

South 27th Street Strategic Action Plan

A Part of the Southeast
and Southwest Side Area Plans



CITY OF MILWAUKEE
DEPARTMENT OF CITY DEVELOPMENT

MARCH 2017



South 27th Street Strategic Action Plan

A Part of the Southeast and
Southwest Side Area Plans



Prepared by the City of Milwaukee
Department of City Development

March 2017

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special Thanks:

Tara Cavazos
Executive Director, Historic Route 41 BID

Carolyn Esswein & Team
UWM Community Design Solutions

Chuck Erickson
City of Greenfield

Andrew Levy
Wisconsin Department of Transportation

Alderwoman Linda Lubotsky
City of Greenfield

Julio Maldonado

Alycson Michalowski

Patricia Najera

Mayor Michael Neitzke
City of Greenfield

Principal Lolita Patrick
Pulaski High School

Alderwoman Shirley Saryan
City of Greenfield

Representative Joshua Zepnick
Wisconsin's 9th District

City of Milwaukee
Mayor Tom Barrett

Common Council

Ald. Ashanti Hamilton, President
Ald. Cavalier Johnson
Ald. Nik Kovac
Ald. Robert J. Bauman
Ald. James A. Bohl, Jr.
Ald. Milele A. Coggs
Ald. Khalif J. Rainey
Ald. Robert G. Donovan
Ald. Chantia Lewis
Ald. Michael J. Murphy
Ald. Mark A. Borkowski
Ald. José G. Pérez
Ald. Terry L. Witkowski
Ald. T. Anthony Zielinski
Ald. Russell W. Stamper, II

City Plan Commission

Patricia T. Najera, Chair
Larri Jacquart, Vice Chair
Joaquin Altoro
Stephanie Bloomingdale
Preston Cole
Whitney Gould
J. Allen Stokes

Department of City Development

Rocky Marcoux, Commissioner
Martha L. Brown, Deputy Commissioner
Vanessa Koster, Planning Manager
Samuel Leichtling, Long Range Planning Manager
Monica Wauck, Project Manager
Nolan Zaroff, Project Manager
Natanael Martinez, Economic Development Specialist
Emma Siegworth, Graduate Intern

Plan Advisory Partner

South 27th Street Business Association

Common Council Resolution..... vi

Executive Summary.....viii

x

Chapter 1: Introduction..... 1

1.1. Background..... 1

1.2. Challenges & Opportunities..... 2

1.3. Planning Goals..... 3

Chapter 2: Area Overview..... 5

2.1. Summary & History..... 5

2.2. Demographic Profile..... 6

2.3 Market Conditions..... 8

2.4. Existing Conditions..... 9

2.5. Planning Context & Past Plans..... 11

2.6. Public Participation..... 14

Chapter 3: Design Charrette..... 17

Chapter 4: Government-Led Actions..... 23

Chapter 5: Business Improvement District-
Led Actions..... 31

Chapter 6: Business-Led Actions..... 39

Chapter 7: Implementation..... 45

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE RESERVED FOR
FINAL RESOLUTION

PAGE RESERVED FOR
FINAL RESOLUTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In Spring of 2016, the City of Milwaukee Department of City Development embarked on a Strategic Action Plan for South 27th. Key partners included the Historic Route 41 Business Improvement District (the BID) and the City of Greenfield. South 27th Street is a major commercial corridor in the metro Milwaukee area, and the impetus for this plan is a desire to ensure that South 27th Street remains a thriving retail attraction. Recent trends, such as lifestyle centers and online shopping, have changed how people shop. Consumers have more options than ever before for how and where they shop, and a proactive approach is needed to ensure that South 27th Street remains competitive.

South 27th Street has many assets, including a strategic location in the metropolitan area, a low commercial vacancy rate, high traffic counts, and strong governmental and business support. South 27th Street's biggest challenges include making the corridor a continued attractive retail destination and developing the appropriate retail and commercial mix of businesses that will continue to make the corridor competitive in the region. Chapter 1 explains in detail the challenges and opportunities facing the corridor, and Chapter 2 details the existing conditions along the corridor.

This Strategic Action Plan is intended to serve as a road map for addressing challenges and capitalizing on existing strengths. Success will require close coordination among the City of Milwaukee, the City of Greenfield, the BID, and corridor businesses, and fortunately, all partners have shown that they are willing to take on this task.

GOALS

Guided by public input early in the process, the City identified several opportunities for improvement. These recommendations are based on the goals (**in bold below**) that serve as the foundation for this plan:

How best can the Historic Route 41 Business Improvement District, local businesses, and local, county and state government, **improve the quality of the public realm that pedestrians, shoppers, residents and commuters experience** when they visit South 27th Street?

In what ways can the Historic Route 41 Business Improvement District and the Cities of Milwaukee and Greenfield **improve the aesthetic character along South 27th Street** through improved landscaping, business façades, signage, and parking lot treatments?

What can the Historic Route 41 Business Improvement District do to **attract a diverse mix of retail and dining options along South 27th Street** that will satisfy the preferences of residents and area shoppers?

And ultimately, how can the Historic Route 41 Business Improvement District, the Cities of Milwaukee and Greenfield, and other interested stakeholders help to **position South 27th Street to remain a vibrant and competitive retail destination in the future** in light of new competition in other parts of the region and shifts in consumers' shopping preferences?

DESIGN CHARRETTE

Improving the public realm, and especially aesthetics along the corridor, emerged as

a key priority for residents and businesses alike. For this reason, UWM's Community Design Solutions was engaged to conduct a design charrette to identify concept design strategies for six different potential redevelopment sites. Local architecture firms re-imagined these sites to illustrate the potential each has for catalyzing further investment along South 27th Street. Chapter 3 provides a summary of these efforts.

PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Key actions for South 27th Street are based on the planning goals and public input received during the process, and are organized by the entity responsible for implementation. This plan identifies why each recommendation is important and how to make it happen to ensure that there is a clear path towards realizing each action.

- Government (Chapter 4)
- Business Improvement District (Chapter 5)
- Business (Chapter 6)

GOVERNMENT LED ACTIONS

KEY ACTION #1: WORK WITH THE WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO MAKE SOUTH 27TH STREET SAFER AND MORE COMFORTABLE FOR PEDESTRIANS AND BICYCLISTS

KEY ACTION #2: EXPLORE A ZONING OVERLAY FOR THE MILWAUKEE SIDE OF SOUTH 27TH STREET, TO ENSURE CONSISTENT ENFORCEMENT OF ZONING STANDARDS

KEY ACTION #3: NATURALIZE WILSON CREEK AND ESTABLISH IT AS A NEIGHBORHOOD-SERVING AMENITY

KEY ACTION #4: ISSUE A REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR THE FORMER WILDENBERG HOTEL SITE, INCORPORATING THE DESIGN CONCEPTS GENERATED DURING THE SOUTH 27TH STREET DESIGN CHARRETTE

BID LED ACTIONS

KEY ACTION #1: MAXIMIZE INVESTMENT TO IMPROVE AESTHETICS AND PRIORITIZE HIGH-VISIBILITY PROPERTIES FOR SIGNAGE AND OTHER PROPERTY IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

KEY ACTION #2: WORK WITH A COMMERCIAL BROKER TO ATTRACT THE TYPES OF BUSINESSES IDENTIFIED THROUGH THE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

KEY ACTION #3: OFFER NEW PROGRAMMING ALONG THE CORRIDOR, SUCH AS JOB FAIRS, STREET FESTIVALS WITH FOOD TRUCKS, PUBLIC ART

KEY ACTION #4: ENGAGE BUSINESSES ALONG THE CORRIDOR TO TAKE A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN THE BID AND ONGOING INITIATIVES

KEY ACTION #5: AS HIGH PROFILE VACANCIES OCCUR, AGGRESSIVELY ENCOURAGE HIGHER INTENSITY OF USES AND HIGHER QUALITY MATERIALS

BUSINESS LED ACTIONS

KEY ACTION #1: INSTALL BASE PLANTINGS AROUND MONUMENT SIGNS AND ALONG STORE FRONTS TO IMPROVE THE VISUAL APPEAL OF CORRIDOR BUSINESSES AND ALIGN WITH THE CHARACTER OF THE GARDEN DISTRICT

KEY ACTION #2: ACTIVELY MAINTAIN PROPERTIES BY CLEANING UP LITTER AND ADDRESSING MAINTENANCE NEEDS

KEY ACTION #3: TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EXISTING CITY OF MILWAUKEE AND BID-FUNDED GRANT PROGRAMS FOR FUTURE PROPERTY IMPROVEMENTS AND RENOVATION



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

For decades, South 27th Street has been one of metropolitan Milwaukee’s principal shopping areas. From the now-extinct Southgate Mall—metro Milwaukee’s first indoor mall opened in 1951—to local staples like Mazo’s, Zebb’s and Leon’s Custard, to its history as the epicenter of auto sales in the area, South 27th Street has a long history of catering to Milwaukee area residents’ shopping, dining and entertainment needs. The southwest side of Milwaukee was mostly developed in the early 1950s, later than many other areas in Milwaukee. Following

World War II, general prosperity brought automobile ownership to America’s growing middle class. At the same time, improved roadways, especially the inauguration of the Interstate system, fueled a new type of development. Fast food, drive-in theaters, shopping malls, and more dispersed neighborhoods sprang up to accommodate this new mobility. The development of South 27th Street reflects this national history.

This Strategic Action Plan will examine the area of South 27th Street between Oklahoma and College Avenues, provide recommendations to maintain and grow



*Original signage for the former Southgate Mall on 27th Street
(Credit: unknown)*

South 27th Street as a center for retail, dining and entertainment, as it continues its evolving legacy as a local and regional amenity for residents, consumers and visitors.

Throughout the planning process, stakeholders expressed a desire to celebrate and sustain the corridor's history as a shopping destination, while positioning South 27th Street for future success. The challenge for the Historic Route 41 Business Improvement District (the BID) that serves South 27th Street businesses, and its partners including the Cities of Milwaukee and Greenfield, will be to find ways to position South 27th Street for success in spite of strong competition both from online retailers as well as nearby competing commercial corridors. Today, South 27th Street stands at a crossroads: on the one hand, vacancy rates are low, traffic counts are high, and the market appears healthy; on the other hand, there is a concern that the corridor is stagnating in a challenging retail environment.

1.2 Challenges and Opportunities

South 27th Street is facing some of the same challenges as other commercial corridors in urban areas. Retail districts around the country are facing pressures from regional shopping centers and online purveyors. South 27th Street faces competition from newer, suburban commercial corridors, such as the new Drexel Town Square in Oak Creek, Miller Park Way in West Milwaukee, and South 76th Street in Greenfield. Although the built environment is similar to its suburban counterparts, South 27th Street, as the oldest of its cohorts, may not have as modern an appearance as its main competitors. Additionally, an increasing percentage of shopping takes place online. While consumers embrace the convenience,

the unintended result has been to weaken the importance of the bricks-and-mortar store.

South 27th Street's origins as an auto-oriented shopping corridor has also presented challenges as recent retail developments have emphasized walkability. Although it has sidewalks, South 27th Street is not a particularly pedestrian-friendly corridor. With the buildings pushed back from the street, the heavy and relatively fast-moving traffic makes walking unpleasant. Shoppers are likely to drive across South 27th Street rather than wtry to cross on foot. Further complicating the matter is that South 27th Street is Wisconsin state highway, so the roadway design is controlled by the State Department of Transportation (WisDOT), which prioritizes moving traffic through the area. At the same, high traffic counts ensure visibility for businesses, which is often cited as a major advantage.

Yet South 27th Street is a healthy and viable commercial corridor by any number of metrics. Boasting low vacancy rates, South 27th Street is home to many long-time, iconic tenants that bring instant name recognition to the corridor. Proximity to I-94 and I-43/I-894 freeways also means that South 27th Street is very conveniently located within the metro area, and the corridor is surrounded by attractive, stable neighborhoods.

South 27th Street also benefits from strong governmental and business support. The BID is the only inter-jurisdictional BID in the state. As a joint effort between Milwaukee and Greenfield, the boundary between the two communities is largely indistinguishable to the outside observer. Support from elected officials is also strong.

1.3 Planning Goals

The challenges and opportunities presented in section 1.2, as well as public input received through the residential and business surveys and in public meetings throughout the planning process, raise a number of questions that this Strategic Action Plan aims to address by recommending specific actions. These questions are based on the following goals that serve as the foundation of this plan:

How best can the Historic 41 Business Improvement District, local businesses, and local, county and state government, **improve the quality of the public realm that pedestrians, shoppers, residents and commuters experience** when they visit South 27th Street?

In what ways can the Historic 41 Business Improvement District and the Cities of Milwaukee and Greenfield **improve the aesthetic character along South 27th Street** through improved landscaping, business façades, signage, and parking lot treatments?

What can the Historic Route 41 Business Improvement District do to **attract a diverse mix of retail and dining options along South 27th Street** that will satisfy the preferences of residents and area shoppers?

And ultimately, how can the Historic Route 41 Business Improvement District, the Cities of Milwaukee and Greenfield, and other interested stakeholders, help to **position South 27th Street to remain a vibrant and competitive retail destination in the future** in light of new competition in other parts of the region and shifts in consumers’ shopping preferences?

The South 27th Street Strategic Action Plan makes recommendations that address these

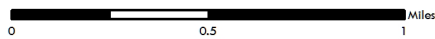
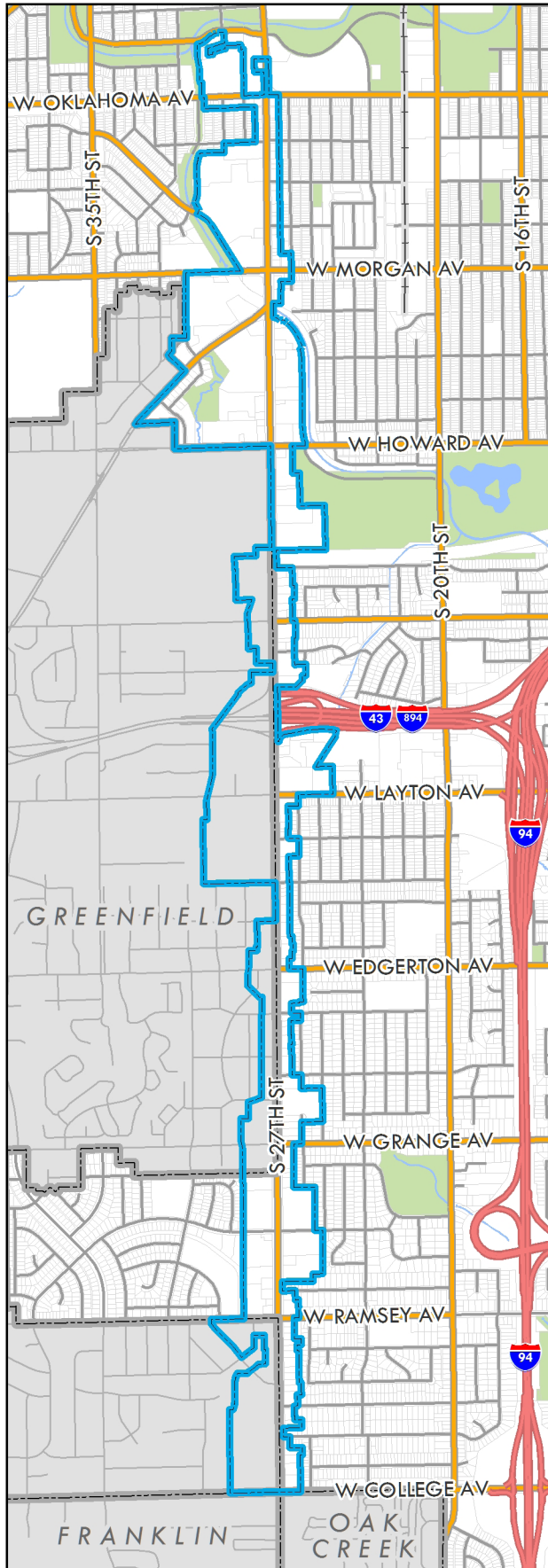
and other critical questions by identifying actions that city government, the business improvement district, businesses and other stakeholders can take to help South 27th Street remain a vital and successful commercial corridor. These recommendations are divided into three areas of focus, based on the type of lead partner most responsible for moving the recommendations forward:

- Government-Led Actions (Chapter 4)
- Business Improvement District-Led Actions (Chapter 5)
- Business-Led Actions (Chapter 6)

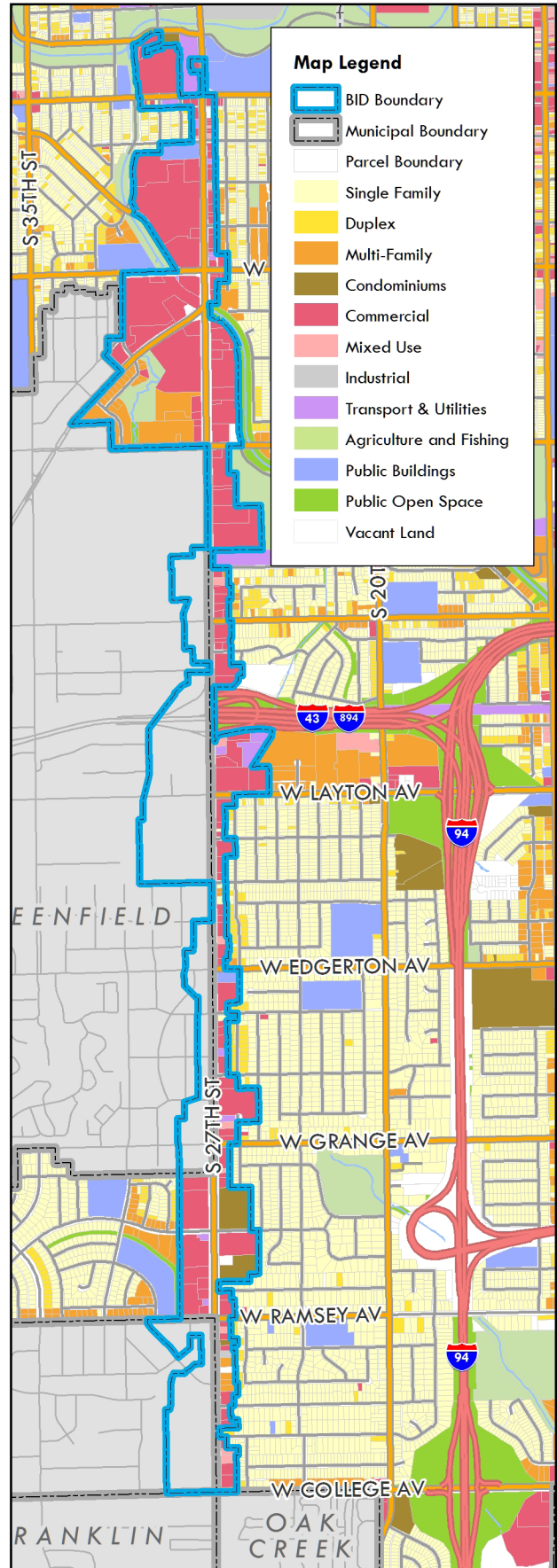
No one organization or entity is responsible to move forward all of the recommendations in this Strategic Action Plan. Rather, it will take coordinated effort between the many stakeholders working in and around South 27th Street for these recommendations to successfully move forward. Some recommendations contained in the following chapters can be implemented quickly, while others may take years or require funds or mechanisms not yet identified. These issues will be addressed in Chapter 7 in more detail.

This South 27th Street Strategic Action Plan offers a road map that will help the Historic 41 Business Improvement District, the Cities of Milwaukee and Greenfield, and the various organizations, businesses, residents and other stakeholders involved, to build upon South 27th Street’s unique strengths as a vibrant shopping and dining destination on Milwaukee’s South Side, and position it in a way that allows it to thrive in the future.

AREA OVERVIEW



CURRENT LAND USE



CHAPTER 2

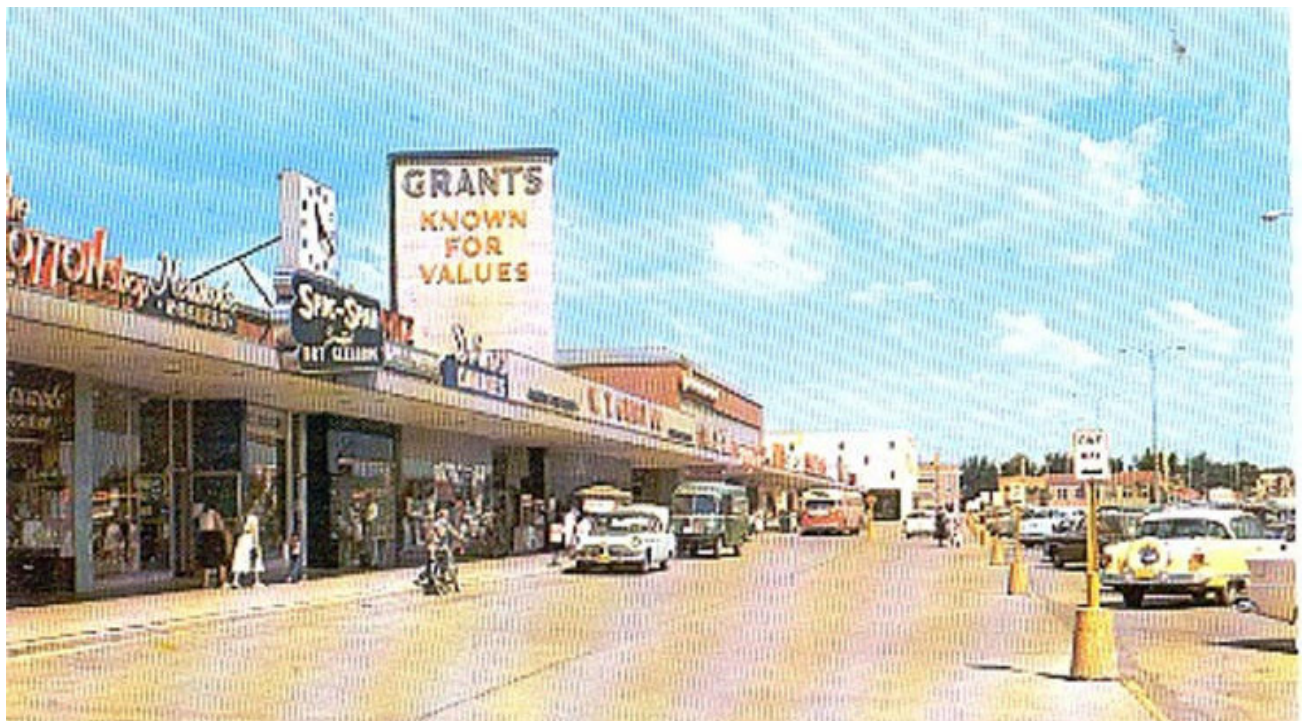
AREA OVERVIEW

2.1 Summary and History

South 27th Street has a long history as a retail destination. According to Milwaukee historian John Gurda, Southgate Mall was Milwaukee's first enclosed shopping center. Built in 1951, the mall had over 60,000 attendees at its opening. According to Gurda, the site was specifically chosen for its strategic location between the older, densely populated south side Milwaukee neighborhoods and the growing suburban areas south and west of the city.¹ Other shopping centers soon followed to cater to other areas of the metropolitan region:

Bayshore Mall opened in 1954, Capitol Court opened in 1956, and Westgate (now Mayfair Mall) opened in 1958. Southridge Mall in Greendale opened in 1970 and became a direct competitor to Southgate. While Southgate was ultimately replaced by a Super Walmart and big box retail, South 27th Street remains a major shopping destination.

South 27th Street has long been a regional destination for automobile sales, with a concentration of auto dealerships as well as the related services that sprung up to support auto-oriented customers.



*Photo of Southgate Mall, circa 1951
(Credit: Retrocom)*

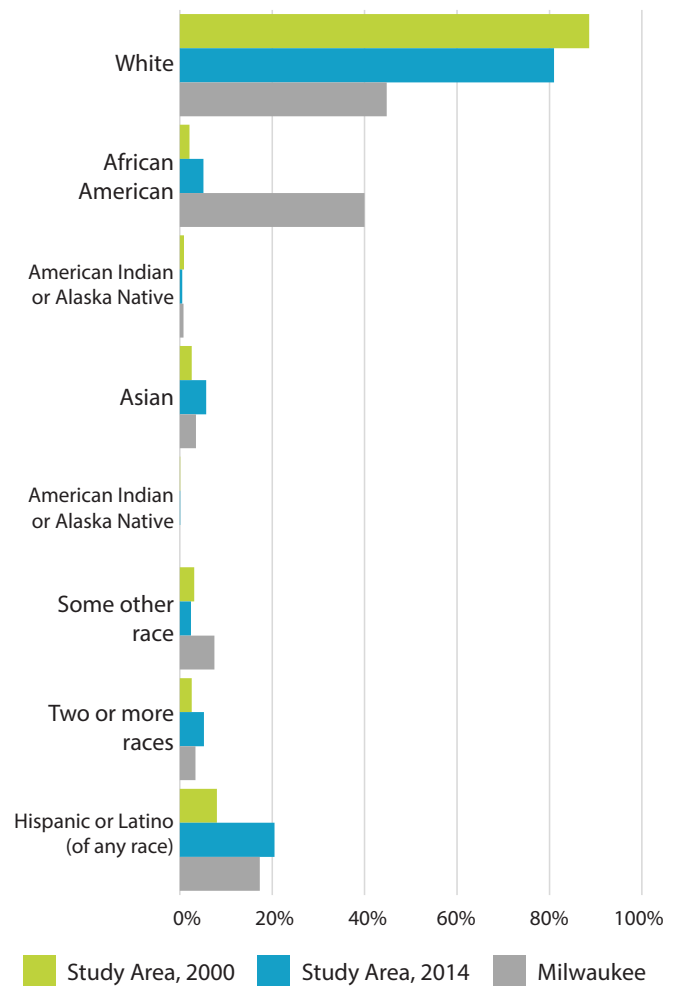
2.2 Demographic Profile

Race and Ethnicity. Based on estimates from the American Community Survey, demographics may be one of the South 27th Street area's greatest assets. Between 2000 and 2014, the population in ZIP code 53221 had grown more than 11%, from 35,422 in 2000, to 39,338 in 2014.² For businesses along the corridor, a growing population means a larger market of consumers to provide products and services. The area is also getting younger and more diverse: median age fell from 39.7 in 2000 to 36.8 in 2014, and African American, Asian and Latino populations grew significantly over the same period. Figure 2.1 shows the change in racial and ethnic composition in the South 27th Street study area between 2000 and 2014.³

Education. Educational attainment in the neighborhoods surrounding South 27th Street is on par with city values. Of those residents aged 25 years and over, 36.4% have a high school diploma or equivalent, and 51.5% have some college experience, including 21.8% with bachelor's degrees or higher. For the city as a whole, the values stand at 29.6% with a high school diploma or equivalent, and 52.6% with some college experience. Figure 2.2 shows trends in educational attainment in the South 27th Street study area from 2000 to 2014.⁴

Educational attainment is a strong proxy for income potential and in turn spending power, and in fact, median household income and per capita income for the surrounding neighborhoods are both higher than city values. Median household income in the area stands at \$47,109, compared to \$35,958 for the City of Milwaukee. Per capita income in the area stands at \$23,314, more than \$3,000 higher than the city value.⁵ This means that households around South 27th Street have greater disposable income than

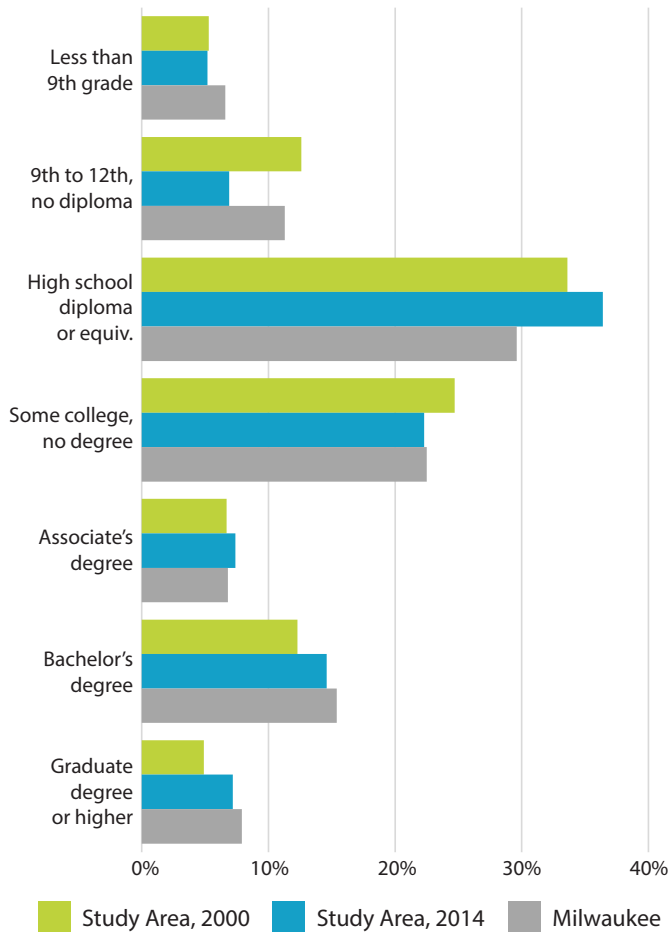
Figure 2.1: Race and Ethnicity in the Study Area, 2000 to 2014, and Citywide³



other neighborhoods, and are more able to support existing and future retail along the corridor.

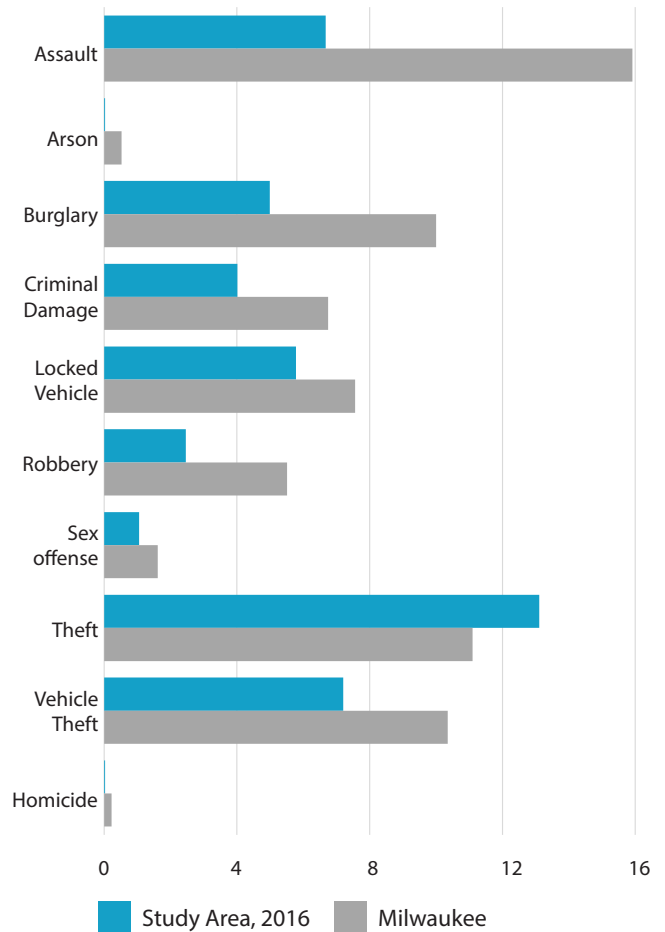
Employment. Along with spending power, employment has also increased between 2000 and 2014, making households in the area more able to patronize businesses along South 27th Street. Between 2000 and 2014, median household income increased by more than \$7,000 to \$47,109, adjusted for inflation. Unemployment rates in the area are also below the citywide value, although they remain slightly elevated when compared to the regional and state values.⁶

Figure 2.2: Educational Attainment in the Study Area, 2000 to 2014, and Citywide⁴



Housing. The neighborhoods around South 27th Street have a strong housing stock. The area is characterized predominantly by single-family homes interspersed with duplexes, and a handful of multi-family developments exist along larger thoroughfares. Home ownership rates are very high, with 89.1% of homes being owner occupied, much higher than the city average of 67.8%.⁷ The average assessed home value for the area is higher than the Milwaukee city average as well: \$131,292 for the neighborhoods surrounding South 27th Street, compared to \$105,277 for the city as a whole.⁸ The area also has significantly lower levels of tax delinquency and tax and bank foreclosures. Finally, the average tenure of residents—the length of time residents stay in

Figure 2.3: Selected Crime Statistics for the Study Area, 2016¹⁰



a home—is higher than the city average: for the neighborhoods surrounding South 27th Street is 12.5 years, whereas citywide the average is 11.9.⁹

Crime. Contrary to current perceptions, the crime rate in and around South 27th Street fall well below city averages, at 45.34 per 1,000 residents, compared to 69.53 per 1,000 residents for the city as a whole. In particular, violent crimes fall significantly below city averages; many types of property crime are relatively low as well. In fact, the only type of crime that was incrementally higher in the study area was theft, which may simply reflect that fact that South 27th Street is a dense retail corridor. Figure 2.3 shows rates of crime for different offenses for 2016.¹⁰

2.3 Market Conditions

South 27th Street has historically functioned as a primary shopping district for the south side of Milwaukee and adjacent suburbs, and it still has significant market share. The corridor benefits from an active BID and a low commercial vacancy rate of around 7%.¹¹ However, as consumers' shopping habits change, shifting towards lifestyle centers and online retail, South 27th Street must find ways to reinvent itself to continue to capture a portion of this retail demand.

Currently, nearly 300 local and national businesses call South 27th Street home, generating more than \$130 million in retail sales in 2013 (the latest year for which data is available).¹² A number of large employers also exist in the area, including Aurora-St. Luke's Medical Center, Northwestern Mutual (in Franklin), and Alverno College, the retail demand of which South 27th Street is strategically positioned to capture.

However, according to Bureau of Economic Analysis figures, and additional \$484 million in local demand is unmet by businesses along the corridor and instead "leaks" to other retail markets around the Milwaukee area.¹³ According to survey respondents, much of this unmet demand goes to Drexel Town Square in Oak Creek, Southridge Mall in Greenfield, and retailers along Miller Park Way in West Milwaukee. Finding ways to broaden and diversify retail offerings along South 27th Street will help the corridor to capture more of this local demand.

Both the residential and local business surveys that DCD conducted indicate that several types of retail could benefit the corridor, including casual dining and sit-down restaurants, bakery, specialty grocery, coffee shops and women's apparel and entertainment options. In fact, data suggests

that nearly \$88 million in unmet demand may exist in these retail categories, underscoring the importance of exploring these options when identifying new establishments along the corridor.¹⁴

In its own strategic planning efforts, the BID identifies attracting high-profile brands as one of its strategic tasks. As new retail developments such as Drexel Town Square and 84South come online, the BID and its members will continue to need to identify ways to diversify and reinvent South 27th Street and remain competitive.

Figure 2.4: Current Corridor Composition

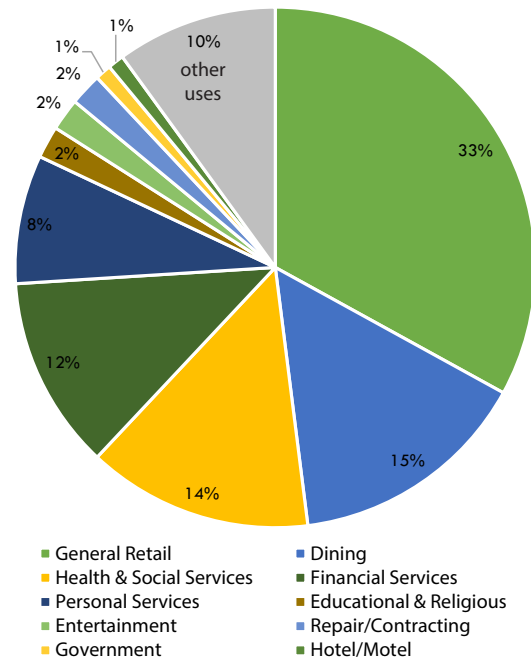


Figure 2.5: Retail Categories Identified as Missing by Survey Respondents



2.4 Existing Conditions

Land Use. Commercial development is almost exclusively located along South 27th Street and on busy arterial streets. Big box and smaller retail stores in strip malls dominate the corridor. Built in the heyday of the automobile, parking is prominently placed in the front of businesses with deep building setbacks. There is a mix of national and regional retailers, such as Target, Toys 'R' Us, Kohl's, Pick N Save, and Hobo. Local eateries, such as Leon's Custard and Mazo's Hamburgers have also enjoyed long tenure and popularity on the corridor. South 27th Street has also become a popular destination for a variety of restaurants and groceries.

Similar to the commercial areas, most of the neighborhoods adjacent to South 27th were developed in the early 1950s. Residential areas are generally separate from commercial activity. The neighborhoods are characterized by well-maintained, single-family Cape Cods and ranch homes. There is

some multi-family housing, mostly located behind the commercial properties on the streets parallel to South 27th Street that tends to be in the form of larger complexes.

Despite the prevalence of commercial land use, the neighborhoods around the 27th Street corridor have access to several parks that residents' value and use. Wilson Park, a Milwaukee County park, is the largest park in the area with a wide range of amenities. Located along Howard Avenue, Wilson Park has an indoor ice arena, pavilion, swimming pool, softball diamond, tennis courts, and sand volleyball. A senior center is also located within the park. Other smaller parks serve the neighborhoods. Although not a designated park space, Wilson Creek is an important natural resource. A tributary of the Kinnickinnic River, it flows in a concrete channel behind the commercial centers, crossing South 27th Street underneath the Point Loomis Shopping Center, near Loomis Road south of Morgan Avenue.



*Signage along South 27th Street showcases the Historic Route 41 BID
(Credit: City of Milwaukee Planning Division)*



*Wilson Creek acts as a dividing line between commercial and retail uses on South 27th Street and the adjacent neighborhoods to the east.
(Credit: City of Milwaukee Planning Division)*

Transportation. In addition to being a major commercial corridor for Milwaukee and Greenfield, South 27th Street is Wisconsin Highway 241, part of the state highway system, under the jurisdiction of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), and as such, serves an important role in the state transportation network. WisDOT recently completed reconstruction of the corridor between Oklahoma and College Avenues, and is currently re-constructing South 27th Street south of the study area in Oak Creek and Franklin. At the time of reconstruction, considerable streetscaping improvements were made with input from neighborhood residents and stakeholders, such as street signage, plantings in the median and grass strip between the sidewalk and roadway, and decorative crosswalks. South 27th Street, now Wisconsin Route 241, was originally US Highway 41. US 41 was the main route between Chicago and Green Bay before the interstate system was built.

The Historic Route 41 BID gets its name from this route. When I-94 was completed in 1966 and 1967 in Kenosha, Racine, and Milwaukee Counties, it replaced South 27th Street as the main link, but South 27th Street remains a main arterial for many shoppers, residents and commuters to this day.

Traffic volumes range along the corridor from about 29,000 to 38,000 vehicles per day, with highest volumes near Layton Avenue. It should be noted that recent construction on I-894, particularly at the interchange of I-894 and South 27th Street, has resulted in fluctuations in traffic volumes over the past decade that make it difficult to establish a baseline. Current traffic volumes on South 27th Street are comparable to other major commercial corridors in the metro area, such as Miller Park Way, Highway 100, and Bluemound Road.

2.5 Plan Context and Past Plans

South 27th Street has been the subject of numerous planning efforts, illustrating its importance to the communities it serves. Many of the plans include recommendations that mutually reinforce the importance of maintaining the vitality of South 27th Street. Below are a summary of past planning efforts.

City of Milwaukee

The City of Milwaukee is divided into thirteen geographic areas under the umbrella of the City's Comprehensive Plan. Each area has its own plan document. South 27th Street is covered by two planning documents, the Southeast Side Area Plan and the Southwest Side Area Plan. The Southeast Side Area Plan addresses South 27th Street from the Union Pacific Railroad, north of Oklahoma Avenue, to Howard Avenue. The remainder of the corridor, Howard to College Avenue, is addressed in the Southwest Side Area Plan. The Southeast Side and Southwest Side Plans remain in force for the corridor and the larger plan areas. However, where the South 27th Street Strategic Action Plan identifies areas of the larger Area Plans that can be improved, updated, or refined, the Action Plan will make recommendations regarding those specific changes.

Southwest Side Area Plan (2010)

The Southwest Side Area Plan recognizes South 27th Street as the main shopping area on Milwaukee's south side and contains both corridor-wide and site-specific re-development recommendations.

The plan identifies South 27th Street corridor enhancements from Oklahoma Avenue to Morgan Avenue as a potential catalytic project. Catalytic projects are high-profile projects that have the potential to

spur transformative development. The plan identifies several issues facing the corridor, including excessive driveways, limited lot depth, excessively large parking lots, and limited pedestrian crosswalks. As envisioned by the Plan, corridor enhancements would include: improving the appearance of existing development, adding green infrastructure in the public right-of-way, naturalizing Wilson Creek, and removing unnecessary driveways. Several of the recommendations related directly to roadway design were implemented when WisDOT reconstructed the corridor. For example, bioswales, decorative sidewalks, and corridor branding signage were installed at this time.

The property of the former Wildenberg Hotel is also considered catalytic, with several potential redevelopment options provided in the plan. Both the former Wildenberg site and Wilson Creek, which runs directly behind the site, were included in the design charrette.

Southeast Side Area Plan (2008)

Completed in 2008, the Southeast Side Area Plan examines several key commercial corridors, including South 27th Street. In the eight years since the plan was approved, some of the recommendations have already been implemented. For example, this area plan recommends that the City work with WisDOT on streetscaping initiatives and that a BID be established to help retain quality retail. Both of these recommendations have already been completed.

Regarding the physical form of the corridor, the plan recommends that new buildings be built closer to the street with parking at the side or rear. It also recommends parking lots be connected wherever possible and that paving private property up to the public sidewalk be prohibited. While these

physical recommendations are important, since South 27th Street is already built out, implementation of these recommendations is incremental.

Garden District Neighborhood District

While not a planning effort *per se*, it is worth mentioning that the 13th Aldermanic district of Milwaukee is the Garden District. Spearheaded by Alderman Terry Witkowski in 2008, the goal is to beautify the area with quality landscaping and perennial flowers. Every year, awards are given to the best residential gardens in the area.

City of Greenfield

City of Greenfield Comprehensive Plan (2008)

The City of Greenfield’s Comprehensive Plan provides several recommendations for South 27th Street. None of these

recommendations are incompatible with the City of Milwaukee’s recommendations and many reinforce recommendations, including improving the streetscaping and encouraging redevelopment.

South 27th Street Corridor Study (2009)

The purpose of Greenfield’s South 27th Street Corridor Study was to identify potential redevelopment opportunities along the corridor. The plan mostly focuses on key intersections: Grange, Edgerton, Howard, Cold Spring, and Layton Avenues. All of these are within the planning area for this Strategic Action Plan. Based on recommendations in the Corridor Study , a tax incremental financing district (TID) was established between Grange and Howard Avenues. According to Greenfield staff, the TID is currently in decrement because current real estate values are below values when the district was established.



Much of South 27th Street falls within Aldermanic District 13, also known as the Garden District. (Credit: Bay View Compass)

Cities of Oak Creek and Franklin

Oak Creek Corridor Plan (2004)

Oak Creek and Franklin, the two suburbs south of the study area, have experienced considerable development pressures. In contrast to Greenfield and Milwaukee, these two communities have agricultural land available for new development. The Oak Creek Corridor Plan is consistent with planning efforts in Milwaukee and Greenfield. From College Avenue to Rawson Avenue, immediately south of the study area, the plan recommends retail uses. Land use then transitions away from retail to mixed use, office, and conservation.

Historic Route 41 Business Improvement District

The Historic Route 41 Business Improvement District as it is formally known from its former status as US 41 is actually made up of three different Business Improvement Districts (BIDs): BID #43 in Milwaukee and BIDs #1 and #2 in Greenfield. Although there are three BIDs, they function as a single entity under one management contract and with one board and one set of bylaws.

It is hard to overstate the value a BID can bring to a commercial corridor. There is great flexibility in the tasks that BIDs can undertake, but in general, they raise additional resources for developing a common image and identity for a business corridor. The levy from the Historic 41 BID generated about \$211,000 in 2016 to fund marketing efforts, corridor-wide events, website design, and building façade grants.

At the time this document was prepared, the BID was undertaking a strategic planning effort to assess and prioritize programs and activities. Discussions have included

whether to place a greater focus on beautification efforts along the corridor or marketing. BID leadership and Department of City Development (DCD) Planning Staff have worked closely throughout the development of this Strategic Action Plan so that recommendations can be utilized to help the BID establish its priorities for the coming years.



*The Historic Route 41 Business Improvement District serves businesses along South 27th Street.
(Credit: City of Milwaukee Planning Division)*

2.6 Public Participation

Public input was critical in developing this Strategic Action Plan and shaping the recommendations. In addition to the two public meetings, there were numerous one-on-one meetings with residents and business owners along the corridor; a design charrette; focus groups with residents, businesses, and developers; and residential and business surveys. Draft recommendations were presented at the second public meeting and revised based on comments received.

First Public Meeting & Launch

Nearly four dozen business owners and residents attended a public kickoff meeting on April 20, 2016, to provide their assessment of the corridor and offer their vision for the future. The meeting was publicized via the City of Milwaukee's e-notify lists, fliers sent to businesses along the corridor, the BIDs email list, local news, neighborhood associations, and word of mouth. The meeting started with a brief presentation about the goals of the study and the agenda, followed by an interactive survey to gauge interest in a variety of issues. The remainder of the meeting was spent exploring these issues in greater depth in small groups.

Residential & Business Surveys

As mentioned in Section 2.3, the City of Milwaukee launched two surveys—one for residents and one for business owners—at the April 20th Launch Meeting to help identify some of the key issues facing the corridor. The residential survey received over 500 responses; the business survey had a more limited response. Both surveys were instrumental in identifying shopping habits and retail demand on the corridor.

Corridor Walk

On July 15, 2016, DCD staff led a walking tour of South 27th Street with elected officials, Community Liaison Officers from the Milwaukee Police Department, staff from the Department of Neighborhood Services and the City's Commercial Corridors Team, WisDOT, resident and BID representatives. The tour gave key stakeholders a chance to see firsthand the issues and opportunities along the corridor.

Focus Groups

In preparation for the South 27th Street Design Charrette, held on September 8, 2016, three focus groups were convened to gain insights into and generate feedback on the six opportunity sites selected for inclusion in the charrette.

Three focus groups were convened, one of each subset of stakeholders who would be affected by any development along the corridor or who are responsible for moving development forward: residents; businesses and BID members; and brokers, developers and funders. Although these meetings focused primarily on the six opportunity sites identified for the design charrette, discussions were wide-ranging and provided valuable insight for both the charrette itself and this Strategic Action Plan.

Second Public Meeting

On December 14, 2016, staff presented draft recommendations to local stakeholders to ensure that they were responsive to area and stakeholder goals and needs. Attendees echoed many of the sentiments from the first public meeting and were supportive of the recommendations presented, particularly those reinforcing the importance of aesthetics along the corridor.



Stakeholders provided valuable feedback at the first public meeting for South 27th Street, held at Pulaski High School. (Credit: City of Milwaukee Planning Division)



Business owners, public officials and other stakeholders discuss draft recommendations at the second public meeting. (Credit: City of Milwaukee Planning Division)



Department of City Development Commissioner Rocky Marcoux talks with stakeholders during a corridor walk of South 27th Street. (Credit: City of Milwaukee Planning Division)



CHAPTER 3

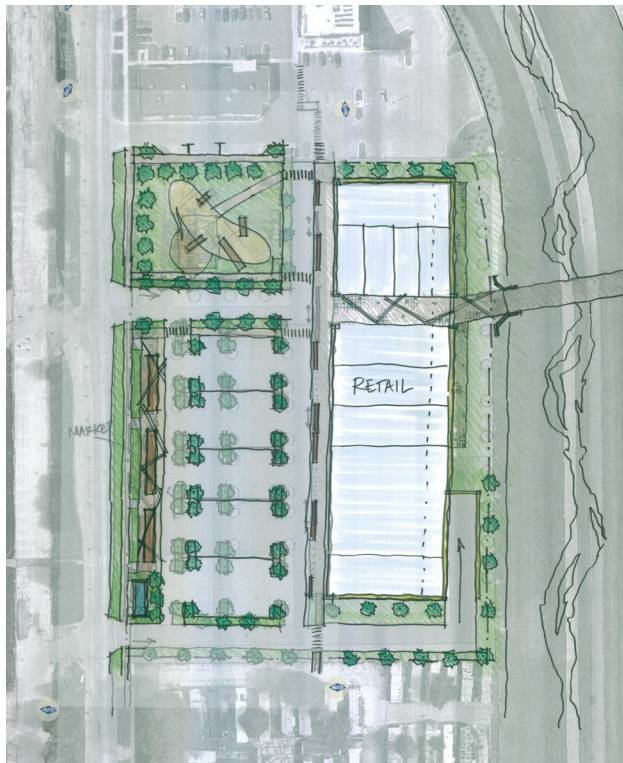
DESIGN CHARRETTE

On September 8, 2016, Community Design Solutions, an affiliate of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Architecture and Urban Planning, led an all-day design charrette for the South 27th Street corridor. Based on conversations with City of Milwaukee and City of Greenfield staff and the three focus groups that preceded the charrette, six architecture firms explored different development concepts at six sites along South 27th Street. The sites were selected because they occupy prominent locations along the corridor, are likely to serve as examples for other similar types of developments, and their redevelopment is

likely to have a particularly positive effect on the character of the corridor. The overall theme focused on how to transform a suburban, auto-oriented corridor into a series of walkable destinations to serve both the neighborhood and the region. Ultimately, market considerations will determine whether these concepts are developed.

SITE 1: 3700-3736 South 27th Street, Milwaukee

This strip mall was recently acquired by a Chicago-area firm that has expressed interest in improving the property. Tenants



Engberg Anderson's concept of a refreshed, mixed-use South Towne Center (Credit: UWM Community Design Solutions, Engberg Anderson)

currently include a Save-A-Lot grocery store, New China Buffet, a nail salon, and a tanning salon. While the building has been well maintained and tenants have been there long-term, there is an opportunity to refresh the building and the site. Enberg Anderson developed two concepts, one with only commercial and one that added a residential component. The key feature of the building improvement is an adjustable-panel façade that can be customized as tenants change. Other site improvements included a covered walkway for pedestrians, landscaped parking islands, a fountain plaza where a fast food Chinese restaurant currently stands, and a pedestrian connection across Wilson Creek to the adjacent neighborhood. A second scenario added town homes to the side and back of the strip mall, facing Wilson Creek.

SITE 2:
3774 South 27th Street, Milwaukee

The historic Wildenberg hotel is currently owned by the City of Milwaukee through foreclosure. The City plans to issue an RFP to solicit development proposals for the site. The hotel is a locally-designated historic site, and Zimmerman Architectural Studios was tasked with preserving the building when proposing a redevelopment plan for the site. Their design concept created a pedestrian-friendly, multi-use site with the historic building adaptively re-used as a brew pub or restaurant. Additional retail flanking the hotel building is also envisioned, as well as town homes fronting Wilson Creek. Similar to Site 1, a pedestrian path across Wilson Creek is envisioned.



*Zimmerman Architectural Studios adds ample housing, connections to the adjacent neighborhood, and showcases the former Wildenberg Hotel as a focal point of the site.
(Credit: UWM Community Design Solutions and Zimmerman Architectural Studios)*



Eppstein Uhen's design engages a critical intersection along South 27th Street, providing new retail and office space while retaining the existing McDonald's (Credit: UWM Community Design Solutions and Eppstein Uhen Architects)

SITE 3:
**Northwest Corner of West Cold Spring Road
 and South 27th Street, Greenfield**

Eppstein Uhen created a development concept that maintained many of the existing businesses, but repositioned and redeveloped the buildings. Their process included close coordination with business owners. The current McDonald's would be moved to the north and redesigned. In addition to more space that could be used for a fast, casual restaurant, the development could also include an automotive training center to support the corridor's automotive retail presence. Outdoor dining would be included along Cold Spring Road. The development would also feature native plantings and bioswales.

SITE 4:
4560-4624 South 27th Street, Milwaukee

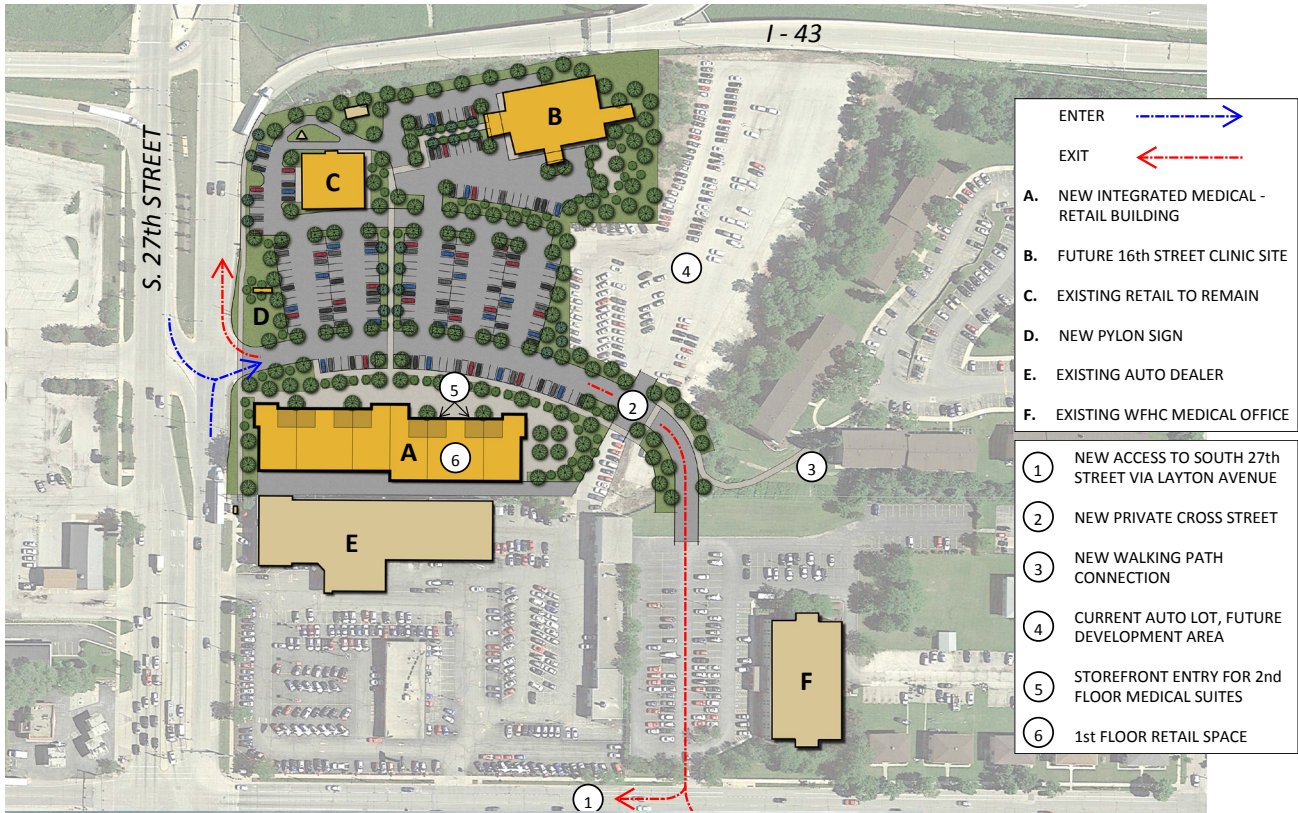
This site has a challenging location in the southeast quadrant of the I-894 interchange. Currently, the site includes a vacant Aurora health clinic, a vacant restaurant, and a motel. Uhlein Wilson Architects re-envisioned the site as a mixed-used medical and retail center. The team identified an opportunity to collaborate with the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center, which is currently looking to open a satellite clinic at this site. In addition to a two-story office and retail building, there would be landscaped walking paths for visitors to enjoy.

Site 5:
**Northwest Corner of West Layton Avenue
 and South 27th Street, Greenfield**

Currently the site of an assortment of different uses: a gas station, a bank, single-family homes, and small retail and office spaces. Kubala Washatko re-imagined the location as a neighborhood center, with a coffee shop, a bank, apartments, retail, and a conference center. A key feature of the site would be an internal parking court that could be converted into a space for a farmer's market or other gathering.

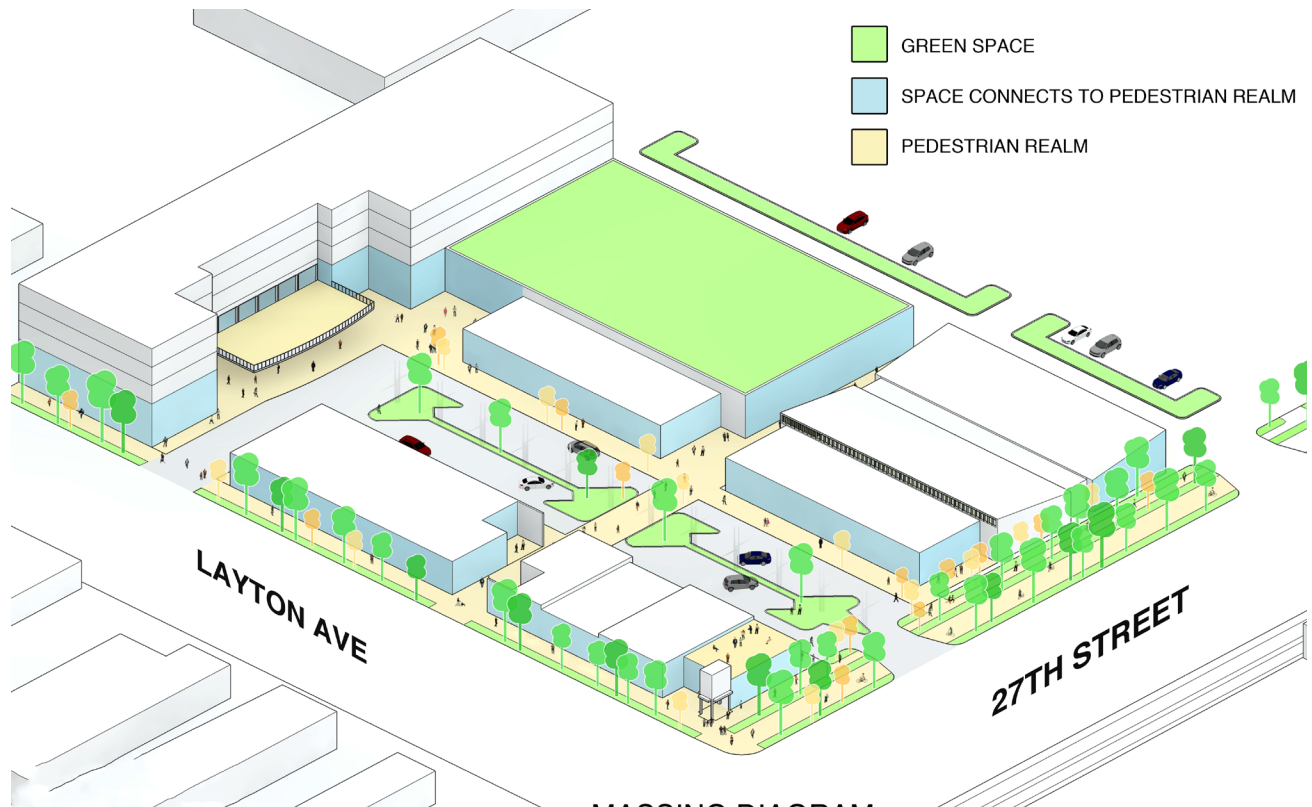
Site 6:
Wilson Creek, Milwaukee

The long-term goal of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Sewerage District (MMSD) and the City of Milwaukee is to naturalize Wilson Creek both to improve storm water management in the area and to turn it into a natural resource and neighborhood-serving amenity. GRAEF provided two different options, one more passive and one more of an active, recreational amenity.



Uihlein Wilson's concept for the former Chancery, Suburban Motel and former Aurora clinic builds on existing plans and transforms the site into a destination medical office and retail development.

(Credit: UWM Community Design Solutions and Uihlein Wilson Architects)



Kubala Washatko addresses another key intersection along South 27th Street with a holistic, pedestrian-focused design. (Credit: UWM Community Design Solutions and Kubala Washatko Architects)



GRAEF, in coordination with MMSD, re-envisioned Wilson Creek as a true neighborhood-serving recreation opportunity. (Credit: UWM Community Design Solutions and GRAEF)



CHAPTER 4

GOVERNMENT-LED

ACTIONS

Local, county and state government have a significant role to play in advancing the goals of South 27th Street, particularly in the area of public infrastructure. As a predominantly auto-oriented corridor, the South 27th Street experience is dominated by the roadway itself, and efforts to improve the condition and aesthetics of the roadway and its right-of-way will go a long way towards improving

the overall experience of all who frequent South 27th Street and its businesses.

This chapter outlines actions that the Cities of Milwaukee and Greenfield can undertake directly or in coordination with partners at the county and state levels, to improve on the character of South 27th Street and position it for future success.

KEY ACTIONS

KEY ACTION #1

WORK WITH THE WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO MAKE SOUTH 27TH STREET SAFER AND MORE COMFORTABLE FOR PEDESTRIANS AND BICYCLISTS

WHAT IS IT?

The Cities of Milwaukee and Greenfield should work together and with other governmental partners to address the conditions of pedestrian, bicycle and public bus amenities along South 27th Street, with the goal of improving the overall experience for these users, including but not limited to: making it safer and more comfortable to cross the street, buffering sidewalks from the main roadway with landscaping, reducing conflict points at driveways and crosswalks, installing street furniture and shelters at bus stops, and improving the visual interest of the corridor to make South 27th Street a place people might want to walk and spend more time.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

While South 27th Street is viewed largely as an auto-oriented corridor, a significant number of visitors experience the corridor on foot. Additionally, if stakeholders wish to transform the character of the corridor, improving conditions for pedestrians and cyclists and making the corridor more welcoming to these types of users will help to attract a more diverse customer-base. Indeed, improvements aimed at pedestrians and cyclists will also improve the overall experience of all individuals visiting and traveling South 27th Street.

(continued on next page...)

KEY ACTION #1 (CONTINUED)

WORK WITH THE WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO MAKE SOUTH 27TH STREET SAFER AND MORE COMFORTABLE FOR PEDESTRIANS AND CYCLISTS

HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

DCD should work with WisDOT and the Departments of Public Works (DPW) of both Milwaukee and Greenfield to explore the possibility of re-timing crosswalks to allow pedestrians more time to safely cross South 27th Street; collaborate with the BID to provide better landscaping in the right-of-way to improve the visual appeal of the corridor and provide a buffer between pedestrians and the roadway; work with WisDOT and business owners to reduce the number of driveways where possible and encourage cross-access easements to improve connectivity between retail sites and reduce conflict points between motorists and pedestrians; and work with Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) to explore improvements to bus stops, including additional benches and bus shelters and other physical improvements that would make waiting for the bus more comfortable. Finally, the Cities of Milwaukee and Greenfield should work with the BID to reinstall the plaques along the corridor that explain the rain gardens in the medians, to add interest and education for visitors walking along South 27th Street.



City government should work with businesses to improve conditions along pedestrian ways. (Credit: DCD / Planning)



Improving traffic crossings can make the corridor friendlier for pedestrians and cyclists. (Credit: DCD / Planning)

KEY ACTION #2

EXPLORE A ZONING OVERLAY FOR THE MILWAUKEE SIDE OF SOUTH 27TH STREET, TO ENSURE CONSISTENT ENFORCEMENT OF ZONING STANDARDS

WHAT IS IT?

Throughout the planning effort, stakeholders emphasized the importance that both sides of the corridor have a cohesive feel and that design quality, signage and landscaping are consistent across municipalities. Currently, however, landscaping, signage and building materials along some property areas along South 27th Street do not feel cohesive, particularly between the City of Milwaukee and City of Greenfield.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Striving for more uniform zoning standards that improve the visual identity of the corridor will also help attract new retail and patrons. Different standards and conditions on either side of the street or across municipal boundaries may make the corridor feel disorganized, or suggest that not all partners have the same vision for the corridor's retail environment.

HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

Although a comparison of the zoning codes for the Cities of Milwaukee and Greenfield show few substantive differences, some differences may exist in enforcement, and the City of Greenfield may have more tools at its disposal for providing greater consistency along its side of South 27th Street.

The City of Milwaukee Planning Division will explore options for providing greater control over design, signage and landscaping along South 27th Street through a possible zoning overlay district or zoning code text revisions to the Local Business (LB1) zoning district, to ensure more consistent enforcement of standards and improve visual cohesion across both municipalities.

KEY ACTION #3

NATURALIZE WILSON CREEK AND ESTABLISH IT AS A NEIGHBORHOOD-SERVING AMENITY

WHAT IS IT?

Wilson Creek is a concrete, channelized tributary of the Kinnickinnic River that winds through the northern half of South 27th Street focus area and forms a physical barrier between retail on South 27th Street and the residential neighborhoods to the east. Given that it connects Wilson Park to Jackson Park, and in light of Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District's (MMSD) ongoing efforts to naturalize portions of the Kinnickinnic River and its tributaries, a real opportunity exists to transform Wilson Creek into a natural amenity that could serve neighboring residents and reconnect adjacent neighborhoods to South 27th Street retail to the west.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

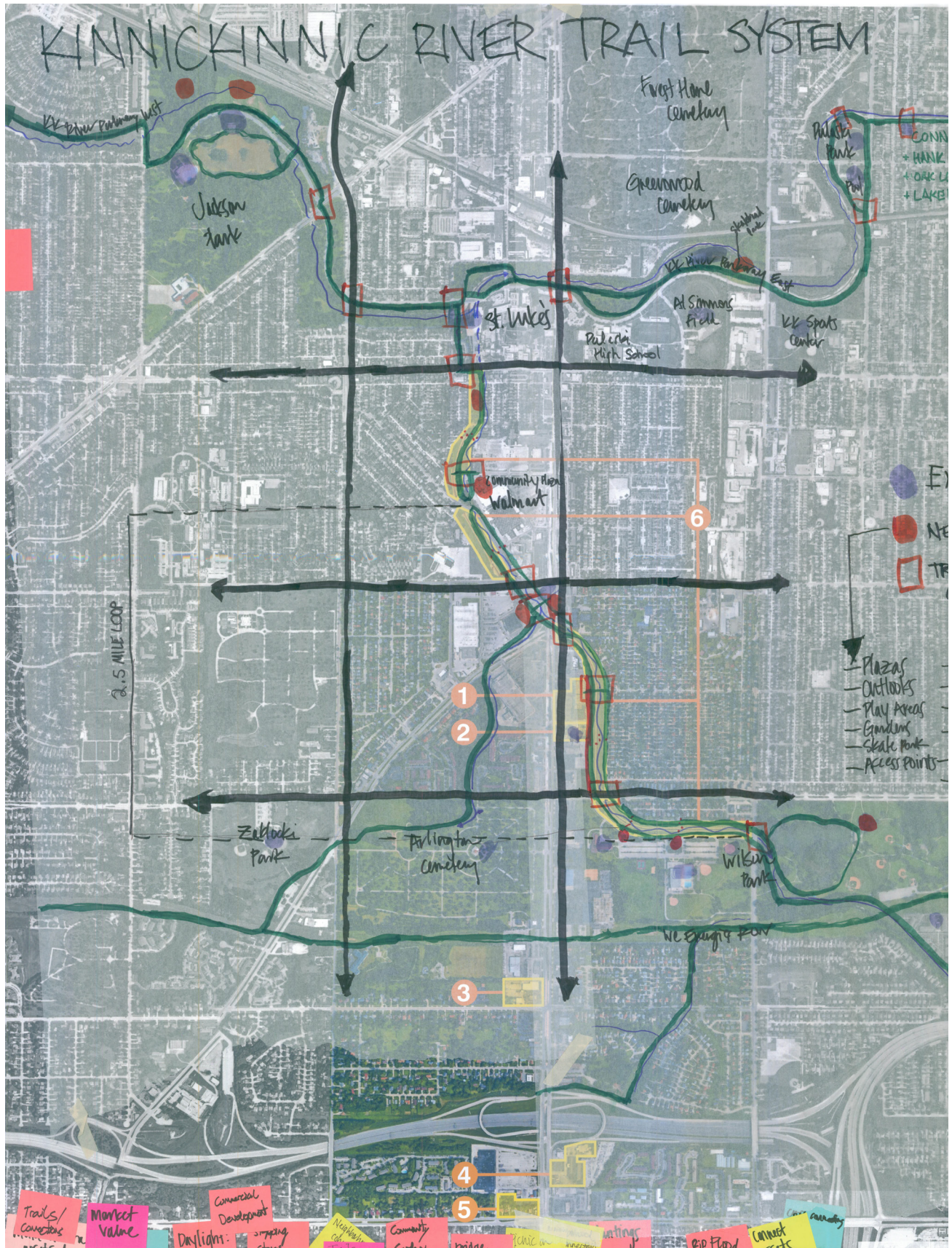
Wilson Creek has a very real opportunity to become a neighborhood-serving amenity, but currently acts as a physical barrier between retail on South 27th Street and potential customers to the east. The current concrete channel is expensive to maintain, is inefficient in effectively dealing with large rain events, and may even pose a safety risk.

HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

For several years, MMSD has worked with GRAEF, a local planning and engineering firm, to develop strategies and designs to naturalize the Kinnickinnic River and its tributaries, including Wilson Creek, in order to better manage storm water and reduce the incidence of flooding events. Part of their longer term plans involve naturalizing Wilson Creek within the South 27th Street corridor, and this time-line provides a prime opportunity for the City of Milwaukee to coordinate with MMSD and GRAEF in order to develop Wilson Creek into a true neighborhood-serving natural amenity. Along with MMSD's plans to remove the concrete channel, the following elements could be included to provide a natural recreation opportunity for neighborhood residents and other visitors to South 27th Street:

- Bike and pedestrian trails;
- Landscaping and native plantings;
- Bridges at key points to reconnect the neighborhood fabric;
- Nature-related educational opportunities and interpretive sites.

Ultimately, these amenities could run the length of Wilson Creek from Wilson Park to Jackson Park in a way that connects the two parks and provides a robust recreational connection for south side neighborhoods.



Wilson Creek naturalization, as part of MMSD's longer-term priorities, offers a significant opportunity to transform the channelized creek into a true connective, neighborhood-serving amenity. (Credit: UWM Community Design Solutions and GRAEF)

KEY ACTION #4

ISSUE A REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR THE FORMER WILDENBERG HOTEL SITE, INCORPORATING THE DESIGN CONCEPTS GENERATED DURING THE DESIGN CHARRETTE

WHAT IS IT?

The Former Wildenberg Hotel is a historically significant site along South 27th Street. It is currently one of the primary development sites along the corridor, and is under City of Milwaukee control. Currently the property is listed along with many other properties on the City of Milwaukee's Real Estate listings. An opportunity exists to elevate this property for transformative development that would help position the corridor for future prosperity.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The former Wildenberg Hotel site occupies a premier location along South 27th Street and is the only property along the corridor that is under full City of Milwaukee control. The City has an opportunity to leverage this site for future catalytic development.

HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

The City of Milwaukee will shift this property from a standard Real Estate listing to a rolling Request for Proposals (RFP), which will incorporate the ideas and concepts that generated from the South 27th Street design charrette. This RFP will seek elevated design elements and potential uses that would complement and advance the goals of this Strategic Action Plan as well as the agenda of the Historic Route 41 BID.



The former Wildenberg Hotel occupies a premier location along South 27th Street and should be prioritized for catalytic development that serves the corridor. (Credit: UWM Community Design Solutions and GRAEF)

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Action #5 Review and revise the City of Milwaukee’s signage ordinance to ensure that signage regulations are consistent with the plan goals of creating attractive retail corridors that attract new investment.

Action #6 Support and encourage the concepts that emerged from the design charrette as appropriate along South 27th Street.

The design charrette conducted by Community Design Solutions on behalf of the Historic Route 41 BID and the Cities of Milwaukee and Greenfield generated a number of design ideas that are applicable not only to the original six opportunity sites, but can be implemented in other locations along the corridor. For example, the following elements were identified in the design charrette, but are broadly applicable at a variety of sites along South 27th Street:

- Better accommodation of non-motorists, including pedestrians, bicyclists and bus riders;
- Improved use of existing and future parking facilities, including fewer curb cuts to reduce conflict points, cross-access easements to improve accessibility, and shared parking to reduce the overall number of parking spaces and impervious surface along the corridor;
- Use of higher quality materials and design elements in new construction and renovations;
- Incorporation of more local retail and neighborhood-serving uses in new developments;
- Increased focus on mixed use and denser development types to make South 27th Street more attractive to a diverse set of patrons and visitors, and begin to transform its reputation as a primarily auto-centric corridor.

Action #7 Encourage new development to be built at the street, use higher quality materials and landscaping, and support density, especially at key intersections.

Local business and resident stakeholders expressed a desire to see South 27th Street become friendlier for pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders, more aesthetically welcoming, and better resemble other successful retail and mixed use nodes within the greater Milwaukee region, such as Bayshore Mall in Glendale, Drexel Town Square in Oak Creek, and Mequon Town Center in Mequon. The uniting element across all of these developments is that they were built with density and urbanism in mind. The buildings within these developments tend to be oriented towards the street, use higher quality building materials, signage and landscaping, and provide more pedestrian-friendly, walkable environments. In a highly competitive retail environment, shoppers have a choice where to spend their money, and increasingly prioritize dense, walkable, “main street” type shopping experiences over big box and strip mall development. The City of Milwaukee already encourages this type of development and will continue to work with the BID and developers to improve the overall quality of design and land development along South 27th Street.



CHAPTER 5

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT-LED ACTIONS

This chapter outlines actions that the Historic Route 41 Business Improvement District can undertake to promote South 27th Street as a shopping destination. The BID has considerable flexibility in determining what programs to offer, and can choose to add, change, or eliminate programs based on the

needs of its members. This flexibility is one of the reasons BIDs have the ability to make such an impact. The BID recently underwent a strategic planning effort with a consultant to identify priorities, the outcomes of which closely align with the recommendations of this plan.

KEY ACTIONS

KEY ACTION #1

MAXIMIZE INVESTMENT TO IMPROVE AESTHETICS AND PRIORITIZE HIGH-VISIBILITY PROPERTIES FOR SIGNAGE AND OTHER PROPERTY IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

WHAT IS IT?

The BID already funds grant programs for signage, landscaping, and remodeling. In recent years there has been discussion about whether to increase this program or focus on other initiatives. Given the survey and public involvement results, improving the appearance of the corridor is a priority. Improving the appearance of private property along the corridor will take time, but providing incentives through BID grant programs will hasten this goal. This can further be realized given the fact that BID grants can be combined with City of Milwaukee grant programs as well.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

All stakeholders—residents and businesses alike—identified poor aesthetics as a major hurdle to creating a more desirable commercial district. While the long tenure of businesses along the corridor is positive, it also means that many properties no longer comply with the existing zoning code and landscaping requirements because they are grandfathered in. Incentives may be useful to spur re-investment.

HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

The BID should prioritize funding signage and other property improvement grants within its annual budget. The BID currently offers grants for remodeling and signage, and should develop a way to prioritize grants to make the biggest impact on the corridor and work with those property and business owners. The BID should also consider increasing the dollar amount of the grants to make more substantial improvements. Among various factors to consider, preference should be given to local businesses over national chains. Preference should be given to exterior improvements to make the most impact on corridor appearance. Advertising the program to business and property owners will also be important since not all businesses are aware of these programs.

KEY ACTION #2

WORK WITH A COMMERCIAL BROKER TO ATTRACT THE TYPES OF BUSINESSES IDENTIFIED THROUGH THE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

WHAT IS IT?

The BID is in a unique position to promote the corridor. The BID should consider hiring a commercial real estate broker on a part-time basis to attract desired businesses. Throughout the study, residents and stakeholders offered ideas for businesses they would like to see on South 27th Street. Many of these were national chains, but there is also an interest in supporting local entrepreneurs. An experienced commercial broker could market vacant properties to potential businesses, both local and national alike.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

In addition to beautification, business attraction emerged as a very important issue during the planning process. Many stakeholders identified types of businesses that they thought would thrive on South 27th Street, and they wanted there to be a more proactive effort to attract these businesses. In addition, as noted in Chapter 2, Bureau of Economic Analysis figures identified nearly \$500 million in local retail demand unmet on South 27th Street in 2013 alone.¹³

HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

The BID should allocate funding in the next fiscal year to hire a part-time commercial broker and determine appropriate targets, tasks and a compensation structure that aligns with their goals for this position.



*Working with a commercial broker could help the BID to more aggressively market properties and attract new retail.
(Credit: City of Milwaukee Planning Division)*

KEY ACTION #3

OFFER NEW PROGRAMMING ALONG THE CORRIDOR, SUCH AS JOB FAIRS, STREET FESTIVALS WITH FOOD TRUCKS, AND PUBLIC ART

WHAT IS IT?

Coordinate with property owners and managers of larger commercial properties with large parking lots for events, such as food trucks during lunch, makers markets, or a farmer's market. Also, work with property owners with underutilized land to dedicate space for public art or gateway signs that would add visual interest to the corridor.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The BID has sponsored events in the past, such as "Cruise the Corridor"; however, there appears to be demand for a greater diversity and regularity of events. The survey showed support among both residents and business owners for additional events. Events are a good way to draw in customers who may not visit South 27th Street on a regular basis. Encouraging food trucks may be a low cost way for local entrepreneurs to explore the possibility of opening a bricks-and-mortar operation on South 27th Street. Additionally, using parking lots for food trucks may be a low cost way to explore out lot development in these larger parking lots.

HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

Concentrate on the northern end of the corridor, near Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center, the Milwaukee Police Department District 6, and Pulaski High School, to capture the daytime employment base. Coordinate with neighborhood groups on what they would like to see at festivals. Consider issuing an RFP for public art proposals once potential sites are identified.



The Granville Business Improvement District, on Milwaukee's northwest side, has seen great success with their "munchdays" food truck events. (Credit: Granville Business Improvement District)

KEY ACTION #4

ENGAGE BUSINESSES ALONG THE CORRIDOR TO TAKE A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN THE BID AND ONGOING INITIATIVES

WHAT IS IT?

A BID with active, engaged businesses will be able to accomplish more. The BID has nearly 300 current businesses and tremendous potential for active BID membership along South 27th Street.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

As the Historic Route 41 BID is one of the largest BIDs in the City of Milwaukee with about 4 miles of commercial activity, South 27th Street features many national retailers that are not always engaged partners. Other businesses may simply not be fully aware of what the BID does and what it has to offer. The BID is the natural conduit between the municipality and its businesses.

HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

Although it can be challenging to maintain an up-to-date directory, it is important to establish and maintain a database of contact information, including email addresses, for all businesses within the BID to improve communication about BID programs and events. Update the database on an annual basis at least, or more frequently, if necessary. Driving the corridor and stopping in at businesses may be the most effective way. At the same time, this offers another opportunity to meet with businesses and explain the BIDs programs. To assist with these tasks, consider hiring an intern.



Nearly 300 businesses call South 27th Street home, which offers real opportunities for deep engagement between the BID and its members and corridor-wide investment and improvements. (Credit: City of Milwaukee Planning Division)

KEY ACTION #5

AS HIGH PROFILE VACANCIES OCCUR, AGGRESSIVELY ENCOURAGE HIGHER INTENSITY OF USES AND HIGHER QUALITY MATERIALS

WHAT IS IT?

New construction should follow design principles laid out in the design charrette. In particular, new development should feature parking in the rear or side of buildings rather than in front, and high quality materials should be used whenever possible.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The design charrette clearly showed the positive difference that even a few quality designs can make on how the overall corridor looks. An improved walking environment is an important goal, and quality design is one way of achieving this goal.

HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

Businesses often approach the BID as a first point of contact when deciding whether to locate on South 27th Street. The BID should work with the City of Milwaukee and the City of Greenfield to ensure that new construction incorporates the goals outlined above and in the design charrette, so that there is pressure not just to fulfill the minimum requirements imposed by zoning, but to exceed those requirements whenever feasible.



Aggressively working to market high profile vacancies, like the former Chancery Restaurant, and encouraging higher quality materials when properties are renovated will help to maintain the visual appeal of the corridor. (Credit: City of Milwaukee Planning Division)

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

ACTION #6 Coordinate with respective code enforcement departments from the City of Milwaukee and the City of Greenfield to target enforcement efforts.

Code enforcement is largely complaint-driven in the City of Milwaukee. The BID should work closely with both municipalities to ensure prompt enforcement. Also consider scheduling regular walk-throughs with police, Departments of Neighborhood Services, and alderpersons.

Action #7 Continue ongoing cooperation between the City of Milwaukee and the City of Greenfield so that all businesses benefit.

At present, the board has 15 members, with 5 members per BID. Since Greenfield has two BIDs and Milwaukee has one BID, Greenfield has twice the representation despite a smaller percentage of the businesses within the corridor being in Greenfield. That said, most stakeholders did not see a problem with this arrangement since, in practice, the BID functions as a single entity. In fact, some board members own properties in both municipalities. No changes are recommended to the BID structure; however, care should be taken to ensure that all interests are represented on the board. Above all, the BID should be commended for being the first inter-jurisdictional BID in the state.

ACTION #8 Continue to coordinate with WisDOT on corridor branding efforts. Periodically evaluate median banners and landscaping efforts.

Since South 27th Street is a state highway, WisDOT exercises jurisdiction over all elements within the highway right of way. The BID, along with the City of Milwaukee and the City of Greenfield, will need to consult with WisDOT when considering any new banners or landscaping within the right-of-way.

ACTION #9 Coordinate with neighborhood associations to achieve common goals.

The Southgate and Wilson Park neighborhoods in Milwaukee have associations that should be included in BID activities as relevant issues arise. There may be opportunities to collaborate on events and issues that both find important, such as sponsoring neighborhood clean-up days, meeting with police liaisons regarding public safety issues, and organizing new events in the area, as discussed in Key Action #3.

ACTION #10 Continue coordination with Milwaukee Police Department and Greenfield Police Department on nuisance properties.

While crime is relatively low along the corridor, just a few nuisance properties can have a blighting effect on an area. For example, there are a few motels that have been the subject of complaints. The BID should stay vigilant in reporting suspected criminal activity.



CHAPTER 6

LOCAL BUSINESS-LED ACTIONS

With nearly 300 businesses along South 27th Street within the Historic Route 41 BID boundaries, the corridor’s business community is vitally important to the success of any initiatives or efforts to transform South 27th Street in the future.

Moreover, many of the concerns of stakeholders and the corresponding recommendations in this Strategic Action Plan relate directly to visual appeal and maintenance needs of privately owned property, which business and property owners will need to move forward directly.

KEY ACTIONS

KEY ACTION #1 INSTALL BASE PLANTINGS AROUND SIGNS AND ALONG STORE FRONTS TO IMPROVE THE VISUAL APPEAL OF CORRIDOR

WHAT IS IT?

One relatively easy and cost-effective way to improve the curb appeal of businesses is to add landscaping. Extensive landscaping can be expensive, and green space is often limited on many smaller parcels on South 27th Street. For that reason, wherever possible, businesses should install base plantings around monument signs, or large planters in front of storefronts as a practical alternative, to improve the overall look of a business.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

One of the most commonly heard remarks from public input sessions was that the physical appearance of South 27th Street, overall, lacks appeal. Installing base plantings or planters is something that can be done immediately, at relatively low cost, and would greatly improve the appearance of the corridor.

HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

The cost of installing base plantings or planters is a relatively low-cost item that can be implemented immediately. As with any commercial corridor, even one property that is not well maintained can reduce the appeal of the entire district. On the other hand, even small actions have the ability to make a significant improvement to individual properties and even the corridor as a whole. Most importantly, the BID and the City of Milwaukee have grant programs available to assist businesses in achieving these goals.



*Examples of good landscaping along South 27th Street
(Credit: City of Milwaukee Planning Division)*



*An example of thoughtful, pedestrian-scaled landscaping along Bluemound Road in Brookfield.
(Credit: City of Milwaukee Planning Division)*

KEY ACTION #2 ACTIVELY MAINTAIN PROPERTIES BY CLEANING UP LITTER AND ADDRESSING VISUAL MAINTENANCE NEEDS

WHAT IS IT?

Another relatively easy and cost-effective way to improve the curb appeal of the corridor is for businesses to stay on top of litter removal. Perhaps because South 27th Street is a highly-trafficked roadway, litter sometimes collects along the street edges, fences and landscaping.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Similar to Key Action #1, cleaning up litter and addressing basic maintenance issues sends a strong message to potential customers about the quality of a business. Cleaning up one's own property not only improves the individual business, but the whole corridor.

HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

Cleaning up litter and taking care of basic maintenance needs is a relatively low-cost item that can be implemented immediately. The BID could aid businesses by sponsoring clean up days, possibly in the spring, after the snow melts.



*Litter and debris along the corridor can have a negative impact on patrons, visitors and others traveling along South 27th Street.
(Credit: City of Milwaukee Planning Division)*

KEY ACTION #3

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EXISTING CITY OF MILWAUKEE AND BID-FUNDED GRANT PROGRAMS FOR FUTURE PROPERTY IMPROVEMENTS AND RENOVATIONS

WHAT IS IT?

Both the City of Milwaukee and the BID have existing matching grant programs that businesses can use to renovate their façades, install new signage or landscaping, or prepare the interior of a vacant storefront for a future business. Figure 6.1 shows currently existing City and BID matching grants available to businesses. Both the City of Milwaukee and the BID recognize that physical improvements can be expensive, but for businesses willing to invest their time and effort into improving the physical conditions of their properties, existing grant programs either help ease the financial burden, or extend the financial reach of a planned renovation or improvement.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The number one concern expressed by residents, patrons and visitors, business owners and other stakeholders, regarded the physical and visual condition of the South 27th Street corridor. While improvements to the roadway itself, medians and rights-of way are important, the biggest visual impact to the corridor will come through direct improvements to business façades, landscaping and parking lots. City of Milwaukee and BID administered grant programs can help businesses fund these improvements and improve the overall aesthetics of South 27th Street.

HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

Local business and property owners along South 27th Street should evaluate seriously what physical improvements they are able to make to their properties, and work directly with the City of Milwaukee's Commercial Corridor Team or the Historic Route 41 BID to identify opportunities to leverage grants to improve the visual appeal of their properties. During the planning process a number of older strip mall and retail properties, such as Plaza 27 at South 27th Street and West Howard Avenue, were identified as high priority targets for façade improvements.

Figure 6.1: City of Milwaukee and BID Matching Grants by Type

Originator	Grant Type	Max Amount	Terms
City of Milwaukee	Façade Grant	\$5,000	\$1 for \$1 match up to max
City of Milwaukee	Retail Investment Fund Grant	\$50,000	Match up to 20% of eligible costs with FTE job creation for every \$5,000
City of Milwaukee	Signage Grant	\$2,500	\$1 for \$1 match up to max
City of Milwaukee	Whitebox Grant	\$25,000	\$1 for \$1 match up to max
BID	Beautification	\$2,500	\$1 for \$1 match for up to 50% of project cost
BID	Façade Grant	\$2,500	\$1 for \$1 match for up to 50% of project cost
BID	Exterior Lighting / Design	\$2,500	\$1 for \$1 match for up to 50% of project cost
BID	Major Business Development	\$2,500	\$1 for \$1 match for up to 50% of project cost
BID	Signage Grant	\$2,500	\$1 for \$1 match for up to 50% of project cost

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Action #4 Seek opportunities for shared parking, entrances and exits, and cross-access easements wherever possible to reduce conflict points and impermeable surface.

One of the dominant characteristics of South 27th Street is the sheer amount of surface parking and paved surfaces along the corridor. While on some level this is understandable, given the historic development patterns and current character of the corridor, the extent of paved surfaces detract from the visual appeal of the area, communicate an unfriendliness to visitors not driving automobiles, and can create conflict points that make it unsafe for pedestrians, bicyclists, people with disabilities, and even motorists, to successfully navigate along the corridor and between businesses. Where possible, businesses should work with one another to identify opportunities to share parking and connect adjacent parking lots so that motorists can visit between businesses without having to re-enter South 27th Street in order to do so. Additionally, businesses should work with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to remove unnecessary curb cuts to reduce points of conflict between cars entering and exiting businesses. These actions have the potential to improve overall safety along the corridor, reduce congestion, improve access for potential customers, and provide additional areas where landscaping can be installed to improve the visual appeal of the corridor.

Action #5 Pursue out-lot development that is complementary to main shopping centers.

A few of the larger retail development sites along the corridor (e.g., Walmart, At Home) are particularly situated for potential out-lot development, especially where there may be an oversupply of parking. In these instances, portions of the property nearest to the street can be parceled off and developed with freestanding retail structures, such as coffee shops, fast-casual restaurants, or other small retail establishments. Prioritizing out-lot development where appropriate can reduce the visual impact of surface parking along the corridor while at the same time providing more retail and dining options for customers and neighboring residents, which can improve the overall competitiveness of South 27th Street. It has the additional benefit of increasing the local tax base and ultimately the resources that are available for the corridor.



*Concept redesign of Plaza 27, at the corner of South 27th Street and West Howard Avenue.
(Credit: City of Milwaukee Planning Division)*



CHAPTER 7

IMPLEMENTATION

This Strategic Action Plan is only a first step in realizing South 27th Street’s potential as a vibrant and evolving shopping corridor. This chapter reiterates the key actions that are necessary to move redevelopment forward on South 27th Street and identifies not just the main implementers, but also supporting entities, funding sources, and time frame.

Government-Led Actions			
Action	Supporting Entities	Funding Sources	Timeframe
KEY ACTION 1: Work with the City’s DPW and WisDOT to improve safety and comfort for pedestrians and cyclists.	WisDOT	State	Long
KEY ACTION 2: Explore a zoning overlay district to ensure the consistent enforcement of zoning standards along the corridor.		City of Milwaukee (staff time)	Medium
KEY ACTION 3: Coordinate with MMSD and Milwaukee County to naturalize Wilson Creek and transform it into a neighborhood-serving amenity.	MMSD, Milwaukee County	MMSD, Grants	Long
KEY ACTION 4: Reissue RFP for the former Wildenberg Hotel site that incorporates concepts from the design charrette.	DCD Real Estate		Short

Between this plan and the BID’s own strategic planning process, the BID is in a strong position to implement these recommendations. Many of the recommendations from these two planning efforts align around the goal of improving corridor aesthetics through

the BID’s grant programs and to increase business attraction efforts. Although these are the current priorities, the BID has the flexibility to change its programming as necessary to fit the needs of its members as time goes on.

BID-Led Actions			
Action	Supporting Entities	Funding Sources	Timeframe
KEY ACTION 1: In coordination with the BID’s strategic planning effort, explore efforts to improve aesthetics along the corridor and prioritize high-visibility properties for property improvement grants to maximize investments along the corridor.	City of Milwaukee	N/A	Short
KEY ACTION 2: Work with a commercial broker to attract the types of businesses identified through the public involvement process, such as casual restaurants.		BID	Short
KEY ACTION 3: Explore ways to offer new programming along the corridor in underused parking lots, such as job fairs, street festivals with food trucks , collaborative discount programs, public art, etc.	Business Community	BID, Business Community	Medium
KEY ACTION 4: Identify ways to better engage businesses along the corridor to take a more active role in the BID and ongoing initiatives. As part of this effort, develop and maintain an email list for all businesses within the BID to improve communication about BID programs and events.		N/A	Short
KEY ACTION 6: As high profile vacancies occur, aggressively encourage higher intensity of uses and higher quality materials, per charrette results and Area Plan and Strategic Action Plan recommendations. *	City of Milwaukee, City of Greenfield	N/A	Ongoing

These recommendations range from the short-term to the long-term, but all of them have the potential to dramatically improve the physical environment. Taking care of the mundane, yet important, tasks such as cleaning up litter and improving landscaping will have a dramatic effect on how people

perceive the individual businesses and the corridor as a whole. Recommendations such as pursuing outlot development may take longer to implement, but will likewise, help realize the goal of retrofitting this commercial corridor.

Business-Led Actions			
Action	Supporting Entities	Funding Sources	Timeframe
KEY ACTION 1: Improve the visual appeal of businesses with planters and base plantings along signs and storefronts.	DCD Commercial Corridors Team	Business Community	Ongoing
KEY ACTION 2: Clean up litter and address visual maintenance needs.	Dept of Neighborhood Services/ Enforcement	Business Community	Ongoing
KEY ACTION 3: Pursue out-lot development that is complementary to main shopping centers.		BID	Ongoing
KEY ACTION 4: Seek opportunities for shared parking and cross-access easements.	Business Community, City of Milwaukee and City of Greenfield	N/A	Ongoing
KEY ACTION 5: Take advantage of existing City of Milwaukee and BID-funded grant programs for property improvements.	City of Milwaukee CCT, BID	N/A	Ongoing

Endnotes

- 1 Gurda, John. "In 1951, Southgate Changed Shopping," Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, 5 December 1999.
- 2 2011-2015 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates
- 3 2011-2015 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates
- 4 2011-2015 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates
- 5 2011-2015 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates
- 6 2011-2015 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates
- 7 Milwaukee Master Property File, 2016 assessment year
- 8 Milwaukee Master Property File, 2016 assessment year
- 9 Milwaukee Master Property File, 2016 assessment year
- 10 Milwaukee Police Department COMPASS, Census Tract Report Card, 2016
- 11 EMSI, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013
- 12 EMSI, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013
- 13 EMSI, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013
- 14 EMSI, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013



City of Milwaukee
Department of City Development
March 2017