



# Livability Alliance for Livability

*“Purpose: Advise on DGRI-related programs, services, and investments related to cleanliness and safety, mobility, beautification, asset management, and urban recreation.”*

August 24, 2015

11:00am – 12:30pm

29 Pearl Street, NW Suite #1

## Agenda

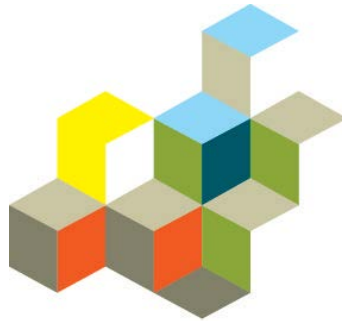
***Main work item:*** *Compile and provide official public comment on GRForward projects in the draft plan that have been prioritized or are related to Livability focus areas. These comments will be intended to shape the recommendations in the next/final version of the plan.*

1. Call to order
2. Public Comment – 3 minutes per person
3. Consent agenda items (Downtown Ambassador reports, July meeting minutes) – 1 minute – **action required**
4. Project Updates (Kirk) – 5 minutes
5. Adjourn

As discussed at last month’s meeting, walking tour groups will visit recommended project areas from the GRForward plan that align with FY 16 budget priorities set by the Alliance for Livability. DGRI staff will assist in collecting ideas, suggestions, changes, etc. to be filed as official public comment from AFL members. This exercise will help to continue to enhance the GRForward plan, as well as AFL project priorities.

The project options are:

- Heartside Park
- Calder Plaza
- Monroe/196 underpass enhancement
- Fulton Street reconfiguration
- Ionia Avenue reconfiguration/redesign
- DASH reconfiguration
- Priority Site development for public art



DOWNTOWN  
GRAND RAPIDS INC.

## Alliance for Livability

July 27, 2015

1. Call to order- Lynee Wells called the meeting to order at 11:04am
2. Members Present: Shaun Biel, Asante Cain, Robert Dean, Joe Elliott, Christian Frank, Johanna Jelks, Matt Koning, Lance Marconi, Marcia Rapp, Jenn Schaub, Jay Schimpf, Lynee Wells

Members Absent: Amy Baas, Trevor Bosworth, Kim Dabbs, Dr. Wendy Falb, Stephen Faber, John Helmholdt, James Hurt, Chris Muller, Nate Phelps

Others Present: Captain Matt Ostapowicz, Annamarie Buller, Melvin Eledge, Murphy Ackerman, Tim Kelly, Bill Kirk, Eric Pratt, Aaron Terpstra

3. Public Comment-Current Business-

Wells explained that she would like to add an item to the agenda to discuss volunteers to help review RFP's for the DID expansion.

Ostapowicz took a moment to introduce Sargent Veentsra and explained that in his new role he will be patrolling the Downtown area and attending the Alliance for Livability meetings to give additional updates on public safety. Ostapowicz shared that there were recently security cameras added to Rosa Park Circle to help identify those that have been involved in altercations at the park specifically on Tuesday nights. There have also been additional officers added to the Friday and Saturday night shifts for heavier patrol. Eledge shared some of the information from the Safety Ambassador report and added that they will be making changes to the report, specifically to the use of the term "homeless" as a contact category. Eledge explained that the term was already pre-programmed into the data gathering tool and has been used to document anytime there is a contact need for someone who is looking for services. Eledge also explained that there has been an increase in safety escorts because there have been more foot patrol as opposed to bike patrol. This increases contact with pedestrians. Eledge also shared that he has been working closely with PD to help mitigate the increased traffic and incidents on Tuesday nights at Louis Campau and Rosa Parks Circle. Schaub asked if there has been

any intentional coordination with the GoSite. Eledge explained that all of the ambassadors are aware of the GoSite and direct visitors to the location, but there hasn't been any further coordination.

4. Consent Agenda Items-

*Motion: Shaun Biel supported by Marcia Rapp, moved approval of the June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015, minutes as presented. Motion carried unanimously.*

5. RFP:

Kirk explained to the Alliance that there is currently an RFP out for the clean team services as the DID begins its expansion plan. Kirk said he would like a few members of the Alliance to volunteer to evaluate the applications and make a recommendation to the DID Board. Schaub, Elliott, and Biel volunteered.

6. Project Updates-

Kirk gave an update of various projects that the Alliance has been working on. The Exit Space mural project has received approval to move forward on the MDOT retaining wall at Division. This will consist of three (3) different artists painting a portion of the wall and will begin in the coming month. WMCAT will also begin painting various utility boxes around Downtown that are owned by the city. The class was given the task of creating pieces that depict their personal heroes. Cain asked if there was a plan to do any more murals Downtown. Kirk explained that this project was curated by the UICA and DGRI worked as a funder and partner of the project. While there is a desire to see more murals Downtown, MDOT in particular was willing to let us use the wall and an eager partner. DGRI will be exploring more locations and more murals in the coming fiscal years. Kirk added that the Downtown Census project is currently underway and DGRI's contractor is working to collect existing data and then will be working to receive additional data in order to ensure that we are not duplicating any efforts that may have already been completed. The next phase will be to determine what format we will want to distribute this information. Kirk explained that staff is currently working closely with Parking Services on the DASH rerouting and creating a Downtown circulator. A lot of these plans will come out of the GR Forward plan. Kirk also explained that DGRI's planning intern is currently working on creating all of the GIS layered maps and transparencies that were requested at the previous Alliance meetings.

7. June Action Items Review and Next Steps-

Kirks took a moment to review some of the items that emerged as a priority from the June alliance meeting, to ensure that we're moving forward on the priorities of the group. Kirk explained that staff will be working to collect more information on current conditions of the riverwalk. This will include working to identify where improvements are needed, plans for graffiti mitigation, and taking an audit of lighting. Frank suggested conducting the lighting audit in the near future to ensure that it's completed prior to Artprize. Schaub suggested using the Safety Ambassadors to help report the issues and graffiti, and then also identifying what the mechanism will be for acting on it. It will be necessary to identify who is responsible for these areas and who is taking responsibility for the riverwalk and its edges. Wells asked Eledge what the current process is when identifying issues on the riverwalk. Eledge said that the ambassadors have their own line of contact with 311 at the City and can track when it's

being reported and when it's being taken care of. Eledge added that his team does not have the tools or the manpower to handle the issues themselves. Kirk encouraged the Alliance to contact him if there were any priorities from the previous meeting that were overlooked.

8. AARP Livability Index Review and Discussion-

Kirk shared the AARP's recent study on Livability. Kirk explained that this resource is beneficial when looking at basic livability standards in other cities as well as how Grand Rapids measures on a national scale. It could be used for helping to align alliance priorities. Wells explained that this was released at the National Planning Association annual conference, and was found as a useful tool to look at how people are thriving and living in their cities. Kirk took a moment to look at and go over the scores for Grand Rapids and clarified that this information was not specifically aligned to the DDA's boundaries. Cain added that the library uses has been using more demographics and is looking at the data on a block by block basis. Kirk asked Cain if he would be willing to share the information that the library is using with Rotondaro who is conducting the new Downtown Census project. Marconi asked how often these metrics are updated. Wells answered that it is standard to update them yearly. Wells encouraged everyone to check out this information on their own and see what metrics could be used to help inform projects moving forward. Wells added that in other cities such as Chicago, they have begun to advertise these measurements and others such as walkscore, and are using it as a selling point for attracting people. Cain asked if DGRI is interested in the demographics from all of Grand Rapids or only the Downtown boundaries. Kirk explained that although GR Forward has been specifically looking at Downtown, Traylor was brought on staff to begin working with and understanding the nearby neighborhoods. Wells added that this information can help to add specific measurements and targets to the working groups. Kirk said that staff will work to flesh out how to use the specifics from these tools moving forward.

9. GR FWD Update-

Kirk explained that the goal of the meeting would be to look at the items in GR Forward that relate specifically to the Alliance for Livability. Kelly shared with the group that the draft plan is now available online. Kelly gave an update of the next steps for the plan before formal adoption and explained that there will be another open house located in the DGRI lobby for the public to stop in, read the plan, and give comments. Kelly, along with the City's planning department, will be going back to the neighborhoods to show them what information and ideas were gathered from the neighborhood meetings, and look at what may have been missed. Kelly added that there will also be more focus groups held to look specifically into the diversity and inclusion piece to ensure that it is weaved throughout each chapter. Kelly said that from meeting with leaders in the community, there has been a desire for more metrics on how to determine the success of the diversity and inclusion portion of the plan. The objective of the comment period is to emerge with more specific measurable and outcomes as opposed to broader ideas. Schaub expressed her desire to see these issue of diversity and inclusion spelled out more clearly in the plan as opposed to alluded to with the use of more specific terms and demographics. Kelly concurred but also explained that when it comes to housing, there are restrictions with the Fair Housing Act but can be addressed in the types of housing and the income range being looked at. Kelly added that this plan will rely on various organizations and the community as a whole.

While DGRI can create and adopt the plan, there will be a strong need for partnership to ensure that the plan is being seen through. Marconi asked what chapter addressed education and schooling in the area. Kelly explained that chapter 6 was developed in partnership with GRPS and begins to look at the need for public schools to attract families to the Downtown. Kelly discussed the implementation matrices and asked the alliance to help to identify partners in the community that could help to accomplish these goals. Kirk added that Kelly will continue to present the plan to anyone that may have a business or organization interested in seeing it

Kirk gave an overview of the projects laid out in GR Forward that the Alliance for Livability could help to implement, including the Monroe Street overpass into the Monroe North neighborhood - with the development of the Rowe Hotel and the MSU School of Medicine, this will become an integral gateway to the near neighborhood. Elliott asked about the progress on the Pearl and Bridge Street overpasses. Kelly explained that the Bridge Street improvements are further along and looking to get underway this fall, and because of the current street improvements, the Pearl Street project won't begin until next spring. Frank added that if there are going to be additional lighting programs Downtown, he would like to see them better managed. If there was better program and management, these bridges could be used as light shows and attractions. Kirk added that with any of these projects moving forward, we will need to continue to keep in mind the maintenance and operational needs. Kirk also presented the concept of a health loop that would work to connect the Medical Mile to the riverwalk. Kirk explained that a short term project could be to begin with proper wayfinding and promotion of these trails. Cain asked about the progress on Heartside Park. Kelly explained that there are conceptual ideas included in GR Forward for the park, but it will need to be addressed in the coming years. Kirk added that while the DASH conversation continues to make progress, the final decisions will be made by parking services, although DGRI has been heavily involved in all of the conversations. There is currently a desire to begin identifying critical intersections for the Rapid and displaying real time information. Kirk explained that while there are more projects that the Alliance can be involved in, these are the large near term projects. Kelly added that anyone with more feedback and ideas should contact him, as the plan is still in draft form and is open to changes. Kirk added that the hope for the next Alliance meeting is to get outside and begin visiting these locations to get a sense of what's happening and where the opportunities are. Kirk encouraged everyone to glance at the plan, and if time allows, read the plan and continue to think of metrics to help inform future projects.

10. Workgroups-

*This item was skipped due to lack of time.*

11. Meeting Survey Feedback –

12. Public Comment – Old/Other Business-

Jan McCullum introduced herself to the Alliance and as a resident of Monroe North, asked how DGRI is working to get the word out to residents regarding these projects. Kirk explained that DGRI has a goal to create a Downtown Neighborhood Association to better help engage and inform residents. Schaub added that new staff members Buller and Traylor were brought on to begin to bridge the gap

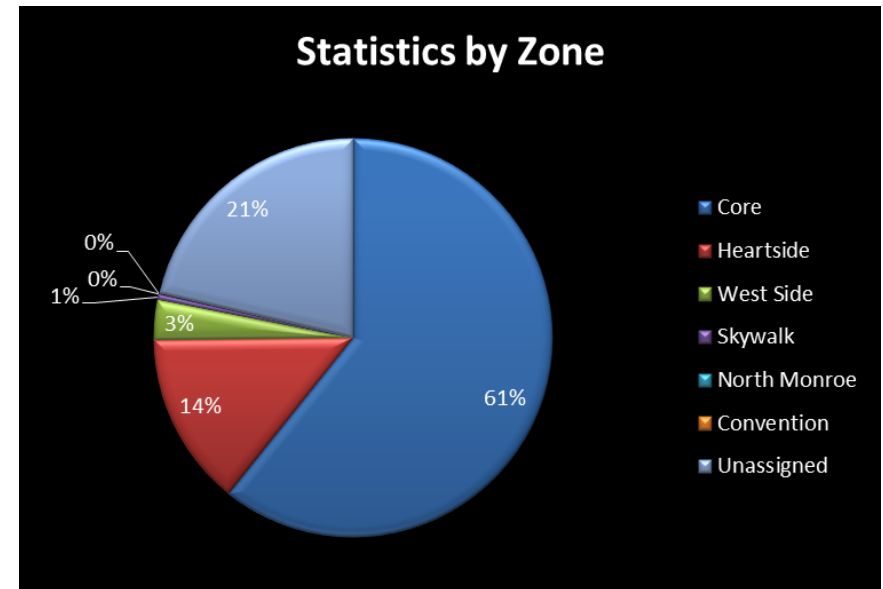
between the organization and the community as well as focus more heavily on the engagement piece of DGRI.

13. Adjourn –  
Wells adjourned the meeting at 12:32pm

Minutes taken by:  
Murphy Ackerman  
Administrative Assistant  
Downtown Grand Rapids Inc.

# Statistics

Activity	July 2015 Total	July 2014 Total	Variance	Total YTD
Bicycle (miles)	259.45	497	(237.55)	873.95
Segway Hours	18.5	70	(51.50)	229.67
Business Contact	246	320	(74)	4054
Graffiti - Removed	99	15	84	1302
Motorist Assistance	3	6	(3)	118
Observation - Fighting	56	28	28	417
Outreach Contact	2643	3168	(525)	34210
PA - Directions	1865	2253	(388)	27359
PA - Information	4880	5344	(464)	58195
PA - Other	9396	5984	3412	95478
PA - Program Information	2327	3086	(759)	36096
Panhandling - Aggressive	125	126	(1)	1633
Panhandling - Passive	88	214	(126)	1359
Request for Fire/EMS	15	33	(18)	187
Request for Police	10	25	(15)	113
Safety Escort	1626	1104	522	15409
Sidewalk Violation	646	631	15	5736
Suspicious Package	16	6	10	854
Suspicious Person	536	213	323	4381
Umbrella Escorts	0	78	(78)	923
<b>Total Contacts July 2015</b>	<b>24577</b>	<b>22634</b>	<b>1943</b>	<b>287824</b>
<b>Total Contacts July 2014</b>				
<b>Total Variance (2014 v 2015)</b>				
<b>Total Contacts YTD</b>				



Core	14927	61%
Heartside	3461	14%
West Side	794	3%
Skywalk	104	1%
North Monroe	34	<1%
Convention	0	0%
Unassigned	5257	21%

July 2015 showed an 8.5% increase (1,943) in statistics compared to the same period last year. The two categories that have shown the largest increase are safety escorts with an increase of 47% (522) and Pedestrian Assistance – Other (PA – Other) with an increase of 57% (3,412). Both categories are increasing compared to last year's totals as a result of the Ambassador team's continued efforts to provide unparalleled customer service to the many patrons of downtown. The Ambassador team continues to offer safety escorts as a way to increase an individual's personal sense of safety but often it is used more as a tool to enhance an individual's experience in the downtown (i.e. we can provide directions and a map or we can provide directions, a map and escort right to your destination).

Starting this month I have replaced the usual graph that again showed a comparison of total statistics with a new chart that provides a breakdown of what areas in the downtown the statistics were actually generated. I look forward to diving deeper into this data and sharing any insights I may have about trends in the future. Please note we are already working to reduce the % of 'unassigned' contacts for August.



# Downtown Grand Rapids Ambassador July 2015 Report



# Outreach Highlights



A flyer for the Ambassador program hangs inside a Service Provider



Ambassadors and AMR work together to bring a man into the PIC

## Initiatives

We continue to work with a case manager at Street Reach to assist a chronically homeless woman attend the necessary appointments to continue to work toward acquiring housing.

The Ambassador team continues to expand our knowledge and understanding of the services available in and around downtown as well as discuss quality of life issues and how we can offer solutions during our daily patrols.

## QUICK VIEW

*Jul 01, 2015 -- Jul 31, 2015*

**85** Panhandling - Passive

**122** Panhandling - Aggressive

**2643** Outreach Contact

# Hospitality Highlights



Eryn draws a walking route for a Downtown visitor



Katie removes graffiti from a railing on the River Walk

## Special Recognition

Rebecca K. was awarded the 2015 Ambassador of the Year Award.

Rebecca has been with the program for nearly 2 years and has excelled as an ambassador since day 1. She works hard to provide exceptional customer service to anyone she meets in her role as an ambassador and has a real passion for serving Downtown Grand Rapids. Congratulations Rebecca!

## QUICK VIEW

*Jul 01, 2015 -- Aug 01, 2015*

- 0** Umbrella Escorts
- 3** Motorist Assistance
- 246** Business Contact
- 99** Graffiti - Removed
- 1865** PA - Directions
- 2327** PA - Program Information
- 4880** PA - Information
- 9396** PA - Other

# Safety Highlights



Melvin assists a man find an outlet to charge his electric wheelchair



Kevin puts in a maintenance request for a damaged bike rack

## Accomplishments

The Ambassador team provided enhanced deployment for Movies in the Park, 4th of July Celebration, Swing Dancing, GRAM on the Green and Picnics in the Park/Relax at Rosa Events.

The Ambassador team has made a continued effort to adjust the focus and usage of its bikes to a more transportation model v. patrol. This change will allow us to increase our time spent of foot and engaging with pedestrians rather than riding the bike around specific areas. We continue to utilize the bikes as tools to reduce our response time when we receive requests for assistance.

## Initiatives

Operations Manager Melvin Eledge Jr., attended a staff meeting at the YWCA to address their staff about the Ambassador program as well as to offer safety escort services to their employees per YWCA Vice President Deb Shimmel's request.

## QUICK VIEW

*Jul 01, 2015 -- Aug 01, 2015*

- 10** Request for Police
- 16** Suspicious Package
- 15** Request for Fire/EMS
- 18.5** Segway Hours
- 56** Observation - Fighting
- 259.45** Bicycle (miles)
- 536** Suspicious Person
- 646** Sidewalk Violation (skateboarding/Bicycling/Rollerblading)
- 1626** Safety Escort

# Stakeholder Feedback



Cheerleading coaches request a 'selfie' after an escort to their hotel

## Community Feedback

Just a note to say how much I deeply appreciate your downtown staff. Today, I was assisted by Tyler and Katie M., and they were VERY helpful to get my groceries home. In the past, it was Veronica who was also VERY helpful. I know just how essential your agency of workers is to the downtown area, and I have your number in my speedial--not just for myself, but to call for assistance when others need such escorts. Keep up the great work! If I ever get on my feet and leave G.R., you escorts will be one of the main features of G.R. I will be talking to others about. (No, I'm not kidding.) Love you people!! God bless you all.

~Susan

I just wanted to let you know that the Downtown Ambassadors were of great service to me last week. I fell in the street, and broke my foot on the corner of Louis and Ionia, Five minutes later I also realized that I had lost my keys. I hobbled around the downtown area trying to find them. Eventually someone took me to the the ambassadors, and I was helped by Veronica. She helped me look again through my purse for my keys, she put an ace bandage on my foot, and took me to a spot where I could put my foot up, iced it, and gave me some ice water. Veronica then went out to see if she could check a few other spots for my keys, and I ended up feeling much calmer, and and very well taken care of. Eventually she came to the end of her shift, and two new ambassadors came to help, looking for a few other places they might have been taken to. After 3 1/2 hours, we gave up, and my husband had to come to get me. Thank you very much for the work you do, and the service that you provide. With Best Wishes, Mary

# Highlights



Eryn removes a large sticker from a utility box



One of DGRI's newest staff, Annamarie, spends the day as a Downtown Ambassador

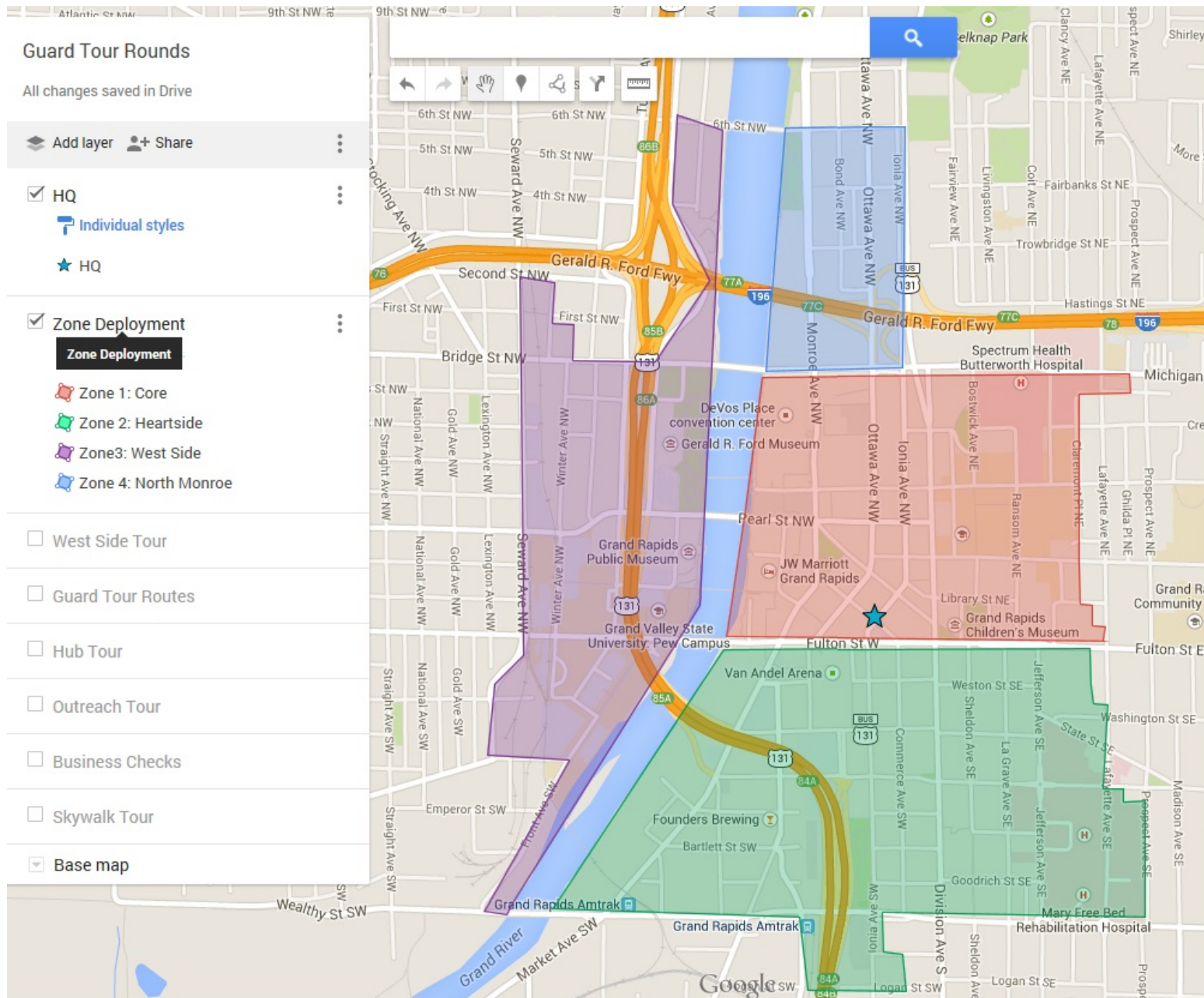


Utility Box Before...



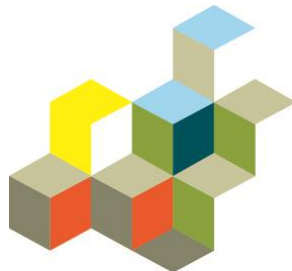
... And After

# 4 Zone Deployment Map



# Alliance for Livability

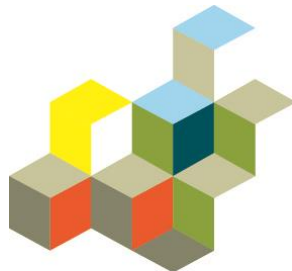
## GRForward Recommendations



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# Public Space Projects

- Heartside park
- Calder Plaza
- Monroe/196 Underpass



## 5.2 RAISE THE PROFILE OF DOWNTOWN PARKS AND PUBLIC SPACES

At 6.4 acres of parks per 1,000 residents, Downtown currently falls short of standards for the amount of parks and public spaces. In fact, more than 10 times as much area is dedicated to transportation (including parking) than open space. With continued growth Downtown, the need for more parks and public spaces will only grow. Downtown needs new open spaces to serve as gathering spaces and amenities for residents and employees.

But it is not just the amount of parks and open space that matters but the quality. Existing

### OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

-  RIVER TRAIL
-  HEALTH LOOP
-  NEW PARK
-  IMPROVED PARK
-  OUTDOOR ENTERTAINMENT
-  LINEAR PARK
-  RIVER ISLANDS
-  RIVER DREDGE / BOAT ACCESS

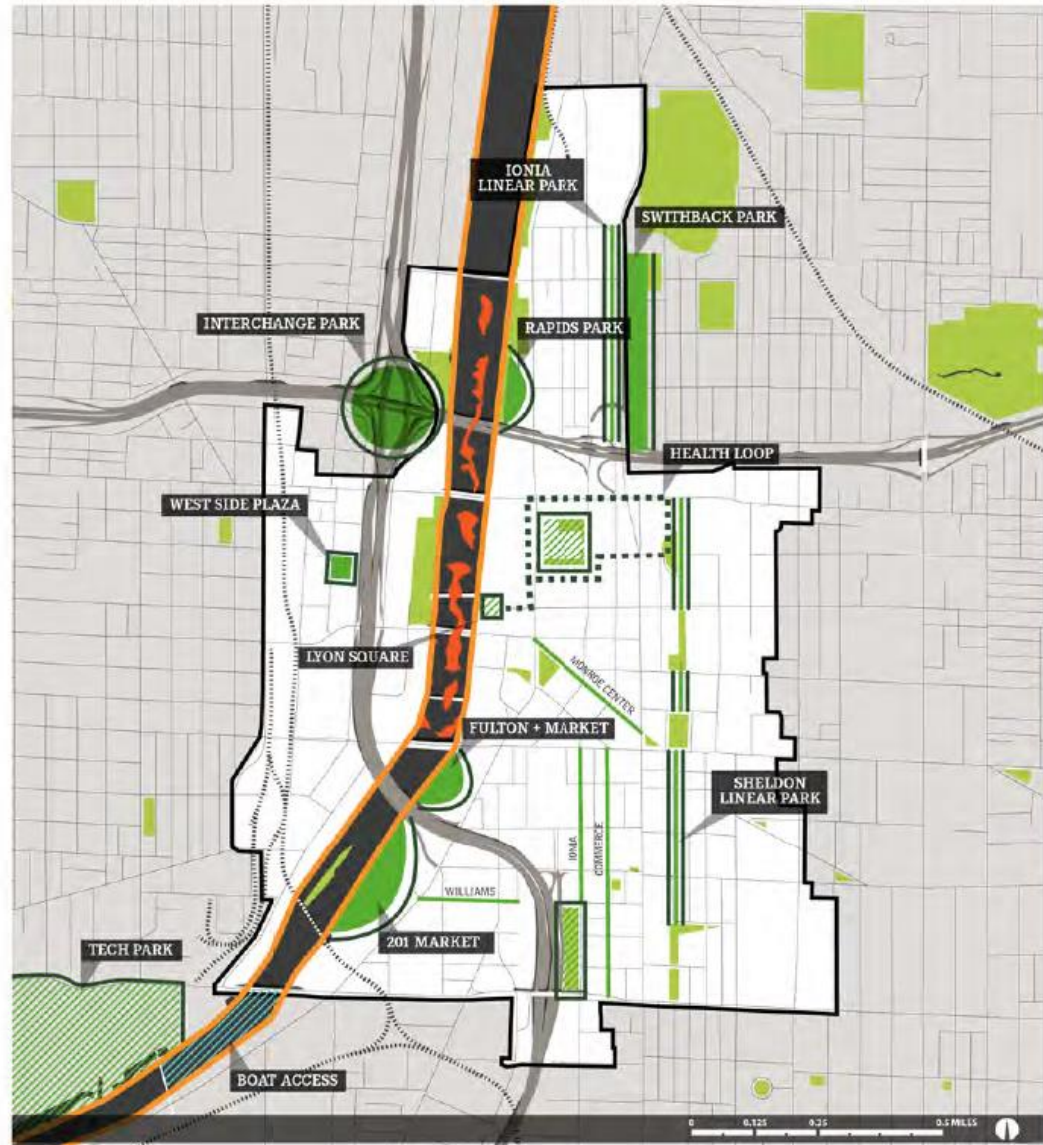


FIG 5.4: Open space strategy

parks Downtown are both undervalued and overlooked. These spaces often lack programming and are physically or socially disconnected from the surrounding context of homes and/or businesses. The opportunity is to transform these parks into vibrant public spaces that truly represent Downtown.

## ENHANCE EXISTING NON-RIVERFRONT PARKS AND OPEN SPACES THROUGH REDESIGN AND PROGRAMMING

### >> Vandenberg Plaza (aka Calder Plaza)

Calder Plaza and its namesake sculpture are some of the true icons of Grand Rapids. The plaza consists of a raised plinth encompassing the superblock bounded by Ottawa, Lyon, Monroe, and Michigan streets and includes 3 office buildings, and 3 government buildings one of which is City Hall. In true modernist fashion, Calder Plaza serves more as a backdrop for the architecture and sculpture than an active, functioning public space. While the design has certain merits; classic modern design, unobstructed views of the sculpture, easily programmable space for large scale events like ArtPrize and Festival of the Arts, there are a series of strategic measures to be taken that can allow flexible opportunities to activate the space for everyday use.

- > Integrate a “Health Loop” to Connect Medical Mile to the River  
Calder Plaza is located between the Medical Mile and the Grand River. With

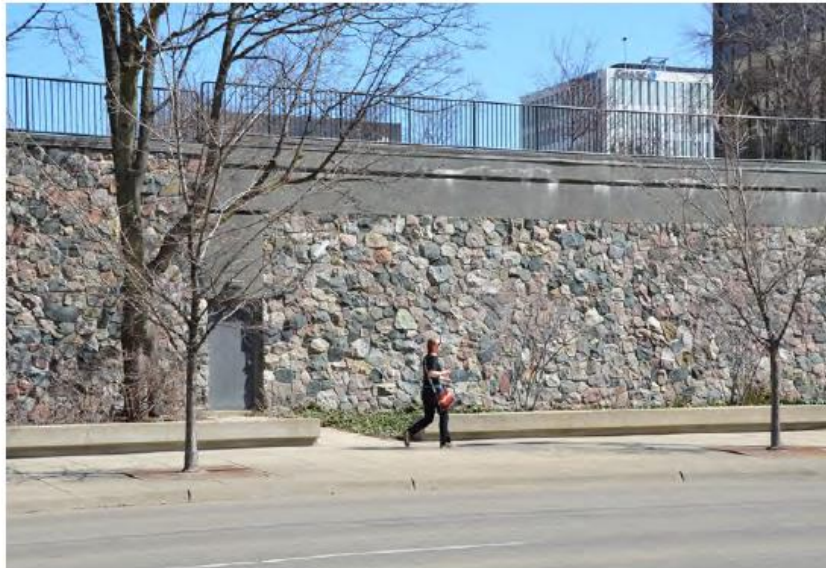


**FIG 5.5:** Medical Mile/Grand River health loop  
*Calder Plaza has the potential to be a hub in a new “health loop” that connects Medical Mile to the River*

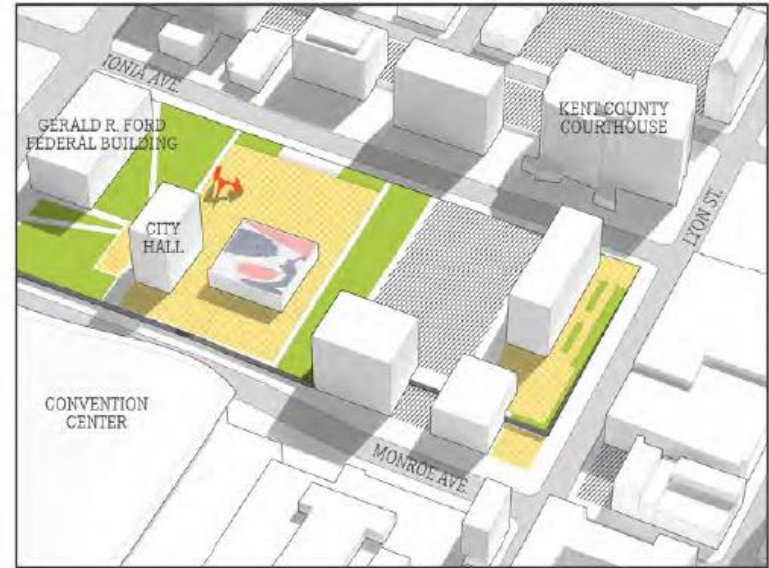
improvements to the Grand River, there should be opportunities for local employees to walk to the River. The idea is to create and brand a “health loop” – an approximate 1 mile loop connecting Medical Mile with the River. While some GR Forward participants think of the elevation change as an impediment to pedestrian mobility, branding it as a health and exercise amenity would help recast Downtown’s



*View from Crescent Park towards Calder Plaza and the River.*



*Calder Plaza's plinth creates a barrier to connections to Monroe Avenue.*



**FIG 5.6:** Existing Calder Plaza

topography as an amenity. The Loop would begin at Crescent Park, continue down Crescent Street, between two existing office buildings, through Calder Plaza and down to Monroe Avenue and the River at Lyon Street. The design of Calder Plaza should accommodate this Loop with new seating, landscaping and a designated path. This idea reflects a plan developed by Grand Action who is working to advance its implementation.

- **Improve Visual and Physical Access**  
Due to its raised plinth, 3 sides of the plaza have large stone walls which make

seeing or accessing the plaza difficult and unpleasant. The most obvious example of this condition is the large inaccessible wall along the entire expanse of Monroe Ave between Lyon and Michigan. This is particularly problematic as the location of the main entrance to the convention center is across the street. To address these conditions, the stairs on Ottawa Street should be replaced with a ramp that seamlessly connects the street to the plaza. Visually compelling pedestrian lighting fixtures could also help link the plaza to the street, especially if they are extended along Ottawa itself. On the Monroe Avenue side,

a new stair tower can serve to connect the Plaza to Monroe or, preferably, a collection of ramps and stairs that gently step down to the street integrated with a new landscape. This option will require altering the existing parking garage on the Monroe Avenue side. Using this option, Calder Plaza will have a direct and visible connection to the Convention Center's main entrance.

- **Activate the Plaza**  
A series of mobile landscapes of various different configurations will break up the space into more intimate environments, introduce more greenery to the paved

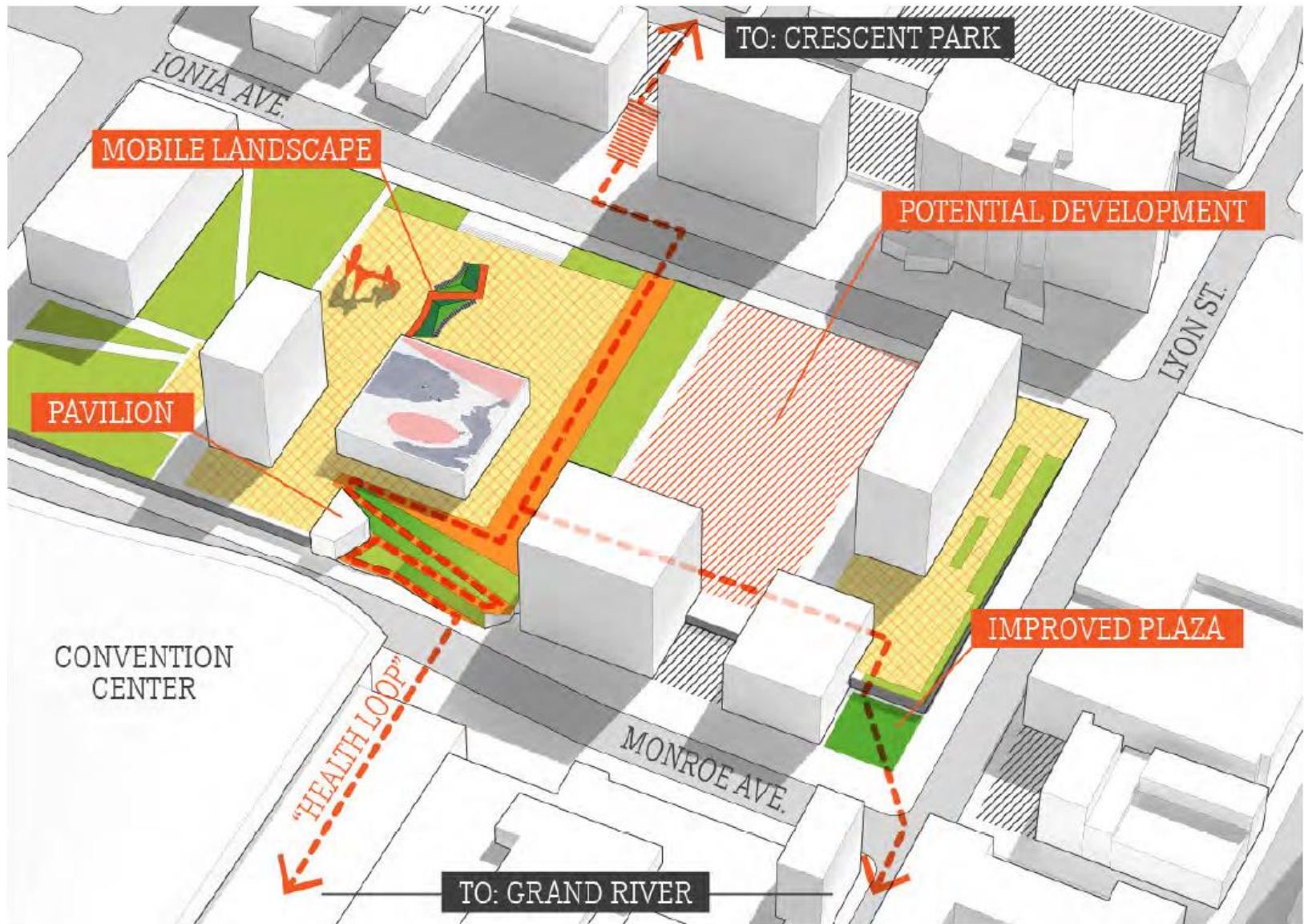


FIG 5.7: Proposed "Health Loop" and Calder Plaza Improvements



FIG 5.8: *Calder Plaza concept*

FIG 5.9: Concept for Heartside Park, Summer



FIG 5.10: Concept for Heartside Park, Winter



plaza, and provide more seating options. As movable planters, they can fit into a variety of different configurations suitable for various events and programs.

#### > Explore Development Opportunities

The large parking lot immediately to the south of Calder Plaza and the entirety of Lyon Street offer an opportunity to integrate new development and new retail into the area. On the parking lot, a variety of new building configurations are possible as the lot is very large. On Lyon Street, simply extending the lobby space of the two Fifth/Third buildings all the way to street with new commercial space will provide a more active streetscape.

#### >> Heartside Park

Heartside Park is the result of a collaboration between grassroots organizations and City leadership to bring a new open space to the Heartside neighborhood. This important work has established a sizable open space in the heart of an area undergoing significant development. In its current form, Heartside Park has limited landscaping and minimal programming. Many have noted the current use of the park for illegal activities which has fostered negative perceptions about the park and the surrounding area. The local social service agencies, many of which provide necessary services for those that are homeless or in transitional housing, agree with the broader public that Heartside Park needs more programming and people to root out the activities that deter use of the park by local

residents and visitors alike. The opportunity is to build upon the grassroots interest and success in creating Heartside Park by taking its design to the next level as a local and regional destination for families of all backgrounds. A lighting plan will play a key role in reversing perception of Heartside Park.

Heartside Park is envisioned as a park that changes with the seasons. In the warm weather there will be various types of gardens and meadows, raingardens and space for growing food. In the colder months the park will transition to a winter playground with a skate track, hockey rink, curling courts, and sledding hill. A manufactured hill on the western edge of the Park will help to buffer it from US131 and the highway off-ramp, improve connections

FIG 5.11: Heartside Park winter activities



to Wealthy Street and, provide an exciting new feature to the park - a sledding hill. All of the winter activities, most notably hockey, skating and curling, must be coupled with partnerships and programs that encourage their use by families of all incomes. Youth leagues and events open to all Grand Rapidsians would further establish Heartside Park as the City's winter playground destination for families.

*“Regional playground at Heartside Park: Larger, multi-story, inclusive playground at unlike other typical playgrounds in the city. Draw for families.”*

*- Online map comment*

*Veteran's Park today.*



### >> Veteran's Park

In tandem with now implemented plans to refresh Monument Park, Veteran's Park was also reconsidered during a design and master planning process begun in 2013. Now that Phase I of this initiative at Monument Park is final, efforts to complete Phase 2 should be supported. To further activate the park, the City and DGRI should work together in engaging the community to consider potential public realm improvements enhancing the pedestrian experience between the main branch of the Grand Rapids Public Library and Veteran's Park. Should redevelopment occur of the parking lot facing Veteran's Park along E. Park Lane, ground floor retail should be encouraged to help activate the Park.

*Parklet installed Downtown.*



## CREATE NEW [NON-RIVERFRONT] OPEN SPACE ASSETS

Improving existing parks should be the first course of action regarding non riverfront parks. However, those improvements alone will still leave Downtown residents with insufficient access to green space. Given the intent of creating stronger connections within Downtown and providing new activities and programming along Downtown streets, there are a few key opportunities for new Downtown parks:

### >> Parklets

Parklets reuse on-street parking spaces as small, temporary or permanent mini-parks. The simple act of converting one parking space into greenspace has proven to enrich the lives of nearby residents and improve the bottom line of businesses. DGRI helped with the installation of parklets at Stella's, McFadden's and Grand Rapids Brewing Company, and is currently building a parklet with Kendall College of Art students. As the idea continues to take hold, parklets should be targeted for primary retail corridors including Monroe Center, Ionia Avenue, Commerce Street, Pearl Street, and Bridge Street.

## 5.3 EXPRESS DOWNTOWN GRAND RAPIDS' CHARACTER AND IDENTITY THROUGH PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS

### MAKE A STATEMENT WITH IMPROVED GATEWAYS

There are many gateways to Downtown that represent opportunities to market local businesses and the City as a whole. Be creative and use art and lighting installations to improve highly visible gateways. US131 and 196, in particular, are opportunities to create improvements that are visible to incoming traffic but also serve to slow the speed of traffic as they enter the City. These underpass improvements are highly sought after by residents who prioritized them in the GR Forward Open House activities. Primary gateway opportunities include: Heartside Park (from 131); Grandville underpass; Fulton Street underpass and at the intersection with Market Avenue; Pearl Street underpass; Bridge Street underpass; Monroe Avenue underpass; 196 on and off-ramps (Ottawa/Ionia); Monroe Avenue at Coldbrook; Market and Wealthy Streets and; Division and Wealthy Streets. Early action gateway treatments should focus on lighting and art at the Monroe Avenue and Bridge Street

### GATEWAY IMPROVEMENTS



GATEWAY IMPROVEMENTS LOCATIONS

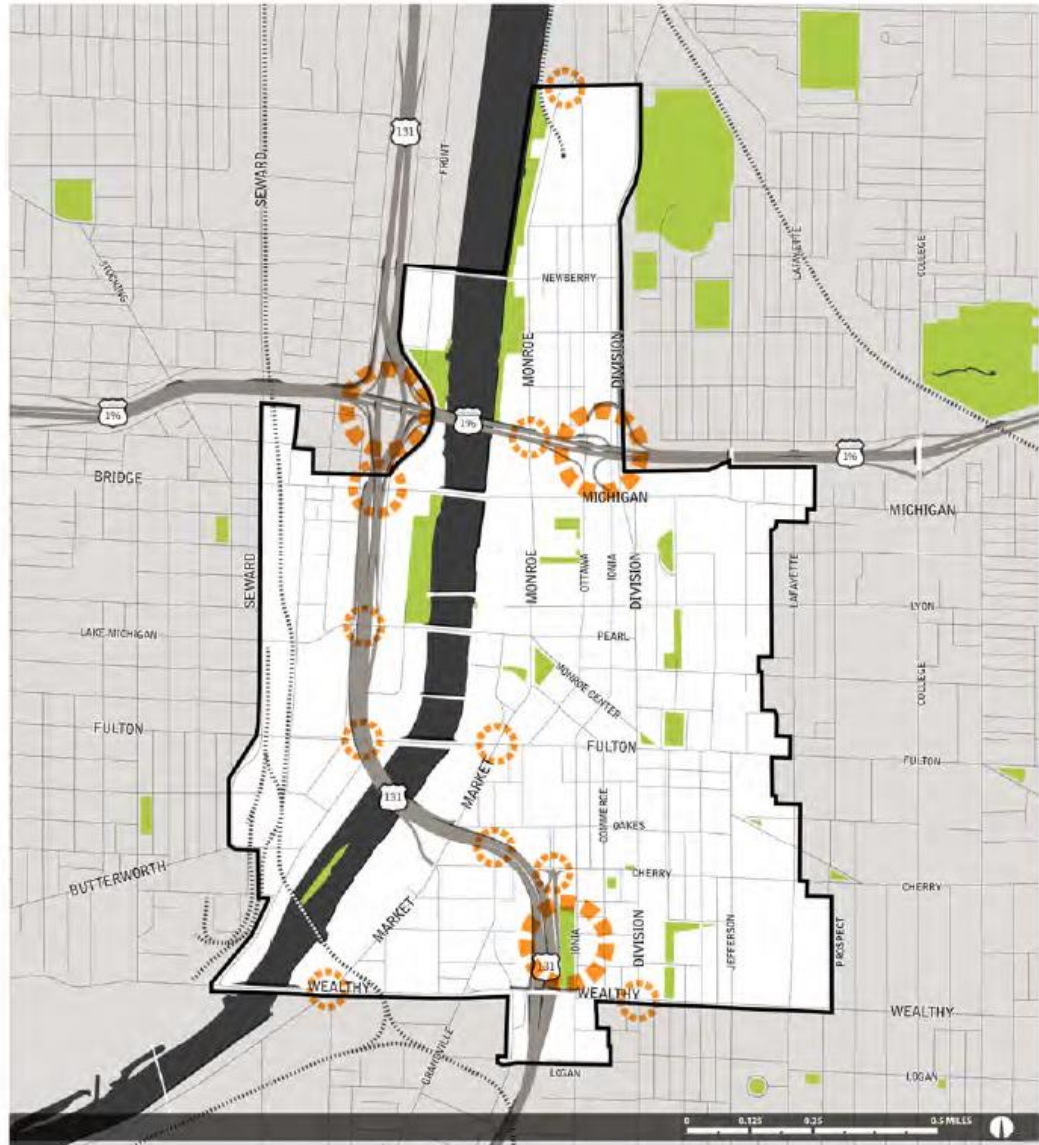


FIG 5.19: Gateway improvements locations



*The Monroe North/Downtown gateway is particularly unappealing.*

In addition to underpasses, key intersections should be considered for bolder design approaches. Think of Cherry Street, for instance – the bright redbrick street makes a noticeable statement from major corridors like Division. Other opportunities should be explored to integrate non-traditional color or design in the streetscape. Examples include the use of ground surface materials to highlight sidewalks or intersections of key pedestrian-focused streets like Ionia Avenue, Bridge Street, or crossings along Fulton Street, as was done at pedestrian crossings at intersections where stations for the Silver Line are present.

### PLANT AND MAINTAIN MORE SHADE TREES TO INCREASE THE DOWNTOWN TREE CANOPY

Trees are necessary elements for a successful downtown. Besides the health benefits associated with trees, they mitigate issues like heat and wind while also adding value to nearby properties. Streets with street trees are



**FIG 5.20:** Existing tree canopy

## TREE CANOPY

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS

**GRAND RAPIDS:**

**28,977** ACRES

TREE CANOPY:

**10,029** ACRES

35%

**DOWNTOWN:**

**899** ACRES

TREE CANOPY:

**47** ACRES

5%

PARKS

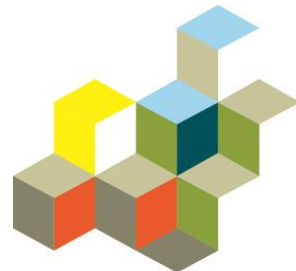
TREE CANOPY

more attractive for businesses and residents alike. The City's Green Grand Rapids Plan has established a goal of 40% tree coverage citywide, up from the current 34%. However, in downtown the current tree canopy is less than 5%. There are many reasons for this including the area's legacy of commercial use [which removed the majority of trees during development] and the difficulty in planting and

keeping trees healthy due in part to the limited space along streets for adequate tree pits. The lack of shade trees downtown has been noticed by many including those that participated in the GR Forward planning process. When asked what improvements would make it easier and more fun to get around Downtown, the number one answer [along with separated bike lanes] was "more trees."

# Mobility Projects

- **Fulton Street Reconfiguration**
- **Ionia Avenue Reconfiguration/Redesign**
- **DASH Reconfiguration**



a minimal impact on traffic operations in Downtown and is a safety issue, particularly when vehicles do not come to a complete stop at the traffic signal. A one year pilot program prohibiting right-turns on red should be implemented in the area bounded by Michigan Street, Wealthy Street, the Grand River, and Division Avenue and the impacts on pedestrian safety, both actual and perceived, traffic delay, and compliance should be evaluated before and during the pilot period.

- > A Barnes Dance/Pedestrian Scramble is a traffic signal operation that allows pedestrians to cross in any direction while vehicles have an all red phase. A Barnes Dance should be piloted at the intersection of Fulton and Ottawa and evaluated.
- > A prioritization system should be developed for pedestrian safety improvements that emphasizes connection to major transit nodes, pedestrian activity generators, and river access points. The prioritization system should focus on areas with current need as well as future potential and inputs to the system should include residential and employment density, crash data, vehicular speeds, transit ridership, and pedestrian volumes.

*“More green space, more pedestrian only space. Work to lessen car dominated areas. Create green alleyways to give pedestrians a safer place to walk”*

## DEVELOP, ENHANCE AND IMPLEMENT A ‘BIG IDEA’ POLICY FOR STREET DESIGN

The City currently has a Complete Streets policy, but it does not dive into the deep details of how streets are designed. A much more proactive stance must be developed to ensure all projects are being designed to protect pedestrians and prioritize their connectivity.

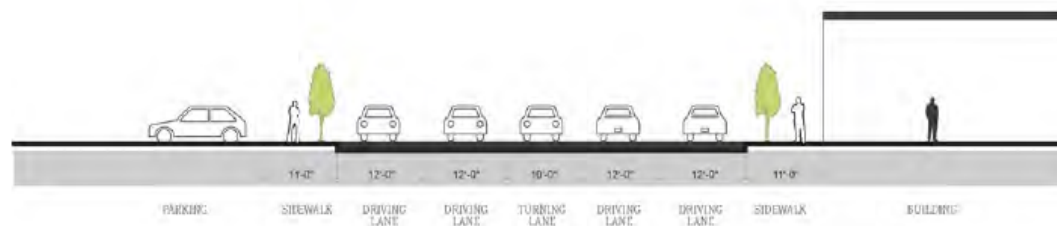
As part of the Vital Streets Plan, a Complete Street design policy/program should be implemented that provides the necessary guidance to ensure that the pedestrian is considered the “design vehicle” for all projects. The plan should also establish a Vision Zero policy to achieve zero deaths on all modes on Grand Rapids transportation network.

## RE-DESIGN FULTON STREET TO BUILD A SEAMLESS PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION

Fulton Street is currently 58’ in width and provides two travel lanes in each direction as well as a center left-turn lane. This design has made it very easy to drive quickly east-west through Downtown. It has also created a physical and psychological barrier between the portion of Downtown north of Fulton and the rapidly developing Arena South district. As Fulton is essentially a local street with no access to US 131 and narrows to one lane in each direction east and west of Downtown, the additional capacity that the street provides is not necessary. Reducing the number of lanes on Fulton within Downtown will improve safety for pedestrians. On street parking can be created in the space currently dedicated to the outer travel lane in each direction, increasing convenient parking options.

*“Fulton is a dangerous road to travel by bike. I commute by bike, so bike friendly roads are essential”*

FIG 3.1: Existing Fulton Street section - looking east



The first step in a more pedestrian friendly Fulton Street will be to reduce the number of lanes and provide shorter pedestrian crossings. This can be accomplished by re-striping the street and adding some additional low-cost intersection treatments. All north-south crossings should be redesigned to prioritize pedestrian safety and connectivity, including installing leading pedestrian intervals, providing crosswalks that are wider and more visible to drivers, and advance stop bars.

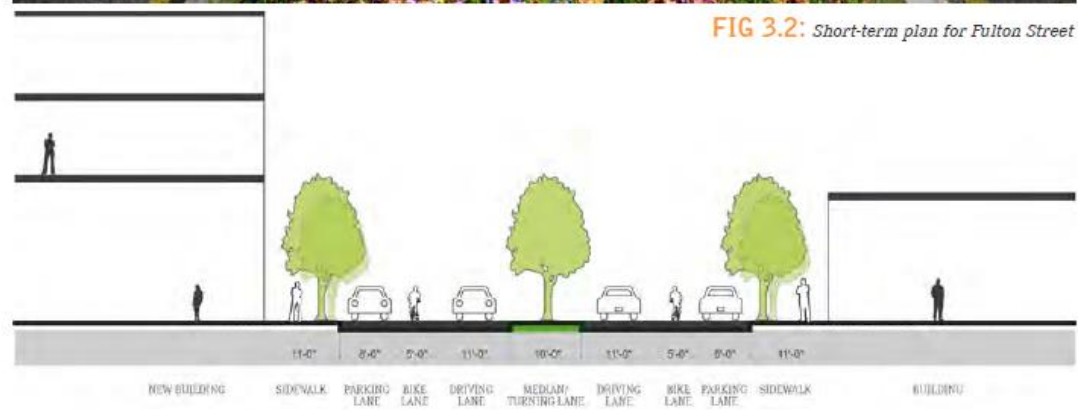
The short term plan for Fulton Street should be to implement a road diet that provides one 10.5' travel lane, one 5' striped bike lane, and a 7' parking lane in each direction with a 10' center left-turn lane. For large events, the parking / bike lane could be used as an additional travel lane. The existing channelized eastbound right-turn lane at Market Avenue should be removed and pedestrian refuge islands should be provided on the east and west sides of the bridge, and mid-block between Ottawa/Ionia, at Sheldon, and between Jefferson/Lafayette. An eastbound left-turn lane should be provided at Ottawa Street.



*Fulton: existing*



**FIG 3.2:** *Short-term plan for Fulton Street*



There are a number of different alternatives for how to best use the curb to curb space on Fulton Street in the long term. It is recommended that DGRI and the City work with local businesses and other stakeholders to prioritize how the street is used. Below are some potential options for the street and additional ideas for consideration.

» Enhanced Bike Facility Option: Remove parking from the short-term option, provide a 4' curbed/landscaped buffer between the travel lane and bike lane, add 4' to sidewalks

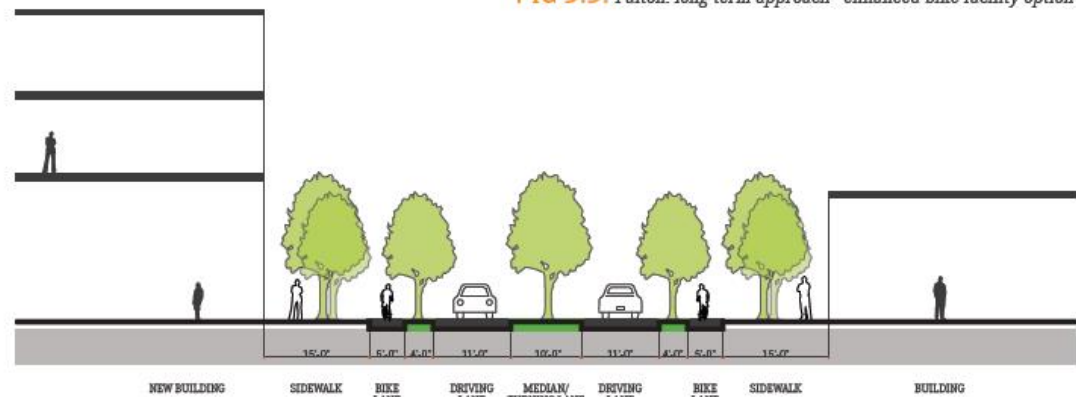
» Shared Lane Option: Remove parking and bike lane from the short-term option and provide a 12' bus only lane with sharrows for bicycle traffic.

In addition, the north leg of Ottawa should be realigned, similar to Ionia, to provide as close to a 90 degree angle as possible with Fulton Street.

Fulton is a central gateway street through downtown which should host bold design elements that demonstrate the City's attitudes toward transportation and the public realm in Downtown. Each stage of the process to implement big ideas on Fulton can further this goal. Typical roadway paint - rather than more permanent thermoplastic - should be used for the initial road diet restriping on Fulton. The typical lifespan of roadway paint is about 2 years. This two-year period can be used as a pilot-period to evaluate the lane configuration and other experimental elements of the streetscape. During this period, the City will



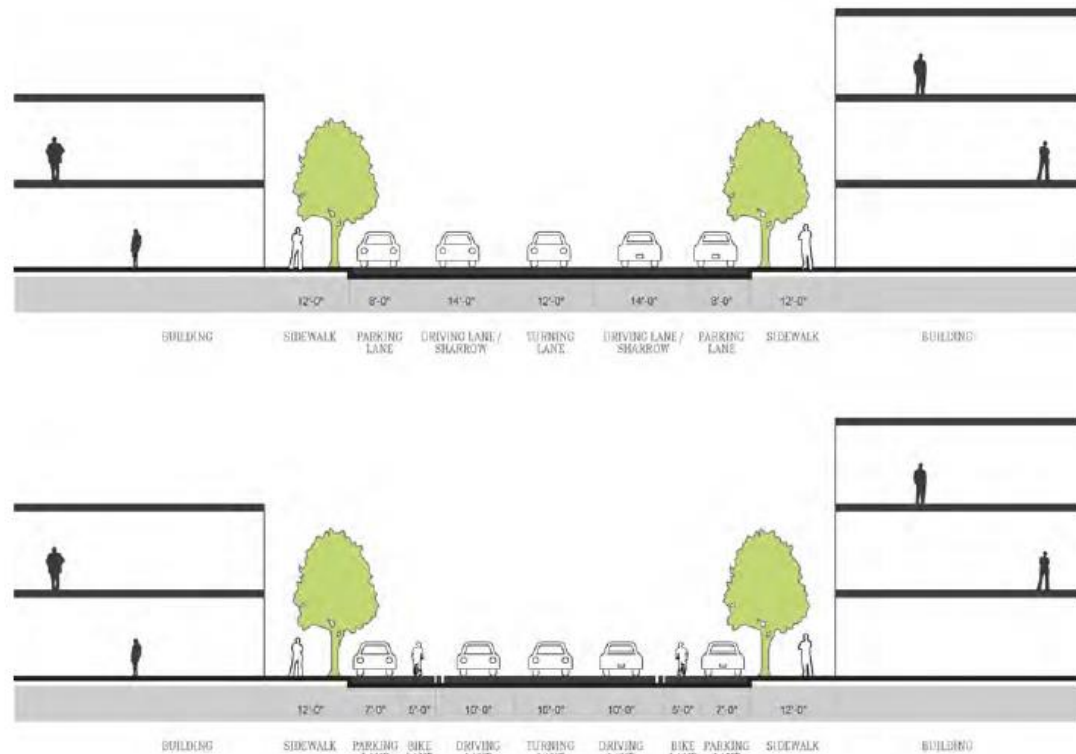
FIG 3.3: Fulton: long-term approach - enhanced bike facility option



be able to measure the success or failure of the lane widths and roadway design to serve the all users, and experiment with techniques to maintain clear bike and parking lanes throughout the winter months. In the spirit of this extended pilot period, the City should also use this time to experiment with a variety of pedestrian improvements such as curb bump-outs and pedestrian refuge islands, explore how to integrate artistic elements and test designs before final landscaping and new curbs are poured in concrete.

### CREATE A MORE WALKABLE DIVISION AVENUE

The current width and function of Division Street varies from block to block. In many areas south of Fulton Street, Division feels unnecessarily wide with limited landscaping. An upgrade in streetscape design is warranted including new tree plantings, busshelters, signage and furniture but broader moves should also be considered. North of Fulton, the current bike lanes could be removed if the proposed bike lanes on Ionia are installed (see Goal 3.3). This space could be used for expanded sidewalks and plantings. South of Fulton there is an opportunity to create a north-south bicycle connection to Fulton Street (proposed for new bike lanes as described above) and Downtown. Reconfiguring the lane widths or, at times, removing the center turning lane, would create space for a dedicated bike lane buffered from traffic. Division south of Fulton has the advantage of width that enables the integration of new bike lanes without negatively impacting traffic or on-street parking. Recognizing that Division is a State-controlled



street, discussions are needed to determine the feasibility of different design solutions and the timing of potential improvements as well as establishing an ongoing maintenance schedule. Consideration should be given to removing the US Business 131 designation and having the City take back jurisdiction of the street. This would increase maintenance costs, but allow the City to have much more control over how the City street network is designed and operated.

*"I'm sure the city is working with the state to generate a plan for Division Ave, so my comment might be irrelevant, but reducing traffic, creating wider sidewalks and more trees/green on Division would help pull people into the businesses, current and future, that are on that street."*

## ENHANCE PHYSICAL AND PERCEIVED CONNECTIONS TO NEIGHBORHOODS SURROUNDING DOWNTOWN FOR ALL MODES

Most people that work or play Downtown live elsewhere, which will continue to be the case until the residential population grows significantly. Improving connections, particularly those for the neighborhoods in close proximity, will help maintain the economic health of Downtown. This will require an investment in these connections and planning new development areas smartly around transit.

The City, the Rapid, and DGRI should make a commitment to investing in all infrastructure that will encourage additional transit use. This may include installing more 'gold standard' transit stops in the neighborhoods to provide protection from the road and weather, providing better information on transit routes and arrivals of the bus, and providing direct outreach to businesses.

Development outside of Downtown should be focused around Bus Rapid Transit nodes and integrate remote parking facilities as part of them.

## CREATE THE MOST BICYCLE FRIENDLY DOWNTOWN IN THE MIDWEST

Cities and downtowns across America have seen tremendous increases in the amount of people bicycling since 2000, including 498% in Washington DC, 389% in Chicago, 169% in St. Louis and 130% in Minneapolis. This is due to a number of reasons, including the relatively low (compared to road projects) investments made in better infrastructure, rising interest in riding bikes as a commuting option, and programmatic investments that encourage people to ride. And it is not only in warm climate cities; those with challenging winters, such as Boston and Chicago, have seen considerable increases in ridership. Minneapolis, which averages approximately 36 inches of snow per year and has an average January temperature of 15.6 degrees, was recently named the most bicycle friendly city in the US. An estimated 4.1% of workers in Minneapolis commute by bike<sup>3</sup>, compared to .9% in the City of Grand Rapids<sup>4</sup>.

Bicycling has also been on the rise in Downtown Grand Rapids, a trend will likely continue with additional residential development. For a Downtown the size of Grand Rapids, riding a bike can be a quick, convenient and free way to get from one destination to the other. However, to help more people in Downtown feel safe riding a bike on its streets, additional infrastructure will be necessary to provide greater protection from vehicle travel and parking lanes. The infrastructure can be supported with increased

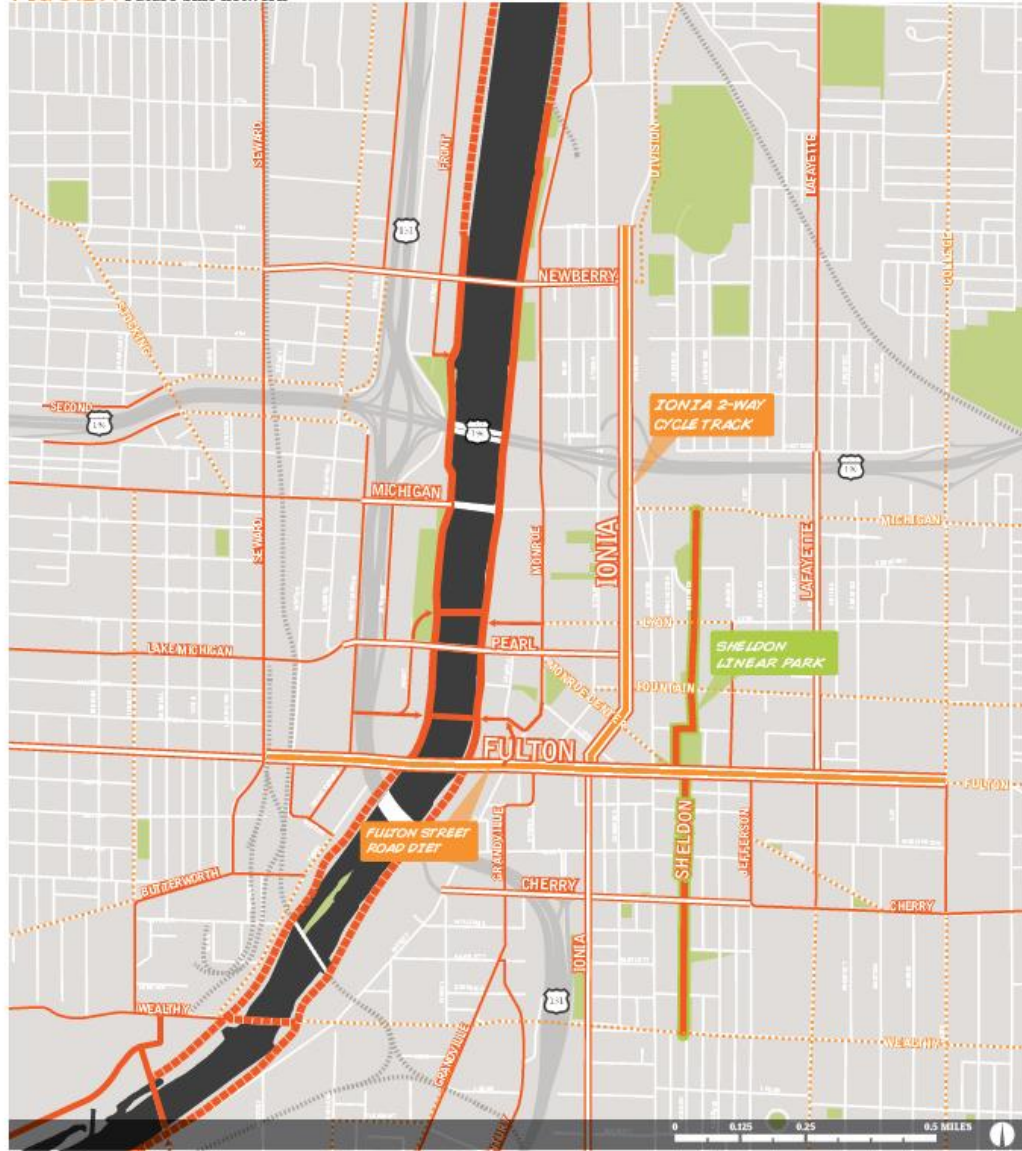
<sup>3</sup> 2009-2012 American Community Survey.

<sup>4</sup> 2008-2012 American Community Survey.








*More and more people are using bicycles to get around. Well-used bike parking at events demonstrates the local potential.*

FIG 3.17: Future bike network



## FUTURE BIKEWAYS

FUTURE VISION OF THE  
BIKE NETWORK IN GRAND RAPIDS

-  HIGH PROFILE ON STREET BIKE FACILITY
-  KEY ON-STREET CONNECTION
-  OFF-STREET MULTI-USE PATHS  
TRAIL CONNECTION
-  EXISTING FACILITY TO IMPROVE
-  (POTENTIAL) NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS  
CREATING A LOW STRESS NETWORK

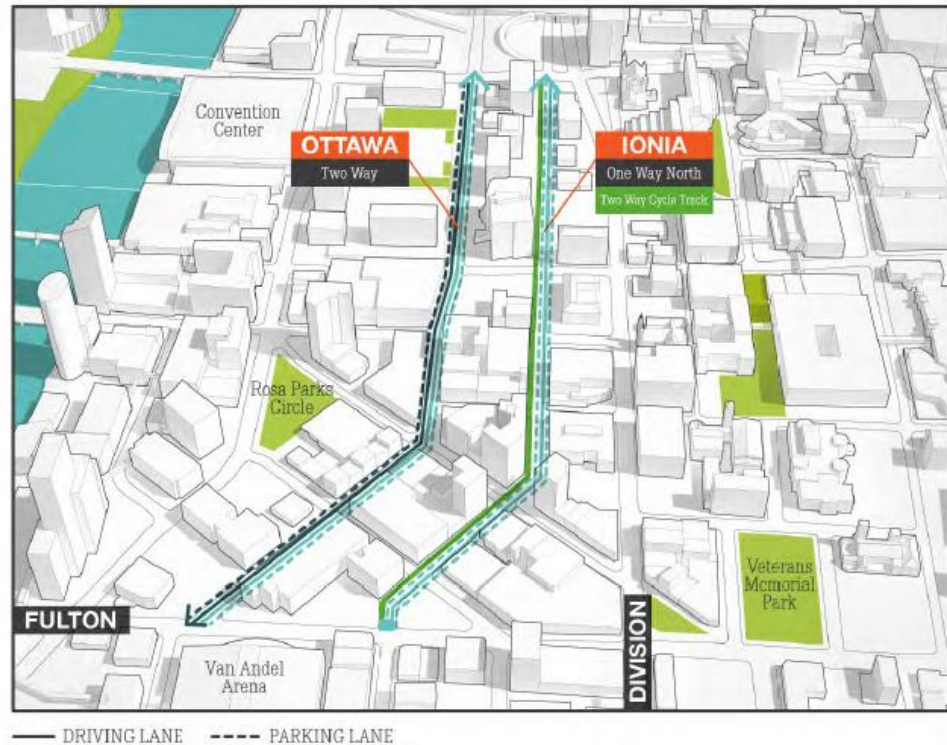


and secure bike parking, better information, and more encouragement and safety programs. This will all create a unique culture in Downtown and help the City attract new businesses, residents, and visitors.

The focus of this plan is on Downtown and there are a number of improvements that can be made as part of it. However, without a plan to develop connections to all of the City, the investment in biking Downtown will not have the overall impact it should. A bike plan will be incorporated as part of the Vital Streets Plan and develop the overall road map for making Grand Rapids the most bike friendly city in the Midwest. It should include a decision tree for bike facilities as part of street design projects (sidepath/trail >> cycle track >> buffered bike lane >> bike lane >> marked shared lane) and include a citywide network of facilities with an emphasis on developing infrastructure that separates people riding their bikes from other modes of transportation and low stress routes using neighborhood streets. Implementation should prioritize installing infrastructure where demand is currently high as well as building in neighborhoods where riding a bike could have a significant impact on household transportation cost.

Providing a dedicated and separated north-south bicycle facility to connect to Downtown should be the immediate bicycle infrastructure priority. A two-way cycle track on Ionia Street would accomplish this. This would require removing one lane of traffic, providing a two-way cycle track on the east side of the street,

FIG 3.18: Re-envisioning Ionia and Ottawa



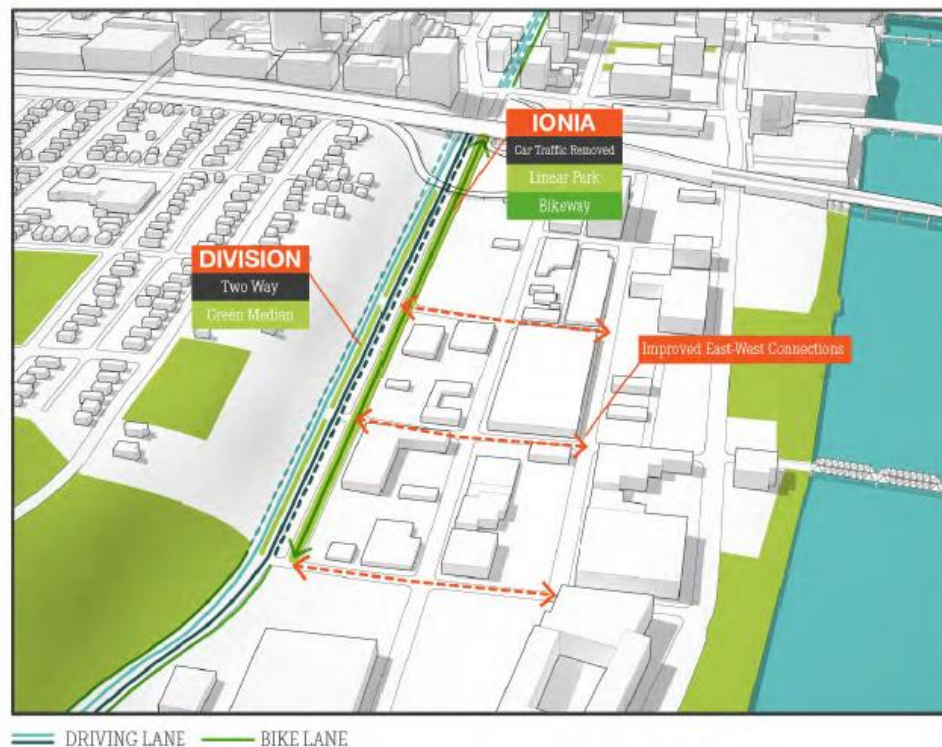
and installing bike signals at each signalized intersection. Converting Ottawa Street to two-way and the redesign of the interchanges will provide the additional capacity and accessibility to balance removing a lane on Ionia. Additional improvements should be made to Ionia, south of Fulton, to make it a low-stress bike route.

*“Develop ‘active’ streetfronts along Ottawa/Iona/Plainfield”*

the opportunity is to redesign it to accommodate this cycle track coupled with a linear park. This improvement will help to connect Belknap, Creston and Monroe North to Downtown.

As discussed previously, Division could serve as a north-south bicycle street south of Fulton. Unlike other streets that have limited width, Division allows the integration of bike lanes without removing parking or travel lanes. Coordination with MDOT is needed to

FIG 3.19: Re-envisioning Division and Ionia, north of I-196



determine the feasibility and timing of these improvements.

Selecting an east-west connection to provide a similar facility needs to be part of the larger bike plan to identify the best connection. The steep grades on Lyon, Fountain, and Fulton present challenges for users riding eastbound (uphill) and hazardous speeds for riders westbound (downhill). A larger planning effort, such as the citywide Vital Street plan, can identify the best

connection to the east side of the City. In the short term, improvements should be made to develop a low stress route from Cherry Street to State Street to Weston Street. Bike lanes should also be tested on Fulton Street as discussed previously. Both of these routes should link up with the Ionia cycle track.

The Blue Bridge should be considered the destination to connect bicyclists across east and west of sides the River. To improve connections

to the west, a new bicycle connection should be provided on Lake Michigan Drive under US 131 that ties in with a low stress route on Front Avenue to the bridge. To the east, bicyclists will be connected to the bridge via the trail on the river connecting to the future bike facility on Fulton and utilizing a low stress route on Lyon, west of Ionia.

The majority of crashes between bicycles and vehicles occur at intersections. People on bikes will always be vulnerable at intersections due to the potential conflict points with vehicles and issues with speed and visibility. Providing greater priority to bikes in intersection design will have a tremendous impact on improving safety. Bike signals should be installed with the cycle track on Ionia Avenue as well as with any future two-way bicycle facility. A protected intersection design for bikes should be developed as part of the Ionia Avenue design at Monroe Center. All bike facilities should be striped through the intersection and bike boxes should be included at the intersections.

One of the challenges with new bicycle facilities, such as a cycle track, is maintaining them. Because they are between the parking lane and the curb, they accumulate snow during winter months and debris during the rest of the year. New maintenance procedures and equipment will be necessary to maintain this infrastructure. This will include a policy on maintenance and training city workers how to plow new bike facilities, procuring additional equipment to maintain cycle tracks, and including bike facilities in the prioritization system of what streets get plowed first.

In addition to infrastructure and policy, Downtown should take a number of steps to become a Bicycle Friendly Business District. These actions are necessary to making biking part of the culture of Downtown and encourage people to ride, particularly those that live within two miles of Downtown. This may include developing an incentive program for people that ride their bike to receive discounts at local stores and restaurants, installing public fix-it stands and air pumps, purchasing a cargo bike and allow it to be shared by businesses in Downtown, increasing the amount of promotional materials on biking, and ramping up participation with Bike to Work Week.

*Ionia and Division today (top) and potentially in the future (bottom) >>*



**FIG 3.20:** Section of proposed improvements to Ionia & Division north of I-196

## INTEGRATE FREIGHT AND HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE INTO THE EXISTING GRID AND NETWORKS IN DOWNTOWN

Barriers exist in almost any urban transportation network, both natural and man-made. While there is nothing that can be done to overcome most natural barriers, steps can be taken to minimize the barriers that rail, bridges, and highways create to a city's transportation network. Downtown has two major highways going through it and industrial land uses that generate high volumes of trucks.

### >> Interstate 196

Interstate 196 provides regional access between Grand Rapids and the rest of Michigan and the Midwest. It is not only important for employee commutes, it also provides a connection for freight traffic. Its location, however, disconnects the north side of Downtown with the rest of the study area, making it difficult for pedestrians to cross. The interchanges at Ottawa and Ionia are constrained by grade and land, which make them confusing to drivers, particularly those using them for the first time. The City Grand Valley Metro Council, Grand Valley State University and the Michigan Department of Transportation are currently conducting a study to redesign these interchanges and the following recommendations should be incorporated into the design:

and operating the facility. For parcels that are currently owned by the City, having Mobile GR own/operate parking should be part of the negotiation strategy.

Providing remote parking facilities that are located next to the Rapid's existing and future Bus Rapid Transit facilities will be necessary to accommodate bargain parkers as well as reduce traffic congestion in Downtown. The existing Silver Line, running primarily on Division Street, and the proposed Laker Line, running along Lake Michigan Avenue, will be a reliable and quick transit service in and out of Downtown, mimicking many of the features of typical rail commuter service. Providing a remote parking option for people to park at a very low rate and ride the bus should be an attractive option in the future. The initial remote parking facilities should be considered pilots to determine what is necessary to make them a success. This will include making it free to park at the facility, providing free transit and evaluating opportunities for mobility hubs and retail amenities as appropriate. Future locations for remote parking should be identified.

*"It's so easy to drive in Grand Rapids. Parking is everywhere and it doesn't cost anything to park."*

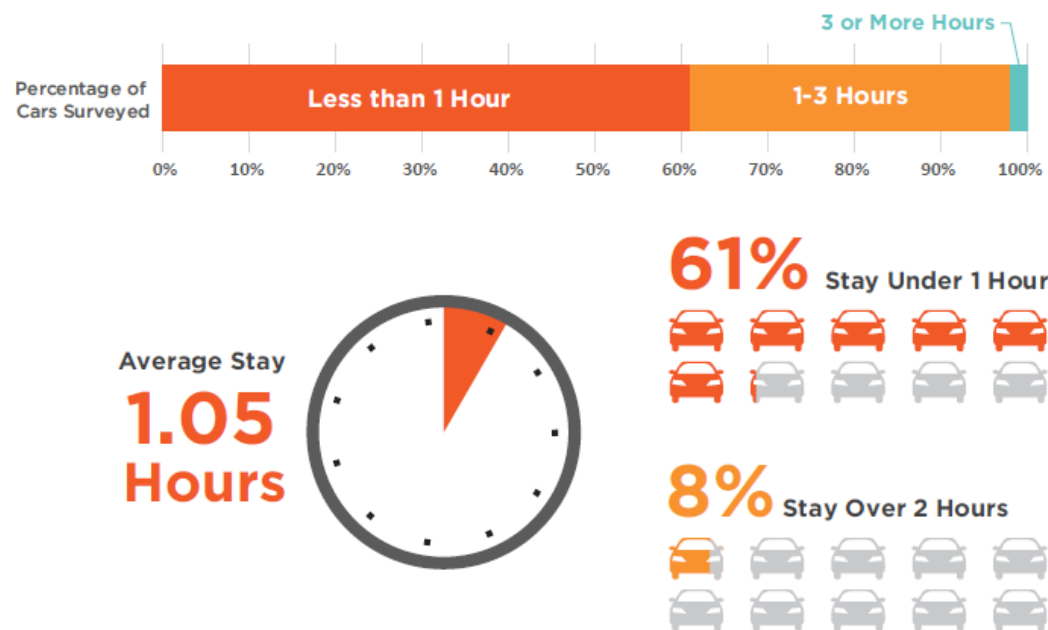


FIG 3.10: Characteristics of on-street parking use

## RECONFIGURE EXISTING DASH SERVICE

One of the primary connectivity issues in Downtown Grand Rapids is the lack of transit service linking all of the different areas within downtown. Due to its geography and size, Downtown is often experienced in sections (e.g. DeVos Place, Downtown Market). This current state of restrictive mobility is primarily dictated by the lack of simple, reliable, comprehensive transit service to connect all Downtown destinations.

To best compliment the Rapid's BRT investments and improve mobility in Downtown, in addition

to serving existing patrons of city-owned parking lots, a revised DASH service should be implemented. This service should function as a circulator to ensure that resources are used in a pragmatic fashion to complete a high-frequency transit network in Downtown Grand Rapids.

This will be accomplished through replacing the current DASH service with two new simple bus lines - comprising the DASH Circulator - that connect current parking facilities to destinations and create a true high-frequency downtown circulator that compliments the current Rapid public transit network. The service would run on weekdays, except holidays.

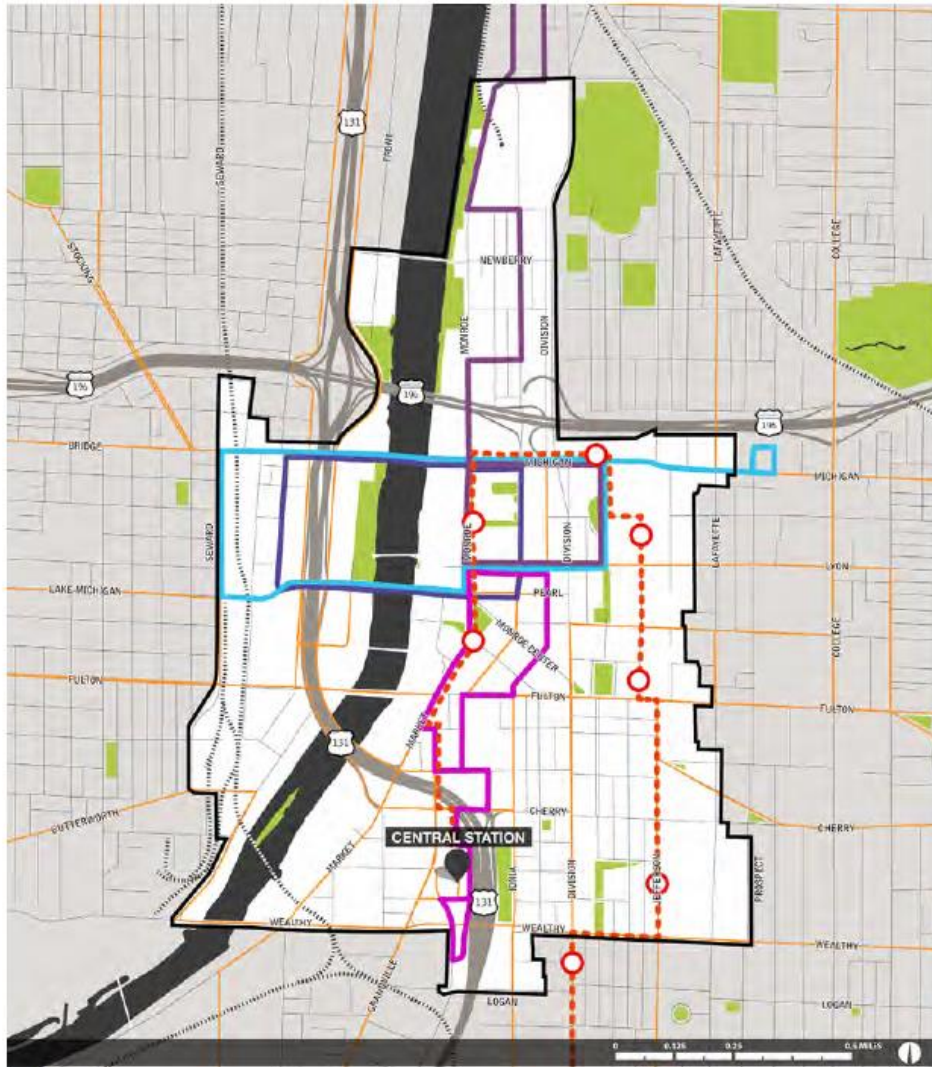


FIG 3.11: Existing public transit assets (Dash + Silver Line)

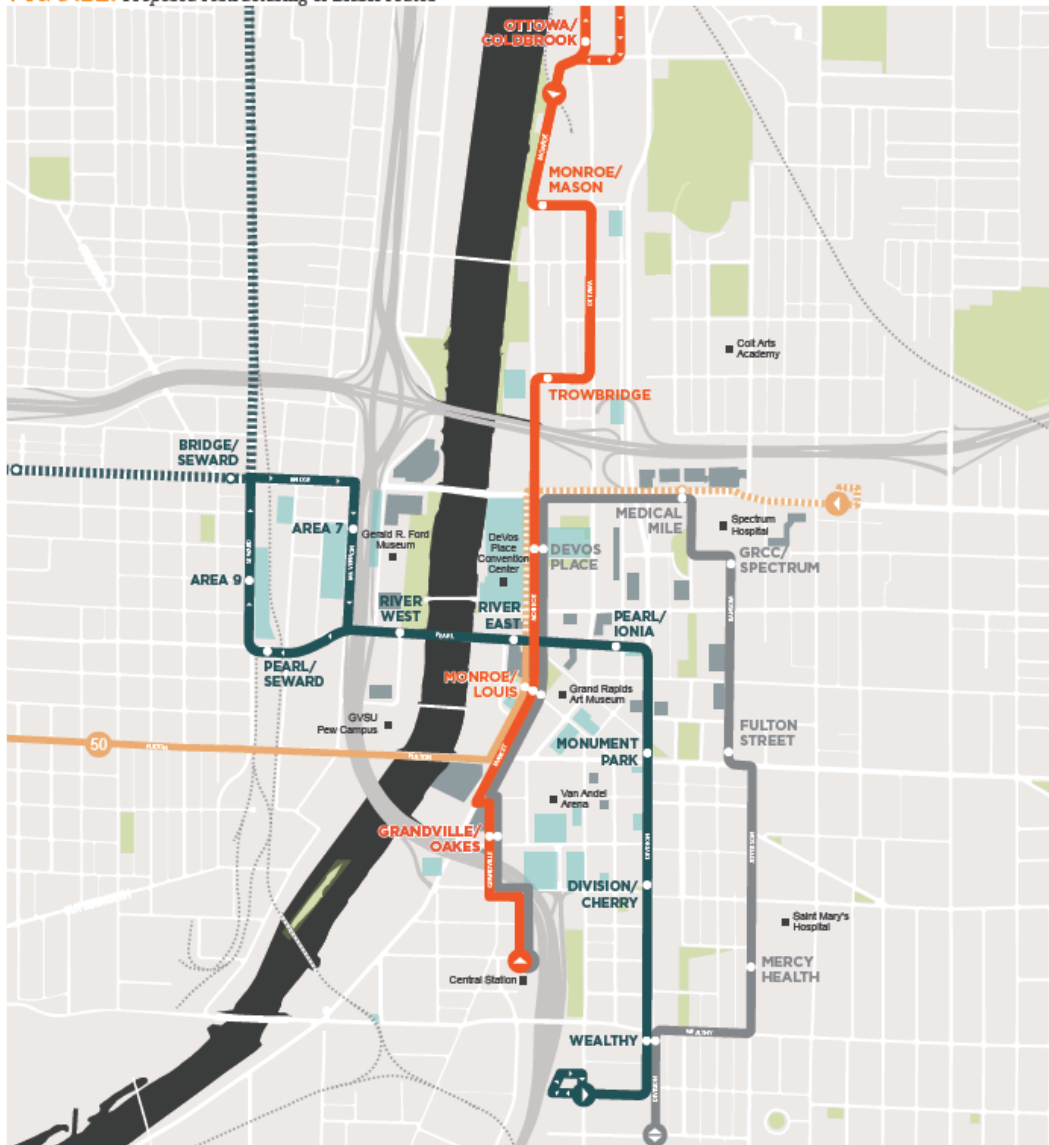
The DASH Circulator (figure 3.12) will link all major destinations through a simple pair of routes connecting Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods with both a north-south and east-west line. Each of these lines is within very close proximity of all city-owned parking facilities and connects to all destinations within Downtown not served by either the Silver Line or planned Laker Line.

**East-West Line:** The East-West Line would connect destinations and parking facilities west of the River with a routing that runs east/west on Pearl to Division Avenue then south on Division Avenue to terminate at the Downtown Market. This route would serve Area 8, Area 9, Area 7, Scribner, GRCC Bostwick, Ottawa Fulton, Pearl/Ionia, The Gallery, Weston Commerce, and Cherry Commerce. Some peak trips will serve a shortened portion of the service area that will end by the Van Andel Arena.

**North-South Line:** The North-South Line would connect destinations and parking facilities in Monroe North, Devos Place with a routing that runs north/south on Ottawa/Monroe/Market/Grandville to Cherry Street then south on to terminate at Central Station. This route would serve Ionia Mason, Monroe North, Ionia North, Government Center, GRCC Bostwick, Ottawa Fulton, Louis Campau, Market Lot, Area 2, Area 3, Area 4, Area 5, and Area 6 city-owned parking facilities.

- DASH - North
- DASH - West
- DASH - Hill
- DASH - South
- - - Silver Line + Station
- Trunk Line Bus Routes

FIG 3.12: Proposed restructuring of DASH routes



## DASH ROUTES

### PROPOSED

- DASH E-W
- DASH N-S
- SILVER LINE
- LAKER LINE
- STATION
- City Operated Parking Facilities
- Non-City Operated Parking Facilities

### PROVIDE NEW AND ENHANCED MOBILITY OPTIONS

In addition to managing parking, Mobile GR will play a key role in supporting the transition of Grand Rapids from a City where people have to drive to one that provides an array of choices of how to get around. Mobile GR will play many different roles with these mobility options: some will be funded and operated by Mobile GR, others will require marketing, and some may just need assistance with building partnerships. Mobile GR's mission will be to provide as many choices as possible to the people of Grand Rapids and do it as efficiently and successfully as possible.

Many of these new options will require time to build awareness, usage and success as Mobile GR is part of a long term vision of how the City will grow. The recommendations for each mobility option should serve as an initial framework to understand opportunities and challenges and establish benchmarks. Each option should be evaluated on an ongoing basis