



Plainfield Charter Township

A New Vision for the Plainfield Avenue
Corridor, from 4 Mile to the Grand River

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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TRANSMITTAL TO THE TOWNSHIP BOARD

Dear Trustees,

Our Steering Committee was created to develop a comprehensive redevelopment strategy for the Plainfield Avenue corridor. In our evaluation, we determined that it was necessary to reimagine something very different than what we see today. The reality is we cannot continue doing the same thing and expect a different result. Vacant storefronts, speeding vehicles, and lacking curb appeal does not imbue a sense of community pride, nor does it help increase our economic prosperity.

Plainfield Township’s proximity to a major urban center, easy access to the region, quality schools, and natural amenities make it an ideal place to live. The Plainfield Avenue corridor should reflect the character and quality of the community it serves. With the right policies, practices, and partners we can remake the corridor into a series of walkable, mixed-use places connected by a green street that safely moves cars and people.

This plan is bold. It recommends that residential land uses be allowed, landscape medians be introduced to Plainfield Avenue, parking requirements slashed, and administrative approvals given for new development. This plan is also pragmatic. There is a housing shortage and unmet needs, vehicle travel speeds well exceed the posted speed limit of 45 mph, there are acres of unproductive land covered in asphalt, and a new message needs to be sent to the development community that redevelopment is desired.

We know a metamorphosis is possible if we are willing to commit to change. It is our hope that the reasoning, vision, and recommendations provided in the Reimagine Plainfield Corridor plan inspires action. Reinvestment in this corridor is important and new strategies, such as tax incentive programs, will be needed to facilitate redevelopment. Creative funding strategies for public improvements will have to be sought out. The zoning ordinance must be amended. The list is long and there will be no shortage of work.

As we enter into the recovery phase from the damage caused by the pandemic, this Plan provides an exciting vision and path forward to make the Township stronger and more resilient in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to represent the citizens and businesses of Plainfield Township. If we can be of service in any way to implement the plan, please do not hesitate to call on us in the future.

Best Regards,

Members of the Plainfield
Redevelopment Steering Committee

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OVERVIEW

Reimagine Plainfield was created to encourage residents, property and building owners, developers, and other stakeholders to think differently about the Plainfield corridor in Plainfield Charter Township. Community surveys and input from community leaders have identified a desire for change. Many parts of Plainfield Avenue are outdated, underperforming, and/or vacant. The repurposing of commercial properties has occurred in some instances, but not all uses have increased the tax base or added jobs.

Thinking about “*what if*” instead of “*what is*” can be challenging in a suburban context. The built form of the Plainfield corridor was not designed to be readily adaptable. Yet, new types of development are needed to improve the quality of life for residents, attract commuter dollars to businesses, and increase levels of investment. Redevelopment offers the opportunity to create community vibrancy, public spaces, street life, places for people to live, and active storefronts.

Plainfield Corridor’s Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges	Opportunities
Changing retail environment	Proximity to an established middle-class community
Perception that “ <i>new</i> ” is “ <i>better</i> ”	Proximity to strong job centers
Changing demographics, with varying household composition, incomes, and needs for goods and services	Large numbers of people moving through area most days
Aging and/or failing infrastructure	Near existing, extendable transit route
Complicated ownership structure/lot lines	Existing, upgradable infrastructure
Disconnect between what the community wants and viable redevelopment options	Potential to rejuvenate with different uses, such as “ <i>downtown</i> ”-style mixed-use center
Neighborhood concerns about higher-density development	Potential to diversify housing options to better suit current and changing needs

Vision:

The Plainfield Corridor is continually transforming into vibrant and prosperous places that are intentionally designed to serve the needs of our community.

The North Kent Mall’s fountain was never replaced with another community meeting spot in the corridor. A yearning has been expressed for a downtown, but the type and volume of traffic – as well as the corridor’s length - is not necessarily conducive to creating a “*main street*” out of Plainfield Avenue. Instead, we can focus on existing centers of activity and consider how these areas might transform into recognizable commercial districts of their own. The spaces in between these districts can be redeveloped into a broad range of uses, particularly residential, to provide the population necessary to support local and regional businesses.

The key themes of this plan are based off findings by the Reimagine Plainfield Steering Committee after 18 months of study, community surveys, and best practices.

These are:

- **Building vibrant places**
- **Traveling “to” as well as “through”**
- **Greening the corridor**

Theme chapters describe why such a radical change in direction is needed from the “*business as usual*” approach. It should be noted that fear of change can tempt people to want to keep things the same. There are notable areas of decline along the corridor, and even those with new investment will surely age in the same manner because it is the same form of development. The cycle of continuing to do the same thing and expecting a different result needs to be broken. Commercial property tax revenues on Plainfield Avenue have remained flat over the past decade. The corridor is not viewed as a preferred area of choice by retailers. Surrounding housing stock is aging. Household demographics have changed substantially since the 1960’s. And existing development patterns are not those that will attract wealth-building investment in the community.

The plan includes examples intended to help visualize how the corridor could be transformed. Design concepts will walk readers step-by-step

through strategies to adapt existing sites, add infill, and redevelop properties along Plainfield Avenue. The overall goal is to transform Plainfield Avenue’s current low-density, auto-dependent, single-use, single-format development patterns into a dynamic environment that is more vibrant and dense, with more varied uses, and where asphalt makes way for landscape.

The timing of this plan is opportune. The pandemic expedited existing trends, including the decline of retail and family-style restaurants, and has re-focused many people on how they view their workplace. Work-from-home mandates have led to people realizing savings in the form of transportation costs and time. Without the commute, people are now looking to find ways to experience community close to home. Reimagine Plainfield provides a blueprint to address dying retail, attract new investment, and improve quality of life for township residents.

This transformation will not be instantaneous. It will require dedication from elected and appointed officials, township staff, development community, and others to intentionally the implement plan. This may, occasionally, require saying “*no*” to the wrong thing. It will certainly require creative financing, flexibility, and partnership to get to “*yes*” for a good project. There are a variety of different tools that can be used to help advance change. In addition to zoning recommendations, the last section provides a primer on the various economic development tools that local officials may wish to consider.

Reimagining the Plainfield corridor involves transforming vacant and tired properties into mixed-use multi-story buildings, planting trees, constructing medians, and focusing Township resources to make it a reality. This plan is intended to guide development for the next 20 years. Three key components to begin to focus change include: changing zoning, working with MDOT on rehabilitation work in 2025, and encouraging efforts to green the corridor. These efforts will provide short- and long-term benefits as the corridor evolves.

Let’s get started!

BACKGROUND

Why we are reimagining

The Plainfield community was developed as an early suburb of Grand Rapids because of its easy access to the cities of Grand Rapids and Rockford. Plainfield Avenue is the major connector between those two cities and is under the jurisdiction of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). The corridor is traversed by more than 33,000 cars per day, which is slightly more than the township’s entire population. Over time, the M-44 Connector has been widened to accommodate the heavy stream of vehicles.

After World War II, the Township’s growth exploded with new tract housing, strip shopping centers, and the North Kent Mall. The automobile became a luxury nearly every household could afford. Development patterns, in turn, were now geared towards the car. Car dealers, gas stations, car washes, repair businesses, and drive-through uses became (and still are) a strong and visible presence along the “Motor Mile”. Commercial retail development desired abundant parking, and the zoning ordinance required it. Little to no consideration was given to stormwater management or landscaping to soften and cool acres of rooftops and asphalt.

The mall closed in 2001. “For lease” signs hang in strip mall windows. The Witmark building has become a symbol of neglect and for the death of retail along the Plainfield corridor. Community leaders recognize that issues associated with vacant and underutilized buildings have led to public concerns regarding property maintenance. Worse yet, commercial property values have been flat for a decade¹.



¹ 2019 is the first year that a modest gain in property tax is being realized.



There have been some modest investments, including the partial demolition of the mall to make way for a successful Lowe’s. The former Turnstyle building, once used by Meijer as an outlet, became Frontline Church. K-Mart is now a self-storage facility. Other investments have consisted of fast-food restaurants, auto parts stores, expansion of car dealer footprints, and an auto repair business. Other buildings have been repurposed. An effort to build positive energy included the creation of a Corridor Improvement Authority (CIA) with Grand Rapids Township, and sidewalks were installed.

Unfortunately, CIA revenues fell below the 2007 base for the Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district in 2013 and the Authority became defunct. Reuse of a commercial

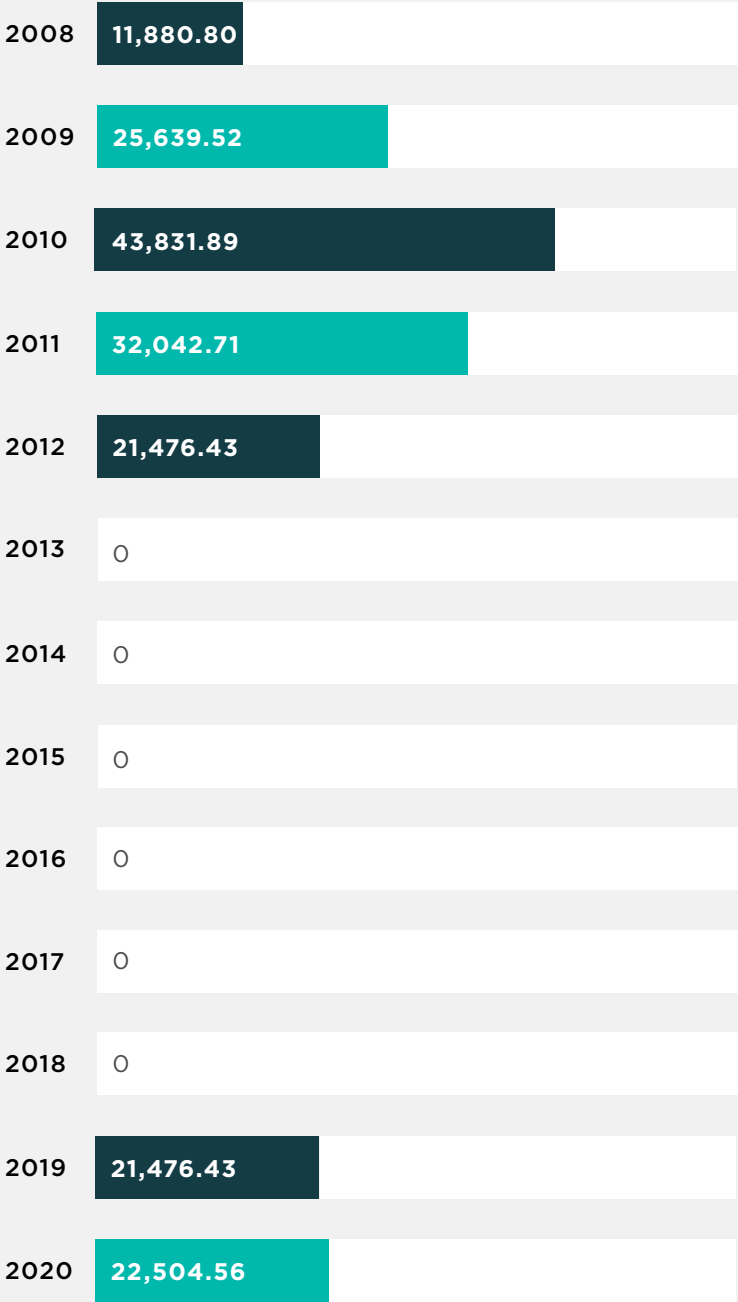
property for religious purposes does not contribute to the tax base. Repurposing a large store for self-storage does not create an abundance jobs. More auto-oriented uses continue to saturate the area that serve commuters but not residents who would benefit from a broader range of neighborhood services in close proximity.

Covid-19 has exacerbated the decline of large and small retailers. When combined with aging infrastructure, rising costs to provide basic services, and increased demand for those services due to shifting demographics, Plainfield Township faces a daunting reality. A new approach is needed to encourage high-value redevelopment and new investment along the Plainfield Avenue corridor. We must bravely face this reality with creativity, time-tested approaches, and a willingness to try something new and different.

Plainfield Strengths

- Easy highway access
- Lakes, rivers and streams
- Parks, trails, and recreational opportunities
- Proximity to Grand Rapids and Rockford
- History
- Safe, low crime
- Business variety and convenient shopping
- Connection to Northview school system
- Friendly neighborhoods and community

Plainfield Corridor Improvement Authority Tax Receipts, 2008-2020



STUDY AREA

Plainfield Corridor is defined as the area along Plainfield Avenue (M-44) from the southern Township Boundary at 4-Mile Road to the junction with East Beltline. The proposed corridor study area also includes neighboring properties north to the Grand River and south on East Beltline to Grand River Avenue.



PLANNING PROCESS

Phase 1

The Plainfield Charter Township Board of Trustees established the Plainfield Corridor Redevelopment Steering Committee (*Steering Committee*) as an ad-hoc committee to advance revitalization of the Plainfield corridor on June 24, 2019. The Board of Trustees tasked the Steering Committee with developing a comprehensive redevelopment strategy, engaging the public, identifying redevelopment tools, and recommending policy and ordinance changes. In one of the Steering Committee’s first meetings, members cited the need to reimagine what the corridor could become – with everything from land use and development to transportation on the table.

The Committee recognized that multiple choices needed to be made. Should Plainfield Avenue be modified, if so how? Should development regulations be overhauled? What partnerships and working relationships will be needed to create tangible change? How seriously is change desired? And, in what timeframe? A strong vision accompanied by clear goals and objectives was needed. The “*why*” of the vision must be understood and consistently referred to as change is guided. Finally, decision-makers must be willing to uphold the vision and remain steadfast if the vision is to be fully realized.

Committee members embarked on an 18-month journey to consider the possibilities during a deliberate and measured process. An effective process requires flexibility to adjust to questions and new learning, the ability of staff and consultants to bring forth resources that facilitate creativity and problem-solving, and the wisdom contained within the Steering Committee to determine next steps.



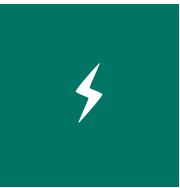
Pre-Planning

- Set expectations
- Describe success
- Create narrative
- Define themes



Visioning

- Initiate engagement
- Identify values
- Discuss current state
- Aspire to future state



Strategies

- Design the corridor
- Illustrate focal areas
- Build partnerships
- Frame policy



Implementation

- Toolbox recommendations
- Amend ordinances



The planning process was envisioned in four phases. The Pre-Planning Phase (*Phase 1*) began with introductions by enthusiastic and committed Committee members on Friday, October 18, 2019. As an ice-breaker, the Committee was asked to draw an image and write one word that shared their thoughts on “*opportunities*” that could be created along the corridor and “*threats*” to redevelopment. Words used to describe “*opportunities*” included:

- COMMUNITY
- RESILIENT
- GROWTH
- AESTHETICS
- LIVELY
- DESTINATION
- RESILIENT
- VITALITY
- WALKABLE (X2)
- EASY
- VILLAGE (*SENSE OF PLACE*)
- WORK-LIVE
- MIXED-USE

INTERESTING FACT

5 out of 13 images included trees.





Based on this input, the Committee's work was scoped for the following nine months around critical topics. The Committee was, fortunately, impatient to cover a lot of ground and decided to hold two meetings a month in January and February, which

Highlights of the learnings from these listening meetings are in this plan. It is important to note that discussions with experts occurred pre-pandemic. However, the trends noted remain in place and, in several instances, have accelerated.

- **Walkability (November 8, 2019)**
 - Disability Advocates of Kent County and test pilots
- **Development trends (December 6, 2019)**
 - Bill Mast, *Visser Brothers*
 - Stan Wisinski, *NAI Wisinski*
 - Ryan Wheeler, *Orion Construction/PURE Property Management*
- **Plainfield development regulations and approval processes (January 10, 2020)**
 - Plainfield Community Development staff
 - › Bill Fischer, *Community Development Director*
 - › Peter Elam, *Township Planner*
 - › Elizabeth Curcio, *Assistant Township Planner*
- **New planning and development approaches (January 31, 2020)**
 - Suzanne Schulz, *Progressive AE*
- **Transportation (February 14, 2020)**
 - Art Green, *MDOT*
 - Kerwin Keen, *MDOT*
 - Nathan Schilling, *MDOT*
 - Chris Zull, *Progressive AE (formerly CoGR)*
 - Tim Haagsma, *Kent County Road Commission*
- **Transit (February 28, 2020)**
 - Max Dillivan, *The Rapid*
 - Steve Faber, *The Rapid/Byrum Fisk*
- **Green infrastructure and the environment (March 13, 2020)**
 - Wendy Ogilvie, *GVMC*

Community Surveys

Governor Whitmer’s COVID-19 Stay Home, Stay Safe orders on March 24, 2020 put an end to the meetings, but the Committee had covered a lot of ground and built an understanding of the big opportunities and challenges facing redevelopment of the Plainfield corridor. Meaningful change is rarely easy, especially when many constituencies will be affected by, and have influence over, land use and transportation decisions.

To begin to get a sense of what residents, business owners, property owners, visitors, and others thought of the Plainfield corridor (*and to keep project momentum*) a series of community surveys were released using the Plainfield Township’s OpenGov survey tool beginning on April 20, 2020. The surveys were advertised in the Township’s newsletters in hard copy and online. Respondents were encouraged to register as users. This did deter some people from providing feedback, so later in the survey series people could comment without identifying themselves.

PART ONE

Respondents were asked about how they use the Plainfield corridor, thoughts on whether it is a destination, perceptions of the corridor, and what was most important. Survey questions were constructed with multiple choice options. There were 152 registered participants. A general comment option was provided, and 78 comments were received.

PART TWO

Using the top-rated response from Part 1 about what was most important, questions were oriented around commercial development along the Plainfield corridor. Strengths, weaknesses, favored commercial district characteristics, and opportunities for change were identified. These questions were an assortment of multiple choice and directed questions. There were 111 registered participants; up to 96 unique responses were provided.

PARTS THREE, FOUR, AND FIVE

These questions were simplified to one question each, based on the common threads heard in Parts 1 and 2. Questions were focused on design of the corridor, priorities for improving its appearance, and sense of place. The number of responses varied, from as few as 15 for one to as many as 81 for another.

Survey results are included in the Appendices and are well worth reading. The information learned from the exercise positioned the Township’s Advisory Committee for the next phase of the planning process.

Very clear and consistent themes emerged from the survey responses. For example, there is a strong desire for green space and/or greening of the corridor. Some points of conflict were predictable, such as whether pedestrians and bicyclists should

be considered in the design of Plainfield Avenue. Other responses had mixed messages, such as “*no more fast food*” but.... “*a Chik-Fil-A would be great.*” Aside from street design, one of the biggest areas of debate was whether Plainfield Avenue should strive to become a desirable place for chain restaurants and national retailers, or a place with a walkable “*downtown*” area. Themes and illustrative survey comments are provided on the next pages.

BIG IDEAS

Community Survey Results

- Allow businesses to build up! Multi-story buildings with a mix of uses (*commercial/residential*) would be ideal.
- Tear down old abandoned buildings. Higher end restaurants and businesses with housing above. Walkability – lessen the access points. Provided dedicated greenspace. Update facades. Warm lighting and flower baskets.
- Development of a centrally located area with places to eat, shop and meet. Includes green space and easy access. Maybe to connected to a neighborhood park.
- A shopping, restaurant, park area by the river or other body of water – why drive to Rockford when Plainfield could be amazing.
- Bike paths, continuity of building design, nice greenspace.
- Add a boulevard with beautiful trees and landscaping, tear down the empty buildings, remodel the storefronts, add sidewalks on both sides, and get some better stores and restaurants.
- Need to develop better balance of residential and commercial space. More green space and walkability with some part of the corridor having a central focus that is a destination not just for those living in the corridor but that would draw those form outlying areas for recreation.
- The Corridor should first be for the people of this community by being desirable and providing value; the focus should not be on providing easy access for visitors to drive through or arrive at big box stores. That model is not sustainable: we do not want to be the next 28th Street (*that appears as mostly abandoned unused commercial sites*).
- My “*big plan*” is to go **SMALL**. Make the area attractive and efficient, not just big and busy. Businesses should be near the street with parking behind. There should be sidewalks, bike lanes and shade trees. Don’t let cheap stuff make it ugly. Let 28th Street or Alpine have the strip malls and traffic.
- Bring it into the current times. Make traffic flow seamless. Address poor road conditions. Address poor sidewalk conditions. Make it more appealing to the eye.
- Create a walkable lifestyle area that is more than just the utilitarian place to run errands. Create an entertainment, dining, shopping area that includes condos, etc, within walking distance.
- Connect driveways/parking lots so it isn’t necessary to go out in main traffic lanes to go from one store to another.
- Put in a Trader Joe’s, Target, Applebee’s or Fazoli’s. Shops like Old Navy, Marshall’s or TJ Maxx.
- More landscaping and green infrastructure is needed. More sense of place. People in Michigan have pride where they live. You need to create a new brand for Plainfield.
- Create a ‘city-center’, community center for Plainfield, with a clear focal point and identify, as opposed to a drive-thru community. Visitors should know they are in Plainfield (identity). It should be more than a road with stores; visitors should know where they are and what the community values.

COMMON THEMES

Community Survey Results

Describe the Plainfield Avenue Corridor

- Heavy traffic just passing through going by rundown businesses and car dealerships.
- It is an older business district that has yet to be updated.
- Old, ramshackle. Looks like it may have been a minor destination in the 70’s or earlier. Definitely past its prime. Has a “low rent” appearance.
- No style, dirty, run down, get through type of a road, not inviting, commercial chaos.

Placemaking

- It needs something to tie it all together that says “This is the Plainfield Corridor”. Lighting, benches, greenspace etc.
- I think it is important to develop some sort of a downtown feel to the corridor. It doesn’t feel like a community in the way the corridor is currently structured.
- Perhaps with more sit-down restaurants and cute shops with green space around them to make this area more inviting and help maintain home values and not make it 28th street. More like a downtown Rockford or EGR feeling.
- Honestly, Plainfield is so abandoned that I don’t feel there are any people or businesses that give any strength to the community.

Uses

- More discriminating selection of the types of business allowed or encouragement of desirable business is needed; we do not need any more cash advance stores, pawn shops, thrift stores, cellphone stores, or national chain fast food.

- We do not need another car dealership or car wash. I think we’re maxed out on those.
- More chain restaurants....Logan’s, Mission BBQ, Craft store like Hobby Lobby.....Frank’s nursery was great when it was here. A great garden center open year round. Target would be great to have. Look at the Beltline and Alpine. Bring a home store here....maybe not as big as Bed, Bath and Beyond but something where gifts can be bought.

Redevelopment

- Multi-story buildings would allow for numerous businesses to operate on a single footprint.
- There has been so much development happening just east and south of us, it seems like (once the economy bounces back) that people would come up here if we had good restaurants, things to do, etc.
- The section of Plainfield between 5 Mile and the Beltline has great potential for some fun type of businesses similar to the East Town, East Hills area.

Street Configuration

- With the center lane it is a wonder there has been head-on accidents! Somehow the left turns from the center lane needs to be safer.
- It’s often difficult to make left turns and cross lanes of traffic. The number of people that turn into the center turn lane is causing dangerous situations.
- An adjustment of traffic flow would be good. Grandville changed its Chicago Dr going through town, while keeping its charm. We have an advantage because of our business sitting farther back from the street is better for parking. Re-direct the entrances and exits for major businesses to traffic lights to make it safe and to readjust traffic flow. Resist the traffic lights for peak hours to move traffic smoother.

Traffic

- The corridor now has the feeling of being an expressway with the only purpose being a zooming vehicle zone.
- It is difficult to turn onto Plainfield from Airway and Hunsberger during rush hours, lunch hour and school drop off & pickup hours. If a community center is built on the Northview campus it could be a real problem for seniors to get out onto Plainfield.
- Too much traffic and not walkable.
 - 59% of respondents (89) said that traffic along the Plainfield Corridor is busy during rush hour, but then is generally lighter in between; 28% (42) responded that it is occasionally busy but is generally fine.

Pedestrian Safety

- Traffic overall has to be slowed down. We see, almost daily, people trapped in the center lane trying to cross Plainfield on foot. The center (suicide) lane is used commonly as a merge lane for people joining the traffic from businesses.
- Need more consistent sidewalks at the North end and bike lanes.
- Streets are meant for CARS not bikes or pedestrians, so please don’t pander to the bicycling-bully brigade by wasting a bunch of money on sidewalks when it could be better spent elsewhere.
 - 70% of respondents (107) said that they do not think that Plainfield Avenue is safe for all users (drivers, pedestrians, cyclists)

Greening

- Corridor is not attractive, would love to see trees, shrubs etc. along the street and also in the larger parking lots, and curbs.
- Dire need for green space. Need for trees and a sense of beauty.
- If possible, make a green space between the two lanes.

Maintenance and Enforcement

- Plainfield Corridor needs an immense revitalization. So many properties have gone unkept, upkeep has not been a focus.
- Unfortunately, it is an ugly area. Too many vacated and dilapidated buildings and surrounding unkempt areas.
- Enforcement of current standards should be met prior to adding new things.

Witmark

(yes, it gets its own category because that’s how many times it came up)

- We need to do something about the derelict buildings that sit unused and are an eyesore; specifically, the Witmark building. It takes up space at a potentially strong intersection and looks terrible as well as having attracted homeless to live around it at various points in the past.
- Deserted buildings should be removed by law. Witmark has been vacant nearly as long as I have lived in Michigan (29 years).
- The Witmark building seems to be purposefully overpriced to keep it from selling with just the bare amount of maintenance being performed to keep it from being condemned. This blight on the Plainfield corridor needs to be dealt with.

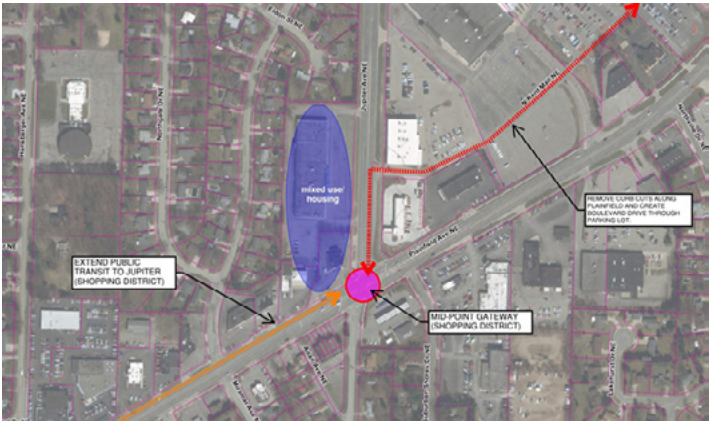
Wish Plainfield Avenue Corridor was more like...

- Rockford
- East Beltline at Knapp
- Ada
- Small town main street
- Easttown
- Standale
- Gaslight Village
- Wealthy Street

VISIONING

Phase 2

Survey results were shared with the Committee. Then, based on the survey results and what had been learned during the listening sessions, the Committee crafted a vision statement for what they hoped the corridor could become. The vision statement reads: *“The Plainfield Corridor is continually transforming into vibrant and prosperous places that are intentionally designed to serve the needs of our community.”* The Committee also identified a series of guiding principles (see *Corridor Vision*) and identified locations along the corridor that could be considered as opportunities for change. This information was then compiled and served as the basis for a corridor charrette.



Charrette trace graphic mixed use housing gateway shopping remove curb cuts

Opportunities for Change:

The Reimagine Plainfield Committee identified the following as areas where there was some opportunity for revitalization/reinvestment/redevelopment:

- Potential development hubs/nodes at Northland Drive, Jupiter, and Meijer location; each node should offer different destinations and encourage walkability
- Shallow commercial lots and strip malls (may need to demolish a few homes to get parcels of sufficient size)
- Look for reconfiguration opportunities
- Lakes are underutilized and short-cut corner by Family Fare is deadly
- Vacant/blighted properties around Northland area (Racket Club, Kemp’s Furniture); Coit to Northland Drive has potential for live/work, residential, walkable areas
- North Kent Mall outlots (e.g. in front of former K-Mart)
- Strip malls across from North Kent Mall
- Single-use, single-story buildings with lots of parking across from Meijer
- Jupiter/Plainfield SE corner vacant lot
- Witmark (x1,000,000,000)
- Plainfield Lumber site (vacant, blighted, underutilized), could extend over Mark Street with adjacent motel for reinvestment
- Areas of concern around school pinch points (Hunsberger, Woodworth) and no sidewalks on Airway
- Everything South of 4 Mile (not in Plainfield Township)

What is a charrette?

A charrette is a collaborative, intensive, visually-oriented brainstorming session. Everyone brings a range of experience and expertise to the table and participants—often a mix of planners, architects, landscape architects, transportation engineers, stakeholders and others—talk and sketch through design options that could help bring a community’s vision to life. It’s a “safe space” to share and test-drive big, ambitious ideas that can then be refined to fit the community’s particular needs.

On October 12, 2020, while COVID-related restrictions on large public gatherings were still in place, Progressive AE took the opportunity to leverage its talent and knowledge from an entire spectrum of staff to reimagine the Plainfield corridor alongside members of the Committee and Planning Commission. Employees were offered the experience as a service-learning opportunity with up to 8 hours of time per person contributed towards the charrette by the firm. More than two-dozen staff persons participated in the event.

The study area was broken down into three focus areas, each with an assigned team. As intended, a set of overlapping themes emerged. The exercise reinforced the need for a vision focused on segments and areas of strength; and to consider the interrelationship of Plainfield Avenue as a road in conjunction with the buildings and uses that line it. The ideas that emerged from this charrette helped to clarify the options available to the Committee and provide a sense of what the corridor might look like in 20 years. This thinking informed the plan themes, which are explained in detail in the Design Concepts section.



STRATEGIES

Phase 3

The charrette process assisted in identifying areas of opportunity for strategic investment along the corridor. As the next step of refinement, site-level analyses occurred to clarify specific design principles and provide a vision that might entice developers. A series of modelling exercises were undertaken to better understand how buildings, parking, landscaping, site access and circulation, neighborhood compatibility, street design, and other considerations might work together to change the character and context of the Plainfield Corridor in a way that would achieve the vision and guiding principles as established by the Committee.

Redevelopment areas now serve as illustrative examples in this plan under Design Concepts to show how the various components can work together to create change. The zoning ordinance, as a regulatory tool, can be used to allow new development types previously not permitted along the Plainfield corridor. The examples provide a basis for building placement, setbacks and heights, massing and scale, street layout, and other pertinent information to guide future zoning language.



Charrette Sketchup Axon

IMPLEMENTATION

Phase 4

The implementation measures outlined in this plan were identified through various conversations with the Committee, including a prioritization exercise where members identified the most desirable priority actions that should be taken. The Committee's recommendations were then vetted by the Township's staff, Planning Commission and Township Board to ensure that there was agreement and alignment on the necessary steps to make visible and impactful change in the Plainfield corridor. The Reimagine Plainfield Plan was then shared with developers, businesses and property owners. More than 200 people in the community tuned in to 6 Zoom webinars and attended

the community open house at the 5 Mile fire station. Events were advertised on traditional and social media. Release of the Plan was covered 15 times on ABC (WZZM), NBC (WOOD), and Fox (WXMI) with 292,777 views. Print and online exposure garnered 475,245 views, and ads were posted on FaceBook and LinkedIn to another 62,544 viewers. The Planning Commission unanimously recommend the Township Board consider adoption of the plan on April 27, 2021. The Steering Committee unanimously referred the plan for the Board's consideration on May 3, 2021. The plan was adopted on _____, 2021 by the Plainfield Charter Township Board of Trustees.



Charrette Day team photo

CORRIDOR VISION & FUTURE LAND USE

Vision

A community vision reflects expectations for what might be in the future. It is aspirational. The vision is the foundation for the work as well as the North Star for where we want to go. The Reimagine Plainfield Steering Committee spent time thinking about and discussing the meaning of the Corridor Plan’s vision as a statement of intent. Several key concepts expressed in the corridor vision are worth noting:

CONTINUAL TRANSFORMATION – The corridor of today is “fixed” with one form of development that makes it very difficult to transition to another use or building type in the same way an urban center might, where buildings are regularly being town down and rebuilt. The Plainfield corridor needs to be nimbler and more flexible to meet the needs of the future.

VIBRANT AND PROSPEROUS - Residents describe the area as “tired” or “worn” which speaks to a lack of activity and investment. The concepts of vibrancy and prosperity relate to creating places for people. Development should create energy and activity as well as build wealth in the community.

PLACES - Plainfield Avenue is a long corridor. It should not be considered as one place but instead as a collection of “places” that have their own unique identities, functions, and relationships with the neighborhoods and businesses that surround them.

SERVING COMMUNITY NEEDS – Land uses along Plainfield Avenue have heavily catered to the automobile. More options for daily living, including a variety of housing types, goods and services, are needed to serve existing and new township residents.



VISION

The Plainfield Corridor
is continually
transforming into
vibrant and prosperous
places that are
intentionally designed
to serve the needs of
our community.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Steering Committee forged a set of guiding principles to assist in decision-making. These guiding principles were developed based on their lived experience on Township matters as elected officials, business owners, and members of the community.

Contributing input was also taken from community surveys and information learned from listening sessions.

These guiding principles assist in steering and setting priorities over time. Proscriptive prioritization of projects can change, depending upon funding opportunities, community preference, or other new projects not anticipated by this plan. Therefore, these principles set the framework for agile decision-making to be able to take advantage of implementation opportunities that advance plan objectives.

Community Identity and Image

We support maintenance and beautification strategies that improve the image of the Plainfield corridor. Good upkeep matters and is expressed in our words and actions that show care and pride.

Design

We believe that quality design matters. Design approaches that create context, support placemaking, and are long-lasting are important.

Quality of Life

We are committed to making a quality living environment for all people. A range of goods and services will be located conveniently nearby and housing will be provided at a range of different price points.

Responsible

We ensure that existing and future development contributes to the financial stability of the township and our quality of life. A deliberative, long-term view will be used in making development decisions.

Balance

We recognize the importance of maintaining a balance between access and mobility along the Plainfield corridor. We acknowledge the need to better focus Plainfield Avenue on the pedestrian and other modes of transportation beyond vehicles.

Investment

We provide a development environment with clear, consistent, and fair rules that reflect the community’s goals and provide direction and predictability to the development community and other partners that may influence the corridor’s development.

FUTURE LAND USE

The future vision for Plainfield Avenue is very different than what is seen today. It is important to rethink development as the community has known it here. The corridor must become more adaptable, flexible, and sustainable if we are to leave behind the vestiges of a lackluster post-World War II suburban strip. Plainfield Avenue has the potential to claim its place in the region as an attractive location of choice for new residents and businesses.

The Future Land Use Map illustrates the general development patterns envisioned for the Plainfield Avenue Corridor using the following land use designations. The categories illustrated are described as follows and in the Building Vibrant Places and Creating Town Centers sections of this plan.



Town Centers

Town centers are intended to support local and regional markets. Each town center will have its own unique focus, but the land use components of all are similar. The selection of these areas is based on existing conditions where positive commercial activity is occurring and the potential to foster synergies with additional uses exists. Each center has a major anchor that can attract other tenants and enough land area for substantial redevelopment.

KEY COMPONENTS INCLUDE:

- Centers are viewed as mini-downtowns that foster diversity and interest with shops, residences, workplaces, and community gathering places.
- Taller buildings and more intense development are permitted here to frame and activate the public realm.
- Opportunities to create smaller blocks, a street network, and streetscapes.
- Building massing and scale is appropriate to support a pedestrian-oriented environment.
- Structures are oriented to frame internal streets.
- Parking is shared between uses, on-street parking is permitted off Plainfield, and off-street parking is located behind or to the side of buildings but not in front.
- Centers have the potential to be served by transit.
- Auto-oriented uses are discouraged; if allowed, they should be on the periphery of the site as part of a larger complex of buildings.
- Civic buildings, public greenspaces, and community gathering places are strongly encouraged.

Mixed Use Segments

This classification will provide the most dramatic change to the physical appearance of Plainfield Avenue. The intent is to create neighborhood-focused segments that connect between town centers. These areas are near existing residential neighborhoods and seek to be compatible with adjacent development as well as provide the residential density necessary to support desired amenities and activities that will contribute towards placemaking and quality of life. Development will be more compact and pedestrian oriented.

KEY COMPONENTS INCLUDE:

- Multiple-story buildings are oriented towards Plainfield Avenue and new greenspaces.
- The widest possible spectrum of uses will be encouraged.
 - Retail uses are allowed, but not required to be in mixed-use buildings.
 - Numerous housing types of varying price points will be supported.
 - Light industrial uses that are similar in their operation to other permitted commercial uses and will increase employment opportunities should be considered.
- Auto-oriented uses, including drive-throughs, are not appropriate.
- Buildings and off-street parking areas are organized in such a way as to soften the existing streetscape and encourage pedestrian activity.
- Spaces for public gathering areas are encouraged.
- Parking is located to the side or behind buildings.
- Curb cuts are reduced along Plainfield and directed to side streets.
- Medians are desired along Plainfield Avenue in these segments to improve livability.

Commuter Commercial

This classification recognizes existing auto-oriented uses and commuter needs, but it seeks to improve the physical character of these areas by identifying and strengthening portions of the corridor sales and services that accommodate the larger region. Due to the large lot sizes located in this area, should remote purchasing and other industry changes evolve which might shrink the amount of land needed for such purposes, it is recommended that this future land use classification be reconsidered to facilitate additional development that will contribute to increasing residential units and employment opportunities along the corridor.

KEY COMPONENTS INCLUDE:

- Single-story buildings oriented towards Plainfield Avenue.
- Auto-oriented uses such as car dealers, gas stations, car washes, repair businesses, and drive-through uses are allowed.
- Parking may be in the front, side, or rear of buildings.
- Curb cuts are reduced and directed to side streets.
- Landscaping is integrated into site design to screen parking lots and provide tree canopy coverage to reduce heat island effect.

Residential Living

Existing residential areas abutting the Plainfield Avenue in the area from Rockvalley Drive to Coit Avenue and Paramount Drive are not proposed to change. Given the abundance of retail space along the corridor, this area provides a welcome break from large buildings and parking lots. It will successfully contribute to making the Versluis Town Center and Plainfield Village distinct from one another.

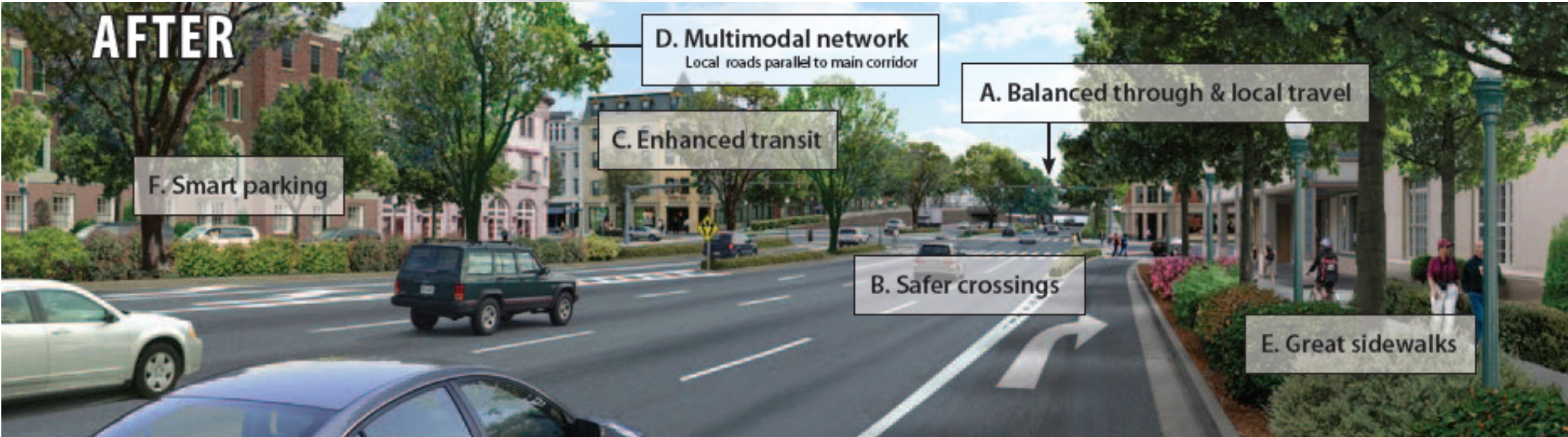
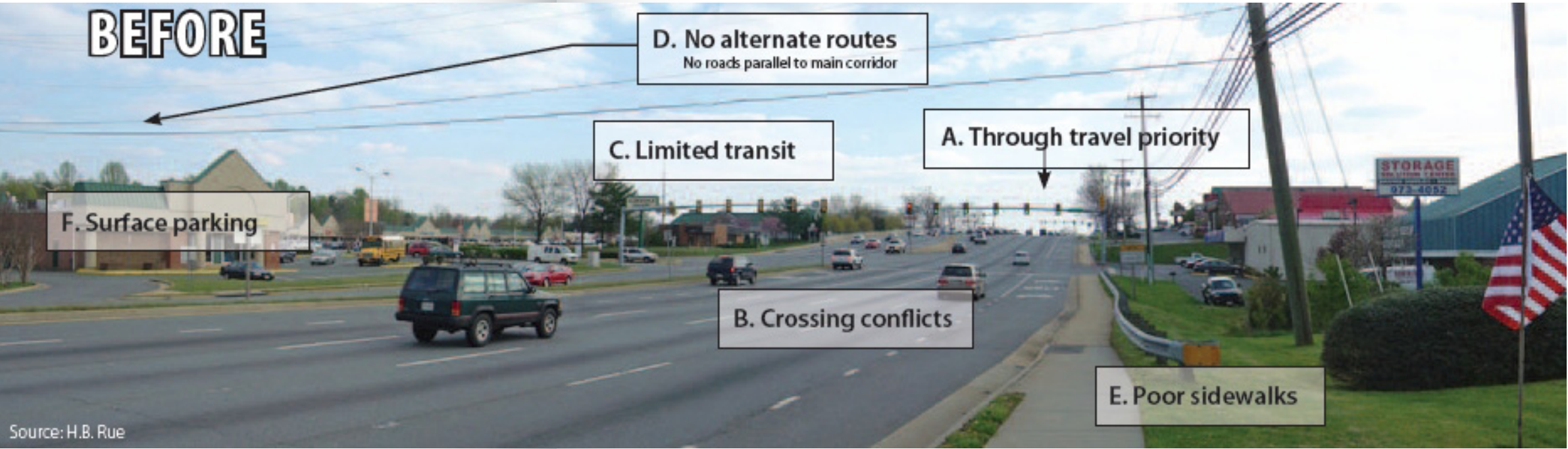


Plainfield Avenue

Existing land use patterns and transportation systems along the Plainfield corridor must evolve from an auto-centric to a people-centric form. Commuters will not go away, and they must be accommodated due to the limited crossings available over the Grand River. The future economic success of the corridor, however, requires a rebalancing. Past practices of developing lots for a single purpose surrounded by surface parking, and designing streets to move cars with great efficiency, impairs the ability to optimize land use in a way that is beneficial to neighborhoods seeking a higher quality of life. Providing mixed-use, dense development that accommodates cars—but also pedestrians, transit and bicycles—enhances the corridor’s potential for additional growth and development while providing opportunities for increased mobility and livability.

KEY COMPONENTS OF A REIMAGINED PLAINFIELD AVENUE INCLUDE:

- Curb cuts are reduced and directed towards side streets.
- A “shadow” street system is created, preferably in the rear of commercial parcels, to create a secondary local street network.
- Residential cut-through streets are closed along Plainfield and instead are connected to the secondary local street network.
- Building placement assists in reducing the need for multiple access points off Plainfield.
- Landscaping and street trees are planted to calm traffic, beautify the corridor, improve storm water quality, reduce the urban heat island effect, increase property values, and create a dramatic contrast from today’s existing conditions.



The following chapters of this Plan describe the concepts necessary to achieve this vision and provide illustrative examples that prove the feasibility of the recommendations contained herein.

DEMOGRAPHIC, SOCIAL, AND LAND USE TRENDS

One of the purposes of planning is to proactively manage change. Understanding demographic, social, and land use trends and their potential impact on a corridor as significant as Plainfield Avenue is important, particularly when the pandemic has accelerated the rate of change. For example, the National retail landscape itself has been changing dramatically. Online shopping comprises a bigger share of purchases, and many retailers and shoppers have turned away from enclosed malls. Shopping centers and large retail stores were dying a slow death pre-Covid. Now, as many as 25,000 stores are anticipated to shut down permanently – many mall staples such as Kay Jewelers, GNC, Zales, Victoria’s Secret, GameStop, Chico’s, Gap, JC Penny, The Children’s Place, Express, and Macy’s; and outlot or strip center tenants such as Bed Bath & Beyond, Office Depot, AT&T, Men’s Warehouse, and Walgreen’s.

It is unusual to dedicate an entire section of a plan to trends. These are not ordinary times, however. To be able to make educated guesses about what the world will look like post-Covid, it is important to understand what is going on today. Part of the aim of Reimagine Plainfield is to consider a different built development form. By examining trends, we can test the validity of our vision and assumptions then chart a path forward. The Steering Committee discussed these and their impact. This information then contributed to plan recommendations.

2 <https://moneywise.com/a/chains-closing-the-most-stores-in-2020#:~:text=A%20record%20of%20500%20stores%20went,dark%20for%20good%20Coresight%20says.>

Our Population is Aging

Communities of all sizes are dealing with a population that has changed tremendously in recent decades. While data from the 2020 Census is not yet available, we know that the population is aging rapidly—projections from Census data suggest that in the next decade 1 in 5 people will be over the age of 65 in the United States. There are 10,000 Baby Boomers a day entering into retirement. In Plainfield Township, it is anticipated that 21.4% of the population will be 65 years or older in the next 5 years. Overall, the Township’s population is expected to increase by 4% in the next five years with Kent County is expected to gain 30,000 new residents. The demand for new housing is an opportunity for Plainfield Township to consider how it might attract new residents to support schools and business activity.

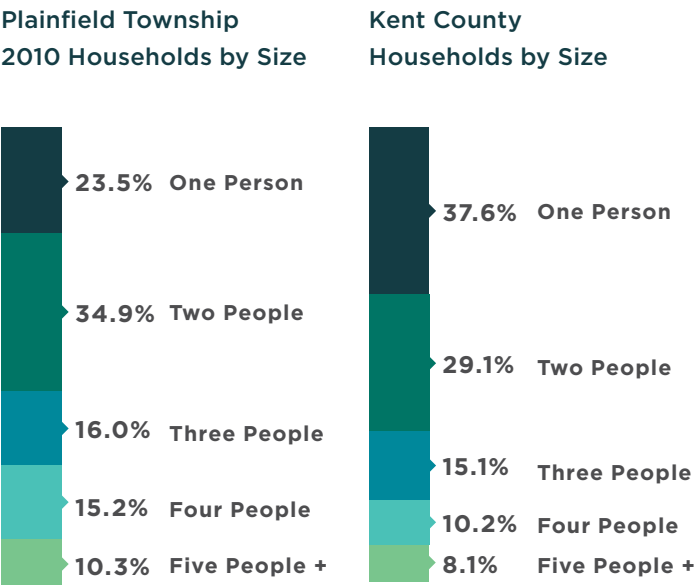
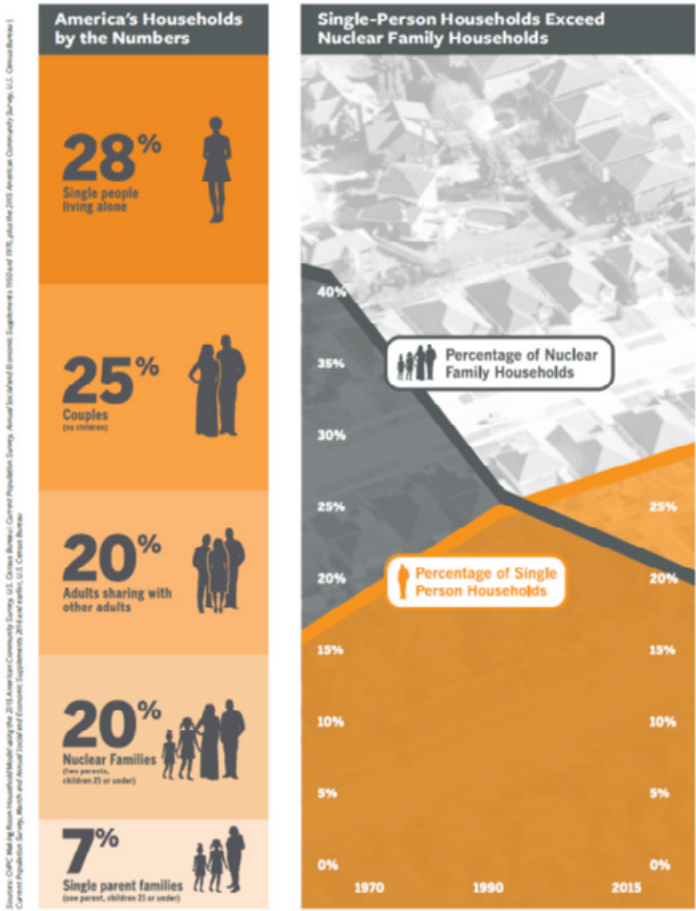
For example, if a single retiree is living in a home designed for families what other types of housing might be provided so that he or she does not need to leave their neighborhood? If the home could be made available for a family, school enrollment could continue to remain strong.

Did You Know

- 1 in 5 people in the United States will be over the age of 65 in the next decade (*by 2030*).
- 1 in 5 US households are nuclear families (*mom, dad, 2 kids*); the remaining 80% have different living arrangements.
- 1 in 5 households are multi-generational (*grandparents and/or adult children living with head of household*).
- 1 in 5 housing units are built as studios or with 1 bedroom; most existing housing (80%) is constructed with two or more bedrooms.

There are a lot of One- and Two-Person Households

The nature of households is changing fast. Data from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey indicate that single people living alone (28% of US households) is now the most common living arrangement. There are more of these kinds of households than those consisting of “traditional” nuclear families with a husband, wife, and their children (20%). The second-most-common form of household is couples without children (25%). Young people are marrying and establishing their own households later, which is having a big impact on household composition. Nearly 60% of households in Plainfield Township were comprised of one- and two-person households in 2010. There is a greater proportion of family households in the township than in the County, with about 250 new family households being added every 5 years.



Plainfield Is Becoming Racially, Ethnically And Economically Diverse

The demographic profile of a person who lives in Grand Rapids’ suburbs is changing. First ring suburbs were originally constructed for white, middle-class couples with children. Federal policy and private deed restrictions at the time prevented people of color from moving in. Today, Plainfield Township is becoming more diverse in terms of race, culture, income, age, sexuality, and lifestyle. This shift suggests that different development solutions are needed to meet contemporary needs—such as a range of housing types to accommodate all lifestyles at different life-cycle stages.

ESRI’s definition of diversity is two dimensional and combines racial diversity with ethnic diversity. This measure shows the likelihood that two persons, chosen at random from the same area, belong to different races or ethnic groups. If an area’s entire population belongs to one race group and one ethnic group, then an area has zero diversity. In theory, the index ranges from 0 (*no diversity*) to 100 (*complete diversity*). In 2010, the diversity index for Plainfield was 16.6. It is estimated that in 2025 this will increase to 22.8.



More Housing Is Needed

Housing in Kent County is in short supply and available housing is mis-matched with current housing needs. The disconnect between smaller household size and available housing stock is exacerbated by the financial strain caused by fast-increasing housing costs and the debt burden carried by recent college graduates. In Kent County the following housing issues exist:

- Bowen National Research (2020) estimates that Kent County and the City of Grand Rapids will need nearly 9,000 rental units and 13,300 owner-occupied units by 2025 to satisfy demand.
- Supply and demand has increased prices, affecting affordability for all housing price ranges.
- Housing units that could be affordable for some households are not because of downward pressure from higher income groups outbidding for properties due to lack of supply.
- Beyond the general shortage in housing units, there is not a variety of housing types to suit the diversity of households in our community.
- There is a lack of builders and skilled tradespeople to do construction. Those who are building can pick and choose projects that yield the greatest return, which has caused an extreme shortage of starter homes and housing in affordable price ranges.

Housing Affordability Is An Issue

The median household income in Plainfield Township in 2020 is projected to be \$72,350 and per capita income is projected to be \$36,244. There is an increasing rate of disparity between income and housing costs. Using the measure of Area Median Income (AMI) for 2 person households, the median household income in Plainfield Township falls within the 80-120% AMI range of \$51,360 to \$77,040. Roughly half of the township’s households had a household income below \$75,000 per year. The majority of builders are constructing homes in price ranges for households above 120% AMI.

Housing affordability has become an issue of concern throughout Kent County. Housing costs should comprise no greater than 30% of a household’s income. If that number becomes greater than 30% then households are considered “housing burdened”. In Plainfield, many households would qualify as needing “affordable” housing. A lack of housing choice prevents people from moving from one housing type to another – for example, a single older adult could move into a small condominium rather than worry about maintaining a single-family home which then, in turn, could be made available for a young family. Alternative housing models such as accessory dwelling units, micro-units, co-housing, apartments, and rowhouses/townhouses expands options and makes housing attainable for more people.



Analysis of the relationship between pay and housing costs in Kent County by HousingNext.org.

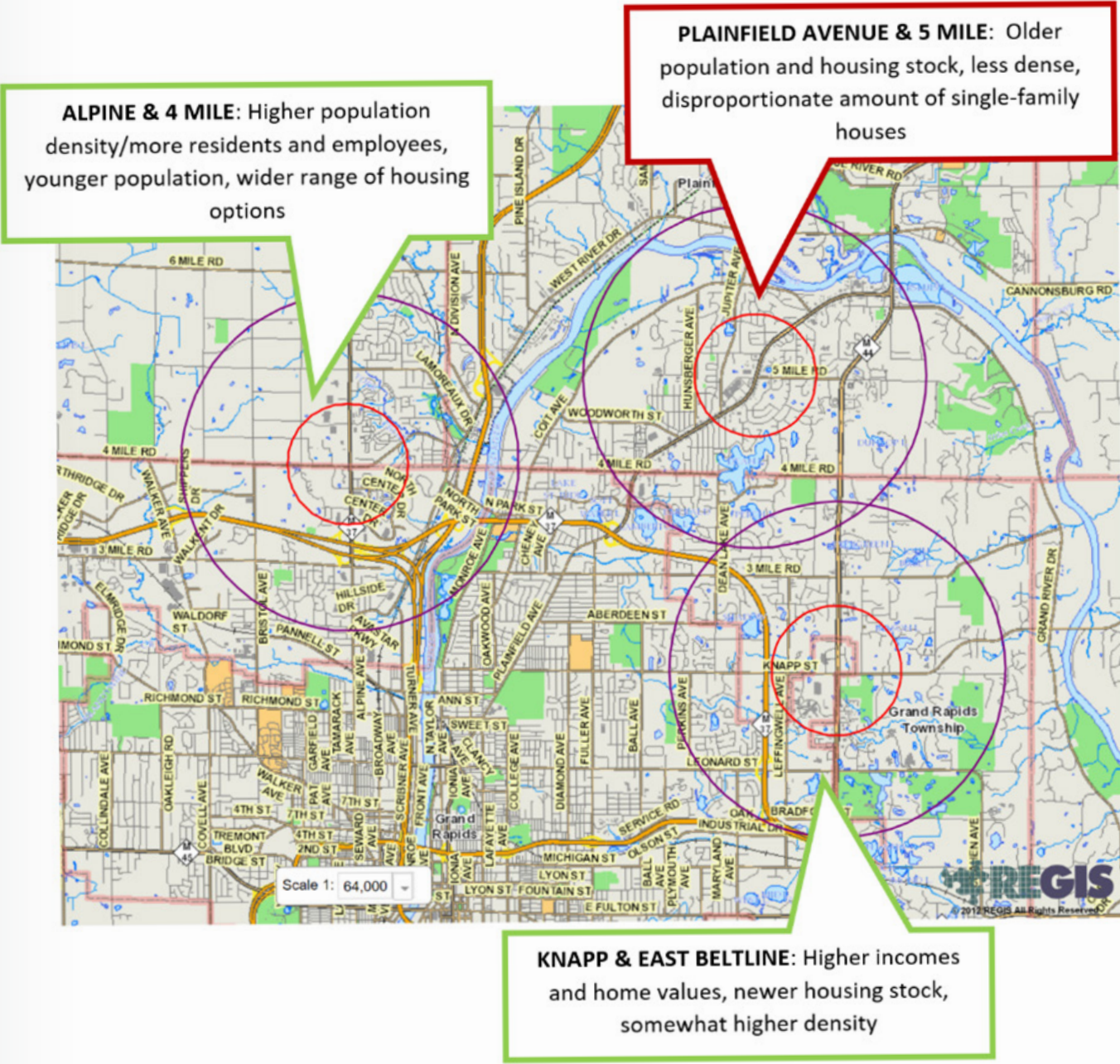
Retailers People Want Aren’t Attracted To Plainfield Avenue

The lack of density and income in Plainfield Township does not serve as a draw for the national retailers that community survey respondents said they wanted to see. Location criteria is typically based on residential and employment densities, income, and housing value. Looking at areas nearby that have attracted recent investment, the area around Four Mile and Alpine is more densely populated and younger. During the day, employees of existing businesses add 30,523 people to the area within a three-mile radius and 3,440 within a one-mile radius at Four Mile and Alpine, compared with 13,991 and 2,370 at Plainfield and Five Mile. There is also much more multifamily housing nearby: only 29.1 percent of the units within the one-mile radius are detached single-family houses versus 73.5 percent within one mile of Plainfield and Five Mile.

At East Beltline and Knapp, density within the three-mile radius is only slightly higher than at Plainfield and Five Mile, but the traffic counts from commuters is nearly double, 2020 median household income is substantially higher, and the median value of owner-occupied houses is greater (\$285,877 within one mile versus \$169,575). The housing stock is also newer.

	PLAINFIELD AVE & 5 MILE	4 MILE & ALPINE	E BELTLINE & KNAPP	PLAINFIELD AVE & 5 MILE	4 MILE & ALPINE	E BELTLINE & KNAPP
	1-MILE RADIUS			3-MILE RADIUS		
TOTAL POPULATION	8,683	9,215	4,896	40,388	48,167	48,396
DENSITY (PEOPLE PER SQ MILE)	2,765 psm	2,935 psm	1,559 psm	1,429 psm	1,704 psm	1,713 psm
MEDIAN AGE	39.4	30	38.5	40	35.9	38.9
ADDITIONAL DAYTIME POPULATION (EMPLOYEES)	2,370	3,440	6,581	13,991	30,523	21,746
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME 2020 (EST)	\$69,575	\$46,948	\$127,132	\$76,276	\$59,685	\$79,578
PERCENTAGE OF DETACHED SINGLE- FAMILY HOUSES	73.5%	29.1%	69.9%	81.3%	69.2%	73.9%
MEDIAN VALUE OF OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSES	\$169,575	\$163,955	\$285,877	\$179,983	\$153,660	\$211,601
MEDIAN AGE OF HOME	42.1 years old	27 years old	27 years old	39.5 years old	41.6 years old	41.6 years old

Data from Sites USA using information from Applied Demographic Solutions



New Downtowns
Are Being Created

The economic identity of suburban places like Plainfield Township has begun to change. Others in West Michigan such as Ada, Hudsonville, and Wyoming are creating their own unique brand of downtown. These places, too, have MDOT controlled roads. They have chosen not to surrender to traffic volumes and instead are crafting new identities. Debunking being a “*bedroom community*” to downtown Grand Rapids, these communities are beginning to develop their own economic centers. The Plainfield Avenue corridor has more than enough land and opportunity to do the same. Centrally located, with significant natural features and amazing community parks, the “*front door*” of Plainfield Township should represent, and contribute to, the high quality of life found here. These photos illustrate how Hudsonville is transforming to create a downtown.



Mixed-use Hudson Center on Harvey Street in Hudsonville



Harvey Street in Hudsonville



Mixed-use Hudson Center on Harvey Street in Hudsonville



Harvey Street in Hudsonville

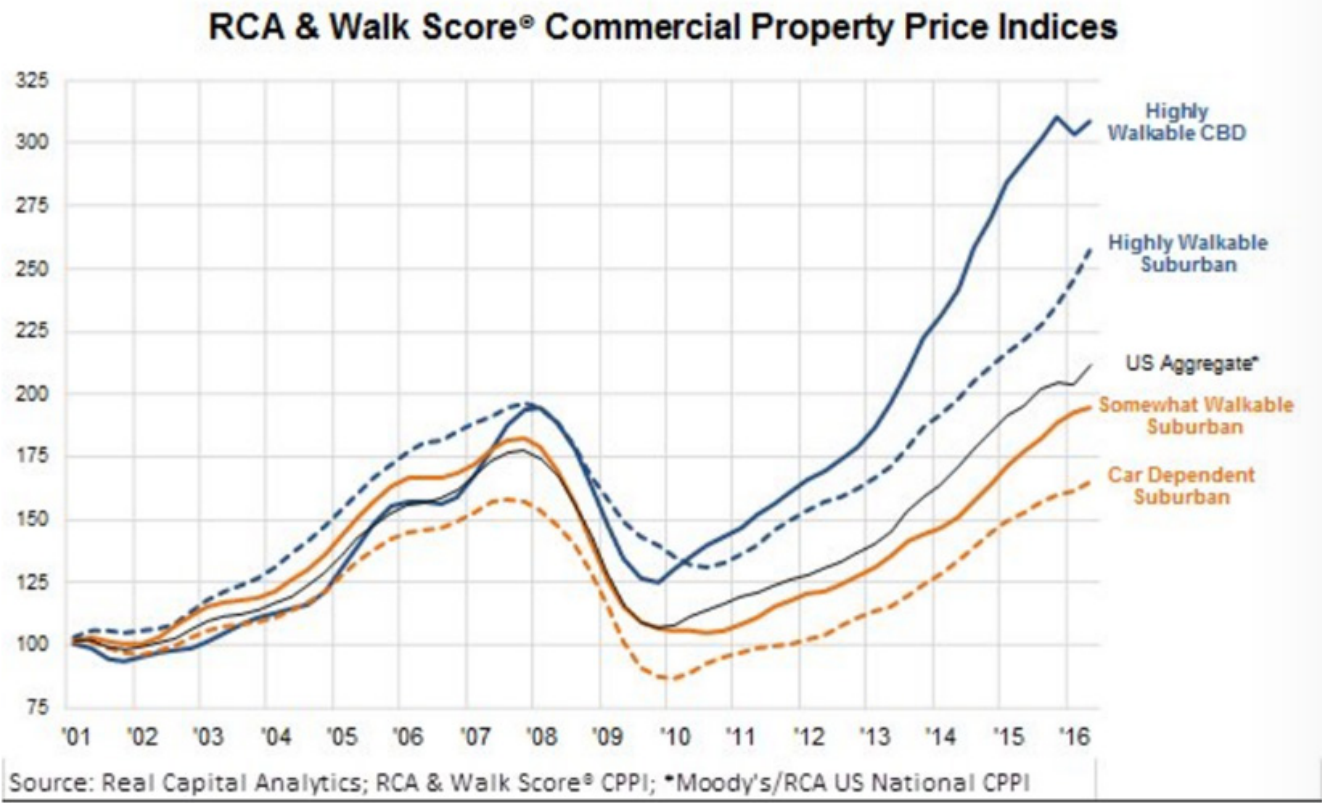
Life Activities Are Happening
Closer To Home

Covid-19 has brought to light the ability and/or desire of remote work. With little to no commute, the area in which people have normally travelled – called the travel shed – has begun to shrink. People are living their daily lives and seeking experiences within a tighter radius. This desire is expected to remain even after life returns to normal in part because the shift was occurring before the pandemic. “*Hipsturbia*” was coined as a trend where younger people are locating to smaller towns and suburbs with downtown-like lifestyle amenities. Throughout the US, suburban areas are beginning to transform with a new mix of uses that include fitness, health and wellness uses; online brands expanding into smaller brick-and-mortar storefronts; experiential and entertainment uses; parks and public gathering places; and even uses that have been traditionally been viewed as part of an urban experience, such as a food truck court. This trend of how people define their community and interact with it provides great opportunity for the Plainfield corridor to create town centers. It is possible to create a sense of community and activity in a more personalized way for township residents in their own backyard.

Walkable and mixed-use communities are good investments

Research shows that improved walkability, including proximity to public transit, has a positive effect on a host of commercial real estate metrics. An improvement in Walk Score®, the yardstick by which many measure how walkable a particular address, neighborhood and city are, strongly correlates with an increase in property values, rents, retail sales, occupancy, absorption and price resilience in downturns.

According to a study conducted by HR&A, mixed-use developments outperform single-use properties in both central business districts and suburban settings alike. Similarly, mixed-use projects located in suburban areas tend to outperform their single-use suburban peers. Shifting preferences among both the millennial and baby boomer generations, which are each gravitating toward new urban environments, drive the outperformance of these walkable developments. The outperformance can also be explained by companies that leverage walkability and strong amenities to attract top-tier talent and are willing to pay a rent premium for highly-walkable space. What is perhaps most salient to property investors is that there is still a great lack of “highly-walkable” real estate supply across property types in the U.S. This may represent a significant generational investment opportunity.⁵



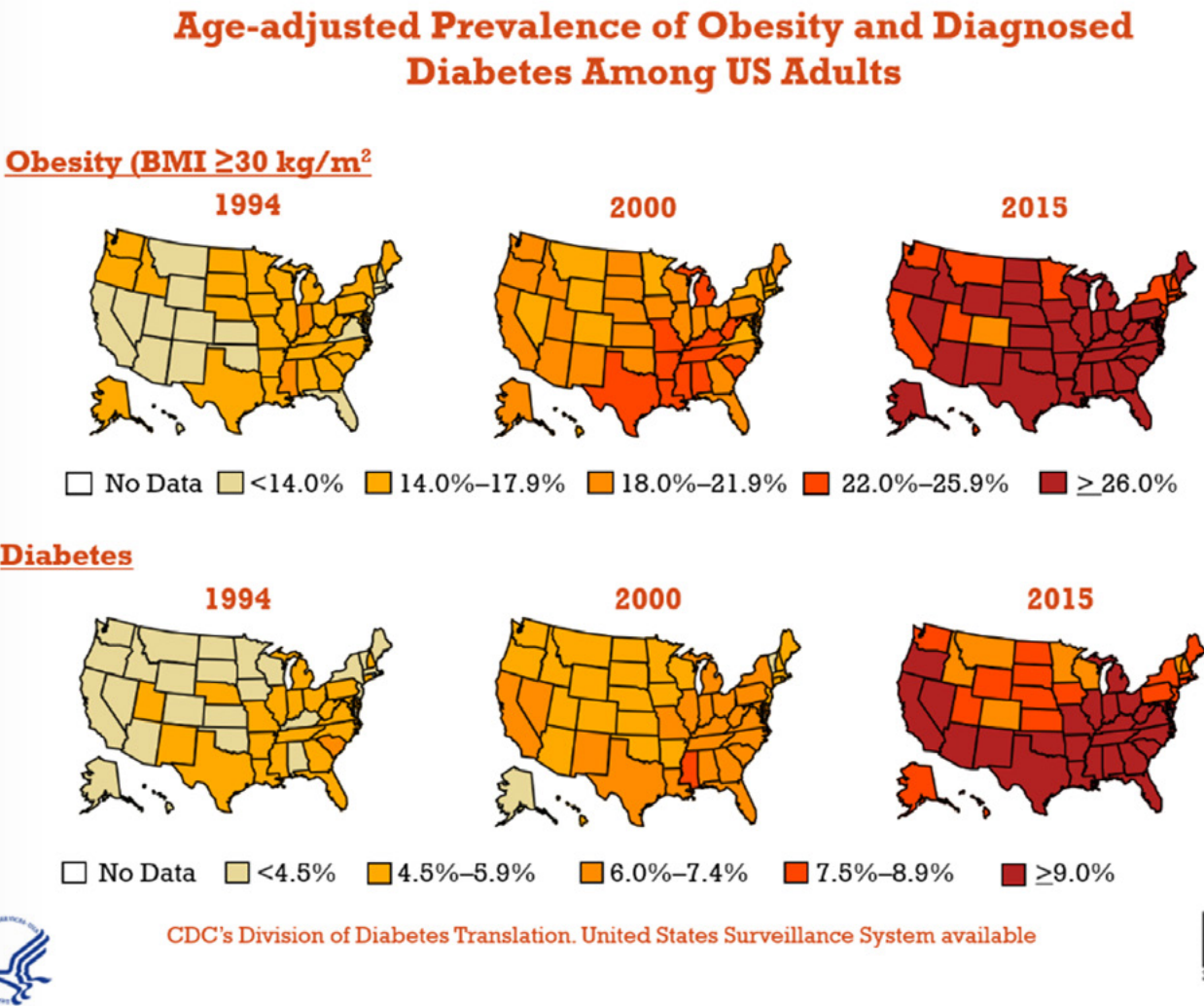
From Jones Lang LaSalle

5 [https://www.us.jll.com/en/views/walkability-why-it-is-im-
portant-to-your-cre-property-value](https://www.us.jll.com/en/views/walkability-why-it-is-important-to-your-cre-property-value)

A lot of people are talking about the 10-minute neighborhood

Ten minutes represents how much time it takes a typical person to comfortably walk a short half-mile distance to reach the goods and/or services that can meet their daily needs. In some communities, this concept may be measured in 15 or 20- minute increments. The primary reason for this focus is for public health. Skyrocketing obesity rates, and accompanying diabetes numbers, could largely be staved off if people could just walk 30 minutes a day. One errand in a 10/15/20 minute neighborhood by foot would meet that goal. This distance is also one that is generally acceptable for children to travel, which allows them to explore and interact in a small community safely. Finally, by eliminating the need for a car, households can save money while also being gentler on the earth.

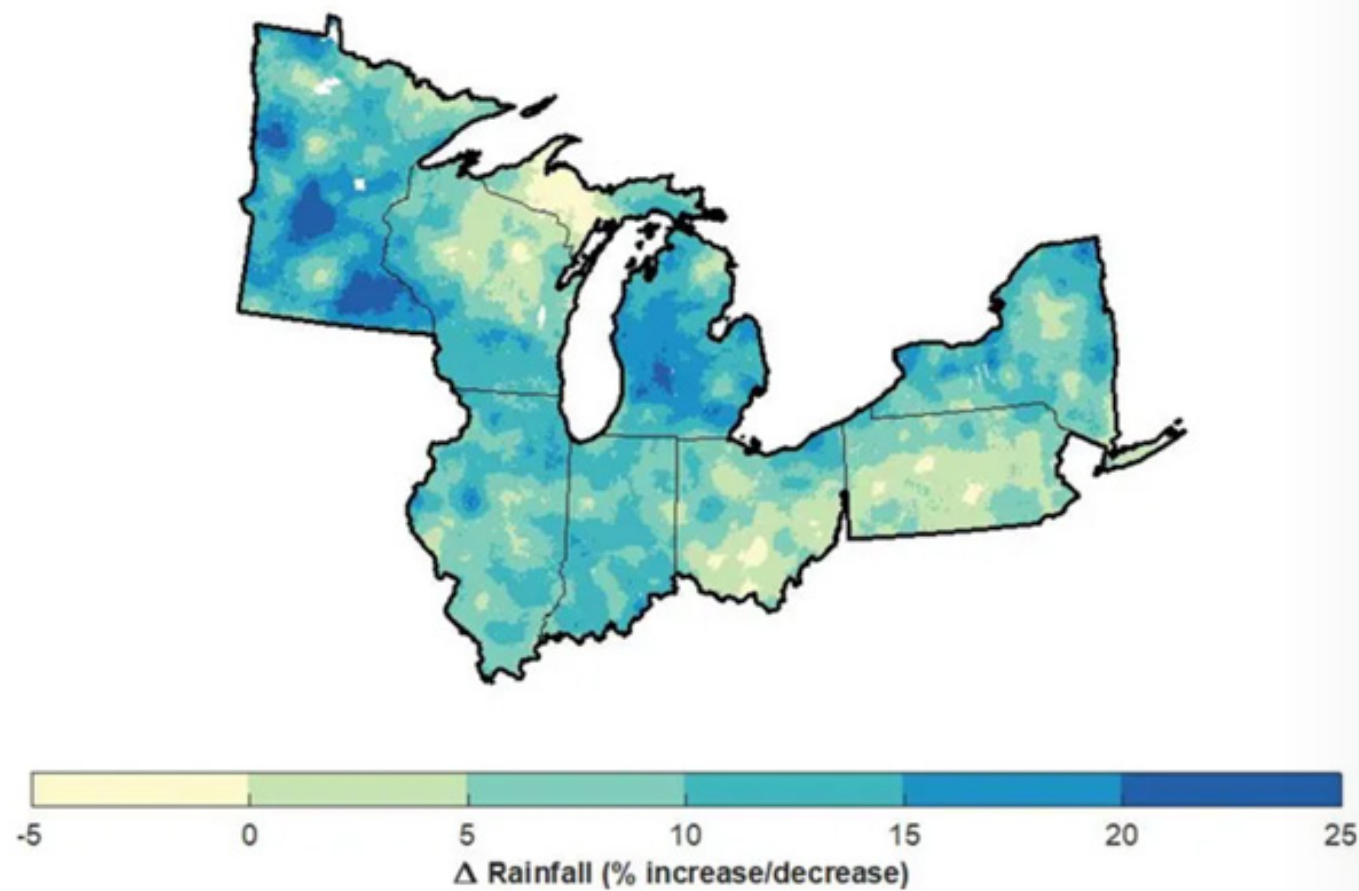
Healthy and sustainable living has been among the fastest-growing trends in homebuilding and community design in recent years, and the pandemic has moved that trend into high speed. While we tend to think of Plainfield Avenue as one long road, there are neighborhoods that directly abut it and neighborhood schools located nearby. This trend of thinking about what makes a healthy community can influence our thinking about land use configurations along the corridor.



Michigan Is Getting More Water More Often

The frequency and severity of flooding, rising groundwater levels, and soil erosion have received headlines in the past several years. The flood of 2013 and several close calls since are evidence that the amount of precipitation falling in the heaviest 1% of storms increased by 35% in the U.S. Great Lakes region from 1951 through 2017. Total annual precipitation has increased by 14% during that same time period.⁶ Extreme and sudden storms have inundated highways in the Detroit area.⁷ In Kent County, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (*FEMA*) has been redrawing floodplain maps. The increasing severity of flooding and severe weather, the amount of asphalt and rooftops along the Plainfield corridor, and aging stormwater infrastructure point to the need to consider resiliency efforts regarding stormwater management.

Change in Average Annual Rainfall: nClimDiv
(1986 - 2016) - (1901 - 1960)



The Great Lakes region saw a significant increase in rainfall over the past 30 years when compared to the first six decades of the 1900s. NOAA/NCEI

6 <http://glisa.umich.edu/media/files/GLISA%202%20Pager%202019.pdf>

7 <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2019/06/13/michigan-climate-change-wetter-springs-hotter-summer/1298208001/>

Technology Is Transforming How We Live

The “*Amazon effect*” has impacted retailers and is now taking on groceries and pharmacies. Food delivery services with online ordering have benefitted from the pandemic. Frictionless retail – shopping without the checkout line – is becoming commonplace. The use of data to target us with Facebook ads, and adjustments to the shopping experience, are modifying behavior. Telecommuting and remote work are shifting the purposes and size of office space. Once-stable business formats are undergoing dramatic transformations or have quickly become obsolete. For all of this change, pre-pandemic and even more so now, surveys have found that people are eager to find places to socialize and gather. As we become more connected digitally, there is a human need to connect with other people.



CONCLUSION

These trends have the ability to shape the Plainfield Avenue corridor. The common thread woven throughout all of them is the relationship between people and their physical environment. On the face of it, rising rates of store closures, obesity, and stormwater appear to be completely unrelated. However, Township leaders can craft thoughtful responses to address multiple topics at once.

For example, if we think about the Witmark building or the large unused paved parking lot in front of the former K-Mart at North Kent Mall...could they be replaced with a building that has a green roof to absorb stormwater?

Could that building be for residential as well as commercial use to provide more housing as well as add shoppers who could walk to their destinations?

Would it be possible to connect the stormwater facility behind the former mall to the trail on Jupiter to increase physical activity?

What if....?

BUILDING VIBRANT PLACES

“Being full of energy and life” is the definition of vibrancy.

Construction activity generates a buzz. People interacting in restaurants and stores creates a hum of conversation and laughter. An exercise class in a local park can spur cheering. Music and community events punctuate memorable life moments. The common thread in these examples is human activity. Where people are building, eating, talking, walking, playing, dancing, or gathering there is energy and life.

Researchers have documented that it is destinations that cultivate a sense of community and generate activity. Today, there are only a few examples of destinations along the Plainfield Avenue corridor that we might consider as being “vibrant”. The corridor can transform over time to not only create new life but also realize multiple other benefits such as being more resilient to change, higher property values, a lower carbon footprint, better air and water quality, transportation cost savings, enhanced quality of life, and increased access to desired goods and services.



A place that is filled with people who have many destinations to go to and things to do is full of energy. There is a direct correlation between liveliness and high density. Density creates synergies among various uses. Where there are shorter distances between stores, restaurants, residential spaces, and offices, residents or office workers can easily become consumers. Denser development facilitates the creation of a sense of place. This makes high density a key element in achieving a community that feels authentic.

Land uses and buildings create “place” at the most fundamental level. Their composition influences the context of our community. We will Build Vibrant Places by understanding the interaction and dynamics between land use, urban form, and transportation. These are often summarized as the “3Ds” of density, diversity, and design.

- Density refers to the concentration of housing or employment per unit area.
- Diversity refers to the mix of land uses, including different types of employment (*retail, institution, services*), as well as residential. The greater mix of land uses that are within a compact area, the greater opportunities there are to walk, to combine trips, and create a more efficient transportation system.
- Design refers to the characteristics of the streets, street network, and buildings.

As the real estate landscape shifts due to retail industry disruptions, we can set the stage for redevelopment that can accommodate new residents and new destinations—whether those destinations are stores, service businesses, civic institutions, or flexible spaces for events—to expand the range of possibilities. We must focus on building a sustainable corridor that can adapt to change, which means that buildings designed only for one purpose and one brand must be reconsidered. New buildings and site layouts can be designed differently to make the built landscape more adaptable and accommodating to community needs.

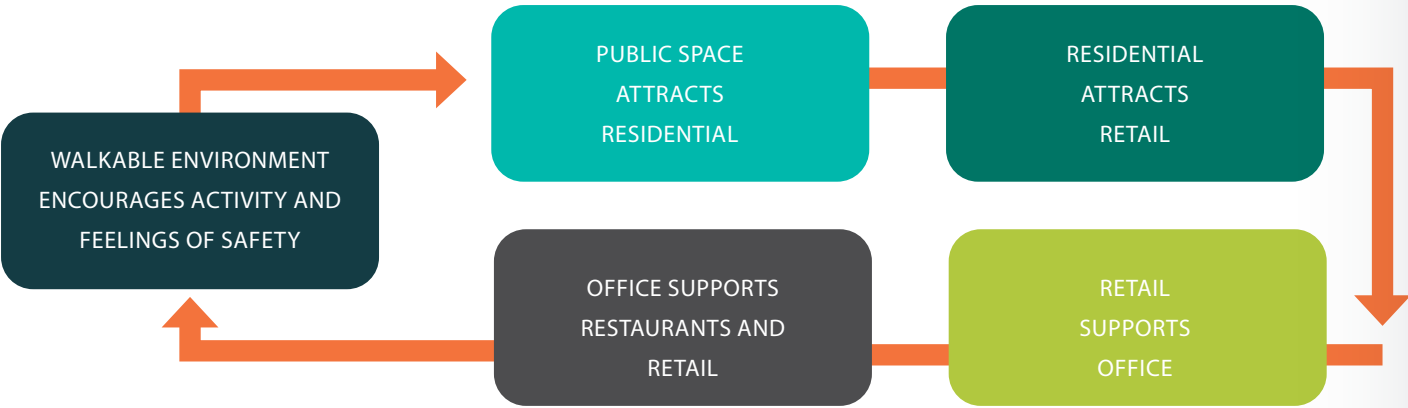
“I think it is important to develop some sort of a **downtown feel** to the corridor. It doesn’t feel like a community in the way the corridor is currently structured.”

- Survey Respondent

Plan Recommendations

The evolution of the Plainfield corridor will focus on mixing land uses, providing outdoor public space, broadening housing choices, increasing residential and employment densities, creating walkable environments, exploring the potential for transit, enhancing civic (post office, library, Secretary of State) uses, and increasing the number of amenities in the township. To achieve the community vision, Building Vibrant Places plan recommendations focus on creating:

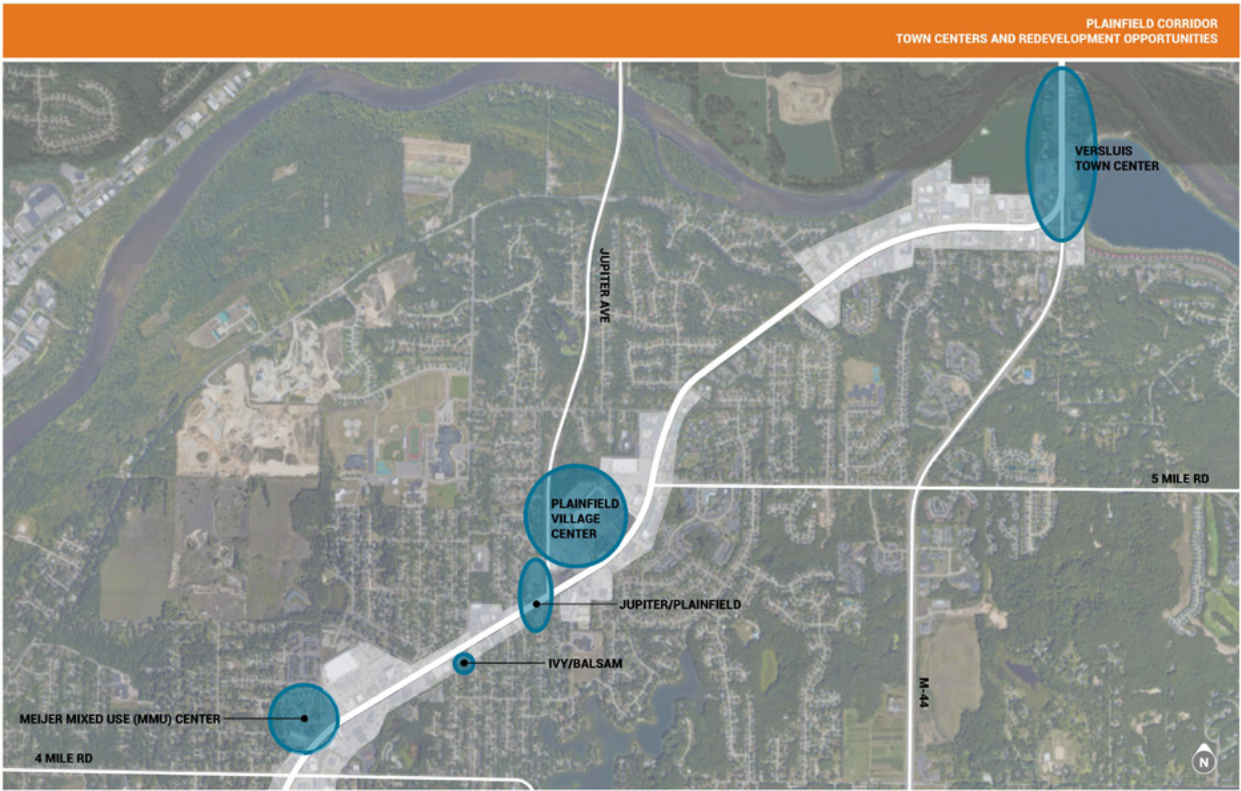
- Three key destinations as “town centers” for community activity;
- A diverse, mixed-use environment that includes more housing; and
- Flexible and adaptable buildings.



Creating Town Centers

A town center is a walkable, integrated, multi-use development area that is organized around a clearly identifiable public space and streetscapes where the community can gather. A successful town center captures the social aspects of being in a traditional downtown. Retail, dining, and recreation uses; vertical or horizontal residential uses; and one or more office, hotel, civic, or cultural uses are found in a town center. Over time, it should evolve into the densest, most compact, and most diverse part of a community, with strong connections to its surroundings – including trail systems and neighborhoods. The Urban Land Institute recommends that the critical mass of mixed use needed in a suburban town center to establish and reinforce a sense of community is a minimum of 200,000 square feet of retail and 2,000 dwelling units within a quarter-mile radius (*ten-minute walk*). The more walkable the center is with finely integrated uses and quality public space the more successful it will be.

Residential and office uses are two of the most critical uses for a town center because they create synergy with retail, service, and entertainment uses, create sidewalk and street traffic, contribute to a more complete experience of a neighborhood environment, and complement and feed other uses and users: for example, civic buildings and hospitality facilities.



This plan proposes three town center locations along the Plainfield Avenue corridor. These are:

VERSLUIS TOWN CENTER

is located at the North end of the corridor between Versluis Lake and Coit Avenue Pond (*located behind The Score*). Versluis Park features a sand beach and swimming areas, fishing pier, boating, playground and picnic facilities, and a one-mile paved walking trail. The corridor’s current design does not hint that there are three water bodies (*lake, pond, and Grand River*) or a public park in close proximity. Public space is an important part of a town center. These existing resources can be leveraged to create a strong lifestyle node focused on physical activity and health. A trail is proposed to connect from this town center from the south, at Coit Avenue, which then provides access to nearby neighborhoods and is a route already used by bicyclists. There is also a trail planned for the north side of the Grand River that would stretch from Jupiter to Northland, across the river using the Northland bridge, and connect with the town center. Nearby condominiums assist in providing the needed density to make a functional town center.

PLAINFIELD VILLAGE CENTER

is the location of the former North Kent Mall. A century ago, there was a Plainfield Village. It was torn down and burned by a wealthy financier, Mr. Joseph Brewer, in 1920 to make way for his country villa. He later lost the villa due to economic failure and Mr. Versluis became the new owner.⁸ Survey respondents and community leaders identified that there is no downtown in Plainfield Township. The concept behind naming this node Plainfield Village is a nod to the past and what was lost, as well as to redefine the new center of the community.

The sizeable amount of land at this location presents a significant opportunity to create a street grid system and public square. Lowe’s serves as a regional anchor and Frontline church, as well as the Fire Station and training facility, are civic uses. The Kent County Drain Commissioner has control over a large stormwater facility that could become a natural features amenity for higher-density residential housing. There is an existing trail system on the North side of Jupiter Avenue that can connect the Village to the Grand River and surrounding community.



⁸ Historic Bike Tour Guide, Boyscout Eagle project by Will Lull and aided by Troup 230 and 283. July



The original Meijer supercenter

MEIJER MIXED USE (MMU) CENTER

is the location of the existing Plainfield Meijer Store. (Yes, the suggested name of “MMU” is a nod to the famous Purple Cow.) There is a great deal of opportunity to consider how new development could be placed around and within the Meijer site. A large, vacant triangular shaped parcel of land, an aging manufactured home community and motel, obsolete retail, and a boat storage facility in the former lumber yard are located to the South of the site. A circulating road behind existing outlots is the start of a local street. Apartments are connected to the Meijer property by a set of confusing double roads that could be refined into a single intersection.

Importantly, the Rapid has been working to provide transit service to this location. In rider surveys, bus service to the Plainfield Meijer has been identified as a priority. A traffic signal is desired by the community at the southern entrance to the store. Travel speeds are high, the road curves, and visibility is generally low. The design concept reflects the addition of a traffic signal to facilitate safe bus turning movements into/out of the site.

The original Meijer supercenter located at 28th Street and Kalamazoo serves as an example of a transit-friendly facility. The large, covered bus stop at that store provides shelter to riders and is heavily used.

Neighbors located in the neighborhood to the south of the proposed town center have expressed concerns about traffic and the intensity of development that might occur nearby. As redevelopment occurs, it will be important to use transitional elements such as a 4-season landscape buffer (mix of evergreens and deciduous trees) and lower building heights. Access points and traffic circulation should also be considered.

Design Principles for Town Centers

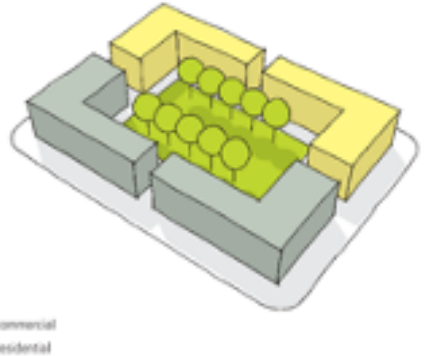
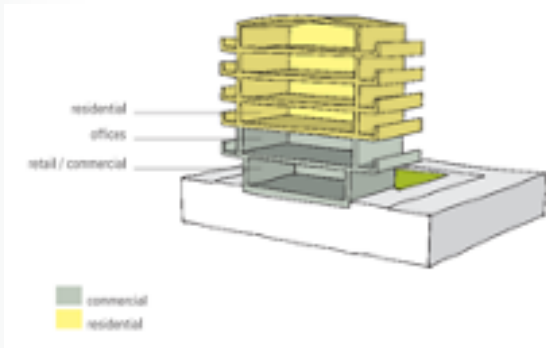
The following design principles apply to town centers:

- Uses are intensified over time with changes such as increased building heights up to 6 stories or allowing surface parking lots to be replaced by buildings and parking structures.
- Commercial intensity is allowed with taller buildings and smaller setbacks to provide greater development potential.
- Amenities are included in the standards for site plan review for bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit riders (where applicable), including wider sidewalks, bike storage facilities, bus shelters (where applicable), lighting, and landscaping.
- Seize opportunities to create smaller blocks, a street network, and streetscapes.
- Building massing and scale is appropriate to support a pedestrian-oriented environment.
- Structures are oriented to frame internal streets.
- Parking is shared between uses, on-street parking is permitted off Plainfield, and off-street parking is located behind or to the side of buildings but not in front to provide safer pedestrian access to store fronts.
- There is the potential to be served by transit.
- Auto-oriented uses are discouraged; if allowed, they should be on the periphery of the site.
- Civic buildings, public greenspaces, and community gathering places are strongly encouraged.

Both Plainfield Village and MMU approach the equivalent amount of retail square footage required for a town center, albeit with one large user (*the Versluis Town Center is smaller*). Lowes and Meijer should be considered important anchors that will allow redevelopment to occur around them in a supportive fashion at a smaller, fine-grained scale to provide the walkable environment needed for a successful town center. Hardware and grocery stores are stable, staple businesses that provide desired goods and services and support local neighborhood as well as regional traffic. The draw of these kinds of businesses can benefit other retailers.

It should be noted that in addition to the recommended retail footprint, a minimum of 2,000 dwelling units are suggested to provide the necessary density to support retailers. Taking advantage of existing infrastructure on underused sites to build housing is an efficient and cost-effective way of addressing the housing need. It can enhance the productive use of property, increasing the revenue it generates, at a lower cost than “greenfield” (*new*) development would require. Redeveloping these sites would give the community more housing options, begin to transform each node into a new neighborhood, and give current and future residents walk- and bike-friendly destinations.

The ongoing pandemic and its economic impacts make the path ahead for retail even less certain, but people were (*pre-pandemic*) and are craving places where they can feel a sense of community. Downtown Rockford has been bustling with activity. Downtown Grand Rapids with its art and ice sculptures recently made National news as people walked around in the winter weather. Research by Chris Leinberger of the Brookings Institution has demonstrated a pent-up demand for walkable, amenity-rich concentrations in suburban areas; finding that office, retail, and housing rents are significantly higher and growing faster than those in more auto-dependent areas⁹. It is possible to create convenient and attractive places along Plainfield Avenue that will encourage people to linger and experience a sense of community. The three proposed town centers can provide retail, housing, offices, and other attractions in a “downtown” atmosphere that meet today’s modern demands.



WHY PLAINFIELD VILLAGE CENTER?

The original Plainfield Village (also known as Austerlitz) was at Northland Drive and West River Drive. In 1920, most of the village was destroyed by Joseph Brewer to build a country estate for himself. He built his estate on the bluffs overlooking the Grand River, east of Northland Drive. Mr. Versluis purchased the estate after Mr. Brewer suffered financial failure. Given that the identity of the area is associated with Versluis Lake and Versluis Park, the decision for was made to keep the recognizable name for Versluis Town Center. The former Old Kent Mall site, then, was favored to become the “new” Plainfield Village Center one-hundred years later to give a nod to the past and provide a vision for the future of a new Main Street along the corridor.

⁹ <https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.gwu.edu/dist/a/326/files/2019/06/FTA19.pdf> and <https://archive.curbed.com/2019/6/24/18715939/real-es->



1967



2021

Plainfield over the years

In 1967, there was no North Kent Mall. It opened in 1971 and closed 30 years later, in 2001, after gradual decline. With the exception of Lowe's, the site has been in a netherworld of sorts for the past two decades...much like many commercial properties along the Plainfield corridor. Over this same time period, Plainfield Avenue

has become wider - growing from a two-lane road to six lanes at the Plainfield and 5 Mile intersection. In less than a full adult lifetime green fields became asphalt, buildings were constructed then emptied, and acres of land with development potential sit idle.

Facilitating Mixed-Use Projects

Declining retail strips pose a particular challenge. How do we reinvigorate these places while new shopping areas such as at the East Beltline and Knapp, online retailers, and big box stores gain more market share? How do we maintain moderate-income neighborhoods and provide attainable housing for families in a hot real estate market? How do we accommodate the dramatic changes in household demographics?

The Answer Is: **We Pivot.**

The benefits of mixing uses and increasing population and employment density are many, from improving the ability to walk to destinations for a healthier lifestyle to increasing safety with more eyes on the street. A sense of community can be formed with daily interactions. Greater social and economic diversity becomes apparent. For those in quarantine, signs of life are still visible as people walk dogs and push strollers. Trips by vehicle can be reduced and peak traffic flows spread out more. Transit access could become feasible to get to jobs or other life activities for those who are too young or old, who cannot afford a car, do not have a driver's license, or choose not to drive for personal reasons. Housing choice and affordability is present when a range of different housing types and price points can be provided.

It is important to note that "mixed-use" can take several different forms. A true mixed-use environment is where retail, office, residential, and/or other uses are mixed together within a single building. A multiuse development can have a range of uses but the uses are not located within the same building; rather, they are located on the same block or in the same development. In suburban environments, some developers favor the multiuse model as opposed to mixed-use because one use can be brought online at a time, rather than worrying about multiple uses in the same timeframe. This is also sometimes called horizontal mixed use versus vertical mixed use.

These developments can also assume a wide variety of scales, configurations, and forms. Although different building types may all be suitable for a particular mixed-use development, each will require a different response to the street. The Design Concepts portion of this Plan provides direction on how buildings should be situated on a lot, access and parking considerations, and how to increase landscaping to soften the site. The Mixed-Use segments as shown on the Future Land Use map will create neighborhood-focused segments between town centers.

Mixed-Use Key Components:

- Multiple-story buildings up to 5 stories with step-backs are oriented towards Plainfield Avenue.
- The widest possible spectrum of uses will be encouraged.
 - Retail uses are allowed, but not required to be in mixed-use buildings.
 - Numerous housing types of varying price points will be supported.
 - Light industrial uses that are similar in their operation to other permitted commercial uses and will increase employment opportunities should be considered.
- Auto-oriented uses, including drive-throughs, are not appropriate.
- Buildings and off-street parking areas are organized in such a way as to soften the existing streetscape and encourage pedestrian activity.
- Spaces for public gathering areas are encouraged.
- Parking is located to the side or behind buildings.
- Curb cuts are reduced along Plainfield and directed to side streets.
- Medians are desired along Plainfield Avenue in these segments to improve livability.



Rendering of Bayshore redevelopment in Glendale, Wisconsin from <https://biztimes.com/updated-design-plans-unveiled-for-bayshore-redevelopment/>

Case study

Encouraging mixed-use development can make investment in redevelopment a better bet during uncertain times. While many suburban areas have embraced more density with newer developments, some of those that depended heavily on retail have struggled. Even so, developers see many of these places as ripe for investment. The retail component of Shops at West End in the Twin Cities area has seen challenges but its presence triggered more than \$350 million of investment in 1,248 apartments, according to the Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal. In Glendale, Wisconsin, just outside Milwaukee, the Bayshore Town Center was designed with about 1.2 million square feet of retail, which ended up being too much; in 2019 its operators announced plans to reduce retail space by 37 percent, adding housing, offices, and a hotel. This highlights the flexibility of planning and building for mixed uses: it's easier to retrofit buildings that were designed to accommodate multiple uses than those built for a single specialized purpose.

Plainfield Township is in a region with a robust job market, unmet housing demand at all price points, and underutilized land in the form of underperforming commercial buildings, parking lots, and vacant property. This plan proposes that the township's focus change to be *"retail ready"* – meaning that energies are focused on creating

the necessary residential/employee/visitor density first that will then support commerce; rather than the traditional approach of allowing indiscriminate commercial development without considering how a project contributes to supporting the township's development objectives. If vibrancy is a goal, more people and activity are needed to get us there.

¹⁰ <https://www.cnu.org/publicsquare/2019/12/11/designing-and-building-mixed-use-centers-suburbs>

Commercial Development

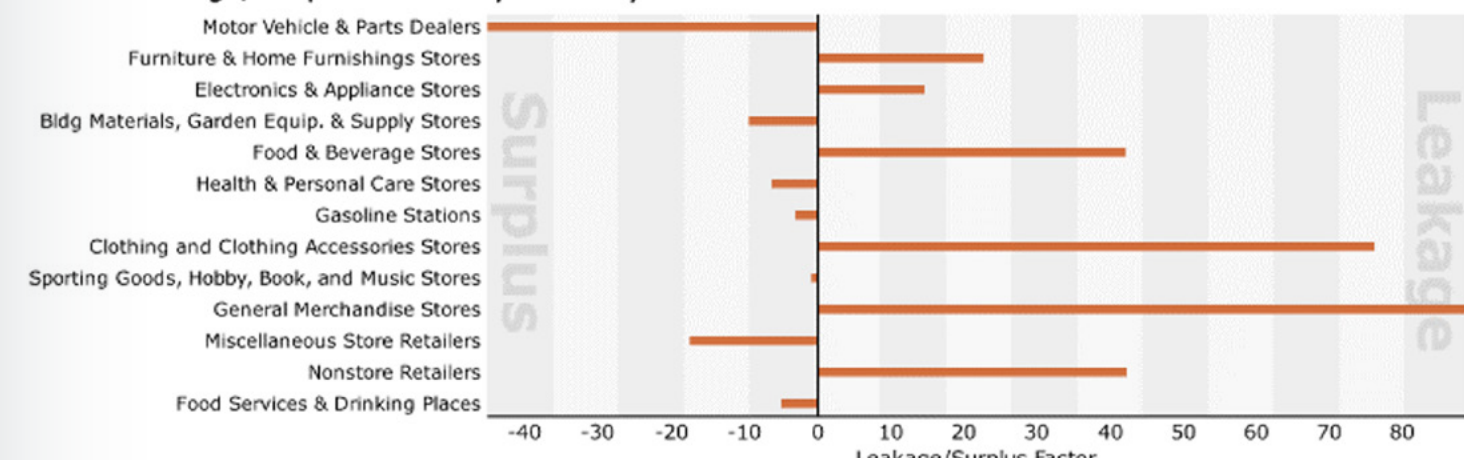
Focusing in on the right mix of commercial development will be necessary if mixed-use buildings are to contribute to a thriving community. A variety of different uses are needed to entice people to walk from abutting neighborhoods and to have residents and others view the corridor as a destination business district where people go *"to"* shop first, instead of driving *"through"* the corridor en route to surrounding commercial areas such as Alpine, Knapp, or 28th Street.

A Retail MarketPlace Profile, compiled by ESRI, illustrates where the greatest market surplus and market leakage is occurring in Plainfield Township. *"Surplus"* means that the area is saturated by a particular sector, whereas *"Leakage"* refers to the amount of money that is *"leaking"* from the community and being spent elsewhere. The chart shows that the Plainfield corridor is abundantly served by vehicle dealers, auto parts stores, and

tire shops. Lowe's presence is acknowledged under the building materials and garden equipment category. The lack of clothing stores and general merchandise stores (*shoes, books, florists, jewelry, office supply, electronics, etc*) validates public input received in community surveys. Many people complained about needing to leave the corridor to go clothes shopping. In 2017, Plainfield Township had only 11 clothing and clothing accessory stores. The potential unmet demand for that retail segment was quantified at more than \$23 million.

Covid-19 and the *"Amazon effect"* will influence the future of retail. However, understanding market gaps provides an opportunity to develop a business attraction strategy. This will be particularly important for town center areas where branding and programming can assist in creating a cohesive identity with complimentary businesses.

2017 Leakage/Surplus Factor by Industry Subsector



HOUSING TYPES AND DENSITIES (DWELLING UNITS/ACRE)			
Housing Type	Typical Block Size	Building Height	Typical Density
Small lot single-family	100' x 220'	2 story	8 du/acre
Duplex	90'x 220'	2 story	10 du/acre
Townhouses	70' x 180'	2 – 4 stories	10 to 17 du/acre
Live/Work	80' x 200'	3 story	20 du/acre
Stacked Maisonettes	70' x 180'	3 to 3 ½ story	22 du/acre
Senior Housing	Varies	2 – 4 stories	20 to 40 du/acre
Stacked Flats	70' x 180'	2 – 3 stories	26 to 30 du/acre
Courtyard Apartments	140' x 200' to 200' x 150'	2 – 5 stories	26 to 34 du/acre
Texas Donut	200' x 200'	3 – 5 stories	55 du/acre
Mixed-Use w/Retail	380' x 500' or 320' x 750'	3 to 4 story	40 to 80 du/acre
Source: <i>Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Suburbs</i> by Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson, Chapter 2, pp 38-43			

Housing

One measure that is used to determine whether a block of “Main Street” style retail can be supported is by calculating the development density in and around it. Not to be confused with bigger town centers, there are segments along the Plainfield Avenue corridor that are recommended as “Mixed-Use Segments” on the Future Land Use Map. In these areas, the goal is to encourage 1,000 housing units within a quarter-mile of the center of the business district. A thriving 10-minute neighborhood is said to need around 20 housing units per acre. This density is equivalent to a pre-World War II neighborhood that may have a range of housing types woven into its existing fabric.

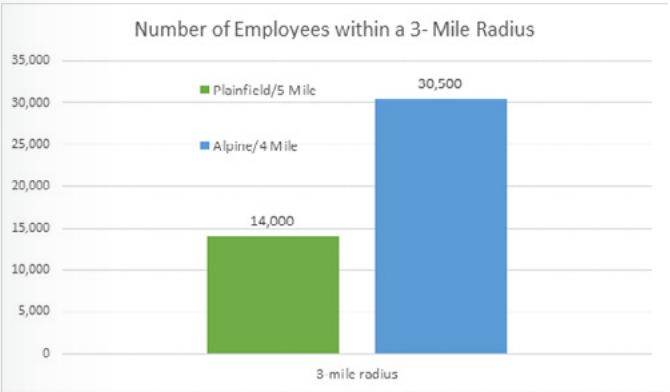
Sometimes raising the prospect of allowing higher density development can trigger community concern. But walkable density doesn’t have to mean urban downtown-style density, at either the building scale or the neighborhood scale. Walkability depends in large part on connectivity. The more connected streets are, the smaller the “walkshed”—

the area within a half-mile of a place—has to be to capture the required number of potential customers. This kind of connectivity can also take the form of “shadow street” networks within higher-density new developments where the streets themselves are laid out in a more traditional street network pattern.

The single-family homes that make up most of the housing in the Plainfield corridor are too big and/or expensive for many singles and groups of adults, and even the less-expensive available options are aging and outdated. These homes are often unaffordable to younger generations, due to the shortage of starter homes, and Millennials (the 2nd largest generation next to Baby Boomers) prefer more flexible spaces that mix uses and can be shared. The current housing stock does not meet the community’s needs, and demand in the region is projected to keep growing, with thousands more housing units needed.

Employment

One of the most dramatic differences between the Plainfield Avenue corridor in comparison to the East Beltline and Alpine Avenue is employment density. The East Beltline/Knapp area has more than 2 ½ times the daytime population as Plainfield/5 Mile within a one-mile radius (6,600 *versus* 2,400). Within a 3-mile radius, the Alpine/4 Mile area has more than double the number of employees than the Plainfield/5 Mile area (30,500 versus 14,000). These numbers are not insignificant. Employment density is just as important as household density for the future of Plainfield Avenue.



A study by the Brookings Institute found that a concentration of jobs in small area instead of being spread out over many areas is best for creating more vibrancy and prosperity. Local jobs help recirculate money back into the local economy – for example, the office worker goes to lunch at a local restaurant and then picks up groceries on the way home. The proximity of jobs to existing township residents is also beneficial, particularly for low-income residents because transportation costs are lower. As an investment strategy, more concentrated and transformative placemaking solutions focused on creating dense places will help Plainfield thrive¹¹.

Within the West Michigan region, call centers have begun to utilize former shopping malls. The clear span of retail spaces (few if any pillars) provides opportunities for light industrial uses. And some office employers have begun to look outside of downtown Grand Rapids for alternatives, largely due to parking concerns. These are all opportunities to examine how a broader range of uses can be allowed along Plainfield Avenue – particularly in the Mixed-Use Segments - to create jobs and encourage the adaptive reuse of existing buildings.

Flexibility And Adaptability

The relationship between a development project and its context is also important. A building can have a long life span. One big challenge with commercial buildings constructed over the past 50 years is that many, such as Witmark, are constructed out of concrete block which does not rot or deteriorate. If the building’s roof is kept in good condition, then the building can stand for a number of years. In understanding the relative permanence of structures, the Township should consider the relationship of buildings to the larger built environment present along the entire Plainfield Avenue corridor.

Flexible building and site designs can accommodate a variety of different users and uses over time. When changes occur in the demand for a particular type of space, the building stock can more readily adapt and continue to be viable. The potential lifespan of a new development, then, is extended without necessarily adversely affecting the construction cost. There are some basic things that can be done to improve the longevity of a building so that it continues to remain productive, even though uses may change.

¹¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/research/where-jobs-are-concentrating-why-it-matters-to-cities-and-regions/> and <https://www.deseret.com/2019/7/3/8935417/why-the-number-of-jobs-in-your-city-is-important-for-you-and-your-city>

Planning Strategies for Adaptability



Entrances

are one of the most important elements of a building. Distinguishing the main building entrance helps to orient people to the development and is often fixed for life. Entrances should be clearly defined, visible from the street, and well lit. Separate entrances to ground and upper floors should be provided.



Floor to ceiling heights

that are higher than the minimum. Higher ceiling heights allow for maximum flexibility with respect to future uses because the building has space to accommodate needs such as technology or other building systems infrastructure. Additional benefits include improved natural lighting, better ventilation, and more appealing interior spaces.



Column spacing

at regular intervals if necessary, but no columns at all would be better. Rooms can then be subdivided by constructing non-load bearing dividing walls or rooms can be combined and enlarged. Modular structural framing and floor layouts allow a building to be easily adapted to commercial and residential uses.



Fixed vertical elements

such as stairs, elevators, and other permanent core components should be located on the edges of a building wherever possible rather than the center.



Depth of usable space

should be at least 30 feet to allow for commercial and/or residential uses. A shallower depth limits options for room layout and circulation. Artificial light is needed when building depth exceeds 45 feet.

Transformative Changes for Buildings:

There are aspects of building design that help to create a new look and feel to the Plainfield corridor.

- **CREATE A RELATIONSHIP TO THE PUBLIC REALM** – community life is experienced in places such as the street, streetscape, park, plaza, or other public space. Buildings should be located adjacent to, and connect with, these spaces. A building should enhance the public realm by framing it appropriately and being designed to acknowledge the relationship between public and private space. In turn, the Plainfield Avenue right-of-way should offer something to the building in terms of greenspace, street trees, lighting, and other items that can become placemaking elements.
- **INCREASE BUILDING HEIGHT** – structures on Plainfield Avenue should be taller to maximize site utilization and reduce the costs associated with redevelopment. Buildings create a sense of definition and enclosure as cars and people move through the corridor. Humans feel safe where there is a sense of enclosure; buildings and trees help to provide this.
- **INCREASE BUILDING FRONTAGES** – building width, like building height, will contribute to the sense of enclosure along Plainfield Avenue. The percentage of the building fronting along the street should be a minimum of 50% but would ideally range from 70% - 100%. The separation between buildings should be kept relatively small from 0 to 30 feet.
- **REDUCE BUILDING MASSING** – while it is desired to have bigger buildings, it is important to also make sure that the buildings don't feel massive to a pedestrian walking by. Building façades should be broken into smaller components, include an expression line, and consider the use of building step-backs to soften building facades and reduce the overall perceived bulk.
- **AVOID BLANK WALLS** - building exteriors should not have solid walls or voids. The way in which windows are spaced and the structural modules of the building are designed should create a rhythm or pattern on the building's exterior that makes it interesting and yet offers some consistency as one travels up and down the corridor. This also assists with building massing.
- **ENCOURAGE VARIETY** – the context and the character of the corridor can be enhanced by providing visual interest with alternating sales of buildings, different types of design, and the use of a variety of materials. The design aesthetic does not need to be one-size-fits-all.
- **CONSIDER COMPATIBILITY** - both related to internal relationships within a mixed-use development and externally, with abutting properties. The arrangement of uses, noise, deliveries, trash locations, and hours of operation can contribute to, or detract from, the quality of life with neighbors.

CONCLUSION

Evolving the corridor into town centers and mixed-use centers will require overcoming many challenges: fear of change by the community, land assembly, potentially complex and sophisticated partnerships between the Township and private landowners, zoning modifications, landowners that prefer to sit than sell, private easements, tenant veto powers, long-term leases, costs for new infrastructure and public greenspace, and diminished property values that affect appraisals.

Adapting the Plainfield Avenue corridor to allow a broad range of non-auto-oriented uses in favor of those that add residents and create jobs is an important step. Desired development types, however, may not always be the lowest fruit on the tree. Requests may be received for projects that are “more of the same” (e.g. car-related uses such as an oil change, car wash, gas station, drive-through, car repair, vehicle sales, etc.) and do not address this Plan’s vision. A paradigm shift away from old development practices is necessary to create a more sustainable development pattern that builds community wealth and improves livability.

Redeveloping obsolete and underutilized properties can be challenging. General development issues include odd lot sizes, limited depth of lots, street angles, and – in some instances - the need to amass many lots to create a viable development site. If Plainfield wishes to change the land use pattern from single-use, single-story buildings on individual lots to mixed-use with combined

lots, then it will need to allow additional development density. The price point needed for developers to recover their investment would necessitate multi-story buildings (4-5 stories). Some residential properties may need to be acquired and demolished to make redevelopment possible. The amount of parking currently required also makes infill development challenging; zoning regulations must be changed. Implementation of this plan will take patience and time.

As discussed in the Trends section, many retail businesses are expected to collapse. This does not mean that there will not be new stores to replace them, but the odds that all store boxes will be filled or that existing, tired strip malls found on Plainfield Avenue will see substantial reinvestment are slim. It will therefore be critically important to embrace the opportunity to allow for a variety of uses in a new format. Case studies show that community leadership in advancing commercial redevelopment is a critical ingredient for success. The use of incentives (see Implementation section) for the Township to act as a development partner will be important. So, too, will be a willingness by the Township to reach out to landowners, existing businesses, and others to encourage change.

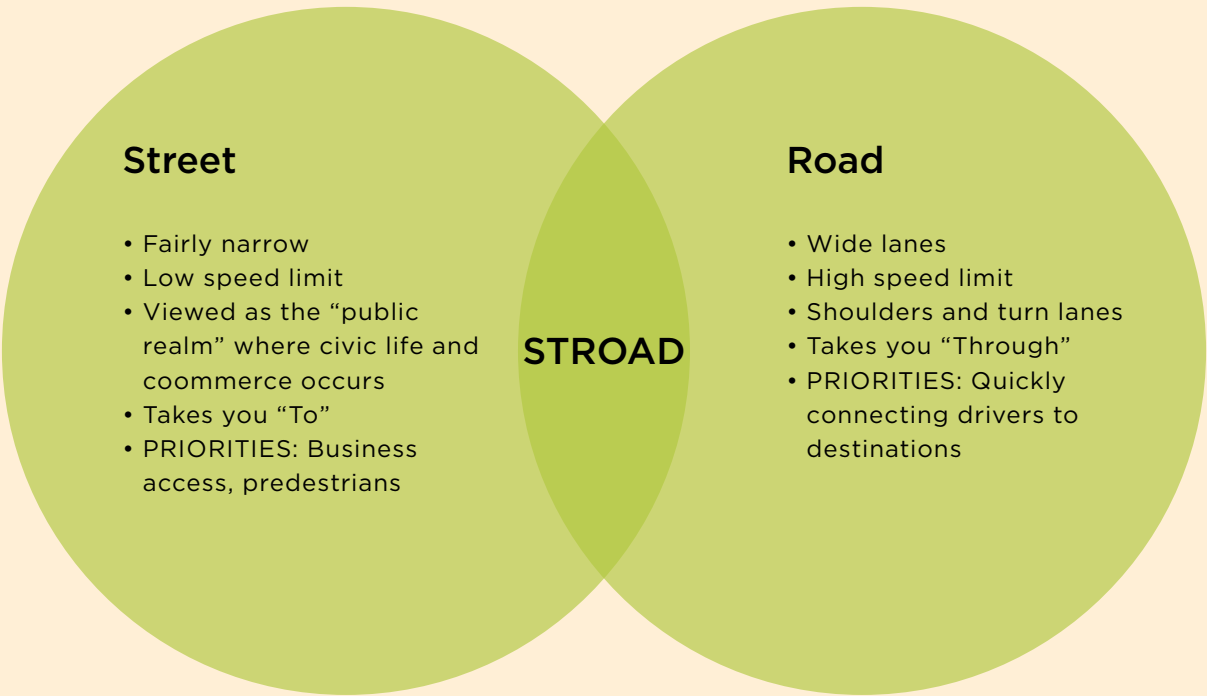
TRAVELING “TO” AS WELL AS “THROUGH”

The heavy emphasis on cars in the Plainfield Avenue corridor is understandable. Plainfield Township has always been viewed as a key “cut through” due to its geographic location. Few crossing locations are available as the Grand River arches through the township. In fact, Plainfield Village itself began in 1683 when Rene de LaSalle sailed up the Grand River attempting to find a shorter passage between the Detroit River and lower Lake Michigan. Today, Plainfield Avenue’s connection to the I-96 freeway and East Beltline/Northland Drive, and West River Drive/Cannonsburg Road to the north, makes it a critical connector to the Northeast suburbs of the region. These travel patterns have had a significant influence on the township’s growth and development over time.



Images from Strongtowns.com

Creating a high-speed roadway to accommodate the mobility of commuters and a place for businesses with substantial access to it has created a “stroad” – a term coined by Strong Towns, a non-profit think tank. The name stroad is a mash-up of the terms “street” and “road”. Strong Towns likens a stroad to a futon because a futon is neither a particularly good bed or a particularly good couch.



Characteristics of a street and road, when combined creates a “stroad”. The performance of the stroad is compromised because it can’t dop both functions well.

A key challenge is that Plainfield Avenue currently operates more like a highway than a business district street. Combining the two purposes on Plainfield Avenue has created a dangerous environment where a high-speed roadway is surrounded by people conducting the normal business of their lives: going to a coffee shop, traveling to school, attending church, and picking up groceries. In community surveys, respondents called the center lane the “suicide lane,” where pedestrians can be stranded and serious head-on and side car crashes occur.

The addition of taper lanes in front of businesses, so cars can leave the outside travel lane to turn right at a slow speed without impeding the flow of traffic, has become a de facto street widening of Plainfield Avenue from five lanes to six or even seven lanes (if both sides of the street have the same condition) between intersections. Transportation decisions have been made based on the goal of quickly and efficiently moving cars. The result is an unsafe and uncomfortable environment for people. We can build a more sustainable and adaptable corridor by building a transportation system that is not designed for only one purpose or one mode (driving). Minor adjustments and new street designs can make Plainfield Avenue a calmer and safer street for everyone.



O'Reilly's Auto Parts

These images of the O’Reilly Auto Parts store show a deceleration lane that is more than 100 feet long. The lane runs along the edge of the sidewalk until the sidewalk disappears into the driveway. The visual effect of this results in an additional twenty feet of pavement (12’ deceleration lane and 8’ unbuffered sidewalk). The driveway width of 50 feet as measured from the sidewalk is double the amount of pavement of two standard vehicle travel lanes or the equivalent of crossing the width of a city street. This is not a pedestrian-friendly design. The lack of separation from moving traffic, absence of a landscape buffer, and crossing distance length heavily favors fast-moving vehicles.

“Traffic overall has to be slowed down. We see, almost daily, people trapped in the center lane trying to cross Plainfield on foot. The center (suicide) lane is used commonly as a merge lane for people joining the traffic from businesses.”

- Survey Respondent

Plan Recommendations

The evolution of the Plainfield corridor will focus on creating a pedestrian-friendly environment that accommodates a variety of transportation modes, not just automobiles. Quality design will begin to transform Plainfield Avenue into a destination where cars are able to travel smoothly but do not pass through as fast as possible. To achieve the community vision, Traveling “To” as Well as “Through” plan recommendations focus on:

- Providing for a range of transportation modes;
- Creating a walkable community; and
- Access management.



Providing For A Range Of Transportation Modes

Overbuilding for a single transportation mode, rather than considering the effects on all users and modes has resulted in an environment that deters walking, bicycling, and transit ridership; alternatives that could assist in reducing traffic congestion, greenhouse gas emissions, and lowering transportation costs for vulnerable populations. Like the discussion in Building Vibrant Places regarding the need to encourage a broad range of uses, so too must we consider how best to accommodate the mobility needs of all members of our community and how to provide a range of transportation choices.

The quality of transportation infrastructure along Plainfield Avenue is mixed; the greatest investments have been in the road itself. Portions of sidewalk have been installed, but do not connect along the entire road from I-96 to the East Beltline. Transit ends at the City of Grand Rapids boundary and does not go to the Plainfield Meijer. Numerous curb cuts reduce mobility and create vehicle movement conflicts.

Infrastructure for pedestrians is addressed in the next section on Walkability. There are no street trees, some sidewalk areas are buffered with landscape strips, and crossing distances between traffic signals are one mile or more apart.

The 10-minute neighborhood was described in the Trends section. Introducing and expanding mobility options, making it easier to choose to bike or walk for some trips, potentially coupling with transit improvement and expansion, improves the travel situation for everyone - even for people who choose only to drive because it takes some travelers off the road. The strategy of town centers and mixing uses reinforces this transportation and land use relationship by building in the destinations and types of land uses that will make other transportation modes more successful from increased use.

Ways in which the Plainfield Avenue corridor can become more multi-modal for all people include:

- Complete sections of sidewalk where there are gaps.
- Connect sidewalks along Plainfield Avenue into surrounding neighborhoods.
- Amend the Zoning Ordinance to require sidewalk connections from the front doors of businesses to the public sidewalk and provide bike parking near to the front door of the businesses.
- Ensure that all sidewalk curb ramps meet current ADA requirements.
- Work with The Rapid to extend Route 11 to the Plainfield Meijer/MMU Town Center.
- Connect proposed town centers to existing and proposed trail systems.
- Create a built environment that de-emphasizes the automobile and instead balances all modes and all users effectively.
- See Walkability and Access Management sections.

Discussions with MDOT and the Kent County Road Commission gave the perspective of Plainfield Avenue as a major connector between the East Beltline, I-96 and downtown Grand Rapids. It is known as “Old US-131” and was designed to move vehicles. The design is considered “old” in that it does not look or operate like newer major roads that have a high capacity for traffic; for instance, the East Beltline has a boulevard. Committee discussions with developers supported the idea of creating a boulevard or adding medians to calm traffic and improve the aesthetic of the corridor. Considerations for a boulevard or median cross section include the amount of space needed, cost of construction and maintenance, turning radii, signals, snow clearing and cross overs.

Data collected from online surveying and in-person mapping exercises undertaken by the Rapid reports that the most requested route extension is for Route 11 to reach Meijer or locations further north on Plainfield Avenue. The Plainfield Meijer has been regularly identified as the top location needing better service in multiple engagement efforts over multiple years. The Rapid is now trying to assess ways to improve the productivity and reliability of the system, as well as the possibility of negotiated costs with communities; linkages have been identified between the need for transit to support workforce/affordable housing and the needs of changing household demographics in Plainfield Township.

To rebalance the road in a way that would sensitively support other modes, the interests and expectations of commuters, businesses, residents, and operating agencies would also need to be adjusted. Traffic management is complicated by the lack of alternative routes in the Plainfield corridor. The addition of traffic signals or other mechanisms that may reduce vehicle speed and corridor throughput has the potential to

affect the desirability of Plainfield Avenue as the route of choice for commuters. The alternative, then, becomes residential side streets. Complaints are already received about through-traffic in some areas, and side streets generally are narrow and have no sidewalks or curb and gutter.

The Kent County Road Commission has expressed a willingness to examine the possibility of closing residential side street connections to Plainfield Avenue. Alternate routes that preserve portions of the street network would greatly assist in making such closures possible. Recommendations in this plan include creating a parallel street system between commercial properties on Plainfield and the residential neighborhoods located behind. This would provide an opportunity for vehicular circulation that serves both land use types. In addition, the creation of new streets within large parcels helps to build a more robust street network for local traffic. One example would be to extend 5 Mile Road behind Lowe’s to Jupiter.



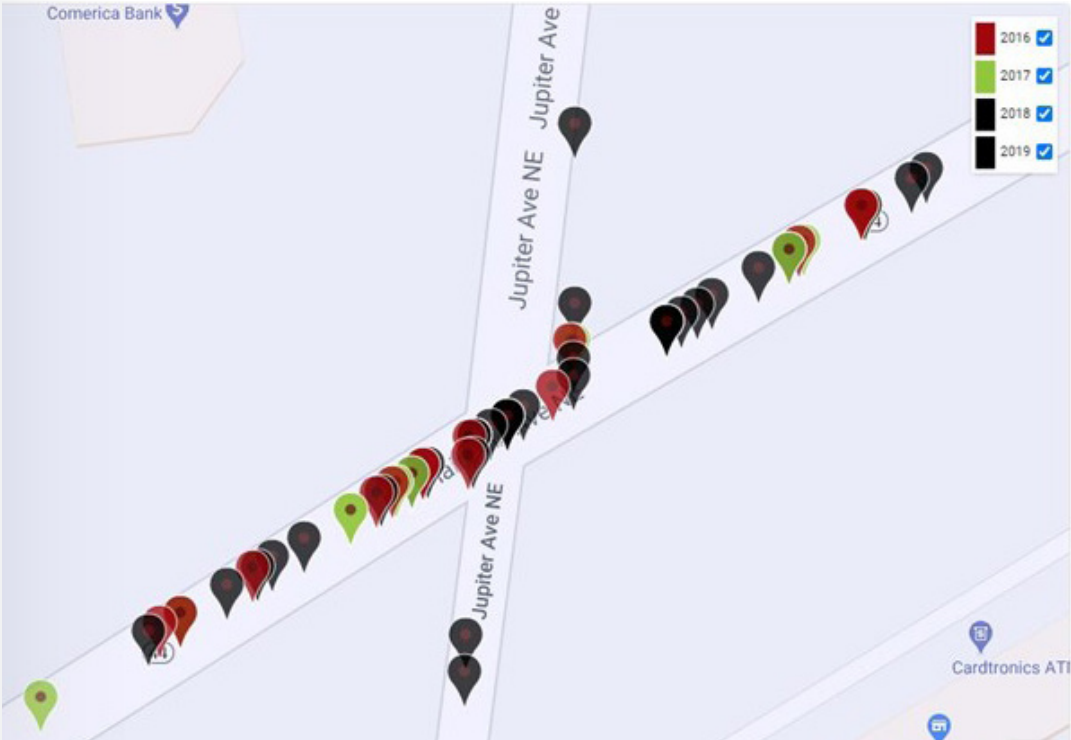
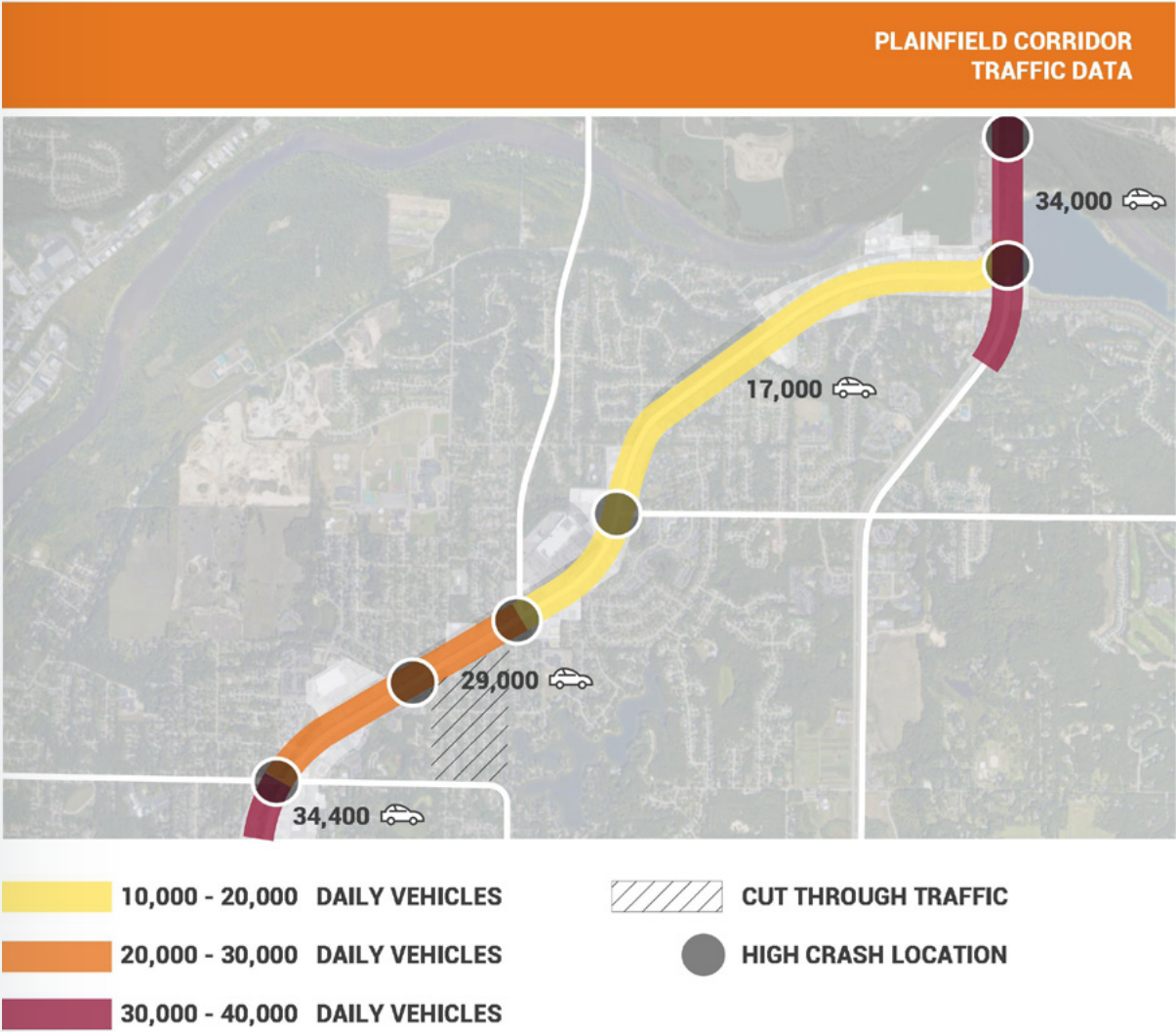
Grand Rapids Bus

Cut-Through Streets

(AS IDENTIFIED BY THE REIMAGINE PLAINFIELD STEERING COMMITTEE)

These are streets that traffic cuts through when the corridor backs up or gets slow and are generally residential in character, without sidewalks. It is desired to work towards deterring traffic from using these streets by keeping an efficient traffic flow on Plainfield Avenue.

- Jupiter
- Miramar
- Holtman
- Ivy
- Balsam
- Drake
- Grape
- Coit





Creating A Walkable Community

Pedestrians are the most vulnerable travelers on Plainfield Avenue. Everyone at some point is a pedestrian in the corridor – whether they are walking or using a wheelchair to travel from point A to point B, or if they leave their car to shop at a store or dine in a restaurant. A pedestrian’s needs are quite basic, they seek comfort, safety, interesting places to walk, and destinations within walking distance. A highly walkable corridor includes a range of ingredients – a clear path, places to walk to (destinations), shade, refuge, a buffer between fast moving vehicles, and short and easy crossing distances. Some blocks along Plainfield Avenue are fairly walkable but, in many areas, narrow sidewalks are barely distinguishable among the multiple curb cuts and lack any buffer from moving traffic or parked cars.

At their second meeting, the Committee was joined by Disability Advocates of Kent County and two of their “test pilots”. Committee members were blindfolded or used a wheelchair to experience first-hand how a person with a disability might navigate Plainfield if they did not have a car. Signal timing of designated crossing locations, the length of the crossing, and lack of crossings were noted. There are only a few safe crossing locations at traffic signals, located one mile or more apart. Pedestrians must cross a 6-lane

cross-section (4 through lanes, a left turn lane, and a right turn lane) to cross Plainfield Avenue...a minimum distance of at least 72 feet.

The distance of the sidewalk from the back of curb was identified as having a significant impact on the feeling of safety – some places have a generous setback, while in other locations there may be only 3 feet of separation between pedestrians and moving cars. Participants observed that some sidewalks directly next to parking areas had vehicles parked over the sidewalk, so that a person with a sight impairment risked walking into the vehicle, or a wheelchair user might need to go into a parking area to navigate around the parked car. Snow storage was cited as another problem, because plow drivers had been observed plowing parking lot snow into the sidewalk rather than clearing it.

A transformative change is needed for Plainfield Avenue to be an inviting and safe place to walk. Moving auto traffic as quickly as possible should not be the only priority. Brookings Institution research has found that creating walkable environments is an economically productive way for a community to grow. Building sidewalks, installing benches, and planting trees—and maintaining these investments—costs less than building and maintaining roads. Communities that focus on creating better walkable environments collect higher rents and have higher property values.¹⁷

¹⁷ <https://creua.business.gwu.edu/research/walkups/>

Self-Enforcing Design

The proposed land use interventions in this Plan can adjust the desired speed of drivers. The desired speed is the speed at which drivers wish to travel based on the roadway’s characteristics, including adjacent land use, topography, cross section, and traffic volumes. If we are to change the corridor from a place people travel through to a place they are traveling to, a change in context is needed.

As a practical matter, more people will drive through Plainfield Township as our region grows. If we continue to value Plainfield Avenue only for its throughput – the ability to move cars – then driving will be the only viable option to move around the corridor and this Plan’s vision will not come to fruition. Eventually, congestion and crashes will worsen. This “business as usual” approach leaves the corridor with the worst of both worlds: a freeway-type road that carries more traffic while becoming less attractive to new businesses and potential residents looking for homes in a place with neighborhood amenities they do not have to drive to.

Plainfield is considered a 45 mph roadway by MDOT, but cars travel much faster than that. Encouraging drivers to observe the posted speed limit should be a top priority because the operating speed of a car directly affects the crash outcome. The faster the car, the more severe the crash. For example, in a study of pedestrian fatalities the authors showed that when a vehicle is traveling 25 mph the fatality risk to a pedestrian is 10%, however if the vehicle speed is 62 mph at the time of impact the fatality risk is 100%. Federal Highway Administration guidance states that “self-enforcing roads aim to change driver behavior by using geometric elements resulting in operating speeds commensurate with the intended roadway purpose, including the existing and intended land use of the surrounding area, the topography, and the intended classification of the roadway.”

The design and operation of Plainfield Avenue should not be considered a foregone conclusion. It is possible to influence driving behavior by providing environmental cues in the design of the street. The speed of traffic

was identified as an issue in community surveys. Travel lane widths, turning radii, intersection controls, number of lanes, line of sight, presence of multiple modes of transportation, progression speed and street edge features such as trees and buildings are those things that guide travel speed. When done correctly, self-enforcing design reduces the need for active police enforcement to control speed and driver behavior.

The Reimagine Plainfield Steering Committee shared observations that assisted in defining goals for creating a walkable corridor:

- There must be destinations to walk to and that those destinations should be in proximity to one another and easily accessible. *(Northland drive has more of this feel today).*
- Density of an area is critical and will determine if people will walk there.
- Diversity of uses and businesses are important.
- Buildings should be visually interesting with quality architecture and lots of windows; in other words, contain design details that can be appreciated by persons walking at street level.
- Mixed-use buildings are present that include residential and are more than one story.
- Linger should be encouraged, and seating and shade provided.
- There should be good offerings to encourage walkability such as boutique stores or an ice cream shop, and attractions such as a trail or water feature.
- Sidewalks must lead to destinations and the walk needs to be continuous.
- Front doors are connected to the sidewalk, a pedestrian does not need to walk through a parking lot to get to the front door.
- Proximity of cars/moving traffic to sidewalks important to understand for pedestrian comfort *(some areas more conducive for walking than others along the corridor).*

Recommendations to Calm Traffic and Make Plainfield Avenue More Walkable

There are a number of things that can be done to transform Plainfield Avenue into a more people-friendly street. These changes will continue to move cars up and down Plainfield and will not reduce the ability of the road to handle the same volume of traffic. “Calming” the street will make the corridor safer by creating modifications that will better regulate the speed and flow of cars, provide more protection for vulnerable road users, and improve the overall driving experience. Recommendations include:



- **CHANGE THE BUILT CONTEXT -**
construct new buildings closer to the road with a landscape buffer between the sidewalk and building to avoid feeling the building is “on top” of the road, move the location of parking lots, and encourage taller buildings.
- **CREATE AN ALLEY OR LOCAL STREET “SHADOW” SYSTEM -**
disconnect neighborhood cut-through streets from Plainfield Avenue and create a local street network that connects to signalized intersections
- **REMOVE CURB CUTS -**
redevelopment provides the greatest opportunity to remove curb cuts. A reduced number of driveways will help to reduce crashes because there will be fewer turning movements along the corridor; it also reduces vehicle/pedestrian conflicts. Over time, as whole blocks are redeveloped, the center turn lane of the five-lane cross-section could be converted into a boulevard as the need for center turn movements are eliminated.



- **ENHANCE CROSSWALK MARKINGS -**
highlight pedestrian crossings using bold markings to send motorists the message that they are crossing a pedestrian path and should use caution.
- **ADD LANDSCAPE MEDIANS -**
visually reduce road width in each direction and reduce turning movements. Accommodate a row of street trees and provide adequate refuge for pedestrians crossing a wide roadway. For example, the striped lane at the intersection of Jupiter and Plainfield is unused space that could be converted to create a safer crossing location.
- **REDUCE PAVEMENT -**
target long deceleration lanes where the effect of widening the road has occurred and the tapers are filled with gravel and trash, signaling that cars don’t drive in that space.
- **INCREASE STREETSCAPE BUFFERS -**
provide separation between the pedestrian and cars by adding landscaping and streetscape elements in areas where trees and landscaping will provide visual separation.



- **PLANT TREES AND USE LIGHT POLES -**
provide the feeling of enclosure with vertical streetscape elements.
- **ADD ART AND VISUAL INTEREST -**
features such as sculptures, fountains, or storefront businesses can serve as a helpful amenity for both wayfinding and providing interest and character.
- **SHORTEN CROSSING DISTANCES -**
signalized intersections are the most desirable locations for pedestrians to cross the street; however, the also usually have longer crossing distances than at non-signalized intersections. Dedicated right-hand turn lanes should be avoided wherever feasible to preserve shorter crossing distances for pedestrians.

The desired future context of the corridor as a vibrant collection of places is at odds with the Plainfield Avenue of today. Re-balancing land use and transportation functions within the Plainfield corridor is possible. Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) examines the planning and development of corridors in a more modern way that considers community values in addition to mobility.

Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS)

CONVENTIONAL VERSUS CSS DESIGN APPROACH	
Conventional	CSS
CONTEXT: • Urban • Rural	CONTEXT: • Suburban • General urban • Urban center • Urban core
DESIGN CRITERIA PRIMARILY BASED ON: • Functional class • Design speed • Forecasted travel demand • Level of service	DESIGN CRITERIA PRIMARILY BASED ON: • Community objectives • Functional class • Thoroughfare type • Adjacent land use

CSS is intended for places where community objectives support walkable communities—compact development, mixed land uses and support for pedestrians and bicyclists, whether it already exists or is a goal for the future. There are State and National resources available that assist in providing guidance using a CSS approach, including:

- **“Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach”** from the Institute of Transportation Engineers¹⁸
- **“Context Sensitive Solutions in Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities”** from the Institute of Transportation Engineers, sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration and Environmental Protection Agency¹⁹
- **“M2D2 Guidebook: Multi Modal Development & Delivery Guidebook”** from the Michigan Department of Transportation²⁰
- **“Guidance for Trunkline Main Streets”** from the Michigan Department of Transportation.

18 <https://www.ite.org/pub/?id=E1CFF43C-2354-D714-51D9-D82B39D4DBAD>
19 <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-11/documents/rp036.pdf>
20 https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdot/MI_M2D2_Guidebook_693706_7.pdf
21 https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdot/TrunklineMainStGuidanceReport_541913_7.pdf

This guidance suggests that there is an opportunity to reconsider the design of Plainfield Avenue so that it can become a contributing part of the corridor’s transformation. Close coordination with MDOT and the Kent County Road Commission will be needed as options are examined to make a more walkable street that has consistent travel speeds, good access management, sufficient buffers between travel lanes and between pedestrians and moving vehicles, less pavement, and encourages wealth-building redevelopment activities.

According to the Institute of Transportation Engineers’ Context Sensitive Solutions in Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities, the following general parameters apply for arterial thoroughfares:

GENERAL PARAMETERS FOR ARTERIAL THOROUGHFARES				
	Suburban Commercial		General Urban Commercial	
Context	Boulevard	Avenue	Boulevard	Avenue
Building orientation (<i>entrances</i>)	front, side	front, side	front	front
Additional daytime population (<i>employees</i>)	2,370	3,440	6,581	13,991
Median household income 2020 (<i>est</i>)	\$69,575	\$46,948	\$127,132	\$76,276
Roadside				
Recommended parkway width	16 ft	15 ft	19 ft	16 ft
Pedestrian buffers	7 ft	6 ft	7 ft	6 ft
Traveled Way				
Typical traffic volume range	20,000 – 50,000	10,000 – 35,000	15,000 – 40,000	5,000 – 30,000
Target speed (<i>mph</i>)	35	35	35	25-30
Number of through lanes	4 - 6	2 - 4	4 - 6	2 – 4
Lane width	10 – 12 ft	10 – 11 ft	10 – 12 ft	10 – 11 ft
Horizontal radius (<i>per AASHTO</i>)	762 ft	762 ft	762 ft	510 ft
Medians (<i>in constrained conditions</i>)	10 ft	10 ft	10 ft	10 ft
Access management	high	moderate	high	low
Source: Institute of Transportation Engineers, “Context Sensitive Solutions in Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities” p.66 https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-11/documents/rp036.pdf				

Access Management

One key concept that substantially influences the design and operations of Plainfield Avenue is access management. “Access management” describes a transportation strategy that balances mobility and safety with land use. Where good access management exists, pedestrians and cyclists, as well as drivers, can easily enter and exit from parking lots and other destinations on to the main road. According to the US Department of Transportation’s Federal Highway Administration, effective access management on a corridor-wide scale can reduce severe crashes along suburban arterial roads, such as Plainfield Avenue, by 25-31 percent²². Good access management makes travel more efficient and convenient and supports coherent land use patterns.

One of the principles of good access management is making sure there are not too many driveways. Research has consistently shown that areas with more access points have more crashes. The Plainfield Avenue corridor was designed in an earlier era, when moving cars as quickly as possible was the highest priority. It has too many curb cuts and driveways, some located near intersections, which makes conflicts more likely. Reducing the number of driveways and encouraging connectivity between parking areas would make traffic flow more predictable and safer for everyone, because there will be less “stop-and-go” driving and fewer conflict points. Access management allows for the removal of deceleration lanes and makes more space available for sidewalks, benches, trees, and other streetscape elements. Fewer curb cuts also eliminate potential conflict points with pedestrians.

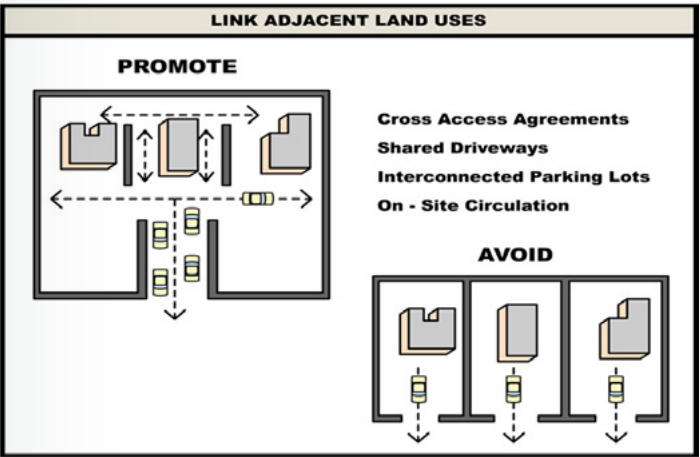
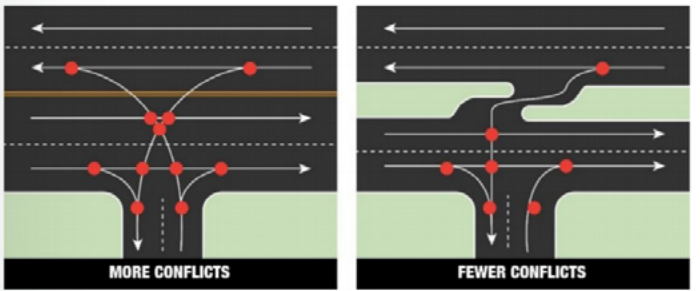
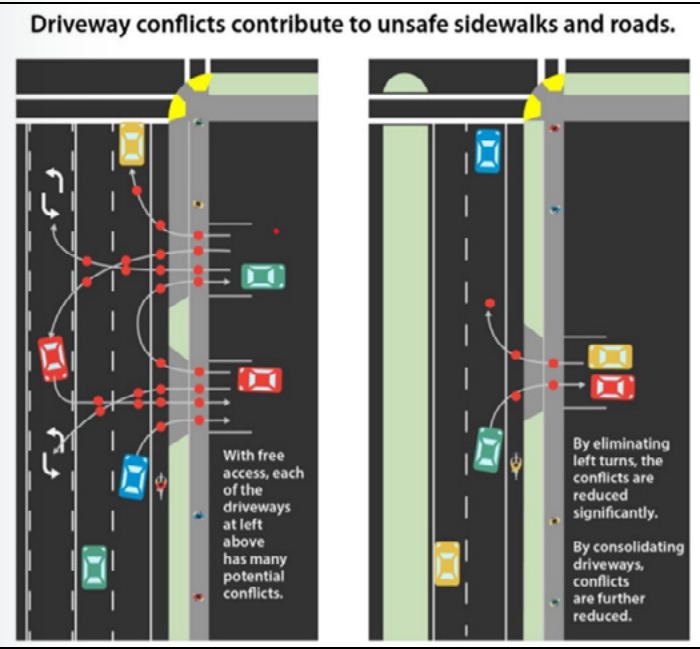
Incorporating access management can help convert auto-oriented strip developments into places that are safer, more attractive, and welcoming, and better able to promote walking, cycling, and transit use. It is a key component of making a boulevard or medians viable, reducing vehicular and pedestrian crashes, and effectively managing the volume of traffic. The Township has taken measures to support access

management, such as requiring connectivity between parking lots, but it has been a long and slow process to make meaningful change. A Corridor Management Plan is recommended to identify where driveways could be eliminated, combined, or adjusted to reduce the number of turning movements and associated infrastructure (such as turn lanes).

The Design Concepts section of this plan illustrates guidance on key access management concepts. The MDOT Access Management Guidebook is also a useful tool. An important recommendation of this plan is the creation of a secondary local street system that connects neighborhoods to one another via alleys or “shadow” streets that parallel the existing Plainfield Avenue. Several connections to neighborhood “cut through” streets would be eliminated along the corridor in favor of the secondary system which would bring drivers to signal-controlled intersections where feasible. This would reduce the potential for crashes, separate “to” and “through” traffic, and allow local cut-through streets to be disconnected.

Access Management Recommendations

- Connect parcels along Plainfield Avenue with service drives
- Limit the number of driveways for a site
- Share parking lots on contiguous parcels
- Create internal streets on large parcels that connect
- Connect to side streets instead of Plainfield Avenue
- Construct service drives to be public alleys or streets



Images from Florida Department of Transportation Access Management Guidebook (https://fdotwww.blob.core.windows.net/sitefinity/docs/default-source/planning/systems/documents/fdot-access-management-guidebook---nov-19.pdf?sfvrsn=c5aa6e5_4)

CONCLUSION

Do we build a different type of transportation system first and hope people will use it, or do we wait until people are in the corridor and then build the transportation system they want when they get here?

The reality is that people are already walking and biking along the Plainfield Avenue corridor. Senior citizens can be observed walking to Meijer, couples can be seen trying to dodge cars as they cross Plainfield, and fast-food employees in their uniforms are trying to get to work. There are many lower-income people temporarily housed in hotels and motels or living in one of the corridor’s mobile home parks; some of these and other area households do not have the means and/or ability to drive. As new development occurs, multi-modal infrastructure will better serve the broad range of uses and households currently located here as well as those to come.

The best opportunity to make infrastructure improvements is when work is already planned. MDOT is planning a two-course resurfacing project with ADA sidewalk ramp upgrades in 2025. The resurfacing project could allow consideration of modifications to the roadway. It will be critically important to engage MDOT and the Kent County Road Commission early in the process to discuss any desired changes. Bringing together financial resources to implement beneficial infrastructure design changes to the corridor is addressed in the Implementation section of this Plan.

²² https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/intersection/other_topics/corridor/

GREENING THE CORRIDOR

“Dire need for green space. Need for trees and a sense of beauty.”

- Survey Respondent

Early in the planning process, survey results found widespread and consistent desires for more greening in the Plainfield corridor, and it was immediately identified as an item that that should move forward. The lack of “green” along Plainfield Avenue is somewhat startling. There are very few trees, minimal lawn areas, parking lots are unscreened, and parking lots are lacking landscape islands. The desire was also expressed for placemaking, which was discussed in the Building Vibrant Places section of this Plan. A related component is the role of public spaces in the creation of places that can contribute to greening and quality of life.



This image of Meijer, its outlots, car dealerships, and roads illustrate the many acres of asphalt and rooftops that are present along Plainfield Avenue. The area is largely devoid of trees and stormwater is collected through pipes then discharged into the Grand River.

The Reimagine Plainfield Committee and survey respondents considered the lack of greening along the corridor mostly from an aesthetic standpoint. However, the science behind green infrastructure is critically important to understand when considering the corridor’s future needs. Low Impact Development (*LID*) is aimed at conserving natural resources and protecting the environment by strategically managing rainfall close to its source, minimizing impervious coverage, using native plant species, and conserving and restoring natural areas during site development or redevelopment.

LID incorporates green infrastructure into private site design and public road projects. Numerous benefits are provided to property owners, regulatory agencies and the general public when stormwater is properly managed. Proper LID design will:

- Reduce infrastructure and utility maintenance costs (e.g., streets, curbs, gutters, storm sewers)
- Reduce stormwater runoff volume and improve stormwater quality
- Increase energy and cost savings for heating, cooling, and irrigation
- Protect community character/aesthetics
- Reduce salt usage and snow removal on paved surfaces
- Protect/restore the water quality of rivers and lakes
- Improve air quality
- Improve urban wildlife and habitat opportunities; and
- Provide additional stormwater capacity for non-conforming sites without modern detention facilities.

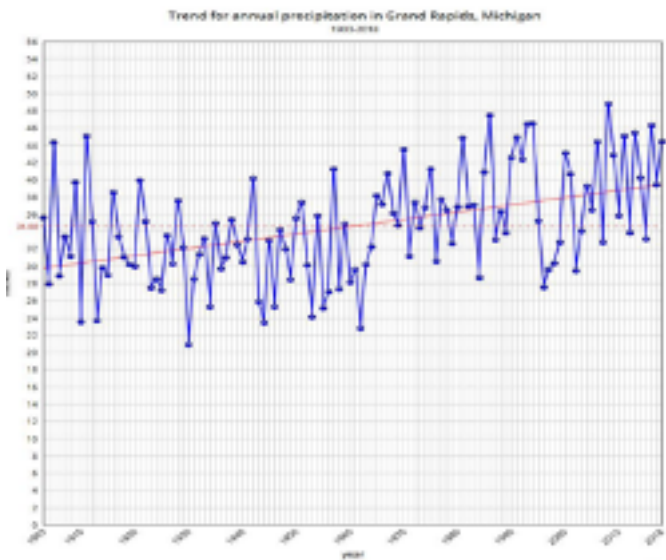


Image from <https://truebornsonsofliberty.blogspot.com/2019/08/trend-for-precipitation-in-grand-rapids.html>.

Increased precipitation and more intense wet-weather events are anticipated in Kent County (see chart). The Grand River flood of 2013 tested storm water and flood protection infrastructure. Heavy downpours are now twice as frequent as they were a century ago. Both summer and winter precipitation has been above average for the last three decades, the wettest period in a century. Design techniques focused on the use of applications modeled after nature, rather than building costly infrastructure and water quality restoration systems, are the best and most feasible options to enhance resiliency.

Plan Recommendations

Paradoxically, greening the Plainfield corridor can be nearly instantaneous while also taking the longest amount of time to change. For example, asphalt can be torn up (instant change) but the trees that are planted in its place will take much longer to reach maturity. There’s a popular Chinese proverb that says: “The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now.” To achieve the community vision, Greening the Corridor plan recommendations focus on:

- Creating compelling public spaces;
- Increasing the tree canopy; and
- Effectively managing stormwater.

Creating Compelling Public Spaces

A critically important ingredient for the corridor’s transformation is the creation of public spaces that draw people in and encourage human interaction. Public space, also called the public realm, is comprised of the places and spaces that belong to, and are accessible by, everyone in the community. This can include streets, sidewalks, plazas, trails, parks, and even civic buildings. The pandemic has only strengthened the yearning of many for a stronger sense of community. The importance of well-designed public space has become critical as people venture outside to escape their houses, participate in physical activity, run errands, and/or meet friends or family safely in the fresh air.

The Social Dimension of Public Space

Public spaces are open to all, regardless of ethnic origin, age or gender, and as such they represent a neutral space for citizens and society. When properly designed and cared for, they bring communities together, provide meeting places and foster social ties of a kind that have been disappearing in many communities. These spaces shape the cultural identity of an area, are part of its unique character and provide a sense of place for local communities²².

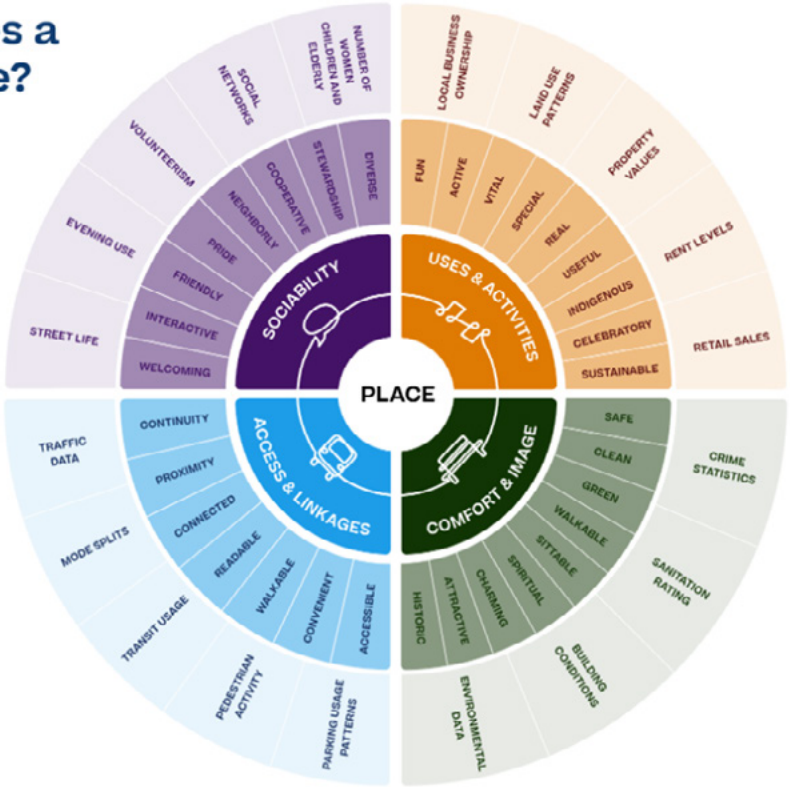


22 <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/as-set/document/the-value-of-public-space1.pdf>

Destinations contribute to the creation of a walkable community. A community gathering place can serve as a destination, whether it is a park, swimming beach, or trail. The spaces that connect these destinations are also in the public realm and contribute to the experience. If a street feels unsafe or unwelcoming, people will be more likely to drive. Compelling public spaces, then, must be thought of as beginning at the edge of a resident’s property line until they reach their destination; and if they are going to a public space, that must also be considered.

What Makes a Great Place?

Project
for Public
Spaces



The Project for Public Spaces identifies four key qualities for the creation of successful public space: it should be accessible, it should be comfortable and have a good image, people should be able to engage in an array of activities, and it should be sociable. The wheel illustrates other attributes that PPS considers as contributing to great public space.²³

The design of a street and the streetscape will determine pedestrian comfort. The geometry of the street should provide sufficient landscape buffers to separate people from high-speed traffic, or on-street parking can be used to provide distance and serve as a physical barrier. In the case of the

Plainfield Avenue, it is proposed that a parkway of at least 8 feet be provided alongside sidewalks that are at least 6 feet in width. Street trees serve as an important buffer between moving vehicles and pedestrians. Pedestrian amenities and crosswalk enhancements, identified in the “To” and “Through” section of this Plan, assist in providing a positive experience. Finally, conversion of the center turn lane into a landscaped median reduces the overall scale of the roadway; when combined with new buildings that frame the street, the feeling of an outdoor “living room” will be created.

23 <https://www.pps.org/article/you-asked-we-answered-6-examples-of-what-makes-a-great-public-space#:~:text=A%20successful%20public%20space%20generally,and%2C%20it%20should%20be%20sociable.>



https://www.progressiveae.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Versluis-Park_4.jpg



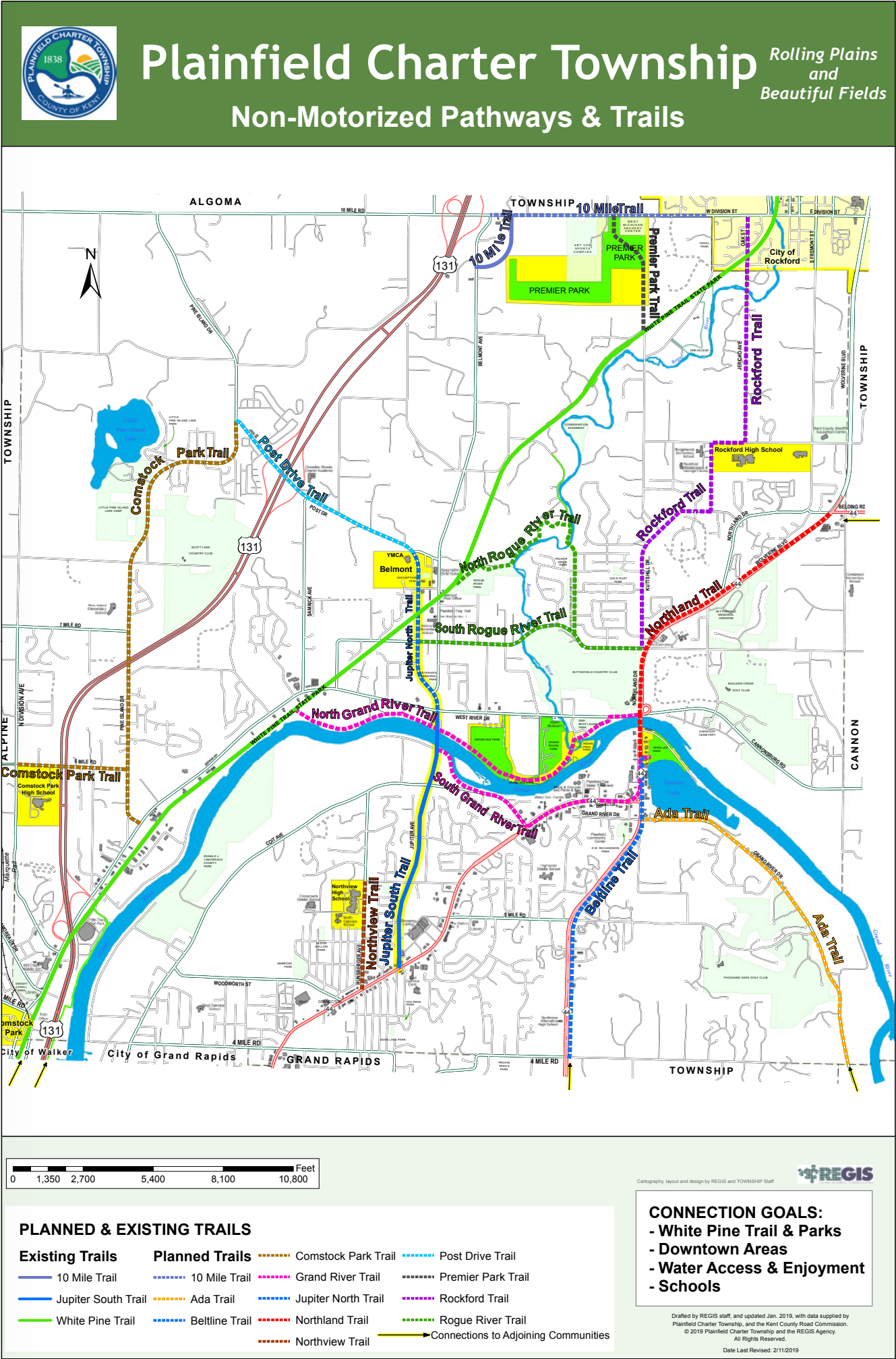
[https://www.plainfieldmi.org/VERSLUIS%20\(19\).JPG](https://www.plainfieldmi.org/VERSLUIS%20(19).JPG)

There are several public spaces that exist or are proposed along the Plainfield Avenue corridor that offer the opportunity to create or enhance community interaction. These locations are as follows:

- A new green would be created adjacent to the Meijer Mixed Use (MMU) Center.
- The proposed Plainfield Village Center would include a large common area that could host events, farmers markets, exercise classes, concerts, charity events and other community happenings. The space would be heavily programmed with the idea that it becomes a true public space identified as Plainfield’s public square. In addition, the stormwater management area owned by the Kent County Drain Commissioner offers an opportunity to provide passive recreation space to the public in contrast the bustling square. This potential “park” also leverages the newly created trail along Jupiter Avenue to connect to the Grand River and natural areas.

Trails will play a critical role in connecting neighborhoods, businesses, and public spaces to one another. The recent addition of the Jupiter South Trail links the Plainfield Village Center to the Grand River. Versluis Town Center can be a central hub that has “spokes” connecting to the abutting uses along the proposed South Grand River, Beltline, Ada, Northland, and North Grand River trail systems. The Non-Motorized Pathways & Trails map shows the long-term plan for trail expansion in the township.

- Versluis Town Center is fortunate to have an existing asset that already serves as a place where different segments of the community come together. Versluis Park offers a wide range of amenities for community gathering. This Plan proposes to make the park entrance more visually connected to the corridor. The opportunity exists to brand Versluis Lake, the Grand River, and a proposed trail extending from Coit Avenue to this town center as an area for persons with active lifestyles.
- Existing residential “cut through” streets that could be closed to limit traffic access into neighborhood areas can provide additional public space. It is not recommended that street ends be vacated for development because of the probability that there is underground infrastructure within the public right-of-way. These areas could serve as an outdoor food court for an abutting restaurant, a pop-up store for a retail business, or a playground or a dog park for an adjacent apartment building.

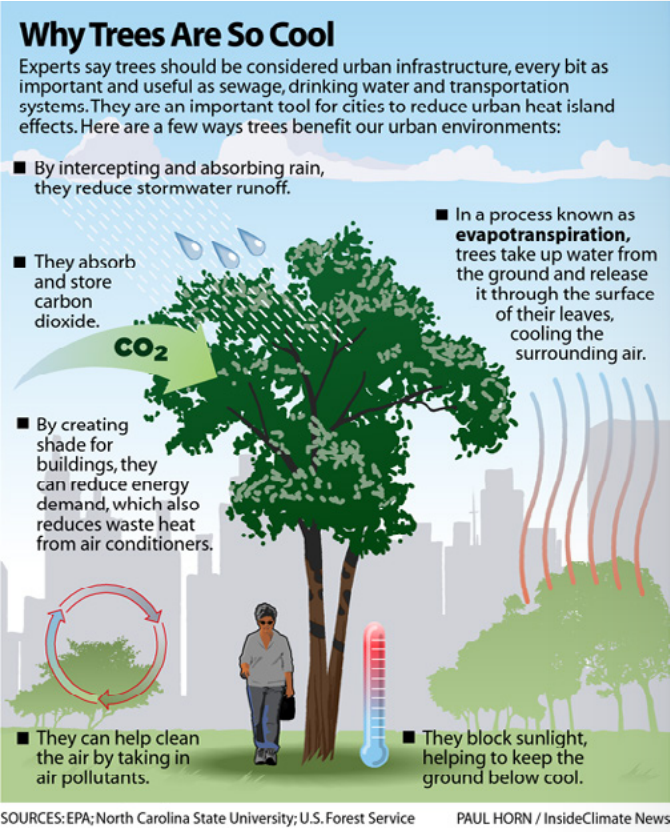


Increasing The Tree Canopy

Trees provide substantial environmental, economic and quality of life benefits. Trees absorb carbon, dust, and soot from the air; generate oxygen; reduce noise levels; absorb stormwater; reduce runoff and prevent soil erosion. Trees create shade to reduce summer temperatures (the urban heat island effect), which is a risk factor for heat-related illnesses, especially among vulnerable populations such as children and seniors. They improve aesthetic qualities, increase pavement life, and have been shown to relieve stress. Tree shade also helps to reduce energy costs for cooling homes and businesses in the summer months.

A good tree canopy is associated with higher property values and higher retail sales in shopping areas. It also gives back to the wider community, with a bottom line backed by research and quantifiable using the US Forest Service’s free i-Tree software (itreetools.org). A 2010 report for the City of Grand Rapids, for example, calculated the value provided by the city’s street trees at \$6.5 million each year, or \$105 per tree per year. Every dollar spent by the city on its forestry program was returning \$3.60 in benefits²⁴.

Sufficient parkway and soil volume for street trees is important if the Plainfield Avenue corridor is going to have a tree canopy that works effectively in creating a walkable, pedestrian-oriented environment. Given the amount of limited space, tree plantings on private property should be encouraged and/or incentivized. Street trees were planted along the southern portion of Plainfield Avenue by Grand Rapids, near the I-96 interchange, in the Fall of 2020. Although the trees are still young, the difference in the look of the corridor is notable.



<https://mk0insideclimats3pe4.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/HeatIslandTrees.png>

Street trees can function as traffic calming measures - research suggests that drivers slow down when a roadway includes strong vertical elements. Well-placed street trees also separate people on sidewalks from traffic in the roadway, making it safer and more pleasant to walk. During the summer, shade from street trees is an important public health element for people walking or waiting for transit. Developing and maintaining a good street tree program takes thought and planning. Trees can struggle in urban and suburban situations, where extensive paving can increase ambient temperatures and make water absorption difficult. They can be damaged by salt and heavy construction and maintenance equipment. When a species manages to thrive despite those challenges, it can be tempting to rely on that kind of tree and plant it extensively. Dutch Elm Disease and the emerald ash borer are good reminders that a diverse range of tree species should be planted.

²⁴ Grand Rapids Urban Forestry Plan, available at <https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Government/Departments/Parks-and-Recreation/Forestry>



This example of Buford Highway illustrates how a Corridor Improvement District is initiating change to install landscaping and enhanced sidewalks to create a greener, more appealing corridor.

Right Tree, Right Place

An initiative was developed by Consumers Energy to help communities better understand tree clearances and power lines called “Right Tree, Right Place”. This initiative provides tree planting guidelines, tree trimming guidelines, descriptions of vegetation management, minimum power line clearances, and safety. Right Tree, Right Place aims to reduce the impact that trees have on utilities, especially since they are responsible for 30% of all power outages. Right Tree, Right Place provides a list of trees that will not grow tall enough to interfere with electrical lines and provides clearance guidelines for each type of line. These standards should be kept in mind for all new plantings/developments within the Plainfield corridor.

TREE CLEARANCE GUIDELINES		
Electric Line Type	Voltage	Suggested Clearance
Distribution	4,800 to 14,400	10 feet from wire in yard and other maintained areas 15 feet from either side of pole in undeveloped areas
Transmission	46,000	15 feet from wire in yards and other maintained areas 40 feet from either side of pole or tower depending on construction style in undeveloped areas
Transmission	138,000	20 feet from wire in yard and other maintained areas 45 to 60 feet from either side of pole or tower depending on construction style in undeveloped areas
Transmission	345,000	75 feet from either side of structure

Figure 5-17. Tree Clearance Guidelines. Source: Consumers Energy

It is recommended that detailed landscape standards be incorporated into the township’s zoning ordinance to encourage tree plantings and “green” the corridor. Minimum soil amounts and specifications, plant size and spacing guidelines, and species-specific direction (*limitations and prohibitions on inappropriate plants*) as well as general landscaping and tree canopy requirements and incentives for protecting existing trees should be included. A comprehensive maintenance plan, including establishment, pruning, and replacement may need to be developed for trees within the public right-of-way.

Overhead Utilities

A number of public comments have been received about the elimination of overhead power lines. Burying lines is an expensive proposition. Consumers Energy often cites that it will cost a community \$800,000 to \$1 million to bury lines the general length of one city block, or 600 feet. Developers are usually better able to negotiate price reductions for substantial developments that will bring additional customers. Where feasible and reasonable, this plan supports burying lines; the cost of which must be weighed against other community priorities.

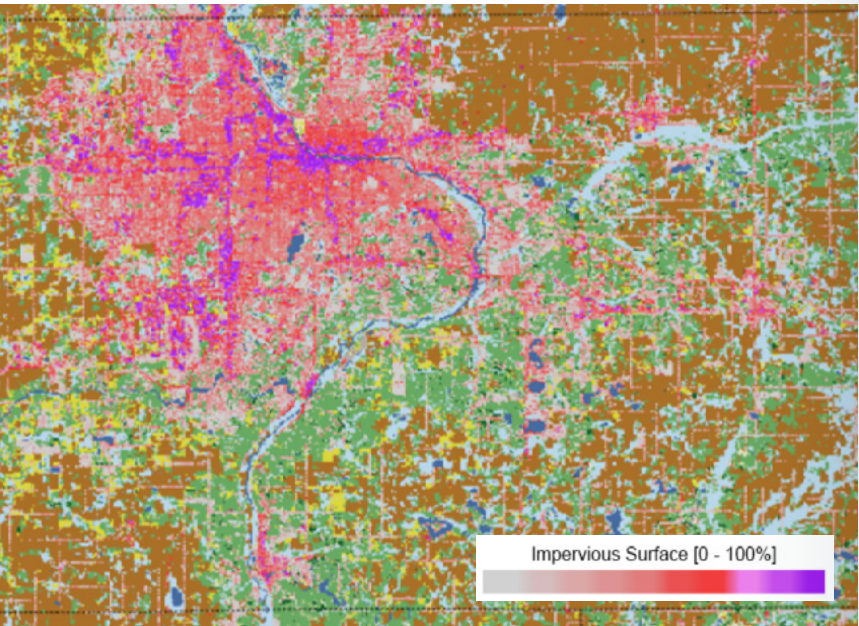
Effectively Managing Stormwater

Stormwater facilities that were built decades ago are proving to be insufficient to manage additional water, resulting in flooding and associated infrastructure issues. Stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces such as roofs, streets and parking lots that are channeled directly into waterways such as the Grand River and Rogue River pose issues in terms of contaminants as well as increased water temperature which can affect fish species and aquatic life.

Large swaths of the Plainfield Avenue corridor are classified as 100% impervious. Retrofitting these sites to better manage stormwater by capturing it where it falls would make significant improvements in water quantity and quality and assist in providing flood protection. Improved integration between stormwater and the built environment is necessary.

Green infrastructure can be used to reduce expensive “grey” infrastructure such as sewers, drains, culverts, and detention basins. The amount of runoff generated during major storms can overwhelm sewer and treatment systems. Absorbing some of this runoff with planted areas not only reduces the quantity of stormwater draining into water bodies but it can also clean the water as it percolates through the system into groundwater. Additional benefits include cooling, beautifying, and softening formerly hot hardscaped areas.

A National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit is required under the Federal Clean



Geological Survey map showing impervious surface cover in Kent County, available at <https://www.mrlc.gov/viewer/>

Water Act for stormwater discharges. Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s) are local governmental units that discharge pollutants conveyed by untreated stormwater into water bodies. Recent changes pertaining to MS4s will affect development in Plainfield Township:

- First flush events must be captured and treated on-site for all storms and suspended solids reduced.
- Channel protection to reduce water volume now requires sites to hold a 2-year, 24-hour rain event to allow for on-site infiltration.
- Release rates have been reduced to assist in flood control.
- Stormwater facility maintenance agreements are now required and must be recorded as part of the property.

These regulations will play a role in how site redevelopment occurs. With precipitation and major storm events increasing, and stormwater management requirements becoming more stringent, places with large amounts of impervious paved area must find creative ways to manage runoff. Introducing porous areas can serve multiple purposes: not only do they absorb runoff, but they can function as amenities in their own right, even in a parking lot or along a road. Over time, better water management may result in avoiding issues such as a 2014 stormwater infrastructure failure at North Kent Mall.

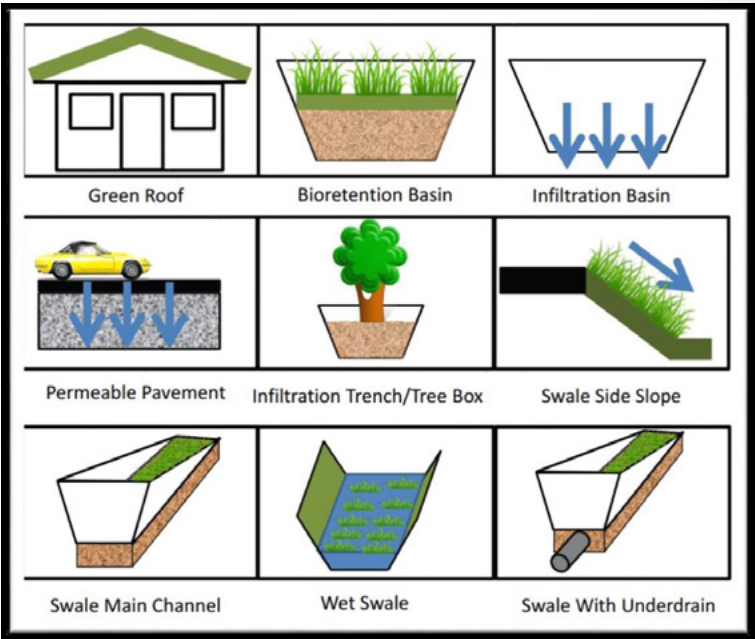
While Low-Impact Development (*LID*) is encouraged wherever it can be applied, it is specifically warranted in areas where vegetation may be installed in lieu of impervious surfaces (*i.e. pavement*). It can be utilized in open spaces, rooftops, streetscapes, parking lots, sidewalks, and medians. In many cases, these beneficial design alternatives offer a significant long-term cost savings, even when factoring in some additional maintenance costs. Design options to consider include use of rain gardens, native plant species, street trees (*i.e. Planter Boxes, Tree Pits*), bioswales and porous pavement in parking areas or the road gutter. To function properly, porous pavement requires adequate subsurface soil conditions, overflow connection to a storm sewer or other final discharge location and by routine vacuum or sweeping maintenance.

The Plainfield Corridor is characterized by wide swaths of surface parking, much of it rarely or never used. “Right sizing” parking areas can be highly beneficial – not just environmentally but economically and aesthetically as well. For example, redevelopment of the former Mizner Park mall in Boca Raton, Florida led to the transformation of a 29-acre site into a successful mixed-use center with a dense mix of retail and residential uses, and entertainment venues including an amphitheater. The project reduced impervious surface area by 15 percent while making the site much more inviting by adding landscaping and a large central plaza.

Opportunities to “depave” parking lots along the Plainfield corridor should be identified. Depaving involves selectively removing paving on appropriate sites to reduce the impervious surface area. Then, green infrastructure can be installed to improve water quality and/or manage water quantity at a lower cost than building more pipes (aka “gray” infrastructure). Even small depaving projects can improve the appearance as well as the function of a parking lot, and the transformation of the space can inspire the community by demonstrating what is possible. Engaging the public in identifying sites for a depaving project can advance the community’s vision and create positive energy.

Bioretention and Bioswales

Bioretention (rain gardens) and bioswales should be considered in areas between new or existing sidewalks, where driveways are removed, and where road medians are installed. Larger drainage areas may require a combination of facilities and overflow areas should be provided for larger rain events. Plant species should be salt tolerant, provide aesthetic benefits and be low maintenance. Sidewalks should be designed to direct runoff into these areas, and maintenance agreements should be included with approvals. There may be an opportunity to explore a partnership with MDOT’s 2025 resurfacing project to create bioretention islands or other green infrastructure solutions along Plainfield Avenue so that water quality can be improved before being discharged into local waterways.



Bioswale



A rain garden at the Argenta Hills development collects rainwater from the Target parking lot. Rather than constructing stormwater ponds and a series of pipes and pumps to carry the water away from the site, engineers used green infrastructure and low-lying basins to create a system that can handle even the largest storms. Elizabeth Dunbar | MPR News

Site- and neighborhood-scale interventions can have an impact. They complement, and are readily folded into, policies and plans that promote thoughtful, attractive, and coherent development including revised street design standards, updated parking requirements and compact mixed-use construction. The US EPA provides a wide range of resources for communities interested in green infrastructure, including cost/benefit analyses, funding opportunities, public education materials, and guides to policies, planning, design, implementation, and maintenance at <https://www.epa.gov/green-infrastructure>.

CONCLUSION

The recommendations of this section emphasize the value of placemaking and public spaces, planting trees, and managing stormwater to repair the downside of change over the past five decades. There are myriad opportunities to alter how the community experiences the Plainfield corridor, and many of them are low-cost. Public action and partnerships can be particularly effective in this regard.

For example, temporary pop-up events on vacant or underused land could be held. The Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds seeks grant opportunities for water quality improvements. Schools, churches, and civic organizations can engage in depave and tree planting events. If the former Plainfield Corridor Improvement Authority were resurrected, it could work on gateways and streetscapes (assuming that there is revenue to invest). These items are not out of reach, nor are they as daunting as multi-million-dollar redevelopment projects. Even in those cases, though, zoning can assist in moving the needle just as a street resurfacing project offers the opportunity to talk about greening and stormwater management. The beauty of these approaches is that they can be as small or larger as the township is willing to take on and every incremental step benefits the whole.

DESIGN CONCEPTS

Words, for the most part, have expressed the reasoning and intentions of the corridor plan up until this point. This section contains a collection of images and observations intended to communicate to property owners, developers, and investors the kind of development Plainfield Township desires to encourage, and the factors that will be considered, in reviewing proposed projects within the corridor.

By clearly articulating these design concepts, much of the guesswork can be removed from the development approval process. This can save time and money for those who are proposing a project. The Township Board, Planning Commission, Township staff, residents, and others can also use this as a guide to assist in discussions with the development community. The illustrated concepts help “*paint the picture*” to avoid misunderstandings about design intent.

While what is presented in the next series of pages is important, also worthwhile is observing what is absent. In traditional master plans one might see suggestions of creating compatible designs with the existing neighborhood context, that the placement of new buildings should match existing buildings, and the scale of a new structure should be proportionate to existing structures. What is “*new*” versus what is “*existing*” equates to being “*the same*”. This plan proposes to break the mold and develop in a different way than what has been done in the past.

For more than five decades the Plainfield Avenue corridor has followed an auto-oriented development pattern. Planning the corridor for people is a deceptively simple and significant fundamental shift. This is an exciting opportunity to address resident and business concerns about lack of new investment, the desire for a downtown, property maintenance, the need for beautification, and other priorities. Admittedly, it can be hard to imagine the corridor being different. This chapter is intended to help envision what it could be.

Design Concepts Matrix

Important design concepts are identified throughout the plan and are listed in the comparison matrix that contains the plan themes *Building Vibrant Places*, *Traveling “To” as well as “Through”*, and *Greening the Corridor*. The big ideas from each theme are listed and cross-referenced. A “check” shows their direct applicability or relevance to each concept. Not every concept is illustrated here; guidance has been provided in the theme chapters. It is worth noting the interrelationships of the various concepts and how they work together to achieve the Township’s desired vision. These are the necessary ingredients to transform Plainfield Avenue into a collection of vibrant and prosperous places intentionally designed to serve the needs of the community.

REIMAGINE PLAINFIELD CORRIDOR PLAN THEMES AND DESIGN CONCEPTS									
	Vibrant Places			To and Through			Greening		
Design Concepts	Create town centers	Facilitating mixed-use	Flexible and adaptable	Range of Modes	Walkable community	Access management	Creating public space	Increasing tree canopy	Stormwater management
Broad range of land uses	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Variety of housing types and price points	✓	✓	✓		✓				
Multi-story buildings frame the public realm	✓	✓			✓		✓		
Limit auto-oriented uses	✓				✓	✓			
New public spaces	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		
Parking behind buildings or to the side	✓	✓			✓				
Parking is shared between uses	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			
Reduce curb cuts (access management)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Build a local (“shadow”) street network	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Introduce landscape medians	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Increase residential density	✓	✓			✓				
Increase employment density	✓	✓			✓				
Flexible building design	✓	✓	✓						
Building frontage widths	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			
Building massing for pedestrians	✓	✓	✓		✓				
Avoid blank walls	✓	✓	✓		✓				
Encourage variety	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Compatibility with surroundings	✓	✓			✓				
Rebalance transportation modes	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			
Connect to surrounding neighborhoods	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		
Entrances face the street and have sidewalks	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		
Expand Route 11 to MMU	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		
Connect town centers to trails	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		
Introduce gateways	✓						✓		
Reduce pavement, including taper lanes	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Add trees	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
Buffers between pedestrians and cars	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Use Low-Impact Design	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓
“Depave” and add landscaping	✓		✓		✓			✓	✓

11 Tactics for Suburban Retrofitting

By Ellen Dunham-Jones
And June Williamson

A variety of tactics can be used to change the context of the Plainfield corridor. Many of those listed in the box (11 Tactics) are found in the Design Concepts Matrix. The additional narrative from this list might be useful to those that are only interested in this section of the plan.

A Series Of Tactics Drawn From The Lessons Described In “Retrofitting Suburbia”

TACTIC #1: Reuse The Box

Adaptive reuse of vacant commercial buildings for new, often community-serving uses, such as libraries or medical clinics, is both socially desirable and reduces waste.

TACTIC #2: Provide Environmental Repair: Restore Wetlands and Creeks

Retrofits sometimes provide the opportunity to reconstruct wetlands and creeks, components in the metropolitan watershed that were erased or diminished by suburban development patterns.

TACTIC #3: Revise Zoning Codes and Public Works Standards (Re-development)

Make it easier to build compact, mixed-use developments with complete streets, and make it harder to build single-use, auto-dependent places.

TACTIC #4: Keep Block Size Walkable

Without careful modulation, the hybridization of suburban building types and parking into finer-grained blocks and streets can lead to oversized blocks and monotonous building fronts. The rule of thumb for a walkable block is a perimeter dimension of less than 1700 linear feet.

TACTIC #5: Establish a More Continuous Streetscape with Shallow Liner Buildings

Wrappers can be employed around reused box buildings and liners can screen surface parking lots to provide a more continuous streetscape.

TACTIC #6: Use Appropriate Street Types and Real Sidewalks

Many suburban streets are overly wide and lack sufficient sidewalks and crosswalks. Recommended design guidelines for a broad range of context-sensitive street types should be referred to.



TACTIC #7: Improve Connectivity for Drivers, Bicyclists and Pedestrians

Build interconnected street networks to increase walkability and public safety, while distributing traffic and reducing overall vehicle miles traveled (VMT).

TACTIC #8: Consider Future Connectivity and Adaptability

If desired street connections cannot be achieved when the retrofit is initially designed and constructed, designs should anticipate potential future connections and buildings.

TACTIC #9: Diversify Housing Choice and Price

The future success of suburbs will hinge on their ability to respond to changing demographics; provide more housing choices.

TACTIC #10: Add New Units to Existing Subdivisions

Infilling residential neighborhoods with accessory dwelling units (ADUs) can provide affordable housing choices for singles and seniors and increase residential density without dramatically altering the neighborhood pattern.

TACTIC #11: Invest in Quality Architecture

The most successful and sustainable retrofits will be beautiful, durable, culturally significant, and built to meet high standards of environmental performance both in the public spaces and the buildings.

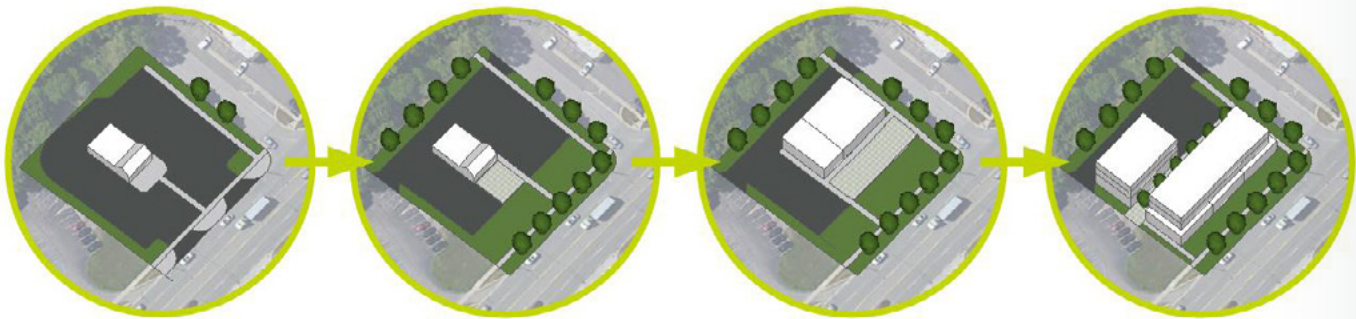
Source: <http://buildabetterburb.org/11-urban-design-tactics-for-suburban-retrofitting/>

How the Corridor Could Change

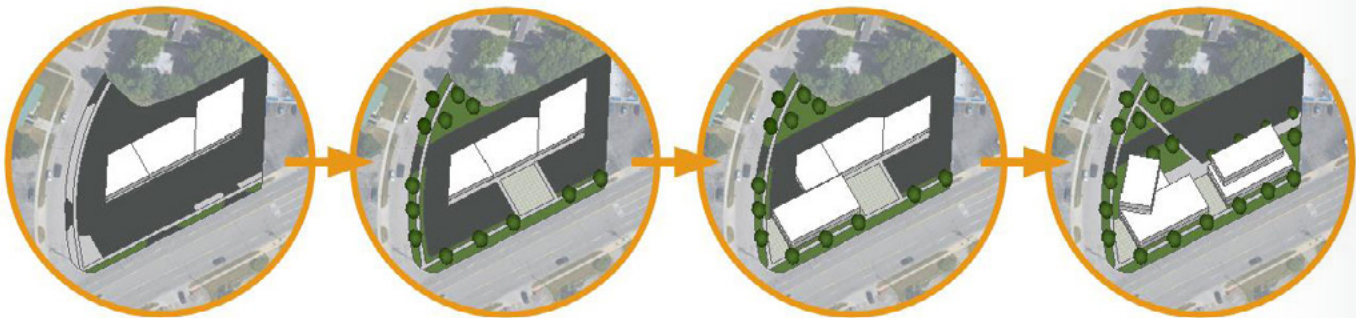
While realizing an integrated and reimagined corridor is the work of decades, it can start now. Different sites and scales can accommodate different kinds of change. Knowing what works where, how to build on quicker and easier interventions, and how land use, transportation, and green infrastructure work together to make a place more attractive and inviting—and incorporating this knowledge into codes, guidance, and plan review—provides a structure to guide both planning and communication. It signals to developers what kinds of change the community wants to see, and shows them how to design projects that are likely to be quickly reviewed and approved.

Understanding how a site could transform is the first step in reimagining something different. There are five general ways in which sites will transform along the Plainfield Corridor:

- **ADAPTIVE REUSE** – an existing building generally stays the same but the land use changes.
- **GREENING** – an existing building generally stays the same but the site changes with the addition of landscaping, trees, low impact development, park, or other “green” elements.
- **INCREMENTAL ADDITIONS** – an existing building remains, but it is expanded to become more conforming with the vision; for example, a strip mall adds on small building wings into the front parking area which provide for a protected outdoor seating.
- **SITE INFILL** – an existing building remains, but new stand-alone buildings are added that increase the density and/or use mix of the site.
- **REDEVELOPMENT** – a site is vacant, or existing buildings are razed, and new construction occurs on the property.



A fast-food restaurant site can accommodate infill development over time.



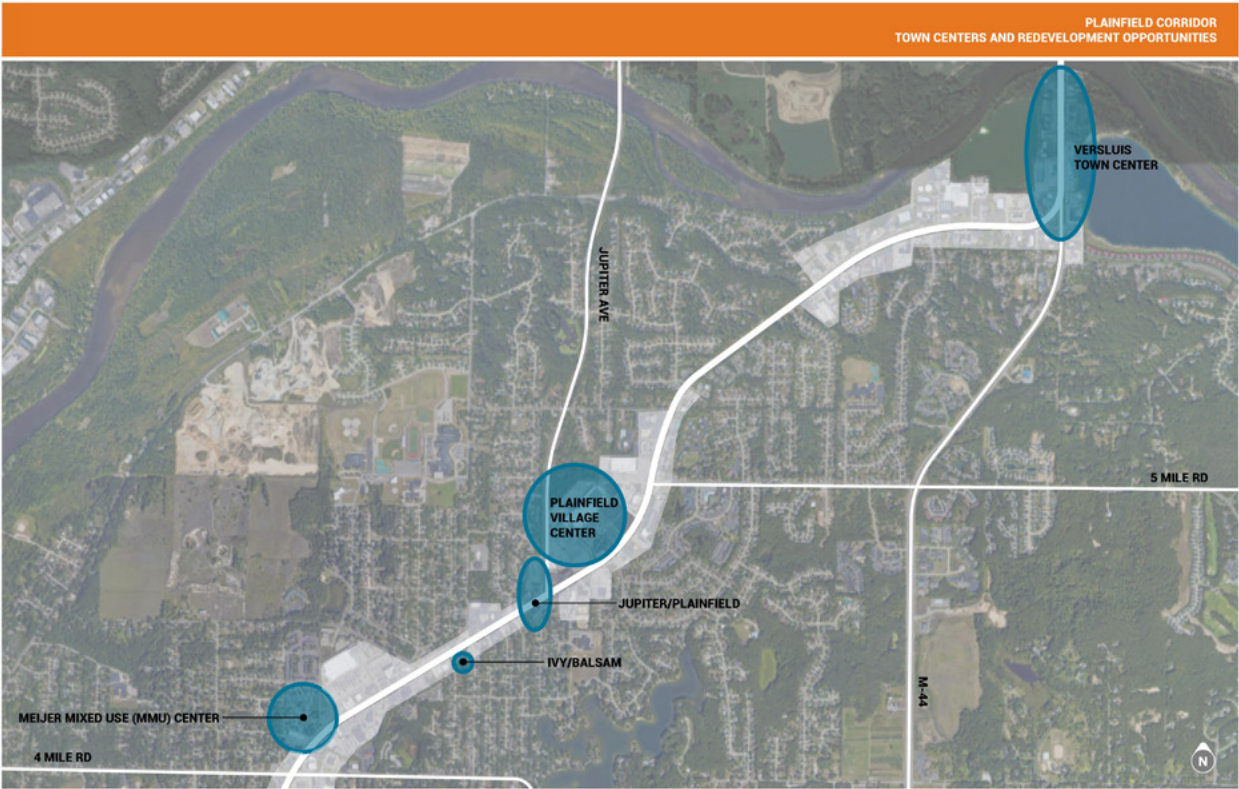
A strip-mall site can be incrementally redeveloped with more desirable forms and new uses.

Redevelopment Opportunities

A series of potential redevelopment locations were identified during the charrette process and in working with the Reimagine Plainfield Steering Committee, they are:

- The three proposed town centers (*Versluis Town Center, Plainfield Village Center, and the Meijer Mixed Use Center (MMU)*);
- Land between the intersections of Plainfield and Ivy and Balsam; and
- Witmark and lands adjacent to the intersection of Plainfield and Jupiter (*see map*).

Several approaches for these areas are included for discussion to demonstrate how design concepts can be applied at various scales. Illustrative graphics are provided to demonstrate how the Plainfield corridor can change over time. Phasing plans are not intended to prioritize what should be done first. Rather, they simply show how a change on one parcel could lead to more changes on adjacent properties. There are multiple ways to put the pieces together. Small sites can stay as small sites, or they could be combined into bigger parcels; for example, residential properties located behind existing commercial development might be assembled to make deeper parcels to facilitate a larger mixed-use redevelopment project.

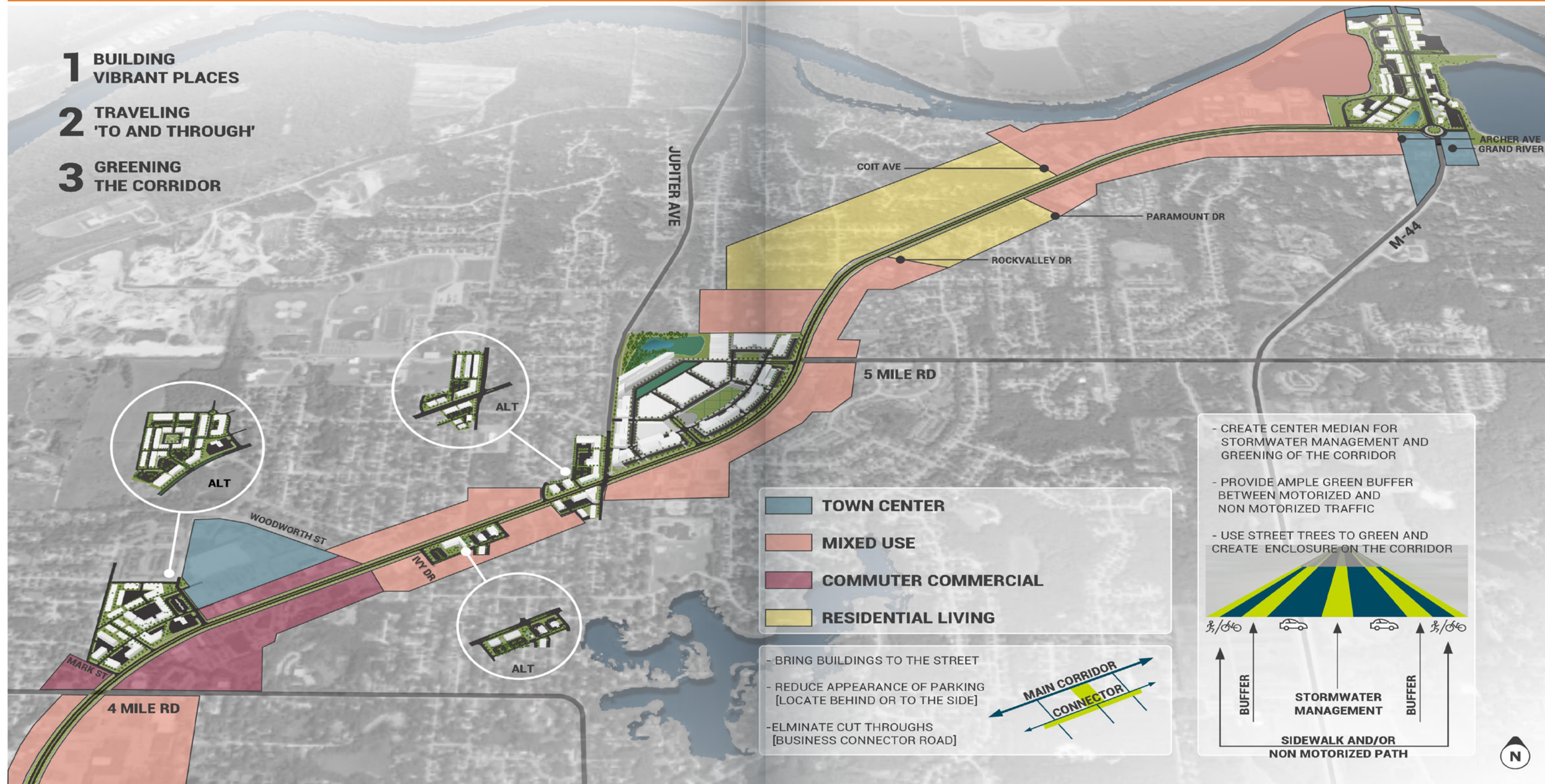


Illustrative examples demonstrate how design concepts could be applied in various situations according to size. These scenarios are based off typical conditions found within the corridor:

- **SMALL SITE** (*<1 acre*) - single story building on a lot with one use (*e.g. fast food restaurant*)
- **MEDIUM SITE** (*1-2 acres*) - single story building on a lot with multiple uses (*e.g. strip mall*)

- **LARGE SITE** (*2-5 acres*) - one large stand-alone building, or multiple buildings that can be combined for redevelopment
- **TOWN CENTER** (*>5 acres*) - large anchor business that can leverage community amenities (*e.g. transit, recreation, events*) and make it a central gathering place

3 GREENING THE CORRIDOR



EXAMPLE #1:

BALSAM AVENUE + IVY DRIVE

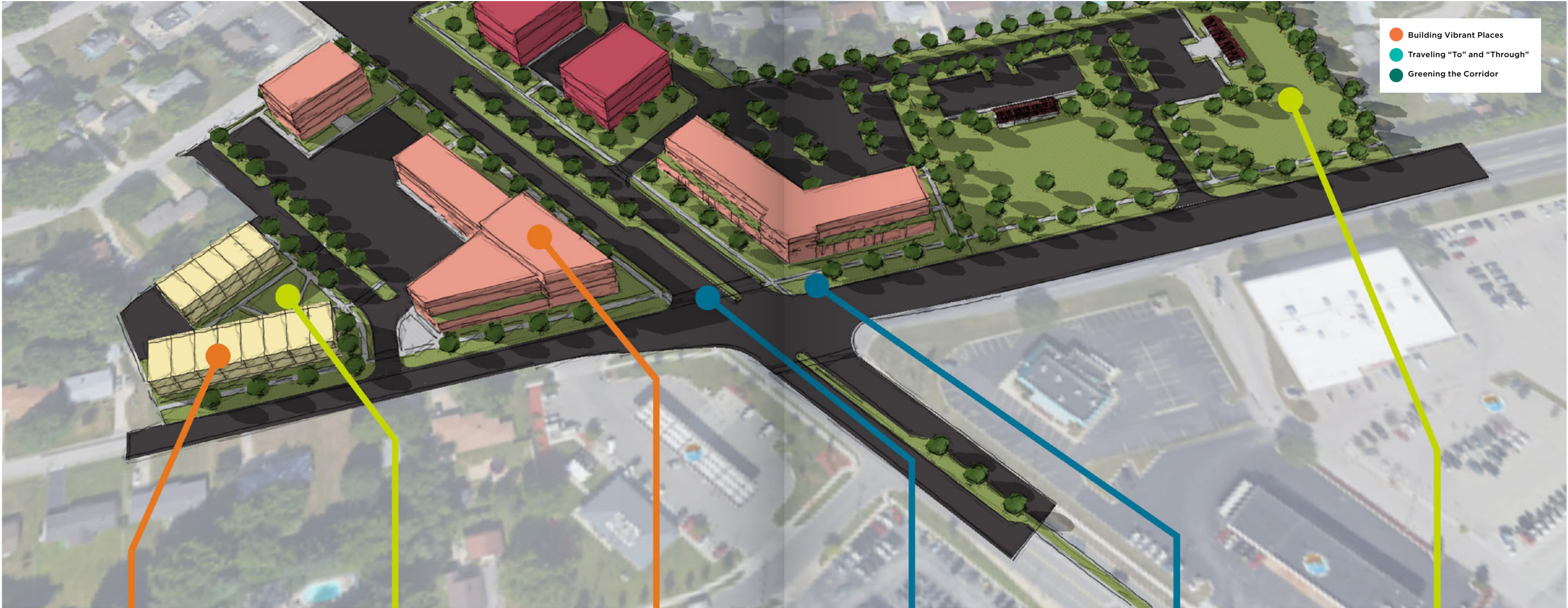




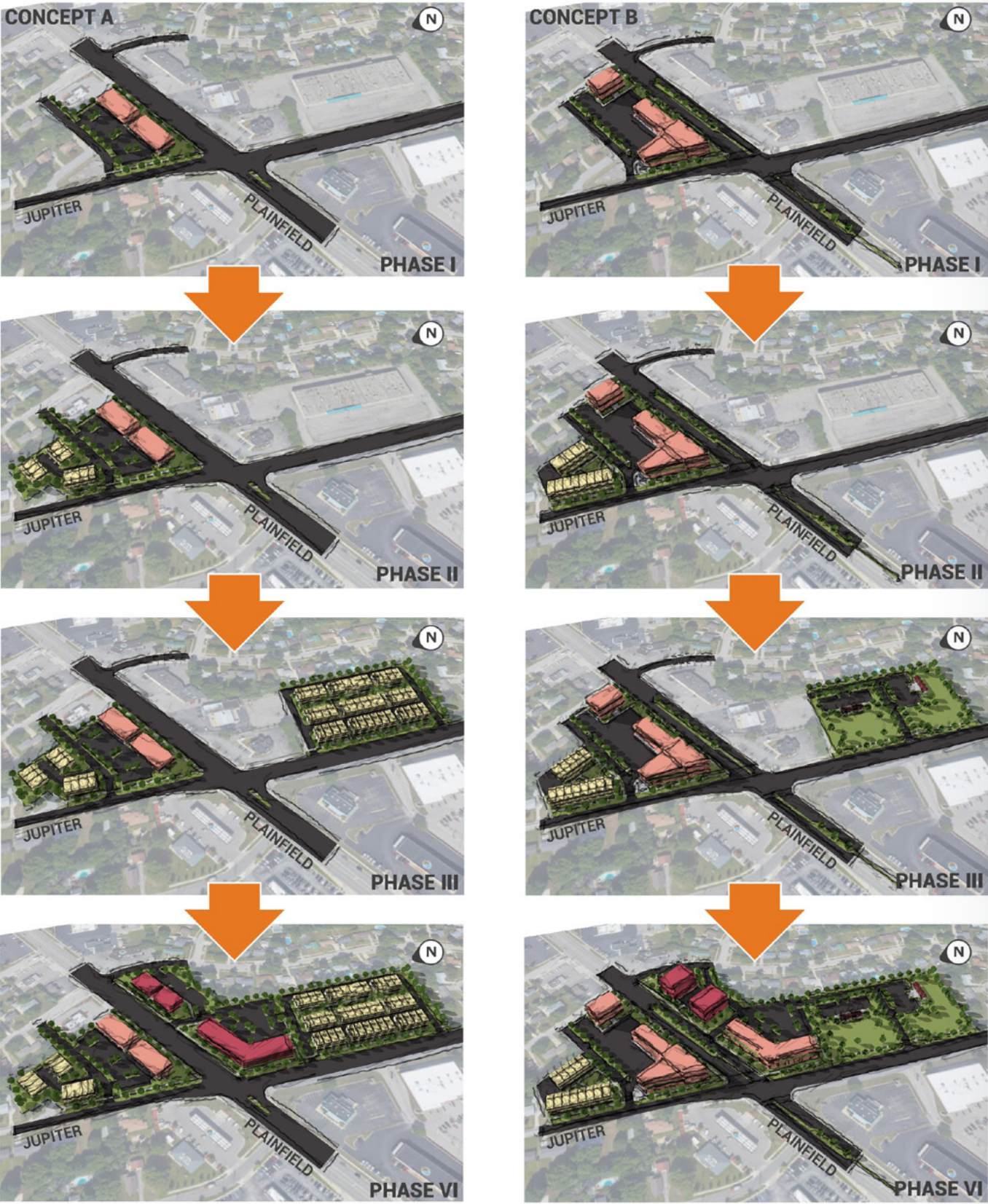
SITE TRANSFORMATION <i>(Adaptive reuse, greening, incremental additions, site infill, redevelopment)</i>	
GREENING, INCREMENTAL ADDITIONS, AND REDEVELOPMENT (left to right)	
SITE SIZE <i>(Small <1 acre, medium 1-2 acres, large 2-5 acres, town center >5 acres)</i>	
Small sites, individual and combined	
DESIGN CONCEPTS	DESCRIPTION
Broad range of land uses	Commercial uses (red) and residential uses (yellow and brown) are mixed by block rather than by building.
Variety of housing types and price points	Townhouses are proposed (yellow) and multi-family dwellings (brown) are shown on a former commercial site.
Multi-story buildings frame the public realm	Multi-family building is proposed at 4 stories.
Limit auto-oriented uses	The bank drive-through is maintained.
New public spaces	Vineyard Avenue is closed and a new public greenspace is created. The streetscape is improved.
Parking behind buildings or to the side	An addition is placed on the bank and an outdoor seating area is extended in front of Russ'.
Reduce curb cuts (access management)	The number of access points are reduced, which reduces the conflict points along Plainfield Avenue thereby reducing the potential for crashes. Traffic flow is enhanced along the corridor. The off-set with Vineyard and Hunsberger is eliminated.
Build a local ("shadow") street network	Network is connected across the rear of the short blocks that front along Plainfield Avenue.
Introduce landscape medians	Medians are inserted in the center turn lane and provide sufficient stacking in the middle lane for turning movements on side streets.
Increase residential density	Yes, new units are added.
Building frontage widths	Approximately 50% of building frontages are along the street and an equal amount is parking.
Compatibility with surroundings	More intense uses are along Plainfield and greenspace and townhouses transition into the neighborhood.
Rebalance transportation modes	Walkability is greatly improved with the addition of the landscape median, street trees, and the elimination of curb cuts to create an uninterrupted parkway. Local and regional traffic is separated.
Connect to surrounding neighborhoods	Non-motorized connections are made from Plainfield to the neighborhood to the East via the closed Vineyard Avenue.
Add trees	Trees are added in both public and private spaces.
Buffers between pedestrians and cars	Trees are evenly spaced and create a buffer between the sidewalk and moving vehicles.
Use Low-Impact Design	A rain garden could be added in the Vineyard Avenue right-of-way.

EXAMPLE #2:

PLAINFIELD AVENUE + JUPITER AVENUE



JUPITER AVE | PLAINFIELD AVE
VISION PLAN



Site Transformation <i>(Adaptive reuse, greening, incremental additions, site infill, redevelopment)</i>	
REDEVELOPMENT	
SITE SIZE <i>(Small <1 acre, medium 1-2 acres, large 2-5 acres, town center >5 acres)</i>	
MEDIUM AND LARGE SITES, INDIVIDUAL AND COMBINED	
DESIGN CONCEPTS	DESCRIPTION
Broad range of land uses	Commercial uses (red), residential uses (yellow and brown), and office (orange) are mixed by block and by building.
Variety of housing types and price points	Townhouses are proposed (yellow) and multi-family dwellings (brown) are shown in various configurations as stand-alone as well as mixed by building in various sizes (which varies prices). See also Option 1 that places townhouses on the Witmark site.
Multi-story buildings frame the public realm	Buildings frame both Plainfield and Jupiter.
Limit auto-oriented uses	No drive-through uses are proposed.
New public spaces	Common greens are shown where there are townhouses.
Parking behind buildings or to the side	Parking is located behind and between buildings.
Parking is shared between uses	Parking areas as illustrated could be shared between buidings or segregated.
Reduce curb cuts (access management)	The number of access points are reduced, which reduces the conflict points along Plainfield Avenue thereby reducing the potential for crashes. Traffic flow is enhanced along the corridor.
Build a local (“shadow”) street network	Secondary streets are shown behind both sides of the buildings fronting on Plainfield as well as on the Witmark site. Traffic is directed towards the signalized intersection.
Introduce landscape medians	Medians are inserted in the center turn lane and provide sufficient stacking due to the double turn lane on the South leg of the intersection. On the North leg, there is already an area that is striped out as a “no man’s land” which can easily be converted into a median.
Increase residential density	Yes, new units are added.
Increase employment density	Yes, commercial and office uses are added.
Flexible building design	The mixed-use nature of the proposed buildings (except the townhouses) would allow for uses to change over time.
Building frontage widths	Approximately 80% (Plainfield) and 100% (Jupiter) of building frontages are along the street.
Building massing for pedestrians	Street view of proposed shows the creation of an outdoor “living room” that has sufficient building setbacks and buildings vary in their building line and heights.
Compatibility with surroundings	The Plainfield/Jupiter intersection is busy and it quickly transitions into neighborhoods. Proposed townhouses increase compatibility.
Rebalance transportation modes	Walkability is greatly improved with the addition of the landscape median, street trees, and the elimination of curb cuts to create an uninterrupted parkway. Local and regional traffic is separated.
Connect to surrounding neighborhoods	Non-motorized connections are made from Plainfield to the neighborhood to the East via the closed Vineyard Avenue. In addition, Hunsberger connects to the Northview Trail.
Add trees	Trees are added in both public and private spaces.
Buffers between pedestrians and cars	Trees are evenly spaced and create a buffer between the sidewalk and moving vehicles.

EXAMPLE #3:

MEIJER MIXED USE (MMU) CENTER



MEIJER MIXED USE CENTER
VISION PLAN



Site Transformation <i>(Adaptive reuse, greening, incremental additions, site infill, redevelopment)</i>	
REDEVELOPMENT	
SITE SIZE <i>(SMALL <1 ACRE, MEDIUM 1-2 ACRES, LARGE 2-5 ACRES, TOWN CENTER >5 ACRES)</i>	
MEDIUM AND LARGE SITES, INDIVIDUAL AND COMBINED	
DESIGN CONCEPTS	DESCRIPTION
Broad range of land uses	Commercial uses (red), residential uses (yellow and brown), and office (orange) are mixed by block and by building.
Variety of housing types and price points	Townhouses are proposed (yellow) and multi-family dwellings (brown) are shown alongside mixed-use buildings. Concerns may arise about mobile home residents being forced to move. The phasing plan shows that, over time, residents could transition into new townhomes. Habitat for Humanity, for example, has started to build townhome units.
Multi-story buildings frame the public realm	Buildings frame a public square as well as Plainfield Avenue and new internal circulation streets.
Limit auto-oriented uses	No drive-through uses are proposed.
New public spaces	A common green is shown.
Parking behind buildings or to the side	Parking is located behind and between buildings.
Parking is shared between uses	Parking areas as illustrated are shared for the buildings fronting on Plainfield Avenue.
Reduce curb cuts (access management)	The number of access points are reduced, which reduces the conflict points along Plainfield Avenue thereby reducing the potential for crashes. Traffic flow is enhanced along the corridor.
Build a local (“shadow”) street network	Secondary streets are shown as extending from the current Meijer access road as well as connections into the existing street system to the South.
Introduce landscape medians	Medians are inserted in the center turn lane and provide sufficient stacking at the Meijer entrance. The median would limit turns in this area, which has a high crash rate.
Increase residential density	Yes, more than 150 new units are added.
Increase employment density	Yes, nearly 50,000 sq ft of commercial and office uses are added. Consider the possibility of live/work, medical office, or even light industrial uses.
Flexible building design	The mixed-use nature of the proposed buildings (except the townhouses and multi-family dwellings) would allow for uses to change over time.
Building frontage widths	Approximately 90% of building frontages are along the street.
Building massing for pedestrians	Street view of proposed shows the creation of an outdoor “living room” that has sufficient building setbacks and buildings vary in their building line and heights.
Compatibility with surroundings	There are multi-family units directly abutting this site. Mixed uses near to the Meijer property are appropriate.
Rebalance transportation modes	Walkability is greatly improved with the addition of the landscape median, street trees, and the elimination of curb cuts to create an uninterrupted parkway. Local and regional traffic is separated. A traffic signal is recommended at the southern entrance to Meijer to allow for future protected bus turning movements.
Connect to surrounding neighborhoods	A new street grid is presented to connect with the surrounding neighborhood.
Entrances face the street and have sidewalks	Yes, building entrances would be placed on the street-facing side of buildings (or have a common pass-through) and connect to the sidewalk on Plainfield Avenue.
Expand Route 11 to MMU	Concept B of the plan for this area contemplates an enhanced bus stop, like the one located at Woodland Mall, at the vacant triangle property should the Rapid be able to expand its service.
Add trees	Trees are added in both public and private spaces.
Buffers between pedestrians and cars	Trees are evenly spaced and create a buffer between the sidewalk and moving vehicles.

PLAINFIELD VILLAGE CENTER VISION PLAN



VERSLUIS TOWN CENTER VISION PLAN



CONCLUSION

Successful places—destinations, areas where people want to linger for a while—are attractive to businesses and residents, especially when located near existing job centers with strong housing demand. In the famous words of William H. Whyte, “what attracts people most, it would appear, is other people.” Establishing places at varying scales along the Plainfield Avenue corridor would facilitate the transition of outdated development over time to a linear sequence with walkable mixed-use nodes of different scales.

The importance of good site planning and quality architectural design cannot be overstated. There are parts of Plainfield Township that have yet to experience the challenges of redevelopment. As the intensity and density of sites changes when redevelopment occurs- this is necessary to attract redevelopment and new investment in deteriorating areas - design considerations adjust from measuring in feet into inches. Details matter, especially when design elements are viewed from the perspective of a pedestrian rather than a person in a car.

Adhering to design concepts, and codifying them into the Zoning Ordinance, is a great first step toward implementation. Community decision-makers, developers, and the public should understand the “why” of the regulations. An audit checklist, similar to the one used with the three examples, can be prepared to evaluate a proposed project and its ability to implement the plan vision.

ZONING PLAN

Redevelopment can take a long time and is caused through a chain reaction of investments in a community. During the Reimagine Plainfield Steering Committee’s work sessions, development experts expressed the importance of having a clear and consistent vision that aligned with development regulations. Preference was expressed for administrative approvals rather than development being involved in a political process. It was also acknowledged that design standards are important to develop the character of the corridor and to protect everyone’s interest in ensuring that there is quality development.

The Reimagine Plainfield Corridor Plan, and its Future Land Use map, are powerful expressions of the Township’s intentions for the future. Once it is adopted it serves as the “guide for growth” for the Township Board, Planning Commission, and staff. The Plan is a statement of policy, whereas the zoning ordinance is law. The primary difference between the two is timing. The Plan shows the intended future land use at the end of a 20-year planning period and provides the logic for zoning regulations. Zoning affects development projects that come in the door today.

The pandemic has highlighted the need for local units of government to be flexible in uncertain times. Outdoor dining, alcohol deliveries, social zones, work-from-home, drive-through COVID testing locations, and other unanticipated uses have emerged. This, combined with nationwide trends in zoning reform such as the reduction or elimination of parking requirements, changes to single-family zone district regulations, allowances for “new” housing types, and fewer and more flexible zone districts, has kept planners on their toes.

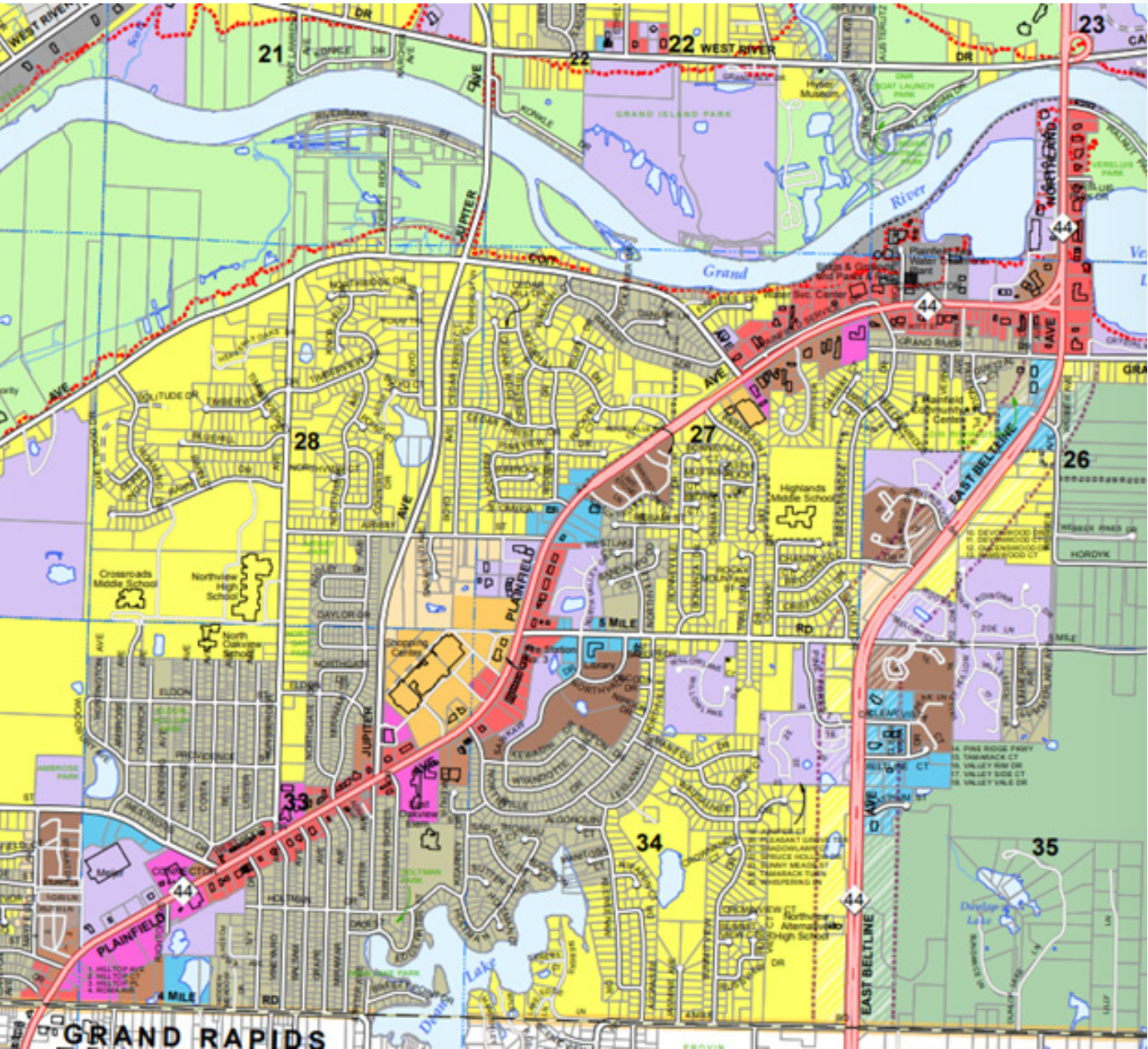
There are currently six zone districts that regulate development in the Plainfield Corridor. None of the commercial districts allow residential uses. Several of the commercial designations are similar in nature, with distinctions made based on the intensity and impact of the uses. Zoning and development regulations are among the most effective regulatory tools that can be used by the Township to help implement the vision, goals, and design concepts in this Plan. Staff suggestions to support corridor

redevelopment include simplifying the number of zone districts and creating more flexibility in design standards and the approval process.

Generally, the following items were identified as considerations by the Steering Committee when updating the Plainfield Township Zoning Ordinance to support plan implementation:

- Use Required Building Lines (*RBL*)
- Evaluate front setback dimensions
- Encourage mixed-use development and higher-density residential development within, and adjacent to, destinations and town centers
- Make the ordinance friendly for adaptive reuse
- Incentivize the creation of new public space
- Use bonuses to encourage what we want
- Eliminate and/or provide for parking reductions
- Allow multi-story buildings at densities that pay for redevelopment
- Include building design elements (*materials, windows, orientation, scale*)
- Provide for blue and green infrastructure (*stormwater, trees, etc*)

To help determine what ordinance regulations need to change, a preliminary audit was conducted of existing zoning according to the Design Concepts. The table provides ideas of how selected concepts could be manifested through zoning into development regulations. The Planning Commission would need to engage in its own process to consider text and map amendments to the Zoning Ordinance, as required by State law, and then provide a recommendation to the Township Board.



The current zoning map for Plainfield Township shows the Plainfield Avenue corridor as being zoned C-1, C-2, C-3, C-4 Commercial, PUD Planned Unit Development, O Office, R-1B and R-4 Residential.



This Plan recommends a reduction in the number of zone districts for the Plainfield Avenue corridor. Three new zone districts are recommended to align with Future Land Use map recommendations. These zone districts would replace all of the proposed areas as shown on the existing zoning map except for residentially zoned areas, which would remain the same.

- **COMMUTER COMMERCIAL.** The first district would meld existing C-1, C-2, and C-3 commercial zone districts into one district to fit the Commuter Commercial future land use category. This development pattern recognizes the current built form. Residential uses would not be allowed in this district, and more auto-oriented uses would be allowed. There would be some minor modifications to align with other plan recommendations, such as for green infrastructure.
- **MIXED-USE SEGMENTS.** The second zone district would be a flexible district to align with the Mixed-Use Segment designation. More closely aligning with the VC Village Center and the C-2 zone districts, this district would allow for a broad range of uses and favor incentives to encourage population and employment density to support town centers and stores that provide neighborhood goods and services.
- **TOWN CENTERS.** The three centers would receive their own zone district that accommodates greater densities than in mixed-use segments. This will be an intensified version of the VC and C-4 zone districts. Bonuses for public greenspace and other amenities would be provided to assist in placemaking.

A fourth district, similar to a Planned Unit Development (PUD), is proposed to allow greater flexibility in the redevelopment of large sites. The existing PUD district could be amended, or a new district created. Coordination between the Reimagine Plainfield Steering Committee and the Planning Commission will ultimately determine the best desired approach.

Potential Zoning Modifications to Advance Design Concepts	
DESIGN CONCEPTS	POTENTIAL ZONING AMENDMENTS
Broad range of land uses and Increase employment density	• Allow residential uses with administrative approval • Consider light industrial uses that are more similar to office uses
Variety of housing types and price points and Increase housing density	• Allow attached single-family (townhouses), live/work units, stacked maisonettes, senior housing, stacked flats, courtyard apartments, Texas donuts, and residential above commercial or retail uses. • Provide a bonus for greater housing densities and/or reduced parking requirements where an affordable housing component is provided in a project. • Allow sufficient density to meet the population metrics needed to support a town center and/or mixed-use business district.
Multi-story bldgs frame the public realm	• Adopt a minimum building height standard.
Limit auto-oriented uses	• Prohibit or strictly control auto-oriented uses in Town Centers
New public spaces	• Incentivize public areas and in mixed-use developments using densities bonuses or other “carrots” to encourage the creation of public space. • Require public space where a specified number of residential units or square footage thresholds are met.
Parking is behind buildings or to the side	• Modify parking placement requirements. • Prohibit front-yard parking.

DESIGN CONCEPTS	POTENTIAL ZONING AMENDMENTS
Parking is shared between uses	• Reduce the amount of required parking. • Encourage shared parking using a mixed-use coefficient or time of day analysis. • Permit deferred parking construction. • Allow administrative parking reductions where connections to transit, EV charging stations, car sharing facilities, etc.
Reduce curb cuts (access management) and build a local (“shadow”) secondary street network	• Reduce front building setback requirements. • Require a rear yard setback that would facilitate the creation of secondary local streets. • Heavily incentivize allowing public access to create the secondary local streets in the form of height and or density bonus, parking reductions, or other option. • Require site access from a secondary street where one is present. • If no other option exists, limit parcels to one curb cut. • Combine with building frontage widths requirements.
Flexible building design and variation	• Set minimum floor to ceiling heights for the first floor. • Establish 30’ depth of usable space. • Examine building materials.
Building frontage widths	• Require that a building occupy at least 50/70% of the lot frontage.
Building massing for pedestrians	• Provide façade transparency requirements, as well as standards for an expression line. Consider building setbacks.
And avoid blank walls	• Operational requirements (lighting, trash, delivery, hours)
Compatibility with surroundings	• Adopt façade transparency requirements.
Rebalance transportation modes	• Require primary building entrances to face the street. • Connections must be provided that connect the primary building entrance to the public sidewalk.
Entrances face the street and have sidewalks	• Trees of a specified caliper and quantity or tree canopy requirements for properties within the corridor must be provided. • Specify required soil volumes to insure tree survivability.
Add trees	• Reduce the amount of required parking. • Encourage shared parking using a mixed-use coefficient or time of day analysis. • Permit deferred parking construction. • Allow administrative parking reductions where connections to transit, EV charging stations, car sharing facilities, etc.
Use Low-Impact Design	• Planted areas are required in parking lots and along streets and sidewalks, including in spaces where curb cuts are eliminated. • Adopt a greenspace requirement (not porous surface) and allow porous asphalt/ concrete/pavers to count towards the required portion in addition to green roofs, rain gardens, and other improvements that hold or clean stormwater.

Case Study:

Michigan Street and Fuller Avenue, Grand Rapids

The character of development at the Michigan and Fuller intersection is more suburban than it is urban. When requests were received to develop the Ace Hardware store and Walgreen’s, a specific project approach was used to blend the changing context of the busy Michigan Street corridor alongside business needs to be parking-adjacent. Each site ended up being nearly equally split in its building frontage width for business activity and dedicated parking. Parking areas were required to match the front building setback line. Landscaping is provided on and along the street. A generous front setback is provided so that the buildings do not feel “on top” of the street but are placed in such a way that they are still able to hold the street edge and contribute to a walkable environment. Storefront windows are required, as is the equivalent height of a 2-story building. Ace Hardware provided a tenant space on the front (presently used by a cell phone carrier) so that the front entrance of the store could face the parking lot. Perhaps most notably, these designs were approved by national chain retailers.



Parking is located on the side of the Ace Hardware building, enabling a more active and attractive streetscape.



Sidewalks and limited driveways make pedestrian travel safer.



Plantings and a sidewalk in front of the Walgreen's store make it more inviting to



Plantings and a sidewalk in front of the Walgreen's store make it more inviting to

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLBOX

Plainfield Township is at a crossroads, both literally and figuratively. The Plainfield Avenue corridor is a critical regional connection between downtown Grand Rapids and Kent County’s northeast suburbs but is grappling with disinvestment and a flat tax base. As community needs evolve, the retail landscape shifts dramatically, and housing demand rises, the township needs a growth and redevelopment strategy that strengthens the corridor and makes it more resilient.

As responsible stewards of our community, we want to maintain our quality of life, grow our tax base to provide essential services, and create a place our children want to come back to. Our figurative crossroads is: which path will we choose? Will we continue the development pattern of the past that has led to stagnation and a lack of community pride? Or will we pivot and adapt using all the tools at our disposal?

The preceding sections established a vision and provided design concepts to guide decisions. This plan also sets the foundation for revising zoning regulations, reviving Plainfield’s Corridor Improvement Authority, discussing capital improvement priorities, and utilizing economic development programs. The proposed path is, in many respects, uncharted territory for Township leaders. It requires a new paradigm with a focus on infill projects and redevelopment, walkability, and the use of incentives. Boldness is required to change the status quo, but this plan’s recommendations are time-tested and reflective of community values.

The Township’s 2008 Master Plan reflected that the *“predominance of residential development in the township implies a need to ultimately address the cost-revenue ratio for Township and other municipal services”* because commercial development assists in subsidizing Township services. If the largest commercial area in the township continues to remain stagnant or declines, then the prospect of higher local tax rates for residents to support necessary community services exists.

REDEVELOPMENT VALUE

Redevelopment on existing parcels can be accomplished on single parcel basis, or through the combination of properties. Land can be used more efficiently and adapt to changing market demands more readily than if a building is constructed only for a single purpose. Mixed-use development patterns create the population and employment densities needed to support existing and future commercial businesses that provide important goods and services to the Plainfield community.

The following examples demonstrate how redevelopment can increase value to the township’s tax base, provide more housing and jobs, and begin to create a sense of place. The following single-parcel examples demonstrate how on smaller lots than those found on Plainfield, a greater return on investment both in terms of dollars and people can be generated:

- value per square foot is 4 to 10 times greater;
- taxable value per acre is 6.5 to 9.5 times greater;
- residents per acre rises from zero to 20 persons per acre and more
- jobs per acre results in 3-fold increase or more, depending on land uses.

Mixed-Use Development versus Strip Center		
PROJECT	THE HUDSON CENTER	STRIP CENTER
Location	3424 Chicago Drive, Hudsonville	4318 Plainfield Avenue NE
		
Acreage	0.65 (28,314)	1.22 (53,143)
State Equalized Value	\$1,574,900	\$753,400
Value per Square Foot	\$55.62	\$14.18
Taxable Value	\$1,338,512	\$389,239
Taxable Value Per Acre	\$2,059,249	\$319,048
Number of Residential Units	9	0
Residents Per Acre	20.8	0
Retail Square Footage	8,400	5,500 (Nail Spa, Consignment, Comics)
Office Square Footage	8,400	5,500 (H&R Block and Kumon)
Jobs Per Acre	64.6	22.5
Notes: Residents/acre assumes 1.5 people per unit; jobs/acre assumes 1 person/1,000 sq ft retail and 1/250 sq ft of office		

Multi-Family versus Self-Storage		
PROJECT	KNAPPS CORNER FLATS	DEVON SELF STORAGE
Location	3100 Knapp Street SE	4151 Plainfield Avenue NE
		
Acreage	7.07	9.52
State Equalized Value	\$11,959,500	\$1,379,700
Value per Square Foot	\$38.83	\$3.33
Taxable Value	\$9,658,108	\$1,379,700
Taxable Value Per Acre	\$1,366,069	\$144,926
Number of Residential Units	203	0
Residents Per Acre	43.0	0
Self-Storage	0	94,000 sq ft
Jobs Per Acre	1	.42
Notes: Residents/acre assumes 1.5 people per unit; jobs/acre assumes 1 person/1,000 sq ft retail and 1/250 sq ft of office		

Mixed-Use Development versus Fast Food Chain Restaurant		
PROJECT	MIDTOWN CITYZEN	DOMINOS
Location	555 & 601 Michigan Street NE	3928 Plainfield Avenue NE
		
Acreage	0.375743	0.946685
State Equalized Value	\$857,700	\$206,400
Value per Square Foot	\$52.40	\$5.00
Taxable Value	\$661,340	\$206,400
Taxable Value Per Acre	\$1,760,086	\$218,024
Number of Residential Units	44	0
Residents Per Acre	175.7	0
Retail Square Footage	5,754	2,000
Jobs Per Acre	15.3	2.1
Notes: Residents/acre assumes 1.5 people per unit; jobs/acre assumes 1 person/1,000 sq ft retail and 1/250 sq ft of office		

Tools To Shape The Corridor

The following tools comprise the “*toolkit*” available to reshape the Plainfield corridor into a collection of vibrant and prosperous places connected by a reimagined thoroughfare and green infrastructure. These tools are often used as a combination of “carrots” (*things developers and property owners find desirable*) and “sticks” (*items that developers and property owners might not want to do but provide an overall benefit to the corridor and which, over time, have a beneficial impact*).

Utilizing a combination of tools will allow the corridor vision to be realized. The more tools that are used the faster the result will be. For example, if economic incentives are adopted and the zoning ordinance is changed to allow for administrative approvals then a clear message will be sent to the development community that change is desired. Conversely, a failure to provide resources to offset demolition and other redevelopment costs and/or to enact zoning changes will result in the same uses and same building types being constructed. Let’s unpack the toolbox:



ZONING AND INFRASTRUCTURE TOOLS

- Zoning Ordinance
- Property Maintenance
- Transportation Infrastructure
- Green Infrastructure

ECONOMIC TOOLS

- Corridor Improvement Authority
- Brownfield Tax Exemption
- Payment in Lieu of Taxes
- Community Development Block Grant
- Michigan Community Revitalization Program

ATTRACTION AND RETENTION TOOLS

- Incremental Development
- Business Development
- Partnerships

Zoning and Infrastructure Tools

Land use and transportation go hand in hand and are important placemaking influences. Zoning and property maintenance are local control police power ordinances that can assist in directing land development and property management to assist the township in realizing its vision. Partnerships with the Michigan Department of Transportation, Kent County Road Commission, and Grand Valley Metro Council will be equally necessary to transform the corridor. This section identifies opportunities for rethinking and collaborating to advance the Reimagine Plainfield vision.

Zoning Ordinance

Zoning defines the land uses, building envelope, building height, parking locations, landscaping requirements and other aspects of a community’s built form. The Township’s zoning ordinance and map are essential tools in implementing the plan. Enacting new zoning rules will be required if the physical form of the corridor is desired to change. It is important to note that current uses and buildings are never forced to change their existing condition when zoning is modified.

Overly prescriptive zoning can act as a disincentive or barrier to redevelopment. Current best practice is to focus more on form and less on the separation of land uses. Historically, zoning was created to prevent undesirable things from happening. Performance standards could be adopted where concerns exist instead of prohibiting a use outright. Rules can be written that start at a higher threshold but allow for reductions in requirements under certain circumstances where plan goals are being satisfied. For example, required parking numbers could be reduced where parking is shared between users or day time/night time uses exist.

Two key recommendations of this plan are to increase the flexibility of uses and buildings along Plainfield Avenue and to encourage redevelopment. There are numerous ways to do this, for example:

- Create provisions for non-conformities (existing uses and buildings that may not meet new zoning requirements) to allow for expansion of a use or building up to a specified percentage. It is desired that existing businesses can continue to grow and prosper in the corridor even if something might not be exactly what is desired in the future.
- Provide bonuses that have value to a property owner or developer, such as the ability to create more units, where the township would like to see important site amenities, public space, public access, regional stormwater management, or other plan goals realized.
- Allow options, substitutions, and/or administrative waivers where meeting the letter of the law is not practicable without the need for a zoning variance and where alternative approaches might be equally suitable (e.g., a wall, landscape hedge, or fencing may be parking lot screening options; or where there is no visibility screening may not be needed).
- Consider how plan goals can be achieved while still meeting developer requests that may not fully meet plan objectives. Perhaps a drive-through for a restaurant is acceptable in a mixed-use center if it is not in a stand-alone building and is incorporated into a bigger block of buildings.
- Permit temporary uses and temporary small-scale structures on underutilized sites such as outdoor seating, tents, food trucks, and sheds to provide opportunities for local entrepreneurs to create start-up businesses that can eventually become brick-and-mortar businesses along Plainfield Avenue.
- Allow administrative approvals where all zoning requirements are satisfied. Time is money. If a project can receive development approvals without needing to go to a board or commission, there is value created with a streamlined process.

Keep in mind that zoning is simply a tool. Ordinance language is not written in stone and can be amended. The ordinance should be viewed as a dynamic, living document that can be modified over time as staff, Planning Commission, Township Board, developers, and the public experience new growth. Sometimes it might feel like learning by trial and error, and that is okay; figuring out what works best for the community is part of the evolutionary process.

Establishing economic incentives for the redevelopment of vacant parcels and underutilized buildings would show residents and potential investors that the Township is serious about implementing a new vision. Township policy could direct incentives towards specific sites using a list of criteria for eligibility (see Economic Tools). A policy of the Township or the Corridor Improvement Authority (when it has resources) may be to off-set some project soft costs (site design, environmental assessments, etc.) for prospective developers.

The City of Kalamazoo requires owners of vacant property to file a registration with the city including contact information; the date and reasons for vacancy; any plans for occupancy; and other relevant information. Owners of vacant blighted structures are assessed monthly or biannual fees, with the amount determined by City Commission resolution.



Witmark Building in July 2019, image from Google Street View

Property Maintenance

In community surveys conducted during Phase I of the planning process, the Witmark Building, which has been vacant for more than 20 years, was mentioned so frequently that it comprised a category of its own. Respondents characterized it as a public nuisance and described it as a “blight on the Plainfield corridor.” But while Witmark is a flashpoint, the proliferation of vacant, unkempt, and dilapidated buildings was noted as well, driving the sentiment that the corridor needs an “immense revitalization.”

The Township has been working on making it harder for property owners to sit on vacant and deteriorating buildings and land. Chapter 8, Article V of the Township code sets out property maintenance requirements and was most recently updated in 2020. Township officials are authorized to inspect vacant properties, abate violations and to seek relief, including the establishment of a special assessment district comprising an area as small as a single lot, from owners in violation of maintenance standards.

Enforcement is important because owners of unattractive or nuisance properties can reasonably conclude resources needn’t be spent on compliance if no one is paying attention. Frequent, regular inspections, problem property registration, monitoring fees to pay for staff time, nuisance abatement, requiring the removal of signs for closed businesses, and other strategies can be used to make it harder for owners to let property languish and decay. Unoccupied buildings work against preserving property values, protecting quality of life, and ensuring public safety.

Transportation Infrastructure

This plan provides the opportunity to anticipate land use and transportation infrastructure needs. Changing conditions will provide opportunities to align and leverage public and private improvements in tandem to shift development and transportation practices along the corridor. The challenge will be to quickly adapt to these changes and create a supportive environment that facilitates the plan’s Guiding Principles.

Plainfield Township does not own or control any of the roads in the Plainfield Corridor. A cooperative working relationship is therefore required with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) for Plainfield Avenue/ Northland Drive and the Kent County Road Commission (KCRC) for local streets to make the important changes called for in this plan. The best opportunities to rethink a street are when there is maintenance or reconstruction; it’s not a matter of if but when. In addition, as transit service needs change it may be possible to connect transit to proposed town centers.

The following are important opportunities for Township staff, Planning Commission and Township Board to be aware of:

• MDOT TWO-COURSE RESURFACING

A two-course resurfacing project with ADA sidewalk ramp upgrades will occur on Plainfield Avenue in 2025. The resurfacing project provides the opportunity to consider modifications to the roadway, bringing together financial resources to implement beneficial infrastructure design changes to the corridor. Coordination on potential design changes in the right-of-way should begin as soon as possible.

• LOCAL STREET MODIFICATIONS

In conjunction with KCRC, during each planning and funding cycle a review should be conducted to identify opportunities to modify local streets to align with the goals of this plan, including promoting safety, walkability, and connectivity. A plan should be created for rerouting neighborhood streets into a secondary street network that runs parallel to Plainfield Avenue and directs traffic to signalized intersections.

• RAPID SERVICE EXTENSION

Transit connections to the Meijer Mixed Use Center (MMU) are possible as the Rapid considers where access will be provided. A traffic signal is recommended at Meijer to facilitate transit ingress/ egress and provide a safe crossing opportunity for pedestrians. This is also a location where the public identified the desire for a signalized intersection due to the curvature and sight lines of the road.

• TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM

Federal transportation law provides block grants for place-based economic development projects that promote safe multimodal choices and walkability. Both MDOT’s Office of Economic Development and the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council administer a competitive grant program to distribute this funding. Matching funds from the applicant comprising at least 20 percent of the project cost is required. While neither the Township can apply for this funding, a partnering opportunity is available with MDOT, KCRC and/or The Rapid.

• SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

The Township can work with public, private and charter schools and the KCRC to identify eligible projects through the Federal Safe Routes to School program, administered in the state via the Michigan Fitness Foundation. The program was established in response to a dramatic decline in children walking or biking to school with the intention of increasing safety and non-motorized connectivity. This decline began in the 1960s and was attributable, in part, to safety concerns associated with auto-centric development.

Green Infrastructure

Plainfield Township’s unique position within the Grand River watershed well-positions the township for grants to reduce the surface area of impervious parking lots and roof tops where rainwater currently must be diverted to “grey” infrastructure pipes for management. Greening projects to increase the amount of landscaped areas, tree plantings and the installation of green infrastructure facilities such as bioswales and retention basins serve the practical purpose of stormwater management but also contribute to beautification of the corridor.

Federal and State programs administered by a variety of agencies offer opportunities to fund green infrastructure projects. Washtenaw County, for example, used Michigan’s Clean Water State Revolving fund to help pay for the planting of more than 1,000 street trees to reduce stormwater runoff and sedimentation/phosphorus levels in the Huron River. The Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds (LGROW) through the Grand Valley Metro Council (GVMC) will be a critical partner in the application of grants for green infrastructure improvements.

The following are important opportunities that can be used to increase green infrastructure along the corridor:

• MDOT TWO-COURSE RESURFACING

Currently the stormwater run-off from Plainfield Avenue is channeled into the Grand River. The resurfacing project provides the opportunity to introduce landscape medians with bioswales into the roadway to create a water quality improvement and slow discharge rates into the Grand River. Another portion of Plainfield Avenue, north of Leonard Street and south of Ann Street in the City of Grand Rapids, underwent this modification when a resurfacing project was undertaken on that portion of the road. Funding from the Transportation Alternatives Program can be a resource to provide matching dollars for MDOT to make these alterations. In addition, trees with appropriate soil volumes should be planted where there is at least five (5) feet of tree lawn available between the sidewalk and back of curb.



Plainfield Avenue Bioswale Graphic from the City of Grand Rapids

• ZONING ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS

Although ordinance amendments only affect new development and retrofitting cannot be required unless there are changes to the site, new requirements for landscaping that work alongside green infrastructure best management practices can be adopted. For example, an option for green roofs in lieu of providing green space around a site can be provided in the code to increase the amount of “green” surface area on a parcel even as development intensifies.

• DEPAVING

As part of building community awareness efforts regarding a “new” Plainfield Avenue corridor, the Township can host a “depaving” party where excess asphalt pavement along the corridor is removed on either Township-owned properties or where permission is granted by a landowner. This can provide immediate gratification and change to people as asphalt replaced with plants and trees. An example of a successful depaving program can be found here: <https://depave.org/>

Economic Tools

Once thought applicable only to large urban centers, not townships, economic development approaches are now being used in aging corridors like Plainfield Avenue to encourage reinvestment and revitalization with the objective of redeveloping outdated and underused commercial sites with new retail/office/residential uses. None of the tools, on their own, provides a full solution—each opportunity will require different actions to bring it to life. But the township can use these tools as part of a broader strategy to attract reinvestment and retain businesses that share the vision of a reimagined Plainfield Avenue.

It is worth noting the State of Michigan offers an array of programs to assist local governments with community redevelopment, including tax increment financing for cleaning up and redeveloping contaminated sites; grants, loans, and other economic assistance for eligible projects; and programs that local governments can use to finance redevelopment in special designated districts. Plainfield Township is in a unique position in that it cannot be considered as a “qualified local governmental unit” because it is not an urban center and the income of township residents exceeds qualifying thresholds. The designation unlocks powerful economic development programs that can rehabilitate buildings and address problems associated with blighted commercial buildings. The Community Rehabilitation Act, Obsolete Property Rehabilitation Act, and Neighborhood Enterprise Zone Act all require that a community be considered a qualified local governmental unit. A potential future action the Township Board may wish to pursue is to seek an amendment to the State’s definition of a qualified local unit to unlock these economic development programs.

The following matrix provides a framework to understand how various economic development programs can facilitate an array of development activities within Plainfield Township that will result in new investment along the corridor.

Criteria for Successful Economic Development

- Long-term political and community leaders with the patience and perseverance to nurture a plan over time.
- A clear sense of the possibilities scaled to the place, and a marked sense of “*optimistic realism*”. These will keep doubters at bay in the critical early stages.
- A vision articulated in a way that captures the imagination of the community.
- A strategic plan for implementing the vision. It is important to have a tactical game plan as well as a compelling goal – dreams fade when no visible action exists.
- A management entity that can “*act*” and take responsibility for implementing the plan. An organization can ensure continuity even when elected officials leave office.
- Early successes that can enhance the community’s ability to maintain a sense of momentum. Realistic first targets and an integrated marketing program help to set a sustainable pace.
- Borrowed successes. Align the plan to initiatives already underway to accelerate the sense of achievement.
- Funding through a variety of sources. The dream should be realizable to a certain degree when taken in smaller steps that can be financed quickly.

Reimagine Plainfield Corridor Economic Development Toolkit					
	PROGRAMS AND TOOLS				
ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES	CIA	BRA	PILOT	CRP	CDBG
Buy/own/lease/sell property	✓	✓			
Grant/acquire easements and options	✓				
Construct buildings	✓				
Rehabilitate buildings	✓				✓
Preserve/maintain buildings	✓			✓	
Façade improvements	✓			✓	✓
Infrastructure improvements	✓			✓	
ADA improvements	✓			✓	
Structural improvements	✓			✓	
Height improvements	✓			✓	
HVAC/lighting improvements	✓			✓	
Multifamily development	✓			✓	
Affordable housing development			✓	✓	✓
Mixed-use development	✓			✓	
Demolition	✓	✓			
Asbestos abatement		✓			
Environmental assessment	✓			✓	
Environmental remediation		✓			
Site prep/cleanup	✓	✓		✓	
Ramped or underground parking		✓		✓	
Stormwater management		✓		✓	
Improvements in the right-of-way	✓	✓			✓
Ped/bike infrastructure	✓	✓		✓	✓
Contract for broadband wifi	✓				
Long-term planning	✓				
Market research/advertising	✓				

CIA = Corridor Improvement Authority; BRA = Brownfield Redevelopment Authority; PILOT = Payment in Lieu of Taxes;
 CRA = Community Redevelopment Act; CRP = Community Revitalization Program; Community Development Block Grant

Corridor Improvement Authority (CIA)

Act 57 of 2018, Part 6, an update of a 2005 statute, establishes a framework to help communities fund improvements in commercial corridors. It enables local governments to establish a Corridor Improvement Authority (CIA) to revitalize outdated commercial zones. In theory, as growth and development occurs within a corridor the additional property tax revenue generated by those improvements is captured and put into a separate account. The captured tax increment then finances plans and projects that enhance and continue to spur reinvestment in the area.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) programs benefit communities by targeting the returns on community investments to the places that generate them, rather than channeling them back into a general fund. The concept is that some foregoing of property tax revenue in the short term will reap the long-term benefits of redevelopment and growth. In a corridor context, improvements also benefit surrounding properties, potentially increasing their value as well.

Plainfield Charter Township established a CIA for Plainfield Avenue in 2006 with the participation of Grand Rapids Township, which had jurisdiction over a small portion of the CID at the southern end of the corridor. This timing turned out to be unfortunate, as it set the authority’s revenue base just before the 2008 financial crisis. With little revenue generated during the post-crisis recession, Grand Rapids Township pulled out of the CIA in 2014. In December 2015, the CIA approved a resolution to readjust the revenue base value to May 2015 and essentially became defunct due to lacking revenue for project support. As evidenced at the beginning of this section, higher value projects are possible on the Plainfield corridor with the right zoning and incentives in place. These changes will enable the revitalization of the CIA which then, in turn, can spur additional development. The Authority is locally controlled and can serve as a central point for planning and organizing, events and marketing, and collaboration among businesses and community partners.

A new Plainfield Avenue Corridor Improvement Authority should be revived and become a focal point for redevelopment efforts; coordinating land owners, businesses, developers and neighbors to facilitate change and implement the corridor plan.



The Township Board has discretion over the powers that it wishes to allow the CIA to have, and there are many. A CIA can:

- Hire a director (*not required*);
- establish a TIF plan;
- borrow money;
- issue revenue bonds and notes;
- levy special assessments;
- make improvements to property (*for example, façade or infrastructure improvements*);
- build, rehabilitate, preserve, equip, or maintain buildings;
- prepare an economic analysis of the corridor development area;
- develop long-range plans to halt the deterioration of property values and promote economic growth, and take steps to persuade property owners to fully implement the plans;
- conduct market research and public relations campaigns; develop, coordinate, and conduct retail and institutional promotions, and sponsor special events and related activities;
- improve land and plan/propose the construction, renovation, repair, remodeling, rehabilitation, restoration, preservation, or reconstruction of a public facility, an existing building, or a multi-family development;
- plan, propose, and implement improvements to a public facility within the development area to comply with the barrier-free design requirements of the state construction code;
- acquire (*by purchase or other means*) or own, convey, or otherwise dispose of land or other property (*real or personal*) or rights/interests in property;
- grant or acquire licenses, easements, and options;
- charge and collect fees, rents, and other charges for the use, in whole or in part, of any facility, building, or property under its control and pledge these funds toward the payment of revenue bonds issued by the authority;

- lease, in whole or in part, any facility, building, or property under its control;
- accept grants and donations of property, labor, or other things of value from a public or private source;
- acquire and build public facilities; and
- contract for broadband/wireless technology service in the development area.

One important definition to know is the term “*public facility*”. A “*Public facility*” means a street, plaza, pedestrian mall, and any improvements to a street, plaza, or pedestrian mall including street furniture and beautification, sidewalk, trail, lighting, traffic flow modification, park, parking facility, recreational facility, right-of-way, structure, waterway, bridge, lake, pond, canal, utility line or pipe, transit-oriented development, transit-oriented facility, or building, including access routes, that are either designed and dedicated to use by the public generally or used by a public agency.

A revived Plainfield Avenue CIA can champion this plan and, over time, bring resources to bear to assist with implementation. The CIA’s Development Plan, which is a required plan for a CIA, will assist in providing the necessary framework to prioritize investments and activities. A majority of CIA appointees must consist of business owners for the locally controlled Authority. This allows the CIA to serve as a central point for planning and organizing, events and marketing, and collaboration among businesses and community partners.

Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (BRA)

Local governments in Michigan can establish a Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (BRA) pursuant to Act 381 of 1996, as amended, to promote their participation in the redevelopment of “contaminated, functionally obsolete, blighted, or historic property” (typically on commercial or industrial sites). This is a more expansive description of “brownfield” than some other states, and the Federal government, use; there is no specific statutory definition of “brownfield” in Act 381. The list of eligible activities is also broad and goes beyond remediation. These characteristics make BRAs powerful tools for Michigan municipalities.

Creating a BRA enables the local government to focus development on sites served by existing infrastructure and encourage private development on contaminated or disused sites by reimbursing eligible activities. Redevelopment on these sites often requires subsidy since the redevelopment costs can be higher than the existing property value. Michigan’s program was designed to encourage redevelopment through public-private partnerships.

Like a CIA, a BRA can use TIF funds for some activities: demolition and lead/asbestos abatement, site preparation and infrastructure improvements. BRA TIF funds can come from additional revenues in the form of local taxes and state school taxes (the local school operating tax and the state education tax). If taxes levied for school operating purposes are to be captured in a TIF plan, approval of a work plan by the Michigan Strategic Fund (MSF) and/or the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) is required. Local-only TIF projects need only a written plan; no work plan is required.

POWERS OF A BRA

- Approve brownfield plans and TIF requests
- Authorize TIF capture for private developments
- Set a maximum amount that can be captured
- Apply for grants and loans
- Own or lease property
- Accept grants and donations
- Incur general administrative and operating costs
- Invest money
- Borrow money and issue notes under the Municipal Finance Act
- Establish a local site remediation revolving fund
- Fund eligible environmental activities including site assessments, baseline environmental assessments, and due care planning



ACTIVITIES ELIGIBLE FOR REIMBURSEMENT

- Demolition
- Asbestos abatement
- Due care and environmental response
- Site preparation
- Public infrastructure improvements
- Ramped and underground parking
- Urban stormwater management systems

A BRA can undertake these activities itself, or work with developers or firms seeking to redevelop brownfield sites. TIF financing requires a developer or other investor.

At their October 26, 2020 meeting, the Township Board adopted a resolution to establish a BRA. As the BRA adopts by laws and begins its work, brownfield sites will be eligible for subsidy in accordance with a Brownfield Plan created by the BRA and approved by the Township Board. Before a brownfield plan is adopted, the BRA must hold a public hearing on the plan, with prior notification to EGLE and MEDC.

Usually local governments work with interested developers or firms to identify sites, and the private entity is repaid for its investment through capture of the increased taxable value of the redeveloped property. The government continues to collect property taxes at the predevelopment rate, and after the developer is reimbursed, it collects taxes at a rate that captures the increment generated by the new investment. The BRA must submit annual financial reports to the Township Board, EGLE, and MSF. TIF programs are audited at least once every three years.

OTHER BROWNFIELD REDEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

Grants and loans for projects with both environmental and economic development components are also available from EGLE. A grant requires private investment and job creation, while a loan does not require a development. Community outcomes and local funding participation can be considered in the application process. Loans can be repaid with TIF funds.

In Michigan, some projects have successfully optimized economic impact by combining brownfield incentives with those available for low-income housing development.

Federal grants are also available for brownfield sites through the US Environmental Protection Agency, including assessment grants that can be used for planning and outreach and revolving loan fund grants for site cleanup.

Payments In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT)

Payments in lieu of taxes, or PILOTs, are programs, or agreements between local governments and individual nonprofit entities, such as developers of affordable housing, that partially offset the loss of property tax revenue arising from nonprofits’ tax-exempt status. PILOTs are often voluntary and can be structured as a proportion of the amount of tax the entity would owe if not exempt, or as a function of its economic activity (for example, square footage or number of units), though in many jurisdictions the basis of the chosen structure is unclear.

In Michigan, PILOTs for affordable housing are governed by Act 346 of 1966, as amended. The Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) offers model ordinances for local governments seeking to encourage affordable housing development with federal or state subsidy. Local governments can also use PILOTs as business incentives, giving businesses an abatement, or discount, on property taxes in exchange for locating or redeveloping within the jurisdiction.

Community Revitalization Program (CRP)

This program, administered by the Michigan Strategic Fund and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, encourages the redevelopment of brownfield sites with gap financing in the form of grants, loans, or other economic assistance for eligible projects. The amount of support, up to 25 percent of project costs or \$10,000,000, is based on a needs analysis. Applicants, including local partners and developers, work with the appropriate MEDC Community Assistance Team to develop applications and execute agreements.

Funding criteria include whether a project supports local/regional economic development goals, revitalizes/activates a large site, addresses accessibility and multi-modal transportation needs, promotes mixed-income neighborhoods, and/or is in a certified “Redevelopment Ready Community.”

Industrial Facilities Tax Exemption (IFT)

Act 198 of 1974, as amended, provides a tax incentive to manufacturers for the renovation and expansion of aging facilities, the building of new facilities, and/or the establishment of new high-tech facilities. The local government must create an Industrial Development District or Plant Rehabilitation District to qualify for an Industrial Facilities Exemption certificate, which exempts eligible facilities from real and/or personal property taxes for a term of one-12 years. Exemptions must be approved by the State Tax Commission.

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)

The Community Development Block Grant program, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, is administered by Kent County’s Community Action office. The program is used to assist communities in economic development, community development, and housing projects. This includes assisting small businesses in creating and retaining jobs by establishing an economic development strategy to support locally owned and operated businesses. The grant can also be used to improve infrastructure and sense of place. In Plainfield Township, portions of the Plainfield Avenue corridor meet eligibility requirements to serve persons with low and moderate income. Projects most likely to receive funding are those focused on accessibility, such as sidewalk improvements, reduction of blight, and providing housing.

Other Incentive Programs

As of the writing of this plan, additional economic development tools specifically aimed at increasing housing numbers are anticipated to be offered in the State legislature. Programs such as the Obsolete Property Rehabilitation Act (OPRA) and Neighborhood Enterprise Zone (NEZ) have, to date, been unavailable to a community such as Plainfield Township. These changes would increase the number of economic incentives and provide a greater opportunity for public private partnerships than ever before.

Attraction And Retention Tools

Incremental Development

One of the “big ideas” expressed early in the first phase of the planning process was to “go small” – making the corridor “attractive and efficient, not just big and busy,” with building fronts closer to the street, more trees and sidewalks, and parking on the side and in back of buildings. This kind of configuration makes commercial areas more attractive to businesses as well as shoppers. And this kind of change can start small.

Smaller-scale redevelopment is feasible and realistic in the near term. Doing it right will help the community visualize positive change, enable them to experience its benefits first-hand, and calm any fears about increased density, showing them how it can be carried out in a suburban setting. Temporary changes can help show the way forward. In Muskegon, city leaders built a dozen small (90-150 square feet) moveable wooden buildings, funded with donations, on a vacant strip. Local businesses were able to test-drive concepts on a “micro-retail” basis without renting big, expensive storefronts, and residents and tourists loved shopping at the cute and lively “chalets.”

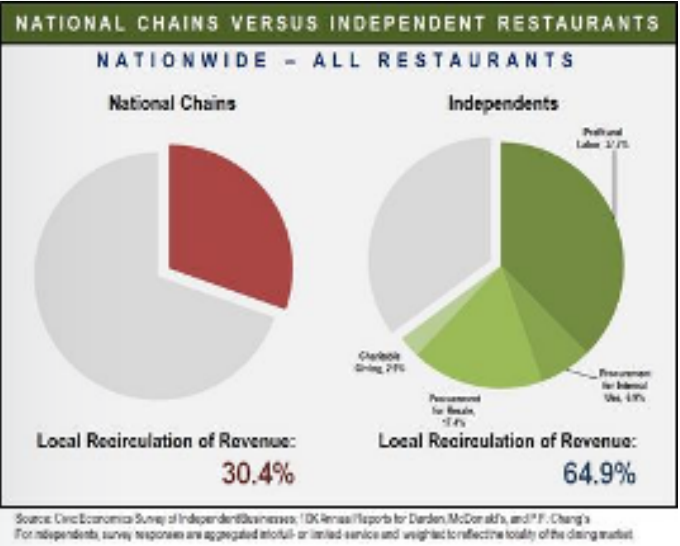
Interventions like these could help the community envision a corridor that invites attention and give them a sense of what it would be like to have a different mix of shopping options close to home, or on the way home from work. In the Design Concepts section, illustrations were provided that showed how the partial removal of a parking area for outdoor seating or a small addition to an existing building could begin to change the look and feel of the corridor. These interventions – from allowing outdoor seating, to small temporary structures and food trucks, to pop-up shops can increase entrepreneurship in the township and allow for organic growth to occur that builds a unique cultural fabric with distinct offerings. These uses have typically been prohibited under zoning, which is why a recommendation has been made to allow for more flexibility in temporary, small-scale uses.



In DeSoto, Texas, outside of Dallas, a small developer bought a strip mall. Seeking to provide opportunities for local businesses, he retrofitted the interior as a flexible space with features based on feedback from prospective tenants. He transformed the abundance of surface parking in front of the building by “pedestrianizing” part of it with gravel and bringing in food trailers and picnic tables to activate the space. A small amount of affordable housing was built on one side of the side, making it even more lively and more of a place people go “to,” not just “through.”



From *Reclaiming the Strip Mall: A Common Suburban Form, Transformed* by Metropolitan Area Planning Council, Congress for the New Urbanism, and *Build a Better Burb*, available at <https://www.cnu.org/sites/default/files/MAPC-CNU%20Strip%20Mall%20Case%20Studies.pdf>



Business Development

Recruitment and retention of businesses along the Plainfield corridor was identified by the Steering Committee as an important component of the corridor’s transformation. There are a number of chain restaurants and retailers as well as locally-owned businesses that contribute to the vibrancy of the business area. It is important to note, however, that not all commercial businesses are the same.

Locally-owned independent retailers and restaurants contribute more to the local economy than national chains. If a choice must be made about where to direct local resources to for the benefit of business recruitment and retention, time and energy would be best spent on local business owners. According to Civic Economics, a research firm that has studied the impact of “buy local” and the economic benefit of independent businesses to a community, studies found that the recirculation of revenue in the local economy from independent restaurants is 69.4%, compared to national chains of 30.4%. In general, for restaurants and retailers studies have show that for every \$100 a person spends at a local business \$68 is circulated in the local economy in the form of donations, local services (such as marketing), and local supplies; in comparison, \$43 stays in the local economy when money is spent with a national chain

A rejuvenated Corridor Improvement Authority can assist in branding, marketing, advertising, and training to support business owners. The Authority itself can serve as a resource to the local business community as an entity to support networking. Township leaders can also take an active role in building relationships with local business owners. Networking provides an opportunity for leaders to show appreciation for a business’ contribution to the local economy as well as learn more about the strengths, successes, challenges and opportunities that are present in the business community.

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Partnerships

Recommendations described throughout this plan vary from programs, policies, and regulations to the physical design and construction of improvements in public and private spaces including street rights-of-way, parks, and private development. In some cases, the Township will be the leading organization through its policies and oversight of private development. But most of the recommendations will involve participation by others – developers, institutions, business owners, employers, transportation agencies, state agencies, non-profits, advocacy organizations and others. Collaborative efforts among all these groups is necessary to bring a Reimagined Plainfieldcorridor to life.

Some partnerships are obvious based on the type of project—for example, the Township can work with MDOT to make changes to Plainfield Avenue, or a partnership could be developed with the Rapid to extend Route 11 further to one or more of the proposed town centers. This kind of cooperation is typical among government entities. In other cases, redevelopment will require teaming up with the private sector. The most obvious rewards that come from creating Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) are the net economic and fiscal benefits— jobs, infrastructure, taxes, fees, increases in the community’s wealth and tax base. Less tangible is the message that the community is on the move and that the Township is intentionally advancing the prosperity of its residents.

The use of tax incentives can sometimes be viewed as giving a hand-out to developers. The reality is that many quality private development projects are simply infeasible but for a partnership with the public sector. It is important to recognize the risks involved for a project to become “real”, including market-demand, construction budget and schedule, leasing, interest rates, weather, and other factors that a developer must account for. As development occurs, the overall economic health of the corridor can improve with gains in property tax, residents to support businesses, new businesses, and new businesses that will make the corridor more financially resilient over time.



A disciplined and transparent accounting of expected rewards and risks, or benefits and costs, goes a long way toward demonstrating to key stakeholders and the public that a deal is worth doing. The public must know that all relevant factors of the deal are being considered—that risks are being carefully defined and evaluated and steps are being taken to offset or mitigate them. In this partnership, Township leaders should also consider what benefits to the public are being offered. While it is important not to make add so many strings to an agreement to make a project infeasible, it is also

not unreasonable to have expectations that quality construction, site amenities, or other community priorities should be accommodated by a developer. Public to Public Partnerships (P2Ps) are oftentimes not fully considered to achieve community goals. Other public entities may have access to assets, services, other funding sources that the township does not. Plainfield Township’s exploration of a joint CIA with Grand Rapids Township is a good example of how, by working together, sidewalks were installed along much of the Plainfield corridor.

EXAMPLES OF P2P OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE:

- Working with area schools to apply for Safe Routes to Schools money to improve pedestrian crossings near schools.
- Coordination with MDOT on the 2-course resurfacing project for Plainfield Avenue and access management implementation.
- Collaboration with MDOT on replacing the bridge over the Grand River to improve traffic flow as well as increase pedestrian access to the Versluis Town Center.
- Engaging with Friends of Grand Rapids Parks to have a tree planting day with volunteers along the corridor.
- Depaving a portion of a parking lot with LGROW to reduce asphalt and increase green infrastructure to assist in stormwater management and improving water quality.
- Planning a secondary “shadow” street system with the Kent County Road Commission to reduce curb cuts on Plainfield Avenue and develop a more supportive local street system.
- Hosting a joint meeting with the Right Place Program to talk to local property owners and businesses about regional economic growth.
- Sharing the Reimagine Plainfield Corridor Plan with Grand Rapids Township and the City of Grand Rapids and encouraging zoning ordinance text amendments in those communities to provide a unified regulatory approach for the corridor.

Regular quarterly meetings to assist in plan implementation with community partners can be especially useful to share information, solve problems and build relationships. Grant applications are strengthened where partnerships are evident. Implementing the vision will require the active participation of both the public and private sectors to be successful.

Goals And Measuring Sticks

Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Performance Measures have been created to guide policy and ordinance changes, assist in prioritizing capital improvement projects, guiding partnerships, and gauging success. These should be referred to on a regular basis as part of the work of the Township Board, Planning Commission, staff, and the Corridor Improvement Authority to determine progress. An annual check-in is recommended to make sure that this information is being actively referred to and that the plan's guidance remains in line with community priorities.

The primary goals of the Reimagine Plainfield Plan are listed here. For each goal, a series of objectives is provided and for most objectives one or more strategies for achieving the objective are specified. In addition, key performance measures are recommended to assist in maintaining a focus on achievements.

Goal 1: Build Vibrant Places

Goal 2: Enhance Quality Of Life

Goal 3: Transform Plainfield Avenue

Goal 4: Green The Corridor

Goal 5: Expect Quality Design

Goal 6: Promote Reinvestment

2008 and 2017 Master Plans

The 2008 Plainfield Charter Township Master Plan, and the 2017 Master Plan Update Supplement, cited as an implementation strategy the creation of a Plainfield Avenue Redevelopment Plan. The Master Plan stated that “a redevelopment strategy and specific design standards that may be flexibly applied to address the aesthetic, access management, land use and redevelopment challenges of the corridor” be undertaken (p.139). In addition to achieving these purposes, the Reimagine Plainfield Plan aligns with the Master Plan’s following Goals and Objectives:

GOAL 6 Traffic and Transportation

All modes of travel will proceed through and within the Township safely and at reasonable speeds along safe and attractive roadways dispersed throughout the community.

- a. Build and strengthen relationship with the Road Commission and MDOT to facilitate cooperative approaches to road planning and design, and with The Rapid with regard to mass transit. Continue to explore options with The Rapid to expand mass transit service to key destinations in the Township.
- b. Develop and implement flexible road design standards and right of-way requirements that are appropriate for the specific application.
- c. Develop site and roadway design standards to anticipate and accommodate future mass transit systems.

GOAL 7

A network of safe and convenient pedestrian and non-motorized pathways, sidewalks and trails will connect neighborhoods to commercial centers, allowing residents to enjoy the community’s many natural features.

- b. Explore innovative storm water management techniques, such as pervious pavement, rain gardens and similar facilities to minimize downstream impacts resulting from growth.

GOAL 10 Utilities and Public Services

Storm water will be effectively managed through advanced techniques that are sensitive to environmental impacts and offer aesthetic amenities for the community.

- a. Continue to review and improve storm water design standards that result in functional facilities to control flooding, protect surface waters from contamination and provide an aesthetic amenity for residents and businesses.

GOAL 11 Economic Development

New businesses in the Township will be clean, responsible and economically viable corporate citizens located in attractive and well-defined commercial centers. The Township will contain a diverse mix of businesses providing meaningful employment opportunities.

- a. Establish and implement standards for new commercial and industrial developments to require and/or incentivize attractive development forms.
- b. Establish and implement a program to reclaim and redevelop brownfields and underutilized and/or contaminated commercial and industrial areas of the Township.

GOAL 12

People and Housing

Neighborhoods in Plainfield Township will include housing for the entire spectrum of society, arranged in walkable, pedestrian-oriented patterns incorporating spaces for social interaction.

- b. Develop and implement standards to incorporate and maintain, where appropriate, pedestrian facilities and neighborhood gathering places, such as community greens and tot-lots, to foster social interaction among neighbors.

GOAL 16

Cooperative Planning

Zoning standards and regulatory requirements of the Township will be clear, fair and broadly understood in the community. All standards will be structured to support the goals of this plan while providing maximum flexibility to protect the property rights of residents and businesses.

GOAL 17

Sustainability

Plainfield Township will develop in a form and manner that meets the needs of the generation.

This plan began by acknowledging that the consequences of maintaining past practices into the future would not be fiscally, economically, or environmentally in the township’s best interest. In the absence of change, continued trends are likely to intensify the challenges facing the corridor. Investment is needed that is guided by the long-term vision of creating a nimbler development pattern that can accommodate a variety of different uses and users over time. The recommendations contained in the Building Vibrant Places, Traveling “To” as well as “Through,” and Greening the Corridor themes, Design Concepts, Future Land Use Map, and Zoning Plan work together to move the corridor toward that vision. The following goals, objectives, strategies, and performance measures summarize specific steps to achieve the plan recommendations presented on the preceding pages.

GOAL 1:

Build Vibrant Places

A Encourage A Mix Of Land Uses

Strategies:

- 1. Change the zoning ordinance to allow a mix of uses by block and site/building.
- 2. Build incentives or bonuses into the zoning ordinance to encourage adaptive reuse, mixed-use development, and higher-density residential development in town centers and mixed use areas.
- 3. Monitor development trends and modify zoning to accommodate new land uses as they emerge.
- 4. Regard parking lots as future development locations.
- 5. Accommodate larger scale commercial uses where shared parking can be supported.
- 6. Educate property owners, developers, and lenders about the advantages of mixed-use development.

B Increase Population And Employment Density

Strategies:

- 1. Allow land assembly in redevelopment areas to create parcels that can accommodate modern development.
- 2. Make sure to allow enough density to make redevelopment financially feasible.
- 3. Concentrate high-density mixed-use projects in the Versluis Town Center, Plainfield Village Center, and Meijer Mixed Use (MMU) Center to capitalize on potential transit investments, provide additional housing units, and add vitality to the area.
- 4. Allow for a variety of different housing options for all income levels.
- 5. Provide public greenspaces and community gathering places in areas of density.
- 6. Protect neighborhood edges by creating incremental transitions in use intensity and building scale.
- 7. Light industrial uses that are similar in their operation to other permitted commercial uses and will increase employment opportunities should be considered in mixed-use segments.

C Reshape The Built Environment

Strategies:

- 1. Create smaller block sizes and establish a local street network on larger parcels.
- 2. Place parking to the side or rear of buildings and encouraged shared parking spaces, particularly where a mix of uses are present that can optimize parking usage.
- 3. Design buildings to a pedestrian scale with expression lines, windows, entrances oriented to the street and sidewalk, uniform setbacks and consideration for stepbacks to reduce building massing in structures that exceed three stories in height.

- 4. Construct buildings for flexibility and adaptability with adequate floor to ceiling heights and usable ground floor depths.
- 5. Discourage buildings constructed for a specific brand and a single use that cannot easily be converted in the future.
- 6. Utilize required building frontages to create a sense of enclosure along Plainfield and reduce curb cuts.

GOAL 1 - Performance Measures

- The daily needs of our community are satisfied by the businesses found along the corridor.
 - MEASURES:
 - # of grocery stores
 - # of pharmacies
 - # of hardware stores
 - # of clothing retailers
 - # of furniture stores
 - # of restaurants
 - average travel distance
 - average travel time to reach shopping and services
- There is an increase in population and housing density.
 - MEASURES:
 - # of new residential units
 - # new businesses
 - _sq ft of retail and office space
 - \$ generated in sales

GOAL 2:
Enhance Quality Of Life

A Enhance Quality Of Life

Strategies:

- 1. Locate buildings adjacent to, and connected with, the public realm including streetscape, plazas, parks, outdoor dining, and other gathering areas.
- 2. Incorporate amenities such as art, lighting, landscaping, banners, and other placemaking elements in public plazas and gathering places.
- 3. Provide streetscapes that include amenities for visual interest and safety, including seating, trees for shade, and green buffers.
- 4. Encourage the programming and active use of public spaces; incorporate arts and culture to advance placemaking goals.

- 5. Build incentives or bonuses into the zoning ordinance to encourage the creation of public spaces; require public space above a certain number of units for residential living.
- 6. Visually connect Versluis Park to the Versluis Town Center with signage, landscaping, and gateway elements so that it the park becomes more obvious.
- 7. Connect public trails to the Plainfield Avenue corridor and to town centers.
- 8. Use stormwater retention facilities such as the Kent County Drain Commission’s location at Plainfield Village Center to create new public spaces.
- 9. Use Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles to ensure that public spaces can be passively monitored for safety.

B Introduce Civic Or Institutional Uses Into Town Centers

Strategies:

- 1. Optimize the use of the Fire Barn as a center for community activity in the Plainfield Village Center.
- 2. Work to visually connect and reinforce the presence of the public library on 5 Mile to Plainfield Village.
- 3. Investigate the possibility of relocating the Secretary of State office or other public offices located in the corridor into the Meijer Mixed Use Center or Plainfield Village Center.
- 4. Encourage civic groups to conduct programming in public spaces.

C Reduce Visual Blight And Improve Property Maintenance

Strategies:

- 1. Focus on sites where long-vacant buildings and deteriorating infrastructure contribute to decline and hinder reimagination and investment.
- 2. Proactively pursue sign violations where closed businesses still maintain identification.
- 3. Educate the public on recent changes to the Property Maintenance Code.
- 4. Increase monitoring activity on blighted properties.

GOAL 2 - Performance Measures

- There will be public gathering places to encourage community enjoyment and interaction.
 - Number of outdoor seating and dining opportunities
- A series of identifiable gathering places are created along Plainfield Avenue.
 - MEASURES:
 - [names and descriptions] of places (as places)
 - branding is “sticky” and known to residents
 - # of annual events and activities
- The Plainfield Corridor is well-maintained.
 - MEASURES:
 - # of code compliance complaints
 - # of citations



GOAL 3:

Transform Plainfield Avenue

A Ensure That Plainfield Avenue Is A Safe For All Users And All Modes

Strategies:

1. Focus on self-enforcing design strategies so that vehicles will travel the posted speed limit, including travel lane widths, progression speed, and street edge treatments.
2. Link sidewalks to the corridor and adjacent neighborhood that are unobstructed, wide enough for a variety of users, and buffered from the street.
3. Consider all transportation modes in site planning, including pedestrians, bicyclists, automobiles, and delivery vehicles.
4. Ensure that persons of all abilities are considered in site design.
5. Add a traffic signal at the south Meijer entrance to facilitate turning movements and accommodate bus turning movements should transit service be extended.
6. Reconsider large deceleration tapers that increase the width of the street and encourage higher travel speeds.

B Create a walkable community

Strategies:

1. Reduce travel lane and crossing widths.
2. Add pedestrian infrastructure, including refuge islands and signals.
3. Plant trees in the lawn area between the sidewalk and back of curb for shade and to create a visual barrier between fast moving vehicles and people walking.
4. Connect Plainfield Avenue sidewalks into surrounding neighborhoods.
5. Amend the zoning ordinance to require sidewalk connections from the front doors of businesses to the public sidewalk.
6. Ensure all sidewalk curb ramps meet current ADA requirements.
7. Connect town centers to existing and proposed trail systems.

C Use Access Management to reduce curb cuts on Plainfield Avenue

Strategies:

1. Use access management techniques to consolidate curb cuts as redevelopment occurs
2. Require service drives for contiguous parcels along Plainfield Avenue and other streets, limit the number of driveways for a site, and require parking lots on contiguous parcels be shared.

3. Facilitate the construction of landscaped medians in Plainfield Avenue to appropriately direct turning movements, provide a landing location for pedestrians crossing the street at unsignalized locations, and increase the amount of landscaping along the corridor.
4. Require primary access points from secondary streets.
5. Amend the zoning ordinance and incorporate into economic incentive programs bonuses to facilitate the development of local “shadow” streets and other connections in new developments that improve connectivity between parcels and abutting neighborhoods without direct connections to Plainfield Avenue.
6. Consider closing and redirecting local cut-through streets to signalized intersections using new local streets.
7. Create a Corridor Management Plan.

GOAL 3 - Performance Measures

- The Plainfield Corridor will become more walkable and connected.
 - **MEASURES:**
 - # of new sidewalk connections from neighborhoods to businesses (walking behind businesses, not necessarily on Plainfield Avenue)
- All road users are safe.
 - **MEASURES:**
 - # of crashes
 - [types] of crashes
 - [severity] of crashes
- Mode shift will occur over time to include other modes of travel other than by a car.
 - **MEASURES:**
 - # of people using sidewalks
 - # transit riders
 - # of bicyclists
- Access management throughout the corridor will reduce vehicular conflicts and improve the flow of traffic.
 - **MEASURES:**
 - # of curb cuts eliminated
 - [linear ft] of new secondary streets created (local shadow network)

Case Study: City of Shoreline, WA

The City of Shoreline, Washington introduced landscaped medians, trees, enhanced crosswalks, street and traffic lights, buried powerlines, and installed sidewalks a decade ago along the heavily used Aurora Avenue North (Highway 99) corridor. The four-lane road had an average of 40,000 to 45,000 vehicles per day. Shoreline worked to address land use and safety issues and to improve the conditions of the corridor. Since construction began in 2005, Shoreline has begun to experience returns on the investment; crashes have been reduced by 60%.



July 2008 and October 2018, Aurora North (Highway 99) in Shoreline, WA
<https://www.google.com/maps/@47.7764738,-122.3461733,3a,75y,187.89h,93.16t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1srT7k-OJRAqROvPhIW8640SA!2e0!7i16384!8i8192>

GOAL 4: Green the Corridor

A Use green infrastructure to manage stormwater runoff and beautify the corridor

Strategies:

1. Create new green open spaces where possible, including on excess paved parking lots.
2. Use stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) to manage stormwater naturally.
3. Focus on the streetscape as an opportunity to improve water quality and reduce water volume entering into the storm water infrastructure system.
4. Develop language in the zoning ordinance to encourage porous paving treatments, green roofs, green walls, planters, and LED lighting.
5. Leverage infrastructure investments, such as a 2-course resurfacing of Plainfield Avenue, to make water quality improvements before water is discharged into the Grand and Rogue Rivers.

B Increase the tree canopy

Strategies:

1. Provide trees with enough land and soil volume to create a productive and long-lived tree canopy.
2. Adopt tree planting specifications and canopy requirements for development projects.
3. Use Consumers Energy's "Right Tree, Right Place" planting approach under power lines.
4. Seek grants and work with community groups to plant trees along Plainfield Avenue in partnership with MDOT and private property owners.

C Develop a Maintenance Strategy

Strategies:

1. Consider the creation of a Business Improvement District which would utilize a special assessment to pay for beautification and maintenance of sidewalks and landscaping.
2. Work cooperatively with MDOT to develop a maintenance program for landscape medians or other green infrastructure in Plainfield Avenue.

GOAL 4 - PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- The amount of green infrastructure will increase along the Plainfield Corridor.

• MEASURES:

- # of trees planted
- # of planters
- _sq ft # of concrete/asphalt removed and replaced with vegetation
- _sq ft [#] of green roof area



Case Study: Rochester, MN

Nearly a three-mile long section of Second Street, extending from US Highway 52 to West Circle Drive, was reconfigured based on Rochester's placemaking plan. The project's goals were to improve safety, increase accessibility and mobility for pedestrians and cyclists, and extend economic growth from downtown across the bridge. Areas of the corridor carry 22,000 cars a day. Improvements included landscaped medians, new left-hand turn lanes, enhanced crosswalks, wider sidewalks, new trees, plantings and benches were added along the corridor. A neighborhood portion of the corridor was renamed "uptown" and art and specialized lighting was added to frame the district's boundaries. Assessed property values in the area grew by 30 percent within the project's first year of completion. Furthermore, blighted properties have gained increased attention from investors.

GOAL 5: Expect Quality Design

A Amend the Zoning Ordinance

Strategies:

1. Use the information in the Design Concepts and Zoning Plan chapters to amend the zoning ordinance.
2. Improve building design by introducing required building lines and evaluating/changing bulk regulations such as setbacks, consider stepbacks so that new buildings do not overwhelm the street.
3. Encourage architectural variety, avoid buildings that are designed for a specific brand that cannot be repurposed.

B Require exactly what the Township wants, then let staff administer it

Strategies:

1. Amend the zoning ordinance to expressly reflect the goals of the Planning Commission and Township Board for new development along the Plainfield Avenue corridor.
2. Provide flexibility in the ordinance for staff discretion, with the option for staff to direct projects to the Planning Commission for review and approval.
3. Allow for administrative approval for all site plans. If this is not acceptable, consider certain parcel size limitations.
4. Share with the development community modifications to the development approval process and develop a feedback loop for input.
5. Review and amend the zoning ordinance at regular intervals.

GOAL 5 - PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- New structures are compliant with design standards contained within the zoning ordinance.
 - **MEASURES**
 - # of variance requests
 - # of development projects that meet or exceed code requirements
- Development decisions will be clear, predictable, and fair.
 - **MEASURES**
 - # of days from submission to receipt of project approval
 - # of board and/or commission meetings per project
 - # of appeals



Gateways

Gateways “announce” entry into an area of significance along the corridor at the entry or exit point along the corridor. It is recommended that unique gateways be considered for each of the three town center locations. This could include a variety of improvements such as enhanced crosswalks, landscaping, hardscaping, medians, and aesthetic treatments such as a monument sign or decorative lights. Architectural and landscape elements incorporated at gateways should be consistent with desired re-development for that each area. A key consideration for gateway components will be the long-term sustainability and maintenance characteristics of the materials. Native landscape materials that are drought-tolerant are recommended.

GOAL 6: Promote Reinvestment

A Reinstate the Corridor Improvement Authority

Strategies:

1. Review current CIA boundaries and identify any changes to the development area.
2. Initiate the process to amend the development area, if necessary.
3. Appoint new CIA members; consider including members of the Reimagine Plainfield Steering Committee.
4. Create a new CIA Development Plan that prioritizes and works to implement the Reimagine Plainfield Plan.

B Foster public - private partnerships for redevelopment

Strategies:

1. Leverage economic development tools to encourage new investment in the corridor.
2. Use public investments to strategically leverage desired economic development in appropriate locations.
3. Prioritize specific properties or locations, such as town centers, for targeted reinvestment.
4. Consider including public improvements in Brownfield plans to ensure that public and private improvements are aligned, well-designed, and concurrent.
5. Reach out to the development community to increase awareness of the availability of township economic development tools and any modifications to the zoning ordinance.
6. Evaluate tax incentive requests and how a project achieves the desired outcomes of the Reimagine Plainfield Plan, particularly for residential and employment densities.

C Foster public - public partnerships

Strategies:

1. Work with the Michigan Townships Association to propose amending the definition of a Qualified Local Unit of Government so that the township can increase the size of its redevelopment toolbox with other economic development programs.
2. Collaborate with MDOT and KCRC to implement street modifications.
3. Partner with The Rapid to extend the bus route to the Meijer Mixed Use Center and collaborate on future transit-oriented development at town centers.
4. Identify opportunities for partnership with schools for Safe Routes to Schools funding.
5. Make stormwater improvements with the assistance of LGROW.

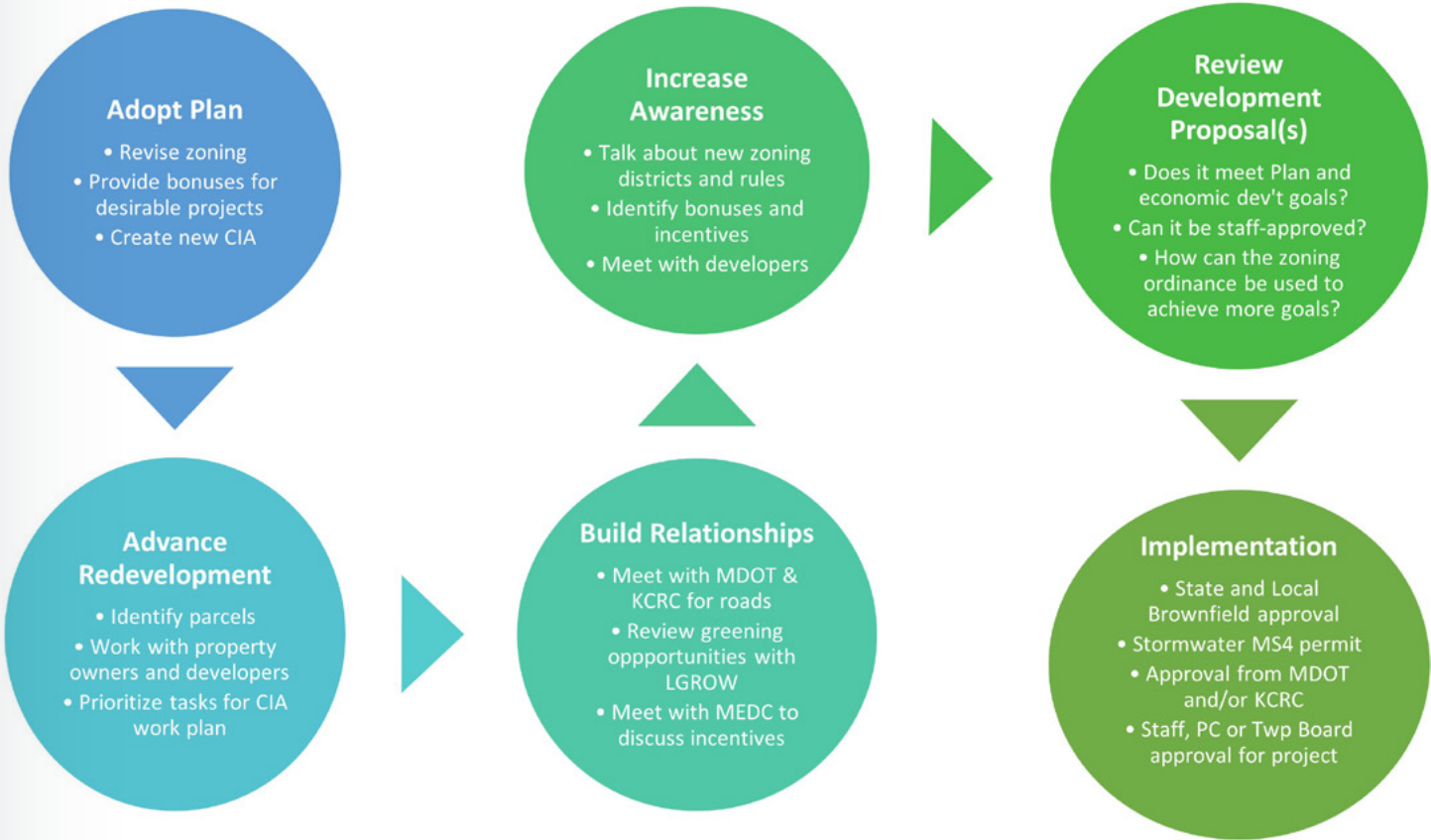
D Engage and support businesses and people work live, work and travel along the corridor

Strategies:

- 1. Focus on the near term with an eye to the long term by encouraging tactical urbanism, “depaving” projects, public art, and pop-up/temporary uses to build awareness and excitement.
- 2. Make accommodations for vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.
- 3. Develop a charrette program for large future developments that establishes parameters and engages the community.
- 4. Use the CIA as a mechanism to reach out to business owners and find ways to encourage the growth of local businesses that provide goods and services to township residents.

GOAL 6 - PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Housing options are increasing in line with current needs.
 - MEASURES:
 - # of new housing units permitted
 - \$ median rent/sale price for new units number of units
- Employment options are expanded and employment density is rising.
 - MEASURES:
 - # of new jobs
 - # of jobs per acre
- Redevelopment is occurring throughout the corridor.
 - MEASURES:
 - \$ of new investment
 - # of building permits
 - \$ of taxable value



Next Steps

Knowing where to start on this transformative journey to go from “reimagining” to “doing” can seem overwhelming. A series of small steps will, over time, culminate into visible and tangible change along the Plainfield Avenue corridor. These bubbles assist in identifying some actions that can be taken to create momentum. The growth and development of a community is a dynamic and iterative process which evolves over time. The tools used to implement may need to be routinely fine-tuned so that they continue to work for their intended purpose. Key stakeholders may change. Community needs or priorities may adjust. This plan emphasizes that the built environment needs to become more nimble and flexible in the types of buildings that are constructed, the uses allowed, and how various modes of transportation are accommodated. Policies and ordinances, too, will need to be regarded in this same way to keep up with trends of development, developer expectations, and to compete for the people and jobs that will advance the Township’s continued prosperity. This is an exciting time. It is hoped that in the future others will point to “before” and “after” photos of the Plainfield corridor as a testament to the visionary leadership and commitment of the Steering Committee, community members, Township staff, Planning Commission, and Township Board.