

Upper Third Street Neighborhood Project 1977

1.0 Area Description & History

This report is focused on the area north of downtown Milwaukee and just west of the Milwaukee River. It is bounded by Burleigh Avenue to the north, Walnut Street to the south, Holton Street to the East, and I-43 to the west. The area is most commonly referred to as the Upper Third Street neighborhood, with Third Street serving as its major axis. Historically, Upper Third Street was a vibrant residential and commercial area for several immigrant families beginning in the late 1800's. However, due to post-war suburbanization, the neighborhood – whose population was primarily African-American at the time – suffered dramatically. Decline of the retail and service strip paralleled the decline of Milwaukee's Central Business District (CBD), but, unlike the CBD, there were no efforts to save it. Despite the severe decline, the neighborhood still offers good housing amenities and is more active and vital than perceived.

2.0 Goal

The goal of this project is to set in motion a process of coordinated actions on the part of the community, the city, private enterprise, and other relevant units of government that will change the perception of the neighborhood and its potential by residents, businesses, citizens at large, potential developers, and lenders and investors.

The project will focus on two aspects of neighborhood development to accomplish this goal: (a) commercial revitalization, and (b) residential development, preservation, and rehabilitation.

3.0 Current Conditions and Use

Commercial Environment

In May of 1976 the Upper Third Street Business Development Association (UTSBDA) was formed, following the recommendation of Real Estate Research Corporation (RERC) in an economic analysis of the area. Their report indicated a market for convenience goods and service commercial activities and UTSBDA was formed in order to further address these needs.

The following bullets enumerate the business demographics of the area:

- Approximately 50% of all the Third Street Properties (including vacant and non-commercial uses) between Walnut and Burleigh are occupied by operating businesses
 - 86% of these businesses are retail and personal service
 - 10% are service commercial
- The service commercial businesses are concentrated south of Garfield Avenue, mainly between Garfield Avenue and Brown Street
- The three blocks south of Brown Street are deteriorated with a large number of vacant buildings and lots
 - 34% (12) of the drinking establishments in the Upper Third Street neighborhood are within these blocks
 - *Recommendation:* Due to the low rents for commercial space (as compared to Milwaukee as a whole) and the proximity to both downtown and highway access, these blocks are ideal for service commercial uses

- There are very few service commercial establishments north of North Avenue
 - *Recommendation:* An incentive program could encourage relocation of these establishments into the southern end of the business area to help form a unified service commercial district

Local Market

There is a strong local market within the Upper Third Street commercial area. At the time of the economic analysis, a small percentage of residential retail expenditures were made within the neighborhood. The personal and income characteristics of area residents indicate a market exists for specific retail and personal service establishments. Furthermore, the market potential for drug stores, grocery stores, and restaurants is probably good, while the demand for entertainment is high.

Other opportunities include:

- A convenience grocery store (ex: Open Pantry, White Hen Pantry)
 - Preferably a locally owned, franchise store
- Chain restaurant facilities (ex: McDonalds, Burger Chef)
- Food cooperative

Existing Structures and Community Environment

- 30% of the properties along the Upper Third Street commercial strip have buildings with rehabilitation potential
 - Area with greatest rehabilitation potential lies between Lloyd Street and North Avenue, and Clarke Street and Center Street
- 37% of the structures in the area are duplexes, 43% duplexes, and the remaining 20% are commercial, rooming houses, multi-family residential, manufacturing, and public buildings
- 39% of the residential properties in the area are owner occupied

Existing Problems

- Poor image and perception
 - Approximately 30% of the properties are vacant (primarily located south of Reservoir Avenue)
- Disinvestment and lack of incentives

4.0 Recommended Actions

- Commercial: Realization of Third Street's full business potential depends on a catalyst in the form of limited investment in highly visible and symbolic public improvements. This project will serve to improve both the visual and the investment image of the area.
 - Blighting influences should be eliminated and/or rehabilitated
- Development of Revitalization Program Concepts: to encourage cooperation and "risk sharing" between the City and the organized business community. Steps include:
 - Form a shared definition of the problem
 - Identify "start-up" or target areas, which will provide the most exposure at the onset of the revitalization efforts. Possible targets could include the following intersections:
 - North Avenue and Third Street
 - Center Street and Third Street

- Locust Street and Third Street

These target areas should extend approximately ½ to 1 block north and south of each intersection and approximately ½ block east and west. These three target areas would comprise approximately 35% of the 1½-mile length of Third Street.

- Create a plan for specific design improvements, including:
 - Façade improvement guidelines for existing buildings
 - A series of inexpensive “sidewalk structures” to be built
 - Landscaping for the street and vacant lots
 - An emphasis on the historic facades within the area
 - Provide for street furnishings in selected areas
 - The integration of “wall graphics” or “super graphics”
 - Address the potential for programmed street activities
 - Open-air flea market is a specific recommendation for the area on the vacant lots west of Third Street, between North Avenue and Meinecke Street. If the assembly of these parcels is cost prohibitive, the city-owned parking lot (directly to the west, bordering 4th Street) should be used.
- City Land Use Policy: The City should modify its clearance policy and abandon any other plans to demolish viable buildings. Increased city concern with preservation of sound or rehabilitated housing, while committing less to extensive clearance, would better support the Upper Third Street neighborhood.
- Viable Public Improvements: Visible improvements to the neighborhoods amenities and physical environment should be made, such as repairing sidewalks, curbs, and gutters and incorporating landscaping, lighting, and furniture into the streetscape. Recreational and open spaces are also needed within the planning area.
- Public Housing: There should be no further “concentration” of public housing complexes in order to avoid weakening the neighborhood’s chances of enhancing its residential competitiveness in the local market. Any subsidized housing that is built should be planned in order to reduce its locational impact and blend into the context of the neighborhood.
- Historic Preservation: The historic qualities of the neighborhood residences should be preserved and promoted as a source of community pride. Possible solutions to encouraging more investment in preservation include: (a) the compilation and distribution of a pamphlet, documenting the history and relevant buildings in the area and (b) the establishment of a fund for the purchase in the private market of historically relevant buildings for resale to owner-occupants.