

Neighborhood Redevelopment: A Master Plan for the 2200 Block of Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive
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1.0 Historical Use

The 2200 block of Martin Luther King Jr. Drive was formerly the center of a busy residential and business district commonly known as Northtown. The buildings were distinctive in their late 19th and early 20th century architecture and many neighborhood goods and services were available. However, during the 1960's and 1970's the economic base of nearby manufacturing and service jobs eroded. The neighborhood began to change as unemployment and out-migration of the middle class began to occur. Eventually, the many small businesses, which depended on the people who had once worked and lived in the community, could no longer survive. Since then, a majority of buildings have been underutilized, left vacant, or demolished.

2.0 Purpose of the Plan

Since the mid to late 1980's, there have been several signs of progress toward the re-establishment of a viable community on the 2200 block of Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. However, one important element was missing – a single, comprehensive vision of the direction such progress should take toward the creation of a new image for Northtown. This plan synthesized several diverse objectives of residents, developers, and City officials into a comprehensive, unified whole to ensure that the newly emerging form of development in Northtown became a powerful image of a special place.

3.0 Goal

The goal of this plan was to re-establish an identity and improve the image of Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) Drive. That image should be responsive to the neighborhood needs and culture. Specifically, the Plan sought to restore the prestige of the 2200 block of MLK Drive as the retail and service core for the surrounding community.

4.0 Catalyst Criteria

Criteria that made the 2200 block of MLK Drive the appropriate catalyst for change were as follows:

- Its position at North Avenue and Martin Luther King Jr. Drive with existing density of retail, commercial, and residential activity
- Building types that were conducive to rehabilitation
- Previous and planned redevelopment of adjacent structure (Halyard Building, Stones Jewelry, Payless Shoe Store, and Historic King Place)
- Strong community support for change
- Major transfer point for two bus routes
- Increased traffic on North Avenue

5.0 Objectives

Objectives for the Plan were as follows:

- Create an architectural context that provides a pleasant and stable atmosphere for new business opportunities
 - Design architectural spaces that are economical for small entrepreneurial businesses
 - Provide appropriate facilities for a full range of retail and professional services
 - Provide convenient and adequate parking

- Find a means to keep existing minority businesses viable during reconstruction
- Create high density and a variety of retail activity throughout a continuous pedestrian level streetscape
- Provide a safe environment for commercial and residential development
 - Design architecture that enhances street life during all hours so that residents, shop owners, and shoppers all contribute to security
 - Provide lighting that is unobtrusive but adequately illuminates all exterior spaces
 - Parking that is convenient and well lit
 - Avoid design of cul-de-sacs, alleys, and blind corners in exterior spaces
- Provide new, affordable housing
 - Design apartments above commercial spaces so that they are available for shop owners who want to live above their place of business
 - Provide one secure indoor parking space per residential unit
- Adapt existing buildings when economically feasible
 - Analyze existing buildings to determine the structural condition and whether they can be modified for new uses. Estimate costs for rehabilitation of any suitable buildings
 - Any adaptive re-use should be sensitive to original architecture
 - If new building is warranted, provide estimates of construction costs
- Design parking appropriate to new development
 - Provide safe pedestrian access to store fronts on Martin Luther King Drive from off street parking
 - Provide adequate off-street parking to avoid congestion of residential streets
- Create a coherent architectural image that does not preclude variety
 - Provide a comprehensive master plan for the streetscape that unifies both sides of the 2200 block of MLK Drive that includes lighting, pavement materials, seating signage, plantings, storefront design, and on-street parking
 - Establish buildings heights from between 2 and 5 stories
 - Establish a continuous pedestrian level elevation