



WEST AKRON

NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

Maple Valley • Copley Road • Sherbondy Hill



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MKSK



KM Date
Community
Planning



PROJECT UJIMA
Collective Work & Responsibility

In Collaboration With

STUDIO

Special Thanks



GAR
FOUNDATION



INTRODUCTION

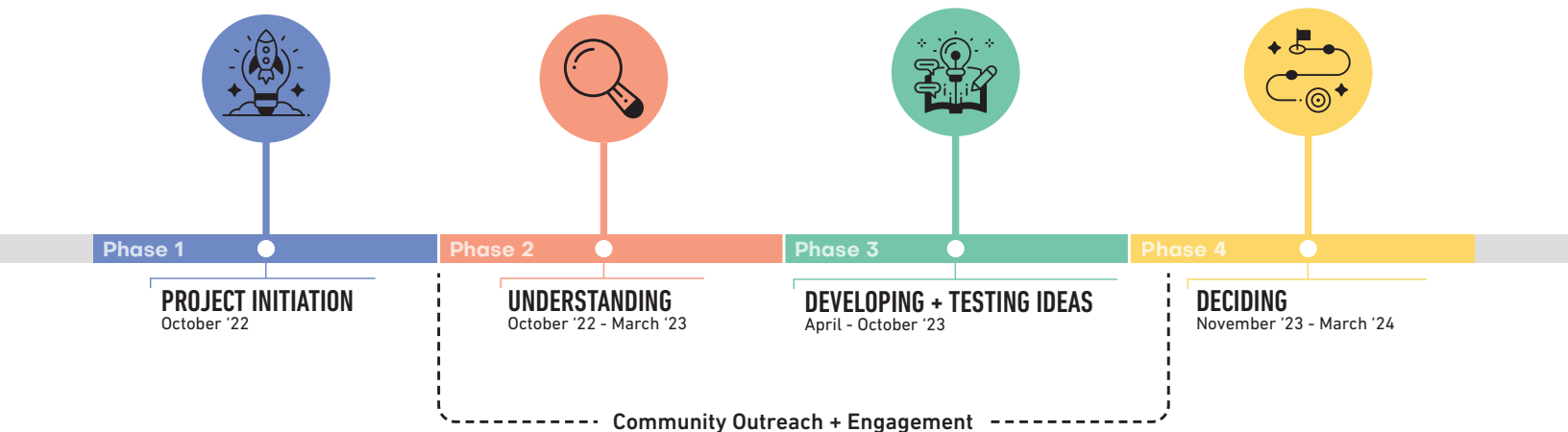
PLAN PURPOSE & PROCESS

The West Akron Neighborhood Plan is a collective vision for neighborhood leaders, residents, the City, and other partners to guide priorities, initiatives, and investments in the West Akron neighborhood moving forward. This plan includes a comprehensive understanding of the neighborhood today and proposes strategic economic and community development recommendations for the revitalization of the neighborhood.

Under the guidance of the Progressive Alliance Community Development Corporation (CDC) and the City of Akron, a project team led the planning process with regular input from a Steering Committee and community members. MKSK coordinated the overall project team and led neighborhood planning and design.

Project Ujima, Inc. led the community engagement portion of the project, facilitating Circle Talks and gathering input from community stakeholders, residents, and business owners. KM Date Community Planning also conducted business and stakeholder interviews and provided market analysis findings and strategies relating to retail, housing and neighborhood revitalization. The plan was supported through technical assistance by the City of Akron.

The 16-month planning process began in October 2022 and was organized into four stages: 1) Project Initiation, 2) Understanding, 3) Developing & Testing Ideas, and 4) Deciding. Community outreach and engagement occurred throughout the process.



ABOUT WEST AKRON

The West Akron Neighborhood Plan study area is made up of the West Akron and Sherbondy Hill neighborhoods, located just west of Downtown Akron. This study area is bounded by Mull Avenue on the north, Exchange Street on the northeast, Route 59 on the east, I-76 on the south, and Collier Road on the west. This boundary represents 6.7 square miles home to 23,000 residents. Within the overall study area, this plan includes three geographic areas of focus which are contiguous with the Great Streets districts in the neighborhood: Maple Valley, East Copley, and Sherbondy Hill.

The neighborhood has experienced some disinvestment and decline, due in part to the negative impacts of urban renewal efforts in Akron that disproportionately affected this area.

In the present day, West Akron is a vibrant neighborhood of tree-lined streets and well-kept homes. Neighbors represent diverse backgrounds, though there remains a strong Black cultural presence. The neighborhood is home to many anchor institutions and assets, including the Akron Zoo, Simon Perkins Stone Mansion, John Brown House, John R. Buchtel Community Learning Center, the Akron Urban League headquarters, two public library branches, and City parks and community centers. The Progressive Alliance CDC, numerous places of worship, and social organizations create a framework for neighborhood representation and advocacy.



Business District on Vernon Odom Boulevard



Maple Valley Business District



Copley Road Businesses



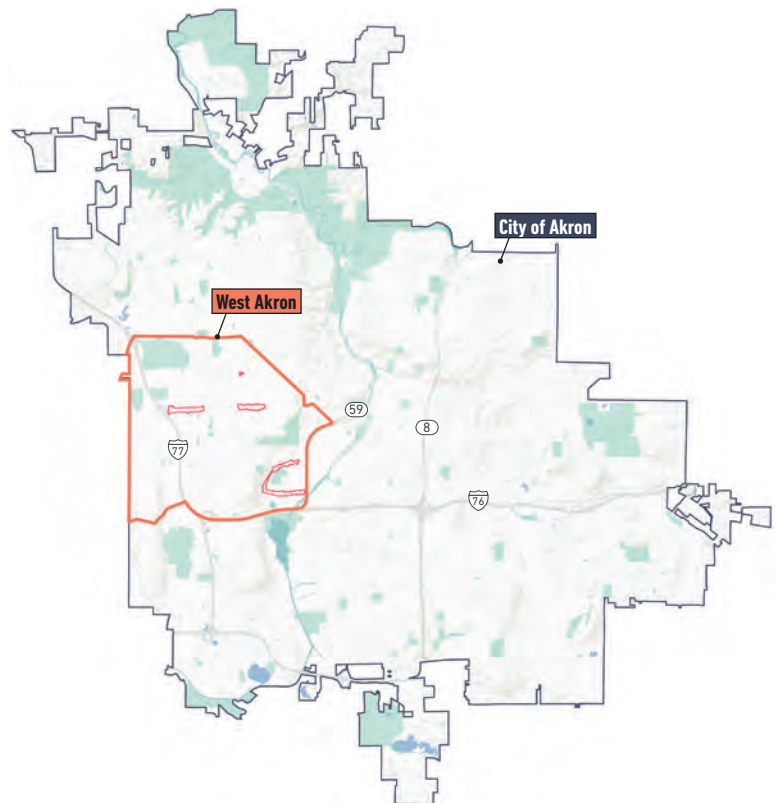
Construction of the Innerbelt

Study Area Diagram.



West Akron Neighborhood

The diagram above depicts the study area for this plan, which spans nearly 11% of the total land area of the City of Akron. West Akron is immediately adjacent to other significant Akron neighborhoods and districts, including Downtown Akron, Summit Lake, Highland Square, Kenmore, and Wallhaven. Within the study area, many assets and institutions anchor the neighborhood and are mostly scattered along major corridors. Beyond those corridors are well-laid out and intact blocks of residential areas with a diversity of housing. Several parks are located throughout the neighborhood, providing green space access for residents and visitors.

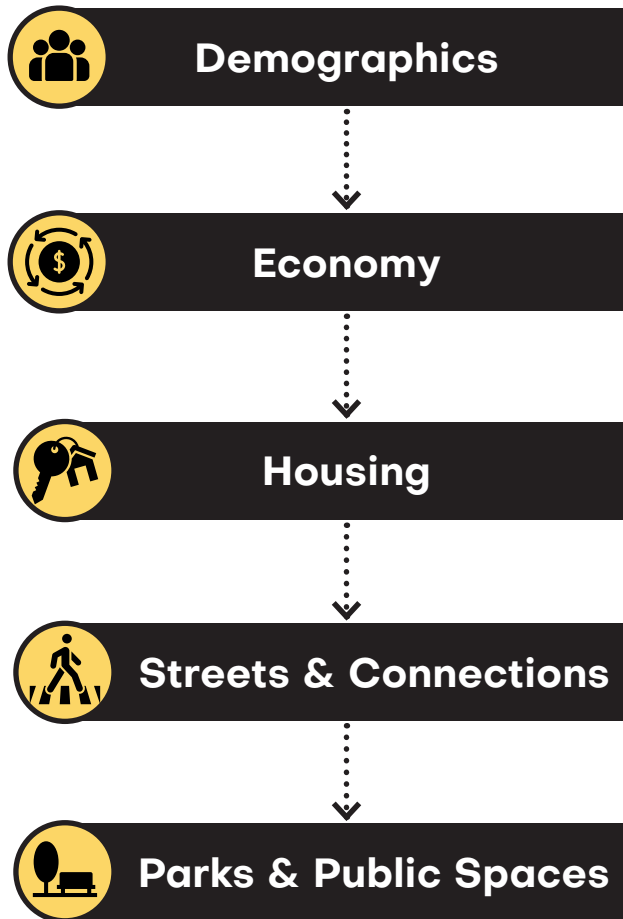


NEIGHBORHOOD

PROFILE

A LOOK AT WEST AKRON TODAY

This chapter outlines a comprehensive neighborhood profile of West Akron today. The neighborhood profile was created to understand the issues and opportunities facing the neighborhood, to summarize and visualize the neighborhood systems, and to inform the development of the plan recommendations. This chapter organizes the findings from existing conditions and analysis into several key topics: demographics, economy, housing, streets & connections, and parks & public spaces. As part of this planning process, a robust retail and economic analysis was conducted, and the findings presented in this chapter represent only a portion of the results of that analysis. The complete report from that work can be found in a separate appendix.



Demographics

West Akron is home to 23,356 neighbors who come from diverse backgrounds. As indicated by community input, the people and the sense of community are the main thing that people love about the neighborhood. In neighborhood planning, it is especially important to better understand the people that make up the neighborhood and the community dynamics within it.

With 75% of residents identifying as Black alone, many view West Akron as a stronghold of Black Akron. While this percentage is higher than the city as a whole, the percentage of residents in West Akron who identify as Black alone has been slowly decreasing from 81% in 2010 to 75% in 2022. Some of this change can be attributed to a slight uptick in people who identify as White alone from 15% in 2010 to 17.5% in 2022 as well as from people who identify as some other race alone and two or more races.

West Akron is a multi-generational community, with a median age of 39.9 years. Only 30% of households in the neighborhood have people living in them who are younger than 18 years old. The other 70% of households only have adults living in them, and of those households, the majority are non-family households, meaning they might include people who are unrelated roommates or unmarried couples.

Due to systemic racism that negatively impacts Black Americans and people of color to this day, West Akron does see some unique economic and educational challenges compared to the region. First, neighbors in West Akron are slightly less likely to have a college degree (26%) compared to the overall City of Akron population (33%) and the population of Summit County (45%). Household income is another metric that may be correlated with educational attainment. The average household income of \$50,602 is lower than the City of Akron (\$61,343) and significantly lower than Summit County (\$90,584). This average may be impacted by the fact that 23% of households have an income of less than \$15,000. In total, 28% of West Akron households are below the federal poverty level, and this most predominantly impacts households with a female householder.

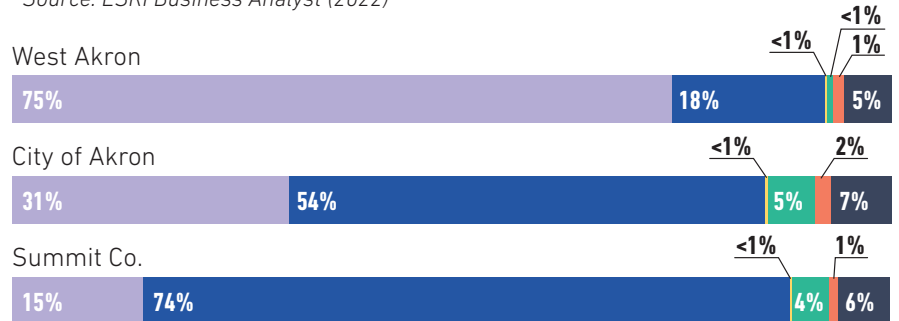
Population Comparison

Source: ESRI Business Analyst (2022)



Population by Race

Source: ESRI Business Analyst (2022)



- Black alone
- White alone
- American Indian alone
- Asian alone
- Some other race alone
- Two or more races

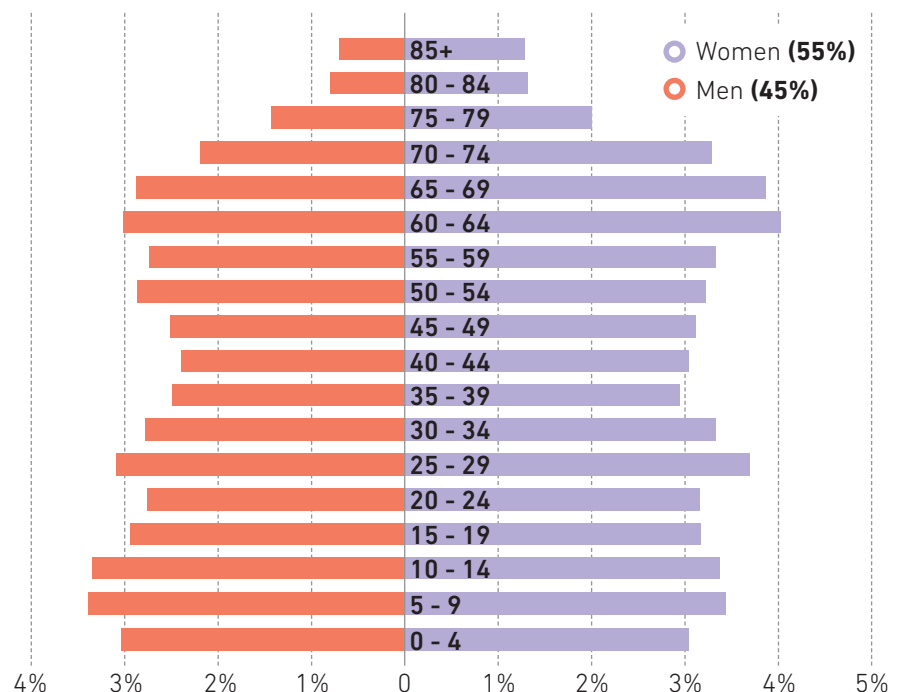
Hispanic / Latino Population

Source: ESRI Business Analyst (2022)



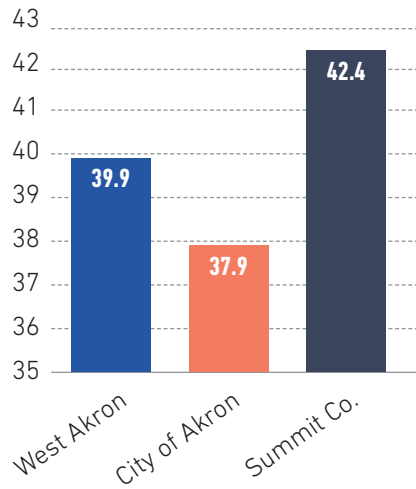
Population by Age and Sex

Source: ESRI Business Analyst (2022)



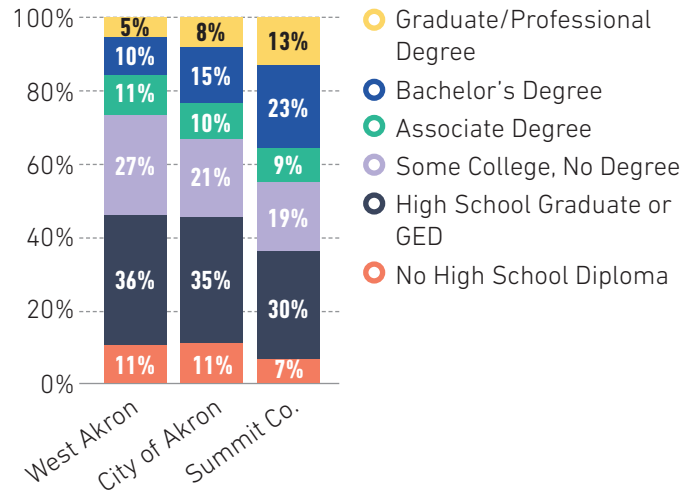
Median Age

Source: ESRI Business Analyst (2022)



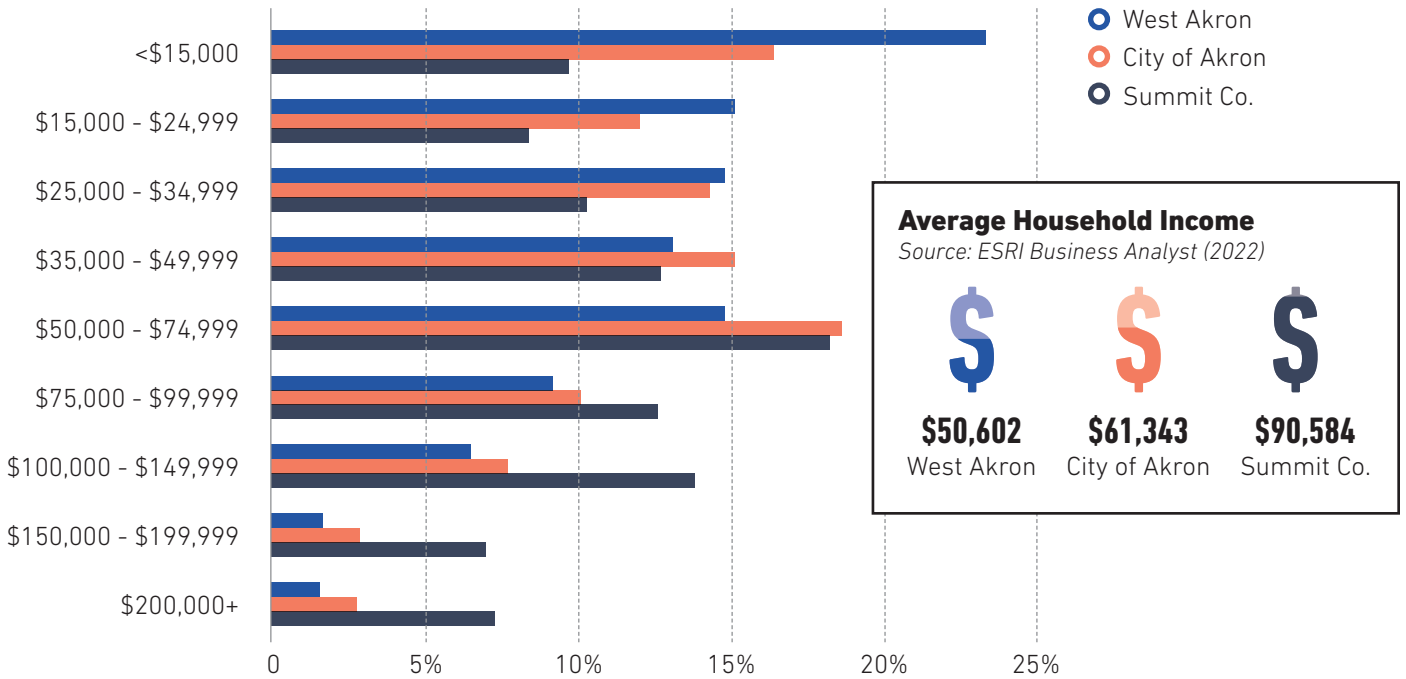
Population 25+ by Educational Attainment

Source: ESRI Business Analyst (2022)



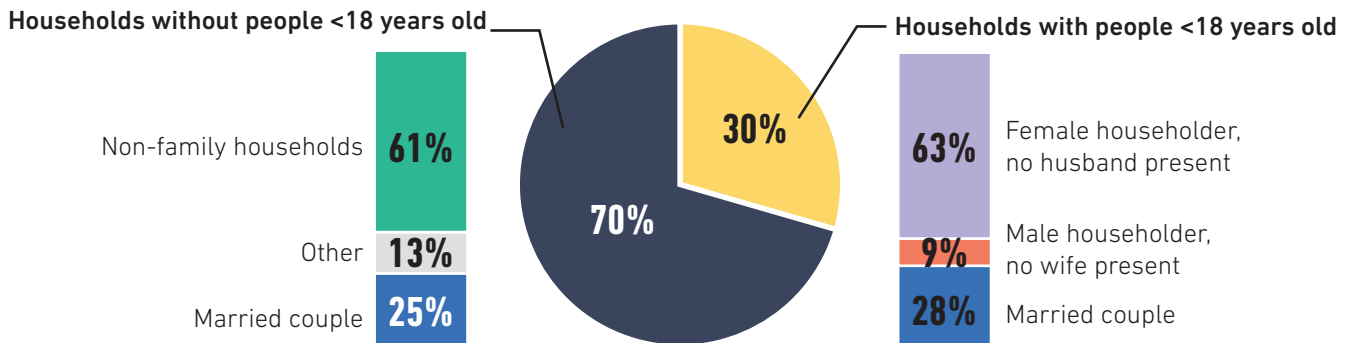
Households by Income

Source: ESRI Business Analyst (2022)



Households by Type

Source: ESRI Business Analyst (2022)



Economy

Typical of many urban core neighborhoods in legacy cities of the Midwest, the neighborhood has a history of disinvestment and decline.

NEIGHBORHOOD ECONOMIC FACTORS

The West Akron neighborhood is home to 23,000 residents, and 10,000 households. The economic analysis showed that the total buying power of these 10,000 households is \$500 million, which is substantial for an urban neighborhood. At the 6-minute drive time, the total buying power increases to \$1 billion, which is very promising for urban/suburban neighborhoods.

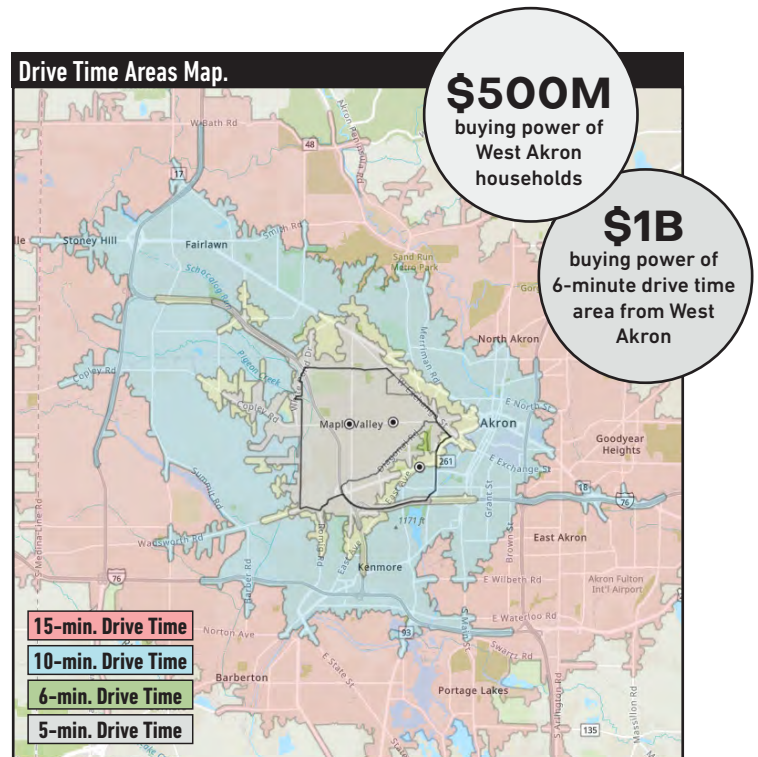
Within West Akron, there are almost 4,000 jobs. The maps on the following page illustrate where West Akron's worker population lives and, conversely, where West Akron's residents work. With its proximity to Downtown Akron and suburban business zones, there are 93,000 workers within 10-minute drive of the neighborhood center. Inside the trade area boundary, the average local household income was \$50,602 in 2022, falling in the middle income "quintile" of US households.

BUSINESS ACTIVITY FINDINGS

An analysis of business activity, including retail and all other commercial entities, shows that there are 327 businesses with commercial locations in the neighborhood, plus 69 home businesses. Strengths in the neighborhood, when compared to the City and County, include education, health care, hospitality and services, motor vehicle and parts dealers, and gas stations. The Akron Public Schools and the Akron Zoo, among the largest employers, are very important assets for workforce development efforts.

The large number of workers within 10 minutes is another opportunity that neighborhood businesses can build on. In addition, larger businesses and employers are likely bringing potential customers to the doorstep of smaller businesses.

Micro-clusters with more than four businesses, and the greatest potential for collaboration, include marketing, design, and publishing; hospitality and tourism; financial services; education and knowledge creation; and business services.



▲ The map above shows the drive time areas from the three business districts in West Akron.

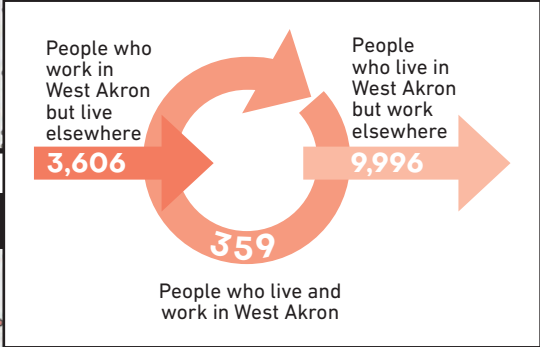
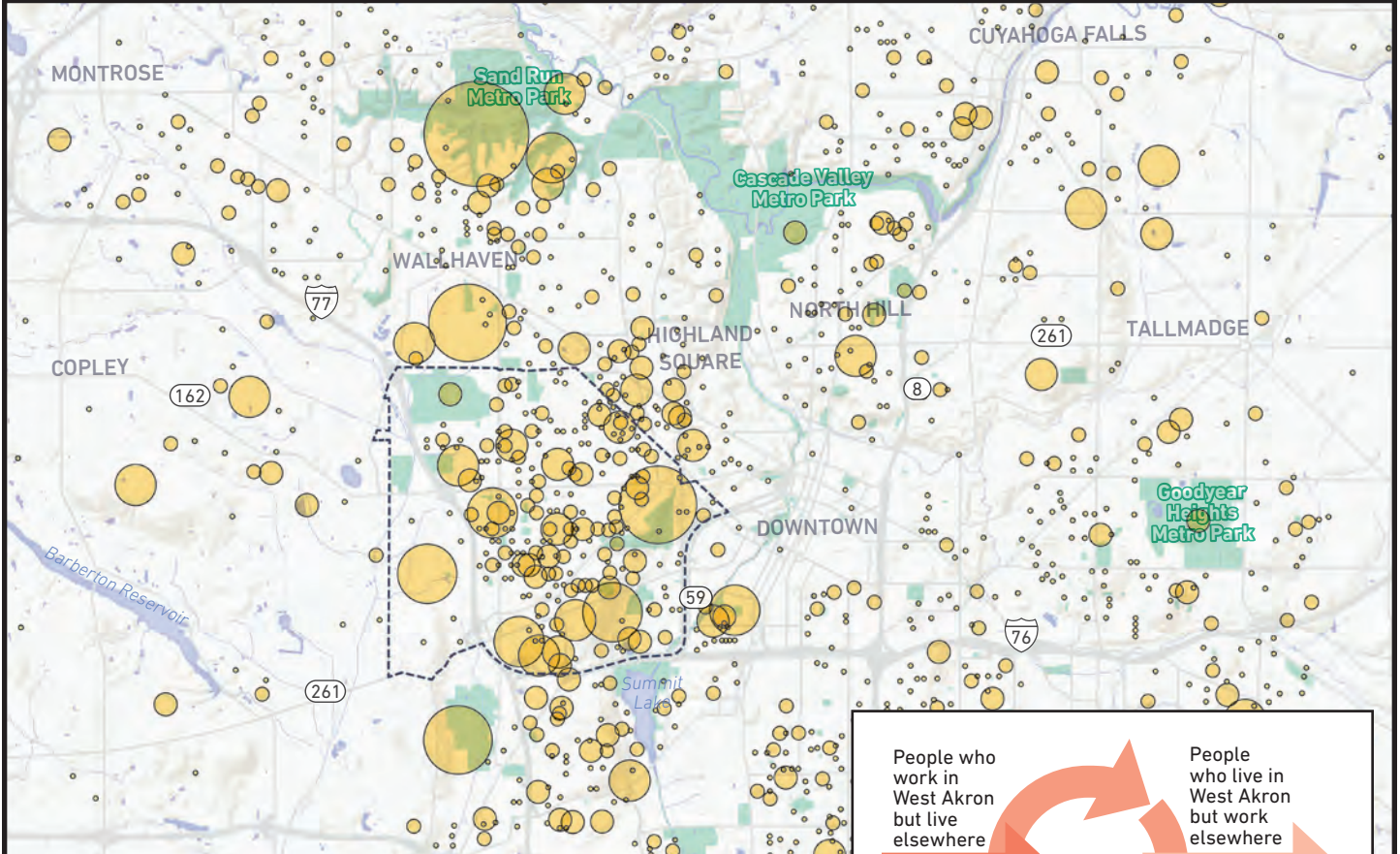
Source: ESRI, KM Date Community Planning (2022)

Top Employers in West Akron

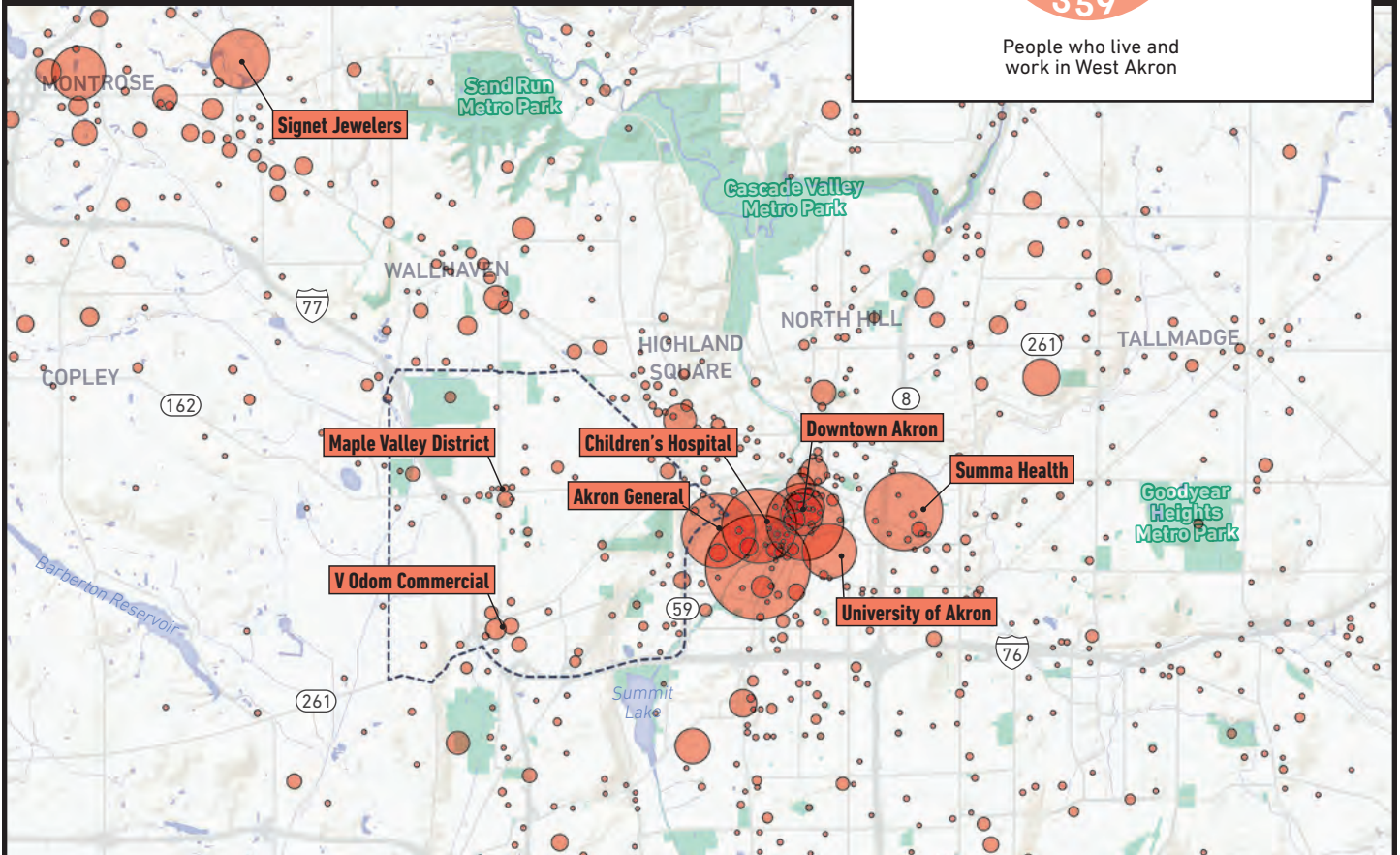
Source: ESRI, KM Date Community Planning (2022)

Organization/Company Name	Est. Number of Employees
Akron Public Schools	419
Akron Zoo	150
McDonald's	91
Hondros College of Nursing	90
Akron Area Commercial Cleaning	60
Summit Toyota	60
The Rage Gallery	53
Summit Adult Day Services	50
Clearwater Systems	50
Akron Public School Early Learning	50
Minority Behavioral Health Group	50

Where West Akron's Workers Live.



Where West Akron's Residents Work.

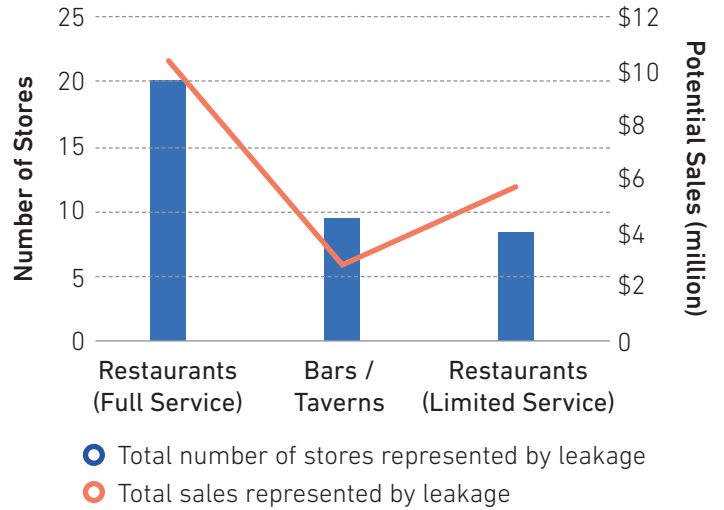


RETAIL FINDINGS

Leakage (neighborhood household dollars being spent elsewhere) in the West Akron neighborhood is substantial. Analysis of retail supply and demand within the trade area shows that there is a leakage of \$14.1 million annually for dining alone, with \$13 million for hardware/home and garden, \$11 million for grocery, and \$6 million for clothing and accessories. There is a general merchandise surplus of \$24 million in the neighborhood, indicating that people are spending more at those stores (Dollar Stores, drugstores, Walmart, and the like) than at other retail opportunities; and that those stores are serving outsiders as well. Similarly, personal, repair and similar services (such as hair salons, auto repair) also have large surpluses, indicating outside clientele and dollars coming in. Pet services/ supplies, legal services, and entertainment are the services with the largest leakage, at \$2 million, \$1 million, and \$1 million respectively.

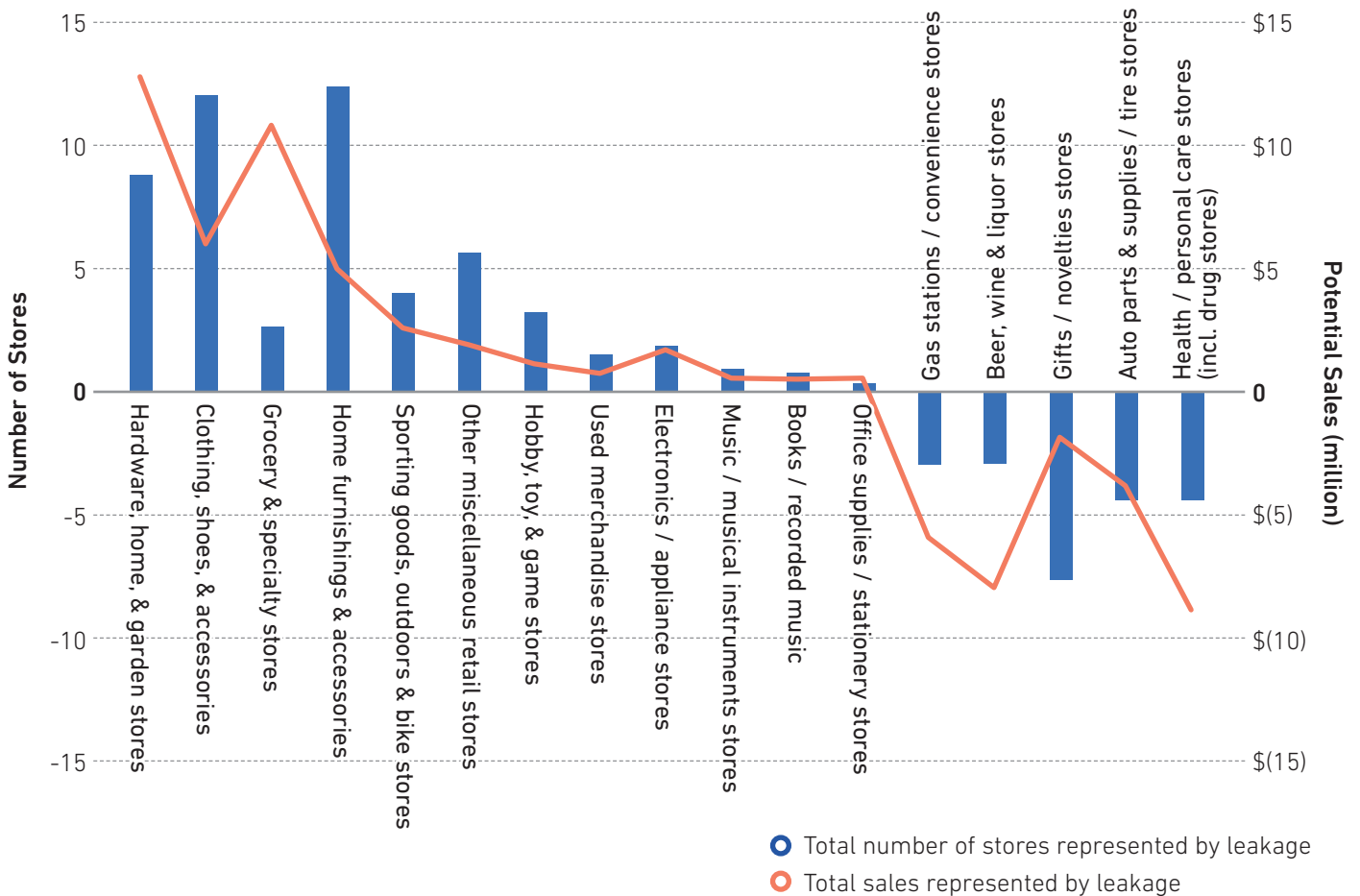
Surplus & Leakage of Dining

Source: ESRI, KM Date Community Planning (2022)

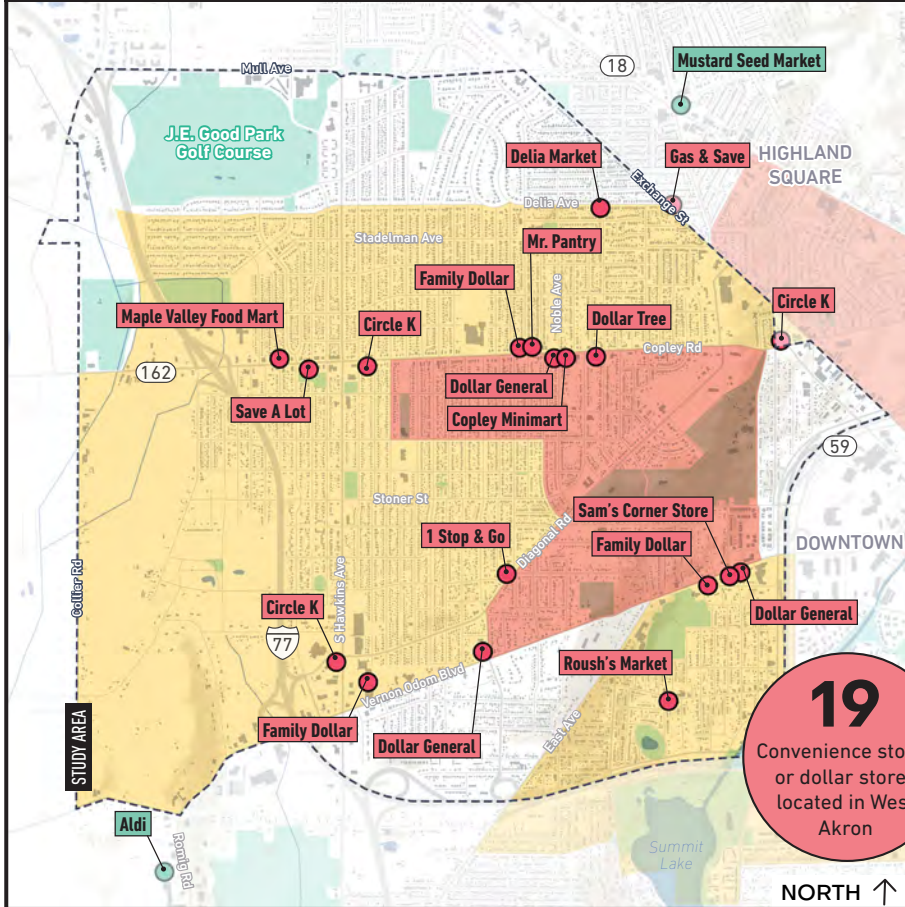


Surplus & Leakage of Retail Goods

Source: ESRI, KM Date Community Planning (2022)



Food Access Map.



Legend

- Convenience store or dollar store without fresh produce
- Grocery store with fresh produce
- Most residents >1 mi. from nearest supermarket
- Most residents >0.5 mi. from nearest supermarket
- Study Area Boundary

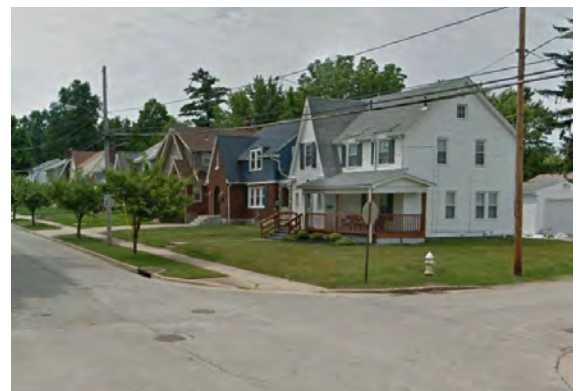
Data Source: USDA (2019)

Food Access

Community input highlighted the desire for a full-service grocer in West Akron because today, the neighborhood is lacking in fresh food access. While most residents live in low food access census tracts, there is an over-saturation of dollar stores and convenience stores that many residents rely on for their groceries. This food landscape contributes to negative health outcomes and general well-being.

KEY FINDINGS

- There is strong demand for dining in West Akron. \$18 million is going outside the neighborhood for dining - \$10 million for full service, and \$5.6 million for fast service – at least 10 restaurants. When analyzed by category, all but one categories of restaurants indicate demand – but in particular, family dining, casual dining, coffee/bakery, ethnic dining, and quick service present opportunity.
- In retail goods, general merchandise (Walmart, target, dollar stores, etc) indicates a surplus of \$24 million, which wipes out all other categories. However, this is typical of most retail markets, while consumer interest in wider selection and quality persists.
- Leakage of \$13 million in hardware/home/garden, \$11 million in grocery, and \$6 million in clothing and accessories is worth examining.
- Personal, repair, and other services have large surpluses, likely indicating many outside customers coming in
- Pet services/supplies, legal services, and entertainment have the largest leakage at \$2 million, \$1 million and \$1 million, respectively.



Housing

Housing is the foundation of a neighborhood and is a critical factor in business and workforce attraction and retention, as well as overall quality of life in the neighborhood.

HOUSING TYPES, OCCUPANCY, & QUALITY

Of the 11,773 units in the neighborhood, 77% are single-family homes, with another 10% duplexes or single-family attached homes. Half of neighborhood householders are renting, and the other half are owners. The majority (85%) of householders over age 65 are homeowners; half of all units are owned by seniors. Across the neighborhood, there is a 15% vacancy rate, which is high, and indicates poor condition, high rents, or both. The owners of 77% of residential parcels in the neighborhood are based in Akron; 8.7% of owners are out of state, and 6.8% are in Ohio but outside Summit County.

HOUSING AGE AND CONDITION

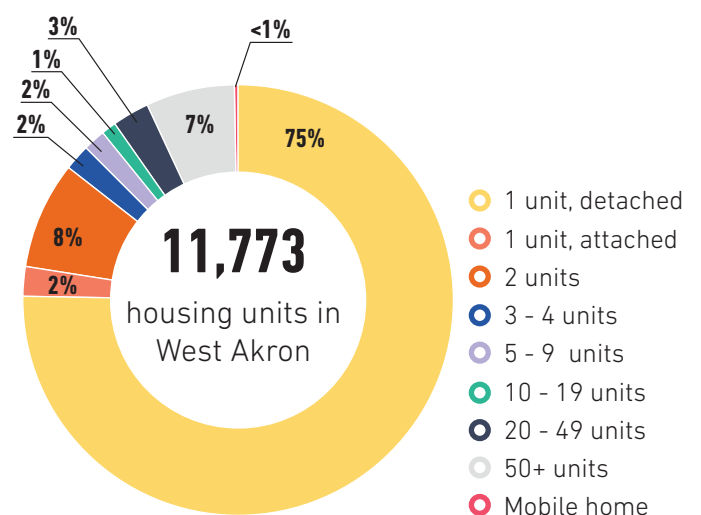
The quality of the residential areas of West Akron is generally very high, with many residents investing in the maintenance of their homes and prominent tree-lined streets. The age of the housing in West Akron is moderately old, with 36% of homes built before 1940, 48% before 1950, and 72% before 1960. Only 5% of homes in West Akron have been built since 2010. This number will be changing soon, however, with the recent completion of the I Promise Housing in 2021 with 40 new apartments, the construction of 89 new homes at the Residences of Good Park, and plans for the development of 30 homes on currently vacant lots located off of Rhodes Avenue.

According to data from the Summit County Auditor, 90% of 1-, 2- and 3-family properties are in very good, good, or average condition. About 5.3% of 1, 2 and 3-family properties are in fair condition (about 485 properties), which are at risk of falling into acute disrepair. About 73 homes are in poor or very poor condition and in need of immediate intervention.



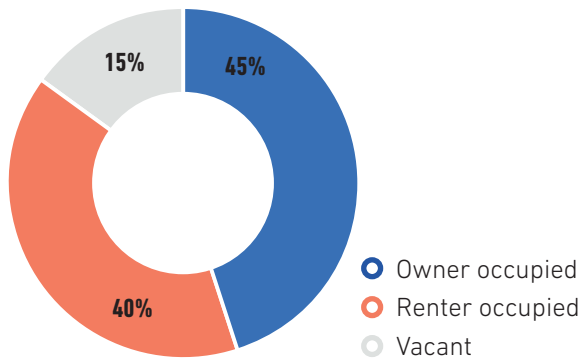
Housing Units by Type

Source: ESRI, KM Date Community Planning (2022)



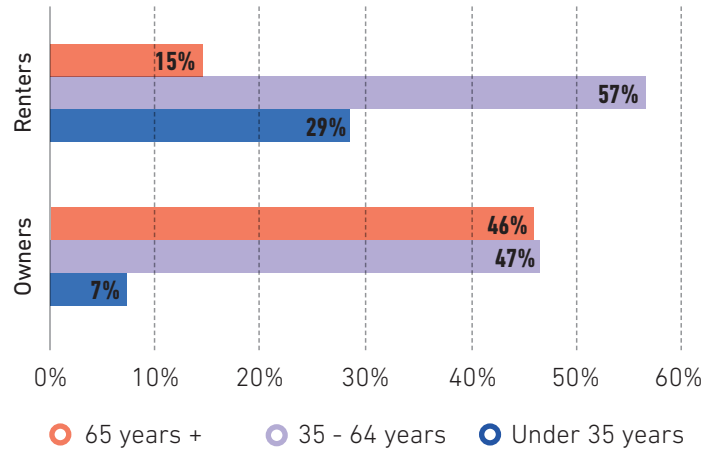
Housing Occupancy by Tenure

Source: ESRI, KM Date Community Planning (2022)



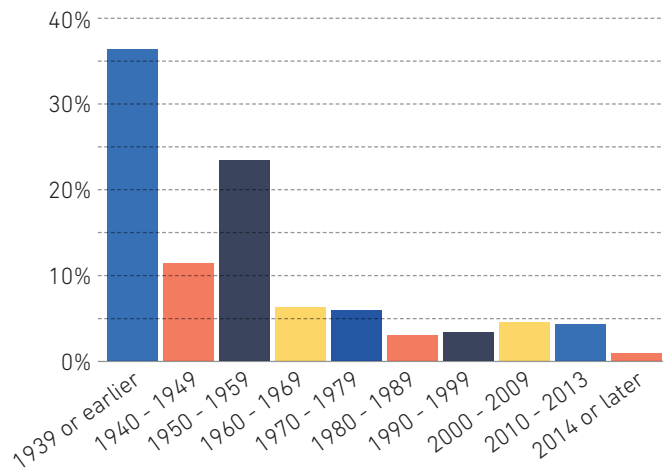
Householder by Age and Tenure

Source: ESRI, KM Date Community Planning (2022)



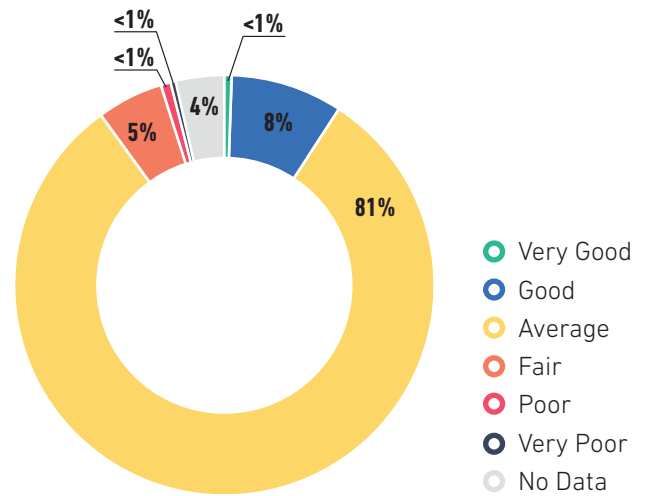
Housing Units by Year Structure Built

Source: ESRI, KM Date Community Planning (2022)



Housing Condition of 1, 2, and 3-Family Homes

Source: KM Date, Summit County Auditor



Gross Rent of Renter-Occupied Units

Source: ESRI, KM Date Community Planning (2022)



\$748
West Akron

\$796
City of Akron

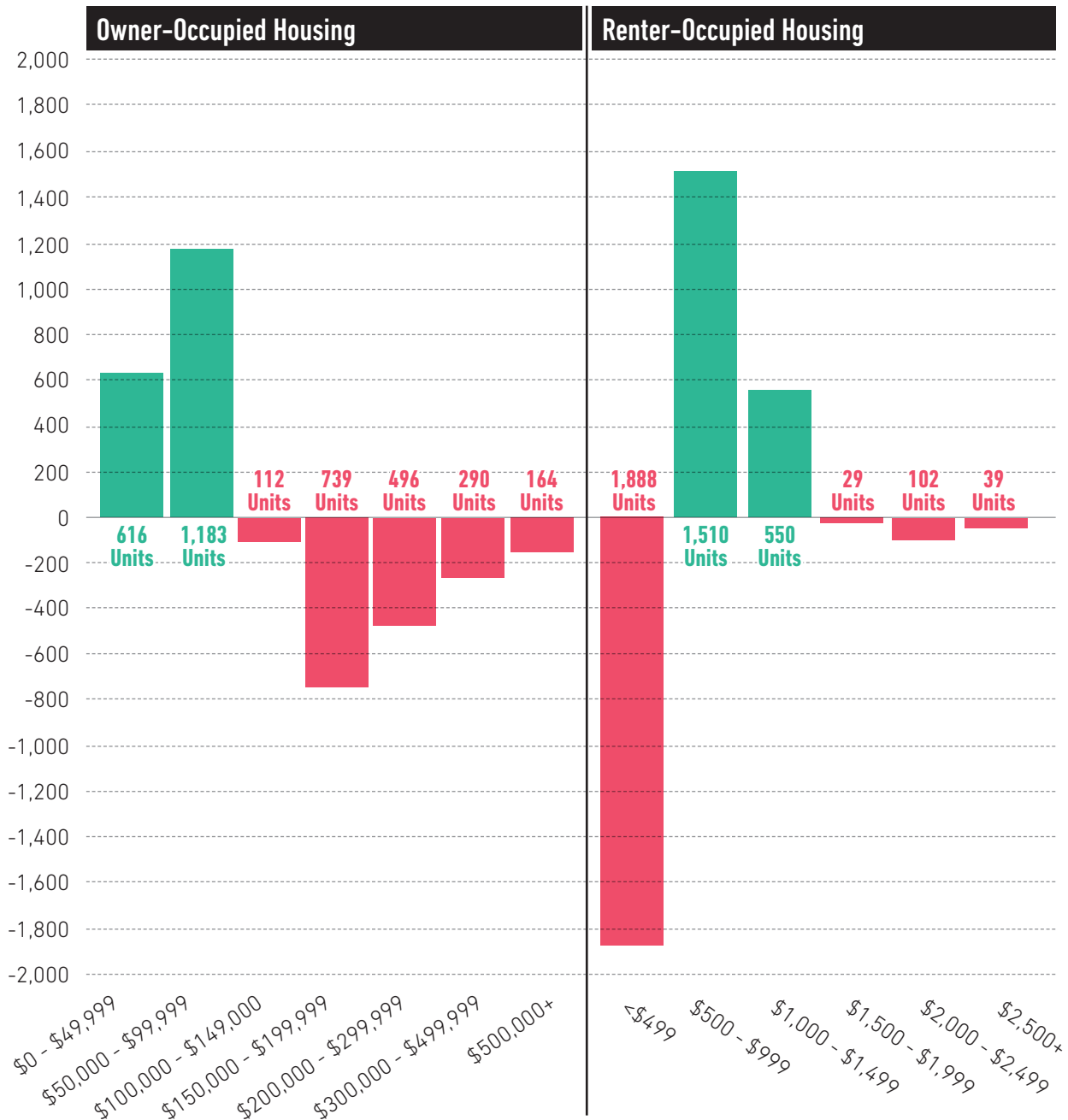
\$854
Summit Co.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

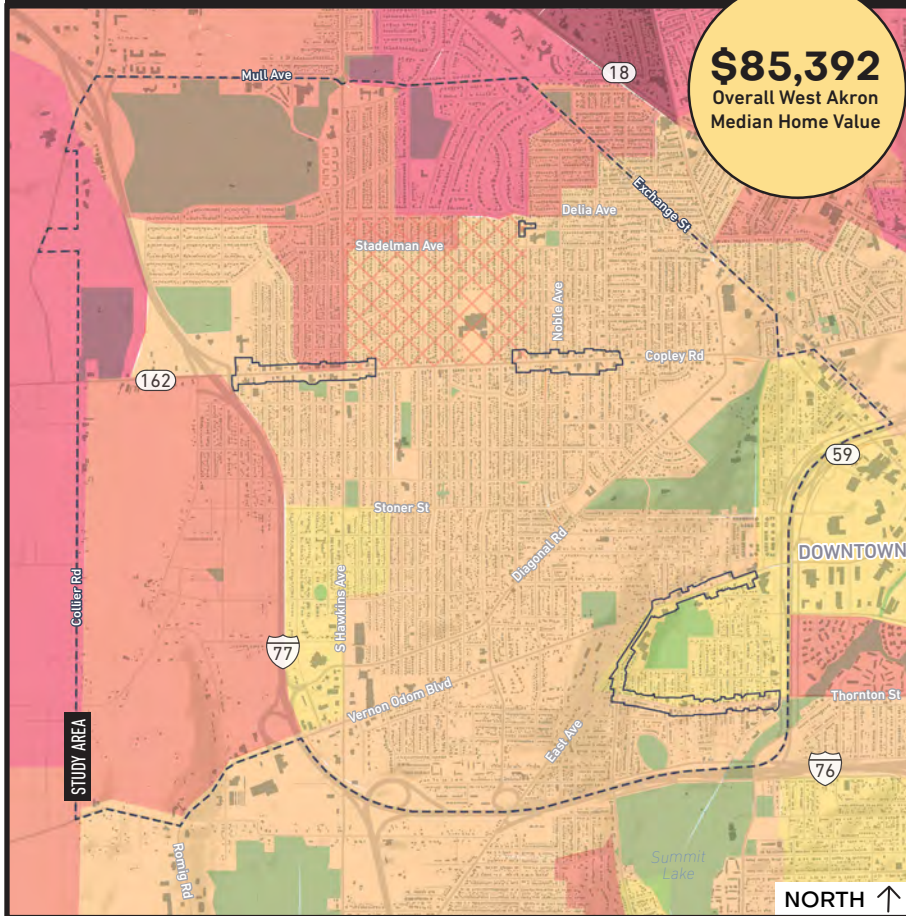
A housing affordability analysis was done, which compares household incomes to housing price points for renters and owners, based on the assumption that households can afford to spend no more than 30% of their income on housing-related costs. The analysis indicates that there is a gap in owner-occupied housing valued over \$150,000. About 1,000 households could afford housing valued higher than \$150,000 which is not available in the neighborhood. When examining rental properties, the situation changes. The gap in rental housing is for units with rents below \$500 per month. 1,800 renting households are shown to be spending more than 30% of their income on housing.

Housing Gap Analysis

Source: ESRI, KM Data Community Planning (2022)

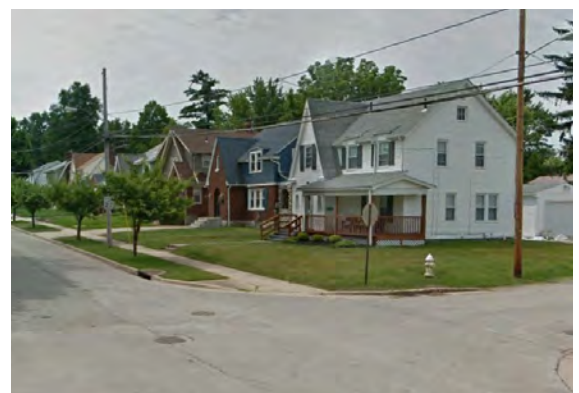


Median Home Value Map.



KEY FINDINGS

- West Akron’s ample single-family blocks with tree-lined streets and quality housing is crucial to the long term success of the neighborhood, attracting families and new homeowners, while enabling existing residents to remain.
- The homes in fair condition must receive maintenance attention to keep them as assets and those that are in poor or very poor condition should be addressed immediately. One or two homes on a block that are in states of disrepair can bring down property values on an entire block, eroding family wealth and attracting predatory corporate landlords.
- The 16% of residential properties owned by entities outside Summit County warrant attention to ensure those landlords are accountable for proper maintenance and responsiveness to tenants.
- About 1,800 households are cost-burdened, which means they’re paying more than 30% of their income on housing, an indicator of a significant need for affordable housing for that population. At the same time, demand exists for a modest amount of higher value housing to help diversify the housing stock and keep families of means in the neighborhood.



Streets & Connections

Exemplary of many pre-war urban neighborhoods, West Akron's street network is laid out in a grid pattern, which creates tight-knit, walkable residential blocks. This grid pattern is sometimes bisected diagonally by a collector or arterial streets that connects West Akron to surrounding neighborhoods, as is the case with Exchange Street, Vernon Odom Boulevard, East Avenue, and the aptly named Diagonal Road. Given their orientation, street design, and traffic volumes, these bisecting roadways can sometimes pose challenges for connectivity within the neighborhood. The other major connectivity challenge for West Akron is the presence of an interstate or freeway on many of its edges, with I-77 on the west, I-76 on the south, and Route 59 on the east. While great for regional access, they also create physical and psychological barriers, cutting off West Akron from adjacent neighborhoods. Route 59 (also referred to as the "Innerbelt"), especially, divides West Akron from Downtown Akron. The urban renewal effort to construct the Innerbelt in the 1960s and 1970s targeted and devastated Black neighborhoods, including West Akron. A portion of the Innerbelt has been vacated and is slated for redevelopment. The City of Akron is actively working on an initiative, called Reconnecting Our Community, an inclusive and equitable process to identify community preferences for the future of the vacated Innerbelt between Main Street and Exchange Street.

The map on the following pages illustrates the functional classification of roadways in the study area. Functional classification is the grouping of roads and highways into a hierarchy based on the role they play in a whole roadway network. This classification is especially important when applying for public funding for roadway projects. The functional classifications are based on definitions and standards provided by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT). Interstates and freeways are very similar and are designed with the highest levels of mobility and long-distance travel in mind. Additionally, these classifications usually include a physical barrier between directional travel lanes and access points are limited to on- and off-ramps. Principal and minor arterials serve metropolitan areas while providing a high degree of mobility. Unlike interstates and freeways, these roadways can provide access to adjacent land uses, but access is typically spaced at significant distances to reduce disruption to through travel. Major collectors gather and channel traffic from local roads to arterials. Collectors will generally have lower traffic volumes, fewer lanes, lower speed limits, and more access points than arterials. Finally, local roads represent the largest percentage of roadways in terms of mileage. They are typically designed for lower speeds and to discourage through traffic. These roadways are usually the primary access points to local developments.

Interstate



Freeway



Principal Arterial



Minor Arterial



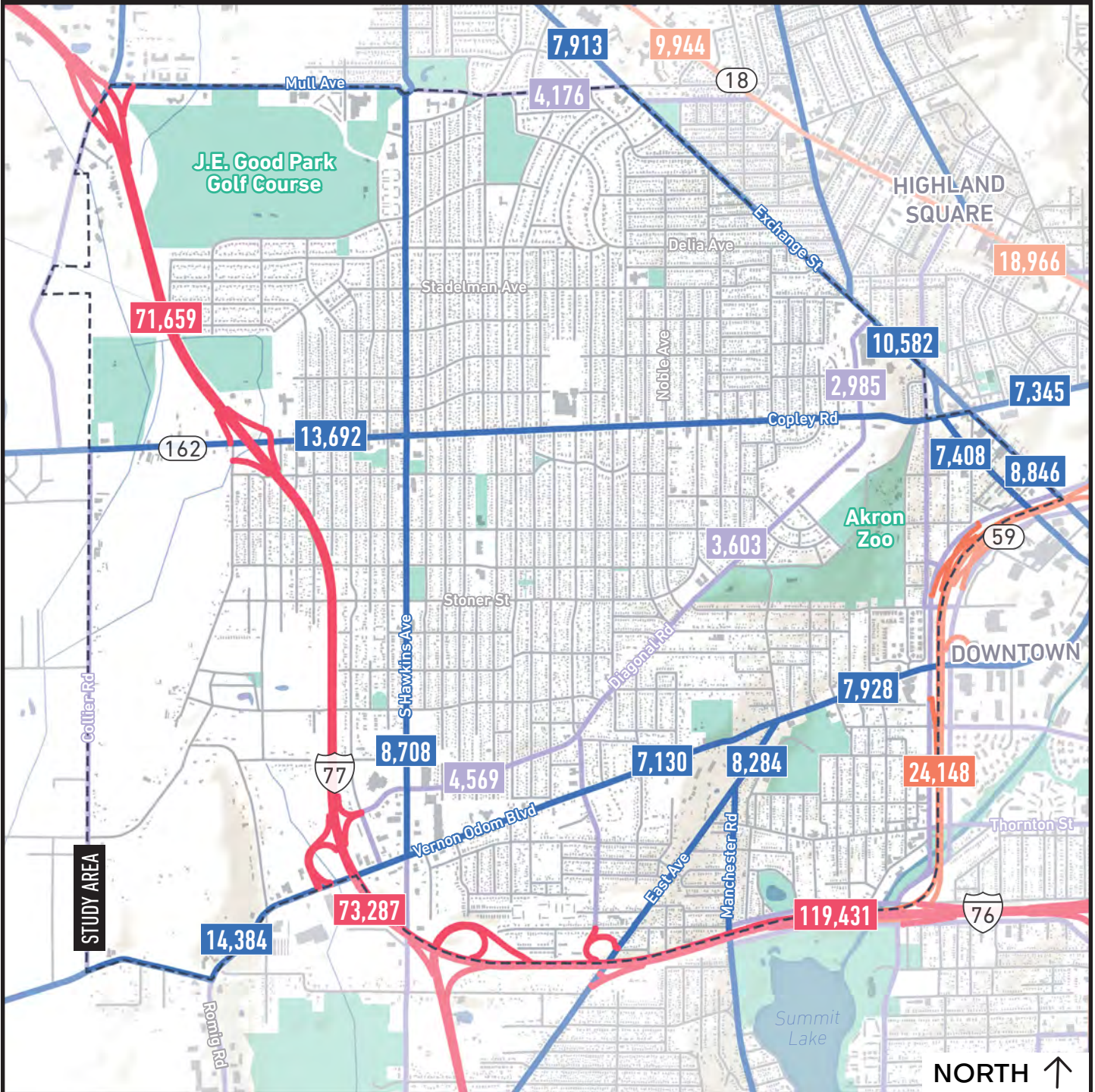
Major Collector



Local Road



Functional Roadway Classification and Traffic Count Map.



West Akron's Vehicular Traffic Patterns

The map above shows the functional classification of West Akron's roadways along with the annual average daily traffic (AADT) where available, which is an estimate of the average traffic volumes for a roadway segment for every day of an entire year. These traffic volumes will typically align with functional roadway classification, with higher traffic volumes found on interstates, freeways, and arterials and lower volumes found on collectors and local roads. For example, a 3-lane road can typically handle an AADT of 20,000. Right now, no roadways in West Akron come close to that level of daily traffic.

Legend

- Functional Classification**
- Interstate █
 - Freeway / Expressway █
 - Principal Arterial █
 - Minor Arterial █
 - Major Collector █
 - Local Road █
- Annual Average Daily Traffic ###
- Study Area Boundary

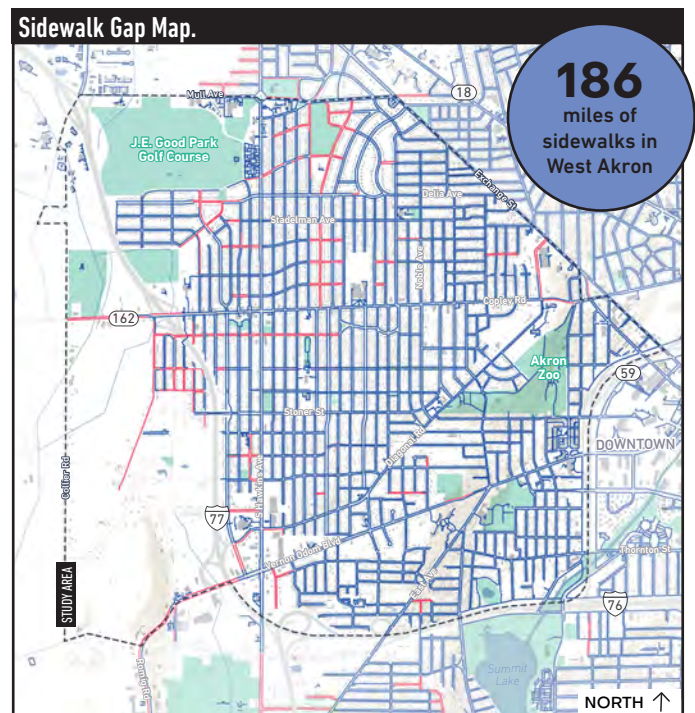
Data Source: ODOT (2022)

ACTIVE AND ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION

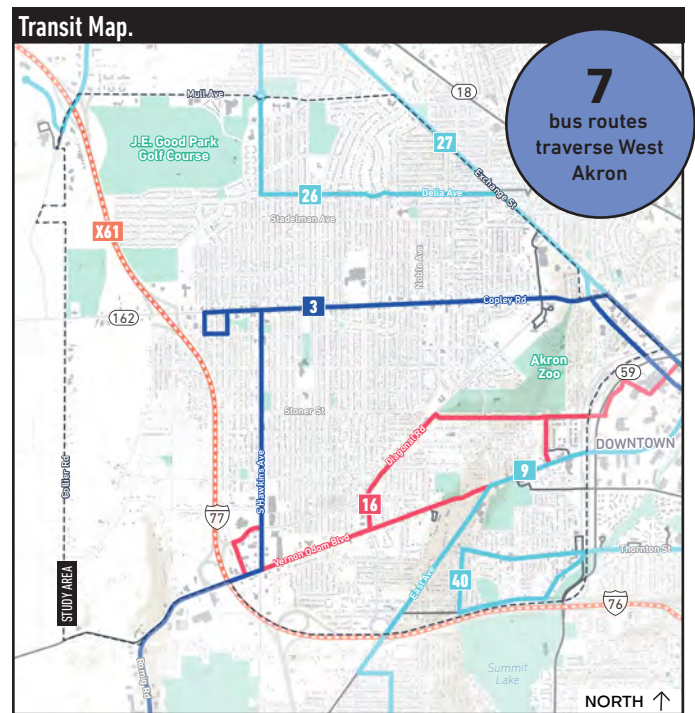
The grid street network and the age of the neighborhood also means that most streets have sidewalks on both sides, with some exceptions mostly located on the western and northern portions of the study area. The presence of sidewalks is a major factor in neighborhood walkability, in addition to other elements like sidewalk condition, lighting, perceptions of safety, the presence and safety of pedestrian crossings, curb cuts, topography, snow removal in the winter, as well as the availability and proximity of neighborhood amenities that people would walk to like parks, schools, stores, restaurants, and libraries.

The City of Akron has made some recent investments in bike infrastructure in West Akron, with the addition of bike lanes on both sides of the roadway along South Hawkins Avenue from Vernon Odom Boulevard to Mull Avenue and along Copley Road starting at St. Michaels Avenue on the west and continuing the full stretch through the study area. With these completed bike lanes, there is now a strong north to south and east to west spine that connect to much of the residential neighborhoods. A few other roadway segments in the neighborhood also have existing bike lanes, including a portion of Vernon Odom Boulevard, East Avenue, and Manchester Road through the Sherbondy Hill district. The City of Akron has some planned bike lanes that would connect some of the existing bike lanes to adjacent neighborhoods. Additionally, the City's Akron Connects Bike Plan proposed varying degrees of bike infrastructure along priority corridors throughout the city, which are also indicated on the map. Still, there are barriers to making West Akron more bike friendly, including the lack of direct routes to regional trails, the fact that most segments of bike lanes don't connect, as well as the significant disconnect between the Sherbondy Hill area and the rest of the neighborhood. Additional investments in bike infrastructure would go a long way to increase biking as a mode of transportation.

In addition to walking and biking, riding the bus is a viable transportation option in West Akron, which is supported by the fact that 27% of workers who do not or cannot drive alone to work choose to take the bus. According to METRO, there are 7 bus routes that serve West Akron. All of the lines except the number 61 bus have stops in the neighborhood.

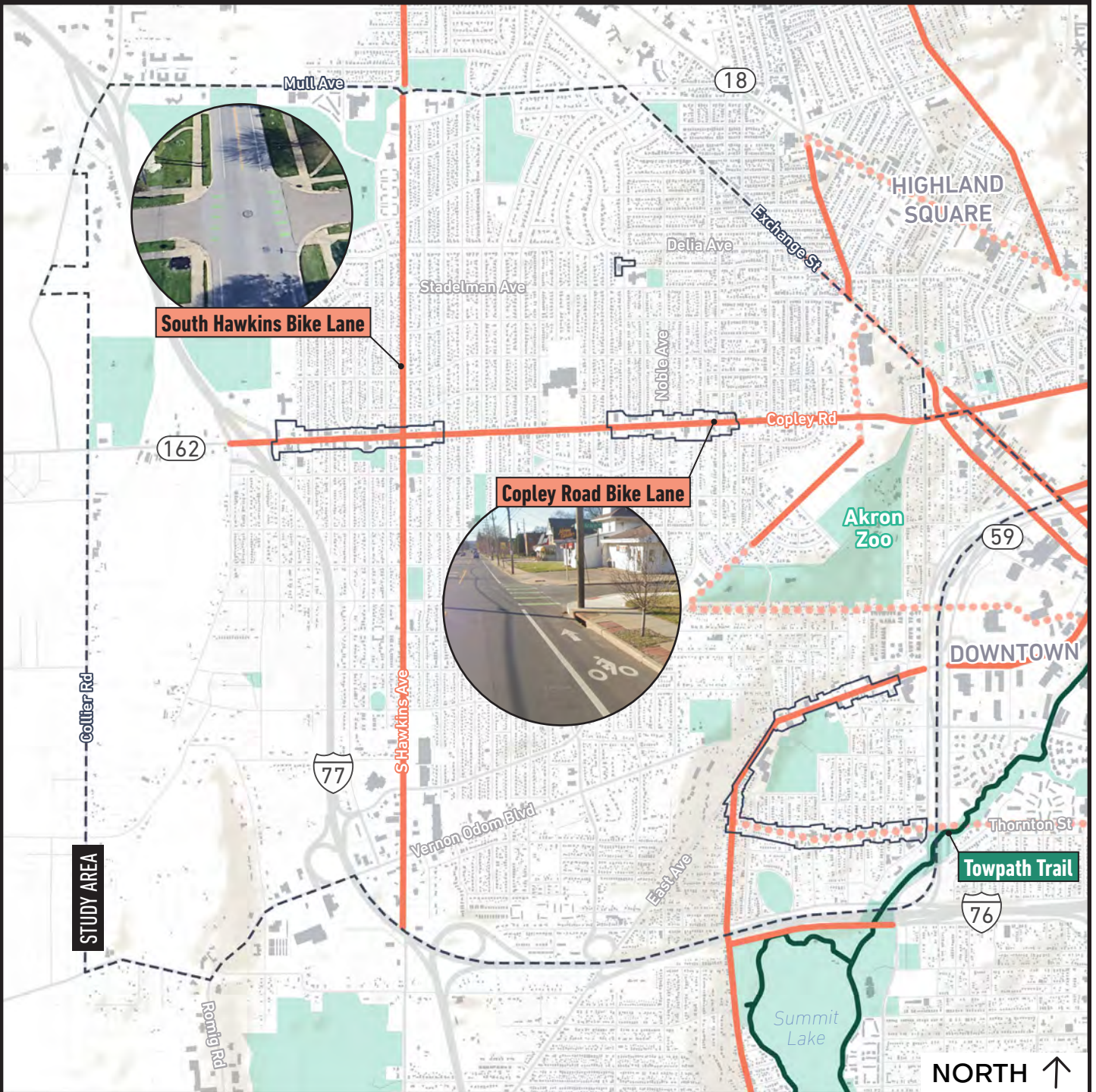


▲ The map above illustrates the city's sidewalk network, with existing sidewalks (blue) and sidewalk gaps (red). Today, there are more than 180 miles of sidewalks in West Akron. *Data Source: City of Akron (2022)*



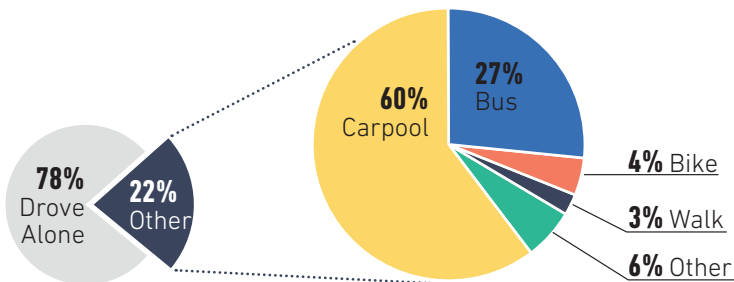
▲ The map above shows the bus routes that traverse through and/or have stops in West Akron. Many of these bus routes converge in Downtown Akron. *Data Source: METRO (2024)*

Bike Infrastructure Map.



Means of Transportation to Work for Workers Age 16+ Years

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate (2016 - 2020)



Legend

- Existing Bike Lane —
- Proposed Akron Connects Bike Infrastructure ⋯
- Multi-use Trail —
- Parks & Green Spaces ■
- Great Streets Boundaries
- Study Area Boundary

Data Source: City of Akron (2022)

Parks & Public Spaces

West Akron has 21 public parks that total 172 acres. These parks range in type from large, regional sports complexes, like the Copley Road Soccer Complex, Lane Field Park, or Erie Island Park to community parks like Schneider Park or Perkins Woods to neighborhood pocket parks like Maple Grove Park or Aquae Park. The 172 acres of public parks includes the outdoor spaces at Lawton Street and Crouse Community Learning Centers, but does not include the 180-acre Good Park Golf Course or the Akron Zoo since those facilities require entrance fees. A couple parks and recreation facilities have also recently been improved or are currently being improved, including Kerr Park, Cadillac Park, Maple Valley East Parklet, Perkins Pool, and the Ed Davis Community Center. A walking path was also recently constructed at Schneider Park.

A walkshed analysis was performed to determine physical park access. This walkshed analysis involved mapping public access points to all the public parks in the study area and then generating a 10-minute walkshed based on those access points. The results from the analysis indicate that 86% of residents in the West Akron study area are located within a 10-minute walk of a public park. Compared to regional peers, West Akron performs very well in this regard. This analysis, however, only captures the physical access of parks and not other factors that add up to a park's accessibility, including quality and availability of park amenities, safety, lighting, ADA accessibility, and other related factors that may need additional improvement or investment.



Kerr Park



Maple Valley East Parklet



Schneider Park



Cadillac Park



Lane Field Park

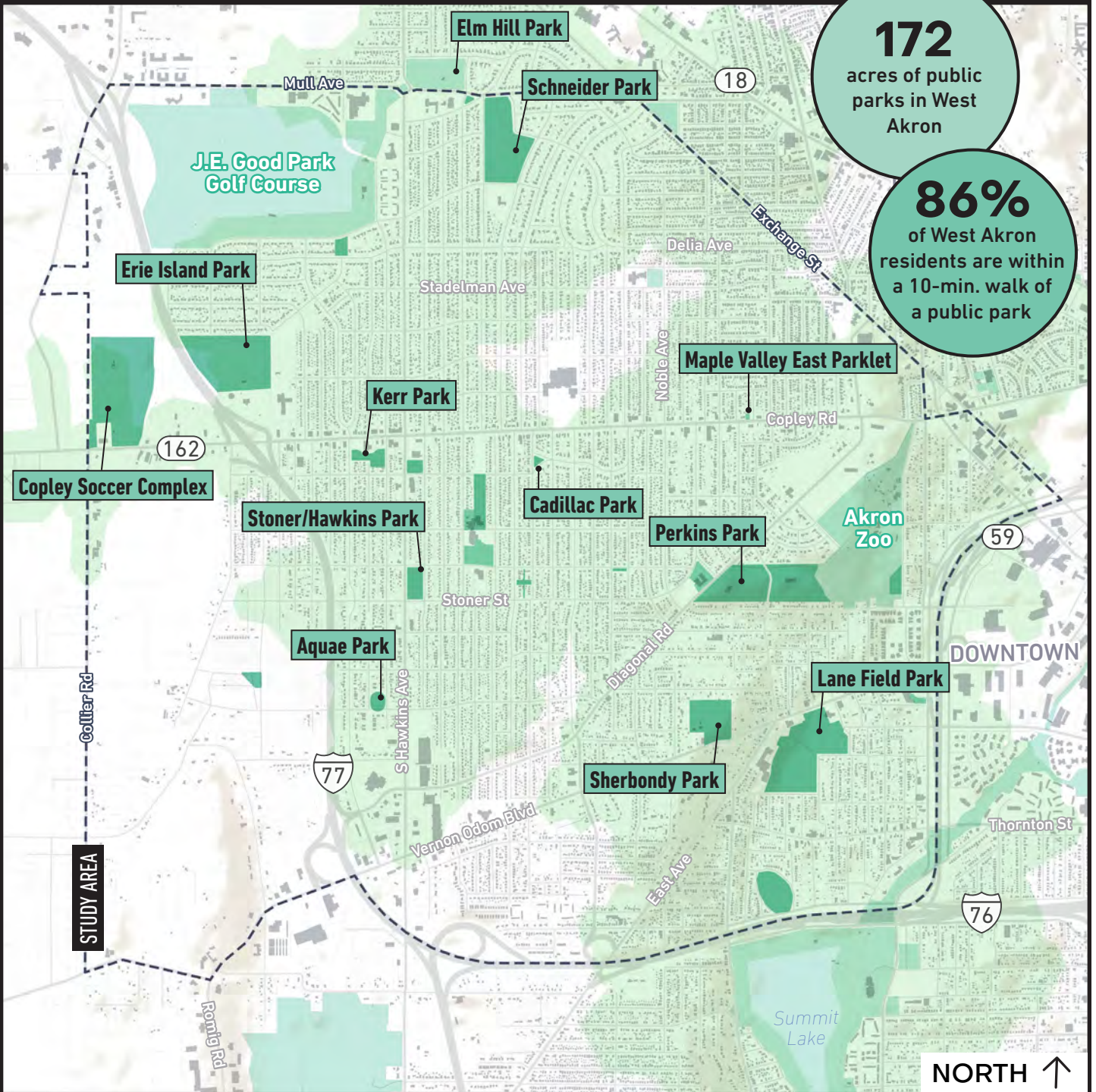


Perkins Pool



Ed Davis Community Center

Park Access Map.



172
acres of public
parks in West
Akron

86%
of West Akron
residents are within
a 10-min. walk of
a public park

Percentage of Residents Within a 10-Minute Walk of a Park

Source: Trust for Public Land ParkScore Index (2022)

West Akron	86%
Barberton	82%
City of Akron	79%
Cuyahoga Falls	79%

Legend

- Public Parks
- 10-min. Park Walkshed
- Buildings
- Ponds, Lakes, & Rivers
- Study Area Boundary

Data Source: City of Akron (2022)

COMMUNITY

ENGAGEMENT

A NEIGHBORHOOD-LED PLAN

The West Akron Neighborhood Plan represents the shared voices and collective vision of the community. The planning process emphasized meaningful input through a number of methods—both in-person and digital. This chapter summarizes the outreach and engagement opportunities conducted as well as the results of those efforts.

The Planning Team used the following methods and tools to gather input and feedback throughout the process:

- ▶ 4 Steering Committee meetings
- ▶ Stakeholder interviews
- ▶ 3 Circle Talks
- ▶ 1 Community Update meeting
- ▶ Online and paper surveys



Steering Committee

A Steering Committee of 22 community members was formed to guide and advise the Planning Team throughout the process. Members included representatives from the City of Akron, faith leaders, and business associations.

The committee was a critical sounding board for this plan, providing feedback and ideas to ensure the plan content reflects the values of stakeholders and the West Akron community. The Steering Committee met four times throughout the process at key milestones.

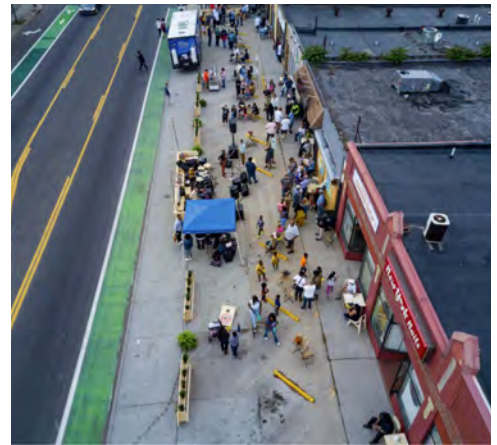
- Meeting #1 | October 13, 2022 | Plan Kick-off
- Meeting #2 | March 9, 2023 | Plan Findings and Draft Framework
- Meeting #3 | June 29, 2023 | Draft Plan Recommendations
- Meeting #4 | February 8, 2024 | Draft Plan Review

Stakeholder Interviews

From November 2022 through March 2023, the Planning Team conducted 28 interviews with community stakeholders. The interviewees included longtime and more recent residents, business owners, property owners, faith-based leaders, developers, real estate agents, elected officials and government employees, school leaders, and representatives from community groups. Questions were focused on neighborhood assets and challenges, and aspirations for the future of West Akron. The following is a brief summary of the interview findings; a full summary report is included in the Appendix.

NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS

- People who are dedicated with strong skills and the will to improve the neighborhood
- Neighborhood block clubs
- Diversity of the neighborhood, while still preserving the Black legacy of West Akron
- Small, family-run businesses, especially restaurants, beauty stores, and barber shops
- Residential character, including tree-lined streets, good housing stock, and good upkeep of homes
- Churches and places of worship are a major asset
- Parks, community centers, pools, and the Akron Zoo
- Buchtel CLC is a major source of pride for people and has a large alumni network that is an untapped asset
- Cleveland Clinic Akron General Hospital, which is nearby, but not very well-connected to the neighborhood
- Former Rankin Elementary School, with its auditorium and stage
- Towpath Trail with its connection to the neighborhood



NEIGHBORHOOD CHALLENGES

- Poor condition of commercial areas, including lack of property maintenance by some business and property owners
- Youth related challenges, including infant mortality, low birth weight, third grade reading levels, and older youth's needs for direction, mentoring, and training
- Poor health and individual outcomes due to social determinants of health
- Lack of grocery store with fresh produce and healthy food
- Consideration for neighborhood's wants and desires by the City and philanthropic organizations
- Real and perceived personal safety concerns
- Lack of awareness of resources and services
- Lack of coordination between various groups and organizations
- Innerbelt's destruction of vibrant Black neighborhoods and commercial areas
- Limited funding and resources
- Poor condition of rental housing
- Proliferation of lower quality commercial establishments, including liquor stores, drive-thrus, and dollar stores

STAKEHOLDERS' BIG IDEAS

Stakeholders discussed their big ideas and aspirations for the neighborhood at length. Ideas discussed include the following:

- Restoring vibrancy to the Copley Road commercial area
- Enhancing regional attraction with a catalytic investment
- Developing commercial opportunities in the Vernon Odom Boulevard corridor with major employers
- Create a new vibrant local retail streetscape in the Sherbondy Hill District
- Develop relationships with anchor institutions, like the Akron Zoo and hospitals
- Develop a community-driven multi-purpose center
- Initiate a community development investment fund
- Develop and implement a comprehensive marketing, public relations, and information approach that serves residents, businesses, and outsiders
- Strategically stabilize neighborhoods and address housing needs
- Strategically organize collaborative community efforts
- Improve parks and recreation opportunities
- Improve neighborhood signage
- Strategically spur more investment



Circle Talks

The Planning Team also utilized dialogue circles called “Circle Talks” to engage a broader cross-section of the community. These Circle Talks were facilitated by neighborhood organization, Project Ujima to build awareness of the planning process and generate ideas for the plan itself. Circle Talks took place in person with the option for virtual attendance, as well.

- Circle Talk #1 | December 15, 2022, 5:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
- Circle Talk #2 | January 21, 2023, 10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
- Circle Talk #3 | September 20, 2023, 6:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

IDEAS THAT EMERGED FROM CIRCLE TALKS:

- Develop more Black-owned businesses
- Increase homeownership with educational programs
- Generate financial support for small businesses
- Fix and increase public lighting
- Build an intergenerational recreation or community center
- Bolster housing rehabilitation efforts
- Empower the community through neighborhood associations
- Involve youth in community outreach
- Increase employment opportunities
- Plant more community gardens
- Improve perceptions of safety



Public Survey

A survey was created and distributed to the community through email blasts, social media promotions, and promotional materials distributed to locations around the neighborhood (libraries, schools, businesses). A paper version of the survey was also available and was distributed to apartment buildings in the neighborhood. The results of the survey are depicted on the following pages.

► My favorite things about West Akron are...

n = 78

1	Sense of community and community pride
2	Proximity to needs and amenities
3	The people
4	Churches and places of worship
5	Character and diversity of housing

“ Close schools for kids to walk to ”

“ Community leaders that live, work or have businesses there ”

“ Historic and diverse neighborhoods ”

“ The westside has a spiritual of togetherness about it ”

“ Opportunities for families: (Zoo, parks, pool, schools, churches, etc.) ”

“ Safety on Copley Road ”

“ I would like to see properties and the city streets cleaner ”

“ Need to have more things for the youth to do ”

“ Would like to have a reliable grocery store on Copley Rd. instead of the numerous dollar stores ”

“ Wrap around resources for our youth/parents ”

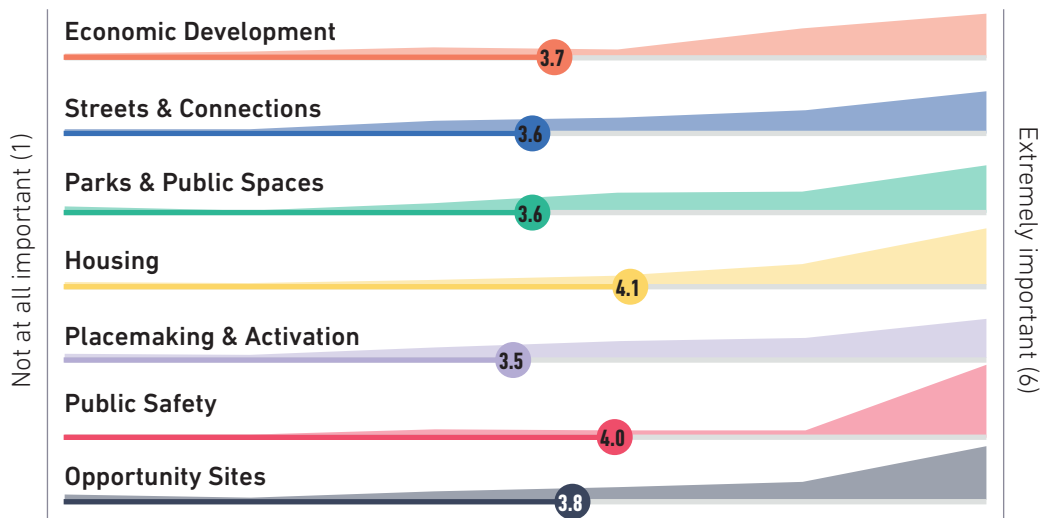
► Things I would change or improve about West Akron are...

n = 80

1	Improved sense of safety / reduce crime
2	More retail and business development
3	Housing upkeep and repair
4	Housing affordability
5	Better community pride
6	Improved streets and public spaces

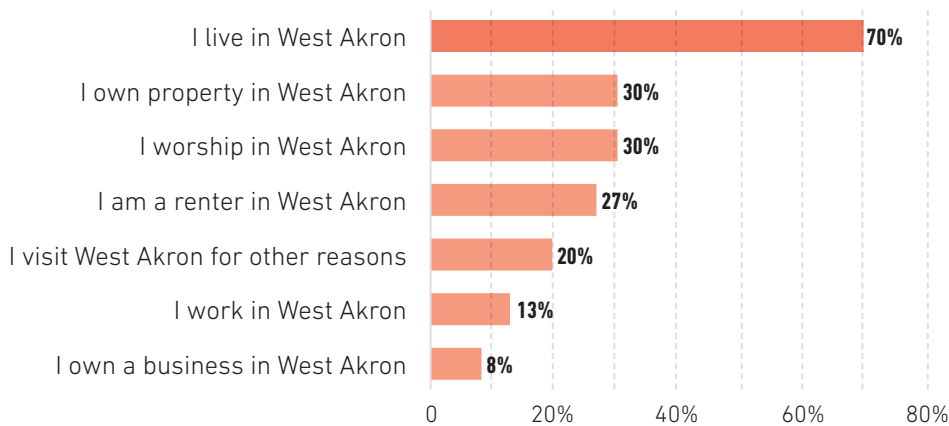
► **Please rank the importance of the following potential components for the plan to address.**

n = 87



► **Please select all that describe you.**

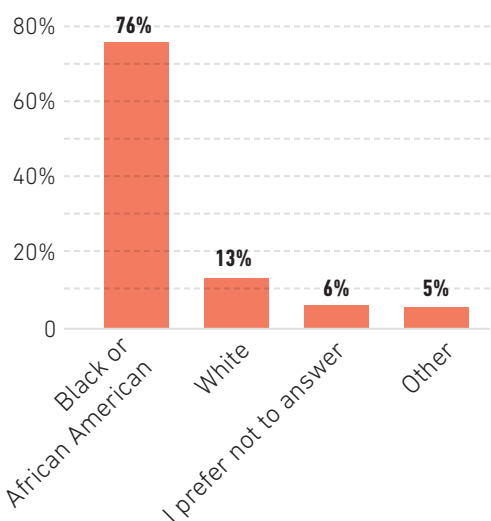
n = 86



- “Other” Reasons**
- Go shopping
 - Go to restaurants
 - Graduate of Buchtel

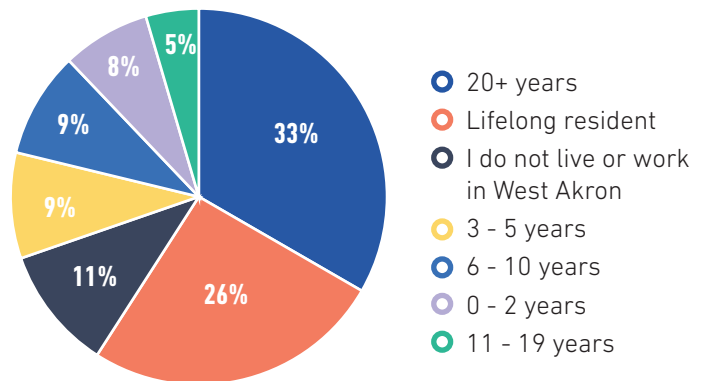
► **How would you describe your race? Select all that apply.**

n = 83



► **How long have you lived or worked in West Akron?**

n = 66



BIG IDEAS FOR

WEST AKRON

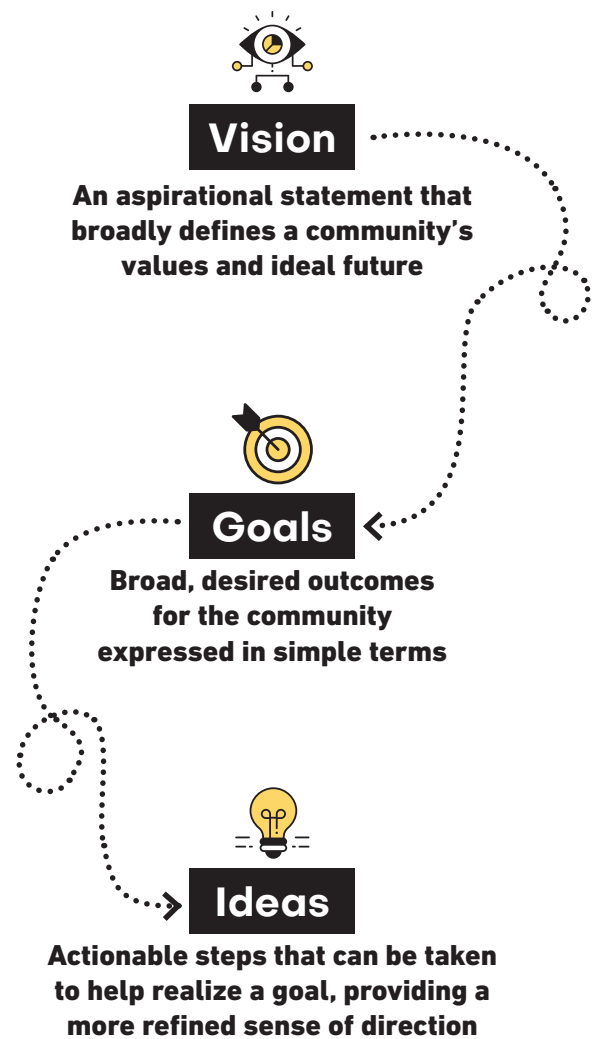
PLAN FRAMEWORK

Through this planning process, neighbors and stakeholders have come together to collaboratively plan for West Akron's future. The recommendations put forth in this plan are representative of the community's values, ideas, and priorities. Many of the sentiments described in this chapter were derived directly from community input.

This chapter presents the recommendations for West Akron: a collection of projects, policies, and programs that, collectively, will guide the community toward its goals for the future. This plan follows the following framework:

- ▶ **Vision:** An aspirational statement that broadly defines a community's values and ideal future.
- ▶ **Goal:** A broad, desired outcome for the community expressed in simple terms.
- ▶ **Idea:** An actionable strategy to achieve the plan goals, broken down into concrete projects, programs, or policies.
- ▶ **Focus Areas:** Proposed improvements for several geographic areas around the neighborhood that show how the ideas presented in this plan can be incorporated into the built environment. These focus areas are incorporated into their own plan chapter starting on page 66.

Throughout this chapter, the ideas are explained through written descriptions as well as through example imagery, case studies, map diagrams, and renderings.



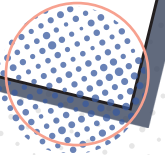
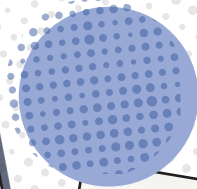
VISION

West Akron is transformed into a **vibrant, safe, peaceful, and joy-filled neighborhood** that people are proud to call “home”. People from across the neighborhood and city flock to **the neighborhood business districts, where locally-owned and Black-owned businesses are flourishing. Housing in the neighborhood is safe, stable, and affordable** and opportunities for homeownership abound.

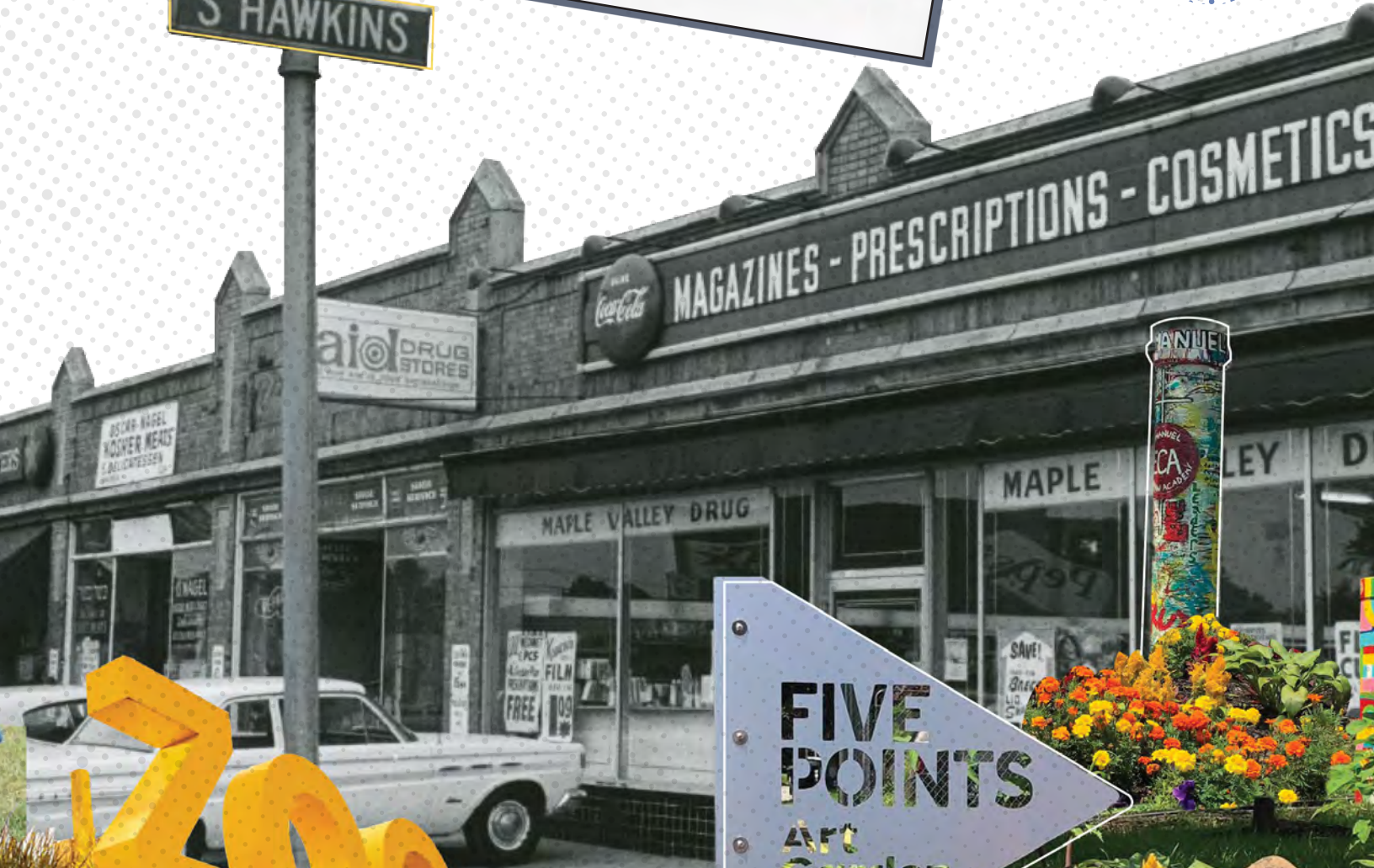
Well-being is easy to sustain because resources are abundant and accessible, so neighbors are able to meet their needs and achieve their dreams. West Akron is a place with a **strong sense of community and pride** where people care for their neighbors, their property, and the environment.

The neighborhood offers a **supportive environment for all generations to thrive**—youth are nurtured and successful, families can grow, and older adults are cared for and respected as they age.





COPLEY
S HAWKINS



**FIVE
POINTS**
ART
Garden



GOALS

The following goals arose from the community's aspirations. These are broad, overarching statements that guided the development of plan recommendations, while still being specific to the West Akron neighborhood.

**Boost Community
Pride**

Build Black Wealth

**Create Spaces for
Joy and Connection**

**Reimagine Safety
and Well-being**

**Build Trust between
the City and
Community**

**Amplify
Neighborhood
Progress**

10 BIG IDEAS

The recommendations for the West Akron Neighborhood Plan are organized into 10 big ideas that arose from the community's input. Together, these big ideas provide a roadmap for shaping the future of West Akron. Nested in each of the big ideas are specific strategies and actions that Progressive Alliance CDC, the City of Akron, and other partners can implement to achieve the community's aspirations.

1

**Foster Vibrant
Neighborhood Districts**

2

Announce West Akron

3

**Grow Local
Businesses and Jobs**

4

**Support Housing
Opportunity for All**

5

**Cultivate
Neighborhood Third
Places**

6

**Activate Parks and
Public Spaces**

7

Create Safe Streets

8

Expand Food Access

9

**Heal the Route 59
Divide**

10

**Build Capacity to
Realize Plan Ideas**

Idea 1: Foster Vibrant Neighborhood Districts

One of the major themes that arose through community input is the desire to improve the aesthetics of the public realm of West Akron. This idea extends to property maintenance, beautification, landscaping, building facades, and more. This idea is highly aligned with the goals of the City of Akron's Great Streets initiative, which seeks to focus beautification and placemaking investments in Akron's neighborhood business districts, where the impact can be most felt.

Identify properties for façade improvement programs and grants. In coordination with property owners, businesses, and the Great Streets initiative, Progressive Alliance CDC should identify properties in the three neighborhood business districts that would be good candidates for facade improvement or the matching Great Streets façade grant. Progressive Alliance CDC can be a conduit for improvements, providing technical assistance to property owners and supporting fundraising efforts to match the grant dollars. A first step in this work would be to assess building conditions in the neighborhood business districts, creating a prioritized list of buildings in need of façade improvements.

Expand streetscape and placemaking improvements throughout the districts. The City of Akron has made investments in the Copley Road streetscape, adding a bike lane, pedestrian crossings and signage, and planters. Additionally, a Better Block event was held in the Maple Valley District, focused on Copley Road between South Hawkins Avenue and Nome Avenue. Elements of this event included removal of parking in front of buildings to create a public space with parklets, café seating, and space for performers. The success of Better Block indicates a need to make some permanent placemaking changes.

In the Maple Valley District, for example, the public realm along Copley Road is very inconsistent, with some blocks even having a continuous curb cut and very little streetscaping whatsoever. Additionally, the presence of tree lawns and street trees varies from block to block and some street tree species are inappropriate for this context. Parking improvements, including well-lit parking areas, public parking signage, and district parking would go a long way. The diagram below illustrates potential streetscape and placemaking improvements along Copley Road in the Maple Valley District, but these same ideas can be applied to the East Copley and Sherbondy Hill Districts, too. See page 66 for a more detailed look at these district improvements.



Examine adopting a form-based zoning code in the neighborhood business districts.

A zoning code is a legal mechanism used to regulate property use, building size and placement, setbacks, and open space on any given parcel. The regulations for a particular property are determined by a combination of the Zoning Map and the corresponding standards in the Zoning Code. Traditional zoning in many cities focuses mainly on how the property is used. Often, this style of zoning results in the segregation of land uses, while neglecting the quality of the built environment. Akron can work to modernize its code to integrate more form-based zoning approaches, which focus on physical form as the organizing principle. According to the Form-Based Codes Institute, form-based zoning typically includes the following key elements:

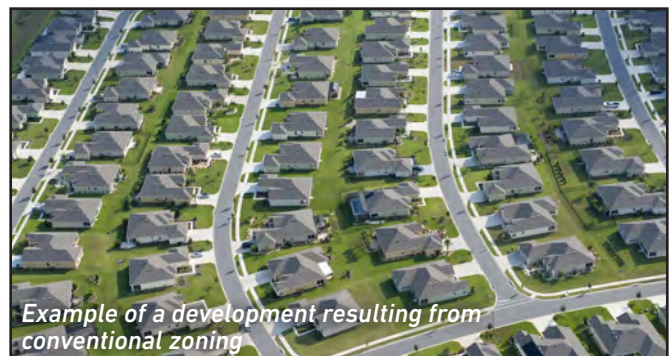
1. **Regulating Plan:** a plan or map of the regulated area designating where different building form standards apply.
2. **Public Standards:** specify the standards for elements in the public realm, such as sidewalks, travel lanes, on-street parking, street trees, furnishings, and more.
3. **Building Standards:** regulations controlling the features, configurations, and functions of buildings that define and shape the public realm.
4. **Administration:** a clearly defined and streamlined application and project review process.
5. **Definitions:** a glossary to ensure the precise use of technical terms.

In addition to these key elements, form-based zoning can also include standards for architecture, landscaping, signage, and natural resource protection. A form-based approach is especially important in the neighborhood business districts of West Akron as it will help to facilitate the types of changes desired in these areas, including mixed-use and infill development, diversification of housing (including missing middle housing) and business types, a focus on the public realm and pedestrian experience. Case studies on the following page illustrate how other Ohio cities are implementing form-based zoning.

Comparison of Form-Based and Conventional Zoning.

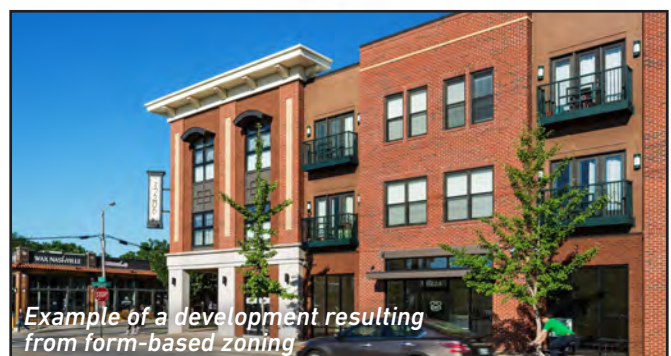
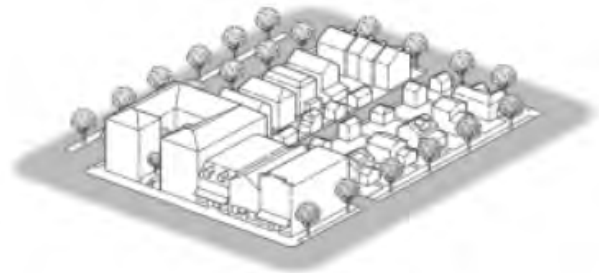
Conventional Zoning

Specifies land use, density, FAR (floor area ratio), setbacks, parking requirements, maximum building heights by zoning district.



Form-Based Zoning

Specifies street and building types (or mix of types), build-to lines, number of floors, and percentage of built site frontage.



Source: Form-Based Codes Institute

CASE STUDIES



CINCINNATI FORM-BASED CODE

CINCINNATI, OH

Cincinnati's effort to implement form-based code across the city is recognized for its innovative neighborhood-led approach to adopting new regulations, allowing change to occur incrementally and voluntarily. The form-based code establishes three sets of guiding principles targeted at the City, Neighborhood, and Block and Building level; these guiding principles outline the development goals that neighborhoods should meet when applying the form-based code.

Cincinnati's form-based code identifies four transects that characterize the different urban development patterns found throughout the city; desired development forms are defined within these transects to regulate the style and appearance of future development, while providing general use guidelines for each transect.

This approach to implementing form-based code ensures the look and feel of neighborhoods is the top priority, and the neighborhood-led implementation of the code allows for form-based code to develop organically over time across the city. Residents and neighborhoods were heavily involved in a public engagement process to ensure the revised zoning code meets the expectations and desires of different neighborhoods across Cincinnati.

ZONE IN COLUMBUS

COLUMBUS, OH

In 2024, the city of Columbus unveiled a zoning code proposal that targets primary commercial corridors throughout the city. The proposal would modernize zoning for over 12,000 parcels along Columbus's most active corridors to promote denser development and encourage mixed-use districts.

The six new proposed zoning districts have a correlated set of rules and guidelines that regulate the form of buildings, including increased height maximums, building setbacks, window to wall ratios, and on-site open space requirements. These new guidelines focus less on the use of a building and more on how it contributes to a vibrant and attractive district. One of the primary goals of pivoting to form-based zoning codes in the city is to allow for more housing development along major thoroughfares where people have access to jobs and transit.

The code also eliminates parking minimums and provides density bonuses for developers who incorporate a minimum number of affordable units to further promote density in these new zoning districts.



Strengthen code enforcement throughout the neighborhood.

Property maintenance was a major challenge that arose through the community engagement process. Neighbors expressed frustration that many commercial property owners along highly visible corridors, like Copley Road, do not adequately maintain or clean their properties. That responsibility then falls to dedicated citizens, business owners, and the Maple Valley Merchants Business Association. Similarly, while rare, there are also some residential properties scattered throughout the neighborhood that are lacking in property maintenance and bring down the quality of the surrounding blocks. These are issues that should predominantly be addressed through code enforcement. Code enforcement, however, does not always have to be punitive; it can also be proactive.

In its housing strategy document, *Planning to Grow 2.0*, the city includes a recommendation to develop more proactive city-wide code enforcement by reviewing related ordinances, adopting new legislation, and evaluating penalties for non-compliance with the City's rental registry program. While these recommendations were written with residential properties in mind, they could also apply to commercial properties. Additionally, the City and Progressive Alliance CDC should take a "customer service" approach to code enforcement, especially with local homeowners and small landlords, to connect them with housing repair funding (see page 49) and best practices for maintenance. Finally, some cities have implemented "good landlord programs" to reward landlords who are identified based on good inspections, transparent rental registration, and good communication with the City by lowering fees and adopting less frequent inspections.

Establish an annual festival to be hosted in one of the Great Streets districts in West Akron. This event should be community-focused and celebrate West Akron. This could be a multi-day festival that attract people from across the neighborhood, city, and region to West Akron. Ideally, this event would take place within or near one of the Great Streets districts to encourage people to visit the local businesses and spend their money in the neighborhood. Organizing this event would also be a great way to build cross-sector and cross-organizational collaboration, bringing together community groups, business owners, faith leaders, and others to make the event successful. There are many examples of successful events like this across the country, including music festivals, food-related events, arts and culture festivals, block parties, and festivals centered around holidays. One such example, the Sidewalk Festival in Detroit, is highlighted in the case study to the right.

Some key considerations for festival planning include permits to block off streets to vehicular traffic, parking or other transportation needs, food and drink vendors, volunteer recruitment, digital and print promotions to drive attendance, photo opportunities at the event, and other entertainment options.

CASE STUDY



SIDEWALK FESTIVAL DETROIT, MI

In the heart of the Historic Old Redford neighborhood, the Sidewalk Festival exists in order to advance public life and establish a strong social infrastructure through arts, culture, design, and collaboration. Central to the initiative is the deliberate recruitment of local artists and youth projects, injecting authenticity, and community spirit into the festival. The ultimate goal is to shift people's perspectives about what to expect in Detroit, fostering an environment where creativity, expression, and celebration coalesce to redefine the narrative of this historic neighborhood. This remarkable organization is characterized by site-specific performance and installation art seamlessly integrated into alleys, gardens, storefronts, courtyards, parking lots, and streets, transcending the confines of traditional stages. Additionally, by highlighting the transformation of local spaces and utilizing a collaborative planning approach, the Sidewalk Festival is able to ensure that the rich tapestry of small businesses in the area are preserved and enhanced, thereby maximizing festival opportunities.

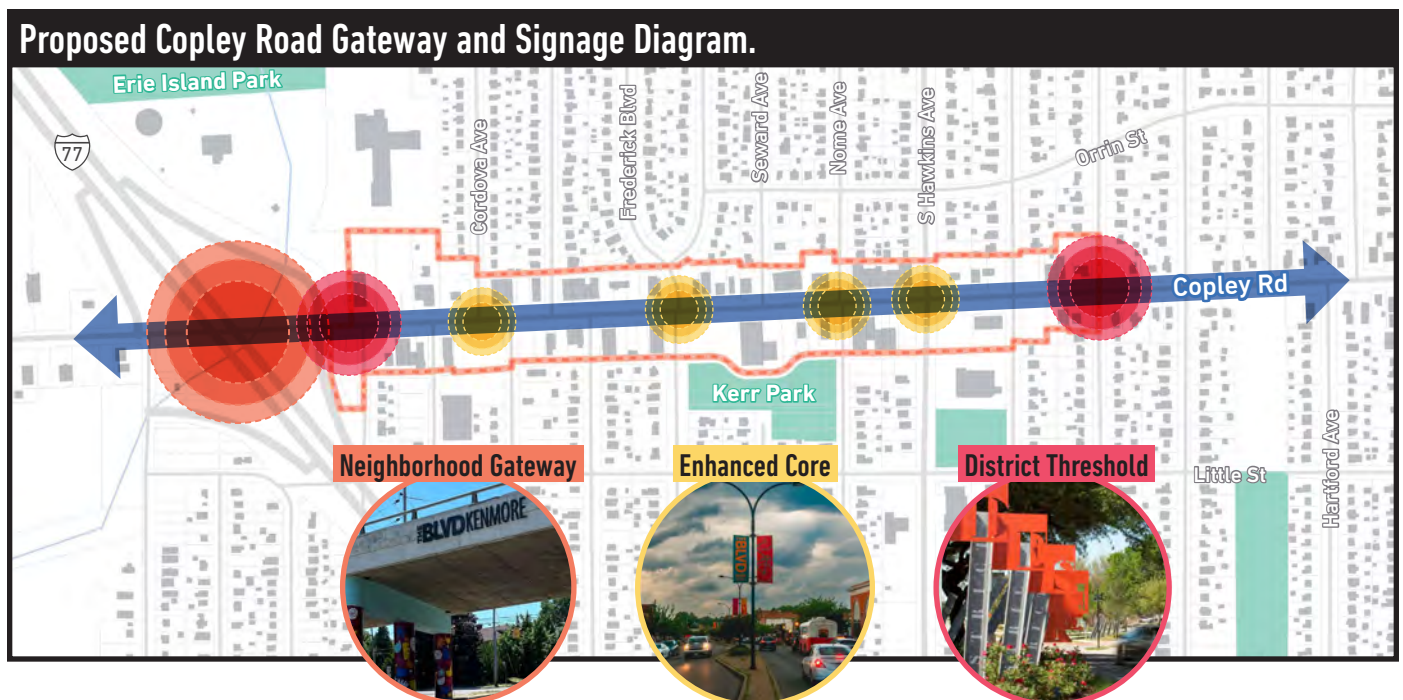
Idea 2: Announce West Akron

West Akron encompasses a large portion of the City of Akron and is comprised of a mosaic of distinctive neighborhoods, commercial corridors, and destinations. During this process, the planning team discovered differing definitions of “West Akron”—for some West Akron is synonymous with the school feeder pattern for Buchtel High School, for others it is very much related to the Copley Road corridor, and for others it is representative of Black Akron. Announcing West Akron is about telling the stories of the neighborhood through communication and through the built environment.

Create a cohesive brand that showcases West Akron’s unique identity. According to NeighborWorks, a neighborhood’s brand is what or how people think of a neighborhood (NeighborWorks America, 2015). A brand for West Akron would allow for sharing and celebrating the story of the neighborhood and the diverse community and experiences that can be found there. In conjunction with the other tangible neighborhood improvements described in this plan, a brand can also serve to change and influence perceptions about the neighborhood, attracting further investment.

Develop a marketing campaign to promote West Akron locally and regionally. Once a neighborhood brand is established, it is important to get the word out to target audiences that are defined during the branding exercise. This could be locals in other Akron neighborhoods and suburban areas, workers in Downtown Akron, the alumni diaspora of Buchtel High School who might live in other cities, people looking to make day trips from the greater northeast Ohio area, and others.

Highlight West Akron’s brand in the built environment through neighborhood gateways, signage, and other creative installations. The ultimate ideal for a neighborhood brand is to be incorporated through graphics, signage, and other creative installations in the built environment to announce the neighborhood to people traveling by vehicle, foot, or pedal. This could include signage at neighborhood gateways, light pole banners installed in the cores of the Great Streets districts in West Akron, and pedestrian-scale sculptural installations at the major thresholds to the Great Streets districts. This idea could also include additional murals to tell the story of West Akron on empty building walls, other types of public art created by local artists, or storytelling signage at important neighborhood landmarks. An example of how this idea could be applied to the Maple Valley Great Street District is shown in the diagram below.



Idea 3: Grow Local Businesses and Jobs

Today, West Akron has limited job opportunities directly in the neighborhood, though it is very accessible to Downtown Akron and all the jobs there. Attracting more job opportunities in the neighborhood is key to building a healthy local economy and retaining youth and talent in the neighborhood. Similarly, local businesses are essential to a neighborhood, and they rely on a strong workforce to operate. The following are a few strategies to support and grow local businesses and jobs in West Akron.

Expand business and merchant associations throughout West Akron. The Maple Valley Merchants Business Association is a very active and engaged group that works to beautify and activate the Maple Valley District. They host district cleanups, maintain planters and landscaping, put up holiday decorations, promote local businesses, and host community events. They serve as a great model for community-led business development. This model should be expanded to the other two business districts in West Akron: East Copley and Sherbondy Hill Districts.

Develop a resource hub and entrepreneurship incubator. Establish a full-service one-stop place for neighbors and entrepreneurs to gather, connect, and access services. This space should be embedded in and operated by the community. Progressive Alliance CDC and the City of Akron have already begun collaborating on such a space, referred to as the Maple Valley Community Resource Center, which would include meeting and event space, office spaces, and a café and coffee shop.

Programs that would be offered at the center would include workforce development and job readiness, business and entrepreneurship development, digital inclusion and literacy, financial literacy and empowerment, food access and nutrition support, family and parenting support, health and counseling services, and housing and transportation resources. A rendering of the proposed Maple Valley Community Resource Center, located at 1474 Copley Road, can be found on the following page.

As the Community Resource Center continues to grow, there may be opportunities to evolve the offerings and expand into more of an entrepreneurship incubator, with small spaces for local businesses, artisans, or makers to rent at a heavily subsidized rate. An example of this type of operation can be found in the case study to the right.

CASE STUDY



E.G. WOODE ENTREPRENEURSHIP INCUBATOR ENGLEWOOD, CHICAGO, IL

Situated on Chicago's Southside, the E.G. Woode Entrepreneurship Incubator is said to exist to purposefully reduce the risk, liability, and scarcity of resources for minority owned businesses in economically distressed communities. The initiative has committed itself to investing in transformative projects, this vision employs a cumulative leasable commercial space of 10,000 square feet. With a strategic vision, the space has been carefully curated to house a diverse array of tenants, each contributing to the vibrant tapestry of the local economy. Of these tenants there are a collaborative architecture, design, and construction firm, a barbershop co-op and college, a low-profit retail consignment shop and fashion design incubator, two casual restaurants and the space is equipped with a co-working space and a full commercial kitchen.

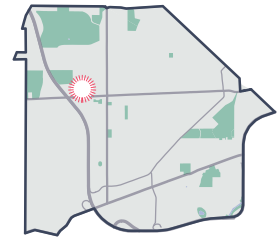
Through providing a dynamic hub for entrepreneurial endeavors the Entrepreneurship Incubator is able to uplift the community while allowing local entrepreneurs to flourish. Ultimately, the generated income from leasing and sales is reinvested, primarily supporting, and empowering minority-owned businesses, creating a sustainable cycle of economic growth and prosperity within the Englewood area.

Proposed Maple Valley Community Resource Center.



A Place Built By and For the Community

The rendering above depicts the exterior of the proposed Maple Valley Community Resource Center, a hub dedicated to providing vital assistance and support to individuals and families. The center will help to empower neighbors by equipping them with the tools, resources, and information they need to overcome challenges and build a better future.



Recruit new businesses to fill neighborhood needs. The market assessment found major gaps in consumer demand that are currently being met outside of the neighborhood (see page 14 for more information about these findings). Recruitment of new businesses should be focused on filling these needs which are not currently being met in the neighborhood, including those depicted in the table to the right.

Business Category

Leakage

Full-service restaurants	\$13.3 million
Hardware, home, and garden stores	\$13.2 million
Grocery and specialty food stores	\$11.1 million
Clothing, shoes, and accessories stores	\$6 million
Home furnishings and accessories stores	\$5 million
Sporting goods, outdoors, and bike stores	\$2.4 million
Pet service businesses	\$2.3 million
Entertainment and movie theaters	\$1.5 million
Legal services	\$1.1 million

Identify locations for possible employment-oriented development to bring high-paying jobs to West Akron. Recruiting a new business to the neighborhood with significant regional draw and employment opportunities should be a priority to create a complete neighborhood where people can work close to where they live. A first step to do this would be to identify sites that can accommodate this type of business, which would typically be larger sites with easy access to the neighborhood and to freeways and access to utilities, as well as compatible zoning. Potential sites and areas in West Akron to consider for these uses would be:

1. The former Erie Island School site off Copley Road;
2. The Five Points Shopping Center off South Portage Path and West Exchange Street;
3. The Vernon Odom Boulevard corridor between East Avenue and Rhodes Avenue;
4. The Vernon Odom Boulevard corridor between Romig Road and Maxen Drive;
5. The East Avenue corridor between Russell Avenue and Longview Avenue; and
6. The West Bowery Street corridor in the Sherbondy Hill District.

Another step to attract a new business would be to identify potential clusters to target for recruitment. Based on findings from the economic analysis conducted for this plan, possible clusters could include:

- Marketing, design, and publishing;
- Hospitality and tourism;
- Financial services;
- Education and knowledge creation; and
- Business services.

Finally, another route would be to strengthen relationships with existing anchor institutions in and around the neighborhood, including the Akron Zoo, Cleveland Clinic Akron General Hospital, Summa Health, the Lebron James Family Foundation I PROMISE Program, University of Akron and others. Building these relationships could bring employment, housing, education, and workforce development opportunities to the neighborhood.

Potential Focus Areas for Employment-Oriented Development.

Example of new commercial development

Example of adaptive reuse to commercial development

Example of new commercial and retail development

Idea 4: Support Housing Opportunity for All

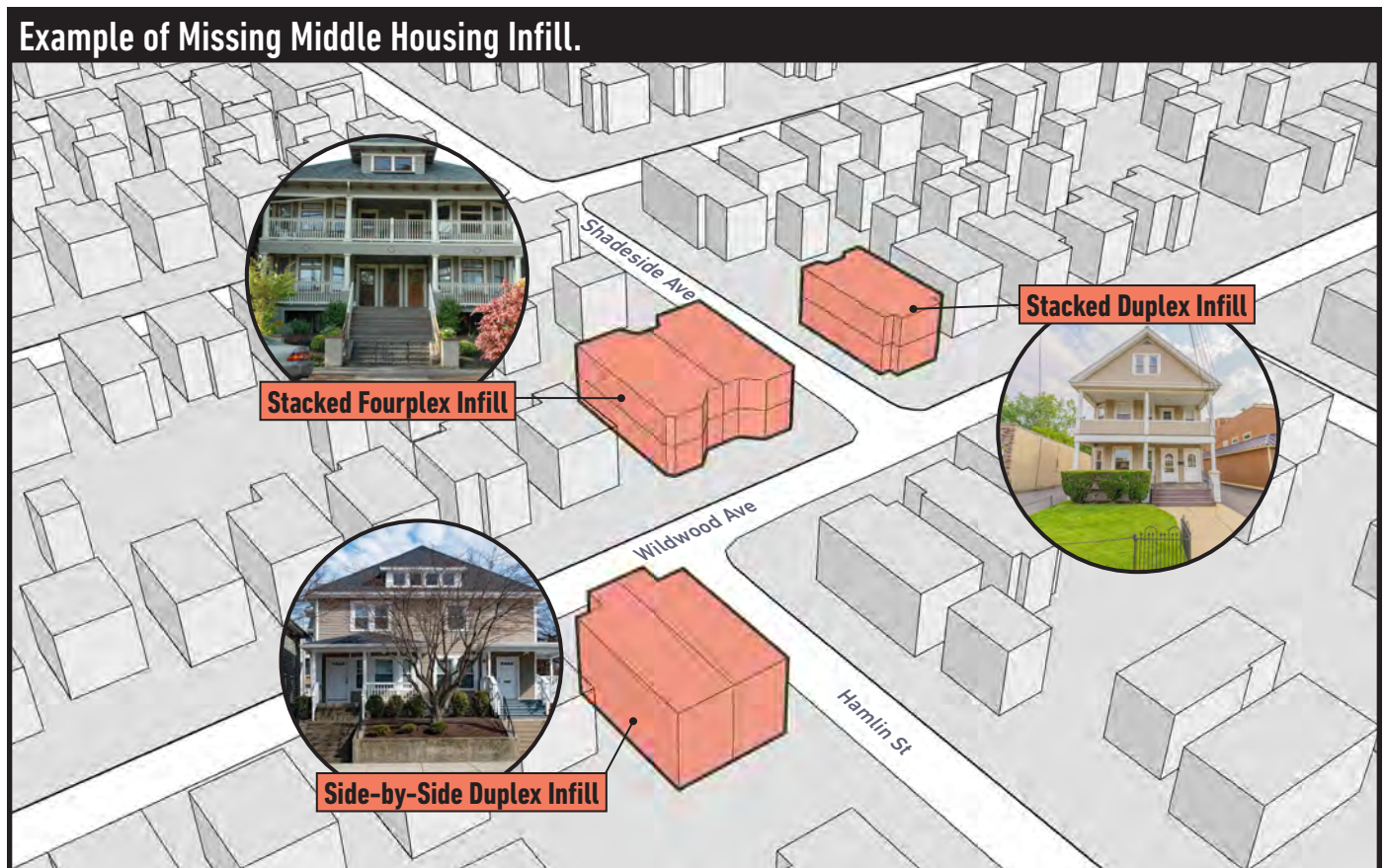
West Akron's housing is a defining factor for the neighborhood—it makes for a neighborhood of residential tree-lined streets full of well-kept homes. The housing assessment (see page 16) included key findings about housing age, occupancy, condition, ownership, and affordability in West Akron. The following recommendations were developed based on those findings along with community input.

Identify opportunities for the development of needed housing types in West Akron. The housing assessment found that 77% of homes in West Akron are single-family homes. While this means there are ample opportunities for wealth building through home ownership, it is also a limiting factor for people to live in the neighborhood who cannot or do not want to be homeowners of a standalone house. Additionally, this limits neighbors from being able to scale their housing to their needs across a lifetime and age-in-place in West Akron.

Some of the missing housing types in West Akron include:

- Owner-occupied housing valued at \$100,000 and above
- Permanent supportive and subsidized rental housing of \$500 or less per month
- Missing middle housing types, such as duplexes, townhomes, fourplexes, multiplexes, and accessory dwelling units

The City of Akron's *Planning to Grow 2.0* document emphasizes the need to revise the zoning code to focus on a diversity of housing, especially missing middle housing. The form-based zoning code discussed on page 41 could also be studied in other parts of the neighborhood to encourage missing middle housing. Progressive Alliance CDC should advocate for these zoning changes in West Akron to allow for more flexibility of housing types. Additionally, Progressive Alliance CDC should proactively work with the Summit County Land Bank to identify parcels that would be ideal locations for the development of these housing types.

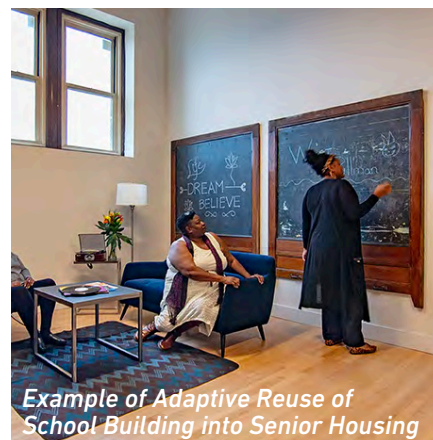


Encourage the development of new senior housing in the neighborhood. Currently, 46% of homeowners in the neighborhood are 65 years or older. As they age, many older adults wish to stay in their own homes and maintain independence for as long as possible, often referred to as “aging in place”. Being a walkable, tight-knit community makes West Akron a perfect place to “age in place”, but it does require services to help people do just that. These could include home-based healthcare, housing repair assistance, adult day care programs, and transit options.

Beyond people who want to “age-in-place”, other neighbors may be entering a phase of their lives where they don’t want to or are unable to care for a large home and full yard. The development of senior housing options would enable these people to remain in their community, while transitioning to safe and affordable housing. This plan includes a recommendation to encourage the adaptive reuse of the former Rankin Elementary School into a senior housing development (see Focus Area chapter page 74). There are many great examples of former schools being redeveloped into housing and the location of that site, being embedded in the neighborhood, would make for a great place to live.

Implement programs to assist first-time homebuyers and existing homeowners. These are programs that would help people purchase their first home and help existing neighbors maintain and stay in the homes. Examples of programs could include:

- **Repair-Resell Program** – this would be a program in which Progressive Alliance CDC or another nonprofit housing organization would work with the Summit County Land Bank to purchase homes in the neighborhood, repair them, and resell them at an affordable price to neighbors.
- **Lease-Purchase Program** – this type of program would be operated by Progressive Alliance CDC or another nonprofit housing organization, which would purchase or develop single-family homes in West Akron and rent them at an affordable rate to households with the option to purchase the home at a heavily discounted price after a 15-year period. This type of program would be combined with homeowner education and economic support for the household.
- **Housing Repair Assistance** – Currently, Summit County and Habitat for Humanity of Summit County offer home repair programs with no interest loans to qualifying homeowners. These programs should continue, but Progressive Alliance CDC should also identify households in West Akron that may not qualify for these programs and work with philanthropic organizations and other community partners to provide housing repair assistance, especially to households with older adults.
- **Homeowner Housing Maintenance Program** – This program would provide assistance and incentives to existing homeowners through a tool lending library, how-to workshops, reduced costs for materials, and an awards program for well-maintained homes.



Idea 5: Cultivate Neighborhood Third Places

Third places are a concept that refers to places where people spend time outside of home and work. These are places where a sense of community is built, social connections are fostered, ideas are exchanged, and where people can simply enjoy themselves. Third places have important characteristics that distinguish them from other places.

- They are free or inexpensive to enter and people should be free to come and go as they please.
- They are accessible to neighborhoods, so that it's easy for them to become a regular part of people's routines.
- They are active spaces where a number of people go on a regular basis.
- They are neutral ground where a person's status in society is of no importance.
- They are places that center conversation and socializing as the main focus of activity.

Traditionally, third places have included public parks and playgrounds, dog parks, cafes, coffee shops, gyms, bars, places of worship, libraries, barber shops, and beauty salons. Third spaces can also include digital spaces, like community forums or temporary spaces, like a block party or a pop-up event. West Akron has ample third places in the form of libraries, community learning centers (CLCs), places of worship, barber shops, and beauty salons, which are essential anchors in the neighborhood. The following are some recommendations to celebrate and build on these third places in West Akron so all residents have places where they can "belong".

Amplify existing neighborhood third places. West Akron already has foundations of great third places, including libraries, CLCs, places of worship, barber shops, and beauty salons. Amplifying the existing third places might include utilizing these spaces to host meetings and events, distributing important neighborhood notices to these spaces, and adding seating, signage, lighting, and other elements to make people feel welcome and encourage them to linger.

Identify an opportunity for a new community-oriented neighborhood third place. West Akron could benefit from at least one new third place that differs from the ones that already exist. One such type of third place that could be successful is an arts and culture-focused venue, whether it be a cultural center, art gallery, maker-space, music venue, or other similar type of place. Many great models exist in other communities, including the two case studies described on the following page.

Identify opportunities for placemaking and activation in existing business districts. The existing business districts and Great Streets districts in West Akron provide a great starting point to cultivate third places because those areas see a lot of daily traffic already. Another strategy is to identify opportunities in these districts for the addition of gathering places through placemaking and activation. This could look like adding some seating options at the generously sized bump-outs in the Maple Valley Great Street district, or activating the parklet in the East Copley Great Streets district, or activating the parks and green space around the Odom Boulevard Branch Library and Lane Field Park.



▲ Music, art, and culture can be a great way to bring people together, foster belonging, and encourage thoughtful conversation.



▲ The availability of food and beverages, public restrooms, and WiFi increase the amount of time people can spend at a third place.



▲ Moveable site furniture and a variety of seating options allow users to make a third place what they need it to be and encourage social interaction.

CASE STUDIES



STONY ISLAND ARTS BANK SOUTH SHORE, CHICAGO, IL

In South Shore Chicago, a former bank building has undergone a profound metamorphosis, emerging as a dynamic hub for artistic expression and community engagement. Under the transformative vision of artist and community developer, Theaster Gates, over 17,000 square feet, have been repurposed to foster innovation in contemporary art and archives. The Stony Island Arts Bank goes beyond traditional gallery spaces, also containing a bar, pocket park, and a versatile pop-up restaurant space, creating a multifaceted environment that transcends conventional boundaries.

The reuse of this former bank building stands as a testament to Theaster Gates' commitment to revitalizing spaces, creating not just a venue for art but a vibrant nexus for cultural exchange and communal celebration. The programming within this cultural haven, features weekly free film screenings and discussions that invite dialogue and reflection, as well as exhibitions curated by local artists, spotlighting the richness and diversity of the community's creative expression.

THIRDSPACE ACTION LAB GLENVILLE, CLEVELAND, OH

The ThirdSpace Action Lab serves as a community hub seamlessly blending the features of a lively bookstore and a welcoming cafe. Located within the walls of a repurposed medical office building, this adaptable space has become a cultural focal point in Glenville, Ohio. Beyond merely hosting a diverse array of events, ThirdSpace Action Lab existing beyond the realms of home and work, this space is vital to the fabric of communities.

The transformative nature of this space is underscored by its commitment to a human-centered design framework, recognizing the intrinsic value of all individuals, especially those with deep roots in the local community. This black-owned establishment transcends traditional business roles, evolving into a cherished cornerstone of community engagement and cultural celebration, reflecting the belief that every individual deserves community and more than just their basic needs satisfied. Through events like artist and author talks, intergenerational lunches, health fairs, and thought-provoking arts exhibitions, it offers a dynamic fusion of literature, culinary delights, and communal activities.



Idea 6: Activate Parks and Public Spaces

West Akron has plentiful and diverse parks throughout the neighborhood, and it fares well in terms of the geographic distribution of parks throughout the neighborhood and park access for most residents. Community members did express concerns, however, about the quality of the parks, the lack of enticing things to do in the parks, and safety traveling to and in the parks themselves. These sentiments indicate some room for improvement of the parks and the need to continue investing in the parks. This is important because parks contribute greatly to individual and community-wide health, social, and environmental well-being. The following recommendations would go a long way to make West Akron's parks meet the community's needs and aspirations.

Upgrade West Akron's existing parks to expand recreation opportunities and improve safety. West Akron has an abundance of parks, ranging from large community parks to small pocket parks. Several parks have undergone or are currently undergoing improvements. Cadillac Park and Kerr Park both won the Akron Parks Challenge in recent years, the Maple Valley East Parklet was developed by Great Streets Akron, and Perkins Park has recently received upgrades to the Ed Davis Community Center and Perkins Pool.

The remaining parks in West Akron, however, are in need of a refresh. In looking at the larger community parks in need of upgrades, the next priority parks for upgrades should be Erie Island Park, Sherbondy Park, and Schneider Park. For the smaller neighborhood pocket parks, the focus should be on improving Maple Grove Park, Slosson Park, and Aquae Park. To accomplish this, Progressive Alliance CDC should identify one or two parks to plan and submit for funding through the Akron Parks Challenge. Improving and activating these parks will transform them from liabilities into neighborhood assets.

To provide a starting point for park improvements, this plan includes concepts for Sherbondy Park and Slosson Park, which represent a larger community park and neighborhood pocket park, respectively. These concepts are high-level ideas for the improvement of these two parks, but a more in-depth planning and design process for these parks would ideally involve the community. This would ensure that amenities included in these parks would fit the needs and interests of neighbors and park users. For the purposes of this plan, the following are the proposed improvements for these two parks.

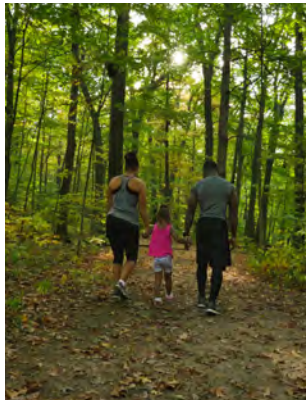
Sherbondy Park Potential Improvements:

- A sidewalk connection to Sherbondy Park along Vernon Odom Boulevard where there is currently a gap in the sidewalk network
- Park entrance signage for wayfinding purposes
- A mural on the existing tower on-site
- A potential overlook that utilizes the existing water tower on-site
- A walking path in the existing field with pockets of programmed spaces along it, which could include a multipurpose field area, play area, and shaded seating or picnic areas
- Nature trails through the existing woodland on-site
- A pedestrian connection from Sherbondy Park to the neighborhood to the north along Bisson Avenue
- A couple viewpoints or overlooks that take advantage of the site's topography to provide views to Downtown Akron and to Summit Lake

Slosson Park Potential Improvements:

- Upgraded fencing along the park edges near street intersections and around the play area to allow for more permeability into the park, while keeping park users safe from vehicular traffic
- Upgraded play equipment and surfacing
- Addition of landscaping, planting beds, and shade trees around the site
- Addition of a small gazebo and seating area in the center of the park with shade trees
- Upgraded benches and picnic tables around the park

Sherbondy Park Concept.



① Sidewalk connection to Sherbondy Park along Vernon Odom Boulevard

② Park entrance signage

③ Mural on existing tower

④ Water tower overlook

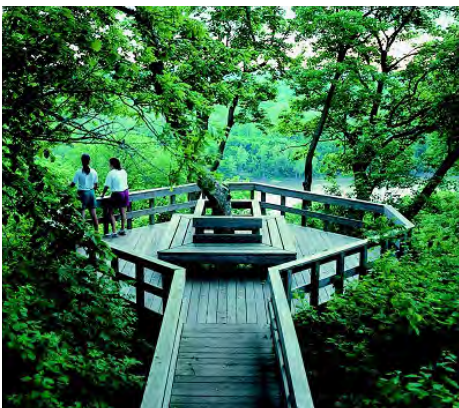
⑤ Pockets of programmed space along walking path in existing field

⑥ Nature trails in wooded area

⑦ Pedestrian connection to neighborhood

⑧ Viewpoint or overlook to downtown

⑨ Viewpoint or overlook to Summit Lake



Slosson Park Concept.



- ① Upgraded fencing along park edges and play area
- ② Upgraded play equipment and surfacing
- ③ Landscaping, planting beds, and shade trees
- ④ Small gazebo and seating area
- ⑤ Upgraded benches and picnic tables



Improve access to parks for all West Akron residents.

West Akron fares better than its peers when it comes to the percentage of residents within a 10-minute walk of a public park, at 86%. While that is a very strong start, this is a time to dream big and envision a neighborhood where every resident is within a 10-minute walk of a park. A couple minor investments would improve park access for everyone in West Akron. Filling in the remaining park gaps with neighborhood pocket parks would round out the neighborhood’s park system. The schoolyard at the former Rankin Elementary School would be well-suited for a neighborhood park and would help to fill in the remaining gap in the center of the neighborhood. A concept for this park can be found in the Focus Area chapter on page 74.

Access to parks is not just about building parks, but also making sure that people feel safe traveling to and being in the parks. So, creating safe walking and biking routes to parks through the establishment of a neighborhood greenways network (see more information about this on page 60) would help to identify safe travel routes to the parks. Finally, it’s important to make sure that all parks have essential creature comforts like good pedestrian-oriented lighting, seating and benches, and recreation amenities that are accessible for a broad range of ages, abilities, and interests.

Expand park and recreation programming to serve the community’s needs.

Another element that would help to activate West Akron’s parks is related to what types of programs, events, and activities happen at the parks. Youth and adult recreation leagues help to activate parks that are focused on sports recreation, like Copley Soccer Complex, Erie Island Park, and Lane Field Park. Programming can be broadened, however, to include other types of positive activities, like cultural festivals, nature education programs, outdoor fitness classes, environmental cleanups, music concerts, birdwatching, outdoor plays, youth camps, geocaching, running clubs, and the list goes on. The most important thing to consider when programming a park is to incorporate the interests of the community. It’s also good to think about how to increase the presence of people in the park at all hours of the day.



Example of nature education program



Example of festival in park



Example of outdoor fitness class



Example of youth recreation programming

Idea 7: Expand Food Access

Community input highlighted the need to focus on food access. Analysis shows that the majority of census tracts in West Akron fall into the low food access designation where most households are low-income and are more than ½ mile from the nearest grocery store. Expanding food access for West Akron will need to be a concerted, multi-pronged strategy that includes utilizing existing programs to meet immediate needs, grassroots efforts to build food sovereignty in the neighborhood, and a long-term focus on attracting a grocery store back to the neighborhood.

Increase availability and accessibility of fresh, healthy food through existing programs and opportunities. In the short-term, food access can be improved and expanded in West Akron through quick-to-implement programs that bring fresh, healthy food to the neighborhood. Examples of programs like this include:

- **Healthy Corner Store Initiatives** – these are programs that help convenience stores and corner stores to provide fresh produce and healthy foods to customers at a reasonable price. These programs involve technical assistance for store owners to sell and market healthy items, marketing collateral to encourage healthy eating choices, youth education programs in schools near participating stores to provide nutrition education, and connecting store owners to community partners, local farmers, and food suppliers to sustain the initiative.
- **DG Fresh** – a selection of Dollar General stores around the country are rolling out the “DG Fresh” initiative to bring fresh fruits and vegetables and other grocery items to stores. This would require coordination with the Dollar General corporate offices to advocate for this program to be rolled out in West Akron’s three Dollar General stores.
- **Pop-Up Pantry** – this is a program within the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank that brings food directly to communities struggling with food access through a mobile food pantry on wheels. Currently, the pop-up pantry visits three locations total around Medina, Stark, and Portage Counties, but this could be an option for a potential partnership to expand food access in West Akron.



Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank Pop-Up Pantry



Example of Healthy Corner Store



Example of Farmers' Market



Example of Local Grocery Store

CASE STUDY



OLD BROOKLYN FARMERS MARKET CLEVELAND, OH

The Old Brooklyn Farmers Market is a staple of the Old Brooklyn neighborhood on Pearl Road in Cleveland. Their mission is to preserve the connection between local growers, artisans, and the consumer; educate consumers about the benefits of preserving local agriculture and using local products; and serve the Old Brooklyn neighborhood by providing fresh, high quality, locally grown produce as well as providing an environment that fosters social gathering and interaction.

Every Saturday from June to September the market hosts vendors that sell fresh produce and artisanal goods, community resource booths, live art and music, and other themed activities throughout the summer. The market is not only lively but is accessible to many in the community by foot, bike, or on the Cleveland RTA's MetroHealth line that travels down Pearl Road, as well as having free parking available.

Not only is their venue physically accessible, but they also require all vendors to accept SNAP, EBT, and match up to \$25 with Produce Perks. This allows a larger portion of residents access to fresh produce, which can often be an expensive grocery item.

Launch a neighborhood farmers market. A farmers market is a great way to bring fresh food directly to the neighborhood, support local farmers and food production, and to regularly activate a public space. Ideally, a West Akron neighborhood farmers market would occur at the same time and location every week, so that neighbors could reliably visit to purchase food. In choosing a regular location for a neighborhood farmers market, it's important to consider site visibility and safety, accessibility to neighbors, and availability of parking. Some potential locations for a farmers market in the neighborhood include the parklet on Copley Road in the East Copley District, the green space in front of Buchtel CLC, the green space behind the Walgreen's near the intersection of Copley Road and South Hawkins Avenue, the plaza space outside the businesses near the intersection of Storer Avenue and Whittier Avenue (see Focus Area chapter page 74). There are many examples of well-executed farmers markets, including the case study from the Old Brooklyn neighborhood in Cleveland, as described in the call-out box to the right.

Relocate and expand the existing food park to provide more centrally located food access. The Route 162 Food Truck park currently located on Copley Road west of I-77 is a great community asset, but is currently not in the most accessible location and, therefore, may not be well-known to or used by residents. This plan recommends relocating this amenity to be more centrally located for West Akron neighbors. Relocating the food park and making it feel like a more permanent community fixture would encourage people to visit more regularly. An improved food park would include amenities like designated spaces for food trucks or vendors, seating, landscaping, lighting, restrooms, waste receptacles, and an area for live music. There are ample vacant sites on Copley Road that would be suitable for a new home for the food park. This plan includes a concept for the food park on a vacant parcel at the intersection of Copley Road and Orlando Avenue in the Maple Valley District. The concept for this can be found in the Focus Area chapter on page 66.

Identify potential sites and work to attract a full-service grocer to the neighborhood. Analysis of retail supply and demand in the West Akron trade area shows that there's a leakage of \$11 million for groceries leaving the neighborhood. In the long-term, Progressive Alliance CDC should use market data and other business recruitment strategies to try to attract a full-service grocery store to West Akron that could compete with mainstream groceries outside of the neighborhood. A first step in this process would be to identify key sites that would be suitable for the development or redevelopment of a grocery store. Attributes to consider for a suitable grocery store site include:

- A large enough parcel to accommodate roughly a 30,000 to 50,000 square foot building and a surface parking lot of around 40,000 to 50,000 square feet;
- Access to an arterial roadway, like Copley Road, South Hawkins Avenue, Vernon Odom Boulevard, Exchange Street, Mull Avenue, East Avenue, or Manchester Road; and
- Sufficient space for truck loading and unloading that does not interfere with customer parking.

Idea 8: Create Safe Streets

Renowned urbanist, Jane Jacobs, introduced the concept that neighborhoods are safer and have stronger social ties when there are lots of “eyes on the street”. This phrase, “eyes on the street” refers to the activity that naturally happens on a vibrant street in which neighbors and business owners informally monitor the street and look out for one another. This big idea addresses the need to improve the built environment of streets to make them accessible, safe, and comfortable to encourage more people to walk and bike on the streets, thereby increasing “eyes on the street”. Pairing with the physical improvement of streets is also the need to activate streets intentionally and meaningfully with neighborhood stewards.

Mobilize neighbors to be stewards of their blocks and of the neighborhood. Stewardship is defined as “the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care”. In the context of a neighborhood, people could be stewards of their neighbors, homes, businesses, blocks, streets, parks, and more. West Akron already has dedicated stewards, as evidenced by the presence of groups like the Maple Valley Merchant Business Association, who are stewards of the Maple Valley District. The group, Neighborhood Dads, have taken it upon themselves to be stewards of Akron’s youth by pairing men with youth who need healthy role models. Neighborhood Dads are a perfect example of a group of neighbors who have mobilized to be stewards of their neighborhood. They’ve organized regular bike rides through nearly every street in West Akron, game nights, neighborhood cleanups, mentorship programs in schools, and de-escalation training. The efforts of groups like the Neighborhood Dads is essential to foster a bright future for West Akron and all who live there. Additional activities that might mobilize neighbors to be stewards include:

- Neighborhood watch groups
- Block parties, community days, and pop-up events
- Litter cleanup
- Food truck events
- Community gardens throughout the neighborhood
- Walking or running clubs



Neighborhood Dads Bike Ride Event



Example of a Walking Club



Example of an Active Street



Example of Neighborhood Block Party

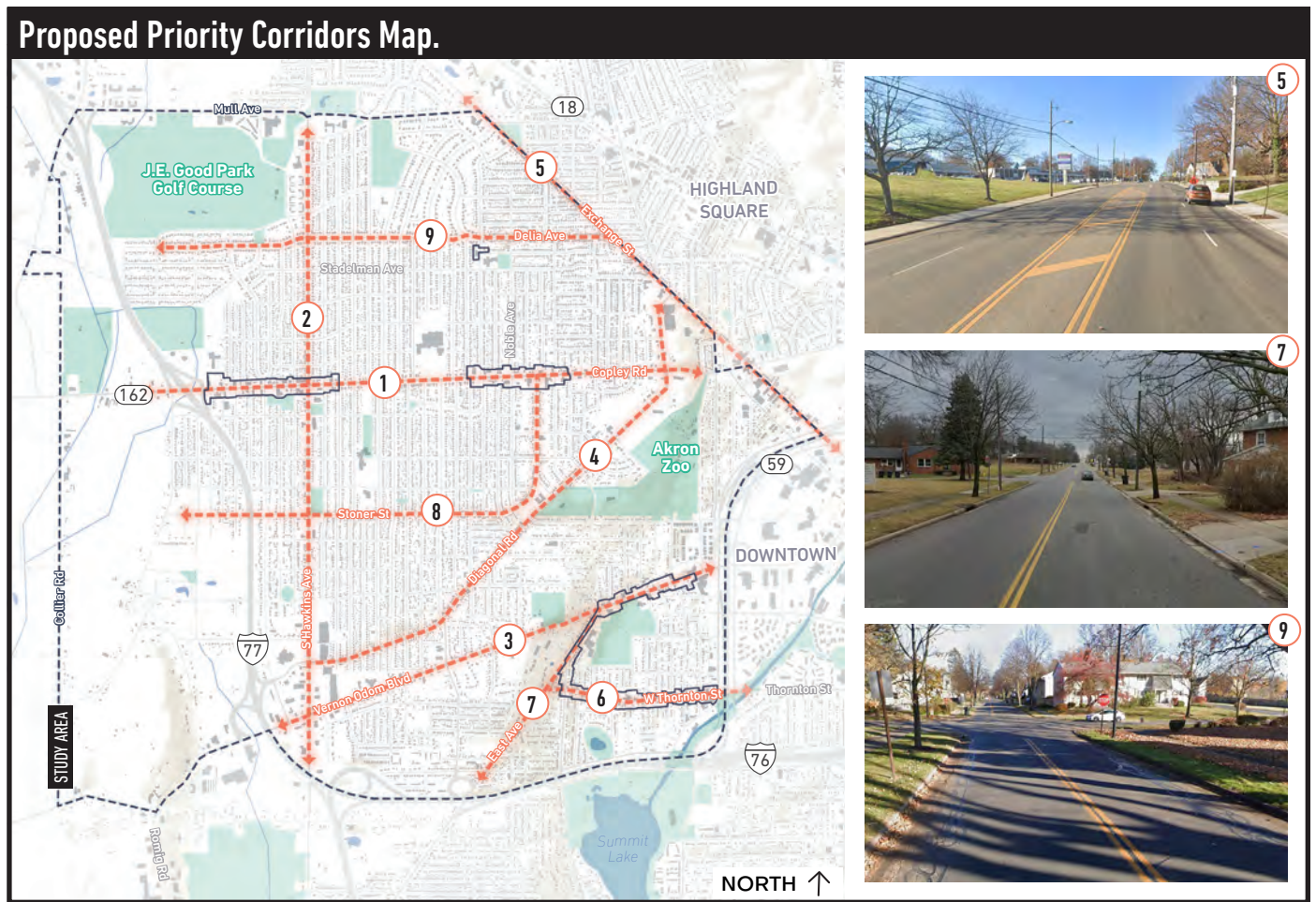
Invest in streetscape improvements along priority corridors to create consistent, safe, and walkable streets. Streets are the largest type of public space in modern cities and, as such, should be accessible and safe for all users, not just vehicles. The City of Akron has made recent investments in bike infrastructure along several roadways in West Akron and this plan has already discussed proposed streetscape improvements on Copley Road in the Maple Valley District (see page 40). The City and other partners should continue to invest in this important public space and design streets with all users in mind. Sometimes, this is referred to as creating “complete streets” or streets that are “designed and operated to enable safe use and support mobility for all users” (US DOT, Complete Streets).

Design elements considered in approaching a streetscape through this lens mobility elements like sidewalks, protected bike lanes, bus lanes, transit stops, street crossings, median islands, accessible pedestrian signals, curb cuts and driveways, curb bump-outs and extensions, modified vehicle lanes.

Streetscape elements should also be considered when thinking comprehensively about streets. This includes things like tree lawns or amenity zones, street trees, paving, lighting, benches or seating, waste receptacles, planters and landscaping, green infrastructure, wayfinding and signage, and other furnishings.

This plan recommends focusing these streetscape investments along priority corridors that are important to the neighborhood’s mobility and character. These include, but are not limited to:

1. Copley Road
2. South Hawkins Ave
3. Vernon Odom Boulevard
4. Diagonal Road / South Portage Path
5. West Exchange Street
6. West Thornton Street
7. East Avenue
8. Stoner Street / Grace Avenue
9. Delia Avenue



Create a network of neighborhood greenways to allow for safe walking and biking routes to parks, third places, and other neighborhood destinations.

West Akron is fortunate to have a very well-defined system of low-traffic residential streets that are interconnected throughout almost the entirety of the study area. This presents an opportunity to develop a network of streets that prioritize people traveling by walking or biking, called a “neighborhood greenway”.

These neighborhood greenways should be designed to feel safe for people of all ages and abilities and should ideally connect to schools, parks, commercial nodes, and other neighborhood destinations.

By creating safe, accessible connections to these

destinations, people will be incentivized to consider a transportation mode shift to walking or biking for shorter, more local trips. Additionally, this neighborhood greenways network would create safer connections to the Towpath Trail and other regional trails.

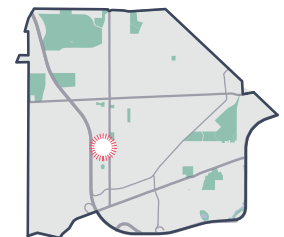
Because they would exist along already calmer, less traffic-ridden streets, there is minimal intervention required to designate a street as a “neighborhood greenway”. Simple improvements like bike boulevard markers or shared road markers (also called “sharrows”), wayfinding signage, and traffic calming devices like bump-out rain gardens and chicanes, where applicable, would go a long way to create West Akron’s neighborhood greenway network.

Neighborhood Greenway Vision.

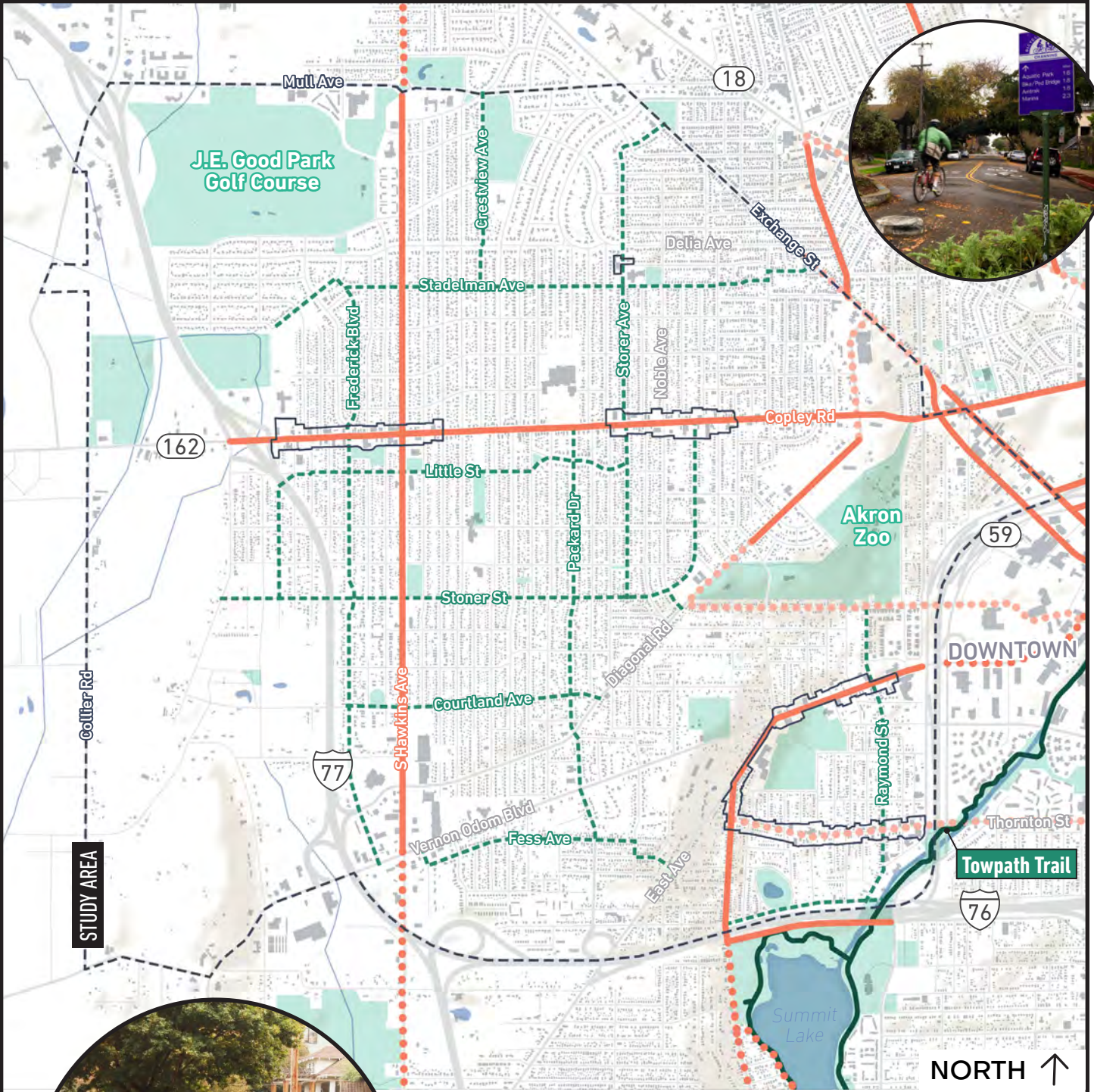


▲ **A Street for People**

The rendering above shows how a neighborhood greenway could look and function in West Akron. Using Stoner Avenue near the intersection of Orlando Avenue and leading to Stoner/Hawkins Park, this shows the possibility of creating a street that is safe, enjoyable, and accessible for all users, not just cars. This ideal vision for a neighborhood greenway includes streets designed to slow traffic speeds to make the roadway safer and more appropriate for the residential context. This vision also includes ample street trees to provide shade and comfort, as well as signage in the amenity zone to identify the street as part of the neighborhood greenway network.



Proposed Neighborhood Greenway Map.



Legend

- Proposed Neighborhood Greenway ---
- Existing Multi-Use Trail —
- Existing Bike Lane —
- Planned Bike Lane •••••
- Proposed Akron Connects Bike Infrastructure •••••
- Great Streets Boundaries
- Study Area Boundary

Idea 9: Heal the Route 59 Divide

In 1970, the Innerbelt (State Route 59) was constructed along edge of West Akron displacing many residents and businesses. This severed connections between downtown and West Akron, disrupted commercial corridors, and displaced the people who helped fuel the vitality of both neighborhoods.

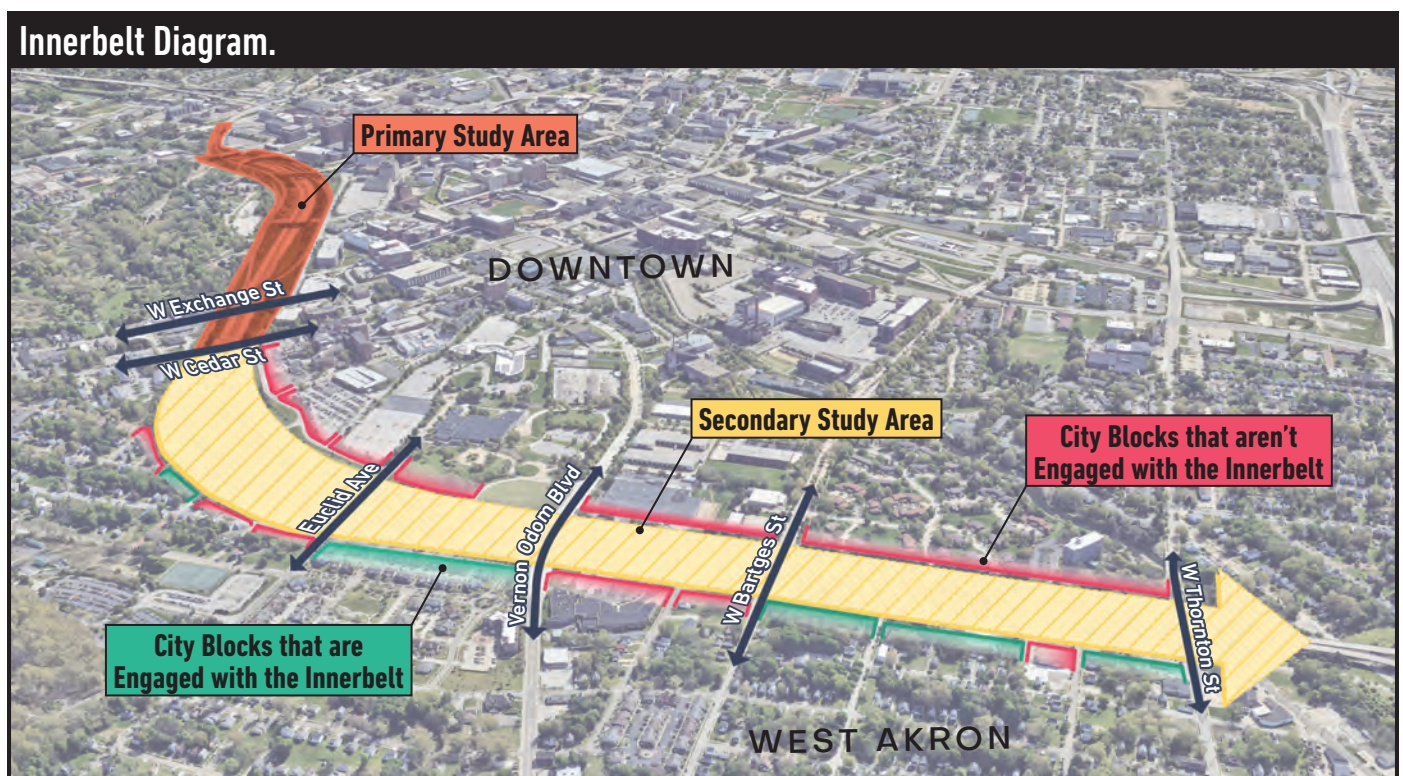
The idea for redeveloping a portion of the Innerbelt emerged in the late 1990s. The City of Akron focused its efforts on the north end of the highway, between Main Street and Exchange Street, where the section of road was reaching the end of its lifespan. The 30-acre site was vacated by the Ohio Department of Transportation in 2016 and turned over to the city for public use. Over the past two years the Reconnecting Our Community process led by Liz Ogbu of Studio O has thoughtfully and inclusively engaged the community to identify community preferences for the future of this section of the Innerbelt.

The planning team worked with Studio O as part of this West Akron Neighborhood Plan and on the update to the Downtown Akron Vision and Redevelopment Plan. Through this work together, there are numerous opportunities to follow through on community ideas for healing the divide caused by the construction of the Innerbelt.

As a follow up to the Reconnecting Our Community Phase 1 Report, there is a national Request for Qualifications for a master planning process for the future of the site with a focus on removing the barriers to community connectivity and equity caused by the Innerbelt. The following recommendations represent a starting point to ensuring that West Akron benefits from these continued community processes that will address the Innerbelt.

Ensure the Reconnecting Communities Grant Focuses on the “Secondary Study Area”.

The Reconnecting Communities Grant will focus on the Innerbelt between Furnace Street on the north and Russell Avenue on the south. The primary study area will be north of Exchange Street and the secondary study area will be between Russell Avenue and Exchange Street. This portion deserves attention because the neighborhood impacts for West Akron were largely between West Exchange Street and West Thornton Street. This is also the portion of the Innerbelt that has yet to be removed, reinforcing a physical barrier. This would more fully address the impacts caused by the Innerbelt and provide opportunities for connections that were cut off by the construction of the highway.

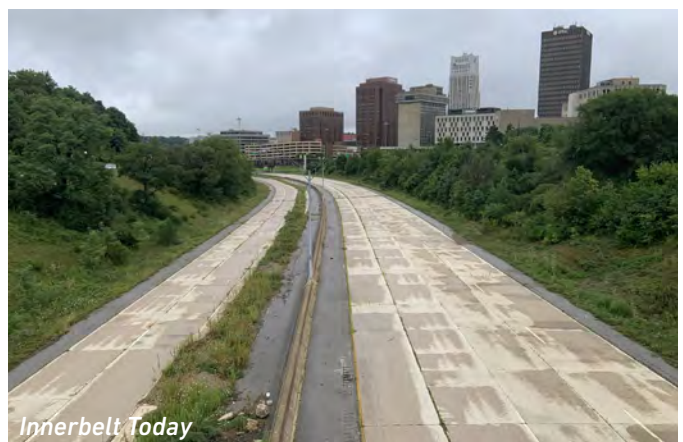


Connect West Akron to Downtown Akron and The Towpath Trail.

The Reconnecting Communities Grant represents an opportunity to truly reconnect West Akron to downtown and address the damage done by the Innerbelt. Downtown Akron is a major employment center with around a third of the city's jobs. Better connecting West Akron to downtown will give residents access to this important job center and increase employment opportunities. Improving these connections also will enable West Akron residents to better access the activities, services and other resources that only exist in downtown. The crossings and underpasses at Vernon Odom Boulevard, Bartges Street, and West Thornton Street need to be improved to make them safer, more usable, and more welcoming for all modes of transportation.

The Towpath Trail is also a major non-motorized regional transportation resource that needs to be better connected and integrated into West Akron. Used by more than 1 million people annually, this trail is only accessible at the southeastern edge of the neighborhood and is difficult to get to for much of West Akron. Increasing this access will have a twofold benefit: it will 1) improve the ability of residents to access this regional transportation and recreation resource and it will 2) help to bring some of the 1 million annual trail users into the neighborhood.

Create gateways at the eastern edge of West Akron across from Route 59. Beyond improving the physical connections, there needs to be equal focus on the aesthetics and appearance of these corridors that connect between downtown and West Akron. Investing in the look and feel of these corridors goes beyond mere beautification, it also signifies the importance of the neighborhood and is a visible symbol of investment and community pride. In other areas of Akron, these crossings have been improved by customized signage, art, lighting, architectural elements and other ways to make neighborhoods feel safer, inviting and interesting. It is also an opportunity to create a unique neighborhood identity that expresses West Akron. As these ideas are implemented it will be critical to involve local stakeholders, designers and artists to ensure that improvements are representative of West Akron.



Idea 10: Build Capacity to Realize Plan Ideas

Neighbors expressed a strong desire to see progress happen quickly and over the long-term. Additionally, self-determination, avoiding duplication of efforts and funding, and the need for continued collaboration were themes that arose through the engagement process. The following strategies and actions would enable West Akron to create the capacity for self-determination and sustainable neighborhood progress.

Expand organizational capacity of Progressive Alliance

Community Development Corporation. West Akron needs a strong community development corporation to be the catalyst for revitalization and redevelopment. Progressive Alliance CDC was formed with such a goal in mind. To do this, however, the CDC will need to continue to build up its board of directors, its funding model, staff, and programs. A great local model is The Well CDC, operating in the Middlebury neighborhood, which has been able to accomplish a lot of progress, including rehabbing and restoring 60 homes in just 48 months and opening the Akron Food Works shared use kitchen.

Collaborate with partners to incentivize economic and community development in West Akron.

It will take public, private, and nonprofit partners to see this plan to fruition. Importantly, it will also take land use and other policy changes at the local government level to incentivize development in West Akron. Many of these policy changes are already being considered by the City of Akron, per the Planning to Grow 2.0 document:

- **Revolving Loan Fund (RLF)** – These are loans that are provided below market interest rates to local businesses that require additional funding for growth, expansion, and renovation.
- **Tax Increment Financing (TIF)** – TIFs are a method of project financing that captures a percentage of the real property taxes paid by the property owner and reallocates it to a specific public improvement project necessitated by the property's development. The City of Akron has utilized TIFs and intends to continue doing so to facilitate development.
- **Expedited and Streamlined Permitting** – this would create a more streamlined and responsive development review and approval process to enable developments to be constructed in a timely manner.

Initiate a West Akron Neighborhood Consortium. To make the vision and ideas presented in this plan a reality, it is recommended that a neighborhood consortium be formed to oversee that work.

CASE STUDY



NEIGHBORHOOD CONSORTIUM

SOUTH BEND, IN

The South Bend, Indiana Neighborhoods Consortium (NC) was formed to encourage inclusive civic participation in the city. The NC consists of one representative and alternate representative from each of the city's active neighborhood and businesses associations, and other key anchor institutions. Each month the NC meets to exchange their neighborhood's upcoming events, share their needs, and communicate about city programs and services. It has twenty active members, fourteen of which are neighborhood associations. The NC holds quarterly meetings with the city and communicate with city staff members frequently during individual neighborhood meetings. A look at their monthly newsletter shows updates on matters such as neighborhood association news and events, neighborhood plans, public safety, grant opportunities, clinics and classes, certification programs, city programs, and announcements such as a new community fridge and an upcoming social event. The consortium works together to disseminate helpful information to its city's citizens, and encourages organizations to work together to maximize their reach and impact.

This consortium would also help to sustain collaboration, built momentum, and identify the next generation of West Akron leaders. Creating alignment and a unified vision is critical to attract investment, too. This consortium should ideally be comprised of representatives from all the community development corporations (CDCs) that do work in West Akron, anchor institutions, faith institutions, educational institutions, community and civic organizations, and other neighborhood leaders. The West Akron Neighborhood Consortium should meet at regular intervals and develop reports of meeting discussions.

Establish a sustainable source of funding for community and economic development in West Akron. While it is important to attract outside investment to help fund neighborhood improvements, it is vital to have diverse funding sources. Often, too, outside funding sources like grants come with specific eligible uses and requirements which can limit their use. To fund improvements that might be a priority for the community, a fund specific to West Akron should be established. This could take many different forms, such as the following:

- **Community Development Fund** – These are organizations that are focused on the needs of local property owners and businesses. These organizations often provide low-interest, zero interest, or forgivable loans for business and property owners within a certain geography. The case study to the right is one example of this type of organization.
- **Community Land Trust (CLT)** – Community Land Trusts specifically help to address the need to keep housing and commercial property affordable where long-time and lower-income community members are at risk of being priced out of the neighborhood. These are typically non-profit organizations that hold the land of the property in perpetuity, while leasing it to an owner in 60- to 90-year leases. The owner of the property then purchases the house or structure, gaining a return on their investment when the property is sold and building wealth.
- **Cooperative** – Cooperatives are businesses that operate as “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically controlled enterprise” (The International Co-Operative Alliance). Originally, cooperatives were agricultural, but today they can be used for energy provision, credit unions, education, housing, and worker-owned businesses. They can be for-profit or non-profit organizations.

CASE STUDY



NEIGHBORHOOD COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FUND NORTHSIDE, PITTSBURGH, PA

Based in Northside, Pittsburgh PA the Neighborhood Community Development Fund operates with a threefold mission: to stimulate business and job growth, facilitate the creation of affordable housing, and actively contribute to the revitalization of neighborhoods. The nonprofit provides loans to small businesses and real estate projects in the region, with a goal of infusing capital into the area while uplifting all members of the community especially, racial, and ethnic minorities and women.

The program has played a crucial role in financing 70 affordable homes, addressing the pressing need for accessible housing options. Additionally, over the course of the past two decades, this fund has been a catalyst for positive change, having disbursed 399 loans that have not only fueled entrepreneurial ventures but have also led to the creation of 1,336 jobs. This sustained impact underscores the program’s unwavering commitment to fostering economic resilience, job opportunities, and community development.

FOCUS AREAS

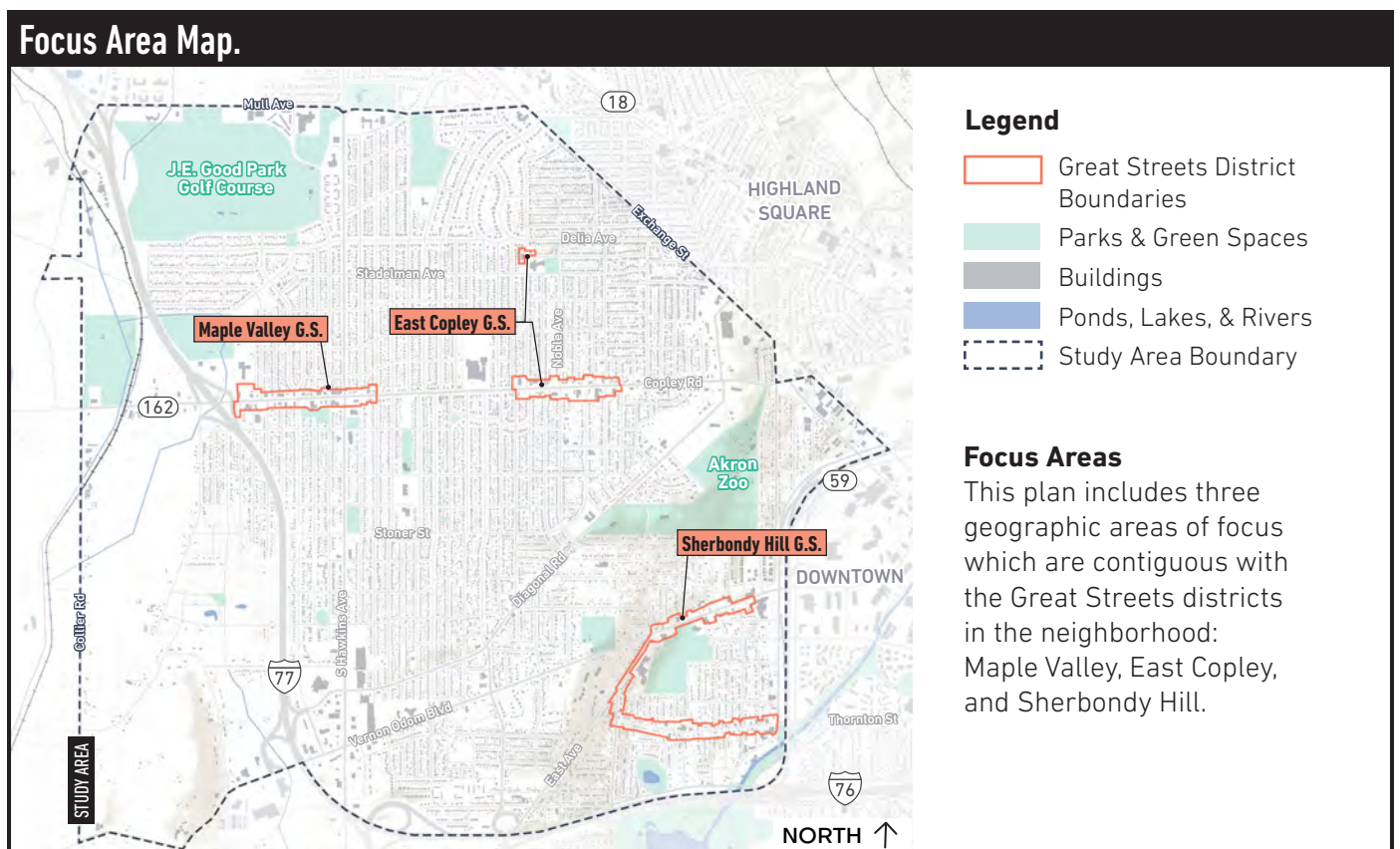
ENVISIONING CHANGE

This chapter provides high-level visioning to illustrate how the plan recommendations can be realized through public and private investments in the three Great Streets districts in the West Akron neighborhood: (1) Maple Valley, (2) East Copley, and (3) Sherbondy Hill. These districts are envisioned to include more walkable, mixed-use, and transit-oriented development with ample public spaces and streets that are designed for people. The plan recommendations in the previous chapter, findings from the market analysis, and community input shaped the site-specific recommendations found in this chapter. These focus areas are where the plan is put into action.

Each of these districts has distinct challenges and opportunities. The Maple Valley District is the primary neighborhood retail district for West Akron and this plan seeks to strengthen it as such, through strategic public realm improvements and encouraging public and private developments to create a complete and comfortable built environment.

The East Copley District has the most number of vacant properties of the three, which is a challenge, but also creates a strong opportunity for larger-scale infill development, with a focus on residential development to add more neighbors to the corridor and creating more activity there throughout the day. Finally, the Sherbondy Hill District faces some connectivity challenges. Despite its proximity, it feels cut off from Downtown Akron, the Towpath Trail, and the Summit Lake neighborhood to the south. At the same time, its proximity makes it a prime spot for employment-oriented development as well as the re-establishment of neighborhood-focused businesses.

The recommendations and graphics in this chapter expand upon each of these districts and illustrate a renewed vision for their future. By illustrating the potential future of these focus areas, the plan can help guide redevelopment and reinvestment.



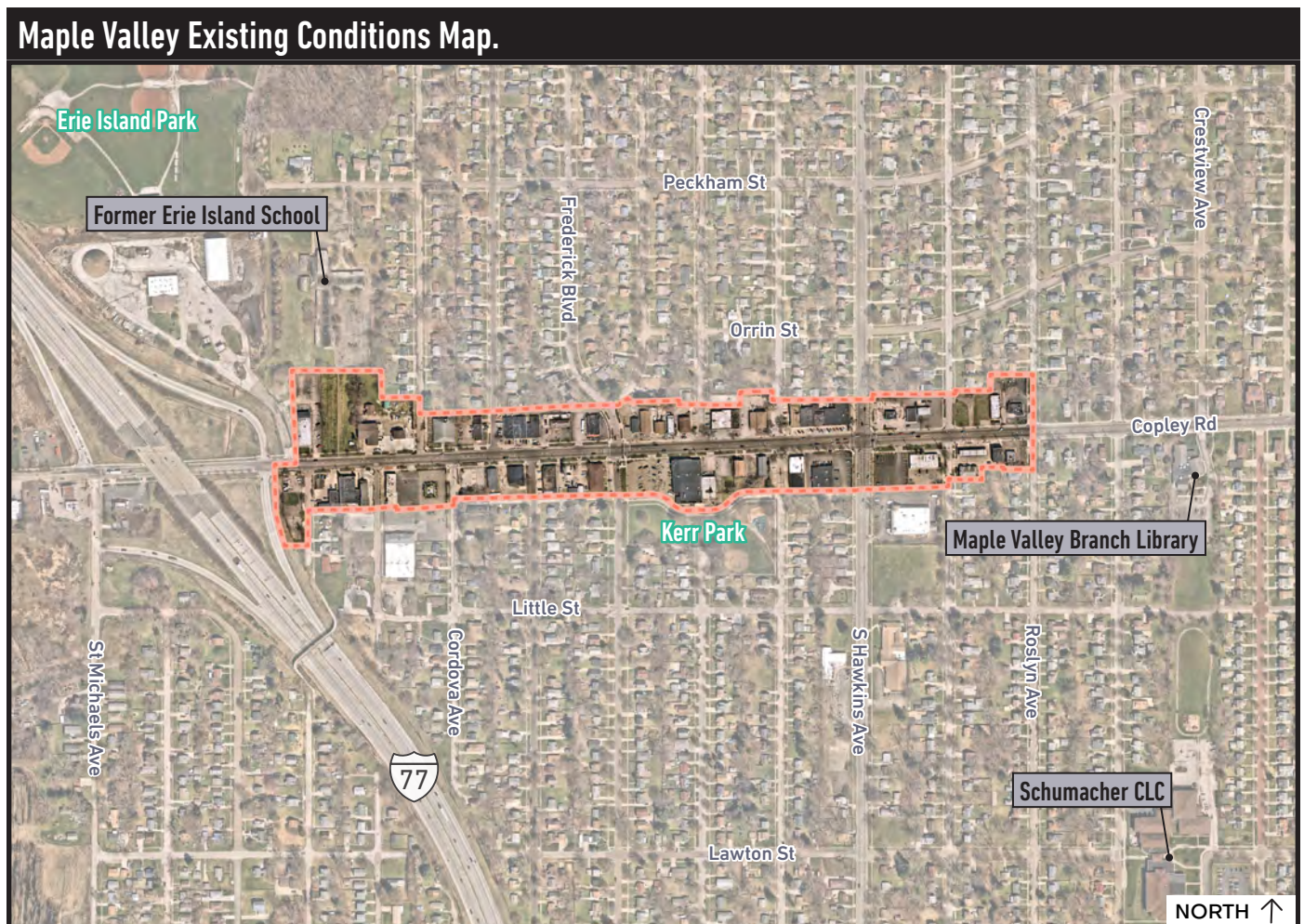
Maple Valley

The Maple Valley District is what many community members associate with West Akron. It is the most complete district of the three in the neighborhood and is surrounded by tree-lined streets containing a mix of homes for families of all sizes. The accessibility of the Maple Valley District to the rest of the neighborhood and I-77 makes this district an ideal location to serve both local and non-local shoppers, alike.

The district is home to several fast casual restaurants, shops, and service businesses. Several organizations and neighborhood anchors are also located in or near the district, like the Maple Valley Branch Library, Minority Behavioral Health Group, The Lawton Street Community Center, Schumacher Elementary School, and the Westside Neighborhood Development Corporation (WENDCO) headquarters. Kerr Park, which has seen recent investment through the Akron Parks Challenge Grant, and Erie Island Park are also located near the district.

The buildings in this district are mostly occupied, signaling a healthy market to support businesses in this district. The district contains several retail centers with small, affordable spaces that are great for local entrepreneurs and startup businesses. The main challenges in this district are some remaining vacant or underutilized properties, as well as properties that have significant setbacks from the street. These create gaps in the pedestrian experience and bring down the overall quality of the district. Additionally, the public realm in this district is inconsistent and not currently conducive to lots of pedestrian activity, but it has a lot of potential.

Despite some challenges, this district is beloved and cared for by many business owners and community members. The area has a very active and dedicated Maple Valley Merchants Business Association, which has been a driving force behind recent improvements to the district.

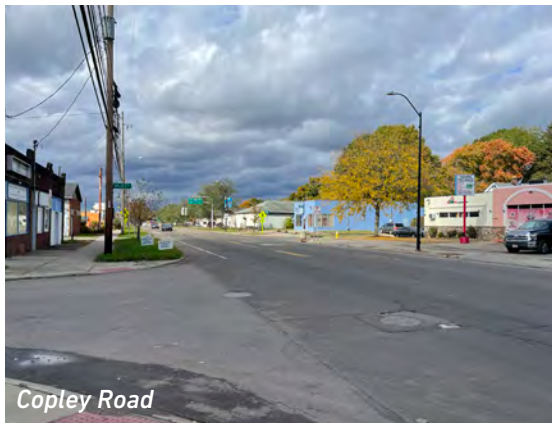




Maple Valley Mural



Maple Valley Branch Library



Copley Road



Kerr Park

RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS

The following is a list of recommended improvements to the built environment to enhance the vibrancy of the Maple Valley District. Graphics on the following pages illustrate these potential improvements.

- Add a gateway feature at the western edge of Copley Road near the I-77 entrance/exit ramps.
- Strengthen the node at Copley Road and South Hawkins Avenue through redevelopment and public realm improvements.
- Remove continuous curb-cuts and consolidate curb-cuts for access management and to improve the pedestrian experience along Copley Road.
- Identify a community-oriented use for the unused green space along South Hawkins Avenue.
- Transform the former Erie Island School site into a mixed-use development, including employment-oriented uses to bring more jobs to the corridor.
- Relocate the food park currently situated just west of I-77 on Copley Road to a more central location in the Maple Valley District, redeveloping a vacant or underutilized site to expand and improve the food park experience.
- Continue streetscape improvements along the entire stretch of the Copley Road corridor through the district to improve the pedestrian experience and safety and enhance the character of the corridor. This could include better continuity and more appropriate species of street trees, the addition of planted amenity zones where there are none currently, pedestrian-scale lighting, buried utility lines, planters, special pavement treatments at intersections, flashing mid-block pedestrian crossings, and median pedestrian refuges.
- Add pedestrian-oriented street lighting along the entire corridor and around public parking areas.
- Develop the planned community resource hub to connect neighbors with services and resources that are currently inaccessible in the neighborhood and to provide a community gathering place in the district.
- Encourage outdoor dining, seating, and other activation strategies at key locations along the corridor.



Housing Infill



Gateway Feature



Community Resource Hub

- 1. Housing Infill
- 2. Commercial / Retail Infill
- 3. Future Community Resource Hub
- 4. Enhanced Primary Commercial Node
- 5. Parking Access + Management
- 6. Relocated Food Park
- 7. Enhanced Crosswalks + Bike Lanes
- 8. Streetscape Improvements
- 9. Community Gateway Feature
- 10. Potential Grocery Attractor Site

Vision for the Maple Valley District.

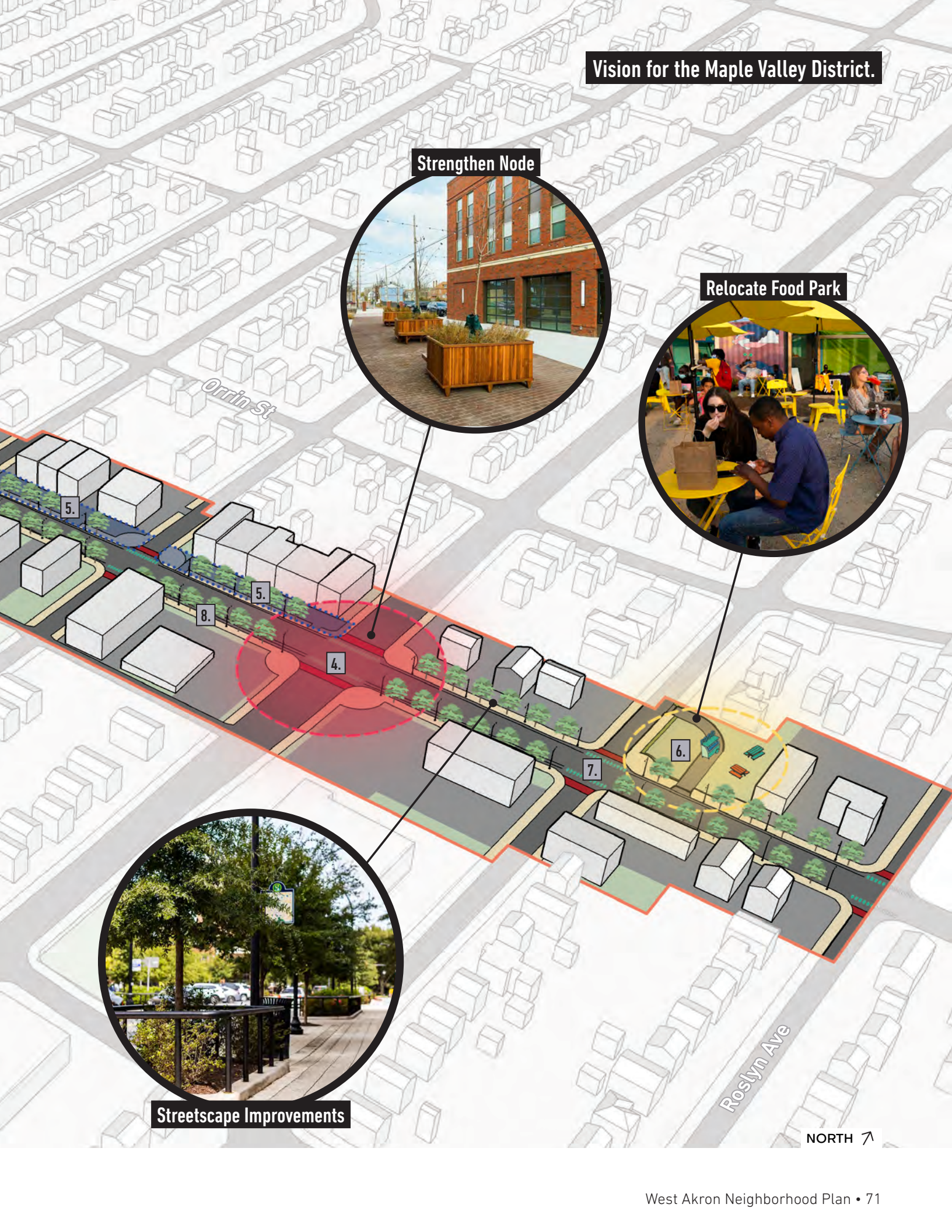
Strengthen Node



Relocate Food Park



Streetscape Improvements



NORTH ↗



Vision for Maple Valley Food Park.



East Copley

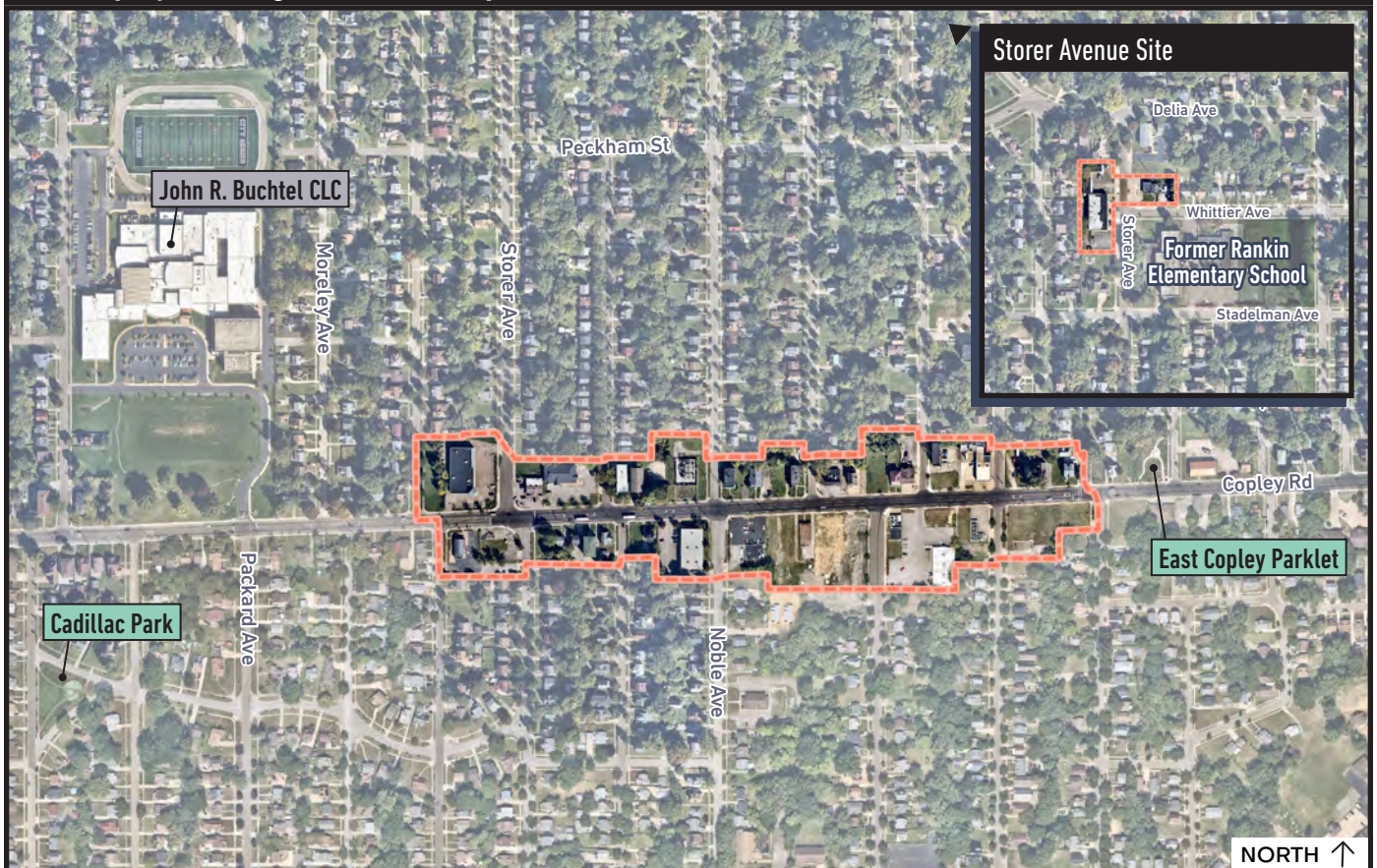
The East Copley district is located along Copley Road between Sunset View Drive and Homer Avenue. It also includes a small area north of Copley Road around the intersection of Storer Avenue and Whittier Avenue, near the former Rankin Elementary School. This district is located near many neighborhood anchors, including John R. Buchtel High School, the historic Simon Perkins Mansion, the John Brown House, Perkins Park, and the Akron Zoo. This is also an area that has seen disinvestment and has struggled to retain businesses.

Currently, numerous vacant lots dot the district, making it feel unsafe for pedestrians and patrons. These vacant lots, however, present an opportunity for infill development to serve the needs of the neighborhood. According to a Great Streets Akron 2019 Market Report, residents living within 10-minute walks of this district spend \$26.2 million annually on retail goods and services, but 80% or \$21.2 million of that spending happens outside of the neighborhood.

This indicates that a major gap currently exists in this part of the neighborhood for resident-serving retail, such as pharmacies, financial institutions (like banks and credit unions), dry cleaners, laundromats, hardware stores, furniture stores, and other similar service businesses.

The size of some of the vacant lots also lend themselves to 2- to 4-story mixed-use residential and multifamily developments. This type of infill development would add missing housing types to the neighborhood (based on the housing analysis findings) and would add more “eyes on the street” to this section of Copley Road, which could help to improve perceptions of safety. The pedestrian experience and safety could also be improved through further streetscape improvements, building on the investment the City of Akron has made already into a bike lane on Copley Road.

East Copley Existing Conditions Map.





John R. Buchtel High School & CLC



East Copley Parklet



East Copley Corridor Character



Cadillac Park

RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS

The following is a list of recommended improvements to the built environment for the stabilization and revitalization of the East Copley district as well as the site further north on Storer Avenue. Graphics on the following pages illustrate these potential improvements.

East Copley District:

- Encourage mixed-use and multifamily housing infill on larger vacant and underutilized sites on the East Copley corridor.
- Encourage small neighborhood-focused retail or commercial infill on key sites on the East Copley corridor.
- Continue streetscape improvements along this stretch of Copley Road.
- Focus on creating a primary node of activity around the Copley Road and Storer Avenue intersection to create a center of the district.
- Enhance the pedestrian crossings across Copley Road for visibility and safety.

Storer Avenue Site:

- Support façade improvements along the strip of retail businesses on the west side of Storer Avenue.
- Utilize the ample sidewalk outside of the retail businesses by creating a plaza-like space for outdoor markets, pop-ups, and outdoor dining.
- Encourage the adaptive reuse of the former Rankin Elementary School building into senior housing.
- Convert the former Rankin Elementary schoolyard into a new neighborhood park, incorporating program for multi-generational park users, such as a sensory or therapeutic garden, natural play area, blacktop play area, performance stage, picnic tables, benches, walking trails, shade trees and wayfinding signage.
- Encourage the adaptive reuse of the vacant automotive building or redevelopment of that parcel if the building is unable to be preserved.
- Incorporate some public space on the automotive building site, such as a small pocket plaza or outdoor seating.

Vision for the East Copley District.



Enhanced Crosswalks



Housing Infill

- 1. Housing Infill with Parking Structure
- 2. Commercial / Retail Infill
- 3. Improved Streetscape
- 4. Enhanced Primary Commercial Node
- 5. Enhanced Crosswalks



Retail Infill



Improved Streetscape



NORTH ↗

Vision for the East Copley District Storer Avenue Site.



Facade Improvements

Storer Ave

Performance Play Area



Stadelman Ave

1. Senior Housing

2. Resident Parking

3. Performance Stage

4. "Schoolyard" Play Area

5. Picnic Tables

6. Nature Playground

7. Therapeutic Garden

8. Wayfinding Signage

9. Park Access Points

10. Residents' Community Garden

11. Adaptive Reuse Opportunity

12. Plaza Space for Pop-Up Markets + Outdoor Dining

13. Facade Improvements

Storer Ave

11.



Pop-Up Market



Therapeutic Garden

Whittier Ave

8.

7.

5.

6.

5.

4.

9.

Noble Ave



Nature Play Area

NORTH ↗

Vision for the East Copley District Storer Avenue Site.





Sherbondy Hill

Rich in history and community pride, Sherbondy Hill is an area poised for resurgence. Originally known as Sherbondy Hill, the name transitioned to Lane-Wooster before regaining its title in 2017. It is close to many anchor institutions and neighborhood assets, including the Akron Zoo, Odom Branch Library, Perkins Woods Pool, Miller South School, Helen Arnold CLC, and the Akron Urban League.

This area had a thriving business district throughout the first half of the 20th century until the urban renewal efforts of the mid- to late-60s, which saw the displacement of people and businesses to construct public projects like the Akron Innerbelt. This history is still top of mind for many residents and who want to see this district regain its former glory.

The Sherbondy Hill District faces some challenges, which this plan seeks to address. Physical connectivity is a challenge in this area due to its unique topography, the development of the street network around the historic canal, and the large barriers created by the Innerbelt on the east and I-76 to the south. Additionally, this district lacks a core or center to attract people to the area. The historic business district was located along Vernon Odom Boulevard (formerly named Wooster Avenue), but that corridor is now occupied by many institutional uses with few remaining developable parcels. The West Thornton Street corridor, on the other hand, does have several vacant or underutilized properties and contains more neighborhood-serving retail and commercial businesses. Additionally, West Thornton Street is a smaller roadway and exhibits more of the qualities of a traditional "main street".





Miller South School for Visual & Performing Arts



Lane Field Park



Akron Urban League Headquarters



Vernon Odom Boulevard

RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS

The following is a list of recommended improvements to the built environment to create a more cohesive and connected Sherbondy Hill district. Graphics on the following pages illustrate these potential improvements.

- Re-establish a neighborhood core in the Sherbondy Hill district, focusing along West Thornton Street, by re-developing vacant or underutilized parcels into retail opportunities and third places.
- Improve access to Sherbondy Park by filling in sidewalk gaps on Vernon Odom Boulevard.
- Focus employment-oriented infill development or redevelopment along the Vernon Odom Boulevard corridor.
- Add bike infrastructure to West Thornton Street and consider creating neighborhood greenways along Raymond Street and Russell Avenue (see page 60).
- Forge a stronger connection to the Towpath Trail, creating a West Akron trailhead around the West Thornton Street area (see more about this idea on page 86).
- Improve the overpasses and underpasses across Route 59 with landscaping, lighting, sidewalk improvements, public art, and other public realm elements to make them safer and more comfortable for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Incorporate neighborhood public art by a local artist to foster a visible sense of identity for Sherbondy Hill.
- Add neighborhood gateways at the major entry points into West Akron from the east, including at Vernon Odom Boulevard, West Bartges Street, and West Thornton Street.

Vision for the Sherbondy Hill District.



Neighborhood Public Art

Sherbondy Park

Lane Field Park

3. Helen Arnold CLC

7. Odom Boulevard Branch Library

Miller South H.S.

Vernon Odom Blvd

East Ave

Manchester Rd

1. Re-establish Neighborhood Core

2. Add Bike Infrastructure along West Thornton Street

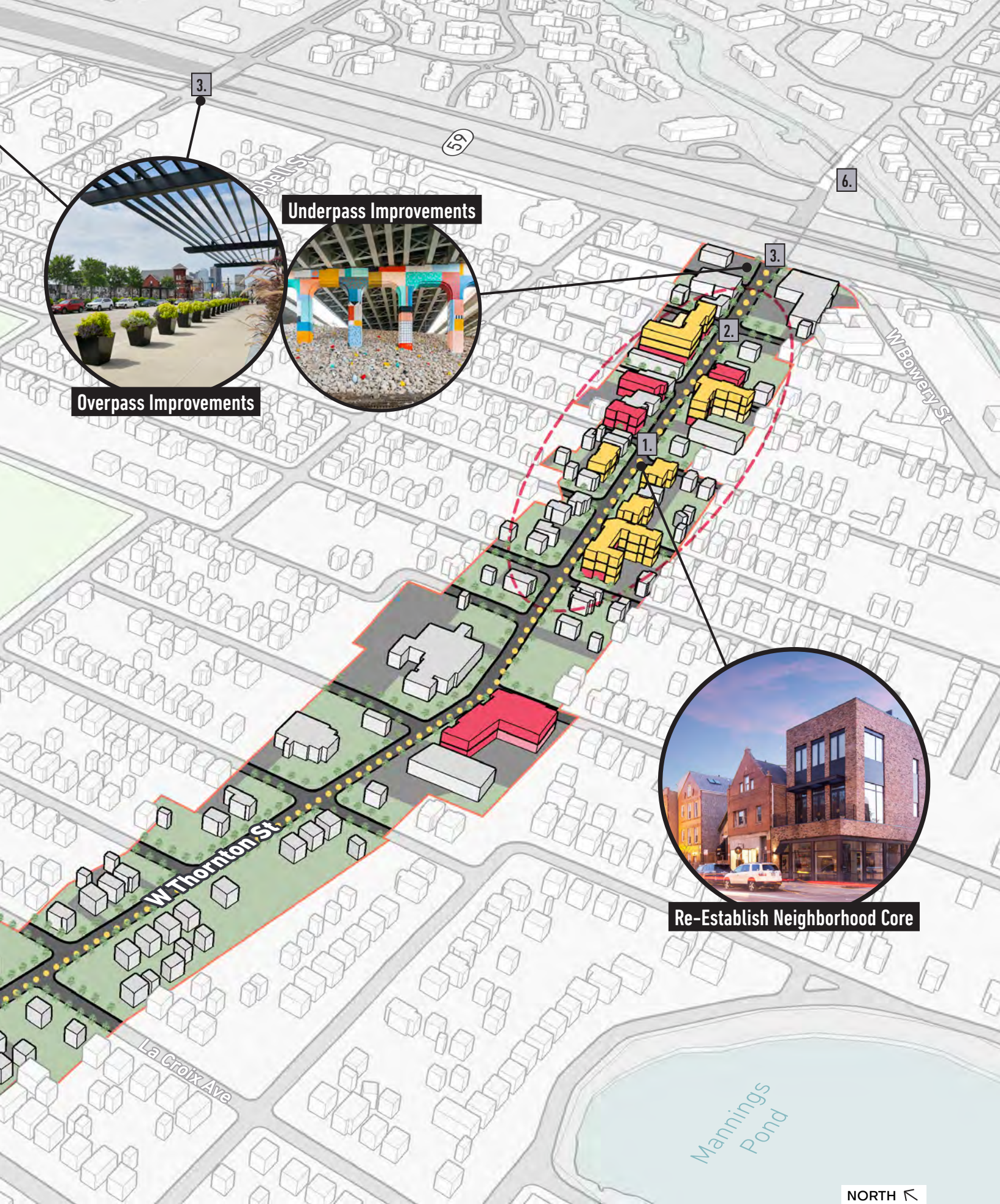
3. SR 59 Underpass and Overpass Improvements

4. Improve Access to Sherbondy Park

5. Add Public Art to Define Neighborhood Identity

6. Create a Stronger Connection to the Towpath Trail

7. Focus Employment-Oriented Infill Development on Vernon Odom Boulevard



3.

59

6.

Underpass Improvements

Overpass Improvements

2.

3.

1.



Re-Establish Neighborhood Core

W Thorntton St

La Croix Ave

W Bowery St

Mannings Pond

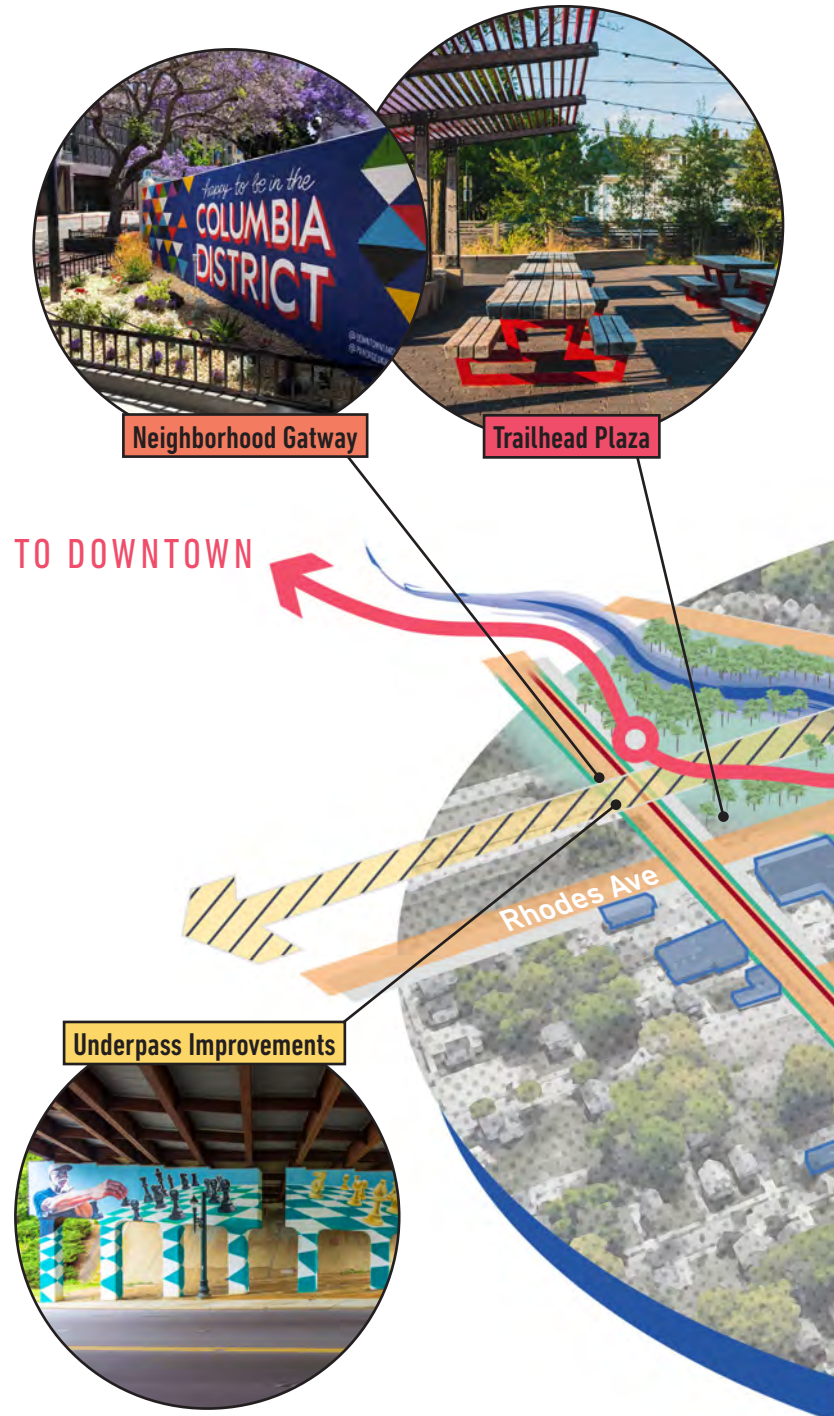
NORTH ↖

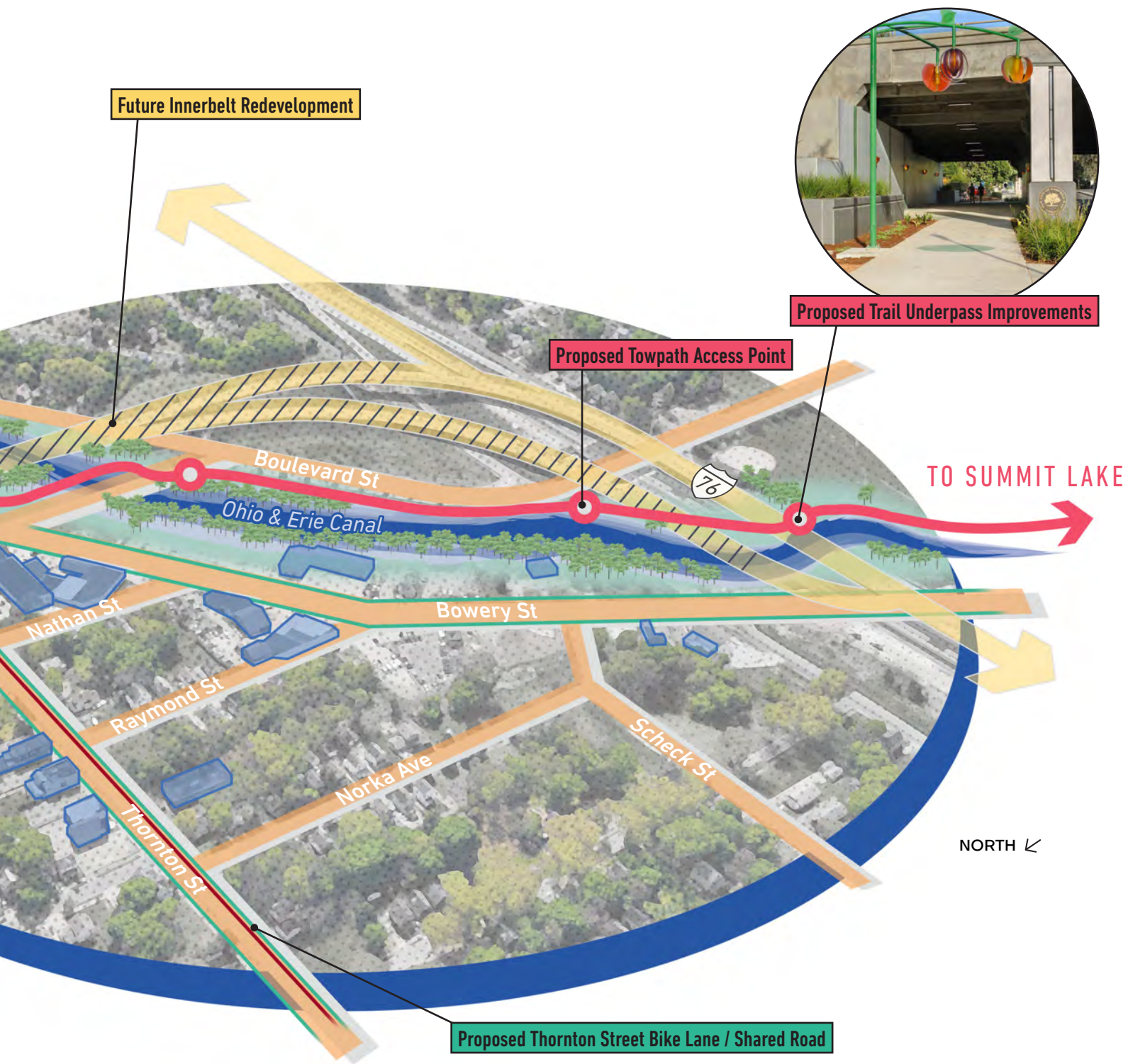
SHERBONDY HILL CONNECTIVITY

Currently, the southeast portion of the neighborhood is the only place with a direct connection to the Towpath Trail, which connects to Downtown, Summit Lake, other neighborhoods, the greater Akron region, and Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Likewise, this is the only section of the neighborhood with access to the canal waterway. With the recommendation to create a new neighborhood node focused along Thornton Street, this becomes a major opportunity for the neighborhood to create a thriving district that prioritizes active transportation infrastructure and connections. Additionally, ample data exists pointing to the economic impacts of trails, like the Towpath Trail, in boosting property values, driving tourism and local spending, and promoting physical activity, thereby reducing healthcare costs.

The diagram to the right illustrates the vision for a Sherbondy Hill district that is connected to the city and region. This includes improved highway underpasses with lighting, landscaping, and public art at the Innerbelt underpass along Thornton Street, the Bowery Street underpass beneath I-76/77, as well as the underpass where the Towpath Trail crosses I-76/77. The proposed improvements here also include a trailhead plaza near the intersection of Thornton Street and Rhodes Avenue. A trailhead plaza is a space where cyclists and district patrons, alike can sit and relax before going about their day, with amenities and creature comforts like seating, shade, drinking fountains, waste receptacles, and a bike repair station.

Additionally, the proposed improvements in this area include bike infrastructure along West Thornton Street, in alignment with the recommendations of the Akron Connects Bike Plan. Given the existing conditions of this roadway, a bike lane could be appropriate between Channelwood Circle just across SR 59 and Raymond Street. West of Raymond Street, the roadway narrows to a width that couldn't support bike lanes, so a shared road marking (sharrow) would be appropriate between Raymond Street and Manchester Road. Bike lanes or a sharrow along West Bowery Street between West Thornton Street and South Street would also provide an on-street bike connection to Summit Lake.





IMPLEMENTATION

PUTTING THE PLAN INTO ACTION

The creation of this West Akron Neighborhood Plan is only the beginning. A plan is a living document that must be operationalized and referenced in decision-making by Progressive Alliance CDC, community partners, and the City of Akron. Ultimately, the outcomes of this plan will result from community-wide efforts. This chapter outlines the recommended approach to using this plan to create lasting, impactful, and positive change for West Akron.

Using the Plan

This plan should be referenced as part of regular operations as public and private decisions are made concerning development, capital improvements, economic development, programs, and initiatives in West Akron. The plan should be aligned with other City of Akron planning efforts, including the Reconnecting Our Community initiative, strategic planning, and focus area planning. The plan should also become part of budgeting cycles for Progressive Alliance CDC and the City of Akron to ensure proper funding is set aside for that fiscal year's priorities.

Monitoring the Plan

Regular review and monitoring of the plan recommendations will help to ensure tangible outcomes for the community. Each year, Progressive Alliance should review all activities performed that year and update the community through an annual progress report. Transparency and communication in the implementation process will enable the community to remain involved in this important work and build pride in what has been accomplished.

Funding Sources

The following is a list of potential funding sources that could be applied to the improvements recommended in this plan:

Akron Parks Challenge Grant

The Akron Parks Challenge is a partnership between the City of Akron, the Akron Parks Collaborative, the Akron Civic Commons, and the Knight Foundation. The goal is to engage neighborhoods in improvements to their public spaces to increase use and neighborhood vitality.

Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

The CIP is a community planning tool used by the City of Akron to coordinate the location, timing, and financing of capital improvements over a 5-year period. The CIP itself is a working document, reviewed and updated annually to reflect changing community needs, priorities, and funding opportunities. Capital improvements include major, non-recurring physical expenditures, such as land, buildings, infrastructure, and equipment. CIP expenditures can also include one-time startup costs for other non-tangible items, such as computer software.

City of Akron Operating Budget

In contrast to one-time or large scale expenses reflected in the multi-year CIP, the operating budget addresses all other expenses which are incurred on a more continuous yearly basis to keep the City of Akron running effectively. This includes payroll and other ongoing maintenance expenses. Similar to the CIP preparation process, the preparation of the operating budget involves initial requests from Department Heads, followed by review from city leadership, then distribution of a final proposal to City Council for approval.

Great Streets Akron Initiative

Great Streets Akron is a City of Akron initiative focused on 13 targeted neighborhood business districts. The program seeks to empower, connect, and develop Akron's neighborhood business districts through community engagement and targeted resources. City resources available to eligible business districts are aimed at supporting the commercial and social revitalization of the districts and activating the street as a public space.

Rubber City Match

The Rubber City Match helps Akronites launch their businesses by matching entrepreneurs at any stage of their business process to the resources they need. This program funds business planning classes with MORTAR at the Bounce Innovation Hub, matches entrepreneurs with available commercial space, offers grants for architectural plans for build out, and partners with the Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI) to offer grants in their financing package.

Akron Resiliency Fund

The Akron Resiliency Fund is a partnership between the City of Akron and the Western Reserve Community Fund, providing low-cost loans to help stabilize Akron's small businesses. Established businesses can apply for loans of between \$10,000 and \$100,000, while startup and early-stage businesses can apply for loans of between \$10,000 and \$30,000. These five-year loans are uniquely structured to help small business owners grow and thrive. Loans can be used for operating expenses, including payroll, working capital, equipment, and debt refinancing.

JobsOhio Inclusion Grant

This grant program was developed to provide additional financial support for qualified projects in designated distressed communities and/or for businesses owned by underrepresented populations across the state. Eligible projects may be awarded grants of up to \$50,000. Eligible costs for this program include fixed asset investment, infrastructure, and training investment. This is a rolling grant program that is capped at \$5 million annually.

State of Ohio Business Loan Programs

The State of Ohio has many grants and loan programs across different departments. One such example are the business loan programs administered through the Department of Development. This includes the Ohio Micro-Loan Program, the Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) Loan Program, and the Ohio Minority Business Direct (MBD) Loan Program. These are all loans with interest rates of at or below current market rates. These three programs are intended only for already established businesses.

Summary Matrix

The table on the following pages is a compilation of the plan recommendations set forth in previous chapters. This matrix connects each recommendation with both lead and support entities who will oversee implementation of that item. The legend to the right provides a key for the various types of information displayed in the matrix.

Timeframe

The following distinctions are assigned to each recommendation to identify how long it is anticipated to take to fully implement.

Estimated Cost





This column assigns an order of magnitude cost to each recommendation to estimate its level of effort and investment. This is a very general estimate since it would require further planning and design for many of these recommendations to develop a more specific cost estimate.

Responsible Entity




It is going to take many partners to make this plan a reality. This column recognizes this fact while still assigning specific partners for the oversight of plan implementation. This column breaks this down further into lead and support entities to delegate overall lead responsibility for implementation and supporting roles to assist in a meaningful way.

MATRIX LEGEND

Timeframe

-  Short term (1 - 3 years)
-  Medium term (4 - 6 years)
-  Long term (7 - 10+ years)
-  Ongoing

Estimated Cost

-  High
-  Moderate
-  Low

Responsible Entity

PACDC	Progressive Alliance CDC
CoA	City of Akron
ACF	Akron Community Foundation
ACRF	Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank
AFSC	Age-Friendly Summit County
AMHA	Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority
APC	Akron Parks Collaborative
APD	Akron Police Department
APS	Akron Public Schools
ASCVB	Akron-Summit Convention and Visitors Bureau
AUL	Akron Urban League
BEWCA	Black Economic and Wellness Coalition of Akron
CBNDC	Cadillac Boulevard Neighborhood Development Corporation
DAP	Downtown Akron Partnership
DFA	Development Finance Authority of Summit County
GAC	Greater Akron Chamber
HFHSC	Habitat for Humanity of Summit County
METRO	Akron Regional Transit Authority
MVMBA	Maple Valley Merchants Business Association
ODOT	Ohio Department of Transportation
OECC	Ohio & Erie Canalway Coalition

Summary Matrix

Recommendation	Time Frame	Est. Cost	Responsible Entity		
			Lead	Support	
Idea 1: Foster Vibrant Neighborhood Districts					
1A	Identify properties for façade improvement programs and grants.	●●●	\$	PACDC	CoA, Property Owners
1B	Expand streetscape and placemaking improvements throughout the districts.	●●●	\$\$\$	CoA	PACDC, Property Owners
1C	Examine adopting a form-based zoning code in the neighborhood business districts.	●●●	\$	CoA	PACDC, Property Owners
1D	Strengthen code enforcement throughout the neighborhood.	●●●	\$	CoA	PACDC
1E	Establish an annual festival to be hosted in one of the Great Streets districts in West Akron.	■	\$	PACDC	Community Organizations, Business Owners
Idea 2: Announce West Akron					
2A	Create a cohesive brand that showcases West Akron's unique identity.	●●●	\$	PACDC	
2B	Develop a marketing campaign to promote West Akron locally and regionally.	■	\$	PACDC	GAC, ASCVB
2C	Highlight West Akron's brand in the built environment through neighborhood gateways, signage, and other creative installations.	●●●	\$\$	PACDC	CoA, Property Owners, MVMB
Idea 3: Grow Local Businesses and Jobs					
3A	Expand business and merchant associations throughout West Akron.	●●●	\$	PACDC	
3B	Develop a resource hub and entrepreneurship incubator.	●●●	\$\$\$	PACDC	CoA, AUL, BEWCA
3C	Recruit new businesses to fill neighborhood needs.	●●●	\$	PACDC	CoA, GAC, AUL
3D	Identify locations for possible employment-oriented development to bring high-paying jobs to West Akron	■	\$	CoA	PACDC, AUL, ConxusNEO
Idea 4: Support Housing Opportunity for All					
4A	Identify opportunities for the development of needed housing types in West Akron.	●●●	\$	PACDC	SCLB, AMHA
4B	Encourage the development of new senior housing in the neighborhood.	●●●	\$	PACDC	CoA, AFSC, SCLB, AMHA
4C	Implement programs to assist first-time homebuyers and existing homeowners.	●●●	\$\$	CoA	AMHA, HFHSC
Idea 5: Cultivate Neighborhood Third Places					
5A	Amplify existing neighborhood third places.	●●●	\$\$	PACDC	Business Owners, Property Owners
5B	Identify an opportunity for a new community-oriented neighborhood third place.	●●●	\$\$	PACDC	CoA
5C	Identify opportunities for placemaking and activation in existing business districts.	●●●	\$\$	PACDC	CoA, MVMB, Business Owners, Property Owners

Recommendation		Time Frame	Est. Cost	Responsible Entity	
				Lead	Support
Idea 6: Activate Parks and Public Spaces					
6A	Upgrade West Akron's existing parks to expand recreation opportunities and improve safety.	●●●	\$\$\$	CoA	APC, PACDC
6B	Improve access to parks for all West Akron residents.	●●●	\$\$\$	CoA	APC
6C	Expand park and recreation programming to serve the community's needs.	●●●	\$\$	CoA	APC
Idea 7: Expand Food Access					
7A	Increase availability and accessibility of fresh, healthy food through existing programs and opportunities.	●●●	\$\$	PACDC	ACRF, Business Owners
7B	Launch a neighborhood farmers' market.	●●●	\$	PACDC	Let's Grow Akron, CoA, Local Businesses
7C	Relocate and expand the existing food park to provide more centrally located food access.	●●●	\$\$	PACDC	CoA, SCLB
7D	Identify potential sites and work to attract a full-service grocer to the neighborhood.	●●●	\$	PACDC	CoA
Idea 8: Create Safe Streets					
8A	Mobilize neighbors to be stewards of their blocks and of the neighborhood.	●●●	\$\$\$	PACDC	APD
8B	Invest in streetscape improvements along priority corridors to create consistent, safe, and walkable streets.	●●●	\$\$\$	CoA	
8C	Create a network of neighborhood greenways to allow for safe walking and biking routes to parks, third places, and other neighborhood destinations.	●●●	\$\$	CoA	
Idea 9: Heal the Route 59 Divide					
9A	Ensure the Reconnecting Communities Grant Focuses on the "Secondary Study Area".	●●●	\$\$	CoA	ODOT
9B	Connect West Akron to Downtown Akron and the Towpath Trail.	●●●	\$\$	CoA	OECC, DAP
9C	Create gateways at the eastern edge of West Akron across from Route 59.	●●●	\$\$	CoA	ODOT
Idea 10: Build Capacity to Realize Plan Ideas					
10A	Expand organizational capacity of Progressive Alliance Community Development Corporation.	■	\$\$	PACDC	ACF
10B	Collaborate with partners to incentivize equitable economic and community development in West Akron.	●●●	\$\$	PACDC	CoA, DFA
10C	Initiate a West Akron Neighborhood Consortium.	●●●	\$	PACDC	CoA, CBNDC, WENDCO, Faith Leaders, Community Organizations
10D	Establish a sustainable source of funding for community and economic development in West Akron.	●●●	\$\$	PACDC	DFA

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