ISSUE AREAS

Neighborhood Commercial

Existing Commercial Areas

The majority of commercial development in Cluster 5 is in a strip commercial format — in other words, a relatively narrow strip of land (about 100' deep) along major streets. Existing zoning reinforces this pattern of commercial development and may not allow the flexibility in site size and configuration needed to be successful in attracting larger scale neighborhood commercial reinvestment. However, in areas where the strip commercial pattern has a traditional "main street" character and a pedestrian-oriented, neighborhood scale of use is desired — for example, in Mexicantown on Bagley and along Vernor between Livernois and Clark Park and at Vernor and Springwells — strip commercial zoning may not be a significant barrier to reinvestment, if adequate parking can be provided.

Cluster 5 also has a concentration of commercial activity to the north and south of Michigan Avenue in the vicinity of (and related to) Tiger Stadium.

The results of the neighborhood commercial building condition survey indicate that many strip commercial areas in Cluster 5 are showing signs of advanced decline or major deterioration. Notable exceptions, where building conditions indicate that economic vitality is strong, include Michigan Avenue west of Livernois, the eastern end of Michigan Avenue, Vernor west of Central and between Military and Junction and portions of Fort Street. (It is important to remember that the map illustrating the results of the neighborhood commercial building condition survey includes all non-residential frontages, not just retail/commercial areas.)

Not all of the declining commercial strips in Cluster 5 will regain their vitality in the next 5 - 10 years. As a result, choices on commercial reinvestment priorities must be made in order to establish a framework for coordinating public, private and non-profit efforts. However, the deteriorated appearance of vacant and poorly maintained buildings along high visibility street frontages creates an overwhelmingly negative image of the vitality of the Cluster and its potential as a reinvestment location. Therefore directions must be established for the re-use of those strip commercial areas which are showing signs of moderate to severe decline and which will not become target areas for retail reinvestment.

Planned Neighborhood Commercial Developments
Only one known, major commercial development is planned in Cluster 5. The Mexicantown Community Development Welcome Center, to be located on Bagley just east of I-75, is expected to include 50,000-120,000 SF of new retail space in combination with a state tourist facility. The project is an equal partnership between the Mexicantown Community Development Corporation and the International Bridge company.

Focus Group and IGI Highlights
Cluster 5 stakeholders identified the large amount of vacant land and buildings within the Cluster, expressway accessibility, the area's ethnic diversity and the existing base of successful small businesses/ entrepreneurs as major assets for commercial reinvestment. Major barriers to commercial reinvestment included:

- the amount of red tape and delay involved in dealing with the City and Empowerment Zone bureaucracy
- the poor appearance of the area
- crime and the perception that the area is unsafe
- the lack of assembled sites ready for development

Stakeholders also recognized that the Cluster's modest household incomes might not appear to represent significant buying power. However, a community income and expenditures study (undertaken by Michigan State University's Center for Urban Affairs in 1997) showed that zip code 48209, representing a little less than half of Cluster 5, had an economy of $1.5 billion. About $1,171 million of this economy is constructed by the business sector, $310 million by households, and $27 million by non-profit organizations. In addition, the area's special place in the regional expressway system, its role as an international gateway and proximity to downtown give it special advantages as a commercial location.

The Cluster neighborhood commercial uses that stakeholders patronize most frequently include banking and personal service establishments. Stakeholders reported that they shopped most frequently outside of the City for clothing, household goods, groceries and business services — and were as likely to seek entertainment outside the City as inside its boundaries. The proximity of Cluster residents to the commercial offerings of neighboring communities (Dearborn, Melvindale, Lincoln

Park, etc.) and their lack of satisfaction with the quality of goods and services offered within the Cluster means that a significant percentage of Cluster 5 dollars are being spent outside the Cluster and the City.

The retail goods and services which stakeholders felt were most critical to quality of life in their Cluster included groceries, clothing, home improvements/hardware and medical centers/hospitals.

The locations which stakeholders identified as having significant potential for retail reinvestment in Cluster 5 include:

- Selected locations on Michigan Avenue between Livernois and Central (based on existing areas of strength and the location historic buildings with re-use potential) - small/neighborhood scale commercial
- Fort and Schaefer - small/neighborhood scale commercial
- Selected locations on Vernor Highway to the east and west of Livernois, with the potential to create a terminus to a revitalized Vernor corridor west of Livernois - small/neighborhood scale commercial
- Livernois/Fort - medium/cluster scale commercial with a special truck/transport orientation and perhaps including a mix of light industrial and highway-oriented commercial
- Michigan Avenue between I-96 and the Lodge (around Tiger Stadium and the Michigan Central Train Station) - large, regional or city-wide scale commercial

Housing

Existing Housing Conditions

On a scale from poor to excellent, the majority of stakeholders in Cluster 5 thought that the Cluster's housing stock was in fair to good condition. There was a 50/50 split between those who thought housing conditions had gotten better or worse since they moved to the area.

The results of the housing condition survey identify areas where concentrations of major housing deterioration and advanced stages of decline exist within Cluster 5. Because the survey was structured to include vacant lots as an indicator of overall block group housing condition, the results correspond closely to existing patterns of vacant land. One of the most deteriorated housing areas is located in the northeastern part of the Cluster from 29th or 30th Street extending east to I-96 both north and south of Michigan Avenue. Housing conditions

in the area to the south of Michigan Avenue and east of West Grand Boulevard to 16th Street are also relatively deteriorated. Another area of major housing deterioration is located south of Fort Street from the Rouge River to West Grand Boulevard. A smaller area located to the north of I-75 and the west of the Rouge has also suffered major deterioration.

In contrast, areas with stable housing conditions are located in the northwestern portion of the Cluster, in the Boynton/South Pointe area in the southwest portion of the Cluster and between Livernois and Junction north and south of Vernor Highway.

Major Housing Developments

Major housing developments planned in Cluster 5 include:

- The planned development of 66 units of rental housing for low-income seniors (St. Anne's Co-op Housing) south of Porter between 17th and 18th
- Two phases of infill housing construction planned by the Bagley Housing Association in the area from St. Anne to 18th at Porter (a total of 22 - 24 new single family homes)
- Newberry Estates, 60 single family homes for low and moderate income families planned for the area located between Magnolia and Buchanan from 28th to 31st (north of Michigan Avenue and east of Livernois)
- Parkside Intergenerational Center, 80 apartment units for seniors on Vernor at Patton Park; a daycare center for children and seniors is planned as a second phase

Focus Group and IGI Highlights

Cluster 5 stakeholders expressed a preference for keeping at least 50% of the Cluster's housing stock as for sale/owner occupied. (Currently, just 50% of the Cluster's housing stock is owner occupied). Stakeholders supported a mix of new housing costs that keep the focus on housing affordable to low and moderate income families. The preferred overall price mix for new housing development in the Cluster was:

- About 50% priced for low and moderate income households ($60,000 - 89,000 sales price)
- About 40% for middle income households ($90,000 - 150,000 sales price)
- About 10% for upper income households (over $150,000 sales price)

Stakeholders identified locations for three different categories of housing reinvestment.

New, Large scale, Single Family Housing Development

- To the northeast of Junction and Michigan in the area where the Newberry Estates development is planned (60 single family units). In the longer term future, the area to the west of this early reinvestment target area will also be a candidate for new housing construction — both single and multifamily. Future efforts should build on a solid success in the initial target area.
- In the St. Anne's Gate area, where new infill housing is planned (22-24 units)

Housing Rehab and Infill

- The area adjacent to Newberry Estates
- The Core City Neighborhoods area north of Michigan Avenue between West Grand Boulevard and I-96
- The Corktown area, where rehab and infill efforts are already showing signs of success
- The area to the far southwest, west of the Rouge River and south of I-75

New Multifamily Housing Development.

- The St. Anne's Gate area
- The area at West Grand Boulevard and I-75
- The Core City Neighborhoods area

Stakeholders also suggested that new multifamily housing (townhouses, low-rise apartments) should be encouraged on Vernor Highway — both to the east and west of Livernois — to create mixed-use residential/commercial corridors. Multifamily housing may also be an appropriate use on those portions of other commercial strips (e.g., Michigan Avenue, Warren, and Buchanan) which will not be target areas for neighborhood commercial reinvestment.

It is important to note that two areas were severe housing disinvestment have occurred have not been proposed for major housing reinvestment. These areas are:

- South of Fort Street between Woodmere and West Grand Boulevard
- North of I-75 and west of the Rouge River

Stakeholders generally agreed that these areas were not suitable housing reinvestment locations due to environmental conditions.

Stakeholders proposed a series of housing reinvestment priorities:

- first, concentrate on maintaining the stability of existing, intact neighborhoods;
- second, reinforce ongoing initiatives for housing improvement that are showing evidence of success; and
- third, start new housing development in areas where severe disinvestment has occurred and no housing improvement efforts are currently underway.

Job Centers

Existing Job Statistics

In 1994, it was estimated that there were about 19,850 jobs in Cluster 5 which represented about 6% of the total jobs (313,082) in the City of Detroit. The largest percentage of Cluster 5's jobs are in the manufacturing sector (34%); 23% are in services and 10 - 12% each are classified as retail trade, wholesale trade and transportation/ communication/utilities.

Major Job-related Development

Significant job-related development projects recently completed, underway or planned in Cluster 5 include:

- Detroit Discount Distributors, bulk food distribution facility located on Rosa Parks just south of Michigan Avenue;
- One Stop Capital Shop, financial and technical assistance services, located on Rosa Parks just south of Michigan Avenue;
- Michigan Department of Transportation $100 million Gateway Project, connecting the Ambassador Bridge to area expressways;
- OJ Transport, $12 million freight and storage facility south of Fort Street at Clark/Scotten;
- Perstop Xytex, $10 million container handling plant north of Michigan Avenue at Scotten;
- Ford Motor Company/Renaissance Global Logistics $19.4 million auto parts warehouse at Fort and Clark;
- Clark Street Technology Park, a 53-acre multi-user development;
- Hispanic Manufacturing Center, $12 million manufacturing facility in Clark Technology Park;
- Plastic automotive parts manufacturing plant at Clark Technology Park;

- Piston Packaging, supplier of pallets and boxes at Clark Technology Park;
- Lafayette Steel plant expansion east of Livernois and south of Michigan Avenue; and
- Chivas Products, a plastic injection molding company, located west of Livernois, south of Michigan Avenue.

Focus Group and IGI Highlights

Stakeholders identified the following as the types of jobs the Cluster needs more of:

- Technology
- Manufacturing
- Skilled trades
- Retail/commercial

Stakeholders also ranked education jobs as a high priority because of the important need for expanded employment training and retraining; early childhood ed/child care; tutoring and computer learning centers. Stakeholders seemed to be asking for increased jobs across the full wage range — from entry level to skilled trades.

Stakeholders identified the Cluster's greatest assets in attracting job-related reinvestment as intermodal access (road, rail, water); a workforce which can be retrained and environmental problems which can be converted to political assets. The greatest barriers to job-related reinvestment were identified as:

- blight, poor appearance of Detroit and the Cluster;
- City red tape;
- need for land/site assembly;
- unskilled workforce; and
- bad condition of roads.

The following were suggested as the best incentives to job-related reinvestment:

- apprenticeship and skilled trades training programs;
- improving the area image through clean-up/landscaping;
- facilitating land assembly; and
- designating preferred truck routes.

Looking at the pattern of vacant land and the results of the neighborhood commercial and housing condition surveys, a number of areas which might be targeted for job-related reinvestment can be identified:

- the area south of Fort Street from Woodmere to West Grand Boulevard. Although relocation of remaining residents, acquisition and land assembly could take some time, this area offers a significant potential for job creation in the longer term future;
- the Conrail site; and
- the area south of Michigan Avenue between Junction and West Grand Boulevard. Here again, relocation of remaining residents and land assembly might take some time; however, this area could serve as an extension of the industrial area to the southwest (Clark Technology Park).

Individual stakeholders were aware of a number of job training programs (SER Metro, GRACE program, Hispanic Manufacturing Center, Mexicantown CDC Entrepreneurial Training) serving Cluster 5 residents. Nevertheless, expanded job training and apprenticeship programs were overwhelmingly endorsed as the most important strategy for attracting jobs and expanding employment opportunities for Cluster residents, both youth and adults. Stakeholders suggested the development of partnerships between educational institutions, business organizations, corporations and non-profits to expand the range of job training opportunities and to ensure that outreach and public information are improved. The idea of establishing a skilled trades school, with the approval and co-funding of the US Department of Labor, was proposed as a strategy Cluster 5 should pursue.

Stakeholders in Cluster 5 also believe that fostering entrepreneurship should become a key strategy for increasing job-related investment and expanding employment opportunities. Import/export activity was seen as a special opportunity, capitalizing on the area's ethnic diversity and role as an international gateway.

Transportation

Multimodal Access

I-94, I-96 and I-75, the Ambassador Bridge, the Port of Detroit and rail lines and yards give Cluster 5 outstanding regional accessibility — a particular asset in attracting job-related reinvestment.

Major Streets

Major north-south streets include West Grand Boulevard, Livernois and Schaefer. However, north-south movement through the central part of the Cluster is limited by the number, design and poor condition of rail crossings and underpasses. Major east-west streets include Warren, Michigan Avenue, and Fort Street. Other important east-west streets which have lower traffic carrying capacities are Vernor Highway and Jefferson Avenue.

Rail Lines

Rail lines criss cross Cluster 5. Major lines run from northwest to southeast (Conrail line connecting to the rail tunnel under the Detroit River) and from southwest to northeast (Grand Trunk Western). South of Fort Street, a 2.3 mile segment of the Conrail Exposition Spur was abandoned in 1982 and is held by multiple owners. The Delray Connector has also been partially abandoned (0.3 miles).

Transportation Investments

The following major transportation improvement projects are programmed in Cluster 5:

- repainting of I-94 underpasses;
- landscaping for Mexicantown International Crossing (Bagley);
- 21st Street streetscape design;
- reconstruction of I-75 shielders and ramps (West Grand Boulevard to Springwells);
- rebuilding of Fort Street rail bridge (west of the Rouge River); and
- rebuilding of Fort Street/Pleasant Street bridge (west of the Rouge River).

A number of street repaving projects are also planned in Cluster 5 (see Table 6).

Two other major transportation improvement projects are also in the proposal stage:

- improvement of I-94, including the possible widening to traffic lanes, improvement of service drives and interchange modifications; and
- a $100 million proposal for improving connections from the Ambassador Bridge to I-75 and I-96.

Both of these projects could have significant impact in reducing the volume of truck traffic on surface streets in Cluster 5.

Access to Automobiles
According to the 1990 Census, about 37% of Cluster 5 households do not have regular access to a car (as compared to 33% in the City overall). Given these statistics, it can be assumed that a significant number of people in Cluster 5 rely on public transit — even though the stakeholders who participated in the focus group were not frequent public transit users.

Transit
Buses operate on the following north - south streets in Cluster 5: Trumbull, West Grand Boulevard, Junction, Livernois, Wyoming and Schaefer. East-west bus routes operate on McGraw, Buchanan, Michigan Avenue, Vernor Highway, Bagley, Fort Street, and Jefferson (west of Livernois). Bus routes on Schaefer and Michigan Avenue operate beyond the City limits. Transfer stops linking to SMART buses are located on Michigan Avenue, Fort and Schaefer.

Focus Group and IGI Highlights
Stakeholders identified road conditions, the cost of auto insurance and truck traffic in neighborhoods as transportation issues having the greatest impact on Cluster 5. They also suggested the following as the top priority transportation-related investments:

- better transit links to the larger metropolitan area and more dependable service;
- an expanded range of transportation options, including greenways for biking and walking and electric trolleys (especially in tourist-oriented areas);
- road paving improvements; and
- clearer identification of preferred truck routes.

Twice as many stakeholders rated the condition of the roads in Cluster 5 as poor than as good. Decisions will be needed concerning the types of road improvements that should be given priority in the Cluster — from repaving, to the reconstruction of selected roadways to support high volumes of truck traffic, to streetscape or traffic calming improvements. In addition, roadway improvement investments should be coordinated with private and non-profit investments in housing, neighborhood commercial and job centers — so that public infrastructure investments can be used more consciously as an incentive and complement private investment.

Environment

Parks and Recreation

Stakeholders identified the Detroit and Rouge Rivers, Ft. Wayne and the availability of vacant land (which could become part of a greenway system) as major recreational assets. While there was support for the idea of creating a greenway system linking neighborhoods to riverfront parks and Ft. Wayne, there were also concerns about the lack of funding for programming and maintaining an expanded open space system given the condition of existing parks and historic Ft. Wayne.

Planning currently underway for the re-opening of Ft. Wayne (83 acres and 41 buildings) focuses on four types of use: recreation, special events, historic exhibits and community-based activities. Improvements will be undertaken in partnership with the Wayne County Parks Department using $4.75 million in bond revenues; additional funding will also be sought for improvements. It is anticipated that Ft. Wayne will be fully re-opened by 2001.

On the topic of recreation, stakeholders felt that a major funding commitment to improving and expanding facilities and programs was needed, although they recognized that City funding capacity was limited. The idea of partnering with area businesses/corporations was proposed as a strategy for increasing funding support for recreation improvements.

Environmental Issues

Quite a few contaminated sites have been identified in Cluster 5. Six sites have been selected as part of the Southwest Detroit Contaminated Sites Redevelopment Demonstration Project. Re-use potentials will be identified for these sites to take advantage of the EPA Brownfield Initiative. As part of the process for selecting the demonstration sites, a process for prioritizing sites for remediation and redevelopment was formulated.

Stakeholders identified contaminated sites, air pollution and oil leaks into sewers and groundwater as important environmental issues. In addition, stakeholders felt that the cumulative impact of overgrown vacant lots and illegal dumping had an equally significant influence on the Cluster's quality of life.

Youth Development

Focus Group and IGI Highlights

Stakeholders felt that the greatest youth development needs in Cluster 5 were:

- A good education and good schools
- Strong families
- Community support through adult volunteers working in a variety of programs
- Job opportunities

Gangs and gang activity were reported to be an important problem in Cluster 5. Job opportunities and job training were generally believed to be the best alternative that could be offered to young people. Stakeholders heard from representatives of the GRACE program and agreed with them that partnerships between the community, corporations and educational institutions were essential in creating meaningful job opportunities that would provide real alternatives to gang activity. The availability of internships, apprenticeships and on-the-job training were seen as important strategies. The idea of establishing a skilled trades school, with the approval and co-funding of the US Department of Labor (to ensure that graduates would end up with essential journeymen cards) was also proposed as a strategy that Cluster 5 might pursue.

While stakeholders were aware of a number of youth development programs addressing job training, tutoring/mentoring, and crime prevention — and generally thought those programs were effective — they were also concerned about not having a comprehensive picture of the youth development agencies and programs serving the area and the manner in which those agencies and programs were being coordinated. As a result, it was suggested that a coordinating entity or forum would be useful. This entity might also serve as an outreach organization and a gateway to information on available programs. In addition, it was suggested that the use of "safe zones" in the Empowerment Zone be expanded to other areas in the Cluster.

On the topic of recreation, stakeholders generally felt that a major funding commitment to youth-oriented recreation facilities and programs was needed, but recognized that City funding capacity was limited. The idea of finding private sector partners to help fund recreation for Cluster youth was proposed. Stakeholders also suggested the idea of using schools more intensively for after hours programs and coordinating City and Detroit Public School resources to maximize cost effectiveness and efficiency in expanding recreation opportunities.