

Common Council File No. 121132
Exhibit A
Corridor Plan for the Historic Mitchell Street Neighborhood Conservation Overlay District

Introduction:

The Historic Mitchell Street Business Improvement District (BID) proposes the establishment of a Neighborhood Conservation Overlay Zone along Historic Mitchell Street from North 6th Street to North 13th Street to preserve and enhance the integrity of its commercial and retail corridor along the street level. A Neighborhood Conservation Overlay Zone (NC) is intended to provide a vehicle to initiate and implement programs for the revitalization and conservation of older areas or districts possessing distinctive features, identity, or character worthy of retention or enhancement. A NC takes effect through adoption of a neighborhood conservation plan and a use list that will facilitate maintenance and protection of the commercial corridor's character and the development of vacant or underutilized storefronts. The intent of this NC is to maintain the continuity of existing street walls and a harmonious relationship with existing street-level uses in the corridor. To do so, the NC will promote active and contributing street-level uses. The base, Local Business (LB2) zoning continues to apply except for changes to the use list. Historic Mitchell Street is a locally designated historic district, and those design guidelines continue to apply to the properties within the district as well.

Street-level uses that currently exist with occupancy permits within the NC are allowed to remain, regardless of whether they are permitted per the overlay or not. Historically, a community-serving commercial district such as Historic Mitchell Street did have exceptions to retail storefront continuity for institutional uses (e.g., churches, schools, banks, etc.) and/or public uses (e.g., libraries, fire and police stations). Most of these institutional or public uses are pre-existing, that is, part of the original historic composition of uses that grew up to serve the surrounding community.

However, as the district continues to evolve (from this point going forward), the predominant pattern of use along the street level that should be encouraged is that of a strong traditional retail cluster located in the existing historic buildings--maintained and repurposed according to historic preservation guidelines--and, in particular, re-using the historic retail storefronts for the purpose for which they were originally designed.

Non-retail and service oriented uses can still contribute to the vitality of the commercial corridor provided that the uses are placed away from, that is above, below, or behind, the main retail corridor. In the case of Historic Mitchell Street, the main retail corridor is considered to be both sides of the street at the street (first floor) level. In order to maintain this desirable continuity of street level retail storefronts, residential and other non-retail uses should be located:

- Above the first floor (street) level in the upper stories of buildings or
- Below the first floor (street) level in the basement level or
- Behind a street level storefront (typically twenty feet in depth or greater), preferably with a separate entrance located to the side or to the rear of the building. If parking is placed to the rear of the building, the separate entrance for the non-retail uses can be conveniently located directly off the rear parking lot.

History:

Mitchell Street has been a commercial corridor for over a century and like other commercial corridors in the metro area (and the United States) has evolved in tandem with the history of retail and the history of Milwaukee. Mitchell Street first became a vibrant retail street when it was established around 1870, and continued its evolution as a commercial corridor into the 1970's, when it was commonly known as the "Downtown of the South Side," ranked second in commercial importance only to downtown Milwaukee.

In its prime, Mitchell Street (1870's to 1970's) was a major shopping destination--similar to what regional shopping malls such as Mayfair and Bay Shore are today--with a cluster of approximately 90 retail stores, the smaller

supporting stores at street level "first floor" and the larger anchor stores at multi-level "stacked floors," including Schuster's, Sears & Roebuck, Kunzelmann-Esser and Goldmann's. Mitchell Street has always been a community-serving commercial corridor with many bridal stores, theatres (most notably the Modjeska), and other retail-related businesses, as well as churches, banks, funeral parlors, etc. This role as the commercial heart of the South Side is a role that Mitchell Street had when it was in its prime as a retail shopping district and rivaled downtown as the "Polish Grand Avenue" and in part, still has today.

In the 1980's, as a result of a market forces, Mitchell Street began to transition to being more of a "service street" than a "retail street" and mixed-use commercial corridor. This can be attributed to a few factors:

1. In the early 1980's, part of Mitchell Street was closed off to vehicular traffic as part of an effort to support commercial districts by creating pedestrian malls or closing off automobile traffic. However, "mallng" did not support the commercial district. It appeared to impede the ability of the district to thrive. In 1991, the pedestrian malls were removed. Mitchell Street was re-opened. However, many Mitchell Street retailers had already moved out, along with their very loyal customer base, due to the decline in retail and destination shopping.
2. During the economic downtown, many of the commercial corridors in the City of Milwaukee, including Mitchell Street, experienced retail and commercial tenant vacancies.
3. The current Local Business zoning district permits other non-commercial uses. The potential formation of a zoning overlay district will support Mitchell Street in a targeted way and be an important step to the progress being made to ensure the future of this historic commercial street.

In 1986, Mitchell Street, from 5th to 13th Streets, was designated the West Mitchell Street Historic District in accordance with the provisions of (currently) Section 320-21 of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances, and in 1996, was legally renamed West Historic Mitchell Street. This historic designation has supported the considerable efforts on the part of Business Improvement District No. 4 and its many partners to return Mitchell Street to its former status as both a thriving and historically significant commercial district.

Existing conditions and uniqueness of Mitchell Street:

Mitchell Street currently is a mix of (1) occupied buildings with active retail storefronts; (2) a few partially occupied or vacant buildings, many in disrepair, many with storefronts that are blocked out or boarded up; and (3) buildings with storefronts that do not contribute to a retail street, e.g., non-retail services.

In order for Mitchell Street to be competitive in a modern retail environment, it must be a "retail street" where street frontage is retail and commercial uses, storefronts are inviting, streetscape design is welcoming; and the street environment is pedestrian-oriented. While Mitchell Street remains a unique shopping street within the South Side market, in order to remain competitive, its retail cluster must be comparable or better than its competition (shopping centers and "big box" stores) and its offerings must be unique and/or superior. For example, a "Main Street" strategy is to offer a product or service that cannot be found in neighboring "big box" stores, similar to Mitchell Street's bridal shop that specializes in quinceanera dresses, its Lopez Bakery that specializes in authentic Mexican baked goods, international restaurants (Cuban, Caribbean, Middle Eastern), a soccer store that specializes in gear from Mexican and South American league teams.

The historic retail buildings that still dominate Mitchell Street still lend themselves to a broad range of retail: niche markets, many that appeal to the growing Spanish-speaking population on Milwaukee's South Side, specialty multi-ethnic markets, traditional markets such as home goods, transitional (growing) businesses and start-ups (new entrepreneurs). Historic Mitchell Street buildings have also adapted well to mixed use formats, typically retail at street level, and office, residential, or other commercial uses above. Commercial uses that do well above street level are those with a designated clientele that do not depend on pedestrian traffic or do not need a storefront to attract customers.

A traditional retail cluster for a commercial district such as Historic Mitchell Street might include one or more stores from the following categories: restaurants, diners, bakeries, coffee or tea houses, taverns, grocery, specialty/import stores, clothing, shoes, jewelry/watch repair, electronics/cameras, barbershops, florists, fitness centers, dance studios, art galleries, museums, antiques, resale stores, movie theaters, performance venues, liquor stores, record stores, hardware stores, dry cleaners, book stores, toy stores, and hotels (particularly those with ground floor retail such as a gift shop, coffee shop, bar or restaurant).

A retail cluster is defined as a grouping of 2 or more stores designed to capture the greatest share of the market within a demographic target area. From an urban planning and policy standpoint, municipalities may stimulate the formation of retail clusters (also known as agglomeration) to yield competitive benefits for the retailers that decide to locate there, and to stimulate urban growth by promoting a shopping district as a draw or magnet for multi-purpose shopping.

Importance of street-level active uses:

For many reasons, it is important to encourage uses along the street level that contribute to the commercial corridor in order to maintain and support Mitchell Street as a "retail street" with a competitive retail cluster.

1. The first reason is economic and goes back to the original premise for the marketplace. Shoppers prefer to do multi-purpose shopping in a pedestrian-oriented zone whenever they can, and a competitive retail cluster (a critical mass of stores that altogether create a "draw" or an "anchor") on a traditional shopping street such as Mitchell Street, offers that. Shopping malls, "lifestyle centers," department stores and many "big box" stores also offer that. In fact, a "big box" store (e.g., Wal-Mart, Target) may present an internal retail cluster that is very similar to a traditional town square or to a retail street such as Mitchell Street.

The retail cluster can be enhanced by retail anchors or destination stores--a single store that is large enough or unique enough to be a draw in and of itself. Even then, shoppers would prefer to combine destination shopping (that one unique store) with the multi-purpose shopping provided by a retail cluster.

2. The second reason, already implied, for the retail cluster is convenience. The customer parks once and can in a pedestrian-friendly environment (definitions for this vary and evolve with individual marketplaces) accomplish a multitude of purchases within a customer-friendly or engaging, walkable marketplace. A traditional commercial corridor is always going to be a "park once" experience, where the customer can do multi-purpose shopping within a 5 to 10 block walking distance, similar to Historic Mitchell Street.
3. The third reason is the quality of the customer's shopping experience as a competitive factor in retailing. After price point and selection of goods, shoppers are drawn to an area based on the retail experience. Whether it is a shopping mall, a shopping street, a town square or "lifestyle center," shoppers prefer a pedestrian-oriented zone with a broad variety of shopping choices in a customer-friendly environment.

The retail cluster is most effective in engaging shoppers when storefronts are continuous and not overly broken up (separated or spaced out) by parking lots, automobile-oriented uses with large curb cuts or paved areas, non-commercial or "non-contributing" uses that dilute and diminish the retail experience.

4. With the goal of maintaining a harmonious relationship between existing street level uses in the corridor, the following uses are proposed to be restricted from the first floor of buildings within the overlay, or limited with respect to lineal frontage along Mitchell Street or placement of non-active components of the business away from Mitchell Street frontage:
 - a. Residential: Residential can be included in the retail cluster, provided they are located above (upper stories above the street level) or away from the retail corridor (around the corner from the street level or on adjacent blocks). Residential uses are, by nature, non-commercial uses, and

break the retail commercial continuity along the first floor (pedestrian-oriented zone) of a commercial corridor.

- i. Exception - Live/work units: These residential units allow non-residential uses permitted in the zoning district, provided that not more than 2 persons who do not reside in the unit are employed on the premises. This use may contribute to the commercial corridor provided that the non-residential component, such as an art gallery, fronts along Mitchell Street. The residential, non-contributing use should be located behind the street frontage or on the upper floors of the building.
- b. Elementary education and day care: Per state statute and City ordinance respectively, day cares and elementary schools are required to provide outdoor play space that would detract from the commercial fabric of the corridor. Additionally, day care and elementary education uses have parking and loading requirements that, if not provided on-site, would compete with the amount and availability of street parking for other, contributing businesses.
- c. Medical service: Medical service facilities provide testing and treatments for a number of medical conditions that require a high level of privacy for patients, and therefore do not have active uses to provide along the street frontage.
- d. Day labor employment agency: This service often requires substantial queuing space for clients as they wait to be dispatched to a daily job, which often is not available within first floor commercial space. As a result, clients often resort to loitering on the sidewalk and in parking areas outside the staffing agency space. This creates a difficult situation for pedestrians to traverse the street. The upper floors of buildings often afford additional indoor waiting space for clients, and frees up first floor commercial space for retail-oriented business that rely on visibility and transparency along the street level.

An employment agency is categorized as a business service. A Day Labor Agency is a type of employment agency. A Day Labor Employment Agency is defined as any person or entity engaged in the business of employing day laborers to provide services to or for any third party employer pursuant to a contract with the day labor service and the third party employer. For purposes of this definition, the following terms are further defined: (a) Day Laborer. A person who contracts for employment with a day labor service agency. (b) Day Labor. Labor or employment that is occasional or irregular at which a person is employed for not longer than the time period required to complete the assignment for which the person was hired. Wage payments are made directly or indirectly by the day labor employment agency or the third party employer for work undertaken by day laborers pursuant to a contract between the day labor service agency with the third party employer. "Day Labor" does not include labor or employment of a professional or clerical nature. (c) Third Party Employer. Any person that contracts with a day labor employment agency for the employment of day laborers.

- e. Medical offices, health clinic: These uses may contribute to a healthy retail corridor provided that active spaces, as opposed to private spaces, are located along the street frontage. Exam rooms, for example, require patient privacy that would lead to windows being filled in/covered to prevent visibility from the street. However, medical offices and health clinics in general bring foot traffic to commercial corridors, and placement of lobbies and waiting areas along the street frontage would permit transparent, large windows at street-facing facades.
- f. Social service: Social service activities are non-commercial in nature. A social service facility located in a relatively narrow storefront may be inserted into a commercial corridor without impacting the commercial nature of the area because the density of the neighboring commercial land uses is maintained. However, when a relatively long expanse of storefront is occupied by a

non-commercial land use such as social service, it increases the separation and distance between the neighboring commercial land uses. Increased distances that separate commercial land uses results in a reduction of the density and pedestrian connectiveness that is necessary to sustain the economic vitality of the area.