

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the Urban and Regional Planning Practicum Course at Michigan State University (MSU), five students were assigned the task of performing a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) assessment of a neighborhood in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The neighborhood is located southeast of downtown and has experienced steady decline over the past twenty years. The original client for this project was Grand Rapids REACH (Reach Everyone Administer Care and Help), Inc. During the process of evaluating the neighborhood, it became apparent that the needs extended beyond the neighborhood served by REACH. As a result, the project boundaries were expanded to include a larger area, and our new client became the Madison Area Neighborhood Association (MANA). The REACH neighborhood comprises a portion of the area served by MANA. The Michigan State University-West Extension Office acted as a liaison between MANA and the students.

The project began with two purposes. The first was to perform a SWOT analysis of the community. The MSU students performed a SWOT analysis for the REACH neighborhood and the community members performed another SWOT analysis through a charrette process. The second purpose of the project was to prepare a charrette handbook so that other communities can apply a similar model to their citizen planning efforts. The results of these efforts are contained in Attachments A through C.

Both SWOT analyses presented interesting findings. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified by both groups were similar in several respects, but differed in many others. These similarities and differences are also discussed at length in SECTION 3.0 of this report. Both groups noted that homes needed repair, and that the streetscape could use improvement. Differences, however, arose as the student analysis focused more on the physical aspect of the neighborhood while the neighborhood SWOT centered on organizational challenges within the community. Since these organizational issues needed to be addressed before many physical issues could, the neighborhood actions generally took first priority for implementation.

The actions implemented focused on making better use of the resources that exist within the community, such as volunteers, neighborhood organizations, etc. The students aided in implementing several of these actions, including updating the business directory, producing a crime-prevention brochure, and preparing a binder of maps that briefly describe housing conditions. In addition, the students surveyed the condition of many properties that MANA was particularly concerned about. MANA is also working on a newsletter and other actions identified in the SWOT analyses.