

Executive Summary

Urban and Regional Planning Practicum students at Michigan State University compiled this commercial revitalization report for a neighborhood located in the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan. A group of five students worked at the request of the South West Area Neighbors (SWAN) and the Michigan State University - West Extension office to assist in the revitalization of a neighborhood commercial district located just west of the City's downtown center.

This neighborhood commercial district revitalization report focuses on an eight-block area in the SWAN neighborhood along West Fulton Street. It analyzes the current business environment along West Fulton Street and identifies goals and recommendations to assist in the revitalization of West Fulton Street, and thus, SWAN. Many of the goals have been shaped directly from the concerns voiced by residents in the SWAN neighborhood. One concern is with the development of Grand Valley State University (GVSU), immediately east of the area. The concern is that this development has been driving up the costs of living and doing business for long-time residents and business owners. Residents are also concerned with new "chain" establishments coming to the West Fulton corridor. Residents are concerned that the "chain" stores are disrupting the unique physical character of the business district, which contains older brick buildings. Residents are also concerned with speeding traffic on West Fulton Street, which has created an environment that is un-enticing for pedestrians.

Michigan State University has been partnering with the South West Area Neighbors for the past year and half as the residents have gone through a neighborhood planning process. A Leadership Team of between eight and ten residents has guided the process. Their work culminated in a SWAN Neighborhood Summit that took place on June 1st, 2002. At the Neighborhood Summit, a consensus was reached on a vision for the redevelopment of the SWAN neighborhood, and three Action Teams were formed. The Action Teams are undertaking specific activities that will achieve the vision of the SWAN community.

At the same time that the SWAN planning groups were forming ideas, the City of Grand Rapids completed a new Master Plan. The Grand Rapids Master Plan provides guidelines for how the City should be redeveloped and calls for area specific plans" that would foster redevelopment and investment within targeted areas of the city. Fortunately, to the benefit of both the City of Grand Rapids and the SWAN neighborhood, the ideas expressed in the Master Plan are consistent with the ideas of the SWAN community expressed in the community's Action Plan. This

commercial corridor revitalization study is a neighborhood specific project and will be occurring as the City of Grand Rapids implements their revised Master Plan.

There are two main components to the neighborhood commercial district revitalization project:

1. *Assisting the SWAN Business Action Team in developing a traffic calming action plan.*
2. *Conducting a commercial corridor study for West Fulton Street with an emphasis on design aesthetics and enhancing the unique character of the district.*

Traffic calming measures are recommended to slow traffic along the Fulton corridor to make the roadway more pedestrian friendly. The 2002 City of Grand Rapids Master Plan classifies West Fulton Street through the SWAN neighborhood as a major city street. The Interurban Transit Partnership, the public transit provider for Kent County and the City of Grand Rapids, provides "*The Rapid*" transit service along West Fulton through the SWAN eight-block study area. Traffic calming measures increasing the 'walkability' of the area include: reducing vehicular travel speeds, placing benches and decorative vegetation along the sidewalk right-of-way, enhancing the aesthetics of the roadway and sidewalk area with ornate lamppost fixtures, and recommend the SWAN neighborhood choose area specific signage for use on area street signs.

The neighborhood commercial corridor study emphasizes design enhancements creating a unique character for the SWAN commercial district. Some suggestions include creating codes to control building height and building facade materials. This will control the problem with inconsistencies in the corridor's appearance and create a character recognizable to passers-by. This is especially important to make drivers and pedestrians aware that they have entered a unique district thus allowing them take notice of the area's character. This will enhance the business district's current businesses and allow future businesses to blend with the uniqueness of the west side character.

All project recommendations have been reviewed prior to the completion of this report to determine if they conform to the drafted 2002 City of Grand Rapids Master Plan.