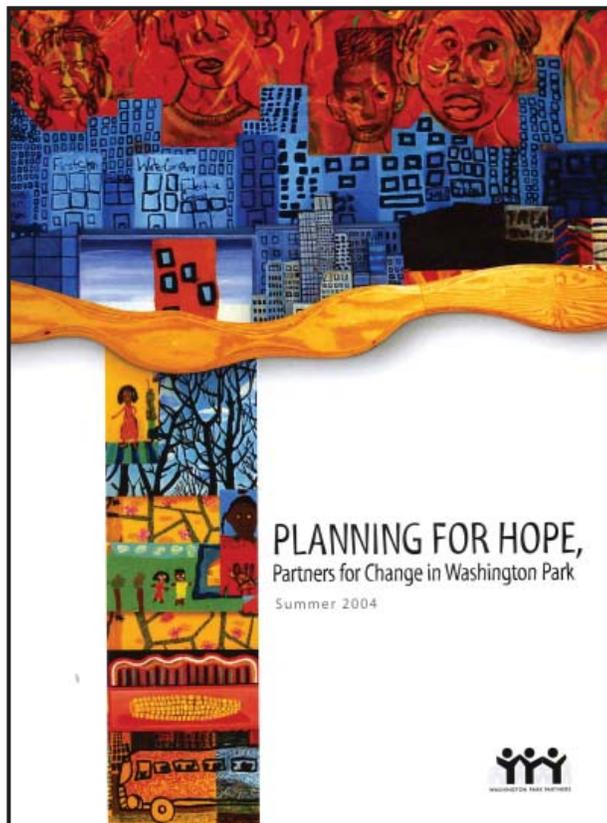


# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The Washington Park Comprehensive Area Plan has been a community-based planning effort based upon the momentum created by recent revitalization activities and current neighborhood assets, including its close proximity to downtown, easy access to freeways and major bus routes, historic architectural charm, and most importantly, dedicated and active neighborhood associations and residents. The plan establishes priorities for strengthening these community housing, business, retail, transportation recreational and cultural assets. The plan promotes investment and provides guidance for public and private development initiatives.

This plan is largely based on work that preceded this planning effort undertaken by Washington Park Partners (WPP). WPP created a quality of life plan entitled “Planning for Hope”, for the area which identified many of the strengths, opportunities and challenges of the area. WPP heavily engaged the community in its process to gain insight into the concerns of the residents. The City of Milwaukee, in partnership with WPP, used the ‘Planning for Hope’ document as the basis for this plan.



## Planning Context

### **City Comp Plan Structure**

The preparation of the Washington Park Comprehensive Plan has been done under the authority of Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law, Wis. Stat. 66.1001, more commonly referred to as "Smart Growth" Legislation. The 1999 Wisconsin Act 9, and subsequently 1999 Assembly Bill AB872 and 2001 Wisconsin Act 16, revised planning legislation for all communities in the State. The Smart Growth legislation provides a framework for developing comprehensive plans, and requires that any program or action of a community that affects land use must be consistent with the community's comprehensive plan. Therefore, upon adoption of all land use decisions must be consistent with the goals, objectives and policies outlined in the Milwaukee Washington Park Comprehensive Area Plan.

The City of Milwaukee's comprehensive planning process has been structured to recognize the different levels of interest, 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 multiple area plans. The Washington Park Comprehensive Plan is one of these area plans.

The overall organization of this plan is intended to create a document that is clear, concise, and user-friendly. Chapters 1 and 2 provide a succinct review and analysis of neighborhood characteristics, including the existing demographic and physical conditions and a summary of the public participation process results. The Land Use chapter identifies the types of uses and related design guidelines planned for the Washington Park area as a whole. The District and Corridor chapter specifies geographically where those land uses should be located and provides additional design standards specified to those locations. The Catalytic Projects chapter identifies a number of specific sites within the area and makes recommendations for the development of those sites. By structuring recommendations, first for the whole neighborhood, then for specific districts, and finally for particular sites, policy recommendations can easily be referenced based on specifics of a reinvestment proposal.

### **Plan Purpose**

The purpose of the Washington Park Comprehensive Plan is to create a place where people can live, work and play in a safe, inviting community. The plan establishes priorities for strengthening and building upon the neighborhood assets. The plan promotes investment and provides guidance for public and private development. By creating new business opportunities, enhancing existing recreation and cultural alternatives, creating pedestrian-friendly areas, and creating a lifestyle option that can result in minimizing the development of

outlying areas, the improvement to the area will provide benefits for the neighborhood, city and region.

## Plan Goals and Objectives

### **Overall Goal**

- Preserve the overall neighborhood character as a compact, interconnected and walkable area.
- Build upon the traditional development patterns and existing assets of the neighborhood.

### **Residential**

- Strengthen and improve the exiting neighborhood fabric.
- Increase owner-occupancy throughout the Washington Park area.

### **Commercial**

- Create retail destinations that utilize existing commercial land and infrastructure.
- Enhance the marketability of commercial nodes to promote economic stability and growth.

### **Institutional and Public Spaces**

- Increase sense of security throughout the Washington Park Area.
- Enhance pubic destinations and gathering places for residents and visitors.

### **Transportation, Parking and Infrastructure**

- Recreate the historic neighborhood traffic patterns to maximize route alternatives.
- Improve the viability of transportation alternatives.

## Neighborhood Context

### **Community Boundaries**

The boundary for the Washington Park Neighborhood Plan encompasses the areas designated as Washington Park and Walnut Hill, while also including small portions of the Metcalfe Park and Midtown neighborhoods. The Washington Park planning boundary fills the area between the previously completed Near West Side and Fond du Lac and North comprehensive plans, ensuring that all of the area between U.S. Highway 41 and Interstate 43, from Interstate 94 to North Avenue is covered by a City of Milwaukee comprehensive plan document. The east side of N. 47th Street, which frames U.S. 41, is the western boundary for this study. Vliet Street along the south side of Washington Park is the southern boundary, also including those parcels that front on the south side of Vliet Street from Highland Boulevard to 27th Street. The eastern boundary is defined by 27th Street, a short block along Galena Street and 26th Street, then includes those parcels that front on Walnut Avenue from 26th Street to the CP Railroad tracks between 31st and 30th streets up to Garfield Avenue and then 35th Street. The northern boundary is Meinecke Avenue, so as to include all of the North Avenue corridor and former Park West freeway right of way.

### **Location within the City**

Washington Park is located between the I-94 and Fond du Lac Avenue corridors, on the northern border of the Near West Side neighborhood. At the sub-regional scale, Washington Park lies nearly equidistant and on a line between downtown Milwaukee and Mayfair Mall; the neighborhood is located approximately 3 miles west of downtown Milwaukee, and 4 miles east of the Mayfair Mall shopping and employment center. If 35th Street is taken to mark the conceptual middle point of the Washington Park neighborhood area, then Wauwatosa begins 25 blocks to the west at 60th Street. The neighborhood's location can also be conceptualized as being in that tier of western destinations that include Miller Park stadium, Miller Brewery, and Harley-Davidson Motor Company. In fact, the Harley-Davidson plant and headquarters lies less than a block south of the planning area boundary, while Miller Brewing Company lies just beyond Washington Park. Miller Park stadium and the Menomonee Valley are a dozen blocks south of the neighborhood.

### **Physical and Cultural History**

In the last decades of the 19th century and first decade of the 20th century, the area that is now the Washington Park neighborhood was a newly subdivided section of the City of Milwaukee located at the northwestern periphery of the growing metropolis. Streets were laid out in the standard Milwaukee grid, creating blocks nearly 700 feet long from north to south and 300 wide. Plats maximized the number of lots on each block, with the majority being 30 feet wide along the



**WASHINGTON PARK AREA BOUNDARY**

 Planning Area Boundary

0 600 1,200 2,400 Feet



Figure 1: Study Area Location and Adjacent Neighborhoods



street frontage and 120 feet deep. These narrow lots created a dense development pattern once they were filled with houses, but one that met buyers' desire for a detached dwelling. No rowhouses were built in the area, and practically no apartment buildings, instead real estate developers marketed small wood frame cottages to families looking for a house and yard.

In the area east and north of the landscaped Washington Park, the population that bought the new homes was homogeneously German. Within a city that was predominately of German descent, the Washington Park area was even more so, with few families that were Polish, Irish, or Italian. Roger Simon's analysis of the city-building process in this section of Milwaukee notes a number of interesting characteristics of the first settlers:

Milwaukee's new neighborhoods were the sections disproportionately devoted to childraising. . . . The chief distinguishing characteristic of these families was their middle position both in social and economic terms. Ethnically, they were neither recent immigrants nor native American stock; they were overwhelmingly German. Fifty-five per cent of the family heads were German-born, and 27.8 per cent more were native-born of German parents. They were also predominately artisans, shopkeepers, foremen, and minor officials which placed them roughly in the middle of the socioeconomic order (*The City-Building Process: Housing and Services in New Milwaukee Neighborhoods 1880-1910*, Simon, 1978, pp. 32-33)

Some urban historians postulate a German immigrant preference for a detached house and a yard as perhaps stronger than for some other ethnic groups, however, the south side of Milwaukee where Polish immigrants were a majority also favored single-family houses. While this desire to own a house led to the particular pattern of settlement found in the Washington Park area, it is also evident that many families in the middle working class could not afford the mortgage on such a house: analysis of the 1905 census and building permits show a trend to build two-flat duplexes following the turn of the century (Simon, p. 30). A two-family dwelling allowed the owning family to rent out the second unit, at least until the mortgage was paid. Therefore those portions of the neighborhood that were built after 1900 have more duplexes, with 35th Street as a useful line marking earlier settlement to the east from blocks to the west developed after this trend took hold, where roughly half of the houses were built as two-flat duplexes.

Settlement of the Washington Park area was dependent on access for the middle class population to manufacturing employment in the Menomonee Valley to the south and other factories located along a railroad corridor built by the Milwaukee Road that ran from the valley north through the neighborhood between 30th and 31st streets.



 Planning Area Boundary

0 500 1,000 2,000 Feet



Figure 2: Aerial Photography and Planning Area Boundary

Small shop owners built places of business along the main streets, including North Avenue, Lisbon Avenue, and Vliet Street, while clerks and other semi-professionals had access to employment in the downtown business district via streetcars.



Following World War II, a sweeping demographic change gained momentum in the Washington Park neighborhood. Milwaukee's small African-American population grew during the period of the first World War, and then surged in the post-World War II era, when industrial jobs were plentiful in the city's manufacturing districts, drawing migrants to the city from southern states. The fair housing struggles of the 1960s and early 1970s created an opening for a wider dispersal of African-American families in the city, during the same period that the original settlers and their descendents were lured to fast growing suburbs to the west.

As described in the demographic analysis given below, by 1990 the Washington Park neighborhood was just over 75 percent African-American—a remarkable change from the German-American neighborhood a quarter century before. It should be noted that Simon's (p.56) description of the neighborhood at the early period of this transition notes the "obsolescence" of many of the old houses and a trend toward disinvestment. Yet even harder times were to come when the bottom fell out of the manufacturing economy that supported the majority of African-American families.



Huge manufacturing plants in the Menomonee and Milwaukee river valleys closed in the 1980s, as did many plants in the 30th Street industrial corridor, along the North Line of the old Milwaukee Road, running through Washington Park. This began what a series of articles published in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel in December of 2004 called a "job loss worse than the Great Depression" with the newspaper's analysis showing that: "In 1970, at the city's industrial peak, the black poverty rate in Milwaukee was 22% lower than the U.S. black average. That turned around by 2000, when the black poverty rate was 34% higher than the national figure. Among the nation's 20 most populous cities in 2000, Milwaukee had the highest rate of black poverty." (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, December 4, 2004). The series of articles highlighted the former industrial might of the city, with a focus on decline of manufacturing along the North Line. The article states that in 2004 only two freight customers remain on the North Line: Miller Brewing and the former A.O. Smith, now Tower Automotive, which employed 8,000 workers making automobile frames as recently as 1979, a third of them African-American. Tower recently announced that it is shifting what is left of its production to Mexico, retaining only 150 jobs in Milwaukee. The effect of this economic decline on neighborhoods in north Milwaukee, including Washington Park has been profound.

It is important to consider this background of the Washington Park community in order to set planning for the future in context. That context includes the people and the place. This comprehensive plan for the Washington Park neighborhood area describes the physical environment in the study area, most of it being the houses that the original developers built for German immigrants, and provides information on social demographics, which continue to change with a new group of immigrants from southeast Asia. Most importantly the plan considers recent development and investment in the neighborhood, from the public and private sectors, and proposes how these revitalization efforts can be reinforced, built upon, and extended throughout the planning area.

