

# Chapter 1: Introduction: Purpose, Structure and Context

## 1.1 City Comprehensive Plan

The City of Milwaukee's comprehensive planning process is structured to respond to the need to plan for the entire City as well as its smaller geographic areas. Consequently, the City's Comprehensive Plan consists of two components: a Citywide Policy Plan and thirteen area plans.

The Southwest Side Area Plan is a statement of the community's desires for future development and preservation of the area. Well-tended homes, a sense of pride in ownership, safety, stability and walkable neighborhoods are among the most cited reasons that Southwest Siders move here and stay.

The principle of sustainability drives the overall framework of the Southwest Side Area Plan.

The Southwest Side Area Plan has been prepared under the authority of Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law (s. 66.1001, Wis. Stats.), more commonly referred to as Wisconsin's Smart Growth Law. This law provides a framework for developing comprehensive plans and requires that any community program of action that affects land use must be consistent with the community's area plan. Upon adoption of this plan, all land use decisions must be consistent with the goals, objectives and policies outlined in this plan.

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*"The area is green, well-kept, and quiet, has hard working people, and is in close proximity to all amenities a family/individual needs."*

Public meeting participant

## 1.2 Plan Purpose

Area plans establish the future vision of an area; create a common understanding among residents, business and land owners, and City departments of expected changes in the area; and develop implementation methods for achieving the goals of the plan.

Southwest Side Area Plan policies guide decisions about growth, development, preservation, environmental protection, economic development, housing, culture and the arts, neighborhood character and transportation.

The Area Plan creates a framework to implement solutions to planning problems or opportunities for the area in the context of the Citywide Policy Plan by:

- a) Identifying opportunities to address community goals;*
- b) Developing criteria to be used in decision-making that balance local area interests with those of the broader community;*
- c) Involving interested groups and individuals to identify issues and opportunities to be incorporated into the area plan and establish a commonly understood vision for the future;*

*d) Integrating the details, patterns and vision of the plan into a clear and concise document;*

*e) Establishing a planning framework in which to review public projects, land use changes, and development proposals; and*

*f) Establishing a broader community context in which to select appropriate locations and projects for expenditures of public funds.*

### **1.3 The Planning Process**

The Southwest Side Area Plan is the product of a collaborative planning process between area residents, employers, institutions, planning and City staff, hired consultants, and elected officials. The Plan Advisory Group was organized to advise the planning team, provide input, build community outreach, and review written materials.

All of these participants provided guidance throughout the process and ultimately helped identify and shape the recommended policies and projects in this plan.

During the Preliminary phase, City staff and the Plan Advisory Group selected a consultant to prepare a Market Analysis and Implementation Study. The Analysis phase included an extensive review of the area's

existing conditions and identified conditions that may be susceptible to change.

During the Visioning phase, different types of public workshops were held to get input on community issues, opportunities and ideas for eventual plan recommendations.

The next two phases of the planning process, Synthesis and Documentation, used all the information gathered and began preparation of the planning document.

Adoption, the final phase of the planning process, included refining recommendations, preparing the final plan and presenting it to the City Plan Commission and the Zoning Neighborhoods and Development Committee, and adoption by the Common Council.

### 1.4 Plan Organization

The overall organization of this plan is intended to create a document that is clear, concise, and easy to use.

Recommendations in this plan have been organized in order of decreasing scale.

Chapter 3 deals with general policies that are less detailed and deal with policies that will impact growth and development throughout the entire Southwest Side.

Chapter 4 includes recommendations for specific districts and corridors and Chapter 5 presents detailed development concepts for select “catalyst” sites.

The increasing level of detail associated with the policy recommendations provides for easy reference when considering the specifics of a land use decision or reinvestment proposal.

Chapter 1: Introduction: Purpose, Structure and Context	Provides a succinct review and analysis of neighborhood characteristics, including the existing demographic and physical conditions and a summary of the public participation process results.
Chapter 2: The Planning Process: Existing Conditions, Information Analysis	
Chapter 3: Community Development Policies and Strategies	Identifies the types of uses, related policies, and redevelopment strategies planned for the Southwest Side area as a whole.
Chapter 4: District and Corridor Recommendations	Outlines more specifically where and how those policies and strategies should be implemented within the neighborhood, and provides additional design guidelines specific to those locations.
Chapter 5: Catalytic Projects and Development Recommendations	Identifies a number of opportunity sites within the neighborhood and recommends several alternative scenarios for the development of those sites.
Chapter 6: Implementation	Identifies phasing, priorities, and responsible parties

Figure 1.4

## 1.5 Area Context

As the name implies, the planning area encompasses the southwestern portion of the City of Milwaukee.

Starting in the northwest corner and proceeding clockwise, the area is bounded by the municipal boundary with the City of West Allis and the Union Pacific Railroad Line to the north, 6th St. to the east, Howard Ave. and the municipal boundary with the City of Greenfield to the south, and the same municipal boundary to the west.

Prior to 1910, when the City extended its limits to 33rd St. and Forest Home Ave., the Southwest Side was primarily rural. Later, the area added new housing for workers in industrial jobs in neighboring West Allis.

This residential building boom was not to end until the 1970's, when residential uses comprised most of the development in the Southwest Side.

The patterns of well tended residential neighborhoods are interspersed with large commercial corridors, parks, and major educational, medical and religious institutions.

Unique neighborhoods in the Southwest Side include Cherokee Point, a neo-traditional subdivision; the Garden District, a neighborhood organization promoting the beautification of the 13th Aldermanic district by



*Cherokee Point*



*Wedgewood Park*

implementing a residential landscaping program; and Wedgewood Park, a post- World War II subdivision based on the Radburn, New Jersey model of Garden City town planning principles.

Historically, the area grew from the northeast to the southwest. Although the entire area has an orderly residential development pattern, curvilinear streets and lots that are larger than average for the City of Milwaukee become more prominent to the west of 27th St.



As the area developed, housing styles changed from duplexes and bungalows to cape cod houses, and lastly ranch style homes.

The largest single growth period, especially west of 27th St., included the post-WW II years of the 1940's and the baby boom of the 1950's. During this period, the Southwest Side witnessed the rapid development of tract housing. This type of housing is sometimes referred to as a Levittown and in some parts of the country constitutes the first ring of suburbs.

The Southwest Side's history of development has combined within its location on the outskirts of the Milwaukee City limits to create a unique pattern of development that blends a dense urban grid with a suburban sense of place and character.

Although the area is more automobile oriented than other parts of Milwaukee, pedestrians can still walk or bike throughout the area on a complete and dense network of sidewalks and local streets.

Over the last half century, home additions and modifications have combined with the maturing of landscaping and street trees to soften the Southwest Side's character and foster well established, stable neighborhoods.

One of the Southwest Side's most striking characteristics is its high quality housing stock. The majority of homes and yards are well cared



*Homes in the Far Southwest Side District*

for, resulting in an overall positive appearance that is an asset to the area. The defining urban design aspect of the area is the consistency of the aesthetically pleasing transition from the public to the private realm.

Drive or walk down any residential street in this part of town and you will see in front of each home, starting at the street, a publicly-owned but privately-maintained planting strip with a mature tree, a sidewalk, a carefully mowed lawn in the front yard, restrained landscaping, and a prominent front door and facade.

These elements combine to create a pleasing face to the public realm. The pride of ownership is palpable. Each individual house is carefully aligned with its neighbor to provide a uniform pattern on each residential block.

Where this pattern is interrupted, often by later, large multi-family developments, the effect can be jarring.

The main axis of the area is Oklahoma Ave., which is the only east-west principal arterial that runs the length of the area while staying inside the City limits. Morgan Ave. and Howard Ave. (minor arterials one-half and one-mile to the south, respectively) occasionally cross into the City of Greenfield.

The major commercial street in the area is 27th St., which continues as a commercial corridor south into the cities of Greenfield, Franklin, and Oak Creek. Major diagonal streets running southwest to northeast, starting from the west include Beloit Rd., Forest Home Ave., and Loomis Rd. These streets and 76th St. and 13th St., which run north-south, often have a mix of multi-family and small commercial uses.

Jackson Park and the associated Kinnickinnic River Parkway play a huge role in defining the character of the area, as do Wilson Park and Wilson recreation area just outside the southern boundary of the area. Wilson Creek and Honey Creek



Jackson Park

also contribute to a strong sense of place. Planning and design for removing concrete stream bed linings is underway in some locations.

Major institutions and landmarks include Alverno College, Aurora Saint Luke's Medical Center, and the Zablocki Library.

Twenty-seventh St. is the South Side of Milwaukee's original strip with average daily traffic of 30,000 and the area's primary and most dynamic commercial corridor, featuring Leon's Frozen Custard Drive-In and major health and shopping related destinations.



27th St. commercial corridor

## 1.6 Recent developments

While the Southwest Side is a stable, mature area with few parcels that are susceptible to change, the area has consistently attracted a high level of investment in existing buildings and a number of exciting new developments over the last ten years.

### *Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center*

Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center on the northwest corner of 27th St. and Oklahoma Ave. is the Milwaukee area's largest acute care hospital.

The hospital was included among the nation's top 50 hospitals in U.S. News & World Report's annual "America's Best Hospitals" list. It was ranked in four different specialties: digestive disorders, geriatric care, endocrinology, and respiratory disorders.

In 2004, St. Luke's existing heart care services moved into a new 12-story tower built directly over its main entrance and parking structure.

The tower operates 270 beds, 192 for surgical patients and 78 for intensive care patients. All rooms are private with extra space built in to accommodate lengthy stays by visitors.

St. Luke's is not only a major employer, community facility and service provider, but one of the Southwest Side's most striking landmarks as well.



*Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center*

The rooftop healing garden at Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center received LEED Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. The project is a good example of the Southwest Side's growing interest in sustainability.

### *Alverno College*

Alverno College, located at 3400 S. 43rd St., consistently makes national headlines for its innovative teaching methods. It has been recognized for nine consecutive years in the *U.S. News & World Report's* annual "Best Colleges" issue.

The women's college was cited in several categories and was the only Wisconsin education institution listed in the categories of "Strong Commitment to Teaching" and top "Up-and-Coming Schools."

In 1999, Alverno completed a \$13 million Teaching, Learning and Technology Center, which houses the science wing, Media Hub and classrooms, and features a central rotunda.

The building not only expanded instructional and conference space, but re-oriented the campus toward 43rd St. to the west.

Beginning in 2007, the college underwent a comprehensive campus beautification effort which transformed the campus.

The project included enhanced signage at all entrances; a central gathering space featuring a fountain, new lighting, banners, trellises and benches; and the planting of thousands of new trees, shrubs, perennials, grasses, bulbs and annuals.



*Alverno College*

A new parking structure was added to open up green space and new sports fields were developed.

Alverno College also is recognized in the community for its popular performing arts series, Alverno Presents, and its international music festival, Global Union, which is held annually at Humboldt Park.

### *Walmart*

The Southwest Side's position between traditional urban and suburban development styles is reflected by the Walmart store that opened at 3355 S. 27th St. in 1990 and expanded to a supercenter with a grocery store in 2007.

Although Walmart rarely locates in central cities, this Walmart store and its expansion preceded stores in south suburbs Franklin and Greenfield.

The store is built on the site of the former Southgate Shopping Center, Milwaukee's first enclosed shopping mall.



*Walmart's expanded 27th St. store*

### *Sixteenth Street Community Health Center*

The Sixteenth Street Community Health Center opened a satellite clinic at 2906 S. 20th St. in 2006. The new Parkway Health Center dramatically expanded the number of low-income patients Sixteenth Street can serve.

Sixteenth Street recently received a \$1.2 million grant to fund renovations to the Parkway Health Center. When fully operational, the facility will have up to 15 medical providers serving an estimated 30,000 new patients.

### **1.7 Previous and Current Planning Efforts**

The Kinnickinnic (KK) River Corridor Neighborhood Plan grew out of a need to remove a failing concrete lining from the KK River and to address flooding issues. The neighborhood plan covers the far northeast corner of the comprehensive planning area, extending north from Oklahoma Ave. and east from 27th St. It includes recommendations for improved greenspace, the neighborhood commercial area along 13th St., and new residential development sites.

In the area where the neighborhood plan and this comprehensive area plan overlap, the KK River flows through parkland so no land use changes are anticipated. The green spaces might be improved and used to some extent for temporary water retention.

South 27th Street is a state highway. A Wisconsin Department of Transportation project with City of Milwaukee cooperation is underway to improve landscaping and signage on S. 27th St. The City recently declared the highway "Historic 41."

### **1.8 Demographic Highlights**

The Southwest Side is a very prosperous and stable part of the City. Demographics and economic data are presented in Chapter 2, but a few highlights set the context for the planning area:

In 2009 the area's population was 55,743 and very stable, declining 1.1% since 2000 and projected to increase 0.3% over the next five years. This trend amounts to an additional 711 individuals and 468 households.

The median household income for the Southwest Side in 2000 was \$41,311. This was higher than both the City of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County. The unemployment rate in 2000 for the Southwest Side was far lower than it was in the City and County. The rate stood at an extremely low 2.5% for the Southwest Side. It was 6.0% in the City and 4.5% in the County.

A major contributor to the area's demographic and economic stability is the extremely low poverty rate and uniformly good level of educational attainment. A relatively small 17% of the population did not graduate from high school.

The area's population is relatively mature and the cohort aged 55 – 74 is projected to grow 17% by 2014. People like to stay and retire here.

The Southwest Side area's population was 9.2% Hispanic in 2000, 15.2% in 2009 and this percentage is projected to increase to 18.9% in 2014.

The number of households with income between \$50,000 and \$99,999 is expected to grow by 9.8%, while households with incomes under \$50,000 is projected to decline, continuing a prosperous trend.