

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Urban and Regional Planning Practicum students at Michigan State University (MSU) compiled this commercial revitalization report for the Creston Neighborhood in the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The group of six students worked at the request of the client groups, the Creston Neighborhood Association (CNA) and the Michigan State University, Grand Rapids Extension office. The goal of the students was to assist the clients in the revitalization of the Creston Neighborhood Commercial District located North of the Grand Rapid's downtown.

This commercial district revitalization focuses on the Creston Neighborhood, in particularly the stretch of Plainfield Avenue in between the crossroads of Leonard Street to the South and Sweet Street to the North. The first portion analyzes the socio-economic profile, conveying the age, income and race makeup of the Creston Neighborhood in comparison with that of the Grand Rapids Metropolitan area. The second section makes up the land use inventory, which accounts for each parcel's current location, classification, assessed value and overall building condition. This is expressed in numerous corridor classification maps that run consistent with the individual parcel's photo and data. Thirdly, the practicum team analyzed a twenty-two-question survey completed by 25% of the business owners in the study area. The survey results were compared with the results of a similar survey distributed five years earlier. Developed by the Creston Neighborhood Association, this survey asked business owners questions ranging anywhere from, *where employees reside*, to *what types of business improvements would the owners like to see*. Fourthly, the MSU Students analyzed a MarketPlace Profile for the Creston area compiled by ESRI Business Information Solutions. The students totaled the number of specific business types relating these numbers to the current supply and demand and made recommendations based on the Market-Place Profile in accordance with rational feasibility and business owner's input. Lastly, the Practicum team combined the results of the prior sections to formulate feasible recommendations. Included in this portion is an alleyway design recommendation depicted in rendered sketches complimented with written guidelines.

The Practicum Team used a variety of methods to complete this report. However, a majority of the land use maps and suggestions were compiled based on the students visiting the corridor and assessing the conditions on foot during the six visits. The students, after multiple visits, which included discussion with business owners and selected Neighborhood Association members, transferred the visual and oral findings into graphical and written documents. After the main report was constructed, the students looked to the Grand Rapid's Maser Plan for guidelines in formulating the final recommendations.

The MSU Students found the Creston Commercial Corridor in greater decline in comparison with five years earlier. The number of necessary fayade improvements had increased, while the number of current residents had decreased. Compared with surrounding neighborhoods, the Creston Neighborhood lagged behind in renewal as new model areas such as the Monroe Neighborhood exemplified new 10ft and retail infill. However, in certain business sectors, Creston proved to remain strong and consistent. In the area of Home Furnishing Stores for example, Creston not only provided to its local

consumers, but also drew persons from outside of the district by providing retail sales that exceeded demand by 700%. Another noteworthy feature about Creston was its vast amount of unique businesses ranging from home furnishings stores to eateries.

When providing recommendations for the business district, the Practicum Team continually referred to the Grand Rapid's Master Plan recently completed in 2003. . Noted in the Master Plan, the team focused its recommendations around two key points.

1. The Creston Commercial Corridor is noted in the Master Plan as a Sub Regional Center, meaning it supports a surrounding population of up to 115,000, acting as the main commercial provider for those surrounding areas.
2. *In accordance with the Master Plan, a successful Commercial Corridor must have identified stabilizing cores (ex: focal retail or restaurant) with supporting connectors located in between each core.*

Incorporating these two main components, the Practicum Team highlighted the Leonard - Plainfield Avenue and the Quimby - Plainfield Avenue Intersections as the stabilizing cores, therefore the areas needing greatest attention. Surrounding these intersections the Students noticed in their land use inventory a number of vacant buildings available at these two crucial locations. Coordinating the two key components, the Team suggested a handful of recommendations for commercial infill in the selected vacant buildings, offering services extending to neighboring communities to fulfill Creston's role as a Sub-Regional Center while making sure the selected businesses are able to perform as corridor pillars, establishing a stabilizing flow between the two intersections.