



# FORWARD

DOWNTOWN & RIVER ACTION PLAN >>



WHAT'S NEXT

FOR DOWNTOWN GRAND RAPIDS?

AND THE RIVER CORRIDOR?

# Welcome to Grand Opening: the Grand Rapids Forward Open House!



## MAP OF ACTIVITIES

- 1: GRAND RAPIDS TODAY
- 2: MAP OUR FUTURE
- 3: DOWNTOWN
- 4: RIVER CORRIDOR
- 5: TELL US ABOUT YOU
- 6: FILL IN THE BLANK



**GRAND OPENING** is a temporary installation featuring interactive exhibits that allow **YOU** to share your ideas to help shape the future of **Grand Rapids**.

When you think of **Downtown Grand Rapids** and the **Grand River**, do you find yourself thinking about what's there now, or do you imagine the potential of what could be?

**GR FORWARD>>** is a comprehensive planning process that invites the public to join Downtown Grand Rapids Inc [DGRI], the City of Grand Rapids, and their partners in envisioning the many ways in which we can leverage this momentum to make progress towards a holistic vision for **Downtown** and the **Grand River**.

# Help shape the future of GRAND RAPIDS. Get involved TODAY.

LEARN MORE: [WWW.GRFORWARD.ORG](http://WWW.GRFORWARD.ORG)

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF GRAND RAPIDS AT

[FACEBOOK.COM/GRFWD](https://FACEBOOK.COM/GRFWD)



JOIN THE CONVERSATION ON TWITTER

[@GRFWD](https://twitter.com/GRFWD)

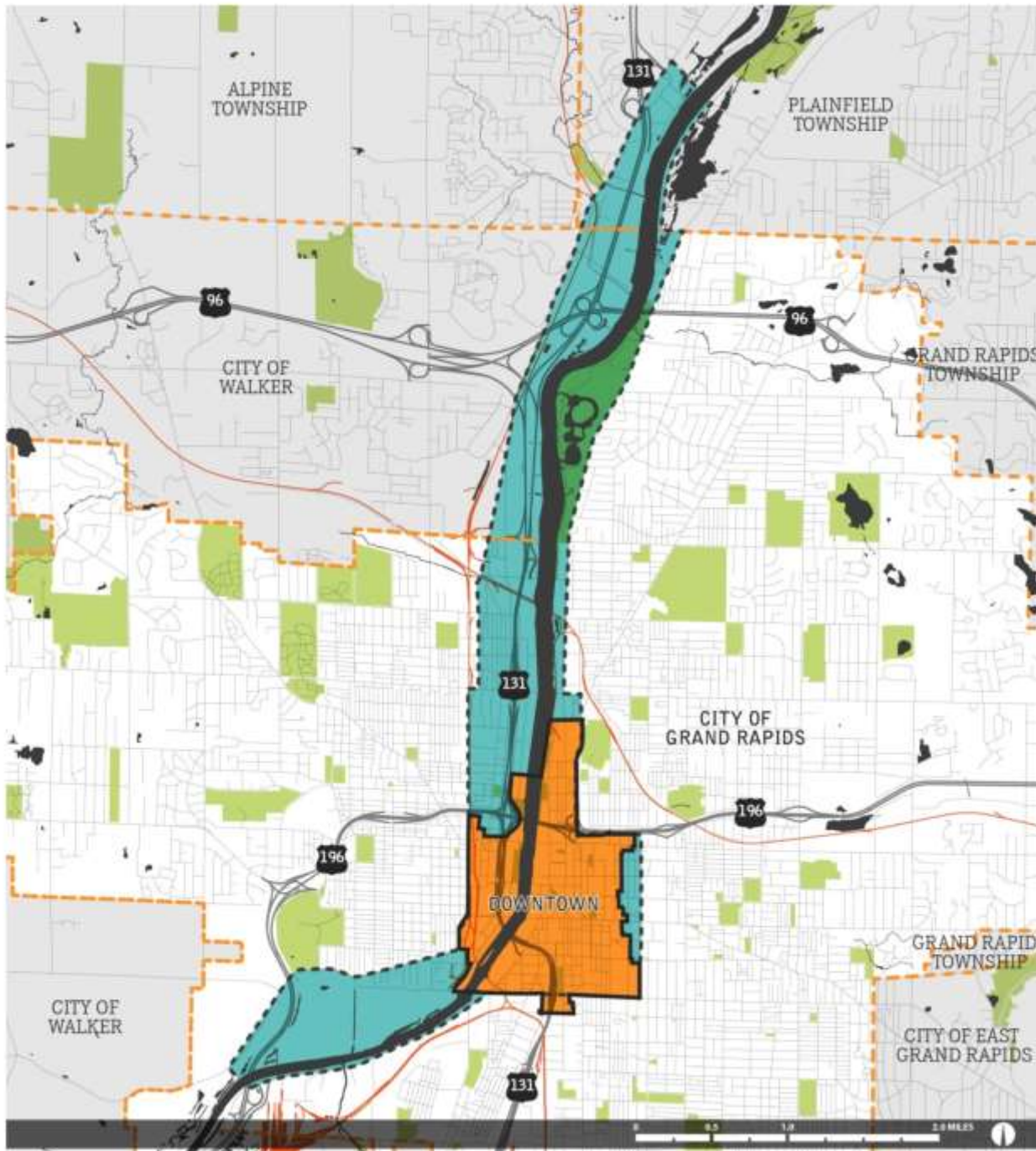


SHARE PHOTOS OF YOUR FAVORITE SPOTS  
AND PLACE-SPECIFIC IDEAS ON INSTAGRAM [@GRFWD](https://www.instagram.com/GRFWD)



**Our focus is on  
DOWNTOWN:  
roughly  
between  
Wealthy Street  
and the N.  
Monroe area,  
Seward to  
Lafayette  
Streets**

**Our focus is on  
the RIVER:  
stretching from  
north to south  
across the City  
and a little  
beyond**

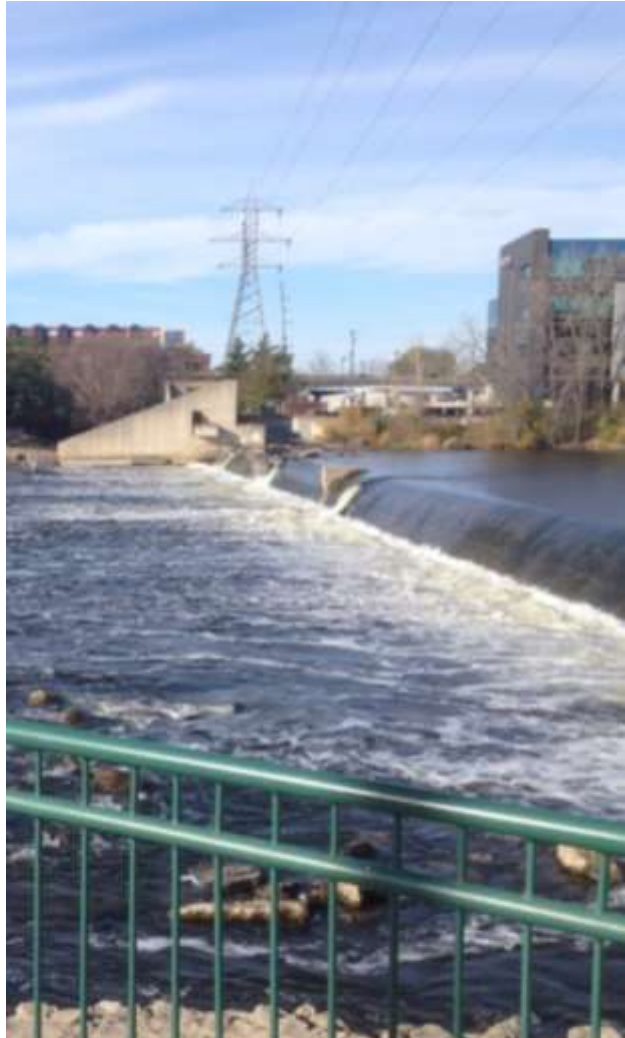


- RAIL
- HIGHWAY
- STREETS
- CITY / TOWN BORDER
- RIVER STUDY AREA
- DOWNTOWN STUDY AREA

**In fact, GR Forward is really many plans in one. In addition to the Downtown and the River, GR FORWARD includes work on local schools with Grand Rapids Public Schools**



**DOWNTOWN**



**RIVER**



**CENTRAL CAMPUS /  
MUSEUM SCHOOL**

**We've been at work since the spring, collecting data and reaching out to residents, business owners, employees and local leaders.**

**GETTING STARTED    INVENTORY & ANALYSIS    VISION & RECOMMENDATIONS    IMPLEMENTATION**

SPRING 14    SUMMER 14    FALL 14    WINTER 14/15    SPRING 15

[SUMMER EVENTS TBD]

INTERVIEWS

WEBSITE LAUNCH

PUBLIC LAUNCH

FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS PLUG

FOCUS GROUPS

OPEN HOUSES

[WINTER EVENT TBD]

FINAL PLAN





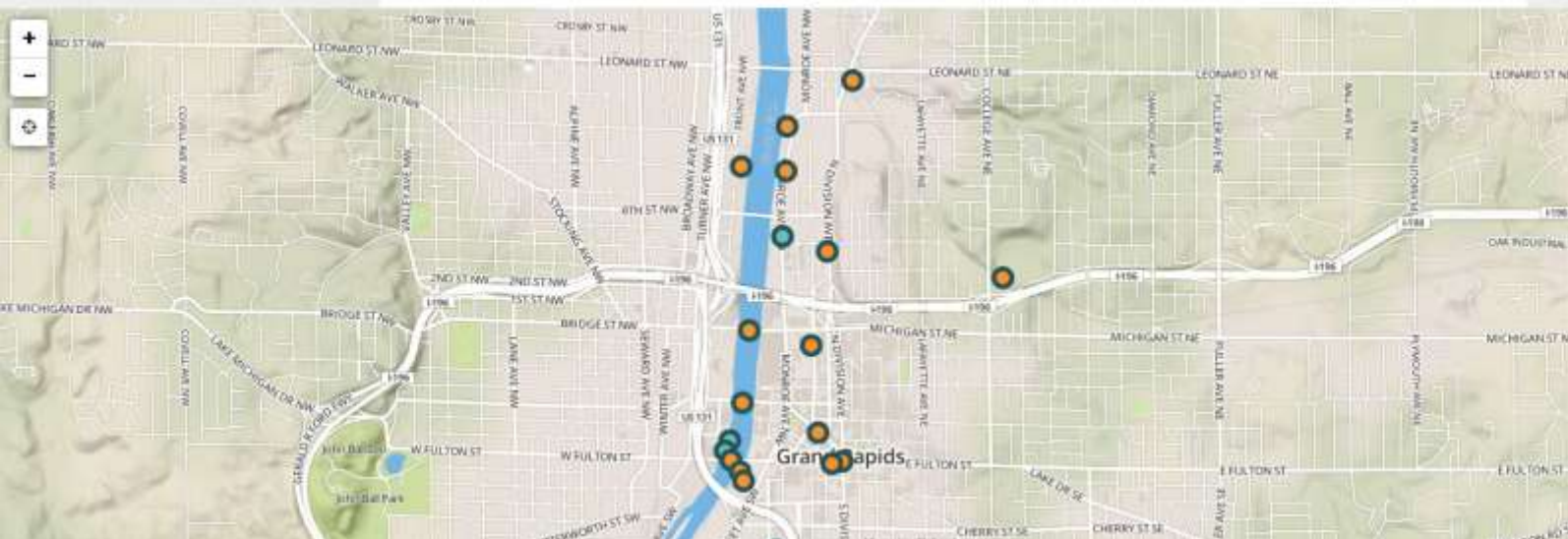
# We launched GRFORWARD.COM in June and set up a Facebook page, Instagram and Twitter accounts

Home News The Plan **Get Involved**

## Share Your Thoughts

What's your experience of Downtown Grand Rapids, and how would you like that to change or stay the same? What are your ideas for the Grand River corridor? We want to know. Add your idea to the map!

**Why get involved?** To accommodate new investment, fully capitalize on the local arts and culture, promote the local economy and reduce the city's environmental footprint all while operating within fiscal constraints requires proactive thinking tempered by hyperlocal expertise. In short, Grand Rapids needs progressive action and a progressive vision driven by those most familiar with the issues and opportunities. That said, Grand Rapids Forward will be developed through a robust community engagement process that will provide the foundation for the vision and recommendations guiding change in Downtown Grand Rapids and along the Grand River.



Adam Tauno Williams commented on Monroe Center

Someone supported Fulton Street bridge

Someone supported Bridge Street bridge

Someone supported Pearl Street bridge

Someone supported Plainfield & Leonard

Brosoph Stalin commented on Wealthy Street interchange

Brosoph Stalin commented on Monroe Center

Someone supported Pearl Street bridge

Someone shared an Observation for Monroe North Area

Someone supported Highland Park



**We've also been at events to ask you about your big ideas – we've learned a lot already**

**Now is our  
chance to share  
with you some  
of what we've  
learned**



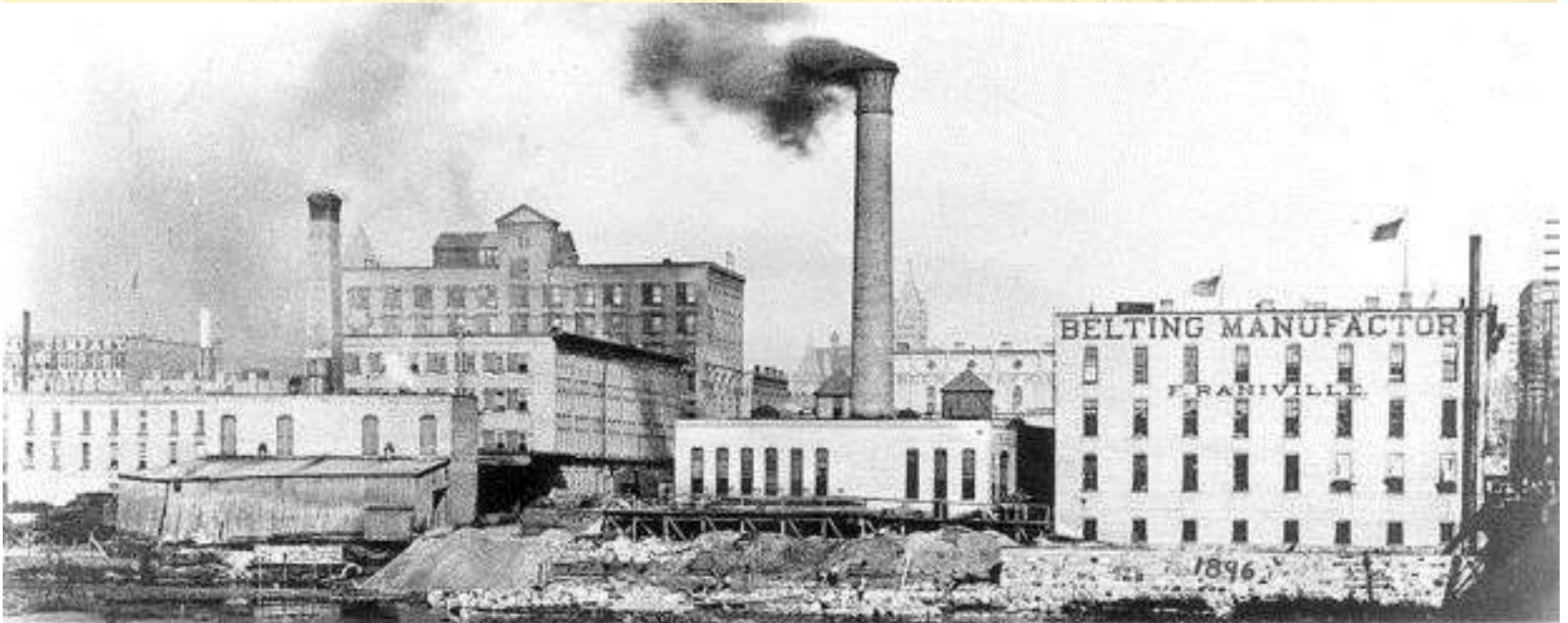
# The river, and later, railroads, spurred economic growth



View from the River

THE GATEWAY  
From the River

Grand Street & Jackson Building



BELTING MANUFACTORY

FRANVILLE

1896

# Grand Rapids: “the furniture city”



**The River was essential to early industry. Lumber provided jobs in over 40 sawmills and 50 furniture companies in the early 1900s**



**Furniture, finished lumber, harnesses, leather goods, flour, grain, cloth and carpet among other manufacturers found a home in Grand Rapids**







# Grand Rapids

BREWING CO.



Annual Capacity  
250,000 BARRELS.



**this helped to create a bustling downtown**



**A downtown with a lot of retail (including 4 department stores)...**



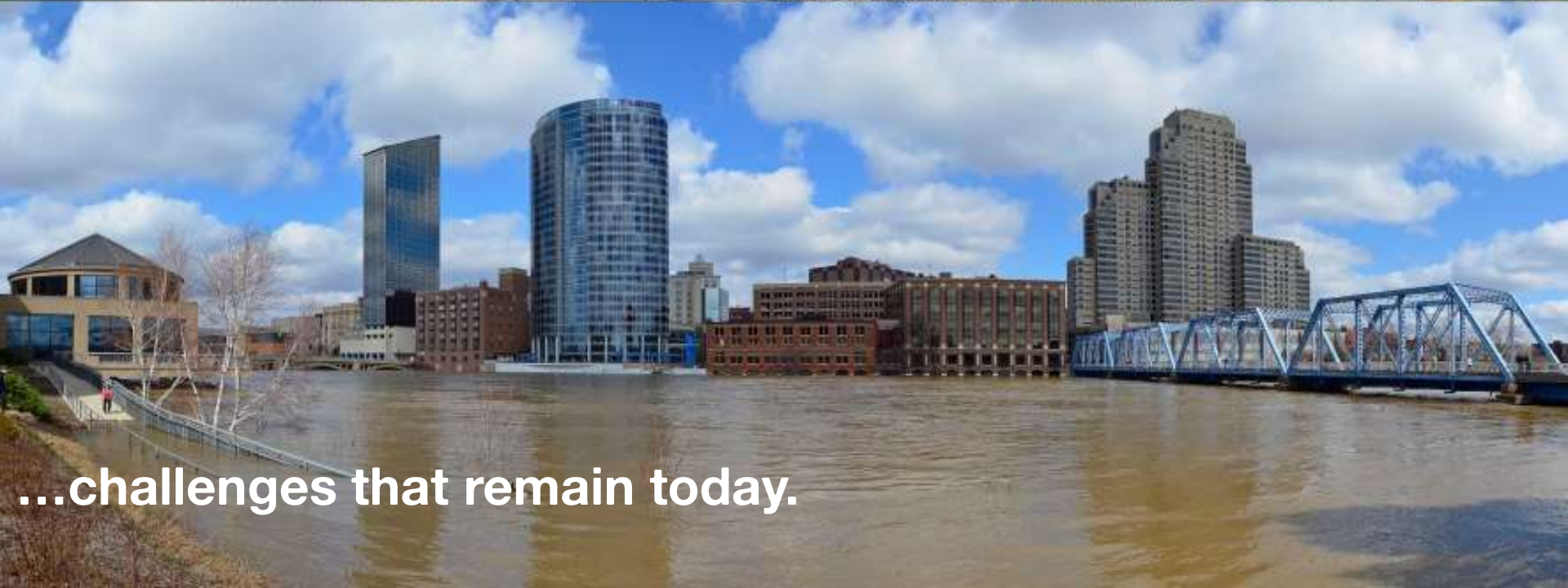
**...and the place  
to hold major  
events**





*WEST LEONARD STREET, LOOKING WEST*

**But as much as the river brought growth, it presents challenges...**



**In 1927, a plan was completed for the next 50 years to widen streets and improve the street cars – notice the new parks and streets along the river**



VIEW OF  
FUTURE GRAND RAPIDS  
SHOWING EFFECT OF  
IMPROVEMENTS PROPOSED IN CITY PLAN  
CITY PLANNING DEPARTMENT



**But how we live changed and people and jobs started leaving the City. “Urban Renewal” in the late 1950s provided a means to address the creeping blight found in downtown. Most of what is in this photo was demolished in the 1960s**





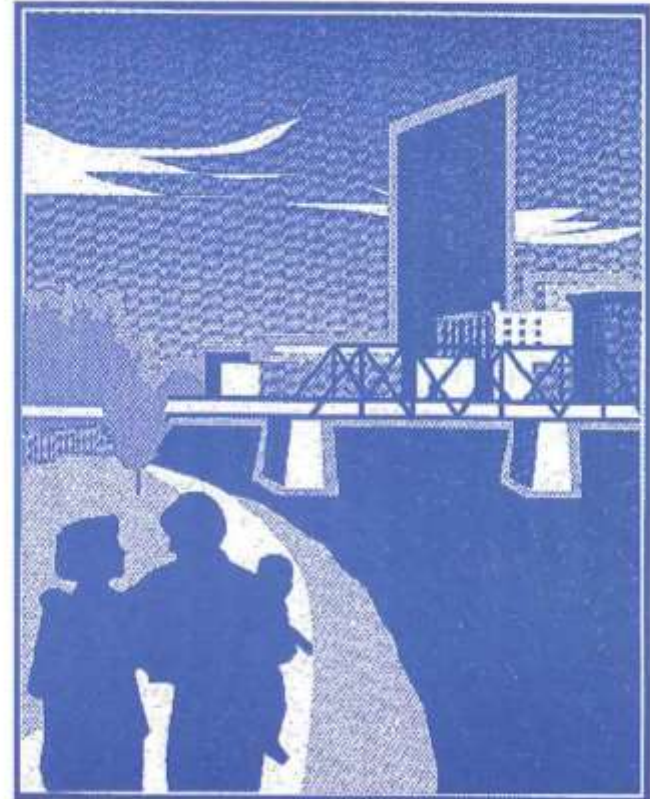
**Parking replaced buildings until development occurred.**



**Urban renewal created the foundation for the convention center, medical mile and the government center**

**In 1993 the Voices and Visions plan was created for downtown. This plan set the tone for much of the investment that has occurred since.**

**VOICES &  
VISIONS**  
COMMUNITY  
PLANNING  
FOR  
DOWNTOWN



**In 2011, Green Grand Rapids sets an agenda for a greener, healthier City. GR Forward builds upon this work.**

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# GREEN GRAND RAPIDS

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**Due to thoughtful planning and investment, downtown today is a very different place.**

**New  
development sits  
along side  
historic buildings**



Grand Rapids is a center for education and medical institutions (eds and meds)...

LX EBERHARD CENTER  
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY





...and for arts and culture





**The City's focus on streetcars is again renewed with progressive investments in new transit**



**We also have a growing bike culture to design for**

**Nearby, there are  
historic and  
attractive  
neighborhoods**



**But also new  
housing  
investment  
downtown**





**Its not just about housing, there's a growing recognition that job growth will come from new businesses and local leaders are trying to encourage them here**

**Despite the positive change, there are visible signs of vacancy and empty storefronts**



**What do we fill the available space with?**





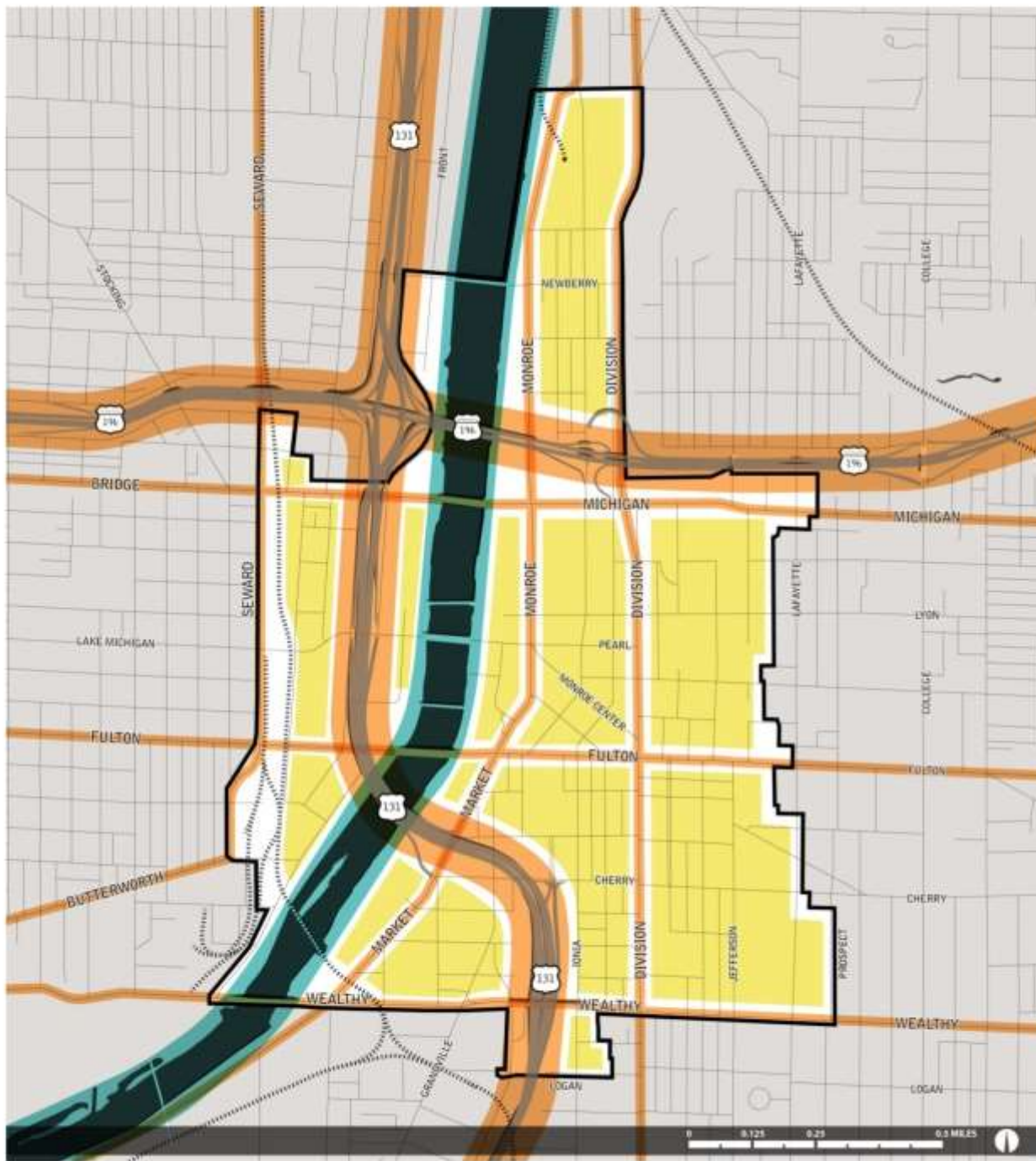


**We also have a legacy of really wide streets that serve to fragment downtown...**

**...along with our highways**

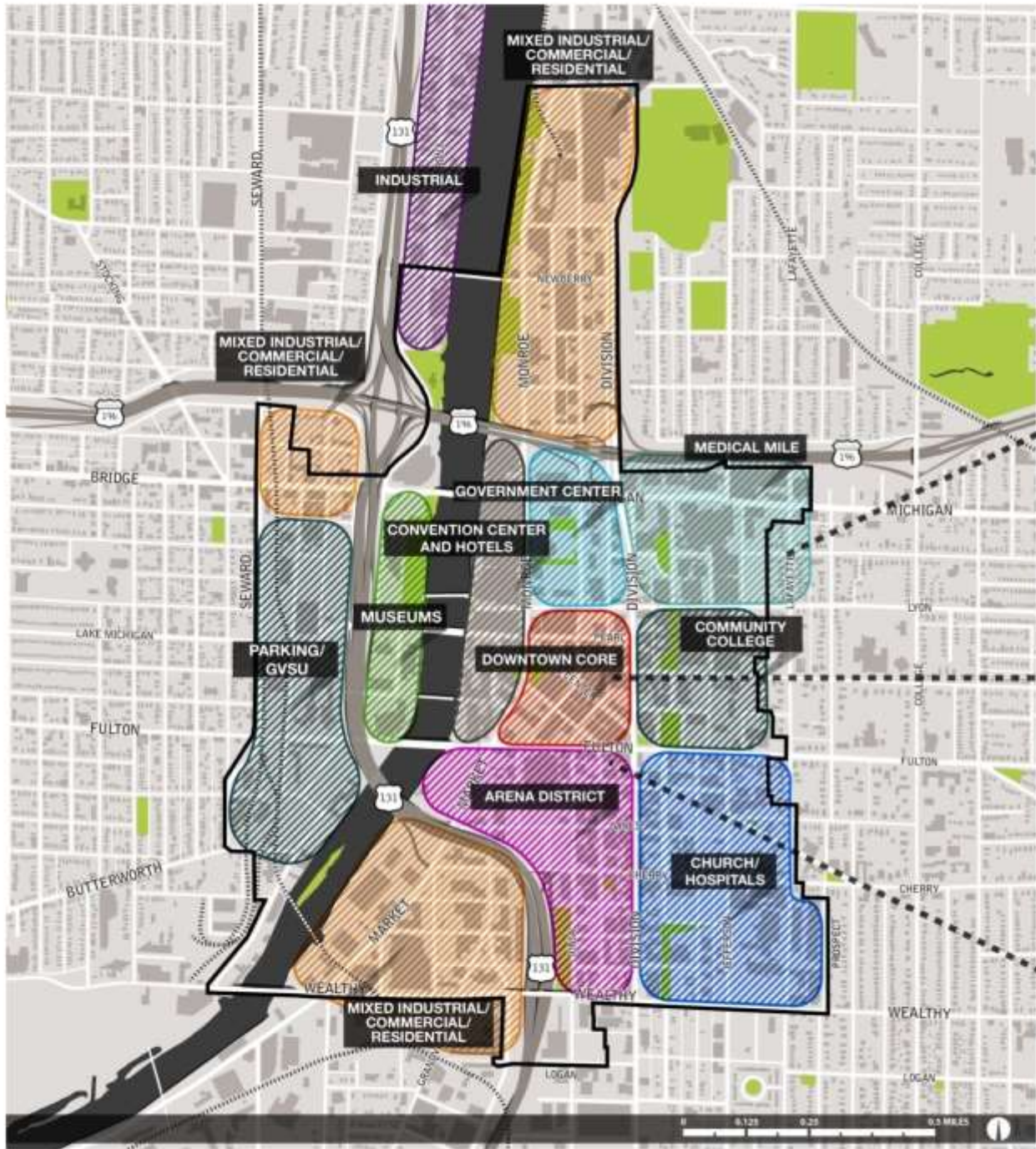


**The reality is, major roads, highways and other factors have created not one downtown, but many smaller districts**



- MAJOR ROAD
- SEGMENT OF DOWNTOWN
- HIGHWAY
- RIVER

The result is this collection of districts, each with its own personality and challenges to address



**MEDICAL MILE** - LANDLOCKED OR A CONTINUED DRIVER OF DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT?

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF THE DOWNTOWN CORE?

**ARENA DISTRICT** - NEW DEVELOPMENT FROM GROWTH OR REDISTRIBUTION OF EXISTING USES?

**This plan is intended to build on prior work but also address the new challenges and opportunities the City faces.**

**Today, we think there are a few key questions to address:**

**1. HOW DO WE MAXIMIZE  
OUR MOST VALUABLE  
ASSET?**

A wide, calm river flows through a city. In the background, a skyline of various buildings is visible under a clear sky. The water is dark and reflects the surrounding environment. The text "THIS IS YOUR RIVER!" is overlaid in large, white, bold letters in the center of the image.

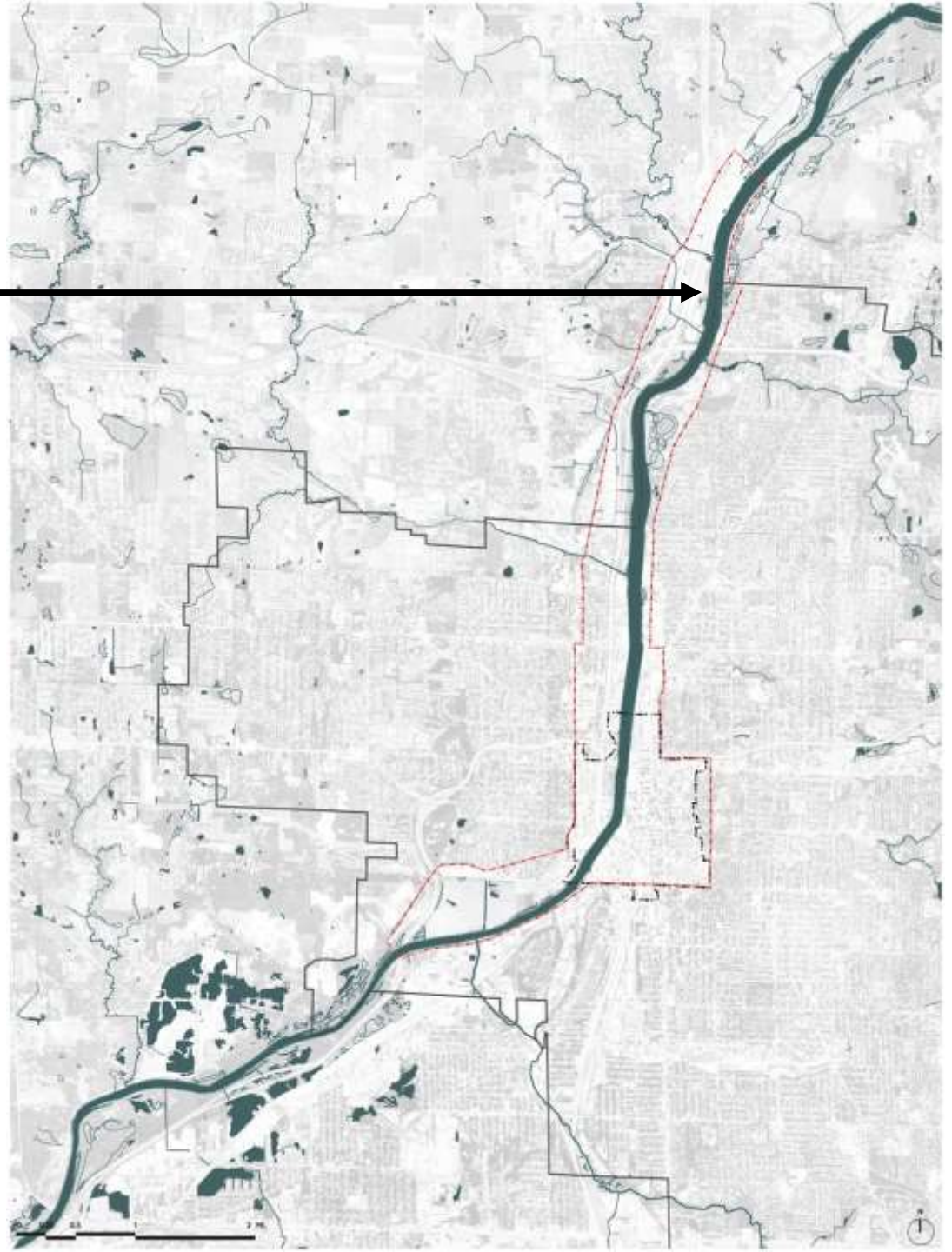
**THIS IS  
YOUR  
RIVER !**

**Grand Rapids  
Whitewater has  
already  
recognized the  
value in  
transforming the  
River for  
recreational use.  
Our job is to think  
about the river's  
edges and work  
with Whitewater  
to re-think the  
River in the City**

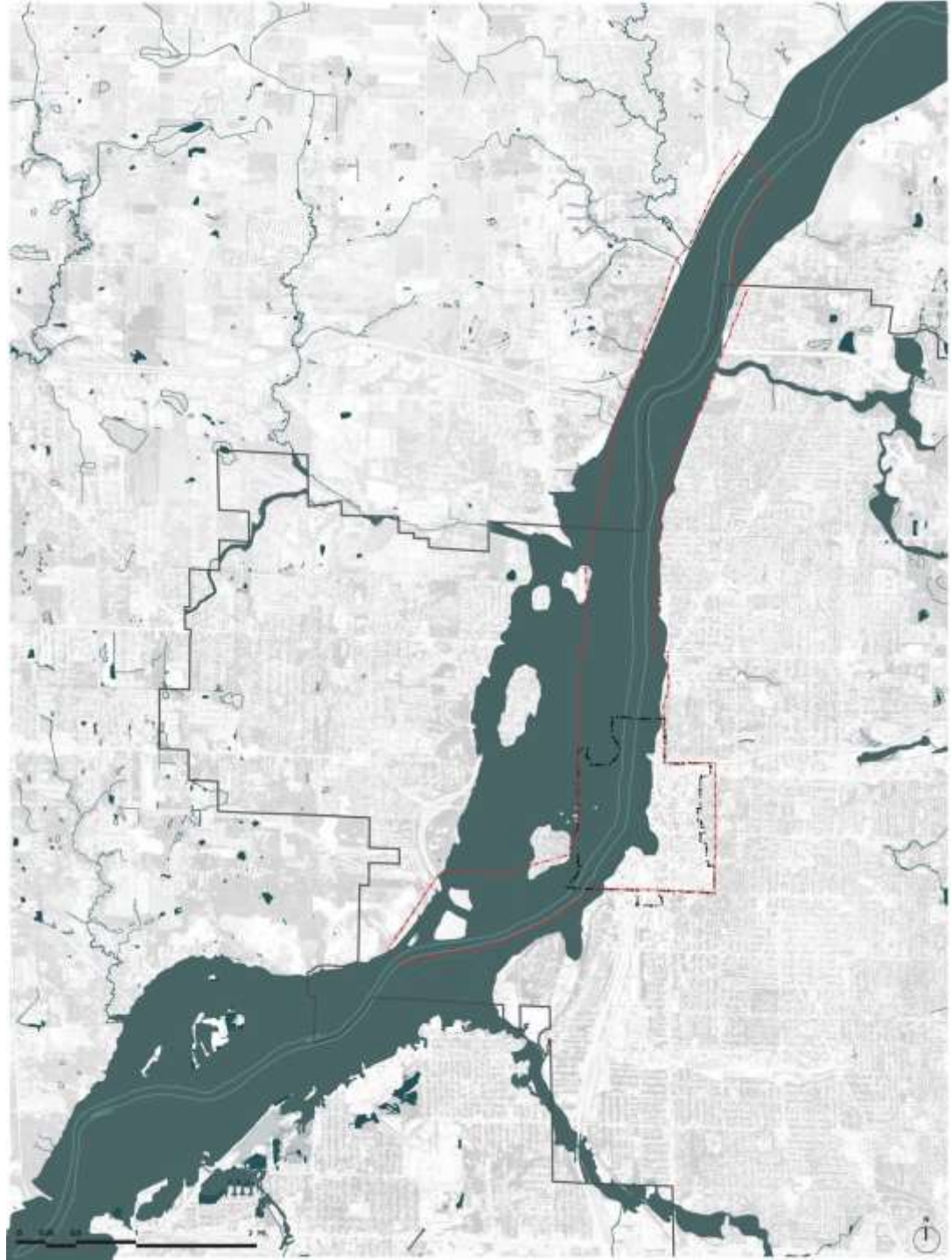




**This is the  
Grand River as  
we know it  
today** →



**This is what it really is – a larger swathe that formed from a glacier – it occupies the low-lying areas in the City. We’ve simply channelized it to enable the development of the City**



# We're ignoring not only how the River functions, but also its role in the City



“WAKE UP AND REALIZE THERE IS A NATURAL ASSET IN DOWNTOWN.”

“THERE’S A NATURAL AMENITY HERE THAT’S HIDDEN”



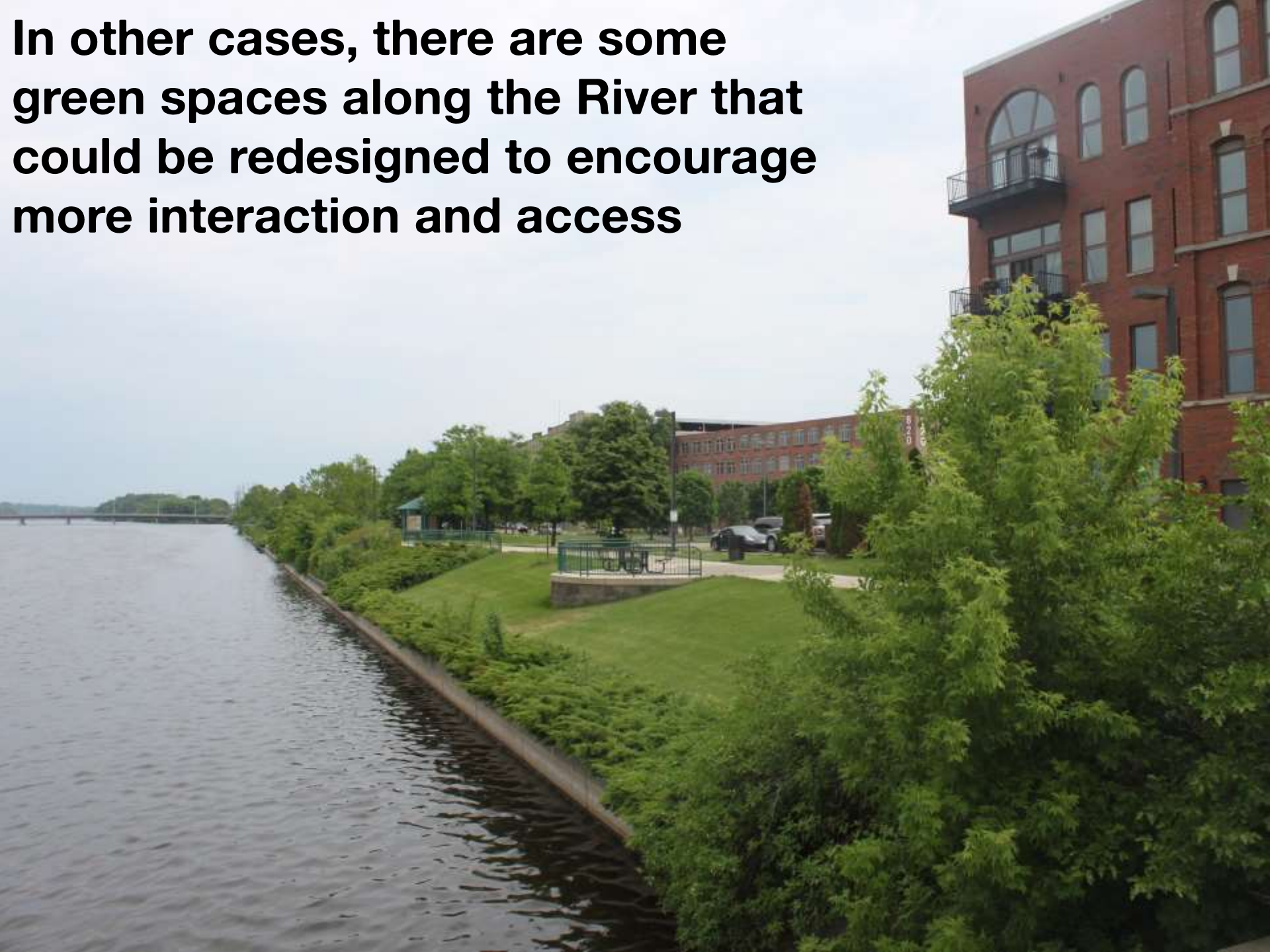
IT IS ABOUT  
INFRASTRUCTURE, HOW  
THE CITY MEETS THE RIVER  
AND HOW RESIDENTS  
ACCESS THE RIVER.


**CAUTION**  
PAVEMENT SLIPPERY  
WHEN WET

**Today, how we experience the River is defined by its edges. Flood walls in some locations create hard edges that limit River access**



**In other cases, there are some green spaces along the River that could be redesigned to encourage more interaction and access**





BUT WE ALSO  
HAVE TO THINK  
ABOUT  
STORMWATER:  
THE CITY HAS  
ALREADY  
REDUCED  
COMBINED  
SEWER  
OVERFLOW BY  
**98%**

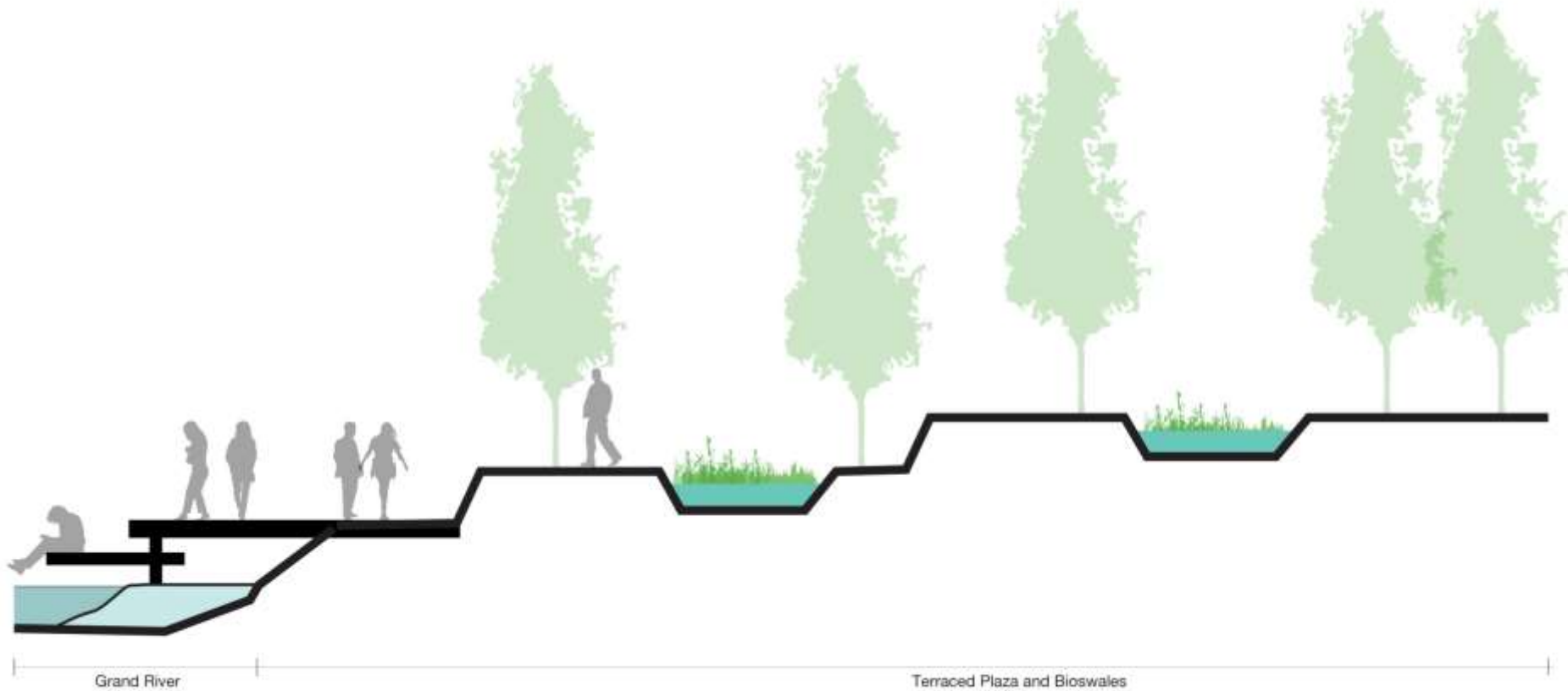
WE NEED TO TREAT AN ADDITIONAL 70  
MILLION GALLONS OF STORMWATER...AND  
THERE MAY BE OPPORTUNITIES TO TREAT  
EVEN MORE



**Other cities are exploring innovative solutions to managing stormwater that also provide river amenities**



**This is what's called a terraced bioswale – it helps to clean water and provide a riverfront amenity**



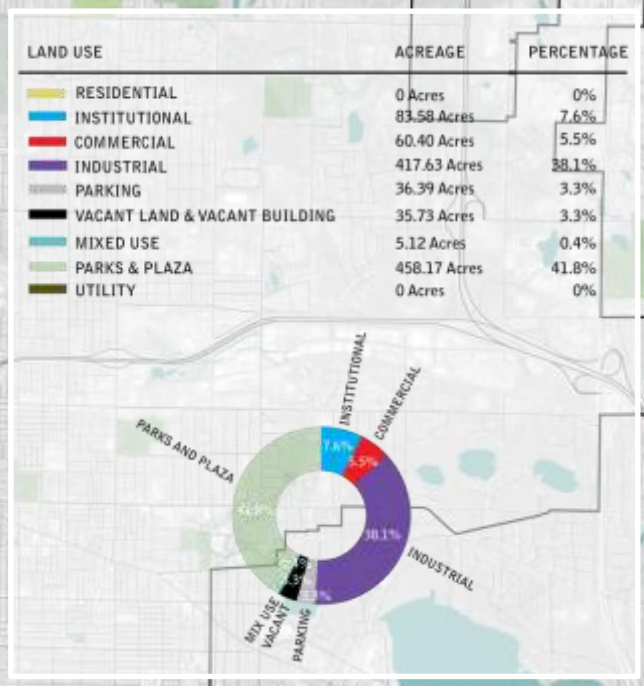
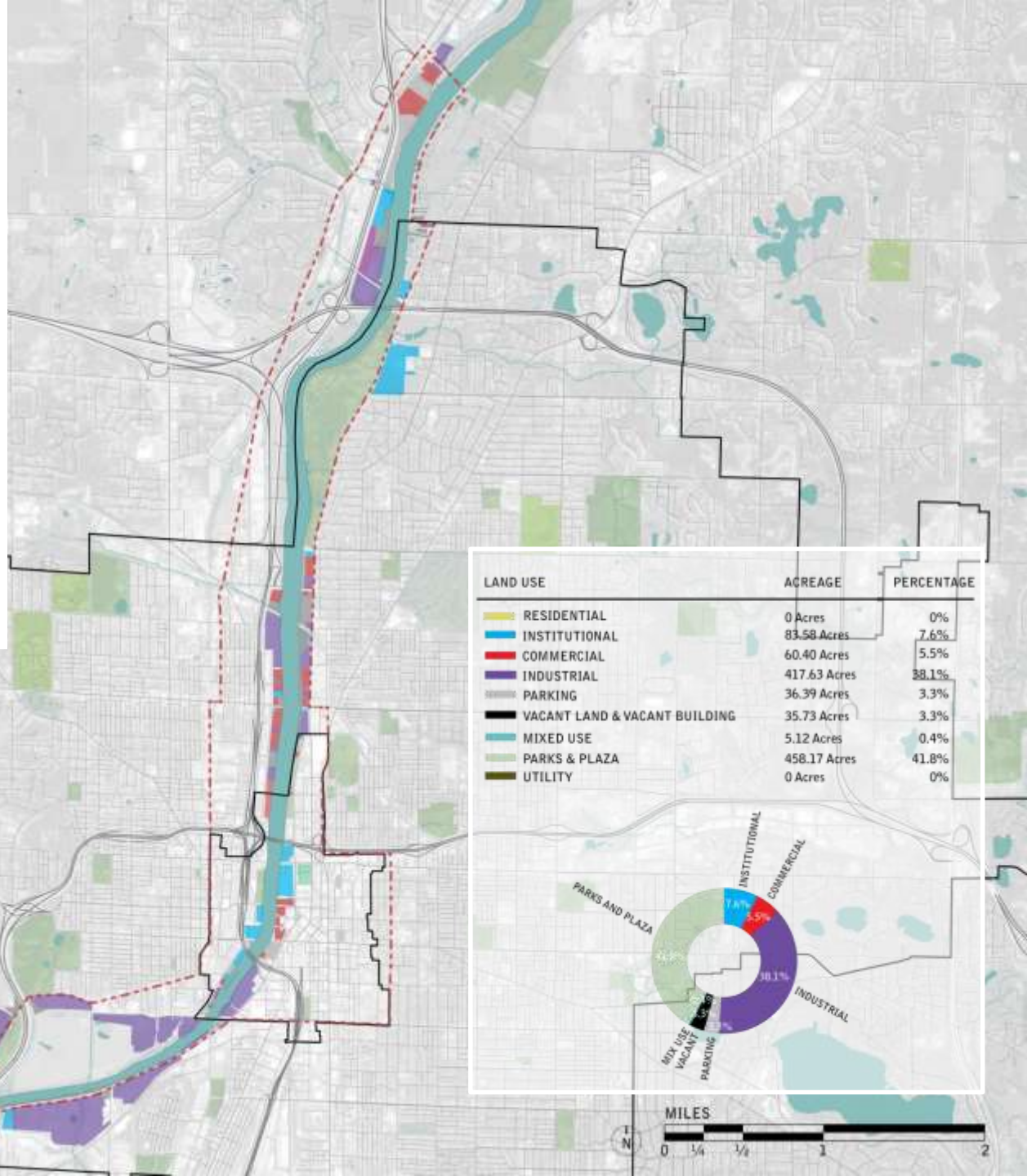
**It can look  
something  
like this**



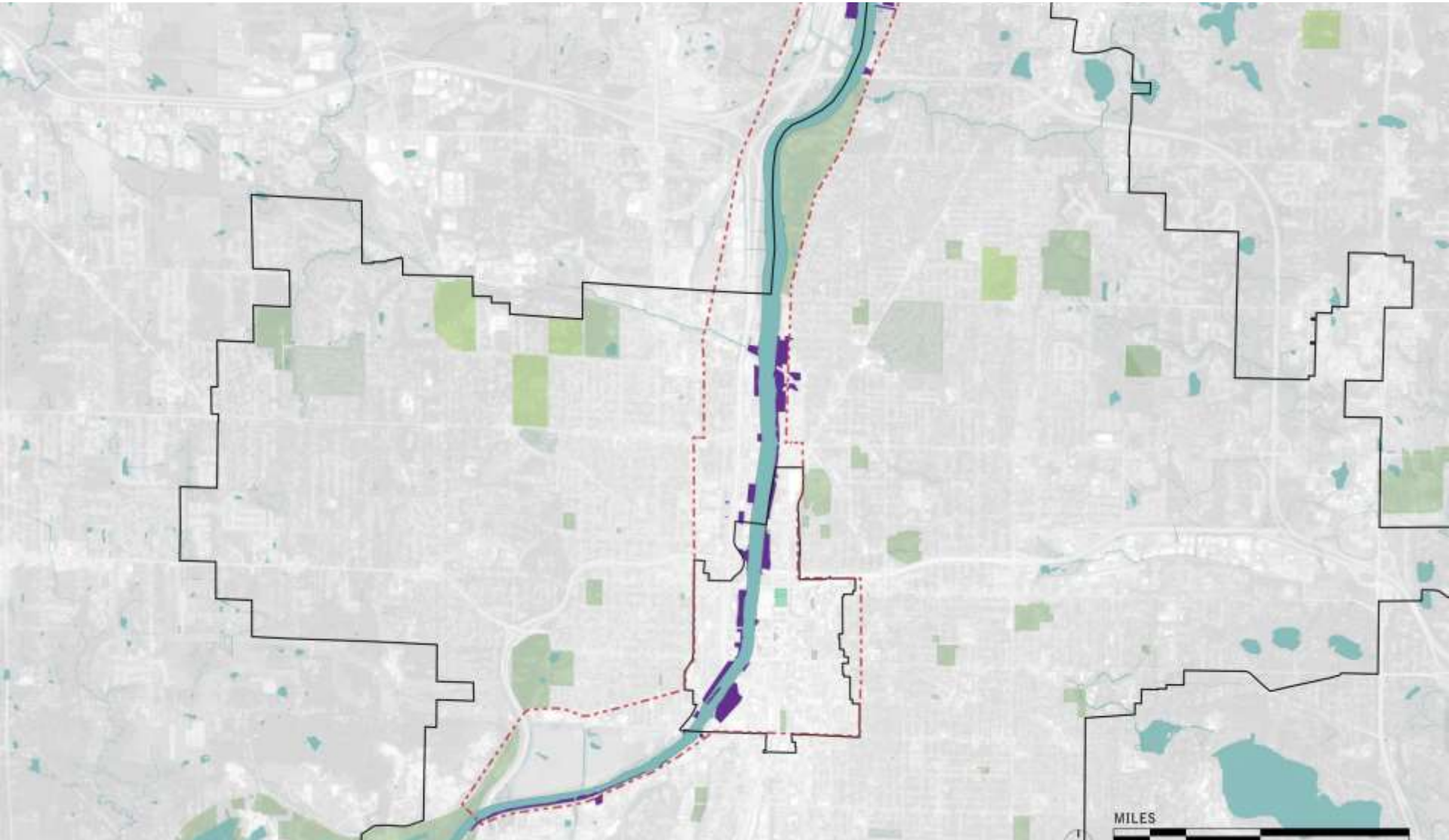


**IT IS NOT JUST ABOUT THE  
WATER. IT IS HOW WE FIND  
OPPORTUNITIES ON THE LAND  
THAT IS NEXT TO THE RIVER**

**Grand Rapids has made strides toward providing public access along the River but there remains a legacy of industrial use. Almost 40% of riverfront use is industrial.**



**There aren't that many vacant sites along the River that could be re-purposed for river access. What exists is shown in purple and focused downtown. We have to make the most of the opportunities we have.**



**BUT EVEN IF YOU CAN  
ACCESS THE RIVER,  
WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE  
TO DO THERE?**

# Here is how other cities are making use of riverfront land



# Here is how other cities are making use of riverfront land





# Here is how other cities are making use of riverfront land



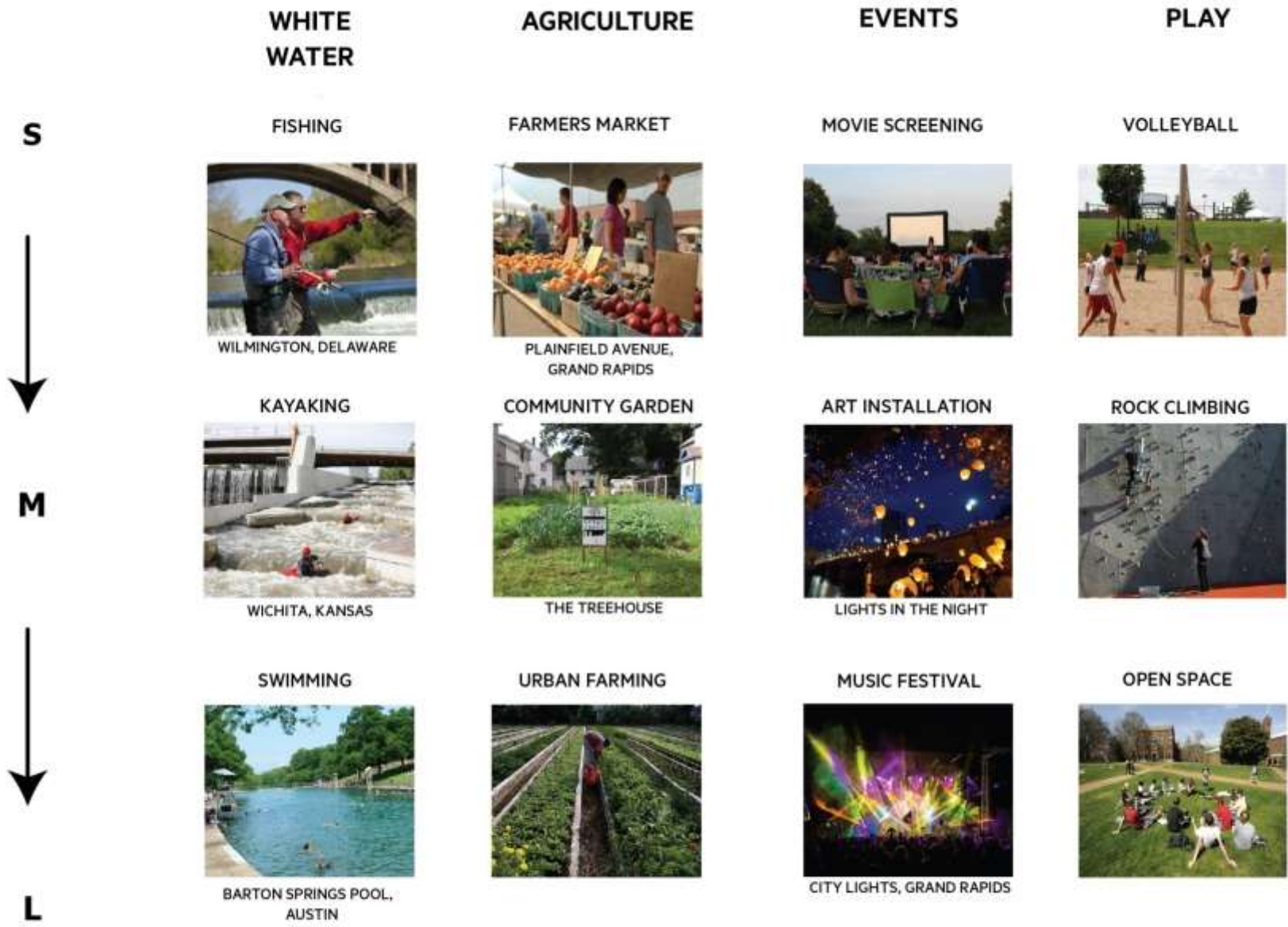
# Here is how other cities are making use of riverfront land



# Here is how other cities are making use of riverfront land



# It's important to think about the programs we want and align them to where they fit – here are just a few examples and their relative size



IN DOWNTOWN...

# 2. HOW DO WE ACHIEVE CRITICAL MASS?

**Between 2000  
and 2010, the  
downtown  
population  
grew by 15%  
and this  
doesn't count  
the new  
housing built  
in the last few  
years**



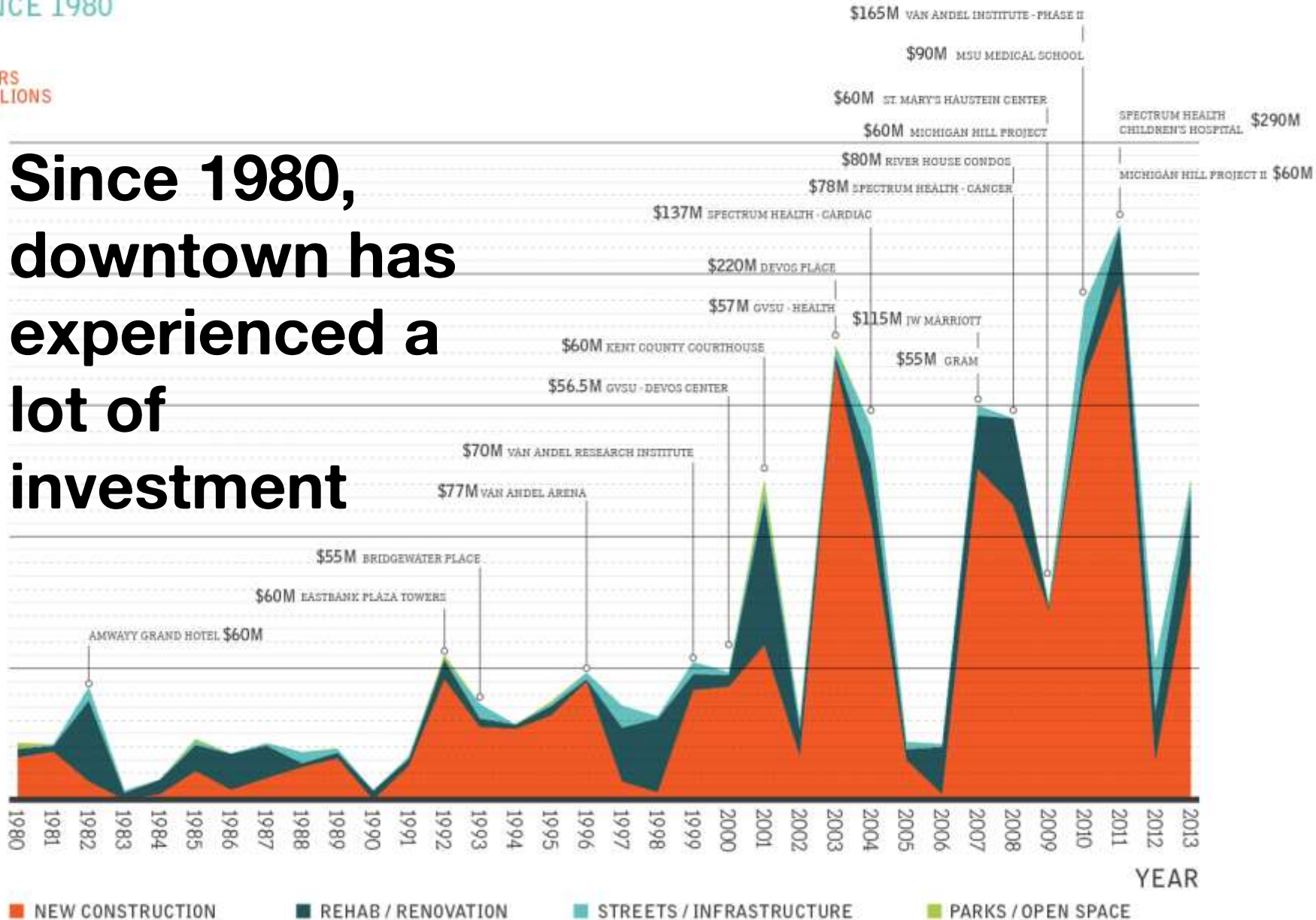
# DOWNTOWN INVESTMENT

SINCE 1980

DOLLARS  
IN MILLIONS

500  
480  
460  
440  
420  
400  
380  
360  
340  
320  
300  
280  
260  
240  
220  
200  
180  
160  
140  
120  
100  
80  
60  
40  
20  
0

Since 1980,  
downtown has  
experienced a  
lot of  
investment



NEW CONSTRUCTION REHAB / RENOVATION STREETS / INFRASTRUCTURE PARKS / OPEN SPACE

but we need to grow a lot more. why?



- >> MORE PEOPLE MEANS WE CAN SUPPORT MORE RETAIL
- >> MORE DEVELOPMENT PROVIDES MONEY TO IMPROVE OUR STREETS AND PUBLIC SPACES
- >> WE WANT PEOPLE TO BE CONFIDENT THAT DOWNTOWN IS MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION – CONFIDENT ENOUGH TO INVEST HERE





## **Many have said they'd like more services downtown – services like:**

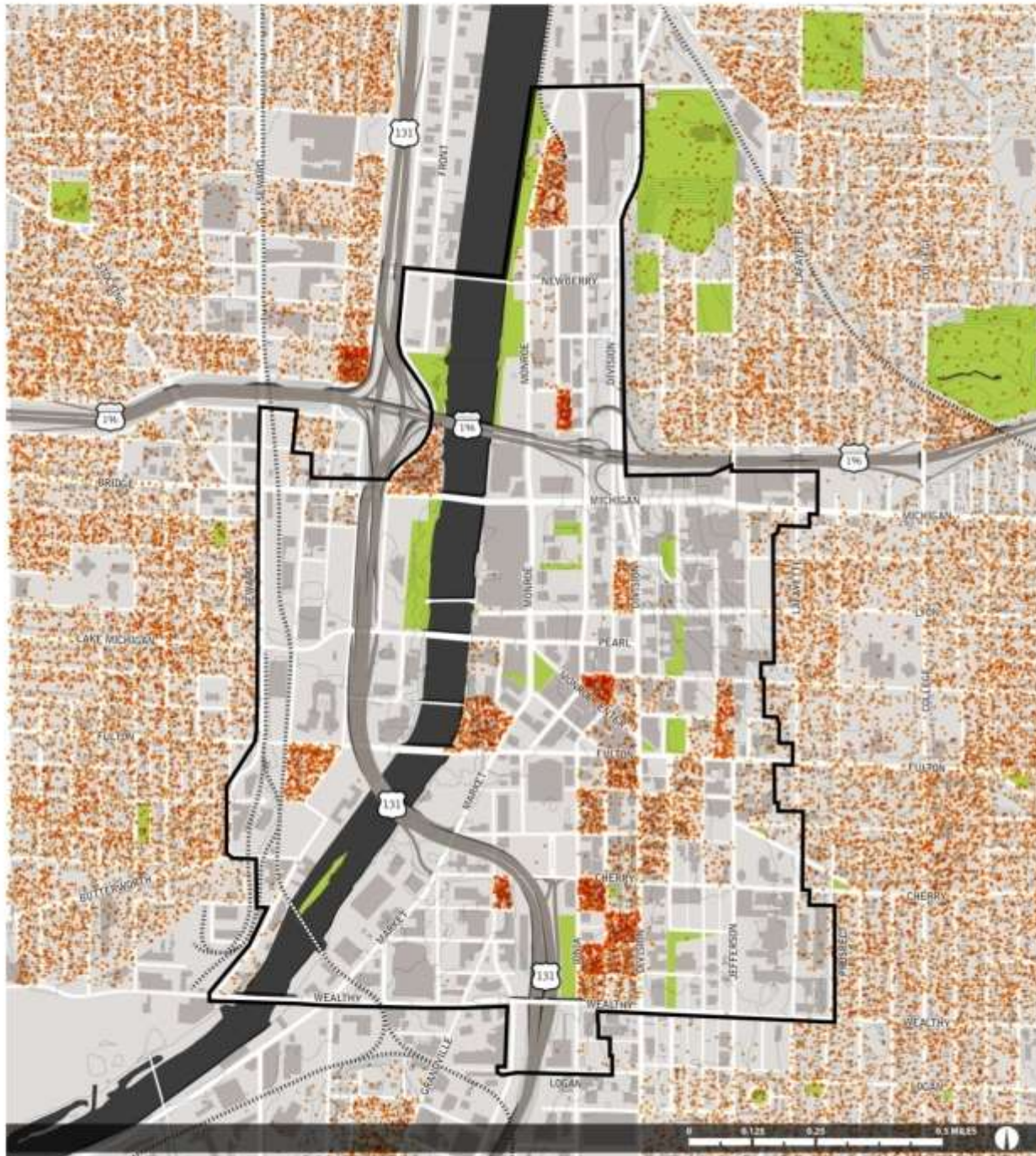
- >> breakfast / lunch places that are open on the weekends**
- >> multiple mini-markets**
- >> CVS / Walgreens urban format model (includes fresh food)**
- >> neighborhood restaurants with neighborhood price points**
- >> dry cleaners / laundries spread throughout and open on weekends**
- >> public space for residents and visitors**

**so how do we get these things? we need more people. downtowns around the country demonstrate that with about 10,000 households downtown, these services are possible.**

# POPULATION

2010 CENSUS - BLOCK LEVEL

**Today there are 5,000 people downtown. You can see from this map that they are concentrated in a few locations**



● = 1 PERSON



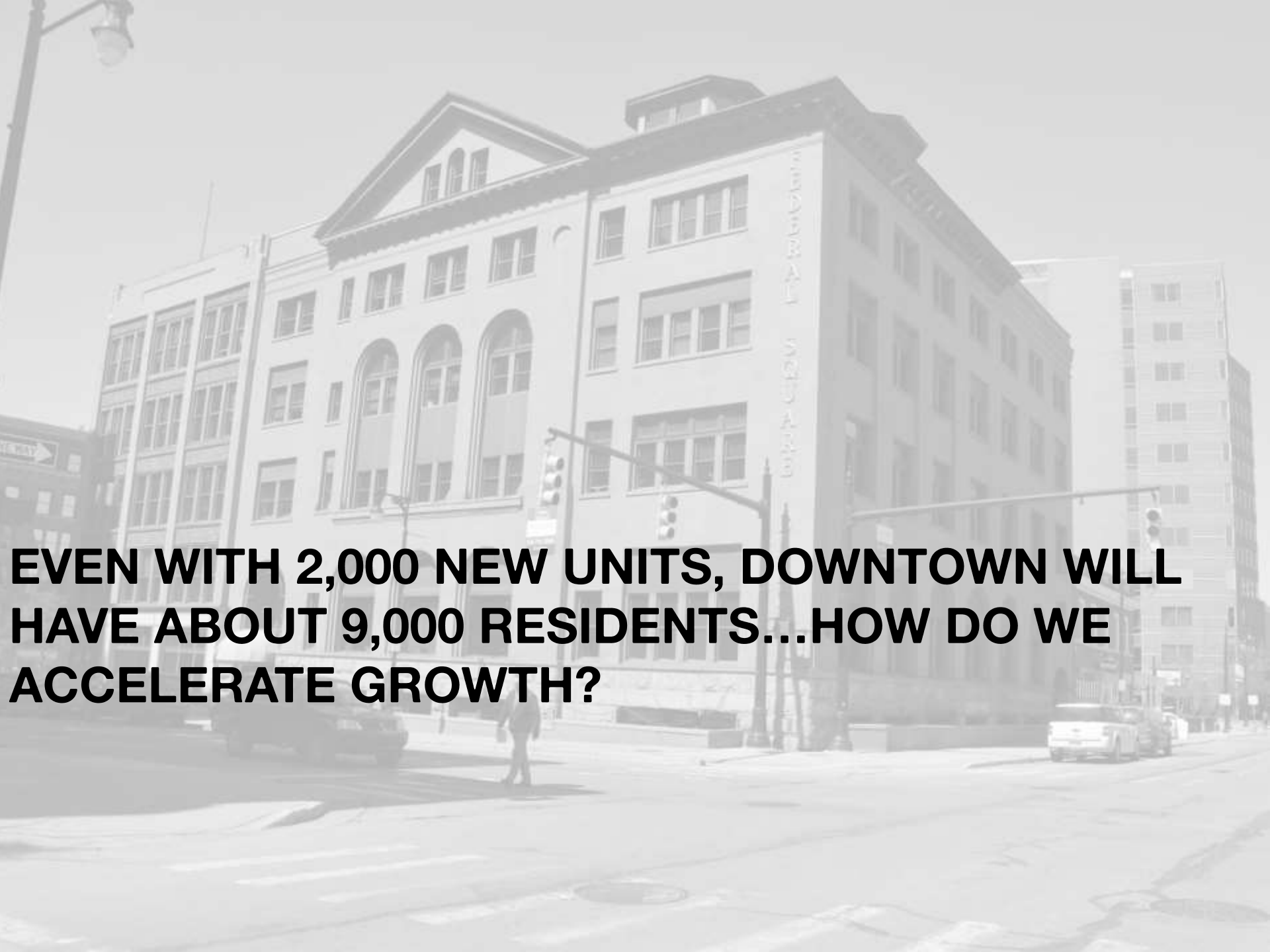
**according to our economist, the  
downtown could support  
approximately 2,000 new housing  
units over the next 5 years. Units  
like:**

**Rental & For-Sale Lofts/Apartments**

**For-Sale Townhouses/Live-Work**

**For-Sale Urban Houses**

**sounds like a lot right?**



**EVEN WITH 2,000 NEW UNITS, DOWNTOWN WILL  
HAVE ABOUT 9,000 RESIDENTS...HOW DO WE  
ACCELERATE GROWTH?**

**WE ALSO NEED TO  
FOCUS ON  
BUSINESS  
ATTRACTION AND  
JOB CREATION**

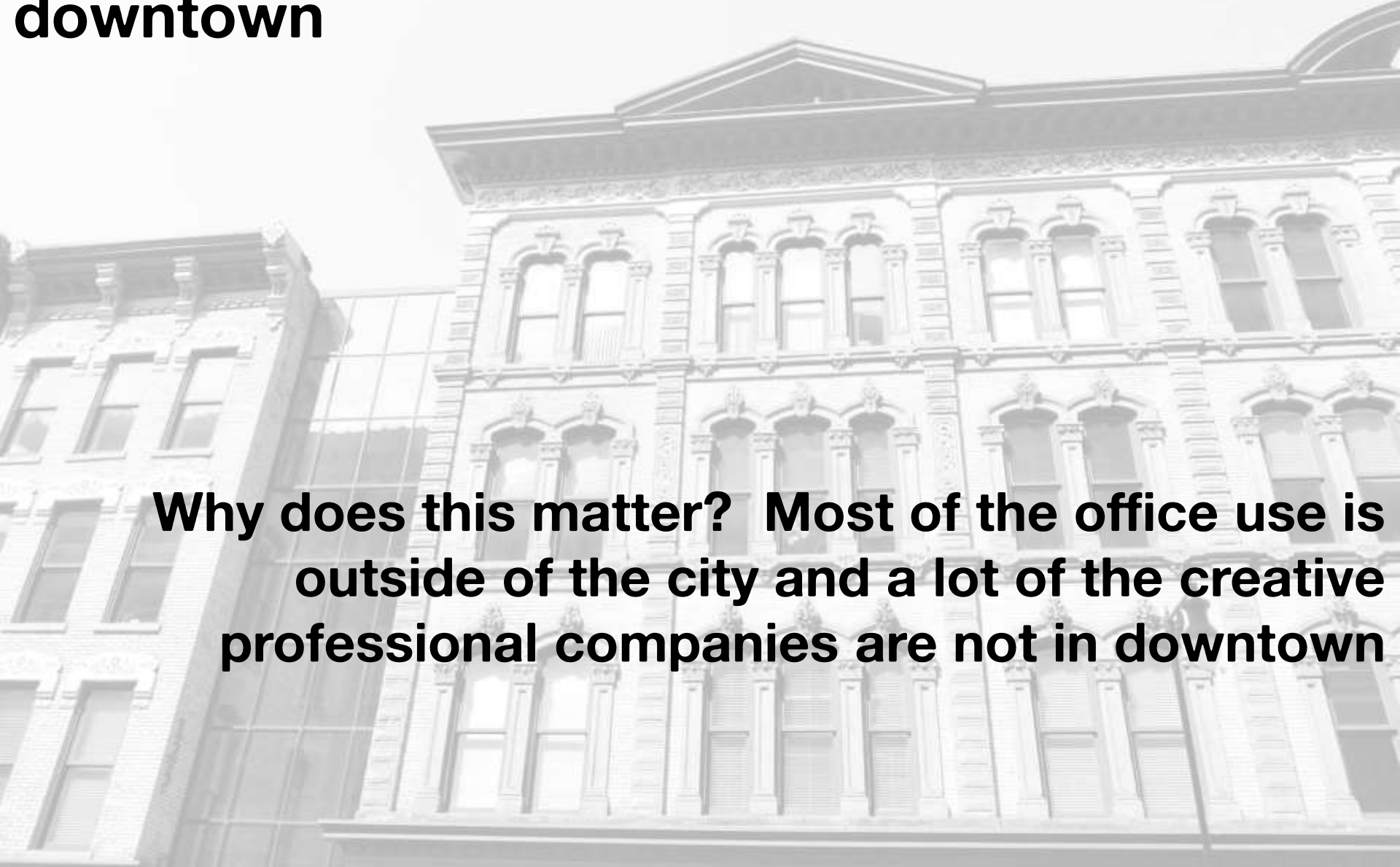




**The downtown is home to a greater concentration (46%) of small to mid-size companies (between 5 and 250 employees) than the metro area (37%)**

**Of those companies where offices are their primary work space, only 16% are located downtown**

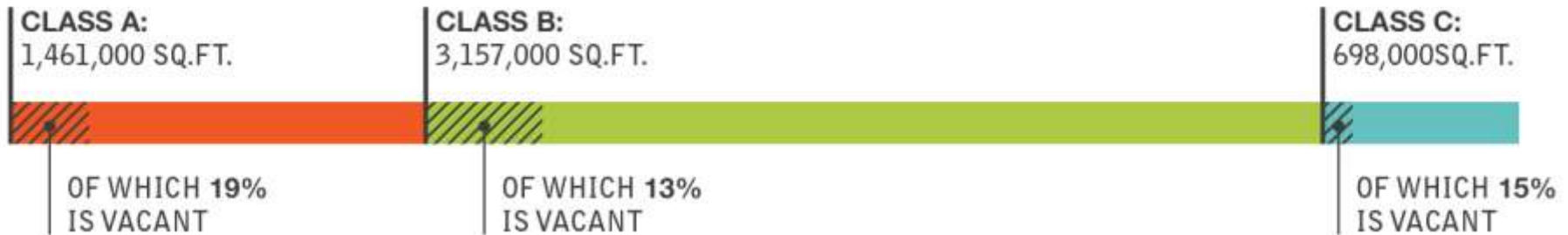
**Why does this matter? Most of the office use is outside of the city and a lot of the creative professional companies are not in downtown**



**It will take 28 quarters (7 years) to fully absorb Grand Rapids' existing downtown office space if the quarterly absorption rate over the last three years continues.**

## OFFICE SPACE VACANCY AND ABSORPTION

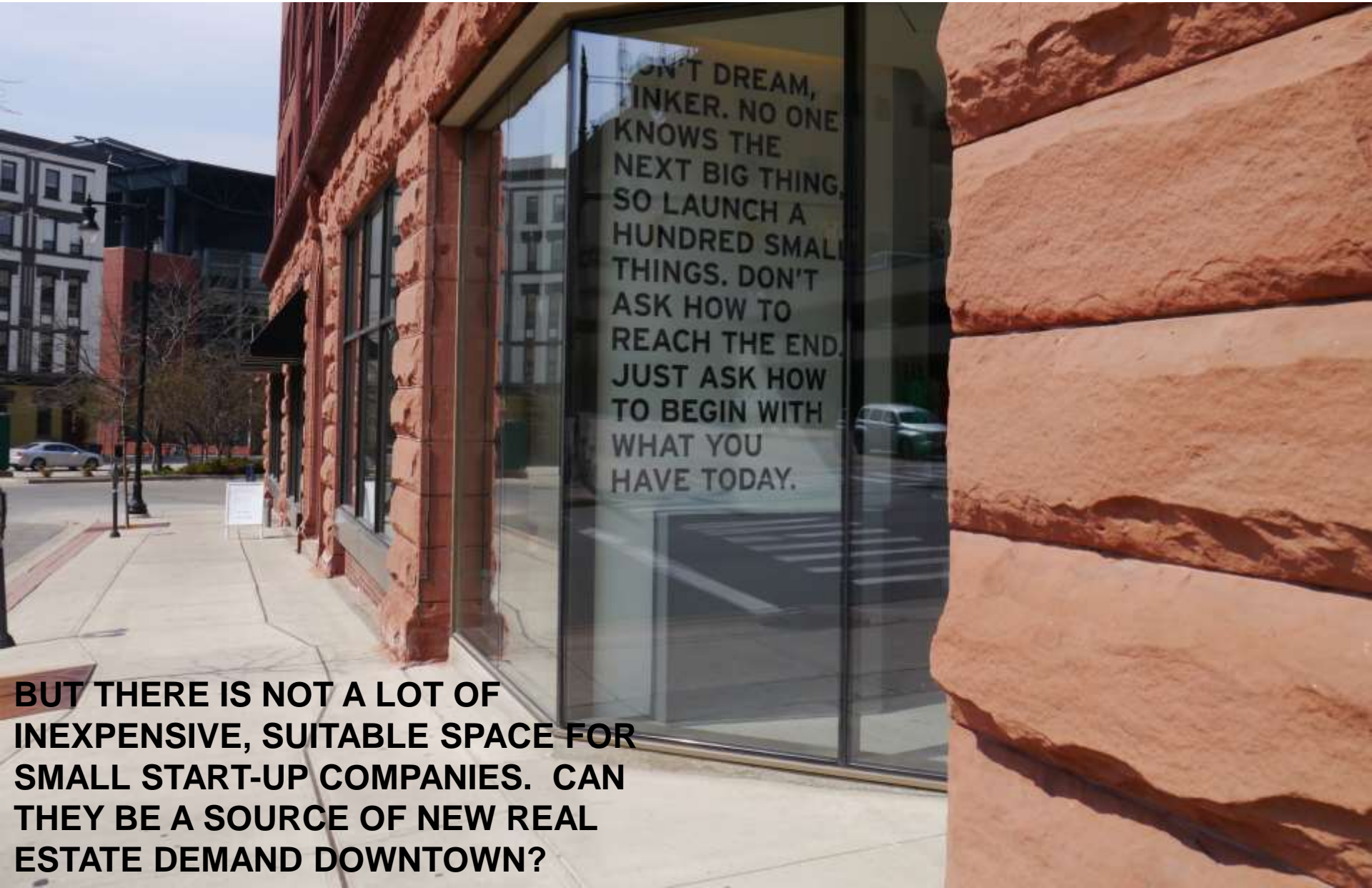
### CBD/DOWNTOWN Q2 2014 OFFICE MARKET



**Why all the vacancy? A lot of the existing space is small, fragmented and not suitable for many businesses.**



**34% of tech start-ups will need a mix of office, research and fabrication space as they grow.**

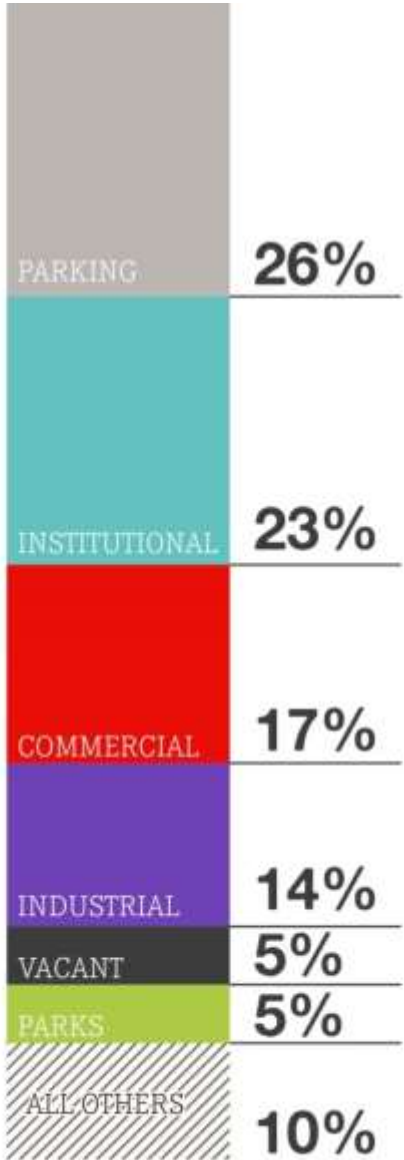


**BUT THERE IS NOT A LOT OF INEXPENSIVE, SUITABLE SPACE FOR SMALL START-UP COMPANIES. CAN THEY BE A SOURCE OF NEW REAL ESTATE DEMAND DOWNTOWN?**

**So where could new housing and new jobs be located?**



Today, almost half of downtown is parking & institutional use



MULTI FAMILY 1-2  
SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL  
COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL  
BICYCLE/TRANSIT  
YARDS  
GARDENS

# Despite office vacancies, there's not a lot of vacant property to develop



-  MARGINAL VACANCY
-  PARTIAL COMMERCIAL VACANCY
-  VACANT BUILDING
-  VACANT LAND

# 3. HOW CAN WE ATTRACT TALENT?



**DOWNTOWN IS A PRODUCT: TO COMPETE,  
PLACEMAKING IS ESSENTIAL**

**This is Paley Park in NYC. It's the kind of space that attracts people and nearby investment. Notice the emphasis on engaging people with water**





**THIS MEANS FOCUSING ON  
CREATING STREETS AND PUBLIC  
SPACES THAT ARE COMFORTABLE  
AND WELCOMING FOR EVERYONE**

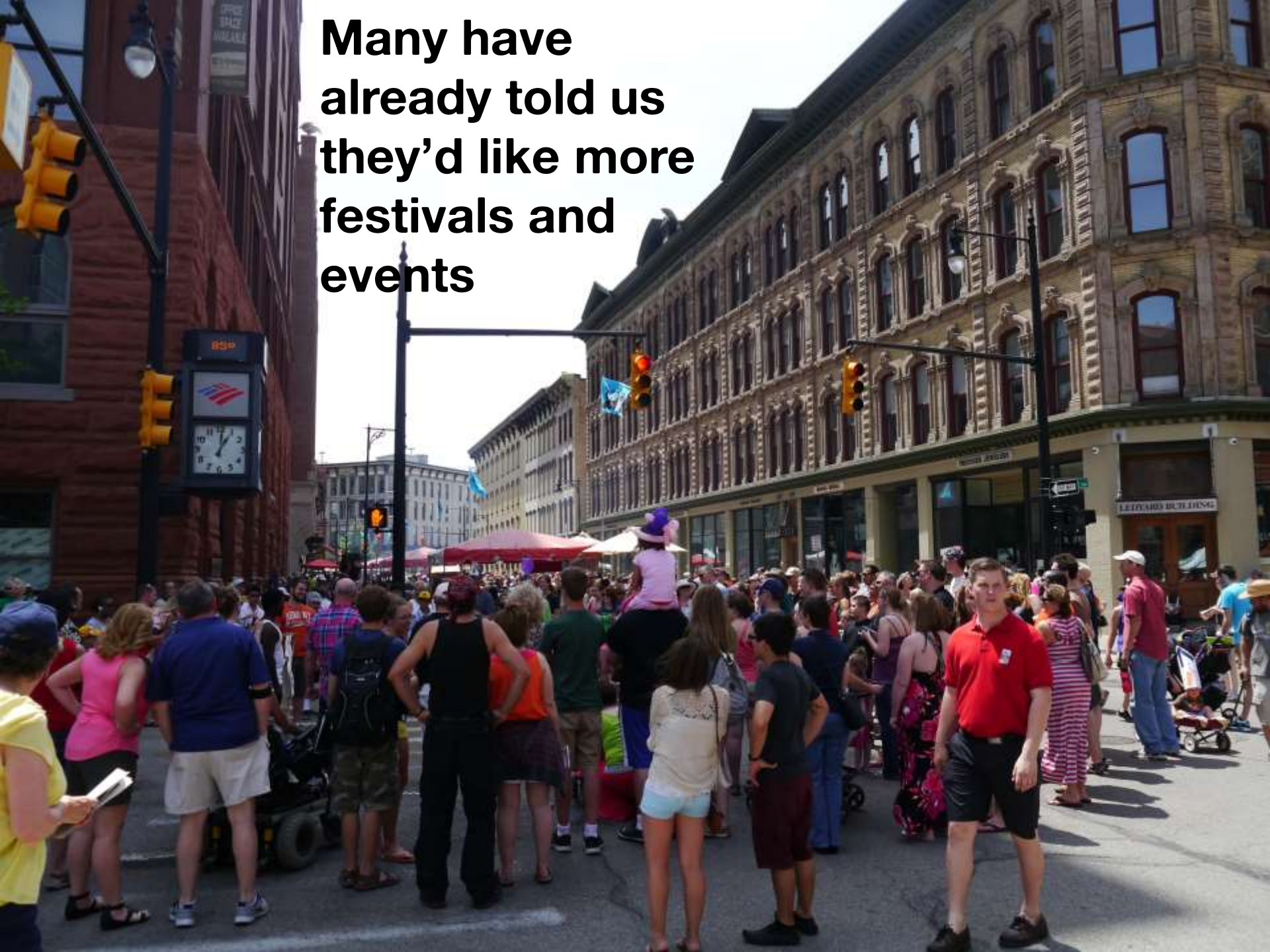


**Sometimes downtown is visibly vacant  
which sends negative messages to  
residents, visitors and potential  
businesses**





**Many have  
already told us  
they'd like more  
festivals and  
events**



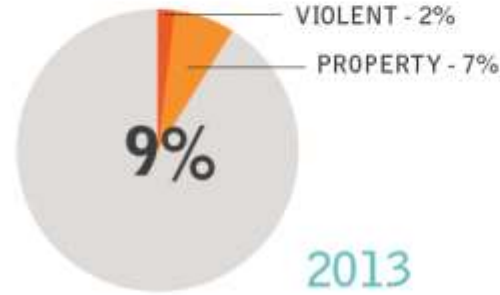




**What about more winter programming?**

**What about crime?**  
**Overall, crime downtown accounts for 9% of the City's total and has declined since 2009**

% OF CITYWIDE PART 1 CRIME IN DOWNTOWN



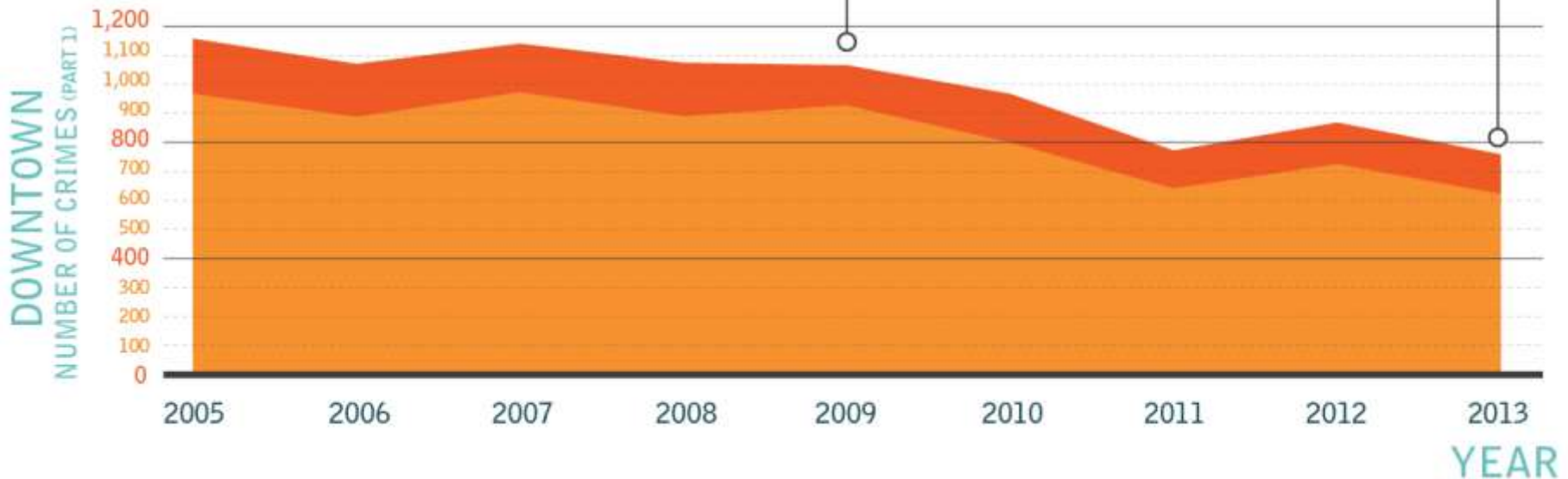
PART 1 CRIMES  
VIOLENT  
PROPERTY

SINCE 2009 DOWNTOWN HAS SEEN A **29% DROP** IN PART 1 CRIMES

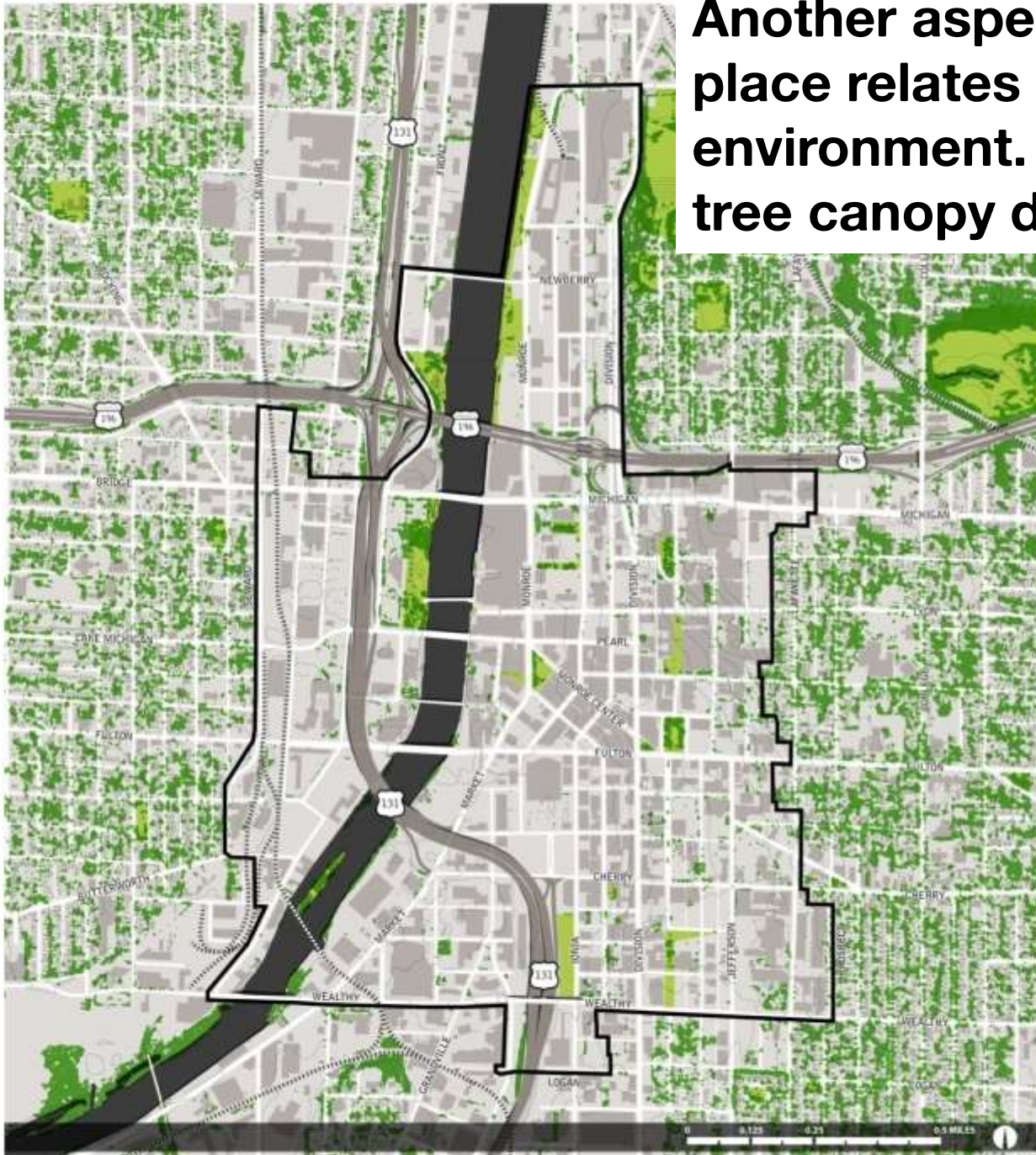
VS. A **20% DROP** CITYWIDE

139 VIOLENT  
928 PROPERTY

136 VIOLENT  
626 PROPERTY



Another aspect of creating a great place relates to the natural environment. We have a limited tree canopy downtown



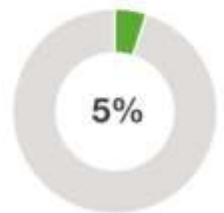
GRAND RAPIDS:  
**28,977** ACRES

TREE CANOPY:  
**10,029** ACRES



DOWNTOWN:  
**899** ACRES

TREE CANOPY:  
**47** ACRES



- PARKS
- TREE CANOPY

A vibrant city street scene on a sunny day. In the foreground, a woman in a light blue shirt and dark pants pushes a shopping cart with a floral bag. To her right, a food cart with a glass display case is being attended to by a woman in a green shirt. The street is lined with mature trees that create a lush canopy. In the background, a dark van with "105.3 HOT" branding is parked, and a person in a green shirt is standing near it. A black lamppost stands in the middle ground. On the left, a building with a large awning and a sign that says "WHO DO YOU LOVE?" is visible. The overall atmosphere is bright and lively.

**A healthy tree canopy creates these kinds of attractive streets**

## And what about parks?

in downtown Grand Rapids, there are approximately

**6.4 ACRES OF PARKLAND  
PER 1,000 RESIDENTS**

based on an estimated population of 5,000 residents



**For comparison, the median for the 100 largest cities is 12.4 acres per 1,000 residents. WE'LL NEED TO PLAN FOR NEW OPEN SPACES GOING FORWARD**



# **4. HOW DO WE IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY?**

**...WITHIN DOWNTOWN AND TO THE RIVER**

A street-level view of a downtown area. On the left is a tall, light-colored concrete building with a grid-like facade. On the right is a multi-story brick building with blue-tinted windows. A dark blue car is in the foreground on the right, and a silver SUV is further down the road on the left. The sky is clear and blue. The text "BALANCED STREETS" ARE BRINGING ECONOMIC BENEFITS TO DOWNTOWNS ACROSS THE COUNTRY is overlaid at the bottom.

**“BALANCED STREETS” ARE  
BRINGING ECONOMIC BENEFITS  
TO DOWNTOWNS ACROSS THE  
COUNTRY**

# STUDY AREA COMPOSITION

Today, a lot of downtown's area is dedicated to streets, highways and parking

BUILDINGS  
**25%**  
202 ACRES



PARKING LOTS  
+ RAMPS  
**20%**  
167 ACRES



PARKS  
**4%**  
32 ACRES




STREETS &  
HIGHWAYS  
**22%**  
178 ACRES





“WHY WOULDN'T YOU WALK AROUND DOWNTOWN. IF YOU CAN SEE THE BUILDING, WALK TO IT.”

**The opportunity is to make downtown more walkable which, as other cities have seen, reduces traffic**



**“Walkability” or what encourages people to walk is closely related to street activity. Do the streets feel active and safe? Streets like this one, with active storefronts and trees encourage walking.**

# ACTIVE STREET FRONTAGE

INTERFACE - STUDIO FIELD SURVEY

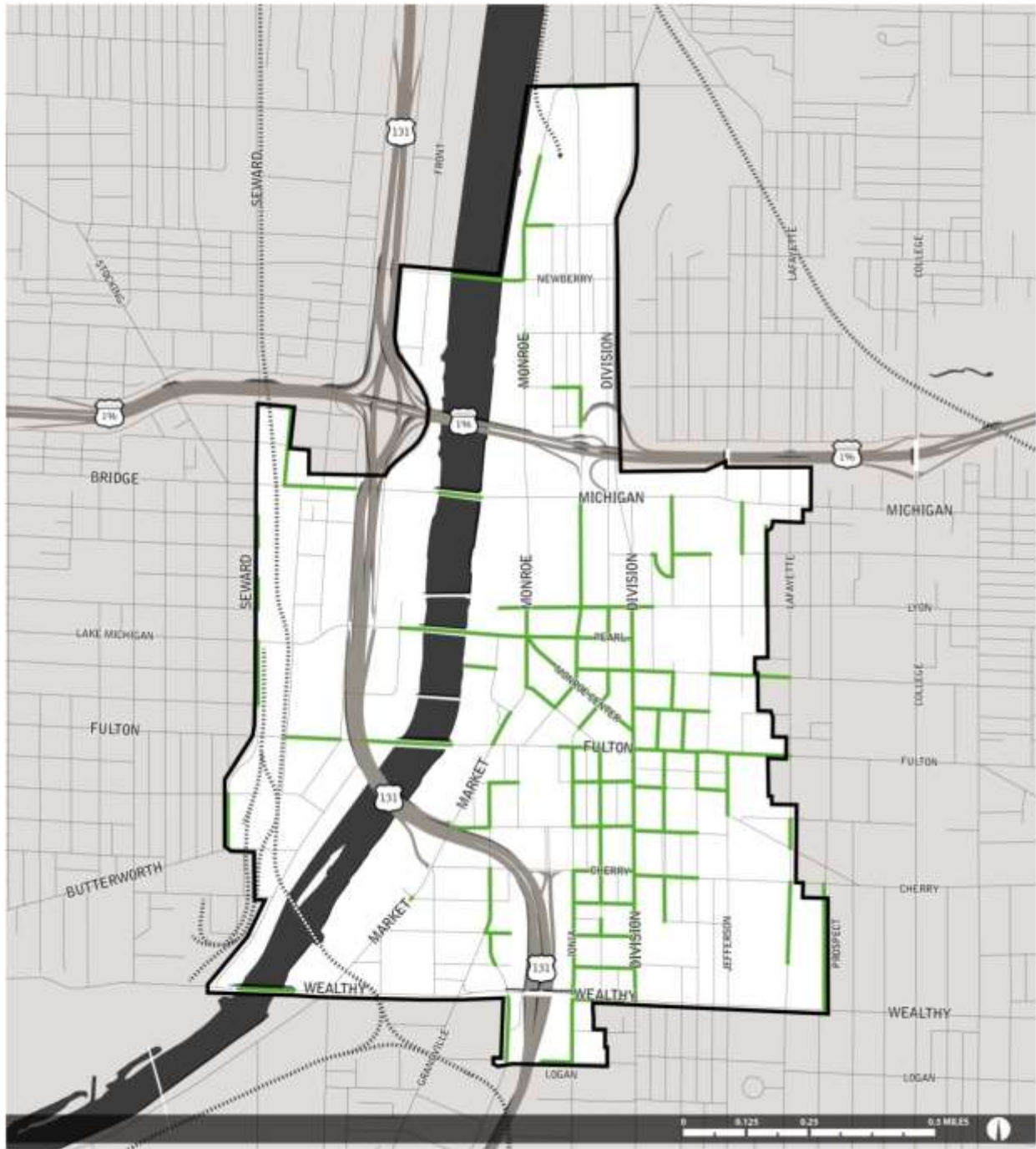
**STREET SEGMENTS DOWNTOWN:**

**493** TOTAL

**180** ACTIVE



**From our analysis, these are the “active” streets downtown – they have open storefronts and street amenities**



— ACTIVE STREET FRONTAGE

**In other cases, there are streets lined with empty storefronts, parking lots / ramps, fences and blank walls. We call these inactive frontages**



# INACTIVE STREET FRONTAGE

INTERFACE - STUDIO FIELD SURVEY

STREET  
SEGMENTS  
DOWNTOWN:

493 TOTAL

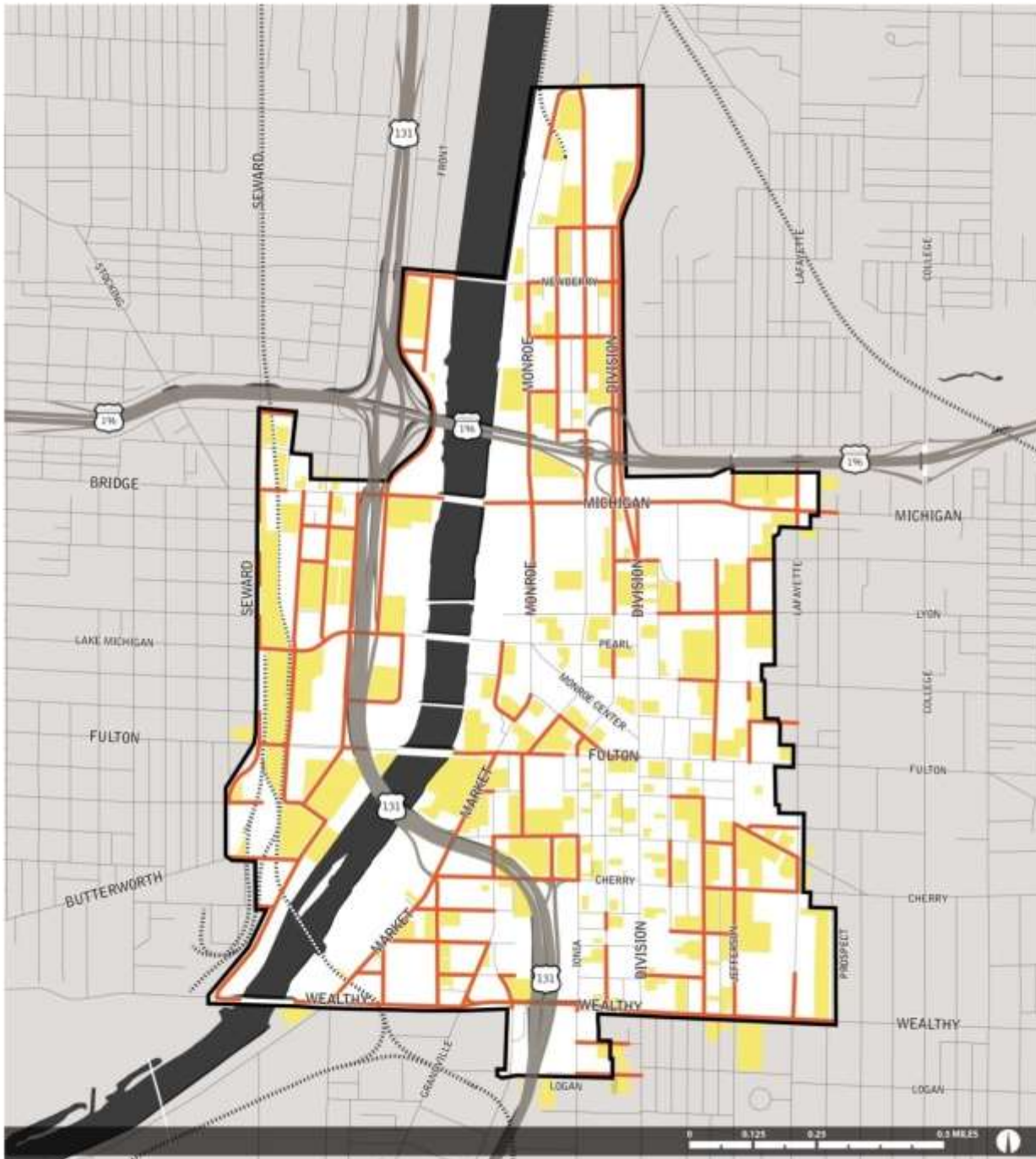
313 INACTIVE



From our analysis, these are the “inactive” streets downtown – streets with blank walls, parking lots / ramps or vacant properties

— INACTIVE STREET FRONTAGE

■ PARKING LOT / STRUCTURE

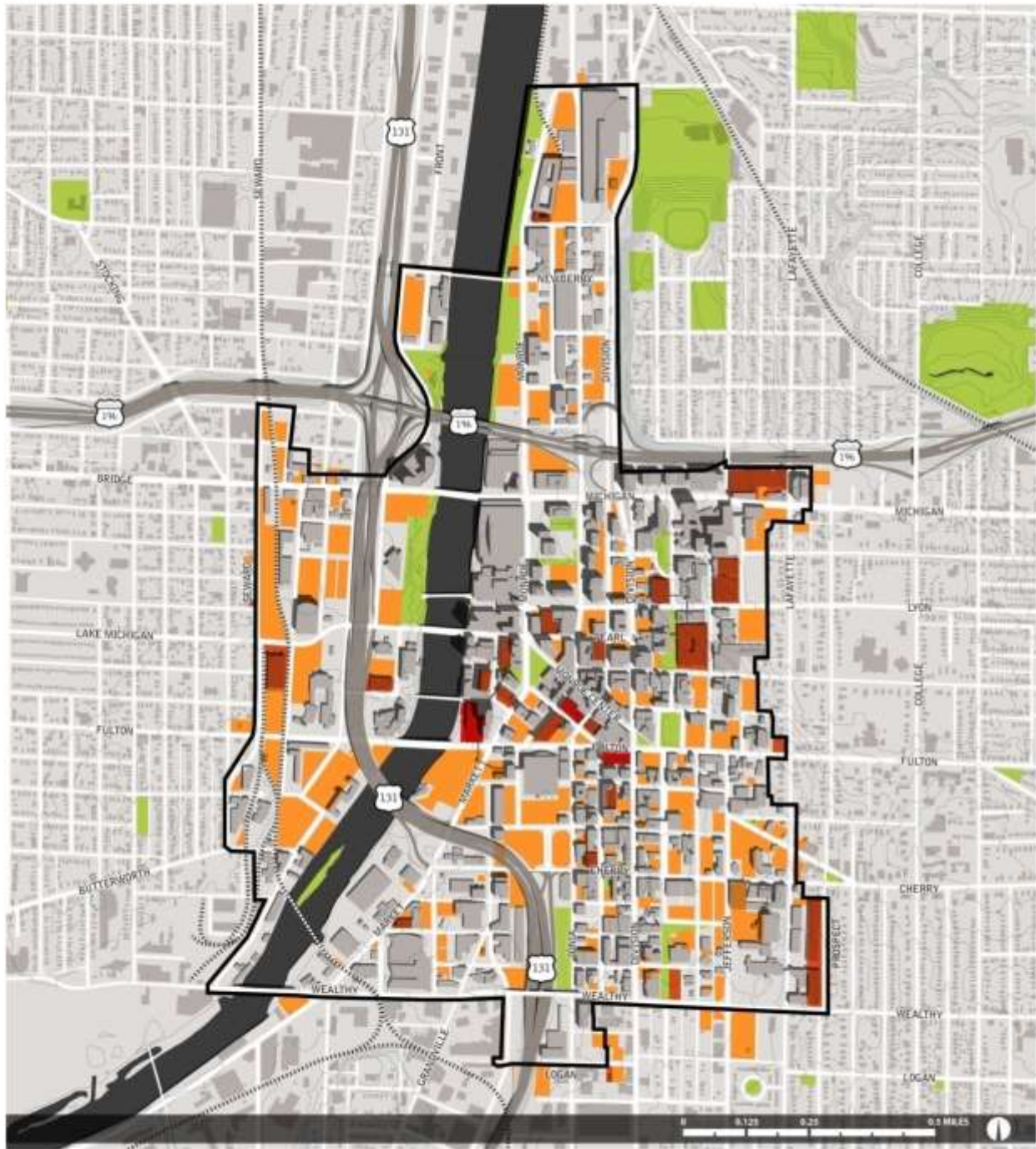






**And what about parking?**

This map shows all of the existing parking downtown. It's 171 acres of land.

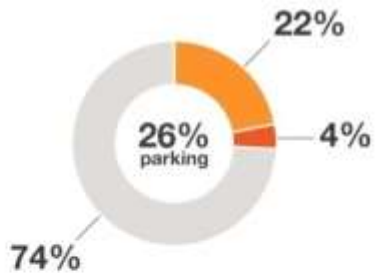


PARCELS / DEVELOPABLE LAND: **649** ACRES

PARKING LOTS: **141** ACRES

PARKING RAMPS: **26** ACRES

MIXED-USE PARKING RAMPS: **4** ACRES



-  PARKING LOT
-  PARKING RAMP
-  MIXED-USE PARKING RAMP

# TOTAL NUMBER OF PARKING SPACES DOWNTOWN

DESMAN ASSOCIATES SURVEY

TYPE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	TOTAL
RAMP	4,336	9,688	14,024
SURFACE LOT	2,479	2,095	4,574
ON-STREET	1,800	-	1,800
TOTAL	8,615	11,783	20,398

**Our study shows that there are over 20,000 spaces available to the public - I.E., spaces that are not dedicated for a hotel or private use.**

# DOWNTOWN PARKING UTILIZATION RATE

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DESMAN ASSOCIATES SURVEY

>> ALL OFF-STREET PEAK: **65.2%**

>> ON-STREET (WEEKDAY): **58.4%**  
ON-STREET (WEEKEND EVENING): **95%**

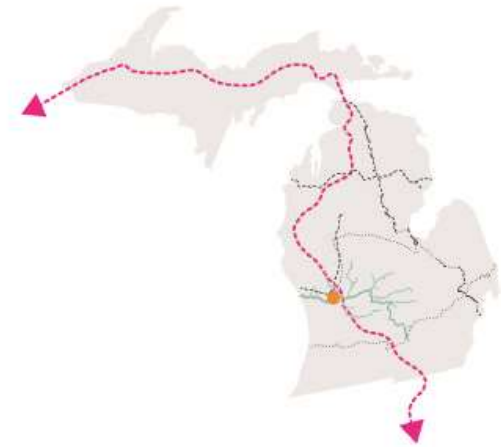
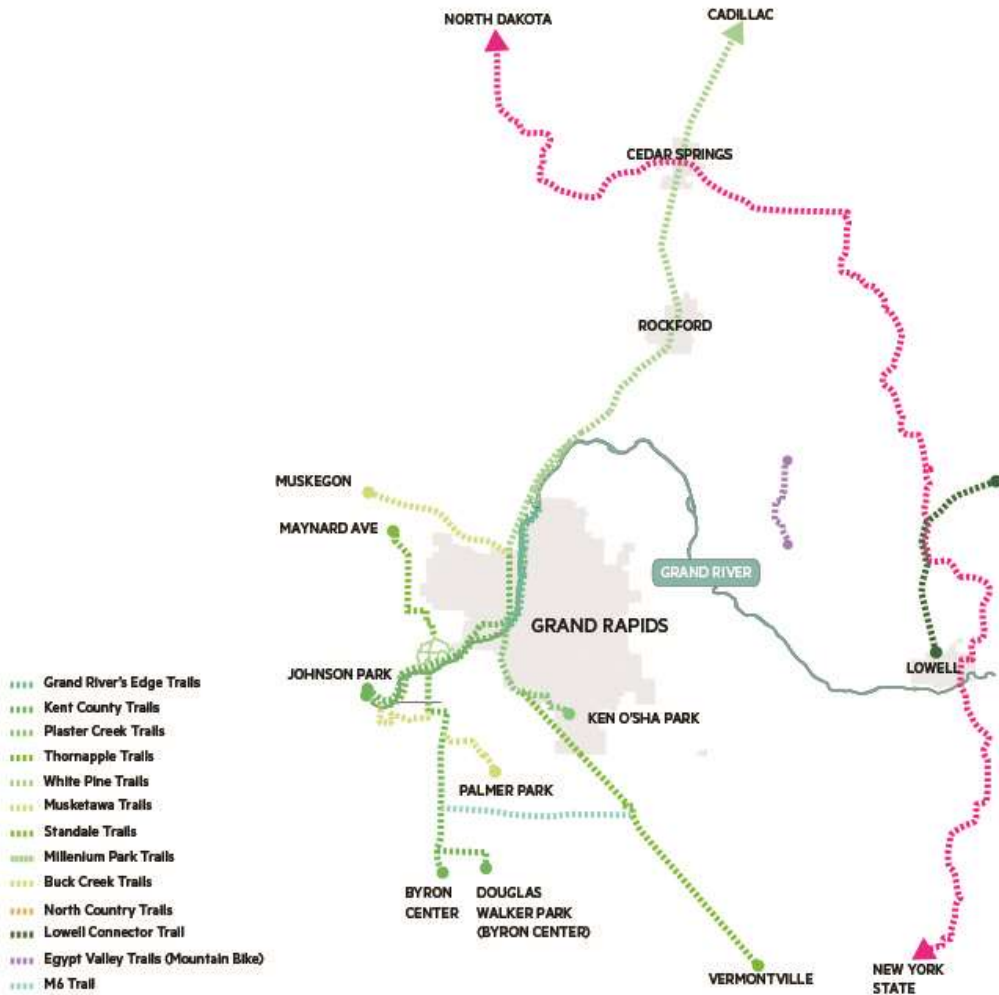
**During peak times, the average utilization is 65%. This means that 35% of spaces are not used during peak times downtown.**

**For on-street parking, the utilization is high on the weekends because the spaces are not enforced.**

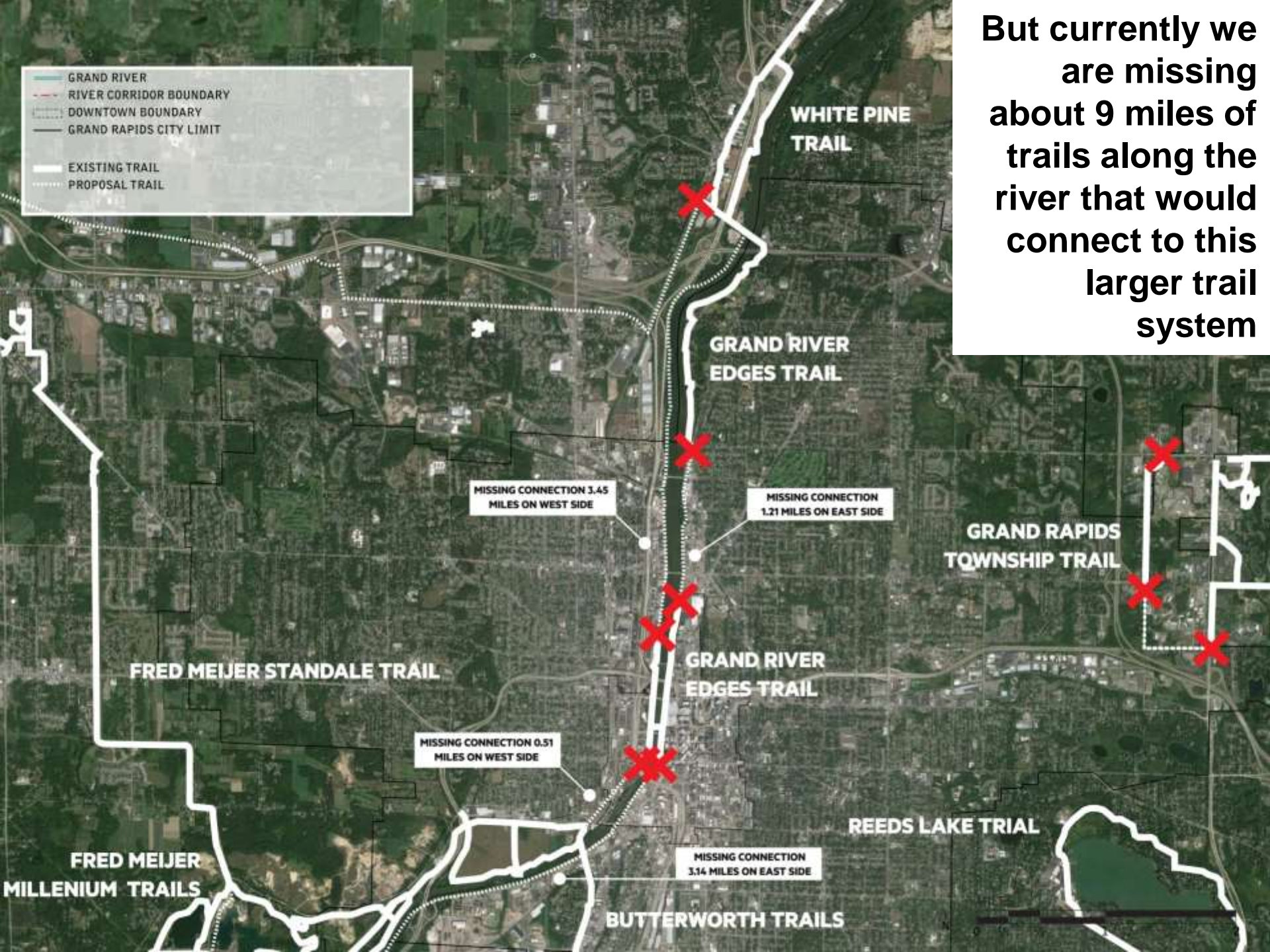


**WHAT ABOUT ACCESS TO AND ALONG THE RIVER? TRAILS ARE AN IMPORTANT TRANSPORTATION ASSET.**

# There is potential to link into a regional and national trail system that already exists



**But currently we are missing about 9 miles of trails along the river that would connect to this larger trail system**



- GRAND RIVER
- RIVER CORRIDOR BOUNDARY
- DOWNTOWN BOUNDARY
- GRAND RAPIDS CITY LIMIT
- EXISTING TRAIL
- PROPOSAL TRAIL

MISSING CONNECTION 3.45 MILES ON WEST SIDE

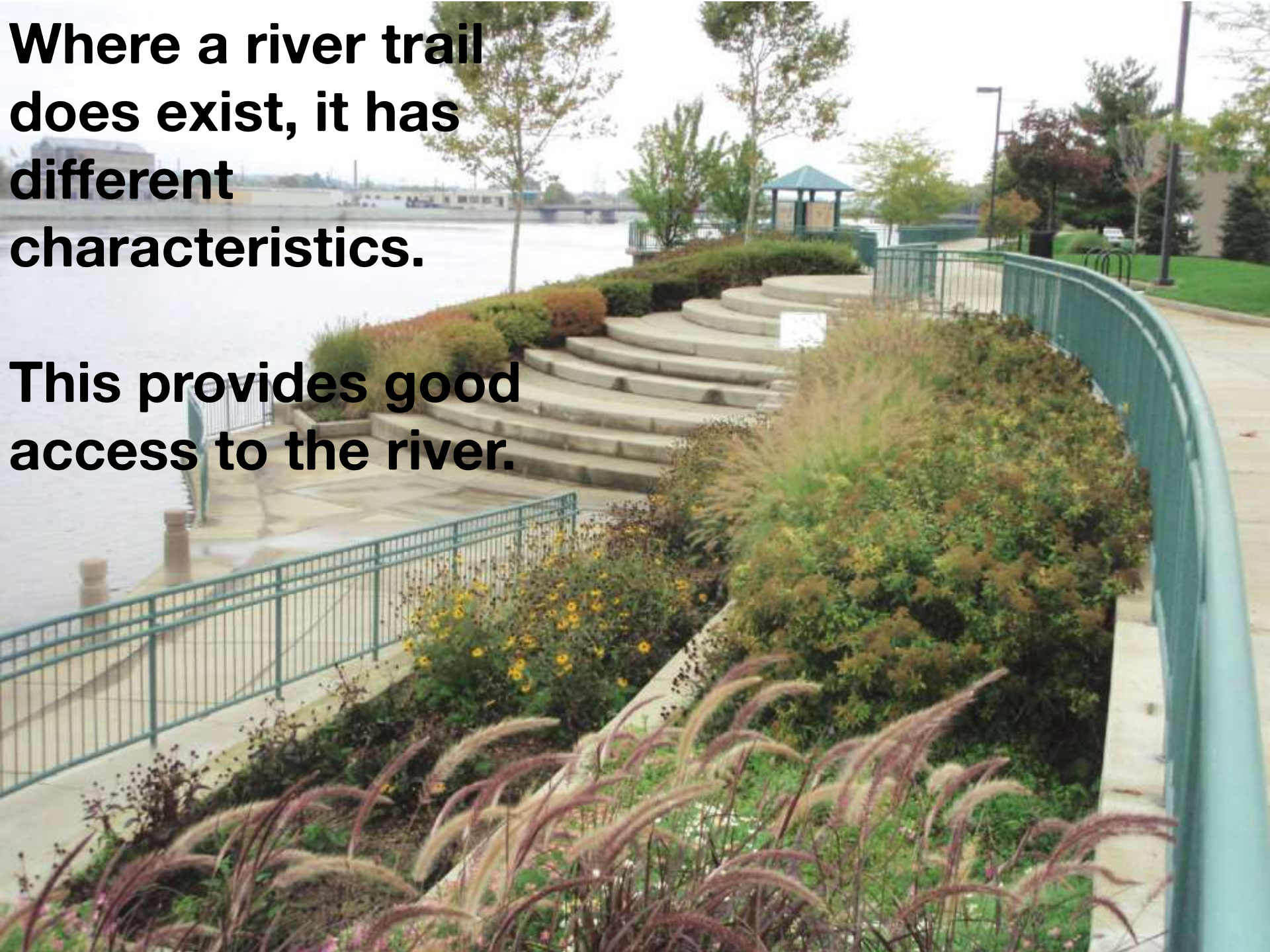
MISSING CONNECTION 1.21 MILES ON EAST SIDE

MISSING CONNECTION 0.51 MILES ON WEST SIDE

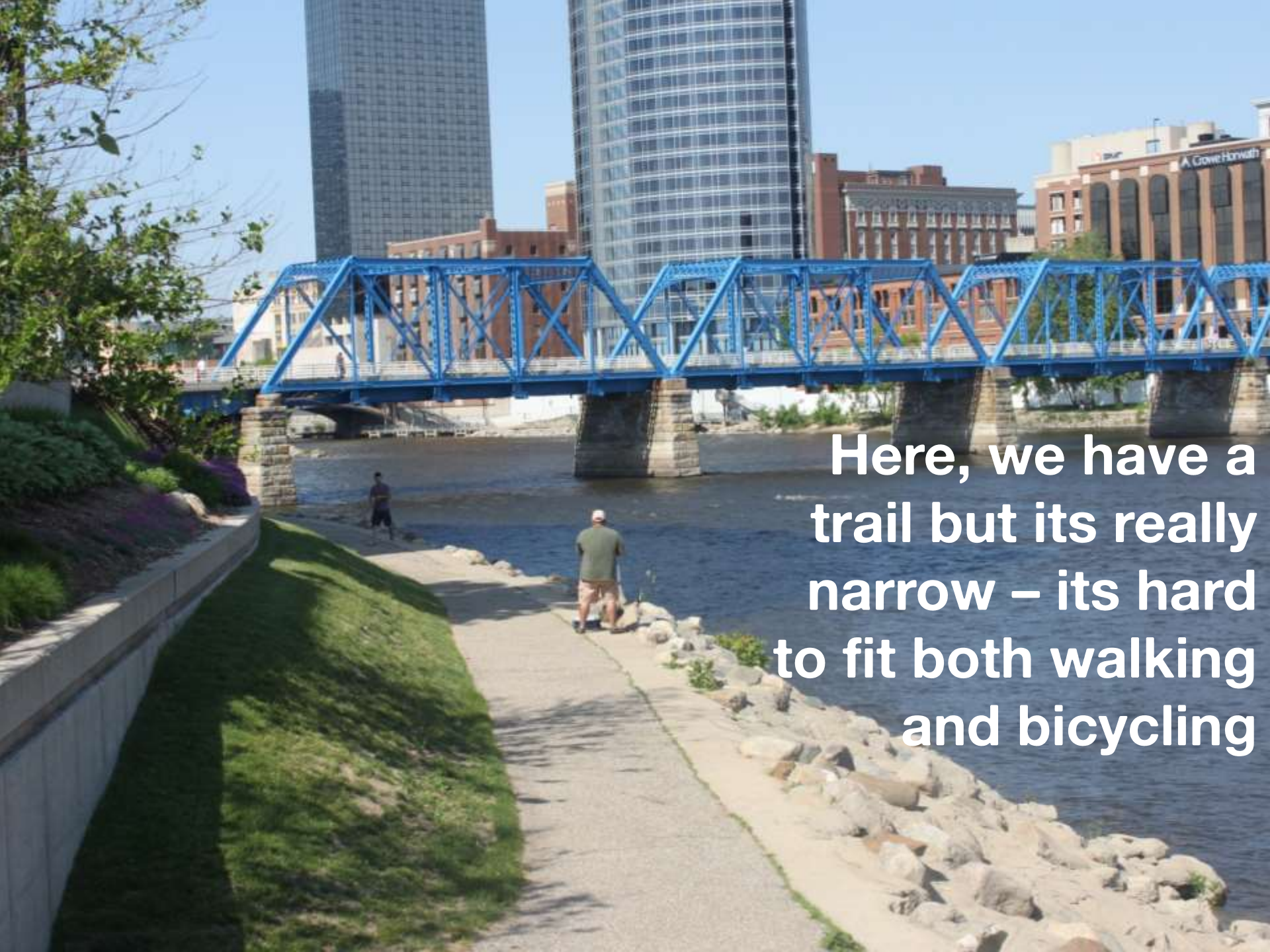
MISSING CONNECTION 3.14 MILES ON EAST SIDE

**Where a river trail  
does exist, it has  
different  
characteristics.**

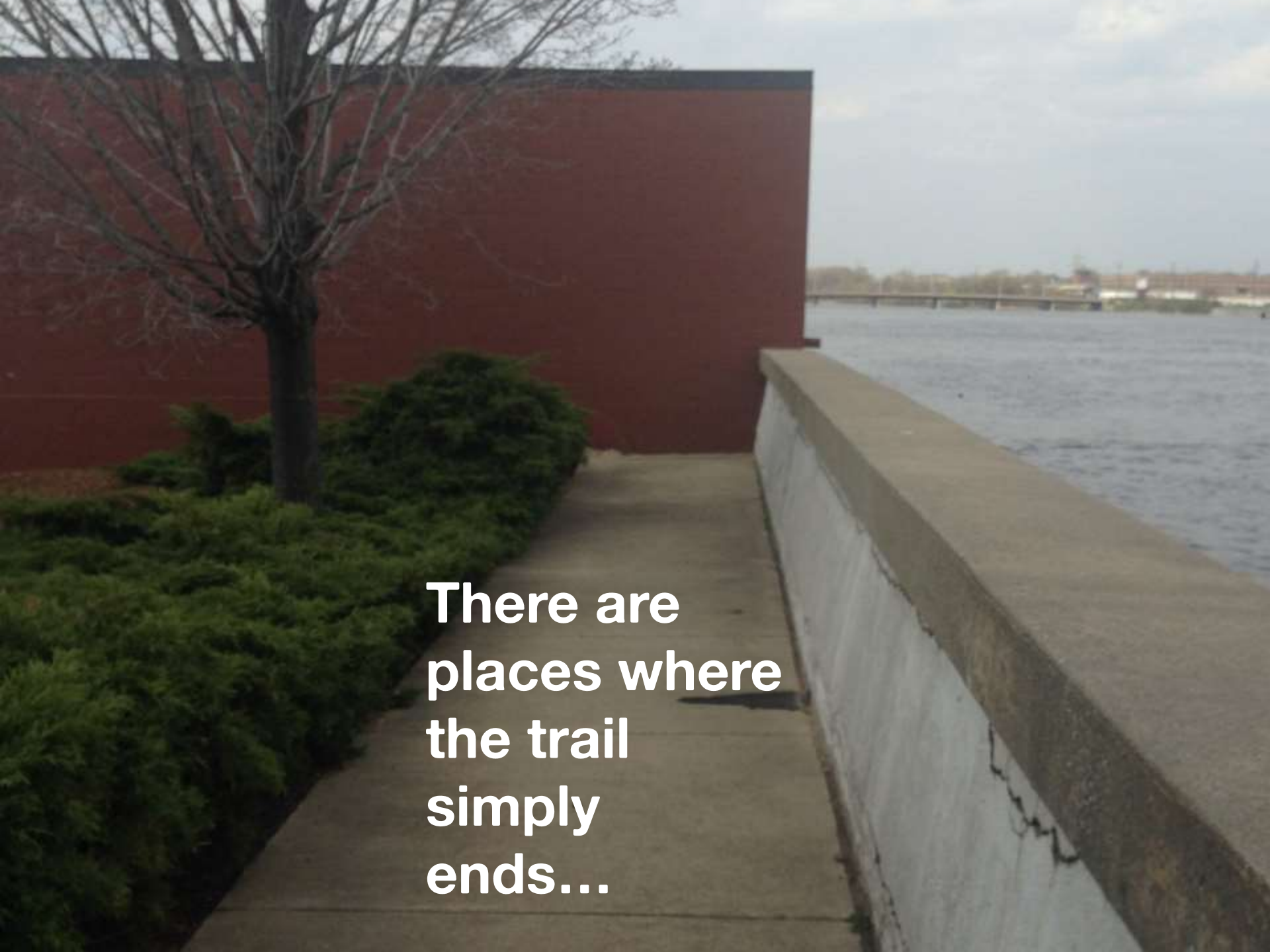
**This provides good  
access to the river.**







**Here, we have a trail but its really narrow – its hard to fit both walking and bicycling**

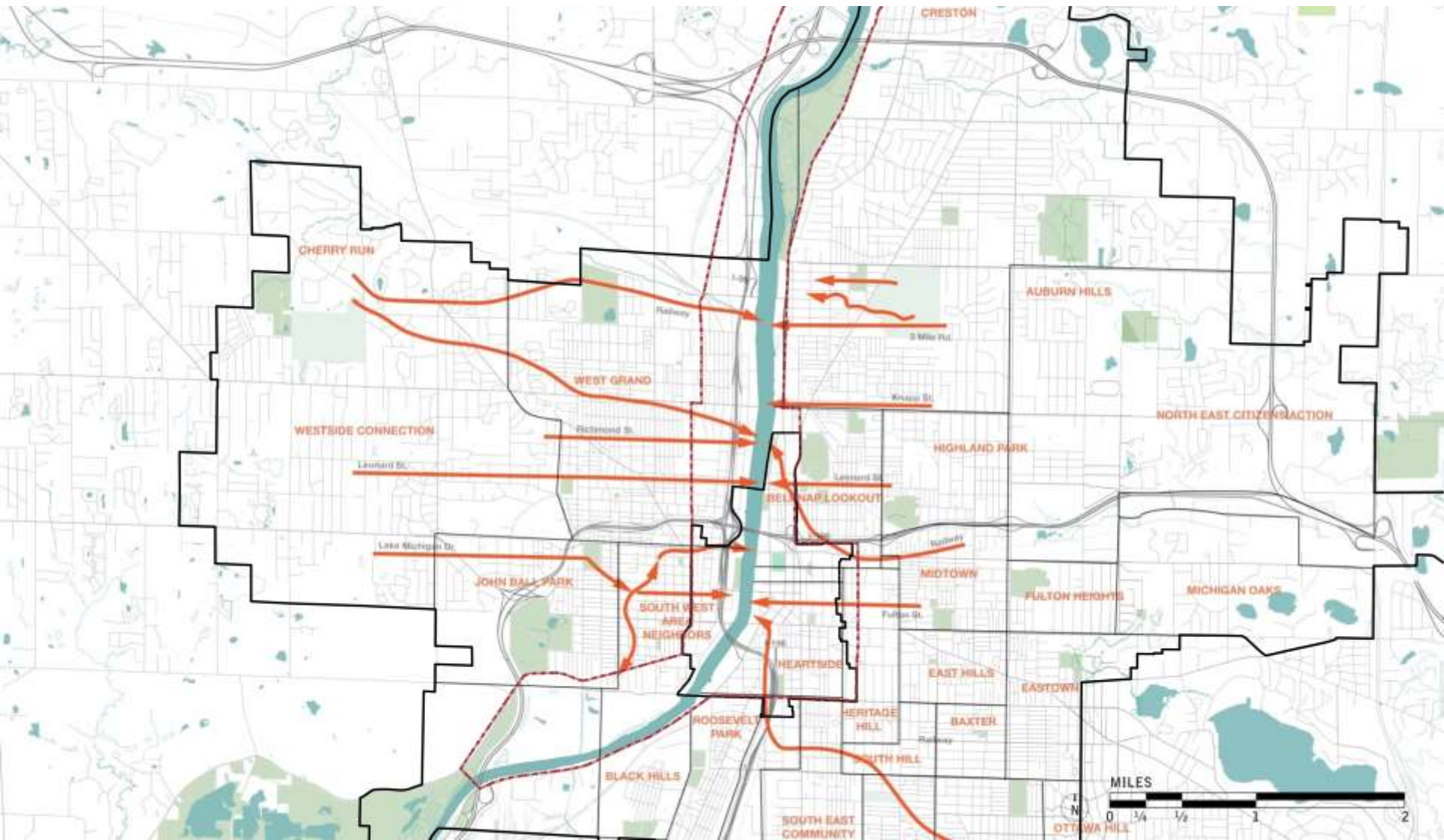
A photograph showing a concrete path that ends abruptly at a low concrete wall. To the left of the path is a large, leafless tree and some green shrubs. In the background, there is a large red brick building. To the right of the wall is a wide river. In the distance, a bridge and some buildings are visible across the water. The sky is overcast.

**There are  
places where  
the trail  
simply  
ends...**

**...and where there is no  
current riverfront access**



**Its not just about a trail but how neighborhoods access the river. This map represents some potential connections using either existing roads or abandoned rail lines. The River should be a true amenity for all Grand Rapidians**



**So what do you  
think? GR  
Forward is so  
important to the  
City's future and  
we need your help**



downtown

[www.downtown.com](http://www.downtown.com)

WHAT'S YOUR  
BIG IDEA for grand  
rapids?



### MAP OF ACTIVITIES

- 1: GRAND RAPIDS TODAY
- 2: MAP OUR FUTURE
- 3: DOWNTOWN
- 4: RIVER CORRIDOR
- 5: TELL US ABOUT YOU
- 6: FILL IN THE BLANK



**This is your checklist of activities, the more you tell us, the better this strategy will be and the more impact it will have. Have a question? Ask anyone with a GR Forward shirt on.**

**DIDN'T GET A CHANCE TO TELL US SOMETHING IMPORTANT?  
WRITE ANY ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS, IDEAS, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS  
ON THE BACK OF THIS CARD.**

**THANKS!**

# THANK YOU!

