signal infrastructure should be context aware. Avoid the installation of additional extra-large traffic signal monotube poles (monotubes) similar to those found at Highland Avenue and North 27th. They are out of scale for a traditional urban commercial corridor and detract from the overall historic character of the neighborhood.

2.13 Future monotubes on North 27th Street in the study area are discouraged. If this infrastructure is required by State and Federal regulations in place at the time of future installations, monotube design and placement should take into account the right-of-way and street-wall context and use more slender components, with the traffic light unit affixed to the far end of the horizontal support to avoid unsightly and sloppy appearances that occurs when the ends of the pole protrudes out. The use of a polished metal or black rather than the dull grey finish should be the standard for this corridor.

Current monotube installed at the intersection of North 27th and Highland Avenue.

A more ideal monotube design used at South 60th and West Forest Home Avenue.

3. Urban Design and Landscaping

Vision

Example: Ideal commercial storefront façade improvements.

All parties with an interest in the overall vitality of North 27th Street recognize the importance that urban design, including landscaping, has on perceptions and ultimately market demand in this corridor. Building facades are identifiable, contain clear, transparent glass and are of a comfortable scale and proportion to pedestrians. Historic buildings are preserved and restored to historic standards. Parking lots are generously landscaped. Taken as a whole, the built environment of North 27th Street conveys to businesses and customers a sense of a positive economic direction and security.

Recommendations

3.1 Once tenanting occurs, preserve and enhance the traditional storefronts that currently exist, with special attention to those located in the 27th and Wells Historic District. Follow historic restoration standards for preserving these attractive storefronts to maximize the impact of reinvestment on the corridor.

3.2 Maintain and build-up the street wall. As redevelopment occurs, ensure that any new properties are constructed with minimal setbacks from North 27th Street.

3.3 Where right-of-way space exists, add planters, benches, banners, and other decorative elements to improve and enliven the streetscape.

3.4 The building façade and parking lot at the Family Dollar property, 930 North 27th Street, should be targeted to be brought up to current zoning standards with façade and landscaping improvements. This is a high profile retail site on the corridor that currently adds to the blighting conditions on the street and improvements could serve as a demonstration project to showcase the impact that upgraded landscaping and building façade appearances can have on the corridor.

3.5 Street facing chain link security fencing should be removed along the corridor as it detracts from the appearance of the area as a whole and is not in keeping with stakeholders vision for the corridor.

3.6 Rope lighting on the perimeters of storefront windows should be discouraged. While a visible, attention-grabbing marketing aid, the appearance does not contribute to the overall vision of an upward trending commercial corridor.

3.7 In the event of any property acquisition or physical reconfiguration of the Penfield Clinic facility, promote the North 27th Street fronting façade of the facility to be improved with pedestrian friendly design elements such as increased glazing, prominent entryways, decorative and security lighting, or landscaping.

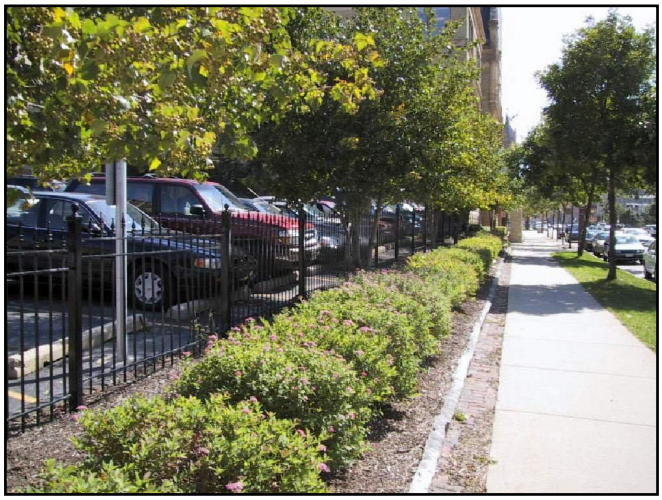
Examples of rope lighting along North 27th Street.

3.8 Should the property at 848 North 27th be acquired and utilized for surface parking by an adjacent property owner, LB2 parking lot landscape requirements shall be implemented.

3.9 The City-owned property at 2622-2626 West State Street includes green open space abutting North 27th Street. A recent CPTED walk determined added lighting and landscape trimming in this area would result in improved safety and appearance on this corner. The City should work with the eventual buyer of 2622 West State to attempt to activate and enliven this greenspace in a manner that complements the reuse of the property.

3.10 Recommended reuses at 2622-2626 West State Street are commercial, including retail with parking located to the rear of the parcel. Any future uses should restore the storefront windows and maintain as much of the original facade as possible.

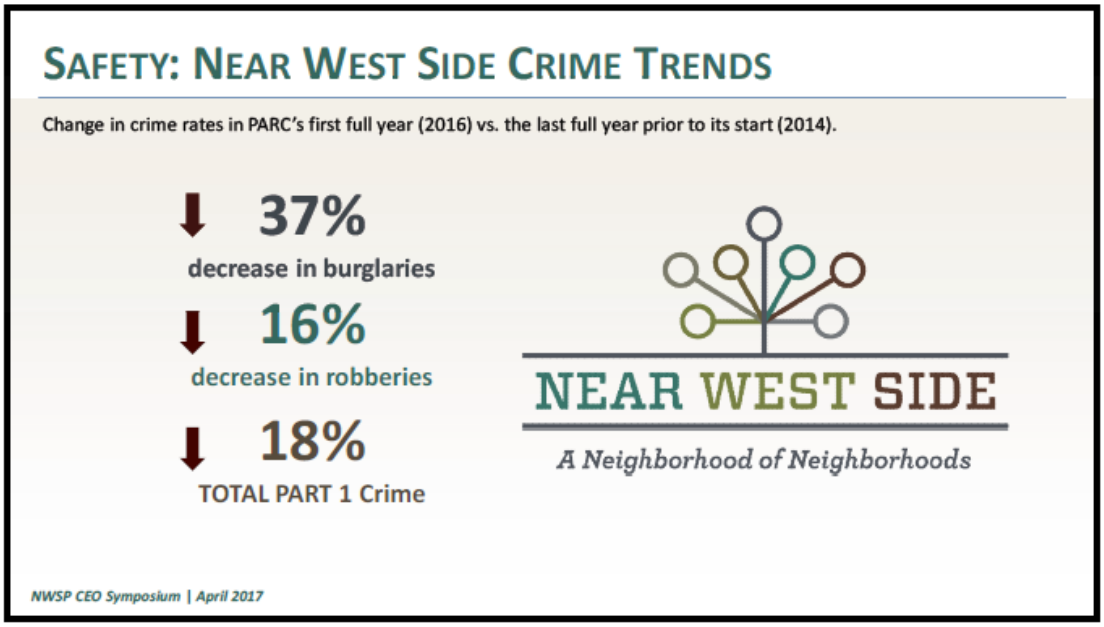
3.11 Any redevelopment of the vacant parcel at the northeast corner of North 27th and Wisconsin Avenue would ideally contain a forecourt to compliment a future BRT stop at this intersection. Doing so would add a comfortable waiting and gathering spot for riders and provide for a useful eating or drinking space for any ground floor carry out or café use.



Example of ideal surface parking lot perimeter landscaping for the SoHi corridor.

4. CPTED

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is an approach to deter criminal behavior through the construction and design of the built environment. CPTED strategies rely upon the ability to influence decisions that precede criminal acts based on purposeful changes to or design of the built environment ranging from the small-scale, such as the strategic use of shrubbery and other vegetation, to the overarching, including the entire building form(s) and increasing the opportunity for "eyes on the street". While statistics show that crime is trending downward in the Near West Side, the perception of crime remains an issue on North 27th Street and safety merits continued attention as part of the North 27th Street Corridor Strategy.



Vision

CPTED techniques are applied to both existing and new developments along North 27th Street. Lighting, landscaping, façade transparency, and parking and building placement, among other elements, are all improved with the goals of CPTED in mind. A commitment by property owners, businesses, residents and other stakeholders to CPTED principles creates more eyes on the street, reduces incidents of personal and property crime, and improves the quality of life for businesses, customers and residents alike.

Recommendations

4.1 Conduct an annual CPTED walk with businesses, NWSP staff, the City Attorney's office, LISC, and others with CPTED training. An initial walk of North 27th Street with LISC, NWSP, and City staff was conducted in July, 2017.

4.2 Convey CPTED findings to property owners.

4.3 Certify NWSP security ambassadors in CPTED training.

4.4 Use available resources from the Department of City Development's Commercial Corridor Team for CPTED uses, e.g. include LED security lighting or installation of transparent storefront glass in façade grant projects.

4.5 Street noise is a CPTED issue: having a louder than typical din along the street, such as this segment of North 27th Street, is a safety issue. For example, a person (or customer) using on-street parking may be less likely to hear whether or not the car is locked as the "beep" or "click" may not be heard, which in turn may increase the likelihood of a car being either stolen or broken into. A long term strategy to reduce street noise through landscape improvements should be explored.

4.6 Prioritize the use of LED lighting in City light fixtures along North 27th Street.

4.7 For property-specific CPTED recommendations, please refer to the Appendix for a block-by-block CPTED analysis that was conducted during July, 2017: *city.milwaukee.gov/AreaPlans/NearWest/North-27th-Street-Corridor-Strategy-1*

5. Programming and Attraction

Vision

Targeted programming to attract desired end users contributes to a safe and visually appealing pedestrian realm that attracts additional restaurants and businesses, in turn drawing customers and future residents to SoHi. When combined, these ingredients create a neighborhood commercial Main Street that anchors the Near West Side similar to Kinnickinnic Avenue in Bayview, Historic Mitchell Street on the Near South Side, and Downer Avenue on the East Side.

Recommendations

5.1 Utilize NWSP corridor ambassadors. Similar to the Downtown BID ambassadors, existing Near West Side safety ambassadors can walk the SoHi corridor during traditional peak business hours offering assistance to visitors and businesses in the form of an eye on the street; offering a quick point of contact for questions or to report issues; and generally providing a comfortable presence for customers and spur return trips.

5.2 Solicit corridor sponsorships. Taking advantage of committed Near West Side anchors, these area entities, or the BID, could sponsor new programming such as additional CPTED measures, decorative lighting, benches, banners or other visual enhancements.

5.3 Undertake a BID commercial property owner compact. Similar to rental property owner compacts, a commercial corridor compact organized by the local BID or NWSP could be created to increase the likelihood of properly maintained properties, adherence to local zoning requirements, and greater selectivity of commercial tenants to ensure an improved corridor environment.

5.4 Continue to support local entrepreneurs with Marquette University's business challenges and business boot camps. Marquette lends its resources and expertise to assist small business owners with a multi-week course featuring mentoring and business plan preparation along with business challenges to attract innovative ideas or business models to the Near West Side.

5.5 Assist new or existing local businesses with Rev Up Milwaukee, a small business competition offered by the NWSP to small businesses or start-ups with financial and mentoring support for a winning idea or business model.

5.6 Utilize the NWS Economic Development Fund to target and attract small businesses to SoHi. The NWS Economic Development Fund is a NWSP initiative funded by the five Near West Side anchors to raise $5 million in part to provide funding to renovate distressed commercial properties and sell them to prospective small businesses .

5.7 The Near West Side Partners and its member anchor institutions should continue efforts to create a local purchasing compact to direct a portion of their purchasing power to local businesses with the goal of growing businesses that may locate or expand on North 27th Street.

5.8 Continue to have staff from the Menomonee Valley Partners and NWSP work cooperatively to direct spillover industrial demand from the Valley to North 27th Street and intersecting corridors of Clybourn Avenue and St. Paul Avenue.

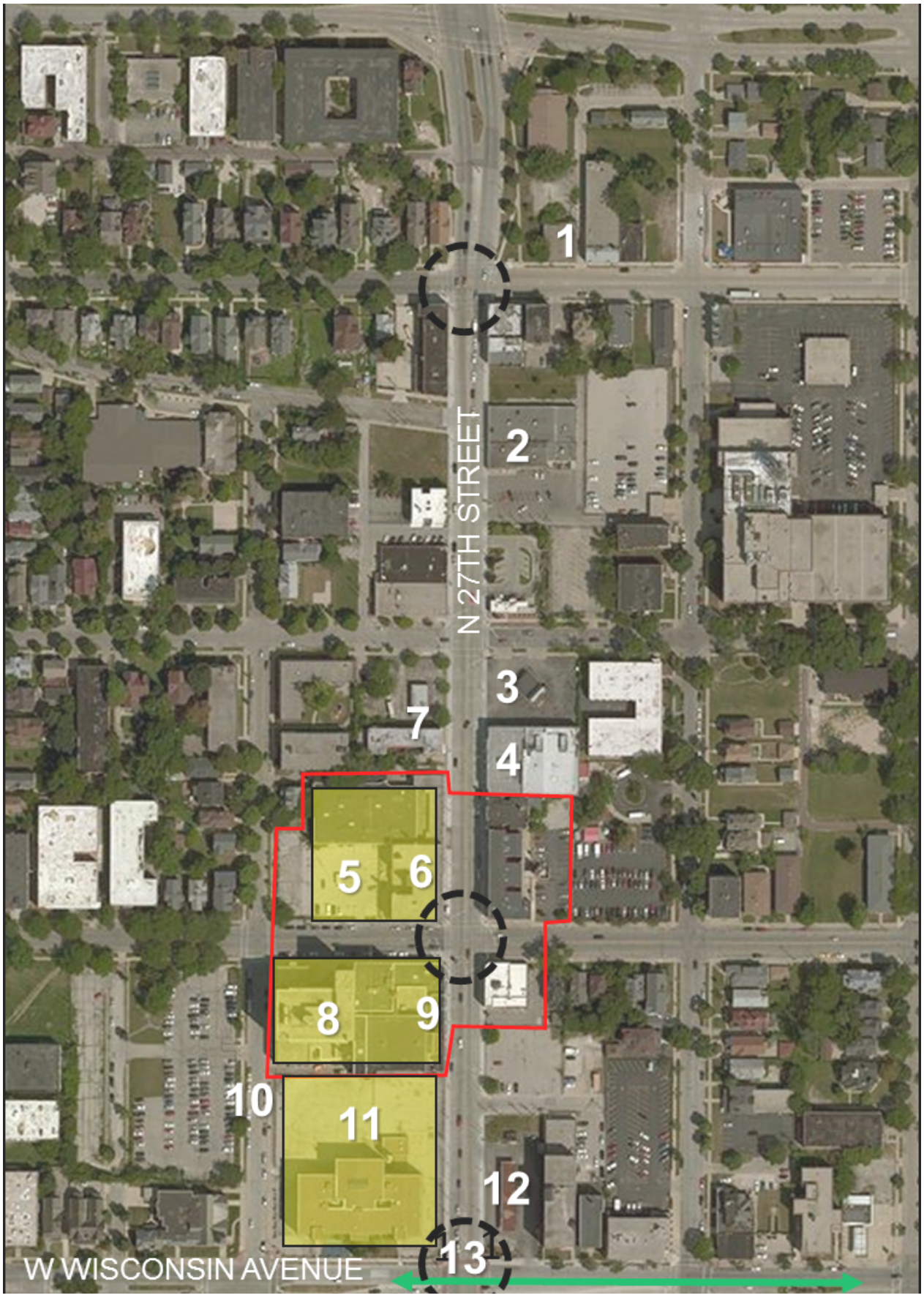
5.9 Working through the BID or utilizing DCD staff as a point of contact, recruit architects to offer façade design services to small businesses and property owners in the corridor. Buying or leasing an older property and making needed appearance upgrades is expensive. A pool of retired architects could offer pro bono façade design services for property owners or small businesses that may not have design backgrounds or capital to effectively improve a property.

5.10 While the construction of new market rate housing may not occur on North 27th Street in the near term, opportunities exist for the conversion of existing upper floor office space to residential units. These conversions benefit from the Near West Side's competitive advantage provided by the proximity to the five anchor institutions and represent a strategy to create new housing options that does not require new construction while bringing new activity to North 27th Street.

5.11 Provide dedicated and secure parking. Based on employee surveys, creating new, market rate apartment space within the existing SoHi building stock that is attractive to area employees will require dedicated off-street parking with security features similar to those recommended for the City Campus. Since existing surface parking in the corridor is limited, shared parking and other creative approaches to parking will be required.

5.12 Consider employer incentive programs. For example, walk / bike to work and public transit assistance can be provided by Near West Side employers as an added incentive to employees who prefer apartment living rather than purchasing a single family or duplex home.

GRAPHICAL SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



1. 2622-26 W State Street. City-owned property with adjacent green space available for commercial redevelopment opportunity. Retention and restoration of original façade is recommended.

2. 930 N 27th Street. Family Dollar store. Visible and frequently used retail site. Recommend façade and parking lot improvements to upgrade pedestrian environment.

3. 848 N 27th Street. Vacant retail building with large surface parking lot. Future redevelopment site will require LB2 design and landscape standards.

4. 833 N 26th Street. Penfield Children's Center. Recommend lighting or landscape additions to improve N 27th Street corridor façade.

5. 801-831 N 27th Street. Recommended for food and beverage (FaB) maker space or other similar commercial opportunity.

6. 801-831 N 27th Street. Mixed use multi-family building in historic district. Recommended uses include apartments above new commercial storefront tenants.

7. 839 – 853 N 27th Street. Vacant buildings under same ownership. Recommended for commercial use. Future land assemblage could yield larger redevelopment opportunity.

8. 2711 W Wells Street. Former City Campus complex and office tower. Targeted for a FaB Center for Excellence headquarters, including lab, start-up space and other office users.

9. 2711 W Wells Street N 27th Street. Historic mixed use vacant property including theater and commercial store frontages. Recommended future uses include ancillary FaB tenants, other retail or services, and event space in vacant theater.

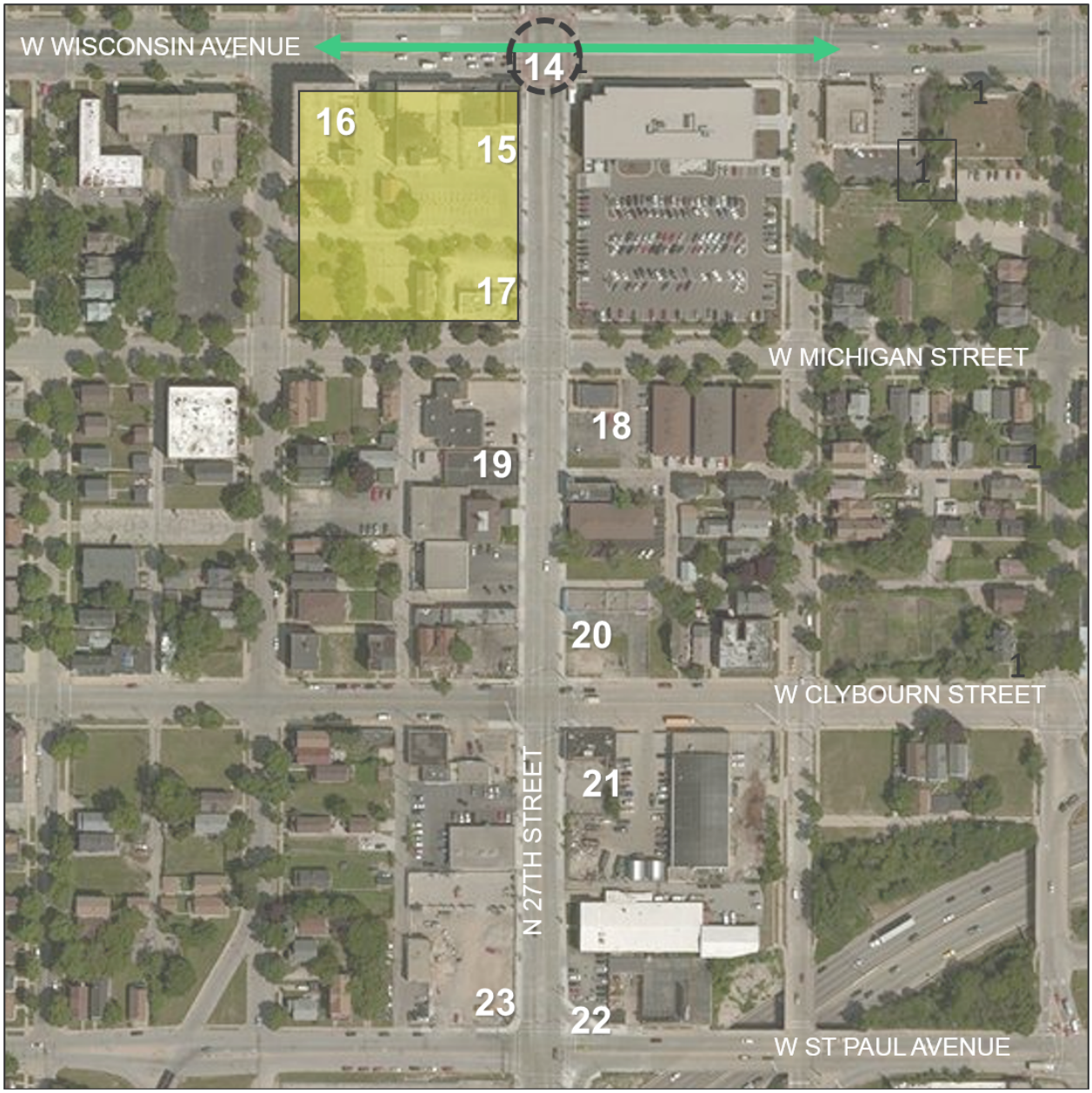
10. 700 Block of N 28th Street. Possible street vacation for secured parking related to future redevelopment of City-Campus complex.

11. 2708 W Wisconsin Avenue. Former Wisconsin Avenue School. Targeted for commercial redevelopment with improved street edge landscaping.

12. 2630 W Wisconsin Avenue. RACM owned vacant parcel at key BRT intersection. Pursue future, mixed-use development.

13. Various Locations on Wisconsin Avenue: Future west bound BRT stops. Preliminary recommendations for station locations within the Near West Side include N 12th Street, N 17th Street, N 27th Street, N 35th Street, and N 44th Street.

GRAPHICAL SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



14. Various Locations on Wisconsin Avenue: Future east bound BRT stops. Preliminary recommendations for station locations within the Near West Side include N 12th Street, N 17th Street, N 27th Street, N 35th Street, and N 44th Street.

15. SW Block of N 27th Street and W Wisconsin Avenue. Assemble for multi-use redevelopment. Ideal new office location.

16. 2733 W Wisconsin Avenue. Vacant multi-story commercial building. Commercial redevelopment site or as part of larger land assemblage.

17. 605 N 27th Street. Former fast food restaurant with drive-thru. Commercial redevelopment or as part of a future land assemblage site.

18. 540 N 27th Street. Vacant building for commercial reuse or new build site. Requires landscaping improvements and façade restoration for any reuse.

19. 535 N 27th Street. Vacant building for reuse or future new build site. Requires landscaping improvements and façade restoration for any reuse.

20. 2634 W Clybourn Street. Pursue commercial redevelopment at this vacant parcel.

21. 2631-39 W Clybourn Street. Vacant building to be razed or reused for commercial or possible light industrial use. Will require street edge landscaping.

22. W St. Paul Avenue and N 27th Street: Obsolete right turn bypass lane recommended not be rebuilt.

23. 405 N 27th Street. Existing model corner landscape treatment.

Section Three
Priority Sites

Many of the recommendations in the previous chapter can be applied corridor-wide or deal with the public realm on North 27th Street. However, to truly spur the type of investment desired by stakeholders for the corridor, special focus should be paid to executing on a defined number of priority projects to attract new development to key sites. The developments proposed at these priority sites would be significant enough to have spill-over impacts that would resonate throughout the corridor and support the recommendations found throughout this document. These priority sites were selected based on their susceptibility to change, past planning efforts that have identified the potential for their redevelopment as "catalytic" for the corridor, findings in the Near West Side Market Study, and consultation with the NWSP and other area stakeholders.

1. City Campus Complex

The City Campus is a former Milwaukee County administration building that was vacated in 2015. This complex of approximately 265,000 square feet is located at the southwest corner of North 27th and Wells Street and extends to North 28th Street. The City Campus is comprised of three buildings: a nine-story building originally constructed in 1964 as a hospital and used by the County from 1992 to 2015; a five-story brick and terra cotta office building constructed in 1928 that still retains many of its architectural features common to the period; and lastly, the two-story Tower Theater, a historic former movie theater that serves as a connecting commercial building built in 1926. Like its five-story companion, the Tower Theater building is a reflection of its times, still containing its original brick and terra cotta details in a Mediterranean Revival style.

Together, the City-Campus physically anchors the entire 27th Street commercial district. Given its wide-ranging redevelopment potential, the City Campus can be an economic anchor for SoHi. The fact that this complex is now under new private ownership that is committed to realizing the potential of the street and the Near West Side overall significantly narrows the gap between vision and reality for the corridor.

The former Milwaukee County City-Campus complex at the southwest corner of North 27th and Wells Street.

Conceptual images of a future Fab Center for Excellence at the former City-Campus complex. Credit: NWSP

Recommendations

1.1 Target the former hospital building for the location of the FaB (Food and Beverage) Wisconsin Center of Excellence. Similar to the Water Council at Reed Street Yards and the Midwest Energy Research Consortium (M-WERC) north of Century City, a FaB center will provide a centralized location in the Near West Side for one of the Milwaukee region's targeted economic clusters for growth. FaB facilities at the City Campus can provide administrative offices, laboratory, incubator, meeting and collaboration space for Wisconsin's FaB industries. This would also create the potential for spinoff FaB businesses to locate elsewhere in the 27th Street Corridor.

1.2 Redevelop the Liberty and the Tower Theater buildings for office users related to the FaB industry or for independent office tenants.

1.3 Following the example of the Grand Theater in downtown Milwaukee, preserve and hold the theater space itself for re-use when more favorable market or development conditions present themselves.

1.4 Preserve the Tower Theater building storefronts along North 27th Street for future commercial uses. Any additions or improvements to the historic storefront facades should preserve and enhance to the best extent possible the original façade design integrity.

1.5 If needed to facilitate the redevelopment of the City Campus, vacate the portion of North 28th Street between Wisconsin Avenue and West Wells Street. This segment of 28th Street is disconnected from the urban street grid at Wisconsin Avenue and Richardson Place. With the vacation, enclosed parking for tenants at the City Campus and future users of the Wisconsin Avenue School site can be secured.

1.6 Should the vacation of a portion of 28th Street be realized, resulting parking areas, including the current surface lot on the west side of 28th Street should include CPTED recommended lighting and open sight-line landscaping.

1.7 In the event a FaB Center of Excellence does not materialize at this site, use recommendations remain the same: office, commercial users for the County facility, office or residential for the five story portion and commercial- including retail and food and beverage uses for the street fronting storefronts and office or residential above.

2. Wisconsin Avenue School

The Wisconsin Avenue School is a former Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) elementary school that holds the northwest corner at the key intersection of North 27th and West Wisconsin Avenue. Built in 1920, the Wisconsin Avenue School was closed by MPS in 2007 and has been vacant since that time. Nevertheless, the approximately 92,000 square foot school has been effectively preserved and its brick and masonry exterior still retains the architectural details that will provide for a solid and attractive repurposing.

Recommendations

2.1 Preferred reuses for the former Wisconsin Avenue School include office, hospitality, or other complementary job and activity generating uses.

2.2 As it is unlikely that the building will be used as a school, convert the existing playground space into parking to accommodate future users of the site. Similar to the recommendations for parking at the City Campus, a new surface parking area for the school should contain CPTED recommended lighting and clear sight-line landscaping and generous interior landscaping.

2.3 For any future use, retain the existing building materials and as many window openings and elements as possible in order to maintain the original façade.

2.4 Retain the existing brick fencing piers along Wisconsin Avenue as they provide an attractive pedestrian element.

2.5 The southwest corner of the property faces the very visible intersection of 27th and Wisconsin but this corner is quite bleak, hampered by the presence of a chain link fence and plastic, city-issued wheeled trash containers typically kept in alleys or at the side or rear of residential properties. This corner, along with the eastern side of the playground / parking lot should contain robust landscaping and related elements to improve appearances and better define the corner and 27th Street edge. The existing chain link fence should be removed as part of this effort. Any future fencing at this location should be of decorative metal picket style and further setback to provide additional "breathing room" along North 27th Street.

Desired fencing type and sidewalk edge condition.

The former Wisconsin Avenue School at the northwest corner of North 27th and Wisconsin Avenue.

Current conditions on the Wisconsin Avenue School grounds.

2.6 Unless it is relocated as part of the BRT project, the existing MCTS bus stop shelter should be replaced with an improved and more visually engaging structure given the prominence of the intersection and its position on the BRT route. This corner should also be considered for the installation of any elements that reinforce the SoHi branding of the neighborhood.

3. 27th and Wisconsin Southwest Block

The block at the southwest corner of 27th Street and Wisconsin Avenue is in a state of transition. The majority of the block is populated either with vacant parcels or vacant buildings, with the largest vacancy being the former Travis Building, a four-story 1960's-era office building that was used as a school until recently. The remaining businesses in operation on this block consist of a corner convenience store and a bar. Overall, the block hinders the revitalization of the entire intersection due to its blighting influences.

The Near West Side Partners have been in the process of acquiring or initiating nuisance actions against problem properties throughout the Near West Side and to this end have acquired the Travis Building. This property acquisition strategy meets a short term objective of curbing crime and the blighting influences of the block in order to realize the longer term goals of making the block attractive for future redevelopment efforts to complement the existing State office building, the proposed BRT line, and the future redevelopment of both the Wisconsin Avenue School and City Campus. Concepts for this block were detailed in the Near West Side design charrette.

The mostly vacant and under-utilized block at the southwest intersection of North 27th and Wisconsin Avenue. Credit: UWM / Community Design Solutions

Conceptual image of a redeveloped southwest block of North 27thand Wisconsin. Credit: UWM / Community Design Solutions

Conceptual image of residential units and open spaces in a redeveloped southwest block of North 27th and Wisconsin. Credit: UWM / Community Design Solutions

Recommendations

3.1 Recommended future uses on this block include office; retail and other commercial services, preferably as part of a mixed use residential or office development; and open space, including community gardens.

3.2 The northwest corner of the block and along Wisconsin Avenue offers the potential for new office uses with parking to be provided to the rear.

3.3 If new office uses are not available, a stand-alone, small format grocery use can also be accommodated as detailed in the 2017 market study.

3.4 Given the redevelopment efforts underway in the area, Special Uses not complementary or not recommended for this block include: transitional housing, rooming houses, pawn shops, cigarette, cigar or tobacco shops, gun shops, liquor stores, payday or auto title loan stores, medical service facilities or uses that do not promote economic stability in the area.

3.5 Reduce the number of curb cuts along North 27th Street by vacating at least one of the two alleys currently on the block and limiting single use surface parking lots.

3.6 Depending on future ownership and development efforts analyze the block for possible rezoning to LB3. While LB3 zoning supports higher density development, it also restricts the square footage for food processing to 3,600 square feet as opposed to 20,000 square feet under LB2; therefore, this should be considered carefully if FaB users are target tenants.

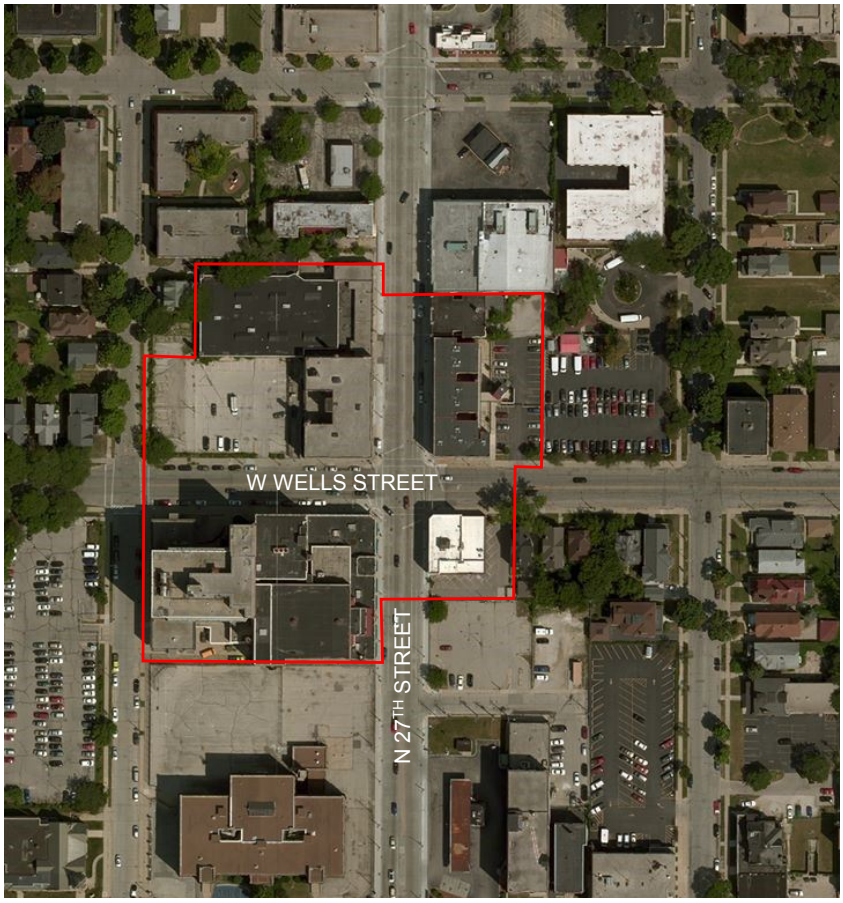
3.7 Should the City of Milwaukee or NWSP acquire additional parcels on this block, raze any blighted buildings to support property consolidation and redevelopment.

3.8 Zoning should accommodate any FaB maker space or similar small operations for front of factory commercial uses.

4. 27th and Wells Historic District

The immediate area around the 27th and Wells Street intersection was very recently designated on the National Register of Historic Places. The intersection is one of the few remaining commercial intersections in the entire city where all four corners are occupied by largely preserved historic or historically contributing buildings. This district traces its origins to the 1920's when the former city streetcar lines created one of the most heavily trafficked routes and transfer points in the city with the intersection of the 27th Street and Wells Street lines. This hub in turn led to one of the most dynamic commercial nodes outside of downtown Milwaukee.

While the majority of the buildings in the historic district are vacant, the flip side to these vacancies has been what has been, in effect, a land banking and preservation of these notable buildings by the recent acquisition of the properties under single ownership. This has allowed the potential of these buildings to remain in stasis while surrounding redevelopment efforts may hopefully provide a catalytic effect to create spillover demand into the historic district buildings with productive and preferred uses that will contribute economic and quality of life vitality to the street and neighborhood.



Map of the 27th & Wells Street Commercial Historic District

Recommendations

4.1 Preserve and re-use the buildings comprising the 27th & Wells Historic District including the traditional facades and storefronts.

4.2 Use the historic district designation to pursue historic tax credits to aid redevelopment of the largely vacant but contributing buildings.

4.3 Prioritize the apartment building at the northwest corner of North 27th Street and Wells Street for second through fourth floor market rate apartments with dedicated parking provided in the rear. An emphasis should be made on providing upgraded housing options for nearby employees including Penfield, Marquette, Aurora, Harley-Davidson, Potowatomi, and MillerCoors.

4.4 Given its proximity to a possible FaB complex, ensure that current or future zoning permits maker space and / or food or beverage production within the centralized commercial building or the street-fronting spaces including micro-brewing. This is provided that those uses don't compromise the integrity and appearance of the contributing buildings in the district.

4.5 Promote the "Historic SoHi" brand for commercial and residential spaces in the district as a positive and place-making branding element.

4.6 As redevelopment occurs and given its historic role as a "Main on Main" commercial hub, future place-making efforts should include liberal use of decorative building lighting in the form of up-lighting; LED light washing; or use of neon building signage to give the district and the entire street a memorable and uplifting place-making impression for visitors and residents alike. A sample of this type of lighting and signage exists only blocks away at the Ambassador Hotel.

Historic photo of North 27th and Wells Street looking northwest.
Credit: Milwaukee County Historical Society

Historic photo of North 27th and Wells Street looking northwest.
Credit: Milwaukee County Historical Society

Adaptive re-use: Corner of 27th and Wells.

Section Four
Conclusion and Implementation

The goals and strategies of this plan are ambitious yet grounded in the findings of the Near West Market Study and the direction forged by existing Near West Side Partners initiatives. Absent major public and private investments there may well be little or no change on North 27th Street, further reinforcing the need for a wide ranging plan embraced by all stakeholders that respects the role they all have to play in the ongoing revitalization of North 27th Street. What makes current efforts unique from past initiatives is the formation of the Near West Side Partners. Created by the five anchor institutions in the Near West Side, the NWSP hold the organizational, political, and financial capacity to bring about visible change to the neighborhoods that make up the Near West Side. This North 27th Street Corridor Strategy can serve as the detailed and overarching redevelopment strategy to guide all involved stakeholders and identify priority projects as they work towards an improved and revitalized SoHi.

Each major partner committed to the improvement of North 27th Street must take on specific roles to successfully implement the North 27th Street Corridor Strategy. The City of Milwaukee, specifically the Department of City Development, will focus on ensuring that zoning, real estate disposition, and land use policies along the North 27th Street corridor reflect the planning and urban design recommendations set forth in this plan.

The Department of Public Works (DPW) is currently finalizing a Complete Streets policy and will soon be creating the City's Pedestrian Plan. The intent of these efforts is to memorialize how all users (pedestrians of all ages and abilities, bicyclists, and automobiles) can more equitably be accommodated within the City right-of–ways. DPW will apply these policies to guide future planning and construction projects on North 27th Street consistent with the recommendations of this plan.

The NWSP will need to continue to involve its extensive list of partners to strategically target problem properties for reuse or acquisition; recruit desired users and businesses to North 27th Street, monitor and report when properties are not in compliance with city codes, assist small businesses with funding and technical assistance, and serve as the overall champion in making SoHi as safe and attractive as possible.

The City of Milwaukee's Commercial Corridors Team and the Milwaukee Economic Development Corporation is available to work with businesses to aid the efforts of business owners and to enact many of the recommendations set forth herein. The following are programs and financial tools available for commercial property owners:

Façade Grants

- Available for commercial property exterior improvements
- Project budget must exceed $2,000
- Grants up to $5,000 per storefront
- Windows, doors, awnings, landscaping, painting, asphalt parking
- No reimbursement for work completed prior to approval
- New construction: fencing, signage, awnings and landscaping

BEFORE/AFTER: The property at 760 N. 27 Street was the recipient of a facade grant.

Signage Grants

- Project budget must exceed $2,000
- Grants up to $2,500
- Matching funds requirement
- Internally illuminated box signs not eligible
- Eligible sign types: Sign boards, awnings, display window lettering, hanging signs, transom, neon

Examples of a recent commercial sign grant project.

White Box Program

- Recruitment to vacant commercial / retail space
- Grants up to $10 per square foot, not to exceed 75% of project cost
- Maximum grant of $25,000
- No reimbursement for work completed prior to application approval
- Cannot be used in conjunction with RIF grant
- Eligible expenses include lighting, plumbing, electrical, HVAC, interior walls and ceiling
- May be used to cover the cost of repairing and restoring damaged surfaces to a state where they can be ready for interior finish-out

Examples of a recent commercial whitebox grant project.

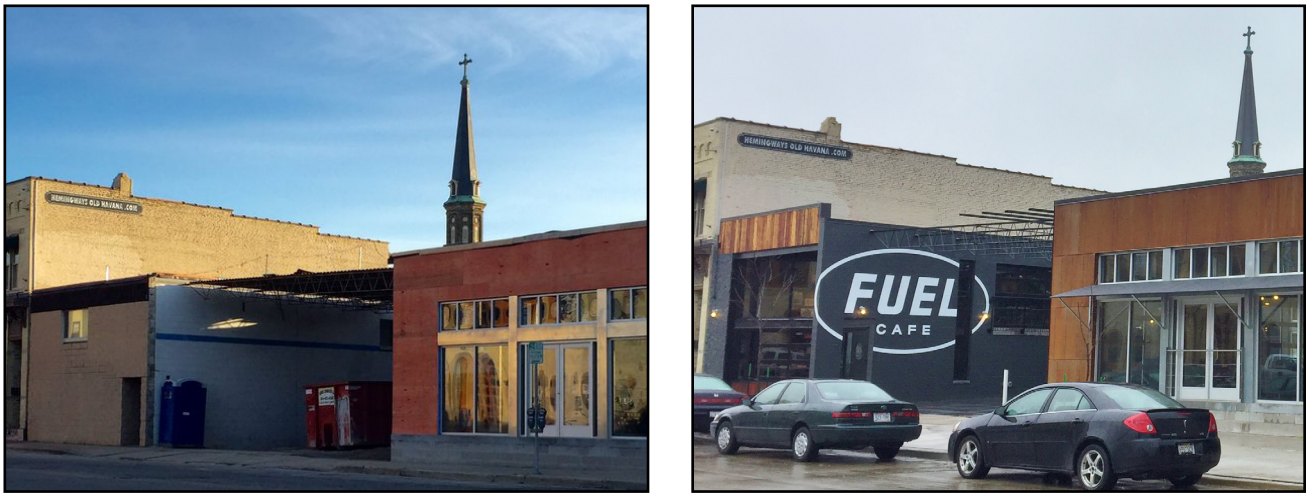
Retail Investment Fund (RIF)

- Award is based on job creation
- Must be a for profit, taxpaying business
- Applicant may own or lease
- Reimbursement program covers up to 20% of project costs
- Offers $5,000 per full-time employee (FTE), or Part-time equivalent, up to $50,000
- Includes furniture, fixtures and equipment (FFE), build-out, startup inventory
- May include A&E (architectural and engineering services that would be required to produce cost estimates, product selection, construction documents, construction supervision, etc.)

Example of recent commercial RIF grant projects.

Milwaukee Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)

- City-affiliated lender providing assistance to create and retain jobs in the City of Milwaukee.
- Second Mortgage Program
- Capital Access Program
- Venture Debt Program
- SBA Community Advantage



Example of a recent MEDC assisted business. Before and After.

Near West Side Partners and Near West Side Business Improvement District Resources

In addition to resources provided by the City of Milwaukee and the Milwaukee Economic Development Corporation, the Near West Side Business Improvement District (BID) can provide additional small business support through its existing programs, which include:

Near West Side BID Member Resources

- Façade Grants
- Signage Grants
- Business Promotions
- Graffiti Removal
- Architectural Support
- Small business technical assistance

Town Bank Small Business Loan

The Near West Side Partners and Town Bank have created small business loan program for Near West Side businesses.

Safe & Sound Camera Program

In partnership with Safe & Sound, the Near West Side Partners offer subsidized surveillance cameras for commercial properties and apartment buildings with 8 or more units in the Near West Side. The cameras are linked to the Milwaukee Police Departments and can be purchased at one-third the cost.

Other Resources

Outside resources are also available to assist small businesses with business plan development, technical assistance, mentorship, or non-traditional loans. These programs can be available at the following organizations:

- Bizstarts Milwaukee
- The Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA)
- The Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC)
- Kiva Zip Milwaukee
- The Multicultural Entrepreneurial Institute
- The Urban Economic Development Corporation (UEDA)
- The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)

To view this plan online, please visit: milwaukee.gov/AreaPlans/NearWest

Sign up to receive future planning updates or any future meeting or related event information at: milwaukee.gov/enotify
(sign up for Near West Side Plan updates)

Questions or comments? Email us at NearWestSidePlan@Milwaukee.gov

City of Milwaukee

City of Milwaukee
Department of City Development
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