

# *Creating a Neighborhood of Choice*



*A Neighborhood Plan for Grand Traverse*

*University of Michigan Urban & Regional Planning*

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# *Creating a Neighborhood of Choice*

## *A Neighborhood Plan for Grand Traverse*

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## SUMMARY

*Creating a Neighborhood of Choice* is a plan for the Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association (GTDNA) to stabilize and revitalize its neighborhood. The Grand Traverse District is an approximately 70 square block neighborhood west of downtown Flint. The neighborhood's boundaries follow I-69 to the south, the Swartz and Thread Creeks to the west, the Flint River to the north, and Beach Street to the east. This area is home to approximately one thousand residents, as well as professional offices, neighborhood businesses, and social service organizations.

## THE NEIGHBORHOOD

In 1960, the population of the neighborhood stood at approximately 4000 people and now is down to 1000 people. Grand Traverse today has a racially diverse population but has significantly lower household incomes on average, a significantly higher proportion of renters, and lower access to vehicles among renter households than the City of Flint as a whole.

The Grand Traverse neighborhood has a variety of land uses, neighborhood businesses, historic homes, and recreational possibilities, but signs of disinvestment are apparent in the high number of vacant lots, damaged structures, poorly maintained homes, and parks in need of maintenance. Several busy one-way thoroughfares pass through the neighborhood, acting as dividers but also providing fast access to other areas.

## ASSETS

The neighborhood has numerous assets that make it a good candidate for a revitalization plan.

**Downtown:** The neighborhood is adjacent to downtown Flint, which is recently benefiting from new development, streetscape improvements, rehabilitation of historic structures and a redevelopment plan by Sasaki and Associates.

**Natural Features and Parks:** The Flint River and Swartz and Thread Creeks form the boundaries of the neighborhood, providing the potential for recreational opportunities. Plans to extend the Flint River Trail into the neigh-

borhood also provide possibilities for the neighborhood. In addition, the neighborhood is home to Memorial Park, a large park in the center of the neighborhood.

**Diversity:** While Flint as whole is diverse, neighborhoods tend to be segregated by both race and income. Grand Traverse, on the other hand, is diverse in race and income which is a unique asset.

**Residents' Energy and Commitment:** The association members are committed to their neighborhood and are willing to invest the time and energy necessary to realize their vision.

## OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of current and future activities in or near the neighborhood that the association can build on to gain momentum for this plan. These include:

**Land Bank:** The Genesee County Land Bank owns much vacant land in the district and has designated the neighborhood a Rejuvenation Target Area.

**Two-way Street Initiative:** The Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission is about to undertake an effort to change some of the existing one-way streets into two-way streets.

**Downtown Revitalization Activities:** A number of foundations, private investors, governmental entities and universities are working to revitalize downtown Flint.

## VISION

GTDNA members summarized their hopes in the following statement:

***THE GRAND TRAVERSE DISTRICT WILL BE A DIVERSE URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD. IT WILL BE A WELL-MAINTAINED NEIGHBORHOOD FOR RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES, A VIBRANT AND SAFE COMMUNITY OF CHOICE.***

The residents determined five goals to achieve in order to make their vision a reality. The plan's recommendations are organized around these goals.

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## **GOAL 1: IMPROVE HOUSING CONDITIONS**

Both exterior appearance and interior living conditions of housing should improve. Residents believe that owner-occupied homes are often in better condition than rental housing. Recommendations to meet this goal are:

- Improve conditions of existing housing through code enforcement, repair and upkeep programs
- Construct new housing
- Rehabilitate existing housing

## **GOAL 2: INCREASE HOME OWNERSHIP**

Increasing home ownership could reduce the turnover of tenants within the area and lead to greater financial and social investment in the neighborhood. Recommendations to meet this goal are:

- Create a home ownership education program
- Create a lease/purchase program

## **GOAL 3: IMPROVE STREET, SAFETY, AND ACCESS CONDITIONS FOR PEDESTRIANS AND VEHICLES**

The streets should be hospitable to both pedestrians and vehicles. Residents should feel safe on the streets and should be able to access local destinations. The streets should welcome visitors to the neighborhood. Because streets create much of the character of the neighborhood, they should promote the plan vision. Recommendations to meet this goal are:

- Convert one-way streets to carry two-way traffic
- Add parking lanes on major streets
- Create bicycle lanes
- Repair sidewalks, pedestrian crossing signals, and crosswalks
- Construct sidewalk bumpouts
- Improve streetscaping with trees, plants, trash cans, and benches

## **GOAL 4: INCREASE RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND ACCESS TO NATURAL AREAS FOR PEOPLE OF ALL AGES**

The Grand Traverse District has several recreational assets, including the Flint River, Memorial Park, Swartz and Thread Creeks and Aldrich Park. These resources should develop so residents can easily access them and take advantage of their value to the neighborhood. Recommendations to meet this goal are:

- Improve Memorial Park by upgrading landscaping and amenities
- Improve access to and safety of Aldrich Park, Swartz and Thread Creeks
- Create a local greenway within the neighborhood
- Become involved in planning for regional greenways

## **GOAL 5: STRENGTHEN RESIDENT AND BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY**

The GTDNA aims to include the diverse residents and businesses in the area and meet their needs. To do so, they must reach out to residents and businesses not currently involved with the association. By increasing active participation in and partnerships with the GTDNA, the organization can bring the neighborhood closer to the stated vision. Recommendations to meet this goal are:

- Perform coordinated door-to-door outreach
- Increase frequency of newsletters
- Expand community gardens
- Designate a business liaison to coordinate business involvement

### **Implementation**

The plan offers numerous strategies for achieving the association's vision. The association can implement the plan by choosing strategies that best meet its needs and goals. The association can increase its chances of success by recruiting more members so that the efforts reflect the desires of a broader cross-section of residents.

The association should choose an organizational structure that best suits its needs. The following are three possible options: 1) retain current organizational structure as a neighborhood association; 2) form or partner with a non-profit organization; and 3) form or partner with a community development corporation (CDC) or community housing development organization (CHDO).

The plan's strategies fall into short, intermediate and long term time frames. The association members can begin working on the short term strategies, planning for the intermediate strategies and thinking about the long term strategies. By building on their assets and resources, the association can bring its vision into reality and make the Grand Traverse District into a vibrant and safe community of choice.



## CHAPTER ONE: WHY A NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN?

The Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association (GTDNA) is seeking a plan for actions to stabilize and revitalize their neighborhood. The association wants to expand on their past projects to improve the neighborhood, which have included trash clean-ups, flower plantings, and neighborhood festivals. This plan is a strategy for the association members to broaden participation and take on larger projects. The plan describes the current conditions of the neighborhood, defines the association's vision for the future, and details actions that the association can take to pursue that vision.

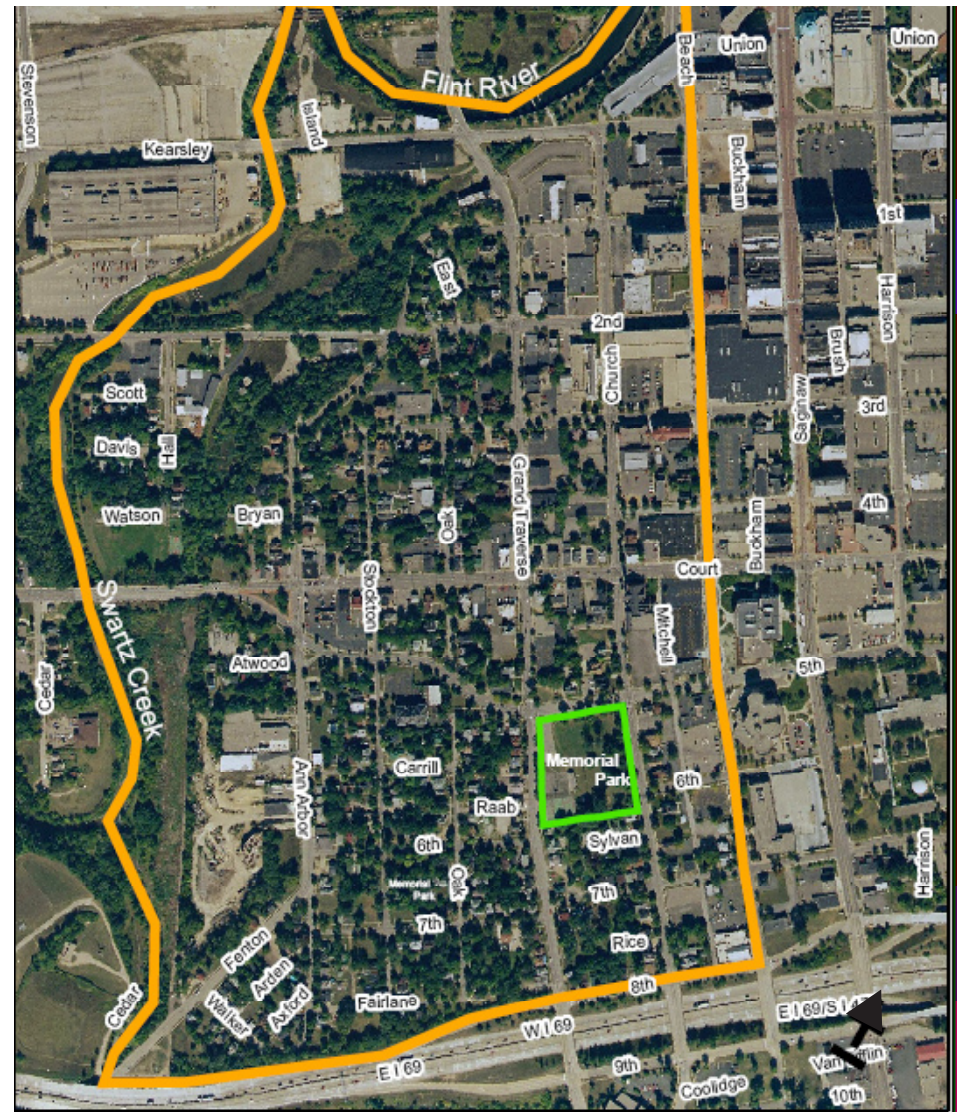
### NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION BACKGROUND

The Grand Traverse neighborhood is made up of approximately 70 blocks west of downtown Flint. The neighborhood's boundaries follow I-69 to the south, the Swartz and Thread Creeks to the west, the Flint River to the north, and Beach Street to the east (see Figure 1.1). This area is home to approximately one thousand residents, as well as numerous professional offices, neighborhood businesses, and social service organizations.

As will be discussed in Chapter Two, the Grand Traverse area is one of Flint's oldest neighborhoods and is rich in a variety of assets. It is bordered by the beautiful natural areas of the Flint River and Swartz and Thread Creeks and is rich in parkland. Its proximity to downtown also adds to the desirability of the neighborhood. The neighborhood is one of the few racially diverse neighborhoods in Flint. On the other hand, it has been affected by the loss of city population and the general downturn in the region's economy. Many of the area's residents are impoverished, and a large proportion of the houses are in need of repair; many have been torn down, leaving vacant lots. However, given the numerous assets and committed neighborhood association, the neighborhood has great potential for recovery.

The Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association brings together residents and business owners who want to work together to improve their neighborhood. The neighborhood association was formed in 1996 and originally focused on the area north of Court Street and south of Second Street.

Volunteers, who live or own businesses in the Grand Traverse neighborhood,



**Figure 1.1:** The neighborhood's boundaries include I-69, Beach Street, the Flint River and Swartz Creek.

*Source:* Heidi Peterson (data), Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission (aerial photo, streets).

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have focused on making visible efforts to show that the area is cared for, such as periodic neighborhood clean-ups. The association also was involved in the Violence Prevention Collaborative, a grant-funded program that brought children together with police and fire officials for educational and social purposes. In tandem with this program, the neighborhood association held ice-cream socials for the adults to bring the residents together.<sup>1</sup>

Neighborhood visioning and strategy sessions led by the Court Street Village Non Profit in 2002 and 2004<sup>2</sup> revitalized the association, and also included a geographic expansion. The GTDNA extended the northern edge of its territory to the Flint River and included the Oak Lawn neighborhood to the south of Court Street, creating more recognizable boundaries and seeking to coordinate neighborhood improvement projects over a wider area.

In recent years, the GTDNA has become even more active in the neighborhood by establishing numerous regular activities and events geared toward the improvement of the neighborhood. Their most visible activities have included neighborhood flower plantings and the annual Family Festival held each autumn in Memorial Park.<sup>3</sup>

### *OPPORTUNITIES*

There are a number of recent and ongoing activities in or near the neighborhood that the association can build on to gain momentum for this plan:

**Downtown Revitalization Activities:** Today, a number of foundations, private investors, governmental entities, and universities are working to revitalize downtown Flint. Because of their proximity to downtown, the Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association sees a need to participate actively in this process. This will allow the association both to leverage these efforts to strengthen its neighborhood and to ensure that the goals of Grand Traverse area residents and businesses influence the revitalization of the area.

**Genesee County Land Bank:** The Genesee County Land Bank is an authority

1 Interview with Matt Young, GTDNA, 20 October 2005.

2 Court Street Village CDC, *2002 Joint Neighborhood Strategic Planning Workshop* and *2004 Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Convention*.

3 Interview with Heidi Peterson, GTDNA, 15 September 2005.

that holds foreclosed properties and has the ability to receive and purchase property. Since the Land Bank can develop properties for community development purposes, it offers numerous opportunities for the association. The Grand Traverse neighborhood is a Rejuvenation Target Area for the Land Bank, so the Land Bank could be an important partner in developing vacant lots and revitalizing housing.

**Flint River Trail Extension:** The Friends of the Flint River Trail's long-term plans to extend the Flint River Trail into the neighborhood provide another opportunity for the neighborhood. The creation of greenways along the Flint River and along Swartz and Thread Creeks, on the northern and western edges of the area, would increase recreational opportunities and showcase the neighborhood to trail users from other areas.

**One-Way Street Conversion Process:** The Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission is about to undertake an effort to change some of the existing one-way streets into two-way. This offers the association the opportunity to participate in this process and promote the street and traffic goals of the association.

**Sasaki Plans:** Over the past few years, several Flint-based organizations and institutions have commissioned four plans from Sasaki and Associates, a Watertown, Massachusetts, planning firm. The firm has written plans for the downtown area, the cultural center, the Flint River district and the University of Michigan Flint campus. Since all of these areas are near the neighborhood, implementation of these plans could have positive spillover effects on the neighborhood. These professional plans demonstrate interest in revitalizing the city and, to the extent that they are implemented, provide new hope for the city.

### *OUTLINE OF THE PLAN*

The plan presented in the coming pages shall assist the GTDNA in leveraging these and other opportunities by providing strategies that incorporate the vision of community members, the resources of the neighborhood, and the planning efforts of other organizations. This plan focuses primarily on input from association members but also incorporates concepts and ideas from organizations such as the Genesee County Land Bank, the Court Street Village Non Profit, the Friends of the Flint River Trail, and Sasaki and Associates.

Chapter Two provides information on the background and current status of the neighborhood. Chapter Three details the vision and goals of the GTDNA. Chapters Four through Eight will recommend ways to achieve each of the goals for housing, homeownership, transportation, recreation, and community involvement. Chapter Nine will provide an overall timeline and guidance for implementing the plan's recommendations.





## CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND AND CONDITIONS

This chapter describes the history and existing conditions in the Grand Traverse neighborhood. It outlines characteristics of neighborhood residents and the physical makeup of the neighborhood, including housing stock and public spaces such as streets, sidewalks, and parks. Understanding the neighborhood's assets and challenges sets a framework in which the Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association can pursue their goals and implement strategies to improve the area.

### GEOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Grand Traverse neighborhood is located within Flint and must be understood within the context of the city. The following section will provide a background on the city and discuss historical changes in population and housing.



**Figure 2.1:** Flint and Genesee County with the Grand Traverse neighborhood marked by a star. Source: Mapquest, 6 December 2005.

#### Background on Flint

Flint, nicknamed the “Vehicle City,” is located in the center of Genesee County, Michigan, about 60 miles northwest of Detroit (Figure 2.1). Founded in 1819 as a trading post, Flint grew quickly over the next several decades, becoming first a center for the lumber industry and then a major carriage-manufacturing city. The carriage industry evolved into the automobile business. Local entrepreneurs Billy Durant and Louis Chevrolet founded General Motors (GM) in 1911. Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the automobile industry has dominated Flint’s history.<sup>1</sup>

1 Wikipedia, *Flint, Michigan*. (Accessed 4 December 2005). <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flint%2C\\_Michigan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flint%2C_Michigan)>

#### Population and Housing Change in Flint

The city’s population peaked by 1960 at almost 200,000. Large numbers of people and jobs have left Flint since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. A combination of individual racism and policies of the federal government and financial institutions encouraged the movement of whites to surrounding townships and suburban communities, taking tax base and investment dollars from the city in addition to population. Between 1960 and 1980, the city of Flint’s white population dropped by almost half while the white population of the rest of Genesee County grew by nearly 100,000. The city’s black population nearly doubled during the same period to over 66,000. Overall, Flint has lost about one third of its population since 1960. Outlying Genesee County has approximately doubled in population during the same period.<sup>2</sup>

Flint’s trends of population loss and disinvestment were reinforced in the 1970s by a loss of manufacturing jobs that continues to this day. In 1970, General Motors employed 82,000 workers in the Flint area. By 2002, this number was cut to under 15,000.<sup>3</sup> By the end of 2008, GM plans to cut its national workforce to 86,000, approximately the number employed in Flint three decades earlier.<sup>4</sup>

Flint’s population, investment, and employment losses have contributed to the city’s crime rate.<sup>5</sup> These factors have especially impacted the Grand Traverse area, as crime rates in the neighborhood are higher than those in Flint as a whole.<sup>6</sup>

With both population and jobs leaving the city, Flint has experienced a reduction in fiscal capacity and has cut public services. In addition, the drop in demand for housing and commercial and industrial space has left many neighborhoods with a stock of vacant land and structures in need of repair.

2 U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Population and Housing Characteristics, 1960, 1980 and 2000.

3 Francis X. Donnelly, “GM’s Desertion Decimates Flint: Closed plants, anemic tax base strip city services,” *The Detroit News*, 24 July 2002.

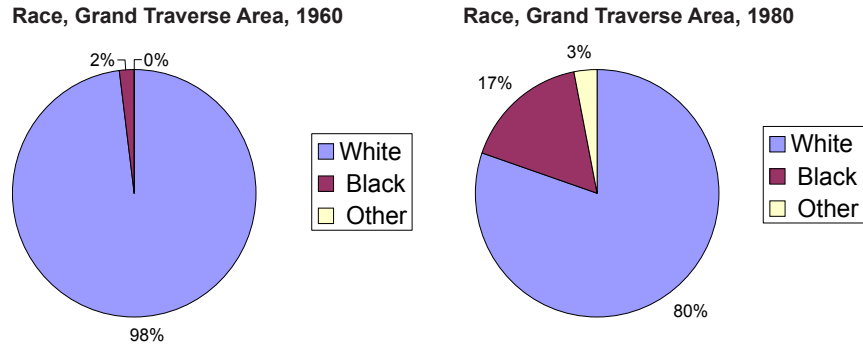
4 Danny Hakim, “For a G.M. Family, the American Dream Vanishes,” *The New York Times*, 19 November 2005.

5 Morgan Quitno Press, *City Crime Rankings by Population Group*. (Accessed 15 December 2005). <<http://www.morganquitno.com/xcit06pop.htm>>

6 E-mail, Steve Wall, Court Street Village CDC, 9 December 2005.

## Creating a Neighborhood of Choice

Today, several signs of promise are blossoming, including the renovation and rehabilitation of downtown buildings by the Uptown Reinvestment Corporation, the restoration of several homes and new businesses in the historic Carriage Town neighborhood, and the efforts of the Genesee County Land Bank to address abandoned properties. The Grand Traverse neighborhood, with its central location, is uniquely positioned to build upon this momentum.



**Figure 2.2:** During the 1960s and 70s, the presence of minorities in the neighborhood increased.

Source: 1960 and 1980 Decennial Censuses, U.S. Census Bureau.

	1940	1960	1980	2000
<b>Grand Traverse area</b>	3,827	2,873	1,633	983*
<b>Flint</b>	151,543	196,940	159,611	124,943
<b>Genesee County outside Flint</b>	76,401	177,353	290,888	311,198

**Table 2.1:** Since 1940, the population of Grand Traverse and Flint has declined sharply, while the population of suburban and rural Genesee County has increased by over 400%.

Source: 1940, 1960, 1980 and 2000 Decennial Censuses, U.S. Census Bureau.

\*2000 neighborhood data based on different boundaries. See Appendix A for details.

## NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY

The history of the neighborhood shapes its current identity. The following sections will discuss the early history of the neighborhood and discuss population changes over time.

### Early History

The neighborhood has its roots as a residential expansion of the old downtown. The neighborhood, then known as Stockton's Addition, was platted to house Flint's elite population in an area to be designated as the Third Ward. Construction of housing for these wealthy residents began in the 1870's. As time went on, housing was included in the neighborhood for working class and middle class residents, creating a mix of housing types.<sup>7</sup> By the 1920s, the neighborhood was largely built out. In addition to housing, the Grand Traverse neighborhood included a district of shops along Court Street such as a drug store, grocery store, and filling stations.<sup>8</sup>

In the late 1920s, housing demand was so great that smaller houses were constructed between two existing houses by purchasing two side-lots.<sup>9</sup>

### Population Change in Grand Traverse

By 1940, the Grand Traverse neighborhood's population approached its peak of 4,000 and has declined since. As shown by Table 2.1 and Figure 2.2, in 1960, the neighborhood of over 2,800 was nearly 100 percent white. By 1980, however, the white population in the Grand Traverse area was cut by more than half of the 1960 figure, while almost 300 black residents now lived in the neighborhood, making up 17 percent of the total population. The Grand Traverse neighborhood has lost a greater proportion of its residents than the city as a whole, declining by about two-thirds since 1960 to around 1,000 residents today.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Interviews with Steve Snuske and Matt Young, GTDNA, 20 October 2005.

<sup>8</sup> E-mail from Steve Snuske, 27 December 2005.

<sup>9</sup> E-mail from Joel Rash, 19 December 2005.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Population and Housing Characteristics, 1940, 1960, 1980 and 2000.

	1940	1960	1980	2000
Units	1016	1230	784	550*
Vacancy Rate	2%	12%	11%	29%*

**Table 2.2:** Between 1940 and 1960, the number of housing units in the Grand Traverse neighborhood has decreased while vacancy rates have increased.

**Source:** 1940, 1960, 1980 and 2000 Decennial Censuses, U.S. Census Bureau.

\*2000 neighborhood data based on different boundaries. See Appendix A for details.

The conversion of homes to offices and other non-residential uses as Flint’s downtown expanded was another factor affecting neighborhood population, impacting Grand Traverse more heavily than most neighborhoods because of its location. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of housing units in the neighborhood was about half of that in 1940 (Table 2.2).

In 2005, this legacy of housing and population loss is visible in the Grand Traverse neighborhood. At the same time, the neighborhood has a diverse population and convenient access to many amenities, which will be described in the following sections.

## THE RESIDENTS OF THE GRAND TRAVERSE NEIGHBORHOOD

This section will describe the residents who live in the neighborhood based on data from the 2000 US Census. These findings serve as an important basis for the plan’s strategies.

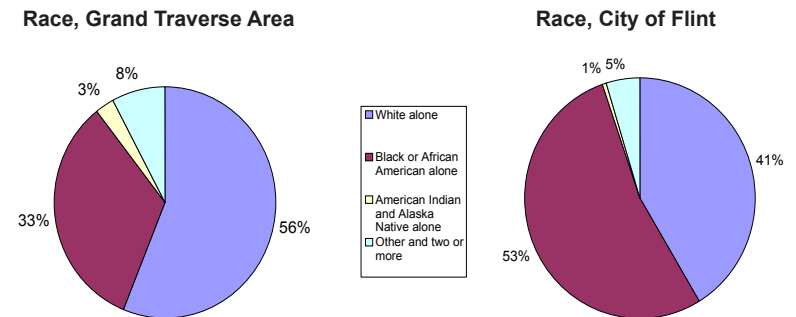
### Diversity

Grand Traverse today has a racially diverse population which is a unique asset in Flint. As shown in Figure 2.3, in 2000, whites made up slightly over half of the neighborhood’s population, and blacks about one third.<sup>11</sup> As of the 2000 Census, the Flint region ranked seventh in the nation in residential segregation between whites and blacks.<sup>12</sup> While census data show that resi-

11 U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Population and Housing Characteristics, 2000.

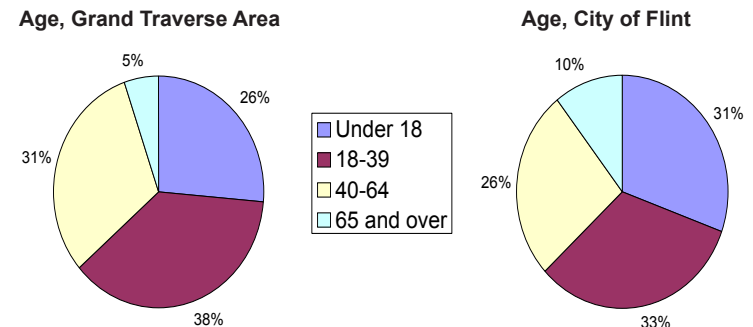
12 Social Science Data Analysis Network, “Segregation: Dissimilarity

dents of a single race dominate most Flint neighborhoods, Grand Traverse is quite racially integrated.<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 2.3:** Grand Traverse includes residents of various races and is not dominated by any single racial identity.

**Source:** 2000 Decennial Census, U.S. Census Bureau.



**Figure 2.4:** The Grand Traverse neighborhood is home to people of many ages, with one-fourth of residents children under the age of 18.

**Source:** 2000 Decennial Census, U.S. Census Bureau.

Indices,” (Accessed 16 November 2005). <[http://www.census.gov/hhes/white\\_black.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/white_black.html)>

13 Of Flint’s 41 census tracts, one race made up at least 60% of the population in all but five census tracts. U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Population and Housing Characteristics, 2000.

# Creating a Neighborhood of Choice

## Age

As described by Figure 2.4, the age distribution of Grand Traverse neighborhood residents is slightly different than that of Flint as a whole. The percentage of persons over 65 is half that of the city, and the percentage of children under 18 in the neighborhood is noticeably lower, though still significant. Almost seventy percent of neighborhood residents, however, are of prime adult working age, between 18 and 64,<sup>14</sup> Improved housing, streets, and recreational facilities are needed to serve workforce-age adults as well as children and seniors.

## Income

As seen in Table 2.3, the Grand Traverse neighborhood is poorer than Flint as a whole. Neighborhood median household income was around one third lower than Flint's median household income in 1999. Poverty rates were about twice as high in Grand Traverse as in Flint, and four times greater than in Genesee County as a whole. The portion of the neighborhood north of Court Street is better off than the southern part of the neighborhood, with a median household income of over \$6,000 more than the southern section. Residents report an influx of middle-class households in the past five years, principally in the northern part of the neighborhood, so these rates may have improved.

	Block Group 3 (North of Court Street)	Block Group 4 (South of Court Street)	zCity of Flint	Genesee County
Median household income	\$20,577	\$14,286	\$28,015	\$41,951
Poverty rate	49%	59%	26%	13%

**Table 2.3:** Grand Traverse households have lower incomes than households city or county-wide, with more than half of neighborhood households below the poverty line in 1999.

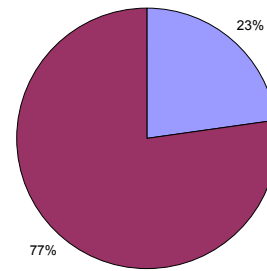
Source: 2000 Decennial Census, U.S. Census Bureau.

14 U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Population and Housing Characteristics, 2000.

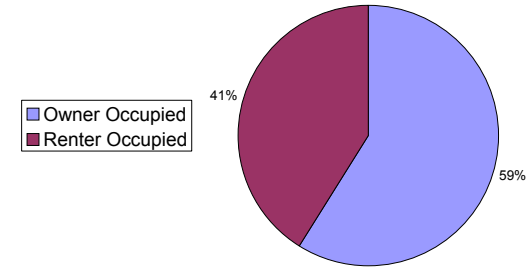
## Home Ownership

The Grand Traverse neighborhood has a low rate of homeownership, with only 23 percent of households owning their home in 2000, while the other 77 percent rented, as illustrated by Figure 2.5. In the city of Flint as a whole, 59 percent of homes were owner-occupied and only 41 percent rental.<sup>15</sup> As will be discussed further in Chapter Five, the high proportion of renters in the Grand Traverse neighborhood may affect the prospects for many residents to build wealth, and landlords may have less incentive than owner-occupants to maintain properties. Also, in 2000, almost half the residents of

Home Ownership, Grand Traverse Area



Home Ownership, City of Flint



**Figure 2.5:** The Grand Traverse neighborhood has a much lower rate of home ownership than Flint as a whole.

Source: 2000 Decennial Census, U.S. Census Bureau.

	Percentage of owner-occupied units with no vehicle available	Percentage of renter-occupied housing units with no vehicle available
Grand Traverse area	8%	34%
Flint	8%	28%
Genesee County	4%	19%

**Table 2.4:** Over 1/3 of renter households in Grand Traverse do not have a vehicle available, a rate greater than that of Flint and the Genesee County as a whole.

Source: 2000 Decennial Census, U.S. Census Bureau.

15 U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Population and Housing Characteristics, 2000.

renter-occupied units had moved within the previous year.<sup>16</sup> This high rate of transience among renters creates challenges for community organizing.

### *Access to Vehicles*

In addition to lower incomes and lower rates of home ownership, the Grand Traverse neighborhood is characterized by lower access to motor vehicles than is typical for Flint. In particular, vehicle access is an issue for renters. As seen in Table 2.4, of rental households in the neighborhood, 34 percent do not own a car, compared to about 28 percent of all Flint renters and 19 percent of rental households countywide, limiting access to job opportunities and services.<sup>17</sup> Because of this high number of residents without cars, pedestrian and bicycle safety and access, as well as public transit service, are important issues. However, the central location of the Grand Traverse neighborhood may make lack of vehicle access slightly less of a problem for its residents.

## **PHYSICAL FEATURES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD**

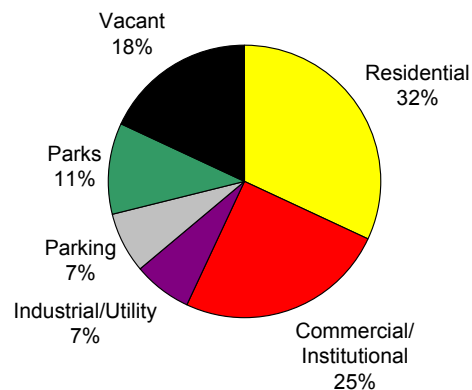
This section outlines the physical conditions of the Grand Traverse neighborhood, including land uses, housing conditions, streets and sidewalks, and recreational facilities. The Grand Traverse neighborhood has a variety of land uses, neighborhood businesses, historic homes, and recreational possibilities, but signs of disinvestment are apparent in the high number of vacant lots, deteriorated structures, and parks in need of maintenance. Several busy one-way thoroughfares pass through the neighborhood, acting as dividers but also providing fast access to other areas.

### *Land Use*

Nearly two-fifths of the neighborhood’s land area are occupied by commercial, office, institutional, industrial, and related uses. Only one third of neighborhood land area is occupied by residential uses. Eleven percent is parkland (Figure 2.6).

A full 18 percent of Grand Traverse’s land area is vacant, a figure that ex-  
16 U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Population and Housing Characteristics, 2000.

17 U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Population and Housing Characteristics, 2000.



*Figure 2.6: The Grand Traverse neighborhood features a mixture of land uses, including significant vacant land.*

*Source: Heidi Peterson, 2004.*

cludes the historic but currently unused former Oak School along Fifth Street, a significant local landmark. The presence of such a large number of businesses, institutions, public spaces, and vacant lots presents both opportunities and challenges. Strategies for revitalizing the area will account for this variety of land uses as this provides a much broader range of resources to draw upon than if the neighborhood were purely residential.

As seen in Figure 2.7, professional offices and other commercial users dominate the northeast section of the district, while neighborhood retail establishments line Court Street at the center of the Grand Traverse neighborhood. Over 100 attorneys’ offices are located in the neighborhood, due to the proximity of courthouses and other government buildings. Prominent neighborhood-oriented businesses include Tom Z’s Flint Original Coney Island, the White Horse Tavern, The Grainery natural food store and the Northwest Market. Four churches, several social service agencies and nonprofit organizations, and other retail and service establishments are also located in the Grand Traverse neighborhood.<sup>18</sup> Several of the local business owners are Grand Traverse residents and participate actively in the neighborhood association.

### *Housing Stock*

Loss of population and investment has affected the condition of the neighborhood’s housing stock, displayed in Figure 2.8 and 2.9. Among the neighborhood’s greatest assets are a number of homes in excellent condition, including several distinctive, restored historic houses.

In a 2004 and 2005 assessment, a large majority of homes in the neighbor-  
18 *Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association, GTDNA Fact Book. 2004.*

## Creating a Neighborhood of Choice



**Figure 2.7:** Commercial, office, and governmental uses are clustered along the eastern edge of the neighborhood, adjacent to downtown, and along Court Street.

Sources: Heidi Peterson (data), Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission (aerial photo, streets).



**Figure 2.8:** Several good and fair-quality homes exist in the neighborhood, but vacant lots and housing in poor physical condition are widespread as well.

Sources: Heidi Peterson, 2004 and Jon Ippel, 2005 (data). Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission (aerial photo, streets).

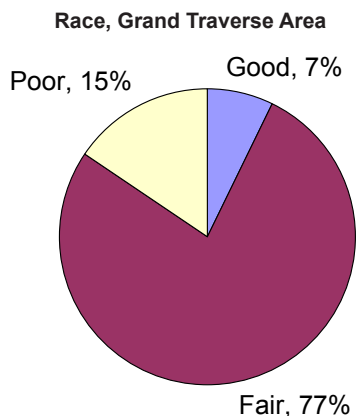


Figure 2.9: Most of the neighborhood’s housing stock has suffered from some deterioration.

Source: Heidi Peterson, 2004. Updated by Jon Ippel, 2005.



Figure 2.10: Houses in the Grand Traverse neighborhood are in varying states of repair.

hood were ranked “fair.”

Many of these houses and apartment buildings have great potential for rehabilitation. The survey rated over 15 percent of the neighborhood’s housing as “poor.” In addition, the neighborhood has 128 vacant parcels.<sup>19</sup>

### Reinvestment Opportunities

To spur reinvestment, the State of Michigan designated the area west of Grand Traverse Street and north of Court Street as a Renaissance Zone (Figure 2.11). Residents and businesses in this area enjoy relief from most state and local taxes until 2009 and may qualify for other state economic development funds.<sup>20</sup> This designation may have already produced benefits in the Grand Traverse area, as an added incentive for several historic home restoration projects in the northwest section of the neighborhood.

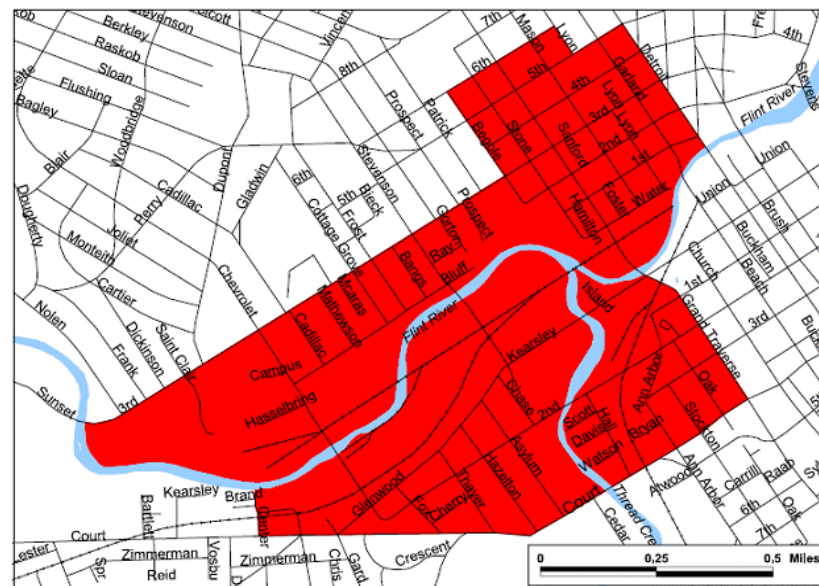


Figure 2.11: Flint Historic-Industrial-Housing Renaissance Zone, including the northwest portion of the Grand Traverse neighborhood. Residents and businesses located in this area enjoy exemption from most state and local taxes.

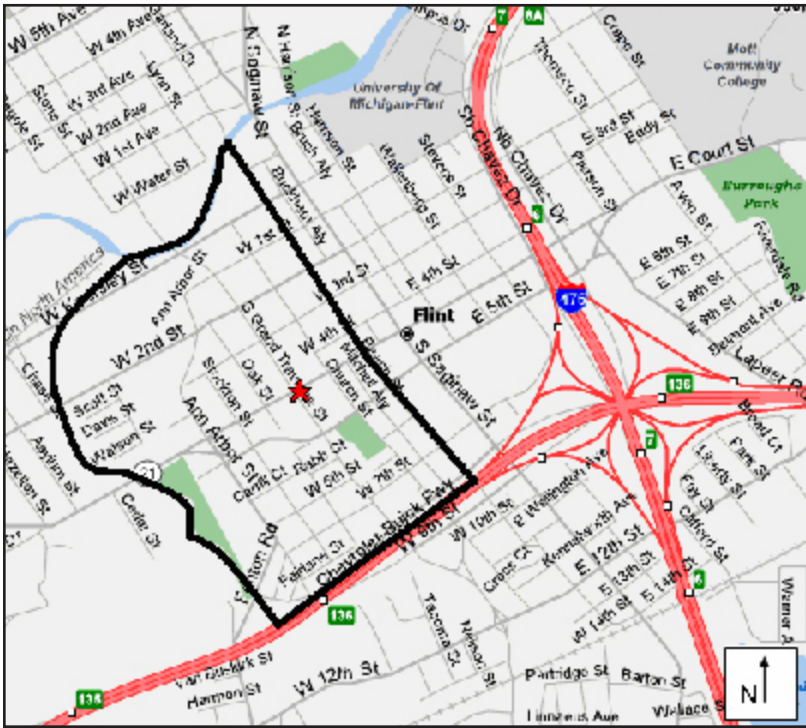
Source: Michigan Economic Development Corporation website: <<http://medc.michigan.org/services/sitedevelopment/renzone/GeneseeCounty>>

### Transportation

Figure 2.12 illustrates the Grand Traverse neighborhood’s fortunate location at the intersection of several major transportation corridors, providing excellent access to and from the neighborhood. Interstate 69 forms the neighborhood’s southern boundary, accessible via southbound Grand Traverse Street and northbound Church Street. M-21 enters the neighborhood from the west at the Court Street bridge, and separates into the one-way pair of Fifth Street (eastbound) and Court Street (westbound). Ann Arbor Street/Fenton Road is another major traffic corridor along the west side of the Grand Traverse neighborhood. Grand Traverse Street and Beach Street provide access to points north of the Flint River. These streets were designed for heavy commuter traffic, but are currently underused because of

19 Surveyed by Heidi Peterson, 2004, as updated by Jon Ippel, 2005. This number does not include parks and side lots.

20 Citizens Research Council of Michigan, “Michigan Renaissance Zones in the Economic Development Context,” Report No. 324, November 1998. (Accessed 16 December 2005). <<http://www.crcmich.org/PUBLICAT/1990s/1998/rpt324.pdf>>



**Figure 2.12:** The neighborhood is adjacent to downtown Flint (centered on Saginaw Street) and Interstate 69, with street access to many area assets. M-21 passes through the heart of the neighborhood as Court Street and Fifth Street.

Source: Mapquest.com, 6 December 2005.

past plant closings. While these high-speed, high-capacity streets provide for easy travel, they also create pedestrian safety and comfort issues by making the streets feel unsafe (Figure 2.13). The many one-way streets in the neighborhood can also cause confusion and inconvenience for drivers.

The Grand Traverse neighborhood is also served by the Genesee County Mass Transportation Authority (MTA) bus system. Routes 3, 11, and 12 provide direct access to downtown, to the south and west sides of Flint and to adjacent townships, as well as to Bishop International Airport. Buses arrive every half-hour during peak hours and also access the downtown MTA customer service center (located only two blocks east of the Grand Traverse neighbor-

hood boundary) where riders can transfer to routes serving other system destinations, including regional job centers in Oakland and Livingston counties.<sup>21</sup> Being so close to the transit center is an asset to the neighborhood, especially with so many households lacking access to automobiles.

### Recreational Opportunities

A large supply of parkland exists in the Grand Traverse neighborhood. Four-acre Memorial Park is located on Fifth Street between Grand Traverse Street and Church Street and serves as a community focal point (Figure 2.14). While the landscaping is well maintained, the parking area and basketball and tennis courts are in disrepair. At almost 10 acres in size, Aldrich Park is the neighborhood's largest public open space, but is somewhat inaccessible. Located along the neighborhood's western edge bordering Swartz and Thread Creeks, much of the park is covered either in thick vegetation or road construction de-

<sup>21</sup> Genesee County Mass Transportation Authority, Mass Transportation Authority, 2004 <<http://www.mtaflint.org>> (5 December 2005)



**Figure 2.13:** Wide one-way streets encourage speeding and do not contribute to pedestrian safety and comfort.



**Figure 2.14:** Shady Memorial Park is a neighborhood focal point.



bris and is used as a dumping ground for the city's leaf pickup services. A basketball court is located in the northern section of the park, which also contains documented soil contamination. Stockton Park, a 1.4 acre site at Third Street and Ann Arbor Street, contained play equipment until recently. However, the site is not currently managed as a park and is maintained by a neighboring property owner.<sup>22</sup>

The Flint River, Swartz Creek, and Thread Creek, three of the most prominent natural features in the area, border the Grand Traverse neighborhood along its northern and western edges, but public access to these waterways is limited. One exception is Riverbank Park, located between the Flint River and Kearsley Street and running along the river from Grand Traverse Street eastward beyond the neighborhood's boundary. The section of Riverbank Park in the Grand Traverse neighborhood consists mainly of manicured grass, ornamental trees, and a paved walkway that offers views of the Flint River. Located at the northern edge of the Grand Traverse neighborhood, Riverbank Park is not easily accessible to many neighborhood residents. Finally, Happy Hollow Nature Area, a city-owned wooded park, lies to the southwest of the Grand Traverse neighborhood along Swartz Creek but is not easily accessible from the neighborhood.

## *CONCLUSION*

As this chapter has outlined, the Grand Traverse neighborhood faces many challenges, but also has many assets. The members of the GTDNA - themselves a significant asset - are very dedicated to strengthening their neighborhood. The next chapter presents their vision for the future of the Grand Traverse neighborhood and their goals for moving toward that vision.

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22 E-Mail from Heidi Peterson, 4 October 2005.



## CHAPTER THREE: COMMUNITY VISION, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

The first step to creating the neighborhood that Grand Traverse residents want to live in is to define a vision of that neighborhood. The vision aims to capture the hopes, dreams and aspirations of the residents for the neighborhood.

The neighborhood's residents expressed their desires for the neighborhood in several ways:

- A survey of neighborhood residents at the Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association's annual Family Festival, held in Memorial Park in September, measured their priorities and perceptions of the neighborhood. See Appendix B for more information.
- In 2004, the Court Street Village Non Profit led a planning process that asked residents to identify their goals and challenges to those goals.
- Finally, association members stated their hopes for the neighborhood during several meetings and interviews.

At a visioning meeting in early October 2005, GTDNA members summarized their collective hopes in the following vision statement:

**THE GRAND TRAVERSE DISTRICT WILL BE A DIVERSE URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD. IT WILL BE A WELL-MAINTAINED NEIGHBORHOOD FOR RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES, A VIBRANT AND SAFE COMMUNITY OF CHOICE.**

In forming this vision, residents mentioned the closeness to resources like downtown Flint and the campuses of Kettering University and the University of Michigan as assets for creating a lively and interesting neighborhood. The vision recognizes the mixture of people and businesses in the area as a benefit, while also seeking to ensure that Grand Traverse retains the pleasant feel of a neighborhood and does not become an extension of downtown.

At the visioning meeting, residents and business owners discussed eight possible goals that could help the neighborhood achieve the vision. They prioritized the goals and selected the following five goals for the plan:

### *Improve housing conditions*

Both exterior appearance and interior living conditions of housing should improve. By improving housing conditions, the stability, desirability and image of the neighborhood will improve; and the neighborhood will be able to grow.

### *Increase home ownership*

Residents believe that owner-occupied homes are often better maintained than is rental housing and that the owners have more of a stake in the success of the neighborhood than do landlords. Therefore, increasing home ownership can lead to greater financial and social investment in the neighborhood.

### *Improve street, safety, and access conditions for pedestrians and vehicles*

The streets should be hospitable to both pedestrians and vehicles. Residents should feel safe on the streets and be able to use them easily to access local destinations, and the streets should welcome visitors to the neighborhood. Because the streets create much of the character of the neighborhood, they should be shaped to promote the plan vision.

### *Increase recreational opportunities and access to natural areas for people of all ages*

The Grand Traverse neighborhood has several recreational assets, including the Flint River, Memorial Park, Swartz and Thread Creeks and Aldrich Park. These resources should be developed so that residents can easily access them and take full advantage of their value to the neighborhood.

### *Strengthen resident and business involvement in the community*

The GTDNA aims to include the diverse residents and businesses in the area and meet their needs. To do so, they must reach out to residents and businesses that are not currently involved with the association. By increasing

## *Creating a Neighborhood of Choice*

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active participation in and partnerships with the GTDNA, the organization can bring the neighborhood closer to the stated vision.

This vision and goals have driven the creation of this plan. The following chapters discuss strategies to achieve the five stated goals. They include recommendations for prioritizing the strategies and guidance for implementing them. The discussion that follows should allow the neighborhood association to begin putting the plan into action.

## CHAPTER FOUR: BUILD, MAINTAIN, AND REPAIR HOMES

### GOAL: IMPROVE HOUSING CONDITIONS

This chapter focuses on how to improve the condition of housing, an element central to the stability, desirability, image, and growth of the Grand Traverse neighborhood. If housing conditions improve, current and potential homeowners will find the neighborhood appealing as a place to live and will be willing to buy, maintain, and repair their homes.

### SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve housing conditions, the GTDNA should concentrate on improving the condition of existing homes and building or completely rehabilitating homes. General strategies for achieving this include:

- Improve code enforcement by developing a neighborhood volunteer program and working closely with the city
- Create upkeep and repair programs for occupied homes
- Build new housing units on vacant land and rehabilitate appropriate vacant houses

### IMPROVE CONDITION OF EXISTING HOUSING

Improvements in visible, external features of housing such as roofs, porches, paint, siding, windows, sidewalks, and yards will foster investment and vitality. Improvements in internal features can make a house safer and more valuable. The following are strategies for improving conditions of existing housing, including code enforcement and repair programs.

#### *Code Enforcement*

GTDNA members have identified code enforcement as a high priority. Code enforcement is a legal tool that enables a municipality to require homeowners to comply with city laws regulating housing and property conditions. Effective code enforcement methods contribute to safer, cleaner, and more attractive neighborhoods.

**Current Status of Code Enforcement:** The Flint Building & Safety Inspections Department is responsible for code enforcement in the city. A shortage of funding prevents the city from proactively enforcing its code, and therefore the department staff rely on residents to call in complaints when they notice code violations. The city department has eight licensed code inspectors to cover nine wards with nearly 50,000 occupied housing units. The City of Flint is working on improving coordination between the prosecutor's office and neighborhoods, implementing a new civil infraction system, and delivering warnings to residents for voluntary compliance before the spring of 2006.<sup>1</sup> Members of the GTDNA are dissatisfied with the level of code enforcement that the city currently provides.<sup>2</sup>

**Citizen Volunteer Initiative:** Flint's code enforcement division would welcome a relationship with the GTDNA. The association can learn about the city code from the enforcement officers and then designate citizen volunteers to report code violations consistently and frequently. The city code enforcement agency will not deputize citizens for official code enforcement purposes but is willing to work with neighborhood organizations to identify and report violations.<sup>3</sup> A volunteer initiative in collaboration with the city could result in significant improvements to the appearance of the neighborhood, as shown in Case Study 4.1.

#### *Case Study 4.1: The Citizen's Nuisance Task Force (CNTF)*

The CNTF was a volunteer initiative that started in Flint in 2002 to clean up trash and reduce blight on vacant lots. The volunteer effort resulted in a citizen-government partnership between volunteers and city administration. This coalition resulted in the removal of 3,545 tons of garbage from 32 neighborhoods throughout the city during the period of April 2003 through September 2005 and the commitment of 1,745 volunteers from 48 different organizations.<sup>1</sup>

1 Court Street Village Non Profit. (accessed 19 December 2005) <<http://www.courtstreetvillage.org>>

1 Interview with Scott Ball, City of Flint Building Inspection Department, 14 December 2005.

2 GTDNA meeting, 1 November 2005.

3 Interview with Scott Ball, City of Flint Building Inspection Department, 14 December 2005.

## Creating a Neighborhood of Choice

### Home Repair

Neighborhood residents may be financially unable to make the necessary repairs to their homes as required by the city code. Therefore, code enforcement programs should operate in conjunction with efforts to assist homeowners and occupants in making necessary repairs. Effective repair programs will create a more appealing and attractive environment that can stabilize the Grand Traverse neighborhood. The following programs could help improve homes of property owners who are not motivated or who cannot afford to pay for repairs.



**Figure 4.1:** The neighborhood could benefit from some exterior repairs on this home.

### Court Street Village Non Profit Programs:

The Court Street Village Non Profit (CSV) has initiated programs that can assist the GTDNA and residents. CSV is utilizing a community development block grant of \$50,000 to assist in exterior repairs of code violations on six homes in the Central Park, Fairfield and Carriage Town neighborhoods. CSV also received a \$25,000 grant from the Ruth Mott Foundation to correct code violations on exteriors of several homes in the Grand Traverse neighborhood.<sup>4</sup> GTDNA leaders could work with CSV in the selection of homes for repair to create a unified strategy for determining how this grant is to be used.

**Saturday Neighborhood Fix-Up Days:** Neighborhood fix-up days would bring the GTDNA, business owners, and residents together to paint and repair exteriors of houses in the neighborhood several times a year. The program directs volunteers to work on selected homes in the neighborhood using resources collected from local sponsors. The programs could include:

4 Steve Wall, Court Street Village Non Profit, GTDNA meeting, 14 December 2005.

- Sponsorship of the event by local businesses and law firms
- Recruitment of volunteer groups such as UM Flint students, church youth groups, fraternities, and other service organizations to participate in the house painting and repairs

**Rebuilding Together (Formerly Christmas in April):** The mission of Rebuilding Together is to preserve and revitalize houses and neighborhoods by partnering with residents to make a positive impact. The GTDNA could become an affiliate of this national organization in Flint to take advantage of their knowledge and resources based on rehabilitation efforts around the country.<sup>5</sup> The program can assist by funding repairs that include roofing, plumb-

### Case Study 4.2: Rebuilding Together in New Orleans

The Rebuilding Together program in New Orleans has repaired numerous homes and buildings around the city. The organization brings together volunteers to do repairs such as carpentry, plumbing and painting. They make a special effort to recruit skilled trades-people as volunteers. Rebuilding Together works with neighborhood associations to identify low-income homeowners who could benefit from their services. Since 1988, the program has assisted in improving twenty historic neighborhoods, including over 900 owner-occupied houses.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 4.2:** Volunteers can be very effective at repairing and painting existing homes. *Source:* Rebuilding Together website

1 Rebuilding Together: New Orleans Affiliate Website. (accessed 22 December 2005). <[www.rtno.org](http://www.rtno.org)>

5 Rebuilding Together's Washtenaw County affiliate is the closest to Flint. The contact number is (734) 994-8421. Tom Mussio, Director

ing, and electrical improvements. Additional information about the organization is detailed in Case Study 4.2.

### *Funding for Home Repair and Maintenance Programs*

Home repair and maintenance can be very expensive, but private and government programs can help. The following are some programs that may be appropriate for the GTDNA either in its current structure as an association or as a nonprofit organization, a community development corporation (CDC), or a Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO). The GTDNA could also partner with another nonprofit or CDC/CHDO (see Chapter Nine):

#### **Neighborhood Impact Program (NIP):**

This program works through banks that are members of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Indianapolis. It provides matching funds for home renovation projects. Non-profit organizations work with member banks to administer the program. Funds can be used for the renovation of owner-occupied, single-family homes. (See <<http://www.fhlbi.com/housing/nipprog.asp>>).

**Property Improvement Program Loan (PIP):** Individual landlords may apply for assistance through the State of Michigan's Property Improvement Program (PIP). The Michigan State Housing Development Authority provides loans for landlords who are interested in making permanent improvements to their property. Possible improvements include replacement of heating systems, windows, roofs, insulation and siding. The PIP allows a maximum loan amount per property of: \$24,000 for one unit; \$25,000 for two units; \$36,000 for three units; \$48,000 for four units; and \$60,000 for five to eleven units. (See <[www.michigan.gov/mshda](http://www.michigan.gov/mshda)>).



*Figure 4.3: Small home repairs can have a dramatic effect on the appearance of the neighborhood.*

**Group Workcamps Foundation:** The Group Workcamps Foundation organizes teens for mission trips to do community service around the country. In the summer of 2006, they will bring 350 young adults to Flint to do exterior home repairs. The GTDNA could develop a relationship with the Group Workcamps Foundation to improve the Grand Traverse neighborhood. (See <[www.Groupworkcamps.com](http://www.Groupworkcamps.com)>).

Successful code enforcement and housing repair programs will lead to more investment and a better appearance of homes. To improve the neighborhood housing conditions, the association could develop a communication strategy with code enforcement officers that would relay continuous information on violations. The association could begin repair programs by incorporating into a non-profit or other CDC/CHDO or by partnering with an existing organization. The following section will discuss how new housing and rehabilitation of vacant housing could improve the neighborhood.



*Figure 4.4: A rehabilitated house like this one on Sixth and Grand Traverse can have a positive impact on the value of adjacent lots and homes.*



*Figure 4.5: Larger structures have renovation potential as duplexes.*

### **HOUSING DEVELOPMENT**

Housing development can include the construction of new housing and the rehabilitation of existing vacant homes. “Infill” housing development on existing residential lots will have an immediate effect on the housing conditions in the Grand Traverse area. Rehabilitation of appropriate vacant homes will also improve housing conditions and help stabilize the neighborhood.

Housing development is an important part of achieving the neighborhood vision because it improves the local market. Many vacant and blighted properties exist in the neighborhood, and efforts can focus on improvement of these parcels. Impacts of housing development on the neighborhood include:

**Image and Appearance:** New housing and rehabilitated housing in an urban neighborhood send a signal to residents, businesses, and visitors that the area is desirable, viable, and improving.<sup>6</sup> The effect is often two-fold: vacant, blighted lots are eliminated and turned into stable, quality housing, and new housing signals hope to the neighborhood residents.

**Property Values and Neighborhood Investment:** Investment and improvements in appearance add value to neighboring properties. This appreciation in value can often spur additional investment in the neighborhood.

**Quality of Life:** Residents may feel safer in the neighborhood with less vacant land and more occupied housing with more ‘eyes on the street.’<sup>7</sup> The improvement in housing conditions also increases the quality of life for the renters or homeowners who live in safer, more energy-efficient, and more attractive homes.

**Community Retail and Service Stimulation:** Added population brings sales opportunities to existing neighborhood businesses and may create a market

for additional businesses. This could increase the vibrancy that neighborhood residents desire.

The key to the success of housing development lies in the type of new housing, its location, and the identification of the appropriate developer.

#### *Type of Housing*

New housing has the most beneficial effect on a neighborhood when it conforms to the use, size, style, and price range of other neighborhood properties. A market study would further determine the demand for housing use, size, and value. Such a study may indicate the types of potential homebuyers and renters and indicate the demand that exists for different housing uses and sizes at certain prices. Michael Freeman, Flint program officer of the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC), has offered to assist with funding and management of a housing market study.<sup>8</sup>

**Use:** Since vacant properties in the neighborhood are generally small and scattered, the most appropriate new uses are single-family homes or duplexes. These uses would best fit with the existing housing stock in the neighborhood. The exception is the Oak School, which the association members would like to see as a mixed-use development, including lofts or other multi-family housing.<sup>9</sup>

**Size:** The most likely market for new housing would be for moderately-sized units that fit with the existing neighborhood and are affordable for low and middle-income buyers. Market studies could further specify the desired size of housing. Larger homes that are renovated may be suitable for duplex occupancy.

**Style:** Infill homes should be designed to match the existing styles, size, and lot placement in the Grand Traverse neighborhood.<sup>10</sup> Maintaining a consistent style preserves existing historical value and continuity.

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6 Diane R. Suchman, *Developing Successful Infill Housing*. Washington D.C.: Urban Land Institute. 2002.

7 George L. Kelling & Catherine M. Coles, *Fixing Broken Windows: Restoring Order and Reducing Crime in Our Communities*. New York: Free Press. 1996. & Gerda R. Wekerle & Carolyn Whitzman, *Safe Cities: Guidelines for Planning, Design, and Management*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold. 1995.

8 Interview with Michael Freeman, Local Initiatives Support Coalition, 21 November 2005.

9 GTDNA meeting, 20 October 2005.

10 Diane R. D. and M. Sowell, *Developing Infill Housing in Inner-City Neighborhoods: Opportunities and Strategies*. Washington D.C.: Urban Land Institute, 1997.



**Price:** According to a knowledgeable local realtor, a large, historic home in excellent condition could sell for as much as \$150,000, but homes in poor condition may sell for as little as \$5,000-10,000.<sup>11</sup> This is the market value of the existing homes in the Grand Traverse neighborhood. Values of homes in fair or good condition vary block by block but generally increase in value towards the north and east sections of the neighborhood.

New construction costs of a 1,500 square foot home would likely average \$90-100 per square foot, or \$135,000-150,000.<sup>12</sup> Because current market values are not this high, even for a new house, subsidies will be required to fund the gap between the construction costs and sales prices. Rehabilitation costs for a 1,500 square foot home would likely average \$60 per square foot, or \$90,000.<sup>13</sup> Rehabilitated homes may also need a subsidy to sell the homes and still cover costs. These new and rehabilitated homes should not be sold below the market value unless the developer rents or sells them to low-income households (see Chapter Five).

### *Housing Location*

Developing in strategically-selected locations will create the largest impact on investment in the Grand Traverse neighborhood. Housing distribution, visibility, proximity to assets, and property ownership are among the factors that determine optimal locations for housing development.



**Figure 4.6:** Some areas have concentrations of vacant lots. Focusing infill in these areas could reach a “tipping point” and trigger further investment in the vicinity.

11 Interview with Ryan Eashoo, Remax Realty, 21 December 2005.  
 12 Interview with Michael Freeman, Local Initiatives Support Coalition, 20 December 2005.  
 13 Interview with Chris Bray, Detroit Catholic Pastoral Alliance Housing Program, 21 December 2005.

**Housing Distribution:** Housing development can be focused in specific target areas or scattered throughout the neighborhood. A combination of both strategies may also be effective in improving the quality of housing in the area. Concentrating infill housing in small areas can create pockets of quality housing stock that encourage adjacent property owners to improve their homes. On the other hand, scattered-site development may revitalize multiple blocks most in need of improvement by eliminating the worst blight.



**Figure 4.7:** Because this Second Street home is in such poor condition relative to its surroundings, renovation or redevelopment of this single property would have a dramatic effect on neighborhood.

In the Grand Traverse neighborhood, the most effective development strategy could combine clustered and scattered-site projects. Properties available for infill and rehabilitation are dispersed throughout the neighborhood, and areas of need are evident in scattered sites as well as clusters.

A concentration of new housing should include at least twenty units in order to achieve a noticeable impact and make the financing more feasible for developers.<sup>14</sup> The NorthStar neighborhood in Detroit and the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood in Cleveland are good examples of non-profit developments that include clusters totaling about 50 homes (see Case Studies 4.3 and 4.4). These projects continue to have a large positive impact in areas that are similar to the Grand Traverse neighborhood.

14 Ben Fedewa, Lecture on MSHDA projects. Ann Arbor, MI, 6 November 2005.

### Case Study 4.3: Mount Pleasant Homes, Cleveland, Ohio

A private development firm initiated a program that built 50 new homes on scattered sites on vacant, blighted property that the city owned in the Mount Pleasant neighborhood of Cleveland.<sup>1</sup>

#### Involved Parties:

- City of Cleveland
- Zaremba Group, Inc.
- Mount Pleasant Now Development Corporation (a local CDC)

#### Funding Scheme:

- \$4.2 million project cost
- \$3.4 million in equity provided by National Equity Fund (a large syndicator of federal low-income housing tax credits)
- \$3.5 million construction loan provided by Huntington Bank
- \$1.2 million permanent loan provided by Huntington Bank
- \$400,000 loan from the City of Cleveland.
- \$2 million subsidy from the State of Ohio
- 15 year property tax abatement by the City of Cleveland

<sup>1</sup> Mt. Pleasant Now website. (accessed 12 November 2005). <[www.Mtpleasantnow.org](http://www.Mtpleasantnow.org)>

**Visibility:** Visible projects exert some “control of the neighborhood environment” when new housing is within sight of major corridors or population areas. The Chicago City Homes program found that prospective homeowners “must first have confidence in the neighborhood” before they risk their money investing in a neighborhood.<sup>15</sup> Current and potential Grand Traverse residents may desire public investment and amenities and may want to feel confident that their properties will appreciate.

<sup>15</sup> Diane R. Suchman, *Developing Successful Infill Housing*. p. 42. Washington D.C.: Urban Land Institute. 2002.

### Case Study 4.4: NorthStar Neighborhood (University Grove), Detroit, Michigan

NorthStar CDC operates in a northwest Detroit neighborhood that is similar to the Grand Traverse neighborhood. NorthStar is implementing a neighborhood housing plan that includes a timeline for developing areas of high visibility and areas of complete neglect. This plan has led to dramatic physical improvements in the neighborhood it serves.<sup>1</sup>

#### Involved Parties:

- NorthStar CDC
- City of Detroit
- Private contractor and architect.

#### Funding Scheme:

- Homes average \$170,000 to build including market study, site theft, labor, materials.
- City of Detroit Community Development Block Grant
- City of Detroit HOME Funds Program
- MSHDA low-income housing tax credits when developing rental housing

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Chris Bryant, NorthStar Community Development Corporation, 19 December 2005.

**Proximity to Assets:** Anchor institutions and community assets such as hospitals, universities, historic buildings, and mature landscaping can reinforce the infill-housing market.<sup>16</sup> Parks and recreation amenities such as Memorial Park or a future cleaned-up Spring Grove are such assets in the Grand Traverse neighborhood, just as the renovated Oak School and Stockton House soon will be. Locating new housing near these assets will increase the attractiveness of the housing to new and current residents.

<sup>16</sup> Diane R. Suchman, *Developing Successful Infill Housing*. Washington D.C.: Urban Land Institute. 2002.

**Areas of Transition:** Areas of market transition, or ‘edge areas’ can benefit the most from an infusion of infill housing.<sup>17</sup> An area of transition is an area between a stable neighborhood and a deteriorating neighborhood. Such areas may be either improving or deteriorating. Building in such a transition area in the neighborhood will ensure that it will improve and be more like the already stable area. The Court and Fifth Street corridor functions as a transitional zone.<sup>18</sup> There is a concentration of stable properties to the north (many renovated residential and offices with fewer vacant parcels), and numerous abandoned structures, tax-foreclosed properties, and vacant properties exist immediately south of the corridor.

**Areas in the Renaissance Zone:** Renaissance zones can make housing infill or rehabilitation more financially feasible in the Grand Traverse neighborhood. Renaissance zones offer incentives by reducing or eliminating property taxes and state income taxes for residents. As illustrated in Chapter Two (see Figure 2.11), the State of Michigan has set up numerous Renaissance Zones in Flint, and one of these is the “historic, industrial, and housing zone” that covers the northwest side of the neighborhood.



**Figure 4.8:** *Although on a side street (Oak Street), this house is visible to all traffic heading into downtown on Fifth Street. Rehabilitation or demolition of this property would have a positive impact on the neighborhood appearance and image.*

**Property Ownership:** Sites for new housing or rehabilitation must be owned by an entity willing to carry out the development. A developer assembles vacant land to develop housing and acquires houses for rehabilitation. If vacant lots or houses are owned by the Genesee County Land Bank, State of Michigan, or City of Flint, the GTDNA or another developer may have an easier time acquiring the property at a reasonable price than from private owners.

The GTDNA can work with the land bank to identify and hold property for future development. A property audit could determine which parcels are best suited for infill or rehabilitation. The Land Bank is willing to lead such an audit, which will take into account physical, environmental and cost considerations.<sup>19</sup> Parcels currently owned by the Land Bank, the state and the city are noted on Figure 4.9.

### *Focus Areas for Housing Development*

Based on the above considerations, areas of the neighborhood that offer the strongest infill and rehabilitation opportunities include:

**Area One:** The Fifth Street and Court Street corridor (green area on Figure 4.9) provides a good place to begin housing investment. This corridor includes the streets between Fifth and Court and a few adjacent blocks. The Oak School, with its potential for reuse as a residential site with commercial uses, is also nearby.

Pros:

- Near the Oak School
- Good visibility to residents and commuters
- Optimal access to downtown, potential greenways, and local businesses
- Near the more stable, northern areas of the neighborhood
- Within or near the Renaissance Zone

17 Diane R. Suchman, *Developing Successful Infill Housing*. Washington D.C.: Urban Land Institute. 2002.

18 Interview with Ryan Eashoo, Remax Realty, 21 December 2005.

19 Interview with Jeff Burdick, Genesee County Land Bank, 21 November 2005.

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### Cons:

- High traffic area
- Near non-residential properties that may be undesirable
- Limited property control by the Land Bank and state and local governments

**Area Two:** The Oak Street and Stockton Street corridor south of Court Street and east along Sixth Street (red area on Figure 4.9).

### Pros:

- Large concentration of vacant land
- Near the Oak School
- Some ongoing rehabilitation work in vicinity on historic homes
- Quieter area than the major corridors
- Within the Renaissance Zone

### Cons:

- Weaker housing market
- Limited visibility to visitors
- Limited property control by the Land Bank and state and local governments on Sixth Street

**Area Three:** The Ann Arbor Street/Stockton House area (blue area on Figure 4.9).

### Pros:

- Some concentration of controllable vacant land
- Good access to potential greenways, quiet areas, and local businesses
- Rehabilitation of some residential properties and the Stockton House
- Near the more stable, northern area of the neighborhood
- Adjacent to the Spring Grove potential recreation and housing site (See Chapter Seven).

### Cons:

- Few Land Bank or government-owned parcels
- Limited visibility to some residents and visitors

## *Housing Development Implementation Strategies*

Because the market for housing in the Grand Traverse neighborhood is weak, a non-profit community development corporation (CDC) would be most effective in leading development of infill housing construction or rehabilitation. Once the locations for housing development have been established, a strong development organization can implement such housing development. This CDC should be able to work closely or exclusively with the GTDNA to create effective change. The following explains how the GTDNA could approach new housing development through finding appropriate developers and partnerships.

Private developers, community development corporations (CDCs - non-profits dedicated to neighborhood development), and community housing development organizations (CHDOs - non-profits dedicated to housing development) can lead the development of infill projects or the rehabilitation of homes. For the Grand Traverse neighborhood, a CDC or CHDO (referred to hereafter as a CDC only) would be the best organization to lead development of new housing and rehabilitation. Case Studies 4.3 and 4.4 illustrate projects in which a CDC brought together multiple partners and funding streams.

## *Potential Developers of Housing*

Three approaches outlined below offer alternatives that the GTDNA can implement independently or in partnership with others:

**Option One - CDC as Project Developer and Builder:** Under this scenario, a CDC--this could be the GTDNA itself--sets up a housing development project by assembling land, acquiring funding, and determining project specifics such as home type and price. The CDC would oversee contracts with private builders or non-profits (Habitat for Humanity). For rehabilitation work, the CDC would hire a contractor to perform the desired services. When the project is completed, the new or rehabilitated homes would be rented or sold at subsidized rates that meet low and moderate-income requirements.

Pros:

- CDC maintains control of entire project
- CDC has access to many non-profit and government funding sources
- Process is more feasible in weaker markets like Flint

Cons:

- Process is complicated because of multiple funding sources with separate requirements
- CDC staff need expertise on project development and management

**Option Two - CDC and Private Entity as Co-developers:** In this scenario, a CDC develops the project in a strong partnership with a private developer. The private entity has more control over the process than in option one and would oversee the construction and possibly the sale of housing units.

Pros:

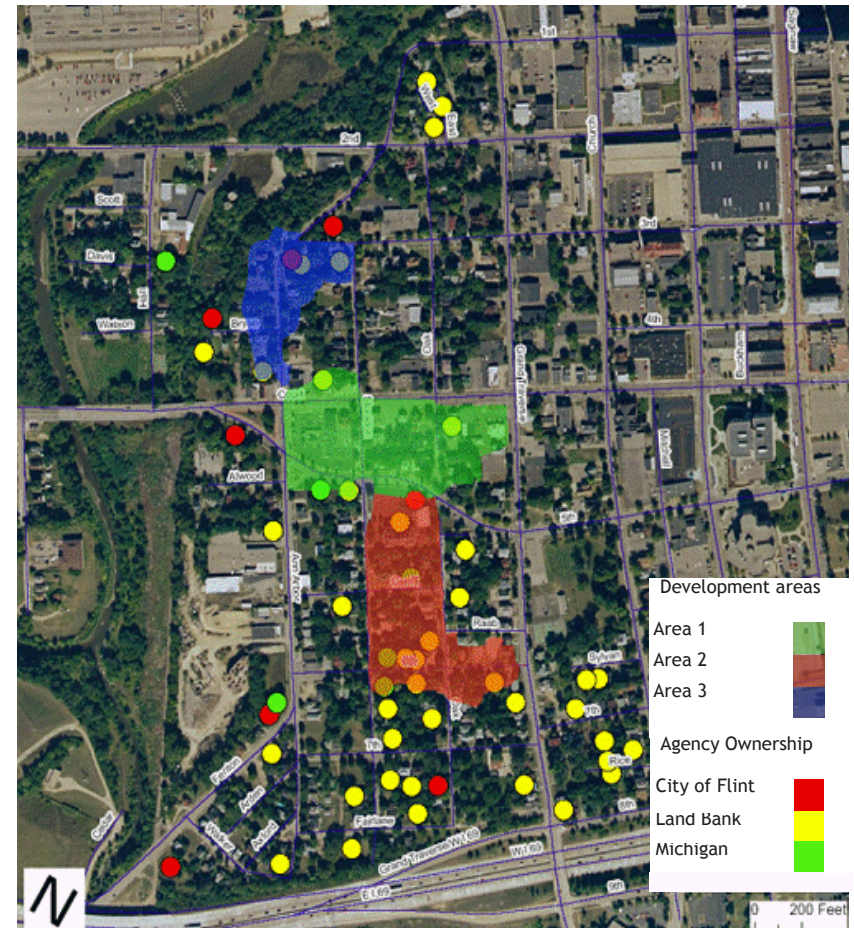
- A specialist handles construction management
- Workload of selling or leasing properties may be eliminated for the CDC
- Commitment by a private entity demonstrates the feasibility of investing in the neighborhood
- Subsidies that are available to non-profits may be available to private builders if they partner with the CDC

Cons:

- Investment by private entities is less likely in weak markets
- CDCs do not collect development fees that can provide funding for future projects
- Control of the project by the CDC is limited

**Option Three - Private Entity as Project Developer and Builder:** This scenario involves a housing developer that acquires land and builds or rehabilitates housing for profit. Property may be privately acquired and developed with or without additional partnerships or non-traditional financing.

This type of development rarely occurs in urban neighborhoods with weak markets but could be a possibility in the future as the Grand Traverse housing market strengthens due to nonprofit housing development and other changes.



**Figure 4.9:** Parcels owned by the LBA and governments are largely in the southwest area of the Grand Traverse neighborhood. **Source:** Genesee County LBA, the City Assessors Office, and Heidi Peterson.

## *Creating a Neighborhood of Choice*

### Pros:

- No demand on CDC resources
- Commitment of private investment signals growing neighborhood strength

### Cons:

- Priorities of the neighborhood residents may be ignored
- Process is unlikely until a weak housing market becomes stronger
- Control of the project by the CDC is negligible or non-existent

Because of current weak demand for housing, the GTDNA should use the first option. A CDC is needed to lead housing development if housing construction in the neighborhood is to occur efficiently and at an appreciable scale. These non-profits can access diverse sources of funding and administer other housing-related programs (see housing repair section above) so that they provide quality housing for sale or rent at a price below what the existing market can afford. As the market in the neighborhood becomes stronger, private partners can take on roles.

### *Housing Development Implementation Leaders*

To accomplish the housing goals of the Grand Traverse neighborhood, the GTDNA needs an effective CDC with the expertise to do housing development. The CDC must be able to work with government agencies, local residents and businesses, developers and funding sources. The CDC should be able to focus its attention on the Grand Traverse neighborhood to achieve the project scale that is needed to induce change. The CDC also needs a committed staff and board that enable it to operate effectively with neighborhood residents and other partners. Potential CDCs to lead development in the Grand Traverse neighborhood include:

**Court Street Village Non Profit (CSV):** CSV was founded in 1986 to develop senior housing and assist neighborhood development in Flint. CSV operates programs in four Flint neighborhoods, including the Grand Traverse neighborhood. Staff has experience with housing issues, is aware of local conditions, and provides diverse services to the Grand Traverse neighborhood.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Court Street Village CDC website. (accessed 19 December 2005). <[www.courtstreetvillage.org](http://www.courtstreetvillage.org)>

**GTDNA CDC/CHDO:** To facilitate housing infill and rehabilitation, the GTDNA could create or become its own CDC or CHDO to focus on the Grand Traverse neighborhood. A CDC/CHDO that is completely committed to the neighborhood and can work very closely with residents would help the GTDNA move forward toward reaching its vision for the area.



*Figure 4.10: The Land Bank owns this property, and an audit could determine if the house should be rehabilitated or demolished and if the land could serve as a site for infill housing.*

### *Housing Development Partners*

Development of infill housing and rehabilitation of homes involves cooperation with many partners. Partners can provide land, expertise, and funding that will ensure that projects are completed and have a positive impact.

Possible partners for the GTDNA include:

**The Genesee County Land Bank:** The Land Bank owns about fifty vacant lots and houses and is the largest landholder in the Grand Traverse neighborhood. The Land Bank also can provide services that include rehabilitation of salvageable properties that they own, land purchases, demolitions, and property audits as described above. The Grand Traverse neighborhood has been designated a Rejuvenation Target Area, or an area of strategic focus for Land Bank initiatives. The Land Bank has agreed to audit properties in the Grand Traverse area to determine which parcels can be utilized for infill housing development and housing rehabilitation.<sup>21</sup>

**Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC):** Once a property audit identifies suitable sites, GTDNA should approach Flint LISC to identify funding sources for the planned infill and/or rehabilitation projects. This non-profit intermediary can assist a lead CDC with finding funding sources, and other services. Such services include the syndication of tax credits, HOME fund allocation assistance, market analysis and more. LISC has agreed to assist the GTDNA in all aspects of project development for infill and rehabilitation, beginning with the most preliminary phases of projects.<sup>22</sup>

**Flint Neighborhood Improvement and Preservation Project, Inc. (Flint NIPP):** This organization is headquartered in the Grand Traverse neighborhood. Flint NIPP operates citywide to assist in small-scale community development projects focusing on housing rehabilitation. Flint NIPP provides low-interest loans and other funding to homeowners who wish to rehabilitate their homes. They also operate a purchase-rehabilitation program where they acquire salvageable homes, rehabilitate them, and sell them at market value.<sup>23</sup> This organization may be a good partner for rehabilitation efforts in the Grand Traverse neighborhood. Contact: Judy at (810) 766-7212.

**City of Flint:** The city is responsible for the allocation of federal HOME fund dollars and Community Development Block Grant monies. The city also owns eight parcels in the neighborhood, controls zoning and permitting, enforces building codes, and controls public infrastructure and traffic. GTDNA should

work with city staff to ensure that projects move smoothly through the zoning, permitting and if applicable, funding processes and to keep projects consistent with residents' vision.

The above strategies for improving housing conditions provide the foundation for achieving the vision of the neighborhood's residents. Chapter Nine provides an overview of phasing and implementation for these strategies. The following chapter will discuss methods for increasing home ownership as a strategy to achieve the neighborhood vision.

21 Interview with Jeff Burdick, Genesee County Land Bank, 21 November 2005.

22 Interview with Michael Freeman, Local Initiatives Support Coalition, 21 November 2005.

23 Interview with Judy Christiansen, Flint Neighborhood Improvement and Preservation Program, 20 December 2005.





## CHAPTER FIVE: EXPANDING HOME OWNERSHIP

### GOAL: INCREASE HOME OWNERSHIP

Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association members expressed a strong desire to increase home ownership in the neighborhood. The association members feel that increasing the rate of home ownership could reduce the high turnover of residents within the area and lead to greater financial and social investment in the neighborhood.

### SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will explain why increasing home ownership in Grand Traverse is important to overall neighborhood health and whom ownership programs should target. It will suggest three approaches for increasing home ownership. Most home ownership strategies provided in this chapter are extensions of infill housing development or housing rehabilitation activities performed by a community development corporation (CDC), but the chapter will also include actions the GTDNA can take to increase home ownership rates without forming or partnering with a CDC. Neighborhood association members could pursue any of these strategies to increase home ownership rates in the Grand Traverse area:

- Create a home ownership education program that would provide skills to potential home buyers to overcome many of the barriers to owning a home
- Create a lease/purchase program that would assist lower income renters in working toward the purchase of a home
- Sell new and rehabilitated housing with financial assistance for home buyers

### BACKGROUND

Increasing the rate of home ownership would have many positive effects in the Grand Traverse neighborhood. This section describes the benefits of home ownership, current opportunities and challenges facing efforts to increase home ownership in the neighborhood, and potential target populations for home ownership programs in Grand Traverse.

### Benefits of Home Ownership

Home ownership provides two beneficial impacts: 1) it creates opportunities for home ownership and wealth creation, and 2) it provides new investment in a neighborhood, both financially and through community involvement.<sup>1</sup> For many home owners, financial stability and wealth creation become attainable through tax savings, stable monthly housing expenses, and the building of equity while paying off a mortgage. Home ownership has a positive effect on the neighborhood through new home owners' greater attention to maintenance and investment in their property, encouraging neighboring property owners to invest in the care of their own property. Increased home ownership rates also tend to increase community involvement because owners have a greater stake in the overall condition and direction of the neighborhood.

As Table 5.1 shows, owner-occupants typically take better care of their property in the Grand Traverse neighborhood than do landlords and renters.<sup>2</sup> Marsha Bruhn, director of the Detroit Planning Commission, recently

Condition of housing	Owner Occupied	Renter Occupied	All Occupied Units
Good	12%	7%	8%
Fair	85%	86%	86%
Poor	3%	7%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%

**Table 5.1: Housing conditions by tenure.** Percentages represent the number of houses segmented into the various conditions of housing. Owner-occupants typically take better care of their property in the Grand Traverse neighborhood than do landlords and renters.

*Source: Ownership from Flint Tax Assessor's Office. Housing condition data created by Heidi Peterson.*

1 D. DiPasquale, "First-Time Homebuyers: Issues and Policy Options." In D. DiPasquale & L. Keyes (Eds.), *Building Foundations*, pp. 157-186. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 1990.

2 Ownership status was determined by comparing taxpayer address to building address. When these matched, the structure was assumed to be owner occupied.

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echoed this sentiment, saying: “With rental property, you don’t get the same level of upkeep on the housing or the same level of maintenance. This is not an indictment of renters, but some rental property is owned by people who don’t maintain it that well. There’s always a feeling among the home owners that they care more about the neighborhood, and that they’re more interested in what happens in the neighborhood than renters are.”<sup>3</sup> While the statement does not apply in all cases, increasing home ownership in the Grand Traverse neighborhood will likely improve the overall maintenance of housing and property in the neighborhood.

### Opportunities and Challenges

The Grand Traverse neighborhood’s low housing values provide both opportunities and challenges for increasing home ownership. Current market conditions provide the opportunity for a household to purchase a home in a neighborhood for an affordable price. However, as discussed in Chapter Four, the low market value also discourages home owners from refurbishing properties because of the uncertainty that prices will appreciate at or above the level of their investments. Therefore, creating an initial infusion of investment into the Grand Traverse neighborhood is both the most important and most difficult step toward increasing home ownership.

### Target Population

The GDTNA can determine the target populations for home ownership programs based on income levels that qualify to assistance programs and groups of people who would be most interested in buying in the neighborhood.

### Income

Non-profit organizations often assume the role of first-phase investors so that the visible signs of new investment reinforce the housing market and demonstrate its strength, spurring the private sector to invest in a neighborhood. The most readily-available financing sources for the initial phase of neighborhood investment generally stipulate that housing projects target households earning less than 80 percent of the area median income (AMI). Genesee County has an AMI of \$40,244.<sup>4</sup> This stipulation is important to

3 Nancy Kaffer, “West Side Story,” MetroTimes, 7 December 2005.

4 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Median Household Income (In 2003 Inflation-adjusted Dollars), 2003.

Number of family members	80% of AMI	Approximate rent/year	50% AMI	Approximate rent/year
1	\$32,179	\$12,872	\$20,112	\$8,045
2	\$37,579	\$14,992	\$25,512	\$10,205
3	\$42,979	\$17,192	\$30,919	\$12,365
4	\$48,379	\$19,352	\$36,312	\$14,525

**Table 5.2:** AMI amounts and approximate rent payments for Genesee County to qualify for affordable housing programs. Median income in Genesee County is \$40,224.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2003.

increasing home ownership because it specifies the households that home ownership programs can target if funding comes from public sources. However, private sector capital (foundations, personal donations, or bank loans) can offer more flexibility in regard to who can purchase homes through housing programs.

Table 5.2 shows approximately how much households in Genesee County with incomes of 80 percent and 50 percent AMI could pay in rent, based on federal standards that say a household should spend no more than 40 percent of total income on housing. Ownership programs are most successful when targeting households making at least 40 percent of AMI, because they can still afford the financial responsibility of owning a house, including payments, taxes, repairs and improvements. Federal housing vouchers and subsidized rental housing are typically the best method to assist households with incomes lower than 40 percent of AMI. Fifty percent of AMI represents the maximum income to qualify for housing in projects that use Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC).

Efforts to increase home ownership in the neighborhood can target households currently renting in the neighborhood as well as other households seeking affordable housing.

### Current and potential residents

Home ownership programs can attract those currently renting in the neighborhood and people new to the neighborhood. Based on 2000 Census data, approximately 140 households can afford to own a house in the Grand Tra-

verse neighborhood, and based on the same data 115 of those 140 already own their own homes.<sup>5</sup> That is, nearly 20 percent of households living in the neighborhood who can afford to own a home do not. The neighborhood is well positioned in Flint to attract new people due to the traditional urban neighborhood design. Many individuals are attracted to the historic nature of older neighborhoods that have amenities lacking in newer communities, such as walkable streets and nearby retail, porches on the front of houses, and old trees. Close proximity to downtown and major highways also benefit the neighborhood. Experience with recent housing projects in Carriage Town has shown that the households most likely to move to the Grand Traverse area are current renters or recent college graduates who are dedicated to Flint and attracted to both the affordable prices and an urban lifestyle.<sup>6</sup>

## *HOME OWNERSHIP PROGRAMS*

Typical barriers for new home buyers include insufficient income to afford a mortgage, a poor credit rating, inadequate funds for a down payment, or insufficient knowledge of the process of purchasing a home. To address these barriers, this chapter describes three options for increasing home ownership: home ownership education, assistance with down payments, and mortgage assistance.

### *Home Ownership Education*

Some tenants in the Grand Traverse neighborhood simply need to learn about the process and benefits of home ownership to realize that they can own a house in their current financial situation. The association could create a home ownership education program to assist households in purchasing a home in the neighborhood. To many potential first-time home buyers, the very idea of purchasing a house seems impractical and intimidating until they learn the process, responsibilities, and potential rewards of owning a

5 Calculations were based on comparing a probable monthly mortgage payment for the median home sales price in the Grand Traverse neighborhood and the number of households who earn sufficient amounts to pay that mortgage payment with 40% or less of their income. Source for number of home owners and income levels: 2000 Decennial Census, U.S. Census Bureau.

6 Derived from Census information and interviews with Jeff Burdick of the Genesee County Land Bank and Michael Freeman of Local Initiatives Support Coalition.

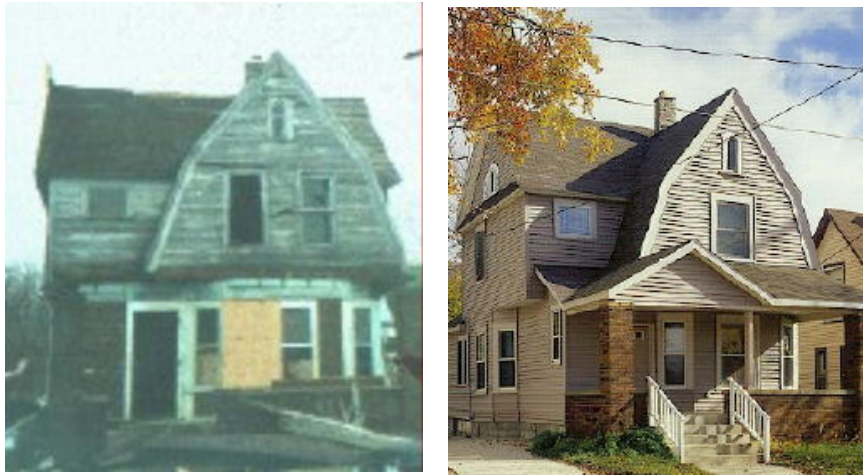
home. Home ownership courses provide the opportunity to overcome those barriers. Home ownership education programs can also decrease the rate of loan defaults by preparing the buyers for the potential difficulties that face home owners.

The curriculum could focus on preparing potential buyers for the breadth of issues that home owners face. Courses typically cover issues of finance (budgeting, credit, banking, savings and investment), the process of becoming an owner (acquiring a mortgage, home insurance, titles, etc.), and the responsibilities of owning a home (liabilities and home repair). Some organizations that run home ownership programs even require participants to perform “sweat equity” before moving into their home. Sweat equity refers to putting equity into a house in the form of labor to both teach valuable home maintenance skills and to reduce the development cost. If the association creates a home ownership education program that links buyers with renovated homes, requiring sweat equity could both lower the cost of rehabilitation and provide the home owner with skills to perform maintenance in the future

Several organizations running home ownership programs have also found that preparing individuals for the financial responsibilities of purchasing a home is only part of maintaining ownership. The home owners served by affordable housing programs in the Grand Traverse neighborhood may also need assistance with child care, job training, and family counseling to maximize the continual success of their ownership.

A home ownership education program would support other home ownership strategies listed in this chapter. For instance, a house sold by a CDC working in the neighborhood could require the purchaser to take home ownership classes before acquiring the property. Requiring ownership classes in tandem with the sale of affordable housing likely provides the best avenue to increase and maintain home ownership for low and moderate income households (see Case Study 5.1).

Running a home ownership education program would require fewer financial resources than other approaches to encouraging home ownership recommended in this chapter. In the short term, the GTDNA could offer a basic program to neighborhood renters who are interested in owning their own homes who are identified through community outreach efforts. The association could then assist those individuals with purchasing houses in the neighborhood sold on the private market. If run by a non-profit or CDC, however,



**Figure 5.1:** Before and after photographs of a rehabilitated house used for a lease/purchase program in Grand Rapids. Source: ICCF.

an educational program would have the capacity to secure a greater level of funding. Increased funding would allow the program to expand the numbers of classes it could offer and participants it could assist.

### Lease/Purchase Programs

A lease/purchase program provides another avenue for increasing home ownership rates in the Grand Traverse neighborhood. A lease/purchase program can achieve one of two goals: 1) construct new housing using Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) while providing opportunities to purchase homes or 2) provide down payment assistance. Descriptions of each method follow.

#### The LIHTC Method

Low-Income Housing Tax Credits can fund approximately 90 percent of the construction costs of new units over a 10-year period.<sup>7</sup> A developer or CDC can raise capital for a project in the Grand Traverse neighborhood by working with a syndicator to sell credits to corporations or investors who seek to

<sup>7</sup> Michigan State Housing Development Authority website. *Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)*. (Accessed 2 December 2005). <[http://www.michigan.gov/mshda/0,1607,7-141-5587\\_5601-21934--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mshda/0,1607,7-141-5587_5601-21934--,00.html)>

### Case Study 5.1: Home Ownership Education in Grand Rapids

The Inner City Christian Federation (ICCF) of Grand Rapids runs one of the largest home ownership programs in Michigan. Over 900 households have taken advantage of their Home Ownership Preparation and Education program (HOPE), where households receive 12 courses on topics covering budgeting, saving and investment, home maintenance, and an overview of the steps required to purchase a home. ICCF staff attribute the success of other affordable housing programs run by the organization to the quality of the home ownership education program because the courses provide home owners with clear expectations of what they must do to remain a successful owners and the skills to achieve it. Along with offering a home ownership education program, ICCF runs the largest lease/purchase program in Michigan.

The organization has sold nearly 200 homes over the past 10 years through the program and currently leases an additional 35 that it will turn over to the owners after two years. The program has been so successful that ICCF is having difficulty finding suitable houses or land parcels to continue the program in the neighborhood where they began. The default rate is close to zero, largely due to the required education courses.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 5.2:** New Construction: ICCF required the owners to participate in homeownership courses to purchase the house. Source: ICCF, Grand Rapids.

<sup>1</sup> Interview with John Carmen of ICCF, 8 December 2005.

reduce their tax liability. The rules stipulate that the houses must remain rental properties for 15 years and the tenant must earn below 50 percent of the AMI upon entering the contract. After renting for the required 15 years, the renter has the option of purchasing the house for the remainder of the

mortgage amount—generally a small percentage of the sales price.

The program aims to motivate tenants to take greater financial and physical responsibility for their homes by promising the transfer of ownership at the end of the rental contract. The long duration of renting also provides the tenants the opportunity to gain a more secure financial footing over the term of the lease, and in many cases the new owners earn significantly more than they did when they entered the program as renters. However, the 15-year requirement becomes difficult for many families to meet due to changing economic and family conditions. The conditions of the houses can also deteriorate if the CDC does not adequately maintain the property over the rental term. Therefore, providing proper property and client management becomes a vital component in the success of the program. While the CDC cannot control the changing economic conditions, it can provide financial, social, and maintenance support for the renters to minimize turnover. The Cleveland Housing Network has had exceptional success rates (see Case Study 5.2) in its LIHTC lease/purchase program largely due to its quality management.<sup>8</sup>

LISC and the Genesee County Land Bank recently embarked on the first LIHTC lease/purchase program in Flint. The project will eventually include 150 condominium and single-family units in Carriage Town. The tax credits will cover all but about \$250,000 of the \$5 million project. If a substantial

*Case Study 5.2: Cleveland lease/purchase program*

Cleveland Housing Network has successfully rehabilitated 2,100 units in the city for a lease/purchase program. Of the 102 houses developed using LIHTC between 1987-1989, 92 were sold after the 15 years. The balance remaining for the purchase of the home ranged from \$6,500 to \$16,500, with appraised values of \$35,000 to \$85,000. About 90% of the original renters stayed in their units the entire 15 years.<sup>1</sup>

1 Cleveland Housing Network website. *Lease Purchase*. (Accessed 8 December 2005). <[http://www.chnnet.com/b\\_lease.html](http://www.chnnet.com/b_lease.html)>

infill housing program becomes a reality in the Grand Traverse neighborhood, both organizations have expressed a strong interest in working in the

8 Interview with Michael Freeman, Local Initiatives Support Coalition, 17 December 2005.

neighborhood, and both have labeled the neighborhood a “Rejuvenation Target Area.”<sup>9</sup> LISC will focus more efforts on the neighborhood in about a year, when their efforts in Carriage Town near completion. The LIHTC provides one viable financing tool for projects that can eventually increase the rate of home ownership. However, receiving the credits is not assured because many non-profit developers compete for the limited amount of credits available.

**The Down Payment Assistance Method**

Lacking money for a down payment creates another obstacle for many prospective home buyers. Several Michigan CDCs run lease/purchase programs that apply a portion of monthly rent to the down payment. For example, ICCF (see Case Study 5.1) allows participants to lease a house for two years; at the end of the two years two-thirds of rent collected is applied to the down payment. The remainder of the rent goes to maintenance, administrative costs, taxes, and management fees. The annual incomes of typical target buyers range from 40 percent to 80 percent of AMI. As the Grand Traverse association explores methods of improving housing stock through a CDC, lease/purchase programs that assist with down payments can increase the number of home owners in the neighborhood.

LISC has assisted Salem Housing CDC in operating a down payment assistance lease/purchase program in Flint. LISC provides funding and technical assistance for the program and has expressed interest in helping a CDC with a lease/purchase program in the Grand Traverse neighborhood.<sup>10</sup>

All lease/purchase programs require substantial interaction between the prospective buyer and CDC to achieve the lowest turnover of renters possible. ICCF and the Cleveland Housing Network have successfully provided ownership options through lease/purchase because the programs stress the quality and participation of the home ownership courses. In addition, both organizations have made substantial commitments to good management of properties and clients. Since the homes are rental properties for a time, quality property management becomes an essential component of keeping a high standard of housing quality, especially for units rented out for a period of 15 years. Substandard property management for any portion of that pe-

9 Interviews with Michael Freeman, Local Initiatives Support Coalition, and Jeff Burdick, Genesee County Land Bank, 17 December 2005.

10 Interview with Michael Freeman, Local Initiatives Support Coalition, 17 December 2005.

## Creating a Neighborhood of Choice

riod increases the possibility that the houses become blighted. LISC can help to identify property management companies for lease/purchase programs.

### Financial Assistance for Purchase of New and Rehabilitated Housing

At this time, housing market conditions in the Grand Traverse neighborhood will likely yield lower sales prices than the actual cost of construction or rehabilitation. Strategies described in Chapter Four discuss methods to bridge the gap between the sales price and the development cost. A third option for increasing home ownership rates is the outright sale of CDC-developed houses. Since the houses would cost more than they could actually be sold for, outside funding sources cover the gap between sales and construction prices to produce quality, affordable housing.

Affordable home ownership programs that sell houses generally target households with more financial security (60% to 100% of AMI) than lease/

#### Case Study 5.3: Habitat for Humanity's Sweat Equity

Habitat for Humanity Kent County builds approximately 24 units per year for families that make 25%-50% AMI. Each family must work about 300 to 500 "sweat-equity" hours before moving into their home. Habitat funds the construction of houses through donations and grants, but home owners also have a mortgage with no interest from Habitat for Humanity. Habitat re-invests mortgage payments to build other houses.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 5.3.** Construction in Kent County, Michigan, using "sweat equity". Source: Habitat for Humanity Kent County.

<sup>1</sup> Habitat for Humanity - Kent County website. (Accessed 30 November 2005.) <<http://www.habitatfkent.com>>

purchase programs (60% and below of AMI). In Grand Rapids, Habitat for Humanity sells houses to households making 25% to 50% of the AMI, though their construction costs are much lower due to donated materials and labor (see Case Study 5.3). If the CDC working in the Grand Traverse neighborhood secures funding from private sources (foundations, personal donations, or bank loans) then income requirements may be less stringent.

With the provision of affordable loans, households can purchase a home in better condition. A CDC can assist the home owner in obtaining a mortgage through an already-established program or develop its own loan program.

- The most readily available program for first-time home buyers below the AMI is the MSHDA Single Family Program. This program offers mortgages with interest rates one point below the prime rate and non-amortized down payment loans up to \$7,500 at zero percent interest.<sup>11</sup>
- A CDC can reduce the financial requirements for the purchase of a house by eliminating the down payment or reducing the interest rate. With sufficient funding, a CDC can issue its own mortgages to home buyers with tailored repayment requirements. For example, a CDC in the neighborhood could apply the model used by Habitat for Humanity in Kent County, Michigan, which sells houses at zero percent interest to increase the affordability of the units (see Case Study 5.3).

## IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter has presented several options to increase home ownership rates in the neighborhood. These strategies provide intermediate steps to increase home ownership rates and housing demand in the neighborhood until the market achieves the same goals independently. Finding a CDC that is willing and able to develop and rehabilitate housing in the neighborhood and to link these activities to home ownership education and financial assistance would have the greatest impact. Therefore, the most immediate decision facing the GTDNA is to determine who can develop the affordable units and who can manage educational programs, lease/purchase programs and sales of the affordable units. The association could also begin working with renters in the neighborhood who express interest in purchasing a home, and the association could assist in developing a home ownership education program.

<sup>11</sup> "Michigan's Mortgage Credit Certificate Program" pamphlet. MSHDA, 05/05. Lansing, MI.

## CHAPTER SIX: RECLAIMING NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS

**GOAL: IMPROVE STREET, SAFETY, AND ACCESS CONDITIONS FOR PEDESTRIANS AND VEHICLES.**

Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association members pointed to the neighborhood's streets as another area of interest. Residents have identified the street system's orientation to through traffic as a major challenge and stated a desire to reclaim use of their local streets while continuing to ensure easy access to assets such as Memorial Park and downtown Flint.

Because of the Grand Traverse neighborhood's proximity to downtown Flint, the roads currently cutting through the neighborhood were designed to carry high volumes of through traffic at high speeds, especially commuters traveling to office or manufacturing jobs. Where Court Street once served as a kind of "Main Street" through the neighborhood, Fifth Street was realigned and paired with Court for maximum east to west capacity; Grand Traverse Street and Church Street carry commuters and users of downtown services between the freeway and the Court/Fifth corridor. While these streets carry thousands of cars daily that travel from the west and south to, from, and through downtown, they carry much less traffic than they were designed for. The neighborhood can reclaim some of this excess capacity to serve their needs in addition to the needs of through traffic.

### *SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS*

This chapter will describe several possible strategies for rethinking the neighborhood's streets. Neighborhood association members could pursue any of these strategies to make their streets better serve their needs:

- Convert one-way streets to carry two-way traffic to provide more direct access to neighborhood homes, businesses, and parks, reduce cut-through traffic on side streets, and reduce speeding
- Add parking lanes on major streets to separate traffic lanes from pedestrians, serve neighborhood businesses, and further reduce speeding
- Create bicycle lanes to enable bicycle access to downtown and to nearby campuses
- Repair sidewalks, pedestrian crossing signals, and crosswalks to improve

access to neighborhood attractions for all pedestrians

- Construct sidewalk bumpouts to make major intersections more pedestrian-friendly, make on-street parking areas more obvious to visitors, and reduce speeding
- Enhance streetscaping with trees, plants, trash cans, and benches to make streets more welcoming to pedestrians and decrease the focus on traffic

Each of these strategies is described in further detail in the following sections. By pursuing some or all of these strategies, the Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association can improve the safety, usefulness, and appearance of their streets for both vehicles and pedestrians.

### *CONVERT ONE-WAY STREETS TO TWO-WAY STREETS*

Several multi-lane, one-way streets physically divide the Grand Traverse neighborhood. These streets, shown in Figure 6.2, primarily serve through traffic, and the negative effects on the local neighborhood are known to



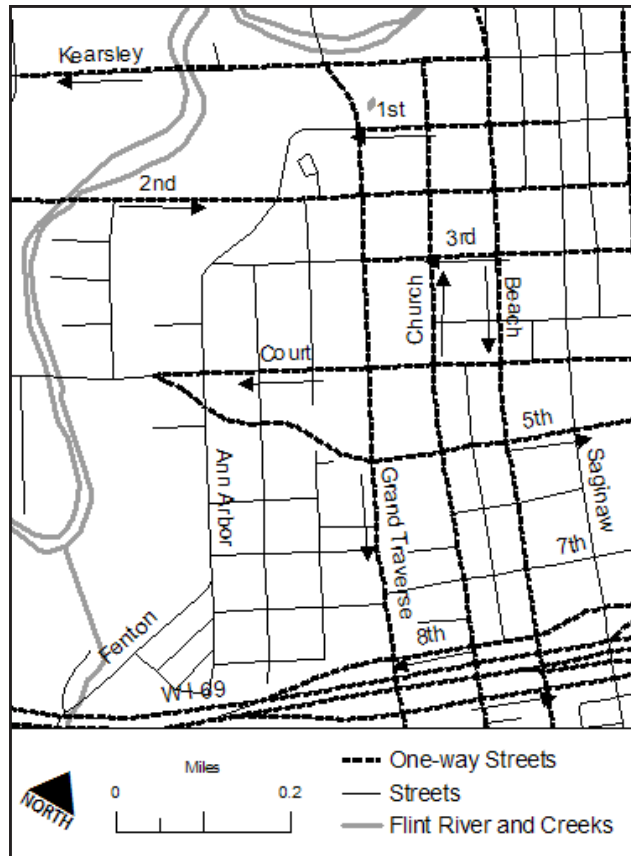
*Figure 6.1: Fifth Street in front of Oak School shows the excess road capacity common throughout the neighborhood.*

## Creating a Neighborhood of Choice

all of the neighborhood's residents and obvious to any visitor to the neighborhood. Residents and business owners can expect a number of benefits from two-way traffic on these streets, and can also use the process of converting streets from one-way to two-way as an opportunity to make other changes such as:

- Two-way traffic will allow vehicles more direct access to destinations in the neighborhood, including homes and businesses, increasing visibility and ease of navigation
- Two-way traffic will reduce traffic speeds through the neighborhood, as oncoming traffic will encourage drivers to be more cautious.
- Re-striping streets for two-way traffic can include creation of bike lanes or parking lanes at very low additional cost

These effects will all contribute to making the streets serve the neighborhood's needs, adding local functions to the through traffic functions they



**Figure 6.2:** The neighborhood's numerous one-way streets encourage speeding and make navigation difficult.

*Source: GCMPC Urban Travel Demand Model, 2002.*

currently serve.

### Accounting for Reduced Capacity

Reconfiguring a street from three or four travel lanes in one direction to one travel lane in each direction will reduce traffic capacity. Some reduction in capacity on the streets in the Grand Traverse neighborhood is acceptable for the following reasons:

- The streets currently serve much less traffic than they were designed to carry. Much of the capacity given up will be capacity that is not currently needed. As Table 6.1 and Figure 6.3 show, the major intersections currently carry only one quarter to one half of the traffic they were designed for, and many area streets carry only a small fraction of the expected daily traffic.
- Converting paired one-way streets will shift capacity rather than remove it. New northbound capacity on Beach and Grand Traverse Streets would make up for reduced northbound capacity on Church Street, and vice-versa for southbound traffic.
- Reduced capacity might beneficially push traffic into other areas. Church, Beach, and Grand Traverse Streets allow drivers to bypass Saginaw Street. Pushing some traffic back onto Saginaw would benefit the business revitalization of downtown with greater visibility.
- Many of the neighborhood's one-way streets are only one-way within the

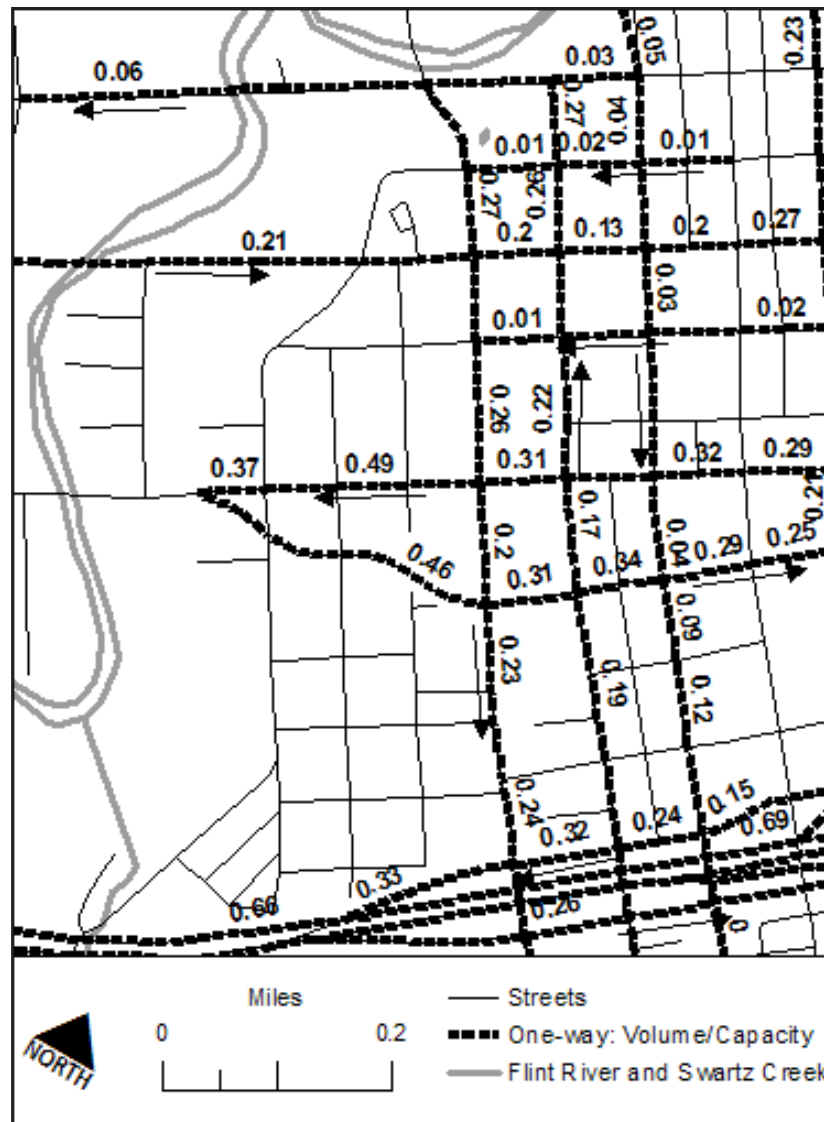
**Peak Hour Volume / Capacity at Major Intersections**

	Ann Arbor Street	Grand Traverse Street	Church Street	Beach Street
Court Street	0.49	0.53	0.33	0.32
Fifth Street	0.25	0.38	0.37	0.34

**Table 6.1:** Even during the peak hour of traffic flow, the busiest intersections in the Grand Traverse neighborhood carry about half of the traffic they were designed for.

*Source: Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission Traffic Signal GIS data, 2002.*





**Figure 6.3:** Throughout the neighborhood, traffic volume to design capacity ratios are low, indicating excess road capacity.  
 Source: GCMPC Urban Travel Demand Model, 2002.

neighborhood; they provide for two-way traffic just outside the neighborhood. In these cases, allowing two-way traffic within the neighborhood could improve traffic flow by allowing vehicles to continue straight rather than detouring a block to a parallel street, slightly reducing total traffic demand.

### *Opportunity to Return Streets to Two-Way Traffic*

The residents of Grand Traverse have an upcoming opportunity to reclaim these streets for local benefit, as the Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission (GCMPC) will begin a study of Flint’s one-way streets in January of 2006. This study will assess the feasibility of converting the one-way streets in central Flint to two-way traffic<sup>1</sup>. The Grand Traverse neighborhood should participate in this process to push for the best possible use of their streets. This study will happen with or without neighborhood involvement; participation will determine how it happens, though, and what the final outcomes are.

The following recommendations are meant to prepare Grand Traverse neighborhood residents to approach this study as informed participants in order to ensure that it advances their interests. Because the residents and businesses in the neighborhood feel so strongly that two-way streets would benefit them, and because this opportunity exists, the Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association should advocate for these changes. Taking advantage of this opportunity will be easier than creating another one.

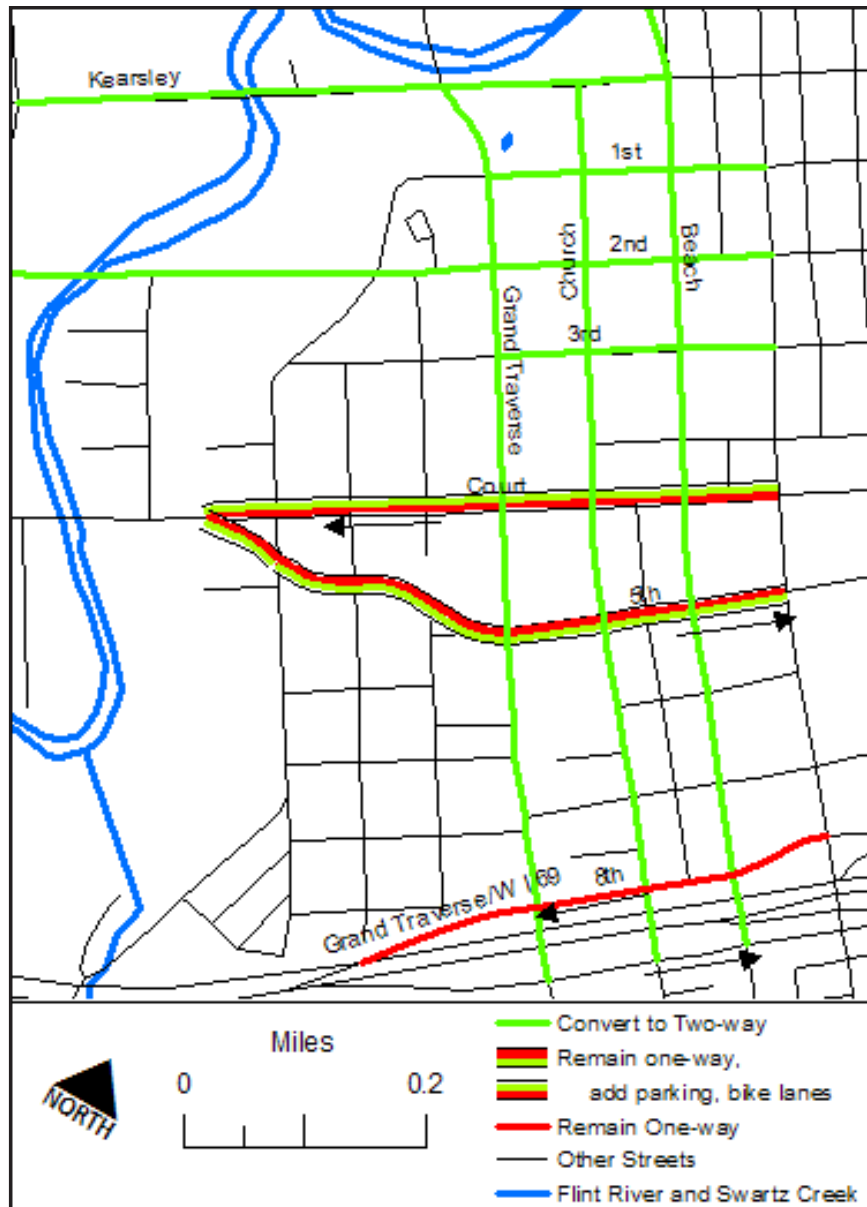
Members of the Flint Downtown Small Business Association have also expressed a strong interest in converting streets to two-way traffic. Working together on this shared goal could improve the likelihood of success and also serve as a springboard for future co-operation between the neighborhood and the business community (see Chapter Nine for further recommendations to increase coordination with DSBA and local businesses).

### *Recommendations*

Grand Traverse residents should seek two-way traffic on all neighborhood streets, with the exceptions of Court Street, Fifth Street, and Eighth Street, due to the special functions those streets serve. In addition, neighborhood residents and businesses could advocate during this process for parking

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Stan Brantley, Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission, 20 October 2005.

## Creating a Neighborhood of Choice



**Figure 6.4:** Most one-way streets in the neighborhood may be converted to two-way traffic.

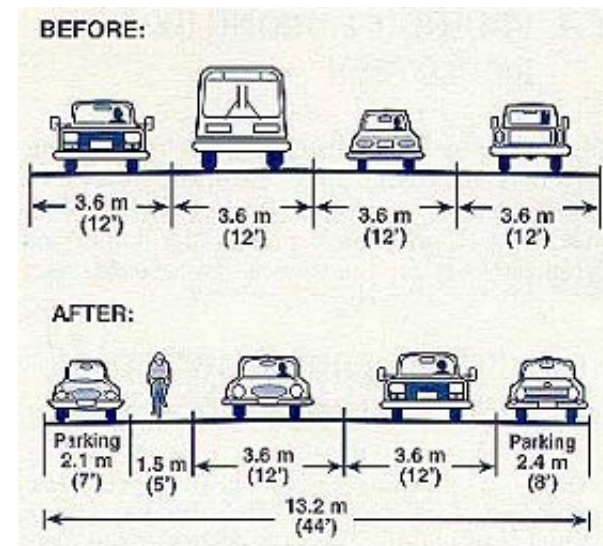
Source: GCMPC Urban Travel Demand Model, 2002.

lanes on both sides of most of these streets and bike lanes on streets that remain one-way. Figure 6.4 shows these changes: streets recommended for two-way traffic are marked in green; streets remaining one-way are marked as multi-function roads, with added parking and bike-lanes.

First, Third, and Fourth Streets do not run all of the way through the neighborhood and so do not need to serve major through traffic roles. These can serve two-way traffic without much concern. These streets do not need bike lanes, as traffic will be light enough and slow enough that bicyclists may safely share lanes with cars.

Grand Traverse, Church, Beach, Second, and Kearsley Streets can provide two-way access while still serving through traffic, providing the benefits noted above. Two-way traffic will retain enough capacity to serve most existing traffic, and conversion work should replace excess capacity with on-street parking and/or bike lanes. The conversion process could consider incorporating left-turn lanes at major intersections or other alternatives to maintain traffic flow, rather than continuing to rely on a large number of lanes.

The M-21 pair, Court Street and Fifth Street, presents a special case, and could best serve the neighborhood if re-configured while maintaining one-way traffic. Traffic on M-21 is heavy enough to require two travel lanes in each direction. Returning all M-21 traffic to Court Street would still use all four lanes on Court Street. This would prevent Court Street from



**Figure 6.5:** Four traffic lanes can be converted to two traffic lanes, two parking lanes, and a bike lane. Source: Federal Highway Administration Course on Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation, Chapter 20. (Accessed 16 January 2006).



**Figure 6.6:** Bumpouts can be used to calm traffic and highlight parking lanes while leaving space for bicycle traffic.

**Source:** Federal Highway Administration Course on Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation, Chapter 15.

providing other beneficial services, such as on-street parking for neighborhood businesses and bike lanes. Though Court and Fifth Streets may remain one-way, the neighborhood association can pursue its goals in other ways on these streets: each could be reduced to only two through traffic lanes, with parking lanes on each side to slow traffic to safe speeds, provide a barrier between cars and pedestrians, and create better access to neighborhood businesses on Court Street and amenities such as Memorial Park. A bicycle lane on each of these streets could allow cyclists to travel in a separate space from automobiles, providing safe bike travel despite high traffic volumes. This

arrangement, illustrated in Figure 6.5, will not have the full navigation and access benefits of complete two-way conversion, but will allow for the greatest benefit to be achieved on Court Street.

Eighth Street also should remain one-way. In this case, maximizing capacity is desirable - Eighth Street can take drivers directly from Saginaw to I-69, drawing them off of neighborhood streets.

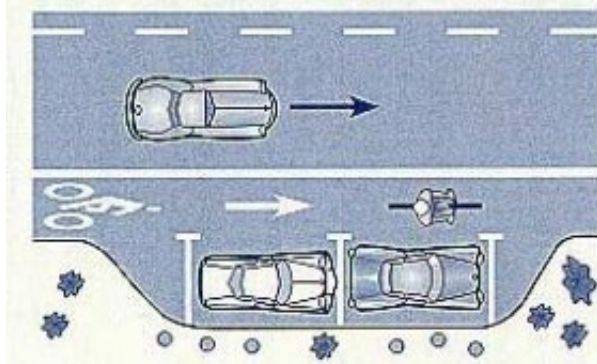
### *One-Way Street Conversion Timing and Funding*

The Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission will hire a consultant to perform the one-way conversion study, which is expected to run from January 2006 to April 2006. Grand Traverse residents need to participate in the study to make their goals known and ask for the changes within the neighborhood. Once the study is completed, the GCMPC will need to im-

plement whatever conversions of one-way streets to two-way are recommended. The GCMPC is already pursuing funding for purchase of new traffic signals, the largest expense in the change in traffic flow, and acquiring this funding will determine the conversion timeline. The GCMPC will also need to perform any additional roadway improvements, such as parking and bike lanes. These improvements would best be done at the same time as the change in traffic flow, as they require only painting the road surface and adding or changing signs along the roadway, actions that the GCMPC will already be performing during a traffic flow conversion. The role of the neighborhood association in this process would not be in implementing any changes, but in organizing support for conversion and providing coordinated input as to what would be best for the neighborhood.

## *IMPROVE INTERSECTIONS FOR PEDESTRIAN SAFETY*

Some streets in the Grand Traverse neighborhood will carry heavy traffic regardless of efforts to eliminate one-way streets. Along with the modifications to traffic mentioned above, improved pedestrian facilities at intersections can help improve safety by making pedestrians more visible to drivers.



**Figure 6.7:** Bumpouts protect on-street parking and make pedestrians feel safer at major intersections.

**Source:** Federal Highway Administration Course on Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation, Chapter 15.

### *Bumpouts*

To further calm traffic, the GTDNA could advocate for bumpouts (also known as bulbouts, neckdowns, and curb extensions), especially at the neighborhood's busiest intersections. A bumpout is a widening of the curb area and extension of the sidewalk into the intersection, illustrated in Figures 6.4 and 6.5. Bumpouts decrease street-crossing distance, increase pedestri-

## *Creating a Neighborhood of Choice*

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an visibility, and slow traffic by making the roadway seem narrower. In addition, bumpouts can make on-street parking more visible to visitors, provide additional space for streetside landscaping, and force truck traffic to make wider turns, reducing damage to trees and signs. Installing bumpouts would require significant outside funding, however, as the cost is \$40,000-\$80,000 to build bumpouts on all four corners of an intersection.<sup>2</sup>

### *Crossing Improvements*

Painted crosswalks and “walk” signals improve safety for pedestrians, especially the elderly, disabled, children, and others who may have special difficulty crossing busy streets. These devices inform pedestrians of safe crossing times at busy intersections and alert drivers to watch for people crossing. Many locations in the Grand Traverse neighborhood lack street-crossing facilities for pedestrians. For instance, traffic lights at the following busy intersections lack pedestrian signals:

- Grand Traverse Street & Kearsley Street
- Grand Traverse Street & Second Street
- Grand Traverse Street & Third Street
- Grand Traverse Street & Eighth Street
- Church Street & Eighth Street

Since pedestrian signals must be coordinated with traffic signals, and all traffic signals will need to be replaced and reprogrammed during the course of any conversion of one-way streets to two-way traffic, any intersection work done during that process could also include the installation and programming of pedestrian signals and striped crosswalks.

## *REPAIR SIDEWALKS AND IMPROVE STREETScape*

### *Sidewalk Improvements*

Sidewalk maintenance is an important pedestrian safety issue. Uneven and cracked sidewalks create tripping hazards and can make travel difficult for

<sup>2</sup> Fehr & Peers Transportation Consultants, *TrafficCalming.org*, (Accessed 11 December 2005). <<http://www.trafficcalming.org/neckdowns.html>>

elderly or handicapped residents. In addition, crumbling sidewalks send a message to residents and visitors that the neighborhood is a place nobody cares about. Landowners are responsible for the condition of the sidewalks in front of their property, and sidewalk maintenance should be included in neighborhood strategies to improve code enforcement (Chapter Four presents specific ways the association could improve or assist in code enforcement).

In addition to seeking better code enforcement for upkeep of sidewalks in front of privately-owned property, the GTDNA might encourage the City of Flint and Genesee County Land Bank to repair sidewalks on property those entities own, especially where the sidewalk has been damaged in the course of demolition activity. Many cities have provided matching funds from Community Development Block Grants or from grants from insurance agencies to help property owners repair sidewalks. The GTDNA could partner with the Land Bank, Court Street Village Non-Profit, or a similar agency in pursuing and administering such a program.

### *Streetscape Improvements*

Streetscape improvements can make streets more visually attractive to pedestrians, draw the attention of drivers, and publicize an area’s identity as a neighborhood. The GTDNA has already begun this process by planting and maintaining flowerbeds at visible locations around the neighborhood and could build on these beautification efforts; streetscaping has also been used to improve the appearance of Saginaw Street, as shown in Figure 6.9, and the Grand Traverse neighborhood could draw upon those design elements.

Court Street is home to many important neighborhood-oriented businesses and is located in the heart of the neighborhood, serving as an important destination for many pedestrian trips to popular shops and eateries such as the Northwest Market and Tom Z’s Coney Island. Court Street also carries a high volume of through traffic. Because of these two qualities, streetscape improvements along Court Street would have a great impact for neighborhood residents and also on the neighborhood’s image to through travelers. Association members could prioritize streetscaping in the Court Street corridor because of the important roles it serves.

Streets that have a more residential character are appropriate locations for a more limited streetscape treatment, such as new street trees and lighting, which would improve safety and comfort for residents in addition to

enhancing new efforts to improve housing in the area (see Chapters Four and Five).

These improvements can be done a few pieces at a time, as funding allows and other opportunities for change arise, such as roadway improvements. While a slow streetscaping effort will not have as much overall impact on the neighborhood as other changes such as conversion of one-way streets, it can be done continuously and without necessarily acquiring much outside funding or establishing partnerships. In addition, such efforts will allow neighborhood residents to make visible contributions and to increase prospects for improving community pride, identity, and involvement.



**Figure 6.8:** Many sidewalks in the neighborhood have been damaged during demolition or suffer from lack of maintenance.

In any streetscape improvement, the association should make special effort to involve neighborhood businesses that would particularly benefit from the improvement of Court Street and other commercial corridors and have a stake in making their area a desirable place to shop. Many neighborhood businesses, while outside the boundaries of the Downtown Small Business Association, are active associate members and could leverage additional organizational and financial support from the DSBA and its partner organi-

zations such as the Uptown Redevelopment Council and the Downtown Development Authority.

Possible streetscape elements include:

**Banners:** Fabric signs, typically in eye-catching colors and designs, can announce events or declare a neighborhood identity. The Downtown Flint Small Business Association, for example, puts up flags on the arches over Saginaw Street for a few days before special events. A similar approach could draw attention to activities in the Grand Traverse neighborhood. Banners may be damaged by wind or other causes, however, and may need to be replaced every few years.

**Planters:** The GTDNA's existing flower plantings could be expanded into raised concrete planters along Court Street; these planters would make the street appear more cared for and would provide a buffer between pedestrians and traffic, making the street more pleasant to walk along. Planters must not obstruct pedestrians on the sidewalk, should not block views of businesses from pedestrians or traffic, and will require a good deal of



**Figure 6.9:** Saginaw Street, in downtown Flint, includes a number of streetscape elements, such as lampposts, street trees, and trash cans, that help separate pedestrian space from vehicle space and contribute to a pleasant atmosphere.

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## *Creating a Neighborhood of Choice*

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maintenance. In addition to arranging for the initial installation of planters, the neighborhood association will need to commit to ongoing planting, weeding, and watering or secure an agreement from businesses to care for the plantings.

**Garbage Bins:** Providing public garbage bins in areas of high pedestrian use can help prevent littering and enable casual clean up of litter. Attractive, sturdy garbage bins would serve both a functional and decorative purpose. As with planters, the neighborhood association would need to arrange for ongoing care of garbage bins. One solution would be to find businesses willing to empty garbage bins on or adjacent to their sidewalks.

**Lighting:** While the Grand Traverse neighborhood is fairly well-lit, additional decorative lightposts would accent the streetscape and provide enhanced safety. They would also show travelers that they are entering a unique district, even at night. A wide variety of styles are available to choose from that could help create a distinctive image for the neighborhood.

**Street Trees:** Street trees not only provide shade in the summer but also soften the visual “feel” of the street and provide an added layer of physical and psychological protection from the traffic flow for pedestrians. The Grand Traverse neighborhood currently has a large number of trees along the more residential streets but few on Court Street or Beach Street. In addition, existing trees throughout the neighborhood have been damaged. Trucks strike overhead branches, and road, utility, or sidewalk repairs sometimes damage tree roots. The neighborhood association can plant young trees in areas currently lacking street trees. These will require care and watering for the first few years but will then be a long-term contribution to the neighborhood. Tree plantings along the street should happen after any other changes needed at a location. Parking lanes on Court and Fifth Streets, for example, will help keep traffic away from street trees, preventing damage. Species that can tolerate harsh urban conditions and require little maintenance should be chosen.<sup>3</sup>

### *Funding for Pedestrian & Streetscape Improvements*

Several funding sources for streetscape and pedestrian improvements are

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<sup>3</sup> The Michigan State University Extension provides an online tree selection guide, *Recommended Trees for Michigan’s Lower Peninsula*, at <<http://www.hrt.msu.edu/ash.alt/List.htm>>

available.

### **Cool Cities Resources**

Flint received a state Cool Cities grant and therefore has streamlined access to 170 state grants and programs through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), many of which may be applied specifically to pedestrian infrastructure and street beautification.<sup>4</sup> Here are several examples of grants that could assist the Grand Traverse neighborhood:

**Commercial Economic Development Fund Grant:** Grants of up to \$50,000 to promote community economic development in neighborhoods served by MSHDA-financed housing developments (as Chapter Four proposes for the Grand Traverse neighborhood).

**Transportation Enhancement Program:** Grants from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) are available to projects by the City of Flint and, along M-21, by MDOT, funding non-motorized transportation facilities and streetscape improvements.

**Context-Sensitive Design:** This MDOT initiative seeks to engage communities and stakeholders in the design of state highways that pass through their boundaries. The GTDNA could lobby the City of Flint to approach MDOT about a redesign of M-21 through the neighborhood that incorporates the changes recommended above.

**Walkable Community Audits:** To evaluate pedestrian conditions in the neighborhood, the GTDNA could apply for a walkable community audit, which consists of an on-site evaluation of walking conditions along specified streets.

**Step-Up to a Healthier Michigan Initiative:** The Michigan Department of Community Health provides grants to local units of government to increase physical activity through community design.

**Urban and Community Forestry Program:** The Michigan Department of Natural Resources provides grants to local units of government and nonprofit organizations for tree planting and other urban forestry activities.

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<sup>4</sup> Program details and contacts are available at <<http://www.mshda.info/cci/tools/>>

## **Foundations**

In addition to the state programs listed above, private foundations may award funding to improve the functional and aesthetic quality of the neighborhood's streets for pedestrians, bicycles, and vehicles. For example, the Flint-based Ruth Mott Foundation awards grants in the areas of beautification and health promotion (<http://www.ruthmottfoundation.org>). The GTNDA could seek-out grants from this and other foundations to fund streetscape and pedestrian-safety improvements.





## CHAPTER SEVEN: ENHANCING RECREATIONAL USES

**GOAL: IMPROVE RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND ACCESS TO NATURAL AREAS FOR PEOPLE OF ALL AGES.**

The Grand Traverse area has natural and recreational assets that are scarce in many urban neighborhoods. The central location of Memorial Park provides an expanse of green space, and its mature trees offer beauty and shade. Many older residents fondly remember ice skating and playing ball at the park. The beautiful waterways of Swartz and Thread Creeks and the Flint River provide neighbors immediate contact with nature. The GTDNA can make these assets into recreational resources for the neighborhood.

### *SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS*

To better use neighborhood assets such as Memorial Park, Swartz and Thread Creeks, and the Flint River and improve recreational opportunities, the GTDNA could pursue the following strategies:

- Develop a vision of an improved Memorial Park and pursue improvements to the landscaping and amenities
- Improve access to natural areas around the neighborhood, such as Aldrich Park and Swartz Creek, by improving sight lines, signage, and knowledge of those areas
- Create a greenway connecting the neighborhood's recreational assets, and become involved in the planning of regional greenways, in order to improve access to and increase use of those assets

### *IMPROVE MEMORIAL PARK*

Memorial Park is an important asset to the neighborhood. With its central location, shaded lawns, and potential for recreational activities, the park should be the first area of focus for achieving the goal of increasing recreational opportunities. Due to the size and visibility of the park, shown in Figure 7.1, its rehabilitation can create momentum for improvements throughout the neighborhood.

Busy streets surround Memorial Park on three sides: Grand Traverse Street

to the west, Fifth Street to the north and Church Street to the east. Amenities include a small parking lot off of Grand Traverse Street, a building that houses restrooms and a small classroom, playground equipment, and a basketball court. A tennis court and handball court also exist in the park, but they are not in useable condition.

### *Park Ownership and Maintenance*

The Ballenger Trust owns Memorial Park as well as Ballenger Park, which is also in Flint. William S. Ballenger, Sr., was the chairman of Citizens Bank and died in 1951. He created the trust for the ongoing maintenance of both parks. Trustees at Citizens Bank control the trust, using its interest to maintain the parks.



*Figure 7.1: Memorial Park has expansive lawns and mature, shady trees.*

When the trust was created, interest income provided enough funds to support both parks, including paying a staff to maintain ice skating rinks in both parks as well as play equipment for the other facilities. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, the trust generated less money than needed for maintaining the parks. At the same time, the equipment for maintaining the ice rink aged, and there was no money to replace it. The trust decided to remove the ice rinks in both Memorial and Ballenger Parks. Since that time, the trust has not had the funds to improve the parks and only has enough funds for basic maintenance.<sup>1</sup>

The Ballenger Trust has contracted with the Industrial Mutual Association of Flint (IMA) to maintain Memorial and Ballenger Parks. The IMA mows the

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Kathy Rembowski and Gwen Kelley, Citizens Bank, 29 November 2005.

## Creating a Neighborhood of Choice

lawn, shovels the snow, maintains the building and rents out the park for events. Currently, the trust pays the IMA \$7,600 per month to maintain both parks. While the IMA maintains the lawn well, the recreational facilities in the park are in disrepair.

### A Vision for Memorial Park

The Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association can make Memorial Park into a stronger focal point for the neighborhood. Association members should determine their priorities for the park and create a vision for the park's future. They may consider the groups of people they would like the park to attract and establish appropriate programs and amenities.

The vision for the park does not need to be limited by the existing amenities or funding sources. Figure 7.2 provides an example of a possible future design for the park.

In this vision, the area in front of the building serves as an amphitheater that can also be used as a picnic area. Nearby is the playground, so adults can easily view their children from the amphitheater space. On the southwest side of the building is a community garden, located in an area that receives much sunlight.

Park amenities on the east side of the park, adjacent to businesses along Church Street, are designed to attract employees of the businesses. The west side includes the community garden and a soccer field, which will appeal to the neighborhood's residents, most of whom live west of Grand Traverse Street.

### Possible Improvements in a Vision for Memorial Park

In defining a collective vision to improve and strengthen the park, association members may want to consider the following:

#### Uniting the Paved and Grassy Areas

Since almost one third of the park is paved and fenced and the other two thirds are grassy and open to the street, the park makes visitors feel as if it is made up of two disparate parts. Figure 7.3 illustrates this and some of the other current conditions in the park.

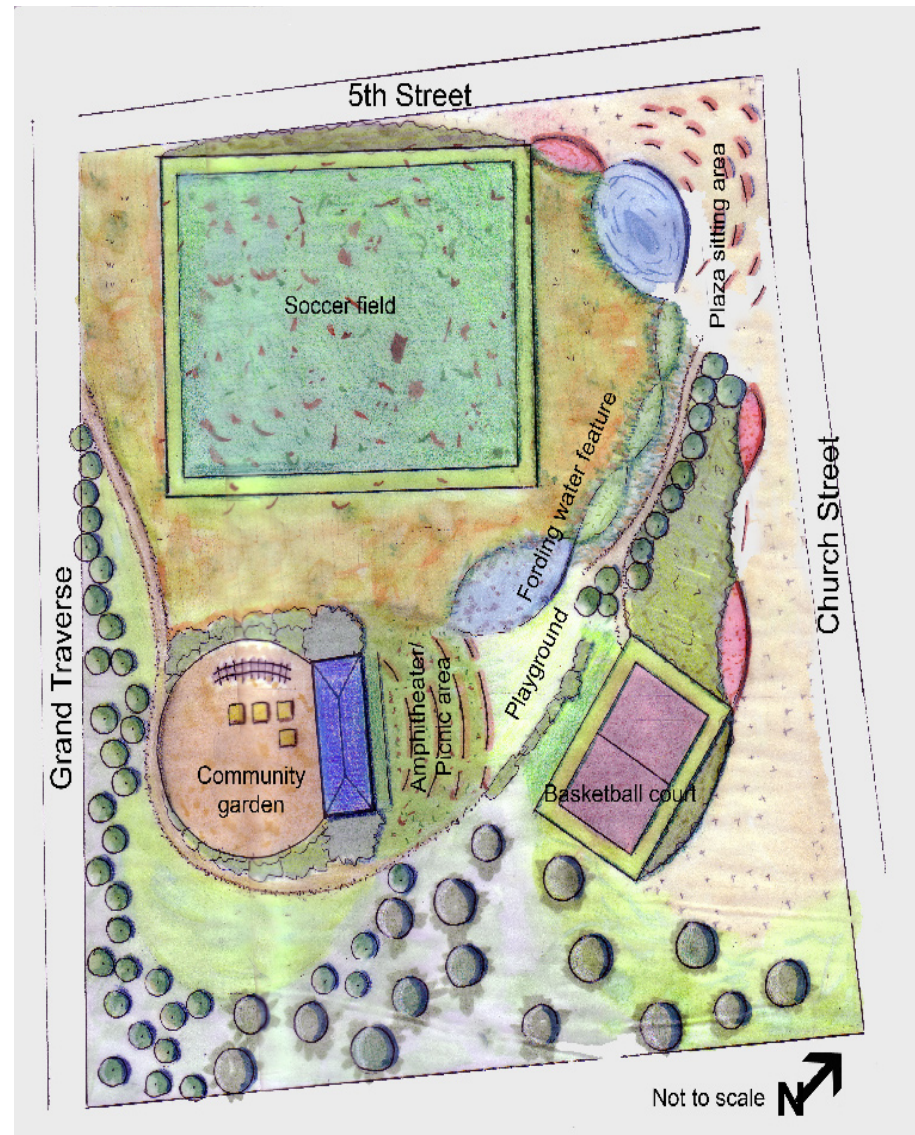


Figure 7.2: A future vision for the park could include community gardens, water features, sports facilities and an amphitheater.

To sharpen Memorial Park's identity and to improve the user experience, the GTDNA and its partners can work to unite both parts of the park. To do

this, they would need to remove the fencing surrounding the parking lot and along Grand Traverse. This will also improve access to the park from Grand Traverse. If the GTDNA wants to maintain an enclosed area, the park design could include replacing the existing fencing with shrubs.

### Improving Landscaping

Since the turf area requires significant maintenance, the GTDNA and its partners may want to replace some of this grass and some of the paved areas with lower-maintenance vegetation.

### Improving Amenities

By improving amenities in Memorial Park, the GTDNA can increase the park's value to the neighborhood. Installing and improving sports facilities will allow the GTDNA to encourage organized recreational sports organizations to use the park, thereby bringing more people into the neighborhood. This would increase the visibility of the neighborhood and bring in more foot traffic, thereby mak-



**Figure 7.3:** Memorial Park currently gives visitors a feel of two separate parks, one that is paved and the other grassy.



**Figure 7.4:** Existing play equipment in Memorial Park is aging and is scattered around the southeast corner of the park.

ing the neighborhood feel safer.

**Play Equipment:** Scattered play equipment, shown in Figure 7.4, is currently located around the southeast corner of the park. While the equipment is in usable condition, the GTDNA and the trust could move it to concentrate the equipment in an open and sunny area. This would create an identity as a playground and attract children. If moving existing equipment proves not to be cost effective, the GTDNA can consider working with the trust and local foundations to buy new play equipment for the park. New and unique play equipment can draw children from surrounding neighborhoods to use the park. For example, people from all over Toronto come to Dufferin Grove Park (see Figure 7.5) since children love the adventure playground and sand pit located there.

**Basketball Court:** The basketball court (see Figure 7.6) already attracts teenagers to the park and is therefore an important amenity to preserve. The GTDNA could repave and stripe the court, thereby inviting more players to use it.

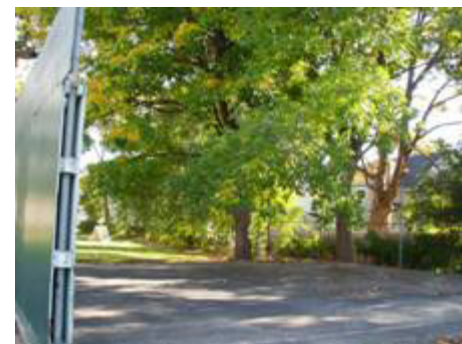
**Soccer Field:** The park has enough open space to support a soccer field. By investing a small amount to in-



**Figure 7.5:** Play equipment at Dufferin Grove Park attracts children from around Toronto. **Source:** Friends of Dufferin Grove Park



**Figure 7.6:** The basketball court in Memorial Park is in need of repair.



**Figure 7.7:** The wall of the handball court creates an uncomfortable hidden space

## *Creating a Neighborhood of Choice*

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stall goal posts, the GTDNA can build a soccer field in Memorial Park without detracting from the open space. Since soccer is a popular sport among both children and adults, it can attract organized recreational soccer leagues.

**Baseball:** Much of the infrastructure for a baseball diamond at the corner of Fifth and Grand Traverse already exists. A small investment in benches and plates would make the baseball diamond usable for recreational leagues. For example, the Flint IMA runs a Greater Flint Area Baseball/Softball Commission that might use the area. When the trust renegotiates a contract with the IMA, they could include use of the baseball diamond for the commission as part of the contract.

**Tennis:** The existing tennis courts are not currently in usable conditions. The GTDNA and the trust could decide either to rehabilitate the tennis court or replace it with another use. If replaced, residents could use the area for other recreational facilities or replace the courts with vegetation.

**Handball:** The handball court at the southern edge of the park is not currently in use. The GTDNA could work with the trust to remove it. Handball is no longer a popular sport and the wall of the court raises safety concerns because it creates a hidden space that can be perceived as unsafe.

**Building:** The existing building houses restrooms and a small room. The organization could refurbish this room to make it a more inviting gathering place. The room could house a community resource, like a tool or toy library. If this room becomes a desirable meeting place, the GTDNA can invite community organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters to use it. This will create a relationship with organizations that would then be expected to assist in the improvement of the park. For example, in Dufferin Grove Park (see Case Study 7.1), neighbors learned that University of Toronto music students needed a place to hold a celebratory dinner. The park allowed the students to use the facilities in exchange for performing a concert at the park.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Project for Public Spaces, “The Big Backyard: Neighborhood Park Becomes Center of Community Activity,” *Community Involvement : Who Is “The Community”?* (Summer 1998) <[http://www.pps.org/topics/community/thecommunity/success\\_toronto](http://www.pps.org/topics/community/thecommunity/success_toronto)>

### **Expanding Community Events**

While the GTDNA currently holds its annual Family Festival in the park, the association could look into expanding these activities. Concerts, art shows and festivals will all draw people into the park and increase awareness of its existence (see Chapter Eight for more information on organizing community events).

### **Addressing Safety Concerns**

The southern edge of the park faces the backyards of homes on Sylvan Court. The fencing separating the park from the homes, large shade-producing trees, and the handball court wall create an area of the park that park users may perceive as unsafe because there are no direct lines of sight. GTDNA could remove the handball court and trim trees to maintain direct lines of sight across the park.

### **Implementing a New Vision for Memorial Park**

While improving the park may seem difficult, GTDNA members can look to the other Ballenger Trust park, Ballenger Park, as an example. Recently, neighbors worked to erect an amphitheater in that park, called Centennial Pavilion. The Greater Flint Sunrise Rotary Club donated \$10,000 and the IMA Children’s Recreation Fund contributed the remaining \$11,049 needed for the project. Rowe Inc. created the site plan, and the Carpenters’ Regional Council donated the labor. In addition, Mott Community College donated eight steel picnic tables. The IMA oversaw the project construction and secured the necessary approvals from the trust. Similarly, the GTDNA will want to find partners both for funding and implementation to facilitate the improvement process. Following are ideas for potential partners:

**Ballenger Trust and the IMA:** Developing a relationship with the Ballenger Trust and the IMA is the first step in improving the park. The IMA serves as the main contact for the park, so any changes or improvements must be discussed with them first. The IMA will ensure that the trust approves of any changes. The trust has two main priorities regarding changes to the park:

- The trust would not approve any changes that would increase the financial burden of maintaining the park without assurance of future funding for these purposes.

**Case Study 7.1: Dufferin Grove Park, Toronto, Canada**

Toronto’s Dufferin Grove Park, comparable in size to Memorial Park, was completely abandoned a few years ago. Today, it is known as the “big backyard.” A group of neighbors formed the Friends of Dufferin Grove Park organization. They held a neighborhood meeting and developed a list of priorities and vision for the park. Now, local children and families use the park on a daily basis. It attracts throngs of people for numerous festivals and events, as can be seen in Figure 7.8.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 7.8:** Dufferin Grove Park is about the size of Memorial Park and is widely used on a daily basis and for festivals and events. *Source:* Friends of Dufferin Grove Park.

1 Friends of Dufferin Grove Park website. (Accessed 8 December 2005). <<http://www.dufferinpark.ca/aboutus/aboutus.html>>

- The trust requires that properly insured contractors perform any construction work in the park, in order to limit liabilities to the trust.<sup>3</sup>

**Ruth Mott Foundation:** The Ruth Mott Foundation supports community vitality by providing grants in areas of Arts, Beautification and Health Promotion. Memorial Park would be a candidate for grants in the Beautification and Health Promotion areas.

3 Interview with Kathy Rembowski and Gwen Kelley, Citizens Bank, 29 November 2005.

**University of Michigan Class Projects:** The size and scale of Memorial Park make it especially suitable for class projects through the University of Michigan. For example, classes in landscape architecture from the Ann Arbor campus could work with the residents to create a landscape design for the park.

**Youth and Volunteer Organizations:** The GTDNA could consider partnering with youth and volunteer organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America or the Junior League of Flint. These organizations are committed to community service and may be able to provide the labor and other resources necessary to bring the GTDNA’s vision for Memorial Park into reality.

**IMPROVE ACCESS TO NEIGHBORHOOD NATURAL AREAS**

In the long term, the GTDNA could improve access to nearby natural areas as a way of reaching its recreational goals. Swartz and Thread Creeks and the Flint River are the northern and western boundaries of the neighborhood, but, overgrown plants currently hinder visibility of the area’s water features. This overgrowth, along with fencing and the poor condition of Aldrich Park, hinders access to these areas. Therefore, residents currently do not appreciate these assets to their full potential.



**Figure 7.9:** Aldrich Park serves as a gateway to Swartz Creek.

By improving visibility and access, residents can enjoy the nature that surrounds the neighborhood. They will also feel better connected to natural assets outside the neighborhood such as Riverbank Park, Happy Hollow and the broader regional park system. Improved recreational access will improve the quality of life for current residents and make the neighborhood more desirable for new residents.

In addition, the City of Flint will soon begin preliminary work for its parks and recreation plan, which will be important in guiding any future public im-

## Creating a Neighborhood of Choice

provements. GTDNA may want to send representatives to the public meetings around this process to voice the concerns of neighborhood residents.

### Improve Access to Aldrich Park and Swartz and Thread Creeks

Aldrich Park is a gateway to Swartz and Thread Creeks and can be developed to create an inviting entrance to the neighborhood's natural areas. Located along Swartz and Thread Creeks, Aldrich Park was once a popular sledding site for children. Currently, residents rarely use the park. The newly installed basketball court is missing one of the backboards, and the weeds in the park are only mown once or twice a year.

Poor access and a lack of maintenance create a sense of insecurity and discourage further use of the space. Access to the park from Court Street is via a narrow stairway, which is barely visible from the street due to overgrowth (see Figure 7.10). As an immediate improvement, neighborhood residents could trim the overgrown tree branches to provide clearer views of the access stairway to Aldrich Park from Court Street. In the next few years, the Michigan Department of Transportation plans to rebuild the bridge over Court Street. This will create an opportunity to improve the access to Aldrich Park and Swartz and Thread Creeks. The stairway could be widened and made more inviting. The association can look to the Broadway Bridge renovation in Ann Arbor (see Case Study 7.2) for an example of how a bridge renovation can include improved park access.



**Figure 7.10:** The stairway from Court Street to Aldrich Park is not very inviting.

If the City of Flint cannot care for the existing turf in Aldrich Park to a level that makes it useable, the association might suggest that it be replaced with lower-maintenance plants that do not require mowing or use of pesticides, and do not look as unkempt. Frequently, native plants adapt to local environments naturally and consequently demand little care. GTDNA could

### Case Study 7.2: Broadway Bridge in Ann Arbor, Michigan

In 2004, the City of Ann Arbor renovated the Broadway Bridge across the Huron River. Prior to the renovation, city residents did not frequent the public lands by the riverfront, as many did not even know that a park existed below the bridge. When the bridge was renovated, access to the park was improved by building a wide and inviting stairway down to the park, as can be seen in Figure 7.11.



**Figure 7.11:** When Ann Arbor's Broadway Bridge was renovated, construction included an improved stairway to the riverside park below.

seek assistance from Mott Community College (MCC) Gardening Association<sup>4</sup>, Flint Urban Gardening & Land Use Committee<sup>5</sup>, or Wild Ones, Flint Chapter<sup>6</sup>, in identifying appropriate plants.

In devising any plan for Aldrich Park, the GTDNA should consider environmental factors. The section of Aldrich Park north of Court Street was

4 Mott Community College Gardening Association website. (Accessed 8 December 2005). <[http://www.mcc.edu/clubs/gardening/garden\\_index.shtml](http://www.mcc.edu/clubs/gardening/garden_index.shtml)>

5 Flint Urban Gardening and Land Use Committee website. (Accessed 8 December 2005). <<http://studentsbc.umflint.edu/site.html>>

6 Wild Ones, Flint Chapter website. (Accessed 8 December 2005). <<http://www.for-wild.org/chapters/flint/>>

originally a wetland that was later filled in for use as a tannery site in the 1920s, causing the soil to become contaminated with arsenic.<sup>7</sup>

The City of Flint uses Aldrich Park south of Court Street as a dumping site for leaves and road construction debris. (See Figure 7.15 for a map that shows the location of Aldrich Park.) Therefore, the association should focus on Memorial Park for its recreational needs and develop Aldrich Park into an entranceway that will lead visitors toward the pathway along Swartz Creek.



**Figure 7.12:** Neighbors maintain a pathway along Swartz Creek that originates in Aldrich Park and ends before Second Street.

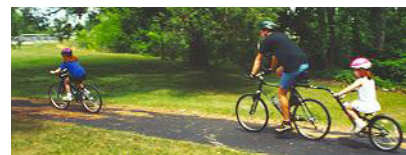
### *Improve view, signage and knowledge of natural areas*

Residents cannot appreciate Swartz Creek if they cannot see it. Overgrown vegetation should be trimmed to open views toward the creek. Currently, some neighbors along Hall Street take responsibility for mowing a small-pathway from Second Street to Aldrich Park and have created a pleasant walking trail as shown in Figure 7.12. The GTDNA could join the volunteers in taking care of the existing pathway.

Signs displaying the location of the creek and marking entrances to the pathway could acquaint local residents with the existence of Swartz Creek and the pathway. The GTDNA could also integrate signage with interpretation boards to enhance the knowledge and understanding of the environment.

<sup>7</sup> Jim Innis, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality Lansing District Office, as cited by GTDNA, 21 September 2005.

## **PARTICIPATE IN EXPANSION OF REGIONAL GREENWAY SYSTEM**



**Figure 7.13:** The Flint River Trail runs along the Flint River from Saginaw Street to the northern edge of the city.

*Source:* Friends of Flint River Trail.

The Flint River Trail is an asphalt-paved trail running along the Flint River from Saginaw Street in downtown Flint to the northern edge of the city, near Johnson School. Friends of the Flint River Trail are considering extending the trail south into the Grand Traverse neighborhood by using the land in the old railroad right-of-way.<sup>8</sup> This would be a great asset for the neighborhood, bringing residents close to natural areas and providing an alternative route

to downtown. Therefore, the GTDNA may want to become involved in planning for the extension of the trail, to ensure that the needs and considerations of Grand Traverse area residents are met.

There are many precedents for converting abandoned railroad right-of-ways into trails. In the decade from 1988 to 1998, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) helped to convert over 10,000 miles of abandoned railroads to greenway trail.<sup>9</sup> The Clinton-Ionia-Shiawassee Trail Project, shown in Figure 7.14, was devel-



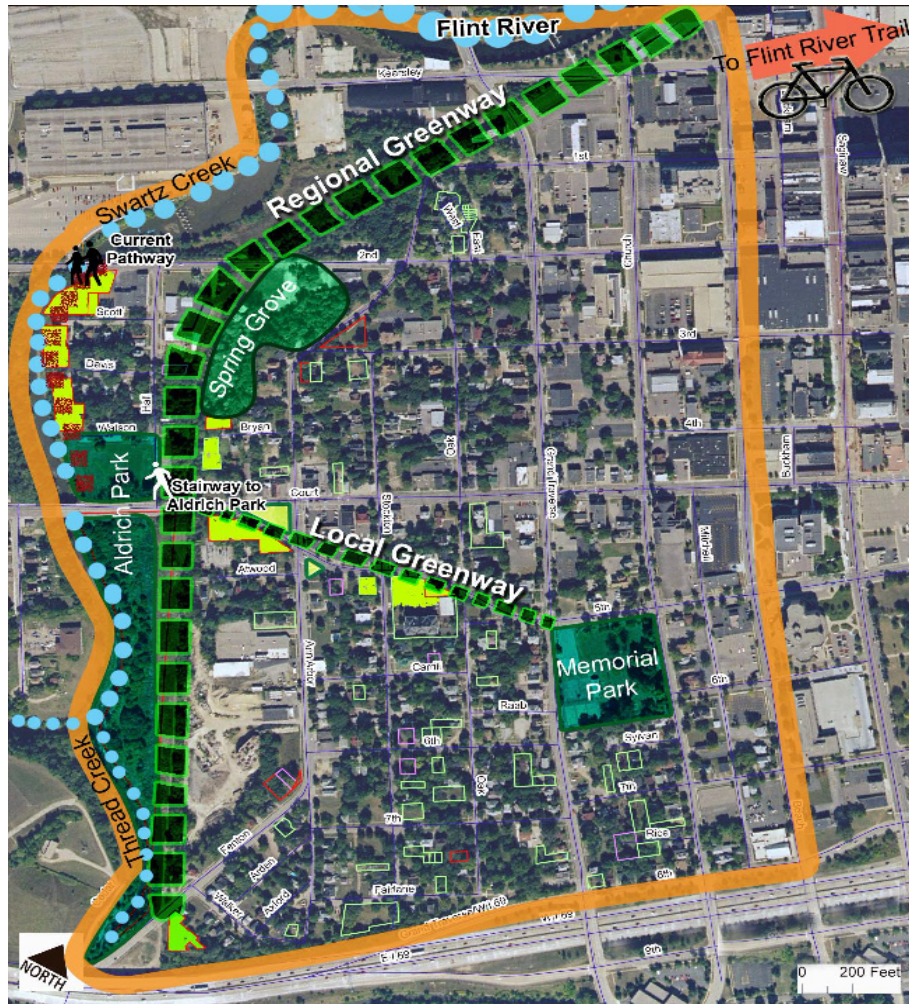
**Figure 7.14:** The Central Michigan Railroad Corridor in Ionia County is now a multi-use trail.

*Source:* Michigan Trails & Greenway Alliance.

<sup>8</sup> Correspondence with Stephany Diana, Friends of Flint River Trail, November 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Jack Ahern, "Greenways in the USA: theory, trends and prospects." In *Ecological Networks and Greenways: Concept, Design, Implementation*, eds Rob Jongman and Gloria Pungetti. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

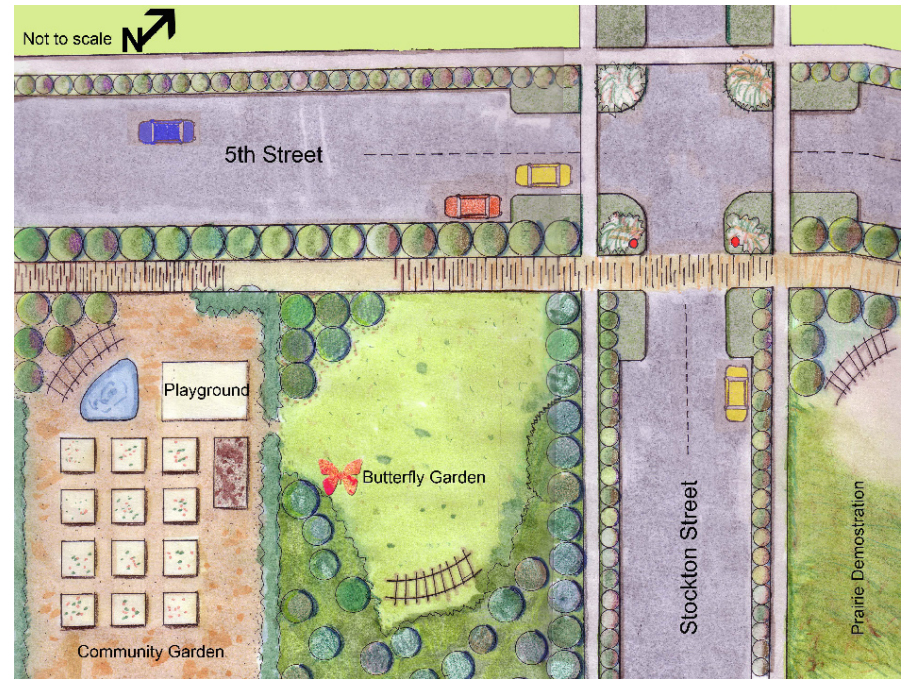
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**Figure 7.15:** In the long term, the association could consider a local greenway from Memorial Park to Aldrich Park, incorporating the open space in front of Oak School.

oped in 1999 by converting the abandoned Central Michigan Railroad corridor into a multi-use trail.<sup>10</sup>

10 Michigan Trails & Greenway Alliance website. (Accessed 9 December 2005). <[http://www.michigantrails.org/cis\\_trail.asp](http://www.michigantrails.org/cis_trail.asp)>



**Figure 7.16:** A local greenway could include a variety of amenities, such as a butterfly garden, community garden, and playground.

The extensive environmental contamination of the land in the railroad right-of-way may create a barrier for the association in extending the trail. The association and its partners should work with environmental groups to ensure that the trail is safe.

Spring Grove, a four-acre tract of land located north of the Stockton House and owned by the Land Bank, could also be incorporated into a regional greenway due to its proximity to the railroad-right of-way. The Land Bank completed a Phase I environmental assessment of the land and found contaminants. Currently, the Land Bank is applying for EPA funds for cleanup and reuse of the area.<sup>11</sup> Plans for the area include the development of a

11 Interview with Christina Kelly, Genesee County Land Bank, 14 December 2005.



recreational area including a walkway in the wetland area as well as replacing invasive species with native plants.<sup>12</sup> Developed in conjunction with a regional greenway, Spring Grove could become an important recreational amenity in the neighborhood.

GLS Greenlinks may make a good partner for developing the greenway. The organization is a green network for Genesee, Lapeer, and Shiawassee counties. The Flint River Watershed Coalition and the University of Michigan - Flint's Center for Applied Environmental Research formed the group in 2003.

### *Create Local Greenway to Connect Natural Areas*

In the long term, the GTDNA may want to consider creating the neighborhood's own greenway to connect its natural areas. For example, a greenway alongside Fifth Street would connect Memorial Park with Aldrich Park. By expanding the sidewalks using distinctive paving and utilizing vacant space for amenities like gardens, trees, benches and art, the greenway could encourage use of both parks. The large open space in front of Oak School could become an important asset for this project. Such a project could grow into a larger greenway system.

Figure 7.15 illustrates the possible location of a local greenway along Fifth Street and Figure 7.16 demonstrates possible amenities along that greenway. The illustration represents the intersection of Fifth and Stockton Streets. Notice that the sidewalk is extended to accommodate bikers and pedestrians and is paved with distinct pavement depicting railroad ties to connect with local history. Landscaping vegetation might be chosen for enhance the integrity of local ecosystems, such as a butterfly garden or prairie, as shown in Figure 7.16. The Ohlone Greenway (see Case Study 7.3) provides one example of a neighborhood converting open space and vacant lots into a greenway connecting community art and vegetable gardens.

12 Genesee County Land Bank. *Spring Grove: A Brownfield Redevelopment Partnership for Stockton Center at Spring Grove and the Grand Traverse District Neighborhood*. By e-mail from Christina Kelly, Genesee County Land Bank, 20 December 2005.

### *Case Study 7.3: Ohlone Greenway in Berkeley, California*

Ohlone Greenway, a linear five block long strip of green open space in Berkeley, California exemplifies collective efforts rooted in community to turn empty lots into living space. It started with a community garden which was earlier a vacant lot fenced with barbed wire and filled with construction materials and debris. Now it connects a cluster of three community art gardens with commons and an ecological demonstration home retrofitted from a ruined residence.

Dozens of volunteers have taken responsibility for maintaining sections of greenway planted as restorations of coastal prairie plants. Local artists painted one of the public art installations, a 72-foot-long mural portraying local history at a street cul-de-sac. What started as a collection of vacant lots became a beautiful and popular greenway.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 7.17:** The Ohlone Greenway in Berkeley, California includes a 72 foot mural depicting local history. **Figure 7.18:** Bikers can enjoy informational displays along the Ohlone Greenway. **Source:** Landscape Architecture, Vol. 95 No. 7, July 2005. **Source:** Landscape Architecture, Vol. 95 No. 7, July 2005.

1 Landscape Architecture. Vol. 95, No. 7 and Berkeley Partners for Parks website. (Accessed 8 January 2006). <<http://www.bpfp.org/>>



## CHAPTER EIGHT: EXPANDING COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT

**GOAL: STRENGTHEN RESIDENT AND BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY**

The Grand Traverse neighborhood's diverse population is one of its assets. People of different races and incomes live in the area. Key to the implementation of many strategies within this plan will be the inclusion of all types of residents of the neighborhood. This will mean having input from business owners, minorities, renters and homeowners. This chapter will provide strategies the association may choose from in order to increase the involvement of both residents and business owners to achieve shared goals.

### *SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS*

The following sections suggest resident and business outreach strategies for the Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association:

#### *Community Outreach*

- Develop a community involvement committee for the association
- Perform coordinated door-to-door outreach to discover neighborhood interests
- Create an association logo and colors to give the neighborhood an identity
- Increase frequency of newsletters to improve visibility of the association
- Plant more and larger community gardens

#### *Business Involvement*

- Designate a business liaison within the association to coordinate business involvement and track business member needs
- Formalize a relationship between the association and the Flint Downtown Small Business Association

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The Grand Traverse neighborhood has 44 percent minority residents, with 33 percent being of African American descent. As of 2000, 77 percent of the residents in the neighborhood were renters, making homeowners the minority (see Chapter Two). However, the association's members are almost exclusively white homeowners, and the association therefore is not able to benefit from the various perspectives of the neighborhood's diverse residents. Recruiting renters and minorities will be an essential element in the association's efforts to implement renewal strategies within this plan.

The importance and value of community involvement can be seen in Case Study 8.1. Like NorthStar, the association could use input from the neigh-

#### *Case Study 8.1: NorthStar CDC of Detroit, MI*

NorthStar Community Development Corporation in Detroit is one of the leading non-profit developers of infill housing within the city. NorthStar has received considerable input from the neighborhood with regard to the type of housing the residents want. NorthStar solicited this input through surveys, town hall meetings and meetings with neighborhood activists. North Star made extensive efforts to inform the public about upcoming meetings through flyers and newsletters "If we did not have the support of the community a lot of what you see around here would have never happened," says Lisa Tucker, acting president of the CDC.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Lisa Tucker, Northstar CDC, 9 November 2005.

borhood residents to refine the plan for housing and other goals.

The following section will outline strategies that the association can use to increase resident involvement in the association and reach out to minorities and renters (see Figure 8.1).

#### *Community Involvement Committee*

A community involvement committee can help increase neighborhood involvement. Currently, the president of the association is solely responsible

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for recruiting new members. A community involvement committee could devote energy and resources to recruiting new members and including more neighborhood residents in association activities and planning. The committee would meet on a regular basis to devise and implement neighborhood outreach strategies such as those listed below. Committee members would decide which areas the association needs to address and which strategies best meet those needs. For example, the committee may want to put a survey together or organize a meeting in order to gain input for Memorial Park improvements. The committee would report their results back to the rest of the association.



*Figure 8.1 Residents can work together to increase involvement of renters and minorities.*

### *Door to Door Contact*

Association members can approach residents in the neighborhood through an organized door-to-door contact program. Such a program includes systematically knocking on doors of residents to introduce the association and discuss the residents' concerns. The purpose of door-to-door contact is to familiarize residents with the association, as well as to learn valuable information from those previously unheard. Association members can listen to other residents' major concerns about and hopes for the neighborhood. The process will allow association leaders to discover new issues, gather support for current directions and set an agenda for the future that reflects the concerns of a wider cross-section of residents. These contacts can also lead to the recruitment of new association members so the association can better reflect the neighborhood's diversity. Neighborhood residents will appreciate the opportunity to voice their concerns and may choose to become active in the association. By speaking to residents, GTDNA members may also be able to identify potential block captains to lead block clubs from among neighborhood residents.

By going door to door, the Dudley Street Initiative in Boston was able to recruit representatives of that neighborhood's diverse ethnic groups, as seen in Case Study 8.2. Case study 8.3 shows how a neighborhood group was able to identify a block captain through door to door contact.

### *Newsletters*

A newsletter can highlight upcoming activities, report on past events and accomplishments and encourage residents to attend planning meetings that affect the neighborhood. The association is currently publishing an effective newsletter but can increase visibility and community involvement by publishing it more frequently and regularly and by enriching it.

By increasing the frequency of the newsletter, residents will be consistently informed of all of the happenings of the association and the neighborhood as a whole. This more frequent flow of information may encourage residents to become more active in the organization.

By enriching the content of the newsletter, the association can increase the value of the newsletter. An expanded newsletter can include a business section to appeal to local businesses. The association may want to involve area residents in the newsletter by allowing them to post announcements, acknowledgements and requests for assistance.

### *Case Study 8.2: Dudley Street Initiative*

The Dudley Street neighborhood is a racially diverse neighborhood not far from downtown Boston. The Dudley Street Initiative is a non-profit that aims to increase community involvement in order to address residents' concerns. They have been very successful with door-to-door community organizing and were able to recruit a board of directors that includes residents from each of the four ethnic groups in the area. Through door-to-door contacts and a diverse board, organization members were able to identify issues that were important to residents and concentrate on them.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative website. (Accessed 21 December 2005). <<http://www.dsni.org/>>

### Case Study 8.3: Anchorage NHS Community Organizing Outreach

Lisa Mills, an Anchorage Neighborhood Housing Services community organizer, was highly successful in reaching out to more than 75 residents in the city's Mountain View community. In the initial stages Mills concentrated on three blocks selected by the organization based on their racial makeup. Before the day of her visits, her organization dropped off fliers in the neighborhood announcing her upcoming visit. At a designated time indicated on the flyer, Mills knocked on doors and began one-on-one conversations with residents. Residents felt comfortable inviting Mills into their homes because they had received notice of her visit. From her initial visits, Mills was able to begin identifying resident leaders and possible projects. The cost for the door-to-door contact was minimal, and the effort allowed her to identify her first block captain, a resident responsible for organizing the neighbors on his block.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Neighbor Works, *Winning Strategies in the Neighbor Works Network*. (Accessed 21 December 2005). <<http://www.nw2.org/Winning-Strategies/display.asp?strategy=1260&offset=-1>>

In order to provide maximum value, the newsletter needs to be distributed widely. Local businesses may be interested in sponsoring the newsletter as an advertising opportunity; this would provide funds for wide distribution. Posting the newsletter on a website is not effective for most residents in the neighborhood because they do not have internet access.

An effective newsletter will:

- Inform residents about current issues
- Build support for events and projects
- Publicize accomplishments
- Recognize valued community members
- Report on meetings
- Attract members and encourage active participation
- Increase community pride

### Community Gardens

Community gardens are gardens that are maintained by neighborhood residents. Currently the association maintains flower gardens in several public spaces (see Figure 8.2). The association could expand the gardening program to vegetable and flower gardens located in vacant lots. Residents could use the food grown in the gardens. The well-established Boston Urban Gardeners have estimated that a household can save up to \$750 annually through community gardening.<sup>1</sup>

Community vegetable gardens in the Grand Traverse neighborhood could also serve as a means of bringing residents together and increasing their pride in their neighborhood. Residents in neighborhoods would maintain the gardens, look over them, and work together to ensure their success. These gardens have the effect of linking old and young residents, whites and minorities, and homeowners and renters. They will promote communication among neighbors and generate community pride.



Figure 8.2 The association maintains flower gardens in several public spaces.

The concept of community gardening is not new to Flint. The Flint Urban Gardening and Land Use Corporation (FUGLUC) has successfully implemented community gardens. FUGLUC is an organization that works with neighborhood groups to change vacant lots into gardens. Jesse W. Perry of the East Bishop/East Flint Park Block Club says, "In our community garden, we don't only grow vegetables, we grow values."<sup>2</sup> Salem Housing CDC of Flint

<sup>1</sup> S. Naimark, ed. *A Handbook of Community Gardening*. New York: Scribner's. pg. 6. 1982.

<sup>2</sup> K. Alaimo and D. Hassler, eds. "From Seeds to Stories: The Community Garden Storytelling Project of Flint." Flint Urban Gardening and Land Use Corporation, Prevention Research Center of Michigan. 2003.

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partnered with FUGLUC for the implementation for their gardens and received funding through a community development block grant from the city of Flint.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to FUGLUC, the association can turn to the American Community Gardens Association which helps neighborhoods develop gardens. They can provide resources and information for starting a new community garden.<sup>4</sup> The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society website is also another useful source to consider.<sup>5</sup>

### *Block Clubs*

Starting small block clubs or a tenant organization is one way to include renters and minorities in the association. A block club is made up of residents of a specific block. These block clubs are led by a block captain and have individual agendas and activities. A tenant organization is made up of renters and would address specific renter needs. These sub-groups can be separate from the organization, yet still affiliated. Block clubs and tenant organizations could work with the association to inform them of the concerns of renters and minorities.

### *Logo/Neighborhood Identity*

The association can create a logo and choose colors in order to create an identity for the neighborhood. Residents could participate in the design and selection processes. A strong identity will create a feeling of pride for neighborhood residents. In addition, the organization may want to change its name (see Case Study 8.4).

### *Resident Recognition*

3 For more information about Flint Urban Gardens & Land Use Committee visit their website at <<http://studentsbc.umflint.edu/>> or contact them directly at (810) 785-5340 ext. 27.

4 American Community Gardening Association website. (Accessed 22 December 2005). <<http://www.communitygarden.org/>>

5 The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society website. (Accessed 22 December 2005). <<http://www.pennsylvaniahorticulturalsociety.org/aboutus/index.html>>

### *Case Study 8.4: MorningSide Community Organization, Detroit, MI*

The MorningSide Community Organization decided to change its organization name in 1995. The process to change the name included a naming contest and a vote from community members on the new name. A goal of the organization's leadership was to include more African Americans within its ranks and to distance itself from the previous perceived exclusive attitude of the organization. Since the inception of the new name, membership has increased as more residents are able to identify with the group.<sup>1</sup>

1 Interview with Eric Dueweke, MorningSide, 20 December 2005.

### *Case Study 8.5: MorningSide Community Organization, Detroit, MI*

MorningSide gives a beautification award annually to the residents who maintain their homes in the most attractive fashion. Throughout the year, residents nominate quarterly award winners. From this pool, MorningSide selects an annual winner. This award gives incentive to residents to maintain their property.<sup>1</sup>

1 Interview with Eric Dueweke, MorningSide, 20 December 2005.

The association could invent an award, such as a "Grand Traverse Neighbor of the Year," that recognizes members within the neighborhood who embody the values of the association and are valuable contributors to the Grand Traverse neighborhood. Award recipients could be highlighted in the newsletter. This type of recognition honors the work of residents. (see Case Study 8.5 for more information on resident recognition).

### *Neighborhood Welcome*

Many renters in the Grand Traverse neighborhood move often. Because of this, the association members have the opportunity to introduce themselves to newcomers when they move into a home in the neighborhood. The association could give these new residents a welcome basket that could include

coupons from businesses in the neighborhood and information about the association. This could attract new members for the association, introduce businesses to residents, and give new residents a positive impression of the neighborhood. This can also begin a relationship between the association and some of the landlords, as the landlords could let the association know when someone moved into one of their properties.

## ***BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT***

The businesses in the Grand Traverse neighborhood include over 100 attorneys, neighborhood-oriented businesses like Tom Z's Coney Island, the White Horse Tavern, the Grainery Natural Food Store, and the Northwest Market (see Chapter Two). The association has partnered with many businesses for neighborhood events such as the Family Festival and the float in the Sesquicentennial Parade. These collaborations benefit both parties, as the association gains funds and supplies for events and the businesses gain exposure. Continued efforts to establish and build relationships with more businesses in the neighborhood will yield greater results.

Like residents, local business owners have a vested interest in the strength and vibrancy of the neighborhood where their businesses are located. Many business owners in the Grand Traverse neighborhood do not reside there, but they spend a large portion of their time in the neighborhood. The association can take steps to strengthen the relationships and dialogue between business owners and community members (see Figure 8.3).

### ***Business Representative***

The association could increase the dialogue with neighborhood businesses by creating a position of neighborhood business representative to act as a liaison between residents and the business community. Ideally, this person would be a business owner or have a background in business. Responsibilities of this position would include coordinating regular meetings between business owners and association members and facilitating communication among residents, the association, and the business community.

### ***Business Section in the Newsletter***

Creating a business section in the association's newsletter could help keep residents informed of the activities of area businesses. It would also encourage businesses to read the newsletter as it would also serve their needs.

### ***Monthly Meetings***

Work and family schedules often prevent business owners from getting actively involved with neighborhood issues. The GTDNA may want to initiate monthly business luncheons at a Grand Traverse area restaurant. These lunch meetings would allow the association to share information about events and sponsorship opportunities. The businesses could share their concerns about the neighborhood so the association can help them make Grand Traverse a neighborhood that is attractive to businesses.

Business owners will be especially interested in participating in activities like streetscaping and one way street conversions (see Chapter Six) as well as in donating coupons for the welcome baskets discussed above. By organizing around common issues and concerns, the meetings will be an effective way to strengthen the involvement of businesses in the community.

### ***Partnership with the DSBA***

Another way to increase business involvement in the neighborhood would be to strengthen the link between the Downtown Small Business Association (DSBA) and the association. While DSBA is often represented at monthly association meetings, the association can build on this relationship to increase communication. For example, the DSBA could be instrumental in organizing the monthly meetings discussed above and identifying sponsors for association activities.



*Figure 8.3 The association can reach out to local businesses such as Tom Z's.*

## *Creating a Neighborhood of Choice*

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### *Event Sponsorship*

The GTDNA has been successful at obtaining business sponsorship for events such as the Family Festival (see Figure 8.4) and for flower plantings. As the association grows and improves its relationship with businesses, the members may want to expand and formalize sponsorship opportunities for businesses. Business sponsorship may be especially beneficial for events such as Saturday fix-up days and neighborhood beautification events (as discussed in Chapter Four).



### *CONCLUSION*

The strategies described in this chapter will allow the association to build on the diversity of both residents and businesses and incorporate many voices and perspectives into its activities. Almost all of the strategies listed in previous chapters depend on strong community involvement. By beginning a meaningful dialogue, homeowners, renters, whites, minorities and businesses will recognize mutual interests and work together to implement neighborhood improvement plans.

*Figure 8.4 The association obtains business sponsors for its annual Family Festival in Memorial Park.*



## CHAPTER NINE: IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIES

This plan provides the Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association (GTDNA) with a number of strategies for achieving the residents' vision for the neighborhood. Since the recommendations each require investments of human and/or financial resources, the association cannot begin all of them simultaneously. This chapter suggests phasing of efforts and explains options for organizational structure, categorizes the strategies into short-, intermediate- and long-term time frames, and identifies the next steps for the association.

### *ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE*

The extent to which the association can implement the plan depends in part on the structure of the organization. The association can choose which structure best fits its goals and needs.

#### *Maintain Current Structure*

If the association chooses to maintain its current organizational structure, it will be able to implement many short-term strategies. These strategies include working with other organizations, such as the City of Flint code enforcement division (Chapter Four) and Friends of the Flint River Trail (Chapter Seven). The association can also begin participating in planning processes, such as the one-way street study, the Flint River Trail expansion, the rebuilding of the Court Street Bridge, and the Land Bank's redevelopment of Oak School.

The association can implement many strategies through the formation of committees, such as a business group that will formalize relationships with local businesses and a community outreach committee that will recruit new members and reach out to more residents. Another group could be a planning committee to represent the association during area planning processes.

#### *Create or Partner with a Non-Profit Organization*

If the association decides to create or partner with a non-profit organization, it will become eligible for funding for neighborhood projects. Many funding sources will only make grants to non-profit organizations. As its own

non-profit or in partnership with one, the association can use funds to advance the rehabilitation of housing, streetscaping, and improvement of recreational facilities in the neighborhood.

#### *Create or Partner with a CDC or CHDO*

Partnering with or creating a community development corporation (CDC) or community housing development organization (CHDO) will allow the association to develop affordable housing in the neighborhood. The CDC or CHDO will be able to apply for federal and state funding for the infill housing strategy and/or housing rehabilitation.

### *IMPLEMENTATION PHASING*

Table 9.1 shows various strategies based on whether the association can implement them in the short, intermediate or long term.

**Short Term Activities:** These are the first steps in plan implementation. They require minimal funding and no change in organizational structure.

**Intermediate Term Activities:** These will take up to a year to complete and will require additional resources. The association will need to become a non-profit or partner with one in order to implement some of them. Some activities that fall in this phase will serve as steps toward the completion of long term strategies.

**Long Term Activities:** These require major resources and time to complete. The implementation of these activities will require significant community involvement or major funding. Some of them will require the capacity of a CDC or CHDO. The completion of these strategies will shape the Grand Traverse neighborhood over the next several years.

While many of the activities are ongoing, Table 9.1 indicates when the association could begin implementation.

<i>Objective</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Short Term</i>	<i>Inter-mediate</i>	<i>Long Term</i>
<b>Improve housing conditions</b>	Code enforcement/ repair and maintenance	Coordinate efforts with the City of Flint code enforcement division	X		
		Form a team of neighborhood volunteers through the association to work with the City of Flint code enforcement division	X		
		Create home repair and maintenance programs such as Saturday fix-up days	X		
	New infill and rehabilitated housing	Work with the Land Bank to identify properties for infill development	X		
		Partner with or create a community development corporation	X		
		Develop projects with LISC & other partners		X	
		Identify houses for rehabilitation	X		
		Partner with a CDC/CHDO for housing rehabilitation		X	
	<b>Increase home ownership</b>	Home ownership programs	Develop a lease/purchase program		X
Develop homeownership classes				X	
Sell rehabilitated and infill houses					X
<b>Improve street, safety, and access conditions for pedestrians and vehicles</b>	Conversion of one-way streets to two-way streets	Participate in the upcoming GCMPC one-way street conversion study	X		
	Pedestrian improvements	Improve pedestrian crosswalks and signals and streetscaping		X	
<b>Improve recreational opportunities and access to natural areas for people of all ages</b>	Memorial Park	Develop relationships with the Ballenger Trust and the IMA	X		
		Define a vision for the park	X		
		Form partnerships with recreational organizations to increase park's use		X	

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Short Term</b>	<b>Inter-mediate</b>	<b>Long Term</b>
<b>Improve recreational opportunities and access to natural areas for people of all ages</b>	<b>Access to natural areas</b>	Trim overgrowth and maintain the pathway along Swartz Creek from 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street to Court Street		X	
		Participate in the renewal of City of Flint's Parks and Recreation Plan	X		
		Get involved in the Court Street bridge re-building plan		X	
		Make signs indicating areas of access to natural areas		X	
		Participate in planning processes for the extension of the Flint River Trail and other regional greenway efforts	X		
<b>Strengthen Resident and Business Involvement in the community</b>	<b>Community Outreach</b>	Develop a Community Involvement Committee	X		
		Speak to residents through door to door outreach	X		
		Create a neighborhood identity (logo, new name, colors)	X		
		Increase visibility with newsletter		X	
		Plant community gardens	X		
		Develop neighborhood programs (neighbor awards, welcome to the neighborhood)	X		
		Develop block clubs		X	
	<b>Business community partnerships</b>	Form a business group within association	X		
		Formalize relationship with the DDA, DSBA, and other local associations	X		
		Develop a business section for the neighborhood newsletter		X	
Increase program sponsorship			X		

**Table 9.1:** The GTDNA can initiate activities at different times to maximize effectiveness.

# Creating a Neighborhood of Choice

## LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

The vision for the neighborhood can guide the members of the GTDNA as they implement the plan, as stated in Chapter Three:

**THE GRAND TRAVERSE DISTRICT WILL BE A DIVERSE URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD. IT WILL BE A WELL-MAINTAINED NEIGHBORHOOD FOR RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES, A VIBRANT AND SAFE COMMUNITY OF CHOICE.**

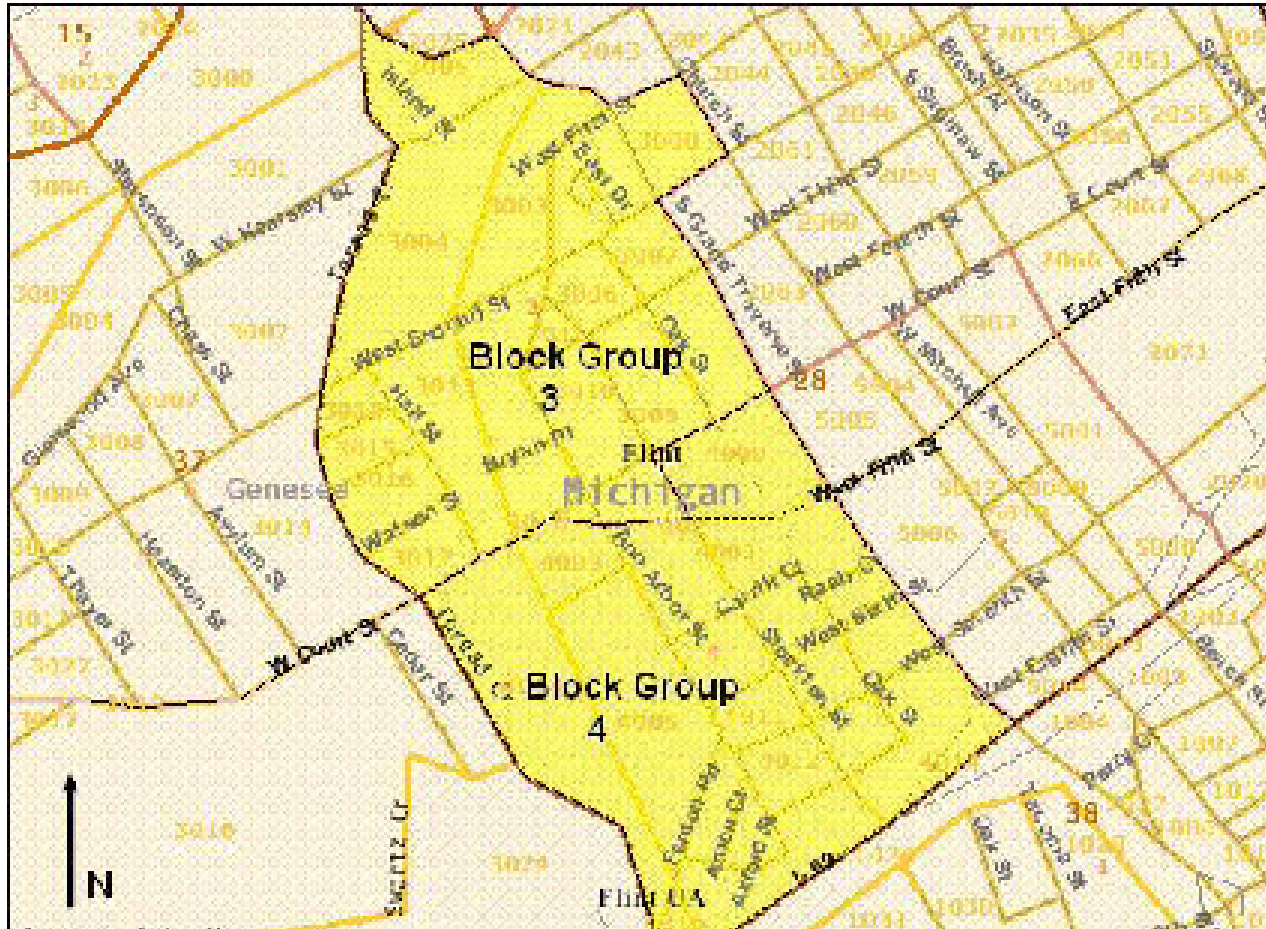
Figure 9.1 can help the association envision the future after the implementation of the plan. The two-way streets, new housing, greenways and bike lanes work together to increase the vibrancy of the neighborhood. The creeks and river can become integrated into the neighborhood.

The association will achieve this vision as they strengthen the organization through community outreach and work closely with the many organizations and partners that can help them, while building on the neighborhood's substantial assets. Together, the association members and community partners can make the Grand Traverse District a neighborhood of choice.



**Figure 9.1:** The neighborhood after plan implementation will include new housing developments, greenways, two-way streets and bike lanes. (Rooftops not to scale).

## APPENDIX A: CENSUS GEOGRAPHY



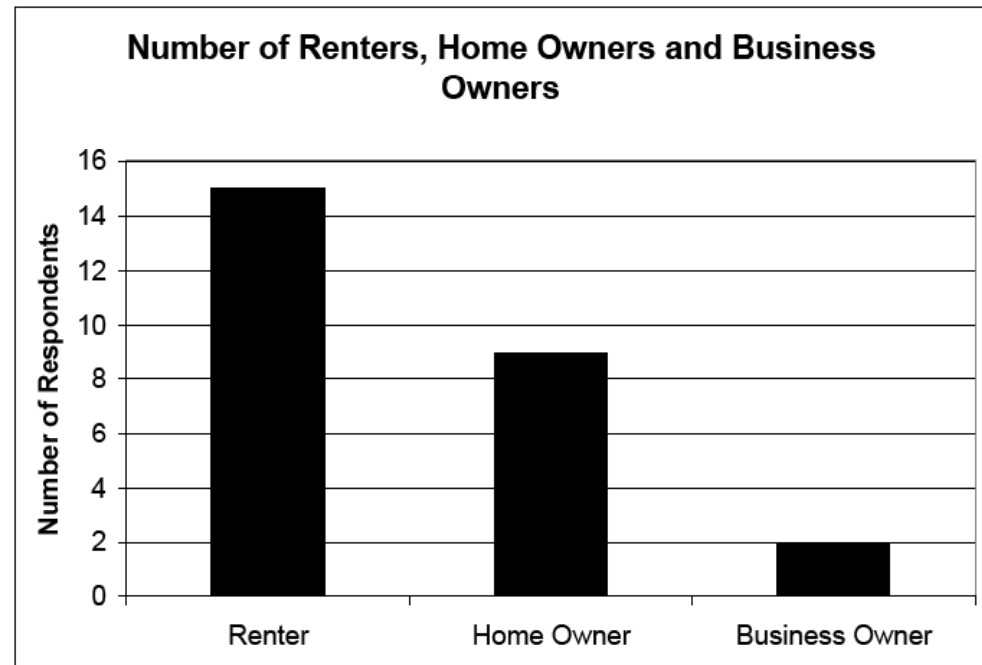
For 2000 neighborhood demographic data, Genesee County Census Tract 28, Block Groups 3 and 4, illustrated above, were used to approximate neighborhood boundaries. These block groups were chosen to exclude the Genesee County Jail, opened in 1988 on Beach Street, as well as the downtown core.

For 1940, 1960, and 1980 demographic data, Genesee County Census Tract 29 was used to approximate Grand Traverse neighborhood boundaries. Census Tract 29 was in those years bounded by the Flint River, Saginaw Street, 7th Street, Fenton Road, and Thread/Swartz Creeks.

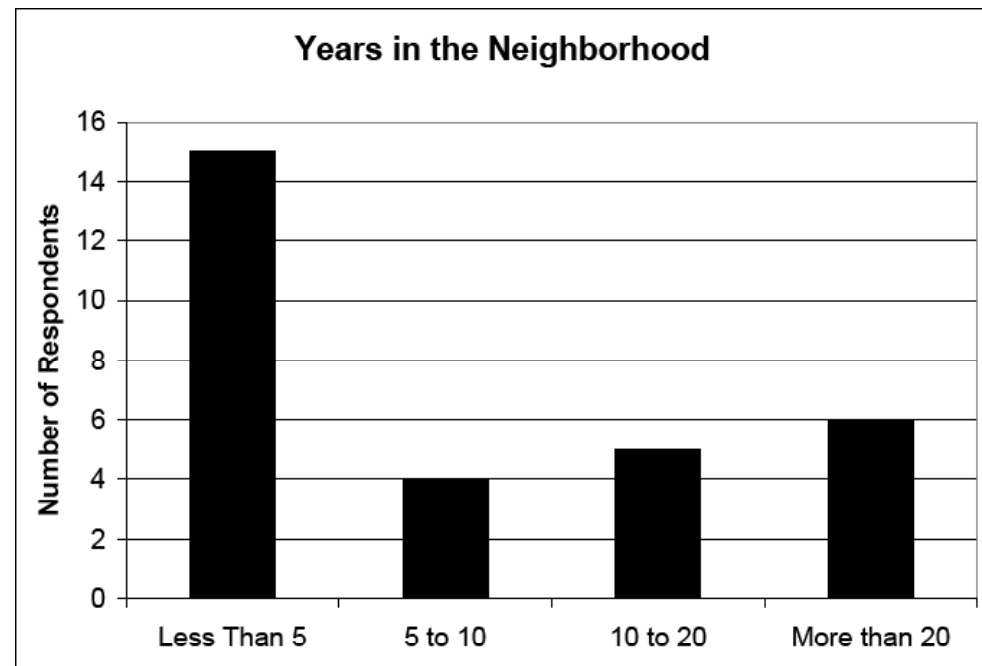
## APPENDIX B: SURVEY RESULTS

Survey taken at Family Festival in Memorial Park, October 1, 2005

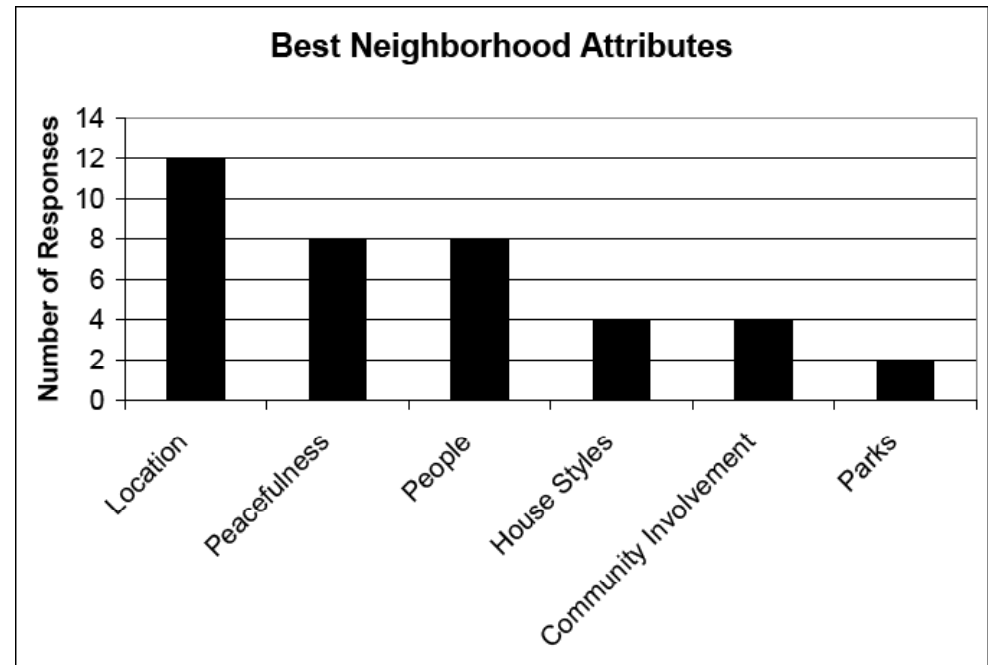
1. How long have you lived in this neighborhood?



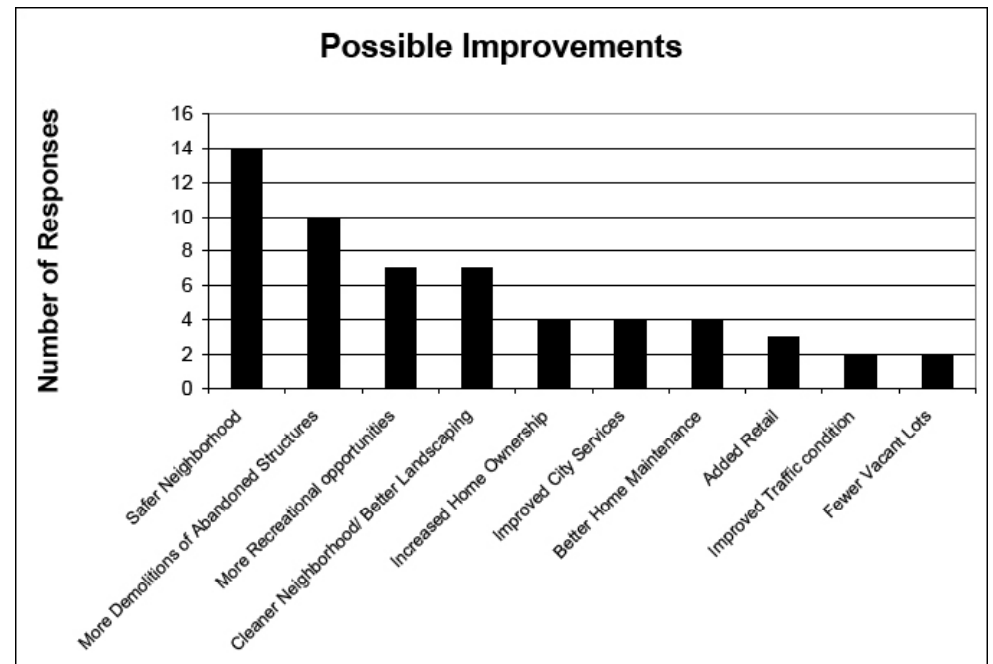
2. Do you own or rent your home?



3. What are the best things about living in this neighborhood?



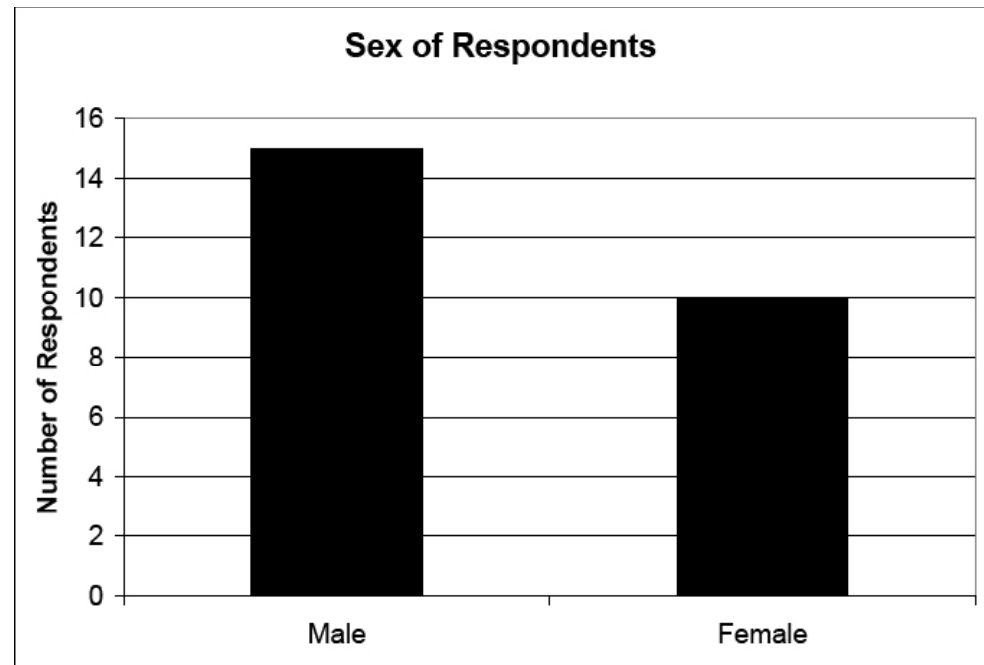
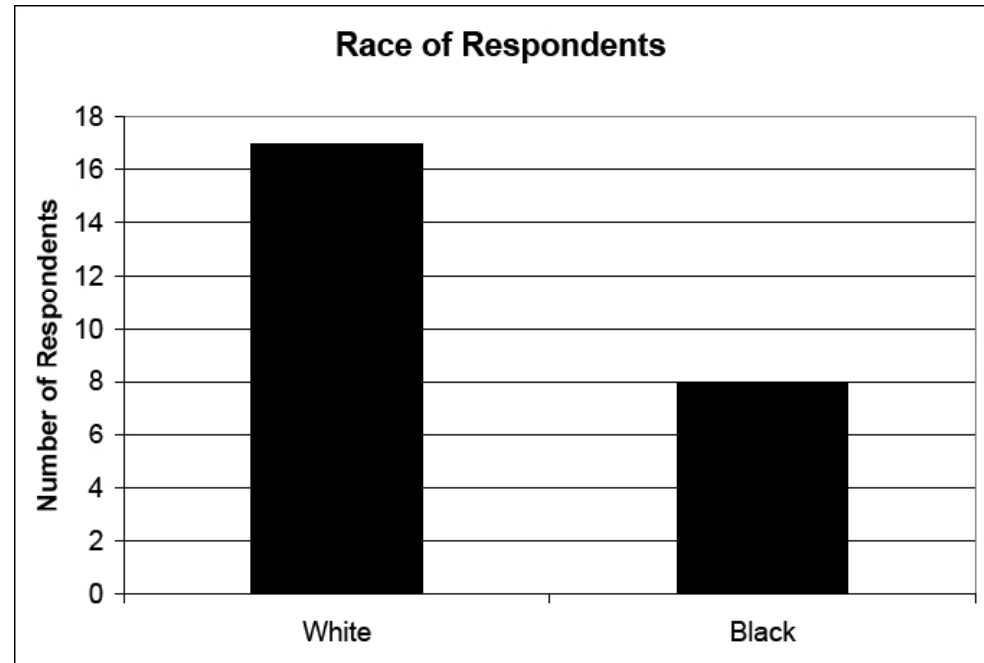
4. Can you name three ways that the neighborhood can be improved?



# Creating a Neighborhood of Choice

## Respondent Profile

Total Respondents: 26







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