MONROE NORTH AREA SPECIFIC PLAN

FINAL REPORT
June 2007

Funded by
Monroe North Tax Increment Financing Authority
Grand Rapids Smart Zone
Grand Rapids Community Foundation

Prepared by
JJR, LLC
110 Miller Avenue
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Table of Contents

	PAGE
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	i
INTRODUCTION	1-2
THE MONROE NORTH DISTRICT	1
PURPOSE OF STUDY	1
PARTICIPANTS	2
PROCESS	2
REPORT ORGANIZATION	3
FRAMEWORK PLAN	4-25
BACKROUND	4
RECOMMENDATIONS	20
INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS	26-31
BACKGROUND	26
RECOMMENDATIONS	31
STREETSCAPE CONCEPT	32-39
BACKGROUND	32
RECOMMENDATIONS	33
APPENDICES	40-41

Figures

Figure 1: Study Area	1
Figure 2: Current Zoning	4
Figure 3: Existing Land Use	4
Figure 4: Village Mixed Use Center	5
Figure 5: A Possible Scenario (Land Use)	6
Figure 6: Revised Land Use Approach	7
Figure 7: Street Network	8
Figure 8: Connecting to Michigan Hill	9
Figure 9: Existing Transit Routes	9
Figure 10: Ownership Patterns	10
Figures 11 & 12: Maximum Potential Building Heights With Current Zoning	12
Figures 13 & 14: Maximum Potential Building Heights With North-South Scenario	13
Figures 15 & 16: Maximum Potential Building Heights With East-West Scenario	14
Figures 17 & 18: Maximum Potential Building Heights With Hybrid Scenario	15
Figure 19: Upper Story Massing	16
Figure 20: Upper Story Massing – View of Trowbridge St.	17
Figure 21: Upper Story Massing – City of Vancouver	17
Figure 22: Pedestrian Priority Streets: Architecture	18
Figure 23: Pedestrian Priority Streets: Parking Restrictions	19
Figure 24: Infrastructure: Street Network	26
Figure 25: Infrastructure: Utilities	27
Figure 26: Communications Infrastructure	28

Table of Contents

(Continued)

	PAGE
Figure 27: Five Year Capital Improvement Projects	28
Figure 28: Infrastructure: Other	29
Figure 29: Smart Zone, Monroe North TIFA, Renaissance Zone	30
Figure 30: Infrastructure Improvements: Priorities, Funding, Phasing	31
Figure 31: Streetscape: Existing Conditions	32
Figure 32: Streetscape: Street Types	33
Figure 33: Streetscape: Street Modifications	34
Figure 34: Streetscape: Sidewalk Zones	35
Figure 35: Streetscape: North/South Streets Curb Extension	35
Figure 36: Streetscape: North/South Streets Paving Detail	36
Figure 37: Streetscape: North/South Option Typical Street Section	36
Figure 38: Streetscape: North/South Option Paving Detail	37
Figure 39: Streetscape: East/West Streets Typical Street Section	37
Figure 40: Streetscape: East/West Streets Paving Detail	38
Figure 41: Streetscape: City Street Lighting Standards	38

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Monroe North Area Specific Plan* provides recommendations for land use, circulation, parking and development character that build and expand on the objectives and policies of the Grand Rapids *Master Plan* (adopted 2002). These recommendations are presented in the Framework Plan section of the report. Recommendations for infrastructure improvements and a streetscape concept are also presented.

The *Monroe North Area Specific Plan* recommendations were developed with the participation of a 10-member Steering Committee. Seven committee meetings were held to review issues and opportunities; define objectives; discuss alternatives and reach consensus on recommendations. Two stakeholder meetings were also held to gather input on issues and opportunities and preliminary Framework Plan recommendations.

The plan recommendations presented in this report will be reviewed by the Monroe North Tax Increment Financing Authority Board and the Smart Zone Board before being forwarded to the Planning Commission and City Commission for review and action. Ultimately, the *Monroe North Area Specific Plan* will be adopted as an amendment to the City's *Master Plan* to guide land use, development and public improvements within the district.

INTRODUCTION

THE MONROE NORTH DISTRICT

The District
Monroe North, located on the riverfront to the north of downtown Grand Rapids, has been one of the city's most dynamic areas for the past decade. Multistory industrial buildings have been adaptively re-used for a mix of office, residential, retail and restaurants. Important investments have been made in creating riverfront parks and re-designing Monroe Street as a boulevard. The construction of new mid-rise residential buildings is currently underway. While a significant percentage of the district is currently zoned for light industrial and heavy commercial uses, land values are increasing, and a continuing transition from industrial to mixed-use development is anticipated. Over time, this transition is expected to yield a much greater density of development than exists in the Monroe North district today.

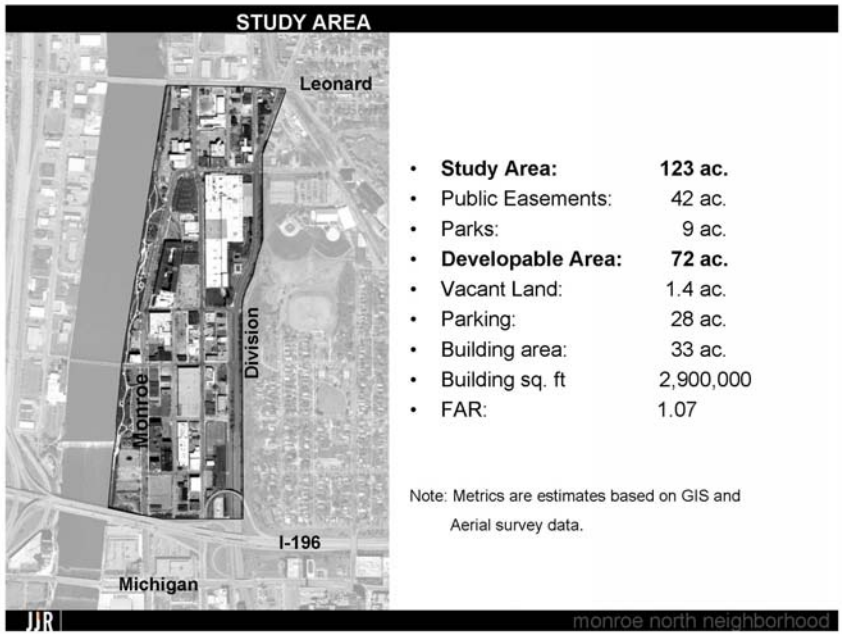


Figure: 1

Monroe North is also located immediately to the northwest of Michigan Hill, Grand Rapid's primary concentration of high tech/life science institutions and businesses. This proximity, the fact that the Hill is nearing build out and the fact that much of Monroe North is included in Grand Rapids Smart Zone, suggest that the district's future should include high-tech and life science businesses.

Problem Statement
In November 2005 the City of Grand Rapids requested proposals from planning and design consultants to prepare an area specific plan to guide and promote growth within Monroe North. Proposals were reviewed and several consulting firms were interviewed before JJR, LLC was selected in January 2007. Civic Economics was selected to assist in identifying the physical attributes that would encourage and support the attraction, development and/or expansion of high tech and life science related businesses to the area.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The *Monroe North Area Specific Plan* provides recommendations for land use, circulation, parking and development character that build on the objectives and policies of the City's *Master Plan* (adopted 2002). In addition, the area specific plan identifies needed infrastructure improvements and proposes streetscape concepts for the district.

These recommendations are based on the following primary objectives for the future of the Monroe North district:

- Capitalize/Focus on the river.
- Encourage focus on continued mixed-use investment.
- Promote urban densities.
- Provide a pedestrian-oriented, walkable setting.
- Encourage a transition to structured parking.
- Strengthen connections to Michigan Hill, Downtown and the Belknap neighborhood.
- Attract high tech and knowledge-based businesses to the area.

PARTICIPANTS

A Steering Committee, representing a range of district interests, was appointed to work with JJR, LLC to prepare the draft area specific plan. The Steering Committee included:

- Major property owners
- District developers
- Industrial business owners
- Residents from the district and the Belknap neighborhood
- Monroe North Tax Increment Financing Authority (TIFA) Board members
- Smart Zone Board members

City staff also participated in the Steering Committee meetings and the City's Design Team provided information on district infrastructure.

In addition, two meetings were held to seek input from district stakeholders. (See Appendices for more detail on participants.)

PROCESS

Seven (7) Steering Committee meetings were held to:

- Review issues and opportunities;
- Define objectives;
- Discuss alternatives; and
- Review preliminary recommendations.

Early meetings focused on the content of the Framework Plan, which addresses land use, circulation, parking and development character. Later meetings focused on infrastructure and streetscape recommendations.

As land use recommendations were being formulated, a special meeting was also held with the Smart Zone Board (June 2006) to gain a better understanding of the types of high tech and life science uses that would be most appropriate in Monroe North.

As noted above, two stakeholder meetings were also held to gather input on (1) issues and opportunities and, (2) preliminary Framework Plan recommendations.

REPORT ORGANIZATION

The results of the planning process are presented in three parts:

- **Framework Plan:** This section of the report addresses land use, circulation, parking and development character.
- **Infrastructure Improvements:** This section addresses the street network, utilities and other public investments.
- **Streetscape Concepts:** This section of the report addresses concepts for streetscape improvements and gateway treatments.

In each section, background information and issues are presented first to provide a context for understanding plan recommendations.

FRAMEWORK PLAN

BACKGROUND

Land Use and Zoning

Existing Conditions. Today, the Monroe North district is zoned for a combination of mixed-use, light industrial and heavy commercial development (see Figure 2). Mixed-use developments, predominantly in older multi-story industrial buildings that have been adaptively re-used, are concentrated on the east edge of Monroe Avenue, a boulevard that parallels the Grand River and its waterfront parks. A mix of industrial and commercial uses is located inland between Bond and Division Avenues, and between Coldbrook and Leonard Streets, at the north end of the district.

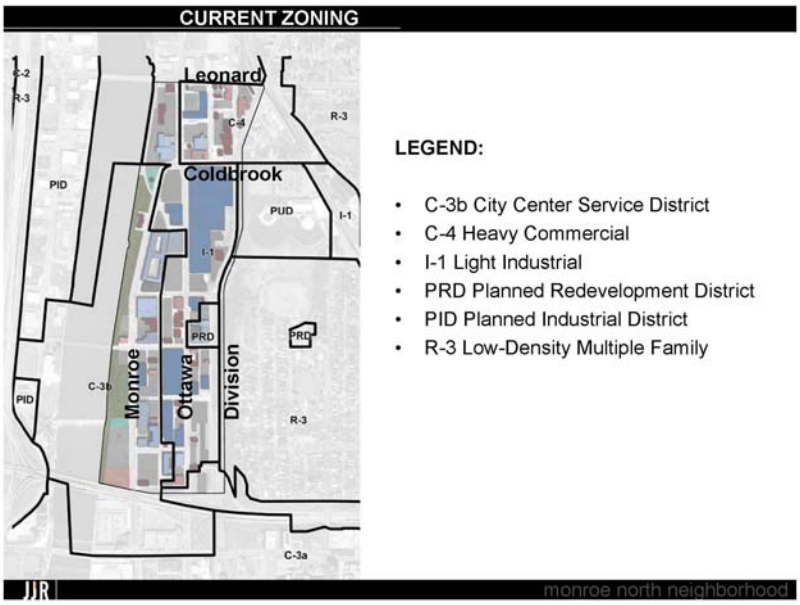


Figure: 2

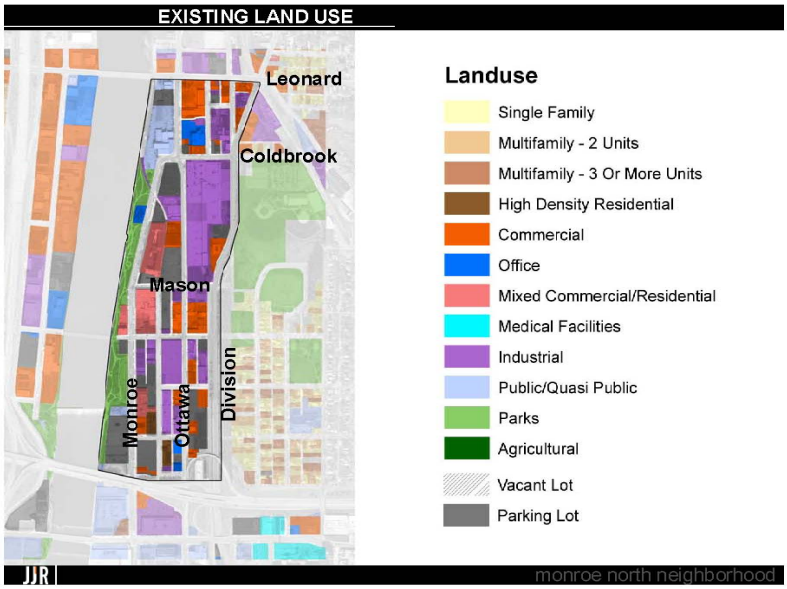


Figure: 3

Master Plan. Grand Rapids' *Master Plan* (2002), calls for a transition from industrial to higher density mixed-use development in the Monroe North district south of Coldbrook Avenue. A mix of housing, shopping, jobs and recreation opportunities are anticipated at densities that capitalize on the riverfront location and serve as an extension of, and complement to, the Downtown area.

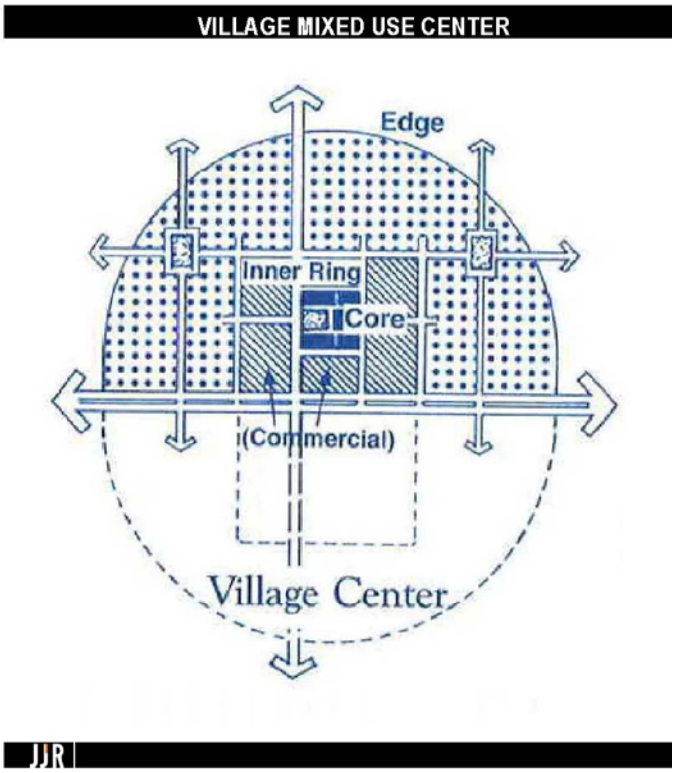


Figure: 4
Source: Grand Rapids Master Plan

North of Coldbrook, the *Master Plan* recommends the re-structuring of existing commercial and industrial development as a compact, walkable, mixed-use village center, served by transit. Retail, service and restaurant uses are recommended on the ground floor in the mixed use village "core" with office and medium density residential on upper floors. Building heights of a minimum of two (2) stories to a maximum of six (6) stories are anticipated in the "core." In the village "inner ring" (located between the "core" and the "edge") a wider variety of uses is recommended including freestanding high and medium density residential, larger footprint retail uses (grocery store; cinema), schools, churches, free standing office buildings and other work places with a high employee-to-floor area ratio. In most instances, building heights of a maximum of four (4) stories are anticipated in the "inner ring." Greater building heights are likely to be appropriate (up to at least six (6) floors) where the "inner ring" abuts a district where even taller buildings are permitted. This will be the case in Monroe North where the village center and the denser mixed-use area meet at Coldbrook.

Tech/Life Science. The portion of the Monroe North district south of Coldbrook Street is part of Grand Rapids' Smart Zone. As a result, attracting high tech and life science businesses/jobs is a priority consideration in this portion of the district. Monroe North's location immediately to the northwest of the Michigan Street high tech/life science corridor is a significant asset in attracting these types of businesses – especially if transit and pedestrian connections between the two areas can be strengthened.

Early in the preparation of the area specific plan, Civic Economics was engaged to identify the physical and market attributes needed to attract and nurture technology-driven firms in Monroe North. Interviews with business, institutional and government leaders in the West Michigan technology sector were conducted. Materials from the West Michigan Science and Technology Initiative (WSTI) and Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) were also reviewed. Civic Economics' summary report[1] noted Grand Rapids' dramatic success in achieving strategic economic development goals through public/private collaboration. The success of these partnerships can be seen on Michigan Hill and provide a strong foundation for meeting the challenges associated with attracting high tech users to Monroe North.

Civic Economics helped to identify the following attributes which high tech and life science businesses seek.

[1] *See website link to the Civic Economics' Report

Geography

- Co-location with prestige firms/institutes is preferred. As a result, better connections to Michigan Hill and Grand Valley State University's downtown campus will be critical.
- Financial incentives/assistance, especially Renaissance Zone tax abatements, will be very important for high tech and life science businesses.
- A setting that offers a variety of housing and recreation options, including green space, is preferred.
- Nearby night life/entertainment is seen as an asset.

Space Needs

All high tech and life science uses

- Likely to lease, rather than own.
- Need inexpensive space and parking (suburbs are the competition).
- Need flexible space (to grow and contract).
- Space needs depend on product cycle (300 – 30,000 plus SF).
- Buildings may require special systems (HVAC; water; back-up power).

Medical device companies

- Require clean room assembly.
- Generate low intensity truck traffic.

In order to accommodate a range high tech users, such as medical device companies needing some light manufacturing space, Civic Economics suggested that some light industrial zoning be retained in Monroe North on blocks located off the riverfront. It was understood that this zoning strategy might also help to slow the increase in land values and lease and sales prices in certain parts of Monroe North to make the district more cost competitive with suburban locations.

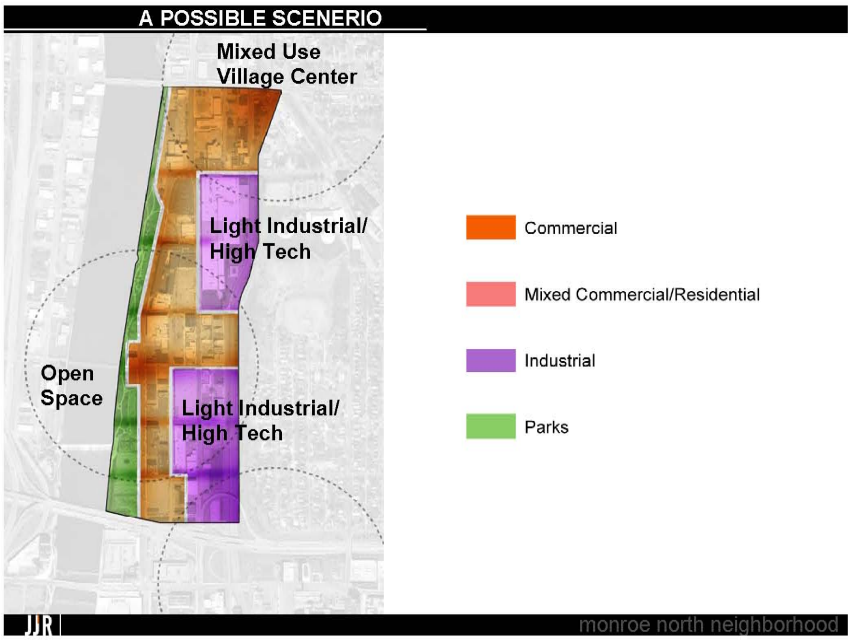


Figure: 5

As a result, the initial land use scenario discussed with the Steering Committee and stakeholders included the retention of some existing light industrial zoning on the eastern edge of the district. Feedback suggested that land values in Monroe North – even in those areas currently zoned for industrial use – had already increased to levels that exceeded those in the suburbs. Subsequent research by City staff confirmed this impression.

The Smart Zone Board[2] was consulted to help define the appropriate land use approach for high tech and life science uses in the district. It was concluded that maintaining light industrial zoning was not the best strategy for the area. It was suggested that the types of high tech/life science uses that need office, rather than single-story, high-bay assembly space, become the focus for Monroe North. These uses might include, for example, information technology, web design, research labs and engineering and design. Board members also suggested initially targeting a block or a building that could combine office/research space and housing to create a live/work "entrepreneurial" village. Board members recognized that financial assistance and incentives will be important to reduce costs for high-tech firms in Monroe North – for example, writing down rents for incubator space, as is currently done on Michigan Hill through WMSTI.

As a result, the land use approach was revised to encourage mixed-use development throughout the Monroe North district. The City is currently working to update its zoning ordinance to implement the *Master Plan*. This update will include a new mixed-use center zoning classification that would apply to the area north of Coldbrook. A revised zoning classification based on the existing C3b district (City Center Service District) is also being developed and should be applied to the portion of the district south of Coldbrook.

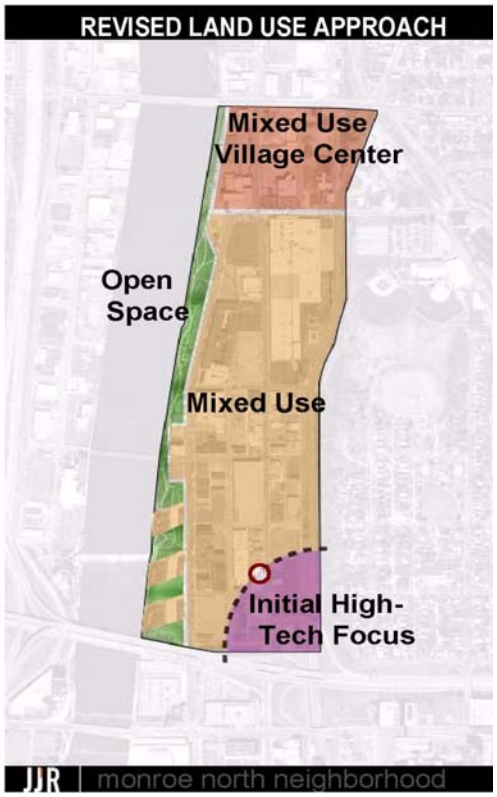


Figure: 6

Light Industry. Existing light industrial businesses in Monroe North provide jobs and tax base that are important to the City. These uses can continue to be part of the Monroe North land use mix. Nevertheless, over time it is anticipated that land values will increase to the point that many of these existing uses will consider relocating and, ultimately, their sites will be redeveloped for a mix of uses at a higher density. In the interim, consistent with the current C3b zoning in Monroe North, the expansion of existing light industry, and the construction of new light industrial buildings, will be permitted with the approval of the Planning Commission and/or Planning Director.

Bonus Height Incentives. Along with many other cities, Grand Rapids currently uses bonus incentives, granting additional building height in exchange for desired uses and development amenities. In Monroe North, the Steering Committee endorsed offering bonus height for the following uses (listed in priority order):[3]

- Residential
- Ground floor retail
- Affordable housing
- High/Tech life science uses
- Daycare facilities

Circulation Connections

The success of Monroe North, as a mixed-use district, and as potential location for high tech/life science businesses, depends on how well it is connected to other districts, including the life science cluster on Michigan Hill to the southeast, the Downtown area to the south and neighborhoods to the east and north. Improved vehicular, transit and pedestrian connections will be needed.

[2] June 23, 2006 Smart Zone Board meeting.
[3] Monroe North's current C3b zoning offers a height bonus for residential use only.

Street Network. Monroe North's street network is an urban grid with north-south block lengths significantly greater than east-west block widths. As noted above, Monroe Avenue has been re-designed as a boulevard between I-196 and Coldbrook. This boulevard treatment, in combination with the riverfront parks and river views to the west, make Monroe Avenue the most important image street within the district.

East-west streets are also critically important to the district's image, as they provide views to the riverfront. Newberry Street, because of its connection to the 6th Street bridge, plays a special role as the only connection within the district to Grand Rapids' west side.

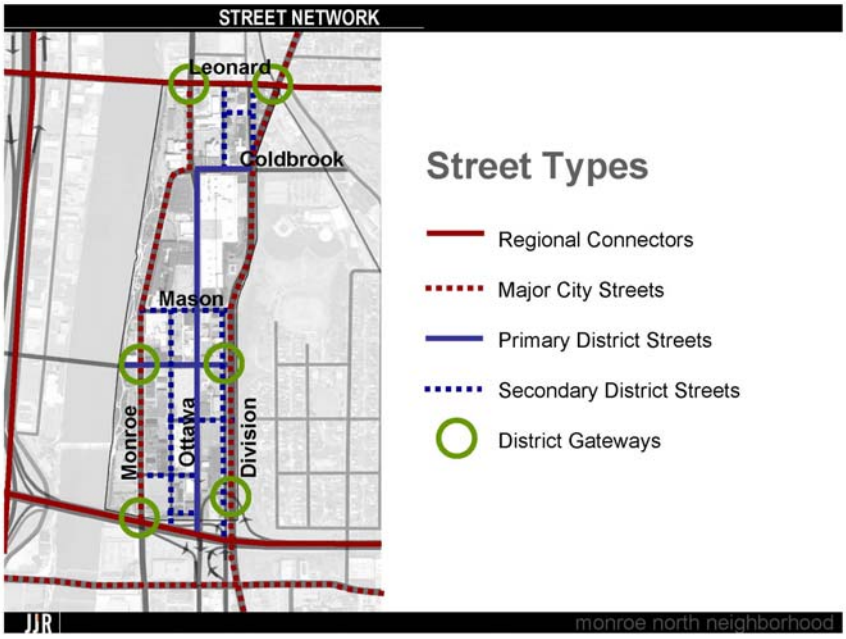


Figure: 7

Vehicular connections. Regional and city-wide vehicular connections are good. Today, however, motorists exiting I-196[4] must travel west on Michigan Street to Monroe to enter the district. A more direct connection from the Ottawa off-ramp to northbound Division is currently being planned by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) as part of a concept for creating a boulevard cross section on part of Division Avenue north of I-196.

Leonard Street, which forms the northern edge of the district, and Michigan Street, to the south of I-196, provide east-west connections from the district to the larger city. Division Avenue, on the eastern edge of the district, and Monroe Avenue, paralleling the riverfront, provide north-south city-wide connections. However, because Division passes below, rather than connecting with, Michigan Street connections to the life science cluster on Michigan Hill are not straight forward. Only Ionia (one-way northbound) and Monroe (two-way) provide opportunities for this critical link to Michigan Hill.

As part of its planning for a future boulevard cross section on a portion of Division Avenue, MDOT has proposed that northbound Ionia within the district be eliminated (with its right-of-way becoming part of the proposed Division boulevard cross section). While a boulevard treatment on Division is strongly endorsed by the Steering Committee as an asset to Monroe North, the current MDOT concept would

[4] US 131, a north-south limited access highway located on the west side of the Grand River, also provides less direct regional access to the district via exits/entrance at Michigan and Leonard Streets.

force all vehicular traffic from the Hill to travel further west on Michigan to Monroe Avenue to enter the district.

As a result, the Steering Committee recommends that the Division boulevard concept be revised to maintain the Michigan Street/northbound Ionia link and that the feasibility of extending Trowbridge from Ottawa to Ionia be investigated. This would maintain a key connection to Michigan Hill without substantially reducing the length of the proposed Division boulevard cross section.

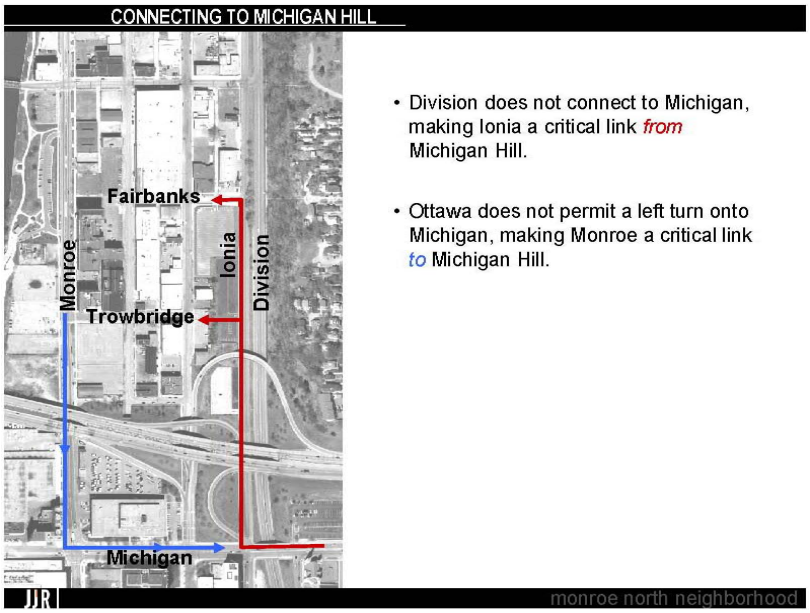


Figure: 8

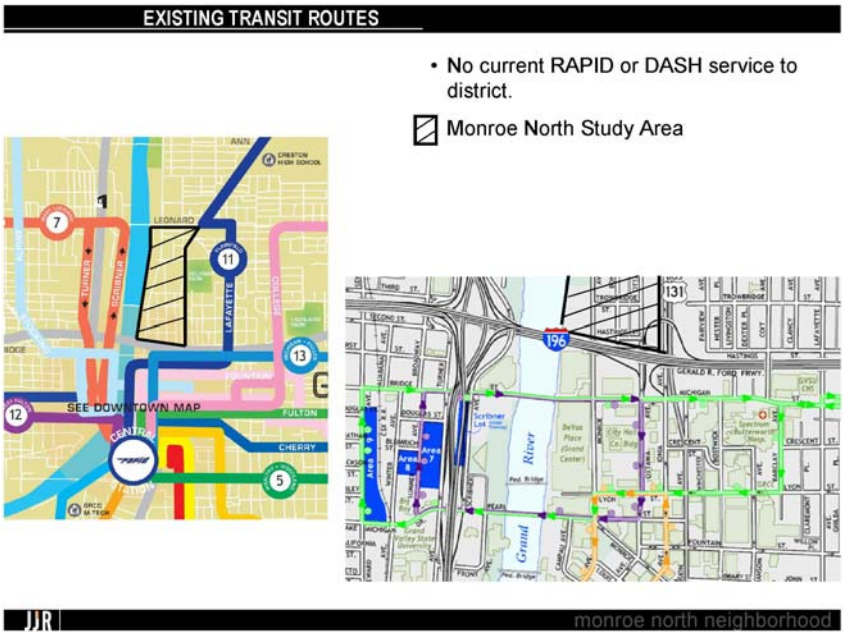


Figure: 9

Transit. An east-west bus route on Leonard Street, at the north end of the district, provides the only fixed route service to Monroe North today. An express route on Division (linking the suburbs to downtown, with a stop at Leonard and Division) is part of the Interurban Transit Partnership's (ITP's) longer term planning. ITP should also be encouraged to track the growth in potential ridership to/from the Monroe North district and to provide regular fixed route service to the area as soon as feasible. A transit shuttle tying Monroe North to Michigan Hill and the Downtown area would also be highly desirable in improving connections to adjacent districts.[5]

[5] These transit shuttle links could take the form of a city-operated DASH route or a dedicated shuttle operated in cooperation with major Hill institutions.

Pedestrians. Pedestrian connections to Michigan Hill, Downtown and nearby neighborhoods must also be made as convenient, safe and attractive as possible. The connection to Downtown could be improved by reducing the extent to which the I-196 overpass serves as a visual barrier, and by creating new destinations along Monroe Avenue both within and south of Monroe North. Connections to Michigan Hill and the Belknap Lookout neighborhood to the east of Monroe North are complicated by a substantial change in elevation (a difference of 130 feet). The creation of a pedestrian connection to Michigan Hill is further complicated by existing I-196 on/off ramps, and the proposed parking deck (and loading bays) that are being built into the slope on the east side of Division as part of the Michigan Street Development.

The City has been working to create a continuous pedestrian system along the Grand River (the riverwalk). The link to downtown (to the south) has been completed. It is anticipated that the link to the north, which will follow an abandoned rail right-of-way, will be constructed in the near future.

Parking. Almost 40% of the developable acres[6] in Monroe North are dedicated to surface parking. Many of the district buildings that have been adaptively re-used (the Brassworks, Monroe Terrace) depend on surface parking to meet the needs of their residents and tenants. Other surface parking lots are owned by industrial uses located within the district (GR Spring & Stamp; AutoDie). The Grand Rapids Press also owns a number of surface parking lots in Monroe North.

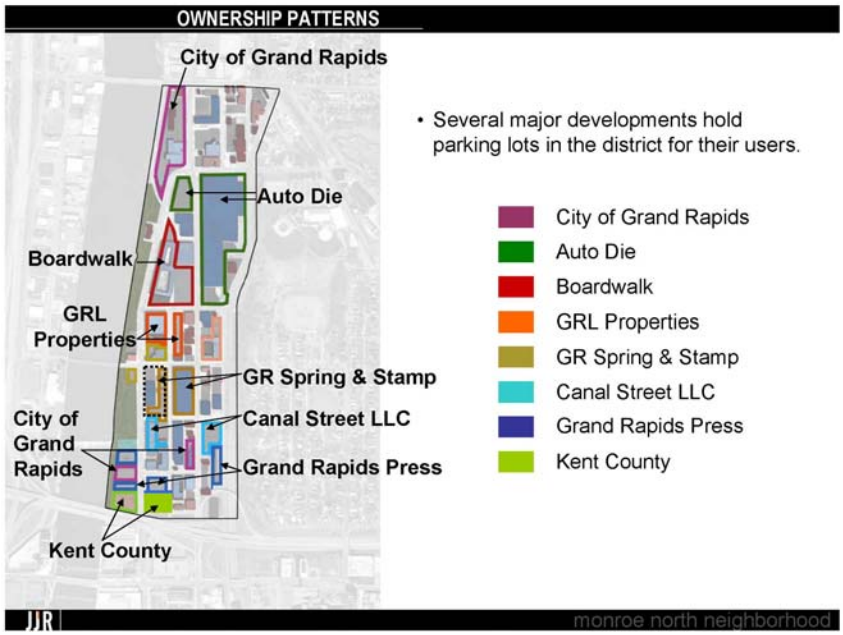


Figure: 10

If Monroe North is to become a dense, lively and walkable urban district, a shift from surface to structured parking will be required. New developments must be encouraged (or required) to provide on-site structured parking and serious consideration should be given to providing public structured parking, as well.

Surface parking in Monroe North has historically been less costly than parking in Downtown. Many downtown employees take advantage of free on-street parking in the district. Many businesses located in, and near, the district also provide parking for their employees at no cost. The essential addition of structured parking (both public and private) within the district will necessarily make parking more

[6] The district comprised approximately 123 acres. Of that total, approximately 9 acres are riverfront parks and about 42 acres are street rights-of-way. The balance of 72 acres of considered developable area.

expensive. At the same time, however, it will allow a significant increase in development density within Monroe North to enhance its vitality as a district, and to generate increased tax revenues.

Development Character

The Riverfront. The Grand River and its riverfront parks are Monroe North's greatest assets. Unobstructed visual access to the riverfront is an important factor in creating value for parcels along the east side of Monroe. Views to the River and the western horizon along east-west streets also create value for inland parcels. Easy pedestrian access to the riverfront parks, and connections to the north and south along the riverwalk add to the district's appeal as an urban residential environment, and as a workplace.

While approximately nine (9) acres along the riverfront, east of Monroe, have been developed as public open space, a number of vacant parcels, largely used for surface parking, remain at the south end of the district (south of the Consumer's sub-station). These are owned by the Grand Rapids Press, the City and the Kent County.

The future use of these parcels has been a key question for the Steering Committee. There is strong agreement that no development should occur on the riverfront parcel at the terminus of Trowbridge Street, consistent with the policy recommendations of the *Master Plan*. The majority of Committee members also agree that, if at all possible, all of these parcels should become an extension of the riverfront park system – and that their development as public open space will enhance the value of land across Monroe to the east. There is also a significant level of Steering Committee support for the re-location of the Consumer's sub-station away from the riverfront.

If, however, it does not prove possible to dedicate these parcels to public open space, Committee members agree that the height and massing of development on this part of the riverfront should be carefully controlled to maintain views and access to the River. In addition, the use mix on these parcels should include ground floor restaurants, shopping, and entertainment that will create district destinations.

In contrast, several participants in the stakeholder meetings suggested that new private development on this southern portion of the riverfront was appropriate given the value of the land. They also suggested that new development on both sides of Monroe adjacent to I-196 could create a "gateway" to the district from Downtown, and help to attract more patrons to retail, restaurant and entertainment offerings in Monroe North. Stakeholders appeared to agree that any new development on the riverfront should be located and designed to maintain some river views (e.g., at street ends). A mix of uses, active ground floor frontages, riverfront access for pedestrians and building entrances oriented to Monroe were also considered very important.

Building Height. JJR developed several scenarios for building height to assist the Steering Committee in reaching conclusions on how these critical factors should be addressed as the district continues to develop. Initially three scenarios for building height were presented for discussion, and a fourth was developed based on Committee input. These scenarios are briefly described, and illustrated on the following pages.

- **Existing Zoning:** This scenario illustrates the maximum as-of-right and bonus building heights permitted under the current zoning in Monroe North.
  - Taller buildings are located west of Bond (85 feet/7 stories as of right; 115 feet/10 stories with bonuses).
  - Smaller buildings are located east of Bond and north of Coldbrook (35 - 45 feet).

CURRENT ZONING

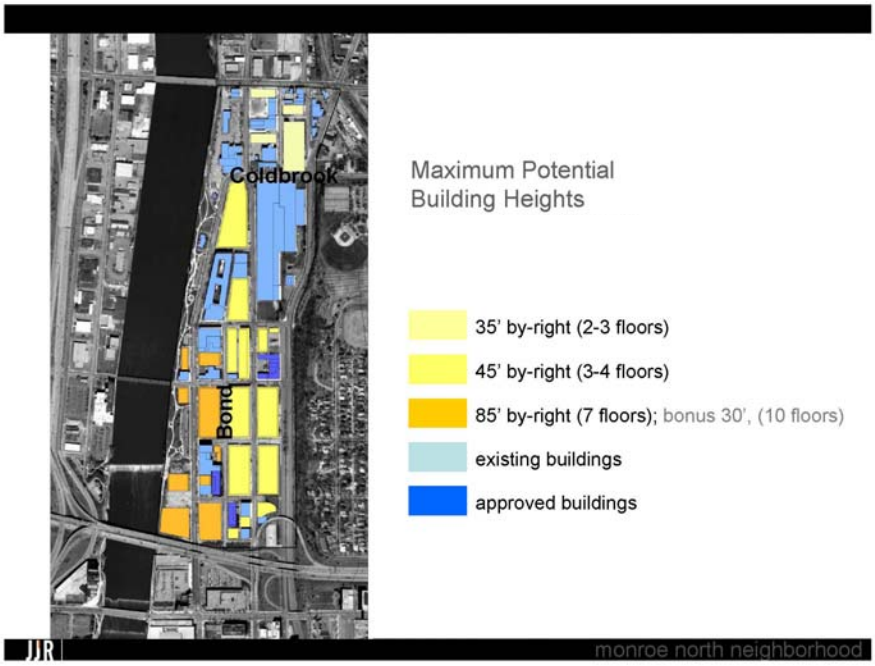


Figure: 11

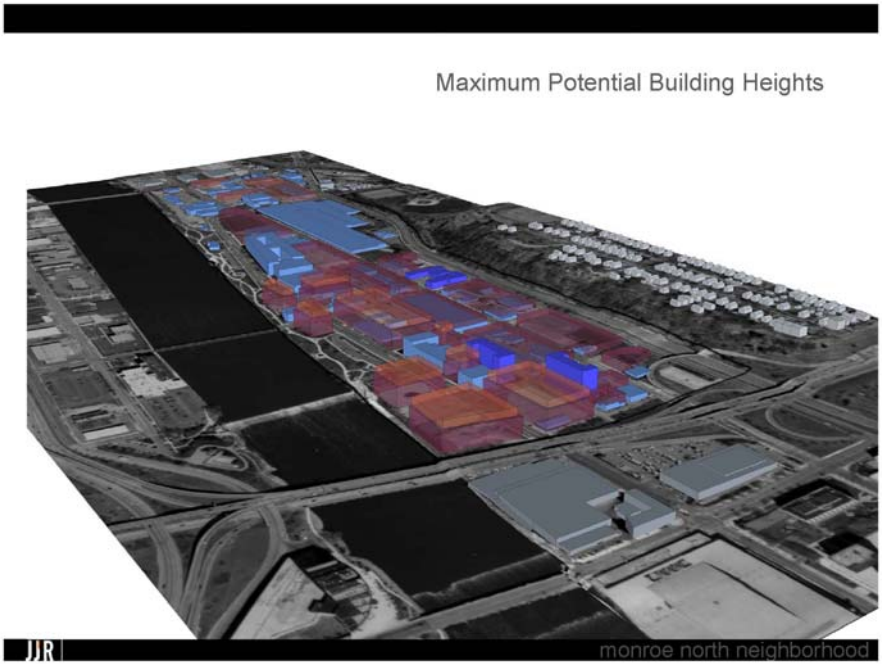


Figure: 12

- **N-S Scenario:** This scenario tests the idea of locating the tallest buildings in the district on the blocks directly north of I-196 to create a stronger visual tie between Monroe North and the downtown area, and to capture the real estate value of proximity to Downtown and Michigan Hill.
  - Tallest buildings are located (no height limit) south of Trowbridge.
  - Tall buildings are located between Trowbridge and Coldbrook (85 feet/7stories as of right; up to 181/15 stories feet with bonuses).
  - Smaller buildings (65 feet/5-6 stories) are located north of Coldbrook.

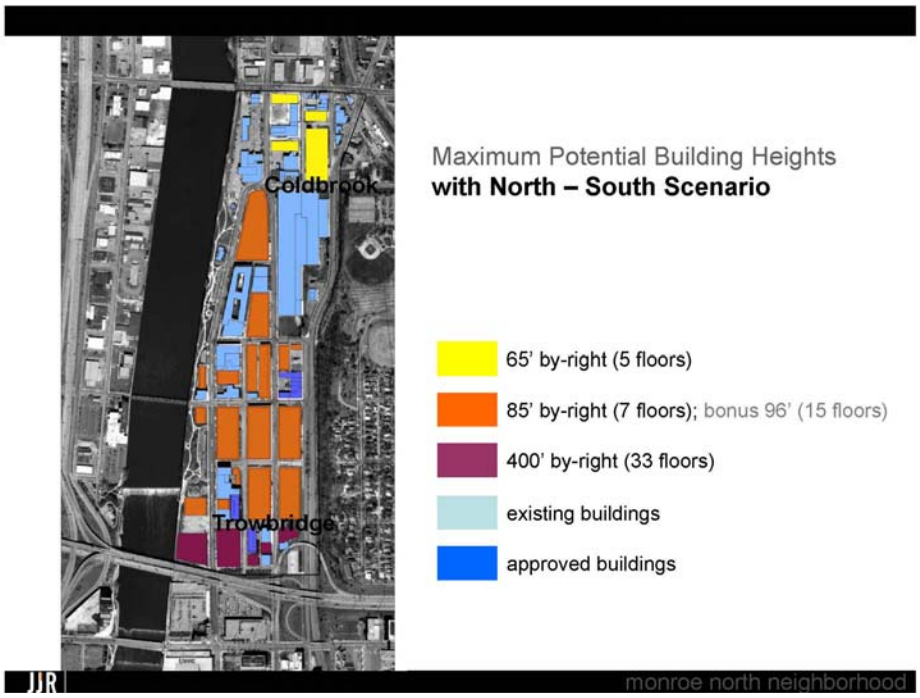


Figure: 13

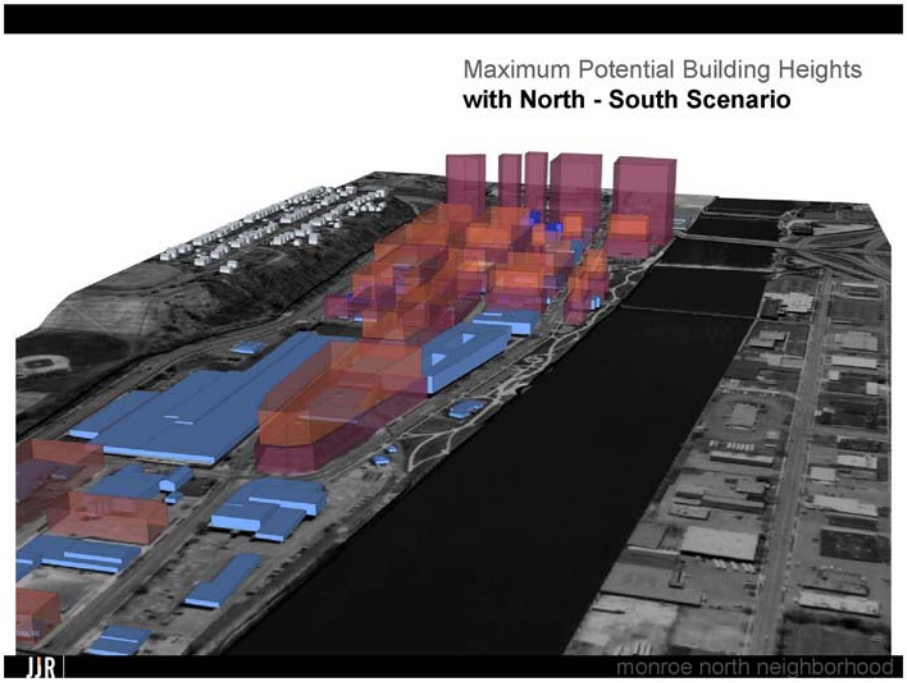


Figure: 14

- **E-W Scenario:** This scenario tests the idea of stepping allowable bonus building heights down toward the river to ensure that all blocks have the potential for some premium view floors.
  - Tallest buildings are located east of Ottawa (85 feet as of right; 243 feet/20 stories with bonuses).
  - Tall buildings are located between Ottawa and Bond (85 feet as of right; 181 feet/15 stories with bonuses).
  - Lower buildings are located between Bond and Monroe (85 feet as of right; 115 feet/10 stories with bonuses).
  - Smaller buildings are located along the riverfront and north of Coldbrook (65 feet/5-6 stories).

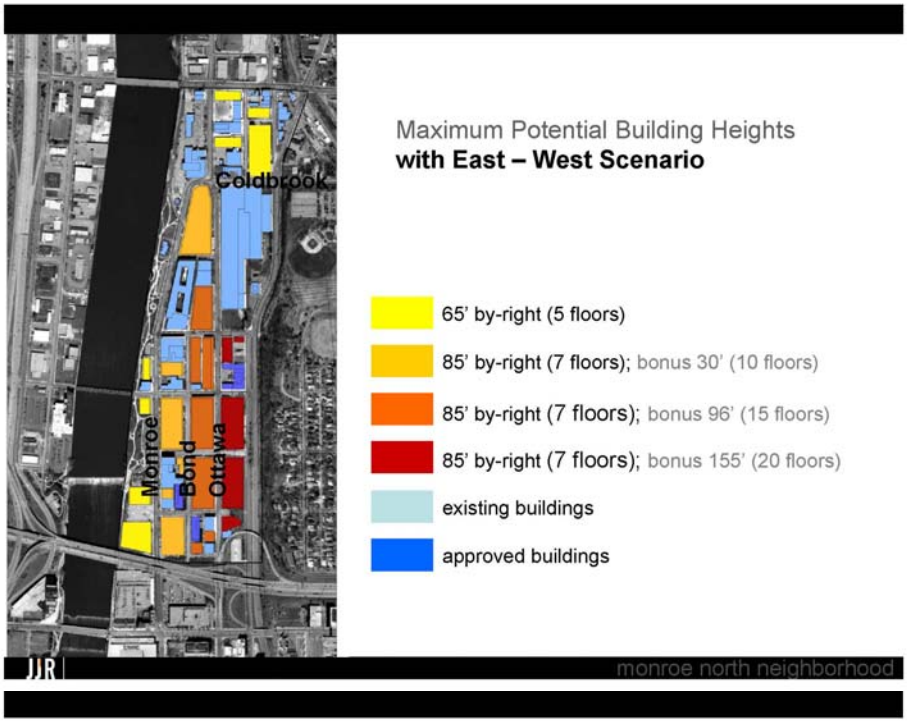


Figure: 15

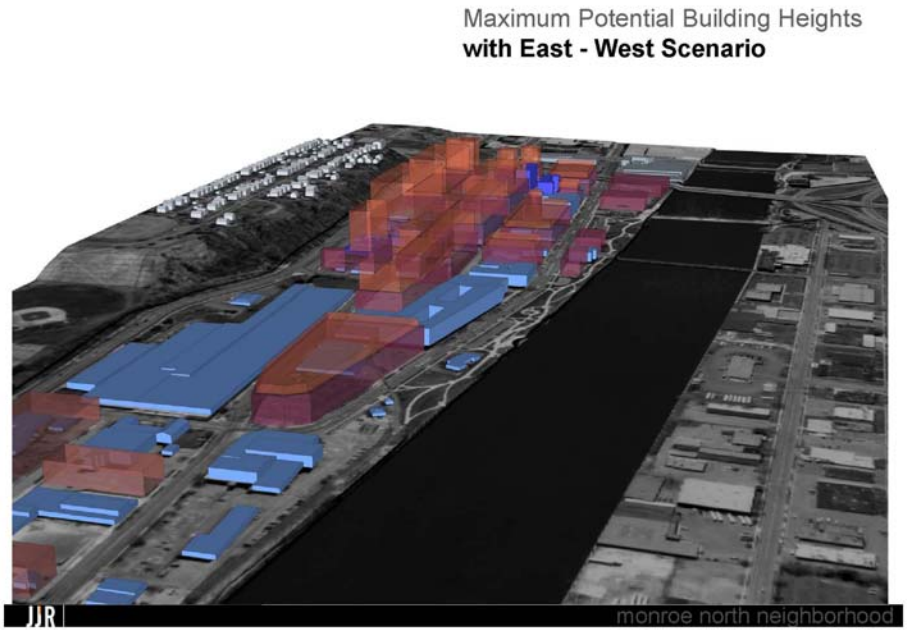


Figure: 16

- **"Hybrid" Scenario:** To reflect Steering Committee feedback on the previous building height scenarios, this "hybrid" scenario locates the tallest buildings in the southeast corner of the district and steps allowable bonus heights down to both the north and the west.
  - Tallest buildings are located south of Trowbridge and east of Bond (85 feet as of right; 235 feet/20 stories with bonuses).
  - Taller buildings are located on Division south of Mason and on Monroe south of Trowbridge (85 feet as of right; 187 feet/16 stories).
  - Tall buildings are located between Ottawa and Bond and on Division north of Mason (85 feet as of right; 151 feet/13 stories).
  - Lower buildings are located east of Monroe Avenue and along the south edge of Coldbrook (85 feet as of right; 115 feet/10 floors with bonuses.
  - Smaller buildings (65 feet maximum/5-6 stories) are located in (1) the mixed use Village area north of Coldbrook (proposed in the *Master Plan*) and, (2) on the riverfront west of Monroe.

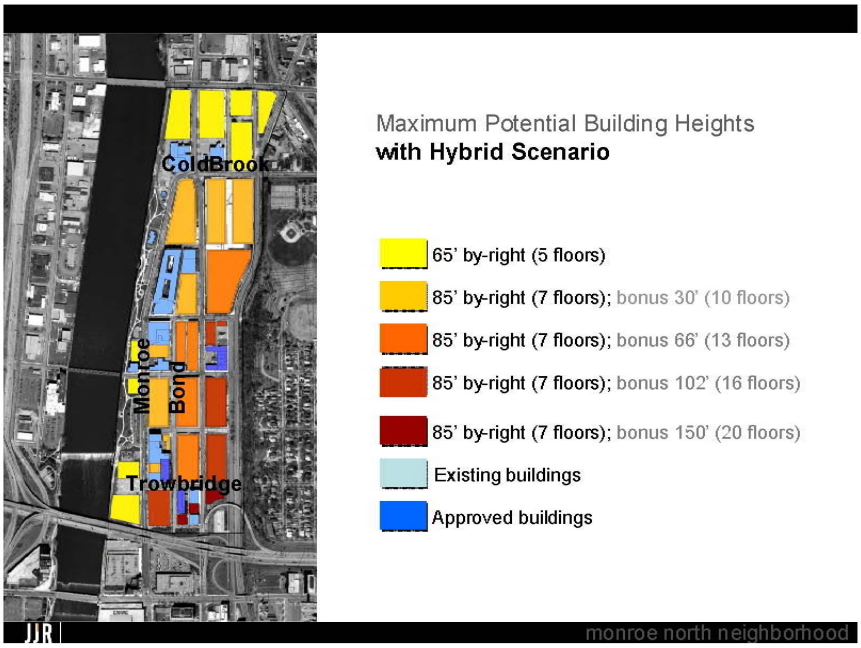


Figure: 17

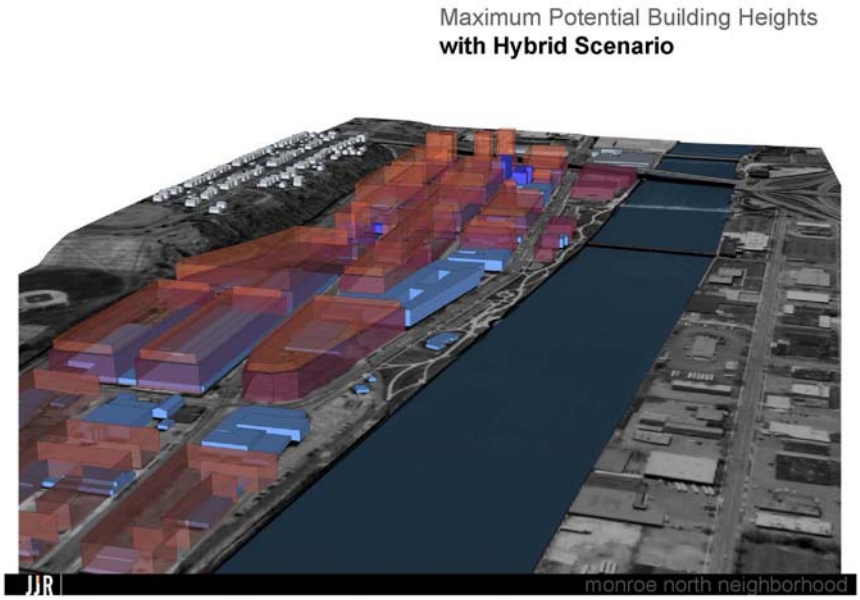


Figure: 18

After considering these scenarios, the Steering Committee recommended that the area south of Coldbrook, should have a uniform as-of-right building height of 85 feet/6-7 stories and a uniform maximum building height no less than 165'/14 stories and as much as 303'/25 stories with cumulative bonuses. This recommendation was based on the belief that:

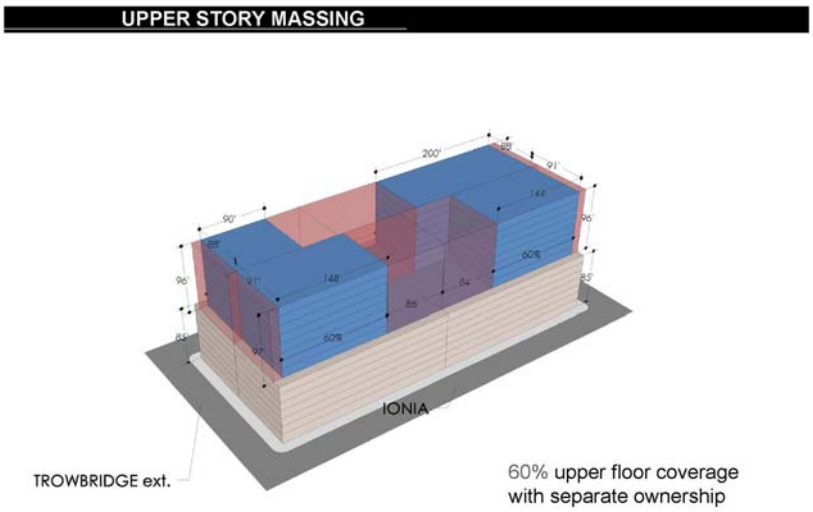
- Limiting building heights along Monroe, where property values are highest, might jeopardize the feasibility of development on those blocks, and
- Greater bonus heights on blocks farther east (closer to Division) might be overestimating the market demand for space in Monroe North.

A maximum building height of 65 feet/5-6 stories was recommended for the area to the north of Coldbrook (the mixed-use village).

If instead of being acquired as public open space, the portion of the riverfront to the south of the Consumers substation is privately developed, the Steering Committee recommended that a strong emphasis be placed on:

- Creating a district destination with publicly oriented uses (retail, restaurants, entertainment), at a minimum on the ground floor;
- Orienting building lobbies and storefronts towards Monroe Avenue to create a human scale and pedestrian interest;
- Screening structured parking from both Monroe and the river and
- Maintaining multiple opportunities for access and views to the river, including keeping the Trowbridge street end open.

In this scenario, building heights and upper story massing would follow the standards for the balance of the district sough of Coldbrook. (See also RECOMMENDATIONS, 4.3 Building Height and Massing, page 23.



JJR **Figure: 19** monroe north neighborhood

Upper Story Massing. The massing of upper story towers (i.e., the added building height allowed by bonuses), and the spacing between them, will have an impact on views between buildings; the feeling of light, air and spaciousness within the district; privacy; and shading. These factors all influence the livability and appeal of a dense urban district.

The Steering Committee considered a number of options for the massing of upper stories on buildings over 85 feet in height.

These included:

- Limiting the dimension of upper/bonus stories to 60% of the north-south dimension of a parcel (Figure 19).
- Increasing currently required upper story building setbacks (recess line) from 12 to 24 feet on east west streets (Figure 20).
- Limiting the maximum dimension of upper story towers to 90 feet and requiring a minimum spacing of 80 feet between towers (Figure 21).

UPPER STORY MASSING

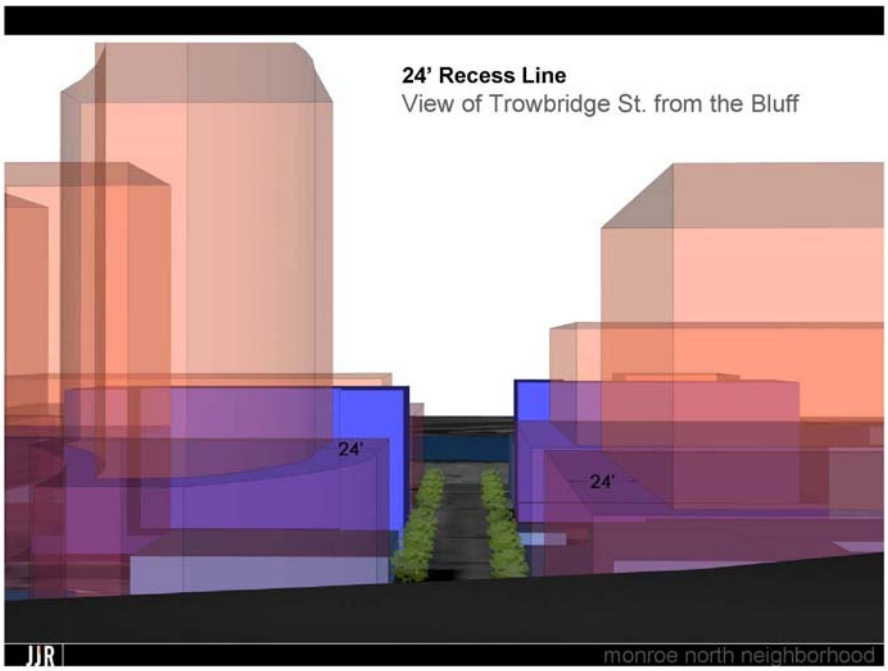


Figure: 20

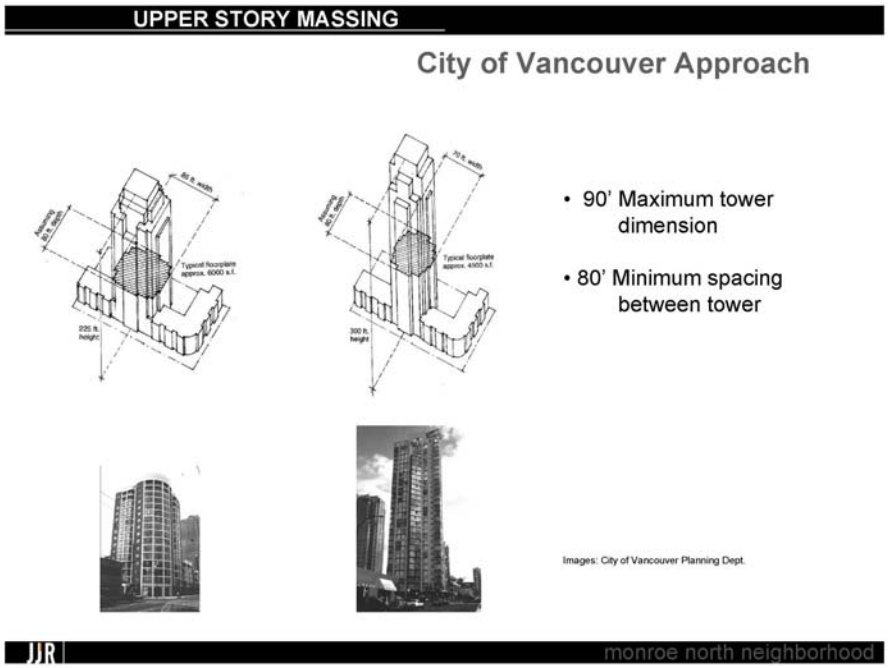


Figure: 21

The Steering Committee preferred the third approach – limiting upper story tower dimensions (above 85') and requiring a minimum spacing between towers – because it could minimize the impacts of taller buildings while treating all properties equally.

Building Placement. Building placement to establish a continuous street wall and, wherever possible, to bring ground floor activity to the edge of the sidewalk, is a key factor in creating a lively, walkable urban district. The first step in defining recommendations for building placement is to identify those streets where the quality of the pedestrian environment should take precedence over vehicular circulation and off-street parking needs. In the Monroe North district, the Steering Committee recommended that all streets, with the exception of Bond,[7] should be considered priority pedestrian streets. The Steering Committee also agreed that:

- New development should create an architectural "edge" along a minimum percentage of the lot frontage on these streets, and that minimum and maximum building setbacks should be established.
- To the greatest extent possible, surface and ground floor structured parking associated with development on these streets should be screened by occupied building space.[8] On upper floors, structured parking could be screened by attractive façade treatments; however, for development parcels facing Monroe Avenue, the district's primary image street, the screening of upper story parking by occupied building space (a "liner" building) should be encouraged.

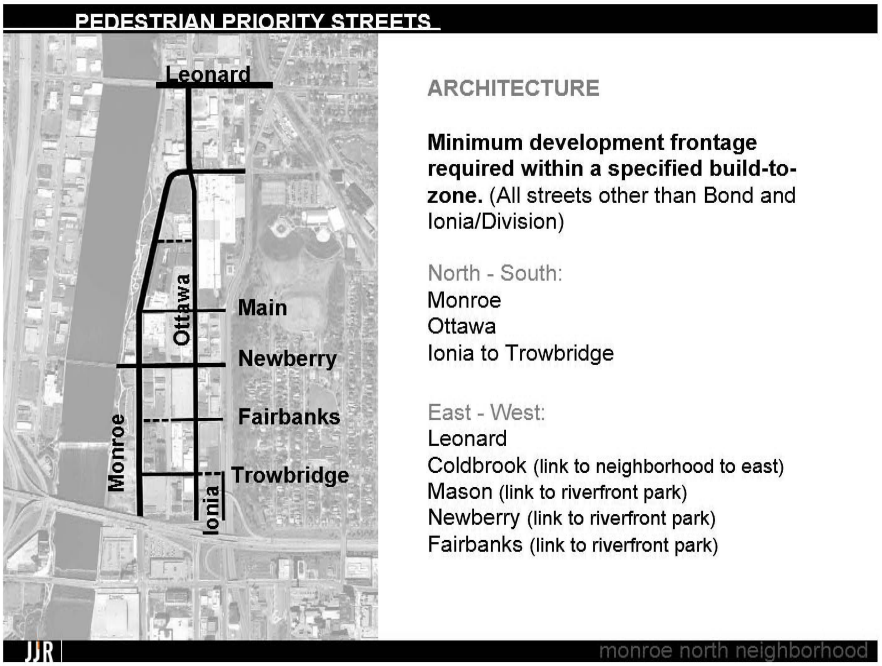


Figure: 22

[7] Bond is the only north-south street in the district that does not extend from Coldbrook to Michigan Street. As a result, it offers the greatest opportunity to become a service street. All east-west streets are considered to be priority pedestrian streets because they provide access and views to the River.

[8] West of Monroe in the vicinity of Newberry Street, however, lot depths may not allow this preferred development approach.

The Steering Committee discussed whether active retail uses, and storefront design, should be required or recommended on any of the district's priority pedestrian streets. While it was agreed that such a requirement might be appropriate at the Monroe Avenue/Newberry Street intersection, Steering Committee members felt that other strategies would be more appropriate on the balance of priority pedestrian streets. These might include, for example, requiring that building entrances be oriented to the priority street; that a certain amount of window and door area (transparency) be required and that height bonuses be offer for ground floor retail/storefronts.

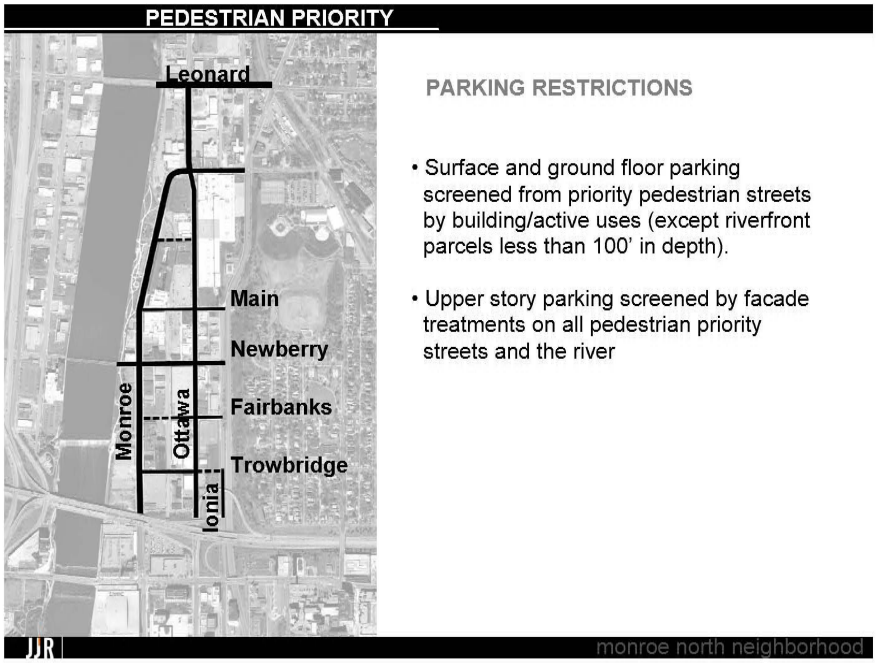


Figure: 23

Bonus Height Incentives. The Steering Committee also discussed the desired development amenities for which bonus height incentives should be offered. These included (in priority order):

- On-site structured parking
- Waterfront walkways/greenways
- Privately provided, publicly accessible open space
- Below grade structured parking
- A percentage of development costs dedicated to public art programs
- Green architecture (green roofs; other LEEDS[9] features)

[9] Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, U.S. Green Building Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following Framework Plan guiding principles, objectives and development character guidelines are recommended as part of the *Monroe North Area Specific Plan*. As noted above, these recommendations are based on, and incorporate, the City's *Master Plan* recommendations, objectives and policies. For clarity, *Master Plan* objectives are presented in **bold type**; additional objectives, policies and guidelines for Monroe North are presented in regular type.

GOALS/GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **Balance varied interests.**
- **Enhance the district's viability and stability.**
- Enhance the City's ability to attract high tech and knowledge-based businesses.
- **Continue to reinforce downtown's role as the multipurpose center for the region (government, large scale office, arts and entertainment, residential).**
- **Enhance the City's competitiveness as a housing location.**
- **Encourage diversity (racial, ethnic, income) within neighborhoods.**
- **Promote transit and walkability.**
- Improve connections to surrounding districts and neighborhoods.
- **Capitalize on the Grand River as a valuable economic, recreational, environmental and historic asset.**
- **Encourage the preservation and adaptive re-use of historic and architecturally valuable structures.**
- **Promote compatibility with valued characteristics of the built environment.**
  - Encourage the adaptive re-use of older multi-story buildings and the mingling of old and new.
  - Protect riverfront open space and views; encourage expanded riverfront activity.
  - Maintain the street grid and enhance connections to adjacent areas/districts.
  - Protect the bluff (east of Division Avenue) to maintain a green backdrop by controlling erosion and managing/maintaining tree cover.
- **Emphasize urban design quality and place making.**

OBJECTIVES

1.0 LAND USE

1.1 General

- **Encourage a transition from industrial to mixed use along the riverfront and in Monroe North.**
- **Provide a mix of housing, shopping, entertainment, jobs and recreation opportunities.**
- **Encourage development that serves as an extension of, and complement to, the Downtown area.**
- **Provide a transition between Downtown's high intensity mix of uses and surrounding lower density neighborhoods.**
- **Provide open spaces that serve as activity focal points and enhance area image.**
- **Allow development densities that capitalize on a riverfront location.**
- **Coordinate the location of higher density housing and employment/activity centers with transit.**

1.2 South of Coldbrook

- **Recommended uses include:**
  - **Residential (medium and high density); residential uses are an essential component of the use mix.**
  - **Retail and service; on Monroe, restaurants, retail and service uses are encouraged as accessory uses located in the same structure as a primary use.**

- **Office -** including high tech and life science uses
- **Hotel**
- **Entertainment**
- **Cultural**
- **Institutional**
- **Light industry with special approval, <u>except west of</u>** <u>Bond</u>**. Industry as a component of mixed use should be small in scale; provide a relatively high ratio of employees to floor area and generate low volumes of truck traffic.**
- **Auto-oriented[10] uses should be discouraged <u>west of Monroe</u>. Auto-oriented uses may be acceptable <u>east of</u>** <u>(but not on)</u> **<u>Monroe</u> under the following conditions:**
  - **A concentration/proliferation of auto-oriented uses will not be created.**
  - **Pedestrian orientation and safety can be ensured.**
  - **Driveway curb cuts can be located/designed to minimize the disruption of pedestrian movement.**
  - **Appropriate architecture, signs and screening elements are used.**

- Offer height bonuses for the following desired uses:
  - Residential
  - Ground floor retail (including restaurants and entertainment)
  - Affordable housing
  - High tech and life science uses

1.3 North of Coldbrook (Village Mixed-Use Center)

- **Encourage the re-structuring of the existing commercial and industrial area as a compact, walkable, mixed-use village center made up of "core" and "inner ring" zones.**
- **Recommended "core" uses include:**
  - **Retail, service and restaurant uses on the ground floor**
  - **Office and medium to high density residential above**
  - **Smaller scale auto-oriented uses may be acceptable at the edge of the core/inner ring**
- **Recommended "inner ring" uses include the above, plus:**
  - **High and medium density residential; live/work units**
  - **Larger footprint retail uses (grocery, cinema)**
  - **Free-standing offices**
  - **Other work places with a high employee to floor area ratio**
  - **Schools, churches**

1.4 Residential

- **Provide a range of housing types and costs to accommodate a variety of incomes, ages and life styles.**
- **Increase resident population within walking distance of retail concentrations to enhance market support.**

1.5 High Tech and Life Science

- Capitalize on proximity to the Michigan Hill in encouraging high tech and life science uses to locate within the Smart Zone in Monroe North.
- Encourage the adaptive use of existing industrial buildings for high tech and life science businesses. Explore the feasibility of establishing a high tech/life science incubator space in the district in the near term.
- Encourage new development to include office space appropriate for high tech and life science uses.

[10] Auto-oriented uses include gas stations, service stations, car washes, drive-through restaurants, etc.

2.0 CONNECTIONS

2.1 Streets

- **Maintain or create a connected street system. Discourage** permanent **street** vacations**.**
- Retain Ionia, south of Trowbridge, as a vehicular entrance to the Monroe North District and an important connection to Downtown and Michigan Hill. Link Ionia to Ottawa at Trowbridge.
- **Balance the use of space within the public ROW to make streets attractive and safe for vehicles**, **pedestrians and cyclists.**
- **Reduce the extent to which highways create barriers to movement between neighborhoods, business areas and the Grand River. Improve street connectivity and bicycle/pedestrian access as highway improvements are planned.**
- Continue to evaluate the possible construction of a roundabout at Monroe/Coldbrook/Ottawa as a strategy for creating a district gateway and improving traffic flow and safety.

2.2 Transit

- **Improve and expand transit service.**
  - Provide efficient transit connections from Monroe North to Downtown and Michigan Hill.
  - Work with ITP to create an express route on Division with a transit stop at the proposed Leonard/Division Village Mixed-Use Center and possible stops on Division at Newberry and Fairbanks.
- **Encourage job-generating uses to adopt transportation demand management (TDM) programs that provide incentives for employees to carpool, use transit, walk or cycle to work.**

2.3 Open Space/Pedestrians

- **Emphasize open space and continuous public access to and along the Grand River.**
  - Create an extension of the riverfront park system, if at all possible, on land located west of Monroe, south of the Consumers substation.
  - Encourage activity generating uses (e.g., restaurants and equipment rentals operated as concessions).
  - Continue to pursue the extension of the Riverwalk north from Canal Street Park.
- **Require the maintenance of open space at** Trowbridge**.**
- **Create links from neighborhoods to the primary open space system[11] and the Grand River.**
- Offer bonus height in exchange for the private development of publicly accessible open space (e.g., at street corners).
- Create a safe, clearly defined pedestrian connection to Michigan Hill (Ionia and/or Division to Michigan).
- Improve the visual appeal of Monroe under I-196 as a gateway to the district.
- Investigate the feasibility of re-constructing the stairs connection Division to the top of the bluff (and the Belknap Lookout neighborhood) at Newberry and providing an appropriate pedestrian crossing on Division.

2.4 Streetscape

- **Make streets a district asset. Encourage streetscape improvements that improve visual quality and create a walkable environment.**
- Create district gateways on Leonard at Monroe and Division and on Monroe at I-196 (Level One), and on Newberry at Monroe and Division (Level 2).
- Designate Monroe, Ottawa, Trowbridge, Fairbanks, Newberry, Mason, Coldbrook, and Leonard as Monroe North's pedestrian priority streets**.**[12]

---

[11] As illustrated in the *Master Plan*. Includes parks and cemeteries; on-street links; use of tributary stream corridors, where possible.

- **Improve high traffic volume image streets that serve as gateways to the city (including Division, Leonard, Monroe).**
  - Work with City and MDOT to refine the proposed re-design of Division as a boulevard adjacent to the Monroe North district.
  - Implement the revised Division Boulevard concept as soon as possible.
- Improve street paving (especially on Bond and east-west cross streets), sidewalks and lighting; provide street tree plantings.
- Improve pedestrian crossings, especially on Monroe, to enhance access to the Grand River.
- Consider establishing a Business Improvement District to fund and maintain streetscape and open space improvements.

3.0 PARKING

- **Encourage the more efficient provision of off-street parking and reduce its impact on the city's appearance and walkability.**
  - Encourage a transition from surface to deck parking.
  - Provide a height bonus as an incentive for providing on-site structured and/or underground parking to serve new private development.
- **Encourage the development of shared and/or district parking.**
  - Work with the City to determine the feasibility of a public parking deck; target the block bounded by Monroe, Newberry, Bond and Fairbanks.
- **Offer reductions in the required number of parking spaces as a development incentive.**
- **Prohibit the use of riverfront land** (i.e., west of Monroe) **for parking lots.**
- **Locate parking to the rear of buildings and on the interior of the block screened from the street, wherever possible.**
  - Except where riverfront parcel depths are less than 100 feet, use actively programmed building space (e.g., liner building) to fully screen any surface parking or ground floor structured parking from priority pedestrian streets.
  - Screen upper story structured parking from streets, parks, and the river by facade treatments.
- **Design parking facilities to minimize impacts on the area's visual quality and residential uses.**

4.0 DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER GUIDELINES

4.1 General

- **Promote urban densities and a compact development pattern.**
- **Encourage incremental transitions in use intensity and building scale to promote a compatible land use mix.**
- **Minimize the external impact of high intensity uses on one another and the quality of the residential environment by establishing performance standards addressing hours of operation, noise, odor, vibration, glare, truck traffic, the location/design of surface parking and loading/trash collection activity.**

4.2 Building Placement

- **Locate buildings to frame the street and screen parking.**
  - Establish a build to zone with a maximum setback of 10 feet from the property line along all street frontages.
  - On priority pedestrian streets, require that as much of the build to zone as possible be occupied by a building.
- **Orient building entries, windows and/or storefronts to the street.**

---

[12] Pedestrian priority streets serve as the primary frontage for development; may require storefront architecture/active ground floor uses and may have strict limits on off-street parking. They are also the highest priority streets for streetscape improvements.

    - See Architecture, below.
- **On riverfront parcels, provide open space setbacks of a minimum of 25 feet from the flood wall to permit the extension of the riverwalk.**
- **On riverfront parcels, maintain open spaces at east-west street ends to provide for public access and preserve view corridors to the riverfront.**

4.3 Building Height and Massing

4.3.1 General

- Require a minimum building height of two (2) stories or 24 feet for new construction.
- Require a horizontal "expression line" distinguishing the building base from the remainder of the building, consistent with existing C3b zoning.
- Require that for building facades facing a public street or park and exceeding 100 feet in length, the building mass be "articulated" into vertical bays at 50 foot intervals (using, for example, facade recesses or projections ; architectural details; window patterns).
- Limit the exterior dimension of upper story towers (i.e., bonus height above the 85 feet permitted as of right in the area south of Coldbrook) to a maximum of 90 feet.
- Require a minimum spacing of 80 feet between upper story towers.

4.3.2 Building Heights south of Coldbrook

- Allow a maximum height as of right of 85 feet.
- Allow a maximum bonus height of no less than 165'/14 stories and as much as 303'/25 stories with cumulative bonuses.

4.3.3 Building Heights North of Coldbrook (Village Center)

- Allow a maximum of six (6) stories in the "core" and "inner ring."

4.4 ARCHITECTURE

4.4.1 General

- Encourage **ground level storefronts for retail and service uses on** all **pedestrian priority streets** by offering bonus building height**.**

4.4.2 Entrance Orientation/Definition

- Orient main building entrances to priority pedestrian streets, and give entrances clear architectural definition.
- Design building entries as porches (a raised and covered area connected to street level by steps) and/or as storefronts.
- Require one entrance for every (150) feet of building frontage.

4.4.3 Transparency

- Define an appropriate minimum transparency requirement for the ground floor and upper stories facing priority pedestrian streets and parks.
- Prohibit blank walls.

4.4.5 Window Proportions

- Encourage the use of vertical proportions for upper story windows.

4.4.7 Roof Type

- Encourage the use of parapet or pitched roofs.

5.0 INFRASTRUCTURE

5.1 Utilities

- Upgrade water main and sanitary sewer systems as needed to support new development.
- Evaluate and augment storm system capacity in east-west streets to support new development.
- Evaluate district storm water management solutions.
- Encourage the use of green roof and storm water infiltration systems to reduce storm water discharge.
- Encourage the relocation of overhead utility lines underground.

5.2 Communications

- Evaluate needs for extending the district's existing fiber optic system.

INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

BACKGROUND

Existing and Future Conditions

Representatives of the City's Design Team met with JJR to provide an overview of existing infrastructure conditions in Monroe North. A second meeting was scheduled to review a hypothetical future build-out scenario for Monroe North to determine whether a potential fourfold increase in occupied building square footage within the district would present any technically of financially insurmountable problems.

Street Network. While Monroe Avenue is in excellent condition, other streets within the district are likely to require some improvements. For example, rail tracks remaining in Bond Street should be removed. In addition, all east-west streets are considered to be in poor condition and will require re-construction.

From the traffic perspective, only Monroe Avenue is near capacity; in addition, the only existing traffic bottleneck in the district is created by left-turn movements at the Monroe/Michigan Street intersection. Some left-turn delays also occur at the Monroe/Coldbrook/Ottawa intersection. To resolve these delays, the City has begun exploring the possibility of installing a round about at that location. The implementation of this concept is complicated, however, by the need to acquire additional right-of-way and the existence of an underground water vault in Monroe.

In addition to the Design Team's assessment of the existing street network, JJR reviewed MDOT's concept for creating a boulevard on Division Avenue (in conjunction with the addition of a direct northbound ramp onto Division from I-196) with the Steering Committee. This boulevard cross section would be achieved by combining the Ionia and Division rights-of-way. As noted above, a boulevard cross section on Division would be an asset to Monroe North. The current plan, however, would eliminate the connection from Michigan Street to Ionia that provides an eastern entrance into the Monroe North district from the high tech/life science cluster on Michigan Hill. This change would reduce rather than improve connectivity between the district and the Hill by forcing vehicular traffic to travel further west on Michigan to Monroe Avenue to enter the district. As a result, the *Monroe North Area Specific Plan* recommends that MDOT re-assess its concept to maintain the Michigan Street/Ionia northbound link. In addition, it is recommended that the feasibility of extending Trowbridge from Ottawa to Ionia be evaluated to maintain the critical connection to Michigan Hill without substantially reducing the length of the proposed Division boulevard cross section.

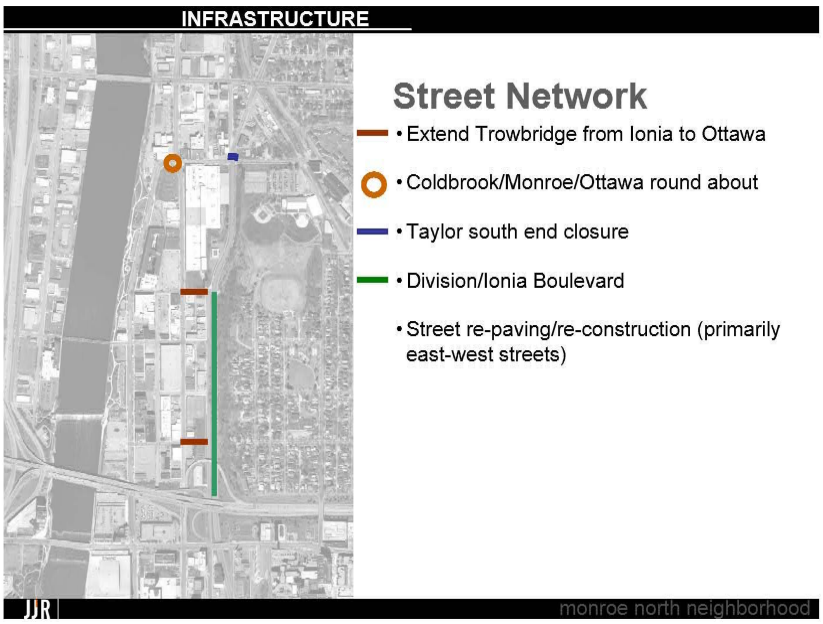


Figure: 24

Representatives of the neighborhood organization (NOBL) representing residents of the area to the east of Monroe North are also very interested in the re-construction of the stairs located at the end of Newberry Street that connect the bluff to Division Avenue and the Monroe North district. An appropriate pedestrian connection across Division at this location will be critical. This connection might include a crosswalk defined by special paving to give it higher visibility and a pedestrian activated crossing signal.

Sanitary Sewer. Design Team members report that the capacity of the sanitary system is sufficient both for today's needs, and to meet the demands of increased density within Monroe North. The age of system components vary widely, however, and those that over 30 years old will need to be replaced by the City as new development comes on line.

Storm System. Design Team members anticipate that increased discharges to storm lines in east-west streets will cause capacity problems. Measures to reduce roof discharges (green roofs; rain gardens; underground storage) are likely to be needed; these are negotiated with the City on a project-by-project basis. Storm line extensions in north-south streets may also be needed.

The Design Team also noted that there are periodic backups in the Coldbrook Creek Drain, causing flooding in the northern portion of the district. One solution to this problem would be the installation of additional underground storm water storage capacity. An alternative approach would be to require that the first habitable floor of new development within the area subject to flooding be located approximately 3 feet above grade.

Water System. Existing water mains less than 6 inches in size will require replacement to serve higher density, high rise development within the district. It is suggested that 4- and 6-inch mains be replaced with 8- to 12-inch mains.

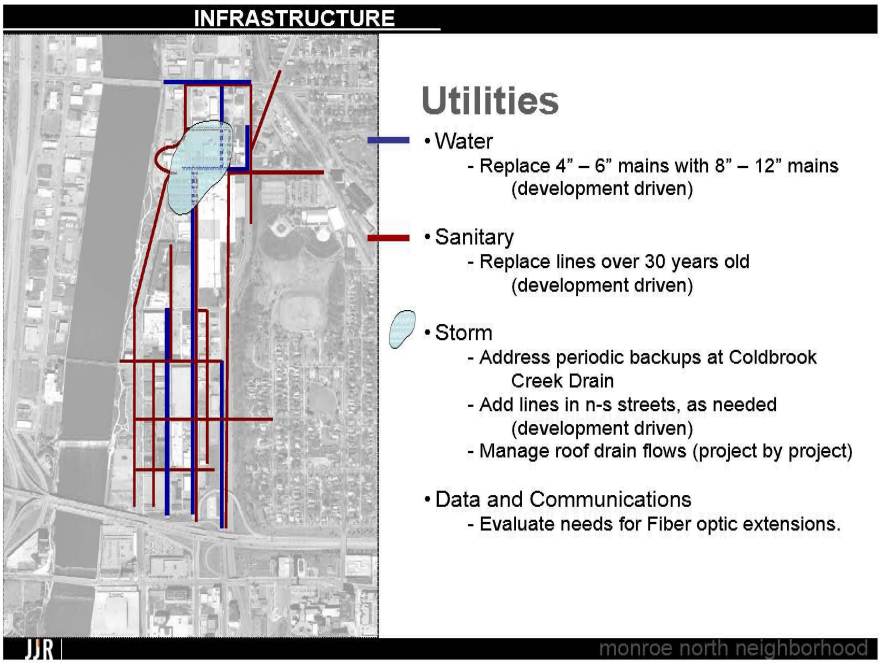


Figure: 25

Communications/Electric Service. With the exception of fiber optic, most of the wire utilities in the district are located above grade. The Design Team recommends that relocation of these overhead utilities under ground be planned and implemented concurrent with street improvement/reconstruction projects.

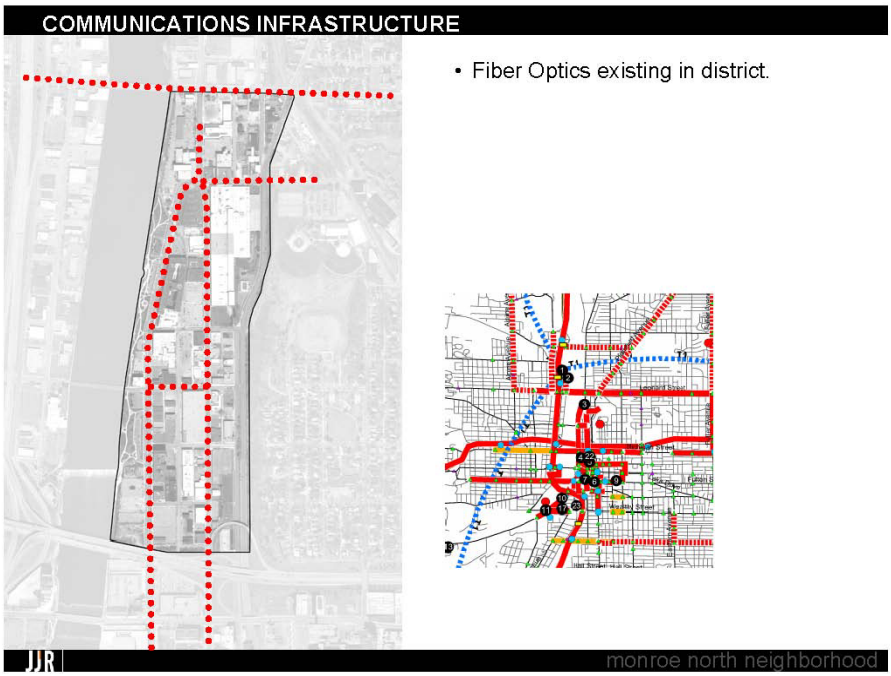


Figure: 26

5-Year CIP Projects

A number of improvement projects in the Monroe North district are included in the City's *Five-Year Capital Improvements Plan* (see Figure: 27).

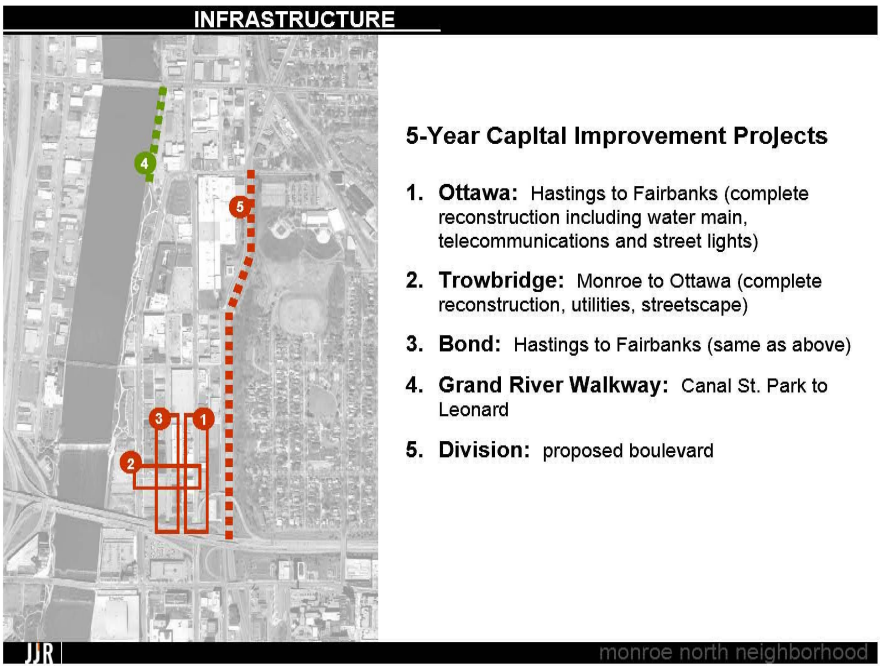


Figure: 27

Other Public Improvements

The Framework Plan also suggests a number of public improvements that will be important to the future of the Monroe North district. These include:

- Acquisition of riverfront land for open space and the extension of the riverfront park system in the area south of the Consumers substation, if feasible
- Construction of a public (or public/private partnership) parking deck
- Street repaving/reconstruction (Hastings, Trowbridge, Fairbanks, Newberry, Mason, Colebrook, Bond, Ottawa)
- Implementation of streetscape concepts
- Implementation of gateway concepts
- Provision of transit links to the Hill and Downtown
- Implementation of the ITP express route on Division (with a stop at proposed mixed-use village at Leonard/Division)
- Relocation of the Consumers substation
- Reconstruction of the stairs to Belknap Lookout

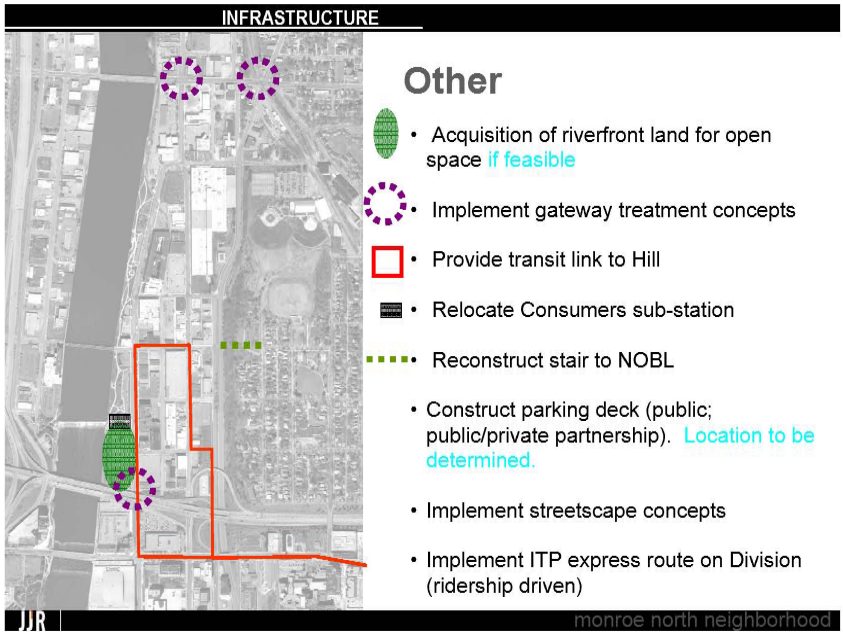


Figure: 28

Potential Funding Sources

In Monroe North, potential funding sources for infrastructure and other public improvements include the Monroe North Tax Increment Finance Authority (TIFA), the Smart Zone Local Development Finance Authority (LDFA), the Inter Urban Partnership (ITP) and City capital improvement funds. Many cities also ask for developer/property owner participation in funding infrastructure improvements through special assessments and development agreements. Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) can also be established to fund public improvements and maintenance. In addition, state and federal grants are available to help fund transit, park and roadway improvements.

Monroe North TIFA[13]. The types of improvements that have been/can be funded by the Monroe North TIFA include:

- Riverfront land acquisition and park improvements
- Sewer relief work

[13] *Tax Increment Financing and Development Plan for the Monroe North Development Area*, November 1985 as amended.

- Relocation of overhead utilities underground
- Flood protection
- Street lighting, street paving, curb and sidewalk, street trees
- Demolition/clearance
- Other actions as necessary to promote/assist development of new mixed use housing/commercial/office uses

Smart Zone LDFA.[14] The types of improvements that can be funded by the Smart Zone include the following, but must be related to high tech development:

- Infrastructure to enhance efficiency/attractiveness for pedestrian and mobilized traffic
- Necessary utilities and communications linkages to permit high tech development
- Work with private market to acquire/make available sites for high tech and industrial business development
- OTHER?

City of Grand Rapids. The types of improvements that can be funded by the City include:

- Utility upgrades (sanitary lines, water mains, storm lines)
- Relocating overhead utilities underground
- Street network improvements (e.g., Trowbridge link)
- Street reconstruction/re-paving
- Streetscape improvements
- Division boulevard concept implementation (with MDOT)
- Riverfront land acquisition and park improvements
- Parking structure
- Transit shuttles

ITP. The Inter Urban Partnership can fund fixed bus routes and rapid transit.

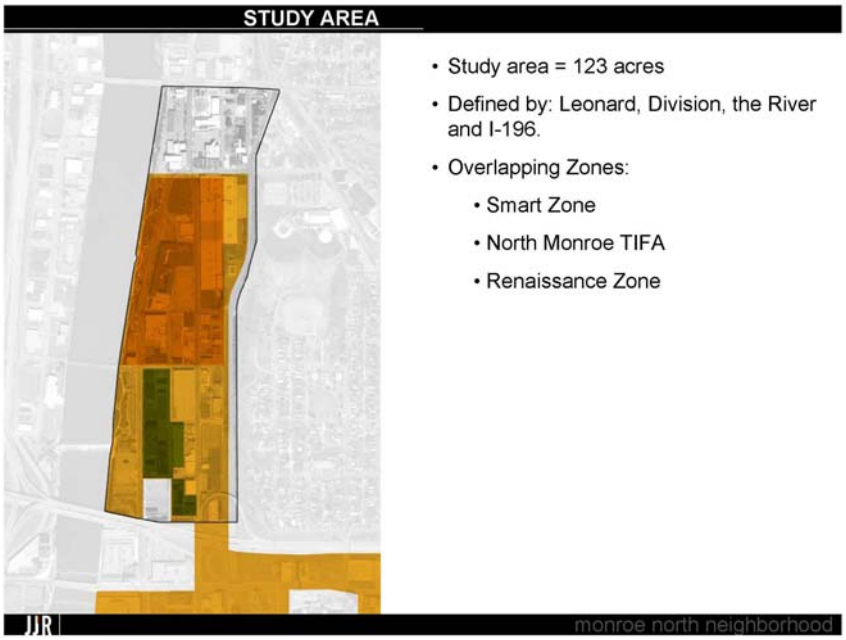


Figure: 29

[14] *Smart Zone Development Plan*, March 2002.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As indicated in the following table, Steering Committee members provided their sense of the priority infrastructure investments for Monroe North. The table also notes potential funding sources and phasing considerations.

Figure: 30

Potential Improvement	Suggested Priority	Potential Funding Source	Phasing Considerations
STREET NETWORK			
• Extend Trowbridge from Ottawa to Ionia (ROW acquisition; construction)	5	City; Smart Zone	With Division Boulevard
• Coldbrook/Monroe/Ottawa roundabout		City; Monroe North TIFA	With Coldbrook Creek Drain Improvement
• Taylor south end closure		City	
• Boulevard on Division/Ionia	5	City; MDOT	With Trowbridge Extension
• Street repaving/reconstruction	1	City; Monroe North TIFA; Smart Zone	Development driven
UTILITY INFRASTRUCTURE			
Water			
• Replace 4" – 6" mains with 12" mains to serve higher density development	13	City; Monroe North TIFA; Smart Zone	Development driven; with street reconstruction
Sanitary			
• Replace lines over 30 years old	10	City; Monroe North TIFA; Smart Zone	Development driven; with street reconstruction
Storm Sewer[15]			
• Add lines in north-south streets?		City; Monroe North TIFA; Smart Zone	Development driven; with street reconstruction
• Address periodic back ups at Coldbrook Creek Drain	12	City	With roundabout
• Manage roof drain flows (project by project)		Developers	Development driven
Data and Communications			
• Fiber optic extensions.	7	City; Smart Zone	Development driven; with street reconstruction
• Underground utilities		City; Monroe North TIFA; Smart Zone	Development driven; with street reconstruction
OTHER			
• Acquisition of riverfront land for open space	11	City; Smart Zone	As funding permits
• Parking deck(s) construction	9	City; developers	Development driven
• Streetscape implementation	2	City; Monroe North TIFA; Smart Zone; developers	Development driven; with street reconstruction
• Gateway treatments	3	City; Monroe North TIFA; Smart Zone	With street reconstruction
• Transit links to Hill and Downtown	6	City; institutions; developers	As funding permits
• Implement ITP express route on Division		ITP	Ridership driven
• Relocation of Consumers sub-station	4	City; Smart Zone	As funding permits
• Stair reconstruction to NOBL	8	City	With Division Boulevard

[15] On-site detention required.

STREETSCAPE CONCEPT

BACKGROUND

Existing Conditions

With the exception of the boulevard treatment on Monroe Avenue, none of the streets within the Monroe North district have benefited from streetscape improvements. On the majority of district streets, few street trees exist and no landscaped area has been provided between buildings and the sidewalk to soften the urban environment and provide a sense of pedestrian scale. Sidewalks are relatively narrow making the addition of street trees and other furnishings difficult.

Figure: 31

Streetscape Considerations

The following considerations established the foundation for formulating a streetscape concept for Monroe North.

- Trees are the most important element in creating an appealing, pedestrian-oriented street in the longer term. As a result, providing curb extensions to accommodate larger tree planting areas is a critical pre-requisite for a successful district streetscape. This re-design of the existing right-of-way cross section will create an enhanced sense of human scale by visually narrowing the street. Travel lanes will also be narrowed as a result, serving to “calm” traffic within the district.
- On-street parking is a necessity for successful urban retail. Consequently, curb extensions – either at intersections or mid-block -- must be planned to maintain an appropriate supply of on-street parking.
- Improved street lighting will be needed to ensure that the district is an attractive residential location and a successful retail and entertainment destination.
- The district will need to accommodate truck traffic in the short- to mid-term to serve existing light industrial uses. As a result, curb radii must be selected to balance the need to accommodate truck turning movements against the need for pedestrian convenience and safety.
- The potential exists to clean and infiltrate storm water in street rights-of-way through the use of “green street” concepts. Planting areas created by curb extensions can be designed to receive, detain and infiltrate run off from the district’s streets. This strategy could manage as much of 25% of the area’s storm run off, reducing the demand on storm sewer capacity, as well as water

quality impacts on the Grand River. This sustainable storm water strategy could also be part of the district's identity as location for the use of "cutting edge" technology.

- Since streetscape improvements are likely to be implemented in phases, as new development takes place in the district, it will be critical to have clear standards that are consistently applied; otherwise, piecemeal implementation will result in a piecemeal result.
- Streetscape improvements must be affordable – both in terms of capital investment and maintenance cost. The challenge in Monroe North is to define a streetscape approach that focuses on essential elements (street and sidewalk paving; curb extensions; trees and street lights) and is relatively low in cost, while establishing a pedestrian-friendly environment and a distinct district identity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Street Hierarchy and Recommended Modifications

Monroe. Monroe Avenue, a boulevard running parallel to the river and its parks, is the primary image street in Monroe North. It is recommended that the existing boulevard treatment be extended north to Leonard (possibly with a round about at the Coldbrook/Ottawa/Monroe intersection) to create a stronger visual and functional link between the portions of the district north and south of Coldbrook.

Division/Ionia. The proposed reconfiguration of Division and Ionia Avenues, on the eastern edge of the district, as a boulevard south of Mason Street will create a second important district image street. As noted above (see Framework Plan, Circulation Connections), the earliest possible implementation of this boulevard concept is strongly supported by the Steering Committee. An important modification to the concept currently proposed by MDOT is recommended, however. This modification maintains the Michigan Street/northbound Ionia entrance to the district from Michigan Hill and extends Trowbridge west to link Ionia to Ottawa Avenue.

In contrast to Monroe Avenue, which provides local access within the district, Division is a through street that serves as a district edge. A positive image along this edge will be critically important, although the "front doors" for majority of development on Division will be oriented towards Ottawa Avenue and/or east-west streets.

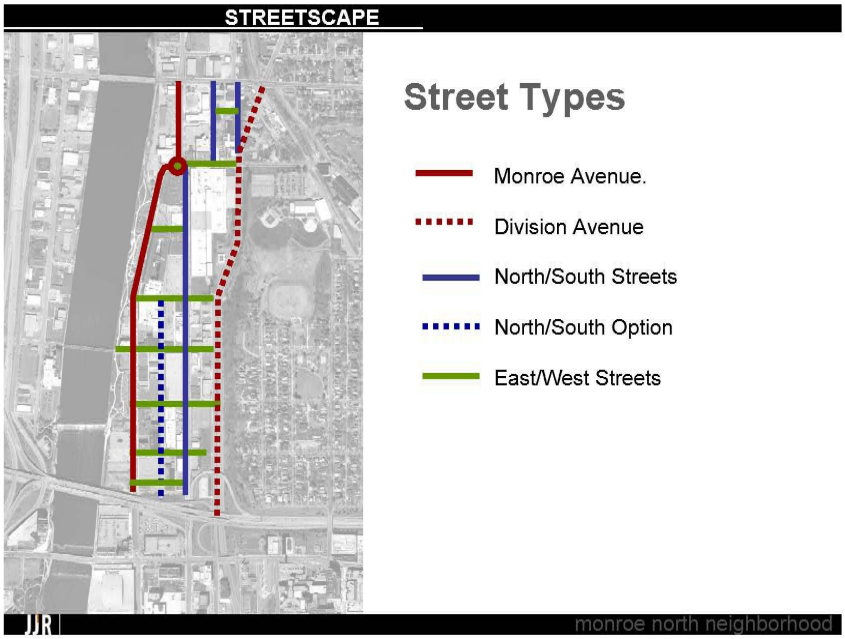


Figure: 32

North-South Streets. North-south streets within the district include Ottawa and Bond Avenues, south of Coldbrook, and Ionia and Taylor to the north. Because Bond does not connect all the way through the district, its future role and streetscape treatment may differ from that used on other north-south streets.

The Ionia right-of-way has been vacated between Mason Street and Coldbrook Avenue. As shown in Figure 33, however, the potential may exist for re-establishing this link in the street grid at some point in the future.

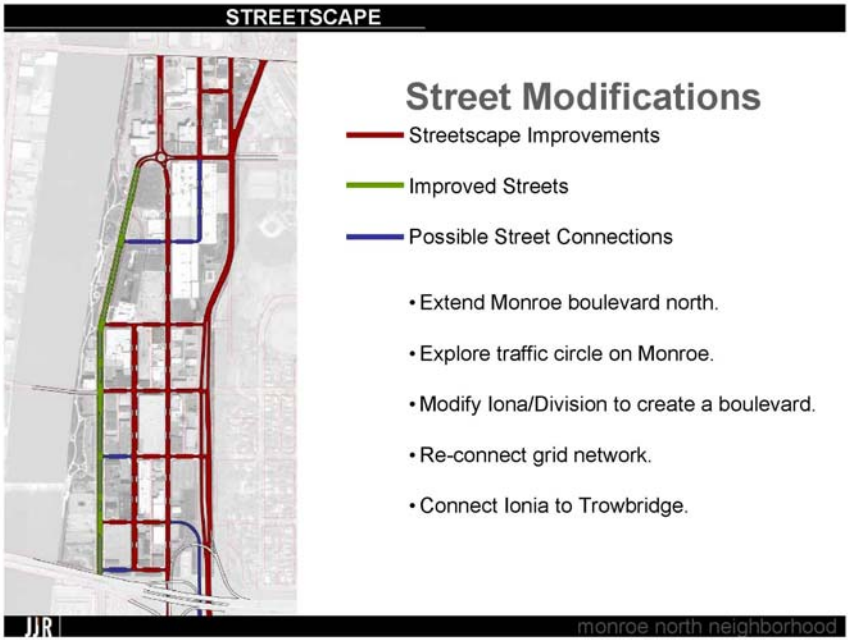


Figure: 33

East-West Streets. East-west streets within the district include Hastings, Trowbridge, Fairbanks, Newberry and Coldbrook. Because these streets serve as pedestrian connections and view corridors to the Grand River, they have a special role to play is establishing the district's image.

A number of opportunities exist for re-connecting the street grid by re-creating east-west street segments. These opportunities include:

- Hastings, between Monroe and Bond
- Fairbanks, between Monroe and Bond
- Walbridge, between Monroe and Ionia (extended)

These connections could be established as pedestrian easements if it is not possible to re-acquire the street rights-of-way.

The most critical new east-west connection, however, is the proposed link along Trowbridge between Ionia and Ottawa. As noted above in the context of the proposed boulevard concept on Division, this connection will make it possible to maintain the Michigan Street/Ionia northbound entrance to the district which serves as a critical link to Michigan Hill.

Recommended Streetscape Treatments

Streetscape/Sidewalk Zones. As illustrated in figure 34, four zones within the sidewalk serve as a foundation for the recommended elements of a streetscape concept for Monroe North. These zones can be visually defined by variations in surface treatment (scoring patterns; paving materials, colors or finishes; surface treatment in tree planting areas). With the exception of an optional treatment on Bond, all streetscape recommendations for Monroe North include widening sidewalks to provide for a 3-foot-wide building frontage zone; a 6-foot-wide through pedestrian zone; a furnishing zone of a minimum of 5 feet and a maximum of 13 feet[16] with curb extension; and a 1-foot-wide curb zone. This will require a new street cross section that relocates existing curbs and established 11-foot travel lanes.

[16] The 13-foot curb extension, located either mid-block or at intersections, incorporates the 8-foot-wide space used for parallel parking on the balance of the block, as well as the 5-foot-wide furnishings zone.

Figure: 34

North-South Streets. The recommended streetscape treatment on long (500 feet, typical) north-south blocks uses curb extensions at two mid-block locations to visually break the block into smaller segments. A scoring pattern is used to define the building frontage zone; both scoring and colored concrete are recommended to define the curb-side furnishings zone where street trees and street lights are located. A contrasting colored concrete band, extending across the entire width of the sidewalk zone, is used to create visual interest and a sense of scale. This accent element provides a low-cost strategy for establishing a distinct district identity

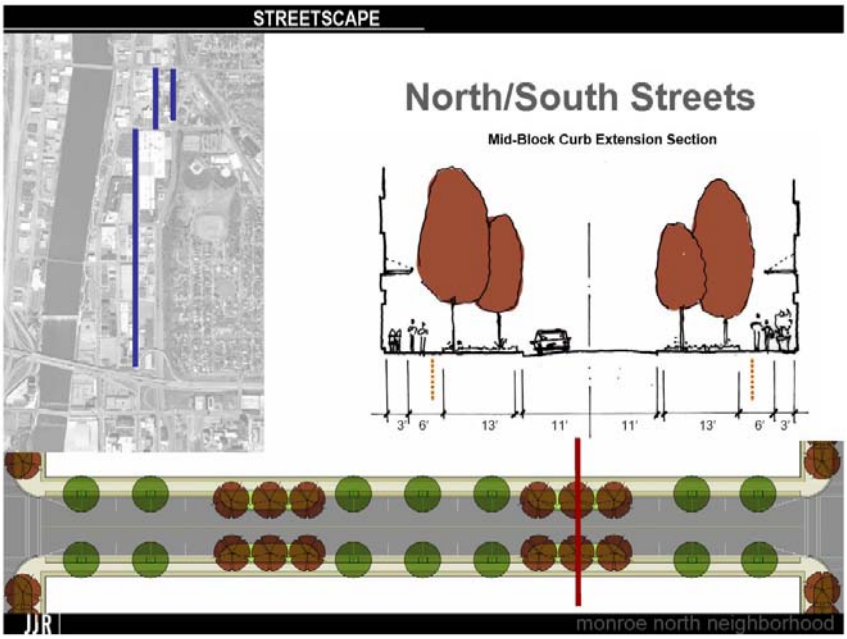


Figure: 35

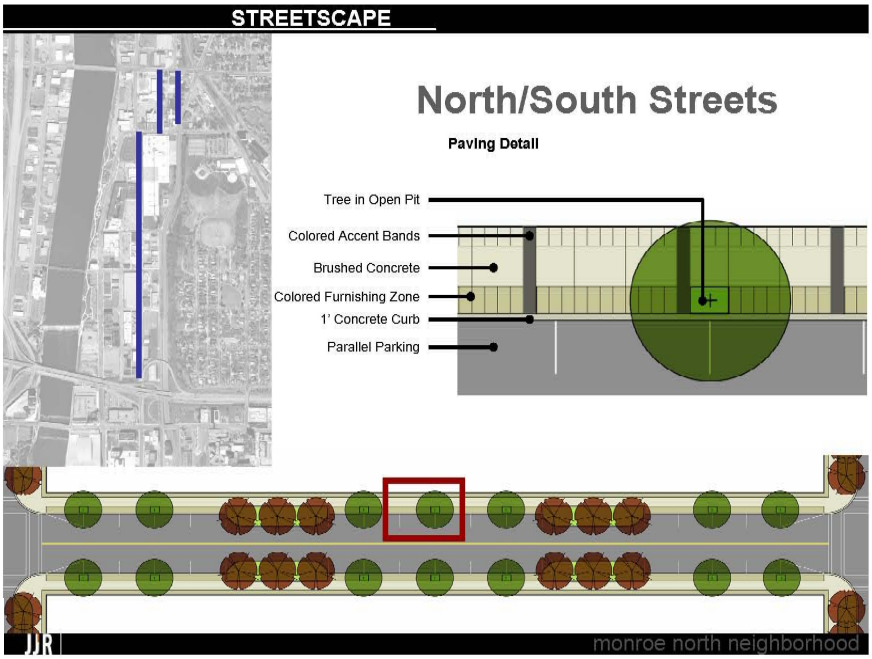


Figure: 36

North-South Option. An alternative streetscape treatment, that maximizes on-street parking capacity, is possible on Bond Avenue. This alternative narrows the sidewalk zone to approximately 10 feet (exclusive of curb extensions) to allow for angled parking on one side of the street. This option could also be configured as reverse angle parking, allowing cars back into parking spaces. Approximately four times as many parking spaces can be provided by an angled parking configuration compared to parallel parking.

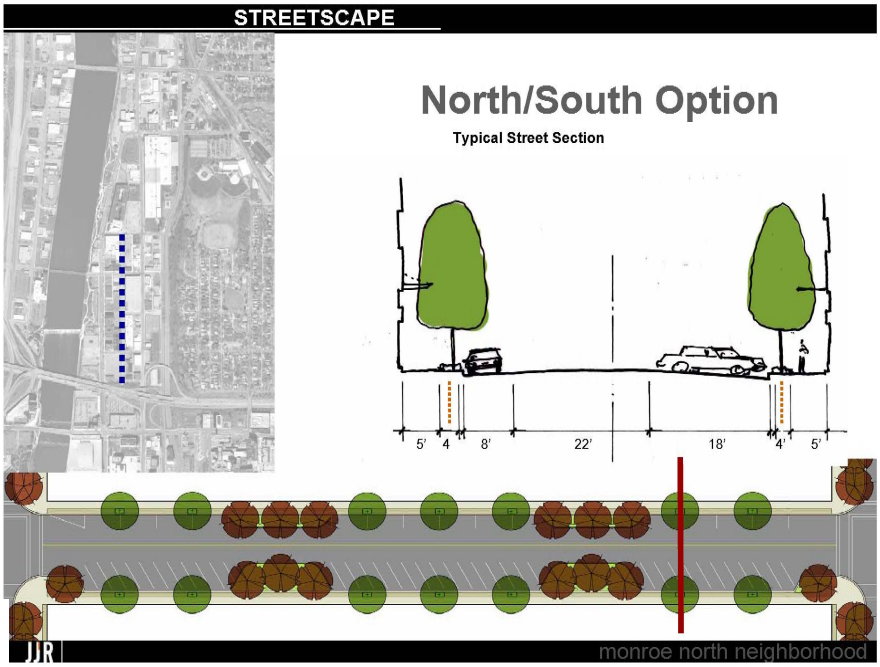


Figure: 37

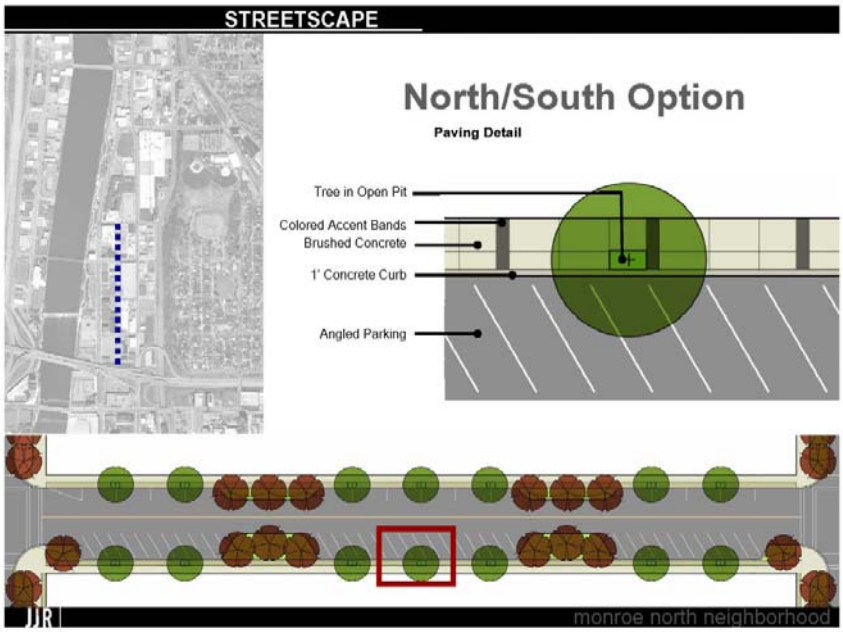


Figure: 38

East-West Streets. The recommended streetscape treatment on shorter (200 feet, typical) east-west blocks locates curb extensions at intersections, rather than at mid block. Street trees are more closely spaced and located in larger planting areas (open tree pits) to create a distinctly "greener" image along corridors leading to and from the Grand River. A number of surface treatment options for these planting areas, varying in installation and maintenance cost are possible:

- Lawn (low installation cost; moderate maintenance)
- Ground cover (moderate installation cost; low maintenance)
- Perennial beds (high installation cost; high maintenance)

While the same colored accent bands used on north-south streets are incorporated into the streetscape treatment on east-west streets, no colored concrete is used in the curb-side furnishings zone.

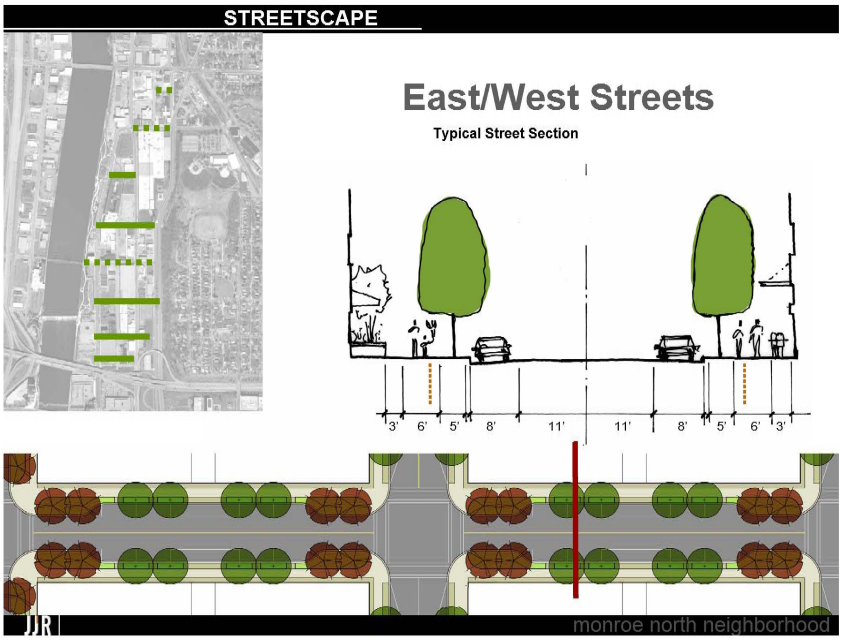


Figure: 39

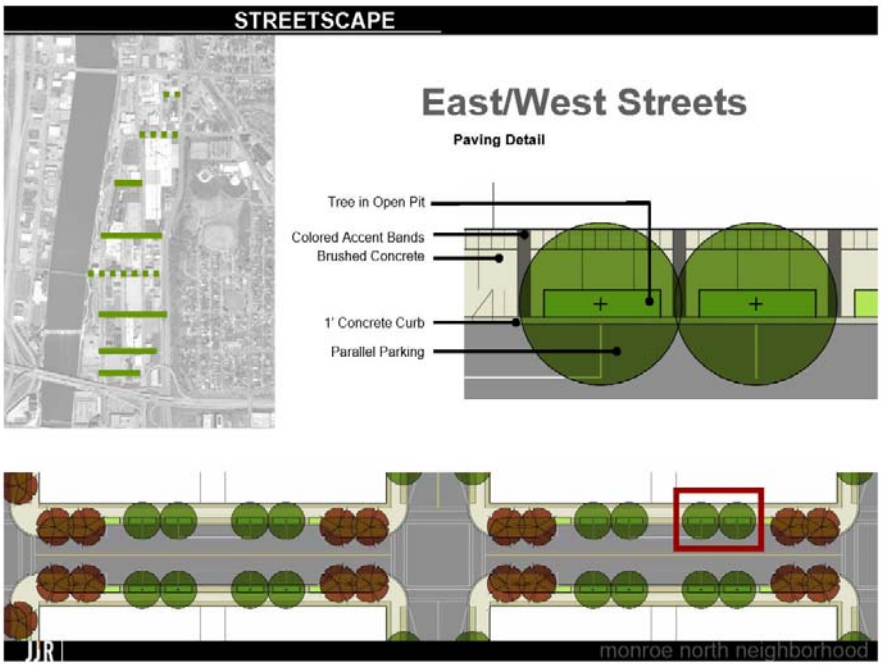


Figure: 40

Street Lights and Other Furnishings. The City of Grand Rapids has selected a limited number of street light poles and fixtures and established standards for their use. The square taper fixture has been installed on Monroe Avenue. It is recommended that the heritage historic fixture be used in the balance of the Monroe North district.

Other furnishings to be used within the district might include benches, trash receptacles and movable planters. While a standard set of furnishings (style and color) should be selected, they may be used selectively to keep costs to a moderate level. Priority should be given to street segments with retail frontage. Cost sharing with retailers should be explored.

Figure: 41

Streetscape Maintenance. The Steering Committee recommends that the establishment of a Business Improvement District for the entire Monroe North area be explored as a means of ensuring that streetscape improvements are maintained to an appropriately high standard.

Conceptual Costs

As noted above, the Steering Committee agreed that priority streetscape investment should include:

- Street and sidewalk paving
- Curb extensions
- Trees
- Street lights

Conceptual costs estimates for the recommended streetscape treatments suggest that implementation will be in the range of $350 to $400 per lineal foot (from building face to the center line of the street. This cost estimate includes:

Demolition

- Asphalt street paving
- Concrete sidewalk paving (regular and colored)
- Curbs
- Street lights and parking meters
- Street trees
- Irrigation
- Adjusting storm utilities

APPENDICES

Steering Committee Members

Mike DeVries
Catherine Ettinger
Howard Hansen
Ben Klooster
Jon Rooks
David Smith
Judge David Soet
Audrey Westdorp
Kelly Wolthius
Jim Zawacki

Ex Officio
Kristi deKracker
Helen Lehman

Stakeholder Meeting Participants

May 25, 2006
Zack Zalak
Joe Moch
Elizabeth Johnson
Rodney VanderZand
Mary Hoogerheide
Steve Stepek
Jack Buchanan
Brad Rosely
Laura Hollemuns
Larry Zeiser
Sharon Wierenga
John Taylor
Brian Giampars
Pastor Henry

October 4, 2006
Shaun Biel
Phil DiCesare
Arnie Jones
Mike Hogaheide
Rodney VanderZand
Alyssa Ritsema
Sheri Willis
Kevin Garcia
Kristi DeKraker
Ed DeVries
Jack Buchanan
Joe Moch, Sr.
Joe Moch, Jr.

City Staff Advisors
Susan Shannon, Economic Development Director and Smart Zone Executive Director
Jay Fowler, DDA Executive Director and staff to the Monroe North T.I.F.A.

Suzanne Schulz, Planning Director
Eric Pratt, DDA Planner

Funding Support
Grand Rapids Smart Zone
Monroe North Tax Increment Financing Authority
Grand Rapids Community Foundation

P:\24788\000\Admin\Reports\finalreport.doc