Project Update, July 2020
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1.0 Introduction

Photo from the first steering committee meeting, December 2019. Image by Lamont Edwards
1.1 Document Purpose

Welcome back to Division United, your transit-oriented development strategy for Division Avenue in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This document has three primary goals:

• To provide an update on project status, time-line, and outcomes. This includes results from the equity workshop and from the existing conditions analysis.
• To document strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats present in the corridor. These will be the basis for goal setting and the creation of a vision statement.
• To prepare you for our third Steering Committee Meeting.

This document has five sections:

• Mobility and Connectivity
• Economic Development
• Neighborhood and the Built Environment
• Quality of Life
• Identity and Community.

Each section identifies between five and eight takeaways. For each takeaway, we note if they come up more than once, if they impact equity, and if they apply to more than one section. These takeaways are the focus of this document and the project team has reviewed them.

This review of conditions and takeaways will help us with the next phase of this project. At the next Steering Committee meeting we will take the information and knowledge gathered here and use it to understand problems and solutions.

Our goal is to take what we know about the study area and apply it to specific locations. We will examine individual station areas and identify strategies for improvements for each.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts, concerns, and strategies for improvement. We will see you at the next meeting.
1.2 COVID-19 Impact Statement

It is important to acknowledge the impact COVID-19 is having on West Michigan and the greater Grand Rapids area. In the section below we discuss the pandemic as it applies to the key areas of our study.

**Mobility**
Transit ridership has decreased because of social distancing and stay at home recommendations. As a result, transit agencies are collecting less fares. Despite this, the transit-dependent populations’ need for reliable local bus options is urgent. Those who rely on public transport to reach their jobs and essential services, such as groceries, will be affected by any service changes. They will also be affected by distancing protocols on transit and at stations. We should consider how these things might impact our mobility recommendations.

**Economic Development**
The pandemic has reduced the number of customers seeking goods and services outside of their homes. It has also meant reduced hours for employees and growth in unemployment. The pandemic also affects the business operations of under-served communities more than others. On June 11th, the Kent County Board of Commissions allocated 25 million dollars of funding to help local small businesses. While this is a good start, we should continue to be vigilant about the adverse economic impacts to small and local businesses caused by the pandemic.

**Neighborhood and Built Environment**
COVID-19 is changing our expectations for public and private space. Close, crowded spaces with poor ventilation can allow the virus to spread more easily. Visitors need to follow six-foot spacing requirements and may need more options to access services, such as drive through. Institutions and businesses must think about how these changes will affect their sites. We should consider how we can support best-practice designs for safe experiences.

**Quality of Life**
Health is critical to quality of life. The Kent County Health Department reported as of June 19 that the rate of infection and death from COVID-19 is decreasing, though approximately 3,089 people are still recovering from COVID-19 now. Spending time outdoors in fresh air has been helpful in COVID-19 recovery, so it is important to consider how to keep outdoor green and public spaces available to those at all levels of need.

**Community and Identity**
The effects of isolation and loneliness can be harmful to mental health. Those with fewer opportunities for social connection during the pandemic are especially vulnerable. This is particularly true for those with limited mobility, such as older individuals. As we conduct this project, we should think about the needs of people who are confined at home. What can we do to practice an ethic of care in reaching them?
1.3 Perspectives Collected & Analyzed

The Division United project team has prepared this document as a review of our previous efforts. Three main sources inform the observations and conclusions documented in this report. They are the previously completed Existing Conditions Report, Previous Planning Efforts, and ongoing Community Engagement.

1. Existing Conditions:

The Existing Conditions Report was finalized in April 2020. The report used federal, state, and local datasets, as well as private real estate and market data. The datasets gave us an understanding of the economic and social conditions of the study area. Knowing existing conditions allowed the project team to establish some baseline facts about the study area with the numbers to back them up. For example, how many and what kinds of jobs are based in the study area? How much average daily traffic goes through the corridor? What is the average median income of people living in the corridor? Answering these questions gave us a baseline for understanding conditions in the corridor at a high level. We have included some of the outputs of this report, such as maps and charts, in this document.

Figure 1: Study area, stations, and transit zones.

Figure 2: Sources of project information and their relationship to this report framework.
where appropriate. The project team also made multiple site visits to the corridor. This allowed us to verify the condition of properties and structures on Division Avenue.

2. Previous Planning Efforts:

The planning efforts of partner cities became our second data source. We also looked at regional or historical plans that affect the area, now or in the future. Important examples reviewed for this project include:

- The City of Kentwood Master Plan
- The City of Grand Rapids Master Plan
- The City of Grand Rapids Housing Now Strategy
- The Wyoming Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing and Housing Needs Assessment
- Wyoming [re] Imagined (Wyoming’s draft proposed Master Plan)
- The South Division Corridor Plan

These plans are important because they are already approved by the local community. They target area-specific issues and provide suggestions for improvement. They also inform us about the broader goals of these places and the policies they already have. We do not want to reinvent the wheel, suggesting solutions that are already underway. We also do not want to make recommendations that contradict what these communities already have in place. We want to respect the existing frameworks that have already been developed.

3. Community Engagement:

Our third source is materials and feedback gathered from community engagement so far. This includes activities such as Steering Committee Meetings 1 and 2. We also incorporated material from Mobile Meetings, transit surveys, and branding surveys. Better Block and Nspiregreen have also hosted block walks to observe conditions in the corridor. AECOM conducted interviews with local developers to understand their perspectives. Finally, we had informal talks with residents and business owners in the community and with you. Your contribution so far has helped us see what matters most to the community. Your input will continue to be important down the road as we identify projects that emerge from this effort. These projects could be pedestrian improvements, better signs, or other programs and policies.

Using these three sources in combination, our project team has identified 5 to 6 major takeaways for each of the five categories. As we compiled these takeaways, we noted three important factors:

1. How often the same concern or issue came up in multiple sources.
2. How many categories the issue or concern was applicable to.
3. Whether this takeaway had any strong equity implications (see Figure 2).

Equity is an important part of what our visions and goals for the project will look like. We explored this topic with an Equity Workshop, which is discussed in the following section.
1.4 Equity Workshop: Perspectives and Outcomes

On June 25, 2020, the project team hosted an Equity Workshop to identify what equity means in the context of our study area. The workshop had three parts: 1) knowledge share between cities, 2) best practices in equity, and 3) discussion.

Knowledge Share: City Policies, Definitions, and Best Practices

Each city presented a mission statement addressing equity within their community. They then described the current policies that promote the mission. The City of Wyoming described equity as “affirming and providing choice across all categories” of services. This includes green space, transportation, and housing. They stressed the need to promote equity by allowing a mix of housing types and ownership and creating options for all price points. They believe in “vibrancy through variety” and in making space for many people to be served and supported according to their needs.

The City of Kentwood described equity as “a belief in fairness and in helping people the way they need to be helped.” They focused on the ways in which they have made changes to housing and economic development policy to support this mission. Kentwood has made the Division Avenue area exempt from their 70/30 housing policy (which emphasized a need for 70% homeowners, 30% renters). They have uncapped residential density allowances. They have a loan program geared towards the area between Eastern Street and Division Avenue. The City of Kentwood Master Plan has language about economic and business development for minority communities. Kentwood believes in ‘championing the differences that make us unique.’ They mentioned also that there are communities of immigrants who live along Division Avenue. This group lives primarily in manufactured homes. While they would like to see mixed-use housing, they are sensitive to the people who live in the community and the pride they have in owning their homes.

The City of Grand Rapids provided the following definition for equity: “When people have the tools, resources and connections necessary to be fully engaged and prepared to benefit from the opportunities they seek.” Grand Rapids further defines racial equity as “when one’s race or ethnicity does not determine, in a statistical sense, how one experiences opportunity, power and life outcomes.” Many initiatives from the city have targeted racial equity, in particular, as a goal. The Housing Now Strategy, The Racial Equity Here Assessment, and the Equitable Economic Development and Strategic Mobility Plan are just a few programs that have incorporated a concern for racial equity in city policy.

Best Practices: How Other Cities are Addressing Equity

After the cities shared their equity definitions and policies, Nspiregreen presented their experiences. They showed previous equity-focused projects and introduced the framework of Domains of
Domains of Justice

Justice. Domains of Justice was developed by Dr. Setha Low of the City University of New York. Domains of Justice are a way of thinking about equity across multiple realms—spatial, legal, logistical, personal, and so on. The five domains of justice are shown in Figure 5.

**Discussion: Small Group and Large Group**

In the third phase of the workshop, the project team broke into two groups to discuss the following questions:

1. How do we define equity for Division Avenue?
2. What are some equity values that should be included as a foundation of the plan?

Sticky notes with major themes and ideas were put on a virtual white-board. While the results of this exercise are still being analyzed, some of the following themes emerged:

**Choice and Agency:** It is important for communities to have some control over their future situations and to choose the kind of support they wish to receive.

**Stability:** Long-term residents and businesses help anchor a community in its identity. Stable economic conditions allow people to grow. There is a desire to preserve the unique diversity of this community and to help it weather the changes it currently faces.

**Safety:** Safety means being free from bodily harm. Participants emphasized that safety in this context meant physical safety. In a mobility context it means protection from vehicles and crashes while walking and crossing the street. Perceptions of the neighborhood as ‘unsafe’ must be counteracted.

**Access and Opportunity:** Equity Workshop participants discussed what access and opportunity means for different types of stakeholders. They expressed that a vision and needs assessment must take an ‘eight to eighty’ (all ages) approach. It must also wrestle with racial equity and current systemic inequalities.

The project team will develop a working draft of an equity definition and values based on the discussion. The cities do not agree about leading with race versus considering race. Therefore, the issue has been selected for future conversations with the cities as well as the Steering Committee.
1.5 Transit Zones

Transit Zone 1: Wealthy Street to Cottage Grove Area

This zone covers the area between Wealthy Street station to the north and Cottage Grove station to the south. Its boundary to the north is Wealthy Street and to the south is Griggs Street (north side). It contains four Silver Line stations. This zone is entirely located within the City of Grand Rapids and is approximately 1.7 miles long and 1 mile wide.

Transit Zone 2: Burton to 28th Street Area

This zone covers the area between Burton Street Station and 28th Street. Its northern boundary is the south side of Griggs Street, and its southern boundary is the north side of 32nd street. This zone is partially inside the city of Grand Rapids (to the north and east) and partially inside the City of Wyoming. It is approximately 1.77 miles long and 1.34 miles wide.
Transit Zone 3: 36th Street to 44th Street Area

This zone covers the area between 36th Street station and the 44th Street station. Its boundary to the north is the southern side of 32nd Street, and to the south, the north side of 48th Street. This zone is partially inside the City of Wyoming and partially inside the City of Kentwood. It is approximately 2 miles long and 1 mile wide.

Transit Zone 4: 52nd Street to 60th Street Area

This zone covers the area between the 52nd Street station and the 60th Street station. Its boundary on the north is the south side of 48th Street and its boundary to the south is the Paul B. Henry Freeway. This zone is partially inside the City of Wyoming and partially inside the City of Kentwood.
2.0 Mobility & Connectivity

A family plays in the biking course area of Plaster Creek Park. Google Images, 2019
Approximately 16,000 to 22,000 vehicles use Division Avenue between Wealthy Street and 60th Street each day. The number of vehicles on the corridor has risen over the past few years, except at Wealthy and 36th Street, where traffic volumes have decreased slightly.
The project team has identified seven key takeaways for the study area overall that are related to mobility and connectivity.

1 Transit Reliability

The frequency and reliability of the Silver Line bus service is affecting ridership. On-time performance on the Silver Line drops from 75% during the day to 53% during the evening rush hour (3 to 6 pm). Once buses begin to run late, it’s very difficult for the trips that follow to recover. For those who already do ride the bus, the station experience is affecting morale. 18.5% Of the transit survey participants, 18.5% said cleaner waiting areas would improve bus traveling experience.

2 Multi-modal Infrastructure

A lack of multi-modal infrastructure affects pedestrian and biking options. It also affects last mile connections to transit at key intersections. Residents identified problem locations that need safety improvements for people walking and biking. The Steering Committee identified 26 locations that need infrastructure improvements in the right-of-way (ROW). This is almost one for each platform area. Currently, most people commute around the corridor by personal vehicle or by carpool. Trips by transit, bike, or walking are a low percentage of mode share. However, households without cars (up to 31% within a half mile of Wealthy station) make up a large percentage of the corridor. Multi-modal improvements will improve the experience of these users. Finally, more connections are needed between non-motorized mobility options within the study area. The Interurban Trail in Wyoming and the East West Trail in Kentwood both provide connections throughout the area; however, the trail systems are not interconnected.

3 Instructions and Way-finding

Customer information, rider instructions, and way-finding are needed to enhance service use. Mobile Meeting participants requested bilingual and improved signs. They also want opportunities for bilingual rider training. Based on interactions with residents, many people in the study area neighborhoods do not understand the basics of how to use the Silver Line. Cultural and language barriers must be overcome to support their ridership.

4 Supporting Students

Students make up a large ridership group and would be one of the main beneficiaries of mobility improvements. Many students ride the bus to school, predominantly Route 1. Improved walking conditions around schools would support these riders. At the
Kelloggsville school’s location, the City of Kentwood would like to see a center median along Division Avenue. They also support a mid-block crossing between 44th and 54th streets. This would facilitate student movements (the school is approximately at 48th Street). Kelloggsville schools have discussed the possibility of renaming an area station after the high school.

5 Battling Transit Stigma

The stigma against using public transit is real and must be overcome for the bus to be successful. According to developer interviews, people perceive that the bus is the mobility option of last resort. If people feel this way about the bus and currently drive, they are less likely to switch modes in the future. The stigma also affects perceptions of bus-riders themselves. Mobilizing, empowering, and catering to transit-dependent people can reverse stigma. It’s also important to provide incentives, opportunities, education, and greater transparency.

6 Connecting to Opportunity

Anchor destinations are lacking, as well as major employers in the southern end of the corridor to bookend the Silver Line and Division Avenue. We can see this in ridership numbers, which are lower at the southern end of the corridor.
3.0 Economic Development

The study area had a total of 18,989 jobs in 2017. Of these, approximately 26.4% of jobs are in manufacturing, 24.1% in retail, 19.2% in wholesale trade and 7.1% in construction trades. Job centers correlate spatially with industrial areas within the corridor.
The project team has identified six key takeaways for the overall study area that are related to economic development.

1 External Investment

Major national retailers and investors find the study area is not a demographic fit with their desired market, so they do not have plans to invest. This is shown in both developer interviews and in the limited office and retail development the study area has had since 2000. This means that economic solutions for the corridor will have to be local and from the ground up. The corridor needs ‘patient capital’ to support existing business opportunities and see long-term gains. Patient capital in this setting is defined as investors with the ability to wait for long-term returns. The community’s expectation for inclusive growth conflicts with the common developer’s ability to deliver. Engaged community members and business leaders have clearly told us what type of development they would like to see. There is strong support for mixed-use projects with affordable housing. However, few developers have the tools in place or the knowledge to deliver such projects, and thus are likely to invest elsewhere.

2 Development Process

The land development process is not transparent to residents and laypeople. This has implications for who can play a part in development. In the study area nine zoning districts abut Division Avenue and there are 28 zoning districts, total. Three of these districts are form-based. This means they have rules related to form, such as lot coverage, building height, and setback. The rest of the zoning categories are use-based. Incentive programs such as density bonuses are also not intuitive. They can pose design challenges even for established developers. We know that the public wants more small-scale development. Of 125 people surveyed, 25 even expressed a desire for further training in incremental development but code complexity poses a barrier to small scale developers, especially first-time ones.

3 Access to Capital

Different demographic groups experience different levels of success accessing capital. Purchasing land, opening a business, and securing entitlements are all examples
of this. Not everyone is thriving equally in the new economy. A City of Wyoming study that looked at loan access uncovered racial disparities in loan approval. Hispanic applicants were less successful than non-Hispanic and white applicants in accessing loans in Wyoming in 2017. In general, Hispanic applicants have fewer loan originations, higher denial rates, and a lower rate of positive outcomes. (City of Wyoming Analysis to Impediments of Fair Housing Choice). Additionally, between 2014 and 2018, the City of Wyoming also had at least four fair housing complaints in or near the study area. These complaints were based on race, disability status, familial status, and gender.

4 Job Opportunities

Many corridor residents are unable to take advantage of current economic opportunities within the corridor. They must travel elsewhere to find work. Only 5% of those who live in the study area also have jobs within the study area. It is also telling that the area with the greatest number of jobs per acre (Transit Zone 1) also has the highest rates of unemployment. For those employed, it has the lowest rates of median income. In short, the corridor has many jobs and even high-paying professional jobs, but they are not filled by area residents.

5 Supporting Local Business

There is strong support for more home-based and small-scale businesses. Residents also desire job training, workforce programs, and micro-lending in the corridor. The study area has an active business community. They have been very successful, even with little external support and capital.

6 Industrial Development

Industrial real estate currently represents the strongest property market in the study area. Additionally, manufacturing represents the greatest share of jobs in two of the three Transit Zone areas (Zones 1 and 2). Industrial employment and real estate provide a level of stability to a corridor. They should be maintained and better integrated into the surrounding area where appropriate.
4.0 Neighborhood & Built Environment

7.44% of the study area, or 539 parcels, is classified as Vacant (or 'Unimproved'). These are lots with no structure. Hall Street and 52nd Street have the highest concentration of residential and commercial vacant parcels within ¼ mile.
The project team has identified six key takeaways for the study area related to neighborhoods and the built environment.

1 Vacant Property 🌟ounder and improve vacant properties, as well as sites with overbuilt parking, offer potential for infill and for redevelopment. (See map on previous page.) On one hand, vacant properties can be a liability. They often lack infrastructure, lighting, and other improvements, and may not be regularly maintained. On the other hand, vacant properties also represent current opportunities, as well as opportunities for new projects in the future. The largest vacant property in the study area is Site 36, a former General Motors metal stamping plant. It is now a now industrial brown-field in the City of Wyoming. The loss of this factory was devastating to area residents. Many projects have been suggested for the remaining brown-field, but it hasn’t been redeveloped yet. Residents have said they would like a mixed-use employment hub at this location.

2 Neighborhood Change 🌟

Some historical planning laws have caused harm to the communities in the corridor. Long-term residents and communities have had their land taken by eminent domain and their wealth reduced. Redlining and now gentrification have also played a negative role. New economic pressures are speeding up change in the study area, especially on the northern end. Housing prices and the rate of price increase continues to climb. Market data from the housing sector shows reduced homeownership since 2010 in the study area. The area also has a greater share of properties that were formerly owner-occupied, but are now rentals. Overall, homeowners still represent a greater share of residents than renters, but the percentage of properties that are rented (vs. owned) is growing. (See Figure 9). Finally, there has been increased ownership of homes by businesses rather than individuals. The trend of these changes shows a general loss in stability for area residents.

3 Auto-Oriented Design 🌟

The auto-oriented design of properties along the corridor impacts walk-ability of station areas. These properties were designed for the access and storage of cars. Improvements and changes over the years in this commercial corridor have only reinforced this. As a result, many properties have parking lots that front the street. They also have multiple and large driveway cuts that interrupt the sidewalk. Finally, there are few sound barriers and little landscape buffering to create a separate pedestrian experience. To make the corridor more walkable and protect pedestrians from traffic, we will have to change the design focus of the past from car to foot traffic.
4 Mixed Use

There is strong support for more mixed use and greater density in the corridor. In a previous engagement exercise, the Steering Committee identified 59 sites in the study area as right for mixed use. This was the most popular category selected by a wide margin. Medium density residential use represented the next largest desired use, followed by park improvements. During the Mobile Meetings, participants also identified sites desirable for mixed use. They support the creation of a mixed use/retirement residential development at 3410 Division Street. In many ways, this reflects a desire for an urban form that was more common in the corridor in the past. Many older historic structures from the 1920s and 30s along the corridor are good examples of walkable development.

5 Affordable Housing

A wider range of affordable housing options and improvements for existing homes is desired. Stakeholders were interested in opportunities to age in place, along with senior and workforce housing. They also support accessory dwelling units (ADUs) on the backs of lots, as well as the rehabilitation of existing properties.

6 Zoning

Zoning categories along the corridor express an unrealized expectation of density. They also do not align with the current lot structure or existing environment. Examples include the residential zoning districts beside Division Avenue. These districts do not support enough density to justify more dense commercial uses. As a result, they are limiting local capacity to help stabilize and diversify the corridor with other uses.
5.0 Quality of Life
There are 16 parks within the study area, ranging in size from 1 acre (the Paul I Philips Recreation Center) to 38 acres (Ideal Park) in size. All schools within the study area are within a 10 minute walk of a park or green space. Four parks are within a 1/4 mile of a Silver Line Station.
Quality of Life Study-Area Analysis

The project team has identified six key takeaways for the study area.

1 Health Outcomes and Inequality

Within the study area there are deep inequalities in wealth and health outcomes. According to data collected by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), few portions of the corridor display worse health outcomes. These are the same areas that are also struggling economically. The study area has rates as high as 15% for asthma and 45% for obesity, with an unemployment rate between 10% and 30% of the population. The World Health Organization notes that the poorest individuals in a community often have the worst health. This indicates that the greater a society's inequalities, the greater the differences in outcomes. Health outcomes are important because they affect people’s ability to live, work, and play.

2 Land Use Adjacencies

Some land use adjacencies within the study area may be undesirable in the long term. This will affect safety, quality of life, and long-term environmental justice outcomes. A significant number of areas have housing that backs up to industrial or former industrial properties. For example, the Cottage Grove station neighborhood also has a railroad line crossing through the area close to a school site. Depending on the type of industrial use, over time this proximity can be incompatible. Industrial uses may have environmental impacts and create increased truck traffic. Although industry provides important job centers, it is important to understand the long-term effects on the health of neighborhoods next to them.

3 Park Access and Experience

The Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan has a goal that every neighborhood should be within a 10-minute walk of a park. Within the study area, access to parks is not equal for all neighborhoods. For example, areas such as the west side of Cottage Grove station, and the east side of 36th Street are more than a 20-minute walk away from a park. Residents also want more green spaces and improved park amenities. The Steering Committee identified 24 sites, indicating the need for green space improvements. These include trails and existing parks. For example, Buck Creek in Kentwood is a potential asset that can be improved with green space connecting the neighborhoods.
4 Pedestrian Experience

Walking along the corridor can feel both unsafe and unpleasant. During a block walk down Division Avenue, participants noted that in certain areas the corridor is very loud. This was noted especially at 44th Street and Division Avenue, partly because of a lack of soft space and buffers. Residents want less noise, improved landscaping, and decorative lighting in the ROW.

5 Third Places

Residents want more attractive, engaging ‘third places’ along the corridor. Third places can include both privately run locations like coffee shops and enhanced public spaces. There is also a desire to leverage transit stops to enhance connections between existing third places. In Mobile Meetings, residents indicated the need for more ‘Park N Ride’ facilities and free ride opportunities off the Silver Line. Participants suggested this will draw more people into the study area to experience the culture of the corridor. It will also reinforce the idea of the corridor as a desirable pace to visit for cultural and recreational reasons.

6 Access to Essential Services

There is much interest in extending the Silver Line route to connect directly to the health care complex south of the study area. This area is about one mile southeast of 60th Street station, and includes Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Center, two pharmacies, and an urgent care facility.

Figure 16: Children play soccer at Plaster Creek Family Park, one of the most popular parks in the study area.

Figure 17: The quarter mile buffer around Cottage Grove Station has a high number of industrial properties adjacent to low and mid-density residential.

![Parcel Land Use Map](image-url)
6.0 Community & Identity

The study area is generally more racially diverse than any individual participating city. It also has a greater share of Latinx/Hispanic-identified people and Black people. There is also a significant share of individuals identified as two or more races within the study area.
The project team has identified five key takeaways for the study area that pertain to community and identity.

1 Diversity

Division Avenue is one of the most diverse corridors in the region. Along with the long-term residents, a large immigrant population contributes to its current cultural fabric. The community is strongly represented by its Black/African American, Pacific, and Asian, Hispanic/Latin groups. The corridor is in general more diverse than any in its partner cities. Transit survey participants ranked ‘diversity’ as one of the highest ranked elements of community pride.

2 Brand and Identity

There is a desire for the corridor to have a recognizable identity. Residents want to see their identities reflected along Division Avenue. Place-making efforts enhance identity and require more municipal support. This includes advertising opportunities for local businesses, branding, and improved way-finding. For example, residents of the area have used the pedestrian bridge at 36th Street as a location to post information about events and hang signs. (See Figure 15.) Food seems to be important for the expression of cultural and ethnic identity in the corridor. The restaurant owners are especially interested in these opportunities.

3 Neighborhood and Cultural Assets

Residents want existing corridor assets recognized and their connections to these places respected. The Existing Conditions Report identified 29 locations as ‘sacred spaces’ and Steering Committee activity identified 7 new locations. These locations range from support centers, to parks, business, and restaurants.

4 Trust and Relationships

In some portions of the corridor, there has sometimes been a high degree of mistrust of both the public sector and developers. This can create misunderstandings and can be discouraging for both residents and developers. Residents want improvement, but there are concerns about displacing existing businesses, the community and its identity. These fears in some sense are well-justified. The development community in the greater Grand Rapids metro area is predominately white. There are concerns about the lack of diversity and the implicit biases it may reinforce. Developers are not familiar with the people and activities along the corridor. Thus, they stereotype
the community as undesirable. This, coupled with poor market demand, has made Division Avenue a “no go” from a development perspective. Perhaps this is why the residents selected the word ‘misunderstood’ to describe their feelings about the corridor.

5 A Need for Local Groups

Residents and business owners want to create stronger groups to support local and ethnic businesses. For example, Greater Grand Rapids is home to the 4th largest Vietnamese community in the U.S. The business owners from this community, would like to form a Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce. In addition, members would like grants for facade improvements and opportunities for advertising. Although there are a few neighborhood associations in Wyoming and Kentwood, there is a need for more such organizations.
7.0
Next Steps

At Steering Committee Meeting 3, we will hold a series of four breakout meetings. We will discuss each transit zone and the stations within that area. As discussed earlier, the study area has been divided into transit zones. Transit zones are approximately 1.7 to 2 miles in length and one mile to 1.5 miles in width. Each transit zone contains two to four Silver Line Stations.

Each station area has a quarter mile radius with the transit station as its center. Station area maps identify vacant properties, municipal boundaries, and community landmarks—all located within a 10-minute walking distance. Station-level discussion focuses on identifying issues, opportunities, and interventions within the area.

We look forward to seeing you at Steering Committee Meeting 3 and speaking to you about specific issues within the study area.