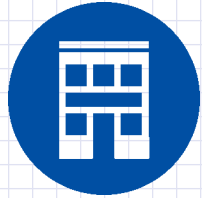


# 4.0 - Vital Business Districts

## 4.1 - Introduction



Vital business districts are critical components of a livable city and a strong economy. Great neighborhoods and vital business districts go hand-in-hand; one cannot succeed without the success of the other. The choices that are made in locating and designing business districts are also important factors in creating a walkable city and supporting transit.



## What Makes a Business District Vital?

The citizens of Grand Rapids expressed the following beliefs in what makes a vital business district.

- Business variety is necessary to maintain a healthy business district.
- High volumes of low speed traffic are good for businesses.
- Available parking is essential to the success of businesses.
- Good pedestrian environments in business areas compliment good automobile access.
- A good network of streets promotes easy access and often attracts businesses to an area.
- It is important for the city to keep older business areas vital.
- The character of buildings contributes to the success of some business areas.
- The success of local businesses is tied to the success of a neighborhood.
- It makes sense to build new buildings or to modernize old buildings.
- Older businesses are often neighborhood landmarks with a loyal customer base.
- Destination businesses attract customers who will also shop in surrounding stores.
- In order to be successful, businesses have to be seen.
- It is good to do business with people you know.

A number of business areas of the city are faced with empty storefronts, strong competition from suburban “big box” chain stores and property maintenance issues. There are many opportunities, however, for success. A comprehensive strategy to revitalize a district that includes façade improvements, marketing, complementary uses, improving walkability/accessibility, parking solutions, and business retention/recruitment efforts is important.



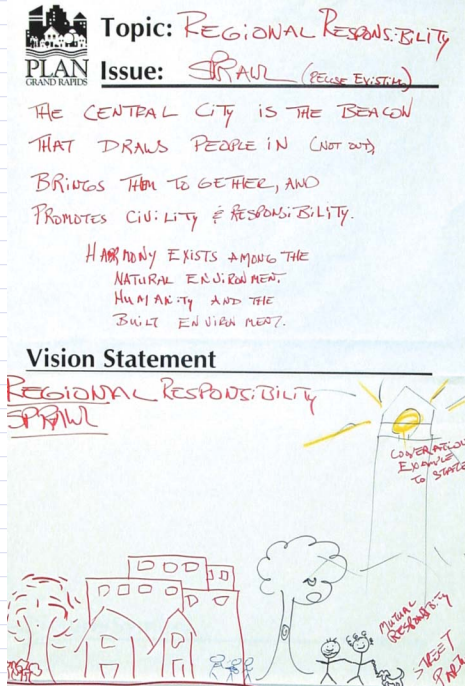
Community Forum participants.

## 4.2 - Visions

One of the first steps of the master plan process was to ask the citizens of Grand Rapids what they would like to see the city look like twenty years from now. At the first community forum more than 300 people came together to discuss the future of Grand Rapids. Their discussion was guided by the information gathered during a series of neighborhood and business association meetings and discussion guide responses collected in the first two months of the planning process. Eleven major categories summarized key issues and provided participants a variety of discussion topics from which to choose. The beliefs and issues used at the forum were developed from the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified previously. Statements and images that described a vision, or preferred future, for Grand Rapids were then created by forum participants in small groups. The following visions emerged.

### 4.2.1 - A Healthy Downtown

Downtown Grand Rapids will remain West Michigan’s center for government, commerce, education, the arts, entertainment and health. Because Downtown will be lively, safe, clean and green its residential population will grow substantially to enhance our city’s image as a “people place.” Our central city will be a beacon that draws people into the community and brings them together to promote civility and responsibility. The strength of our central core will be a significant factor in our city’s economic success, as well as that of the metropolitan region.



Posters are from the first Master Plan Community Forum held at Central High School in March 2001.

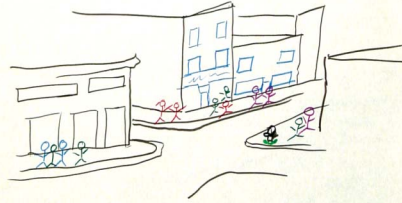


Topic: NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESSES

Issue: SOME BUSINESS AREAS ARE SPREAD OUT TOO MUCH

We will have clustered, compact local retail districts - walkable areas for neighbors & visiting shoppers, composed of compatible, neighborhood-friendly stores & services within walking distance of every city neighborhood - places where people can meet and get most of their shopping needs without moving their cars.

Vision Statement



Picture/Symbol

Wade-Trim Team

4.2.2 - Vitality

Grand Rapids' diverse businesses will meet the needs of neighborhoods, the larger community and the region. We will be especially proud of the large number of locally owned small businesses that emphasize customer service. We will succeed in redeveloping and reusing vacant and underutilized properties in our business districts by encouraging a mix of uses and compact commercial centers. Throughout much of the city, convenience shopping and services will be available within walking distance of neighborhoods. Businesses will cooperate in recruiting a mix of uses appropriate to the district, its adjacent neighborhoods and residents. Many neighborhood business districts will include upper story residential or office space in addition to ground level shops, restaurants and offices.

4.2.3 - The Public Realm

Our neighborhood business districts will have streets that are clean, attractively landscaped, well lit and walkable. Wherever possible, the number of travel lanes will be reduced to slow traffic and provide on-street parking. Additional parking will be provided to the rear or side of buildings to maintain a pedestrian scale on the street. This parking will serve the district as a whole, allowing visits to multiple shops from a single parking place. Street-level store windows will make walking interesting and add to a feeling of safety at night. Pocket parks and other outdoor gathering spots will add to the liveliness of each business area. Because the design of our business districts will be neighborhood- and pedestrian- friendly, they will serve as meeting places and focal points for community life. Property owners will cooperate to make sure that the design of buildings, façades and signs add to the unique and welcoming character of each district by coordinating these key design elements. These efforts will make our business districts both vibrant and beautiful.



We will make our business districts both vibrant and beautiful.



Topic: NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESSES

Issue: POOR QUALITY STREETScape

THE CLEAN STREETScaPES IN THE CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS PROVIDE PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLY ACCESS TO STORES AND BUSINESSES. THEY BORDER TWO-LANE STREETS, ARE LANDSCAPED WITH TREES AND FLOWERS. YOU CAN SAFELY WALK OR DRIVE TO YOUR DESTINATION, AND THERE ARE GATHERING PLACES, WELL LIT AT NIGHT. THE BUILDINGS PRESENT A COMMON THEME.

Vision Statement



Picture/Symbol

Wade-Trim Team





Business districts are made up of a variety of commercial uses, such as on East Fulton where one can find pet food, pastries, frames and furniture.

## 4.3 - Plan Recommendations

To provide the basis for achieving these visions, plan recommendations focus on the type and scale of uses and the character of development appropriate in Grand Rapids' existing business districts and propose new ideas for mixed-use development. These mixed-use business district types include:

- Downtown;
- near-Downtown and riverfront mixed-use areas;
- traditional business areas (TBAs);
- neighborhood, village and sub-regional mixed-use centers.

*Scale and transportation orientation are important factors in determining compatible commercial development in different types of business districts.*

### Types and Scales of Commercial Use

Business districts are made up of a variety of commercial uses, including retail, restaurant, entertainment, service and office. These uses can be developed at a variety of scales (or sizes) and can be designed to emphasize access by automobiles and/or by people on foot. These considerations – scale and transportation orientation – are important in determining which kinds of commercial development fit compatibly into different types of business districts. For example, a retail use can take the form of a small shop of less than 1,000 square feet or a “big box” discount store of over 200,000 square feet. The larger the commercial use, the larger the amount of parking and land area required to support it. Using typical suburban parking standards (1 parking spaces for every 200 square feet of usable building space), a retail shop of 1,000 square feet would require 5 parking spaces. In comparison, a “big box” of 200,000 square feet would require 1,000 parking spaces; about 7.5 acres of parking would be needed if these spaces were provided in a surface lot. Clearly, the scale of a commercial use, and the amount of off-street parking required by the city’s zoning ordinance, should be factors in making decisions about land use and development character in Grand Rapids’ business districts (see *Chapter 6 - Balanced Transportation - Page 75*).



### 4.3.1 - Transportation Orientation

The scale of a commercial use helps to determine how easily it can be designed to “fit” into a pedestrian-oriented business district and/or a neighborhood setting. But the transportation orientation of a commercial use is also an important determining factor. Some commercial uses, by the very nature of the products and services they offer, attract more automobile traffic and are more dependent on auto access than others. These uses include, for example, drive-through restaurants, gas stations, repair shops, car washes and new and used car sales. Careful site planning and architectural design can make even large scale commercial uses (with large amounts of off-street parking) and auto-oriented commercial uses more pedestrian-friendly; but a concentration of auto-oriented uses – or a poorly designed one at a critical location - can undermine the walkability of a business district.

To ensure that all Grand Rapids’ business districts become more walkable, and that the scale of development is compatible with the district context and nearby single family neighborhoods, it will be necessary to make distinctions among commercial uses on the basis of scale and auto-orientation.<sup>1</sup> The plan recommendations presented on the following pages demonstrate how these distinctions can be recognized and applied in making decisions on future land use and development character in the different types of business districts shown on the Future Land Use Map (see Figure 2.a, Page 21). These include a commercial land use classification that accommodates more suburban auto-oriented development and several mixed-use districts:

- Downtown;
- near-Downtown and riverfront mixed-use areas;
- traditional business areas (TBAs);
- neighborhood, village and sub-regional mixed-use centers.

As noted throughout the Master Plan, the goal of mixed-use development is to help create a human scale, walkable and transit-supportive city. To be successful, mixed-use areas must be carefully planned and designed to provide incremental transitions in use intensity and building scale, coherence in architectural design and a pedestrian-friendly public realm. Performance standards are also needed to control impacts (for example, noise and truck traffic) that can reduce the quality of life. The recommended *Development Objectives for All Mixed-Use Areas* (Figure 3.g - Page 37), descriptions of the *Purpose, Recommended Uses and Special Considerations for Mixed-Use Areas* (Figure 3.h - Page 38) and sample development guidelines in *Chapter 10 - Development Character - Page 117* provide the basis for undertaking more detailed area-specific plans for each proposed mixed-use area. These area-specific plans can determine where existing development should be protected and enhanced and where future redevelopment should be encouraged. These more detailed planning efforts, undertaken with the collaboration of the city, area land owners, developers, residents and business owners, are essential in establishing a foundation for successful mixed-use development (see *Chapter 11 - Area-Specific Plans - Page 151*).

<sup>1</sup> The incorporation of Traditional Business District (TBA) and Urban Business District (UBD) classifications in Grand Rapids’ current zoning ordinance represents an important first step in recognizing that some scales and forms of commercial use are less compatible than others in business districts originally built as human scale and pedestrian-oriented commercial areas. Augmenting and refining this first step will be an important task in revising the zoning ordinance to implement the Master Plan’s recommendations.

### Renewed Interest in Urban Shopping

Retail development is now taking place in a climate of renewed interest in urban shopping. *Barron’s* reported in August 1999 that shoppers are beginning to tire of enclosed malls, leading developers to experiment with open-air town square, or main street, shopping and entertainment districts. Many of these projects are located in suburbs, but still feature stores built to the sidewalk, curbside parking, and greater attention paid to the quality of public space. For developers, this trend may provide some hope – more retailers are getting used to operating in a pedestrian-oriented environment. Traditional mall tenants such as the Gap and Banana Republic are increasingly opening stores on city streets, lured by lower rents, the absence of fees for mall maintenance and security, and the growing number of affluent empty-nesters who are returning to urban areas.

Federal Realty, a real estate investment trust (REIT) that has developed New Urbanist projects, is spearheading this trend, as reported in *Urban Land* magazine in July, 1999. Federal’s strategy has been to purchase large, multi-block developments and redevelop them into full-scale, mixed-use retail and office districts. One example is Bethesda Row in downtown Bethesda, Maryland which will include 512,500 square feet of retail and offices at completion. The first phases of Bethesda Row have already brought new pedestrian life to downtown, and care has been taken to maintain a mix of local, regional and national retailers and to encourage diversity in storefront design.

Excerpt from: *New Urbanism and Traditional Neighborhood Development*, © 2000, New Urban News, Ithaca, NY



View of Downtown from Ah-Nab-Awen Park.

## 4.3.2 - Downtown

The 1993 *Voices & Visions* plan for Grand Rapids' Downtown includes a "constitution" that presents the following goals for the downtown area.

- Downtown is the physical and spiritual heart of the metropolitan area.
- Downtown Grand Rapids is for everyone.
- Downtown of the future should include the best of our past.
- Downtown is a place for pedestrians.
- Development in Downtown must protect and enhance the natural environment.
- Downtown reflects and celebrates our community's diversity.
- Downtown decision-making must remain open and inclusive.

- Downtown must be economically strong.
- Downtown must be user-friendly.
- To achieve our envisioned Downtown Grand Rapids, we must:
  - design Downtown, don't just let it happen;
  - do things right;
  - work together.

In addition, over 30 proposals are presented for making Downtown a place where people want to live, work and play. These proposals address, among other topics:

- expansion and promotion of arts and entertainment activities;
- the need to "green" Downtown and make it pedestrian-friendly;
- the importance of downtown housing;
- the public sector's role as a partner and facilitator;
- the importance of transit.

In order of priority, *Voices & Visions* also recommends focusing on the retention and recruitment of the following land uses as critical components of a downtown mixed-use district.

- Public uses
- Office users
- Retail
- Housing

This Master Plan builds on these recommendations for what Downtown can and should be, but focuses attention on the balance of the Grand Rapids community to define land use strategies that support and capitalize on Downtown's role as a regional mixed-use center.

### 4.3.3 - Near Downtown and Riverfront Mixed-Use Areas

The growing strength and appeal of Downtown, as demonstrated by the ongoing transformation of the North Monroe and Heartside areas as mixed-use districts, can be a powerful catalyst for reinvestment in nearby areas. In turn, this reinvestment can help to provide a transition between Downtown's high intensity concentration of institutions, offices and entertainment opportunities and surrounding lower density neighborhoods. To accomplish this, the Master Plan recommends that neighborhood edges be respected and that mixed-use development be encouraged in existing institutional, commercial and industrial areas within and adjacent to Downtown, along the riverfront and on the Near West Side (see *Figure 2.a - Future Land Use Map - Page 21*).

All commercial uses (retail, restaurant, hotel, entertainment, service and office) can be compatible components of near Downtown and riverfront mixed-use areas. The *Development Objectives for All Mixed-Use Areas (Figure 3.g - Page 37)*, descriptions of the *Purpose, Recommended Uses and Special Considerations for Mixed-Use Areas (Figure 3.h - Page 38)* should serve as a starting point for area-specific planning. (See *Chapter 5 - A Strong Economy - Page 63* and *Chapter 7 - A City that Enriches Our Lives - Page 89*.)

### 4.3.4 - Traditional Business Areas (TBAs)

Grand Rapids pre-World War II neighborhoods contain fifteen proposed traditional business areas (TBAs) as illustrated in *Figure 2.a - Future Land Use Map - Page 21*. Today, these older strip commercial areas vary in length, appearance, land use mix and economic vitality. The Master Plan recommends that these TBAs be restored and revitalized by encouraging the restructuring of land use patterns and the recreation of a pedestrian-friendly environment. This



restructuring should recognize that the city has a disproportionate amount of commercial zoning along its main thoroughfares as a result of changing development trends. Commercial activity should be concentrated at strategic locations to increase economic benefits to each business district.

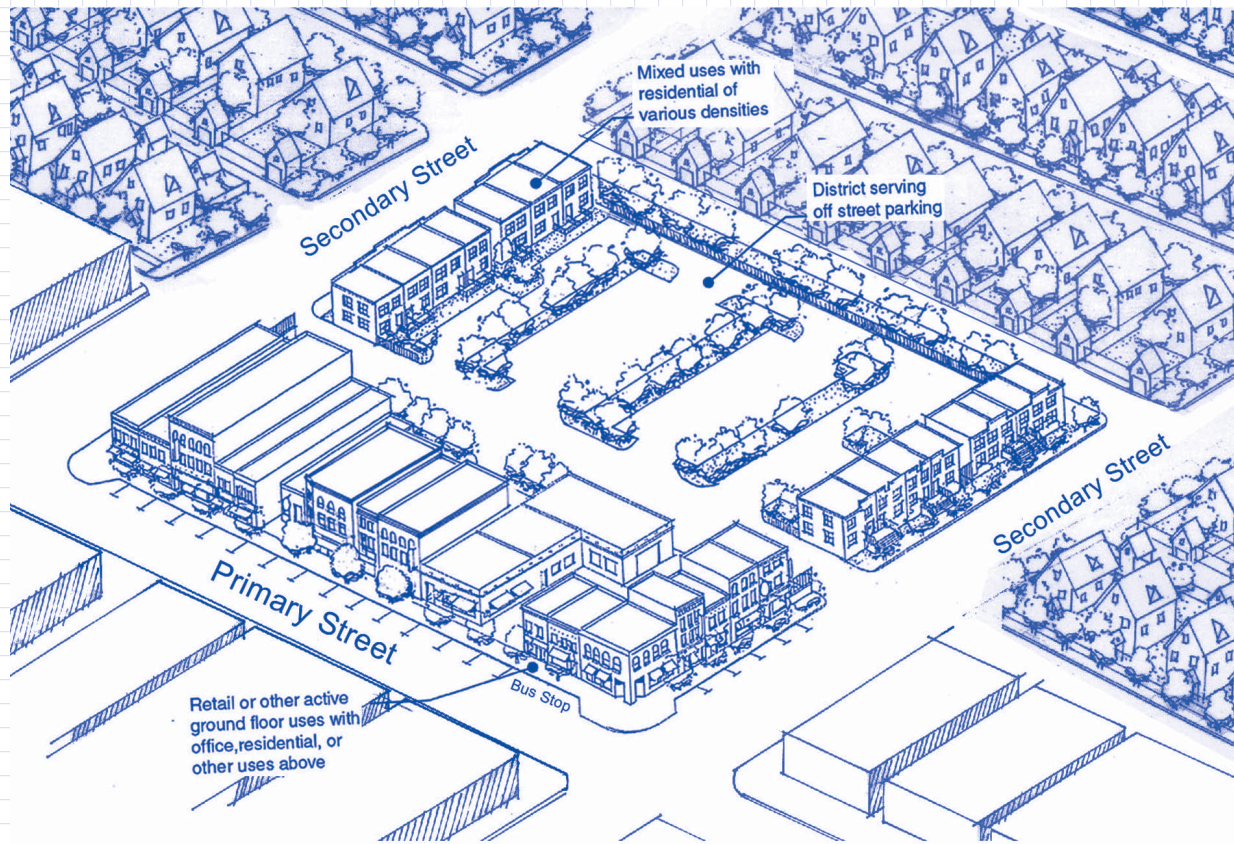
**The Model TBA** - Typically located along street car routes, TBAs were developed before lifestyles became so dependent on the automobile. They included a mix of civic and retail uses at street level, with apartments and/or offices on the upper floors of multi-story buildings. These buildings were located on the front property line and shared sidewalls (or were built with minimal side yard setbacks) to frame the street with a continuous “street wall.” Buildings were typically 2 -3 stories in height and set on relatively narrow lots. Off-street parking was limited and located to the rear of the building. As a result, TBAs created a human-scale and pedestrian-friendly environment where retail, jobs and services were available within easy walking distance from many homes.

In some TBAs, the addition of auto-oriented uses (for example, drive-through restaurants) and other suburban-style re-development (where parking lots, rather than buildings, are located adjacent to the side-

*The Boardwalk, formerly the Berkey and Gay furniture factory, is part of the ongoing transformation in the North Monroe area.*



*Restaurants are a compatible use in designated mixed-use areas.*



A human-scale and pedestrian friendly environment is desirable in a traditional business area.

walk) have eroded some of the original pedestrian orientation and traditional architecture that characterized these areas. These changes have made people in Grand Rapids increasingly interested in preserving and restoring the qualities that made TBAs attractive, people-oriented places and focal points of neighborhood activity.

**Parking Issues** - There are several difficult issues to be addressed in re-establishing the development character and economic vitality of these older business areas. Parking is one of them. TBA businesses typically occupied relatively shallow lots and originally offered only limited off-street parking. Today's dependence on the automobile (and the tendency to

believe that ample free parking is the key to economic success) creates tension between business owners wanting more parking and the need to preserve the pedestrian orientation of the shopping street, on the one hand, and residents' concerns about commercial encroachment into neighborhoods, on the other. Maintaining buildings and storefronts at the edge of sidewalks is critical to the walkability of the TBA. Several strategies can help to reduce the amount of off-street parking needed within a TBA, however. These include, for example:

- increasing the population living within easy walking distance of the TBA's retail core;
- improving pedestrian and bicycle connections to nearby neighborhoods;
- maximizing on-street parking on the TBAs main street;
- providing shared off-street parking to more efficiently meet the needs of the district overall;
- capitalizing on transit service to TBA's.

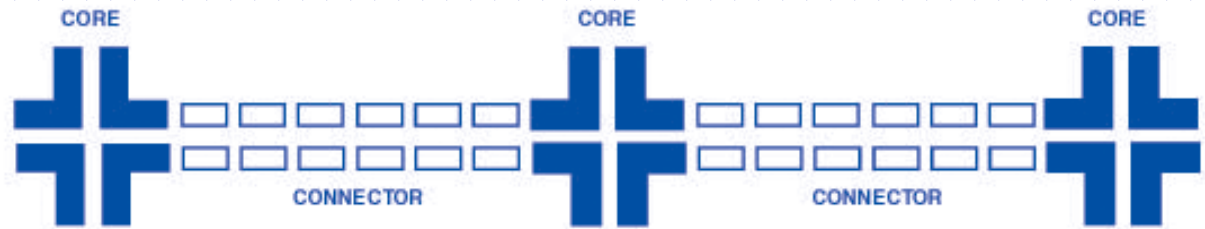
Nevertheless, in many TBA's, businesses and residents will have to explore ways to expand off-street parking. This can be accomplished in a way that creates better transitions between residential and non-residential uses and compensates for the loss of any existing homes. One such solution, based on the idea of creating shared district parking edged by medium-density town homes or apartments is illustrated on this page and described in greater detail in *Section 10.4 - Traditional Business Area - Page 127*. Collaborative planning will be essential in defining the best solution for each TBA and its surrounding neighborhoods (see *Chapter 11 - Area-Specific Plans - Page 151*).



**Retail Market Demand** - A second important issue in planning for the future of Grand Rapids' TBAs is the market demand for the types of retail commercial space they offer. Many people believe that Grand Rapids may have more land zoned for these kinds of commercial uses than the market can support. Persistent vacancies in some business districts (as well as in some more recently constructed strip centers) and the conversion of storefront space to non-retail use suggest that this may be true.

It may not be possible to recruit desirable tenants for every existing commercial building in every TBA. As a result, plan strategies are needed that encourage the clustering of retail uses to create shopping destinations in some portions of a TBA and redevelopment for supportive, non-retail uses in other areas. The cores and connectors concept, that proposes the creation of more compact retail/mixed-use centers (cores) at certain locations, linked by higher density residential/mixed-use (connectors) is recommended to address this need (*Figure 4.a - Cores and Connectors - Page 55*). The recommended uses for TBA cores are described in *Figure 3.h - Purpose, Recommended Uses and Special Considerations for Mixed-Use Areas - Page 38*; recommended uses for TBA connectors are those described for Mixed-Use Area Type D in the same Figure. (See *Figure 3.g - Development Objectives for All Mixed-Use Areas - Page 37*.)

Both market analyses of retail potential and more detailed area-specific planning will be needed to determine the location and extent of each TBA's cores and connectors. These area-specific planning efforts should be collaborative, involving the city, area property owners, residents and business people. The restructuring needed to promote the future economic success of Grand Rapids' TBAs will be predominantly driven by the private sector; nevertheless, public sector participation to provide technical and financial assistance supportive of private sector efforts may be required.



**Retail Management** - The restoration, revitalization and continuing success of Grand Rapids' TBAs will require coordinated action on future land use patterns and physical improvements (streetscapes, parking, building rehab, signs). Just as important, business retention/recruitment, retail management, maintenance and promotion must be addressed. Like a successfully managed shopping mall, TBAs made up of many small, independent retailers need a coordinated, comprehensive and pro-active plan and a full- or part-time manager dedicated to making that plan work.

Some of the market analysis needed to support this planning could be undertaken on a citywide basis - for example, to better understand the overall market for smaller retailers today and over time, as other plan recommendations for making the city a more competitive residential choice are implemented. A periodically updated base of information is also needed on retail space availability, rental and purchase prices and sales per square foot to allow entrepreneurs to develop business plans and qualify for loans. In addition, any incentives for retail reinvestment that may be offered by the public sector (including for example, low interest loans, assistance with utility upgrades and connections and/or assistance in providing shared parking) need to be defined and translated into programs with funding support. Priorities for targeting the use of these incentives will also be needed.

**Figure 4.a - Cores and Connectors**

**Core:** Retail shops and restaurants in the core create a vital destination.

**Connector:** Higher density housing and residentially scaled office (with possible ground floor retail) increase the population density within walking distance of the core.

### 4.3.5 - Mixed-Use Neighborhood, Village and Sub-Regional Centers

The Master Plan recommends encouraging the restructuring of many of the city's existing commercial concentrations - in both pre- and post-war neighborhoods - into compact, walkable, mixed-use centers, particularly those located on transit routes. Many proposed mixed-use centers are located in traditional business areas in pre-war neighborhoods (see Figure 2.a - Future Land Use Map - Page 21). Proposed mixed-use centers are located in areas zoned for commercial use that have been developed as more auto-oriented shopping centers, strip malls or collections of freestanding businesses in post-war neighborhoods. In contrast to traditional business areas, these commercial areas are typically located on larger, deeper parcels and have been designed for automobile, rather than pedestrian, access. In addition to Downtown, the regional mixed-use center, three additional types, or scales, of mixed-use centers are pro-

posed (see Figure 3.i - Neighborhood Characteristics and Preservation Tools/Strategies - Page 40 and Figure 4.b - Hierarchy of Mixed-Use Centers - Page 56).

- Neighborhood centers that serve as the focus of a neighborhood, or several neighborhoods, and are located on a major transit route.
- Village centers that serve several neighborhoods and are located on a proposed express and/or high frequency service transit route.
- Sub-regional centers that serve several villages (and may also serve areas outside the city) and are located on a proposed express and/or high frequency service transit route.

By incorporating housing, shopping, jobs and services, and providing attractive alternatives to travel by car, mixed-use centers will make it possible to reduce the amount of off-street parking (and land required to accommodate it) and support improved transit service (see also, Chapter 6 - Balanced Transportation - Page 75).

Figure 4.b - Hierarchy of Mixed-Use Centers



#### Neighborhood Mixed-Use Center

Serves as the focus of a neighborhood or several neighborhoods; located on a major transit route.

Core Retail Uses	Other Core Uses	Approximate Retail Gross Square Feet	Approximate Trade Area	Population to Support
<p>Convenience shopping:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small food market</li> <li>• Deli</li> <li>• Bakery</li> <li>• Local restaurant</li> <li>• Florist</li> <li>• Video store</li> <li>• Beauty/barber</li> <li>• Dry cleaning</li> <li>• Other local small business</li> </ul>	<p>Non-retail uses within the core might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small upper-story offices</li> <li>• Day care</li> <li>• School</li> <li>• Police or fire substation</li> <li>• Multifamily housing</li> <li>• Live/work housing</li> <li>• Branch library</li> </ul>	7,500 - 10,000	<p>¾ - 1 mile ¼mi primary area</p>	<p>Minimum 6,000 - 10,000</p>

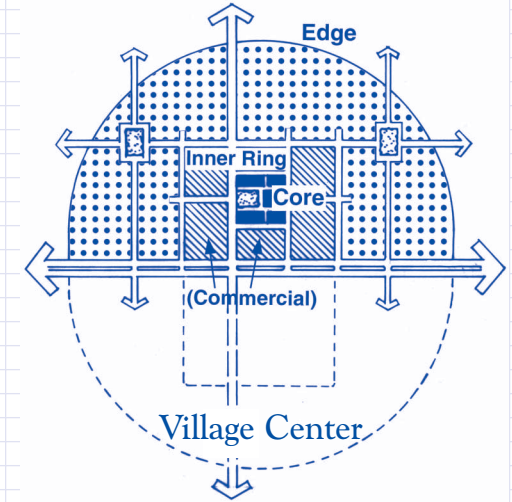
Figure 4.b - Hierarchy of Mixed-Use Centers

**Village Mixed-Use Center**

Serves several neighborhoods; located on a high frequency service transit route.

Core Uses	Inner Ring Uses	Approximate Retail Gross Square Feet	Approximate Trade Area	Population to Support
Convenience shopping with at least one anchor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supermarket</li> <li>• Drugstore</li> <li>• Hardware</li> </ul> Other retail: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entertainment</li> <li>• Specialty shops</li> <li>• Gifts</li> <li>• Clothing</li> <li>• Bank</li> <li>• Etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher density housing</li> <li>• Larger freestanding offices</li> <li>• Other job generators with high employee to floor area ratio</li> <li>• Cinema</li> <li>• Branch Post Office</li> <li>• Church</li> <li>• Community recreation center</li> </ul>	30,000 – 150,000 GSF	1 – 3 miles;  1/2 mile primary area	Minimum 20,000 – 35,000

See also *Neighborhood Mixed-Use Center Core Uses*.

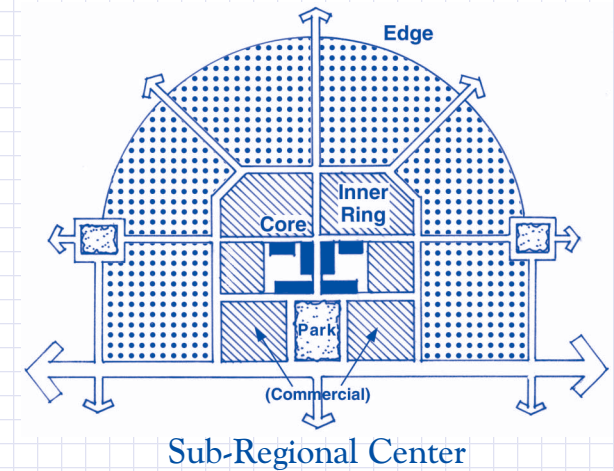


**Sub-Regional Mixed-Use Center**

Serves a specific area of the city (several villages) and may also serve areas outside the city; located on a high frequency service transit route.

Core Uses	Inner Ring Uses	Approximate Retail Gross Square Feet	Approximate Trade Area	Population to Support
General merchandise and convenience shopping with two anchors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supermarket</li> <li>• Drugstore</li> <li>• Home improvement</li> <li>• Department store</li> <li>• Specialty/discount apparel</li> <li>• Chain restaurant</li> <li>• Other retail plus non-retail core uses</li> </ul>	See Village Inner Ring Uses, plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College/technical school</li> <li>• Larger scale health care</li> </ul>	150,000 – 275,000 GSF	3 – 5 miles;  1 mile primary area	Minimum 55,000 – 115,000

See also *Neighborhood and Village Mixed-Use Center Core Uses*.



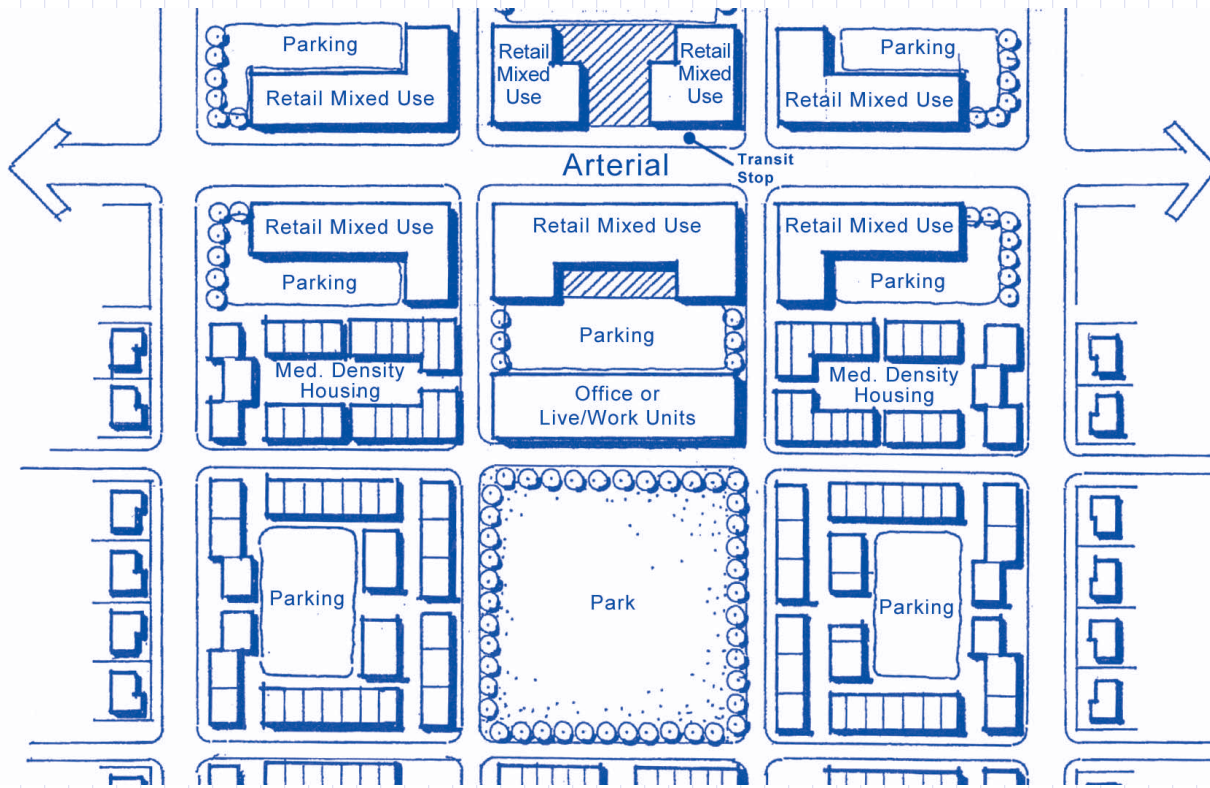


Figure 4.c - Illustration of Neighborhood Mixed-Use Center

### Common Characteristics

The three categories of mixed-use centers will vary significantly in size and in the type and amount of business and residential development they include; yet all will share certain characteristics:

- a mixed-use retail “core” that includes shops, services, offices, restaurants, entertainment, civic and residential uses in buildings that are oriented to the street;
- a transit stop;
- public spaces for shared activities;
- a connected street system that defines small blocks, is designed for walkability and links the mixed-use center to surrounding neighborhoods;

- a range of housing types for people of all incomes and ages; and
- an “edge” zone that creates a transition in residential densities and building scale adjacent to existing single family neighborhoods.

A plan illustration of how these common characteristics might be organized in a neighborhood mixed-use center is presented in *Figure 4.c - Illustration of Neighborhood Mixed-Use Center - Page 58*.

Like the TBAs, the cores of all mixed-use centers should include street level retail and services, with upper story residential and office use. Parking should be provided both on-street and in off-street lots (or decks) that are located on the interior of blocks, with buildings located along the block’s edges to screen parking and ensure that streets have a human scale. Building entries and storefronts should be oriented to these streets to provide a pedestrian orientation and an active edge. When located on a regional or major city street, traffic through the core (and/or mixed-use center) may require calming.

### Variable Characteristics

**Core Uses** - Although all mixed-use centers should include a retail mixed-use core, the scale of the retail uses, and the total retail square footage, will vary. Preliminary ideas about the types of uses that might be located in the core area of each type of mixed-use center are presented in *Figure 4.b - Hierarchy of Mixed-Use Centers - Page 56*.

**Inner Ring** - Proposed village and sub-regional mixed-use centers are large enough to include an inner ring in addition to core and edge zones. Uses in this intermediate zone can include medium and high-density residential development, larger footprint retail uses (for example, a grocery store), larger freestanding office buildings, other work places with a high employee-to-floor ratio (including technology and

certain light industrial uses), medical clinics, schools and churches. Each mixed-use center must be designed to fit its specific context; nevertheless, the greater the residential and employee population within a ¼-mile walking distance of the retail core, the greater the market support for the retail component will be. Travel origins and destinations will also be better concentrated to support improved transit.

**Other Commercial Areas/28th Street** - 28th Street is Grand Rapids' largest commercial corridor. It is home to a broad range of commercial development types from small, freestanding businesses to small strip centers, auto-oriented uses (gas stations, car sales), national chain and big box retailers, hotels and planned shopping centers. Along 28th Street, Grand Rapids has an appropriate location for large footprint and auto-oriented commercial uses that do not fit comfortably into traditional business areas, neighborhood mixed-use centers or village and sub-regional mixed-use center cores.

Many people anticipate that the South Beltline will inspire business relocations from 28th Street, in particular, major retailers and car dealers. This would present unique opportunities to restructure development along some portions of the 28th Street corridor by redeveloping larger commercial sites as new, walkable mixed-use village centers as described above. Even if large commercial sites are not available, these village centers can be created incrementally over time. (See the illustrative plans presented in *Supplement B* for an example of how such a transformation could occur at 28th and Division.)

The Master Plan also recommends encouraging a transition in land use to medium-density residential on shallow commercial parcels that are difficult to market because of their limited depth. A change to residential use on these segments of 28th Street would greatly reduce (or eliminate) the conflicts that exist today between the low-density residential neighborhoods adjacent to the corridor and the current

use of the shallow, less commercially viable, corridor frontage. A boulevard treatment or other re-design of the 28th Street roadway would improve its marketability as a residential location.

**Auto-Oriented Commercial Development Guidelines** - Today, commercial development along 28th Street and in other suburban-style shopping centers in Grand Rapids gives little recognition to the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and transit users. Large parking lots located between commercial buildings and the street discourage walking (even from a transit stop to a building entrance); signs scaled to catch motorists' attention create visual confusion and multiple driveway curb cuts create safety conflicts. While the Master Plan acknowledges the need to maintain auto-oriented development patterns in some portions of the city, visual quality and non-motorized access can also be improved. The recommended guidelines for auto-oriented commercial development presented in *Chapter 10 - Development Character - Page 117* provide a starting point for preparing improved standards for parking lot screening and landscaping, signs, etc.

Auto Oriented Commercial - Project Concept

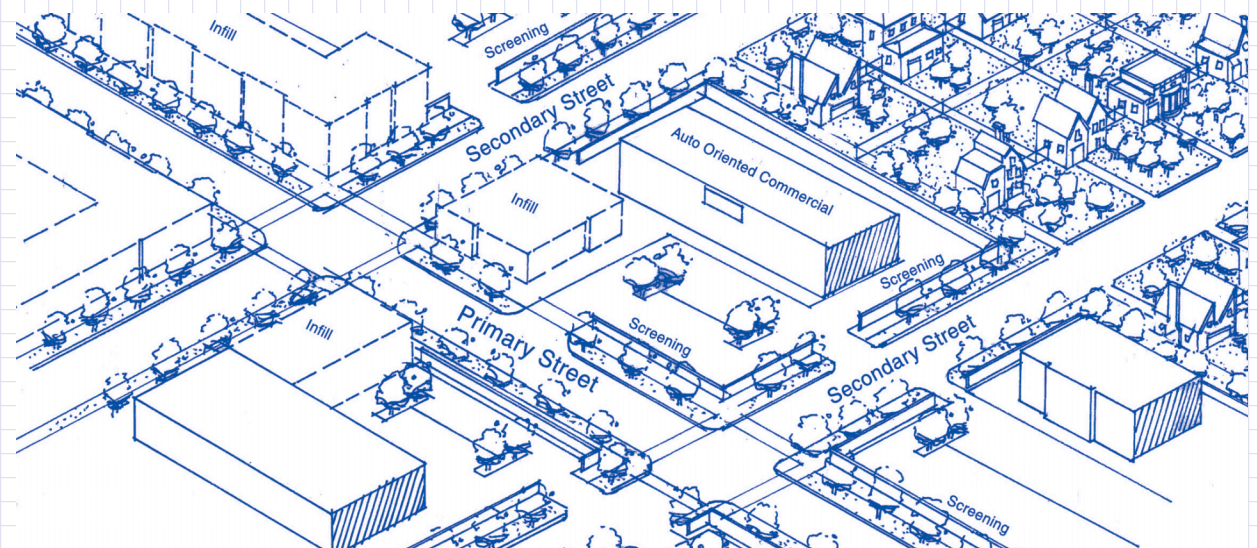




Photo courtesy of ArtWorks Expanded Visions 2001 youth apprenticeship program.

## 4.4 - Objectives and Policies

The following objectives and policies summarize what needs to be done to achieve the vision and plan recommendations presented on the preceding pages so that Grand Rapids can become a city of vital business districts. Above each objective is a line of theme icons. The icons illustrate how a particular objective is interrelated with another Master Plan theme. See Page 24 for a description of each theme.



### Objective VBD 1

Continue to reinforce Downtown's role as the multipurpose urban center for the metropolitan region.

- a. As the regional center for West Michigan, encourage the location of government, large scale office and arts and entertainment uses in Downtown.
- b. Promote the expansion of the resident population in and adjacent to Downtown by encouraging the conversion of near-Downtown and riverfront industrial and commercial areas to mixed-use (see Figure 2.a - Future Land Use Map - Page 21, Figure 3.g - Development Objectives for All Mixed-Use Areas - Page 37 and Figure 3.h - Purpose, Recommended Uses and Special Considerations for Mixed-Use Areas - Page 38).
- c. See also *Voices & Visions: Community Planning for Downtown*.



### Objective VBD 2

Encourage reinvestment in traditional business area corridors to create compact retail mixed-use centers (cores) linked by residential mixed-use development (connectors).

- a. Assist traditional business area (TBA) organizations in assessing the market support for retail business, office and higher density residential, and the appropriateness of their building inventory, in planning for reinvestment.

- b. Assist TBA organizations in developing business retention and recruitment strategies and managing the retail mix to create a marketable district identity and planning promotional activities.
- c. Foster property/business owner and resident cooperation in determining the appropriate mix of business uses.
- d. Provide technical assistance to encourage local business start-ups and expand local ownership.
- e. Target public investments in improving roadways, transit stops, streetscapes and parking to business districts with comprehensive, coordinated plans for retail recruitment and management, physical improvements, maintenance and district promotion.
- f. Encourage rehabilitation and infill development that enhances each TBA's traditional architecture and pedestrian orientation.
- g. Carefully control auto-oriented uses (3.g - Development Objectives for All Mixed-Use Areas - Page 37).
- h. Accommodate larger scale commercial uses where existing parcel configurations and shared district parking can support them.
- i. Employ on-street parking, shared parking lots and parking decks; locate and design off-street parking to minimize its impact on the pedestrian character of the district and adjacent neighborhoods.



#### Objective VBD 3

Encourage the development of compact, walkable commercial centers that provide a mix of uses (retail, other commercial and higher density residential) located on transit routes.

- a. Encourage the development of neighborhood and village mixed-use centers within traditional business areas, and restructure more suburban commercial areas, as shown on the Future Land Use Map (2.a - Future Land Use Map - Page 21, 3.h - Purpose, Recommended Uses and Special Considerations for Mixed-Use Areas - Page 38 and 4.b - Hierarchy of Mixed-Use Centers - Page 56).
- b. Encourage the development at East Beltline/Knapp and East Beltline/28<sup>th</sup> to take the form of sub-regional mixed-use centers.
- c. Educate property owners, developers and lenders to the advantages of mixed-use development.
- d. Work with existing property and business owners to develop area-specific plans that can serve as catalysts and guides to mixed-use re-development of existing commercial areas.
- e. Prepare mixed-use development standards and guidelines using the Master Plan's recommendations as a starting point (Figure 3.g - Development Objectives for All Mixed-Use Areas - Page 37 and Figure 3.h - Purpose, Recommended Uses and Special Considerations for Mixed-Use Areas - Page 38).
- f. Develop incentives to encourage mixed-use development (for example, density bonuses, public street extensions, off-street parking reductions, streamlined development approvals).



#### Objective VBD 4

Encourage the restructuring of commercial development on 28<sup>th</sup> Street.

- a. Concentrate retail development in proposed village and sub-regional mixed-use centers and in planned shopping centers.
- b. Encourage the conversion of shallow (hard to market) commercial parcels to medium and/or high-density residential mixed-use (Mixed-Use Type D in Figure Figure 3.h - Purpose, Recommended Uses and Special Considerations for Mixed-Use Areas - Page 38).
- c. Collaborate with neighboring communities to improve the design and appearance of 28<sup>th</sup> Street, including the possibility of a boulevard cross section.



#### Objective VBD 5

Improve the visual appeal and walkability of all business districts.

- a. Assist in providing streetscape improvements to enhance the pedestrian environment and the visual appearance of the city's commercial areas.
- b. Coordinate with the Interurban Transit Partnership to provide appropriate transit facilities (bus lay-bys, benches, shelters).
- c. Upgrade district appearance by encouraging compatible façade, storefront and sign improvements to enhance curb appeal and visual interest.

- d. Provide zoning standards and design guidelines as needed to improve site planning and design (landscaping, architecture, signs, buffers, etc.) and to improve pedestrian and bicycle access in auto-oriented commercial districts.
- e. Ensure that streets are clean and well lit and that traffic speeds are safe.
- f. Enhance pedestrian connections from commercial districts to nearby neighborhoods.

