

URBAN COLLABORATORS

Resource Guide Series



Revitalizing Neighborhood Retail

The Urban Collaborators is a group of MSU Extension educators and the School of Planning, Design, and Construction faculty whose goal is to help revitalize Michigan's urban cities by linking research, outreach, and learning. The group helps bring MSU resources to local communities through MSU Extension in eight targeted cities: Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, Jackson, Lansing, Pontiac, Saginaw, and Ypsilanti.

The Urban Collaborators' Resource Guides are a series of bulletins on single topics related to community development and urban planning. These Resource Guides are the result of the successful linkages between research, outreach, and learning that the Urban Collaborators strive for. The Resource Guides provide practical techniques for citizen planners, community activists, and field educators to implement within their own communities. The guides are grounded in research and their

practices have been tested in other communities to ensure that they are practical and accurate.

Each year, small teams of students are assigned to work in Michigan's communities for one semester on revitalization projects. The students carry out planning-related studies for community partners ranging from neighborhood associations to municipal governments. In this way, MSU faculty transfer the knowledge they've gained through research to students; students implement the practice through an outreach project in a community; communities gain valuable and practical technical assistance and resources; and students, faculty, and community representatives all learn through a collaborative process. These Resource Guides capture this process and transfer out the lessons learned so that other communities and local organizations can build their capacity to address their own community needs.

Urban Collaborators' Goals

- ✦ Implement key initiatives that enhance the linkage of research and outreach resources of the University with the community development needs of seven target cities.
- ✦ Provide substantive support for MSU Extension educators, community and economic development.
- ✦ Contribute to and learn from community development assignments in urban communities.
- ✦ Engage communities and scholars in ways that translate into new knowledge.
- ✦ Build the capacity of local organizations to address urban issues.

*Teaching and Learning
Practice and Outreach
Research*

Revitalizing Neighborhood Retail

What is Neighborhood Retail?

Central business district, commercial corridor, and inner city center or market are just a few synonyms for neighborhood retail, but they all suggest the same thing: an area of business in a centrally located portion of a city, usually along a main street. We've all experienced, either personally or through books or movies, the city with a core business area that is thriving. However, over the past few decades, cities' commercial areas have faltered for a number of reasons.

Certainly crime, or its perception, has dogged neighborhood retail areas, but the underlying and probably most influential factor is the unintended consequence from urban sprawl—the exodus of inner city residents to suburban areas. As residents left the city for the suburb, many retailers followed, leaving retail deserts in the urban cores. It can be argued that communities are living entities that pass through cycles of decline and rebirth like many other dynamic processes. If that is true, then neighborhood retail is due for a rebound and development patterns and socio-economic trends concur. This resource guide will explore ways to encourage its revitalization.

Why is Neighborhood Retail Important?

Most healthy communities have a blend of land uses (residential, commercial, industrial, open space, etc.), and it is this mix of uses that breeds success. As can be seen in the exhibit below, neighborhood retail provides goods, jobs, a strong and diverse tax base, and a sense of community to its residents. So, although individual household incomes may be lower in inner cities, the density of demand (due to the high population density) creates enormous retail purchasing power. Many communities, investors, and businesses are rediscovering this potential and putting plans in motion to tap this resource as part of an overall economic development strategy and to create a more healthy community.

“Promoting quality retail in inner city neighborhoods is smart community development, not just economic development.”

— U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development



From The Virtuous Cycle of Retail, Urban Land Institute.

HOW TO ANALYZE NEIGHBORHOOD RETAIL

What follows is not an exhaustive explanation of how to analyze information about neighborhood retail, but rather offers an overview of common practices and key points for consideration. Neighborhood retail revitalization is a long and complex process. Proper analysis is a beginning step and a tool that can be used to evaluate progress.

Revitalization is typically identified as a desired outcome of a visioning process. See the Resource Guide titled *Community Assessment: Creating the Vision (Part 1)* for information on this process. There are many techniques that can be used to analyze a neighborhood retail development or its potential. Socio-economic profiles, visual assessments, and surveys and interviews are part of the process and were presented in more detail in the Resource Guide titled *Community Assessment: Collecting the Data (Part 2)*. This guide will explore the others.

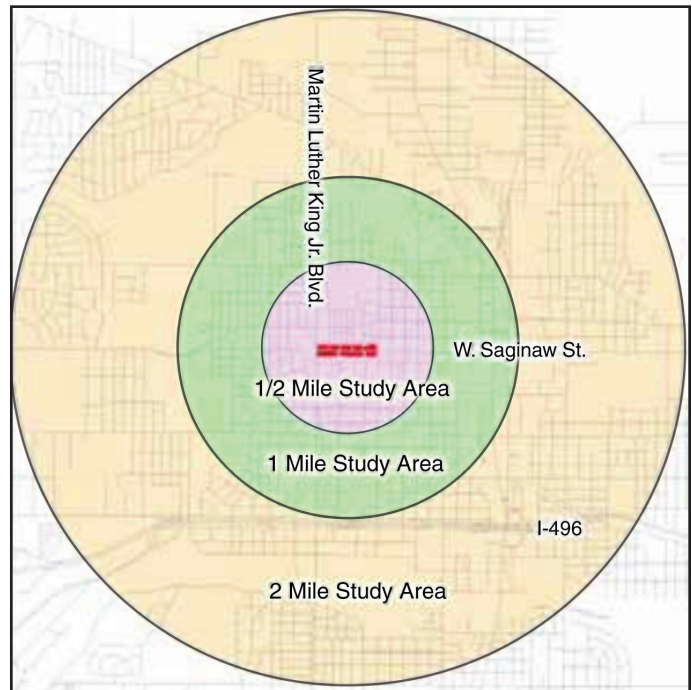
- Socio-Economic Profile
- Visual Assessments
 - ◆ Exterior Housing Survey
 - ◆ Exterior Commercial Corridor Inventory
 - ◆ Exterior Business Survey
 - ◆ Land Use Inventory
- Business Analysis Using Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) Data
- Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat (SWOT) Analysis
- Market Analysis
- Collecting Perspectives
- Case Studies

Communities often find that they need to employ several different techniques to provide all the necessary information for an accurate analysis.

Define the Study Area

Usually the study area is a well-defined pocket of commercial development or an area that has the potential to support a neighborhood retail development. Because neighborhood retail is designed to support pedestrian activity, it is typically not more than a half mile in length. But that is just the center of the area that will be studied.

In order to determine what type of retail is appropriate and sustainable, the study area should be expanded to include areas of population density, neighboring retail, and other land uses. Consider the neighborhood retail development in question at the center of concentric circles of increasing distance. The rings should be spaced so as to include enough population and retail to make comparisons with the target area. In this example, they are 0.5, 1.0, and 2.0 miles from the neighborhood retail development. The distances should vary depending on the context of the study, but should remain manageable and comparable.



SOURCE: West Saginaw Highway Corridor Market Study Lansing, 2006. (<http://spdc.msu.edu/LinkClick.aspx?filetic ket=1b4FvZSOgmw%3d&tabid=249>)

Socio-Economic Profile

Consideration of socio-economic factors is essential to understand community issues and make sound decisions. A review of historical economic and demographic activity helps explain current conditions while projecting future economic and demographic trends can help community leaders anticipate and plan for changes that will impact neighborhood retail and the community.

The purpose of a socio-economic profile of a community in the context of neighborhood retail is to discover pools of potential employees, unearth aggregated retail purchasing power, understand its residents' lifestyles, and identify a community's issues. Typically, socio-economic data can be collected through census data at a census tract level—a small, relatively permanent statistical subdivision of a county—which is easily translatable to a neighborhood retail scale.

The four primary sets of indicators or data that should be included are population, education, employment and income, and housing and community facilities. Data should be collected from the community in question, its surrounding neighbors (to develop a regional context), and the state. In order to develop trends during the analysis phase, data should be collected from the current status back twenty years prior, at least.

For a more complete explanation of socio-economic profile, see the *Community Assessment: Collecting the Data (Part 2)* Resource Guide.

Business Analysis Using ESRI Data

The Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) is a software company (www.esri.com) that collects and maps data for a variety of uses. A report costs roughly \$500, but other sources of this information are available through some local libraries. After the study area is defined the following information should be collected and mapped at each defined interval and compared with the desired neighborhood retail development at the center:

- Number of businesses
- Types of businesses
- Number of employees

- Businesses by industry
- Population
- Daytime to nighttime population ratios

The ESRI data will show where neighborhood retail is located, what kind and size of businesses exist, how much and where both customer and employment pools are, and what potential there is to sustain business in evening hours. This will help a community not only understand its business mix, trade area, local economics, and customer demographics and lifestyles, but identify niches that may be filled with new or revitalized retail development.

Visual Assessments

Visually assessing a community's built environment involves two steps—*inventory and assessment*—and both can be done simultaneously. They typically require a small team of individuals to canvas the community, collecting necessary data, and evaluating (ranking and judging elements on a relative scale) what they see. An assessment tool or survey instrument is used to help assessors evaluate the built environment and create quantifiable and measurable results. Visual assessments can be conducted by car or foot, but safety of the assessors must be considered.

The goal of an assessment is to inventory existing facilities and assess the condition of the built environment. An inventory will count all units and types. While not every structure in a community needs to be assessed (unlike an inventory), it is important to gather a sample that can represent the study area. In addition, it is worth noting that building conditions can vary greatly from block to block.

There are four primary types of inventories or assessments conducted:

- Exterior Housing Survey Form
- Commercial Corridor Inventory
- Exterior Business Survey
- Land Use Inventory

For a more complete explanation of visual assessments, see the *Community Assessment: Collecting the Data (Part 2)* Resource Guide.

SWOT Analysis

After the area is understood using the socio-economic profile, visual assessments, and the ESRI data, a useful tool to analyze all of this data is a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. A SWOT analysis explores the data by matching a community's resources and capabilities against its challenges. The exhibit to the right displays a general SWOT template.

This exercise can be done by an individual or by a group of stakeholders during a visioning meeting. First, the profile, assessments, and data are presented and considered. Then different attributes are discussed, deliberated, and sorted into the following categories:

- Strengths: *internal* attributes of the community that are helpful to achieving the objective
- Weaknesses: *internal* attributes of the community that hinder achieving the objective
- Opportunities: *external* conditions that are helpful to achieving the objective
- Threats: *external* conditions which could do damage to the objective

Each attribute and condition is placed in the respective quadrant of the matrix for future analysis. Consider how the strengths and opportunities can be leveraged to overcome the weaknesses and threats. The exhibit to the right displays a completed SWOT.

For a more complete explanation of SWOT analyses, see the *Building Great Neighborhoods Manual*.

	Helpful to achieving the objective	Harmful to achieving the objective
Internal Origin (attributes of the organization)	Strengths Location Easy access to highways	Weaknesses Decreasing population Perception of crime
External Origin (attributes of the environment)	Opportunities Prices below market rate Proximity to cultural, educational, and business institutions	Threats Inaccurate pricing Proximity to new center and downtown

SOURCES:

Top Image: <http://www.excelsia.ch/htmlgb/blog/images/swot-analysis-image.png>
 Bottom Table: Vanguard Community Development Corporation: Small Business Incubator Study, Detroit. 2006. (<http://spdc.msu.edu/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=QE XQNpu77VE%3d&tabid=249>)

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: minutes from downtown, Wayne State University, automotive industries, casinos, and other businesses in the area • Easy access to highways and main roads: (I-75, I-94, Lodge Highway Grand Blvd, and Woodward Avenue) • Parking: Easy access has parking on-site, (necessary for success due to little parking in area and no public transit) • Vanguard CDC has invested and created presence in the community by creating and redevelopment of housing, children programs, and residential enrichment programs • Increase in median income for North-end neighborhood (81%) 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High presence of vacant buildings • Area population decreasing, approximately 25% in last decade • High percentage of neighborhood below poverty incomes • Presence of deteriorated properties • Perception of high crime and vandalism in area
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to price at or below market value as incentive for leasing • Local businesses and self employed residents with small business needs • Proximity to resources • Identify a specific market for Milwaukee Junction Business Center • High investment for success (church owns most of the adjacent area) 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown office space as a more desirable location • New Center; other office space more desirable • Challenge to become self-sufficient in 5 years • Inaccurate pricing (pricing/rent to high and preventing businesses from moving in or pricing to low and deferring revenue)

Market Analysis

The market analysis pulls together all of this data and assesses retail opportunity by industry or sector (retail, service, restaurant, theater, office, residential, lodging, etc.) to identify the real potential of a neighborhood retail development.

To determine what concepts have the greatest potential, the following questions need to be answered for each sector:

- What types of demand could be captured in the downtown area?
- What do local demographics and lifestyle characteristics suggest about market demand?
- Who are the existing competitors and how successful are they?
- What concepts are missing from the area?

Using the market analysis findings, draw conclusions about the viability of certain concepts and ideas for neighborhood retail. Because of the complexity of each industry, this analysis is not intended to be a complete market feasibility analysis. Rather each concept within an identified sector should undergo a more detailed study.

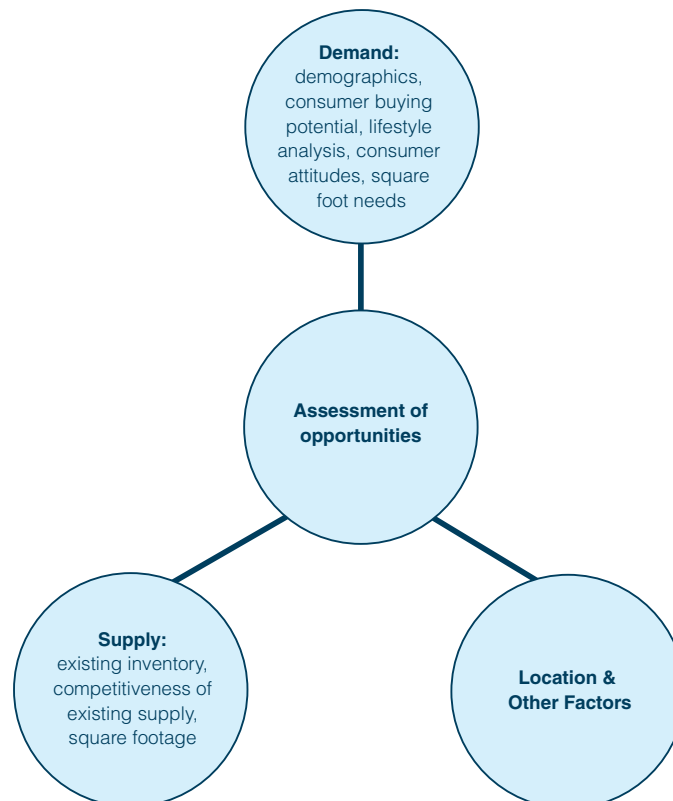
Collecting Perspectives

While there are many techniques that can be used to collect perspectives, it is important to collect the opinions of a variety of stakeholders (e.g., residents, potential retailers, existing retailers, community leaders) with regard to the data collected, findings discovered, and concepts for the future of neighborhood retail. Some techniques include:

- Focus Groups
- Interviews
- Public Meetings or Public Issues Forums
- Surveys

Communities often find that they need to employ several different techniques to answer all the relevant questions and collect the necessary data.

For a more complete explanation of collecting perspectives, see the *Community Assessment: Creating a Vision (Part 1)* Resource Guide.



Case Studies

Once the area is defined, its data collected and analyzed, and desired attributes and concepts identified, a case study analysis can offer insights by comparing the targeted neighborhood retail development with other similar or hoped-for projects.

As is the case in any analysis, it is important to note similarities and differences as they may impact the implementation of certain strategies. But when conducting case studies and comparing similar projects, it is most important to note what worked, why, and

how so that the successful principles can be replicated. Similarly, if there were lessons learned or discouraging results, unearthing and avoiding them is another key to success.

A case study is usually a story told about a similar project in narrative form. However, it is also often useful to supply a matrix of common or expected characteristics to quickly evaluate strategies and compare and contrast projects. A sample is below.

Incubator Development Matrix

Organization	Services provided	Type / # of tenants	Physical structure	Selection guidelines	ED Affiliation	Resources	Financial resources	Outcomes
Hasting Industrial Incubator	Yes	Specific / ?	Yes; 44,000 sq. ft.					
Jackson Industrial Incubator	Yes	Mixed / 5	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes?	
Albion Incubator Program	Yes	Mixed / seeking tenants	Yes: 9,000 sq. ft.		Yes	Yes		
Central Michigan University Research Corporation Technology Acceleration	Yes	Specific / 7	Yes		No	Yes	Yes	
Southwest Michigan Innovation Center	Yes	Specific / 14	Yes	Yes; specific	No	Yes	Yes	
Tech Town	Yes	Specific / 18	100k sq. ft.	Yes; specific	No	Yes	Yes	
Whetstone Project	Yes	Mixed / 13 (6 clients / 7 permanent)			Yes	Yes	Yes	
Jefferson East Business Development Center		Mixed						
Booker T. Washington Business Association		Empowerment						
Michigan Tech Enterprise SmartZone (Powerhouse Incubator)	Yes	Specific/	11,.000 sq. ft.		Yes	Yes		
Michigan Tech Enterprise SmartZone (Portage Incubator)	Yes	Specific /	15,000 sq. ft.					

SOURCE: Vanguard Community Development Corporation: Small Business Incubator Study, Detroit. 2006. (<http://spdc.msu.edu/Link-Click.aspx?fileticket=QEXQNpu77VE%3d&tabid=249>)

HOW IS NEIGHBORHOOD RETAIL REVITALIZED?

The center exhibit lists the characteristics of a successful neighborhood retail area. A few of those concepts are discussed below along with other strategies.

While revitalization needs a person or a team to lead efforts, often a public/private partnership offers a good solution for leadership or involvement in leadership. A public/private partnership is a government service or business venture that is funded or operated by a partnership of government entities and one or multiple private sector companies. The balance of the government's regulatory power together with the investment potential of the private sector can make the most of retail development efforts.

To establish a vision for a multi-stakeholder visioning process, see the Resource Guide titled *Community Assessment: Creating a Vision (Part 1)*. It is important to reflect on the potential of retail in its current and future state and not its past. Retail areas of today have different needs and provide different services and products than in the past. In addition, the communities in which neighborhood retail developments exist are probably completely different than in yesteryears.

While the ultimate goal may be to increase retail, residential revitalization may also need to occur to support the planned-for retail. Successful neighborhood retail depends on high-*quality* residents, not

high-*income* residents. High-quality residential development is characterized by higher home-ownership rates including condominium ownership, mixed income households, and mixed uses.

Establishing the right blend of retailers is critical to the health, welfare, and sustainability of a neighborhood retail area. Creating a coordi-

Characteristics of Successful Neighborhood Retail

- ✦ Utilizes public/private partnerships
- ✦ Established through a multi-stakeholder visioning process
- ✦ Targets high density residential areas
- ✦ Walkable
- ✦ Provides convenient and adequate parking
- ✦ Clean, safe, and friendly
- ✦ Retail holds evening hours
- ✦ Chooses tenants carefully
- ✦ Uses regulatory and financial tools to attract investment
- ✦ Employs both short- and long-term sustainability plans
- ✦ Provides business services to specialized entrepreneurs (e.g., immigrants, ethnic sectors)
- ✦ Retailers target product selections toward a diverse customer base
- ✦ Retailers hire from the community and customize training and retention programs
- ✦ Retailers are engaged with and involved in the community

*Customers will walk
3–4 blocks to shop*

Examples of Successful Types of Retail

1. Grocery
2. Pharmacy
3. Discount department
4. Restaurant
5. Furniture
6. Hardware
7. Automotive
8. Movie rental
9. Bank
10. Dry cleaning

nated merchandise plan and implementing it through a quasi-public leasing and management agency is one such strategy. This agency would collaboratively develop the plan, coordinate the leasing strategy, and recruit tenants.

Inner cities are constantly changing. According to the Center for an Urban Future, immigrants account for an increasing percentage of population growth in major cities around the nation. Not only do immigrants add to the diversity and culture of metropolitan areas, but they also contribute to the array of restaurants, shops, and other small

businesses that can drive neighborhood retail development to success. Immigration patterns suggest that immigrant entrepreneurs are having a significant effect on economies in many cities and incorporating immigrant entrepreneurship into a city's broader economic strategy is wise. To do this,

- Provide business services to immigrant communities.
- Partner with local organizations that have credibility in immigrant communities.
- Explore initiatives that help local immigrant-run businesses export their products beyond the immediate locality.
- Promote the city's major ethnic business districts as unique destinations for shoppers from throughout the region.

Banks and foundations also have a role in fostering immigrant entrepreneurship with support of microenterprise organizations and by catering to the unique needs of immigrant populations.

To help the venture succeed, explore the opportunities that public regulatory and financial tools offer. Oftentimes, they can be the catalyst for revitalization. Additionally,

- Develop strong relationships with local financial institutions and nonprofits.
- Set up design guidelines and development standards to regulate not only aesthetics but also the type and operating hours, etc. of potential establishments.
- Implement Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) or Principal Shopping Districts (PSDs) as a revitalization (not redevelopment) tool when applicable. BIDs define a geographic area in which the majority of property owners and/or merchants agree to provide an extra level of public service in a specific area by imposing an added tax or fee on all of the properties and/or businesses in the area. Examples can include increased security, additional street cleaning, and marketing special events.

- Create a Corridor Improvement Authority (CIA) to allow a community to correct and prevent deterioration in business districts, promote economic growth, encourage historic preservation, and authorize the creation and implementation of development areas and plans.
- Use tax increment financing (TIF) in instances where there are major land holdings in need of rebuilding or where there is substandard or lacking infrastructure. TIFs use future gains in taxes to finance current improvements.
- Add "demolition by neglect" standards to combat deteriorating properties.
- Implement "friendly eminent domain" for use with property owners who might be willing to sell deteriorating property.

Finally, in managing for change, remember to treat neighborhood retail development as a sort of living entity that will grow and change with time. Constant monitoring and reevaluation is necessary to ensure that the targeted area is healthy, strong, and sustainable.

Mine that data!

Research suggests that one of the reasons that neighborhood retail has been overlooked is a lack of information; however, market analyses that are compiled to attract investors to an area can be done with simple census data, tax assessor data, and building permits. A recent analysis of downtown Detroit found the following findings that support the existence of a strong inner city retail market.

- Average household incomes (\$59,000) were higher than expected.
- New downtown residents are highly educated with 83 percent holding a college degree or higher. The national average is only 26 percent.
- Detroit has a large population base with 6,500 downtown residents and 74,300 residents in downtown and neighborhoods oriented toward downtown.
- There is \$1.5 billion in annual aggregate income for residents of downtown and the neighborhoods oriented toward downtown.
- There are 80,500 downtown workers, which make up 21 percent of the city's total employment.
- Fifteen million people visit downtown annually.

	Business Improvement District (BID)	Principal Shopping District (PSD)	Downtown Development Authority (DDA)	Corridor Improvement Authority (CIA)
	Public Act 120 of 1961	Public Act 120 of 1961	Public Act 197 of 1975	Public Act 280 of 2005
General Characteristics				
Amend district boundaries	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District lifespan	7 years ¹	7 years ¹	Indefinite	Indefinite
Cross-municipality	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Number of like districts	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Business/property owners input	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Residential input	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Municipality input	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Funding Revenue Options				
General obligation bonds	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Grants and donations	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Loans	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Local governmental funds	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Property revenue	No	No	Yes	Yes
Revenue bonds	Yes	Yes ²	Yes	Yes
Special assessments	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tax increment financing	No	No	Yes	Yes
Service Options				
Contract for district services	Yes	Yes	Yes ²	Yes
Event/activity sponsorship	Yes	Yes	Yes ²	Yes
General marketing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Long-range plans	No	No	Yes	Yes
Market research	No	Yes	Yes ²	Yes
Non-retail/non-general marketing	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Public relations	Yes	Yes	Yes ²	Yes
Retail marketing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Study/analyze metro growth	No	No	Yes	Yes
Property Management				
Build/buy public facilities	Yes ²	Yes ²	Yes	Yes
Ownership/lease agreements	Yes ²	Ownership Only	Yes	Yes
Property fees and rents	No	No	Yes	Yes
Construct/maintain property	Yes ²	Yes ²	Yes	Yes

¹ Option to review the assessment district after expiration.

² Some restrictions apply.

SOURCE: West Dearborn Business District Principal Shopping District Feasibility Study, Dearborn. 2006. (<http://spdc.msu.edu/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=oodAC8CfgQ4%3d&tabid=249>)

Revitalizing Neighborhood Retail
Community Spotlight

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

In 2006, a group of MSU students from the Urban and Regional Planning Program's Practicum class were commissioned by the Creston Neighborhood Association of Grand Rapids to assist in the revitalization of the Creston Neighborhood's Commercial District located north of the Grand Rapids' downtown.

The student group employed the following methods to gather data in order to analyze the current situation, compare it to a baseline completed in 2001, and make specific recommendations for revitalizing the Creston Corridor:

1. Socio-economic profile
2. Land use inventory including corridor classification maps
3. Survey of business owners
4. Market analysis

This information allowed the students to develop feasible recommendations that included an alleyway design. The students continually referenced the Grand Rapids Master Plan to ensure compatibility. Ultimately, they recommended that the Creston Neighborhood

Association (CNA) focus its revitalization efforts, including infilling of vacant buildings, on two main intersections.

The students' work helped build the foundation for the Creston Neighborhood Association to apply for and receive two AmeriCorp volunteers to implement some of the revitalization efforts proposed. In addition, the alleyway design concept was used to transform a typical, dark alley into a safe and pleasant connector between public parking and the shopping district. In collaboration with community partners, CNA has installed three murals and tile benches in the corridor, continued promotional efforts, and developed an annual car show in the corridor. The car show is now in its fifth season and CNA has successfully passed operations to a committee of corridor business owners. The Creston Neighborhood Association along with a group of business owners is now exploring a Corridor Improvement District (CID).

To view the Executive Summary of the Practicum report, [click here](#). For more information about the Creston Neighborhood Association, [click here](#).

“The students’ work provided the momentum needed to get the ball rolling on some key revitalization efforts to the business district in this neighborhood.”

—Carol Townsend,
Urban Community Development Educator,
*Michigan State University-Extension-
Kent County.*

MSU-Extension, as a community partner and invited participant, was instrumental in connecting the Practicum students with the CNA.

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