

AREA SPECIFIC PLAN:

# CRESTON



DRAFT

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## INTRODUCTION

### OVERVIEW

The Creston Area Specific Plan (ASP) is the culmination of a series of community input and feedback sessions with the neighborhood. The ASP outlines the community's vision for the future of the neighborhood and defines the steps necessary to achieve that vision. This includes both short- and long-term improvements related to land use, housing, economic development, transportation, and public space.

The Creston ASP is bounded by the Grand River and the following streets: 3 Mile Road, Fuller Avenue, and Leonard Street. Creston is primarily a residential community with industrial areas along the rail lines and Monroe Avenue, and a commercial corridor along Plainfield Avenue that bisects the neighborhood diagonally (see **ASP Study Area Boundary** map). Defining features within or adjacent to the study area include Riverside Park, Kent Country Club, the Plainfield commercial districts, and the Grand River.

### ASP STUDY AREA BOUNDARY



### RELATIONSHIP TO COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN AND OTHER PLANS

The Community Master Plan (CMP) acts as a blueprint, outlining a vision and broad objectives along with detailed recommendations to achieve them. Building on this foundation, the Area Specific Plans (ASPs) adhere to the same principles and provide more detailed strategies. These plans illustrate how the overarching vision and goals of the CMP are tailored and implemented to meet the unique needs of individual neighborhoods. Additionally, citywide planning initiatives such as the Vital Streets Plan, Bicycle Action Plan, the Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan, Grand Rapids/Kent County Housing Needs Assessment, Grand River Equity Framework, and others offer further recommendations.

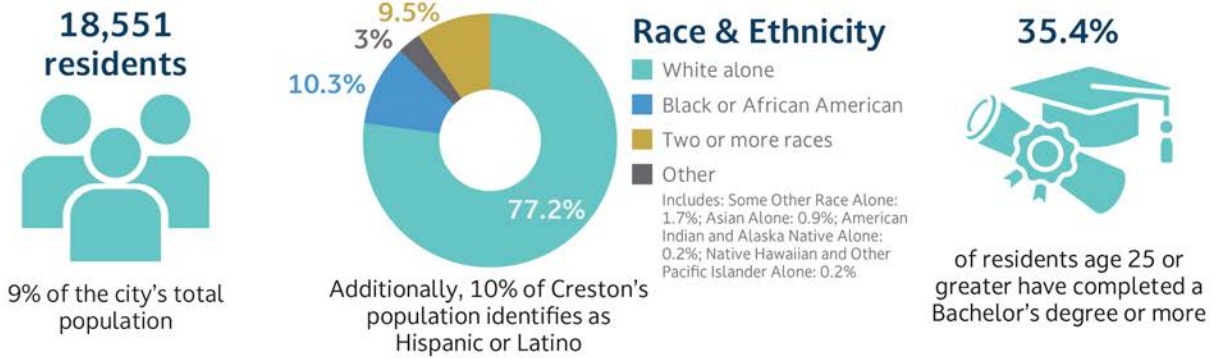


## NEIGHBORHOOD TODAY

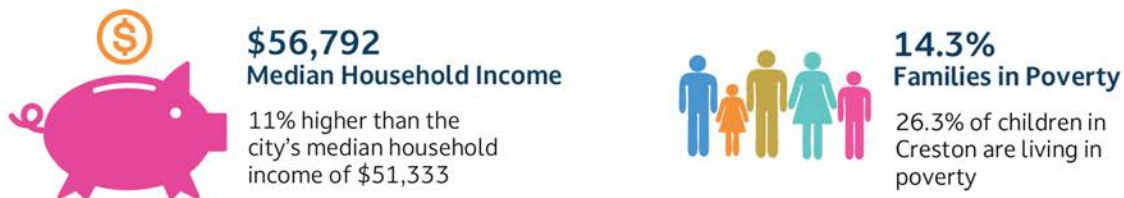
### COMMUNITY PROFILE

Source: U.S. Census ACS 2020 & 2022 (5-Year Estimates) - Census Tracts 4, 5, 9, 10, and 13, Kent County, Michigan

#### POPULATION



#### INCOMES



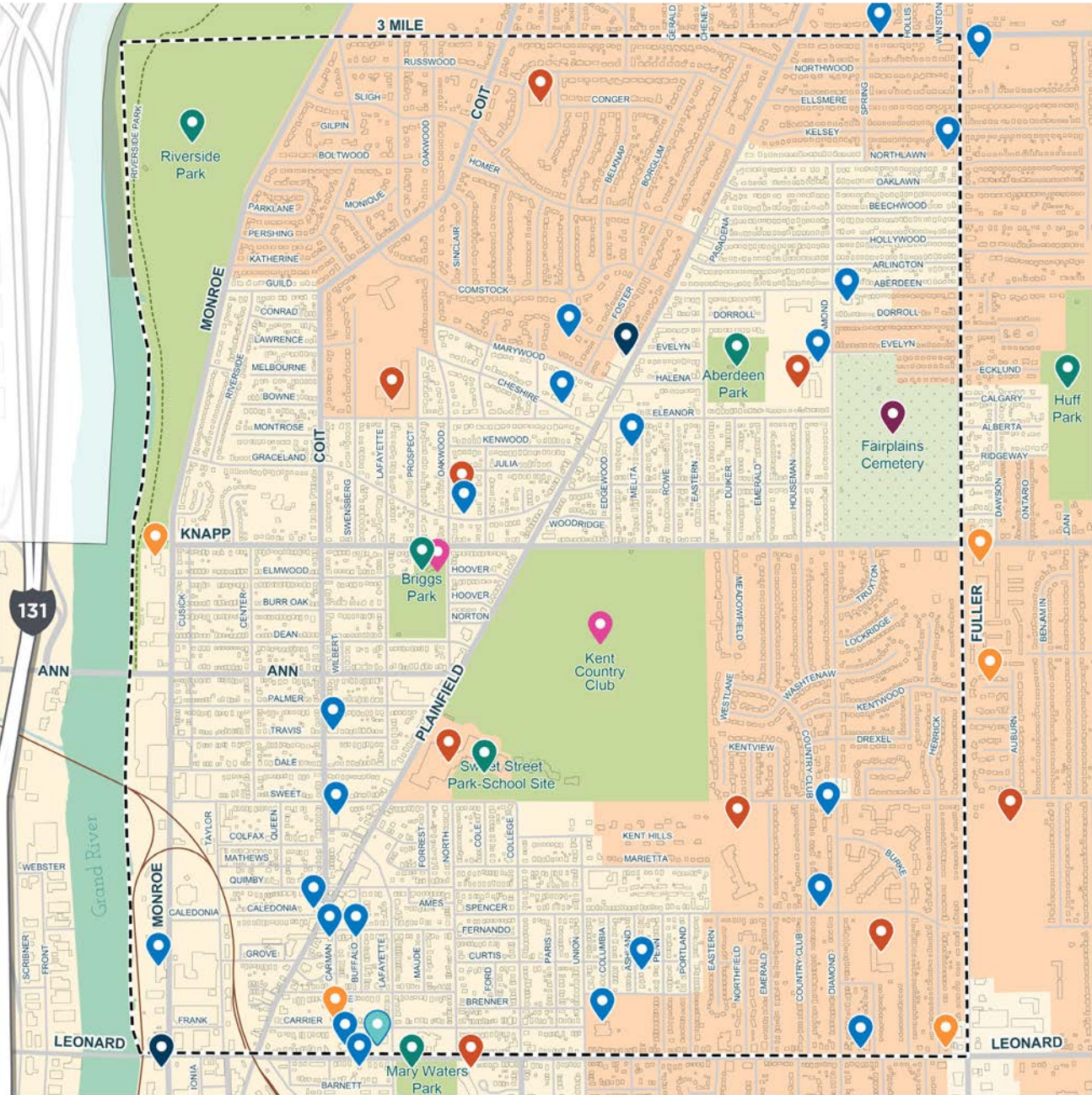
#### HOUSING

##### Housing by Geography

	1 North of Knapp	2 South of Knapp	3 Plainfield, Sweet, College
Homeownership Rate	89%	54%	29%
Median Home Values	\$155k	\$132k	\$112k
Rents	\$1,180 per month	\$880 per month	\$938 per month
Cost-Burdened Homes (paying 30%+)	24%: owners 57%: renters	26%: owners 50%: renters	32%: owners 57%: renters

Census tracts are designed to capture statistical data and are often delineated based on population size and other criteria that do not necessarily correspond with neighborhood boundaries, which can be more fluid and defined by a combination of historical, social, and economic factors. Despite these limitations, the insights derived from analyzing census tract data provide a valuable foundation for understanding the broader trends and dynamics of the neighborhood.

NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS AND CLASSIFICATION



Legend

- |                           |                    |                            |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Neighborhood Study Area   | Parks              | Places of Worship          | Traditional Neighborhood |
| Parks & Other Open Spaces | Community Services | Arts, Culture & Recreation | Mid-Century Neighborhood |
| Cemetery                  | Education          | Historic & Landmarks       |                          |
| Railway                   | Health Facilities  | Public Services            |                          |
| Existing Trail            |                    |                            |                          |



## NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS

The Creston neighborhood is a tight-knit and engaged community of over 18,000 residents with beloved neighborhood assets (see **Neighborhood Assets** map) that neighbors want to support, enhance, and expand access to. Some of the assets identified by residents include:

- Quality public schools.
- Access to local and citywide parks and trails.
- Easy access to downtown Grand Rapids.
- Active and organized residents and neighborhood groups.

## NEIGHBORHOOD CLASSIFICATION

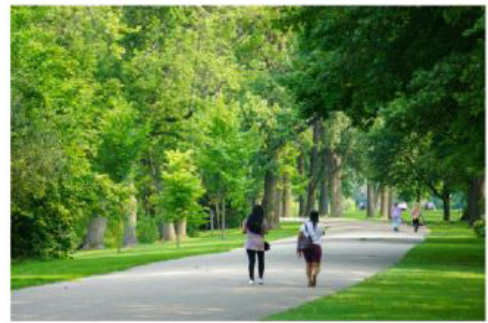
The Grand Rapids Zoning Ordinance assigns different neighborhood classifications to residential and mixed-use commercial districts based on existing development characteristics. Creston contains two of the three residential classifications as seen on the map to the left.

**Traditional Neighborhood (TN):** Designed prior to the advent of the automobile, these neighborhoods were created to offer residents commercial and institutional uses within a short walk of their homes. Housing options include single-family homes and apartments located above storefronts, with commercial and institutional spaces seamlessly incorporated into the neighborhood. The variety in building sizes and uses adds to the vibrancy of these areas.

**Mid-Century Neighborhoods (MCN):** Post-World War II, neighborhoods transformed to accommodate the rise of the automobile. Residential areas expanded, featuring larger lots and buildings set back from the streets, creating a more open feel. The interconnectedness of streets and neighborhoods diminished, with land uses becoming distinctly separated and apartment buildings no longer mixed with single-family homes. More intense commercial and institutional activities were relegated to heavily traveled corridors, manifesting as strip developments.



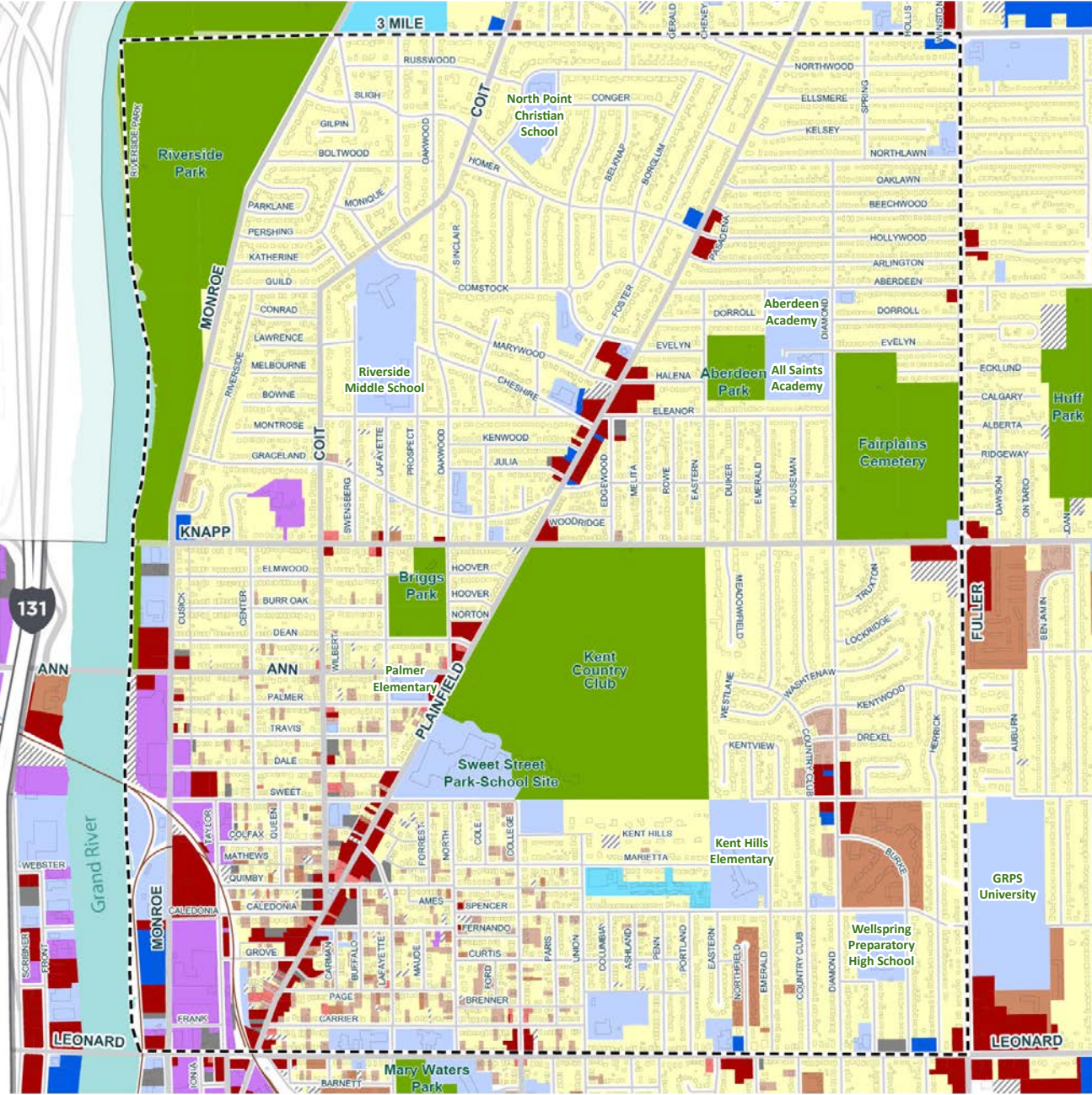
*Creston Garden Tours (credit: Creston Neighborhood Association).*



*Riverside Park (credit: City of Grand Rapids).*



EXISTING LAND USE



Legend

- Neighborhood Study Area
- Railway
- Existing Trail
- Parks & Other Open Spaces
- Single Family
- Multifamily - 2 Units
- Multifamily - 3 Or More Units
- High Density Residential
- Mixed Commercial/Residential
- Commercial
- Public/Quasi Public
- Medical Facilities
- Office
- Industrial
- Parking Lot
- Vacant Lot

## EXISTING LAND USE AND ZONING

### Existing Land Use

The land use in Creston (see **Existing Land Use** map) contains three main areas:

- The majority of Creston is made up of predominantly single-family residential neighborhoods. Traditional Neighborhood classifications include a mix of housing types including some multifamily housing, while Mid-Century Neighborhoods are almost exclusively single-family.
- Plainfield Avenue contains the majority of commercial businesses in Creston but there remain pockets of residential use interspersed between areas of commercial activity.
- The riverfront is a historic industrial district that now contains some more traditional commercial spaces and larger vacant parcels.

### Existing Zoning

Zoning in Creston generally reflects existing land uses within neighborhood streets and commercial corridors. Industrial properties along the riverfront have been rezoned to the mixed-use commercial district Transitional City Center (TCC), serving as a buffer between the higher-intensity uses allowed in City Center and the adjacent residential districts. Many larger-scale industrial uses are now allowed only by special land use permits, altering the nature of this historically industrial district.

The following zones are found in Creston and fall under the Traditional Neighborhood (TN) and Mid-Century Neighborhood (MCN) designations:

- TCC - Transitional City Center
- TBA - Traditional Business Area
- LDR - Low Density Residential
- MDR - Mixed Density Residential
- C - Commercial
- S-OS - Open Space
- NOS - Neighborhood Office Service



*Properties in the Low Density Residential district.*



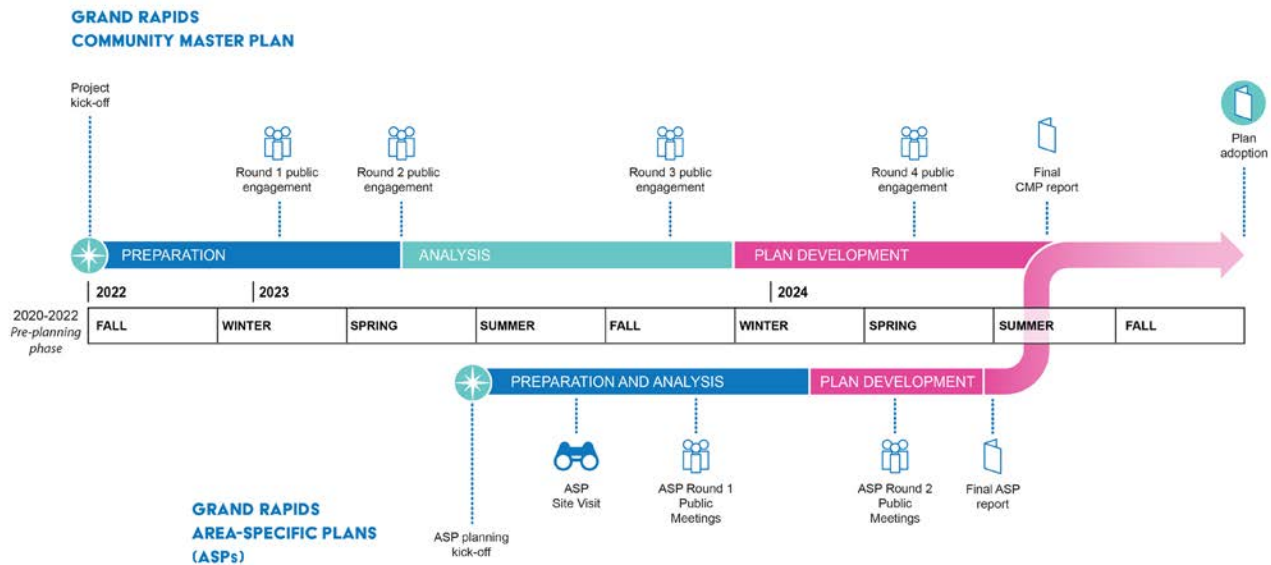
*Properties in the Traditional Business Area district.*



*Properties in the Transitional City Center district.*

## PLANNING PROCESS AND ENGAGEMENT

### CITYWIDE ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE AND CMP VALUES AND GOALS



### A Comprehensive View

The City of Grand Rapids began developing a new Community Master Plan in 2022, after two years of preliminary planning from 2020 to 2022, and more than 20 years since the release of the previous plan. The citywide engagement process required a comprehensive, phased approach over two years, including:

- Four rounds of **engagement**.
- Various **focus groups and interviews** with key stakeholders to discuss specific issues.
- Regular meetings with the **Steering Committee** to help guide the process.
- Small group meetings and targeted conversations with neighborhood residents through **Community Connectors**. The Connectors were trusted voices in the community, made up of community leaders and activists representing nonprofits and other stakeholders from across the city. They hosted small group meetings, in addition to other tasks, helping to expand the reach of the engagement process.
- The City of Grand Rapids has over 30 **Neighborhood Organizations**, many of which participated in the Community Master Plan process. Some were on the Steering Committee, others served as Community Connectors, and CDBG funding enabled many to host engagement meetings. These organizations helped inform residents about the process and facilitated community conversations.



## Community Master Plan Values

One clear goal of the citywide engagement process was to determine the values that are most important to the community. These values are crosscutting and are threaded throughout the CMP.

### CULTURE



### EQUITY



### SAFETY



### SUSTAINABILITY



### VIBRANCY



## Community Master Plan Goals

The citywide engagement process also revealed residents' overall concerns and priorities, such as a desire for better and more diverse housing options, pleasant public spaces that support economic activity, access to local jobs and amenities, and improved pedestrian safety and mobility. This community input, combined with an existing conditions analysis, informed the creation of the community goals upon which the CMP is based and **ultimately guided the strategies for the ASPs:**

**1. Great Neighborhoods:** Connected and diverse neighborhoods where residents can thrive. Grand Rapids neighborhoods will have access to housing, retail, open space, and more that meet the needs of residents in all phases of life.

**2. Vital Business Districts:** A network of unique and diverse businesses in all neighborhoods. Vital business districts will provide a variety of products, services, amenities, and safe, walkable places that attract people.

**3. A Strong Economy:** An economy that offers a prosperous quality of life. The Grand Rapids economy will offer a range of employers and job choices so that everyone can access and earn a living wage.

**4. Balanced Mobility:** A transportation network that is safe, reliable, and affordable. Grand Rapids will have mobility options that include a variety of ways to move about the city and beyond.

**5. Desirable Development Character:** A strong sense of place through high quality design. New development will improve or support the existing fabric of each neighborhood.

## CRESTON SPECIFIC ENGAGEMENT

The Creston ASP engagement process began in the summer of 2023, alongside the citywide engagement process. The community priorities identified through the citywide effort helped shape the ASP engagement by highlighting issues and priorities that needed further exploration with community members.

The ASP engagement process included:

- Two public meetings with over 100 attendees overall. The meetings were organized in partnership with the Creston Neighborhood Association (CNA) and hosted locally.
- ASP related questions and activities in the broader CMP engagement process.
- Regular meetings with City staff and consultants to ensure alignment between the community input from Creston residents and the strategies being developed in the Community Master Plan.

### ASP Engagement Summary

Common themes that emerged from these discussions include:

- Housing affordability.
- Increased pedestrian and bicycle safety.
- Preservation of valued community spaces and historic features.
- Encouraging a conscious development that was compatible to its surroundings, both physically and culturally.

Residents echoed the need to encourage:

- Sustainable, equitable development.
- A vibrant and thriving business community.
- Affordable and inclusive growth.
- A lively and unique neighborhood (a.k.a. Keep Creston Funky).
- Safer, walkable and bikeable streets.
- Revitalized and connected open spaces.



Community event in Creston.



Ideas shared by the community at an outreach event.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Engagement with neighbors, along with data and analysis of existing conditions, led to several key takeaways.

### A COLLECTION OF RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES UNITED BY PLAINFIELD AVENUE

Creston proudly proclaims itself as the largest neighborhood within Grand Rapids. Plainfield Avenue is the connective tissue and defacto gathering space that unites this large geography and helps to create a cohesive community. Because of this vital role, investments to the corridor will have an outsized influence on the surrounding community.



*Plainfield Avenue in Creston.*

### THE NEIGHBORHOOD IS EXPERIENCING THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF INVESTMENT SEEN IN DECADES

Both Plainfield Avenue and the riverfront are areas with increasing investment interest. New apartment buildings are just a few of the visible signs of the major investments currently taking place in Creston. Coupled with proposed development projects along Monroe North, Creston is poised to benefit from the new residents and businesses that will soon call the neighborhood home. Building off this momentum will be critical for Creston to leverage investments that help to meet neighborhood goals.



*New construction on Plainfield Avenue.*

### OPPORTUNITIES EXIST TO CREATE A MORE VIBRANT AND CONNECTED RIVERFRONT

The industrial nature of Creston's riverfront is rapidly changing. Proposed investments seek to further transform older industrial buildings to a broader mix of uses. Finding the right balance between support for long-term businesses and encouraging residential and mixed-use development will help to create a vibrant riverfront district.



*Vacant land near the riverfront.*



### **MOST PARKS ARE ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND CONNECTIONS CAN BE DIFFICULT**

Riverside Park, Huff Park, Ball Perkins Park, Highland Park, and Belknap Park are some of the crown jewels of the Grand Rapids Park system and are located in or adjacent to Creston. In addition, the burgeoning river trail network along the Grand River will soon connect Creston to neighborhoods north and south with a safe, off-street connection. Finding opportunities to not only improve these assets, but better connect the community to them, will greatly improve the quality of life for Creston residents.



*Riverside Park.*

### **PLAINFIELD AVENUE IS EVER CHANGING, YET RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS ARE STATIC**

While the Plainfield Avenue commercial district and the riverfront are poised to change, much of Creston is zoned Low Density Residential. With very few vacant properties available for new development, there are limited opportunities to provide additional housing within the neighborhood. In order to create more diverse housing options and address concerns around housing affordability, Creston must look for ways to integrate new housing units and housing options within its traditional single-family residential neighborhoods.



*Single-family residential neighborhoods in Creston.*



*A typical residential street in Creston.*

## COMMUNITY GOALS

The following goals were determined with the community throughout the engagement process.

### 01

## AFFORDABLE AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

This goal relates to the **Great Neighborhoods** and **Desirable Development Character** goals found in the Community Master Plan.

### 02

## A LIVELY AND UNIQUE NEIGHBORHOOD (AKA KEEP CRESTON FUNKY)

This goal relates to the **Vital Business Districts** and **A Strong Economy** goals found in the Community Master Plan.

### 03

## SAFER STREETS FOR BICYCLING AND WALKING

This goal relates to the **Balanced Mobility** goal found in the Community Master Plan.

### 04

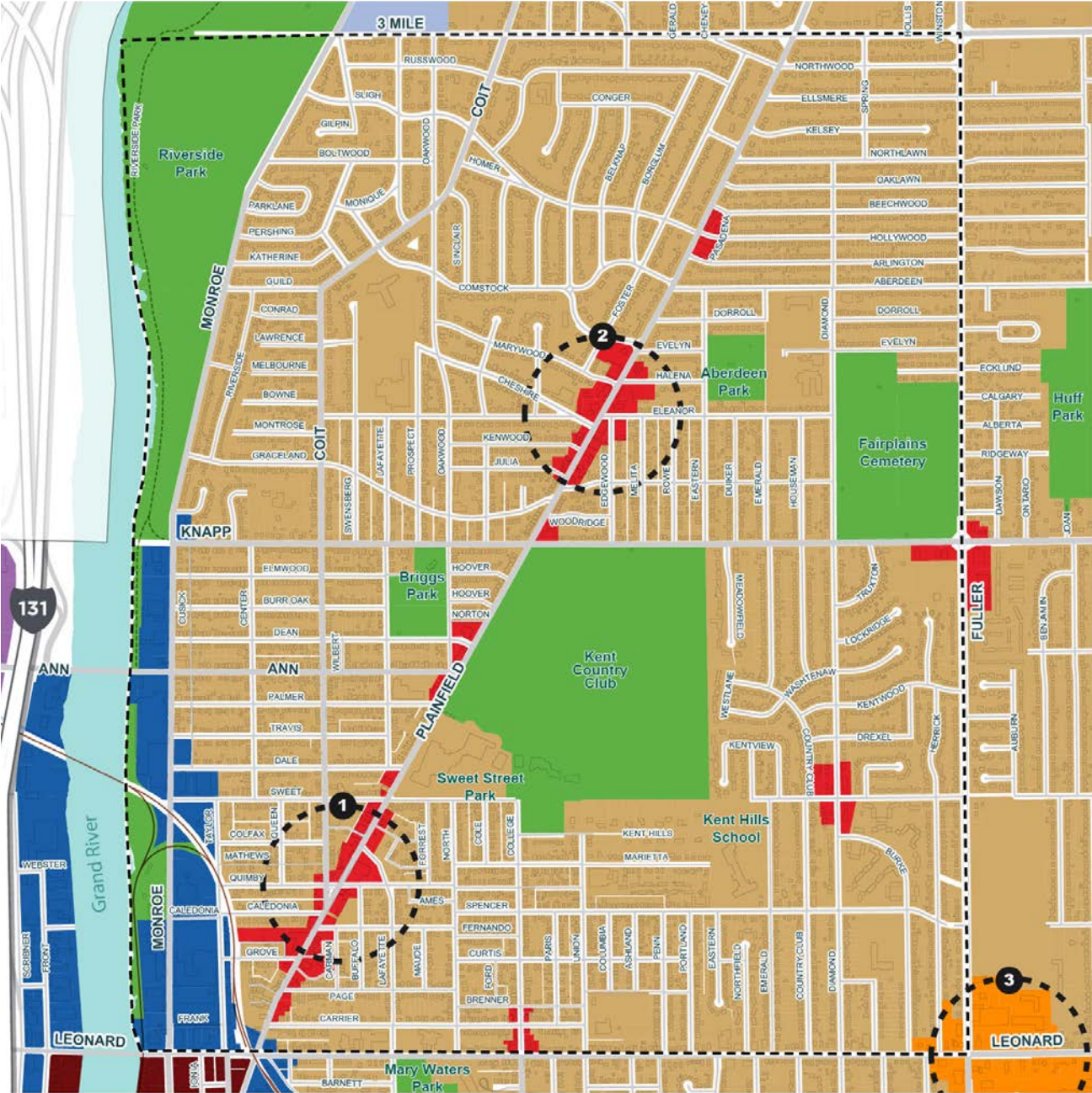
## REVITALIZED AND CONNECTED OPEN SPACES

This goal relates to the **Great Neighborhoods** goal found in the Community Master Plan.



NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE FUTURE

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER MAP AND NODES



Legend

Neighborhood Study Area

Neighborhood Nodes

- 1 Plainfield Avenue and Quimby Street
- 2 Plainfield Avenue and Eleanor Street
- 3 Fuller Avenue and Leonard Street

- Downtown
- Transitional Activity Center
- Community Activity Center
- Neighborhood Center
- Compact Neighborhood

- Suburban Neighborhood
- Manufacturing & Logistics
- Campus
- Innovation Center
- Parks and Open Space



Through the CMP and ASP engagement process, the community helped co-create the Future Development Character Map, which outlines Grand Rapids' future land use. It emphasizes development character and qualities as well as urban form and function. This map guides future development citywide, reinforcing existing patterns in some areas and supporting changes in others.

### Neighborhood Node



**Intent:** Neighborhood Nodes are central to residential areas or business zones, primarily serving the neighborhood but sometimes drawing regional visitors. They offer local access to businesses, services, and amenities within walking distance. These nodes mix commercial, civic, institutional, and residential uses, and increased residential density within a quarter-mile radius is crucial for supporting them.

**What it means for Creston:** Creston has three Neighborhood Nodes as defined by the CMP:

- Plainfield Avenue and Quimby Street
- Plainfield Avenue and Eleanor Street
- Fuller Avenue and Leonard Street

### Community Activity Center

**Intent:** Provide places to live, work, and shop around key intersections, to create well-connected, walkable places within a 15-minute walk, bike, or transit trip of surrounding neighborhoods.

**What it means for Creston:** The future development character map envisions the shopping center at Fuller and Leonard as a Community Activity Center.

### Neighborhood Center

**Intent:** Reinforce a pedestrian and transit-friendly environment in a compact area and promote a mix of small-scale retail, service, entertainment, civic, office, and residential uses to enhance the vitality of surrounding neighborhoods.

**What it means for Creston:** Existing commercial corridors in Creston will continue to serve as Neighborhood Centers.

### Compact Neighborhood

**Intent:** Create, maintain, and promote a variety of housing opportunities to meet the needs of a diverse population while maintaining the desired physical characteristics of the city's existing neighborhoods.

**What it means for Creston:** Neighborhoods that are predominantly single family housing may grow to provide more diverse housing options.

### Innovation Center

**Intent:** Accommodate a broad range of flexible employment opportunities, with a focus on active ground floor uses abutting public streets to promote compact, walkable areas.

**What it means for Creston:** In the future, the former industrial areas along the riverfront will include diverse employment options as well as multi-family residential and active ground floor uses. Access to the riverfront and trails will also be improved.

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GOAL 01:

# AFFORDABLE AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

Grand Rapids has been experiencing significant population growth that aligns with growth at the county level. Consequently, the demand for various types of housing at different price points has also increased.

According to the City of Grand Rapids Community Master Plan (2024):

Grand Rapids is the largest city in Kent County and accounts for 30% of its population. After a short period of decline (5% between 2000 and 2010), the population of Grand Rapids has recovered and is increasing, with new residents partly fueling the city's growth. Additionally, the population of Kent County is expected to grow by about 27% (+169,000 people) by 2045. If Grand Rapids maintains its 30% share of county population, the city will grow to approximately 251,000 residents in that time. In the shorter term, it is expected that Grand Rapids will need at least 14,000 housing units by 2027 to satisfy demand (CMP, 2024).

The housing shortage in Grand Rapids can be alleviated through various means, and the CMP identifies several key recommendations. The ASP process provides an opportunity to observe the impacts of broader citywide policies within ASP areas. In Creston, there are opportunities to add housing along the commercial corridor, in parking lots, on vacant lots, and in areas near the river that were rezoned for mixed-use development. There are also opportunities to meet some of this demand in the traditional residential neighborhoods while retaining the community's development character. The following recommendations offer ideas to add new housing and provide support for existing residents and homeowners.



*Surface parking lots, such as the one near the intersection of Plainfield Avenue and Lafayette Avenue, would be ideal places for new housing and redevelopment.*



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1

#### ENCOURAGE DENSER HOUSING ON KEY CORRIDORS.

The Community Master Plan (CMP) strongly advocates for incorporating denser housing in areas with adequate transportation infrastructure. The CMP includes specific goals to better coordinate development with transportation decisions, with a particular focus on lots fronting Link Residential and Network Residential streets. The Vital Streets Plan defines these street types as follows:

**Link Residential:** Link Residential streets connect neighborhoods and local destinations. They are common in areas with a traditional grid layout but can be found in any neighborhood type. These streets typically feature low-to-moderate density housing and should support high-quality residential life. They often host community facilities like parks, schools, and places of worship.

**Network Residential:** Network Residential streets are quality residential corridors that efficiently and safely move vehicles and non-motorized users. They are similar to arterial roads but are designed with more attention to non-auto users. These streets typically have higher residential density than other types and often feature community facilities like parks, schools, and places of worship, along with some industrial or small commercial spaces.

Link Residential and Network Residential streets are shown on the map to the right. Existing bus routes are layered onto the map to reinforce the connection between land use density and transportation infrastructure.

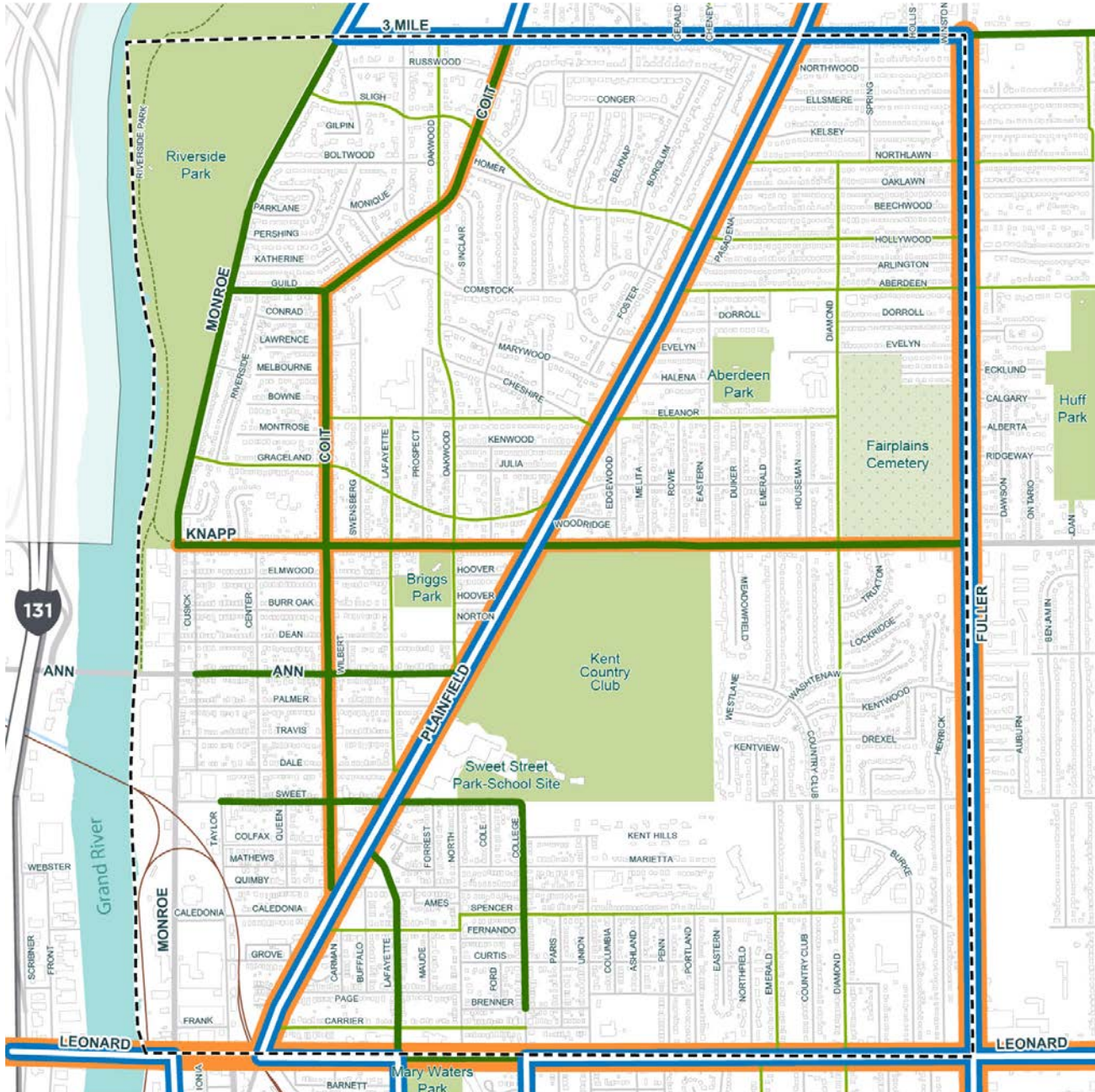
The following streets should be prioritized for consideration of denser residential use for these reasons:

- **Plainfield Avenue** contains bus and bicycle connections, is a major vehicular street, and is suitable for denser uses.
- **Leonard Street** contains bus and bicycle connections, is a major vehicular street, and is suitable for denser uses.
- **Knapp Street** is a network residential street, and is the proposed location for new bicycle facilities in the Bicycle Action Plan.
- **Coit Avenue** is a network residential street, and is the proposed location for new bicycle facilities in the Bicycle Action Plan.
- **Fuller Avenue** is a major vehicular street and is suitable for denser uses.



*New apartment buildings under construction on Plainfield Avenue.*

## VITAL STREETS PLAN STREET TYPES AND EXISTING BUS ROUTES



### Legend

- Neighborhood Study Area
- Existing Bus Route
- Network Residential (Vital Streets Plan)
- Link Residential (Vital Streets Plan)
- Priority Streets for Increased Density (as proposed in the ASP)



## 2

**ALLOW FOR A VARIETY OF HOUSING TYPES IN SINGLE-FAMILY DISTRICTS.**

The CMP recommends allowing denser types of housing in low-density residential zones, up to and including quadplexes. This aims to keep naturally occurring affordable housing viable and compliant with regulations. It also seeks to expand and preserve middle-density housing and encourage the development of new housing types for a range of families.

The CMP identifies the residential neighborhoods of Creston as Compact Neighborhoods within the Future Development Character Map (see **CMP Compact Neighborhood Designations** map). They are defined as areas that create, maintain, and promote a variety of housing opportunities to meet the needs of a diverse population while maintaining the desired physical characteristics of the city's existing neighborhoods.

Most residential properties in Creston are zoned for Low Density Residential and are predominantly detached single-family houses. Opportunities exist within the code to add denser housing types in various circumstances, particularly in Traditional Neighborhood designations. Achieving the future development character identified in the CMP will likely require broader zoning changes, especially outside of the Traditional Neighborhoods. Based on the engagement, residents would support changes that allow for more diversified housing types.

**CMP COMPACT NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGNATIONS AS WELL AS EXISTING NEIGHBORHOOD CLASSIFICATIONS****Legend**

- Compact Neighborhood - Future Character as Defined by CMP
- Existing Neighborhood Type - Traditional Neighborhood
- Existing Neighborhood Type - Mid-Century Neighborhood

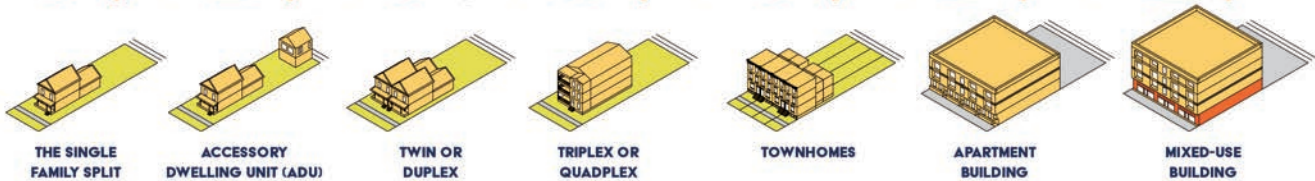


*Below: During the engagement process, residents were asked to vote with a thumbs up or thumbs down to indicate the types of development they would or would not support in their neighborhood.*

I am comfortable with this **in my neighborhood.**



I am comfortable with this **on my block.**



As part of the engagement process, residents were asked about the types of housing they would be comfortable with in their neighborhood and on their block. The types of added density that residents were most comfortable with included:

- Single-family housing split into multiple units
- Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)
- Duplexes
- Triplexes
- Quadplexes
- Townhomes

Residents had mixed opinions on apartment buildings and mixed-use buildings, with an equal number of residents supporting and opposing these housing types.

When residents were asked what type of housing they would like to see most on their block to help address the housing shortage, ADUs received the most votes. According to the Grand Rapids zoning code, an ADU is a secondary housing unit on a single-family residential lot that is either attached to the main house or a separate structure. ADUs are a great way to add density to neighborhoods without altering their development character. Both homeowners and potential renters can benefit in various ways: homeowners can supplement their income through renting the ADU and gain opportunities to age in place, while renters often find ADUs more affordable due to their smaller size.

While the benefits of ADUs are numerous, there are some downsides. Upfront costs, such as those associated with water and sewer regulations, can be substantial and difficult to finance. To overcome this challenge, the City has continued to refine its legislation to lower barriers to entry and make the process as easy as possible, such as eliminating the owner-occupancy requirement, allowing ADUs in association with duplexes, and making it a by-right use. The City should continue refining as needed.

There are also issues regarding accessibility, parking, and residents feeling like secondary members of the community. Focusing ADUs on properties with an existing alley network may help sidestep some of these challenges by creating additional off-street parking spaces, which can be difficult to find on narrow lots in traditional neighborhoods like Creston. Additionally, residents would have direct access to their units rather than having to walk through the primary home's property. Alleyways are also the most likely locations for detached parking garages, which offer easier and more affordable opportunities for residential conversions.

Another challenge is that residents may be unaware of the benefits of ADUs and current city legislation. As an initial step, neighborhood or housing-focused organizations could conduct outreach to property owners to educate homeowners on ADUs, discuss their benefits, and provide resources.

**CASE STUDY:** Los Angeles leads the United States in the number of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). The city's favorable regulations, which include no owner-occupancy restrictions and no minimum lot size requirements, have made it a model for ADU development. Los Angeles allows detached ADUs up to 1,200 square feet and two stories tall, with many homeowners converting garages into livable spaces. Los Angeles has also launched the Accessory Dwelling Unit Standard Plan Program, which offers pre-approved ADU designs to simplify the building process.

*Below: Examples of ADUs in Los Angeles. The photos below include off-street parking and direct access from an alley.*

Source: [bunchadu.com](http://bunchadu.com)



Source: [archdaily.com](http://archdaily.com)

## 3

**SUPPORT EXISTING HOMEOWNERS AND RENTERS.**

Neighborhoods thrive on the diversity of their neighbors, and it is important that existing homeowners and renters can stay in their community if they choose to do so. Along with the City's CMP and housing-related initiatives and policies, it is important to undertake targeted outreach to Creston residents to ensure they are aware of and have access to resources available to help them improve their housing. This work needs to be done with the following principles in mind:

**Keep Housing Affordable:**

- Continue to provide and promote the Housing Rehabilitation Program, a federally funded program administered by the Community Development Department that offers affordable loans for home repairs to applicants who meet eligibility requirements.
- Incentivize and preserve affordable housing per the Grand Rapids Housing Needs Assessment.

**Encourage Resident Involvement:**

- Create pathways for residents to be informed and provide input on new development.
- Support community members who aspire to take on small-scale real estate development projects in their community through trainings, mentorship, and networking opportunities.



*Photo of a new home under construction in Creston.*



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GOAL 02:

A LIVELY  
AND UNIQUE  
NEIGHBORHOOD  
(AKA KEEP  
CRESTON  
FUNKY)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4

#### REDEVELOP THE RIVERFRONT AS AN INNOVATION CENTER.

Industry along the Creston riverfront benefited from its location adjacent to both the river and rail for decades but has seen a decline similar to other urban industrial districts as their needs have evolved. Over time, these uses left or closed, replaced with different uses or surface parking lots, and this trend is likely to continue in the future.

The CMP identifies the Creston riverfront as an Innovation Center, an area that can accommodate a broad range of flexible employment opportunities, with a focus on active ground-floor uses. These ideas were reinforced through the ASP engagement, where residents envisioned the riverfront as a mixed-use area. It will offer places to work (excluding heavy industry), provide new housing to support the community and existing businesses, and add new commercial amenities for residents. Much of this can be achieved through the existing zoning of Transitional City Center.

Existing development proposals aim to provide hundreds of new residential units and multiple commercial spaces in the coming years. While the community would benefit from new development, many of the smaller-scale industrial buildings along Taylor Avenue have supported a variety of different business types over the years and are vital to retain given their relative affordability for commercial and light-industrial businesses. Some of these properties currently house traditional small-scale industrial businesses, while others have newer businesses like pottery studios and advertising agencies in repurposed buildings. Providing affordable, flexible spaces for businesses will be important for Creston to retain its existing development character.

The City may offer support in various ways through targeted assistance to help repurpose existing buildings or economic development programs designed to support entrepreneurship and small businesses.



*Vacant land near the riverfront.*



*A vacant industrial building near the riverfront.*



*Small scale industrial building near the riverfront.*



*Small scale industrial building in the riverfront district.*

## 5

**SUPPORT PLAINFIELD AVENUE WITH NEW MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT.**

The Plainfield Avenue commercial corridor is an important public gathering space for Creston, with multiple neighborhood-serving businesses that residents love. Adding density in strategic locations that complement the surrounding context would enhance the vibrancy of the corridor and support local businesses by bringing additional foot traffic to Plainfield Avenue. At the macro level, new apartments and mixed-use buildings on Plainfield Avenue can help address the shortage of units across the city with a housing type not largely available in Creston.

Key opportunities for new mixed-use development along Plainfield Avenue include:

- **Planfield at Leonard** - This location could serve as a gateway to the community but is currently made up of auto oriented uses, vacant lots, and parking lots. New development could help to change the nature of this location and create a more welcoming environment to the entrance of the commercial corridor. The active rail lines that cut through the site diagonally will need to be considered in future redevelopment.
- **Plainfield at Quimby (from Grove to Sweet and Graceland to Halena)** - This intersection was identified as Neighborhood Nodes in the CMP and the heart of the Plainfield Avenue commercial district for their adjacent neighborhoods. New development should be considerate of the existing urban fabric and new buildings should be contextual.
- **Plainfield at Kenwood (from Carrier to Grove, Palmer to Dean, and Arlington to Beechwood)** - These areas are a mix of auto-oriented businesses and buildings as well as some traditional urban commercial buildings. If redevelopment were to occur, retaining the historic and smaller scale commercial buildings will be important.

**VARIOUS CONDITIONS OF THE PLAINFIELD AVENUE COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR**

*The intersection of Plainfield Avenue and Leonard Street.*



*The intersection of Plainfield Avenue and Quimby Street.*



*The intersection of Plainfield Avenue and Kenwood Street in Cheshire.*

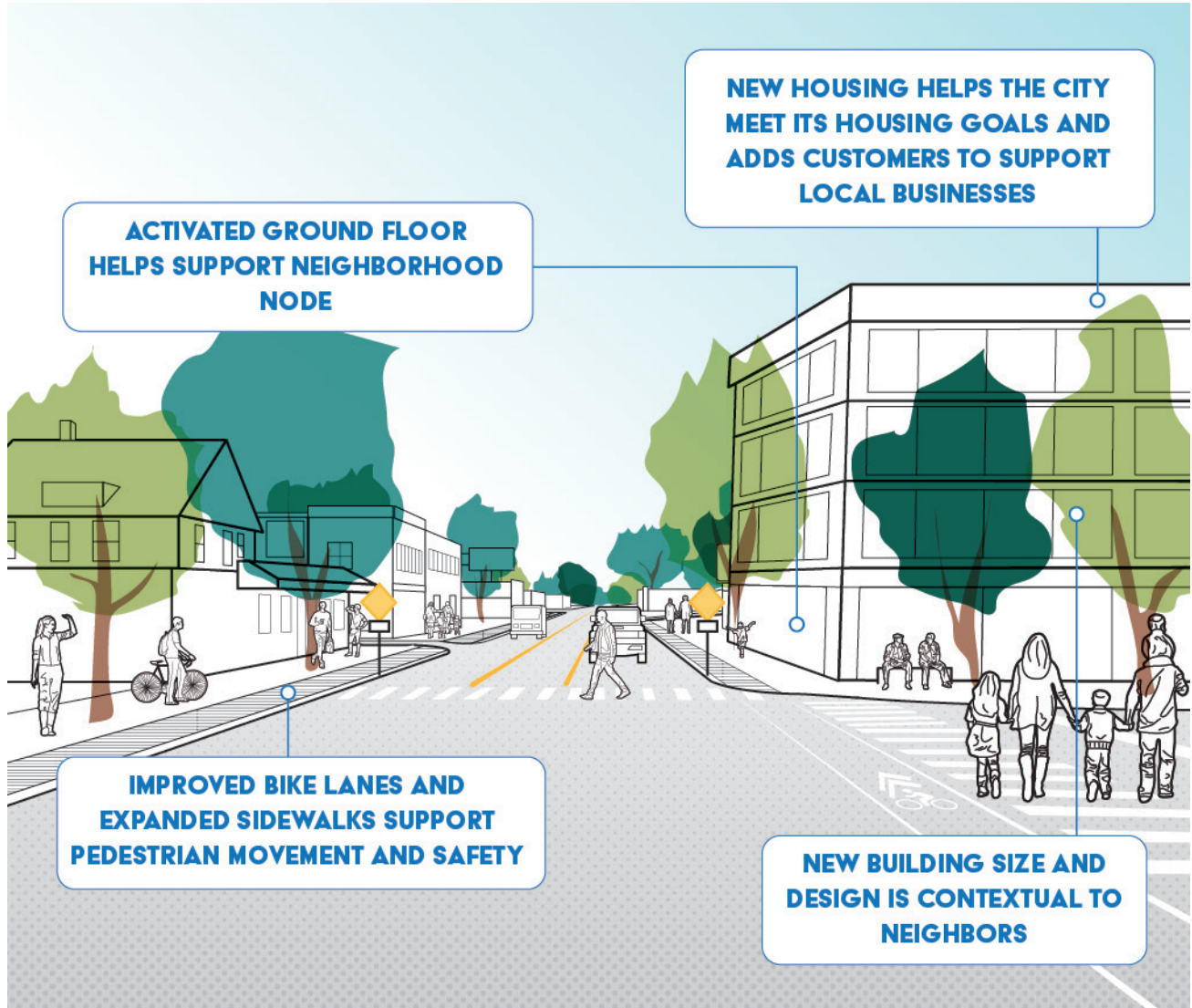
## 6

**TARGET STOREFRONT AND FACADE REPAIRS IN NEIGHBORHOOD NODES AND SUBDISTRICTS.**

Grand Rapids has six Corridor Improvement Authorities (CIAs) that can administer facade improvement grants. Plainfield Avenue, within the North Quarter CIA boundaries, should focus on engagement within the target areas described in Recommendation 5 to educate and support interested property owners.



## POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS TO PLAINFIELD AVENUE AT LAFAYETTE AVENUE AS PROPOSED IN RECOMMENDATION 5



*The various facade types on Plainfield Avenue require different levels of maintenance and improvement.*



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GOAL 03:

# SAFER STREETS FOR BIKING AND WALKING

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7

#### IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLING CONNECTIONS ON PLAINFIELD AVENUE.

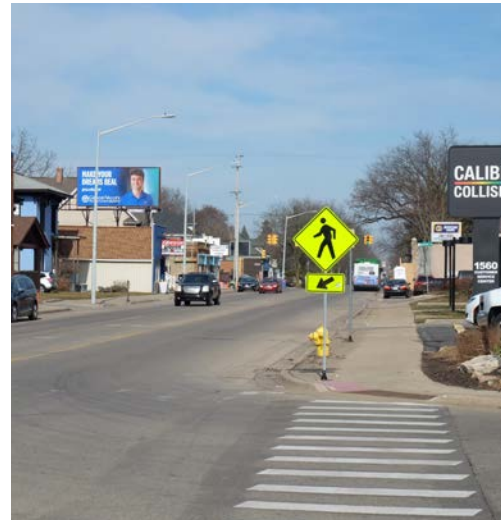
As the community's primary commercial street, Plainfield Avenue needs to better serve active transportation or people that are walking or bicycling. Plainfield currently lacks a continuous bicycle lane, has small sidewalks, and few places to safely cross the street. The street is narrow, which requires finding the right balance of space for traffic and space for people. The City should consider the following improvements:

- **Sidewalks** - Sidewalks on Plainfield even in the Neighborhood Node at Quimby are narrow, sometimes only 7 feet wide. Future improvements to the street should consider expanding the sidewalk width.
- **Bicycle lanes** - Existing bicycle lanes disappear in the main commercial portions of the corridor and are replaced by on-street parking, forcing people bicycling into lanes with automobile traffic. The City should prioritize completing this gap in the network and improving bicycle safety. Engagement and coordination with local business owners and neighborhood organizers will be necessary to discuss potential solutions, given the narrow street width.
- **Crossings** - Few signalized crossings exist in the commercial sections of Plainfield Avenue, forcing people to walk long distances to cross safely. The stretch of Plainfield between Leonard and Quimby is over a third of a mile and lacks any traffic lights. Beyond Quimby, the next traffic light is at Sweet Street, which is an additional 1,000 feet away. The City has made improvements by installing crosswalks, signage, and updating policies to require cars to stop for pedestrians in crosswalks. However, the engagement process revealed that drivers often don't follow these updated policies, leaving pedestrians uncomfortable crossing at these locations.

The City should consider adding enhanced crossing treatments to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety at Page, Spencer/Caledonia, Lafayette, and Graceland.



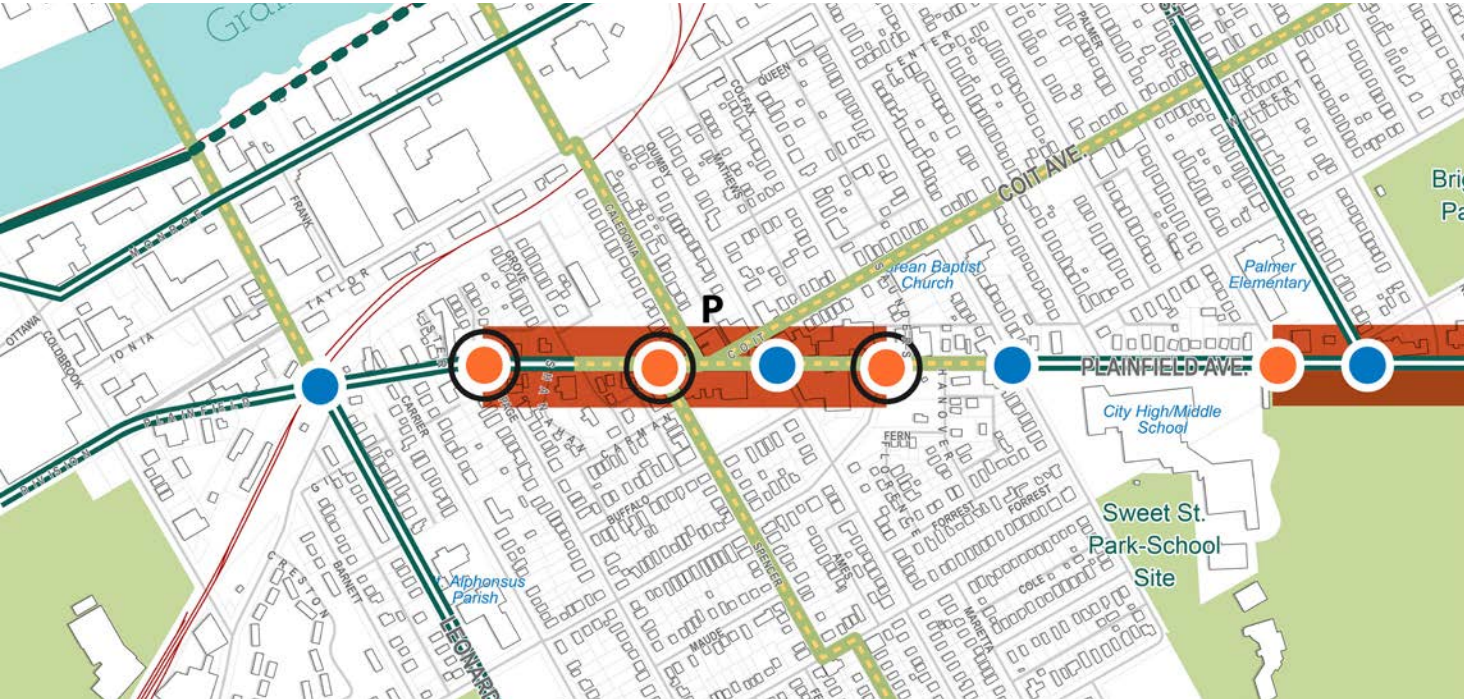
*Example of a narrow sidewalk on Plainfield Avenue.*



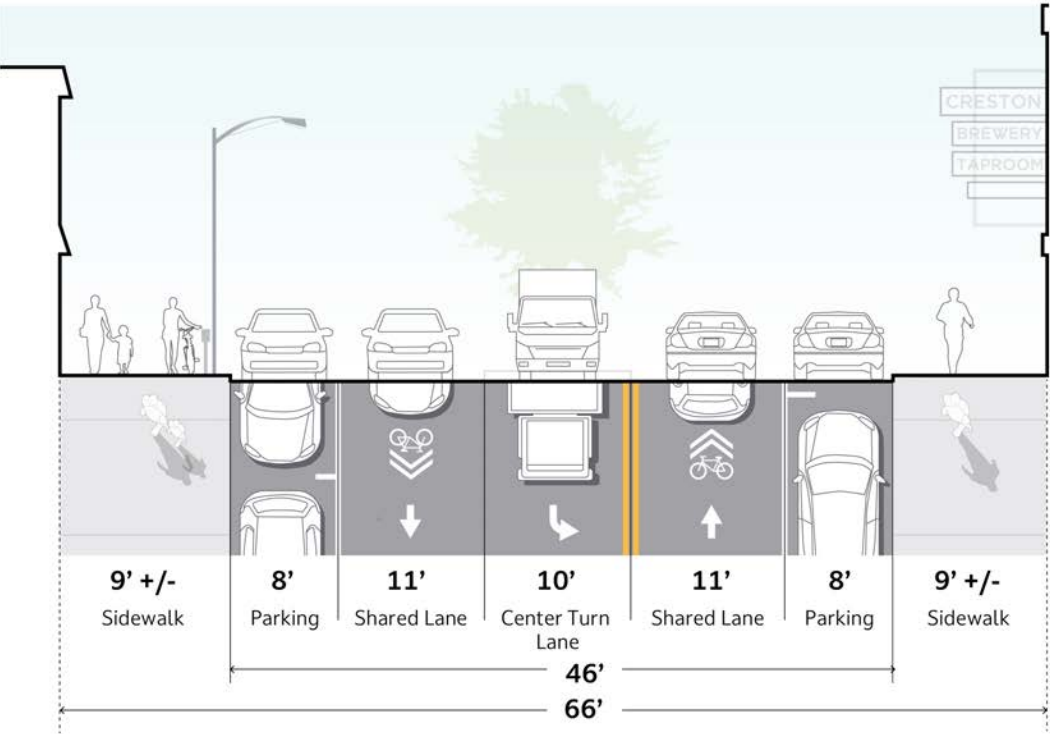
*An example of a new pedestrian crossing on Plainfield Avenue.*



PLAINFIELD AVENUE COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR - PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

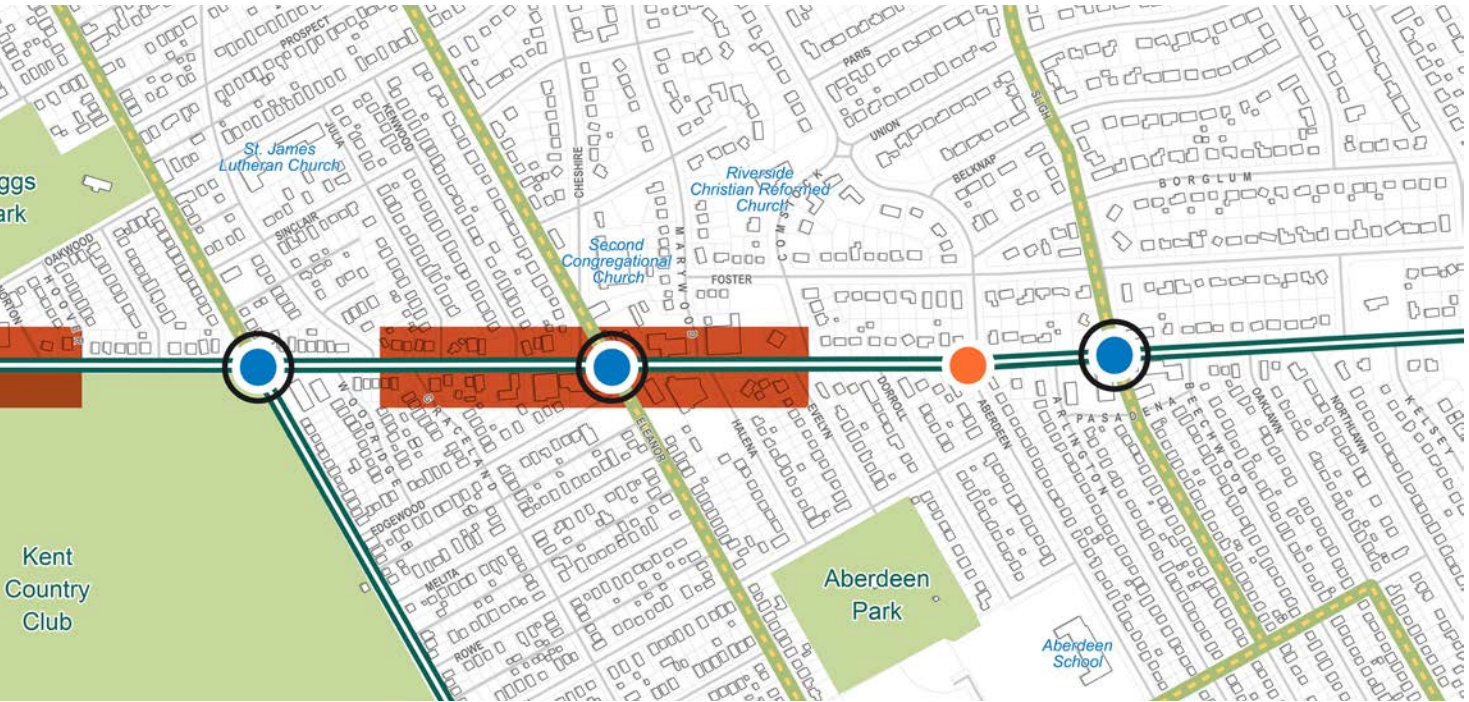


EXISTING SECTION - PLAINFIELD AVENUE AT QUIMBY STREET

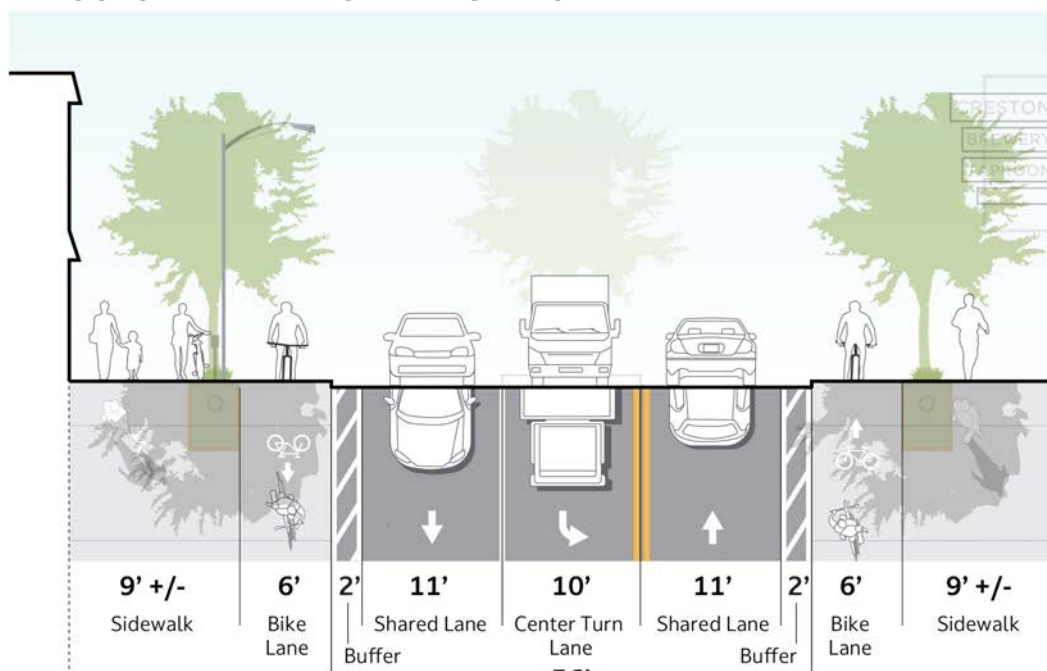


## Legend

-  Existing Bike Facility
-  Proposed New/Improved Bike Facility
-  Targeted Sidewalk Improvements
-  Pedestrian Crossing - With Signalized Stoppage
-  Pedestrian Crossing - Without Signalized Stoppage
-  Potential Pedestrian/Bicycle Improvements



## PROPOSED SECTION - PLAINFIELD AVENUE AT QUIMBY STREET BICYCLE LANES ON SIDEWALK REPLACE PARKING LANES





## 8

**ADD BICYCLE INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGHOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD.**

The City has recently invested in improving bicycle infrastructure by adding new lanes on Monroe Avenue, Plainfield Avenue, and smaller streets like Ann Street. Residents appreciate these improvements, but additional investments are needed to create an interconnected network. This network would allow residents to safely enjoy neighborhood amenities (such as Riverside Park and the Plainfield Avenue commercial corridor) as well as amenities in nearby neighborhoods (including Downtown, Huff Park, Highland Park, Belknap Park, and Ball Perkins Park). The Bicycle Action Plan (see **Bicycle Action Plan - Proposed Improvements** map) outlines significant investment in bicycle infrastructure in Creston over the coming decades.

As the Bicycle Action Plan is implemented, some key projects should be prioritized for the following reasons:

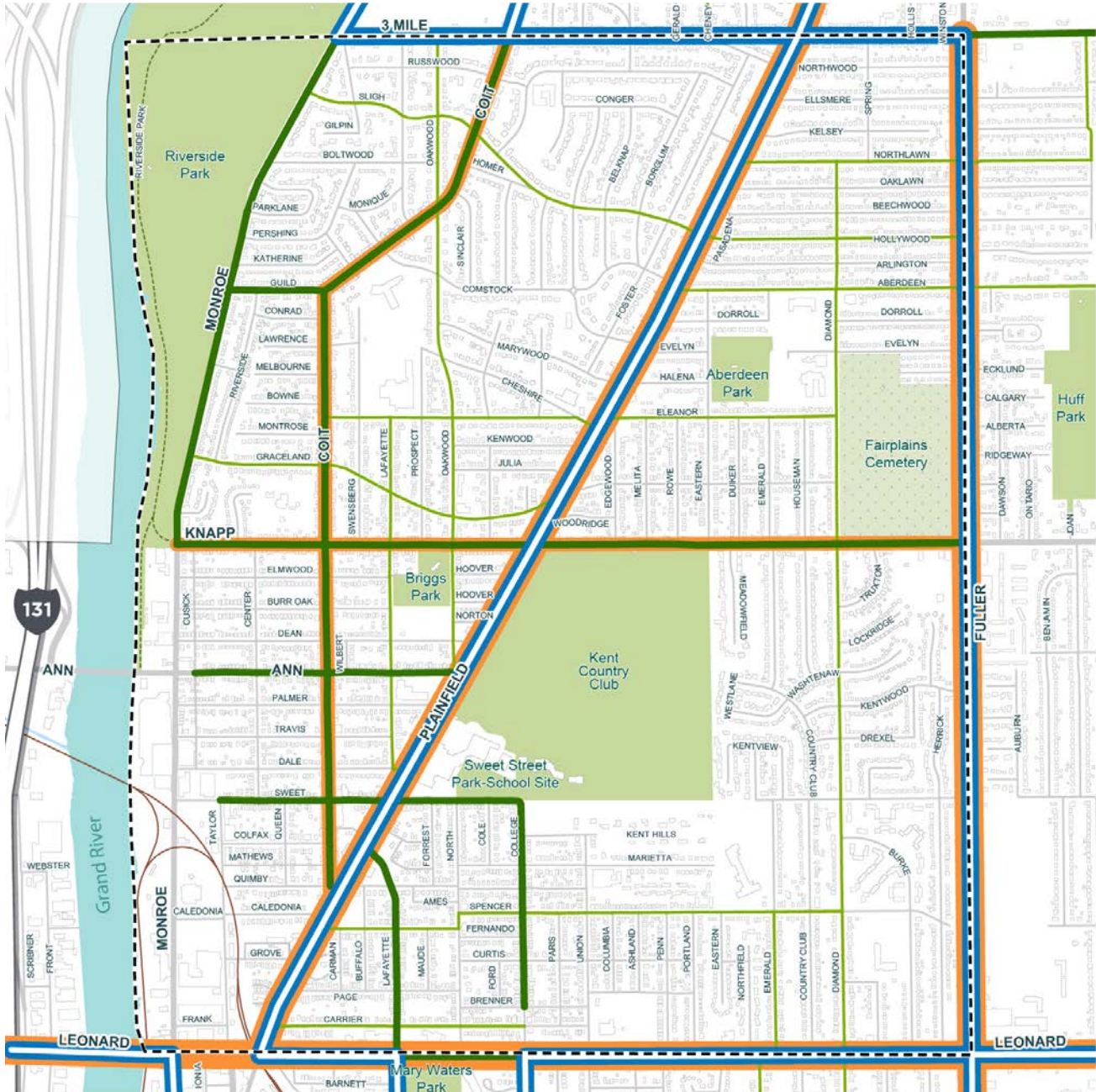
- **Plainfield Avenue** is a major bicycle route that currently lacks continuous dedicated infrastructure.
- **Coit Avenue** serves as an important ancillary north/south route to Plainfield Avenue. The existing bicycle lane currently terminates at Oakwood Street. Enhancing the existing biking lanes and extending this network all the way to the intersection with Plainfield Avenue will create an important new connection south of the existing network. Traffic-calming measures at Spencer would also enhance safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- **Caledonia Street** could serve as an important connection between the riverfront trail and the Plainfield Avenue commercial district. The City should explore options in creating a new bicycle facility on this important connection.
- On **Spencer Avenue**, the City is actively working to create this facility and would serve as an important east/west connection to Ball Perkins Park, and onto Caledonia, eventually reaching the Grand River Greenway.
- On **Ann Street**, the City plans to reconfigure the section of street between Plainfield and Monroe by removing on-street parking on one side and raising the bike lanes to sidewalk level. Construction is expected to begin in 2025.



*The existing bicycle lane on Plainfield Avenue.*



## BICYCLE ACTION PLAN - PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS



### Legend

- Neighborhood Study Area

-  Existing Bus Route
-  Network Residential (Vital Streets Plan)
-  Link Residential (Vital Streets Plan)
-  Priority Streets for Increased Density (as proposed in the ASP)

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GOAL 04:

# REVITALIZED AND CONNECTED OPEN SPACES

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 9

#### CREATE A PLAZA WHERE COIT AVENUE MEETS PLAINFIELD AVENUE.

Plainfield Avenue has minimal sidewalk space and few public areas for neighborhood programming. The last block of Coit Avenue, where it meets Plainfield Avenue, is a street that could be repurposed as flexible public space. Closing this block would have minimal impact on traffic flow, as cars could easily divert to Quimby Street. Parking spaces could be added to Quimby and Plainfield to offset the lost spaces on Coit.

In the short term, closing the street to vehicular traffic with strategically located planters or retractable bollards and adding outdoor furniture could be an effective way to test the best use of the space, after which more permanent redesigns could be pursued. Local organizations like the North Quarter CIA and the Creston Neighborhood Association could actively program the space with a variety of events. This concept will require further vetting with other City Departments and the Fire Department.



*Block of Coit Avenue that could be closed to vehicular traffic.*

#### POTENTIAL COIT AVENUE AS A PEDESTRIAN ONLY STREET BETWEEN PLAINFIELD AVENUE AND QUIMBY STREET.





## 10

**BETTER CONNECT PLAINFIELD AVENUE TO THE RIVERFRONT ALONG KEY STREETS.**

Throughout the planning process, residents continuously expressed a desire to better connect the riverfront trail (and trail users) to the Plainfield Avenue commercial corridor. Caledonia Street sits at a key location, connecting the river and trail to the heart of the Plainfield Avenue commercial corridor and adjacent to major development sites. To better improve this connection, the following measures should be taken:

- Create a bicycle lane on Caledonia from the river trail to Plainfield.
- Add sidewalks where they are missing.
- Add trees and green infrastructure.
- Explore a connection through the Water Department property to ensure access to the river and trail.

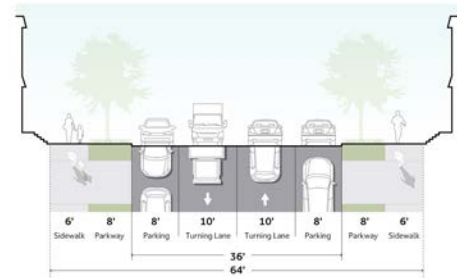
Improvements to the street should be done in coordination with any redevelopment of adjacent properties to ensure projects are aligned. Any development team may be obliged to make improvements to support this goal.

Beyond Caledonia, additional streets to improve connections between the neighborhood and the river may include:

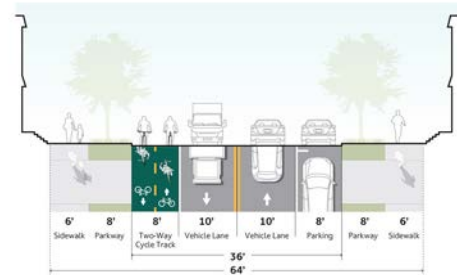
- Leonard Street
- Sweet Street
- Ann Street
- Knapp Street
- Replanted trees in the bioretention islands



*Images of Caledonia Street near Plainfield Avenue.*



*Existing section - Caledonia Street between Plainfield and Taylor Avenues.*



*Proposed section - Caledonia Street between Plainfield and Taylor Avenues.*

*Please Note: A two-way bike lane is one form the bicycle connection may take as conditions change from the river trail to Caledonia Street and further east on Spencer Street.*

## 11

**WORK TO COMPLETE THE GRAND RIVER GREENWAY THROUGH THE NEIGHBORHOOD.**

The Grand River Greenway extends north through Creston at Ann Street, and south at Leonard, with a missing segment from Leonard to Ann Street. Plans are in the works to close this nearly one mile gap in the system and allow residents to have a continuous off-street path connecting to points north and south. Neighborhood organizations should continue to advocate for this work to ensure that it is fully implemented.



*Rendering of the future Grand River Greenway through Creston.*

*Image courtesy of VIRIDIS.*

## 12

**FOCUS ON GREENING RESIDENTIAL PORTIONS OF PLAINFIELD AVENUE.**

Trees and other plantings on Plainfield Avenue are often intermittent, depending on location. Recent investments to add green infrastructure and planted medians have added welcomed greenery to the corridor. Additional improvements to the residential portion of the street may include:

- Coordinate efforts among residential property owners to add trees and other native plants in front yards and sidewalk strips.
- Work with Kent Country Club to upgrade their fence along Plainfield Avenue including a setback to provide space for additional plantings.
- Find space to create new greenery along the corridor's narrow sidewalks. Consider:
  - Landscaped buffers between sidewalks and parking lots.
  - Street trees within the sidewalk where width permits.
  - Container gardens or planters outside businesses.



*Residential portion of Plainfield Avenue.*



*Chain link fence along Kent County Country Club.*

## 13

**ESTABLISH A COMMUNITY VISION FOR REDEVELOPED SCHOOLS AND SCHOOLS SLATED FOR CLOSURE.**

While Riverside Middle School has immediate plans for activation, the future of other schools in Creston slated for closure remains uncertain. Two schools in Creston are expected to close in the next five years, namely East Leonard Elementary (410 Barnett St NE) and Palmer Elementary (309 Palmer St NE). The size and location of these properties lend themselves to future housing development opportunities, but an extensive community engagement process to understand the community's desires for these spaces should precede and inform any redevelopment efforts by GRPS.



*Open space at the former Riverside Elementary School.*

Riverside Middle School (265 Eleanor St NE) is slated to become the new home of North Park Montessori and Grand Rapids Montessori in the fall of 2026, serving students in Pre-K through 12th grade. The engagement process revealed that the open space at Riverside Middle School is a valuable community asset, with the soccer fields, large lawns, and basketball courts all being utilized by nearby residents. As investments are planned for the school structure, additional community engagement is needed to determine how to improve the open space to best support the community's needs.

The City and Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) are working together on the future of these properties with these common goals:

- Benefitting the community and the school district as a whole.
- Redeveloping GRPS properties as they are vacated.
- Initiating redevelopment projects informed by and supported by the neighborhood and community.
- Rehabilitating closed buildings where feasible.
- Prioritizing affordable housing development options for families with children, GRPS teachers and support staff.
- Increasing both rental and homeownership opportunities.
- Preserving outdoor amenities and green space consistent with data-informed evaluation, and consider expansions where new developments may warrant.
- Leveraging each organization's strengths.



## 14

**BOOST CRESTON'S CLIMATE RESILIENCE.**

Urban trees play an important role in creating a healthy environment for the city and its residents. They help to clean the air, absorb stormwater, and create shade to mitigate the urban heat island effect. Residential streets within Creston have good tree coverage on both private yards and along curbs, but portions of the riverfront lack tree coverage due to its industrial history. To help bolster Creston's resilience and protect residents from summer heat, focus on ensuring new trees are included with new development and identify locations throughout the community that need additional trees to fill gaps in the urban forest.

To complement new tree initiatives, new development and building renovations should seek to reduce the community's carbon footprint where possible. This includes:

- Sourcing local and sustainable building materials.
- Encouraging solar panels or solar hot water heaters and reducing the use of fossil fuels where possible.
- Encouraging new rain barrels to help capture and reuse stormwater.
- Encouraging the use of design and technology solutions like green roofs, natural ventilation, insulation, and others to minimize the use of heating and air conditioning.



*Good tree coverage in residential neighborhoods.*



*Formerly industrial areas along the river are lacking tree coverage.*

# DRAFT

# FUTURE SCENARIOS, ZONING AND IMPLEMENTATION

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## FUTURE SCENARIOS, ZONING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The recommendations set the stage for future changes. The final section of this Area Specific Plan outlines the potential impact of these recommendations across Creston and how to implement them. This section is divided into the following parts:

### **Future Development Scenarios (illustrative):**

This section graphically depicts how many of the recommendations around the built environment and housing could look on typical blocks within Creston. It includes a variety of developments that add housing in a contextual way, mixed-use developments that support commercial corridors, and larger-scale developments on formerly industrial areas.

### **Site-Specific Improvements:**

While the future development scenarios illustrate potential futures on typical blocks, this section focuses on specific areas within Creston, showcasing what the recommendations could look like across different goal areas. The primary areas of focus are the industrial zones near the river and Plainfield Avenue and adjacent blocks, which are most likely to undergo changes.

### **Future Development Character Areas and Zoning:**

The CMP identifies future development character areas across the city, often requiring zoning changes to achieve the desired character. This section includes a map and associated chart to help navigate potential zoning changes.

### **Implementation:**

This matrix identifies potential partnerships needed to accomplish the specific recommendations outlined in the plan.



DRAFT

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT  
SCENARIOS

**REDEVELOP THE  
RIVERFRONT AS AN  
INNOVATION CENTER.**  
Please see  
**RECOMMENDATION 4**  
for more details

**SUPPORT NEIGHBORHOOD  
NODES WITH NEW MIXED  
USE DEVELOPMENT .**  
Please see  
**RECOMMENDATION 5**  
for more details

Repurposing of small scale industrial  
buildings for new businesses

Adaptive reuse of  
existing buildings

Ground floor commercial

Upper floor residential  
Ground floor maker space

Height respectful to  
neighborhood context

Commercial corridor

Upper floor residential

Ground floor commercial



**ENCOURAGE  
ACCESSORY DWELLING  
UNITS (ADU) WITHIN  
THE NEIGHBORHOOD.**

Please see  
**RECOMMENDATION 2**  
for more details

Existing alley

ADUs clustered  
on existing alley

**ALLOW FOR A VARIETY OF  
HOUSING TYPES IN SINGLE  
FAMILY DISTRICTS.**

Please see  
**RECOMMENDATION 2**  
for more details

Duplex

Single family  
home with ADU

Townhomes

Duplex

6 unit building

Single family home with ADU

Network/Link Residential Street

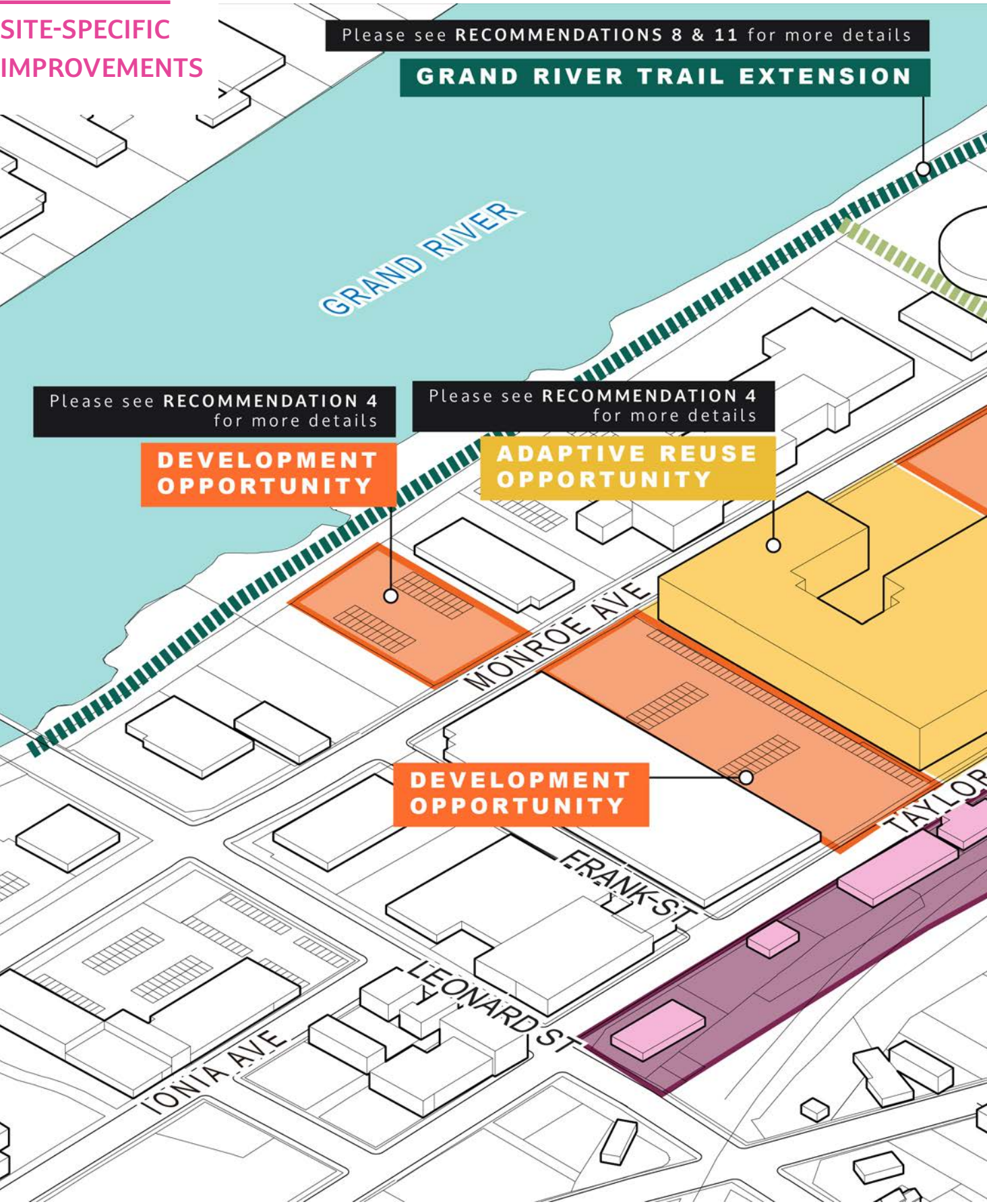
Triplex

**ALLOW FOR DENSER  
HOUSING ON KEY  
CORRIDORS.**

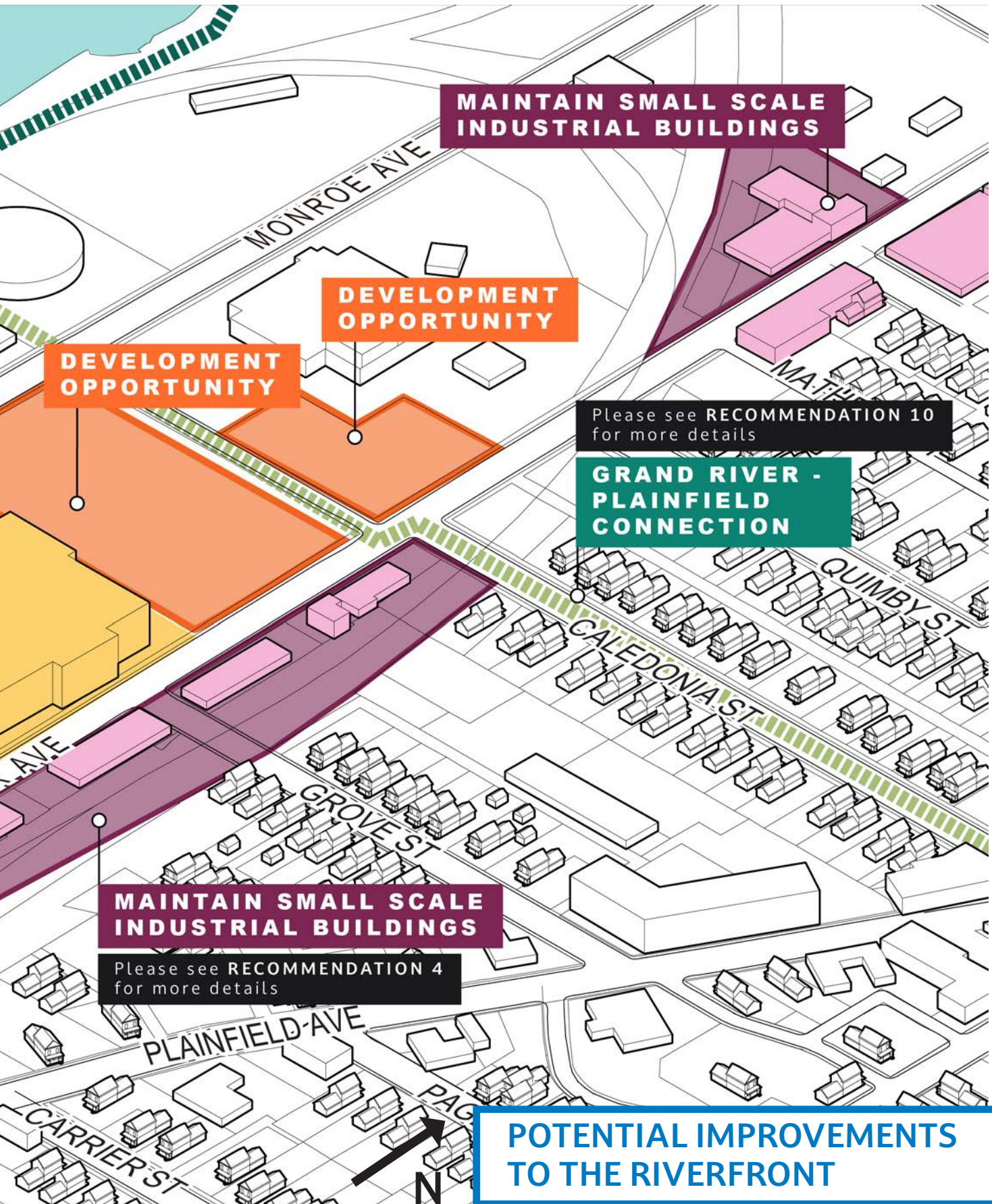
Please see  
**RECOMMENDATION 1**  
for more details



SITE-SPECIFIC IMPROVEMENTS







**MAINTAIN SMALL SCALE INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS**

**DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY**

**DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY**

Please see RECOMMENDATION 10 for more details

**GRAND RIVER - PLAINFIELD CONNECTION**

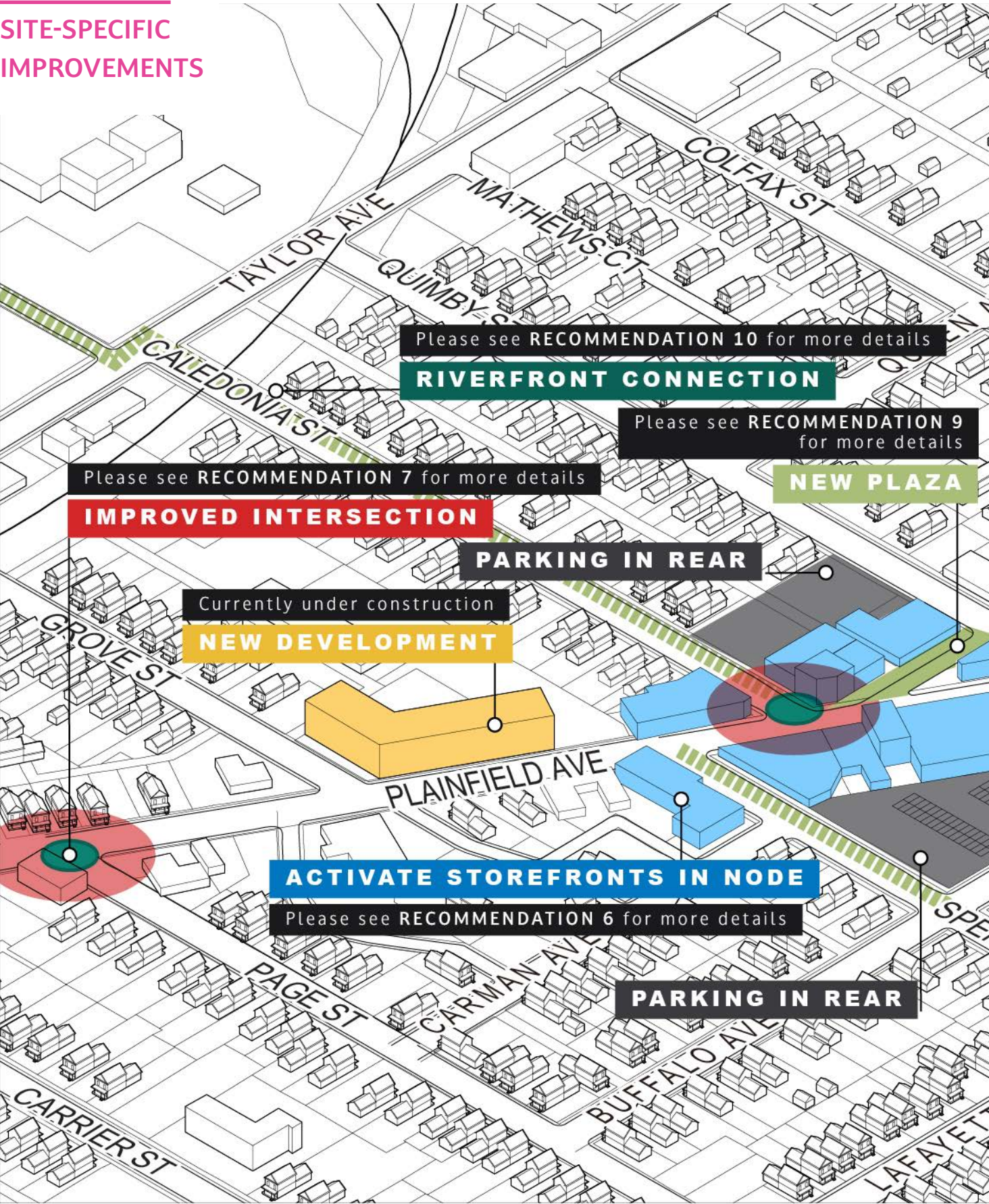
**MAINTAIN SMALL SCALE INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS**

Please see RECOMMENDATION 4 for more details

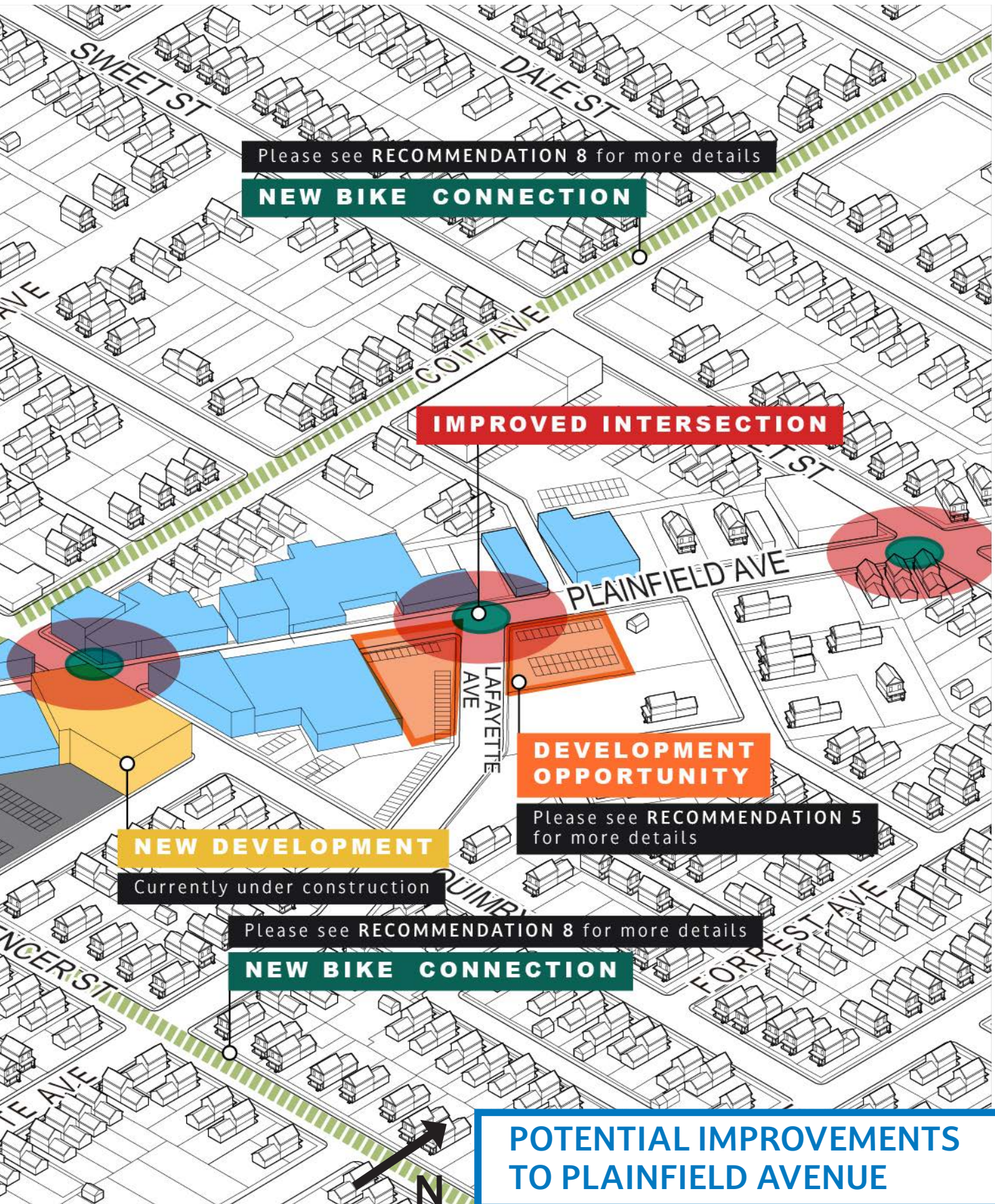
**POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS TO THE RIVERFRONT**



SITE-SPECIFIC  
IMPROVEMENTS



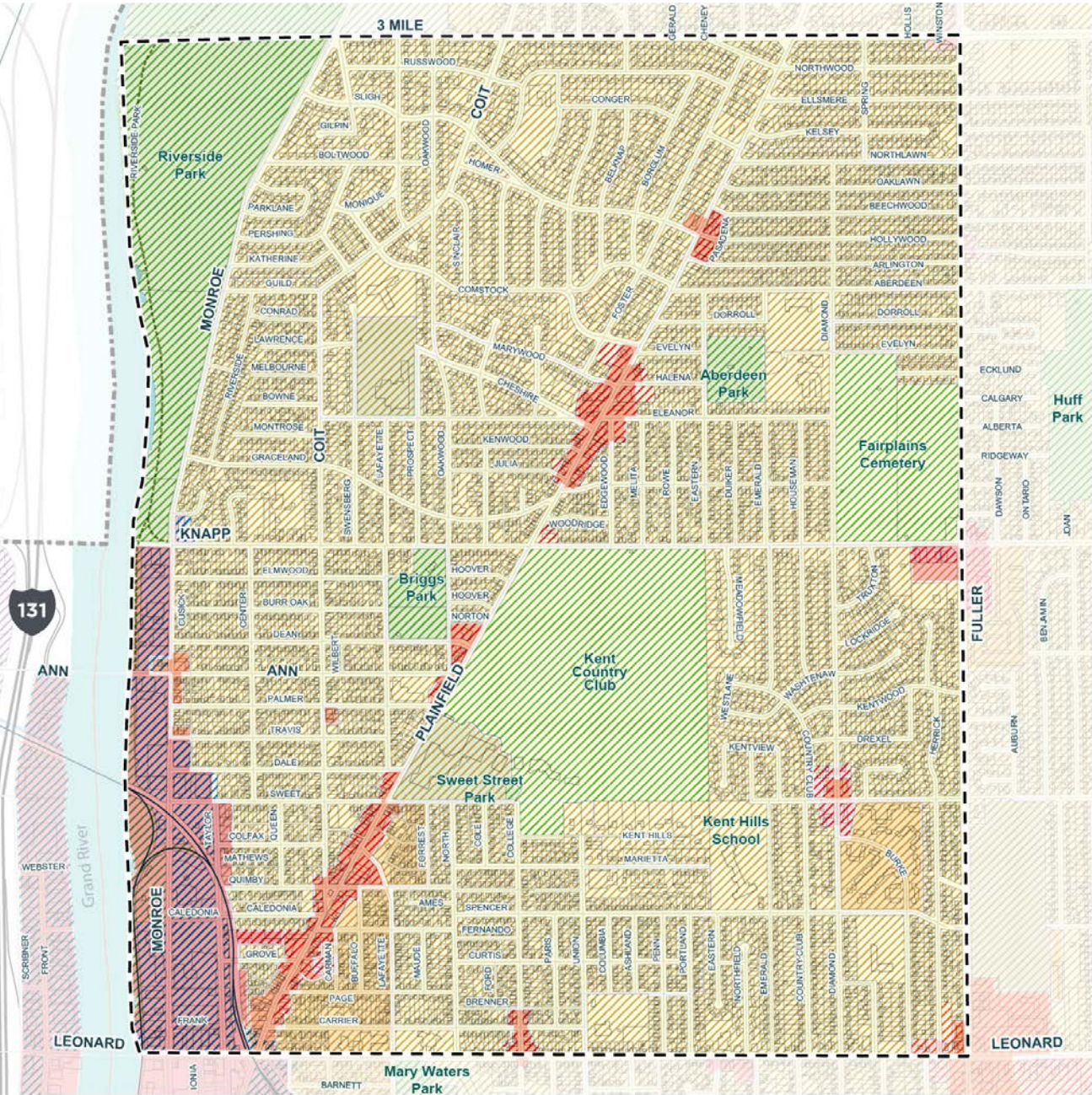






FUTURE DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER AND ZONING

RELATIONSHIP TO ZONING



Legend

Existing Zoning

- LDR** - Low Density Residential
- MDR** - Mixed Density Residential
- TBA** - Traditional Business Area
- NOS** - Neighborhood Office Service
- C** - Commercial
- TCC** - Transitional City Center
- OS** - Open Space

Future Character Areas

- Downtown
- Neighborhood Center
- Community Activity Center
- Compact Neighborhood
- Transitional Activity Center
- Campus
- Innovation Center
- Parks & Open Spaces
- Manufacturing & Logistics



### Community Activity Center

#### Appropriate Zoning Districts:

- Commercial
- Neighborhood Office Service
- Planned Redevelopment

### Neighborhood Center

#### Appropriate Zoning Districts:

- Traditional Business Area
- Neighborhood Office Service
- Transit Oriented Development

### Compact Neighborhood

#### Appropriate Zoning Districts:

- Mixed-Density Residential
- Low-Density Residential
- Neighborhood Office Service
- Planned Redevelopment

### Innovation Center

#### Appropriate Zoning Districts:

- Transitional City Center
- Commercial
- Transit Oriented Development
- Mixed-Density Residential
- Planned Redevelopment

### Campus

#### Appropriate Zoning Districts:

- Institutional Campus
- Transit Oriented Development
- Planned Redevelopment

### Parks

#### Appropriate Zoning Districts:

- Open Space

The **Future Development Character Map** and **Zoning Map** serve different purposes for the City.

**Future Development Character Map:** This map is a visionary tool that outlines the intended use of land in the future, reflecting the community's long-term goals and aspirations. It is part of a Community Master Plan and guides future development, informing decisions about growth and land use changes.

**Zoning Map:** This map is a regulatory tool that defines the current legal use of land, specifying what can be built and how land can be used right now. It divides the city into zones, each with its own set of rules and regulations regarding building types, densities, and uses.

In essence, the **Future Development Character Map** provides a guide for future development, while the **Zoning Map** enforces current land use regulations. The City will need to update its zoning to achieve this vision, and this zoning plan may help coordinate between existing zoning classifications and desired outcomes.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Action	Category	Timeframe	Responsibility - City Departments	Responsibility - External Partners
<b>GOAL 01: AFFORDABLE &amp; INCLUSIVE GROWTH</b>				
1. ALLOW FOR DENSER HOUSING ON KEY CORRIDORS.	R	S	Planning	
2. ALLOW FOR A VARIETY OF HOUSING TYPES IN SINGLE-FAMILY DISTRICTS.	R	S	Planning	
3. SUPPORT EXISTING HOMEOWNERS AND RENTERS.	P	S	Planning, Community Development Department	
<b>GOAL 02: A LIVELY &amp; UNIQUE NEIGHBORHOOD (AKA KEEP CRESTON FUNKY)</b>				
4. REDEVELOP THE RIVERFRONT AS AN INNOVATION CENTER.	R	S	Planning, Economic Development	
5. SUPPORT PLAINFIELD AVENUE WITH NEW MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT.	R, P	S	Planning, Economic Development	
6. TARGET STOREFRONT AND FAÇADE REPAIRS IN NEIGHBORHOOD NODES AND SUBDISTRICTS.	P	S	Economic Development	
<b>GOAL 03: SAFER STREETS FOR BIKING &amp; WALKING</b>				
7. IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLING CONNECTIONS ON PLAINFIELD AVENUE.	C	M, L	MobileGR, Engineering, Planning	
8. ADD BICYCLE INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGHOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD.	C	Ongoing	MobileGR, Engineering	
<b>GOAL 04: REVITALIZED &amp; CONNECTED OPEN SPACES</b>				
9. CREATE A PLAZA WHERE COIT AVENUE MEETS PLAINFIELD AVENUE.	C	M	Engineering, Planning, Economic Development, Fire Department	Creston Neighborhood Association
10. BETTER CONNECT PLAINFIELD AVENUE TO THE RIVERFRONT ALONG KEY STREETS.	C	M, L	MobileGR, Engineering	



Action	Category	Timeframe	Responsibility - City Departments	Responsibility - External Partners
11. WORK TO COMPLETE GRAND RIVER TRAIL THROUGH NEIGHBORHOOD	C	S	<b>Engineering, Parks and Rec</b> , Downtown Grand Rapids Inc., MobileGR	Creston Neighborhood Association
12. FOCUS ON GREENING RESIDENTIAL PORTIONS OF PLAINFIELD AVENUE.	C	M	<b>Planning, Engineering</b> , Parks and Rec, Economic Development	Creston Neighborhood Association, <b>Friends of Grand Rapids Parks</b>
13. ESTABLISH COMMUNITY VISION FOR REDEVELOPED RIVERSIDE MIDDLE SCHOOL.	O	M	<b>Planning, Executive Office, Economic Development</b> , Parks and Rec	GRPS
14. BOOST CRESTON'S CLIMATE RESILIENCE.	R, P	M, L	Planning, Economic Development	GVSU, Friends of GR Parks, Creston Neighborhood Association

### CATEGORIES

**R:** Regulations: Actions that could be implemented through the Framework zoning code rewrite or other update to city ordinances.

**C:** Capital Project: Physical improvements to city facilities and infrastructure.

**P:** Program: Programs or initiatives that may require some ongoing City support or participation.

**O:** Policy: Direction used on an ongoing basis to guide City decisions.

### TIMEFRAME

**S:** Short-term (1-5 years)

**M:** Medium-term (5-10 years)

**L:** Long-term (10-20 years)

**Bold text** indicates who is leading the effort

