



GOAL 5

**REINVEST IN PUBLIC
SPACE, CULTURE
& INCLUSIVE
PROGRAMMING**

REINVEST IN PUBLIC SPACE, CULTURE & INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING

How can we rethink our parks and public spaces to better serve the entire community and further activate Downtown Grand Rapids year-round? Through both programming and design, public investment can make a big impact by capitalizing on our local culture and creating a more inclusive Downtown.

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WHY THIS MATTERS

Downtowns across the country function differently than they did even a few decades ago. Successful downtowns, those that grace the pages of “best of” lists and attract investment and jobs, are quickly adapting to meet today’s opportunities. There are more people living, and excited to live in Downtown Grand Rapids than in recent memory. At the same time, businesses are competing for talent with cities across the country. A key factor in supporting both residential and job growth is the quality of the place. Downtown Grand Rapids needs to provide a unique experience that can’t be found regionally or even in other cities.

The experience of Downtown is defined by the quality, character and amenities provided on Downtown streets, in Downtown parks, within destinations like GRAM or the Arena and through events and programming that bring people together.

The foundation of creating this kind of Downtown experience is taking care of the basics—clean, safe, and well managed public spaces and streets. There are mixed feelings about safety Downtown depending on who is talking. For many less familiar with urban areas, the issues of panhandling, trash, graffiti and news reports that highlight crime in the area help to form strong negative perceptions about Downtown. Recognizing that perception can be reality to many, DGRI launched the Downtown Ambassador Program in 2013. The Ambassadors are visible on the street, provide services to local businesses and residents, and



FIG 5.1: “Thumbs up” activity results. Four of the top five priorities from the “thumbs up” exercise at the public open house are related to public realm elements and programming.

support safety Downtown. To date they’ve helped to remove 211 instances of graffiti, provided over 4,000 safety escorts and been in contact with over 1,400 businesses. Even prior to the launch of this program, crime in Downtown Grand Rapids dropped 29% between 2009 and 2013—a rate of reduction greater than that of the City as a whole. To further this trend, other actions including improved lighting, clean-ups and effective snow removal can help to greatly improve the perception and experience of Downtown.

The most effective tool to changing perceptions, however, is more activity. More people on the streets, more businesses and more programming provide what is frequently referred to as “eyes on the street”—a key factor in improving safety in other successful downtowns. The challenge is that much of Downtown’s built environment does not actively support street activity. 63% of Downtown streets are lined with “inactive uses” [blank walls, parking lots or empty space] that can make a street feel unsafe. This discourages walking and does not provide an attractive

“Instead of a subterranean entrance to Government Center complex, install a “Spanish Steps” style walkway to a new entrance/connection Center between City Hall and the County building and access to Calder Plaza. Existing lower lobby could be partially retained behind the steps and current elevators can be used to continue to provide handicap access to the upper level.”

- Online map comment

The Grand Rapiidians shared hundreds of great ideas about public spaces through the online collaborative map. This one is a spoiler for what's included in the coming pages.

space to enjoy. In contrast, streets lined with trees and storefronts are inviting to customers and residents alike. Today, the Downtown tree canopy is 5% compared to the city-wide goal of 40%. A map illustrating trees in and around Downtown [Fig. 5.19] makes the point clear - the Downtown boundaries are clearly visible simply from the lack of street trees alone.

Coupled with the quality and character of Downtown streets is the role of parks in bringing people together. Currently, Downtown lacks sufficient open space, with only 6.4 acres of parks per 1,000 residents. With residential growth, this number will further decline. For comparison, the median for the 100 largest cities is 12.4 acres per 1,000 residents. Improvements on the Grand River can make a significant difference by providing new active and passive

recreation on, and within, the Grand River. But as Downtown grows, additional parks will be needed to provide space that brings together residents and/or visitors. These parks can act as vibrant public spaces for growing Downtown neighborhoods, help to strengthen connections within Downtown and provide ecological benefits. But one of the key needs is to re-think the Downtown parks that exist today. Grand Rapiidians have strong opinions about parks Downtown and have contributed multiple suggestions for ways in which to activate VandenBerg Plaza and Heartside Park, among others.

A near term opportunity is to ramp up Downtown programming. ArtPrize, Laughfest, Movies in the Park and many other programs

and events already transform Downtown into a local, regional and national destination at specific times of the year. A full slate of major events, year round, as well as continuous smaller events like parklets and other temporary “pop-up” spaces can provide spaces that people want to use. In fact, participants in the GR Forward Open House prioritized programming such as food truck rallies, pop-up beer gardens, outdoor dining and parklets to help active Downtown streets. In expanding a calendar of events, it is essential that programming be inclusive by both seeking to attract a full cross section of individuals and families from across the region, and, by marketing to communities of color. As the vision for GR Forward states, Downtown must be welcoming to all Grand Rapiidians.



FIG 5.2: Open space access statistics

5.1 EXPAND ARTS AND CULTURAL EVENTS AND TEMPORARY PROGRAMMING TO FURTHER ACTIVATE THE PUBLIC REALM YEAR-ROUND

As part of the Downtown residents survey, participants were asked to rate a number of aspects of their community. One of two aspects tied for the top rating among them was “Availability of arts and culture destinations and programming.” Without discounting the value and importance of Downtown Grand Rapids’s many significant arts and cultural institutions, an important part of this is events and temporary programming. Towards that end, Grand Rapidians offered some creative outside-the-box ideas for events programming Downtown, such as tractor pulls, dragon boat races, igloos in winter, and a “bacon fest” during GR Forward outreach and engagement events. Clearly, the increased activation of Downtown’s parks and public realm with events and

temporary programming, such as Movies in the Park at Ah-Nab-Awen Park, ArtPrize, parklets, and many more, has ramped up interest in these types of activities and there is additional demand for more.

DESIGN AND PROGRAM PUBLIC SPACES TO ACCOMMODATE WINTER ACTIVITIES

Part of the challenge is ensuring that Downtown Grand Rapids feels as active during the winter months as it does during the rest of the year. Events are an important way of encouraging foot traffic Downtown to sustain businesses through the winter, not to mention boosting morale and fostering community when everyone has had enough of the cold, wind, and snow.

DGRI has made efforts to expand festive winter programming and activities Downtown through a range of initiatives, including ice skating at Rosa Parks Circle, which welcomed over 35,000 skaters during the 2013-2014 season;

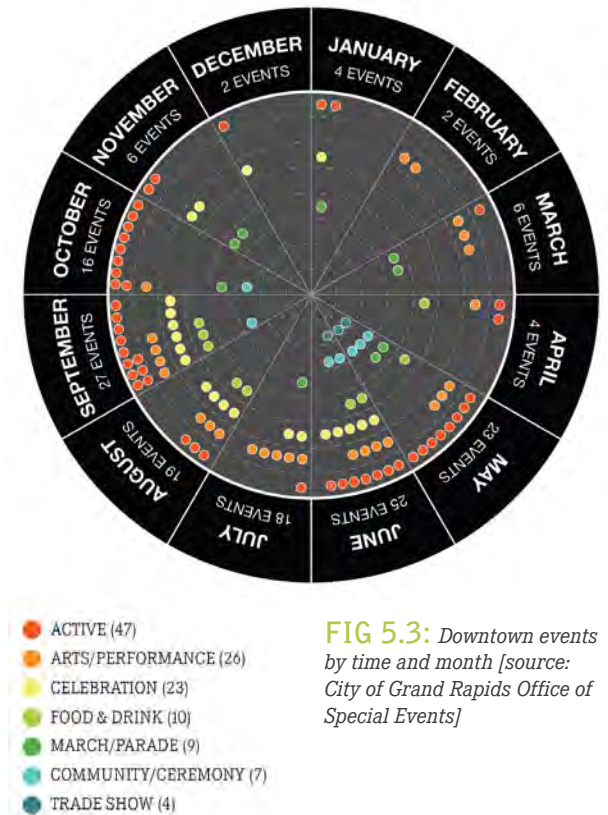


FIG 5.3: Downtown events by time and month [source: City of Grand Rapids Office of Special Events]



Big ideas for Downtown events at movies in the park and Grand Rapids Festival of the Arts; DGRI’s Valent-ICE installations.

hanging over 84,000 holiday lights throughout the Downtown area; the Window Wonderland Competition, which engaged Kendall College of Art and Design students in designing storefront displays; the “Valent-ICE installations” of custom ice carvings outside of businesses leading up to Valentine’s Day; and others. That said, plotting the frequency of Downtown public events throughout the calendar year [Fig 5.3] reveals that there is still work to be done in filling the gaps to activate Downtown with events and programming through the most challenging months.

Recommendations put forth through the GR Forward process include accommodating seasonal programming for winter activities along the Grand River and in Heartside Park, which will bring more energy and foot traffic to the Downtown area. Complementing these activities—and rounding out winter activities in the near term before these types of capital improvements are fully implemented—there is room for additional winter events and programming.

>> The winter version of food trucks—featuring concept menus and collaborations between Downtown businesses—may look a little different than they do in warmer months, but the novelty in and of itself could prove to be a draw. Temporary restaurants specifically tied to river locations have generated a buzz in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and a similar idea could bring a buzz to Downtown Grand Rapids and the Grand River through the winter months.



RAW: ALMOND POP-UP WINTER DINING

RAW: Almond, the “first ever outdoor dining restaurant on a frozen body of water,” has reinvented the experience annually in Winnipeg, Manitoba since 2013. Pictured is the winning entry of the 2015 design-build competition, by UK architects OS31, which specializes in lightweight and adaptable architecture.

>> How can Downtown’s public spaces be temporarily reconfigured to invite use and provide comfortable utilization of Grand Rapids’s public spaces during the winter months? Keeping warm by staying active is a worthwhile approach, but if you’re just wanting to relax and stay warm while socializing, how can public realm amenities accommodate breaks between shopping, enjoying the outdoors after dinner, or enjoying the setting of



WARMING HUTS

Since 2010, The Forks Renewal Corporation has invited artists, designers, and architects to submit ideas through a design-build competition for temporary structures intended to draw folks outside during the winter months, when temperatures commonly drop to 30 or 40 degrees below zero in Winnipeg. Several of the structures are built each year, clustered along the Red River Mutual Trail. Pictured [above] are Patkau Architecture’s 2011 ice skating shelters and [below] “the Hybrid Hut,” a 2015 entry by Rojkind Arquitectos



Downtown Grand Rapids when it would be too cold outside to do so otherwise? The idea is to winterize our sidewalks by learning from other cities and creating a range of amenities that provide outdoor comfort even in winter months.

With the wealth of innovative ideas being generated among the design and entrepreneurial community in Downtown Grand Rapids, one might expect that this crowd might have some innovative ideas about how to beat the cold in winter while also activating the public realm through the winter months. What better way to engage the community through the winter months than to host a collaborative design-build competition resulting in the installation of site-specific winter retreats and programmatic features, accompanied by a week long festival during which the community experiences each of the temporary installations and votes for their favorite winter destination? The competition could also invite entries from across the globe, creating the opportunity for spreading awareness of the climate for design innovation in Grand Rapids beyond the region.

LEVERAGE THE OPPORTUNITY OF DOWNTOWN EVENTS

Downtown events are essential in creating a great place and level of activity that compel residents to live and visitors to hang out Downtown. They are also a great opportunity to introduce potential residents to the lifestyle, cultural vibrancy, and entertainment Downtown Grand Rapids has to offer. Part of leveraging the opportunity is maximizing marketing and promotional tools to make the most out of all the hard work that goes into organizing events Downtown:

>> DGRI already makes use of social media tools to spread the word about things going on in the Downtown area, but there may be additional strategies that can help boost awareness and attendance of events. Running a real-time interactive competition or creative crowd-sourcing event-within-an-event with a visual presence at the event itself would ideally prompt attendees to respond to social media prompts, boosting visibility of the event among networks of participants. For example, having a “caption that photo” or “guess the number of

“During ArtPrize businesses were closed by 7pm, including the public museum. This was a missed opportunity.”

- Online map comment

bottle caps in the truck bed” contest could help bring attendees to a specific location where marketing materials promoting Downtown living and amenities are stationed could boost participation and social media activity while bringing more visibility to additional Downtown marketing materials.

>> It's often easy for some to lose promotional eblasts among the piles of marketing and sales emails, especially around the holidays when Downtown event marketing is often in full swing. Grand Rapidians could be given the option to opt in to a text alert subscription service to stay in the loop about upcoming events Downtown.

>> Partner with local educational institutions to ensure that event details are reaching the local student population through school email lists.



KENSINGTON KINETIC SCULPTURE DERBY

Since 2007, the annual Kensington Kinetic Sculpture Derby has invited entrants to parade their wild and crazy custom modifications of bikes and other wheeled and pedaled self-powered transportation machines in a wacky “race” through neighborhood streets in one of Philadelphia’s hipster enclaves. Reaching the finish line [a goal secondary to that of creating a totally off-the-wall kinetic sculpture] is usually preceded by a major blooper moment as participants try to navigate their rides across a

treacherous mud pit, which, as any cyclist would know, is pretty darn near impossible on two wheels. The Derby, organized by the New Kensington Community Development Corporation [NKCDC] as a part of the Trenton Avenue Arts festival in East Kensington, brings together thousands of bike enthusiasts, local artists, residents, and visitors, increases exposure of Philadelphia’s creative community, and promotes local bike culture.

>> Ensure that events are directly marketed to communities of color. All should feel welcome to participate in Downtown events.

A second important aspect of leveraging the opportunity of events Downtown is ensuring that those who attend events are able to experience first-hand all that Downtown has to offer. Specifically, local businesses should be encouraged to stay open, whether or not that means extending their hours, during major events. Well in advance of a major event, organizers should make a coordinated outreach effort to businesses within walking distance [and potentially beyond, depending on the type of event] to inform them of the hours and benefits of staying open during the event.

BUILD UPON LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

Consider establishing a Performing Arts District to help promote Downtown arts assets including the Avenue for the Arts, UICA, Ladies Literary Club, Civic Theater, Spectrum Theater, Dog Story Theater and St. Cecilia Music Center. Branded as a year-round entertainment destination, it could help establish Grand Rapids as an alternative to Detroit, Toronto or Chicago. If established, the District would require a name, banners, signage and lighting to help create a sense of place. Marketing for the district should be coupled with the museums [GRAM, Grand Rapids Children Museum, Ford Presidential Museum and VanAndel Public Museum] as well as the Arena District and could be done in partnership with Experience Grand Rapids. The opportunity



is to assist the member organizations to plan year-round programming that inspires visitors to stay overnight for 2 or more events. As the


District evolves, it could consider creating pop-up museum space, arts studios and other venues that promote local live music.

5.2 RAISE THE PROFILE OF DOWNTOWN PARKS AND PUBLIC SPACES

At 6.4 acres of parks per 1,000 residents, Downtown currently falls short of standards for the amount of parks and public spaces. In fact, more than 10 times as much area is dedicated to transportation [including parking] than open space. With continued growth Downtown, the need for more parks and public spaces will only grow. Downtown needs new open spaces to serve as gathering spaces and amenities for residents and employees.

But it is not just the amount of parks and open space that matters but the quality. Existing

OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

-  RIVER TRAIL
-  HEALTH LOOP
-  NEW PARK
-  IMPROVED PARK
-  OUTDOOR ENTERTAINMENT
-  LINEAR PARK
-  RIVER ISLANDS
-  RIVER DREDGE / BOAT ACCESS

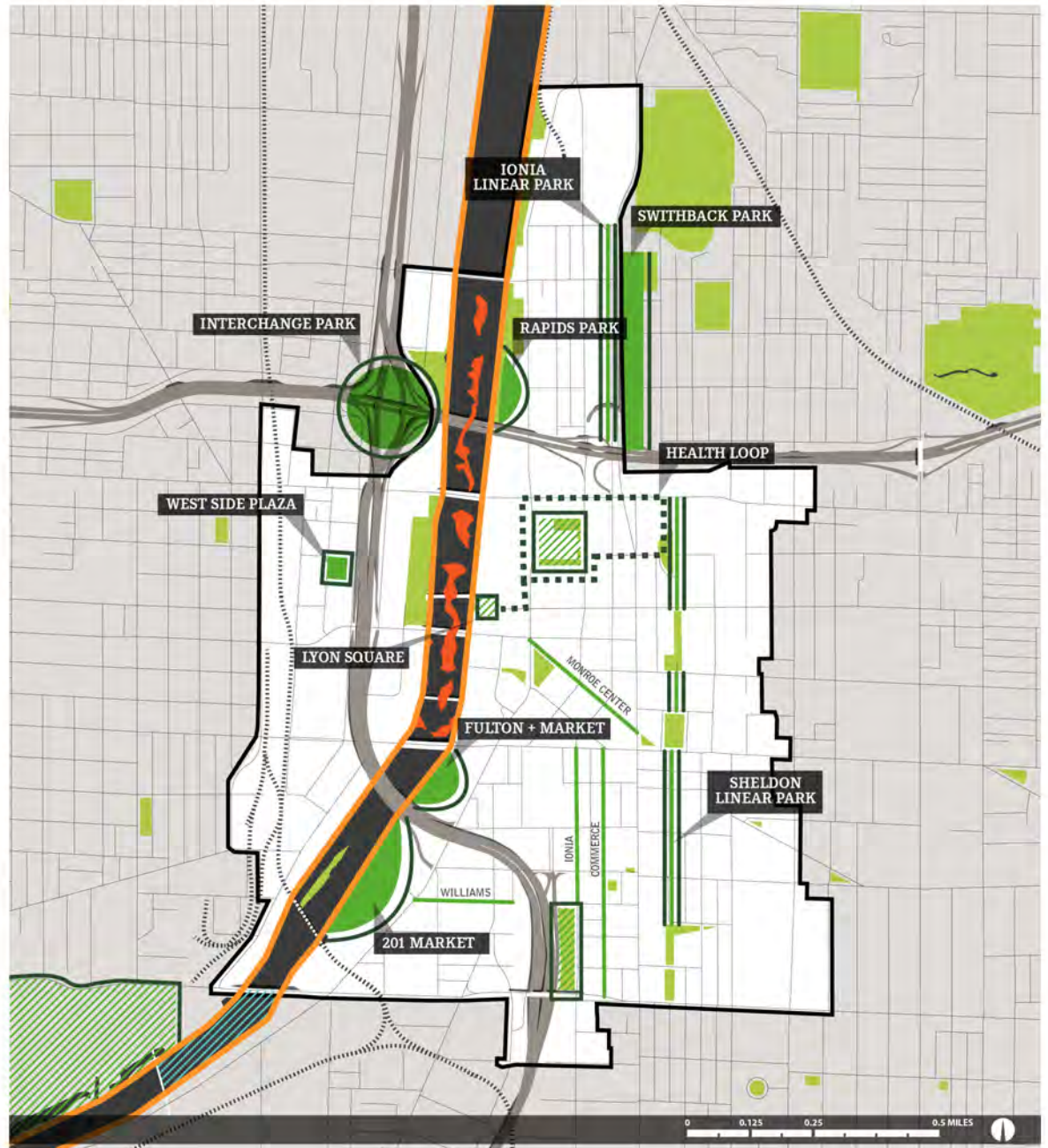


FIG 5.4: Open space strategy

parks Downtown are both undervalued and overlooked. These spaces often lack programming and are physically or socially disconnected from the surrounding context of homes and/or businesses. The opportunity is to transform these parks into vibrant public spaces that truly represent Downtown.

ENHANCE EXISTING NON-RIVERFRONT PARKS AND OPEN SPACES THROUGH REDESIGN AND PROGRAMMING

>> VandenBerg Plaza [aka Calder Plaza]

VandenBerg Plaza and its famous sculpture are true icons of Grand Rapids. The plaza consists of a raised plinth encompassing the superblock bounded by Ottawa, Lyon, Monroe, and Michigan streets and includes 3 office buildings, and 3 government buildings one of which is City Hall. In true modernist fashion, VandenBerg Plaza serves more as a backdrop for the architecture and sculpture than an active, functioning public space. While the design has certain merits; classic modern design, unobstructed views of the sculpture, easily programmable space for large scale events like ArtPrize and Festival of the Arts, there are a series of strategic measures to be taken that can allow flexible opportunities to activate the space for everyday use.

- > Integrate a “Health Loop” to Connect Medical Mile to the River
VandenBerg Plaza is located between the Medical Mile and the Grand River. With improvements to the Grand River, there



FIG 5.5: Medical Mile/Grand River health loop
VandenBerg Plaza has the potential to be a hub in a new “health loop” that connects Medical Mile to the River

should be opportunities for local employees to walk to the River. The idea is to create and brand a “health loop” – an approximate 1 mile loop connecting Medical Mile with the River. While some GR Forward participants think of the elevation change as an impediment to pedestrian mobility, branding it as a health and exercise amenity would help recast Downtown’s topography as an amenity. The Loop would



View from Crescent Park towards VandenBerg Plaza and the River



VandenBerg Plaza's plinth creates a barrier to connections to Monroe Avenue.

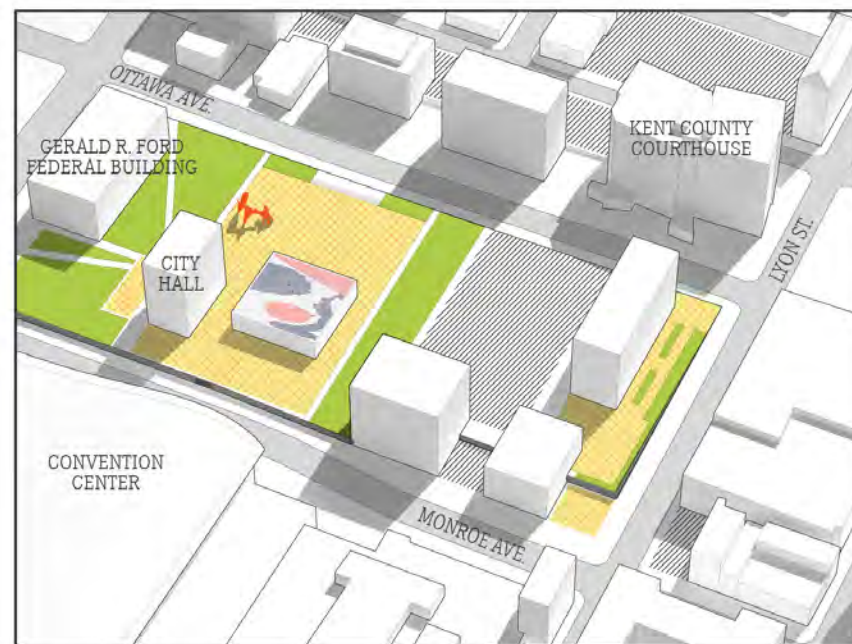


FIG 5.6: Existing VandenBerg Plaza

begin at Crescent Park, continue down Crescent Street, between two existing office buildings, through VandenBerg Plaza and down to Monroe Avenue and the River at Lyon Street. The design of VandenBerg Plaza should accommodate this Loop with new seating, landscaping and a designated path. This idea reflects a plan developed by Grand Action who is working to advance its implementation.

- **Improve Visual and Physical Access**
Due to its raised plinth, 3 sides of the plaza have large stone walls which make seeing or accessing the plaza difficult and

unpleasant. The most obvious example of this condition is the large inaccessible wall along the entire expanse of Monroe Ave between Lyon and Michigan. This is particularly problematic as the location of the main entrance to the convention center is across the street. To address these conditions, the stairs on Ottawa Street should be replaced with a ramp that seamlessly connects the street to the plaza. Visually compelling pedestrian lighting fixtures could also help link the plaza to the street, especially if they are extended along Ottawa itself. On the Monroe Avenue side, a new stair tower can serve to connect the

Plaza to Monroe or, preferably, a collection of ramps and stairs that gently step down to the street integrated with a new landscape. This option will require altering the existing parking garage on the Monroe Avenue side. Using this option, VandenBerg Plaza will have a direct and visible connection to the Convention Center's main entrance.

- **Activate the Plaza**
A series of mobile landscapes of various different configurations will break up the space into more intimate environments, introduce more greenery to the paved plaza, and provide more seating options.

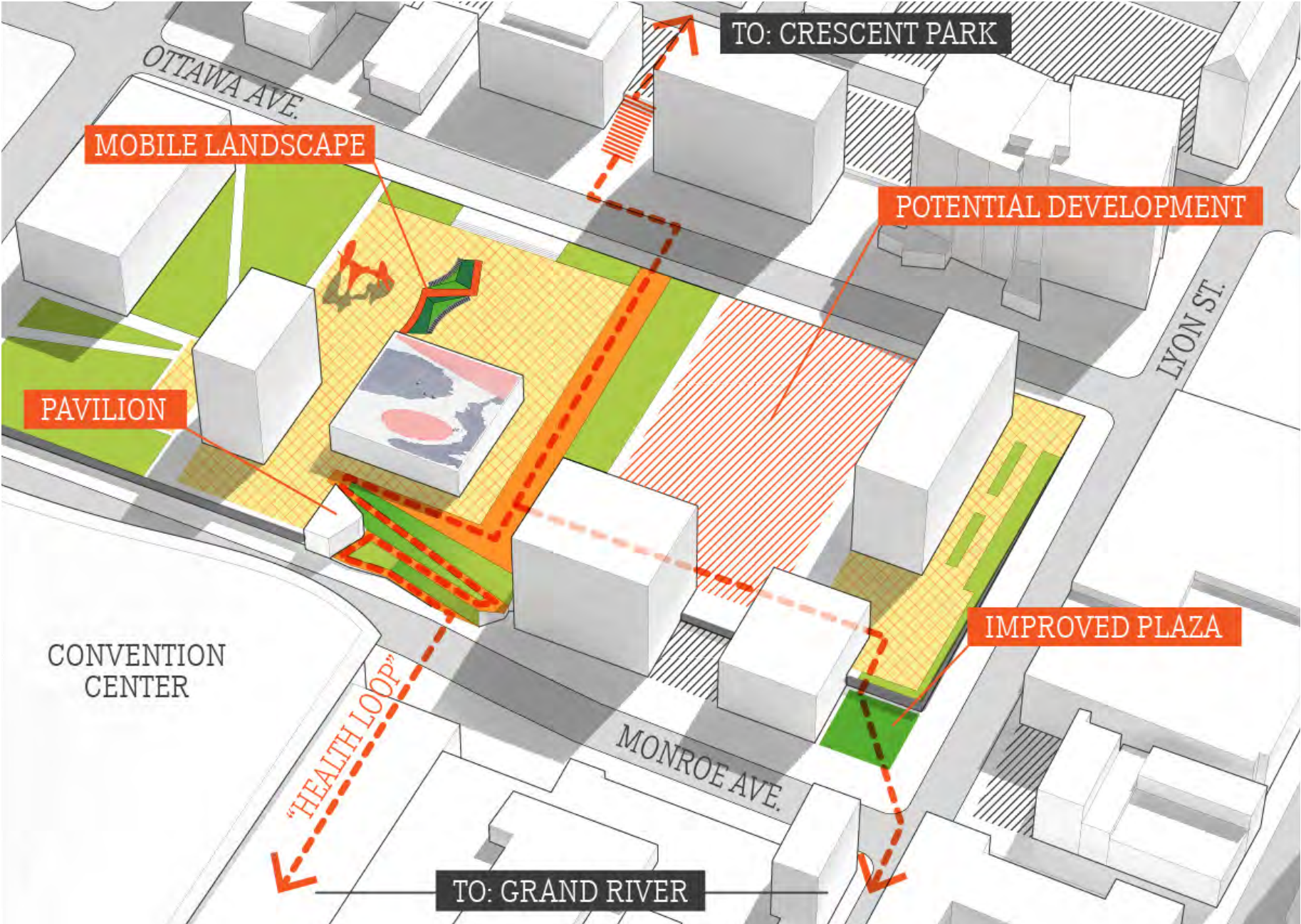


FIG 5.7: Proposed “Health Loop” and Vandenberg Plaza Improvements

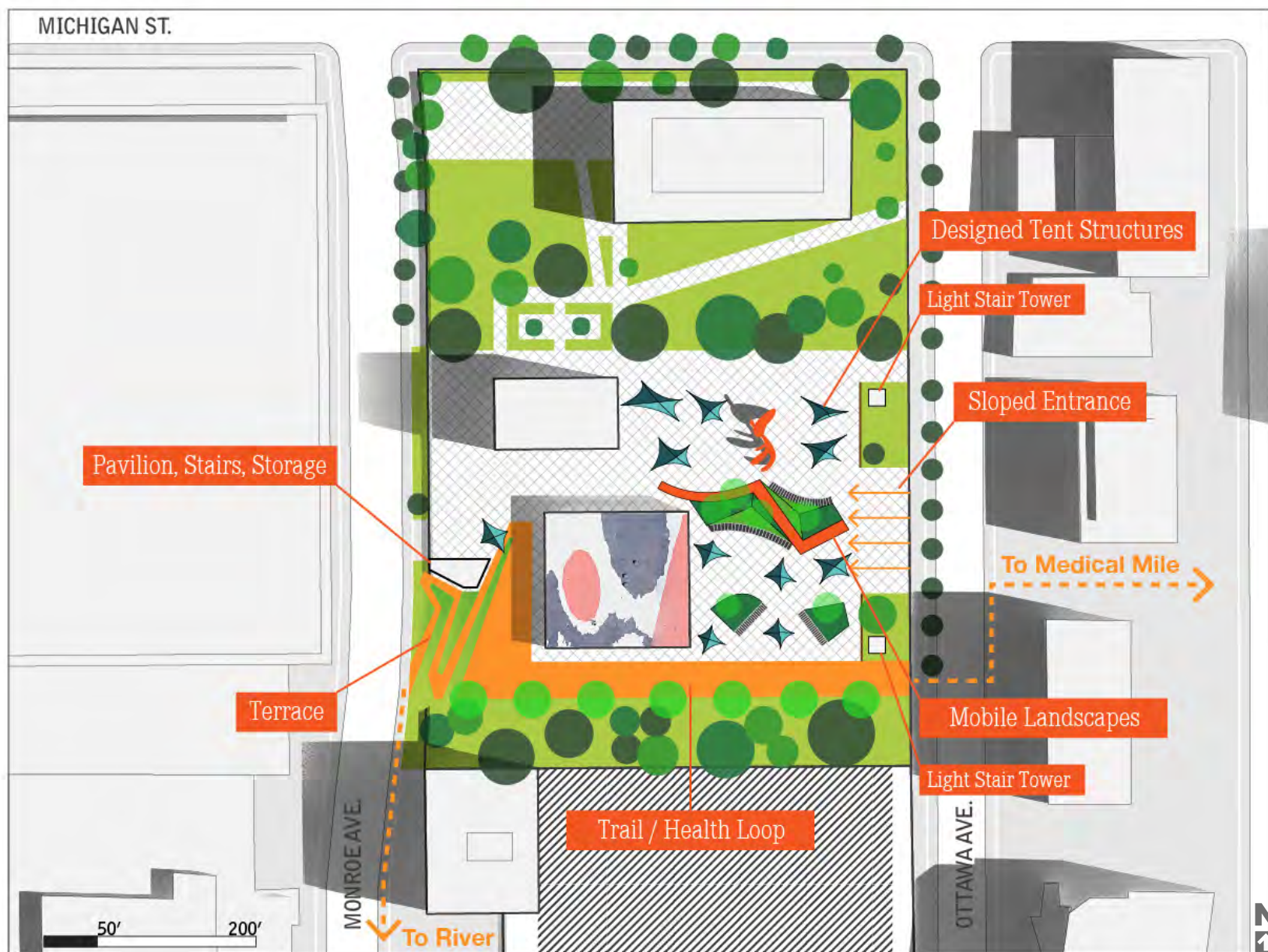
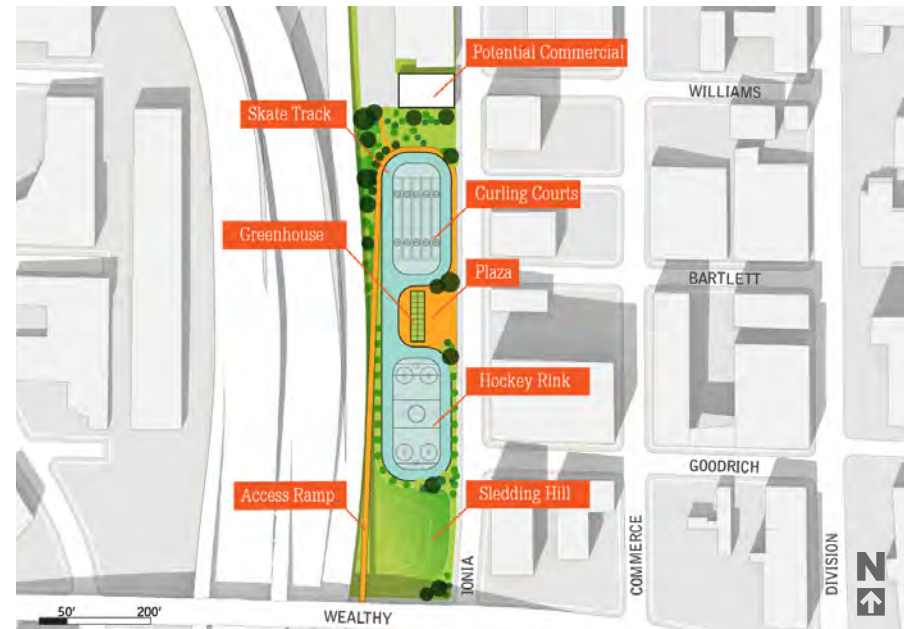


FIG 5.8: VandenBerg Plaza concept

FIG 5.9: Concept for Heartside Park, Summer



FIG 5.10: Concept for Heartside Park, Winter



As movable planters, they can fit into a variety of different configurations suitable for various events and programs.

- > Explore Development Opportunities
The large parking lot immediately to the south of VandenBerg Plaza and the entirety of Lyon Street offer an opportunity to integrate new development and new retail into the area. On the parking lot, a variety of new building configurations are possible as the lot is very large. On Lyon Street, simply extending the lobby space of the two Fifth/Third buildings all the way to street with new commercial space will provide a more active streetscape.

>> Heartside Park

Heartside Park is the result of a collaboration between grassroots organizations and City leadership to bring a new open space to the Heartside neighborhood. This important work has established a sizable open space in the heart of an area undergoing significant development. In its current form, Heartside Park has limited landscaping and minimal programming. Many have noted the current use of the park for illegal activities which has fostered negative perceptions about the park and the surrounding area. The local social service agencies, many of which provide necessary services for those that are homeless or in transitional housing, agree with the broader public that Heartside Park needs more programming and people to root out the activities that deter use of the park by local

residents and visitors alike. The opportunity is to build upon the grassroots interest and success in creating Heartside Park by taking its design to the next level as a local and regional destination for families of all backgrounds. A lighting plan will play a key role in reversing perception of Heartside Park.

Heartside Park is envisioned as a park that changes with the seasons. In the warm weather there will be various types of gardens and meadows, raingardens and space for growing food. In the colder months the park will transition to a winter playground with a skate track, hockey rink, curling courts, and sledding hill. A manufactured hill on the western edge of the Park will help to buffer it from US 131

FIG 5.11: Heartside Park winter activities



and the highway off-ramp, improve connections to Wealthy Street and, provide an exciting new feature to the park - a sledding hill. All of the winter activities, most notably hockey, skating and curling, must be coupled with partnerships and programs that encourage their use by families of all incomes. Youth leagues and events open to all Grand Rapidsians would further establish Heartside Park as the City's winter playground destination for families.

“Regional playground at Heartside Park: Larger, multi-story, inclusive playground at unlike other typical playgrounds in the City. Draw for families.”

- Online map comment

Veteran's Park today.



>> Veteran's Park

In tandem with now implemented plans to refresh Monument Park, Veteran's Park was also reconsidered during a design and master planning process begun in 2013. Now that Phase I of this initiative at Monument Park is final, efforts to complete Phase 2 should be supported. To further activate the park, the City and DGRI should work together in engaging the community to consider potential public realm improvements enhancing the pedestrian experience between the main branch of the Grand Rapids Public Library and Veteran's Park. Should redevelopment occur of the parking lot facing Veteran's Park along E. Park Lane, ground floor retail should be encouraged to help activate the Park.

Parklet installed Downtown.



CREATE NEW [NON-RIVERFRONT] OPEN SPACE ASSETS

Improving existing parks should be the first course of action regarding non riverfront parks. However, those improvements alone will still leave Downtown residents with insufficient access to green space. Given the intent of creating stronger connections within Downtown and providing new activities and programming along Downtown streets, there are a few key opportunities for new Downtown parks:

>> Parklets

Parklets reuse on-street parking spaces as small, temporary or permanent mini-parks. The simple act of converting one parking space into greenspace has proven to enrich the lives of nearby residents and improve the bottom line of businesses. DGRI helped with the installation of parklets at Stella's, McFadden's and Grand Rapids Brewing Company, and is currently building a parklet with Kendall College of Art students. As the idea continues to take hold, parklets should be targeted for primary retail corridors including Monroe Center, Ionia Avenue, Commerce Street, Pearl Street, and Bridge Street.

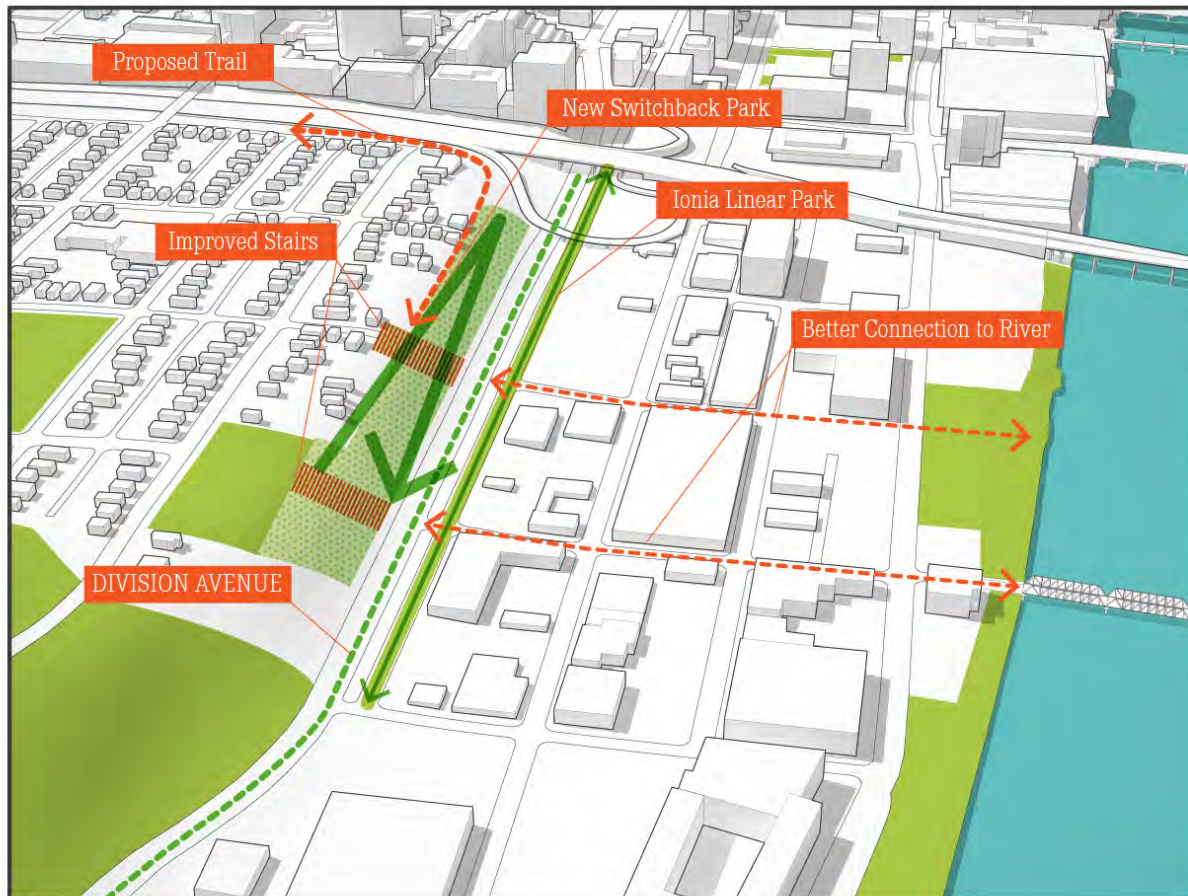


FIG 5.12: Aerial diagram of proposed Switchback Park

>>Switchback Park

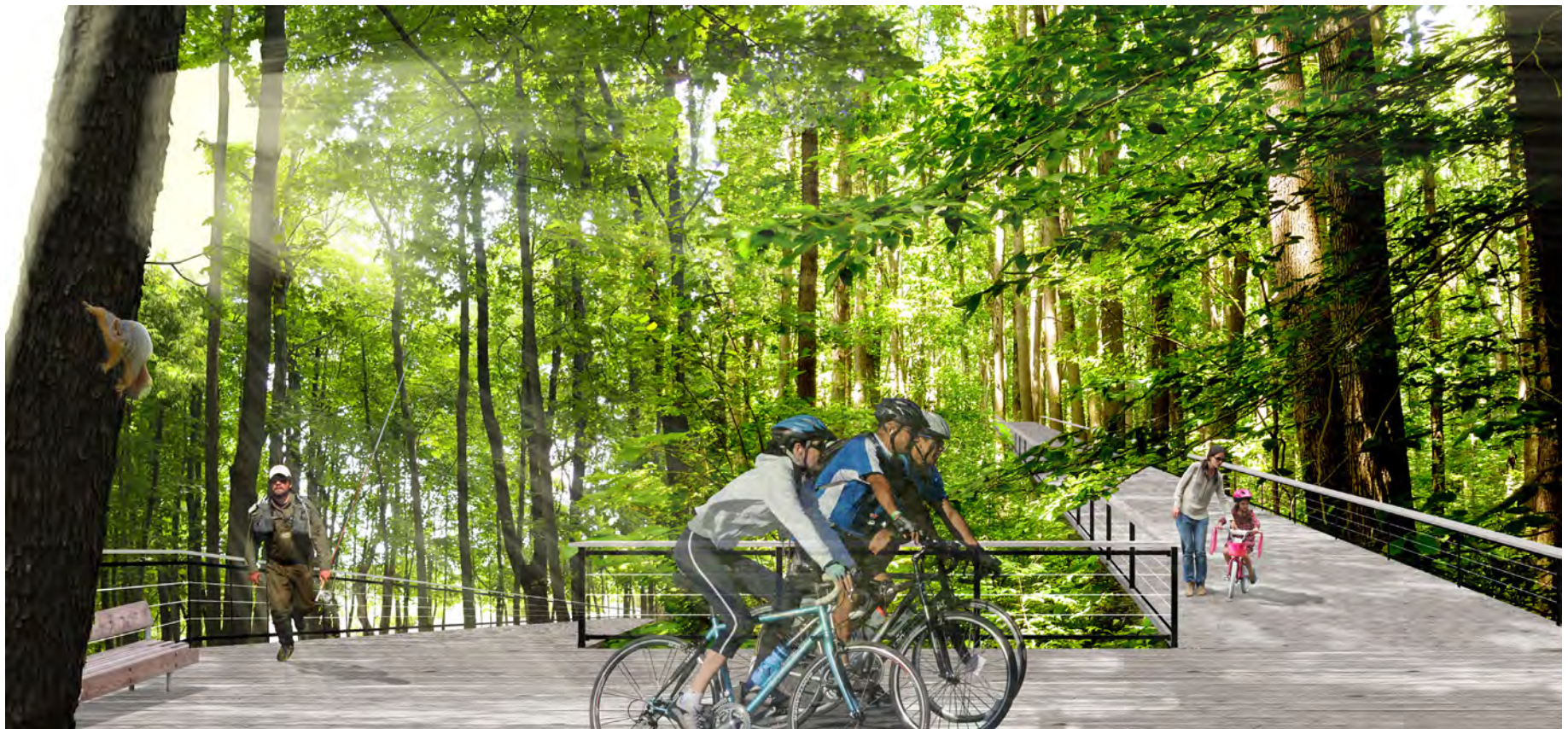
The slopes of Belknap Hill represent an opportunity to provide new park space within Downtown that will also help connect the neighborhood with Monroe North. Many have noted that while there are currently two sets of stairs at Newberry Street and Fairbanks Street, they are both in disrepair and require significant improvements. A new set of stairs for Newberry as well as a better pedestrian crossing at Division Avenue can help to create a stronger connection from the 6th Street Bridge, through Monroe North, and up to Look-out Park.

A more aggressive opportunity is to capitalize on the expansive views of the River and Downtown, expand Look-Out Park and create a new “Switchback Park” on the slopes of the hill. This is an extension of a proposal included in the Michigan Street Corridor Plan that identifies an opportunity to create a trail north of I-196 that wraps around Belknap and connects to the existing stairs. From this point, the opportunity is to extend this trail back and forth down the slope to connect with Division. This will provide greater accessibility both for those with disabilities but also for those on bicycles. Further, the design provides an opportunity to secure grants that would also repair the existing stairs which has been difficult due to ADA requirements. This gently winding path will offer pedestrians a trail connection to Monroe North and with the potential for numerous outlooks along the way it will provide a whole new experience and view of Downtown and the River.

One of two sets of stairs leading from Division to Belknap is still usable; the set not pictured has eroded almost completely.



FIG 5.13: View of the proposed Switchback Park



>> Ionia Street Linear Park

The proposed two-way cycle track for Ionia Downtown will provide a dedicated and safe space for north-south bicycling. North of 196, this facility can become a true linear park with landscaping, seating and bicycle paths offering a direct link from Belknap, Monroe North and Creston straight to Downtown. In this area, Ionia Street serves as a spillover parking and carries extremely limited traffic.

>> Near Westside Plaza

The Westside of Downtown lacks a central gathering space with the exception of Ah-Nab-Awen Park. Redevelopment of the large surface parking lots located around Summer Avenue offers a great opportunity to create a park that serves as the center for new housing development. Near Westside Plaza will be bound by an extended Blumrich Street to the north, new buildings to the east and south, and Summer Avenue to the west. Active ground floor commercial on all 4 sides will make the plaza a place to enjoy the outdoors, grab a coffee, or read the newspaper.

>> Sheldon linear park / Sheldon Green

Sheldon/Bostwick Street traverses Downtown north/south from Michigan Street and the Medical Mile to Wealthy Street. This corridor connects Crescent Park, Veteran's Memorial Park, Cathedral Square, and the Sheldon Rain Garden Park. From Fulton to Maple, Sheldon Street is a wide, one way street with a median in the middle. The opportunity is to close the eastern portion of Sheldon Street in this location and convert it into a linear green space that



Existing view of Division and Ionia north of 196



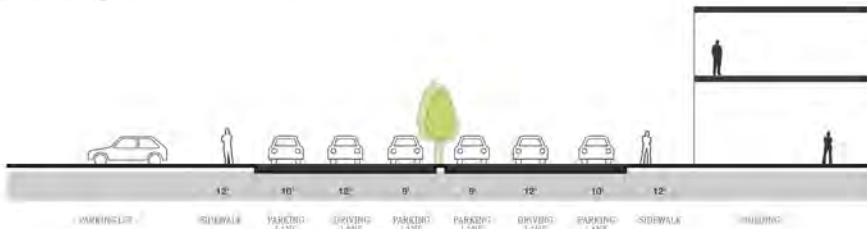
FIG 5.14: *View of the proposed Ionia Street Linear Park*

provides outdoor passive space and stormwater management. This action, completed in tandem with streetscape improvements stretching up to Crescent Park, will create a distinctive link between some of Downtown's major institutions and unique green spaces.

FIG 5.16: Sheldon linear park: existing and proposed sections looking south

SHELDON@Weston

Existing

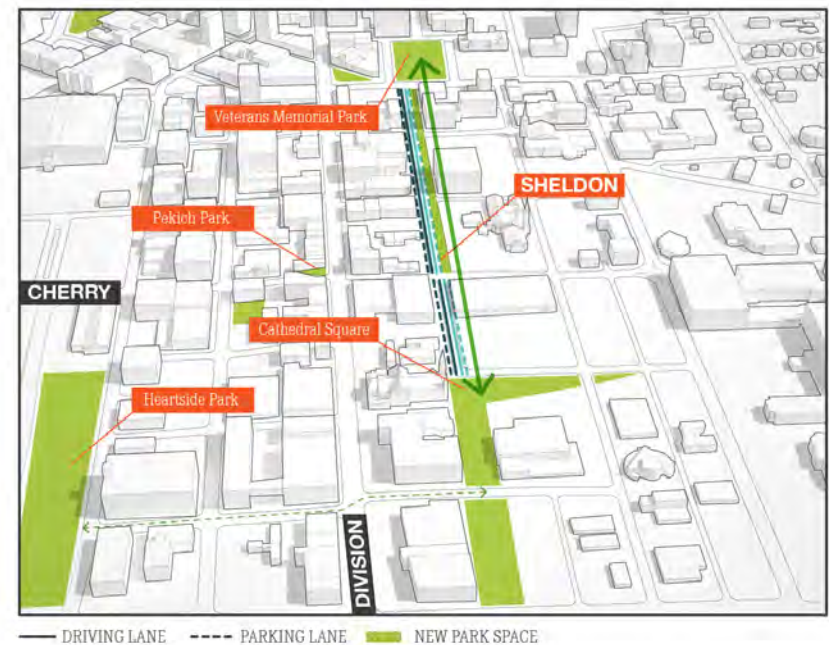
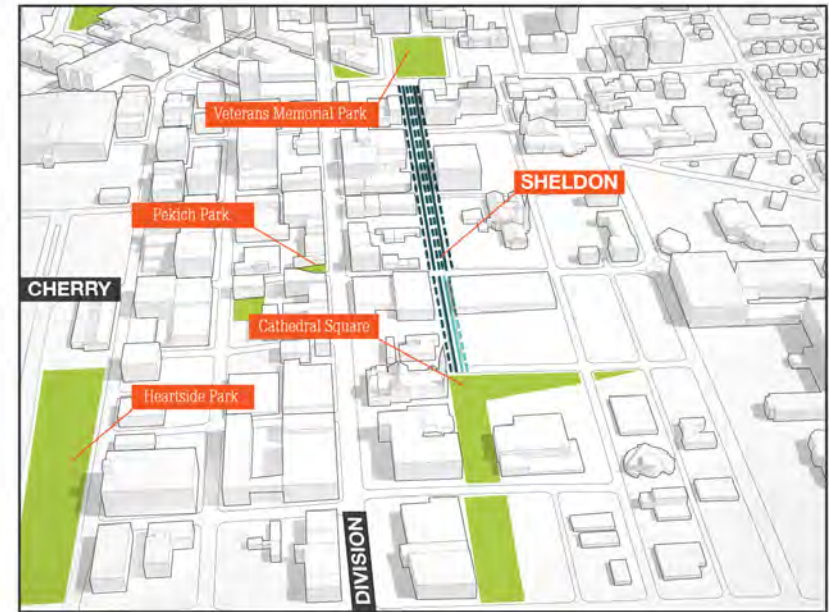


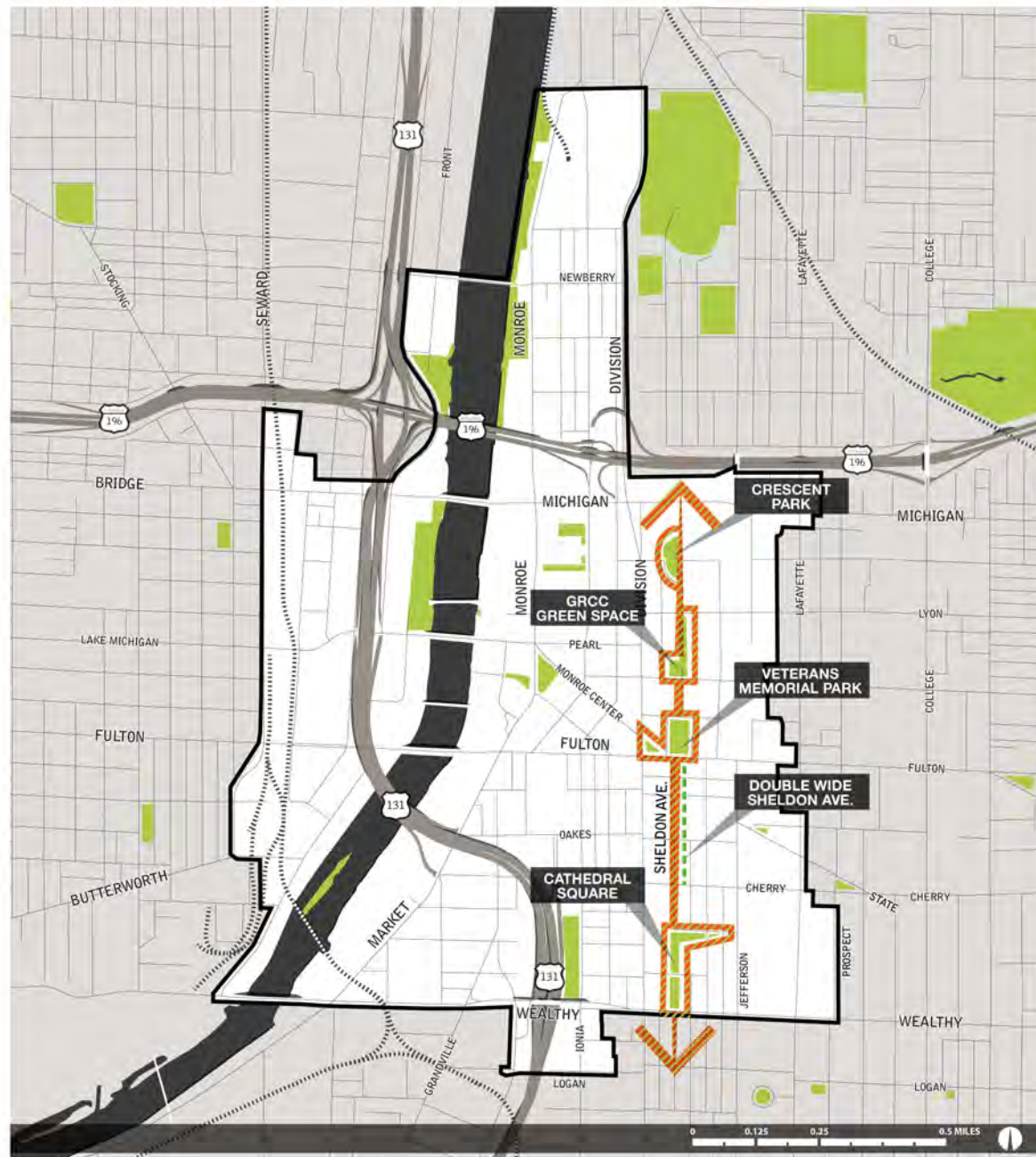
SHELDON@Weston

Proposed



FIG 5.15: Sheldon linear park: existing and proposed aerial diagrams





EXTRA ROAD SPACE ON SHELDON AVE. CAN BE USED TO CONNECT IMPORTANT OPEN SPACES THROUGH DOWNTOWN.

 POTENTIAL GREEN CORRIDOR

FIG 5.17: Sheldon Street linear park open space network

>> Downtown skate park

The popularity of skateboarding has continued to rise not only as a recreation activity, but also has a viable transportation mode. To that end, in 2015 the Grand Rapids City Commission lifted a longtime ban on Downtown skateboarding. The new policy closely matches the existing bicycling ordinances, and helped to signal the importance of skateboarding to Grand Rapiadians.

While the change in policy is significant, during the public engagement for GR Forward it became clear there remains a strong desire for a permanent Downtown skate park, which in many cities are as common as basketball courts and baseball fields.

To that end, a skate park subcommittee has convened to identify potential Downtown skate park locations, as well as develop priorities to evaluate potential development sites. Preferred sites, as well as the priorities are listed below. It is recommended that DGRI and the City continue conversations with interested stakeholders and the skate park subcommittee to identify a Downtown location for a skate park and advance construction as soon as possible. To ensure the skate park becomes a regional amenity, areas of connectivity and access, as



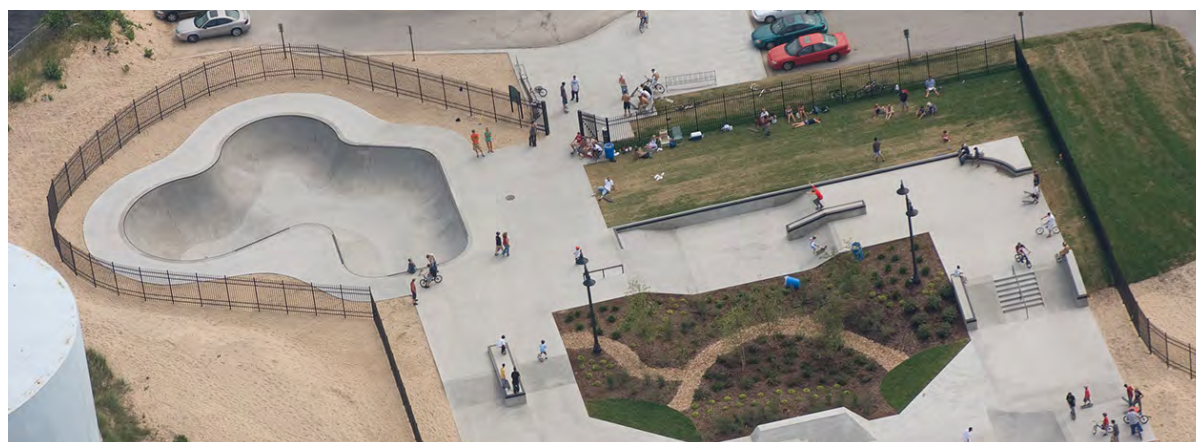
well as system-wide park impacts, should be taken into consideration within the 2016 Parks and Recreation master plan update.

DOWNTOWN SKATE PARK PRIORITIES

- Located within the DDA Boundary and easily accessible by transit;
- Feasibility of development;
- Inviting to spectators with areas of shade and green space incorporated;
- Appealing to youth skaters under the age of 18;
- Proximate to active and complementary development and uses;
- Minimum 15,000 square feet of skating area; and
- Plaza-style design.

POTENTIAL LOCATIONS

- DASH South Lot Area 6A;
- Heartside Park;
- Canal Street Park;
- Fish Ladder Park;
- Ah-Nab-Awen Park.



>> River corridor parks

There are a number of new open spaces proposed along the River. Three of these spaces are located in or adjacent to Downtown and are owned all or in part by public agencies. 201 Market Avenue is designed to include a large green living room that will help to connect residents to the River and provide space for large-scale River programming. The sites immediately north of 196 owned by the City, Michigan State University and Kent County offer another opportunity for green space along with River. Lyon Square is under design to better serve restaurants in the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel but also to integrate flood infrastructure and enhanced public access to the River. Finally, the proposals to improve Rapids View Park [fishladder] and create a new Interchange Park on the Westside [described in Goal 1] provide necessary Westside riverfront parks with enhanced public access and stormwater management. All of these parks will help provide anchors to an expanded River trail system discussed in Goal 1.

Skate park examples - On the left, Burnside in Portland. On the right, a skate park in Grand Haven.

5.3 EXPRESS DOWNTOWN GRAND RAPIDS'S CHARACTER AND IDENTITY THROUGH PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS

MAKE A STATEMENT WITH IMPROVED GATEWAYS

There are many gateways to Downtown that represent opportunities to market local businesses and the City as a whole. Be creative and use art and lighting installations to improve highly visible gateways. US 131 and 196, in particular, are opportunities to create improvements that are visible to incoming traffic but also serve to slow the speed of traffic as they enter the City. These underpass improvements are highly sought after by residents who prioritized them in the GR Forward Open House activities. Primary gateway opportunities include: Heartside Park [from US 131]; Grandville underpass; Fulton Street underpass and at the intersection with Market Avenue; Pearl Street underpass; Bridge Street underpass; Monroe Avenue underpass; 196 on and off-ramps [Ottawa/Ionia]; Monroe Avenue at Coldbrook; Market and Wealthy Streets and; Division and Wealthy Streets. Early action gateway treatments should focus on lighting and art at the Monroe Avenue and

GATEWAY IMPROVEMENTS

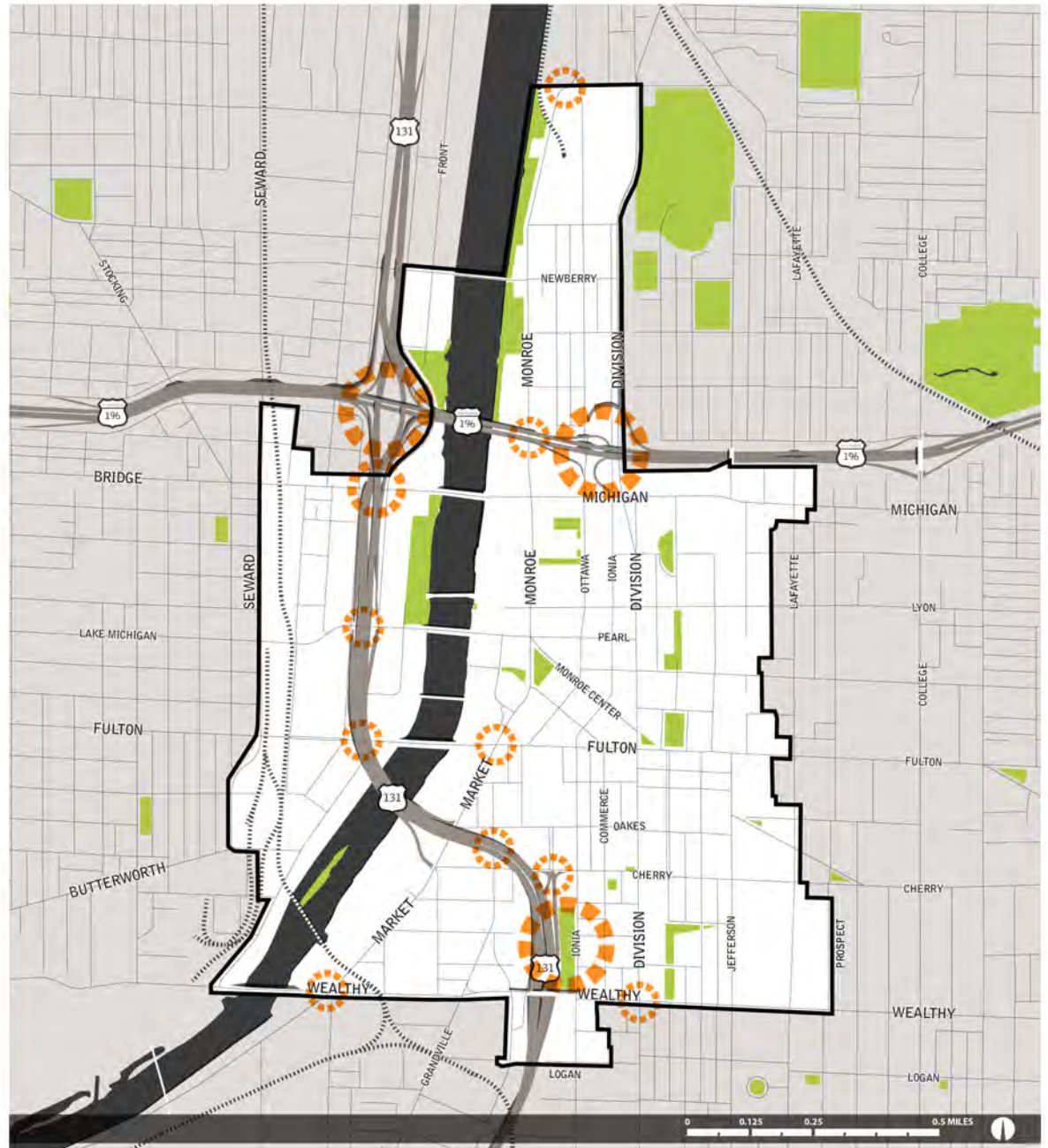


FIG 5.18: Gateway improvements locations

Some examples of gateway treatments for underpasses can be found in Goal 3.



The Monroe North/Downtown gateway is particularly unappealing.

In addition to underpasses, key intersections should be considered for bolder design approaches. Think of Cherry Street, for instance – the bright redbrick street makes a noticeable statement from major corridors like Division. Other opportunities should be explored to integrate non-traditional color or design in the streetscape. Examples include the use of ground surface materials to highlight sidewalks or intersections of key pedestrian-focused streets like Ionia Avenue, Bridge Street, or crossings along Fulton Street, as was done at pedestrian crossings at intersections where stations for the Silver Line are present.

PLANT AND MAINTAIN MORE SHADE TREES TO INCREASE THE DOWNTOWN TREE CANOPY

Trees are necessary elements for a successful downtown. Besides the health benefits associated with trees, they mitigate issues like heat and wind while also adding value to nearby properties. Streets with street trees are

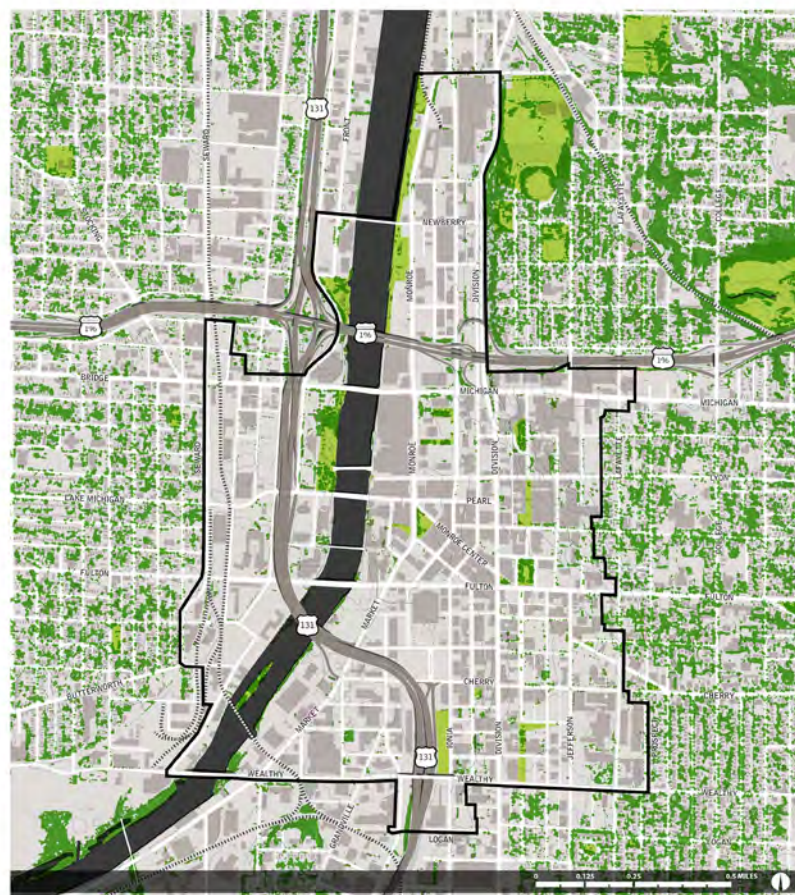


FIG 5.19: Existing tree canopy

TREE CANOPY

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS

GRAND RAPIDS:
28,977 ACRES

TREE CANOPY:
10,029 ACRES



DOWNTOWN:
899 ACRES

TREE CANOPY:
47 ACRES



■ PARKS

■ TREE CANOPY

more attractive for businesses and residents alike. The City's Green Grand Rapids Plan has established a goal of 40% tree coverage city-wide, up from the current 34%. However, in Downtown the current tree canopy is less than 5%. There are many reasons for this including the area's legacy of commercial use [which removed the majority of trees during development] and the difficulty in planting and

keeping trees healthy due in part to the limited space along streets for adequate tree pits. The lack of shade trees Downtown has been noticed by many including those that participated in the GR Forward planning process. When asked what improvements would make it easier and more fun to get around Downtown, the number one answer [along with separated bike lanes] was "more trees."

DGRI, the Friends of Grand Rapids Parks, Urban Forestry Committee, and the City have made a commitment to doubling the Downtown tree canopy to achieve a 10% canopy by 2025. Given the need and difficulty, this will take time and investments to retrofit and install new infrastructure with the capacity to provide adequate soil volume for healthy tree growth. To ensure both visibility and impact of new tree plantings, priority streets should be identified for concentrated plantings. To help facilitate citizens' access to the Grand River, the east-west streets that connect the neighborhoods to the River should be first priority for improving the tree canopy.

DEVELOP STREETSCAPE DESIGNS TO UPGRADE KEY STREETS

The look and feel of streets should exemplify the direction Downtown is heading. Street furniture, lighting, signage and landscaping should play a prominent role in helping to upgrade Downtown streets as spaces that support local business and encourage activity. A number of streets should be considered for streetscape improvements:

>> East-west streets: Improvements to the following streets are also proposed beyond the boundaries of Downtown to create stronger connections between the River and the City's neighborhoods as discussed in Goal 1 of GR Forward.

- > **Fulton Street**
As a primary gateway to Downtown, Fulton is envisioned as a boulevard that



The Bridge Street corridor is brimming with character and potential.

integrates new landscaping, parking lanes, bicycle lanes and safer pedestrian crossing at the intersections. The parking / bicycle lanes can be converted to travel lanes to accommodate traffic during major events at the Arena or in Downtown.

- > **Bridge Street**
To support Bridge Street as the primary retail corridor on the Westside in Downtown, improved sidewalks, crosswalks and bumpouts are necessary to enhance pedestrian safety. Façade improvements, lighting and signage will also support the growth of new retail businesses.
- > **Grandville Avenue**
The streetscape of Grandville is an opportunity to support cultivation of the Latino-owned business corridor through thematic positioning. As a first step, DGRI and its partners should seek resources to implement a bi-lingual sign program.



While improvements on Cherry Street east of US 131 have improved the pedestrian environment, sidewalks are narrow and obstructed by sidewalk infrastructure to the west.

- > **Pearl Street / Lake Michigan**
As a primary connection between Downtown and the River, this corridor should integrate signage about the River, trails and other amenities and provide new landscaping and street furniture to reinforce these linkages.
- > **Cherry Street**
As the primary street connecting east side neighborhoods to Downtown and, one day, the River, Cherry Street is an important Downtown street. Much has been invested already in the streetscape. New and improved wayfinding and improved bike and pedestrian-oriented improvements will help establish this corridor as a River connector street.
- > **Wealthy Street**
Wealthy Street traverses a collection of different industries and institutions. The design should reflect an "innovation corridor" concept through the use of newer

technologies [solar-powered LED lighting] and branding to highlight the business activity in the area. In addition, the Wealthy Street overpass acts as a significant barrier from both north to south and east to west. To address this condition, a redesign of the Wealthy Street overpass is warranted. A feasibility analysis is necessary to determine the most beneficial approach that will provide better connectivity in this portion of Downtown.

>> North-south streets:

> Division Avenue

As described in Goals 2 and 3, Division is an important corridor for the development of Downtown and in its role as a primary connection from neighborhoods to the south. As a wide street, Division has the room to provide protected bike lanes without removing parking or travel lanes south of Fulton thus creating a safe connection for all modes of transportation to Downtown from neighborhoods to the south. North of Fulton, there is space to



Division Avenue south of Fulton

widen sidewalks and encourage walkability. Other opportunities include ramping up lighting on the buildings using LED fixtures and integrating signage and landscaping.

> Market Avenue

South of Fulton, Market Avenue is an extremely wide corridor. To complement and support proposed new development along the River, Market Avenue is proposed for a road diet to include a landscaped median and on-street parking. New development should be set back from Market Avenue to provide for wide sidewalks.

DEVELOP A DESIGN APPROACH FOR THE 'EVENT CORRIDOR' AND 'OUTDOOR ENTERTAINMENT CORRIDORS'

The street typologies defined in Goal 3 identify “outdoor entertainment corridors” including Ionia, Commerce, Bridge, Monroe Center and Williams and the Ottawa Avenue “event corridor.” These streets either already support,



Market Avenue south of Fulton

or have the potential to support, a range of activities designed to create vibrant commercial streets and support local businesses.

>> Develop a design kit for event corridors that help to activate these streets during different times of the year. The kit potentially includes: Parklets; designated spaces for temporary events, including food truck rallies and pop-up beer gardens; and streetscape designs that enhance pedestrian safety including unique crosswalks, curb bumpouts at intersections, potential speed tables and new street furniture. In addition, work with area restaurants to encourage outdoor dining [even in the winter] through assistance in permitting, awnings, tents and outdoor heaters.

>> Maximize the utility of Ottawa Avenue to accommodate large festivals. Ottawa is closed from time to time to support Downtown festivals. To help slow traffic and improve safety for pedestrians, Ottawa is proposed to become a two-way street. As a part of this redesign, additional improvements should be considered



Ottawa Avenue closed down for an event

that assert the corridor's role as home to major festivals. Potential improvements include small tensile structures or shelters that can serve as host to vendors during events and accessible electrical outlets for vendors and performers.

TURN UP THE VOLUME ON PUBLIC ART

One need look no further than Grand Rapids street signs, the sides of City vehicles, and the City of Grand Rapids flag itself—all featuring the iconic 1969 Alexander Calder sculpture, *La Grande Vitesse*, located at VandenBerg Plaza—to see that there is an important relationship between public art and City identity in Grand Rapids. With so many cultural and educational institutions with arts programs, Grand Rapids's design industry heritage, and the wealth of arts events held Downtown, the City should take advantage of more opportunities to showcase this vital part of its identity in the public realm.

>>Re-establish the Municipal Art Advisory Commission

Founded in 1977, the City of Grand Rapids's Municipal Art Advisory Commission was dissolved in 1985 by City ordinance. According to the City's municipal code, the Board of Art and Museum Commissioners is responsible for stewardship of works of public art in Downtown Grand Rapids, but this role is not mentioned on the City's webpage outlining the purpose of the Board, which focuses rather on its function overseeing the City's Public Museum. Today, there is an Art's Advisory Committee that is only used when requested by the City Manager.



In order for Grand Rapids to fully take advantage of opportunities for public art with leadership, review, and oversight structures in place to implement and maintain a forward-thinking public gallery, the function of public art stewardship should rest with one Commission dedicated to this purpose alone. Members should have extensive professional experience in art, design, architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, conservation, and related fields.

The Commission's primary function would be to oversee design review of public art works at public meetings in advance of permitting. Any work of art proposed for placement within a public right of way or on City-owned property would require Commission approval. Approval would also be required for conservation and maintenance of public art.

>>Require public art proposals to include review and recommendations from a certified conservation consultant

Given that architectural conservationists are the folks who step in when works of public art were not installed or designed with enough considerations for the wear and tear of urban context and regular maintenance, they are exactly who you want at the table to make sure things are designed and installed to stand up to the test of time in the first place. The cost of engaging conservationists should be budgeted into plans to secure resources for public art works.

>> Establish a percent for public art program

Many municipalities have established percent for art programs to set aside resources for the provision of public art where new construction or substantial renovations of publicly owned or leased buildings meet certain criteria. Some programs allow use of public resources to trigger a percent requirement as well. Programs vary from place to place, but generally require a percentage [best practice is 1% at minimum, and many allocate 2%] of capital construction costs be reserved for acquisition and permanent installation of works of public art on-site. Payments into a public art fund in lieu of providing public art on-site are also common and would be advisable in Grand Rapids.

>>Determine priority sites for public art

Downtown Grand Rapids is full of opportunities for more public art, and as the Grand River corridor takes shape as a network of open space

“The Grand Rapids Police Department has a giant, blank wall that overlooks the intersection of Commerce and Fulton. Barring adding windows, the wall would be a fantastic spot for a mural. It would be a fantastic PR opportunity for GRPD, and would provide a much better sight down Commerce. ArtPrize 2015?”

- Online map comment



The Police Department's imposing blank facade hovering over Fulton Street was identified numerous times as an ideal location for public art.

assets, even more opportunity will present itself. Specific opportunities were identified as a part of the GR Forward process, including the Grand Rapids Police Department facades facing Fulton and Louis Streets, the Convention Center, GRCC Parking Structures, Ah-Nab-Awen Park, and gateway locations outlined previously in this section. Interest was also expressed to designate a graffiti street wall as an integral part of the Downtown arts scene.

HIGHLIGHT THE PRESENCE OF THE GRAND RIVER WITH ENHANCED LIGHTING

The “Blue Bridge” is a landmark Downtown and along the River. Originally a maintenance project, the striking end result, both day and night, represent what is possible in Grand Rapids. As other bridges over the Grand River require maintenance or reconstruction, use the Blue Bridge as the example of how Grand Rapidsians cross the River. Seek to integrate bright color and LED lighting on all of the Grand River's bridges over time to complement the other investments dedicated to activating the Grand River.

“The 6th Street Bridge is an awesome landmark - more pretty bridges!”

- Open House Participant



The iconic “Blue Bridge.” Photo credit: MJZ Photography



WYNWOOD WALLS

Wynwood Walls is an art park in a Miami warehouse district. The park, created by the late real state entrepreneur and placemaking visionary Tony Goldman, features dozens of graffiti and street art murals from international artists on warehouse walls in addition to a restaurant and pop-up shop. Additional murals have been commissioned in the surrounding neighborhood as well. Art walks occur the second Saturday of every month, attracting up to 10,000 visitors. The success and scale of the project has been a driving force in the revitalization of a previously dilapidated neighborhood. Pointing to this precedent is not necessarily a suggestion that Grand Rapids should become a playground for accomplished graffiti writers [although the concept could harmonize with Creative District placemaking], but that a holistic vision for public art—where individual pieces are linked thematically or aesthetically, especially as they can relate to the emerging identity of Downtown Grand Rapids—can reinforce the brand and vibe, as well as help build buzz about Downtown.



Photo credit: Flickr user Juliana Su

5.4 CONTINUE TO ENSURE THE SAFETY AND CLEANLINESS OF DOWNTOWN GRAND RAPIDS

Cleanliness, safety, fun, and attractiveness are the bedrock of the downtown experience. Without the first two, the second two aren't possible. For Downtown to continue building momentum, public realm management and perception will continue to play a critical role.

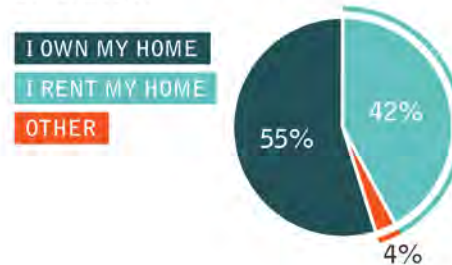
Although crime Downtown comprises only 9% of crimes city-wide, and serious crimes fell 29% Downtown from 2009 to 2013 [compared to a 20% crime reduction in Grand Rapids as a whole], there is still a perception issue that Downtown is comparatively unsafe. This is reflected in the survey completed for GR Forward that identified crime as a factor impacting the decision to purchase a home Downtown.

Much of what drives the perception that Downtown is unsafe is the character of Downtown streets. Figure 5.21 illustrates active and inactive streets Downtown. Active streets include open stores, windows and doors that help to generate street activity. More people or “eyes on the street” tend to improve perceptions about safety. Conversely, inactive streets are lined with blank walls, empty land or buildings, parking lots and structures or fencing. These factors foster negative perceptions about safety. Today, 63% of Downtown streets are inactive. This number must change to help address the persistent negative perceptions regarding Downtown.

HOUSING SITUATION

RESIDENT SURVEY

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION?



WOULD YOU CONSIDER BUYING A HOME IN THIS COMMUNITY?



WHICH OF THESE FACTORS ARE REASONS YOU WOULD **NOT** CONSIDER BUYING A HOME IN THIS COMMUNITY?

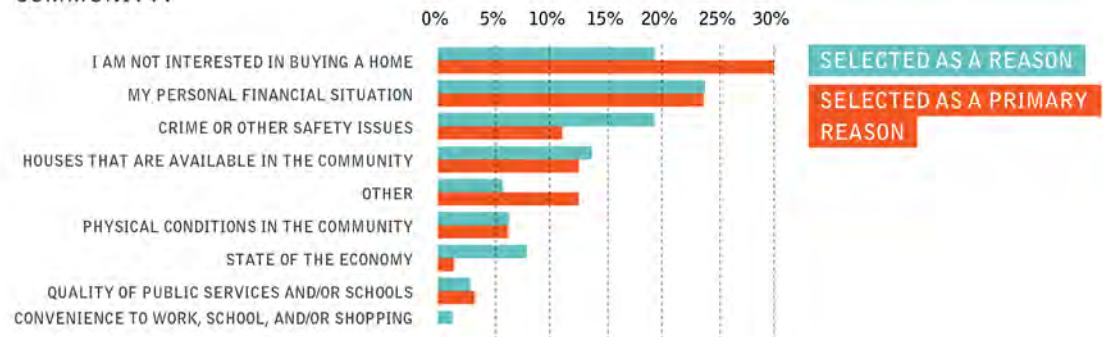
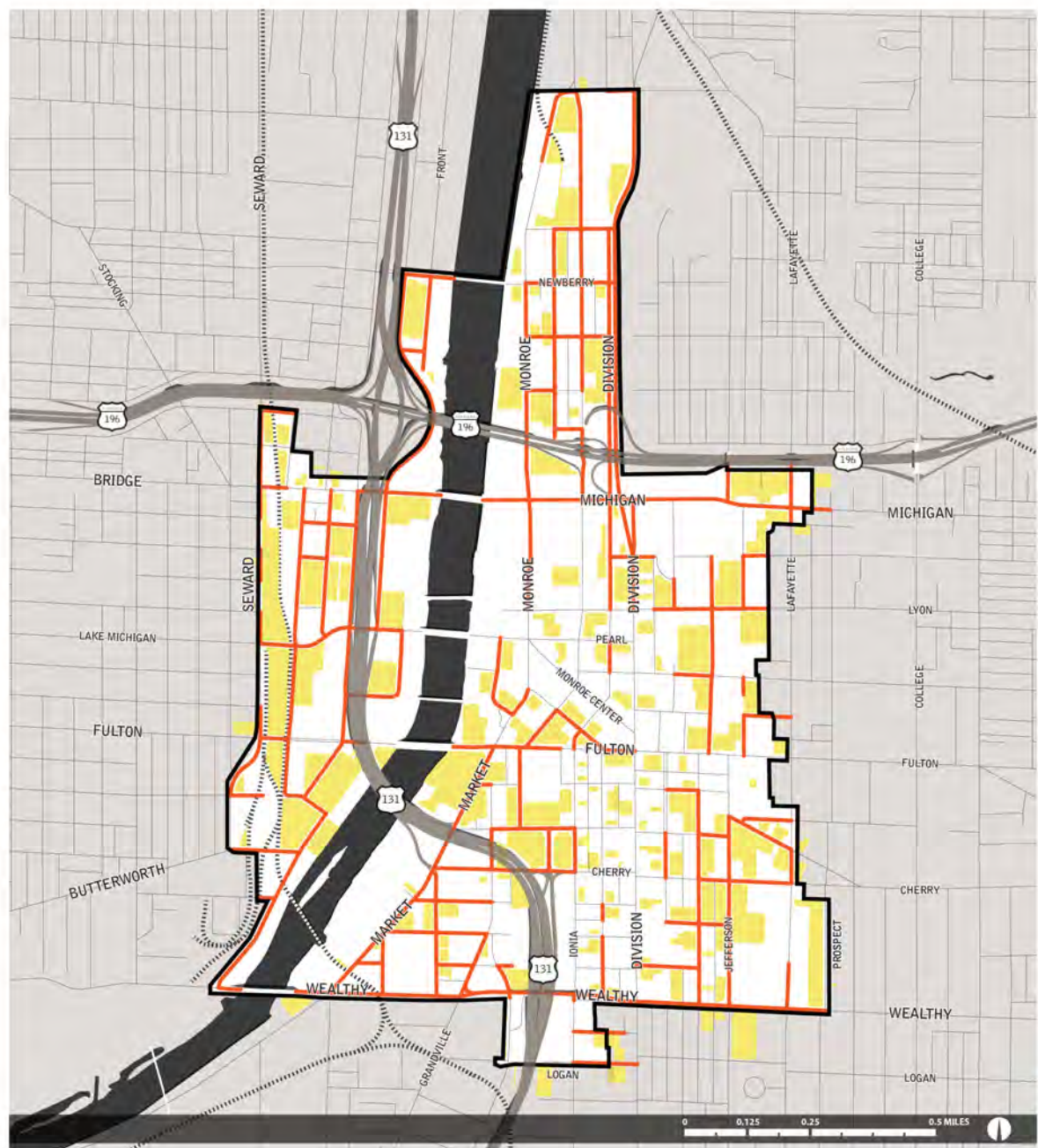


FIG 5.20: Resident survey housing choice results. 50% of renters who were surveyed reported that they would not consider buying a home in Downtown Grand Rapids. Factoring out lack of interest in owning a home at all and lack of financial capacity, the top reason why they would not consider Downtown living was related to perception of safety. Nearly 20% of potential homebuyers identified “Crime or other safety issues” as a reason.

Looking at the crime rate per 1,000 residents [Figure 5.22 on the following page] may reinforce this perception without further diving into the numbers. Normalizing the crime rate by number of residents Downtown results in an inaccurate representation, as there are tens of thousands of workers and visitors Downtown on any given

day, and all of them are potential victims of crime. If the rate were calculated by crimes per 1,000 “users,” inclusive of the Downtown resident, worker, and visitor contingents, this rate, compared to the city-wide rate would not be nearly so extreme. However, there is also the reality that because of the concentration of



INACTIVE STREET FRONTAGE

INTERFACE - STUDIO FIELD SURVEY

STREET
SEGMENTS
DOWNTOWN:

493 TOTAL
313 INACTIVE



- INACTIVE STREET FRONTAGE
- PARKING LOT / STRUCTURE

FIG 5.21: Inactive street frontage Downtown

CRIME

GRAND RAPIDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

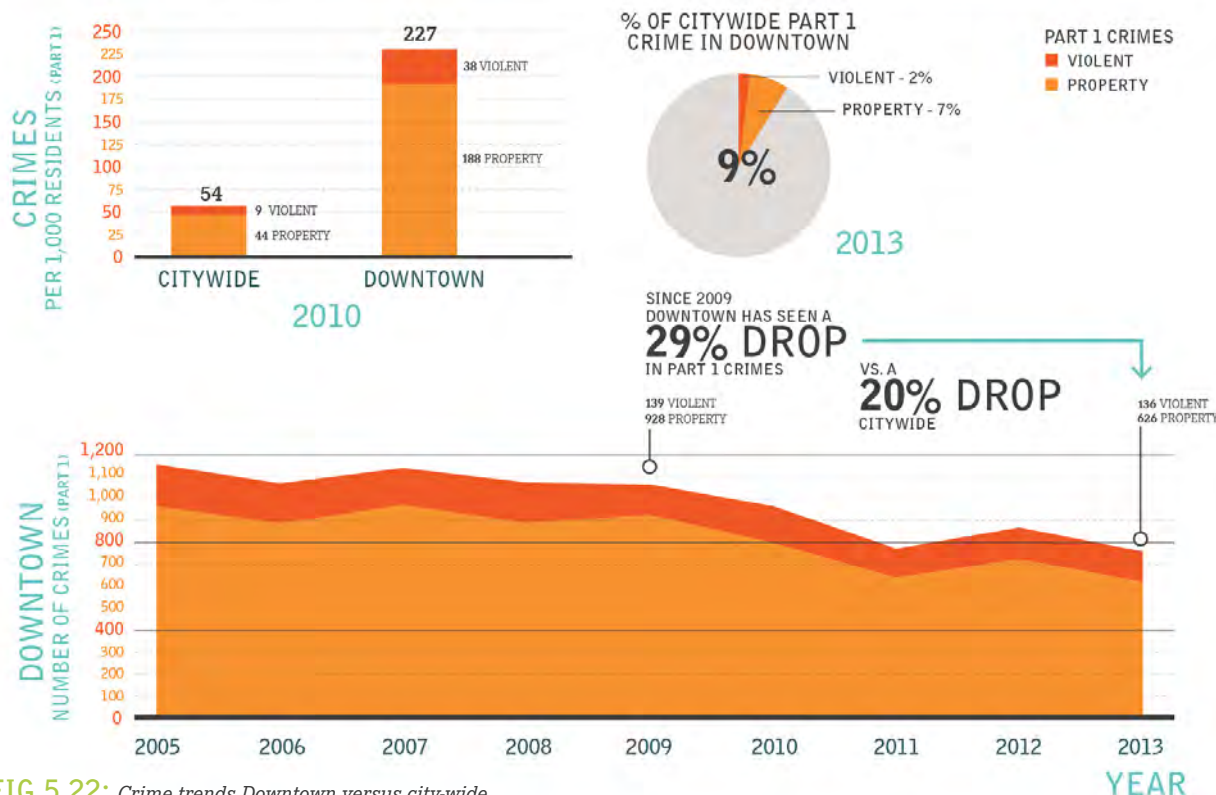


FIG 5.22: Crime trends Downtown versus city-wide

users and activity Downtown, there is bound to be an elevated crime rate.

Whether more based on perception or reality, the impression that Downtown is unsafe negatively affects the area's ability to attract new residents, businesses and visitors. The Grand Rapids Police Department, along with DGRI's Ambassadors and campus security, are doing a great job reducing and preventing crime,

and there are a number of ways to support them in continuing this trend. Numerous studies have shown that an important component of crime prevention is ensuring an orderly environment—that the presence of trash, vandalism, and other forms of visual disorder, tends to encourage illicit behaviors. That said, measures to continue making Downtown clean and safe are mutually reinforcing strategies to ensuring positive growth and vitality.

EXPAND BEAUTIFICATION MANAGEMENT

As Downtown continues to draw more residents, workers, and visitors, there's no question that this growth will also come with the need for additional beautification resources. Simply put, the more people there are populating Downtown streets and public spaces, the more trash and vandalism there will be to address.

>> Additional trash and recycling bins in public places

Trash cans should be installed on every corner of Targeted Active Commercial Corridors—and mid-block as well on longer blocks. Bus stops are also good locations to provide transit users with a place to deposit waste. As new open space amenities are developed, they should also be furnished with receptacles.

DGRI should work with its Downtown Clean Team to identify which existing trash receptacles are the most heavily utilized and consider these locations for the installation of Big Belly solar powered bins that compact trash to reduce the number of times trash needs to be picked up and reduce waste overflow.

>> Increase cleanings and graffiti removal targeting problem areas

DGRI's Downtown Clean Team is integral to maintaining Downtown Grand Rapids's welcoming environment. Keeping streets and public spaces free of litter and debris is critical to reinforcing perception of safety and attracting new residents, businesses, and investment.

DGRI is encouraged to pursue resources to continue building the team as Downtown users increase, as well as expanding service areas to include as much of the Downtown area as possible.

BUILD ON THE SUCCESSES OF THE DOWNTOWN AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Given the prevalence of activity gaps and stretches of streets lined with blank walls, backs of buildings, and parking garages, it's important to continue to find ways of bringing an active presence throughout the Downtown area, including areas and times of day/week where there is low volume foot traffic. Launched in 2013, DGRI's Downtown Ambassador Program was established in response to conversations with and the needs of local property and business owners. The Ambassadors help orient visitors, have a continual presence bringing eyes on the street, making the public realm feel safer and friendlier. DGRI is encouraged to build on the success of this program, expanding the coverage area and number of patrols.

IMPROVE LIGHTING ON STREETS AND IN PUBLIC SPACES

Adequate lighting on streets and public spaces is a critical component of the perception of safety Downtown, and enhanced lighting can also serve a number of purposes, including furthering placemaking goals, improving traffic safety, and boosting foot traffic for businesses after dark. To further leverage these benefits,



DGRI's Downtown Ambassadors

among others, a range of approaches are proposed to highlight Downtown's nightscape:

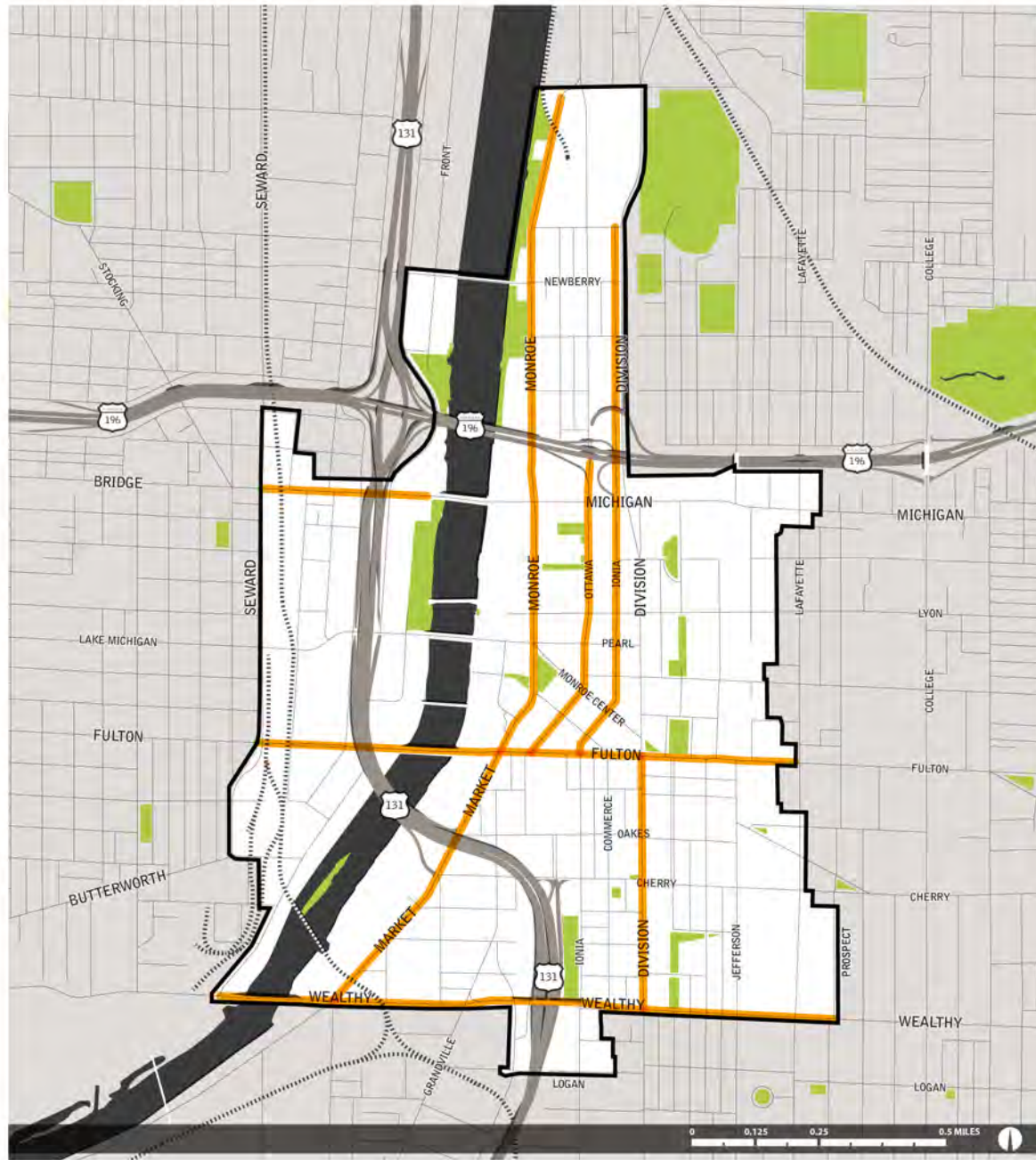
>> Install pedestrian-scale lighting on key streets

Lighting sidewalks with pedestrian-scale fixtures will not only distinguish major corridors Downtown, it will also help improve perception of safety. On streets with high foot traffic lighting can serve to further enhance safety by making pedestrians more visible to motorists at night, as well as by acting as a traffic calming device. The following general design guidelines are proposed for consideration when making decisions about pedestrian light installations:

- > Pedestrian stick lights are generally placed closer together than standard street lights in order to create sidewalk environment with an even level of light, rather than creating spots of well-lit areas along an otherwise dark corridor.

- > White lights, such as LED, are preferred over the yellow light cast by many traditional street lamps. This helps to distinguish the sidewalk from the street and does a better job of highlighting the character of building facades.
- > Fixtures should be between 12' and 15' off the ground in order to prevent vandalism while ensuring that the light is cast from a point close enough to the ground to provide illumination and relate to the pedestrian scale.
- > It is important to select a wattage that will provide a sufficient amount of light without over-lighting the corridor, which can create an unpleasant pedestrian atmosphere and could be distracting to motorists. A photometric analysis should always accompany planning to install pedestrian light fixtures.

PRIORITY CORRIDORS FOR NEW PEDESTRIAN LIGHTING



296 GR >> RECOMMENDATIONS

Although they have many benefits, the drawback of pedestrian scale lighting is the cost. There are considerable cost savings when stand-alone pedestrian lights can be integrated with planned large-scale right of way reconstruction, which should be taken into account when budgeting and planning for street or sidewalk reconstruction projects. Given the high cost, pedestrian lighting should be limited to priority locations, such as:

> Bridge Street

As a re-emerging commercial corridor with a more of an old-time main street scale and feel, Bridge Street would be well suited for pedestrian scale lights of a more traditional character. Given the narrow width of the right of way, it may be possible to adequately light both the roadway and the sidewalk with the provision of pedestrian lights alone. This may mean installing slightly higher poles to allow a greater reach and avoid glare for pedestrians. Positioning poles with an opposite arrangement—directly across the street from each other—would create the opportunity to string lights across Bridge Street for the holidays or to add charm as a permanent gateway and placemaking feature. This would be another reason to provide taller poles on Bridge in order to provide adequate clearance [the Federal Highway Administration recommends 14 feet of clearance for an urban collector street] under the string lights for trucks.

> Fulton Street

As a major gateway/through street and

events corridor, sidewalk lights would not only improve the sidewalk environment for pedestrians, but would pronounce the presence of Downtown Grand Rapids for motorists passing through. Pedestrian lighting is included as a part of the proposed reconstruction of the right of way to soften Fulton and create improved pedestrian connections between the Downtown core and Heartside.

> Ionia Avenue

New fixtures will be needed to light the proposed cycle track for Ionia. North of 196, these lights will serve as the primary lighting for the Ionia Avenue linear park.

> Market and Monroe Avenues

As Grand Rapids's future "river boulevard" linking the Downtown core to large scale developments and signature open spaces along the Grand River, pedestrian scale lighting would be an essential component of a new streetscape design along both sides of Market Avenue. The lighting elements would ideally continue north along Monroe Avenue into Monroe North, establishing a common visual element to knit the visually and perceptually disconnected segments of these streets together as a continuous river boulevard corridor.

> Ottawa Avenue

Pedestrian lighting on Ottawa would serve as a gateway element for motorists entering Downtown from 196, as well as sidewalk infrastructure to support Ottawa as an

events corridor. In addition to providing a festive atmosphere for evening events, the poles themselves could be outfitted with lockable electrical outlets for vendors, performers, and other uses. Using the same or aesthetically similar fixtures along Ottawa and in VandenBerg Plaza would link the two together visually, reinforcing the concept of Ottawa as an extension of the plaza for events programming.

> Wealthy Street

As previously discussed, solar-powered LED lighting specifically would reinforce the "innovation corridor" branding concept.

>> Work with property owners to create a façade lighting corridor on Division Avenue

Given the need to address concerns around perception of safety along Division Avenue in the near term, Downtown leadership should work with individual property owners to implement an owner assisted lighting façade program. A cost sharing model would be employed to install and maintain LED lighting on the facades of buildings, acting to increase sidewalk lighting. This will serve to improve safety and perception of safety along Division. Building owners should be encouraged to keep façade lighting on 24 hours a day, whether or not ground floor commercial spaces [if present] are open for business.



Could major snow pileups, like this one next to a GRCC parking structure, be moved elsewhere for recreational use?



A snow pile plowed from the Bridgewater Place parking ramp blocks the river trail to the Fish Ladder.

>> Integrate lighting concepts in park and public space improvements

Lighting is an important component of all of the proposed Downtown open space improvements detailed earlier in this plan. Placement and design should be used to complement programs, highlight features, announce gateways, and reinforce the distinct identity and character of each space.

EVALUATE SNOW REMOVAL PRACTICES

As we know all too well, winter in Grand Rapids can sometimes be a headache, especially when trying to navigate the streets after a heavy snowfall. Community members who participated in the GR Forward process had plenty to say about snow removal practices and how they impact mobility across modes—whether on foot, biking, or driving. Additionally, on-street parking management to accommodate plows can sometimes be confusing and inconvenient.

Some part of the issue may be a matter of education and awareness about how the City manages snow; also, there could be some potential for rethinking practices and coming up with some new approaches. The City should initiate an outreach and engagement process to listen to the concerns of community members and educate them about how snow is handled and harness crowdsourcing to identify particularly problematic scenarios and place-specific trouble areas. This process that would also be an important opportunity to evaluate snow removal Downtown and research best practices from cities like Montreal that have adopted more progressive management strategies.

Given the City's motivation to improve policies around Low Impact Development and other issues that impact water quality and

environmental health, the City's Departments of Streets and Public Services have initiated new techniques for snow removal. These include replacing the salt used for deicing which can negatively impact the water and soil with, non-harmful, natural materials like sand. In line with this forward-thinking approach to snow removal, other solutions could be explored including the potential reuse of plowed snow in parks to accommodate winter sports and outdoor adventure.

IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

Strategies to enhance the public realm as described in this chapter are an extension of the positive trends already established in Grand Rapids. Transformations to public space including streetscape design, tree planting and gateway enhancements are activities that the City, Friends of Grand Rapids Parks and DGRI have expertise and knowledge in completing. A combined effort, coupled with forging strong links to existing businesses in locations designated for improvements, will be needed to move quickly from design to implementation. Similarly, the design and implementation of Downtown park improvements requires not only advancing the concepts presented here into construction documents but also a concerted fundraising effort that creates partners amongst those that will benefit from these enhancements. Other activities outlined here from programming to Downtown management are embedded within DGRI's mandate and capacity. However, to expand programming will require additional resources and partners so as not to take away from existing activities undertaken by DGRI and their partners.

The improvements outlined for the public realm will create a more vibrant and attractive Downtown and raise expectations about what Downtown should look like, how it should function and how it will be managed. To meet tomorrow's expectations, implementation today needs to take into account long-term maintenance and sustainability of both spaces and programs.

The following projects are implementation priorities for activating the public realm Downtown

- > Design a winter parklet & identify 2-3 locations to pilot the design - launch a design competition to beat the cold
- > Develop interactive competitions via social media for Downtown events
- > Develop a text alert notification service for Downtown events
- > Create a "stay open late" campaign for businesses to encourage active participation in Downtown events
- > Coordinate with local partners on developing final designs for Vandenberg Plaza [Calder Plaza]
- > Develop phase 1 of the Ionia Street cycle track and develop the full park design for north of I-196
- > Design and implement underpass improvements for Bridge Street and Monroe Avenue underpasses
- > Develop streetscape design plans for Bridge Street
- > Re-stripe Fulton Street as a pilot road diet
- > Implement the Pearl Street streetscape plan
- > Explore the possibility of expanding the Downtown Ambassador program

5 REINVEST IN PUBLIC SPACE, CULTURE & INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING

5.1 Expand arts and cultural events and temporary programming to further activate the public realm year-round

Recommendation	Timeframe	Responsibility / Partners	Source of Funds
Design and program public spaces to accommodate winter activities	1st-year	DGRI / local Colleges & Universities / local businesses	DGRI

Initial Action Steps -

Design a winter parklet & identify 2-3 locations to pilot the design - launch a design competition to beat the cold

Discuss the possibility of Winter-specific menus and events with Downtown restaurant owners

Leverage the opportunity of Downtown events	ongoing	DGRI / local Colleges & Universities / local businesses	DGRI
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Initial Action Steps -

Develop interactive competitions via social media for Downtown events

Develop a text alert notification service for Downtown events

Create a “stay open late” campaign for businesses to encourage active participation in Downtown events

Coordinate with local universities on the distribution of information on Downtown events

Build upon local Institutions	within 5 years	DGRI / Avenue for the Arts / UICA / Ladies Literary Club / Civic Theater / Spectrum Theater / Dog Story Theater / St. Cecilia Music Center / GRAM / Grand Rapids Children Museum / VanAndel Public Museum / Tourism and Convention Bureau / Hospitality Industry	DGRI / foundation grants / City of Grand Rapids / Experience Grand Rapids
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Initial Action Steps -

Create a performing arts district

Develop a coordinated calendar of performing art events and work with local institutions / businesses to promote tourism

5.2 Raise the profile of Downtown parks and public spaces

Recommendation	Timeframe	Responsibility / Partners	Source of Funds
Enhance existing non-riverfront parks and open spaces through redesign and programming	varies [see below]	City of Grand Rapids / local non-profits / DGRI	City / DGRI / private & foundation support
> VandenBerg Plaza	within 5 years	City of Grand Rapids / Kent County / Calder Foundation / DGRI / local non-profits / Grand Action	City of Grand Rapids / Kent County / DGRI / private support

Initial Action Steps

Coordinate with local partners on developing final designs

Secure agreements with adjacent property owners for space to accommodate a trail from the Medical Mile to the River

> Heartside Park	5 to 10 years	DGRI / local non-profits / Convention & Visitors Bureau / Heartside neighbors & institutions	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / private support
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Initial Action Steps

Develop design documents with the surrounding community

Form partnerships to provide park programming

> Veteran's Park	within 5 years	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / Public Library	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / private support
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Initial Action Steps

Update existing plans [as needed] and secure financing for construction

Create new [non-riverfront] open space assets	varies [see below]	City of Grand Rapids / local non-profits / DGRI	City / DGRI / private & foundation support
> Parklets	1st-year	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI	–

Initial Action Steps

Continue outreach with local business owners on targeted corridors

Recommendation	Timeframe	Responsibility / Partners	Source of Funds
> Switchback Park	5 to 10 years	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / local non-profits	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / private support
<i>Initial Action Steps</i>			
Undertake initial engineering and park concept development			
> Ionia Street Linear Park	1st-year	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / local non-profits	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / private support
<i>Initial Action Steps</i>			
Develop cycle track design for Phase 1			
Develop full park design north of 196 [landscaping attached to cycle track] for Phase 2			
> Sheldon Linear Park	within 5 years	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / local non-profits / local institutions	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / private support
<i>Initial Action Steps</i>			
Develop full street re-design			
> Near Westside Plaza	with new development proposed for near Westside	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / local non-profits / private developers	DGRI
<i>Initial Action Steps</i>			
Designate protected park space within DDA-owned land			
Support developer partners through assistance in park design			
> Bridge Street Skate Park	within 10 years	DGRI / City of Grand Rapids / local property owners	DGRI / private support / City of Grand Rapids
<i>Initial Action Steps</i>			
Coordinate with MDOT on use of space under US 131			
Develop initial designs with local property owners			
> River Corridor Parks	varies	DGRI / City of Grand Rapids	City / DGRI / State / Federal private & foundation support
<i>Initial Action Steps</i>			
See Goal 1			

5.3 Express Downtown Grand Rapids's character and identity through public realm improvements

Recommendation	Timeframe	Responsibility / Partners	Source of Funds
Make a statement with improved gateways	ongoing	City of Grand Rapids / MDOT / DGRI / property owners	City of Grand Rapids / MDOT / DGRI / private support

Initial Action Steps -

Design underpass improvements for Bridge Street and Monroe Avenue underpasses

Plant and maintain more shade trees to increase the Downtown tree canopy	within 5 years	DGRI / Friends of Grand Rapids Parks / Urban Forestry Committee / City of Grand Rapids	DGRI / Friends of Grand Rapids Parks / Urban Forestry Committee / City of Grand Rapids
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Initial Action Steps -

Retrofit and install new infrastructure with the capacity to provide adequate soil volume for healthy tree growth

Target tree plantings on east-west streets

Develop Streetscape Designs to Upgrade Key Streets	1st Year [design plans]	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI	DGRI / City of Grand Rapids / MDOT
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Initial Action Steps -

Develop design plans for Bridge Street, Pearl and Fulton

Develop a Design Approach for the 'Event Corridor' and 'Outdoor Entertainment Corridors'	within 5 years	DGRI / City of Grand Rapids / Kent County / business owners	DGRI / City of Grand Rapids / MDOT
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Initial Action Steps -

Initiate design work for Ottawa Street in coordination with potential conversion to a two-way street [City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / Kent County] - consider realignment at Fulton

Create design and programming guide for outdoor entertainment corridors - conduct targeted outreach to business owners [DGRI] - fund bumpouts, speed tables, street furniture and special events

Turn up the volume on public art	within 5 years	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI / river art group*	City of Grand Rapids / private support
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Initial Action Steps -

Establish a percent for public art program [City of Grand Rapids]

Determine priority sites for public art [City of Grand Rapids, DGRI / river art group to continue discussion on potential sites for public art]

Highlight the presence of the Grand River with enhanced lighting	5-10 years	MDOT / City of Grand Rapids / DGRI	MDOT / City of Grand Rapids / DGRI
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Initial Action Steps -

Identify bridges slated for reconstruction / improvements in the coming years / begin discussion on possible design solutions

5.4 Continue to ensure the safety and cleanliness of Downtown Grand Rapids

Recommendation	Timeframe	Responsibility / Partners	Source of Funds
Expand beautification management	within 5 years	DGRI	-

Initial Action Steps -

Determine locations for new Big Belly trash receptacles - coordinate with streetscape improvements on designated corridors

Improve lighting on streets and in public spaces	within 5 years	DGRI / City of Grand Rapids / local non-profits	DGRI
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Initial Action Steps -

Install pedestrian-scale lighting on key streets - start with Bridge & Fulton - 100 pedestrian fixtures @ \$10,000 each

Work with property owners to create a façade lighting corridor on Division Avenue - target 2-3 blocks and conduct outreach to property owners - Target 20 facades @ \$5,000

Integrate lighting concepts in park and public space improvements [Friends of Grand Rapids Parks / City of Grand Rapids / DGRI] - TBD for costs

Build on the successes of the Downtown Ambassador Program	1st Year	DGRI	DGRI
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Initial Action Steps -

Discuss with DDA and Alliances the potential need for expansion and budget

Evaluate snow removal practices	within 5 years	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI	City of Grand Rapids / DGRI
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Initial Action Steps -

Conduct outreach and education on snow removal

Explore options for reusing plowed snow to support winter programming

** the river art group formed during the GR Forward process to discuss public art along the River and explore potential themes and sites for art*