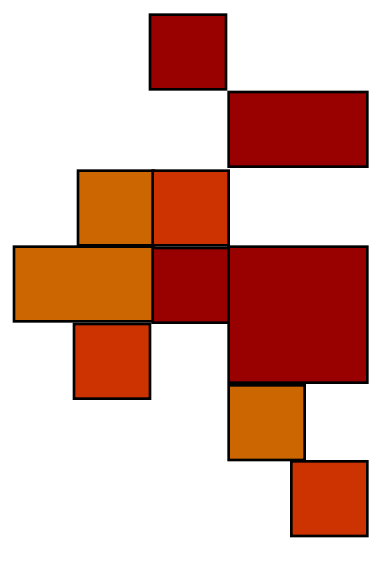


Boston Square Planning & Design Project Grand Rapids, Michigan



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Prepared for UP 494/894
Urban and Regional Planning Program
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early January 2008, a group of students from Michigan State University's Urban and Regional Planning Program selected the task of aiding the Oakdale Neighbors in developing an area specific plan within Grand Rapids. Throughout the process we worked closely with community leaders, primarily Tom Bulten of Oakdale Neighbors, under the guidance of Michigan State University's Extension office in Kent County with our primary contact being Carol Townsend. Our area encompasses the Oakdale Neighbors and Fuller Area Neighbors organizations and the Boston Square Business Association, commonly referred to as the Boston Square area. The area is in southeastern Grand Rapids, bordered to the north by Hall Street and to the south by Dickinson Street and Boston Street. The neighborhood extends east and west of Kalamazoo Avenue.

The planning process took our practicum group through many steps in a short period time. First was to meet with Tom Bulten and obtain his input and vision for the area. Mr. Bulten began the process by facilitating a SWOT analysis of the area with neighborhood members during a community meeting. The next step in analyzing the area was to conduct a block-by-block neighborhood analysis, as well as a parcel-by-parcel analysis along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor. This was done to provide a specific picture of existing assets and any potential redevelopment options. After collecting data from the neighborhood, we assessed the information and determined implications for the neighborhood.

One of the first things discovered was the neighborhood has a fairly stable population as evidenced by the small population decline between 1990 and 2000 as well as by high occupancy rates within the neighborhood. There has been little development and redevelopment in the area indicating that current neighborhood residents find the neighborhood to be a good choice as is.

Second, Boston Square consists mostly of single-family housing of which a large percentage of homes have three or more people dwelling there. Additionally, compared to the City of Grand Rapids as a whole, Boston Square has a larger population of 10-20 year-olds as well as 30-40 year-olds.

Third, the percentage of violent crimes that occur in the Boston Square area is greater than the proportion in the City of Grand Rapids. This is troublesome because potential residents will be more hesitant to relocate into the area if it is perceived as dangerous. The crime rates in the area will need to be addressed in a proactive way if the population level is to be maintained and/or increased.

Crime is an issue in the Boston Square area that results in a relatively poor public image amongst outsiders who visit the neighborhood. This image is detrimental to any future development as it reduces the likelihood that anyone would want to locate in the Boston Square area.

Our team recommends seven strategies within two phases to help the neighborhood move toward the vision of a vibrant neighborhood.

PHASE 1: IMPROVING LIVABILITY

Recommendation 1: Create an attractive pedestrian-friendly and bicyclist friendly environment that encourages walkability and public life

1. Maintain sidewalks year round
2. Line public rights-of-way and open spaces with benches
3. Add pedestrian-scale streetlights to Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor
4. Improve the image of the neighborhood through beautification projects
5. Add bike lanes to all road construction projects
6. Add bike racks/lock-ups to public rights-of-way and local businesses
7. Increase number of sheltered bus stops

Recommendation 2: Develop Boston Square as a community-oriented neighborhood through public activities and programs and the addition of park space

1. Host public events
2. Organize community clean-up events
3. Create “community tool-sheds”
4. Create a community park(s)

Recommendation 3: Conduct a feasibility study to rehabilitate an empty building into a multi-use community center

PHASE 2: CREATING MIXED-USE AND PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Recommendation 4: Within the context of an Area Specific Plan (ASP), pursue growth that encompasses the principles of Pedestrian-Oriented Design and Mixed-Use Development

1. Improve the quality of the sidewalk space along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor
2. Redevelop 1460 Kalamazoo Avenue as a Mixed-Use Center
3. Formulate development standards and guidelines with these specifications
4. Actively pursue and facilitate the development of mixed-use and pedestrian-oriented development
5. Consult the Grand Rapids Interurban Transit Authority with any development plans
6. Contract a consulting firm to conduct a retail market analysis of the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor

Recommendation 5: Utilize outside funding and work with developers to promote development in the Boston Square area

1. Apply for grants
2. Utilize economic development tools such as Corridor Improvement Districts (CID), and Business Improvement Districts (BID) to assist community projects and development
3. Partner with Nonprofits to Repair Dilapidated Parcels
4. Contact MDOT for a Walkable Community Audits to facilitate walkability improvements & planning

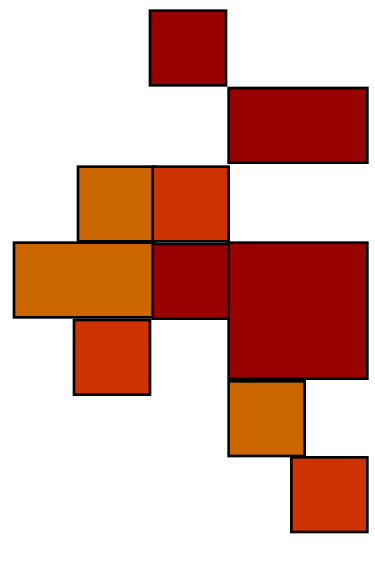
Recommendation 6: Adjust the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor zoning and enhance its image

1. Re-zone residential parcels to Traditional Business Area (TBA)
2. Work with industrial-use parcels to beautify frontage along Kalamazoo

Recommendation 7: Redesign the intersection at the southeast corner of the Kalamazoo Avenue, Hall Street, and Butler Avenue

1. Redevelop the parcels at Kalamazoo Avenue, Hall Street, and Butler Avenue

Through the implementation of these recommendations, Boston Square can most effectively achieve its long term vision.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Grand Rapids Practicum Group would like to express our sincere gratitude to Dr. Zenia Kotval and Jim Van Ravensway for their constant guidance throughout the process of developing and refining of the Boston Square Planning and Design Project. The group would also like to thank Carol Townsend, from the Kent County Michigan State University Extension Office, Tom Bulten, from the Oakdale Neighbors Association, the Fuller Neighborhood Association, Dale Fitz, from the City of Grand Rapids Planning Department, Rex LaMore, from the Michigan State University Center for Community and Economic Development, and Sharon Vanderbout for their assistance with data acquisition, provision of background information about the neighborhood, and for their enthusiastic support and sound guidance. Our report would not have been possible without the contributions of the above-mentioned individuals.

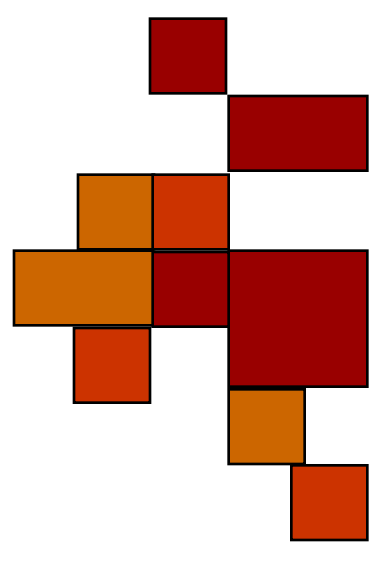
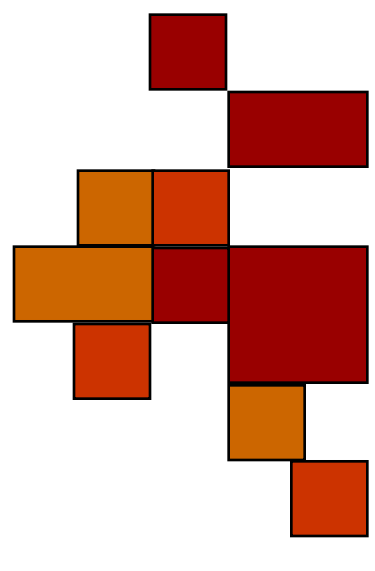


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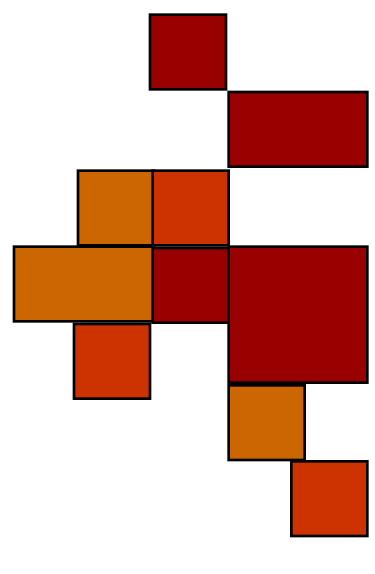
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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

PLANNING PRACTICUM

Michigan State University (MSU), from its founding as a land-grant institution, has a mandate to apply its resources as a world-class research university to everyday lives in pursuit of the public good. As part of this pioneering outreach, the MSU Urban and Regional Planning program organizes practicum, a once-a-year capstone class for all seniors. This class places students in real-world planning scenarios, allows them to refine the skills they have learned over the past four years, and teaches them entirely new lessons. Students work as planners, serving as consultants for entities that either cannot afford professionals or that have an educational purpose.

Students are broken up into groups of seven or eight and are assigned to a client with whom they define their project goals, execute their study, and present their final recommendations in a series of drafts and final presentations. Students apply theory learned from coursework to practice sound planning principles, giving a solid base for their future as planners. The work these students put together not only reinforces their education, but also helps shape our communities' future.

CLIENT INFORMATION

This project was prepared for Tom Bulten of Oakdale Neighbors, in association with Carol Townsend from the Kent County MSU Extension office, to further the planning and development of the Boston Square area.

Oakdale Neighbors is a Christian community development organization with the goal of creating “a neighborhood of grace and vitality by discovering, developing, and connecting skills and resources.” Formed in 1996, Oakdale Neighbors has been working diligently to protect the community feel of the neighborhood, while revitalizing the more distressed areas.

The Boston Square business area includes several different neighborhoods within the City of Grand Rapids. It encompasses the area along Kalamazoo Avenue from Hall Street to Boston Street and it spans the Oakdale and Fuller Area Neighborhoods.¹ A strong cornerstone of the community is the abundance of different denominational churches, which is helping in the attempted revival of the Boston Square Area.²

In 2002, Grand Rapids included the intersection of Kalamazoo Avenue and Boston Street as a potential “neighborhood mixed-use center” in their future land use map. Boston Square has mostly a minority population, which is something that defines the area compared to the rest of Grand Rapids. Currently, a plan called “Shaping Our Square” is in the development process. This plan calls for mixed-use development in the area to increase investment and hopefully bring more people to the area.³ This is part of a long process to eventually revitalize the neighborhood.

MISSION STATEMENT

The goal of the Grand Rapids Practicum Group is to create a document that will act as the vision for the renaissance of the Boston Square area. This document will create priorities for the realization of this goal and guide the neighborhood in its achievement. The expertise of the group in the creation of the document will lend credence to the advice this provides to the Boston Square area.

To invigorate the Boston Square area it is the objective of the group to alter the reality and perception of the area creating an enjoyable and safe neighborhood to live, work, and play.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Anticipating future development pressures, the Michigan State University Grand Rapids Practicum Group has collaborated with Oakdale Neighbors, as well as the Kent County Michigan State University Extension office to promote conscious design and development of the Boston Square area and use this report to further the efforts in achieving an Area-Specific Plan. The Area-Specific Plan will be used to amend the City of Grand Rapids' master plan. The practicum group has taken on the role of various tasks to promote and encourage the Area-Specific Plan.

1. Evaluating General Existing Conditions

A general assessment of the housing and business conditions within the Boston Square area using information gathered from GIS data, the City of Grand Rapids, the use of a Neighborhood Windshield Survey, and Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor Analysis.

2. Providing Future Corridor Development Recommendations

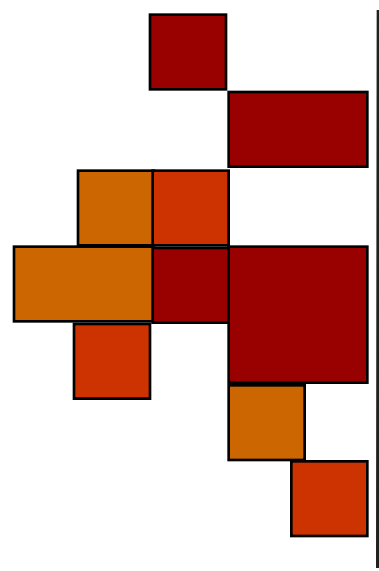
A set of recommendations based on existing conditions analysis and "Livable Winter Cities" concepts to enhance the Boston Square area. Recommendations focus on short term and long term neighborhood goals that begin with basic community organization projects then lead to long term projects, including a Mixed-use Center (MUC) within the neighborhood and zoning recommendations.

3. Evaluate Density Implications

A look at current density levels within the Boston Square area as well as implications of higher density levels for the area. This includes the construction of a Visual Preference Survey to provide visual examples of higher density neighborhoods.

4. Incorporating "Livable Winter Cities" Concepts into the Neighborhood

A review of "Livable Winter Cities" concepts and the impacts of winter weather in the Boston Square area. Includes design suggestions to create a more harmonious winter environment.



PART 2: BOSTON SQUARE AREA PROFILE

LOCATION

Oakdale Neighbors is a neighborhood association located on the southeast side of Grand Rapids, Michigan within Kent County. The Boston Square planning area is approximately one square mile and is centered on Kalamazoo Avenue between Hall Street and Boston Street.

Satellite Image,
Grand Rapids



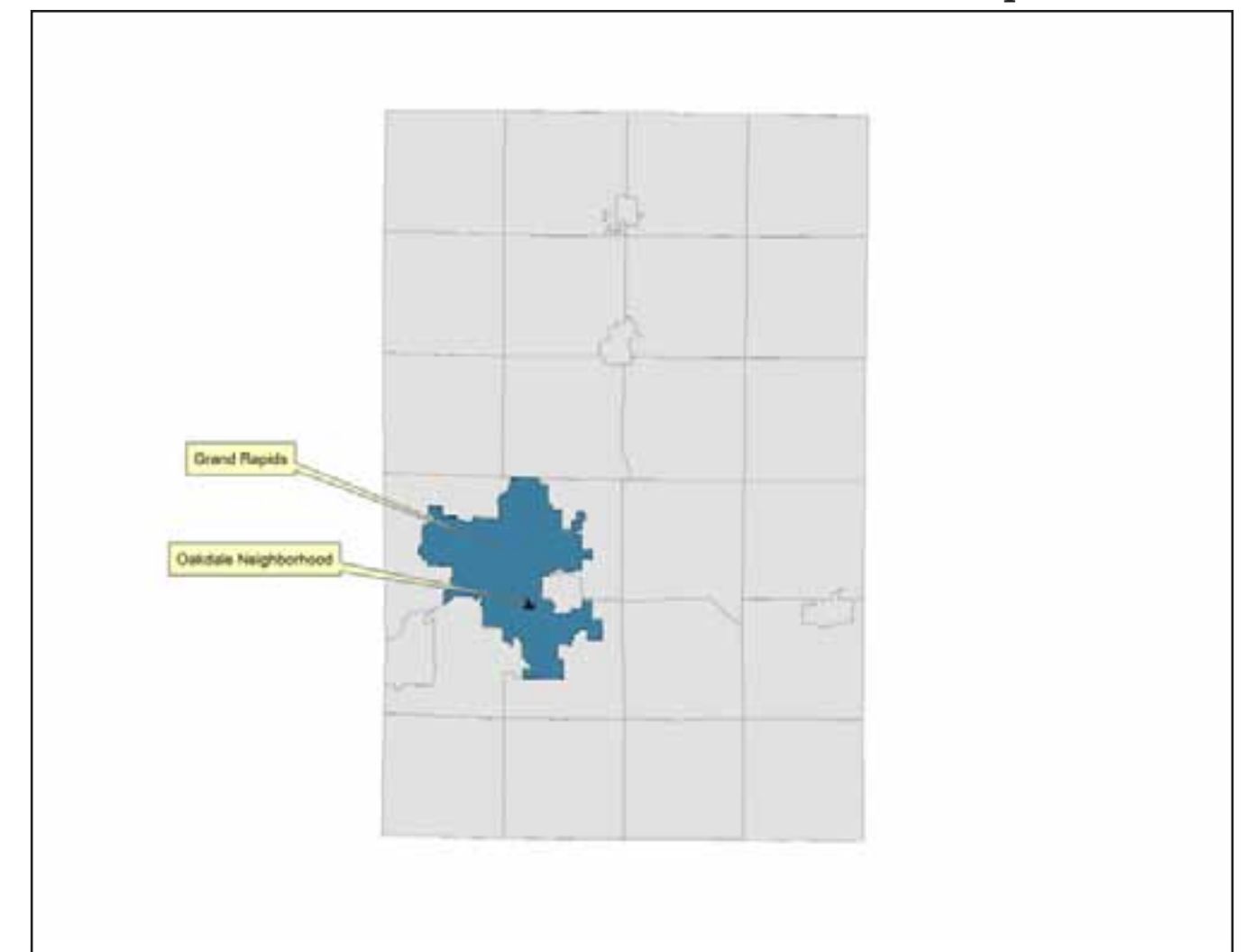
Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Kent County



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Boston Square Area



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

POPULATION

Between 1990 and 2000, Grand Rapids was one of the few large urban areas in Michigan to experience a growth in population. As the table on the right shows, Grand Rapids experienced an increase between 1990 and 2000 that amounts to 4.4%. However, the 2006 American Community Survey shows that this trend may be reversing as Grand Rapids lost population between 2000 and 2006. The city still has a higher population than it did in 1990, with an increase of 2%. This compares favorably to Detroit and Lansing, each with double digit losses over those 16 years.

Population Growth	Michigan	Lansing	Detroit	Grand Rapids
1990 Census	9,295,297	127,321	1,027,974	189,126
2000 Census	9,938,444	119,128	951,270	197,800
2006 ACS	10,071,822	114,276	871,121	193,083
% Change	7.7%	-11.4%	-18.0%	2.0%

Figure 1 - Source: 1990, 2000, and 2006 American Community Survey from the US Census Bureau

Population Growth	Grand Rapids	East Grand Rapids	Tract 35-Boston Square
1990 Census	189,126	10,807	5,853
2000 Census	197,800	10,764	5,816
2006 ACS	193,083	10,373	
% Change	2.0%	-4.2%	-.06%

Figure 2 - Source: 1990, 2000, and 2006 American Community Survey from the US Census Bureau

The Boston Square Area did not grow with the city during the 1990-2000 time period. The decline was small compared to neighboring East Grand Rapids, a suburb that lost 4%. Although the American Community Survey has data for 2006, it was not broken down to the census tract level.

Population stagnation can be detrimental to new development, but one must be mindful of the reasons behind it. This particular neighborhood has not had significant changes in population over the past 20 years because, in part, it has not had any new development or redevelopment in that time period. As will be illustrated later, Boston Square has a relatively high occupancy rate, so the problem does not lie within a lack of demand, but more with a lack of development.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC COMPOSITION

Regional Comparison

The City of Grand Rapids has a higher proportion of minority residents than the State of Michigan. The Boston Square area has significantly more African American residents, proportionately, than does the City of Grand Rapids and the State of Michigan. Ethnic backgrounds other than white and African American are similar to the city and statewide numbers.

Racial Composition	Michigan	Grand Rapids	Tract 35 (Boston Square)
Population of one race	98.1%	99.4%	96.0%
White	81.7%	69.5%	38.0%
Black or African American	14.5%	21.1%	54.3%
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.6%	0.8%	0.6%
Asian	1.8%	1.7%	1.7%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%
Some other race	1.3%	6.8%	5.4%
Population fo two or more races	2.0%	3.3%	4.1%

Figure 3 - Source: 2000 Census Data from the US Census Bureau

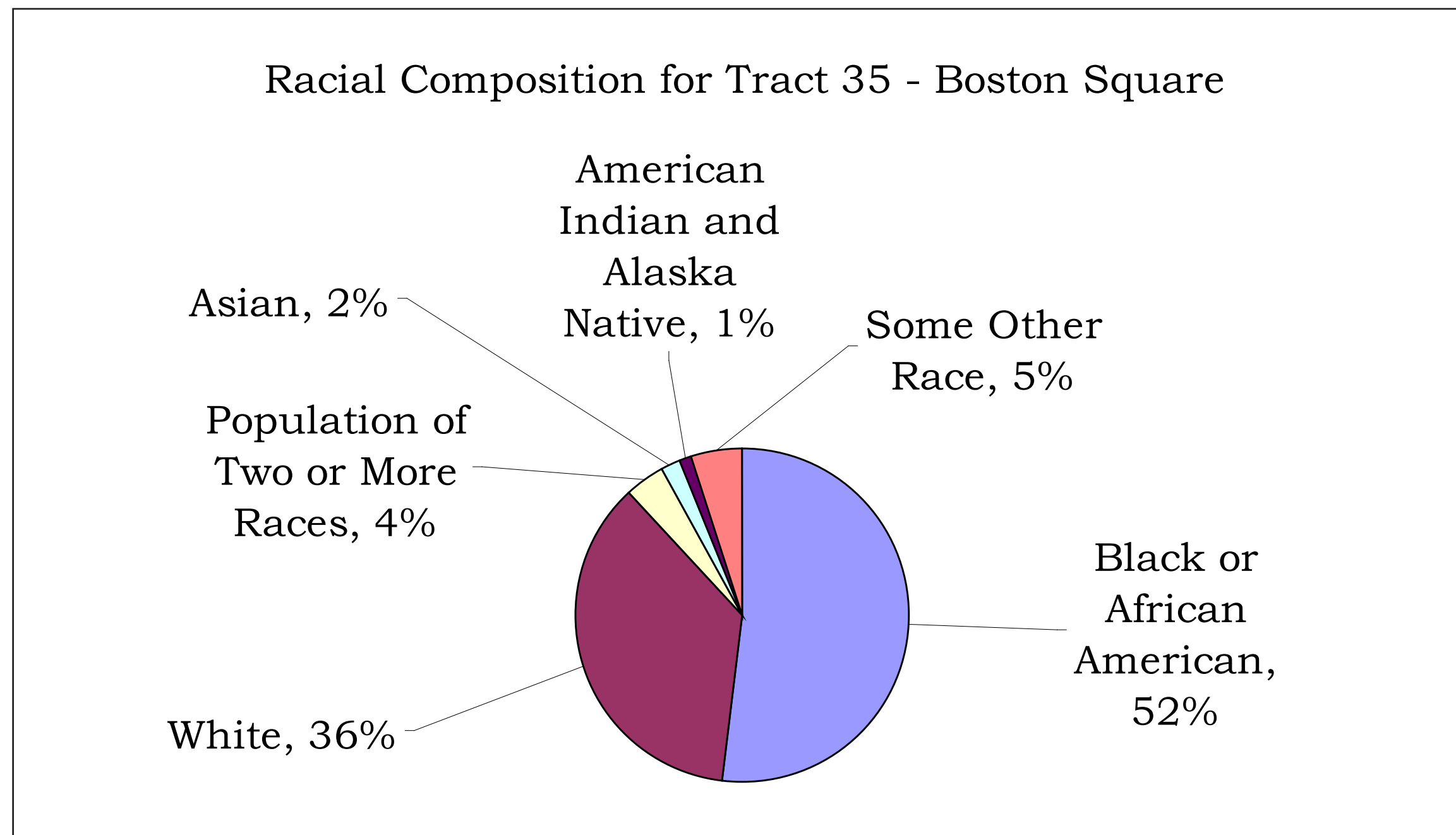


Figure 4 - Source: 2000 Census Data from the US Census Bureau

Local Racial and Ethnic Distribution

As this pie graph shows, Boston Square has a significant population of African American residents, almost four times the amount seen with the State of Michigan. Like the rest of Michigan, Boston Square has a fairly low number of Asians, American Indians and others. This composition is not uncommon in Grand Rapids and can be found in many other neighborhoods including Brikyaat.

AGE DISTRIBUTION

Age of Population

The age of residents in a community affects the type of services they require. Places with high proportions of elderly inhabitants may require special services such as additional medical care facilities, transit stops, etc., while high numbers of young children increase the demand for schools, day-care facilities and other child-related services.

Age Distribution

The Boston Square area's age distribution differs from the rest of Grand Rapids in two distinct places. Boston Square has two peaks – one in the 10-20 year old group and one in the 30-40 year old group. The City of Grand Rapids shows a peak in the 25-28 year old area. This shows the Boston Square area as having more family-aged persons than the rest of Grand Rapids. Because the study area has more families, it will require more family-related retail and services.

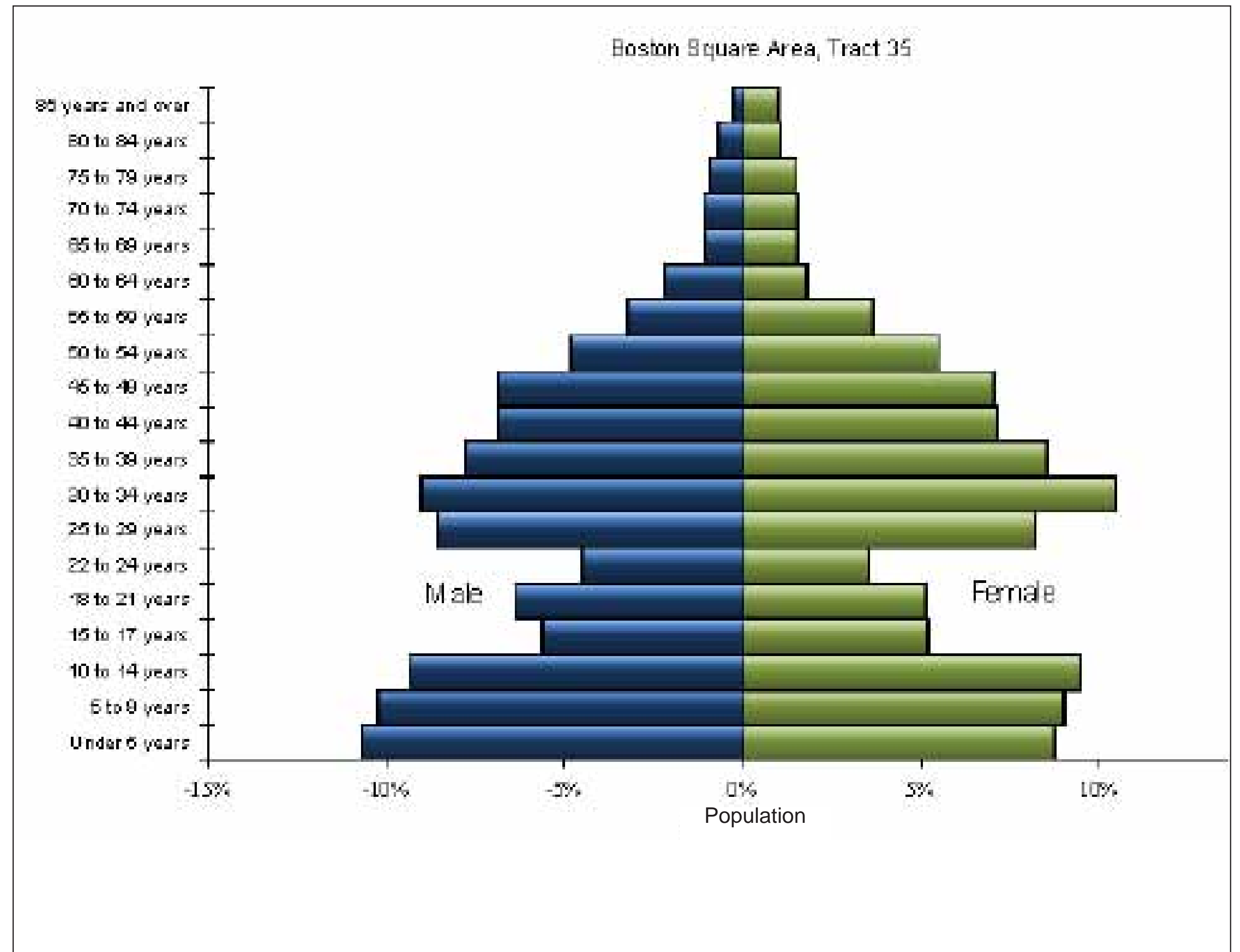


Figure 5 - Source: 2000 US Census Bureau

Median Age by Sex	Michigan	Grand Rapids	Boston Square
Both Sexes	35.5	30.4	27.3
Males	34.3	29.4	25.9
Females	36.6	31.7	28.1

Figure 6 - Source: 2000 Census Data, Tract 53 Kent

Median Age

Boston Square's median population for both sexes is lower than the comparative groups of Michigan and Grand Rapids. This can be seen graphically above in the high number of children compared to adults.

HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

Vacancy Rates

The number of vacant homes in an area can be an accurate indicator of the economic state of the area. More vacant homes imply a housing surplus, which drives down home prices. Large numbers of vacant homes increase crime rates and lower the quality of life for all of the neighboring residents. Everybody benefits when vacancy is kept to a minimum.

The vacancy rate in Boston Square is 5.4%, which is lower than the rest of Grand Rapids and in Michigan, for the 2000 Census. However, eight years of economic change has been sweeping over the state. Rising unemployment, subprime foreclosures, and other factors may have changed this statistic drastically since the census.

Housing Occupancy	Tract 35 - Boston Square	Grand Rapids	Michigan
Occupied Housing Units	94.3%	93.9%	89.4%
Vacant Housing Units	5.4%	6.04%	10.9%

Figure 7 - Source: 2000 Census Data, US Census Bureau

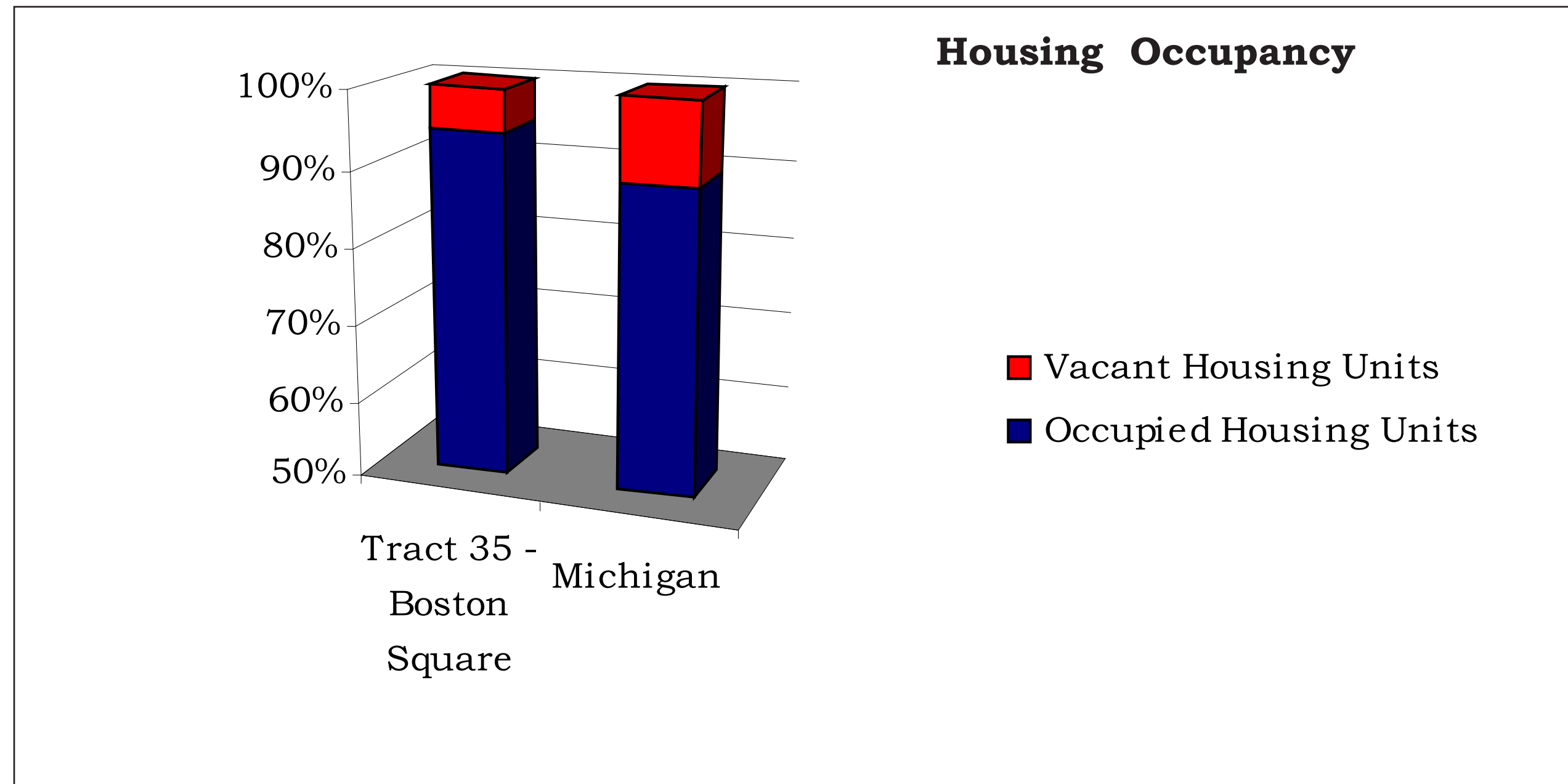


Figure 8 - Source: 2000 Census Data, US Census Bureau

Vacant homes have a negative effect on neighborhoods. If homes are left vacant for long, either by absentee landlords or banks as a result of foreclosure, they can quickly fall into disrepair. This not only damages the appearance of a neighborhood, large numbers of vacant homes can become havens for criminal activity, and may pose a public safety risk. The effects of the state's economic downturn will take time to show, but the neighborhood should concentrate on keeping homes occupied and on keeping any abandoned homes properly secured.

Year Structure was Built

The majority of homes in the Boston Square area were built prior to 1961. The housing stock in the area is aging and will likely require significant repairs and remodeling. Parcels without year built information are largely in the industrial and commercial areas of the neighborhood.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Year Structure was Built

Rent Asked

Residential rental rates can provide insight into the economic status of a neighborhood and will directly affect the value of rental properties. Rental property value is found by dividing the rent by a rate, known as a capitalization or cap rate. This rate is found by comparing the sale prices of rental properties to their rental rates.

Lower rent rates will result in lower property values. The City of Grand Rapids has a normal or bell-curve rental rate distribution, with a median within the \$400-\$500 range. Boston Square has comparable proportions in this range, but also has a proportionately high amount of low-income rental housing.

Boston Square's large public housing development may be the reason for this marked difference. Property values do not show one concentrated low-income area, but differing values from block to block.

The presence of the middle and higher rental rates within the neighborhood and area show the mixture that characterizes Boston Square.

Developers will not build new residential properties for low rental rates, and any new development could be expected to have rent rates at or greater than the median rate for the city.

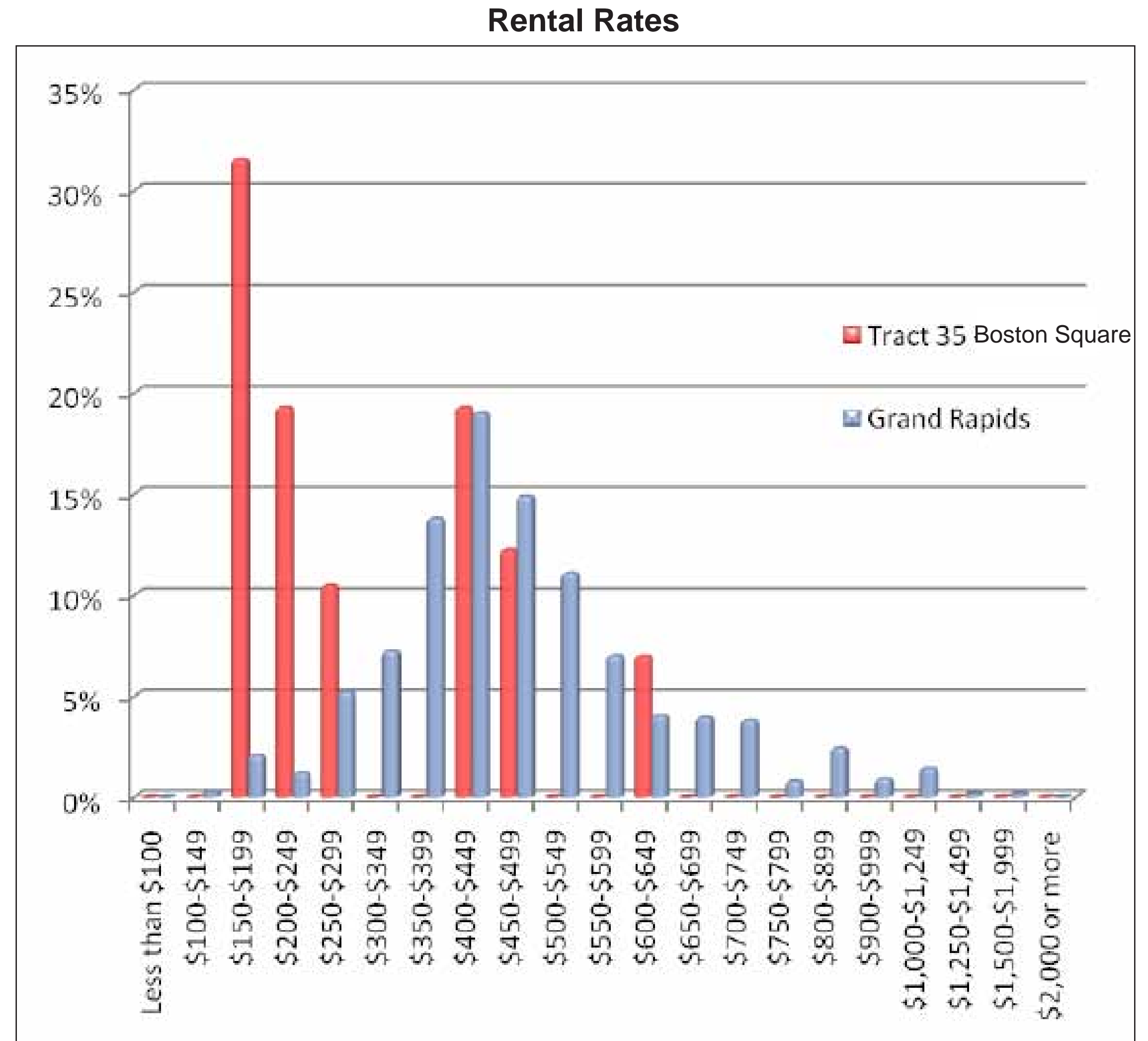


Figure 9 - Source: 2000 Census, US Census Bureau

Dwelling Units by Parcel

The majority of homes within the neighborhood are single-family residences. The notable exception to this is the public housing complex located at the intersection of Fuller Avenue and Adams Street.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Dwelling Units
by Parcel

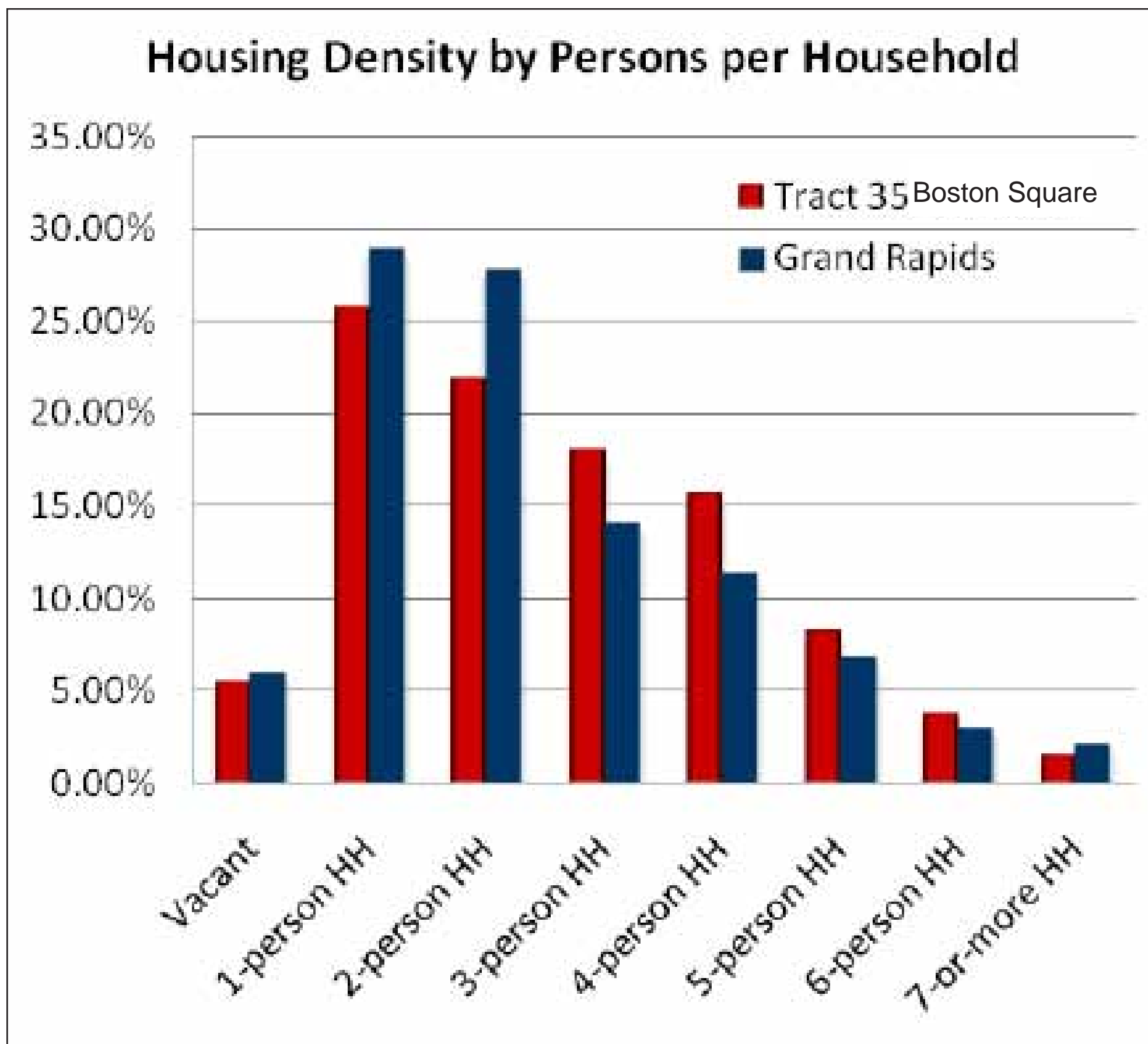


Figure 10 - Source: 2000 Census, US Census Bureau

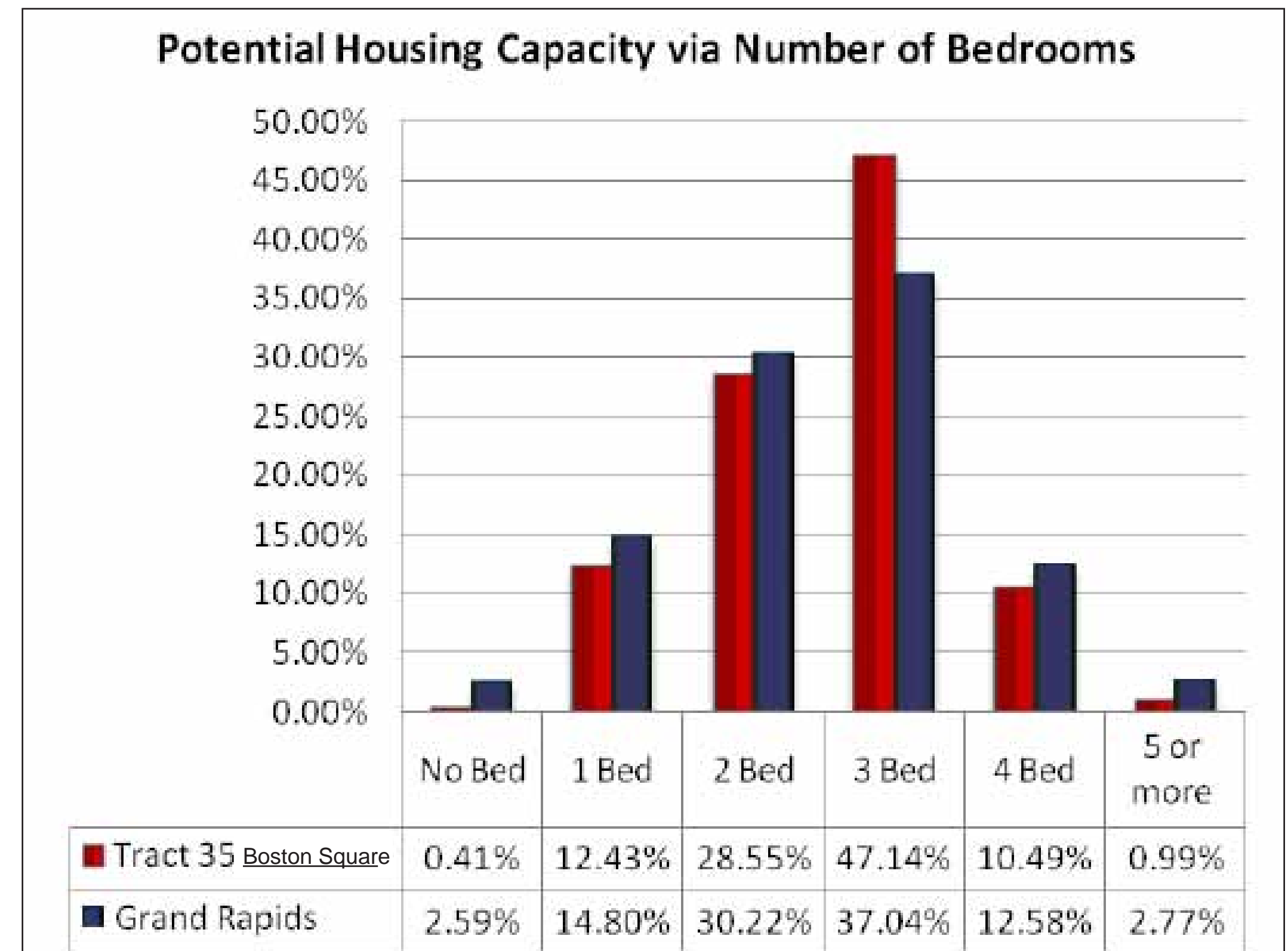


Figure 11 - Source: 2000 Census, US Census Bureau

Intensity of Occupancy

The intensity to which a house is used can be significant for analyzing neighborhood density. The graph to the left above shows that Boston Square has a larger proportion of homes with three or more residents than does the rest of Grand Rapids.

The graph to the right above shows that the Boston Square area has more 3-bedroom homes than does the rest of Grand Rapids. This is a typical construction standard for homes built post-WWII in middle class neighborhoods.

These two statistics, coupled with the high occupancy level in the Boston Square area, suggest that this neighborhood's population has reached a maximum, and any future growth would require additional development.

Families in Boston Square

Part of building successful, viable and vibrant communities is having a well-connected and diverse population. The most important social component in a community starts with the family. Families consume more than single persons, demand more diverse services, and provide stability to neighborhoods that comes with the social capital built through interaction. They also provide the social safety net that can help those that are struggling.

Families	Michigan	Grand Rapids	Boston Square
Average Family Size	3.10	3.24	3.19

Figure 12 - Source: 2000 Census, US Census Bureau

Households and Household Size	Michigan	Grand Rapids	Boston Square
Average household size	2.56	2.57	2.88

Figure 13 - Source: 2000 Census, US Census Bureau

The average family size is slightly smaller in Boston Square than it is in the rest of the city, but is still larger than the average size in the State of Michigan.

The average household in Boston Square is larger than other households in the State of Michigan and the City of Grand Rapids.

Annual Property Taxes

The City of Grand Rapids has a normal, or bell-shaped, frequency chart for property tax-dollars paid. The Boston Square area's frequency distribution is skewed in favor of lower taxes. This means that the median homeowner in Boston Square can be paying up to \$1000 less than the median homeowner in Grand Rapids.

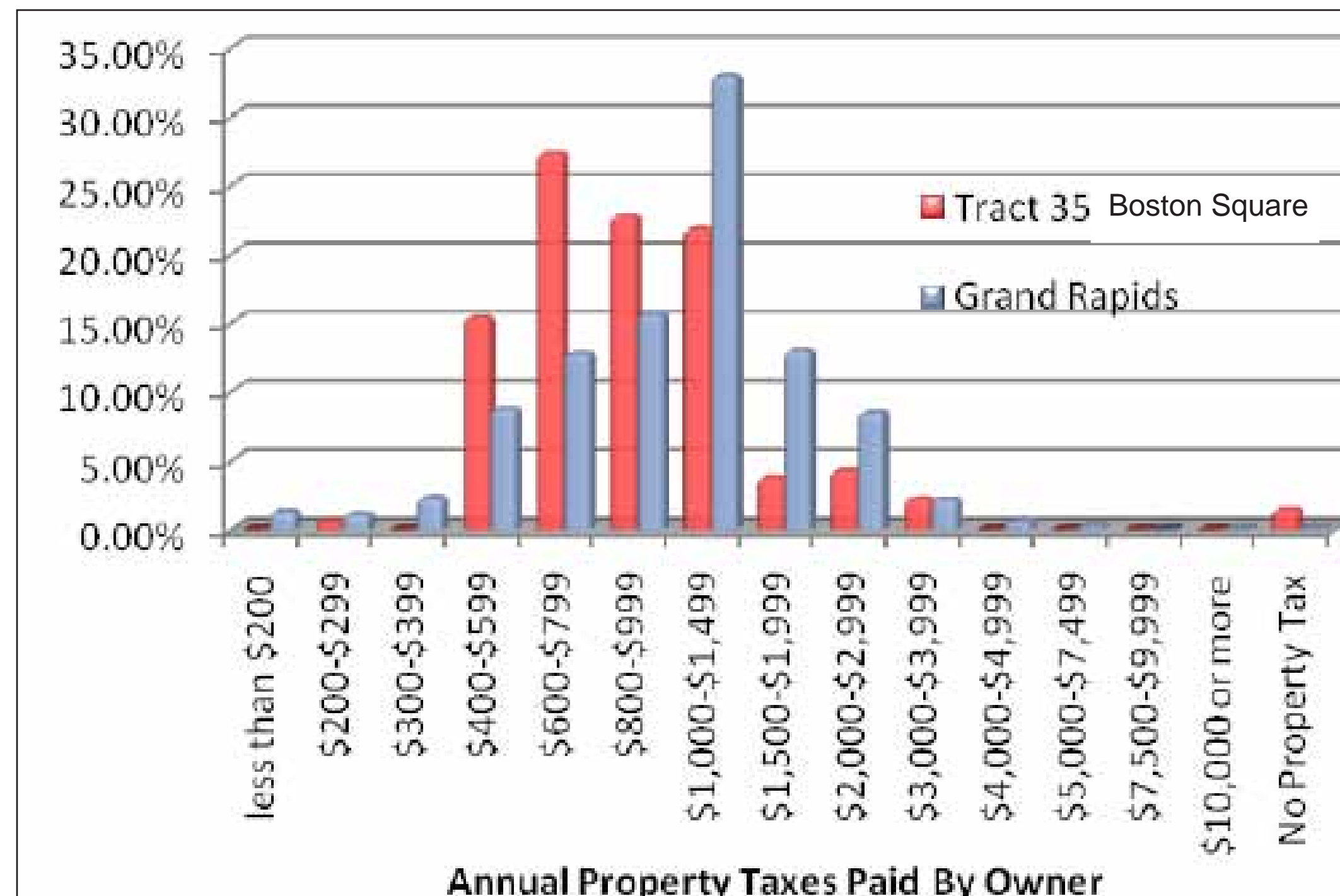


Figure 14 - Source: 2000 Census, US Census Bureau

INCOME

Median Income

Median household income is an indicator of wealth and is used here to compare general levels of wealth between the city and state. The 'Adjusted Median Income 1989-2006' figure uses data from the 1990 Census, 2000 Census and the 2006 American Communities Survey (ACS) with a linear trend extending from the 2000 census, as 2006 ACS data for Tract 35 is not available. This figure shows that, although the Boston Square area (Zone 1) has a lower median household income than the state of Michigan, it has a higher median income than the rest of Grand Rapids (Zone 2).

The homes along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor and the neighborhoods immediately surrounding are not mid- to high-income. This would be apparent to any visitor, and the map shows that this area has a lower household income than its surroundings.

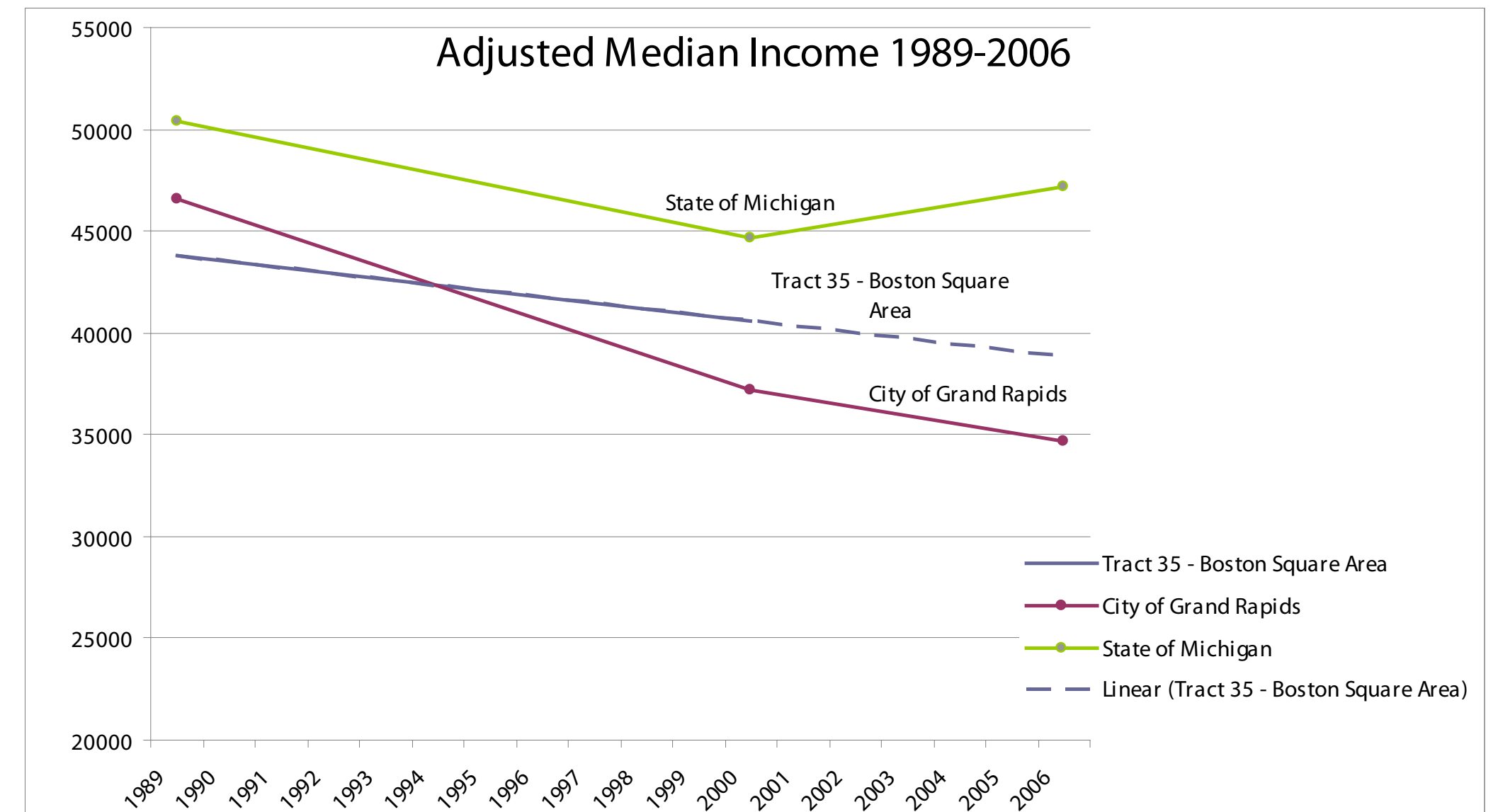


Figure 15 - Source: 1990, 2000 Census, American Community Survey, US Census Bureau

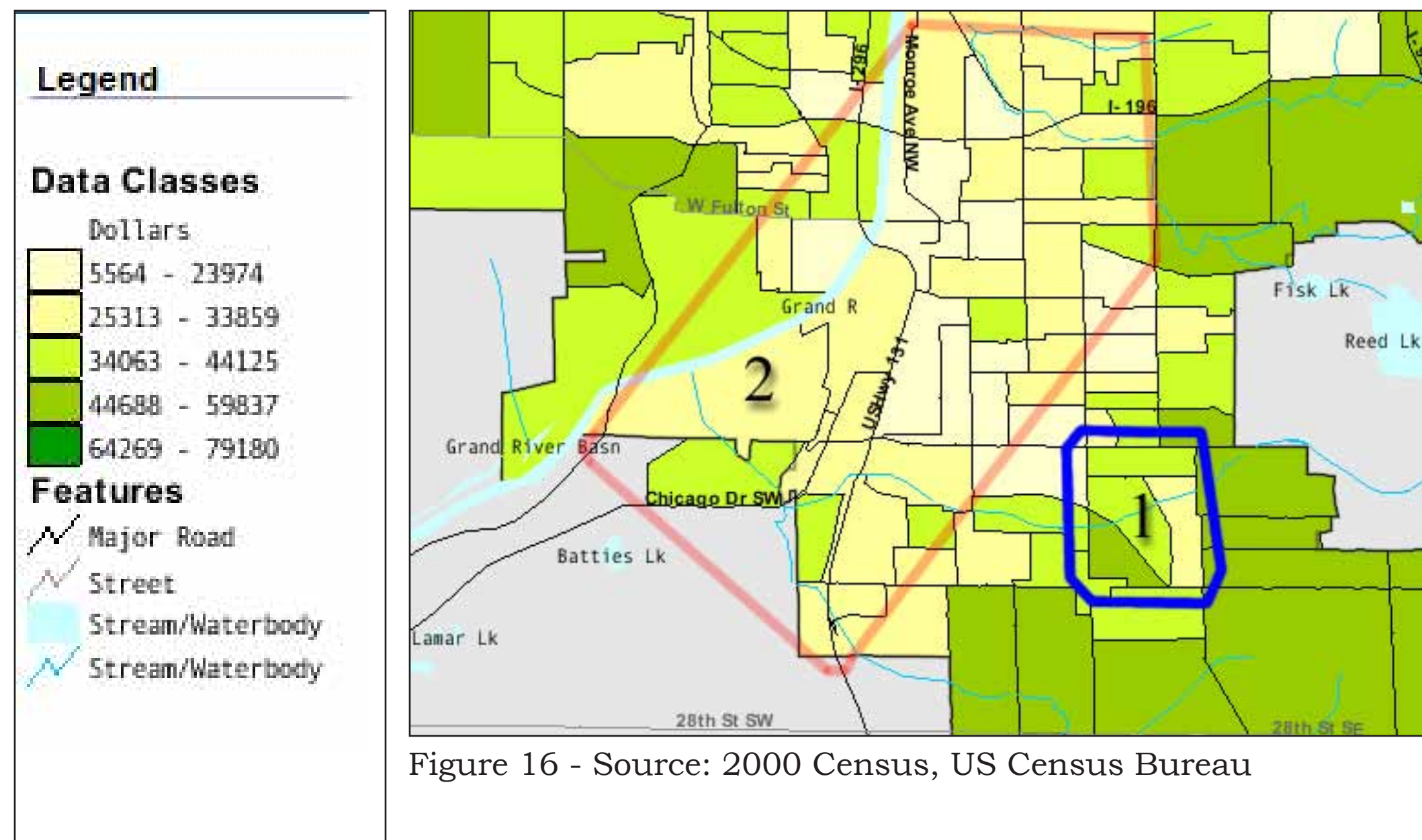


Figure 16 - Source: 2000 Census, US Census Bureau

EDUCATION

Educational Background

There is a strong correlation between educational attainment and income level. This becomes even more important as the state transforms into a more knowledge-based economy to catch up with the rest of the country.

The Boston Square area has less associate and bachelor degrees in proportion to the city and nation, but more bachelor degrees than the state. Boston Square also has more people without degrees when compared to the other groups.

On the whole, Boston Square has a slightly lower educational attainment than the rest of the city and country.

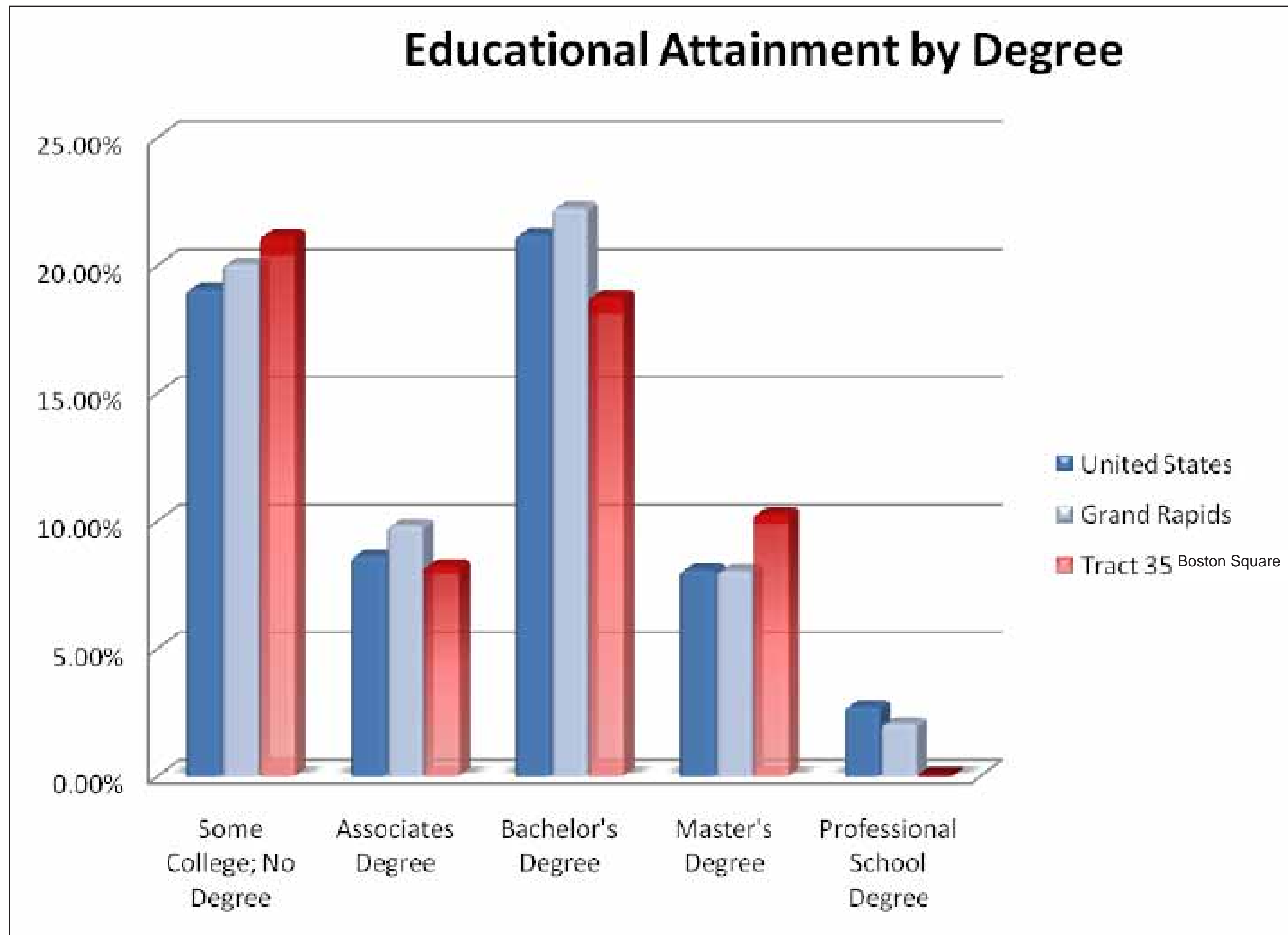


Figure 17 - Source: 2000 Census, US Census Bureau

CRIME STATISTICS

Crime Statistics

Crime can be a deterrent to neighborhood growth and economic development. Violent crimes include armed robbery, assault, murder and other offenses where physical harm has come to a person. Property crimes consist of larceny, burglary, vandalism, automotive theft and arson. The 'Other Crimes' category involve drug-related offenses, DUI, and other similar non-violent, non-property related crimes.

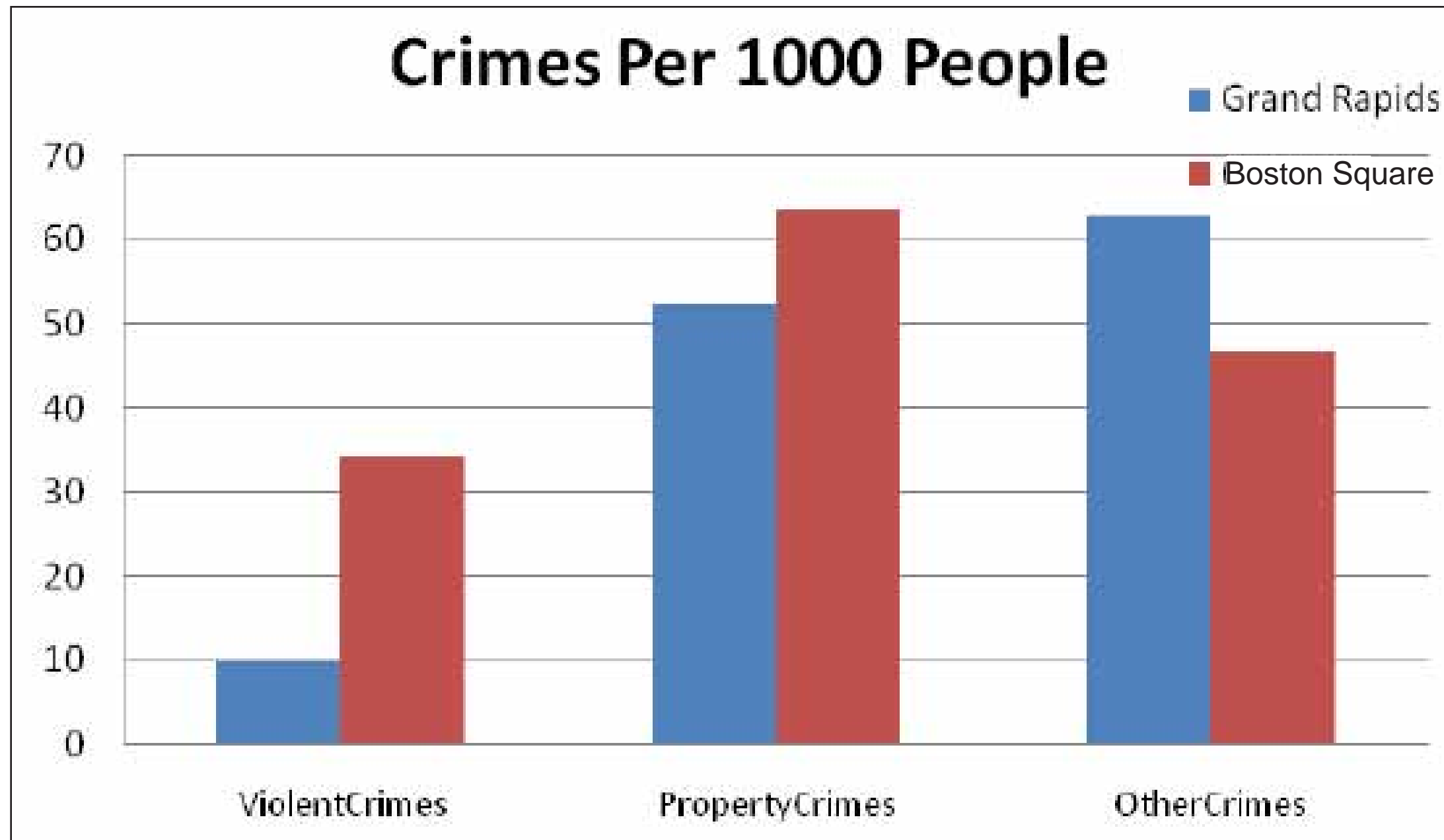
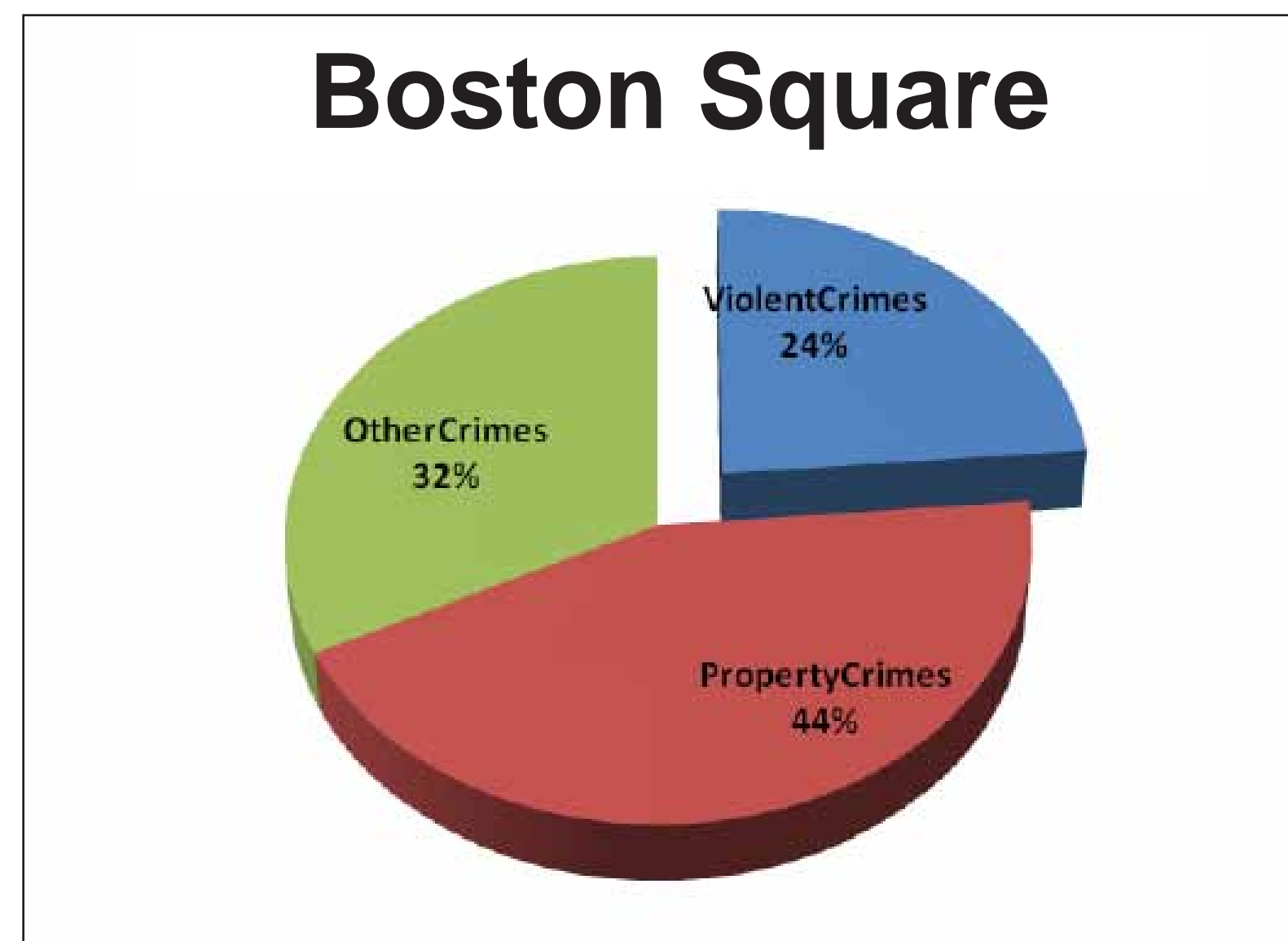
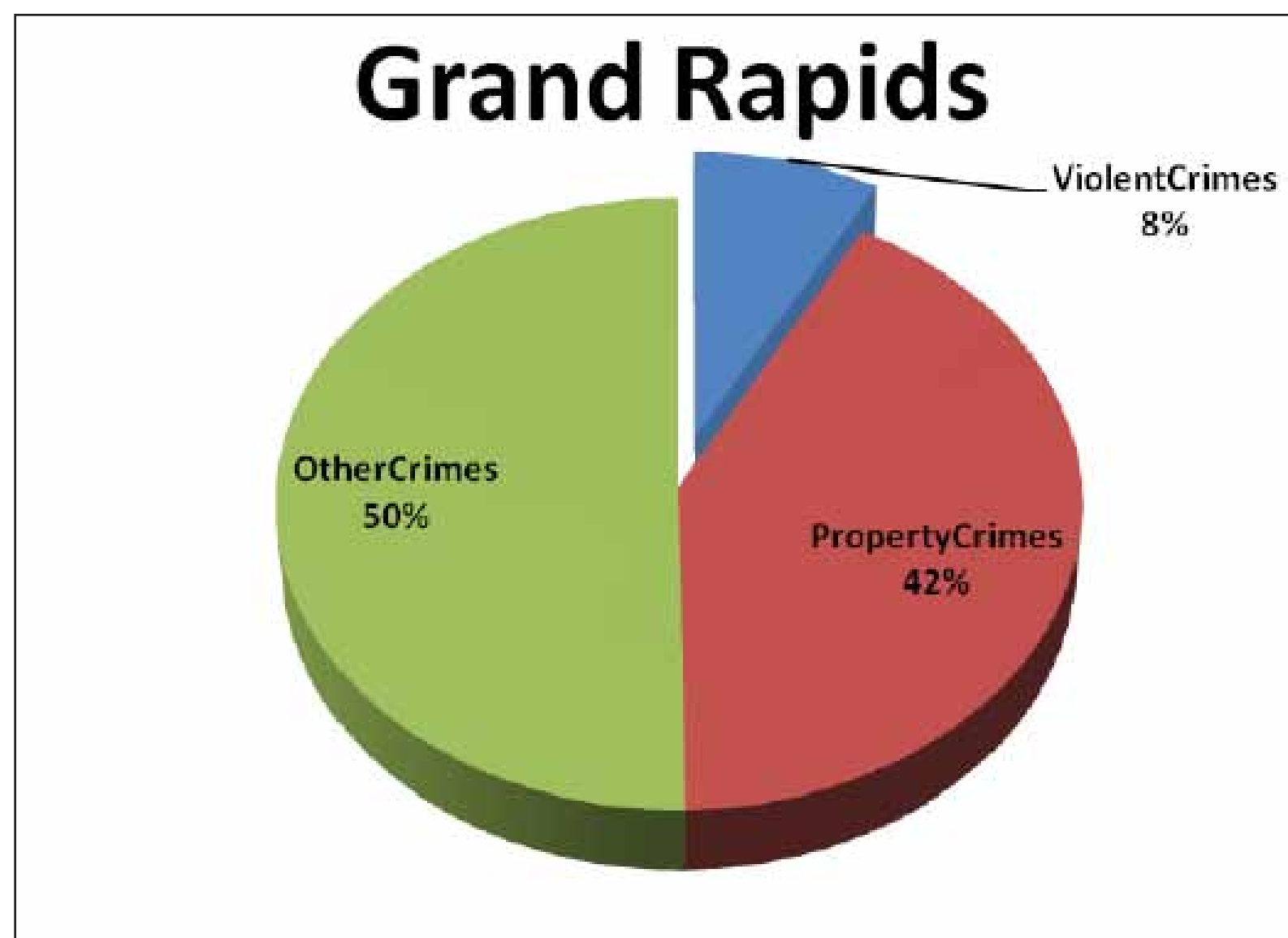


Figure 18 - Source: Community Research Institute (Oakdale) Federal Bureau of Investigation (Grand Rapids)

Boston Square has higher incidence of violent and property crime than the rest of the city, but a lower occurrence of crimes in the 'other' category.

Violent crime accounts for 24% of the crimes committed in Boston Square, three times the proportion for the rest of the city. This high incidence of violent crime is a deterrent to new development within this area and can severely affect property values.

Action should be taken to fight crime in this neighborhood. Neighborhood Watch, added police patrols, and engagement of local community organizations would go a long way to this purpose.



Figures 19 and 20 - Source: Community Research Institute (Oakdale) Federal Bureau of Investigation (Grand Rapids)

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is a critical part of community development. The movement of goods, services, and people are what our economy consists of, and sufficient access to these amenities can affect the economic status of an area.

Pedestrian

Pedestrian-friendly development is characterized by short distances between buildings, proper lighting, sidewalk accessibility from the front (as in storefronts), and often includes a mixture of land uses as well as green space.

Much of the Boston Square study area is accessible through sidewalks, but the most walkable areas are along parts of the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor and around the old elementary school. These areas have well-maintained sidewalks along much of their expanse and those sidewalks do not dead end or cross dangerous intersections without nearby traffic lights for safe crossing. The single-family residential neighborhoods provide the least pedestrian-auto conflict because they are lightly traveled and have sidewalks, and are thus very walkable. The least walkable part of the neighborhood is centered around several auto-based uses, including the light-industrial lumberyard, junkyard and shop offices the south-southwest part of the study area.

While Kalamazoo Avenue is walkable, it has much room for improvement. The empty lots along the corridor create unnecessary expanses to travel over, and infill development would not only provide added economic growth, but would make the area more pedestrian friendly. Auto-oriented businesses with large parking lots deter people from walking to them.

Additionally, walkable areas should be welcoming to pedestrians. The cyclone fences with barbed wire surrounding the taxicab garage as well as the expansive parking lots at the hardware store and Walgreens are not conducive to a friendly, welcoming atmosphere.

Lighting is also an important factor for pedestrian traffic during nighttime activity. Proper lighting can make neighborhoods feel safer and can help prevent car accidents involving pedestrians.

While all of these factors are important in helping neighborhoods be walkable, it should be noted that nothing is walkable without proper snow removal. Grand Rapids is notorious for its lake-effect snow, and Boston Square residents and business owners must do their part to clear the sidewalks to improve accessibility



Proper Snow Removal



Pedestrian- Automobile Crossing



Improper Snow Removal

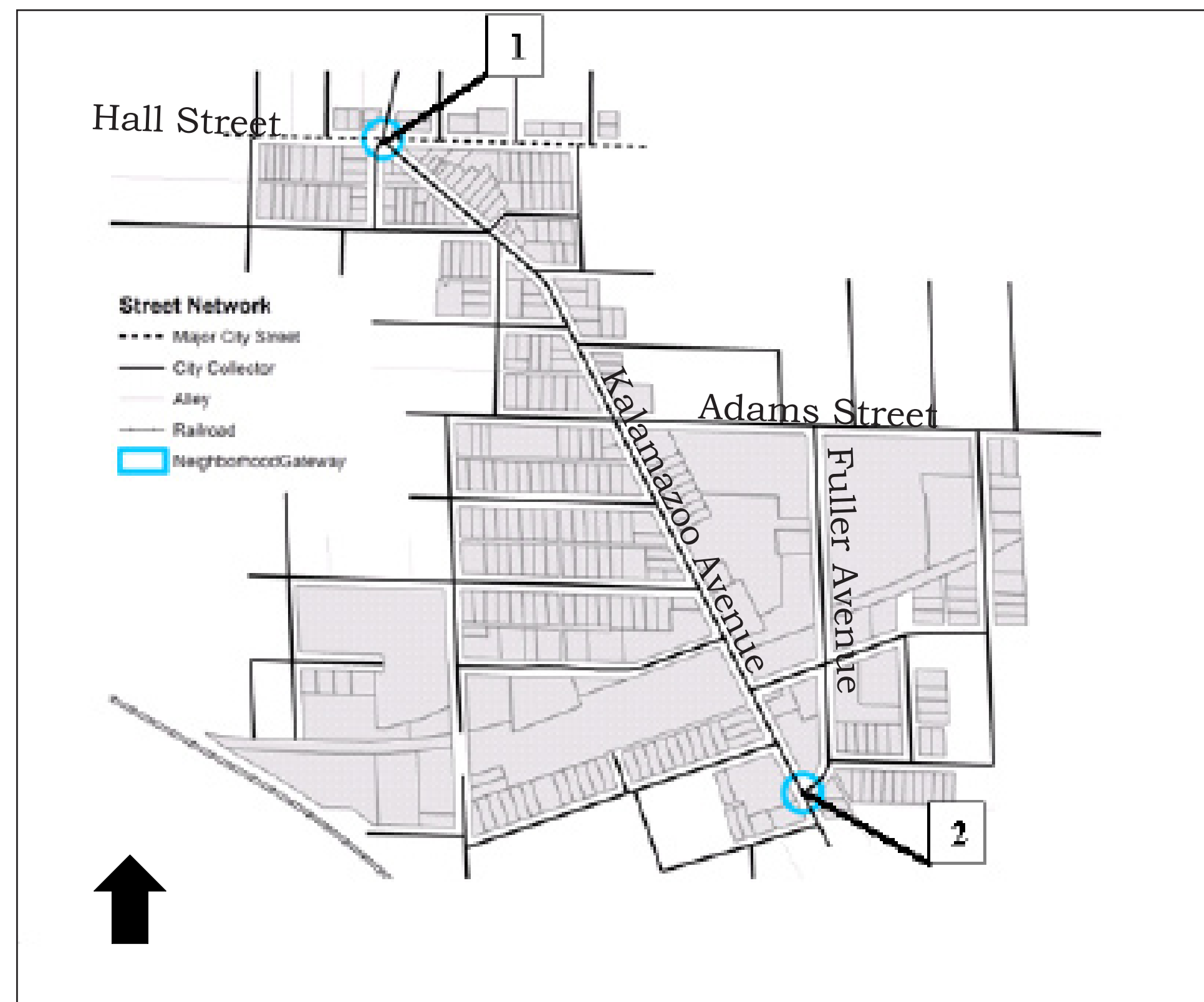
Automotive

Boston Square was built with significant automotive accessibility, yet has a rather confusing set of intersections. The main streets throughout the neighborhood are classified as 'city collector' streets. The primary function of a collector is to feed traffic into streets with higher throughput, known in Grand Rapids as 'major city' streets. The only 'major city' street passing through this study area is Hall Street, which bounds it at the north. Hall Street is the quickest route to US 131, and extends 1.5 miles in either direction until ending at intersections.

The 5-way intersection at Kalamazoo Avenue, Hall Street and Butler Avenue (See, 1 on map) poses a safety problem, and should be rearranged to better improve the safe and efficient flow of traffic. It serves as the neighborhood gateway, so it should be a high priority. Also, the high number of traffic lanes intersecting at Fuller Avenue, Kalamazoo Avenue, and Ramona Street (See, 2 on map) should be studied to find alternatives in minimizing the number of turns one would need to make to go through the intersection.

The Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor is most friendly to automotive uses. It is a two-lane road with very wide lanes, allowing for wide turning radii and the possibility of on-street parking. The rest of the roads in this study area, with the exception of Hall Street, are less wide and are typical for baby-boomer and earlier neighborhoods.

Some of the residential blocks use alleys to access rear garages. This is a traditional-style arrangement, but one that grows with popularity as new urbanist and neo-traditional development principles become more common. Using alleys minimizes the prevalence of the parked automobile, allowing homes to be closer together.



Street Networks

Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Public Transit

Having a diverse choice of transportation options can increase each mode's effectiveness. In addition to pedestrian and automotive options typical for places in Michigan, the region's public transit provider has a fixed route passing through Boston Square on its way between the city center and the Meijer on 28th Street.

The current service for this route is a 30-minute headway, or space between buses for Routes 2 and 4. Route 2 travels between the Rapid Central Station downtown and 44th Street and Walma Avenue, passing a Meijer grocery and a convenience store.

For bus transit to be most effective, its users must start and end their trips within a corridor that is $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile away from the bus stop.⁴ Transit use increases as distance from bus stops decreases. The illustration shows the study area's distance from the nearest transit routes.

Using this distance assumption, the green area is served exclusively by Route 2, and the blue area by Route 4. The light shading in the middle reflects an area that is within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of both Routes 2 and 4. Although it is within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of the transit route, pedestrian access must be improved in order for transit to be best utilized. This maximum distance assumes a very walkable environment. The current conditions are not walkable enough for the disabled or the elderly. Especially in the colder months, sidewalks become impassible, and crosswalks are too few. In the short-term, adding more crosswalks and improving sidewalk accessibility will greatly improve the transit's effectiveness.

Additionally, any new development in this study area will be directed along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor. This new development will add density and destinations along the corridor that will be perfect for transit, due to being within walkable distance of Route 2.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Rapid Bus Route/Stop

Public Transit (cont.)

While moving the bus route to travel down Kalamazoo Avenue may seem like a simple solution, it is complicated by the peculiar geometry of the intersections along Kalamazoo Avenue. Typical 40' and 60' articulated (bendy or slinky) buses have turning radii between 46' and 55'.⁵ This means the outer wheel can travel no closer than 55' to an internal pivot point to complete a 90 degree turn. The streets that the route currently travels are just wide enough to accommodate buses without having to travel too much into other lanes, but having a bus turn more than 90 degrees will cause it to either swerve into the oncoming lane or drive over the curb, both of which can be dangerous and cause serious damage to the buses.

Included in the ¼ mile corridor is Adams Park Apartments, a public housing project, on Fuller Street. This building has its own waiting shelter outside, which as a general rule, indicates average daily ridership is at least 25 riders in one direction.⁶

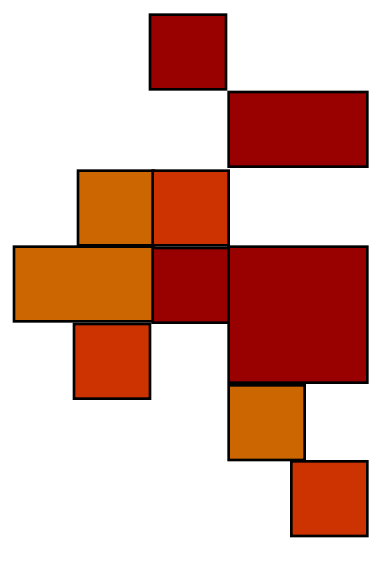
Development within the center of the green-shaded corridor will increase the effectiveness of the route. Increased density along this corridor will justify higher frequency bus service and, at some point, may lead to higher-occupancy alternatives to bus transit. Emphasis on high-density, mixed-use and pedestrian friendly design will create a neighborhood center that is accessible by all modes of transportation available in this neighborhood.



Kalamazoo Avenue



Bus Stop Shelter (Fuller)



PART 3: EXISTING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS

METHODOLOGY & STRUCTURE

The Boston Square area is a mixed-use, post World War II neighborhood experiencing some deterioration and distress. Upon initial inspection of the neighborhood, we noticed that there were inconsistencies in land use, vacant businesses along Kalamazoo Avenue, and some structures in need of major repairs. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the Boston Square area, it was first necessary to build a survey that would provide a general profile of the area and its primary commercial corridor, Kalamazoo Avenue.

In creating our survey method, the group met with our client, Tom Bulten, to determine the goals, vision, and concerns that Oakdale Neighbors association and the residents of the neighborhood have regarding the Boston Square area. Mr. Bulten expressed a desire to obtain Corridor Improvement District status for Kalamazoo Avenue and to complete an Area Specific Plan, which would comply with the requirements for the Grand Rapids Master Plan. He also wanted to know the feasibility of redeveloping Kalamazoo Avenue to create the character of a commercial corridor, thus avoiding inconsistent segments of residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial uses.

The group determined that a windshield survey was the best method to profile the current conditions of the neighborhood. A windshield survey is a method of analysis by which a person or group of people can obtain a general idea of an area based on walking or driving the area, and filling out a sheet or check list. To ensure that our group had an appropriate survey, we researched other surveys and included the most valuable elements of each model in our survey. After creating a survey, we ranked our priorities for surveying the neighborhood.

One of the major priorities was to assess the structure condition of the businesses and houses in neighborhood, particularly along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor. The group developed a rating system to assess the Boston Square area based on the characteristics of the housing and building stock; the system provided a consistent method to rate the buildings in the neighborhood. The rating system for the buildings is as follows:

- **Sound** - No visible signs of deterioration; nothing needs to be fixed
- **Minor Deterioration** - Peeling paint, minor shingle work, landscaping needs maintenance
- **Major Deterioration** - Structural problems, roof deterioration, broken windows

See, Appendix E for sample images representing these classifications.

The group divided the survey into two different parts: neighborhood blocks and the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor. For the blocks, the group drove through the neighborhood and obtained a general idea of each block based on the conditions of the housing in the area.

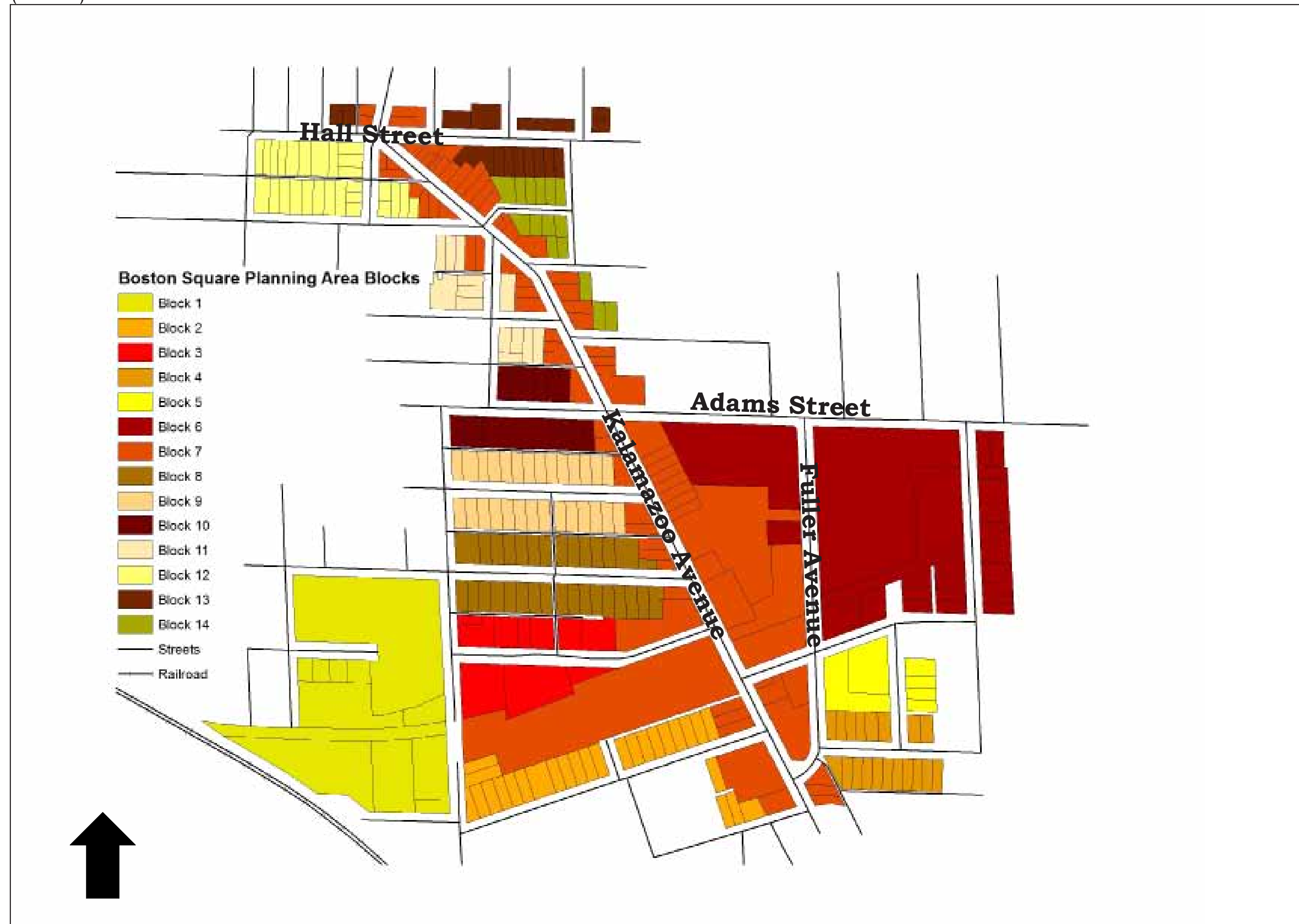
The client desires the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor to become a neighborhood attraction that will bring businesses, increased density, and mixed-use housing. Due to this desire for a business corridor, the group decided that it was important to collect detailed data specific to Kalamazoo Avenue. Thus, for the Kalamazoo commercial corridor, the group conducted a parcel-specific walking survey of Kalamazoo Avenue.

After conducting the windshield survey, the blocks were organized into groups based on similar characteristics and conditions of the housing stock. In addition, the practicum group determined that Kalamazoo Avenue, despite the presence of inconsistent land uses and variation in structure condition should be treated as a single block; therefore, in our analysis the entirety of Kalamazoo Avenue is grouped within a single block classification.

The practicum group found the windshield survey that had been developed and executed to be very useful in gaining a broad impression of the neighborhood. The Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor parcel survey provided a deep understanding of the specific issues requiring attention.

NEIGHBORHOOD WINDSHIELD ANALYSIS

Boston Square Planning Area
(Blocks)



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

The Boston Square Planning area extends both east and west of Kalamazoo Avenue. Since data needed to be gathered for the entire neighborhood, it was logical to subdivide the area into blocks based on the street grid. Each block is centered around one street. This was more efficient than parcel-by-parcel collection and still yields the detailed data necessary to assess the current neighborhood conditions.

BLOCK 1

Surrounding Streets: Evergreen Street and Blaine Avenue

Analysis Summary

Block 1 is bound by Evergreen Street and Blaine Avenue and falls within the southwestern corner of our planning area. The block's primary land use is industrial; characterized by light industrial metal working shops. The block also includes a vacant elementary school that occupies a substantial portion of the block group. Block 1 is not pedestrian or resident friendly.

Implications

The large industrial parcels are an asset to the area, allowing development that requires extensive real estate to occur easily without the need for individual parcel buy up and compilation. A preexisting school structure in this block also provides a starting point for a large-scale use or combined multiuse facility. These two elements make this block an ideal candidate for larger revitalization efforts.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Block 1



Typical housing stock in area



Industrial land use



Closed elementary school

BLOCK 2

Surrounding Street: Boston Street

Analysis Summary

Block 2 is on the southern edge of the planning area and runs along Boston Street. This area is primarily residential and earned an overall assessment rating of fair quality. The area housing is comprised mostly of single-family units that were assessed as needing minor repairs. The street condition is fair, with adequate street lighting and signage.

Implications

The housing stock in this block is in moderately good condition and is in close proximity to neighborhood retail. These two assets create a residential section that is well suited to its existing land use. Existing investment in the houses of this area has been moderate and will likely see improvement over time.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Block 2



View of the streetscape



Rear business parking



Typical housing stock

BLOCK 3

Surrounding Streets: Cottage Grove Street and Blaine Avenue

Analysis Summary

Block 3 is bordered by Cottage Grove Street and Blaine Avenue. The land use within this block is entirely industrial. The building stock is reported as having major deterioration, however the streets are well maintained and in new condition. Some additional aspects of the area that could be improved include the lack of sidewalks and lots with abandoned cars within sight.

Implications

The quality of the existing infrastructure makes this block prime for redevelopment and revitalization. The existing industrial uses are not at their highest capacity and existing structures are in poor condition. Construction of new or renovation and repair of existing structures combined with new roads and infrastructure would create a draw for potential new industrial uses and reinvestment in those existing parcels.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Block 3



Rear industrial parking



Industrial land use



Typical view of block

BLOCK 4

Surrounding Street: Boston Street

Analysis Summary

Block 4 is primarily located along Boston Street and is within the southeastern corner of the planning area. This area received an assessment of good quality. The area was assessed as being in good condition because the housing that is primarily single-family detached was in sound condition. The streets' curbs and sidewalks were all in good condition with adequate streetlights and signage.

Implications

The existing land use of this area is exclusively residential that is well maintained. This pattern shows that the current land use of this block is successful. It is best to maintain this status as daily living amenities are close enough for walking, public transit or short drives.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Block 4



Sidestreet in neighborhood



Streetscape of block



Typical example of housing on block

BLOCK 5

Surrounding Streets: Silver Creek Avenue and Boston Street

Analysis Summary

Block 5 is located on Silver Creek Avenue, which shares a three-way intersection with Boston Street. The area's primary land use is residential, but it also has a portion of commercial property as well. This area received an overall assessment of fair. This rating occurred due to having housing that was in need of minor repairs, no sidewalks, streets in poor condition and unattractive views of the commercial storage lot.

Implications

This block has two main existing land uses, neither of which is optimal. Industrial land use lowers the value of existing residential units, while the use of this land for residential results in more scattering of industrial uses in the surrounding areas. By concentrating on optimizing one land use in this block, owners of either type can avoid being a nuisance to one another.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Block 5



Open lot in neighborhood



Typical example of housing on block



Commercial land use in area

BLOCK 6

Surrounding Streets: Fuller Avenue, Calvin Avenue, Adams Street and Ramona Street

Analysis Summary

Block 6 is very large containing properties facing both Fuller and Calvin Avenues and is bordered to the north by Adams Street and to the south by Ramona Street. This area has three land uses present: residential, commercial, and institutional. The type of residential housing also ranges from single-family detached to high volume multifamily, all of which are in sound condition. The area is accented with good sidewalk conditions. The drainage district parcel and the school provide a substantial amount of green space.

Implications

The varied natures of the land uses in this block do not create any nuisances so there is no need to separate or focus on one type. The sound condition of housing stock shows that this area does not suffer from disinvestment and provides a positive example of compatible mixed-use. It is likely that investment in any one of the land use types in this block would have a synergistic effect.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Block 6



Adams Parks Apartments, public housing



Typical example of housing stock



Commercial use in block (car wash)

BLOCK 7

See, Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor analysis.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor

BLOCK 8

Surrounding Street: Evergreen Street

Analysis Summary

Block 8 is composed of the properties along Evergreen Street and is of residential land use. The housing stock is made up of single-family detached houses that are in sound condition. There are open lots that could be utilized as green space. This block also includes a community asset, the Oakdale United Methodist Church. Thus, for the reasons stated above, Block 8 has been assessed as good quality.

Implications

The high quality of the housing stock shows that the market for this land use in the area exists. It would be highly beneficial to continue supporting the trend of investment in this block with the intention of creating a spill over into the surrounding area.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Block 8



Typical housing stock in area



Church



Vacant lot

BLOCK 9

Surrounding Street: Oakdale Street

Analysis Summary

Block 9 consists of the properties that are located on Oakdale Street. The properties along this street are of residential land use. Like most of the other housing stock in the area, they are single-family detached and exhibit minor deterioration, requiring repair. This block was rated fair quality, in part, due to having poor lighting and vacant housing.

Implications

Poor lighting and vacant housing in this block may be contributing to a cycle of disinvestment. Its proximity to other blocks with better housing condition makes it possible that revitalization could spill over into this block.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Block 9



Typical housing stock in area



Vacant lot



Typical housing stock in area

BLOCK 10

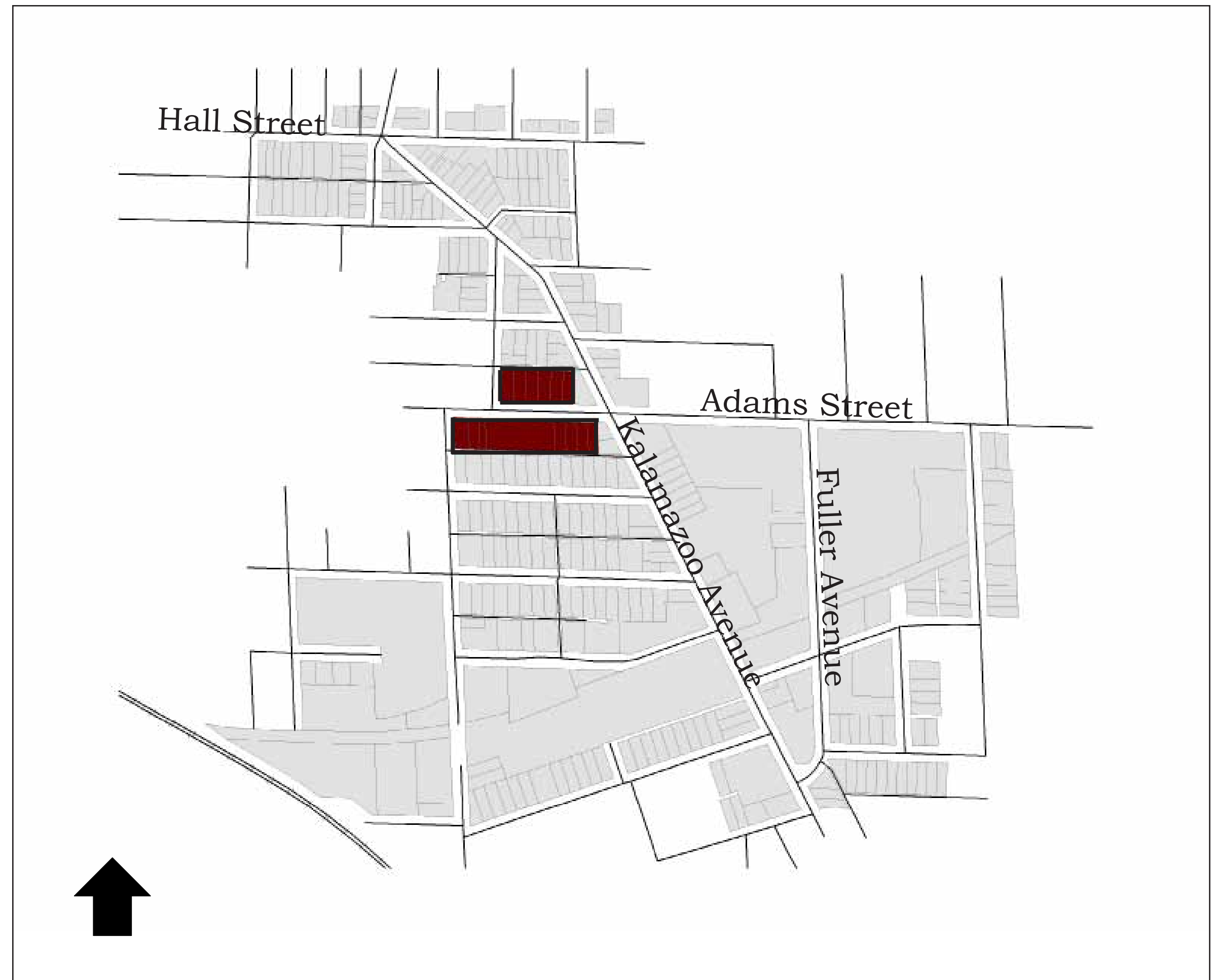
Surrounding Street: Adams Street

Analysis Summary

Block 10 is on Adams Street west of Kalamazoo Avenue. This block is largely single-family detached residential, requiring minor repairs. Unfortunately, the sidewalks in this area are in poor condition and the streets are only in fair condition. The major asset this block possesses is a church.

Implications

The poor condition of housing stock and infrastructure makes this block an unlikely choice for future residents. The current situation may be representative of cyclic disinvestment. Changes to sidewalks and lighting could create an environment where available housing attracts new investment in improved quality of housing stock.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Block 10



Typical housing stock in area



Church



Commercial property

BLOCK 11

Surrounding Streets: Ewing Avenue, Temple Street and Hancock Street

Analysis Summary

Block 11 is entirely residential and has both single-family detached and multi-family houses with 2-4 units. This area includes some of the newer housing in the Boston Square area, but it also has a portion that is in need of minor repairs. The area has adequate streetlights and signage and therefore, has been determined to be in fair quality.

Implications

Newer housing shows a market for properties in this area. The existing mix of single and multi-family units highlights that multiple types of housing can coexist and can be an option for the area.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Block 11



Typical housing stock in area



Typical housing stock in area



Typical housing stock in area

BLOCK 12

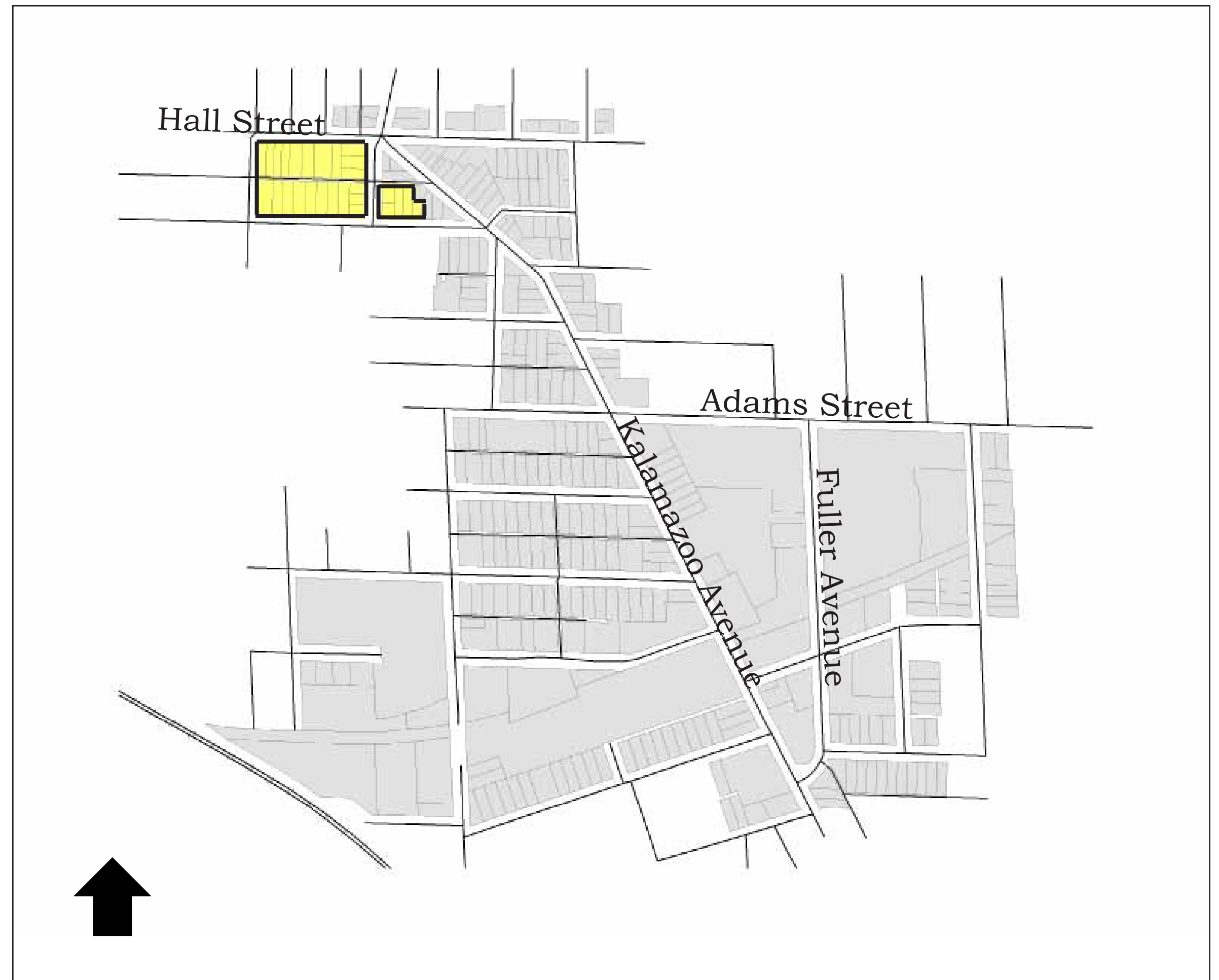
Surrounding Streets: Hall Street and Temple Street

Analysis Summary

Block 12 is entirely residential in land use and its parcels face both Hall Street or Temple Street. The properties are all single-family detached. The housing units here are in need of minor repairs and currently rated as being of fair quality.

Implications

Housing in this block received a fair rating showing room for improvement. Due to being located near a gateway into the community, these units provide a statement about the neighborhood on the whole and their improvement would benefit the entire area.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Block 12



Typical housing stock in area



Typical housing stock in area



Typical housing stock in area

BLOCK 13

Surrounding Street: Hall Street

Analysis Summary

Block 13 is made up of the properties that face Hall Street and are not adjacent to Kalamazoo Avenue. Hall Street is a “major city” street and therefore, characterizes this block differently from the other streets in the neighborhood. This block is made up of residential and commercial properties. Most of the buildings on this block are in need of minor repairs. The overall assessment of the block showed a quality rating of fair.

Implications

This end of the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor has not been the site of new commercial development and this indicates a lack of market for this land. The vacant buildings may have a negative effect on surrounding residential property and contribute to the potential for cyclic disinvestment.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Block 13



Typical housing stock in area



Abandoned Key Shop



Example of steep terrain

BLOCK 14

Surrounding Streets: Toren Court and Alto Avenue

Analysis Summary

Block 14 is composed of the properties on Toren Court and Alto Avenue. This is a small block that is entirely residential, where all of the properties are in need of minor repairs.

Implications

This residential area suffers from some instances of disrepair. Its proximity to Block 13 may indicate a spill over of disinvestment stemming from abandoned commercial use buildings.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Block 14



Typical housing stock in area



Large open lot



Typical housing stock in area

Existing Block Land Use

The Boston Square area has a wide range of land uses. The area surrounding Kalamazoo Avenue (the blocks) is of residential (green), industrial (maroon), institutional (teal) and religious (purple) uses. The majority of the neighborhood is residential. Industrial uses lie south of Adams Street. A parcel with an institutional land use is located on Fuller Avenue (south of Adams Street). There are also four churches are located in the area.



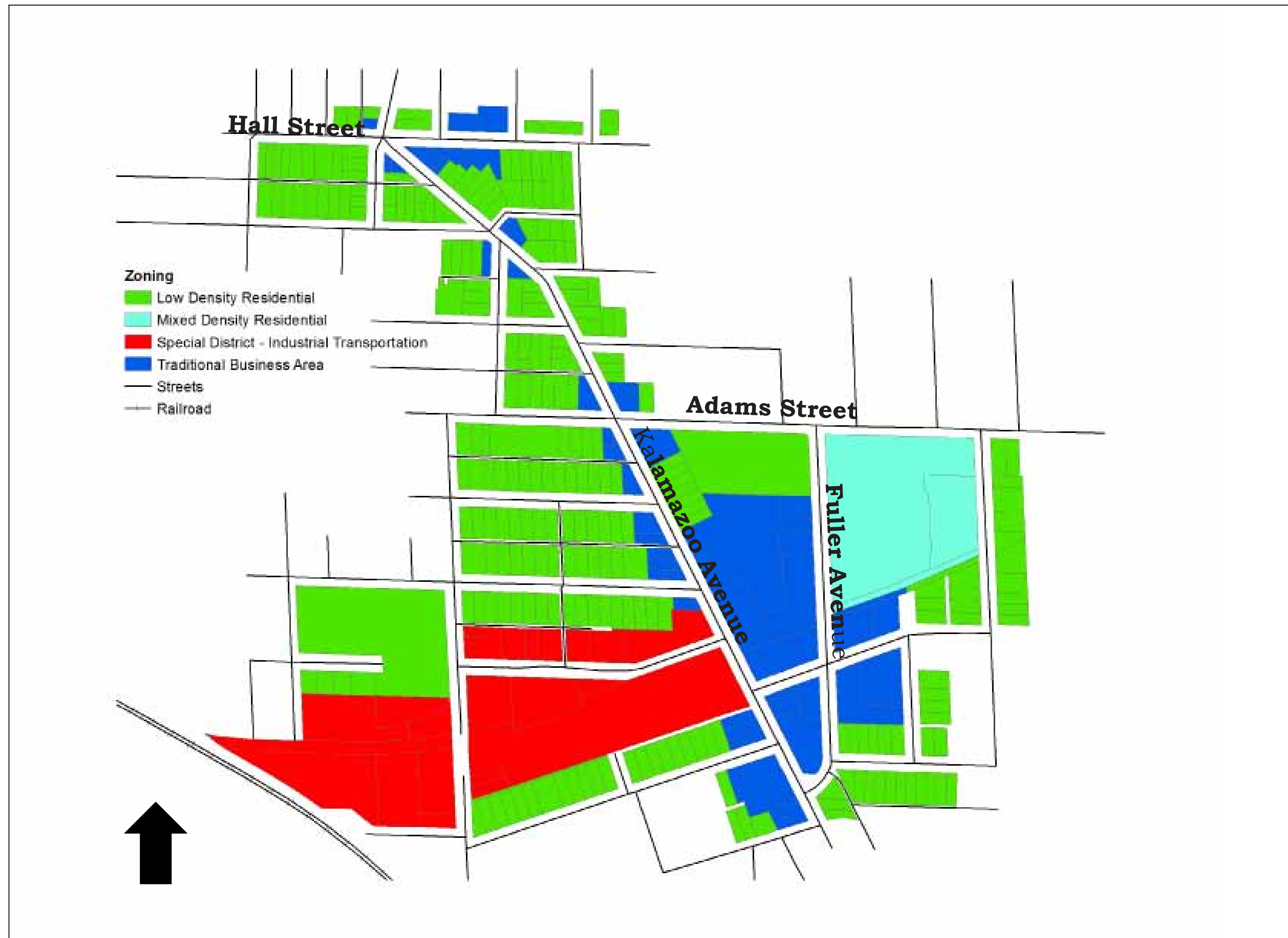
Blocks' Existing Structure Condition

The Boston Square area is comprised of structures ranging from sound condition to structures that are in need of major repairs. The conditions of the structures throughout the neighborhood are primarily in sound condition or in need of minor repairs. Scattered throughout the area are structures that need major repair. Structures in sound (green) condition are located south of Adams Street, on both sides of Kalamazoo Avenue. Buildings in need of minor repair (yellow) are located north of Adams Street, on both sides of Kalamazoo Avenue. The area with structures in need of major repairs (pink) is located south of Adams Street (this area is primarily industrial).



Zoning

The Boston Square area is zoned for four primary uses: low-density residential (green), mixed-density residential (light blue), special district-industrial transportation (red), and traditional business area (blue). The majority of the area is zoned low-density residential, with traditional business area being the second most common classification. Special district-industrial transportation and mixed-density residential are a minor part of the zoning.



NEIGHBORHOOD IMPLICATIONS

The Boston Square area extends east and west of Kalamazoo Avenue between Hall and Boston Streets. The area hosts a diverse mix of land uses, with the parcels north of Adams Street primarily being used for residential purposes. The area south of Adams Street contains all of the industrial, institutional, and religious properties appearing in the neighborhood, in addition to hosting a fair proportion of residential and commercial parcels.

Some of the land uses occurring in the Boston Square area are complimentary, while others are conflicting. Many types of residential and commercial properties can coexist within a geographic area without problems arising. These land uses often enhance each other creating a synergy. However, not all forms of commercial land use are well suited for residential neighborhoods. In the Boston Square area, lumberyards, taxi-depots (with cyclone fencing and barbed-wire), large shopping centers, and junkyards are examples of commercial and industrial land uses that can detract from the character and quality of a residential neighborhood or a traditional business area.

North

The northern zone of the planning area, Blocks 10-14 and Zones 1 & 3 of the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor (Block 7), provide a generally harmonious mix of residential and commercial properties. The area is exclusively zoned as Low Density Residential and Traditional Business Area and all of the parcels are used for residential or commercial uses, with the exception of one church on Adams Street. The structures in this area are in need of minor repairs, with all of the Blocks in this area rated as fair quality. However, along Kalamazoo Avenue there were, at the time of assessment, four parcels classified as being in need of major repairs and nine vacant structures. (See, page 47 for a more in depth discussion of the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor). These parcels are unsightly and aesthetically displeasing. Vacant structures and parcels requiring major repairs discourage investment, whether for homeownership or commercial development.

There is a single vacant parcel/lot within the Boston Square area at Kalamazoo Avenue and Adams Street. This property is an inviting location for youth to congregate in the evening, a magnet for litter and rubbish, and is a general eyesore for the neighborhood.

Southwest

A large portion of the southwestern sector of the Boston Square area, Blocks 1-3 and Zone 4 of the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor (Block 7), is currently zoned as Special-District Industrial Transportation. The sector includes one commercial and two residential parcels that are zoned for light industrial. The industrial parcels fronting on Kalamazoo Avenue, with their cyclone fences, barbed-wire and lengthy frontage conflict with a traditional Main Street atmosphere. Specifically, these parcels are out of place for the Boston Square area, where Kalamazoo Avenue is primarily zoned as a Traditional Business Area and Low Density Residential. It would be advisable to have parcels fronting on Kalamazoo Avenue maintaining a similar character. It is recommended that either: all of the parcels fronting on Kalamazoo Avenue be zoned to provide for consistent land use or that the owners of the industrial parcels properly maintain their properties to enhance their aesthetic character.

East Side

In the eastern portion of planning area, within Block 6, large institutional parcels exist, including properties administered by the Grand Rapids Housing Commission, Grand Rapids Public Schools, and the Silver Creek Drainage District. This eastern sector of the planning area is currently zoned as Low Density Residential, Mixed Density Residential and Traditional Business Area. The Mixed-Density Residential refers to the Public Housing Commission property at Adams Street and Fuller Avenue. The Grand Rapids Public Schools property is zoned as Low Density Residential, much like the abandoned school in Block 1 in the southwestern sector of the planning area. These institutional land uses integrate well with the residential properties existing on Calvin Avenue, as well as, those south of Ramona Street and the ones north of Adams Street. The structures within this area are primarily rated as sound, with some properties characterized as being in need of minor repairs. Block 6 was rated as being in good quality and neighboring Blocks 4 and 5 were rated as good and fair respectively.

The Boston Square area does not seem to include sufficient community and public amenities to support the residents and clients of these institutional facilities. Rapid Route 2 provides much needed transit access for this institutional sector; however, health and community facilities are insufficient. It is recommended that the large parcel at 1460 Kalamazoo Avenue be redeveloped as a mixed-use neighborhood center, with traditional businesses fronting Kalamazoo Avenue. The site should include a community center, as well as offices for health professionals and other services needed within the neighborhood. It is further recommended that the unique parcel at 1451 Fuller Avenue be subdivided, to allow infill development of a traditional business on Kalamazoo Avenue, while enhancing the railroad right-of-way to allow for passive recreation of the current green space.

KALMAZOO AVENUE CORRIDOR ANALYSIS



Kalamazoo Avenue Four Zones

Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

The Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor was broken down into four individual zones based on individual characteristics. Each zone has prominent land uses throughout its parcels.

Zone 1 consists of the parcels between 1154 Kalamazoo Avenue and 1356 Kalamazoo Avenue. The land use for the area is primarily residential.

Zone 2 consists of the parcels between 1412 Kalamazoo Avenue and 1632 Kalamazoo Avenue. The land uses for the area are primarily commercial and religious.

Zone 3 consists of the parcels between 1157 Kalamazoo Avenue and 1353 Kalamazoo Avenue. The land use for the area is primarily residential, but has multiple mixed-use parcels.

Zone 4 consists of the parcels between 1403 Kalamazoo Avenue and 1625 Kalamazoo Avenue. The land uses for the area are primarily industrial and commercial.

Zone 1

Zone 1 begins at 1154 Kalamazoo Avenue and ends at 1356 Kalamazoo Avenue. The area within Zone 1 consists of 26 parcels. The parcels within the area either lie directly on Kalamazoo Avenue or have property lines that extend to the avenue. Building orientation for all of the properties is to the street.

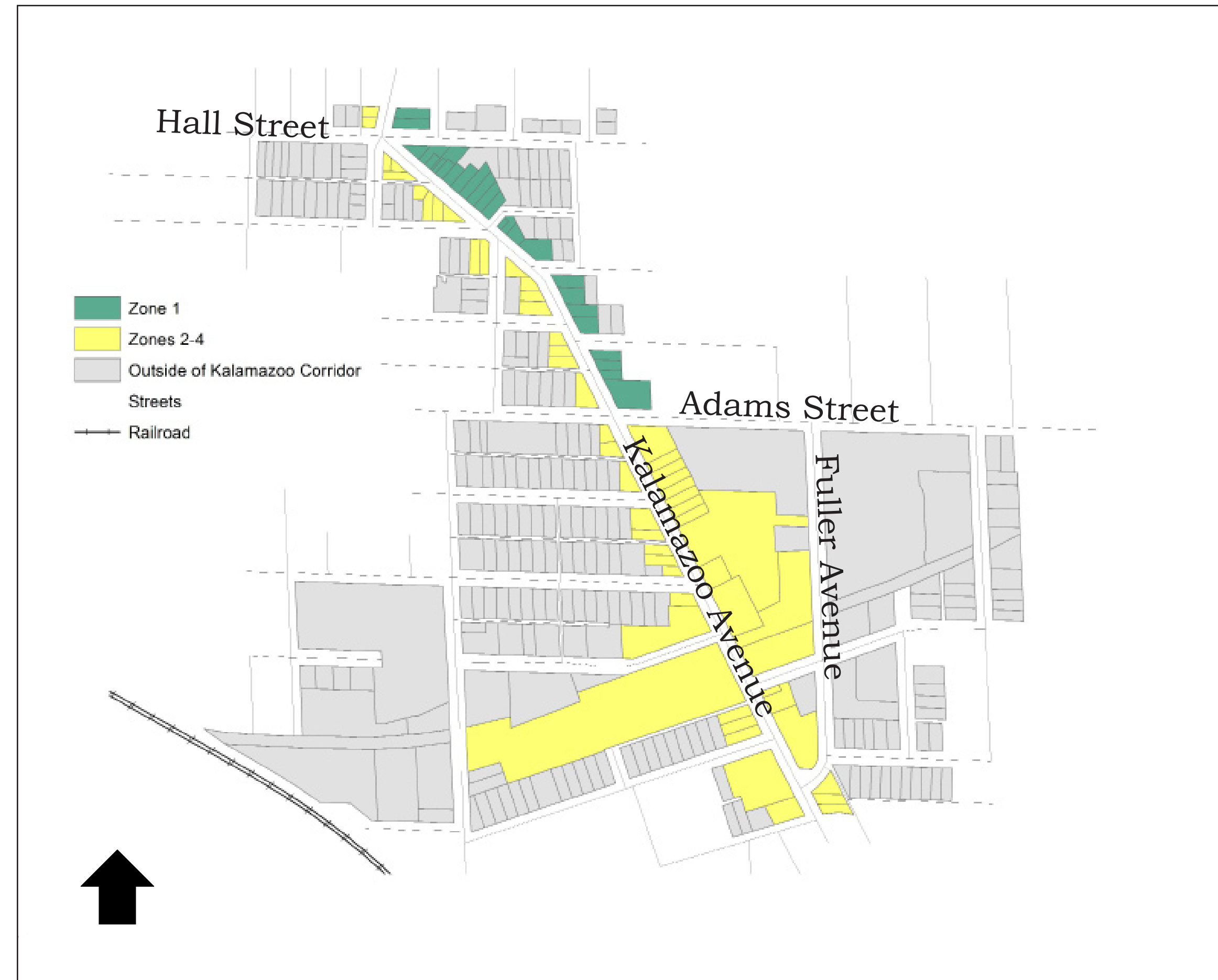
The main land use within this zone is residential (61.5%). 62.5% of the residential properties are in need of minor repair. The other residential properties are in sound condition. The remaining parcels are used for commercial use. Structure conditions of the businesses range from sound to in need of major repair. Among the six commercial properties, there is an equal range of each structure condition.

The building height for properties varied between one and three stories. The majority of parcels with two-story buildings are residential uses and the majority of commercial buildings are only one-story.

The parcels in the zone are accessible by street, driveway, alley or parking lot. Access varied between land use type, however 40.9% of the properties have access from a driveway, 27.3% with access from the street, and 22.7% having access from a parking lot. The residential parcels have a mix of the access points listed above. Two of the properties have access from a parking lot, those primarily being a commercial use.

Parking within the zone varied. The majority of parking (63.6%) in this zone is “residential driveway” with access from Kalamazoo Avenue. Residential properties are the uses with this parking availability. Commercial properties have either less than 10 spaces or no on-site parking outside of Kalamazoo Avenue.

Within the area there are four vacant parcels (15.4%). Three of the parcels are vacant structures with the final one being a vacant lot. The vacant lot is located at the corner of Adams Street and Kalamazoo Avenue.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Kalamazoo Avenue Zone 1

Zone 2

Zone 2 begins with 1412 Kalamazoo Avenue and ends at 1632 Kalamazoo Avenue. The area consists of 19 parcels, including the old train right of way (1451 Fuller). The properties within the area lie directly off of Kalamazoo Avenue or have property lines that extend to the avenue. The majority of the buildings are oriented facing the street.

The majority of the land uses are residential and commercial. Residential land use is 47.4% of the area and commercial is 31.6%. The remaining parcels are used for mixed-use and industrial use. Of the residential properties, just over half of the structures exhibit minor problems that are in need of repair. The other residences are in sound condition. Commercial structures have building conditions ranging from new to minor problems. Of the six commercial structures, two are new, two are sound and two are in need of minor repair. The mixed-use and industrial use parcels have structures in need of small repairs.

The building heights for structures within Zone 2 consist primarily of one and two-stories. All residential properties have two-stories. The parcels with commercial and industrial uses have one-story structures. The mixed-use property is two-stories.

Accessibility within the zone is either from a driveway, alley or parking lot. The majority of parcels have access from a driveway (41.2%). These are primarily residential structures. 35.3% of the parcels have access from a parking lot, mostly commercial properties. Four parcels have access from an alley.

Parking within the zone varied depending on land use. Over half of the properties (52.9%) have a residential driveway (with access from Kalamazoo Avenue) for parking. Almost a quarter of the area has 50 spaces or fewer. These properties are industrial and commercial uses. 11.8% of the properties (commercial and mixed-use) have less than 10 spaces and 11.8% of the area has less than 25 spaces. These properties have a commercial use. None of the parcels within the zone have parking off-site.

Within the zone there are two vacant parcels (10.5%). Both are vacant structures.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Kalamazoo Avenue Zone 2

Zone 3

Zone 3 begins with 1157 Kalamazoo Avenue and ends at 1353 Kalamazoo Avenue. There are 20 parcels within this length of Kalamazoo. The properties within this area either lie directly on Kalamazoo Avenue or have property lines that extend to Kalamazoo Avenue. Most of the buildings are oriented toward the street while also being accessible to the street.

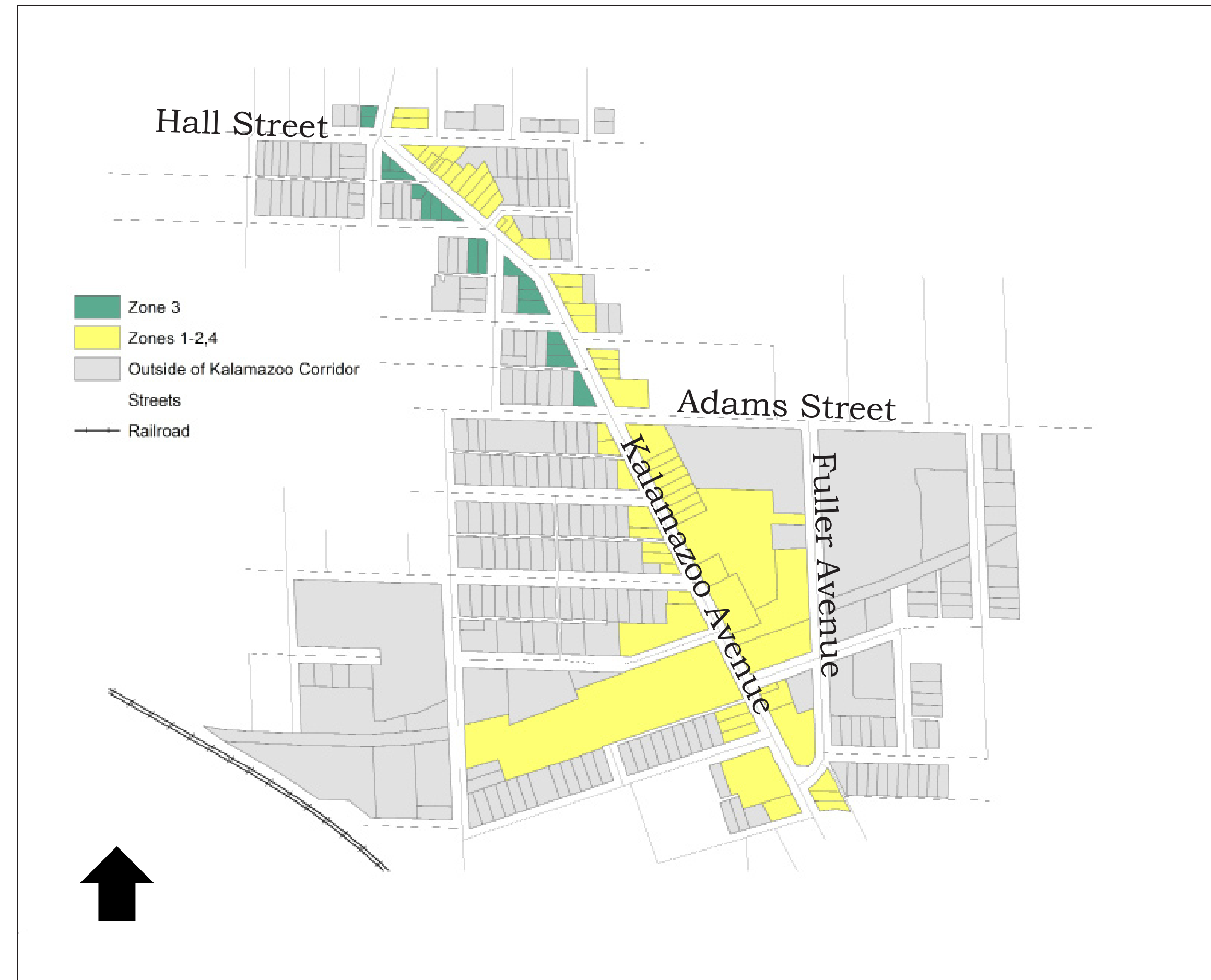
Seventy percent of these 20 parcels are residential, 15% are commercial and 15% are mixed-use, however, 22% of the total properties are vacant. None of the parcels are used for industrial purposes. The residential buildings are either in sound condition or in need of minor repairs, with only one of the residential buildings needing of major repairs. All of the commercial buildings within this zone are in sound condition.

All of the residential properties are two stories in height. Two of the three commercial buildings are only one-story. All of the mixed-use buildings are also only two-stories high. There were no buildings with three-stories within this zone.

Most of the buildings are oriented toward the street while also being accessible to the street for vehicles.

All the residential properties have a residential driveway for parking. Most of the commercial properties have at least less than 10 parking spaces for their parcel. Parking is available for 43% of the properties on the street.

Twenty percent of the buildings are vacant in Zone 3. There are no vacant lots within the zone.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Kalamazoo Avenue Zone 3

Zone 4

Zone 4 begins with 1403 Kalamazoo Avenue and ends at 1625 Kalamazoo Avenue. Within this zone there are 19 parcels. The properties within this area either lie directly on Kalamazoo Avenue or have property lines that extend to Kalamazoo Avenue

The main land use is commercial use at 79%. There are two mixed-use properties, one residential property and one industrial property along with the commercial. There are two new buildings located in this zone and both are commercial. There are three buildings in need of major repair, one being a mixed-use building, one commercial and one vacant building. The other commercial buildings and the residential property are in minor repair.

Sixty-three percent of the buildings are only one story, primarily commercial lots and industrial lots. The residential parcel in Zone 4 is two stories as well as the mixed-use properties.

The buildings are accessible either from the street, parking lot, an alley or a driveway. There are 53% of the buildings accessible from the street, 26% from a parking lot, 16% from an alley and 5% from driveways. The one residential building is accessible from the alley with less than 10 parking spaces available.

There are no dominant parking resources in this zone. For 63% of the buildings, there are less than 10 parking spaces. Sixteen percent of the parcels have less than 25 spaces, 5% have more than 50 parking spaces and 5% have no on-site parking. The larger parking lots are for the commercial and industrial buildings use. The one residential property has a “residential driveway.”

There are three vacant buildings within Zone 4 and their prior use was commercial.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Kalamazoo Avenue Zone 4

Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor Parcel Land Use

The Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor is mixed with multiple types of land uses. The majority of the land is used for residential purposes. The rest of the corridor is used for commercial, industrial, and mixed-use purposes. Residential properties (green) are located primarily north of Adams Street with a few parcels at the southern end of the corridor. Commercial (blue) and industrial (maroon) uses are situated near the south end of the corridor (south of Adams Street). Scattered throughout the corridor are mixed-use parcels (light purple) and religious-use parcels (purple). Mixed-use parcels are along the western side of the corridor and the religious use parcel is located between the industrial use parcels.



Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor Existing Structure Condition

The Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor is comprised of structures in need of minor or major repairs and structures of sound condition. The majority of the corridor has structures needing minor repairs (yellow). These structures are mixed throughout the entire corridor. Structures of sound condition (green) are evenly dispersed along the corridor. Throughout the corridor there are only a few structures in need of major repairs (pink). These are located near the north and south ends of the corridor. The area also has one vacant lot (brown), situated at the corner of Adams Street and Kalamazoo Avenue.



Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor Building Height

There are 80 parcels along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor. Over half of the properties are 2-story buildings with the primary use being residential or mixed-use. With the exception of a few properties, commercial-use parcels are only one-story buildings. Only three properties have a building height taller than two-stories and are residential-use.



Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor Parcel Vacancy

The Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor has several vacant structures and vacant lots. There are 12 unoccupied structures. The corridor also has three unique parcels (1451 Fuller Avenue, 1356 and 1463 Kalamazoo Avenue) that do not qualify as entirely vacant or entirely occupied.

The parcel at 1451 Fuller Avenue is an odd-shaped parcel that extends from Fuller Avenue to the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor. On the east side, the parcel shares a physical structure with the parcel immediately to the north. It is the portion of land adjacent to Kalamazoo Avenue that causes it to be classified as unique. The strip of land that runs from Kalamazoo Avenue to Fuller Avenue is an open tract of land that was formerly part of a railroad right-of-way. While this entire parcel is not vacant, a significant portion is usable, green, open space.

The parcel at 1356 Kalamazoo Avenue is entirely vacant but is unique because it serves as a parking lot for a parcel across the street. Directly west of this parcel (across Kalamazoo Avenue) was the Boston Square restaurant. The same individual holds title to these two parcels and since the Boston Square restaurant is up for sale, it is possible that the lots could be sold together. While 1356 Kalamazoo Avenue is an open lot that holds much potential, its connection to the lot across the street cannot be overlooked.

The parcel at 1463 Kalamazoo Avenue is also not completely vacant. The owner of this parcel also owns the adjoining parcel. The structure on the neighboring parcel (1465 and 1467 Kalamazoo Avenue) has a beauty shop in the lower level and an apartment above. Located at 1463 Kalamazoo Avenue is a garage utilized by those living next door as well as a large dirt lot the provides parking for the beauty shop. This lot is not entirely vacant, but has significant potential should the beauty salon no longer require the parking spaces.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor Parcel Vacancy

Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor Parking

Parking for the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor varies depending on the type of land use for each parcel. Residential properties have parking that consists of a residential driveway either with access from the street or from an alley. The residential driveways are suitable for two to three vehicles. Depending on the size of the structure and the commercial use, the number of spaces varied from 10 to 50. Small commercial properties, such as Mahogany's Island of Beauty, have no on-site parking other than parking allowed on Kalamazoo Avenue. Average-sized commercial-use parcels, such as service or office buildings, have parking with less than 10 spaces. Larger commercial uses such as Standard Kitchen and Modern Hardware have less than 50 spaces. Industrial properties have less than 25 spaces not including areas for truck pick-up and delivery. Kalamazoo Avenue does have on-street parking along the Corridor in specified locations.

1356 Kalamazoo Avenue is currently a vacant lot used for parking by local residents. It previously was used for parking by the former Boston Square Restaurant. The parcel is owned by the same person as the Boston Square Restaurant.

1451 Fuller Avenue is an odd-shaped parcel that extends from Fuller Avenue to the corridor. The former railroad right-of-way runs through this property and extends from Kalamazoo Avenue to Fuller Avenue. There is currently no parking on this strip. The second part of this parcel, along Fuller Avenue does have possible space for parking with access from Fuller Avenue.

1463 Kalamazoo Avenue is currently a dirt lot used for parking for the adjoining properties (1465 and 1467 Kalamazoo Avenue.) The owner of this parcel also owns the adjoining parcel.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor Parking

KALAMAZOO AVENUE CORRIDOR IMPLICATIONS

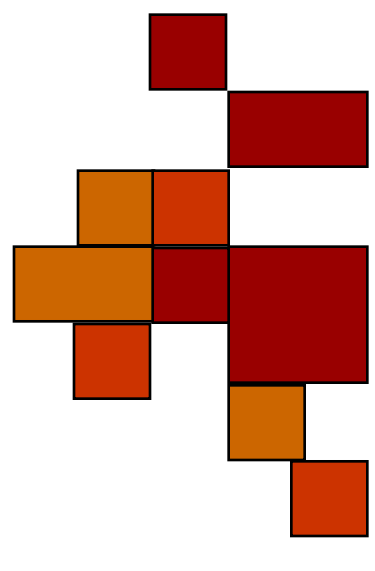
There are many different combinations of land uses on the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor. Each is able to coexist because of the need for each other. Most of the parcels on the northern end of Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor are residential and within walking distance to commercial uses. The residents need specific types of commercial buildings, such as grocery stores, for every day living. The buildings that are walkable from the residential areas should be utilized allowing the business to thrive. More business would consider filling in the current vacant buildings because of the potential market in the district.

The southern side of the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor has more industrial and commercial parcels than residential. These larger building types require more parking spaces that could increase the number of personal vehicle trips. With the concentration on driving rather than walking, the sidewalks may not be used as much. The under-utilization of the sidewalk could lead to deterioration of the cement causing it to become a less walkable environment.

The closest bus route near the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor is one street over on Fuller Avenue. The lack of a bus system running through the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor may reduce the amount of people coming to the commercial area. With a lower number of people shopping or living in the area, it could lead to properties going out of business or moving out of the area. Being left with abandoned parcels reduces the probability of the remaining ones staying afloat.

Vacant or abandoned buildings are an unpleasant sight. Without someone maintaining the buildings, these vacant properties are deteriorating. With most of the vacant parcels in need of minor or major repairs, the property values of the homes are decreasing. The lower property values turn people away from purchasing a home within the area. Keeping up the buildings would bring in potential residents or businesses owners and generate a growing corridor.

Most of the residential parcels have a residential driveway or an alley as parking for the homes. Trees and other landscaping can hide these driveways. Large parking lots that are needed for mixed-use, commercial and industrial parcels, are in much more prominent view and are harder to disguise. The parking lots in front of Walgreens and the shopping center across the street disconnect pedestrians from the commercial buildings. With less interaction between pedestrians and businesses, there are fewer economic exchanges and thus a lower rate of business success and a loss in local ownership.



PART 4: SWOT ANALYSIS

The Grand Rapids Practicum Group conducted a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis to determine perceptions of the neighborhood from both internal and external perspectives. To organize the traits of the Boston Square area the SWOT was constructed to highlight internal traits with strengths and weaknesses physically located within the defined boundary of the area, while opportunities and threats were seen as external traits of the greater region affecting the perception of the area. The City of Grand Rapids and the State of Michigan were chosen as external factors. The adopted model follows the methodology of Stanford Research Institute fellow Albert S. Humphrey, who is credited with inventing this technique.⁷ The purpose of this analysis was to highlight the traits meriting preservation and those necessitating change in order to enhance the perception of the Boston Square area.

Boston Square Internal Observation SWOT Analysis

The first stage of the SWOT Analysis was centered on a neighborhood meeting hosted by the Oakdale Neighbors' community organization on January 29, 2008. Individuals attending the neighborhood meeting included residents, property owners, business owners, and organization members. Oakdale Neighbors' requested the attendees to list positive and negative traits of their neighborhood. Following this initial collection of perceptions, a master list of traits was presented and participants were asked to vote for the traits they best felt identified their neighborhood.

The Michigan State University Practicum Group formatted the results into the SWOT analysis grid, assigning traits to their most applicable category. This SWOT analysis grid provides a brief summary of the perspectives from residents, local business owners, and others with current invested interest in the neighborhood. Maintaining the character of the neighborhood that current users enjoy is important in preventing a loss of the base population, when changes occur. Below is a chart highlighting the top traits (up to ten) within each category. Community members did not identify any external opportunities. A complete version of the listing is available in Appendix C.

Boston Square Internal Observation SWOT Analysis (Top Traits)

		Helpful	Harmful
		<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
Internal Origin		Convenience	Unsafe perception
		Sense of community	Irresponsible renters and landlords
		Diversity	Absentee landlords
		Neighborhood pride	Parking problems
		Community Outreach	Lack of children's activities
		Neighborhood businesses	Lack of senior programs
		Conscientious homeowners	High-speed traffic on Kalamazoo Ave.
		Churches	Break-ins
		Housing character	Vacant businesses and lots
		Walkable neighborhood	Zoning violations
External Origin		<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Threats</i>
		-	Slum lords
		-	Decreasing home ownership
		-	Disinvestment
		-	Shaky economy
		-	Stereotyping
		-	Drug traffic
		-	Fear
	-	Poor reinvestment	

Figure 21 - Source: Oakdale Neighbors

Boston Square External Observation SWOT Analysis

The second stage of the SWOT analysis was the creation of a list of traits the Grand Rapids Practicum Group observed in the neighborhood during visits in January and February of 2008. This Michigan State Practicum analysis was conducted prior to viewing the results of the Oakdale Neighbors' meeting's initial list to avoid influencing the students' observations.

Similar to the first SWOT, the traits were organized into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, following the same criteria regarding internal and external status. This SWOT analysis grid provides a brief summary of how potential residents or business owners might view the neighborhood when considering investment in the Boston Square area. Changing the negative perceptions of potential users is important when looking at sustaining population or creating future growth. Below is a chart highlighting the top traits (up to ten) within each category. A complete version of the listing is available in Appendix C.

Boston Square External Observation SWOT Analysis (Top Traits)

	Helpful	Harmful
Internal Origin	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
	Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor	Lack of grocery stores
	Community Associations	Existing vacant and abandoned buildings
	Bus route	High number of houses on market
	Neighborhood identity	Lack of primary education options
	Quality infrastructure	Incompatible mixed-use
	Racially integrated neighborhood	Accessibility to neighborhood
	Vacant lots provide space for infill development	High percentage of non-occupant owned properties
	Dense walkable neighborhood	Abandoned vehicles
	Mixed-use development	Litter and trash
	Some businesses draw regional clientele	Poorly maintained properties
External Origin	<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Threats</i>
	Grand Rapids has a good reputation	Michigan recession
	Grand Rapids' focus on infill development	Out of state migration
	Proximity to Lake Michigan	Young and educated professionals leaving state
	Near grocery and retail outside of neighborhood	Shaky economy

Figure 22 - Source: Oakdale Neighbors

Summary of Boston Square SWOT Analysis

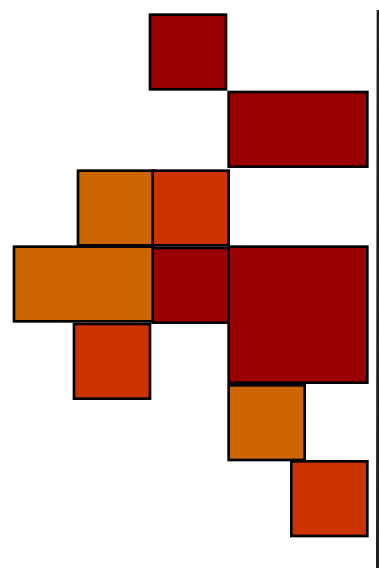
In summarizing the results, the Grand Rapids Practicum Team analyzed both SWOTs and found the common themes identified within each category by both current users and potential future users.

Strengths - In both instances, individuals felt a sense of community and collective presence of the varied elements of which the neighborhood is composed.

Weaknesses - Both current and potential users of the neighborhood expressed concern with the status of property. Largely there was a perception that much of the neighborhood was composed of rental units that were poorly maintained and not locally owned. There was also concern that many of the locally owned properties were for sale or abandoned/vacant. Generally there was a perception of poorly maintained property.

Opportunities - Present users did not include this category in their list of traits. However, potential users of the neighborhood were attracted to the positive image of the greater region and the neighborhood's potential to benefit from regional image.

Threats - The common fear of current and potential users of the neighborhood was the state of the economy; translating into insecurity for investment in the Boston Square area.



PART 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

VISION

The existing conditions in the Boston Square area create a challenging—yet exciting—environment in which redevelopment, mixed-use development, and pedestrian-oriented development can be explored. These concepts can be utilized to establish the Boston Square area as a safe, clean and attractive destination for people to live, work, and play. Community and professional assessments of the neighborhood have revealed the sense of place that is needed to turn the Boston Square area into a desired location. Ideally, Boston Square would have walkable streets, enhanced public spaces, improved mobility options, dense mixed-use structures that include retail and residential options, and increased population density.

The low property values and the high potential for infill development allow for extensive redevelopment of the area in pursuit of this vision. However, this type of development can only be sustained in the long-run if it is created on solid neighborhood demand and infrastructure.

The following recommendations are divided into two phases:

1. The first addresses the need to create the demand require for mixed-use and pedestrian-oriented development
2. The second outlines the beginning path to create the mixed-use developments and pedestrian-oriented developments

The second phase is contingent on the completion of the first phase.



Action Plan

PHASE 1: IMPROVING LIVABILITY

Goal: Create conditions that will improve demand for increased density, mixed-use and pedestrian-oriented developments based on the current conditions of the Boston Square planning area

Recommendation 1: Create an attractive pedestrian-friendly and bicyclist-friendly environment that encourages walkability and public life

Reasoning: Areas that have high pedestrian traffic rates are perceived as safer by residents, enhancing the positive perception of the neighborhood. Currently, the Boston Square area lacks facilities needed to support and encourage pedestrian traffic. Boston Square has very little non-transportation infrastructure (no bike lanes or racks, lack of protective bus shelters) for modes other than the automobile.

Specific Actions:

1. *Maintain sidewalks year round*

Sidewalks should be well maintained year round. The sidewalks in the Boston Square area are well utilized (this is apparent by the abundance of tracks in the snow during the winter). Ensuring that snow is removed in the winter as well as providing buffers from vehicular traffic will increase the frequency with which they are used during the winter months. Replacing old and broken up portions of the sidewalks will make them safer for all users. In addition to maintenance of the current sidewalks, widening the sidewalks would allow for more pedestrian traffic.

2. *Line public rights-of-way and open spaces with benches*

The placement of benches along sidewalks and in public spaces encourages pedestrians to participate further in public life. Not only does the greater presence of pedestrians increase the sense of community in a place but it also can help reduce crime. The residents of Boston Square identified a sense of community as one of the strong points of the area (See, SWOT analysis). Public spaces foster public interaction which results in a sense of community. Benches give residents an opportunity to sit and interact with the street life enhancing and building on that sense of community.



Maintained Sidewalk
Royal Oak, Michigan



Street Benches
Austin, Idaho

3. Add pedestrian-scale streetlights to Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor

Currently all lighting in the Boston Square area is roadway lighting (approx. 30 ft pole). Bringing the lighting down to a pedestrian-scale (approx. 15 ft pole) especially along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor increases the sense of safety for pedestrians while reducing the frequency of crimes on the street. Traditional lantern-style lighting is especially suitable for the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor because it is aesthetically pleasing and can also enhance the character of the neighborhood. In addition, the light poles provide a place to display banners advertising events occurring and businesses located in the neighborhood.

4. Improve the image of the neighborhood through beautification projects

Neighborhood beautification projects are inexpensive, effective ways to boost the outside perception of a neighborhood. The Boston Square area would benefit greatly from the addition of trees and shrubs along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor that could function both as a buffer between the sidewalk and street as well as an attractive roadside feature. Trees also provide shade for pedestrians who choose to walk down the street in the middle of the summer. Flower plantings along Kalamazoo Avenue also function to make the corridor more “comfortable” for visitor and resident pedestrians alike. The Boston Square area has a significant amount of litter along the sidewalks (documented in the numerous photos taken during the data collection phase of this project). Strategically placing trash cans along Kalamazoo will reduce the amount of waste discarded on the sidewalks while improving the appearance of the neighborhood. Additionally, signage and banners placed on light poles and businesses provide needed positive publicity for neighborhood events.



Pedestrian Scale Lighting
Howell, Michigan



Street Buffering
Hayward, California

5. Add bike lanes to all road construction projects

Bike lanes serve several functions and are a necessity for any pedestrian-oriented development along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor. Boston Square residents should advocate the inclusion of a bike lane provision in all street construction projects in their area. Boston Square's large population of 10 to 20 year-olds indicates that bike lanes would probably be well travelled within the area as those young people bike to their schools, restaurants, and convenience stores. Potential residents who are avid bike riders would be drawn to the Boston Square area specifically to utilize these bike lanes. Further, bike lanes serve useful purposes year round. During the snowy, winter months the lanes can be used as snow depositories. This keeps the snow off the sidewalks and actually utilizes it as a buffer between vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Researching bike lane construction projects throughout the state will be beneficial.

6. Add bike racks/lock-ups to public rights-of-way and local businesses

Bicycling as a means of transportation (as opposed to recreation) requires adequate bike parking facilities at the most likely destinations of bikers. If bikers do not have adequate parking facilities, they are less inclined to utilize bikes instead of cars. Bike racks are an extremely feasible option to encourage and increase the usage of bicycles in the area. At the average cost of \$75 to \$100 per rack and with a single rack typically holding one or two bicycles, Oakdale Neighbors should consider creating a partnership with the local businesses to provide bike racks.⁸



Bike Lanes
Burlington, Vermont



Bike Racks
Denver, Colorado

7. Increase number of sheltered bus stops

It is difficult for every city and every community to convince its residents to ride the bus or use other public transit instead of using their cars. Areas that receive much snow in the winter months face an even greater challenge because waiting in the wind and cold for a bus to arrive is a disincentive to riding public transit. The Boston Square area is serviced by two bus routes yet only has one sheltered bus stop (circled on the map). One protective bus stop is not enough to counter the ease of hopping in one's personal car to go to the Walgreens or the Subway. The Boston Square area (street network, houses with driveways and garages) was designed for the automobile. This means that if there is ever to be a demand for pedestrian-oriented development, the neighborhood will have to work extremely hard to make public transit a competitive alternative to the car. Protective bus stops will appeal to those who need a little boost to get past their reservations. An added benefit here is that well-positioned and utilized sheltered bus stops become an ideal spot for redevelopment.



Walkable distances from bus stops in Boston Square

Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors



Bus Stop in Boston Square area



Only Sheltered Bus Stop on Fuller Avenue



Bus Stop in Boston Square area

Recommendation 2: Develop Boston Square as a community-oriented neighborhood through public activities and programs and the addition of park space

Reasoning: Community activities and programs increase the satisfaction of residents which will reduce their likelihood of leaving the neighborhood while at the same time improving the overall perception of the neighborhood as a safe place to live, work, and play. Activities, programs, and park space area are amenities that can draw new residents into the area while improving the quality of life for current residents.

Specific Actions:

1. Host public events

Public events such as block parties, cook-offs, and festivals for the neighborhood children should be orchestrated by the area's community development organizations. These events will boost public perception of the neighborhood. Additionally, these types of gatherings should be highly publicized in and out of the neighborhood. The local media should be contacted when events are going on to publicize the good things that are happening in the Boston Square area. Further, Oakdale Neighbors should consider regularly contacting a writer at the Grand Rapids Press to run articles and features about any and all positive events in the neighborhood. This positive advertising will help to shift the perceptions of the Boston Square area and make it a more attractive area to live.

2. Organize community clean-up events

These types of events serve many purposes and are fairly cheap and easy to organize. Cleaning up the neighborhood builds on the community spirit by encouraging a pride in the neighborhood itself. Community clean-up efforts will act as a deterrent against crime and littering since they reinforce a sense of pride in the neighborhood and residents don't want to trash their neighborhoods.



Annual events
Vancouver, Canada



Clean up events
Detroit, Michigan

3. Create “community tool-sheds”

A “community tool-shed” operated by Home Repair Services exists outside of the Boston Square area in near proximity. However, due to strict income requirements, home ownership requirements and distance from the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor, it is recommended that a community tool shed be created within the Boston Square area.

A “community tool-shed” is a free service available to residents of a community. The “tool-shed” is equipped with tools that are often too expensive for a person to purchase individually. Items can include snow-blowers, wet/dry vacuums, power washers, and other tools utilized for the upkeep of homes and yards. The “tool-shed” can even include reference books on how to do certain repair jobs. Based on analysis of the existing conditions, many of the residents in the Boston Square area own or rent homes that need minor repairs. Given the age of the housing stock (most homes were built prior to 1962) it is reasonable to expect that more homes will be requiring greater repairs in the next couple of years.

A “community tool-shed” would empower residents to make the necessary repairs to their homes thereby increasing their property values and the likelihood of future development in the neighborhood. The tool shed could be funded as a partnership between the area churches or donations could be solicited from home improvement businesses and housed at and managed by a local church or the Oakdale Neighbors office.

The city of Muscatine, Iowa has a community tool-shed for similar reasons. Provided here is a link to their program: <http://www.neighborhoodlink.com/org/tool/>.⁹



Lend A Tool Shed
Milpitas, California

4. Create a community park(s)

Creating a well maintained park in the Boston Square area is an excellent way to foster community interaction, provide a location for community activities, and draw residents out of their homes and cars. An internal SWOT analysis from community residents expressed a desire for public green space and external observation noticed a lack of green space along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor.

The park's beginnings could simply be open green space in the area used to host a block party to raise awareness that it is a public space. Equipping the green space with trash cans, bathroom facilities, bike racks, and picnic tables would make the area an ideal place for community functions. In future years, play ground equipment could be added for the children (which would respond to neighbors' concerns that they are not enough activities/programs for children). This type of improvement is a definite incentive to attract new residents. It would also help stabilize the area by facilitating the creation of community ties. These strong ties bond the residents to their homes and operate as motivation to maintain their properties and stay in the area.

Two parcels have been identified as potential locations for a neighborhood park and should be considered for rezoning to classification Special District- Open Space (see map for location of parcels): 1451 Fuller Avenue and 1356 Kalamazoo Avenue.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Description of parcels on following page.

1451 Fuller Avenue:

This parcel is located in the southern portion of the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor and is unique since the western part contains a structure that houses a business while the eastern portion is open green space. This site was selected because of its current unused green space. It fronts Kalamazoo Avenue and requires no landscaping work before it could be utilized as a park, though improvements could certainly be made in the future. The parcel is owned by the adjacent church which is another advantage since the church might be willing to allow the parcel to be divided into two separate parcels and maintain the parcel as a park. Oakdale Neighbors (as well as the other neighborhood and business associations in the neighborhood) could partner with the church for maintenance and upkeep of the park. Potential issues with this parcel include the unwillingness of the church to allow public access to the land and possible difficulties with subdividing the parcel.

1356 Kalamazoo Avenue:

This parcel is located at the intersection of Adams Street and Kalamazoo Avenue and is currently paved to be used as a parking lot. This lot is large and square which, coupled with its location at an intersection, make it a highly visible parcel in the area. Removing the parking lot and turning it into temporary green space would improve public perception while passing through. This parcel would be more expensive to redevelop as a park than 1451 Fuller Avenue, but is larger and probably has more potential as a park. This temporary green space would serve as a transitional use, making the area more desirable for future retail and mixed-use. A potential roadblock to redeveloping this parcel as a transitional park is that its title is held by the same deedholder of the vacant Boston Square Restaurant, for which the parcel formerly served as a parking lot.



1451 Fuller Avenue



Pocket Park, Fair Bluff,
North Carolina



1356 Kalamazoo Avenue

Recommendation 3: Conduct a feasibility study to rehabilitate an empty building into a multi-use community center

Reasoning: The Boston Square area does not have adequate indoor public space for holding community events. By creating this space, Oakdale Neighbors can cultivate a source of tangible pride for the community. Boston Square residents would have not only a place to gather, hold community events, and have activities for children, but also the building itself would give the neighbors an identifiable landmark that makes the Boston Square area unique. Residents who have an attachment to a neighborhood (such as a sense of pride or connection to the community center) are less likely to move away from the neighborhood. This creates stability in the neighborhood, ultimately helping any efforts to redevelop the Boston Square area, since stable neighborhoods experience lower crime rates, better home maintenance, and stronger community networks.

Specific Actions:

Three parcels have been identified by the Grand Rapids Practicum Group as suitable places for a community center on the basis of location and are shown on the map at right. These locations are all currently vacant and have great potential to be redeveloped into community and family-oriented facilities. Oakdale Neighbors should further investigate the possibilities that each of these parcels presents for the neighborhood.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

Description of parcels on following page.

Oakdale Elementary School (944 Evergreen Street):

This parcel is located in the western portion of the planning area and is not along Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor. Despite its location, it was selected as a potential community center because it is an old elementary school and could easily be rehabilitated into a community center. The building already has many of the facilities that a community center might want such as a large multi-purpose room, an industrial kitchen, and large (class)rooms that could be retrofitted to serve the community's needs. Additionally, if after-school programs were to be a part of the community center, the former Oakdale Elementary school building would be capable of handling activities such as tutoring, arts and crafts, and outdoor sports. The site already has park space and public bathrooms making outdoor community activities feasible. The site is currently for sale by Grand Rapids Public Schools, making it easy to obtain for redevelopment.

Hannah Community Center in East Lansing, Michigan is an excellent model of an old school being reinvented as a community center.¹⁰ The former school now features conference rooms, a 500-seat theatre, as well numerous other community facilities and activities.

1505 Kalamazoo Avenue:

This parcel was selected as a potential site for the community center not only because it is located right along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor, but also because of its proximity to 1451 Fuller Avenue. The central location of this parcel along Kalamazoo Avenue would make the community center a focal point of the Boston Square area. This parcel would be easy to acquire because the deed is held by the Mercantile Bank of West Michigan and the parcel is a vacant structure. Because the structure is in need of significant repair, it would be a logical place to redevelop an old structure into a community center. The greatest asset of this parcel is its proximity to 1451 Fuller Avenue. 1451 Fuller Avenue is currently open green space and has been recommended to be utilized as a pocket park. Should this green space become public space, it would act as a connector for 1505 Kalamazoo Avenue and Fuller Avenue. This greenway would provide a direct walkway between the community center and the neighborhood bus route, where a new bus stop could be added. In addition, it would make the community center more accessible for pedestrians coming from the public housing units and would provide services and amenities to the public housing residents.



Oakdale Elementary



1505 Kalamazoo Avenue

1606 Fuller Avenue:

This parcel was selected because it is located right at one of the identified neighborhood gateways and is currently vacant. This location is highly visible within the neighborhood and would be noticed by outsiders coming into the area, due to being located at the gateway to Boston Square, which has neighborhood signage across the street. The parcel has a vacant structure that could be rehabbed as a community center. Because the parcel and structure are smaller than the other two parcels it may be more affordable for the community. This parcel is located right across from a Rapid Route 2 southbound bus stop at the Shell Station, which improves accessibility to this parcel. This parcel is located at a busy intersection within the neighborhood, which is the only major concern with this parcel. Some sort of traffic calming measure would need to be utilized to make this parcel a feasible site for a community center.



1606 Fuller Avenue



1606 Fuller Avenue

PHASE 2: CREATING MIXED-USE AND PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Goal: Create a neighborhood center in the Boston Square area through the implementation of mixed-use and pedestrian-oriented infill and new construction

Recommendation 4: Within the context of an Area Specific Plan (ASP), pursue growth that encompasses the principles of Pedestrian-Oriented Design and Mixed-Use Development

Reasoning: The Grand Rapids master plan calls for the Boston Square area to be a Neighborhood Center, and these design and development concepts are conducive to that designation. A Neighborhood Center is defined by the master plan as: “A pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development located on a transit line, that serves as the focus of a single neighborhood or several neighborhoods.”¹¹ This designation will help Boston Square achieve its vision of becoming a vibrant, family-oriented and economically diverse regional destination.

Specific Actions:

1. Improve the quality of the sidewalk space along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor

Giving priority to pedestrian uses by widening sidewalks, adding space for dining ‘al fresco’, adding a green buffer, and utilizing non-street level bike lanes will encourage pedestrian and non-motorized travel. Sidewalks create an area for each mode of local transportation to exist with minimal conflict.

2. Redevelop 1460 Kalamazoo Avenue as a Mixed-Use Center

1460 Kalamazoo Avenue can be redeveloped as a mixed-use center, with traditional businesses fronting Kalamazoo Avenue. It is recommended that the parcel be redeveloped to be a mixed-use property with a traditional business, like a neighborhood grocery store, a bakery, or delicatessen on the first floor, with apartments on the floor(s) above the first floor. It is further recommended that the unique parcel at 1451 Fuller Avenue be subdivided, to allow infill development of a traditional business on Kalamazoo Avenue, while enhancing the railroad right-of-way to allow for passive recreation of the current green space.



Wide Sidewalks, Tipton, Iowa



East Lansing, Michigan

3. Formulate development standards and guidelines with these specifications

- Priority should be given to pedestrians at all times.
- Intersections should have a 55' minimum outside turning radius with a minimum lane width of 12' to be transit accessible.¹²
 - o Street-level bike paths can be used to offset this width requirement because buses can cross into these paths during turns.¹³
 - o Non-street level bike lanes are best because they minimize the possibility for bicycle-auto and bicycle-pedestrian conflict, but when space is limited, street level bike lanes are better than none at all.
- Any development, infill and new construction, should be multi-level and mixed-use along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor.
 - o This increases the effectiveness and utilization of transit and non-motorized modes of transportation.
- All new development, because of the locations of Routes 2 and 4, will take place within a quarter mile of an existing transit route. This is considered the maximum walking distance for a healthy person to use transit, but it assumes a walkable pedestrian environment.¹⁴ It is crucial for transit-oriented development that the area be pedestrian friendly.
- All parking must be in the rear of buildings, in parking garages, and in small amounts as parallel parking. This makes the area more walkable, as distance between destinations is minimized.



Non-Street Grade Bike Lanes, Germany



Non-Street Grade Bike Lanes, Germany

4. Actively pursue and facilitate the development of mixed-use and pedestrian-oriented development

To preserve the neighborhood character in this area and to ensure resident approval, Oakdale Neighbors should include a broad base of stakeholders in the development process, including neighbors, business owners, and local civic or religious organizations. Oakdale Neighbors should approach developers with the information included in the area specific plan, such as demographic and market analysis, as well as grant and funding information pertinent to redevelopment within the Boston Square area.

Oakdale Neighbors should ensure that any properties located along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor are zoned as Traditional Business Area, encouraging any infill development and new development to follow these guidelines. See, Recommendation 6 for more discussion.

5. Consult the Grand Rapids Interurban Transit Authority with any development plans

The Rapid staffers will be able to provide valuable input on new development projects involving transit. They should be consulted to ensure the project will not have any negative impact on service in the area.

6. Contract a consulting firm to conduct a retail market analysis of the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor

A consulting firm would have the knowledge and expertise to produce a sound analysis of the retail market along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor to determine the feasibility of future development.

Recommendation 5: Utilize outside funding and work with developers to promote development in the Boston Square area

Reasoning: By securing additional funding, both externally and internally, the Boston Square area will be able to stimulate positive development

Specific Actions:

1. Apply for grants

Redevelopment is no small undertaking and since revitalization of the Boston Square Area, redevelopment along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor and redesign of the Kalamazoo-Hall-Butler intersection would be important rehabilitation projects for the southeast side of Grand Rapids it makes much sense for Boston Square community stakeholders to seek grant funding, from the City of Grand Rapids, Kent County, the State of Michigan and the United States federal government, as well as foundations and nonprofits. One potential source of funding is the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). MDOT's Safe Routes to School Program provides funding for infrastructure improvements, including new sidewalks and traffic calming projects, to make it safe, convenient and fun for children to bicycle and walk to school. MDOT also offers funding through its Transportation Enhancement program , for enhancing surface transportation systems, developing nonmotorized transportation facilities, landscaping and streetscaping and through its Transportation Economic Development Fund for road improvements that directly contribute to economic development and for reduction of traffic congestion.

Funding for Boston Square area redevelopment projects would also be possible through the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and its Clean Michigan Initiative , which could provide funding for rain gardens and stormwater management or its Scrap Tire Cleanup Grants, which could “assist property owners with the proper removal of abandoned scrap tires and scrap tires at collection sites.”

Boston Square community stakeholders could apply for a Cool Cities Catalyst Project grant for the any of its redevelopment or livability projects, through the Cool Cities Neighborhoods in Progress program. This website from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) provides a way to search for grants from the State of Michigan by eligibility and type of project: <http://www.mshda.info/cci/tools/>

Finally, if community cleanup events prove insufficient in maintaining the Boston Square area as a safe, clean, and attractive neighborhood Michigan Department of Corrections' minimum-security prisoners provide labor to public and non-profit agencies including: establishing and maintaining bike paths, cleaning up entertainment events sites, assisting in renovation of public buildings, and assisting in repair and construction of playgrounds. In addition, probationers and parolees provide community service including shoveling sidewalks for the elderly and disabled, cleaning up parks and roadways, playground maintenance, and planting trees and shrubs.

2. Utilize economic development tools such as Corridor Improvement Districts (CID), and Business Improvement Districts (BID) to assist community projects and development

BIDs and CIDs are district authorities established by the city with the power to, among other things, to levy taxes and apply tax-increment financing. Creating a CID along Kalamazoo Avenue will allow the Boston Square area to capture tax dollars that would otherwise be spent elsewhere, and direct them to fund projects within. It would be up to the chartering documents and local rules and regulations to decide eligible projects, but much of the needs of this community can be addressed with this funding source.

3. Partner with Nonprofits to Repair Dilapidated Parcels

A community coalition should be formed to repair dilapidated structures within the neighborhood. The four churches within the planning area could seek to partner with a nonprofit, like Habitat for Humanity of Kent County. In the alternative individual churches or neighborhood, associations could sponsor builds in the area separately.

Opportunities are also available through working with the Lighthouse Communities organization, which is based in southeast Grand Rapids.

4. Contact MDOT for a Walkable Community Audits to facilitate walkability improvements & planning

MDOT walkable community audits are on-site evaluations of walking conditions along specified streets within the community. MDOT analyzes areas for positive and negative conditions and makes recommendations on sidewalk width and condition, street crossings, on-street and off-street parking, connectivity to parking, tree canopy, building placement, street design and land use patterns.

Recommendation 6: Adjust the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor zoning and enhance its image

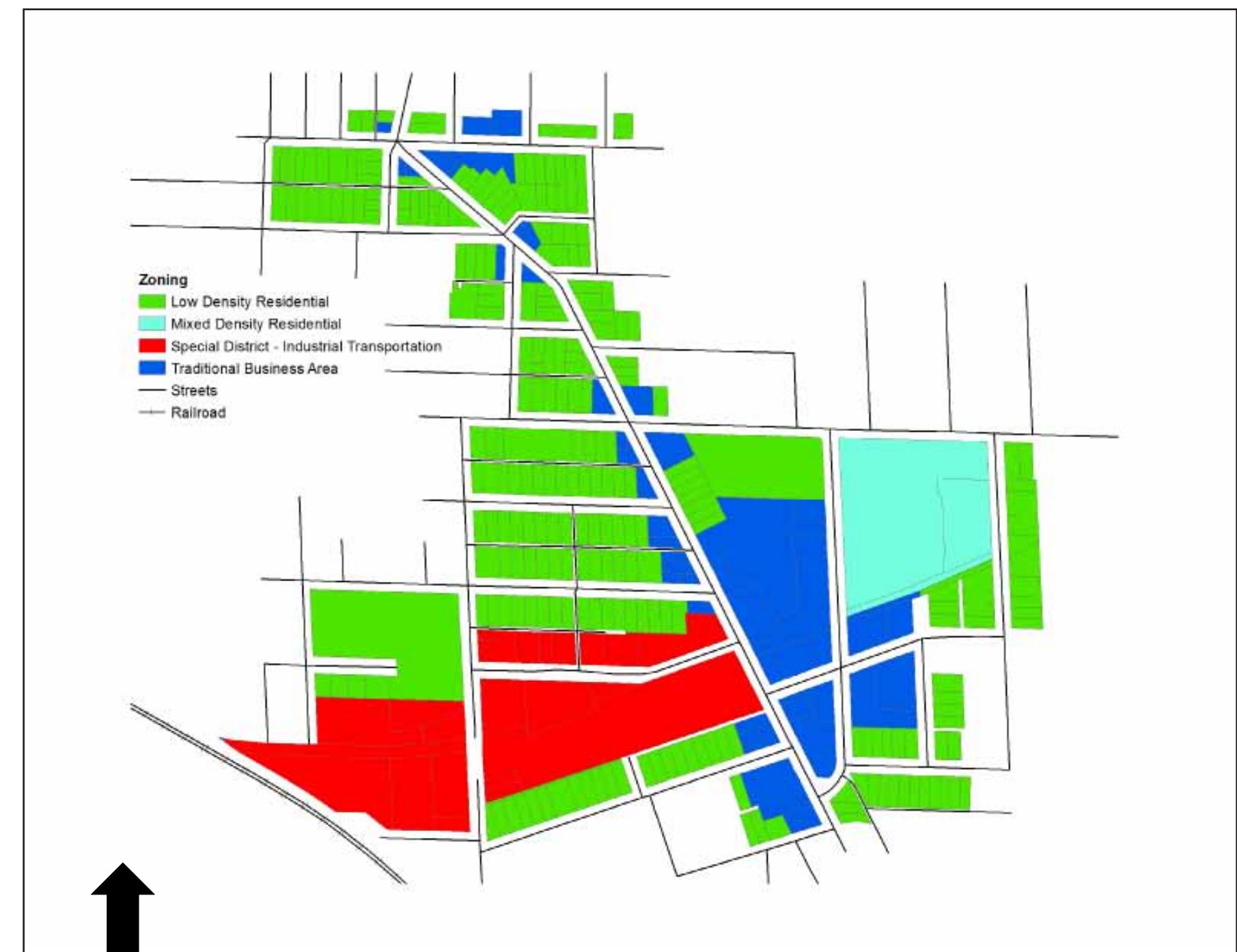
Reasoning: Once demand has been generated in the neighborhood for increased housing and retail options, developers will become interested in working in the area. To encourage their work, the Boston Square area needs to engage in “readiness activities” such as ensuring the corridor is properly zoned for redevelopment. It is important to keep in mind that these steps are not valuable unless the demand has been generated for new development, by making the area safe, clean and attractive.

Specific Actions:

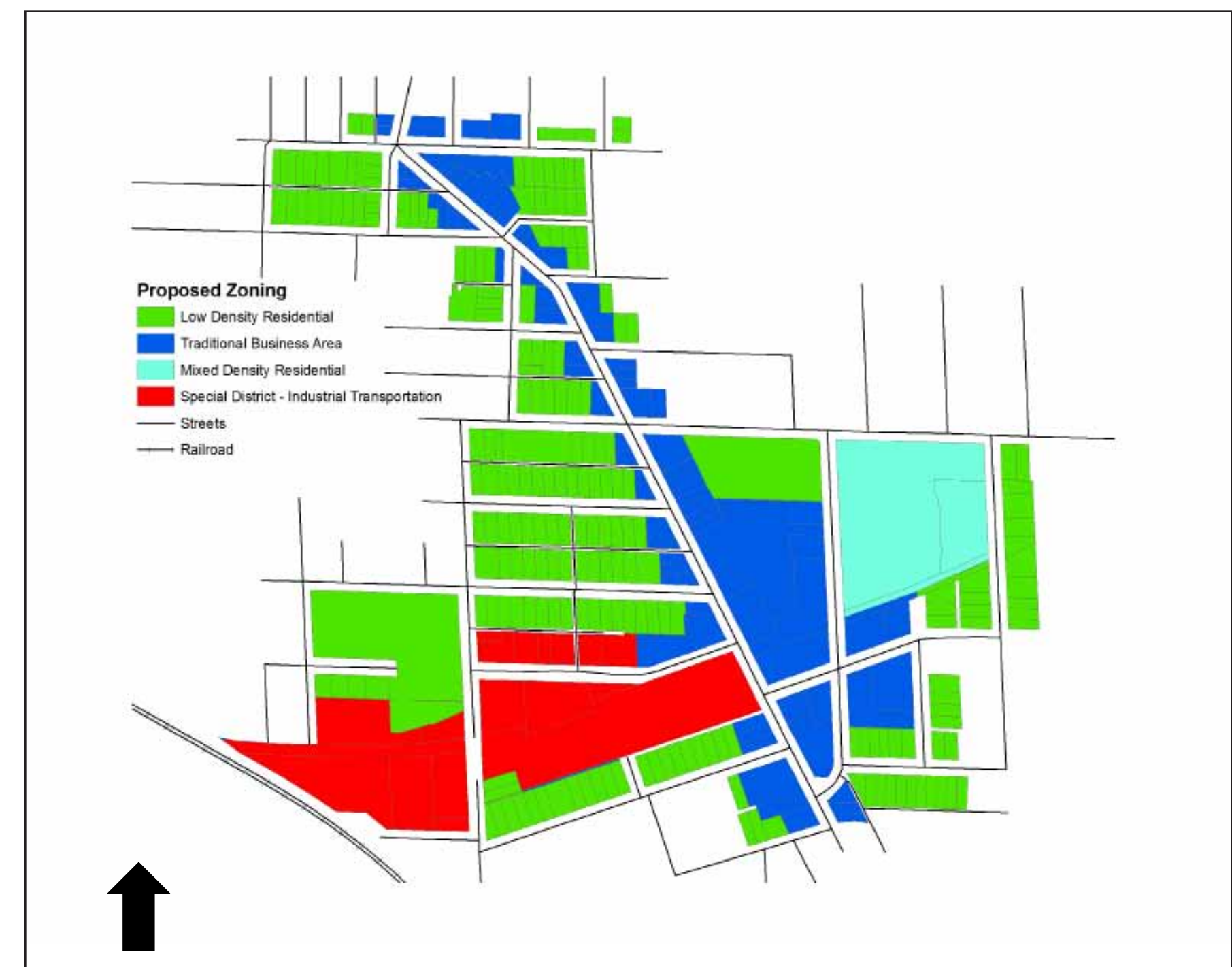
1. Re-zone residential parcels to Traditional Business Area (TBA)

There are many parcels along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor that are zoned as residential only. This type of zoning does not permit mixed-use development. This could be a hindrance to developers that might be interested in acquiring several parcels for a new structure. The goal here is not to displace the current residents but rather to allow for mixed-use and higher densities of the parcels. Additionally it may be feasible to leave some of the single-family residents and incorporate them into the new developments as is. However, if rezoning is done pre-maturely, residents might presume that it is an effort to boot them out of their homes. Homeowners and residents must be informed in all steps of the process to make certain they understand that no one is trying to take their homes away but are trying to improve the neighborhood for them and their neighbors.

The top map shows the current zoning in the Boston Square area and the bottom map shows proposed zoning changes to the Boston Square area.



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors Current Zoning



Source: Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors Proposed Zoning

2. Work with industrial-use parcels to beautify frontage along Kalamazoo

The industrial parcels located in the southwestern quadrant of the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor provide job opportunities for community residents and contribute taxes to the city. While these industrial parcels are not ideal land uses it is unlikely that they will move away anytime soon. Rather than trying to force them out somehow, it would be prudent for Oakdale Neighbors (and other business/neighborhood associations) to attempt to work with the owners of the parcels to “beautify” the portion of the parcel that fronts Kalamazoo. Currently, these parcels are an unattractive eyesore to the community. Façade and landscaping improvements would change the appearance of the parcel without interfering with the use. Improving these few parcels would encourage development since potential developers would no longer worry about the “eyesores” down the street.



Possible Industrial Facade
Ashland, Massachusetts



Current Industrial Site



Current Industrial Site

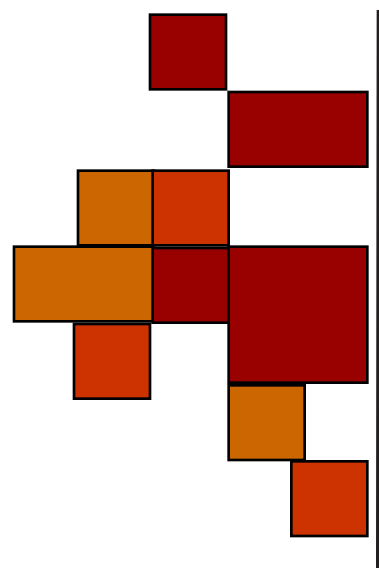
Recommendation 7: Redesign the intersection at the southeast corner of the Kalamazoo Avenue, Hall Street, and Butler Avenue

Reasoning: The focal point of any proposed mixed-use district in the Boston Square area would be the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor. The corridor has a good mix of residential, commercial, and industrial parcels. The majority of these parcels only require minor repairs or none at all. Unfortunately, the parcels that do need major work are located at the intersection of Hall Street, Kalamazoo Avenue, and Butler Avenue which has been identified as a “neighborhood gateway.” This less than ideal location casts the first impression on potential residents and visitors as well as passers-by. Improvements in the structures located at this intersection would enhance the public perception of the neighborhood and a better public perception would increase interest in the neighborhood.

Specific Actions:

1. Redevelop the parcels at Kalamazoo Avenue, Hall Street, and Butler Avenue

The intersection at Kalamazoo Avenue, Hall Street, and Butler Avenue is the first one that many visitors see when entering the area. It is important that it be physically appealing to draw residents and developers. The parcel between Butler Avenue and Kalamazoo Avenue on the south side of the intersection, has already been rehabbed and looks aesthetically pleasing. The parcels across the street on Kalamazoo Avenue, however, are in desperate need of work. The structures are vacant and lack proper upkeep. Oakdale Neighbors should partner with a developer to sponsor the redevelopment of these parcels and intersection in a way that reinvents this area as a proper neighborhood gateway. Targeting these parcels only allows for greater investment of resources and once this project is complete, developers will begin to see potential in the remainder of the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor. The redevelopment of these parcels should have pedestrian-friendly sidewalks, bike lanes and racks, as well as space for future bus shelters, should a line ever run down Kalamazoo Avenue.



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APPENDIX C- Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor Analysis

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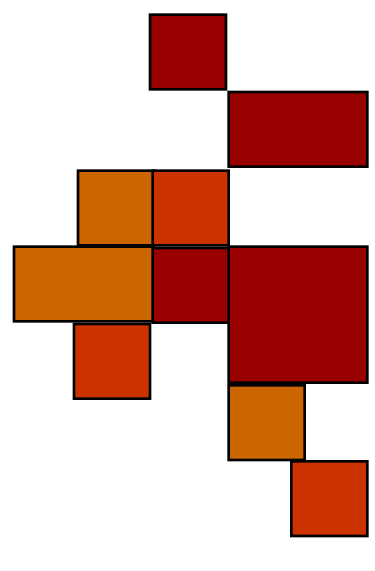
APPENDIX E - Sample Structure Classifications

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APPENDIX G - GIS Maps

APPENDIX H - References

* Information for the following maps was provided by the Grand Rapids Assessor, via Oakdale Neighbors

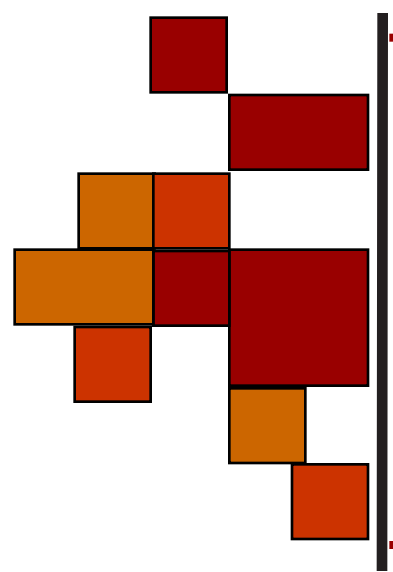


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APPENDIX A

Density Analysis

Density Analysis: a Current, 5, 10, and 20 Projection

At the request of our client, the group compiled additional information relating to urban density. The aforementioned information is provided to help visualize what density growth could look like and how it may affect: housing, education, commercial and transit facets of the Boston Square area. Ideally the information from this Density Analysis will be a stepping-stone for our client to further explore density opportunities in the Boston Square Area.

Current

Currently the Boston Square area is at a density of 2,000 people per square mile, or roughly three people per acre. There are mixed use areas that incorporate buildings that house commercial uses and housing independently. The area has lower income, higher crime rates and lower home-ownership than the rest of Grand Rapids.

In the short-term, the neighborhood should concentrate on infill development, filling vacant tenants in the commercial corridor and encouraging home ownership in the residential areas. Within this time period, a 50% increase to 3,000 dwelling units per square mile would help stabilize the commercial uses. This level of density would be conducive to office uses, and would probably consist of two-three story buildings in the Kalamazoo corridor.¹⁵

The midrange 10-year goal for the Oakdale neighborhood is to double current level of density from 2,000 dwelling units per square mile to 4,000. This type of growth is feasible within ten years following development and redevelopment of key areas. This will have a significant effect on the types of services supported and demanded by the area, as the population will have doubled.

The 20-year goal is to see 8,000 dwellings per square mile or about 13 per acre. This level of density is able to support entirely new housing, education, commercial, entertainment, and transit options. While it is not the high density one would find in the city core, around 50-150 dwelling units per acre depending on the area, it is significantly different from the existing three units.

5-year Projection

Housing:

Any change in the housing stock through the first five years should be through property rehabilitations and infill development. Currently several parking lots and open lots line the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor, and these sites are great opportunities for infill development.

Education:

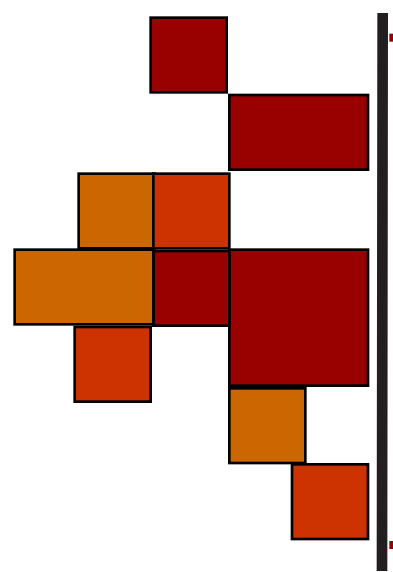
The Oakdale Elementary School within the study area will probably not be affected by growth within these next five years. The bare minimum of 300 school-aged children will not be met, and the school district will probably not reopen the school.

Commercial:

The current population and income level of the residents in the Boston Square area is too little to support much more than what is currently there. However, a significant portion of the structures along the Kalamazoo Avenue Corridor are in major states of disrepair, obsolete, or are not built in a form conducive to walkability.

Transit:

Increasing density to three units/acre from its current state of around two units/acre will not have a significant effect on transit usage. However, the new development, redevelopment and infill development should be concentrated within an easily walkable distance of the several bus stops throughout the area.



APPENDIX A

Density Analysis

10-year Projection

Housing:

A density of six dwelling units per acre presents an easily attainable density level for Oakdale. The small lot size, presence of existing high-density development, and the possibility for infill development and higher-density mixed use make it easy to achieve this level of density.

The new construction in this area should be mixed use around the Kalamazoo Corridor with building heights at a minimum of two stories. Higher elevations provide space for higher densities, but no more than four stories are required for this density level.

This density level also assumes the existing green space will remain so. This includes the old elementary school's playground, the green space behind the public housing unit and any parks in the area.

Education:

This density level may be enough to support a more local elementary school. Generally, Michigan schools will use a factor of .3 elementary children per new household.¹⁶ While this rate leaves 1200 students in the square mile, the study area is far less in area than a square mile, and the general target minimum for opening an elementary school of 300 is nearly met. A centrally located school may help the neighborhood define its identity and area

Commercial:

With an increased amount of density, this neighborhood would attract new commercial uses. It may become possible to support tenants such as banks, grocery stores, day cares, delis, chain food stores, and commercial offices. Crime, however, is a significant deterrent to these types of businesses. The high crime statistics in the Boston Square area are contributing factors to the lack of the aforementioned uses. Increasing density and lowering crime will have a significant effect on the neighborhood's land use.

Transit:

The study area is currently served by a fixed route bus service through the Inter-urban Transit Partnership, or colloquially known as 'The Rapid'. This density level comes to about 6.25 dwellings per acre, which is less than the nine/acre prescribed by findings of the Transit Cooperative Research Board.¹⁷ However, this area does not need to have this density to have a high level of service. The existing route travels through the neighborhood between the downtown and the 28th Street Meijer, two large attractions.