



WESTSIDE

GROWS TOGETHER

NEIGHBORHOOD
REVITALIZATION PLAN

JUNE 2012

INTERFACE STUDIO LLC + V. LAMAR WILSON ASSOCIATES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



WHO IS INVOLVED?

The West Side Revitalization Plan is a collaborative effort by residents, community groups, businesses and neighborhood-based institutions focused on improving the quality of life in all the West Side neighborhoods.

WHY PLAN?

Despite the engaged citizens and strong institutions of the West Side, there are also serious challenges to overcome. The West Side Revitalization Plan serves to capitalize on the community's strengths and overcome the challenges.

OUR STRENGTHS

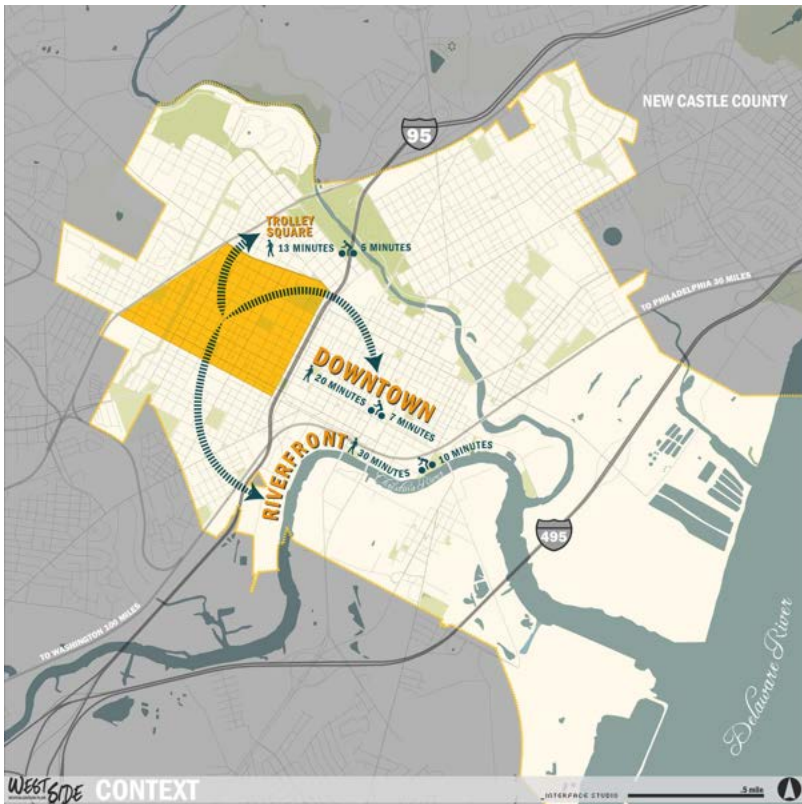
- > Home to 13,000 people (18% of Wilmington, DE population)
- > Ethnic diversity
- > Historic parks and homes
- > Base for over 300 businesses
- > Strong institutional anchors
- > Home to churches and civic organizations
- > Center of local festivals
- > Restaurant destination

OUR CHALLENGES

- > Families living below the poverty line
- > High unemployment
- > Lack of good schools
- > High crime rate
- > Large number of vacant properties
- > Deteriorated business and residential properties
- > Lack of green space
- > Struggling businesses and business districts

WHERE ARE WE?

The West Side Revitalization Plan target area includes all of the neighborhoods between Pennsylvania Avenue and Lancaster Avenue and between North Jackson Street and the railroad tracks west of Bancroft Parkway.



*Top left: West Side neighborhoods;
bottom left: context map.*



1 PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The West Side Revitalization Plan is a collaborative effort involving community groups and neighborhood-based institutions focused on improving the quality of life for residents in all the West Side neighborhoods while maintaining the character that makes the West Side one of the most vibrantly diverse communities in Wilmington. This plan is the result of a resident-driven effort coordinated by local community groups and neighborhood-based institutions to guide a focused and broad-based effort to transform and strengthen the community.

The process of revitalization is about reinvesting in both **people** and in **place**. This plan is intended to:

- > Empower residents as agents of change on the West Side and unite them behind a common cause;
- > Reconnect the people, institutions and places that are community strengths;
- > Ensure that the revitalization of the West Side benefits all residents of the West Side;
- > Market community assets and strengths to encourage private reinvestment;
- > Celebrate the West Side's diversity and heritage through arts and culture;
- > Create great places through greening and public realm improvements;
- > Coordinate the efforts of the city, nonprofit organizations, churches and residents such that everyone is working from the same playbook;
- > Inform funding decisions and raise money for neighborhood investments.

WHY THE WEST SIDE? WHY NOW?

The West Side is a unique and historic collection of neighborhoods at the doorstep of downtown Wilmington. The West Side is defined in this plan as the area bounded by Jackson Street / I-95, Lancaster Avenue, the rail line west of Bancroft Parkway and Pennsylvania Avenue. The area developed in the late 1800s as the City of Wilmington expanded, providing a home for families who worked in and around Downtown and the industries along the riverfront. The construction of I-95 in the 1960s linked Wilmington to the other cities on the Northeast corridor but had the unintended consequence of diminishing the strength and continuity of the neighborhoods that were in its path. Today, the West Side is still within walking distance of Downtown and other strong, revitalized neighborhoods like the waterfront and Trolley Square and could benefit from strengthening those links.

“this should be an area we
can get our hands around”

- stakeholder insight,
interview

Within the West Side there are multiple neighborhoods and resident leaders that have all demonstrated a capacity and interest to organize and improve their communities. The West Side is home to almost 13,000 people and boasts historic parks and homes as well as an active employment base of well over 300 businesses that are located throughout the community. It is home to the beautiful Bancroft Parkway and recently completed Woodlawn Library as well as distinctive churches and Little Italy – long a restaurant destination in the City. As home to many ethnicities, the West Side is also distinguished by renowned events and festivals including St. Anthony's Italian Festival (one of the largest on the east coast), the Holy Trinity Greek Festival, and the Hispanic Parade on 4th Street. In short, within the West Side's different neighborhoods of Cool Springs, Tilton, the Hilltop, The Flats and Little Italy there is a mix of cultural assets, strong institutions and neighborhood services.

Despite the strong tradition and engaged citizens that comprise the West Side, there are also serious challenges to overcome. Like many communities in cities across the country, the West Side includes many families living well below the poverty line with low educational attainment and limited prospects for finding a job. The combination of poverty, low educational attainment and lack of economic opportunity has contributed to high crime rates that have persisted over time. One response to the crime has been outmigration from the highest impacted neighborhoods over time, leading to concentrations of vacant properties. The high crime rates and vacant and deteriorated homes, exacerbated by the recent economic downturn and foreclosures, have negatively impacted the quality of life for residents across the West Side. Many lament the long standing issues around crime and safety on the West Side but recognize that part of the solution must come from the residents themselves. Put more succinctly by one resident - **“this neighborhood always fights back.”**

Today, the West Side is at a tipping point. On the one hand, there are capable organizations that continue to improve and invest in the West Side yet on the other hand we face discouraging trends that threaten the stability of the community. This plan recognizes that now is the time to take action as a group. The West Side is poised for revitalization if we build upon the strengths of its people and organizations. But to make true progress, we must tackle the challenges together. As expressed by a local resident, **“People need to belong to something they can hold their heads up about. If we don't restore a sense of belonging then all we've got is competing forces fighting against each other...we're in this together.”**



*Cool Spring Park in the 1890s.
Source: Delaware Archives
(<http://archives.delaware.gov/>)*



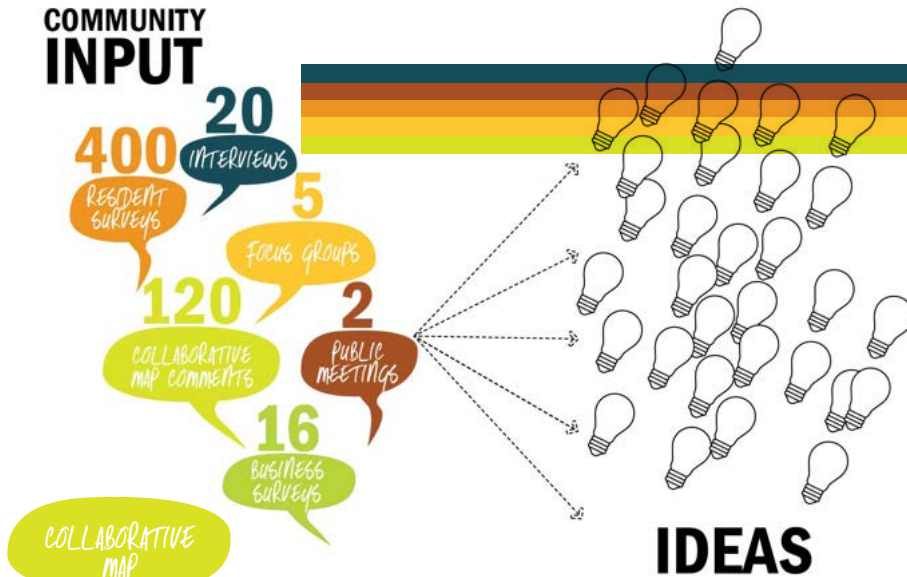
*Franklin Street in the 1890s.
Source: Delaware Archives
(<http://archives.delaware.gov/>)*



*St. Anthony's Italian Festival in June is one of the biggest on the east coast.
Source: Daisy Ferret/Trip Advisor*

PLANNING PROCESS

COMMUNITY INPUT



The planning process was designed to be both data-driven and people-driven. The planning team conducted demographic research and a physical survey to understand the West Side through DATA. But also listened to what residents had to say through a variety of COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT activities –a key component of the plan and the basis for the vision and recommendations. These elements combined to provide a comprehensive picture of the challenges the West Side faces today.

The planning process was designed to not only engage the public, but also help to build a sense of community among the West Side's diverse constituency. The process informed and brainstormed with residents and stakeholders using a number of different outreach tools including:

- > A **local Steering Committee** formed of local residents, community leaders, business owners, and representatives from local institutions to guide all aspects of the project.
- > Twenty confidential **interviews** with a sample of residents, community leaders, business owners, service providers, and City officials.
- > Five **focus groups** with over 100 representatives from distinct stakeholder groups: youth providers, health providers, merchants from Union and Lincoln Streets, stakeholders interested in parks and gardens, and 4th St. residents and businesses.
- > A **collaborative map** to collect public input in the form of insights and ideas for specific locations in the West Side. The map consisted of an online map and two hard copy maps – one installed in the Woodlawn Library and another that was carried to meetings and events throughout the community.
- > **Postcards from the Future** to encourage residents to dream about what the West Side could be in 20 years.
- > A **resident perception survey** administered by community volunteers to collect the perceptions and concerns of residents across all of the West Side neighborhoods.
- > A **business survey** to gain the insights and ideas of local business owners on Union and Lincoln Streets.
- > Two **public meetings** to present the analysis of existing conditions, an overview of the preliminary recommendations of the plan, and invite the community to weigh in on issues affecting the future of the community.



This plan is a chance to envision the West Side as a whole and find opportunities to join forces and collaborate in a way that amplifies and unites all the work of residents, community groups, institutions, and businesses, and organizes the West Side as a unified voice to present and implement...



A COLLABORATIVE VISION FOR A *vibrant* WEST SIDE

we are ... **A UNIFIED COMMUNITY OF
DIVERSE PEOPLE,
NEIGHBORHOODS, INSTITUTIONS,
AND BUSINESSES WHO SHARE A
COMMON GOAL OF ENSURING THE
WEST SIDE GROWS TOGETHER**

The West Side is in it together and is working to ensure that revitalization benefits the entire community. The recommendations are divided into six thematic areas:

- 1 OUR COMMUNITY IN OUR HANDS** – focusing on empowering the community and bringing it together to improve quality of life,
- 2 OUR YOUTH, OUR FUTURE** – focusing on youth empowerment through educational opportunities in school and out,
- 3 A PLACE TO CALL HOME** – focusing on rehabilitating and improving existing housing and developing new housing for all income levels and diverse households,
- 4 OPEN FOR BUSINESS** – focusing on economic development to support thriving vibrant businesses that provide services and jobs,
- 5 MOVING FORWARD** – focusing on making streets safe and accessible for everyone,
- 6 WEST SIDE OUTSIDE** – focusing on improving parks and gardens as places where neighbors and neighborhoods comes together.

1 OUR COMMUNITY IN OUR HANDS : community building and quality of life

- > BUILD A STRONG COMMUNITY BY BRINGING NEIGHBORS TOGETHER
- > ADDRESS THE BASICS TO MAKE THE WEST SIDE CLEAN, SAFE AND ATTRACTIVE

These recommendations aim to empower residents to build a strong and healthy community by working together to improve quality of life in the West Side. A healthy community is clean and safe for all ages, supports a healthy lifestyle, embraces diversity, and is a place where neighbors know one another. Our Community in Our Hands refers to power in numbers, whereby small individual actions add up to have a transformative impact. The plan provides strategies to tackle the various quality of life issues that contribute to unsafe conditions in the West Side. Key Recommendations include:

COMMUNITY BUILDING AND ENGAGEMENT

- 1.1 Create network to enable community associations and other neighborhood-based groups to collaborate
- 1.2 Strengthen block-level leadership network
- 1.3 Develop a communications strategy for reaching all the diverse segments of the community
- 1.4 Coordinate a West Side Events Calendar
- 1.5 Organize regular community events
- 1.6 Launch a seed grant program



Events such as community picnics and the farmer's market get neighbors out and help build a strong community.

MAINTENANCE AND BEAUTIFICATION

- 1.7 Strengthen resident-driven maintenance, ownership, and pride at the block level
- 1.8 Launch resident education campaign
- 1.9 Help residents, institutions and businesses plant and maintain trees/landscaping
- 1.10 Launch Clean Streets campaign
- 1.11 Clean, green and light alleys
- 1.12 Address the impact of trash cans and recycling bins in the public realm

MANAGE VACANT AND DETERIORATING PROPERTY

- 1.13 Form a Nuisance Abatement Task Force **[TOOL]**
- 1.14 Advocate for revisions to the Vacant Property Registration Program **[POLICY]**
- 1.15 Take control of vacant properties with land banking and a vacant property management program **[TOOL/POLICY]**

PUBLIC SAFETY

- 1.16 Prevent crime by design
- 1.17 Promote porch lights
- 1.18 Strengthen community policing



The Westside Community Action Committee and Westside Coalition spring clean ups demonstrate some of the grassroots efforts to clean and beautify the West Side and forge strong relationships with public safety officers.

2 OUR YOUTH, OUR FUTURE : youth and education

> FOCUS ON IMPROVING SCHOOLS AND ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES TO SECURE THE FUTURE OF YOUTH AND THE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE

The West Side is a youthful community where 1 in 3.5 residents is under the age of 19, but schools in the community fail to meet acceptable performance levels and are unable to provide students with the skills needed to succeed and gain employment in a world that increasingly requires not only a high school diploma but education and training that goes beyond high school. The plan stresses connecting youth with positive opportunities both in school and out to inspire them and unlock their potential to become leaders in their community and set them up for success in their future. Key Recommendations include:

- 2.1 Advocate for high quality neighborhood schools **[POLICY]**
- 2.2 Develop youth leadership and youth-led change
- 2.3 Support and expand existing programming
- 2.4 Develop new programs to connect youth to each other and the broader world
- 2.5 Develop skills to empower youth in the global economy
- 2.6 Provide shuttle transport for youth programs and events
- 2.7 Match organizations with available space with programs looking for space



Improving Father Tucker Playground is a pilot Youth-Led Change project that will be a model for subsequent improvements to parks throughout the West Side.



Left: Westside Community Action Committee Clean Up; Right: Martin Luther King, Jr Day.



3 A PLACE TO CALL HOME : housing rehabilitation and development

- > SUPPORT HOMEOWNERSHIP AND ASSIST EXISTING RESIDENTS TO MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE THEIR HOMES
- > ENCOURAGE AND INCENTIVIZE RESPONSIBLE LANDLORDS AND REINVESTMENT
- > SPUR NEW INVESTMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Affordable and diverse housing options are assets in the West Side but better quality housing, better maintenance and better marketing are needed to achieve the aspiration of making the West Side a place where “everyone wants to live.” The research conducted during the plan led to several conclusions; first, there is an urgent need for high quality affordable rental housing; second, there is an opportunity to help qualified renters become homeowners and help existing homeowners stay in their homes; and finally, good relationships between landlords and tenants, making sure each is aware of their roles and responsibilities to the community, are necessary to ensuring neighborhood stability. In addition to helping existing residents, there is also an opportunity to build on the strong employment base and a growing artist community to attract new residents to the West Side. These recommendations aim to improve overall housing conditions by helping existing residents and property owners to rehabilitate and maintain their homes, facilitating the renovation and development of new housing, and marketing West Side as a Place to Call Home. Key Recommendations include:

COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITIES

- 3.1 Create housing development entity to coordinate development and marketing

PROMOTION

- 3.2 Develop a branding strategy to recruit residents
- 3.3 Market the different neighborhoods to real estate agents, visitors, renters and buyers
- 3.4 Create a Live Where You Work Program [TOOL]
- 3.5 Develop an incentives and financing clearinghouse

HOUSING REHABILITATION AND IMPROVEMENT

- 3.6 Assist low-income homeowners with grants/loans for renovations [TOOL]
- 3.7 Assist residents with maintenance and repair technical assistance [TOOL]
- 3.8 Reduce foreclosure actions [POLICY]
- 3.9 Promote yard/driveway program
- 3.10 Support Woodlawn Trustees improvements
- 3.11 Advocate for re-institution and revision of Pre-Rental Inspection program [TOOL]
- 3.12 Promote Crime Free Multi-Housing [TOOL]
- 3.13 Create incentives for landlords to reinvest in properties [TOOL]



402 N. Broom: before and after



New construction at Speakman Place.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

- 3.14 Facilitate access to capital and incentives to spur private investment [TOOL]
- 3.15 Develop incentives to convert multifamily housing to single family [TOOL]

4 OPEN FOR BUSINESS : economic development

- > DISTINGUISH AND PROMOTE THE WEST SIDE AS A PLACE TO DO BUSINESS AND GROW JOBS
- > CREATE CORRIDORS THAT ENCOURAGE FOOT TRAFFIC AND HAVE A MIX OF COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES SO THAT PEOPLE STAY A WHILE
- > COORDINATE EFFORTS TO DEFINE AND DISTINGUISH DIFFERENT CORRIDORS
- > STRENGTHEN THE EXISTING HEALTH CARE SECTOR TO PROMOTE A HEALTHY COMMUNITY AND GROW JOBS

Over 300 businesses and health care providers have chosen the West Side as their home base. They provide a mix of different commercial activity and also jobs that are within easy reach of residents and bring visitors into the community. The primary commercial corridors are Union/Lincoln Street, 4th Street, and Pennsylvania Avenue, with Lancaster Avenue emerging as a secondary commercial corridor. Each corridor has its own distinct character and flavor. The West Side's commercial corridors are the public face of the community and their businesses are employers and engines of economic growth within the community. An integral part of the revitalization plan is to establish a thriving business district to provide local jobs and services to the residents, enhance the neighborhood, and attract new residents and customers. Key Recommendations include:

DISTRICT-WIDE

- 4.1 Form a business alliance to oversee district-wide initiatives
- 4.2 Connect residents to local jobs
- 4.3 Conduct a market study for West Side commercial corridors
- 4.4 Encourage design that promotes pedestrian-oriented corridors
- 4.5 Improve parking and its impact on the corridors
- 4.6 Advocate for changes to city code regarding outdoor seating **[POLICY]**
- 4.7 Adhere to maintenance standards and advocate for even enforcement

UNION/LINCOLN

COLLABORATION

- 4.8 Form a Union/Lincoln Main Street Program to promote economic development

PROMOTION

- 4.9 Market Union/Lincoln Streets as a destination
- 4.10 Work on branding the district
- 4.11 Bring more public art to the district
- 4.12 Coordinate district-wide events and marketing

PUBLIC SAFETY/MAINTENANCE

- 4.13 Hire corridor stewards for cleaning and safety
- 4.14 Install additional trash cans and arrange for professional pick up

PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

- 4.15 Redesign Union Street
- 4.16 Improve pedestrian street lighting
- 4.17 Provide assistance to improve curb appeal
- 4.18 Coordinate tree planting along the corridors



4TH STREET

COLLABORATION

- 4.19 Organize 4th Street Collaborative to invest in community and people
- 4.20 Form a 4th Street Revitalization entity

PUBLIC SAFETY/MAINTENANCE

- 4.21 Clean the corridor
- 4.22 Target crime in the area

PROMOTION

- 4.23 Reposition and rebrand the corridor
- 4.24 Hold more events year round
- 4.25 Launch community markets

PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

- 4.26 Improve existing homes and businesses
- 4.27 Consider re-zoning 4th Street
- 4.28 Target redevelopment to support emerging commercial corridor
- 4.29 Encourage new businesses to locate in target area by offering incentives
- 4.30 Improve 4th Street to make it safer and more attractive
- 4.31 Improve and redesign I-95 ramp at 4th Street
- 4.32 Inaugurate a big impact public art project

HEALTH COLLABORATIVE

- 4.33 Form a Health Collaborative
- 4.34 Promote Healthy Living health education programs
- 4.35 Launch a 5k West Side Run
- 4.36 Bring fresh, healthy food to the community
- 4.37 Promote public safety
- 4.38 Market the Health Collaborative as a comprehensive health care campus
- 4.39 Develop and publicize a referral system so point-of-entry providers can augment service provision

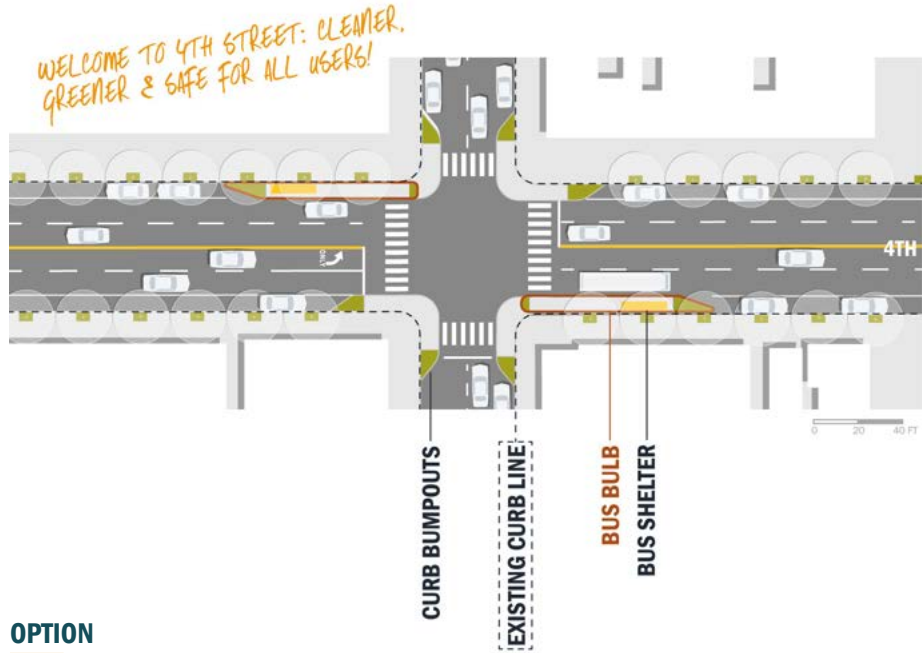
OTHER

- 4.40 Improve streetscape on Pennsylvania Avenue as a Gateway to Downtown
- 4.41 Improve the auto garages around Judy Johnson Park so legitimate business can thrive and contribute to the community



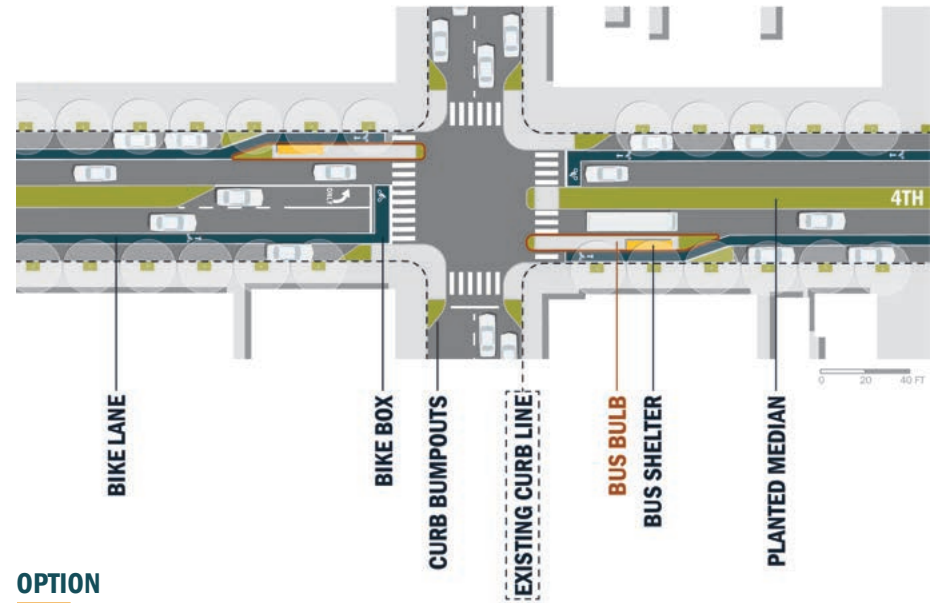
A proposed redesign for Union Street to make it safer and attract more foot traffic.





OPTION

1 Proposed streetscape improvements to 4th Street



OPTION

2 Proposed reconfiguration of 4th Street



5 MOVING FORWARD : mobility and safe streets

- > IMPROVE PUBLIC TRANSIT AMENITIES TO ENCOURAGE NEW RIDERS
- > IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS AND SAFETY
- > GROW THE BIKING COMMUNITY BY MAKING IT SAFE AND CONVENIENT

Along with improving basic street infrastructure, there is consensus that we need to focus on redesigning streets to encourage bicycling and walking. By supporting alternative modes of transportation, congestion can be reduced, parking will be less of an issue, transit ridership and performance can be increased, and people will enjoy a healthier, fitter lifestyle. Getting out of the car more also gives residents more chances to run into their neighbors on the street and say “hello” – a basic building block of community. The goal of these recommendations is to make the West Side safe and accessible for everyone whether they are walking, biking, driving, or using transit. Key Recommendations include:

PUBLIC TRANSIT

- 5.1 Target bus shelter improvements on commercial corridors and near parks and institutions
- 5.2 Consider bus bulbs along 2nd and 4th Streets to decrease travel time
- 5.3 Consider consolidated stops on 4th Street to improve travel times

PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS

- 5.4 Add pedestrian signals and crosswalks
- 5.5 Calm traffic for pedestrian safety
- 5.6 Improve pedestrian connections over and under I-95
- 5.7 Create walking routes that connect amenities

BICYCLING NETWORK

- 5.8 Create a bike network that links the West Side and the City
- 5.9 Install bike parking at institutions, on commercial corridors, and at parks
- 5.10 Create a community bike center for maintenance and education
- 5.11 Organize a bike club for group rides



Attractive streets and bike and pedestrian connections make the West side safe and accessible.



Left to right: Volunteers help mulch Tilton Park; City Gardens contest; expanding the Rodney Reservoir garden.

6 WEST SIDE OUTSIDE : parks and gardens

- > PROVIDE EVERYONE WITH ACCESS TO WELL-MAINTAINED OPEN SPACES THAT SERVE BOTH ACTIVE AND PASSIVE NEEDS
- > USE PARKS AND GARDENS TO BRING NEIGHBORS TOGETHER AND OVERCOME NEIGHBORHOOD BARRIERS

The West Side has many great parks that allow for a range of different uses in plazas and playgrounds, sports fields and green squares. But there is room for improvement; some of the parks are underutilized, undermaintained, or completely inaccessible. The West Side has only two acres of open space per 1000 people, and in Hilltop the ratio is even worse, less than one acre per 1000 people. This is equivalent to squeezing 265 people onto a quarter-acre parcel of land which is the typical size of a residential parcel in Cool Spring. Both Hilltop and the West Side as a whole fall short of the average space for high density population which is six acres per 1000 people. Furthermore, the highest concentration of youth which is in Hilltop corresponds to the lowest concentration of parks. The goal of these recommendations is to improve the network of parks and make better connections so that everyone has access to open space and they serve to bring neighbors and neighborhoods together. Key Recommendations include:

COLLABORATION

- 6.1 Form Friends of the Park groups for each park

PROGRAMMING

- 6.2 Improve the physical and mental connection to parks through events
- 6.3 Boost programming in all the parks
- 6.4 Promote City Garden's Contest

PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

- 6.5 Improve existing parks through public-private partnerships
- 6.6 Repurpose fenced-off spaces
- 6.7 Expand community garden momentum throughout the West Side
- 6.8 Develop Rodney Reservoir as a model for urban agriculture business
- 6.9 Practice sustainable landscaping techniques in local parks

**“It’s going to take more than just a plan -
it’s going to take people to make it happen”**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a copy of the full West Side Revitalization Plan,
click on or copy the following link into your browser:
<http://tinyurl.com/westsideplan>

For an electronic copy of this Executive Summary,
click on or copy the following link into your browser:
<http://tinyurl.com/westsidsummary>

CONTACT US:

Send an email to us to find out more and get involved:
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THANK YOU TO THE LEADERSHIP TEAM AND EVERYONE WHO MADE THIS PLAN POSSIBLE:

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Luigi Vitrone, Little Italy Neighborhood Association
Johnny Williams, Westside Neighborhood Coalition
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John Hundley, Westside Family Healthcare
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Clara Zahradnik, Cool Spring/Tilton Neighborhood Association

YOUTH COMMITTEE

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Daniel Day, Skypointe Church
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Reverend Lawrence Livingston, Mother African Union Church
Ellen Priest, Artist
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